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**Saturday  
December 17th, 2016**

**Monthly Chapter  
Meeting**

**First Unitarian Society  
900 Mt. Curve Avenue  
Minneapolis**

**Doors open at 10:00 a.m.  
Program 10:20 a.m.-Noon**

***HUMANISM:***

*A better life for all through  
education, democracy, free  
speech, reason, and science,  
without reliance on arbitrary  
dogmas, revelations, and  
faith.*

***Chapter Meeting:***

***“What Does Peace Mean to You?”***

***with John Noltner***

***Saturday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016***

With the holiday season upon us, it is time to reflect on what "Peace-on-Earth" means to us and to people around the world. For our December chapter meeting, join us in welcoming author and photographer John Noltner who is uniquely qualified in helping us explore this topic.



For several years John has been traveling around the country and world asking people the simple question, "What does peace mean to you?" The result has been the publication of the award winning book *A Peace of My Mind*. This project combines photographs and personal stories of the meaning of peace. He has included the voices of Holocaust survivors, homeless individuals, political refugees and others. Ela Gandhi, granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi, wrote the forward to his book: "John Noltner takes us on a unique journey filled with revelations of courage and commitment, resilience and hope. It is a beautiful journey that speaks to our innermost being. It touches us in a way that allows us to see the world from a different perspective. Perhaps it will inspire us to become peace-makers."

John Noltner is a Minnesota author and photographer. With images and words as his medium, John has been telling stories for 20 years for magazines, Fortune 500 companies, and non-profit organizations. His work has appeared in National Geographic Traveler, Midwest Living, and other publications. He has national and international commercial clients and his book, *A Peace of My Mind*, has received both regional and national awards. Ω

## PRESIDENT'S

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We have had an uncannily mild fall, but the next two months are guaranteed to be dark and dreary. In just three brief weeks, the shortest day and the longest night will be upon us. We are entering the darkest days of the year. And given the outcome of the recent election, for many of us they are going to seem especially dark. If only hibernation was a real option—like for four years, right? Wrong! Even as a metaphor for one's mindset and demeanor, that's the worst thing any of us could do now.

That this post-election malaise and crisis bumps up against the looming holiday season seems especially ill-timed. What person of good conscience could go on with business as usual—or partying as usual—and the seemingly frivolous distractions of the season? Accordingly, recent events offer secularists another good reason to eschew a holiday to which so many already have an aversion. No doubt, some will be inclined to plunge themselves into a media bubble of continual analysis replete with anger, blame and doomsday prophecies. Others may relentlessly seek out emerging campaigns for resis-

tance or action.

But how about we take a breather first? Not to hibernate, but to celebrate. How dare I suggest that, you may ask. Is it merely a self-indulgent response by an ardent proponent and producer of winter solstice celebrations? I think not. Holidays are central to the human experience. They make meaning out of our lives—a core human need. Celebratory rituals – and yes, even magical religious rites – help people keep life in perspective. Celebrations allow us to transcend particular times and circumstances to see the “big picture.” Holidays nudge us to think about what matters to us. Who matters to us. And why. Humanists need more rituals – albeit naturalist and secular ones – not less – to celebrate and uphold the values and the worldview we espouse.

While ardent Christians bemoan the secularization of Christmas, too many others embrace the commercialization of the season – toying with their material and emotional needs. But instead of sitting out the season, humanists should re-claim and re-invent the season—as has been done throughout the ages. By focusing on the winter solstice, we can celebrate the naturalist, humanist and universal meanings of the season. Here are three suggestions on how to celebrate.

First off, let's create midwinter solstice rituals that connect us to the natural world. After all, the reason for the season *is* the axial tilt of the earth. Like many of our ancestors did, we too can bring evergreens indoors to remind ourselves that life does not end in these cold, dark days. We can get outdoors to enjoy all the beauty to be found there and gaze in awe and wonder into the clear starlit night. We can ponder our place on earth and claim our responsibility for its care. We can learn from earth's resilience and fragility. Midwinter holiday celebrations with these sensibilities shore us up to take on the work of climate change.

This holiday season can also link us to the past in ways that are fun, creative and instructive. Centuries ago, midwinter celebrations were called the “people's holiday.” These celebrations provided a festive respite from the hard labor of survival and allowed for the suspension of social mores. The season was characterized by excess, merriment and freedom for ordinary folks. Masters waited on their servants, revelers masqueraded and cross-dressed, mock peasant kings reigned for a brief time of peace, the rich indulged the poor, and people feasted and made merry to keep the dark and cold at bay. Can we not maintain holiday traditions wherein we are reminded that our lives are more than our work, that oppressive social structures can be undone and that generosity and compassion help sustain us through hard times? The season is awash in movies, shows, events and volunteer opportunities that highlight these values. Fill your holiday with some great experiences with others—not more unnecessary stuff.

