

The Minnesota Atheist

Join us for the Family Friendly Freethought Picnics!

This year they will be at:

The Wabun Picnic Area, Shelter B (Minnehaha Park)
4655 46th Ave S
Minneapolis, MN

We will be in a modern picnic shelter with children's tables, sufficient electric outlets, and in close proximity to bathrooms. Also in close proximity are a wading pool, a playground, and Disc Golf.

The picnic is a potluck so bring a dish if you can and enjoy the variety of dishes that people bring. Be sure to bring your own beverages. Plates and utensils will be available, but to reduce waste, feel free to bring your own.

Rain or shine, the picnics will take place the following dates featuring the following sponsors:

- **Sunday, June 14th at Noon** - Camp Quest Minnesota and CASH (Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists)
- **Sunday, July 19th at Noon** - Humanists of Minnesota
- **Sunday, August 16th at Noon** - Minnesota Atheists

The shelter is reserved from 9am – 3pm for all three dates.

This facility is friendly to multiple methods of transportation:

Car – Free Parking Lots

Light Rail – just a mile from the Hiawatha Ave & E 46th St Blue Line Station

Nice Ride – half a mile from the bike rental station

Bus – served by busses 23, 46, 74, & 84 (stops in close proximity) and buses 7, 9, 46, 74, & 84 (stops near Minnehaha Ave & E 46th St)



President's Column 2
News and Notes 3
Cryptogram 3
Aints Game Info 4
Conference Info 5
Meeting Review 6
Cryptogram Answer 7
Cable Report 10
Volunteer Report 13
Radio Report 14



President's Column – Scientology Tour

By Eric Jayne



A group from Minnesota Atheists visited the Church of Scientology this past Memorial Day weekend. It was the second time we toured their building after first visiting shortly after it opened in 2011. Just like last time, the church members were hospitable, but evasive.

About 50 of us gathered inside the building's main lobby to begin the tour. We had two main escorts: Nancy—a former Lutheran who joined Scientology 39 years ago, and Mia—a young woman who didn't share her personal story but seemed very passionate about Scientology.

We began at the E-meter station for a demonstration by a Scientology church member. The device, she explained, is used to “see your thought” during an “auditing” session between an authorized facilitator and a newcomer. She said crises from our past affect how we live in the present, with which most everyone from our group agreed, but she wasn't able to convince us of the device's benefits.

A few people from our group attempted the E-meter with some guidance. After taking hold of the two cylinder cans, the subject was told to think of a negative thought, such as somebody or something at work that's infuriating. The needle on the E-meter's scale would then jump to the right then shift a little back and forth. Many from our group observed that the E-meter works in the same way as an Ohm meter.

We then meandered around the main floor for about 20 minutes and viewed the videos at the dozen-or-so kiosks celebrating the life of L. Ron Hubbard and the Scientology approach to happy living. There were plenty of free DVDs and literature available at each kiosk for further viewing at home. I was the only one allowed to take pictures but I needed to get Nancy's approval before taking them.

The tour concluded in the building's sanctuary, which used to be the Omnitheater before the building was transformed from the Science Museum to the Church of Scientology. We watched five, 90-second public service announcements inspiring good work, self-improvement, and positive thinking. At the conclusion of the short films we were allowed to ask questions on the condition we didn't ask about the “lies” from the documentary or

book *Going Clear*. We were directed to read their free and readily available publication *Freedom* or to visit FreedomMag.org (“the voice of the church of Scientology”) to get the “truth”.

The Question and Answer session began with Mia reading a L. Ron Hubbard quote from one of the two Scientology books she had in front of her on the podium. It appears to be a well-regarded quote among Scientologists because I was able to immediately find it on Scientology.org. The gist of the quote is that truth is limited to only what you personally observe to be true. Here's a little snippet: *“What is true for you is what you observed yourself...Nothing in Scientology is true for you unless you have observed it and it is true according to your observation.”*

There were about 15 questions asked during the 20 minutes of Q&A. When asked what the Church of Scientology's position is on same-sex marriage, vaccines, and abortion, we were told there is no official position. When asked if Scientology accepts Darwinian evolution, Nancy and Mia were uncertain at first but then Nancy said she remembered something L. Ron Hubbard said about survival of the fittest and then confirmed evolution is compatible with Scientology.

Compatibility seemed to be a selling point for their church, because it was explained to us by Mia and Nancy that several Scientologists maintain other religious beliefs. If you're Catholic, for example, you can still practice the Catholic faith and believe what the Pope says while doing courses in Scientology.

When asked about the church's position on afterlife, Nancy and Mia seemed uncertain. When asked about creationism Nancy and Mia were also not sure what their church's position was. When asked if it's expensive to be a Scientologist they said it's up to the individual how much they want to spend and how far they want to go into their coursework. They said it was \$50 for the introductory lessons.

They answered with a firm “no” when asked if L. Ron Hubbard is thought to be infallible. But when asked if his writings and so-called discoveries are open to criticism among church members, Mia referred back to the L. Ron Hubbard quote she read earlier and said “if some parts of his writing are not true to you then it's not true for you.”

