

*IN THIS ISSUE*

- 2 President's Column
- 3 Announcements  
Discussion Groups
- 4 Jan Chapter Summary
- 5 Book Review  
Highlights from the Bd
- 6 In Memoriam  
2015 HofMn Balance Sht
- 7 Cable Program

**Saturday  
February 20, 2016**

**Monthly  
Chapter Meeting**

**First Unitarian Society  
900 Mt. Curve Drive  
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.*

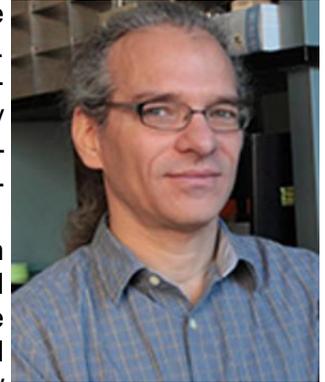
*Humanists of Minnesota Chapter Meeting*

***New Horizons for Natural Selection:  
Darwin's Time Machine***

*by Prof. Michael Travisano, University of Minnesota*

*Saturday, February 20th, 2016*

Darwin Day has become an important event within the humanist community in the past couple of decades. While the actual day to commemorate Darwin's birth--February 12<sup>th</sup> -- will already have past, we traditionally pay tribute to Darwin at our February chapter meetings. We'll have door-prizes (win a Darwin bobble-head!) and hear a fascinating talk on evolution.



Since before Darwin, central questions in evolution have involved origins: the origin of species, life, and humanity. Traditional evolutionary approaches have looked back to answer these questions: how did things happen millions to billions of years ago? A new complementary approach has attracted much attention that looks forward. Instead of attempting to see into a potentially unknowable past, experimental evolutionists start anew with microbial populations. Using viruses, bacteria and yeast, we directly investigate the evolution and adaptation of populations over hundreds to thousands of generations.

Many fascinating topics in evolutionary biology can be observed as they occur such as transitions in adaptation, the evolution of biological complexity and the evolution of new species. Ambiguity in the evolutionary process is greatly reduced, so that the causes and consequences of adaptation can be disentangled. Our most recent advance is the evolution of multi-cellular organisms, the foundation for all visible life and its biological diversity. Despite a century of conjecture suggesting that the evolution of such biological complexity occurs gradually, it can readily evolve under the right conditions in the laboratory.

Michael Travisano studied Astrophysics as an undergraduate at Columbia University but, seeing limited prospects for understanding the origins of life, shifted eventually to evolutionary biology. He received a PhD with Rich Lenski at Michigan State University, followed by post-docs in Japan and Oxford. Before coming to Minnesota in 2007, Travisano was on the faculty at the University of Houston. Ω

## PRESIDENT'S

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Are you feeling more “spiritual” these days—overcome by a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being and wonder about the universe? Apparently while Americans are getting less religious, spirituality is on the rise. The latest report from the [Pew Research Center](#) indicates that “spiritual” feelings are increasing—even among atheists, agnostics and the unaffiliated—along with everyone else. What should we make of this?

First off, definitions are important. “Spirituality” has become a pretty amorphous term these days. After dutifully reviewing several definitions from a variety of dictionaries, I found this opening statement from [Wikipedia](#) the most helpful: “There is no single, widely agreed definition of spirituality; surveys of the definition of the term, as used in scholarly research, show a broad range of definitions, with very limited similitude.” Then offering some much-needed insight, the entry went on to say: “In modern times the emphasis is on subjective experience. It may denote almost any kind of meaningful activity or [blissful experience](#).” With such a broad meaning it’s no wonder re-

searchers can document an increase in “spiritual” feelings among any demographic. Of course, the definition of “spiritual” from the Oxford dictionary still carries some weight for many of us: “of, relating to, or affecting the human spirit or [soul](#) as opposed to [material](#) or physical things.” The term “soul” is going to deter many a non-believer from identifying with the word “spiritual.”

