

Can We Survive Our Own Evolution? February Public Meeting

Evolution is often seen as a linear progression in which background conditions don't contribute much to the process itself. In this model, we might assume that the causes of both evolutionary novelty and extinction are mostly consistent over time.

However, in this talk, Greg Laden will reframe our view of evolution to reveal likely complexities and interdependencies not usually considered.

With this somewhat novel approach in mind, he will explore the hypothesis that recently evolved features found in *Homo sapiens* will make it impossible for us to manage the biosphere in a way that will sustain us.

Are we doomed? Or is there any hope? Come help us celebrate the month Charles Darwin was born with this thought-provoking talk on evolution.

*Dr. Greg Laden is a biological anthropologist who has contributed to our understanding of the ape-human split and the rise of the genus *Homo*. He earned his MA and PhD from Harvard, with work on the Efe Hunter Gatherers of the*



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Sunday, February 18, 2024

1:00–1:15 p.m.: Social
1:15–1:45 p.m.: Business Meeting
1:45–2:00 p.m.: Break, Presenter
Set-Up, Social Time
2:00–3:30 p.m.: Program
3:30–4:00 p.m.: Social Time
4:00 p.m.: Leave for dinner

Dinner:
Los Ocampo
615 University Avenue West
St. Paul, MN 55103
(kitty-corner from the library)
<https://www.losocampo.com>

Rondo Community Library
461 Dale St N
St Paul, MN 55104
(There is free underground parking
off of University Ave.)

Online:
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82344512218?pwd=VWNDclk2b-VUxeWJdTnAzU3BhQnNRdz09>

Or call in:
+13092053325,,82344512218#,,,*6
76832#

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2 The Minnesota Atheist

Public Meeting continued from page 1

Ituri Forest (PR Congo), and has taught at Harvard, Boston University, the University of Minnesota, and elsewhere.

During our Minnesota Atheists Business Meeting we will hold our annual election for the MNA Board of Directors. The positions are: President,

Associate President, Chair, Associate Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, and three Directors-at-Large.

Voting Alternatives: National Popular Vote (NPV) Interstate Compact & Ranked Choice Voting (RCV)

March Public Meeting — Sunday, March 17, 2024

Cryptogram

By George Francis Kane

Puge wgvfj eufw jn mglqfinkj aj euge jfdkzgi

Ukwglajej znnv ckje zavf tnk glm wf. Jnwf nr eufw

dnkzm of tnki ofje riaflmj paeunke tnk vlnpalq euge

euft gif Ukwglajej.... Ln nlf aj jgrf kleaz Dnlqifjj

jfej kb gl Glea-Jfdkzgi Ukwglajw Dnwwaeeff en qfe

ge euf ine. Paelfjjfj ugxf en of dgzzfm, glm euf t

ugxf en lgwf lgwfj.

Ukwniaje Gie Okdupgzm, al g dnzkwl eaezfm

“Uklealq Mnpl euf Jfdkzgi Ukwglajej.”



News and Notes Behind the School Wall

By *George Francis Kane*

The legal case that I plan to follow most closely this year is *Oklahoma Parent Legislative Action Committee v. Statewide*

Virtual Charter School Board, although it is highly unlikely to reach the Supreme Court this term. At issue is St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Charter School, which will become the nation's first entirely state-funded religious school. (It has other online public schools) as to create a legal case to bring before the Roberts Court that could end the separation of church and state in public funding of education.

The Archdiocese of Oklahoma City and the Diocese of Tulsa chartered St. Isidore to provide tuition-free online education to students residing everywhere in Oklahoma. Charter schools are required by Oklahoma statute to be non-sectarian, but in its application, the archdiocese said that it would be a Catholic School and part of the "evangelizing mission of the Church." Religion will be intrinsic to its instruction in all subjects.

St. Isidore also will require religious exemptions to state requirements in employment, student admissions and discipline. Future church schools that apply for state sponsorship as charter schools will surely also demand these exceptions if St. Isidore succeeds.

If court decisions allow public funding of religious schools, the legislatures in conservative states will be enlisted to bail out financially troubled religious school systems. Catholic and Protestant churches are in financial difficulty nationally after long declines in church attendance and donations.

