



ROSEVILLE NEW CHURCH

**THE SYDNEY SOCIETY OF THE
NEW CHURCH**

**AGM AGENDA & REPORTS
2022**

**SYDNEY SOCIETY OF THE NEW CHURCH
AGENDA for the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
TO BE HELD IN THE CHURCH, SHIRLEY ROAD
ROSEVILLE**

AND BY VIDEO CONFERENCE

11.30 AM, 27 FEBRUARY 2023

- 1. OPENING.**
- 2. CHAIRMAN.**
- 3. PRESENT.**
- 4. RISING TRIBUTES TO JUNE TAYLER AND MICHAEL HARTING**
- 5. APOLOGIES.**
- 6. GREETINGS IN AND OUT.**
- 7. NOTICE OF MEETING.**
- 8. MINUTES OF THE A.G.M. HELD ON 27 FEBRUARY 2022**
- 9. ANNUAL REPORTS.**
 - 1. MINISTER**
 - 2. COMMITTEE**
 - 3. TREASURER**
 - 4. SWEDENBORG CENTRE**
- 10. MINISTER'S CONTRACT**

AS detailed in the Committee's report, the Committee has resolved to recommend that the meeting adopt the following motion:

That the Society invites Rev. Howard Thompson to renew his contract for a period of three years from its expiry, after which there will be the option of an additional two years.

11. **ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE.**

The Articles state: "There shall be certain Officers of the Society, that is to say a committee consisting of a Chairman of Committee, a Secretary, a Treasurer and not less than 4 and not more than 7 members including the Minister, who shall be chosen by the members of the Society." The current Committee and a list of people available to serve for the coming year are shown below. Any further nominations may be forwarded to the Secretary or made at the meeting.

	2022	2023 nominations
CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE	Charles Zarb	Charles Zarb
SECRETARY	Graham Hall	Graham Hall
TREASURER	Joel Duckworth	Joel Duckworth
MINISTER	Rev. Howard Thompson	Rev. Howard Thompson
2	Ruth Duckworth	Ruth Duckworth
3	Wayne Kasmar	Wayne Kasmar
4	Caroline Neave	Caroline Neave
5	Debra Thompson	Debra Thompson
6	-----	-----
7	-----	-----

The Committee has the power to co-opt members to any vacant positions.

It is customary, though not required by the Constitution, to appoint a number of other officers at the AGM.

POSITION	2022	2023 nominations
SUNDAY SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT	-----	-----
NEW AGE CORRESPONDENT	Mr. W. Kasmar	Mr. W. Kasmar
FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE	Rev. H. Thompson, Mrs. D. Thompson, Messrs. G. Hall, C. Zarb and J. P. Duckworth	Rev. H. Thompson, Mrs. D. Thompson, Messrs. G. Hall, C. Zarb and J. P. Duckworth
AUDITOR	LBW and Partners	LBW and Partners
NEW CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA REPRESENTATIVES	Mr. W. Kasmar, Ms. C. Neave	Mr. W. Kasmar, Ms. C. Neave
FUTURES COMMITTEE	Rev. H. Thompson, Mrs. D. Thompson, Messrs. G. Hall, J. Vandermeer, B. Draper, Ms. C. Neave	Rev. H. Thompson, Mrs. D. Thompson, Messrs. G. Hall, J. Vandermeer, B. Draper, Ms. C. Neave

12. Any Other Business.

There are no motions of which notice has been given.

13. GENERAL VOTE OF THANKS.

14. CLOSE

REPORTS OF THE SYDNEY SOCIETY OF THE NEW CHURCH 2022

MINISTER	Rev H Thompson	(Page 3)
SECRETARY	Mr G Hall	
TREASURER	Mr J P Duckworth	(Page 14)
CHURCH OFFICER	Mrs D Thompson	
COMMITTEE		(Page 5)
	Mr W Kasmar	
	Ms C Neave	
	Mr J Vandermeer (ex officio)	
	Mrs R Duckworth	
	Mr C Zarb (Chair)	
SWEDENBORG CENTRE DIRECTOR	Mr J Vandermeer	(Page 11)

AUDITOR:LBW and Partners

Minister's Report

Rev. Howard A. Thompson

In the opening sentence of last year's (2021) Minister's Report I spoke of both my "frustration and even a twinge of anxiety." One year on and as our summer break comes to a close and I am reflecting on the year that has passed. The frustration and anxiety I felt last year was largely driven by uncertainty around the continued global pandemic that is COVID-19. At the beginning of 2022 we did not know if the cycle of lockdowns, travel restrictions and vaccine certificates would finally come to an end or continue. Fortunately, by mid-year 2022 our lives here in Australia and in the Roseville New Church had largely returned to normal. Maybe I should have had greater faith in the Lord last year. Maybe I should have remembered the Lord's words from Arcana Coelestia 4855; "Peace holds within itself trust in the Lord, the trust that He governs all things and provides all things, and that He leads towards an end that is good." Services, classes and outside groups use of the church hall have returned to normal.

