

# WES Express

Monthly Newsletter of the Washington Ethical Society

December 2014

## Upcoming Platforms – Join us at 11am

**Sunday, December 7 "Celebrate Good Times", Amanda Poppei, Senior Leader.** As we begin our monthly theme of celebration, Amanda will explore how we celebrate good times...even while we're aware of the bad times. Why, and how, do we engage in revelry across cultures and in sometimes desperate situations? What could it mean to celebrate everything? Music from the WES Chorus.

**Sunday, December 14 "We Joyfully Celebrate Together", Amanda Poppei, Senior Leader and the Community.** WES' Statement of Purpose includes a phrase promising that "we joyfully celebrate together and support each other through life." We know what that looks like when times are hard—we show up with casseroles and care. But how do we celebrate each other's accomplishments, luck, and happiness? Join your community for a morning ceremony, and bring your moment of celebration with you. Music from Josh Blinder.

**Sunday, December 21 "Blue Christmas", Amanda Poppei, Senior Leader.** The holidays can be hard for all kinds of reasons—-we struggle with the religious part, our family is hard to take, we feel lonely, we just can't stand one more chorus of Jingle Bell Rock. How do we manage in the midst of the holiday blues? Music from jazz vocalist Nicole Rumeau.

**Sunday, December 28 "Center Down".** Join your WES community on this Sunday in the midst of the holiday season to find some quiet. We will share meditation and mindfulness time, and enjoy music from Doris Justis.

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

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

## December Theme: Celebration

*Amanda Poppei, Senior Leader*

Celebrate good times--oh yeah! Every time I've thought about the December theme of Celebration, that little musical phrase plays in my head. Sometimes I even sing it out loud (you can imagine how fun that is for everyone around me).

Celebration, though, is so much more complicated than that. As we prepared to explore the theme in December, we've tried to avoid the obvious: the temptation to just focus on the winter holidays as wonderful, joyful times. The truth is, for many of us the winter holidays are challenging. We'll focus on that on December 21 with a "Blue Christmas" platform looking at the experience of sadness or upset during this season. On the 7th, we'll examine how it's even possible to celebrate at all in the midst of turmoil, whether it's in our own lives or in the world at large. That's certainly in my mind these days, as our country prepares for news from the Grand Jury in Ferguson, as conflict rages around the world.

That question informs our Winter Festival this year, too, which explores stories from many cultures--and how those stories help us to keep our balance in a world that can be scary, upsetting, or disappointing. It promises to be a beautiful evening (and the Cookie Walk afterward should be delicious!).

Throughout the month, as you celebrate in your own traditions at home and engage in WES' special traditions too, I hope that you look for moments of celebration. They might be big and bright and covered in tinsel, or they might be a quiet smile when you see the beauty of the bare trees. May you find Celebration in your heart.



Amanda Poppei,  
Senior Leader

*Ways to engage with the  
December theme:*

December platforms  
from 12/7 – 12/21

Story for All Ages:  
*The Trees of  
Dancing Goats*  
by Patricia Polacco

Winter Festival  
*December 13*

Share the plate recipient  
*Leader's Caring Fund*

## From Your Board of Trustees

*by Ann Baker, Board Member*

The Board is currently finalizing a "Statement of Ends" for WES that will serve as a focus for our activities and dreams over the next several years. This effort is a form of strategic planning that the Board decided to adopt 2 years ago after exploring different models used by UU congregations.

The Board started the strategic planning process last year, as required by our constitution, inviting members at the fall 2013 membership meeting to articulate what they most cared about and wanted to work on at WES. Further discussion and shaping of Ends occurred with a group of WES lay leaders at the Board's Mid-Year Planning Retreat in February. However, the effort was temporarily set aside last spring after Mary Herman's resignation.

What exactly are Ends?, you ask. According to John Carver, a guru of "policy governance" for nonprofit organizations like WES, "Ends are about the organization's impact on the world ... that justify its existence." Ends answer the questions:

- What difference do we want to make in the world?
- For whom?
- And with what priority or at what cost?

In more familiar words, Ends are the "big picture" results that an organization wants to achieve. Ends are achieved through means, otherwise known as programs and activities. Developing means is something that we delegate to our Senior Leader, Amanda Poppei. The Board intends to monitor our Ends regularly to see if we are moving toward them, and we will revisit the Statement of Ends periodically to review its relevance.