After the Q&A we were invited to take more free swag and given a bag to put it in. The swag and bags were put out on a nicely displayed table in a hall with framed pictures of the very smiley and handsome church leader David Miscavige. We exited the building and hurried down four blocks to the Amsterdam Bar & Hall for drinks, food, and a lot of debriefing.

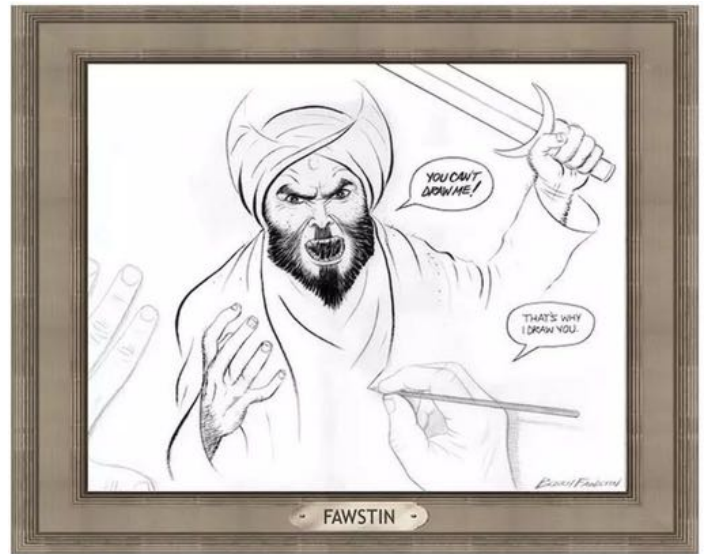
News and Notes

By George Kane

Let's not shy away from the obvious truth. Pamela Geller is a horrible person. The Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled her organization, the American Freedom Defense Initiative (AFDI) as an anti-Muslim hate group. She is a religiously-motivated fundamentalist Christian. She portrays as a threat to the American way of life not just the religion-inspired paramilitary groups like the Islamic State and Al Qaeda, but Islam itself and all Muslims. She is notorious for running anti-Muslim ads in public transit systems in Washington, New York and San Francisco; when New York refused the ads, she went to court and got an order forcing the Metropolitan Transit Authority to run them. One said, "In any war between the civilized man and the savage, support the civilized man. Support Israel. Defeat Jihad."

On May 3, the AFDI held the "First Annual Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest" at the Curtis Culwell Center in Garland, Texas. It was inspired, obviously, by the 2005 cartoon contest held in Denmark by the *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper, and by the French satire magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, the Paris office of which was the target of a murderous attack by *jihadi* terrorists. Geller selected the site because an event called "Stand With the Prophet in Honor and Respect" had been held there in January to combat negative stereotypes of Muslims.

The contest hit the national news when two Muslims from Phoenix, Elton Simpson and Nadir Hamid Soofi, showed up, armed with handguns and AK-47 rifles, intent on attacking the roughly 200 exhibit attendees. Before entering the building, however, they shot at a police car parked outside. They wounded a security guard in his ankle, but were both killed by a Garland policeman. Soon after the attack, the Islamic State took credit for it, referring to Simpson and Soofi as "two soldiers of the Caliphate." Law enforcement is investigating the connection, but it appears unlikely that the Islamic State had any role in planning the attack. They may have inspired the attack, but apparently Simpson and Soofi acted alone. I'm surprised that the Islamic State would



want to take credit for an attack that was such a dismal failure, or for such incompetent perpetrators.

Pamela Geller has been widely criticized for holding the contest. Kathleen Parker wrote in the *Washington Post* "Not since Westboro Baptist Church's 'God Hates Fags' message and Florida pastor Terry Jones burning the Koran has the principle of free speech been so sullied and abused." Bill O'Reilly condemned her for "insulting a religion with more than a billion followers." Juan Williams asserted that she was motivated only by self-promotion. In my opinion, however, Geller's intentions are beside the point.

When the *Jyllands-Posten* published cartoons of Mohammad, editor Fleming Rose said that the target was the self-censorship of Danish journalists in fear of offending Muslims. That self-censorship undermines the principle of freedom of speech. After the Danish cartoons were published, there were riots, arson and even murders in several countries, even though few of the outraged rioters had seen the cartoons. It has been demonstrated repeatedly in those countries that mobs can be incited to violence by claims of religious insult when it is useful for the government or a political faction, even when the insult was never made.

(continued on page 6)

George Kane Cryptogram

Iobzg Nclgcq oqn Jcusg cq htz Jobdyw mzrmzgzqh htz
vmzohzgh htmzoh hc ucqghdhshdcqoy ydlzmhdzg dq csm hdbz.

Lommw Ywqq, zfzushdxz ndmzuhcm cj Obzmduoqg Sqdhzn
jcm Gzromohdcq cj Utsmut oqn Ghohz.

Leave Your Soles at the Gate: A Shoe Drive

Presented by Minnesota Atheists and Foundation Beyond Belief

St. Paul Saints are secularized to the MR. PAUL AINTS!



