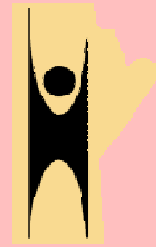


# Manitoba Humanist



*Axial Tilt is the  
Reason for the Season*

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



# HAAM

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

## CELEBRATE THE WINTER SOLSTICE!

**Saturday December 20<sup>th</sup>.** CanadInns Polo Park, 6:30 – 10:30 PM

Come celebrate the end of another glorious year at HAAM with your fellow reality worshippers! There will be door prizes and festive singing, with the inaugural performance of our **Harmonizing Humanists** glee club.

**Tickets** are \$15 each and include a selection of **hors d'oeuvres**. We must know how many are attending so can order the food. If possible, **please purchase your tickets ahead of time** via PayPal on our website. (Click the 'Donate' button and add a note in the 'instructions' box that you are paying for tickets.) If you are unable to do that, you may provide a **firm RSVP by Dec. 15<sup>th</sup>** and pay at the door. See page 6 for contact info.



If you would like to participate in our Secret Santa exchange, please bring a **wrapped gift** with an approximate \$10 value, and we'll hold a switcheroo auction.



Our December charity is **WINNIPEG HARVEST**. Don't forget to **"Bring a Tin for the Bin"**!



The year is almost over, and that means memberships are expiring! You can renew your membership in person at the Solstice Party; on our website; or by mail using the form on page 6.



We have lots planned for the New Year!  
Turn to page 2.

## MORE EVENTS!

All events are subject to change. Watch future newsletters, our website, Facebook page, or join us on Meetup for more information as it becomes available. Contact and membership info is on page 6.

### Mark your calendars:

Here are the events we have planned in the New Year so far:

**Thursday January 15<sup>th</sup>, Secular Parenting group,**

6:30 PM, St James-Assiniboia Public Library.

**Saturday January 31<sup>st</sup> - AGM and guest**

**August Berkshire** from Minnesota Atheists.

**Thursday February 12<sup>th</sup>, Round Table,** topic TBA,

6:30 PM, St James-Assiniboia Public Library.

**Saturday February 21<sup>st</sup>,** topic TBA.

**Sunday March 1<sup>st</sup>, Film Fest,** 1:00 PM.

**Saturday March 14<sup>th</sup>,** topic TBA.

The musical **Book of Mormon** will be playing in Winnipeg in March. If any HAAM members will be attending the 1 PM performance on **Sunday March 22**, it might be fun to meet for lunch or coffee before or after the show. Please contact HAAM and we will arrange a time and place to meet.

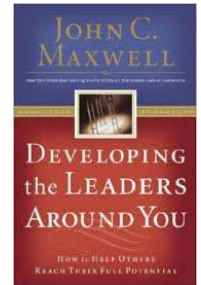


HAAM members spent a very enjoyable evening in November with our guest speaker, **Winnipeg's Police Chief Devon Clunis**. The Chief spoke

candidly about his background, his motivations for becoming a police officer, his plans to combat crime through social change, and the need for the whole community to work towards making the city a better place. I support, without reservation, the Chief's goals and plans, and wish him only the best success.

One of the goals of our group is the separation of church and state, and we discussed several issues that blur this separation. An important issue of the evening was the Winnipeg Police Service's use of a leadership course entitled "Developing the Leaders Around You", by John C. Maxwell. Maxwell is a prolific author of materials on leadership and is also the founder of Equip and INJOY, Evangelical Christian Groups whose sole purpose is the training and advancement of Christians into leadership positions worldwide. The course material used by the WPS contains gems like, "Spiritual-based authority comes from people's individual

experiences with God and from His Power working through them. It is the highest form of authority" and "Assessment of future leaders should include an evaluation of these qualities", followed by a list of 25 qualities. Number 16 is "The person is growing closer to God."



Another issue, one that predates the Chief's tenure but is still occurring, is the distributing of Bibles to new police officers. After some considerable discussion, the Chief agreed that he would look into the acceptability of Maxwell's material and the offering of Christian bibles to police recruits. There was also some discussion over the positions of Police Chaplains but we found little basis for agreement.

