



Ethical Views

May 2007

Vol. 121, No. 9

Newsletter of the Philadelphia Ethical Society



Sunday Platforms

May 6, 2007

Living with Death

Speaker: Richard L. Kiniry, Leader, Ethical Society of Philadelphia

We know the inevitable is out there waiting for us, but now far out there makes a difference. These days many of us are living with chronic conditions that will likely end our lives and yet the living goes on through the process. While avoidance is a natural response to the reality of death, can we together make death a more acceptable reality?

May 13, 2007

Founders Day:

Evolving Ethical Humanism

We will focus on the role of women in the evolution of Ethical Humanism through the years.

May 20, 2007

Women, Social Justice and Spirituality: Opening New Doors for Young Feminists

Speaker: Patricia A. Cooper, Associate Professor of History and Women's Studies, University of Kentucky

A new women's spirituality movement is sweeping the country. It is not about religion, but rather about a broader spiritual and ethical sense that we are all connected into one web of life. This deep belief is at the heart of much spiritually-based social activism. Can feminists afford to ignore this movement? Is there a way to reconcile feminism and spirituality?

May 27, 2007

End War, Not Just This War

Speaker: Richard L. Kiniry, Leader, Ethical Society of Philadelphia

How many wars, just or otherwise, must fail to make life better while

killing thousands of men, women, and children before we admit that war doesn't make sense? Humankind must find better tools to address conflict.

Summer Platforms

On Sundays from June through August the Platforms will start at 10:00 AM and alternate between Colloquies and Book Discussions. The Education Committee invites members to come forward with appropriate books and Book Discussion leaders.

<>



Leader's Message

BE NICE, BUT . . .

by Richard L. Kiniry

I occasionally wonder if our open attitude toward morality is too casual to be of much use. After all we are the Ethical Society and we find a lot wrong with our world, and we talk about making the world better and acting to bring out the best in others, but what about our personal behavior? Many religious groups psychologically abuse their members in an effort to keep them on the straight and narrow. That is not the case with the more liberal religious groups; personal behavior is often considered just that, personal. At times it can seem that for liberal religion being ethical has become the same as being nice. Well, actually there is some truth there — being nice and being ethical have much in common. If you are a person who takes other people's interest into consideration you are probably being both nice and ethical.

Does that mean we should change our name to the Nice Society of Philadelphia? Not so fast. Although we don't talk about personal ethics often, I

hope we all know that ethical behavior means more than just being nice. Most people if asked would say being ethical means doing the right thing, assuming we all have the same idea of right. The belief that there is only one right action in any situation is too simplistic. Without being totally relativistic we would say finding the right depends on the situation, on the intention, and on the consequences. But primarily being ethical is a process of character and integrity.

Being nice is a socially useful habit and doesn't require much thought. Being friendly, helpful, and cooperative qualifies you for the title of nice, but being ethical may require more thoughtful, possibly objectionable, behavior. Which of course doesn't mean that being nice doesn't have ethical force. The simple act of being nice is an under-appreciated first step in bringing out the best in most people.

(Continued next page)

In This Issue

- 1 Platforms, Leader's Message
- 2 President's Message, Technology and Me
- 3 Platform Summaries, New Member Profile
- 4 School for Ethics, Announcements
- 5 Announcements (cont'd), News from the Caring Committee
- 6 Bridging the Gap: A Page from a Case Worker's Notebook, Acknowledgment
- 7 Calendar
- 8 Flower Dedications, Sunday Morning Volunteers

Leader's Message (Continued)

Ethical Humanism's golden rule for judging ethical behavior is our adage: when you act to bring out the best in others, you are bringing out the best in yourself. I cannot count the number of ways I have dissected that saying of Felix Adler's as I have attempted to make it sensible to newcomers. Basically the idea is, you ought to realize that your life is not an individual event. You should awaken to the fact that your life is a relationship and caring for the pieces of your relationship is caring for yourself. What you sow, you will reap. Bringing out the best in the human parts of your relationship with life means you accept those people as part of you while accepting that they are different and distinct. Life works better when all the

Ethics doesn't mean following rules, or just being nice, it means putting yourself into the lives of others as a force for the good.

parts are working at their best. Ethics doesn't mean following rules, or just being nice, it means putting yourself into the lives of others as a force for the good. And the good becomes the fulfillment and happiness of all those parts. The way you treat the rest of life isn't just the moral part of your life, it is your life, it is who you are.