Liturgically this year we followed several themes, building multi-week sermon series around two different subjects. First we took a look at the story of Noah and the Flood. On a spiritual level, this story is about our own temptations and regeneration. This series was a great interest to our newcomers as it delved deeply into an Old Testament story. Though from a Christian background our newcomers are not particularly knowledgeable about the OT. Our second series, following on from the Noah Series and its emphasis on the transition from the Most Ancient Church to the Ancient Church, was a 6 part series looking at the history of the five spiritual churches or five spiritual ages of humanity. It was a 6 part series because the last week looked at the question; What is the most important church? The answer was simple; the one the Lord is creating in each of us as we seek to live His truth into our lives.

In another sign of normalcy, returning I was able to return to the U.S. for a month-long visit in June. This was a solo visit as our youngest son was still deep in the middle of his final year of high school. The reason for the extended visit was two-fold. First to make a surprise appearance at my sister's COVID-delayed wedding. The surprise was a success. And second, to attend the long-delayed General Church clergy meetings. GC clergy have not been able to meet as a group since 2019. The meetings confirmed that many of the difficulties we have experienced here with dwindling attendance and aging congregations are not at all unique to us. This leads to our next subject—Evangelisation.

With the end of pandemic restrictions and the return to normalcy, the Church Committee turned its attention to church growth efforts and formed the Futures Committee. Comprised of several Church Committee members and some others, the Futures Committee has been looking at ideas for engaging the public and trying to increase the number of people participating in church activities. I anticipate the work of this committee to begin in earnest in early 2023.

We end 2022 on a sad note with the hospitalisation and subsequent passing of long-term friend and member of the Roseville New Church, June Tayler. Though June and Allen moved their family to Ingleburn many years ago, Roseville was still their church. Pre-pandemic we still saw June and Allen several times a year, usually bringing their grandchildren with them to church. I performed June's service in late January and Allen seemed most appreciative of the several Roseville members who made the trip to Leppington to pay their respects.

In order to continue to provide services for those who cannot attend in person I continue to produce "Spiritual Shorts," 10-15 minute videos condensing my Sunday message for a home-worship audience. These videos are not only viewed by current members who have not been attending church during the pandemic but also by members who have moved away and are no longer able to attend in person. At the end of our Noah Series we had one sermon dedicated to the subject of the "rainbow" as a symbol. This particular video resulted in nearly twice the typical number of views. Perhaps we made a small dent in trying

introduce a different meaning behind the symbolism of a rainbow; a sign of the presence of the Lord in neighbourly love, in charity.

May the Lord continue to bless the society in 2023 and guide us in our desire to Worship Him and love one another.

Howard

Committee Report

Graham Hall, Sec.

In 2022, after two years of severe disruption and restrictions due to the Covid pandemic, we resumed what might be considered a “new normal” pattern of activities.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

June Tayler passed into the Spiritual World on 12 January. June was from a New Church family in Lancashire. As a young nurse in the early 1970s she came to Sydney, where she met and married Allan. June served on the Committee for several years, travelling from their home at Ingleburn to attend meetings, and always made thoughtful and practical contributions to our discussions.

Michael Harting passed into the Spiritual World on 12 October, after many years of ill health. Between 2009 and 2012, when his health was better, he served on the Committee, and wrote some poetry that reflected the teachings of the Church.

Otherwise there were no changes in the formal membership of the Society.

SERVICES

Regular services generally resumed after the Covid lockdowns of the preceding years. Prior to that, the

ATTENDANCE AND MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS

	2019	2020	2021	2022
MEMBERS	54	54	52	50
AVERAGE ATTENDANCES				
SUNDAY, ADULTS TEENS	11	10	10.5	11
SUNDAY, CHILDREN	0	*	^	0
HOLY SUPPER	10	?	9.7	9
SPIRITUAL SHORTS		45	23	24
TIMES				
WORSHIP	c 50	34	34	45
SACRAMENT	10	3	7	12
BAPTISMS	0	0	0	0
WEDDINGS	0	0	0	0
FUNERALS	2	0	1	1
SPIRITUAL SHORTS		33	46	41

*13 on one occasion, one on two occasions

^ One on each of 2 occasions

Saturday Angel Service had been discontinued, as attendances had become minimal.

During the lockdowns, the Minister prepared a number of services entitled “Spiritual Shorts” and made them accessible via the internet. It was clear from the numbers participating that this served a real need, so the program has continued since then. There are now about 70 subscribers. Participation fluctuates considerably, but with an average of 24 – almost the same as last year.

