

WES Express

Monthly Newsletter of the Washington Ethical Society

April 2015

Upcoming Platforms – Join us at 11am

Sunday, April 5 "An Imperfect (Football) Savior" Amanda Poppei, Senior Leader. As we begin our monthly theme of Imperfection, Amanda will explore the imperfect life and work of RGIII, quarterback of the Washington football team—and how stories of perfection and brokenness continue to shape our lives. Music from pianist Perry Beider.

Sunday, April 12 "Well, Nobody's Perfect" Amanda Poppei, Senior Leader. How does imperfection—and our understanding of it—play into our personal relationships? How does it help us to show vulnerability, to connect with others, and to forgive? Music from the WES Chorus.

Sunday, April 19 "Coming of Age on a Warming Earth" Seth Bush. An organizer with the Beyond Coal Campaign at the Sierra Club shares experiences from his ongoing journey as a young person in the climate justice movement and how coming of age in a new era of global warming and extreme energy extraction has shaped the values of his generation. Music from the NASA singing group The Chromatics.

Sunday, April 26 "Spring Festival" Join us for our beautiful multigenerational celebration of spring, followed by our traditional potluck brunch! Music from the WES Chorus. This platform will include two baby dedications!

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The Washington Ethical Society is a humanistic congregation that affirms the worth of every person.

We strive through our relationships to elicit the best in the human spirit.

With faith in human goodness, we appreciate each person's unique capacities. We joyfully celebrate together and support each other through life. We nurture a sense of reverence and responsibility for each other and the earth.

We invite you to join our community. This month we are running a special "Path to Membership" program, see page 8.

ethicalsociety.org

March Theme: Imperfection

Amanda Poppei, Senior Leader

Imperfection. What a bummer, huh?

All around us, we see images that exhort us to perfection, or someone's version of it anyway. The cream that removes all wrinkles or redness. The living room furnished just so. The child's birthday cake, a symphony of color, with little tiny icing roses and Happy Birthday written in elegant, cursive script.

It's the cakes that get me. I love baking, and I have enough Martha Stewart in me to want my creations to look gorgeous. And sometimes they do. Or anyway, sometimes they did. These days, I do most of my baking with my children.

Children, it turns out, don't carry a series of Pinterest images in their heads. Children feel that the more sprinkles on a cookie, the more beautiful it is, whether or not those sprinkles are distributed in anything like an even pattern. Children seem to care more, actually, about the fun of baking and then the fun of eating than about how the product looks in between.

Weird, isn't it? Almost as though perfection isn't the goal.

Sometimes people ask me how I balance working and parenthood (side note about the fact that they never ask my husband this, and about how lucky I am to have a flexible job with new parent leave, sick leave, and a salary that covers good childcare). I sometimes say that the thing that makes it work – because it is a lot, sometimes, to manage the evening meetings and the Daisy troop, the report deadlines and the snuggle time – is that I have lowered my standards significantly. Believe me, baking is only one example. As I write this, my living room exists in a state that would never have passed muster 7 years ago. Part of this, of course, is a shifting in priorities, a focus on the most immediate needs in my life. But part of it is a bigger learning, I hope. A realization that no matter whether we have no time at all or all the time in the world, sometimes the messy imperfect process of life is more important than the photo-ready finished product.

So here's hoping that this month, as we explore Imperfection, we will remember and remind each other about the gifts it brings to our lives...even as we occasionally mourn, or at least laugh at, the lopsided cakes we have created.



Amanda Poppei,
Senior Leader

*Ways to engage with
April's theme:
Imperfection*

April platforms

Story for All Ages:
Wabi Sabi,
Mark Reibstein

Share the Plate:
Sierra Club of Maryland

From Your Board of Trustees

by Lindsay Lucke, Member, WES Board of Trustees

Amanda's Sabbatical

Amanda's contract provides for a month of sabbatical for every year she is with us. At this point, she is due seven months of time away, and the Board has approved her request for three months, which will start after the first Sunday in May. Amanda will be back with us for platform on the first Sunday of August.

1. WES is not its leader. It's good for us and it is good for Amanda to experience the distinction.
2. We – the members – are WES. Having to manage without Amanda for a little while will strengthen our community.
3. Amanda's renewal. She works so hard for us. A break in the demands on her will help her be her best self for the long run.

