



Annual Convention Offers Exciting Mini-Courses

The 2018 Annual Convention is fast upon us, and a treasure trove of mini-courses have been lined up for stimulating engagement of the delegates and guests. There are eleven scheduled mini-courses so far, and previews for them follow.

Previews for the remainder will appear in the March *Messenger*.

Mini-Courses for Convention 2018

- “Proprium and Freedom” with Rev. Robert McCluskey
- “Blake and Swedenborg” with Rev.

Dr. David Fekete

- “Best Practices in Our Churches and Ministries” with Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence
- “Swedenborg as Spiritual Duct Tape: A look into the diverse and

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Best Practices in Our Churches

BY JIM LAWRENCE

The small church has special challenges in meeting “best practices” standards compared to larger churches, and for quite some time, there has been discussion of shaping a larger church conversation on best practices for our small churches, especially with regard to conflict of interest issues and accountability structures. There are a number of additional possible goals and targets with a study of best practices in churches, such as healthy ways to support the spiritual life of the church and empowering ways to tap the talents and energy in the work of ministry. But the special category of ethics, which is the most difficult to discuss sometimes, pertains in quite specific ways to small churches.

President Jane Siebert has appointed a task force group chaired by Vice-President Tom Neuenfeldt that also includes Rev. Sarah Buteux, Rev. Andy Stinson, and me to help shepherd a

conversation and process that can lead to a Best Practices Policy recommendation for the Swedenborgian Church of North America that addresses the challenges of healthy, fair, transparent, and ethical management and governance in our church life.

Our first step as a task group is to reach out to everyone to survey and gather experiences, ideas, and suggestions for upping our game and consciousness around best practices in the running of our small churches. Common issues that have arisen a number of times over the past twenty and more years in our church involve following bylaws and inadequate bylaws that need crucial amendments, avoiding common conflicts of interest in composition of church boards and councils, the abuse of assets through conflict of interest actions, compliance with denominational bylaws for ministry leadership, and proper mechanisms of accountability.

We’d like to hear about learnings or frustrations that have occurred through

Save the Dates!
“The Way to San Jose”
Annual Convention
July 1–5, 2018
San Jose State University
San Jose, California

experiences in our small churches and also hear ideas and suggestions for a best practices proposal document that can be further discussed and perhaps voted on as a denominational guidelines document. Experiences and ideas can go beyond these immediate concerns centered in accountability and ethics and also speak to healthy practices in other aspects of congregational life.

A survey of our denomination will be going out via email, and you can also respond directly to this short article by emailing any of the committee members: Tom Neuenfeldt at neuenfeldt@chartermi.net; Sarah Buteux at revsarahb@mac.com; Andy Stinson at Stinsonad@aol.com; and Jim Lawrence at jlawrence@psr.edu.

The Editor's Desk



What's this Convention All About?

And, by the way, what is the *General Convention*, and how is it different from the *annual convention*?

As editor of *the Messenger*, I am familiar with the structure, workings, and personalities of the denomination, but all Messenger readers may not be as informed. I try to assure that references in articles to entities, events, and people are fully identified, even if that seems a little tedious to some readers. But still, some confusion may persist. Before I try to explain the annual convention, let me address this whole "convention" issue.

The denomination known as the Swedenborgian Church, of which this publication is a part, was founded as the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in 1817 by a gathering (convention) of state and regional associations of Swedenborgian churches (which called themselves, and many still do, *societies*). Thus we often call ourselves the *General Convention*, or

just *Convention*, and we also go by the DBA of the *Swedenborgian Church*.

Of course, like many national bodies, we have annual conventions, which leads to the confusing shorthand nomenclature of *Convention* holding its *convention*.

Back in the nineteenth century, there was less confusion as the General Convention held annual *meetings*, not annual *conventions*. When or why the nomenclature changed, I don't know—perhaps the word meeting seemed too specific to cover the range of activities engaged in by delegates when they came together for a few days. (In my quest as editor to be succinct, perhaps I should lobby for a return to the old nomenclature.)

So, let's look at the 2018 Annual Convention. The convention is a gathering of delegates and guests who are members of the Church or who have an interest in Swedenborg and

Swedenborgianism. It includes business sessions (including elections), a keynote speaker (Curtis Childs of "Off the Left Eye"—more about this next month), worship services, a social outing, numerous opportunities for conversation, ordination of new ministers, and mini-courses.

Mini-courses (page 13) provide an opportunity to meet ministers, professors, and others with special insights, knowledge, or experiences in an interactive setting. The courses always generate stimulating conversation and are often cited by participants as a high point of the convention experience.

—Herb Ziegler

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Swedenborgian News

For Swedenborg's birthday the popular podcast "**Things You Missed in History Class**" featured Swedenborg and interviewed Lisa Oz. It is a great summary about him. Take a listen: <https://tinyurl.com/ybu4dqpa>

The Church of the Holy City (Washington, DC) has a new 3-D tour of its historic house of worship. Take a look: <https://tinyurl.com/yce4upzg>.

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Church Calendar

- **May 12, 2018:** General Council Spring Teleconference meeting
- **July 1–5, 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,

There are good things happening in the General Convention.

First, thanks to all of you who give back to Convention, in time serving on committees, your faithful work in our churches, retreats, camps and ministries, and with your financial gifts. Donations were up 20% in 2017 and the number of donors was up 30%. Thank you all for your support. We are all working our best, and your financial and spiritual support helps to keep us going.

The Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS) continues to excel at being a “think tank for Swedenborgian studies globally” as it lives up to its mission statement: to prepare qualified women and men for ministry in the Swedenborgian Church and the world, to serve as a center on the leading edge of Swedenborgian scholarship, and to share its resources of scholarship, leadership, and people with the wider church and community. (<http://css.gtu.edu/>)

At the recent Winter Intensive at CSS—designed to create community, teach practical skills for ministry, and bring off-site students onto the Berkeley campus—there were four students preparing for ordained ministry, one induction candidate, and two working on requirements for the licensed pastor (LP) program. Christine Campbell from Temenos is working on her second module of the LP program and Lorraine Kardash is beginning her first LP module from the Portland New Church.

Nancy Piorkowski is in her second year of seminary training for chaplaincy. Dan Burchett is preparing to transfer his ordination to Swedenborgian. Professor Devin Zuber is working towards fulfilling his ordination requirements. Rachel Madjerac will be completing her M.Div. in May; she is planning for ordination this summer and has accepted a residency in chaplaincy in San Diego (page 19). And Cory Bradford-Watts, also completing his M.Div. and planning ordination this summer, is ready to candidate and find a Swedenborgian church or center to serve. The students practiced offering communion, baptized ten-pound bags of potatoes, and engaged in conversations about weddings, memorial services, and church polity. The Committee for Admission to the Ministry (CAM) took advantage of the students all being in one place at the same time to have meetings with each one. I am blessed to report the CAM meetings went very well, and we are in good hands for the future.

