



The Big Question

BY DELL J. ROSE

“Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15) Though this question was given to Simon Peter, it is a question at the heart of the Christian tradition and our tradition in general. It has been over three hundred years since our illuminator Emanuel Swedenborg proclaimed the descent of the New Jerusalem, and the full weight of that proclamation still has relevance today. In our personal responses, each of us must answer who the Lord is to us, and as a body, we must answer what binds us together in fellowship around the unique vision of Christianity that Swedenborg’s revelation expounded.

It was this question that led us to our first schism, to a period of ugliness where, forsaking Swedenborg’s own exhortation not to allow doctrine to engender anger and bitterness, we split. The Church of the New Jerusalem was split in two, and we all bear those scars today. For those of us in

Convention, we chose to move away from a prescriptive vision of Swedenborg’s revelation to one that placed the emphasis of the movement on the universalist aspects of the tradition. Oftentimes, with much violence to what has traditionally been core elements of the tradition. One body embraced

We must answer what binds us together in fellowship around the unique vision of Christianity that Swedenborg’s revelation expounded.

a literalistic approach to Swedenborg’s revelation, eschewing historical critical methods of analysis for a hermeneutic of faith. In an effort not to be those guys, we flipped the discussion about who we are on its head and concluded, problematically, that we were in no position to exclude anyone—everyone’s

opinion was equally valid, and the weight of the tradition was to be left by the wayside.

The influx of members from the General Church, fleeing the literal and unimaginative way that Swedenborgianism was understood in that context, added to the broad reaction within Convention against any attempt to formalize Swedenborg’s teachings, even to the point of trying to de-center Swedenborg in the work of our national church.

Something has gone very, very wrong here.

A former member of the General Church confessed to me that they felt as though when they came to Convention that they had to abandon the “intellectual” approach to Swedenborg. In joining the other fold, it required that you no longer approach the writings as sources of divine truth and revelation and instead embrace a vision of

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The Adults’ Turn

Hear about what it’s like to attend an *adult* retreat with the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative at Duxbury, Massachusetts.

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Featured Artwork



“Equilibrium”

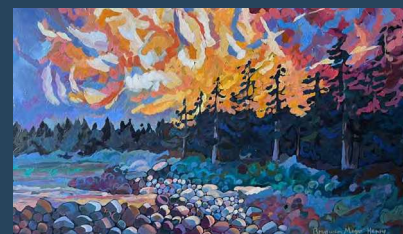
By Rev. Robert McCluskey

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Convention 2026 Virtual Programs

A handy one-page schedule for you to use as reference to attend virtual Convention this year.

Insert



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Editor's Corner



Identity

Who am I? What do I believe in? Who do I love? What do I value? Answering these questions helps shape our identities as individuals, communities, and organizations.

It is tempting to answer these questions with negatives. Who am I not? What do I not believe in? Who do I dislike? I remember reading in NPR that the TikTok algorithm is so successful at curating content for you because it measures not only what you like, but what you *don't* like. The videos you quickly flick away from say just as much about you that the videos that you choose to watch do.

I don't think that this serves us well as human beings. I don't want to be defined by what I am not, even though the culture and politics around me want me to do exactly that. I am not a program or an algorithm, and community is not the same as content.

Several articles this month ask questions about identity. Who is the church organization and what belief binds us together? Who and how do we welcome people into the gates of the New Jerusalem? How do we make worship and community spaces that are not merely permissive spaces, but ones that spiritually nourish every one of us?

Community requires discernment, and disagreement is inevitable. An evolving and living community requires addressing these questions honestly and with charity, and I believe that Convention is the perfect time to have these discussions with each other. As we hold these conversations we should remember to focus on who we *are* and not on who we *are not*.

—Brittany Price
editor@swedenborg.org

the Messenger

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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

- **June 6, 2026:** Pre-Convention General Council Meeting
- **June 15, 2026:** Virtual Registration for 202nd Convention closes
- **June 26, 2026:** Annual COM meeting
- **June 26–June 29, 2026:** 202nd Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America
- **July 7, 2026:** Post Convention General Council Meeting
- **August 15, 2026:** SCFA Grants Due
- **September 15, 2026:** All Reports due for the 2026 Journal.

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.

Registration for virtual attendees for Convention closes on June 15
 Register here:
swedenborg.org

*Message from the President***What is Our Polity?***The Year of the New Jerusalem: 2025–26*

Some might say there's even a prior question to ask, which is "What is a polity?" And the simple answer is that polity is a governance theory. From its Greek roots (*poleis*), we get the common word "politics," and in governance theory it refers to the specific form of political or social governance.

Thus, polity usually proceeds by identifying the core politically organized unit, such as a state, country, church, or corporation, by which resources are managed, maintained, and controlled.

In church life and across all the many denominations in Christianity, we find the classic dividing line between vertical and horizontal polities. The word Episcopal (from the ancient Greek word *episkopos* that became the early church word for bishops) is a vertical form with power at the top that is mediated down through various organizational forms. The word congregational stems from old Latin *congregare*, which means to herd together. Thus, every "herd" is a congregation! Congregationalism is a horizontal form of power that gives voice and vote to all individual congregations. In a congregational denomination, there is no higher power that can come in and tell congregations what to do. The only power that exists from above is that a denomination could choose to disassociate from a particular congregation, but that decision also would be made on a wide horizontal basis.

The Swedenborgian Church of North America is congregational and horizontal and is the most radically horizontal of all the Swedenborgian branches of the New Church on earth. As such, our denomination is democratically governed by rank-and-file

membership through a representative government headed by a General Council, which is also democratically elected through the voting system of the denomination.

The month of June means we are headed for our annual convention where our polity is in action at its most visible and functional every year. Many decisions are made through our democratic polity. The top governing body is the General Council, which is comprised of thirteen elected members and the chair of the Council of Ministers. The officers of the General Council oversee the business sessions where voting members in our congregational polity will make many decisions. Voting delegates are determined by our regional Associations who are allotted delegates in a proportional formula based on the membership totals in Associations, which themselves are legal constituent societies, usually having their own 501(c)(3) status, within that geographic region.

There are also five Standing Committees comprised of three or six people who are also elected by delegates to serve terms. These are working groups that function throughout the year handling responsibilities for financial functions, information management and publishing (online and print), educational events and support resources, and nominations for the upcoming convention.

The other important body is the Council of Ministers, who have powers over the standards and process for ministry training and who provides counsel and guidance for the spiritual work of the denomination. Ordained clergy have automatic voting rights at the summer convention. Wherever you are, you can show up at these meetings virtually by registering as a virtual participant, and you can also attend some wonderful Mini Courses!

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

Cover Story

The Big Question*Continued from cover*

“love,” which seems to ask only that one blindly accept any theological vision presented. In the eternal fear of causing division by asserting, we have allowed all manner of divergent viewpoints as capable of being equally “Swedenborgian.” Like the concept of “love,” “Swedenborgian” has devolved into an empty signifier, an open concept that is so bereft of characteristics that it can be used for anything. Needless to say, I don’t agree with this perspective.

I can understand why. Religion can hurt. It can make you feel bad about things you have no control over, and it can make the most natural human realities evidence of an omnipresent nature of condemnation. Yet, this “kid-friendly” version of religion, shorn of sharp edges, is profoundly unfulfilling. That which enlivens is always unruly, wild, and unwilling to be domesticated. It makes demands. It challenges. It demands that you face it with all that you have; in this way, it reminds us of our Lord’s demand that we name who he is for us. Universalism is always attractive, but lest we forget, the point of Swedenborg’s writings was that we reassess who Christ was and is. Swedenborg demands again that we meet the Lord again, to see him through the eyes of a new dispensation and to reject those barriers that the old church placed around his love. This is his love. This is the sword that he promised to bring.

The church must always be a place of refuge for those who need it. And we are enriched by our brothers and sisters who have joined us from the General Church; however, our theology must not be formulated in reaction, or worse, suspicion. Coined by Paul

Ricoeur, the phrase “hermeneutics of suspicion” refers to a method of reading that assumes that communication is always rooted in a desire for domination. It asks not, “What does this mean?” but rather, “What is this trying to hide?”

