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Dr. Karen Shragg: From Worship to Wonder February Public Meeting

Dr. Karen I. Shragg, a proud atheist, has just published her second book with Freethought House press. *Change Our Stories Change Our World* is all about what is behind the momentum to the change we need. One of those six stories that weighs us down is the chapter called "From Worship to Wonder." Worship handicaps our ability to be flexible with the new realities created by modern consumption and driven by our overpopulation problem. We are still paying attention to rules set down when there were billions fewer of us. The other chapters describe our failure to provide enough for others, as we continue to mistakenly believe there are unlimited resources and that greed should drive our economy.

Dr. Shragg is a retired nature center director who is now running her own LLC, MUSEC (Move Upstream Environmental Consulting) while continuing her advocacy for overpopulation to be included in the progressive movement. She has been on the Minnesota Atheists program before and spoken to several free thinking/humanists groups.



Sunday, February 21, 2021

1:00–1:15 p.m.: Zoom Opens, join us and work out any tech issues

1:15–1:45 p.m.: Business Meeting and Board Nominations

1:45–2:00 p.m.: Break

2:00–3:30 p.m.: Program

Online

You can join via a desktop browser or on the Zoom app on your smartphone by using this url: <https://zoom.us/j/97047403073> passcode: 849621

You can alternatively telephone in. Just call this number and enter the meeting number:

Dial: 1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 970 4740 3073

Passcode: 849621

One tap mobile: +13126266799,,97047403073#,,,,,0#,,849621#

We hope you can join us! The meeting will open at 1:00 p.m. to give people time to get connected and test out the sound.

Nominations for the 2021 Board of Directors

By Chris Matthews

Minnesota Atheists holds elections for the Board of Directors every year. The board of directors consists of president, associate president, chair, associate chair, secretary, treasurer, and three directors at large. All positions are up for election each year. If you are interested in joining the board or would like to know more about a board position, please contact any current board member and/or attend the January Business Meeting.

To be eligible for office, the nominee must

have been a dues-paying member for at least one year prior to the date of assuming office, except for director-at-large nominees who must have been a member for six months prior instead. If you're interested in being on the board but do not meet these qualifications, consider getting your dues in now so you may qualify next year.

The elections will take place on February 21st during the February Business Meeting at 1:15 p.m. This meeting will be held virtually due to COVID. The new board will take effect on March 1, 2021.

Please see the nominee statements starting on page 4.

MNA Website Relaunch The Countdown Has Begun

By Stephanie Zvan

In late 2019, Minnesota Atheists announced a project to update our website and migrate it to a new platform. We've been working since then to design a site that meets the needs of our broad community and to transfer content in a more accessible form. We're excited to announce that

we're nearly ready to launch the new site. Coming soon, perhaps even before this newsletter is distributed, the new website will be active.

You won't have to do anything different to access the site. Just go to mnatheists.org as usual. Once you're there, however, we hope you'll find the site easier to use. It should be easier to renew your membership, easier to find up-to-date information on our activities, easier to contact us with questions.

Cryptogram

By George Francis Kane

Thwjdkoukf cj wl udceoue tujeasux tf jzdupjececal al
bakkal julju.

Patupe Vpuul Clvupjahh



News and Notes Congressional Wish List

By *George Francis Kane*

On the Sunday before the national election, Ryan Jayne, a Freedom from Religion Foundation staff attorney, spoke at the monthly meeting of their Duluth Chapter, Lake Superior Freethinkers. The event was open to the world on the internet. One of his conclusions is that for 20 years, the Supreme Court has been issuing decisions that have steadily battered Jefferson's wall of separation between state and church. With Trump's appointment of three new justices, the threat from Christian Nationalism is greater than it has been in many decades.

After Ryan's presentation, he held a Question-and-Answer session. I pointed out that the legal foundations of the separation of state and church are the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses of the First Amendment, which in this century has failed to much influence the Court. What new constitutional amendment, I asked, would be needed to reestablish separation as it had been understood previously?

He responded that that would be to require the tests for an Establishment Clause violation that were established in the Twentieth Century. That would be the Neutrality Test, that government may not favor one religion over another, or religion over non-religion; the Endorsement Test that a government action may not convey either endorsement or disapproval of religion; and three-pronged Lemon Test.

Jayne cautioned, though, that a constitutional amendment is so difficult to pass as to render an effort a practical impossibility. He thought that we could rescue the Establishment Clause by simple legislation. Now, since the election has established Democratic Party control over the Executive and Legislative branches, that might be feasible. He said that he is working with the lawyers of the other national secularist organizations to come up with a legislative "wish list," and could support legislation of this sort. The products of that cooperation can be seen in the similarity of goals on the websites of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, American Athe-

ists and the Secular Coalition for America.

