

BESpeak

NOVEMBER 2012

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

Time for Serious Election Reform?

by Hugh Taft-Morales, BES Leader

I learned much preparing for the first installment of our Constitution Series last month. In my study and then discussion of the “right to vote,” what proved most surprising was the casual, diverse, and arbitrary nature of much of our current voting system in the United States. Given that we are a country whose very identity is wrapped up in the biannual ritual of voting, how is it that each of our 13,000 voting districts has its own rules and regulations? Why are states so free to create their own voting procedures? In some states (such as in Iowa and Minnesota) you can register the day you vote while in others (Oregon) there is no voting “place” - you can only vote by mail. There seems little coordination or professionalism within the very process that brought us the notorious “hanging chads.”

In order to “tighten up” the system, some activists promote voter ID laws that mask intention to restrict suffrage. There is no evidence that in-person voter fraud is a problem. Why would anyone try to influence an election by faking a single vote when federal conviction for such crime could lead to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine? Faking votes seems a very ineffective way to affect elections!

With our voting system being so far from perfect, the Supreme Court’s 2010 Citizens United decision is made all the more ominous. Already vulnerable to manipulation, our electoral system is in danger of being sold to the highest bidder. Thanks to the Court, corporations and unions are free to spend as much as they wish from their general treasury funds on political advertisements.

What is even odder than this judicial turn of events are some of the justifications offered on its behalf. The Supreme Court majority argued that restrictions on corporate spending would lead to an electorate “deprived of information, knowledge and opinion vital to its function.” Justice Thomas went so far as to declare *moderate* limits on corporate campaign spending “the most significant abridgement of the freedom of speech and association since the Civil War.” Does the Court actually believe that corporate campaign ads offer anything other than self-serving propaganda?

Sorry, but I just don’t believe corporations’ primary concerns are the principles

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SUNDAY PLATFORMS

10:30 a.m.

(details on pages 4-5)

NOVEMBER 4

“Bullets and Bullies at the Ballot Box: What Latin America Can Teach Us About Why We Should Vote”

Maureen Taft-Morales

*Specialist in Latin American Affairs,
Congressional Research Service,
Library of Congress*

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American Ethical Union*

NOVEMBER 25

“Faith for Faithless Times”

Richard Kiniry

*Leader Emeritus, Ethical
Humanist Society of Philadelphia*

ETHICAL HUMANIST SUNDAY SCHOOL

WITH LINDA JOY BURKE

Every Sunday

10:30 a.m. – Noon

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On the web at bmorethical.org

Building Humanist Communities in Baltimore

by *Emil Volcheck, BES President*



Three years ago this month, the Baltimore Coalition of Reason (Baltimore CoR) formed. What started with three groups has since grown to a coalition of nine humanist and atheist organizations. The CoR got off to a strong start – with a lecture by Greg Epstein speaking about his book *Good Without God* – that drew an audience of nearly 200 at First Unitarian thanks to the electronic billboard advertisement at Ravens Stadium funded by the United Coalition of Reason.

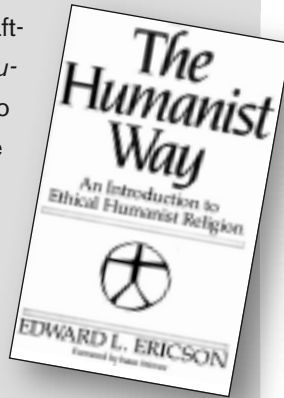
Looking back over the past year, Baltimore CoR has kept a pace of events that has exceeded my expectations. The highlight of the year for many of us was attending the Reason Rally, which brought to the National Mall an estimated 20,000 humanists and atheists and employed several of us as volunteer VIP ushers. Since September 2011, the CoR has organized or co-sponsored a diverse range of events, including: a “Parenting Beyond Belief” workshop by Dale McGowan; a lecture on religious fundamentalism by Professor Bjorn Krondorfer; a lecture by Sean Faircloth on his book *Attack of the Theocrats*; the second annual celebration of HumanLight in Baltimore; a lecture on LGBT rights in Uganda by Reverend Kiyimba; two lectures marking Darwin Day; a concert by singer and political satirist Roy Zimmerman; a celebration of World Humanist Day that featured a documentary about the impact of religious millennialism on U.S. foreign policy, followed by a counterpoint Humanist view of the future provided by astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson; and Skepticamp DC 2012. Catherine Blackwell, past president of the UMBC Secular Student Alliance, represented Baltimore CoR on the TV debate show “Square Off with Richard Sher.” Baltimore CoR also helped launch the LGBTQ Humanist Council of Baltimore, the newest chapter of the American Humanist Association in the city. The events of the CoR serve to build and strengthen a greater humanist community in Baltimore. For a young and loosely knit coalition, this is an impressive record of activity.

