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The Minnesota Atheist



Black Freethinker History February Public Meeting – February 15, 2015

There is an African proverb that says, “Until the lion has his or her own storyteller, the hunt will always favor the hunter”. The history of Blacks and those of African lineage in the Americas have been doomed to oblivion ever since that first African slave was dragged off the boat in the 1500s by the New World Spanish settlers of Santo Domingo. Black History month allows us to not just recognize past and present history and accomplishments of African Americans and those of African lineage, but it requires us to look at the counter-narrative that we are living in a post-racial age.

In 1857, after 450 plus years of slavery, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Dred Scott vs Sandford that whether free or not, African Americans were not citizens, and had no rights or legal standing to sue in federal courts. Therefore the federal government could enact no laws to change that. Abolitionists had long been urging President Lincoln to free slaves and in 1863 the President issued the Emancipation Proclamation, but not before he declared, “My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union”.

The Black Nationalism that emerged in the late 1850s with Martin Delany and other African American Freethinkers like Hubert Henry Harrison gave way to a cultural explosion that was the Harlem Renaissance. This movement gave rise to African American writers, philosophers, artists and musicians. It also, in time, led to the Civil Rights Movement that we know today. The Civil Rights Movement was largely made up of men and women of faith. The Black Church then, and some still do to this day, provided the necessary resources for these poor and working families.

Largely because of the Black Theology Liberation Movement, 84% of the Black population in this country are religious. But let’s not forget, there have been many black Freethinkers, Humanists, Skeptics, Agnostics and Atheists of the past and present who are forgotten in history’s narratives. So, what will it take for us to be inclusive today? What will it take for the Atheist community to not just be interested in minority speakers but also minority issues?

Our speaker, Mahad Muhammad, will answer these questions and more. Mahad is a member of Minnesota Atheists, Black Lives Matter Minneapolis, and the recently founded Black Freethinkers of Minnesota, a group creating a safe space for Atheists of color.

Muhammad was recently interviewed on Atheists Talk Radio. You can listen to the interview at mnatheists.org

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Southdale Public Library, 7001
York Avenue South, Edina MN
1:00-1:15. – Social time
1:15-1:45 – Business Meeting
1:45-2:00 – Break
2:00-3:30 – Reproductive Justice
Activism
4:00-whenever – Dinner
Q.Cumbers, 7465 France Avenue
South, Edina MN

President's Column – Not Believing in Jesus

By Eric Jayne

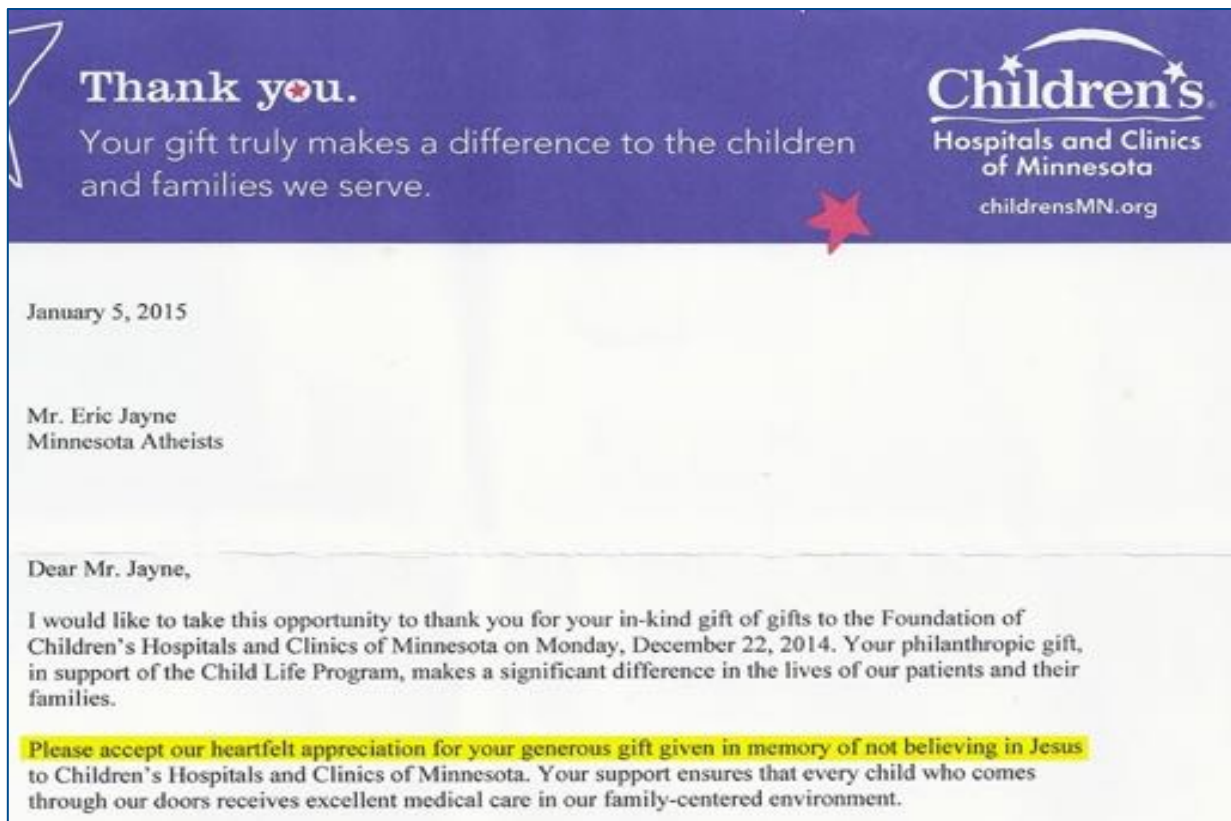
I recently received a thank you letter on behalf of Minnesota Atheists from Children's Hospital of Minnesota after a group of us donated two carloads of toys and other gifts to benefit hospital patients and their families. When the gifts were dropped off I wrote "not believing in Jesus" under the *In Memory of* line on the gift donation form we were required to complete. The hospital's mail merge software, presumably, formatted it so the following line was included in the letter: ***Please accept our heartfelt appreciation of your generous gift given in memory of not believing in Jesus to Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota.***

