

## Parish Instruction 2025 — Swedish Church Australia Ltd

The Church of Sweden is an Evangelical-Lutheran denomination and an open national church. The Swedish Church Australia is a parish within the Church of Sweden. The parish operates in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. The parish belongs to the Diocese of Visby and is under its supervision. The Church Board's Council for the Church of Sweden Abroad has the assignment to promote the work.

The Swedish Church Australia is a living and beloved congregation with history and tradition, while also driving renewal, change and continually welcoming new people who make it their spiritual and social home. The parish's ambition is to be a spiritual and social community and meeting place. Together with all Christians we have the task of making God visible in the world. The Swedish parish aims to serve Swedes — temporary visitors, newly arrived and permanent residents in Australia and New Zealand. The language of activity is Swedish.

### 1 Presentation of the parish

A Christian parish consists primarily of people. People who, to the best of their ability and based on their circumstances, try to live according to Jesus' example and mission.

We are all on a journey through the various changes of life. We believe in the good encounter — the meeting between people and the meeting with God. Our vision, our task and challenge as a parish is to meet people and offer a way into church and parish. We want to be an open and inclusive community. We want to share and listen to people's longings to meet, both in good conversation and dialogue, in a safe environment.

As a Swedish parish on the other side of the world we need to be aware of these challenges and dare to address what is not always easy, dare to talk about what hurts and dare to meet people in the midst of the crisis, struggle or culture clash that for many occurs at some point while far away. As a parish we want to be a safe harbor, a home far from home that can shelter human vulnerability and exposure and demonstrate God's love and care. We want to welcome and tend to people's needs for existential, spiritual and emotional closeness and security.

This means that our parish serves as a second home for many, where the church can replace the community that is provided in other contexts in Sweden. Worship life is lively and central; parish fellowship stands at the center and is a natural starting point for the church's life and ministry. In our parish many opportunities for fellowship are offered in the midst of people's everyday life and weekends. Work, school and interests take much of people's time and energy, but our parish is experienced by many as a Swedish oasis. We celebrate worship and invite people to many kinds of activities such as devotions, evening prayers and candle lighting, café, children's groups,

lunches and Bible discussions. We have meetings for the elderly and for young people, a book club, choir and a rich parish life.

As with many overseas parishes, faith, fellowship and culture are in focus in a way that requires the church as a meeting place to be balanced to meet different needs. We see social activities as an aspect of parish life and as a connection to Swedish culture, where the church functions as a natural meeting place.

This means that there are many wishes and expectations within and of our parish and our activities because the parish is an obvious cultural bearer. We have active work to create increased understanding of what the church's and parish's task is. A recurring question is how the church opens up a context so that the fellowship does not become only a Swedish social association that preserves certain Swedish traditions. It is an ever-present question.

An important area of work for the parish has been, and which we want to continue to develop, to create more contact points and to reach the Swedes who have not yet found the parish. One way to do this is to invest time and resources in communication and information to make the parish visible and to facilitate people's contact with us.

We therefore actively work to provide targeted information to our different target groups about where we are and what one can do at the church. We use our digital newsletter, website and social media for daily information about the parish's identity and activities. This is something we want to devote more time to as it is important to be present and visible where people are. We also want the possibility of individual conversations to be made clearer.

We see that more needs to be done for the age group 6–18 years and for young adults. The large number of Swedish youths who are present in Australia do not come to the parish and many in that group are not aware that there is a Swedish church in Australia. But as the parish encourages more young volunteers to engage in the daily work, we have begun to see changes. More and more young people are coming to the parish, and we experience an increased interest in volunteering. Many of our parishioners who immigrated to Australia in the 1960s and 1970s are starting to age. They have been very active in parish work over the years but now do not have the strength to help in the same way as before. It is important to continue investing in children and youth and their families, while at the same time balancing the older parishioners' need to feel seen and welcome.

## History of the parish

The Church of Sweden has been present in Australia since the beginning of the 20th century. The seamen's church early on was characterized by traditional church activities but also a strong diaconal and social focus. Today the focus of parish work has shifted from the seamen's church to

parish work with new target groups.

