



American Ethical Union

Inspiring Ethical Communities

2 West 64th Street • New York, NY 10023 • www.aeu.org
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ANNUAL SOCIETY REPORT

Society Report for Philadelphia Ethical Society

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Please provide brief updates on the following areas of your Society that occurred or developed in 2020:

Ethical Action:

During 2020, ethical action in our Ethical Society has been furthered in at least three ways: (1) Continuing our active participation in POWER, the central and eastern Pennsylvania interfaith coalition, to bring racial justice in environmental protection, to attain a living wage, to obtain fair distribution of funding of public schools based on actual needs from our state, and to bring true justice to the criminal justice system

(2) Following the lead of AEU, we have encouraged over 2,000 (probably discouraged) citizens to exercise their right to vote

(3) Organized and rallied against, and otherwise protested the attempted coup that rejected the results of a well-conducted election. Also, some of our voices probably led to the closing of the terrible family detention center in Berks County. Finally, looking inward, we surveyed our congregation about our own racism and our task force's efforts to end it, with results to be used in 2021 to mitigate our own complicity in racism.

Ethical Education:

We have begun a Gender Bias Taskforce to discuss issues and implement corrective actions pertaining to this important concern for both our Ethical Society and society at large.

Our leader holds regular Intro to Ethical Humanism discussions for those interested in learning more about the beliefs underpinning our Society.

Our leader also holds regular book discussions about pertinent written works.

Our attempts to re-start our SEEK program have not been productive recently and the COVID-19 pandemic have made this even harder.



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Communications:

Over the past year, the value of communication has become even clearer. We continue to work on improving our social media and web presence. Our Mailchimp list has almost 800 names that we use to distribute our newsletter and other items of interest. Meetup now has 1020 members signed up. Additionally, we are working to increase visibility of our platforms and events on Facebook. Communications in various forms have been extremely important in the COVID-19 era. Perhaps unexpectedly, using Zoom has allowed us to connect to friends and members who had either moved away or otherwise had found it difficult to travel to attend platforms before the pandemic. Still, we realize that for some, technology remains a barrier, and we look forward to the day that we can begin transitioning back to in-person events. Once that is possible, we intend to continue iterating with digital formats by implementing a hybrid platform model of live streaming in-person events.

Finances:

The advent of COVID 19 in March presented a formidable challenge for our financial operations: Approximately 55 to 60 percent of our annual income is derived from rental income as we provide space in our building for a variety of activities. When it became readily apparent that a significant portion of this income would be lost for most, or all, of the remaining months of 2020, we had to implement a variety of measures designed to address this fiscal exigency. First and foremost was the implementation of cutbacks as we formulated our 2020-21 budget, scheduled to commence in July. In comparison to recent years, the budget was reduced by approximately 20 percent. This was, however, not sufficient to eliminate a projected deficit. Other measures were required, actions which would be effective for the remainder of 2020 and the first six months of 2021.

We applied for, and we were successful in obtaining, funds from the Paycheck Protection Plan. Though this technically was a loan, it eventually became, when we submitted the required documentation, a grant with no obligation to pay back any amount. (We were able to obtain a second grant in 2021.)

We appealed to our membership for an increase in their pledge payments. Their generous response was most gratifying. Additionally, we initiated several meetings - remotely - with the financial organization that manages our Endowment. Our objective was an increase in the monthly income derived from the Endowment. Modifications in the distribution formula were effected; the additional income was forthcoming in 2021

The bottom line of these and other financial responses not specified here: we averted a cash crisis and are now relatively well-positioned to end fiscal 2020-21 in positive territory or, in the worse-case scenario, with only a slight deficit.



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Membership:

Our membership has remained relatively constant this year. We think it likely that the increased ease of attending our weekly Zoom platforms – even from people signing in internationally – will help bolster our visibility and in turn our membership numbers.

New Developments:

Our Ethical Society engaged a facilitator in strategic and long-range planning this past year. She is working with the Board to develop a 3-5 years plan to help shore-up and strengthen five key areas of our Society which were identified through member surveys and stakeholder interviews. We are currently on track to present the plan to our membership to be voted on at our May membership meeting.

Goals for 2021:

The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled our Ethical Society to interject a large dose of contingency in our plans for 2021. We continue to keep in mind the spectrum of possibilities between “things get back to normal” but also “things continue to require adapting.” We have managed to move our programming largely to online platforms at this point. We are preparing to move to a hybrid model of continuing to offer this but also in-person programming and meetings. We are investigating ways to make the use of our building safer to that end - a matter of adequate ventilation, an enhanced schedule of cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces, the intelligent use of our spaces, and striking the right balance of contact tracing in-person participants while respecting individual privacy.