



Things Heard & Seen: Swedenborg, Netflix, and Necromancy

BY THOM MULLER

On April 29, Netflix released a brand-new horror movie entitled *Things Heard and Seen*, starring Oscar-nominee Amanda Seyfried (known from blockbusters such as *Les Misérables*, *Mean Girls*, and *Mamma Mia!*), written and directed by Shari Springer Berman and based on the novel *All Things Cease to Appear* by Elizabeth Brundage. It follows a college professor and scholar of Swedenborg and painter George Inness, and his family, as they move into a new home in rural upstate New York, which is haunted by ghostly beings, including the spirit of a fictional Swedenborgian woman named Emma Lucks. The film begins with a quote from *Spiritual Experiences* §5685, “This I can declare that things that are in heaven are more real than things that are in the world.”¹

While it may seem like the stereotypical haunted house flick with the usual tropes, the film is unique in its explicit engagement with the mystical teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg, particularly as they relate to the

afterlife and communication with spirits. The title itself is a reference to Swedenborg’s most popular published work, *Heaven and Hell* (1758), and its original full title *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell, from Things Heard and Seen* (“*De Caelo et Eius Mirabilibus et de inferno, ex Audi-*



tis et Visis”), in which the Swedish sage describes his countless journeys to the spiritual world and encounters with the various beings residing there.

Throughout the movie, uniquely Swedenborgian spiritual and metaphysical concepts are mentioned and his life, work, and followers are depicted, which make for a unique, fascinating, and entertaining—albeit often inaccurate—engagement with his spiritual system. This appears to already be by far the most popular and well-known film inspired by Swedenborg

and offers an opportunity for contemporary pop culture to discover and explore New Church spirituality and the actual richness of insight it provides when portrayed and approached properly, beyond the dramatic, flashy, and provocative imagery of the movie.

Rather than being a review of the film, this piece is meant to shed light on its underlying Swedenborgian principles and explore the connections between Swedenborg, the paranormal, and popular culture.

Continued on page 73

¹ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Emanuel Swedenborg's Journal of Dreams and Spiritual Experiences*. Translated by C. Th. Odhner. Bryn Athyn, PA: Academy Book Room, 1918.

What's Inside:

More About Virtual Convention 2021 • The Good People of the World will Always Outnumber the Bad • Bridgewater Seeks Minister • And More!

Contents

Things Heard & Seen: Swedenborg, Netflix, and Necromancy.....	65
Editor's Corner	66
Letters to the Editor.....	66
Letter from the President	67
Year of the Spiritual World.....	68
The Good People of This World will Always Outnumber the Bad.....	69
A/V Consultant Quick Tip.....	72
Convention 2021 Schedule.....	77
More to Look Forward to at Convention 2021	78
Convention Virtual Choir	79
Pandemic Relief Still Available.....	80
Bridgewater Church Pastoral Search.....	81
What's Happening.....	83
From the Social Justice Committee	84

the Messenger

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Editor, design, and production: Rebekah Greenwood

Copy editing and proofing: Robert Leith, Ben Phinney, Brittany Price, Herb Ziegler, & Trevor

Standing Committee for Communication and Information: Holly Bauer, Kevin Baxter & Val Brugler

Printing: Classic GraphX, Cambridge, MA

Email: messenger@swedenborg.org

Editorial, Business, and Subscription Address:
The Messenger, Central Office
50 Quincy Street
Cambridge MA 02138

Tel: 617.969.4240

Email: manager@swedenborg.org

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Editor's Corner



Gearing Up for Summer!

Virtual Convention is this month. The Convention Committee and many volunteers have been working endlessly on making this as close to an in-person convention as possible. With almost 200 people registered to join us, it will be sure to be an amazing event. There is still time to register to join us at Swedenborg.org/Convention2021. See [page 77](#) for the schedule and [pages 78–79](#) for more details about worship and music. See you there!

—Beki Greenwood

Messenger@Swedenborg.org

Letters to the Editor

Church and Politics

What is the church's role in politics? What exactly makes a human rights issue political? This is a topic of conversation and debate amongst many, including members and leaders of our denomination, especially over the last year as individuals and organizations have grappled with the effects of systemic racism and how to respond.

Over the last year, the grassroots anti-racism group Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism (SAAR) has provided resources and opportunities to help us increase awareness of, and identify actions we can take to address biases and racism in ourselves, our friends and families, our workplaces, our communities, our country, our church, and our world.

Another such opportunity is coming up at Convention where you are invited to be part of the vital conversation

around who we are and how we stand for what we believe. There will be chances to share, anonymously if preferred, about what the Social Justice Committee (SJC) and SAAR have been doing and should do next.

Here are some questions to ponder before we come together.

1. How should we as a church love the larger neighbor and address present day social justice issues? How do we discern what is "too political" for church involvement and what desperately needs the light and voice of our theology to heal and transform?

2. Have you ever been in the presence of racism in the form of jokes, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, remarks, policies, etc.? This includes strangers, co-workers, friends, and family.

3. Recognizing that silence is complicity, have you been able to pastorally and constructively confront in the presence of racism?

4. Can you think of a story from your own experience that was uncomfortable in regard to racism?

5. What steps have you already taken toward educating yourself about issues of race, including reading leading voices at the center of the discussion, to familiarize yourself with problem areas and the disparities that need to be addressed, so you are able to make an informed judgment about the church's role in race relations?

To participate in this important conversation, join us Sunday, June 27 at 1:00 PM ET / 10:00 AM PT be sure to register by June 15 at Swedenborg.org/Convention2021.

I hope that persons with any degree of interest or holding any opinions on these issues will tune in.

—Lori Gayheart
Michigan City, Indiana

Who is Speaking for Us?

In the last issue of *the Messenger*, Ben Phinney wrote an article about

Continues on page 80

Letter from the President

The Year of the Spiritual World: 2020–21



Dear Friends and Members,

The General Council of the Swedenborgian Church of North America (SCNA) met virtually May 15, and I want to share some of the good decisions and discussions that took place.

We are gearing up for Convention 2021, Navigating the Rapids in the Stream of Providence. Members of the Council were able to try out the new virtual voting process that will be used for our business meetings at convention through the company Nemo-Vote. We will have more representation for voting across the U.S. and Canada because delegates do not have to travel to the site of convention. As of writing this, we have 110 delegates registered to vote which is a third more than recent years.

We are excited to invite the world to join our keynote speaker from England. Gary Lachman, previously known as Gary Valentine, a founding member of the band *Blondie*. He is author of over a dozen books, including *Swedenborg: An Introduction to His Life and Ideas*, published in 2012. On his website he lists the many presentations he is giving this summer including, “On June 26, I will be the keynote speaker at the Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America. I will be speaking about my new book, *Introducing Swedenborg: Correspondences*, an essay on the influence Swedenborg’s ideas about *correspondences* between the natural and spiritual worlds had on modern culture.”

The New Church of the Southwest Desert is purchasing the building they have been renting for several years, thanks to a loan from the Building Fund Committee. This is a mission church started by Rev.

Skye Paradise over twelve years ago. With the current leadership of Rev. Carla Friedrich and Pastor Linda Callander they are offering a community coffee house and meeting space in conjunction with the church.

Our National Church in Washington, D.C. is contracting to repair the steeple of the church, which has weathered many storms, including an earthquake in 2011. The church building is owned by the Swedenborgian Church of North America, so General Council is taking out the loan from the building fund to make sure the structure of the steeple is secure and protected.

Rev. Betsy Coffman informs us an anonymous donation has allowed The Johnny Appleseed Museum to purchase Brown Hall, which is on the campus of the closed Urbana University.

SCNA has been able to support our churches that have been financially affected by the pandemic with over \$32,000 in donations from the 2020 convention, associations, individuals, and the General Council. Another fund raiser to help individuals and families affected by the pandemic garnered \$35,000 in donations that are still being distributed in \$500 grants. Donations for this year’s convention will go to our camps, to help them build for the future.

Sadly the New York New Church is being sold after many years with no minister, while a few loyal members worked to keep programs and usage of the building going. The good news is the proceeds will go into a New York Legacy Fund to support Swedenborgian initiatives in and around New York

Continues on page 82

The Year of the Spiritual World

In the Presence of Angels

BY JIM LAWRENCE

Swedenborg wrote more about angels during the eighteenth century than any other writer, and scholars frequently peg Swedenborg as a leading voice shaping modern beliefs about the presence of angels. Far exceeding famous saints, the new picture of assisting souls from heaven include all who have gone on into the spiritual world who possess a developing set of skills for a ministry of presence with those on earth.

