

September/October
2026
Volume 36
Number 4

In this Issue

Rebuilding Our Lives After Faith	1
Cryptogram	2
Death Sentence Quashed, but the Fight for Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's Freedom in Nigeria Continues	2
News and Notes	3
The Frosty Atheist	4
Treasury Report	5
Upcoming Monthly Events	6
The "Nones" That You Know	7

Rebuilding Our Lives After Faith September Public Meeting (October Public Meeting on page 5.)

With Drew Bekius

Drew Bekius shares common challenges often experienced among those exiting faith, along with considerations, resources, and potential next steps to help make the navigation process a little smoother than it otherwise would be.

He is the host of *Life After Faith*, a live call-in show on the Skeptic Haven network, available on YouTube and other social media outlets on Wednesdays at 7 p.m. Central Time. He is also the author of *The Rise and Fall of Faith* and *Your Next Life Now*.



Drew is a coach, writer, and your Resident Heretic at Large. Having done a variety of work in secular and humanist spaces for over a dozen years, his heartbeat is for helping the post-faith crowd navigate life after godstuff.

A former evangelical pastor, Drew has also served as president of The Clergy Project, and he often teaches humanism at the First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis, commonly regarded as the "birthplace of congrega-

September Continued on page 5

Sunday, September 20, 2026

1:00 p.m.: Library opens. Social Time. 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:

Longfellow Grill
2990 W. River Pkwy.
Minneapolis, MN 55406
(1.4 miles west of the library, just over the Mississippi River, where Marshall Ave. in St. Paul turns into E. Lake St. in Minneapolis.)

Merriam Park Library
1831 Marshall Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55104



Online:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82344512218?pwd=VWNDclk2bVUxeWJDTnAzU3BhQnNRdz09>

Or call in:

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

Death Sentence Quashed, but the Fight for Yahaya Sharif-Aminu's Freedom in Nigeria Continues

Minnesota Atheists is a member society of Atheist Alliance International (AAI). An important part of AAI is its Atheist Support Network (ASN). This is one of its success stories.

On 10 August 2020, Yahaya Sharif-Aminu was

convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death by hanging by the Kano Upper Shariah Court sitting at Hausawa Filin Hockey in Nigeria. AAI played a critical role in challenging both the conviction and the wider legality of blasphemy laws in Nigeria.

AAI provided funding to the Foundation for Religious Freedom (FRF) to pursue Yahaya's initial appeal between September 2020 and January 2021 arguing that the conviction was fundamentally unsound due to serious procedural failures during the trial, including the denial of legal representation.

Sharif-Aminu Continued on page 4

Cryptogram

By George Francis Kane

DTUWERUVEW BRY INU XENOVDRUWJ MP R
XRDW RIJ WORYLVDRUWJ LETUTLRD XETWYUKNNJ
YTIQTIQ UKWTE DTURITWY TI WOXUP LKVELKWY
— INE TY TU R QROW CNE UKW LDNTYUWEWJ
WDWLU, UKW UTIKNEI OWIJTLRIUY NC DNB-
LRDNETW JWYXRTE.

SNKI YUWTIMWLZ, INMWD XETFW RLLWXURILW
YXWWLK



News and Notes The Sharia Strawman

By George Francis Kane

Republicans have embarked on a new crusade to save America from Sharia law. In Congress, they have introduced the No Sharia Act and the Defeat Sharia Law in America Act, which would prohibit courts and public agencies from recognizing foreign legal constructs that conflict with the U.S. Constitution. In nine states, similar bills and constitutional amendments have been introduced, although they are usually directed against “foreign” or “religious” laws rather than explicitly against “Sharia” law, in an attempt to pass constitutional muster.

This is merely a new flare-up in a decades-long campaign to demonize Muslims by feigning fear that they pose a danger to America’s courts and to intimidate American Muslims into withdrawing from public life. In a 2011 report titled “Nothing to Fear: Debunking the Mythical ‘Sharia Threat’ to the Judicial System,” the American Civil Liberties Union refuted the arguments advanced to support this fearmongering campaign.

