

The Minnesota Atheist

Religion and Climate Change Denial with Greg Laden

April Public Meeting

Minnesota Atheists welcomes anthropologist and science blogger Greg Laden to talk to us about the intersection of religious communities and climate change denialism at our April meeting. A frequent guest on our radio show, this month, he'll join us in person.

Most of the important events in the Bible are linked to climate change. Genesis describes the creation of a planet with a rapidly changing climate. Noah helped all the animals and his family escape an epic flood. We can guess that the seven years of lean following the seven years of abundance associated with the early days of the sons of Israel were a climate effect. The plagues were a form of "weather whiplash." Indeed, during the times of Moses, wildfires may have been more common, given the number of burning bushes reported for the time.

After all this you would think that mainstream "Abrahamic Religion," as an organized entity, would be on the forefront of climate change. It is not.

We'll look at the links, some overt, some more subtle, between efforts lead by the religious right to damage science education and parallel efforts to deny climate science. There is a reason that the National Center for Science Education addresses both evolution and climate change curriculum in public schools. But don't expect the link to be simple or straightforward. Historically, there has been almost as much denial of climate science from the secular community as from the religious community, a situation that has been changing in recent years.

This talk is mainly about the most current thinking--in some cases rapidly changing thinking--about climate change and an update on efforts to hold back progress in dealing with this important issue.

Greg Laden's **BLOG**

CULTURE AS SCIENCE - SCIENCE AS CULTURE

with GREG LADEN



Greg Laden writes about climate change, evolution, science education, and other topics at National Geographic Science Blogs (www.scienceblogs.com/gregladen) and other venues. He is a trained biological anthropologist and archaeologist who has taught at several colleges and universities. Today he mostly engages in climate-change-related science communication.

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Minnesota Atheists
April Public Meeting

Maplewood Public Library
3025 Southlawn Drive
Maplewood, MN 55109

1:00-1:15 p.m. – Social time
1:15-1:45 p.m. – Business Meeting
1:45-2:00 p.m. – Break
2:00-3:30 p.m. – Greg Laden talk
4:00-whenever – Dinner at Pizza Ranch

President's Column: Celebrate Good Friday and Easter with Minnesota Atheists (by Eric Jayne)

As our Christian neighbors and friends celebrate the most popular zombie story ever told on Good Friday and Easter (April 18 and 20, respectively) atheists will be doing a variety of things that might be a little more fun and productive. Some of our own supporters and members at Minnesota Atheists will be contributing to our mission of *Positive Atheism in Action* by demonstrating support for women's reproductive rights and serving meals on Saturday and Easter Sunday to families without permanent housing.

On April 18 we'll be joining hundreds of Planned Parenthood supporters for their annual Solidarity Day demonstration at the Planned Parenthood flagship health center on Vandalia Street in St. Paul. There will be live music, food trucks, friendly camaraderie, and perhaps most important of all, representatives of Minnesota Atheists will be part of a large demonstration that affirms the human right to reproductive health and freedom (which is Planned Parenthood's mission statement) and combats the ruckus of the anti-choicers on the other side of the fence.

The next day, Saturday, April 19, will be the date of the monthly Minnesota Atheists dinner preparation at the Family Place Shelter in St. Paul. Thanks to the dedication and leadership of some key Minnesota Atheists members our monthly meals at the shelter has become one of our chief service projects for local freethinkers.

Since no one volunteered to provide a meal the following day the Minnesota Atheists stepped up and offered to serve both an Easter lunch and dinner to the shelter's guests. Check our Meetup site to RSVP to one of these service projects, other recurring service projects, and more!

Here's one more thing of interest: The newly elected Minnesota Atheists board had its first meeting last month and it didn't go without notice that for the first time ever our board consists of a majority of women. It's been an honor to share in the continued progress of our accomplished organization and I'm looking forward to the upcoming projects that will be overseen by this year's board!

Visit MinnesotaAtheists.org and click the "Join" button to become a member! Your membership helps us protect the separation of church and state while promoting *Positive Atheism in Action*.



MNA Board Makes Two Appointments That Need Ratification

As we reported at our February and March meetings, and in our March newsletter, our candidate for associate chair withdrew before our February elections. This created an opening in that position. Our bylaws state that mid-term board vacancies may be filled by the board of directors, subject to ratification by our members.

At its March 19 meeting, the MNA board appointed then-director-at-large Phil Cunliffe as our new associate chair. This created an opening for a director-at-large, which the board filled by appointing Alyssa Ehni. There were no other candidates for these positions and they were approved unanimously by the board.

For the first time in many years, the majority of members on the MNA board of directors are women. These two appointments need to be ratified by our members at our next members meeting on April 27.



The Minnesota Atheists board of directors: (left to right) August Berkshire (director-at-large), Alyssa Ehni (director-at-large), Phil Cunliffe (associate chair), Jill Carlson (secretary), Eric Jayne (president), Stephanie Zvan (associate president), Georgia Hancock Tsoi (director-at-large), Heather Hegi (chair), Chris Matthews (treasurer). Photo by George Kane.

News and Notes (by George Francis Kane)

During the last month Arizona Governor Jan Brewer vetoed SB 1062, which was trumpeted by its supporters as necessary to protect owners of small businesses who, because of religious convictions, did not wish to provide services – such as catering or photography – to same-sex weddings. Viewed as an anti-gay measure that provides legal protection for discrimination, the bill provoked a national outcry and threats of reprisal against the state. Brewer feared that if she had signed the bill into law, The National Football League would have moved the 2015 Superbowl.

To her credit, Brewer vetoed the bill. Her decision was more significant as a portent for separation of church and state than as a victory against anti-gay discrimination. The bill, in fact, says nothing at all about the civil rights of GLBT residents in Arizona, and would have had no effect on them. It would only have amended the definition of ‘person’ in Arizona’s Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) to include “any individual, association, partnership, corporation, church, religious assembly or institution, estate, trust, foundation or other legal entity.” It would have provided a religious freedom defense to businesses.