Last March, it was my privilege to address an audience of over seven hundred at Ignite Baltimore #10 on the theme of this essay. Baltimore CoR is a publicity coalition whose purpose is to raise public awareness that people can be good without believing in God. For those of us who are fortunate enough to have found a home in Ethical Culture (or any member of Baltimore CoR), this message might seem obvious, or a distraction from our primary focus. But we must not forget there are those less fortunate who suffer hardship as a result of their beliefs. Army Reserve Captain Ryan Jean was rated “spiritually deficient” by an Army psychological fitness test and berated by an Army chaplain who told him he should resign his commission if he did not believe in God. (Listen to the podcast of his platform address on the BES website.) Jessica Ahlquist, a high-school student in Cranston, Rhode Island,

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EXAMINING ETHICAL HUMANISM

The history and philosophy of Ethical Humanism beg to be explored. If you'd like to learn more, join Leader Hugh Taft-Morales as he offers a series of discussions of *The Humanist Way* – an important explanation of what it means to be a nontheistic religion written by former Ethical Culture Leader Edward Ericson. Keep your eye out for the schedule for this series that will appear in various venues such as our website, Meetup, and Facebook. Reflections will be shared and questions entertained at these free sessions that will encourage discussion of what Humanism means and are open to the public as well as to Ethical Society members and visitors.



JOIN AYO & JESSE JACKSON

Thursday, November 8, 5:00–7:00 p.m.

Affirmative Youth Opportunity (AYO), the juvenile justice coalition of organizations, businesses and faith institutions that BES helped organize, will hold a “Reallocate to Recreate Rally” on Thursday, November 8 from 5:00–7:00 p.m. at City Hall. Rev. Jesse Jackson and other notables will speak in support of the AYO program: no new youth jail and the reallocation of monies reserved for the jail to fund opportunities for youth in impoverished Baltimore neighborhoods.

BES WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS



On September 16 BES formally welcomed four new members. From left to right: Dan Blank, Darlene Cook, Argentine Craig, and Kate Dushel. In an effort to help everyone get to know them a little bit better, we will begin running a series entitled “New Member Profiles” on our website, bmorethical.org, in the coming weeks.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Poetry Group

Sunday, Nov. 4, 9:30 a.m.

BES Luncheon Social

Sunday, Nov. 4, 1:00 p.m.

Reallocate to Recreate Rally

Thursday, Nov. 8, 5:00 p.m.

Baking Night at Moveable Feast

Thursday, Nov. 8, 5:45 p.m.

Ethical Action Meeting

Sunday, Nov. 11, 9:15 a.m.

Mindfulness Meditation

Sunday, Nov. 11, 9:30 a.m.

Moveable Treats

Sunday, Nov. 11

Family Game Night and Potluck Dinner

Saturday, Nov. 17, 5:00 p.m.

Board Meeting

Sunday, Nov. 18, 12:30 p.m.

Constitution and Ethics Series

Sunday, Nov. 25, 12:30 p.m.

Newcomers Meeting

Sunday, Nov. 25, 12:30 p.m.

BES Ironweed Film Club

Wednesday, Nov. 28, 7:30 p.m.

SUNDAY SNACK SCHEDULE

Last names starting with:

A to F	Nov. 4
G to L	Nov. 11
M to R	Nov. 18
S to Z	Nov. 25

NOVEMBER 4

“Bullets and Bullies at the Ballot Box: What Latin America Can Teach Us About Why We Should Vote”

Maureen Taft-Morales

*Specialist in Latin American Affairs,
Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress*

In the last presidential elections, about a third of U.S. registered voters who failed to exercise their right to vote said they were too busy to do so. As countries in Latin America and the Caribbean continue to make the transition from dictatorships to democratic governments, citizens trying to hold their governments accountable have faced threats, oppression, and murder at the hands of government or other forces. Voters have been shot at, members of opposition parties have found their names mysteriously erased from voter registration lists, and ballots have gone missing. Their struggles for free and fair elections remind us of why we should not take voting for granted on November 6 – or at any other election.

