



Center for Swedenborgian Studies Represented at "Retracing Swedenborg" in London

BY DR. REBECCA ESTERSON, DEAN OF THE CENTER FOR SWEDENBORGIAN STUDIES

Faculty and students from the Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS) participated in an international conference on the topic of "Retracing Swedenborg: Texts, Contexts, and Changing Perspectives," November 6–8, 2025, at the Swedenborg House in London.

In addition to our cohort from the Graduate Theological Union (Berkeley, California), participants came from the University of Copenhagen (Denmark), Martin-Luther-Universität

Halle-Wittenberg (Germany), the Jagiellonian University Kraków (Poland), University of Jyväskylä (Finland), University of Amsterdam (Netherlands), Lund University (Sweden), Tokyo Metropolitan University (Japan), Heritage Christian University (Alabama), and several British universities including University of Kent, Oxford University, University College London, University of London, Lincoln Bishop University, and the University of Cambridge. There were also many independent scholars, artists, and community members in attendance.

The conference organizers highlighted the following as key areas of focus: "Swedenborg's connections to William Blake; Enlightenment and



Hosts, organizers, and presenters from around the world gathered together for a meal during the conference to exchange ideas and inspire each other.

Romantic-era philosophies; and eighteenth and nineteenth-century Reform Movements, as well as the role of Swedenborgian thought in early Modernist and Surrealist contexts. Sessions

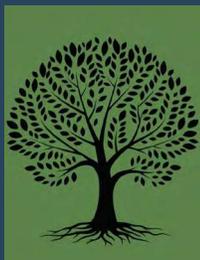
Continues on page 26



Swedenborg House in Bloomsbury Square, North London, United Kingdom.

Tu BiShvat

At The Garden Church



Celebrating New Years for Trees with Pastor Connie McOsker in San Pedro, California.

Page 27

Justice Is the New Jerusalem

A new featured column from the Social Justice Committee.

Page 30

NYNC Legacy Fund

Ten projects that received grants in 2026.

Page 31

Convention 2026 Keynote Speaker

Meet Bronwen Mayer Henry!



Creative expression as spiritual practice that builds inner harmony

Page 24

Contents

CSS Represented at "Retracing Swedenborg" in London	cover
Church Calendar	22
Editor's Corner	22
Message from the President.....	23
Bronwen Mayer Henry Named Convention Keynote Speaker.....	24
Call for Convention Musicians	25
CSS 2026 Annual Meeting.....	26
Tu BiShvat.....	27
We Are All Immigrants.....	28
Beyond Patriarchy: Helen Keller's New Heaven and New Earth	30
Learning to Organize for Justice: FCNL Workshop Report.....	31
Sign up for SAAR Newsletter.....	31
First Round of Legacy Funding in New York	32
Kindling Our Light Into Darkness: Three Opportunities to Gather.....	33
Paulhaven Camp: Camp Pastor Wanted	33
Passages.....	34
2026 Convention Appeal.....	36

Editor's Corner

Moana



For those who don't know, *Moana* is a Disney movie that came out in 2016. It tells the story of a Polynesian girl, Moana, who, despite wanting to feel at peace at home, instead feels the call of her ancestors and the ocean to go out and explore. Despite this longing, it isn't until her home is at risk of destruction that she decides to leave and embark on a quest to save it. I love *Moana* and it makes me cry every time I see it.

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.

Moana's need to go out and see what else there is resonates deeply with me, as I have often felt the same need to go out from where I am. *Moana* frames this longing in song, with lyrics like "I can lead with pride, I can make us strong. I'll be satisfied if I play along. But the voice inside sings a different song. What is wrong with me?"

I was reading an interview with Opetai Foa'i, a Samoan who grew up in New Zealand, and who wrote "We Know the Way" with Lin-Manuel Miranda, a song where the ancestors are calling to Moana. Opetai was talking about how at first the studio wrote Moana as being motivated with boredom with the island and wanting more excitement, which is quite a modern and Western mentality when you think about it. Instead, Opetai told them that Moana's motivation would actually be wrestling with the obligation of needing to stay but also needing to leave, which is something many people from these Pacific island nations struggle with. Thankfully the studio listened to him and changed the story to be more in line with Polynesian cultural norms, making a movie that spoke to a deeper struggle than adolescent boredom. The struggle of obligation and longing, and that ultimately you must take what you learned on the adventure, and return home again.

This March my family will be returning to the United States after living in New Zealand. I hope that my home is still recognizable and that I might be able to take some of what I've learned and contribute to making it a little better.

—Brittany Price

messenger@swedenborg.org

Do you write poetry?

Send it along to:

messenger@swedenborg.org

the Messenger

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

March 2026

Volume 250, No. 2 Whole Number 5501

Editor, design, and production: Brittany Price

Copy editing and proofing: Trevor, Beki Greenwood, & Jackie Shihadeh

Standing Committee for Communication and Information: Rev. Kevin Baxter, Rev. Dr. David Brown, & Tara Conkling

Editorial Advisory Committee: Rev. Jane Siebert, Beki Greenwood, and Rev. Dr. Dave Brown

Printing: FenwayGroup, Boston, MA

Editorial Email: messenger@swedenborg.org

Editorial, Business, and Subscription Address: *The Messenger*, Central Office

PO Box 380270

50 Quincy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Tel: 617-969-4240

Central Office Email: manager@swedenborg.org

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

Submissions are accepted at any time.

Submissions must be received by the 14th of the month to be considered for the next issue.

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

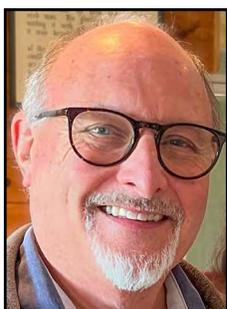
Church Calendar

- **March 21, 2026:** General Council Meeting
- **April 1, 2026:** Association Membership information is due to Central Office
- **April 3–April 5, 2026:** Central Office of the Swedenborgian Church is closed for the Easter holiday
- **April 15, 2026:** Registration for 202nd Convention opens!
- **May 15, 2026:** In-Person Registration for 202nd Convention Closes.