The tradition of sabbaticals in professions that are not 40-hour-a-week jobs recognizes that breaks for renewal are important. There is a TED talk about a design firm that takes a full year off every seven years http://www.ted.com/talks/stefan_sagmeister_the_power_of_time_off. The head of the firm makes a good case for the increased creativity that results.

Each Board meeting we spend some time reviewing the work that Amanda and her team are doing to prepare for this time of renewal. A lot of effort is going into planning for platforms. We are figuring out how to strengthen our pastoral care activities to meet most of the needs that will arise while she is gone. Amanda will respond to extreme needs – a death or life-threatening illness – and she will arrange for clergy to be available to help the pastoral care team if needed.

There will be a brochure explaining the system that will be in place for her absence.

Our Increasing Platform Attendance

The Board is noticing, as you probably are too, that the hall on Sunday mornings is sometimes pretty full. If the room is more than 80 percent full, visitors think there is no room for newcomers. We are increasing the number of chairs we put out and have started to think about how to organize the room to seat more people comfortably.

We want to make WES available to all who want what we have to offer. That may require some changes, which I hope we will make with open hearts.

WES News

"But We'll Miss You!" – Sabbatical Update

by Amanda Poppei, WES Senior Leader

As we get closer to May 3 (my last Sunday at WES before my sabbatical starts), I'm hearing from more and more of you: Q: How long is the sabbatical? Q: What will you be doing? Q: How can I contact you while you're away?

A: It's three months. I'll be back speaking at platform on Sunday, August 2. A: I'll be recharging and renewing, walking and gardening and deepening my mindfulness practice, connecting with family, reading and thinking and writing, and preparing to come back to you better able to serve you. A: You can't.

Well, that's not entirely true. A team of three people--a Board member, staff member, and member of my sabbatical team--will have the capacity to call me back from sabbatical in the case of a major challenge at WES that requires my presence, or in the case of a significant pastoral concern. But in all likelihood, you won't see me or hear from me during those three months. In the March newsletter I detailed who will be taking care of WES in my absence (short version: the wonderful staff and volunteers that always take care of WES, with a few extra supports and plans in place to help). In this newsletter piece, I'd like to explore why it's traditional, and a good practice, for clergy to have sabbatical time away from the congregation they serve.

Of course it might be easy to imagine why it's good for the clergy person! I feel so lucky to have this time to renew, to "reset" my brain. I'm aware of how much adrenaline pumps through my body as I respond to pastoral concerns, speak on Sundays, help WES to navigate challenging periods, and just manage our many programs. I am planning a lot of quiet time during my sabbatical, and especially time outdoors, moving my body and working specifically on meditation and mindfulness. Even though I work to preserve my day off each week, I know that I never really disconnect from the work and worry of WES--even a weeklong vacation doesn't quite do that. I hope to return from my time away feeling grounded and centered, ready to work energetically and with a deep sense of connection to my spiritual and ethical core.

But how about for WES? Is the sabbatical *only* a gift to me, and mostly just a challenge for you? I actually think a congregation benefits from experiencing significant time without its clergy. It allows you all to know, really know, that you are complete and whole without me: I am honored to serve you, but WES existed long before me and will exist long after I'm gone. Remembering that as a congregation can be both empowering and reassuring. The separation time also allows both of us to grow and change, to imagine new ways of being that we can't quite see when we're together. I expect that WES will look different when I come back--in fact, I hope it does. We may discover, on my return, that both the congregation and I want to explore something new together. WES will not be in stasis, or in a holding pattern, while I'm away. It will be growing, changing, living during that time, and doing it differently than it could while I am there.

Finally, what does it really mean that you "won't hear from me?" Aside from the odd Facebook post, it really does mean just what it sounds like. Email sent to

my account during that time will be deleted (and the sender will receive a message directing them to other people who could help). I won't be checking in at the office, or sidling up to people in the grocery store asking how it's going! Of course, if you see me around town, I'll be so happy to see you and say hello...but if you try to get me to give an opinion on WES business I'll probably smile blithely and gaze toward the sunset. I have complete faith in the folks at WES that will be leading in my absence, and I'll be excited to discover what has happened at WES when I return.

And that's the key to the whole thing, isn't it? I'll certainly miss you, and then I'll return on August 2, ready to tell you everything I learned and experienced while I was away, and eager to hear from you what you have learned and experienced.

