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Teens Find Their Path at Bishop's Ranch

By Kurt Fekete

Seventeen teens from the East Coast and Midwest traveled to California with Erika Dearing and me to attend the West Coast Retreat. After an overnight at the Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco and an exciting day visiting Fisherman's Wharf, we traveled to Bishop's Ranch to join seven teens from the West Coast for a total of twenty-four teens!



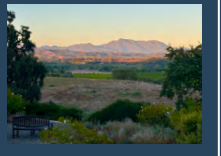
Some of the East Coast and Midwestern SCYL teens taking advantage of an extra day of sightseeing at the Golden Gate Bridge before catching a later flight home.

I led a series of sessions on the retreat theme of "Find Your Path." We talked about the ways we can find our way in body, mind, and spirit. In the first session, we discussed the difference between being lost and wandering and made a list of the emotions you feel when you experience these two distinctly different treks. We noticed how similar the feelings were in your body, mind, and spirit, both when you are lost and when you are wandering. We also discussed some important steps to take before starting a journey into the unknown. We learned about the importance of telling someone where you're going and when you expect to return, taking a compass and a physical map (mobile phone batteries die!), and bringing enough water and food. We looked at how these precautions relate to a spiritual journey and used correspondences to help us better understand our venture; for example, considering water as truth, you need plenty of truth to safely travel down a new spiritual path and often need to find sources of truth that can sustain you when you drift off the path and lose your way.

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Swedenborgian Church Youth League Goes West!

Hear what the SCYL *Clear Blue Sky* editor, Serena G., has to share about their trip out West.



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Faith Under Fire



Catch up on what you may have missed at our event on voter rights, brought to you by the Social Justice Committee.

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Art as Spiritual Practice



Cecropia by Katy Venzor from the Washington, D.C., society.

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Church Calendar

- **November 13–14, 2026:** Annual hybrid General Council meeting.
- **November 26–27, 2026:** Central Office closed in observance of Thanksgiving.
- **December 24–25, 2026:** Central Office closed in observance of Christmas.
- **December 27–30, 2026:** SCYL Winter Retreat.

Editor's Corner

Shared Loves

My father was a businessman, and his specialty was textiles—their production, sale, and political negotiations around the business of textiles. I suspect that my own interest in the fiber arts and textiles is some sort of a combination of the interest I grew up around and my own interest in anthropology and archaeology. Exploring the art of what we make and clothe ourselves with and the old technology that makes it happen has been a hobby of mine for years. I not only weave, but I also love learning about natural fibers: wool, cotton, flax, and nettle. There are times in my life when I am able to give this hobby attention, and other times when I am not, but it is always there waiting for me. My spinning wheel and loom are always in my home, waiting for me to return.

Since 1980, the New York State Sheep and Wool Festival has hosted farmers, vendors, and crafts people every year in Rhinebeck, New York. It is a massive multi-day affair and one that I have always wanted to attend. However, after having gone to some of these types of events on my own in the past, I did not want to attend solo. I have always been casually looking for someone to go with me. Then, one afternoon while attending the Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA) this summer, I mentioned the festival to Emily Tergliafera, since she lives in New York State, and lo and behold, she not only knew the festival, but had attended in the past and had family in the area we could stay with! Quickly, we started planning a meet-up and roped Beki Greenwood into it as well. We would meet up again in October and attend together.

My life is full of plans that never go anywhere, with kids, jobs, and obligations often taking priority. So when Emily texted Beki and me in September to see if we were still on to meet up, I was excited to say yes! Before I knew it, I spent a weekend with Emily, Chris (her husband), and Beki—laughing and talking, taking a break from my regular life. A real mini-vacation with the friends I had made at Convention and FNCA.

The Swedenborgian Church of North America is constantly providing opportunities for groups of Swedenborgians to get together and build community. Whether it is a summer camp like FNCA, a youth retreat like the West Coast Retreat, or a group of concerned citizens wanting to protect our voting rights, the denomination offers many ways for two or three to get together in His name. Before you know it, you will have friendship and community with people who share all sorts of loves with you.

If you find yourself wanting more information about an event, wanting to connect with an author, or wanting to know when the next gathering is happening, please feel free to email me at editor@swedenborg.org or Central Office at manager@swedenborg.org. You never know where the conversation might lead.

—Brittany Price
editor@swedenborg.org

the Messenger

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

Message from the President

Anonymity and Celebrity: Swedenborg's Double Life

The Year of the Lord: 2026–27



Swedenborg initially sought anonymity with respect to his spiritual world travels. The goal was to spread the new good news to the world, not to make a name for himself. He dove into preparing the books that are now legendary, but he published anonymously for eighteen years to keep the attention away from himself. The author explicitly claimed to have been graced with the ability to enter the spiritual world fully and hold discussions with spirits and angels, and he felt staying anonymous kept the focus where it needed to be. But it turned out that his new abilities ended up being impossible to hide completely due to Swedenborg's new capacities coming into his everyday life.

In short order three events unfolded: his now-famous "seeing" the Great Stockholm Fire of 1759 from 300 miles away at a dinner party on Sweden's west coast city with several notable citizens; Queen Louisa Ulrika lightheartedly asking Swedenborg to give her regards to her deceased brother and Swedenborg returning a few days later with a message from him that caused her to nearly faint as she exclaimed no one except her deceased brother knew what Swedenborg had just shared; and after a foreign ambassador's widow approached him for a similar favor to stave off a creditor hounding her for a bill she was certain her husband had paid, Swedenborg showed up while she was entertaining guests, and he went upstairs and fetched the "lost receipt" from a secret compartment in her husband's desk. These dramatic stories all followed one another in short compass, and together they unmasked Swedenborg's anonymity as the author of the much-talked-about spiritual books.

Something similar happened regarding these books and their author long after Swedenborg's death. Swedenborg was in charge of publishing his books and distributing them as he saw fit—books exceedingly critical of the established Christian traditions. He sent his books to influential bishops and clergy of Catholicism and the Reformation churches, but being careful to maintain his anonymity by arranging for them to be sent via his publisher, various booksellers, and trusted contacts without his name being attached in any way.

As could be predicted, these books made very little impact upon their recipients because they were searingly critical of what the recipients believed. But something interesting happened on the way to the cultural forum, and it is perfectly illustrated by a story told by a philosophy scholar at a major state university in the South who became interested in Swedenborg. He poked around his university to find others who knew about him, and what he discovered is that *no one* in the religious studies department knew anything about Swedenborg, and *everyone* in the various literature departments knew about Swedenborg.