In Swedenborgian spirituality we are psychically fused with the spiritual world continuously because we live in a divine unified field in which every level of and order of being is simultaneously present. Every one of our thoughts and feelings are fused with innumerable spiritual communities that all have their source in the Divine, and much of this fusion is intentional from the spiritual worlds beyond our physical world.

All heavenly societies also send guardian angels to watch over people on earth to ward off the influx of evil affections and thoughts, inspiring them instead, so far as they will receive, with good affections by which peoples' deeds might be motivated. While in this office, the angels are not aware of the specific person with whom they are. They mostly act through subject-spirits. Their use does not involve any actual communication with the person, for they perceive only the interior affections and thoughts of those with whom they are, and they feel these as their own. Hence, they must separate themselves whenever there is an interior disagreement. Yet when serving as guardian angels they do in no case recede altogether

from the person, for if they should intermit their care for a single instant, the person would be plunged into irretrievable evils. They also observe any of the evil spirits that are affecting the person and so far as the person is suffering, they strive to bend what evil inclinations into good ones. Thus, they dissipate influxes of new and alien evils. With those in temptation, the angels instill strength to resist. When with people on earth, guardians assume their interior memory—something not permitted to evil spirits (*Arcana Coelestia* §5985).

Let us not only trust that we have guardian angels, but that we can help them to better help us.

The angels who talk with us never use the natural concepts that are proper to us, all of which derive from time, space, matter, and the like. They use spiritual concepts, all of which derive from states and their various changes in and around angels. However, when the angelic concepts, which are spiritual, flow into us, they change instantly and spontaneously into those natural concepts proper to us that exactly correspond to the spiritual ones. Neither the angels nor we are aware of this; but still, this is how all inflow of heaven occurs for us (*Heaven and Hell* §168).

Broadly speaking, angels of all communities are assigned to us to protect us, to lead us away from evil feelings, and the evil thoughts these cause and to instill good feelings to the extent that we are freely open to them. These serve to control our deeds or works by removing our evil

intentions to the extent that this can be done. When angels are with us they seem to dwell in our affections, near us to the extent that we are engaged in something good because of truth and distant to the extent that our life is removed from such engagement. However, all these tasks are things the Lord does by means of angels since angels do them not on their own but from the Lord (*Heaven and Hell* §391).

The more we can feel Divine impulses, which angels facilitate, the better we can discern and choose how we want to be and live. In a very real way, we have guardian angels, and we can make great use of our natural relationship with wise beings who care about our spiritual well-being. When we open ourselves to and invite those with a much higher consciousness to be with us, we are potentially uplifted higher into Divine light and love. Regular intentional connection toward angelic presence stimulates further motivation to be aligned and fused with Divine will, which in turn empowers our will to choose regenerate living (*Secrets of Heaven* §99).

Swedenborg assures us that the power of angels is immense:

In the spiritual world, angels have so much power that if I were to highlight everything I have seen, it would strain credulity. Anything that needs to be removed because it is opposed to the divine design, they can raze and overturn it simply by an effort of will and a look. So, I have seen mountains that were the abode of evil people leveled and overturned, sometimes shaken from end to end as happens in

Continues on page 82

The Good People of This World will Always Outnumber the Bad

BY ANNETTE WOOFENDEN

Ask Google “what is the most unequal country in the world,” and it will answer “South Africa.” South Africa has the distinction of being both a first world and a third world country.

Millions of South Africans live in one-room corrugated metal shacks. There is no insulation. The shacks are hot in the summer and freezing in the winter. A strong wind can almost blow them over. They often leak when it rains. Flooring, if there is any, is frequently made from scrap cardboard.

The official term for a cluster of shacks is “informal settlement.” The common term: “squatter camp.” Typically, there is no running water or sanitation. Most people use bucket toilets. The electricity, if any, is usually the result of unsafe illegal connections.

Nevertheless, informal settlements are communities of good people living busy lives. The men go to work or go out looking for piece-work. Women clean. Children walk to school in spiffy uniforms. As the residents pursue their dreams, they must survive without proper infrastructure, and with the ever-present threat of violence from a lack of security.

It is rare for outsiders to venture into informal settlements, even though the townships are filled with them. Indeed, the Soweto headquarters of the New Church of Southern Africa is adjacent to an informal settlement.

A few days before Easter of this year, a solo cyclist found himself in trouble at the edge of an informal settlement in Devland, one of Soweto’s many neighborhoods. He had stopped at the bottom of a hill on a dirt path to check the map on his smartphone. He heard three men yelling. They were coming



An informal settlement in Soweto, South Africa, also called a “squatter camp.”

for him. Thrusting the phone into a cargo pocket, he jumped onto the pedals of his bike and took off from a dead stop. He labored to build up enough speed to outrun them, but he was climbing a hill.

The men caught up. One grabbed hold of the rear wheel, jerking the bike to a stop. The other two began stoning him with fist-sized rocks. Realizing the bike helmet was protecting the cyclist’s skull, the men bludgeoned his face, jaw, and neck with the rocks. They also beat his body with a stick whose shape and heft resembled a baseball bat.

Despite knowing that he was in serious trouble, the cyclist resolved not to fight back. He resolved to take the beating but also to hang onto his bike for as long as he could while yelling for help.

Some women and children were the first to emerge from their shacks but were afraid to intervene. Then a few men began to arrive. Initially the onlookers were shocked by the sight of a white man in their midst. But they quickly realized that they were bearing witness to a vicious assault. It was then that the robbers swung that baseball bat into the side of the cyclist’s head, knocking him motionless to the ground. With that blow they freed the

bike and took off with it before the arriving men could stop them.

The crowd crept forward towards what they thought was a dead man. So, when he sat up dazed with blood spurting from between his eyes and down his face, they collectively drew back in horror. It was then that a gogo (a grandmother) stepped forward and took charge.

She instructed the men to bring the cyclist into their yard and sit him on an overturned bucket. She called for salt, clean water, and for a fire to be started. With only a single Band-aid and a dish cloth, they struggled to slow the bleeding from multiple wounds. In the midst of the commotion, the cyclist closed his eyes and rested, gratefully accepting the people’s ministrations. When he opened his eyes, he saw a small boy standing in front of him, silently holding up a piece of his battered helmet. It was the cyclist’s rear-view mirror.



Witnesses told me afterwards that they were certain they had witnessed the death of my cyclist husband, Lee Woofenden.

Continues on page 70

Good People of The World

Continued from page 69

The residents called the police, but to their disappointment, Lee declined to open a case. All he wanted was his bike returned. Thus, the settlement men bravely inserted themselves into the business of the robbers and successfully retrieved the bike. They told us that the robbers are in the country illegally, and I gather that they aren't well-liked by the settlement residents.

That day, as we waited at the doctor's office for Lee to get stitches, he insisted that he wanted to do something for the large group of people who had helped him. We decided to give them a fatted calf they could sacrifice for a real biblical feast. Except it would be a sheep instead of a calf.

This isn't something we urban Americans could do on our own. So we turned to Siviwe, a neighbor and one of Lee's cycling partners. We also turned to Busi, another neighbor and a gogo herself. She suggested that we visit the settlement first to see what materials the residents had and what their situation was. Siviwe added that we couldn't just drop off a sheep on them and assume things would go smoothly. "We're in the city, not the homelands," he said.

So it was that on a Friday morning four days after the attack, the four of us set off for the informal settlement in Devland despite police warnings never to return there. Its dirt tracks were too rough for our little VW Polo, so we parked at a nearby petrol station and circled the settlement on foot until we reached the rear where Lee was rescued.

Residents gaped as we passed by, picking our way over sewage and half-buried electrical cords. Eventually Lee found the site of the attack. A community leader and his entourage greeted us and led us through the shacks on a maze of narrow and rocky paths to



Lee (right) and his neighbor and cycling partner, Siviwe (left).

Ngicela ukuthi loku eni kwenzile kimi, niphinde nikwenze kwabanye.

Loosely translated: Please, as you have helped me, help each other when help is needed.

reach the entrance to the gogo's home.