As an example of the bold thinking that has gone into our Ends, here are a few of the themes developed at the Mid-Year Retreat, somewhat paraphrased:

- Cultivate radical hospitality and inclusion
- Foster ethical agency in our endeavors and in our members of all ages
- Act against oppression and support more just alternatives

The current Board has had lively discussions about how to incorporate these and other ideas into a Statement of Ends that we can all support. We have chewed on questions such as how expansive or narrow the Ends should be; whether they should encompass all of our activities; and how to define a scope for social justice work that is meaningful, given our size.

Both Amanda and the Board members are striving to articulate Ends that are not merely descriptive of what WES already does well but that challenge the community to stretch – that inspire us individually and as a community to take on ethical actions, relationships, and behaviors that truly elicit the best in others and thereby in ourselves. We hope that these Ends will serve us well for years to come.

Although we are still working on the Statement of Ends, you will surely hear more about this in the coming months. In the meantime, come visit a Board meeting and learn more!

# Global Connections Committee Update

By *Lola Skolnik*

## Water for Life: The Shared Dream



The Global Connections Committee and the community of El Rodeo, El Salvador have a shared dream. This dream has been on everyone's mind since the first WES delegation went to our sister community in 2009. The dream is clean, running water.

This year WES has a unique opportunity to help El Rodeo move a little closer to our shared dream. One of the water sources is being offered for sale to the community. With WES's help we will be able to secure Aguas Caliente for the community and help to create water security for El Rodeo. The price tag for the spring and legal fees will be around \$6,500.

We Americans don't think too much about our water, except when there is some temporary interruption in service. In El Rodeo, the residents think about water constantly. As subsistence farmers, they worry about when it will rain and whether it will be enough or too much. They worry that the springs in the community, that they don't own, might go dry or worse yet, be sold to private owners who may deny the community access to the water source.

In 2010 WES members helped achieve a first step toward clean water by funding bucket water filters for every household and the school in the community. As a consequence, the incidence of sickness from water-borne diseases was greatly reduced. However, the life span of these filters is up this year and they will be replaced as part of our continuing effort to bring clean water to El Rodeo.

In the not too distant future we hope that partnerships with Salvadoran and American organizations, as well as continued support from WES, will bring about our ultimate dream, a system of clean, running water



delivering the source of life to each and every person in El Rodeo. We hope you will want to contribute to make this dream come true.

Please consider supporting the Water for Life Campaign. To donate to the purchase of Aguas Caliente Spring for our Sister Community, El Rodeo:

- Use your credit card or leave a check at the Aguas Caliente donations table in the WES lobby on Sunday.
- Make a check out to WES, with Water Campaign in the subject line and mail to:

WES Water Campaign  
7750 Sixteenth Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20012

### **Eye Glasses Campaign a Huge Success: Thank You, WES!**

Many WES members responded to a request for eye glasses prior to the July 2014 delegation to El Rodeo, El Salvador. Over 50 pairs of glasses were collected in a very short time. Forty-three pairs of glasses and cases found new homes with 37 individuals. The testing was simple: thread a needle or read print off a bottle for reading glasses; look at an object in the foreground for distance glasses. The look of wonder and amazement on the faces of those who saw detail or distance for the first time in a long while was heart filling. Thank you again, WES members, for your generous support and continued commitment to the people of our sister community, El Rodeo.



*Don Carlos is amazed when the reading glasses allow him to clearly see the face of the book's author, our own Beth Baker.*

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### **WES Immigration Action of the Month**

If you can manage to do just one activity this busy month to support your hopes for a more just world for immigrants, reserve December 4, 12 pm – 2 pm for:

- **Unaccompanied Migrant Children from Central America**– a report looking at context, causes and advocacy responses from the Center for Latin American and Latino Studies, American University. Light lunch provided at the Kay Spiritual Life Center. RSVP to [dolezal@american.edu](mailto:dolezal@american.edu)

## **Earth Ethics Team News: on the Energy Front**

Thanks to all who signed letters to the Environmental Protection Agency docket in favor of the proposed Carbon Pollution regulations. Between September 7 and October 12, over 100 WES attendees participated in this advocacy. That followed the 100+ signatures in June and July on letters to President Obama in support of the EPA regulations. Your Earth Ethics team stands ready to hear further suggestions from WES members for ethical advocacy actions on behalf of the environment.

