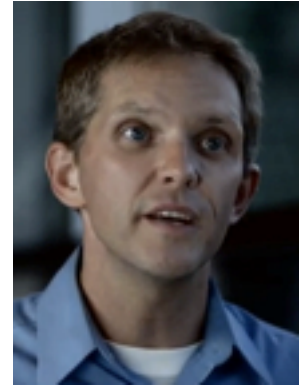


The Minnesota Atheist

Have we turned a corner? Progress on LGBT issues in Minnesota and beyond



The modern phase of the LGBT equality movement is generally about forty years old, but it seems as if in recent years, progress toward that goal has picked up steam. From advances regarding relationship recognition, to employment equality, the movement for LGBT rights has never been stronger. Our speaker, Phil Duran, will review and analyze recent developments, and offer thoughts about more to come.

OutFront Minnesota Legal Director Phil Duran began volunteering with OutFront Minnesota in 1997 and joined the staff in 2000. A graduate of the U of M Law School, his work focuses on legal information, referral, and education; state legislative research and analysis; state administrative agency, judicial, and local government public policy; and direct representation in selected public-assistance and human-rights cases. He is well-known for his work regarding legal issues facing transgender people.

Phil represents OutFront Minnesota on Governor Dayton's Task Force on the Prevention of School Bullying, and chairs the Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity subcommittee of the Minnesota Judicial Branch's Committee for Equality and Justice. He is currently President-Elect of the Minnesota State Bar Association, and is a past member of the Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission and a founding board member of the Minnesota Lavender Bar Association.

If You Go...

When

Sunday, April 21, 2013

Where

Roseville Library
2180 Hamline Avenue
Roseville

Schedule

1:00-1:15 Social Time
1:15-1:45 Business Meeting
1:45-2:00 Break
2:00-3:30 Duran Presentation
4:00- Dinner at Panda Garden Buffet

IN THIS ISSUE...

- February Meeting Review.....see page 4
- News and Notes.....see page 5
- A Letter to the Editor.....see page 7
- February TV Show Report.....see page 10



IN THIS ISSUE...

February Meeting	1
President's Column	3
March Meeting Review	4
News and Notes	5
Congressional Testimony	6
The Day of Reason	7
Highway Clean-up	8
Free Book Offer	8
Freethought Cryptogram	8
Feb / Mar Radio Report	9
May Day Parade	10
Secularists Unite?	11
February Treasury Report	12
Respect Religious Beliefs?	13
February TV Show Report	14
Things To Do....	15

**MINNESOTA ATHEISTS
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

board@mnatheists.org

President: Eric Jayne
pres@mnatheists.org

Associate President:
Stephanie Zvan
apres@mnatheists.org

Chair: Heather Hegi
chair@mnatheists.org

Associate Chair: Andy Flamm
achair@mnatheists.org

Secretary: Jill Carlson
sec@mnatheists.org

Treasurer: Chris Matthews
treas@mnatheists.org
763-428-3424

Director-at-Large:
August Berkshire
dir1@mnatheists.org
612-338-4548

Director-at-Large: George Kane
dir2@mnatheists.org
651-488-8225

Director-at-Large: Phil Cunliffe
dir3@mnatheists.org

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Published by Minnesota Atheists,
P.O. Box 120304
New Brighton, MN 55112
612-588-7031, info@mnatheists.org
www.MinnesotaAtheists.org

Editorial Board, editor@mnatheists.org

James Zimmerman, editor
zgoatee@gmail.com

Chief Photographer: Richard Trombley

Membership/change of address: Steve Petersen, address@mnatheists.org, 651-484-9277

Public Relations: Emily Matejcek, pr@mnatheists.org

Atheists Weekly Email (AWE): George Kane, awe@mnatheists.com

Cable: Steve Petersen, cable@mnatheists.org, 651-484-9277

Webmaster: Grant Hermanson, web@mnatheists.org

Podcasts: Grant Hermanson, podcast@mnatheists.org

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Submit material for the newsletter to editor@mnatheists.org. Submissions may be edited. Publication is not guaranteed.

Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly neighborhood atheism in order to:

- Provide a community for atheists;
- Educate the public about atheism; and
- Promote separation of state and church.

MNA Meetup members: 1,371

Life memberships: 30

Honorary Members

- Hector Avalos, PhD
- Dan Barker
- Gerald Erickson, PhD
- Annie Laurie Gaylor
- Dick Hewetson
- Robert M. Price, PhD

Minnesota Atheists Mission Statement

Minnesota Atheists is dedicated to building a positive atheist community that actively promotes secular values through educational programs, social activities, and participation in public affairs.