Even so, let’s be honest about the human experience. Humanists, agnostics and atheists—all have subjective experiences of meaning and bliss—not unlike the rest of our human companions. Whether it be a sense of contentment through meditation, intimate bonding with another person, awe at the sight of a spectacular sunset, wonder at the cosmos through the night sky, ecstasy from accomplishing a physical feat or moved by a piece of music. It’s not always easy to find the appropriate way to talk about such experiences with others. Our language fails us—especially when we want to go for the short description—or we are not eloquent or poetic enough to do justice to the experience. What’s a non-religious person to say?

Well, remaining silent is definitely the wrong approach. Those of us in the freethought movement are still suffering from a bad image because for too long we have neglected to express our full humanity to others—especially to those outside our community. We are often characterized as merely intellectual, objective and unfeeling people. No room for awe and wonder, poetry and music, emotion and vulnerability.

That image was brought home to me recently when I spoke to a group of retired University professors, spouses and staff at a local humanities club about secular humanism. My presentation seemed to defy some of their stereotypes. A few of the comments and questions bordered on veiled accusations that I have often heard lobbed at our clan: cerebral and smug. *Secular humanists and atheists think they have it all figured out and everyone else is in la-la-land.* Alas, we need to communicate more effectively. Don’t we want to convey quite the opposite? That we don’t have everything figured out? That we don’t have all the answers—and don’t claim to? We live by the best knowledge to date. And the more we know, the more we know we don’t know. That leaves a lot of room for further inquiry, curiosity, a sense of mystery, and humility.

No doubt, part of our image problem stems from our association with the Progressive Era of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century just as Humanism was coming into its own as a modern world-view. Humanists generally shared with their contemporaries the belief in science, technology, expertise, education and, perhaps most importantly, in *human* agency to improve the environment and conditions of life. However by mid-century, especially after WWI and WWII, this confidence in humanity’s ability to save itself seemed not merely over-rated but full of unwarranted hubris.

We need to take our cue from the likes of Carl Sagan. If you haven’t in a while, revisit Sagan’s [“Pale Blue Dot.”](#) Full of awe, wonder, humility and...a “transcendent” experience? It makes me feel a part of something larger than myself. Perhaps overcome by a deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being and wonder about the universe? Maybe.

I’m not comfortable with the term “spiritual.” And personally, the word “transcendent” works better for me. But I don’t use either of them very often. I don’t want to convey to anyone that I believe in anything supernatural. But we can speak of our values, share what brings us bliss. Express our awe and wonder. Whatever we say, let’s try our best to communicate our sentiments about this amazing world and the opportunity to be a part of this great adventure! 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*, Salsa a La Salsa--2841 Hennepin Ave., Mpls.

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

**2nd Sunday 2:00 p.m.**, *Sunday Assembly*. First Unitarian Society. 900 Mt. Curve Avenue, 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*, Old Country Buffet, County Road B2 between Fairview and Snelling. 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

**2nd Wednesday, 7:00 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>

## Death and Dying Series

**First Saturdays of the month (Oct. –June)**  
**Rondo Community Library, St. Paul**

**February 6th @ 10:30 am**  
**Quality of Life Issues and Sense of Self**

At this fifth session, we will discuss dementias and terminal illnesses; considerations for palliative and hospice care; challenges of care-giving and for care-givers; dying at home.

This series is designed to help humanists, agnostics, atheists and freethinkers prepare for the final chapter of one's life. While a "good death" may be best secured through living a "good life," we will explore the unique challenges of aging given the potential for increased frailty, debilitating illness and loss of independence—for oneself or for a loved one.

Through facilitated discussion, each session will focus on a particular end-of-life issue from creating health care directives, conducting conversations with family members, considering options for disposition of the body, planning memorial services and making ethical wills or legacy gifts. No medical or legal expertise will be provided, but instead, here is an opportunity to think out loud about our mortality and the pragmatic issues surrounding our impending deaths. For more information about the series, contact Audrey at [akingstrom@comcast.net](mailto:akingstrom@comcast.net).

