



Portland in the Rearview

BY REV. DR. JIM LAWRENCE

The surprisingly green urban spaces of downtown Portland, Oregon look lovely in hindsight as we move forward from our 201st annual meeting held in a conference hotel adjacent to Portland State University for those in person, and we also again maintained virtual participation for people to join us from wherever they are for our business sessions, our Mini Courses, and our special services.

In practical terms, we addressed and engaged some very big projects promising significant potential for future ministry outreach from the Swedenborgian Church of North America. We heard how quite realistically Wayfarers Chapel will be rising again in an even more stunning fashion than its original version, which already has worldwide recognition. We learned how the team running the New York New Church transition is converting bricks into people through its visionary New York New Church Legacy Fund that has geared up to support numerous worthy projects and ministries. We heard how the historic Washington, D.C. church has transitioned from its traditional church edifice on 16th Street to a seminar and small meetings style space rich with ambience and surrounded by the Dupont Circle thriving culture of young professionals. We also connected with the vision of the team building the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative, along with all our longstanding virtual ministries such as Spiritual Questers and Spiritual Sunshine.



*Ordination of Lynn Clare Chittick—Laying on of Hands:
Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, Chelsea Odhner, Ben Gunter, B.J. Neuenfeldt,
Dr. Rebecca Esterson, Rev. Shada Sullivan, and Andrea LoPinto*

As is our delight every year, we enjoyed many powerful and enriching Mini Courses that allowed us to abide in our extensive and deep Swedenborgian spirituality, to meet new people and relish longstanding friendships, and to worship, pray, and play together.

In an exceptionally delightful moment, we cheered the official return of a prodigal son ministry, the historic Boston Church on Beacon Hill, at the 20th anniversary of its, shall we say, newsworthy exit, and we received from them a joyous invitation to host our 202nd convention next summer. See you next summer in Beantown! 📺

What's Inside: Meeting Reports • Election Results • Convention Sermon •
New York New Church Legacy Fund • SCYL Convention Recap •
Ordination Service • Keynote Address • And More!

Guest Editorial

Why Go In-person to Convention?

Convention 2025 has come and gone. So much hard work goes into the planning and organizing leading up to the event that some of us are exhausted before we even arrive. Most everyone travels in some way or another—deals with jet-lag, red-eye flights, or ten-hour drives. But why do we travel when we can just attend online? Filling our voting delegates with virtual attendees is a true gift of the times we are living in. But it can never replace the strength of the bonds, the community, and the lasting connections that are made being there together.

The purpose of convention is to execute the annual business of the SNCA, but the magic is what happens between the business meetings. Our annual convention offers us the opportunity to connect with many other Swedenborgians from across North America that we may never have had another chance to meet otherwise. And these relationships stand the test of time; and trust me, it's not because we sat through a business meeting together!

It's the trips to the coffee truck, the swims in the pool, the outings, the joy of a pancake machine, the fellowship once the day is over—that's the magic. I've talked with so many who have long term friendships that started at convention. Martha Richardson and Polly Baxter met at convention in 1972 and have been friends ever since. Nancy Little and Lee Dyer met in 1979 as teens and are still close pals. I met Tirah Keal last year in 2024, and she is someone who I know I will be connected to forever—this is what makes coming to convention special.

So come for the business meetings, make your voice matter. But stay for the friendships and the bonding power that only a Swedenborgian event can provide.

—Beki Greenwood



Every so often at a Swedenborgian event, I meet someone I must have known in a past lifetime. Tirah is for sure one of those people!



I didn't think having a pool at convention would make a difference—when would we have the time? It was one of the best things about this year's convention not only for us, but for the teens, too.



Daily coffee walks with Emily and Jennifer for just a few minutes were some of the best moments of the whole event.

the Messenger

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Submissions must be received by the 10th of the month to be considered for the next issue.

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General Council Pre-Convention Meeting Report

BY KAREN CONGER, RECORDING SECRETARY

The General Council (GC) met virtually on Saturday, May 31, 2025, for their pre-convention meeting. Various reports were received including those from the officers, the Operations Manager, and the Chair of the Council of Ministers.

Under President Jim Lawrence's leadership the GC has recently begun to research insurance assistance for properties owned by the denomination. This effort ties into a broader, ongoing attempt to support all of our ministries with properties, to protect Convention assets, and help ministries manage their financial responsibilities.

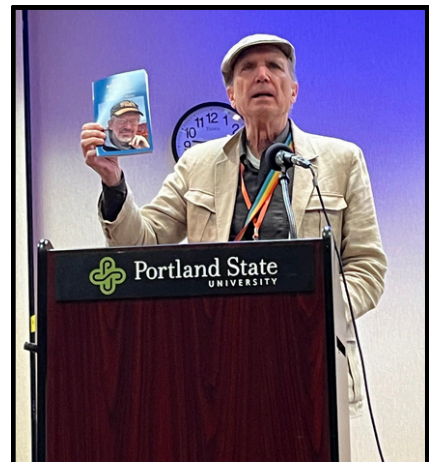
As part of this effort, there is active research underway to explore the feasibility of establishing a group insurance policy. This includes looking into whether such a policy could also extend to properties not directly owned by Convention and whether an umbrella policy could be created to cover additional ministries within the Convention network. Operations Manager Jackie Shihadeh has sent out an email to gather insurance information from various ministries and has begun receiving responses.



Vice President Kurt Fekete looms over Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay, President Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, and Recording Secretary Karen Conger

The GC received information on the NYNC Legacy Fund and the process which continues to settle the lawsuit with the next-door neighbor to the former NYNC property. There is a light at the end of the tunnel regarding this matter, and it is hoped that matters will soon be settled in a way that benefits the NYNC Legacy Fund, at which point the NYNC will formally dissolve. The Legacy Fund Trust hopes to begin granting funds by the end of 2025.

Jim shared that there is a proposed location for the restoration of the Wayfarers Chapel in the City of Rancho Palos Verdes on a site which offers a significantly improved view, and the branding and public-facing identity of the Chapel are actively being developed. Jim emphasized that things are going exceptionally well, and remarked that it's hard to imagine the future of the Chapel looking any more promising. Attendees at convention will have the opportunity to see the plans and learn more about this inspiring new phase. 📱



Spiritual Innovation in the Year of the New Jerusalem

BY REV. RICH TAFEL

The following is a transcript of the compelling keynote address by Rev. Rich Tafel. We encourage you to watch the full video of the keynote on our [YouTube channel](#).

What if the secret to spiritual innovation means showing up? Over my past decade as pastor of the Church of the Holy City in Washington, D.C., I've witnessed something extraordinary: the beauty of watching people find their spiritual path through the twelve gates of the Holy City.

Showing up has meant being present, meeting people where they are, and trusting divine providence to work through us. Let me share what it looks like in real time.

Through the Gate of Physical Need: A 21-year-old jogger pulled a muscle running past our church, stumbled in during a service seeking relief, and discovered deep conversations during coffee hour.

Through the Gate of Intellectual Seeking: A young university professional woman arrived one Sunday wrestling with a spiritual question that wouldn't let her go; that week's sermon spoke directly to her struggle.

Through the Gate of Service: A prominent progressive activist seeking calm after the 2016 election upended her world, found a safe place to discuss her concerns.

Through the Gate of Dialogue: A young secular business leader came for our interfaith dialogue with a Buddhist monk and eventually joined the community.

Through the Gate of Truth-Seeking: A secular law student who was seeking a faith path, became frustrated by D.C. churches that seemed to preach for one political party or another, and checked us out as a place for honest dialogue.

Through the Gate of Healing: A young scientist at the nation's leading laboratory came with questions about her ability to use energy to heal, that she hadn't shared publicly.

One of Swedenborg's great teachings is that the twelve gates to the Holy City speak to the variety of spiritual paths by which we come to God. I believe I've witnessed someone come through each one of those different gates.