In addition, our CSS professors, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, Dr. Devin Zuber, and Dr. Rebecca Esterson, continue to offer classes at the Pacific School of Religion and the Graduate Theological Union to a variety of students from various faith traditions and leadership paths. Few leave either of these institutions without some level of introduction to Swedenborg. The professors are also invited to speak nationally and internationally and truly broaden Swedenborgian studies within an elite academic environment.

Thank you for your continued support of our seminary with your financial gifts and prayers.

I am asking for one more gift and that is to *the Messenger*. Editor Herb Ziegler is always looking for updates on our churches, camps, and youth leagues and for general articles that help keep everyone informed and connected. He does an excellent job as editor and writer. You can thank him by sending local information, writing articles, and send donations designated for *the Messenger*.

With faith and hope in the future,

—Rev. Jane Siebert

Cambridge Welcomes Rev. Anna Woofenden

In a world where the culture is changing, and where the church is changing, we often are asking, what is next for our churches? What does it look like to “be church” today? What does it mean to be Swedenborgian? And how can we be faithful in this generation?

At Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, Massachusetts, we have been diving into these questions since the arrival of Rev. Sage Cole in 2015, and are seeking to face them head on this year as we have invited Rev. Anna Woofenden to join with us through 2018 as Ministry Consultant for Outreach and New Initiatives. The possibilities for vital and creative Swedenborgian ministry in Cambridge are vast, and we feel energized to think about the different directions our work could go. While the ways that God and religion and church are being lived out in the world are changing, the need for places to come together to learn and grow and love God and love the neighbor are still vitally important. We feel confident that our Swedenborgian tradition has much to offer future generations and are so excited to find new ways to be church in the world and to be of use in our community.

Please stay tuned to hear more as the year unfolds! And consider adding your prayers to our work. We see our ministry and future as important not just to our direct neighbors but to the church as a whole, and in that spirit welcome all to be involved in fostering our vision and work for the future.

We wanted to share Anna’s first sermon with us “God as Divine Composter,” preached at Swedenborg Chapel, Sunday January 28th 2018.

—The Cambridge Society



dirt and the seasons and the seeds and the soil, we had the regular opportunity to be reminded of the way that the natural world is infused with a spiritual reality: this idea that Emanuel Swedenborg calls *correspondences*. These cycles and processes of the natural world have things to teach us. And God’s love and wisdom are present in them.

So we spent time looking at how seeds have to break out of their husks in order to grow, and how we need to slough off layers of our husks in order to grow spiritually. We looked at the bulbs and how they hibernate underground, waiting until the right conditions of warmth and moisture are present before they bloom, just as we need the love and truth for our spiritual lives to grow.

One Sunday when we were looking at the parable of the weeds, we wrote down the “weed messages” that are persistent in our lives and then went together over to our Prayer Garden, where we ripped them up and dug them into the dirt, to be decomposed and composted. People read their messages before they ripped them, and we heard in sacred voices the messages such as, “I’m not good enough,” “I’m all alone,” and “I’ll never amount to anything” spoken. Reassurance and freedom come from voicing these thoughts and having God and people keep loving us.

Carlos came for the first time that day and worked hard throughout the work-together time. He stayed for church, joined right in, and shared beautifully and heart-wrenchingly as we stood in the prayer garden. He said

that he really had been questioning that week “if one person really mattered or could make a difference, if I matter or make a difference. But seeing what was happening and how I was invited to be part of it had made me wonder if really my life could matter.” Afterwards he showed me a video of his three-year-old daughter, Destiny, and how he’d do anything to help her know she’s loved. We learned from those weeds and saw God in the natural world and in each other as we made church together.

At the Garden Church, we examined butterflies and watched them transform, watched hibiscus blossoms, and nurtured generations of Swiss chard. And we talked about compost—yup, lots and lots of talk about compost.

And, this is the lesson I want to bring here to you today. Here we are three thousand miles away from that warm urban sanctuary, in a different beautiful sanctuary in the heart of a city. Your beautiful chapel and precious church right here in Cambridge Massachusetts, an island in Harvard’s Campus, offering over 100 years of sanctuary. Thousands of people have come through its doors over the years, many thousands more have walked by, noting its beauty and witness. You have given so much to so many over the years, and I know you’ve now been in a season where you are asking the questions, “who are we and what will our church look like in the next generation?”

You may not think these two churches have a lot in common, but I think the compost heap has a message that will connect the dots. Because both of these churches, the brand new Garden Church in the warm LA sun, and this historical, sacred space of the

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Rev. Anna Woofenden

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Swedenborg Chapel in wintery Cambridge, they have these things in common: They are both part of the Lord's Church on earth. They are both part of the thread and story of Christianity. They are both part of a greater cycle of all things being made new. And they are both striving to be places that are a little bit more like heaven here on earth—a part of that Heavenly City descending. Places where people can connect to each other and to God. And they both can learn from the compost heap.

When we zoom out a bit and think about the Church throughout time, what might that bring up in your hearts and minds? What is “the Church” even? God's way of connecting with us? Our way of connecting with each other? Our way of connecting with God?

Swedenborg speaks to the arch of the Christian narrative with the idea that there is always some church, some structure, within which people connect with each other and God. He tells it with a Christian-centric bent, but I think the principle applies more globally. God is always available, accommodating, present, pressing, and urging to be received—to all people, in all cultures, throughout time.

And it seems that God is a god of variety, of creativity, of accommodation, and throughout time is always looking for how to use what is there, be it the structures, the context, the mindset, or the cultural objects. People and God work together to create what we know broadly as “church.” They are places where people come together to connect with God and community.

And the way this looks changes over time, over generations, decades, centuries. Swedenborg names various eras of church, from the Most Ancient Church, through what he calls the

New Church or the New Jerusalem—a “new Christianity.” In the context of this teaching, this new church is what many of us in the Swedenborgian tradition are striving for, working for, and hoping that we are part of. And I hope that we are.

My grandparents and great-grandparents and great-great-grandparents—all staunch Swedenborgians—certainly thought so. And I don't doubt that they were. But I also wonder. I wonder if at times we can get stuck in the idea that we've arrived at that New Church, or even worse, that it has come and gone. We can get stuck and despair if we think that the church that so many of you have dedicated your lives to is dying and on its way out, instead of engaging ourselves as part of God's continual work to bring more heaven here on earth, to cultivate the peaceable kingdom, to create environments conducive of the heavenly city New Jerusalem continuing to descend.

