



Convention 2026 Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice

June 26—June 30, 2026

Join us this year in the greater Boston area!

Call for Mini Course Presenters!
Share your passion and knowledge as a Mini Course presenter this year!

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SCYL Winter Retreat

Teens tackled the seven deadly sins at this year's winter retreat. Also, meet the 2026 SCYL officers!

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From our Church Communities:

Swedenborg Chapel

Ben Gunter, ministerial fellow and CSS student, reflects on Wayfarers and the Christmas Eve service at the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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The Garden Church

An invitation to help those who are struggling with food insecurity, while also supporting local artists. The Garden Church in San Pedro, California, hosts their third annual Soup-er Bowl fundraiser!



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...And More!

General Council Meets at the New Swedenborg House in DC

BY BEKI GREENWOOD, RECORDING SECRETARY



General Council and Church of the Holy City members. Back: (left to right) Jimmy Cox, Dr. Emily Tergliafera, Beki Greenwood, Rev. Thom Muller, Ross Capon, Jennifer Lindsay, Rev. René Machiniak, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, Kurt Fekete, and Malcolm Peck. Front: Jackie Shihadeh, Herb Ziegler, Rev. Rich Tafel, and Rev. Sage Cole. (Not pictured: Tony Raffa took the photo).

It was a mild, mid-November weekend as members of the General Council arrived in our nation's capital for their annual fall hybrid meeting. Looking forward to two full days of meetings on the horizon, members trickled into the hotel following a fifteen-minute ride from the airport (passing several of our national monuments) and settled into their spacious hotel rooms. Early arrivals were invited by Rev. Sage Cole to attend a Be Love, Be Honest, Be Useful gathering hosted by the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative at nearby Melissa Donaldson's house—a collaborative's board member. Greeted by a buffet of Indian cuisine, several General Council members enjoyed an evening of good food,

good conversation, and fun games. Others who were unable to attend this gathering found other local gems of cuisine to enjoy close to the Dupont Circle area of Washington, DC. A perfect way to rekindle connections and get ready to work together to make decisions together for the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

The Royal Sonesta hotel is conveniently located two blocks away from the Swedenborg House on Q Street—the new home of the Church of the Holy City and the Washington, DC society. What a treat to walk over and be warmly welcomed by Rev. Rich Tafel and Jimmy Cox, the longtime facility manager of both the former

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Church Calendar

- **February 4, 2026:** Workshop with the Social Justice Committee (p. 15)
- **March 21, 2026:** General Council Meeting
- **April 1, 2026:** Association Membership information is due at Central Office
- **April 3–April 5, 2026:** Central Office of the Swedenborgian Church is closed for the Easter holiday

Submission Deadline Reminder

Time-sensitive articles submitted to *the Messenger* must be received by the **14th of each month** to be considered for print in the following issue.

Editor's Corner

Two "New" Church Communities



Blink and you might miss it. Two organizations were added to the official membership rolls of the Swedenborgian Church of North America! The Maine Association now recognizes Fryeburg New Church Assembly as a full member of the Maine Association, and the Michigan Association now recognizes Almont New Church Assembly as a full member of the Michigan Association! (See p. 20 for the announcement.)

When I worked in Central Office, my winter season between Christmas and Convention was membership season. I spent many hours communicating with all of the Associations and Conferences about who is or is not in their official organization, who is a member vs. who is a friend, and who can send delegates to Convention. I am happy to see these two organizations added to their respective Associations as member churches who can now be represented at Convention.

In the Swedenborgian tradition we understand that church is more than an organization, membership body, or building. Church is shared community, values, faith, and acts of charity. Church is a living thing made up of people, not places. Therefore it feels incredibly appropriate and valuable for the denomination to recognize that these camp communities are living church communities for many people. The organization is expanding to include a more diverse and inclusive interpretation of what a living church community can look like.

Please join me in welcoming these two "new" churches!

—Brittany Price

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the Messenger

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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.

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*Message from the President***A Time to be Silent and a Time to Speak***The Year of the New Jerusalem: 2025–26*

Ecclésiastes 3 is not silent about the need sometimes to speak, and this is such a time. Over a year ago, I sent a presidential pastoral letter in an email blast on “The Current Political Tempest” with the sub-head, “Swedenborg Argued against Authoritarianism in

Government and In Favor of Justice and Compassion for Others” (<http://tiny.cc/kk5y001>). Within a half-hour, four people resigned from the denomination. They thought I should be silent on politics. Many others, though, shared appreciation that such a message could be aired. They valued that the church spoke up.

When researching where our church *really* was at on the slavery question in antebellum America for my essay “A World Apart: The American Antislavery Issue” published in *The Moment Is Now: Carl Bernhard Wadström’s Revolutionary Voice on Human Trafficking and the Abolition of the African Slave Trade* (2019, Swedenborg Foundation), I discovered that *The Messenger* had stayed silent on the slavery question before the Civil War broke out and continued to stay silent for more than a year after the war was engulfing the still young nation.

I found a letter by Rev. Chauncey Giles (Cincinnati) to Rev. J.R. Hibbard (Chicago) dated April 10, 1862, in which he writes: “I do not think a journal of the Church should be so strictly ecclesiastical or abstractly spiritual that it cannot notice current events. On the contrary, it seems to me to be one of

its special duties. I would have it comment on events and books in the light of spiritual truth... *the Messenger* has kept itself almost criminally aloof from a word of sympathy or any expression of interest in this terrible crisis of our national life. I think it ought to have done all it could to sustain the members of the Church in this trying hour. Spiritual things are clothed with the natural in this world. I have no belief that teaching truth begins and ends with the generality of shunning evils and doing good. What evils shall we shun, and what good shall we do? Here are themes for discourses and illustration in endless variety. I must do good to the neighbor, but the country is more the neighbor than the individual, and cannot I express a word of sympathy for her when she is in the clutches of demons and is struggling for her very existence?”

Our national government controversy has continued to deepen and, in my opinion, has worsened from a year ago. I want everyone reading this to know that we do have two formal groups in our church that meet monthly where we do try to integrate spiritual perspectives and teachings with contemporary social issues and affairs: the Social Justice Committee (SJC) and Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism (SAAR) both meet monthly on Zoom. Rev. Shada Sullivan has been publishing a tri-weekly email blast for SAAR. If you would like to be on the email list for either the SJC or SAAR or the email blast, please write to our Central Office at manager@swedenborg.org or PO Box 380270, Cambridge, MA 02238.

—Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence
president@swedenborg.org

News from General Council

Thank You Karen!

Celebrating a Decade of Service

BY BEKI GREENWOOD, REV. JANE SIEBERT, AND REV. RICH TAFEL

After over a decade of service as the Recording Secretary of the Swedenborgian Church of North America, among many other responsibilities, after careful thought and prayer, Karen Conger decided it was time to pass on the role of secretary and tendered her resignation in mid-November 2025. Though there could never be enough words to thank Karen for her years of dedicated service to the Church we all love, here are a couple of reflections from those who worked closely with her.

