

Manitoba Humanist

The Reason for the Season?

Well, since you asked...

The Early Romans celebrated the Saturnalia on the Solstice, honoring their god Saturn. Saturnalia consisted of days of feasting and gift exchanges

The Iranian god Mithra was born of virgin birth on December 25th.

The celebration of the Saturnalia was too popular with the Roman Pagans for the new Christian church to outlaw it, so the new church renamed the day and over time reassigned meanings to the traditions.

**The Winter Solstice is the day with the shortest amount of sunlight, and the longest night. In the Northern Hemisphere, it falls on December 21st or 22nd.*

**In Northern Europe the Druids-- the priests of the ancient Celts-- decorated their temples with evergreens- a symbol of everlasting life.*



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



HAAM

www.mbhumanistsatheists.ca

The Winter Solstice is almost here... Come Celebrate with Us!

Saturday December 12th, 2015
Belgian Club, 407 Provencher Blvd
6:00 PM

Join us for HAAM's annual Winter Solstice Party as we celebrate the earliest sunset of the year. (Yes, that really IS on December 12th, even though the shortest day won't be until Dec 22nd.)

Admission is \$10 per person; kids under 12 are free. Please bring a potluck item to share. In case of allergies, we suggest labeling your item or listing ingredients. There will be an oven and a very small microwave to reheat food if necessary.

We are planning some activities and a sing-a-long of seasonal songs led by our Harmonizing Humanists.

*Everyone is
Welcome!*



**Our December charity is
The Christmas Cheer Board**



**Help HAAM help a
needy family!**

Details page 2.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- our Bible Study wraps up
- the refugee crisis
- 2016 meeting dates
- time to renew your membership
- books to help you understand Islam
- and more...

... just keep reading!

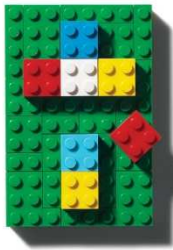
COMING UP!

If you're new to HAAM, welcome! Contact and membership info is on page 6.

In the event of inclement weather or unforeseen circumstances, events may be subject to cancellation or details may change. Watch future newsletters, our website, Facebook page, or join us on Meetup for more information.



Thursday December 3rd, Secular Parenting Group, River Heights Library, 1520 Corydon Ave, 6 – 8 PM.



This is the meeting that was originally scheduled for November 19th and cancelled due to the weather. HAAM's parents' group will meet to share stories and tips on raising kids who are good without god. New members are always welcome! Your hosts will be

Luc and Tammy Blanchette. If you have children, please come out and support each other!

The meeting room is in the basement, so kids are welcome to tag along and play in the room, or use the library, while parents chat.

This event is intended for HAAM members, but if you're not a member, and want to check us out, you are welcome to attend before joining. Memberships are available at any event as well as on our website.

Save the Dates!

Our meeting topics for 2016 are still in the planning stages, but the dates have been booked. All of the following meetings will be held at Canad Inns Polo Park, 1405 St Matthews Avenue.

January 9th (this meeting will include our **AGM**). For this meeting only, our meet-and-greet time will be 4:30 PM, followed by the AGM at 5:00, dinner at 6:00, and then our regular meeting beginning around 6:30.

The following meetings will begin with our meet-and-greet time at 5:30 PM.

February 13th

March 12th

April 9th

May 14th

CHARITY OF THE MONTH

Our charity for December could be called a classic... the **Christmas Cheer Board**. People who have delivered hampers to deserving families know that it

can really be a heart warmer, knowing you're helping others in your community.

HAAM has requested a family of 2 or 3 people. We don't have any details about the family yet. We will let you know when we do. However, because the recommended hamper list of items is really specific, and it would be very challenging to try and have everyone pick specific items, we're asking for cash donations. We will then go shopping for all the items.

The estimated cost of the food hamper for a family of that size is roughly \$100. It's pretty basic (doesn't even include fruit or milk), and gifts are extra, so we hope to collect closer to \$150 from our members to ensure a happy holiday for the family we sponsor. We'll be accepting donations at the Solstice party on December 12th. If you can't make it to the party, you can mail a check or donate online (add a note that it's for the Christmas hamper).

If you can volunteer to help us shop, wrap presents, or deliver the hamper, please let us know – either on FB or by sending us an email.



**RENEW YOUR
MEMBERSHIP**



With year-end approaching, it's membership renewal time. Please note that HAAM operates on a calendar year, meaning that memberships come due in January. FIRST TIME members who join between September and December pay the full annual fee but their membership will include the upcoming year. If you are one of those brand new members, this renewal notice does not apply to you. Everyone else needs to renew.

We count on our members to support HAAM's continuing work in providing a community and a voice for non-believers. Fees are affordable and include a 'limited income' option if applicable. Please continue to support the group that supports you! Memberships can be renewed anytime by credit card using the PayPal link on our website, by cheque in the mail, or by cash or cheque at any event.