That line made me laugh. I found it to be hilarious, actually. I shared it on Facebook and saw a bunch of other people have the same reaction. Looking past the humor, however, there was something else I felt which I think was pride.

After a dozen and a half years of church lessons, Sunday school lessons, Bible school lessons and youth ministry groups teaching a devotion to Jesus and instilling fear of any thought wavering from a commitment to God; the idea of not believing in Jesus is an empowering thing to admire. So even though I was feeling a little giddy and impulsive when I filled out the hospital's donation form, the donated gifts—along with other community service projects I have the privilege of participating in—are partly the result of observing the atheist conclusion with a very high regard.

In March I will be entering my final year of this 3-year term as president of Minnesota Atheists. Not believing in Jesus has been, and will continue to be, a significant motivator as I work with the talented Minnesota Atheists board, members, and supporters to carry out our brand of positive atheism in action and help others unrepentantly reach the atheist conclusion.

Stay tuned for updates that will make 2015 an exciting and productive year for Minnesota Atheists!



News and Notes

By George Kane

December is of course the season for the annual War on Christmas. I write this facetiously, as I know of no one who is trying to stop anyone else from celebrating Christmas. Quite the contrary, the substance of the War on Christmas appears to be nothing more than that some Christians get offended that there are people who do not observe it.

Jews, Muslims and the nonreligious do not celebrate Christmas, in which they are joined by adherents to many small religions. The nation is much more conscious of its religious diversity than in the past, so today wishing someone a “Merry Christmas” is presumptuous if you do not know that the person is a Christian. The culture warriors, however, regard any other greeting that acknowledges the season, such as “Happy Holidays,” as offensive. They cannot accept that some people have other celebrations.

They also want government to recognize their religious holiday, and no other. They want crèches displayed in public parks, on courthouse lawns and in capitol rotundas. They are not concerned that this constitutes an endorsement of religion – after all, that is the whole point. As a result, this is a season of many suits against government (but not against religion.) The Freedom from Religion Foundation is leading the way in lawsuits to stop local governments from erecting religious symbols on public land.

In Jay, Florida, a life-sized nativity scene had been set up on town land each December for nearly 40 years. When a local resident complained to the FFRF, they threatened suit. The town sold the nativity scene to the Santa Rosa County Ministerial Association, which moved it to private property.

In Utica, New York, the Fire Department has in recent years put up a large banner reading “HAPPY BIRTHDAY JESUS WE LOVE YOU” on Fire Station 4. In April the FFRF sent a complaint letter to Fire Chief Russell Brooks. When the banner was put up anyway, they wrote to Mayor Robert Palmieri, to no avail. Watch

for the FFRF to take preemptive legal action next year to prevent the Fire Department from hanging the banner.

In other cases, rather than take down the Christian display, the local government removed itself from responsibility for it, instead declaring the area a ‘free speech zone.’ This requires them to accept seasonal celebration displays from any other organization. This was the case at the Michigan State Capitol, where the Satanic Temple placed a ‘snaketivity’ display on the lawn. The FFRF provided a display with the following message:

At this season of the Winter Solstice, let reason prevail. There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell. There is only our natural world. Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds.

At the VFW Park in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, the FFRF answered two religious displays with a ‘Reason’s Greetings’ banner. One of the other displays was a Festivus pole, commemorating the holiday created on the ‘Seinfeld’ TV sitcom.

Free speech zones do not always run smoothly, however. Vandals tore down FFRF’s solstice banner at the Bulloch County Courthouse in Statesboro, Georgia. That left the lawn displays dominated by bible quotes and Christian symbolism.

The FFRF got Franklin County to agree to take down a nativity scene from their courthouse lawn on December 26, instead of remaining up until mid-January as they have done in past years. But in response to FFRF’s complaint, State Senator Jim Smith plans to introduce his “Merry Christmas bill” in the upcoming legislative session. The bill would allow cities and towns to have Christmas displays as long as displays from other faiths are permitted, thus setting up another ‘free speech zone.’

Finally, Christians were enraged when Neil DeGrasse Tyson issued a couple of tweets. “What do Jews and Muslims call December 25th? Thursday” and “On this day long ago, a child was born who, by age 30, would transform the world. Happy Birthday Isaac Newton b. Dec 25, 1642.” How are those statements offensive?

George Kane Cryptogram

Q ja mtodxjym. Q’a joo ptx pxdd ehddub jyi pxdd xqlbme,
ngem ytm ty ldudavdx msdymf-pqpmb.

Lxdmubdy Ujxoety ty “Ptr jyi Pxqdyie,” drhojqyqyl sbf dkdxftyd
ebtgoi ejf ‘Adxxf Ubxqemaje’ xjmbdx mbjy ‘Bjhfh Btoqijfe.’

