



# The Minnesota Atheist

## Sehoya Cotner to Speak on “Are We Still Evolving?” at the February Minnesota Atheists Meeting

Sehoya Cotner is a professor of biology at the University of Minnesota. Her research interests include evolution education for the non-scientist and using sex to teach evolution.



**Sehoya Cotner**

In an interview with *Specimen Magazine*, Dr. Cotner said:

It's clear that we have a big science problem in our country. . . . I don't think it's exclusively a U.S. phenomenon. . . . There is non-science everywhere. There is pseudo-science or creationism in place of evolution. I don't care how enlightened we think the country is.

She is the coauthor with Randy Moore of *Arguing for Evolution: An Encyclopedia for Understanding Science*. In the book, they write:

“What insect could suck it?” These were the words Charles Darwin used when, in 1862, he was confronted with the Madagascan orchid, *Angraecum sesquipedale*. . . . Because the flower's nectar sat at the base of a foot-long spur, Darwin could not imagine what creature might be able to pollinate it. Yet . . . Darwin was able to make a logical prediction: “[I]n Madagascar there must be moths with proboscises capable of extension to a length of between ten and eleven inches!” Nobody had ever reported on such a creature; moreover, the same group of orchids had been used earlier by the Duke of Argyll to cite the existence of a creator. . . . Sure enough, in 1903—21 years after Darwin's death—scientists reported the existence of a moth in Madagascar with a proboscis long enough to reach the unusual orchid's nectar.

For the February meeting of Minnesota Atheists, Dr. Cotner will speak on “Are We Still Evolving?” Be there to learn the answer.

### **Time and Place**

The February Minnesota Atheists meeting will be held at the Southdale Public Library, 7001 York Avenue South, Edina, on February 16th. The meeting will follow our usual schedule:

1:00-1:15 p.m. Informal Gathering Time  
1:15-1:45 p.m. Business Meeting  
1:45-2:00 p.m. Break  
2:00-3:30 p.m. Program

You may attend any part of the meeting you wish. At 4:00 p.m. there will be an optional dinner at Q. Cumbers, 7465 France Avenue South, Edina.

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President's Column • Eric Jayne

## Assembling Helpful, Freethinking Support Through the New Twin Cities Sunday Assembly

When I joined the Minnesota Atheists board three years ago, I wanted to increase our community outreach and volunteer efforts because I know how much cash-strapped nonprofits rely on donations and volunteer labor to address the growing needs within their service areas. I also wanted there to be a safe and welcoming outlet for atheists who were interested in collectively helping under the atheist banner while enhancing their freethinking identity with kindness and compassion. Having collaborated with several secular and faith-based organizations in my professional life as a licensed community social worker, and participated in many Minnesota Atheists volunteer events, I feel fully confident in branding our atheist volunteers as some of the most genuine, accepting, and helpful in the Twin Cities.

It might be more of a radical dream than a practical goal, but I would love to build on our volunteer success by establishing some sort of support center—either online or bricks and mortar or both—for freethinkers to tap into when they're looking for a welcoming, competent advocate to coordinate direct services or help navigate through the tricky web of community resources. I envision this endeavor to be an open, privately administered program that we and our nonbelieving neighbors can visit without fear of being preached to or vetted by local church parishioners before services can be received. I don't know if this would really be an appropriate undertaking for the Minnesota Atheists, but I think this could be a productive enterprise for the local Sunday Assembly that is currently trying to form in the Twin Cities.

According to their website, the aim of the British-based Sunday Assembly is to “live better, help often, and wonder more.” There's a desire to “create communities of action and build lives of purpose” and they even recognize “Community Action Heroes” within their chapters. It seems, then, that these are the essential elements needed to create a freethinking support center like the one I envision.

In addition to building communities of action, the Sunday Assembly leadership has instructed local chapters to hold monthly meetings that feature guest speakers followed by “singing as one.” They also encourage readings and playing games. Except for the group singing, this sounds very similar to the product already offered by Minnesota Atheists (MNA) and the Humanists of Minnesota (HMN)—both of whom are locally operated by a rotating variety of volunteers.

Counting both MNA and HMN, there are two monthly meetings (i.e. services) and numerous book discussions, brunches, game nights, and other social outings every month. So it seems like our local freethinking community would be most effectively served by a Sunday Assembly that narrows their focus on the community action part and less on the parts that basically duplicate what's already abundantly available.

I'd like to see a local Sunday Assembly become a resource for those who want to participate in formal activities like volunteer training, benevolent giving, direct services, strategic planning, joining with others in need for supportive advocacy, and coordinating with other service providers to represent the godless community. For those seek-

ing help, it could be a means to receive encouragement, social support, emergency assistance, goal setting, and an assortment of resources—all either directly or via referral.

With significant funding decreases for community programs continuing and the incredibly low housing vacancy rate in the Twin Cities, the ability for many people to meet their basic needs has become an extremely difficult task. Many families and professionals are forced to reach out to churches for help. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but too often the help is misguided, inferior, and preachy.

In the Mounds View school district, for example, there is a public school building that houses a program called the “Community Support Center.” This program is closely connected to overtly Christian-based services. In order for families to receive help, they must work with volunteers from one of the local churches. These volunteers are called “allies.” These allies are trained within a local ministry program called Starfish Ministries. According to their website, Starfish Ministries helps families “overcome their problems “ by “most important[ly] sharing the hope we have in Christ.” One of the books used in their volunteer training curriculum says that what is at stake when volunteering is the “very authenticity of the church's witness to the transforming power of the kingdom of God”, and the book's foreword proclaims that the “central message of this book is that we need the person of Jesus Christ to transform not just the poor but also ourselves.”

Remember, this faith program is administered through the Mounds View Public Schools at the Pike Lake Center. This isn't at the offices of a faith-based organization. Incidentally, you can respectfully share your concerns with Dr. Karl Brown, the director of the Pike Lake Center, at 651-621-7403 or the superintendent's office at 651-621-6001. Your shared concerns would be especially meaningful if you lived in the Mounds View school district which serves Mounds View, New Brighton, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, and parts of Vadnais Heights.

It would be so delightful if there was a centralized, relatively formal program in our community that provided assistance that was not just secular but emphasized understanding and acceptance of our godless neighbors, friends, and families. From my perspective as a social worker, I think this is where a local Twin Cities Sunday Assembly could shine best and be most useful.

### Minnesota Atheist Notes

## The Twin Cities Sunday Assembly

The new Twin Cities Sunday Assembly, known as Sunday Assembly MSP, is now in the planning stages. You can learn more about it on page 4. If you share the vision to have Sunday Assembly MSP play an important role in secular social services, now would be the perfect time to get involved.



News and Notes • Commentary by George Kane

## Mount Soledad Cross Case Heads to the US Supreme Court after Twenty Years of Litigation

In mid-December, US District Court Judge Larry Burns issued a decision in the case *Trunk v. San Diego* that may open the final chapter for the Mount Soledad Cross after more than twenty years of litigation. Judge Burns ordered the cross to be removed within ninety days, although the order was stayed pending appeal.

