



A Vibe Shift This Year at Convention

BY REV. DR. JIM LAWRENCE

It started with a suggestion from Rev. Ken Turley to shape the theme of Convention this year around music. The Executive Committee of General Council thought the idea had merit and forwarded it to our Standing Committee on Educational Resources (SCER), which typically shapes the next theme of Convention to propose to the General Council, and also proposes a keynote speaker for the theme.

Chaired by the Dean of our seminary, Dr. Rebecca Esterson, who shepherds a group of elected members serving terms, currently Rev. Shada Sullivan, Beki Greenwood, and Dell Rose, SCER liked the direction of the idea but decided to expand it to the arts more generally, and they finally settled on the

artist Bronwen Mayer Henry, well known in Swedenborgian circles as a cradle-up Swedenborgian, but who is a practicing Buddhist today.

wrong with that at all! But this year, Bronwen Henry's keynote address, "Creating Harmony: Art as Spiritual Practice," focused on the inner work of

dealing with life's issues as she told her own story of facing life-threatening illness and the way art played a crucial role in not only her healing but also the way she lives spiritually. All along, we were treated to lush slides of her artwork that bathed the atmosphere of the auditorium in richly soothing visual emotions. The vibe in the room was so different from the usual, and I've attended every convention since 1982. The next day, our art-

ist speaker led an educational experience titled "Practice Contemplative Creativity" that was a hands-on workshop for a large

Continues on page 107



Everyone contributed to this final "Convention 2026" painting at the "Taste of Boston" banquet hosted by Boston Church on the Hill in Boston, Massachusetts.

Though frequently terrific and always good to do, let me pause to say that Convention keynote talks have always been quite intellectual. Nothing

Convention Banners!



Convention opened with the banner procession this year!

Page 96

Center for Swedenborgian Studies



We celebrate six graduates this year!

Page 114

Creativity without Fear



Our Keynote speaker Bronwen Mayer Henry on Art as Spiritual Practice.

Page 100

Contents

A Vibe Shift This Year	cover
Church Calendar	94
Letter to the Editor	94
Editor's Corner	95
Harmony Among Many	96
A Litany of Heavenly Societies	98
Report from General Council	99
Art as Spiritual Practice	100
Report from the Council of Ministers	106
Chaplain's Table at Convention	106
Convention Photos	108
Business Meeting	110
Poetry as Spiritual Practice	111
CSS Commencement Address	114
CSS Valedictorian Address	117
"Taste of Boston" photos	119
Clear Blue Sky	120
New York New Church Legacy Fund Update	122
Passages	123
Meet Me in St. Louis!	124

Church Calendar

- **August 15, 2026:** SCFA Grants Due
- **September 4-7, 2026:** Labor Day West Coast Swedenborgian Retreat, including an SCYL retreat.
- **September 15, 2026:** All Reports due for the 2026 Journal.
- **October 9-12, 2026:** SCYL Fall Retreat

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Letter to the Editor

Convention Table Talk—Necco Original Candy Wafers and Swedenborgian Doctrine

One of the delights of convention is the table talk during meals. Breakfast this morning was a laugh-a-minute. We were all preparing to go our separate ways, and goodbyes were flying around us. We shared funny church stories, memories of past conventions, and appreciation for a wonder-filled convention this year. And then, someone picked up the NECCO candies left on the table, of course made in Boston. That started the candy comparisons. Snickers verses Almond Joys. Three Musketeers versus the Puritan Hershey's Milk Chocolate bars. Someone remembered a type of candy that looked like bacon and tasted like coconut. We looked a bit crosswise at her. The discussion expanded to the Necco Original Candy Wafers that come in brown for chocolate and green for mint, which another explained were not mint, but the green made people believe they were mints.

Our conclusion: Our discussion was like agreeing on Swedenborgian Doctrine. We all have different choices for what we hold dear. And we all like candy.

Suggestion: read it again and think about doctrine.

—Jane Siebert (Petra)



Do you write poetry?

Send it along to:

messenger@swedenborg.org

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.

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.



Convention videos, the Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism program, and virtual content that has been created, can be found here for viewing at anytime!
Click the YouTube logo above to subscribe!

Editor's Corner



Display tables this year showcased creativity. (left) Rev. Chris Barber's display on Anna Baker and (right) the Fryeburg New Church table featuring a stained glass fundraiser.

Bringing the lessons of Convention home with me

The first thing my daughter asked when I got home was "Can I have your watercolors?"

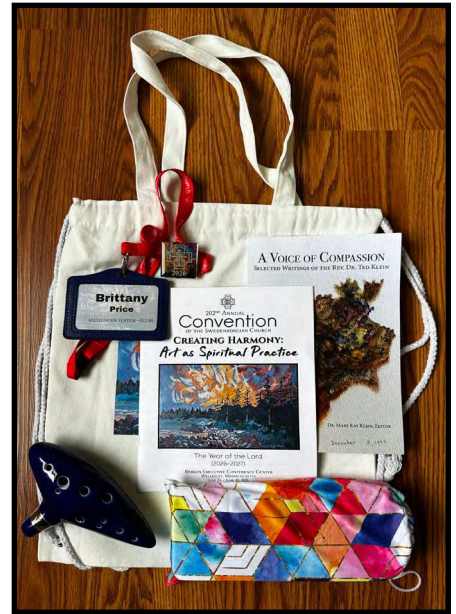
In her keynote, Bronwen Mayer Henry invited us to prioritize creativity as a spiritual practice, and make space for it in our everyday lives, not just once in a while. Convention 2026 did an excellent job of prioritizing creativity!

The Boston Church on the Hill put together convention bags that embraced many different forms of creativity. Our bags included a choice of several different musical instruments (I got an ocarina!), our own watercolor paint set, and a book of the spiritual reflections and drawings of the late Rev. Ted Klein. We each received a pin that I am sure will be a collector's item in no time (perhaps we can start a tradition of having a pin for each convention?).

I appreciated that this Convention

did not limit itself to just one expression of creativity. We began with the banner procession featuring many new creations as well as celebrating the older ones. There were several creative Mini Courses that asked you to create using your hands, use your voice to sing, to write, and to share. Some of our services featured the original music of Ken and Laurie Turley (tinyurl.com/2y7u59cb), or a new liturgy created by Heather Garland. Our entire Convention worship service was a reflection and celebration of prose and music from Rev. Catherine Lauber. Even the display tables were an exercise in creativity, with more tables this year than I've ever seen in past years.

Finally, we concluded with a "Taste of Boston" outing that concluded at the Artists for Humanity EpiCenter. We were treated to a celebration of New England cuisine and invited to create and play! The colorful art featured on the cover of this issue was one of the results of our collaborative creativity.



(above) The Boston Church on the Hill put together Convention bags that encouraged making music, prose, and art! (below) My daughter quickly claimed the watercolors and started creating without fear, painting the first thing she saw which was her and her brother!

Which brings us to the best part of Convention this year, when I brought everything home with me and shared it with my family. Even though she has never used watercolors before, my daughter immediately and furiously started creating, observing the world around her. Without the restraints of perfection, self-doubt, or performance, she focused solely on creativity and expression. My kids continue to teach me every day.

—Brittany Price
editor@swedenborg.org



Opening Celebration

Harmony Among Many

WELCOME REMARKS BY REV. KEVIN BAXTER



On behalf of the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem, or Church on the Hill, I welcome you to Massachusetts. Living here over the past year has been kind of crazy and unusual because you may or may not know it's the 250th anniversary of some historical events. So we've had Paul Revere riding on horseback all the way from Charlestown to get arrested. We've had groups of Free Masons gather and dump tea, remembering the tea party. Living in Boston is a lot about history. It's one of the things I love the most. Boston's kind of weird because even down to its brownstones, it very traditional-looking, but what we are reminded is that while Boston is traditional, maybe sometimes reserved, it also has a revolutionary spirit that runs deep.

New England's known as the frozen chosen because we're just not very expressive about things from time to time. And yet it is the heart of a very deep burning desire for individual freedom, for expression. And I like to celebrate when someone asks what Massachusetts is. Our newsletter always has on its cover a historical figure from the past associated with the Swedenborgian

movement. We might look back now and say this is a traditional, old, stodgy person, but each one of them has been a revolutionary in their own way.

The Boston Church, throughout its history, has been a place of spiritual revolution where the spirit of individualism has given a home to sometimes odd people. It gave a home to people wanting to fight slavery. It gave a home to a certain famous hymn writer, George James Webb, the organist at Old South who got fired from his job. Old South is one of the most historic churches in Boston, and Webb got fired from his job because whenever the minister at Old South started to preach, the organist would run up the hill to our church to listen to our sermon and then run back down to finish his service.

When somebody asks me to talk about, "What is New England? What is Boston?" I like to think of the heart

Continues on page 97



Opening Celebration

Harmony Among Many

Continued from page 96

of the church. It is both liberal and conservative. It is both kind of withdrawn, but yet revolutionary. I'm going to quote Cal Turley.

Cal Turley in the 1960s wrote a letter to the architect designing the church in Bellevue, Washington. In his first paragraph, he wants the architect to know what they're building for. He has a very interesting statement. He says:

The Church of the Good Shepherd is a mission church sponsored by and affiliated with the General Convention of the Church of the New Jerusalem. It is a liberal Protestant church in the sense that it welcomes and cherishes God's gift of human reason. It is a liberal church in the sense that it looks not for uniformity of thought, but union among its members through their response to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is a conservative church in the sense that it treasures most highly, the Bible as a unique book among men, containing within it external abiding word of God. It is a conservative church in the sense that it believes in revelation that God has and does reach into the order of his creation to make himself known among men. But ours is first and foremost a Christian church, acknowledging

that, in the framework of its history, and in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the one God of heaven and earth, the ultimate step of saving love in making himself and his will known to men. Thus the church finds its distinction and members of the congregation find their sense of oneness in the response to the Lord God Jesus Christ.

I like to think that that actually sums up what the Boston church is, relatively well. I think it's problematic for our church, or really any church, to consider itself either liberal or conservative, new or old. I think it's dangerous to define tradition as bad and new

Continues on page 107

The Banner Procession has not happened at Convention since 2019. Everyone was excited to show off their banners, both old and new. Thank you to Boston for keeping this tradition alive! (from upper left on the opposite page, across the bottom, and back up to the right) the banners represent the following ministries: the Swedenborg Library, Swedenborg House, Garden Chapel Sanctuary, Almont Summer School, Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative, Bloom Haven, Royal Oak Church of the Holy City, Chrysalis Retreat Center and Swedenborg Sanctuary, Cambridge Society of the New Jerusalem, Church of the Holy City in Wilmington, Fryeburg New Church, The Garden Church, Spiritual Society of Puget Sound, New Church of Montgomery, Bath Church of the New Jerusalem, Temenos, and the Swedenborgian Church Youth League.