Bring your gently used shoes to the game for donation to **Soles4Souls** – a secular nonprofit that will distribute the shoes to those in need



Tickets Now Available!

\$10 – General Admission + St. Paul Saints hat

\$20 – Infield (Infidel) Reserved + St. Paul Saints hat

Tickets: SaintsGroups.com

Password: soles



Humphrey School of Public Affairs - 301 19th Ave S, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

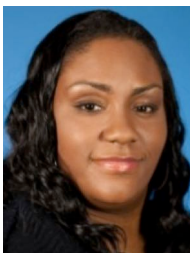
Minnesota Atheists is doing something different with our summer conference this year. We have teamed up with Campus Atheists, Skeptics, and Humanists (CASH) and Secular Woman to bring you a conference by activists and for activists, the Secular Women Work Conference. This conference will be a celebration of the work of female and genderqueer activists who create and run projects and communities in the secular movement.

Our full slate of speakers includes:



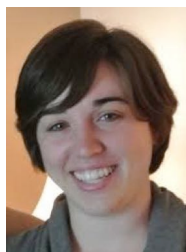
Desiree Schell

is a union organizer who is passionate about effective activism. Here, she tells us how she ended up an activist, why measuring our results is so important, and what topics she'd like to see activists tackle.



Mandisa Thomas

is the president and founder of Black Nonbelievers, Inc. She also has a new project called New Turn which provides help for ex-convicts, at-risk juveniles and individuals who are at a general education and economic disadvantage by developing critical thinking and practical instruction and skills, as well as maximize entrepreneurial capability."



Lauren Lane

is founder and on-going organizer of Skepticon, the Midwest's largest Skeptic Conference. Here's a little bit about how Lauren got started and what she's looking forward to at Secular Women Work.

Registration is now open for the Secular Women Work conference!

Registration: \$125

Student rate: \$35

Register at: MinnesotaAtheists.org/store

Online registration ends on July 20th.

If you already got tickets through the January-February Kickstarter, you're good to go (there's no physical ticket). Thank you for being a part of making the conference happen!

Minnesota Atheists May Meeting Review

By Alyssa Ehni and Hertzzy Hertz

For the past three years, Minnesota Atheists has sponsored the Saint Paul Saints and changed their name to the Mr. Paul Aints for the evening. At the May public meeting, Scott Bush, Assistant General Manager for the Saints, gave us an inside look at the club, talked about the new CHS field, and provided insight on feedback the Saints have received about allowing “Atheists Night” at the ball park.

As a club, the Saints have existed since before 1900 in various incarnations. The first version of the team left Minnesota for Chicago, where they became the Chicago White Sox. Other versions of the club have come and gone. The current incarnation of the Saints has been around since 1993. They are an independent minor league team and often wind up being a first chance/last chance

team for players. Their roster typically consists of players who weren’t drafted, or players with major league experience who aren’t able to sign with a major league team. As an example, Bush cited Darryl Strawberry. He was suspended from Major League Baseball in 1995 due to cocaine, and signed with the Saints in 1996.



He was able to get himself back on track while playing with the Saints and was picked up by the New York Yankees in mid-season, and won the World Series that year.

Bush described how the first year hosting “Atheist Night” was stressful; they hadn’t thought that far out of the box yet. However, hosting an “Atheist Night” was very much in line with the Saints’ values. It was inclusive, imaginative, involved partnering with a longstanding organization, and was irreverent. Overall the Saints’ experience in hosting an “Atheist Night” with Minnesota Atheists was positive, and they received national media attention. Fox News was the first national media outlet to pick up the story. The club received emails and letters, mostly from folks in Ohio and Florida, criticizing the event as un-American or not family friendly. However, because the partnership was in line with the Saints’ values, it made the backlash easier to deal with. Since the first year, the emails critical of the partnership have dwindled, and the Minnesota Atheists have continued to sponsor the Saint Paul Saints.

Join the Minnesota Atheists and Foundation Beyond Belief at CHS Field on August 8, 2015, for another fun “Atheist Night” at the ball park. And don’t forget to leave your sole at the gate, by donating new and/or gently used shoes. Additional information can be found at mnatheists.org/baseballgame.

News and Notes

(continued from page 3)

It is perfectly reasonable to criticize what Geller says as hate-speech and fear mongering; it is not reasonable to try to silence her, especially for blasphemy. If criticism of religion becomes unacceptable, the freethought movement will be completely shut down. Freedom of speech means that everyone must at times endure ridicule and mockery; atheists receive more than most. There can be no exemption for religion.

In 2005, the Minnesota Atheists newsletter was one of the very few publications in the United States to publish all of the Mohammad cartoons. In the spirit of support for freedom of speech, here is the cartoon (top of page 3) from the AFDI-sponsored contest, for which Bosch Fawstin, an ex-Muslim, received a \$10,000 prize.



Recent Blog Post from an Atheist in Minnesota

The Guilt of Being a Support Person and the Guilt of Being the Sick One

by Olivia James, reprinted from <https://taikonenfea.wordpress.com/> with permission

In recent weeks and months I have been spending more and more of my time on the support person side of the mental illness equation. For about five years previous to that, I was the sick one, the one who needed to rely on others to support me and help me with some pretty basic things. I still have to do that sometimes now, but I've started to find myself stable enough to take on the role of support person for certain friends and family.