In this light, I propose that Convention think once again about what we bring to this revelation. I would argue that we have not done the necessary work of truly defining our own position. If we do not reckon revelation the same way as the General Church, then how do we reckon it? Between literal acceptance and insipid universalism, there is a living, messy, and enlivening reality. A moment to accept the miraculous with the rational.

Yet this emphasis on clarity must not be mistaken for closure. For where the errors of past practice have been rooted in a reactionary reductionism that flattened doctrine into an indiscriminate openness, the antidote must not be an attempt to shut the doors and whisper that there is no longer room for those whose approach to Swedenborg is necessarily more emotive, exploratory, and universal in character. Convention has, at its best, been an expansive body: one where intellectual rigour and a less exclusively defined, more experiential grasp of the Church have co-existed in often uneasy tension. The challenge that now faces us is not to dissolve one into the other but to note that any tradition that is to be capable of sustaining Swedenborg’s theological vision must be capable of sustaining multiple approaches to that vision, so long as they continue to be in earnest dialogue with questions of truth. A reinvigorated scholarly seriousness must not replace the so-called “squishier” (thanks, Tirah) elements of the Church but can only serve to enrich them further. Similarly, the universalist impulse, well

controlled, need not result in the loss of content, but rather in the reminder that the goal of all doctrine is charity. What is needed, then, is not a narrowing, but a more articulated center: a church confident in its theological work to the point of welcoming difference without falling into indifference, and structured in its commitments to the point of ensuring that this welcome does not happen at the expense of what makes the Swedenborgian Church recognizably the Swedenborgian Church.

In Shi’i Islam, the concept of prophecy, *nubuwwah* (نُبُوּوَه) is spoken about in terms of absolute necessity. Revelation is a natural force that is always arising, yet its implications require further elaboration. Every revelation, Swedenborg’s included, is always mixed between the wheat and the chaff. It requires sifting. The voice of the prophet, as Swedenborg was acutely aware of, often colors the revelation in ways unique to the time and the place where the revelation was unveiled. It requires us to ask not what can be read into the revelation, but about those views that conflict with it. To return to the case presented with Shi’i Islam, although prophecy was necessary, so too was guardianship *walāya* (وَالِيَا). The community must ask of every revelation, “is this true revelation?” And of every interpretation, “Does this bring us closer to Christ’s revelation through Swedenborg?” This hermeneutic will not allow for every interpretation, but it will allow for the diversity of those who would seriously ask of Swedenborg’s writings, “What is the Lord saying here?” “And am I being as faithful a steward of this truth as I can be?”

This will mean some views will be closer than others, and some necessarily will be outside the realm of the acceptable. This is the role of judgment,

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Year of the New Jerusalem

The New Jerusalem and the Rose of the World

BY RICHARD SMOLEY

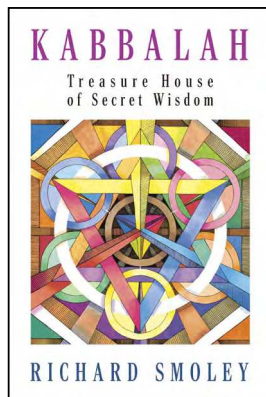
The most famous picture of the New Jerusalem appears in Revelation, where John “saw the holy city...coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2). Yet it is not the first such vision in the Bible.

Revelation harks back to earlier prophecies such as in the latter part of Zechariah, dating perhaps to the third or fourth century BCE. Here, too, we find a final apocalyptic struggle after which Jerusalem will be restored. “Living waters shall go out of Jerusalem... and the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one” (Zechariah 14:9).

These prophecies are embryonic manifestations of a universalistic vision. The Lord—Yahweh—is gradually revealed to be the God not just of the Jews but of all nations. Of course the vision is portrayed in terms that Jewish prophets of the era would conceive: God is Yahweh and no other. Still it is a striking instance of a perception, not only of a single God, but of a universal recognition of that God.

These gropings toward universalism have created centuries of disruptions, such as the warring claims of each of the Abrahamic religions that there is one sole God that is somehow theirs alone. We can hope that these squabbles—petty and yet cataclysmic—will soon vanish completely.

The Russian visionary Daniil Andreev (1906–59) offers a similar but unique perspective in his vision of the coming “Rose of the World:” a transcendental blossom that will unite and harmonize all religious traditions.



Kabbalah: Treasure House of Secret Wisdom by Richard Smoley will be available on Amazon in September 2026 and be pre-ordered at tinyurl.com/ywkynmh7.

It will not be like any restricted religious faith, whether true or false.... It will be an inter-religion or pan-religion, in that it will be a teaching that views all religions that appeared earlier as reflections of different layers of spiritual reality, different sets of variometral facts, and different segments of our planetary cosmos.... If the older religions are petals, then the Rose of the World will be a flower: with roots, stem, head, and the commonwealth of its petals.

Andreev’s Rose of the World parallels Swedenborg’s concept of the New Jerusalem, which signifies a new, purified church from heaven that is oriented toward love of the Lord and charity toward one’s neighbor. Its primary characteristic is faith united with love—not divorced from it, as was characteristic of the earlier churches.

In Andreev’s terms, each religion preserves its integrity but not at the expense of granting legitimacy to other religions. As with Swedenborg’s New Jerusalem, faith is not separate from love—much less conflicting with

it—but harmonious and indeed united with it.

A related vision comes from the British esotericist Alice Bailey (1880–1949), who speaks of the coming of a “New Group of World Servers” that “is to be composed of men and women of all nations and ages, but each one must be spiritually oriented, all must be conscious servers, all must be mentally polarized and alert, and all must be inclusive.”

Swedenborg, Andreev, and Bailey—all coming from quite different perspectives—seem to point toward the same eventuality. Despite the angst created by current events, we can see clues to this trend in many current developments. Of course the process is far from complete, and it is unlikely to reach its full realization in the lifetime of anyone now breathing on the earth, but we have been assured that the outcome is certain. 🌹

Richard Smoley is editor of “Quest: Journal of the Theosophical Society in America.” His next book, “Kabbalah: Treasure House of Secret Wisdom,” is to be published by G&D Media in September 2026.



Convention Update: Full Slate

The Nominating Committee will be presenting a full slate of candidates at the 2026 convention. For more information visit swedenborg.org/events-activities/annual-convention.

New Ministry

Bloom Haven Spiritual Community Center

BY TIRAH KEAL

Bloom Haven will be a church by another name, a spiritual community center. Currently taking shape in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania, we are a brand-new congregation of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

Our Mission Statement:

Rooted in the Swedenborgian message of love, inclusivity, and respect for all paths, Bloom Haven exists to support people in forming and nurturing relationships with themselves, with each other, and with the Divine.

We are building a community that will strive to embody the Swedenborgian idea that “Religion is all about how we live, and the religious way to live is to do good” (Doctrine of Life §1).

I am called to be the founding executive pastor for Bloom Haven, it’s a call I wasn’t expecting, and it would certainly be more convenient to ignore it, but I heard and saw a need, and realized I can’t look the other way. Growing up as the daughter of a Swedenborgian minister, from a different branch than the SCNA, I thought my dad’s job looked like the best work in the world: fun, and deeply important. But that branch doesn’t ordain women, so I was told I couldn’t do that job. I remained a member of that church, married and had five children, supporting my husband as he became a Swedenborgian minister himself. Living in Huntingdon Valley since 2008, I gave much of my time and ability to that church as a volunteer supporting the church behind the scenes. Still loving the idea of women becoming ministers, even if

I wasn’t one of them, I became an activist, hoping to change the organization from within. I helped with efforts on demonstrations, and even went so far as to publish a survey asking the population if they wanted women in the clergy (the majority did!). In addition, there was rising energy advocating for inclusion of LGBTQ+ folk in the church, and I joined the effort and led a march and passed around a petition that gained over 800 signatures asking for change.