The Swedish Church in Melbourne was established in 1909 and settled in its current premises in 1956, in Toorak House, the state of Victoria's original governor's residence. The location holds considerable cultural and historic value and is accessible to the surrounding community. Here there is a church hall, kitchen and café space, children's corner, office, library, sauna, large garden with playground, pool and staff housing.

The Swedish Church in Sydney was formed in 1988. Between 1970 and 2004 Melbourne's vicars regularly held services in Sydney. From the early 2000s the parish was built up with its own premises with worship services, ceremonies, devotions, Bible studies, pastoral care, youth activities, children's hours and staffed by a vicar, volunteers and interns. Membership increased along with visitor numbers. Since 2017 the activity has largely lain dormant, but the vicar makes regular visits to lead worship, make home visits, take part in various decision meetings and for pastoral care.

The Swedish Church in Brisbane has been active since the late 1950s and was part of the seamen's church. The activity, mostly run by volunteers, includes lay-led services, social activities, home and hospital visits. The vicar makes regular visits to lead worship, make home visits, take part in various decision meetings and for pastoral care.

## Parishioners

Our primary target groups are Swedes permanently residing, newly arrived Swedes (many with families), contract employees, students, researchers, young people with work visas (so-called backpackers) and tourists. The Swedish parish addresses all these different groups. The pastoral area covers the whole of Australia and New Zealand.

The parish has over 750 members but is a spiritual and social home for far more. The parish receives up to 65,000 visits each year.

Most of our parish members and visitors do not live nearby. We meet permanent residents, newly arrived Swedes and families with children, au pairs, contract employees, students, young people with work visas and tourists in our daily activities. The parish is a unique place that conveys joy and security to so many.

## Geographical area

Parish work in Australia is carried out through the permanent activities in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. The majority of parish work is conducted in Melbourne with regular visits to Sydney and Brisbane by the vicar. The Swedish Church Australia and its vicar also have responsibility for

visiting places such as Canberra, Perth, Adelaide and New Zealand.

## 2 Environmental analysis

Being in a new country and culture often means understanding oneself in a new way; one's own history, culture, values and theology become clearer in contrast with the new country's. It can be a difficult balancing act as a Swede to navigate Australian society, where the culture reflects and is still governed by patriarchal and hierarchical values, where relationships are rarely equal. It is not easy to be a child in a culture focused on achievement, where children's abilities and successes are measured in relation to others.

There are several factors that challenge and affect our parish work and our ability to fulfill our mission as a church abroad. Some factors we cannot influence. Visa regulations, exchange rates, pandemics, employment opportunities, as well as economy and lifestyle naturally affect how Swedes travel and work. We know that Australia is one of Swedes' favorite destinations and Swedish immigration is increasing according to official figures.

According to the most recent census conducted in 2016, there were 9,554 Swedes born in Sweden living in Australia, an increase of 12.5% compared to the previous census in 2011. Most live in New South Wales (3,425), Queensland (2,183), Victoria (2,057) and Western Australia (1,023), South Australia (463), ACT (184), Tasmania (132) and Northern Territory (81). In the census, over 50,000 people reported having Swedish heritage (Department of Social Services). In addition, there is the category of 'temporary residents' (contract employees, researchers and corporate employees) and all the young people who have a working holiday visa, as well as tourists and students.

Australia is the third most popular country for Swedish students after the USA and the UK. Today it is permanent residents, newly moved Swedes and their families, au pairs, contract employees, students, researchers as well as young people with work visas (backpackers) and tourists who make up the largest groups of Swedes in Australia. Each year approx. 70,000 Swedish tourists also visit Australia, which means there is a great variety in both age groups and socio-economic background among those we meet in our activities. This results in a wide age structure and we meet people of all ages in our activities.

## 3 Pastoral program

### Worship

*The goal is to increase engagement and participation in worship services.  
We want the parish's worship life to be central in our activities — a place  
where we meet to be together with God and with one another.*

We celebrate main services with Holy Communion several Sundays each month and on ecclesiastical holidays. In addition, Danish, Norwegian and Finnish services are held. Besides this there are Swedish lay-led services. It remains a challenge for the parish to increase the number of worship participants and to involve more people. Therefore, we continue to work actively to give services a larger presence on social media as well as advertising at the church and in other open activities to clarify our ecclesiastical and spiritual profile. Part of the strategic work is to engage families with children in worship life through weekday services, since it is difficult to get families to attend Sunday services.

