

# The Minnesota Atheist

## Minnesota Atheists Files Court Brief

### Minnesota Atheists Files Friend of the Court Brief for Marriage Equality

by August Berkshire

Minnesota Atheists has filed an amicus curiae (friend of the court) brief in the Minnesota Appellate Court, on behalf of three same-sex couples who are suing the government for the right to get legally married in Minnesota. At least two of these six individuals are atheists.

#### Background

In 2008, an organization called Marry Me Minnesota was created, whose purpose was to legally challenge our state’s laws against same-sex marriage.

On March 6, 2009, three same-sex couples applied to Hennepin County to get marriage licenses. They were denied.

On May 11, 2010, the couples filed suit in District Court in Minnesota’s Fourth Judicial District (in Hennepin County) to overturn Minnesota’s ban on same-sex marriage.

The case is entitled *Benson, et al. v. Alverson*. Douglas Benson is one of the plaintiffs suing for the right to marry and the “et al.” refers to the other five plaintiffs. Jill Alverson is the defendant, in her official capacity as the Local Registrar of Hennepin County. (It is a peculiarity of U.S. law that Ms. Alverson must be named personally, rather than just her office.)

In their complain, the plaintiffs charged that, “By denying the Plaintiff couples the right to marry solely because they are of the same sex, Minnesota law violates the due process, equal protection, freedom of conscience, and freedom of peaceful association provisions contained in Article I, Sections 7, 2, and 16 of the Minnesota Constitution.” They also asked

the judge to declare that the 1997 Minnesota Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defines marriage as “only between persons of the opposite sex,” to be unconstitutional under the Minnesota Constitution.

#### District Court Hearing & Ruling

On December 10, 2010, the case was heard by a judge in District Court in Minnesota’s Fourth Judicial District (in Hennepin County). On March 7, 2011, the judge issued an order dismissing it.

The judge cited a nearly identical 1971 Minnesota Supreme Court case, *Baker v. Nelson*, involving two men who had also sued the Hennepin County Registrar for the right to marry each other. In that case, the Minnesota Supreme Court ruled that same-sex couples did not have a right to civil marriage. The judge in the current case declared that that precedent was still binding on lower court rulings.

Furthermore, the judge found no basis in the plaintiffs’ arguments to declare the 1997 Minnesota Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) unconstitutional.

The judge concluded that “Same-sex marriage will not exist in this State unless and until the Minnesota Supreme Court overrules its own decision in *Baker*, or the State Legislature repeals the State DOMA.”

#### MNA Gets Involved

Minnesota Atheists had been following this case for well over a year, waiting for our chance to get involved. Amicus curiae briefs are not accepted at the District Court level, so we had to wait for the Appellate Court. After the loss in District Court on March 7, 2011, we found out that the appeal was filed on May 3, 2011.

We contacted the lawyer representing the three same-sex couples and told him of our desire to file an amicus curiae brief. He said all such briefs in support of the plaintiffs were being handled by Marshall Tanick of the law firm Mansfield, Tanick & Cohen.

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**MINNESOTA ATHEISTS  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

board@mnatheists.org

President: August Berkshire  
pres@mnatheists.org  
612-338-4548

Associate President: Mike Haubrich, apres@mnatheists.org

Chair: George Kane  
chair@mnatheists.org  
651-488-8225

Associate Chair: Steve Petersen  
achair@mnatheists.org  
651-484-9277

Treasurer: Chris Matthews  
treas@mnatheists.org

Secretary: Rick Rohrer  
sec@mnatheists.org

Director-at-Large: Andy Flamm  
dir1@mnatheists.org

Director-at-Large: Eric Jayne  
dir2@mnatheists.org

Director-at-Large: Robin Raianiemi, dir3@mnatheists.org  
612-872-0574

MNA Meetup members: 931  
Life memberships: 30

**Honorary Members**

Dan Barker  
Gerald Erickson, PhD  
Annie Laurie Gaylor  
Dick Hewetson  
Robert M. Price, PhD

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P.O. Box 120304  
New Brighton, MN 55112  
612-284-4495, info@mnatheists.org  
www.MinnesotaAtheists.org

Editorial Board, editor@mnatheists.org

James Zimmerman, editor  
zgoatee@gmail.com

Chief Photographer: Richard Trombley

Membership/change of address: Steve Petersen, address@mnatheists.org,  
651-484-9277

Public Relations: Emily Matejcek,  
pr@mnatheists.org

Atheists Weekly Email (AWE): George Kane, awe@mnatheists.com

Cable: Steve Petersen,  
cable@mnatheists.org, 651-484-9277

Webmaster: Grant Hermanson  
web@mnatheists.org

Podcasts: Grant Hermanson,  
podcast@mnatheists.org

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Submit material for the newsletter to editor@mnatheists.org. Submissions may be edited. Publication is not guaranteed.

**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 Mission Statement**

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.

## COURT BRIEF (CONTINUED)



by August  
Berkshire

Marshall Tanick is a civil trial specialist and is considered to be a “super lawyer.” He agreed to give us a discounted rate since we are a nonprofit organization.

