Swedenborg
Foundation

Annual Report 2020

FOUNDED IN NEW YORK CITY in 1849 as the American Swedenborg Printing and Publishing Society, we have been dedicated from the start to making Emanuel Swedenborg’s thought as widely available as possible. Originally, that meant distributing his books for the lowest cost possible, but in 1928 (the same year our name changed to the Swedenborg Foundation), our mission expanded to include publishing books about his ideas. Since our founding, we have sold or given away millions of books, pamphlets, and other informational materials. In entering the digital age, we have embraced new forms of communication, but our goals remain the same: to reach out, to inspire, and to inform.

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Greetings to all people involved in the Swedenborg Foundation. My name is Soni Soneson Werner, and I am the newly elected president of our board of directors.

I would like to take this opportunity to send you a message of hope and gratitude. Since being elected as president in September 2020, I have been amazed at the generosity of our members and the hope we all share about God’s providence (in spite of our current pandemic). I have also been in awe of the variety of reasons why people support this organization, as board members, as staff, as donors, and as Foundation members. I am grateful and hopeful because of the variety of all these amazing people. We are stronger as an organization because we may have differences, yet we have all chosen to be involved, much like spirits in the afterlife get to choose their heavenly communities.

I would like to highlight three stories which illustrate the variety of remarkable people whom I have come to appreciate in my short time as president.

Story #1: In 2020, we held an election of four officers for the board: Bergen Jungé became the vice-president, Pete Toot continues as our secretary, I agreed to serve as president, and Cory Bradford-Watts is now our treasurer. We work very well together yet we are quite diverse in terms of our genders, our ethnic backgrounds, our affiliations with organized church groups, our geographical locations, our ages, and our reasons for committing our volunteer time to support the Swedenborg Foundation. Looking deeper than our demographic differences, let’s focus on some unique spiritual pathways to Swedenborg’s works. For example, Cory had an unusual journey to the Foundation. He has been a dedicated Foundation board member for six years and he tells me he was inspired to dive into Swedenborg’s ideas after having a near-death experience (NDE). Undergoing a life review, a deep feeling of truth, and strange visions, Cory came out of his NDE searching for answers and eventually developed a deep belief in a compassionate God, all of which led him to Swedenborg’s writings. Funny enough, his father had already emphasized some of Swedenborg’s messages

Variety arranged in a heavenly form makes perfection . . . and variety occurs where there are many individuals. —Heaven and Hell §71
to him, along with many other traditions’, an effort Cory once thought fruitless!

Cory’s pathway to change his profession, become a pastor and then to serve as a volunteer for the Swedenborg Foundation is completely different from Bergen’s, Pete’s or my own. I would say we respect each other’s different backgrounds and perspectives, and we agree to lead the board together with a united dedication to the Swedenborg Foundation mission.

**Story #2:** In 2020, we began searching for new members to the board as others were about to finish up their terms. As a result of that effort, we added half a dozen new board members in May 2021. Once again I am taken aback at the remarkable stories of the spiritual pathways each one has been on that led each of them to this role. Consider the spiritual pathway taken by Kim Shine, one of our new board members. Kim told me that when her father died while she was just eleven, she had a sense that he went to an afterlife, even though she was not active in any church. Unfortunately, her grief from losing him was so profound that during her adolescence she coped with the pain by becoming addicted to substances. She tells me that, years later, she “hit rock bottom and surrendered to God asking for help.” She has been in recovery for decades now, and trying to serve God and her neighbor every day. When her mother died more recently, she again experienced serious grief. She went searching online for some source of comfort. She found Off the Left Eye videos about the afterlife. She tells me: “I watched an episode and it all made perfect sense. . . . I have been studying Swedenborg ever since and trying to learn how to improve and perfect my regeneration process.” I appreciate how Kim has become involved in the Swedenborg Foundation, as she contributes both her time and funds to support our organization.

**Story #3:** This third story is about two generations of followers of Swedenborg’s works. Mary Fulton Keating was a reader. She often worked as a librarian and according to her son, she “read Swedenborg every day.” She loved to write in the margins and blank pages of her books, to capture her interpretations for future contemplation. In her copy of Swedenborg’s book *Heaven and Hell,* she noted that heaven is “not only a preview of what is to come but an aid to making the most of our life here.” Her son, David J. Keating, recently told me that he “always knew that God equals love from her example. I believe she knew it from reading Swedenborg, and from her own connection with God. . . . I decided it was best to try to follow her example.” Now that his mother has passed into the spiritual world, David has chosen to honor her memory by making financial donations to the Swedenborg Foundation in her name.

