

# WES Express

Monthly Newsletter of the Washington Ethical Society

March 2015

## Upcoming Platforms – Join us at 11am

**Sunday, March 1 "Gnosis and Unknowing" Amanda Poppei, Senior Leader.** As we begin our exploration of the Sacred, Amanda will consider what this idea might mean for Ethical Culturists and humanists of all stripes. Do we define the sacred apart from the secular? What if we are ourselves "secularists"? Come examine this hot button word with us! Music from WomenSpirit Singers led by Mairi Breen Rothman.

**Sunday, March 8 "My Spiritual Journey" Don Montagna, Former WES Senior Leader.** Don is currently the Executive Director of *International Partners*. "Since departing WES leadership 9 years ago, my experiences working in El Salvador with people who live in extreme poverty have validated humanistic spirituality as a guide for creating a more satisfying life and a better world." Music from the WES Chorus led by Bailey Whiteman.

**Sunday, March 15 "Turning Ourselves Into God" Amanda Poppei, Senior Leader.** A critique of humanism is sometimes that we turn humans into gods – in effect, worshipping ourselves. How can we respond to this fully, while also preserving the idea of the divine spark within each human being, which is a hallmark of progressive religion and humanism? Music from internationally acclaimed percussionist Tom Teasley.

**Sunday, March 22 Elvis Zavala and Vidalina Morales.** Elvis and Vidalina – leaders from El Rodeo, our partner community in El Salvador – will talk about what is sacred to them: land, water, dignity, freedom, solidarity and community.

**Sunday, March 29 "All Music Sunday"** Join the WES Chorus, led by Bailey Whiteman, for this beautiful and moving exploration of the sacredness of place. This special platform experience full of music and poetry is not to be missed.

## Table of Contents

Upcoming Platforms.....	1
Theme Exploration .....	2
Board Column.....	3
WES News.....	4
Sunday School News ....	5
UU Climate Meeting .....	6
Felix and Friends.....	6
AEU Message.....	7
Leader's Sabbatical .....	8
Coming Up at WES .....	9

***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 of children and adults as we work for a world where love and justice cross all borders.

***[ethicalsociety.org](http://ethicalsociety.org)***

## March Theme: The Sacred

*Amanda Poppei, Senior Leader*

I was chatting the other day with a visitor to WES about the theme for March and she said, "yeah, I saw that on there...Sacred. And I thought, huh?!"

Huh?! Not a bad response to the idea of Sacred, actually. For a community<sup>1</sup> like ours, it can seem confusing, maybe even scary or irrelevant to think about the Sacred, or Sacredness. Of course, I tend to think it's precisely those themes, those words, that are juiciest – that offer us the most to dig into as a community.

Over the course of the month, we'll look at the idea of a sacred/secular divide: where it came from in religious world history, what humanism has to say about it (time to look at the first Humanist Manifesto!), and what it means for us, now, as an Ethical Culture community in a postmodern, multicultural world. We'll also take on one of the biggest arguments against humanism, the idea that we turn ourselves into the sacred, that we engage in the idolatry of worshipping ourselves. And we'll welcome some special guests, who will themselves address the theme of Sacred: Don Montagna, who served as Senior Leader at WES from 1972 until 2006, and Elvis Zavala and Vidalina Morales, leaders from El Rodeo, our partner community in El Salvador. Finally, our All Music Sunday at the end of the month will explore the idea of Sacred places, through poetry and song.

Spoiler alert, though: in all of this, I think you'll end up finding that in Ethical Culture, something is made Sacred because we hold it to be so. We create the Sacred, the special, the meaningful when we gather together for good in the world. And we will get a chance to celebrate the creation of good, and commit ourselves to it, at our Community Dinner in the middle of the month. That, too, can be a Sacred time of connection and intention-setting (plus it's a heck of a lot of fun).

So even if this month's theme has you saying "huh?!" I hope you will engage, go deeper, think, learn, and share as we explore the Sacred together.