Opening Celebration

A Litany of Heavenly Societies

A special responsive call to worship, honoring the Associations of the Swedenborgian Church of North America

Leader: In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, the Holy One of Heaven and earth, who gathers countless societies into one heaven.

***People:* Make us one in Your Divine Human.**

Leader: As heaven is formed out of the perfection of diversity, many distinct people and communities, each has its own affection and use.

***People:* So gather us, distinct yet united in love.**

Massachusetts: From Massachusetts, where our tradition first took visible form in this land. We come as a society of remembrance, guardians of the story, stewards of beginnings.

***People:* May memory become living wisdom among us.**

Maine: From Maine, shaped by sea and stone. We come as a quiet society of steadfast affection, holding faith through changing seasons.

***People:* May constancy anchor our common life.**

Mid-Atlantic: From Mid-Atlantic, crossroads of voices and paths, we come as a society of thoughtful exchange, where charity seeks understanding.

***People:* May truth and love embrace in our speech.**

Eastern Canada: From Eastern Canada, where cultures and tongues meet, we come as a society of reverent harmony, honoring diversity within unity.

***People:* May many languages proclaim one Lord.**

Western Canada: From Western Canada, beneath wide skies and mountains, we come as a society of vision, lifting our eyes toward higher things.

***People:* Raise our hearts toward heaven's light.**

Michigan: From Michigan, where many waters gather into great lakes. We come as a society of service, joining streams of effort into shared use.

***People:* Make our works flow together in charity.**

Ohio: From Ohio, heartland of faithful labor, we come as a society of diligent hands and willing spirits.

***People:* Let every task become holy use.**

Illinois: From Illinois, prairie and city side by side, we come as a society of renewal, seeking new growth from enduring roots.

***People:* Plant us deeply; send forth boldly.**

Kansas: From Kansas, where horizon opens without end, we come as a society of clarity and openness.

***People:* Stretch our understanding toward eternal truth.**

Pacific Coast: From the Pacific Coast, where the continent meets vast waters, we come as a society of compassion and creative hope.

***People:* Let living waters flow through us to the world.**

General Council

General Council Pre- and Post- Convention Meetings

BY BEKI GREENWOOD, SECRETARY

The General Council met virtually on Saturday, June 6, 2026 for their pre-convention meeting. Various reports were given including those from the officers and the Central Office Manager.

President Jim Lawrence reported that he spends much of his time participating with Wayfarers Chapel and the New York New Church Legacy Fund. He also noted that the Silver City Church of the Southwest Desert in New Mexico and Temenos in West Chester, Pennsylvania, have needed extra care this past year.

Vice President and Youth Director Kurt Fekete reported that as chair of Spiritual Sunshine he is proud of the growth that has been made by Rev. Cory Coberforward as he adapts to emerging trends in social media platforms. Kurt reported that fifteen teens attended the Memorial Day weekend retreat at Almont in Michigan, and that he is thrilled to hear a recent high number of eighteen teens at this year's convention.

Recording Secretary Beki Greenwood reported that much of her time was recently spent on preparations for convention, primarily surrounding the gathering of membership lists and

delegates from the associations, as well as the Advance Reports. She voiced concerns over how much confusion there seems to be around membership and the importance of accurate lists being submitted to Central Office.

has recently been fielding questions from seekers from the website. One interesting one recently was a request from a descendant of Rev. Chauncy Giles!

The General Council has been continuing its research on insurance assistance on properties in which the denomination holds the deed. It has been determined that even with all of the SCNA affiliated properties we are still considered too small for an umbrella policy. They are forming a task force to develop proposals for how Convention might support congregations with property insurance costs as this is an ongoing issue with many of our ministries.

The Council met virtually again on Tuesday, July 7, 2026, for their post-convention meeting. The primary purpose of this meeting is to make necessary appointments to a few committees. The following appointments were made: Investment Committee, Kim Shine; Building Fund, Bob Perry; Retirement Committee, Gina Peracchi, John McIntoch, and Merry Piotti; Wayfarers Chapel Board, Robert Carr and Laurie Pelayo; Spiritual Sunshine, Rev.



Some of the General Council Members who were able to attend convention in person. (from left to right) Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, Rev. Shada Sullivan, Kurt Fekete, Rev. Sage Cole, Dr. Emily Tergliafera, Pastor Paul Deming, Rev. Reneé Machinak, and Beki Greenwood.

Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay reported that she has been working with Gina Peracchi in accounting and for FY2025 we came in around budget. She also reported that there is the possibility of a new church building coming into our midst with the General Church looking to sell their building in Cincinnati to the Cincinnati society.

Central Office Manager Jackie Shihadeh reported that apart from Convention planning that takes up much of her time this time of year she

Continues on page 107

Keynote

Art As Spiritual Practice

2026 KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY BRONWEN MAYER HENRY

The following was taken from a transcript of the 2026 Keynote Address delivered by Bronwen Mayer Henry, artist and speaker.

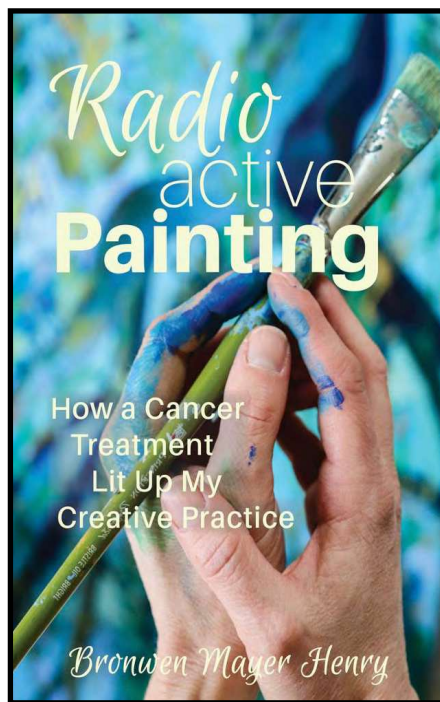
I am so deeply touched to be here, truly. I don't think I've been to Convention in person, but I feel like I have. You feel like family. It feels like home. I feel the warmth and connection. When I was driving here from Philadelphia, I said to my husband, "What could go wrong? I'm sure there won't be a room full of rolling chairs where everyone just rolls out into the hallway, but it could happen. It could happen."

I do want to say that with my interfaith work, I do workshops in a lot of different environments, and we do a brief introduction of your faith background and your professional background. And I always talk about my Swedenborgian roots and how today I'm studying and practicing Buddhism.

And I say to the room, has anyone ever heard of the Swedenborgian tradition? *[everyone raises their hand]* So I just want to check in here. I knew that would feel good. There's usually like one hand, maybe half a hand.

I come from a long line of Swedenborgians. I was just reflecting that it is three generations of clergy, and it is a faith that has shaped me and shaped the lens through which I see the world. It's not where I find my refuge at the moment, but it has formed me, and I'm profoundly grateful for it. And I feel at ease here with you all.

I like to begin the way that I would like to end, which is giving you what is most important to me, which is an



Radioactive Painting (2020) by Bronwen Mayer Henry is available on Amazon (tinyurl.com/bdcn8d5x).

experience of a loving presence. So if you are able to be still in your rolling chairs. (For those online, all the chairs are on wheels. It's very stressful, but you're all doing great!)

I want to invite you to pause. If you're comfortable, close your eyes. I don't know what time zone you're in. You might just lower your gaze to stay awake, but I just invite you to let yourself arrive. We have such beautiful offerings as we gathered here, but just to let your body, your heart, and your mind be in one place. And you might notice the feeling of your seat and the feeling of your feet.

And just let yourself be here now. Noticing your breath. Letting yourself arrive. I invite you to feel what is most present in your heart. We're all

arriving with different energy, some relaxed and open, some distracted and stressed. Just notice what's on your heart. And with a friendly attitude, just pay attention to what's on your heart. I invite you to open to each other, to open your awareness to the beings in this room, the beings online, just with mutual respect and kind regard. Bring your awareness to the wisdom in this room, the kindness in this room, and how we belong to each other.

I dedicate that this time that we would be open to more joy, more harmony, more hope, and more kindness, and that that expansion would spill over into our lives, into our relationships, into our work, into our congregations, our communities, our countries, and our world. So when you're ready, you can blink your eyes open or lift your gaze. I invite you to bring this energy of presence, this friendly attitude for whatever's unfolding in your heart, and this openness to each other as we continue to explore creativity and art as a spiritual practice.

When Shada [Sullivan] first reached out to me about being your Keynote Speaker, I said, "Well, it's only my favorite topic in the whole world. So I'll do it. Yeah."

I want to share with you a bit of my story, and I wrote a book about my story. I call it *Radioactive Painting*. For me, stepping into creativity, stepping into compassion, started with a cancer diagnosis.

So in 2013, thirteen years ago, this was my tiny little family (opposite page, top left), and now they're tall. I had two small children. My parents

Continues on page 101

Keynote

2026 Keynote—Art as Spiritual

Continued from page 100*Bronwen's family then (2013) and now (2026).*

had recently moved in with me. I had a lot of caregiving responsibilities. I was stressed. I was focused on other people. If you asked me then, Bronwen, how are you doing? I would have been like, "I don't understand the premise of this question." I had no response. I was busy. I was hustling. And it was in that stage of life with those little kids and my parents in my home that I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer.

Part of having thyroid cancer meant that I had my thyroid removed, and then there was cancer in my lymph nodes. So I had the opportunity to have a radioactive iodine treatment. Now, I was raised with homeopathy, and I didn't even take Tylenol for a headache. So the idea of swallowing radioactive pills sounded like a terrible idea and provoked a lot of anxiety for me. But at the same time, it was this beautiful science with precision and effectiveness, and I also took this as a gift of science.

So I had the thyroidectomy, and then a couple of months later, I was going to take this radioactive pill. And when you swallow a radioactive pill, you become radioactive (if you've seen Spider-Man, it's in there). You have to be in isolation because you don't want

to expose other people to the radioactivity. So I had to spend seven days in isolation, and I was very nervous about this. This was 2013. Isolation and quarantine weren't as popular as they are today. They were more novel. And I had never been alone for seven days. I'm a chatty person. I like people. I've never been alone. I'd never been away from my three- and five-year-old. And I was super anxious about it.

I had enjoyed creativity in my life; I had enjoyed painting. I know it had been exactly my daughter's age since I had last painted (three and a half years) because I did a painting workshop with each pregnancy. I thought, *I'm going to paint when I'm in isolation*, and I made this little rule for myself (this is the hot tip for new behaviors): pair things up. Put something you don't like with something you want to do. So I paired swallowing the radioactive pill with

painting.

