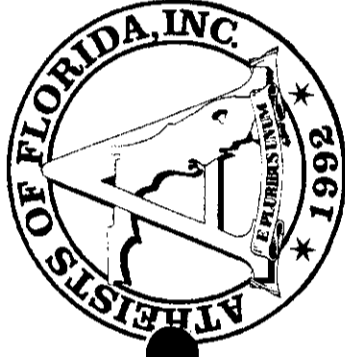




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Volume XII No. 4
August 2004

Atheists of Florida CHAPTER EVENTS

DADE&BROWARD: Sunday August 15th, 2:00. New chapter director Geoff Price has called a meeting at the home of Roy Fischer, an atheist and fellow member of MENSA who is also interested in helping to get the group back together. It has been difficult to get a public event scheduled and Price just wants to have one meeting with a few people in order to get things going. Then the chapter can go back to public events.

Geoff can be reached by E-mail at:
geoffprice03@hotmail.com

TAMPA BAY: Pinellas County—First Sunday of each odd-numbered month (Jan., Mar., etc.) 1:30. Due to holidays and outreach events, no more meetings at the library for the remainder of 2004. Members will be notified of special events.

Tampa—First Sunday of each even-numbered month, 1:30-4:30. Platt Library, 3910 S. Manhattan Ave., Tampa. Dinners follow all meetings at nearby cafeterias.

FMI: Ed Golly, 813/835-1500, AthALFLE@aol.com.

Big Deal! Free CD—of an atheist/Christian debate to all first-time attendees of any Tampa Bay chapter meeting.

EVERY THREE YEARS Atheists of Florida elects a new board of directors. During the month of September, we will be accepting nominations for positions on the board. The

Nominations should include a resume of one to four paragraphs describing the member and submitting reasons the candidate should be considered for the board. All nominations must be received by September 15, 2004. If you send a photo, we will be glad to return it.

Atheists of Florida Board Elections

board is open to any member who has been active for at least one year. Members may nominate themselves or any other qualifying member.

Board members serve for three years. As our bylaws currently stand, the board shall consist of not less than six nor more than 24 members. The officers of Atheists of Florida consist of members of the board are elected by the board of directors. Officers serve for one year.

The Atheists of Florida board holds one meeting per year. The president is responsible for selecting the site and time of the meeting, which is usually held on a Sunday between late January through the end of February. Board meetings usually require about six hours.

All members who feel they have skills that can be of use to the board should give serious consideration to nominating themselves.

In October, ballots will be mailed to all active members of Atheists of Florida. Ballots will need to be marked and returned in approximately one month. The new board will be announced in December, 2004, along with the time and location of the 2005 board meeting.

Any questions concerning the elections should be directed to Jim Young, secretary of Atheists of Florida, Inc. at (813) 737-1688 or JAYOUNG@mindspring.com.

All nominations should be mailed to:

ATHEISTS OF FLORIDA
P O BOX 130753
TAMPA FL 33681

Atheist Forum

Now being broadcast in two Tampa Bay counties

Pinellas County BrightHouse Cable TV subscribers—Joe Reinhardt is now producing 30-minute pre-taped *Atheist Forum* programs broadcast on channel 96, though it is not seen in all of Pinellas County.

Saturdays.....10:30 PM
Sundays.....11:30 PM
Wednesdays....1:30 AM

Hillsborough County Cable TV subscribers:

Wednesday (live)... 10:00 PM Channel 20

Rerun Saturday..... 10:00 PM Channel 19

Also, watch **Backtalk with Brent**, a one-hour live call-in show by A of F president Brent Yaciv:

Tuesday (live)... 10:00 PM Channel 20
Rerun Friday..... 11:00 PM Channel 19

Buckner, Pigliucci, Nasrin, and more... Convention succeeds despite cold welcome

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO—AGAIN THIS YEAR, the Atheist Alliance International spring convention offered the opportunity to hear dynamic speakers covering many subjects that inform and entertain. At the 10th Annual AAI convention, attendees met a very fascinating group of speakers. Our presence also stirred up some local politicians.

