



The Minnesota Atheist

James Zimmerman to be featured at October Minnesota Atheists Meeting

The October meeting of Minnesota Atheists will feature James Zimmerman discussing his new book *Deliverance at Hand!*

James is a member of the Minnesota Atheists Editorial Board and a former editor of *The Minnesota Atheist*. He is a frequent host and guest of the *Atheists Talk* television show. His writing has appeared in *The Minnesota Atheist*, *The Humanist*, *Free Inquiry*, and *American Atheist*. His essay "Losing My Head" appears in the book *Atheist Voices of Minnesota*, which he helped edit.

Deliverance at Hand! recounts James' life as a loyal, zealous Jehovah's Witness and his subsequent defection from that faith. James will compare the Witnesses with other religions, discuss the Witnesses' claimed evidence for believing that we're living in the last days, explain what nonbelievers often get wrong about the religion, and reveal some little-known aspects of the Witnesses' religion. He will also shed some light on the Witnesses' policy of shunning former members, citing examples from his own life. A question-and-answer session will follow.

Here is a passage from the book:

One morning, no one else showed up for service. There were seven other regular pioneers in the congregation, plus auxiliary pioneers, not to mention the assorted publishers, but not a single person showed up. I was baffled. I didn't know that sort of thing ever happened. Not a single person in the entire congregation could find the time to do this most important work? So I just sat there. As if holding my own private meeting, I thumbed through the *Watchtower*. I said a prayer. Then I went home. I had nothing to do. I was discouraged. This occurred eleven times that year.

On another occasion, after we stopped for lunch, one of the sisters in our group was nowhere to be found. At first, we assumed she was using the ladies' room, but then five minutes turned into fifteen. Finally, after thirty-three minutes, she trotted out of the adjacent grocery store with a cart of groceries. That evening, I told my parents how



James Zimmerman

ridiculous that was.

"Stuff like that happens from time to time," my mom said. "I don't like it either." My dad said that if that happens again, I should offer magazines to the people in the parking lot to keep my time going.

That was the thing about pioneering: you had to keep your time going.

The October Minnesota Atheists meeting will be held at the Apple Valley Community Center, 14603 Hayes Road, Apple Valley, on October 20th. The meeting will follow our usual schedule:

1:00-1:15 p.m. Informal Gathering Time

1:15-1:45 p.m. Business Meeting

1:45-2:00 p.m. Break

2:00-3:30 p.m. Presentation by James Zimmerman

You may attend any part of the meeting you wish. At 4:00 p.m. there will be an optional dinner at Rascal's Bar & Grill, 7721 147th Street West, Apple Valley.

President's Column 2
News and Notes 3
Cryptogram 3
September Meeting 4
Defining Atheism 4
Religion's a Joke 5
Board Report 5
Sexual Harassment 5
Atheist Marriage Law 6
Treasury Report 8
Upcoming Events 8
Television Report 9
Radio Report 10

President's Column • Eric Jayne

Know Your Local Nonprophet Nonprofits

Our recent, first-ever, "Dinner with the Board" event was delightfully fun. The board members had a chance to talk with several supporters while enjoying delicious drinks and food. A couple of the guests I spoke with wanted to learn more about the philanthropic endeavors of Minnesota Atheists. We talked about our ongoing work with the Family Place shelter, Emergency Food Network, and Children's Hospital of Minnesota. We also talked about other local, secular nonprofits that provide helpful services to the community without the proselytizing that often comes with faith-based agencies. We concluded that it might be helpful to have a list of some of these secular nonprofits to refer to when considering places to donate money—after, of course, a donation has been made to Minnesota Atheists.

I've included a small list of local nonprofits that provide help without a faith-based agenda. So instead of dropping coins into the buckets of the clanging Salvation Army bell ringers, you can save them for secular alternatives. I have included a list of twenty local secular nonprofits that I have had professional experience working with. (I work for Keystone Community Services which is listed below.) This is not meant to be a complete list of secular nonprofits in Minnesota but just a brief introduction to some of the wonderful community organizations that provide valuable resources to local people every day. For more information about programs and other community organizations in your area, visit the local United Way 2-1-1 website at www.211unitedway.org.

Emergency Food Network. 8501 54th Avenue North, New Hope, MN 55428, 763-450-3860. Food bank serving most metro area food shelves.

Second Harvest Heartland. 1140 Gervais Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55109, 651-484-5117. Food bank serving most metro and greater Minnesota food shelves.

Ralph Reeder. 2101 14th Street Northwest, New Brighton, MN 55112, 651-621-7450. Food shelf and emergency services for Mounds View, New Brighton, and Shoreview.

Tubman Center. 3111 1st Avenue

South, Minneapolis, MN 55408, 612-825-3333. Domestic violence services including housing and legal aid.

White Bear Area Emergency Food Shelf. 1884 Whitaker Street, White Bear Lake, MN 55110, 651-407-5310. Food shelf and emergency services for the White Bear Lake area.

Merrick Food Shelf. 1740 Van Dyke Street, Saint Paul, MN 55109, 651-287-2088. Food shelf and emergency services for Maplewood and parts of Saint Paul.

Keystone Community Services. 2000 Saint Anthony Avenue, Saint Paul, MN



Eric Jayne,
Minnesota Atheists President

55104, 651-645-0349. Food shelf, case management, senior programming, youth programming, and emergency services for most of Saint Paul and Roseville.

Community Emergency Assistance Program (CEAP). 7051 Brooklyn Boulevard, Brooklyn Center, MN 55429, 763-783-4930. Food shelf and emergency services for the northwest suburbs.