Accepting Nominees to the 2015 Board of Directors

President - Eric Jayne



I am thrilled to be running for a third and final year of a term as president of Minnesota Atheists. I have served on the board since 2011 and I've participated in Minnesota Atheists events since 2007. The idea of *positive atheism in action* has guided my efforts in helping to promote our organization through several mechanisms including

billboards, baseball games, conferences, and community service projects. (Stay tuned for updates about "atheist night" in 2015 with the St. Paul Saints!)

As a fulltime social worker in St. Paul I have worked hard to connect several godless volunteers to local secular nonprofits who help underprivileged individuals and families meet their basic needs. Thanks to a dedicated group of event leaders, Minnesota Atheists has helped support the work of several local agencies while receiving recognition and awards from Foundation Beyond Belief for successfully completing a variety of community service projects.

I look forward to another year of working with, and learning from, a talented board of directors. Increasing our paid membership by at least 10 percent is a primary goal which I hope to achieve before my term is up next year.

Director-at-Large - Art Kallenbach



After being raised in a moderately religious Lutheran family in Coon Rapids, I unceremoniously realized I was an atheist in the mid-1980s. Several years ago my son identified as a Christian. He invited me to attend a debate his

pastor was having with August Berkshire. Impressed by the debate, I looked into the work Minnesota Atheists was involved in. I soon understood the importance of an organized, unified opposition to all beliefs unsupported by evidence. A year ago I found time to start volunteering with Minnesota Atheists through Meetup.com and saw, in the membership, a level of character and intelligence only eclipsed by a cohesive dedication to purpose.

Secretary - Heather Hegi



I am happy to have been nominated this year as secretary on the board of directors. Having been the chair of Minnesota Atheists these last three years, I think I'm well prepared to take on this position. I look forward to continue serving our membership and the greater atheist population of

Minnesota as a member of the board. In addition to the duties of recording minutes and giving reports, I will continue to do what I can to make sure Minnesota Atheists itself is running smoothly.

A little about myself: I moved to Minnesota in 2009 from my home state of Nebraska. I had come to the atheist conclusion by the time I was in High School, so when I decided to move to the Twin Cities for grad school, it was icing on the cake when I found there was an active and influential atheist community here. I am a passionate atheist who sees religious thinking as harmful to society, suppressing science, reason, and free thought. Since religions are widespread, I think this organization is an important voice of reason.

I became a member of Minnesota Atheists in the spring of 2014. I am honored to be a nominee for Director-at-Large.

Assuming confirmation, I look forward to helping the board of directors and Minnesota Atheists continue to provide Minnesota with an island of reason in a sea of superstition. Incidentally, my son rejected Christianity (and religion in general) shortly after ministers tried to convince him to speak in tongues.

Accepting Nominees to the 2015 Board of Directors

Director-at-Large - Georgia Tsoi Hancock



I am excited for the opportunity to serve on the board again this year. I have been a member of Minnesota Atheists for almost nine years and have enjoyed seeing the increase in members and participation the last few years. I share Minnesota Atheists' goals of educating the public about atheism and promoting the separation of state and church. I am an open

atheist in my community and career and encourage others to be open and educate their friends and family about atheism. I took on the role of librarian for the MNA Library and look forward to more opportunities to learn and grow with the Minnesota Atheists board this year.

Director-at-Large - August Berkshire



What an impressive group we have become! I am excited to be able to continue to contribute new ideas and to encourage new people in leadership roles, both on and off the board. I think it helps to have one person on the board who has been with our group a long time, to serve as institutional memory. In addition, I look forward to

working with Stephanie Zvan to finish the work we started last year to change Minnesota law to allow secular celebrants to perform civil weddings that are legally recognized by the state.

Associate President - Alyssa Ehni



I've enjoyed serving on the board this past year as a director at large and am excited to have been nominated for associate president. Although I've only been a member of Minnesota Atheists for a year and a half, I've been an atheist for 13 years. I'm happy to have found a welcoming community full of kind people with interesting stories to

share. During the past year I have actively been involved in our community by volunteering, participating in Freethought Toastmasters, and hosting a craft beer meet-up, among other things. I look forward to furthering Minnesota Atheists' mission helping to grow our community by being a positive force.

Chair - Phil Cunliffe



I grew up in Edina, Minnesota and graduated from Edina High School in 1982. I moved back to Minnesota in 2008 after spending 10 years living in the Chicago area. I have been an atheist for more than 30 years. In Minnesota Atheists I have found a group that shares the values that I consider

important. Serving as a member of the board of directors for the past 2 years has been a great experience. I look forward to continuing to serve our community.

Accepting Nominees to the 2015 Board of Directors

Associate Chair - Jill Carlson



Jill has been attending Minnesota Atheists events since 2010 and is an active member of the Unitarian Universalist church in Bloomington. She is interested in secular parenting, feminist philosophy, community service, and interfaith dialogue. Jill served on the editorial board for Atheist

Voices of Minnesota and her personal experience with atheism can be read there. Jill lives in Burnsville with her husband and son and works as a licensed mental health counselor. Jill is running for the position of Associate Chair.