Now here's the hard truth: church, and churches as we know them really might be dying, and change is the name of the game. If statistics across denominations—and particularly in the main-line protestant churches in the US that we find ourselves comparable to—tell the story, then yes, things are changing. Attendance is down drastically, giving is down, churches are struggling financially, and the rate of churches that close their doors each year is on an exponential rise.

I think it's important that we recognize this. There is a very real trend in our country and in various parts of the Western world. The rise of secularization leaves church as one option among many, rather than the general assumption. Over a few generations, we now find ourselves with more and more people who were not raised in church, consider themselves non-religious or spiritual but not religious, and unsure why they would ever want to be part

of a church.

It can feel like a rather bleak picture. You might be able to add your own strokes to this picture in very local and personal ways. You can track your own declines in attendance, harken back to a day when the pews were full, lament the down-turn of giving and people serving, and wonder about the state of the roof.

And this is all real. I am not here to convince you otherwise. But maybe what I can offer is for us to zoom out a bit and see it all through a longer-term lens.

Maybe, maybe the New Church, a New Christianity, the Kingdom of God, the Peaceable Kingdom is still being birthed. Maybe there is new life and faith in generations to come. Maybe, in the midst of caring for what is fading and changing, we can look and see that yes, there are these marker points of death—and mixed right in with them, fertile soil for what is sprouting.

Okay, this is where I want to talk about compost again. I do really love compost. Actually, over the last four years I've become a bit obsessed about it—just ask my husband.

Here's the thing about compost: the more I learn about it, the more it seems like one of the more powerful analogies for God and for the work God does in the world. God is the ultimate recycler, the Divine Composter. God takes all that has been, all that we've used, our best bits and our slimy bits, the ends of those carrots and the pain of loss, the tantalizing crumbs of our joyful moments and the leftovers that we clung onto too long. God takes all of that and says, “okay, great, let's see what we can do with it next!”

What do you know about compost? A brief 101 lesson: Compost takes all sorts of things that are leftover, done, used, dying. Food scraps, peels, leftovers, dried leaves, shredded

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newspaper, even your stale donut, and turns them into rich soil. You take all of this stuff and you gather it together and put it in a container; it doesn't have to be fancy, but it needs to be purposeful. And then you let nature do her thing.

What immediately begins to happen is that the little bacteria get to work! They start breaking down the banana peels and the crunchy maple leaves. The humans in the equation can make sure that it gets turned every week so that there is proper air, that more materials get added to it, that it's getting a good balance of wet and dry, we might add some worms to it to aid the process. But mostly, we just sit back and let nature do her work.

Then, just weeks later, a well-tended compost heap reveals its magic. Where a bunch of old food scraps were, we now find dark, rich, delightfully warm and moist soil. What just weeks ago made you plug your nose and go running the other way, now calls us to bury our noses in it, the fresh warm earth.

And this is not just any old dirt. Soil that comes from compost is amazing! It improves the soil structure, increases nutrient content, holds water more effectively, and wards off plant diseases. So it's actually not only free and available, but also better than the soil you might get elsewhere. Not to mention the incredible environmental impact it makes.

Tragically, up to forty percent of all food produced in the U.S. intended for consumption is not eaten, which equates to about twenty pounds of food per person each month. Food that gets thrown out ends up in landfills, where it gradually rots and releases methane, a strong greenhouse gas. Globally, if food waste could be represented as its own country, it would be

the third largest greenhouse gas emitter, behind China and the US.

So composting not only affects the direct local environment of your own compost heap and garden, it also is a powerful contributor to the bigger ecosystem. It has an impact by not adding more strain to the system as well as adding strength to the environment.

But, back to the theology of it all. So if the Lord is the Divine Composer, what might that mean for our lives, our spiritual path, our churches, and the world?

I think it can change the way we look at death and decline. It can help us to zoom out and say, "Huh, yes, maybe that thing as we know it is changing and parts of it are dying, but does that mean it's totally over and useless, or does it mean it's going on the compost heap to help grow a new thing?"

I believe a new thing is coming—and is here. Within this country, within faith communities, within the Christian tradition, new things are growing, new things are being born. And the Heavenly City is always striving to be realized, a world that is more just and generous, faithful and beautiful and true is constantly possible. And I, for one, think that the Church, and this church, are still part of that.

I don't think the need for church—for people gathering together to love God and love neighbor—is going away. In fact, I think it's needed more than ever, but it may just look a little different than we might expect.

I don't stand here today naïvely giving you a sunny picture of what I hope. I offer a more defiantly hopeful picture based on what I see. Because I see this heavenly city breaking in so many ways. In and amongst that which is dying.

And I know, that can be a bit confusing. I think this time is asking of us, inviting us, demanding from us, that we are able and willing to live in this tension of what has been and what

is coming. It's not a clean break. Both death and new life are happening simultaneously within a compost heap. And that is part of our work together, to sort out and to listen and attune ourselves to what needs to be let go of and change, what is that firm foundation, and what wants to grow next.

And to trust together and have our eyes open to what the new thing is that God is doing. What the new things are. Both right here at Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, and across the Church, across denominations, across the country, where is God doing a new thing?

It could be a dinner church meeting on Thursday evenings while the traditional church meets Sunday mornings, and the discovery that both communities enrich each other. It's the traditionally black church outside of Baltimore that tore up their well manicured lawn and put in a farm to grow vegetables for their local community, but didn't stop there and went on to teach hundreds of people living in struggling neighborhoods how to grow a portion of their own groceries in their front yards, in window boxes, and empty lots.

It's the church that opens up its fellowship hall as an overflow freeze shelter when they find out that some of their neighbors had slept sitting up in the emergency room as the only alternative to being out in the four-degree weather. It's sanctuaries opening themselves up to theater groups and meditation classes, it's taking ashes out onto the streets, it's opening doors and making sacred space available to a community, having pastors who are there when grief and loss hit.

It's an empty lot transformed into an outdoor edible sanctuary and, friends, it's right here in Cambridge Massachusetts at Swedenborg Chapel.

You have served faithfully; your ancestors served faithfully. We are given so much to work with, and there are people, possibilities, and life to come.

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CSS Student Rachel Madjerac's Chaplaincy Work in Hawaii and San Diego

BY JIM LAWRENCE

From Berkeley to Oahu to San Diego, Rachel Madjerac, Swedenborgian student soon to complete her Master of Divinity degree this May and ordained this summer at the annual convention, has taken her calling to the places she loves the best, the beach communities of California and Hawai'i.

Rachel came to the Center for Swedenborgian Studies of the Graduate Theological Union (CSS) in the Fall of 2015 after finishing her undergraduate work at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts. From the beginning she knew her goal after seminary was a chaplaincy, though her positive and successful year-long internship in congregational ministry at Hillside Community Church in El Cerito, California, has her realizing she may profile herself as bi-vocational.