Once I swallowed it, I got to work on a painting. And I chose to purchase a large paint canvas that was three feet by four feet. That's the one (below) with my little dog. This is the first large painting that I did, which I call "Radioactive."

So it's three feet by four feet, and I had never painted on a big canvas, and this terrified me. Swallowing the pill terrified me in a kind of creepy way, and painting on a huge canvas terrified me in a kind of exhilarating way. And so I swallowed the pill, I went into isolation, and I started working on this large canvas. And it ended up being this incredibly transformative experience. It was so joyful, so healing, so hope-filled. And I genuinely thought this would be a singular event in my life that we would always remember, that time I made one big canvas. (If you follow my work at all, I have made a lot of big canvases. I do keep track, and I'm approaching 800. Probably by next year I'll be at like 780. If you're into math, it's like one a week for the last thirteen years.)

I came out of isolation and I thought that was so fun. That was amazing. That was so powerful. Remember that? Okay, back to it. Now forget about yourself and just go back to caring for everyone else like you were.

And this thought came to me. I thought, what if I don't have to have cancer to paint? What if I don't have to have a medical mandate to have a moment of refuge and retreat to spend time with my heart and my soul?

Now, painting on large canvases, if you've ever been to an art store, is very expensive. And I was like, how am I going to solve this? So I reached out to a couple of friends and I said, would you pay for the material? I'll make a

*Bronwen Mayer Henry, "Radioactive," 2013, acrylic on canvas.**Continues on page 102*

Keynote

2026 Keynote—Art as Spiritual

Continued from page 101

painting for you. You pay for the materials, and I'll make the painting for you for the cost of the materials.

For my first friend who agreed, I started working on her painting, and I immediately thought this had better be good. Oh my gosh, this big painting she's going to put in her house. It better be beautiful. I have to do a good job. And I had this sense of needing to perform. And it was like total repulsion to me. It was offensive to me. I was like, what? This is not what my experience was like with my first big canvas. I was not performing for anyone. I had an open heart. I was in *joy*. I was in *kindness*. I was not in *I hope I make a good painting for someone*. It robbed the joy of the experience. So I decided in that moment that I'm not doing this...but then I was like, well...I'm not going to do it with this attitude.

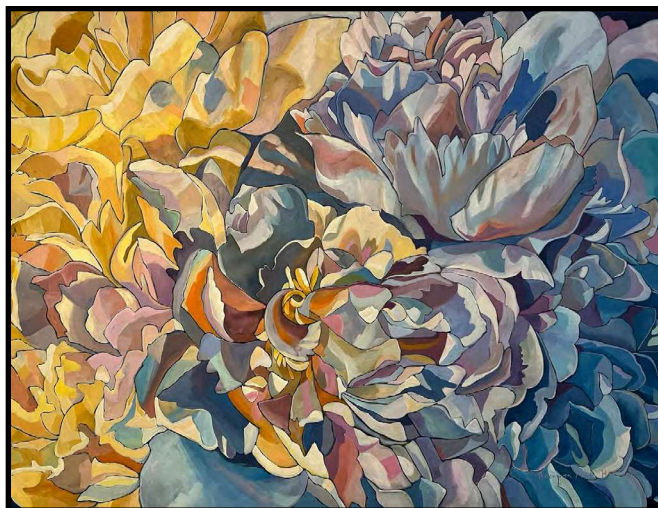
So, knowing this friend well, I thought: *What could I hold in prayer for her? What do I know about her life that I could hold in prayer for her while I work on this painting?* And it was like a key that just unlocked a door, and it has not closed since. When my creative practice comes from a practice

of compassion for myself and/or for others, it is an open gate that I walk through easily, and I think you all can too.

So there are three strategies I want to share with you. One, I see creativity as a doorway, not a destination. Two, I see creativity as available to everyone because it is a tool that helps you be present with what's on your heart. And three, I see creativity as a way to open up to each other and care for each other more skillfully and with more courage. Creativity is a doorway, not a destination.

A lot of people interact with the art. They're like, "Oh, that's pretty or a flower or something." And I'm like, "Okay."

But what you don't see is what's happened in my heart, and that's what I'm interested in. I do a lot of workshops with a lot of different materials, and I tell people I don't care what appears on the surface. I care about what's appearing in your heart while you're creating. It's a doorway to be present. For me, painting is the one. We all have something different. This takes many forms. My dream in life is not that everyone's painting. My dream in life is that everyone has a practice that helps them access the here and now. That they have a practice that helps them access kindness in their heart, that they have a practice that helps them open to each other. It could look like anything. It could look like photography. It could look like poetry. It could look like playing the guitar. It could



Bronwen Mayer Henry, "Opening Together," 2023, acrylic on canvas.

look like sitting by the creek. It could look like dancing. I don't know what it looks like. That's your mission to find out what it looks like for you.

I love a quote from Mark Nepo. He says, "Whatever opens us is never as important as what it opens." This is a picture of me painting (below left). I'm using chalk, actually, on a blank canvas. What I do before each painting is write the intention, write the prayer, write the hope on the canvas, and then paint over it.

These are peonies (above). This practice of creativity is a way to be in the present moment. I like how it goes from light to dark because, for me, the creative practice allows me actually to enter dark spaces, to build capacity to be with things that scare me, to build capacity with things that I would rather not touch. So to actually move from light into darkness. I believe that creativity is for everyone a tool to open your heart.

I want to talk about barriers. What prevents us from being creative? The resistance we find is part of the process, and we all have them. I want you to just take thirty seconds, turn to the

Continues on page 103



Bronwen using chalk to write her intention, prayer, and hope on the canvas before painting over it.

Keynote

2026 Keynote—Art as Spiritual*Continued from page 102*

person next to you, and say, what gets in the way of you being creative? And for those online, you can reflect on this. What gets in the way of you being creative?

Did anyone say, “I’m too busy?” Okay. Did anyone say, “I don’t know how. I’m a beginner.” Okay. What about something that sounds like “I do it, but then I’m too judgmental and critical, and it doesn’t go the way I want it to?” It can be one or two or more barriers.

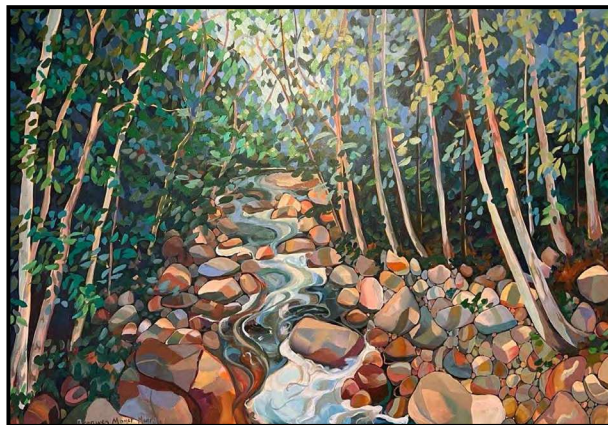
I want to share with you what helped me break through what I discovered was my barrier, because when you go from not painting at all to painting like you’re on fire, your friends start to ask questions and they’re like, “Bronwen, what happened? Where was this?” And I’m like, “I don’t know. Let me think about it.” This is what I discovered.

I went to a large public school in Cincinnati. And there was an art track that started in fifth grade, and you get to take like 30% more art than other people. I’m in this art track, and I’m in my senior year in high school, and I’m in the AP Portfolio class, and there are around twenty-five kids in this class. I fact-checked this with my best friend from high school, and I make what I consider an accurate assessment that I am the least skilled in the room of twenty-five random people in Cincinnati. I decide that since they are more skilled, I won’t pursue it.

Some people have an art injury from the outside. Someone makes a comment, and it will stick with you. My art injury was from the inside. I didn’t say,

“How does the creative process make you come alive, Bronwen?” No. I said, “How does your product compare to those people’s products?” Twenty-four out of twenty-five people that I haven’t seen in thirty years. They have no part in my life. And yet I said I wasn’t good enough to continue with the practice.

I like to think about the parallel to movement. I don’t know if you’ve been to the doctor lately. I don’t know if they said something like, “Hey, get moving or do some weights or something.” And I don’t know if you’re like me, but if you’re inclined to respond with something like, “But I didn’t qualify for the Olympics.” Your doctor’s like, “What?”



Bronwen Mayer Henry, “This Too Shall Pass,” 2022, acrylic on canvas.

In movement, we don’t expect to have to be the best. We know movement is good for our bodies, our hearts, and our mental health as well. With creativity, we have this idea that some people get to do it and the rest of us don’t. We don’t say creativity is good for my heart, for my spirit, for my mind. Since I’m in a faith space, I feel safe giving a few faith-based examples.

Unlocking these thoughts that creativity is selfish, or not part of spiritual life. I know that being raised Swedenborgian, being useful is really

important. *I have got to do stuff and work really hard.*

I think a lot about the Ten Commandments. The commandment to keep the Sabbath. I think that it’s really friendly of the Divine to say rest. To put it into the commandments, to not work, but to rest. And I don’t think of it as one day a week. I think of it as one seventh of my life. So I like to think of it as one-seventh of my waking hours. So it’s like two hours a day, maybe more, that I get to rest in the presence of the Divine, being creative, writing poetry, painting, sitting at the creek. This is one of my favorite creek paintings. (below left)

We think of Martha and Mary. If you remember, Martha was hustling around doing everything, and Mary was sitting. The quote is: “Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what the Divine said.” And Jesus said that Mary chose the better way: to sit, to rest, to listen for the Divine. For me, creative acts are acts where you can hear the Divine.

Psalm 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God.” To find that stillness where you can actually hear the Divine message for you. Now, this was not said

in the barriers poll that we had earlier (what prevents you from being creative?), but what I think sometimes prevents us from being creative is in that stillness. Sometimes we experience the Divine, but a lot of times we experience pain, grief, regret, and fear when we slow down, we put our phone down, we stop hustling, and we experience suffering, pain, and discomfort.

I like to think of the analogy of if you’re sitting cross-legged and you haven’t used it in a while, your leg

Continues on page 104

Keynote

2026 Keynote—Art as Spiritual

Continued from page 103



Bronwen Mayer Henry, "Fullness of Joy," 2020, acrylic on canvas.

falls asleep. You're like, "Oh, I better move it." So what happens when you start moving your leg when it has not been in action? What's the first feeling? Buzzing. Pins and needles. It's actually really painful if you really observe it. But because we've experienced the journey from an asleep leg to an awake leg, we move through the pins and needles with confidence. We don't say, "Quick! Sit on it again! Put it back to sleep, that's painful!"

