

# Manitoba Humanist



## HUMANISTS IN TRAINING

Lots of fun for all ages at the October meeting! Above, Emma Burton (L) with our President, Donna Harris, and below at right, Gloria Froese holds our youngest member, Calista.

## YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

Our November meeting will be significantly different from our usual format of hosting a speaker. Instead, our members will be speaking themselves, sharing personal stories about how they arrived at their present stage of non-belief and found their way to HAAM. Everyone in attendance is welcome to join in the discussion. However, to get the conversation started, we have asked several members to prepare in advance, so that no one will feel pressured to speak or be put on the spot. It's OK to just

listen! We hope you will join us for what already sounds like a fascinating evening.

We share our stories for a variety of reasons:

- To let others know that they are not alone
- To reach out to others who may identify with our experiences
- To provide answers to the repeated questions many of us receive about why we don't believe, or no longer believe, or feel the need to join a group of non-believers
- To work through the emotional turmoil

Published by and for the  
Humanists, Atheists and  
Agnostics of Manitoba

*"We are beyond  
belief"*

# HAAM

[www.mbhumanistsatheists.ca](http://www.mbhumanistsatheists.ca)



## UPCOMING EVENTS

All of our upcoming events can be found on page 5 of this newsletter.



- many of us feel after leaving religion
- To build understanding and fellowship as we get to know each other better

HAAM welcomes stories from all of our members. Our lives have taken many different paths, and every story is different, so the more people who share, the greater the likelihood of finding someone with whom we identify.



In addition to sharing at our meetings, we have a new feature on our website ([mbhumanistsatheists.ca](http://mbhumanistsatheists.ca)) called **Meet the Humanist**, where members can post their stories. If you would prefer to write your story rather than tell it, please consider submitting it [here](#).

We realize that not everyone can 'go public' with their personal beliefs, because of family, employment, or similar concerns. If you fall into this category, don't be afraid to contribute. It is even more important to get your story out there, to let the public know about the discrimination non-believers face, and to let others in the same situation know that they are not alone. Your name and photo can be omitted from the web page, and details can be disguised if necessary. You can view your article for approval before HAAM posts it anonymously, and only one or two people on our executive would know your real identity.

If you find yourself staring at a blank paper/screen and have no idea where to start, here are some suggestions:

- Imagine (or actually draw) a timeline of your life. At pertinent points on it, think about what you believed and what you practiced. Why? And did these change over time, why or why not?
- Think about all the different individuals and groups who attempted to influence

your beliefs, both formal and informal. Which ones were effective in changing your mind, and which weren't, and why or why not?

- If you deconverted, was it a gradual process, and how long did it take? Was there a particular trigger at the beginning, or a 'final straw' at the end? Was there a particular "aha" moment, and if so, what?
- If you were never a believer, why not? Did anyone attempt to convert you, and why didn't it work? If you grew up in a secular home, did you learn much about religion at all? What message did your family convey about believers?
- What led you to join HAAM, in other words, to become active in the secular movement, and/or to seek out a community of like-minded people?
- Have your beliefs, or lack of belief, ever resulted in social isolation or discrimination at your employment? How? And if so, how did (or do) you deal with this?

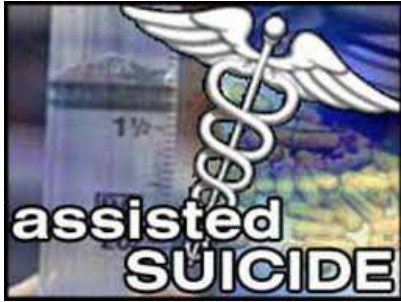
HAAM would love to hear your story. Join us at a meeting, or submit it to us anytime via email [mbhumanistsatheists@gmail.com](mailto:mbhumanistsatheists@gmail.com) or by regular mail (address on page 6).

- Dorothy Stephens

## **DYING WITH DIGNITY – DEITY STYLE**

Some of our HAAM members took the opportunity recently to attend a panel discussion on physician assisted death organized by the Manitoba Multifaith Council, hosted by St. Mark's Lutheran Church. Having attended the presentation last month on this topic, organized by Dying With Dignity, I was interested to see what some of the perspectives were on this issue from the faith based community.

The evening proceeded with a case study presented by Dr. Brent Kvern, in which he described a patient diagnosed with ALS who asks his physician if he will help him die when the patient feels the time is right, not when the disease decides the time is right. Dr. Kvern then handed over the question to the panelists as to what they would answer the patient from their faith perspective.



The panel consisted of representatives from the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian faiths, as well as a Humanist. Rabbi Alan Green and Sheikh Hosni Azzabi spoke first and to my ears it sounded like they were reading from the same script. I learned that their religions are duties oriented, not rights oriented and that in both faiths they were instructed to preserve life in all cases, no exception (save the convenient one of taking a life in warfare) as one astute questioner pointed out during the Q&A that followed. I also noticed that no one brought up the stoning and beheading, perhaps that's considered off-limits during a feel good multifaith love-in. But I digress. They also were very clear in getting the message out that, in their religion, autonomy is not a value. We don't own our bodies or our lives, both being given by God/Allah. The Muslim spokesperson was also clear in getting across that quality of life is not a concern.