Last summer she completed the basic full-time ten-week unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) in Hawai'i. A requirement of both the denomination and the certification process for accreditation in the College of Chaplains, Rachel landed a spot at the competitive placement of The Queen's Medical Center in Honolulu. The chance to learn Native Hawaiian healing and other traditions was part of what drew her to the enchanting setting where

she would experience an intense full-time summer workload as a chaplain trainee. The Queens is a major trauma center whose staff and patients can range from Native Hawaiian to transplants and tourists, the homeless and incarcerated.

Rachel and her cohort of CPE trainees visited many Hawaiian cultural and sacred sites led by native guides and healers. Hawaiian rituals are a

deeply rooted part of Hawaiian culture. One of the rituals she was privileged to learn was the Ti Leaf Ceremony a blessing that helps clear negative energy and restore health and harmony. She was honored to be asked to perform the ceremony for her colleagues at the hospital several times.

Back stateside to launch into her third and final year in seminary at Pacific School of Religion, Rachel began looking for a full-time, post-graduation CPE placement, and was selected by another competitive program: Sharpe Memorial Hospital in San Diego. Beginning on August 27, 2018, Rachel will take her next bold step on the chaplaincy journey and also continue to ponder how she can serve the Swedenborgian Church that has nurtured her since young adolescence and to which she is committed. ☩

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence is dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies. Swedenborgian ministry students earn their Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary, often from the Pacific School of Religion, on whose campus the CSS offices are located.

Rev. Anna Woofenden

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I don't know for sure, but my gut says that the Lord is not done with us, with this chapel, with this community yet. I don't know precisely what that means, or exactly what that looks like, and I know this is uncomfortable, but I'm banking on God doing some of Her beautiful composting transformation around here. Because it takes our efforts, yes, but ultimately it is God and God's spirit that make all things possible.

So, maybe we need to start thinking

more like composters. . . . What can we put on the heap to make it have a good balance? What are the scraps and leftovers that need to be let go of? What are the healthy browns, the areas of stability and resources that we have? How can we bring aeration and oxygen to this process? How do we spread out the good soil in order to invite healthy things to grow?

We have an opportunity to explore together this year. I do not know what the end result will be. But I promise my commitment to entering into the process with you and listening and learning and growing together. And

I am privileged to be on this journey with you, and curious and excited to see what it is that the Divine Composter will do. May we live into these words of Isaiah (65:17-18):

See, I will create new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create,

for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy

Amen. ☩

A Pretty Prairie Christmas

The Pretty Prairie Society had a good group at our Christmas Eve service this year. Many things stayed the same but there were some changes as well. Rev. Jane led our thoughts to the reality of Mary's struggle to accept her pregnancy and the willingness to do what God had planned. Likewise, with Joseph and the probability that it was a shock to find Mary was pregnant. This brought it down to a human level, and not just the pretty picture we see on the Christmas cards.

A big change was absence of the Christmas play the late Jean Graber always wrote for the kids and whoever else wanted to participate. Since she



was no doubt writing a heavenly play, it fell to the ones left here on earth to fill in, honoring the many years she spent writing plays. Ethan and Noah Perry wrote a short play called "Traditions and the Christmas Spirit" and Sue Pulsifer wrote one about the "Legend of the Poinsettia."

We had two musical numbers: Noah Perry on the saxophone and Rev. Eric and Leslie Siebert singing "O Holy Night."

The evening ended with our traditional singing of "Silent Night" by candlelight. And, of course, the visit from Santa Claus, passing out gifts and candy. The evening is always such a special time. ☪

Rev. Dan Burchett

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I never doubted Goodness and Truth that I perceived to be God. I did learn to contextualize human experiences and relationships, discovering that people were in various stages of transformation, and most didn't look very much like God to me. So much of the problem is about perception, and so much of life, especially difficulties, is about chipping away our inaccurate perceptions about God,



Wayfarers Chapel

self, and other human beings. The human ego before transformation is so large and forceful that it is only when we come through some sort of "dark night of the soul"¹ that diminishes the external material experience and we realize we have survived it, that we become more aware of the slow arduous process of awakening that is ongoing.

For me, that process included several years of ministry that followed the path of my young religious experience, the devastating crisis of a divorce after sixteen years of marriage, and honestly facing personal issues I avoided for many years which was the cause of my divorce, to name a few. When we begin to see our losses as necessary to spiritual awakening, we experience a sense of the eternal that is God-breathed in us . . . the part of us that will never be diminished by crises or any material loss. I believe it is not loss for the sake of losing but rather a removing of what is false to make room for what is true. It is, in part, the clearing away of what we have accumulated in beliefs that are based in our egoic false self, religious affiliation, misconceptions about God, and many other things reflecting our finite existence.

A wonderful thing I discovered in this journey is that engaging in our gradual transformation is in no way dependent on our conscious understanding of the process, nor is it conditional to our discerning minds and emotional stability. It is seemingly in spite of our deep inclination toward the status quo of flawed human experience. It really seems to be the result of the force of God in love that allows us the freedom to discover through trial and error, while attracting the human soul through a relentless and frag-

grant, alluring presence that eventually allows me to willingly embrace Love that is God and God that is Love . . . realizing I am in that equation! I am in the Love that is God and I am in the God that is Love.

The word that first comes to mind is freedom. One day you awaken and you no longer feel the restraints of religious systems, theological opinions, political perspectives, personal failure or success, or any other imposed restrictions. You begin to see that all of Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom of God were about the here and now and how we love and are loved, not having power through systems of religious or political governance. You also begin to feel like a new creation that has not only survived past crises but that has become fuel to allow you to soar and sing, not submerge. And this is only the beginning.

In my experience, Wayfarers Chapel as my introduction to The General Convention of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian Church) has come into vision at a time in my journey when one cluttered path led to a clearer one that allows for deeper experiences and clearer perspectives—an awakening to a greater freedom. ☪

¹ Spanish Mystic St. John of the Cross

SPLATz Survive the Plagues at Manna House

BY KURT FEKETE

Twelve 10- to 13-year-olds endured snakes, blood, frogs, gnats, flies, loss of livestock, boils, hail, locust, darkness, and, ultimately, death(!) at the January SPLATz (Super Powered Lovable Almost Teens) retreat on the theme of The Ten Plagues, hosted by the LaPorte New Church, in LaPorte, Indiana. But, think again if you think this retreat was a dark, dispiriting affair.

Although the subject was depressingly grim and the lessons were difficult, the young people were captivated by the stories about the plagues and their deeper spiritual meaning. Most importantly, they learned what steps they can take to avoid suffering through those terrible inner catastrophes in the first place.

To help remember the plagues, the tweens made origami jumping frogs and a big, colorful wheel of plagues. They helped me share the plague story and its meaning with the LaPorte New Church congregation on Sunday morning. They also learned about Passover and the great exodus out of Egypt.