We were welcomed in Colorado with some snow instead of the sunshine that we traditionally are accustomed to at conventions. The local politicians were just as cold with their welcome. When booking a convention in town, there is a box to check if an official welcome letter is wanted from the governor. The organizers checked the box. Probably for the first time in his career, Colorado Governor Bill Owens refused to sign the letter.

The bias spread to the Colorado Springs as Mayor Lionel Rivera also refused to acknowledge the heathens. He also thinks this is the first time in office that he refused to sign such a letter. Enter free publicity, as radio DJs mocked and editorial pages filled with letters for two weeks about the convention. Colorado Springs has heard of the Atheist Alliance.

Not totally snubbed, the Vice Mayor of Colorado Springs was quite cordial when he showed up to give a welcome to conventioners at our Saturday afternoon luncheon.

Atheists from Florida comprised about 20% of the conventioners. The Friday night dinner was followed by a refresher of the Noah myth done as a one-man play by Josh Talley. First seen at the Dallas convention in 2002, Talley's polished act did a wonderful job exposing the utter absurdity of the story leaving viewers wondering how any literate person in a modern industrialized nation could give the story an ounce of credibility. We're still hoping we can convince Talley to send us a video of the presentation so we can broadcast it on the *Atheist Forum*.

Next, Richard Dawkins had prepared a video message for us to see before the presentation of the Richard Dawkins award, the magnificent glass sculpture prepared by Dennis DeBon. Regrettably, the English video equipment he used was incompatible with our equipment. Fortunately, the talented Julia Sweeney filled in and read the speech for us.

Margaret Downey accepted the Dawkins Award for Ann Druyan who could not be with us. Ed Buckner closed out the evening with his speech titled "Focus on Your Own Damn Family: Lies the Christian Right Never Tires of

Telling." Buckner did a fantastic job of exposing the lies told most frequently by the religious right.

With snowfall outside, Saturday was filled with presentations and break-out sessions. The highlight was Sweeney's presentation that evening of her new monolog titled "Letting Go of God," a humorous look at Sweeney's life trying to get a handle on the god issue. Most could relate.

Sunday morning wrapped up the convention with probably the most gripping presentation of all when Taslima Nasrin delivered her speech, "Islam and the Family," a first-hand account of the victim of rote religious dogma in control of an entire culture in Bangladesh. She observed that religion has nothing to do with morality, saying with great emotion, "I am a stranger everywhere. I am a stranger in the land where I was born. I am a stranger in the West....My home is love."

@theistalliance

Attorney John Patrick Michael Murphy, who formerly hosted a weekly radio program about law that ultimately evolved into a show about atheism, followed with another exemplary talk. Murphy was successful in getting an amendment on a state ballot in Colorado to tax the churches, which got 17% of the votes.

Taslima Nasrin and Julia Sweeney were added to the list of honored advisors to the organization.

What kind of a world do we live in when we can see hundreds in a church being duped out of their treasure and their intellect, while barely a hundred nationwide make the effort to absorb the intellect of an atheist convention?

Next year the convention will be hosted by Atheists United in Los Angeles.

"For ages, a deadly conflict has been waged between a few brave men and women of thought and genius upon the one side, and the great ignorant religious mass on the other. This is the war between Science and Faith. The few have appealed to reason, to honor, to law, to freedom, to the known, and to happiness here in this world. The many have appealed to prejudice, to fear, to miracle, to slavery, to the unknown, and to misery hereafter. The few have said 'Think! The many have said 'Believe!'"

—Robert Ingersoll

Atheists of Florida
Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church
www.atheistalliance.org/florida Sponsor of the MARK TWAIN SCHOLARSHIP FUND
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Membership dues

- Life Member \$ 500.00
- Sustaining 60.00 yr
- Couple 50.00 yr
- Individual 40.00 yr
- Student (under 25 yrs) 10.00 yr
- Limited Income (over 65) 10.00 yr
- Newsletter (out of state) 10.00 yr

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IN THE DAYS BEFORE CHARLES DARWIN and even during his time there were many who realized that species were not static. A common term used then was transmutation. After all, farmers and even some scientists could see that there were changes within a species and the close relationship between species could also be observed.

