



February
22

Sunday
11:00

ROSEVILLE NEW CHURCH

FEBRUARY 2026

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord.
“They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give
you a future and a hope.”

(Jeremiah 29:11)

Directory

Society Minister

Rev. Howard Thompson

Officers

Secretary

Graham Hall

Treasurer

Joel Duckworth

Church Officer

Debra Barratt Thompson

Sunday Service -

The Roseville New Church holds a twice-monthly service of worship the 1st and 3rd Sunday at 10:00am. The first Sunday of each month includes an opportunity to partake of the Holy Supper.

Sunday Social Hour -

After every service we have tea and coffee, an opportunity to meet socially, sometimes more formally.

Calendar - *Included*

The Swedenborg Centre -

The Centre is generously supported by the Sydney Society of the New Church and provides an independent and relaxing place to meet and discuss a personal approach to finding spiritual meaning. The Centre has a wide range of study materials, Swedenborg's works, and books by supporting authors. The Centre and its director Joe Vandermeer can be reached on phone (02) 9416 2812 or email info@swedenborg.com.au Opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm. More events details at www.swedenborg.com.au The Centre can also be used to answer enquiries about the New Church, its literature and its teachings.

The Lord's Divine Providence is present within the smallest details of a person's life; for there is only one source of life, namely the Lord, from whom we derive our being, life, and action.

~ Arcana Coelestia ~

#10774

Roseville New Church Newsletter

Issued by the Sydney Society of the New Church Established in 1875
4 Shirley Road, Roseville, N.S.W. 2069
Church Office phone: (02) 9416 7026

Minister's e-mail : revhathompson@gmail.com
On Facebook – Roseville New Church

February 2026

In This Issue

- **Truth is Hard, Falsity is Easy**
- **Swedenborg Centre News - Back to it!**
- **Departures**
- **Bondi Reflection**
- **NCIA Retreat 2026 Report**
- **AGM Announcement**

Spiritual Shorts

Our minister, Rev. Howard Thompson, shares weekly videos on his YouTube channel, Spiritual Shorts. The channel has recently completed its third evolution and is reaching a growing audience well beyond our local community. Each week features a 5-minute Sunday message summary, a 1-minute inspirational reflection, and a deeper exploration of Heaven and Hell. If you haven't already, take a look!



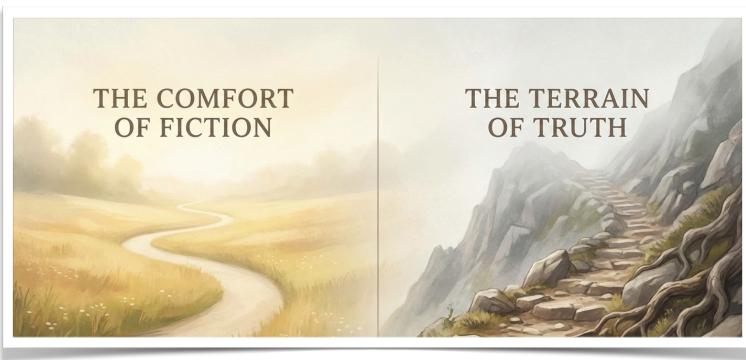
Spiritual Shorts YouTube Channel:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsrICJGeGmrnXVawn_Y7UQA

Truth Is Hard. Falsity Is Easy.

"When it comes to uniting people, fiction enjoys two inherent advantages over the truth. First, fiction can be made as simple as we like, whereas the truth tends to be complicated..."— Yuval Harari

Truth isn't a Feeling

Harari's insight speaks to something we all instinctively know: we prefer tidy answers to messy truths. We like simple explanations, stories that make us FEEL secure, FEEL grounded and FEEL safe—even if they're not entirely true or grounded in reality. Truth, by contrast, is complicated. It demands more of us.



Most importantly, for a spiritual life, **truth isn't a feeling**. It requires patience, humility, and a willingness to be challenged. The process of seeking truth means questioning not only what

we're told but also what we already believe. That's where **confirmation bias** enters the conversation.