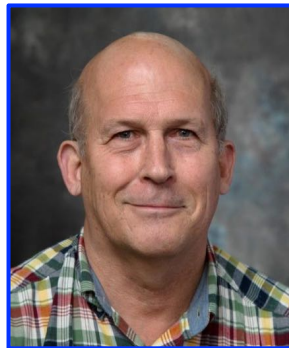
Treasurer - Christopher Matthews



I self-identified as an agnostic as a teen growing up in a small town in southern Minnesota (yes, I'm a native). I signed up for Minnesota Atheists' newsletter at Minneapolis Pride in the late 1990's. I became a member soon after and am now a life member. I have served as treasurer of Minnesota Atheists since 2011. This

role suits me well since I enjoy working with numbers and computers. I am proud to help provide the infrastructure that the organization needs to pursue goals that we collectively find worthwhile. I personally value the positive atheism and also the efforts to keep church separate from state. I appreciate the opportunity to continue serving as treasurer.

OUT OF THE CLOSET



You may have your own opinions, but you cannot have your own facts!

Douglas Earl
Out of the Closet Atheist



My favorite quote by Margaret Sanger is:

No gods - No Masters!

Shirley Rae Moll
Out of the Closet Atheist

Contact us at board@mnatheists.org if you are interested in participating in the Out of the Closet campaign. We look forward to hearing from you!

Minnesota Atheists January Meeting Review

By Alyssa Ehni

In our January public meeting, *Reproductive Justice: Activism on the Sidewalk*, Brianne Bilyeu and Niki Massey provided their unique perspective on what the fight for reproductive justice looks like as a clinic escort. Both Massey and Bilyeu are clinic escorts at Whole Women's Health clinic in Minneapolis.

Clinic escorts volunteer all year-round: rain, shine, or snow. They are not at the clinic to counter-protest the anti-abortion protestors. With the consent of the patient and/or patient's companion, a clinic escort creates a barrier between ever present anti-abortion protestors, and those seeking clinic services. Clinic escorts also deescalate situations that arise due to the harassment patients and companions receive from protestors.

According to Bilyeu and Massey, being a clinic escort is not for everyone. It requires the ability to handle physical and psychological intimidation from anti-abortion protestors, a nearly superhuman amount of patience, the ability to ignore the misinformation the protestors try to give the patients, companions, and escorts, and the ability to function before 7:00 a.m. If you are interested in becoming a clinic escort you can meet the current escorts at Whole Women's Health on a Saturday morning to observe what a shift entails.

If clinic escorting does not sound like it would be a good fit for you, you can contribute to reproductive justice causes in other ways. These include donations to pro-choice organization such as Pro-Choice Resources or the Clinic Vest Project, volunteering at clinics in other capacities, challenging anti-abortion apologetics, considering sharing your story, and providing an unconditionally supportive environment for friends and family who are making their own reproductive decisions.

Massey and Bilyeu also provided general information regarding reproductive justice, abortion rights, and how reproductive justice ties into atheism. There has been a sharp increase in abortion restrictions since the 1990s. Between 2011 and 2013, more abortion restrictions were passed than in the entire previous decade (2001 - 2010). As of the beginning of January, nine states had already proposed legislation with additional restrictions. While reproductive justice is certainly a Humanist cause, it may not appear to be an atheist issue on the surface. However, the majority of attacks on a person's reproductive autonomy are religiously motivated.

Massey and Bilyeu also covered myths surrounding what abortion is and is not, the positions different religions take on abortion, common tactics used by anti-abortion protestors to "save" patients, and how to become a clinic escort or otherwise contribute to the cause.

Bilyeu and Massey ended their talk by sharing some of their personal sidewalk stories.

Minnesota Atheists' public policy positions, including our position on Reproductive Rights can be found at mnatheists.org/information/public-policy-positions.



Cable Report

By Steve Petersen

There was no program in January because of the untimely snowstorm that made travel too difficult to get around the city. I would like to take this time to thank everyone who has conducted interviews, been a guest, helped on the crew or sponsored the program in your viewing area, as well as the members and donors of Minnesota Atheists. There would not be a program without your support. The goal of this program is to provide the atheist views on topics of interest to the general public.

If you would like to see if a program could be shown in your area, or you have a program idea, please contact Steve Petersen at address@mnatheists.org

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

Podcasts: MinnesotaAtheists.org. Available via iTunes and YouTube podcasts are made possible by Grant Hermanson. To date, our channel has had over 134,000 downloads.



Cryptogram Answer

I am tolerant. I'm all for free speech and free rights, just not on December twenty-fifth.

Gretchen Carlson on "Fox and Friends," explaining why everyone should say 'Merry Christmas' rather than 'Happy Holidays.'



Cable Schedule

Burnsville/Eagan Community Television: Ch. 14. Check their website 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: nwct.org/programming.aspx Sponsor: 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

Secretary's Report – January

By Jill Carlson

The following is a summary of board of directors' activities for Minnesota Atheists in January, 2015.

- Stephanie Zvan summarized the Kickstarter campaign promoting the conference titled "Secular Women Work" happening at the University of Minnesota in August 2015.
- August Berkshire provided a brief presentation on the status of the secular celebrant legislation Minnesota Atheists has proposed to various lawmakers.
- The Aints game and funding plans were detailed and approved by board members. Eric Jayne led this initiative.
- Minnesota Atheists' board members reviewed work prepared by the Public Policy Subcommittee and submitted suggestions for editing.
- Monthly Public Meeting topics were brainstormed and tasks assigned to secure guest presenters for March and April.
- Georgia Tsoi reports positive response to her efforts with the lending library.
- The board approved Mike Haubrich as a new producer for the Atheist Talk radio program.

Call for March 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 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. Article length should ideally be 500-1000 words and no more than 2000 words.

Please send submissions to the editor, Jenny Nolan at editor@mnatheists.org by 11:59pm on February 20. All submissions may be edited for style and length.