In 2021, the head of the clergy published a letter making it clear that the stance of the church would not change, and LGBTQ+ people would continue to be excluded. I was broken-hearted but reconciled with the fact that the church I had given so much to and loved so dearly, was never going to open the pulpit to me, and it was never going to love a whole swath of precious people for who they are. I joined the SCNA with a goal of answering the call to become a minister and plant a truly inclusive congregation in the community where I have lived for decades. I have come to realize that the Lord had been preparing me for this

call all along. While I have a passion for this work, I also know it’s not about me. I am just here to follow in the path I have been given and invite others to join me in building something I know will be beautiful and life-giving.

I have been blessed in my education and preparation by the mentorship of Rev. Shada Sullivan at The Church of the Holy City in Wilmington, Delaware. Under her guidance, I have spent the past several years learning ministry by doing it. I’ve founded our monthly Dinner Church program, developed and preached a sermon series on Divine Providence, relaunched the children’s program, and crafted a building manual to support day-to-day stewardship. The work of Bloom Haven will draw directly on every one of those experiences.

This extended period of incubation has also allowed me to assemble a wonderful team of people to serve as my founding Board of Directors. Folks with experience in ministry and the private sector have stepped up to lend their time and talents to help make my vision for Bloom Haven into a reality.

Bloom Haven is intended as a place for everyone, Swedenborgian and otherwise, to gather in spiritual growth and mutual support, with a foundational inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community. I am delighted to find fellowship in the SCNA with so many people who have found Swedenborgianism, and made their home here in Convention precisely because women and LGBTQ+ folks are welcomed into leadership and full inclusion. I have been sharing the vision of Bloom

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New Ministry

Bloom Haven

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Haven in my neighborhood, and many people have expressed excitement, saying things like “It’s about time!” and “we need this!” and “A woman in the pulpit? I’m in!” It makes it clear to me that many Swedenborgians already living in this region long to practice their faith in a community free of the exclusionary practices. Right now, the nearest inclusive congregation is over an hour’s drive away, which is out of reach for most.

We call Bloom Haven a spiritual community center rather than a church. It’s a tragic reality for many that the word *church* on a building can act as a barrier to entry, a reminder of institutions that have failed to live up to their mandate. My hope and prayer is that by choosing a different name we can offer a clearer message of welcome, one that can reach people who might otherwise find it difficult to walk through our door.

Bloom Haven will be a place for people to gather in person for a wide variety of events and activities. While we are not identifying ourselves as a church by name, we will have worship! The basic service will be a gathering on Sunday afternoons. We’ve drawn our inspiration from the practice at the Garden Church in San Pedro, California. We’ll gather in the afternoon to cook together, then worship together, and after worship, eat together. The cooking will include making the meal for those who come in person, and making extra to be packaged up and sent to food pantries in the region. Our worship service will be informal, with lots of music, readings from scripture, a simple sermon, and a time for sharing among everyone there. People will be welcome to whichever parts of the

afternoon and evening they are fed by, literally and figuratively.

We will have a mid-week evening worship service, focusing on a peaceful meditative ritual rather than a sermon-based service. The focus will be making time to hear/read the Word and reflect on it. Alternating music with readings, the framework will allow time for reflection, and time to share insights with the whole gathering.

During the rest of the week, we plan to host a wide variety of groups and have the flexibility to try new ideas and be responsive to the needs of our community. We have a pilot program already in operation called Prysm Arts, which is an after-school ally arts and crafts club for kids ages 9–13.

We hope to have a morning program for infants and young children and their parents involving music and movement.

We intend to have an active youth group that will be a part of the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) based at Bloom Haven, providing weekly gatherings for kids ages 13–18, and connecting them to the annual retreats and camps.

We have plans for an evening Spiritual Sharing Group for the Transitions young adults group ages 18–30. It will follow a simple format grounded in Bloom Haven’s mission of nurturing relationships with self, others, and the Divine. The group will hold space for real questions and concerns, offering an expansive and inclusive welcome.

We have plans for two ongoing series called *Confronting Scripture*, and *Confronting Swedenborg*, both of which will be a format in which we read through books of the Bible and Swedenborg’s writings, respectively, and investigate the ideas contained. We will read pre-planned sections and gather to discuss and more deeply

understand what we read. There will be a special attention paid to passages that have historically been used to exclude people or excuse prejudice.

There will be two weekly performance groups, Music Performance, and Scripture Performance. The Music Performance group will be led by a paid music director and made up of volunteer musicians and singers to prepare the music for Sunday and mid-week worship. The Scripture Performance group will be led by me, and composed of volunteers who will prepare the readings from the Bible and the writings for use in Sunday and mid-week Worship. Depending on the interest of the participants, I will offer support for the development of scripture as storytelling, where people will learn the Bible passage by heart to deliver at worship in a storytelling style.

As a new endeavor, this ministry depends completely on funding from denominational grants and individual donations. This is an ambitious project and we begin with the recognition that a minister has a skill set that does not always include managing the vital day-to-day operations of a community center, not to mention that we plan to have more to do than I can fulfill alone. As such, we intend to raise funding not only for our programming and location, but also for staffing. We envision a staff made up of myself as the full-time pastor, a full-time Director of Operations, and a part-time Music Director. We are actively looking for a location that will be open for use and connection seven days a week, and that will also require a dedicated group of volunteers in addition to our staff.

In the fall of 2026, I will begin my final year of education, and as long as I remain in good standing for ordination with the Committee on Admission

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Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative

Rekindling Our Light and Being Love

BY BEKI GREENWOOD

“**M**om, where are you going this weekend?” my teenage son asked me as I was packing up my car on a Friday in April. “Nate, I’m going to the Adult Retreat in Duxbury, remember?” and his response was “Oh, right! That sounds really fun.” My kids, now both teenagers and active members of the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL), know what it means to head off for a weekend retreat with like-minded people. For me, the last proper retreat I attended was at Blairhaven in Duxbury, Massachusetts, in 1999. As a teen, I used to count down the days until the next retreat or camp session, so having the opportunity to attend one now as an adult was a no-brainer. And, with the Cedar Hill Retreat Center literally on the same street and beach as Blairhaven was, it made it that much better. I was really happy to not only be attending but be part of the planning team with Rev. Sage Cole and Alex Gayheart.



Back (left to right): Jill Baxter, Lori Phinney, Deane Currie, Rev. Sage Cole, Rev. Susannah Currie.
Middle: Merrilee Phinney, Alex Gayheart, Kelly Barone, Bill Baxter, Shelley Dolley, Kurt Fekete.
Front: Beki Greenwood, Ben Gunter

The Be Love East Coast Retreat was organized by the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative and sponsored by the Massachusetts New Church Union. Attendees joined the retreat from all over the Midwest and East Coast: Indiana, Ohio, New Jersey, Maine, Rhode Island, and several from Massachusetts. Some joined us for the entire weekend, some joined us just for the day Saturday, and everything in between. All were welcome to take part and join us in any way that fit their schedule.

Guests started to arrive Friday evening and were welcomed by fellowship and a charcuterie board to enjoy while friends slowly trickled in. Everyone was encouraged ahead of time to bring food items or share things that bring you love or help you show love. Making charcuterie boards is one thing not

only that I love to do as a creative outlet, but also love to share with others. Lori, whose daughter attends everything the SCYL does but had never attended anything Swedenborgian herself, brought fresh flower arrangements from her own garden to warm our retreat space with her love language. Once greeting time was over, we gathered to end the night with an opening vespers. A calming way to end the day.

For the Be Love Brunch the next morning, a delicious array of breakfast items was displayed with homemade quiche (made with donations from their own chickens), baked French toast, a variety of fruit and berries, ham, potatoes, and all-around comfort foods. Rev. Sage had invited attendees ahead of time to share a response to the following question: “*What is*

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Who wouldn’t want to be welcomed by a charcuterie board waiting for you? Jill even had the brilliant idea of the cheese labels being turned into flags!

Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative

Rekindling Our Light

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helping you right now to feel a sense of the presence of LOVE?" All were encouraged to share in whatever way felt best to them—could be very sacred, very simple, or very silly—whatever spoke to their heart. Day attendees arrived in time to partake in this session and shared what they do to show love. Sage had placed prompts around the table that we could use to spark new directions to the discussion about love: what does love taste like or sound like, for example. Deane sang a song that he recently shared with a dear friend who was transitioning to the spiritual world for sounds of love, and it was a touching moment for us all. The sense of family while enjoying meaningful conversation around a meal together was powerful even for those who had never met before the retreat.

One of the special things about gatherings like retreats is the joy and fun spent around making meals together, cleaning up together, and being useful to each other by partaking in the “chores.” They don’t feel like chores when you’re doing them with

(Right) Before our Be Honest Tea, everyone washed each other’s hands as a symbol of baptism. Here Kelly is washing Jill’s hands. (Below) We enjoyed (though a little chilly) an early Sunday morning “church” with the birds as we listened to over fifteen different bird songs to start our day.



friends, laughing and singing the time away. We all took turns with the cooking and cleaning, and enjoyed crafts and puzzles in the downtime between sessions and meal times.

For the afternoon, a Be Honest Teatime was held, and we were encouraged to bring a favorite tea to share to enjoy with tea sandwiches, crumpets, and macaroons, and be honest with each other and ourselves. Before sitting down to tea, Rev. Sage led us in a baptism ritual where we washed each other’s hands before the meal. We split into two groups and were prompted with, “*What are some tensions you are present with at the moment? Where are you being invited to grow?*” Though it took a few minutes to settle in, people opened up to each other about some really difficult things they are going through or processing in their lives, families, marriages, or otherwise. One group wrapped up with a poem that one member brought to read, which summed up their feelings. The other broke into sub-conversations and kept their discussions going.

We said goodbye to our day attendees after teatime, and there was some downtime to enjoy a walk to the beach, games, or a nap. Though, as it

always seems to happen, as the afternoon moved into early evening, everyone ended back around the table enjoying cribbage, scrabble, and lots and lots of laughs.

Our Be Useful Sunday got slightly derailed as the weather turned colder and wetter. Though it held off long enough in the morning for many of us to enjoy our coffee, listening to the birds on the porch and watching the deer in the yard, it was nature’s church for sure. Some made the journey up to the Boston Church on the Hill to enjoy a service and to see family. Others had to head home, and some of us stayed and took a walk around the old Blairhaven grounds. The afternoon remained low-key and made space for useful conversations about the church, membership, and what it means to be a Swedenborgian while keeping our fingers busy putting together a puzzle. We then made homemade soups and fresh bread for those of us who were left and enjoyed a closing evening together, having several days of deepening our connections to one another.

Extended times like these give the space for people to really form spiritual connections or find ones they didn’t



Beki, Alex, and Sage visit the old site of the Blairhaven Retreat Center just down the street from the Cedar Hill Retreat Center. Blairhaven was sold by the MNCU in 2011 to the town of Duxbury and is now a public open space park. The iconic tree (behind) still stands and so does the outdoor chapel.

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Summer Camps

A Lifetime of Memories and Connection to FNCA

BY DR. JESSE ANN WHITE

Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA) has always been a part of my life. I have vivid sensory memories from my childhood. The smell of pine trees and a general sense of the day care area when I must have been quite little. The smell of an army tent. Did I sleep there with the little girls? Perhaps I just visited them. I recall the first time I went back as a teen, and often since, and having a scent memory hit me strongly as I entered the circular driveway, and then again as I entered the Main Building. Sometimes when I am in one of the cabins, those scent memories seek me out. Each time, it feels like home.

I recall experiences, such as, at maybe age six or seven, innocently exploring a pine tree, and finding, as I climbed down, that I was covered with pitch (if you don't know about pine pitch, just think of Superglue: it's about as easy to remove). I can picture the chin-up bar that was between two trees at one point. I remember, as a young girl, sewing bean bag frogs with Lois McCurdy. I kept that frog for a long time and even made another one on my own. I remember children's classes in an upper room with Louise Woofenden, lying on a piece of paper, tracing the outlines of our bodies so we could create a picture of an Egyptian. Camp was a fun experience! At the end of my fourth-grade year, we moved to Connecticut, and we didn't return to camp for a while. However, when I turned thirteen, I came back on my own. I

could now be a Flame and sleep in the dorm. That brings back a whole other set of memories, but, let me back up...



Jesse's parents, Swish and Mac, with her sister Randall on the FNCA front porch steps in 1953.

My family was a part of camp well before me. My parents became familiar with the camp through Nancy and Fred Perry. Our families were friends when living in Massachusetts. My mother, my sister Randall, and my brothers Doug and Gerrit, came up to camp when my siblings were little. They are all at least eight years older, so they have their own stories to tell... the rope swing, the sound of the train, the tents... being silly and becoming themselves in this safe atmosphere. When I came to camp as a teen, their initials were carved on walls from long ago. And I experienced many of those things they had told me about.

Our father told me he used to bring my family up and then sometimes stay for the weekend. He loved running in high school, and he told me he remembered someone set up hurdles for him to run over in the field near the road. I've since seen pictures of him at the river or a lake as a young father, my sister just an infant. My aunt Sally (then Konitzky) also came up sometimes. I don't think I really knew that until some of her generation asked me about her. She was a church organist, and I believe accompanied my mother, a soprano soloist, who sometimes sang in the Swedenborgian churches: in Newtonville, at the Chapel in Cambridge, and in Bridgewater, I think.

All the stories I was hearing and my own memories made me want to go back to camp. I was so happy when I returned after a few years and found that I knew so many of the adults and some of the kids. I came with my friend Cammy Moorhead, who had not been before. We had just met, but she was good company during my first year there alone. Cammy was the daughter of another family that my parents knew when we lived in Massachusetts.

At thirteen, it was a whole new experience of camp. And not the type of camp I had heard about from my school friends. This was a family camp. There were parents, grandparents, older kids, and younger kids. We all spent time together, ate together. I had a job helping with meals along with all the other

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Summer Camps

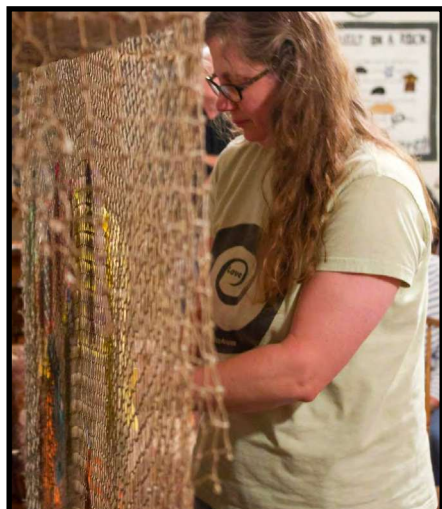
Lifetime of Memories

Continued from page 82

teens: getting up early (never my favorite) to set tables, serving food, and coffee, washing dishes, cleaning up. But, as I've experienced in other places, the job can be fun when you like the people you work with.

We were exploring who we were. We had classes and attended some lectures. I recall that a lot of the lectures were hard for me to understand, but we had some interesting, thought-provoking discussions in our classes. And of course, deep (at least we thought they were) discussions amongst our teen group. Though there were rules, we also had a lot of free time.

I was (and still am) a thinker. Sometimes I just spent time alone. I wrote poetry. I wrote to my friends at home. I also developed close friendships, fell in and out of love, and tried to figure out the meaning of life. In short, I grew up. I spent ages thirteen to seventeen at camp every summer and attended many retreats at Blairhaven and other places. I felt accepted. It was never perfect (it never is as a teenager), but overall, I felt part of a wonderful group of people that my friends in school knew



Jesse working on the Fish Net Project in 2013.

nothing about. And I felt loved and cared for by many adults. That, I now know, is priceless.

