

# The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Established 1991

Positive Atheism in Action

Volume 13 Number 2

February 2003

**Metaphysics is a restaurant where they give you a thirty thousand page menu, and no food.**

Robert M. Pirsig, Author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

## Reproductive rights face battles in Minnesota and Washington

"Since the 2002 election in Minnesota, it is clear that it's open season on abortion." With that statement, Teresa Nelson, legal counsel for the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union (MCLU), opened a presentation about the status of reproductive rights 30 years after *Roe v. Wade*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that said women have a right to control their own bodies.

The good news, Nelson said, is that a 1996 Minnesota Supreme Court decision (*Doe v. Gomez*) still stands despite challenges and provides Minnesotans with a higher level of protection than the U.S. ruling.

The bad news is there are a number of challenges to reproductive rights. An existing law requires clinics to notify both parents in the case of minors seeking abortions. There is a judicial bypass provision, but there is a shortage of attorneys to take such cases leaving young girls to go to court without legal counsel.

A proposed law would have reporting requirements mandating doctors to say how many abortions they performed, how they were paid for, and what reasons the patients gave. Such reporting is intended to intimidate women.

While emergency contraception (EC) is a right, very few doctors and

clinics mention its availability. EC is often used in cases of rape or incest to stop pregnancy even at the very earliest stages.

Another battleground is sex education. Currently, high school courses have an abstinence-based perspective.

Some schools offer abstinence as the only possibility and those courses are religion- and culture-based. One passage in a book that was considered but then rejected put the onus squarely on girls by saying: "Girls, watch what you wear. If you don't aim to please, don't aim to tease."

This segues into the informed consent bill that Nelson

referred to as the "women are stupid bill." Minnesota has an informed consent law on the books, but this bill would require women to wait 24 hours before returning to the clinic for an abortion. The bill has passed in previous years, but was vetoed by then-Gov. Ventura.

Another bill proposed in this session is a prohibition against so-called "partial birth abortion." In medical language there is no such procedure, but that does not concern its proponents, Nelson said.

Anticipated bills include a super-gag rule that would prevent funds from



**Teresa Nelson, Legal Counsel for the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union**

*Photo by Vern Young*

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**Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly neighborhood atheism in order to:**

- Create a community of atheists;
- Educate the public about atheism; and
- Promote separation of state and church.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## February Membership Meeting

**Sunday, Feb. 16, 2003, 1-4 p.m.**  
**Speaker, 1:30-2:30 p.m.**

**Southdale Library (2nd floor)**  
**7001 York Ave. S., Edina 55435**

From Highway 62, take Xerxes Ave. south (Xerxes becomes York). Go to 70<sup>th</sup> St., turn left.

From I-35W Southbound, take 62 West, then Xerxes exit south (as above)

From I-494, take France Ave. north to 70<sup>th</sup> St. Turn right. Cross York (first traffic light) and enter library lot.

### A Brief Look at the Life of Darwin

**Charles Darwin, the man whose theory of evolution enabled human-kind to see the world from a more rational viewpoint, was born February 12, 1809, in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England. Celebrate Darwin's 194<sup>th</sup> birthday with a presentation by member Brett Welch.**

With the help of maps and books, Welch will give a summary of Darwin's life and take a look at how the places he visited in his home country of England and then throughout the world influenced his thinking and the development of his ideas.

Using a world map, Welch will track Darwin's journey around the world on the *HMS Beagle*. While living and studying at Oxford this past year, Welch visited Darwin's home and gained an even greater appreciation of the man and his science.

**Follow Darwin's journey and be ready to ask questions.**



**Brett Welch will discuss Charles Darwin** Photo by Vern Young

### Election of Board of Directors

*(Continued from page 1)*

going to any group that even mentions abortion as an option. When Nelson testified to a committee about the bill, she told them how to change the language so that it would not be so clearly unconstitutional and told them the MCLU would sue if it passed. They ignore her advice and warning.

On the national level, George W. Bush seemed somewhat conciliatory when running for office. "Since then," Nelson said, "he has been incrementally ratcheting up his assault on reproductive choice." She said science-based information about reproduction is slowly disappearing from the Department of Health's Web site.

The biggest problem nationally, she said, is Bush appointing judges who will erode reproductive rights. On the international level, the U.S. has even blocked helping young victims of war crimes because so many of them are victims of rape.

