

# Manitoba Humanist

## Don't miss HAAM's SUMMER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION



**Saturday June 20th, 5 - 8 PM**  
Assiniboine Park, picnic site #3 (see map)



Picnic site #3 is on Assiniboine Park Drive, just west of the zoo near the river; easiest to access via Roblin Blvd. If you're worried you won't find us, e-mail HAAM and we'll send you a cell # you can call that day for help.

Contact and membership info is on page 6. All events are subject to change, and some details may be TBA. Watch future newsletters, our website, Facebook page, or join us on Meetup for more information.

If you're new to HAAM, considering becoming a member, or just curious about our group, the Solstice Party is a great time to check us out! Get to know your fellow Humanists at this fun and informal get-together! Non-members and guests are welcome.

We provide the basics (like hot dogs, hamburgers, condiments, and expert BBQ cooks). All you need to add is people, pot luck goodies to complete the meal, your favorite beverage, a container for leftovers, and a few lawn chairs, Frisbees, kids, pets, or whatever else will make the evening enjoyable!

Our *Harmonizing Humanists* singers will be performing some fun songs!

**Don't forget to bring your garage sale items!** (See page 2).

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



# HA<sup>2</sup>M

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

**Plan to attend our  
upcoming conference!**

**River City  
REASONFEST**

September 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>,  
2015 at Canad Inns Polo Park

**\* Fascinating and inspiring  
speakers, including:**

- Hector Avalos
- Scott Carnegie
- Greta Christina
- Tracie Harris
- PZ Myers
- Lloyd "Hawkeye" Robertson
- Arthur Schafer
- Stephanie Zvan

**\* Meet and socialize with  
your fellow Non-Believers!**

Registration is NOW OPEN  
Early bird rates apply!

<http://rivercityreasonfest.org/>

## COMING UP!

June

**Thurs June 11<sup>th</sup>, One Gay City: A History of LGBT Life in Winnipeg**, 6:30 PM, Red River College – The Roblin Centre, 160 Princess St, Room P107. This documentary screening will take viewers on an emotional tour of Winnipeg's LGBT community through personal stories, news headlines and archival images.

<http://tinyurl.com/n6nwp7q>

**Sunday June 14<sup>th</sup>, Pride Parade**, Manitoba Legislature grounds. The rally to kick off the celebration begins at 11 AM, and the parade departs at 12 noon. HAAM members will again be meeting in front of the legislature at 11:30 and participating as a walking group. Let us know if you'll be joining us, so we can all find each other.



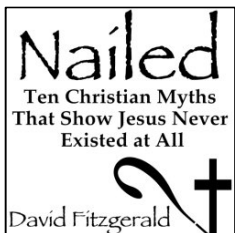
**Saturday June 27<sup>th</sup>, Garage Sale**, 9 AM to 3 PM, 1122 Crestview Park Drive (in St James, off Cavalier). To make it a success, we need all that great stuff you no longer use! So clean out your closets and basements, and *bring your gently used items to the Solstice Party*. If you have a large item, or a lots of things, or can't make the party, please contact HAAM and we'll arrange pick-up or drop off. Tax receipts are available for donated items with a total value of \$10 or more (so be sure to put your name on your items).

If you can help out with the sale – either to set up beforehand or during the day, let us know. Otherwise, just show up and check out all the good stuff.



July

**Wednesday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, Summer Book Club Meeting**, 7 PM, 77 Edmonton St. The book is **Nailed! Ten Christian Myths That Show Jesus Never Existed at All**,



by David Fitzgerald. (Details on our website.) There are 2 copies in the Winnipeg Public Library. It can also be ordered from McNally Robinson or in Kindle form from Amazon. Former pastor **Jeff Olsson** will be our host.

August

**Friday 21<sup>st</sup> - Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup>, Summer Outreach at the Morden Corn and Apple Festival**. Once again, HAAM members will be out at one of Manitoba's most popular summer festivals, asking people what they believe and why they believe it, and letting those who don't believe

know that HAAM exists. In years past we've reached out to nonbelievers with our "You are Not Alone" campaign. We've promoted science and human rights. We've encouraged visitors to our booth to explore humanism and critical thought. But every year we get pulled back to the same age-old assertion by many of our visitors: Morality comes from God. (Whether we like it or not).

So this year we are, to use a show-biz term, going to give the crowd what they want. We'll take the bull by the horns and ask the question "**Can you be Good without a God?**" It's the intention of this year's outreach to demonstrate with evidence and discussion that not only can we be good without gods, we can be better!

*We are always looking for volunteers! We can accommodate your*



**YES, I'M GOOD WITHOUT GOD!**

schedule – come for an hour or two, or all day. Don't be shy! If you're new, we'll put you with experienced outreach people. In addition to talking with the public, we have a lot of fun and get to know each other better in the process. So if you're at all interested just drop us a line though our email or website. Even if you haven't done anything like this before, come on down for a visit, stuff yourself with some really good food, and see what it's all about. The largest small town fair in Manitoba, the Morden Corn and Apple Festival, runs August 21–23 (Friday and Saturday 10-10 and Sunday noon-6).