On June 1, 2011, our amicus curiae brief was filed with the Clerk of the Appellate Court. It was accepted by the Appellate Court on June 20, 2011.

### Strategy

The *Benson, et al. v. Alverson* case appealed for justice and equality under the Minnesota State Constitution, not the U.S. Constitution. It was the hope of the plaintiffs that Minnesota judges would find that the Minnesota State Constitution afforded them greater protections and rights than the U.S. Constitution does.

Marriage laws are state laws. If a discriminatory marriage law is challenged based on a state's constitution, the highest level it can be appealed to is that state's Supreme Court. A loss in one state will not affect efforts in other states.

This is why, for example, when a state Supreme Court, in a state such as Massachusetts, Iowa, or California, rules that that state's anti-same-sex marriage laws are unconstitutional *under their state's constitution*, the anti-equality side does not appeal it to the U.S. Supreme Court. Instead, their only recourse is to try to change (amend) their state's constitution, or to elect different State Supreme Court justices in hopes of bringing the case again and getting a different, anti-equality verdict.

On the other hand, if a discriminatory state marriage law is challenged as a violation of the *federal* constitution, the case could reach the U.S. Supreme Court. A loss there could have negative affects on all the states.

Thus, following the lead of the appellants, in our amicus curiae brief we too only made reference to the Minnesota State Constitution.

### MNA Amicus Brief

Minnesota Atheists had observed many pro-equality advocates in this debate talking about how the free exercise of their liberal religions was being denied. But, as the District Court pointed out, the government was *not* interfering in any private religious belief or practice.

But the elephant in the room that few people seemed to be talking about was that denying same-sex couples equal civil marriage rights is a clear violation of separation of state and church. *This was why it was important for Minnesota Atheists to make this case.* Highlights of our brief include:

- Since there is no valid secular reason to deny same-sex couples equal civil marriage rights, the government is enshrining *one* particular religious belief (theocracy), when it should not be basing laws on *any* religious beliefs.

- In a Minnesota Senate Committee hearing on April 29, 2011, six religious leaders used religion to oppose same-sex marriage.

- “Ex-gay” ministries such as the Christian group Exodus and the Jewish group JONAH believe that homosexuality is “outside of God’s will” and try to change gay people’s sexual orientations.

- The American Psychiatric Association and the American Medical Association support legal recognition of same-sex unions.

A pdf file of the amicus will soon be downloadable from our website.

### What's Next

The appellants filed their appeal on May 3, 2011. Their legal brief is due on July 11, 2011. After that filing, the other side has 30 days to respond, and then the appellants have 10 days after that to reply. Some time after that, the Appellate Court will set a hearing date for oral arguments in St. Paul at the Minnesota Judicial Center.

It's likely that whichever side loses at this Appellate Court level will appeal to the Minnesota Supreme Court. However, like the U.S. Supreme Court, the state Supreme Court can choose not to hear the case.

### Expenses

The cost for a lawyer to help draft the brief, its printing, and filing was \$3,000. It is likely that a subsequent filing to the Minnesota Supreme Court will cost another \$2,000.

A Minnesota Atheists member stepped forward to cover this cost, in hopes that money could be raised in our newly created MNA Legal Fund to reimburse him/her. If you wish to donate, you may send us a check directly (marked “Legal Fund”) or donate on-line at [mnatheists.org/donatelegal](http://mnatheists.org/donatelegal). Contributions are eligible to be tax-deductible.

For a donation of \$250 or more, you can receive a signed official printing of our legal brief.

### More Information

For a more complete history of this case, the people involved, and copies of legal documents, go to [marrymeminnesota.org](http://marrymeminnesota.org).

## Do You Have a Unique Story to Tell?

### Dear Minnesota Atheists,

You are invited to submit a paper for possible inclusion in a new book scheduled to be published in late 2012. The book, with the working title **Atheist Voices of Minnesota**, will be a collection of primarily autobiographical writings from atheists living in or who are from Minnesota. All proceeds from the sale of this book will benefit Minnesota Atheists, a 501c3 nonprofit organization.



The project has two goals: to create a unique outreach tool for atheism here in Minnesota, and to financially support Minnesota Atheists. As an outreach tool, the book will cast atheism in a positive, personal light, and will be something that anyone, no matter their point of view, will be able to read and find interesting. What this book will not be is a collection of diatribes against religion, or science writings. There is enough of that already out there. This will be a volume of positive, personal stories of individual lives. It will be professionally published and widely distributed, including on amazon.com. Advance copies of this book will be submitted for reviews in newspapers, journals, and other media outlets. We will also seek advance endorsements.

Not all submissions will be accepted for publication. Essay selection will be based on the quality of the writing and the impact of the story. The book's editorial board will be looking to include a wide variety stories from a wide variety of people, and so selections will also be made with an eye on diversity.

This is an all volunteer project—a collaborative effort to help advance atheism and to support Minnesota Atheists. No individuals working on this project, including authors, will receive any financial benefit. Although authors of accepted submissions will

not be paid, they will receive two complementary copies of the book and will have a 40% author's discount available for purchasing additional copies.

