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## From The Editor's Desk In Case You Need More Reasons To Avoid Crowds

*By Milo Grika*

In these very strange and straining days, many (most?) of us are itching to get back to normal and apprehensive to do so — especially as it comes to public gatherings. Social distancing is working to “flatten the curve,” and it’s clear, this is worse than the flu.

Religious institutions, on the other hand, seem to be just as itching to get together, with little or none of the anxiousness. Some believe God will protect them, some believe this is test from God, while others do it as a protest to liberal media lies and government overreach.

Hemant Mehta’s Pathos website (<https://friendlyatheist.patheos.com/>) has been reporting on the effect these protests have had on congregants and their editor was gracious in letting me republish bits of their articles. Spoiler Alert: The result is just as horrible as you imagine.

### **One rural Arkansas church becomes a hotspot.**

- Two people who showed symptoms of the virus attended this church in early March. (They’re the “primary cases.”)
- 92 people attended that church that same week.
- 35 of them soon tested positive for the virus, resulting in three deaths. (Only 45 members were actually tested, so this is a severe underestimate.)
- Another 26 people who interacted with those churchgoers — which researchers knew from contact tracing — also tested positive later on, with one of them dying.

Final tally: 61 Infections and 4 Deaths

### **Not even prophets can help us.**

Frankline Ndifor, a popular Cameroon “prophet” (and presidential candidate) who claimed he could cure COVID-19 with “laying of hands” has died of the disease after delaying getting medical treatment.

### **A new sickness spread by priests.**

A Catholic church in the Houston area is closed again after at least three

Continued on page 2

**Due to the shelter-in-place order, there will not be a public meeting in May nor possibly June.**

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**Crowds** continued from page 1

priests tested positive for COVID-19, two of whom had been active in celebrating public Masses at Holy Ghost, where there were in excess of 180 people inside the 900-capacity church.

**But California specifically made churchgoing against the law.**

A person who later learned they were positive for Covid-19 attended an illicit California religious service exposing the virus to 180 other people.

**New York Latinos are getting hit hard.**

In some majority-Latino congregations, pastors report that 25-30% of the congregation is infected. A Roman Catholic church in Queens and a Lutheran church in Manhattan have combined more than a *hundred* Covid-19 deaths.

**There's dancing in Israeli streets**

Even though it was banned, adults and children were dancing and congregating in close quarters to celebrate Lag B'Omer. Newly released numbers show that the ultra-Orthodox, who currently make up only about 12 percent of Israel's population, now account for 37 percent of the country's coronavirus deaths.

## Cryptogram

*By George Francis Kane*

Ec eo hyooefdn cy hit igycjnv kig'o znfco yg jeo

fnjids, fxc ec eo gyc hyooefdn cy kian i pxedct kig

eggyqngc ft oxssnvegp eg jeo hdiqn.

—Qivd Dyskiva

**And, of course, we'll end with a "Florida Man" story ... and some possible good news.**

**Florida Man Who Hoped God Would Defeat COVID-19 "Hysteria" Now Has COVID-19**

Brian Hitchens, a ride-share driver from Jupiter, Florida, who believed that COVID-19 was a made-up crisis, contracts the virus.

*"I'd get up in the morning and pray and trust in God for his protection, and I'd just leave it at that. There were all these masks and gloves. I thought it looks like a hysteria."*

On the plus side, he now pleads with his Facebook friends to heed warnings:



**Brian Lee Hitchens**  
about a week ago 

Many people still think that the Coronavirus is a fake crisis which at one time I did too and not that I thought it wasn't a real virus going around but at one time I felt that it was blown out of proportion and it wasn't that serious. We kept on watching the news and kept on hearing about the spreading of the Coronavirus and to be honest I didn't really think nothing of it I still thought it was being blown out of proportion until about 4 and 1/2 weeks ago when I started to ... [See More](#)

 651  15  1.8K

And with that I'll say, be safe my friends, reason will save your life!