We worked together to discover ways we can avoid the slippery path that leads to the plagues by discussing what is most important in life, like being a kind person and loving the neighbor and the Lord more than loving the latest electronic device or game. I



Hot cocoa time!

wanted to emphasize the good at the end of the plagues when the Israelites finally get out of Egypt, so we made our own special kind of mezuzahs.

Jewish mezuzahs are decorative cases that hold a precious piece of parch-

ment to God. They decorated cardboard tubes as mezuzahs to put their *klafim* into.

During breaks between sessions, the tweens visited the newly renovated LaPorte Public Library across the street from Manna House, LaPorte Church's parish house, where we stayed. On Sunday afternoon we went sledding and had creamy hot cocoa with lots of marshmallows afterwards.

We concluded the retreat program with a heartfelt worship service on Sunday evening, which we held to celebrate the six 13-year-old teens graduating out of the SPLATz group and entering into the SCYL (Swedenborgian Church Youth League). This was a powerful and moving time for the group.

The whole retreat was both fun and enlightening on many levels for both the tweens and myself. I have always loved the story of the plagues and

remember first delving into them way back when I was a teenager at Almont Summer School. I'd like to share some insights into the inner meaning of the plagues with you here. All of what you find below was discussed with the tweens at this retreat, and once again they amazed me with their knowledge, thoughtfulness, and ability to understand both the theology and the critical life lessons we can learn from this story.

The Plagues

We find the story of the ten plagues

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Tubing: the individuals



Pairs sliding



Thrills and spills

hand quilled by a qualified scribe. The mezuzah is then affixed to the doorpost of the home.

In our version, the retreaters used parchment that I preprinted with the beginning klaf words "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." in both English and Hebrew. Then, the tweens added words and writings of meaning that spoke to their personal

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in the seventh chapter of the book of Exodus. The Israelites had been living in Egypt for over 400 years by this time, much of it as slaves. Spiritually, Egypt represents a worldly, materialistic place. If you live in this place



Pasta dinner—yum

too long, you become enslaved to material things. You become captive in Egypt and forget about the Holy Land. When your primary focus is on material goods, you can easily lose your spiritual nature and everything that is good and true. You don't think about loving the Lord and loving the neighbor anymore. The plagues present a progression of deeper and deeper falsities and evils which strike the inner life of the wholly materialistic person that is "living in Egypt."



Mezuzahs and klafim

We pick up the story in Exodus 7:8–9. The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron. He said, "Pharaoh will say to you, 'Do a miracle.' When he does, speak to Aaron. Tell him, 'Take your walking stick and throw it down in front of Pharaoh.' It will turn into a snake."

The snake is a symbol of the sensual or the worldly. This is a warning and a foreshadowing of the bad things that can happen to us if we ignore our good thoughts and intentions and disregard God and spiritual things.

We discover that the first four plagues deal for the most part with false thoughts and ideas. They are bad, but not as bad as the plagues that follow them. The first plague, the turning of the waters into blood, relates to how we turn or twist truths to support the falsities we are particularly fond of. The frogs follow and represent the enjoyment we get when we argue from falsity and deny or slander spiritual things. The "croaking on" of people in this state can sound despondent and grumbly although it is pleasant for the people doing the croaking! Next come the gnats which are all the bothersome and annoying trivial thoughts and desires that distract us from our greater purpose and use. The gnats come up from the dust of the earth where the snake crawls, so we know thoughts like this are closely connected to our five senses. These are all the millions upon millions of "I wants" and "I shoulds" that overwhelm us and persist everywhere all the time. After the gnats we get the flies. Flies gather and settle on everything unclean. The flies dwell in the mind as an enjoyment of corrupt or nasty thoughts until they begin to interfere with our higher ambitions and goals. Perseverating on evil is akin to the car crash or grotesque scene that we cannot turn away from or stop thinking about.

The fifth plague, the death of the livestock, is transitional in that it is more severe and damaging to us. Where the prior four plagues involved water, insects and cold blooded frogs—all related to thoughts and falsities—we now encounter warm-blooded animals, which relates to the affections or the will. As they are domestic livestock, they represent

affections for being useful. We are like livestock when we contribute to society and serve others. The death of livestock comes about when we no longer are contributing to the greater good. This is when things are really getting spiritually bad for us. With the death of the livestock, we no longer feel passion or motivation to live a useful life. Our heart is no longer engaged in loving and caring acts towards the neighbor, and we no longer desire to have a connection with God either. As a member of the LaPorte New Church pointed out to me, this is a stage where addiction can occur. It is extremely difficult to recover from the plagues from this point forward.

We are halfway through the plagues, and the impact of living a selfish life is about to become apparent to everyone around us. This is represented in the plague of boils. The bodies of all the Egyptians were covered with boils. The magicians couldn't stand in front of Moses because of the boils that were all over them (Exodus 9:11). These painful inflammations correspond to when our interior evils break out to the surface. The ugliness inside becomes read-



Ally and Zsa Zsa work on the cover of the plague wheel

ily noticeable as a visible flaw in our outer life. Until they appeared, you could hide your infliction. Now people around you—your friends, co-workers,

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and family—become grossly aware of your inner condition and the damage it is doing to you and to others. Boils cannot be hidden from others for long. The ugliness surfaces. If a favorable intervention is to take place, this might be the likely stage at which it could occur.

Next, we encounter the plague of a hailstorm. We read in Exodus 9:31–32 that the barley was ripe and the flax was in bloom, so they were both destroyed. But the wheat and spelt weren't destroyed. That's because they ripen later. The destruction of the young crops by hail is falsity destroying the spiritual truth we learned in childhood (called by Swedenborg *remains*). At this point the basic spiritual principles that we knew to be true are broken down by falsity. These remains always live in our heart, as the Lord protects them and they cannot be harmed, but they can no longer be found in our mind and therefore cannot be acted on or accessed in any useful way.

The eighth plague is the locusts. "The locusts covered the ground until it was black. They ate up everything left after the hail. They ate up everything growing in the fields. They ate up the fruit on the trees. There was nothing green left on any tree or plant in the whole land of Egypt" (Exodus 10:15).

Leaves correspond to learned "living" truths that help us live out our passion. Fruits are the good that come out of our charitable work. Our good works can only come to fruition after the leaves of truth provide us with a sound, strong foundation of knowledge. We need to understand both natural and spiritual fundamentals before we can properly bring our fruits of labor to others. When the locusts come, they devour both the leaves, our learned knowledge, and the fruit, our

My First Retreat

BY: ZSA ZSA DOLLEY

Hello! My name is Zsa Zsa, and I am 10 years old. I just had my first retreat in LaPorte, Indiana for 3 days. This SPLATz (Super Powered Lovable Almost Teens) tween retreat was about The 10 Plagues. We learned about the story, and what the spiritual meaning of each plague was. For crafts, we made origami jumping frogs and mezuzahs (we put a Swedenborgian twist on a Jewish tradition). Also, we went sledding down a big hill, and had hot cocoa after! At the end of the retreat we presented what we learned to the local church in LaPorte. All in all, I had a lot of fun and will be sure to come to the next retreat.



good works. They consume all remaining goodness that was spared by the hailstorm, and we are left barren. We are still alive but utterly lifeless.

