ANNUAL SOCIETY REPORT 2019

Society Report for Ethical Society of St. Louis

Leader(s): For 2019-2020: Kate Lovelady (Ministry Team Leader), James Croft (Outreach Director)

President(s): For 2019-2020: Amanda Verbeck (President), Krystal White (Past President), Stephanie Sigala (President-Elect)

Administrative Director/Office Contact: Nancy Jelinek (Office Administrator)

Ethical Action:

The Society had a suggested ethical action for each month.
1. Donate blood, donate organs, donate body for science (hosted two American Red Cross blood drives)
2. Support Atheist Alliance Helping the Homeless St. Louis
3. Advocate for public policy to support the environment, universal health care, gun safety, and Missouri’s Amendment 1
4. Own our impacts and revere the world
5. Participate in Black Lives Matter vigils (monthly vigils were held at the Society with an average of 15 participants)
6. Participate in Pride Saint Louis and reflect on LGBTQIA+ liberation
7. Donate to the Gateway STEM khaki pants drive (collected 350 pants for students)
8. Support the International Institute’s Community Luncheon
9. Donate to the Operation Food Search food drive
10. Donate blankets, underwear, sanitary pads and tampons, and other personal items to support unhoused individuals in the Saint Louis area
11. Donate kitchen and other household items to benefit families through International Institute
12. Support the students at Ugandan Humanist schools (raised over $25,000 from our congregation to support 36 full-board scholarships for girls at the humanist secondary schools)

Additional ethical actions: participated in Adopt-A-Highway cleanup program, ongoing Operation Food Search food drive (collected 1585 pounds of food this year), hosted monthly secular sobriety groups, annual Thanksgiving society-wide morning of service
In 2019, the Society had split collections on Sunday morning, raising $2253 to support many local organizations, including Bilingual International Assistance Services, Kingdom House, Planned Parenthood, Independence Center, Missourians for Single Payer, Gateway STEM High School, Future of Ethical Societies, PROMO, AEU New Society Development Program, Jamaa Birth Village, World Community Center, UNICEF, and Winter Outreach.

Each year, our Ethical in Action Award recognizes an individual or group in the St. Louis community that has provided courageous and dedicated service to maintaining the rights and dignity of their fellow human beings in some aspect of life—religious, social, political, economic, medical, educational, ecological, recreational, or artistic. This year’s award was given to Joyce Best, lifelong activist for peace, justice, and racial equality. Joyce was an active member of the Committee on Racial Equality and she participated in sit-ins and other interracial actions, including helping to form the Freedom of Residence group in St. Louis. Joyce was active in Mothers and Children Together, which sponsored visits of children with mothers in prison, and in her profession as a librarian, she helped establish a library at Pruitt-Igoe. She is a longtime active member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, and with that group she helped establish a children’s peace camp in University City, planning and administering the camp and working there each day as a volunteer for several summers. She also locally coordinates the national Jane Addams Children’s Book Award, which recognizes children’s books that promote interracial harmony and world peace. Joyce’s Ethical Society work includes serving on the Board of Trustees, and years of active participation in the Sunday School, including as volunteer director; in many committees, notably the Ethical Action Committee, and single-handedly administering the Gilpin Fund utility assistance program; and serving in multiple roles in the Tuesday Women’s Association. She continues to be a strong and persuasive voice of conscience at the Society.

Ethical Education:

In December 2019, Director of Ethical Education Rachel Valenti stepped down from the role. That same month, Ethical Society leadership made the decision to hire Kat Weir in her place. Kat holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education from Webster University and a Master of Arts degree in Nonprofit Management from Washington University in St. Louis. She brings to the Ethical Society nearly 10 years of professional leadership experience in education and nonprofits.

Throughout the year, SEEK partnered with the Navigators for the first hour of one Sunday each month. All elementary aged kids were invited to participated in Navigator led workshops which included guest presentations and simulation activities among other fun and informative sessions.
In February, upon the departure of the SEEK Assistant, Leader James Croft and Director of Education Kat Weir agreed to combine the duties of SEEK Assistant and Director of Ethical Education, resulting in Kat increasing her hours from 20 to 28 and eliminating the SEEK Assistant position.

Attendance tracking was inconsistent in the first half of the year as turnover took its toll. Kat Weir is presently fine-tuning a more effective, intuitive system for attendance tracking.

**Attendance and Enrollment September 2019 - March 2020**
- Total enrollment PK-12: 81
- Total average attendance: 56%

**Communications:**

This year we have focused on the development of new programs and content, in accordance with the goals set in last year’s report, including YouTube videos, the new *Ethics and Chill* podcast, and educational programs. Of course, the end of this program year has been overshadowed by the coronavirus crisis, which has required us to place resources into online meetings and digital content like never before. We don’t yet know how this will affect outreach efforts, but it has led to some planned programs having to be postponed, as well as the development of entirely new programs. We are incredibly proud of how the staff and membership have transitioned so many programs online. James Croft and Louise Jett have worked tirelessly to make this happen. We routinely have over 100+ connected devices at our Platforms.

**Finances:**

The Society’s finances are very healthy and our investments continue to grow. Each spring, the Board reviews the next year’s budget that is prepared by Leader Kate Lovelady. After the Board approves the budget, it is considered by the membership at our Annual Meeting. Significant deviations from the budget, which would be caused by unanticipated expenditures, must be approved by the Board. For the 2019–20 year, pledge payments amounted to $336,816, a 6% increase from the prior year and an all-time high for the society.

**Membership:**

Our Membership Committee has created a new Connectors mentorship program. This program will give new members the option to be paired with a mentor who can help them navigate the Society and find ways to become more involved in our community. The hope is that the program
will help to retain new members.

As of April 13, 2020, ESSL had 366 total members.

New Developments:

2019-20 Board Goals
COMPLETE – Create and execute a new contract with James Croft.
COMPLETE – Conduct Triennial Leader Evaluation of James Croft by the membership.
COMPLETE – Research/obtain estimates for next year’s financial audit or review.
COMPLETE – Monitor progress on the strategic plan and communicate progress to the membership.
COMPLETE – Develop and adopt a process for monitoring Ministry goals on a monthly basis. Regularly communicate progress on these goals to the membership.
COMPLETE – Conduct a search for a Second Leader. (Our Second Leader Search Committee did incredible work in finding a highly qualified candidate. While it is disappointing that the candidate chose a position elsewhere, the search process went extremely well.)
INCOMPLETE – Implement the Increase Revenue Plan approved in 2019.

We bid Leader Kate Lovelady farewell at the end of May. She has retired, and we will miss her greatly at the Society!

Goals for 2020:

Our main goal right now must be to keep communication with our own community open and clear throughout the entire coronavirus crisis, so that our members and friends understand that we are here for them and appreciate them.

Another goal for the upcoming year is to support Leader James Croft in his new role as our new Ministry Team Leader.

Looking ahead, we are planning now for ways to safely reopen when the time is right.