Project for Pride and Living (PPL). 1035 East Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55404, 612-455-5100. Housing programs and emergency services for Minneapolis.

360 Communities. 501 Highway 13, #102, Burnsville, MN 55337, 952-985-5300. Food shelf, emergency services, housing programs, and domestic violence services for Dakota County.

Face 2 Face—Safe Zone. 1165 Arcade Street, Saint Paul, MN 55106, 651-772-5555. Housing for homeless youth and mental health services in Ramsey County.

The Bridge for Youth. 1111 West 22nd Street, Minneapolis, MN 55405, 612-377-8800. Housing for homeless youth and other emergency services.

Neighborhood House. 179 Robie Street East, Saint Paul, MN 55107, 651-789-2500. Food shelf, emergency services, youth programming, and bicultural services.

CLUES. 720 East Lake Street, Minneapolis, MN 55407, 612-746-3500. Mental health, chemical health, and bicultural family services.

Lifetrack Resources. 709 University Avenue West, Saint Paul, MN 55104, 651-227-8471. Services for the deaf, employment services, and family services.

Family Place. 244 10th Street East, Saint Paul, MN 55101, 651-225-9354. Emergency shelter for families without permanent housing in Ramsey county.

People Serving People. 614 Third Street South, Minneapolis, MN 55415, 612-332-4500. Supportive housing, employment services, education programming, and emergency services for families in Minneapolis

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Greater Twin Cities. 2550 University Avenue West, Suite 410N, Saint Paul, MN 55114, 651-789-2400. Mentoring program for Twin Cities children and youth ages 6-18.

People Incorporated. 2060 Centre Pointe Blvd, Suite 3, Saint Paul, MN 55120, 651-774-0011. Direct mental health programming for individuals and families in the Twin Cities metro area.

Minnesota Community Action Partnership. There are twenty-eight Community Action Partnership agencies throughout the state. They administer and operate several programs including Head Start, Energy Assistance, Weatherization, Emergency Shelter, and much more. Visit mncaa.org to find your local Community Action Partnership agency.



News and Notes • Commentary by George Kane

Religious Freedom Amendment to Wisconsin Constitution Would Limit Civil Rights

Wisconsin's state constitution provides excellent protection for the separation of church and state, defining it more clearly than the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Since the state legislature is now firmly in thrall to the religious right, however, both houses have taken up a constitutional amendment to eviscerate that protection.

Article 1, Section 18 now reads:

The right of every person to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of conscience shall never be infringed; nor shall any person be compelled to attend, erect or support any place of worship, or to maintain any ministry, without consent; nor shall any control of, or interference with, the rights of conscience be permitted, or any preference be given by law to any religious establishments or modes of worship; nor shall any money be drawn from the treasury for the benefit of religious societies or religious or theological seminaries.

This clause has protected secular government since Wisconsin was admitted to the Union in 1848. It ensures the separation of church and state by prohibiting any support for religion from state funds—money deriving from the state's taxpayers.

The proposed amendment would append the following text to that section:

The right of conscience, which

includes the right to engage in activity or refrain from activity based on a sincerely held religious belief, shall not be burdened unless the state provides it has a compelling interest in infringing upon the specific action or refusal to act, and the burden is the least-restrictive alternative to the state's action. A burden to the right of conscience includes indirect burdens, such as withholding benefits, assessing penalties, or exclusion from programs or access to facilities.

This changes the law completely. If this amendment passes, the state will be forbidden to “burden” anyone's exercise of religious conscience by “withholding benefits, assessing penalties, or exclusion from programs or access to facilities.”

The Wisconsin amendment is a “model bill” for other state legislatures, just like the “Stand Your Ground” and “Voter Photo ID” laws authored by ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council. The “Religious Freedom” Amendment was crafted by Wisconsin Family Action, an affiliate of Focus on the Family. Similar bills have been introduced in Colorado, Nevada, and Kentucky.

Some intended applications of the law are clear. The Assembly's version of the amendment states that it is needed to reinforce a court ruling that a high school did not have the authority to censor an anti-gay adoption editorial in a school newspaper. It would prevent the state from “burdening” the refusal by pharmacists to fill prescriptions for

emergency contraception, such as by requirements that the customers must be referred to another pharmacist or pharmacy. After all, the “religious conscience” of the pharmacists requires them to do whatever they can to deny women products to which they have a legal right. Under the proposed amendment, the state can only act to secure the woman's right if it can prove that the state has a “compelling interest.”

The Wisconsin-based Freedom from Religion Foundation has listed other expected consequences if the constitutional amendment passes. For example, it would permit employers, by asserting a religious motivation, to pay women less, or discriminate against them in ways that are otherwise prohibited, and deprive them of equal employment opportunity. State employees could refuse to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, or even interracial couples, claiming a religious exemption. It could enable students to refuse schoolwork, such as lessons in biological evolution, that conflicts with their religion. It could be invoked to give parents and guardians permission to rely on “faith” and “prayer” rather than carry out their duty to seek medical care for gravely ill children. Perhaps it could even be invoked to exonerate priests who refuse to report child rape.

If this amendment passes, it will turn “religious freedom” into a powerful weapon against the hard-won civil rights of women and gays, and cripple the state's ability to protect citizens from those who want to impose their religion on others.

George Kane

Freethought Cryptogram

Bu'a qyor dsow uf mypbyqy bl Vfw hdyf gyousbl jyfyjy soy lyqyo auoige mr pbvdulblv.

