



## Honing the Style of Our Annual Conventions

BY REV. DR. JIM LAWRENCE

We continued to evolve how we gather for our annual convention in three strategic ways this year: staying in a hotel for in-person, advancing our IT support for virtual attendees, and shortening our overall schedule. Early assessments from participants have been quite positive on all these directions. For the first time since the late sixties, convention goers did not dwell in rather frugal dorm rooms with bunk style beds and shared bathrooms. Those taking advantage of attending only virtually also found themselves in better accommodations with our virtual prowess continuing to improve for supporting high quality connecting and participating from afar. We have continued to focus on hosting excellent hybrid capacities for virtual attendance for all programmed events including special services, business sessions, and Mini Courses. Additionally, by shortening the overall length of time for those attending from the beginning of the ministers and pastors' meeting by two days was met with general acclaim. The reduced time frame relieves both *convention fatigue* and overall convention costs.

I want especially to call our staff whose professionalism that included Central Office Operations Manager, Brittany Price, and Digital

Communications Manager, Rudy Caseres, who were helped by an assisting team of Beki Greenwood and Emily Teragliafera, as we move forward in honing our annual “pop-up” summer gatherings as a denomination in a different place every year.



*Induction of Rev. James H. Barry—Laying of Hands: Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, Rev. Junchol Lee, Rev. Rich Tafel, Rev. Jane Siebert, Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber, Dr. Rebecca Esterson, and Rev. Shada Sullivan.*

The substance of our programs and events proved effective. The Council of Ministers, chaired by Rev. Rich Tafel, met for only one day that concluded its efficient business strategy before dinner. The opening of convention happened right after dinner and featured a keynote talk by futurist and Swedenborgian Dylan Hendricks (see p. 58) who was brought virtually into the auditorium on a giant screen that was far more personal and engaging than if he had been on the auditorium

stage behind a microphone. Each of the first three evenings during convention featured speakers that included Convention Preacher, Rev. Betsy Coffman (see p. 62) during Convention Worship and communion with the elements being served by the Youth League. An

inspiring Induction Service for Rev. James Barry in the historic Alumni Chapel at Michigan State University capped the third evening with inspiring talks not only by the inductee (see p. 73) but also by Rev. Junchol Lee (see p. 71), the preacher for the occasion.

The Mini Courses were a big hit again this year, half of which were offered in a hybrid format. These explored topics of applied Swedenborgian spirituality, Swedenborgian ministry in the present context, our rich trove of history, and views toward the future. Rev. Jane Siebert anchored another highlight occasion by designing a special midday service to

remember, celebrate, and grieve Wayfarers Chapel in terms of its “first life” with numerous brief speakers accompanied by a coordinated stream of images. And a review of special services must conclude with the youth. Adults that led the [Children's program](#) were Heidi Barnaby, Alexa Eisenberger, with volunteer help on Monday's Children's Service from BJ Neuenfeldt and Amy Little. The [SCYL](#) teen program and service were guided by Heather Oelker

*Continues on page 61*



The captain of the Michigan Princess shows Nate, Nando, and Aiden the bridge of the ship.

Youngest Convention attendee, Blair, gets to pull the winner for most popular raffle prize, the Swedenborgian Cross necklace.



Above: Zeb takes a nice long nap on Heather Oelker during the COM meetings. Below: Aiden turns EIGHT during Convention!

## the Messenger

© The Swedenborgian Church of North America  
Published monthly except two combined issues by the Standing Committee for Communication and Information of the Swedenborgian Church of North America (founded 1817, incorporated 1861 as the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America), Rev. Dr. James Lawrence, president.

July/August 2024

Volume 248, No. 5 Whole Number 5490

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Printing: FenwayGroup, Boston, MA

Editorial Email: [messenger@swedenborg.org](mailto:messenger@swedenborg.org)

Editorial, Business, and Subscription Address:  
The Messenger, Central Office  
PO Box 380270  
50 Quincy Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138

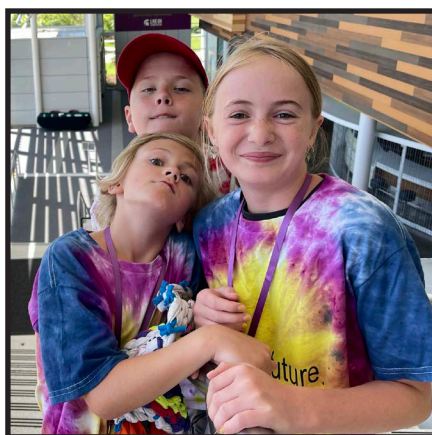
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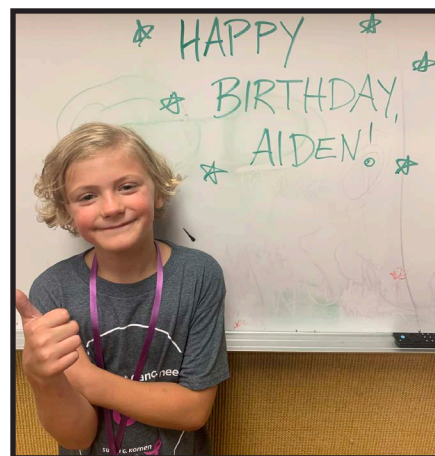
Subscriptions: free online subscription at <https://swedenborg.org/subscribe/>. Printed and mailed to US address, \$25/year; to Canada address, \$30/year; to all other addresses, \$40/year; single copies, \$3.00, libraries & prisoners, free. Send check made out to "Swedenborgian Church" with "Messenger" on the memo line. Other requests, write or call Central Office.

Submissions are accepted at any time. Submissions must be received by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month to be considered for the next issue.

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



Above: Nate, Aiden, and Natalie became fast pals. Below: Craig Carson and Nate help Aiden skip through the hopscotch the kids program drew.



## Contents

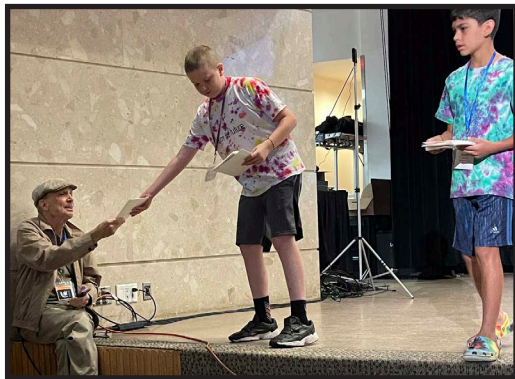
|                                       |         |
|---------------------------------------|---------|
| Honing the Style of Convention .....  | 53      |
| Children's Program and Photos .....   | 54 & 55 |
| General Council Pre-Convention .....  | 56      |
| Council of Ministers .....            | 57      |
| Keynote Address .....                 | 58      |
| Business Meeting Report .....         | 60      |
| Honoring Wayfarers Chapel .....       | 61      |
| Called by the Spirit .....            | 62      |
| Photo Spread .....                    | 66 & 67 |
| Commencing into the Green Earth ..... | 68      |
| CSS Meeting Report .....              | 70      |
| From Natural to Spiritual .....       | 71      |
| A Change of Perception .....          | 73      |
| SCYL and Photos .....                 | 76 & 77 |
| SCCM Meeting Report .....             | 78      |
| Thank You .....                       | 79      |
| Say Yes to Michigan .....             | 80      |

# Children's Program

BY HEIDI BARNABY AND ALEXA EISENBERGER

We had a splendid group of children to participate in the program while parents were attending sessions at Convention. There were eight total—ages 3 to 11. Children were with the leaders all day from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM breaking for lunch with their parents.

The theme this year for Convention was “Envisioning the Future” which led to the children’s theme being “The Children are our Future.” During the days they learned fun songs (the favorite being “The Yucky Song”), did arts and crafts, took a walk to the Children’s Garden and the Dairy Store, and made tie-dye shirts with Ronnie Vigas, a tie-dye expert from Almont Camp. They prepared a program to show all of Convention on Monday which included songs, and the handing out of handmade cards with quotes about the future during Whitney Houston’s song, “Greatest Love of All.” They also each shared what their idea of church in the future would be like. The three year old said it would have lots of toys!

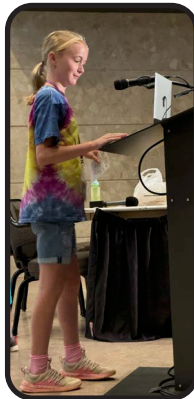
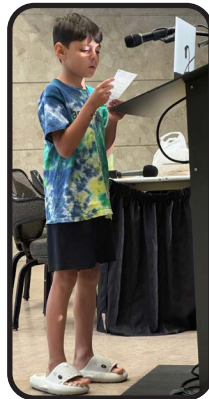


They also each shared what their idea of church in the future would be like. The three year old said it would have lots of toys! 🧸



**Above:** Alexa helps the littles of Convention show everyone what they want in a church (Zeb: Dad Kevin, Blair: Toys!).  
**Below:** Take a bow, kids! Job well done!

**Above:** Nate and Nando begin to hand out the handmade cards—Herb Ziegler was one of the first to receive one.  
**Right:** José, Natalie, and Sadie take their turns reading what they wrote about what they would like to have in their church.



Everyone enjoyed the song "Greatest Love of All" while handmade cards were handed out by the kids of Convention.

# General Council Pre-Convention Meeting Report

BY KAREN CONGER, RECORDING SECRETARY

The General Council (GC) of the Swedenborgian Church of North America convened virtually for its pre-convention session on Saturday, June 22, 2024, at 10:00 AM PT. All but two Council members were in attendance and there was a quorum present.

President Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence mentioned his ongoing high-level involvement in the status of the Wayfarers Chapel as the building continues to be disassembled and the artifacts stored on property owned by the City of Rancho Palos Verdes, as well as his involvement in Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism, the Rainbow Group, the Advisory Placement Committee, and other matters.

Vice President Kurt Fekete spoke of his involvement in the Spiritual Sunshine online ministry, and the mentoring of Rev. Cory Coberforward that has sprung from that, as Cory and his family make the move from Canada back to the United States. Kurt also spoke of his real love, his work with the youth of this Church, and the recent Memorial Day Retreat at Almont. He was particularly thankful to note the very able assistance he received from the involvement of Rev. Renée Machiniak and noted the particular degree of bonding that was observed between the teens at this particular session. The Council enjoyed a brief power point of some of the high points of the retreat.

Secretary Karen Conger reported briefly on her ongoing secretarial duties plus involvement with the New York New Church Legacy Fund Trustees and various matters relating to the sale of the National Church property in Washington, D.C. which will soon be placed on the market.

Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay brought the Council up to date on various matters including the fact that the first Mary Baldwin Trust payment arrived in April of this year, as it will continue to do permanently. The amount of the payout is likely to change a bit annually based on what the corpus is earning. Jennifer is working with the Trustees of the Building Fund to determine how to make these funds available on a grant basis to those properties for which the denomination holds the deed. A letter advising the availability of the proposed grant is currently in draft form and will soon be distributed. She and Accounting Manager Gina Peracchi are preparing for the annual financial review, and Jennifer's work on the Draft Ministerial Leadership Financial Support Proposal was gratefully received. The Massachusetts New Church Union (MNCU) is currently engaged in shifting the proceeds from the sale of the former Newtonville, Massachusetts, Church of the Open Word, into the Common Fund.

Operations Manager Brittany Price spoke of her excitement about the opportunity to be having convention at a facility (Michigan State University) with a hotel. Brittany emphasized the importance of our continuing to support youth travel to convention. She reported that virtual attendance is down and that two associations/ conferences did not submit any delegates, and one did not submit any membership numbers.

Regarding the New York New Church Legacy Fund, Rev. Rich Tafel advised that the process to finalize the Fund continues; the legal rulings regarding the disputed water rights with the brownstone next door to the former church continue to fall in our favor

and it's looking likely that the various fees are all going to be paid back. The NY Church will continue to exist until the court case is satisfied. The Trustees of the NYNC Legacy Fund met (mostly) in-person last fall and things are going very well.

Regarding the sale of the National Church in Washington, D.C., a corporate resolution designating Rev. Rich Tafel as the GC's agent has been signed by all members of the GC. Rich and Jennifer continue to work on a contract that finalizes the distribution of the proceeds of the sale of the property, which will include a dissolution clause. The Washington Society hopes to establish a Swedenborg House along the lines of the same model in London, England.

Two properties for which the denomination holds the deed, the Church of the Open Word in St. Louis, Missouri, and Temenos in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area, are interested in entering into a conservancy of the type in which a grantee is given a permanent easement on a property for ecological preservation. Jim has been investigating appraisers to ascertain what kind of an impact this might have on the value of the properties. As a possible counterbalance to loss of property value, conservancy-type folks in general attract/raise monies for ministry. The ExCom will continue the due diligence analysis and will be coming back to the General Council with the data. Pastor Paul Deming shared a beautiful power point presentation outlining their hopes for the Church of the Open Word.

The Fall meeting of the General Council will be held in the Los Angeles area during the middle of November 2024. 🌐

# Report on the Council of Ministers Meeting

BY REV. KEVIN BAXTER

On the evening of June 27 through the afternoon of June 28, twenty-six ministers, plus eight leaders of our churches consisting of licensed pastors, and ordained ministers from other traditions, gathered in-person and online at Michigan State University in E. Lansing, Michigan.

The Council thanked the convention planning committee, staff, and volunteers who made it possible for us to meet and do the business of the Council.

The chair put forward an agenda that highlighted the professionalism of our clergy and a desire to serve and support them. Issues are arising about the systems through which the Council functions. The Executive Committee will be spending some time envisioning the function of the Council.

After dispensing much of the standard tasks including reading of minutes and receiving reports, the Council focused on some notable business.

The Council created a Chaplaincy Committee to advise the denominational endorsing officer for the certification of chaplains, as well as supporting them through professional and educational development.

The Council asked the Executive



Rev. Rich Tafel  
Chair of the Council of Ministers

Committee of our council to present to General Council a request to develop new models that increase support for our ministries by: Exploring new modes of financial support for historic church buildings in need of support, creating new funding mechanisms for ministries outside the traditional parish model, and exploring new funding levels for ministers.

The Council spoke about a critical failure of the denominational process of misconduct for Ministers and Licensed Pastors. The council is presenting its proposal to General Council for a stop gap process for the denomination's Board of Inquiry and the Council of Ministers Misconduct Determination Board. Yet, this is a proposed temporary repair. It is essential that General Council and the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers work to develop an up-to-date misconduct policy that will carry us into a more professional future.

The Council asked the Executive

Committee to review the Licensed Pastor process to ensure clarity of roles and training exist.

The Council received the Plan and Vision of Ministry from Tirah Keal.

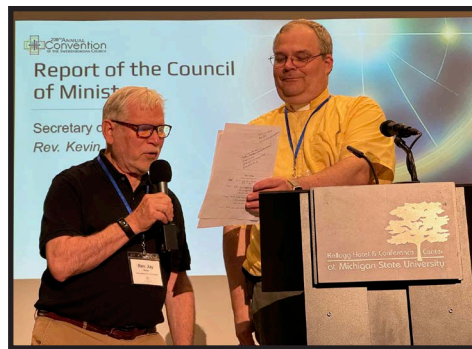
Elections were held and the Rev. Kevin Baxter was elected as Secretary of the Council, the Rev. Gabriella Cahalley was elected to the COM Executive Committee, the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell was elected to a one-year unexpired term on the Committee on Admission into the Ministry, the Rev. Rachel Madjerac was elected to the Council Nominating Committee, and the Rev. Catherine Lauber was elected as the 2026 Convention Preacher.

The Council gathered on Friday afternoon for an educational program on grief lead by the Rev. Dr. Donna Keane, Rev. Julie Conoran, Rev. Gabriella Cahalley, and Rev. Roslyn Taylor. The program explored personal and organizational issues. The Council then broke into discussion groups to talk about the importance of giving voice to grief for the process of our spiritual growth.

And finally, the following motions are being brought before the convention for its deliberation and action.

**Motion:** After eighteen years in the ordained ministry, the Rev. Freeman Schrock entered the fullness of the spiritual world on October 19, 2023. The Council of Ministers recommends to the Swedenborgian Church that their name be removed from the Roll of Ministers and added to the Roll of Former Ministers.

**Motion:** After fourteen years in the ordained ministry, the Rev. Dr. Sharon Connelly entered into the fullness of the spiritual world on the first of June, 2024. The Council of Ministers recommends to the Swedenborgian



Rev. Kevin Baxter reads the motion for the induction of Rev. Jay Barry into the General Convention of the New Jerusalem and they read the traditional response.

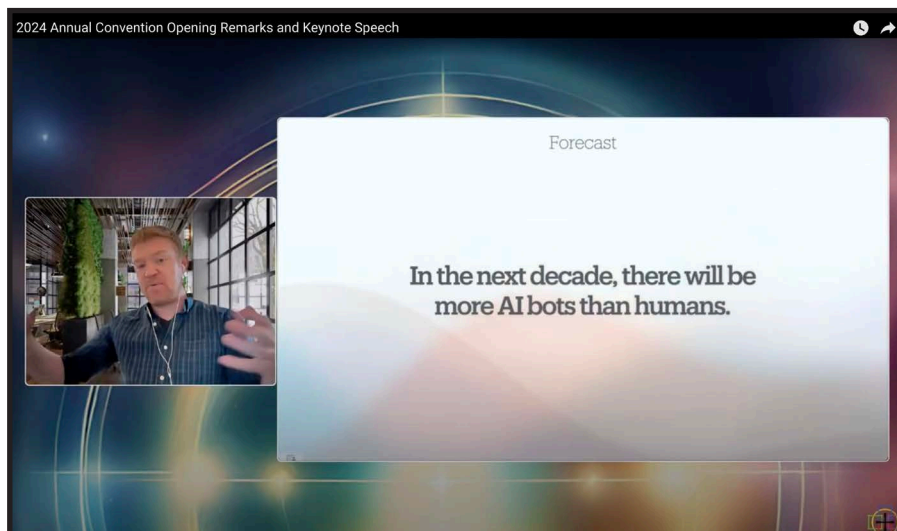
# Planting Seeds for the Future of Swedenborg

BY DYLAN HENDRICKS

*The following is an excerpt from a transcript of the compelling keynote address by Dylan Hendricks, a futurist and Swedenborgian, with the Institute for the Future. We encourage you to watch the full video of the keynote on our [YouTube channel](#).*

The second driver, and this is going to be the part of the talk where I lean the most into what you might expect from a futurist, is emerging technologies. We know that these technologies are changing our world. They're often the most dramatic things that we see impacting our world. The Institute for the Future was actually founded by some of the early hardware pioneers of the internet. So back in the late sixties, there were folks that were working on some of the technologies that make the internet possible, things like packet switching. And they were working on these under DARPA projects, under US military contracts, they weren't really able to talk about what they were doing. But the sort of first act of the Institute for the Future was in its founding, where these folks that were working on this military research sort of saw that if the internet became anything like what they thought it might, and again, this is in the late 1960s, so they had some foresight, that the world was not ready for the kind of change that was coming. Organizations, governments were not ready. So, they founded the Institute for the Future with the public mission of helping organizations and communities to think more systematically about the future.

