The Minnesota Atheist

November/December 2026
Volume 36
Number 5

Thanksgiving: Giving Thanks to Our Members and Supporters!

November Public Meeting

With August Berkshire

Minnesota Atheists has been in existence since 1991. During that time a number of people have been recognized with awards for their contributions to the success of our organization. Unfortunately, others have not. Last November we began to correct this oversight, and we will continue this month.



The Minnesota Atheists board of directors has compiled a list of 10 more people deserving of recognition. (Excluded from this list are people who have already received an award in the past or who are current board members.) We will probably have another group for next year!

At our meeting (and in our subsequent newsletter) we will highlight each individual's accomplishments and also hear from them directly about their experiences and memories. In this way we will not only honor their achievements but also learn more about the history of our organization. This meeting was very popular last year and we look forward to it being so again this year. We will also take time to remember Minnesota Atheists leader Lee Salisbury who died this past year.

Sunday, November 15, 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#,,,

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President's Column
NAC AII

By Heather Hegi

We have the opportunity to nominate someone to be the North American Coordinator (NAC) for Atheist Alliance International (AAI)! I have been asked to serve in this role, but I have no interest because I wouldn't be able to put in the time that should be warranted by such a role. As with many roles like this, the North American Coordinator is an unpaid volunteer role, but if this sounds like something that lines up with your passions, I encourage you to let us know! If we know you, we may outright nominate you, but if you haven't been involved in Minnesota Atheists, we would be glad to interview you to see if this might be a good fit for you. The nominee would be voted on by all the AAI North American affiliates at the AAI online Annual General Meeting (AGM) in January 2027 but could start getting up to speed now.

AAI is the largest outright atheist umbrella organization in the world for atheist, humanist, and freethought groups. AAI has 13 North American affiliates including Minnesota Atheists. The former AAI Regional Director for North America died recently so AAI is looking for a new one. August Berkshire, the Chair of Minnesota Atheists, is also the Vice President of AAI. He is acting as the interim Regional Director, but it is not a position that he can hold permanently and simultaneously as Vice President.

I think it's important for atheist groups to be somewhat unified and have support. We atheists are a factious bunch. By nature, we are independent thinkers, not unified by a shared doctrine. We are united by the lack of belief in something. Who unites based on a lack of belief? Well, we are driven to when surrounded by believers, and when believers impede on our own rights. Absent this, there isn't a reason to unite. But as we know, we constantly have to be vigilant to stand up for the separation of church and state. It's hard to be motivated when it's not something that has a personal impact, and in our personal lives in Minnesota, particularly in the Twin Cities, we aren't bothered by religion as we might be elsewhere. However, just here in the United States, there is cause to be concerned, particularly with the current administration's push of Christian Nationalism. The Christianizing of our military is a blatant

NAC AAI Continued on page 4

Cryptogram

By George Francis Kane

MF MP PNFFMUR Y IMRI CYEWN WHVU VWA

VHMUMVUP FV AVYPF ZNU YUQ DVZNU YEMCN

VU YGGVWUF VO FINZ.

ZMGINE QN ZVUFYMRUN



News and Notes

Religious Liberty At Risk

By George Francis Kane

The annual review of Minnesota Atheists' Public Policies is nearly ready for submission to the Board for approval. This year's revision is the most thoroughgoing that we have ever done, because the separation of state and church has been thrown into crisis. Following is the new Prologue, which was written to shine a spotlight on this crisis.

During the second term of Donald Trump's presidency, the separation of church and state has reached its greatest crisis in American history. This crisis does not reflect a national revival of religiosity, but rather the surprising political success of a minority ideology known as **Christian nationalism**. Although its triumph appears to be sudden, it followed years of planning by a well-funded and well-organized movement determined to transform the United States into a Christian nation.

Throughout world history, governments have been strongly influenced by prevailing religions. The United States was founded at a time when many still believed that God's blessings depended on a nation's obedience to His will. Nevertheless, chastened by centuries of religious conflict in Europe, inspired by Enlightenment skepticism, and eager to avoid sectarian division among the states, the framers wrote a Constitution that deliberately separated church and state. While some groups have always sought to fuse religion and government, the principle of separation has long been a bedrock of American governance.

The modern anti-separation movement can trace its roots to conservative efforts to reshape the Supreme Court, beginning with the campaign to impeach Chief Justice Earl Warren, who served from 1953 to 1969. Although Republicans appointed several justices during this era, many — including Warren — proved more liberal than expected. President Eisenhower famously called Warren's appointment "the biggest damned fool mistake I ever made." After the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, religious conservatives intensified their focus on the Court, targeting Jefferson's "wall of separation" and other individual rights the Court had upheld for decades.