New York and DC

Two of the most significant challenges facing the denomination during Karen Conger's tenure as secretary were the future of the New York New Church and a new vision for the Church of the Holy City in Washington, DC. To both, Karen brought her characteristic combination of Love and Wisdom.

In New York, Karen carefully built bridges between the denomination and a local community that had mixed feelings about denominational involvement. Working with then-President Rev. Siebert, she promised to bring resources to help an embattled community imagine a new future. The plan that emerged was bold: sell the building and create a foundation that could serve those in need throughout New York City while also supporting Swedenborgian communities



They made a great team!
Rev. Jane Siebert (left) and Karen Conger (right).

across North America. Karen's reassuring presence throughout this complex transition proved essential to realizing this new vision.

As head of the national church trustees, Karen worked closely with the Washington, DC, community as they decided to relocate to a setting better suited for their evolving work. This was particularly difficult for Karen, who had grown up attending the 16th Street church. Yet once again, her commitment was to serve God's greater purpose. She became a trusted ally to the local community and provided the crucial connection between local and national interests that enabled the remarkably successful launch of the DC society's new location at the Swedenborg House in Dupont Circle.

Many people contributed to these transformations at key moments. But Karen played an irreplaceable bridging role that made these opportunities

for denominational usefulness possible. Her unique combination of Love and Wisdom in service to the church created pathways that might not otherwise have existed.

—Rev. Rich Tafel, Chair of the Council of Ministers

A Gift

Karen, a gift to many over decades of devoted, quiet, loving service to our denomination and the world around it. The list is long and laced in our history with her documentation.

Karen, never seeking accolades for her work or compensation for hours of toil, just loyally preserving the records with a simple: Karen Conger, Secretary of The General Convention, The Swedenborgian Church of North America.

Karen, striving to make the words shared in meetings meaningful, inclusive, educational, without bias or hint of her own convictions. The symbol of a good secretary and team member.

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Karen Conger (left) and Beki Greenwood (right) working together during Convention.

News from General Council

Thank you Karen!*Continued from page 4*

Karen, a friend I will always cherish for her gentle support and willing spirit that took on the many challenges of keeping peace on boards, speaking out when necessary, and living her Swedenborgian heritage of acceptance and love for one another.

—*With love and deep appreciation, Rev. Jane Siebert, past President 2016–2022*

Karen's resignation was read to the General Council at their November meeting with much shared emotion. The Council then voted to appoint Beki Greenwood, former editor of *the Messenger*, as recording secretary with full voting rights on General Council and the Executive Committee for the remainder of the year until the election at Convention 2026. Karen will be continuing in some of her roles throughout the denomination, as well as supporting the secretary transition as needed. We thank and celebrate her for an exemplary tenure as the denomination's recording secretary. Well done, good and faithful servant. 🙏

General Council Meets*Continued from cover*

church building and the current. Both were eager to share the five-story walk-up with the Council.

With the high-quality technology the Swedenborg House has set up, we were able to hold a seamless hybrid meeting with our General Council members from afar. The council discussed a variety of topics from the 2026 budget, to visions for the virtual future, to how we can better support our congregations, and many more in between. We heard reports from Spiritual Questers (*Our Daily Bread*), the



Rev. Tafel shows some of the items from the original National Church that were relocated to the new space. He was complimented on how the space even had that "New Church Smell" because of the historical items that were relocated and throughout the space.

Messenger, Spiritual Sunshine (swedenborgiancommunity.org/), and from the dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies. They shared with us their plans for 2026, the forward movement of their programs, and their goals for the next year. It was possible to hear reports from California, Missouri, and New Zealand! Our modern technology is so amazing.

Another piece of the fall meeting is the liaison reports from each member. Each general council member has a few churches they reach out to a couple of times a year to check in and offer support from the council, and check if they are looking for help in any area of their ministry or congregation. It seems like a small thing, but it keeps everyone connected in our special community. General Council members may have information on things like grants and funds that a society may not know they can request, or other avenues of unexplored assistance. They are reaching out to you to be an ear or a hand, whatever you may need. Everyone's reports

are read, and any issues that may have come up are discussed. It helps everyone stay in tune with the vibe of the denomination.

After a full day of business, council members went out in the local area to enjoy dinner and fellowship together at Lauriol for some Latin American cuisine. It is always a treat to get to spend some quality time with our like-minded colleagues and friends. Washington, DC did not disappoint, and we all enjoyed a lovely evening together.

The second day of meetings started with a budget presentation by treasurer Jennifer Lindsay for 2026. She presented a well-thought-out plan for the year with limited changes made by the council. Kei Pang and Pastor Paul Deming then shared a presentation on the conservancy plan for the St. Louis Garden Chapel followed by a slideshow put together by SCYL Youth Director Kurt Fekete on the teens adventure in England this past summer. We were then joined by members of the Washington, DC society to share with us their journey to the vision of the new space and how it's going so far. It was a delight to participate in proof of concept by hosting our meeting!

Towards the end of the day the council emotionally received Karen Conger's resignation after ten years of serving as recording secretary of the SCNA. We can't thank her enough for all of her dedicated service to the Swedenborgian Church.

The next meeting of the General Council will be held virtually in March. 🙏

Beki Greenwood is an active member of the Fryeburg New Church Assembly, Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative, and the newly appointed Secretary of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.



Church Communities

When Wayfarers Gathered at Cambridge

BY BEN GUNTER

Pause for a moment, Wayfarer, on life's journey. Let the beauty of holiness restore your soul. May the harmony of sky and water, leaf and rock, nourish the creation and growth of your inner being as you fare through this life and on into the life beyond.

These are the words appearing on a plaque that greeted millions of visitors to Wayfarers Chapel throughout its seventy-three years of service. These words spoke intimately to me about the spiritual experience evoked by a visit to share sacred space at Wayfarers Chapel. The words must have spoken to Rev. Erni Martin too, given that he borrowed four of them for the title of his coffee table compendium, *"The Beauty of Holiness."*

During a Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS) Winter Intensive, when I first visited the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I felt striking echoes of the same sense of wonder and tranquility in a structure that could scarcely be more different. So I located the Chapel guest book and wrote out that inscription.

I wouldn't know until Christmas Eve 2025 how apropos these words were.

This year, the Cambridge Society invited Rev. Kevin Baxter and me to lead their candlelight service on Christmas Eve. It would be a service intended primarily for those longstanding members who were missing the tradition at

their home congregation. With little fanfare consisting of a simple hand-drawn poster on the exterior and an announcement on the Chapel website, all the members of the small congregation who were able to, made the pilgrimage. Yet when we ran out of bulletins fifteen minutes before the service start time, we began to understand the gravity of the Christmas Miracle that was taking place in that timeless Sanctuary.