As many do, I spent time away from camp during college, graduate school, and my first jobs. After a while, I was not sure about coming back. I think many of us wonder: Will they remember me? Will it be the same? But when I moved from Baltimore back to New Hampshire, I knew I had to return to camp. And, yes, it all felt the same, and I was welcomed with open arms. It's an amazing feeling, coming back after so many years. The love is, of course, still there and always will be.

Coming back, I came to the realization quickly that I was now in a different position at camp. In my late thirties, I was now sought out to take on adult roles and to help run the camp. I eventually joined the Board of Directors and served on it for many years. I became more of a mentor for the teens. I enjoyed watching my nephew Nick and niece Celia discover the camp. I introduced my husband Erwin to Swedenborg and learned through exploring his questions. Later, Swedenborg got me through the toughest moments, including Erwin's passing in 2012. The writings have helped me with many other losses since then.

I have continued to support the youth programs and outreach efforts. I was (and still am on occasion) a dorm mom, and over the years, I have watched the youngsters become leaders themselves. And I've said goodbye to the elders I knew growing up. This close-knit group of people has been together through the best and hardest of times. We get through it because of our faith, trusting in the Lord.

As an adult, over time, Swedenborg finally started to make sense to me. I understood more of the lectures and the knowledge I gained through them,



Rick Dyer, Cammy Moorhead, and Jesse White on the front porch at FNCA in 1977.

which, through the discussion groups, became very meaningful to me. I had a lot to learn then. Twenty-plus years later, I still feel like a beginner, but I realized long ago that I had truly embraced the New Church. I was raised in the Episcopal church, where my mother was the choir director, and continued in that tradition until my early forties. I now attend a Methodist/UCC church in my current Vermont neighborhood for worship and connections. But Swedenborg's writings guide me, and I seek further understanding.

Camp has become precious to me in so many ways, but as an older adult, camp is my spiritual retreat. I crave the inspiration and learning I receive from the lectures. I yearn for the peace of the campus and the love that seems to pour forth from everyone there. Similar to when I was a teen, I experienced those feelings of connection, belonging, and acceptance. Camp is more than the buildings, the river, the pine trees, even the people, it is an opening of the spirit and a chance to receive the blessings that can seem so elusive in my daily life: the blessings coming from the Lord, that I know are always there.

Camp gets me to slow down and listen and look and take them all in. At sixty-one, there is no other place in my life where I experience all this,

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Justice is the New Jerusalem

Queer Ecology: LGBTQ+ Identities and Environmental Advocacy—Workshop Summary

SUBMITTED BY ALEX GAYHEART ON BEHALF OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

The Social Justice Committee was thrilled to host Parker McMullen Bushman (she/they), a Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion strategist and founder of Ecoinclusive (www.ecoinclusive.org), in May as part of our 2026 Speaker Series on social justice issues.

Parker began their workshop by delving into the concepts of bias, both conscious and unconscious, and stereotypes, both implicit and explicit. She described implicit bias as a kind of pattern-mapping. Our brains receive more information than we can consciously process, so they sort experiences, media messages, images, jokes, family stories, religious teachings, school lessons, and cultural assumptions into “folders.” Later, when we encounter a person or idea, the brain may pull out that folder before we have consciously examined whether the contents are accurate or fair.

A major part of the session next focused on untangling concepts such as sex/sex characteristics, gender (socially defined), gender identity (self-defined), gender roles (social expectations), gender expression (how individuals present their identity), and pronouns (using someone’s pronouns is a basic form of respect, not a special favor) that are often treated as if they are the same. As we look back throughout time and across different cultures, we can see that gender is not fixed and has been, and continues to be, defined and influenced by social narratives.

The workshop named how people are socialized into a binary,

heterosexual framework from childhood. This shows up in toys, colors, compliments, clothing, career assumptions, family expectations, movies, stories, leadership norms, and the ways adults imagine children’s futures.

Queer Ecology challenges us to break the binary because the natural world does not conform to it. The workshop challenged the idea that the natural world is neatly binary, heterosexual, fixed, or simple. Instead, nature is full of variation, adaptation, fluidity, cooperation, kinship, social bonding, and reproductive strategies that do not map neatly onto human cultural assumptions.

Parker defined often misunderstood terms such as intersex (an occurrence as common as red-headedness, approximately 1.7% of the population), an umbrella term for natural variations in sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary definitions of male or female bodies, and transgender vs. cisgender. The terms “cis-” and “trans-” are Latin prefixes that have been used in scientific fields for over a century to indicate relative positions: same side vs. opposite side.

The workshop highlighted that attraction and relationship structure are also more varied than many people are taught. Sexual attraction, romantic attraction, gender identity, and relationship agreements are distinct pieces of a person’s life. They can align in expected ways, but they do not always.

The Gender Unicorn, transstudent.org/gender, developed by Trans Student Educational Resources, is an

infographic that helps demystify these concepts in an easy-to-understand format.

Parker named that bias against LGBTQIA+ people appears interpersonally and structurally. It can show up in jokes, family rejection, policy, exclusion from spiritual communities, employment discrimination, healthcare barriers, housing insecurity, violence, and public narratives that frame queer and trans people as threats, leading to depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation due to constant stress and fear.

One of Parker’s strongest messages was that allyship is not an identity someone claims; it is an action someone practices. Allyship requires humility, learning, repair, risk, and follow-through.

Ways to *be* an ally:

- Advocate for change
- Provide support and validation
- Be aware of microaggressions
- Use inclusive language
- Speak out
- Listen and learn

During the Q&A, Parker emphasized that social justice and environmental work are not separate. The same biases and systems that shape schools, churches, workplaces, healthcare, housing, policing, and family life also shape who has access to nature, who is welcomed in environmental spaces, who is believed, who is protected, and who is most harmed by climate disruption and environmental hazards.

Parker offered these questions for spiritual/justice community reflection:

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Justice is the New Jerusalem

The Rainbow Church

BY REV. COLIN AMATO

For decades, if not for centuries, Queer people and members of the LGBTQ+ community have struggled to find a safe space to inhabit that is intentionally sacred. Queer folk can find church congregations or other spaces that are open and supportive of LGBTQ+ people. However, two areas that are not always being addressed: first, the plight of queer people who cannot find a physical space to come together in community, and second, the feedback from queer people who expressed the real desire for a spiritual space where being queer is the focus, as opposed to traditional church being the priority, and queer identity secondary.

The Rainbow Church’s mission is to be such a space that fulfills those two aforementioned areas. The Rainbow Church is currently conducting weekly worship services, broadcasting live each Sunday (www.facebook.com/rainbowchurchswedenborgian). Every third Sunday, we celebrate communion. We are in the process of rewriting the liturgy and worship service with language that puts queer identity and spirituality in the spotlight. We engage in queer hermeneutics of stories, scripture, and the writings of

Emanuel Swedenborg. Important and relevant for our time is to not ignore the social climate we are in, the pain it is causing to the LGBTQ+ community. This pain is necessary to be upfront and vocal about, and this is something that the Rainbow Church is committed to doing, in addition to praying and searching for ways to help those suffering. The future for The Rainbow Church is optimistic. We plan to continue to engage in a hybrid model, meaning that in-person activities also take place. These include weddings, funerals, interfaith services, attending Pride events, and representing the church at local gatherings that further the spiritual well-being of the LGBTQ+ community.

We were pleased to co-sponsor a Be Honest Conversation with the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative, *LG-BTQIA+ Identity: Love, Gender, Marriage & Sexuality*, at the end of May. Featured speakers included the Rainbow Church’s very own Rev. Colin Amato (he/him) and Alex Gayheart (they/them), as well as Tirah Keal (she/her), founding executive pastor of Bloom Haven (<https://www.facebook.com/BloomHavenSCC>). ☪

Rev. Colin was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. Ordained in 2022, he currently serves as pastor of the virtual 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 (www.solanopride.org) and maintains a private psychotherapy practice.



Queer Ecology Summary

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What does my faith, spirituality, ethics, or worldview ask of me when people are being targeted? How can spiritual communities move beyond “welcome” into safety, affirmation, and shared power? Where has religion been used to harm LGBTQIA+ people, and what does repair require? How can love be practiced as policy, budget, language, leadership, and daily behavior?