Following a lively question and answer period, Jerry Rauser, member of Minnesota Atheists and a board member of the MCLU, discussed the MCLU's defense of the Bill of Rights, pointing out that many issues of concern to atheists are defended by MCLU and the American Civil Liberties Union. A \$20 check buys a year's membership in both organizations. Contact Jerry Rauser at 763-535-7637. - Sue O'Donnell

## The Minnesota Atheist

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 and American Atheists.

Meet the candidates Feb. 16

## Election slate set for coming year

At the January 19<sup>th</sup> general membership meeting, Minnesota Atheists members nominated board members for the year beginning March 1, 2003. Since no positions are contested, the February 16<sup>th</sup> election will not hold much in the way of drama, but this will be an opportunity to get to know your board members and let them know what you expect from them and from Minnesota Atheists.

As part of the election process, each nominee was asked to submit a 150-word statement to you, the members. The nominees are:

**President:**  
**August Berkshire**  
(nominated by  
**Karri Silventoinen**)

This past year we experienced record public outreach through extensive, free media coverage; our cable program; our newsletter; Atheists Weekly E-mail; our high school appearances; the debates we participated in; the parades we marched in; and the booths we staffed.

I look forward to continuing to be part of a team that builds on this success. My goals for this next year are: maintaining our visibility in the media, via the press and our cable program; increasing our high school outreach; participating in even more community fairs; developing good working relations with legislators; growing our building fund; increasing our membership; and succeeding with our Minnesota Atheists Conference.

Fortunately, our members continue to be very generous with their time, talents, and money. I feel



**August Berkshire**

confident that, together, we can meet all future challenges and continue our steady growth. I would be honored to continue serving as your president.

**Associate President:**  
**Steve Petersen**  
(nominated by  
**Art Anderson**)

Our elective process is the most important function of our membership, and our elections are special events -- a time when the members either validate or change the direction of Minnesota Atheists, a time when the members have a direct voice in who and how the leadership will function.

Last year the membership endorsed a change to a positive and community oriented representation. Under the leadership of August we have seen more media coverage than all of our recent history and we have expanded our community outreach programs. The goal for many of us in Minnesota Atheists is to put a visible body in our community chair and take control of our identity in the public at large.

If we are to impact society about our views on separation of religion and government, personal responsibility, skeptical thinking and positive atheism, we must be public and visible. That is my goal for the future of Minnesota Atheists.

**Chair of Board:** **Sue O'Donnell**  
(nominated by **Marilyn Nienkerk**)

It has been my job (and my joy) this past year to edit the newsletter along with Tom Riddering. The pictures and articles tell an exciting

story of an organization building a strong atheist community.

It was a year of activism -- letters to editors, an unprecedented amount of media coverage, marching in parades, staffing booths at community events, debates with theists, discussions with legislators, cable TV programs. It was a year of growing friendships at picnics, the annual banquet, the solstice party, our happy hours and dinner socials, Reel and a Meal. It was a year of learning at membership meetings, through atheist visitors, with members attending the Godless Americans March and national and international freethought conferences.

With your support, I look forward to a year of even more activism, learning and friendships -- and someday, I hope soon, a building to serve as a center of all this activity.

**Associate Chair:**  
**David Mallinder**  
(nominated by  
**Steve Petersen**)

I'm a relatively new addition to the Minnesota Atheists family, but I've tried to make some contributions over that time. I'm currently a director at large on the board. I'm a regular at cable tapings both on and off camera. I debated an Evangelist in a Christian book store event, locally broadcast on Baptist radio. I started the online merchandise store (please buy stuff!).

Overall I try to bring some



**Sue O'Donnell**



**Steve Petersen**



**David Mallinder**

different ideas to the board while writing a few pieces for the newsletter, staying involved in Freethought Toastmasters, the Freethought Follies and an occasional happy hour or lunch. I've also started to get a few contacts in outside atheist groups and was part of the Minnesota delegation to the Godless Americans March on Washington in November. My hopes for the upcoming year as associate chair are to find some creative fundraising opportunities as well as increase our positive outreach to the community at large.

### Secretary

**George Kane**  
(nominated by  
**Frank Manos**)

As the secretary of Minnesota Atheists, I'm responsible for mundane but essential tasks, such as producing timely and accurate meeting minutes, and e-mail distribution of the calendar of events of interest to atheists, Atheist Weekly E-mail (AWE). I also serve as technical director on the cable crew, and occasionally appear as on-screen talent. I was the founder of the Freethought Toastmasters group, which is still flourishing.

In the last few years, I've been heavily involved in many other atheist projects, and try to promote respect and public visibility for atheism at every opportunity. If reelected, I look forward to new opportunities to serve our ever-growing organization.