With creativity, it's such an unused muscle. So when you first start moving it, it might actually be quite painful. And I'm telling you, it's not always painful, but it can be painful. From numb to full range of motion, you experience pain as well as the joy.

So what has helped me to navigate this feeling of pain and the fear of feeling what's going on? It's remembering how we're connected to each other. I've done quite a few Aspen-inspired paintings (left). Aspens, if you're familiar with them, look like individual trees, but the root systems are interconnected. Just like us. When I remember the pain that I'm feeling, that others know it as well, something softens in me. I like the three words *just like me*.

Just like me. Others know this. I experienced this deeply before I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. In the process, I was in a doctor's office, and I was very anxious. At that time, I was alone in the doctor's office and I thought to myself, I should pray. This would be a good time to pray. You're stressed, you're anxious, you're afraid. I should pray. And for whatever reason, prayer was not available to me. I couldn't access it. And I had this thought: *Was I able to pray for the people in the other examination rooms even though I didn't know what was happening for them?* I could imagine that they were nervous and I could offer them my kindness, that they would experience comfort, that they would be brave to speak up for themselves with the doctor, and

that they would be brave to face whatever results came. And in offering that kindness to people I imagined in other rooms, I got included as well.

This painting of butterfly wings (below) is more than six feet wide. It's really big (It's now owned by my dentist. I thought you would want to know that.). I did a series of butterfly wings. And for me, wings are an important message here about the way we step into creativity, the way we step into compassion.

I think you'll hear a Swedenborgian vibe in here as well, which is that as we build awareness, we need to meet it equally with kindness. So if you come into awareness of a diagnosis, you've got to boost up the kindness for yourself navigating that. If you come into awareness of something hard happening in a relationship, you have to boost the compassion and kindness. And when the two are together, then you can take flight. Then you have movement. Then you have freedom, the ability to act. So these two wings of compassion, awareness and compassion, that go hand in hand, are central for me in how creativity helps me open to each other and inform the way

Continues on page 105



Bronwen Mayer Henry, "Wings of Freedom," 2020, acrylic on canvas.

Keynote

2026 Keynote—Art as Spiritual*Continued from page 104*

I move in the world.

We come into some awarenesses just by looking at your news app. And for some, for many, it's very overwhelming. So you might, I don't know, do you take a break and play a game on your phone? Do you scroll? Do you rage? Do you drink? Do you overeat? What do you do to cope with stresses that are beyond your power? When you come into awareness of suffering that you can't solve, there is an invitation to meet that awareness with more compassion and kindness.

I'm very moved by the work of Valerie Kaur. She wrote *See No Stranger* as well as some other books, and she has beautiful teachings that make sure to include with her social action, to also include time for grief, time for care. She often speaks about an analogy of labor, laboring to give birth, and that there's time of pushing and there's time of breathing. That you don't just push the whole time. You have to have that rest and move back and forth. But this quote from her, I thought, captured what I want to say about how expanding our understanding of others can help inform how our compassion for others helps inspire us to serve them and care for them. She says, "When we are brave enough to sit with our own pain, it deepens our ability to sit with the pain of others. It shows us how to love them."

For me, the creative practice is room to be with the heartache, be with the guilt, be with the regret, take responsibility for my own shortcomings, to actually look at things I don't want to look at about myself or my society, to actually be present with it, not just numb out. Sometimes people say, well, you can either take action, social

action, or you could do these things like creativity and prayer and refuge. But for me, the two are not one or the other. For me, if the choices were: I'm either going to numb out and be paralyzed, or take action; I'm going to pick numb out. But creativity helps you move from feeling numb to feeling what's happening to taking action.

This is what's currently on my easel (above right). Incomplete. More peonies. And I am incomplete. We are incomplete. Creativity is the invitation to be here now. When I am moving that paint around, I am in that moment of delight and discovery. It is an invitation of space and time to be with what's on my heart. It sounds like a cartoon or something. I guess a sad cartoon, but when I'm painting I genuinely have tears falling, and the other day it just splashed off my apron. I don't know if I've ever had tears fall where I'm painting before, and I'm just feeling. I'm brave enough to feel what's breaking my heart, and then I'm letting that inform and inspire me in the way I move in the world and how I can show up and love other people.

There's a million reasons not to be creative. There's a million reasons not to have time. There's too much laundry for one. There's so many things to do. But I really encourage you to create anyway. And this is a tiny little watercolor painting I did in isolation (right). I write prayer poems with every painting that I make. It's kind of the listening part of prayer, while I'm painting, and then I write it down like Mary Oliver says, like chasing wild horses or

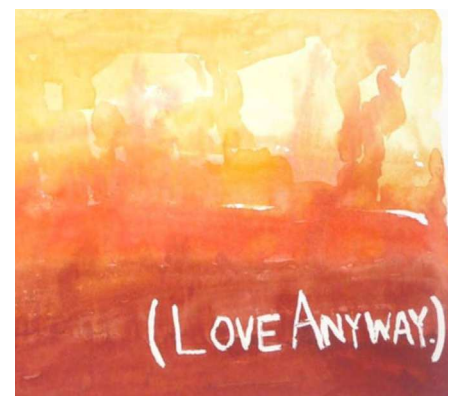


Bronwen Mayer Henry, unfinished piece, 2026, acrylic on canvas.

something. This poem I wrote while I was in isolation. It's called Love Anyway:

You are afraid. Love anyway.
You are alone. Love anyway.
You don't know how things will turn out. Love anyway.
There is no burden so great that you can't love anyway.
No burden is lightened by your fear or worry. Love anyway.
You are not sure what to do or say. Love anyway.
Even here in this place of distress, even now in this time of uncertainty, you my friend, you are being called to love anyway.

—Thank you. 🙏



Bronwen Mayer Henry, "Love Anyway," 2013, watercolor on paper.

Council of Ministers

Report from the Council of Ministers

BY REV. KEVIN BAXTER, SECRETARY

Twenty-eight ministers and nine guests assembled in the Potomac Room of the Babson Executive Conference Center at Babson College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, on June 25–26, 2026.

The Rev. Rich Tafel, concluding his term as Chair of the Council of Ministers, reflected on the accomplishments that were most meaningful during his tenure. In particular, he spoke about the challenges ministers face in today's cultural climate. His primary areas of focus were professionalism and support for ministry. Highlights of this focus were an in-depth review of the misconduct determination process, implementation of Cohen continuing education requirements, and universal access to training videos on the highest risk areas of ministry. The council expressed its gratitude for his faithful service as chair.

The council received reports from its various committees. Highlights included the work of the Worship Committee, which completed a successful survey of liturgical and worship needs and is moving forward with the development of new and engaging worship resources. The Chaplaincy Committee continues to develop resources for emerging chaplains while supporting those already serving in chaplaincy ministries. The Advisory Placement Committee reported on the ministerial needs of congregations and the positions that have been filled during the past year. The council was also pleased to receive a report from the Center for Swedenborgian Studies,

which detailed its efforts to integrate contemporary theological education with the rich theological heritage of Swedenborgianism.

The ad hoc Committee on the Revision of the CAM Handbook for Ordination presented an update that addressed areas of ambiguity and conflict within the document. The revisions were received with appreciation by both clergy and students.

As part of its ongoing focus on the changing landscape of theological education and the evolving needs of congregations, the council engaged in a significant discussion regarding the Essential Arts of Ministry—the core competencies and skills required for ordained ministry—as well as opportunities for continuing education. This work is part of a broader effort to reexamine and refine the requirements for ordination in the contemporary church. The council will continue exploring these issues, along with reviewing areas of confusion and challenge within the current Licensed Pastors program.

The Rev. Dr. Donna Keane led an insightful presentation on the fundamentals of family systems theory. Building on those concepts, Chelsea Odhner facilitated a discussion on Internal Family Systems and their application to personal and ministerial life.

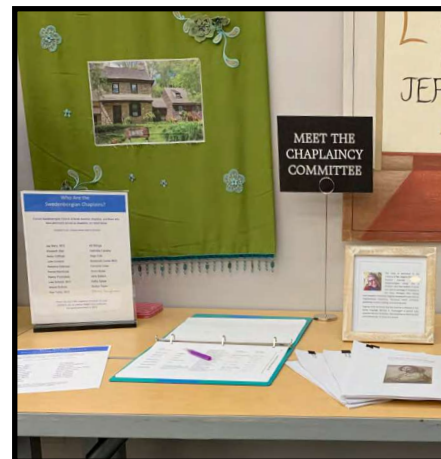
Motion: After sixty-one years in the ordained ministry, the Rev. Randall E. Laakko entered into the fullness of the spiritual world on Friday, March 11, 2026. The Council of Ministers

Chaplain's Table at Convention 2026

In an effort to offer spiritual support to people who were attending Convention, and to provide an opportunity for attendees to meet and learn more about our Swedenborgian chaplains, the Council of Ministers' Committee of Chaplaincy organized two tables at Convention 2026. One was a display table with printed materials on it, and the other was a designated table during the evening meal where chaplains were ready to lend a listening ear to anyone who wanted support.

We dedicated the display table to Chaplain Rev. Dagmar Bollinger, who had unexpectedly passed into the spiritual world shortly before Convention. Among the various materials on display, the most popular was a collection of letters from a Swedenborgian chaplain who served during the Civil War. He repeatedly asked for copies of *the Messenger* and wanted to stay in contact with other Swedenborgians.

From our experience at the designated table at dinner, we concluded that Convention attendees feel supported and encouraged by being among other Swedenborgians, just as our Civil War chaplain longed for. ☪



Continues on page 107

Harmony Among Many

Continued from page 97

as good. We are a complex mix of distinctiveness. No matter from where we come, we bring with us distinctiveness. No matter who we are, our congregations are full of distinctiveness. We must be a home that welcomes the differences without demonizing. We must welcome the differences while celebrating what it is the Lord created us to be.

At this point, I'd be remiss without thanking the members of the Boston Society and the staff of the Boston Society, the choir of the New Jerusalem, our music director, and my partner in crime there, Ben [gunter]. As well as just a shout out to the people involved in planning the convention. It's mostly denominational folks, but a lot of time, a lot of energy, a lot of effort goes into the creation of the convention, and it really is a joy. All that work

leads to this moment, to the people in this room, to the exchanging of ideas, to learning new things, to celebrating tradition, to embracing the future.

Each one of you received a bag upon arrival. I like to think that this bag is about this intersection of history. We have a book in there which is filled with both writings and drawings of the Reverend Dr. Ted Klein. We also have within it the historic candy of Cambridge, Junior Mints. We also have within it watercolors and musical instruments that are about going forward and making new music and new art.