Immigration Action of the Month

CASA of Maryland offers a workshop and opportunity to help immigrants apply for citizenship every month. Those of us who volunteer find it an uplifting way to connect with some of our immigrant neighbors. First you will be briefed on how to help aspiring citizens to fill out the paperwork. Then you will assist one or more applicants. No need to speak Spanish. Note the April workshops are in Baltimore or Hyattsville. Here are the dates: Sunday, April 12, 2015, 11am - 4:00pm @ CASA Baltimore and Saturday, April 25, 2015, 9:00am - 2:00pm @ CASA Multicultural Center:

CASA's Multicultural Center
8151 15th Avenue
Hyattsville, MD 20783

Let Molly Gavin at mgavin@wearecasa.org know you are coming. She can answer any questions. o. **240.491.5723** c. **505.660.7233**.



Auction Team Open House

The Auction Team is gearing up for this year's event! If you are interested in helping with the Auction in any way – large or small – please join us for an open house on Saturday April 18 from 2:00 – 4:00 pm at Sarah Morris' house.

Contact: Sarah Morris se.morris@verizon.net

If you haven't volunteered for the auction previously, come see what opportunities are available. If you are a returning member, come brainstorm your role for this year. Once you meet the crew, you'll want to join the Most Fun Committee at WES!

If you are interested in helping but can't come to the Open House, please let Sarah know (and save the date: The Auction will be held on November 7.

WES Welcomes First-Ever Delegation from El Rodeo

Thanks to the hard work of the WES Global Connections committee, a delegation from our sister community, El Rodeo, came to Washington in March for a jam-packed week of activities. The delegation included Vidalina Morales and Elvis Zavala of El Rodeo, and Cristina Starr, WES's long-time in-country guide in El Salvador.

Global Connections organized a **rally against gold mining in El Salvador on Thursday, March 19**, and to call attention to a secret tribunal known as ICSID (International Centre for Investment Disputes). ICSID will determine if Pacific Rim's interests trump the environmental concerns of the Salvadoran government and people. More than 100 people came to the World Bank to protest and to distribute educational flyers to employees. Joining WES at the rally were a wide range of organizations, among them the AFL-CIO, the Teamsters, Institute for Policy Studies, CASA, Oxfam America, CISPES, and Sisters of Mercy-Institute Justice Group.



Sixty people turned out on **Saturday, March 21 for an awards ceremony to honor our Salvadoran guests**. Cristina and Elvis were given an award for their work with Radio Victoria, a youth-run grassroots station, and Vidalina was honored for her work with ADES, an economic development organization, and for her anti-mining efforts. Shown here are Global Connections (GC) team members and our Salvadoran friends. From left: Lola Skolnik, Vidalina, Cristina, Peggy Goetz (front), Karen Storms, Elvis, Ross Wells, Justin Taft-Morales, and Susan Runner. Not shown are GC members Pam Williams and Bill d'Alelio.



Lola and Steve Skolnik provided home hospitality to the delegation. Here Lola hawks t-shirts to raise money for Radio Victoria.

At a **packed platform and potluck lunch on Sunday, March 22**, WES members warmly embraced our Salvadoran friends. After lighting the community candle, Cristina (shown to the right) spoke about the importance of our sister community relationship.



Peggy led off the platform address, explaining WES's role in El Salvador as one of "accompaniment." "We see ourselves as the learners, and the people of El Rodeo as the experts about their own reality," she said.

Jean Rohe (left, shown with Elvis), of the Brooklyn Ethical Society, provided lovely music, including some songs in Spanish.



Every year, Susan, left, gives free dental care to the people of El Rodeo. She also trains local teens to do cleanings and fluoride treatments.

The delegation presented Amanda and Ross with posters of Archbishop Romero, the martyred leader for justice who is being considered by the Vatican for sainthood.



WES Sunday school kids made this beautiful poster of El Rodeo to present to our friends.

Special thanks to Steve Skolnik for Sunday's photos.

Felix and Friends

On the Sacred Character of the State

On the other hand, the "secularization of the state" has given rise to the deplorable impression that the state exists only for so-called secular purposes, and has stripped the idea of the state of the lofty attributes with which the greatest thinkers of antiquity had clothed it. It is the function of the religious society, dwelling uncoerced in the midst of the state, to reinvest the state with the sacred character that belongs to it. I do not of course intend to exalt the state after the manner of Hegel, as if it were a kind of earthly god or to set it up as an object of religious or quasi-religious devotion. The object of religious devotion is the infinite holy community, the spiritual universe. The function of the religious society is to generate the ideal of the infinite holy community, of the spiritual universe. The family, the vocation, the nation, are sub-groups of this, lesser entities. Even mankind itself is but a province of the ideal spiritual commonwealth that extends beyond it. To concentrate worship upon the state or nation as some propose, would be to usurp for the part the piety that belongs to the whole.

