



## The Boston Society of the New Jerusalem: A Living Legacy on Beacon Hill

BY REV. KEVIN BAXTER

**P**erched atop historic Beacon Hill in Boston, the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem, affectionately known as the Church on the Hill, stands as one of the oldest and most enduring Swedenborgian congregations in the United States. Its story is one of



*We are looking forward to seeing you all at the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem, or "The Church on the Hill," in Boston, Massachusetts for the 2026 Convention!*

intellectual curiosity, spiritual exploration, resilience through challenge, and a continued commitment to meaningful community life. Today, the church bridges more than two centuries of history with a renewed sense of purpose, offering a compelling example of how a historic religious society can remain vibrant in the modern world.

The origins of the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem stretch back to the late 1700s. Whether it was the lection James Glen gave in the Green Dragon

Tavern or the reading groups the Rev. James Hill gathered, a mark was made. Hill gave his books to Harvard, where Thomas Worcester found them in a room of curiosities in the 1810s. Soon, a new reading group formed with Thomazine Minot, Thomas Worcester, Sampson Reed, Nathaniel Hobart, and more. After the Weeks heresy trial in Abington, Massachusetts, a more organized movement emerged, culminating in the formal establishment of the Boston church in 1818

ing the pastor to run a boarding house to generate revenue to pay for the various halls. This location, overlooking the city both physically and symbolically, inspired the now-familiar nickname "Church on the Hill." The original Gothic Revival building became a prominent landmark and a spiritual home for generations of worshippers until the mid-twentieth century.

The physical structure of the church has also evolved. The original Gothic

*Continues on page 56*

### CSS Winter Intensive

Hear from two attendees about their experiences at this edifying and community building event.

Page 58

### 2026 Mini Course Offerings

Descriptions of this years Mini Courses along with short biographies of those who are offering them.

Page 62

### SJC Presents: Queer Ecology

On May 6 at 7:00 PM ET come hear Parker Bushman present on *Queer Ecology* on Zoom.

Page 70

### Contents

The Boston Society of the New Jerusalem: A Living Legacy on Beacon Hill .....cover  
 Church Calendar .....54  
 Editor's Corner .....54  
 Message from the President.....55  
 Locked Doors .....57  
 CSS 2026 Winter Intensive.....58  
 Mini Course Line-Up for Convention 2026.....62  
 Proposed By-Law Amendment .....66  
 More Nominations for Elected Positions .....67  
 CSS Annual Meeting Updates.....68  
 Come Make a Joyful Noise!.....68  
 Calling All Display Tables!.....68  
 Calling Swedenborg Inspired Creators: Join the Swedenborg Social Media Network.....69  
 2026 Speaker Series with Social Justice Committee: Queer Ecology .....70  
 It's a Banner Year!.....72

### Editor's Corner



#### No One Leaves a Stranger

This issue is filled with details about the 202<sup>nd</sup> Convention in Boston. Boston, Massachusetts, will always remind me of my sister, who passed away a few years ago. She used to work at the Paul Revere House and loved U.S. colonial history, living museums, and pretty much everything Boston.

I haven't had the opportunity to go into downtown Boston since the last time that I was there with her, many years ago, so I am especially excited to see what the Boston Society has in store for Convention attendees—particularly the “Taste of Boston” outing!

This year's Mini Courses also resonate with me. Art has always played a prominent role in my life and home, and I am looking forward to celebrating the theme with classes focused on fine art, music, and more!

Another highlight will be Rev. Catherine Lauber's Convention Worship Service this year. Being able to experience a different minister's service, and the diversity of experience that they each bring, is always meaningful.

Finally, I am most excited to see everyone! I know I am blessed to be able to attend these gatherings and I cherish every connection and shared laugh, cry, and memory that is formed at these events.

If you can manage it, and aren't sure if you are going to attend this year, I implore you, “Come!” All are welcome and all are made to feel welcome. If you're ever unsure of what to do or where to go, grab a seat next to me! The very best thing about these events is the people—this group always makes sure no one leaves a stranger!

—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.

### Church Calendar

- **May 15, 2026:** In-Person Registration for 202<sup>nd</sup> Convention Closes
- **May 15, 2026:** 2026 Advance Reports due to Central Office
- **May 22–25, 2026:** Memorial Day Youth Retreat
- **May 25, 2026:** Central Office Closed for Memorial Day
- **June 6, 2026:** Pre-Convention General Council Meeting
- **June 15, 2026:** Virtual Registration for 202<sup>nd</sup> Convention Closes
- **June 26, 2026:** Annual COM meeting
- **June 26–June 29, 2026:** 202<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America

Do you write poetry?

Send it along to:

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### Submission Deadline Reminder

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

Registration for in-person attendees closes on **May 15**

Registration for virtual attendees closes on **June 15**

Register here:  
[swedenborg.org](http://swedenborg.org)

*Message from the President*

## The Communication Revolution That Started the New Church

*The Year of the New Jerusalem: 2025–26*



Swedenborg declared a New Age was at hand—one connected to a new communication system between the natural and spiritual worlds. Communicating about the novel opening of the spiritual realm was aided by the innovative publishing technology called the

Gutenberg printing press. Mass and fast communication had become widespread, and Swedenborg believed such technology was pivotal for the New Age he heralded.

Ironically, the very ability to communicate effectively about the emerging New Age mirrored the very spiritual world Swedenborg was revealing. When I was in seminary school in the early eighties, we talked about this very topic often: how much technology had continued to expand since Swedenborg’s day in a manner making life in the natural world increasingly like life in the spiritual world. In the spiritual world, if two angels wish to speak with one another, even if in vastly distant parts of the spiritual world, they are instantly in communication together. Space collapses through intention. Same thing with picking up the phone in the twentieth century and dialing someone on the other side of the planet: instant presence.

As the eighties proceeded with new ways to send written messages to others (we call this email now), we could deliver significant discourse to others within seconds, no matter where the recipient was, *if* they had the proper technology. Spiritually, we might imagine proper technology as prayer, and

belief as another way of experiencing instantaneous communication.

We were so excited back then to see technology unfold powerfully in ways that Swedenborg predicted would be increasingly true in “the New Age,” a progressively popular terminology taking hold at that time. “New Age” framing began in the seventies, but then morphed dramatically in the eighties, while my seminary colleagues were trying to connect with contemporary ministry strategies. If you read the Wikipedia article on the New Age Movement ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Age)), you will see Swedenborg identified prominently among the thinkers who popularized its concepts.

Rev. Chauncey Giles, one of our most significant writers in the eighteenth century, was using the term “New Age” as a synonym for both the New Church and the Second Coming. And remember, the Second Coming itself involves a new communication system within the Word! Giles was probably the most effective Swedenborgian in the second half of the nineteenth century for reaching big audiences, and his popular public lectures and widespread writings heralded a New Age underway that had opened the spiritual world and revealed a farsighted view of where it is all going.

The New Church all started with a communications revelation that continues to evolve in extraordinary ways. We can reach out to others and hop on Zoom together in real time from all over the country: collapsing time, connecting us instantaneously, creating a dynamic community of spirit, and being *part of* the New Age of the New Church. ☩

—Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence  
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## Featured Community

**Boston Society***Continued from cover*

building was replaced in the 1960s with a more modern facility integrated into an apartment complex, reflecting both practical needs and changing demographics, and, in some ways, a return to its earliest days when it ran a boarding house.

Like many long-standing institutions, the church has faced periods of difficulty. Internal challenges in the early twenty-first century—including a highly publicized federal investigation in 2013—threatened its stability. Yet the congregation endured, sustained by a committed core of members who worked to rebuild and reimagine its future.

Today, the Church on the Hill is a smaller, but deeply engaged community, with a few dozen active members who gather regularly for worship, study, and fellowship. Its intimate size has fostered a strong sense of connection and shared purpose toward service and usefulness. This resilience has become a defining feature of its modern identity. Sunday worship remains at the heart of congregational life. Services are held weekly and combine traditional liturgical elements with a progressive theological outlook. Music plays a central role, featuring both classical and contemporary selections led by a professional choir.