President's Column

One Nation Indivisible



Eric Jayne

Twenty-seven years after the last shot was fired in the Civil War, a socialist, Baptist minister named Francis Bellamy wrote the Pledge of Allegiance as a visionary celebration of a unified, undivided nation. Published in 1892, the Pledge first appeared in a popular children's magazine entitled *The Youth's Companion*. The publication's purpose was to teach ethics and promote positive, active citizenship to children. As most atheists and other secularists are well aware, Bellamy made no mention of gods. His original words were: *I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic, for which it stands, one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

It wasn't until 1954—62 years after Bellamy penned the Pledge—that Communist-fearing lawmakers literally divided Bellamy's clause, "one nation indivisible" by wedging in "under God" at the behest of the Catholic *Knights of Columbus* organization. The idea was to showcase the United States as a pious nation as opposed to the godless Soviet Union.

Not that the Cold War was a legitimate reason to inject God into the Pledge in the first place, but the Soviet Union dissolved over 20 years ago which should render the intended purpose of "under God" null and void. It's painfully obvious that our nation is long overdue to correct the misguided religious intrusion to our patriotic vow.

The position of Minnesota Atheists is very clear on this issue. We believe that the government violated—and continues to violate—the U.S. Constitution's Establishment Clause (*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion*) when it switched our nation's oath from a secular and inclusive act of citizenship to a reverent prayer toward God. To be sure, the government added "under God" with a capital "G", which specifically refers to the Judeo-Christian god. This means that children—Jewish, Christian, or otherwise—

throughout Minnesota public schools are in fact being led by their teachers to proclaim that their country is subservient to Yahweh.

Minnesota Atheists understands that our government is of the people, by the people, and for the people, so we take issue when our government endorses a particular god belief of *some of the people*. As with Vishnu, Odin, and the Flying Spaghetti Monster, the Judeo-Christian god has no place in the people's national oath, judicial system, monetary system, military, and lawmaking.

It is this demand for inclusivity and respect that our Day of Reason event will underscore. We want to remind our elected representatives, along with the rest of the citizenry, that if we are to be a single indivisible nation, our shared government must show no favoritism to a group based on race, ethnicity, sex, sexual preference, gender identity, or theological persuasion.

This year's Minnesota Atheists red, white, and blue shirt design boldly heralds *One Nation Indivisible* so they will echo the message we are promoting at the Day of Reason. They will be available at our various events throughout the year and our online store by mid-April so you could possibly wear the new shirts at the Day of Reason!

The Day of Reason will again coincide with the Day of Prayer (the first Thursday of every May) so just like the last several years, the prostrating will take place outside the capital building and the reasoning will take place inside the capital's rotunda from 12pm to 1pm.

Let's remind our elected officials, friends, and family that we will never be one nation indivisible until our government becomes fully secular. Restoring the Pledge of Allegiance to its original secular and inclusive meaning is a step in the right direction.



March Meeting Review

by Jack Caravela

As atheists it is not unusual for us to find ourselves in situations where a religious majority chooses to ignore our presence (and the First Amendment) to advance its own point of view in the public square. When that happens, we must ask ourselves a hard question: how much and how loudly are we willing to speak out? This is a



difficult enough decision for those of us who live in the metro area. What it is like when you make your home in a small town dominated by churchgoers, where everyone knows you and your family? This was subject of Ken Kressin's inspiring presentation at the Minnesota Atheists March 17th public meeting.

Ken and his family live in Cannon Falls, where in spite of its small population the local newspaper lists some thirty church services every week. His journey began when one of his daughters told him of a video she had seen in her public school claiming that abstinence-only sex education is as effective as comprehensive, science-based sex ed. This sounded suspect to Ken, who asked to see the video himself and was surprised to find it had been provided by an association of Christian athletes and featured the infamous revisionist historian David Barton, a man who habitually misquotes and fabricates the words of our country's founders to falsely assert that they intended the United States to be a Christian nation. When Ken pointed out that the program was inappropriate the video was withdrawn, but he met with greater resistance when he spoke up about a

Christian religious observance held on school grounds.

These experiences led Ken to become an activist, sending letters to the local newspaper, forming the group Cannon Falls Freethinkers (and starting an adopt-a-highway initiative in its name), joining a protest against Fred Phelps' hateful Westboro Baptist Church's promised appearance at a performance of The Laramie Project in Hastings, and standing in front of churches that displayed their support of the recently defeated Marriage Amendment with his response: a sign that read "No Fear. No Prejudice. No Discrimination. No Hate." Often alone with his sign on the streets of Cannon Falls, Ken endured verbal abuse and attempted intimidation, but he went out every week until the election nonetheless, finding strength whenever a passerby offered a supportive word or other sign of encouragement.

As we saw the photos documenting Ken's activities and heard him describe his deeply felt commitment to activism, it was clear to see he has touched many lives, set a positive example for those around him, and is grateful for the friends he has made along the way. As Ken's presentation vividly showed, one person can make a big difference.