The ACLU report identifies three categories of legal cases that anti-Muslim opponents have cited as evidence of a Sharia threat to our legal system: cases involving religious-freedom claims; contracts, arbitration, and other agreements; and public-policy issues. Its analysis shows that existing law provides robust safeguards against any Islamic takeover.

Religious-freedom cases involve claims for exemptions from U.S. laws based on the First Amendment’s Free Exercise Clause. For example, in *Shaheed Allah v. Adella Jordan-Luster*, a Muslim inmate claimed that a prison had violated his right to religious exercise by failing to ensure that all meat served to him was prepared in accordance with his Islamic beliefs. The court rejected his claim but has accepted similar claims brought by prisoners of many other faiths. Shaheed Allah’s claim failed because the court found that the meals served to him satisfied the requirements of his religion. Muslim prisoners, however, may not be denied the religious dietary accommodations provided to prisoners of other

faiths.

It is common for parties to business contracts to stipulate that any disputes will be settled through binding arbitration. Jewish parties sometimes specify the Beth Din of America, a prominent rabbinical court that regularly hears commercial, contractual, and partnership disputes. Catholics sometimes select diocesan tribunals. Muslims who enter into contracts have sometimes selected a Sharia court at their mosque. The resulting decisions can be legally binding under civil arbitration laws.

Anti-Muslim groups pushing for Sharia bans have pointed to several state-court decisions upholding arbitration rulings based on Islamic principles as evidence of the alleged “Sharia threat.” But in these cases, American courts merely recognized the right of people of faith to agree to settle disputes according to the principles of their religion. A court may enforce a binding arbitration award or vacate it if the award violates public policy. These decisions follow neutral principles of law and do not advance the legal standing of Sharia in any way.

Proponents of anti-Sharia laws have seized on and denounced any case involving consideration — or even the mere mention — of Islam to stoke fears that American courts are imposing religious beliefs and doctrines incompatible with American standards. When considering foreign law in these contexts, one of the primary factors a court examines is whether a particular order, judgment, or legal system would violate U.S. or state public policy. The cases cited by proponents of anti-Sharia measures do the same, demonstrating that there is no discernible trend of courts improperly enforcing Sharia law in violation of public policy. On the contrary, in nearly all of these cases, the courts rejected, on public-policy grounds, deference to a foreign law, judgment, or legal system — once again refuting the curious claim that these cases illustrate a growing Sharia threat.

American Muslims view Sharia as a personal guide for daily prayer, charity, and ethical conduct. Christian nationalists, however, consistently portray it as the harsh legal system of hostile nations where Islam is the state religion. This ruse should never be used to deny Muslims equal protection under the law or their constitutionally protected right to the free exercise of religion.

The Frosty Atheist God of the Constant Gaps

By Ross Meisner



You've likely observed the arguments for god evolve from being based on holy texts (which are pretty easy to refute) to more sophisticated approaches trying to fit god into the framework of our modern knowledge about the universe. As their god(s) get squeezed into ever small corners, religious leaders have gotten craftier by assigning to god those areas we can't yet fully explain. One of these approaches that absolutely fascinates me is the "fine-tuned universe" argument.

This argument points out that we have identified about 31 "constants" in nature that are exquisitely balanced to allow our universe to exist as it is today. These include factors like the force of gravity, nuclear forces, the mass and electrical charge of atomic particles, the expansion coefficient of the universe, Einstein's cosmological constant, and so forth. The neat thing about these constants is that they're not mathematical in the sense you can calculate them. You can't. They each had to be measured independently, and then became a "constant" in the equations that use them. They each describe some fundamental attribute of our universe.