Then the plague of darkness descends upon us. In Exodus 10:22 we read, "So Moses reached out his hand toward the sky. Then complete darkness covered Egypt for three days." Darkness means that the mind cannot even see the truth anymore. If we reach this sad point in our lives, we lack the complete ability to discern genuine understanding or useful knowledge. We are unable to see anything spiritual or truthful. Three days represents a complete state of darkness affecting love, wisdom, and action or mind, body and spirit. A member of the congregation at the LaPorte New Church astutely commented how this sounds like a very deep state of depression.

The last plague, where we find the Passover story, is the death of the first-born males. The death of the first born is when you have no life left in any of the things you held true and good. You are essentially spiritually dead. There is no good left in your heart of any use at all. Up until now, the Israelites were spared all of the plagues. All of these horrific afflictions happen to those who dwell in Egypt for a very long time, ignoring all things good and true. Yet to escape the last plague, the Israelites

had to do something themselves, both as a sign of their faith in God and in recognition of their deliverance. They had to take action and do something significantly meaningful and reverent. They had to prepare the Passover. We too need to take action in our lives and do something significantly meaningful with reverence and care. This is our exodus from the slavery of Egypt. The Lord will guide us and protect us if we are willing to use our hearts, our heads and our hands to carry out the charitable work that we have been called to do. In the words of the Jewish prayer *Shema Yisrael*, Deuteronomy 6:4–9,

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.

I pray that each of you avoids the plagues and does good and faithful work in your life. ☪

Kurt Fekete is youth director of the Swedenborgian Church.

Mini-Courses

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potent ways Swedenborg's ideas affect people online" with Curtis Childs

- "Five stages of Creativity and Five Stages of Regeneration: a Comparison" with Wendy Soneson
- "Spirituality, Sustainability, and Food Justice: Lessons from the Garden Church" with Rev. Jonathan Mitchell
- "Swedenborg and New Discoveries in Cosmology" with Rev. Dr. Rachel Rivers
- "Maurice Nicoll's Clever Use of Swedenborg" with Rev. Jeffrey Adams
- "The Old and New Jerusalem" with Dr. Rebecca Esterson
- "What's the Use of the Swedenborgian Church?" with Rev. Thom Muller
- "Exploring Swedenborg's Life and Times in Sweden" with Dr. Devin Zuber and Colin Amato

Proprium: The Search For Spiritual Identity

Swedenborg's theology revolves around several key concepts, including the divine nature of the Lord, the renewal of religious consciousness, the inner meaning of Scripture, and the



personal work of regeneration. But throughout all of his writings, one concept, one term, emerges as truly central: *proprium*. A strange word on the

face of it, this Latin word is usually translated as "one's own," which is just abstract enough to be largely unhelpful. It is the root, though, of many other terms we know well: property (what's mine), appropriate (to make something one's own), proper (suited to me), etc.

Most Swedenborgians have heard this term, and many have a general idea of its meaning. But for all of its importance in Swedenborg's writings, few have a confident understanding of what is at work here. In this mini-course, you are invited to explore this concept in greater detail, to learn what the *proprium* is, what it isn't, and perhaps uncover some hidden insights into your "own" spiritual identity along the way.

Rev. Robert McCluskey

Rev. Robert McCluskey, B.A., M.A., and a graduate of the Swedenborg School of Religion, was ordained into the Swedenborgian Church in 1984. Rev. McCluskey has pastored Swedenborgian churches in Portland, Maine and New York City, and for seventeen years served as Swedenborgian representative to the National Council of Churches, with specific attention to the work of social justice and religious freedom. He is now a minister at the Wayfarers Chapel in Rancho Palos Verdes, California.

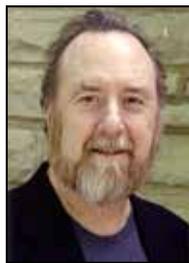
"And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb"—William Blake's Complex Relationship with the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg

Swedenborg's influence is everywhere in Blake's writings. At times, Blake loved Swedenborg's theology, and at times he hated it. But love or hate, Blake could not get away from Swedenborg.

In this talk, I sketch Swedenborg's ideas in the writings of Blake, from early infatuation to later sarcastic appropriation, to a still later embrace of Swedenborg's thought.

Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete

Rev. Dr. Fekete took his B.A. from Urbana University, then a Swedenborgian College. He earned his master's degree from Harvard Divinity School and concurrently received a diploma from the Swedenborg School of Religion. This was followed by a Ph.D. from the



University of Virginia. He is the pastor of the Church of the Holy City in Edmonton, Alberta, and serves Western Canada Conference of the Swedenborgian Church. He considers himself a spiritual quester.

Best Practices in Our Small Churches

The small church has special challenges in meeting "best practices" standards compared to larger churches. What are the common issues? What are the best ideas for empowering a small ministry, and what are the most common pitfalls?

Everything we do carries risks. How do we distinguish between bad risks and good risks? This course will present snapshots of the latest research and provide time for general discussion.

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence is dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU), in Berkeley, California. He earned his undergraduate degree in Economics for the Developing Worlds from the University of Texas at Austin. A growing focus on the need for spiritual renewal in the world led to seminary. He studied at Brite Divinity School (Texas Christian University) and then at the Swedenborg School of Religion in Boston; he was ordained upon graduation in 1984. Over the next seventeen years he worked with three Swedenborgian congregations in rural, suburban, and urban settings, while simultaneously serving in publishing ministries. He contributed as publisher, editor, and author to more than thirty works in church related publication ministries. He received the Doctor of Ministry degree with a concentration on writing and publishing in 1992 from the Graduate Theological Foundation in Indiana, and in 2012 received his Ph.D. in Christian Spirituality from the GTU. From 2001 to 2015, he was dean of the Swedenborgian House of Studies and, since July 1, 2015, he has led the Center for Swedenborgian Studies. In addition to Swedenborgian studies, he pursues research and teaches in spirituality studies, Western Esotericism, and New Religious Movements.