THE SOLUTION IS EVOLUTION
No. 28—Evolution redefined

—Jim Strayer



Darwin's great contribution was to show a way that this could happen. Once Charles Lyell and others showed that the earth was not six thousand years old, but at least millions of years old, Darwin saw that there was time for natural selection to take place.

Darwin used artificial selection, fossils, geographic distribution, and anatomical structures to support the theory of evolution. We know now that the picture was far from complete. Darwin and others thought that offspring resulted from a blending of something from the parents. This made evolution difficult to explain. With the discovery of genes the picture became more clear, but more needed to be discovered.

Within a relatively short period of time not only were DNA and RNA discovered, we now know that there are bits of chemicals (viral genes) that are attached to strands of

Strayer's series The Solution is Evolution will continue in the next newsletter. Strayer is a retired biology teacher living with his wife, Bobbe, in Ormond-by-the-Sea.

The Mark Twain Scholarship Fund 2004

We warmly thank the following members who so generously contributed to the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund drive this year. The total amount donated as of May 6, 2004 by members of Atheists of Florida and friends was \$1,630.00.

- Donors of \$300 to 500: Nan Owens, Maria Richardson, Kyoko Brogdon, Raymond G. Erickson
- Donors of \$100 to 299: Bruce Gregg, Edward J. McDougall
- Donors of \$50 to 99: Olympia Wood, Michael Brannon, Alex Giannakoulis, Steve Miles, C. W. Mitchell

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DNA that affect inheritance. All of this information has resulted in a much better definition of evolution and how it works. That does not mean that the evidence that Darwin used was wrong, it just means that we now have the answers to many questions that Darwin could never have answered.

Any good scientific definition should be as simple as possible. The definition for photosynthesis is short and simple. It is the process that is complicated. So too with evolution. The definition is short and simple. The process is complicated, but still easily understood.

Biology textbooks are now using a definition accepted by almost all of science. BIOLOGICAL EVOLUTION IS CHANGE IN THE GENE POOL OF A POPULATION OVER TIME.

We must keep in mind that the term gene refers to all of the chemistry effecting inheritance.

It is these changes reacting in different environments that determine if a species succeeds or becomes extinct.

The main purpose of this article is to separate Darwinism from evolution. Most of us understand how important Darwin's work was and how the evidence he used proved the theory. But that was over 150 years ago. New discoveries, new ways of interpretation, and vast improvements in scientific instruments have made evolution an undeniable fact. We will continue to explore the different avenues and I am sure that much more amazing information will come forth in the future.

I believe that from now on when we are confronted by creationists or those who accept intelligent design, we should use the correct definition and take Darwinism out of the argument. Attacking Darwinism should fall on deaf ears. The argument can now be, as it always should have been, about science and not individuals.

Religious right behind gay marriage opposition

Moral conservatives, including President Bush, are considering a constitutional amendment to preserve the sanctity of marriage.

What in the world are these people afraid of? Peaceful, consenting adults who harm no one else are absolutely no threat to orthodox, heterosexual lifestyles.

LETTERS

including marriage.

American society would be wise to accept the Libertarian doctrine, which states that citizens have the right to live in whatever peaceful ways they choose, so long as they do not interfere with the rights of others to live peacefully.

Which is more immoral—a heterosexual family in which an abusive husband beats his wife and children, or a gay or lesbian couple raising a child in a nonviolent, loving environment?

Would the social moralists prefer the former, which conforms to the "sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman?" This smacks of theocracy. —BARRY ROWE Melbourne

It's about the cruci-fiction
Published March 6 in the Tampa Tribune. It generated several calls to our atheist phone line.

