

Ethical Society of St. Louis

Leader Search Information



We are a Humanist congregation in St. Louis, Missouri, seeking our next Ethical Humanist Leader to help guide, inspire, and grow our community.



Who We Are

We believe in the capacity of human beings to work together to create a better world.

The Ethical Society of St. Louis is a Humanist congregation, founded in 1886 and affiliated with the American Ethical Union (AEU). We function like a traditional religious congregation—with weekly gatherings, ceremonies, and community life—but our programs are non-theistic and involve no prayer or worship of a deity.

We are an intergenerational community providing education, inspiration, social action opportunities, support, and friendship for people of many different backgrounds, beliefs, and identities. Many of our members identify as Humanist, agnostic, atheist, secular spiritual, or religious “nones.”

Our mission is to inspire ethical living by affirming the worth and dignity of every person and advocating the primacy of ethical behavior above any creed.

Through careful stewardship and a long view toward future generations, we are financially stable and supported by significant endowments. Each Sunday we hold services for adults and provide ethical education for children and youth from preschool through high school. We also gather throughout the week for community groups, justice work, and social events.

You'll find here a community that is:

- Humanist in philosophy
- Inclusive in practice
- Curious in spirit
- Committed to ethical action in the wider world

What is a Leader?

The Role of an Ethical Society Leader

In Ethical Culture, “Leader” is the title for our clergy-equivalent: the person who provides inspiration, ethical and pastoral guidance, and collaborative leadership for the congregation.

At the Ethical Society of St. Louis, our Leader:

- Participates as an integral stakeholder in our Ministry Team, consisting of a network of paid staff and volunteers, to support the spiritual life of the Society.
- Collaborates closely with the executive staff and Board of Trustees, sharing leadership of the congregation and staying engaged with key aspects of congregational life.
- Provides Sunday Platform talks, interactive Forum presentations, and other educational programs that help members and visitors explore ethical questions and deepen their commitment to ethical living.
- Offers pastoral care and support to members and friends during times of change, challenge, and celebration.
- Supports the executive staff in shaping the annual budget.
- Represents the Ethical Society as the public face of our community in the St. Louis region and within the wider Ethical Culture and Humanist movements.

Professional Preparation & Certification

“Leader” is the title for a person certified by the American Ethical Union (AEU), which recognizes professional training in:

- The history and philosophy of Ethical Culture
- Organizational development and congregational growth
- Public speaking and education
- Pastoral care and counseling

Candidates may come to ethical leadership through a wide range of educational backgrounds, professional experiences, and comparable certifications. We welcome applicants who bring strong grounding in ethics, humanist philosophy, community leadership, organizational management, education, counseling, or related fields.

While AEU Leader certification is one respected pathway within the Ethical Humanist movement, it is not the only one. If a candidate is hired who chooses to pursue AEU certification or another relevant professional credential, the Society is committed to supporting that development in collaboration with the appropriate certifying body.

Ethical Humanism

We are part of the Ethical Culture movement, founded in the late 19th century by Felix Adler.

Ethical Humanism affirms that how we live and act with one another is more important than any set of beliefs.

Ethical Humanism:

- Honors the human spirit, not the spirit world.
- Affirms the dignity and worth of every individual and embraces diversity within our membership.
- Seeks truth through reason, science, experience, and free inquiry—not through dogma or sacred text.
- Strives to bring out the best in others and in ourselves.
- Focuses on ethics in action; deed before creed.

We celebrate life's stages—births, partnerships, memorials—through ceremony and ritual that center human relationships, meaning, and responsibility.

Through community, we are inspired to live lives of worth and to contribute to a more just and compassionate world.

Our congregation is the largest member society in the AEU, and we see ourselves as both rooted in tradition and open to change, evolving as the world around us changes.

Quotes from Felix Adler

“To care for anyone else enough to make their problems one’s own, is ever the beginning of one’s real ethical development.”

“Act so as to encourage the best in others, and by so doing you will develop the best in yourself.”

“The fundamental principle of Ethics is that every human being possesses indefeasible worth.”