So we certainly hope that this convention refreshes and rejuvenates us, and at points brings us back to our historic center, but not for living in the past, but for living into the future. So thank you all and blessings, and I look forward to the rest of our convention together. 📻

Report from COM

Continued from page 106

recommends to the Swedenborgian Church that their name be removed from the Roll of Ministers and added to the Roll of Former Ministers.

Motion: After thirteen years in the ordained ministry, the Rev. Dagmar Bollinger entered into the fullness of the spiritual world on Friday, June 22, 2026. The Council of Ministers recommends to the Swedenborgian Church that their name be removed from the Roll of Ministers and added to the Roll of Former Ministers.

The Rev. Dr. David Brown was elected to a three-year term on the Council of Ministers Executive Committee, and the Rev. Sage Cole was elected to fill an unexpired term on the same committee. The Council elected The Rev. Susannah Currie to its Nominating Committee. The Rev. Shada Sullivan was elected as the new Chair

A Vibe Shift

Continued from page cover

participant group.

But there's more. We followed through with Ken Turley's original request by having more robust musical arrangements performed in our services, and breaking quite radically from tradition, our Convention Preacher, Rev. Catherine Lauber, shaped the main "Convention Service" the following evening around practicing harmony in the arts. With poetry as her "sermon" topic that involved hands-on practice with paper passed around for participatory engagements around spiritual harmony and poetry. It worked. It all worked, and there was a vibe shift this year that still lingers. 📻

of the Council of Ministers, and the Rev. Dan Burchett was selected to serve as the preacher for the 2028 Convention. 📻

THE BANNERS

Hush, I think it's time
Wait, I hear them coming
See? Over there

The procession enters
Is there music? Maybe
Yes and a rhythm - whispers on the carpet

Soft, intentional movement
It is the banner bearers
Many, many of them. Step, step

What are they saying?
Can you see what they say?
Lots of color, waves of cloth

See, they speak of us
Look at that one
And one just there - about you I think

One long cord of us
Still walking like a ripple on a journey
Well, yes that was a little ripple
A happy ripple in a mighty stream

—Pete Toot

General Council

Continued from page 99

Lynn Chittick and Pastor Jae Chung (filling an unexpired term); New York New Church Legacy Fund, Shelley Dolley, Rev. Rich Tafel and Rev. Robert McCluskey.

Other brief topics of conversation included a discussion about the recent convention, and a new Basic Needs Emergency Fund that was being created in a similar fashion as the Pandemic Relief Funds that were available in 2020.

The General Council will meet next in-person in November at the Chicago Swedenborg Library. 📻





A special thank you to our contributing photographers, Beki Greenwood, Serena Greenwood, Jackie Shihadeh, Rev. Renée Machiniak, Michael Robbins, and Dr. Emily Tergliafera. If you would like to see the full 2026 Convention album and more please email editor@swedenborg.org.

Business Meetings

Business Meeting

BY BEKI GREENWOOD, SECRETARY



Members of the Executive Committee presiding over the 2026 Convention business meetings.
(from left to right) Kurt Fekete, vice president; Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, president;
Beki Greenwood, interim secretary; and Jennifer Lindsay, treasurer.

The annual convention business sessions of the Swedenborgian Church of North America convened at the Babson Executive Conference Center in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Many thanks to the Boston Church on the Hill for the gifts and hospitality they offered the attendees.

The Credentials Committee reported that there were a total of 100 delegates in attendance, out of a total potential of 178. Nearly all of the associations or conferences within the Church were represented, with the exception of New York, Eastern Canada Conference, Western Canada Conference, and the At-Large class.

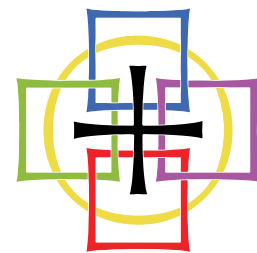
The proposed amendment to Article XX as printed in the [May 2026](#) issue of the Messenger regarding the removal of language pertaining to the governance and maintenance of the National Church in Washington, DC was passed.

A variety of reports were given, including Our Daily Bread (ODB), Spiritual Sunshine (swedenborgiancommunity.org), the Messenger, the Helen Keller

Spiritual Life Collaborative, the Swedenborg House in Washington, DC, the Chicago Swedenborg Library, Bloom Haven, the Social Justice Committee and Swedenborgians

in Action Against Racism (SAAR), the Swedenborg Foundation, the Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS), the New York New Church Legacy Fund, and others.

Convention 2027 will be held in St. Louis, Missouri. For a full text of the minutes from the business sessions of this year's convention, please see the 2026 issue of the Journal, which is expected to be available this fall. ☩



*The Swedenborgian Church of
North America*

Election Results

Vice President:	Kurt Fekete [†]
Recording Secretary:	Beki Greenwood
General Council Lay Person:	Pastor Helen Barler
General Council Lay Person:	Tom Murphy [†]
General Council Minister:	Rev. Renée Machiniak [†]
Standing Com. Communication & Info.:	Rev. Dr. Dave Brown [†]
Standing Com. for Education & Resources:	Rev. Junchol Lee
Standing Com. for Financial Accountability:	Andrea LoPinto
Standing Com. for Financial Accountability:	Kei Pang
Committee on Admission to the Ministry:	Gabriella Cahaley [†]
Standing Committee for Nominations	
(unexpired term):	Pastor Jae Chung
Standing Committee for Nominations:	Tirah Keal
Center for Swedenborgian Studies Board of Trustees,	
Representative Class:	Rev. Lisa Solwold

[†]incumbent

Convention Worship Service

Poetry as Spiritual Practice

A REFLECTION FROM REV. CATHERINE LAUBER

The Convention Worship Service this year featured both music and poetry in the service. This is the reflection from Rev. Catherine Lauber, this year's Convention Preacher. In addition to her reflection, several poems were shared at the service. If you would like to experience the full service and music, please visit our YouTube channel @TheSwedenborgianChurch (tinyurl.com/4afvaa6b).



Rev. Catherine Lauber.

I want to share with you a little bit of my experience with poetry. It's not been my favorite style of literary work. If I'm going to sit down and

read something, it's almost never going to be a book of poems.

And yet, for almost two years now, I've been part of a monthly poetry group. It's led by a local poet/artist/jewelry maker friend of mine.

And I thought, this might be a good thing to help me with my sermon writing. And Denise is pretty fun, and maybe I'll give it a try and see what happens.

So, each month, a small group gets together, we share poetry, we write poetry, and we read poetry out loud to each other. Each month, Denise sends out a prompt for the theme of the month, and she will also include a specific style or form of poetry that we can try our hand at if we want (i.e., a sonnet, a haiku, an ode, etc.). The important thing is to come and invite in that space for poetic creativity to flow, even

if it's simply in listening to poetry. I've realized that, in itself, it can be a spiritual practice. Simply listening to the rhythm and the meter, the rhyme or the not rhyme of the poem. Entering into the flow of the words.

And here's what I've learned...poetry begins when language stops behaving. I had to let go of my Gen X obsession with grammar rules, two spaces after the period, and proper spelling (which is subjective, by the way, and depends on what country you're in—I've been in three different countries, three different spelling and grammar rules—and that's not even counting academic writing).

Worrying about all of that...it stops the flow of creativity. I had to let all that go and start misbehaving with words and language.

When I can do that and be more intentional about writing poetry as a spiritual practice, I've found it to be a useful tool for expressing the dynamics of my inner life—thoughts, emotions and feelings about God, community, life in general, relationships, current events, etc.

And so this poetry practice has become a spiritual practice. It's helping me connect to God; it's moving my spirit towards creativity; it's bringing me into community; and the reading, the writing, and the hearing of poetry are bringing a sense of beauty and wonder into my mind and deeper spirit.

I've also found it to be helpful as a tool for regeneration. As a way to help shift, process and express the inner life.

Here is an example. In December, I was invited to give the blessing at the annual Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony in Bradley Park. It's a lovely

honor, and I had been invited the year before, so I knew what to expect and I was really looking forward to it.

Well, the day before the ceremony, we were expecting a big storm, and a notice went out that the event was cancelled due to the weather. I was a little disappointed about that, but—it really wasn't about me—so I didn't want to dwell on it. But to me it felt... unfinished.

The day after the ceremony was to take place, I drove past the park and saw that the Christmas lights were on and the tree was lit up, and it looked very festive. So the lights got turned on, but we missed the gathering and the community connection.

The poetry group was that week, and I was thinking about the tree, and the blessing, and the sense of incompleteness that I felt about the whole thing, and I wrote the following poem:

Blessings on the tree,
lit, unceremoniously,
the day after
the event
was meant
to be.

Poetry allowed me to wrap up this commitment in a way that felt good to me, and then I could share my poem with the community to help bring the sense of togetherness, and the tree got its blessing.

A few months later, Denise sent out a prompt introducing us to the Haiku form of poetry; usually nature-based, three lines with some sort of active, movement component. As I was

Continues on page 112

Convention Worship Service

Poetry as Spiritual Practice

Continued from page 111



Rev. Betsy Coffman read
*"What is the Spiritual Sense?" True Christian
 Religion §194 out loud as spiritual prose.*

staring out the upstairs window, the inspiration came for this little ditty that is very New England-y:

February 2, 2026

I. Sunshine in winter.

Drip, drip, drip... icicles shrink.
 Roof's edge is cleared.

II. Rumble... bang-crash! Sound
 interrupts quiet reflection —
 Heart leaps as snow slides.

III. Melting to liquid,
 landscape changes appearance —
 Mud season begins.

Anyone who has heard the thunder of snow falling off the slant roof can relate to that heart-in-the-throat feeling. But the haiku provided a fun way of talking about everyday experiences. The changing of the seasons...

...The melting of the ICE.

Poetry can be the vehicle to help express more taboo topics or unpopular

stances, in a way that is often more accessible, while still allowing us to honor and express our inner life.

When the Limerick came around as the poetic form for the month I think I probably rolled my eyes. Limerick... hmmm... how am I going to turn that into spiritual practice?

I was surprised by the inspiration that came up for this poem:

There once was a man who stated
 that empathy was overrated.
 To those who know better,
 Be the trendsetter,
 And share love and compassion,
 unabated.

The Limerick gave me a vehicle to express some inner tension and wrestling with things that come up in the daily news. Poetry doesn't require you to take a position, craft an argument, defend it, debate it, and line up the facts. Poetry simply allowed me to share an inner 'a tension,' in a way that was non-threatening, light-hearted and still made a point.



Trevor leads the gathering in singing his original song, "7 Hills." A video of this song played at convention with a full choir is on
 Trevor's music channel here:

tinyurl.com/nhju8su5

Through poetry, you can share ideas, feelings, movements, a little more freely and creatively, and express your inner world through the written and spoken word.