Over the past decade, the church

has done direct service through working with other groups to provide meals for all the people in the community and assembled teams to build homes with Habitat for Humanity. Through groups like the United Way and the Wonderfund of Massachusetts, church members assemble to pack bags with Christmas gifts, hygiene products, and laundry necessities to make a difference to marginalized people in the community. In addition to those programs, the church has given almost three million dollars in grants to help its community and the larger world.

Whether it was the founding of the Gregg Neighborhood House a hundred years ago, or the recent establishment of the Rev. Dr. Ted Klein Scholarship for Ethics and Philosophy at UMass Boston, education has continued to be another cornerstone of the church's mission. We hold spiritual growth classes, discussion groups, and informal learning opportunities to invite participants to engage deeply with Swedenborgian teachings and their relevance to contemporary life.

In recent years, the church has taken significant steps toward renewal and reconnection. In 2024, it rejoined the Massachusetts New Church Union and the broader Swedenborgian Church of North America after two decades of independence. This milestone represents both a healing of past divisions and a renewed commitment to shared identity and collaboration within the wider Swedenborgian community.

At its heart, the Church on the Hill is a place of spiritual hospitality—a “home away from home” where

**Convention Outing:  
A Taste of Boston!**

On June 29, the Boston Society will present a “Taste of Boston.” We will have an experience of rich cultural heritage and history of the City of Boston. It will be based from the Church on the Hill, the home of the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem. Tours of the church, its downtown neighborhood, dinner, and more!

individuals can explore faith, find support, and engage in meaningful relationships. Its theology encourages not only belief, but action: living a life of charity, openness, and service.

As Boston continues to evolve, so too does this historic congregation. It stands as a reminder that even in a fast-paced, ever-changing city, there is space for reflection, connection, and the quiet work of spiritual growth.

In many ways, the story of the Church on the Hill mirrors the broader Swedenborgian vision: a belief that renewal is always possible, that truth unfolds over time, and that communities grounded in love and purpose can endure. More than two centuries after its founding, the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem continues to live out that vision—faithfully, thoughtfully, and with hope for the future. ☩

Rev. Kevin Baxter is the senior pastor at the Church on the Hill in Boston, Massachusetts. He also serves as the secretary for the Council of Ministers for the Swedenborgian Church of North America.



*The congregation gathers for Sunday worship at the Church on the Hill.*

## Featured Sermon

# Locked Doors

BY REV. KEVIN BAXTER

The first reading of the day is Genesis 19:6–11, where Lot locks the doors of his house to protect two angelic visitors from the people of Sodom. The second is John 20:19–31, when the Lord enters into the midst of a house with locked doors to find all the Apostles, except for Thomas, hiding out of fear. Both of these readings involve locked doors—doors that are shut. In one sense, they are about fear and protection from the outside. We often look at such situations as a kind of healthy locking of doors. Yet when we consider the disciples, their fear sometimes gets a bad rap. We look at their locked doors and think they were afraid for no good reason.

After all, the resurrection had just happened. Easter is a pretty remarkable day, isn't it? Rising from the dead—surely that would be enough evidence. And yet, the disciples remain behind locked doors. There's a sense that locking yourself inside a house out of fear of the outside world is somehow wrong. In both of our readings, we encounter closed spaces—homes, in fact. And I want to talk a little bit about those locked doors.

One thing we know about the Lord in the Gospel story is that He seems able to bypass any security system. He doesn't need to open the door or know the code. He simply manifests wherever He is needed. If the disciples had been hiding in a bathroom at a local restaurant, the Lord would have entered there just the same. The Lord comes wherever He is needed.

The transformation of Easter is about a divine presence that transcends closed doors.

Lot, on the other hand—in the story of Sodom—also encounters a locked door. But in that story, the door not only protects those inside; those who try to reach it are struck blind, unable even to find it. Even if the door were unlocked, they could not access it.

So what are these “houses” with locked doors on a deeper level? The house represents the inner mind, the inner life within us. And the question in both stories is not simply about fear of the outside world, but about what happens inside the house.

## **The transformation of Easter is about a divine presence that transcends closed doors.**

In both cases, messengers are present within the home—representing the Lord. In Lot's case, they speak with him. In the Gospel, Jesus stands among the disciples to speak with them. In both houses, God reaches people in moments of fear—moments when the outside world is dangerous, when corruption threatens, or when we are unable to recognize the truth. We hear from Swedenborg that no matter where we are, no matter how tightly the door is shut, God can always find a way in.

Now, has anyone here ever been scared? I'm guessing you all have—I know I have. I get scared all the time. We sometimes praise firefighters as people without fear. But the reality is, they're not without fear. Do you know what they are? People with a lot of training.

When the call comes, their training kicks in. Their fear may still be there,

but they respond based on what they've learned. There's not always time to think. The chiefs may strategize, but the firefighters on the line have a simple directive: put the wet stuff on the red stuff. Everything is done by training and repetition.

And so they do remarkable things.

But what happens if you give them time to think? What happens when fear has space to grow? The world can close in very quickly. Training works because it prepares people to face what would otherwise overwhelm them. But take away the gear, put someone in an unfamiliar situation, and suddenly they are just like you and me—human beings facing fear.

And when we get scared, what happens? Our doors lock. We lose our ability to reason clearly. This is the secret behind phobias: the problem is not just what is happening outside, but what is happening inside—the inability to think clearly because of fear.

Now, some fears are deep and complex, and they are not solved by a simple Bible reading. But for many everyday fears, Scripture offers us a powerful lesson. Retreating into the house—into the inner self—and even locking the door is not necessarily a bad thing. It can be a way of allowing the Lord to protect us. It is okay to close the door for a time. The problem comes when we close the door and then try to act from that state. Then we become like those in Sodom—blind to what we are doing, reacting without clarity or control.

Scripture teaches us something different: retreat into the house, into the inner self—but do so rightly. Be still.

*Continues on page 71*

## CSS Winter Intensive

## Center for Swedenborgian Studies 2026 Winter Intensive

BY TAMARA A. HUNTER AND PASTOR PAUL DEMING

*This year we offer two different perspectives on the same event: The CSS Winter Intensive. This is a gathering of CSS students that includes those on the ordination track, those training to be Licensed Pastors, and those earning a certificate in Swedenborgian Studies while still discerning their path forward.*

### 2026 Swedenborgian Winter Intensive by Tamara Hunter

This year's 2026 Swedenborgian Winter Intensive, *Church Polity and Practice*, fulfilled expectations as an immersive learning experience filled with enriching instruction, deep discussions, and community fellowship. Reflecting upon it now brings back images of the beautiful Bay Area, the serenity of the churches, the profundity of Swedenborg's doctrines, and the kind dispositions of all the people involved. I was privileged to be a part of the four-day exploration and to learn more about the history and structure of the General Convention Church (d.b.a. The Swedenborgian Church of North America) and its people. Our cohort of eleven participants enjoyed a productive and fun time together in Berkeley at Hillside Church, the Swedenborgian classrooms and archives at the GTU campus, as well as the historic Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco.

Our estimable instructors included Dr. Rebecca Esterson, Dean, Center for Swedenborgian Studies; Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber, Associate Professor of American Studies, Religion,

and Literature; Rev. Junchol Lee, Senior Pastor, San Francisco Swedenborgian Church; and Jennifer Lindsay, Treasurer, Swedenborgian Church of North America, all leading informative and well-versed discussions. This illuminating course led not only to deeper perspectives but also to deeper connections between one another as we explored Swedenborgian theology, practice, and the enjoyment of learning together.

