

Manitoba Humanist



Summer Solstice Party and BBQ!

Saturday June 21st

Winter seemed endless, so let's celebrate the summer sun with friends and good times! Join us for a fun and informal get-together with your fellow HAAM members!

Non-members and guests are welcome; come and go as you please. If you've been considering becoming a member, or are just curious about us or have questions, this is a risk-free way to check us out!

Bring a food item for pot-luck, your favorite beverage, lawn chair, blanket, Frisbee, kids, pets, and a container for left-overs... or just bring yourself! HAAM will provide hot dogs, hamburgers, buns, assorted condiments, cutlery, plates, cups, and expert BBQ cooks!

Picnic site #3 is on Assiniboine Park Drive, just west of the zoo near the river; easiest to access via Roblin Blvd. (See map at right).

P.S. Don't forget to bring a **'Tin for the Bin'** (details page 5).
See you there!

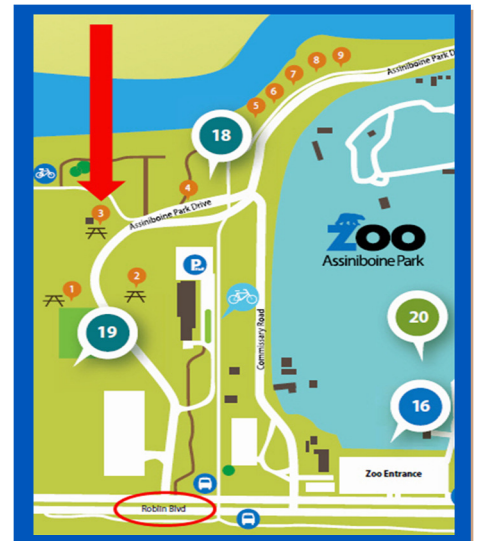
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Atheists, and
Agnostics of
Manitoba



HAAM

www.mbhumanistsatheists.ca

Our members speak up
about religion at work.
See page 3.



COMING SOON!

All events are subject to change. Some details are TBA. Watch future newsletters, HAAM's website or Facebook page, or join us on Meetup for more information as it becomes available.

Join us! Get involved! Make new friends!

June

Sunday 1st: Annual Pride Parade, 12 noon at the Legislature. Details on our website or in the May newsletter.

Saturday 7th. Garage Sale, **Note change of location**, 398 Burrows Avenue (south side of Burrows, just east of Salter), 8-5. Come out and find some great bargains!



Spring cleaning? Renovating? **HAAM needs your gently used treasures for the garage sale.** Contact dgoods@mts.net or phone 204-284-4319 to arrange drop-off or pick-up. Please label your items with name and contact information, since you may be eligible for a tax receipt for the value of the donation.

August

Friday 22nd to Sunday 24th: Morden Corn and Apple Festival. Save the date! HAAM will again be hosting an information and outreach booth. Further details in July newsletter.

NO CHOICE FOR YOU!

Last month, a few members of HAAM attended a panel discussion on assisted dying at the U of M. The discussion revolved around the issue of assisted dying and legal issues related to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The panelists included Dr. Harvey Chochinov of the Faculty of Medicine, Dr. Mary Shariff, associate professor at the Faculty of Law, and Dr. Paul Henteleff, a retired physician, known as the father of palliative care in Manitoba. Dr. Henteleff filled in on short notice for Professor Arthur Schafer, who had to cancel due to illness.

Dr. Henteleff began with a short presentation in

which he spoke of his experience caring for patients at end of life. A staunch supporter of quality palliative care, his position was also informed by the reality that in some cases the suffering of patients cannot be alleviated despite our best efforts. Moved by compassion and respect for autonomy, he made the case that we must allow for assisted death in some circumstances. He also made a very astute observation during the Q&A portion of the evening that unfortunately, the reality of expanding palliative care so that every citizen could have access to it at end of life, is not realistic in light of other demands that are made on our health care system. Perhaps not what we wanted to hear, but true nonetheless.

Dr. Chochinov, in his presentation spoke of some of the usual concerns of those who oppose assisted death. He talked of a slippery slope, using examples from countries that have legalized this procedure. He seemed very concerned that people, in the throes of unrelieved suffering, might choose to die, when having appropriate symptom relief might make a difference in their choices. He also discussed an interview conducted by a physician with a patient requesting assisted death, in which there was no consultation with the family of the patient. He presented this in as a negative, inferring that somehow this personal decision should be made by committee; in my opinion, a violation of the heart of patient confidentiality. Throughout Dr. Chochinov's presentation, I couldn't help but notice an underlying air of condescension, as if we hadn't considered the issue and needed to defer to his superior knowledge.



Dr. Shariff brought up some legal aspects of the debate, and what the courts will have to consider when this issue comes before them later this year. I have to confess, either I wasn't paying close enough attention, or perhaps I just don't understand lawyer speak all that well, but I didn't feel very much more enlightened on the legal issues at the end of her talk. She did make a case that whichever way we go with this issue, we must be careful to come up with a solution

that takes into account our Canadian culture and values, and not be too quick to adopt something from another country, which may not serve us well.