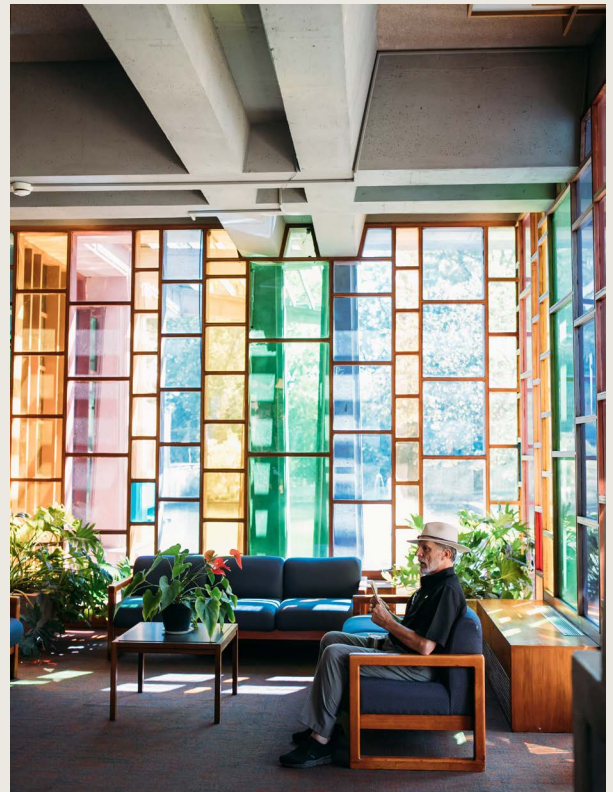
“Diversity in the creed, unanimity in the deed! This is that practical religion from which none dissents.”

“The unique personality which is the real life in me, I cannot gain unless I search for the real life, the spiritual quality, in others.”

“The past speaks to us in a thousand voices, warning and comforting, animating and stirring to action. What its great thinkers have thought and written on the deepest problems of life, shall we not hear and enjoy? The future calls upon us to prepare its way. Dare we fail to answer its solemn summons?”

“The freedom of thought is a sacred right of every individual [person], and diversity will continue to increase with the progress, refinement, and differentiation of the human intellect.”

Sundays



Each Sunday, we come together for a variety of Programming. These programs are integral to our community life.

A typical Sunday morning includes:

- **Forum: 9:45-10:45 a.m.** – Discussion-based, interactive presentations exploring ethics and building community
- **Platform: 11 a.m.-12 p.m.** – Values-driven, multi-media presentations with trained volunteer hosts, member reflections, local musicians, featured speakers, community announcements, and calls to action for the week ahead.
- **Coffee Hour: 12-1 p.m.** – Casual community conversations, complementary coffee, and a variety of opportunities to connect with our congregation
- **Youth Programs: 10 a.m.-12 p.m.** – Educational activities and community building for youth ages 0-18



Youth Programs

Through their time with us, we hope to empower every child with the knowledge and support needed to navigate each stage of life with grace, inspire them to embrace the wonder and complexity of being human, and prepare them to contribute to a more just, loving, ethical world. Our youth programs are structured to meet the developmental needs of each stage of growth:

- Nursery (Ages 0–5): A safe, nurturing space where children first experience belonging and care.
- SEEK (Grades K–5): Sunday Ethical Education for Kids, providing foundational lessons in ethics, empathy, and cooperation through stories, play, and projects.
- Coming of Age (Grades 6–8): A rite-of-passage program that supports young teens in exploring identity, beliefs, and personal values.
- Youth Group (Grades 9–12): A community for high school students to practice leadership, explore real-world ethical challenges, and deepen peer connections.

At every level, we provide experiences that blend learning, service, and community, ensuring continuity from early childhood through adolescence.

Nursery → SEEK → Coming of Age → Youth Group
Belonging → Foundations → Identity → Leadership

This structure ensures that children grow with the Society: first feeling safe and welcome, then learning ethical tools, then testing their own identity, and finally stepping into leadership and responsibility.



Youth Education Core Values

Our youth programs are guided by our Core Values.

- Every person is important and unique.
- Every person deserves to be treated fairly and kindly.
- I can learn from everyone.
- I am part of this earth; I cherish it and all the life upon it.
- I learn from the world around me by using my senses, mind, and feelings.
- I am a member of the world community, which depends on the cooperation of all people for peace and justice.
- I can learn from the past to build for the future.
- I am free to question.
- I am free to choose what I believe.
- I accept responsibility for my choices and actions.
- I strive to live my values.