If you attended Reasonfest in September, you received a coupon for a discount when you join or renew your membership. This special offer will expire on December 31st, so don't forget to use it! You can redeem it at the



Solstice Party on December 12th. If you cannot make it to the party, you may mail the coupon in with a cheque, or contact us to make arrangements to use it towards online renewal.



HAAM's **Atheist Bible Study** is now complete. Right now, I feel like I never want to open a bible again - but I know I will. I'll need it to refute

claims that the bible is the source of morality, or wisdom, or our modern justice system. I'll refer to it when I encounter politicians denying climate change because they believe end-times prophesy, or lobby groups trying to deny basic human rights to others because of their own narrow-mindedness. After reading the entire book, I have a better understanding of how to debunk those arguments. Knowledge is power.

Did you know that the 2015 Barna survey of American adults reveals that 43% of them believe that the bible discourages slavery, and 32% believe it discourages war? How is that possible? Easy – most people read only their favorite passages, or a lectionary of cherry-picked verses, instead of the entire book.

There were well over 100 members in our Atheist Bible Study Facebook group, following along at least part of the time. For most of them, however, keeping up with the reading schedule was a daily or weekly struggle. The



Helen Friesen

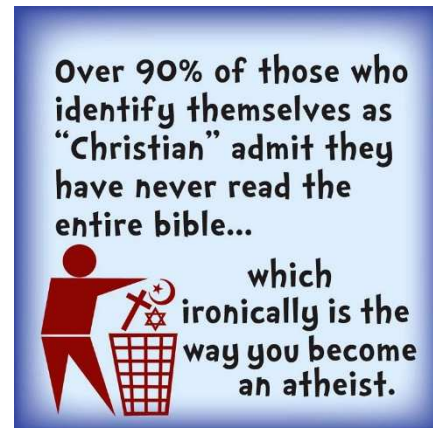
bible is massive - 66 books, 1,189 chapters, 31,102 verses, and 783,137 words in the standard King James Version. I would like to thank everyone who participated by reading and/or contributing, even if it was only occasionally. I don't think I could have finished without

you! Five people participated all the way through. They are HAAM members **Helen Friesen, Jim Taylor, and Jack Tessier**; and two more from the USA who joined online. Each was presented with a certificate of completion. Congratulations!

If you have heard about the Atheist Bible Study but found out too late to join at the beginning; or if you started reading but lagged behind and gave up (we

know of quite a few people who fall into that category!), you will be glad to know that the study guides and archived posts are being uploaded to our website. The Old Testament is almost complete and the entire bible study, including the videos, links, and photos that accompanied the original posts, should be available online by the end of the year. The website version allows you to proceed at your own pace. So head on over there and start reading! Now there is no excuse not to know what's in the bible. Happy reading!

- Dorothy Stephens



REACTIONS TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS

There has been no shortage of controversy in both the mainstream and social media networks lately over Syrian refugees. Canada has committed to accepting 25,000 of them over the next few months. This move has prompted criticism – and worse – from every kind of fear-monger, racist, and xenophobe. Meanwhile, desperate people are trying to escape terrorism and get to safety. Witness this heartbreaking image of a seven year old girl from a news article about where refugee children sleep.



It's sad to say that historically, fear and rejection of newcomers is nothing new. Anne Frank might be a 75 year old woman living in the US today if her family had been able to get out of Germany in the 1930's. And 'foreigners' haven't always been welcome here in Manitoba, either, as history shows.

It can sometimes be difficult to separate out criticism of ideologies from bigotry against entire groups of people. But separate them we must, because the lives of innocent victims are at stake.

That said, many of us are looking for ways to help. HAAM is not a large enough organization to sponsor a refugee family, but there are other groups assisting refugees that individual members can support.



International organizations:

- **Oxfam** is providing aid to refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. In Jordan's Zaatari Camp, home to 83,000 refugees, the nonprofit provides clean water, sanitation services, and hygiene education to help ward off cholera and other intestinal diseases.

- **UNICEF** is a UN agency assisting Syrian children by providing healthcare, nutrition, immunization, water and sanitation, and classes.

Canadian organizations:

- The **Canadian Council for Refugees** has a website with multiple suggestions on ways you can help both nationally and locally, including links to local organizations that will be involved with sponsoring or assisting refugees arriving in Manitoba.

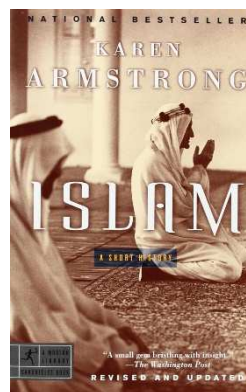
- The **Canadian Red Cross** is working in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and throughout the region, providing food, household items and life-saving health services to internally displaced persons. *The Canadian Government will match every eligible dollar donated by individual Canadians to registered Canadian charities in response to the impact of the conflict in Syria, up to \$100 million, effective immediately and until December 31, 2015.*

Read the full article about Syrian refugees, including examples of social media posts, more photos, and links to the above organizations, on our website.