Amanda Poppei,  
Senior Leader

*Ways to engage with  
March's theme:  
The Sacred*

March platforms

Story for All Ages  
March 1  
*The Everything Seed:  
A Story of Beginnings  
by Carole Martignacco*

Exploring Circle: Sacred  
See: Coming Up at WES

Share the Plate:  
FAIR Girls

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<sup>1</sup> *Our community where some members identify specifically as secular while others identify as religious humanists, or theists, or atheists, or agnostics, or mystical humanists, or non-theists, or just plain old Ethical Culturists!*

## From Your Board of Trustees

*by Lindsay Lucke and Danna Pope, Members WES Board of Trustees*

At the end of January, the Board facilitated a mid-year retreat to plan for the coming 12 to 18 months. As described in the WES By-laws,

"the Board organizes an annual Mid-Year Planning Retreat to ensure that WES activities and expenditures align with a near-term strategic vision."

During the retreat, 16 lay leaders and 4 staff members of WES gathered together to spend 10 1/2 hours over two days to develop *focus goals* which will be used to guide the organization in the near term.

As you may recall, your Board has been working to establish our *End Statements* – that is, a statements of what we want to achieve in the long run. The *End Statements* originated in a series of community discussions and these statements fill a need for strategic planning. While there might be a few tweaks to be made to the phrasing of the *Ends*, there was consensus on the underlying ideas. We used the draft *End Statements* to collectively create *focus goals* which help us move closer to our Ends. We can't do everything and will do best if we focus our attention.

With a group of 20 WESians, it was interesting to see the ways in which we easily agreed and the discussions that came up over priorities. It was a good practice for the group to keep reminding ourselves that this is just the focus for the next year or so and that we can shift our energy to different things over time. There was strong support for integrating environmental stewardship throughout WES. We had more discussion about, and ultimately left to next year, things such as focusing on body awareness and mindfulness practices.

The lay leaders present were Lori Betsock, Andrew Batchner, Julie Campbell, Sarah Morris, Tony Nam, Bob Pokorney, Carol Rawie, Susan Runner, Sheila Waters, and the entire Board. The lay leaders were chosen by the Board and Senior Leader to represent a wide cross-section of active programs. From the staff Christine Parcelli, Amanda Poppei, Melissa Sinclair, and Bailey Whiteman participated. Thank you to everyone for their hard (and fun) work!

To see all of the focus goals revealed, join us at Community Dinner on March 14.

## WES News

### WES WELCOMES FRIENDS FROM EL RODEO

The WES Global Connections Committee is thrilled to be hosting three of our friends from El Salvador, who will deliver the platform address on March 22, followed by a community potluck lunch. This is the first time a delegation from El Rodeo, our sister community, will come to D.C. to meet WES members. We will also have an awards celebration for the delegation on Saturday, March 21 from 2:00-4:00 at WES, to which all are invited. (See WES Happenings for details.)

For the past 5 years, the people of El Rodeo have opened their homes and graciously hosted over 25 WES members. We are delighted that we can begin to repay that hospitality. As part of our cross-cultural exchange, we will be hosting Elvis Zalaya and Vidalina Morales, both of El Rodeo, and Cristina Starr, a U.S. journalist who has lived in El Salvador for decades.

Elvis is the President of the community council and a leader of Radio Victoria, a progressive youth-led community station. Vidalina works for ADES, a community development organization, and is an environmental activist. Cristina is our in-country facilitator and also a founder of Radio Victoria. All three have been active in the struggle against foreign-owned gold mining operations that threaten El Salvador's already degraded and fragile water system. The staff of both ADES and Radio Victoria continue their work despite limited funding, extreme hardship, the murder of a number of activists opposing mining, and threats against their own lives.

WES has been active in El Rodeo since the summer of 2010, when we began a process of Community Capacity Building. WES delegation members participated in community-wide meetings, aimed at identifying the villagers' priorities. Together, we crafted a Partnership Agreement, formalizing our commitment to one another. Over the past 5 years WES has sent delegations each summer to El Rodeo to build our relationship and support their main goal: potable running water for every household. WES raised funds to provide temporary water filters for each home and for the school. This past December, WES members raised funds to buy the primary water source in the community, a major step in the process of building a comprehensive water system. In addition, WES member Susan Runner provides free dental care to the village each summer.

We hope you will mark your calendar for the weekend of March 21-22 and take advantage of this very special opportunity to meet representatives of our sister community.