In addition to his activism, Ken has been responsible for bringing freethought comedian and musician Roy Zimmerman to the area for two performances and has made a tradition of hosting a Freethought Camping event at his home every summer. If you're able to attend this year you'll find Ken and his family to be extraordinarily gracious hosts. Find more information on the web at <http://www.meetup.com/Twin-Cities-Atheists/events/109716172/>.



photos courtesy of Richard Trombley

News and Notes



Republicans took a **thumping** in the November elections, but they behave as if voters gave them a mandate to advance conservative Christian goals. House Resolutions 940 and 973 would both create faith-exemptions to the requirement for contraceptive coverage in employee insurance plans. HR 940

by *George Kane* would amend the Affordable Care Act, so-called “Obamacare,” while HR 973 exempts from any fine, excise tax or suit for failure to provide any coverage to which the employer objects based on religious belief or moral conviction. Both bills were referred to three committees for review. Also, HR 23 presents a direct assault on reproductive rights. It declares that human life begins with fertilization, conferring to the zygote the obligatory protection of government.

HR 898 is the portentously named “Religious Organizations Using Taxpayer Money Without Limits Act.” While authorizing 2014 – 2017 funding for the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, it provides that religious programs that receive funding will not be required to provide any services to which they object. This is in response to the Department of Health and Human Services cutting off funding for a Catholic Charities program to rescue sex-trafficking victims, because the charity refused the requests of victims to be referred to abortion services and contraception. Between 2006 and 2011, HHS paid Catholic Charities \$15 Million from its Office for Refugee Resettlement, until it ruled that the clients of participating programs are entitled to reproductive health services.

Finally, Senate Resolution SR 11 would declare the support of Congress for prayers to open school board meetings.

The Supreme Court will decide in this term two cases that are certain to be landmarks in the struggle for same-sex marriage. In the first, the court will decide whether the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) violates the equal protection guarantees in the Fifth Amendment's Due Process Clause, as

applied to same-sex couples legally married under the laws of their own state. The legal issue is whether the federal government can deny tax, health, and pension benefits to same-sex couples in states where they can legally marry.

The other case is an appeal of the decision by the federal appeals court in San Francisco to overturn Proposition 8, with which, by a 52% - 48% margin, voters restricted marriage to opposite-sex couples. The Obama administration has filed an *amicus* brief supporting the decision of the Appeals Court.

In a surprising setback to the separation of church and state, a Colorado appeals court has rejected a challenge brought by the ACLU to a “Choice Scholarship Program” contrived like a Rube Goldberg machine to circumvent the state constitution's prohibition against taxpayer funding of church schools. The county created a fictional charter school, without a building or teachers, to which it assigns program participants who are actually attending church schools. This “school” receives state funding as a public school. The county in turn mails checks to parents, who endorse the check over to their religious private schools.

There were two very good reports from the United Nations this month, indicating that the influence there of the Organization of the Islamic Conference may be declining. First, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) ruled that language in the Rabat Plan of Action referring to “incitement to religious hatred” does not allow states to punish people for criticizing or dissenting from religion. Then the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief issued his annual report which made clear that changing one's religion — or leaving religion altogether — is a human right which must be protected. This undercuts the justification used by nations that have criminalized apostasy.

The Secular Coalition for America plans to draft a *Model Secular Guide for Legislatures*, outlining model policy and approaches to governing from a secular perspective, which it will distribute to elected officials. It is recruiting a task force for this project. If you might be interested, they have scheduled a 30 minute call every Friday at 2 pm. To participate, call-in at 559-726-1300, code: 199568.



Minnesota Atheists Testifies in Favor of Marriage Equality

Testimony by August Berkshire, representing Minnesota Atheists, at a Minnesota House Civil Law Committee hearing, in favor of the bill HF 1054, changing state law to allow for marriage equality. March 12, 2013, 6:00 p.m.



Thank you, Mr. Chair; Committee Members. My name is August Berkshire and I represent Minnesota Atheists, our state's oldest, largest, and most active atheist organization.

We view this as a matter of separation of church and state. It can be confusing because the same word, "marriage," is used for both a civil contract and a religious ceremony. But we must keep in mind that these are two separate things. Today you may hear testimony from some people that their god is in favor of same-sex marriage, and testimony from other people that their god is opposed to same-sex marriage. Fortunately, that's not a debate you have to resolve. Government laws must have a secular basis.

The best secular arguments in favor of same-sex marriage are the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal protection under the law and the fact that long-term relationships, gay or straight, help to stabilize society.

In our opinion, there are no secular arguments against same-sex marriage that hold up to scrutiny. Many of these arguments were also used 50 years ago to oppose interracial marriage.

I would like to end on a personal note. My partner, Rachel, and I are heterosexuals and we have been together for 17 years. We are both atheists, and so we will not be getting married in a church, synagogue, or mosque. Instead, we will seek a judge to perform a civil marriage ceremony.

However, we will not get married until it is legal for everyone, because how can we stand up in front of family and friends, some of whom happen to be gay and lesbian, on what is supposed to be the happiest day of our lives, knowing that this happiness is not available to them as well?

So please pass this pro-marriage bill and make civil marriage available to everyone. Thank you.

