



# Ethical Action Report

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## Welcome to the Ethical Action Report 2.0

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*Bronx Climate Justice North,*

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In May 2014, Riverdale-Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture (RYSEC) member Lynda Paull alerted the Society to the People's Climate March scheduled for the following September 21st. In June three of us attended a talk by Pat Almonrode of 350NYC and distributed a leaflet inviting northwest Bronx neighbors to a Sept 21st planning meeting at RYSEC on July 1st. During the next two months we hosted a number of meetings to plan outreach events to build attendance at the march. We contacted every congregation and organization we knew in the Riverdale, Kingsbridge, and Marble Hill neighborhoods, and sponsored a procession through these communities ending in a jazz program, "Cool Tunes to Cool the Planet," at The Church of the Mediator in Kingsbridge. The result was an excellent turnout for the 21st!

A number of us involved in mobilizing for the march shared our conviction that an ongoing, organized effort must develop from this historic event. So we began meeting at RYSEC in October to envision what quickly emerged as Bronx Climate Justice North (BCJN). The "Justice" component was agreed on because we were conscious that those who are impacted "first and worse" by global warming are disproportionately the poor and people of color - "frontline communities" as the movement has named them. We identified as "North" because in organizing for September 21st we were privileged to begin working with several, vital environmental organizations in the South Bronx and we wanted to support a borough-wide environmental justice effort we were delighted to find already underway.



*Early in the morning of the historic People's Climate March, September 21, 2014, the Riverdale-Kingsbridge Coalition for Climate Action (predecessor to BCJN), begins to gather near Columbus Avenue in Manhattan, with friends from Riverdale-Yonkers Society for Ethical Culture.*

From last November to the present BCJN has held monthly meetings with presentations on a number of issues we wanted to study in order to organize more effectively. Equally important, we have developed three working groups that also meet monthly to plan actions to propose for the whole group's support. "Green Visions" is joining with a New York citywide project to restore as much as possible of the original, pre-European colonial flora and fauna to our natural spaces. "Food Justice" is mobilizing to expand food stamp availability for locally produced fresh fruits and vegetables and to support food insecure families in their struggles with city bureaucracy. And "Energy Solutions" is joining with the Manhattan College Urban Resilience Department in hosting a forum on building renovation for energy efficiency with living wage jobs development.

Our new RYSEC Leader, Jone Johnson Lewis and Director for Outreach, Liz Collier are solidly behind the work BCJN is pioneering. They, along with the RYSEC Board, are planning programming through the fall that will complement BCJN projects. Thus more and more people will be drawn both to our vital environmental work and to a better understanding of Ethical Culture in action!

***Riding the Pope's Environmental Wave – A Personal Reflection,***  
**Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader, Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia and Baltimore Ethical Society**

Many Humanists and Ethical Culturists are cheering the progressive tendencies of Pope Francis. For many environmentalists in our movement in particular, the Pope's recent Encyclical on the environment reflected many sentiments shared by humanists – especially the fact that climate change disproportionately affects the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities. It might indicate that the Catholic Church is going to get serious about climate change.

As Stephen Seufert of the *Huffington Post* pointed out, the Vatican's embrace of theories of evolution and the scientific consensus about climate change may counter reactionary forces, such as young-earth creationist Senator Ted Cruz who is, absurdly, in charge of overseeing NASA's study of the earth's atmosphere! In Seufert's words, "The question then becomes: will Catholics who believe in the dangerous effects of climate change allow a small group to compromise efforts to promote and protect the common good?"

This brings up a second question for humanists: “How can we best ride the wave of the Pope’s environmentalism so as to encourage 1.2 billion Catholics to become better activists for earth?” One answer for those at the Baltimore Ethical Society (BES) is to join forces with Jamie DeMarco and the Chesapeake Climate Action Network (CCAN). Encouraged by Kate LaClair, past Ethical Action Chair at BES, Ethical Culturists in the mid-Atlantic region have long been impressed with CCAN.

BES is joining with CCAN’s “Climate in the Pulpit” efforts of September 26 – 28. CCAN is asking religious groups to speak out from the public in defense of the environment during the Pope’s visit to the United States. They are asking clergy to declare “a moral imperative that people of faith and conscience be stewards” of the earth and “address climate change in our congregations and community.”

Does your local area have similar campaigns? If not, at least consider encouraging Catholic communities near you to embrace the environmental progressivism of the Pope’s Encyclical, excerpts from which I share below. What I find exciting is the Pope’s linking of environmentalism and economic justice. Too often environmentalism is seen as of interest only to the privileged classes and liberal left.

The Pope points out, however, that “...many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry.... There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever.”

He continues: “Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

Near the end of the Encyclical, Pope Francis demands that our species evolve, so to speak: “Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.”

It is important, however, not to get lost in all the hero worship of the first relatively progressive Pope in decades. In riding the Vatican’s environmental wave, humanists cannot ignore the Catholic Church’s role in one of the major causes of climate change: over-population. There is much good in the Pope’s Encyclical, but it does not advocate for a change in the Church’s stance on birth control. John Seager, President of the *Population Connection Action Fund*, praises elements of the Pope’s climate message, but criticizes him for being “unwilling to break the doctrinal chains that prevent the Vatican from recognizing the impacts of population growth.”

