



EHSN

European Humanist Services Network

2026

AUTUMN SCHOOL

EXISTENTIAL CARE IN TIMES OF GLOBAL CRISIS



26-30 OCTOBER 2026

ESCH-SUR-ALZETTE, LUXEMBOURG



LEARNING.



CONNECTING.



ACTING.

TOGETHER FOR A
MORE HUMAN FUTURE

Welcome to the *EHSN* Autumn School 2026

Theme and Thank You



Welcome to the European Humanist–Existential Care Autumn School 2026, taking place from 26–30 October 2026 in Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg.



This year's Autumn School brings together practitioners, academics and trainers from across Europe and beyond under the theme "**Existential Care in Times of Global Crisis.**"

At a time marked by ecological anxiety, political instability, moral injury, institutional pressures and professional burnout, this gathering offers a vital space to reflect, connect and strengthen practice.



We are especially pleased to welcome a truly international group of participants, with colleagues joining from across Europe as well as across the Atlantic from the United States.

This diversity of perspectives is central to the spirit of the Autumn School—an opportunity not only to learn, but to build a shared professional language and deepen collaboration across contexts.



A warm welcome also to those working within the European Humanist Services Network (EHSN), whose continued efforts are shaping and strengthening this field.



We extend particular appreciation to our network leader, Lone, for her leadership, vision and ongoing commitment to fostering connection and professional development across borders.



We are deeply grateful to all speakers and contributors who have generously agreed to be part of this programme. Your willingness to share expertise, practice and reflection is what makes this week both rich and meaningful.



Our sincere thanks go to our hosts in Luxembourg, and to the team at Youth Hostel Esch-sur-Alzette, for providing such a welcoming and inspiring setting for this year's Autumn School.



We also gratefully acknowledge the humanist organisations who have supported participants in attending, enabling this important international exchange to take place.



Welcome to the *EHSN* Autumn School 2026



Practice at the Centre

Alongside conceptual exploration, this year places strong emphasis on practice: **How do we actually do existential care in times of crisis?**

Through case examples, practical demonstrations, peer exchange and reflective dialogue, participants will engage with with real-world challenges and approaches across sectors and settings.



Soft Launch: Building the Field Together

This year's Autumn School also marks the soft launch of two initiatives supporting the development of humanist–existential care:



Academic & Professional Publication Platform

In collaboration with Niels de Nutte and the journal *Secular Studies*, we are developing a peer-reviewed special section dedicated to Humanist–Existential Care. Autumn School speakers are warmly invited to develop their contributions into academic articles for this route.



Alongside this, a professional publication stream within EHSN will provide space for practitioners and participants to contribute reflective pieces, case studies, and applied work—helping to connect practice, research and ongoing professional development.



Institute for Humanist–Existential Chaplaincy (I-HEC)

We are also pleased to introduce the Institute for Humanist–Existential Chaplaincy (I-HEC), founded and directed by Lindsay de Wal, and developed in collaboration with EHSN.



I-HEC provides a structured layer of professional formation and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to support practitioners and national organisations as the field grows in scale and complexity. Importantly, it complements—rather than replaces—existing national systems, which retain responsibility for accreditation, endorsement and governance.



These initiatives contributes to a more coherent, sustainable and internationally aligned ecosystem for humanist–existential care.

EHSN TEAM

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE MISSION



EHSN Leader

Lone Ree Milkaer

lone@humanistservices.eu



EHSN Ceremonies

Even Gran

even@humanistservices.eu



EHSN Humanist-
Existential Care

Lindsay de Wal

lindsay@humanistservices.eu



EHSN Youth Education

Troels Barkholt-Spangsbo

tbs@hs.dk




TOGETHER FOR A MORE HUMAN FUTURE

PROGRAMME AM

 **MON 26**
October

Arrival and
Start Autumn
School

 **TUES 27**
October


Crisis, Moral
Injury &
Humanist
Response

 09:00–10:30

Plenary Lecture

Humanism in
times of global
polarisation and
transnational crisis

Niels de Nutte

 10:45–12:30

Exchange Panel

- How Are We
Responding in
Practice?