Here are some of the most important goals they have in common.

Executive Actions

Reverse Trump Executive Orders and agency regulations that undermined the separation of State and Church, such as the Muslim Ban (Executive Order 13769.) Sign an Executive Order to guide agencies as they adopt policies that will restore and protect religious liberty and revoke policies that justify discrimination. Terminate Trump's commissions such as the Religious Liberty Task Force at the Department of Justice, the Conscience and Religious Freedom Division at the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Commission on Unalienable Rights at the Department of State.

Legislative Bills to Enact into Law

- The Do No Harm Act, which prohibits the application of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) to federal laws that protect against discrimination.
- The Equality Act, which includes sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity among the prohibited categories of discrimination or segregation.
- The No Ban Act, which imposes limitations on the President's authority to suspend or restrict aliens from entering the United States.
- The Scientific Integrity Act, which prohibits government oversight of scientific research to engage in scientific or research misconduct or to manipulate technical findings.
- The Stop Female Genital Mutilation Act, strengthening U.S. opposition to Female Genital Mutilation worldwide.
- The Coronavirus Oversight and Recovery Ethics Act, which establishes oversight in the disbursement and supervision of COVID-19 relief funds.

The Congressional wish list also includes items not in legislative bills already introduced.

- Have a secular Congressional invocation.
- End mandatory swearing to God in all congressional oaths.
- Advocate for the inclusion of protections for atheists and other religious minorities seeking asylum in any new legislation regarding asylum policy.

Nominee Statements Board of Directors

Ben Blanchard President

In my candidate statement last year, I wrote with hope about what could happen in 2020. Unfortunately the year became more difficult than anyone could have expected.

Fortunately, even though we are not yet through this difficult period, we can see a brighter day on the horizon. While I'm not sure exactly what Minnesota Atheists will look like for the next several months, nor the more distant future, I am sure that we are stronger together. I look forward to working hard with our board and membership at large to forge the best 2021 we can.



Stephanie Zvan Associate President

I believe in working to forge and strengthen relationships with national organizations in the secular movement and leveraging some of those relationships to help MNA meet its local goals. I'm working with the Center for Inquiry to push Minnesota to finally allow marriage officiants from atheist and secular humanist groups who don't identify as religious. Working with Secular Woman (where I'm also a board member) and Black Nonbelievers, I've helped organize two Secular Women Work conferences in Minnesota in partnership with MNA. I'm excited to work on other partnerships that can help us do more without consuming all our resources.



Heather Hegi Chair

I have been a dedicated volunteer and member of the board of Minnesota Atheists since 2012. I am happy to serve the board as Chair as it's the position I have held for the majority of my time on the board. I look forward to being a part of this year's board as we work as a team to keep Minnesota Atheist relevant and active through this pandemic. I am a passionate atheist who sees religious thinking as harmful to society, suppressing science and critical reasoning. Since religions are widespread, I think this organization is an important voice of reason.



Kamrin Duncan Associate Chair

This will be my 3rd year on the board and I am now moving from a Director-at-Large into the Associate Chair position. I write a monthly article for the MNA newsletter called Kamrin's Corner and hosted a couple of blood drives this past year. I am always amazed with the amount of work that MNA does for Minnesota and the atheist community, and although 2020 was a bit different, MNA has continued to provide a safe community for atheists and secular-minded individuals despite the limitations of social distancing. We are still connecting through social media, online events, and safely-distanced community engagement. I am excited for the opportunity to continue working with the MNA board and to see what the future holds as we head into the new year.



Chris Matthews

Treasurer

I am a Minnesota native and a life member of Minnesota Atheists. I personally value positive atheism and the separation of government and religion. I have served on the board as treasurer since 2011. I am proud to help provide the infrastructure that the organization needs to pursue goals that we collectively find worthwhile, and I look forward to continuing in this role.



Alyssa Ehni

Secretary

I am excited to have been nominated to continue serving Minnesota Atheists as Secretary. I so enjoy this community and the many wonderful people in it. The past year was difficult and I have seen (and been on the receiving end of) our community supporting one another. Continuing to foster fellowship and build our community in the ways we are currently able are important tasks for the coming year.



Hertzey Hertz

Director at Large

Many years ago I found myself looking for an atheist social circle. I had read lots of blogs and even started to listen to a couple of podcasts. But I missed having events to go to on a regular basis. I found, through Meetup, the Minnesota Atheists, and specifically the Newbie Night and Godless Gamers. Through these events, I found many friends and events to occupy my extroverted self. As I enjoyed the events, I became curious about the leadership and started to attend board meetings as a general member. It did not take long for me to become a Director at Large. During my tenure I held multiple roles on the board, planned the Solstice Dinner of 2016 and 2018,



and was head of the radio show. After a sabbatical, I have accepted the nomination for Director at Large. I am very excited to see how I can help our community grow and flourish. Thank you!