The Christian perspective was presented by Rev. Lynn Granke, the director of spiritual care at the Victoria Hospital. From what I could gather, she is a liberal Christian, and as most liberal Christians do, presented her points of view in a way that encompassed everything and nothing at the same time. In her defence though, I have to say that her opinions did seem to be enlightened by the nature of her work in a hospital. Of the three religious views, hers was the only one that actually seemed informed by compassion and the recognition that there can be a lot of nuance to be considered. Again, her position wasn't very clear, but I think that she weighed in on the side of supporting assisted death, at least in some circumstances.

The humanist perspective was presented by Barry Hammond. He spoke of the humanist view that we are all a part of nature, and that death is a natural part of that. His view of humanism

strongly emphasizes that we need to be compassionate and help one another, and that the views of a god, which in his opinion is an undemonstrated hypothesis, carry no weight for those who accept a naturalistic worldview.

The Q&A part of the evening was quite interesting. We heard from some palliative care nurses, who obviously found something spiritual in caring for those at end of life. There were many that clearly felt that the solution to this problem was better palliative care. I myself learned from a discussion I had with a past colleague who was at the event that only 16% of Canadians have access to palliative care. This needs to change. However, a point that was raised during the Q&A by Dr. Paul Henteleff, who is considered the father of palliative care in Manitoba, is that all situations are unique and that sometimes even the best possible care does not work to alleviate suffering. As an RN who has many years of experience in palliative care, I can attest to the truth of that myself. When I approached him later, he shared with me, that during his career, he realized that his own biases in promoting his specialty had prevented him from seeing it, but that later on reviewing data, he found that as many as 10% of the patients that he felt were well managed, had actually still been experiencing considerable distress.

To sum up, I would say that it became clear to me that the religious community and humanism are worlds apart on this issue. The religious all seemed to share the idea that suffering is good. As Cheri Frazer said to me afterward, it reminded her of the opinions of Mother Theresa, who built a career out of helping other people suffer for Jesus. (But when it came to her own death, it was "pass the morphine here, thanks".) I don't believe that we will be able to find common ground as it spelled out how different our values are. Religious morality consists of following rules, of doing what you're told even when it feels wrong. But luckily, as Dr. Henteleff also astutely pointed out to the panelists, that although they may not in their religious traditions value autonomy, our government and the people of Canada do, as it was the main principle behind our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I think that freedom will win out in this issue, hopefully sooner than later.

- Diana Goods

## **RELIGION, REASON, AND THE COMMON GOOD**

On October 23, Allan Gregg presented a lecture at the U of W about what he has called the “assault on reason” in public policy formation, and the prevailing attitude in Ottawa towards science, statistics, evidence-based policy making, the environment, and rational compromise.



Gregg is a prominent Canadian pollster and media pundit. He is a columnist for *MacLean's*, a CBC commentator, and the founder of Decima Research, the polling firm for Conservative Party. Given this association, there was concern that he might be a government shill, but his views were, on the contrary, highly critical of the war on science and the influence of the religious right on public policy.

He began by noting the disturbing trend of the government's decreasing use of evidence and science to determine public policy, and its seeming plan to eliminate the people who use science to object to government policies. The basic premise of his argument here is that effective solutions to society's problems can only be found when based on facts. He cited Steven Pinker's assertion that the suppression of knowledge is a frequent tool of both political and religious tyrants to control their subjects, and argued that reason is the foundation of democracy and progress.

Gregg then discussed the relationship of morality and religion to politics, stating that while science may define and solve social problems, it is morality which decides what constitutes a problem in the first place. Since for many

people, religion has close ties to morality, religious people closely associate religion with politics. Secularism stands in opposition, creating an impasse in decision-making. He noted that scientists reject beliefs that are unsubstantiated, while apologists defend them, resulting in religion and science becoming enemies.

So how can society overcome this diversity of thought and govern effectively? Gregg's suggestion: find a neutral middle ground for the common good. Seize common fundamental human beliefs like protection, respect for nature, fairness, etc and govern according to those principals. Sure sounds like Humanism! Gregg noted that in times of uncertainty, prosperity is often a zero-sum game where people feel less charitable toward others and make more divisive decisions. The solution to the social problems this creates is not harsher legislation but programs which lead to more hope and help people to feel less threatened.

Gregg didn't defend religion, but he didn't condemn it, either. He admitted that for most of the last 2 millennia, it has been on the wrong side of the history of social justice. However, he did make one faulty claim - that since the Age of Enlightenment, most advances in human rights have been driven by religion, including the abolishment of slavery and decline of colonialism. Overall his presentation was reasonable and hopeful, although it lacked practical solutions for dealing with extremists who refuse to find any common ground. Best line of the evening goes to the woman who, during the Q and A, commented that we didn't need any of the information in this lecture to know right from wrong and what is for the common good.

