

PANViews



Newsletter of PA Nonbelievers, Inc., affiliated with American Atheists, Atheist Alliance International and the Council for Secular Humanism.

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President's Report

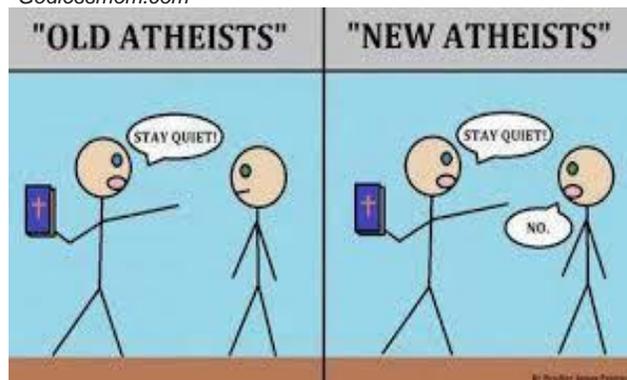
Josh CruverKibi

Unfortunately, the Third U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decided to uphold the Pennsylvania House's policy of limiting prayer to believers due to historical precedent. For more information on the court ruling, Pam has written an article in this month's *PANViews*. I agree with our attorney Alex Luchenitser's statement in the August 23, 2019 Associated Press news article: "The court has permitted the Pennsylvania House of Representatives to discriminate based on religion against people who do not believe in a god." This should be a good topic of discussion at our monthly meetings for this month, because there is far more to say.

For the month of September, PAN will be doing the **FREE** annual Pride of the Susquehanna boat ride on Sunday September 15 from 10:00-11:00 am. Make sure you get there a little early, so you have enough time to find the boat location. This is a great activity and experience for families with kids as well.

PAN will not be tabling for the month of September. PAN's next and last tabling event of the year is the two-day Pumpkinfest in October. Pumpkinfest will be on Saturday October 12 from 9:30 am-5:00 pm and Sunday 11:00 am – 5:00 pm. If you are interested in volunteering or attending any of the upcoming PAN events you can say that you are going on Facebook and or Meetup.com.

Godlessmom.com



Atheist News in Pennsylvania – The Nation – The World!

Legal Loss, Part 1

Pennsylvania Nonbelievers, along with Lancaster Freethought Society, Dillsburg Area Freethinkers and several individual members of these groups, sued the PA House of Representatives in Federal Court over its refusal to allow non-theistic invocations before its sessions, and the House's insistence that everyone stand before the religious invocation is offered.

Our side won a partial victory at the District Court level. The judge ruled that the guest chaplain policy violated the Establishment Clause, and issued a permanent injunction. The House had made the "please rise" policy less coercive in 2017 in response to the lawsuit; the Court ruled that the current policy was acceptable.

That's it for good news. The House appealed, and the Third District Court of Appeals ruled in its favor. The ruling states: *The House's policy preferring theistic over nontheistic prayers does not violate the Establishment Clause because it fits squarely within the historical tradition of legislative prayer. Next, legislative prayer is government speech, so the policy is not susceptible to an attack on free-speech, free-exercise, or equal-protection grounds.*

The Court agreed that current policy about requiring people to rise is legal.

If this weren't bad enough, the Court of Appeals specifically referenced the recent Supreme Court decision allowing the Christian cross to remain on public land in Bladensburg, MD (citations removed): *Even more recently, the Supreme Court has expanded its historical framework beyond the confines of legislative prayer. In rejecting an Establishment Clause challenge to a Christian cross commemorating World War I on state property, the Court held that the memorial "must be viewed in [its] historical context." It also announced "a presumption*

of constitutionality for longstanding monuments, symbols, and practices." Indeed, our Court just reiterated the "strong presumption of constitutionality" for practices like the one before us. That presumption applies to the longstanding practice of theistic prayer in the United States; since the first congressional prayers in 1789, the U.S. House of Representatives "has never had an openly atheist or agnostic guest chaplain."