Elvis Zavela & Cristina Starr



Vidalena Morales

## Sunday School News

**Melissa Sinclair, Acting Director of Religious Education**

This winter in Sunday School we are forging ahead with new plans while we continue with full classes. What's new? First, we are growing and added a class to our offerings. Our classes are now: Nursery, Preschool, and a Kindergarten-1st grade *Our Whole Lives* (OWL) class. Then we have a Kindergarten-3rd grade class and 4th-5th grade class that work with our monthly themes at WES, a 6th grade Neighboring Faiths class, 7th-8th grade OWL, and our teen group. As well, 35 people have stepped up to teach or assist in the classrooms; however, we could use a few more volunteers so that we can make it a once a month commitment for all the volunteers.

Secondly, we had a very productive parent meeting at the end of January. At the meeting we agreed on a couple of new policies. For example, we want to let everyone at WES know about a phrase and gesture we use when we want someone to walk and not run. We say "We walk at WES" along with a walking fingers motion. So, if you see a big or little person running, just kindly say, "We walk at WES" while showing your walking fingers!

We are also going to use walkie-talkies to communicate when the platform is ending so that the children can come to the Social Hall synchronized with when the platform ends. The ushers have offered to assist with that which should make everything run more smoothly.

Next, we also talked about having more family events at WES. That idea was so popular that two members planned something right there at the meeting! That resulted in the popular Valentine's Day Dance Party for the kids and, for the parents, a freebie night without kids! We hope to get more such activities planned soon!

We now have a Facebook page called *WES Sunday School Group*. It's a closed group so please ask to join if you want to follow the goings-on in the Sunday School. In other news, our family friendly camping trip has a new location: Three Otters. More details on the camping trip will be sent out soon.

Although it is still winter, we are already planning to plant a shade garden on the north side of the building. Finally we will update some of our curricula.

Last but not least, our *Story for All Ages* in February, "The Story of Dr. Nancy Jennison," is a lovely part of WES history and we are looking for someone to create a storybook that brings history to life with illustrations and photos. But, we need some talented volunteers to work on the book. Contact Melissa or Amanda to discuss the possibilities!



*Dressed for the Valentine's Day Dance Party*

## UU Regional Climate Meeting

The Earth Ethics Team encourages WES members to participate in a program sponsored by Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice in the National Capital Region Saturday, March 14 at National City Christian Church, 5 Thomas Circle, NW, Washington, DC.

Meet and greet at 9:30 am with the program running 10:00 am – 12:20 pm. Strategize together with Pamela Sparr, who is Associate Director of the *UU Service Committee* (UUSC) and Steering Committee Member of *Commit2Respond* (a UUA and UUSC climate initiative). Learn:

- What can your congregation do about climate change? EARTH DAY AND BEYOND.... Learn about exciting UU short- and long-term activities, programs, worship and educational resources including General Assembly, Paris UNFCCC talks, and Papal Visit.
- How can UUs in the metro DC region play a key role in national climate change advocacy efforts and work with the interfaith community?

If you have any questions or need more information contact Rev. Cyn Snively at 202-600-9132 or [info@uusj.org](mailto:info@uusj.org). Register at: [http://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/50780/p/salsa/event/common/public/?event\\_KEY=2422](http://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/50780/p/salsa/event/common/public/?event_KEY=2422)

## Felix and Friends

*I do not find worth in others or in myself. I attribute it to them and myself. And why do I attribute it? By virtue of the reality-producing functions of my own mind, I create the ethical manifold – the possibility of an ethical culture. This ideal is a community of uniquely differentiated individuals. In order to advance toward it, I must help others become conscious of their uniqueness and interrelation with others. I must help others in order to save myself. I must look upon other people as ethical individuals, moral beings, in order to become a moral being myself. – Felix Adler*

This quotation was selected by Don Montagna and used in his pamphlet "Creating Ethical Community" pg. 38, 1993. For more or to comment, see: <http://felixadlerandfriends.blogspot.com/2015/01/march-2015-quotation.html>

## News from the AEU

### ***Why I am Involved with the AEU – Carol Bartell***

*AEU Board Member,  
Member of the St. Louis Ethical Society*

I am Carol Bartell from the Ethical Society of St. Louis. I am currently serving on the AEU Board and serve on the Personnel Committee and Leadership Committee.

I became involved with the AEU some 20 years ago as one of lay members of the Leadership Committee. I was very impressed with this committee's organization and mission. The committee consisted of five lay members and five professional Leaders. We were charged with overseeing the training of people who wanted to become Leaders in our Movement.