Arizona’s RFRA, Section 41-1493 of Arizona Revised Statutes, states:

- *Government shall not substantially burden a person's exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability.*
- *Government may substantially burden a person's exercise of religion only if it demonstrates that application of the burden to the person is both:*
- *In furtherance of a compelling governmental interest.*
- *The least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.*

Activists for eroding the separation between government and religion want to set a standard of strict scrutiny for religious freedom. “Strict scrutiny” means just what is stated in the bullets of Arizona’s RFRA – that the

government action must be based on a compelling government interest and be the least restrictive means of reaching it. The Supreme Court held since the 1963 *Sherbert* case that strict scrutiny was required to justify a requirement that violates a person’s religious principles. It reversed that in 1990 in *Employment Division v. Smith*, holding that a generally applicable law is valid even if it requires a person to act contrary to his religious beliefs, as long as the law did not specifically target those religious beliefs.

Congress responded to this decision with the *Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993* to restore strict scrutiny. In *City of Boerne v. Flores*, the Supreme Court invalidated RFRA in 1997 as it is applied to the states, leaving it applicable only to federal laws and regulations. In response, 18 states, including Arizona, adopted their own RFRA laws.

Ironically, extending strict scrutiny to companies is not needed at all to permit businesses to discriminate against same-sex couples. States enact laws to prohibit discrimination in public accommodations by defining protected classes. Arizona’s anti-discrimination law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin/ancestry, sex, religion/creed and physical/mental disability. There is no law, though, prohibiting discriminating against anyone on the basis of sexual orientation. Arizona is even one of only five states which does not include GLBT as a protected class in its hate crime laws. If a bakery does not want to make a wedding cake for a same-sex couple, or if a photographer does not want to photograph their wedding, they are breaking no law so there is no basis for a lawsuit.

So SB 1062 was purely symbolic, and did nothing to harm the rights of GLBT citizens. It only provides a cover of a claim of religious freedom for discrimination against groups protected by Arizona’s anti-discrimination laws, such as atheists. If you walk into a restaurant in Arizona wearing a shirt that reads “Gay and Proud,” the manager could refuse to serve you if he does not approve; but if your shirt reads “Atheist and Proud,” denying service would violate Arizona’s anti-discrimination law on the basis of creed. Thanks to Jan Brewer’s veto, that is still true.



Governor Jan Brewer posted this picture on her twitter account (twitter.com/GovBrewer) the day of the veto. She tweeted the message, “Moments ago, I vetoed #SB1062.”

Atheist Wedding Celebrant Bill Introduced in Minnesota Legislature (by August Berkshire)

On March 12, 2014, atheists and humanists in Minnesota made history when Minnesota State Representative Phyllis Kahn introduced what is believed to be the first legislative bill to ever mention us. House File 2966 (HF 2966) is titled "Marriage solemnization by atheist and humanist celebrants authorized." It allows for our celebrants to legally perform civil marriages.

The bill was immediately referred to the House Civil Law Committee, where it awaits a hearing. Minnesota State Senator John Marty has promised to introduce a companion bill in the Senate.

Unfortunately, this year's legislative session is short and crowded, so these bills may not get committee hearings, meaning they will not have a chance to pass and get signed into law. If that's the case, we hope to reintroduce them in the next legislative session. In the meantime, these bills will serve to get the conversation started. The text of the bill is as follows (underlining signifies additions to current law):

A bill for an act relating to civil law; authorizing marriage solemnization by atheist and humanist celebrants; amending Minnesota Statutes 2013 Supplement, sections 517.05; 517.18, by adding a subdivision.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

Section 1. Minnesota Statutes 2013 Supplement, section 517.05, is amended to read:

517.05 CREDENTIALS OF MINISTER OR CELEBRANT.

Ministers of any religious denomination, or any other celebrant identified in section 517.18, before they are authorized to solemnize a civil marriage, shall file a copy of their credentials of license or ordination or, if their organization or religious denomination does not issue credentials, authority from their governing board or the minister's spiritual assembly, with the local registrar of a county in this state, who shall record the same and give a certificate of filing thereof. The place where the credentials are recorded shall be endorsed upon and recorded with each certificate of civil marriage granted by a minister or celebrant.

Sec. 2. Minnesota Statutes 2013 Supplement, section 517.18, is amended by adding a subdivision to read:

Subd. 4a. Atheists and humanists. Civil marriages may be solemnized by atheist or humanist celebrants who have been appointed by the boards of directors of self-identified atheist or humanist organizations that sponsor training for such individuals. An atheist or humanist group appointing such celebrant must be registered as a nonprofit with the Minnesota Office of the Secretary of State and must have tax-exempt status as an educational organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

The original language submitted was drafted by Minnesota Atheists' director-at-large August Berkshire and was aided by research done by Minnesota Atheists' associate president Stephanie Zvan. (August Berkshire is also the legislative chair for the Secular Coalition for Minnesota.) The state revisor made small, inconsequential changes to what we submitted.

As submitted, the word "humanist" in the heading after Subd. 4a was capitalized. However, the state revisor indicated that it should be lower case.

Also, we had suggested that this be subd. 5, and that the current subd. 5 be relabeled as subd. 6. However, the state revisor doesn't like to renumber statutes. So instead our section was labeled subd. 4a. Thus seems odd since subd. 4 is about American Indians, making it look like we are a subset of them. (This is not what it means legally, but that's how it looks.) These things might be changeable in committee, or if the bills get reintroduced next session.

The clause about "training" was added because that seemed to be of concern to legislators. The national groups the American Humanist Association and the Center for Inquiry provide such training, and it is likely that if these bills pass then local atheist and humanist groups may also establish such training. After all, the groups that sponsor these celebrants will want them to do a good job, as it will reflect back on the groups.



Debate is Not Inquiry (by Stephanie Zvan)

As atheists, we do a lot of debating. Many of us debate online, where there is an endless supply of misconceptions about us. Some of us do formal debate with religious leaders. Debate is so much a part of what we do in organized atheism that we sometimes run the risk of forgetting that it's not the same thing as free thought.

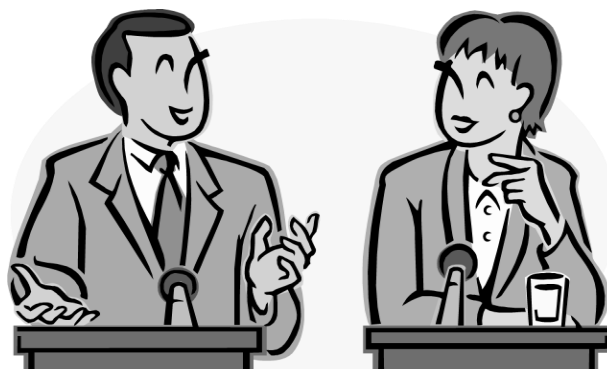
Debate is not inquiry. Argument is not skepticism. In fact, promoting debate for its own sake makes us less knowledgeable as movement and even as a culture, not more.