These three stories are just a few of the various spiritual experiences of our board
members, our donors, our staff, and our members. I am grateful that they were willing to share these wondrous stories with us all, and that they are each contributing to our community to keep it vibrant.

Over a century ago, one of the first American psychologists, William James, wrote a book entitled *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). James came from a Swedenborgian household and was always fascinated by the diverse ways that people experienced spirituality. He reported that some people have moments of intense emotional excitement, such as what Cory described with his NDE. Other people, like Kim, hit rock bottom and experienced hopelessness, but then surrendered to God. Still others, such as Mary and David, spend a lifetime studying truths and then earnestly try to apply these ideals to shape their lives.

So, I invite you all to follow in William James’s footsteps, showing appreciation for the variety of spiritual pathways of people affiliated with the Swedenborg Foundation. We may come from many places and backgrounds, yet we are united in our hope and gratitude for ideas we learn from Swedenborg’s world view.

*Kindred souls gravitate towards each other.*
—*Heaven and Hell §44*

I leave you with my hope for the future and gratitude for all the various members, donors, staff, and directors who support the mission of the Swedenborg Foundation.

Soni Soneson Werner, Ph.D.
President, Swedenborg Foundation
Navigating Extraordinary Times

In March 2020, the world entered an incredibly difficult time as the global pandemic shut down many areas of life and forced us to rethink how we do everything from shopping to worship to staying in contact with friends and family.

At the Swedenborg Foundation, we’ve been incredibly blessed to have the support of an amazing community of donors, members, and friends who have not only helped us financially but encouraged us to keep going in spite of the challenges. Thanks to you, and to the dedication of staff members who carried computers to their homes and carried on filming, writing, and connecting online, we didn’t miss a video posting on Off The Left Eye or a message that needed a response, and we were able to post free resources online (and send free books through the mail) for people who needed an uplifting message.

Later in this report we’ll talk about how the pandemic affected both donations and our finances overall, but for the moment, we can happily report that not only did we keep going in 2020, but we launched a number of new initiatives and laid out plans for the future.

Off The Left Eye

Off The Left Eye, which encompasses not only the original YouTube channel but a suite of social media platforms, made a major expansion in July 2020 with the launch of the dedicated Off The Left Eye website, offthelefteye.com. The site highlights the most popular videos from the channel, arranged by topic to make it easier to explore popular subjects and create custom playlists to watch later. The site is also the focus of Google Ad campaigns that drive people looking for information on topics like the afterlife or Bible interpretation to tailored pages where they can learn more.

Along with the new website we launched a podcast called Inside Off The Left Eye, hosted by Off The Left Eye Director of Content Strategy Chelsea Odhner and featuring insights from Curtis Childs (who in addition to his hosting duties is the Swedenborg Foundation’s Vice President of Programming and Chief Visionary Officer) and New Century Edition Series
Editor Jonathan S. Rose on everything from current discussion topics on Off the Left Eye videos to historical events in Swedenborg’s life.

While both of those initiatives were received with great acclaim—the website won a design award for Digital Wave, the company that built it—the Off The Left Eye YouTube channel remains the core of the program. Thanks to a new advertising strategy launched in early 2020, the channel got a total of 7.3 million views throughout the year, about double the number from 2019, which translated to approximately 5 million unique viewers.

The most popular video of the year, accounting for 3.9 million views, was “You Are the Lungs,” a short animated piece first posted to the channel back in 2013, which has been a staple since then. In 2020, the ad campaign around this video became a runaway success, contributing to the majority of the new views on the channel. Outside of that particular video, the most popular content revolves around the afterlife, in particular the viral success “What Happens Immediately after You Die?”

In September, the channel reached a major milestone: 100,000 subscribers! This milestone comes with the coveted Silver status on YouTube, something that only about half a percent of all channels receive, and is truly a mark of how successful the channel has become.

As Off The Left Eye continues to expand, so does its staff, and during the course of the year three team members moved into new managerial roles: Chelsea Odhner, previously a writer, moderator, and production manager, was promoted to Director of Content Strategy; Chris Dunn, architect of Off The Left Eye’s digital marketing initiatives, was promoted to Director of Digital Strategy; and Karin Childs, who has been a crucial part of the moderation team for many years, has been promoted to Community Manager.