In doing so, we join in an ancient tradition of using poetic language to pray and to praise God, to express joy and wonder at the beauty of creation.

Scripture is full of poetic language, and some of the most beautiful poems, prayers, and hymns come to us in the Book of Psalms. I wanted to share just a few verses of Hebrew poetry from Psalm 19—a testimony to the power of God and an expression of awe and wonder at the beauty of creation.

The heavens declare the glory of
 God;
 the skies proclaim the work of His
 hands.
 Day after day they pour forth
 speech;
 night after night they reveal
 knowledge.
 They have no speech, they use no
 words;
 no sound is heard from them.
 Yet their voice goes out into all the
 earth,
 their words to the ends of the world.
 In the heavens God has pitched a
 tent for the sun.
 It is like a bridegroom coming out of
 his chamber,
 like a champion rejoicing to run his
 course.
 It rises at one end of the heavens
 and makes its circuit to the other;
 nothing is deprived of its warmth.

—Psalm 19:1-6

Beautiful, poetic expression of praise. It stirs the soul and inspires the mind.

Continues on page 113

Convention Worship Service

Poetry as Spiritual Practice

Continued from page 112

As I was putting this service together and working with Ken Turley on the music, I sent him a draft of the service. He saw the reading of Psalm 19 and said, "I have a song based on Psalm 19." And I think I heard Laurie in the background say "it's the most beautiful song!" so we had to include it in this service.

One of the practices that we do monthly at the poetry group is to actually write a poem, right then and there. Denise will give us a prompt, and then we have five to seven minutes to write a poem, and afterwards we share them with the group.



Pastor Paul Deming performing his original song "Surely God is My Salvation".

This practice has shown me that I don't always need an elaborate ritual, or a special writing pen, or twenty minutes of meditation before I create a poem. A short deadline and a small prompt can help us connect with the inner poet.

I wrote the following poem at one of those gatherings, in about five minutes, using a small piece of rock as inspiration.

MICA
January 18, 2026

Shining slivers of light
cast between rock and stone.
Cold and dull,
now turned to the sun,
shimmers and glows.
Reflection of the One
light of creation.
A reminder, that all is filled
with Divine light.
Sometimes, all it takes
is a slight turn to see.

When we allow for space for the Spirit to move, with the intention of creating, in the span of even just five minutes, we can connect to God and receive that inspiration. That influx of heavenly power that is constantly pouring into us.

A simple practice can lead to profound spiritual experiences.

Poetry is one tool that we can use to support our spiritual life, our regeneration, and our connection to God.

Throughout this evening, we have heard poems, songs, scripture, and reflections—different expressions of the same spiritual impulse: the desire to respond to the Lord's presence in our lives.

We share these examples with you (poems, lyrics, readings, songs) to help maybe inspire you to think about



Laurie Turley singing a song she and Rev. Ken Turley wrote together, "Peace," with the Convention Worship Singers.

Poetry as a Spiritual Practice. Using poetry, as a way to engage your creativity, as a way to connect with God and with others, through a place of love and integrity, of honesty, and compassion. With maybe a little humor and a limerick or two thrown in there. I invite you to give it a try. ☸



SwedenborgianCommunity.org

With broadcasts and written messages most weeks, *Spiritual Sunshine: A Swedenborgian Community Online* is your interfaith-Swedenborgian community—with a presence on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and your favorite podcasting platform. Join us as we seek to empower awareness of and connection to the spiritual sunlight from Divinity within all of us.

Center for Swedenborgian Studies

Center for Swedenborgian Studies Commencement Address

BY TOM NEUENFELDT

If you would like to watch the complete graduation ceremony, including the valedictorian speech given by Pastor Robert Hagan, it is available on our YouTube channel, [@TheSwedenborgianChurch](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTheSwedenborgianChurch) (tinyurl.com/yc7e69sd).

Having our Convention that celebrates the arts in Boston seems quite natural. Boston is the home of the Museum of Fine Arts. James Taylor was born here. The New Kids on the Block and Aerosmith are from here. This is the home of The Boston Pops. As a matter of fact, in 1980 when Convention was here at Wellesley, there was an outing to go hear the Pops perform with John Williams conducting. Equally iconic are the Sam Adams brewery

and Cheers on Beacon Hill, where everyone knows your name.

With the Convention theme of *Creating Harmony: Art as a Spiritual Practice*, I've decided to emphasize music in my remarks tonight. Hearing the Choir of the New Jerusalem during our opening session was stunning.

Rev. Catherine Lauber's worship service last night lifted all of us spiritually. She, the musicians, and soloists combined poetry and music to create a heavenly state of mind.

We are honoring our graduates tonight with their diverse and varied backgrounds, interests, and visions of

ministry. They are similar to the many voices of a choir singing in harmony, or instruments in a band or symphony. Our

graduates are bringing all of their varied and diverse life experiences and talents to produce the same heavenly harmony—the love of the Lord and neighbor through their individual musical score of uses.

I am reminded of a great children's song that BJ used to sing with her youth choir at church several years ago. It is *All God's Creatures Got a Place in the Choir*. If you don't know the song, it goes like this:



CSS Professors Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber and Dr. Rebecca Esterson, dean.

All God's Creatures got a place in the choir,

Some sing low and some sing higher,

Some sing out loud on the telephone wire,

And some just clap their hands, or paws, or anything they've got now.

Everybody here is part of the plan,

We all get to play in the great critter band.

From the eagle in the sky to the whale in the sea,

It's one great symphony.

Our denomination has come a long way in promoting diversity and including everyone in our Swedenborgian critter band. In our 1980 Convention that I mentioned earlier, we ordained Rev. Gladys Wheaton. She was our second female clergy member.¹ Of

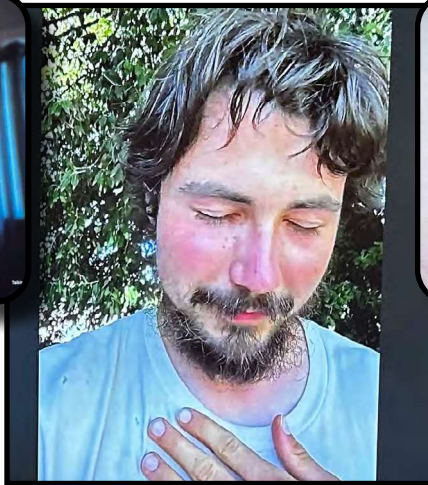
¹ The 1980 ordination class consisted of four people (three of whom were women): Gertrude Dole Tremblay, Susan Turley-Moore, Gladys Wheaton, and Carl Yenetchi.

Continues on page 115



(above) Heather Garland leads the congregation in singing. She created the liturgy for this service. (above right) Pastor Paul Deming and BJ Neuenfeldt share their musical talents.

Center for Swedenborgian Studies



CSS Commencement

Continued from page 114

course, Dorteia Harvey was our first.

Our current Roll of Ministers lists thirty-six female clergy. That is 50% of our current menagerie of ministers.

Our diversity goes beyond clergy gender. In 2015, in Bridgewater, we reaffirmed that the Church Universal includes those of diverse origins, and stated that no society should exclude anyone from membership based on ethnic origin, race, color, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, health, handicap, or economic status.

In 2022, we approved a Standing Resolution to welcome and support all people in the LGBTQ+ community.

Our denomination has created a Social Justice Committee, Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism, and a resolution on Climate Justice. In 2023, Rev Colin Amato began his virtual ministry, The Rainbow Church of the New Jerusalem.

Today we honor graduates with a wide variety of interests, backgrounds, and life stories.

We welcome Pastor Robert Hagan and thank him for offering his inspiring and meaningful address this evening. Robert tells us that the people in Ghana are hungry for the inner meaning of the Word. He is envisioning

There were six CSS students receiving their Certificate in Swedenborgian Studies this year. Three remotely and three in person. (above left to right) Pastor Tassy Farwell, Michael Goos, and Pastor Robert Hagan. (below left to right) Pastor Paul Deming, Tirah Keal, and Ben Gunter.



holding regular classes on correspondence and training lay leaders who can visit the sick, teach children, and carry on pastoral care in communities that he is not able to reach.

Michael Goos is thankful to the Center for Swedenborgian Society (CSS) for giving them tools to deepen their search for the abiding presence of love and wisdom in scripture, nature, others, and themselves. Michael is making a physical pilgrimage to sacred

places in nature to better appreciate the correspondence between the natural and spiritual worlds. Michael has focused their research on William Cowherd, an English minister who was a vegetarian activist who encouraged abstinence from meat and alcohol.

Ben Gunter is the inaugural recipient of the Rev. Chauncey Giles Ministerial Fellowship and is serving a call to ministry here in Boston, at the Church on the Hill. He has also joined with several agencies to develop the first naloxone distribution program in downtown Boston. Ben has a background in neuropsychiatry and has previously been awarded fellowships to do research and teaching at UCLA. Ben found Swedenborg through a used copy of *Earth's in the Universe* in the bookstore that he owned.

As you can see, our 2026 graduates are bringing their interests and skills to share the same message of the Lord's Love, and Swedenborg's interpretation of the Word, to all of us from their unique perspectives of the world socially and politically.

But wait, there is more:

Tirah Keal is currently planning a ministry through Bloom Haven Spiritual Community Center. Bloom Haven is intended as a place for everyone, Swedenborgian and otherwise, to gather in spiritual growth and mutual

Continues on page 116

Center for Swedenborgian Studies

CSS Commencement*Continued from page 115*

support, with a foundational inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community. Tirah strives to embody the Swedenborgian idea that, “Religion is all about how we live, and the religious way to live is to do good.”

Tassy Farwell is the Licensed Pastor at the Hillside Church in El Cerrito, California. She served as vice chair of the CSS board of directors before her call to ministry. Tassy has written a curriculum that incorporates Swedenborgian theology and ethics. For her, spirituality is living, vitalized, moving, and progressing, as adopted from the Bahá’í; which is compatible with Swedenborg’s concept of uses. Tassy believes that women can do anything if they have the right shoes.

Paul Deming is a musician and Licensed Pastor in St Louis, Missouri. He reports that his studies at CSS have helped him understand more of the depth and inner sense of Scripture through Swedenborg’s writings and have given him an appreciation for the diverse and colorful ways that God uses people in ministry. Paul has served on the Committee on Worship, the Standing Committee for Education and Resources, and is currently on the Standing Committee for Nominations and General Council. Paul has served as the music coordinator for several of our Conventions.