—Udy pbuupy mfr bl udy gfnbg auobj *Gspqbl slw Dfmmya*. (Answer on page eight.)

Alyssa Ehni

September Minnesota Atheists Meeting Featuring PZ Myers Draws Large Crowd

The room was packed for September's Minnesota Atheists meeting at the Roseville Public Library. The meeting featured PZ Myers, an Associate Professor of Biology at the University of Minnesota, Morris, who has become well known in the atheist community through his Pharyngula blog at Freethought Blogs. He has recently released a book titled *The Happy Atheist*.

For the first half hour of Myer's presentation, Myers shared parts of the chapter "Daughter's of Eve" from his book. This chapter provides quotations from the Bible and biblical interpretations from theologians which demonstrate Christianity's oppressive attitude towards women. Myers comments that a culture can increase its potential for achievement by allowing all to participate fully instead of imposing a lesser role on half of its members. Myers noted that while Christianity is not the origin of these attitudes, it does reinforce the

status quo.

The last hour of the presentation was a lively question-and-answer session which covered a range of topics. Myers argued that to become a happy atheist it is essential to adopt a view of atheism which goes beyond the dictionary definition to include a more humanist outlook. Myers noted that the atheist community is expanding beyond those who it traditionally encompassed, and it is important to listen to and include the diverse ideas which come with this growth.

Myers explained that his own involvement as an atheist activist is in part a reaction to creationism's attacks on his profession of biology. He discussed what it's like to be an atheist living in a small religious town, where he largely finds support within the scientific community at the University of Minnesota, Morris. Still, according to Myers, not even the bookstore on campus is carrying *The Happy Atheist*.



PZ Myers at the September Minnesota Atheists Meeting

The Happy Atheist is available at amazon.com. Myers' Pharyngula blog can be found at freethoughtblogs.com/pharyngula.

Commentary • Steve Petersen

Action, Not Semantics, Defines Atheism

At the September Minnesota Atheists meeting with PZ Myers, a classic issue came up in the question-and-answer session: Atheism only defines what we do not believe rather than what we do believe. I argued that many people are proud to be independent, not dependent, even though this also defines only what they are not. Similarly, the Declaration of Independence is primarily a negation of dependence on Britain, but it is not viewed as a pejorative document, at least not because of its title.

The real issue is not one of semantics but of how atheists are perceived. One of the main roles of religion is to control society. Many people see atheists as a threat to that control and see atheism as bringing about the end of civilization. This concept has faded over time, but fear of atheism is still widespread.

One of the best ways we can change

this perception is to earn respect through collective action. For centuries, the lone atheist might bring about change for the better, but history would usually ignore his or her atheism. On the other hand, history has been all too willing to credit God for the success of reformers who were religious.

Social media and the growth of organized atheist groups have given atheists an opportunity to influence society's perception of atheists and have also given atheists a stronger voice in the creation of our laws and the nature of our government.

Sometimes it may not be good enough to rely only on science to solve a problem. Sometimes we may need to expose the anti-scientific goals of both individuals and groups and the harm those goals may cause our shared future. Sometimes we may need to expose the religious

zealot who is running for elective office and wants to enforce his or her narrow religious views on everyone. Sometimes it may be best to say we come to our views because we are atheists.

I believe I am but a speck of dust on a planet of dust in the vast universe that will go on whether I live or die, but as long as I am here, my voice is important. Society is in great need of reason instead of superstition. I see this as a positive attitude, not a negative one. Reason is a fundamental part of our being, even if superstition is as well.

Positive atheism as practiced by Minnesota Atheists has actively helped atheists earn respect in our community one event at a time for over twenty years. If we continue to be successful in our work, someday it may become as commonplace and accepted for people to belong to an atheist center as to belong to a church.

Religion's a Joke

The Stoning

As Jesus was walking through Jerusalem, he came upon an angry crowd. As He approached more closely, He saw that the crowd was surrounding a young woman, and that the young woman looked very frightened.

Jesus stepped to the center of the crowd. "What hath this woman done?" He asked.

"She was taken in adultery, in the very act," replied a man at the head of the crowd. "Moses in the law commands us, that such should be stoned."

Jesus looked at the angry crowd. He could see that many of the people in the crowd carried stones in their hands. He looked at the young woman and saw the terror in her face. And then he turned to the crowd and said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

The crowd became silent. Some people dropped their stones quietly to the ground, and others shuffled their feet. Then an old woman worked her way slowly to the front of the crowd. She was poorly dressed and seemed weary in the extreme. She faced the young woman and looked at her carefully. Then the old woman drew a large stone from under her shawl and threw it at the young woman. The stone hit the young woman on the side of the head and knocked her to the ground. Blood gushed from the wound on her head.

The young woman looked beseechingly at Jesus, but Jesus seemed confused. He looked at the crowd desperately, but the people who had dropped their stones began to pick them up. Soon a hail of stones hit the young woman, and in a matter of minutes she was dead.

The crowd slowly dispersed. Only the old woman remained with Jesus, along with the young woman's body in a pool of blood. Jesus looked at the body a long time, and then He turned to the old woman with an anguish that made it hard for him to speak.

"Ma," He said, "don't help me!"

Board Report • Jill Carlson

Minnesota Atheists Board Attempts to Rent Space for Library, Reviews Public Policy Statements

This October the Board of Directors of Minnesota Atheists is introducing a new feature to the newsletter. Each month the Board Secretary will provide a brief column summarizing events that occur within the leadership of Minnesota Atheists (MNA).