Our arrival was a pleasant surprise. They never expected to see Lee again. The gogo told me that she wondered what had become of him, and that she had prayed for him. For three nights following the attack, she had not been able to sleep. She emphasized how miraculous it was that Lee survived. "Your husband is very strong."

I thanked her in Zulu for saving him.

It quickly became apparent to Busi that the gogo would not be able to cook the feast herself. She had few adult women nearby to help, and scant kitchen implements. We decided we would cook the feast ourselves and deliver it the next day, Saturday, which happened to be the day before Easter.

We needed to buy a sheep—a normal activity for Sowetans who are

expecting honored guests for dinner. We drove to an area where makeshift pens had been set up near a busy intersection. Then we stood back as Siviwe, who had spent some of his Xhosa childhood on a farm in the Eastern Cape, carefully examined and lifted various sheep to feel their weight before selecting the best one.

After negotiating with the shrewd business lady, we paid in cash. She quickly slipped it into a purse-sized money bag that she kept hidden in her bosom, kasi (township) style. After some back and forth with her, we realized that the sheep was going to be a fifth passenger inside our little Polo. Transporting farm animals in passenger cars is a perfectly normal activity here. However, I could hardly focus on the road ahead because I kept staring into the rearview mirror at the sheep in the back.

Arriving at a farm on the edge of Soweto, I was the most confused driver ever when the butcher-man gestured for me to pull up to a rock out in the open, on which a knife rested. After we offered a prayer of thanks to God for the sheep, and asking that it not suffer, the expert butcher slaughtered the sheep right in front of our car. He and his assistant cut the sheep into sections and packed them into large garbage bags.

We drove to another establishment where men used a band saw to cut the sections into smaller pieces. So it was that we returned home in our Polo bearing the sheep's diced meat on the bone, together with its head, feet, and intestines (local delicacies!) in heavy garbage bags. This was certainly different than buying in bulk at our local Pick N Pay.

The next morning saw Busi get up at 3:00 AM to start preparing the salads and sides at her place before coming over to ours with her sister to cook the meat and pap (a food staple

Continues on page 71

Good People of The World

Continued from page 70

similar to grits, but drier). It was quite a production to watch as these women went about the business of cooking such large quantities. I served as their assistant.

By noon Saturday, we returned to the informal settlement, where a group of excited and happy people gathered around us. In front of them stood Lee, with his bruises, swollen face, and blue stitches between his eyes. He delivered a sermonette based on the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37).

As Siviwe translated into Zulu, Lee told them a story. He was traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, he said, when he was attacked by robbers, beaten, and left

for dead. But a group of good Samaritans—his listeners, our new friends in Devland—took pity on him. They took him into their homes, bandaged his wounds, and cared for him. In so doing they fulfilled the two Great Commandants given by Jesus: love the Lord with all your heart and all your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself. They had shown love to Lee as their neighbor, and in so doing were walking the path to eternal life. He concluded by saying that we wanted to express our gratitude by bringing them a feast. “Izandla ziyagezana,” he said—a Zulu proverb: “The hands wash each other,” meaning “people help one another.”

Wearing an African dress and very pretty head scarf that Busi had tied on

my head, I then spoke to them:

“*Ngiyabonga ukusiza ubaba.*” [Thank you for helping the sir/father.] “*Nginithanda khakhulu.*” [I love you all very much. (I choked up when I said this.)] “*Ngicela ukuthi loku eni kwenzile kimi, niphinde nikwenze kwabanye.*” [Loosely translated: Please, as you have helped me, help each other when help is needed.]

We served full plates to 45–50 residents, who all ate their fill.



Lee and Siviwe with their new friends from Devland.

Inside the gogo’s shack, I privately gave her new bedding, various home and kitchen goods, food, candles, and my copy of Desmond Tutu’s illustrated children’s Bible stories in Zulu.

Of the men, there were two who helped Lee into the gogo’s yard and who were instrumental in retrieving Lee’s bicycle. We gave them a sizeable bucket of roof tar. I also spoke to each one individually behind the gogo’s shack. I thanked the community leader, who was primarily responsible for getting the bike back. While chatting with him, I slipped him R250 (\$17 USD) which I had stored in my bra, kasi style.

Then I sought out the younger man who had assisted the community leader, and privately thanked him

too, but with the intention of slipping him a R100 note (\$7 USD). Except I couldn’t get that single note out of my bra. Things got awkward as I reached down into the front of my dress with both hands to dig it out. He realized I was trying to give him money. When I finally fished out the dang note, water flowed from his eyes, and he wept upon seeing the blue color of the bill.

“Are you OK?” I asked.

“It is too much! Thank you,” he said, and ducked into his own shack for a minute to compose himself before returning to the group of young men who were sitting on overturned buckets.

Then we relaxed. The men then broke out a smoke and a six-pack of beer, which they shared amongst themselves as their after-meal

digestif. And we all shared the camaraderie of good company under the warmth of the afternoon sun. The men told us we could return any time without fear, and that Lee may ride his bike there. They will not let any harm come to us. They also requested that Lee return and preach—something we are now arranging with them.

God turns evil into good.

After his wounds had sufficiently healed, Lee and I resumed attending church services at the headquarters of the New Church of Southern Africa. To our dismay, we realized that the church has been living its own Jerusalem to Jericho experience.

Like the Devland residents, the church property and its residents are

Continues on page 72

Quick Tip from A/V Consultant Ben Phinney

Do you need tech savvy people to help with your live stream?

Needing to find tech savvy people to help run A/V equipment or a live stream, in my mind seems like a great opportunity for outreach in your community—and an even greater opportunity to reconnect with the youth! If the members of your congregation don't feel comfortable with the necessary equipment here are some questions to ask yourself to help find young, tech savvy volunteers in your community: Are there any teenage or young adult children of congregation members that might be more eager to come to church if they had a fun job to do like running a live stream? Are there any volunteer or A/V clubs at local schools that would be willing to offer their time? Are there any local cable access TV studios that might have—or could point you in the direction of—volunteers? The answer to any one of these questions is likely yes. Churches running a live stream have been overjoyed that their virtual offerings have allowed them to easily connect with new audiences globally. In my mind, the physical needs of running the live stream should be an equally rewarding opportunity to connect with people in person as well.

SCCI Technology Grants up to \$3,000 are Still Available

Applications should be made with consultation from Ben Phinney AskPhinney@gmail.com and may be emailed to Holly Bauer at: Bauer.HollyM@gmail.com. See the *May issue of the Messenger* for more details.

Good People of The World

Continued from page 71

also being victimized by robbers and burglars who sneak up from the nearby informal settlement. The minimal infrastructure that is in a dilapidated state makes the church a soft target for thieves who are getting more aggressive with each passing day.

Indeed, the very night before our first Sunday back at church, professional thieves broke into one of the buildings and stole power tools and other valuable items. After the service, we watched the minister—still dressed in his clerical garb—chase off two more would-be thieves who had come onto the property during the service. “Must I fight on a Sunday?” he lamented.

It is hard to appreciate the safety and security that infrastructure provides until one is forced to navigate life without it. Such is the struggle here in the townships that simply defending the church and its property impedes the good work it could be doing.

That is why we are building a wall around the church property.

We are happy to report that thanks to many generous donations both small and large, twenty sections of the wall have already been completed, which is approximately 200 feet of pillars and palisades. Yet there is still a great deal

of work to do as the spacious property remains unsecured.

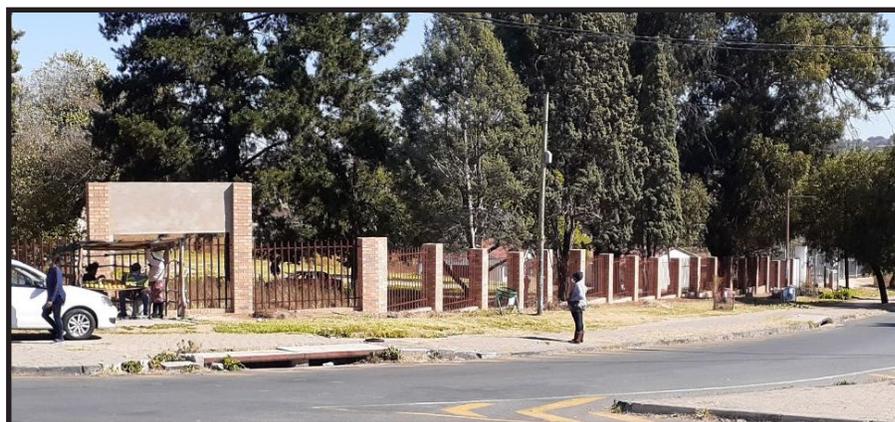
That is why we are seeking good Samaritans in the wider church who will take pity on our struggling brothers and sisters here in South Africa and come to their aid.