## News and Notes Religious Disobedience

By *George Francis Kane*

The scourge of the Covid-19 pandemic is a unique, all-consuming challenge for our time. It wreaks havoc on the lives of each of us, disrupting our livelihoods and life routines, confining us in isolation with no sign on our horizon of a return to normalcy. This pandemic devastates us medically, economically and socially, and has turned our dreams for the future into a nightmare panic. It is difficult, in these times, to address ourselves to our habitual concerns.

In this dystopian reality we face another enemy that is neither environmental nor microscopic. Our national disaster is being exploited by conservative Christians to undermine the wall of separation between government and religion. We must gather ourselves from our fears to oppose the specter of Christian nationalism.

In response to today's contagion, most of the nation is in lockdown. The only people going to work as usual are those workers performing essential services. Others who can work from home, by email and online meetings, self-isolate while maintaining their income. The great majority of workers, however, in industries such as agriculture, food service and retail, have no way to participate in the productive economy. They face short-term or permanent loss of their livelihoods.

Lawmakers have treated the economic consequences of the pandemic as at least equal in importance to the medical consequences. The U.S. government has shown that it is willing to spend limitless resources to rescue and restart the economy. As of this writing, three Covid-19 bailouts have been passed by Congress and signed into law. The Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, signed on March 4, released a now-paltry \$8.3 Billion. It was soon followed by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, signed on March 18, which raised the ante to \$2 Trillion. The third tranche, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Security Act (CARES), signed on March 27, is the one with dire implications for the separation of state and

church.

The act of course contains enormous payments for the agendas of the opposing political parties. The greatest largesse naturally is earmarked for the "too large to fail" mega-corporations. Other funds are directed to smaller businesses, with the idea of sustaining not only those businesses, but also their employees.

At issue are provisions in CARES to provide small businesses and nonprofits that lose income due to the Covid-19-induced recession to receive interest-free loans from the Small Business Administration to stay in business. These loans are part of the Paycheck Protection Program and the Emergency Economic Injury Disaster Loans. These loans will later be forgiven for companies that do not lay off any employees, or hires them all back when the shut-down is over. The SBA has internal regulations that prohibit it to provide loans to "businesses principally engaged in teaching, instructing, counseling or indoctrinating religion or religious beliefs, whether in a religious or secular setting."

The hidden agenda of the Christian Nationalists was let slip by two Republican Senators. Prior to the enactment of CARES, the SBA sent letters to churches notifying them of these restrictions on SBA loans and grants. Missouri Senator Josh Hawley tweeted that "the SBA is **WRONGLY** telling churches and lenders that churches and religious nonprofits don't qualify for the new #COVID19 relief program." Then, Florida Senator Marco Rubio pledged to the Florida Family Policy Council that the CARES Act would pay churches to meet payroll and rental payments.

These threats to exploit disaster relief stimulus programs to provide government funding of religion prompted a quick response from the leading secularist organizations. A letter was jointly sent to the SBA by American Atheists, the American Humanist Association, the Center for Inquiry, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the Secular Coalition for America and others, demanding that it follow its regulations prohibiting it to fund religion.

When the public comment period ended, however, the SBA announced that it would set aside these regulations when administering the loans. Ironically, they claimed this was to "protect religious freedom."



## Atheists Talk Radio Show

By *Steve Petersen*

Podcasts available at [www.mnatheists.org](http://www.mnatheists.org) (scroll down to the podcast link), <https://www.patreon.com/AtheistTalk>.

Listen live, every Sunday morning at 9:00 a.m. Central on AM 950 KTNF or online at <http://www.am950radio.com/listen-live/> and <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/a-minnesota-transatheist/atheist-talk>. Contact us during the show with questions or comments at (952) 946-6205 or contact us anytime via [radio@mnatheists.org](mailto:radio@mnatheists.org) or Twitter at [@atheiststalk](https://twitter.com/atheiststalk).

Program sponsors: Q.Cumbers restaurant, American Atheists, and the members and donors of Minnesota Atheists. To support the program, go to [mnatheists.org](http://mnatheists.org) →Join/Donate →Radio Fund, giveMN/minnesotaatheists, <https://www.patreon.com/AtheistTalk> or donate by mail to our PO Box. All donations are tax deductible.