Facilitator:

Lindsay de Wal

Panel:


Alexandra Rondas,
Ingun Steen
Andersen, Yvan Deur



LUNCH
12:30–14:00

 **WED 28**
October


Community &
Collective
Resilience

 09:00–10:30

Plenary Lecture

Ecological Anxiety,
Collective Fear &
Meaning-Making

Birgitte Fredriksen

 10:45–12:30

Panel Dialogue

- Humanist
Responses to
Collective Crisis

Facilitator:

Niels de Nutte

Panel:


Hans De Ceuster,
Gaby Jacobs,
Birgitte Fredriksen



LUNCH
12:30–14:00

 **THU 29**
October

Methods,
Professional
Identity &
Sustainability

 09:00–10:15

Plenary Lecture

Humanist-
Existential Care
as boundary
practice

Gaby Jacobs

 10:15–12:30

Design & Exchange Labs II


- Alone, yet
together
Nikkie van Biemen
- Handling heavy
emotion
Audrey Delcourt
- When we fail:
learning from
mistakes
Liz Young



LUNCH
12:30–14:00

 **FRI 30**
October

Knowledge
Sharing &
Next Steps

 09:00–10:00

Soft Launch

Academic Journal
Ed &
Professionals
Platform


Lone Ree Milkær &
Lindsay de Wal

 10:00–11:15

Writing & Development Session

- Participants
begin outlining
potential articles
in small feedback
groups.

Lone Ree Milkær &
Lindsay de Wal

 11:15–12:00

Integration Circle

- What do we
take back?
- What will we
implement?

Lone Ree Milkær &
Lindsay de Wal

PROGRAMME PM I

MON 26
October

Arrival and
Start Autumn
School

🕒 13:00–14:00

Arrival

🕒 14:00–14:30

Informal
Welcome

Lone Ree Milkær &
Lindsay de Wal

TUES 27
October

Crisis, Moral
Injury &
Humanist
Response

🕒 14:00–15:30

Parallel Workshops

- Existential care in the context of moral injury
Carmen Schuhmann
- Rituals & Institutional Ceremonies in Secular Settings
Dagfinn Ullestand

🕒 15:45–17:00

Fishbowl

- Demonstrating Existential Care: A live existential care conversation
Winnie Belpaeme

WED 28
October

Community &
Collective
Resilience

🕒 14:00–15:15

Parallel Group Work

- Dialogue formats
Ingun Steen Andersen
- Holding fragile space in times of uncertainty and crisis.
Liz Young
- Mindfulness and embodied approaches
Christian Lisker

🕒 15:30–17:00

Design & Exchange
Labs I

- Crisis response models (1–1)
Niels de Nutte
- Existential care in Flanders.
Winnie Belpaeme
- Existential care for and within groups of staff
Asbjørn Fretheim
- Spiritual Accompaniment for Chaplains
Liz Young

THU 29
October

Methods,
Professional
Identity &
Sustainability

🕒 14:00–16:00

Excursion

- A guided excursion to Luxembourg University campus
Bob Reuter & Tanya Frank



Free afternoon
to explore
the town

FRI 30
October

Knowledge
Sharing &
Next Steps

🕒 12:00

Departure &
end of Autumn
School

PROGRAMME PM II

MON 26
October

Arrival and
Start Autumn
School

🕒 14:30–15:30

Plenary Lecture

- Living with
Existential Fear:
Understanding
What Weighs on
Us Today — and
What We Can Do
About It

Christian Meyers

🕒 16:00–17:00

Opening Session

- Humanist
Chaplaincy Amid
Polycrisis: The
World Needs our
Work More than
Ever

Greg Epstein

TUES 27
October

Crisis, Moral
Injury &
Humanist
Response



Evening free /
informal exchange

WED 28
October

Community &
Collective
Resilience



Evening free /
informal exchange

THU 29
October

Methods,
Professional
Identity &
Sustainability



Free Afternoon
to Explore
the town

FRI 30
October

Knowledge
Sharing & Next
Steps



End of Autumn
School 2026



LOCATION

Youth Hostel in Esch/Alzette,
Luxembourg



[Find their website here](#)



[Find a Google Maps link here](#)



EHSN

European Humanist Services Network

OUR SPEAKERS

*Meet the voices shaping conversations
in humanist-existential care*





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European Humanist Services Network

BIOGRAPHIES



Greg Epstein



Greg M. Epstein is Humanist Chaplain at Harvard and MIT and a leading voice in contemporary humanism. New York Times-bestselling and award-winning of *Good Without God* and *Tech Agnostic*, his work explores ethics, community, and meaning in a secular age. He has led major humanist and interfaith initiatives across the United States.