Music can bring us joy, pleasure, excitement, reflection, and peace. It can also leave us with feelings of pain, terror, and displeasure. Watching a movie without the music track is lackluster and leaves us a bit flat.

We listen to it in our cars, on our headphones, and through our play lists as we exercise or meditate. We sing and play music in worship. We sing in the

shower, and we use music to celebrate and mourn.

Christmas Eve would not be complete without turning off the lights, lighting candles, and singing “Silent Night.”

Memorial services need “Amazing Grace” or “In the Arms of Angels” to express grief and our belief in the future awaiting us all in the spiritual world.

Music has a rich and varied history in our denomination and the churches we attend.

The talents of the members of our denomination have been shown through groups like DEADSU. You remember: that unique combination of Grateful Dead and Swedenborgian Support Units, made up of Robert McClusky, Ken and Laurie Turley, Lon Elmer, Joe Tucker, and Amy Reichardt.

We have Missing Rachel, with the harmonious voices of Sarah Buteux, Rebecca Esterson, Leah Goodwin, and Rebekah Maddock, singing scripture the way it was intended.

Rev. Ken and Laurie Turley have made music their life’s expression both personally and professionally. This year’s Convention has been blessed with their talented work.

The Almont Band is made up of whoever shows up with an instrument or has an interest in an instrument. We have members who have included a Concert Master at a local symphony, our Sweet Dean the Queen Trombly on keyboard, and any camper who wishes to perform “Out on Brandau Bay” for skit night. We also have our Convention choirs and musicians.

Other members, including Rev. Kathy Speas, have joined voices with the Threshold Choir, singing gentle a capella blessings to anyone at a threshold in their life: quite often at the threshold of passing to the spiritual

world.

John Titus and the Cowens from the Urbana Church are members of the World House Choir, singing for justice, equality, and peace. Rev. Renée Machiniak, Joe, and the Royal Oak Church have a Music Ministry that provides music and presence to the sick, lonely, and isolated members of the church and community in their homes, nursing homes, local homeless shelters, and hospitals. I can’t forget our CSS Secretary Karen Conger, whose lovely voice we are missing at this Convention.

Many of you, attending our service online or in-person, are members of local bands and choruses, and you sing in your church choirs at home. BJ, our keyboard player tonight, is also the choir director at the Presbyterian church that we attend at home, and Marjie Leas is the piano player at the church. The list can go on and on.

A special shout out goes to Heather Garland, a CSS student and music coordinator at the San Francisco church, for her solo, and creating tonight’s liturgy.

We learn from Swedenborg that music is both an earthly and heavenly experience. Music and musical instruments performed and expressed on earth have a correspondence in the spiritual world.

As Swedenborgians, we view the Psalms as inspired by the Lord, primarily written by David. They are a collection of 150 songs. Their original Hebrew title translates to Song of Praise. They were originally intended and arranged for musical performance, with instrumental accompaniment.

We have heard earlier of singing for joy in Psalm 95. Listen now to Psalm 98:4.

Continues on page 118

Center for Swedenborgian Studies

Valedictorian Speech

BY PASTOR ROBERT KWESI HAGAN

The valedictorian speech this year was given by Pastor Robert Kwesi Hagan, serving as the residential pastor for the New Church in Ghana. He is a devoted husband, father, and teacher, and a graduate of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies. His deepest calling is guided by one principle: the essence of usefulness. He is committed to bringing the Lord's Word into Ghanaian homes and beyond, so that affirmative faith becomes love in action, and worship is lived out in service to the neighbor.

If you would like to watch the complete graduation ceremony, including the valedictorian speech given by Pastor Robert Hagan, it is available on our YouTube channel, @TheSwedenborgianChurch (tinyurl.com/yc7e69sd).

Good evening, faculty, friends, and fellow graduates. My name is Robert Kwesi Hagan, and it's a pleasure standing here today with heartfelt joy and gladness. I'm honored to join you

remotely as a graduate of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies. Today, I also carry greetings from my spiritual home, the New Church Convention in Accra, Ghana. For such an honorable moment to unfold in my life, it's very appropriate to express my gratitude to Rev. Dr. James Lawrence, President of the Swedenborgian Church of North America, who first introduced me to the Center for Swedenborgian Studies and encouraged this path. Thank you, Rev. Lawrence.

It has been a wonderful experience for me at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, both in being exposed to sacred texts and in engaging with brilliant minds through their various works. We have been taught to look at artworks with defined eyes, through the knowledge of correspondence, to see the beauty that lies beneath their portrayals. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my tutors, Dr. Rebecca Esterson, Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber, and Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry, for their



Pastor Robert Kwesi Hagan.

patience in imparting the knowledge and spiritual formation needed for the task ahead.

I came to the Center for Swedenborgian Studies looking for knowledge. What I found was a treasure box, within which are the sacred doctrines, which have now prepared me to love. The doctrine of love is not abstract, but it looks like listening before speaking, like being willing to serve your neighbors without keeping score. The center formed that habit in me. My eyes are trained to see, as correspondence has taught me, that everything in the natural world has meaning. A neighbor's needs, a moment of silence and meditation, a melancholy state, a sudden joy—none are random, and I leave here with eyes that look for the Lord's presence in the ordinary. Ideas have not been impressed upon me not for memorable sake, but



Pastor Robert Hagan's ministry in Accra, Ghana.

Continues on page 118

Center for Swedenborgian Studies

Valedictorian Speech*Continued from page 117*

to understand that regeneration is a daily practice of reflection, prayer, and usefulness that will prepare me to serve congregations and communities with humility.

So today I express love and deep affection for my studies, for the texts that wrestled with me, and the insightful interactions with my fellow mates who generated a deeper sense of humor in me, knowing that everyone is valued and well-listened to. For the professors who corrected me in truth and encouraged me in grace. You didn't just fill my head with knowledge, you helped form my soul anew. I am ever more grateful for your commitment and visualization for an integrated world, where the love of the Lord and the thoughtfulness towards the neighbor become our supreme priority. To the tutors and faculty of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, thank you once again. You kept pointing me to the treasure, the living doctrines that will guide me as a minister, a scholar, and a human being. Because of you, I step into what comes next not with answers to hand out, but with a way to walk alongside others towards the light. These greetings from Ghana would not be possible without your work.

Through the Lord's divine providence, the New Church Convention is established here in Ghana, and the congregation is gradually growing. An active youth fellowship and neighborhood service project has been set in motion. Our ultimate aim is to spread the Heavenly doctrines of the New Church, which have been revealed through Hon. Emanuel Swedenborg, and to restore the heavenly dignity of the Word in its glorified state. We worship at Spot M, barrier, off Nsawam

Road, and by the Lord's mercy, the church is alive. Last year, we stepped onto television with a broadcast termed "Spiritual Insight" on OFFTV, because we believe these doctrines are not meant to stay inside our walls. We hope to revamp that broadcast soon, so more Ghanaians can hear that the Lord is Divine love itself and Divine wisdom is its fullness of operation, that the Word has an inner sense, and that every honest work is a form of worship.

This is the first time the New Church Convention (Ghana) has formally been present at the Convention, and we bring one message: we are already family. We drink from the same well. The treasures Hon. Emanuel Swedenborg was given, thus to understand the essence of divine love, correspondence, and the call to a useful life, are changing lives here in Ghana just as they are everywhere the Doctrine is adhered to. The Lord's visitation to Hon. Swedenborg ignited a devotional attitude and deepened his affection for the Word. And commissioned him to take up this extraordinary task of revealing angelic wisdom for the edification of the Church and for the redemption of the human race. This visitation from the Lord also applies to all of us who have come to receive these heavenly truths. That we may go forth into the world and teach and preach about the second coming of the Lord. For now, it is permitted to enter into the mysteries of faith.

I'm here to say: let's walk together; pray with us as we pray for you. And so, to my fellow graduates, may we carry these treasures lightly, generously, and with courage. On behalf of my congregation here in Ghana, thank you for welcoming Ghana into the conversation. May this be the first of many tables to share. We are grateful to be home. Thank you. 📺

CSS Commencement*Continued from page 116*

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord. Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord.

Are we talking about playing instruments and singing, or are we talking about truths and affections? As all of you know better than I do, the answer to both questions is yes.

In 2017, Rev. Wilma Wake wrote an article for *Our Daily Bread*, titled "Reflections on Swedenborg and Music." She wrote:

Swedenborg talked of life in heaven as filled with music, concerts and singing. He said that music originated in the heavens before coming to the natural world. Music can be an experience of wholeness and connection with each other and with God.

Some of you may know Leah Martin, the organist at the Bryn Athyn Cathedral.

In her 2024 Doctoral Dissertation titled "Music in Emanuel Swedenborg's Theology Revitalizing New Church Hymnody" at the University of Notre Dame, Leah goes even deeper into the connection between earthly music and the heavens.

She writes:

Without music, worship would not resemble worship in Heaven....

Swedenborg's writings about heavenly choirs demonstrate that hymn singing can aid spiritual growth and connect congregations

Continues on page 123



Swedenborgian Church Youth League

clear blue sky

1981
october

SCYL Teens at Convention

BY SERENA GREENWOOD, SCYL CLEAR BLUE SKY EDITOR

The teens had an amazing time at Convention this year! We did a lot of fun things in our free time. When we were at the hotel, we played games such as Catchphrase, Continuo, and Pass the Pigs. Some of

us went to the rec center and either played racquetball, volleyball, worked out in the gym, or swam. If the rec center happened to be closed at a time we went, we used Kurt's volleyball and played on an open grass area. Some of us also attended Trevor's Mini Course session and we did a bunch of his fun games there! On our day out in Boston, we went to Newbury Street and got food, went shopping, and hung out

with each other. That night, we played more Catchphrase for hours, along with endless screams of karaoke. We were all happy and excited to be together for a few more hours until we all had to leave, which was sad, but we knew we would all see each other again very soon.



(left to right) Teens take advantage of the photo booth at the closing banquet; games with Trevor; teens get ready to walk to the CSS graduation together.

A testimonial shared during the Swedenborgian Church Youth League worship service

Back in October, I got the worst news of my life. The news came from the MRI. My knee was in worse shape than we had thought, and I would need surgery to do any of my sports such as dance and basketball. This news changed me in ways that I didn't think were possible.

I started becoming more interested in my community and helping out. I gained leadership positions in clubs that I have dreamed of being in.

Although it was hard at first, admitting the change that was about to take over my life, it was a change that was needed in my life in order for me to succeed.

The takeaway for this story is, if you feel a change or there is a sudden need of change in your life, follow it, explore all the new and different opportunities you will have. —Serena

Swedenborgian Church Youth League

SCYL Worship Service

BY NORA BARNABY, SCYL PRESIDENT



(above) The 2026 SCYL Convention teens once their worship service is complete!
 (below) Nora leading the teens in a worship service practice.