Recognise your Biases or be Controlled by Them

You've likely heard the term. At its core, **confirmation bias** refers to our tendency to seek out, favour, and interpret information in ways that confirm our existing beliefs. But this bias isn't a simple, one-size-fits-all problem. **Psychologists and science communicators have identified numerous ways confirmation bias can manifest**—such as interpreting evidence selectively, only

remembering facts that support our views, or surrounding ourselves with people who reinforce our beliefs.

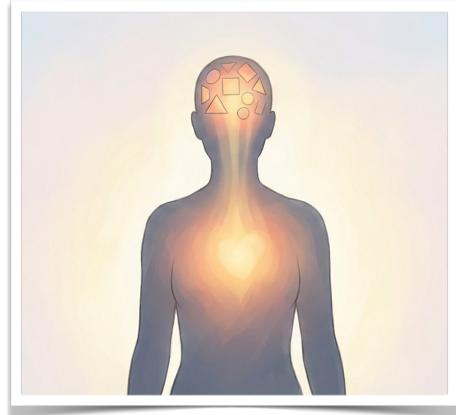
In fact, **some thinkers have cataloged as many as 14 or more variations in how biases reinforce what we already want or expect to be true.** These aren't formally defined categories in academic psychology, but they do reflect the depth and variety of our cognitive blind spots. Examples include biases based on what we expect, what we desire, or what will make us look good to others. The point is: **we are wired to protect our beliefs, not to question them.**

Long before confirmation bias was named in psychology,

Emanuel Swedenborg described something even deeper. In Divine Providence #195, he teaches that **our deepest love—our “life’s love”—determines what we see as true and good.** He writes:

“We call ‘good’ whatever we feel as pleasant because of the love of our volition, and we call ‘true’ whatever we therefore sense as appealing because of the wisdom of our discernment... Because of the pleasure of evil and the appeal of falsity, we are quite capable of calling them good and true, and of believing it.”

In other words, **our affections—what we love—shape our sense of what is true.** We don't merely hold beliefs.



We want to believe them. And that want influences what we accept, what we reject, and how we interpret the world.

Even more sobering, Swedenborg writes that evil spirits flow into our cravings and false beliefs, feeding our distortions until we become captive to them. It's a spiritual warning: **we may end up loving what is false, calling it true, and building our lives around it.**

Swedenborg consistently affirms that **our will (our love) and our understanding (our thoughts) must work together**, but the will leads. If our loves are disordered, our thinking becomes distorted too. He writes:

“Any wisdom that is not united to our love seems like wisdom, but it is not; and any love that is not united to our wisdom seems like wisdom's love even though it is not. Each gets its essence and its life from the other in mutual fashion.”

(Divine Love and Wisdom #39)

This insight is key: **We can “know” the truth and still reject it—because we don’t love it.** This is why the spiritual life isn’t just about learning what’s right. It’s about becoming the kind of person who wants what is right.

So, What Can We Do?

Acknowledge our limits.

We all have biases. That’s not a flaw—it’s part of being human. But spiritual growth begins when we admit those biases and ask God for help to see more clearly.

Examine our Loves

Ask: “Why do I want this to be true?” Is it pride? Comfort? Reputation? The answer may uncover what’s really ruling our heart.

Seek Truth with Humility

If our will is turned toward the good—toward love of the Lord and neighbour—then we are gradually opened to deeper truths. That's the foundation of faith.

Live the Truth we Know

When we put truth into practice, even in small ways, our capacity to see and love deeper truth grows.

Spiritual life is not about being right all the time. It's about being willing to be shown. Willing to grow. Willing to be led. Truth is hard—because it demands that we surrender our illusions and reorient our loves.

But the reward is freedom.

“You shall know the truth,” the Lord said, “and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32)



Let's not settle for comforting fiction. Instead, let us desire the truth—even when it's complicated, even when it challenges us. Because in the end, truth is not merely something we think—it is something we become. And if what we love as truth is actually falsity, then that falsity shapes who we are.

Howard

* * * * *

Swedenborg Centre News

After a well-deserved holiday and the NCIA Retreat, Joe is due back in the Centre on Monday 02 February. Our Newsletter update, however, may need another month, so

please check the website for details of all upcoming events and Zoom links:swedenborg.com.au.