### Treasurer:

**Tim Lamb**  
(nominated by  
**Andy Flamm**)

I am running for the board position of treasurer. I



**George Kane**



**Tim Lamb**

currently live in the southern suburb of Apple Valley and I like to ride roller coasters. I have developed an interest in the area of finance over the last decade and am currently the senior partner of a small five-member investment club. It is my hope over the next 6 months to transition my primary occupation into the finance industry.

I think the current board has done an excellent job over the last year. What would I like to see changed in the future? Looking forward over the uncertainties of the next year, I would like to see the board of directors utilize our financial advisor more than we have in the past.

**Directors at Large**  
**Michelle Losey**  
(nominated by  
**Sue O'Donnell**)

Some of you know me as the "Reel and a Meal" organizer. I first got involved with the freethought community with the U of M Atheists and Humanists. I was not brought up in any religion, although my parents are believers. I have always been an atheist, and by age 12 was declaring that "people who believe in god must be stupid." My mother explained that a lot of smart people I knew believe in a god, and that one should respect others' beliefs.

To this day, I think that positive atheism is the way to project ourselves; it is not constructive to alienate people by making unreasonable statements. I feel that the goals stated on the front of this newsletter are very appropriate.

I want us to continue our social activities and consider new ones; to expand our outreach and education efforts; to explore new ways to get our message out. Please feel free to contact me (952-736-1739, m.losey@worldnet.att.net).



**Michelle Losey**

**Shirley Moll**  
(nominated by **Fern Wodtke**)

Going forward, my interest will be implementation of the Merrill R. Holste Research Library. There are now approximately 1,300 books plus related magazines, pamphlets and papers. My focus will be on how Minnesota Atheists is able to make the library a publicly accessible resource.

There are many different possibilities for the library short of a building, but ultimately public respect will come when we establish our own building. A building is the long-term goal for many of us and I will continue to support and work for a solid foundation for Minnesota Atheists in a building we can call our own.

Both the library and a building are central to the public visibility of Minnesota Atheists. My dream will come true when the media responds to a news conference in the library of the Minnesota Atheists Center.

**Brett Welch**  
(nominated by  
**Larry Larson**)

I joined Minnesota Atheists in 1997. I have marched in the May Day parade, worked on the cable program and spent two years as board chair. I was active nationally as an Atheist Alliance International board member for four years, and spent two summers attending the Center for Inquiry Institute, where I recently got my Certificate of Proficiency in Critical Inquiry.

My activism was reduced in the past two years as I focused on a



**Shirley Moll**



**Brett Welch**

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return to college and traveled throughout Europe (including attending Oxford University). I have returned a more well-traveled and, I hope, wiser person.

Attending several board meetings this last year has shown me a group that has a cheerful, friendly, positive energy that didn't exist just a couple years ago. It is an organization I want to be a part of again. My previous board experience and my knowledge of other national movements should be an asset to this organization.

## News and notes of interest to atheists

### Minnesota Atheists is in Britannica

While doing an Internet search using the key words "Minnesota" and "atheists," I discovered that Minnesota Atheists is listed in the 2003 on-line Encyclopedia Britannica. On the page relating to atheism are various definitions and articles on atheism and one category titled "The Web's Best Sites." The five listings were Atheist Alliance International, Minnesota Atheists, American Atheists, Celebrity

Atheists and Massachusetts Institute of Technology Atheists, Agnostics and Humanists.

Britannica wrote that Minnesota Atheists is a "U.S.-based nonprofit educational organization promoting the positive contributions of atheists. Provides membership details and informational meetings. Includes links to related sites." Britannica also linked right to our Web page. At last we have been able to define who we are on our own terms. -- **Steve Petersen**

### Berkshire essay in Darwin book

A just-published book, *Darwin Day Collection One: The Single Best Idea, Ever*, has essays from lots of well-known atheists and scientists including Richard Dawkins, Eugenie Scott, Ian Tattersall, and our very own August Berkshire. Berkshire's contribution is a satirical essay titled *Creationists Announce New Theory of Gravity*.

You can read the essay online at the Minnesota Atheists Web site ([www.mnatheists.org](http://www.mnatheists.org)). Or you can buy the 466-page, \$29.95 book online for \$25 plus \$2 for shipping and handling at the Darwin Day Web site ([www.darwinday.org](http://www.darwinday.org)).