The miraculous angle to this argument is that if just one of these constants were changed even a tiny bit, our universe would either not exist, or would not be able to support life as we know it. And this is the scientific truth — it is mind-boggling that these measurements in physics and cosmology are indeed set to precisely the necessary right values for us to exist. Surely this perfect puzzle demands that some vast intelligence carefully designed it to be so!

Because we genuinely don't know why or how the constants got their values, this argument for a designer is awfully difficult to refute. There are three primary scientific possibilities. One, the anthropic principle, is simple: we observe these constants because we happen to exist in this universe, and any other set of values would not generate a universe that we could exist in to observe. The author Douglas Adams (*Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*) used the analogy of a puddle that becomes sentient. It looks around at the hole it is in and says, "wow, this space fits me so fantastically well, it must have been

designed just for me!" What makes the anthropic principle so hard to accept is the staggering low odds that our universe got it just right. Are we really that lucky? Well, yes, in fact we are — simply because we are here.

The second explanation puts this rare luck within a challenging but rational scientific context. Just as humanity's awareness of our surroundings went through seismic expansions (flat earth to round, one planet to many, one sun to many, one galaxy to many) there is no reason to assume there is just one universe. The multiverse hypothesis posits that there are infinite other universes with widely varying values for the constants of nature, and we just happily (and luckily) exist in one that we can now observe. So far, we are unable to detect any other universes, but that lack of observed evidence does not mean they're not there.

The third idea is most fascinating to me. Despite all we have learned, there is so much more we don't yet understand. "As our island of knowledge grows, so does the shore of our ignorance." (Physicist John Archibald Wheeler) Scientists continue to work towards a unified theory of everything that combines quantum physics and general relativity into one framework that consistently explains everything. It is reasonable to believe that there are underlying physics and natural laws we have not yet glimpsed that will explain why the constants are the way they are. They may not be random or unlikely values at all. They may simply be not yet understood.

Our challenge as humans is to embrace our ignorance, relish the glorious exploration of new answers, and not create fantastical ideologies simply to comfort us in the darkness.

Sharif-Aminu continued from page 2

FRF also challenged the constitutionality of Shariah blasphemy laws, arguing that they conflict with Sections 10, 38, and 39 of the Nigerian Constitution, which guarantee religious neutrality, freedom of religion, and freedom of expression.

On 21 January 2021, the Kano High Court overturned Yahaya's conviction and death sentence. Rather than ordering his release, the court directed that he be retried before the same Shariah court, stating that Section 10 of the Constitution — prohibiting the Federation or any State from adopting a state religion — was not justiciable.

Minnesota and National Elections and Civics in 2026

October Public Meeting
Sunday, October 18, 2026

With Greg Laden



Every election is different, but there seems to be one thing true of all of them: Every election is the most important election so far.

Also, almost every jurisdiction is different and every state is different, and this often leads to unproductive conversations in which untenable assertions drive the conversation. Talking about elections without a nuanced understanding of the process is a little like talking about evolution using the intellectual tools developed by creationists.

We will spend some time painting this year's "most important election ever" at the national and state level, with a look at gerrymandering, election security, and what is happening at the extreme ends of the political spectrum, both of which seem to be extra important this year.

Showing how the design of the Minnesota political and electoral process matches real life practice turns out to be very complicated. We'll spend some time with a version of this material, exploring how a complex history has resulted in a uniquely complex system of boundary and districts, and what this means to each Minnesota voter and interested resident.

Greg Laden, in his other life when he is not an evolutionary biologist, is a co-leader of one of the area's largest Indivisible groups, ... Indivisible West Metro," which supports democracy, fair elections, and education about civics. Greg has been a senior operative or manager for several campaigns at the local, state, and national level, and writes about Minnesota and national politics in his substack, Auspicious Subtext.

NOTE: Schedule, remote information, and dinner are the same as the September meeting on page 1.