Burns had ruled in 2008 that the cross served the secular purpose of promoting patriotism, but the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals disagreed and remanded the case back to trial court. The case was appealed to the US Supreme Court, which refused to grant *certiorari*. In his concurrence to rejecting the case, Justice Alito wrote that the absence of a final judgment prevented the court from considering the constitutionality of the memorial, which is “a question of substantial importance.” Burns’ order to remove the cross provides the “final judgment” that will force the Supreme Court to get involved and clarify the guidelines used to decide the constitutionality of religious symbols on government property.

The Burns decision was a brief four pages. It noted that in remanding the case back to him for reconsideration, the Ninth Circuit Court had opened the question of whether there might be a way to resolve the case by modifying the monument in some way. “Nonetheless,” Burns wrote, “other deliberate language in the opinion makes it clear that removal of the large, historic cross is the only remedy that the Ninth Circuit conceives will cure the constitutional violation.”

The analysis of case law to which the Supreme Court will have to respond lies in the circuit court’s 2011 decision. That decision was based upon the two Supreme Court tests for public monuments violating the Establishment Clause, *Lemon* and *Van Orden*.

*Lemon* requires the court to decide if, in the words of *Vernon v. City of Los Angeles*, “it would be objectively reasonable for the government action to be construed as sending primarily a message of either endorsement or disapproval of religion.” As Justice O’Conner noted in *Lynch v. Donnelly*, this is especially true when religious endorsement tells non-adherents “that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members.”

*Van Orden* requires the court to determine whether the memorial is at odds with the underlying purposes of the First Amendment’s religion clauses. The decision observes:

[The religion clauses] seek to “assure the fullest possible scope of religious liberty and tolerance for all. . . .” They seek to avoid that

divisiveness based upon religion that promotes social conflict. . . . They seek to maintain that “separation of church and state” that has long been critical to the “peaceful dominion that religion exercises in [this] country.”

In applying earlier Supreme Court rulings, the Ninth Circuit Court wrote, “In our analysis, we must consider fine-grained, factually specific features

of the Memorial.” The court also wrote, “We conduct our inquiry from the perspective of an ‘informed and reasonable observer’ who is familiar with the ‘history of the government practice at issue.’”

For most of its history, the forty-three foot cross was the only component of what the government claims is a memorial to soldiers who died in the Korean War. Secular components were added during litigation, but the cross can be seen throughout the area and is the only element of the monument that is visible from outside the park. The uses of the monument were overwhelmingly for religious services, and only rarely and incidentally for memorializing war dead.

The circuit court responded to the argument that no one objected to the cross for four



Mount Soledad Cross

decades by noting that an illegal conspiracy of realtors and government had barred Jews from buying homes in La Jolla at least through the 1960s. The lack of early litigation is merely evidence of the success of that policy of exclusion which, to some, the cross symbolizes.

If the case does end up in the Supreme Court, it will be difficult for the Justices to refute the Ninth Circuit Court’s analysis. The *Lemon* and *Van Orden* guidelines compel the conclusion that the Soledad Cross violates the Establishment Clause. The danger is that they will just draw up new criteria based upon their ideology rather than precedent.

George Kane

## Freethought Cryptogram

Pex sub h dej em peex glsbb, hxx bykrs Pex ksosl cejwslb je hrjzhddi bwea zg hxx shlk jws hrredhxs, lsdyppek bjshdb jws peex lsgzjhjyek em jws gsegds xeykp jws peex aelv.

—G.Q. Fislb, *Jws Whggi Hjwsybj* (Answer on page 7.)

Rebecca Chesin

## Sunday Assembly is Coming to The Twin Cities

You may have heard some of the buzz about Sunday Assembly as an “atheist congregation” that’s popping up in cities around the world. While it’s true that Sunday Assembly gatherings are a-theist (without gods), Sunday Assembly does not actively address the question of belief or disbelief. Rather, as one member of the local planning group put it, it is apatheist—religion is simply not present in, nor relevant to, the content of meetings. The focus of Sunday Assembly is neatly summed up by its motto: live better, help often, wonder more.

The guidelines listed in the Sunday Assembly Public Charter include:

- Not-for-profit and volunteer-run
- No doctrine and no deity
- Independent and inclusive
- A celebration of the one life we know we have

Most people attracted to Sunday Assembly would probably describe themselves as somewhere on the godless spectrum: humanist, agnostic, atheist, and so on. Prospective members of the proposed Twin Cities Sunday Assembly, Sunday Assembly MSP, are no exception if the comments at our group’s first planning meeting are any indication.

When I heard that the founders of Sunday Assembly, British comedians Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans, would be giving a webinar presentation on how to establish local assemblies based on their successful model, I was ready to try an initial planning meeting. Local humanist and atheist Meetup groups kindly posted the event, and it quickly became apparent there was enough interest in this “global movement for wonder and good” to warrant its own Meetup group.

On Saturday, January 11th, twenty-five people met to view the webinar and brainstorm about moving forward. Aided by pizza and an impromptu song, we shared our reasons for interest, considered how Sunday Assembly could complement the wealth of non-religious options already available in the Twin Cities, and discussed various practical details. The strong enthusiasm to advance this project was clear! There was also broad agreement on the



**Sunday Assembly planning group participants at the January 11th meeting**

importance of creating partnerships and synergy with compatible groups already active in the area while maintaining a distinct brand for Sunday Assembly.

Here are some comments from our members that give a good flavor of what we see ourselves as being about:

- “I would like to be in a group that lets us reclaim celebration, ritual, and ceremony—which existed centuries before the rise of religion.”
- “Awesome. I am so glad I went. The energy in the room was incredible to see. I can’t wait for the next meeting.”
- “My family is looking for a socializing opportunity that focuses on positive relationships without having to suspend our disbelief.”

We also had a potluck social on January 19th. It was the perfect opportunity for us to continue getting to know each other and to start creating a life-celebrating and freethinker-welcoming community. Aided by good company and good food, a very enjoyable afternoon was had by all.

In just two weeks, we’re up to almost seventy members. Our initial meetings and discussions show that we’ve reached critical mass to be able to hold our first Sunday Assembly MSP sometime this year. Some key pieces we need to have in place—or at least fully consider—to move forward in a thoughtful and growth-supporting way include:

- **A venue.** Whether we find a single place we can meet at regularly or spend some time rotating, we need a pleasant space, available on Sunday, and free or very cheap.
- **Speakers and musicians to participate in the services.**
- **Other volunteers.** You can see a list of the eight or so suggested roles, as well as a recommended format for assembly meetings, at [www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly-MSP/files/](http://www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly-MSP/files/).
- **Financial and legal organization.** Sunday Assembly International has applied for 501(c)(3) status in the US with the goal of extending this status to the various US congregations. Besides non-profit status, we’ll need funds. At this point we have no funds at all; we don’t even have a bank account yet.

Interested? Any level of involvement is welcome. Our next planning meeting will take place February 16th where, with the help of a big whiteboard and some creativity, we’ll start bringing together the pieces we need to make this thing happen.