### Refreshing news

Thanks to the following members who donated refreshments at membership meetings in 2002: Fern Wodtke, Sue O'Donnell, Shirley Moll, Jim Barri and Marilyn Nienkerk. Special thanks to Art Anderson for brewing coffee at each meeting. If you would like to provide refreshments for a meeting, call Marilyn Nienkerk, 612-866-6200. Contributions received for the refreshments are deposited in the Minnesota Atheists treasury.

## Thank you, Tom and Andy

In a healthy organization, there is a constant change of leadership that keeps new ideas coming. In a super-healthy organization, as leaders leave the board, they continue to offer their experience and counsel. That is the case with Tom Riddering and Andy Flamm. Both are leaving the board as of March 1.



**Tom Riddering**

When Riddering moved here from Detroit, he immediately became involved in the freethought community, bringing his experience in the Detroit freethought community with him. As chair for the past two years, he led the board through the most tumultuous period in our history. When times got tough, Riddering kept the board steady, moving always toward accomplishing the members' goals. He has spent many hours designing and laying out our newsletter, and he has offered his home as a

frequent meeting place for atheists. The Merrill R. Holste Research Library has a temporary home at the Riddering's.

As a director at large for the past year, Flamm brought our board the perspectives and professionalism he has gained in 19 years as a small-business owner. His business sense and his commitment to atheism combined as a much-valued resource to all the board members. He thoroughly modernized the newsletter printing and mailing processes resulting in better photos, an electronic version on our Web site, and an ability to use a more efficient (and less expensive) mailing process.

Both Riddering and Flamm will continue to be active in Minnesota Atheists. Their special brand of leadership will continue to strengthen Minnesota Atheists and the freethought community. – **Sue O'Donnell**



**Andy Flamm**

## Letters from our in-box...

### Thanks from Katahdin

As you can see from the enclosed photos, our holiday celebration was a rousing success! The whole Katahdin family, staff and students alike, would like to extend thanks to Minnesota Atheists and Humanists [of Minnesota] for the assorted gifts they received during the 2002 celebration. Everyone wanted to know who was responsible for the gifts they got, and thought it was wonderful that valued members of the community had stepped up to recognize them.

If you have any specific questions about how we celebrated the holiday season, or Katahdin's plans for the year ahead, please contact us.

**Mia Olsen,**  
**Katahdin Workshops**  
*(Katahdin is a program for at-risk*

*youth and their families. Each year, the freethought community collects gifts and brings them to the Solstice Banquet.)*

### Great memories

The Minnesota Atheist newsletter article [January 2003] on the Solstice Banquet and Follies was great! When I looked through the photos, I had to laugh out loud, remembering all the fun we had.

### Jerry Rauser

### Yeah, we get these, too

Dear Friends,

I came across your program on channel 6. Believe me—THERE IS A GOD!!! His word is FOREVER TRUE!! Only a fool says there is no God!! JESUS CHRIST IS A REAL PERSON—I know this for sure as he came into my heart + life 19 years ago!! The HOLY SPIRIT IS REAL!!

He led me to accept Jesus as my Savior + Lord & receive the GRACE OF GOD + receive ETERNAL LIFE!!

THERE IS A JUDGMENT DAY COMING & ONLY THOSE WHO KNOW JESUS AS THEIR SAVIOR WILL ENTER HEAVEN & ESCAPE ETERNAL TORMENT!! JESUS IS COMING SOON!!

Believe me—Satan is real & he is a deceitful liar + blinds people to the truth!!

Read the enclosed booklet—it explains everything pertaining to SALVATION!!

**MAY YOU COME TO KNOW THE TRINITY—GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON & GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT!!!!**

Sincerely in Christ,

John

P.S. GOD WILL FORGIVE YOU!!

## Letters from our out-box...

### A patient's decision

*This letter was published in the Minnesota Women's Press, Jan. 29 - Feb. 11, 2003.*

I was deeply disturbed and angered by the information reported in "Catholic hospitals withhold EC" [MWP Jan. 15-28]. Emergency contraception is not only a legal but a humanitarian medical treatment. To withhold EC, especially in the case of rape, is not only negligent but cruel. I'd be surprised if most Catholics, who use contraception at the same rate as the general public, agreed with their Church on this. This sounds like another lawsuit against the Catholic Church waiting to happen.

Sadly, in a growing number of communities, Catholic hospitals are the only option available. Most Catholic hospitals also refuse to do abortions, vasectomies and tubal ligations. If Catholic hospitals can't

provide full medical treatment then, in an act of true charity, they should turn their hospitals over to the public.