What's remarkable is none came to learn about Swedenborg. So it must have been the great preaching, right? I'm sorry to admit, none came because of the world-class preaching of the pastor. They came because they were seeking practices that work, communities that heal, wisdom that helps them navigate a chaotic world—and community there to meet them. Only after we met them, where they were, did they discover that our tradition's insights are perfectly designed for this moment.

The Courage to Show Up

When I was twenty-two, I explored the Swedenborgian ministry as a student in Boston, coming from an American Baptist background. I left because I felt the denomination didn't offer me a clear path forward. Forty years have taught me that we don't get to see the full path forward. Spiritual innovation requires we release our need for certainty about outcomes and remember that our job is simply to show up.



Rev. Rich Tafel gives a compelling keynote address at the University Place Hotel in Portland, Oregon.



The Columbia Falls Ballroom hosted many Convention programs in a comfortable setting.



Rev. Junchol Lee (left) lead the Opening Worship Service before the Keynote Address by Rev. Rich Tafel (right).

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Keynote Address

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As one church member reminds me: "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." I'd add: Trust the Lord and the angels to do the rest. This power of showing up is embodied by our church patriarch, Dr. Malcolm Peck, who joined our community forty years ago and continues serving as both our historian and board vice president. Malcolm demonstrates what showing up looks like across decades.

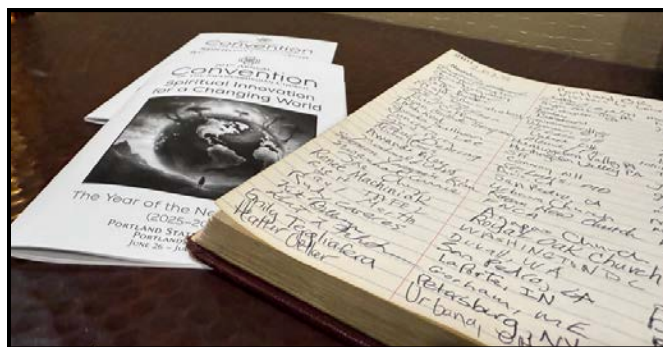
Our tradition is uniquely situated to offer guidance in a chaotic age asking: How do we create peace in a time of polarization? How do we find community in a time of loneliness? What wisdom do we have for the rising generation?

Swedenborg's revolutionary predictions speak directly to these questions:

- To bring about a new order, you must go through a time of chaos
 - Traditional religious forms would fade as new spiritual communities would arise
 - What matters isn't belief alone, but love and usefulness
- These teachings directly answer the questions of our time.

Breaking Through Fear

Despite being blessed with these insights, we Swedenborgians often get stuck. We freeze when innovation feels risky and resources are thin. We calculate how long our endowments will last, instead of asking God, what do you want to birth through us? We risk becoming museum curators instead of movement builders, burying our talents like the fearful servant in Jesus' parable, rather than investing them for the Kingdom. Two things we can do right now to prepare ourselves to be truly innovative: first, avoid burnout so we can show up; second, shift our focus from the past to the future.



If showing up is the critical element to innovation, then we must do all we can to cultivate talent and protect against burnout. What I've learned from the social investment world is investors expect startup leaders to commit fully for several years with large teams before expecting returns. But in church work, we do just the opposite. We ask ministers to work part-time for minimal compensation while carrying everything. We quickly add laypeople to boards, dropping new responsibilities on them. We tell our non-traditional ministers to figure out their own path. This isn't the way to innovation—it's a recipe for burnout. We must transform how we support and cultivate talent in our pulpits, pews, and chaplaincies.

Second, we must escape the nostalgia trap. We must stop looking backward and begin describing the future. We've become overly focused on our past contributions, forgetting to make present ones. At times I become a walking Swedenborg Jeopardy category. I'll take Swedenborg for \$1000.

This famous Swedenborgian tree planter traveled through Ohio? This major city's plan was inspired by Swedenborg's vision? This Swedenborgian pastor coined the phrase "the New Age?" This Swedenborgian inspired the founding of AA?

We've accomplished great things. That's wonderful. But the world doesn't need us to talk about what we once did—it needs us to be great now. We get proficient at talking about the past, but the world doesn't need us to prove Swedenborg influenced AA's founding. They need us to create the next AA.

The question isn't whether we have something to offer—we do. The question is whether we'll cultivate our talent to be there to meet those in need, and whether we have a vision of the future to lead them into.

Three Paths of Spiritual Innovation

So how do we move from preservation to transformation? Innovation can feel impossible for our small community facing overwhelming needs. But what if everything we've seen as our weaknesses, are actually our greatest strengths?

I see three crucial areas where ways we can lead:

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1. We Must Lead Peacemaking

The greatest threat to our nation and world is our descent into a spiral of contempt, addicted to outrage. Swedenborg's teachings offer radical inclusion for a faith community, more crucial than ever. We can be proud of our past efforts of inclusion. My presence tonight as your Chair of the Council of Ministers speaks to this. We need to build on our inclusion.

At our 2022 Long Beach Convention, I introduced Cultural Translation—a bridge-building methodology that doesn't compromise values. Here's how it works: instead of arguing about positions, we help people understand the values beneath opposing viewpoints.

For example, when conservatives express concern about immigration, we help progressives hear the underlying value of security and community stability. When progressives advocate for immigrant rights, we help conservatives hear the underlying value of compassion and human dignity. Once people understand each other's values, they can find creative solutions that honor both.

Today, just three conventions later, Cultural Translation has been taught to White House Fellows, leading government agencies, Navy officers, and corporate leaders. One political leader told me, "This training was a blessing at work, but personally I've built a bridge back to my brother who I haven't spoken to in years." And it is growing: the Society of Human Resource Managers is interested in piloting with their network of a thousand businesses.

Introduced at our convention, supported by our congregation, and piloted with Swedenborgian volunteers nationwide—many sitting here—that's peacemaking in action. That's our inclusive theology lived out. We can begin to share this training through our own denomination network now.



Dr. Emily Tergliafera takes a turn helping Polly Baxter get around Convention.

2. We Must Build Authentic Community

We're living through a loneliness epidemic, but we know how to build genuine community. I've spent a lot of time in a lot of churches full of sweet people. Yet, there's a kindness in our denomination that's actually our secret weapon. I wondered why and the answer might surprise you. I've realized there's no prestige in being Swedenborgian—no social status, no career advancement. If money, prestige, or earthly power is your goal, then look elsewhere.

Those who choose our path, do so purely to be useful. What the world sees as our weakness—being small and unknown—is actually our superpower. We're not protecting institutional power; we're free to focus on transformation.

We must use this insight to innovate new forms of community. The Garden Church is a good example of creating something new to meet the current moment.

In D.C., we sold our massive church building and created Swedenborg House D.C.—a hybrid spiritual center with kitchen, shower, guest space, and areas for both in-person and virtual worship alongside honest conversation.

Our congregation helped redesign our services to include open discussion after sermons, wrestling with questions like: "How do I make a difference? Should I stay in my job?" This is innovation in action.

New York faced a similar cliff—five members, enormous building. They could have managed slow decline, taking the titanic into the iceberg. Instead, President Anna Rich called then-President Jane Siebert for help. Members from across our denomination shared time and energy to help a New York congregation most had never met. Their collaborative leadership transformed their legacy into a \$14 million innovation fund for nonprofits in N.Y. and our Swedenborgian communities.

They didn't preserve the past—they sparked a future. That's what life after death looks like in this world. That's spiritual innovation. These examples show us how we are building community within our tradition. But innovation also calls us beyond our comfortable boundaries to serve those who may never join our churches, but desperately need what we offer.

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3. We Must Serve the Rising Generation

In addition to facilitating peacemaking and building community, we must venture outside ourselves to serve the next generation. In the early 1900s, our D.C. church pioneered the nation's first preschool for Black children—bold innovation for its time. What are we doing today?