The main language of activities is Swedish. Out of respect and consideration it is sometimes necessary to also use English, particularly at ceremonies.

We work strategically to hold more worship services in connection with various events and cultural holidays. Church rites are an important part of parish life. We encourage baptisms during our Sunday services to show that it is a concern for the whole congregation. We want to be an open, present church where there is room for reflection, faith and commitment. A church that people have a positive relationship with and that they are happy to belong to. We want to be an inclusive church that is accessible to everyone.

- We want to continue to work on the design of services so that the parish's worship life is relevant to people of all ages.
- We want to continue to work on participation and voluntary engagement in the services.
- We want to work to meet the faith and longing that exists among those who participate.

## Teaching

*Our goal is to guide and help the Swedes  
whom the parish comes into contact with  
to be able to formulate and live their Christian faith in a relevant way.*

The principles that lead us toward the goal are that at each occasion we want to be a place where people feel there is an environment that encourages learning and spiritual development for all ages, that there are opportunities for teaching, conversation and reflection. The Swedish Church in Australia is an obvious cultural bearer.

The parish works toward this goal for children through various contexts that lead to close contact and good conversations about life's questions, Christian faith and grief, for example in connection with baptism, marriage and funerals in ways the children need and can absorb. The open preschool and children's hours are among the parish's most important meeting places where



children meet not only other children but also other families in the parish environment, and networks are strengthened and create opportunities for support and conversations on the children's terms. This also applies in other contexts such as café activities and meetings at the church that lead to conversations about spirituality, what it means to be a Christian and questions about the church in general. Cooperation with the Swedish School gives the parish an opportunity to convey Christian faith and Christian values based on children's everyday lives and circumstances. The connection between the church's teaching, Swedish holidays and other Swedish traditions becomes clear.

The parish works toward this goal for young people by creating contact and good conversations about life's questions, Christian faith and grief in connection with, for example, weddings, baptisms and funeral conversations even if it is someone else's baptism or funeral. This creates a good basis for reflections among younger people about significant life events. The parish offers confirmation every other year. Meetings at the church in connection with café activities and special groups that gather at the church lead to conversations about spirituality, what it means to be a Christian and questions about the church in general. The parish provides opportunities for young people to meet and discuss Christian faith, and for conversation and support. Pastoral care is a central opportunity for teaching elements when it comes to young people.

Marriage, baptism and funeral conversations create close contact and good conversations about life's issues, Christian faith and grief especially for adults. A church warden course is organized to encourage more people to take a more active responsibility for worship and development work. The parish council is a forum for teaching, not least in discussing objectives, direction, strategic work, worship development and reporting. It is important for continued good work and increases understanding of who the Swedish Church is, what it stands for and the parish council's understanding of its mission. The open preschool/children's hours are among the parish's most important meeting places for children's adults as their networks are strengthened and there is an opportunity for support and conversation based on their unique perspectives and conditions. Also, for adults, different meetings at the church are an important entry point to conversations about spirituality, what it means to be a Christian and questions about the church in general. The parish choir is seen as part of the church's teaching.

### Diaconal work (Diakonia)

*Practicing diaconal work is an important mission for the whole parish.*

*We want to convey support and care to people in need of spiritual, social and practical help.*

Our approach is characterized by openness and care around the individual person's needs, especially when life is exposed, complicated and fragile. In the diaconal approach there is a desire to meet people in life's various contexts and especially in vulnerable situations. We work for more people in the parish to feel involved in a joint and local responsibility. We remind and convey to each other that the belief that God is present — even in hardship — is what sustains and inspires

us to engage.

Treatment, attentiveness and mutual respect are important parts of the diaconal work. But also the belief that the people we meet have inherent resources, abilities and competence and that in that encounter we can help free their own strength.

We make home, hospital and prison visits. The vicar is available for pastoral conversations. We meet many who need short-term diaconal help. It can be about having gone astray during their journey, mental illness, having been subjected to a crime, being in hospital or prison. Relatives also ask for help in contacting family members and friends who are in Australia and not well. The parish regularly comes into contact with women exposed to domestic violence where the diaconal interventions often require emergency measures. We also meet many, above all young people, who feel homesick. Distances to family and friends in Sweden are large and many feel lonely and somewhat lost.