We should be able to remember this. We spend a lot of time talking about debates: debates on evolution, debates on the existence of god, debates on "alternative medicine", presidential debates. We talk about whether they're wise. We talk about who gets tickets to these events. We analyze debaters tactics and strong and weak points. We talk about their "hits" and "misses" whether they "won". What do we *not* talk about in all that? We don't talk about whether the people debating educated each other. As much fun as it is to say someone was "schooled", that's not what the word means in this context.

We also don't talk about debates as a tool for critical thinking, and with good reason. Debate is not about sorting through evidence and coming up with the best conclusion. Take a debate class, and you'll be taught the opposite—how to find the evidence that best suits any pre-existing conclusion. That's why a standard practice in teaching debate is to give students a topic but not tell them which side they'll need to argue until they get to the debate. Then there are all the parts of a debate that have nothing to do with the truth of the proposition being debated. Bill Nye was criticized for letting Ken Ham stack the audience with creationists, because how an audience reacts affects which debaters are seen as more reasonable. Debaters learn how to stand, how to look like they're making eye contact with the audience, how to lower the pitch of their voices, how to inject emotion into their voices and their messages, how to undermine their opponents' personal credibility, how to dress and enunciate to play on class consciousness, how to de-emphasize the weaknesses in their own arguments. All of those make for very effective rhetoric. They make for terrible skepticism.

It's possible to get people to a state of understanding that closely approximates reality through debate, but it's hardly guaranteed. Presenting people with good reasons to change their minds about a deeply held belief may even reinforce that belief. Psychologists have known about this effect, called the "boomerang effect", since the 1950s.

So why do atheists and skeptics agree to debates? Well, often we don't. Our reasons may include an unwillingness to legitimize some ideas by declaring them up for debate, distrust that our opponents will obey the terms agreed to, or the simple recognition that the skills of a scientist or a teacher are not the skills of a debater paired



with an unwillingness to lose because of factors unrelated to the merits of an argument.

When we do debate, however, we usually do it for one simple reason: access. Religion puts butts in seats. If we have debates in churches or other celebrations of credulity, we gain access to audiences we usually have trouble reaching. Sometimes a debate is worthwhile if it gets your message to people who have never heard it in its unskewed form. Sometimes, however, it's not, even for that. The Nye vs. Ham debate was not welcomed by everyone. Richard Dawkins refuses almost all debate challenges.

When we actually want to pass on the best information to a group of people we already have access to, we use education, not debate. When people call us "bad skeptics" for educating people about things they don't like, we don't thank them for their "corrections". We mock them with "Teach the Controversy." We don't let their calls for debate stop us from making sure the best information possible is presented in a way that maximizes learning.

When we want to find consensus on the best knowledge about a topic, rather than simply passing it on, we still don't turn to debate. The scientific process contains multiple constraints to check as many of the sources of bias present in a debate as possible. It strongly favors deep familiarity with a topic, reliance on data, testing of alternative scenarios, expert review and challenge, and building on established consensus, among other things. Philosophy as practiced at its best does much the same.

The scientific process isn't perfect at any of those of course, but compared to open debate, it's a machine for cranking out knowledge. Progress may be slow, but it happens. Science is not, for example, still rehashing the 1850s. Scientists may revisit a question from those days, but only when they have new information. Debaters today still study Lincoln-Douglas as something other than history.

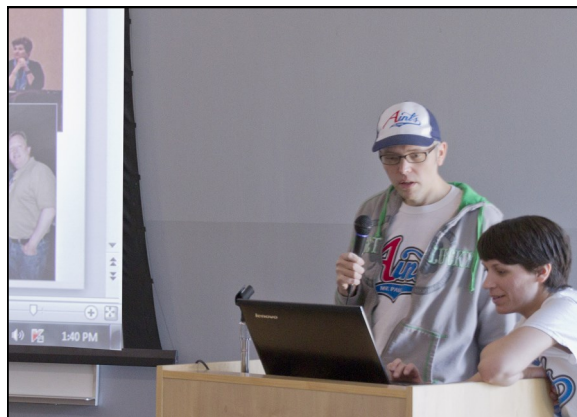
Calling nonexpert debate a means of discovering truth is cargo cult skepticism, lacking the empiricism and rigor required to produce useful results. Let us keep debate in our toolshed for what it is, but let's not mistake it for a necessary part of freethought. What we want in that case is inquiry, a different beast altogether.

Minnesota Atheists Meeting Report — *Hug an Atheist* Viewing March

During the March meeting of Minnesota Atheists we were able to view the documentary *Hug an Atheist*. The documentary was meant to examine American atheists and how they live their lives. It was divided into several categories and experts from different freethinking fields, as well as examples of American atheists and their families, were interviewed. The first section went over what it means to be an atheist. One atheist said that we “elicit the best from each other.” The next section dealt with how some atheists choose to raise their children and what it means for children to be atheist. It spent a good amount of time focusing on the idea of Santa Claus and the other reasons for the season. This led to an examination of the war on Christmas.

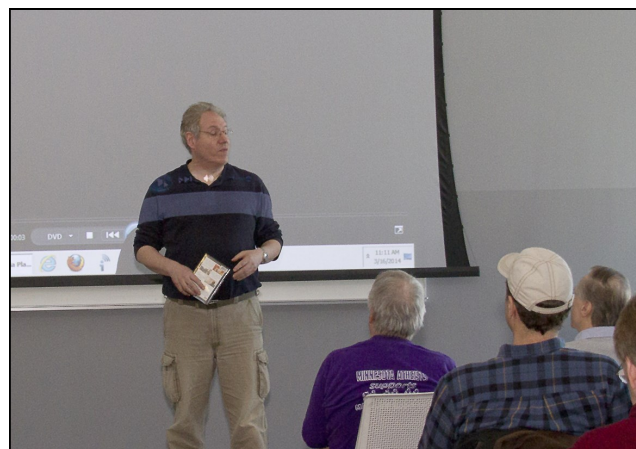
Atheist weddings were put under the microscope, what did they look like if there was no church or “sacred vows”? There were also pieces on what it means when atheists get sick and what happens when atheists die. The section of the documentary that dealt with death wasn’t just about death but about the loss of family and friends when you come out as an atheist. The focus on loss turned to community and the next section of the documentary focused on atheists being united by a common set of values. It showed atheists getting together and working together to help each other and those around us. The last part of the documentary focused on the point of being an atheist. Each person in the documentary was able to say what gave their life meaning. Some said that they appreciate the time they have now and that they like having the control over their own life.