## Membership Update

*As of January 2016, Humanists of Minnesota Membership is at 183. We have 2273 followers on Meetup and 194 friends on Facebook.*

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





*January Chapter Meeting*

## **“Higher Education”**

*Summarized by Suzanne Perry and  
Scott Lohman*

The U.S. higher-education system is generally considered the best in the world, but it is suffering from a long list of problems that have no easy fix, according to Jerry Smith, professor of management at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI), the speaker at the Humanists of Minnesota January chapter meeting.

“I don’t see any silver-bullet solutions here,” he said.

The problems include rising tuition and student debt, unprepared students, an over-emphasis on research versus teaching, and a flawed academic culture. None of that would matter if the quality of education was improving, he said. But instead, he said, employers complain that colleges are graduating students that do not have good work skills.

Why should we care? Higher education benefits individuals, for example by preparing them for jobs, Prof. Smith said. It also benefits society by disseminating knowledge, producing research that enriches our culture, and helping generate economic growth by educating workers. “Democracy depends on having a thoughtful, well-educated public,” he added.

Prof. Smith is a longtime Humanists of Minnesota member who delivers critical-thinking instruction and is co-organizer of the popular D-Cubed monthly events. At UNI, he teaches critical thinking, problem solving and decision making to business students.

Among his other points:

- College dropout rates have increased, with only 57 percent of students now completing a four-year degree. Enrollment growth has also stalled.
- Many schools are facing financial difficulties. To attract students, they lower their admission standards and spend money on facilities like fancy dorms, health clubs and climbing walls, along with marketing and financial aid.
- Today’s students often go to college to earn credentials and are less interested in getting a general education. And many think: “If I paid all this money for tuition, I’d better get good grades.” Grade inflation is rampant.
- Academic culture promotes the concept that knowledge should be valued for its own sake. That leads to a lot of research that is never cited and has little application to the larger society. Some faculty members take the principle of “academic freedom” too far, resisting any efforts to make them accountable.
- College curricula have become “bloated,” with a move away from the classical “here’s what everyone should know” to boutique courses like “Bob Dylan’s lyrics back in the ‘70s.”
- Some institutions, especially research universities, undervalue teaching, allowing professors to keep their course loads low by offering leaves and waivers. Schools are increasingly relying on poorly paid adjunct professors to do the teaching.

So short of the nonexistent silver bullet, what should be done? Prof. Smith said one solution would be to provide better assessment of how much students are learning. That would be easier for some fields -- like accounting, where students can take the CPA exam -- than others, where “higher-order outcomes” such as thinking skills are more important.

However it would help parents and students to select colleges because they offer the best education, rather than for reasons like prestige or football teams, he said. “If we could validly and reliably assess the educational value-added of academic courses and program,” he said, “It would turn higher education upside down.”

Some schools have moved toward “competency-based education,” awarding degrees based on what students know, as demonstrated through tests, rather than on the number of credits earned, he said.

Prof. Smith said improving faculty performance is also essential. It’s not that professors don’t work hard, he said, but that they spend much of their time on “stuff that turns out to be inconsequential” -- like unnecessary research or unproductive committee meetings. Faculty members should be held accountable for the significance of their work and schools should be more flexible about their workloads, he said, for example requiring some to teach more. Some of these suggestions could help transform the current higher-education system if they were picked up broadly, although that is challenging since the field is so decentralized. Outside pressure may hold the key: “For big stuff to happen, it’s going to come out of the public and political system.” Ω

**Book Review:**

***America's Secret Jihad:  
The Hidden History of Terrorism  
in the United States***  
(Counterpoint 2015)

by *Stuart Wexler*

Reviewed by *Paul Heffron*

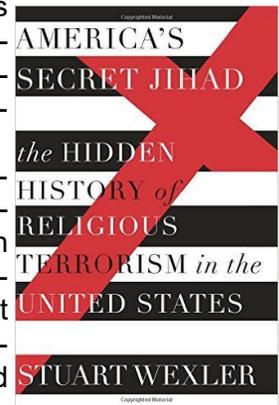
Voltaire said those who believe in absurdities are apt to commit atrocities. The subject of this new book on American religious terrorists provides a good example. We should remember that there was a successful terrorist movement in American history. The KKK brought an end to the Reconstruction in the South. It changed government policy through terror. Wexler's terrorist subjects run from the 1950s to the present. His account is based on the access to records and research since the 1980s and provides a revision of the history of domestic terrorism.