At the September board meeting, the Board voted to sign a lease on rental space at the Wesley Center in Downtown Minneapolis for \$200 per month for one year. This arrangement failed when it was later determined that the space was already rented by another tenant. The Board agreed to continue to search for affordable spaces to display our extensive collection of atheist books that is currently in storage.

Heather Hegi promoted the newly scheduled "2014 Goals Setting Meeting" to be held at 2:00 p.m. on October 13th in

the Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1280 Larpenteur Avenue West, Saint Paul. This meeting is open to all members of MNA. One of the goals of this meeting is to foster better communication among committees and to enhance committee operations.

The Board reviewed work completed by the Public Policy committee and provided suggestions for revising MNA public policy statements.

The Board also reviewed the successes and challenges of the Saint Paul Saints Game and the Annual Conference occurring in August. General financial information was shared about expenses and revenue.

Finally, the Board addressed a request from Ben Blanchard to sponsor his work on Pathfinder Project with a financial donation. The Board agreed to solicit donations at the next MNA monthly meeting.

Bernadette Chlebeck and Phil Cunliffe

Sexual Harassment Policies Should be Gender Neutral

When you hear the words "Sexual Harassment Policy," what image comes to your mind? Most likely you envision a female victim and a male perpetrator. If you do, you are not alone. Statistics from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission show that 82.2% of reported sexual harassment charges were filed by females. The atheist community has had its share of sexual harassment violations, and sexual harassment policies are now being created to help protect women.

The atheist community should be a leader in the effort to identify sexual harassment for the abuse that it is and to make it clear that it will not be tolerated, especially in our own community. But as we do this we must remember that anyone, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, can be a victim of sexual harassment. It is all too easy to forget that 17.8% of people who

report being sexually harassed are male.

We should also look for the best way to communicate our policies during events sponsored by atheist groups. Ideally, we can address the serious nature of the topic without creating discomfort for the audience.

It is especially important to address the issue of male victims. For many men who are victims of sexual harassment, it can be extremely difficult to know what to do or how to bring up the topic. Often, sexual harassment of men is regarded as funny or trivial. If you are laughing as you read this article, you are probably not alone. But if our community is going to be a safe place for everyone, we must make our sexual harassment policies equal with respect to both gender and sexual orientation, and we must enforce them rigorously. Tolerating even a single case of sexual harassment will only tend to drive people away.

August Berkshire

Minnesota Atheists Seeks to Change State Law to Allow Atheist and Humanist Leaders to Perform Civil Marriages

Minnesota Atheists has restarted our process to change Minnesota state law to allow atheist leaders to conduct civil marriages. We began this project a few years ago but then the marriage amendment and the marriage equality legislation intervened. We knew that the Minnesota state legislature was not going to tackle both gay and atheist marriage issues in the same year.

Civil marriage laws are primarily a state issue, not a federal issue. This is why things such as the age at which a person can marry vary from state to state. Only rarely does the national government get involved, such as in 1967 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Loving vs. Virginia* that no state can prohibit interracial civil marriage. Currently same-sex marriage is on a state-by-state basis, though many of us hope the U.S. Supreme Court will issue a similar ruling ending discrimination in this area as well.

The person who can legally officiate at a civil marriage also varies from state to state. In some states you only need to be a notary public. Civil marriage laws in Minnesota are primarily covered in statutes 517.001-517.23. For at least twenty years, atheist leaders have been concerned that Minnesota law does not allow for atheist leaders per se to conduct civil marriages. Here is the law as it now stands:

517.04 Persons Authorized To Perform Marriages.

Marriages may be solemnized throughout the state by an individual who has attained the age of 21 years and is a judge of a court of record, a retired judge of a court of record, a court administrator, a retired court administrator with the approval of the chief judge of the judicial district, a former court commissioner who is employed by the court system or is acting pursuant to an order of the chief judge of the commissioner's judicial district, the residential school administrators of the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf and the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind, a licensed or ordained minister of any religious denomination, or by any mode recognized in section 517.18. For purposes of this section, a court of record includes the Office of Administrative Hearings under section 14.48.

When we look at Section 517.18, which is mentioned at the end of Section 517.04, we see a list of groups that have gained enough stature in Minnesota to make sure they were covered by the law:

517.18 Marriage Solemnization.

Subdivision 1. **Friends or Quakers.** All marriages solemnized among the people called Friends or Quakers, in the form heretofore practiced and in use in their meetings, shall be valid and not affected by any of the foregoing provisions. The clerk of the meeting in which such marriage is solemnized,

within one month after any such marriage, shall deliver a certificate of the same to the local registrar of the county where the marriage took place, under penalty of not more than \$100. Such certificate shall be filed and recorded by the court administrator under a like penalty. If such marriage does not take place in such meeting, such certificate shall be signed by the parties and at least six witnesses present, and shall be filed and recorded as above provided under a like penalty.

Subd. 2. **Baha'i.** Marriages may be solemnized among members of the Baha'i faith by the chair of an incorporated local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is, according to the form and usage of such society.

Subd. 3. **Hindus; Muslims.** Marriages may be solemnized among Hindus or Muslims by the person chosen by a local Hindu or Muslim association, according to the form and usage of their respective religions.

Subd. 4. **American Indians.** Marriages may be solemnized among American Indians according to the form and usage of their religion by an Indian Mide' or holy person chosen by the parties to the marriage.

Subd. 5. **Construction of section.** Nothing in subdivisions 2 to 4 shall be construed to alter the requirements of section 517.01, 517.09 or 517.10.