Overall the documentary was well received and there was good attendance for the viewing.



Scenes from the March Meeting

Above: Eric Jayne and Heather Hegi
Below: August Berkshire



Scenes from *Hug an Atheist*



Day of Reason 2014 (by Heather Hegi)



We will be celebrating our ninth annual Day of Reason celebration at the State Capitol Rotunda on May 1st. Our program will start at noon and will last about an hour. We welcome you to join us!

The National Day of Reason was instituted as a protest against the National Day of Prayer, which was established by Congress in 1952 and fixed in 1988 as the first Thursday in May. The National Day of Reason is supported by secular groups across the country in support of separation of church and state.

The theme of this year's Day of Reason will be "30 Years and Growing with Good Reason". While the Day of Prayer simultaneously occurs on the steps leading to the capitol, we will be in the rotunda celebrating the continuous presence and growth of secular organizations in the State of Minnesota throughout the last 30 years.

We will hear from several organizations which have had a positive secular presence in Minnesota, and hopefully we will also hear from a few representatives on how they view the benefits of separating government and religion.

This is a family friendly event. Though some children might not understand all the speeches, educating them on the importance of standing up for your rights and making change in the world is invaluable! This is a great way to do that. You may also call ahead to schedule a tour of the capital building for your visit.

Let's represent secular society by filling up the rotunda, letting ourselves be heard, and celebrating reason in Minnesota!

For more information, please contact info@mnatheists.org.

George Francis Kane Freethought Cryptogram

Yu rejjslb im jwsicifv il qicyjygec jwsilv, awsls e lejyuec reu aycc wicx jwej ej ksbj jwsls yb e bcyfwj keceugs im qliekykyjv iu ius byxs il jws ijwsl, qsiqcs elfzs ayjw qebbyiu eux bzqqilj jwsyl iqyuyiub kv qwvbygec bceoslv yrqibsx kv elrysb eux rsujec bceoslv yrqibsx kv bgwiicb.

Ksljleux Lzbbfcc

May Day Parade with Minnesota Atheists! (by Heather Hegi)

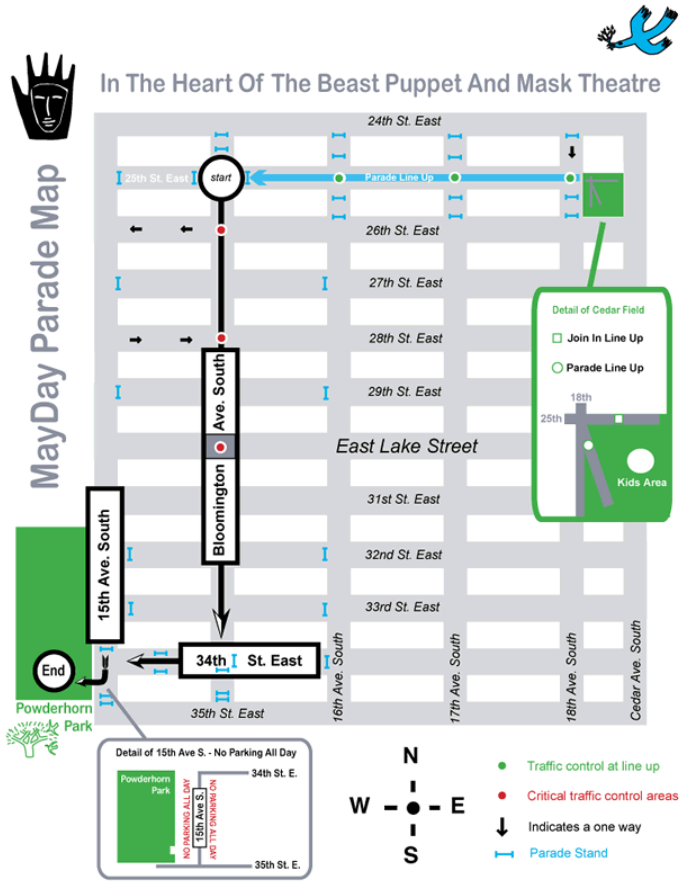
It's hard to believe that we will have spring weather soon enough and what better way to celebrate it than to walk in the May Day Parade with Minnesota Atheists!

I really enjoy walking in the parade and holding signs representing secular values. It just makes your day when you overhear someone from the crowd reading one of our signs exclaiming "Hug an Atheist", and instead of coming out to hug one of us they hug the person standing right beside them. We truly do feel welcome at this parade, we get lots of cheers and everyone is in a festive mood!

This year's parade is on Sunday, May 4th, with the parade starting at 1pm. We line up at Cedar Field Park in Minneapolis (2500 Cedar Ave, Minneapolis) and we will walk in the parade to Powderhorn Park (3400 15th Ave S, Minneapolis). Show up about 15 minutes to a half hour before the parade starts at 1pm to get a Minnesota Atheists T-Shirt and pick a sign to hold of your choosing (Provided by Minnesota Atheists). You may come wearing your Minnesota Atheists or Aints t-shirt, or get your own special edition Minnesota Atheists T-Shirt which we will have on hand (suggested donation of \$5). The organizers of the festival want this to be a no waste event, so please bring your own reusable water bottle so no disposable water bottles are needed.

After the parade the May Day festival will continue at Powderhorn Park where you are welcome to join us at the Minnesota Atheists booth. We converse with people who stop at the booth, field questions about atheism, and let people know what we are all about. We could also use volunteers to help set up and take down the booth. If interested please contact Steve Petersen at spetersen175@comcast.net or 651-484-9277.

For more information about the May Day celebration visit: hobt.org/mayday



Parade starts at 1:00 pm



Who is the new Minnesota Atheists Newsletter Editor? (by Jenny Nolan)

My mother and I were driving one day when I was young. I was looking out the window as I asked her how we knew that Jesus walked on water. Without hesitation she said, "Because that's what the bible says."