For twenty-five years, **Maureen Taft-Morales** has been providing expert advice, analysis, and other assistance to members and committees of Congress as a Specialist in Latin American Affairs with the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress. Recognized as an authority in her field outside of Congress as well, Ms. Taft-Morales has written about transitions from dictatorship to democracy in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Peru and is an experienced member of international election observation missions in various Latin American countries. In

BES LUNCHEON SOCIAL

Sunday, November 4, 1:00 p.m.

Members and friends are invited to come together the first Sunday of each month for lunch at a local restaurant. Following the platform we will decide as a group where to gather. We encourage wearing BES shirts or other items of BES visibility for promotion and unity as we enjoy a meal together. If you have any questions, please contact Paul Furth at pdqblues@aol.com.

2007, she was awarded a Senior Democracy Fellowship at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), given to advance democratic practices in emerging and transitional democracies. As part of the USAID Mission in Guatemala, Ms. Taft-Morales helped conduct democracy promotion programs that advanced the work of civilian watchdog groups, government transparency, and the broader participation of indigenous people – especially indigenous women – in the 2007 Guatemalan national elections.

NOVEMBER 11

“Ethical Winning and Losing”

Hugh Taft-Morales

Leader, Baltimore Ethical Society

Are there ethical ways to win and lose? Do adults engaged in high-stake contests maintain the “good sport” habits we’re taught growing up? How will victorious and defeated candidates and political partisans respond to the election results? Ethical Humanists active in our country’s political process will be striving to assure that our best responses are brought out when the dust settles after November 6th. Through attention to the sports analogies dominating our national culture of competition, we discover that we must continue to grow ever more civically engaged and positive if we are to create an ethical culture.

Hugh Taft-Morales is now in his third year as BES Leader and main guitarist. A Yale College graduate (1979), he also earned a masters in philosophy (1986) from University of Kent in England. For twenty-five years he taught high school philosophy and history. Then after his mid-1990s discovery of Ethical Culture, he served the Washington Ethical Society as a board member from 2003–2006, the last year as president. In addition to being a certified Leader in Ethical Culture, he has completed a three-year leadership certification program with the Humanist Institute. A faculty member at the 2012 AEU Lay Leadership Summer School and secretary to the AEU’s National Leaders Council, Taft-Morales serves as Leader for the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia and as Consulting Leader to the Ethical Society Without Walls (ESWoW). He and his wife Maureen, who delivered last Sunday’s platform, live in Takoma Park, Maryland; they are the enthusiastic parents of three children: Sean, Maya, and Justin.

FAMILY GAME NIGHT AND POTLUCK DINNER WITH BART WORDEN

Saturday, November 17, 5:00–8:00 p.m.

Please join us for a potluck dinner and play some board games! We welcome a special guest this evening – Bart Worden, the new Executive Director of the AEU. Bart would like to meet members and hear what they appreciate and enjoy at BES. We hope you'll attend and make him feel welcome. You can sign up to bring a dish and a game at <http://ur1.ca/aih1j>.

NOVEMBER 18

“What We Live For”

Bart Worden

Executive Director, American Ethical Union

In 1876 the founder of the first Society for Ethical Culture – Felix Adler – said the following in his inaugural address: “There is a great and crying evil in modern society. It is want of purpose. It is that narrowness of vision which shuts out the wider vistas of the soul. It is the absence of those sublime emotions which, wherever they arise, do not fail to exalt and consecrate existence.” Adler’s aspiration was that Ethical Societies would inspire people to experience profound purposefulness coupled with both an expansive vision of humanity and a passion realizing each person’s worth and dignity – with his hope being that these conjoined beliefs would lead us toward a richly humane and just society. How well does Adler’s concern today reflect our concerns?

Bart Worden, a longtime member of the Ethical Culture Society of Westchester, was recently named Executive Director for the American Ethical Union and continues to serve the Westchester Society as its Leader. He has been an active participant with a number of AEU committees and task forces, has served on the AEU board as a National Leaders Council representative, and is a faculty member for the AEU Lay Leadership Summer School. Worden obtained his bachelor’s degree in 1978 from Hope College, where his major was philosophy of religion. In 1983, he obtained a masters degree in social work from New York University, after which he worked

as a social worker and psychotherapist for adults with psychiatric disabilities. He currently serves The Guidance Center of Westchester as the organization’s associate executive director. Prior to his appointment as Leader for the Westchester Society in 1998, Worden graduated from the Humanist Institute (1997) and worked as a Leader-intern at the New York Society for Ethical Culture. His introduction to the Westchester Ethical Society was extended twenty-seven years ago by his wife Ruthanne, and sons Gary and Jeff are graduates of Westchester’s Sunday school.