All of the hoopla over Mel Gibson's movie distracts us from the real questions.

I question not only who Jesus was, but the existence of the deity he is claimed to represent/be a part of. I question the objectivity and accuracy of biblical authors, writing years after the events took place and from hearsay accounts, rather than providing us with eyewitness testimony—and even that is notoriously error-prone. I question the most basic assumptions of believers.

We welcome correspondence from readers. Address mail to: Atheists of Florida P.O. Box 130753 Tampa, FL 33681 Or e-mail: ATHALFLE@aol.com

month on alternate sides of the bay on the first Sunday. For details call 813-835-1500. —BRENT YACIV President, Atheists of Florida, Inc.

An act of god?

I attended the AAI conference in Tampa last year and made a "field trip" with Richard Dawkins, James Randi, Michael Shermer and other conferences to witness the miracle of the virgin in the windows.

But, hallelujah, she has been decapitated. Do you think they will paint in the new windows to give the virgin back her head? —CAROL www.secular.org

Forum viewer

I saw your show last night on Tampa's Public Access channel and I was glued to it for the entire show. You seem extremely intelligent, and I love the way you make the religious people stumble over their words and stump them.

How can I receive more info? I especially would like to hear that CD you talked about, a debate of some sort. Please contact me ASAP. Thanks. —JOE HOOKE Odessa, FL

"Atheist" religion?

I am a lifetime member of Atheists of Florida but do not attend meetings due to Cocoa Beach being a long way from our chapters.

While reading the previous issue of our newsletter the thought struck me that if we declared ourselves a religion, oh, say—the 'holy church of free thinkers' or some other religions sounding name: would that not accrue to us the same benefits and protections as Christian, Jew, Muslims and other religious flavors? And if so, could we not demand the same benefits and privileges as Catholics, Baptists and Jews? And if someone were to attack us could we not accuse them of religious persecution and demand the full force and protection of the Federal government? And could we also accuse the government of favoring one religion over another, if another religion were given some benefit we were denied? It seems this would be a win/win situation for us. —BOB LANGCASTER Cocoa Beach

Bob—Yes, it might be a win/win situation unless you find hypocrisy intolerable. We are already often accused of being a religion, even among members of A of F, in spite of the fact we lack a worship figure and do not fit any of the criteria of a religion. This would include establishment of arbitrary dogma, arbitrary "morals" and utterly inexplicable rituals. In other words, we would need to incorporate into atheism all the insanity that atheists reject. To do these things to suck money from the government through seems completely hypocritical to me.

Rather, the course of action Atheists of Florida takes is to oppose all unconstitutional government subsidies of religion and stand on the moral high ground. Perhaps some of our readers will weigh in on your suggestion and we'll publish their thoughts next issue.—Ed

Faith-based plan part of culture war

WASHINGTON—The head of the White House's faith-based initiatives program said in June that a "culture war" divides the Bush administration and its critics who challenge the constitutionality of such programs.

Jim Towey, director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives said, "Much attention is being placed on the war in Iraq, but there's also another war that's going on. It's a culture war that really gets to the heart of the questions about what is the role of faith in the public square."

Towey, who was a lawyer for Mother Teresa, warned that when faith is driven out of that public square, "you almost wind up creating a godless orthodoxy."

Drawing on the "compassionate conservative" themes of his 2000 campaign, *W* vowed this month to rid the federal government of what he called the "unfair discrimination against faith-based charities." He apparently made no mention of his plan to endorse hiring discrimination practiced by such charities.

While the faith-based initiatives have languished in Congress, the president observed that, "Government can hand out money, but what government can never do is put love in a person's heart, or a sense of purpose in a person's life."

Addressing the Knights of Columbus, the world's largest Catholic fraternal organization gathered in Dallas for their annual convention, *W* also punctuated other issues, from his opposition to abortion, gay marriage and human cloning to his support of faith-based organizations and preserving the phrase "under God" in the Prayer of Allegiance.