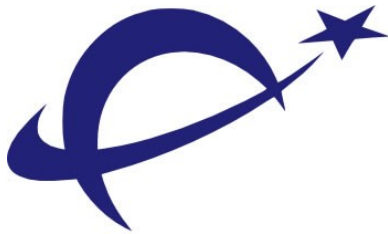
"Yes, but how do we *know*?", I urged.

"You just have to have faith."

The car increased speed and the memory ends. This is the earliest spark of atheism I can recall. (Although I do have a short essay, tucked in my piles of notebooks, concerning the story of Jesus and the fig tree- Mark 11:12-14 and 11:20-25- written in a child's handwriting.) For as long as I can remember I have been the thing that is not like the others. I was the defiant child, always asking questions, needing to see to believe. I grew into a non-conformist adult, unafraid to step out on my own but always carrying that undeniable human desire to be a part of something more.

I grew up in Wisconsin with a strict Catholic family and a Catholic education. After high school I eagerly left Wisconsin and my family to attend the University of Minnesota. Within my first year I befriended Jews and Atheists and Jewish Atheists. My world opened. I ended up converting to Judaism on my 21st birthday, convinced I had found a community that was able to give my questions answers. Not quite. Even after a trip to Israel there were still things that didn't sit right.

I graduated with a degree in English, an emphasis on creative writing, and was *this close* to a minor in Jewish Studies but I couldn't quite get a handle on Hebrew. Ultimately, I learned more from the environment of college than I did from the classroom. After college I decided that I couldn't give religion what it wanted from me and started to live life without it. I started reading Hitchens, Rand, and Dawkins. I found people willing to give me an honest "I don't know" and urge me to find my own answers. My world opened once again.



My reality consists of, first and foremost, my chosen family. I have a brilliant, freethinking husband, Jonathan, and a bright, beautiful daughter, Emmai. (Emmai backwards is I AM ME) If I believe in anything, it's them. I have a passion for books (reading and writing), art, movies, music, religion, debate, and health. I find small talk difficult but delight in discussion of heavy subjects. I have an eye for detail and have turned observation into a skill. It has taken me a lifetime of experiments, scrutiny, and awareness to discover who I am, so when introducing myself I feel inclined to include everything, but I couldn't possibly fit it all here. Fortunately, I believe we will get to know each other over time as I become more involved in Minnesota Atheists. I have a tendency to hang back and watch the world from backstage. From behind the curtain I can edit the script, direct the action, and always keep an eye on the audience.

My new adventure as the editor for the Minnesota Atheists newsletter will allow me to move beyond the curtain, focus on the art that is my life, and begin to fulfill that desire I still carry with me. I look forward to meeting and working with all of you. I welcome your thoughts and stories as I am always willing to share mine. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity.

Please feel free to email your articles, suggestions, or questions to editor@mnatheists.org

Cryptogram Answer

In matters of theology or political theory, where a rational man will hold that at best there is a slight balance of probability on one side or the other, people argue with passion and support their opinions by physical slavery imposed by armies and mental slavery imposed by schools.

Bertrand Russell

Find Good Ethics and Decency Outside Bible (by August Berkshire)

(The following letter to the editor was printed in the St. Cloud Times on Feb. 18, 2014.)

The Feb. 18 letter “Turn toward God and away from immorality” apparently believes that “gays are seeking to force their philosophy on all parts of our culture, including government, business, schools and churches.”

And just what would this notorious philosophy be? That all people are created equal and deserving of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Sounds pretty American to me.

Perhaps the author would like to live in a country like Russia where liberties, such as equal rights for gays and lesbians, are suppressed.

The letter urges us to base our laws on biblical teaching. However, most of the Ten Commandments would be unconstitutional.

According to the biblical god, the following people should be killed: People who curse or blaspheme the Lord (Leviticus 24:11-16), People who worship another god, (Deuteronomy 17:2-7) (Exodus 22:20), witches and wizards

(Deuteronomy 22:13-21), gay men (Leviticus 20:13), disobedient sons (Deuteronomy 21:18-21), people who curse their father or mother (Exodus 21:17), and someone who works on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36) (Exodus 31:15) (Exodus 35:2).

Of course, there are some nice parts of the Bible as well, which advocate for good behavior. But because both the good and bad parts of the Bible come from the same god, how do we decide which advice to obey and which to ignore?

The only way we can separate the two is to bring our own, outside-of-the-Bible, sense of decency to bear on it. Good ethics come from our evolution as a social species and consist of empathy, cooperation and observing and predicting consequences.

No god-belief is necessary, and in fact it tends to confuse things more than help.

2014 Minnesota Atheist T-Shirt Design

It's a new year, so that means a new T-Shirt design for Minnesota Atheists! We are following suit of the last two years by offering another special edition T-Shirt for 2014 which lines up with our Day of Reason theme. This year's design will have our logo on the front and the back will feature the state of Minnesota with stars for all the cities in which we are aware of atheist organizations existing.

The text at the top reads, “30 Years and Growing with Good Reason”, honoring the continuous presence and growth of secular organizations in the State of Minnesota throughout the last 30 years. Then of course our website is listed at the bottom.

The cities that are featured are Grand Rapids, Moorhead, Brainerd, Duluth, Morris, St Cloud, Cannon Falls, Northfield, St Peter, Mankato, Winona, Rochester, and the Twin Cities. Most of these locations are where a chapter of the Secular Student Alliance resides, but it's great to know that secular students are organizing and fostering the idea that it's alright to be an atheist at a young age! I won't list all the organizations, but if the shirt indicates a group in your town that you didn't know about, be sure to look them up! Even if it's a Secular Student Alliance chapter, these groups usually host events that are open to the general public which would be worth attending.

The T-Shirts should be in by late April just in time for the Day of Reason and to give to participants in the May Day Parade. If we're lucky, we may even have them available for the April Monthly Meeting! We will have the shirts available at upcoming events, or you may pre-order shirts on our website at www.mnatheists.org/store



Minnesota Atheists Seeks Librarian

Minnesota Atheists is seeking a volunteer (or two) to act as the librarian for our lending library. The First Unitarian Society (FUS) in Minneapolis (near the Walker Art Center) has graciously agreed to house this collection along side their own.

