



ESSL Leader Transition Town Hall

April 7, 2019

Overview

Krystal White – President

Outreach Director James Croft is the Society's candidate for Senior Leader, starting June 2020.

Our current Senior Leader, Kate Lovelady, believes there is no one in Humanism or Ethical Humanism with James's talent, drive and heart. If there is anyone that is going to take the Ethical Society of St. Louis to the next level, it is going to be him.

The Board feels that James is the best candidate for the Senior Leader position, and as a result his candidacy is on the annual meeting ballot (May 16, 2019).

The purpose of the today's townhall is to make certain that members have the chance to voice thoughts and concerns.

Some members already have approached the Board President with the following questions.

Why not have an open search and just let James apply?

The Board grappled with this question for multiple months and considered many factors before making their decision.

There is a big difference between having an intern apply for an open position versus having a second leader that has ably served the Society for several years apply for an open position. When consulting leaders within the movement that understand congregational dynamics, an open search may seemingly be democratic, but it would be damaging to the congregation.

It would be a waste of time and effort as Croft is well known in the movement and is respected greatly. Other candidates would not be interested applying for a position they assume Croft would get anyway.

Congregations are emotionally different from other non-profits. Members have intense feelings for their leaders and their societies. In the unlikely event that another candidate was chosen instead of Croft, many members would be upset and maybe leave the Society. The new Senior Leader may have difficulty being accepted and Croft may leave to pursue opportunities for growth elsewhere.

So now what? It sounds like the Board has already made the decision, why are we having this town hall?

It's not the Board's decision about who the leaders are at the Society. It is the members decision. The congregation will vote on Thursday, May 16. An affirmative vote of two-thirds of active members, in person or by absentee ballot is required to approve Croft as Senior Leader starting in June 2020. That is a significant proportion of the congregation.

If the congregation votes affirmatively, 2019 -2020 fiscal year will be a transition year. Lovelady will mentor Croft. The Society will then consider what the Second Leader role should look like. Options may include searching for a Second Leader or recruiting an intern leader.

If elected, the Board anticipates that Croft would take on more responsibility during the transition. The transition would be smoother, with less of a learning curve with James as the Senior Leader.

That is why the Board is recommending James for the position.

Response / Questions / Feedback from the Membership

The floor was opened to the membership.

What about James's visa status?

Croft is currently in the re-application process for his green card. There is full anticipation it will go through. The process is ongoing.

Is the idea to have the new Second Leader position ready to go when Kate leaves (Summer 2020)?

The goal is to have the Senior Leader in place by June 2020. The Second Leader would not be in place by that time unless that is what the congregation decides it would like to pursue. Conversely, if we need more time to determine what Croft will be like as the Senior Leader and then figure out what the Second Leader role should look like, it would be in the 2020 - 2021 fiscal year.

James has 100% of my support. If James is elected, how much input will he have with selecting the new Second Leader?

Four years ago, for the Second Leader search, Lovelady had input but it was not her decision. She was instrumental in drafting the job description. We would likely follow the same process.

I think that they really complement each other.

This was a recurring opinion in the Two-Leader Model survey results. We would hope to craft a Second Leader job description to be complimentary.

What is the proposed tenure for the new Senior Leader?

According to Bylaws, contracts are from one to three years.

We have not crafted a contract as the vote has not taken place yet. But if membership approves, then the contract would be negotiated within the parameters stated in the Bylaws.

The current model has Kate in charge of the Administrative and Pastoral internal functions and the Outreach Directory oversees the external functions. Why aren't we continuing with this model.

Typical to other congregations, unlike what we have currently at the ESSL, the Senior Leader is the external face of the Society. Many of the external functions Croft is performing now are what other congregations have their Senior Leaders performing.

Also, if Croft is approved as the Senior Leader, and we were to hire a Second Leader with skills or traits that compliment Croft, then the roles of the Senior Leader and the Second Leader would change.

So, if James decides to leave in 10 to 15 years, then we'll do this whole process again?

Re-phrased: Are you creating a tradition for the process on how to handle a Senior Leader's departure?

No, this is what the Board is recommending for this instance. Future Boards and the membership will need to make their own decision on how to handle the situation.

I'm disappointed that we didn't do a search. I think James will be a good leader. But I think the search should have been done. The search process possibly could have shown that James was the best candidate. We don't know as a congregation if there are better candidates out there. You say it is up for us to decide. I think, effectively the decision has been made.

In a separate communication to the President, the member stated they wished a search would have been conducted and that this is what is done with other non-profits. The Board grappled with that for months. The Board did a pro-con list for an open search. The con list outnumbered the pro list. If you disagree with the Board decision you can certainly vote "No".

What happens if we do not have two-thirds of the membership vote “Yes”?

The Senior Leader will leave in 2020, and we anticipate that we would pull together a search committee.

Additional responses from President-Elect and Past President:

During the Board deliberations, outside of an official search, feelers were put out about interest by potential candidates. The reality is that the pool of qualified candidates is small.

Furthermore, candidates within the qualified pool would not be interested in applying for the position knowing that the ESSL has such a strong internal candidate.

If James becomes the Senior Leader, he is going to take on all of the Administrative responsibilities Kate has been doing and continue to do Outreach?

He will be doing Outreach Director tasks, and possibly outsource some tasks to the Social Media Manager. He already has some Admin tasks including staff supervision. But as the Senior Leader, he would have final oversight of all the staff.

What the day-to-day roles will be still needs to be negotiated.