- Dorothy Stephens

## **OUTREACH OPPORTUNITY**

On November 16, *Dying With Dignity* will offer a one-day training session for members who are interested in spreading the word. The session covers advance care planning, patient rights and the reasons why medically-assisted dying should be legalized in Canada.

A DWD ambassador is a person who wants to be informed, to engage friends, family,

colleagues or others in conversation and to respond to any questions that might come out of such conversations. For more information or to register, please contact DWD at 1.800.495.6156 or [info@dyingwithdignity.ca](mailto:info@dyingwithdignity.ca)

## COMING UP SOON!

On November 20 Diana Goods will host our first **Round Table Discussion**, about Faith-based vs Secular Moral Arguments. Where do we get our morals from? This will be a friendly, informal event; no expertise required.



In December Scott Burton will host our first **Book Club** meeting. The first book will be *The God Argument* by A. C. Grayling. Please register by Nov 11. Again, no expertise required except to read the book before the meeting.

**Please join us!**  
**Not yet a member? Memberships will be available at the door at all our events**

## CHARITY OF THE MONTH

**Thank you!** to all who donated at the October meeting to Osborne House women's shelter. We collected candy, costumes, and about \$130 cash to help the families there celebrate this Halloween.

**Agape Table** will be our charity of the month for November. Recently their coffee maker broke and they are looking for help in either fixing or replacing it. It is a large coffee maker and the cost is high. Right now Agape Table is not able to serve coffee to the hundreds of people that they help to feed.

At this time of year, warm winter clothing is also welcome, so bring coats, mitts, or scarves to the meeting and we will include them along with our donation.

Agape Table has a different model for their charitable program that involves recipients of the meals paying a small portion toward the cost. This is thought to foster ownership in the program from those who use it. It is important to note that, as a matter of principle, Agape Table does not proselytize to anyone who uses their services.

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

**Saturday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

Meeting: You Are Not Alone!  
Location: Canad Inn Polo Park  
Time: 5:30 pm

**Saturday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

Dying with Dignity Ambassador Training  
Riverview Community Centre  
90 Ashland Avenue  
Time: 9:00 – 4:30

**Wednesday, November 20<sup>st</sup>, 2013**

**Note change of Date**  
Round Table Discussion on Morality  
Time: 6:30 pm (*Members only*)  
Location: Millennium Library, 4<sup>th</sup> floor, Meeting Room #3

**Wednesday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

Book Club: *The God Argument* by A. C. Grayling  
Time: 7:00 pm (*Members only*)  
Location: Scott Burton's home  
RSVP to [mbhumanistsatheists@gmail.com](mailto:mbhumanistsatheists@gmail.com) by November 11th

**Saturday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

Winter Solstice Party and Potluck Supper  
Time: 6:30 pm  
Location: Belgian Club, 407 Provencher Blvd  
Admission \$5 at the door

**If you donate blood** let the staff know that you wish your donation to count towards the Humanist Association of Manitoba's yearly pledge of just 10 donations. Our ID number is **HUMA008484**. Call 1 888 2DONATE.

**Executive:**

Donna Harris, President  
Heather McDonell, Vice President  
Helen Friesen, Treasurer  
Allison Nelson, Secretary

**Members at Large:**

Scott Burton  
Cheri Frazer  
Diana Goods – Librarian  
Pat Morrow  
Jeff Olsson  
Jake Peters  
Grant Rogerson

**Newsletter:**

Dorothy Stephens

Contact us at:

[mbhumanistsatheists@gmail.com](mailto:mbhumanistsatheists@gmail.com)



Yes, I would like to **BECOME A MEMBER** of the  
Humanists, Atheists & Agnostics of Manitoba

New Member       Renewal

**Membership Category:**

Individual Membership      \$30.00  
 Individual Limited Income      \$10.00  
 Household Membership\*      \$50.00  
 Household Limited Income      \$15.00

\* After July 1<sup>st</sup>, just pay ½ the yearly fee for the rest of the year.  
After October 31<sup>st</sup>, pay full fee and get the entire next year.

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

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

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone#: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Household Memberships: Please give the names of all  
additional Humanists in your household 18 years or over:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**DONATION** (Tax receipts issued for all donations of  
\$10 or more)

I would like to make a donation to HA<sup>2</sup>M of:

\$10    \$20    \$30    \$50    \$100  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**PAYMENT:**     Cheque       Money Order  
                      Visa       Mastercard

Please complete the following if paying by credit card:

Account No. \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheque or money order payable to:  
**Humanist Association of Manitoba** and mail to:  
Humanist Association of Manitoba, 7 Pinehurst Lane,  
Mitchell, MB, R5G 2J3.

Or bring your form and the fees to any HA<sup>2</sup>M meeting  
and give it to Helen Friesen, or any member of the  
executive.