**August Berkshire**  
**President, Minnesota Atheists**

### Another look

*This letter was published in the Star Tribune, Jan. 25, 2003.*

A Jan. 22 letter criticizes Dr. Mildred Hansen for her comments in the Jan. 19 article about abortion. The writer asks, "Does Hansen really believe Jesus Christ would have condoned the destruction of that which his father has created?"

The answer would appear to be "Yes" because Christ's own father, God, with his awesome unlimited powers, allowed his son Jesus to be crucified on the cross. Next question?

**Robert Nienkerk, Richfield**

### Proposal is wrong

*This letter was published in the Pioneer Press, Jan. 28, 2003.*

A proposed HUD rule would allow religious groups to use federal money for the construction of buildings that include religious activities as well as social service programs (story, Jan. 23).

Minnesota Atheists opposes this rule as a violation of separation of state and church. However, if it becomes law, we look forward to the government helping us build a Minnesota Atheists Community Center. Since atheism is not a religion, there should be no problem with receiving full funding.

At this center, we will, among other social services, tutor underprivileged children and those studying to become citizens. One of the things they will be taught is that the government should be subsidizing neither religion nor atheism.

**August Berkshire, Minneapolis**  
*The writer is president of Minnesota Atheists.*

## Minnesota Atheist Conference—August 22, 23, 2003

**Rob Boston\***,  
**Bobbie Kirkhart\*\***,  
**Annie Laurie Gaylor\*\*\***,

and more to be announced soon will be speaking, autographing books, and getting to know us at the Minnesota Atheists Conference.

Plan to be there Friday, August 22, and Saturday, August 23. You can make your hotel reservation now at the Minneapolis Airport Marriott Hotel on 494

near the Mall of America and five minutes from the airport. Call 1-800-228-9290. Rooms are \$79 plus tax per night. That rate is good for Thursday, Aug. 21-Monday, Aug. 25. Be sure to mention the Minnesota Atheists Conference when you make a reservation.

Friday night will feature a casual, getting-to-know-you reception with music from the Freethought Band. Saturday will have several sessions with speakers you won't want to miss PLUS a luncheon with speaker PLUS the Minnesota Atheists annual banquet with speaker. Throughout

the conference, there will be a book and product room where you can find the best in freethought literature (and T-shirts).

We are firming up the schedule and pricing, but you can make your room reservation now if you want to stay at the Marriott.

**\*Rob Boston represents Americans United for Separation of Church and State.**

**\*\*Bobbie Kirkhart represents Atheist Alliance International.**

**\*\*\*Annie Laurie Gaylor represents the Freedom From Religion Foundation.**

## Petersen, Berkshire talk with legislators

As the Minnesota Legislature went into session in 2003, some of the first bills filed are for restricting abortion and mandating the Pledge of Allegiance in every public school.

House File (HF) 9 is a constitutional amendment to ban state funding of abortion. Senate File (SF) 14 is a bill that states a woman must receive information on abortion complications and other options. SF 20 is a ban on partial birth abortions. Each of these bills is meant to render the Constitutional right to an abortion null and void. (See related article,

page 1.)

HF 6 and SF 14 seek to mandate saying the Pledge of Allegiance in every public school classroom and mandate teaching respect for the flag. The only intention of this bill is to mandate a narrow version of patriotism and state-sponsored belief in god.

Two good bills! SF 7 and HF 92 are companion bills that change absentee balloting. Why would we care? As the law stands now, if your precinct votes in a church and you decide to vote absentee you have to

check one of four reasons. Objecting to the polling place is not one of the reasons offered. This bill would simply reduce the reason for an absentee ballot to whoever cannot reasonably make it to the polling place – no questions asked.

August Berkshire and I are working the halls of the Capitol this year, but we need your help. Contact your legislators today on these issues – tomorrow may be too late. Let us know how they respond. – **Steve Petersen**

### “Atheists Talk” schedule

**Minneapolis:** Ch 17, Sat. 8:30 p.m.  
Sponsor: Art Anderson

**Rochester:** Charter Ch 10. Check schedule on Web page rochath.tripod.com/tv.  
Sponsor: The Cramers

**Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Mounds View, New Brighton:**

Ch 15, Tues., Midnight. Sponsor Art Anderson

**St. Cloud:** Ch 10, Thurs., 9:30 p.m.  
Sponsor Ken Christianson

**St. Paul:** Ch 32, Wed. 10:30 p.m.  
Sponsor: Steve Petersen

**Stillwater:** Ch 16, Tues. 7:00 p.m. and Wed. 9:00 a.m.  
Sponsor: Lee Salisbury

**South Washington County Community Access:** Ch 14, Tues. 7:00 p.m.  
Sponsor: Jim Bodsberg

**White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, No. St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights:** Ch 15, various times: Sponsor: Art Anderson

**MCN Channel Six metro wide:** Sundays 4:30 p.m. "Atheists Talk" 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays alternating with the Humanists of Minnesota on the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays.