The budgeting and the personnel, if we don’t have a Second Leader, how will it all get done?

If we don’t get a Second Leader, then the Senior Leader will need to take on the rest of the responsibility. Prior to having a Two-Leader Model, Lovelady was responsible for serving in such capacity.

I appreciate that Kate represents multiple points of view. James does not present multiple perspectives, and only has his view, and that “this is how it should be”.

No direct response, but appreciate voicing that opinion.

I strongly hope that our community stays with the two-leader model. It has made ESSL stronger.

The two-leader model is effective. The task force found overwhelming support for the two-leader model. The Board supports having the two-leader model and is recommending that Croft serves as one of the leaders.

James is open minded and is willing to consider other points of view. Procedural question, between now and June 2020, will function/roles for Kate and James be the same as it has been?

The plan is that Kate will mentor James to be the Senior Leader during this time.

One of Lovelady's responsibilities is to put the budget together. The goal would be for Lovelady to mentor Croft on developing the budget as well as on her other duties.

Please clarify what James's role would be.

The plan has not been communicated to Croft because he has not been hired. It is pending on the outcome of the vote.

Additional response from Past President and Trustee:

The responsibilities of the leaders will change, but we cannot determine the responsibilities until we know who is in those positions.

Exact delineation of duties may involve a structure of people reporting to the Second Leader, with the Senior Leader having ultimate oversight. It would not be a very significant change.

Is it possible to sketch the time frame for having two leaders in place? What is the earliest this could happen?

The earliest possible placement of both Senior and Second Leaders would require the following:

- Two-thirds of the active membership votes "Yes" at the Annual Meeting on May 16, 2019.
- The Senior Leader transition takes place in June 2020.
- At the Annual Meeting in May 2020, the active membership votes on a Second Leader candidate assuming a search committee has presented a nominee.
 - o This may be the earliest a Second Leader may come into the Society but it may not be the best-case option. The membership may consider other options like a leader in training, for example.

I appreciate that the Board is being transparent. Some organizations just go through the motions. I appreciate James and his leadership. James is the reason why I am here and he is making the Society more diverse. If this society is going to grow we need to get younger people in here. We need to keep it progressive.

No direct response, but appreciate voicing that opinion.

25 years ago, the Society had an internal candidate for a vacant Leader role but a national search was conducted. The decision and the search process split the society apart. I recommend an up down vote for James.

The history of events described were considered by the Board during deliberations.

I was President when James was hired. At the time, a goal was to increase membership. The assumption was that the congregation would grow with the two-leader model. At the time, we were looking for someone to give us better visibility.

The Board, several years ago, delegated decisions to the Leader. We need to re-look at this decision. We should think in terms of managing on site. Focus on how restructuring staff may provide James with the ability to concentrate on what he is doing.

With the two-leader model, the quality of forum presentations is much better. Consider restructuring the Staff.

A reminder that the vote at the Annual Meeting will not be on whether we should restructure staff but whether to approve Croft for the Senior Leader position.

Can the Ethical Society afford to keep two leaders on staff?

Yes. Especially if the membership supports two leaders. If the Society deems it important, we have the funds to make it happen.

Is the vote in May to bring James on as Senior Leader? Can he handle the responsibility of two leaders? Can the Board provide a response on how he can handle it?

The Board is not prepared right now to say how the description for the Senior Leader should be designed. We can't have those conversations until the vote is made. We will not make those motions until then.

Can you provide clarification on voting? Is it affirmation of two-thirds of active members that vote, or two-thirds of all active members whether or not they vote? If an active member does not vote, is that a vote for "No"?

There is confusion on the interpretation of the Bylaws and this question is being deferred to the Governance Committee.

From the Governance Committee:

This is the relevant section from the Bylaws:

"4.1 An American Ethical Union-certified Leader or Leaders shall be appointed by the Board of Trustees for a renewable contract term not to exceed three years. An affirmative vote of at least two-thirds of Active Members voting either in person or by absentee ballot at regular membership meetings or at an Annual or Special Membership Meeting called and including that purpose, shall be required to initially hire a Leader."

And this is the section on meetings from the Bylaws:

"6.4 The presence, in person, of ten percent of Active Members of the Society shall constitute a quorum at meetings of the membership and any action shall require a majority vote of Active Members voting either in person or by absentee ballot except where otherwise specified in these Bylaws."

Note: James Croft was hired based on two-thirds of those voting, not two-thirds of all active members.

Why didn't we have a search? Past experiences.... Interim leaders have not helped. The Board has put out some feelers. In the Medical field, searches sometimes come up dry. James is good with Outreach and platforms. I think he can grow into things, administration and ministry. I think we should go in with a leap of faith and see if he can grow into it. If we vote no, we lose the opportunity for Kate to mentor James. The second leader model is great.

No direct response, but appreciate voicing that opinion.

Originally, it was decided that the second leader would be a co-leader. James fell into our laps fortuitously. How did it change from being a co-leader model to a Senior Leader and Junior Leader (Outreach Director) model?

Response from a Past President:

It was decided a co-leader model wouldn't work.

(Presumably because a clear hierarchy or chain of command is necessary for operations and decision-making to prevent power struggles.)

Concerns about James are around him being opinionated. Some members are not comfortable with pushing gay rights. He is conscientious of diverse views. He constantly thinks about this in his private life and for the ESSL.

Additional Feedback?

If you have additional questions, comments, or concerns, please direct them to the Board of Trustees.



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Townhall summary submitted by Tom Draney, Secretary of the Board of Trustees.