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

Volunteer with Minnesota Atheists at the Food Group

By Steve Petersen

Volunteer at the Food Group (formerly Emergency Foodshelf Network) for a rewarding volunteer opportunity. We will begin sorting and packing food at 1:00pm and end at 3:00 pm every second Thursday of the month at the Food Group warehouse. (Please arrive 10 minutes early to fill out the volunteer waiver.) The food we pack will then eventually be distributed to various food shelves throughout the Twin Cities. We sometimes pack meat products, but they always have a vegetarian alternative if one does not want to handle meat or poultry items.



The Food Group is a secular, NON-faith based non-profit organization whose mission is to "serve the hunger needs of our changing communities".

Please show up at the warehouse (8501 54th Ave. North, New Hope, MN) a few minutes early and be sure to wear closed toe shoes and comfortable clothing! There will be a short waiver for you to sign at the Food

Group warehouse before the shift begins. Sign up on Meetup or RSVP by contacting Steve at spetersen175@comcast.net or 651-484-9277.

The Minnesota Atheists is a partner organization of Volunteers Beyond Belief.

Radio Report

By Mike Haubrich

"Animal Liberation and Atheism" Kim Socha on show #287, October 26, 2014

Kim Socha's book "Animal Liberation and Atheism: Dismantling the Procrustean Bed," is a recent publication of Freethought House publishing. Socha points out that most of the ethical arguments for animal liberation are presented from a religious perspective, while there are much more effective structural arguments to be made from a secular standpoint. She also argues that religion is inherently antithetical to animal rights and she invites all atheist to construct an ethical standpoint towards animals reflecting their value and relationship to us, discarding a speciesist position.

"Roll to Disbelieve," Cassidy Hawkwood on show #288, November 2, 2014

Scott Lohman produced the show for the Humanists of Minnesota.

"#AtheistVoter" Nick Fish on show #289, November 16, 2014

Turnout for the 2014 state and federal elections was alarmingly low among millennial voters. This is the group that according to polls is the most secular generation. Nick Fish is the Development Director for the American Atheists and feels very strongly about voting, especially for atheists because we need to have a demonstrable voice in policy.

"Sins of Our Fathers" Shawn Lawrence Otto on show #290, November 23, 2014

The novel is Otto's first, and it is the story of a banker who must befriend and betray the founder of a rival bank on a reservation in Northern Minnesota. The subplot teaches the reader how difficult it is for Native Americans to borrow and lend due on reservations due to arcane and restrictive "sovereignty" laws. Greg Laden conducted the interview.

"Ex-Muslims of North America" Heina Dahdaboy on show #291, November 30, 2014

As the Muslim populations of the United States and Canada grow, more ex-Muslim atheists surely follow. Their community needs as they move out of their religious backgrounds differ from other atheists and secularists. A group called the Ex-Muslims of North America has been formed and Heina Dahdaboy spoke to us about the group and how it is addressing their needs.

AM950 KTNF

"Salvation Army Alternatives" Dale McGowan on show #292, December 7, 2014

Most atheists are aware that the Salvation Army is a religious organization, but were not in tune to the fact that they not only actively discriminate against GLBT people in need, they actively lobby for discriminatory laws. Dale McGowan is the Executive Director of the Foundation Beyond Belief and talked about charitable donations and volunteer opportunities more closely in line with atheist ethics and values.

"Living the Secular Life" Phil Zuckerman on show #293, December 14, 2014

Phil Zuckerman founded the first Institute of Secular Studies at Pitzer College. Using innovative sociological research, he examined the moral code of the non-religious and determined that, yes, we have one and it includes the Golden Rule. Carl Hancock interviewed him about his new book.

"Comforting Thoughts About Death That Have Nothing to do with God" Greta Christina on show #294, December 21, 2014

When an atheist is grieving the death of a loved one, they certainly don't want to hear platitudes such as "She is in a better place now," or "The Lord's plan was for him to go home now." So, what can you say to an atheist to help them through the process? Greta Christina has studied the hard philosophical thoughts on death and presents them in a comforting way in a new pamphlet.

"Holiday Spirits" Anne Sauer on show # 294, December 28, 2014

Anne Sauer is Mad Art Lab's resident mixologist, with a passion for science communication. On this show she talked with us about the science behind the drinks we share in the holiday season. Just in time for New Year's Eve, she gave us all the chemical information we need to know in order to ring in 2015.

"Atheist Christmas" Keith Lowell Jensen on show #295, January 4, 2015

Keith Lowell Jensen is a comedian whose routine includes stories of his family, stories about masturbation and also about his atheism. Keith has opened for Norm McDonald, Will Durst, the late Robin Williams and Doug Stanhope. He has also performed at Skepticon in Missouri. Keith has a new DVD out, "Atheist Christmas," and on our show this was a good time to get some laughs.