To learn more, visit the Sunday Assembly International website at [www.sundayassembly.com](http://www.sundayassembly.com), and drop by the Sunday Assembly MSP Meetup site at [www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly-MSP](http://www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly-MSP). If this idea is as exciting to you as it is to us, we’ll gratefully accept your two cents, both figuratively and literally.

Commentary • Jack Caravela

## A Thankful, Charitable Atheist

When I read Eric Jayne's column, "Giving Thanks for the Blessings of Atheism," and observed his use of the word *thankful* in reference to circumstances not caused by human intervention, I immediately took his meaning as, "I recognize and appreciate my good fortune, especially since it is not universally shared by others." I seriously doubt anyone misunderstood this choice of words as his being grateful to a deity. However, George Kane ("Atheists Should Speak and Act with Care") objects to this use of the word and celebration of the Thanksgiving holiday as "intrinsically religious." There is no official lexicon or approved code of conduct for atheists. If I may be allowed a generalization, we take pride in thinking for ourselves. We can express ourselves with words of religious origin (including two of my favorites, *hell* and *damn*) without compromising our

convictions.

In admonishing Bernadette Chlebeck and Phil Cunliffe for asking that we proudly wear our atheist T-shirts to charitable events, George interpreted their words to mean that we should show ourselves to be atheists simply to improve our public image. This is at best a misleading oversimplification. Judging by the huge response to our many Meetups devoted to worthy secular causes and by the many freethinkers I've spoken with over the years who have asked which local charities we support, many of us want to participate in activities that benefit those less fortunate than ourselves, and we want to do so in the company of other atheists. Local charities seek out groups to help, and local businesses, fraternal organizations, and other secular organizations respond. If it wasn't for Bernadette and

Phil organizing a Minnesota Atheists team for the Polar Plunge event that benefits Special Olympics, I would have missed out on one of the most enjoyable Minnesota Atheist activities I've ever attended. I reject the notion that Minnesota Atheists should shun such fund-raisers for fear that someone might interpret our participation as self-serving. Two of our stated missions are to build a community of freethinkers and to educate the public about atheism, and these charitable events serve both of them very well indeed.

I am thankful for (and to) Eric, Bernadette, and Phil. They generously devote their time, effort, and energy to Minnesota Atheists, are always outgoing and never fail to welcome newcomers. I believe they are among the best representatives of our organization, and I wish that there were many more like them.

Commentary • George Kane

## A Clarification and an Apology

I have to correct the mistaken inference drawn by some readers of my commentary in the January issue that I am critical of the sentiments expressed by President Eric Jayne or the leadership of volunteer community service activities by Bernadette Chlebeck and Phil Cunliffe. I think that all three are doing an outstanding job and are performing a great service to Minnesota Atheists.

My comment on Eric Jayne's President's Column was that any time we say that we are thankful for something,

we must be thankful to someone. But, especially in November, it is a social convention to express thanks for things like a bountiful harvest or good health. This is why Thanksgiving is so religious in character: "thankfulness" for many things that please us implies acknowledgment of God. I was merely proposing that we express our appreciation in terms other than thankfulness or gratitude.

Nor was I critical of Minnesota Atheists community service activities. I think that it is wonderful that the

organization is able to provide volunteer opportunities to its members. My admonition is against using public service as a public relations campaign. The justification for the activities should be that they improve the lives of the people they serve; exploiting these activities for promoting Minnesota Atheists will be perceived as self-serving.

I sincerely apologize to all three that my carelessly worded commentary could be viewed by some readers as critical of them personally. That was not at all my intent.

Commentary • Lewis Campbell

## Protecting the Brand

The article by George Kane, "Atheists Should Speak and Act with Care," provoked a small storm of email to the editorial board when the January *Minnesota Atheist* was sent to the Minnesota Atheists board just prior to publication. Some Minnesota Atheist board members suggested eliminating the article. Others held that George had the right to print his opinion in *The Minnesota Atheist* regard-

less of how critical it was.

This discussion raises a very interesting question: Does a corporate publication have an obligation to protect the free speech of the organization's members by publishing critical articles, even if those articles might be detrimental to the image of the organization? It is certainly possible for adverse publicity to destroy an organization, as ACORN found out a few years

ago. In my view, however, it is always best to allow a free and open exchange of ideas. The truth usually leaks out no matter what, so an organization that can publicly acknowledge its internal differences and resolve them openly only grows stronger. Open discussions ultimately lead to the best decisions and reassure members that problems are being addressed and resolved in a responsible way.

## Minnesota Atheists Meeting Report

# Civil Marriage and Celebration Discussed at January Minnesota Atheists Meeting

Our January meeting featured presentations and discussions on changing the marriage laws in Minnesota to allow atheist and secular humanist leaders to conduct civil marriage ceremonies. August Berkshire began the meeting by summarizing the law and the changes we've proposed. (See the October newsletter for a detailed description of our proposed changes.) Our suggested language has changed slightly following meetings with lawmakers and may change again as the legislative process continues.

August then shared the requirements for becoming a notary public in Minnesota, since State Senator John Marty has suggested to us the option of authorizing notaries public to officiate at civil marriages. Comparing the filing requirements for notaries public and clergy shows us that it is more expensive and onerous to obtain and maintain licensing as a notary public.

Additionally, August shared the "Certificate of Filing," which is the county form required to file as a marriage officiant. This paperwork, like the law itself, makes it clear that this position is currently only open to a limited number of state officials or those willing to identify as clergy of a religious organization. While Minnesota Atheists supports the right of other atheist or humanist organizations to be recognized as religious organizations should they so choose, Minnesota Atheists as an organization, and many of those who have said they would become celebrants if the law were changed, cannot in good conscience identify as religious.

## Minnesota Atheist Notes

# Who Can Perform a Marriage in Minnesota?

Current Minnesota law allows only a limited number of people to perform marriages. These are judges and retired judges, court administrators and retired court administrators, court commissioners, the school administrators of the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf

Stephanie Zvan, who emceed the meeting, then presented results from a survey she conducted on options for changing the law (see the facing page). She also discussed the various strategies used by other states that allow more than clergy, judges, and elected officials to officiate civil marriages. We will provide this information to Senator John Marty along with the survey results.

Next, couples who were married in a secular wedding spoke about their experiences. Atheists who had performed secular wedding ceremonies though ordination in a religious organization also spoke. Finally, we heard from people who wished to become atheist wedding celebrants through Minnesota Atheists if we succeed in getting the law changed. Much of this portion of the program focused on what makes a marriage ceremony meaningful in the absence of religion, both for the people being married and those conducting the marriage.

A lively discussion with the audience concluded the presentation. The discussion centered around two main questions:

1. Why is Minnesota Atheists interested in certifying wedding celebrants? Members of the board pointed out that providing community for atheists is part of our mission. It's true that we aren't the sort of organization that feels we have an interest in the marriages of our members, as a church does. However, our members still have an interest, as most people do, in having their marriages recognized and supported by their

community. We recognize that as a valid need.