Additional submission guidelines:

- The deadline for submissions is **September 30, 2011**. Feel free to submit your essay at any time from now until then.
- Maximum length is 4,500 words. There is no minimum length.
- Papers must be submitted electronically, as an attachment, to [mnatheistbook@gmail.com](mailto:mnatheistbook@gmail.com).
- You will receive a confirmation email verifying that we received your paper.
- Papers should be submitted in MS Word. If you are unable to use or access MS Word, please contact us at [mnatheistbook@gmail.com](mailto:mnatheistbook@gmail.com).
- Include your name and contact information in the email, but not in the Word file. Papers will be read "blind" by the book's Editorial Board.

We are also seeking volunteers to help with the production and promotion of this book, particularly with copy editing, proofreading, advertising and marketing. If you are willing to help, and have strength or experience in any of these areas, or if you think you can help with this project in another way, please email us at [mnatheistbook@gmail.com](mailto:mnatheistbook@gmail.com). All project volunteers will be thanked in the book.

If you have any question about this project, submitting a paper, or how you can help, please feel free to contact us at [mnatheistbook@gmail.com](mailto:mnatheistbook@gmail.com).

Thank you,

### Editorial Board

August Berkshire  
 Jill Carlson  
 Mike Haubrich  
 Eric Jayne  
 Bill Lehto  
 James Zimmerman

## News and Notes

**June is the time of year for high school graduation ceremonies**, and the time for that annual battle of the culture wars when Christians try to turn them into religious services. This year the outcome was a distinct and disappointing setback for the separation of church and state.

Louisiana's Bastrop High School distributed programs for their graduation that listed a prayer to convene the event. A graduating senior, Damon Fowler, wrote in protest to Principal Stacey Pullen, objecting that the inclusion of a prayer violates his religious liberty guaranteed by the First Amendment. Fowler stated that if the prayer were not removed from the agenda he would take the matter to the ACLU. When Morehouse Parish School System attorney Steve Katz advised school officials that prayer could not be part of a school-sanctioned event, Pullen acceded, and had new programs printed that substituted a "moment of silence."

When the word of Fowler's actions became known, Christian zealots at the school initiated a campaign of bullying him. He was threatened with violence. His Facebook wall was flooded with hate-postings, forcing him to deactivate his account.

The final insult occurred on graduation night. When the moment of silence was announced, Graduating senior Laci Mattice walked to the lectern and said that her faith compelled her to thank God for blessing the class of 2011. "I now ask my fellow students who wish to join in to recite the Lord's Prayer."

There was nothing spontaneous about it. Principal Pullen said that he had hired extra security guards, in fear that the event would be disrupted by atheists. This comment is a gratuitous insult, since only Christians threatened violence, in bullying Fowler. The atheist threat was to take legal action.

**In Texas**, the plans for prayer at the Medina Valley High School graduation did make it to court. Like Fowler, Christina and Danny Schulz wrote to the school to object, on behalf of their son, a graduating senior, to the school's plans to include prayer in the ceremony. When their letter was ignored, they took their case to Americans United for Separation of

Church and State. U. S. District Judge Samuel Frederick Biery, Jr., on the last day of May, issued a preliminary injunction that ordered the school to drop the planned invocation and benediction from the ceremony.

It was an easy decision, since the Supreme Court ruled in *Lee v. Weisman*, 1992 that public schools may not impose prayer and religious worship onto students and their families during commencement ceremonies. In that ruling, Justice Kennedy wrote: "It is beyond dispute that, 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 that establishes a religious faith, or tends to do so."

End of story? Not quite. Three days later the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit dissolved the preliminary injunction tersely: "On this incomplete record at this preliminary injunction stage of the case, we are not persuaded that plaintiffs have shown that they are substantially likely to prevail on the merits, particularly on the issue that the individual prayers or other remarks to be given by students at graduation are, in fact, school sponsored." But, according to *Lee v. Weisman*, to constitute an Establishment Clause violation it is only necessary that the school sponsor the event, not that it dictate the content of the prayer.

**In the debate by Republican presidential candidates**, former Minnesota governor Tim Pawlenty was asked to define the separation of church and state, and to explain how that would affect his decision-making. Pawlenty's answer showed that he is no friend of the separation of church and state:

*Well, the protections between the separation of church and state were designed to protect people of faith from government, not government from people of faith. This is a country that in our founding documents says we're a nation that's founded under God, and the privileges and blessings at that we have are from our creator. They're*



by George Kane

*News and Notes continued on page 7.*

## Responding to the Response



by Eric Jayne

**B**ack in April, on Good Friday, a tornado ripped through St. Louis, Missouri. There was some property damage but not one single person was killed or badly injured. Missouri Governor Jay Nixon credited divine intervention for this fortunate circumstance. Sadly, Nixon's omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent god failed to intervene five days later when tornados shredded through Alabama killing over 200 people. God also didn't bother offering life-saving miracles in Japan the month before when over 20,000 people succumbed to a massively fatal tsunami. Nixon understandably didn't bother invoking divine intervention when a tornado killed over 150 Missourians in Joplin one month after the St. Louis tornado. Victims included children like 10-year-old Shante Caton and her 6-year-old brother Trentan. Public mourning and national relief efforts seemed appropriate, but Gov. Rick Perry of Texas has invited Nixon along with all the other governors to Houston's Reliant Stadium next month for a different kind of response that requires prayer and a "call upon Jesus to guide us through unprecedented struggles."