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Mini-Courses

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Swedenborg as Spiritual Duct Tape: A look into the diverse and potent ways Swedenborg's ideas affect people online

As a lifelong Swedenborgian, I've always believed that Swedenborg's writings were something of real value—something that could make a tangible difference in the world and change lives for the better. However, just between you and me, the strength of that conviction wavered quite a bit through the years. As I crawled through the complex maze of “truth” and “good” and the “truth of good” and the “good of truth” and the “good of the truth of the good of truth” (OK, the last one is an exaggeration), there were times when I wondered, is this environment only comforting to me because I'm native to it?

Are there really gems here? Is there really medicine here? Well, good news! The last few exciting years of sending Swedenborg's message out online and hearing response from people has left me fully convinced that the message is even more valuable than I'd expected or hoped, and valuable in ways I wouldn't have seen coming. In this mini-course, we'll look at real responses we've gotten from our online audience and the diverse mosaic of impact that the concepts in Swedenborg are making in all corners of the world.

Curtis Childs

Curtis Childs graduated with a degree in Communications at Oakland University. Beginning with short stints in everything from carpentry to working at a juvenile detention facility, his career path led him to the fascinating and meaningful field of Swedenborgian outreach. Hired by the tech-focused startup NewChurch Live, Curtis worked on, and eventually became head of,



something that could make a tangible difference in the world and change lives for the better. However, just between you and me, the strength of that

KidsLive—a program that sought to distill the complex yet vital ideas in Swedenborg's published theological works into something that not only could kids understand, but that would get them to joyfully embrace the principles of mutual love. He wrote scripts, acted, and yes, even dropped a kids' album.

He began working in online video in 2011 and, after a period of independent production, was hired by the Swedenborg Foundation to build digital community and get exposure for Swedenborg's writings through the internet. He is now the digital media producer, and his projects have amassed more than 400,000 Facebook page likes, 10 Million YouTube views, and 84 Million minutes of content watched. His work has been featured on the Dr. Oz Show, and he has been a featured speaker at numerous events, including the Conference for Consciousness and Human Evolution in London and the Wisdom of the Near Death Experience Symposium in Austin, Texas. To see so many people around the world embrace Swedenborg's message is a constant source of wonder, inspiration, and gratitude for him. He lives in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, with his wife Brooke and their two-year-old daughter Sydney, who gets cuter every day.

Five stages of Creativity and Five Stages of Regeneration: a Comparison

Creative process mirrors transformation in regeneration. We are changed as we prepare ourselves then seek influx and finally bring into being, the new. “Behold I make all things new” refers to the continual manifestation of creation. Artists and other creative problem solvers have learned to honor each stage of the process for best results. We will do a hands-on project appropriate for all, not just so-called creative types, since we all are created in God's image, the Grand Creator.



Wendy Soneson

Wendy Soneson is a seventh-generation Swedenborgian educated in Swedenborgian schools, and holds a Master of Arts in Human Development degree. She has been teaching

art and creativity for forty years in schools and at Swedenborgian camps and conventions. She lives in the Bay Area, teaching in five locations and showing her watercolors.

Spirituality, Sustainability, and Food Justice: Lessons from the Garden Church

Much of Jesus' ministry took place in the context of the shared meal, meals which defied the conventions of his day around ethnicity and social class.



At the Garden Church we grow chemical-free food, make our own compost, host shared meals, and include our unhoused neighbors in all our activities. This is a way of working on issues of food justice and environmental sustainability, of course. But this program also invites people to come out of isolation and into community, thereby enhancing the spiritual lives of all who participate. In this mini-course we invite you into an open discussion of how these principles can be adapted and put into practice in all our ministries.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell is a native of Massachusetts, where he grew up in a restaurant family. Before entering the ministry, he pursued academic interests in philosophy, comparative religion, and language. He holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and an M. A. in Swedenborgian Studies from the Swedenborg School of Religion. Since ordination, he has served ministries in Washington DC, Wayfarers Chapel, San Diego, and now San Pedro. In his spare time he enjoys hiking, cooking, and the study of natural history. 🌱

Wedding at the FNCA

BY SARAH MAY GRAMS

After my first visit to the Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA), all I could think of was, “This is where I want to get married,” “My family will love it,” and “Who wouldn’t love it?”

My husband Troy even based our wedding invitation and order of service designs on the iconic and beautiful view of the mountains and pine trees from the front porch.

On July 16, 2016, we had the ceremony at the Fryeburg Church of the New Jerusalem and our reception at the FNCA. It was perfect! And everyone did love it!

We wanted a fairly informal wedding; we hung up soft white Christmas lights in the dining hall and had home-grown flowers and wildflowers in mason jars. It looked great!

We rented the whole of the Assembly from Friday through Monday to give us plenty of time to relax with friends and family. The majority of my family and friends came from the UK, so accommodations were very important to us. Everyone loved that when they wanted to have some quiet time they could just head to their cabin.

Our wedding day started with a morning swim in the Saco River, (what better way?) followed by a buffet breakfast in the dining hall; then my bridesmaids and I headed to the lecture hall (a comfortable spacious room with the all-important air conditioning!) for hair dressing and make-up.

The ceremony was at 10 AM. We had some photos taken outside on the front steps of the church before heading back to the FNCA for more photos: group photos on the front porch



Newlyweds Sarah and Troy Grams with the Saco River in the background

and a few more taken on the front lawn with the beautiful mountains and Saco River back drop.

After lunch we were entertained to the delight of everyone by Troy’s uncle, Trevor the Games Man (trevorthegamesman.com), who had everyone in stitches with his “Party Game Show.”

Most guests who had come just for the day left around mid-afternoon, so with our smaller, intimate party left we had time to relax and take another swim in the delightful, clear waters of the Saco. After dinner we pushed back the tables in the dining hall to give us a good-sized dance floor. Some of us danced, a few played badminton or volleyball outside, and others found somewhere comfortable to sit, chat, catch-up, or get to know one another.

It was just wonderful! ☪

Sarah and Troy Grams live and work at Flying Pond Farm in Vienna, Maine.

Passages

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Jerusalem (Swedenborgian), and was an active board member of the Swedenborg Foundation. At the Foundation—the largest non-profit entity devoted to publishing work by and about Swedenborg—Dr. Williams-Hogan served for twelve consecutive years as a member of the Board of Directors, and was a long-time board associate. Her Foundation colleagues fondly recall her “rare blend of insight and integrity” and “deep, inexhaustible passion for Swedenborg’s life and works” as she oversaw the Foundation’s line of scholarly books about Swedenborg.

In spite of her cancer diagnosis in 2016, Dr. Williams-Hogan was still able to co-organize a large international conference, “Swedenborg and the Arts,” that brought over forty academics to Bryn Athyn College for five days of rich conversation this past June. It was to be, in hindsight, her academic swan song. As with the earlier 1988 landmark conference and ensuing

book, the 2017 lectures are currently being turned into a collection of essays. The forthcoming volume will be dedicated posthumously to Dr. Williams-Hogan in recognition of her field-advancing contributions to Swedenborg studies and her great enthusiasm for the arts. She truly was, as Ralph Waldo Emerson once said of Swedenborg, a “colossal soul” who impacted the lives and ways of thinking of people around the globe. Her light may have left our earthly, natural plane, but her ideas continue to shine in the work that will continue to be done by many scholars in different fields, both Swedenborgian and those in more secular contexts.