2. What will Minnesota Atheists do to maintain the quality of celebrants it certifies? Part of the answer to this is already in the proposed changes to the law. The board of Minnesota Atheists would be responsible for screening those it certified. What that means in practice, however, hasn't yet been settled. Now that we've determined that changing the law has broad support, the board will take up this question. Please feel free to contact the board with any considerations you feel are important.

During the discussion, it was discovered that some county clerks have rejected ministerial certifications from the Humanist Society and from the Universal Life Church on the grounds that these aren't genuine religions. As David Pacheco of the Minnesota chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State pointed out in the meeting, discrimination against us is written into the current law. If some clerks accept atheist celebrants as religious celebrants, that doesn't mean they all would, even if we did feel we could take this approach in good conscience. The only way to guarantee equal treatment is to change the law.

We wish to thank the following people for speaking at the meeting: Stephanie Zvan, August Berkshire, Bjorn & Jeannette Watland, Elina Kolstad & Munir Massar, James Zimmerman, Nicole Infinity, Georgia Tsoi, and Dale Handeen.

and the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, and ordained ministers. Special provisions are made for several religious groups that do not have ordained ministers. These groups are Quakers, Baha'i, Hindus, Muslims, and American Indians.

The current law gives atheists several

options for getting married without a religious official presiding. None of these options, however, is equivalent to the options provided for theists. Whether the Minnesota legislature will consider this an important enough difference to warrant revising the law is an open question.

## Minnesota Atheist News

# Minnesota Atheists Meets with State Senator John Marty

On December 3rd, August Berkshire, Stephanie Zvan, and Eric Jayne met with Minnesota state senator John Marty. At that time we presented him with the following talking points in support of atheist and humanist celebrants being allowed to conduct civil marriages under state law:

1. The State (through legislation) has the authority to designate people as agents of the State to conduct civil marriages.
2. The history of civil marriage in Minnesota is one where more and more groups are granted this privilege.
3. 2014 marks the 30th continuous year of organized atheism in Minnesota. Atheist and humanist groups would like to be added to the list of groups that can solemnize a civil marriage.
4. According to Trinity College's 2013 American Religious Identification Survey, 15% of college students do not believe in a god or higher power. Nearly another 15% are agnostic and do not identify as religious.
5. Most religious and nonreligious people want the same thing: to have a wedding ceremony that is recognized by the state and which is conducted by a leader from their community who has known them for many years.
6. We believe our suggested language changes, in Sections 517.05 and 517.18, address two questions that the legislature has had: (A) How do we define an atheist or humanist group? and (B) How do we provide oversight to maintain quality control?
7. We are open to any language that accomplishes our goal that is consistent with our identity.
8. We are not trying to take away any rights or privileges that religions now have.
9. This only becomes an issue of Separation of Church and State if atheists are treated differently by the State than religious people are treated.
10. Legal Argument:  
When someone is given the authority by the state to legally conduct a civil marriage, they are acting as agents of the state. This is true no matter who it is: a judge, a clergy person, an atheist leader, etc.  
In a sense, then, they are appointed public officials or at least acting in the public trust. The U.S. Constitution states that, "no religious

test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." (Article VI, paragraph 3)

Therefore, a person cannot be excluded from conducting a civil marriage on the basis of religion. This includes not only religious clergy but atheists as well. It is likely we would win a court case, but we prefer to be cooperative instead of confrontational.

In our discussion with Senator Marty, he observed that simply allowing notary publics to conduct civil marriages would solve our problem. But he agreed with us that there are fees that notaries have to pay that clergy do not, so this would not put us on equal footing with religion.

Senator Marty wondered how much support there was in our atheist/humanist community for the various options. To that end, we conducted a survey of nonbelievers in Minnesota. The results of the survey are reported below.

We will meet again with Senator Marty to show him these survey results and discuss a plan of action at the legislature.

## Minnesota Atheist News

# The Atheist Marriage Celebrant Survey

To discover how much support there is in our atheist/humanist community for various atheist wedding celebrant options, Stephanie Zvan created a survey that we distributed to nonbelievers in Minnesota through several channels. These are the results:

## Survey Overview

- 267 responses (as of January 17, 2014)
- Nine removed (not a Minnesota nonbeliever and would not use or become celebrant)
- 33% Minnesota Atheists members
- 18% Humanists of Minnesota members
- 13% paid members of other organizations
- 56% would use a celebrant
- 66 people would become celebrants

## Option 1: Amend current law to specifically allow officiants appointed by atheist and secular humanist organizations

- 54% Prefer this option
- 38% Support this option
- 6% Do not support this option
- 3% Have no opinion

## Option 2: Amend current law to more generally open the process of civil marriage officiating to those who are

## notaries public

- 19% Prefer this option
- 51% Support this option
- 24% Do not support this option
- 6% Have no opinion

## Option 3: Take no action to have the law changed

- 4% Prefer this option
- 86% Do not support this option
- 10% Have no opinion

Generally speaking, both options for change have broad support in the community, though there is a clear preference for the first option, if it will pass in the legislature.

Commentary • Jennifer Zimmerman

## The Fight for Reproductive Rights is Not Just About Abortion

When we talk about reproductive rights the first thing that comes to most people's mind is the right to abortion. However, reproductive rights encompass much more than that. The prolife movement has been pushing fetal personhood legislation that can potentially affect the rights of every pregnant woman, both those who want to continue their pregnancy and those who do not. Personhood rights would give a fetus full state constitutional rights from the moment it is conceived. Personhood legislation has passed in about five states, and been introduced and rejected in several others. However, many states that do not have personhood laws still favor the rights of the fetus over the rights of the person who carries that fetus and sustains its life.

What many people don't realize, both those who are prolife and those who are prochoice, is that the right to abortive services also protects the rights of pregnant women who want to continue their pregnancy. When we limit these rights by placing restrictions on them, such as restrictions based on the age of the fetus, we are effectively limiting the rights of all pregnant women. If a fetus past the age of viability is legally a child and no longer a fetus, then what happens to the rights of the woman who carries that child? Often her rights are usurped in favor of the fetus she carries.

In Washington, DC cancer survivor Angela Carder was carrying a twenty-five-week-old fetus when a tumor was discovered in her lung. Carder opted for aggressive treatment and her husband, parents, and obstetrician all agreed on this treatment plan. Carder did not want a cesarean section to deliver her baby because she was not expected to survive it, but the hospital obtained a court order to deliver Carder's fetus. Carder's family and doctors and Carder herself opposed the surgery, and Carder repeatedly stated that she did not want it. Carder's child was delivered by cesarean section and died within two hours of its birth. Carder died two days later.

In New Jersey, V.M. was asked to sign a standard pre-consent form allowing the hospital to perform a cesarean section if it should become necessary. V.M. refused

to sign. The hospital felt she was behaving "erratically" and was "combative" while in labor, so they called for a psychiatric evaluation while she was in labor, even though this behavior during labor is quite normal. V.M. passed both psychiatric evaluations that were given to her during labor and was found to understand the choices she was making for herself and her baby. V.M. allowed certain medical procedures and refused others, including a potential cesarean section. This is well within a patient's rights, as the right to informed consent provides that a patient has the right to choose or refuse any treatment. V.M. went on to deliver a healthy baby girl vaginally with no issues. However, a court order was obtained and her baby was taken away and given to a foster home. V.M. was later found to have a history of PTSD, and was determined to be an unfit parent. Custody has not been returned to her. V.M. would never have been deprived of custody based on having a mental illness alone had she not refused to sign the consent form for a cesarean section that she didn't need.