If you would like to help, send me an email at aswoof@outlook.com and I will send you a link where you can see pictures and videos documenting our progress and how to donate. Even a few American dollars will go a long way here.

As evidenced by the large number of Devland residents who came to Lee's aid after three men assaulted him, the good people of this world will always outnumber the bad. Please help us make it possible for our church here in South Africa to reach out to the good people of Devland, and to the many other townships and informal settlements of this beautiful country, bearing a message of healing and hope... and sometimes a great feast! 🍷



Annette Woofenden lives in Soweto, South Africa, with her husband, four cats, and dog. She is running a library out of her home for the benefit of neighborhood children and teens.



Progress on the wall around the church property. Donations are still being accepted to complete this project.

Things Heard and Seen

Continued from page 65

How accurate is the film in its portrayal of Swedenborgianism?

While the film does a decent job at hinting at several uniquely Swedenborgian metaphysical ideas, such as the constant presence and influence of spirits in our own inner lives, the notion that spirits are drawn to like-minded individuals, and a general sense of a benevolent overall spiritual and cosmological structure, both the notions of haunting and the summoning or contacting of specific spirits of deceased people are not concepts of Swedenborgian spirituality, neither is the idea of people being damned or bound to specific physical locations, as the film insinuates.

While there is certainly an openness towards, and interest in such phenomena as near-death experiences, spiritualism, and practical mysticism, Swedenborgians are not known to hold seances seeking out communication with specific spirits. This may be by far the most notable inaccuracy of the film, and one that is bound to worry actual Swedenborgians, who have a long history of rightly attempting to distance themselves from the spooky, strange, and occult aura popular culture has often associated with the great mystic.

Didn't Swedenborg talk to dead people?

It is absolutely true that one of Swedenborg's major claims, and sources for his writings, were his alleged conversations with "angels and spirits," all of whom, he writes, used to be human beings who have deceased and are now living in the fullness of the spiritual world, which is intimately connected to our "natural" conscious state. Arguably, his mystical writings constitute the largest, most extensive record of communication with the dead known

to scholars, making the Tibetan Book of the Dead and the Seth Material look pale in comparison as far as volume is concerned.

While there is certainly an openness towards, and interest in such phenomena as near-death experiences, spiritualism, and practical mysticism, Swedenborgians are not known to hold seances seeking out communication with specific spirits.

At the same time, he presents his encounters as experiences and realms he was led to as part of an overall revelatory process about the nature of spirit, rather than a specific "seeking out" of particular entities, something that distinguishes him from other mediums and mystics. The objective, for Swedenborg, was not to learn earthly information from specific beings, but rather a holistic experience of the subtle realms of consciousness, which to him, are intimately connected to the spiritual world.

One reason why Swedenborgians have not been known to practice channeling is Swedenborg's explicit warnings about the matter, claiming that while communication with spirits is certainly possible, it is not advisable for most people, and likely to have problematic outcomes.

It is clear how dangerous it is on this planet, when spirits speak with people, or people listen to spirits operating in them, if they do not have faith in the Lord. If they have faith, it does no harm, for the Lord liberates them; but if they do not have faith . . . they are not only persuaded that it is the holy spirit [speaking], but are also aroused and incited toward wicked acts (*Spiritual Experiences* §3781).

According to Swedenborg, the

spirits with the greatest interest in such activities are exactly the ones that are better avoided....

It seems important to note, however that there are exceptions to Swedenborg's general approach toward communicating with the spirits of deceased people, which is to focus on being led by the divine by means of connections with benevolent spirits and inquiring about universal spiritual truths from both angels and demons, rather than invoking the presence of specific beings. Perhaps the most famous example of explicit Necromancy ("the supposed practice of communicating with the dead,"² generally associated with an *active* and *intentional* seeking out or invocation of *specific* spirits) is his supposed encounter with Queen Louisa Ulrika of Sweden in 1761. As the story goes, Queen Louisa requested that Swedenborg contact her deceased brother, Prince Augustus, who had died in 1758, to relay a private question to him. Swedenborg is said to have returned to her a few weeks later, providing the Queen with Augustus' answer to the question, which she claimed could have only been known by her brother, confirming Swedenborg's successful contact.

Just a year earlier, Swedenborg had supposedly been asked by yet another lady of high status, the widow of a deceased French diplomat, to contact him regarding the location of an important receipt which had been missing, the location of which only her late husband would know. Upon Swedenborg's inquiry in the spiritual world, he appeared to his widow in a dream, and informed her, accurately, of the location of the document.

While these anecdotes are often used as examples of Swedenborg's *evidential mediumship* and prominently

² *Oxford English Dictionary*. Accessed May 7, 2021. <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/necromancy>

Continues on page 74

Things Heard and Seen

Continued from page 73

touted by his followers as confirmation of his supernatural abilities, they present a challenge to those who try to disassociate him from the practice of necromancy. Be that as it may, his message to the world about talking to specific deceased spiritual beings can be most easily summed up as *better not to mess with it*.

There are other examples of Swedenborg seeking and encountering the spirits of specific personalities, including in his published theological works, such as prominent philosophers and theologians, in the worlds beyond, although he maintains that *special permission* was granted to him in order to convey particular spiritual ideas and principles, and that generally, important popular figures are not inclined to be easily contacted by mortals, and are better left alone.

What about haunted houses?

When people think of ghosts, spirits, and demons, the idea of haunting and possession often come to mind. Hollywood has capitalized on the disturbing concept that spirits can and do reside in specific places in this material world (including *taking over* or *residing in* specific people, requiring some kind of exorcism, seance, or other ritual to be banished. Swedenborg does not share this magical view of the more subtle realms of spirit. As mentioned above, to Swedenborg, spirits are constantly present with us in a way that resembles multi-dimensionality. But the spiritual world is not bound to material time and space.

The notion of a spirit being *stuck* in an early realm quite simply does not make sense within Swedenborg's cosmological system. Rather, it is we who are constantly occupying spaces within the spiritual world, since our inner selves already reside there, parallel to

our earthly existence. We inhabit various spiritual communities, both heavenly and hellish, at all times subconsciously, based on our thoughts and affections. In other words, a person who is caring for others is, on a deeper level, in spiritual community with angels who enjoy the same kind of activities, emotions, and thoughts as we do in that moment. Someone engaging in hurtful or selfish thoughts, emotions or actions is also in the presence of the spiritual communities and beings who share those affinities.

People have around them a number of auras from the spiritual world that mirror their life and place them in company with spirits of a similar emotional makeup (*Secrets of Heaven* §5179).³

The process of spiritual growth, or *regeneration*, in Swedenborg's view, entails our cultivating our spiritual associations, "making ourselves at home," by our own choosing, in spiritual abodes which correspond to our true inner desires, loves, and pleasures. Heaven and hell are not places of reward or punishment, but of radical self-realization. Once our physical body dies, we then continue to dwell in these communities permanently.

Rather, it is us who are constantly occupying spaces within the spiritual world, since our inner selves already reside there, parallel to our earthly existence.

This framework does however offer insight into the phenomena that appear like haunting and possession (as in spirits residing within the material world, rather than vice versa) which so commonly seem to be experienced by people across cultures. One of the

primary features of the natural world is the appearance of, and preoccupation with, physically limited space and linear time. It's how earthy humans conceptualize reality. This (useful but ultimately inaccurate) appearance becomes less and less pronounced the further one's consciousness is raised into the realms of spirit, at whose center and source (aka God) they are completely transcended.

God is infinite because he existed before the world, before space and time came into being. The physical world has time and space. The spiritual world, on the other hand, lacks actual time and space, although it does have apparent time and space. Time and space were introduced into both worlds for the sake of distinguishing one thing from another, large from small, many from few—one quantity from another, and one quality from another. [...]

