

A POWERful Relationship, Hugh Taft-Morales

As Leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society, I am thrilled that our community is a member of *Philadelphians Organized to Witness, Empower, and Rebuild* (POWER). When we joined the POWER coalition a few years ago, we did so despite the theistic elements of their mission statement. We joined because we believe in “deed before creed,” and POWER was all about deed. We joined because those most active in POWER invited us to help make the world a better place.

Since its birth in 2010, POWER has grown into one of the most effective social justice organizations in our area. POWER members advocate in the legislative halls of Harrisburg and at Philadelphia City Council meetings for smarter, more compassionate policies. They call attention to the plight of the disempowered in our city and state, and demand that our elected officials serve *all* citizens, regardless of economics, religion, or identity.

POWER is part of PICO, a national network of faith-based community organizations founded in 1972 to increase access to health care, improve schools, build affordable housing, and revitalize democracy. Kate Esposito serves on a national PICO committee that pulls her away from Philadelphia for multi-day meetings on a regular basis. PICO, soon switching to the new name of *Faith in Action*, represents over 1000 member organizations and more than one million families - many families that are economically and politically marginalized. They come together to demand compassionate and responsible civic programs. As they declare on their website, “POWER believes that people should have a say in the policy decisions that shape their lives and therefore should not shy away from the exercise of power to promote justice and advance the common good.”

Led by Executive Director, the Rev. Greg Holston, a staff of about 15 full or part-time employees work hard to bend the arc of history toward justice. I attend the POWER Clergy Caucuses when I am in town, and find them inspiring. Just being around so many clergy committed to serving those in need through activism and advocacy fills me with positive energy. Current POWER work focuses on raising the minimum wage, assuring that all citizens have health care, reforming the criminal justice system, funding Pennsylvania’s schools, and promoting a transition to sustainable energy.

Some of the highlights of my work with POWER include:

- Marching the streets of Philadelphia with Ethical Society members to promote the POWER agenda, such as the Anti-Poverty event of March 3rd, 2014;

- Martin Luther King Day Leadership Assemblies and Teach-ins;

- Participation in planning discussions with Lorraine Marino on creating a “Whites Confronting Racism Workshop Series,” something Sylvia Metzler found useful in preparing to co-chair the Ending Racism Task Force;

- Meeting at PES with our state rep Brian Sims and other POWER members to discuss strategy to fund public education;

Trips to the State House in Harrisburg to sing justice songs and speak about our legislative concerns with various General Assembly offices, usually staffers, unless ever-vigilant Kate corners an unsuspecting real live elected official in the hallway for a little politician education!

During one of those trips, I spoke from the podium in support of full fair funding of schools throughout the commonwealth. I shared that those at the Ethical Society are “committed to the inherent worth of each and every person – we strive to treat every person as unique, irreplaceable, and sacred. That’s how parents see each child – as unique, irreplaceable, and sacred. This commitment to the worth of every person is why I am at the Ethical Society, and why I am here today. Our state budget, and the political priorities that drive it, do not treat every child as unique, irreplaceable and sacred. Year after year of deficit budgets are harming our children – it’s fiscal child neglect. This is simply unethical.”

By promoting ethical thinking regarding social change, PES has something of value to POWER. By demonstrating that humanists and non-theists can link arms with member of traditional faith institutions, PES demonstrates the importance of a welcoming, inclusion culture within POWER. But more than anything, POWER needs our members to show up at POWER events. Look for announcements of how you can be one of the foot-soldiers for justice. Consider joining one of the POWER teams described below by current PES members active in POWER. Now more than ever, we need to work together to bring ethics and compassion back into the center of political power!