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## Meet Minnesota Atheists! May Public Meeting

**NOTE:** We were unable to get our usual spot at Rondo Library in St. Paul. If you need a ride to the Roseville Library, or to the Panda Garden Buffet restaurant, please contact us at [info@mnatheists.org](mailto:info@mnatheists.org) or 612-588-7031 as soon as possible and we'll see if we can arrange one.

In the wake of the American Atheists National Convention in Minneapolis in April, we anticipate that there will be many people finding out about us for the first time. In addition, there are a lot of existing members who aren't acquainted with all that we do.

So we thought we'd take this opportunity to introduce (or re-introduce) ourselves. We'll have a panel of speakers to talk about the history of our organization, its leadership, and the many Meetups and other activities we sponsor – things like local and international speakers, happy hours, picnics, winter solstice parties, book clubs, bowling, nature hikes, Toastmasters, service projects, rallies at the Capitol, and booths at Gay Parade and ConVergence.

This is an informal and open discussion. We hope you can attend to engage in our community and meet fellow atheists – and to let us know what other activities you'd like us to do!

### Sunday, May 18, 2025

1:00 p.m.: Library open. Zoom starts.

1:15–1:45 p.m.: Business Meeting

1:45–2:00 p.m.: Break/Social Time

2:00–3:30 p.m.: Program

3:30 p.m.: Leave for dinner

Dinner:

Panda Garden Buffet  
1706 Lexington Ave. N.  
Roseville, MN 55113

Roseville Library  
2180 Hamline Ave. N.  
Roseville, MN 55113  
(Corner of Hamline Ave. N. & County Road B West — On Metro bus routes 65 and 83.)

Online:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82344512218?pwd=VWNDclk2b-VUxeWJDnAzU3BhQnNRdz09>

Or call in:

+13092053325,,82344512218#,,,,\*676832#

## American Atheists National Convention

April 17–20, 2025

Minneapolis Marriott City Center.

In addition to the formal sessions, the convention also offers numerous social events, including comedy and game nights, which provide a relaxed atmosphere for attendees to connect and build lasting relationships. The event is family-friendly, with programs like Camp Quest available for children aged 5–15, ensuring that everyone can enjoy the experience.



## President’s Column:

A Time for Action

*By Heather Hegi*

This is a pivotal time to take the helm as President of Minnesota Atheists! We are enthusiastic for the American Atheists Convention to be in Minneapolis this month! This is going to be a big event, so I encourage anyone who can to attend, even if it’s just for one day. We are planning a Minnesota Mixer with HumanistsMN to take place that Friday afternoon, after Keith Ellison’s presentation. I hope to see you there!

At the end of April, we are holding a rally for the Day of Reason, we are calling it a Rally for Secular Government. There is a lot of discontent with the current administration in the White House. While we do not endorse any candidates, many steps have been taken by our country’s president that threaten our platform issues as stated in our Public Policy. I also don’t think I’m going out on a limb to say that we shouldn’t ac-

Continued on page 4

## Cryptogram

*By George Francis Kane*

Xtqmx d jq unxv Lxqaq zwbxq wam wp njq mwbs,

tv y jp nx qxxq njq qntywu nx iwxq stze jv tv y ux

ixm qjr bwdx uxxeq wp ujv mxd.

Lwex mwhy wv “Mnx Qbw mnx dq Sdw mnx dq Zwbxyk

Nwad” sk Yjze Qbw mnx dq



## News and Notes Crashing Through The Wall

By *George Francis Kane*

During the last electoral campaign secularists were sounding alarms about the plans of Project 2025 to demolish American democracy and to herald the triumphant dawn of the age of Christian nationalism. Since Donald Trump won a second term, the news on every site that monitors church/state separation has been continuously frightening and infuriating.

Secularists find little solace that many of our political allies are in an even more precarious position. Thousands of career civil servants have been villainized and summarily dismissed as federal agencies and major functions are being eliminated. Americans in the economic mainstream are apprehensive of the collapse of government benefit systems on which they depend. Immigrants are being picked off the streets, deported and even imprisoned abroad at U.S. government request, with no opportunity to present their facts to legal adjudication. We, too, are likely to find that Establishment Clause violations become minor concerns among the assaults of government that we face.

But even though all this had been threatened during the electoral campaign, I am still bewildered by the on-rushing dystopia. We have so many advantages to secure the separation of church and state into the future.

- The religious share of the population is declining. Self-described Christians fell from 78% in 2007 to 62% in 2023-24, while the religiously unaffiliated have grown into America's largest denomination. The recently released Pew Religious Landscape Survey notes that the decline of Christians has stalled, but that is not going to last long. The generation starting their families today is much less religious than their parents, so the decline in religious conviction of the future population has the momentum to continue.
- The Dobbs decision overturning the right to abortion has inspired Christian nationalist state legislatures to push for outlawing the practice, but the popular backlash has been overwhelming. Across the nation, abortion

rights have won wherever it was on the ballot. Abortion is recognized by everyone as a religious issue, and the struggle has driven politicized religion under deep suspicion.

- Additionally, Americans have a reflexive trust that the institutions that protect our civil rights and liberties will hold.