The technology explorations are deep in the DNA of the work that I do. And I'm sure like many of you, I do often wonder, as Devin mentioned, you know, as we think about the rich



kind of library of correspondences that were given in Swedenborg's writings, helping us think about the things that manifest in this natural world and what their spiritual meaning might be. I can't help but wonder what the correspondences are of some of these tech-

**If we die and wake up in the spiritual world, are folks using the internet? Are they texting each other? Are they asking Siri to turn the lights off downstairs?**

nologies. If we die and wake up in the spiritual world, are folks using the internet? Are they texting each other? Are they asking Siri to turn the lights off downstairs or to play the new jam? It's hard to square these worlds and how these technologies have shown up. As Devin even mentioned with Zoom, you know, and I will certainly not be the first to observe that many of these technologies like the internet have already in many ways made our natural world in some ways feel more like how Swedenborg describes the spiritual world. This is something that I

think when we think about the future and technology, it's hard for my mind not to go there. Is the natural world, in fact, adopting some more of these characteristics? Already today, we know that we can, as described in the spiritual world, think of somebody, and they can appear. That's in some ways what we're doing tonight. I'm able to appear. We can think of an idea and bring ourselves closer to that idea and manifest that idea. This ability to use technology in this way, and to have it connecting us in our lives, and to be always connected to our phones. This is obviously also a part of the previous driver of institutional distrust.

We are no longer as gated from each other. We can no longer hide the things that we're doing. Institutions and powerful people can no longer hide what they're doing in the same ways, and that's a good thing in many ways. But on the other side, we also have a lot more disinformation and a lot more falsity in our information streams than we have before. This brings us to AI, to artificial intelligence—which is like electricity or the internet—these major technologies that changed the way we

*Continues on page 59*

## Keynote Address

*Continued from page 58*

live our daily lives over the last hundred years. I think artificial intelligence is appearing now in the 2020s as something that is kind of poised to have a similar transformation. There are a lot of people talking about it. We've been researching it for decades, but the most recent developments in the last few years are surprising, even to us. To give you a at least one nugget of something that feels very futurist-y, I'll share with you right now a forecast. This is jumping ahead a little bit because there's more forecasts later. Forecasts are, if drivers are a part of the evidence basis of strategic foresight, forecasts are the closest that we get to predictions. Forecasts have kind of a predictive value. They are stated like coherent, provocative statements about something that will be true in the future. But we present them not try to convince you that this is absolutely the way that things will be. In fact, our goal is to not convince anybody that the future is predetermined, but to help people recognize their agency and shaping it. But instead, these provocations of forecasts are designed to help us think more imaginatively and immersively. What if this was true? What if this thing that's being described was true? What would that world be like? How do we prepare for a world like that?

In the spirit of being a good futurist, I'll share this forecast that in the next decade, I believe there will be more AI bots than humans in our world. In many cases, they will be indistinguishable from regular people. In

fact, believe it or not, this seems like Dylan, but I'm actually an AI right now. Dylan's actually behind you. And if you look behind, hey, Dylan. No, I'm just kidding—I'm trying to appeal to the comedian lane of what I might have been in another lifetime. But my background is AI generated. This is a synthetic image that constitutes some real, some not. I think we're entering a world where we're going to be in much



*In-person convention attendees enjoy a virtual keynote address surrounded by the technology that makes it possible.*

more blurred realities about whether we are interacting at any given time with a human or with an AI. These AIs are going to really be weirder than we think. One of the ways we think about it now (I'm not going to talk about Skynet or Terminator or any of the kind of sort of science fiction that

**When I think about this forecast that there will be more AI bots than humans, I think there's going to be a lot of demons in this world.**

was imaginatively trying to conjure up this technology) but I think more practically. When we think about what the technology actually does, where it's likely to be integrated, that it is going to become much more relational. We're going to have many more kinds of relationships with our computer systems because they're going to be able to come to us, kind of meet us where

we're at. We're going to have some relationships that are like assistants or interns, some that are like bosses or co-workers. There will be the fast-food drive-through workers who take your order in the voice of Ronald McDonald. There will be folks that pursue sort of intimate and romantic interests with AI bots (that's a whole other world to talk about). And there's also going to be a lot of scam bots, just so, so, many scam bots.

When I think about the scam bots, it also makes me think more about something else that Swedenborg talked about, which I don't normally have the opportunity to bring up when I'm in a meeting with, say, a car company or a financial institution. But I think

a lot about the way that Swedenborg described interactions between spirits in the natural and spiritual world. This idea that our spiritual selves are in the spiritual world, our physical selves are in this world and that if we try to talk to spirits from this world, the kind of spirits that generally want to talk to us are not the kind of spirits that you want to be talking to. They're probably demons. When I think about this forecast that there will be more AI bots than humans, I think there's going to be a lot of demons in this world. There's going to be a lot of AI bots that want to talk to you that sound very charming and very charismatic, that might sound like somebody that you know and have a lot of knowledge, but don't have good intentions and are not trying to lead you down a good path. So, it's another way in which I think the natural world might adopt more characteristics of the spiritual world in

*Continues on page 78*

# Business Meeting Report

BY KAREN CONGER, RECORDING SECRETARY

The annual convention business sessions of the Swedenborgian Church of North America convened on the beautiful campus of Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. Many thanks to the Michigan Association for gifts and hospitality they offered the attendees.

The Credentials Committee reported that there was a total of 101 delegates in attendance, out of the potential 189. All of the Associations/Conferences within the Church were represented with the exception of New York and the At-Large membership.

The Council of Ministers' report included the recognition of the passing into the spiritual world of Rev. Freeman Schrock and Rev. Sherrie Connelly. In addition, it was recommended that the Rev. James (Jay) Barry be inducted into the ordained ministry of the Swedenborgian Church. The latter service was conducted at the beautiful Alumni Memorial Chapel on campus of MSU.

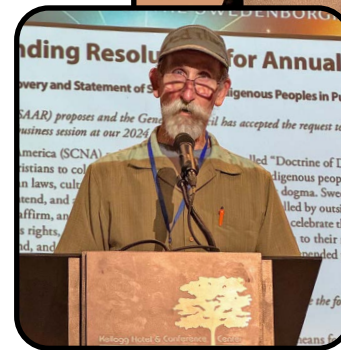
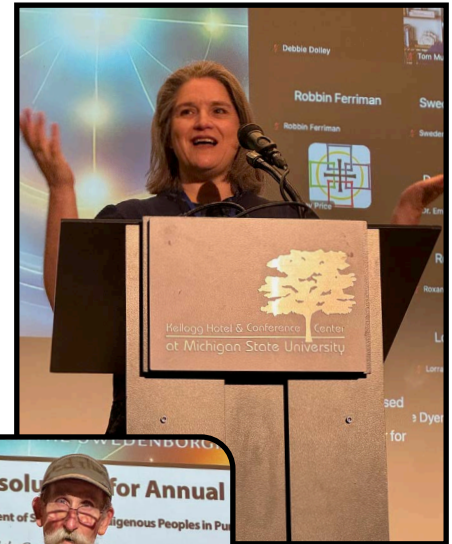
Two standing resolutions were moved, seconded, and carried, (1) Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery and Statement of Support for Indigenous Peoples in Pursuit of Restitution and Reparations and (2) a Standing Resolution on Climate Justice, the texts of both having been published in previous issues of *the Messenger*. The latter standing resolution was amended on the floor and the updated version is available on the denomination's [website here](#).

The proposed addition of a Standing Committee for Ministry Development was withdrawn from consideration on the floor when it was determined that its language interfered with Article II, Section 4 of the Constitution. It was determined this committee would better function as ad hoc.

The proposed amendment to Article XVIII of the Bylaws as printed in [April 2024](#) issue of *the Messenger* regarding the Common Fund Investment Committee terms of appointment (five years, each member may be reappointed without term limits) was passed.

A variety of reports were given including *Our Daily Bread* (ODB), *Spiritual Sunshine* (swedenborgiancommunity.org), *the Messenger*, The Helen Keller Center, the National Church, Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism (SAAR), the Swedenborg Foundation, the Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS), and others.

The site and dates for Convention 2025 have not been confirmed. For the full text of the minutes from the business sessions please see the *2024 Journal* which will be available this fall.



**Above:** Rev. Shada Sullivan presents the Standing Resolution on Climate Justice. **Left:** Andrew Dodd presents the Standing Resolution on Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery and Statement of Support for Indigenous Peoples in Pursuit of Restitution and Reparations.

## Election Results

|                                                                                        |                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>President Elect:</b> .....                                                          | Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence <sup>†</sup> |
| <b>Vice President:</b> .....                                                           | Kurt Fekete <sup>†</sup>           |
| <b>Recording Secretary:</b> .....                                                      | Karen Conger <sup>†</sup>          |
| <b>General Council Lay Person:</b> .....                                               | Kei Pang                           |
| <b>General Council Lay Person:</b> .....                                               | Herb Ziegler <sup>†</sup>          |
| <b>General Council Minister:</b> .....                                                 | Rev. Thom Muller <sup>†</sup>      |
| <b>Standing Com. Communication &amp; Info.:</b>                                        | Tara Conkling <sup>†</sup>         |
| <b>Standing Com. for Education &amp; Resources:</b>                                    | Rev. Shada Sullivan <sup>†</sup>   |
| <b>Standing Com. for Financial Accountability:</b>                                     | Kurt Fekete <sup>†</sup>           |
| <b>Standing Com. for Financial Accountability:</b>                                     | Tom Neuenfeldt <sup>†</sup>        |
| <b>Committee on Admission to the Ministry:</b>                                         | BJ Neuenfeldt <sup>†</sup>         |
| <b>Standing Committee for Nominations:</b>                                             | Pastor Kelly Milne                 |
| <b>Center for Swedenborgian Studies Board of Trustees, Representative Class:</b> ..... | Rev. Dr. Gard Perry <sup>†</sup>   |

<sup>†</sup>incumbent



# Honoring Wayfarers Chapel

BY REV. JANE SIEBERT

The service to honor the journey of Wayfarers Chapel was well attended by in-person convention attendees and online. The historical video is available on [YouTube](#), thanks to Rudy Caseres’s work to put it together.