From 1969 through 1992, Republican presidents Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and George H. W. Bush appointed twelve Supreme Court justices, while Democratic presidents appointed none. Yet the Court continued to support separation of church and state until 2005, when Justice Sandra Day O'Connor retired. A Reagan appointee and frequent swing vote, O'Connor was a consistent defender of the Establishment Clause. Her departure shifted the Court decisively toward opponents of separation. Today, conservatives hold a 6–3 majority, reducing the Establishment Clause to near irrelevance and transforming the Free Exercise Clause into a guarantee of Christian privilege.

Still, the current crisis would not have emerged through judicial action alone. Although President Trump has limited knowledge of Christian scripture and doctrine, he understands that Christian nationalists form a crucial part of his political base. The blueprint for many of his second-term actions can be found in Project 2025, spearheaded by the Heritage Foundation, a wealthy conservative think tank.

Project 2025 is an ambitious plan to transform the federal government — and ultimately the nation — into an instrument of conservative dominion. Its core premise is that conservative presidents have been thwarted by career civil servants who staff powerful regulatory agencies. To overcome this obstacle, the plan embraces **unitary executive theory**, which holds that all executive-branch agencies fall directly under presidential control. This theory surfaced repeatedly during the George W. Bush administration through a wave of signing statements attached to new laws.

To operationalize this takeover, Project 2025 proposed a sweeping replacement of government personnel. Less than a month before the 2020 election, Trump issued the **Schedule F Executive Order**, reclassifying thousands of civil service positions as at-will employment. The order argued that the president must rely on a cadre of confidential, policy-making professionals. President Biden rescinded the order early in his term, but

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Liberty continued from page 3

Project 2025 called for its immediate reinstatement, opening roughly 8,000 federal jobs to political appointment.

The 2025 transition plan envisions an immediate takeover of every federal agency by an army of "weaponized conservatives ready on day one to do battle against the deep state." For example, Christian nationalists hope to redirect federal education subsidies away from public schools and toward religious institutions. The Supreme Court has ruled that if states provide vouchers for private schools, religious schools cannot be excluded.

Social service agencies are likewise encouraged to outsource functions to Christian charities. Project 2025 calls for the Department of Health and Human Services to adopt a "biblically based" definition of marriage and family. Policies framed as "family-based" now include eliminating abortion and outlawing "pornography," defined broadly enough to include any mention of LGBTQ rights.

President Trump has issued several executive orders aimed at eroding the traditional separation of church and state by expanding "religious liberty" protections, increasing religious expression in public institutions, and weakening restrictions on political activity by religious organizations. The **Executive Order Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias** directs federal agencies to identify and reverse policies deemed hostile to Christian practices. The **Executive Order Establishing the Religious Liberty Commission** calls for "building bridges" to churches rather than maintaining separation. **Executive Order 13798** instructed the IRS to stop enforcing the Johnson Amendment, which bars tax-exempt religious organizations from endorsing political candidates, and encouraged federal departments to accommodate conscience-based objections to healthcare mandates.

Trump also issued guidance encouraging federal employees to display religious symbols and discuss faith in the workplace, and permitting Veterans Administration doctors to pray with or over patients. He expanded access for religious organizations and schools to public funding and accommodations, further blurring the line between government and religion.

With Republicans controlling both houses of Congress, lawmakers have been unwilling or unable to oppose Trump's efforts to dismantle the separation of church and state.

Christian nationalism is also advancing in state legislatures through groups like **Project Blitz**, also known as Freedom for All. Project Blitz works with conservative lawmakers in every state, drafting model bills that promote Christian privilege, expand prayer and funding for religious schools, restrict abortion rights, and oppose protections for people with nonconforming sexual orientations or gender identities.

The takeover of government by a coalition of conservative factions including Christian nationalists has been decades in the making, but it has now brought us to the verge of the extinction of religious liberty. Unless it is resolutely opposed, the United States may in the near future declare itself a Christian nation, which holds all non-Christians to be anti-American and legally suspect. **Unless**.



Image by Milo Grika and AI

NAC AII continued from page 2

violation of the separation of church and state, but unless you or a family member is in the military, it might just seem conceptual and not drive you to action. It's so easy for us to have apathy for effects we don't experience, it's a coping mechanism of the human condition. We should be reminded; we need to take action before it affects oneself.

Unifying atheists across the world is no easy feat, which is why it may seem futile at times, but it is a noble effort to provide a unifying organization in efforts to support each other. There is great potential in the AAI and what a North American Coordinator could do. Please reach out if you're interested to me, Heather Hegi, pres@mnatheists.org and August Berkshire, chair@mnatheists.org.