We see a continued challenge in being able to support diaconal needs. Many contact the parish for conversations and practical help. The parish's emergency accommodation is frequently used but it is a challenge to be able to help people more long term. We also come into contact with many elderly people who request more contact and visits. In the long run the parish needs to develop organized support for the educator and the vicar who often make home and hospital visits.

Many Swedes from other Australian states and from New Zealand contact the church in Melbourne and the vicar for talks and support. The parish therefore continues its active development work of digital diaconal care. Through this the parish continues to meet the demand for digital pastoral care and diaconal services.

## Mission

Mission is about making Christ known. In a way the whole activity around the Swedish Church can be described as missionary work. The parish's social fellowship is therefore central. We reach many and invest heavily in participation and community. The hope is that those who come to the church in various contexts experience an environment that creates curiosity about Christian faith.

It is about creating meeting places that strengthen faith, openness and hope. We would like to see more baptisms in the parish. One of our goals is to work to increase contact points with Swedes in Australia. It is about establishing contacts, relationships and creating trust for the church which is important for the parish's continued pastoral work.



## 4 Strategic conditions — finance and personnel

Economic sustainability is the work the parish does to run activities with a balance between financial success, social responsibility and environmental consideration.

The parish will be strongly affected over the coming ten-year period by economic uncertainty as a result of the larger changes that have begun. There are uncertainties regarding which premises will be available, how compensations and grants will look and to what extent the Church of Sweden Abroad will cover the costs that the parish has.

The parish has a long tradition of relative economic independence in Melbourne which is closely linked to the property. It allows larger events that also provide significant income; a condition that the other locations do not have access to. In Melbourne there is also access to housing which simplifies both recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers, something that is financially advantageous over time. Purchasing power among visitors in the different activity locations also differs, in Melbourne there is an older structure which results in higher purchasing power and in Sydney the visitors are characterized by younger backpackers and students who are generally less affluent.

A challenge for the parish is dependence on local membership fees and donations. This means that the financial situation can feel insecure as resources vary from year to year. The parish must constantly focus and prioritize based on the financial conditions that exist in meeting the different groups and people the parish encounters. The parish is responsible for various types of premises, with different degrees of responsibility. This means that the financial conditions vary greatly depending on which geographic part of the parish is being discussed. In Melbourne the parish's premises require large resources, and conscious long-term financial management is important. In Brisbane the parish requires less resources as the parish rents space in a local church for shorter periods. In Sydney the parish faces the task of re-establishing itself with everything that entails regarding, for example, premises.

According to operational agreements, staff are partly financed by grants from the Church of Sweden Abroad and partly by the parish itself. The parish has never been completely dependent on its grants from the Church of Sweden Abroad. It is essentially self-financed through donations, collections and membership fees. In addition to these, the parish has extensive sales and gatherings that generate income.

### Voluntary work

The parish has a parish council and many voluntary workers who help with daily activities. Our volunteers are indispensable. With their experience and knowledge, they constitute a valuable asset. They have a major influence on the parish, not least financially, where volunteers

contribute to a good economy through their commitment. Many individual volunteers also gladly sign up to live and work in the parish for shorter or longer periods. The age of volunteer workers varies. The parish works particularly to get more young people to engage in parish work. Many of our volunteers take great responsibility and our parish is largely carried by voluntarism. An important part of parish work is to enable the volunteers' faith and commitment to grow and develop.

## 5 Activities in other locations

The parish is located in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. The vicar is based in Melbourne but also has the responsibility to visit further locations within the Swedish Church in Australia and New Zealand. Annually the vicar visits Canberra, Perth and Auckland in order to hold worship, ceremonies, pastoral care, contribute to ecumenical cooperation and make home visits as well as to build networks with local Swedish-affiliated organisations such as consulates and community associations. The work also aims to maintain a Swedish representation from the Swedish Church in those places and thereby contribute to continuity and sustainable cooperation even in the longer term. Cooperation with the Norwegian Seamen's Church is of particular importance and significance in this work.