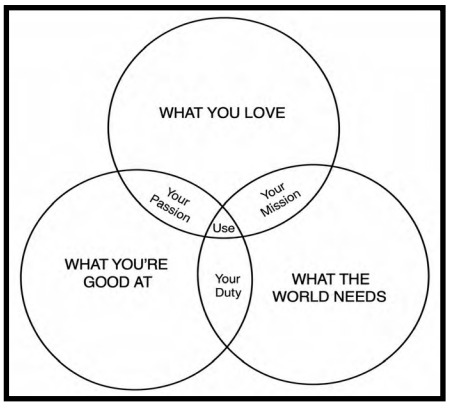
The reason isn't difficult to discover. The Center for Swedenborgian Studies has been part of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley for a quarter century, and the GTU boasts one of the largest theological libraries in the country. You can stroll through many aisles of biblical studies and theology,

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Swedenborgian Church Youth League

Teens Find Their Path

Continued from cover



Swedenborgian variation of an Ikigai Venn diagram.

Next, we went to the Bible and looked at the story of the Israelites and their exodus out of Egypt. We discussed their story all the way from the Egyptians enslaving the Israelites, through Moses and the burning bush, the plagues, crossing the Red Sea, and continued with the struggles and challenges in the wilderness on their way to Mt. Sinai. We talked about the Ten Commandments and how Moses dealt with the golden calf. Finally, we discussed the spies sent out into the Holy Land, how Moses feared their stories of giants in the land, and how this lack of faith led to forty years of wandering in the wilderness. When we lack faith, ignore God, and attempt to do everything our own way without concern for the neighbor, we can end up tragically lost in the wilderness without direction, goals, or aspirations.

In our final sessions, we talked about the four loves (God, neighbor, worldly things, and self) and how it is important to find the right balance of these loves to find our way. We learned about our ruling love, and from True Christian Religion §399 we read, "The very life of a person is their love, and as their love is, such is their life. It is the dominant or ruling love that makes the person. What belongs to the dominant love is what is loved above all things. That which a person loves above all things is constantly present in his thought."

We also discussed Swedenborg's concept of "use." "Use" is the action driven by your ruling love. Your ruling love is the thing you love above all else, the root orientation of your whole life. Use is that *love in action*. I told the teens, "Your ruling love is the engine, and your use is what that engine does, i.e., moves the vehicle. An engine is not useful if it is not doing something. For Swedenborg, a love that never finds a use isn't fully itself yet." Lastly, we looked at a Swedenborgian variation of an Ikigai Venn diagram that I created (with the categories of "what you love," "what the world needs," and "what you are good at").



Teens discuss ways to "find your path."

The teens filled out this diagram by thinking up three things for each category. Then a few teens shared their personal diagrams with the group, and we talked about the potential joys and struggles that the diagram showed. It was an interesting activity, and the teens enjoyed learning about how their loves and talents interacted with the needs of the world to uncover valuable insights into potential careers and opportunities.

The closing vespers service was led by the teens. They talked about wandering. They read Deuteronomy 2:7 and a passage about wandering from *True Christian Religion*. Maudie shared a poem titled "Wandering."

This was a beautiful way to end the teen spiritual programming for the retreat.

The sessions were well received, engaging, and interactive. We all learned much. We left the Bishop's Ranch retreat with a greater understanding of how to find our path and, more importantly, what we can do when we are lost in the wilderness.

Kurt Fekete has been the youth director for the Swedenborgian Church for over twenty years. He also currently serves as vice president of the denomination.



Wandering

Lost or wandering
Fear or peace
Forced or chosen
I wander the roads and paths
Following a path that I do not yet know
Wandering but not lost
For I don't know what I'm seeking
But I know I'll find it here
Wandering and traveling
I'm never lost for there is no destination
I wander for eternity in the gardens of the world

—Maudie Baxter, age 15

Swedenborgian Church Youth League

clear blue sky 1981 october

The SCYL Goes West

By Serena Greenwood, SCYL Clear Blue Sky editor

The SCYL had a lot of fun during this West Coast retreat! The East Coast and Midwest groups met up at The Swedenborgian New Church of San Francisco after our long flights from Boston and Detroit, sleeping over in the church. The next day, we were all very excited because we were going to explore the wharf area of San Francisco, so we woke up bright and early to get a head start on the day.

We started with breakfast in the city and saw the view of Alcatraz, afterwards walking to Pier 39 to see the sea lions. We then split off into groups of two or more to explore the city. We went to shops for clothing, candy, chocolate, and so much more. We soon after met up at Pier 45 at the Musée Mécanique, a museum of old but playable quarter arcade games, and spent a few hours playing a variety of games and using the photo booths.



East Coast and Midwestern SCYL teens in front of Alcatraz in San Francisco, California.



Grayson and Athena playing quarter arcade games at Musée Mécanique in San Francisco, California.

As we were walking to our next place, we stopped for a few minutes to take in the live music playing and sang along to whatever songs we knew. We went on a historic streetcar to get to the Ferry Building Marketplace to look around for anything we would have liked. Soon after, we got on another streetcar to get us to what we all wanted for food: In-N-Out. The line was crazy long, but we all still managed to get our lunch. Soon after, we headed back to the cars and started making our way to the retreat at Bishop's Ranch. After dinner, we settled into our cabins and got familiar with the layout of the ranch.

At our first evening session, we had an icebreaker that included putting a random name on our forehead and asking questions to figure out who we were. Once we figured out who we were, we had to find our match, someone who goes along with the person on our foreheads, like Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce. Later that day, we figured out we could go apple picking and easily decided to go. Apple picking was so much fun. We picked a bunch of apples to donate and ate a bunch ourselves. We brought some back for other

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Swedenborgian Church Youth League

SCYL Goes West

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people to eat as well. After apple picking and another session, we all went for a nice swim at the pool.

Throughout each day, there were many activities we did, such as arts and crafts, playing Catchphrase, basketball, and volleyball. We also made sure to spend time with Mango, the super friendly ranch cat. That night, we went to our meeting room and played a bunch of board games and more Catchphrase.

The next day, we shared our arts and crafts that we made during our first session. After lunch and another wonderful session where we were given compasses, then some of us went on a long nature walk while others went swimming. The nature walk was between two and four miles depending on how far we wanted to go. We ended up walking to the lake while some turned back, and some walked the whole loop. After the nice and long nature walk and seeing the rattlesnakes (yes, a real nest with baby rattlers!), some of us went swimming while others went and played volleyball or basketball.