Swedenborg Chapel on Christmas Eve in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

As organist Angie Papierski began to lead the congregation through the first carol of the night, "O Come All Ye Faithful," my heart briefly sank as I heard nobody singing along. I worried that we weren't actually providing the engaging and meaningful experience we intended to. By the end of the second verse, I realized the voices were drowned out by the majestic organ pipes located a few inches behind my head on the chancel. I breathed a sigh of relief, chuckled to myself, and watched as the service played out

beautifully, complete with a baby crying in the rear of the Sanctuary during the lesson on the birth of Christ.

Cambridge board members Mark Careaga and Andrew Sciarretta served as our ushers for the night and seamlessly dimmed the lights and distributed candles at the right time while also managing the deluge of unexpected visitors. That night, Christ was born anew in sixty-eight attendees, many of whom were simply members of the

community curious about the Chapel and desiring a welcoming and inclusive service in a beautiful setting. In California, we call those people wayfarers.

In the coming year and beyond, it is my hope that we might continue to transform hearts from within, carrying with us the lesson of Christmas Eve at Cambridge, and emboldened by the notion that now is as good a time as there ever has been for the beauty of holiness to restore our souls. May we

all renew our appreciation for the power of inviting people to share our truly special places, people, and practices. 🕊️

Ben Gunter is a student at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. He is currently working as the inaugural Chauncey Giles Ministerial Fellow at the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem while pursuing ordination with the Swedenborgian Church of North America.



Church Communities

Soup-er Bowl of Caring

BY REV. DR. AMANDA RILEY

I remember first learning about the Soup-er Bowl of Caring when my youth group ran a canned food drive at our church every February on Super Bowl Sunday. The idea was simple: we were going to have a Super Bowl party featuring not just the big game, but a table overflowing with food. We did this knowing there are many in our community who were hungry. When we shopped for the big game, could we also buy a can of soup or two to share with our local food pantry? The answer was “yes.” Thanks to our generous congregation, each year we collected boxes and boxes of food.

This was a tradition I continued when I served youth groups in Michigan. Each year, we were excited to not just think about our game-day snacks but also how we could provide food for our greater community with less access to food. Then, about three years ago, a colleague of mine who had moved to San Pedro from Iowa told me about her experience of the Soup-er Bowl of Caring. Instead of a canned food drive, it was a community event that pairs ceramicists with soup-makers, and for a ticket price, you get a tasty bowl of soup in a handmade bowl of your

For the last two years people have gathered at the Garden Church for their Soup-er Bowl fundraising event. This event creates the opportunity for the community to gather together and support both those in need as well as local artists. Come join us this year on February 7 (Pictures from Soup-er Bowls of years past at The Garden Church in San Pedro, California).



A delicious bowl of soup in a hand-crafted bowl.

choice, to support a local organization that provides food.

In 2024, the Soup-er Bowl of Caring began in San Pedro, California. Our first year, we sold more than 100 tickets and raised \$1,500 for our local Meals on Wheels here in San Pedro (www.sanpedromealsonwheels.org/). Last year, we sold more tickets and raised just shy of \$2,000. Each year, a generous collection of handmade bowls has been provided by Blue Water Clay (www.bluewaterclay.com/), a local ceramics studio just a few blocks from the garden. This year, we are adding additional tickets, and the ceramics artists are making more bowls to meet the growing popularity of the event. We are looking forward to raising even more funds for Meals on Wheels, which has been feeding those

in need in San Pedro for more than five decades.

We hope you can join us on Saturday, February 7 from 11AM–2PM PT! Contact gardenchurchsp@gmail.com for information. 📧

Rev. Dr. Amanda Riley has served numerous Presbyterian churches, and is pastor at The Garden Church. She fell in love with the vision, work, and mission of the church, and became involved in 2016.



Swedenborgian Church Youth League – Clear Blue Sky

SCYL Teens Explore the Seven Deadly Sins

BY SERENA GREENWOOD, SCYL CLEAR BLUE SKY EDITOR



2025 Swedenborgian Church Youth League Winter Retreat teens.

At this retreat, we talked about the seven deadly sins: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride. We had a pretty packed house with sixteen teens! Personally, I really enjoyed this retreat and all of the amazing lessons we had.

With Rev. Renée, in our session of wrath, we all lined up in height order, shortest to tallest, to all hit a piñata. This piñata was in the form of a fire. All of us got to hit the piñata at least once, some of us were lucky enough to get a second turn. The goal here was to show our wrath and get some of our anger out on the piñata while enjoying the experience with our friends.



with eight cards, including: three cards titled food, two cards titled water, one card titled building materials, one card titled tools, and the last card titled medical kit. After receiving those cards, every group got a special card different than all the others, which could protect us from a certain natural disaster in the game. After all our cards were

Serena, Cam, Charlie, Lily, Greyson, and Nate enjoying some down time at the retreat (lower-left). Teens prepare the Yule Log for the annual Exodus ceremony led by Rev. Renée (below and right).



In Kurt's session on greed, we were sorted into dish teams, four teams of three or four people (at the start of every teen retreat, the teens are assigned to "dish teams" to complete camp chores and dishes). Each team

was supplied, Kurt randomly pulled a natural disaster. We had to give up some of our materials in order to survive all of these different disasters. Once one group was unable to survive the disaster, their group was eliminated. However, the group could've asked for help from a different group. This is where the greediness came into play. At the beginning of the game, nobody wanted to share with anyone. Nearing the end of the round, everyone was begging the other groups for materials, everyone just wanting to win the game. After reflecting on the game, we all realized how greedy we could be and saw the ways we could've done better and helped each other.

At this retreat, we were lucky enough to have seminary student Ben Gunter

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Swedenborgian Church Youth League

SCYL Seven Deadly Sins

Continued from page 8



Not even Zsa Zsa is safe from "6-7!"

join us! One of Ben's sessions was on envy, where we got to see what we like and dislike about ourselves/others. During this session, we all got a slip of paper with someone's name

on it and had to write something about the other person you like about them or wished you had. Receiving this feedback from the person who wrote about us, which was completely anonymous, was something everyone enjoyed, and we all agreed we should write affirmations more.

Between all the amazing sessions we had, teens always have our own fun like playing catchphrase, werewolf, imposter, and our annual bowling trip. We also had our annual officer elections! Nearing the end of the retreat, Renée and Ben led us in an amazing Exodus ceremony, along with our yule log burning, where we sat around the fireplace. On our last night of the retreat, we teens stayed up late, chatting and enjoying our last few hours together before the East Coast van had to depart. As always, it is so sad to leave our friends, especially having to leave early, but the trip is always worth it, no matter how much snow we have to drive through on our way home. 📷



Micah takes his wrath out on a piñata.

2026 SCYL Officer Elections

BY KURT FEKETE

The 2026 Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) Officer and Chaplain elections took place at the winter retreat this past December. I was excited to see a few new faces run for and successfully get elected to SCYL positions.