Treasury Report

October, November, and December

Radio Fund

Alice Lesney	\$500
John Annen	\$205
George Kane	\$200
Nancy Ruhland	\$150
Doug Post	\$110
Susan Christiansen	\$75
Mike Haubrich	\$70
James Barri	\$50
Silvian Sundrum	\$50
Ann Zaiser	\$50
Herbert Davis	\$30
Steve Petersen	\$30
Jim Wright	\$25
cash donations, November	\$141
Total Radio Fund	\$1,686

General/Visibility Fund

Ioannis Roussos	\$50
Total Building Fund	\$50

General/Visibility Fund

Mark Nelson	\$300
R Hewetson	\$200
Michael Abbott	\$165
Daniel Harrison	\$135
Thomas Houlton	\$100
George Kane	\$100
Vanita Mishra	\$100
Keith Thorkelson	\$100
Paul Gramstad	\$75
Michelle Tjernagel	\$70
Ed Lubinski	\$67
David Bicking	\$65
Vicky Hagens	\$65
Cathi Harding	\$50
Tim Traynor	\$50
Justine Hartz	\$27
Matthew Ayala	\$25
Lilly Bubser	\$25
Arthur Kallenbach	\$25
Frank Neubecker	\$25
Adam Zielie	\$25
Rajiv Vaidyanathan	\$25
anonymous	\$25
Noelle Haland	\$20
Daniel Hansen	\$20
Nancy Ruhland	\$20
William Donnay	\$15
Marcia Hunter	\$15
Peter Dodge	\$10
Geraldine Donnelly	\$10
Jake Foster	\$10
Barbara Minor	\$10
Steve Petersen	\$10

Radio Report (continued)

“Black Freethinkers of Minnesota” Mahad Muhammad on show #296, January 11, 2015

Black atheists, freethinkers and agnostics have a rich history but it seems that in the modern world they face some extra challenges and they seek to find support in their own communities and groups in addition to other secular groups. They can provide support to each other in ways that white atheists are not able to do. Mahad Muhammad is familiar with the challenges of being black atheist, as well as the apostate child of a Muslima and a Jehovah's Witness. Mahad has been organizing a new group in Minnesota and talked about that on our show. An extra special treat was a reading from Langston Hughes.

Minnesota Atheists is the producer of the radio program, and the director is Carl Hancock with hosts Carl Hancock, Brienne Bilyeu, Scott Lohman, David Pacheco, Mahad Muhamad and Stephanie Zvan. Both Stephanie and Brienne upload podcasts to our web site. The radio program is broadcast live every Sunday from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. from AM950 KTNF studios in Eden Prairie, MN. Live streaming is available on our web page. www.mnatheists.org. Original music was composed, played and recorded by Brent Michael Davids. The cost to us is \$5,320.00 every six months. Your donations will be appreciated. They can be sent to our post office box or posted online at <http://minnesootatheists.org/join-and-donate/radio-fund>. Thanks to Brienne Bilyeu the program has a presence on social media: an Atheists Talk Facebook page and an account at [Twitter.com/atheists talk](https://twitter.com/atheists_talk). All past programs can be accessed via MNA web page <http://minnesootatheists.org/news-and-media/podcast> or on iTunes. If you are interested in helping on the radio program, please send a message to radio@mnatheists.org

Treasury Report (continued)

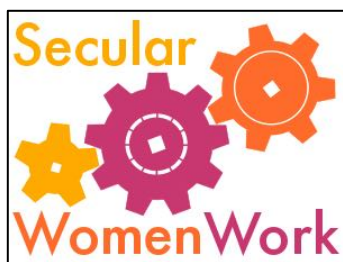
other	\$381
Total General/Visibility Fund	\$2,365
Total Income:	\$4,101
Current Building Fund Total	\$133,647
Top Expenses	
Radio Show	\$2,690
Solstice Exp	\$1,592
Newsletter Printing	\$1,034

Tickets for Minnesota Atheists' Summer Conference Are on Sale Now

By Stephanie Zvan

Minnesota Atheists is doing something different with our summer conference this year. We're making the conference both bigger and more focused. We've teamed up with Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists and Secular Woman to bring you a conference by activists and for activists, the Secular Women Work Conference. Tickets are on sale until February 19 through Kickstarter, and we can't promise there will be any left when the Kickstarter is done.

What is the Secular Women Work Conference, and why do we expect so much interest? The Secular Women Work conference will be held in



Minneapolis on the U of M campus this August 21–23. This conference aims to give secular activists more and better tools for their work and features accomplished activists Lauren Lane, co-founder of Skepticon; Mandisa

Thomas, founder of Black Nonbelievers, Inc.; and Desiree Schell, union organizer and host of *Science for the People*. In fact, the conference will feature a full slate of exclusively women and genderqueer speakers.

Most activist work is unpaid, and unpaid work is traditionally "women's work." That means it's often undervalued, particularly as skilled work. When we set out to create a conference that focuses on building the skills of activists, inviting women to share their expertise was a natural step.

Using a Kickstarter campaign to sell conference tickets also sets this conference apart from the growing field of atheist conferences. This is the first atheist or skeptic conference to raise funds this way. We're on track not only to fully fund the Kickstarter but to sell out the conference in the month the Kickstarter is running.

In addition to conference tickets, which will be transferable, the Kickstarter offers conference-logo t-shirts, custom SurlyRamics jewelry, and advertising space as backer rewards. The campaign will end February 19.

The Secular Women Work conference will be heavy on skill-building and problem-solving workshops, with panels and speakers covering specialist topics. All workshop leaders, panelists, and speakers will be seasoned activists themselves. Additional speakers are expected to be announced during the Kickstarter campaign.

The conference is a joint project of the Minnesota Atheists; University of Minnesota Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists (a Secular Student Alliance affiliate), and Secular Woman.

We hope you can join us this summer. Go to our website to find a link to the Kickstarter, and follow the conference website (secularwomenwork.org) for news about the conference.

Why I Am Not a Rationalist

by Stephanie Zvan (Reprinted from the blog 'Almost Diamond' with permission)

I am not a rationalist.