The Leadership Committee also provided programs and training for lay leaders preparing them to officiate if needed by a Society. In addition, the committee supported the creation of the AEU Lay Leadership Summer. This was and still is a very productive committee.

Last year I returned to the Leadership Committee as Chair. In this position, I have come to appreciate the support of our AEU staff. Without them, I don't think I could serve effectively as Chair. Without the financial support from the AEU, we could not train new Leaders for our movement.

That is why I contribute money annually to the AEU. I hope you will join me in supporting the AEU.

I believe that the AEU's programs and events make me realize that our Ethical Culture movement is larger than being a member of the St. Louis Society.

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**100<sup>th</sup> AEU Assembly** – AEU Board Secretary Jan Broughton has a few words about the upcoming assembly:

“This year’s 100<sup>th</sup> Assembly should have particularly good attendance. The location in Stamford, Connecticut is near several of our member societies and is easily accessible by train from Grand Central Station in NYC. The Westchester society is close enough to act as ‘host’ for one evening activity. The board held its retreat at the same facility last year and the accommodations are excellent. Remembering past AEU assemblies, I find the greatest value is in the connections made with those from other societies, from coast to coast and border to border. Sharing problems and successes, finding common ground and inspiration from the work of others, and just having fun socializing and in informal conversation make the Assembly worthwhile. I hope all societies will encourage and support their members to attend the 100<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the American Ethical Union, June 25-28.”

## **Amanda's Sabbatical Update: Who's Minding the Shop?**

As my sabbatical approaches (my last Sunday at WES will be May 3, and then I return in early August), plans are coming more clearly into place both about what I'll do during that time – check out April's newsletter for that – and what WES will do. As you might imagine, the Board and the staff are two groups with a particular interest in that second part! Thanks to careful work together, we've already made great strides in planning for my time away.

**Who will do the actual work?** While there are some discrete tasks that will move from my plate onto a different staff member's plate (like preparing the Sunday program each week and sending a welcome email to first-time visitors), many of my ongoing tasks will be taken on by lay leaders. For instance, three lay leaders are covering the Newcomer Q and A's on the first Sunday of the month; another is communicating with visitors about upcoming Path to Membership classes; another group will focus on Sunday mornings; Board members will greet people at the door on Sundays and ensure a consistent presence throughout the three months.

**Some of what I do simply won't happen while I'm away.** For instance, about once a month, sometimes more, I participate as a clergy representative in social justice actions; while I'm away WES folks might well (indeed I hope they do!) engage in those kinds of actions, but we won't have an official representative in the same way. I'm arranging the classes I offer to visitors and members to occur before May and after August, and I'm pre-planning the Sunday speakers and the theme materials before I leave. In other words, I'm front-loading work so that it doesn't fall on anyone's shoulders while I'm on sabbatical.

**And how about decision making?** We are setting up a series of staff-lay leader partnerships and teams who will be empowered to make decisions that might typically come to me. For instance, Peter Kent (head of the Finance Team) and Christine Parcelli (our Administrator) are the perfect team to make a decision about our finances. This approach allows people to feel as though they don't suddenly have solo responsibility for something they'd rather share; the idea came out of one of those staff meeting sabbatical conversations. Christine will serve as Head of Staff while I'm away, running staff meetings and supporting the staff with any internal needs. And of course our awesome staff already make plenty of decisions themselves without needing me at all, and I expect them to go right on being great at their jobs and supporting the whole of WES' mission.

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## Coming up at WES

### Sunday, March 1

**Capital Campaign Event for New Members**, 7pm, Home of Loretta Neumann and Dan Smith. Members who have joined since our successful *Burn the Mortgage, Ignite the Future Capital Campaign* are invited to a dessert party to learn about the campaign and how it has influenced our community.

### Tuesday, March 3

**Exploring Circle: Sacred**, 7:30pm, home of Becky and Jonathan Klabunde Tomer. Join Becky and Jonathan on Tuesday evenings in March for this chance to deepen your experience of the month's theme and connect with others in a small group atmosphere. A wonderful way to form bonds with other members, longtime and new. Please RSVP to Becky at [beckyann1110@gmail.com](mailto:beckyann1110@gmail.com).