The bill passed the committee on a 10-7 party line vote – Democrats for, Republicans against. The 9 p.m. FOX at 9 local TV news on channel 9 reported that the bill's "supporters ranged from Catholics to atheists." Earlier that day a companion bill passed a Minnesota Senate committee. The bill now moves to the full legislature, which will vote on it after they have passed a budget.

Celebrate the Day of Reason

On Thursday, May 2, 2013, from noon to 1:00 pm, Minnesota Atheists and other organizations that recognize the need for separation of state and church will be observing the Day of Reason at the Minnesota State Capitol Rotunda. This year's theme is One Nation Indivisible.

Speakers will include: Eric Jayne, President of Minnesota Atheists, Scott Lohman of the Humanist of Minnesota, Blake Page from Military Religious Freedom Foundation and David Pacheco, with Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Masters of



Ceremony and presenters will include George Kane and Heather Hegi. The committee chair for Day of Reason is Steve Petersen

The Theme, *One Nation Indivisible*, makes the point that government should respect all points of view and not endorse one sectarian view over any other. The Pledge of Allegiance has changed over the years to reflect the tyranny of a religious majority over a non-religious minority. Our event will honor our secular Constitution and



secular veterans who took an oath to protect it. The Day of Reason celebration, "One Nation Indivisible," will have speakers on the benefits of secular governance. Those who want will recite the secular Pledge of Allegiance, and Minnesota Atheists will give

Certificates of Appreciation to Veterans who will have the majority of the time to speak on their personal views.

If you are a veteran and would like to be a part of this event or if you know someone else who may be interested in receiving recognition have them call 651-484-9277 or email Steve Petersen at spetersen175@gmail.com. This is a family friendly event. Please bring your children to this family-friendly, educational event. Tours of the capitol may be available following the event (visit <http://www.mnhs.org/places/sites/msc/featured.html> for more information about tours). Banners and signs are also welcome, just remember that the sign or banner must be hand held: no sticks are allowed in the Capitol.



Highway Clean-up and Lunch Event

Our long tradition of helping beautify our highways and getting some atheist recognition (in the form of a road sign informing motorists that this stretch of highway is maintained by Minnesota Atheists) continues.

On Sunday, April 28th, Minnesota Atheists will be performing its Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup. The work begins at 10:00 am and continues until about noon. We'll meet at The Old Creamery Cafe, 405 Main St., Rice, MN 56367 (west of the stoplight on Hwy. 10).

Arrive at 9:45am beforehand and stay for lunch afterwards. Gloves and sturdy footwear are recommended.

Go to Minnesota Atheists Meet Up page to coordinate car pools from the Twin Cities. Contact: Deb Doucette 320-749-2025 or Steve Petersen (Shoreview) spetersen175@gmail.com for more details.

Hope to see you there!

Free Book for Minnesota Atheists Members

Author Michael David Jeffers is offering members of Minnesota Atheists a free e-version of his latest book, *Fundamental Questions: Challenging the Notion of Biblical Perfection*.

The book is both an attempt to offer insight into the whys of a fundamentalist approach to the Bible, and a very simple argument, based solely on the Bible itself, about why that approach is mistaken. No name calling, but an open appeal for us to understand each other, and an invitation to come away from the yoke of biblical "perfection." It's written from the viewpoint of a former preacher who began to see the cracks in the foundation of literal Christianity, and wanted to make a chronicle of his first steps to offer hope to others.

Visit smashwords.com and enter keywords "Fundamental Questions." When prompted, enter code NY66Y for your complimentary copy. Jeffers' offer expires 20 April 2013. Physical copies of his book are available at amazon.com.

FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM

BY GEORGE KANE

Ktgyuty jvk iqddz pghjdeh vun tyqhvguh.

Tqyvhdugkhk jvcy tyqhvguh pghjdeh vun iqddz.

-Vkjxyn Sduhvwey

Cryptogram answer appears on page 14.

Atheists Talk: February / March Radio Report

Atheists Talk is produced by Minnesota Atheists, directed by Carl Hancock, and hosted by Carl Hancock, Brianne Bilyeu,

by Steve Petersen

Scott Lohman, Greg Laden, David Pacheco, and Stephanie Zvan. Both Stephanie and Brianne upload the podcasts to the web site. The radio program is live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 at AM950 from KTNF studios in Eden Prairie. Listen to live streaming through our web page, www.mnatheists.org Original music was composed, played, and recorded by Brent Michael Davids. Thanks to Brianne Bilyeu we have an Atheists Talk Facebook page and Twitter account at twitter.com/atheiststalk.