The prayer and fasting event is titled *The Response* and is sponsored by the American Family Association (AFA). According to their philosophical statement, the AFA believes "that a culture based on biblical truth best serves the well-being of our nation and our families." Part of their mission is to "restrain evil by exposing the works of darkness" and "convince individuals of sin and challenge them to seek Christ's grace and forgiveness." If that wasn't disturbing enough, one of the Directors of AFA, Bryan Fischer, recently said "Homosexuality gave us Adolph Hitler, and homosexuals in the military gave us the Brown Shirts, the Nazi war machine and six million dead Jews."

To be sure, Fischer isn't the only anti-rational pious hack sponsoring the event. There's a whole bunch of them: Cindy Jacob, who insisted the recent unexplained deaths of blackbirds in Arkansas was a result of the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. There's

Doug Stringer, a pastor in Houston, who suggested the 9/11 terror attacks were the result of increasing secularism in the U.S. And among the many other rationally challenged supporters is Mike Bickle, Director of the *International House of Prayer* (IHOP). Not to be confused with pancake diners, the International House of Prayer is an extreme fundamentalist organization based in Kansas City, Missouri that proclaims "when unbelievers die, they are consigned to hell, there to await the Day of Judgment when they shall be punished in the lake of fire with eternal, conscious, and tormented separation from the presence of God."

According to The Response's website *theresponseusa.com*, "only God had the power to solve both the internal moral decline and the external economic and military threats." Therefore, as the argument goes, praying to God is the only way to address our nation's debt, natural disasters, and terrorist attacks. Of course this kind of reasoning makes one wonder why Response supporters would bother voting for policy makers in the first place if they believe prayer is the only way to solve problems.

Sponsors cite the second chapter of the book of Joel to better explain their cause. It is there that a prophet calls on the Zion nation to gather in one concentrated group to weep, fast, mourn, and pray so that God will hear their plea for replenished crops that were destroyed by an overwhelming army of locusts. According to the *the New International Version*, God became "jealous for his land and took pity on his people" after the group prayer (Joel 2:18). God responded, "I am sending you grain, new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations" (Joel 2:19)

*Jayne continued on page 7.*

T wmyysd wsywntbn sl m Xsc qvs anqmace myc  
 fgytevne vte wanmdgane, sa vme m qtii sl dvn drfn  
 sl qvtwv qn man wsyewtsge ty sgaenibne.

-Mipnad Ntyednty, *Dvn Qsaic me T Enn Td*

Planning your estate?  
 Don't forget to include  
 Minnesota Atheists.

(Answer on page 14)



**News and Notes (continued)**

not from our member of Congress. They're not from our county commissioner.

And 39 of the 50 states have in the very early phrases of their constitutions language like Minnesota has in its preamble. It says this, "We the

people of Minnesota, grateful to God for our civil and religious liberties," and so the Founding Fathers understood that the blessings that we have as a nation come from our creator and we should stop and say thanks and express gratitude for that. I embrace that.

**Responding to the Response (continued)**

Not only was God apparently responsible for sending the destructive army of locusts, but the chapter concludes the same way it opens: apocalyptic and pernicious. God promises to eventually destroy the world and punish nonbelievers by first turning the sun dark "and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31). It seems then, that Gov. Perry and his delusional coterie of Response sponsors are suggesting that the United States is at the mercy of a power-hungry, jealous,

maniacal, psychopath whose thirst for human suffering is quenched only by a centralized large group of groveling followers.

Whether our lawmakers are crediting God for fortunate circumstances or fearfully prostrating to him for relief we must not tolerate these misguided responses for worldly struggles in our shared corporeal world. When our elected representatives say they will be praying, or encourages us to pray, as a response to societal struggles respond by sending them an email. Remind them that they—not God—were elected to address our collective challenges. As the secular proverb goes - Two hands working can do more than a thousand clasped in prayer.



## Gay Pride Parade and Festival

During the weekend of June 25-26, Minneapolis hosted the annual Twin Cities Gay Pride Festival. Almost 50 people marched in our contingent in the parade down Hennepin Avenue and helped set up and staff our booth in Loring Park.