## Darwin changed the way we see ourselves

By David Mallinder

For February who else could we include in our series of great thinkers and figures in freethought history but Charles Darwin, as we celebrate on Feb 12<sup>th</sup> the 194<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth.

Darwin was actually never a professed atheist and probably retained some sort of impersonal god-belief. He reluctantly identified himself as an agnostic if asked. However, his impact on the debate over a creator god's place in the world is so enormous that it would be remiss to exclude him. Very few discussions between atheists and believers go longer than a few minutes without his name and famous, much misunderstood, theory looming large.

Born in Shrewsbury, England, in 1809 to a wealthy family of scientists and physicians, Darwin was well educated and initially attended medical school, then even studied for the clergy, before becoming disenchanted with both. It was a Cambridge botany professor named Henlow who encouraged him to engage in scientific exploration, and so upon graduation, Charles signed on as the unpaid ship's naturalist on the

HMS Beagle. The voyage lasted five years and, although the famous theory was not published until more than 20 years later, Darwin immediately set to work upon his notes on his return. He also married shortly thereafter in 1839 and began a long, stable and apparently happy family life with his cousin/wife Emma and their seven surviving children.



Once published in 1859, *On the Origin of Species* created instant controversy and consternation. It caused many intellectuals to question and even lose their faith in an intimately involved divine creator. This book mentions humans in only one coy sentence — Darwin did not address human evolution until much later and less well known works such as 1871's *The Descent of Man* and 1872's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, which posited that even our most "human"

behavior has an evolutionary cause. In all he wrote 19 books, but 18 are, of course, overshadowed.

Darwin shyly refrained from any public debate or discussion of these earth-shaking theories and remained very private in his beliefs. He lived a humble, decent and charitable life, staying in his country house after that lone voyage and rarely traveling or speaking publicly. Unfortunately this reticence probably allowed the false rumor about his deathbed embrace of Christianity, started by the evangelist Lady Hope, to spread. He died on April 19, 1882, of unknown causes after decades of poor health. His last words were in fact "I am not in the least afraid to die". Here's hoping we all face our inevitable end with the same thought.

Darwin was buried locally but later interred in a state funeral at the royal resting place of Westminster Abbey, alongside Sir Isaac Newton. This signal respect was not and is not undeserved. Few there are to whom skeptics, materialists and freethinkers of all kinds owe greater debt and greater honor.

For more about Charles Darwin, come to the membership meeting, Feb. 16 (see page 2).

### Our very own Minnesota Atheists Online Store!

Shop online for a wide range of Minnesota Atheists goods.  
T-shirts ... mugs ... mousepads ... hats ... aprons  
... boxer shorts ... tote bags ... and MORE

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All products are high quality, reasonably priced with a 30-day, money-back guarantee. Profits will go right to work to improve Minnesota's oldest and largest atheist group.

**Shop now and show your atheist pride!**



**Jerry Rauser, Angie O'Neill and Frank Manos share coffee and conversation at the January meeting.**

### Donation dilemma

It's surprising how many community groups and organizations that I would otherwise support have a religious purpose. It's easy to avoid contributing to the obvious religious groups like the Salvation Army, but I almost donated time and money to a community group near where I live that turned out to be an "interfaith coalition of churches." You have to read the fine print in their solicitation materials.

I was totally unprepared for the thank you letter my wife and I got recently from Habitat for Humanity International. It included the statement (in bold) "Thank you and God bless you..." and a mission statement that talked about working in partnership with God to serve God's people so they can live as God intended. Whatever... But if that's their message, then they won't get any cash from me in the future.

I can't possibly imagine that

any of this was in their solicitation or I would have tossed it out. Here's the letter I sent back to them.

Dear Associates:

Today my wife and I received a nice note from you thanking us for our recent donation. We are pleased to help provide affordable, quality housing to people in need.

What I'm not pleased about is the strong religious tone of your letter. Your mission statement makes it clear that Habitat for Humanity International is a religious organization. As an atheist, I contribute solely to secular organizations. In the future, the money I would have donated to you will instead be directed to Project for Pride in Living, a Minneapolis-based organization that fulfills a mission similar to yours, but without the religion.