The six month cost for the show is \$5,320. Every donation to support the program is greatly appreciated. Please consider becoming a monthly Sustaining supporter. To donate just send in a donation to our mailing address (see page 2) or online at minnesotatheists.org/join-and-donate/radio-fund

All past programs can be accessed via MNA web page <http://minnesotatheists.org/news-and-media/podcast>. If you are interested in helping on the radio program please send a note to radio@mnatheists.org

"The Stardust Revolution," #207, February 24, 2013

Astrobiology is necessarily still a largely speculative field, which could make it difficult to write a book on the topic. That didn't phase journalist and performer Jacob Berkowitz, who has a passion for science that has started from a disadvantaged position. In his book *The Stardust Revolution: The New Story of Our Origin in the Stars*, Berkowitz chronicles the histories of astronomy, chemistry, and evolutionary biology that have come together to demonstrate that we humans are made of star stuff. Carl Hancock produced and interviewed. Stephanie Zvan hosted.

"The Fact of Evolution," #208, March 3rd, 2013

Dr. Cameron McPherson Smith has the A's covered: Academic, Author, Archaeologist and



Adventurer - and now *Atheists Talk* radio show guest! An illustrious pedigree, if we do say so.

Dr. Smith has been all over the world looking for new places to explore, phenomenon to uncover, and stories to tell. For this episode of *Atheists Talk*, Dr. Smith discussed the results of his travels, which are laid out in his book, *The Fact of Evolution*, in which he lays out in plain language what evolution is. Producer and interviewer: Carl Hancock. Host: Brianne Bilyeu.

"50 Simple Questions for Every Christian," #209, March 10, 2013

Author and skeptic Guy P. Harrison returns to *Atheists Talk* to discuss his forthcoming book, *50 Simple Questions for Every Christian*. Continuing in the tradition of his previous "50 Things" books, this one is addressed at helping Christians and non-Christians explore each other's viewpoints. Carl Hancock produced the show. David Pacheco conducted the interview and Stephanie Zvan hosted.

"Atheism For Dummies," #210, March 17th, 2013

Dale McGowan is an accomplished writer and leader in the atheist community, perhaps best known for his book, *Parenting Beyond Belief*. Dale's newest book, *Atheism For Dummies*, is now available from Wiley Publishing. On this show, Dale discussed the reasons for and content of his book. Carl Hancock produced the show. Scott Lohman conducted the interview. Brianne Bilyeu hosted.

May Day Parade and Event

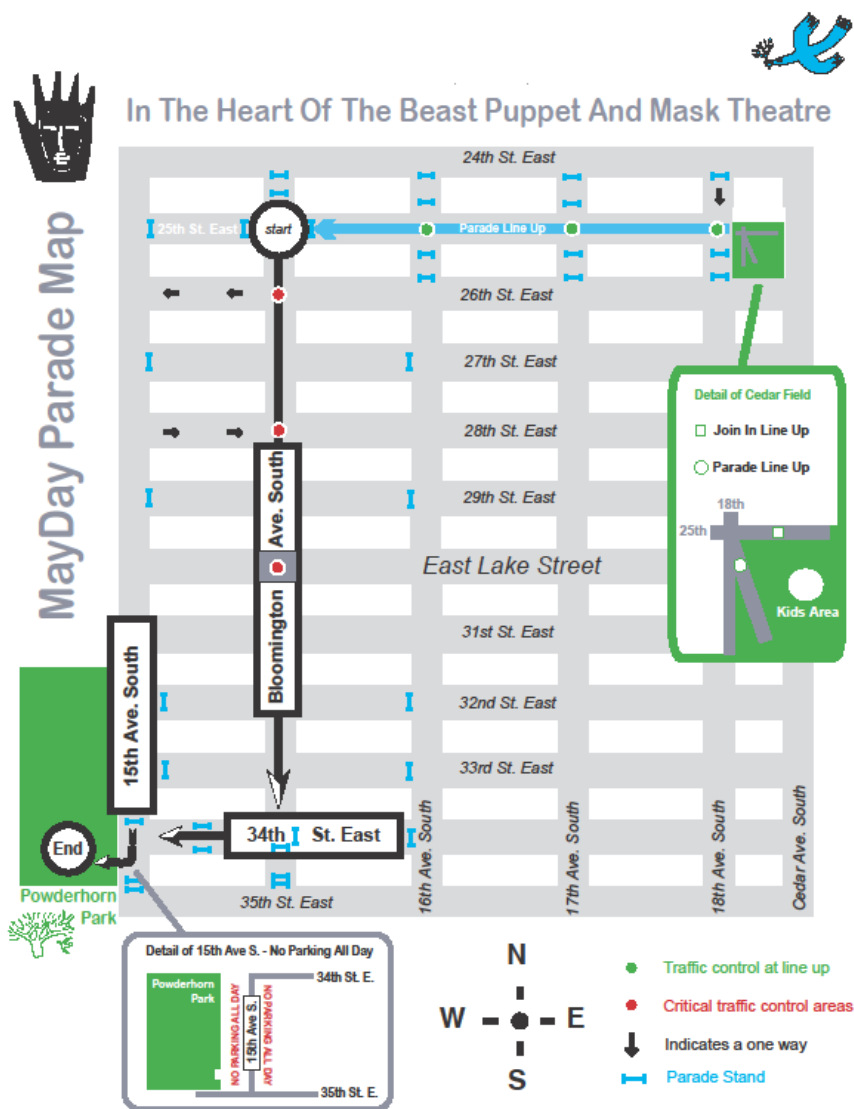
The May Day Parade and Festival in South Minneapolis is one of the most fun things Minnesota Atheists get to do during the year. We gather at Cedar Field at noon to march down Bloomington Ave from Cedar Field to Powderhorn Park. We carry signs as we march to educate the public about us.