There's something that I want to say to everyone who has mental illness in their life, on both sides of the relationship: it's not your fault.

The more time I spend interacting with my own and other people's mental illnesses, the more I see the overwhelming feeling that drives the experience is guilt. The guilts look different.

When I was sick, the guilt was the guilt that I was a burden, that I was sucking too much time and energy from the people I loved, that there was something wrong with me that could never be fixed. It's easy to feel guilty when you see how much you are hurting the people around you simply by trying to survive. And when your brain is in the midst of serious depression, any criticisms start to feel like commentary on your worth as a person. It's easy to live completely within guilt, and start to feel as if you need to apologize for your existence. Being the sick one is something that comes with a side helping of guilt not just internally, but from a society that asks why you can't deal with things on your own, why you're so sensitive, or why you have to be such a burden.

But what I didn't understand until recently was the guilt of being the support person.

Right now, some of the people I'm trying to support were there for me through my mental illness. There is a part of my brain that interprets that as an obligation I now have to return. They were there for me, which means that I am never allowed to abandon them. There are lots of versions of this form of guilt: I love this person and they love me, so I must be there for them. This person supported me through grief or illness or childhood or any other difficult situation, which means I must be there for them.

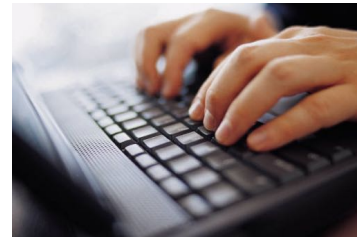
There is the guilt that comes with not being able to do anything. You can sit and watch someone you care about hurting, and there will be times when there is absolutely nothing that can be done to change it. There's the guilt of taking care of yourself, perhaps the most insidious guilt of all. No one can be on all the time. No one can always be available and ready to provide support and care, or even just time to listen. Every support person (and every "sick" person) gets time to set boundaries and

do what they need to to take care of themselves. But the narratives around support tend to be all or nothing rather than nuanced: you are always available, or you are never available.

I understand all of these guilts. The problem is that mental illness is no one's fault. Difficult things in life happen. Hard emotions happen. There are certainly ways to respond to them that should elicit guilt, but their existence or your inability to eradicate them is nothing to feel guilty over.

I think what I want more than anything is to be able to talk about the guilt. Whenever I say that I think it's my fault I get empty reassurances. I want to sit down with the people I love and break down the ways that the mental illness makes our lives suck and then remember: none of us caused this. None of us are required to fix it. Are you doing your best? You have no cause for guilt.

But you get to feel guilty. If you need to. No matter which party you are.



If you would like to respond to something you saw in *The Minnesota Atheist*, please send it to:

editor@mnatheists.org

We value your thoughts. Thank you.

Cryptogram Answer

Philosophy is questions that may never be answered. Religion is answers that may never be questioned.

Anonymous

Atheism, Legislation, and Feminism: My ‘Day of Reason’ Talk

By August Berkshire

Minnesota Atheists and the Humanists of Minnesota are currently trying to get a bill passed that would allow atheist and humanist wedding celebrants to conduct civil weddings without having to get certified through a religious organization and without turning atheism into a religion. We’d like to thank the following legislators for co-authoring this bill: House members Phyllis Kahn and Mike Freiberg, and Senate members John Marty, Sandra Pappas, and Kari Dzedzic. We’re always looking for more co-authors, so if you’re a legislator listening to this message, we welcome your support. Please sign our petition urging all legislators to vote for this bill.

In keeping with Minnesota Atheists’ theme of feminism this year, we would like to point out that the religious war on women continues everywhere. *Every* major religious faith – Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism – has within it, rules and practices that treat women as second-class people. This legacy of sexism is something we must work to overcome, even within our atheist/humanist community.

Here in Minnesota, we already have on the books a 24-hour waiting period before a woman can get an abortion. A woman under 18, with rare exceptions, has to have both of her parents notified before she can get an abortion. Currently in the Minnesota legislature, there have been submitted a number of bogus TRAP laws that seek to unjustifiably restrict a woman’s access to abortion.

On the bright side, there are also bills in the Minnesota legislature that call for state and federal equal rights amendments. But it’s a mark of the power that religion still has, that in 2015 these amendments still haven’t passed.

The two largest atheist groups in America were founded by women: American Atheists in 1963 by Madalyn Murray O’Hair, and the Freedom From Religion Foundation in 1976 by Anne Nichol Gaylor and Annie Laurie Gaylor.

A statement that Madalyn Murray O’Hair read before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1963 still rings true today. In this statement, she uses the word “man” in the scientific sense, meaning all human beings (though today, of course, if we meant all humans, that is the word we would use).