Thank you to the following people:

August Berkshire, Serah Blain, Caroline Brunner, Jack Caravela, Jill Carlson, Melissa Christian, Kevin Dahlberg, Lydia Dunbar, Brandy D., Andy Flamm, Mark Friedl, Jeff Gassman, Josie H., Mandy Hale, Tony Hale, Carl Hancock, Heather H., Jill Hiatt, Robert Hiatt, Joseph Homrich, Laura Hutt, Eric Jayne, Daniel Jensen, Jonathan Jensen, Ron Julien, George Kane, Nikii Lambert, Anna Larson, Rhonda LeSage, Chris Matthews, Finn McCauley, Karen McCauley, Jamie Ann Meyers, Shirley Moll, Kristin Oman, Chris Pederson, David Perry, Steve Petersen, Daniel Post, Jerry Rauser, Tom Riddering, Fabian Rivera, Ryan Schmid, Calla Simms, Angie Stehr, Will Tanberg, Mike Toft, Georgia Tsoi, and Rachel Wilson.







**Gay Pride (continued)**



Find us! We are on the web at [mna.theists.org](http://mna.theists.org) and on Meetup and Facebook:



<http://www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists/>



[www.facebook.com/pages/Minnesota-Atheists](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Minnesota-Atheists)

## Book Review: *The Unbelievers*

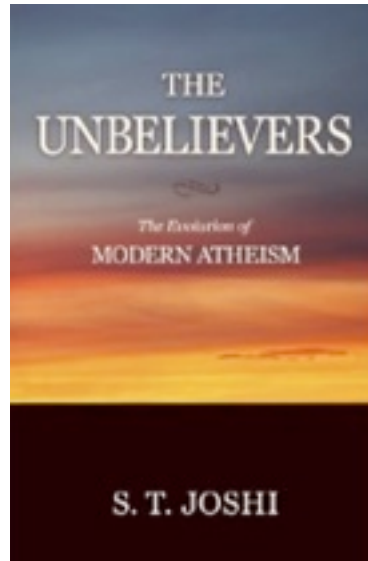
by James Zimmerman

S. T. Joshi's latest book sketches the lives and teachings of the main players in the non-belief arena from the time of Darwin until today. In some ways, *The Unbelievers: The Evolution of Modern Atheism* could be read as a sequel to Kerry Walters' book *Revolutionary Deists* - Prometheus Book's release from earlier this year - that detailed the deism of several founding fathers.

Joshi introduces his book by offering it as "a nucleus" for certain aspects of the history of atheism. As his description indicates, his book doesn't cover that majority of atheism's history. Joshi admits that a full-scale history is still absent from the bookshelves. He notes that such a history would likely begin in the fifth century BCE, with Diagoras the Atheist. Instead, Joshi chooses to begin his book with Thomas Henry Huxley. Even though Huxley might not have considered himself an atheist (a claim for which the book offers no documentation), Joshi argues that Huxley's intense efforts in bringing Darwin's theories into the mainstream allowed, finally, for "the adoption of atheism as a working hypothesis far more intellectually viable than it had been in the generations that preceded him" (40).

The book continues, then, with a chronological overview of atheism's major players during the last 120 years. Biographies are offered on thirteen more

Image courtesy Prometheus Books. Used by permission.



*The Unbelievers*, by S.T. Joshi ©2011, Prometheus Books, 272 pages.

individuals including J. S. Mill, Mark Twain, Clarence Darrow, Bertrand Russell, and Gore Vidal. The final three chapters are devoted to Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. In their cases, Joshi dispenses with the most of the details of their biographies and instead offers analyses of their popular books. The analyses make for fascinating reading, even if they are inconsistent at times. For example, Joshi claims Dawkins goes "a bit overboard" in *The God Delusion* by maintaining that

the 9/11 terrorist attacks "would not have occurred without religion" (209). Later, however, he says Sam Harris should "be praised" for his assertions that religion "must be a root cause and perhaps the sole cause" of the events of 9/11 (218).

Readers are also likely to be put off by the narrow scope. Joshi's book should, perhaps, more correctly be subtitled *The Evolution of Modern White, Western, Male Atheism*. Nothing in this book took place outside of Europe or North America, and the only woman detailed is Madalyn Murray O'Hair, a person whom Joshi begins discussing by saying she "has always been a bit of an embarrassment to the atheist community" (167). The lack of diversity here represents several missed opportunities, especially considering the majority of the figures in this book are already well-known by most atheists.

Here's hoping for a more comprehensive, inclusive sequel...

## Juneteenth Festival

Minnesota Atheists hosted a booth at the Twin Cities Juneteenth Festival at the North Mississippi Regional Park in Minneapolis on June 18, 2011. From left: A festival attendee signs up for our mailing list as Matthew Richardson and Serah Blain look on. Also helping to staff the booth was August Berkshire, who took this photo.



## ***Atheists Talk: May/June Radio Report***

by Steve Petersen

**Our radio program is** live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 from the KTNF studios in Eden Prairie on AM 950. Minnesota Atheists is the producer and the director is Mike Haubrich. Hosts include Mike Haubrich and Scott Lohman. Original music is composed, played and recorded by Brent Michael Davids. Live steaming is available on our web page [www.mnatheists.org](http://www.mnatheists.org). The six month cost is \$5,320.00, each donation to support the program is greatly appreciated. To donate, just send in a donation to our post office box, or donate online at [http://mnatheists.org/component/option,com\\_civicrm/Itemid,55](http://mnatheists.org/component/option,com_civicrm/Itemid,55). All past programs can be accessed via web page.