Civil liberties are the enemy

DAYTON, TENN.—As if to signify a yearning to return to the dark ages, Roy Moore's Ten Commandments monument began a national tour this month on the back of a flatbed truck, beginning from the very courthouse where the teaching of evolution was put on trial almost 80 years ago.



"The ACLU is still the enemy," said June Griffin of Dayton, an outspoken advocate for displays of the commandments in government buildings. A small gathering of about 75 people showed up to see the granite monument outside the site where John Scopes was convicted in 1925 of giving lessons on evolution. Judge Moore, who is not participating, lost his job

for defying a federal court order to remove his display from the judicial building.

As long as you weren't on the wrong side of the torch

VATICAN—Torture, burning at the stake and other punishment for the faithful condemned as witches or heretics by church tribunals during the Inquisition was not as widespread as commonly believed, according to the Vatican. In 2000, Pope John Paul II apologized for the sins of Roman Catholics made in the name of their faith, including abuses during the Inquisition. The statement lacked comment on the validity of a faith that would inspire such horrors—a faith unchanged to this day.

This month the Vatican denounced feminism for trying to blur differences between men and women and threatening the institution of families. The drive for equality, the Vatican said, makes "homosexuality and heterosexuality virtually equivalent, in a new model of polymorphous sexuality."

Praying judge cops complaint

ORLANDO—Attorney Steve Mason complained in June that Circuit Judge Frederick Pfeiffer offered only Christian prayers along with the Pledge of Allegiance at the opening of proceedings in his courtroom. Mason claimed the practice indicated a "biatant sponsoring of religion," and set a tone that hurt his Canadian clients' case. His clients "felt compelled to participate" in the pledge, fearing they would otherwise offend jurors.

The 78-year-old judge said a prayer and the pledge have been part of his court proceedings since 1973, but he stopped referring to Jesus after being admonished by the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in 1984.

We could take a lesson from them

BRUSSELS—France has declared it could not accept references to God and Christianity in a European Union constitution. France and Belgium have been most opposed to religious references in the charter, while Italy and Poland, backed by the Pope, want the charter to acknowledge Christianity's role.

Last December, President Jacques Chirac, warning that growing ethnic and religious divisions threatened to erode France's tradition of equality, called for a new law that would ban Muslim girls' headscarves and all other overt religious symbols from the country's public schools.

"Secularism is not negotiable," Chirac said in a nationally televised speech. "The schools will remain secular."

Few countries cherish their secularism as much as France, which broke from the Roman Catholic Church after the French Revolution and enshrined the separation of state and church into its Constitution in 1905. While France has long been a country of immigration, the French tradition is one of aggressive assimilation; newcomers are welcome as long as they adopt French language, tradition and culture.

We received this from Glen Paul via E-mail

THE PRESIDENTIAL PRAYER Team is currently urging us to: "Pray for the President as he seeks wisdom on how to legally codify the definition of marriage. Pray that it will be according to Biblical principles. With many

In defense of Biblical marriage

forces insisting on variant definitions of marriage, pray that God's Word and His standards will be honored by our government." This is true.

Any good religious person believes prayer should be balanced by action. So here, in support of the Prayer Team's admirable goals, is a proposed Constitutional Amendment codifying marriage entirely on biblical principles:

A. Marriage in the United States shall consist of a union between one man and one or more women. (Gen 29:17-28; II Sam 3:2-5)

B. Marriage shall not impede a man's right to take concubines in addition to his wife or wives. (II Sam 5:13, I

IT'S THAT DARN TV SHOW!

At the beginning of 2004, our producers, who were not members of Atheists of Florida, left Public Access.

Where've we been?

Having anticipated that they would not produce our show indefinitely, a few of our members had just begun training. But to certify for full producer status, allowing us to use any of the studios at Hillsborough Public Access, requires completion of a



Jim Butler, left, with Michael Harvey on the current set of the *Atheist Forum*.