If you're planning to visit the Centre, it's always good to send an email beforehand to joe@swedenborg.com.au as there may be occasional events which are run remotely, which makes it hard to offer you that free coffee.

Of course, when you visit be certain to ask Joe to tell you of his recent visit to Tasmania and whether or not he encountered any devils.

Wishing you all the very best.

Howard

* * * * *

Departures

An Announcement from the Secretary

At the December meeting of the Committee, Howard let us know that around the middle 2026, he will be answering a call to serve in a General Church role in the US. Howard spoke very much in the terms of his letter, attached.

The Committee is thankful to the Lord for the time Howard and Debra have spent – and have yet to spend - with us, through a very challenging period of change both for the church and for the world. We will miss them, but we fully appreciate the reasons for their difficult decision, and all of us wish them only the best for their future lives and service to the Lord.

Graham Hall, SSNC Secretary



Rev. Howard A. Thompson
4 Shirley Road
Roseville NSW 2069
AUSTRALIA
revhathompson@gmail.com
+61 (0)432 357 475

19 December 2025

Sydney Society of the New Church
Members and Friends
% Graham Hall
4 Shirley Rd.
Roseville NSW 2069

Dear SSNC Members and Friends,

When I first arrived in Roseville in 2018, it was after a long and at times difficult search for a new minister. Eventually, I was “found” in the UK, serving a society of the General Church of the New Jerusalem. The GC agreed to “loan” me to Roseville for a period of five years.

Well, as the Lord often does, He had other plans. Those five years turned into seven and a half, and I can honestly say they have been some of the most meaningful years of our lives. This society and the Roseville community have become a spiritual home for us in ways we never expected. And we are deeply grateful.

Recently, however, the General Church has reached out and asked me to return to service in the U.S. After prayerful reflection, and with some sadness, I have accepted this call. There are still many details to work out, but Debra and I will likely be departing in June.

Part of what has shaped our decision is Debra’s growing desire to be closer to family. After 14 years of living and serving abroad, she’s increasingly feeling the pull of home—especially to be near our daughter Chelsea, her mother who is now in her 80s, and her three sisters, all of whom live within a few hours of one another. While she has deeply loved our life and community here, the distance from family has become more and more deeply felt.

Rt. Rev. Peter Buss, Jr. will be attending the NCIA camp next month and will be spending a few days in Sydney before the camp. Bishop Buss will be meeting with the Church Committee to discuss the opportunities for the General Church to continue to support the society after our departure.

Please know that the decision to leave Sydney was as difficult as the decision to accept the call to Sydney. This church has a strong heart and a faithful mission, and I trust the Lord will continue to lead it into the future.

May the Lord bless you and keep you..

Sincerely,

Rev. Howard A. Thompson



“A Presence of Heaven” Reflections on Shabbat After Bondi

I write this on Saturday morning (20 December 2025), less than a week after the horrific anti-Semitic attack at a Jewish community gathering on the first night of Hanukkah at Bondi Beach.

As a Christian pastor—especially within the unique tradition of Swedenborgianism—I want to begin by asking a question I hope you’ll sit with:

When you go to church this weekend, or [when you attended at] Christmas, how many rings of security do you pass through before you reach the sanctuary?

This past Sunday evening, my wife and I went to bed with only the first faint alerts of the Bondi attack pinging through our phones. By Monday morning, the full and devastating truth was known. The images, the horror, the heartbreak—unmistakable. That such terror—so common in other parts of the world—had found its way to our own shores felt like a tearing of the fabric that holds our peaceful, pluralistic society together.

Over the past year, I’ve attended several Australian Citizenship Ceremonies—my own included. At each one, speaker after speaker affirmed that Australia is a place where people of many faiths live side by side in peace,

where “love thy neighbour” is not just spoken, but lived out in quiet, everyday ways. What happened last Sunday is not only a violation of public peace—it is a violation of our spiritual calling as human beings.

In the days that followed, I heard a phrase repeated by many Australians: “This is not who we are.” And to make that truth visible, people gathered in a uniquely Australian way—through a paddle-out at Bondi Beach to honour the victims and reclaim the space with love, unity, and defiance of hate.