A theological movement in Fundamentalist Christianity called Christian Identity (CI) was, according to Wexler,

the driving force behind the hate crimes which are generally familiar to us. The CI hatred was based in part on an odd interpretation of Genesis in which white Europeans come out as the Chosen People issuing from Adam and Eve and the Jews and other "races" issue from Eve and the serpent (Satan). CI saw the Jews as the main enemy of Christ and as the cause of Communism and the Civil Rights Movement. CI believed in fomenting a race war by attacking blacks thereby purifying America and bringing on the Apocalypse. They worked through groups like the KKK and were involved in major ways in the murder of Medgar Evers, the bombing of the Baptist church that killed four children, the Mississippi Burning murders, the Murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Oklahoma City bombing by McVeigh, to name some of the more well-known episodes. Although there were synagogue bombings by CI, the focus was on blacks and the race war as a short-term strategy. Long-term CI aimed to eliminate the Jews, change America, and play a role in the End Times.

In Wexler's words, "There can no longer be any question that Christianity can and has accommodated domestic terrorism inside the united States, not as a veneer, but as at least one motivating force shaping the character and contours of the violence itself. In the 1960s, [Rev. Wesley Albert] Swift's Church of Jesus Christ-Christian functioned in much the same way the Al Qaeda functioned from 1996 to present: as an ideological umbrella for a network of zealots, that facilitated interactions between otherwise decentralized 'chapters' of terrorists, with key figures cross-affiliating among different groups."

Wexler maintains that post-9/11 we have underestimated domestic terrorism in our preoccupation with Islamic terrorism. He thinks we need to see CI and Al Qaeda as perversions of their religions and not condemn Islam or Christianity in general. He takes both Sean Hannity and Bill Maher to task for disrespecting and showing contempt for all Muslims. I am biased, but I must disagree. Maher condemns the Islam fundamentalists but not all Muslims. In any case, Wexler persuasively argues that ignoring CI puts our nation's security at risk. His revisionist history will undergo debate, but his research and analysis should bring serious attention to the religious sources of American terrorism. Ω



***Highlights from the  
Board***

By *Juliet Branca, Secretary*

From the January board meeting:

- February 12th is Darwin Day. Our February speaker, Michael Travisano's topic will be "Darwin's Time Machine". Look for a chance to win a Darwin bobblehead at the Chapter meeting!
- The board passed a motion to endorse

the MN Compassionate Care Act which supports aid in dying.

- The Bylaws Committee finished its revisions of the bylaws. Members will be asked to vote up or down to accept these changes at the May meeting.
- The Executive Committee, along with volunteers Nancy Somers and Nick Hayden will meet this month to discuss the 2016-2017 budget.

***Maple Grove Discussion Group:***

*Saturday, February 13th, 10:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.: "Its Never Too Late," with Roxanne Altmeyer, Fire Fighter /EMT. Maple Grove Community Center, 12951 Weaver Lake Rd, room 124, Maple Grove 55311, \$5 donation. Register at landfor-sale@visi.com or call Laurie at (763) 420-6350.*

***In Memoriam:***

***John L. Schneider  
Richard Ley***

John L. Schneider, member and supporter of Humanists of Minnesota, died November 1, 2015, at the age of 95. Family man, scholar, teacher, life-long learner, master gardener and volunteer. Taught in Minneapolis Public Schools for 29 years. U.S. Navy veteran WWII. Memorials to First Unitarian Society Foundation, Doctors Without Borders or Planned Parenthood. "A teacher affects eternity;

he can never tell where his influence stops" -Henry Adams.