Thanks to all who participated in our second Home Energy Workshop held on November 16, 2014. This workshop presented a very practical, hands-on approach and our three speakers gave personal consultations to attendees about their home energy issues. Speaker Maria Langholz, Interfaith Power and Light, presented a basic overview of the life-cycle/story of coal, and on climate change and its impacts. Speaker Pamela Nelson, Energy Efficiency Outreach Specialist for the Office of the People's Counsel (OPC) of the District of Columbia, presented some simple and practical energy efficiency products with a hands-on demonstration. These included thermostats, the kill-a-watt meter, draft-sealing methods, water flow restrictors and a variety of lighting possibilities for energy consumers to save money and conserve resources.

Speaker Thomas Allen outlined the process of a comprehensive home energy audit, which he has performed for energy audit companies, and discussed using foam sealant. Two actual reports of home audits were displayed. Carol Rawie provided information on signing up to obtain all-wind sources for home electricity at discount. We also had D.C. hand-outs from the Sustainable Energy Utility, PEPCO hand-outs, and information on rebates and incentives for both Washington, D.C. and Maryland residents. For instance, up to \$1,800 is available for qualifying home energy upgrades to homes in the District of Columbia. We can also provide web-links to obtain more energy savings information. Should you wish to obtain any of these materials, please contact John Kester at [John.Kester@earthlink.net](mailto:John.Kester@earthlink.net)

## Sunday School News for December

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

There are a lot of exciting developments with Sunday School this year. First, our attendance is up. We are seeing around 50 children every Sunday from babies to teens. You may have noticed, but we are also doing more things online like Sunday School registrations, babysitting sign-ups, and Stone Soup sign-ups. As well, we have created a Sunday School Facebook page. But we want to do more!



In the upcoming months, we plan to spread the word as much as possible about what we do – kind of waving our hands to the world a bit about what ethical culture is and how to find us (more on this in the AEU Ethical Education Retreat article below). We will be taking more photos and sharing more of what the children do in a Sunday School blog and on the Sunday School Facebook and WES Facebook pages.

We will also be getting more active - physically active. Our children sit throughout the day and it is affecting their physical and emotional health. They sit still most of the school day, so I don't want to ask them to be still at WES. There is no need for it! Lessons can be learned on the move, too. Our preschool students are active with the Celebrating Me and My World curriculum, but we will expand movement with the Workshop Rotations, too. For the month of December our K-1st grade class and our 2nd-5th grade class will be celebrating the theme of Celebration through dance. Even our 6th grade class, which studies other religions, has become more active.

Over the summer Nora Ludden and Saundra Bishop took the Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education course (OWL) and are now certified to teach the K-1st grade and the 4th -6th grade courses. The OWL course covers topics about birth, babies, their bodies, and families. After their training, Nora and Saundra excitedly proposed teaching the K-1st grade course as part of the curriculum for the year. With some looking at our themes, and with a bit of tweaking of timing of themes, we decided we could offer the course as part of our Workshop Rotations this coming March, April and May. The information meeting about this class is scheduled for December 7 at 9:00 am for all the parents of our Kindergarten and 1st grade parents (childcare is provided if needed - must RSVP). We will look at offering the 4th-6th grade class in the near future.

Lastly, let me just say how wonderful it has been for the past three and a half months that I've been here at WES. Everyone has been warm and welcoming. The Children's Education Council, the staff, the Board, teachers, and members have all been patient, supportive and helpful in getting me oriented at WES. And now that I've learned the ropes a bit, my next goals are to ramp up and promote the already great programs already in place. Let's make the attendance numbers of 50 get to 75 and beyond!

## **AEU Events**

### **The AEU Ethical Education (EE) Conference**

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

The weekend of November 7 -9 marked the first EE conference under the leadership of the new National Director of Ethical Education with the American Ethical Union, Dale McGowan, and it was a full, great weekend with representatives from many ethical societies. Concurrent with the EE conference, there was an AEU Board meeting and several board members later joined up with the EE conference to hear about the new ideas and developments.

The event started with getting to know you activities that were followed by presentations and intergenerational activities. The weekend ended with colloquy and platform on Sunday. The presentations this year were informative, uplifting, hopeful and doable.