Each month our librarian would go to FUS and load a selection of books into a small suitcase on wheels (about the size that would fit into an airplane's overhead bin). He or she would then bring that selection to our monthly meeting, and perhaps any other gatherings that he or she may attend. Our access to FUS would be limited to their normal business hours.

The list of books in our library would be posted on our website. The librarian may choose to be available to take requests from that list.



No library skills are needed, just a good aptitude for filing and keeping track of things and an eagerness to spread the good word of atheism.

Someone who is already a member of FUS, or who visits there once in awhile, or who lives nearby, might be ideal for this position. If interested, please contact August Berkshire at (612) 868-2267 or augustberkshire@gmail.com.

Public Policy Committee — Volunteers Wanted

The Public Policy Committee of Minnesota Atheists will be conducting its annual review of our public policy positions starting in August 2014. The policies from this committee, when ratified by the board of directors, define the political positions of Minnesota Atheists and direct the conduct of our lobbyists and the editorial board of our newsletter. We will meet monthly for 3-4 months. We are looking for volunteers with an interest in our policies to join this committee.

As part of our annual review we will this year pay particular attention to a comparison of our current public policies with the model policy guidelines recently released by the Secular Coalition of America.



Secretary's Report

The following is a summary of activity occurring at the MN Atheists Board of Directors meeting taking place on March 19th, 2014.

- New Board members, Alyssa Ehni and Georgia Tsoi join the Board for their first meeting. Departing members include Andy Flamm and George Kane. Thanks to George and Andy for their service.
- Discussion on a new Board meeting room venue took place; Lunds in NE Minneapolis and the Wilder Building in Saint Paul are being considered. Central location, parking and cost are major factors for the decision. April's meeting will take place at the Community Room at Lunds and May's meeting will take place at the Wilder Building in one of their free meeting rooms for registered non-profits.
- A summary of the MNA summer conference and the Aints game were discussed and marketing efforts were approved.
- August Berkshire reported that \$259 dollars was raised at the March monthly meeting, "Hug an Atheist". These funds are being sent to the filmmaker to further the distribution of the movie.
- A brief brainstorm took place to recruit entertainment for the Solstice event in December. The hip hop artist, Dessa, was suggested as a headliner.
- Fundraising policies and procedures were discussed to ensure MNA is complying with guidelines set forth by Minnesota law.

Atheists Talk Radio Report

"**Christian Nation**", Fred Rich on *Atheists Talk* #258, February 23, 2014

What do people like Sarah Palin mean when they say the U.S. is a "Christian nation"? What would their vision look like if it were made real? Could they ever really succeed in taking control of the country? Author Fred Rich tackles all these questions in his recent book, *Christian Nation: A Novel*. From the publisher's description:

In the spirit of Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*, one of America's foremost lawyers lays out in chilling detail what such a future might look like: constitutional protections dismantled; all aspects of life dominated by an authoritarian law called "The Blessing," enforced by a totally integrated digital world known as the "Purity Web." Readers will find themselves haunted by the questions the narrator struggles to answer in this fictional memoir: What happened, why did it happen, how could it have happened?

"**The Age of Atheists**", Peter Watson on *Atheists Talk* #259, March 9, 2014

"How do atheists find meaning in their lives without God?" It may be the second most common "gotcha" question asked of atheists, after "Where do atheists get their morality from if not God?" It's just as annoying too, because the answer is "In every way possible!" If you need proof, just turn to the new book by journalist and historian Peter Watson.

In *The Age of Atheists: How We Have Sought to Live Since the Death of God*, Watson chronicles the Western scientists, philosophers, and artists who have worked to draw meaning from our lives since Friedrich Nietzsche so infamously signed God's death certificate. It is a book remarkable for its scope.

"**Hug an Atheist**", Sylvia Broeckx on *Atheists Talk* #260, March 16, 2014

Sylvia Broeckx is hardly the first person living in Europe to be appalled at how atheists are treated in the U.S. Her approach to dealing with the problem, however, was new. Rather than tut (perhaps rightly) at how uncivilized we are, she decided to do something about it. After crowdsourcing the funding, she came to the U.S. to make a film featuring everyday atheists in the U.S. The result was the documentary *Hug an Atheist*, which premiered at the atheist film festival in San Francisco last year.

"**David Silverman**", on *Atheists Talk* #261, March 23rd, 2014

David Silverman is an activist and the current president of American Atheists, the most prominent organization in the United States fighting for the civil liberties of atheists, and the total separation of church and state. David will be joining *Atheists Talk* this Sunday to discuss the upcoming 2014 National Convention in Salt Lake City, American Atheists billboards, and the CPAC controversy.

Atheists Talk

AM 950 KTFN

Minnesota Atheists produces *Atheists Talk* and is directed by Carl Hancock. Talk show hosts are Carl Hancock, Brianne Bilyeu, Scott Lohman, David Pacheco, and Stephanie Zvan. Both Stephanie and Brianne upload podcast to the website. The radio program is live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 at AM950 KTFN studios in Eden Prairie, MN. Live streaming can be done through our web page, www.mnatheists.org. Original music was composed, played and recorded by Brent Michael Davids. The six months is \$5,320.00: each donation, just send in a donation to our post office box or online at minnesotatheists.org/join-and-donate/radio-fund Thanks to Brianne Bilyeu we have an *Atheists Talk* Facebook page and [Twitter.com/atheiststalk](https://twitter.com/atheiststalk). All past programs can be accessed via MNA web page, minnesotatheists.org/news-and-media/podcast

If you are interested in helping on the radio please send a message to radio@mnatheists.org.



Cable Report (by Steve Petersen and Jordan Peacock)

Our program this past month had Minnesota Atheists board Secretary Jill Carlson interviewing Kevin Watson on a program titled *Can An Atheist Be Religious?* Kevin represented The Humanist Institute, an accredited program in Humanism that prepares individuals to be tomorrow's leaders and they offer a one day Humanist Celebrant program. Kevin is also the Secular Student Alliance Advisor at Hamline University.

Thanks to Grant Hermanson we are on Northwest Community Television (NWCT) access again. We are waiting for a regular time slot but until then go to www.nwct.org/programming and check the program guild for Atheists Talk to see the time and date of programs.