Message from the President

The Arts in Swedenborg Studies

The Year of the New Jerusalem: 2025–26



TTrue story. A married couple, each teaching philosophy at a major state university in the south, reported a thought-provoking discovery when they first began researching Swedenborg. They were more aware of Swedenborg from connections to such literary arts figures as Blake and Balzac than they were to major philosophers and theologians, so they decided to confer with faculty scholars on their campus in both the religious studies and the arts departments. What they discovered painted a picture, if you will: *nobody* in the religious studies department knew anything about Swedenborg, and *everybody* in the arts department knew a fair amount about Swedenborg.

I'm quite aware of this situation after teaching at the Graduate Theological Union with the fourth-largest religious studies library in the United States. Walking through the rows and rows of biblical and theological studies while pulling book after book off the shelf to see if Swedenborg is in the index, 98% of the time, he isn't. If I walk across the street to the University of California to one of their large libraries to explore novelists, poets, and artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, I discover Swedenborg quite often abiding in the index.



William Blake

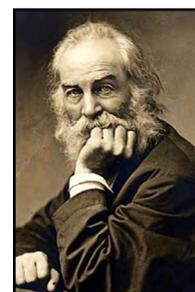
The various Swedenborgian branches have gathered

summaries of “the famous names” list of those across the arts who found inspired engagement with Swedenborg’s radical cosmos. Honoré de Balzac, Charles Pierre Baudelaire, William Blake, Ralph Albert Blacklock, Jorge Luis Borges, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Daniel Burnham, Thomas Carlyle, Frederic Edwin Church, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, John Flaxman, Robert Frost, Johann Goethe, Edgar Guest, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Heinrich Heine, Johann Herder, Julia Ward Howe, William Dean Howells, George Inness, Henry James, Sr., Sarah Orne Jewett, William Keith, Sheridan Le Fanu, Vachel Lindsay, George MacDonald, Edwin Markham, Czeslaw Milosz, William Page, Coventry Patmore, Edgar Allan Poe, Hiram Powers, Howard Pyle, Kathleen Raine, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Arnold Schoenberg, August Strindberg, Walt Whitman, Richard Yardumian, and William Butler Yeats represent the big picture, if you will.

What is the teaching tale of this true story of Swedenborg keeping company with an honor roll of figures in the arts and a backseat place in religious studies? We'll be having some spiritual fun with this culture tale at our summer convention in Boston. A few significant philosophical



Elizabeth Barrett Browning



Walt Whitman

Continues on page 31

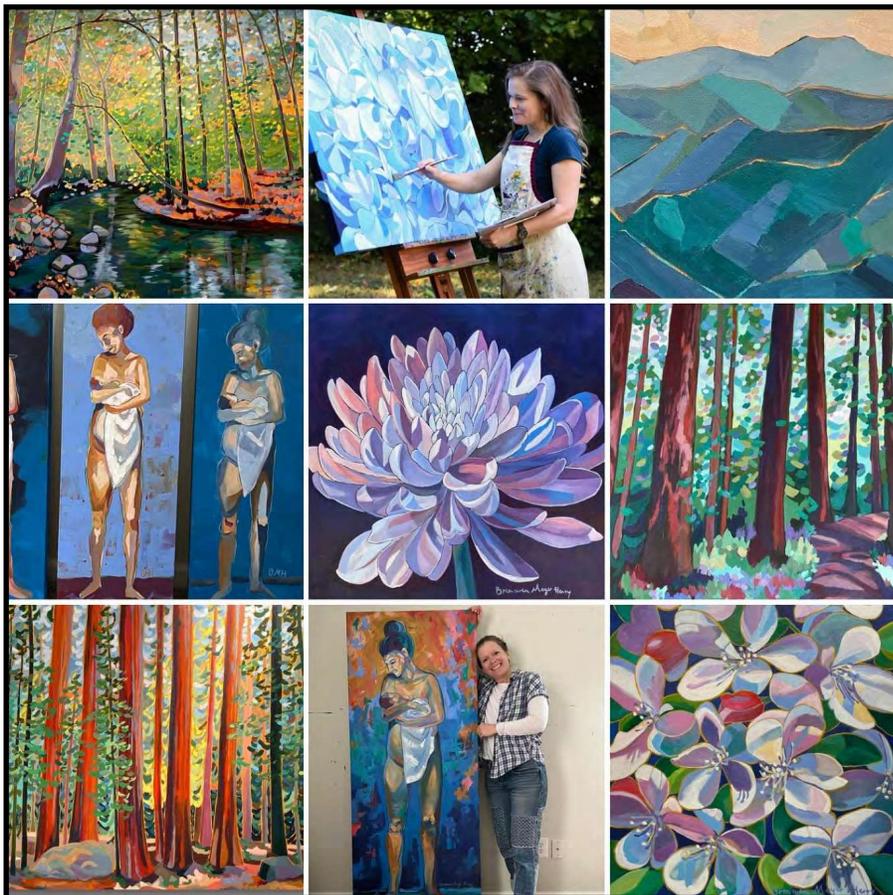
Convention 2026: Creating Harmony, Art as Spiritual Practice

Bronwen Mayer Henry named Convention 2026 Keynote Speaker

Bronwen Mayer Henry is an educator, nonprofit leader, author, and contemplative painter whose work lives at the intersection of creativity, compassion, and spiritual formation. She helps individuals and communities cultivate the skills, courage, and self-awareness needed to build more compassionate selves and communities, and a more understanding world.

For more than two decades, Bronwen has worked in curriculum development, leadership training, and facilitation within the faith and nonprofit sectors. Trained in elementary and special education at Bryn Athyn College, she began her career designing experiential, small-group learning models that translate values into lived practice. During eight years in congregational leadership at Bryn Athyn Church, she co-created and led the five-year Finding Hope initiative in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, mobilizing community leaders to respond to complex challenges, including suicide, addiction, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and mental illness.

Continues on page 25



Bronwen has been painting for many years. Here are just a few examples of her work. You can find more on her website, www.bronwenmayerhenry.com as well as on Instagram @choosejoyoverperfection. (above) 2024 Snapshot of original artwork. (below left) "One Another," 2025, acrylic on canvas. (below right) "Wild Edges," 2025, acrylic on canvas.