After the parade, which starts at 1:00, we join together at our booth. It's a great chance to talk to people who are supporters of our causes, even if they are not atheists. Many people who identify as wicca, pagan, or neo-spiritualist support the separation of church and state just as much as we do. So, stop on by the booth, or parade to show your support!

For more information, visit The Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theater page at hobt.org, or contact Steve Petersen at spetersen175@comcast.net or 651-484-9277. We are also looking for volunteers to help with the booth. Let Steve know if you are willing to set up, staff or take down the booth. For more info on the parade or to help with signs contact Heather Hegi at chair@mnatheists.org

Cedar Field is on 18th Ave and 25th St. Bus routes 22, 14, and 27 will get you close, so will the Franklin Light Rail Station.

Remember, we are headed to Powderhorn Park, so if you park near Cedar Field, you need to walk back from Powderhorn Park.



Parade starts at 1:00 pm

Secularists of Minnesota Unite?

Submitted by Jerry Smith. Edited for space considerations. -ed.

In his President's Column in the February 2013 issue of this newsletter, August Berkshire proposed that local atheist, humanist, and other secularist groups merge into a single consolidated organization. I am a member of both the Minnesota Atheists and the Humanists of Minnesota, although I am much more active in the latter organization. Speaking only for myself in what follows, I will offer reasons why I believe, on balance, such a merger would not be desirable.

I agree with many of the points August made in his column: The differences between local humanist and atheist groups are dwindling. Many people, like myself, belong to both organizations and attend their co-sponsored events, where group affiliations are not highly apparent. There is growing societal acceptance of atheism, especially among the young, which partially explains why the Minnesota Atheists' membership tilts younger than that of H of M. And I agree that divisions between such organizations often derive from personalities or historical factors that lack legitimacy.

On the other hand, I think August overstates the benefits of a merger. The scale economies he cites are insignificant, since neither organization has sizable operating costs. No salaries or facilities costs would be saved since the organizations run on volunteer labor and meet in public buildings. Perhaps there would be benefits in having a single newsletter, website, TV show, and Meetup group. But for most of these things, more is better, providing more opportunities to promote secularism. Multiple boards of directors provide more people opportunities to get actively involved. Indeed, social scientific research suggests that smaller groups offer participants a stronger sense of belonging and mattering; members might be less active and engaged in a single secularist megagroup.

Based on this, I'd be somewhat neutral on the merger August proposes. It wouldn't be a terribly bad thing to do and might even be beneficial. However, there is another argument, not yet heard, that, in my opinion, counts strongly against a merger. This argument holds that the two organizations serve somewhat different purposes and consequently,

despite overlaps, have somewhat different "target membership markets."

In the United States today, atheists have a social identity. Numerous opinion polls have found widespread public disapproval of atheists and atheism. Though diminishing, these negative attitudes will not soon be extinguished. Humanists, on the other hand, are barely recognizable as a group. Asked for their opinion of humanism, most Americans would respond, "What's that?" For purposes of attracting members, the Minnesota Atheists have benefitted from atheism's notoriety, while the Humanists of Minnesota have suffered



from humanism's nebulous invisibility.

Because atheists have a social identity, there is a need for the kinds of assertive efforts the Minnesota Atheists have been making. There's a need for people who will actively proclaim themselves to be ATHEISTS, people who will push for public policy and other initiatives that advance a secular perspective. At the same time, however, just as there have always been black people and gays who didn't want to lead the charge for equality, people who didn't want to be viewed primarily in terms of their social identity, there are atheists with the same mindset. They aren't embarrassed by their atheism; they just don't want it to be their defining feature, the cornerstone of their identity. They will readily admit to being atheists while not wanting to be ATHEISTS.

These people would also like to have an organizational home, a place they can go to be with others like them, where they can pursue common interests, where they can share the common

Continued on page 12.

February Treasury Report

Radio Fund

Morgan Christian	\$52
Nancy Ruhland	\$50
John Lindlan	\$25
James Wright	\$25
Shirley Moll	\$10
Mark Paquette	\$10
Steve Petersen	\$10
Total Radio Fund	\$182

General/Visibility Fund

Valerie Gingras	\$170
Geraldine Jensen	\$20
Meghan Kosowski	\$10
Total General/Visibility Fund	\$200

Total Income: \$382



Current Building Fund Total \$131,180

Top Expenses for February

Radio Show	\$820
Newsletter Printing	\$597
Storage	\$152

Secularists of Minnesota Unite? (continued from page 11)

experiences and perspectives of being atheists, without having to be an ATHEIST. The Humanists of Minnesota serves the needs of these people.