Dane Haverly

Director at Large

Mike Trombley

Director at Large

My view is that many people are de facto atheists, whether formal members of MN Atheists (MNA) or non-believers “on their own.” I think of MNA as a group where the broad societal expectation of “we’re religious so you must be also” is gone. It’s a relief to be around or socialize with others without pretending to be something I am are not.



I have put in many hours of community service volunteering since retiring a few years ago. It seems true that religious groups are often the primary means to get some specific charity action accomplished or launched. I’ve often felt obligated to remain a closeted atheist while helping others within a religious-based charity. As a Director of MNA, I’d like to help make it easier for any and all atheists to feel comfortable with their non-belief in society. In particular, I’d like to initiate some additional ways to show that a non-belief doesn’t diminish our interest or value in society. Lastly, I’d like to add my voice to many others, stating the perceived rights of the religious do NOT override the rights of the non-religious. Religion and government should never mix.



Kamrin's Corner

The Invention of Lying

By Kamrin Duncan

This is an older movie, but if you haven't seen "The Invention of Lying" I would highly recommend taking the time to do it now. The Invention of Lying has been a hit amongst atheists and criticized by Christians since it made its debut back in 2009.

The premise involves a world in which nobody can tell a lie, until one day, the main character Mark, realizes he possesses the ability to tell lies. Of course, no one recognizes that he is lying because no one has ever told a lie. Mark begins to use lies for personal gain. He pursues his dream job, money, and the woman he wants to marry through lies. Now the interesting part of this film is when Mark decides to invent a lie to explain the afterlife, unknowingly creating "religion."

The film pokes fun at religion and despite being a romantic comedy, the film makes several points that are relevant to atheism. The whole premise of religion being invented by a lie is humorous in itself, but there are deeper things to reflect on during the film. In one scene Mark tells his dying mother that she will go to heaven after she passes even though he knows this is a lie. He does this to comfort her and to give her peace as she dies. Many of us have told a lie to protect or comfort someone. It's easy to see how people can fall prey to the idea of an afterlife. In a way it is a lie people tell themselves, maybe as a way to cope, to avoid responsibility, or to hope for better things. Regardless of how a lie benefits one in the moment, there are always consequences.

(<https://www.warnerbros.com/movies/invention-lying>)



Treasury Report

September, October, & November 2020

By Chris Matthews

Atheists Talk Fund Donations

\$0 Subtotal

General/Visibility Fund Donations

\$200 Art Kallenbach
 \$200 George Kane
 \$150 Mandy & Ross Meisner
 \$100 Keith Thorkelson
 \$100 Ben Zvan
 \$50 Thomas Bauch
 \$30 Geri Jensen
 \$25 Frank Neubecker
 \$25 Rajiv Vaidyanathan
 \$15 David Monson
 \$68 anonymous (2)
 \$60 YourCause
 \$29 AmazonSmile
 \$11 PayPal Giving Fund

\$1,063 Subtotal

Building Fund Donations

\$0 Subtotal

\$1,063 Total Donations

Expenses

\$529 Newsletter
 \$65 IT General
 \$241 Misc

\$835 Total Expenses

Current Building Fund

\$145,550

Wish List continued from page 3

The Courts

All secularist organizations are calling for the nomination of judges who will support the principle of separation of government and religion. It will take many years to reverse the harm to secular government that President Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell have achieved by packing the federal judiciary with judges hostile to this principle, however. Nevertheless, at last there is hope.

The “Nones” That You Know

Andy Rooney

By *Milo Grika*

Andrew Aitken Rooney (January 14, 1919 – November 4, 2011) was an American radio and television writer who was best known for his weekly broadcast “A Few Minutes with Andy Rooney,” on the CBS News program 60 Minutes from 1978 to 2011.

“I am an atheist, I don’t understand religion at all. I’m sure I’ll offend a lot of people by saying this, but I think it’s all nonsense.”

— Andy Rooney

Upcoming Events

All in-person events are canceled until further notice. Virtual get-togethers are encouraged!

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 \$ _____

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State ZIP _____

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

Cryptogram Answer

Blasphemy is an epithet bestowed by superstition on common sense.

Robert Green Ingersoll

Get Famous (Sort of)

You too can become published by simply submitting something to The Minnesota Atheist newsletter:

Have a blog?

Let us reprint it.

Have an opinion?

Let us hear it.

Just send your input to editor@mnatheists.org and we’ll do the rest.

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.

Minnesota Atheists

PO Box 120304

New Brighton, MN 55112

8 The Minnesota Atheist

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

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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:

3,554

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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