Nora Barnaby, *Clear Blue Sky* editor for the past three years, was elected to the position of President. Congratulations Nora! I look forward to working with you. Caroline Phinney returns as the elected East Officer and Activities coordinator. Abby Lau returns as our elected Midwest Officer and has volunteered to become our new SCYL Treasurer. We welcome two newcomers to SCYL leadership roles. Greyson Sleight was elected to the West Officer/Ambassador and Service position. Serena Greenwood was elected to *Clear Blue Sky* editor. Rev. Renée Billings-Machiniak returns as our elected 2025 League Chaplain. Renée has served as our League Chaplain for numerous years and has attended many retreats at Almont. She presents inspiring and engaging sessions and does a fantastic job caring for and mentoring our youth. We are blessed to have her as League Chaplain. We say farewell to 2025 President Zsa Zsa Dolley and Officer Lilly Carson and thank them for their service.

Please join me in congratulating and welcoming our new Officers and Rev. Renée, our Chaplain. I am certain that they will do amazing work this year as they represent a good mix of established teen leaders, along with a couple of younger, energetic teens. They will be a dedicated team, possessing useful skills and bringing fresh ideas. I am excited to work with them in 2026.

The 2026 Swedenborgian Church Youth League Officers

President

Nora Barnaby

Clear Blue Sky (CBS) Editor

Serena Greenwood

East Coast and Activities

Caroline Phinney

Midwest and Treasurer

Abby Lau

West Coast and Service

Greyson Sleight

Canada Officer

Open

League Chaplain

Rev. Renée Machiniak

Meet the 2026 Officers!

Nora Barnaby*President*

My name is Nora Barnaby, and I am so excited to introduce myself as the new president of the SCYL. I have enjoyed my time for the past few years as the

Clear Blue Sky editor and look forward to what this new role has in store for me. I spend a lot of my time involved in many organizations, like Student Council and the National Honor Society, but I also love reading and hanging

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Swedenborgian Church Youth League

SCYL 2026 Officers

Continued from page 9

out with friends. I'm so excited to see what this year brings!

Serena Greenwood

Clear Blue Sky Editor



Hey everyone! My name is Serena Greenwood, and I was elected for the first time to be the SCYL *Clear Blue Sky* editor this year. I live in Massachusetts and

attend Carver Middle High School as a Freshman while participating in Student Council, Student Ambassadors, and being a manager in multiple sports. I'm very excited to take this position, especially since I love remembering these retreats as they have a huge impact on my life. Some of my hobbies include dancing in various styles and playing basketball. 2026 will be my third year attending Almont Summer Camp, and all the other years of my life, I have attended Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA). I'm very excited to get this year going with all these amazing people here!

Caroline Phinney

East Coast and Activities



Hi! I'm Caroline Phinney, and I will be serving as the 2026 East Coast and Activities officer! This is my second year as an officer, and I am very excited

to continue serving the SCYL. I am from Carver, Massachusetts, and I am a Junior in High School. I have been

attending Almont Summer Camp and retreats for almost four years now, and have been going to FNCA for most of my life. This community means so much to me, and I can't wait to continue to represent it!

Abby Lau

Midwest and Treasurer

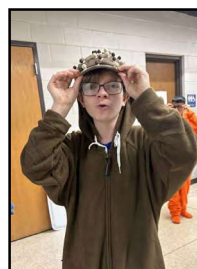


Hi, I am Abby Lau, and I am serving as the Midwest officer and Treasurer of the SCYL. This will be my second year as an officer, and I'm so excit-

ed to be involved because the people in this group mean so much to me. I have been attending Almont Summer Camp since I was around eight years old, and growing up with this community is one of the best things in my life.

Greyson Sleight

West Coast and Service



Hi, my name is Greyson, and I am the West Coast and Service officer. I am fourteen years old, and I live in Lansing, Michigan. I really enjoy SCYL re-

treats and activities as a whole, but the people are the best part of it all. I really love spaghetti and other pastas. 🍝



2026 SCYL Officers.

Friendsgiving 2025

BY RONALD VIGES



Wow, how time flies! We gathered once again for our yearly Transitions Friendsgiving retreat to come together to feast and give back. With a turnout of just under twenty people ages 18–30, we took on a bonus challenge this year of preparing and delivering meals to people in need. We used a small donation of some food items from West Berlin United Methodist Church and the money raised by the Transitions group at Almont's 2025 session, selling coffee and tie-dye.

With many of us arriving late Friday night, we broke into two groups early Saturday morning to ensure that both the winterization of the buildings and the food drive was set up. Sadly, due to Almont being a little bit off-grid, we had nobody show up to the initially planned food drive. The Transitions, with some help from Tammara Mounce, Lori Patana, and Rev. Renée, found three different places that were looking for the blessings we could offer.

Wyatt Steinhieser, McKenna Tourangeau, and I delivered the meals to People of Impact, Inc. and Lapeer Area Citizens Against Domestic Assault. Rev. Renée loaded up and delivered meals to South Oakland Citizens for the Homeless. With the success of delivering over one hundred meals to people in need, we have decided that at our retreats, we want to continue

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Featured Artwork

Choices, Life over Death

BY IRMA REINHOLD



*"Choices, Life over Death" (1978) by Reynolds Thomas and Irma Reinhold.
Located at the Church of the Holy City in Wilmington, Delaware.*

Everything in the physical world comes from the Divine through the spiritual world. So there is something spiritual within everything earthly... it follows that what is spiritual is actually the essential element within what is earthly, and therefore so is the Divine, which is the source of all things.

—Emanuel Swedenborg, *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* §48

The painting "Choices, Life over Death" was completed in 1978 when I was learning to paint with acrylic paints and was one of the students in Reynolds Thomas' class. Our lessons were held in a church in New Castle, Delaware. Perhaps because of that, we frequently discussed religions. Reynolds was a Swedenborgian. I was curious to learn more and went to The Church of the Holy City, in Wilmington, Delaware, to speak with Rev. Randall Laakko, the minister who taught me, as well as others in the congregation, the importance of Swedenborg's writings. He awakened us to the truth of the spiritual world and the importance of how we choose our eternal life. Those who choose to live a life of love and purpose in this material world will enjoy eternal life in a paradise with like-minded individuals. Those who choose to live a life of jealousy, hatred, and evil, due to their own preferred actions, will gravitate to those such as their own selves, and together they will live in darkness and deception, without Light, without Love.

The owl was our model, brought to our class by another student, and the branch was from my garden. Reynolds painted the skull without a model. I never really knew the significance of the painting until now, many years after its completion, and many years of observing human's self-destruction.