The Social Justice Committee of the Swedenborgian Church of North America is charged with



raising awareness within the body of Convention around social justice issues. This year, to that end, we are offering this Speaker Series and hope to see your participation and engagement!

“Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.”—Benjamin Franklin ☪



Convention 2026 Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice

2026 Convention Display Tables

Showcasing Our Greater Community

Every year at Convention, we are treated to some delightful displays from our church membership from across the continent. These displays showcase the various communities, endeavors, and organizations within the denomination's membership.

This year, the displays will be located in the St. Lawrence meeting room and will be available to visit throughout the event. For more information on Display Tables please see our [Convention FAQ](#) and [Convention schedule](#), both located on our website: <https://swedenborg.org/events-activities/annual-convention/>. Here is a sample of some of the tables you will see this year.

Bloom Haven Spiritual Community Center



Something exciting is taking root! Visit our table to find out about Bloom Haven, a

brand-new Swedenborgian Church of North America congregation being planted with care and intention by Tirah Keal. We're located in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania, a place where our tradition's history runs deep and the soil is ready for fresh growth. Anchored by our commitment to inclusivity and welcoming every open heart, Bloom Haven is poised to reach a new generation and become a beacon of Swedenborgian renewal in the greater Philadelphia area.

Committee on Chaplaincy

The Committee on Chaplaincy is a relatively new committee of the Council of Ministers. It was initially formed to provide ecclesiastical endorsement for prospective Swedenborgian chaplains, and we have now created a path towards endorsement. Providing support for individuals in the Swedenborgian Church of North America for their spiritual paths has also emerged as a function of the Committee on Chaplaincy. To that end, the Committee meets monthly for support for Swedenborgian chaplains, with our chair, Rev. Jay Barry, facilitating. We also convened a well-attended denominational online meeting in April for supporting ourselves and others in times of crisis, as many people were reporting distress and anxiety related to national and world events. Stop by our display table to meet the Swedenborgian chaplains, and to learn about our role in ministry. We will also have a designated table in the dining area during Convention, hosted by chaplains, if you are feeling in need of spiritual support.

Sue Ditmire, Author

The table is for the introduction of my book, *Overlooked: Black Ministers in a White Denomination*. It is about the Black ministers in our denomination and the culmination of the project I started with Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism (SAAR). I have had several Mini Courses over the past few years, but the story is much bigger than can be covered in an hour: hence the book.

Free Books!

There will be an unsupervised table with a complete set of Swedenborg's writings (aka "The Green Thirty"), Pott's *Concordance*, and the *Dole Notes*, along with a number of other collaterals and commentaries. These will be free to take for whoever wants them.

Fryeburg New Church Assembly

The Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA) family camp display table will hold our beautiful, stand-up, arced FNCA cloth banner; info about this year's camp session; the 2026 Dole 3-Miler Road Race held in Fryeburg, Maine on Saturday August 8; plus some QR codes for easy access to further information. And probably some free swag, too!



Fryeburg New Church

The Fryeburg New Church will be hosting a raffle! The raffle prize is a beautiful stained glass cross, designed and crafted by Gary Lauber, Rev. Catherine Lauber's father. All proceeds will be going to support the Fryeburg New Church in Fryeburg, Maine.

Tickets are \$10 for one ticket, \$25 for three. The fundraiser is open to everyone, near and far, from May 1 to

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Convention 2026 Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice

2026 Display Tables

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June 30, 2026.

The winner will be drawn on June 30, 2026, at the Swedenborgian Church of North America's annual convention. The winner will be notified on June 30, 2026, via their selected form of communication (listed in the registration form). To see a larger photo and purchase tickets please go to tinyurl.com/yvkmjvpf or use the above QR code.



The stained glass hanging comes with a wooden storage and shipping box, measures 16.25" round, and weighs 3.5 pounds. The piece is made of ninety-four pieces of gold irritated glass that is no longer available. The artist, Gary Lauber, will sign the stained glass if desired. This is truly one-of-a-kind!



We accept PayPal, Venmo, Credit, Debit, Checks, and Cash (in person). Any questions, please email Lee Dyer at fryeburgnewchurch-fundraiser@gmail.com.

The Messenger

As the new editor of *the Messenger*, I want to hear from you! I want to hear if you think anything has been missing from the publication and hear about events and ideas that you would like to contribute. More than anything, as the editor of the official publication of the Swedenborgian Church of North America, I am looking forward

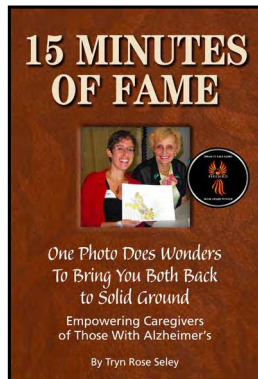
to connecting with both new and familiar friends and contributors.

You could also win a year's subscription of the print edition of *the Messenger* by filling out a brief survey. So come by, have a chat, and let me know what you would like to share with everyone over the next year!

You don't need to be at Convention to participate in the survey and be entered to win. Anyone can enter by going to tinyurl.com/4c54b629 or by using the above QR code. The winner will be drawn on July 15, with their first complimentary issue being the 2026 Convention Special.



Tryn Rose Seley, Author and Musician



Tryn Rose is a church musician and therapeutic music provider for all ages, particularly those living with dementia and their families. Her

Mindful Art creative sessions include live music, storytelling prompts, and art experiences, which bring out the best in the people she serves.

She will have materials from her creative sessions with people living with dementia, and copies of her book, available to purchase, *15 Minutes of Fame: Empowering Caregivers of Those with Alzheimer's*.

Convention Online Worship Services

The following Worship Services are planned to be livestreamed for all to enjoy:

Opening Worship Service
Friday, June 26 at 7:30 PM ET
with Rev. Kevin Baxter followed by the Keynote Address with Bronwen Mayer Henry

Convention Worship Service
Saturday, June 27 at 7:30 PM ET
with Rev. Catherine Lauber the 2026 Convention Preacher

Memorial Worship Service
Sunday, June 28 at 8:00 AM ET
with Rev. Renée Machiniak and Rev. Kit Billings

CSS Worship Service and Graduation
Sunday, June 28 at 8:00 PM ET
with Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber, Dr. Rebecca Esterson, and more

Wilmington's Church of the Holy City



Learn more about the bold renovation project that has restored our historic Swedenborgian church under the leadership of Rev. Shada Sullivan.

We've honored the building's nineteenth century character, incorporated twenty-first century technology, and expanded our welcoming in-person and online community. Stop by our table to grab a copy of *Holy City Connections*, our new quarterly newsletter. 📧

Featured Artwork

Equilibrium

BY REV. ROBERT MCCLUSKEY



"Equilibrium" (1978) by Rev. Robert McCluskey acrylic on canvasette. Located in a private collection in San Pedro, California. Contact artist directly for more information.

That people have spiritual freedom by means of the equilibrium between heaven and hell, and, that people cannot be reformed except in freedom, may be seen in the work on *Heaven and Hell*, n. 597.

—Emanuel Swedenborg, *Last Judgement* §73

I first encountered the writings of Swedenborg on March 3, 1977, during a lunch break from my day job. Strolling along Newbury Street in Boston, I saw a sign, "Swedenborg Library and Bookstore: Religion, Philosophy, Psychology." Being interested in all three subjects, I entered. I quickly ran through several volumes of Swedenborg, along with several collaterals. I attended discussion groups at the library and attended services at the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge. In the fall of 1978, I entered the Swedenborg School of Religion and began painting this picture. Call it a neophyte's first impression.

We find the individual at the center, encased in the natural: iron, stone, wood; sensual truth, natural truth, natural good. It is here that we experience the limits of our freedom. Surrounding and supporting the individual is the Divine Love and Wisdom of the Lord: the red warmth of Divine Love, and the white light of Divine Truth. Sustaining us in an equilibrium between heaven and hell, good and evil, truth and falsity, throughout our life, giving us the appearance of free will. Here we discover the possibilities of our freedom.