Today's challenge is equally urgent. This rising generation is spiritually awake but practically focused. We need to leave our comfort zones to serve them where they are. A member of my congregation, Steve, offers a simple solution: What if we partnered with existing youth programs in our community and offered to work together? When you show up to meet the rising generation where they are, they will take you to places you've never been. Two areas in particular have pushed me to learn more, and I'm beginning to see concrete ways we can engage.

Navigating Mystical Experiences

We are a mystical church and among the rising generation there is a hunger for the mystical. Whether through yoga, breathwork, or medicine journeys, we've got to get out of our heads and into our hearts in developing practices to meet their needs. It requires us to keep an open mind to their new spiritual paths. Numerous secular young adults describe medicine experiences remarkably similar to Swedenborg's writings—direct perception of spiritual reality, encounters with divine love, understanding of universal interconnectedness. Dismissing them means we miss opportunities to serve those genuinely seeking God. Sharing our deep understanding of dark forces could also help protect them.

Imagine if we've started hosting monthly "Mystical Conversations" where young adults share their spiritual experiences—and we explore how Swedenborg's teachings offer framework for understanding these encounters.

The Age of Artificial Intelligence

Another crucial area where we're uniquely positioned to serve the next generation is navigating the age of artificial intelligence. As AI handles cognitive tasks, young people ask deeper questions: "What makes me irreplaceably human? How do I find meaning when machines can do my work? When I did some work with Google ten years ago, they brought me into a meeting to ask from a religious perspective what was uniquely human. Our tradition offers profound answers: that love, wisdom, and spiritual growth are humanity's unique contributions to creation.

Our faith tradition offers profound insights into what makes us essentially human—our capacity for love, our ability to choose between good and evil, our role as spiritual beings having a natural experience. Imagine that we developed workshops for college students and young professionals called "Irreplaceably Human," helping them discover their unique calling in an AI world.



Rev. Sue Turley brought a beautiful display of her original artwork to share and sell among the display tables.

Our faith tradition offers profound insights into what makes us essentially human—our capacity for love, our ability to choose between good and evil, our role as spiritual beings having a natural experience.



Left: SCYL Teens gather together after the Keynote Address: Caroline, Abby, Charlie, Serena, and Teagan with Elin and Nora below.

Below: Rev. Junchol Lee and Rev. Rich Tafel with 2025 ordinand Lynn Clare Chittick.



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The Vision for Our New House

When we commit to showing up and trusting in God's providence amazing things can happen. Those transformation stories I shared of young seekers aren't exceptions—they're the pattern. That young man who pulled a muscle jogging by our church now helps the homeless at the nation's leading social impact housing firm and serves on our board.

That young professional woman full of questions, now leads Sunday worship. That activist who found peace during political chaos, leads our board and runs an organization bringing left and right together around kitchen table issues. That business leader shares his faith journey with skeptical friends and serves as our treasurer and on the Swedenborg Foundation board.

That energy healer recognizes she's not alone and is writing academic papers bridging science, healing energy, and Swedenborg. That law student is building a legal career around bridge-building and service and serves as our youngest board member. None of these innovations could have been written into a strategic plan.

Spiritual innovation happened because we showed up. We met people where they are and asked God to work through us. When we get discouraged, we must remind ourselves that we don't get to see where it ends up.

But when we can articulate our vision and ask God to work through us as instruments of his peace, amazing things can happen.

The New Jerusalem isn't a place we wait for—it's descending to the degree that we co-create it.

Your Invitation to Spiritual Innovation

Transforming the world requires us to transform ourselves. There are small actions we can take:

- To be peacemakers, we must release the contempt you feel for people who vote differently
- To build community, we must offer spaces where the minority voice feels heard
- To meet the rising generation, we must choose curiosity over judgment when young people share their spiritual paths.

The Torch Is in Your Hands

We're not superior because we're Swedenborgian; we're just blessed. To whom much is given, much is expected.

Much is expected of us—specifically, to become instruments of God's peace in a divided world, to create communities where authentic transformation happens, to mentor a generation hungry for meaning beyond materialism.

Swedenborg didn't build a church. He carried a torch that lit the darkness and offered insight. That torch has been passed from generation to generation to each of us to illuminate faith's mysteries.

We cannot hide that light under a basket; we must let it shine before others, that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

Through some strange grace you are here tonight asking God how to be useful. In this very moment, the torch is in our hands. We have the opportunity to light pathways toward healing, to illuminate spaces where the lonely find community, to kindle hope in hearts that have grown cynical about faith. The world hungers for what we carry: practical mysticism, healing community, and the radical truth that love is stronger than contempt.

Those young seekers I've met represent millions approaching the twelve gates of the Holy City right now. They're not looking for another institution to join—they're looking for a community that heals and mentors without judgment.

The New Jerusalem isn't behind us. It's ahead of us, waiting to be born when we have the courage to show up and innovate. The seekers are already at our gates. The world is waiting. The only question for those of us gathered at this Convention is this: What will we light? Thank you. 📱



President, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence welcomes everyone to the 201st Annual Convention for the Swedenborgian Church of North America.



The dessert displays were not only beautiful, but delicious too!



Convention attendees were thrilled to have Rev. Eric Allison in-person.

Council of Ministers Meeting Report

BY REV. KEVIN BAXTER, RECORDING SECRETARY

On July 27, the Rev. Rich Tafel called the Council of Ministers meeting to order shortly after 9:00 AM PDT with twenty-eight Ministers, six Licensed Pastors, four CAM candidates, and a few other guests, at the University Place Hotel and Conference Center in Portland, Oregon.

After dispensing with the normal business of minutes and the like. The chair reviewed the work of the Executive Committee throughout the year. The Misconduct Process for Clergy and Licensed Pastors was reviewed by an attorney and found to be very good. In examining the issues, we believe a simple addition of a gathering of both the Committee on Inquiry and the Misconduct Determination Board would insure both training and clear communication. The Chaplain Committee was established which serves as an oversight and resource group for our chaplains. Because of this, the Church has regained its ability to endorse chaplains to military and government agencies. The chair has been working with General Council to explore creative ways of supporting ministries throughout convention.

Of significant note, the Council took some time to brainstorm and examine the requirements for the denomination's ordination process. The Rev. Junchol Lee will be leading a group to examine our current handbook and process in the light of the cultural shifts and with comments collected in small group discussion.

This did not dampen the spirits of the Council as we received Visions of Ministry from both Ben Gunter and Pastor Paul Deming. In addition to them, we also received and approved of the plan of ministry of Lynn Clare Chittick.

Rev. Baxter answered questions on the current process but then proceeded to talk about the value of prevention. We will be working on ethics videos and misconduct training to help us respond, should the need arise.

The Advisory Placement Committee informed the assembly that Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen has begun a pastorate in Bath, Maine, which is on the heels of last year's pastoral shifts of Rev. Catherine Lauber's to Fryeburg, Maine, and Rev. Alison Moore's to Kitchener, Ontario.


The meeting recessed for a presentation on, "The Enneagram for Spiritual Leadership: Cultivating Self-Awareness and Pastoral Wisdom," which was facilitated by the Rev. Sara Nave Fisher from the Disciples of Christ.

Following which, several ministers gave presentations. Rev. Robert McCluskey gave an update on the New York New Church Legacy Fund. Rev. Sage Cole presented some thoughts on the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaboration. Rev. Dr. Gard Perry has designed a seven-session online course of study the glorification experience of the historical Jesus. Rev. Roslyn Taylor presented about the content creator resources through the Swedenborgian Content Creator's network. She spoke about the need to have interaction and asked folks to do the likes needed by the end of the day. Rev. Taylor also shared some thoughts on Deborah's Tree and Gathering Leaves, which will be held at Temenos this year.