We explored the history of the Chapel and listened to stories from ministers’ memories while working there. A few convention goers spoke about their experiences at the Chapel on special occasions over the years. Amy Little told about the wonderful experience of having her daughter Ivy baptized there. Karen Conger

sang a beautiful tribute to the chapel and talked about her love of the Chapel and being confirmed. Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence shared about his wedding at the Chapel.

It was an emotionally filled time to say “Thank you, dear Wayfarers Chapel. Whatever the future brings we hold your memory in our hearts.”



## Honing the Style of Convention

Continued from the Cover

and Youth Director Kurt Fekete.

Lastly, a special banquet held in a Kellogg Hotel ballroom supported the fourth and final evening that was the closing of convention featuring *Michigan Fare* cuisine, a terrific local band, “Betty B and the Rope Walkers,” booked and paid for by the Michigan Association, that inspired much dancing. At the banquet we shared the convention raffle results bestowing to ticket winners various prizes of Wayfarers artifacts—engraved couples champagne goblets, necklaces, and more—donated from the former Wayfarers gift shop to benefit the Wayfarers Chapel reconstruction.

## Council of Ministers Report

Continued from page 57

Church that their name be removed from the Roll of Ministers and added to the Roll of Former Ministers.

**Motion:** At his own request and upon certification for induction by the Committee on Admission to the Ministry, the Council of Ministers recommends to the Swedenborgian Church that James Barry having been ordained in the General Church of the New Jerusalem and after preparation recognized as adequate, accepting the doctrines of the New Church and expressing allegiance to the Constitution of the General Convention, be inducted into our ministry and that this service of induction be held at this session of the General Convention, his name after induction to be placed on our Roll of Ministers.

## Poem for Wayfarers Chapel

BY REV. JENNY CAUGHMAN

Beauty  
 the Beauty of Holiness  
 the Manifest Divine  
 beckons

Struck by the unfathomable  
 harmony of sky and water  
 Leaf and rock  
 spirit and matter  
 we pause

Each of us  
 wayfarers on life’s journey  
 touched, moved, fed  
 transformed by Divine Presence

Enriched, we breathe in beauty  
 manifest goodness, truth  
 Renewed by the presence of discernible love  
 fortified, we move in  
 better prepared to lovingly, wisely fare through this life  
 having glimpsed the one beyond

**Honoring the Journey of Wayfarers Chapel can be watched in full on our [YouTube Channel](#).**

# Called by the Spirit

BY REV. BETSY COFFMAN, CONVENTION PREACHER

“This is Holy Ground, we’re standing on Holy ground, for the Lord is present, and where he is, is Holy...” “Spirit, Spirit of gentleness, Blow through the wilderness, calling and free. Spirit, Spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness, Wind, Wind on the sea—over the eons you called to each thing..You call from tomorrow. You break ancient schemes...with bold new decisions your people arise.” My message tonight is “Called by the Spirit.”

Friends, we are all, each and every one of us, “called by the Spirit.” Spirit has been calling us from “the moment of our first waking,” and it is calling us right now, in this “Holy moment” of the present, as we are gathered together, and it beckons to us into our future as well. For this Spirit, this Spirit of love and *gentleness, calling and free*, calls us to awaken to the life that has been gifted to each of us. As Jean Houston says, we are all *God-seed*. We are seeds, planted by God’s infinite love, in the soil of spirit, and of this natural earth, with all the potential of every seed, to become what we were each uniquely created to be. We are always being called into being, into becoming, by the true Source of all life, called by many names— Holy Spirit, God, Infinite Love—seeking to become manifest. This “call of the spirit” is not just one that seeks our individual response, but it is a call to us collectively as humans, and as such, is very relevant to our present Convention theme of envisioning the future of “church,” as all are called into this process of becoming, like the current of a river, flowing onward toward the sea of God-consciousness.”

And though the call is constant, our



Rev. Betsy Coffman, 2024 Convention Preacher and Rev. Catherine Lauber, 2026 Convention Preacher.

awareness of it is not. I have a friend who uses the term “spiritual amnesia” to describe our frequent forgetfulness of God’s constant presence and “calling” in our lives. The main reason that we are unable to maintain a consistent awareness of that Inner Voice is because we are “citizens of two worlds at once.” Swedenborg tells us it is part of the Divine Design that *we are all spirits inwardly, spirits clothed in bodies* and as such, we all have an inner self and an outer self. The outer self is the part of us that is aware and living in this physical world. It is the part of us that is able to interact with others and to carry out the necessary tasks of the earthly world. However, the inner self, of which we are mostly unaware, is simultaneously interacting at the spiritual level and is in community with angels. According to Swedenborg, our whole purpose here is to develop our inner self and character through an outer life “that leads to heaven.” And the heavenly life, which we get to choose and practice while here in our earthly bodies, is a life of “love in action,” what Swedenborg called a “life of charity.” In simple terms, this means a life in

which we have genuine care and concern for others, and seek to be useful, helpful and kind, *in all our affairs*. As such, while here on earth, we might see ourselves as *angels-in-training*. There’s a wonderful scene in the film *Splendors of the Spirit*, about Swedenborg’s life and teachings, in which a little girl asks Swedenborg to show her an angel, and he sits her in front of a mirror and says, you’re looking at one right now. We all have an “inner self” that is an angel coming-into being, if only we heed the call to respond to our God-given destiny.

Throughout our lives this Spirit calls to us to continue to become, to change, to transform, to grow into the unique person we were created to be. It is always calling us. It is within us and around us, at all times, urging us to listen to what Abraham Lincoln called, *our better angels*, those loving and true voices both outside and within, that urge us to “do the next right thing” and to avoid the pitfalls of the outer self that wants to control and resist. This is a life that calls for “surrender,” for giving up our self-will and discerning the Lord’s will for us—and it is not easy—and it is ongoing. I think most of us know that don’t we? It is our ego, our need to have things *our way*, and our holding on to our old patterns and beliefs (*ancient schemes*), even if they no longer serve us, and even cause us pain, that block us from acknowledging and heeding the “call of the Spirit.” And that, in turn, blocks our spiritual growth. The passage we read from Luke, alludes to this process.

...no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled,

*Continues on page 63*

## Called by the Spirit

Continued from page 62

and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he/she says, 'The old is better.'

How often do we wish for the old and think it was better, and have trouble embracing the new, even if, in reality, it is what we really need in order to grow and move forward? Friends, we are being called, from the old to the new, individually and as a church—the Spirit is calling for healing, and change (new wineskins). *We need new ways of looking at things. To see reality from a different perspective.* Yet, when we are experiencing this process, *"We might [feel as though we are] swimming against the [familiar] current, (even though) we've made a conscious decision to practice something different in response to an inner call."*

Spiritual writer, Gerald May, notes the significant difference in ways our "outer" and "inner" selves develop, which often leads to internal conflict as we are in the process of growing and developing as human beings. He states,



Convention Worship and Music Coordinator, Pastor Paul Deming, plays for the Convention Worship Service.

*In growing psychologically, (outer) one moves toward increasing autonomy and independence. In growing spiritually, (inner) one increasingly realizes how utterly dependent one is, on God and on the grace of God that comes through other people. [Will and Spirit].* And yet, both need to happen as we traverse our road towards spiritual transformation,

**How often do we wish for the old and think it was better, and have trouble embracing the new, even if, in reality, it is what we really need in order to grow and move forward?**

on our journey to heaven. Somehow, we have to learn to navigate these two seemingly opposing paths. We all need to develop a healthy sense of self, develop our minds, bodies, and talents and an ability to function well in our human lives, but we are also called upon at the same time, to let God take the lead, what 12-step programs call *turning our will and our lives over to the care of God...* And just as important, we need to tend to our inner garden to the growth of our inner, spiritual self, at the same time that we're operating in the outer world. That can be very difficult indeed, requiring that we develop spiritual practices that help us tune out the outer world and connect with the inner world which in turn can support and sustain us in our outer activities and interactions.

In **Isaiah 40:3-5**, we see wonderful imagery that illustrates this process of spirit and human activity that is part of our regenerative or transformational process. Listen,

A voice of One calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low, the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD

will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Albert Barnes, in a commentary [written in 1851] on this passage, remarks on the context of these verses,

*The idea is taken from the practice of Eastern monarchs, who, whenever they entered on a journey or an expedition, especially through a barren and unfrequented or inhospitable country, sent...[forerunners] or heralds before them to prepare the way. To do this, it was necessary for them to provide supplies, and make bridges, or find fording places over the streams; to level hills, and construct causeways over valleys, or fill them up; and to make a way through the forest which might lie in their intended line of march. Those who went before, to mark and improve the route, were the forerunners. They were "the scouts, the pioneers, the ones sent before a king to prepare the way."*

We might recall pioneer Daniel Boone and his party of woodsmen laying out a 200-milelong route. Over time, as more people came over the trail, it was improved, widened, and smoothed. It all began, however, with one man. That man then led others, and it multiplied from there.