There were a good number of questions directed at the Chief about his plans to reduce crime and the operations of the police service. HAAM welcomed the Chief in the spirit of our shared humanity and common interest, and even when the conversations became passionate and intense, I believe the discourse was friendly and respectful though sometimes blunt.

The evening was a rousing success because the vast majority of members were able to meet Chief Clunis for the first time and take the measure of the man, and found him to be honest, sincere, thoughtful, articulate, friendly, and dedicated to making the city a better place.

- Bob Russell



**The Winnipeg Free Press** covered that meeting – you can still read the article entitled 'Clunis discusses faith with non-believers' at <http://tinyurl.com/lbv2dnl>.

HAAM received an email response to the Free Press article, stating in part: "The Chief, it would seem, is a decent man and was not in a position to debate these issues with you in front of the media. So you had him at a disadvantage being he is a political figure who has to maintain a decorum .... Why didn't you debate him when you were given the bible or the leadership book one on one, instead of sandbagging him ....?"

We would like to correct any misconceptions people may have about Chief Clunis being caught off-guard at that meeting. Our Outreach Coordinator, **Pat Morrow**, responded to the writer. Here is a portion of his response for anyone who may have had similar thoughts:

"Our police chief Devon Clunis was told days before the event of the subject matter we wanted to cover. He was also informed that there would be a reporter there well before he had a chance to get anywhere near a

podium. I don't think Police Chief Clunis felt it was an ambush or that he was being "sandbagged" in any way. Any discomfort he may have felt was probably due to his religious beliefs clashing with the realities of today's modern moral society, but that is purely speculation on my part.

In addition our meeting had nothing to do with challenging our chief's religious beliefs. As an organization we don't care what the police chief or any of our police officers believe. What we are concerned about is the peddling and proselytization of unfalsifiable, supernatural beliefs by any religion in our taxpayer-funded public police service."

## MORALITY – THE BIBLE VS. DR. SEUSS

Several months ago, some members of HAAM started reading the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. I decided to read along with the Atheist Bible Study group. Now, several months in, I must confess that lately I've fallen a bit behind and am relying on our unofficial leader Dorothy to do the hard work and summarize, while I dip in for the more interesting stories.

My own biblical knowledge background was pretty sparse prior to this endeavour. I was raised Lutheran, and although I now know that the Lutheran Church is actually pretty conservative as far as mainstream churches go, as a child it managed to escape my knowledge that we put much stock in the Old Testament at all. Our typical services consisted of a lot of cherry-picked New Testament passages, with brief forays into the OT for the favourite Sunday School stories - Noah, Samson, David, and not much else (except of course for the antigay passages which apparently are relevant for all time, unlike the ban on shrimp or mixed fibres).

Even though this has been my first attempt to read the OT more thoroughly, I was already aware that the god portrayed in these books was bloodthirsty and brutal. In this regard, the reality of this god character has far exceeded my expectations, being even more tyrannical and petty than I had anticipated. On the question of morality, I knew that the bible fell short of anything resembling what we, in the 21st century consider to be moral, but even with this low expectation, I have been struck by the emptiness of what passes for a moral code in these books.

The god character is pretty good at giving his people huge lists of Don'ts, but what surprised me was how lacking it is in lists of Do's. Other than specific lists of how to worship him properly, with extremely detailed instructions about how to slaughter the chosen

sacrificial animal and how to sprinkle the blood and divvy up and dispose of the entrails, the bible is woefully lacking in any basic guidance on how to live your life. There is little in the way of teaching people how to treat each other, unless of course we count the rules about how to enslave your conquered enemies and divvy up the spoils of war.

A cornerstone for me regarding morality is that it pertains to how we should live as social animals. If we're not talking about how to treat others, then, I'm not sure that we're talking about morality at all. And yet in the OT, guidance about how to treat others is practically nonexistent, and when it appears, it always takes a back seat to following and worshipping god. As a parent, yes, there is a place for teaching my child what not to do, but more importantly I want her to learn what to do. Basic lessons about fairness, sharing, kindness, empathy and compassion are the building blocks of morality. How to be a friend, how to help others, how to love - these concepts are simply not found in the OT.