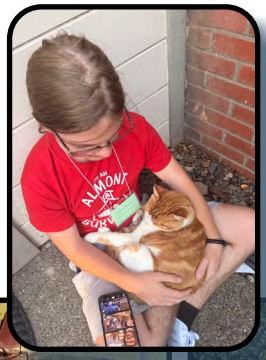
The teens went apple picking and gathered a large variety of apples to share and donate.

Kurt returned to the cabins to discover that the boys had found a rattlesnake in their cabin! Thankfully, the Bishop's Ranch staff were able to quickly respond to our call for help and catch the rattler and release it back into the wild.

We were also in charge of running vespers that night, which was very fun. That night, we had a "campfire" and sang many campfire songs as well as sharing some of our own. Later, we bought pizza, breadsticks, and drinks and all hung out together to enjoy the last night of our time together.

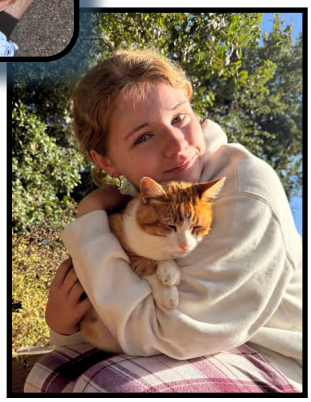
Unfortunately, the next day it was time to leave the ranch, and it was a hard goodbye to our new friends. However, the East Coast and Midwest group got to spend the rest of the day together, first stopping at a viewpoint of the Golden Gate Bridge. We went to a few different angles of the Golden Gate Bridge, first near the top and next on the beach below where we played frisbee. We then drove to Golden Gate Park and walked to the food trucks and then got some delicious ice cream. We soon after walked to Hippie Hill, where we spent a good chunk of time listening to live music and dancing with each other. Later, we went to a mall and bought food, tried on clothes, and made sure to spend the last few hours we had together to the max.

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Mango the ranch cat spent quality time with many of the teens, getting snuggles and cuddles.







A rattlesnake family found along the trail.

2026 Missions Grant Recipient

The Garden Chapel Sanctuary: The Wayfarers of the Midwest

By Pastor Paul Deming

There's something about music that transcends boundaries, cultures, race, and backgrounds. It stirs the soul and, on many occasions, inspires and resonates to a level deeper than consciousness. The apostle John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word…" The word, as we know it, is the sound of a vibration. In the beginning was "vibration." Perhaps all of the universe resonates with the sound of creation, the work of the Creator. "And the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

At the Garden Chapel Sanctuary, thanks to a generous grant from the Swedenborgian Church of North America's (SCNA) Missions Grant fund, vibrations continue in the form of our Sunday Concert Series. The series that draws from the pool of top talent in Saint Louis to provide performances at our own architecturally noted sanctuary. Here are a few of the highlights from 2026.



The Fanfare Band with singer Kittie Moller performing at the Garden Chapel.

The series got started late with a June performance by the 0-60 Band, a contemporary rock band of Illinois performers featuring our own bassist, Parker Seely!

July continued with the Henry Kress Jazz Quintet. Henry was our pianist, a student at Webster University, who has since moved to Philadelphia to pursue graduate studies. The concert combined good music with a going-away party of sorts, as several group fans attended. Also in attendance were our good neighbors who live next door.

August brought a Saint Louis favorite, the Fanfare Band featuring singer Kittie Moller, celebrating fifty years

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The Matt Rowland Trio showcasing both classical and electric guitar.

2026 Missions Grant Recipient

Garden Chapel Sanctuary

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Pastor Paul Deming playing at the tenth annual "BeatleFest."

of performing for Saint Louis audiences. The pianist (and frontman) Vincent Golomski, who managed to play keys and bass all from his keyboard while singing, proved once again that some men can multitask (and very well)! The guitarist, Dave Black, is a legend in Saint Louis and has several albums available through local channels. The band has been featured on radio and television. The band played great tunes ranging from the 1950s through today. One of the visiting audience members commented, "What a great show!"

September brought the Matt Rowland Trio to the Garden Chapel Sanctuary. Matt is as comfortable with classical finger style guitar as he was exciting audiences with his masterful lead work on electric guitar. His album *Be Like Water* is available on Spotify, Apple Music, and Google Play.

In October, we featured our tenth annual *BeatleFest* with ninety minutes of straight Beatles music. This is a perennial favorite and always draws crowds, missing only one year due to COVID. Many of the favorite Beatles songs are sing-alongs, such as "All You Need Is Love" and "A Little Help from My Friends."

In December, the Garden Chapel Sanctuary will feature our Eve of Christmas Eve Choral Concert, which includes singers from several area churches and volunteer groups. This has, historically, brought the largest crowds to the chapel and is a favorite way to get into the spirit of the season!

There's something for everyone in our Sunday Concert Series, and, thanks to the Missions Fund of the SCNA, we will be providing concerts through May 2027, most of which will be livestreamed on Facebook and Zoom. For information, contact Pastor Paul Deming at 314-803-6519 and check our calendar at: GardenChapelSanctuary.org!

Paul was installed as pastor of the Garden Chapel Sanctuary in 2016 after completing certification requirements for Licensed Pastors. He is married to Suzy and the father of two grown sons and grandfather to one grandson. Paul is on the ordination path and is completing his seminary training at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis. He has served on various committees, including Education Resources and the Nominating Committee. Paul is a singer/songwriter, a published composer, and a lover of the arts.



The Swedenborgian Church of North America provides a variety of grants from the Augmentation, Iungerich, and Mission Funds to our ministries. This article highlights one ministry that is benefiting from such grants in 2026.

Anonymity and Celebrity

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pulling volume after volume from the shelf to see if Swedenborg's name is in the index. The answer is less than 1% of the time! But you can also go across the street to the main library at the University of California and do the same in the aisles of literary works and frequently find Swedenborg's name in many volumes. Rather than anonymity, we find celebrity.

The reason we find celebrity is connected to the three stories that blew Swedenborg's anonymity. Our various "Famous Names" list (mine has seventy-five on it) boasts all these well-known people in history who read Swedenborg sympathetically and with great interest: Blake, Balzac, Baudelaire, Borges, Frost, the Brownings, Coleridge, Goethe, Emerson, Yeats, and Strindberg, among others. Swedenborg's breathtaking picture of what's going on in our cosmos, in our world, and in our souls inspires great writers. The very transformative vision that turned off most traditional Bible and theology scholars inspired a long list of creative masters. I very much enjoy the irony that the very reason why Swedenborg wanted anonymity ended up creating a fair bit of celebrity.

—Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence
president@swedenborg.org

The Swedenborgian Church of North America

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Fryeburg New Church Assembly

"Reflections" Looking Back on FNCA 2026

By Trevor

The year 2026 will be looked back on as a turning point in Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA) history. After significantly lower attendance since COVID, this year we suddenly had more than twenty new campers! The infusion of so many new people brought a whole new spirit to the Assembly.

This year also saw the retirement of Fryeburg resident Dave Richardson from the Buildings and Grounds (B&G) Committee after fifty-plus years of service taking care of our facility year-round with expertise and loving care. Dave has been known, during the off-season, to often make the ten-minute drive from the Richardson's Farm at midday, bringing his lunch to the Assembly and enjoying his meal on the front porch. We honored him with a plaque that has a write-up about his contributions to the FNCA and a photo of him sitting there, which now hangs prominently on that porch he loves so much. Three cheers for Dave!

Climate change has also made itself heatedly known with daytime highs often in the upper 80s and a few night lows in the low 70s. The B&G committee asked for, and got approval from, the annual meeting of the members to install mini-split A/C and heating units for Whitehead Hall, the Dole Wing, and the Perry Wing before next year to make the spaces where we regularly congregate and the senior bedrooms more bearable. The dining hall and kitchen are next on the list, but may take a while.

We had a very lively lecture program, with interesting, educational presentations by a baker's dozen of lecturers over a wide variety of topics, starting with "Overview of the Inner Sense of Scripture" and ending with "Overlooked: Black Ministers in a White Denomination." There were lots of engaging questions that spilled over into the adult discussion group after the second lecture each day.

This year's Rev. Everett K. Bray (EKB) visiting lecturer was Chelsea Odhner, vice president of publishing at the Swedenborg Foundation and co-author of *Opening the Inner World*, which was our afternoon book club selection this year. She was part of the *Off The Left Eye* video channel as writer, host, and later director of content strategy, helping to shape one of the most widely accessed Swedenborgian education



Dave Richardson holds the plaque presented to him at the annual meeting recognizing over five decades of year-round service taking care of our site. It now hangs out on the front porch, where he loves to hang out.

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"Samba Whistle Percussion Bateria": an audience participation song during the annual Stunt Night.

Fryeburg New Church Assembly

"Reflections" FNCA 2026

Continued from page 173



7:09AM, Fryeburg Town Beach, the Polar Bear Club about to take their daily plunge.

platforms in the entire world. Her timely FNCA lectures on "Love the Neighbor as Yourself" and "You in Me and I in You" introduced the eager audience to these topics through the lens of Internal Family Systems (IFS), an evidence-based model of psychotherapy, from a Swedenborgian perspective.

All the usual stuff happened: rising bell, Polar Bear Swim (at the town beach since we didn't have any lifeguards on staff), breakfast, chapel, first and second lecture, adult discussion group, lunch, rest hour, free time for swimming or reading or socializing or whatever and a Flames activity, arts and crafts, afternoon book club, dinner, Sparks Games, evening activity, and another Flames activity before the camp goes quiet at 10:00PM.

A very wide variety of evening activities were available for interested campers, including presentations on Logopraxis, Be Love, Walking the Path with Ros, Crystal Singing Bowl Sound Bath Meditation (our most popular program!), Choose Joy Now!, a lively song swap, an evening with the FNCA historian, a tour through the Balkans focusing on Albania, and our annual Talent Show/Stunt Night/Open Mic, which included nine different acts including music, storytelling, poetry, comedy improv, pithy quotes, and closed with a poem by Rev. Dr. George F. Dole read by his daughter Sarah.

There was frequent rousing applause and grateful thanks for our head cook Chris Tergliafera and his able assistant Abbey Tibbets for the excellent meals and for their extra careful attention to taking excellent care of what could be (to mere mortals) a bewildering array of special diets.



Head cook Chris Tergliafera loading a big order into his truck before camp starts. YUM!

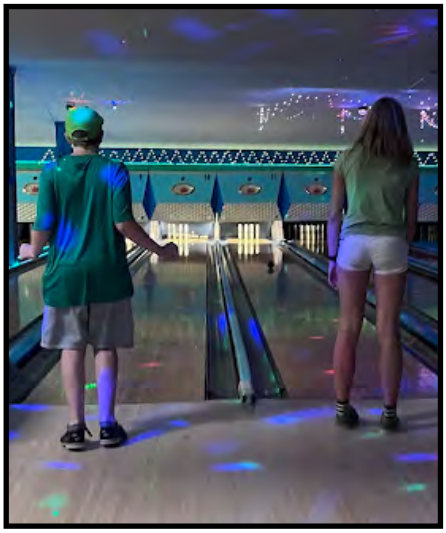
The thirteenth annual Dole 3 Miler road race in honor of Rev. Dr. George F. Dole, who ran in the 1954 race in which Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile, was a smashing success, with sixty-four runners crossing the finish line. Second-time winner Dylan Stoltzfus set a new course record of 14:55, which is *three* 4:58.3 miles *in a row!*

The Flames had good numbers, averaging ten each week. Youth director and Flames advisor Jesse White did a fine job of shepherding them through both weeks. The Flames enjoyed Flames Games, disco bowling, the Lower Falls, arts and crafts, and many other activities. The chapel service they led during week one on the parable of the wheat and the tares was excellent and not to be missed!

There was lots and lots of music throughout the camp session: people playing hymns on piano and guitar during morning chapel, several people playing the piano in Whitehead Hall throughout the afternoon and evening, singing grace at many meals, impromptu singing on the porch, an accordion pumping out some tunes at different times, a joyful song swap that included quite a few different musicians, as well as a couple of group songs at Stunt Night.

The opening weekend program was a real rouser titled "What in Hell is Bothering You?!?: A Look at Negative Emotions and Their Causes." Led by FNCA religious program coordinator Rev. Susannah Currie, the group dug into the topic with gusto in three sessions titled: "Exploring Hells That Impacted OUR PAST!," "Exploring Hells That Impact us NOW!," and "Exploring Hells That We Will Release for a BETTER FUTURE!"

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The Flames went Disco Bowling!