The Council elected Rev. Junchol Lee as the Chair of CAM, Rev. Julie Conoran to the Executive Committee of COM, Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell to continue on the Committee on Admission into the Ministry, Rev. Lisa Solwold to the Nominating Committee, and the 2027 Convention Preacher, Rev. Alison Moore. The Council would also like to thank Jackie, Rudy, and all the support staff that made our meetings possible.

Motion: After thirty-eight years in the ordained ministry, the Rev. Kathleen Easton-Gilhooly entered the fullness of the spiritual world on September 9, 2024. 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. The Convention voted the acceptance of the motion by standing in silence, and a declaration of "Well done, good and faithful Servant."

Motion: After forty-four years in the ordained ministry (eleven with the General Convention), the Rev. Terry Schnarr entered into the fullness of the spiritual world on February 9, 2025. 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. The Convention voted the acceptance of the motion by standing in silence, and a declaration of "Well done, good and faithful Servant."

Motion: At her own request, based on the plan of ministry and by recommendation of the Committee on Admission to the Ministry, the Council of Ministers recommends to the General Convention that Lynn Clare Chittick, who has received a Master of Divinity Degree and a certificate of Swedenborgian Studies, be ordained into the ministry of the General Convention and that this service of ordination be held at this session of the General Convention, her name after ordination to be placed on our Roll of Ministers. 

Business Meeting Report

BY KAREN CONGER, RECORDING SECRETARY

The annual convention business sessions of the Swedenborgian Church of North America convened at the University Place Hotel and Conference Center at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. Many thanks to the good people of the Pacific Coast Association for gifts and hospitality they offered the attendees!

The Credentials Committee reported that there were a total of 98 delegates in attendance, out of a total potential of 188. Nearly all of the associations or conferences within the Church were represented with the exception of the Eastern Canada Conference, the New York Association, and the At-Large membership.

The Council of Ministers' report included the recognition of the passing into the spiritual world of Rev. Kathleen Easton-Gilhooley and Rev. Terry Schnarr. In addition, it was recommended that Lynn Clare Chittick be ordained into the ministry of the General Convention. The latter service was conducted at the beautiful St. James Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon.

Various reports were received including those on *Our Daily Bread*, *the Messenger*, Swedenborgian Community Online (Spiritual Sunshine), The Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative, Wayfarers Chapel, Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism, the Swedenborg Foundation, the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, and others.

Convention 2026 will be held in Boston, Massachusetts. For the full text of the minutes from the business sessions of this year's convention please see the 2025 issue of the Journal which is expected to become available this fall. ☒



Above: Robert Carr presents on the future of Wayfarers Chapel
Below: Digital renderings of the new vision and location for the reconstruction of Wayfarers Chapel



Election Results

Vice President:	Kurt Fekete [†]
Recording Secretary:	Karen Conger [†]
Treasurer:	Jennifer Lindsay [†]
General Council Lay Person:	Emily Tergliafera [†]
General Council Lay Person:	Paul Deming [†]
General Council Minister:	Sage Cole [†]
Standing Com. Communication & Info.:	Kevin Baxter [†]
Standing Com. for Education & Resources:	Dell Rose
Standing Com. for Education & Resources:	Beki Greenwood
Standing Com. for Financial Accountability:	Rachel Madjerac [†]
Standing Com. for Financial Accountability:	Jane Siebert
Standing Committee for Nominations:	Terrie Crenshaw
Center for Swedenborgian Studies Board of Trustees,	
Representative Class:	Jennifer Lindsay [†]

[†]incumbent

The Ultimate Sermon

BY REV. KEVIN BAXTER, CONVENTION PREACHER

Since 1959, it's always a history lesson with me. Since 1959, there's never been a convention preacher who preached more than once in their career. This gives me a feeling of importance about this moment. Some gravitas. For some, it might be a large group; for others, it's their chance to impart some understanding to the larger Church. For me, it must have been a sense of competition because I'm going to preach the ultimate sermon.

The ultimate sermon. There you have it. So the first question I have to ask is, what does ultimate mean, actually? I believe Jim and I spoke about this earlier, because there's nobody who knows what the word ultimate means anymore. The word ultimate can mean the greatest sermon: that was the ultimate sermon. Or it can mean most important: the ultimate goal of the sermon is to transform. Or it can mean (and it's kind of funny) it's the last on the list. But it can also mean the last in a series. "The ultimate decision on what to preach was up to Kevin."

When I was in seminary, I learned the "ultimate" used by Swedenborg is this last notion. The ultimate means the outermost, the fullest, the last thing in the series. The Lord came here, because, well, it was the last thing left to be done.

Earths in the Universe. There you go, I went there, everybody! I said it, *Earths in the Universe*, the book that nobody really likes to talk about. The ultimate means the outermost, the fullest, the last thing in the series.

The Lord came here, because, well, it was the last thing left to be done. Now it's something else about worlds—*Earths in the Universe*, tells us that it was at a certain time, a certain place in all creation that the Lord came to be manifest.



I do not know if being the place where the Lord visited is a compliment or not. It's a nice claim to fame, but it means that we needed it the most. We were the place. The outermost, the end, the place where change needed to be affected to transform all of creation.

We could have been in one of those places in *Earths in the Universe* where the people had mouths in their stomach, so truths would just enter right into us. We wouldn't need to digest them. But no, we have this mouth, neck, and digestive tract—we have to do the work of digesting all of our food.

So, this is correspondence about how we process information. Swedenborg writes in that book that some people just hear God's word and just live off of it, we need to digest it. We need to chew it, we need to swallow it, and we need to figure out what is good, and what is not good (some call it evil, others bad).

So, our tradition talks about this reliance on the ultimate, this Ultimate Experience, that is difficult.

Swedenborg writes that both the spiritual and the natural descend in order from the Divine and end up into the fullness and stability of Creation in the ultimate, or you can just say, "what we do is really important." What finds manifestation? You can love someone and if you never kiss them or hug them, they don't know.

All of us, I'm assuming, exist in this room because we believe we're on a spiritual journey toward regeneration. This physical world is an ultimate plane where all of God is made manifest, but so is all of what is not God made manifest. So, my question is, what do you do to regenerate? How do you do it?

We talk a great deal about change. We can create rituals; we can create actions. All these things are actions that we have to perform in this world. They are all things where the ultimate reality comes into what we do. We love to talk about God being divine love and divine wisdom and end up in this concept: Use. We, as Swedenborgians, want to be of use. Right? Anyone ever find the word, use, to be difficult to understand what is being talked about. It's a conjunction of love and wisdom. It's the form. It's the action. It's the doing of charity, faith, and I like the words, good works instead. Right. Charity. Faith. Good works.

What happens when you mix a little bit of charity? Dump in some Faith. Put it in the oven. Is what you get a good works cake? We are also told that we are containers. We are recipients of God's love. So, we have our will; our will is what we love and what we care about. We have our understanding; it's how we think about things. What is the receptive term we use for good work?

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The Ultimate Sermon

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Oftentimes if you've ever noticed, it's use. But I want to charge us with possibly considering the idea of the word, service, as the container.

As we intentionally do practices to grow in love and we intentionally do practices to grow in wisdom, we meditate on something to feel God's presence. We go to school to learn about things. I would offer that a dedicated form of spiritual growth is just the concept of service in an intentional way, not an abstract way. How do we make our love manifest in the ultimate, in the final form, in an intentional way?

I'm a minister, at least, I think I am. I was ordained. Sometimes I'm doing Church work and it's not intentional. I'm just waking up in the morning, trying to get through the day. Closing the door. But I say, "Oh, I have to make prayer time, right"? Oh boy, I need to make prayer time. I need to make sure I start my day out with prayer. I'm going to create a (I love this term) spiritual activity because it's prayer. Oh, no! I need to prioritize reading scripture and reading Swedenborg so I can be a good Minister. I'm going to make that practice. But you know what I don't do. I don't make an intentional practice of service. How am I actively loving the neighbor? In an intentional way, on a regular basis. How are our churches doing that? Some of our churches are. I'm not accusing anyone. I'm raising the question.