Our schedule began with a lovely, clear day at the Hillside Community Church, where Pastor Tassy Farwell serves as a licensed pastor, and who also attended the Winter Intensive as a participant. We began there with an examination of Church history led by Rev. Dr. Zuber and Dr. Esterson, along with introductions from our eleven participants. Our short biographies revealed a diversity of experience and backgrounds as well as many common bonds of spiritual inquiry and dedication. Many of us traveled from afar, with considerable efforts to arrive, and later challenges getting home as one of the biggest storms of the season found its perfect timing! But efforts were rewarded by calm weather in the bay for



(From front center going counter-clockwise) Tirah Keal, Heather Garland, Dell Rose, Pastor Tassy Farwell, Rev. Junchol Lee, Jennifer Lindsay, Pastor Paul Deming, Tamara Hunter, Circe MacDonald, and Ben Gunter.

the whole of the four days, with mostly clear days and moderate temperatures.

It was a pleasure to see the simple but serene composition of the Hillside Church in its green, sloped natural landscape with its impressive bay views. It is a valuable place not only for Swedenborgians but also for the broader community as a forum for community events, meetings, weddings, and learning opportunities. Some of us returned in the evening for a well-attended and fascinating presentation on "Swedenborg and Shinto" by Dell Rose, which also provided an opportunity to meet some of the locals. Hillside Church is clearly an important asset to its members and the larger community as a welcoming, inclusive,

*Continues on page 59*

## CSS Winter Intensive

## CSS 2026 Winter Intensive

*Continued from page 58*

space for connection and development.

It was an ideal place to begin our initial conversations, focusing on the nature of the Swedenborgian Church, part of our guiding reflection for the course duration. Readings included text from Marguerite Beck Block, James F. Lawrence, and Swedenborg—notably “The Church” in *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine*, §241–248 which includes:

The term ‘church’ is applied to the regions where the Lord is acknowledged and the Word exists, since the essentials of the church are a love for the Lord that comes from the Lord and a faith in the Lord that comes from the Lord, and the Word teaches us how we need to live in order to receive this love and faith from the Lord.”

We focused on this text in group discussions, and many proposed the idea that the contemporary church includes characteristics of inclusivity, creativity, positive actions, and a will and dedication toward social justice. This theme of the church today is extended through the Winter Intensive as a focal point of personal and institutional development.

Our second day brought us an introduction to the elegantly rustic and impressively historic Swedenborgian Church in San Francisco. We were well guided through some of the church’s fascinating history and impressed to learn about its nearly singular designation (along with the US Capitol) as a Level Four Landmark Status National Historic Landmark. I was impressed to learn about its connections to the famous naturalist John Muir, a close personal friend of founding minister Rev. Joseph Worcester, and to see the conch

shell at the altar where Robert Frost was baptized. The worship hall and rooms are emblematic of the Arts and Crafts aesthetic, blending such natural elements as wood and stone with fluid lines and muted colors. Many of the naturalist paintings in the church also came from a friend of the church, the well-known painter William Keith (November 18, 1838 – April 13, 1911), whose work represents California in its natural beauty.

Our topic for the day included a review of the General Council and church organization by Dr. Esterson, whose background and experience with the church added introspection and a personal perspective. We read the Constitution and Bylaws of the Swedenborgian Church, the Standing Resolutions, and reviewed the [2024 Journal](#), helping us understand the depth of church history and its current status and structure. Jennifer Lindsay, treasurer of the Swedenborgian Church, also gave a remarkably knowledgeable review of the funding structures in the organization, which helped all of us understand the essential financial underpinnings of the church. After a delicious lunch graciously prepared by Rev. Junchol Lee (including a signature kimchi), we were treated to his presentation regarding ministerial ethics, professionalism, and conduct. It was an ideal day for learning about the history of the church with some of its most knowledgeable representatives and exploring the iconic physical building itself.

On our third day, we returned to the Berkeley GTU campus at Holbrook Hall with further considerations of the future of the church and its ministry. We discussed Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence’s sermon “Social Justice Is the New Jerusalem,” which focuses on Swedenborg’s *Revelation Unveiled*

§905 and the dimension of justice in the image of the new church: “the city is laid out foursquare means the justice in it.” We also reflected on George Dole’s article on the 2015 Annual Convention theme, “Toward a Newer Church” (from *the Messenger*, [September 2015](#)), which captures another essential Swedenborgian theme that resonates when he says, “Regeneration is, after all, a transformation of consciousness. I believe this adds up to a call to each of us individually and to our church.” Each of us has been called upon to interpret our own process of regeneration and our ability to bring justice into balance in our lives.

After our studies, we toured the eminent Swedenborg Archives located in the GTU basement, where we were privileged to view many important original manuscripts, including signed copies of original Swedenborg texts. After a delicious lunch from an excellent local restaurant, we had the special opportunity of meeting at Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber’s home in the Berkeley Hills. We are thankful to our host, Devin, for offering his home as a special setting for our individual class presentations. Participants described their own unique visions for creating meaningful service and contributing to the causes of social justice and ministry. Many of us are already engaged in work with churches and Swedenborgian education, and it was a moment to articulate our plans and hopes. The conversations were illuminating, the views incredible, and to top it off, we even shared some delicious locally baked fruit pie!

We concluded the adventure-filled week with a return to the Swedenborgian Church, where we reflected on the *Church Polity and Practice* questions from the course, as well

*Continues on page 60*

## CSS Winter Intensive

### CSS 2026 Winter Intensive

*Continued from page 59*

as our own personal experiences. The final excursion concluded with a walk and tour at the Presidio with its impressive vistas of the bridge and Alcatraz Island. Most importantly, it provided a time for reflection on the principles learned and community bonds forged throughout the week.

For me, the four-day intensive was an edifying, informative, and even inspiring experience that has deepened my personal commitments to service and learning. The material reviewed and the time spent with professors and church leaders is invaluable. I am so pleased to have had the opportunity to meet new colleagues and friends with common goals, centered on the Swedenborgian Church of North America and its practice. The theme of the New Church resounds as we move through the challenges of our time with a dedication to the “good fruits” that, as Rev. Dr. George Dole noted while translating Revelation Unveiled for the New Century Edition, are also known as the “good of love.” “Section

934 tells us very clearly: again in Standard Edition language. . . ‘fruits’ signify the goods of love or charity, which are called in common speech good works.” (“A Call,” *the Messenger*, September 2015) I am heartened to know we can all enjoy the daily practices of love and charity and contribute in meaningful ways that enrich our lives and those of others.

### The Winter Intensive: A Pastor’s Perspective by Pastor Paul Deming

This year, I was delighted to be invited to join several of my colleagues in various stages of their spiritual and educational journeys, and to enjoy the study, wisdom, and instruction by our esteemed professors, Dr. Rebecca Esterson, Dean, and Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber.

As we delved into the “ghost” of churches past, I learned that our faith tradition is the only Christian denomination that has a distinction of both opening the Word at the beginning of each service and closing it at the end. It has been this way since the very beginnings of our church societies.

Like many mainline protestant traditions, our history was not exempt from quarrels and divisions. Some churches, musicians were hidden behind a screen because it was believed they would detract from worship. That is why many churches from different denominations have a choir loft,

and often an organ, in the back balcony, out of sight of parishioners. We visited the San Francisco church (built in 1895 and one of the oldest still in use in San Francisco), where, in decades past, the choir sat up front, but was separated from the congregation with a partition. Thankfully, in the services of our time, most partitions have been removed, and those with a song in their heart can be *seen* and heard.

I was interested to learn that our particular denomination did not break away from the General Church (as with most reformed traditions) but, rather, the General Church (as it is now known) broke away from our sect (the Swedenborgian Church of North America), primarily over the desire to form a more episcopalian hierarchy, and the belief that the writings of Swedenborg are in fact a third testament—a belief we do not hold.

Another group broke off from the General Church, known as Nova Hierosolyma (New Jerusalem), believing, further, that this third testament had an inner sense of its own. To this day, each group has dedicated followers who worship in the way they know best, and often members of different branches welcome opportunities for combined gatherings of lectures and special events. It is not unusual to see members of both the General Church and Nova Hierosolyma at our conventions.