Kevin Watson and Jill Carlson

Cable Crew: George Kane, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Les Stordahen, Grant Hermanson and Art Anderson

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

Cable Schedule

Burnsville/Eagan Community Television: Ch. 14 Check their web site www.bect.tv for day and times. Sponsor: Kevin Hardisty

Bloomington: Ch. 16. Sunday 11:00 p.m. Sponsors: David and Joanne Beardsley.

Minneapolis: Ch. 75. Monday 7:00 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

Northwest Community Television (NWCT) Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Golden Valley, Maple Grove, New Hope, Osseo, Plymouth and Robbinsdale, Ch. 20 check web page for date and times: www.nwct.org/programming Sponser: Grant Hermanson

Rochester: Ch. 10. Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Salutz.

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

St. Cloud: Ch. 12 Thursday 8:30 to 9:00 p.m. Sponsor Tom Stavros.

St. Paul: Ch. 15 Wednesdays 5:00 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Wright.

Stillwater: Ch., 16. Tuesday 7:00 p.m.; Wednesday 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury.

White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights: Ch. 15. Saturday 8:00 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.

February Treasury Report

Building Fund

| | |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Geri Jensen | \$10 |
| Total Building Fund | \$10 |

Radio Fund

| | |
|------------------|-------------|
| James Wright | \$25 |
| Roger Baumann | \$20 |
| Steve Petersen | \$15 |
| Geri Jensen | \$10 |
| Mark Paquette | \$10 |
| Total Radio Fund | \$80 |

General/Visibility Fund

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Susan Kennedy | \$400 |
| Valerie Gingras | \$190 |
| Robert Rudell | \$55 |
| Geri Jensen | \$10 |
| Total General/Visibility Fund | \$655 |

Total Income: \$745

Current Building Fund Total \$132,704

Top Expenses

| | |
|---------------------|-------|
| Radio Show | \$820 |
| Newsletter Printing | \$585 |
| Parade, Booth, etc | \$120 |

Call for May Articles

We welcome contributions from all readers of The Minnesota Atheist. While we cannot guarantee that your submission will be accepted for publication, we will carefully consider anything that is related to atheism. We would especially like to receive contributions which provide profiles of individual atheists and which report on atheist-related events in the wider community.

Because we are a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization, we cannot print articles that support or oppose a specific candidate, but we can print articles that support or oppose specific causes. A good length to aim for is about 500-1000 words, and no more than about 2000 words, which comes to two pages in the newsletter. We can use text in most common formats such as Word, WordPerfect, and OpenOffice, but not Apple Pages. We encourage you to include photos or other artwork along with your submission. To reproduce well, images should be at least 300 pixels in each dimension. We can use most common image formats, including tiff, jpg, and png. Please send submissions to the editor, Jenny Nolan, at editor@mnatheists.org by 11:59 p.m. on April 22nd. All submissions may be edited for style and length.

Several past contributors have asked for the opportunity to review the edited version of their submissions before publication. We would be happy to work with contributors in this way, but we will need a few extra days to do so. If you would like to review the edited version of your submission, please indicate this in the email accompanying your submission and send your submission by 11:59 p.m. on April 17th.

We look forward to receiving your submissions. Without contributions from readers like you, The Minnesota Atheist would be needlessly constrained in its breadth and depth.



Upcoming Events

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

Lake Superior Freethinkers Monthly Membership Meeting. First Sundays, social time 9:00 a.m., breakfast 9:30 a.m. (\$13.00), program 10:00 a.m., Duluth Radisson, 505 West Superior Street, Duluth.

Freethought Toastmasters. First and third Mondays, 6:30 p.m., Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue West, Saint Paul. Contact George Kane, nup@Minn.net

Freethought Lunch. First Tuesday, 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Old Country Buffet, County Road B2 between Fairview and Snelling. Contact Bob or Marilyn Nienkirk, 612-866-6200.

Burnsville Book Club. First Wednesday, Dinner 6:30 p.m., meeting 7:00 p.m. to about 9:00 p.m., Davanni's, 14639 County Road 11, Burnsville. Meet in the party room.

Atheists Talk Television Show Recording. First Thursday, 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., MTN Studio A, 125 Southeast Main Street, Minneapolis. Contact Steve Petersen, 651-484-9277.

Crafty Freethinkers North. Second Sunday, 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Brookdale Library, Study Room I, 6125 Shingle Creek Parkway, Brooklyn Center.

Little Canada Book Club. Second Sunday, 1:00 p.m., Caribou Coffee, 3354 Rice Street, Little Canada.

Freethought Dinner Social. Second and fourth Mondays, 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Davanni's, 8605 Lyndale Avenue South, Bloomington. Contact Bob or Marilyn Neinkerk, 612-866-6200.

Godless Gamers—Board Game Night. Second and fourth Thursdays, 6:00 p.m., Fantasy Flight Games Center, 1975 County Road B2, Roseville.

Blasphemer's Brunch. Second Saturday, 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., Pizza Lucé, 800 West 66th Street, Richfield.

Lunch at the Dragon House Restaurant. Third Wednesday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Dragon House Restaurant, 3970 Central Avenue, Columbia Heights. Contact Bill Volna, 612-781-1420.

Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting. Third Wednesday, 6:30 p.m., Open to all members. Contact Heather Hegi, hair@mnatheists.org for location.

Freethinking Females Evening at Chatterbox Pub. Fourth Monday, 7:30 p.m., Chatterbox Pub, 800 Cleveland Avenue South, Saint Paul.

Dinner & A Book. Fourth Tuesday, 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Skeptech 2: Electric Boogaloo. April 4th 5:00pm Willey Hall, University of Minnesota

For all the latest meeting news, subscribe to Atheists' Weekly Email (AWE) at:

mnatheists.org/atheists-weekly/subscribe-to-awe



Check out more events on our Meetup page at: meetup.com/minnesota-atheists.

2014 Atheists Game and All Star Conference: Tickets and Registration Details

Friday, July 11

St. Paul Saints are secularized to the Mr. Paul Aints for the third year in a row!

We're calling it the *Night of Unbelievable Fun: The 3rd Strike* sponsored by MN Atheists and Freedom From Religion Foundation. Game time is 7pm at Midway Stadium. Tailgating begins at 4pm in the parking lot!

