

Communities Without Churches April Public Meeting



In April we are excited to spotlight Minnesota Atheists' President Stephanie Zvan giving, for the first time in the United States, her presentation "Communities Without Churches: What Fandom Can Teach Organized Atheism."

When people leave religion, they often leave behind a religious community. The secular movement has sometimes struggled to build new communities for them. Science fiction and fantasy fandom has been creating largely god-less communities for decades. What lessons should we take from them?

Stephanie is an accomplished writer, speaker, educator, interviewer, and organizer. In addition to being the President of Minnesota Atheists, she is on the board of Secular Woman. She helped run three regional conferences for Minnesota Atheists and co-founded Secular Women Work with Monette Richards. Secular Women Work has Kickstarted and run two conferences to date and organizes workshops for Skepticon. She's also helped run online conferences for Freethought Blogs and The Orbit.

Stephanie speaks on science, skepticism, and community in a number of venues, including science fiction and fantasy conventions. She participated in SkepchickCon, the skeptic track at CONvergence, from inception to end and hosted conversations on communicating science and critical thinking at the ScienceOnline unconference. She's presented talks and workshops at skeptic and atheist conferences in the U.S. and Canada. She's interviewed guests for Atheists Talk radio and television and The Humanist Hour podcast.

In this Issue

Communities Without Churches 1
2022 Day of Reason 2
Cryptogram 2
News and Notes 3
February Meeting Review 4
Treasury Report 4
The Establishment Clause 5
Upcoming Events 6
The "Nones" That You Know 7

Sunday, April 24, 2022

1:00–1:15 p.m.: Zoom opens to work out any issues
1:15–1:45 p.m.: Business Meeting and board elections
1:45–2:00 p.m.: Break
2:00–3:30 p.m.: Program

Virtually at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/99846973161?pwd=U0dKZD-IUQXFGUy9uQUpKYjFzdHYxdz09>

Or call in at: 13126266799,,99846973161#,,,,*487362#

2022 Day of Reason

Theme: Follow the Science

Hard to believe that the last Day of Reason was in 2019. But we are so excited to finally be bringing our voices and message back to the capital!

We encourage attendees to bring hand-held signs indicating the group they represent, or their passion for science-based legislation. Signs must have a positive message and match our theme.

If you represent an atheist, humanist or freethought organization in Minnesota let us know if you would like to speak. If you know of

a religious group that supports secular government and separation of government and religion, we also would like to know so that we can invite them too.



Cryptogram

By *George Francis Kane*

Bo b latalpl, ogj Hutnoaopoaut fpbsbtojnn ogbo
 fuxjstljto lbq tuo hujshj btqutj ou npvvuso us
 vbsoahavboj at sjkafaut us aon jzjshanj, us
 uogjsyanj ou bho at b ybq ygahg jnobckangjn
 sjkafaut us sjkafaupn ebaog, us ojtin ou iu nu.

Dpnoahj Btogutq Mjttjiq,

ysaoatf ogj ijhanaut ue *Kjj x. Yjanlbt*



News and Notes

The War of Words

By *George Francis Kane*

In early February, the Star Tribune ran an AP article headlined “Millions in tax dollars flow to anti-abortion centers”

detailing how, while Republican-controlled legislatures have done everything they could to make abortion unavailable, state funding of anti-abortion centers has spiked. The article revealed that these anti-abortion centers do not provide medical care but instead provide misleading and incorrect information about abortion and contraception.

In a past column, I wrote about a team to write letters-to-the-editor of the Star Tribune. This was, of course, grist for the team’s mill. I sent in a denunciation of state funding of religious projects. I noted that the churches that created these anti-abortion centers sought “to impose church dogma on the population of the states with the force of law.” I capped it with a quote from James Madison’s “Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments” that denounced legislators who use religion as an instrument of civil policy.

A week later the Star Tribune published a rebuttal to my letter, under the headline “Dogma as deflection.” The writer claims that my denunciation of dogma driving civil law is just a distraction, apparently because dogma is just a belief, and everyone believes things. He writes “(i)f his logic is to be accepted, then efforts to support Planned Parenthood (hundreds of times larger than taxpayer support of pro-life work) and other pro-abortion organizations by people of faith ... must also be seen as an imposition of ‘church dogma’ on a secular society.” Of course Planned Parenthood has never received state funding for any abortion, but only Medicare payments for medical services at the same rate as every other provider. Neither has it ever received state funding to persuade people to have abortions, which would be the correlate he claims to the

anti-abortion centers. There is no equivalence to whatsoever to “imposing dogma with the force of law.”

The writer admits that his opposition to abortion is based on “faith that human life is special and sacred everywhere at all times.” The anti-abortion side wants to use the force of law to deny to women the right of abortion. The other side does not try to impose anything on anyone.