September 2026 Meeting Review
Rebuilding Our Lives After Faith

By Steve Petersen

Our September meeting had Drew Bekius as our speaker. Drew gave an energetic review of his evolution of being an evangelical minister to an atheist. Drew's story is covered in the book *The Rise and Fall of Faith*. Drew also hosts a podcast titled "Life After Faith" on the Septic Haven. Drew's presentation was captivating, entertaining and interactive as virtually each person in attendance participated in the question and answer.



Photo by Steve Petersen

October 2026 Meeting Review
Minnesota and National Elections and Civics in 2026

By Steve Petersen

Greg Laden gave an election 101 talk on elections in our country. Explaining the role of the federal government, that of rule maker but not a controller of the process. States are for the most part in control of the process and even then, it is more decentralized right down to the counties and eventually to the precinct level. Concentrating on Minnesota, Laden explained logistics of ballot design for both security of the ballot and rotation of the order of the listing of candidates.

Laden asked an intriguing question: "Why are dead people kept on the voter rolls?" In Minnesota, when the Secretary of State receives a death certificate from a county medical examiner, he is responsible remove the decedent's name from the active voter roll. It remains in the system but is flagged so that a precinct chair will investigate if anyone tries to vote using the decedent's name. The voter's name is kept in the records as a means of **preventing** fraud.

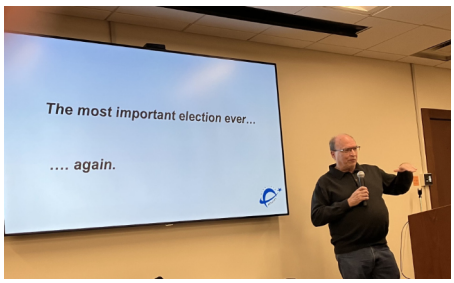


Photo by Steve Petersen

Treasury Report
July–August, 2026

By Chris Matthews

General/Visibility Fund Donations

$260	Steve Petersen
$100	Ross Meisner
$416	Cash & anonymous (9+)
$776	**Subtotal**

Atheist Refugee Assistance Program (ARAP) Fund Donations

$100	Steve Petersen
$100	**Subtotal**

$876 Total Donations

ARAP Fund

$3,000	Goal
$1,720	2026 Donations
57%	**Of Goal**

Expenses

$230	Donations
$1,744	IT
$898	Parade, booth, etc.
$22	Misc
$2,894	**Total Expenses**

Current Building Fund — $169,825



Upcoming Special Events

In Person **2026 Winter Solstice Party** 5–8:30 p.m., Gabe's Bar & Kitchen
991 Lexington Parkway N.
St. Paul, MN 55103
(NW corner of Energy Park Drive & Lexington Parkway N.)

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.

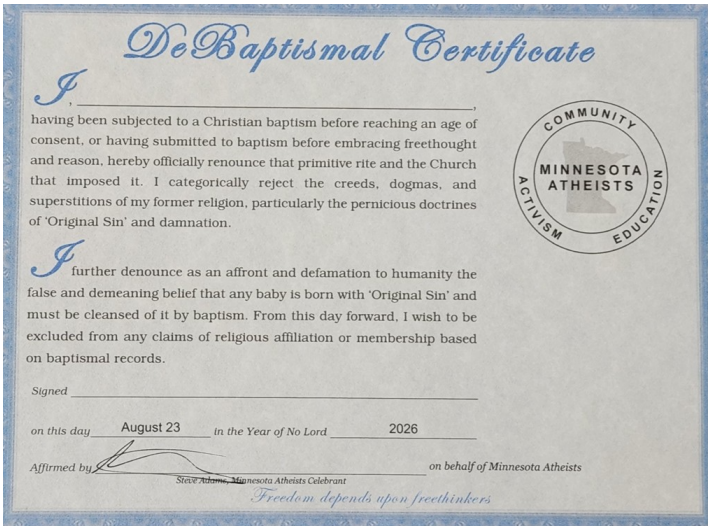
In Person **Blasphemer's Brunch** 2nd Saturday of every month at 10:30 a.m.,
Pizza Lucé, 800 W 66th St, Richfield, MN.

In Person **Lunch with Secular Seniors and Friends** 1st Tuesdays, 11:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.,
Pagoda, 2401 Fairview Ave N, Roseville, 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
Woody Allen

By Milo Grika

Woody Allen (born Allan Stewart Konigsberg; November 30, 1935) is an American filmmaker, actor, writer, and comedian. In a career spanning more than seven decades, he has written for film, television, and theater. As a screenwriter, Allen holds the record of most wins (3) and nominations (16) for the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay.

"If God exists, I hope he has a good excuse."

—Woody Allen

Cryptogram Answer

It is setting a high value upon our opinions to roast men and women alive on account of them.

Michel de Montaigne

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.

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City, State ZIP_____

☐ Just email newsletter Email address_____
(Required for student memberships and email subscriptions)

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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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.

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