Richard Ley, member and supporter of Humanists of Minnesota, died December 31, 2015, at the age of 80. Dick faced his illness and his death in the same way he lived his life - with insight, humility, good-heartedness, and a remarkable sense of humor. His family was his greatest source of happiness and pride. Draftsman and engineer at Bepex for over 30 years; Army veteran. Memorials to Doctors Without Borders or Humanists of Minnesota. "That man is a success who looked for the best in others and gave the best he had" -Ralph Waldo Emerson. Ω

### ***Upcoming Critical Thinking Club Meetings***

*Twin Cities Chapter. Sunday, February 7th, 10:00 a.m. to noon: "The Ecology Democracy Network and the Genuine Progress Indicator for Minnesota," by Ken Pentel. Uptown Community Gathering Place, 514 Lowry Ave NE, Minneapolis.*

*West Metro Chapter. Saturday, February 27th, 10:00 a.m. to noon: "The Cuban Missile Crisis," by Dick Taylor. Ridge Point Apts. Meeting Room, 12800 Marion Lane W., Minnetonka.*

*Stillwater Chapter. Monday, February 8th, 7:00 p.m.: "The Benefits of Tai Chi," by Paul Ryberg. Family Means Bldg., 1875 Northwestern Ave, Stillwater.*

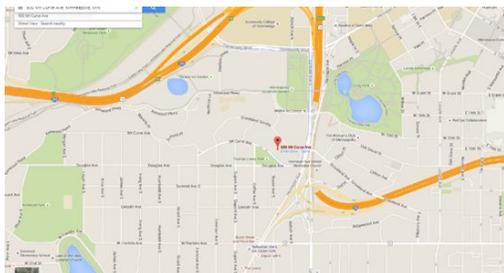
*For additional information, visit:  
[www.meetup.com/Critical-Thinking-Club/calendar](http://www.meetup.com/Critical-Thinking-Club/calendar)*

*Chapter meeting location: Easiest approach is south on Lyndale St, past the Walker, right on Douglas Ave and right on Mt Curve Ave.*

*If you are coming from the north on I-94, take the Lyndale Street exit.*

*From the west (I-394), get off at Dunwoody, then make a right onto Lyndale.*

*From the east on I-94 get off Exit 231B (Lyndale/Hennepin Aves.), take a hard right on Dell Ave. and a left on to Groveland Terrace to Lyndale.*



### **Humanists of Minnesota Balance Sheet (as of 12/31/2015)**

<b>Income</b>	<b>\$17,468</b>
Dues	\$ 6,745
Solstice Banquet	\$ 3,220
Fundraisers	\$ 4,300
Lunch with Humanists	\$ 1,378
Donations	\$ 256
Interest	\$ 63
Misc. Income	\$ 1,506

<b>Expenses</b>	<b>\$15,345</b>
Administrative	\$ 1,871
Solstice Banquet	\$ 2,840
Program Events	\$ 3,193
Community Outreach	\$ 590
Picnics	\$ 125
Media	\$ 2,426
Fundraisers	\$ 4,300

**Operating Gain (Loss)                   \$ 2,122**

Tubman Solar Donation	\$ 2,000
Food Group Donation	\$ 1,000

**Overall Net Gain (Loss)                   \$ (878)**

*Brad Bolin, Treasurer*

## HUMANIST NEWS & VIEWS

**Editor**, Nathan Curland

**Editorial Committee** - Brad Bolin, Dale Handeen, Mark Thoson

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 22nd of the prior month.

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## Cable Program

Scott Lohman's guest for the January taping was Minnesota Atheists board member August Berkshire. The topic was "Atheism, Agnosticism, and Humanism." How are these defined? What are the nuances? Where do you fall on the spectrum? Catch the program on our website:

[www.humanistsofmn.org](http://www.humanistsofmn.org)



*L to R: August Berkshire, Scott Lohman*

## Humanists of Minnesota

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#### Group Photographer -

Richard Trombley

#### Historian -

Paul Heffron

#### Cable Program Staff -

Scott Lohman, Nathan Curland, Brad Bolin,  
Grant Lohman

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February 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.

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

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

(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)