In Wisconsin, Alicia Beltran informed the physician's assistant providing her prenatal care that she had previously been addicted to the narcotic painkiller Percocet, but with the help of Suboxone, a drug used to wean her off the Percocet, Beltran was now totally drug free as confirmed by a urine test. The physician's assistant recommended she go back on the Suboxone, but Beltran refused because of the risks to the fetus. This is when a court order was obtained to send Beltran to a drug treatment center against her will. Beltran was also charged with negligence, which could affect her right to custody of her child after it's birth. Beltran was basically kidnapped and held against her will for the sake of her fetus, which would have been in more danger had Beltran taken the Suboxone.

In Florida, Samantha Burton was forced to stay in a hospital on bed rest against her will. In the twenty-fifth week of her pregnancy, Burton's membranes ruptured, but she was not in preterm labor. Her doctor recommended bed rest, and when Burton said she wished to seek a second

opinion, her doctor would not allow her to leave the hospital. The hospital obtained a court order requiring Burton to stay and undergo "any and all medical treatments" that her physician decided would be best for the fetus—a court order that was decided without providing Burton legal counsel. Burton, a single mother, had two toddlers at home and was worried about who would care for them and what would happen to her job during the months she would be in the hospital on bed rest. Three days later her fetus was delivered by cesarean section and was found to have died.

Just a few months ago in Texas, Marlise Munoz, fourteen weeks pregnant, was found unconscious on the floor of her home by her husband. She likely experienced a pulmonary embolism. It is unknown how long she and her fetus went without oxygen. Munoz and her husband were paramedics and she had made it clear to him that she would not want life-saving measures taken if there was no hope of recovery. Munoz's husband and her parents support her wishes to be disconnected from the machines keeping her body alive despite her pregnancy. However, the state of Texas refuses, citing the Texas Advance Directives Act, "A person may not withdraw or withhold life-sustaining treatment under this subchapter from a pregnant patient." However, as her family has pointed out, Munoz is not a patient, Munoz is brain dead with no chance of recovery. Munoz is currently twenty-two weeks pregnant and her fetus has been found to be "distinctly abnormal". The fetus has heart problems, hydrocephalus, and a deformity of the lower extremities. A Judge has finally ordered the hospital to discontinue life support by Monday, January 27th, at 5 p.m. As of this writing there is no word on whether the hospital plans to comply with or appeal the decision. It also seems that the judge came to this conclusion specifically because the fetus was found to be "not viable," so a situation like this could potentially occur again. A lawyer for the Munoz family, Jessica King, stated, "pregnant women die every day. They die in car accidents, of heart attacks and other injuries. And when they die their fetus dies with them. It's the way it's



always been and the way it should be.”

To turn a pregnant woman’s body into a science experiment to see if it can gestate a fetus after death is unconscionable. This case also raises the question of who is going to pay to keep Munoz’s body alive for these weeks while she has been on life support? And who would have paid for the cesarean surgery her body would have been forced to undergo? Who would have paid for the medical care of her seriously ill fetus after it was born? If this fetus survived life outside the womb, it would likely need very expensive medical care for the duration of its life.

These cases are all different, but the common thread is that the pregnant woman herself—or her family in the case of her

death—has had her rights to her own body taken away in the name of fetal rights.

These cases clearly demonstrate that when a fetus is granted personhood rights, those rights take precedence over the rights of the mother. Any law that gives the fetus rights is detrimental to all pregnant women.

Where will fetal personhood laws lead? When constraints have been imposed on the right to abortion, such as ones involving the gestational age of the fetus, these restraints have limited the rights of pregnant women who wish to go to term. Fetal personhood laws, which would grant a fetus legal rights as soon as it’s conceived, further limit a woman’s rights to make decisions for her own body. Despite the fact that person-

hood laws have only passed in a handful of states, pregnant women are already having their rights limited in the name of the fetus. It is a physician’s responsibility to explain the risks, benefits, and alternatives to each proposed treatment, and it is then the patient’s right to choose or refuse that proposed treatment. A pregnant woman should have the legal right to refuse care, even if that care may save the life of her fetus. It is not uncommon for pregnant women and women in labor to be denied their rights to informed consent and decision-making power. Personhood laws will just make it legal to do so and worsen the situation. Reproductive rights are about much more than just abortion.

**Commentary • Jo Marsicano**

## Toward a Prayer-Free Minnesota Legislature

I recently sent an email to my state representative, Paul Thissen, who’s also the Speaker of the House, declaring my atheism and my right as a citizen and taxpayer to be represented equally, strongly urging separation of church and state and a strong secular government.

Among other things, my letter stated, “I don’t think any lawmaking body should start its sessions with religious rituals of any kind, such as a chaplain leading the body in prayer. As Speaker of the House, I would urge you to remove this practice from the chamber altogether.”

Representative Thissen responded, in part, “You specifically requested that as Speaker of the House I eliminate the practice of opening House sessions with prayer. That is not my decision to make. The prayer is called for in House Rule 1.01. As with all rules of the House, Rule 1.01 was adopted by a majority vote of the full House of Representatives.”

His letter included the rule language, and the relevant portion states, “The call to order is followed by a prayer by the Chaplain or time for a brief meditation.” Representative Thissen stated, “Frankly, there are simply not the votes in the House to do away with that tradition.”

If atheists ever decided to pursue removing this section from House rule 1.01, we’d have to convince a majority of house members to do away with it. A large task, I’m sure, but in my view, worth it. The inclusion of “brief meditation” does not improve

the house rule. It simply adds another option of private mental activity which our laws should not be based on. Rather they should rely on evidence-based, rational decision making.

According to news reports last year, a proposal in the Minnesota Senate would have cleared the way for prayer leaders who open Senate sessions to be more specific in naming their deities, a thinly veiled attempt to give Christian chaplains the right to invoke the name of Jesus or other Christian-specific language. A contentious debate followed, and fortunately the senate voted the idea down, although the larger problem remains—a lawmaking body opening its sessions with any kind of prayer.

Representative Thissen noted in his response that *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, now pending before the US Supreme Court, may determine, in Representative Thissen’s words, “whether a city council violated the constitution by opening its meetings with mostly Christian prayers.” Representative Thissen included an article from the *New York Times* regarding the case. But after reading the article, I realized that the case is only about whether the prayers used to open council meetings can use overtly Christian language, not whether prayer itself can be used. While I hope for a court ruling that restricts the overtly Christian language, I also hope for an eventual court case that could strike down prayers at public meetings, period.

Representative Thissen said in his

letter, “You can count on my continued support for policies that fully recognize the separation of church and state as implied in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.” I was struck by use of the word *implied*. The first amendment states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. . . .” Debate about the validity of the term “separation of church and state” comes from theocrats who want to dismantle Thomas Jefferson’s descriptive phrase in a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in 1802, “thus building a wall of separation between Church and State” to describe the purpose of the amendment.