Cordially yours,

**Richard J. Rohrer**

## Donations

Thank you to the following for their donations during the fourth quarter 2002.

### Building Fund:

Anonymous	100
Art Anderson	25
Larry Larson	50
Lawrence W. Keegan	10
Martin Frank	50
Shirley R. Moll	75
Steve Petersen	100
Sue O'Donnell	150
Tom Stavros	20

### Cable/General Fund:

Art Anderson	25
August Berkshire	100
Bob and Fern Wodtke	20
Bob and Marilyn Nienkerk	100
Bruce C. W. Landwehr	20
Carl Selnes	10
Doug Gray	30
Eunice and Daniel Anderson	10
James Bodsberg	15
James R. Salutz	25
Lawrence R. Ronning	25
Lyle Hoffa	100
Mary J. Scholer	10
Rachel Wilson	100
Richard Dean	350
Rick Rohrer	200
Robert Clapp	25
Ross and Phyllis Jordon	35
Russ Samdahl	20
Stuart Tanquist	60
Tom and Jean Riddering	50
Vern Young	500
Doug and Cameo Cramer	150

### Life Memberships:

Shirley R. Moll	600
Steven D. Petersen	600

### Project Visibility:

Al Collins	100
Charles Blomquist	50
Dennis Schlutter	10
Eunice and Daniel Anderson	10
Irving J. Yablon	100

## HUD wants your opinion on faith-based building construction

### By August Berkshire

On January 22, the *New York Times* reported that the Bush administration, through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), proposed a new rule that federal housing money could be used to build, buy, or rehabilitate centers where religious activities occur, so long as part of the building is also used for social services.

According to officials, examples of newly permitted uses of HUD money (which amounted to \$7.7 billion last year) would be:

- a) a Christian group purchasing a building and using public money for the portion used for a homeless shelter and private money for the portion used for a sanctuary,
- b) a Jewish group using a federal grant to rehabilitate part of its synagogue for a counseling center for AIDS patients or the poor,
- c) a Muslim group using government money to upgrade the lighting and equipment in a room in its mosque to allow it to be used as a counseling center for single parents.

The ACLU responded, "This is probably the most clearly unconstitutional aspect of the White House's faith-based initiative that we've seen up to this point. What this does is take federal money that is serving the neediest of the needy in our society and diverts it to the bricks-and-mortar construction of churches and sanctuaries and other places of worship."

U.S. Rep. Barney Frank said, "You run the nightmarish problem of having the government monitor what goes on inside churches. Are we going to start sending in the inspector general to charge people with committing a bar mitzvah?"

Professor Marci Hamilton of Cardozo Law School added, "Once religious entities start arguing that any

portion of their building is for non-religious purpose, they start opening themselves up to all sorts of problems, like their tax-exempt status as religious institutions. It's a whole Pandora's Box."

Current rules require that housing projects must be used exclusively for secular activities. The proposed changes would allow for mixed-use buildings "where a structure is used for both eligible and inherently religious activities."

When the story appeared in the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*, I sent a letter to the editor (see page 6).

Like other "faith-based" programs of the Bush administration, this puts the government in a position of having to pick and choose among religions in the distribution of limited government funds. This program further entangles state and church by putting government in the position of having to monitor building use.

This could be a full time job. Imagine a religious group claiming a mixed-use building will be used 20% of the time for religion, and receiving funding for 80% from the government. An agent of the government would have to camp out in the building with a stopwatch and a log book to make sure the law wasn't being violated.

In a news release issued by the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), Dan Barker said, "The Administration is bypassing the 3 C's: Court precedent, Congress, and the Constitution. The courts have never permitted such a breach. Nor has

Congress been consulted. Once again Bush has promoted this radical departure from the status quo through fiat, not democratic process."

The public has until March 7 to comment before HUD is scheduled to issue its final approval. FFRF and Minnesota Atheists are urging our members to send letters (fax and e-mail not accepted) to:

**Office of the Rules Docket Clerk  
Office of General Council, Room  
10276**

**Department of Housing and Urban  
Development**

**451 Seventh St. SW**

**Washington DC 20410-0500**

Letters should refer to: Docket No. FR-4782-P-01 and the title "Participating in HUD Programs by Faith-Based Organizations; Providing for Equal Treatment of All HUD Program Participants."

Win or lose, these comments will become part of the public record. Please send copies of your letters to: Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701 (or [fttoday@mailbag.com](mailto:fttoday@mailbag.com)) and also to Minnesota Atheists, P.O. Box 6261, Minneapolis, MN 55406 (or [info@mnatheists.org](mailto:info@mnatheists.org)).