The less one attempts to change a law, the more likely one is to achieve success. It therefore seems that our best chance to achieve equality for atheist wedding celebrants is to simply have our own subdivision in Section 517.18.

A few years ago, Minnesota Atheists approached Minnesota state legislators and asked how we could change the marriage law to include atheist leaders. They brought up two issues they felt we needed to address: First, how do you define an atheist group—as opposed to, say, the Sierra Club? Second, how do you provide oversight, so that it's not just a group of random people?

With these objectives in mind, we came up with this addition to Section 517.18:

Subd. 5. **Atheists and Humanists.** Marriages may be solemnized by atheist or humanist celebrants appointed by the board of directors of self-identified atheist or humanist organizations that are registered as nonprofits with the Minnesota Secretary of State's office and have 501(c)3 nonprofit status with the federal government.

With the addition of this subdivision, the current Subdivision 5 would be renumbered as Subdivision 6.

The phrase "self-identified atheist or humanist organizations" answers the question of how we define an atheist group: we define ourselves. There are other nonprofits, like the Sierra Club, that

are atheist in the sense that they don't mention a god, and which are humanist in the sense that they do good works, but they don't self-identify as atheist or humanist. (The First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis identifies itself as a religious humanist group, but since they are already covered by the law this shouldn't be a problem.)

The phrases "board of directors," "registered as nonprofits with the Minnesota Secretary of State's office," and "501(c)3 non-profit status with the federal government" provide the oversight that we believe the legislators are looking for. I don't know of a well-established religion operating in Minnesota that isn't registered with the state and doesn't have 501(c)3 non-profit status, so it's not unreasonable to ask us to have it. Although some atheist and humanist groups in Minnesota don't have this status, they could get it if they wished. In the meantime, groups like Minnesota Atheists could appoint marriage celebrants from their groups if we felt confident they could do a good job.

We would also like to modify Section 517.05, as shown below. Strikeout text indicates deletions and underlined text indicates additions.

517.05 Credentials of Minister or Celebrant.

Ministers of any religious denomination, or atheist or humanist celebrants, before they are authorized to solemnize a marriage, shall file a copy of their credentials of license or ordination or, if their ~~religious denomination organization~~ does not issue credentials, authority from ~~the minister's spiritual assembly~~ their governing board, with the local registrar of a county in this state, who shall record the same and give a certificate of filing thereof. The place where the credentials are recorded shall be endorsed upon and recorded with each certificate of marriage granted by a minister or celebrant.

Rather than deleting the word "minister" and replacing it with a neutral term, we thought we'd have a better chance of having this pass by simply adding the word "celebrant." Two other changes, substituting "organization" for "religious denomination," and "governing board" for "the minister's spiritual assembly," do use neutral terms to replace religious wording, and it may be that we'll end up having to use added wording there instead.

Our wording is subject to change, either by suggestions from our members or by legislators. However, we will oppose any attempts to call atheism a religion. Our suggested changes have met with the approval of the boards of directors of Minnesota Atheists and the Humanists of Minnesota. Equally important, they meet with the approval of someone willing to sponsor this legislation: Minnesota State Representative Phyllis Kahn.

Some people have suggested that we simply enroll our leaders in the on-line Universal Life Church (ULC) so they can perform marriages that way. But the reason the state of Minnesota accepts ULC credentials is because the ULC is a religion. On their website you can pursue your spiritual beliefs, become ordained as a minister, submit prayer requests, and engage in on-line confession. Their Credentials of Ministry are issued by their monastery and signed by a chaplain. They are registered with the Minnesota Secretary of State's office as the Universal Life Church of God.

Therefore, the worst thing we could do would be to have our leaders become Universal Life Church ministers. If we were to

follow this approach, we could anticipate the following responses from legislators:

1. This just proves that atheists are unethical. Atheist leaders becoming religious ministers in order to perform atheist weddings demonstrates that atheists have no ethics, values, or scruples. At best they are hypocritical and at worst they are unethical. Why should we do anything to advance the welfare of this group of people?
2. Changing the law is unnecessary. Look, an atheist leader was able to perform an atheist wedding ceremony, so what's the problem? Why do we have to change the law? Did that leader object to registering as a religious minister? Then why did he or she do it? The couple could still have gotten married by a judge.
3. Atheism is a religion. If an atheist leader is willing to consider himself or herself a religious minister, this means atheism is a religion, so we don't need to change the law.

The most effective way to protest a law is to protest it, not to give in to it. You don't protest being forced to ride at the back of the bus by riding at the back of the bus.

So, now that we have come up with a draft of suitable language, our next steps are:

1. Find a Minnesota Senate sponsor. We have a couple of legislators in mind already.
2. Once a sponsor is found in both houses, have our members contact their State Representatives and State Senators to be cosponsors of the bills.
3. Once the bills are introduced, have our members contact their State Representatives and State Senators to vote for the bills in committee and on the floor.
4. With the help of the MNA membership, find community leaders who can testify on our behalf, including religious leaders and leaders from organizations such as the ACLU and OutFront Minnesota. Ideally the bills would pass on their merits, but some legislators may need the political cover of testimony from community leaders, especially religious leaders. Since we would strongly defend religious groups if, for example, the state attempted to force them to conduct same-sex or interfaith marriages, we expect that at least some of them will be willing to help us.

Finally, what approach should we take to passing these bills? The most effective strategy will be one that is friendly, positive, and low key. We should treat this change as one whose time has come, as something that corrects an oversight, and as a simple matter of technical revision.