That isn't easy to comprehend, at least for me, but it explains why we don't do much preaching about personal ethical behavior. We don't offer moral principles that can be measured, we offer an attitude toward life as an ethical guide. And since every relationship is unique, each of us has to do it our own way. But while we are at it, may I ask, how are you doing at caring about the uniqueness of others? You have a moral responsibility to be a positive force for good in the lives of those around you. That doesn't mean you receive a pass by performing noble good deeds. Besides good deeds you are responsible for your day-to-day presence in the lives of others. Do you limit yourself to telling the world what is best or do you attempt to bring out the best? ◇



Photo by Ken Greiff

President's Message

by Howard Peer

I've been thinking about work a lot recently. I started out thinking I know what work was. But I'm not so sure anymore. On a very simple basis work is what I do that I get paid for, it's what puts the butter on the bread. In another context it is the summation of a persons' life accomplishment as in "his body of work." And for us Ethical Humanists it is embodied in our motto, "Deed before Creed."

A fortunate few of us find pleasure in our work. For most of us work is not particularly pleasurable, even though it may have some socially redeeming value. The Sanitation Engineer is doing a needed job that benefits the overall health and welfare of the community. But I doubt he likes it.

What about artists? Are they doing work? When does it cease to be work and turn into self indulgence? We can point to Michelangelo and Van Gogh and say that they contributed to the overall betterment of society. But when Van Gogh was 25 years old, who knew he would be so successful? When I see a painter in Rittenhouse Square I can look at him sneeringly and say he is playing for he is no Van Gogh. Yet Van Gogh was, when alive, no Van Gogh. For all the hundreds of marginally successful artists there are hundreds who slave away and never make a go of it.

It is interesting to compare ourselves to other species. Top level predators work to get their prey then devour it, then lie back to rest until hungry again. Their work is short and highly productive. But perhaps we are more like the bee or the ant. Leaf cutter ants in particular come to mind. Like them we have a highly specialized social organization in which most of us are workers with a few specialized and highly valued individuals.

So this summer do something really radical. Take a nice vacation. Do what you want to do. Don't worry too much about work, or even doing social good for that matter. Just do what you want to

do, enjoy yourself, indulge. Things may work out better than you think. And if they don't? Well at least you will be in a pleasant frame of mind and cheerful to be around. And that ain't such a bad goal. Have a great summer. ◇

Technology and Me

From an interview with Kurt Vonnegut in the November 1995 issue of *Inc. Technology*. Vonnegut was asked to discuss his feelings about living in an increasingly computerized world:

I work at home, and if I wanted to, I could have a computer right by my bed, and I'd never have to leave it. But I use a typewriter, and afterward I mark up the pages with a pencil. Then I call up this woman named Carol out in Woodstock and say, "Are you still doing typing?" Sure she is, and her husband is trying to track bluebirds out there and not having much luck, and so we chitchat back and forth, and I say, "Okay, I'll send you the pages." Then I go down the steps and my wife calls, "Where are you going?" "Well," I say, "I'm going to buy an envelope." And she says, "You're not a poor man. Why don't you buy a thousand envelopes? They'll deliver them, and you can put them in the closet." And I say "Hush." So I go to this newsstand across the street where they sell magazines and lottery tickets and stationery. I have to get in line because there are people buying candy and all that sort of thing, and I talk to them. The woman behind the counter has a jewel between her eyes, and when it's my turn, I ask her if there have been any big winners lately. I get my envelope and seal it up and go to the postal convenience center down the block at the corner of Forty-seventh Street and Second Avenue, where I'm secretly in love with the woman behind the counter. I keep absolutely poker-faced; I never let her know how I feel about her. One time I had my pocket picked in there and got to meet a cop and tell him about it. Anyway, I address the envelope to Carol in Woodstock. I stamp the envelope and mail it in a mailbox in front of the post office, and I go home. And I've had a hell of a good time. I tell you, we are here on Earth to fart around, and don't let anybody tell you any different. ◇