Among the readings prescribed for this course were several chapters from *The New Church in the New World* by Dr. Marguerite Beck Block (originally copyrighted in 1932 and again in 1960). I was interested in learning about the Boston Society because it is the location of our next Convention (June 2026). It is one of our oldest societies with a history that spans over

*Continues on page 61*



(From front right going counter-clockwise) Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber, Pastor Tassy Farwell, Tirah Keal, Dell Rose, Heather Garland, Pastor Paul Deming, Michael Goos (standing) Tom Neuenfeldt, Jennifer Lindsay, Circe MacDonald, Tamara Hunter, and Aaron Kallow.



## CSS Winter Intensive

## CSS 2026 Winter Intensive

*Continued from page 60*

two centuries.

Each of our societies has a rich history involving a small group of people dedicated to learning more about Swedenborg's view of a God who does not punish but, rather, desires a loving relationship with all humankind, and learning about concepts of ecclesiology that transcend church walls, denominations, and religious institutions.

So where does the Swedenborgian Church of North America (SCNA) fit into the current religious landscape? There are several distinctions within the SCNA that determine its uniqueness among Christian denominations. One might describe its view of God and its primary theological focus as inclusive. Rather than three separate persons of the Trinity, our faith tradition holds that there are three aspects of one God in the person of Jesus Christ. Also inclusive is the welcoming of female ministers (starting in 1975 with Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey) and the welcoming of openly gay ministers (starting in 1997 with Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell). While this positions the SCNA as progressive, its inclusivity expands beyond its own institutional walls in proposing that people of other faith traditions or no faith at all who live a life of love and selfless service to others will be welcomed into heaven. The SCNA positions itself as a member of a larger community seeking tolerance and acceptance among people of faith and is a member of the National Council of Churches, USA.

Finally, rather than restricting its reverence for the Word to a literal translation, our faith traditions hold that there is an inner sense or spiritual correspondence to much of Scripture. This, for me, alleviates the

cognitive dissonance of trying to reconcile a wrathful and violent image of God with the life Jesus lived and demonstrated for his followers. Any way you look at it, the Swedenborgian Church of North America offers relief from traditionally restrictive church dogma and encourages spiritual inquiry and freedom of thought within a Christ-centered liturgy, rooted and strengthened in usefulness and service.

As a final exercise, attendees were asked to comment on the future of the Swedenborgian Church. Some focused on the slow transition from building-oriented societies to smaller groups enhanced with digital technology, allowing for worldwide participation from the comforts of home. Others mentioned non-traditional services like the Garden Church in San Pedro, California, an outdoor, streetside, garden church that offers free community meals and opportunities for participant-gardening and home-grown vegetables. Still, others mentioned the re-purposing of church communities to be welcoming to the growing number of spiritual but not religious people through nature conservation and eco-friendly outreach programs. A conscious shift towards a more social-justice-oriented approach was discussed with a caveat that while politics should not (and legally cannot) be preached from the pulpit, a loud and clear protest against the inhumane practices and hateful policies of authoritarianism is not only allowed but a socially responsible calling of the church universal.

We finished the course with a visit to the nationally acclaimed Presidio Park of San Francisco and walked along the beach at the southern tip of the Golden Gate Bridge. I was struck by the awesome power of the waves, the beauty of nature, the exotic plants

and palms and pines, the wild parrots, and the sea cranes. In the same landscape, there stood a monumental wonder to the achievement of creative architectural minds and the hard-working hands of the bridge builders. There was a cry within me that said, "Let everything that has breath, is alive, and moves, praise the living God!"

May we, the believers, the ones who proclaim the goodness of God, bring our creativity and hard-working hands to offer the *golden bridge* of love to a despairing world! There is an undeniable harmony in nature, a resiliency that offers a reflection, its correspondence to heaven (even to the smallest DNA molecule), the beauty of God in the marriage of divine wisdom and love, in the light that transcends the soul, and the warmth that touches our innermost being. I felt so lucky to be alive that day to witness such a glorious sight and experience it—mind, body, and soul.

In summary, the Winter Intensive brought me more than the California sunshine! It offered a wonderful opportunity to expand the historical and present-day understanding of our beautiful denomination, as well as the chance to dialogue with more learned minds and perspectives. I returned home to record snowfall and cold, but carried with me the warmth of the memories and experiences of sharing we all enjoyed. To my fellow students, instructors, and all who worked to make the January Intensive possible, and to the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, my sincerest thanks. My life will be forever better because of you! 🙏

Tamara is a full time teacher of students with disabilities for Santa Fe, New Mexico public schools with Master's degrees in Special Education and Cultural Literary Theory from the University of New Mexico. She worked many years in New York City and

*Continues on page 71*

## Convention 2026 Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice

# Mini Course Line-Up for Convention 2026

*Mini Courses will be held in three time slots that have four courses running concurrently—two in-person only and two hybrid for both in-person and virtual attendees.*

**M**ini Courses are small group offerings for attendees to learn about a topic that is presented by someone from the Swedenborgian Church of North America or an invited guest. We are excited to be able to continue to offer a variety of formats this year for our hybrid convention. After you register, you will receive information on how to join them, both in-person and virtually.

## There are two formats for Mini Courses

- In-person for on campus attendees only
- Hybrid style meetings that are also hosted on Zoom so that people can attend and participate both in-person and virtually

These three time slots have four courses running concurrently—two in-person and two hybrid for both in-person attendees and those online. Virtual attendees will be able to choose between the hybrid sessions, while the in-person attendees will be able to attend any of the courses being offered.

We look forward to seeing everyone both in person and online this year!

### Don't Wait to Register!

Due to space and material limitations, the first two in-person Mini Courses will require pre-registration when you register for in-person Convention. Spaces will be awarded on a first-come-first serve basis. Register at [swedenborg.org](https://www.swedenborg.org)

## Saturday, June 27 at 1:30 PM ET

### Practice Contemplative Creativity

**Bronwen Mayer Henry**

*This course will be in-person on campus. Due to limited seats (30), this Mini Course will require pre-registration when you register for Convention.*

This Mini Course invites you to practice contemplative creativity in a simple, accessible way—no art experience required. Together, we'll explore creative play with shapes and color as a gentle practice for meeting life's struggles with greater compassion and kindness. You'll be encouraged to set aside pressure to perform or produce and instead use creativity to slow your thoughts, soften fear and self-criticism, and reconnect with moments of ease and joy. Artist and meditation teacher Bronwen Mayer Henry will guide participants in a contemplative, process-based approach to creativity as meditation and stress relief. All levels welcome, including beginners.

Bronwen Mayer Henry is a self-taught contemporary painter specializing in nature-inspired large-scale canvases with acrylic paints. It was an unexpected path through Thyroid Cancer that led Bronwen to commit time to painting. Her art is an expression of prayer, meditation, hope, and joy. She shares the inspiration of breaking through creative barriers by designing and leading retreats and workshops, and in her book, "Radioactive Painting," published by Shanti Arts LLC.



### Creative Contemplative Prayer: A hands-on, guided experience—No artistic ability required!

**Rev. Jenny Caughman**

*This course will be in-person on campus. Due to limited seats (16), this Mini Course will require pre-registration when you register for Convention.*

This workshop will combine two spirit-rich experiences—both of which are open to people of all levels. First, we will decorate a candle holder. Participants will then be led in a guided contemplative prayer experience, and finally, will finish decorating their candle holder with insights coming from the prayer experience. Jenny firmly believes that God speaks to us in a myriad of ways and we can deepen our personal relationship with God by opening ourselves up to God, and inviting God into our inner world through both the creative process and contemplative prayer.

Contemplative prayer is a form of prayer where we choose to turn toward God with a listening stance, inviting God into our hearts and minds and being open to what God might say or present to us. We will use *Lectio Divina* (Latin for Divine Reading), which is a way of engaging with Scripture, not striving to cognitively understand it (which, while very valuable, is not what we will be doing in this experience) but instead inviting God to speak to us through scripture. In this way, we are open to moving from an intellectual understanding of God to a felt relationship with God. In Swedenborgian terms, from externals to internals, or

*Continues on page 63*

Convention 2026 Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice

2026 Mini Course Line-up

Continued from page 62

from using our understanding to engaging our will. Contemplative prayer is a way “of being willingly present for God and trusting God’s presence for us” (Tilden Edwards). In a similar way, the creative process moves past understanding as we open ourselves up to another form of truth as we explore different forms of knowing and expressing ourselves.