The other attendance statistics are also very similar to those of 2020. The Committee report last year stated, we are

all ageing, and we have had no new members and few visitors. Clearly this situation cannot continue indefinitely. Sunday services of collective worship in a shared space are not our only activity, but they are a vital one..... The incoming Committee will be forming a sub-committee to work on this issue, and anyone who would like to contribute in any way will be warmly welcomed.

The Futures sub-committee was accordingly formed. It is led by our Minister, and includes Debra Thompson, Caroline Neave, Wayne Kasmar, Joe Vandermeer, and Graham Hall. Lately we have been joined by Bede Draper, a welcome new visitor to our services.

The sub-committee has met regularly, and has covered a lot of useful ground. But it has not yet identified a clear course of action. And in the past year we have all aged a year, and two members have passed on. Bede is one of three welcome regular new visitors, so that in simple numerical terms the situation is little changed.

As organised Christian churches in advanced countries around the world, including the organised New Church well know, there are no obvious solutions. However we do have the resources to try various possible approaches. The Committee recognises that the situation is urgent, and will be taking specific actions aimed at increasing attendances in the coming year. The first of these is an updated website, <https://www.rosevillenewchurch.com.au>.

SOCIETY'S SESQUICENTENARY

At this critical period in the Society's history, it is intriguing to remember that in May 1875, a Swedenborg Club was formed in Sydney. In June, the name was changed to the

Sydney New Church Society and its first church service was held in the December. So 2025 will be our sesquicentenary year. In the context of working towards a sustainable future, we need to start thinking about a commemoration.

MINISTER’S CONTRACT

The Minister’s relationship with the organised church is very different in most ways from that of other contracted employees in the economy, but in law, he is an employee of a not-for-profit company.

The Minister’s initial 5 year contract expires in September. The family’s “temporary skill shortage” visas expire a little before the contract. Their applications for permanent residency require an ongoing guarantee of employment. While the Committee is empowered to make a contract with a Minister, it has been normal practice for these matters to be referred to General Meeting.

The Minister and the Committee recognise that the future is uncertain. The state of the Society and the nature of the Minister’s work may be very different in five years, which is the usual contract term. We therefore recommend that the Minister’s contract be renewed for three years, with the option of a further two years to follow. A motion to this effect will be put to the AGM.

COMMITTEE MEETINGS AND MEMBERSHIP

The Committee met on twelve occasions during the year, with members attending in person or by video conferencing. Joe Vandermeer attends meetings both as a committee member and as Director of the Swedenborg Centre.

SERVICES IN MINISTER'S ABSENCE

The Minister and Rev. Todd Beiswenger exchanged pulpits on one occasion. Joe Vandermeer and Revs. Trevor Moffat and Julian Duckworth conducted services on one occasion each.

PROPERTY MATTERS

Various ongoing maintenance issues were attended to.

SWEDENBORG CENTRE

The Centre continued its wide range of activities through the year. The accompanying report from the Director, Joe Vandermeer, covers them in detail. The trend away from printed books and printed magazines and towards internet-based communications has affected the way the Centre operates, but meetings in person at the Centre, and with interested groups elsewhere, remain important. Through the Centre we support the Swedenborg Association of Australia, which is an independent body.

ASSISTANCE TO THE WIDER CHURCH

A substantial contribution was made to support the work of the Director of Spiritual Training, Australian New Church College, Rev. David Millar.

FINANCE

The audited Financial Statements have been provided in the required format. The accompanying Treasurer's report provides an excellent summary. As reported now for four years, the estate of Dr. William Moore, from which the Society has received income for well over 50 years, is still in the rather protracted process of being wound up. The matter is in the hands of the Crown Solicitor and neither we nor the other beneficiaries we have been able to obtain

advice on progress. The Society will receive a share of the Estate's assets when it is complete.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

Our small society, entrusted as it is with important responsibilities and considerable assets, relies on many people to assist with spiritual and outreach work and with property and administrative matters. We are grateful to them all: our Minister, Rev. Howard Thompson, Joe Vandermeer, the full time Director of the Swedenborg Centre; part time people: Debra Thompson, Church Officer, Elizabeth Kemmis, assisting at the Centre, Katrina Papallo, our organist; Wayne Kasmar and Michael Chester, assisting at the Swedenborg Centre; Jasper Curry and Kathryn Baker, assisting with maintenance and gardening.

NEW CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Howard Thompson, Joe Vandermeer and Ruth Duckworth are members of the Board of the NCIA. Caroline Neave and Wayne Kasmar were the Sydney Society's representatives to the NCIA.