Local, state, and federal lawmaking bodies, from school boards to legislatures to congress, commonly open their sessions with religious, usually Christian, prayer rituals. These rituals are fueled by those motivated on one end by simple arrogance and on the other by a thirst for theocracy. They want so much more out of government than is due them. As a result, our representatives give undue deference to superstitious ritual and waste their time and our taxes in contentious debate like that in the Minnesota Senate last year.

Prayer rituals at public meetings are harmful. They act out a public belief system that marginalizes nonreligious people even though we have an equal stake in public life. We vote, pay taxes, and are subject to all state laws. We have the right to a prayer-free Minnesota legislature.

## Minnesota Atheist News

# New Minnesota Atheists Board Nominated

A full slate of candidates for the Minnesota Atheists board was chosen at the January 19th Minnesota Atheists monthly meeting. All candidates are running unopposed. The nominees are:

President: Eric Jayne  
 Associate President: Stephanie Zvan  
 Chair: Heather Hegi  
 Associate Chair: Joseph Homrich  
 Secretary: Jill Carlson  
 Treasurer: Chris Matthews  
 Directors-at-Large: Phil Cunliffe, August Berkshire, and Georgia Tsoi

Because of an unforeseen scheduling conflict with the normal board meeting time, Joseph Homrich withdrew his candidacy on January 29th.

Candidate statements from those nominees who submitted them follow.

## August Berkshire

This year I will be working with other board members to try to change the law to allow atheist and humanist wedding celebrants to perform civil marriages without having to sign documents that turn them into religious ministers. We will also be lobbying



the legislature to end the blue law that prohibits the sale of liquor in liquor stores on Sundays. My other priority will be our Aints baseball game and regional atheist-humanist conference.

I believe the greatest strengths I bring to the board are my ability to analyze problems and come up with workable solutions, and the knowledge I have of the atheist-humanist movement in Minnesota.

The year 2014 marks the thirtieth anniversary of organized atheism in Minnesota. I am delighted by the new people who come forward on a monthly basis and take on leadership roles in our organization. I hope we all appreciate the efforts that so many of our members make that contribute to the success of Minnesota Atheists.

## 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 ten years living in the Chicago area. I have been an atheist for more than thirty 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 year has been a great experience. I look forward to continuing to serve our community.



## Chris Matthews

I have served as treasurer of Minnesota Atheists since 2011. This role suits me well since I enjoy working with numbers and computers. The upcoming year looks to be exciting and, from my perspective, just different enough from recent years to keep things fresh. I am proud to help provide the infrastructure that the organization needs to pursue goals that we collectively find worthwhile. I appreciate the opportunity to continue serving as treasurer.



## Heather Hegi

Having been chair the last two years, I feel I am getting better and better at fulfilling the duties as chair, and am glad to run for chair for a third year (the term limit for chair). In addition to the duties of running the board meeting and public meetings, I do what I can to make sure Minnesota Atheists itself is running smoothly and see that events are adequately organized and advertised. A goal of mine is to get more people actively involved and invested in the organization. We have several opportunities for volunteers such



as: planning events, writing articles for the newsletter, working behind the scenes for the cable program production, being an interviewer/interviewee on our cable or radio program, and if you have an idea you would like to initiate yourself under the Minnesota Atheists name, let us know and we will run it by our board!

## Georgia Tsoi

I'm excited for the opportunity to serve on the board this year. I have been a member of Minnesota Atheists for almost eight years and have participated in many activities in the free thought community throughout the years. I have enjoyed meeting new members and am



looking forward to taking a larger roll in the Minnesota Atheists Community. It has been great to see 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. My partner Jim is an atheist and he will support me as I move forward in my new role.

## Minnesota Atheist News

# Last-Minute Board Vacancy

Due to the withdrawal of Joseph Homrich from the slate of candidates for the Minnesota Atheists board, there is now an opening for the position of Associate Chair. The Associate Chair works in collaboration with the Chair to conduct board and membership meetings and to report to the membership on the organization's activities. If you are interested in running for this position, contact one of the current board members.

Commentary • August Berkshire

# Repeal the Ban on Sunday Liquor Sales

Once again a bill has been introduced in the Minnesota legislature to try to repeal the state's ban on Sunday liquor sales at liquor stores. Governor Mark Dayton has signaled his willingness to sign the repeal, though it is not a priority for him.

On January 14th, Representative Jenifer Loon issued the following press release:

The time has come for state government to abolish this outdated law and move the decision closer to the people. While local governments should have the final say in how these sales are controlled, our citizens and businesses deserve a less restrictive regulatory climate that invites competition, creates jobs and brings fundamental freedom back to our communities. While I understand and appreciate some of the concerns raised by opponents of Sunday sales in the past, none of our neighboring states ban off-sale liquor sales on Sunday, and Minnesota is one of only 12 states nationwide with such a law. I have worked with both Republicans and Democrats who are ready to make this small but important change

to our state statutes and enhance our economic competitiveness.

The legislation would amend Minnesota Statutes section 340A.504, subd. 4 by removing a current statewide ban on Sunday sales.

This is an issue that crosses party lines and has mostly to do with geography. Cities near the Minnesota border that lose Sunday liquor sales to neighboring states tend to have the greatest support for repealing the law. Some other liquor stores, which are not near the border, oppose the repeal, saying that adding another day of sales will reduce their profits by spreading the same amount of weekly sales over an additional day while incurring more costs, such as labor and utilities, in order to be open for that extra day.

At this point the issue is purely economic, but the origins of this ban are religious. Sunday was hardly chosen at random. Minnesota Atheists opposes these old blue laws as a violation of separation of state and church.

On March 16, 2011, Minnesota Atheists testified in favor a similar bill, SF 197,

at a hearing of the Minnesota State Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection. We have contacted Representative Loon's office to offer our testimony again.

If Representative Loon is your representative, please let us know. You can contact me directly at 612-868-2267 or dir1@mnatheists.org.

## Minnesota Atheist Notes

# Beer Activists

Minnesota Beer Activists is a consumer organization working to repeal the ban on Sunday liquor sales. Their mission is to "represent consumer interests through active engagement in education, legislation, and community participation regarding beer, wine, and spirits in Minnesota."

Upcoming plans include a letter-writing campaign, a capital rally, and a promotional concert.

You can learn more at [mnbeeractivists.com](http://mnbeeractivists.com) or at [facebook.com/mnbeeractivists](https://www.facebook.com/mnbeeractivists) or by calling Andrew Schmitt at 651-434-3303.