And as with blacks and gays, it's not just the activists who create social change and dull the edge of social identities. The efforts of other, non-movement people are also important. The black, the gay, the atheist living next door or down the hallway has as much to do with our coming to view members of these groups as individuals as do the self-assertive efforts of their BLACK, GAY, and ATHEIST friends. By being less insistent on their social identity, everyday atheists are less threatening to religious people and are better able to engage them in social interactions. By doing this, they too help erode the stigma attached to this social identity.

In the end, that's what we want: A world in which there are no social identities, just individual human beings, variously characterized, each of whom is judged as an individual. In such a world, atheism will be no more threatening to the American mainstream than is Presbyterianism. To achieve that goal, we need both the activist efforts of the Minnesota Atheists and the less threatening work of the Humanists of Minnesota. ATHEISTS will want to join and work through the Minnesota Atheists; whereas many atheists will be pleased to find, in the Humanists of Minnesota, a place where they can share secularist perspectives and pursue common goals. For the time being at least, both of these organizations are needed.

Respect for Religious Beliefs?

submitted by Hank Zumach

I've been thinking a lot lately about the issue of respect surrounding religious beliefs. I was slightly horrified at Christmas to learn that six members of my family - my parents, both brothers, an aunt and an uncle - all consider me to be showing gross disrespect for religious people when I call bullshit on their superstitions. One particularly jarring comment came from one of my brothers:

Brother: "You can't respect people if you don't respect their beliefs."

Dad: "He's right, Lu."

To be clear, my parents and my brothers are also non-believers. I'm less certain about the aunt and uncle, but if they do hold religious beliefs of any kind I've never seen any indication of it.

This issue of respect is one that comes up again and again, and I find the attitudes of other non-believers on the matter absolutely baffling - far more incomprehensible than the anger I sometimes get from believers. As I see it, there are two main problems with this idea that non-believers should just shut up and let people believe whatever they like.

1: Typically it is not the non-believers making this case who suffer for the privileged place religion holds in the world. My brother is in no danger of being prevented from living as he chooses to live because of religion; other people - particularly women, gay people, and atheists unfortunate enough to live in religiously-dominated nations - face real dangers and suffer real abuses stemming directly from religion.

2: It is deeply condescending to religious people to adopt the view that while we know better, the superstitious masses need the comfort of religion. I find it slightly nauseating to be told that I should avoid challenging a mentally competent adult on their beliefs, as if they lack the wit to think logically or to withstand the emotional impact of a rational argument. And it only seems to go for religious beliefs; no one demands that I refrain from questioning political ideologies, philosophical opinions, ethical decisions (unless religiously motivated!) or anything else. I think it would be disrespectful - not to mention potentially dangerous

- not to give my honest opinion on a person's beliefs. I would go so far as to say that in pretending to respect religious beliefs, non-believers show breathtaking disrespect to the intellect of the person holding them.

This notion that even those of us who do not hold religious beliefs should nevertheless respect them may be the single most dangerous thing about religion. It causes well-meaning liberal people living safely in secular nations to grant greater importance to the wounded sensibilities of a Muslim man than to the oppression, routine abuse, mutilation and murder suffered by millions of women at the hands of his faith. It places the unfounded beliefs of the religiously-motivated "pro-life" (more accurately, anti-choice) lobby over the life of Savita Halapannavar, who died in Ireland after being denied a medically-necessary abortion because a religion to which she did not subscribe forbade it. It tells a religious parent that their wish to send their child to a "faith school" is more important than the child's right to have a decent education, and not to suffer psychological trauma in the form of horrific threats and unnecessary guilt over imaginary "sins".

If you make the argument that people like me ought to show "respect" to religious people by avoiding criticism of their beliefs, you are not only patronising and belittling religious people... you are also saying that one person's wish not to have his or her feelings hurt takes precedence over the rights of countless others to live their lives free of the threat or reality of violence, abuse, oppression and misery. That's about as un-liberal a principle as I can imagine.

My family and others living free of the rule of religious dogma are in a tremendously privileged position, unimaginable to millions of people worldwide who cannot safely speak out against the violations of their own rights. Not only do I have every right to challenge religious beliefs and practices - I think I have a duty to do so.

March Atheists Talk Television Show Report

by Steve Petersen

For the recording of our March edition of *Atheists Talk*, James Zimmerman interviewed George Kane on Critical Thinking. George is one of the organizers of the Critical Thinking Club. George described critical thinking as the process of reviewing information without pre-conceived bias or desired outcome of the information. He also covered the difference between critical thinking and logic. Logic is used by people who want to convince others of their position which is much different than non-bias information analyses. Look for the program on the cable stations listed, youtube or iTunes.



Minneapolis viewers please note that our channel, day and time has changed. Check the schedule below.