The author accuses me of leaps in logic yet asserts that his “understanding of the issue comes from several points: settled scientific fact, reasoning that the only logical point of protection is conception.” That “settled scientific fact,” he tells us, is that “from the moment of conception the baby is a unique and individual human being.” Most Americans, however, do not agree with him that a microscopic cell is deserving of the rights and protections that we accord each other. The “point of protection,” as he calls it, is not a scientific question, but a matter entirely of valuation. His argument necessarily rests on a religious dogma to which most Americans do not

(O)pposition to abortion is based on “faith that human life is special and sacred everywhere at all times.”

subscribe, but which certain state governments would impose on everyone.

I saw this letter online, the night before it was published. I immediately wrote all of this to the other members of the team, and to a few other activists. I thought that it would be best for the advocacy of secularism if the response came not from me but from others. I have not seen the Strib run a “back-and-forth” between letter writers, and were they to do so it would be looked upon as a personal feud. If others write, they could expose the weakness of his arguments and show that the separation of state and church has widespread support.

I was disappointed that I did not receive a response from anyone on the team. I’m sure that they all have valid reasons for not getting involved with this particular letter, but this exposes one critical weakness of the project: the team is too small to make the case that secularism is an important issue for a significant share of the newspaper readers.

If any of you want to join our team, please let me know, at George.Francis.Kane@gmail.com.

February Meeting Review

Debbie Goddard

By Joe Smith

After listening to Debbie Goddard's presentation at the February public meeting, I found I needed some time to absorb her points. My initial reaction to her presentation was that it seemed geared toward organizers and not towards general members. However, after some thought on the presentation, I found some common ground with the second of her points: what does it really mean to be an atheist? If I remember correctly, the only real test to be an atheist is if one agrees that there is no incontrovertible evidence for the existence of god(s). I took her point and looked again at Minnesota Atheists public policy positions and asked myself, "Are these the policy positions of a pro-atheist group, or these the policy positions of an anti-religion group?" While that question is something I still need to ponder, an additional thought occurred to me concerning what I call a peer-group litmus test. I think this can be best explained by my example.

When I first joined Minnesota Atheists, I brought my wife to a meeting. After the meeting we were engaged in conversation with one of the board members, and it seemed that they were running down a mental list of questions on various topics. Questions like do you believe in alternative medicine, global warming, or a spiritual aspect to life. Afterwards my wife asked me what any of those topics had to do with believing that there is no god? That questioning had left her with a cold feeling about the group, and in the end my wife decided not to be a member.

Per Debbie Goddard, if atheism is to grow as a movement, then atheists of all stripes need to feel welcome. I don't think it is only the public policy positions which make people feel welcome, I think it is also the ability to make people feel that they, and their opinions, are respected which makes people feel welcome. This is where I may have a short coming. As an atheist I have learned to articulate vehemently my position on a variety of topics connected tangentially to a belief in god. Maybe I need to dial that back a little when it comes to potential new members to Minnesota Atheists as we are already in agreement on the central topic about god.

Treasury Report

December, 2021–January, 2022

By Chris Matthews

General/Visibility Fund Donations

\$200 Art Kallenbach
\$200 Ross Meisner
\$165 David Bicking
\$100 George Kane
\$100 Michael Ryan
\$100 Keith Thorkelson
\$40 Ben Zvan
\$28 Frank Neubecker
\$25 Vicky Hagens
\$15 Tim and Joanne Dunnigan
\$15 Marcia Hunter
\$15 Duane Stave
\$40 YourCause
\$25 MightyCause
\$8 PayPal Giving Fund
\$10 anonymous

\$1,086 Subtotal

Building Fund Donations

\$0 Subtotal

\$1,086 Total Donations

Expenses

\$530 Newsletter
\$404 IT
\$411 Misc

\$1,345 Total Expenses

Current Building Fund

\$146,176



The Establishment Clause SCOTUS Takes Aim at the Wrong Basket

by George Francis Kane

Women's basketball fans celebrated the South Carolina Gamecocks' 64–49 thrashing of the UConn Huskies to win the NCAA women's basketball championship. I stopped following the tournament when Stanford was knocked out, and knew nothing of the South Carolina powerhouse. I was dismayed to read that the team's coach, Dawn Staley, is notorious for using her prominent position to promote her Christian religion.

She posts a "gameday devotional" on her social media, which she reads to her players. In her posts she portrays her team as representing Jesus, such as calling the championship game "Jesus versus Connecticut." The Freedom from Religion Foundation last year complained to the university that Coach Staley using her position in a public institution for proselytizing violates the Establishment Clause of the first amendment.

Coaches of school sports teams often have a major effect on impressionable young players. It is important to them to win their coach's approval, as they may feel that it may affect their playing time. The courts have therefore consistently held that public high school coaches may not lead team prayers.