NOVEMBER 25

“Faith for Faithless Times”

Richard Kiniry

Leader Emeritus,

Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia

Ethical Humanism claims each person plays a part in creating our human world. So – are we proud of our handiwork? While Ethical Society members may have trouble living up to that belief, most human beings have never heard of the idea. Trying to live that principle could change our world and could assist humans as they learn to find their meaning in life through positive involvement in their relations with others and the natural world. Ethical Humanism is a very good idea; we ought to spread the word.

Richard Kiniry served as Leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia from 1990 to 2011. A former Roman Catholic seminarian, Peace Corps volunteer in India, and stained glass artisan, Richard joined the Philadelphia Ethical Society in 1984 after a prolonged search for a naturalistic religion that combined humanism with social justice. He became a Certified Leader in 1990. Among the many accomplishments he is credited with having achieved as Leader may be counted the reopening of Camp Linden – a summer day camp serving underprivileged youth that is supported and maintained by the Philadelphia Ethical Society – and related efforts to bolster the quality of life of families living in the Strawberry Mansion section of North Philadelphia. As an active participant in the American Ethical Union (AEU), he has served in a variety of leadership roles including president of the National Leaders Council and as chair of the AEU Ethical Action Committee.

IRONWEED

Film

CLUB

**Wednesday, November 28,
7:30 p.m.**

Join the BES Ironweed Film Club as we screen *Imagine It!*

Imagine It! provides material for discussion on the power of big ideas in action and reports on the promise of a new youth culture engaging their curiosity to change the world, empowered by science, technology, education...and desire. Innovators, scientists and authors, such as “the restless genius” Ray Kurzweil and Sally Ride, a major champion of STEM education, inspire viewers to imagine a better world by unleashing their creativity and taking action to solve global challenges.

This film is an affecting introduction to the movement to get creative thinking and the arts back into schools and connect those with science and engineering and it should encourage spirited discussion.

Join the Film Club Meetup at meetu.ps/mLcNM. Screenings are open to members of BES and the BES Ironweed Film Club. Ask Emil about free membership (volcheck@acm.org or 410-929-3399). Donations are requested for refreshments.

HERB SILVERMAN AT PROLOGUE, INC.

Sunday, November 11, 3:00 p.m.

The Baltimore Coalition of Reason is hosting Herb Silverman, founder of the Secular Coalition for America, discussing his recently published and well-received book *Candidate without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt* at Prologue, Inc., 3 Milford Mill Road, Baltimore, MD 21208, on Sunday, November 11 at 3:00 p.m.

Silverman turned from apathetic to activist atheist when he discovered that the South Carolina Constitution prohibited anyone who “denied the existence of the Supreme Being” from running for public office. To overturn this anachronism, he engaged in an eight-year battle that included his becoming a candidate for governor and inspired his “Get off your apathy!” rallying cry. His is a powerful and humorous story that has been termed “a candid, well-written, captivating read.” For event details, see <http://meetu.ps/mL3nR>. Book sales and signing will follow the talk.

Join Herb Silverman and leaders of Baltimore CoR for lunch at 1:30 p.m. at the Suburban House restaurant. You can also meet and greet Herb at BES after Hugh's platform that Sunday morning.

BAKING NIGHT AT MOVEABLE FEAST

Thursday, November 8, 5:45–8:00 p.m.

Join BES members and others for this enjoyable outing at a great organization – check out their website at www.mfeast.org. Let Lisa Alderson know you are coming (lialderson@gmail.com) and show up at Moveable Feast, 901 N. Milton Ave., Baltimore, MD, at 5:45 p.m. Park in front of building and enter through the door closest to Ashland Street. Let Lisa know if you'd like to carpool, and she'll try to match you up with another BES participant.

MINDFULNESS

meditation

Sunday, November 11, 9:30 a.m.

Mindfulness is a tool we can use in our daily lives to act in a more ethical way. We practice mindfulness meditation so that mindfulness comes naturally in stressful times. Join us as we sit (on chairs) and breathe (just the way it comes naturally) and listen to some words from Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the world's best-known teachers of mindfulness.