“Your petitioners are atheists and they define their beliefs as follows. An atheist loves his fellow man instead of god. An atheist believes that heaven is something for which we should work now – here on earth



Photos by Richard Trombley

for all men together to enjoy. An atheist believes that he can get no help through prayer but that he must find in himself the inner conviction and strength to meet life, to grapple with it, to subdue it, and enjoy it. An atheist believes that only in a knowledge of himself and a knowledge of his fellow man can he find the understanding that will help to a life of fulfillment. He seeks to know himself and his fellow man rather than to know a god. An atheist believes that a hospital should be built instead of a church. An atheist believes that a deed must be done instead of a prayer said. An atheist strives for involvement in life and not escape into death. He wants disease conquered, poverty vanquished, war eliminated. He wants man to understand and love man. He wants an ethical way of life. He believes that we cannot rely on a god or channel action into prayer nor hope for an end of troubles in a hereafter. He believes that we are our brother’s keepers and are keepers of our own lives; that we are responsible persons and the job is here and the time is now.”

Secretary's Report – May

By Heather Hegi

- A motion was made and approved to pay \$26 extra dollars for T-Shirt expenses than was originally approved.
- Georgia Hancock Tsoi, Alyssa Ehni, and Hertzey Hertz gave an update of the Humanist Collaboration Group and ideas were discussed.
- Jill Carlson proposed a Mall of America Photo Scavenger Hunt Event and details were discussed.
- A motion was made and approved to appoint Georgia Hancock Tsoi as Associate Chair, vacating one of the three Director-at-Large positions. The appointment will be subject to approval at the next members' meeting.
- A motion was made and approved to appoint Jim Barri as a Director-at-Large. The appointment will be subject to approval at the next members' meeting.

Complete meeting minutes are available to dues paying members by contacting Heather at sec@mnatheists.org.

Board Appointment Announcement:

At the May Board Meeting of Minnesota Atheists, the Associate Chair vacancy was filled by appointment by the board in accordance to our bylaws. Georgia Hancock Tsoi was appointed as Associate Chair. This created a Director-at-Large vacancy, which was also filled by appointment by the board. Longtime member Jim Barri was appointed as Director-at-Large. Both positions are subject to approval at the next membership meeting which will be announced at a later date.



The photo collage to the right represents the May Day parade of 2015.

Call for July/August 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 June 22. All submissions may be edited for style and length.

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.



Cable Report

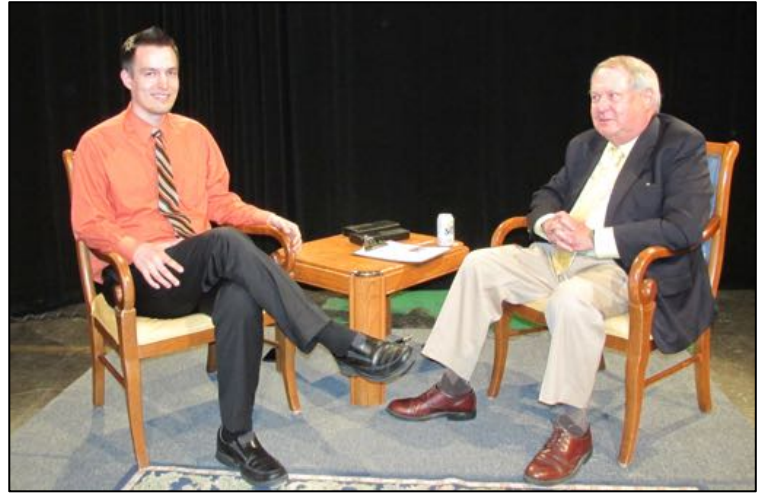
By Steve Petersen

In May George Kane interviewed Jordan Peacock, a student at the European Graduate School, Media and Communication Division, and co-founder of the software startup Becoming Machinic. The title of the program was *Philosophy 101*. Issues covered included how one's perspective changes when a person moves from a believer to an atheist, specifically on ethics and epistemology (how we know what we know;); how ethical ideas have changed over time; and finally just because atheists agree on the god conclusion does not mean they agree on philosophy. They considered utilitarianism (and other forms of consequentialism) versus rationalism.

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 which are made possible by Grant Hermanson. To date, our channel has had over 134,000 downloads.



Jordan Peacock and George Kane

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



In The News

INTERNATIONAL HUMANIST AND ETHICAL UNION (IHEU)

May 12, 2015

Early this morning, Ananta Bijoy Das was murdered, hacked to death by four assailants on the streets close to his home.

Ananta had been on a list of atheist bloggers produced by Islamist political parties in 2013. They demanded a death penalty for 'blasphemy', and since then several writers on the list have been murdered, always by machete attack. Ananta was also named on a new hit list in March [Bangla] in connection with a group called Ansarullah Bangla Team.

Ananta wrote to IHEU at the time:

"It seems to me I am one of the targets . I am not sure how long I will hide myself. But I am sure If they will find me they will do what they did with Mr. Avijit Roy. My life is seriously unsecured . I am not sure how can I protect myself & my family."

International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) statement:

Each of these murders is a crushing loss to the humanist and secularist communities of South Asia and the world.

IHEU condemns this murder in the strongest possible terms, as well as the failures of the Bangladeshi authorities to bring to justice the individuals and to break the networks behind this string of targeted killings. Whether from apathy, or incompetence, or intimidation, the police and government are utterly failing Bangladeshi humanist, atheist and secularist writers, thinkers and activists.