Convention 2026: Creating Harmony, Art as Spiritual Practice

2026 Convention Keynote

Continued from page 24

She now serves as Director of the Leadership Institute at Interfaith Philadelphia, equipping leaders across sectors with the skills and relationships needed to navigate difference and foster civil dialogue.

Bronwen completed the Executive Program in Social Impact Strategy at the University of Pennsylvania in 2021 and a two-year meditation teacher training with Jack Kornfield and Tara Brach in 2025. She is currently training as a facilitator with the Compassionate Listening Project.

Daily creative practice grounds her approach to life and work. After a cancer diagnosis in 2013, she turned to painting as a way to move through fear—an experience that she describes in her book *Radioactive Painting* (2020). She continues to lead retreats and workshops exploring contemplative creativity as a pathway to resilience, insight, and compassion.

Bronwen lives in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, with her husband, Jeremy, their two teenagers, and their King Charles Cavalier Spaniel, Yoda.

2026 Keynote Address

Bronwen’s keynote, *Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice*, explores how creativity can be an accessible, everyday path to healing, finding inner steadiness, and meaningful engagement with the world. This keynote invites participants to see creative expression as a spiritual practice—a form of expressive meditation that builds inner harmony and strengthens our capacity to face personal and collective challenges. Rather than competing with social action, creativity can ground and sustain it, helping us be present without going numb. Attendees will leave



Bronwen Mayer Henry, "Not Always So no. 1," 2025, Acrylic on Canvas.

with a renewed sense that creativity is a birthright and a simple, nearby practice for cultivating peace, resilience, and connection.

The keynote will be on June 26, 7:30PM–9:00PM ET, in the St. Lawrence meeting room, and will also be available online. In addition to the keynote, Bronwen will also be offering a Mini Course that puts this all into practice. Details will be available when registration opens on April 15. 📍

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, the Boston Church on the Hill.

- Located at the Babson Executive Conference Center in Wellesley, Massachusetts
- Join our hosts for this year’s outing in downtown Boston.
- Stay tuned for more details coming in the April *Messenger!*

Registration Opens April 15
More information will be shared on swedenborg.org!

Come Make a Joyful Noise at Convention!

Music, will be an essential part of the artistic harmony of our upcoming Convention this summer. An essential aspect of that is planning, preparation, and practice. To help us in that, please let us know as soon as possible how you would like to participate in the music of our session. We, of course, are looking to hear from any and all who would like to be a part of the Convention Choir, and please specify what part you sing. We would also like to know of anyone who would like to offer themselves as a soloist and/or instrumentalist of any kind. Please email your interest to kenturley75@gmail.com and paul.deming@icloud.com. 📍

Swedenborg House Conference in London

CSS in London

Continued from cover

will also address wider thematic currents such as eighteenth-century politics, millenarianism, esotericism, and the role of visionary experience in intellectual history.” A presidential address at the conclusion of the conference featured celebrated author Iain Sinclair on the subject of poetry and pilgrimage in London.

CSS was well represented. Professor Devin Zuber presented on the Swedenborgian artist Ralph Albert Blakelock, and Dean Rebecca Esterson presented on Helen Keller’s Swedenborgian phenomenology of the senses. CSS student C. J. Swenson presented on Swedenborg’s study of longitude, or how he “charted sea and spirit,” while CSS student Dell Rose presented on engagement with Swedenborg in Meiji-era Japan.



(From left to right) Ariel Hessayon (University of London), James Barszcz (independent scholar working on the James family), Dell Rose (CSS), and C. J. Swenson (CSS).

Those in attendance were inspired by the work of our hosts, the Swedenborg Society, and by what they have created at Swedenborg House, which is located in the vibrant Bloomsbury Square area in north London. The entry rooms of the building contain a lively bookstore and coffee shop, where one can enjoy “Arcana” brand coffee and peruse Swedenborgian literature. Further along, one finds an art gallery/museum, large event spaces, and a library and archive specializing in Swedenborgian history. The building was bustling with people from diverse backgrounds, wandering the halls for various reasons and enjoying the spirit of discovery and wonder that the space encouraged. Some were there for the coffee and pastries, but stayed to pick through an interesting volume. Others were there for the art, which featured in the gallery spaces, but was also spread throughout every room of the many-leveled building. Others were there for special events such as a book launch, a gallery event, or the academic conference. Many of us were able to access the archives while we were there for the sake of our own research and to enjoy quiet moments with original manuscripts or historical material that exists nowhere

else on the planet. For instance, I was able to access late-nineteenth-century issues of the journal *Uses* “A Monthly New-Church Journal of Evolutionary Reform” put out by the New-Church Socialist Society in England.



“Arcana” coffee at the Swedenborg House bookstore and coffee shop.

The conference was an opportunity for Swedenborg scholars from around the globe to meet and engage with one another, and we expect significant collaborations to come from the gathering. The Swedenborg Society (swedenborg.org.uk) hopes this will be the first of many conferences to be held, every other year, in different locations around the world. There are plans already for upcoming conferences in Sweden and Japan. The event also provided much inspiration for those of us interested in thinking about ways to create multi-purpose Swedenborgian spaces, spaces that integrate the arts, community activity, and scholarship (and coffee!). Please, if you are ever in north London, pay a visit to Swedenborg House. ☺

Dr. Rebecca K. Esterson is the dean of CSS and the Dorothea Harvey Professor of Swedenborgian Studies. She teaches in the Department of Sacred Texts and Their Interpretation at the GTU in Berkeley, California and is a member of the Swedenborg Society of the East Bay.