It would be counterproductive to grandstand, to send out press releases, to take a victim stance, and to accuse the legislators of discrimination and religious privilege. Why? Because the legislature has never been asked to do this before, so let's give them the benefit of the doubt that they will do the right thing.

We are not changing the definition of civil marriage, nor are we affecting any rights or privileges religion now has. This should be an easy vote for the legislature, and a much easier one than the marriage equality vote which passed readily.

Chris Matthews

August Treasury Report

Radio Fund

Arthur Searcy	\$65
Shirley Rae Moll.....	\$10
Mark Paquette	\$10
Steve Petersen.....	\$10
Other.....	\$55

Total Radio Fund \$150

General/Visibility Fund

Ed Lubinski.....	\$20
Joseph Homrich.....	\$15
Andrea Benson.....	\$5
Other.....	\$23

Total General/Visibility Fund \$63

Building Fund

No donations for August	
Cumulative Total.....	\$131,615

Total Income \$213

Top Expenses for August

Conference.....	\$8,692
Radio Show.....	\$820
Postage.....	\$459

Crpytogram Answer

It's very hard to believe in God when certain people are never struck by lightning.

—The little boy in the comic strip
Calvin and Hobbes

Upcoming Events

2014 Goals Setting Meeting. Sunday, October 13, 2013, 2:00 p.m., Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue West, Saint Paul. Join us to discuss how Minnesota Atheists has been doing and what goals it should work towards.

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

Atheists Talk television show recording. First Thursday, 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., MTN Studio A, 125 Southeast Main Street, Minneapolis. Contact Steve Petersen, 651-484-9277.

Blasphemer's Brunch. Second Saturday, 10:30 a.m., Pizza Lucé, 800 West 66th Street, Richfield.

Burnsville Book Club. First Wednesday. Dinner 6:30 p.m., meeting 7:00 p.m. to about 9:00 p.m. Davanni's, 14639 County Road 11, Burnsville. Meet in the party room.

Crafty Freethinkers North. Sunday, October 27th, 12:00 noon to 5:00 p.m., Maple Grove Library, Training Room 133, 8001 Main Street North, Maple Grove.

Dinner & A Book. Fourth Wednesday, 7:00 p.m. Davanni's, 5937 Summit Drive, Brooklyn Center.

Freethinking Females Evening at Chatterbox Pub. Fourth Monday, 7:30 p.m., Chatterbox Pub, 800 Cleveland Avenue South, St. Paul.

Freethought Dinner Social. Second and fourth Mondays, 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Davanni's, 8605 Lyndale Avenue South, Bloomington. Contact Bob or Marilyn Neinker, 612-866-6200.

Freethought Lunch. First Tuesday, 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Old Country Buffet, County Road B2 between Fairview and Snelling. Contact Bob or Marilyn Nien-

kirk, 612-866-6200.

Freethought Toastmasters. First and third Mondays, 6:00 p.m., Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue West, Saint Paul. Contact George Kane, dir2@mnatheists.org.

Godless Gamers—Board Game Night. Second Thursday, 6:00 p.m., Java Train, 1341 Pascal Street North, Saint Paul.

Godless Gamers II—Board Game Night, the Sequel. Fourth Thursday, 6:00 p.m., The Source, 2057 Snelling Avenue, Roseville.

Heathens' Highway Cleanup and Lunch—Rice, Minnesota. Sunday, October 6th, 10:00 a.m., Old Creamery Cafe, 405 Main Street, Rice, Minnesota. For more information, contact Deb Doucette at 320-253-5422, or Steve Petersen at 651-484-9277 or spetersen175@gmail.com.

Little Canada Book Club. Second Sunday, 1:00 p.m., Caribou Coffee, 3354 Rice Street, Little Canada. For our October meeting we will be discussing two books, *Free Will* by Sam Harris and *Who's in Charge? Free Will and the Science of the Brain* by Michael S. Gazzaniga.

Lunch at the Dragon House Restaurant. Third Wednesday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Dragon House Restaurant, 3970 Central Avenue, Columbia Heights. Contact Bill Volna, 612-781-1420.

Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting. Third Wednesday, 6:30 p.m., Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Avenue West, St. Paul. Open to all members. Contact George Kane, dir2@mnatheists.org.

For all the latest meeting news, subscribe to Atheists' Weekly Email (AWE) at mnatheists.org/atheists-weekly/subscribe-to-awe.html. Also visit our Meetup page at meetup.com/minnesota-atheists.

Special Debate Event

Can We Be Good Without God?

August Berkshire, past president of Minnesota Atheists, and Dr. Scott McMurray, pastor with Faith United Methodist Church, will debate the topic, "Can We Be Good Without God?" The debate is scheduled for Sunday, October 20th at 7:00 p.m.

at the University of Wisconsin, La Crosse, in the Valhalla Room of the Cartwright Center, 1725 State Street, La Crosse. Admission in free. This debate is sponsored by The La Crosse Secular Student Society and The La Crosse Area Freethought Society.

Cable Television Schedule

Podcasts

Atheists Talk is available via both iTunes and YouTube. For more information see the Minnesota Atheist website at mnatheists.org. Podcasts are made possible by Grant Hermanson.

Cable

Bloomington Community Access Television, Channel 16. Sundays, 11:00 p.m. Sponsored by David and Joanne Beardsley.

Burnsville Community Television, Channel 14. Broadcast on an erratic schedule. Check www.burnsville.org/index.aspx?NID=484 to see if any showtimes are scheduled. Sponsored by Kevin Hardisty.