THE CONSTITUTION SERIES – CHURCH AND STATE SEPARATION

November 25, 12:30–2:00 p.m.

The *Constitution Series* examines important issues in relation to the Constitution, legal rulings, and ethics. Leader of the Baltimore Ethical Society, Hugh Taft-Morales, will discuss separation of church and state. Questions to be explored include: How do the Constitution and subsequent court rulings explain the separation of religious and civil activity? How do we assure an appropriate separation of church and state while maintaining religious freedom?

Building Humanist Communities

(continued from page 2)

faced threats of bodily harm that required police to protect her at school. Ahlquist received a 2012 Humanist Pioneer Award from the American Humanist Association. Also receiving the Pioneer Award was Damon Fowler, a high school student in Louisiana who was disowned by his family and shunned by his classmates after he objected to a unconstitutional graduation prayer. Misunderstanding and discrimination can indirectly impact atheists and humanists causing them to self-censor their views. A member of our society revealed to me that when they recently began a search for a new job, they deleted a profile on a popular social networking website that listed them as atheist so that this fact would not be seen by potential employers.

I am proud that the Baltimore Ethical Society has played a vital role in supporting the Baltimore Coalition of Reason through the volunteer work of our members and the use of our facil-

ities. The message of Ethical Culture – “Deed Before Creed” – means that we believe it is what we do that matters, not what religious beliefs we hold. We have an ethical duty to stand up against discrimination based on religious beliefs or nonbeliefs because this diminishes the dignity of our friends and family. Whether this discrimination affects employment opportunities – or marriage rights – it’s unethical, and the Baltimore Ethical Society stands against it.

I hope that you will help build the greater humanist community in Baltimore by supporting the message of Baltimore CoR and participating in some of the upcoming events of the coalition, including lecture and lunch with Herb Silverman on November 11th (see announcement on page 6) and HumanLight on December 23rd at BES. Please watch for the announcements of Darwin Day in February and World Humanist Day on June 21st.

Election Reform?

(continued from page 1)

of free speech or the creation of “educated voters.” I agree with Justice Stevens who, in dissent, said, “While American democracy is imperfect, few outside the majority of this Court would have thought its flaws included a dearth of corporate money in politics.” Senator John McCain too criticized the Court’s “extreme naiveté” regarding influence of corporate money in politics.

For all these reasons, I think it is time for some serious campaign finance reform. A step in the right direction is the Disclosure of Information on Spending on Campaigns Leads to Open and Secure Elections [also known as the Democracy Is Strengthened by Casting Light On Spending in Elections] Act of 2012 (DISCLOSE). Proposed first in the U.S. House of Representatives by Maryland representative Chris Van Hollen, DISCLOSE would require that organizations certify to the Federal Election Commission (FEC) not only that they are not coordinating their spending with political candidates and campaigns but that when money transfers occur among organizations for the purpose of influencing federal elections the participating organization be made known and that these organization leaders publicly endorse the campaign advertising and that organizations contributing large (over \$10,000) sums toward campaigns and/or ad expenditures must disclose that. These provisions would, at the very least, let consumers and stockholders know about political use of corporate funds. DISCLOSE could serve as the first step in making our elections truer reflections of government by the people!

BESpeak

BALTIMORE ETHICAL SOCIETY

306 W. Franklin Street, Suite 102, Baltimore, MD 21201-4661

NEWSLETTER

Please do not delay!

TIME VALUE

ETHICAL ACTION MEETING

Sunday, November 11, 9:15–10:15 a.m.

Come help plan the Ethical Action strategy for the Baltimore Ethical Society!

NEWCOMERS MEETING

Sunday, November 25, 12:30 p.m.

New to the Society and interested in learning more? Attended a meeting or two? Thinking about joining? Come to the Newcomers Meeting, held following the last platform of every month, and learn more about Ethical Culture and about our Society – its history, its philosophy, and its organization. Meetings last about one hour and attendance is recommended before becoming a member. See Karen Elliott or Hugh Taft-Morales for more information.

SUPPORT MOVEABLE FEAST AND MOVEABLE TREATS

Baked Goods – Sunday, November 11

Other Items – Every Sunday

Support Moveable Feast in its work to feed people with AIDS or blood or breast cancer and their families. Guidelines for donations can be obtained at the Society. For more information about Moveable Feast and their many additional programs, visit them on the web at www.mfeast.org.



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