**"Leaving Jehovah's Witnesses," James Zimmerman on Atheists Talk #116, May 22, 2011** Interviewed by Mike Haubrich and hosted by Scott Lohman.

Leaving the Jehovah's Witnesses is a difficult process because of the tremendous pressure to remain. Once a member leaves, they are "shunned" by the society. Even family members; sisters, brothers, parents, children along with cousins and uncles and aunts will refuse to have contact with ex-Witnesses. James Zimmerman, our guest, is a former Jehovah's Witness who could not believe the tenets of the faith. His wife also left the church, and they are now members of the Minnesota Atheists.

James and Mike talked about the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses, how he came to question the faith and finally left it.

James is the editor of this newsletter, and frequent host of *Atheists Talk* television show.

**"Choice In Dying," Eric MacDonald on Atheists Talk #117, May 29, 2011** Mike Haubrich interviewed Eric MacDonald. Scott Lohman hosted.

Choosing one's own death should be the right of every living person facing the process of a long, debilitating, painful terminal illness. Not everyone finds "dignity in suffering," yet religions insist that the value of "life above all else" trumps individual choice. Eric MacDonald and his wife faced this

decision in her choice to end her life. The government of Canada and the authorities of the Anglican Church, of which MacDonald was a priest, threw up legal roadblocks and threats. Since that experience, Eric has become an outspoken atheist, defending the "New Atheists" against charges of shallow philosophy and a light understanding of theology. He writes about his interpretations of Church authority and atheism at his blog, *A Choice In Dying*.

**"Skeptically Speaking;" Desiree Schell and Greg Laden on Atheists Talk #118, June 5, 2011.**

Interviewed by Greg Laden and hosted by Mike Haubrich.

Desiree Schell - who produces the podcast "Skeptically Speaking" - and Greg Laden touched on a broad range of topics, including a preview of what Desiree will be talking about at this year's Skepchick track at Convergence.



*Host Mike Huabrich, right, with guest Brian Dalton. Photo courtesy of Karen Burke.*

**"Look at All the Crazy Preachers." Ed Brayton on Atheists Talk #119, June 12, 2011.** Interviewed by Greg Laden and hosted by Mike Haubrich

When Harold Camping announced his calculated date for The Rapture, rational people laughed at his

*Radio Report continued on page 16.*

# The Blasphemer's Ball



While we were waiting (or not) for the world to end on May 21<sup>st</sup>, Minnesota Atheists member Keith Lodermeier set up a fundraising benefit concert for the Minnesota Atheists Building Fund called a "Blasphemer's Ball" at (where else?) Hell's Kitchen in downtown Minneapolis.

The event received advance press coverage in *The St. Paul Pioneer Press* newspaper. It was very well attended and everybody had loads of non-rapturous fun. Minnesota Atheists split the proceeds equally with the bands, which amounted to \$150 for our Building Fund.

We wish to thank Keith Lodermeier for organizing the event and the following bands for performing: Ocean Cats, Robots from the Future, Le Cirque Rouge, and Trendy Trendy Space Vegans.

*(Photos and write-up by August Berkshire. -ed.)*



# June Treasurer's Report

Compiled by Chris Matthews

## Building Fund

Cash via Blasphemer's Ball	\$150
Jerrold Larson	\$25
Dean Borghorst	\$50
Thomas Dooley	\$50
James Smith	\$50
<b>Total Building Fund</b>	<b>\$325</b>

## Radio Fund

Cash via 5th Sunday Fundraiser	\$165
Theodore Bagg	\$10
Julie Owens	\$10
Kristin Meyer	\$15
Rodney Weaver	\$15
Gordon Holtan	\$20
James Barri	\$25
Charles Boltuck	\$25
Teresa Cerling	\$25
David Dorn	\$25
Sharon Fortunak	\$25
Louis Geeraerts	\$25
Geraldine Jensen	\$25
Rhonda LeSage	\$25
Dawn MacDonald	\$25
Michael Seliga	\$25
Mike Stanfill	\$25
Matthew Stark	\$25
Leah Weaver	\$25
David Yount	\$25
Ken Christianson	\$50
Neil Clark	\$50
Joseph Denor	\$50
Thomas Dooley	\$50
Andy Flamm	\$50
Jennifer Hopper	\$50
Daniel Johnson	\$50
Ronald Julien	\$50
June Li	\$50
Mark Mahowald	\$50
Christopher Matthews	\$50
Catharine Nisam	\$50
Steve Petersen	\$50
Edward Rang	\$50
Nancy Ruhland	\$50
James Salutz	\$50
Alvin Shimek	\$50
Otto Link	\$100
Robert McGeachie	\$100
Theodore Nagel	\$100
Douglas Post	\$100
Leland Salisbury	\$100
Morgan Smith	\$100
Rachel Wilson	\$100
George Kane	\$150
Vernon Young	\$150
Dorothy Rae French	\$250

