

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF WESTCHESTER

2020 -- YEAR IN REVIEW

2020 was an interesting year to say the least. While we have clearly not been conducting “business as usual”, we certainly have still been conducting business. As the saying goes, “necessity is the mother of invention”, and we have found ways to reinvent the way we do things because we have had to. Thankfully, we have been able to conduct our weekly Sunday platforms, our book club meetings, our Friday Forums, our monthly Board meetings and attend meetings with partner organizations. Our care committee has been diligent in reaching out to members and checking in on everyone who has been out of touch to make sure that everyone is okay.

Jim Young has continued to manage our buildings and grounds with nothing major to report on, most likely due to less usage and less wear-and-tear, so to speak.

Our membership has not increased this past year and sadly we lost two of our dear longtime members, Charlotte Klein and Oliver Swift. We currently have 52 members at our Westchester Society.

Our office administrator, Giuliana Gallesi, continues to work in our office but her hours have now been reduced to four hours on Sunday mornings in an effort to reduce our overhead.

Many of our members continue to remain active on the Ethical Action front but it sometimes is a virtual effort. One of our focuses of this past important election year was the Reclaim Our Vote Campaign. Our members sent out thousands of postcards to voter-suppressed folks in NC and TX to help get voters registered and out to the polls. Some members even did phone-calling outreach. Alex Zackrone has been extremely active in sending us emails alerting us to local rallies and community activist events, giving us ample opportunity to be involved where we felt safe to do so. Lannie Spalding continued to email us with opportunities to help out the Interfaith Council for New Americans-Westchester (ICNAW) with the coat drive and various other volunteer opportunities. We have also been involved in the AEU’s anti-racism initiatives which will be ongoing.

Our Ethical Education program has been struggling as the kids have not seen each other in person since March 2020 with one exception—a visit to a local park where they could socially distance but actually see each other in person. With school turning into a remote situation and children forced to be in front of a screen all day, it is not an appealing option to then spend Sunday mornings in front of a screen also. As the adults participated in some all-Society events, it seems as though the future of the ethical ed program, at least while the pandemic ensues, may also be a joint effort. We look forward to working with Trish Cowan in the future as we understand that she is the new AEU-hired Ethical Education Coordinator who will be working with all the Societies to unite us with curriculum and activities. Our Ethical Education Director, Sabine Salandy, resigned in December of 2020 as she has found a full-time position helping young, talented, tech-savvy people of color find employment in the tech industry. So we will have to find other ways of keeping our kids at Ethical connected until we can be reunited in person once again. We have no plans at this juncture to hire a new EE Director.

Our social and special events, such as our Café Nights, are what have taken the biggest hit of all. As there are still limitations on the number of folks that can gather and the risk this still poses, we are still forced to stay apart, at least physically. We all miss our festivals and hearing our beautiful chorus sing! I am sure everyone is looking forward to the opportunity to get back to normal as soon as possible. At the beginning of the year before COVID hit, we were able to hold our Day of Deeds Auction for MLK Day and raised a lot of money for a dozen or so charities. And at the end of 2020, we did hold a hybrid version of our traditional Winter Festival Bag Party where some members were at the Society and the rest were on Zoom directing the few that were at the Society how to fill the bags with donated items for the homeless shelter residents. Our modifications to this event which has taken place for many, many years only proves that “when there is a will, there is a way.”

In November 2020, Board members reached out to all members to ask a few questions about the future direction of the Society. We were seeking input and suggestions for future virtual planning and hoping that we can resume in-person platforms sometime before the end of 2021. Our 2021 pledge campaign is in progress. We have extended our fiscal year by an extra four months (ending in

December 2020) in the effort to help our deficit this year and transition to a fiscal year that operates on a calendar year. The rental income that has always sustained us is greatly diminished with only the nursery school, rental house and parking payments coming in, so that the membership pledges are going to be heavily relied on to carry us through to better days. Our Treasurer, Geoff Smith, has worked fastidiously on our financials and has provided the AEU with all Financial Reports to date.

Our leader Bart Worden's theme for 2021 is Pathways to Equity. Topics covered so far are: Equity in Politics, Education, Money and Housing. We are all looking forward to hearing the remaining engaging, thought-provoking platforms to come on this topic.

Respectfully submitted,

Lillian Schulz

President, Board of Directors

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