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*The Swedenborgian Church of
North America*

Nunc Licet Fellow

Today, This is Fulfilled in Your Hearing

BY PASTOR PAUL DEMING

Luke's gospel differs from Mark and Matthew, especially regarding the story of Jesus reading from Isaiah in the synagogue. Quite frankly, Mark and Matthew do not mention it, except to say that Jesus went into his hometown teaching in the synagogue. (Matthew 13:54, Mark 6:1–2) If Luke is embellishing with the story, it is very effective. There is a certain drama to someone handing Jesus the scroll and Jesus finding Isaiah 61, standing up and beginning to read the first line. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." He is speaking with the veracity and resolve of someone who has been to the mountaintop, as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would say. Only it is now, in the present, that he is speaking, and the elders of the synagogue are hearing with their ears but not with their hearts. "Because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18–19) In a television drama, the background music would be low but foreboding as Jesus says, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:21)

Nunc Licet Fellowship

The Nunc Licet Fellowship is a merit-based program intended to relieve the financial burden of tuition expenses for promising individuals who wish to serve the ministries of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

Mark and Matthew do not tell of Jesus proclaiming how Elijah and Elisha brought God's favor to people outside the tribes of Israel. "There were many widows in Israel when a great famine came over the land," Jesus explains, "and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." (Luke 4:25–27) In Luke's drama, Jesus has quoted one prophet (Isaiah) to proclaim a Messianic fulfillment of liberation, and mentioned two others to illustrate that "no prophet is welcome in his hometown." One can begin to sense the indignance with which the synagogue responded. Just who is being rejected and who is being favored?

One should not stand before a congregation saying God favors those outside of the assembly walls and expect to receive accolades. In fact, the *New American Standard Bible* translation reads "And all in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they rose up and cast Him out of the city and led Him to the brow of a hill on which their city had been built in order to throw Him down the cliff." (Luke 4:28–29) If Jesus had a PR firm, they would be scrambling to put a positive spin on his comments to the authoritarians in power. In the music entertainment industry, we would scratch this venue off the list for any possibility of a return gig. The *Revised Standard Version* translation reads: "But passing through the midst of them he went away." (Luke 4:30) Hence, the scene closes on a dramatic

episode that depicts a ministry geared towards the poor, the oppressed, and those outside the assembly walls.

I am very fortunate to be part of a liberal theological seminary, and I'm learning that the term "liberal" goes much farther in depth and meaning than I ever imagined. There are three writers of liberation and resistance theology who have resonated with me in my studies.

It is the nature of God to recognize and hear the cry of the oppressed, and to join in that suffering with the transformative power of the Spirit.

The first is Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Catholic priest from Peru whose work for the exploited in Latin America has made an impact on liberal theology everywhere. Gutiérrez helps me understand that "preaching good news to the poor" is not gifting some level of benevolence to those on the sidelines. Rather, it is working in the trenches to identify, challenge, and change the societal structure that has oppressed and exploited them, the ones who "are deprived of the fruits of their labor and stripped of their life and reality as human beings."¹ According to Gutiérrez, working with the struggle and conflict of changing history is where "God reveals the mystery of his person."² It is

Continues on page 13

¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith*, from *Readings in the Christian Theology*, Volume 2, Revised Edition, From the Reformation to the Present, William C. Placher and Derek R. Nelson, ed. (Westminster John Knox Press, 2017) 175.

² *Ibid.*

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Today, This is Fulfilled*Continued from page 12*

the nature of God to recognize and hear the cry of the oppressed, and to join in that suffering with the transformative power of the Spirit.

Jesus was not content with the status quo. He was a revolutionary when he turned the tables in the sanctuary and disrupted the profit-making exchange of favors. He challenged the lawyers when he healed on the sabbath. He told the religious leaders who had hardened their hearts towards God that prostitutes and tax gatherers would get into heaven before them because they were willing to change the ways that they lived, a grassroots change. According to Gutiérrez, the history of exploitation and human alienation will change “into one of authentic communion when we opt for the poor and exploited classes, identify ourselves with their plight, and share their fate.”³ The orientation of Jesus’ ministry was not to the comfortable within the assembly walls. His favor fell on those who were outcasts, who had suffered, and were open to change. As with Latin American history, the timeless words of Gutiérrez ring true: “At that time people did not see so clearly that it was society as a whole and its prevailing system of values that were being called into question from the roots up.”⁴ “To set at liberty those who are oppressed,” (Luke 4:18) calls all of us to reach beyond the assembly walls and accept with helping hands and open hearts those who are oppressed and join in voice with those suffering from systemic inequality and injustice.

The next writer is a Korean woman, Dr. Chung Hyun-Kyung, a lay

To set at liberty those who are oppressed,” (Luke 4:18) calls all of us to reach beyond the assembly walls and accept with helping hands and open hearts those who are oppressed and join in voice with those suffering from systemic inequality and injustice.

theologian in the Presbyterian Church of Korea, and was once a temporary Buddhist novice nun. When she addressed the World Council of Churches in 1991, she explained that in Korea, the spirit of “broken-heartedness and the raw energy for struggle for liberation” is called “Han.”⁵ “In my tradition,” she said, “people who were killed and died unjustly became wandering spirits, the Han-ridden spirits.”⁶ Such spirits, she claimed, are agents for the Holy Spirit. “Without hearing the cries of these spirits, we cannot hear the voice of the Holy Spirit.”⁷ It is a bold assertion to say one cannot hear the Holy Spirit without hearing the cries of victims yearning for justice. However, it completely resonates with the biblical narrative. In Genesis 4:10, God is speaking to Cain who has killed Abel: “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground.” Perhaps it was the Han-ridden spirit of the unjustly killed Uriah that prompted Nathan the prophet to confront King David, who had arranged for the killing so he would have Bathsheba, Uriah’s wife, for himself. (2 Samuel 12:7) After being confronted, David was cut to the quick in his spirit, and he repented.

Repentance is the first thing we should do when the Spirit calls us, according to Chung. Repentance is a key in fighting the poverty of spirit, not just repentance of evil thoughts and acts, but of attachments, of greed, and the participation in cultural values that exploit others, human and non-human, as well as the earth. Can non-human creatures be among the oppressed? Can the earth and nature be included among the oppressed? As an eco-theologian, Chung has a resounding answer:

“Traditional Christian creation theology and Western thinking put the human, especially men, at the center of the created world, and men have had the power to control and dominate the creation. We should remember, however, that this kind of thinking is alien to many Asian people and the indigenous people of the world. For us the earth is the source of life, and nature is ‘sacred, purposeful, and full of meaning.’ Human beings are a very small part of nature, not above it.”⁸

It is a meaningful statement and requires a re-thinking of our place in the

Repentance is a key in fighting the poverty of spirit, not just repentance of evil thoughts and acts, but of attachments, of greed, and the participation in cultural values that exploit others, human and non-human, as well as the earth.

created cosmos, our relationships with each other and non-human creatures, and our desire for the sustainability and harmony which our great, great,

Continues on page 14

3 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith*, pp. 175-176

4 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith*, 174.

5 Chung Hyun-Kyung, “Welcome the Spirit; hear her cries” *Christianity and Crisis* 51 (July 1991): 221.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Chung Hyun-Kyung, “Welcome the Spirit; hear her cries” *Christianity and Crisis* 51 (July 1991): 222.

Nunc Licet Fellow

Today, This is Fulfilled*Continued from page 13*

grandchildren might enjoy. To give voice to the oppressed includes the creation that suffers the injustice of human capitalism and exploitation. We must go beyond the assembly walls and join in the protests around the world against global warming and the proliferation of fossil fuels that endanger our environment.

