

# SWEDENBORG: ENVISIONING THE FUTURE

## 200<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH

### Nominations for Elected Positions in the Swedenborgian Church

The Nominating Committee nominates at least one candidate for each open elected position. Elective offices and nominees to date are listed on the chart shown on the right. If you are interested in being nominated for any position, contact the Nominating Committee through Central Office. The following candidate statements have been received by *the Messenger*.

**Rev. Jim Lawrence, D.Min., Ph.D.**  
**President**  
**(three-year term)**

I'm only two years into my first term as president, but since we have an *elect* year I need to decide already whether to keep going if re-elected. I'd be honored to keep going as your president. When I wrote my first profile for the Messenger in 2021 for the "president elect" year, I mostly reflected on the many ways I had worked in the Swedenborgian movement since crossing over from a mainline denomination and how much I still believed in this church. The compelling need I'm seeing is to facilitate creative paths forward for often struggling existing ministries and to re-imagine paths for new ministries.



Despite the beauty of our spirituality, the paradigm of church has been in a long cultural decline that is now trending downward even more dramatically with the younger generations. In addition to keeping all of our current moving parts humming, most of my creative effort goes toward sustaining our current trained leadership and attracting the next wave of prospective leaders. Two specific foci involve emphasizing the powerful new tools of virtual outreach

Position to be Filled	Term (Yrs)	Candidate
President	3	Jim Lawrence*
Vice President	1	Kurt Fekete*
Recording Secretary	1	Karen Conger*
Treasurer	3	***
General Council: layperson (2 to be elected)	3	Herb Ziegler* Kei Pang
General Council: minister	3	Thom Muller*
Standing Committee for Communication & Information	3	Tara Conkling*
Standing Committee for Education & Resources for Spiritual Community	3	Shada Sullivan*
Standing Committee for Financial Accountability (2 to be elected)	3	Tom Neuenfeldt* Kurt Fekete*
Committee on Admission to the Ministry: layperson	3	BJ Neuenfeldt*
Board of Trustees of CSS, representative class	4	Gard Perry*
Standing Committee for Nominations	5	OPEN

\* Incumbent

\*\* Years remaining in unexpired term

\*\*\* No candidate to be elected this year

to those living far away from a church but who prefer Swedenborgian spirituality if they can get it. They can get it now if we serve it to them! Virtual tools can also collapse distances between our own disparate ministry settings such that groups can worship together in real time in new ways, do more together, and grow community. Additionally, we need to reimagine the power of our denominational resources for how they can better sustain livelihoods of those willing to give their professional time and effort to the Swedenborgian movement. Who will go for us? We need to make leadership sustainable.

New starts and re-starts hold genuine potential for the Swedenborgian Church of North America, and there's nothing I would rather do than work with everyone in our movement to keep imagining the New Jerusalem.

**Kurt Fekete**  
**Vice President**  
**(one-year term) &**  
**Standing Committee for Financial**  
**Accountability**  
**(three-year term)**



I am pleased and honored to accept the nominations to the positions of vice president as well as the Standing Committee for Financial Accountability (SCFA). I was raised in a Swedenborgian family and have been involved with the Swedenborgian Church my entire life. I attended Sunday school at the

*Continues on next page*

Detroit church that later moved to Royal Oak when I was a teenager. I attended Almont summer camp every year. I loved going to Almont, and when I became a teenager, I also loved attending youth retreats. I was fascinated by Swedenborg, and as an adolescent I enjoyed talking about theology with my mother, Joyce. Like Swedenborg, I was also fascinated by science and engineering. I graduated from Wayne State University with a BS in Chemical Engineering and worked as a bench chemist, department director, and quality engineer into my forties. I was a member of the original team that launched the young adult group known as Transitions and led the group through the 1990s and early 2000s. I was also a board member of the Almont New Church Assembly and served as president for a partial term. I continued working as a church youth leader volunteer at camps and retreats until I discovered that youth work was my true passion and calling. In 2001, I left my career in chemical engineering to become the Youth Director for the Swedenborgian Church. Now in my twenty-third year serving the youth of the church, I still love working with teens, tweens, and young adults at retreats and summer camps. I have also greatly enjoyed my work as denomination vice president and as a member of the SCFA. I think that I make important contributions to our denomination, and I wish to continue to serve in these two capacities. I strive for excellence and steady reliability as your elected representative to the Executive Committee and SCFA. If elected to serve in these two positions in the coming year, I hope to continue to provide a youthful perspective to the organization while honoring the heritage and foundational principles of our beloved faith community. I live in Maine with my fabulous wife, Shelley, whom I met at a youth retreat, and my two wonderful daughters, Ava and Zsa Zsa.