Fryeburg New Church Assembly

"Reflections" FNCA 2026

Continued from page 174

Tuesdays are workdays, with everyone pitching in from 2:30PM to 4:30PM to improve our camp. This year, major projects included a series of new outlets in the girls' dorm, rebuilding the ramp and stairs of Frank Hall, rehanging artwork in the Dole Wing, collecting kindling, all sorts of cleaning, and many other projects. Thanks to all who helped each week!

Outing day saw campers heading out for the day to explore scenic areas of the region. After making a bag lunch at the end of breakfast, some groups went mountain climbing, some canoed down the Saco River, some went tubing on the Saco, others explored the Kancamagus Scenic Highway, Pirate Cove, Lower Falls swimming area, and other nearby attractions.

Our traditional banana split dessert on Thursday evening is always preceded by the Banana Hunt! Everyone writes their name on a banana, and a small crew hides them in the Dole Wing and the adjoining Whitehead Hall. Then, with a mighty call of "Let the Banana Hunt begin!" the hunt is on! When you find your banana (soon for some, later for others), you head back to the dining hall where all the makings for a banana split are waiting. YUM!



Camp president and Buildings and Grounds Committee member Dan Dyer lying down on the job in the Bath House on Work Day.



Aerial view of the 2026 LALLA Scrabble Tournament finals. Finalists, clockwise from lower left: Herb Ziegler, Jennifer Lindsay, Trevor, and this year's champion, Rev. Susannah Currie!

Thursdays are also special for another reason. The first Thursday is Purple Day, with many people wearing all the purple things they brought. And the second Thursday is Tie-Dye Day, when tie-dye abounds!

The winner of the 2026 LALLA Memorial Scrabble Tournament was the formidable Rev. Susannah Currie, making her a three-time winner! Other finalists included Jennifer Lindsay, Herb Ziegler, and Trevor.

The FNCA Puzzle Club is an ongoing activity throughout the entire camp session: there is always a puzzle to work on at the puzzle table, usually a 1,000-piece challenge, with Puzzle Club members working on it pretty much only if they feel like it.



Art director Carol LeBaron (standing back center) had a delightful array of arts and crafts. Here, campers are creating painted ceramic tiles.

The arts and crafts program, led by our art director, Carol LeBaron, was very well attended and included both popular and new projects, including monster bookmarks (Rawr!), painted tiles, journaling, visible fabric mending, paper beads, paper flowers, and more.

A new fundraiser was created this year to take the place of the sales table auction. It is called the Pick-a-Prize Raffle. Buy some tickets, put them in the jar(s) of the prize(s) you want, and then wait for the drawing and hope you win. A dozen or so prizes donated spur-of-the-moment by campers included: a weekend stay at the Currie's

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A leisurely Outing Day float down the clean, cool waters of the Saco River.

Fryeburg New Church Assembly

"Reflections" FNCA 2026

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cabin in Denmark, Maine, a private meal for two with a special menu created and prepared by our head cook Chris Tergliafera, Wood's Maple Syrup and Wood's Cider Jelly donated by Willis Wood, artwork, crafts, a rare SCYL t-shirt, and, of course, the famous Carmen Miranda earrings (two sets!) that you are bidding on the usage rights for one year and then you have to bring them back for us to sell them again the following year. These have raised at least $1,000 over the past decade!

An informal poll on the last full day of camp revealed many highlights: all the new people, the EKB lecturer and her afternoon book club, being with family, seeing friends old and new, the food, watching the sunrise and the sunset, the lectures, a fire in the fireplace on a chilly morning, an evening swim after supper one very hot day, installing and the use of a whole bunch of new outlets in the girls' dorm, all the nice people, disco bowling, the song swap and music jam, the public Scrabble game, the Dole 3 Miler, the Fatted Calf which kept changing its hiding place in the dining hall each day, getting to know people in a different way on a more personal level, and the sheer beauty of our location especially the view over the river of the fields and mountains beyond that are always the same yet also different every day.

And a good time was had by all!



Trevor has been attending the FNCA all his life. He is currently the camp activities director, serves on the Board of Directors, the Summer Session Committee, and the Outreach Committee, and is the FNCA webmaster at fryeburg.org.



The 2026 all-camp group photo was taken the last day of camp... because we were having so much fun we forgot to take it during the middle weekend when the most people are traditionally at the FNCA.

Justice is the New Jerusalem

Faith Under Fire: Defending Democracy in the Age of Authoritarian Threats

Summary by Alex Gayheart, Social Justice Committee co-chair

adapted from the speaking notes shared by the presenter, Min. Christian S. Watkins

We've all heard the phrase, "I don't do politics." While we all are free to "not do politics" all we want, it's important to realize that those who are in power do. As Min. Christian Watkins says, "Your landlord and your mortgage company does politics. The company that manages your electricity, they do politics. The people downtown that determine your tax rates, they do politics. So, are you going to let them politic over you, [or] are you going to participate in the system to make sure that you have adequate representation?"

Christian tells us that "democracy is about whether people can meaningfully participate in the decisions governing their lives and that for people of faith, that makes democracy a moral question as well as a political one. Human dignity demands a voice. Solidarity demands that my neighbor's voice matters even when my neighbor votes differently from me. And the common good requires institutions through which all of us can participate."

The ministry of Min. Christian S. Watkins, MDiv, third guest speaker in the Social Justice Committee's 2026 Speaker Series, sits at the intersection of public policy, faith, and democracy. He is a senior government relations advocate with NETWORK Advocates for Catholic Social Justice, chair of the Faithful Democracy Coalition, and serves as a minister of social justice at Asbury United Methodist Church in DC.

Min. Watkins first talked about the importance of getting our information from reliable sources. He encourages us to ask ourselves these questions: "Who produces this information? What evidence are they showing me? And do I follow anybody credible who challenges what I already believe and can offer me a different point of view?"

Democracy is about whether people can meaningfully participate in the decisions governing their lives and that for people of faith, that makes democracy a moral question as well as a political one.

> Because one of democracy's great vulnerabilities is not simply misinformation: it is information isolation. We increasingly inhabit different factual universes. And faithful citizenship requires more than consuming information that confirms us. It requires discernment.