The third writer that speaks to me is Dr. Dorothee Sölle, a German theologian who was a professor at Union Seminary in New York. To Sölle, liberation is not a gift. To set the captives free is to enable them to see the possibility of their liberation through resistance, a renunciation of oppressive structures, disobedience, and, in some cases, practical illegality. Exodus was a struggle, a liberation struggle that involved resistance. “The Israelites free themselves from the wrong ideals of the oppressor, they stop singing the songs of the ruling culture of injustice.”⁹ To Sölle, Egypt represents the affluent. In America, “Egypt” would be the top one percent of the wealthy that live nearly tax-free, while the burden for the bulk of taxes falls on the working class. For us to consider the oppressed, the victimized, the marginalized, the forgotten, and enslaved, we must look at the economic, political, social, and cultural practices that not only give ascent to the status quo but also reinforce the systems that proliferate suffering. “If greed and lust for power are no longer structurally rewarded in a given society, then change is possible.”¹⁰

According to Sölle, “To resist is probably the adequate form of

struggle for those who are Christians in Egypt.”¹¹ We witness forms of resistance in America, sometimes at great personal costs. When protesters of war and genocide are abducted and shipped out of their home state or shipped to prisons in other countries without a hearing or trial, they become the victims of injustice. When protesters of mass deportation are abducted and deported without a hearing or trial, they too become the victims of the injustice they were protesting. Protests, however, will continue, and the voice of resistance must be heard.

For us to consider the oppressed, the victimized, the marginalized, the forgotten, and enslaved, we must look at the economic, political, social, and cultural practices that not only give ascent to the status quo but also reinforce the systems that proliferate suffering.

There is conflict, there is struggle, and there are costs. When organized efforts succeed in halting the deluge of consumerism in online and retail purchases, even for one day, results are seen, messages are received, and grassroots efforts are felt as empowering. Giving in to the notion that “you can’t fight City Hall,” is what Sölle calls “anthropological pessimism.”¹² It states that our tendency for selfish ambition always takes precedence over our desire for justice and righteousness. “When we buy into this myth,” she says, “we agree with a prevailing understanding of history that is totally

anti-Christian.”¹³ It is surprising how many religious leaders and churches espouse this kind of thinking; what I call apocalyptic thinking based on the “sinful nature” of man. If we are bound by our “capitalistic experiences,” and the “uncontrollability of life” as Sölle puts it, then aren’t we also limiting the meaning of “Christ’s resurrection too?”¹⁴ Her point is well taken. Our theology teaches that there is a divine spark within people who, given the freedom to choose truth and love over falsity and evil, can learn to find purpose in helping others, and, with God’s help, can find a regeneration of the soul in a life of selfless service. That life can be expressed in liberation theology, in resistance theology, and in eco-theology, to name only a few approaches that give voice to the down-trodden and the oppressed.

The reading of the opening of Isaiah 61 by Jesus in the gospel of Luke is, without question, a dramatic event that focused on the orientation of his ministry, the inclusion of all oppressed peoples, the marginalized, and those who are held captive by systems of exploitation, and the anticipated response from those in power who benefit from the status quo. I can imagine another dramatic scene. In this scene, Jesus is standing before a crowd of disenfranchised, abused, forgotten, and sidelined people of all cultures and races who have embarked on a journey of resistance and liberation, many of whom have suffered and died, as have some of the liberation theologians I have been fortunate to study. He is unrolling a scroll to read from the opening of Isaiah 62 in another Messianic prophecy. He speaks clearly: “For Zion’s sake I

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9 Dorothee Sölle, “Resistance: Towards a First World Theology,” *Christianity and Crisis* 39, no. 12 (July 1973) 179.

10 Sölle, “Resistance: Towards a First World Theology,” 180.

11 Sölle, “Resistance: Towards a First World Theology,” 178.

12 Sölle, “Resistance: Towards a First World Theology,” 180.

13 Ibid.

14 Sölle, “Resistance: Towards a First World Theology,” 181.

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Today, This is Fulfilled*Continued from page 14*

Our theology teaches that there is a divine spark within people who, given the freedom to choose truth and love over falsity and evil, can learn to find purpose in helping others, and, with God's help, can find a regeneration of the soul in a life of selfless service.

will not keep silent. And for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet, until her righteousness goes forth like brightness and her salvation like a torch that is burning. The nations will see your righteousness and all kings your glory; and you will be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will designate. You will be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God." He closes the scroll and says, "Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." And all the people said, "Thanks be to God." 📖

Paul was installed as Pastor of the Garden Chapel Sanctuary in 2016 after completing certification requirements for Licensed Pastors. He is married to Suzy, and is the father of two grown sons, and grandfather of one grandson. Paul is on the ordination path and is completing his seminary training at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis. He has served on various committees, including Education Resources and the Nominating Committee. Paul is a singer/songwriter, a published composer, and a lover of the arts.



Updates from Denominational Groups

SWEDENBORGIAN S IN ACTION AGAINST RACISM

WE ALL STRIVE TO LEARN, CHANGE, AND ACT TOGETHER

Since 2020, the Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism newsletter has provided a way to stay connected with the work of racial justice, through introducing new perspectives and analyses of current events, highlighting useful and concrete actions to take, and encouraging relevant reflection and spiritual practice. Sign up here: <http://tiny.cc/7sly001>

Social Justice Committee Workshop

**Online Workshop on
February 4, 2026 7:00 PM EST**

The Social Justice Committee presents: A workshop on **Service, Justice, and Community Organizing** from The Friends Committee on National Legislation.

Wednesday, February 4, 2026, 7:00 PM EST on Zoom.

Participants will analyze the differences between responding to social problems with a focus on service projects, and responding with advocacy efforts. Then, we will spend time planning community organizing campaigns that focus on either direct service efforts or grassroots advocacy.

This workshop will be led by Jackson Malkus, Lead Program Coordinator with The Friends Committee on National Legislation, a national, nonpartisan Quaker organization that lobbies Congress and the administration to advance peace, justice, and environmental stewardship.

Register here: tinyurl.com/jjht8yfx

Service, Justice, and Community Organizing

*A workshop from
The Friends Committee on National
Legislation*

February 4th at 7pm Eastern on Zoom

Social Justice Committee – Join Us!

The Social Justice Committee is a forum established by the Swedenborgian Church of North America to address social concerns, provide information, and offer resources for ways to be involved. To that end, this community page is a private space for people to share their spiritual practices for staying centered amid turbulent times, post or look for information about workshops or other activities to promote social justice, and to offer resources that any might find helpful. Please join us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61572962886393!

Logopraxis

Logopraxis: Discovering the Spiritual World Within You

BY REV. DAVID MILLAR AND REV. SARAH WALKER

Are you seeking a deeper connection to Emanuel Swedenborg's profound writings and practical ways to integrate them into your daily life? The Logopraxis Institute offers a unique approach to spiritual development that is both introspective and community-focused.

What is Logopraxis?