IN 2020, THE OFF THE LEFT EYE YOUTUBE CHANNEL HAD:

- 733,000 HOURS WATCHED
- 7.3 MILLION VIEWS
- 430,000 UNIQUE VIEWERS PER MONTH
Our publishing program spans many media, including books that appear in both print and digital form (many of which are made available for free through Swedenborg.com), as well as shorter-form pieces like blog posts and articles about Swedenborg’s thought. In 2020 we not only had two major book releases but continued growth in traffic to Swedenborg.com.

New Century Edition

In July 2020 we published the compilation volume *The Shorter Works of 1763 Deluxe Edition*. It includes some of Swedenborg’s most accessible short explanations of theological themes—*The Lord, Sacred Scripture, Life,* and *Faith* (traditionally given the joint title *Four Doctrines*). Rounding out the volume is the work *Supplements*, containing Swedenborg’s additions to *Last Judgment* and *Heaven and Hell*. This much-anticipated Deluxe edition offers fresh translations, absorbing discussion of Swedenborg’s efforts to promote them, and engaging annotation on pertinent aspects of his vast knowledge and on the time and culture in which he wrote, along with the most complete indexes yet available for these works. In a related effort in August, Series Editor Jonathan S. Rose recorded an audiobook version of the introduction to this title, which is available to listen to for free through the Swedenborg Foundation YouTube channel (youtube.com/swedenborgfoundation).

We would like express our gratitude to all those who have given so generously to bring the theological works published by Swedenborg to the English-speaking readers of our times. We note that in *Revelation Unveiled* 875:15, Swedenborg writes that he once saw the books *Divine Love and Wisdom* and *Divine Providence* in heaven. Thanks to our contributors, readers won’t have to wait until they reach heaven to get access to these and the other volumes of the series. And every new gift to the project makes the completion of our work all the more close and certain.
Progress to Date

The NCE series has published nine Deluxe volumes, as well as thirteen Portable (translation-only paperback) volumes in print and e-book form; the Portable print versions have as a whole been reprinted another twenty-four times. The year 2020 saw the completion of the Heaven and Hell large-print Portable Edition in November and in December the third printing of both The Lord Portable and the Secrets of Heaven volume 1 Portable. The Shorter Works of 1763 Deluxe e-book was also completed in December.

Production Pipeline

So far, the New Century Edition team has issued thirteen out of the eighteen titles in the series. During the year significant simultaneous progress was made toward the publication of the remaining: Marriage Love, Revelation Unveiled, Soul-Body Interaction, Survey, and the Secrets of Heaven series. Part-time editing of the translations of Marriage Love and Revelation Unveiled continued; research on and composition of the annotations for Secrets of Heaven volume 4 were completed; and annotation work began on volume 5. The edit of the translation of Soul-Body Interaction was completed in December, and progress was made toward Deluxe and Portable editions of that work.

Sales and Free Downloads

In 2020, we had total sales of 5,996 print, e-book, and audiobook editions for a total of $22,401, an increase of 35% over 2019 that was due largely to the release of The Shorter Works of 1763. In spite of the excitement around the new volume, our most popular seller of the year remains Heaven and Hell in both e-book (#1) and print (#2) formats. Coming in second are Secrets of Heaven and Divine Love and Wisdom. With the addition of those 2020 sales figures, our cumulative total sales since inception are 73,295 volumes.

As always, our annual sales were far outpaced by the free downloads of NCE volumes. Visitors to Swedenborg.com downloaded a total of 18,577 copies of NCE translations, a 20 percent increase over 2019 that was due to an overall increase in visitor traffic throughout the year. That brought the total number of volumes downloaded since the project inception to 287,382.
New Book Offerings

In addition to *The Shorter Works of 1763*, this year we were pleased to release *Swedenborg’s Principles of Usefulness: Social Reform Thought from the Enlightenment to American Pragmatism* by author John S. Haller Jr. The book examines how readers of Swedenborg, guided by his teachings around doing useful actions in the world, had an impact on social reform movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As we work on new books, we’re also constantly working to update older volumes, reprinting them as they run out of stock and also adding e-book editions as needed. In 2020, we reprinted *Spiritual Recovery: A Twelve-Step Guide* and *You Can Believe*, both by Grant Schnarr, creating new electronic editions at the same time; we also produced a new paperback version of Swedenborg’s work *The Worship and Love of God*, translated by Alfred H. Stroh and Frank Sewall.

Also added to our bookstore in 2020 and early 2021 were two new books from the Swedenborg Society. *Medicine, Mysticism and Mythology* is a biography of James John Garth Wilkinson, a prominent British Swedenborgian and homeopath from the nineteenth century whose far-reaching connections shed light on the culture of the time. *On the Conjugial Angel* is a talk given by acclaimed author A. S. Byatt on her novel of the same name, in which she explores themes of marriage and the afterlife.