Platform Summaries

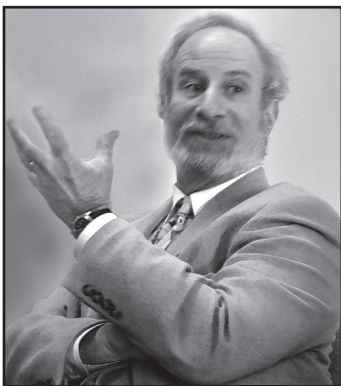


Photo by Janice R. Moore

On February 11, **Dr. Joseph Chuman**, leader of the Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County, NJ spoke on Religion, Ethnicity, Identity, and Ethical Culture. Dr. Chuman voiced his concern about the contemporary situation with religious and ethnic violence of extreme groups, and a perspective that offers an old-world/new-world identity as part of the problem. Dr. Chuman believes that multiculturalism is an ideology that harbors deeply rooted ambivalence. Identity is not monolithic but in reality has very complex elements which are played both up and down. This allows for many communities to cross lines because it then becomes obvious that identity is not solely inherited. On the inside of cultural communities you will find that there are antagonistic diverse sub-communities.

The idea of pure cultural identity is becoming increasingly non-existent. There are rituals that are still carried out in different cultures which can be thought of as gruesome, such as female circumcision, or as affirming, such as a Jew "embracing his own cultural identity".

We must refuse to view the world through radical hybrid lenses, embrace our own experiences, and move across the boundaries of shared values for mutual cooperation and peace. Dr. Chuman sends a message that there is a possibility to go beyond boundaries of religion and culture to break down the walls that divide us.

— **David Ralston**

On April 1, **Richard Kiniry's** topic was "God is Dead, Get over It." Since humans created religions, he said, we must take them seriously. As religionists we see value in serious concerns for meaningful lives, but we need to be open about our disbeliefs just as we are open about our beliefs.



Photo by Janice R. Moore

Richard argued that we need to offer our understanding of life as a relational experience we share with others and with all of the natural world. Our stance is that life itself is the ultimate focus for our attempts to seek honest and meaningful involvements in life. As Ethical Humanists in the 21st century, we recognize that we cannot accept supernatural crutches and must recognize that natural causations are our central concerns. It is time to see the ridiculous as ridiculous. While we do not have full answers, we do know that we can look only to ourselves and to nature to seek understanding. How we live our lives and what we do with our opportunities are what we see as our ultimate concern and task.

In the ensuing discussion, participants articulated a variety of perspectives about a non-theistic religion, from personal atheism to personal theism; yet the discussion stressed that the religious base of ethical humanism looks to the secular world for the full focus of our ways to make our lives meaningful and contributive. The religious push is towards thinking about others, about taking responsibility for the wrongs we see, and about trying to effect positive changes in ourselves, others, society, and our various contexts. The natural world is our concern and focus, not any supernatural distractions. Active involvement in life is the demand.

— **Lyle Murley**



Photos by Janice R. Moore

New Member Profile

— **David Ralston**

Laura and Rich Rizzo live in Bala Cynwyd with three young children, Isabella (4), Talia (2), and Orion (6 months). They met in Philadelphia in 1992 and moved to Albuquerque, NM together in 1995 where they both attended the University of New Mexico. While there Laura danced for the Ballet Theatre of New Mexico and the Santa Fe Opera Company and Rich worked for the football team and UNM newspaper. They graduated in 1998, Rich with a degree in creative writing and with a degree in history. That year they returned to Philadelphia where they were married by Richard Kiniry.

After a brief residency at Mount Holyoke College, Laura attended Temple University where she received a Master of Education degree and is now working to complete her PhD in Dance and Women's Studies. She has danced, taught, and choreographed for many local dance companies and schools, including Sprezzatura Baroque Dance Ensemble, Dance Theatre X, Temple University, Bryn Mawr College, Drexel University, the PA Academy of Ballet. She has also done freelance writing projects for the PA Ballet and Brooklyn Academy of Music. Rich is currently working as the lead information technology specialist for the US Attorney's Office where he manages hundreds of cases a year, including all political corruption trials.

They both love hiking and camping and the outdoors. Rich loves fishing and Laura loves gardening and baking. They both enjoy reading and spending quiet time with their young children and working on their old house.