So come, listen, play, pray, and learn about yourself and God!

The Rev. Jenny Martin Caughman has had diverse professional experiences, from working as a music therapist with terminally ill cancer patients to being in the unique position of a Swedenborgian minister serving a United Methodist Church for fourteen years. Recently retired from congregational ministry, she is currently training in Spiritual Direction and seeks to integrate the creative and contemplative processes into helping people deepen their knowledge, love, and experience of God.



Living Liturgies for the New Church: Our Work in Progress  
Heather Garland

This course will be hybrid for both in-person and remote attendees.

What if liturgy were something we created rather than something we only inherited? This interactive workshop explores the purpose and power of liturgical forms and invites participants to collaborate in shaping new prayers, rituals, and worship language rooted in Swedenborgian theology and responsive to the spiritual hungers of our

time. Through discussion, reflection, and small-group creative collaboration, workshopers will help craft fresh expressions of worship and leave with tools for cultivating locally grown liturgical practices in their own communities, and a network for sharing those resources with the church at-large.

Heather Garland is the Music Coordinator at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church. Her ministry seeks to awaken the experience of inner sense through the arts of worship. She is currently engaged in research toward the creation of a Swedenborgian Hymnal for the General Convention, and is a student on the Licensed Pastor track through the Center for Swedenborgian Studies in Berkeley, California.



Bringing Out the Best: Creativity and Dementia

Tryn Rose Seley

This course will be hybrid for both in-person and remote attendees.

Tryn Rose’s Mindful Art sessions are designed to enhance the lives of those with dementia through music, storytelling, and artistic expression.

The presentation will include a slide-show of a session, anecdotes regarding the positive impact on participants, and a hands-on experience of Mindful Art elements, including live music and creative time.

Attendees will participate in both 1:1 and large group sharing. They will leave with a mini art project and an expanded understanding of how to use creative methods for people with dementia, as well as for themselves.

Tryn Rose has spent thirty years working with young children and elders with special needs.

She looks for the person beyond the layers of Alzheimer’s or other forms of dementia, and finds the spark that’s waiting to emerge. She is a professional musician, photographer, expressive arts teacher, music leader, and meditation provider for various church communities, and has written a book and contributed to other books for caregivers of those living with dementia. Her books can be found on her website, [caregiverheart.com](http://caregiverheart.com), and wherever books are sold.



Sunday, June 28 at 1:30 PM ET

Harmony at Play: Everybody Wins as Spiritual Practice

Trevor “The Games Man”

This course will be in-person on campus.

A play-shop by TREVOR “The Games Man” featuring interactive, non-strenuous, everybody-wins, social games for adults and teens designed to create unity, team-building, and friendship. There will be ice breakers, large group games, small groups, one-on-one, brain teasers, creative problem solving, oh, and some silly stuff, too! All ability levels, no special skills required, just arrive with a playful spirit... and comfortable shoes.

TREVOR “The Games Man” is a certified New Games Leader, Cooperative Play Specialist, Professional Stilt-walker, multiple award-winning full-time entertainer, and fifth or sixth generation Swedenborgian.



Continues on page 64

## Convention 2026 Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice

### 2026 Mini Course Line-up

*Continued from page 63*

#### Through Anna's Eyes: Using Correspondences to Read the World

**Rev. Christopher Barber**

*This course will be in-person on campus.*

When she died in 1877, Philadelphia Newchurchwoman Anna Keyser Baker (b. 1821) left behind, in the form of a three-year diary, an inspiring record of how she saw the world through a Swedenborgian lens. Miss Baker interpreted nature and art with a correspondential frame of mind and applied her faith to all aspects of her life. Join Rev. Chris Barber for an introduction to Miss Baker, her life and times, and the sights and sounds that inspired her. Additionally, you will be shown a few simple resources, techniques, and exercises to help you interpret your world as she did. This session will include history, theology, art, and spiritual practice, leaving participants better knowing this obscure yet moving figure from New Church history and how you, too, can read your world.

Rev. Barber is an ordained priest of the General Church of the New Jerusalem and a teacher of religion at the Academy of the New Church in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania.

He writes, teaches, and

lectures on New Church history, theology, and social issues. He serves as the President of the Swedenborg Foundation and holds degrees from Bryn Athyn College and Widener University. Barber is publishing an annotated and appended edition of the Diary of Anna Keyser Baker with Brookline Books in Summer 2026.



#### The Hidden Churches of the East: Swedenborg's Japanese Readers and the search for World Renewal in 'Thibet'

**Dell Rose**

*This course will be hybrid for both in-person and remote attendees.*

Like Utopia, wherever the mystic "Far East" might be, it always seems to be somewhere far away. This was certainly the case in Meiji Japan, where Japanese religious thinkers, like their Western esoteric brethren, were also looking for the spiritual secrets of Asia. Onisaburo Deguchi 出口 王仁 三郎 (1871–1948), one of the two leading lights of the Oomoto faith (大本), believed this so strongly that he personally led an expedition to connect with spiritually enlightened civilization on the Mongolian steppe. This quixotic quest gets even more bizarre when we consider that his inspiration in seeing Mongolia as the last bastion of spirituality, a "church" from the ancient world, came not from any Japanese movement, but rather from the writings of Swedish visionary and esotericist Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). Swedenborg taught that in the Ancient Church, a golden age period, people had an innate understanding of spirituality and understood from nature the truth of the spiritual world. There were still pockets of this living tradition around the world, notably in Africa and in a geographically mysterious "Thibet." Onisaburo accepted these claims as factual and wanted to learn the secret nature of the world from those who still knew it, hence his expedition. However, Swedenborg's teachings also colored how he would see his own Japan and the spiritual legacy that existed hidden in traditional arts. I argue that Western conceptions of the spiritual "Far East" were also complementary to nativist arguments

flourishing in the Meiji era, and that many like Onisaburo were happy to use Western connotations for their own cultural self-assessment.

Dell J. Rose (Swedenborg Library Chicago & HHP Centre-Universiteit van Amsterdam) is on the ordination track for the Swedenborgian Church of North America and is a historian



of religions, working on Swedenborg's global reception. His work engages New Testament studies, Japanese history, radical theology in the Reformation, Italian Fascism, as well as science in the early modern period. At present he is at work on his book, *The Meiji Swedenborg: Western Concepts in Eastern Esotericism*, a project supported by Swedenborg House United Kingdom and the Aries Series in Western Esotericism at Brill.

#### Church, State, and Social Justice: Religion, Politics, and the First Amendment

**Rev. Robert McCluskey**

*This course will be hybrid for both in-person and remote attendees.*

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Countless experts over the decades agree that these first sixteen words of the First Amendment constitute a bold, unprecedented experiment in Western culture, the genius of American life, and our greatest gift to the world: the end of theocracy. "It has protected the common good from religious factionalism, and it has ensured the integrity of faith from too close an alliance with the state."

What is the best way for church, state, and society to interact? How

*Continues on page 65*

**Convention 2026 Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice**

**2026 Mini Course Line-up**

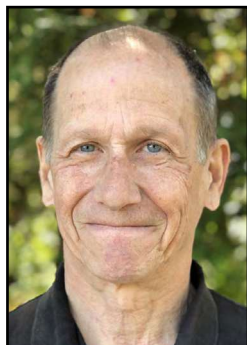
*Continued from page 64*

might the church, our church, be involved in the pressing social issues of the day, the needs of our neighbor, small and large? Recent events have turned a light on the critical issue of religious freedom, which has been a constant source of debate and division from before this country's founding.