Ananta Bijoy Das had reached out to us at IHEU following the murders of Avijit and Washiqur. Accepting the very serious threat to this life, we advised Ananta in trying to make the difficult move out of danger. However, we have been informed that his application for a visa to travel to Sweden, under invitation from Swedish PEN, was rejected last week by the Swedish embassy in Dhaka, on the basis that he might seek to remain in Sweden.

We call on all countries to recognise the legitimacy and sometimes the urgency and moral necessity of asylum claims made by humanists, atheists and secularists who are being persecuted for daring to express those views.

We've been in contact with several Bangladeshi humanists, in particular since Avijit Roy was killed in February. These writers are not hateful, not intolerant; they write about science and politics, they are proponents of secularism, they voice skeptical and rationalist arguments, they call for justice and for humanism. They are desperately and increasingly concerned that they, too, have been named on the Islamist death lists.

Their murderers are assassinating writers in an attempt to terrify a nation against voicing humanist and secularist values and ideas, and to deter any criticism of religious beliefs or religious authorities. Their vile campaign of intimidation and terror must be met — not with hollow words and appeasement — but with strenuous, rigorous justice.

Swedish PEN has confirmed that they had invited Ananta to Sweden to talk about the threat to atheists in Bangladesh, but his visa application was refused, despite the clear and demonstrated mortal threat to atheist writers in Bangladesh, and despite the support of PEN for his visit. Swedish PEN demand:

a detailed and credible explanation of why the Swedish Embassy in Dhaka chosen not to grant Ananta Bioy Dash the visa he needed to meet the Swedish PEN's invitation to speak in Stockholm

In the visa refusal letter seen by IHEU (sent by the Embassy of Sweden in Dhaka to Ananta Bijoy Das on 22 April 2015) the embassy notes among other considerations: "you are unmarried and you do not have any children" as reason to consider the applicant not "well established in Bangladesh," therefore:

...you have not made it likely that the purpose of the journey is only for a short visit for a meeting and not settlement there. You belong to a category of applicants where there is always a risk involved when granting a visa that you will not leave Schengen area after the visit.

"Furthermore, the purpose of your trip is not urgent enough to grant you visa. With regards to this and different circumstances in your case as well as different visa regulations you do not fulfill the requirements for a visa. Your application is therefore rejected."

Prior to Ananta's murder this morning, blogger Md Washiqur (or Oyasiqur) Rahman Babu was hacked to death on March 30 this year, in Tejgaon, Dhaka, his attackers claiming they had been instructed to kill him as their "Islamic duty". Avijit Roy was killed February 27 2015, outside the Dhaka book fair, in an attack which also seriously injured his wife Bonya Ahmed. On November 15 2014 Prof Shafiul Islam was similarly killed in broad daylight near his Choddopai residence close to Rajshahi University campus. Ahmed Rajeeb Haider, a blogger, architect, and activist of the Shahbagh movement, was hacked to death in the capital's Pallabi on February 15, 2013. All had been accused of 'offending Islam' one way or another.

Bob Churchill

Director of Communications

International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU)

Atheist Officiant Update

By Stephanie Zvan

On May 4, U.S. District Judge Joan Ericksen dismissed a lawsuit filed on behalf of Atheists For Human Rights (AFHR) as moot. The suit was filed when a marriage officiant certified by AFHR had their filing of that certificate rejected by Washington County on the basis that atheists were not among the groups authorized as marriage officiants under Minnesota law. Ericksen dismissed the suit when Washington County reversed its decision and declared it should have accepted AFHR's certificate at the start.

Washington County's decision is being lauded as a victory and a step forward for atheist marriage officiants. However, while this is an unequivocal victory, it is a victory for the status quo. It isn't progress. Understanding the difference takes some background, both on the current situation for atheist marriage officiants and on what AFHR hoped to accomplish with their lawsuit. It also helps to be familiar with the judge's order.

If you've followed me as a writer or Minnesota Atheists as a group, you'll know that we aim to change the law on marriage officiants. We've been working with state legislators to come up with acceptable language that would allow atheist and secular humanist nonprofits to certify their own trained marriage officiants and see the state recognize marriages performed by these officiants as legal.

While we've been going through this process, AFHR has taken a different tack. Though the correspondence we've had with Marie Castle on this has been somewhat contradictory, the gist of it is that AFHR issued its own officiant certificates, identifying itself as a "life stance organization". They anticipated that rejection of these certificates would provide standing for a lawsuit that they hoped would result in a ruling overturning the law.

A number of counties instead accepted the certificates—as they should under current law. There is nothing about religion that says you must believe in a deity. Atheist religions include the Ethical Society, many sects of Buddhism, and Satanic churches. Religious humanism and Unitarian Universalism are very friendly to atheist participation, including in the ministry.



On top of that, the officiants certified by AFHR filed additional certificates in their counties that attested that they were in compliance with state law in filing the AFHR certificates. In other words, they attested to being ministers of a qualifying religious organization. That their religious organization included "Atheists" in its name doesn't disqualify it. After some confusion, Washington County agreed.