We encourage kids to be themselves, to respect our earth and all living things, to think critically, and to act kindly. We explore the many ways humans make sense of the world and our existence, from scientific inquiry to philosophy, the arts, and religious traditions. We challenge teens to define their personal values and then act on them.





Ethical Action

We understand ourselves as members of a global community and inhabitants of a shared planet. We therefore have an ethical responsibility to strive for justice, peace, and the well-being of people and the earth. Most of our collective ethical actions are member-driven initiatives, including:

- **Good Deeds Team** – A member-led group that organizes hands-on service projects and partnerships to meet immediate needs in the St. Louis area, from preparing meals and assembling care kits to supporting local nonprofits and neighbors in crisis.
- **Uganda Humanist Schools Trust** – Our congregation helps support Humanist schools in Uganda, including funding for girls' education; former Board presidents have visited, taught, and built relationships there.
- **Climate Action Now!** – A member-led group that meets monthly to identify practical steps we can take—individually and collectively—to respond to the climate crisis.
- **Collaboration with the International Institute** – Partnering with the International Institute to provide refugees and immigrants in the St. Louis region with material support, guidance, advocacy, and friendship.
- **Reproductive and LGBTQ+ Justice Advocacy** – Supporting abortion rights, LGBTQ+ rights, racial justice, and related issues of human dignity and equality through public statements, partnerships, and action.
- **Mutual Aid & Community Support Drives** – Organizing ongoing donation drives to support people experiencing homelessness and others who are underserved in our community.
- **Public Policy & Democracy Engagement** – Participating in lobbying and political actions at local, state, and national levels to promote justice, equality, and meaningful social change.

Our next Leader will play a key role in articulating our ethical commitments, supporting member-led initiatives, and representing the Society's values in public conversations.

Music at the Ethical Society

We celebrate human creativity in all its forms. Our music programs bring together professional and volunteer musicians committed to creating a more just, loving, and sustainable world.



Featured Platform Performers

Each year we invite a wide range of musicians—professional performers and highly skilled members—from diverse styles, cultures, and traditions. We strive to connect music with Platform themes, using it to deepen reflection and open our community to new ideas and experiences.

Justice Choir STL

Justice Choir STL is a radically inclusive community choir amplifying local justice movements through collaborative performances. Our multimedia concerts blend spoken word, video, singers, instrumentalists, education around a local justice issue, and concrete opportunities for action.

Ethical Voices

Ethical Voices is our in-house choir, performing several times a year during Platform. We sing in a variety of musical styles and value the way singing together builds community.

The Ethical Band

The Ethical Band is a member-led ensemble, open to musicians of many ages, instruments, and skill levels. The band performs a wide variety of music once a month at Platform and at special events.

The Leader collaborates with musicians and staff to ensure that music, message, and values work together to inspire and sustain our community.

Community Life

The Ethical Society is home to a wide array of committees, teams, and member-led groups. Some serve the internal life of the Society; others focus on outreach, service, and connection beyond our walls.

Examples include:

- Committees and teams that support Platform speakers, building and grounds, finance and fundraising, and membership and hospitality.
- Volunteer-driven efforts such as blood drives, food and supply donations, and collaborations with community partners.

- Social groups that foster friendships and mutual support—book discussion circles, dinner groups, bicycling and walking groups, amateur theater, and groups for people navigating divorce, religious transition, or LGBTQIA+ experiences.
- Enrichment and education groups, including a science group, writing group, Tai Chi, meditation, and Ethical Navigators, a co-ed alternative to Scouts.

For our next Leader, this rich network of groups and teams offers many points of connection for relationship-building, leadership development, and shared ministry.



Shared Responsibility, Mission & Vision

Shared Responsibility

Leadership at the Ethical Society of St. Louis is a shared responsibility of the members and staff.

- Members share responsibility for discerning the Society's mission and organizing to fulfill that mission. Members do not "own" the Society for individual or collective benefit; rather, they hold the Society in trust for those who benefit from its work now and in the future.
- The congregation reserves certain duties for itself through our Bylaws, but delegates most leadership responsibility to the Board of Trustees and Ministry Team.
- Our Policy Manual and Bylaws inform our organizational operations.