Overall, I can't say that this discussion introduced a lot of new information on this subject, but what became really clear to me, from the point of view of those opposed to assisted death, were the parallels between the abortion debate and this one. At the top of this list would be the disregard for autonomy shared by those in the anti-choice camp. To an anti-choicer, a woman's body is not her own and can be violated to gestate another. I see a strong correlation with the views of someone opposed to assisted death - the belief that your very life does not belong to you, that you are obligated to live it whether you want to or not. Another parallel that strikes me on these issues is the argument that gives more weight to potentials, than to actuals. In the case of the anti-abortion position, the rights of the potential human being trumps the rights of the existing human being. For those opposed to assisted death, the potential harms entailed in the slippery slope arguments are given more consideration than the actual harm and suffering of real people right now. In addition to these similarities, the argument brought forward by Dr. Chochinov regarding the potential for someone to make a decision that they could regret, or wouldn't make in other circumstances, reminded me of those anti-choicers who like to put forward the idea that because some women regret their abortions, we have an interest in preventing every woman from exercising her choice. Unfortunately life is full of choices, and living with those decisions (or not, in the case of assisted death), is just reality. Sometimes do-overs are not an option, and as a responsible, autonomous individual, I am OK with that.

But perhaps there is something to be taken from the parallels between these two arguments. Right now, assisted death is illegal in Canada, and yet that does not seem to stop it from happening. Whether it is anonymous doctors, like the one who helped Sue Rodriguez, or people taking matters into their own hands, helped by family or friends or going it alone, with all the messiness that can happen with do-it-yourself solutions, people are exercising their choice and their freedom. When abortions were illegal, women obtained them, risking their health and sometimes their lives. The argument for harm reduction is an important one in the pro-choice arsenal, and perhaps we can borrow

it when making the case for legal assisted death. We need to trust ourselves to make the right choices for our lives, just as we trust women to make the right choices with their bodies.

- Diana Goods

RECENT HAPPENINGS

Our May meeting about **religion-related conflicts and dilemmas in the workplace** was quite an evening! Three HAAM members described situations that they have personally experienced or witnessed in Manitoba.

Confidentiality prohibits revealing names or specific workplaces, but here are the basic issues they addressed:

1. In public sector essential services (such as health care, police and fire, and public works), rotating shifts (including weekends and holidays) are considered part of the job and *are* shared by all. To what extent should religious beliefs be accommodated? Is it fair to the other employees and to the taxpayers when one worker refuses certain shifts on religious grounds, and others are forced to work overtime as a result? Is this freedom of religion, or unfair religious privilege? This has been happening in Winnipeg, and neither employers nor lawyers will tackle the issue because religion is considered an untouchable subject.



2. In some communities in Manitoba, religious groups attempt to control their members by social tactics, including shunning. This is particularly common in small towns in the Bible Belt. What happens when social control extends itself to the workplace? Local businesses may face a boycott if they hire someone who has been excommunicated by the dominant church. Workers may face social isolation and subtle bullying at work, such as co-workers who refuse to assist them, if they step outside the lines. Members of more moderate churches in the community are afraid to speak up for fear of a ripple effect financially. Many businesses openly promote prayer at work. Speaking up can mean risking one's job.

3. What happens when a government agency that is expected to serve the whole community hires a top manager who openly promotes his own religion in the workplace? Staff training days are held in a local mega-church, with members of the church handing out religious literature while catering the coffee breaks and lunches. The manager selects a *staff training manual* by a Christian author who states that *in order to be a good leader or manager, one must be 'growing closer to God'*. Employees who do not accept this are pressured to keep quiet or they will never be considered for promotion in this work environment.



Germaine Greer's speech on Women and the Struggle for Human was the last in the Fragile Freedoms series at the new Canadian Museum for Human Rights, so the season ended on a controversial note.



Greer began with the main topic, mentioning that men usually refer to rights in terms of liberty and property, whereas women's rights are more related to bodily autonomy, education, and a fair workplace. In turn, bodily autonomy is related mainly to sexual issues, like sex education, refusal of non-consensual sex, access to contraception and abortion.

But then she digressed. She explained that she refuses to get on the 'bandwagon' of those who oppose FGM (female genital mutilation) because that position 'argues from Western cultural superiority'. She compared it to episiotomy, cosmetic surgery of the vulva, and shaving of body hair. However, the clear difference to me between these practices and that of FGM is informed consent.

After that she meandered into a discussion of power struggles between cultures, including Islamophobia.

The main focus of the Q & A that followed was Greer's position on the transgender community, which had a sizable group of protesters outside the museum prior to the event. According to

information sheets they handed out, Greer has a 'long and horrific history of actions and statements against transgender people'. Several members of the audience asked her to clarify or retract those statements. Greer responded that while she 'wouldn't make trouble' for transgender people, she refuses to support them. She stated firmly that 'sex is more than body parts' and that she believes 'transgender surgery is unethical'. She actually used the same argument cited by Diana Goods in her article above on assisted dying – what if people make a decision they later regret?