There were no general meetings of the NCIA apart from the statutory AGM to approve the accounts.

Respectfully submitted

Graham Hall, Hon. Secretary, on behalf of the Committee

Swedenborg Centre Report

Joe Vandermeer, Swedenborg Centre Director

This year has been another delightfully active year for the Swedenborg Centre, for its activities and for its participants.

The types of events we regularly continue to hold range from fortnightly Bible Study with Howard Thompson, discussion groups, Swedenborg reading groups, Dr Groves reading groups and networking with groups who are able and willing to benefit from the material Swedenborg offers such as various Gurdjieff reading groups and spiritual movement groups.

Over the year we also delivered several Swedenborgian lectures to various outside organisations, such as the Open Forum and the Theosophical Society. And a series of events involving art expression on the theme of correspondences was very well received and popular.

Since Covid, our online presence has continued to increase in popularity with half a dozen participants from as far as Canada regularly attending.

The quality and speed of our internet service has been improved this year thanks to an upgrade to high speed NBN. And participation in 'hybrid' events (a mix of online and live participants) has been more enjoyable thanks to the new larger format TV at the Centre.

Our office equipment continues to service our needs. The printer was recently fully serviced to enable us to enjoy the option of printing our material on demand for our digitised

booklets (most of which are also available as free PDF downloads on the website). Although printing costs have gone up per page by 50% this year due to a renewed contract, any printing we do on behalf of other organisations such as magazines for SAA and NCIA, or booklets to sell (but not what we produce for the SSNC itself) are all invoiced and fully reimbursed or recouped at the time a printed item is sold.

Postage costs have also gone up slightly at the beginning of this year as Australia Post copes with the post-Covid world of postal demands, even though we continue to enjoy a small postal discount thanks to our franking machine.

Meanwhile, book purchases from the Centre have continued to decline (so as a result we are also stocking less books). There are claims (e.g. by the National Endowment for the Arts) that total book reading and the reading of literature is declining, with adults reading any books declining by 7 percent over the past decade, and only less than half of adults still reading literature. This is stimulating our focus on useful services other than book-based material, e.g. providing face to face and online interaction and relationship-building related to Swedenborg spiritual teachings and content.

We no longer advertise in the New Dawn magazine due to the cost and the reduced number of responses and enquiries (which appears to be a pattern for all their advertisers).

The new website is performing well and continues to deliver, thanks to Joel Duckworth's excellent design which now better also serves searches from mobile devices. As a result we have been attracting new contacts looking online

to meet their spiritual questions and needs. The website has also continued to receive occasional praise for its layout and for its range and quality of content. The website has a donation button linked to Donorbox, which has been used at times by visitors to provide some one-off donations and even an ongoing monthly donation.

Our greatest expense is staff costs, including my own salary and that of the casual employment of my capable staff member Liz Kemmis who averages one day a week to help out on a wide range of activities. I hope you will agree that considering the successful service and useful engagement that the Centre continues to provide that this cost remains money wisely spent.

I am very grateful to have such a supportive community both in word and in deed as well as financially, which makes it possible to keep the Centre and its functions available and growing to meet future needs of spiritually searching people in the wider community.

Thanking you all and really looking forward to another joyful year of activities.

Joe Vandermeer

Treasurer's Report

Joel Duckworth, Treasurer

The summary of the Society's Income and Expenditure for the year shows a surplus of current year earnings amounting to \$857,285 (2022 surplus \$201,401). The main contributor to this surplus was the increase in value of investment properties. However, it was also reported that the Warakirri equities fund experienced a loss in value compared to the same period in the previous year. The loss is attributed to general market volatility and has fluctuated by the same amount up and down over the last few years.

The general bookkeeping and payroll functions are all handled by Benkorp. Debra Thompson works closely with them on the day-to-day reconciliation, payments and payroll. Joe Vandermeer does the same for all the Swedenborg Centre related items and payroll. LBW and Partners are our auditors, and they audit all the accounts from Benkorp.

We continue to generate income from a spread of income earning assets. These include:

- Brookvale and Mosman commercial properties (currently fully tenanted)
- An ethical diversified share fund called Warakirri Charitable Equities
- A cash-based share fund also from Warakirri

- A commercial mortgage loan to Bolden Pty Ltd (managed by Charlie Zarb)

Other income comes from offertories, distributions from the William Moore Estate, book sales and donations (which includes income from the hire of the Church Hall).

Our expenses are primarily employee benefits (salary / wages), church & manse property maintenance, investment management costs, and admin & compliance.

We also support New Church College at an annual rate of \$60,000.

We are constantly managing our cashflow position to ensure we are able to meet our commitments.

Joel Duckworth (Treasurer)

15 January 2023