Annual Meeting of the Corporation of the New Church Theological School

The Annual Meeting of the Corporation of the New Church Theological School (d.b.a. the Center for Swedenborgian Studies of the Graduate Theological Union) will be held during the annual convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America, Sunday, June 28, 2026 at 3:15 PM ET, St. Lawrence Meeting Room, Babson Executive Conference Center in Wellesley, Massachusetts

Church Communities

Tu BiShvat

BY PASTOR CONNIE MCOSKER

“One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the olive tree, ‘Be our king.’ But the olive tree answered, ‘Should I give up my oil, by which both gods and humans are honored, to hold sway over the trees?’ Next, the trees said to the fig tree, ‘Come and be our king.’ But the fig tree replied, ‘Should I give up my fruit, so good and sweet, to hold sway over the trees?’ Then the trees said to the vine, ‘Come and be our king.’ But the vine answered, ‘Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and humans, to hold sway over the trees?’ Finally all the trees said to the thornbush, ‘Come and be our king.’ The thornbush said to the trees, ‘If you really want to anoint me king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, then let fire come out of the thornbush and consume the cedars of Lebanon!’”—Judges: 9:8–15

In the scripture today, we heard Jotham shout from a mountaintop. Jotham, the eleventh King of Judah, who lived in the 700s BCE, tells a fable as a warning to the citizens of Shechem about the big mistake they are making in choosing an unworthy leader. The olive and fig trees and grape vines are the heroes. They are personified beautifully and given honor in the way they answer the call to leadership. The olive tree is asked and respectfully declines the position, the fig tree is asked and is not interested either. So too, the vine is asked to lead, and it’s again a “No Thank You.” These trees know their worth and understand their value in being who they are. They know what they have to offer the world. The thornbush is not prepared; it doesn’t produce a fruit, it is a bramble, and dangerous to get caught in. It says that it will give shade, but it cannot, by its very nature, it’s too thin. This thornbush also warns of destruction if it is not obeyed. May this scripture stay within us, live in our hearts, as we prayerfully choose who has sway over us.

Now let’s consider Emanuel Swedenborg, whose tradition we follow



(From left to right) From Temple Beth El, Cantor Ilan Davidson on guitar and Rabbi Julia Knobloch on the mic. From the Garden Church, Pastor Connie McOsker with Tim McOsker.

at The Garden Church. He was a theologian and philosopher who lived in the 1700s. In his mystical experiences, he found more. All that was thought literal, has correspondences. These describe the internal structure of a person’s mind and the quality of their actions.

In his writings, there are general symbols:

- Trees represent the “intellectual parts” of a person’s perceptions, and understanding.
- Fruits represent the “works of charity.” In Swedenborg’s opinion, a tree is living only when it produces fruit, meaning knowledge is only valuable when it leads to a well-intentioned life. Swedenborg believes that the

Tu BiShvat

The Garden Church celebrated Tu BiShvat with their Jewish brothers and sisters of Temple Beth El in San Pedro, California, on February 1, 2026. Tu BiShvat is the Jewish New Year of the Trees, sometimes thought of as Jewish Arbor Day, and historically the cut-off day for the tithing of fruit trees. Fruit that blossomed before Tu BiShvat was counted toward the previous year’s tithing cycle, and fruit that blossomed after was counted toward the new year. Over time, the day evolved into a celebration of honoring and planting trees.

Continues on page 35

Featured Sermon

We Are All Immigrants

BY REV. RICH TAFEL

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.”—Matthew 25:35

I’ll be preaching sermons on topics you’ve recommended, and this came up from a few of you. Recent events in Minnesota make this an even more important topic.

So, what’s the Christian response to immigration?

The short answer is right here: Jesus said, “I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.” (Matthew 25:35)

He did not say, “I was a stranger with the right paperwork.” He did not say, “I was a stranger who posed no risk.” He did not say, “I was a stranger whose presence made you comfortable.” He did not say, “I was a stranger who spoke without an accent.”

He said: “I was a stranger.”

And then he made the most unsettling claim of all: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these...you did it to me.” This hard teaching shows the enduring power of Jesus’ teaching and why I read the gospel each week. We humans have a hard time processing it even 2000 years later. It’s still a challenge. But Jesus is clear that there is no us versus them, what we do to the least of these, we do to God. I find that beautiful and haunting.

There are over fifty times in the Bible where we are told to welcome the stranger. And remember that story about Sodom and Gomorrah? Some church leaders eventually turned it into a story against gay people, but it was actually a story about the sin of inhospitality, according to Jesus.

Our Immigrant Church

The Swedenborgian denomination has always been made up of recent immigrants. This past week, I completed a two-volume history of the Swedenborgian church in Frankford, Philadelphia, where my grandfather served for over forty years. You can see the drawing of that church in the dining room. My grandfather ministered to German Swedenborgian immigrants, and during his service as part of the US occupation after World War I, he married a German woman who became my grandmother.

All Americans migrated here. Even Native Americans crossed into this continent. Some, like my family, arrived over the last 150 years. Some came earlier. Many have come in recent years. It has always been what made America great.

While I don’t feel it is a pastor’s job to preach each week from the headlines and give you a political plan, I do believe it is important to see what we can learn from our faith about how to approach current issues.

Let’s look at our current immigration crisis.

There is a right way and a wrong way to immigrate to the United States. When people have abused it, they should have to leave and do it properly, but this doesn’t justify the way we are treating immigrants now.

With aggressive actions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) around the country, I get angry as I watch the events unfold. We are seeing a level of intensity in immigration enforcement that feels different, with masked men kidnapping people on their way to deliveries here in DC,

at courthouses where they showed up for their hearings, and in our neighborhoods, warehouses, and workplaces. This behavior is not police work as usual, and the police have spoken out against these tactics. I found an interview with the police chief of Minneapolis clarifying that, as did my training with the NYPD. These officers feel caught in the middle of bad policies.

Many churches are speaking up. The Catholic Bishops recently released an outstanding message pleading for an end to dehumanizing rhetoric. Even more strikingly, the Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire told his clergy this week to “get their affairs in order,” suggesting that the time may come to put our very bodies on the line to protect the vulnerable. A friend of mine who is an evangelical pastor in northern Virginia told his congregation that if ICE comes to their church, he’ll go to jail with anyone they take.

Now, my primary goal is to help give you a spiritual lens to look at current events. Here’s one I find helpful.

Divine Love and Divine Wisdom

In the Swedenborgian tradition, we believe that God is Divine Love and Divine Wisdom. One cannot function without the other.

Let’s look at how that plays out with the immigration issue.

In the physical world, wisdom teaches we need boundaries. Homes need walls to provide safety for the family within, and a nation uses boundaries to maintain the order necessary for a society to function. Without order, we cannot be useful. The ability for people to work, trade, and care

Continues on page 29

Featured Sermon

We Are All Immigrants*Continued from page 28*

for one another in safety, is lost. Order allows a community to know its capacity so that it can serve its members effectively.