Foundational Principles

In all we do, we are guided by the following principles:

- We recognize the importance and worth of every human being and value the unique qualities present within each individual.
- We seek to promote personal moral development and social responsibility.
- We foster a caring and supportive community, recognizing that our relationships bind us together.
- We are dedicated to the principle that respect, compassion, and integrity are the building blocks of personal and global harmony.
- We are committed to lifelong learning and self-improvement, seeking truth and meaning in all that we do.

Mission Statement

The Ethical Society of St. Louis inspires ethical living in a Humanist-centered congregation by affirming the worth of every person and advocating the primacy of ethical behavior above any creed.

Vision Statement

The Ethical Society of St. Louis will be a large, welcoming Humanist community of diverse members, recognized throughout the region for its commitment and practices in support of ethical living, behavior, and action.



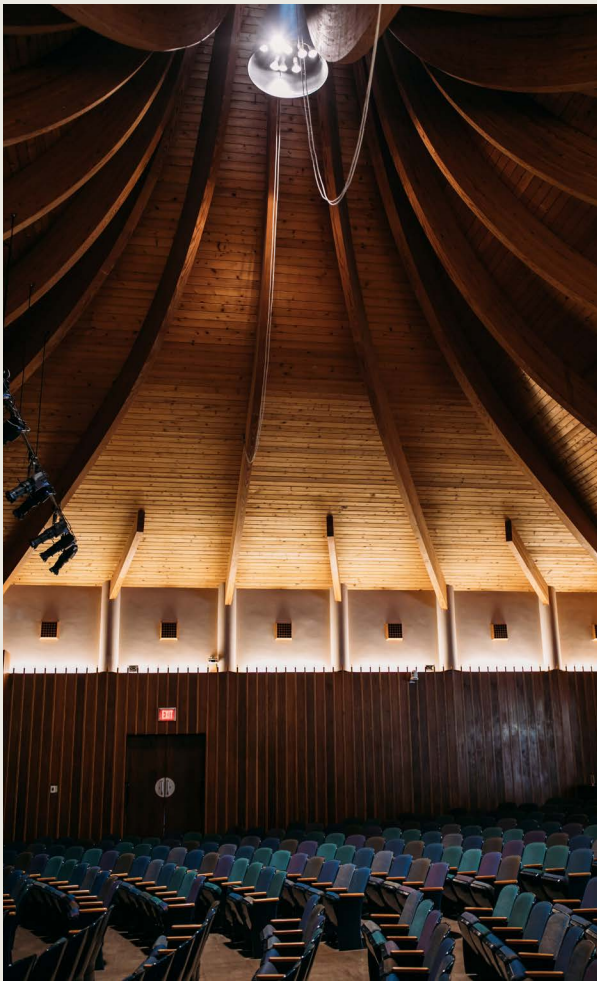


Our Building

Our building, with its soaring modernist architecture and skyward-thrusting roof, symbolizes the Society's aim to bring out the best in all of us. The auditorium seats more than 400 people, is known for its outstanding acoustics, and houses a baroque tracker organ.

The facility includes:

- Multiple meeting rooms of various sizes
- A professional-quality kitchen
- Offices for staff
- A professional kitchen
- Classrooms and nursery space



These spaces are used for our own programs and frequently rented for meetings, concerts, and community events. Our current building, completed in 1964, is the third home of the Society since our founding in 1886.

Finances

The Board of Trustees submits a budget for each fiscal year to the membership for approval at the annual meeting. The Ministry Team leadership prepares the annual budget in collaboration with the Treasurer and Finance Committee.

Our annual budget is supported by:

- A substantial endowment
- A building we own outright
- Pledges, rentals, and other income sources

These resources allow us to weather difficult periods and plan for the future with care.

Next Steps for Prospective Leaders

If you are drawn to Ethical Humanism and to the idea of serving a vibrant, justice-oriented, non-theistic congregation, we invite you to learn more at ethicalstl.org and consider applying. For more information or to submit application materials, please contact: leadersearch@ethicalstl.org.