Per Christian, these are trustworthy organizations that provide good information to keep us informed as to the impacts and losses as a result of certain policy decisions, executive orders, decisions, etc., as well as guidance to help voters make informed decisions during elections:

- Christians Against Christian Nationalism
- Brennan Center for Justice
- Legal Defense Fund
- League of Women Voters
- Public Citizen
- Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
- Declaration for American Democracy
- Guides.vote
- See. Love. Vote. - NETWORK Advocates
- Washington Interfaith Staff Community

Min. Watkins suggests we think of these resources as an ecosystem:

> Faith organizations often bring something particularly important: trusted relationships and a moral voice. Legal organizations bring litigation expertise. Policy organizations track legislation. Civil rights groups identify desperate racial effects. Election specialists understand administration. Grassroots organizations know what people are experiencing on the ground. So no single institution sees the whole field. And that matters because threats to democratic participation rarely arrive labeled, "This will disproportionately affect poor Black women," or "This creates another hurdle for an elderly rural voter." The intersectional impact becomes visible when we put our different forms of expertise together.

Next Min. Watkins touched on some of the pressures facing voter access and election administration at the federal, state, and local levels, such as the SAVE America Act. Viewing from an intersectional lens helps us to see how rules can impact people differently based on circumstances, such

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Faith Under Fire

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as poverty, rurality, disability, and homelessness.

Where a person lives can also have a significant impact on their practical access to democracy, because how and when a person can vote is dictated by different combinations of federal, state, and local laws applicable in their voting district.

"[T]hose differences intersect with everything else. A reduced early-voting period affects somebody working two jobs differently from somebody with paid leave. A shortened mail-ballot deadline affects a disabled voter differently from somebody who can easily drive to a polling place."

Christian suggests that studying the mechanism (be it the SAVE Act, mail-ballot rules, international wars, etc) by considering the questions below (instead of partisan assumptions about intent) that it will give us much more analytical clarity:

- Does it centralize authority?
- Does it change election rules close to an election?
- Does it make participation easier or harder?
- Does it transfer discretion from accountable local election administrators somewhere else?
- And who bears the practical burden?

"The law may describe a ballot. Our job is to see the human beings trying to cast it, and help them see value in engaging in their sacred responsibility."

Min. Watkins then turned toward the 2026 midterms—not simply as an election, but as an administrative, informational, legal, and moral challenge as we face a multitude of issues including: redistricting, voter intimidation and political violence, mail-ballot confusion, potential disruptions in election administration, misinformation, and disinformation.

When considering redistricting, Christian points out that we need to remember that:

> Districts structure representation. And representation shapes who has political bargaining power when decisions are made about healthcare, schools, environmental burdens, wages, housing, criminal justice, reparations, disaster assistance, and infrastructure.
>
> That is why racial representation is not a siloed "Black issue." Political representation connects directly to a community's ability to advocate across multiple material issues.
>
> And what makes misinformation especially dangerous is that its purpose does not always have to be convincing you of one false story. Sometimes the effect is simply to make truth feel unknowable. If I can get you to believe that everybody lies, that every institution is corrupt, that every election is questionable, and that no source deserves trust, I do not actually need you to believe my version. I only need you to stop believing that democratic institutions can work.
>
> That is why information literacy is democracy work. And because misinformation frequently targets existing fears—racial fears, fears about immigrants, fears about gender, fears about crime—our response has to recognize how disinformation weaponizes social division.

Finally, Min. Watkins moved the conversation from what's happening to what we can do about it. He says:

> We have to remember that Christian hope is not just optimism; hope is not pretending the thicket is a garden. Hope tells the truth about the thicket, situations and the current choices before us, and walks into them believing that death, disorder, and darkness do not have the final word. After all, remember that the creation story begins with chaos. Darkness. Deep, unseparated waters. And last time I read my Bible, God does not run from chaos.
>
> God speaks into the chaos: Let. There. Be. Light. And the light does not pretend the darkness never existed. The light makes it possible to see what is actually there.
>
> That is part of our vocation for such a time as this. Where confusion is manufactured, we are called to bring clarity. Where neighbors are isolated, the antidote is building beloved community. Where people feel powerless, equip them. Where fear says, "Your voice does not matter," remind them that citizenship is not a spectator sport.
>
> We do not overcome darkness by becoming better at describing darkness. We turn on and shine the light. And if we find ourselves wandering in darkness and can't find the light switch, we become the light.

Where confusion is manufactured, we are called to bring clarity... Where people feel powerless, equip them. Where fear says, "Your voice does not matter," remind them that citizenship is not a spectator sport.

To get out the vote in the 2026 midterm elections, NETWORK Advocates and sixty-four multi-faith and secular partners across the country are utilizing a nonpartisan education and voter engagement campaign called **See. Love. Vote.**

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Justice is the New Jerusalem

Faith Under Fire

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See. It means paying attention. See your community as it actually is. See who is flourishing and who is hurting. See the policy choices beneath the headlines.

Then, **Love.** Name what and who… Not sentimental love, but social love. Love that understands that my neighbor's dignity is bound up with mine.

And then **Vote.** To act, faithfully respond to the matters at hand to bring about Beloved Community and common good. We do this because values that never become practice remain aspirations. The goal here is not to dictate a partisan conclusion, but to help people make informed civic decisions and to be engaged deeply, while holding the needs of their whole community in view.

I immediately saw the connection between this and the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative's model of gathering and being: Be Love (Love), Be Honest (See), Be Useful (Vote), which is of course rooted in the Swedenborgian understanding of Divine Love, Divine Wisdom, and Use.

Things we can do to help get out the vote: Inform and Equip.

Help somebody check their registration and/or register to vote (https://www.networkadvocates.org/vote). Help them learn where and when they can vote. Help them understand identification requirements. Help them make an actual voting plan.

If they have a disability, help them identify accessible options. If transportation is a barrier, help solve the transportation problem. If English is not their first language, connect them with appropriate election information. If they recently moved, make sure they understand the registration requirements where they now live.

Rev. Jen Bailey, founder and executive director of the Faith Matters Network, says that "relationships move at the speed of trust, and social change moves at the speed of relationships." That is why intersectional voter engagement is critical in forming and strengthening relationships in this time and age where people are becoming more isolated and distrusting of others.



Min. Christian has offered to share the PowerPoint slides from his presentation with anyone who is interested at tinyurl.com/mrkmdrj6.

The message we need to convey (keeping it simple, inviting, and relational) is, *"We are voting. Our community is participating. Together, we make our voices heard."*

Christian ended his talk with these powerful words:

Democracy is not self-executing.

No Constitution jumps off the page and enforces itself.

No Voting Rights Act walks somebody to the polls.

No court decision teaches your neighbor where to vote.

Institutions matter. Laws matter. Courts matter. Elections matter.

But ultimately, democracy requires people who practice democracy. People willing to **See** clearly. People willing to **Love** beyond the boundaries of race, party, geography, class, gender, generation, and immigration history. People willing to defend their neighbor's voice with the same seriousness with which they defend their own. And people willing to **Vote**.