Apparent space and time follow the different states of mind that spirits and angels go through there. The units of spiritual time and space match the desires of their will and the resulting thoughts in their intellect. Apparent space and time, then, are real—they are predictably determined by one's state of mind (*True Christianity* §29).⁴

Because the concepts of time and space are so fundamental to our natural state, which is more coarse and limited than the realms of spirit, it makes sense that we would conceptualize encounters with spirits within the limits of our ability to conceptualize. A classic example of this would be the human idea that heaven and hell are dwelling places we occupy *after* we die, in a somewhat abstract place which is clearly distinguished and ordered by the process of physical death. Another would be the notion that particular

Continues on page 75

³ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *Secrets of Heaven*. Translated by Lisa Hyatt Cooper. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2008.

⁴ Swedenborg, Emanuel. *True Christianity*. Translated by Jonathan S. Rose. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010.

Things Heard and Seen

Continued from page 74

spirits reside within particular physical locations on earth. So, while our legitimate spiritual experiences bear the appearance of being bound by time and space, they are in reality a result of inner processes. One might say that it is really we who are doing the haunting.

Take a haunting, for example. Many completely sane and credible people have reported encounters with spiritual beings which seem to directly correlate with specific places. We may wander through a Victorian mansion, contemplating its history and thinking of the people who once inhabited it. Suddenly, we have an otherworldly seeming experience, in which their presence seems to become tangible. This may vary from slight emotional or physical responses to auditory and visual appearances. It is logical, based on Swedenborg's worldview, that we would conclude that a spirit has intruded into our material space, is somehow permeating it, and possibly stuck or bound to this location. In reality, he would argue, we are, by means of our thoughts and emotions, on a subtler level than that of materiality, entering *their* spaces, and getting a natural glimpse of what is already occurring within. The real encounter happens in the spiritual world, not in the natural world, but parallel to it.

Swedenborg and Spiritualism

The practice of seances, in a modern Western context, has been primarily associated with the Spiritualist tradition, one of several alternative and esoteric movements, such as New Thought, Theosophy and Anthroposophy, which have been heavily influenced by Swedenborg. Many of the early (as well as later) Spiritualists were avid readers of his works, and the influence of his cosmology on that of Spiritualism is significant. Perhaps the most

notable example of Swedenborg influenced spiritualism exists in the work of one of the most influential early Spiritualist practitioners, Andrew Jackson Davis.

While the film's explicit engagement with Swedenborg is bound to excite his followers, there is likely going to be concern about the specific impressions the public might get about Swedenborgianism and Swedenborgians.

Helena Blavatsky, the primary fountainhead of Theosophy, which contributed greatly to the popularization of Spiritualism, channeling, and mediumship in the modern West (although this only constitutes a small aspect of Theosophical teachings and interest) and has in turn influenced nearly every consequent Western esoteric system which has emerged, writes in her 1892 "Theosophical Glossary" that "Of all mystics, Swedenborg has certainly influenced *theosophy* the most."⁵

While Swedenborg and the history of channeling, mediumship, and the paranormal are inseparable, it is important to distinguish between the man himself and the various spiritual philosophies he inspired. Among Swedenborgians, the practice of channeling and seances is extremely rare, and generally discouraged, heeding the old Swede's personal advice.

In a different sense, however, Swedenborgian spirituality might be considered the *ultimate spiritualism*. Not only is his communication with the deceased at the core of his mysticism and revelatory process, but his cosmology as a whole presents a spiritual framework in which, people, all

people, are in constant contact with the dead, who intimately influence every aspect of our inner life, including thought and emotion.

Good spirits and angels are not only present with human beings, but even reside in their feelings. For every feeling has great extension, and because the ultimate plane is with human beings in their feelings, therefore this happens when the Lord enlivens, and then arranges them; just as good spirits are in the affection for gardening, where they have little abodes (*Spiritual Experiences* §4399).

In other words, Swedenborg would claim that we are all already communicating with spirits every second of our lives, on a subconscious, and often unconscious, level of our spiritual psyche. Only on rare occasions are we fully aware of the specific personalities of the spiritual beings constantly residing within the more subtle levels of our being.

At this point, it seems important to point out the immense and diverse variety of interpretations of Swedenborg's experiences and works among Swedenborgians. Some are drawn to the literal metaphysics of spirit and the afterlife, others tend to focus on their inner (correspondential) significance, effectively psychologizing his otherworldly reports of spirits, angels and extraterrestrials (yes, he did claim to speak to aliens as well, but that's another can of worms, to be opened in a different piece. Stay tuned!) Swedenborgian scholar and theologian Rev. Dr. George F. Dole puts it this way,

In a sense, then, (Swedenborg's) descriptions of heaven and hell, and especially the intermediate state between them, the world of spirits, which he sees as our present spiritual environment, can be tested against our own experience. His

⁵ Blavatsky, H. P. *The Theosophical Glossary*. Santa Barbara: Theosophy Trust Books, 2018. P.316.

Things Heard and Seen

Continued from page 75

descriptions of that world are in some sense replicable. We may not have open experience of an alternative reality, but we can to some extent be aware of the workings of our mind.⁶

Is any PR good PR?

While the film's explicit engagement with Swedenborg is bound to excite his followers, there is likely going to be concern about the specific impressions the public might get about Swedenborgianism and Swedenborgians. There is a long history of New Church people trying to at least appear more mainline, so as to avoid scaring people off. While this may have been a useful tactic in times when Mainline Christianity (which has never had much use for the old Swede) was blossoming and popular in Western culture, and thus a helpful "gateway" to his more esoteric and unique teachings, the popular tides have turned significantly. Particularly for younger Americans, traditional organized religion and particularly mainstream Christianity are not only irrelevant and unappealing, but actively repulsive. Swedenborg's biblical exegesis and Christology, as beautiful, unique and liberating as they are, are unlikely to serve as entryways for the kinds of people who would show an interest in Swedenborg. His otherworldly experiences, unusual and countercultural ideas, and his rejection of dogmatism and sectarianism are. The few who are still drawn to mainline traditions still have plenty to choose from and are unlikely to pick a small Swedenborgian community over their neighborhood Episcopal, Methodist, or Roman Catholic church. At the same time, an interest in alternative spirituality as a

whole, the afterlife, the paranormal, altered states of consciousness, and spiritual paths such as personal gnosis and applied mysticism are alive and well and continue to permeate popular culture in ways that were uncommon just a decade ago.

This is an immense opportunity for followers of Swedenborg to invite folks to explore the rich and profound contributions which the Swedish mystic still has to make to spiritual, theological and philosophical discourse.

Things Heard and Seen is a great example of a superficial and somewhat sensationalized treatment of profound spiritual and philosophical questions, which is reflective of a deep interest in spirituality outside of the constraints of established, exoteric religion, whose appearance Swedenborgians have unsuccessfully attempted to recreate by establishing Swedenborgianism as yet another Old Church sect, with the same trappings of organized religion which Swedenborg so strongly rejected. This is an immense opportunity for followers of Swedenborg to invite folks to explore the rich and profound contributions which the Swedish mystic still has to make to spiritual, theological, and philosophical discourse. The history of Swedenborg's reception clearly shows that the realm of alternative, mystical spirituality, art, and literature has been by far the one most receptive of and interested in his ideas. As times change, Swedenborgians ought to re-think how they approach public discourse, step out of their comfort zone, and own the uniqueness and mystique of this spiritual system. As I like to say, "The facade of Mainline Christianity is a sinking ship; it's not our ship, and there is no longer

any reason to jump on it," as the Old Church gradually but quickly decays, as Swedenborg predicted.

A piece of the film's plot seems eerily reflective of this dynamic: the Swedenborgian ghost mentioned above, Emma Lucks, is murdered by her husband, a staunch Calvinist, and consequently damned to roam within the static and life-less and abandoned home which is no longer her own, trapped within an obsolete external dwelling which keeps her from pursuing the fullness of spiritual potential which she herself had so longingly embraced in her devotion to the radically new, progressive, challenging, and liberating spirituality which she had found in the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg. ☩



Rev. Thom Muller is the pastor of Hillside Community Church, an Urban Sanctuary, in El Cerrito, California, as well as managing editor of *Our Daily Bread* at spiritualquesters.org, and assistant night minister at the San Francisco Night Ministry. His passions include interfaith spirituality, civil rights work, comparative mysticism, and the western esoteric tradition.



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.