In this Mini Course, we will look at the complex history of the religion clause of the First Amendment. We will also look at Swedenborg's teachings on the spiritual, moral, and civil realms of life: each distinct from the other, and each interacting with the others. We will review our church's past efforts to confront societal injustice, as well as the diverse theological views underlying those efforts. We will hear from experienced experts as to how the church should, and should not, engage in social issues. And we will take a closer look at the phrase, coined by Thomas Jefferson, about the "separation of church and state."

For those interested in getting a head start, please check out my review of *Solemn Reverence: The Separation of Church and State in American Life*, by Randall Balmer (*the Messenger*, Summer, 2021).

Rev. Robert McCluskey holds a BA and MA in philosophy, with a focus on Greek philosophy, modern idealism, existentialism, and hermeneutics.



He is a graduate of the Swedenborg School of Religion and was ordained into the Swedenborgian Church of North America in 1984. He has pastored

churches in Portland, Maine and New York City, and served on the Social Justice Committee. He also served for eighteen years as representative to the National Council of Churches, with specific attention to the work of social justice and religious freedom. Until recently, he administered rites and sacraments at Wayfarers Chapel near Los Angeles, California.

**Monday, June 29 at 10:15 AM ET**

**"To be his own master, and so to be free." Swedenborg on Temporal and Spiritual Slavery**

**Dr. Vincent Roy-Di Piazza**

*This course will be in-person on campus.*

Swedenborg discussed slavery extensively across his theology. While his influence on eighteenth-century Swedish abolitionism has long been recognized, paradoxically, few studies have explored Swedenborg's own views on slavery in detail. This Mini Course will delineate the corpus of Swedenborg's writings about temporal and spiritual slavery. We will explore where his views on slavery stood in the context of his time, how they differed from abolitionism, and eventually, how they became part of his wider theology about free will, evangelization, and spiritual emancipation.

Dr. Vincent Roy-Di Piazza is a historian of early modern science, religion, and political economy based in Finland. Vincent obtained his doctorate from the University of Oxford in 2022, with a dissertation on Swedenborg and the soul-body problem. A Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, his articles on Swedenborg have been featured in academic journals such as *Annals of Science*, *Political Hermetica*, and the *Intellectual History Review*.



**The Path of Creative Vision and Practice, Using Mandalas, Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian Art**  
**Pastor Lorraine Kardash**

*This course will be in-person on campus.*

We will explore the light of wisdom in the Buddhist use and meaning of visual art in mandalas and thangkas, in Hindu visual art as found in yantras, and in Christian iconography, as well as the use of sound in mantra, yantra, and word.

There will be participation in singing a Buddhist mantra together, a Hindu mantra, and, if there is time, creating a simple mandala using the symbols found in one of the mantras.

Lorraine retired as the licensed pastor of the Portland New Church in September, 2025. She was ordained as an interfaith minister by The Chaplaincy Institute of Maine in 2006. As a student and painter of Christian Orthodox iconography and Tibetan Thangka, she has explored the process of immersing in an art form in a meditative state. Lorraine also studied with the musician Russell Paul, author of the book *The Yoga of Sound*, in the practice of Hindu Sanskrit Mantra, and for many years with Geshe Gendun Gyatso in the study of Tibetan Buddhism.



**Table Fellowship and the New Church: "Brown Rice Makes You Very High"**

**Rev. Lynn Chittick Thompson**

*This course will be hybrid for both in-person and remote attendees*

The teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg and the significance of the plants of the bible hold profound importance for us all. In the art of

*Continues on page 66*

## Convention 2026 Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice

### 2026 Mini Course Line-up

Continued from page 65



cooking, how do spiritual correspondences play a role in our day-to-day lives, helping us live in harmony with ourselves and nature? Fur-

thermore, how can we pursue our dreams through the culinary arts, recognizing cooking as a deep connection to God's creation? Swedenborg extensively explored the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms. How do these three kingdoms influence our neurobiology and spirituality in the twenty-first century? In this exploration, we will delve into the profound wisdom of how God's creation provides us with the natural art of health and wisdom, ultimately nurturing our souls.

By examining the deep wisdom of food and health through the lens of nature, we can better understand how our dietary choices affect our physical well-being. We will explore the gifts that the earth and God have provided for us to steward and cherish. This course will also address the environmental impacts of our choices and how they contribute to a universal understanding of peace. Additionally, we will discuss practical ways to build fellowship and foster community through seasonal events at your church, and to bridge connections through "Table Talk Health" programs.

Fellowship manifests in many forms. Jesus entrusted us with a healing ministry that can embrace and express through the spirit of food. Building upon Swedenborg's insights into

the three kingdoms, this session invites us to explore how our bodies, minds, and spirits can deepen and flourish as we engage playfully and purposefully in the kitchen.

Rev. Lynn Chittick Thompson, RN, MDiv, ordained in June 2025 by The Swedenborgian Church of North America. Founder of TORCH: The Organization for Realizing Change in Humanity, focused on peace, health, environment, and technology. She has been a nurse, long-time speaker, author, teacher, and entrepreneur focused on the dream of One Peaceful World. She is currently focused on a DMin with Pacific School of Theology.

### Artwork During Spiritual Crisis

Rev. Colin Amato

*This course will be hybrid for both in-person and remote attendees.*



During a period of intense personal change, and on the eve of World War I, Carl Jung began to experience visions that heralded a time of spiritual growth.

Jung turned to journaling and writing in an attempt to process these experiences, but ultimately found artwork as the best medium of expression and integration. This Mini Course will present images of Jung's *The Red Book*, along with accompanying text to help demonstrate the significance of artwork as an expression and practice of the spirit. More recent content from the publication of "The Black Books," Jung's earliest personal journals, and a connection to Swedenborgian thought will be included. ☪

Rev. Colin was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. Ordained in 2022, he currently serves as pastor of the virtual

## Proposed Bylaw Amendment for 2026 Annual Convention

### Bylaws: Amendment Proposal on Article XX

Whereas Article XX of the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States bylaws pertains to the governance and maintenance of the property at 16th Street, NW Washington, DC, which has been sold on November 21, 2025, the General Council moves that Article XX be repealed but that the article continue to retain the number XX for future use.

### Article XX. The National Church

~~The Board of Trustees of the National Church, now holding the title to and having control of the Church property in Washington, D.C., shall continue to consist of fifteen members who shall be citizens of any part of the United States and of whom a majority shall be chosen from some other place than the city of Washington, DC, and shall not be selected from any one association; and vacancies in their number shall be filled by the Board with approval of the President and the Secretaries of the Convention, having in mind the restrictions stated above, and five members shall constitute a quorum.~~ ☪

community, The Rainbow Church, an online LGBTQ+ ministry of the Swedenborgian Church of North America. Rev. Colin, a licensed marriage and family therapist, also serves as the clinical director of Solano Pride Center and maintains a private psychotherapy practice.

Convention 2026 Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice

## More Nominations for Elected Positions in the Swedenborgian Church

The Nominating Committee nominates at least one candidate for each open elected position. Elective offices and nominees to date are listed on the chart shown below. If you are interested in being nominated for any position, contact the Nominating Committee through Central Office. All other candidate statements may be found in the [April issue of the Messenger](#) or on the website: [swedenborg.org/events-activities/annual-convention/](http://swedenborg.org/events-activities/annual-convention/).

### Andrea LoPinto Standing Committee for Financial Accountability (three-year term)



Andrea LoPinto is honored to be nominated as a candidate to be a member of the Standing Committee for Financial Accountability.

Andrea and her husband, Robert Carr, were married in the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church in 1986, and she has been an active member of the Church since 1995. Andrea is presently serving on the San Francisco Church Council. She has been an active volunteer at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco for eighteen years, and has been on the Board of the Northern California Society of Botanical Artists for the past five years. She is looking forward to being more active in the denomination.