– Felix Adler, from Chapter IX: Religious Fellowship as the Culminating Social Institution in "An Ethical Philosophy of Life", Copyright 1918. Reprinted by Ethical Press, 1986

For more on the quotation or to add your own comments, see the blog: <http://felixadlerandfriends.blogspot.com>

Path to Membership

Have you been attending Sunday platforms for a while, and find yourself wanting to learn more about what it means to belong to WES? We hope you are getting a sense of how WES can touch hearts, expand minds, and change lives. We would enjoy helping you feel more connected to our community and answering any questions you might have. The "Path to Membership" class is offered 3 times this month on Tuesday April 21, Saturday April 25, and Tuesday April 28. We always recommend newcomers attend one of these fun and informational sessions before deciding to become a WES member. The session is a great way to meet others new to WES. Participation in the class does not obligate you to join our community. Facilitated by Amanda Poppei, Senior Leader, and a member of the membership team. Childcare is available upon request. All sessions run from 7 – 9:30pm in the WES Library. Contact Amanda Poppei at amandap@ethicalsociety.org.

If you want to learn more after one session, then you should attend "Path to Membership II: Going Deeper" on April 28, 7-9pm in the Library. If you are busy this month, there will be two other opportunities later this year as well.

Coming up at WES

Friday, April 3

First Fridays Discussion Group, 12:30 – 2:00 pm. Join WES members and friends who are retired or have a flexible work schedule for our monthly lunch discussion group. Our discussions are based sometimes on presentations from members or guests who have some special information to share, and sometimes on sharing within the group. We have enjoyed presentations from writers of poems, blogs, and novels; champions of social justice issues, historical celebrations, and healthful practices; members of intentional communities, service organizations, and performance groups; researchers on elder issues, happiness, and end of life planning; and many others. And we have shared ideas on poems and stories we have loved, holiday practices in our families, our solutions to common problems, our travels, and much more. We sometimes bring bag lunches and sometimes take turns bringing food to share with the group. To learn more, contact Marty Brockway, ewbrocs@rcn.com.

Saturday, April 4

Humanist Seder, 6 pm, Main Hall. Bring your family and friends for our annual tradition of a humanist Seder. We will tell old stories and understand them in new ways as we explore the Ethical Culture message found in the Seder.

Roy Zimmerman Concert, 9 pm, Social Hall. What can one person do about climate change, torture, racism, gun violence, fracking, Congressional ineptitude, ignorance, war, and greed? Write funny songs, says Roy Zimmerman. Zimmerman's got songs about all of the above, and he brings his new show, "The Faucet's on Fire!" to this performance, immediately following WES' Humanist Seder. Admission for Zimmerman's show is a suggested donation of \$18. "Without a doubt, Roy Zimmerman is among the most important political commentators of the last few decades," says *No Depression* magazine, "and in the end, it's the music that unites and disarms. With music this good and humor this insightful, there is good reason to be optimistic."

Sunday, April 5

Newcomers' Q and A, 12:30 pm, Library. Bring your coffee, cookies, and questions to this informal gathering! Meet Senior Leader Amanda Poppei and learn more about WES and what it means to be part of our community.

Tuesday April 7

Meditation Group, Adler Study, 7 pm. This group, which meets on 1st and 3rd Tuesdays, is open to anyone interested in meditation. We will use an approach called *Recollective Awareness Meditation*, based on a form of vipassanā, which involves meditating with our thoughts, emotions, and sensations rather than considering them distractions. Afterwards we will recollect and reflect upon what happened during the meditation sitting. This experiential process introduces beginners to a meditation practice that is gentle and friendly from the outset, while it supports experienced meditators in bringing more awareness and compassion to their inner world. Sigfried Gold is a teacher in training with the Skillful Meditation Project and will be leading the group. Call or email him ([301-775-3339](tel:301-775-3339), sigfried@sigfried.org) with questions. For more information about Recollective Awareness Meditation, see <http://skillfulmeditation.org/>.