And it is here that we come face to face with the human experience of choice and decision. Not a once-and-for-all decision, but an ongoing existential encounter between God and our proprium, between the Lord and ourselves. To feel the "pull" of both heaven and hell, and to freely choose between one or the other. ☸

New Church in Australia Retreat—Join Us!

Have you ever wondered what January feels like when it is summer? Have you ever wanted to take a trip to Australia? Here is a unique opportunity to combine a trip with a retreat full of people who live life through the teachings of Emmanuel Swedenborg.

Every year, the New Church in Australia runs a family retreat for four nights (three full days) in January. These retreats are held at various places around Australia. On January 22–26, 2027, the retreat will be held at a place called Stanwell Tops, just about an hour south of Sydney. It is very easy to travel there on public transport and is situated within a five-minute drive of a beautiful beach and spectacular views along the Illawarra Escarpment.

A variety of sessions (doctrinal, spiritual, and arts and crafts) are run

throughout the retreat, usually forty-five to sixty minutes long. The children and teens split off into their own groups in the mornings, and the afternoons are free for activities. There are also some shared sessions offered in the afternoons, with the evenings filled with fun activities. Over the years, we have had an eighties disco party, trivia night, talent night, and even a bush dance! All sessions and activities are



Stanwell Park beach, a five-minute drive from the Stanwell Tops conference center.

optional, the main reason to come is to connect with like-minded people.

The Tops is the conference center at Stanwell Tops. We will be staying in the Grevillea site. We have stayed here many times before at different sites. Please go to www.thetops.com.au for more information about the site, and if you have any questions, please email Carolyn at nciaretrear@gmail.com. All accommodation and meals are included in the price (which is in Australian dollars). There are a variety of price options: from two people having a private room together, to family rooms, or singles sharing a room. All rooms are en-suite and air-conditioned.

For pricing, room options, and to make a booking, please go to tinyurl.com/mupzrwab or email nciaretrear@gmail.com 📧

A Snapshot of Memories of Randy

BY REV. DR. JIM LAWRENCE

Rev. Randy Laakko was my ordaining minister in 1984. He was already well known to me because he had a close working relationship with the professor of pastoral care and counseling, Rev. Dr. Cal Turley, at the seminary and was brought in to lead seminarian retreats and participate in class discussions. Cal had been his mentor back in the 1960s when Randy did his extended field education in the new-start Seattle ministry called Project Link that was conceived as a mid-century response to changing demographics and an emerging spirituality that emphasized psychology. Randy followed Cal Turley's footsteps in training to be a professional and licensed counselor as part of his ministry skills. For decades, Randy maintained a small counseling practice.

When he was still in seminary, Randy participated in a famous psychological experiment called the Good Friday Experiment in the spring of 1962 where he worked with none other than Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (who would later become known as Ram Dass). He became especially close to Richard Alpert through that project, and Alpert invited Randy into a year-long counseling and mentoring relationship held in Alpert's office on the Harvard campus.

The Good Friday Experiment is now a famous research project designed by a Harvard psychology PhD student, Walter Pahnke, whose advisor was Timothy Leary. Twenty seminarians in the Boston area were recruited to be a part of it, and Randy volunteered.

Pahnke became so impressed with Randy's participation that they continued building a professional relationship for years afterwards. Pahnke went on to become the clinical director of the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, and since Wilmington was not too far away, Pahnke asked Randy to be an advisor on spiritual issues for the clinical work at that center. For years Randy traveled to that center to help Pahnke assess various patient issues.

I always felt close to Randy due to his deep interest in personal development as the core feature of Swedenborgianism and found him to be an unfailingly intelligent dialog partner for issues in ministry. And nobody in Convention had a more boisterous laugh! 📧

Passages

Deaths

Rev. Randall E. Laakko, 88, of



Wilmington, passed away on March 27, 2026, he was surrounded by family and close friends at Christiana Hospital.

A man of profound faith and intellect, Randy was a dedicated pillar of his community for over sixty-five years.

Born and raised in Michigan, Randy held a lifelong affection for his “favorite place on earth,” the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and remained deeply connected to his Finnish ancestry. After graduating from St. John’s College (Kansas) and Concordia Senior College (Indiana), he attended Andover Newton Theological School (Massachusetts), and the Swedenborg School of Religion (Massachusetts). Following ordination into the Swedenborgian denomination in 1965, he and his beloved wife, Mildred, moved to Wilmington, Delaware, to begin his forty-seven year ministry at the Church of the Holy City.

During his tenure, Randy’s leadership extended to the highest levels of his faith. He served on multiple governing groups and was elected to two terms as president of the Swedenborgian Church of America (1984–1990). Locally, his impact was equally significant. He served as a pastoral counselor with the Tressler Center for over a decade, participated in multiple community service groups, and served on the institutional review board of Christiana Care as a community representative. A dedicated advocate for social justice, Randy was an active participant in the Civil Rights

Movement of the 1960s, firmly believing in the equality of all people and our “capacity to overcome forces that would bring destruction on the world.”

After retirement in 2013, Randy continued to embrace life with a contagious vitality, even as a seasonal Santa Claus, a role he played with brilliant resemblance and joy. Randy remained active in the Tressler Center Clergy Support Group and the Men’s Spirituality Group up until his passing. Whether he was exploring nature, stargazing, golfing, traveling, or enjoying a meal with friends, Randy viewed every moment as an opportunity to build his “life story” with the people he loved.

Randy is survived by his children, Kristina (Darren) Stroh and Nathan (April) Laakko; his grandchildren, Ryan, Erik, Christopher, Elizabeth, and Calleigh, whom he viewed as a bright hope for the future; and his sisters, Karen (Clint) Feil, and Cathy (David Fennell) Laakko. He was preceded in death by his beloved wife of sixty years, Mildred; his granddaughter, Annalisa; his three brothers, Mike Jr., Erick, and Bruce; and his parents.

Douglas Goddard White, 71, of



Westbrook, Connecticut, passed away at home on Saturday, April 11, 2026, after an all-too-brief fight with cancer.

Doug was born on September 17, 1954, the son of the late Mac and Swish White. He spent his youth in Wenham, Massachusetts, where he cultivated a lifelong fascination with the natural world and immersed himself in music, swimming, tennis, treehouse-building, and

bees (which he kept in his bedroom for six months, in spite of his cowardly brother). He was proud to attend Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, graduating in 1976 with a degree in Biology.

In 1980, he met his “destiny,” Marti Robinson, while teaching at TASSIS Hellenic International School in Kifissia, Greece. In 1983, the couple helped to open TASSIS Cyprus in Nicosia, where their first son, Alex, appeared in 1984. Doug asked for “seven more of these,” but Marti agreed to only two, and thus, sons Ben and Nick came along in 1986 and 1988.

Doug’s career in education spanned more than forty years. He was a science teacher and Dean of Students at TASSIS and Oxford Academy in Westbrook, and then a school counselor at Branford High School until his retirement in 2018. Doug’s humor, ingenuity, and creativity always inspired his work with kids.

An accomplished amateur photographer, Doug captured the essence of field and forest life in award-winning photos. He championed his deeply felt love of the natural world through his many years on the board of the Westbrook Land Conservation Trust. He shared his musical spirit and deep bass voice as a longstanding member of Con Brio Choral Society. Doug was also a secret composer at his piano and the inventor of the famous (to those who knew him) Douglas Cookie. Aside from time with his family, he was happiest digging in his garden, sitting in his back acre with an IPA, or watching the Red Sox, Patriots, and Huskies win.

Doug loved the Fryeburg New Church Assembly. He had fond memories of being a Flame with his siblings, Gerrit and Randall. As a young father,

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The Big Question

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and we are not excused from using it. Furthermore, I think that when we honor the truth claims of our tradition, we will be met with others eager to know our path. The New Jerusalem is descending; nothing can or will stop that. Just let us be honest witnesses to its appearance. ☞

Dell J. Rose develops and hosts programs for the Swedenborg Library in Chicago and is on the ordination track for the Swedenborgian Church of North America. He holds the position of Swedenborg Doctoral Fellow with the Swedenborg Society in the United Kingdom, and he is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the Universites van Amsterdam.