Christian Meyers is a senior lecturer in Educational Sciences at the University of Luxembourg. Originally trained as a primary school teacher, he later specialized in the sociology and politics of education, as well as the history of religions. Beyond academia, he is actively engaged in political and humanist associations.



Christian Meyers



Niels de Nutte



Niels de Nutte holds a PhD in History from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, where he is guest professor history and humanism, alongside his role at deMens.nu. His research focuses on nonreligion and bioethics. He is editor of *Secular Studies* and programme coordinator of *Praktisch Humanisme*.



Yvan Dheur is passionate about international humanist diplomatic development and religious radicalism and extremism. He works on international affairs for deMens.nu, is treasurer of Humanists International and is the only humanist airport chaplain active in the world at the moment. He is also a Reserve Officer to the Humanist military chaplains in Belgium.



Yvan Dheur



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BIOGRAPHIES



Ingun Steen Andersen



Ingun Steen Andersen is Head of Humanist Existential Care at the Norwegian Humanist Association. As a philosophical practitioner, she works across counselling and group dialogue in educational and civic settings. Her work centres on dialogue as a space for reflection, connection and growth, with a focus on developing humanist existential care in Norway.



Carmen Schuhmann is Associate Professor of Chaplaincy Studies at the University of Humanistic Studies. Originally trained in mathematics, she later worked as a humanist prison chaplain. Her research focuses on meaning in life, moral injury and resilience, and chaplaincy in institutional contexts, including the military.



Carmen Schuhmann



Dagfinn Ullestad



Dagfinn Ullestad has worked as a humanist existential counsellor in the Norwegian Humanist Association and now serves as a humanist chaplain at the University of Agder. With a background as a parish priest and prison chaplain, his work explores how rituals and symbols can take on meaning in secular contexts.



Winnie Belpaeme is a humanist chaplain based in Ghent (deMens.nu), with a background in Moral Sciences and Morele Begeleiding. She also trained as a creative therapist. Alongside her practice, she serves on the board of European Humanist Professionals and teaches in the postgraduate programme Practical Humanism at the University of Brussels.



Winnie Belpaeme



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BIOGRAPHIES



Birgitte Fredriksen



Birgitte Fredriksen is a humanist counsellor at the University of Oslo. Previously a secondary school teacher, she engaged students in philosophical dialogue and citizenship-focused projects. With a background in pedagogy and philosophy of education, her work centres on dialogic practice and a strong commitment to humanity and the natural world.



Gaby Jacobs is Professor of Humanist Chaplaincy Studies at the University of Humanistic Studies (Utrecht). With a background in social psychology, her research focuses on meaning in life, empowerment, and person-centred practice in health and social care. She also leads the Dutch Knowledge Centre for Meaning in Life and Spiritual Care and holds a PhD in humanist chaplaincy.



Gaby Jacobs



Christian Lisker



Christian Lisker is Advisor for Practical Humanism at the Humanist Association Berlin-Brandenburg. A trained counsellor and systemic therapist, he has worked in hospital chaplaincy and grief support. His work focuses on developing humanist chaplaincy and integrating mindfulness-based approaches, particularly within Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.



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Alexandra Rondas



Alexandra Rondas joined the team of moral counsellors within the Belgian Defence in 2020 after working as a secondary school teacher in Humanist studies and secular ethics. With experience in international deployments with the Land Component and Belgian Navy, she supports military personnel around questions of meaning, responsibility, connection and existential care.