So, when the information becomes overwhelming, when the politics becomes exhausting, when the thicket gets thick, remember the assignment.

We do not surrender the light because darkness exists. We carry it farther.

See clearly.
Love boldly.
Vote faithfully.

Minister Christian S. Watkins, MDiv (he/him). Christian serves as senior government relations advocate for Criminal Legal Systems, Democracy Reform, and Reparatory Justice at NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, where he works to eliminate racial disparities and advance transformative federal legislation. He is also a certified candidate for ordained ministry in the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church, minister of social justice at Asbury United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., and secretary of the Downtown Cluster of Congregations.



Art as Spiritual Practice

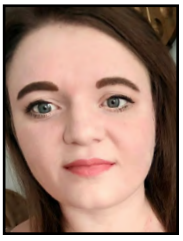
Cecropia

By Katy Venzor



"Cecropia" (2026) by Katy Venzor, oil on canvas, 24 x 36 inches.
On display at the University of Maryland's 2026 Another Look, Another World art show, from October 14 to November 6, 2026.

I've recently been inspired by learning more about the cecropia moth, which carries a deep well of Swedenborgian symbolism. Like most moths, they spend the majority of their lives as caterpillars, living only about one or two weeks after emerging from their cocoons as completely different-looking creatures, a gradual transformation of the inner self, followed by an entirely changed outward life. Their caterpillars are large and strange-looking before transforming into extraordinary adult moths, the largest native moth species in North America. Adults do not eat; they rely on the energy they accumulated as caterpillars to sustain their brief adult lives. Since they are nocturnal, this transformation happens in complete darkness and privacy, so much of their lives happen away from human eyes. There is so much we can learn from the Cecropia about the natural world, hidden transformation, regeneration, living a transformed life, the sacredness of overlooked things, unexpected usefulness, and the truth that a life does not have to be witnessed in order to be meaningful.



Katy Venzor is a special education math teacher, membership director at Swedenborg House D.C., and painter. She is passionate about education, community-building, and the arts.

Personal Reflections

My Story of Loss and Awareness

By Betty Yenetchi

My name is Betty Barnes-Yenetchi, and I would like to share my story of loss and awareness with you. I will keep it as pleasant as possible. However, all of you who have had the pleasure of talking to me know that I tend to be somewhat verbose. In this story, I will make it more concise.

After the death of my husband, Carl, on March 2, 2023, I was plunged into deep grief, a grief so intense that I was not sure I would ever be free of it. Just a few short months later, I had a stroke. This stroke was like a thief that came in the night and stole my sight, insight, and personality. The significant loss of my sight was the most severe to me because it took my independence. I had to relearn how to be in the new world. I was in despair and determined to heal.

When I had my stroke, I knew that if my husband Carl were living at the time, he would have moved heaven and earth to see that I received everything I needed to heal. But he was gone, and I felt alone. After a stroke, people can feel alone. I did. I felt angry at my body. I even felt envious of people who did not have to worry about their bodies. I lived with the fear of it happening again.

Months passed, and I was still grieving. I had lost Carl, and the stroke had stolen so much from me that I wasn't sure how to move ahead. My daughter suggested we talk with a neurologist to see if there was something else we could do. We made an appointment and went to see the doctor. She listened to us and asked if we had ever heard of neuroplasticity. We said no, and she began to tell us about rewiring the brain, or neuroplasticity.

When we came away from her office, we felt pleased that finally we had a clear path to follow. Wanting to know more about neuroplasticity, I searched online and found a class that taught me how to rewire my brain. The class began the next day. The first thing I learned was that rewiring is another name for neuroplasticity, which is the brain's ability to make new connections and pathways. I was eager to try this.

After the class, I began to work with the elements as given in the class. The thing I knew I had to do was choose a complex topic to study that would stimulate my brain. As my husband had been a Swedenborgian minister, I decided to make Swedenborg the topic of my study.

> **I had to...choose a complex topic to study that would stimulate my brain....I decided to make Swedenborg the topic of my study.**

I began to study alone and quickly realized that I was going to need help with this line of study. Several people recommended Rev. McCluskey as someone who was somewhat of an authority on Swedenborg. I asked him, not knowing if he would be willing because he really did not know me very well.

We worked mostly by email after we discussed my low vision problem, and he agreed to always use large print when communicating with me. Our studies focused on the key concepts of Swedenborg, such as good and truth, useful service, and the proprium, to name a few.

I had two favorites: good and truth and the proprium.

I began to learn things that I had not known before, and that gave me hope. Specifically, I learned about good and truth and about being of useful service. Swedenborg's idea of useful service is open-ended, and that mattered to me. I realized that useful service is "People helping people."

Also, I would be remiss if I did not mention that Rev. McCluskey encouraged my journaling, which led to a rebirth of my poetry. For this alone, I truly owe him a big thank you for this precious gift.

Poetry was a part of my life before the stroke. As a matter of fact, I was a child when I became interested in poetry. My older brother was my listener. He would listen to me recite one of my poems, and he would critique gently so as not to hurt my feelings. He was my favorite brother, and he passed two months before his eightieth birthday and two months before my husband passed. For my birthday, he would often buy me a book of poetry. Every time I think of my brother, I think about my poetry. He died of a stroke. Sam, I love you, and I miss you.

Before the stroke, I had not been writing poetry for some time because I was too sad to spend my time writing poetry. After all, I needed time to cry. Then, when I began journaling, which my study buddy had suggested, my writing automatically turned to poetry. I told my study buddy that, and he smiled.

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Personal Reflections

My Story of Loss and Awareness

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Before the stroke, I enjoyed words and thoughts, and I could use words to influence or bring enjoyment to someone. However, after the stroke, I had changed so much. I had to learn new ways of thinking, remembering, and understanding the world around me. Even the person I had always thought of as myself seemed to be harder to find or to connect with.

Then my brother and my husband brought me back into poetry. They were on my mind so often that it led me back to poetry. I really did not know where this was going to lead me, but just writing helped to steady my mind. I followed my urge to write and did so.

It was more than a bunch of words on a page; it was communication with my soul. After the stroke, poetry began helping me write myself back into my own life. Words began to lead me to reaching the parts of myself that felt lost. Little by little, poetry became a way to gather the scattered pieces of my experience. This way, I could give shape to feelings that I could otherwise not explain. Also, I could listen to the voice that was still inside me.