⁶ Dole, George F. *Freedom & Evil: a Pilgrim's Guide to Hell*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2018

197TH ANNUAL
Convention
 OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH



Navigating the Rapids in the Stream of Providence

Registration is required and will be open until June 15th – This event is free

Friday, June 25 All times are Listed in Eastern Time

- 12:00 PM — Opening of Convention followed by an open Business Meeting. Featuring reports from the President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, COM, and more.
- 6:00 PM — Welcome address by Rev. Jane Siebert, president, and a presentation of the churches in Convention
- 7:00 PM — Opening Church Service for Convention hosted by Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church, followed by Social Gatherings on Zoom with Evening Meditation

Saturday, June 26 All times are Listed in Eastern Time

- 12:00 PM — Memorial Service and Virtual Communion hosted by Elmwood New Church
- 12:40 PM — **Keynote Presentation: Gary Lachman** (Rock & Roll Hall of Famer from the band *Blondie*):
Swedenborg and the Language of Correspondence
- 2:00 PM — Second Business Meeting, Bylaws Change, Nominating Report (any nominations from the floor), Licensed Pastor votes, approve minutes, and more. **All delegates are expected to attend and vote.**
- 3:30 PM — **Mini Course 1: A Swedenborgian Theology of Social Justice**
 with Rev. Shada Sullivan
- Mini Course 2: Glimpses of Goodness: Fostering a Perspective of Love**
 with Rev. Jenny Martin Caughman
- 4:30 PM — **Mini Course 3: John's Gospel in its Own Words**
 with Rev. Dr. David Fekete
- Mini Course 4: The Relevance of the Swedenborgian Perspective for Two Troubling Modern Issues**
 with Rev. Renée Machiniak
- 6:00 PM — Recognition Service followed by Zoom Social Gatherings, Games, and Evening Meditation

Sunday, June 27 All times are Listed in Eastern Time

- 12:00 PM — Convention Worship Service and Children's talk by Rev. Sage Cole, convention minister, and hosted by Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge
- 1:00 PM — **Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism**
Swedenborgian Spirituality: Our Journey Toward Social Justice
- 2:30 PM — CSS Annual Meeting
- 3:00 PM — Business Meetings – Elections and Standing Resolutions. **All delegates are expected to attend and vote.**
- 4:30 PM — **Mini Course 5: A Most Peculiar Paragraph: Unpacking Secrets of Heaven §634**
 with Rev. Robert McCluskey
- Mini Course 6: Beyond all Knowledge: Mystical Spirituality for the 21st Century**
 with Rev. Thom Muller
- 5:30 PM — **Mini Course 7: The Lost History of the New Church in India: D. Gopaul Chetty and the Marriage of Swedenborg and Śaiva Siddhānta**
 with Eleanor Schnarr
- Mini Course 8: The Buddha of the North: Swedenborg's Deep Parallels to Buddhist Thought**
 with Rev. Cory Bradford-Watts
- 7:00 PM — Closing of Convention – Join us on a virtual outing and an invitation to next year in California! 

More to Look Forward to at Convention 2021

Worship Services From the Massachusetts New Church Union

All worship services will also be streamed to Facebook

Opening Worship Service

June 25 at 7:00 PM ET

Join us for our Opening Worship Service of Convention, hosted by the New Jerusalem Church in Bridgewater.

Memorial Service and Virtual Communion

June 26 at 11:50 AM ET

A musical prelude performed by Ken Turley will be followed by a Memorial Service and Virtual Communion hosted by the Elmwood New Church. Join us as we honor our loved ones who have passed onto the Spiritual World. Names submitted ahead of time will be read out loud. If you would like to lift up one as you are watching you may do so by typing them into the chat. Memorial Service will be followed by Communion—please have your own sacraments on hand.

Convention Worship Service with Children's Talk

June 27 at 12:00 PM ET

Join us for the Convention Worship Service and Children's talk delivered by the Convention Preacher, Rev. Sage Cole and hosted by the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge.

Closing Worship, Virtual Outing, and Invitation for Next Year

June 27 at 7:00 PM EDT

Join our future hosts for Convention—Wayfarer's Chapel, Agapao Church, and the Garden Church—as they invite us to Convention 2022. The Garden Church will offer a closing worship service, and we will officially end Convention 2021 with the closing of the Bible.

Musicians from Around North America

Accompanying our worship services, musicians from around North America have offered up their talents to make our virtual gathering unlike any we could have in-person. (You won't want to miss what Laurie Turley and our virtual choir have put together for you, see [page 79](#).)

Rev. Ken and Laurie Turley



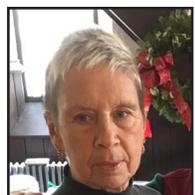
Now retired from ministry and school teaching respectively, they continue to be active in music. While performance and open mic opportunities are restricted, they continue to compose, arrange and play together. Creating online music video collaborations of new and older compositions is a new area of exploration. Please visit [Ken's YouTube channel](#) and www.turleymusic.com.

Lisa Grace and Ian Woofenden

Renewable energy guru Ian and voice coach extraordinaire Lisa live and sing on an island in the Pacific Northwest. They enjoy creating music with friends and family at the campfire, for church, weddings, house concerts, or wherever the musical spirit moves.



Jean Dougherty



I am the organist at the Church of the Holy City, Wilmington, Delaware. I started as the organist there on the first Sunday in Advent, 1973

and joined the church in 1974. I come from a Lutheran background and graduated from St. Olaf College and have been involved in church music most of my life. I also teach piano lessons via Zoom and at my house. Music is my life.

Rev. Dr. David Fekete

When I was in my twenties, I faced one of the most difficult choices in my life: to go into music professionally, or to go into ministry professionally. I had studied music theory and composition in university, had taken private lessons on piano, trumpet, and jazz, had performed publicly. I decided on ministry, but stayed active in music, playing in bands in university, writing, and continuing to progress in learning. Two years ago, I finished recording a CD of my originals, from which the music I sent to Convention is taken. My CD is still available for purchase.



Social Gatherings

There will be a time set aside each evening for our much needed social gatherings to reconnect and spend time together. Social gatherings will be followed by evening meditations.



Be sure to join us **Saturday night, June 26 at 7:00 PM ET** for an hour of Zoom games for all ages with professional entertainer Trevor the Games Man! Trevor is the activities director at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly. Over the past year he has been bringing his in-person fun and games to people everywhere virtually. ☩

Convention 2021 Virtual Choir

BY LAURIE TURLEY

Being an elementary school music teacher, the COVID-19 restrictions have challenged my known methods of teaching music in many unfortunate ways, but the silver lining is that I was forced to learn technology that I would never have previously imagined in order to provide remote instruction to my students. I jumped in feet first in the spring of 2020 to quickly learn as much as I could in a short time about compiling Virtual Ensembles to ensure that my students could still have a “Virtual Spring Concert.” Even though most of our students returned to the building in September, they are sadly not in my music room, and so I have become quite familiar with seeing my students only on a computer screen.

Consequently, I have compiled



The Virtual Choir: Emily Alsup, Graham Bier, Rhett Billings, Julie Conaron, Karen Conger, John Cullen, Paul Deming, Rebecca Esterson, Bet Giddings, Greg Huang-Dale, Jenny Huang-Dale, Lori Lipski, Susan Logan, Joe Machiniak, Renée Machiniak, Mark Matthews, Tammara Mounce, Nina Sasser, Kathy Speas, John Titus, Ken Turley, and Laurie Turley

several virtual ensembles and educational music videos in the past year and had just recently completed one for my local community orchestra when I received an email from Rev. Jane Siebert with a photo of a prior Convention Choir, with the remark that sadly, this would be the second year without a choir. I knew I had to make an offer to Convention and to the choir that we could still sing *together* while apart. We were late getting started, so I quickly got the word out to as many choir members as I could (my apologies to anyone I missed), and was thrilled with the quick response from so many who were eager to join in. Hence, the three Virtual Choir videos that are presented as our offering to this 2021 Virtual Convention were created. I sent out music scores and sing-along mp3s, choir members recorded themselves with their smartphones and cameras, sent me their videos and I put them all together into these Virtual Choir

videos. I still have much to learn, and while I made several mistakes along the way, I was consistently given support and encouragement by the choir members for my efforts. It has been my honor and delight to have their beautiful faces and singing voices grace my home over the past two months and now, they will grace yours as well!