Our overall book sales for 2020, including New Century Edition titles, were $55,143, with 10,437 copies sold. That represents an increase of 9 percent in dollar terms, although the number of volumes sold went down. Over the past couple of years, we’ve been selling more books in print and fewer e-books; because e-books have a lower retail price, selling more print books means a higher revenue.

In addition to books for sale, we also donate books to individuals or groups in need; in 2020, we donated approximately 500 volumes to people all over the world.

*Swedenborg.com*

*Swedenborg.com* remains a resource for people of all backgrounds to learn more about Swedenborg and his theology. In 2020, we did a complete redesign of the site—in the process making technical changes to help it
load and run faster—including a new theology section with links to pages on the different facets of Swedenborg’s theology, a revamped bookstore, and more.

The site had an overall 14 percent increase in traffic over the course of the year, with a total of 221,150 visitors. The majority of our visitors come from search engine traffic and are looking either for information about Swedenborg himself or about some aspect of this theology, especially the afterlife. The most popular page on our site is a page about the spiritual world; other popular topics include evil spirits, angels, and Swedenborg’s impact on the world.

One of the most popular features of the website is the free downloads section of the bookstore. We offer all of Swedenborg’s writings for free download, including both New Century Edition and older Redesigned Standard Edition volumes, as well as selected books aimed at introducing beginners to Swedenborg. In addition, we’ve been gradually adding our out-of-print books to that section of the site so that they’re still accessible for anyone who wants them. Throughout 2020, visitors downloaded a total of 43,043 e-books from the site, an increase of 36 percent over 2019.

Another important driver of site traffic is blog posts. Far and away the most popular post of the year—and one of the most popular pages of the year—was a post titled “How Your Body Can Protect You from Evil Spirits.” Along the same theme, the number-three post was “Do Evil Spirits Give Us Signs to Lure Us off Track?” while number two was “Helen Keller’s Spiritual Sight.” Those three posts alone accounted for approximately 45,000 visitors throughout the year.
The year 2020 was a financial challenge for many organizations. Along with many others, we kept an eye on the stock market after a sharp drop early in the year, and were relieved to see stocks recover in the fall and winter. We were also quite blessed with donations from our many supporters; our cash donations were only shy of 2019 by 14 percent. That and a combination of drawdown from investments and past donations went to support our annual expenses of $2.54 million, a 15 percent increase over 2019.

**Finances**

**Programs and Funding**

Approximately three-quarters of our overall spending goes into program-related expenses. The following is a breakdown of both the expenses and the funding sources for our major programs. For a more detailed breakdown by program of our expenses, please see the Statement of Functional Expenses chart on page 14, below.

**Off The Left Eye**

In 2020, we made an adjustment to the way we classify our programming to separate expenses related to Off The Left Eye from other types of online programming, like expenses related to social media promotion or Swedenborg.com. Even with that adjustment, Off The Left Eye continued to be by far our largest program, with total expenses of $1.08 million, a 14 percent increase over 2019.

Some of the increased spending went toward new initiatives; for example, the development of the Off The Left Eye website. There were also staff members who took on positions of increased responsibility, and in addition to those increased personnel costs, the group hired a management consultant to help with the transition and also to think about strategic initiatives for the future.

On the funding side, donations and other program-related income accounted for $555,058 of program operating funds; the rest came from unrestricted Swedenborg Foundation donations and operating funds. We were especially grateful for a grant from the Asplundh Foundation that covered a significant percentage of these costs, as well as an ongoing pledge from a private donor of $100,000 per year.
New Century Edition

Our second-largest program in 2020 was the New Century Edition of the Works of Emanuel Swedenborg. Total expenses for the New Century Edition were $491,440, an 18 percent increase over 2019.

Those expenses represent costs associated not only with the current translation program but also with the next phase in the evolution of the New Century Edition: training the next generation of translators and editors who will continue the work of bringing Swedenborg’s words to new audiences. In 2020, we recruited a new editor who is working on editing translations and other supporting materials, and have continued plans to accelerate the editing of the translations for release (see above in the New Century Edition section).

Thanks to the support of a generous and loyal group of donors, we received support of $89,035 throughout the course of 2020, and were able to apply an additional $29,345 of donations from 2019 to the project. The remainder of the support for the project came from a board-designated fund; with a total of $262,948 drawn from the fund in 2020, the balance of that fund stands at $702,030.