Position to be Filled	Term (Yrs)	Candidate
President	3	***
Vice President	1	Kurt Fekete*
Recording Secretary	1	Beki Greenwood
Treasurer	3	***
General Council: layperson (2 to be elected)	3	Helen Barler Tom Murphy*
General Council: minister	3	Renée Machiniak*
Standing Committee for Communication & Information	3	Dave Brown*
Standing Committee for Education & Resources for Spiritual Community	3	Junchol Lee
Standing Committee for Financial Accountability (2 to be elected)	3	Kei Pang Andrea LoPinto
Committee on Admission Into the Ministry	3	Gabriella Cahaley*
Board of Trustees of CSS, representative class	4	Lisa Solwold
Nominating Committee (unexpired term)	4**	Jae Chung
Nominating Committee	5	OPEN

\* Incumbent \*\* Years remaining in unexpired term \*\*\* No candidate to be elected this year

### Gabriella Cahaley Committee on Admission to the Ministry – Minister (three-year term)



Gabriella Cahaley returned to school after many years of managing aquatic programming, teaching, and coaching swimming. She obtained her undergraduate degree from the University of Arizona and went on to seminary, first at the Pacific School of Religion, then she transferred to Earlham School of Religion, where she earned her MDiv degree. Since her ordination in 2011, Gabriella has pastored in three different congregations. Gabriella returned to Tucson and began working as a

chaplain and bereavement coordinator. After her husband's death, she returned to Georgia, where she served as bereavement coordinator and chaplain for several hospices. In 2025, after six years at Skyland Trail, a psychiatric residential treatment center, she left her job as a pastoral counselor. Since August 2025, Gabriella has served as a hospice chaplain with Georgia Hospice Care. 📞

### Nominating Committee

Are you an active member of one of the Canadian Conferences, or the Kansas, Michigan, or Mid-Atlantic Association and what to make a difference to the denomination? **Contact Paul Deming** at [paul.deming@icloud.com](mailto:paul.deming@icloud.com) to be considered for the open NomCom position.

## Convention 2026 Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice

# CSS Annual Meeting Updates

BY TOM NEUENFELDT, CHAIR OF CSS BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies wishes to announce some recent and upcoming changes in its membership.

Lewis Shaw's current term on the Board expires on June 30, 2026. Lewis has decided not to seek reelection. We are very grateful for Lewis' membership and contribution to the CSS Board since he joined in 2018. Lewis is currently working on a book project that will be a critical edition of Ethan Allen Hitchcock's 1859 work, *Swedenborg, a Hermetic Philosopher*, with Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence. He has been a very contemplative member of the Board, offering his perspective of the church and school through his Buddhist lens.

Pastor Tassy Farwell recently resigned from the Board to follow the next steps in her ministry call. She served on the Board starting in 2021. Tassy is currently the Licensed Pastor at Hillside Community Church in El Cerrito, California. She offered her skills as an educator in her role on the Board, while also serving as vice chair.

To replace these outgoing board members both the Standing Committee for Nominations and the Nominating Committee for the CSS are presenting nominees during the 2026 Convention.

The Standing Committee for Nominations is nominating Rev. Lisa Solwold to fill a four-year term as a representative member on the Board. She and her husband Hank reside in Jacksonville, Florida. Lisa's biographical information was published in the [April edition of \*The Messenger\*](#). The election for this position will occur on the floor of Convention, along with all other SCNA elections.

The Nominating Committee for the CSS has nominated Dr. Brad McKinnon, PhD to fill the remaining two years of an unexpired four-year term as an at-large member of the board. Brad and his wife Bridget live in Florence, Alabama.

*Continues on page 71*

### Annual Meeting of the Corporation of the New Church Theological School (d. b. a. the Center for Swedenborgian Studies of the Graduate Theological Union)

Board Chair, Tom Neuenfeldt, will call the meeting to order on Sunday, June 28, 2026 at 3:15 PM ET to conduct the annual business meeting. Dr. Rebecca Esterson, Dean, will give the dean's report, and Jennifer Lindsay will present the treasurer's report. Elections will be held for two board of trustees members, one at-large and one from the representative class. In addition to the nominations presented, nominations will be taken from the floor for both elections.

A graduation ceremony will occur at 8:00 PM ET on Sunday, June 28, at the Glavin Family Chapel at Babson College. Dr. Rebecca Esterson, will preside over the event. The graduates and other students will participate in the festivities with presentations and singing. Tom Neuenfeldt will deliver the graduation address.

A reception will follow.

## Come Make a Joyful Noise With Us This Year!

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 are looking to hearing from any and all who would like to be a part of the Convention Worship Singers, led again by Greg Huang-Dale (please specify what part you sing). We would also like to know of anyone who wants to offer themselves as a soloist and/or instrumentalist of any kind. Please email your information to: [kenturley75@gmail.com](mailto:kenturley75@gmail.com) and [paul.deming@icloud.com](mailto:paul.deming@icloud.com).

## Calling All Display Tables!

We want to feature your tables in the June issue of *the Messenger*! While final display table commitments are not due to Central Office ([manager@swedenborg.org](mailto:manager@swedenborg.org)) until June 1, if you would like to feature your table in next month's *Messenger* please submit a description, logo, and organization name to [messenger@swedenborg.org](mailto:messenger@swedenborg.org) by May 14.





Swedenborgian Collaboration

# Calling Swedenborg-Inspired Creators: Join the Swedenborg Social Media Network

BY REV. DAVID MOFFAT

The Swedenborg Social Media Network (SSMN) is a growing, [public Facebook group](#) for people who are creating—or wanting to create—content inspired by the spiritual teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Whether you make videos, podcasts, blogs, social posts, or support this work behind the scenes, this space is designed to help you connect, collaborate, and grow.

At the heart of the SSMN is a simple vision: instead of one or two big channels carrying the load, we want to see many vibrant voices bringing Swedenborgian spirituality into today’s online spaces. Drawing on ideas shared by Curtis Childs, our long term goals include nurturing “one hundred ‘Off The Left Eye’ style channels,” each with its own personality, audience, and way of presenting the message; and a “World Wide Contacts Page,” which we hope will provide the impetus for the formation of new groups in areas not currently served by existing New Churches.

To support that vision, the group focuses on four main aims:

1. Building many channels, not just one. Members share ideas on content formats, video production, copy writing, thumbnails, and more, so new creators don’t have to “reinvent the wheel” on their own.

2. Creating a clear “funnel” of next steps. We want online content to lead somewhere—toward small groups, courses, retreats, and other ways people can go deeper into Swedenborg’s teachings and spiritual community.
3. Forming a New Church engagement pod. By intentionally liking, commenting, and sharing each other’s work, we can “juice the algorithm” and significantly boost the visibility and reach of Swedenborg inspired content.
4. Developing flagship content. We are exploring big, imaginative ideas, such as immersive “wow factor” projects like a walk through model of the New Jerusalem, that can capture attention and communicate Swedenborg’s insights in powerful new ways.

The group already shares practical resources to help creators. A public Google Drive folder offers a growing list of Swedenborgian creators across platforms, Jon Childs’ summary of Swedenborgian channels, and collections of AI generated and public domain images, video, and audio. There are also new tools emerging from within the community, such as Discord servers and a read only WhatsApp feed where creators can drop their latest posts for the engagement pod to support.

Just as importantly, the SSMN is a place to discern together what we are and what we are not.

A recent survey invited people to respond to two questions: “What do you think a Swedenborg Social Media Network should be doing?” and “What should a Swedenborg Social Media Network not do?”—with responses helping shape the culture, boundaries, and priorities of the group. This ongoing conversation keeps the focus on collaboration, mutual respect, and the shared mission of serving others spiritually online.

If you feel drawn to any part of this, especially creating content and supporting those who do, you are warmly invited to join the [Swedenborg Social Media Network on Facebook \(tinyurl.com/3ndcrnwf\)](#). Once you are in the group, you can also opt in to our event announcement email list at [swedenborgsmn@googlegroups.com](mailto:swedenborgsmn@googlegroups.com) by sending your preferred email address to Rev. David Moffat at [swedenborgcommunityvictoria@gmail.com](mailto:swedenborgcommunityvictoria@gmail.com). Together, we can help many more people discover living spiritual insights for today’s world. 🌐

Rev. David Moffat is the Spiritual Leader of Swedenborg Community Victoria, a post he has held since 2020. He is also president of The New Church In Australia, president of Monash Interfaith Gathering, vice president of Monash Inter Church Council, and convenor of the Swedenborg Social Media Network. David was ordained in 1997, serving congregations in Birmingham, United Kingdom, and Canberra, Australia prior to his call to Melbourne. He is married to Pam and they have three adult children.