The theme for this year's convention in Boston was "Creating Harmony: Art as a Spiritual Practice." For the SCYL worship service, we wanted to represent this idea by emphasizing how everyone contributes individual pieces of themselves to a larger picture that isn't always obvious at the time. We chose to show this through butterflies and their evolution from caterpillar to butterfly. During our service, the congregation was asked to decorate a butterfly with whatever they felt in their hearts at that moment, whether that was a drawing, a poem, or a short paragraph. We collected the butterflies from them, and at the end of our service, they got to see their individual butterflies displayed with the others as one large butterfly. It was a beautiful moment as the teens placed their own butterflies, stood together arm in arm, and sang "Count on Me" by Bruno Mars. Through this church, we are often reminded of how important being together is, and it is a valuable lesson to learn that we all bring our unique selves together to build this wonderful community. It was an amazing convention, and we can't wait to put on another great worship service next year. 🍌



A testimonial shared during the Swedenborgian Church Youth League worship service

When I get back from a retreat or camp, it's not uncommon for my friends to ask me why I'm acting so weird and different. In truth, I struggle to be myself for most of my life. I find myself hiding behind what I think people want from me instead of being my true self. Honestly, there have been times when I felt like I didn't know myself. But in the worst of times, I have always been able to find sanctuary within the Swedenborgian Church. The people in this community have embraced me as myself, and I have always felt so grateful for having these special people in my life.

The SCYL is a group that has helped me find myself during good and bad times. And when I return to my home town friends, I find it harder to hide within myself because I have learned how to be my own person around people who care about me. And that's why my friends think I'm different and weird after I spend my time with you. It's because they are seeing the vulnerable side of me that they don't know I have

—Leah

Grants

NYNC Legacy Fund — Serving the Larger Neighbor

BY REV. ROBERT MCCLUSKEY

In keeping with its stated mission, the New York New Church Legacy Fund is committed to maintaining a Swedenborgian presence in New York City and surrounding area. We do this by supporting “innovative works that provide useful impact toward greater inclusion, social justice, and leadership for resilient communities.” Here now is a summary of grants made to 16 nonprofits in the greater New York area in 2026, listed according to our four focus areas.

Basic Needs

Ali Forney Center: The nation’s largest organization dedicated to protecting LGBTQ+ youth from homelessness. It offers emergency and transitional housing, medical and mental health services, and educational and vocational programs to youth aged sixteen to twenty-four.

Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen: The city’s largest emergency feeding program, serving over 5,000 meals weekly to individuals in need; also offers a pantry program, meal outreach, and a

monthly Sunday Supper, all in an atmosphere of respect and hospitality. The organization is committed to nourishing not just the body but also the spirit.

New Destiny Housing: Operating in all five boroughs, providing permanent, affordable housing and supportive services to survivors of domestic violence and their children.

New York Common Pantry: This org aims to reduce hunger and promote dignity, health, and self-sufficiency among food-insecure New Yorkers. The organization addresses both immediate food needs and long-term stability.

POTS (Part of the Solution): Based in the Bronx, POTS offers comprehensive services to individuals and families facing poverty and homelessness. Its offerings include a community dining room, food pantry, legal and immigration services, and job training programs. Also addresses immediate needs and long-term stability and self-sufficiency.

Environment / Climate Change

New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance: A statewide coalition of residents, scientists, and lawyers fighting toxic siting in low-income Black and Brown neighborhoods. It offers EJ policy boot-camps that helped grassroots leaders draft the landmark 2020 NJ Environmental Justice Law.

New York–New Jersey Baykeepers: Acting as the citizen “Harborkeeper,” Baykeeper restores oyster reefs, litigates polluters, and runs pump-out boats that have planted 8 million oysters and preserved 3,000 acres of

habitat around the nation’s busiest port since 1989.

Staten Island Greenbelt Conservancy: This org stewards 2,800 acres of forests, trails, and nature centers—New York City’s largest contiguous green space—through environmental education, citizen-science, and volunteer re-forestation.

We Stay/Nos Quedamos: Born from South Bronx anti-displacement struggles, this org advances community-owned affordable housing, green design, and cultural programs so long-time residents can “stay” amid rapid rezonings.

Equity / Social Justice

CAAAY Organizing Asian Communities: Since 1986 CAAAY (Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence) has built tenant unions in Chinatown and Queens to fight eviction and gentrification. Its bottom-up model seeded NYC’s first Chinese-language tenant union bylaws.

Jews For Racial & Economic Justice: JFREJ mobilizes progressive Jewish New Yorkers in coalitions for police accountability, immigrant justice, and anti-antisemitism work. Notably, its “Jews Against White Nationalism” campaign helped pass NYC’s first municipal white-supremacy resolution.

The Audre Lorde Project: A community-organizing center run by and for LGBTQ People of Color, working for community wellness and progressive social and economic justice. Projects include training street-medics and safety alternatives to policing in Brooklyn and Queens.

Continues on page 123

Grants are due in August!

Denominational grant applications managed by the Standing Committee of Financial Accountability are due August 15.

New Church Legacy Fund grants are due August 31.

Please email Central Office at manager@swedenborg.org for more information.

Passages

Deaths

Rev. Dagmar Bollinger, 81, passed away peacefully following a fall, leaving behind a life defined by faith, compassion, courage, and service to others.



Dagmar was born on December 27, 1944, in northern Germany. As a young woman, she embraced adventure and a new beginning when, at the age of twenty-three, she married Jamie Miller and immigrated to the United States. One year later, they welcomed their daughter, Johanna.

Dagmar dedicated the first half of her professional career to the automotive industry, where she earned the respect of colleagues through her strong work ethic and determination. Later in life, she followed her true calling by entering the ministry. She became an ordained minister and a certified chaplain, devoting herself to providing spiritual guidance, comfort, and hope to countless individuals during life's most difficult moments. Her ministry reflected her deep faith, gentle spirit, and unwavering belief in the dignity and worth of every person.

A devoted member of the Swedenborgian Church, Dagmar's faith shaped the way she lived each day. She believed in serving others with kindness, listening with compassion, and offering encouragement to all who crossed her path. Those who knew her will remember her warm heart, thoughtful wisdom, and steadfast commitment to helping others.

Above all, Dagmar treasured her family. She is survived by her beloved daughter, Johanna Erps, and her cherished grandson, Zachary Erps.

NYNC Legacy

Continued from page 122

Spirituality / Wellness

Connections at Home NJ: Combating senior isolation by pairing homebound elders with social workers and providing easy-to-use tablets—decreasing feelings of isolation and depression through its tech-supported programs.

DevOUT: A progressive Christian nonprofit, aiming to reclaim the gospel as a message of inclusion, transformation, and hope for all people. The organization challenges far-right religious narratives through digital media, community organizing, and educational resources, focusing on empowering

queer Christians and their allies.

Little Brothers-Friends of the Elderly: This org tackles “extreme aging alone” through weekly visiting teams, holiday meals, and intergenerational outings for isolated seniors in five U.S. cities.

Interfaith Works of Central New York State: Through education, service, and dialogue, Interfaith Works focuses on building racial and religious equity, and fostering understanding across diverse communities. Its three main programs focus on: refugee resettlement services; community dialogues to promote cross-cultural understanding; and Center for Healthy Aging to help seniors remain independent and socially connected. 🌐

CSS Commencement

Continued from page 118

with heavenly choirs....

Swedenborg wrote about heavenly choirs joining in with earthly choirs and experiencing indescribable joy when biblical texts, such as the Psalms, were sung.

Leah goes on to say that angels hear these musical expressions through their inner meaning, even if the singers do not know or understand that inner meaning.

I believe that there is power in song and music of all kinds. When performed or listened to with purpose, intention, and reflection, music can become life-changing and transforming.

In an April, 2024 interview with Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, for *the Messenger*, Rev. Ken Turley shared his life's journey with music as a change agent for him and how he “became a minister who does music.” Ken said:

Dagmar's legacy lives on in the lives she touched, the comfort she offered, and the enduring example of faith, resilience, and love that she leaves behind. She will be deeply missed by her family, friends, and all who were blessed to know her. 🌐

For me personally, it has a profound effect on my inner state of being and has been and continues to be an uplifting means of personal expression and, at the same time, a wonderful way to connect with other people.

I am forever grateful for having found and made music a central part of my life, even as I continue to explore and discover music without ever approaching any kind of sense of complete comprehension. It is a gift to be gratefully received and shared, and a mystery to be enjoyed and shared.

Please know, Ken and Laurie, that we are grateful for you and your music and presence in our lives.

Our 2026 graduates and certificate recipients: may each of you find a voice that lifts and inspires you and everyone who is touched by your ministry. In whatever form it takes, may it be lived out through our two greatest commandments:

To love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

When appropriate, do it in song.

And remember “All God's Creatures Got a Place in the Choir.” 🌐

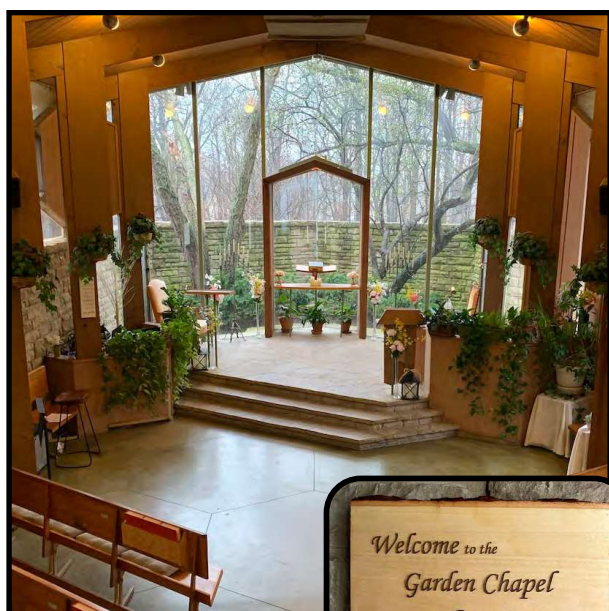
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124 the Messenger

Convention 2026

Convention 2027



Meet Me in St. Louis!

Save the Date!
July 2 – July 6, 2027

Join us for the 203rd Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church in St. Louis, Missouri, with our hosts, The Garden Chapel Sanctuary!

Convention will be from July 2 – July 6 (includes travel dates). Meetings and lodging will be at the Royal Sonesta Chase Park Plaza in the heart of downtown St. Louis. Information about the hotel can be found at tinyurl.com/4sakw5ns 



More information will be shared on swedenborg.org in the spring of 2027!