SCHOOL FOR ETHICS

THE HISTORY OF HUMANISM

We are starting a new class. This time we are looking at the history and evolution of Humanism. We will begin by discussing Alan Bullock's book, *The Humanist Tradition in the West*, which starts with Renaissance Humanism and moves to the present. This is a discussion group and not a lecture. All are invited. For more information speak to Richard Kiniry.

Third Thursday of the month,
May 17, 7:30 PM

ETHICS FOR CHILDREN

Our children's program is growing quickly. We now have a staff of three with our new lead teacher, **Josh Bickford**. We strive to challenge the child's understanding of right and wrong and not brainwash them. If you know of any parents who might be interested, we can send them our Ethics for Children brochure. Call the office with the information, 215 735 3456.

Each **Sunday** morning, 10:45 AM



Photo by Janice R. Moore

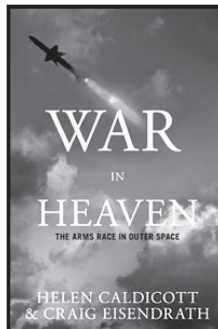
Our Camp Linden Picnic is coming up soon! Mark your calendars early for **Sunday, June 3, 2007, 12 p.m.**

AEU SUMMER SCHOOL

The AEU's **School for Ethics** (Summer School II) will be held in Highlands, North Carolina from **August 11-18, 2007**. An exciting new program is planned, with flexibility for individuals to select learning experiences to deepen knowledge of ethical ideas, develop leadership skills for thriving Ethical Societies, develop a personally richer Ethical experience and lifelong learning, and experience ethical community.



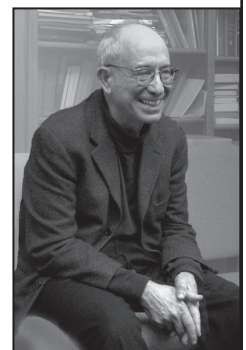
Information about the school and registration materials are available on the AEU website, which is accessible from the Ethical Society of Philadelphia's own website. An early bird discount will be given to those who register by **May 1, 2007**.



War in Heaven: The Arms Race in Outer Space

Thursday, May 3, 7:30 p.m.

In *War in Heaven*, Nobel Prize-nominated and the 1986 Elliott-Black awardee Helen Caldicott and former US Foreign Service officer Craig Eisendrath look at the history of the military use of space and the current plans for "weaponizing the heavens." On May 3 **Craig Eisendrath** will enlighten us to the unnoticed threat that the US is today the principal obstruction to the passage of an international treaty banning weapons from outer space.



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA
ACTION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. HOPE FOR HUMANITY.



Ethical Society of Philadelphia

Amnesty International Forum on Human Rights at Guantanamo Bay

Thursday, May 17, 2007, 7:00 PM

Co-sponsored by the Ethical Society, this forum will consider the human rights violations being committed at Guantanamo Bay and the psychological effects of torture and maltreatment. Speakers include:

Jumana Musa, the Amnesty International USA Advocacy Director for Human Rights and International Justice who has traveled to Guantanamo Bay as part of a delegation of rights groups observing preliminary proceedings for detainees facing trial by the military commission.

Chris Huber, a local attorney who has performed pro bono work through the ACLU representing prisoners at Guantanamo Bay.

Denise Mitchultka, Director of Philadelphia's Liberty Center for Survivors of Torture.

Mary Shaw, Philadelphia Area Coordinator for Amnesty International.

A Day of Caring May 3, 4:00-6:00 p.m.

On Thursday, May 3, the US will be observing a National Day of Prayer. As an alternative, the Ethical Society of Philadelphia will observe **A Day of Caring**. We are going to make some home-cooked meals to donate to the Aid for Friends Project (AFF), which is located in northeast Philly and has been delivering meals to over 3,200 frail, elderly, and disabled people in the Greater Philadelphia region since 1974.



On May 3, we will assemble turkey dinners with stuffing, potatoes, and a vegetable. We will need at least 15 people to cook a turkey breast at home, slice it when it cools, place in a plastic Ziploc baggie, and bring it to our refrigerator at the Society. This can be done anytime from Sunday, April 29 to Thursday, May 3. We also need instant mashed potatoes and Stove Top stuffing. These can be made at home or in our kitchen. If you can't contribute a cooked dish, please bring in a BIG can of peas, peas and carrots, carrots, or green beans.