Thursday, April 9

Board Meeting, 7 pm, Library. All WES members are welcome to attend monthly Board meetings. Every other month, they are held on Sundays after platform to encourage guests! Agenda and materials may be found before the meeting in the Members' Access section of the website, www.ethicalsociety.org.

Sunday, April 12

Biology Discussion Group, 12:45-2 pm, Library. On the second Sunday of every month there's a lively buzz in the WES library as members and friends gather for the Biology Discussion Group, facilitated by Barbara Searle. On April 12, May 10, June 14 we will read *The Arrival of the Fittest, Solving Evolution's Greatest Puzzle*, by Andreas Wagner. At this meeting, we will discuss the Prologue and Chapters 1 to 3. All are welcome, whether or not you've done the reading! For more information contact Barbara: bsearle70@msn.com.

Tuesday, April 14

Flourish! Core Curriculum: Ethical Culture Ideas, 7-9 pm, Library. Join Senior Leader Amanda Poppei for an introduction (or a refresher!) about the core ideas in Ethical Culture and in the humanist movement broadly. This class will be an interactive exploration of historical ideas...and YOUR ideas!

Thursday April 16

Young and Thirsty, 7 pm, Busboys and Poets in Takoma Park, MD. All young(ish) adults are welcome to join this casual get-together to talk about topics philosophical and otherwise!

Valuing Differences Group, 7:30-9:00 pm, WES Library. This group meets monthly for an unstructured conversation about differences in our life space of race, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, etc. The group provides a safe place to ask questions, express concerns, and maybe find some fundamental answers. Members of the group take turns leading the discussion. We plan to start each month with a theme or a topic, but current events and the concerns of those attending may take precedence over anything preplanned. Contact June Fair, junelfair@gmail.com, or Shan Evans, sevans4406@yahoo.com, for more information.

Saturday, April 18

Auction Team Open House, 2:00 – 4:00 pm at Sarah Morris' house. If you haven't volunteered for the auction previously, come see what opportunities are available. If you are a returning member, come brainstorm your role for this year's event. Once you meet the crew, you'll want to join the Most Fun Team at WES! Contact: Sarah Morris se.morris@verizon.net Sunday, March 22.

Sunday April 19

Schmoozapaloosa, after platform, Main Hall. WES continues our lunch on every 3rd Sunday for all who want to hang out after platform and gab with friends. Gather around tables in the Main Hall and keep on talking. Nosh on a great lunch, with vegetarian options always available. Requested donation \$5. Schmoozing with your friends and licking your fingers—what better way to keep on talking, parse the platform, and catch up!

More Than Just an Advance Medical Directive, 1:15 pm, Social Hall. Barbara Blaylock, M.D., will lead a discussion about steps you should take to try to ensure that your choices about health care in general, as well as near the end of life, are honored. She will also share information about after-death care and how to ensure that preferences about that are honored as well. This discussion will include issues faced by those who are single and/or have no children. All are welcome. Contact: Barbara Blaylock (b.blaylock@verizon.net).

Tuesday, April 21

Meditation Group, 7 pm, Adler Study. This group, which meets on 1st and 3rd Tuesdays, is open to anyone interested in meditation. See the full description above for April 7.

Path to Membership, 7 - 9:30 pm, Social Hall. See page 8 for description. Contact Amanda Poppei at amandap@ethicalsociety.org.

Saturday, April 25

Path to Membership, 9:30 am - 12 pm. Social Hall. See page 8 for description. Contact Amanda Poppei at amandap@ethicalsociety.org.

Sunday, April 26

Needlework Group, 12:30 pm, Senior Leader's Office. Knitting...crocheting...even nalbinding...do you do them? Do you want to? Come enjoy crafting and company the last Sunday of the month.

Tuesday, April 28

Path to Membership II: Going Deeper, 7 - 9 pm, Library. This is an opportunity for those who have attended a Path to Membership class to connect more deeply with Ethical Culture, their own spiritual and ethical journeys, and each other. Contact Amanda Poppei at amandap@ethicalsociety.org.

Friday, May 1

First Fridays Discussion Group, 12:30 - 2:00 pm, Join WES members and friends who are retired or have a flexible work schedule for our monthly lunch discussion group. See full description above for April 3.

Sunday, May 3

Newcomers' Q and A, 12:30 pm, Library. Bring your coffee, cookies, and questions to this informal gathering! Meet Senior Leader Amanda Poppei and learn more about WES and what it means to be part of our community.