I have friends who are rationalists. I do my best to think of it as a nice little hobby of theirs. I do cryptograms and other puzzles in my down time. They spend time hacking their thinking processes, or trying to. We've all got our thing.

Every once in a while, though, they'll promote some argument or another from another rationalist, and I have to speak up. Why? Because the argument is a dreadful bundle of wrong wrapped up in a "logic" bow. Why? Because it doesn't matter how well you regulate your thinking. You could overcome the limitations of the human brain and turn yourself into a computer.

(You can't, but bear with me here.) You're still going to get garbage out if you put garbage in.

I'm not a rationalist because I'm an empiricist. I find no value in "logical" arguments that are based in intuition and "common sense" rather than data. Such arguments can only perpetuate ignorance by giving it a shiny veneer of reason that it hasn't earned.

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Why I Am Not a Rationalist (continued from page 12)

by Stephanie Zvan (Reprinted from the blog 'Almost Diamond' with permission)

I boggle that we haven't sorted this out yet. I particularly boggle that atheists of my acquaintance promote rationalism over empiricism. The tensions between basic rationalism and empiricism parallel the tensions between church theology and the philosophy of science. We have no problem rejecting church theology as not being grounded in evidence. Why do so many atheists praise rationalism?

Let me stop here and make it clear that I'm not rejecting logic or critical thinking. Goodness knows that I've spent hours just this summer helping people share useful heuristics that will, in general, help them get to the right answers more often. I've led workshops and panels on evaluating science journalism and scientific results. When I've spoken to comparative religion classes in the past, I've talked about religious skepticism with an emphasis on the basics of epistemology.

The problem isn't logic or critical thinking. The problem is a tendency to view those skills as central to getting the right answers. The problem is a tendency to view them as the solution. They're not, and the idea that they are is in distinct contrast with the way humanity has actually grown in knowledge and understanding of the world.

Rationalism is, at heart, an individualist endeavor. It says that the path to getting things right lies in improving the self, improving the thinking of one person at a time. It's not surprising that the ideology and movement appeal largely to the young, to men, to white people, to libertarians. It focuses primarily on individual action.

That's not how we've come to learn about our world, though. It's not how science or any other field of scholarship works. Scholarship is a collaborative process. And I don't just mean peer review and working groups, though those are important as well.

Scholars add to our knowledge of the world by building on the work of others. They apply tools and methods developed by others to new material and questions. They study the work of other scholars to inspire them and give them the background to ask and answer new questions. They evaluate the work of others and consolidate the best of it into larger theoretical frameworks. Without the work of scholars before them, scholars today and evermore would always be recreating basic work and basic errors.

All too often, I find rationalists taking this repetitive approach. They think but they don't study. As a consequence, they repeat the same naïve errors time and again. This is particularly noticeable when they engage in social or political theorizing by extrapolating from information they learned in secondary school and 101-level college classes, picked up in pop culture, or provided by people pushing a political cause. Their conclusions are necessarily as limited as their source material and reflect all its cultural biases.

The situation is worse than that, however. Not only do these rationalists come up with poor conclusions, but they're frequently convinced that they must be right because they know how to think better than other people do. A greater understanding of cognitive biases and traps should engender epistemic humility. It should build comfort with uncertainty and some ability to estimate how much uncertainty is likely to exist around a question. Instead, it often seems to foster arrogance, as though avoiding certain errors makes someone's conclusions correct.

It doesn't. Neither does identifying yourself as a logical person or critical thinker. Those probably even make the problem worse.

The problem is that there aren't any real shortcuts to getting things right. If there were, someone would have gotten there long before us. Logic isn't new. Critical thinking isn't new. Rationalism certainly isn't new. And none of them have ever stopped anyone from finding some subject to be grossly wrong about.

They never will. Hell, empiricism never will either. There are just too many topics for people to become educated enough in all of them that they'll stop getting things grossly wrong. Adherence to empiricism does, however, limit the topics on which people feel qualified to opine. It reminds people that their conclusions are only as good as the information and evidence on which they're based. It reminds them that experts matter.

Rationalism doesn't do that. It doesn't do it in theory, with the emphasis it puts on how one thinks. Even in the modern rationalist movement, which speaks more to collecting evidence than classical rationalism, I have yet to see any emphasis on epistemic humility. In fact, I see calls to apply rationalism broadly to people's decisions, which adds to the uninformed arrogance I see too much of. This may be a marketing decision, made to help sell logic and critical thinking, as well as the classes that teach them, but in the end, it still pushes people to be wrong.

That's why I'm not part of the rationalist movement. That's why I'm not a rationalist.

The Secular Watch

By Grant Steves

In 2007, Charles Taylor published his book, A Secular Age. It is a 900 page treatise on the philosophical and sociological history and critique of secularism. Since the Reformation secularism in Western culture has increased and the signs of that can be seen in three ways:

- 1) The 'public spaces' of politics, business, education, law, and medicine do not operate on the presupposition of a belief in god or the supernatural.
- 2) That the number of people attending a church or a place of worship has continued to decline.
- 3) That in a reasonable person's life it is now optional and not axiomatic to presuppose religious belief and the existence of god.

It is ironic that the democratization of religion has resulted in its decline. We went from one religious authority in 1400 to having over two thousand Christian authorities today. Each century since the Reformation has seen the proliferation of Christian sects and cults. The greatest number of these new sources of religious authority developed in the United States. The free market place of a democratic society has encouraged the development of religious groups, free thinking groups, and scientific thought. Christianity – note especially Protestant – has not encouraged science but rather has not been able to stop its expansion and influence.