*Filling up valleys and removing the tops of mountains seems like a lot of work...and it is, yet this is the work and the life to which the Spirit of God is always calling us, and in our answering of that call, there is a process of healing and transformation that takes place in our inner *barrenness*, where we may feel empty, desolate, and in need of nourishment so we can thrive. This is the work of that *Spirit of gentleness*, blowing through the wilderness, calling and free. Can you feel those places inside you? This passage is talking about us, and those desert and rough places inside each of us that need to be leveled and cleared in order to *make a straight highway*, an open path for us to "hear the voice that is calling us from the*

*Continues on page 64*

## Called by the Spirit

Continued from page 63

wilderness areas of our inner being.” It is calling for us to be made new and in doing so, to enlarge our ability to love. From Rumi, we hear, *your task is not to seek for love, but ...to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.* And in that process, we are changed and become pathfinders and forerunners for others. Each of us in our daily interactions, in the nitty-gritty, ordinariness of our lives, has opportunities to affect the lives of others in a positive way, and in so doing, we are forging our road to heaven, while showing the way for others.

As Swedenborgians most of us are aware of two rather famous pathfinders, who did just that. John Chapman, a.k.a. Johnny Appleseed, and Helen Keller, both of them, through following their spiritual call, changed the world and influenced others in profound and beneficial ways. Johnny Appleseed traveled west into the frontier planting apple seeds, and creating orchards ahead of the settlers who came after. The apple trees he provided were the means by which they sustained themselves through the winters and the planting of trees made it possible for them to gain full ownership of their property. But along with apples trees, Johnny also planted spiritual seeds by handing out chapters from Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*, which he called *Good news straight from Heaven*, as well as modeling a character and way of life that demonstrated peaceful living between settlers and natives; living in harmony with nature; contentment with very few possessions and being a friend and helper to all. There are many documented stories of his helpfulness to settlers in need. This was just one man, who lived the life to which he felt called, and in the process, positively changed and influenced much of that part of the world through which

he traveled—and whose life and virtues are remembered and revered today.

And then we have Helen Keller. Rendered deaf and blind at a very young age, in a world that had no idea at that time, how to deal with such a child, she overcame her afflictions with much support and assistance from her mother and a special teacher. She became a forerunner for the rights of women, for people with disabilities, and planted spiritual seeds through her writings, particularly, *A Light in My Darkness*, in which she tells her life story and how Swedenborg’s writings “opened her inner eyes,” so that she could respond to the “call of the Spirit.” In listening to her personal call, she was able to overcome the challenges of her physical limitations, actually use them to draw attention to the common misconceptions about “disabled” people of her time and advocate successfully for positive changes that were forerunners to many more that came later. Her inspiration to so many, her words and accomplishments changed our world and still resonate today. She wrote,

What I am looking for is not out there, it is in me. I am only one, but I am still one. I cannot do everything, but still, I can do something. Because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something I can do. Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.

These were not mere words, but were true expressions of how she lived and what she was able to accomplish.

A present-day pathfinder, not so



The large conference center screen was used for music throughout the worship services.

well-known, but by similarly responding to her inner call in a small but meaningful way, has helped to heal the lives of many “wounded and broken-hearted women.” Episcopal priest Becca Stevens is founder of Thistle Farms, a social enterprise run by survivors of sexual abuse, trafficking, and addiction. Stevens explains how it came about,

“My mother’s example of showing love through practical means gave me the wherewithal to open a home for women [survivors]. It was a small house for five women. I said: “Come live free for two years with no authority living with you. Live free.” I figured that’s what I would want if I were coming in off the streets or out of prison. I did it because sanctuary is the most practical ideal of all. I wanted to do the work of healing from the inside out. And that begins with a safe home. From its humble beginning, it now has thirty global partners that employ more than 1,600 women. To me, this brings to mind the parable told

Continues on page 65

## Called by the Spirit

Continued from page 64

by Jesus in Matthew (13:31–32),

“<sup>31</sup>The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. <sup>32</sup>Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

None of these pathfinders knew what the fruits of their actions (fruits of the spirit—Galatians) would ultimately be. In fact, Rev. Stevens tells of her serious doubts about her plan. She says,

Initially, it seemed a bit ridiculous to me to think that by starting a small community, we could somehow change the world, but now, it seems more ridiculous to me to think that somehow the world will change if we don't do something. Now, I can see that one loving gesture is practically divine. We have to do small things and believe a big difference is coming. It's like the miraculous drops of water that seep through mountain limestone. They gather themselves into springs that flow into creeks, that merge into

streams, that find their way to oceans. Our work is to envision the drops as oceans. We do our small parts and know a powerful ocean of love and compassion is downstream. Each small gesture can lead to liberation. The bravest thing we can do in this world is not cling to old ideas or fear of judgment but step out and just do something for love's sake. (“Do the next right thing... do what's in front of you to do.”) Sometimes what we need most is to remind one another of how the divine is all around us, calling us to see and taste it for ourselves (*Practically Divine* by Becca Stevens, Nashville, TN: Harper Horizon, 2021).

Like these forerunners, we too, need to decide if we will respond to the promptings of the spirit. We have the freedom to say “yes,” “no,” or “maybe later, but not right now.” However, this Spirit, this voice crying in the wilderness of our deepest souls, tells us, *This is the place, and this is the time; here and now [I AM] waiting to break into [your] experience. To change [your] mind, to change [your] life, to change your ways. To make [you] see the world and the whole of life in a new light. To fill [you] with hope, joy and certainty for the future. This is the place, as are all*

*places; this is the time, as are all times...* This is the voice, that is both gentle and restless, and in that restlessness, *calls us from the placidity* of our lives. It calls us from our spiritual inertia and resistance, to move forth into that wilderness of our beings, where things may be stagnant and there is need for new growth. This Spirit calls from the deepest of our being, urging us forward into a new life. And though

it starts with each of us individually, what we do affects the whole, and we each have our part to play in the building of God's Kingdom on Earth. This is how we move forward, transforming our “earthly church” from an external form, to one that reflects God's Divine Design and purpose. And our own seemingly small efforts can and do make a difference, even in this world of much pain and suffering. From the Talmud we hear,

Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it (Rabbi Rami Shapiro).

Friends, it is in responding to and acting upon these urges of the Spirit, that we are transformed, changed, and regenerated over the course of our lifetime, into new beings, and having *developed heaven within us*, we are prepared and ready for the eternal life of heaven that is our inheritance. Let us answer the call!

### Prayer For Our Community

God, Lord of all creation, lover of life and of everything, please help us to love in our very small way what You love infinitely and everywhere and help us answer your call to put our love into action in our daily lives. Let us know the reality that every thing and every one is connected, and nothing stands alone. To care for one part is really to care for the whole, and so we do. Help us each day to stand for love, for healing, for the good, for the diverse unity of all creation, because we know this is what You desire: as Jesus prayed, that all may be one. We offer our prayer together with all the holy names of God, we offer our prayer together with Christ, our Lord. Amen. ☪

The Convention Worship Service that includes Rev. Coffman's message can be viewed in full on our [YouTube Channel](#).



Teens from the Swedenborgian Church Youth League waiting to help Rev. Coffman and Rev. Lauber with communion.



## Commencing into the Green Earth

BY REV. DR. DEVIN ZUBER, CSS COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER

We often think of commencement as the end of something—often marking the conclusion of an academic school year, accompanied by a graduation. But etymologically, commencement is actually the beginning of something, with a great energy or force—the *comm* in “commencement” or to “commence” comes from a Latin root which means a strong force, and this lies behind our other English words related to power, like to commandeer and command.

So for our graduates of our certificate program from the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, in Berkeley, California, the receiving of this diploma is a command of sorts, a powerful invitation to commence into the future with your training in Swedenborgian theology, to go out and engage with the world in all its complexity, beauty, and problems, with a mind and heart that have been shaped by your immersion in Swedenborgian thought, and its application to life. What a journey it has been! The great French poet Paul Valery (1871–1945) wrote that reading Swedenborg, for him, was like,

Pushing on into an enchanted forest where every step stirred ideas that flew up like unexpected birds, where shimmering hypotheses, echoes, and psychological chases ran together at every crossroad, and where the eye glimpses mysteriously renewed vistas, in the midst of which the hunter seeking rational answers gets encouraged, lost, and then he finds the track again, only to lose it from sight ... I love the hunt for its own sake, and there are few hunts so captivating as this hunt for the mystery of Swedenborg.



*Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber leads the commencement for the certificate in Swedenborgian Studies, with graduate Lynn Chittick Thompson on screen at the Kellogg Conference Center.*

So don't feel discouraged, in other words, if you felt at times lost along the way; you are in good company with Paul Valery and so many others. In addition to the usual divinity school curriculum with its focus on the scriptures and biblical interpretation which many of our students must go through, the time you spent learning with us at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies has presented a mountain of seemingly insurmountable books: Swedenborg published eighteen different theological works in the second half of his life, and many of these were multi-volume, meaning that to get through them all in English, you'd have to read something like thirty-five books, some of them hundreds of pages in length, cover-to-cover. Tens and tens of thousands of pages, in the end—Swedenborg wrote so prolifically, as many of you know, that the massive archive of his manuscripts at the Royal Academy of Sciences in Stockholm, Sweden, constitutes one of the largest single-author

manuscript collections from the eighteenth century in the world.