If you like what you see and hear, and want to join in future ensembles, please note that several of the choir members have already said yes to a Virtual Christmas Choir video. Even though it's likely that most Christmas services will be in person by December, we wanted to continue the fun of singing *virtually with our friends* from across the continent. Sneak preview: I am working on an arrangement of an “Alleluia” canon by Phillip Hayes, (mid 1700s) combined with the familiar “Angels We Have Heard on High.” I have already enlisted some of my local orchestra friends to accompany the choir. We'd love to welcome you too!

If you would like to take part, please let me know by sending an email to LaurieTurleyVirtualEnsembles@gmail.com and I'll add you to the contact list. Expect to receive the music via email sometime in mid-late July, with a due date of late September for all video submissions. 🎵

Surprises and Special Recognitions

June 26 at 6:00 PM ET

Join President Rev. Jane Siebert as we honor those who have served the denomination. We will celebrate Ministers and Pastors who have reached a milestone year, as well as those who would have been honored last year. We will also be surprising several leaders who have contributed significantly to our churches and communities.

Look for more information at Swedenborg.org/Convention2021

Follow **Swedenborgian Church of North America** (www.facebook.com/SwedenborgConvention)

on Facebook for the details, schedule, and updates as they become available.

All Are Welcome. There is no fee for this event; however, donations encouraged. www.Swedenborg.org/Donate

Letters to the Editor

Continued from page 66

social media and the church which I felt made some interesting points. One thing that really stuck out to me was that he said you need to decide who is speaking on a church's social media accounts. As Swedenborgians, we all know that we speak a message of love, truth, and wisdom, but outsiders, many of whom are members of marginalized communities, cannot assume that the church will be a safe place for them.

For this reason, I feel that it is the duty of the church to issue public statements in solidarity with marginalized communities. I feel this way because it is not political to defend the basic truths we have been taught as Christians—to love one another, to show empathy, and to stand on the side of justice. It is not, or at least shouldn't be, controversial to extend a few words of kindness to those who need it most.

Maybe I come from a unique perspective. As a college student, my Methodist-affiliated school has put out countless statements expressing solidarity with students of color, LGBTQ students, and more. The president of Notre Dame, which is Catholic, commemorated Juneteenth with students last year. Even Brigham Young has dedicated resources to committees based on equity and inclusion. It is expected that schools make statements because it is assumed that their populations contain members of these groups, and therefore showing solidarity with them helps foster safety and acceptance within their own communities. Why, then, is it controversial for us? Do we not also seek to create a diverse community of the faithful?

What points of view do we imply when we say nothing? We know who we are: loving, kind, empathetic Christians. But marginalized folks cannot assume so because many of them have

always experienced the opposite. If we want to become a space where all types of people feel welcome, then we need to make that clear. In an era of constant communication, silence is violence. The church has been a place of fear and oppression for many. If we want to change that, we need to actively change the narrative.

So, who is speaking for us? Is it a majority rule on a Convention vote, or is it our unwavering faith in the Word? Because they seem to be speaking two different languages, and I fear that our voices are starting to talk over each other to the point of being nearly incoherent.

—Olivia Hackett
Indianapolis, Indiana

Response to Ava and Divine Providence §141

I loved reading “Teens Respond to Swedenborg’s Writings Concerning the Spiritual World” in the April 2021 issue of *the Messenger*. It reminded me of so many good times at Swedenborgian Church youth retreats and church camps over so many years, both as a teenager and as adult staff.

What I enjoyed most at the retreats and camps was the great and challenging conversations about God, religion, the church, humanity, love, relationships, the afterlife, and all the other big topics we humans face in this life. It is good to see that the youth of the church are still actively thinking about these big issues.

I would love to sit down with Ava Dolley at Almont this summer and dig into the tough issues she raises in her thoughtful piece. Alas! Now that my wife and I live in South Africa, it's a little too far for us to travel to camp! I hope she doesn't mind if I continue the conversation here in the pages of *the Messenger*.

First and foremost, unlike in the belief systems of some other churches, in

Continues on page 82

Pandemic Relief Grants Still Available for Individuals

A reminder that the Executive Committee of the General Council of the Swedenborgian Church in the U.S. and Canada has authorized a limited number of one-time grants per household for pandemic related relief.

We have given twenty-six, five-hundred dollar grants so far to individuals financially affected by the pandemic. We still have funds available, so remember to contact Rev. Jane Siebert (president@swedenborg.org) for assistance for members and friends of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

Details

- Requests to be received by the President of General Convention, preferably through a recommendation from a Minister or Licensed Pastor. Everything is confidential.
- Up to \$500 one-time grant per household for pandemic related relief. Grants shall be initiated by those who are 18 years of age or older and actively involved with a Swedenborg Church Society, Camp, or Association/Conference.
- The president of General Convention will present the requests from the fund to the person or household making the grant request.
- Employees of General Convention and members of General Council are explicitly excluded from consideration of a grant request.
- Grants will be available through 2021 or until the available funds are fully expended.

Bridgewater Church Seeks Half-time Minister

The Position

We are seeking an ordained, Swedenborgian minister who will bring appreciation for our well-loved programs and new energy and enthusiasm for enrichment, outreach, and church growth. We hope to expand our virtual offerings for community and global outreach with the assistance of a minister experienced with and excited by technology and social media. We encourage candidates who enjoy collaboration and who will thrive in a team ministry working with our newly consecrated licensed pastor, who is an experienced lay preacher and Sunday school director.

At this time, we offer a half-time position, progressing to more hours as the congregation grows. Salary will be commensurate with experience. Our compensation package includes a housing allowance, paid health insurance, and contribution to the retirement fund. There are many nearby outstanding medical facilities for chaplaincy work and hospice organizations.

About the Application Process

Please submit:

- A resumé and a cover letter.
- Three letters of reference from:
 - a ministerial colleague
 - a person in the community familiar with your work
 - a character reference
- A brief statement of your approach to ministry, to working in a pastoral team, and to growing the church.
- Two video samples of sermons with written transcripts.

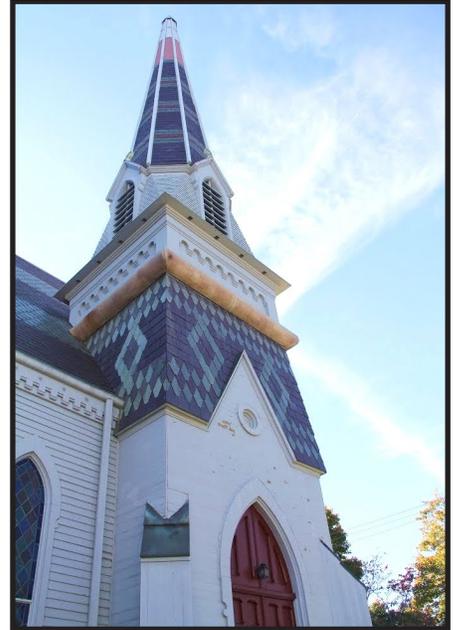
Please email your application by July 12 to Bet Giddings, Chair, Pastoral Search Committee:
betgiddings@comcast.net

About the Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church

The Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church is a well-established, long-standing society committed to Swedenborgian doctrine. Worship services and Sunday school are held weekly and are beautifully enhanced by live piano music and occasional offerings from our talented choir and guest instrumentalists. A bi-monthly spiritual discussion group takes place after the worship service and book discussion and Bible study are also favorites.

We have a wonderful church community who enjoy fellowship activities and potluck luncheons. We have presented well-attended lectures, open to the public, on topics such as Helen Keller, death and dying, angels, and world religions. We have hosted musical events, circle dancing, and chair yoga. We participate every year in the ecumenical Thanksgiving and Easter services presented by the Bridgewater Council of Churches. We hope to expand our community outreach with the energy and commitment of our new minister.

The Bridgewater Society was established in the early nineteenth century and has conducted services in our building for 150 years. The building, a unique wooden structure of Victorian Gothic architecture, lies within the Central Square Historic District and is a prominent landmark on the Town Green. Our central location lends itself to maximum exposure and to participation in town activities. In 1994 our building was ravaged by fire, and accounts of the tragedy were covered by local and national news. As a result, our once-obscure denomination received a great deal of attention. After our decision to rebuild, we received overwhelming support from the Bridgewater community and beyond.



About Our Town and Community

Bridgewater, Massachusetts, is a charming residential, suburban community with a real town center and easy accessibility to Boston by highway, rail, and bus. It offers a diversity of activities in a caring, friendly small-town atmosphere.