If you would like to sponsor our program in your community, or have an idea for a program, or if you have a public access television station in your community, please contact Steve Petersen at: spetersen175@comcast.net or 651-484-9277.

Cable Crew: George Kane, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, Grant Hermanson and Art Anderson .

Podcasts: MinnesotaAtheists.org. Available via Itunes and YouTube Made possible by Grant Hermanson.

Television Schedule

Burnsville/Eagan Community Television:

Channel 14. Check their web site www.bect.tv for day and times. Sponsor: Kevin Hardisty.

Bloomington:

Channel 16. Sunday 11:00 pm. Sponsors: David and Joanne Beardsley.

Minneapolis:

Channel 75. Monday 7:00 pm. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

Rochester: Channel 10. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 7:30 pm. Sponsor: Jim Salutz.

Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Moundsview/New Brighton: Channel 14. Wednesday 10:30 pm. Sponsor: Shirley Moll.

St. Cloud: Channel 12. Thursday 8:30 to 9:00 pm. Sponsor Tom Stavros.

St. Paul: Channel 15. Wednesday 5:00 pm. Sponsor: Jim Wright.

Stillwater: Channel 16. Tuesday 7:00 pm. and Wednesday 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury.

White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights: Channel 15. Saturday 7:30 pm. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.



Cryptogram Answer

Science has proof without any certainty. Creationists have certainty without any proof.
-Ashley Montague

Minnesota Atheists

www.mnatheists.org

P.O. Box 120304, New Brighton, MN 55112

CHECK THE WAYS YOU WANT TO HELP ATHEISM GROW

Minnesota Atheists has IRS 501(c)(3) status. All contributions are tax-deductible.

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Other than students, please let us know if you wish to receive your newsletter by email or regular mail. If you prefer e-mail, please add your e-mail address:

Things to Do, Places to Go: A Calendar for Atheists

In addition to these regularly scheduled events, there are many more events every month. Please subscribe to Atheist Weekly e-mail on our web site, mnatheists.org, and join our Meetup group.

Sundays, 9:00am-10:00am *Atheists Talk* Radio. AM 950 KTNF in the Twin Cities or stream live at <http://www.am950ktnf.com>. Contact us during the show with questions or comments at (952) 946-6205 or radio@mnatheists.org.

Sundays, 6:00pm-7:00pm Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous. Men's Center, 3249 Hennepin Avenue South Suite # 55, Minneapolis Meet in the basement. Open to all genders.

2nd Sundays, 1:00pm Minnesota Atheists Little Canada Book Club, Caribou Coffee 3354 Rice St, Little Canada, MN 55126

3rd Sundays, September through May, 1:00pm-4:00pm. Minnesota Atheists Public Meeting. Various libraries. Business meeting, educational program and dinner afterwards at a nearby restaurant.

5th Sundays, 5:00pm (April, June, September, December). Flying Spaghetti Monster Dinner. Old Spaghetti Factory, 233 Park Ave., Minneapolis. Get together for drinks and pasta.

1st & 3rd Mondays 6:00pm Freethought Toastmasters. Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Ave. W, St. Paul 55113. George Kane, dir2@mnatheists.org.

2nd and 4th Mondays, 5:00pm-7:00pm Freethought Dinner Social. Davanni's, 8605 Lyndale Avenue South, Bloomington, MN. For more information call Bob or Marilyn Neinkerk at 612-866-6200.

1st Tuesdays, 11:30am-1:00pm Freethought Lunch. Old Country Buffet, County Road B2 between Fairview and Snelling. Bob or Marilyn Neinkerk at 612-866-6200.

4th Tuesdays, 7:00pm Maple Grove Book Club. Byerly's Meeting Room - 12880 Elm Creek Blvd N Maple Grove, MN 55369

Every other Tuesday, 7:00pm Secular Bible Study. Various locations. See the Meetup page <http://www.meetup.com/Secular-Bible-Study/>.

1st Wednesdays, 7:00pm Minnesota Atheists Burnsville Book Club. Davanni's, 14639 County Road 11, Burnsville MN 55337. Meet in the Party Room.

3rd Wednesdays, 11:30am-2pm Lunch at Dragon House Restaurant. Dragon House Restaurant 3970 Central Avenue Columbia Heights. Private room reserved. Bill Volna 612-781-1420

3rd Wednesdays, 6:30pm Minnesota Atheists Monthly Board Meeting. Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue, St. Paul, 55113. Open to all members. George Kane, dir2@mnatheists.org.

1st Thursdays, 6:00pm-9:00pm *Atheists Talk* television show. MTN Studio A, 125 SE Main Street, Minneapolis. Steve Petersen at 651-484-9277.

To sign up for the Atheists' Weekly Email (AWE), send a request to awe@mnatheists.org.

To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, visit atheists.meetup.com/493.



“Religious freedom should work two ways: we should be free to practice the religion of our choice, but we must also be free from having someone else's religion practiced on us.”

-John Irving, novelist (b. 1942)

**Check us out on the radio!
AM 950 KTFN**