**Meditation Group**, 7pm, Adler Study. 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](mailto:sigfried@sigfried.org)) with questions. For more information about Recollective Awareness Meditation, see <http://skillfulmeditation.org/>.

### Friday, March 6

**First Friday Discussion Lunch**, 12:30-2:00 pm, Social Hall. Ellen Dinerman and Jim Perdue will follow up on their WES platform presentation on *Death with Dignity* by bringing us further information about *Compassion and Choices*. If you have wondered about end-of-life options that may be open to you even though you may not fit the profile covered by currently proposed legislation, you are welcome to join us for this interactive discussion. Please bring a sandwich and any lunch extra you might like to share and arrive early enough so that we can begin lunch and a go-round at 12:30. Contact: Marty Brockway ([ewbrocs@rcn.com](mailto:ewbrocs@rcn.com)).

**Board Meeting**, 1pm, Social Hall. 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](http://www.ethicalsociety.org).

**Biology Discussion Group**, 12:45-2pm, Library. The group will conclude its discussion of *Evolution in Four Dimensions: Genetic, Epigenetic, Behavioral, and Symbolic Variation in the History of Life* (second edition, 2014) by Eva Jablonka and Marion Lamb. For more information contact Barbara: [bsearle70@msn.com](mailto:bsearle70@msn.com).

**WES Book Group**, 2pm, Molly Beiting will host in her home in Takoma Park. Please join the WES Bookgroup as we discuss Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's award winning novel, *Americanah*. A powerful, tender story of race and identity, *Americanah* follows two young lovers as they depart military-ruled Nigeria for the West. One heads for America, where she grapples for the first time with what it

means to be black. The other plunges into a dangerous, undocumented life in London. Fifteen years later, they reunite in a newly democratic Nigeria, and reignite their passion—for each other and for their homeland. For more information contact Tony Nam [tonyknam@yahoo.com](mailto:tonyknam@yahoo.com).

### **Tuesday March 10**

**Exploring Circle: Sacred**, 7:30pm, home of Becky and Jonathan Klabunde Tomer. See the description above for March 3.

### **Saturday, March 14**

**Community Dinner**, 6pm, Main Hall. Join your WES community for our annual celebration of fellowship, fun, and funds! This is our annual pledge drive dinner...and it's also a heck of a good time. Please plan to be there!

**UU Regional Climate Meeting**, 9:30 am. National City Christian Church, 5 Thomas Circle, NW, Washington, DC. See the article on page 6 above.

### **Sunday, March 15**

**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!

### **Tuesday, March 17**

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

**Exploring Circle: Sacred**, 7:30pm, home of Becky and Jonathan Klabunde Tomer. See the description above for March 3.

### **Thursday March 19**

**Young and Thirsty**, 7pm, Denizens Brewing Company in Silver Spring. All young(ish) adults are welcome to join this casual get-together to talk about topics philosophical and otherwise!

### **Saturday, March 21**

**Awards Ceremony in Honor of El Rodeo Leaders**, 2-4pm. WES will co-host an awards event to honor Elvis Zavala and Vidalina Morales, two leaders from El Rodeo, and Cristina Starr, the founder of Radio Victoria. These three have been tireless in their work on behalf of their community and the people of El Salvador. We are thrilled that Vidalina, Elvis, and Cristina will be here at WES to attend the celebration and receive this recognition. See also the article on page 3 above.

### **Sunday, March 22**

**Potluck Lunch in Honor of El Rodeo Delegation**, 12:30pm. Platform will be presented by our partners from El Rodeo. Following the Platform, all are invited to a potluck lunch and to visit with Elvis, Vidalina, and Cristina. Where else but WES can you hang out with ELVIS! Learn more about our Sister Community, and help welcome our dear friends to Washington and to WES.

## **Tuesday March 24**

**Exploring Circle: Sacred**, 7:30pm, home of Becky and Jonathan Klabunde Tomer. See the description above for March 3.

## **Sunday, March 29**

**Needlework Group**, 12:30pm, 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, March 31**

**Exploring Circle: Sacred**, 7:30pm, home of Becky and Jonathan Klabunde Tomer. See the description above for March 3.

## **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](mailto:ewbrocs@rcn.com).

## **Saturday, April 4**

**Humanist Seder**, 6pm. Please join us--and 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.