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 featured an article on the United Nations resolution urging reparations for slavery’s historical wrongs, as well as passages from Swedenborg, inspiring prayers, and updates on upcoming events of interest. Sign up here: tinyurl.com/3nae8uw7 ☞

Bloom Haven

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to into the Ministry, receive approval from the Council of Ministers, and am successfully voted on the floor of Convention, then I will be ordained into ministry for the SCNA at Convention in 2027. If it is the will of the Lord, Bloom Haven will open in July of 2027. We will need a lot of help getting ready for that to happen!

Bloom Haven is now incorporated as a Pennsylvania non-profit organization, and we have a bank account where we can collect donations! If you would like to contribute, please check out our website: www.bloomhavenscc.org.

May we all have a haven in which to bloom, and may Divine Love and Wisdom, community by community, fill the world. ☞

Tirah Keal lives in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania with her husband, five kids, and two cats, all together in joyful chaos.



Lifetime of Memories

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and that makes it precious to me. And a lifetime of memories only makes it more special. I hope you get to experience Fryeburg New Church Assembly for yourself. Please join us.

For more information on joining us this summer please visit fryeburg.org. The 2026 FNCA camp session runs this summer from July 25 to August 6. ☞

Dr. Jesse White has been attending The Fryeburg New Church Assembly since childhood. She helps coordinate youth activities and the Ministry Safe trainings for the camp. She lives in Vermont.



Rekindling Our Light

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know existed. Hearing the thoughts from newcomers who were brave enough to try something different affirms the meaningfulness of these retreats. “The retreat was blessed with some of the same energy that fills our youth camps. Some folks said it was nostalgia, but as a relative newcomer to this group, I know it’s more than that,” said Ben, and Lori said, “Caroline told me that ‘now I would know why she loves it so much’ and was so excited for me to go. I will definitely be back next year.” Makes it all worth it, and we’ve booked the same weekend (April 16 – 19, 2027) for next year!

To learn more about the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative and join either their in-person or virtual events visit: helenkellercollaborative.org. ☞

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



Passages

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he introduced his kids to the camp, and, in his later years, he enjoyed the peace of spending time alone in a cabin off-season. He continued reading Swedenborg and spoke of someday returning to a camp session in person.

Doug is survived by Marti, his three sons Alex (Sofia), Ben (Meredith), and Nick (Becky), his granddaughters, Evelyn and Olivia, his sisters Randall and Jesse, his brother Gerrit—not to mention a slew of loving cousins, nieces, nephews, and in-laws. ☞

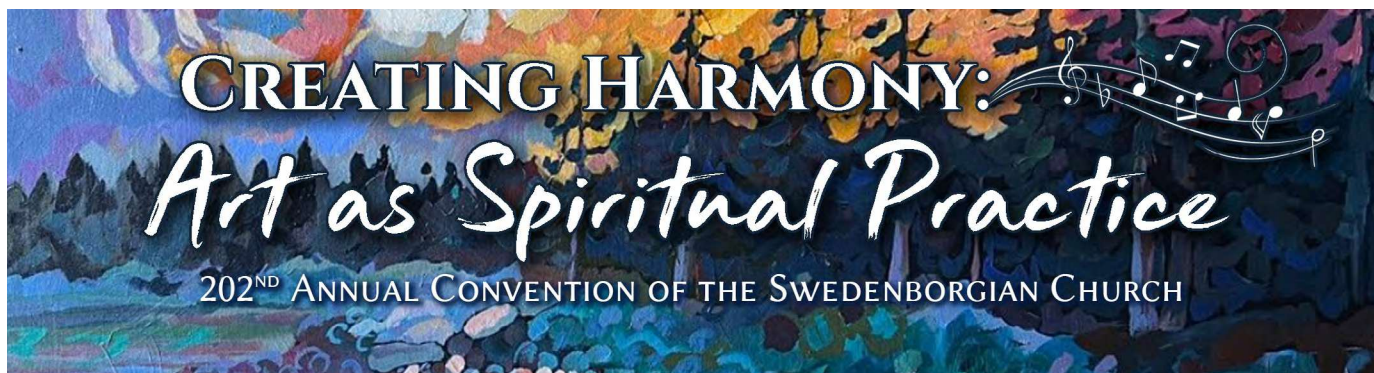
Church Membership and Delegate Statistics

Article I, Section 3, of the Constitution of the Swedenborgian Church states that it is composed of “Constituent bodies... which... unite with the Swedenborgian Church in performing the distinctive uses of a church.” The constituent bodies are the associations and groups listed in the table below. The constitution continues, “The members of the Swedenborgian Church shall be those persons who are adult, active members of a constituent body or who have been accepted as members-at-large through Rite of Confirmation and by vote of the Swedenborgian Church.”

Article IV, Section 2, states, “Every constituent body of the Swedenborgian Church shall be entitled to two delegates and an additional delegate for every ten members.”

The table below displays statistics as of December 31, 2025. 🗺️

Association (Conference)	Churches		Affiliated Ordained Ministers	Active Members	Number of Potential Delegates
	Active	Inactive			
Eastern Canada (ECC)	1	0	2	59	7
Illinois Association	4	1	2	58	7
Kansas	2	0	1	54	7
Maine	4	0	7	69	8
Massachusetts New Church Union (MNCU)	4	1	6	84	10
Michigan	2	0	3	59	7
Middle Atlantic	3	0	7	103	12
New York	1	0	1	13	3
Ohio	2	1	3	37	5
Pacific Coast (PCA)	6	0	23	188	20
Western Canada (WCC)	1	0	0	65	8
At Large	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	2
Unknown Affiliation	n/a	n/a	18	2	n/a
Church Membership Sub-Total	30	3	n/a	793	96
COM	n/a	n/a	73	n/a	73
General Council (lay officers and members)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9
Total Possible Delegates					178



Virtual Programs for Convention 2026

*All times listed are in Eastern Time. Visit swedenborg.org for details.
 Livestreamed events will be able to be viewed by anyone, anywhere live on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com).
 Zoom Events require [registration](#)—attendees will be able to interact and participate.*

Friday Evening, June 26

- 7:30–9:30 Banner Procession, Opening Convention, Worship Service, and
 Keynote Address by Bronwen Mayer Henry:
 “Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice” *Zoom Events & Facebook*

Saturday, June 27

- 9:00–11:30 Business Session I *Zoom Events*
- 1:30–3:00 Mini Course Section 1 (two options) *Zoom Events*
 - “Living Liturgies for the New Church” with Heather Garland *Zoom Events*
 - “Bringing Out the Best: Creativity and Dementia” with Tryn Rose Seley *Zoom Events*
- 3:15–5:00 Business Session II *Zoom Events*
- 7:00–8:30 Convention Worship Service and Communion with Rev. Catherine Lauber..... *Zoom Events & Facebook*

Sunday, June 28

- 8:00–9:00 Service of Remembrance
 with Rev. Kit Billings and Rev. Renée Machiniak..... *Zoom Events & Facebook*
- 9:15–11:45 Business Session III *Zoom Events*
- 1:30–3:00 Mini Course Section 2 (two options)
 - “The Hidden Churches of the East” with Dell Rose..... *Zoom Events*
 - “Church, State, and Social Justice” with Rev. Robert McCluskey..... *Zoom Events*
- 3:15–3:45 Business Session IV..... *Zoom Events*
- 3:45–4:30 CSS Annual Meeting *Zoom Events*
- 8:00–10:00 CSS Worship Service & Graduation *Zoom Events & Facebook*

Monday, June 29

- 10:15–11:45 Mini Course Section 3 (two options)
 - “Table Fellowship and the New Church” with Rev. Lynn Chittick Thompson..... *Zoom Events*
 - “Artwork During Spiritual Crisis” with Rev. Colin Amato *Zoom Events*