The American experience has also given birth to a wide number of 'well-meaning' public sector groups (religiously motivated). The list includes: The Christian Voice, The Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, The Family Research Council, etc. Some of them maintain a tax free status by supporting or attacking issues and not candidates. For example: two candidates are running for governor. Candidate X supports 'abortion on demand' (two words that exaggerate the meaning of Roe vs Wade);

Candidate Y is pro-life and has called for a ban on abortions and getting rid of Roe vs Wade.

They do not endorse Candidate Y, however, by their issue statements a 'Christian' will know whom to vote for in the election.

A recent incident has illuminated another approach groups may take to gain political influence. The Isaiah group (www.Isaiahconsult.com and www.Isaiahmn.org) states on their website under 'Prophetic Voice' that they "...address concrete issues that will benefit our community.... Encouraged by God's prophetic call to service." They are a group supporting religious values.

It is alleged their intent is to change government from the inside, with the following tactics:

- 1) The group has members hired to government positions – no problem at this point.
- 2) The members hired support candidates for employment and promotion who are members of their group or reflect their values – ethically questionable but not necessarily illegal.
- 3) The members hired must post employment openings to the public and they may define the opening in such a manner that only their candidate will qualify or they dismiss other candidates for reasons that do not allow them to appear before the hiring Board – unethical and illegal.

The result is an agency that reflects their Christian values.

The values may not be in conflict with a secular approach to government. However, the promotion of individuals that support a religious agenda is ethically and perhaps legally wrong.

The challenge of maintaining a secular nation requires citizens to be alert to activities by religious groups pushing their dogma based agendas. No doubt good intentions are behind public support for education but when it is religious education the intention is motivated by religious bias. Which religious institution should receive the public funds? Catholic, Jewish, Islamic, Lutheran, Buddhist, or Satanic schools? If the government is to be neutral in its treatment of religions it must give to all an equal share of the money. Being neutral and secular assures government is not involved with any group or to show any bias.

Thomas Jefferson had it right when he wrote to the Baptists in Danbury – we must have a wall of separation between religion and government – in that case a wall between the interests of the Baptists and the Congregationalists. The concern was not over some cult but another Christian denomination – known for its lack of tolerance toward differing Christian points of view. To let either prevail is to surrender to the theocrats.

Upcoming Events

Freethinking Females 2 Tuesday, February 10, 7:00pm, Claddagh Irish Pub, 7890 Main St N, Maple Grove MN
Shattering the myth that Atheist groups are male dominated with a female's only event.

Volunteer with MN Atheists! 2nd Thursday of every month at 1:00pm, The Food Group, 8501 54th Ave N, New Hope MN

Godless Gamers Every Sunday at 2:00pm and Thursday at 6:00pm, Fantasy Flight Games Center, 1975 County Road B2, Roseville MN

Blasphemer's Brunch 2nd Saturday of every month at 10:30am, Pizza Lucé, 800 W 66th St, Richfield MN

Freethought Toastmasters Meeting 1st and 3rd Monday of every month at 6:30pm, Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1280 Larpenteur Ave W, Saint Paul MN
freethought.toastmastersclubs.org

Team MN Atheist Polar Plunge Saturday, February 28, 11:00am, Crooked Lake Park, 13180 Crooked Lake Blvd, Coon Rapids MN. Help us raise money for the Minnesota Special Olympics and shiver for a good cause.
reg.plungemn.org/team/mnatheist

Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting 3rd Wednesday of every month at 6:30pm, Amherst H Wilder Foundation, 451 Lexington Pkwy N, St Paul MN. All Minnesota Atheists members are welcome.

Freethinking Females 3rd Monday of every month at 7:30pm, Chatterbox Pub, 800 Cleveland Ave S, St. Paul MN. Shattering the myth that Atheist groups are male dominated with a female's only event.

Bowling for Deities Last Saturday of every month at Noon, Memory Lanes, 2520 26th Ave South, Minneapolis MN



There's always time to make a difference.

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

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
- Three-year sustaining membership \$200
- Life membership \$600
- General Fund \$_____
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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.

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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.

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Board Email

Board@mnatheists.org

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August Berkshire
dir1@mnatheists.org
612.868.2267
Georgia Hancock Tsoi
dir2@mnatheists.org
Alyssa Ehni
dir3@mnatheists.org

The Minnesota Atheist Newsletter

Editorial Board Email

editor@mnatheists.org

Editorial Board

George Kane
nup@minn.net
651.488.8225
Heather Hegi
chair@mnatheists.org
Christopher Matthews
c03m13@bluebottle.com
Shirley Moll
srmoll@comcast.com
James Zimmerman
zgoatee@gmail.com

Editor

Jenny Nolan
editor@mnatheists.org

Chief Photographer

Richard Trombley

Membership and Change of Address

Steve Petersen
address@mnatheists.org
651.484.9277

Submissions

Submit material for the newsletter to the editor at editor@mnatheists.org
Submissions may be edited.

Minnesota Atheists Media

Public Relations Chair

Emily Matejcek
pr@mnatheists.org

Atheists Weekly Email (AWE)

Christopher Matthews
awe@mnatheists.org

Cable TV Chair

Steve Petersen
cable@mnatheists.org

Webmaster

Grant Hermanson
web@mnatheists.org

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Grant Hermanson
podcasts@mnatheists.org

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.

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PO Box 120304

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612-588-7031

info@mnatheists.org

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