Finally, midwinter solstice festivities can serve to secure the bonds of kinship, friendship and community. Holidays are embedded in human culture. Let's use them to build and strengthen our relationships with each other as we prepare to act on our values in the year ahead. Deep and enduring relationships with our fellows are essential for personal fulfillment and for effective civic engagement. The humanist worldview is not one to be lived in isolation. So invite a few friends over, sit by the fire, savor some hot chocolate or a glass of wine and imagine together the humanist world we could create. Fortify yourself for the challenging year ahead. Happy holidays! Good Yule! Ω

# Announcements

## DISCUSSION GROUPS ETC.

**2nd Friday 5:00 p.m.**, *Humanist Happy Hour St. Paul*, Green Mill Restaurant & Bar, 57 Hamline Ave S.

**4th Friday 5:00 p.m.**, *Humanist Happy Hour Minneapolis*, Pizza Luce, 800 W. 66th St., Richfield

**2nd Friday 10:00 a.m.**, *Coffee and Current Events*, Loring Park Dunn Bros., 329 W. 15th St., Mpls.

**2nd Saturday 10:30 a.m.**, *Blasphemers' Brunch*, Pizza Luce, 800 W 66th Street, Richfield

**2nd Sunday 11:00 a.m.**, *Sunday Assembly*. 514 Lowry Ave. NE, Minneapolis.

**1st Sunday, 9:00 a.m.-noon**, *Lake Superior Freethinkers monthly meeting*. Radisson Hotel Duluth, Viking Room. For information contact Bill van Druten, (218) 724-4176.

**1st Sunday, 10:00 a.m.**, *Central Minnesota Freethinkers, St. Cloud Coffee Social*. Check their website for details: [cmfreethinkers.org](http://cmfreethinkers.org) or contact them at [info@cmfreethinkers.org](mailto:info@cmfreethinkers.org)

**Mondays, 5:00-6:30 p.m.**, *Atheists for Human Rights Happy Hour*, Ol' Mexico Restaurant, 1754 Lexington Ave., Roseville (just north of Larpenteur). Tables on terrace level. Call Paul Craven, (763) 788-8918.

**1st and 3rd Mondays, 6:30 p.m.**, *Freethought Toastmasters Club*, Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Ave. W., St. Paul. Contact George Kane, [nup@minn.net](mailto:nup@minn.net) or (651) 488-8225.

**2nd & 4th Mondays, 5:00-7:00 p.m.**, *Freethought Dinner Social*, Davanni's, 8605 Lyndale Ave So, Bloomington. Call Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

**1st Tuesday, 11:30 a.m.—1:00 p.m.**, *Freethought Lunch*, Dragon House, 3950 Central Ave. NE, Columbia Heights, MN. Call Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

**3rd Wednesday, 11:30 a.m.**, *Freethought Lunch*, Dragon House, 3950 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights. Call Bill Volna, (612) 781-1420.

**2nd Thursday, evening**, *Rochester Area Freethinkers (RAFT)*, Downtown Rochester Public Library, Meeting Room A. Contact Jim Salutz, [jsalutz@aol.com](mailto:jsalutz@aol.com) or (507) 280-8012.

## OTHER EVENTS

**Monday, Dec. 5th, 7 p.m.**, *Humanists of Minnesota Board of Directors meeting*. Open to all members. Contact Audrey Kingstrom at [akingstrom@comcast.net](mailto:akingstrom@comcast.net).

**Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.** (during school year), *Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH)* general meeting. 3rd floor Coffman Memorial Union, 300 Washington Ave. SE, Minneapolis. Contact [cash@cashumn.org](mailto:cash@cashumn.org).

Check out our Meetup events at <http://www.meetup.com/humanism-166>

## Hospitality Team Initiative

### Get Involved! Volunteers Needed!

Volunteers are needed to help out with hospitality at Humanists of Minnesota events—especially the monthly meetings. Our long-time volunteers, Juliet Branca, Jerry Smith and Mark Thoson would like to share these responsibilities with others. And the Board would like to establish a hospitality team to help them manage refreshments and lunches going forward. Responsibilities would generally include: make and/or arrange for coffee and tea, pastries and lunches as planned; purchase necessary supplies; provide food and beverage service set-up and clean-up. The team would meet as needed.

Please contact Audrey at:

[akingstrom@comcast.net](mailto:akingstrom@comcast.net) if you are willing to serve on this team. Thanks!