Before the stroke, I wrote poetry because I enjoyed it. After the stroke, I needed poetry for something deeper in me that could help me find meaning in what had happened to me. I needed to recognize what I remembered and what was something else. Either way, a deeper understanding of what I now was was essential to my well-being.

Before the stroke, I never worried about my thoughts, but now, who I was, where I was going, and why I was doing all these varied things were questions that tickled my soul and spirit. When I sit down to write poetry, a light shines within me, and I am no longer afraid of what I am going to find out. Connecting with deeper truth is something I want to know and do. It is the good and truth of Swedenborg.

Before Rev. McCluskey turned to his other work, he introduced me to two people who gave me work that kept me on target with neuroplasticity. I continue to work with them today.

One of those people was Rev. Rich Tafel, who conducted a prayer service every Sunday. Thank you for all the support you gave and still give me today. It was fun listening to sermons and learning more about the close attention to the Word, gifts from Divine Providence. Thank you for all the conversations when I was sick.

Dell Rose, who is the program director of the Swedenborgian Library in Chicago, also offered his kindness and support. As a matter of fact, Dell Rose learned that I liked to laugh, and he made me laugh quite often.

My studies were going well, and I had hope that new pathways were growing. I started studying the philosophers. It felt nourishing to be learning again. I joined some study groups and was rewarded with deeper learning. After a stroke, learning can feel like stretching.

I went to see my neurologist. She told me that everything had healed except a spot in my neck where the stroke had begun. She said they hoped that it would continue to heal, and she thought the neuroplasticity would aid the healing of that spot.

Then an eye therapist started working with me. She asked me what I wanted to do to grow new pathways in my brain. I told her I wanted to learn the Lord's Prayer in Aramaic. She agreed that it was a good idea. We began with one word at a time. She also gave me eye exercises that would stimulate my brain.

One day, I realized I felt like myself again. My therapist said that she had noticed that and was happy that I had grown so much. And yet I knew something was not quite right, but I trusted in the Lord and knew all would be shown to me.

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TRUE

If you are a Swedenborgian,
You are people of the book,
Always willing to take another look

If you are a Swedenborgian
You never decline,
To let your little light shine,

If you are a Swedenborgian,
It is all clear to you,
What Useful Service wants
You to do,

If you are a Swedenborgian,
And you like the Good and True,

If you do not understand it,
Someone will explain it to you,

If you are a Swedenborgian,
You have a proprium, face up, we must from this cup sup,

As a Swedenborgian, I love to
Interpret everything I see and
Proprium doesn't mean me,

As a Swedenborgian, I am open to hear your point of view, we could talk about the old and the new,

If you are a Swedenborgian, we seek to know how to grow beyond what we already know.

—Betty Yenetchi

SCYL Goes West

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Sitting around the "campfire" singing songs both old and new.

Before we knew it, it was time to part ways at the airport, where we said our goodbyes through many tears. However, we always knew that we would see each other soon at a retreat, whether in October or December, just knowing that we spent the most time we could all together as best friends.



Serena Greenwood is the editor for *Clear Blue Sky*, the SCYL newsletter publication. She is a sophomore in high school in Massachusetts who enjoys participating in dance, sports, and student council. She has been to as many SCYL events as possible ever since she turned thirteen. She has also attended Almont Summer Camp for the last few years and has been attending Fryeburg New Church Assembly every summer for as long as she can remember.

My Story of Loss and Awareness

Continued from page 182

Thank you to Kimberly Catlett, Karen Feil, Karen Conger, Dawn Fox, Tammara Mounce, Jackie Shihadeh, and all of my study buddies, Rev. Sue Turley, and Rev. Eric Allison.

As Swedenborgians, you stepped up, and you stepped out. You did not pout, and you did not doubt, because you knew what it was all about. Thank you. And the Lord said, " Whom shall I call?" And you each replied, "Here am I, Lord, send me."

Betty Barnes-Yenetchi lives in Florida and has been a Swedenborgian since 1980. Her family is of the utmost importance to her, and her spiritual life is her ruling love. In 2023, Betty experienced a stroke that greatly influenced her writing and deepened her love of poetry. Her belief in "people helping people" and the Swedenborgian principle of useful service have contributed to her spiritual growth. Betty graduated Summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Science in public relations. During her studies, she incorporated Swedenborg's ideas into her presentations. Her professor was so impressed with her work that he told her he planned to use her contributions in teaching his other classes.





Our Daily Bread at SpiritualQuesters.org is your resource for recent sermons, meditations, reflections, lessons, interviews, and original content from within and beyond the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

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Submission Deadline Reminder

Time-sensitive articles submitted to *the Messenger* must be received by the **14th of each month** to be considered for print in the following issue.

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From the Denomination

From the Standing Committee for Communication and Information

Submitted by Rev. Kevin Baxter

Chair of the Standing Committee for Communication and Information (SCCI)

The Standing Committee for Communication and Information met in September to discuss a few issues. One was the question of website American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, the other was about worship material being hosted on the website, and the last issue was about a delegate for the website editorial committee.

The September meeting opened with a question after our website manager was directed by the officers of the church to do an assessment and update the denominational website to meet the ADA Title III Compliance. As chair, the Rev. Kevin Baxter stated that he was happy this process was engaged, because it is good and proper for us to do so, but that we had no legal liability.

For those who are unaware, website litigation has become a focus for certain legal practices and people looking for damages from commercial entities that do not meet the accessibility requirements of Title III on their web pages. While this is a real concern for commercial businesses, the law specifically states, "Religious entities are generally exempt from the requirements of title III of the ADA. A religious entity, however, would be subject to the employment obligations of title I if it has enough employees to meet the requirements for coverage."

However, as stated earlier, the denomination's web page morally should follow the ADA policies out of a desire to reach as many as we can with the message of Love that our Lord showed us on the earth. The chair of the committee stands ready to assist people in learning about the resources and repairs that can be made to make their existing websites more accessible. A quick search would show www.accessibe.com, www.audioeye.com, and www.equalweb.com are just a few of the companies that will do a free scan.

We then moved on to the question of what worship resources the denomination should be hosting on its website. While worship leaders might have a variety of tools they use and would like to share, the Council of Ministers should look to other methods for sharing resources that are not generated or created by our denomination. SCCI believes the resources we place on the website should have clear authorship and ownership rights along with vetting by the Council of Ministers' Committee on Worship.

The final question was about a website editorial board to advise the website manager with certain decisions about content and strategy. Such a committee already exists for *the Messenger*, and we were pleased to support the request and provide a representative from SCCI.