The Pope is right to question our addiction to consumerism and our blindness towards economic justice, but until women are given full reproductive rights - including in Catholic dominated countries – we deny ourselves options that might slow our exponential growth and increasing economic demands. For me personally, I am challenged to balance my enthusiasm for the progressive statements of Pope Francis with regressive and anti-feminist elements of the Vatican. I hope to do so as I speak out in support of the Pope’s progressivism and in asking him to go further.

## ***More Support for Humanist Schools in Uganda!***

**Dr. Anne Klaeyen, Leader, New York Society for Ethical Culture**

***Editor’s Note:*** As a follow up to an article in June’s *AEU Ethical Action Report* by Kate Lovelady, Leader of the Ethical Society of St. Louis (ESSL), I asked Dr. Anne Klaeyen to offer some words on her Society’s contribution to education in Uganda. While ESSL worked with the Ethical Society of Austin to provide scholarships to female boarding students in Uganda, the New York Society for Ethical Culture (NYSEC) focused on supporting one particular school. In a country where intolerance is making life a living hell for so many, there is work enough for us all to get involved.

Over the past few years, I have read with horror the stories coming out of Uganda about waves of American missionaries who have turned "The Pearl of Africa" into a test case for rightwing, anti-gay Christian backlash. An article and video entitled *Gospel of Intolerance* by filmmaker Roger Ross Williams in *The New York Times* (1/22/13) reveals how money donated by American evangelicals helps to finance a violent anti-gay movement in Uganda. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/23/opinion/gospel-of-intolerance.html?smid=tw-share&r=0>).

Another, full length, documentary - "Call Me Kuchu" (<http://callmekuchu.com/>) - is a heart-wrenching and inspiring look into the lives of Ugandan gays and lesbians whose lives are at risk every day. The combination of evangelical Christianity and anti-Western resentment (except for the Americans who send money) has produced an environment that is extremely dangerous for those struggling for gay rights. You can learn more about the intolerance on the IHEU website at <http://iheu.org/?s=Uganda>.

As Kate Lovelady pointed out in the June Ethical Action newsletter, Humanists in Uganda are trying to address some of these issues by supporting education. I am encouraging the NYSEC to get involved by supporting the Kasese Humanist Primary School. You can learn about it at the International Humanist and Ethical Union's *Facebook* page and website of the Kasese Humanist Primary School (See: <https://www.facebook.com/kasesehumanistschool> and <http://kasesehumanistschool.webs.com/aboutus.htm>)

I learned about the school when someone emailed me at Columbia University requesting books on humanism. As (bad) luck would have it, he was a fraud who was trying to convince me to send him laptop computers and digital cameras. However, by comparing his post office box and phone numbers to those of the *real* humanist school, I connected with Bwambale M. Robert, School Project Director, and am sponsoring one of the students. NYSEC's *Ethics for Children* families will connect with the school's families by sending letters, drawings, and books. This, like the friendship we have for several years shared with Afghan Child Education and Care Organization (<http://www.afceco.org/>), connects us to humanists around the world.

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### ***Ethical Action Spotlight***

*With many thanks to Jim White and Anne Klaeyesen for contributing text and ideas to this month's EAR, and to Amanda Poppei for her editorial assistance. Let's continue the dialogue in our national Movement – submit comments, articles and suggestions for future EAR editions!*

*Hugh Taft-Morales, Leader, Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia and Baltimore Ethical Society.*

### **The Ethical Action Report 2.0**

As Ethical Societies around the country are well into their 2014-2015 program season, the EAR is evolving to try to be more useful to you and to generate more constructive, engaged dialogue about “deed before creed” throughout the Movement. We hope this new format offers stimulating ideas and practical hints that make ethical action more effective and rewarding at your societies and in your lives.

#### **EAR 2.0 hopes to offer:**

- More in-depth analysis of particular social justice issues.
- *Stories of Ethical Action projects that worked well at one of our Societies and might enliven your home Society.*
- Discussion of ways to frame Ethical Culture's commitment to Ethical Action.
- *Excerpts from recent Ethical Culture platform addresses or statements from around the Movement about civic, social, or ethical issues.*

*Join the fun!*  
*Offer your thoughts and news items –*

*For the ‘Ethical Action Feature’ in the Autumn edition of “Dialogue.”*  
*And for the November edition of the “Ethical Action Report,”*

- Write about an issue connected to your professional life or private interest.
- *Share news about an interesting Ethical Action project at your Society.*
- Write a “letter to the EAR editor” addressing any articles in this or future issues.
- *Do a historical reflection on an Ethical Action moment from Ethical Culture’s history.*

Submit your essay early and the editorial volunteers can help polish your offering.

Feel free to float your idea or a draft by me at [HughTM@gmail.com](mailto:HughTM@gmail.com) by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. All final copy has to be sent to me no later than the 25<sup>th</sup> of September for the Dialogue’s ‘Ethical Action Feature’ and the 25<sup>th</sup> of October for the Ethical Action Report.

Sincerely,  
Hugh Taft-Morales, Ethical Culture Leader and Editor  
*Ethical Action Report and Ethical Action Feature*

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