### *Support Humanists of Minnesota! Painlessly!*

*Do you shop at Amazon.com?*

*If so, Amazon will donate some of their profits to Humanists of Minnesota! Just use the following URL to enter their website when you shop there (note: though the charity listed is the AHA, the funds will go to HofMN):*

*<http://smile.amazon.com/ch/41-1570800>*

“Humanist Views,” our weekly Cable program, airs at **6:30 p.m. Mondays** on MTN Channel 75.





## *Echoes from the Third Reich*

*Book Review:*

*"City of Women"*

*by David R. Gillham*

*Reviewed by Harlan Garbell*

Like many book readers I maintain a written list of books that I intend to read over the next weeks and months. However, I often think that some books select me and not the other way around. For example, when I go to the library and browse the stacks a title will occasionally jump out at me in which case I put it next in my queue. Recently, one such book was *City of Women* (Penguin Group, 2012) by David Gillham.

The year is 1943. The German army is bogged down on the outskirts of Moscow. Moreover, the Germans

have just suffered a staggering defeat at Stalingrad and British bombers are pounding German cities regularly at night. Every commodity is scarce and rationed. The only men left in Berlin, the capital, are those too old to fight or those who have been sent back from the front with missing limbs and other assorted injuries. The home front is on a "total war" footing as decreed by the Führer.

All of Berlin's offices are staffed by women. So are the factories, along with slave laborers-both men and women. It is illegal not to report to work. Each apartment building and every block has a party member overseeing the movements of their neighbors. People spy on friends and co-workers for any hint of defeatism. The city is gripped by paranoia, fear, and hunger. Martial music is played everywhere.

The Gestapo has started rounding up the city's Jews for transport to "resettlement" camps in the East. Many Jews go into hiding as a result. Rabid anti-Semitism infects the very core of daily life. The Jews are considered vermin and the primary enemy of the Reich. Berlin's citizens are encouraged to turn in any Jews they know. If they don't, they will be severely punished.

The protagonist of our historical novel is Sigrid, an attractive thirty-something Berlin hausfrau. Her husband is fighting at the front and she lives with her overly critical, patriotic mother-in-law. Sigrid works as a typist in the patent office. Lonely, afraid, and dispirited, Sigrid finds a lover. They pursue their relationship in dingy hotels and the balcony of a dilapidated movie theater. Sigrid has a problem, however. Her lover is a Jew on the run. If found out, Sigrid would be sent to a concentration camp as such a relationship is strictly forbidden by the German Nuremberg race laws. To complicate matters even more, Sigrid is also seeing her neighbor's brother, an injured German officer.

Although Sigrid's romantic life is conflicted, she has slowly but steadily gained clarity on what she believes is the overriding issue of her life- the treatment of Berlin's Jews. Although she sees herself as an ordinary woman, and not particularly courageous, she refuses to look the other way (unlike other Germans) when she sees Jews being openly beaten on the street and pushed into the back of police vans. Outraged at these events, Sigrid gets involved with a small network of people who share her moral clarity and hide Jews in safe houses.

The novel has many significant twists and turns that make it a terrific read. The background historical research creates an authentic and riveting view of wartime Berlin. As an historical thriller only, I would recommend this book. However, what makes this book so compelling are the complex moral issues it explores involving ordinary people under extraordinary stress. In an environment where the existing moral compass has been turned upside down, some people maintain their humanity in the face of imminent danger to themselves and their families, while others lose all sense of compassion for others.

Sigrid's mother-in-law, perceives herself as an upstanding German citizen. However, she doesn't flinch when her long-time friend and neighbor, whose son recently died on the eastern front, curses Hitler in her grief. She turns her in to the Gestapo, and the friend is arrested. In custody, the friend commits suicide and the mother-in-law carts away her belongings from her apartment.

Other characters in the book are often not what they seem on the surface. A woman photographer who is publicly shunned because she sells pornographic photos (legally) to soldiers, doesn't hesitate to put her life in danger by hiding Jews in her attic. There are numerous characters in the book who surprise the reader by their unpredictable behavior in harrowing circumstances. More often than not we are wrong in our assumptions as to who makes the courageous moral choice, who is indifferent, and who betrays other people.

This book appealed to me on many levels. After all these years, and scores of books read on World War II, fiction and nonfiction, I am still drawn to the incredible events of those years. How could humans devolve into

*(Continued on page 5)*

(Continued from page 4)

such savage behavior? Were these aberrations of the human experience?