Chris Matthews

# December Treasury Report

## General/Visibility Fund

Sarah Bachmann-Lane.....	\$250
Andy Flamm.....	\$250
George Kane.....	\$200
John Annen.....	\$100
Sue Halligan.....	\$100
Jim Mueller.....	\$100
Keith Thorkelson.....	\$100
Vicky Hagens.....	\$65
Gregory Hall.....	\$50
Edward Lubinski, Jr.....	\$50
Ronald Kyllonen.....	\$50
Frank Neubecker.....	\$50
Robert Lawrence Schmitz Trust.....	\$50
Timothy Traynor.....	\$50
Tim and Kimberly Walker.....	\$50
Jason Willett.....	\$50
David Bicking.....	\$25
Gregory Burnett.....	\$25
Bernadette Chlebeck.....	\$25
Jeanette Dehmer.....	\$25

Eric Jayne.....	\$25
Michael Stiegler.....	\$25
Theodore Haland.....	\$20
Catey Jordan.....	\$10
Rajiv Vaidyanathan.....	\$10
Anonymous.....	\$50
<hr/>	
Total General/Visibility Fund.....	\$1,805

## Radio Fund

John Annen.....	\$300
Alice Lesney.....	\$300
Mark Nelson.....	\$200
Darryl Halbrooks.....	\$100
George Kane.....	\$100
Rachel Wilson.....	\$100
Jo Ann Kremers.....	\$65
Susan Christiansen.....	\$50
Joyce Nordquist.....	\$50
Timothy Traynor.....	\$50
Steve Petersen.....	\$45

Lillian Bubser.....	\$25
Heather Hegi.....	\$25
Shirley Moll.....	\$25
Georgia Tsoi.....	\$25
Mark Paquette.....	\$10
Anonymous.....	\$50
Fifth Sunday Fundraiser.....	\$244

Total Radio Fund..... \$1,764

## Building Fund

No donations for December  
Cumulative Total..... \$132,127

**Total Income: .....\$3,569**

• • •

## Top Expenses for December

Radio Show.....	\$1,025
Storage.....	\$146
Internet.....	\$102

**Religion's a Joke****The Twelve Steps of Theists Anonymous**

1. We admitted we were powerless over religion—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that the power of reason could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of reason as we understood it.
4. Made a searching and fearless rational inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our irrational thinking.
6. Were entirely ready to have reason remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked of reason to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed through religion, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure ourselves.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were religious promptly admitted it, except in church.
11. Sought through thinking and meditation to improve our conscious contact with reason, as we understood it, hoping only for knowledge of reason and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a rational awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to theists, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

**Cryptogram Answer**

God gets a lot of good press, and since God never bothers to actually show up and earn the accolades, religion steals the good reputation of the people doing the good work.

—P.Z. Myers, *The Happy Atheist*

**Radio Report • Steve Petersen****Peter Boghossian Featured on Atheists Talk Radio**

The *Atheists Talk* radio show is broadcast live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 on KTNE, 950 AM. A live stream and podcasts are available through the Minnesota Atheists website at [mnatheists.org](http://mnatheists.org).

Recent shows are summarized below.

**Not Home for the Holidays—Sarah Morehead on Atheists Talk #249, December 22, 2013**

Sarah Morehead is the Executive Director of Recovering from Religion, an organization that has helped to support countless people through their transition from belief. She joined us this Sunday to talk about the challenges formerly religious people face during the holidays and some of the ways people find to cope.

**A Manual for Creating Atheists—Peter Boghossian on Atheists Talk #250, December 29, 2013**

Dr. Peter Boghossian is a philosopher, skeptic, author, and public speaker. He is currently an instructor of philosophy at Portland State University. Dr. Boghossian's primary research areas are critical thinking and moral reasoning. He joined us to discuss his newly published book, *A Manual for Creating Atheists*. This book provides practical advice on how to talk with religious people in a way that will help them question their faith and turn to greater reason and rationality.

**Daylight Atheism—Adam Lee on Atheists Talk #251, January 5, 2014**

Adam Lee is an award-winning writer. His work has appeared in *Salon*, *Freethought Today*, and *Free Inquiry*.

Adam Lee's goal is to shine bright light into the dark crevices and shadowy doctrine of organized religion. His blog, *Daylight Atheism*, aims to give atheists a voice in our society and highlight the role that secular humanism must play if we are to progress toward a brighter future.

This Sunday, Adam Lee spoke about his most recent book, *Daylight Atheism*, a summation of many of his views related to religion, atheism, and humanism.

**Refusing Atheist Money—Hemant Mehta on Atheists Talk #252, January 12, 2014**

Recently, Hemant Mehta of the *Friendly Atheist* blog had funds raised by his readers declined by a park board and library board. The library chair went so far as to call Mehta's blog "a hate group." Mehta has also encountered this problem as a board member of Foundation Beyond Belief. On this show, Mehta talked to us about atheist giving, or at least attempted atheist giving.

**Geeks Without God—Atheists Talk #253, January 19, 2014**

*Geeks Without God* is a podcast with one foot in the atheist community and the other in geekdom. The weekly podcast is hosted by three local comedians, Tim Wick, Molly Glover, and Nick Glover. The first *Geeks Without God* podcast went up on iTunes on July 9, 2012. Eighty episodes later, *Geeks Without God* has exploded in popularity and now enjoys an international following. *Geeks without God* has addressed such topics as leaving religion, morality, Christian role playing games, separation of church and state, and parenting. Wick, Glover, and Glover joined *Atheists Talk* this Sunday to discuss their podcast and some of their other activities.

The *Atheists Talk* radio show is produced by Minnesota Atheists. Recent shows were created by Brianne Bilyeu, Carl Hancock, George Kane, Scott Lohman, and Stephanie Zvan. Original music was composed and performed by Brent Michael Davids.

If you would like to participate in the creation of the show, please contact us at [radio@mnatheists.org](mailto:radio@mnatheists.org).

To learn more about *Atheists Talk*, visit us on Facebook and at [twitter.com/atheiststalk](http://twitter.com/atheiststalk).

*Atheists Talk* radio costs about \$900 per month to produce. Please consider making a denotation by using the coupon on page fifteen or by visiting [mnatheists.org/join-and-donate/radio-fund](http://mnatheists.org/join-and-donate/radio-fund).

# Cable Television Schedule

## Podcasts

*Atheists Talk* is available via both iTunes and YouTube. For more information see the Minnesota Atheist website at [mnatheists.org](http://mnatheists.org). Podcasts are made possible by Grant Hermanson.

## Cable

Bloomington Community Access Television, Channel 16. Sundays, 11:00 p.m. Sponsored by David and Joanne Beardsley.

Burnsville Community Television, Channel 14. Broadcast on an erratic schedule. Check [www.burnsville.org/index.aspx?NID=484](http://www.burnsville.org/index.aspx?NID=484) to see if any showtimes are scheduled. Sponsored by Kevin Hardisty.

Eagan Community Television, Channel 15. Broadcast on an erratic schedule. Check [www.eagan-tv.com/index.php/channels/channel-15](http://www.eagan-tv.com/index.php/channels/channel-15) to see if any showtimes are scheduled. Sponsored by Kevin Hardisty.

Minneapolis Television Network, Channel 75. Mondays, 7:00 p.m. Sponsored by Steve Petersen.

North Suburban Access Corporation, Channel 21, serving the Moundsview area. Wednesdays, 10:30 p.m. Sponsored by Shirley Moll.

Rochester Public Access, Channel 10. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, 7:30 p.m. Sponsored by Jim Salutz.