Audrey Delcourt is a humanist chaplain within the Belgian Armed Forces. Her work focuses on existential support, ethical reflection, human dignity, and humanist ritual practices. She is interested in worldview transformations among military personnel confronted with demanding operational contexts, contributes to Defence suicide-prevention working groups, and serves as a Mindful Warrior trainer.



Audrey Delcourt



Asbjørn Fretheim



Asbjørn Fretheim is a philosophical practitioner and humanist chaplain at St Olavs hospital in Trondheim. He works extensively with different, often revolving, groups of staff, such as nurses, porters, receptionists and young physicians, and in, sometimes, new and surprising ways.

Photo credit: Kamilla Østerberg



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BIOGRAPHIES



Liz Young



Elizabeth Young is Course Leader for the MA in Pastoral Care: Existential and Humanist Practice at The New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling. She works as a Humanist Chaplain at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust, with a background in nursing, medical sociology, and the NHS.



Nikki van Biemen is Program Manager for Humanist Chaplaincy at the Humanistisch Verbond, where she oversees professional standards and development. She also works as a chaplain, supporting practitioners and maintaining a private practice focused on grief, loss, and unfulfilled parenthood through counselling, group work, and ritual.



Nikkie van Biemen



Bob Reuter



Bob Reuter is Assistant Professor in Educational Technology at the University of Luxembourg, with a background in cognitive psychology. He is also President of AHA Lëtzebuerg, promoting humanist values in public life. During the Autumn School, he will lead a guided tour of the University's Belval campus.



Hans De Ceuster is humanist chaplain general at the Belgian Armed Forces. He is member of numerous Belgian and international panels on military ethics, military values and virtues, spiritual-existential care, moral injury and radicalization, and active in the international military chaplains community to advocate for humanist military chaplaincies.



Hans De Ceuster



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SESSION ABSTRACTS

*Exploring practice, reflection, and innovation
in humanist-existential care*



PLENARY SPEAKERS

Numr 1 of 2...

MONDAY 26 OCTOBER



Opening Plenary

Greg M. Epstein

*Humanist Chaplaincy Amid Polycrisis:
The World Needs our Work More than Ever*

TBC Abstract

MONDAY 26 OCTOBER



Plenary Lecture

Christian Meyers

*Living with Existential Fear: Understanding What Weighs on Us Today —
and What We Can Do About It*

We live in an age of compounding uncertainties — climate disruption, technological upheaval, social fragmentation — and many of us carry a quiet but persistent weight we struggle to name. This keynote puts words to that weight. Drawing on social psychology, philosophy, and politics of society, it explores where our deepest fears come from, why they feel so overwhelming, and — crucially — why feeling them is not a weakness but a sign of profound care for the world and for one another. Most importantly, it offers concrete, human-scaled pathways out of paralysis: how we reconnect, how we act meaningfully, and how we find — together — the courage to face an uncertain future without losing hope.

TUESDAY 27 OCTOBER



Plenary Lecture

Niels de Nutte

Humanism in times of global polarisation and transnational crisis

This lecture explores the challenges facing humanist organisations in Europe in an age of polarisation, democratic uncertainty, and transnational crisis. Traditionally situated on the progressive left, many humanist actors now operate in a context where the scientific method is no longer broadly taken for granted, where humanists are no longer a clear minority, and where interconvictional cooperation increasingly places them in the centre rather than at the margins. The presentation asks how humanist activism can remain meaningful and distinctive when it can no longer simply act as the critical outsider. How do we preserve a public voice, defend reason and pluralism, and sustain engagement in a world where humanism must navigate compromise, dialogue, and strategic repositioning? The lecture offers a reflection on the future of humanist advocacy in an increasingly contested civic sphere.



PLENARY SPEAKERS

Nmr 2 of 2...

WEDNESDAY 28 OCTOBER



Plenary Lecture

Birgitte Fredriksen

Ecological Anxiety, Collective Fear & Meaning-Making

As studenthumanist Birgitte has cooperated with a group of environmentally aware psychologists and students, to develop a framework for facilitating non-therapeutic dialogues to address climate worry amongst students. The project is called Natursamtaler and aims to restore hope and strengthen communities. In this lecture Birgitte will share experiences from the Natursamtaler project and the thinking behind it. She will also invite participants to do some “thinking together the Natursamtaler-way!”