In the Swedenborgian tradition, we believe that God is Divine Love and Divine Wisdom. One cannot function without the other.

But here is the danger: Wisdom without Love becomes a cold, rigid legalism. It enforces the letter of the law while crushing the human spirit. The policies we are seeing played out now by ICE are legalistic without compassion. Conversely, Love without Wisdom becomes a chaotic sentimentality that ignores the practical needs of the whole community. The policies of the last administration that encouraged caravans of people to walk right across borders to petition for protection, but then disappear, represented compassion without wisdom that leads to disorder.

Both of our political parties have erred. One side often champions a “love” that lacks the wisdom of order, while the other champions a “wisdom” that has lost its heart. In this moment, the pendulum has swung. We are seeing Law without Love.

An ideal policy would marry love and wisdom together.

Another important lens for looking at this issue is understanding that Jesus says my kingdom is not of this world. In the natural world, we are citizens of a country with laws and borders. But looking through a spiritual lens, as followers of Jesus, we have a much broader kingdom to exist in, where we believe we are all created in the image

of God. Every person, regardless of what papers they carry, is a child of the Divine.

We are all spiritual immigrants while on earth for a short time.

If we have the privilege of being born in more affluent places, we have an obligation to abide by “when I was hungry you gave me food.” None of us chose to be born in the most affluent place in the world. None of us earned it. It is a blessing. The same is true of the migrant. They didn’t choose their life circumstances. When we see them, we must, as part of the body of Christ, offer support and remind ourselves that “There but for the grace of God go I.” Supporting those less fortunate financially is an opportunity for our own spiritual growth.

In Jesus’s Kingdom, the citizenship that matters is whether we have learned to love our neighbor as ourselves. Our task as Christians is to honor the practical needs of the physical world while never losing sight of the spiritual reality that transcends all human borders.

Swedenborg taught that a healthy society is one where everyone can contribute their unique service. When we terrorize the person delivering our Amazon packages or the person roofing our houses, we are tearing the fabric of the healthy society apart. If we cannot see Christ in the face of the frightened worker today, then we have lost the Gospel itself.

We’re ignoring our role to create policies that work for all.

The Witness We Are Called To

We can advocate for secure borders and orderly systems—Wisdom demands it. But we cannot accept the terrorization of families as the price of that order—Love forbids it.

In times like these, we struggle to know how to make our voices heard,

how to be faithful witnesses. Some of us are called to organize politically, some to prayer vigils, some to protests, and some to the work of bridge-building across divides, which is what I’ve been attempting through Cultural Translation. There are many forms of faithful witness, and we need all of them.

We must each ask God in our prayer time, “How can I be most useful?” and then when shown the way, do it. This week, we can start with our personal engagements.

Notice the people who serve you. The person who delivers your package. The worker who is repairing your street. Look them in the eye. Learn their name if you can. Let them know they are seen, they are valued, and they belong here.

This is moving our hearts from a place of “us vs. them” to a place of “I see you.”

When we meet fear with presence and meet invisibility with recognition, we are building the Kingdom of God one encounter at a time. That is a “Use” we can all perform, starting today.

May the God of Love and God of Wisdom give us the heart to love the stranger and the mind to build a world of order. Help us to see through the fog of fear. When we are confused, lead us back to the simple truth: that what we do to the least of these, we do to You. Amen. ☪

Rev. Rich Tafel is the pastor of the Church of the Holy City in Washington, D.C. He is a strategist who works at the intersection of faith, business, and politics to build bridges bringing together unlikely coalitions to solve some of the world’s greatest challenges.



Justice is the New Jerusalem

Beyond Patriarchy: Helen Keller's New Heaven and New Earth

BY REV. SAGE COLE

When the nudge to make space for a new form of new church life first began to land in me back in 2018, it was Helen Keller's image that quickly came to mind, in part, of course, because she's amazing, but also because she is a she. Sitting in Cambridge amidst dusty volumes penned by men, in a building built by men, in a church designed by men, Helen was like a gentle breeze of possibility. Somehow, this deaf-blind woman, just by being her full, vivacious, curious, loving, self, had been a powerful vessel for the emergence of the new church. She gave me confidence that perhaps I could do the same.

It has become clear in 2026 that honoring the voice, the experience, the wisdom of women is desperately needed if our world is going to come back into alignment. The history of patriarchal control of this planet, once accepted, for a time tolerated, has now become an open wound that cannot be ignored. People of all genders are learning to heal from this history, to root out the patriarchal conditioning that has left us alienated from ourselves and each other. We are coming to remember our true shared identity as beloved children of God, and this remembering is causing us to challenge and question many of the long-standing structures designed with inequality in mind.

I feel honored to be able to lift up Helen as the first contribution to the Social Justice Committee's new column, "Justice is the New Jerusalem." She perhaps, more than any other devotee of Swedenborg, saw this to be true. Helen understood the invitation of the new church to be an invitation to an entirely new way to live together on this planet. She is known as the woman with the radical social vision. A radical social vision of equality, of peace, of mutual care and inclusion, of heaven on earth. She understood this to be not only possible, but inevitable, a new heaven and a new earth that was on its way.

My confidence in the final triumph of idealism over materialism does not spring from closing my mental eyes to the suffering of the evil-doing of men, but rather from a steadfast belief that good will climb upward in human nature while the meanness and hatred drop into their native nothingness, and life goes on with unabated vigor to its new earth and heaven.

—Helen Keller, "My Luminous Universe," 1956.

The new church that Helen was devoted to bringing into being, and that we are charged with making space for, is a community of mutual heavenly love, of equality, and of spiritual freedom. The structures of the Swedenborgian denomination also carry vestiges of patriarchal control that must be named and transformed. While we have been changing, thanks to the legacy of those women who have broken barriers into ordination and leadership, there is still

more change to come. We, too, must allow ourselves to be remade, to be regenerated, to become not just

an institution built by men that allows women, but an organization remade with equality and a respect for the feminine at its core. While much progress has been made since Helen's time, there is still so much to do. May we carry the same trust and confidence in heaven's invitation that Helen did, and not be disheartened by the work ahead. May we trust that the new heaven and new earth are descending, and this is but the work before us.