## Radio Fund (continued)

Rick Rohrer	\$500
<b>Total Radio Fund</b>	<b>\$3,185</b>

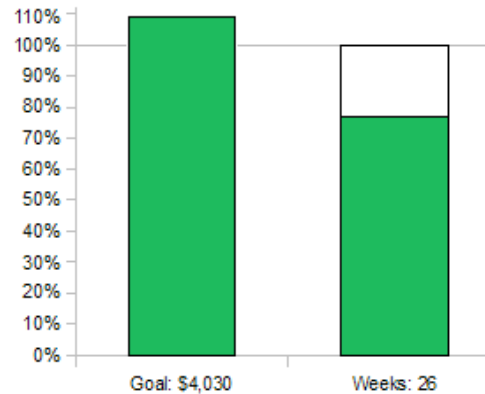
## General/Visibility Fund

Joe Crump	\$7
Anne Hanna	\$10
Dale Howey	\$10
Meghan Kosowski	\$10
Justine Hartz	\$13
Gary Bolt	\$15
John Fruhwirth	\$25
Brian Kaul	\$25
Robert Wilson	\$25
Michelle Tjernagel	\$42
Dean Borghorst	\$50
Jim Hartmann	\$50
James Smith	\$50
Robert Muldoon	\$65
Lee Newman	\$100
<b>Total General/Visibility Fund</b>	<b>\$497</b>

**Total Income: \$4,007**

**Current Building Fund Total \$128,885**

Radio Show Fundraising Goal  
for 6 months ending July 31



Amount Raised in first 20 weeks: \$4,385  
Amount Remaining to Reach Goal: \$0

## Top Expenses for June

Newsletter Printing	\$626
Storage	\$142
Printing (non-Newsletter)	\$126

# June Cable Report

We had a two-part program for June. In Part One, local librarian Mindy Rhiger discussed her ten favorite books for young children on the topics of religion, faith, belief, and death. She noted that the books were great for introducing children to these difficult topics without indoctrinating them. Some of the books explained, in simple terms, that people around the world have a variety of beliefs. Others are designed to help secular families talk about death and loss without involving religious teachings such as resurrection. This included

Steve Petersen at [achair@mnatheists.org](mailto:achair@mnatheists.org) or call 651-484-9277.



**Cable Crew:** George Kane, Brett Stenbridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, Grant Hermanson, and Art Anderson.

by Steve Petersen

**Podcasts:** MinnesotaAtheists.org. Available via iTunes. Made possible by Grant Hermanson.

## Cable Schedule:

**Burnsville/Eagan Community Television:** Channel 14. Check their web site [www.bect.tv](http://www.bect.tv) for day and times. Sponsor: Kevin Hardisty.

**Bloomington:** Channel 16. Monday 9:30 p.m. and Tuesday 5:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Sponsors: David and Joanne Beardsley.

**Minneapolis:** Channel 17. Saturday 8:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

**Rochester:** Channel 10. Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Salutz.

**Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Moundsview/ New Brighton:** Channel 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Shirley Moll.

**St. Cloud:** Channel 12. Thursday 8:30 to 9:00 p.m. Sponsor Jack Richter.

**Stillwater:** Channel 16. Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Wednesday 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury.

**South Washington County:** Channel 14. Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Bodsberg.

**White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights:** Channel 15. Saturday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.

## FREETHOUGHT CRYPTOGRAM ANSWER

I cannot conceive of a God who rewards and punishes his creatures, or has a will of the type of which we are conscious in ourselves.

—Albert Einstein, *The World as I See It*



*The Tenth Good Thing About Barney*, by Judith Viorst, which offers children an open, honest look at death and *Goodbye, Rune*, by Marit Kaldhol, a book that offers a humanist perspective on the loss of a friend.

In Part Two, Rhiger discussed ten great books for young children on scientific topics. Some, such as *Riverbank* (adapted from the final paragraph of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*) and Steve Jenkin's *Life on Earth*, provide an introduction to evolution for young people. Others, such as *Born to be Giants*, point out what we do know - and what we *can* know - about dinosaurs and other events from Earth's past. Rhiger also expressed her fondness for books that encourage children to be explorers, critical thinkers, and to ask questions. These included *Turn It Loose*, by Diane Swanson and Marcus Pfister's *Questions, Questions*.

James Zimmerman hosted both episodes.

A complete Listing of Rhiger's book suggestions will appear online and in our next issue.

If you would like to sponsor our program in your community, or have an idea for a program please contact

# Minnesota Atheists

[www.mnatheists.org](http://www.mnatheists.org)

P.O. Box 120304, New Brighton, MN 55112

## Join or Renew Membership

- \_\_\_\_\_ \$35 - Individual Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$45 - Household Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$75 - Sustaining Fund Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$20 - Student (newsletter by email; send copy of fee statement or school ID)
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$600 - Lifetime Membership
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$25 - Newsletter Only

## Donate to Special Funds

- \$\_\_\_\_\_ General Expense / Outreach Fund
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Building Fund
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Radio Fund
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Donation

All memberships include the newsletter. To pay by credit card or PayPal, please visit our website.