**On Jan. 23, August Berkshire gave a well-received, 25-minute presentation about atheism to a Creative Evangelism class at Bethel College and Seminary in Arden Hills. The instructor said she would invite him back next year.**

## Things to do, places to go: A calendar for atheists

1<sup>st</sup> Sundays: **Reel and a Meal**  
Times and locations vary, see AWE or  
call Michelle Losey, 952-736-1739

1<sup>st</sup> Sundays: 3-5 p.m. **Freethinking  
Families.** Potluck at members' homes.  
Rich Sinda, 952-380-0688.

2<sup>nd</sup> Sundays: 6 p.m. **Minnesota Atheists  
board meeting.** Location varies. All  
members welcome. George Kane 651-  
488-8225.

3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays: 1-3:30 p.m. **Minnesota  
Atheists Membership Meeting.**  
(See page 2 for program and address)

1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Mondays: 6 p.m. **Freethought  
Toastmasters Club.** Muffaletta Cafe,  
2280 Como Ave., St. Paul. Private room.  
George Kane, 651-488-8225.

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays: 5-7 p.m. **Happy  
Hour North.** Free food. Ol' Mexico  
Restaurant, on Lexington Ave., one  
block north of Larpenteur Ave.,  
Roseville. George Kane, 651-488-8225.

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays: 5-7 p.m. **Happy  
Hour South.** Chi Chi's Mexican  
Restaurant, 7717 Nicollet Ave., Rich-  
field, Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk,  
612-866-6200.

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesdays: 11:30 a.m. **Lunch Social.**  
Old Country Buffet, County Road B2  
between Snelling and Fairview, Rose-  
ville. Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, 612-866-  
6200.

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays: 11:30 a.m. **Lunch  
Social.** Old Country Buffet, Holly  
Shopping Center, Hwy 47 and Missis-  
sippi St. NE, Fridley. Private room.  
Bill Volna, 612-781-4273.

1<sup>st</sup> Thursdays: 6-9 p.m., **"Atheists  
Talk" TV taping.** MTN, Studio A,  
125 SE Main St., Minneapolis. Steve  
Petersen, 651-484-9277.

3<sup>rd</sup> Saturdays: 1-3 p.m. **Religion-Free  
Families.** Galaxie Library, Apple  
Valley. Rhonda Arkley, 952-322-1003.

**Note: Breakfast changed from  
Saturday to Sunday.**

4<sup>th</sup> Sundays: 8:30-11 a.m. **Breakfast  
Social.** Old Country Buffet, Holly  
Shopping Center, Hwy 47 and Missis-  
sippi St., Fridley. Private room. Fern  
Wodtke, 651-784-2307.

**"Atheists Talk" TV Broadcast**  
First and third Sundays, 4:30 p.m.,  
Metro Channel 6.

**Get a free weekly list of atheist activities by subscribing to AWE (Atheist  
Weekly E-mail). Send request to George Kane at [nup@minn.net](mailto:nup@minn.net)**

### CHECK THE WAYS YOU WANT TO HELP ATHEISM GROW

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

#### JOIN OR RENEW MEMBERSHIP

- \$25 - Individual membership  
 \$35 - Household membership  
 \$50 - Sustaining Fund membership  
 \$15 - Student (send copy of fee statement or high school ID)  
 \$600 - Life Membership  
 bill my credit

#### All memberships include newsletter

- \$15 - Newsletter subscription only

#### DONATE TO SPECIAL FUNDS

- \$\_\_\_\_\_ General Expense / Cable TV Fund  
 \$\_\_\_\_\_ Building Fund  
 \$\_\_\_\_\_ Outreach / Visibility Fund  
 I authorize Minnesota Atheists to  
 card each month (minimum \$10/month) for one  
 year or until my card expires, whichever comes  
 first. Bank name:

Payment by:  check (enclosed) for \$\_\_\_\_\_ payable to Minnesota Atheists (Checks preferred if less than \$25)

Credit card  Visa  MasterCard \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail to: Minnesota Atheists, P.O. Box 6261, Minneapolis MN 55406-0261**

**Celebrate Charles Darwin's birthday  
February 12th. See page 8.**

Most people I know hold quasi-religious views that vaguely refer to some "higher power" whose motives aren't clear, but they are sure that whatever it is, it's not mad at them.

- Bill Burlison, Minnesota Atheists member and GLBT activist

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