To continue this conversation, please join us for a special live virtual event: "Gender Equity & the New Jerusalem: A Be Honest Conversation," Tuesday, March 24, 2026, at 7:00PM ET, co-sponsored by the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative and Deborah's Tree, featuring Dr. Page Morahan. More information can be found at www.helenkellercollaborative.org.

Rev. Sage Cole is the visionary founder of the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative. She publishes the Substack Worship Is life and produces the Be Love Podcast. Sage lives in Boston, MA with her husband Ted, sons Zachary and Theo, cat Miso, and dog Princess.



THE HELEN KELLER
SPIRITUAL LIFE
COLLABORATIVE

Justice is the New Jerusalem

Learning to Organize for Justice: FCNL Workshop Report

BY DR. PAGE MORAHAN



On February 4, the Social Justice Committee sponsored “Service and Justice: Organizing for Change in Our Communities,” a virtual workshop led by Jackson Malkus of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL).

The workshop challenged the participants to examine the critical distinction between Service and Justice work. While service projects like food pantries and community gardens address immediate needs, they often perpetuate existing systems and maintain a giver-versus-receiver dynamic. Justice work, by contrast, requires systemic change—addressing root causes through public action rather than private charity. Both matter, but recognizing the difference helps us be more strategic in our advocacy.

Malkus introduced George Lakey’s framework for roles in social activism, emphasizing that all contributions—from organizers to helpers to advocates—are essential. Effective community organizing always begins with one-on-one conversations that build into group action, followed by careful

reflection on what worked and what didn’t.

The group worked through a planning worksheet that integrated both service project elements and campaign organizing strategies to influence policy decisions. Using issues like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention as an example, the exercise reinforced that even seemingly small steps—like writing personalized letters to legislators or requesting face-to-face meetings—can create meaningful change when done strategically and in community.

Take Action: FCNL provided a worksheet that addressed both the elements of Service Project Planning and justice elements in Campaign Planning that can influence policy decisions. Access the basic worksheet at <https://tinyurl.com/586m4au8>. Learn more at www.fcnl.org or contact Jackson Malkus at jmalkus@friend-splacdc.org.

Page S. Morahan, Ph.D., is Professor Emerita, Drexel University College of Medicine, and Founding Director of Drexel’s ELAM® and Founding Co-Director Emerita, International FAIMER Institute (IFI®). Her current passions focus on: advancement of women; social justice; voting rights; and inspirational photography to connect people around the world. She started Page’s Pages Around the World™ to support FAIMER. She hosts the Home Church in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania and is active in Deborah’s Tree activities.



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. The most recent issue includes reflections on biased narratives of blame, the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance, and how to help our neighbors in Minnesota. Sign up here: <http://tiny.cc/k73z001>

Message From the President

Continued from page 23

thinkers have taken Swedenborg seriously, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson. He picked Swedenborg as “the mystic” for his well-known 1850 collection of seven essays titled *Representative Men*: “A colossal soul, Swedenborg lies vast abroad on his times, uncomprehended by them and requires a long focal distance to be seen...One of the missori-ums and mastodons of literature, he is not to be measured by whole colleges of ordinary scholars.”

We will be at one of those colleges in Boston this summer, and I encourage you to join us physically or virtually for our annual summer convention, as we do our necessary business along with playfully exploring the deep romance between the arts and Swedenborg.

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

Updates from Denominational Groups

First Round of Legacy Funding in New York

BY REV. DR. JIM LAWRENCE AND REV. ROBERT MCCLUSKEY

The first round of grant applications was accomplished by the trustees of the New York New Church Legacy Fund with the guidance of PENN Creative Strategy, a New York consulting group that specializes in strategy and planning. The trustees are led by Rev. Robert McCluskey, who is serving as chair and who is a longtime former minister at the New York New Church in the Murray Hill neighborhood of Manhattan.

We thought it would be informative to report a snapshot of the first round of grant support from the new legacy fund organization incorporated in the state of New York for the purpose of supporting other nonprofit organizations.

The trustees decided in this first year to support ten organizations that perform good uses for society in the New York City area itself, and ten Swedenborgian Church of North America organizations that might be located anywhere in the United States or Canada.

We solicited grant proposals and received a number more than ten for both categories and went through a process of evaluations and decisions on the grant proposals. With varying levels of financial support, the following funding decisions were made:



The former New York New Church in Murray Hill, New York, New York. The proceeds from the sale of this property is what created the New York Legacy Fund.

- The Church on the Hill in Boston was supported to grow their internal leadership with a ministry residency and to design and implement a local addiction and recovery ministry in Boston.
- The Center for Swedenborgian Studies in Berkeley was funded to grow its scholarship support to attract new talent for future leadership by reducing the cost of professional formation for ministry in our denomination.
- The Swedenborg Library in Chicago was supported to provide a Swedenborgian outreach set of lectures and events in Manhattan to help maintain a Swedenborgian witness in the Big Apple.
- The new Swedenborg House in Washington, DC, ministry was supported to establish an improved outreach in its new location in the capital city.
- The Church of the Holy City in Wilmington, Delaware, was supported to expand its programming for outreach in its locale by adding new staff and for specific ministry outreach programs.
- The newly renamed Garden Chapel (formerly Church of the Open Word) in St. Louis was supported in its significant Conservation Easement project that creates spiritual ecology education programs, weekend retreats, and spiritual practice sessions that align with the enhanced ecology project on their property.
- The outdoor Garden Church of San Pedro, California, was supported with resources in their ministry for those dealing with food and housing insecurity, which is central to their weekly operations.
- The Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative was supported to develop a traveling exhibit that brings Helen Keller's life and faith into renewed awareness to the larger world.
- Hillside, an Urban Sanctuary, was supported to expand its successful Spiral outreach program by adding appropriate technology and funding for engaging guest presenters.
- The Swedenborgian Spiritual Community of Puget Sound was supported to create and develop a new outreach program called "Crosshatched."
- The San Francisco Swedenborgian Church was supported to increase youth attendance at their annual retreat.
- The New Church of the Southwest Desert was supported in adding part-time staff to increase outreach to the local college and develop programming and events for their "downtown" coffee shop, Oasis. ☺

Updates from Denominational Groups

Kindling Our Light in the Darkness: Three Opportunities to Gather

The Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative is thrilled to announce a number of Be Love, all adult, retreats happening this spring in the Midwest and on the East Coast with the theme: Kindling Our Light in the Darkness. In the midst of the challenging times we live in, there is so much light! These retreat offerings will hold space for us to share the light we each hold within, of love, truth, and usefulness with each other.