The importance of living in the ultimate is manifesting our faith and spiritual life. It requires us daily exercising our love and our understanding through being loving towards other through honored forms of doing it. Some of it is just in worship services.

As a preacher's kid, I always thought it was funny that they called worship a service because it really did feel like service. Like, I'm talking oil change service where you're just waiting for the guy to come in and give you back your keys so you can leave. When I started taking Latin and finally realized, the word for service is based out of the same word as slavery —Church made so much more sense. So sorry. This is how I felt as a kid, because I just needed to endure worship until its end. After all, it was the cookie at coffee hour I was after! I didn't much care about all the stuff being said in front of me.

It wasn't until I went to Pacific School of Religion and I started helping out at the San Francisco Church that I began to understand how transformational worship was. When I was driving fellow students there, I'd get there really early because they had to. I would sit down with John Gall and fold bulletins, with a free lesson on the appropriate way to be a docent. After that, I was the tall guy who could reach the candle chandelier. And at some point between the first time I did it and the end of that student's internship, I started going to church and appreciating church because it opened things in me that I didn't understand. When that internship ended, I was still going.

Along with this, my job at Pacific School of Religion was being the AV geek. I attended worship and the like multiple times a week, because I ran all the AV equipment. The transformation for me was, in the beginning, I was kind of a snot. This isn't the right way to worship. They're not doing it the right way. And, at some point, I started realizing these people are really connecting to God. What's wrong with me? And I realized I was bringing the wrong energy. I wasn't wanting to manifest in the ultimate, a closeness to God. I was wanting to be right about the right way to do it. I was wanting to say this is proper worship, and this is not proper worship. But at the end of the day, there are lots of ways to do it. I saw some beautiful things. How do we do service in the world? Part of our service is attending worship with the desire to actually meet God, no matter the styrofoam discs of communion bread or not. No matter the musical choices. No matter whether or not you enjoy it. Certainly, we have preferences and things we enjoy, but we need to welcome what is different. I'm not saying that. I'm saying don't close ourselves down from the Divine that is around us, and surrounding us. Being in connection and worship with God is about being present in the ultimate, to open the door to who God is.

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The Ultimate Sermon

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What room? What container are you opening? Are you opening the upper room? Are you looking when you read scripture to ask how the Bible is wrong or are you looking when you read scripture to transform your soul? How we step into it, the questions we ask are important. Wesley Gray. Everybody knows Wesley Gray, right? Well, anyone who applies for money knows Wesley Gray, it's the Gray Fund. We don't need to know who Wesley Gray is. But you know, I ran into a guy the other day when I was talking about visiting Wesley Gray's grave, and he was like, "man, we have a Gray roof." I paused—somewhat shocked at this non-Swedenborgian—and looked at him and said, "you know who Wesley Gray is?" The man responded, "of course, he was the best slate roofer Massachusetts has ever seen." Wow, this guy actually knows who Gray is. Wesley Gray was great. He was an early adopter, he loved new things. He threw a party because he got a light bulb. He invited the entire town of Stoneham to his house to see his light bulb and threw a party, brought in singers from Cambridge to entertain people when it got dark enough so they could still see their music. He viewed the light as being this great transformational thing. He also really believed more than anything in Mission. Every cent he gave to our church, he gave to Mission. Sometimes I asked the question, are we living up to what he wanted?


It was not until about 1925 that the federal government put in place our immigration laws. So people would just come to the U.S., and even in the great land of Massachusetts (which we all know the closest thing to heaven) they would be given factory work and treated horribly.

Gray and a group of a few other men created a place which is now known as the Greg Neighborhood School. It is still in existence 200 years later. And it was created simply to educate immigrant children who came into the United States. He really disliked the amount of abuse children were getting, being put into working situations and not being given a chance to live. He embraced the refugee or immigrant. The Greg Neighborhood House still says that they were founded by the men from the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem on their webpage; we have not spoken to them in eighty years! The differences we can make when we simply care about someone other than ourselves are incredible, they are transformational. We can be small and transform the world. If we intentionally try to do it—if we are of intentional service to others—it is the greatness that we can do.

From this would form groups dedicated to helping children like the Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, one of Gray's favorite charities. The Boston Church threw a Christmas party with an elephant (real or not?). Either way it was dressed like Santa Claus. It was a fundraiser to help children. It was an ultimate that needed to be done. In fact, if you look at any of our funds from these people, who donated these money, all of these people did great things.

How do we give to our denomination? Do we give? Would anyone here like to be on the nominating committee? No one likes to be on the nominating committee. Yeah, it is a great committee but it's horrible because everyone feels like they are calling everyone who will be telling them, "No!"

How do you give to your denomination? Who are the faces that you see always sitting around the tables, and, if it's not you, why isn't it you? What does it mean to be of service—to your church; to be of service, to your community; to be of service even to your country in an intentional way that isn't accidental? These are the ultimates and in this ultimate our divine purpose is fulfilled.

We must honor the daily responsibility for us to make everything we touch, Holy Ground. A lot of it's about the why. But if we are not intentionally doing it, it's accidental. So I charge, I challenge all of us this year to ask the question of what is your ultimate and what is your ultimate spiritual practice or being of service. In the various areas that you live. 



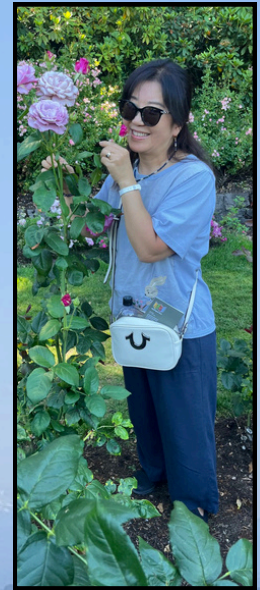
Jackie Shihadeh passed out the communion sacraments to Rev. Susannah Currie



The Convention Worship Singers led by Pastor Paul Deming



Rev. Paul Martin





CSS Commencement Address

BY REV. DR. GARD PERRY, CSS SPEAKER

Thank you all for being here in support of our Center for Swedenborgian Studies. Please celebrate the achievement of our graduate, Roxanne Sperry. It was my privilege to be her Site Supervisor at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly 2024 Summer Session. I came away from that week knowing I had been with a capable, multiply talented individual. I was enriched by our many meaningful conversations. God's speed and God bless!

In this talk I take you to the campus of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies followed by stop at the founding of the New Church Theological School (our legal name) in 1866—with a nod to the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem—which was instrumental in that founding.

Please join me now for a short visit to our campus at 1798 Scenic Drive, at the Graduate Theological Union, high above the East Bay of San Francisco. It's an early summer day in the Bay Area, and we are standing as a group on a sprawling green lawn within a large courtyard. Looking to our right is a Tudor style stone and stucco building with a huge and heavy brown wooden door. That is where our faculty offices are and our library. Turning our heads to the left is an expansive view to the west. There in the distance is the San Francisco skyline, that large body of water glistening in the sun below us is San Francisco Bay, and, yes, that's the Golden Gate Bridge poking out of the fog in the distance. I can feel a soft westerly breeze on my face.

But wait! We are on a tour of the campus. Someone is speaking. It's our tour guide. Let's see if we can hear what they are saying. I can hear them now and they are telling us about our theological school, the Center for Swedenborgian Studies:



Rev. Dr. Gard Perry leads the commencement for the Certificate in Swedenborgian Studies.

We are a welcoming community of learners at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Guided by the Bible, which is our sacred text, and by the theological insights of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Center of Swedenborgian Studies provides scholarship, training for spiritual leaders, and engagement with emerging trends in society. Our perspective on the future informs our attention to the need for social transformation, to the interior transformation of individuals, and to the dynamic interface between the two.

