

Leader's Message  
-- Richard L. Kiniry

The Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia is a loosely connected community. Mostly we see each other on Sundays, and then not every Sunday. What ultimately hold us together are the relationships we have built within the group, and those relationships are based on shared interests. The activities of the Society attract certain kinds of people and the members coalesce around some of those activities. But that involvement can also restrict a member's more complete understanding of what the Society is all about. While there are divergent interests within the Society, those interests represent varied attempts at meaningful living.

Since we are without unconditional principles, members are granted latitude in their personal understanding of our philosophy and through the years we have accepted that the purpose of the Society is not one dimensional. In fact we are in the habit of saying we have three missions—community, education and ethical action—and those missions have been translated into our committee structure.

That structure may be too tight a fit for the unique interests of some members but it can also conceal our primary purpose.

Although we accept that much of what passes for religion these days is more a problem than a solution, we are also in the religion business; we attempt to fulfill the function of offering a framework for meaningful living.

Meaning is a complicated word. It is one thing to ask about the meaning of the word life and another to ask about the meaning of life. While we Ethical Humanists supposedly believe that meaning is a human issue and personal to each human being, the feeling that life with a capital L has some greater meaning is hard to abandon.

Beside the designated three missions of the Society, that meaning aspect is part of our larger understanding of who we are. Ultimately the purpose of the Society is to offer an approach to living meaningfully. And that I believe is our primary mission—helping people to move past failed religious understandings to one based on a naturalistic, ethical relationship with all of life.

But who needs it? If you are enjoying living and doing something you think is worth doing, then does it have to mean something? Or is that what meaningful means? At certain times in life we retrospectively examine our past and wonder if that living was well done, or important or good. Does that mean we desire meaningful living? While as a group we are concerned about social issues and making a better world, do we take seriously the job of helping each other attach meaning to our lives? At the Platform on November 7th I will be asking those questions, asking what meaningful living is and asking if the Society is helping with those questions.