ON THE BOOKSHELF

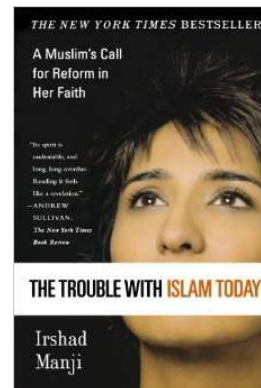
In view of the recent terrorist attack in Paris and the Syrian refugee crisis, there has been an upsurge of interest in understanding Islam. You may want to check out these books from our HAAM library on the subject.



Islam: A Short History, by Karen Armstrong, describes the evolution not only of the Islamic world, but also of the practices and tenets of the religion. Armstrong relates the history of Islam and traces most major currents of thought within it. She examines the evolution of Sharia (Islamic law), Sufism, the Ismailis, Twelver Shiism, and Wahhabism.

This book is written in plain English for a western audience with no great exposure to Islamic teachings, and for the most part sticks to simple facts rather than opinions. Reviewers call it a good primer, neither praising nor condemning the religion.

The Trouble with Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith, written in 2005 by Canadian broadcaster Irshad Manji, has been described as "unsettling read for most of her fellow Muslims". In it, Manji highlighted several grievances that she believes many



Muslims probably share: Saudi Arabia's disproportional and destructive influence on Islam; how the hijab, or veil, has become a litmus test for a Muslim woman's faithfulness; the need to question the accuracy of hadiths (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad); and the exclusion of women from Muslim leadership. Has any of this changed in 10 years?

All HAAM members are welcome to borrow books. If you are interested in a particular book or topic, email HAAM so that we can bring it to the next meeting for you. We also welcome suggestions or donations of books from members. *Note that in an effort to keep track of our books and prevent loss, borrowing privileges are now limited to paid members only.*

IN THE NEWS



After the November 27th terrorist attack on Planned Parenthood in Colorado Springs, HAAM wishes to state that, in accordance with our Position Statement on reproductive choice), We Stand With Planned Parenthood.

Visit our website and look under the *About Us* tab to view HAAM's position statements.



The **Winnipeg Chapter** of Dying With Dignity now has its own website. This will make it easier for Manitoban members and supporters to connect with each other, access local resources, and find local events. The new site has information on Advance Care Planning (including samples of ACP's completed by members), assisted dying, books and videos that may be of interest, an events page, and contact information.

The Winnipeg chapter remains a part of Dying With Dignity Canada, and further resources and information are available on the national website, particularly in relation to national and broader issues.

<http://dwdwinnipeg.weebly.com/>

ON THE WEB



There is now an Announcements section on the front page of our website. Urgent or breaking news, action alerts, and event cancellations or last-minute updates will be posted there. Of course, we will also continue to get the word out on our Facebook and Meetup pages.

And as always, if you need information and don't find what you are looking for, please contact us!

HELP WANTED



We are still looking for people to join the HAAM executive in 2016. In order to keep the group active, participation and input from our members is crucial! We need you! It's not that difficult – mostly the executive committee plans events, answers mail, sets goals and

policies – the usual stuff that running any organization requires. Most of the communication takes place online, so physical meetings are kept to a minimum. The more participation we have, the more we can plan and do. What we really need are members-at-large; people who can provide input and just help out as required. No particular skills needed – just enthusiasm and a desire to contribute to the group and make a difference in the wider community.

Please consider volunteering, or accepting the offer to join if you are approached. Many hands make light work.

Elections will be held at our AGM in January, 2016 – so you have some time to think about it or ask questions of our current executive (see page 6).



(Whatever you celebrate!)

HAAM's Executive:

President Donna Harris
Vice President Pat Morrow
Treasurer Helen Friesen
Secretary Cheri Frazer

Members at Large:

Todd De Ryck
Norm Goertzen
Tony Governo
Dorothy Stephens – Newsletter



Contact us at:

<http://mbhumanistsatheists.ca/contact-us/>

mbhumanistsatheists@gmail.com

or Phone 204-612-0601



Humanists, Atheists, and
Agnostics of Manitoba



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@MBHumanists



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

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Province: _____

Postal Code: _____

Phone #: _____

Cell #: _____

Email: _____

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

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Registered Charity # 85080 5326 RR0001

New Member Renewal

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

Special Offer for New Members!

If you are a NEW member joining for the FIRST
TIME, and you join after September 1st, your
membership fee will include membership for the
2016 calendar year.

DONATION (Tax receipts will be issued for
donations of \$10 or more)

I would like to make a donation to HA²M 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 HA²M
meeting or HA²M event.