This is indeed a victory for AFHR. It puts AFHR in the same class as the Humanist Society, the Ethical Society, and the Universal Life Church as entities that have won recognition as religions despite opposition. That's worth celebrating.

It is also, however, the status quo as far as atheist marriage officiants go in Minnesota. Even if AFHR's lawsuit had gone all the way to judgment, there is no guarantee that the court would have agreed to examine the constitutionality of state law. Because AFHR's officiants certified that they are religious ministers, they may not have been granted standing to challenge a law they insisted already covered them. Bringing another religion into the fold does nothing for groups and individuals that cannot in good conscience identify themselves as religious.

I and several other people in Minnesota interested in becoming atheist celebrants have undergone officiant training through the Center for Inquiry or the Humanist Institute. At least two of us have been officially certified by Minnesota Atheists, in MNA's capacity as an atheist educational nonprofit. We can't honestly sign papers that say we're ministers. Nor can we say that MNA is a religious group. We're not. They're not.

Washington County's decision was the right one. It provides another organization religious atheists can work through to obtain the ordination the state requires of marriage officiants. It doesn't, however, provide any relief to nonreligious atheists like me who wish to be able to perform legal weddings in our nonreligious atheist community. For us, the problem is the same it's always been.

So congratulations to AFHR on their recognition from Washington County, but let's not think this change affects all atheists in Minnesota or even Washington County. There's still plenty to be done on that score. MNA will keep working on it.

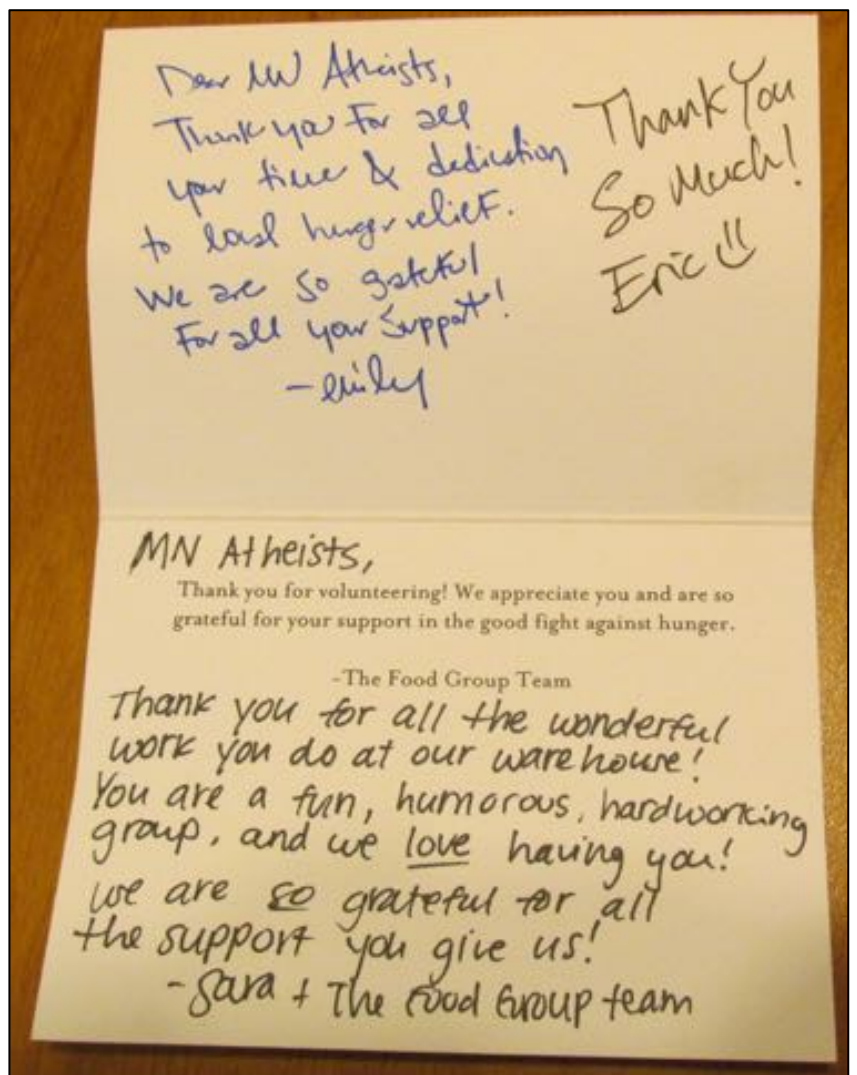
Volunteer Report

By Steve Petersen



Minnesota Atheists supporters volunteer monthly at the Food Group Warehouse in New Hope. Volunteers at the May event repackaged enough rice and potatoes to help feed 1,780 people (above)! We recently received a thank you card from the Food Group for all the work our group performs (right).

Minnesota Atheists supporters volunteer every second Thursday from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the Food Group. See our Meet Up site for more information or contact Steve at spetersen175@comcast.net for more information.