Our library serves the Center, the Church, and the wider world; our scholars teach and conduct research and development; and the school collaborates with the Committee on Admission to the Ministry to prepare spiritual leaders for ministry within the Swedenborgian Church; and beyond. Dr. Rebecca Esterson is our Dean; Rebecca is the Dorothea Harvey Professor of Swedenborgian Studies who administers our students' learning journeys, teaches, and writes in the area of Swedenborg and Jewish-Christian relations to critical acclaim.

The Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber is the George. F. Dole Professor of Swedenborgian Studies, who also teaches and writes in many areas, including Swedenborg, the environment, the arts, and literature, where I am told he is not only on the leading edge – he is on the leading edge of the leading edge. Tom Neunfeldt is the Chair of our Board of Trustees; Tom's vast experience and broad perspective helps us navigate the quaking landscape of graduate theological education.

Our thanks to each of them and to our staff.

We leave our tour of the campus at 1798 Scenic Drive in Berkeley, California headed for Boston, Massachusetts. The year is 1818. We are now in Boston! We are walking into the Back Bay home of prominent resident and charter member of the soon to be Boston Society of the New Jerusalem. We must be quiet for there is a small ceremony in progress to inaugurate the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem, remembered thus by one of those present:

The ceremony was very simple. We stood in a circle around the room; suitable forms were read; including some passages from the Word; we knelt and united in repeating the Lord's Prayer; the proper questions were asked and answered. We were then declared to be a duly constituted church."

Reflecting on that moment fifty years later, Sampson Reed wrote: "Is it too much to suppose that the heavens, then new indeed, may have been opened, and the minds of those present made receptive of their influence, by which conflicting

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CSS Commencement

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elements were harmonized, and a Divine benediction given to the work which was then commenced?"

That work included founding the New Church Theological School. We travel in time. The year now is 1865. The Rev. Thomas Worcester, pastor of the Boston Society and President of Convention is delivering an address in which he calls for the creation of a theological school. Accomplished in short order, the school's first home was housed in the Waltham New Church School Chapel (Waltham Massachusetts 1866); then in the vestry of the Boston Society (1878); at the Sparks Mansion in Harvard Square alongside the Cambridge Chapel (1901); 48 Sargent Street as the Swedenborg School of Religion (1966); and, with the Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence at the helm, the school moved to Berkeley California as the Swedenborgian House of Studies at the Pacific School of Religion (early 2000s); and, as the Center for Swedenborgian Studies at the Graduate Theological Union (presently).

We're at the end of our tour, which leaves a moment to acknowledge the special relationship between the Center for Swedenborgian Studies and the Boston Society. Under the steady hand of the Rev. Kevin Baxter, the Boston Society has come back into the fold of the General Convention and has restored a generous annual grant to support the library. Thank you, Kevin!

With thanks again to our faculty, Board of Trustees, and to each of you - for your support! God Bless You! 🙏



Dr. Rebecca Esterson leads a Mini Course, "Created in the Image of God: Imago Dei and D.E.I." to a full room of in-person attendees.



Rev. Jane Siebert celebrates fifty years of ordained women in the Swedenborgian Church of North America by recognizing the fiftieth anniversary of Rev. Dorothea Harvey's ordination.



Dr. Dylan Odhner presents his portable labyrinth for his Mini Course, "The Labyrinth as a Spiritual Praxis."

Ordained to Belong: Embodied Ministry for Remembering Wholeness

BY CHELSEA ODHNER, ORDINATION SPEAKER

We're here to celebrate this milestone in Lynn's life of becoming ordained.

As I reflected on her and what it's like for her to be stepping into ministry, my mind was drawn to the fact that she grew up in Maine: the lighthouse state! Lighthouses and their function are rich with symbolism for ministry.

Maine has sixty-five lighthouses and nearly a third of those mark the entrances to the thoroughfares and safe harbors of Penobscot Bay where she grew up. When you're out on the water, in a sailboat, in the dark, navigating winds and waves and rocky shorelines, to see a lighthouse is to feel safety, relief, a sense of direction, beauty and awe.

When the world is in shadow, we need people who tend to the light, who remind others of it, and hone their own capacity to absorb and reflect it. By stepping into ministry and being ordained, Lynn is committing to being a keeper of the light.

Light, of course, is all around us but we don't perceive it unless it's absorbed by something and reflected. In the darkness of outer space, it takes a reflector to make the light known. This is true even in our own personal systems, our inner world, where our spiritual self can be a lighthouse for our earthly self.

We all find ourselves in the dark sometimes, in what can seem like an inescapable shadow, and yet even the darkness is full of light, if you know how to sense it.

Lighthouses help ships navigate dangerous shorelines, and give them reference points so they don't crash. The original, natural lighthouses are the sun, moon, and stars.

When you're on the open seas, these celestial lighthouses can guide you, but when you're near the shore, by land, you need something on the ground, something that brings the light down to this level.

The light in us is God's divine light. We can absorb this light through our inner self and embody it in our outer self. The best lighthouses are able to reflect as completely as possible all the brightness of the light inside and direct it clearly to help others.

I'm going to talk about what it means to embody the light, as a lighthouse, and then offer some thoughts on how we do that.

Light as it comes into us, is inherently whole. Swedenborg writes that the Lord flows in with all his divine love and all his divine wisdom, undivided and whole wherever it is. We each take in as much as we are able and willing to embody (*True Christianity* §364).

Every present moment, Swedenborg writes, contains the Lord's eternity and infinity. On account of that, angels can come into the Lord's presence in a split second, without any intervening space or time (*Secrets of Heaven* §1382).

This is true for us too. In *True Christianity*, Swedenborg writes, "Love and wisdom flow into human minds the way heat and light from the world's sun flow into bodies, bringing them to life depending on the quality of their form. Each form takes what it needs from the general inflow" (§364).

Love and wisdom is the light. So how do we embody it? By allowing our earthly self to become receptive to our spiritual self.

To reflect the light out, we first absorb it, allowing it to come all the way down to the outermost parts of ourselves.



Chelsea Odhner delivers a wonderful message at the Ordination Service.

The outermost level in us is our body and its sensations. Our body is a portal to spirit. It grounds all of what is spiritual within us. Swedenborg writes, "Our thinking and our willing, which are spiritual, flow down into our sensations and actions, which are earthly, and are completed and take on a permanence there. If we did not have these latter functions as well, if we lacked these sensations and actions at our outermost boundaries, the thoughts and feelings of our spirits would dissipate like things that had no defined outlet or foundation." (*Last Judgment* 9 [8]).

The reflector in us is our bodies! And as I've gotten to know Lynn, she is someone who knows this intuitively. This outermost level, the realm of earthly sensation, is where we start to connect to spiritual things; through this level, we start to open our spiritual senses. And it is through our spiritual senses that we can perceive the light, the inflow of the divine, and begin to participate in its influence on us.

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Ordained to Belong

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It takes time for our outer self to be willing to embody the inner light. It's a gradual process. A lifelong and even eternal journey.

To our outer senses, anything inside feels dark. It can feel like nothing is there. And when it feels like nothing is there, we feel like we are on our own and that it is up to us to make sure everything is okay.

So, how does our outermost level begin to awaken to the presence of the light inside of it?

It's the most amazing thing, but you simply begin by bringing your attention to sensation. This interrupts the flow of reactivity by bringing awareness instead. You can just start with a bodily sensation and bring curiosity to its qualities, and that focused attention gradually develops from a felt-sense, into a multi-dimensional image.

When we do this, we can't predict what will happen, but by being present we are in the presence of the divine. We are opening to divine inflow and it will give us new impulses, motivation, and insight. As you sit with it, the sensation becomes a dynamic image that you can connect with and relate to. Allowing you to ask questions about what it is thinking or believing and feeling.