March 20–22 at Almont New Church Assembly, Michigan

First up, we will be gathering for our second Be Love retreat in collaboration with the Michigan Association at Almont New Church Assembly in Allenton, Michigan, Friday, March 20–Sunday, March 22. You can learn more about this retreat and register here: helenkellercollaborative.org/event/be-love-all-adult-spring-retreat-at-anca/

April 17–20 at Cedar Hill Retreat Center, Massachusetts

Next, we'll be at the Cedar Hill Retreat Center in Duxbury, Massachusetts from Friday, April 17–Monday, April 20. You can find out more about this Be Love retreat, sponsored by the Massachusetts New Church Union, by visiting: helenkellercollaborative.org/event/massachusetts-adult-be-love-be-honest-be-useful-spring-2026-retreat/

May 16 at The Lord's New Church, Pennsylvania

And finally, in collaboration with Deborah's Tree (deborahstree.org), we have a Be Love day retreat coming up on Saturday, May 16. Join us in-person at The Lord's New Church in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, or virtually through our hybrid option. For more details and to register, visit helenkellercollaborative.org/event/bryn_athyn/

Please join us if you are able! If your association, congregation, camp, or group is interested in exploring the possibility of collaborating with the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative on a Be Love retreat with your community, email us at info@helenkellercollaborative.org. 

Paulhaven Camp: Camp Pastor Wanted

Paulhaven's Children's Camp is seeking a caring and enthusiastic Camp Pastor for our summer camp week, July 19–25, 2026, located in Ashmont, Alberta. The Camp Pastor will lead the religious program, developing and implementing a continuing spiritual program that includes worship, chapel, and faith-building activities for campers ages 8–16.



We are looking for someone who enjoys working with children and youth, and sharing God's love in a camp community!

For more information or to apply, please contact: paulhaven.camp@gmail.com. 

Double Rainbow arcing over Paulhaven Camp in Ashmont, Alberta, Canada (right).



Passages

Deaths

Jean Shirley (Wentz) Cressy, 90, of Fryeburg, Maine, passed away on January 7 at her home with family nearby.



Jean was born on September 8, 1935, in Melrose,

Maryland, to Maurice Sr. and Pauline Wentz. She grew up and lived in Manchester, Maryland, until meeting the love of her life, Warren Cressy, in the Empire State Building. They were married in 1957 and then moved to Fryeburg, Maine, around 1963 with their two young children, Michael and Andrea. Jean worked at the A&P store as a cashier until it closed. After the closing, she started work at Emery's until their closing, where most people remember her and her smiling face greeting them and assisting them as a cashier. She then worked at Harvest Hills Animal Shelter for twenty-two years, only stopping about six months prior to her death.

During her time in Fryeburg, she was known to deliver the local newspaper to many of her friends and neighbors in town. She was highly active at The Fryeburg New Church, where she was known as a Sunday School teacher and trustee and loved the community within her church.

Jean was also incredibly involved in her grandchildren's lives, often attending school activities, sporting events, and caring for them after school on many days.

Jean had a great love for her family, friends, and loved ones. She always welcomed hugs, was known for hosting Sunday family dinners, and making the most scrumptious desserts.

Jean is survived by her son Michael (Ella) Cressy, daughter Andrea Bryan, and daughter Joan (Brian) McBurnie. Grandchildren Jessica Warren (Wes Smith), Aaron Cressy (Payton), Jasmine Bryan, Zachary Bryan, Carrie Cressy, and Jackson McBurnie. Great-grandchildren Brigham Smith, Penelope Cooper, Stella Smith, Kyler Cressy, and Nora Cressy. A niece, nephew, and cousin in Maryland.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Maurice Sr. and Pauline Wentz, husband Warren Cressy, and brother Maurice Wentz Jr.

A funeral service is planned for April 11, 2026 at the Fryeburg New Church at 11:00 AM ET with a luncheon to follow.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to:

- Harvest Hills Animal Shelter, 1389 Bridgton Rd, Fryeburg, ME, 04037
- Fryeburg Fire Department, 520 Main St, Fryeburg, ME, 04037
- Fryeburg Rescue Department, 89 Bridgton Rd, Fryeburg, ME, 04037
- Fryeburg New Church, 12 Oxford St, Fryeburg, ME, 04037

Cristina "Tina" Guiu Wood, 77,



entered fully into the spiritual world on Monday, Jan. 12, 2026, at her home in Weathersfield, Vermont, surrounded by family and friends,

after a battle with cancer. She was buried, as she wished, on the farm where she had lived for much of her life. She was a lifelong believer in the spiritual teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg and

attended the Fryeburg New Church Assembly in Fryeburg, Maine, every summer for almost all of her seventy-seven years.

The middle of three sisters, Tina was born on February 22, 1948, in Greenfield, Massachusetts, to Rafael and Elizabeth (Bray) Guiu. She moved to Weathersfield, Vermont, in 1970, after graduating with a degree in music from Bennington College. As a child, she had always wanted to live on a farm, and that childhood dream became a reality when, at the height of the Vermont Back to the Land movement, she and her husband Willis took over the family farm that had been in his family since the late 1700s. Here they stayed for the next fifty-five years, raising two children, Joshua and Marina, continuing and expanding the farm's cider and maple business, while also raising cows, sheep, and chickens. She was a wonderful gardener, spending countless hours raising vegetables and tending the beautiful flower gardens that surrounded her house. She reveled in the fact that, in maybe twenty-five years of hard work, she managed to turn a patch of Japanese knotweed into a thriving vegetable garden, but never managed to conquer the encroaching gout weed. She was a wonderful cook and entertainer, easily turning a lunch from two to twenty when friends, grandkids, or a sweaty hay crew showed up.