Unfortunately, in my view, World War II was not an aberration. That war ended 71 years ago- a blink of history. Yet, since that time we have witnessed millions of victims falling prey to organized violence, e.g. Vietnam (twice), China, India/Pakistan (five times), Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Congo, Uganda, Somalia, Nigeria, Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya (twice), Iraq (three times), Iran, and Syria. And this, by no means, is an exhaustive list.

History demonstrates that often the great majority of people are, at best, indifferent to the suffering of others during these horrific episodes. Many people even actively participate in the genocidal impulses prevalent at the time. And yet, within these horrific conflicts humans often have displayed courage in saving others in the face of indifference, hypocrisy, and depravity.

The underlying and disturbing moral question that confronts the reader in *City of Women* is what makes this book so compelling. That question is: what would you do in a similar situation? In looking at recent, disheartening events here and around the world, that question may arise again. Ω

### November Chapter Meeting



## “LGBTQIA—Getting to an Inclusive Gender Model”

Summarized by Harlan Garbell

At our November chapter meeting, members and guests had the privilege of listening to a presentation by Stef Wilenchek, Director of the Gender and Sexuality Center for Queer and Trans Life at the University of Minnesota.

Stef started the program by asking the attendees at each table to have a conversation about their weekend without using gender markers, e.g. pronouns, relationship words, etc. This was a challenge as people have learned early on to use gender based pronouns in everyday discourse. Stef used this exercise as a way of introducing this topic and as a way of explaining why these gender markers may not accurately describe the sex/gender reality for many people in our society.

Stef used a "Butterfly Model" (see link below) in her presentation to describe to the attendees current social constructions of sex and gender. In this model there are four major categories of social constructions (the "wings" of the butterfly): sex identity; sexual orientation; gender identity; and gender expression. The "body" of the butterfly describes male/female stereotypes and forms a boundary with these social constructions.

The model describes how males are generally stereotyped physically (for example) as being tall, having body hair, and not having breasts. Females are generally stereotyped with opposite physical characteristics: being short, without body hair, and having breasts. The problem is that these male/female stereotypes are often rigid, not necessarily based on reality, and through misunderstanding can serve as a basis for sexism/genderism as well as homophobia and transphobia.

Transphobia, for example, involves "negative attitudes, bias, fear and/or discrimination against transgender and gender non-conforming people." Stef explained that understanding the nature of culturally based identities and roles could help eliminate barriers and biases between and among people. This would, hopefully, lead to greater tolerance in our society and serve to reduce the level of violence against transgender people who do not conform to male/female stereotypes

This presentation was valuable in that it provided an analytic framework for why LGBTQIA communities are marginalized in our society. It also provided us with information on how we can better understand and talk about gender and sexual identities from a place of inclusivity. I think I can speak for many in attendance that this presentation was a valuable learning experience and helped us further understand important issues involving the human experience. Ω

A complete copy of Stef's presentation can be found at:  
<http://humanistsofmn.org/images/Wilenchek-Presentation-Nov-2016.pdf>



*Freethought History:*

***Scholars of Freethought and  
Skepticism in the Early  
American Republic***

*Paul Heffron, Chapter Historian*

Dr. Kirsten Fischer is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Minnesota's College of Liberal Arts, specializing in Colonial history. She moved forward in time to take on the subject of freethought prior to the Civil War and did an article about the deist critique of Christianity in the early Republic. She has also covered aspects of the current culture wars in America. She is working on a book titled *Pantheism Comes to America: Elihu Palmer and Radical Religion in the Early Republic*.

Palmer was a prominent figure in the much overlooked currents of freethought and skepticism in the early Republic.

Another scholar working in the field of American freethought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Nathalie Caron, Professor of American History at the University of Paris, Sorbonne, recently did an article on Lincoln, Paine, and the American Freethought Tradition. Thomas Paine's Age of Reason was a major influence on freethinkers and skeptics, including a young Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln clung to deistic and biblical beliefs during the Civil War but never belonged to a Christian church or expressed orthodox Christian doctrines. He reflected a predominately Christian nation which had acquired a freethought tradition. Susan Jacoby in her book, *Freethinkers*, views this tradition as a continuation of the Enlightenment rationalism of some of the founding fathers, especially Thomas Paine. Lincoln managed to straddle both the Bible and Enlightenment founders such as Jefferson and Paine.