Thank goodness our spiritual tradition is not a competitive race requiring a marathon of reading! We hope in your journey at CSS, in addition to learning how to contextualize and wrestle with the unexpected birds and shimmering hypotheses in these voluminous theological works, that you have learned the application of the teachings, the insights, in your own life, grounded in love. The way to heaven is not by reading a set number of books, but by how you choose to live your life in relation to others. “A life without faith is like sunlight without warmth,” Swedenborg writes in the *Arcana Coelestia*, “the

type of light that appears occurs in winter, when nothing grows and everything droops and dies. A life of faith rising out of love, on the contrary, is like light from the sun in spring, when everything grows and flourishes, and warmth from the sun is the fertile agent.” This metaphor about seasons—light and warmth, darkness and cold—is a powerful correspondence ever-present in the abundant earth we are gifted with; it is summer here in Michigan, with fragrant trees and flowers, the sounds of bird song in the mornings when we wake up in our dormitory or hotel here in East Lansing—and while a Certificate in Swedenborgian Studies is just, in the end, a little slip of paper, we hope it signifies your acquiring a kind of perception. That you have been given eyes to see, ears to hear, and even a tongue to taste, the lived goodness of a life of faith rising out of love, and that in whatever work you will continue doing or end up undertaking, that you will share this gift

*Continues on page 69*

## Commencing into the Earth

Continued from page 68

of perception with others around you.

But we can't go into the future, commencing forth with this good news, without understanding the past that has brought us here. So, let us briefly go back in time, some two hundred and four years ago, to encounter some wisdom from one of our tradition's ancestors, a moment that touches our own in more ways than one: a sort of Swedenborgian back-to-the-future. In 1821, a progenitor of our little tradition in North America, a man named Sampson Reed, was invited to give a commencement talk to the Harvard Divinity School. It was entitled "An Oration on Genius," and among other things, it encouraged its listeners to cultivate inner spiritual perception, and to connect their regeneration inside their minds with the regeneration of the beautiful natural world and its cycles of life and birth, decay and death, fall into spring, summer into winter. In many ways this little talk could be said to be the first fully-fledged American Romantic manifesto; and by Romantic here, I don't mean Valentine's Day with chocolate and roses, but that tumultuous epoch of the early nineteenth century that produced poets like William Blake and William Wordsworth, and novels like *Frankenstein*. Sampson Reed, the Swedenborgian, ended his commencement address at Harvard by saying that "...living in a country whose peculiar characteristic is said to be a love of equal liberty, let it be written on our hearts, that the end of all education is a life of active usefulness."

One of the young students listening to this talk was none other than Ralph Waldo Emerson, who would become the founding figure in the Transcendentalist movement, and a major philosopher and influence on American culture. Emerson was so struck by



the independent Romantic manifesto in Reed's talk, that he later wrote it was as if Reed's lips "mouthed words of fire." Seventeen years later, Emerson himself was invited to give the commencement address at Harvard's Divinity school on a hot July day, and his speech caused a scandal and sensation—don't rely on books and learning, Emerson told the theological students, much to the shock and dismay of all the professors and faculty present; don't worry about fitting into church traditions, all those good grades you got—pay attention instead to cultivating your inner spiritual perception and learning from the correspondences of nature that are always flowing around you. Emerson's punk-style exhortation made him infamous, overnight, and it was deeply shaped his immersion in Swedenborg's teachings. "In this refulgent summer," Emerson said at the beginning of the commencement talk,

It is a luxury to draw the breath of life. The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spotted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers. The air is full of birds, and sweet with the breath of the pine, the

balms-of-Gilead, and the new hay. Night brings no gloom to the heart with its welcome shade. Through the transparent darkness the stars pour their spiritual rays down on us. We under them seem as young children, and this huge globe our toy. The cool night bathes the world as with a river and prepares our eyes again for the crimson dawn. The mystery of nature was never displayed more happily.

So, to our well-deserving graduates from our certificate program in Swedenborgian Studies, may you commence into the future with your training behind you and under your belts, prepared to meet the unfolding and flowing beauty of this earth which is ever-present around us! 🌱



CSS hosted an evening reception with delicious appetizers and desserts with plenty of time to chat and reconnect. Rev. Junchol Lee and Rev. Gard Perry pictured left.



# Center for Swedenborgian Studies Annual Meeting Report

BY TOM NEUENFELDT

The Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS) held their corporation meeting on Sunday, June 30, 2024, at the annual convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. Rev. Dr. Gard Perry delivered the invocation.

The meeting was called to order by chair, Tom Neuenfeldt at 3:15 PM. All in attendance were invited by Secretary Karen Conger to join the Corporation by signing the membership book if they have never signed before.

Tom welcomed all in attendance to Michigan. He thanked the dean, Dr. Rebecca Esterson, for all of the energy she puts into the school and the denomination. CSS is now purchasing accounting services from Clifton-LarsonAllen, due to the fact that the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) no longer is operating their accounting offices.

It was reported that Rev. Dr. Gard Perry was re-elected to the Board of Trustees on the floor of Convention in the Representative Class.

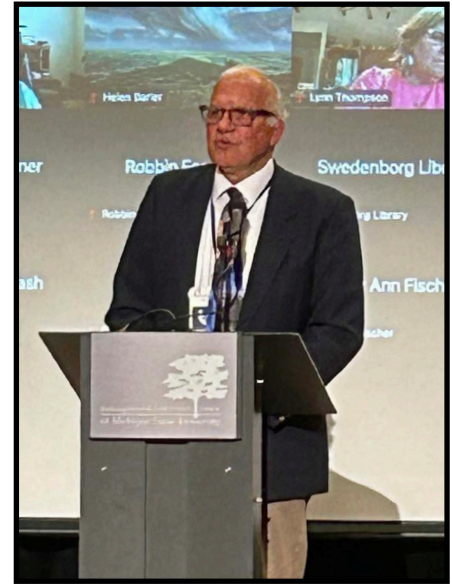
In her Dean's Report, Rebecca thanked the Board for their bold visioning and dedication to the school. She offered some prizes during a trivia game.

Rebecca read the mission of the school:

The Mission of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies is:

"To prepare qualified individuals for ministry in the Swedenborgian Church and world. To serve as a center on the leading edge of Swedenborgian scholarship. To share its resources of scholarship, leadership."

There are currently four very interested prospective students. Rebecca spoke of various classes and seminars that are and have occurred. The January Intensives were very successful. Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber offered a Creation Care class. Dr. Esterson has offered several classes throughout the year including "Embodied Knowing in Helen Keller's *The World I Live In*."



Tom Neuenfeldt, Chair of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies Board of Trustees, opens the annual meeting of the CSS Corporation.

Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay spoke about the CLA arrangement. She spoke of the Common Fund which earned 13.2% last year. The *Nunc Licet* Fellowship program continues to be an investment that the school is making for qualified ordination path students. It is currently costing the school one half of one percent of the corpus.

Lynn Chittick Thompson joined the meeting remotely from her home in Pennsylvania and was awarded the Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies. Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber presented a commencement address (see p. 68).

Karen Conger nominated Pastor Tassy Farwell as an At-Large member of the Board. No nominations were received from the floor. Tassy was reelected to the Board. The meeting adjourned at 4:38 PM.



Left: Dean Dr. Rebecca Esterson gives her dean's report to the floor of Convention.



Right: Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay speaks about the Common Fund and the *Nunc Licet* fellowship program.

## From Natural to Spiritual

BY REV. JUNCHOL LEE, INDUCTION SPEAKER

First, I'd like to express that it's such an honor to be the induction speaker for this very gentle, fine person, Rev. James Barry. I only have known him maybe two years, max. But there are two things that Jay deeply impressed me with that I would like to share before my message, which I can promise will be short.

Jay appears to me as a very humble person. Despite the background, the career, and the things that I had heard about him, he is very humble and always willing to listen. To me, humility is a very important quality to have as a minister. The other one, which is more personally favored, is compassion, he cares about his family very deeply. The reason Jay asked the Committee on Admission to the Ministry (CAM) and Rev. Jane to postpone his induction one year was because of his family. He cared about them and their thoughts.

It has been my personal conviction before God that I have to do the things first for my wife, because she only has one husband, that's me; my kids, because they only have one father, that's also me; but God has many servants besides me. So, I will diligently do what God asks me to do after these—please forgive me. And it looks like Jay and I have a certain similarity in that way. I'm very proud and honored to be here tonight and speaking now.

My message is titled "From Natural to Spiritual." Know this is very important for the growth of our spirit. You have heard many times this phrase, probably even you used it yourself,



*Rev. Junchol Lee gives his message for the Induction Worship Service with inductee Rev. Jay Barry and Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence listening in the background.*

saying "I am not religious but spiritual." What does that mean? If you ask what the term "spirit," or "spiritual" means to Swedenborg, he will be puzzled and will probably shake his head and say, "Do you not know what spiri-

**God's message for spiritual cultivation is that we are permanent beings, spirits dwelling in the physical bodies.**

tual really means?" There are two different meanings for the word spiritual from Swedenborg. Did you know that? No? Perhaps, I'll offer a Mini Course about it next year. Spiritual, according to Swedenborg, is one way of saying heavenly or angelic. But the other meaning of the word spiritual includes hell. Why? Where is the hell? Hell is not on earth, meaning not in the physical realm, because it is in the spiritual realm. So, when using the phrase "I'm not religious but spiritual," you must be very careful about what you truly mean. And the same thing is when and

what Swedenborg says about "natural." This is a word a lot of people, in my perception, associate directly with being physical or worldly. But you are all New Church people, you know the new heaven, right? The new heaven is not any better heaven than any previous heavens, according to Swedenborg. If you read it carefully, it's a lesser grade heaven. The new heaven is composed of celestial natural and spiritual natural. What is natural is in heaven! Shocking? Maybe, or maybe not.

Do we want to become spiritual or angelic? God says you better be. You may ask "Why?" or think, it would just benefit God. You may even shake your head. However, you know deep in your heart that it does not benefit God at all. It delights God when we become higher beings. Yet, it does not benefit God any more so than it benefits us.