Treasury Report

March–June, 2026

By Chris Matthews

General/Visibility Fund Donations

\$400 George Kane
\$200 Steve Petersen
\$200 Ross Meisner
\$3 PayPal Giving Fund
\$1,697 Cash & anonymous (20)
\$2,500 Subtotal

Atheist Refugee Assistance Program (ARAP) Fund Donations

\$200 Steve Petersen
\$20 Michael Wear
\$200 anonymous
\$420 Subtotal

\$2,920 Total Donations

ARAP Fund

\$3,000 Goal
\$1,620 2026 Donations
54% Of Goal

Expenses

\$3,000 Atheist Refugee Assistance Program
\$1,593 Newsletters
\$1,186 IT
\$571 Day of Reason
\$665 Misc
\$7,015 Total Expenses

Current Building Fund — \$169,825

September continued from page 1

tional humanism."

Drew has a Master of Divinity degree from Moody Theological Seminary, a Bachelor of Arts in pastoral studies from Moody Bible Institute, personal and business coaching certificates from Life Purpose Institute, and a Humanist Celebrant endorsement from The Humanist Society. Drew has two adult daughters. He and his wife Stacie "Apostacie" Marie jump back and forth between homes in Minnesota and the Okanagan in BC, Canada. Find more at drewbekius.com.

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, MN.

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, MN.
freethought.toastmastersclubs.org.

Online 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, MN.
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, MN.

In Person Lunch with Secular Seniors and Friends 1st Tuesdays, 11:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.,
Maya Cuisine, 1840 Central Ave NE, Minneapolis, MN.

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

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

www.meetup.com/MinnesotaAtheists 



The “Nones” That You Know Ani DiFranco

By *Milo Grika*

Angela Maria “Ani” DiFranco (born September 23, 1970) is an American-Canadian singer-songwriter. She has released more than 20 albums. DiFranco’s music has been classified as folk rock and alternative rock. She has released all her albums on her own record label, Righteous Babe.

Jim Walsh (Rock critic, St. Paul Pioneer Press!):
“What song proves to you that there is a God?”
Ani: “I’m an atheist, for Chrissake!”

—Ani DiFranco

Cryptogram Answer

Literature was not promulgated by a pale and emasculated critical priesthood singing their litanies in empty churches — nor is it a game for the cloistered elect, the tinhorn mendicants of low-calorie despair.

John Steinbeck, Nobel Prize acceptance speech

Get Famous (Sort of)

You too can become published by simply submitting something to The Minnesota Atheist newsletter: editor@mnatheists.org.

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 \$_____

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.)

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

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

Board Email

board@mnatheists.org

President

Heather Hegi

pres@mnatheists.org

Associate President

Eric Jayne

apres@mnatheists.org

Chair

August Berkshire

chair@mnatheists.org

Associate Chair

Michelle Morlan

achair@mnatheists.org

Secretary

Steve Petersen

sec@mnatheists.org

Treasurer

Chris Matthews

treas@mnatheists.org

763.452.0337

Directors at Large

Trevor Nelson

dir1@mnatheists.org

Frank Leonard Eller

dir2@mnatheists.org

Shelly Nelson

dir3@mnatheists.org

The Minnesota Atheist Newsletter

Editorial Board

editor@mnatheists.org

Editorial Board

George Kane

George.Francis.

Kane@gmail.com

651.488.8225

Heather Hegi

dir1@mnatheists.org

Shirley Moll

srmoll@comcast.net

James Zimmerman

zgoatee@gmail.com

Editor

Milo Grika

editor@mnatheists.org

Chief Photographer

Richard Trombley

Membership and Change of Address

Steve Petersen

address@mnatheists.org

org

651.484.9277

Minnesota Atheists Media

AtheistsWeekly Email

(AWE)

Chris Matthews

awe@mnatheists.org

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 memberships: 79

Life members:

54

Meetup subscribers:

4,517

AWE subscribers:

1,162

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 — September/October 2026

Published by Minnesota Atheists

PO Box 120304

New Brighton, MN 55112

612.588.7031

info@mnatheists.org

Copyright 2026 by Minnesota Atheists.

All rights reserved.