Transitions

Rev. Dagmar Bollinger, a Swedenborgian graduate of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies and Earlham School of Religion is a board-certified hospital staff chaplain. She has just been appointed to a new position as chaplain at St. Joseph Mercy Brighton Cancer Center in Brighton, Michigan, which serves southeast Michigan. ☪

Passages

Deaths

Dr. Jane Williams-Hogan recently passed away in the comforts of her home while surrounded by her immediate family, after a brave struggle with cancer. The professor of religion and sociology at Bryn Athyn College was seventy-five years old. Over a prolific career that spanned some forty-three years, Dr. Williams-Hogan made indelible contributions to the academic study of the eighteenth-century scientist-turned-mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. She leaves a substantial legacy in the fields of western esotericism and new religious movements, where Dr. Williams-Hogan's pioneering scholarship on Swedenborg's place in modern religious and cultural thought remains foundational



Dr. Williams-Hogan was born on October 26, 1942, to Lt. Colonel William R. Kintner and Xandree Hyatt Kintner. On her mother's side, Dr. Williams-Hogan was a direct descendant of Jonas Person Odhner, an eighteenth-century Lutheran pastor who met Emanuel Swedenborg and was among the first Swedish clergymen to preach Swedenborgian doctrines from the pulpit (in Lyrestad, Sweden). Dr. Williams-Hogan's later academic work often took her to Sweden where the Swedish culture and its people became a veritable second home for her.

Dr. Williams-Hogan attended the University of Pennsylvania, earning a B.A. in English Literature (1964), an M.A. in Human Relations (1969), and later, a Ph.D. in Sociology (1985). Her doctoral dissertation on the early formations of the Swedenborgian church

movement in England—*A New Church in a Disenchanted World: A Study of the Formation and Development of the General Conference of the New Church in Great Britain*—contained several ideas that she would continue to refine and develop in the decades to come, particularly her notion of the “charisma of the book”: that one characteristic distinguishing the advent of Swedenborgianism as a “new religious movement” was not the charismatic power exerted by an individual or leader over others, but in the “charm” of a corpus of texts and the ideas they contained. Dr. Williams-Hogan would later come to argue, in a series of articles and talks, that this was one reason why so many post-Enlightenment artists and writers became enthralled with Swedenborg's ideas: that his books empowered aesthetics (or poetics) as a means for re-enchantment.

In keying the discourse of (dis)enchantment, Dr. Williams-Hogan's dissertation brilliantly combined the secularization theories provided by sociologist Max Weber with a careful parsing of early New Church archives, making new observations on the appearance of the early Swedenborgian church movement in the epistemological aftermath of the Enlightenment. A useful contribution to the sociology of religion, parts of Dr. Williams-Hogan's dissertation were later translated into Italian (by the noted professor of Hermetic philosophy Marco Pasi), and published in 2004 as *Swedenborg e le Chiese swedenborgiane (Swedenborg and the Swedenborgian Churches)*.

Her research interests were not limited to the purview of sociology, however; in some thirty separate articles and book chapters that appeared in various journals and collected volumes over the next three decades, Dr. Williams-Hogan tracked Swedenborg's broad impact on world thought, writing on everything from nineteenth-century artists and writers (Edgar Allan Poe,

William Blake) to the vexed question of Swedenborg's relation to Jewish Kabbalah. She penned an additional nine encyclopedia entries related to Swedenborg for different scholarly anthologies, including, most recently, the *Encyclopedia of Western Esotericism in Scandinavia* (Brill). Dr. Williams-Hogan further coedited an important collection of essays that came out of the Swedenborg Bicentenary conference that she had organized at Bryn Athyn College in 1988. At the time of her death on February 11 of this year, two unfinished book projects were nearing completion—a collection of essays on Swedenborg and five artists, and a new comprehensive biography of Swedenborg buttressed by Dr. Williams-Hogan's years of research in Swedish archives and libraries.

At the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and other scholarly associations devoted to the study of religion, Dr. Williams-Hogan played an essential role in ensuring that Swedenborg maintained a proverbial place at the table. Dr. Williams-Hogan established and chaired the AAR's Swedenborg Seminar from 1993–1997, and was further much involved in the early days of the study of western esotericism at the AAR, the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), and the Center for the Study of New Religious Movements (CESNUR, based in Turin, Italy). To honor Dr. Williams-Hogan's seminal contributions, CESNUR is dedicating a future lectureship in her name that will be inaugurated in June 2018 at Weixin College, Taiwan. The first lecture will be given by Prof. Bernadette Rigal-Celard of the University of Bordeaux, France, who was both a dear friend and colleague of Dr. Williams-Hogan's.

Dr. Williams-Hogan spent her career as professor at Bryn Athyn College, a liberal-arts institution affiliated with the General Church of the New

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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.

Meet Rev. Dan Burchett of Wayfarers Chapel

BY REV. DAN BURCHETT

Be-coming an officiant with Wayfarers Chapel beginning approximately seventeen years ago has been a decision that changed the trajectory of my journey in ways I did not anticipate. A recent event in the fall of 2017 was the honor of being accepted as an Induction candidate for ordination by the Committee On Admission into the Ministry (CAM), General Convention of the Swedenborgian Church, with Rev. Dr. James Lawrence, dean at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, overseeing required studies. Another substantial yet unanticipated life event has been assuming the position of director of finance and administration at Wayfarers Chapel in January of this year upon the retirement of my esteemed predecessor, Shannon Reynolds. I am humbled by the trust that has been placed in my hands in both of these meaningful life events. And now, allow me share some of the back story leading up to these events.

If you have been privileged to walk

the grounds of Wayfarers Chapel, enjoying the vision and fragrance of the rose garden, observing the statuesque redwoods or viewing a sunset overlooking the vast Pacific Ocean, and especially experiencing the solitude while reflecting in the chapel, you know you have been in a sacred space. However, what is beneath the surface of these experiences yet very much attached to them is something even more profound that reaches into our being and substan-



tiates what we know on a much deeper level—God is present. God is personal. God is passionate about me and our union—God with me and in me.

I was raised in the home of a minister who surely loved God. We were in a church service more than once weekly, and in those early years I experienced God and church together. Since God and church are not the same thing, I began seeing things about church that I knew intrinsically were not the same as God, and a kind of dualism began to form in my thinking related to spirituality. I can say from my earliest "God experiences"

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