Books and Other Outreach

Although publishing books is no longer our sole strategic focus, we continue to produce books on Swedenborg’s thought for a broad range of audiences. Expenses related to book production were $193,924 in 2020 (a 12 percent increase from 2019).

We also engage in other activities aimed at promoting Swedenborg’s thought. One of our important ways of reaching the public is Swedenborg.com, and we also have an active social media presence, including active organization Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts. As mentioned above, many of these activities, which previously had been accounted for under the general heading of Online Programming, have now been moved to this category. This resulted in a significant increase in expenses in this category, for a total of $131,406 in 2020.

Both of these additional programs are funded through a combination of donations, book sales, and general operating funds.
Supporting Costs

Our supporting costs fall into two categories: general/administrative and fundraising. Administrative costs cover staff time spent on organizational business; office expenses and maintenance; professional fees, such as investment management and costs associated with leadership meetings; and so on. Our administrative costs for 2020 were $433,230, an 18 percent increase over 2019 that was due in large part to increased expenditures on equipment, rising costs for insurance, and one-time costs for consulting on organizational development.

Fundraising costs cover staff and other expenses related to fundraising, include mailings, gatherings, and supporting costs. Total expenses in fundraising for 2020 were $255,219, a five percent increase over 2019.
In 2020, as in most years, we drew the lion’s share of our operating funds from our endowment, the majority of which we invested in mutual funds (see below). For budget purposes, we treat this drawdown—which, to ensure sustainability, is limited to 4.5 percent of the endowment value—as income. Above and beyond that base percentage, we also draw money from the board-designated fund for the New Century Edition and to cover unexpected expenses and shortfalls in other budgeted income. Combining all of those factors, our drawdown for the year was $1.69 million.

We received $698,564 in donations and memberships in 2020, all of which were applied to current-year expenses; in addition, we drew from $129,345 in donations from previous years.

Other funds applied against this year’s spending were $38,991 in investment income and $58,309 in book sales.
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Off The Left Eye</th>
<th>Book Distribution — NCE</th>
<th>Book Distribution — SF</th>
<th>Events and Education</th>
<th>Total Program</th>
<th>General and Administrative</th>
<th>Fundraising</th>
<th>Total Supporting</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
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Membership and Donations

Our total gifts for the year included $685,339 in donations and $13,225 in memberships, for a total of just under $700,000 in gifts from supporters. While that number was less than 2019—as we had anticipated, given the economic conditions—for the third consecutive year we had an increase in new donors of more than 20 percent: 302 people gave to the Foundation for the first time, bringing the total number of donors to 955.

We’ve also made great strides in donor retention: 51 percent of our new donors from 2019 gave again in 2020, which is once again an increase for the third consecutive year.

Our fundraisers have been working hard on building funds that support our two largest programs. A brand-new endowment fund named in honor of New Century Edition Series Editor Dr. Jonathan S. Rose was launched in the fall, and we also held campaigns for the OTLE Endowment Fund, previously launched in 2018.

We have also been gradually building our 1749 Legacy Society, a group of supporters who have included the Foundation in their planned giving; as of the end of 2020, the society had thirty-nine members.

Many thanks to everyone who gave in 2020, regardless of amount. Your gift truly does make a difference!

Investments and Other Assets

Our endowment is invested in a combination of mutual funds and real estate investment trusts (REITs). Vanguard manages our stock market investments, which include domestic funds, international funds, and fixed-income instruments like bonds.

The year 2020 was a volatile one for the stock market, with our corpus of invested funds losing 17 percent of its value between January 1 and March 31. However, over the course of the rest of the year, the funds gradually regained their value, and we ended the year ahead of where we began with a value of $18.27 million.

The Poole-Locke Group manages our REITs investments, which were valued at $1.48 million at the end of 2020 (a value comparable to that of 2019).

Taking into account our investments, cash on hand, property, and other assets, our total net assets as of the end of 2020 were $20.61 million.
The firm of Alan Ross & Company PC audited our 2020 financial statements. You can obtain our auditor's full report by contacting our business manager, Valerie McLaughlin, by phone at (610) 430-3222, ext. 108; by e-mail at vmclaughlin@swedenborg.com; or by mail at 320 North Church Street, West Chester, PA 19380.
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*It is with a deep sense of loss that the Swedenborg Foundation notes the passing into the spiritual world of the following valued supporters:*

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The Swedenborg Foundation’s Patron Society serves to recognize donors who have chosen to support the annual financial needs of the organization. Members of the Patron Society are exceptional people who share their compassion and generosity with the mission of the Foundation. All members receive recognition and benefits including an annual stewardship report.

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