With all of that going for us, we can't possibly lose, right? Unfortunately, the wall of separation is being washed away in the wake of the now derelict rule of law.

The political dominance Trump has wielded thus far has been bewildering. He received less than half of the popular vote and has the narrowest possible majority in both houses of Congress. He has failed in most of the court actions the administration has received so far.

Presidents usually enjoy a holiday at the beginning of their term, borne on the optimism of their victory. Typically, they run into a backlash in the mid-term elections. Trump is already a "lame duck," prohibited to run again by the Twenty-second Amendment. That usually drains the president's political capital, so that they cannot accomplish much in their second term.

But Trump is working on a radical project. He is not trying to create any new program, but rather to dismantle government. He is reducing dozens of federal agencies to skeletons. He is not increasing government power but eviscerating its functional capacity. For example, he is deeply cutting the staffing of Social Security while eliminating telephone service lines and requiring claimants to appear in-person to file for benefits. The current waiting time for an appointment, though, already exceeds a month. He is crippling government agencies to render them incapable of executing their client service functions.

The objective of Trump's campaign of destruction is far-sighted. He is counting on political division to be so intractable that Congress will be unable to repair government. With a weak domestic government, the economic elite will be able to control the nation unfettered.

Trump's Christian nationalism, to the contrary, is purely transactional. His only interest in promoting the influence of religion over government is to win votes, so he may not be inclined to devote further attention to their cause.

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**Letter** continued from page 2

cept the overstep by the executive branch. They are downright ignoring the Constitution. On top of that, the checks and balances built into our government have been too inept to reign him in. This is an assault on our democracy and the governmental system that has protected the people, including atheists, over the years.

I feel that ever since COVID shutdowns, many of us have become comfortable staying at home and not being as involved in things. We are discovering that we can't do that, and we are getting motivated to get out and do things again. One of those things is standing up for atheism and the separation of church and state.

Let's keep this momentum going from the convention to the angst we feel with everything. If you haven't attended an event for awhile, come join us, even if it's just online. If you have an idea or want to volunteer in any way, please reach out. An organization like ours is dependent on and fully run by motivated volunteers. Let's show the world Positive Atheism in Action!

Heather Hegi

president@mnatheists.org

## February 2025 Meeting Review Atheist Alliance international (AAI)

*By Kazi Ahmed Habib*

Speakers:

- Tonoy Emroz Alam — President of Atheist Alliance International (AAI), an ex-Muslim atheist Bangladeshi who currently resides in Germany as a refugee.
- Onur Romano — Development Director of AAI and an ex-Muslim from Turkey who resides in Canada as an Asylee.

Tonoy starts off the meeting with a brief introduction of the AAI and the current state of security for atheists internationally. AAI is a publicly funded non-governmental organization with 72 member organizations from around the globe. They are focused on combatting discrimination, criminalization and other injustices committed against atheists and secular activists. They are also responsible for support programs that aim to rescue atheists at risk in their own countries such

as the Atheist Support Network.

Tonoy goes on to report the numerous success stories of AAI, such as the rescue of Umar Farouk in Nigeria, who was sentenced in court due to blasphemy charges; Shahadat Russell, who is an outspoken atheist filmmaker in Bangladesh; and a Yemeni ex-Muslim YouTube content creator named Ahmed Aref, who resides in Netherlands. Details of these cases can be found in the AAI Annual Report. Another notable initiative taken by AAI is the funding of 4 humanist and humanitarian schools in Uganda where 1400 children are currently enrolled. Other concerns addressed by Tonoy include women's right of inheritance in Islamic countries and advocating for grant programs in developing countries at the 2024 Bluewater Atheists Humanists and Agnostics Conference (BAHA Con).

In the final parts of his segment, Tonoy shares a remark made by Donald Trump regarding his belief that a 29-million-dollar fund granted to Bangladesh through USAID to strengthen the political landscape went on to be misused by a firm with only 2 people. After a brief explanation of the term "Geopolitics" and how it was used by colonial imperialists to justify their control over poor countries, Tonoy asserts that Bangladesh deserves a secular nation. The growth and progress made in improving Bangladesh's GDP was gone. This was caused by the decrease of women in the workforce who are held back due to terrorism from Islamists. In his closing statements, Tonoy urges the crowd to raise concerns with the U.S. government regarding the political climate and poverty in Bangladesh.

Following Tonoy's segment, we are introduced to another board member of AAI — Onur Romano who was live from Inuit territory in Canada where he was granted asylum. In his introduction, we learn that he was responsible for establishing the first atheist magazine in the Middle East called "The Atheist Magazine," and was a founding member of the first legally recognized atheist organization in countries like Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan called "Association of Atheism" that was inspired by the AAI.