Do you ever feel lonely, lost, confused, don't know what the hell you're doing here, or even why you're born here? Why am I so stupid? Why can't I run faster? Why can't I study math well? Or why am I in this school? And what's my purpose? A lot of times we ask these kinds of big questions in our life's adventure. However, afterwards most of us try to find answers in worldly manners. Perhaps we are here to make a lot of money or to be successful. Sounds attractive, right? Perhaps we should buy nice cars, big houses, travel the world, or spend the money like kings and queens. The ultimate question is, "Would doing these satisfy our soul?" The answer is "Not really." Are we here to chase after and obtain

*Continues on page 72*

## From Natural to Spiritual

*Continued from page 71*

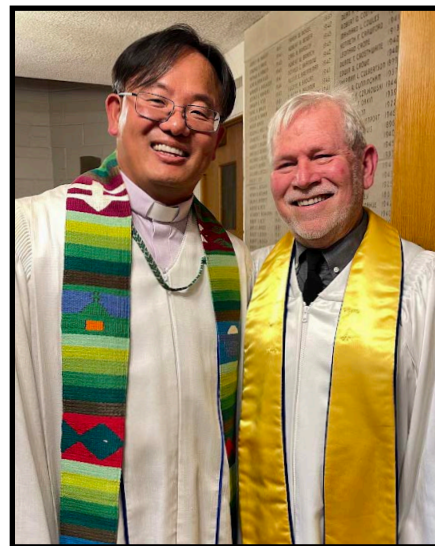
them? Again, the answer is “Not really.” Then, why are we here?

Being spiritual is undergoing spiritual cultivation, that is regeneration. And this is a call from God and is an invitation from love. It is God’s love for us, suggesting that there is a better way to be for us. If we follow it, we’ll be safer, we’ll feel more peaceful, we’ll be more joyful, and we’ll feel fulfilled in our living. So how do we get there? In answering this, I would like to quote one of my teachers, Buddha. Buddha left his home on the day—the moment—his son was born. He stopped by his son, he looked at him, and he said, “impermanent.” Then he left. The meaning of this message is that everything in this physical world is impermanent and temporary. All impressions we get, and we store in our mind

are all temporary. Sadly, all our relationships are temporary as well. Why? because everything changes forever in the physical world. If you have had any relationship since you were born, is there anything that has stayed exactly the same? Nothing. Nothing stays the same.

God’s message for spiritual cultivation is that we are permanent beings, spirits dwelling in the physical bodies. We are innately seeking and desiring what is permanent. Yet, we’re spending all our time with what is impermanent. That’s where our suffering and sadness arise. So why don’t we cultivate our minds in the way we could obtain what is permanent? To cultivate what is permanent, we need to know first, “What is permanent.” Interestingly we all know the answer—love. Love as the way we are trying to help, support, and benefit the other cultivates what is permanent. Do that and if it doesn’t feel good, please come back to me. Perhaps, I could train you better.

Let’s not use the term being spiritual with ignorance. Because being spiritual means cultivating the qualities that belong to heaven. So that when we cultivate them, they become a permanent



*Rev. Junchol Lee and Rev. Jay Barry are all smiles after the Induction Service.*

part of us. And they generate joy, delight, and peace within us. Nobody can take them away. That’s why Jesus teaches us that we need to work for the treasure in heaven. He didn’t mean that if we give money to a church on earth, God will have money in heaven waiting for you. There’s no money in heaven. But what Jesus meant is that we will have something permanent within us that resonates with what makes have and our own true self, if we cultivate them here with love.

May you be blessed in your journey and your cultivation, and your willingness to follow and pursue and find what is permanent for you. 🙏

The Induction Worship Service that includes Rev. Lee’s message can be viewed in full on our [YouTube Channel](#).



**Above:** Marjie Leas and her daughter Becky Moore, the 2024 Convention Choir Director.

**Below:** We were treated to a large Convention Choir of all ages this year. **Right:** BJ Neuenfeldt and Marjie alternated accompanist duties throughout Convention.

# A Change of Perception

BY REV. JAMES BARRY, INDUCTEE

I have a sixty-five year old friend in Philadelphia who spoke of how he found a new life thirty years ago. We were talking on a spring evening in a gathering of friends at a neighborhood church. He told me when he was young, he was doing well. But, in his thirties a pattern of events revealed that he was conflicted, unhappy, and unconsciously self-destructive. This awareness brought him to the threshold of a total change in his life.

I was talking to him thirty years later. He was now a friendly, outgoing man, with a warm smile who was entering retirement after a successful career. In his new life, he had found spiritual connections, a community of friends, prayer and meditation, a healthy lifestyle, and a new vision of life. This is the way he described the turning point in his life:

*I had a change of perception.*

I would like to talk about that today. Our life, and our spiritual formation is dependent in many ways upon a change of perception. This moment of perception can be a spark which fuels a new spiritual understanding of oneself and the world.

I'm sure that each one of us can reflect upon a time when we decided to



Rev. Jay Barry was inducted into the Swedenborgian Church ministry on June 30, 2024.

**In many ways, our church embodies the Lord's universal love for all people. We are inclusive, we embrace all, and honor everyone's journey.**

move in a new direction. I am standing before you, having made such a big decision myself. It all depends upon choices we make—even in the midst of great challenges—which open up avenues of growth and change.

*The Lord's change of perception.*

Swedenborg's theology teaches that the Lord had the same experience when he walked among us. Like us, he experienced moments of perception to choose one path over another. This is illustrated in the Old Testament in the story of Abram and his brother Lot. Both brothers were wealthy, traveling together into a new land. As they traveled a conflict arose between them that became too much for Abram to bear.

And there was a strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and between the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. And Abram said unto Lot, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and between thee and between my herdsmen and between thy herdsmen, for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, I will go to the left." (Genesis 13:7-9)

Abram's story is much more than a historical narrative. Swedenborg's theology magnifies the entire Old Testament as a deep and holy story of the Lord's own spiritual journey as he was growing up.<sup>1</sup> He does this by examining the spiritual meaning of every person, place, and thing in the Word.

In this particular story, Abram represents the internal mind of the Lord, and Lot represents something quite different, the external part: "the pleasure derived from sensory things, thus the most external things which usually captivate the mind in childhood and lead it away from the things that are good."<sup>2</sup>

Abram's separation from Lot represented the Lord's change of perception, his awareness that the spiritual direction he wanted to pursue was not consistent with purely external dreams and goals. The strife between the brothers signifies an inner conflict in the Lord's mind. As they journeyed together southward, which signifies traveling to the "interior and in most things in the mind, where truth is in light,"<sup>3</sup> the conflict increased.

*Continues on page 74*



Quinnell Batair and Dell Rose enjoy listening to Rev. Barry at their first convention.

<sup>1</sup> Arcana Coelestia 1741, 1989

<sup>2</sup> Ibid #1547

<sup>3</sup> Ibid #9642

## Change of Perception

Continued from page 73

Abram made the decision for Lot to go his way, and for his family and cattle to go on a new path.<sup>4</sup> He had a *change of perception* and decided to move in a new direction. Abram did this, the Lord did this too, and so can we.

I am wearing something at this service that represents a change of perception on my part, a change that led me to the Convention. I was ordained fifteen years ago in this stole, which was handmade for me in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, by a group of wonderful seamstresses. One side of the stole you can see blue, and on the other side is gold. The blue represents Divine truth, and the gold, Divine love. We were instructed to always have the blue side facing the congregation.

My own change of perception is represented by the fact that I decided to reverse the color of my stole to reveal the gold fabric on the other side. Yes, truth is essential as we well know, but love is the essence of all forms in the universe. The gold fabric does not represent me, *but the Lord's love for the entire human race.*<sup>5</sup> This gold fabric does not represent a distant, authoritative obscure God who is indifferent to the affairs of the world, but rather is the color of *the ruling love of the Lord himself, for which he battled for his whole life.*<sup>6</sup>

He battled every day—in his own thoughts and perceptions—to preserve the universal love of the entire human race. Not just for some, but for all.



Laying of Hands: Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, Rev. Junchol Lee, Rev. Rich Tafel, Rev. Jane Siebert, Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber, Dr. Rebecca Esterson, and Rev. Shada Sullivan.

In many ways, our church embodies the Lord's universal love for all people. We are inclusive, we embrace all, and honor everyone's journey. We are committed to help, to listen, and to engage. We walk in the universal light from the Word, which touches all minds on the planet in a tremendous variety of ways. I am happy to be walking with you.

### **Swedenborg's change of perception.**

In profound ways, Swedenborgian theology also represents a change in perception. One example is the *Second Coming*. Swedenborg's teaches that this

will not be a physical event only for Christians. Rather, the Second Coming is a spiritual pathway for all people to recognize a more comprehensive understanding of the Divine. This expansive shift in perception is imaged by the twelve gates of entry into the New Jerusalem<sup>7</sup> which represent that all spiritual truths are related. These twelve gates envision a pathway to heaven for all who love God—as they understand God—from indigenous belief systems to the Dao, to Zen Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. With love and service to all humanity, we are one New Church on earth.

### ***A change of perception.***

Returning to Genesis when Abram separated from Lot, he did so without malice. They parted ways, resolving their differences without violence or discord. As Abram journeyed on his path alone, a significant event followed:

Then Abram removed his tent, and came to dwell in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar to the Lord.<sup>8</sup>

This is a beautiful story of a decision the Lord made, a shift of perception which changed the world forever. His innermost desire was, and is, to love everyone and to help us change and grow. He does this by leading us from patterns of conflict to choosing path of love, mercy, forgiveness, and supportive relationships.

The starting point for all of us is a change of perception, just like my friend in Philadelphia experienced. It is a gift from the Lord for all people. ☸

4 Genesis 13:8

5 Arcana Coelestia 2253

6 Ibid #1690, 1789, 1812, 1820.

7 Apocalypse Revealed 916

8 Genesis 13:8



**Left:** Heather Oelker, Alex Gayheart, and Rev. Rich Tafel.  
**Right:** Stan & Karen Conger and CSS Student Tirah Keal.  
**Lower Right:** Amy Little and Kurt Fekete in accidental matching stripes.