As it turns out, the light is particularly concerned with how open or receptive we are to perceiving love. The divine light that flows into us knows exactly what needs to happen to soften us to love. I've come to understand that this is what healing is. This is the root. This is divine love and wisdom experienced.

I invite you right now to turn your attention inward, if you're open to it. Notice what it feels like inside to be you in this moment. What sensations are present? You might notice the rhythm of your breathing, how it feels to be sitting in your chair, or a certain quality in the energy of your body, perhaps a heaviness, or a buzzy-ness. You might notice particular areas of tension, or you might notice the absence of sensation, areas might feel numb.

As you scan your body right now, see if there is a particular area of sensation that you are drawn toward and allow your awareness to settle there. And as you focus your attention on this one area if it feels okay to, start to bring some gentle curiosity to it, to this sensation you're noticing. What are its boundaries? What's happening at the edges of it? How far does it reach? Where does it feel like the center of it is? Is it heavy or light? Moving quickly or slowly, or not at all? If it feels okay to, just allow yourself to be with it right now. It might shift and adjust as you give your attention to it. Without judging yourself or second-guessing what you're feeling, I invite you to open your heart to it. In whatever way feels right, let this sensation know that you're here noticing it with love or caring. You can extend your love toward it like a cool breeze or a mist entering a forest. How does it shift in response to you letting it know that? You might ask if it has anything it wants you to know. If it did share something, you can thank it. Then notice if there has been any shift in the quality of how it feels within you just since you first turned your attention inward.



Stunning views of the inside of the St. James Lutheran Church from the balcony.



B.J. Neuenfeldt once again shares her talents as the Convention Accompanist.



The Convention Worship Singers perform at the Ordination Service.

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Ordained to Belong

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It takes courage to connect to divine love in your body, in the sensations of our outer self. It can feel confusing and overwhelming, even impossible or unreal. This is why we need lightkeepers, on the ground, with us, as we navigate the rocky terrain and unseen hazards of this life. Especially when it's dark and cloudy, lightkeepers help us build the confidence we need to trust in the navigation of our own inner celestial light bodies, to believe that they are even there. Whether out at sea, or being welcomed into safe harbor, lighthouses support us on our journey.

All lighthouses are suited to their unique location. We need different lighthouses for distinct shorelines. Lynn is taking this step into ordained ministry as someone who has opened to the light within herself, who has surrendered to the journey and continues to trust the guidance of her inner light. As she becomes her own unique lighthouse, she will undoubtedly help others who haven't yet found the light within themselves or who have and have lost touch. Through ritual, service, and ceremony, grounded in the body, connected to the light in all things, she will help us find our way.

Thank you Lynn, for taking this step on your journey to benefit our collective community. I'm excited for where this next phase of your journey will lead you. I'm grateful for how you reflect the light and help us all to see and feel it in ourselves. ☦



Seasons of Change

BY LYNN CLARE CHITTICK

Psalm 77:10–20

Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work and meditate on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God is holy. What god is great like our God?"

You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples. You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron."



Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence leads the Ordination Worship Service on June 29, 2025.



Let us Pray:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Divine Love and Wisdom,

We come before You with reverence, humility, and awe.

You know the paths we have all walked, the fears we each hold, and the flame You have placed within our souls.

We each stand on the edge of something sacred. Let this moment be the moment we each stand together on this holy ground.

Remove all that is false. Strip away what is not ours to carry.

Let us step forward, not by our strength, but by Yours, beloved Lord. May our life become a vessel of Your peace, Your truth, and Your use.

AMEN

Today, we gather to celebrate a sacred rite—the ordination of a servant called to lead and serve within the divine plan. As I reflect on this milestone, I am drawn to the powerful symbolism of seasons—natural, spiritual, and eternal—Seasons guide our journey of renewal and growth. Swedenborg teaches us that the divine governs these seasons, and through them, souls are renewed and refined.

We have just entered the summer season, a time of flourishing and growth. The divine light shines brightest and reminds us of how love and wisdom help our virtue mature. It brings us new love and advancement. It is expansive, and the flowers are in full bloom. The fields around us are also in full bloom. As we look into summer and consider where we are in this season, it is a time when love and virtues mature. This is a period of new love's growth and when we start to understand and radiate the deep virtues of our soul. This is when the divine light shines brightest in this phase.

We have been discussing Spiritual Innovation over the past few days. What a blessing it is to learn, to be transformed, and to hear from all of you, my dear brothers and sisters. A good friend of mine asked me what ordination means. We looked it up. It means to put your life in order. When I think of God's seasons of change, I continually know that God has a plan. God has a place in each of our hearts where it is defined and embedded into the elements of divine love to work with, deepen, and exchange our hearts together.

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Seasons of Change

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When I think of the title of my talk, “Seasons of Change,” revelation comes to mind.

Revelation 21:5 ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Highlights the divine promise of ongoing renewal. We are constantly being renewed, *continuously!*

Swedenborg teaches us that the divine governs the cycles of nature and that these cycles reflect the ongoing evolution of the soul. In his words, “All things are momentary in the world, but in their essence, they are eternal; and all things are renewed” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* §340). We observe this truth in the seasons—each season is a phase in the divine dance of creation and renewal.

- Spring: a season of awakening, not only in nature but also within our hearts. In True Christianity, Swedenborg speaks of spiritual rebirth: “He who is being regenerated is like the springtime. New life begins to sprout.” It calls us to open ourselves to divine love, planting seeds of faith and hope.
- Summer: Divine Providence—a season of flourishing, where love and virtues grow stronger. The divine light shines brightest during this time. Swedenborg describes this as the period when “the new growth of love begins to appear” (*Divine Providence*, §42). It encourages us to nurture our virtues and spread kindness of renewal.”

The internal examination of how we change, how we help each other change, and how our own nature evolves isn’t just about the weather of spiritual chaos; it’s also about the weather of human connection.



You have helped me transform, along with every teacher, friend, and family member. On this day, the deep witness of the 50th anniversary of Dorothea Harvey, the first woman ordained in our denomination, has also profoundly changed my order of service.

Yes, this experience changed me; tears came, and this is the moment I say when things like this happen, “Grace Appears.”

I have to admit, when I looked at this correspondence, I wondered what Dorothea Harvey was thinking fifty years ago, during her season of change.

Change is often met with resistance or fear, but Swedenborg shows that it is vital for our spiritual growth. Each season prepares us for what lies ahead, leading us closer to divine love and wisdom.

In our personal lives, we experience periods of challenges and periods of ease.

In our communities, we encounter times of hardship and times of celebration.

Recognizing that Divine Providence guides these seasons helps us develop patience, trust, and humility.

Your journey becomes sacred not because it is easy, but because it teaches us to confront our past regressions.

So, when I was afraid of becoming a pastor, of answering this call, or unsure why I was doing the next right thing—the one thing I worked so hard for—I asked ChatGPT. I asked, “Why am I so afraid to be ordained, so afraid to enter this next phase of the pastor call?”

This is what it gave me. Swedenborg writes, “The Lord alone acts, and man receives” (*Divine Providence* §171).

You are not called to carry the sacred—you are called to be carried by it.

- You may fear losing parts of your freedom or identity outside of “pastor.”
- But spiritual leadership done well is not a narrowing—it’s an unfolding.

You are not stepping into a cage. You’re stepping into a field—perhaps even one you helped plant. It was amazing, to hear this and I read more.

Move forward with courage. When waters rise, remember the wonders of old. When your footprints seem invisible, trust that God’s way is still through the sea. And when others are lost, may you be the one who leads—not by power or certainty, but with compassion and faith.

- In the moments when I fall down, Swedenborgian wisdom says: The Lord never bestows a spiritual office without also granting the power to fulfill it.

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The act itself attracts Divine influx. You don't need to be fully ready — just willing.

Swedenborg states that angels experience a holy fear—not terror, but “a sacred awe of the Divine” (*Heaven and Hell* §282).