13-week course which wasn't available until summer. With four of our members now completing the training we are set to resume production of the *Forum* in a three-camera studio giving a much more professional

Kings 11:3; II Chron 11:21)

C. A marriage shall be considered valid only if the wife is a virgin. If the wife is not a virgin, she shall be executed. (Deut 22:13-21)

D. Marriage of a believer and a non-believer shall be forbidden. (Gen 24:3; Num 25:1-9; Ezra 9:12; Neh 10:30)

E. Since marriage is for life, neither this Constitution nor the constitution of any State, nor any state or federal law, shall be construed to permit divorce. (Deut 22:19; Mark 10:9)

F. If a married man dies without children, his brother shall marry the widow. If he refuses to marry his brother's widow or deliberately does not give her children, he shall pay a fine of one shoe and be otherwise punished in a manner to be determined by law. (Gen. 38:6-10; Deut 25:5-10)

G. In lieu of marriage, if there are no acceptable men in your town, it is required that you get your dad drunk and have sex with him (even if he had previously offered you up as a sex toy to men young and old), tagging with any sisters you may have. Of course, this rule applies only if you are female. (Gen 19:31-36) **A**

appearance to the show. One of those members is the newsletter producer/editor, who also just happens to have a house under construction coupled with a rather busy year with his profession.

However, with that behind us, we should be able to get our newsletter back on a regular six-week publication schedule.

Since we've been somewhat delinquent in our mailings, we have decided to extend all memberships for six months. This means your membership expiration date shown on your mailing label will have been extended by six months when you see it on your next newsletter.

Besides our Web site which is connected to the Atheist Alliance International Web page, Tampa A of F member Kenney Courtney has developed a site for the Tampa Bay Area members. Designed for quick, easy postings of local events, commentary, or reference to Web sites of interest to atheists, it can be accessed at: <http://tampabayatheists.org>.

An atheist invocation?

In late June, the Tampa Bay chapter was invited to give the invocation at the Tampa City Council meeting. We were all too delighted to accept.

At the June Tampa Bay chapter meeting, member Michael Harvey agreed to give the presentation. A committee to draft the invocation was formed from among those present at the meeting. After an exchange of scores of e-mails the final draft of the invocation was completed. The date selected was July 29, a date which will live in atheist infamy. As events beyond our imagination continue to unfold, the ensuing publicity generated by the occasion is worthy of the entire next issue of the A of F newsletter which will include the complete and exact text of the invocation.

Congratulations to all of us!

OKAY, I'M NOT A DOCTOR, though I've played one on TV...but this isn't medicine for the body I'm talking about. This is medicine for the future of the Atheists of Florida. But first, a little history: I'll keep it short, but it's necessary for understanding some of our issues lately.

When I first joined this group as a charter member back in 1992, the Tampa Bay area was the laggard. The Miami chapter of American Atheists was signif-

President's prescription: Miami, heal thyself!

—Brent Yaciw

cantly larger and better funded than the Tampa/St. Pete chapter. If my recollection is correct, there were over sixty paid members led by a man with the ironic name of Christos, who wanted to sue American Atheists over several thousand dollars in funds misappropriated by Madalyn & Co. In our area, we were lucky if we had twenty paid members, and we had little reserve. Miami was the growing, vibrant group with plenty of funds, regular speakers, a booth at the Miami International Book Fair, and a TV show that we had to travel there to participate in.

What happened?

Frankly, I'm not sure. That's the problem with living five hours away and with chapters operating autonomously. I know Christos moved to Ft. Pierce, but I'm not sure what role that played; all I know is that, as of a recent tally, the Miami area has less than a third of the members it had when it began. Ironically, some of the things I've heard from Miami are almost the same things I used to hear in Tampa.

For example, I've heard that people in Tampa don't care about Miami. To some extent, there's truth in that: chapters operate autonomously, and while those of us in Tampa harbor no ill will toward Miami, and have (usually at our own expense) traveled there to assist in major endeavors like the Book Fair and TV show, we're focused on keeping our own group growing - and we've been pretty successful at it, as membership in this area is at least three times what it was ten years ago, and (in large part because of the TV show we're producing locally) is still growing.