For my part, by noon on Monday, I had reached out to Rabbi Nicole at one of the synagogues closest to our church. I expressed my heartbreak and asked if I might quietly attend Friday’s Shabbat service—not to speak, but simply to be a silent, prayerful expression of love for the neighbour across faiths. Rabbi Nicole welcomed me warmly.

Returning to my earlier question—how many rings of security do you expect at your church this weekend? As my



wife and I approached the synagogue, we passed through three distinct layers of security. Once inside, we were warmly received. Reserved seats had been set aside for us, and a board member kindly sat with us to guide us through the service. To my relief, we were not alone. Seated near us were Catholic, Uniting, and Anglican clergy, as well as members of parliament and local mayors—each present to bear witness, to stand in solidarity.

Shabbat Shalom



Throughout the service, I was reminded again and again of the Jewish people's profound love and reverence for the Word of God. Emanuel Swedenborg writes in *Divine Providence* 260:

"Jewish people have been cared for and spread around much of the world for the sake of the Word in its original tongue. They revere this more than Christians do; and the Lord's divine nature is present there in every detail... The presence of the Lord and heaven takes place wherever the Word is read reverently."

That reverence was deeply felt on Friday night. The prayers, the songs, the reading of Torah—all felt like a tether to something holy and enduring.

Yet I cannot help but think: while God—Adonai—has cared for the Jewish people as they've been scattered around the world, humanity has not. We have too often failed to uphold the sacred charge of neighbourly love. The work of true religion—of drawing us nearer to God and closer to each other—remains urgent.

As we approach Christmas, may we reflect not only on the light coming into the world, but also on how we can be that light—especially in the face of darkness, division, and hate. Shalom, and peace be with all people of goodwill.

Rev. Howard A. Thompson
Roseville New Church



NCIA Retreat 2026 Report

In the weeks leading up to this year's NCIA Retreat 2026, I was watching my weather app to see what Alexandra, QLD had in store for us. For several weeks, every time I checked, it said it was going to rain—all day, every day—for the entirety of our stay at Alexandra Park.

Well, I should have remembered my old nickname for weather forecasters from my sailing days: **“Weather-Guessers.”** The weather turned out to be fantastic—albeit a little hot and humid. But hey, we *were* in Queensland after all!

David Moffat gave two presentations. The first, *Making Your Voice Heard*, explored how to communicate in ways that invite genuine listening—from understanding what makes others receptive, to choosing words sensitively and engaging through thoughtful questions and stories. Drawing on parables and real-life experiences, David encouraged attendees to reflect on language, empathy, and the power of silence.

In his second talk, David had our heads spinning with *what AI is* and *how to use it with confidence*—even if you’re not a tech expert. He shared several ways he’s using AI to streamline his work and offered practical strategies to avoid common pitfalls. We walked away with tools to become more confident AI users.

Darren Brunne modelled the Brisbane Church's monthly *Sacred Circle* service by walking us through a line-by-line look at the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30). He placed special emphasis on how each of us manifests all three servants in different aspects of our spiritual lives.