The rest is fun! We will need about ten people at the Society on Thursday, May 3, from 4-6 PM. to assemble the meals in small tin foil trays. We'll add a bit of gravy, insert a menu, and wrap the tray in a tin foil sheet and a plastic bag. Once the trays are assembled, I will take them home to my freezer and a few days later deliver them to AFF.



Please sign up as a cook/assembler when the sign-up sheets are on display. Children over 10 are welcome to help.

— *Carole Erb, for the Ethical Action Committee*

News from the Caring Committee

— *Temma Fishman, Chair*

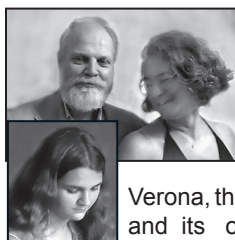
Pat Leopold is out of rehab and is now recovering at home. She welcomes cards and notes.



Jesse Zelnick and **Lew Wilkinson** were welcome sights at the Ethical Society when they came for platforms after being away for so long. We hope to see them both again soon.



Bertha Waters tells us that the Waters family have two things in abundance: educational degrees and offspring. This year two great-grandchildren will be added -- one born March 30, one due in June. Also, one of Bertha's daughters and two granddaughters will receive Master's degrees in May.



Howard Peer, Doris Leicher, and their daughter **Monica** spent Easter Week in Italy, visiting Verona, the Dolomites, Venice and its outlying islands of Murano, famous for its glass art work, Burano, and Toricello.



Photo by Howard Peer

New Lunch Plan Continues

Since January, we have been asking each member to help provide lunch once a month so that everyone can pitch in and take the burden off the few who have been doing it for so long. The meal doesn't have to be elaborate.



The membership list has been divided into groups by the first letter of last names, and each group has been assigned one

Sunday per month to make lunch, to make coffee *and to clean up*.

1st Sunday of the month - letters A-D

2nd Sunday of the month - letters E-K

3rd Sunday of the month - letters L-O

4th Sunday of the month - letters P-Z

In months that have a 5th Sunday, we'll make ad hoc arrangements for that week.



This new plan started on Sunday, January 7 with the First Sunday folks (A-D) and will continue through May. Please check your membership list for those in your group. We think it will be most efficient, fair, and enjoyable for everyone if group members consult and work together.

The cost of lunch will be \$4 and will continue to benefit our Handicapped Accessibility Fund. Reimbursement for expenses is available. If you have questions or concerns, contact Temma or the Society office at 215-735-3456.

Many thanks to our members and friends who have worked to make our new lunch plan a rousing success. We've collected more money than ever from the lunches for our Handicapped Accessible Fund. Keep up the good work!

Bridging the Gap: A Page from a Case Worker's Notebook

— Henry Pashkow

Calvin had lived on the street and in other shelters, and when he came inside this time, when it got cold, and he tested positive for drugs, he said there was no way he would stop using in spite of the rules. I had been warned about what to expect.

"There is no way I'm gonna quit," he said to me, in my office.

"Well, you know the rules here," I said. "I'll test you again in a few days and if you're still positive and you still don't want to go into a counseling program, you'll have to go."

"I don't give a shit about what you do," he said, and leaned back, satisfied.

I didn't say anything.

But he wasn't satisfied, he was building up a head of steam, and he leaned right up in my face.

"You wanna know why I use drugs?" he said.

I didn't like him right in my face, and leaned back.

"You wanna know?" he repeated.

"Well, I don't know, Calvin, I guess I do," I said. "I do and I don't. In a way, it really doesn't matter. It sounds like you've given it a lot of thought. I think that's what matters."

"No way I'm gonna quit, Henry."

"Yeah, I know, Calvin, you already said that."

He didn't say anything for a minute and then he said, "Do you use drugs, Henry?"

I had to decide between being proper and being real. "If there's weed at a party I'll smoke it."

Calvin nodded and smiled like he was zeroing in on a valuable point of information.

"Do you enjoy it, I mean do you enjoy smoking it?"

"Yeah, Calvin, I do. Otherwise I wouldn't do it."

He nodded, and looked serious. "You be careful, boy. Don't take it the wrong way 'cause I'm sayin' this. I'm not trying to tell you what to do."