For that reason, it is surprising that the Supreme Court has taken up the case of *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, about a football coach who led team prayers at the 50-yard line after games. What more is there to decide? Thirty years ago, the Court ruled in *Lee v. Weisman* that a public school's actions must not "coerce anyone to support or participate in a religious exercise." It has also ruled that teachers and coaches are representatives of government when they are engaged in their school duties and are under Establishment Clause restrictions. Also, that children are especially susceptible to religious coercion, so their religious freedom must be most strictly protected.

What is more, the court should dismiss the

case as moot. When Coach Joe Kennedy was fired by the school district in 2015, he moved across the nation from Washington to Florida. Kennedy's claim that if the Court reinstates him, he will return to Washington state for a job that pays just \$5,304 a year is transparent posturing. His only objective is to get the ban on public school-led prayer overturned. Kennedy has become a beloved martyr on the Christian right and was extolled by President Trump in a speech on Religious Freedom Day in 2020.

Dishonesty runs throughout this case. Kennedy claims that he wants only to be able to kneel in prayer, silently and alone, for a few seconds, but he has rejected all offers by the Bremerton School District to accommodate him. They offered to let him use a schoolroom after the game to pray, or to wait until after the stadium emptied to pray at the 50-yard line. But no offer was enough for him that was less than leading his team in prayer in full public display. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals called his claims of religious suppression a "deceitful narrative."

(N)o offer was enough for him that was less than leading his team in prayer in full public display.

Let's return to the question of why the Supreme Court has granted a hearing to such a weak

case. Since it has been reconstituted with a 6–3 conservative majority, the Court has demonstrated the intent to reverse a half-century of clear and consistent Establishment Clause precedent. The common understanding of it is that government must stay out of religion, that government must be neutral and favor no religious views over any other. But in *Township of Greece v. Galloway*, the court upheld invocations at town council meetings, even though they were nearly exclusively Christian. In *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*, the court ruled that state benefits that are offered to any group cannot be denied to religious organizations, making taxpayers support religious instruction. *American Legion v. American Humanist Association* requires taxpayers to maintain a religious monument. In all these cases, the court is requiring active government support of religion.

The court is selecting cases that enable it to erode the separation of church and state and require government to support religion.

6 The Minnesota Atheist Upcoming Events

Online Freethought Toastmasters Meeting 1st and 3rd Monday of every month from 6:30–8:00 p.m.
freethought.toastmastersclubs.org

Online Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting email chair@mnatheists.org for the meeting link.

Freethinking Females

Online 2nd Monday of every month at 7:00 p.m.

In Person Last Monday of every month at 5:30 p.m., Sweeney's Saloon, 96 North Dale Street, St. Paul.

NOTE: The first is online and the second is in person. Shattering the myth that atheist groups are male dominated with a females-only event.

Online Blasphemer's Brunch 2nd Saturday of every month at 10:30 a.m.

Bowling for Deities Last Saturday of every month at noon, Memory Lanes, 2520 26th Ave S, Minneapolis.

In-person Trivia Night Every Sunday from 5:30–8:00 p.m.
Venn Brewing, 3550 E 46th St Suite 140, Minneapolis

M.A.S.H! (MN Atheists Social Hour!) Every Wednesday from 5:30–6:30 p.m.

Online In Depth – Discussion and Debate Every 4th Tuesday of the month from 3:00–4:00 p.m.

For more events and instructions for connecting to online events, visit:

www.meetup.com/MinnesotaAtheists



The “Nones” That You Know

David Cross

By *Milo Grika*

David Cross (born April 4, 1964) is an American stand-up comedian, actor, director, and writer known for his stand-up performances, the HBO sketch comedy series Mr. Show, and voice-over roles in the Kung Fu Panda film franchise.

“I was born Jewish, but I am an atheist. I don’t believe in God.”

— David Cross

This one is more fun!:

“When the Bible was written, then rewritten, and then edited, then re-edited, then translated from dead languages, and then re-retranslated, then re-edited, then re-re-re-edited, then re-translated, and then given to kings for them to take their favorite parts out, then re-edited, then

retranslated, and then re-edited, then given to the pope for him to approve, then re-retranslated, then re-re-re-written, then rewritten, re-edited, retranslated, re-edited again...all based on stories that were told orally 30 to 90 years after they happened...to people who didn’t know how to write...so...”

— David Cross

Cryptogram Answer

At a minimum, the Constitution guarantees that government may not coerce anyone to support or participate in religion or its exercise, or otherwise to act in a way which establishes a state religion or religious faith, or tends to do so.

Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing the decision of *Lee v. Weisman*

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.

Minnesota Atheists
PO Box 120304
New Brighton, MN 55112

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State ZIP _____

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

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
Open Position
pr@mnatheists.org

**AtheistsWeekly Email
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Cable TV 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: 191
Life members: 50
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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