**Left:** Congratulations Rev. Jay! (The cake was looking so yummy—we almost missed our chance for a picture!)  
**Above:** Rev. Solomon Keal and Andrew Dodd.  
**Right:** Nora, Zsa Zsa, and Trent.  
**Below:** A full chapel to celebrate in song for Rev. Jay Barry.



# clear blue sky

1981  
october

## SCYL Teens at Convention

BY NORA BARNABY, SCYL Clear Blue Sky *Editor*

This year, Convention was held in East Lansing, Michigan. The theme was Envisioning the Future. The majority of our time was spent planning our worship service while the adults were in business meetings, however we also enjoyed the beautiful campus of Michigan State University. The teens swam, played volleyball, and weight lifted in their recreation center. We also enjoyed the delicious food they had to offer; my personal favorite was the ice cream. We had the amazing opportunity to see Rev. James H. Barry inducted into our denomination. Then, bright and early the next morning the teens were up getting ready for our worship service. We got to watch the children's service before ours which was definitely a highlight for us all. Later that day, the whole congregation went on a riverboat which was sponsored by Michigan Association. At the end, there was a Convention banquet, where we enjoyed lots of delicious food and a live band that everyone was dancing to! It is always nice to spend time with friends and make new memories and this Convention was a perfect place to do so. ☪

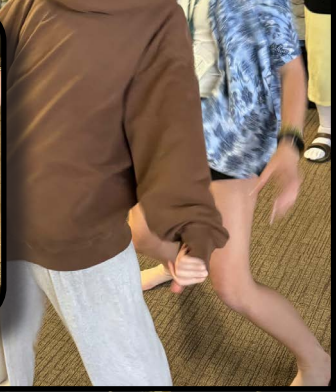


**Back (left to right):** Lily S., Zsa Zsa, Lilly C., Nora, Serena, Charlie, Bedo, Trent, and Ephraim  
**Front:** Ellie, Calliope, Greyson, and Micah



The SCYL Worship Service took place 50 years in the future at the 250<sup>th</sup> Swedenborgian Convention where Trent the SwedenBot (center lower image) was applying to become the first AI minister. Run like a traditional business meeting, the service included music, prayer, and much philosophical debate over the ethical conversation of an AI bot minister.







## Keynote Address

Continued from page 59

ways that are going to be quite strange. But in addition to sort of relationships with AIs that are trying to influence or manipulate us, which is going to happen and is going to be very weird, we're also going to potentially be able to have a relationship with Swedenborg himself. He's going to be back and around to talk to.

One of the folks at the [Swedenborg Foundation](#) that I've had the pleasure of getting to know while on the board is Chris Dunn. And Chris is an amazing person to me. He studied in the ministry to become a minister and then found work with the Swedenborg Foundation and particularly working with Curtis Childs on [Off the Left Eye](#), which most of you are probably familiar with. Chris Dunn has articulated to me that he recognized the capability of using AI to enhance everything that they do. So, he has built AI bots that are helping them to take Swedenborg's message and bring it to thousands of people, sometimes hundreds of thousands of people in the work that they're doing, which is really incredible. And he's also building AI bots that take all of Swedenborg's writings, which as we know are quite voluminous, quite dense at times. It's a difficult hill to climb for a lot of folks to get into Swedenborg. And here now we have models where you can just ask the writings for what Swedenborg said about a certain topic. And rather than having to go through the volumes of correspondence that might track that topic, they can synthesize across hundreds of thousands of pages and give you intelligent answers with some occasional hallucinations and sort of made-up things. But mostly adhering to what's in the text and synthesizing it and translating it and summarizing it and bringing it to entirely new audiences.

# SCCM Meeting Report

BY NANCY LITTLE

The annual meeting of the Swedenborgian Church Children's Ministry (SCCM) was held on June 30, 2024, at Michigan State University. A hybrid meeting allowed attendees to participate in the meeting via Zoom, as well as in-person.

Rev. Kit Billings called the meeting to order at 12:21 PM. Rev. Kit opened the meeting with a welcome and opening prayer. Articles I and III from the SCCM Constitution were read by Rev. Kit. A motion was made to accept the agenda as presented.

Current officers: Rev. Kit Billings, President; Pastor Kelly Milne, Vice President; Bev Titus, Treasurer; Nancy Little, Secretary.

The minutes of the 2023 annual meeting were read and accepted.

Rev. Kit gave his president's report and stated that he continues to have neurological issues due to a concussion and has not been able to devote the time that he would like to the work of the SCCM. Pastor Kelly agreed to step-up as President.

Bev Titus gave the treasurer's report,

So, I think we're going to see both the light and the dark out of this technology like many, but ultimately, it's going to bring us in some ways kind of closer to, I think, some of the realities of our existence here. And as I speak for that, and I won't, I promise, be talking about technology for much longer, but I do want to share just another kind of thought about where this technology is driving this. And this is in this concept of simulation technologies. And this is where I think AI is going to be most useful in the world in the future. 🗣️

A full transcript of the keynote address can be found on our [website](#).

stating that the balance is currently \$11,124.39. The report was accepted.

Bev Titus reported that she has been in contact with Sarah Vallely, a mindfulness coach who specializes in mindfulness for children and teens, about offering a four week mindfulness training (\$120/per person). Bev asked people to use a sign-up sheet to express interest in the training. A one hour mindfulness meditation training will be offered to teens attending the SCYL retreat in fall/winter. Bev will be in contact with Kurt Fekete to make arrangements. SCCM will sponsor a mini course on mindfulness meditation facilitated by Sarah Vallely at the 2025 annual convention.

SCCM continues to work on short religious education videos using the PowToons platform. A list of Top five was compiled. In addition, Rev. Kit was able to obtain Joyce Fekete's Top Ten with the help of Kurt Fekete. Feedback from teens about the videos and ideas for new videos will be sought with the cooperation of Kurt Fekete, SCYL Leader. Pastor Kelly showed a sample video about Noah and his family which she produced using PowToons. SCCM is in the process of purchasing a professional level of PowToons. Pastor Kelly asked people to send their feedback and ideas about the videos to a new email address: [sccmswedenborg@gmail.com](mailto:sccmswedenborg@gmail.com)

Elections were held and the secretary was asked to cast one ballot for the slate:

President: Pastor Kelly Milne  
Vice President: Rev. Kit Billings  
Treasurer: Bev Titus  
Secretary: Nancy Little

Meeting adjourned at 12:51 PM. 🗣️



Convention videos, the Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism program, and virtual content that has been created, can be found here for viewing at anytime!

*Click the YouTube logo above to subscribe!*

### Thank You Photographers!

- Betsy Aldrich**
- Katie Carson**
- Andrew Dodd**
- Kurt Fekete**
- Beki Greenwood**
- Serena Greenwood**
- Renée Machiniak**
- Tom & Bj Neuenfeldt**
- Brittany Price**
- Herb Ziegler**

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### **Central Office Update**

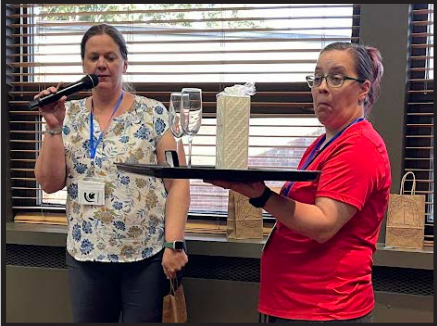
Kia Ora! Central Office Operations Manager Brittany Price is relocating to New Zealand with her family. While we will miss her very much, we wish the Price family all the best on their next adventure this October!

We are now accepting applications for the Operations Manager and Event Coordinator Position. See all the details on [swedenborg.org](http://swedenborg.org).



**Thank You Staff!**

- Rudy Caseres**
- Beki Greenwood**
- Brittany Price**
- Emily Tergliafera**



## Say Yes to Michigan!

BY BJ NEUENFELDT

In the fall of 2023 at the October meeting of the Michigan Association, armed with the knowledge that Convention 2024 already booked at Michigan State University (go Spartans!) and the Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center, the group was getting excited about welcoming other Swedenborgians to our great state.

The budget was set to encourage members of the Michigan Association to attend and provide welcoming help and supplies. Swag bags were designed by Marjie Leas, including note pads from the Church of the Holy City in Royal Oak, and pens from Almont New Church Assembly recognizing that 2024 is the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Almont Summer School. Being proud of the great products made in Michigan, Marjie and B.J. went shopping and got treats for the welcome bags—from corn muffins by Jiffy, to “pop” such as Faygo and Vernors, Sanders Chocolates, Kellogg Rice Krispie treats, trail mix by Kars Nut



**Above:** Marjie Leas, BJ Neuenfeldt, Dorie Litchfield, and Beth Sowles were ready to welcome in-person Convention attendees with their full spread of everything Michigan.

**Right:** Tom Neuenfeldt gives us a wave from the top of the Michigan Princess.

Co., and rocks gathered off the shore of Lake Huron.

The Michigan Association also planned the afternoon outing on the Michigan Princess, a 110-foot-long riverboat, on the Grand River in Lansing, Michigan. We were able to have the whole boat for our group of 100 and

it holds up to 500. There were delicious appetizers available, and we had the privilege of a strolling violinist from the Lansing area that is a regular attendee at Almont.

On the final evening of Convention, live music by local band Betty B. and the Rope Walkers was provided by the Michigan Association to entertain us all at the closing banquet. The banquet tables got pushed back and the dancers came out in force. All ages got in on the action! We hope you all felt welcomed in the mitten state and come visit us again! 🇺🇸