THURSDAY 29 OCTOBER



Plenary Lecture

Gaby Jacobs

Humanist-Existential Care as boundary practice

The core of Humanist-Existential Care is to support people in engaging with existential questions through humanity, freedom, and personal meaning-making, while creating the conditions that allow this process to unfold. We live in a time marked by pluralization, instrumentalization, and acceleration, all of which profoundly shape existential concerns and the ways people search for meaning.

In this lecture, I will explore the implications of these developments for humanistic-existential care. I will propose a model that is more radically relational, political, and spiritual in nature, drawing on concepts such as boundary spaces, multi-level practice, and moral and spiritual development in order to address the challenges of the contemporary world.



PARALLEL SESSIONS & WORKSHOPS



PAGE 1 OF 3



TUESDAY 27 OCTOBER



Existential care in the context of moral injury

CARMEN SCHUHMANN

This session centers around moral injury, which is increasingly recognized as an important topic in chaplaincy practice. Over time, the concept of moral injury, which was originally developed in the context of the military, has been adopted more broadly to denote the moral struggles of a variety of professionals and people in different contexts.

We will explore what is the specific contribution of chaplains regarding moral injury, in particular from a humanist perspective, and how to understand this contribution in terms of strengthening moral resilience.



Rituals & Institutional Ceremonies in Secular Settings

DAGFINN ULLESTAD

In rituals and ceremonies, simple actions may be accompanied by the use of symbols, tactile elements, texts, and spoken words. They may also take the form of sharing texts, music, or other material that has been prepared in advance, often in collaboration with those who take part.

In this session, participants are encouraged to bring a note or sketch describing a ritual, ceremony, or commemorative practice that has either been tested within an institutional context, or that can serve as a proposal for ritualisation to be explored together within the group.



WEDNESDAY 28 OCTOBER



Dialogue formats in Humanist Existential Care

INGUN STEEN ANDERSEN

In this session, we will explore different dialogue formats, with particular attention to how group dialogue can create spaces for reflection, meaning-making, recognition and shared human experience.

The session will present practical examples and participants will be invited to take part in short experimental exercises and conversations, allowing room not only for shared reflection about dialogue, but opportunities to experience dialogue in practice.



Holding Fragile Space in Times of Uncertainty and Crisis: Existential Modes of Professional Support

LIZ YOUNG

This session explores how chaplains and pastoral carers can hold space for vulnerability and uncertainty. It reflects on professional presence, relational care, and the challenges or supporting others in times of crisis.



Mindfulness Methods in Existential Care

CHRISTIAN LISKER

The session 'Mindfulness methods in existential care' asks the question in how far 'mindfulness'-methods can contribute to Existential Care in a useful and valuable way. After a short introduction into the phenomenon itself and some popular methods we will get to know one of them in more detail: 'Dropping Anchor' as a mindfulness technique used to ground yourself during intense emotional distress or anxiety. There will be time to experience and try out the method yourself in order to get an impression if you can integrate it in your own work in a meaningful way.

PARALLEL SESSIONS & WORKSHOPS

PAGE 2 OF 3



WEDNESDAY 28 OCTOBER



Existential Care in Flanders

WINNIE BELPAEME

Based on our humanistic convictions, we accept that each human being, as he/she/they, gives meaning to their existence. Our methodology regarding humanist chaplaincy is based on this conviction.

People are welcome in one of our 35 huizenvandeMens (in Flanders) – regardless of their religious or philosophical views – to talk about the loss, problems, questions, worries, ... they experience. We listen to their questions about life, both big and small, their inner restlessness, or doubts about their identity. We take in their silences and outpouring of words when they express their pain, often for the first time.

We let people tell their stories. We try to walk with them as they search for words to their questions about life, in a friendly and caring way. We listen with compassion and without judgement to the underlying values that make up their personal moral compass.

Most of the time there are no 'solutions' for the concerns people present to us. But being there as humanist chaplain can make a huge difference.