Ticket Prices:

\$22 - Infield (or "Infidel") Reserved + Aints hat

\$12 - Outfield General Admission + hot dog and soda

You can order and print out these special group tickets online at SAINTSGROUPS.com

Enter the captcha letters and then the password: atheists

Saturday, July 12

All-Star Conference presented by MN Atheists and Humanists of MN

Starring: Susan Jacoby, PZ Myers, Rebecca Watson, James Croft, and more!

RiverCentre, 175 W Kellogg Blvd, Saint Paul, MN

Early Bird Ticket Prices:

\$45 – Regular Admission (add \$20 for lunch and \$30 for dinner)

\$80 – Full Package (Regular Admission + lunch + dinner)

\$20 – Student Admission (add \$20 for lunch and \$30 for dinner)

\$55 – Student Full Package (Student Admission + lunch + dinner)

- * Headliner speakers
- * Morning workshops
- * Silent auction
- * Book signings
- * Lunch and dinner socializing
- * Network with like-minded freethinkers

Take advantage of EARLY BIRD SPECIALS before prices go up!

Ten percent DISCOUNT for all paid-up members of Minnesota Atheists and/or Humanists of MN. Members will be verified by MNA and HofMN after purchase.

Financial assistance grants are available. To apply, email pres@mnatheists.org. To donate see link below within the conference price selections. Student discounts available with current student ID

Contact Steve Petersen at spetersen175@gmail.com to confirm your MNA membership OR join at mnatheists.org/join-and-donate/become-a-member

Contact Nathan Curland at editor@humanistsofmn.org to confirm your HofMN membership OR join at humanistsofmn.org/join

July 11: ATHEIST BASEBALL GAME
Presented by Minnesota Atheists and FFRF
St. Paul Saints become Mr. Paul Aints (vs. Kansas City)
Midway Stadium - ~~Saint~~ Mister Paul, Minnesota

July 12: ALL STAR CONFERENCE
Presented by Minnesota Atheists and Humanists of Minnesota
Speakers include Susan Jacoby, Rebecca Watson, and MORE!
RiverCentre - ~~Saint~~ Mister Paul, Minnesota

Aint's
MR. PAUL
ATHEIST
GAME
20 14

Speaking at the conference:



- Susan Jacoby -

Best-selling author, scholar, and former Washington Post reporter. Her work has explored law, religion, medicine, aging, women's rights, and political dissent. Her most recent book about Robert Ingersoll was made available in paperback in February.



- Rebecca Watson -

Skeptical female activist and founder of the Skepchick blog. She is a popular speaker around the world on topics about atheism, feminism, skepticism, and science.



- PZ Myers -

Associate Professor of Biology at the University of Minnesota in Morris. He is the author of the world-famous science-atheist blog Pharyngula, which can be found on Freethought Blogs and Science Blogs. His recently published book is titled The Happy Atheist.



- James Croft -

Research and Education Fellow at the Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard. He is a Cambridge and Harvard Graduate, and is currently studying for his Doctorate in the philosophy of education.



TBA - That's right! It's the catch-all "TBA." We will be announcing even more!

More speakers will be added to the list which includes the variety of morning workshop presenters. There will also be morning workshops, silent auction, autographs, books, merchandise, optional meals, networking, pub crawl, and more!

You can register for the Minnesota Atheist Conference by visiting MinnesotaAtheists.org/store or sending your check or money order with the registration form below:

10% CONFERENCE DISCOUNT MN ATHEISTS MEMBERSHIP!

TO BECOME A MN ATHEISTS MEMBER CHOOSE ONE OF THE FOLLOWING LEVELS:

\$10 Student \$35 Individual \$45 Household \$75 Sustaining \$600 Life

Convention Early Bird Price (Before May 1, 2014)

\$80 or \$72 Members Discount! - Full Package (Speakers, Lunch*, and Dinner**)

\$45 or \$41 Members Discount! - Speakers-Only (no meals)

\$20 or \$18 Members Discount! – Speakers-Only (no meals) **STUDENT** Price

\$55 or \$18 Members Discount! - Speakers-Only (with all meals) **STUDENT** Price

* **Lunch Choices:** Italian Hoagie Apple & Brie Croissant Vegan option (TBD)

** **Dinner Choices:** Southwestern Buffet with chicken, hand-fried corn tortilla, fresh salsa, black bean roasted corn salsa, guacamole, hand-fried tricolor corn tortilla chips with homemade fresh tomato salsa. Cinnamon churros will be served for dessert.

Vegan option (TBD)

TOTAL: \$ _____

Mail this coupon with your check (made to "Minnesota Atheists") or credit card info to:
Minnesota Atheists; PO Box 120304; New Brighton, MN 55112.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Check VISA Mastercard American Express Discover Card

Acct. # _____ Expires _____ Security Code _____

Tired of just hanging out and want to discover something new?

Join Minnesota Atheists, renew your membership, or make a donation.



Minnesota Atheists Membership and Donations

- One-year student membership \$10
- One-year individual membership \$35
- Three-year individual membership \$90
- One-year household membership \$45
- Three-year household membership \$115
- One-year sustaining membership \$75
- Three-year sustaining membership \$200
- Life membership \$600
- General Fund \$_____
- Building Fund \$_____
- Radio Fund \$_____

Donations are tax deductible. Membership fees are deductible for the amount beyond their fair market value.

Student memberships include a subscription to the PDF version of *The Minnesota Atheist* delivered by email. All other memberships include a subscription to the printed version delivered by postal mail. If you would prefer the PDF version delivered by email, please check the box and provide your email address.

- Please send my subscription by email

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email (required for student memberships and email subscriptions): _____

Minnesota Atheists, PO Box 120304, New Brighton, MN 55112. Please make checks payable to Minnesota Atheists. Students, please enclose a copy of your fee statement or school identification.

Minnesota Atheists

Positive atheism in actionsm since 1991

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.

Minnesota Atheists Board of Directors

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editor@mnatheists.org
Submissions may be edited.

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Minnesota Atheists Goals

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.

Minnesota Atheists Affiliations

Minnesota Atheists is
affiliated with the Atheist
Alliance of America, Atheist
Alliance International,
American Atheists, The
American Humanist
Association, the Council for
Secular Humanism, The
International Humanist and
Ethical Union, and the Secular
Coalition for America.

Minnesota Atheists Membership

Regular members: 207
Life members: 37
Meetup members: 1,566

Minnesota Atheists Honorary Members

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

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