"I'm not taking it that way. By the way, I appreciate your concern."

"Do they know about it here at the shelter? I mean the big guys, the guys you work for." He looked concerned.

"I don't think so. I haven't told them."

"You have nothing to worry about from me, Henry. I'm not gonna tell them."

"I think I can trust you with this, Calvin."

"I'm not tryin' to tell you what to do, Henry. I'm just sayin', you be careful."

I nodded. "I appreciate that, Calvin."

There was a pause.

"You gonna stop?"

"Hell no, Calvin."

He left the shelter by the end of the week. I ran into him on the street a few months later, and we greeted each other.

"You still usin', Henry?" he asked.

"Same as before," I said.

"Likewise," he said, and we shook hands and were on our separate ways.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT



Again this season, we have been honored -- not only by **Tim Ribchester's** performances on piano at our Sunday Platforms -- but by his informative pre-performance talks on the music he has chosen to play.

Tim's wife, Rebecca (Becky), has also played her violin for us on occasion during the past couple of years. We want to thank both of them for sharing their gifts as musicians with us.



Photos by Janice R. Moore

MAY 2007



Birthdays

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 Jim Cummings Felicia Hinson	2 Meetings - Weston Room 6:30 p.m. Community Committee	3 Day of Caring 4 - 6:00 pm War In Heaven: The Arms Race in Outer Space 7:30 p.m.	4	5 Camp Linden Volunteer Day 11:00 a.m.
6 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Living with Death Richard L. Kiniry	7 Nick Sanders	8	9 Meetings - Weston Room 6:30 p.m. Ethical Action Committee 7:45 p.m. Education Committee	10	11 Rick Zorger	12
13 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Founders Day: Evolving Ethical Humanism	14 Madeleine Suringar	15 Marion Steininger	16 Meetings-Weston Room 6:30 p.m. Executive Committee 7:30 p.m. Board Meeting Jean Bradley	17 Forum Human Rights at Guantanamo Bay 7:00 p.m. Class History of Humanism 7:30 p.m.	18	19
20 Mtg. Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: Women, Social Justice and Spirituality: Opening New Doors for Young Feminists Patricia A. Cooper 1:30 pm. Annual Membership	21 Ethel Boyer	22	23 Meeting Weston Room - 7:30 p.m. Camp Linden Committee	24	25	26
27 10:45 a.m. - Weston Room Ethics for Children 11:00 a.m. Platform: End War, Not Just This War Richard L. Kiniry	28 Robert Kay	29 Mary Lou da Silva Gian Polizzi	30	31		



Annual Membership Meeting

Sunday, May 20th - 1:30 p.m.

Following our Platform and Lunch, members will gather for our Annual Membership Meeting, which will include reports and an election of Trustees.

EXERCISE ★
your right
 ...TO VOTE!

Ethical Views is published monthly
except July and August.

Editor, Ellen Rose
Layout and Photo Editor,
Janice Moore
Distribution, Jean Bradley
Web Master, Bob Moore

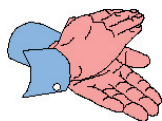
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SUNDAY MORNING VOLUNTEERS

Flower Dedications - Ken Greiff, Chair

May 6 - Rebecca Ribchester in memory
of her grandmother, Joan Harris.

May 13 - Saul Machles: Happy Birthday
to my wife Jean, with love.

May 20 - The Oranges in honor of the
birthdays of Audrey and Marlee Orange.

May 27 - Nick Sanders: In celebration
of those who joined the Ethical Society
with me in May 2003:

Sylvia Bornkoff-Polizzi
Gian Polizzi
David Ralston
Ellen Rose
Joe Monte
Bob Moore
Terry Martin-Murley
Lyle Murley
Pat Leopold

with apologies to anyone I've missed.

Ushers - Arnold Fishman, Head Usher

May 6 - Joel Putnam
May 13 - Howard Peer
May 20 - Ray Smith
May 27 - Gian Polizzi

Greeters - Saul Machles, Head Greeter

May 6 - Saul Machles
May 13 - Saul Machles
May 20 - Chuck Ward
May 27 - Saul Machles

Coffee Hour Lunch

May 6 - Group A-D
May 13 - Group E-K
May 20 - Group L-O
May 27 - Group P-Z

Ethical Society of Philadelphia

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