We try to help people to find a way to deal with the challenges life brings each of us, in the form of loss, adversity, difficult choices, ... A way that is as close as possible to their own value framework. With gentle and professional expert care for the thin line between self-determination and connectedness on which each of us balances.



Existential care for and within groups of staff

ASBJØRN FRETHEIM

This session explores our individual vulnerability and possibilities for sudden loss, combined with experiencing our common longing for the palms of others and belonging together.



Paying attention to our own spirits by Liz Young: Spiritual Accompaniment for Chaplains

LIZ YOUNG

This presentation aims to explore the place of spiritual accompaniment for chaplains and pastoral carers working within an existential framework. In contemporary chaplaincy, supervision is widely recognised as a vital space for reflective practice, professional accountability, and personal resilience. Professional standards are beginning to emerge, but, as yet, there is not a commonly accepted standard.

As chaplaincy becomes more professionalised, it is timely to consider in what form supportive practice could be offered to practicing chaplains. Should supportive practice be clinical supervision, reflective practice, mentoring and/or spiritual direction? Theist colleagues are likely to be operating within a framework which offers spiritual direction as part of their religious organizational support separate from employer line management. For many non-theist chaplains, the language and frameworks of traditional spiritual direction can feel distant, overly theistic, or misaligned with their worldview.

This presentation explores how models of spiritual accompaniment can be reimagined and adapted to serve as a complementary practice alongside, or as part of formal supervision.

Starting with a consideration of spiritual and its place in non-theist chaplaincy the presentation draws on approaches from pastoral care, existential psychotherapy, and humanistic practices, to examine how accompaniment can offer a distinct yet synergistic dimension to supervision: one that attends not only to the "how" of chaplaincy work, but also to the deeper "why" that sustains it.

Through a case example of the authors' own spiritual accompaniment sessions, we will explore models that prioritise meaning-making, ethical reflection, moral guidance and vocational grounding based on an existential framework.

Participants will be invited to consider: By the end of the session, attendees will have a clearer understanding of how spiritual accompaniment—rooted in presence, curiosity, and shared humanity—can help chaplains sustain their work with integrity, resilience, and renewed purpose.

PARALLEL SESSIONS & WORKSHOPS



PAGE 3 OF 3



THURSDAY 29 OCTOBER



Alone, yet together

NIKKI VAN BIEMEN

*A reflective and connecting session
for Humanist Chaplains*

Contemporary life places increasing demands on our flexibility, resilience, and endurance. Navigating these demands often involves searching for moments of stillness, finding the “eye of the storm” and developing ways to relate to experiences that may feel complex or burdensome. Clear or definitive answers are not always available. Even those who guide others in their search for meaning may, at times, encounter the limits of their own resilience.

In this sense, the world also calls upon us as humanist chaplains. For this reason, intentional reflection is essential.

This session offers a structured moment of reflection and connection, centred on the themes of loneliness and connectedness. Through a multi-sensory exercise, facilitated dialogue, and a closing ritual, participants are invited to explore their own experiences: when do you feel alone, and when do you experience connection?



Handling Heavy Emotion

AUDREY DELCOURT

Abstract TBC.



When we fail: learning from our mistakes

LIZ YOUNG

This workshop is about working with the acknowledgement of our human frailty and the inevitability of failure in human relationships which are the basis of humanistic care. It is not about public confession. It is about recognising the existential reality of imperfection in care work, reviewing reflective tools to process personal and professional mistakes and along the way exploring compassionate self-awareness to prevent burnout and shame and identifying ways to repair relationships and restore trust after failure.



EUROPEAN
HUMANIST
SERVICES
NETWORK
EHSN

Thank you
for being part of
the EHSN Autumn School 2026

We hope this week of learning, reflection and connection
inspires and strengthens your practice.

We look forward to staying in touch and
building our community together.

STAY CONNECTED



EHSN Website
humanistservices.eu



I-HEC Website
humanist-existential-care.trainercentralsite.eu



Humanists International
humanists.international



Together, we cultivate care,
dignity and human flourishing.

See you next time!