We left with goals for the year which are to get every person involved in Ethical Education on and actively using *Podio* (an online tool, ed.). There was also a feeling that the AEU Board could perhaps join more of the conference in future years thus making the communication and relationships between societies even stronger.

### **The AEU YES Conference**

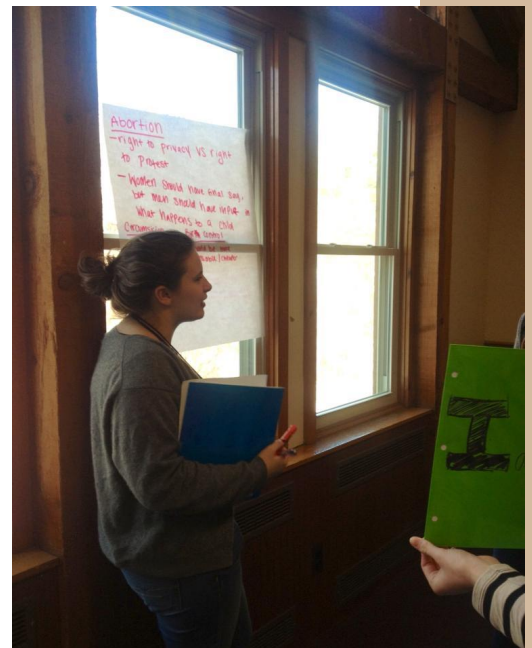
***Melissa Sinclair, Acting Director of Religious Education***

The Youth of Ethical Societies (YES) Conference was held near New York City this year at a YMCA camp from November 14 - 16. Four of our students from the teen group attended along with our Teen Group Advisors, Pati Sanabria and Tom Bishop. They traveled by bus Thursday afternoon and participated in pre-conference activities at the New York Ethical Society as well as taking in some sightseeing in NYC where the teens tried new foods and had new experiences.

The theme of this year's conference was Ethics in Science in Medicine. Greer Turner was part of the planning team for the conference. Once the conference started, the teens took over.

After traditional opening rituals, they broke out into sharing circles to discuss various topics related to the theme. From those sharing circles, teams created posters sharing themes and discussions they had in their sharing circles which they then presented in the Gallery Walk. Highlighted themes/topics included: sexual health, senior health, health education in general, and politics in reproductive health.

Overall, the teens and advisors walked away feeling it was a great experience that energized them for further action back home, and for enthusiasm to return next year with even more teens participating from WES and the other societies. I call that a success!





## Immigration Film Fest Draws Big Crowd to WES

For well over a year preparations for the first ever Immigration Film Festival in the greater Washington area were underway, led by Judith Johnson and Patti Absher.

The payoff came over the weekend of October 24-26. On Friday night some 110 filmgoers from WES and beyond gathered to see "A Bridge Apart" and meet the filmmakers.

The evening's arrangements unfolded smoothly thanks to Nancy Sorden, who not only coordinated the house and backstage tasks at WES but also the advance arrangements at multiple other film screening sites.

Saturday night at Washington's GALA Hispanic Theatre drew 235 from as far away as Baltimore and Winchester, VA, to a reception with live music and the screening of the highly acclaimed *Who is Dayani Cristol?*. This superb film with Gael Garcia Bernal is a forensic detective story and a re-creation of one young man's journey which ended tragically. A panel with Maryland State Delegate Ana Sol Gutierrez and two people involved with the film spoke to the audience following the screening.

In all a total of 900 filmgoers attended 13 film screenings across suburban Maryland, Virginia and in DC. The feature-length movies were selected to inform, entertain and inspire viewers in hopes that they would become more receptive to and perhaps more involved with urgently needed immigration reform.

The Film Fest Committee thanks all the WES supporters for their donations and enthusiasm.