For personal enrichment and outdoor fun, there are nearby museums, historic sites, cultural events, hiking, skiing, and water sports. The ocean is at our doorstep and the mountains are an hour away. The Elmwood Church is just down the road, the Cambridge Chapel, and the Church of the Open Word in Newtonville are each about an hour by car, and the Fryeburg New Church Assembly is three hours away, providing easy access to New Church gatherings.

Bridgewater State University, located a block away from our church, is one of Massachusetts' largest public institutions of higher education. Collaboration with the university and outreach to students are exciting areas for further exploration. ☒

www.bridgewaternewchurch.org

Letters to the Editor

Continued from page 80

Swedenborgian Christianity our default destination is always heaven. It is never hell. That is why, according to Swedenborg, children who die before reaching adulthood finish growing up in heaven, and when they do become adults, all of them make their permanent home in heaven.

For the same reason, people who reach adulthood physically, but never develop sufficient mental functioning to make rational decisions, will always make their permanent home in heaven, and never in hell. After they die, they will finish their *mental* growth to adulthood, which they were unable to complete here on earth through no fault of their own.

People end up in hell only when, as rational and self-responsible adults, they persistently choose to live from self-centeredness and greed when they were perfectly capable of making the other choice. It's not because God sends them to hell. It's because they themselves insist upon being there.

No one goes to hell by accident, or due to circumstances beyond their control.

Second, if you read further in *Divine Providence* §141–142, you will find that when Swedenborg speaks of “a state of mental disorder” he is mostly talking about *temporary* unsoundness of mind. He speaks (in a different translation) of “depression, imagined or illusory guilt, various kinds of hallucinations, mental anguish brought on by misfortunes, and mental anxiety and pain brought on by physical disorders.” People who have these episodes and then return to a more balanced and rational state of mind can continue their process of regeneration.

What if severe mental illness that makes rational thought impossible is a person's permanent state? Swedenborg covers this as well, in §142: “If people

like this have not been reformed before their illness, then afterwards, if they do die, they are the same kind of people they were before the illness.” So we have to ask, “What kind of people were they before their illness?” If incapacitating mental illness goes all the way back to childhood and the womb, then the above principle applies: They will always go to heaven. If the mental illness came on when they were adults, then they will continue their life in the spiritual world from where they left off before their mind was incapacitated by mental illness.

Once again, no one goes to hell by accident, or due to circumstances beyond their control.

But in Ava's case, her “strawman friend or relative” is right! Swedenborg's definition of “mental illness” would not include her, because she is clearly quite capable of rational thought! Keep in mind that Swedenborg lived several centuries ago, when today's more nuanced understanding of mental illness, spectrums of mental functioning, and so on, had not yet been developed. In fact, Swedenborg himself, in his earlier years, was one of the first scientists ever to write a book about psychology.

Finally, what if, as Ava suggests, a person's “disorder” is a part of her or his core spirit and identity? Here Swedenborg's concept of *proprium*, or “sense of self,” comes into play. We humans have many genetic, environmental, and social influences that shape the person we are. However, it is those that we make a part of ourselves by *choosing* to be that person that become a part of our *proprium*, or core identity.

Nothing that we think of as “me” will be taken away from us, even if some people may think of it as a “disorder.” On the other hand, if we long to be free of something such as deafness or a particular mental illness that we experience as a frustrating limitation on fully expressing the person we are, then that will indeed be lifted from us

in the spiritual world. Only the parts of us that express our own inner sense of self—of who we are—will remain with us.

And incidentally, people who prefer to live in a world of silence will not be cut off from communication with their friends and loved ones in the afterlife. In heaven, according to Swedenborg, though angels can and do speak in words, their deepest communication is a direct sharing of thoughts and feelings that requires no words and no sound.

—Lee Woofenden
Soweto, South Africa

Letter from the President

Continued from page 67

and the world beyond. The oversight trustees are from the New York New Church, General Council, and other appointees.

The General Council and Executive Committee are a great team and good things continue to emerge in the midst of a difficult year.

—Rev. Jane Siebert

Spiritual World

Continued from page 68

our earthquakes. I have seen cliffs split down the middle right to the bottom and the evil people on them swallowed up. I have also seen angels scatter some hundreds of thousands of evil spirits and cast them into hell... They do have this kind of power in the spiritual world (*Heaven and Hell* §229).

Let us not only trust that we have guardian angels, but that we can help them to better help us.

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence is Dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies and both faculty associate in Spirituality and director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Pacific School of Religion.

What's Happening

Register now!
8th Annual Dole 3 Miler
August 14, 2021



The Dole 3 Miler is an annual three-mile road race in August in Fryeburg, Maine—a celebration of the life and loves of Fryeburg native, Rev. Dr. George F. Dole. George was one of six runners in perhaps the most famous road race in history, Roger Bannister's Four Minute Mile which took place in Oxford, England on May 6, 1954. This race is sponsored by the Fryeburg New Church Assembly. Proceeds benefit the camp and Fryeburg New Church.

Run, walk, skip or hop with us in Fryeburg, ME
OR join us where you are with our virtual race

\$20 - receive a commemorative t-shirt and a handcrafted sturdley
<https://runsignup.com/Race/ME/Fryeburg/dolethreemiler>



SwedenborgianCommunity.org

With broadcasts every Thursday & Sunday, *Spiritual Sunshine: A Swedenborgian Community Online* is your affirming, interfaith community—with a presence on YouTube, Facebook, and your favorite podcast platform. We seek to uplift God(dess) in all people's diverse ways of living.



Nature & Spirit Continues through June 29th

Full series access to *Nature & Spirit*—and a bonus. Sign up for “Full Series Access” and not only get access to all future presentations as scheduled, but also access past presentations and the recorded Q&A sessions with the presenters through June 27. Even if you missed earlier presentations, you can still see and hear all seven of them in their entirety and the Q&A sessions. *Plus* something extra: a bonus eighth event to close the series! Once the series ends, so does this offer. Just go to sfswedenborgian.org/nature-spirit and look for “Full Series Access.” More details will be available on the church website sfswedenborgian.org and on the Facebook page [The SF Swedenborgian Church](https://www.facebook.com/TheSFSwedenborgianChurch).

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A shipping error in April for the bakery led to an abundance of:

*Jumble by Jason Greenwood
Answers will be printed in the next issue.*

Answers to the April Jumble (there was not a jumble in May):
Filet, Fourth, Throat, Import
After dropping all the papers the clerk had to ask is there were any nominations “From the Floor”

From the Social Justice Committee

Social Justice Committee Update and Invitation to Convention Programming

The Social Justice Committee is looking forward to seeing you all at our Virtual Convention sessions. Rev. Shada Sullivan will be offering a Mini Course, “A Swedenborgian Theology of Social Justice” June 26, 3:30 PM ET.

We are also planning a series of *Messenger* articles intended to address social justice activism from a Swedenborgian perspective.

In April, Rev. Dr. Amanda Adams Riley and Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell (co-pastors of the Garden Church in San Pedro, California) became co-chairs of the committee.

Rev. Amanda grew up in Washington, D.C., and from a young age understood how social policies directly affect the lives of people. Growing up in the Presbyterian church her first experiences with advocacy from



a perspective of faith came through a youth trip to the United Nations. As a voting adult she has been part of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options, and has advocated at the local, state, and National levels for secular policies which benefit from being informed by the progressive religious voice. Amanda has also held a variety of leadership roles and is looking forward to serving the denomination in the role of co-chair.

Rev. Jonathan has long been passionate about working for social justice from a Swedenborgian perspective. While at the Swedenborgian School of Religion, he wrote a Masters Thesis (1995), entitled “Confronting Evil: A Swedenborgian Spirituality for the Oppressed,” which sought common ground between Liberation Theology and Swedenborg’s teachings on hereditary evil and regeneration. In 1997, he became the first openly gay person to be ordained into the Swedenborgian ministry. He has served on the board of directors of the South Coast Interfaith

Council in Los Angeles County. In 2013 he took part in a week-long training in Faith-based Organizing offered by the Gamael Foundation. He has been active in Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE-LA). Most recently he has taken part in the programming of Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism (SAAR).

The Social Justice Committee hopes to foster a lively exchange of ideas and to encourage individuals and groups within the Swedenborgian fold to do the work of regeneration while putting their passion for social justice into useful action. We hope that you will be part of these timely conversations. We honor a diversity of voices and welcome sincerely held differences of opinion into our conversations. ☪