The sponsors and hosts of the event, (the museum, the U of M Centre for Professional and Applied Ethics, and the CBC) were well aware of the controversy and cited the importance of freedom of speech, raising debate on vital issues, and inspiring a 'museum of ideas'. They did not interrupt either the speech or the protesters.

As humanists, we need to think about these types of issues. If you would like to hear all this for yourself, it will be available on the CBC Ideas website soon. Go to <http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/>.

- Dorothy Stephens

OPERATION 'READ THE BIBLE'

Welcome to HAAM's Bible reading guide! If you missed the preliminary information in last month's newsletter, you can check it out on HAAM's website <http://tinyurl.com/otikgh5>. Each week there will be 5 assigned readings, so *there are 2 'catch-up days'* each week if you can't manage to read every day.



Many Bible reading guides jump around, making it easier to focus on positive content and gloss over the negative. Instead, we will read from beginning to end. It will take a full 3 months to read the first 5 books of the Old Testament, also known as the Pentateuch, the Books of Moses, or in Judaism, the Torah. According to Jewish tradition (later adopted by Christianity) the Torah was dictated to Moses by God, but modern

consensus is that the stories are taken from several different written sources and were brought together over several hundred years.

Many of the best-known Biblical characters appear in the Pentateuch: Adam and Eve, Noah, Moses, Joseph, patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and matriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel. Some of the highlights of this first month of reading – two contradictory creation stories, the great flood, the tower of Babel, the circumcision covenant, Sodom and Gomorrah, God telling Abraham to kill his son Isaac, the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the Ten Commandments, and instructions on how to buy a slave (and beat him), and how to sell your daughter. Enjoy these stories, because after Exodus it will quickly become much more boring.

A note about versions: Steve Wells used the King James Version for his Skeptic's Annotated Bible, both in order to avoid copyright issues, and because the KJV is still considered by many to be the most 'authentic' English version. Wells' notes and cross-references are invaluable; however, the language of the KJV can be difficult. You may find a more recent translation with modern language easier to understand. Feel free to use any version that suits you. If there are appreciable differences, we can compare and discuss them.

One minor change of plans – We have created a **separate Facebook group** dedicated to this project, rather than using our current Manitoba Humanists group. The new group is called **Atheist Bible Study**, and you can find it at <http://tinyurl.com/qf88xho>. Please head over there, join, and introduce yourself!

Let's get started! Here are the weekly readings:
Jun 1: Gen 1-3; Gen 4-7; Gen 8-11; Gen 12-15; Gen 16-18.

Jun 8: Gen 19-21; Gen 22-24; Gen 25-26; Gen 27-29; Gen 30-31.

Jun 15: Gen 32-34; Gen 35-37; Gen 38-40; Gen 41-42; Gen 43-45.

Jun 22: Gen 46-47; Gen 48-50; Ex 1-3; Ex 4-6; Ex 7-9.

Jun 29: Ex 10-12; Ex 13-15; Ex 16-18; Ex 19-21; Ex 22-24.

CHARITY OF THE MONTH

At our Solstice Party, HAAM will be collecting a "Tin for the bin". **Winnipeg Harvest** is a non-profit, community based organization whose goals are to collect and share surplus food with

people who are hungry; offer training opportunities to help people step up and out of poverty; and focus attention on hunger within our community and move towards long-term solutions.



Please bring along whatever you can spare. Here are the top ten food items needed:

Canned fish and poultry – tuna, or salmon (packed in water) chicken or turkey; **Canned fruit and vegetables** (packed in own juice); **Canned stew, chili, brown beans; Peanut Butter; Baby Food** - jars of chicken, beef, vegetables or fruit, infant cereal such as oatmeal, barley or rice, formula with added iron; **Whole grain/whole wheat pasta; Rice** – brown, converted or parboiled; **Canned spaghetti sauce or tomatoes; Cereal** – high fiber, non-sugar coated; **Canned soup** – lentil, pea, vegetable.

ON THE WEB

Recent episodes of Winnipeg's own **Life, the Universe & Everything Else** podcast that you won't want to miss:



Cosmetics: Are marketing claims false advertising? And are high-SPF sunscreens better?

The Historicity of Jesus: Is the character of Jesus Christ as portrayed in the Christian Bible actually based on an historical figure?

Near-Death Experiences: What are the possible psychological, physiological, and transcendental explanations? A recent debate on the subject with Eben Alexander, author of Proof of Heaven, is linked in the show notes.

LUEE podcasts promote secular humanism and scientific skepticism and are co-presented by HAAM and the [Winnipeg Skeptics](#). You can listen to LUEE on your computer or from your mobile device. Just search iTunes or Stitcher for "Life, the Universe & Everything Else", or visit <http://lueepodcast.wordpress.com>.

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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: _____

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. _____

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 1st, pay just ½ the yearly fee for the rest of the year. After October 31st, pay full fee and get the entire next year.

DONATION (Tax receipts issued for all 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, 7 Pinehurst Lane, Mitchell, MB, R5G 2J3.

Memberships are also available by credit card on our website, or by cash or cheque at any HA²M meeting or HA²M event.

March 2014