Saint Cloud Public Access, Channel 12. Thursdays, 8:30. Sponsored by Tom Stavros.

Saint Paul Neighborhood Network, Channel 15. Wednesdays, 5:00 p.m. Sponsored by Jim Wright.

Suburban Community Channels, Channel 15, serving the Maplewood area. Saturdays 8:00 p.m. Sponsored by Michael Seliga.

Valley Access Channels, Channel 18, serving the Stillwater area. Check [valleyaccesschannels.tv](http://valleyaccesschannels.tv) for showtimes. Sponsored by Lee Salisbury.

## Cable Television Report • Steve Petersen

# Greg Laden Discusses Climate Change on *Atheists Talk* Television



Greg Laden on *Atheists Talk*

Greg Laden, a prominent science blogger, was interviewed by James Zimmerman for two programs in January. “Climate Change News” reviewed current science on climate change and covered the broad foundation of research that supports climate science. “Climate Warming and Climate Change Skeptics Examined,” compared the vast quantity of data used by climate scientists to the very selective data used by climate change skeptics, most of whom are not trained in the field of climate science.

The *Atheist Talk* cable television show is created by George Kane, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Les Stordahlen, Grant Hermanson, and Art Anderson

## Commentary • Lewis Campbell

# Climate Change and Science

It is often said that the vast majority of climate scientists hold that global warming is well established and that the cause is primarily human activity. This is true as far as it goes, but it ignores the very real limitations of science.

In papers prepared for professional conferences, climate scientists express much less certainty than is commonly reported. For example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says in its 2013 report, “It is likely that anthropogenic forcings, dominated by greenhouse gases, have contributed to the warming of the troposphere since 1961.” The IPCC defines *likely* as a probability of 66-100%. This is not really very certain at all, but in science few things are certain if we bother to look at the professional literature carefully.

A number of respected scientists reject even this degree of certainty, although they are in the distinct minority. For example, both Freeman Dyson, professor emeritus of physics at the Institute for Advanced Study and a Fellow of the Royal Society, and Richard Lindzen, professor emeritus of atmospheric science at the Massachusetts

Institute of Technology and a member of the National Academy of Sciences, say that it is not possible to model global climate accurately enough to support the claims of the IPCC.

The real problem goes much deeper, though. Science is far from the pristine search for truth that we would like it to be. Scientists are subject to herd mentality and political machinations just as the rest of us are; they are as human as anyone. For example, Immanuel Velikovsky was systematically denied access to scientific journals and conferences in the late 1950s because his theories were opposed by most scientists. Yet his theories have been supported by numerous subsequent observations. The suppression of Velikovsky’s work has been thoroughly documented in *The Velikovsky Affair*, edited by Alfred De Grazia. Most likely, this was not an isolated incident.

As atheists, we should be especially wary of accepting the claim that something is true because a group of experts says it is true. Instead, we should carefully consider the evidence for ourselves and reach our own conclusions.

# 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 on atheist-related events in the wider community.

Because we are a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization, we cannot print articles that support or oppose a specific candidate, but we can print articles that support or oppose specific causes.

A good size to aim for is about 500-1000 words, and no more than about 2000 words, which comes to two pages in the newsletter. We can use text in most common formats such as Word, WordPerfect, and OpenOffice, but not Apple Pages.

We encourage you to include photos or other artwork along with your submission. To reproduce well, images should be at least 300 pixels in each dimension. We can use most common image formats, including tiff, jpg, and png.

Please send submissions to the editor, Lewis Campbell, at lfc-813@sevenpathswebdesign.com by 11:59 p.m. on February 22nd. All submissions may be edited for style and length.

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

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

# Upcoming Events

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

**Atheist Polar Plunge for the Special Olympics.** Saturday, February 8th, 1:00 p.m., Crooked Lake Park, 13180 Crooked Lake Boulevard, Coon Rapids. Join the Minnesota Atheist Polar Plunge team and raise money for the Minnesota Special Olympics. For more information, visit the Polar Plunge Tips and Policies Page at /www.plungemn.org/tipsolicies. Register or pledge to a plunger at [www.plungemn.org/team/minnesotatheists](http://www.plungemn.org/team/minnesotatheists).

After the plunge, we'll head over to Davanni's at 3430 129th Avenue Northwest, Coon Rapids.

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

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

**Burnsville Book Club.** Wednesday, February 5th. Dinner 6:30 p.m., meeting 7:00 p.m. to about 9:00 p.m., Davanni's, 14639 County Road 11, Burnsville. Meet in the party room. The book for February is *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?* Edited By Paul Kurtz.

**Cook for and Dine with Families at a Local Homeless Shelter.** Saturday, February 15th, 3:00 p.m., Family Place, 499 North Wacouta Street, Saint Paul. Space is limited, so sign up on [meetup.com](http://meetup.com) to reserve a place.

**Crafty Freethinkers North.** Sunday, February 9th, 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., Brookdale Library, Study Room I, 6125 Shingle Creek Parkway, Brooklyn Center. You may attend any part of the time.

**Dinner & A Book.** Tuesday, February 25th, 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., Davanni's, 5937 Summit Drive, Brooklyn Center. The book for February is *Deliverance at Hand!* by James Zimmerman.

**Food Packing at the Emergency Food Network Warehouse.** Thursday, February 15th, 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.,

Emergency Food Shelf Network, 8501 54th Avenue North, New Hope.

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

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

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

**Freethought Toastmasters.** First and third Mondays, 6:30 p.m., Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue West, Saint Paul. Contact George Kane, [dir2@mnatheists.org](mailto:dir2@mnatheists.org).

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

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

**Little Canada Book Club.** Second Sunday, 1:00 p.m., Caribou Coffee, 3354 Rice Street, Little Canada. The book for February is *Guilty Robots, Happy Dogs* by David McFarland.

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

**Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting.** Third Wednesday, 6:30 p.m., Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue West, Saint Paul. Open to all members. Contact George Kane, [dir2@mnatheists.org](mailto:dir2@mnatheists.org).

For all the latest meeting news, subscribe to Atheists' Weekly Email (AWE) at [mnatheists.org/atheists-weekly/subscribe-to-awe.html](http://mnatheists.org/atheists-weekly/subscribe-to-awe.html). Also visit our Meetup page at [meetup.com/minnesota-atheists](http://meetup.com/minnesota-atheists).

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in hell, we'll  
refund your  
money.**

**Join  
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#### **Minnesota Atheists Membership and Donations**

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**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 action<sup>sm</sup> 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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### Minnesota Atheists Board of Directors

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Submissions may be edited.

#### The Minnesota Atheist

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### Minnesota Atheists Goals

Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly, neighborhood atheism in order to provide a community for atheists, educate the public about atheism, and promote separation of state and church.

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### 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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### Minnesota Atheists Membership

Regular members: 215

Life members: 34

Meetup members: 1,486

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### Minnesota Atheists Honorary Members

Hector Avalos, PhD

Dan Barker

Gerald Erickson, PhD

Annie Laurie Gaylor

Dick Hewetson

Robert M. Price, PhD