The term "Logopraxis" literally means "to practice the Word," combining the Greek words Logos ("Word") and Praxis ("to practice"). This approach was born from a desire to make Swedenborg's ideas accessible and applicable to everyday life. It recognizes that for many, these spiritual texts often remain intellectual pursuits rather than guides for day-to-day moments and struggles.

The Logopraxis approach was founded over twenty-five years ago, starting with a small group and expanding today to sixteen "Life Groups" worldwide, many of which meet online. These groups span continents and time zones, fostering a rich, diverse environment where practitioners from various cultures come together. This global collaboration underscores the Logopraxis focus on embracing variety and diversity in spiritual understanding. It is recognized that all individuals are continuously developing their understanding of truth, and that no one possesses the ultimate truth. Practitioners are encouraged to listen for what resonates with their own inner landscape in what

others share. The multifaceted illustrations of the Word at work in each other's lives contribute to a rich, collective understanding, forming an image of the Divine Human being made present, as described in Matthew 18:20: "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, I am there in the midst of them."

The Heart of Personal Practice

Logopraxis follows a two-week cycle where each practitioner reads a specific portion from Swedenborg's writings. The aim is to identify a concept of truth from the text and formulate a personal task to test in their daily life. This task is not about achieving a specific outcome but serves as a prompt to remember and reflect on the chosen concept, allowing for a personal illustration of its principles to emerge.

These spiritual texts are not intended to instruct us about others, but rather to support our own personal spiritual rebirth. The guiding question during reading is always: "How does this speak to my own inner life of feelings and thoughts? How does this describe the spiritual world within me?" For instance, if a text discusses life on other planets, the history of humanity, the marriage of the masculine and feminine, or the afterlife in heaven and hell—the practitioner considers these as symbolic illustrations of what occurs within the mind when divine love and wisdom attempt to enter. So they don't describe people and places "out there," but instead the receptions and resistances to life from the Divine within oneself.

Working for the Whole

From its very beginning, Logopraxis has been an experiment in spiritual community. The approach is two-fold: dedicated to the spiritual growth of the individual, and also for the sake of the whole—the group, the community, and ultimately, the Lord. At the end of the two-week cycle, practitioners meet with their Life Group to share what arose during their attempt to work with the task, or even just to remember it! This individual work contributes to the collective, providing material to share with the group, which is a core aspect of what it means to love one's neighbor within a Logopraxis context.

The emphasis is not on getting it right or on judging what is shared, but on trusting the process. Whatever emerges is considered to be under the Lord's providence and precisely what is needed for the group, even if it feels insignificant. It can be likened to the biblical account of the barley loaves and fishes: the Word, as the Lord, takes what is brought and transforms it into a feast to nourish many. Time and again, practitioners report gaining insights they would not have seen otherwise, as unique perspectives weave together to form a beautiful tapestry of shared understanding.

What makes Logopraxis Different?

Several elements distinguish Logopraxis from other spiritual growth groups. Fundamentally, the Word is firmly at the center: it serves as the Facilitator, Mediator, Healer, and Therapist. Facilitators guide participants

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Logopraxis

Logopraxis

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back to the Text, reminding them that whatever arises in their spiritual process, the Word is capable of supporting them. While individual experiences differ, universal patterns in spiritual processes are taught through the Text.

During group meetings, the focus is maintained on universal spiritual principles rather than excessive personal details, which can distract from listening and connecting with these deeper truths. A neutral sphere is also maintained during sharing and listening, supporting genuine hearing and allowing the speaker to be fully present without external affirmations or criticisms that might influence their inner state. While this can initially feel unconventional, the unique quality of the Life Group's sphere, where people are present with one another through the medium of the Word, is a recurring positive comment from practitioners.

Another unique aspect of Logopraxis is its emphasis on examining the sense of self. Traditional self-examination often focuses on what we perceive as *me*, but the teachings clarify that all life flows in, and we are neither inherently good/true nor evil/false. Instead, the practice is to examine the sense of self that believes it is *me*, which is a distinct endeavor. Historically, there has been an idea that shunning evils means pushing away bad thoughts until they are gone. However, Logopraxis teaches that greater enlightenment brings a clearer perception of what resists Divine life. Thus, the work is not to eliminate hellish thoughts but to see them clearly without identifying with them or claiming them as one's own—and this is where the transformative work lies.

While this may seem deeply introspective, it significantly enhances the quality of people's lives. Any negative state of mind stems from an identification with what belongs to the hellish proprium, or sense of being. At the core of these states is a belief in a sense of self that claims incoming experiences as its own. By working with Swedenborg's teachings on the nature of this self versus the nature of the Divine, a life changing impact can be made on how we respond to others and the world around us. Becoming more objective when negative states arise is an act of love in the form of truth. The more one comes to know hell, the more one comes to know heaven and the Lord and ultimately, this enables us to be more effective vessels of Divine Love.

New 8-Session Introductory Course

The Logopraxis Institute has created a new course to introduce newcomers to this transformative approach. The 8-session program is designed to be short enough to avoid overwhelming newcomers yet long enough to establish a consistent spiritual rhythm. Each session includes short readings from *Heaven and Hell*, an ideal foundational text for spiritual work, as it mirrors the process of newly awakening spirits entering the spiritual world. There is no cost for this course, as all that is required is a willingness of heart to engage with the material and an openness to the process of inner change. ☦



Rev. David Millar is the Director for Spiritual Training of the Australian New Church College (ANCC) out of which The Logopraxis Institute is funded. With a passion for making Swedenborg's



**Are You Ready
to Explore the
Spiritual World Within?**

**Register for our
Introductory Course
starting February 9**

Please sign up at
logopraxis-institute.online/events/
 or email David at david.millar@logopraxis-institute.online or
 Sarah at sarah.walker@logopraxis-institute.online.

writings accessible, Logopraxis formed in 2004 as he worked with a small group in Adelaide, South Australia. Since then, the approach has grown to include 16 Life Groups and 11 facilitators, with many of these meeting online across various continents and time zones. David's vision for Logopraxis centers on the Word as the primary facilitator for transformative growth and community, encouraging practitioners to discover universal spiritual patterns within the texts.

Rev. Sarah Walker is the Assistant to the Spiritual Director for the Australian New Church College (ANCC) and is also a Life Group facilitator. She plays a key role in guiding practitioners through the Logopraxis approach, emphasizing personal reflection on Swedenborg's writings and their application to one's inner life. Sarah is particularly passionate about helping individuals understand how these texts describe the "spiritual world within" and how the practice of Logopraxis supports a unique examination of the sense of self which simultaneously enhances a deeper connection to Divine Love.



Convention 2026

Call For Mini Course Proposals: Due February 15

The 2026 Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America will meet June 26–30 at the Babson Executive Conference Center in the Greater Boston Area. The Standing Committee for Education & Resources for Spiritual Community (SCER) is currently accepting Mini Course proposals. Mini Courses are ninety minutes long and can follow a variety of formats, including lecture, workshop, discussion, or panel. They can be offered fully in-person or in a hybrid format (in-person with either Zoom participation or online live streaming). The theme of this year's Convention is "Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice." Mini Courses can relate to the theme of Convention, but they do not have to. They can be on any topic that you feel is relevant to the needs of the church at this time or that you think will be of interest to those gathered.