I've often wondered why Christians are so enamoured of Jesus, but now that I have a better understanding of just how despicable a character the OT god is, I can see more clearly the appeal of Jesus. Even though his idea of morality falls far short of our modern concept of goodness, in comparison to the god of the OT, his advice that people should love their neighbours must



have seemed quite visionary to those accustomed to the commandments of the vengeful, sadistic Yahweh god.

As a modern parent, I am now even more thankful that my options for teaching morality to my child encompassed more than one book. Our bookshelves contained lots of Dr. Seuss and the Berenstain Bears, with more wisdom and kindness than all of the OT books combined. Dr. Seuss said "So be sure when you step, Step with care and great tact." Those two little lines are better advice than any in the bible. When it comes to morality, following your heart beats following commands.

- Diana Goods

## SECULAR THERAPIST UPDATE

In response to our request in last month's newsletter for the names of secular therapists, HAAM did receive some





suggestions and contact information from several members. Professional regulations regarding advertising and confidentiality prevent us from publishing their names here. However, if you are seeking a mental health professional who will not try to solve your problems with prayer, you may contact HAAM confidentially and we can pass the names on to you. Note that we have not, and cannot, check out, recommend, or endorse any particular therapist, but only provide the names of those who have been recommended to us. We hope this may help. Please continue to provide additional names and/or feedback so that we can continue to update our records.



This is YOUR newsletter! Every month we try to include information that we believe will be of interest to our members, as well as upcoming events and editorials on relevant topics.

We value your input:

- If you have a beef or bouquet about what is included, or a suggestion for an article, please let us know.

- We welcome contributions from all our members, including articles and opinion pieces. Submissions will be published subject to approval of the executive and editing, if needed, for length and style. Usually 300 – 700 words is good, depending on the topic.



### CHARITY OF THE MONTH



Thanks to your donations, our final total was 9 shoeboxes for the Manitoba Shoebox Project (our October charity)!

Don't forget that our December charity is **Winnipeg Harvest**. Bring your donations to our

Solstice Party if you're planning to attend. If you can't be there, you can still contribute financially by mail or website (include a message that the donation is for the Charity of the Month). Tax receipts are available from HAAM for donations of \$10 or more.

### ON THE WEB

On the latest episode of Winnipeg's own **Life, the Universe & Everything Else** podcast: Our panelists discuss some terrible films (and one that's pretty good),

including **"Resonance: Beings of Frequency"**, which they consider a candidate for 'most misleading documentary'. It's about fear-mongering regarding Wi-Fi, cell phones, electromagnetic fields, and the like. Other films discussed include **Hungry for Change** (about the food industry), **An Honest Liar**, (about James Randi - this is the 'pretty good film'), and the new **Left Behind** movie (they watched it so you don't have to!).



LUEE podcasts promote secular humanism and scientific skepticism and are presented by the Winnipeg Skeptics and the Humanists, Atheists & Agnostics of Manitoba. 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>.

### YULETIDE TRIVIA

Ever watched a Yule log burn? How many songs do you know that include the word Yule or Yuletide in the lyrics? How about Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly ("See the blazing Yule before us, falalalala ..."); Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas ("make the Yuletide gay"); Christmas Time is Here ("Yuletide by the fireside,



And joyful memories there"); and There is No Christmas Like a Home Christmas ("and that merry Yuletide spirit in the air").

Although in many countries Yuletide is synonymous with the Christmas season, I have to admit I never gave the word much thought. How surprised I was to find that it originated as a pagan religious festival

observed by the historical Germanic peoples, later being absorbed into and equated with the Christian festival of Christmas. Scholars have connected the celebration to the Wild Hunt, the god Odin and the pagan Anglo-Saxon Modranicht. Today, in most forms of Wicca, Yule is celebrated at the Winter Solstice as the rebirth of the great horned hunter god. Who knew?