Hope to see you there!

## SCHOOL PRAYER UPDATE

At the **Winnipeg School Division #1 board meeting** on May 4<sup>th</sup>, board members approved the motion to ask the provincial government to amend the legislation that enables private religious instruction (like that provided by the **Child Evangelism Fellowship**) into our public schools. (Details on our website if you missed this story.) Does that sound like a victory to you? Because it's not. It will NOT produce changes in any Manitoba schools this year, because the motion was only to ASK the government to amend the legislation. Individual school divisions have no authority to act on their own and ban religious groups. And there is no requirement for the government to act on the school division's request – in fact, at this point they have no plans to address the issue in the near future. Furthermore, even if the government DOES amend the Public Schools Act as requested, the resulting change in legislation will likely only impact children in WSD #1 and



perhaps one or two more urban divisions where inclusiveness and impartiality is valued. There would be no province-wide directive to all school divisions to prohibit proselytization, so it would certainly continue, especially in rural communities in the 'Bible Belt'.

It's up to us now to put pressure on our politicians to act. Please contact your MLA and let him/her know that we need to keep our kids safe from religious indoctrination!

## RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

You have likely read recently about the Canadian Supreme Court decision regarding religious prayers at municipal council meetings. A key point of the ruling was that "the state neither favour nor hinder any particular belief, and the same holds true for non-belief". So why is Winnipeg City Council still including prayer at its meetings? Stay tuned - we plan to invite **Mayor Brian Bowman** (above) to a HAAM meeting in the fall.



This question is part of a larger issue of prayer in our public institutions - which brings us to an update on a related matter. You may remember that last November,



**Winnipeg Police Chief Devon Clunis** was the guest speaker at our monthly meeting. (Details in the December newsletter archived on our website.) A practicing Christian himself, Chief Clunis graciously answered

our questions and concerns about partiality in the Police Service; in particular regarding the presentation of bibles to new recruits, and the use of a textbook written by an evangelical Christian in management training courses. Recently we were pleased to learn that he did, indeed, take these concerns seriously, and *the WPS has now ended both of these practices*. Together we have a voice, and that voice was heard.

In addition to these two issues, HAAM has recently also advocated for the end of proselytization of children in public schools and discrimination against the non-religious in the workplace (May newsletter). And we will continue to support these and other issues and organizations that mesh with our core values (our Mission Statement and Position Statements are on our website), like Dying with Dignity, LGBT rights, evidence-based science education, and reproductive choice.

But we need your support! Recently, we received several enquiries from the public wondering what "HAAM" is doing about some of the issues mentioned

above – well, "HAAM" is its members! People with no religious affiliation now make up 24% of the Canadian population, but we lack a voice because most of us don't formally belong to organizations that support our secular values. *If we want our concerns addressed, we need to unite and be heard*. Working together, we can accomplish more towards ensuring justice and fairness in the public square.

**Here's what you can do to help:**

1. *Join HAAM* – we have strength in numbers of paid members. 2. *Get involved*. With more people we can spread out the work, form friendships, and develop a sense of community. 3. *Make your opinions heard* in the public arena – write letters to news outlets, comment on articles, and post on social media. 4. *Let politicians and public officials know your views* (you can bet those opposed to our positions do). We will not make further advances in public policy if we don't ask. Silence is consent! Please, add your voice to ours! If you need inspiration, here is a letter HAAM member **Bob Russell** recently submitted to the Winnipeg Free Press:

*Mayor Bowman is flipping a middle finger at the Supreme Court of Canada's decision regarding religious prayer in council meetings. This violates the law and displays contempt for the highest court in the land. I suspect he is getting bad legal advice. The court ruled that the state must be neutral and may not promote the participation of certain believers or non-believers in public life to the detriment of others. The state cannot discriminate against non-believers. Even if "prayers" are inclusive, they are by nature and content religious and may exclude non-believers. I would add that nothing stops individuals praying, alone or together, at any time before or after official functions, and even if they wish to sit and pray to themselves in silence during them. If it wishes to be truly inclusive then the city opens itself up to a circus act of crackpot religions ranging from the mainstream to the obscure.*

*The Police Service has chaplains who are exclusively Christian, and have worn the crucifix on their uniforms. A chaplain recited a prayer and benediction at the recent police graduation ceremony, directing all present, as if in agreement, to stand and bow their heads. Attempts seem to have been made to be inclusive by dropping reference to the man named Jesus, but prayer is a religious act in itself and benediction is a Christian rite.*

*Our current Police Chief, who is not shy about his own religious opinions, has had the courage and sense to stop the old practice of presenting exclusively Christian bibles to police recruits, as well as dropping leadership*

Join Us!

material by Christian Evangelist John C. Maxwell from the training syllabus for supervisors. I request that he continue the process of obeying the law by eliminating chaplain positions and ceasing religious prayer of any nature from official police functions.