Please send your Mini Course topic suggestions to the SCER by February 15, indicating your preferred format (in-person only or hybrid). Contact the SCER chairperson, Dr. Rebecca Esterson, at resterson@gtu.edu with topic proposals or questions. Please include a suggested title and short description. The SCER will consider proposals and respond by early March.

The SCER can offer limited support for the cost of attending Convention to a few individuals. Please indicate whether you would require this financial support and how much. We will be offering funding support as we are able, given the number and size of requests from presenters. 📱

The 202nd Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church

*Creating Harmony:
Art as Spiritual Practice
June 26 – June 30, 2026*

Please plan to join us for the 202nd Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church where we will return to the east coast with our gracious hosts from the Boston Church on the Hill.

- Convention will be June 26 – June 30 (this includes travel dates)
- Located at the Babson Executive Conference Center in Wellesley, Massachusetts
- Well-appointed hotel style bedrooms
- Join our hosts, The Boston Church on the Hill, for this year's outing in downtown Boston.
- Stay tuned for more details coming this spring!

More information will be shared on swedenborg.org!

What's Happening

Helen Keller's Spiritual Birthday Celebration!

Helen Keller would always honor March 3, 1887, as her "Spiritual Birthday," the day she met her teacher, Annie Sullivan, and her life changed forever. As we seek to honor and carry forward the spiritual legacy of Helen Keller, we have made it our practice to hold an annual celebration of Helen Keller's Spiritual Birthday each year in the first week of March.

Please plan to join us for this coming year's celebration, March 2–March 7, 2026. This year's theme is BE HONEST, and we will celebrate Helen by lifting up the areas of advocacy and change that she worked for and cared about, including: Peace, Economic Justice, Racial Justice, Gender Equity, Disability Justice, and Creation Care.

To register, visit: helenkellercollaborative.org/annual-celebration/

Friendsgiving 2025

Continued from page 10

finding ways to help communities and add a little bit of light to the world around us. On [Almont New Church Assembly's Facebook page](#), photos help paint this twenty-four-hour mission. Special Mention to Jeff Oelker, who consistently shows up to ensure there are some expert eyes on our projects that help keep maintenance at camp going strong. It continues to amaze me how many hands volunteer and donate money and time to accomplish all of these things. Till next time. 📱

Ronald Viges is the Assistant Camp Director of the Almont New Church Assembly Summer School. He lives in Michigan and is an expert in the art of tie-dye.



Begins December 21st 2025 - Ends July 12th 2026

Seven Days of Creation Regeneration Series

A program of the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative



What will this series include?

Virtual Liturgies on each Day of Creation, Live-streamed on YouTube 7 pm Eastern on Sundays

December 21st 2025 DAY ONE *"Let there be light!"*

January 18th 2026 DAY TWO *"We are spiritual beings having a human experience.."*

February 15th 2026 DAY THREE *"What is the ground upon which we stand?"*

March 22nd 2026 DAY FOUR *"What lights guide our way?"*

April 19th 2026 DAY FIVE *"What is starting to come alive in our spiritual and natural bodies?"*

May 17th 2026 DAY SIX *"Embodying our light."*

June 21st 2025 DAY SEVEN *"Flow, surrender and resting in light."*



REGISTER HERE

Monthly ZOOM Workshops/Gatherings

"Expressing your relationship to the Creation story through art." with Rev. Sue Turley
Bring your preferred medium and let's create! Thursdays 2 pm ET, dates vary

"Creation as a Perpetual Process of Awakening from Death." with Rev. Sarah Walker

Exploring Swedenborg's descriptions of newly arriving spirits awakening in the spiritual world and how these can be integrated with the Genesis Creation story. Mondays 7 pm EY, dates vary

"Kindling the Light." with Rev. Sage Cole This sharing circle will invite space for sharing about the days of creation in relation to our spiritual lives. Second Thursdays 7 pm ET

"Dreams as a Portal of Creation." with Rev. Ted and Sage Cole Dreams are a powerful portal to the Divine. Join us for this monthly dream group. Second Mondays 11 am ET

"Exploring Your Inner World," with Chelsea Rose Odhner We will explore the Seven Days of Creation as a lived journey of awakening awareness, inner relationship, and healing. Second Mondays 7 pm ET

"Your Word Is Fire," with Rev. Judith Lethin In this writing workshop we will take a deep dive into the transformational power of the written and spoken word. First Thursdays 7 pm ET



JOIN IN ANYTIME, ALL ARE WELCOME!

Register for free at

www.helenkellercollaborative.org/creation-series

About the Swedenborgian Church

Emanuel Swedenborg was born on January 29, 1688, in Stockholm, Sweden. Although he never intended a church denomination to be founded or named after him, a society was formed in London fifteen years after his death. American groups eventually founded the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches.

As a result of Swedenborg's spiritual questioning and insights, we as a church exist to encourage that same spirit of inquiry and personal growth, to respect differences in views, and to accept others who may have different traditions.

In his theological writings, Swedenborg shared a view of God as infinitely loving and at the very center of our beings, a view of life as a spiritual birthing as we participate in our own creation, and a view of scripture as a story of inner life stages as we learn and grow. Swedenborg said, "All religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." He also felt that the sincerest form of worship is a useful life.

Announcement

Two Church Camps Accepted as Full Members of the Swedenborgian Church of North America

From the Maine Association:

The Maine Association of the Swedenborgian Church of North America, at its November 3, 2024 annual meeting, unanimously approved the application of the Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA) to be a full member of the Association.

FNCA members can request to become confirmed members of the Swedenborgian Church, either through transfer from another SCNA body or through confirmation classes with Rev. Susannah Currie, Religious Program Coordinator (revscurrie@gmail.com).

The year-end report of the Maine Association and membership rolls will now include the FNCA confirmed members. Welcome FNCA!

From the Michigan Association:

During their October 5, 2024, Annual Meeting, the members of the Michigan Association of the Swedenborgian Church of North America (SCNA) continued their long history of support for the Almont New Church Assembly (ANCA) by unanimously approving the Assembly's request to be a full member of the Association.

Members of the ANCA can now choose to become confirmed members of the Swedenborgian Church directly through the Assembly, either by transferring from another SCNA body or through confirmation classes administered by our Spiritual Program Coordinator, Rev. Jane Siebert (janesiebert@gmail.com), during the annual Summer School session. Previously, individuals who chose to become confirmed members of the SCNA during the camp session were required to be counted only as "At Large" members of the Michigan Association, or their preferred home association. Membership in the ANCA itself will continue to be available without confirmation in the SCNA.

The year-end report of the Michigan Association and membership rolls will now include ANCA confirmed members. We look forward to a more direct partnership with the Association and our General Convention! 