Christopher Grasso, professor of history at William and Mary College, is another scholar who has researched 19<sup>th</sup> century freethought. I commented earlier in my chapter historian column on his article about faith and skepticism in the early Republic. His book on that subject is due out any time now. His thesis challenges the prevailing view that Evangelical Protestantism took over and supplanted Enlightenment rationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His revisionist view is that faith and skepticism were at work in almost equal measures in the schools, churches, and institutions—even seminaries and sometimes within the same person—during the early Republic. This view could modify the historiography of the period, suggesting that from early on there have been an America of faith and an America of reason in our culture and history, sometimes in conflict and sometimes simply coexisting. This provides perspective on our current situation in which conservative religion seems dominant and yet various elites, dissenting groups, and individuals reflect the prominence of freethought and humanism. Ω



*Humanist Community:*

***Caring Connections  
Team Needs You!***

Humanists of Minnesota is re-launching the Caring Connections Team and we are looking for caring volunteers who want to respond to members especially in times of need. The Team's mission is to provide compassionate and practical support to members who are facing a challenge. Services might include supportive phone calls/cards/emails; hospital visits; and rides to

Humanists of Minnesota events, to name a few.

If you have an abundance of caring and compassion for your fellow members and want to get involved in a rewarding experience, please email Joyce Edwards at [jresearch@att.net](mailto:jresearch@att.net). Ω



***Highlights from the  
Board***

*by David Guell  
Secretary*

From the November board meeting:

- At-large member Christina Royal notified the Board that she has been offered the position of president of Holyoke Community College in MA. She will serve out her term on a consulting basis. We extended our hearty congratulations to Christina and will miss her greatly.
- The Newsletter Editorial Policy Task Force proposed the policy it developed; the policy was unanimously approved.
- There was considerable discussion concerning whether to become more active in issues raised in the wake of the election.

## HUMANIST NEWS & VIEWS

**Editor**, Nathan Curland

**Editorial Committee** - Brad Bolin, Dale Handeen, Suzanne Perry

Articles, letters, event notices and other writings are welcome. Send to: [editor@humanistsofmn.org](mailto:editor@humanistsofmn.org) with the word "newsletter" in the subject line, or to P.O. Box 582997, Minneapolis, MN 55458-2997. (E-mail submissions are preferred.) All submissions must include the writer's full name, postal address, telephone number and e-mail address. All submissions become the property of this newsletter and cannot be returned. Submission deadline is the 23rd of the prior month.

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### *Upcoming Critical Thinking Club Meetings*

*Twin Cities Chapter: Sunday, December 4th, 10:00 a.m. to noon: "Why Can't We Trust the Polls?" by Milo Schield. Augsburg College—Christensen Center 1st Flr, 720 22nd Ave S., Minneapolis.*

*Stillwater Chapter. Monday, December 12th, 7:00 p.m.: "The Cuban Missile Crisis," by Dick Taylor. Family Means Bldg., 1875 Northwestern Ave, Stillwater.*

*For additional information, visit:  
[www.meetup.com/Critical-Thinking-Club/calendar](http://www.meetup.com/Critical-Thinking-Club/calendar)*

### *Maple Grove Discussion Group:*

*Saturday, December 10th, 10:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.: "Ayurveda (ancient East Indian medicine) and Cancer, Arthritis, and Psychology" with Dr. Vanashree Gadam Maple Grove Community Center, 12951 Weaver Lake Rd, room 133, Maple Grove 55311, \$5 donation. Register at [landfor-sale@visi.com](mailto:landfor-sale@visi.com) or call Laurie at (763) 420-6350.*

## Humanists of Minnesota

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December 2016

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL**

Your membership is vital to the growth of Humanism and the Humanist community. Our membership categories are:  
(For categories at RH and above, married couples or domestic partners will be considered as one membership, if you so indicate.)

- (B) Budget, \$25.00
- (RI) Regular Individual, \$40.00
- (RH) Regular Household, \$60.00
- (S) Sustaining, \$100.00
- (P) Patron, \$250.00
- (BN) Benefactor, \$500.00
- (L) Life Membership, \$1000.00
- (T) Trial subscription for 3 months, just ask

\*Full time students at an accredited institution can receive a complimentary subscription

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For national or international membership write to:

American Humanist Association  
1777 T Street NW  
Washington, DC 20009-7125  
[www.americanhumanist.org](http://www.americanhumanist.org)

Council for Secular Humanism  
PO Box 664  
Amherst, NY 14226  
[www.secularhumanism.org](http://www.secularhumanism.org)

Please check the appropriate box, complete the information and mail with your check to Humanists of Minnesota, P.O. Box 582997, Minneapolis, MN 55458-2997.

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(for special announcements, blogs etc. Keeps you in touch!)

I would like my newsletter sent via email (  ) (in color!)

Second Member at same address (for RH and above):

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Visit our website at:  
[www.humanistsofmn.org](http://www.humanistsofmn.org)