Eagan Community Television, Channel 15. Broadcast on an erratic schedule. Check www.eagan-tv.com/index.php/channels/channel-15 to see if any showtimes are scheduled. Sponsored by Kevin Hardisty.

Minneapolis Television Network, Channel 75. Mondays, 7:00 p.m. Sponsored by Steve Petersen.

North Suburban Access Corporation, Channel 21, serving the Moundsview area. Wednesdays, 10:30 p.m. Sponsored by Shirley Moll.

Rochester Public Access, Channel 10. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, 7:30 p.m. Sponsored by Jim Salutz.

Saint Cloud Public Access, Channel 12. Thursdays, 8:30. Sponsored by Tom Stavros.

Saint Paul Neighborhood Network, Channel 15. Wednesdays, 5:00 p.m. Sponsored by Jim Wright.

Suburban Community Channels, Channel 15, serving the Maplewood area. Saturdays 8:00 p.m. Sponsored by Michael Seliga.

Valley Access Channels, Channel 18, serving the Stillwater area. Check valleyaccesschannels.tv for showtimes. Sponsored by Lee Salisbury.

James Zimmerman on left and Eric Jayne on right at the September recording of *Atheists Talk*.



Cable Television Report • Steve Petersen

James Zimmerman Interviewed for September Cable Show Recording

For our September recording, Minnesota Atheists President Eric Jayne interviewed James Zimmerman regarding James' new book, *Deliverance at Hand!*

James is a member of the Minnesota Atheists Editorial Board and has contributed many articles to *The Minnesota Atheist*. He is a frequent host for the *Atheists Talk* television program.

Deliverance at Hand! describes James' life as a Jehovah's Witness and how he eventually left that religion. In the show, James explains his motivation for writing the book and why he feels the book will be of interest to the general public. Eric asks James about the frustration of dealing with the leaders in Jehovah's Witnesses and

the difficult decisions James had to make when he discovered information that ran counter to the doctrines of the Witnesses. Eric also explores the practice of shunning, and James briefly talks about how this affected him, both as a Witness who shunned former members, and later as a former Witness himself who experienced shunning by his family and former friends.

The show provides a fascinating insider's view of the Jehovah's Witnesses and their beliefs.

The *Atheists Talk* cable television show is created by George Kane, Brett Stemberge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, Grant Hermanson, and Art Anderson.

Steve Petersen

Cable Television Ideas and Sponsors Always Needed

If you have an idea for our *Atheists Talk* cable television program, or if you have a public access television station in your community and would like to be a sponsor, please contact me at spetersen175@

comcast.net or 651-484-9277. We would especially like to be back on in Duluth, Mankato, Fergus Falls, and Moorehead. Sponsorship is easy to do and you will help bring the atheist voice to your community.

Radio Report

Greta Christina, David Fitzgerald, Tom Mates, David Bonney, and Rebecca Watson Featured on *Atheists Talk* Radio for August and September

The *Atheists Talk* radio show is broadcast live every Sunday morning from 9:00 to 10:00 on KTNE, 950 AM. A live stream and podcasts are available through the Minnesota Atheists website at mnatheists.org.

The shows for August and September featured a number of prominent atheists, with both local and national reputations.

Nailed—David Fitzgerald on *Atheists Talk* #233, August 26th, 2013.

David Fitzgerald was back on *Atheists Talk* for the August 26th show. Earlier we had David on to discuss his new book *The Complete Heretic's Guide to Western Religion Book One: The Mormons*. For this show, he joined us again to speak about his critically-acclaimed book, *Nailed: Ten Christian Myths that Show Jesus Never Existed at All*.

In *Nailed*, Fitzgerald explores ten commonly accepted ideas that many people hold about the existence of Jesus Christ. Fitzgerald proposes that Christ is a mythical being, a story formed out of legend and desire. He presents painstakingly detailed historical research which suggests that Jesus Christ logically could not have existed. His writing style is approachable and entertaining for those who are new to the idea of the Christ myth theory, but detailed enough to peak the interest of those who have studied it.

Atheist Shoes Revisited—David Bonney on *Atheists Talk* #234, September 1st, 2013.

More than a year ago, we interviewed David Bonney, founder of Atheist Shoes, about his Kickstarter project and the shoes he made to help people declare their lack of belief. In the meantime, he has continued to make the news—and make new kinds of atheist shoes. For the September 1st show, we caught up with Bonney and found out what he's been up to.

Why Are You Atheists So Angry?—Greta Christina on *Atheists Talk* #235, September 8th, 2013.

In early 2012, Greta Christina published a book that instantly connected with its target audience. In this book, Christina provides an answer to a question that so many of us nonbelievers have been asked: “Why are you so angry?” Actually, she provides ninety-nine answers.

In *Why Are You Atheists So Angry? 99 Things That Piss Off the Godless*, author and atheist activist Christina doesn't waste time trying to explain that we're not angry, that many of us live happy and fulfilled lives without having to believe in supernatural beings. Okay, she does say that. But she also embraces the anger; she unapologetically and categorically states that gods and religions do make many of us angry, and for extremely good reasons. We hope you will listen to this show as Christina shares with *Atheists Talk* why she's angry, and explains why you should be too.

Skepchick Network—Rebecca Watson on *Atheists Talk* #236, September 15th, 2013.

When you identify a group that is underrepresented in skepticism, what do you do? You could try blaming that group for not being interested in your work, but how appealing is that going to look to the people you want to attract? Alternately, you could try to meet people where they are, to show them how skepticism applies to them and their interests.