I've also been told AofF is a "closed shop." The facts, however, don't seem to bear that out. Alex Giannakoulas, once a student member, has in the past few years joined AofF as a full member and is now on the Board of Directors, as well as serving as Vice President. Jim Young, likewise a member for only a few years—though time moves ever swiftly—is also a Board Member, and our secretary. Our most recent Board

Member, Joe Reinhardt, has been a member less than two years. If one looks at the Board's roster from years back, one can see that the Board's membership has varied over the years, and until lately included more Miami members than anywhere else.

It's true that there is sometimes a lack of communication between the chapters. Frankly, it's easier—and less expensive, since playing a doctor on TV failed to earn me an equivalent salary—to pick up the phone and call someone locally. It's also easier to talk to someone I've known for years than someone I just met. However, e-mail is cheap, and nearly all board members have it, along with a significant part of the membership. One of my goals as president will be to increase cross-communication between chapters. I'm personally going to make an effort to attend at least one chapter meeting of every chapter statewide in the coming year, and though it's not a rule, I'm going to suggest that every other board member do the same. I'm not too proud to sleep on a couch if it's offered: I suspect it'll cost me some motel and travel expense, but it's part of the job. Which brings me to that issue.

Some of our members, including those serving on the board and as chapter officers, seem to have become infected with a disease I'll call *passivivis aggressivensivissus*. Maybe it comes from watching the activities of churches over the years, or maybe it's just an infection some folks acquire. You see, if you go to a church, they do everything possible to keep you coming. They have greeters as you come in the door, they inundate you with mail and reminder calls, they literally bug you until you give in and attend. In fact, you don't even have to go; I just moved, and already I've received two mailers inviting me to attend a church. I guess they can afford to do this with all the tax-free money they get!

We don't do that. It's not a lack of concern; it's more that, for some of us, one reason we're atheists is because we HATE people bugging us to do things or spend money. Because of my profession, I miss quite a few local meetings; weekends are tough for me. I really do not want someone calling me up and asking me why I wasn't there, or otherwise laying a guilt trip on me; as well, I feel that as an officer it's my duty to let others know when I won't be there so they can plan appropriately. However, there are some who feel differently; perhaps we need a "bug/don't bug" check off box on our membership forms, and we can let all the "bug" people know who the others are so they can call them!

Some of it is also that most of us are not retired, and we have full or part-time professions, limited funds, and no promise of a reward in the afterlife to spur us into action! Seriously, that's one area with which we can never compete; the best we can promise is a better life here on earth. Even those of us who are above average in our commitment to atheism still tend to put other things higher on our list of priorities.

Given this, it's not easy keeping a group growing, especially a group as diverse as ours. Some members feel our focus should be on recruiting older members

who can provide better funding. Some feel the focus should be on recruiting younger members, as they are the future of any group. Some even think our focus should be on recruiting certain ethnic groups, putting out newsletters and pamphlets in other languages. In truth, all of these are needed. Older, more financially secure members bring both needed funds and time to the group, time younger struggling members often don't have. As well, retirees are no longer afraid of losing their jobs because their boss found out they were atheists! However, older people also succumb to illness or death, and the image of A of F as an "old white folks group" is one we constantly battle. We need new, younger members to stir the pot, to provide energy and new ideas, to keep the group from getting stale. To attract them, we need to address their needs and sensibilities; the musical introduction to our TV show, for example, while oft benamed by the older generation, has the drive and energy that younger viewers find attractive. Now if we could only get more of them to guest or host the show, we'd be halfway there!