Radio Report

By Mike Haubrich

Atheists Talk radio and podcast is a communications service of Minnesota Atheists. Our volunteer producers, hosts, interviewers, and contributors are committed to presenting topics of interest to atheists and humanists. Topics include, but are not limited to, general atheism and humanism, separation of church and state, science, religion, gender, race, culture, and the arts.

"The Nones Versus the Dones," Neil Carter on Atheists Talk #311, April 29, 2015

Neil Carter explained that The Nones in surveys on religious values are not necessarily atheists. The group we should notice are The Dones, that is, those of us who have been through belief and are "done" with the whole enterprise.

"Humanism in Indiana," Victoria Gipson on Atheists Talk #312, May 3, 2015

Indiana's new law to protect the "religious freedoms" of business choosing to discriminate against gays is infamous in its scope compared to similar laws in other states. Victoria Gipson of Freethought Fort Wayne explained how humanists and atheists in the Hoosier State are fighting back.

"What are Morality and Ethics?" Dan Fincke on Atheists Talk #313, May 10, 2015

In denigrating atheists, theists will often claim that we have no basis for morals nor a grounding for ethics. We don't have a book, we don't have a source, we don't have commandments that tell us, as atheists, how to be good. Engaging the issue, atheists often make the mistake of listing all the good things that we do as citizens and generally altruistic human beings and rightly we are proud of our efforts. But, we aren't necessarily more moral or ethical than anyone else and so, if we take credit for the good things we do we have skipped a crucial step in argumentation: we haven't defined our terms. Dan Fincke returned to Atheists Talk to explain how atheists can use empowerment ethics to choose and act morally.

"A Pod of Podcasts," Local Podcasters on Atheists Talk #314, May 17, 2015

Atheists Talk is not the only source for entertaining atheist podcast listening in the Twin Cities. Mike Haubrich took the opportunity to talk to podcasters in the metro including Geeks Without God, Trans Atheist, Positively Godless and Dimland Radio.



Minnesota Atheists is the producer of the radio program, and the director is Mike Haubrich with hosts Mike Haubrich, Brianne Bilyeu, Scott Lohman, David Pacheco, Mahad Muhamad and Stephanie Zvan. Both Stephanie and Brianne 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://minnesotatheists.org/join-and-donate/radio-fund>. Thanks to Brianne 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://mnatheists.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

AM 950 KTNF

Upcoming Events

An Evening with Richard Dawkins Tuesday, June 9th at 7:00pm, Mayo Civic Center, Presentation Hall, 30 Civic Center Dr SE, Rochester. \$35.00 General Admission.

Presentation: History & Where We're Going in the Separation of Church & State Saturday, June 13th at 1:00pm, Highland Park Library, 1974 Ford Pkwy, Saint Paul. The Minnesota Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) hosts three-time president of AU, Rev. Cal Didier.

Freethought Potluck Picnic Sunday at noon, June 14, July 19, and August 16, The Wabun Picnic Area, Shelter B (Minnehaha Park), 4655 46th Ave S, Minneapolis. Family friendly. Come rain or shine!

March in the PRIDE Parade Sunday, June 28 at 10:45am, along South 3rd Street, probably near 5th Avenue South, Minneapolis. Look for the people in the Minnesota Atheists T-Shirts with the Minnesota Atheists banner.

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

Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous Every Sunday from 6:00pm to 7:00pm, Men's Center, 3249 Hennepin Ave S, Suite #55, Minneapolis. Meet in the basement. Open to all genders.

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

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

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

Shooting Pool with the Infidels 2nd Saturday of every month at 7:00pm, Dunham's Bar and Grill, 173 Lothenbach Ave, West St Paul

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

Freethinking Females 4th Monday of every month at 7:30pm, Chatterbox Pub, 800 Cleveland Ave S, St. Paul. 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

2015 Aints Game Saturday, August 8, CHS Field, 360 N Broadway St, Saint Paul. Save the Date!

Secular Women Work Conference Friday-Sunday, August 21-23, Humphrey Conference Center, 301 19th Ave S, Minneapolis. Save the Date!

For more events, visit:

www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists



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
- 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.

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 Atheist Board of Directors

Board Email

Board@mnatheists.org

President

Eric Jayne
pres@mnatheists.org

Associate President

Alyssa Ehni
apres@mnatheists.org

Chair

Jill Carlson
chair@mnatheists.org

Associate Chair

Georgia Hancock Tsoi
achair@mnatheists.org

Secretary

Heather Hegi
sec@mnatheists.org

Treasurer

Chris Matthews
treas@mnatheists.org
763.428.3424

Directors-at-Large

August Berkshire
dir1@mnatheists.org
612.868.2267
Jim Barri
dir2@mnatheists.org
Art Kallenbach
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
sec@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

Podcasts Chair

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.

Minnesota Atheists Membership

Regular members: 204
Life members: 40
Meetup members: 1792

Minnesota Atheists Honorary Members

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



The Minnesota Atheist June 2015
Published by Minnesota Atheists
PO Box 120304
New Brighton, MN 55112
612-588-7031
info@mnatheists.org
Copyright © 2014 by Minnesota Atheists.
All rights reserved.