### Recent Programs:

Ep 526 **Antarctic Experiences with Rob Ray**  
Mar 22, 2020

Rob Ray, atheist and host of the podcasts Secular Yakking and Sparky on Ice joins us to discuss his year living and working in Antarctica. Sparky on Ice was a one of a kind podcast, recorded and published from the continent of Antarctica.

Among the many points of this conversation is a discussion of how scientists catch penguins for studying. I've linked a video, and now I only want to visit Antarctica even more than previously.

### LINKS:

Secular Yakking: <https://www.facebook.com/secularyakking/>

Sparky on Ice: <https://www.facebook.com/sparkyonice/>

Tackling a Penguin, from the BBC: <https://youtu.be/RxgScMyZDXI>

Ep 527 **Miri Mogilevsky, Managing Anxiety**  
Mar 29, 2020

These are anxious days. Whether you're looking at politics or the pandemic, there's plenty of cause for concern. If you're suddenly having problems coping, today's show is for you. My guest is Miri Mogilevsky, a clinical social worker specializing in LGBTQ and HIV-positive clients. If anyone understands anxiety, Miri does.

### Links:

Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle

"Free Guide to Living with Worry and Anxiety Amidst Global Uncertainty"

## Treasury Report February 2020

By *Chris Matthews*

### Radio Fund Donations

\$15 Anita & Eugene Martinez  
\$10 Cynthia Flaig  
\$70 via Patreon  
**\$95 Subtotal**

### General/Visibility Fund Donations

\$50 Mandy & Ross Meisner  
\$40 Ben Zvan  
\$15 Mark Nelson  
\$42 anonymous  
\$17 Amazon Smile  
\$6 PayPal Giving Fund  
**\$170 Subtotal**

### Building Fund Donations

**\$0 Subtotal**

**\$265 Total Donations**

### Expenses

\$820 Radio Show  
\$563 Newsletter  
\$240 IT General  
\$191 Other

**\$1,814 Total Expenses**

### Current Building Fund

**\$144,328**



## Kamrin's Corner The Good Place

By Kamrin Duncan

Most of us have been quarantined in our homes and have probably watched our fair share of TV at this point. So, if you haven't already, I recommend you delve into *The Good Place* an NBC sitcom featuring Kristen Bell. Upon first glance *The Good Place* seems like a show an atheist would avoid. The premise involves a woman named Eleanor (Kristen Bell) showing up in "the good place" after dying in an unfortunate accident. Eleanor soon realizes she is there by mistake as she has lived a not-so-moral life, setting off a series of events that makes up the plot of the show.

For a show being about the afterlife, *The Good Place* remains to be somewhat secular and focuses more on ethics and moral philosophy rather than religion. I have only watched the first season myself but have been impressed with the overall themes of community, being a good person, and that actions, not faith or beliefs, determine our outcomes in life. The theological elements of the show are usually thrown in for the purpose of humor and do not play a critical role in the plot line.

*The Good Place* may sound like a parallel to heaven, however it is not a biblical heaven. People earn their way into the good place by way of a point system. The more good you do on earth, the more points you earn. Your final tally determines if you go to the "good place" or the "bad place." There is no God or other deities to determine who is good or evil. The first episode makes it clear that this is not a show based on any religion. Upon entering the Good Place, Eleanor is given an introduction to the afterlife by the creator in which he says, "So who was right about all this, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims? They were

all about 5% right." The pilot makes a point to minimize all doctrine, adding to the secular tone of the show.

There is the ongoing theological/moral argument that people cannot be moral without God and morality comes from God. As atheists we know this argument is illogical and that people can be good without God. So far, *The Good Place* has emphasized this point and continues to focus on the here and now, bettering ourselves, and being good not because we want to go to heaven, but because doing so betters ourselves and the society we live in. Humans are perfectly capable of being morally good without the concept of God or doing good things for a bigger purpose. In a quote from the show one of the main character states:

"What matters isn't if people are good or bad. What matters is, if they're trying to be better today than they were yesterday. You asked me where my hope comes from? That's my answer."  
– *The Good Place*

The show itself is quite doltish in nature but offers some good laughs at the expense of religious doctrine. As an atheist there are certainly secular themes to be found and the content offers up plenty of discussion involving ethical dilemmas. You can watch *The Good Place* on <http://www.NBC.com> for free, and it is also available to watch on Netflix and Hulu.