## Justice is the New Jerusalem

## 2026 Speaker Series with the Social Justice Committee: Queer Ecology

Parker McMullen Bushman (She/They) will be leading a workshop in May as part of the Social Justice Committee of the Swedenborgian Church of North America's 2026 Speaker Series on social justice issues: *Queer Ecology: Exploring LGBTQ+ Identities and Environmental Advocacy* 7:00 PM–8:30 PM ET on Zoom. Explore the intersection of LGBTQ+ identities and environmental advocacy in the realm of queer ecology. This workshop delves into the ways in which LGBTQ+ individuals engage with nature, ecological spaces, and environmental activism, and will give a greater understanding of nature through queerness, disrupting the myth of heteronormativity in nature. Participants will gain insights into inclusive approaches to environmental advocacy, promoting acceptance, visibility, and justice for career communities within ecological discussions. **Register at [shorturl.at/lyz8A](https://shorturl.at/lyz8A)**

Parker was recently interviewed by Rev. Sage Cole on the Be Love Podcast. You can listen to it here: [worshipislife.substack.com/p/be-love-really-allows-people](https://worshipislife.substack.com/p/be-love-really-allows-people)

In this powerful and deeply personal conversation, Parker McMullen Bushman invites us to rethink everything we've been taught about nature—starting with the idea that it exists somewhere “out there,” separate from us. “We are all nature,” they remind us. “We've been talking about the natural world this whole time because we are part of it.” This reframing sits at the heart of their work and forms the foundation of their upcoming



Parker McMullen Bushman

workshop, *Queer Ecology: Exploring LGBTQ+ Identities and Environmental Advocacy*.

Drawing from their upbringing in the Bronx, Parker challenges the dominant narrative that cities are somehow disconnected from the natural world. “We don't think of cities as nature,” they explain, “but it is—just nature that we've changed.” By tracing how this false separation emerged, particularly through early conservation movements that framed wilderness as something to be protected from humans, they highlight how these ideas have shaped not only environmental policy but also who feels welcome in environmental spaces.

Parker weaves together environmental history, personal storytelling, and social critique to show how systems of exclusion—racism, classism, and heteronormativity—have long been embedded in environmentalism. From

not visiting a national park until their twenties to witnessing stark differences in neighborhood pollution as a child collecting cans, their experiences reveal how environmental awareness often comes not from formal education, but from lived reality. “No one told me I was recycling,” they reflect. “I was just trying to make money. But I noticed things—who had clean neighborhoods, who didn't—and I started asking why.”

That questioning became a catalyst for activism and, ultimately, a career. But Parker is clear: access to environmental pathways is not equally distributed. Their work calls attention to the ways marginalized communities are disproportionately impacted by

*Continues on page 71*



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. Recent issues have included reflections on Ramadan and a eulogy for Rev. Jesse Jackson. Sign up here: <https://tinyurl.com/42pwj4kv> 📧

### Locked Doors

Continued from page 57

Listen for the voice of God. Remember, Jesus' first words when He appears to the disciples are "Peace be with you." Enter the house. Calm yourself. Be quiet. Look for the Lord's presence. Look for the way God enters your life.

Only then can the deeper dialogue begin—like the one that unfolds with Thomas. What does it mean for our inner life and our outer life to come together? What does it mean to protect ourselves, and what does it mean to bring what we have protected back out into the world? The locked door is a time of divine guardianship. The Lord standing in our midst is a time to listen.

So my question to you is: when you are scared—when you are frightened—what do you do?

I once heard someone say that when they were the most frightened they had ever been, they simply repeated the Lord's Prayer over and over again. Like a firefighter relying on training, they turned to something they didn't have to think about. They repeated it again and again, and it pulled them out of fear. It reminded them that divine providence is real. Often, what we imagine is far worse than what will actually happen.

So I would suggest this: when fear closes the doors of your mind, retreat into those deep, rooted truths—whether it's the Lord's Prayer, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, a word of love from someone you trust, or anything that reminds you of goodness. In doing so, you create a space where the Lord can enter. And when the Lord enters, He will help you unlock the door and return to the world with clarity and purpose.

When the doors of our minds are shut by fear, the Lord will guard you, speak to you, and then release you.

—Amen. ☩

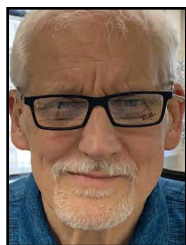
### 2026 CSS Winter Intensive

Continued from page 61

has an entrepreneurial background as co-founder of Terrapin Restaurant and Calamus Retreat Center in the Hudson Valley of New York. She is pursuing the Certificate in Swedenborgian Studies in order to enrich her teaching practice and develop new positive approaches to career and life.



Paul was installed as the Licensed Pastor of the Garden Chapel Sanctuary in 2016. He is married to Suzy and the father of two grown sons and grandfather to 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.

### CSS Annual Meeting

Continued from page 68

He was a Swedenborg Society doctoral scholar from 2020 to 2024, earning his PhD from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. Dr. McKinnon helped organize the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative and is currently completing a monograph titled the *Epiphanies of Helen Keller: Swedenborgianism, Socialism, and the Representation of Disability in Twentieth Century America*.

The election for the at-large member of the board will be held at the Annual Meeting of the Corporation of the New Church Theological School on the afternoon of Sunday June 28 during the 2026 Convention.

The Board and faculty of the CSS look forward to participating in this year's upcoming Convention and the CSS corporation meeting at the Babson Executive Conference Center in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

We hope to see you there. ☩

### SJC Speaker Series

Continued from page 70

environmental harm—while also being excluded from the spaces where solutions are shaped.

One of the most compelling frameworks Parker offers is the idea of "indicator species." In ecology, these are organisms whose health signals the overall condition of an ecosystem. Parker extends this concept to people, "Our most marginalized communities—people of color, trans folks, people with disabilities—they're our 'indicator species.' When they are being harmed, it's a warning of what's coming for everyone." It's a striking reminder that environmental justice is inseparable from social justice.

Through a queer ecological lens, Parker invites participants to dismantle

binaries, not just between human and nature, but between identities, disciplines, and ways of knowing. Their approach is rooted in interconnectedness, reciprocity, and care, values long held by Indigenous communities and increasingly vital in the face of climate crisis.

This workshop is not just about learning, it's about unlearning. It's about recognizing that the systems that separate us from nature are the same ones that separate us from each other. And it's about imagining new ways forward, grounded in inclusion, equity, and collective responsibility.

Join Parker McMullen Bushman and the SJC of the SCNA on Wednesday, May 6, for a transformative exploration of what it means to belong—to the planet, to our communities, and to ourselves. ☩

### 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.

## Convention 2026 Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice

### It's a Banner Year! 2026 Marks a Return to Convention Banners

This year, we will have a traditional procession of banners at the Convention opening ceremony! We are asking those who are attending Convention in person to bring their ministry's banners with them. This will be the first time we have done this since the COVID-19 pandemic shut down in 2020.

While established banners are great, we also encourage you to create new banners if you feel so inspired (est. 2x3 feet). Let our theme of spirituality and the arts flow through you into the creation and resurrection of banners for our annual convention! Your banner will not only celebrate your ministry and be added to our procession, but will also be used as the backdrop for the main convention meeting space, seen by both in-person and virtual attendees!

Please let us know either way if your group is bringing a banner by filling out this form at [forms.cloud.microsoft/r/tcjK265d9P](https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/tcjK265d9P).



(above) Banners can represent churches, associations, conferences, camps and more! We hope to see lots of banners from all over North America this year! (left) The banners from the various ministries in attendance at the 2019 Convention in Valparaiso, Indiana.