You are feeling this holy awe. That is not a reason to turn back. It is a sign you are very close to the veil.

Well, at Almont, I remember my sermon on the Tabernacle and the lifting of the veil. In the cloud, lifted by angels—both seen and unseen—were designed by my God. For this, I am eternally grateful. I am forever supported in taking this call to the next level. I know you, God, are with me. I know we are here to support you, God. And I believe all my brothers and sisters before me can understand—when the thunder roars, when the waters surround us, and lightning strikes—we stand upon this veil and know that God whispers, I am with you. Thanks be to GOD! ☦



clear blue sky

1981
october

SCYL Teens at Convention

BY NORA BARNABY, SCYL CLEAR BLUE SKY EDITOR

At this year's convention in Portland, Oregon, the teens had a fun experience getting to stay in the hotel for the first time. Much of our time was spent thoughtfully planning our worship service, swimming, and playing Codenames. We also enjoyed delicious meals from local food trucks. I give them a 10/10 and as a picky eater that is high praise. A special highlight for the group was traveling to St. James Church to witness the beautiful ordination of Lynn Chittick. The teens then put on a successful worship service, "Serena and the Three Churches," where Serena Greenwood explored different spiritual communities to discover what resonated with her. After the stressful part was over, we got to have a little fun. We took a bus over to Powell's City of Books, which if you didn't know is the world's largest independent book store. This was like a dream come true for the readers in the group. Finally, we ended our time together with a closing banquet and some dancing with a DJ. Another amazing convention in the books and I can't wait to see what is in store for us next year! 📺



Left to right: Heather Oelker, Teagan, Nate, Conner, Bedo, Charlie, Micah, Abby, Caroline, Elin, Zsa Zsa, Serena, and Nora





From Murray Hill to Mission: The New York New Church Legacy Fund

BY REV. ROBERT MCCLUSKEY AND REV. RICH TAFEL

A New Chapter in 163 Years of Faithful Service

After more than a century and a half of worship and ministry in Manhattan's Murray Hill neighborhood, the New York Society of the New Church has embarked on an exciting new chapter. When the congregation sold its historic building on East 35th Street in 2022, they didn't simply close a door, they opened countless new possibilities for Swedenborgian ministry and mission.

The proceeds from the sale have created the New York New Church Legacy Fund, a forward-thinking initiative that transforms bricks and mortar into living ministry. This fund ensures that the spiritual legacy of New York's New Church community will continue to grow and flourish in innovative ways.

Continuing the Mission Through Strategic Giving

The Legacy Fund operates with a clear mission: to support projects that embody the Swedenborgian values of inclusivity, practical service, spiritual growth, and community building. Rather than maintaining one physical location, the fund now has the flexibility to support ministry wherever it can make the greatest impact.

"We're not just preserving our past—we're investing in our future," explains board Chair Rev. Robert McCluskey, who once served as pastor of the New York New Church.

The initiative operates on two complementary tracks: supporting recognized Swedenborgian Church of North America organizations, while also partnering with nonprofits throughout the greater New York metropolitan area that share our values and mission.

Opportunities for Innovation and Growth

The fund offers grants of up to \$50,000 per project, with twenty grants planned for the first year—ten for Swedenborgian organizations and ten for New York area nonprofits. This represents a significant opportunity for creative ministry initiatives across our denomination.

Priority areas for Swedenborgian organizations include:

Special priority will be given first to ordained Swedenborgian Ministers or Licensed Pastors with plans to establish a new Swedenborgian society in New York City, reflecting the fund's commitment to maintaining along with the New York Korean New Church a vibrant Swedenborgian presence in the nation's largest city.

The next priority will be organizations in the New York area and then to all applicants nationwide.

Areas of focus for applications include:

- Church growth and community outreach — Expanding our reach and welcome
- Bringing Swedenborgian insights to the broader community — Sharing our wisdom beyond church walls
- Inclusion and social justice — Living out our values in concrete ways
- Creative ministry initiatives — Exploring new forms of faithful service
- Leadership development — Nurturing the next generation of servants
- Spiritual outreach and community building — Strengthening connections within and beyond our communities

The focus on this year's grants are on growth and outreach. We are not focusing on building programs. Those requests should be sent to the building fund.



New York Legacy Fund

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A Simple Application Process

Applicants should prepare their request in a one-page (longer applications will be rejected) document that answers four key questions:

- What is the project's goal?
- What are concrete plans for implementation?
- What is your funding requests (up to \$50,000)
- What is your overall budget for the program including cost breakdowns.

Our goal is to ensure that good ideas can move quickly from vision to reality.

All eligible SCNA organizations—including societies, ministries, camps, theological institutions, and other official activities—are encouraged to consider how this funding might support their calling to serve in meaningful and innovative ways. Please send your one-page document or any questions to Rev. McCluskey at nynclf@gmail.com.

Key Dates:

- We are accepting applications now as of this article being published.
- Applications will close August 30, 2025, when the board will vote on the ten to be funded this year.
- The winning applications will be announced October 15, 2025 via email to applicants.

The goal of this board is to provide similar grants on an annual basis. Receiving a grant in 2026 doesn't ensure or preclude an organization from getting grants in future years.

Dreaming Boldly for the Future

"We encourage you to dream boldly," the fund's organizers emphasize. This isn't just about maintaining existing programs, instead it's about imagining new possibilities for Swedenborgian ministry in the 21st century. Whether that means innovative worship experiences, community service initiatives, educational programs, or entirely new forms of spiritual outreach, the Legacy Fund stands ready to support visionary projects.

The transformation of the New York New Church from a single congregation in Murray Hill to a catalyst for widespread ministry throughout the region reflects the dynamic nature of faithful service. As Emanuel Swedenborg himself taught, true spiritual life is always growing, always seeking new ways to serve the divine purpose of love and wisdom in the world.

As the fund's mission statement beautifully captures: "Let's continue building a vibrant future rooted in Swedenborgian wisdom and service." The stones of the old building may have found new purposes, but the spiritual foundation they supported continues to grow stronger than ever.

The New York New Church Legacy Fund represents a bold step forward—proof that sometimes the most faithful response to change is not to resist it, but to embrace it as an opportunity for even greater service. 🌱

Rev. Robert McCluskey is Chair of the Board of Trustees with the New York New Church Legacy Fund and also former minister of the New York New Church who provided leadership for fifteen years at the iconic church in Murray Hill.

Rev. Rich Tafel serves as pastor of the Church of the Holy City in Washington, D.C., chair of the Council of Ministers, and member of the NYNCLF board.



SwedenborgianCommunity.org

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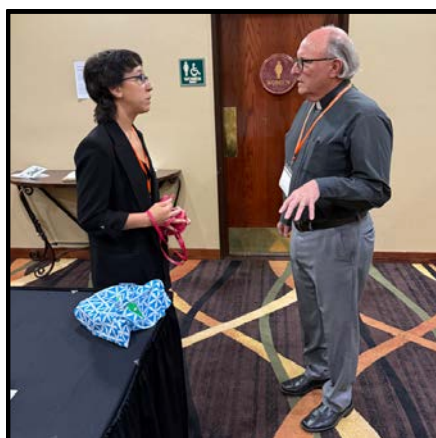
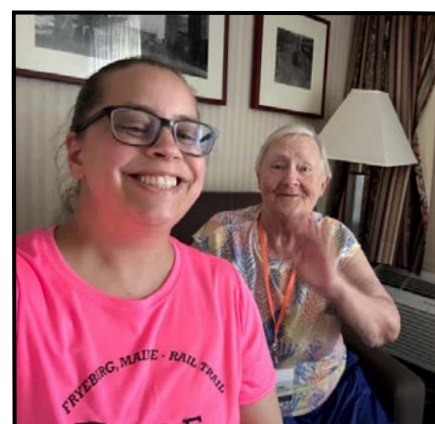
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