Ecclesiastes 1:9 states that there is nothing new under the sun. This really does apply to religions, each of which tends to build on the beliefs and practices of previous cultures. Yuletide is only one of many traditions we associate with Christmas that pre-date Christianity.

- Dorothy Stephens



Have you had your flu shot yet this year? I was asked by a member to write something about vaccines, and it's such a broad topic that I decided to focus on one

aspect, **herd immunity**, because this is the most common misconception that I personally hear. The rationale usually goes something like this: "I never get the flu so I'm not worried about it"; "I don't need it, because I have a strong immune system"; or "it's only for the frail and elderly".

When I started looking for information about 'herd immunity' on the internet, the first site that appeared on my search result belonged to an organization called *International Medical Council on Vaccination*, which I quickly realized is a fancy and official-sounding name for an anti-vaccine group. RationalWiki refers to this organization as "a front group for vaccine hysteria", and it is one of many organizations listed on a page called "Quackwatch – your Guide to Quackery, Health Fraud, and Intelligent Decisions". This, then, is your first warning about looking for responsible, professional advice on the web – Just because an organization appears high on a search list doesn't make it credible and legitimate. Quackwatch lists some points to consider when evaluating an organization, including who are its leaders, what are its membership requirements, does it oppose public health measures, how is it financed, does it promote a specific treatment, is it accredited, and more. <http://tinyurl.com/2a5ognl>

Back, then, to my original topic. Herd immunity just means that contagious diseases have difficulty spreading if the majority of individuals in a given societal group are immune. Even though a few individuals in the group may be unvaccinated, or cannot be vaccinated (such as those with compromised immune systems or receiving cancer treatments), they are protected because everyone around them is immune and so can't get the disease and pass it on to them.

Herd immunity is the reason that everyone in Manitoba is now eligible for the flu vaccine. Originally it was only given to those most at risk, but experience has shown that by immunizing a greater portion of the healthy population, the spread of disease is greatly reduced overall because it has no place to gain a foothold. Healthy adults can be the biggest contributors to epidemics, because they may not feel that ill themselves, and so continue to go out in public and spread illness to those who are more vulnerable. For

this reason, the CDC now recommends that 'everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine every season'.

For more information, check the following:

-Our own **LUEE podcast** did an excellent presentation on vaccines a couple of years ago. You can still listen to it from the archives; it's episode 30

<http://tinyurl.com/nyqzxke>

- **Manitoba Government** <http://tinyurl.com/obc2zy2>

-The **CDC** <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/>

It's not too late to get your flu shot! And have a healthy New Year!

- Dorothy Stephens



We have only 2 weeks of readings this month followed by a 2 week break over the holiday season, resuming on January 5, 2015.

God's killings and punishments, including making Uzziah a leper for burning incense without a license, continue right up to the end of 2 Chronicles.

Next up are Ezra and Nehemiah, which were originally combined, but became separated in the first centuries of Christianity. Together, they represent the final chapters in the historical narrative of the Hebrew Bible (Alleluia!)

Ezra is divided into two parts. The first tells the story of the return of exiles to Jerusalem in 538 BC, and the completion and dedication of the new Temple in 515 BC; the second tells of the mission of Ezra to Jerusalem and his struggle to purify the Jews from the sin of inter-marriage with non-Jews.

Nehemiah, a Jew who is a high official at the Persian court, tells the story of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and the dedication of the city and its people to God's laws.

There's not much exciting in either of these books, but at least they're short.

**Readings for the week of:**

**Dec 7:** 2Chron 21-24; 25-27; 28-31; 32-34; 35-36

**Dec 14:** Ezra 1-3; Ezra 4-7; Ezra 8-10; Neh 1-3; Neh 4-6

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

<http://tinyurl.com/qf88xho>



**HAAM's Executive:**

President Donna Harris  
Vice President Heather McDonell  
Treasurer Helen Friesen  
Secretary Cheri Frazer

**Members at Large:**  
Todd De Ryck  
Chad Froese  
Diana Goods – Librarian  
Pat Morrow – Outreach  
Bob Russell  
Dorothy Stephens – Newsletter



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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

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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. \_\_\_\_\_

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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

\* 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 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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.