Tina enjoyed traveling, including trips to Cuba (her father's birthplace) and Guatemala, where her son and daughter-in-law lived for many years. One memorable trip was walking the entire Camino de Santiago, a 500-mile pilgrimage trail running from France to Santiago, Spain.

Music was always central to her life. She spent many years teaching piano

Continues on page 35

Passages

Continued from page 34

to both children and adults, sang in many local choirs, and played piano and organ at the Weathersfield Center Church for more than forty years, as well as at other local churches. Some twenty years ago, Tina and her friend Julie Levy started and led Clear Springs, a hospice choir, where she shared her love of music with sick and dying patients at homes and assisted living centers. After years of singing to others on their deathbeds, her choir sang to and with Tina as she became sicker, and even up to the moment of her death.

Tina is survived by Willis, her husband of fifty-five years; her son and daughter-in-law, Josh and Gabriella Wood; her daughter and son-in-law, Marina Wood-McNaughton and Nathan McNaughton; and grandchildren Zed, Myra, Ada, and Rose. She was predeceased by her sister Cecilia (Guiu) Searle and survived by her sister Gloria (Guiu) Costello, as well as nieces and nephews. The family plans a celebration of her life in the spring. ☪

Tu Bishat

Continued from page 27

“twelve fruits” that we mention each week in our liturgy are the various types of good works that are done from love for God and others. And in the passage we use, when we say “one fruit for each month of the year,” Swedenborg emphasizes that we can alternate the good works, that a variety of fruit is necessary, depending on the need that is evident. He also connects the “twelve fruits” to the “twelve tribes of Israel,” which symbolize the good and truth of faith in a comprehensive sense

through history. The branches are important: they support the leaves, flower blossoms, and eventual fruit. When we say “the leaves are for the healing of the nations” each week, Swedenborg wants us to think of a leaf as a page, a piece of paper, something written down as important, thus scripture. So the knowledge of truths of faith, prepare our minds to heal when we do the good works.

Taking a look at the trees mentioned in today’s passage, Swedenborg is more specifically focused on the level of the human essence they represent.

- The Olive Tree is Celestial, representing the highest state of closeness to the Lord, driven by love for God. Its oil symbolizes the “good of love.”
- The Fig Tree is Natural, representing the lowest state. Our outward life and worldly knowledge. The figs represent natural goodness or simple kindness.
- The Vine is Spiritual, representing a level between the Natural and the Celestial, led by truth and love for the neighbor. Its wine symbolizes spiritual truth.
- The Cedar of Lebanon is Rational, representing a noble understanding that can distinguish between natural and spiritual things. So in the last line of today’s scripture, the Bramble leader would take away reason and common sense.

And so to summarize The Tree of Life for Swedenborg, it corresponds to the perception that all life and goodness flow from God. Eating its fruit means living in constant awareness of this divine source.

Speaking of eating fruit, now let me tell you my simple thoughts about real, non-theological fruit. I love fruit. It has vitamins and antioxidants. Fruit was the original dessert, God’s dessert.

Fruit is special to me because of how I was raised. I grew up with various fruits as the dessert, rarely was there a cake or a cookie. We were taught to make a wish when we ate the first fruit of the season. My mom grew figs and grapes. My dad took me shopping to teach me how to pick the best fruit, and sometimes told me that a pear had a rosy cheek, like mine. In college, I ate an apple every day for four years. My family owns a grove of olive trees in Italy that is over 500 years old. I’ve had the opportunity to harvest our olives and make olive oil with my family. I appreciate imperfect fruit too, cutting off a blemish and eating the rest. I freeze fruit, I dehydrate fruit! I made grape juice recently from a donated box of grapes from the farmers’ market because they were too ripe to sell. And we used that for our “cup of salvation” here at The Garden Church. I deeply appreciate those who grow our fruit, pick our fruit, and deliver our fruit to our markets. I pray for their fair wages. I cannot let fruit go to waste. When my kids were small and would run away from the dinner table, I would shout, “Come back, we didn’t have fruit yet, and we didn’t talk enough!” They coined that: Mom’s fruit obligation. Ahh, I can say so much more about fruit, maybe we’ll have a chance to chat at dinner!

So let us this day, on Tu BiShvat, continue to appreciate each fruit and each tree it comes from. Every time we take a bite of real fruit, let us think of a Natural, Spiritual, or Celestial act we could perform to make us closer to God! —Amen ☪

Connie is a retired Adult Education Teacher/Arts Facilitator/Homeless Services Provider. She has been a Licenced Pastor with The Garden Church since 2022.



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.

2026 Convention Appeal

A Message from the Executive Committee

Dear Members and Organizations of the SCNA, We are reaching out to our wonderful benefactors, both individuals and organizations, to consider making a contribution towards helping us provide a meaningful experience for all of our members and friends. We are thrilled to be hosting our 202nd annual convention in a beautiful setting near our historic "home city" of Boston, at the Babson Executive Conference Center, adjacent to Babson College, globally recognized for its top-ranked programs in the scenic suburb of Wellesley, Massachusetts.

This lovely location provides delightful meeting spaces and lodging accommodations. At the same time, we continue with robust technology support so people can also attend our worship services, business meetings, and our popular Mini Courses from the virtual comforts of home. Overall, we are building a terrific design for widespread participation.

Our theme is "Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice," and the keynote address will be by celebrated artist Bronwen Mayer Henry. In addition to wonderful Mini Courses and worship experiences for all ages, we will hold important business sessions and receive hopeful reports of positive developments in many aspects of our denominational life.

To support our time-honored tradition of gathering every summer for this fusion of business, education, children and youth activities, worship, fellowship, and play, we would love donations from our organizations and individuals to help fund this inspiring and legally required convention. Contributions can be steered to youth activities, hospitality, need-based scholarships, technology for virtual participation, music programs, Mini Courses, or simply for general cost support. Modest gifts are richly welcomed—and all gifts will be acknowledged!

To donate online, visit www.swedenborg.org/donate, and please remember to indicate what this donation is intended for. If you would like to send a check, please make it out to "Swedenborgian Church of North America" and mail it to: General Convention ATTN: Gina Peracchi, PO Box 380270, Cambridge, MA 02238-0270. 