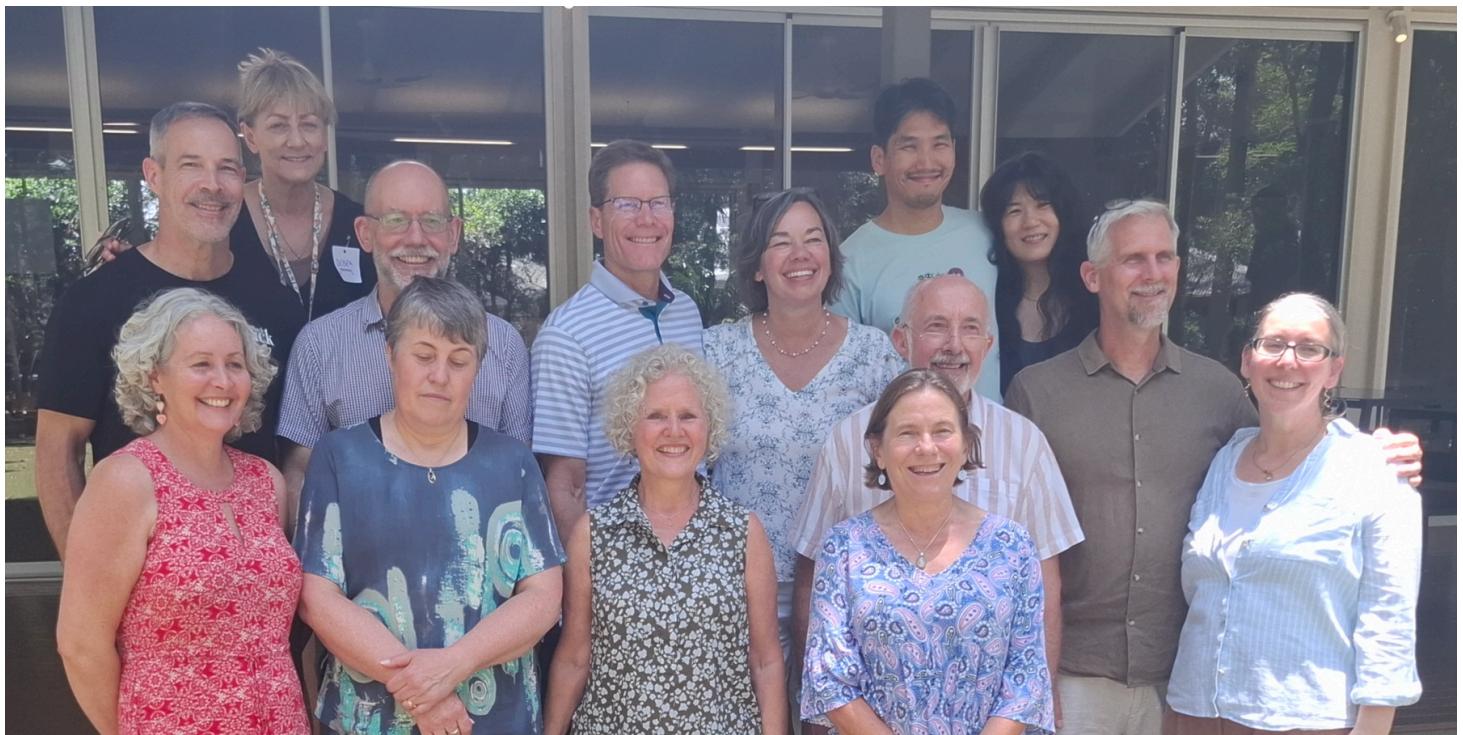
Sarah Walker gave two engaging and powerful talks. The first, *Waking Up in the Spiritual World*, took us on a journey through what happens after we die. It was especially memorable thanks to several children who helped dramatise this process of spiritual awakening—fun and moving for all ages.



Sarah's second presentation explored the profound question of what it truly means when the Bible says, "*The Word became flesh.*" Many attendees came away with a renewed understanding and a deeper appreciation for the Word and its embodiment in our lives.

Joe Vandermeer asked, *Why Sacred Geometry?* and then guided us through a visually and intellectually rich presentation exploring what makes some geometry "sacred." He explained why the subject fascinates him, shared key principles, and showed examples of his own sacred geometry work.

Michelle Heldon and **Angela Caldwell** did a fantastic job engaging the children and young people in a wide variety of activities—the kind you'd hope for on a Sunshine Coast holiday: pool time, beach time, creative time, and good old-fashioned games.



HyunJin Yang gave a thoughtful and insightful presentation to the general audience on what it means to be *“separated from the Lord.”* He shared a range of meanings that this phrase can take on in our lives and spiritual states. HyunJin also spoke with the young people, and while I didn’t sit in on that session, I heard glowing reviews afterward. With a full year now behind him as Pastor of the Hurstville New Church, it was encouraging to see how fully HyunJin has grown into the role—no doubt with much support from his wife, YoungHee.

Ros Taylor invited us into a study of Deborah, the only female judge mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (Judges 4–5). Deborah, known for judging under a date palm tree, prophesied that Barak would lead the Israelites in a great battle against the Canaanites under Sisera’s command. It was a powerful look at courage, leadership, and divine calling.