That second approach is what led Rebecca Watson to found Skepchick, a skeptical site aimed at women who want their skepticism to sometimes hit a little closer to home than fake moon landings. Starting with the main site, aimed at women, the Skepchick network now covers four languages and six topical areas. Additionally, Skepchick runs a track of science and skepticism programming at CONvergence, a large science fiction and

fantasy convention held in the Twin Cities over the Fourth of July weekend.

For our September 15th show, Watson talked about Skepchick and her work in connection with it.

My Own Church—Tom Mates on *Atheists Talk* #237, September 22nd, 2013.

For this program, author Tom Mates joined *Atheists Talk* to discuss his new book, *My Own Church: A Nonbeliever Looks At Post-Christian America*. Instead of trying to answer the question of whether gods exist or arguing for the elimination of religion, Dr. Mates urges believers to recognize that religion is too personal to be applied as a source of moral absolutes.

Dr. Mates is a proponent of respectful, non-adversarial debate that considers the entire spectrum of belief. In *My Own Church*, he explores the roles that fundamentalism and anti-theism have had in bringing us to the current state of the discourse on religion and belief, and he urges us to do better.

Dr. Mates is an analytical chemist and the author of the 2011 book *A Judeo-Islamic Nation: The Evolution of America's Political Theology*.

The *Atheists Talk* radio show is produced by Minnesota Atheists. The August and September shows were created by Brianne Bilyeu, Carl Hancock, Scott Lohman, and Stephanie Zvan. Original music was composed and performed by Brent Michael Davids.

If you would like to participate in the creation of the show, please contact us at radio@mnatheists.org.

To learn more about *Atheists Talk*, visit us on Facebook and at twitter.com/atheiststalk.

Atheists Talk radio costs about \$900 per month to produce. Please consider making a denotation by using the coupon on page eleven or by visiting mnatheists.org/join-and-donate/radio-fund.

**You have
nothing to
lose but your
immortal soul.
Join
Minnesota
Atheists,
renew your
membership,
or make a
donation.**



Minnesota Atheists Membership and Donations

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> One-year student membership \$10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Three-year sustaining membership \$200 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> One-year individual membership \$35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Life membership \$600 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Three-year individual membership \$90 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> One-year household membership \$45 | <input type="checkbox"/> General fund \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Three-year household membership \$115 | <input type="checkbox"/> Building fund \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> One-year sustaining membership \$75 | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio fund \$ _____ |

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. All other 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 send my subscription by email.

Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email (required for student memberships and email subscriptions): _____

Minnesota Atheists, PO Box 120304, New Brighton, MN 55112. Please make checks payable to Minnesota Atheists. Students, please enclose a copy of your fee statement or school identification.

Minnesota Atheists

Positive atheism in actionsm 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 ATHEISTS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BOARD EMAIL
board@mnatheists.org

PRESIDENT
Eric Jayne
pres@mnatheists.org

ASSOCIATE PRESIDENT
Stephanie Zvan
apres@mnatheists.org

CHAIR
Heather Hegi
chair@mnatheists.org

ASSOCIATE CHAIR
Andy Flamm
achair@mnatheists.org

SECRETARY
Jill Carlson
sec@mnatheists.org

TREASURER
Chris Matthews
treas@mnatheists.org
763-428-3424

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE
August Berkshire
dir1@mnatheists.org
612-338-4548
George Kane
dir2@mnatheists.org
651-488-8225
Phil Cunliffe
dir3@mnatheists.org

THE MINNESOTA ATHEIST NEWSLETTER

EDITORIAL BOARD EMAIL
editor@mnatheists.org

EDITORIAL BOARD
George Kane
nup@minn.net
651-488-8225
Shirley Moll
srmoll@comcast.net
Christopher Matthews
c03m13@bluebottle.com
James Zimmerman
zgoatee@gmail.com

EDITOR
Lewis Campbell
lfc-813@
sevenpathswebdesign.com
507-645-5217

CHIEF PHOTOGRAPHER
Richard Trombley

MEMBERSHIP/CHANGE OF
ADDRESS
Steve Petersen
address@mnatheists.org
651-484-9277

Submit material for the
newsletter to editor@
mnatheists.org. Submissions
may be edited.

THE MINNESOTA ATHEIST,
October 2013, Published
by Minnesota Atheists, PO
Box 120304, New Brighton,
MN 55112, 612-588-7031,
info@mnatheists.org,
mnatheists.org. Copyright ©
2013 by Minnesota Atheists.
All rights reserved.

MINNESOTA ATHEISTS MEDIA

PUBLIC RELATIONS CHAIR
Emily Matejcek,
pr@mnatheists.org

ATHEISTS WEEKLY EMAIL
(AWE)
Christopher Matthews
awe@mnatheists.com

CABLE TV CHAIR
Steve Petersen,
cable@mnatheists.org,
651-484-9277

WEBMASTER
Grant Hermanson
web@mnatheists.org

PODCASTS CHAIR
Grant Hermanson
podcast@mnatheists.org

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.

MINNESOTA ATHEISTS AFFILIATIONS

Minnesota Atheists is
affiliated with the Atheist
Alliance of America, Atheist
Alliance International,
American Atheists, the
American Humanist
Association, the Council
for Secular Humanism, the
International Humanist
and Ethical Union, and the
Secular Coalition for America.

MINNESOTA ATHEISTS MEMBERSHIP

Regular members: 215
Life members: 34
Meetup members: 1,486

MINNESOTA ATHEISTS HONORARY MEMBERS

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