He is a director of the Atheist Refugee Assistance Program (ARAP) in Turkey, which is led by the AAI in conjunction with the Center for Inquiry. Some of the roles of this program are to pro-



vide legal aid, housing, mental health guidance, and job placement for atheist refugees and asylum seekers who face persecution in developing countries with their primary focus being on the large number of non-Turkish refugees harbored in Turkey. This program has a low (19%) acceptance rate and provides limited or no financial support for seekers but works in collaboration with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to provide evidence of persecution from secondary sources due to the high number of fraudulent cases. ARAP also employs Turkish immigration case managers who are able to verify whether the applicants' beliefs and identity align with the identity they've declared themselves to be on legal documents. ARAP agencies have moved to Canada due to the Turkish governments' favoritism towards the Muslim Brotherhood. Onur goes on to display images of ARAP safehouses in Turkey and with this his segment comes to an end.

In the Q&A session following the presentation, we learned of the extensive verification process for the Apostacy Assistance Program which requires that applicants undergo a live interview, are outspoken advocates, have no contradictions in their narratives, agree to have their social media accounts investigated and have blasphemy charges against them.

Recent changes in U.S. policy and the travel bans have left U.S. military allies in Afghanistan such as translators and defectors abandoned. Humanitarian visa holders sponsored by Welcome Corps were cancelled during the Trump administration though they were legally accepted into the United States. In the closing announcements, Tonoy informs us of how to be more involved through the AAI website.

For my personal closing statement, I wanted to mention that as an ex-Muslim atheist Bangladeshi myself, I recognize that Tonoy has taken a brave stance in going against the grain of traditional Bangladeshi society for which it is common to face humiliation and lack of empathy. People who share his background truly appreciate the sense of support and security brought about by his presence and unrelenting advocacy.



## Day of Reason A Rally for Secular Government

By *Heather Hegi*

Wednesday, April 30, 1:00-2:15 PM  
Minnesota State Capitol Rotunda  
75 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Blvd  
St Paul, MN

Join us in this Rally for Secular Government for the National Day of Reason. We have the State Capitol Rotunda reserved starting at 1:00 PM on Wednesday, April 30th. Our program will start at 1:15 PM featuring a variety of speakers emphasizing the need to protect our secular government against Christian Nationalism.

### Treasury Report December, 2024

By *Chris Matthews*

#### General/Visibility Fund Donations

\$450 August Berkshire  
\$250 John Annen  
\$150 Aric Greene  
\$100 Jason Brown  
\$100 George Kane  
\$100 Rajiv Vaidyanathan  
\$50 Vicky Hagens  
\$50 Ross Meisner  
\$50 Jason Varin  
\$25 Frank Neubecker  
\$25 Steve Petersen  
\$20 Michelle Tjernagel  
\$20 Ben Zvan  
\$10 Rabih Nahas  
\$200 anonymous  
**\$1600 Subtotal**

**\$1600 Total Donations**

#### Expenses

\$2,670 Large Social Events  
\$279 Meetings and Venues  
\$132 Misc  
**\$3,081 Total Expenses**

**Current Building Fund — \$161,353**

## Upcoming Special Events

**In Person** **American Atheists' 2025 National Convention** April 17–20, Minneapolis Marriott City Center, 30 South 7th Street, Minneapolis.

With educational presentations, social events, comedy and game nights, training workshops, exhibits, and opportunities for networking, National Conventions are the highlight of the year for hundreds of American atheists. <https://convention.atheists.org/>

**In Person** **Day of Reason: A Rally for Secular Government** Wednesday, April 30, 1:00-2:15 PM, Minnesota State Capitol Rotunda, 75 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Blvd, St Paul, MN  
Feel free to bring homemade signs (no sticks attached) related to the cause. Bring friends, and most important, bring yourself! Let's fill up the Rotunda and make it loud and clear that we support a Secular Government!

## Upcoming Monthly Events

**In Person** **Bowling for Deities** First Sunday of every month at 11:30 a.m., (usually) at Flaherty's Arden Bowl, 1273 West County Road E, Arden Hills

**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](http://freethought.toastmastersclubs.org).

**Online** **Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting** 1st Wednesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. Email [chair@mnatheists.org](mailto: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.

**In Person** **Blasphemer's Brunch** 2nd Saturday of every month at 10:30 a.m., Pizza Lucé, 800 W 66th St, Richfield

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

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

[www.meetup.com/MinnesotaAtheists](http://www.meetup.com/MinnesotaAtheists) 



# The “Nones” That You Know

Billy Joel

By *Milo Grika*

William Martin Joel (born May 9, 1949) is an American singer, songwriter, and pianist. Nicknamed the “Piano Man” after his signature 1973 song of the same name, Joel has had a successful career as a solo artist since the 1970s.

[Asked whether he believed in God]  
 “No. I’m an atheist.”  
 —Billy Joel

## Cryptogram Answer

Easter is when Jesus comes out of his tomb, and if he sees his shadow he goes back in and we get six more weeks of winter.

Joke told on “The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour” by Dick Smothers

## Get Famous (Sort of)

Send submissions to The Minnesota Atheist newsletter. Just email your input to: editor@mnatheists.org and we’ll do the rest.

## 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.

#### Minnesota Atheist Board of Directors

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#### Minnesota Atheists Media

**AtheistsWeekly Email (AWE)**  
Chris Matthews  
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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 Feb. 28, 2025)  
Regular memberships: 73  
Life members: 54  
Meetup subscribers: 4,346  
AWE subscribers: 1,177

#### 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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Published by Minnesota Atheists

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