However, even older members can still address issues of importance to all age ranges, and we strive to do so. As for other ethnic groups, all races, genders, and ages have always been welcome at our meetings, but often they look at us and assume (something one should never do, but an affliction that affects nearly everyone sometimes) that the group is closed to other cultural backgrounds. It's not, but it takes some effort, and more than simply coming up with grandiose ideas for others to accomplish. Which brings me back to that *passivivis aggressivensivissus*. This group isn't wealthy enough to spend a large chunk inviting a single speaker to a single event when it's much more cost effective to invite that speaker, videotape the speech, and distribute it. Everything the group does has to be looked at in Return On Investment terms. We are considering dropping the Miami Book Fair because, judging by our paid membership roster, it's not generating enough members to justify its cost. I'm betting that a booth at a local university's flea market area, similar to the one we staff here at the University of South Florida (and kudos to Jim Young for taking over that mantle in the past year or so; the booth's been active for over ten years now!), would be a better choice. I'm not sure about the return on our infamous Ten Commandments book covers, but once again funding was provided by a benefactor specifically for that project.

In fact, here in Tampa we've been very active since our inception in 1992. The newsletter is produced and mailed from here as well, at least, the English version is. We're willing to have our newsletter translated and sent to anyone who wants it in another language, but we need someone willing to take that responsibility who speaks the language in question and can edit, produce, and mail it—do we have a Miami area volunteer? Ditto with the speeches and programs we have in the can; we'd LOVE to have an interpreter translating them and laying down a soundtrack, or even providing closed captioning. I'm betting that if someone were to record a soundtrack or type in the closed captioning track in Miami, we'd find a way to get it produced—presuming we have copyright permissions to do so, which applies to works we produce ourselves.

In short, there's plenty to do, but we're not going to chase people down to get them to do it. Maybe we should, but we figure you're adults and you can decide for yourself how much the promotion of atheism means to your life. We're pretty busy getting our own lives together and keeping this area's assault on unbelief at bay, but we're more than willing to give a hand to other areas of the state. All you need to do is ask.

Brent Yaciw was elected president of Atheists of Florida at the 2004 Board of Director's meeting. He also serves as vice-director of the Tampa Bay Chapter. He can be reached at: Yaciw@earthlink.net

Dear freethinkers:

This month's AAI news release comes in a different form, a personal letter to all members of our affiliate groups, because I feel very personal about the subject.

At the beginning of June, Harvey and I attended the Tai Solarin conference at the Mayflower School in Ikeene, Nigeria. We made many new friends and met face-to-face people we had known only through E-

Atheist Alliance Report Books for Nigeria

—Bobbie Kirkhart

mail. As in every such trip, getting to know the community of freethinkers was the best part. And everywhere we went, people asked for books on science and philosophy.

Nigeria is a very religious country. Most of you have read about the violence between Christians and Muslims in the North. In the central coast, where the Nigerian Humanist movement keeps offices, there is no violence. There the majority Christians show their strength on every street corner, making it very difficult to be an open atheist. The government is scrupulously tolerant of both religions, while attempting the rein in the extremes, such as faith-healing fraud or the excesses of the Sharia courts. You will read more about the Solarin conference, the Mayflower School and religion in Nigeria if you get the Third Quarter Secular Nation.

The Nigerian Humanist Movement serves as a Center for Inquiry and therefore has a nice selection of books published by Prometheus, but they have little other literature. (I'm certain that any duplicates of Prometheus books would be put to good use.) Most of the people we met were highly educated, so no book would be too sophisticated, although there are those just beginning their study of rationalism, so basic books are also useful.

They are happy to have used books, so long as they are in useable condition.

I am asking all readers to search their homes for science and philosophy books which are no longer needed and send them to Nigeria. It would be a simple matter to make this a group effort, with a sturdy mailing box at your next few meetings collecting the books. Mailing by economy rate is not expensive: \$21.75 for the first five pounds. The per-pound rate decreases as the pounds increase. Twenty pounds costs \$46, and fifty pounds, \$83.50.

Books should be mailed to:
The Nigerian Humanist Movement
77 Ososami Road
Ibadan, Oyo State
Nigeria

Thank you for doing this.

Best regards,
—Bobbie Kirkhart

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