The decision by the Virtual School Charter Board to approve St. Isidore was quickly challenged by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Education Law Center and the Freedom from Religion Foundation, on behalf of the Oklahoma Parent Legislative Action Committee

(OKPLAC) and nine parents, faith leaders, and public-school advocates who support the separation of church and state. The Statewide Virtual Charter School Board will be represented gratis by the incredibly well-funded Alliance Defending Freedom. In a press release announcing the filing of the suit, plaintiffs stated:

The board is ignoring the legal and public education experts, religious freedom advocates, and Oklahoma taxpayers who all oppose St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School – a public school that plans to discriminate against students, families, and staff and indoctrinate students into one religion. Our plaintiffs are fighting the approval of St. Isidore in court because they are committed to public schools that welcome and serve all Oklahomans.

If St. Isidore survives this and other legal challenges, the Supreme Court may still intervene to require legislatures in other states to approve taxpayer funding for Christian schools. The Supreme Court's 2022 decision in *Carson v. Makin* has already prohibited states with voucher programs to exclude church schools from those programs. A 2017 National Bureau of Economic Research study called these vouchers "a dominant source of funding for many churches." St. Isidore will add charter schools to the legal mix as a new source of revenue.

Robert Franklin, the Chair of the Statewide Virtual Charter School Board who opposed the school's application, warned that "[t]he game is to get this to the Supreme Court. If the court approves this, it changes everything" about public education in America. Considering that St. Isidore has not even opened, it could take years for the court system to decide whether states will be forbidden, permitted, or required to provide public funding for religious schools through their charter school systems.

Conservatives are optimistic that this legal test will be successful and want to rush it to the Supreme Court to take advantage of its current conservative make-up. Legal groups supporting church/state separation are trying to avoid cases

Nominee Statements Board of Directors

Ben Blanchard President

Greetings!

I am honored to be nominated for President of Minnesota Atheists, and I am excited about what we can accomplish this year. Having spent more than a decade in leadership roles in the secular world, I firmly believe the role we play is important, both for our members and in the greater community. This year I look forward to focusing on growing our membership (a goal deferred due to covid) both in number and heterogeneity of members. I also want to focus on developing more leaders in our community, so that we can accomplish more as an organization. Thank you.



Heather Hegi Associate President

I am honored to be nominated for Associate President. I have been on the board and volunteering my time to Minnesota Atheists since 2012. I think it is important for atheists to organize as a force and let our voices be known. Religion is still prevalent in our society, and it affects things such as how we respond to global climate change and how “morality” is imposed on us when it comes to LGBTQ rights, the right to an abortion, and Medical Aid in Dying. When one views this world to be a steppingstone to eternal life rather than the one and only life we have, the seriousness of our reality is degraded. I want Minnesota Atheists to continue to be a voice of reason, educating the public about atheism, while providing a community for atheists in Minnesota.



Michelle Morlan Chair

I am excited to have the opportunity to continue volunteering on the board of Minnesota Atheists for another year. I joined in 2021 as a director at large and spent the last year as associate president. I have really enjoyed working with the organization and have many thoughts for the future! I am a STEM professional, and I’m passionate about how critical science and reason are to society at large.



August Berkshire Associate Chair

The role of the chair is to set the agenda for the Minnesota Atheists board meeting and business meeting and to lead (chair) those meetings. The role of the associate chair is to fill in when the chair is not available. For the past year, as the current associate chair, I believe I have done a good job doing this. I would be happy to continue in this role. I look forward to helping us prepare for the 2025 American Atheists national convention in Minnesota.



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 for Minnesota Atheists to pursue goals that we collectively find worthwhile, and I appreciate the opportunity to continue in this role.



Treasury Report
[Look for an update in the next issue]

Alyssa Ehni

Secretary

I have served on the Minnesota Atheists' board of directors in varying capacities for the past several years. I have enjoyed my time on the board of directors; shaping the organization and helping us move towards our organizational goals. If elected, I intend to revisit our pre-pandemic goal of increasing membership. Building our community is important to the foundation of everything else that we do.



Mike Trombley

Director at Large

I've been on the MN Atheists board for two years. While my goal has been to increase membership and community, I've realized that these two items are mutually dependent. We won't have a robust membership if we are not visible within our communities. And we can use our membership as a means to be visible for that community. MN Atheists is a necessary group to be available to those who might be trying to grab hold of the safety in knowing that there are others around them, like themselves, not burdened by a societal expectation of a god belief. Being on the board is one way to assist in growing a healthy group of Atheists within our community.