## The “Nones” That You Know

Katharine Hepburn

By *Milo Grika*

Katharine Houghton Hepburn (May 12, 1907 – June 29, 2003) was an American actress who was a leading lady in Hollywood for more than 60 years where she received a record (for any gender) four Academy Awards for Lead Acting Performances.

*“I’m an atheist, and that’s it. I believe there’s nothing we can know except that we should be kind to each other and do what we can for each other.”*

—Katharine Hepburn

## Cryptogram Answer

It is possible to pay another man’s debts on his behalf, but it is not possible to make a guilty man innocent by suffering in his place.

—Carl Lofmark

**Paul Keller just became  
MNA’s 49th Life Member!**

## Get Famous (Sort of)

You too can become published by simply submitting something to The Minnesota Atheist newsletter. Just send your input to editor@mnatheists.org and we’ll do the rest.

## Minnesota Atheists Membership and Donations

### Membership Levels

- 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

### Donation Funds

General Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Building Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Radio Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Please make checks payable to:

**Minnesota Atheists.**

Students, please enclose a copy of your fee statement or school identification.

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City, State ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Just email newsletter    Email address \_\_\_\_\_  
(Required for student memberships and email subscriptions)

## Upcoming Events

**Atheists Talk Community Brunch** 1st Sunday of every month at 10:30 a.m.,  
Q. Cumbers, 7465 France Ave S, Edina.

**Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous** Every Sunday from 6:00–7:00 p.m. and W  
7:00–8:00 p.m.,  
Health Recovery Center building, lower floor, 3249 Hennepin Ave, Minneapolis  
Based on A.A., minus beliefs in any form of a God.

**Roseville Human Rights Happy Hour** Every Monday from 5:00-7:00  
Dr, Roseville.

**Freethought Toastmasters Meeting** 1st and 3rd Monday of e  
Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1280 Larpenteur Ave W, St  
astersclubs.org

**Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting** 1st Wednesday of  
Amherst H Wilder Foundation, 451 Lexington Pkwy  
All Minnesota Atheists members are welcome.

**Godless Gamers** Every Thursday at 6:00 p.m.  
Fantasy Flight Games Center, 1975 Coun

**Freethought Dinner Social** 2nd and 4th Monday of every month from 5:00–7:00 p.m.,  
Davanni's, 8605 Lyndale Ave S, Bl

**Freethinking Females** 2nd Monday of every month from 6:00–7:00 p.m.,  
Claddagh Irish Pub, 7890

And 4th Monday of every month from 6:00–7:00 p.m.,  
Sweeney's Saloon, 1000

**NOTE:** Two different events are male dominated with a females-only event.  
Shattering the

**Volunteer** 3rd Thursday of every month at 1:00 p.m.,  
The P

**Freethought Group** 3rd Thursday of every month from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in the  
Larpenteur Estates apartment complex in St. Paul.

**Brunch** 2nd Saturday of every month at 10:30 a.m.,  
W 66th St, Richfield.

**Beliefs of Deities** Last Saturday of every month at noon,  
Men

For more events, visit [www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists](http://www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists)



**All events are canceled until further notice.**  
[Everyone is encouraged to have virtual gettogethers]

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Minnesota Atheists

### Positive Atheism in action 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

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##### Associate President

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#### Minnesota Atheists Goals

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

#### Minnesota Atheists Media

##### Public Relations Chair

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#### Minnesota Atheists Affiliations

Atheist Alliance of America

Atheist Alliance International

American Atheists

The American Humanist Association

Council for Secular Humanism

The International Humanist and

Ethical Union

Secular Coalition for America

#### Minnesota Atheists Membership

Regular members: 183

Life members: 49

Meetup members: 3,045

#### Minnesota Atheists Honorary Members

Hector Avalos, PhD

Dan Barker

Gerald Erickson, PhD

Annie Laurie Gaylor

Dick Hewetson

Robert M. Price, PhD



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