Payment by: Check (enclosed) for \$ \_\_\_\_\_, payable to **Minnesota Atheists**.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

>> Minnesota Atheists has IRS 501(c)(3) status. All contributions are tax-deductible. <<

## Things to do, Places to go: A Calendar for Atheists

In addition to these regularly scheduled events, there are many more events every month. Please subscribe to Atheist Weekly e-mail on our web site, [mnatheists.org](http://mnatheists.org), and join our Meetup group.

Sundays, 9:00am-10:00am "Atheists Talk" Radio. AM 950 KTNF in the Twin Cities or stream live at <http://www.am950ktnf.com>. Contact us during the show with questions or comments at (952) 946-6205 or [radio@mnatheists.org](mailto:radio@mnatheists.org).

Sundays, 6:00pm-7:00pm Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous. Men's Center, 3249 Hennepin Avenue South Suite # 55, Minneapolis Meet in the basement. Open to all genders.

2<sup>nd</sup> Sundays, 1:00pm Minnesota Atheists Little Canada Book Club, Caribou Coffee 3354 Rice St, Little Canada, MN 55126

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, September through May, 1:00 – 4:00. Minnesota Atheists Public Meeting. Various libraries. Business meeting, educational program and dinner afterwards at a nearby restaurant.

Fifth Sunday, 5:00 pm Flying Spaghetti Monster Dinner. Old Spaghetti Factory, 233 Park Ave., Minneapolis, MN. Get together for drinks and pasta. A collection is taken for the Radio Fund

1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays 6:00pm Freethought Toastmasters. Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Ave. W, St. Paul 55113. This group meets the 1st and 3rd Monday of every month. George Kane, [chair@mnatheists.org](mailto:chair@mnatheists.org).

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays, 5:00pm-7:00pm Freethought Dinner Social. Davanni's, 6345 Penn Avenue South, Richfield, MN. For more information call Bob or Marilyn Neinker at 612-866-6200

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday, 11:30am-1:00pm Freethought Lunch. Old Country Buffet, County Road B2 between Fairview and Snelling. Bob or Marilyn Nienkirk at 612-866-6200.

4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays, 7:00pm Maple Grove Book Club. Byerly's Meeting Room - 12880 Elm Creek Blvd N Maple Grove, MN 55369

Every other Tuesday, 7:00pm Secular Bible Study Various locations. See the Meetup page <http://www.meetup.com/Secular-Bible-Study/>

1<sup>st</sup> Wednesdays, 7:00pm Minnesota Atheists Burnsville Book Club. Davanni's, 14639 County Road 11, Burnsville MN 55337. Meet in the Party Room.

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays 11:30am-2pm Lunch at Dragon House Restaurant. Dragon House Restaurant 3970 Central Avenue Columbia Heights. Private room reserved. Bill Volna 612-781-1420

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays, 6:30pm Minnesota Atheists Monthly Board Meeting. Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue, St. Paul, 55113. Open to all members. George Kane, [chair@mnatheists.org](mailto:chair@mnatheists.org).

1<sup>st</sup> Thursdays, 6:00pm-9:00pm Minnesota Atheists Taping -- Atheists Talk TV. MTN Studio A, 125 SE Main Street, Minneapolis. Steve Petersen at 651-484-9277.

**To sign up for the Atheists' Weekly Email (AWE), send a request to [awe@mnatheists.org](mailto:awe@mnatheists.org).**

**To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, visit [atheists.meetup.com/493](http://atheists.meetup.com/493).**



### ***Atheists Talk: May/June Radio Report (continued)***

certainty. We were also saddened that his deluded followers sold everything they owned and devoted their lives to spreading the word that the "End is Near." The rapture didn't happen, but Camping is not the only crazy preacher out there.

Freelance writer Ed Brayton, who writes at ScienceBlogs' "Dispatches from the Culture Wars" has been following and writing about religion and politics and highlighting the more insane fundamentalist preachers, priests, rabbis, and imams. He highlighted the funny - yet scary - people who use fear and bigotry to attract followers, money and even influence public policy.

**"Black Atheist Evangelism;" Jamila Bey on Atheists Talk #120, June 19, 2011.** Interviewed by August Berkshire and hosted by Mike Huabrich

Black atheists experience isolation in several different ways. In their own families and community,

they are often ostracized by a culture that assumes and values religion to a larger degree than the white culture. While the number of atheists and non-religious whites is growing, the social bedrock of church attendance and belief runs deeper for blacks and so African-American atheists find themselves to be a minority within a minority. This can also give them the feeling of isolation.

Fortunately there are activists within the black atheist community who are working to change the situation for black atheists, and to the benefit of atheist groups as a whole. When there are more better voices we all win.

Jamila Bey is a comedian and a journalist in the Washington, D.C. area, and a black woman unafraid to use the "A" word. On our show, she discussed what she does to help spread the truths of Logic, Reason, and Science to all who may hear.

The study of theology as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing; it rests on no principles; it proceeds by no authorities; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing; and admits of no conclusion.

-Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason, part II*

**Check us out on the radio!  
AM950 on Sundays at 9:00 a.m.**