**Karen Conger**  
**Recording**  
**Secretary**  
**(one-year term)**

Greetings! It's once again an honor to accept nomination for the office of Recording Secretary of the General



Convention, a position to which I was first elected in 2015. I am a lifelong, third generation Swedenborgian who was raised in the Church of the Holy City in Washington, D.C. I have been a member of both the Urbana and Los Angeles Societies and am currently a Member-At-Large of the Pacific Coast Association. I served on the former Ministries Support Unit, the Nominating Committee more than once, and I was the Secretary of the PCA for several years, as well as holding elected positions on the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Society and the Wayfarers Chapel Board of Directors. I continue to very much enjoy working as secretary and hope to continue in the position. Thank you for your consideration.

**Kei Pang**  
**General Council-Layperson**  
**(three-year term)**



In reflecting on my journey, I find that my spiritual and professional paths have intertwined in unexpected yet enriching ways, guiding me toward a deeper understanding of myself and my place in the world.

My upbringing, spanning across different cultures and continents, has instilled in me a sense of openness and curiosity toward diverse perspectives and beliefs. While my early exposure to Christianity through Lutheran traditions laid a foundation for my spiritual exploration, it was not until encountering Swedenborgian theology at the Garden Chapel in St. Louis that I found resonance and congruence with my beliefs. For the past seven years, I have been actively engaged in the Swedenborgian community, contributing to the spiritual and practical aspects of our congregation. Serving on the board and investment committee has not only allowed me to offer my skills and insights but has also deepened my connection to the church community.

Beyond my spiritual journey, my professional life has been equally fulfilling and diverse. With an engineering degree from the University of London and an MBA from the University of Michigan, I embarked on

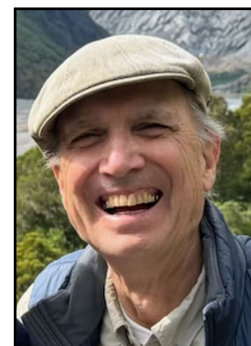
a career with Emerson Electric in St. Louis, where I spent decades contributing to the company's growth and success. Alongside my corporate endeavors, I pursued further academic pursuits, earning a Doctoral degree in Business Administration from the University of Missouri. My involvement with the University Chancellor's Advisory council has further underscored my commitment to education and academic excellence.

Upon retiring from the business world in 2022, I embraced a new chapter of exploration and service. Immersing myself in the study of natural sciences and climate change, I have sought to deepen my understanding of the interconnectedness of all life on our planet. Engaging in volunteer work, particularly in ecological restorations, has allowed me to translate my knowledge and passion into meaningful action, contributing to the preservation and restoration of our environment for future generations.

As I stand at the threshold of this new phase of life, I am filled with gratitude for the experiences that have shaped me and the opportunities that lie ahead. It is with humility and dedication that I offer myself to serve the Swedenborgian Church of North America, drawing upon my diverse background, skills, and passions to contribute to our collective journey of spiritual growth and ecological stewardship. With faith as my compass and service as my guiding principle, I look forward to the journey ahead, trusting in the wisdom and grace that illuminate our path.

**Herb Ziegler**  
**General Council-Layperson**  
**(three-year term)**

I would appreciate your support for a second term on General Council. I offer experience, wisdom, an analytical mind, and deep care for the sound management and administration of the General

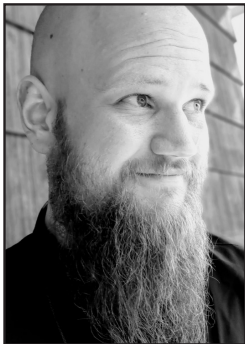


Convention's resources for the present and the future. I served earlier terms on General Council and several terms on the CSS board (SHS at the time). I have a

good knowledge of the workings, history, and challenges of the Church, and I claim some wisdom from being on this earthly plane for a long time. In my past service I have contributed useful insights, ideas, and time toward moving us forward. I believe my contributions have been well received and I would like to continue my service for one more term.

**Rev. Thom Muller**  
**General Council—Minister**  
**(three-year term)**

Rev. Thom Muller is pastor at the Swedenborgian Society of the East Bay at Hillside, an Urban Sanctuary, in El Cerrito, California, as well as senior editor of *Our Daily Bread*. His passions include the intersection of spirituality and psychology, interfaith theology, and the Western esoteric tradition. Rev. Muller was ordained into the ministry of the Swedenborgian Church of North America in 2016, upon receiving his theological education at Bryn Athyn College and the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California.



**Tara Conkling**  
**Standing Committee for**  
**Communication & Information**  
**(three-year term)**



Thank you for this opportunity to be nominated for a second term serving the Standing Committee of Communication and Information (SCCI). Originally from Pretty Prairie, Kansas, I grew up going to the New Jerusalem Church there, and even though we often didn't attend regularly, our presence in the congregation was always welcomed with smiles and open arms. Many of our closest friends and neighbors have been Swedenborgians, and I have always considered our church members to be

part of my extended family.