We were especially fortunate to have **Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.** and his wife **Teresa** join us this year. Peter is the

Executive Bishop of the General Church of the New Jerusalem. While he and Teresa have visited Australia before, this was their first time attending camp in many years.

Peter, now seven years into his role, presented a vision for the future of the General Church—one focused on empowering people to serve the Church in meaningful, inspired ways. His message, grounded in Isaiah’s words *“Here I am! Send me”* (Isaiah 6:8), reminded us that the Church grows when each of us is empowered to live our faith with purpose and joy. As Peter put it, **“You are needed.”**

Howard Thompson (me) also gave two rich presentations. His first looked at the spiritual depth of Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* and used it as a lens for understanding the true nature of the Divine. His second talk was a timely exploration of *how we know what is true in the age of AI*. Howard offered practical tips for assessing online content and invited us to think deeply about truth and discernment in a digital age.

While I didn’t personally attend the children’s sessions, I heard from more than one young voice that **Julian Duckworth’s** morning sessions were both engaging and delightful. Julian and the kids also created a massive representation of both the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. Julian later used this for a meaningful lesson that he shared with all of us. Well done, Julian and team!

And of course, I *cannot* close without mentioning the **ping-pong tournament**. With the absence of the much-missed, multi-tournament-winning Wayne Kasmar, the field was

wide open. Seizing the opportunity—and nearly decimating the competition—was **Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.**, who walked away with the trophy. His dominance may very well compel him to return for the NCIA Retreat 2027 to defend his title!

Speaking of **NCIA Retreat 2027**, keep an eye out for more information.

Stanwell Tops has already been reserved, and with the excitement still building from the last two post-COVID retreats, 2027 promises to be a *smashing* time.

This year's retreat was another joyful, spiritually rich, and heartwarming gathering. From inspiring talks and creative activities to shared meals and games, the NCIA Retreat 2026 was filled with connection, learning, and laughter. Deep thanks to all who helped make it happen, especially our extraordinary retreat coordinator, **Carolyn Heldon**. I truly do not know how this event would have gone without her steady hand and attention to detail. It was, in every way, a true family retreat.

Howard

* * * * *

Monday's Meditation with Kathryn Baker



Meditation



Just a reminder that Kathryn Baker has been guiding members of our community in meditation for many years. Recently there has been an upsurge in activity and Kathryn has returned to a regular Monday morning meditation held in the quiet of the church sanctuary.

In today's ever-changing, fast-paced and sometimes overwhelming life, meditation offers a gentle respite—an opportunity to re-centre, quiet the mind and become more aware of the comforting presence of the Divine. Even a short time of stillness can soften anxiety, renew focus, and deepen our capacity to love and serve.

If interested, feel free to join the group any Monday at 10:00am. If you'd like to speak with Kathryn before coming along, feel free to contact her at ph. 0410 166 482.



Minister's Contact Information and Office Hours

Rev. Howard A. Thompson

Office Hours: 11:00 am - 4.00 pm

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday

Email: revhathompson@gmail.com

Phone: 0432 357 475

The Lord is my shepherd, I have all that I need...Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

~ Psalm 23 ~

Sydney Society of the New Church
Annual General Meeting
22 February 2026 - 11:00am

The Sydney Society of the New Church (Roseville New Church) will hold its Annual General Meeting on Sunday 22 February at 11:00am. The meeting will be held in the church sanctuary following the 10:00am Service. All members are encouraged to attend. Remote attendance via Zoom is available, please email Howard (revhathompson@gmail.com) for a link.

Church Committee



February

2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.00am Service of Worship Including Holy Supper Rev. Howard A. Thompson		Bible Study 11.00	Swedenborg Readings 10am		Swedenborg Saturday 10am - 12pm	
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
		Swedenborg Readings 10am				
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
10.00am Service of Worship Rev. Howard A. Thompson		Swedenborg Readings 10am			Swedenborg Saturday 10am - 12pm	
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
10.00am Service of Worship Rev. Howard A. Thompson Rev. Howard A. Thompson SSNC AGM 11.30am		Swedenborg Readings 10am				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7



5
6
7