The Film Fest Committee, building on the foundation of this year's successful festival, plans to double the attendance for 2015. Anyone interested in becoming involved with this exciting project should contact Judith at [judithheron@gmail.com](mailto:judithheron@gmail.com) or Patti at [patti.absher@immigrationfilmfest.org](mailto:patti.absher@immigrationfilmfest.org)



## Felix and Friends

*The Ethical Ideal is Real.*

~ ~ ~

*We are all right when we align ourselves with these basic principles which we call the Ethical Ideal. And when we are **not** aligned with these principles of our being,*

~ ~ ~

*it does not feel good.*

~ ~ ~

*I believe that even the devils have to follow ethical principles. The real devils, the ones who live in Hell, have to follow ethical principles because they couldn't cooperate and run Hell if they didn't work together.*

*Don Montagna, WES Leader, transcribed from a WES platform address:*

*"What Ethical Culture Means to Me" 21 September 1986.*

*(~ ~ ~ indicates a long pause) See:*

*<http://www.ethicalsociety.org/article/215/sundays-celebrations/wes-classics-cellar/ethical-culture>*

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## AEU Seeking Nominations for Elliott-Black Award

The American Ethical Union's Elliott-Black Award will be presented during the 2015 Assembly in Stamford, Conn., June 25-28, 2015. Both John Lovejoy Elliott and Algernon Black were known for their personal courage and for going beyond the usual limits in their commitment to social justice. If you would like to nominate someone for the award, please submit his or her name to Amanda Poppei, Senior Leader, by December 31. Nominees should have demonstrated a commitment to ethical action through their deeds and must be able to speak at the Elliot-Black Banquet on June 27 during the 2015 AEU Assembly.

## Coming up at WES

### Sunday, December 7

**OWL Parent Information Session**, 9:00am, Library. Nora Ludden and Sandra Bishop have been certified to teach the Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education course for the Kindergarten through 1st grade class. They have offered and are planning to teach this course March through May as part of Sunday School at WES. The description of the course is this: "Supports parents in educating children about birth, babies, bodies and families. Following a Parent Meeting and Parent/Child Orientation, the 8 sessions engage children with stories, songs and activities and include a weekly HomeLink - a homework project for parents and children to do together. Promotes dialogue between parent and child." Please plan to attend to find out more as very regular attendance by students is very important.

**A Grand Bazaar 2014**, after platform, Social Hall. Come one. Come all. The Washington Ethical Society invites members, friends, and neighbors to A Grand Bazaar 2014. Open for one day and one day only, Sunday, December 7, 2014, 12:45 p.m. until 3:00 p.m. or until all merchandise is sold. Hand-crafted items, large and (mostly) small, and any remaining Auction items will be available for purchase.

*The Biology Discussion Group will not meet in December. Beginning in January, the group will meet on the second Sunday of the month. See January 11.*

### Thursday, December 11

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

**Board Meeting**, 7pm, 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](http://www.ethicalsociety.org).

### Saturday, December 13

**Winter Festival**, 6PM, Bring your family and friends to our wonderful celebration of the winter holidays and the spirit they bring to our lives.

### Sunday December 21

**Schmoozapaloosa**, after platform, Main Hall. WES continues our lunch on every third 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, January 6

**Skeptical Spirituality Reading Group**, Adler Study, 7PM. Join writer Sigfried Gold on the first Tuesday of each month to discuss spirituality and spiritual practices from a skeptical viewpoint. By skeptical Sigfried means: 1) doubting or rejecting the existence of supernatural forces and phenomena, and 2) bringing an open-minded but critical eye

to any practice we consider. Our primary aim will be to explore spiritual ideas and practices that, if they can survive critical analysis, might support our ethical aspirations and promote a deep sense of purpose and meaning.

### **Thursday January 8**

**Washington Interfaith Network Action with Muriel Bowser, DC's New Mayor,** Time and Location TBD. Join leaders from WIN congregations city-wide in an action with Muriel Bowser during her first week in office. We will present to Mayor Bowser an agenda around Jobs, Housing, Homelessness and other issues important to our Congregations. Bring a team of 15-50 from your congregation to make our voices heard!

### **Friday January 9**

**First (Second!) Friday Discussion Group,** 12:30-2:30pm, Social Hall.

**Social Justice Retreat with Cedar Lane UU and All Souls,** Friday and Saturday at Cedar Lane UU.

### **Sunday January 11**

**Biology Discussion Group,** 12:45-2pm, 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. In January, February and March they will discuss *Evolution in Four Dimensions* by Eva Jablonka and Marion Lamb. All are welcome, whether or not you've done the reading! For more information contact Barbara: [bsearle70@msn.com](mailto:bsearle70@msn.com).