I live in Davis, California—close enough to enjoy occasional visits to the Hillside Swedenborgian Church when distance (and traffic) allows. And over the years I have lived many places for school and work (Kansas, California, Utah, Texas, Florida, Mississippi, and even Australia) in my career as a Wildlife Biologist, but I have only been close enough to congregations a few times to be able to attend a Swedenborgian church in-person. However, the communication methods we all discovered during the COVID-19 pandemic (such as Zoom) have also allowed me to attend many local events such church services and guild meetings with friends and family in Kansas, as well as participate in SCCI meetings with members spread across the country.

Although nothing is quite like the experience of in-person worship and fellowship, these past few years have shown me the benefits that these (along with our traditional) communication methods have in maintaining that sense of connection with others (regardless of the distance). For example, adapting the Annual Convention to include both in-person and online attendance has allowed many members (myself included) the opportunity to participate in convention these past few years, and helped us all overcome the challenges of travel or daily lives that may have limited people from attending in the past.

I've enjoyed my time over the past three years on the SCCI helping with efforts to expand the Denomination's digital footprint through content for both current members and the general public on our online platforms (such as the revised website, Facebook, and YouTube) and annual convention, as well as our efforts to provide support to local congregations with their social media content and digital outreach. An important part of this outreach is making the content easy to use (and easily accessible) to everyone, regardless of their computer skills and experience. As such, I look forward to the opportunity to continue these efforts with the SCCI to help all of those in our Swedenborgian community (and those outside it seeking to learn more) continue to build our connections with each other.

**Tom Neuenfeldt**  
**Standing Committee for Financial**  
**Accountability**  
**(three-year term)**

I am running for a second term on the Standing Committee for Financial Accountability (SCFA). This has been a very productive committee under the leadership of our chair, Jennifer Lindsay. One of the major functions of the committee is to review grant requests from our ministries and to distribute available funds as appropriate. In addition to SCFA, I am the chair of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies Board of Trustees, a member of the Royal Oak Church and Almont New Church Assembly. BJ and I live in East Tawas, Michigan and chase our grandchildren around the state in their many activities. We enjoy our local music groups and spoil our dog, Bear.



**BJ (Betty Jean) Neuenfeldt**  
**Committee on Admission to the**  
**Ministry—Layperson**  
**(three-year term)**

My name is BJ Neuenfeldt (alias for Betty Jean which you may call me if you knew me before college) and I grew up in Detroit, Michigan, and currently live on the shore of Lake Huron in East Tawas, Michigan. After graduating from Central Michigan University with a teaching degree, I spent over twenty years as an elementary school teacher and special education teacher. I married Tom in 1972 and we have three daughters and nine grandchildren. I am retired now but active in Almont New Church Assembly (education) and the Swedenborgian Church of North America serving now on the Nominating Committee and the Committee on Admission to the Ministry. I have previously served on the education and financial



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committees. I've finished one term of three years and am willing to keep going for three more to keep continuity for the ordinands.

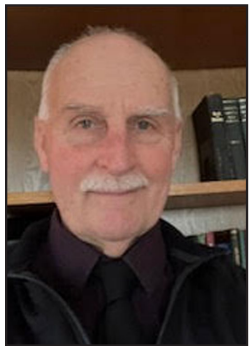
**Rev. Shada Sullivan**  
**Standing Committee for Education & Resources for Spiritual Community**  
**(three-year term)**

Rev. Shada Sullivan is the Pastor at The Church of the Holy City in Wilmington Delaware. She is co-chair of the Social Justice Committee, and a member of the Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism (SAAR) leadership team.



**Rev. Dr. Gard Perry**  
**CSS Board of Trustees – Representative Class**  
**(four-year term)**

Rev. Dr. F. Gardiner (Gard) Perry was ordained into the Ministry of the Swedenborgian Church in 1979. He served as pastor in Royal Oak, Michigan, in the 1980s, and in Fryeburg, Maine, in the 1990s. Gard earned his Doctor of Ministry degree (1990) at the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit, Michigan, after which he attained Certified Pastoral Counselor by the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. In the 2000s he worked in his home area (Conway, New Hampshire) as Spiritual Care Counselor in End of Life Care until his retirement in 2020. In his career, Gard has served on numerous boards and committees, and has been a long-time lecturer at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA) Summer Session. Having served a first term on the CSS Board, Gard has closely followed our faculty's leading-edge scholarship and support for student journeys. Available to serve a second term, Gard will attend meetings in-person, continue as a member of the Faculty and Staff Relations Committee, and engage with the Center for Swedenborgian Studies



(CSS) Board governance process. He writes, "It is my honor to stand in nomination to represent the Swedenborgian Church of North America as a Member of the CSS Board of Trustees Representative Class. Thank you!"

**Standing Committee for Nominations**  
**(five-year term)**

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