Mayor Bowman should follow Chief Clunis' lead, and bring the entire City of Winnipeg in line with the law. Not doing so is to demand that non-believers, who grow more numerous each year, obediently submit to the superstition of believers. Religion is a private, not a public matter.

## THE ETHICS OF RELIGION

At our May meeting, philosophy **Professor Arthur**



**Schafer** was asked whether it is ethical to try to talk people out of their religion if it gives them comfort. He answered the question decisively by emphatically stating that not only is it ethical to talk people out of superstitious beliefs; it is actually unethical to be religious.

In the excellent presentation that followed, Professor Schafer explained his answer in much more detail, but the gist of it is this: A populace that doesn't think critically is a big risk to society. When people allow themselves to believe whatever makes them feel comfortable without examining and testing the evidence, they will be led to make decisions that are wildly irrational. False beliefs lead to actions based on those false beliefs, which in turn causes harm to ourselves and/or others. Poor decision making can occur in relation to all sorts of issues besides religion – medical treatment, politics and government, finances, lifestyle choices, and more. People who are gullible seldom limit their gullibility to one area or belief. However, in societies that experience prejudice and persecution, these attitudes are almost always based on false beliefs – usually based in religion.

Regarding the reasons that people turn to religion, Professor Schafer noted that it is most likely because they fear chaos and disorder, and seek security and comfort. However, there is much more disharmony in the universe than harmony, and certainly no evidence for an all-loving deity. Nevertheless, the fact that there is no intrinsic meaning in the universe doesn't mean that we have no meaning in our lives; it's up to us to create our own meaning. We have to learn to live with some uncertainty, and learn to make the best decisions we can based on the available evidence. We CAN live without illusions and old superstitions, even ones that give us comfort.

If you missed the meeting, the entire speech is now up on our YouTube channel. <http://tinyurl.com/oqhtx8m>



In April, the Winnipeg chapter of **Dying With Dignity** hosted an excellent public forum, featuring the **Hon. Steven Fletcher** speaking about his proposed assisted-dying legislation, and **Natasha Griffiths** relating her mom's experience with assisted death in Switzerland.

Natasha spoke about the difficulties of having to travel in order to honor her mother's request for an assisted death – the expense, the need to prearrange and commit to a date, the stay in an unfamiliar hotel room rather than the comfort of home, the absence of family and friends, and her mother's need to end her life sooner than necessary rather than risk becoming too ill to make the trip. You could hear a pin drop in the room during her presentation. While the Griffiths family (and everyone else present) agreed that we need better access to quality palliative care, she stated that in her mother's case, no amount of palliative care could have made her change her mind because the issue was autonomy rather than comfort.

Steven Fletcher proved to be an eloquent and



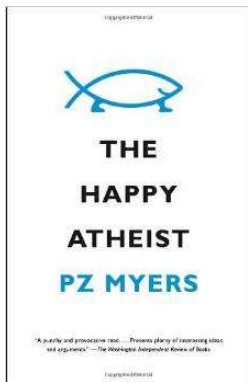
thoughtful speaker as he discussed how he has long supported assisted dying, how it has largely been ignored by governments of all stripes, and how most

politicians are still trying to avoid it even now. He expressed amazement at the overwhelming public support, and at the way the Supreme Court decision annihilated common oppositional arguments, like the slippery slope and protection for vulnerable people. He noted that during the court hearing, even the government's lawyers were forced to admit that the status quo causes increased suffering and leads to people ending their lives prematurely (as Sue Griffiths did). Fletcher mentioned that not all practical details involved in assisted dying have been decided, such as who would be responsible for storing and administering lethal medication and how to prepare health professionals who will participate. He also addressed the concern that people with disabilities would be victimized, by explaining that because informed consent and mental competence are key requirements, assisted dying would not even be applicable to individuals who are unable to consent. He closed by affirming that one individual's personal choices in no way diminish another's.

If this issue is important to you, please tell your MP to stand up for your rights! There are only about 8 months left until the old law prohibiting assisted dying expires, and we need to make sure that when it does, there are guidelines in place that will promote universal access, prioritize individual choice, and protect the most vulnerable members of society. Guidelines for writing to your MP are posted on the DWD website.