St. Isidore continued from page 3

reaching the Court and are pursuing solutions in legislative action instead.

"Schools are the last bastion of church-state separation, and they have been the target of Christian nationalists and the shadow network for decades," said Andrew Seidel of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Stephanie Zvan

Director at Large

I've volunteered with MNA since 2009: on the radio show, on TV, at community events, building governance processes, representing us to other organizations, on the board. I'm proud of what we've accomplished and determined to address our challenges. This year, I intend to get more involved with legislative initiatives as part of American Atheists' state advocacy team.



Catherine Prody

Director at Large

I have been a member of Minnesota Atheists (off and on) since 2000. Off and on as I moved out of state twice for employment. I am an attorney licensed to practice in Minnesota. I am essentially retired but am able to work on legal issues that may arise. (My speciality has been intellectual property law.) If elected, I look forward to working on the board.



Get Famous (Sort of)

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

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Have a blog? | <i>Let us reprint it.</i> |
| Have an opinion? | <i>Let us hear it.</i> |
| Want to review a movie/TV show/book etc.? | <i>Give us your take.</i> |
| Enjoyed a gathering or event? | <i>Tell us about it.</i> |
| | <i>You can also send us a photo.</i> |
| Have a comment about something we printed? | <i>Don't hold back.</i> |

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

Upcoming Monthly Events

Hybrid Freethought Toastmasters Meeting 1st and 3rd Monday of every month from 6:30–8 p.m.
Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1280 Larpenteur Ave W, St Paul.
freethought.toastmastersclubs.org.

Hybrid Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting 1st Wednesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. Email chair@mnatheists.org for the meeting link.

Freethinking Females

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

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

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,
(usually) at Flaherty’s Arden Bowl, 1273 West County Road E, Arden Hills

In-person Trivia Night Every Sunday from 5:30–8 p.m.

Venn Brewing, 3550 E 46th St
Suite 140, Minneapolis

Online M.A.S.H! (MN Atheists Social Hour!) Every Tuesday (**note the day change**) from 5:30–6:30 p.m.

RSVP in Meetup and a Zoom link appears in the announcement.

Online In Depth – Discussion and Debate Every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month from 3–4 p.m.

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

www.meetup.com/MinnesotaAtheists 



The “Nones” That You Know

Robert Altman

By Milo Grika

Robert Bernard Altman (February 20, 1925 – November 20, 2006) was an American film director, screenwriter, and producer. Best known for *M*A*S*H* (1970), *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (1971), *The Long Goodbye* (1973), *Nashville* (1975), *3 Women* (1977), *The Player* (1992), *Short Cuts* (1993), and *Gosford Park* (2001).

“Still, it’s worth noting that by the age of 20 this whistle-blower had resisted two of the most powerful institutions — church and army, both. He is an atheist. And I have been

against all of these wars ever since”

— Robert Altman

Cryptogram Answer

What makes them so dangerous is that secular Humanists look just like you and me. Some of them could be your best friends without you knowing that they are Humanists.... No one is safe until Congress sets up an Anti-Secular Humanism Committee to get at the rot. Witnesses have to be called, and they have to name names.

Humorist Art Buchwald, in a column titled “Hunting Down the Secular Humanists.”

Minnesota Atheists Membership and Donations

Membership Levels

- Student membership *Free*
- 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 \$ _____

Atheists Talk Fund \$ _____

I would like my donation(s) to be

- private
- public
- attributed by my name only

for reporting in the Minnesota Atheists newsletter and on the website. (By default, each donation will be considered private.)

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State ZIP _____

Just email newsletter Email address _____

(Required for student memberships and email subscriptions)

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. Student memberships do not have voting rights and are not able to run for the board.

All paid 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

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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.

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NOTE: The numbers for “Regular memberships” and “Life members” are based on financial data. These membership numbers undercount actual members, since one household or sustaining membership could represent more than one person.

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 (as of Dec. 31, 2023)

Regular memberships: 67
Life members: 53
Meetup subscribers: 4,089

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.



The Minnesota Atheist — February/March 2024

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