## 6 Cooperation with embassies, consulates and other organizations

Our parish has a good cooperation with the Swedish School, SWEA, Swedes in Sydney, Swedes Down Under, the Swedish Club and the Swedish-Australian Chamber of Commerce. There are many large Swedish companies represented in Australia such as Scania, Ikea, Volvo, Tetra Pak, Business Sweden, Ericsson and H&M but also businesses started in Australia by Swedes living locally. Our parish is in contact with about 20 such companies. We also have a well-functioning cooperation with various Nordic associations and companies as well as with the Swedish embassy in Canberra and the Swedish consulates in Australia.

The parish have a very good cooperation with the Swedish embassy. They inform people that the church is available as support and help in difficult situations. This also applies to the Swedish consulates in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth. The vicar in Melbourne has been in Australia for a long time and has a wide network. Many conversations are relayed through the embassy and consulates. The same applies to prison and hospital visits. The vicar is also available for conversations with staff.

The Swedish Church has been an official polling station in Melbourne for many years. The Church of Sweden in Melbourne has also hosted several exhibitions together with the embassy in the church premises, such as the exhibition about Raoul Wallenberg. In connection with consular conferences in Canberra, the Swedish church has been invited to participate but also to inform about the church's activities. The conferences also include crisis and disaster work. The Swedish

embassy in Canberra invites to a Christmas service each year, with a Lucia celebration at the embassy afterwards together with the Swedish School in Canberra. It is the vicar in the Swedish Church Australia who leads that service.

## 7 Ecumenism

The Swedish Church in Australia has good ecumenical cooperation with nearby congregations in both Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Joint services are celebrated each year with other local and Scandinavian churches. Each month the Swedish Church in Melbourne participates in local churches' ecumenical prayer meetings. During Lent joint study meetings are arranged. On Good Friday a traditional cross walk is held between the four local churches in Toorak, Melbourne.

Furthermore, regular meetings take place between the local vicars in Toorak in the four parishes for theological conversations, support and information. The parish also participates in World Day of Prayer in a special service with representatives from different churches. We are also part of one of the larger Lutheran schools' religious programs where we during their annual study visits tell about the Swedish Church and what we stand for.

Ecumenism also often occurs during church rites that take place in our parish when people from different backgrounds meet. The interest in what the Swedish Church thinks and believes in relation to other churches is great. Our open and accepting attitude is often appreciated. Cooperation with the Danish, Norwegian and Finnish churches works well and services are held every month in the different languages in the Swedish Church's premises. Norwegian, Danish and Finnish children's groups also meet every week at the church.

It is important to deepen ecumenical contacts and find possible and interesting joint projects and create understanding and knowledge between our parish and the other churches. The parish continuously works to safeguard, preserve and create collaborations and relationships with local churches in the area. Cooperation with the Nordic churches is well established, routines and contacts exist and cooperation is seen as a mutual commitment.

## 8 Child impact analysis

In the church's activities we perform child impact analyses when we make decisions. To assess whether a decision's consequences are positive or negative for children, we use the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child — the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention states that children are all people between 0 and 18 years of age.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has identified four basic principles in the Convention that guide interpretation: Non-discrimination (Article 2), The best interests of the child (Article 3), The right to life, survival and development (Article 6) and The right to be heard (Article 12).

The Church Order states that in Christian faith the child occupies a special position and therefore needs particular attention. In the work and decision-making, the parish strives to assess what consequences arise for the child.

Children's and young people's perspectives are taken into account in our parish instruction based on conversations with children and young people as well as staff and volunteers who have experience working with children and young people. To translate the child impact analyses into practical activities, the parish continues to continuously develop its work in this area.

The parish council and the program councils work to, at each council meeting, consider how upcoming decisions affect children and young people, and analyze what consequences the decision will have from a longer-term perspective. We relate to various principles such as:

- *We shall carry out child impact analyses of the decisions that are made.*
- *We continue to put children at the center of our activities.*

We relate to different questions such as:

- *Do we carry out activities for children and young people in the best possible way?*
- *Do we meet where children and young people are active?*
- *Based on age and conditions: do we create the right space for children and young people to participate in church life?*

***Our vision is that the spiritual fellowship  
— with God and with one another —  
shall inspire and give strength in all parts of our life and work.***

Approved by Diocese of Visby, the Chapter, December 11, 2025

Katja Lin

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