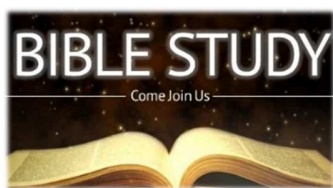
<http://tinyurl.com/q2xl6lz>

## ON THE BOOKSHELF



Scientist **PZ Myers** will be speaking at our **River City Reasonfest** conference in September. Lately he has managed to generate quite a bit of controversy (to put it mildly) in atheist circles. Widely known for his blog *Pharyngula* and the recipient of a number of honors, including Humanist of the Year from the American Humanist Association in 2009, he was

recently blacklisted by Atheist Ireland for what they termed “hurtful and dehumanising, hateful and violent, unjust and defamatory rhetoric”. So – love him or hate him? You decide. We have his book, **The Happy Atheist**, (a collection of his most popular writings), in our HAAM library. Read it for yourself, and make up your own mind, before you come to hear him in person. Just contact HAAM, and we will bring it to an upcoming event for you to borrow.



Only 13 books left in the Old Testament! **Daniel** is supposedly an account of the activities and visions of Daniel, a Jew exiled at Babylon. However,

modern consensus considers the book pseudonymous, with the stories of the first half legendary in origin, and the visions of the second half the product of later anonymous authors. Although it supposedly takes place during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar, scholars now date its writing to the second century BCE. The reasons are explained very succinctly in the introduction to the book in the *Skeptic’s Annotated Bible* (available online), so I will not repeat them here.

The OT finishes with 12 ‘minor prophets’. So who are these guys? **Hosea** prophesied during a dark era of Israel’s history, the period of the Northern Kingdom’s

decline and fall in the 8th century BC. As **Joel** contains no explicit references to datable persons or events, scholars’ opinions vary widely, anywhere from 900-400 BCE. **Amos** prophesied c. 750 BC during the reign of Jeroboam II (786–746 BC), making his the first biblical prophetic book written. His major themes of social justice, God’s omnipotence, and divine judgment became staples of prophecy. **Obadiah** prophesies divine judgement against Edom. Jewish tradition says that he was a descendent of Job’s friend Eliphaz, and a servant to King Ahab, which puts him in the 9th century BCE, but the politics described in the book imply mid-5th century BCE. Next is **Jonah** – everyone knows this fish tale. It’s set in the mid-8th century BCE, but was probably not written until after the exile, in the late 5th to early 4th century BCE. **Micah** lived in the 8th century BCE; however scholars believe that only the first 3 chapters of his book date to that time, with the rest being revised and completed later, sometime after the exile. **Nahum** prophesied about the destruction of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, in the 7th century BCE, although the exact date of his writing is debatable. **Habakkuk** also prophesied during the 7th century BCE, although there is speculation that chapter 3 may be a later edition. His message that “the just shall live by his faith” is referenced in the NT epistles. Just who **Zephaniah** was isn’t very clear, but he may have been a contemporary of Jeremiah. Like Jeremiah, he preached religious reform (ie return to the covenant and religious laws). No one really knows who **Haggai** was, but he wrote his book around 520 BCE, just before the temple was rebuilt in Jerusalem. His purpose was to urge the Israelites to get on with it. **Zechariah** was a contemporary of Haggai. His book begins with a series of 8 visions, followed by predictions in chapters 7-14 that most Christians interpret as Messianic prophesy. Both Haggai and Zechariah are mentioned in Ezra. And finally! **Malachi**’s identity is uncertain, but he likely wrote around the same time as Haggai and Zechariah. And again, his purpose was to correct the lax religious and social behavior of the Israelites post-exile.

It probably goes without saying, but none of these final books of the OT are going to be happy or uplifting. Brace yourselves!

### Readings for the week of:

**June 7:** Ezek 43-45; 46-48; Dan 1-3; 4-6; 7-9

**June 14:** Dan 10-12; Hos 1-7; 8-14; Joel; Amos 1-5

**June 21:** Amos 6-9; Oba-Jonah; Micah 1-7; Nahum 1-3; Hab-Zeph

**June 28:** Haggai 1-2; Zech 1-7; 8-14; Malachi 1-4; Mark 1-3

Please share your comments or questions on our Atheist Bible Study Facebook group page

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/234461256751696/>

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or Phone 204-612-0601



Humanists, Atheists, and Agnostics of Manitoba



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

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

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

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

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

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

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

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Membership Category:

- Individual Membership      \$30.00
- Individual Limited Income      \$10.00
- Household Membership\*      \$50.00
- Household Limited Income      \$15.00
- Lifetime Membership      \$1000.00 or more

\* After July 1<sup>st</sup>, pay just 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.

**DONATION** (Tax receipts will be issued for 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: \_\_\_\_\_

Please **DO NOT** send cash in the mail. Make cheque payable to: **Humanist Association of Manitoba** and mail to: Humanist Association of Manitoba, 112 - 230 Barkman Avenue, Steinbach, MB R5G 0Y5.

Memberships are also available by credit card on our website, or by cash or cheque at any HA<sup>2</sup>M meeting or HA<sup>2</sup>M event.