The decision can be found here: <https://www2.ca3.uscourts.gov/opinarch/182974p.pdf>



Legal Loss, Part 2

For the last 75 years, Lebanon County's Seal has featured a cross (see above). The Freedom From Religion Foundation sued to have the cross removed. The US Third Circuit Court of Appeals has now ruled that the cross can stay. Why? Just as in the invocation case, the Court of Appeals referenced the US Supreme Court ruling in the Maryland cross case.

According to the Associated Press, www.apnews.com, the Court of Appeals said that the cross did not amount to an endorsement of religion. It was one of many symbols on the seal, the Court said, and due to the passage of time, its significance is now historical, not religious. The decision read, "The Lehigh County seal fits comfortably

within a long tradition of State and municipal seals and flags throughout our Republic that include religious symbols or mottos, which further confirms its constitutionality. It also abided over 70 years without complaint."

This decision is believed to be the first to follow the Supreme Court's reasoning in the Maryland court case, where a World War I memorial cross constructed in 1925 was allowed to remain on public land. Justice Samuel Alito wrote the majority opinion that long-standing religious monument are allowed "strong presumption of constitutionality," and that removing them "may no longer appear neutral."

"We're obviously extraordinarily happy with the outcome," said Lehigh County spokesman Joshua Siegel, adding that Lehigh wanted to protect the county's history.

Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, noted that the decision was not a surprise. She said, "We're appalled. It's not just a blow to the Constitution, but it's a blow to what our country is supposed to be founded on and aspire to, which is to welcome everybody and not to take sides on religion."

This decision made Lehigh County's lawyers, the Becket Fund For Religious Liberty happy. The Becket Fund is notorious for bringing religion-tinged lawsuits; it successfully represented Hobby Lobby in its fight to avoid providing medical insurance coverage for birth control to its employees. Diana Verm, senior counsel, said, "I just think local governments will start to wise up, especially their lawyers, when they get these threat letters."

www.patheos.com/blogs/progressivesecularhumanist



Here's Another One

Apologists for organizations riddled with sexual abuse complaints sometimes say that, well, yes, it was awful, we're sorry, but after all, these claims happened years ago. It's better now.

Yet the hits keep on coming. PennLive, www.pennlive.com, reports on a Chambersburg-area pastor who had sexually explicit images of bonding scenarios with children. With his face superimposed into the pictures.

Charges have been filed by the Office of the Attorney General's Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force against Stephen L. Dunn, a Franklin County pastor. Investigators used an internet image search to find sexually explicit images involving children, and that lead them to Dunn. A search of his home found 50 printouts of young girls in bondage and other sado-masochistic situations, with Dunn's face inserted, in a bedroom dresser drawer.

According to Dunn's website, he has been a pastor for 48 years, and is the director of Bridgebuilders Ministries, which he says is his "personal ministry" to help churches stay healthy. He was the interim executive pastor at the Hanover (PA) First Church of God, which he describes as a 1,000-person congregation, but his name no longer appears on the church's website.

Good News About Good News

Last month *PANViews* reported that Christians were concerned about the effect of the Trump administration's tariff policy on the production of Bibles. It seems that most Bibles are printed in China, for a variety of reasons, and the proposed tariff restrictions threatened that business.

Well, worry no longer. According to *Christian Post*, www.christianpost.com, the administration has heard the Christian cries. The office of U.S. Trade Ambassador Robert E. Lighthizer announced that Bibles will be excluded from the proposed 10% tariff.

LifeWay Christian Resources is the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention. It is understandably grateful for the reprieve. President, Ben Mandrell, said: "For the past several months, there has been great concern among the Christian publishing community that our important work would be threatened by proposed tariff schedules This announcement by the U.S. Trade Representative has given us hope that the administration has heard our concern."

More Religious Preference

The Labor Department has proposed a change that would allow more federal contractors to take religion into account when they make hiring decisions.

The New York *Times*, www.nytimes.com, reports that the proposed rule would allow federal contractors to discriminate if they identify include a religious purpose in their mission, and state that they practicing their religion advances that mission. Currently only nonprofit contractors can make such a claim.

The *Times* gives an example of how the rule currently is applied. A Jewish agency that has a federal contract to feed poor children could insist on hiring a rabbi to oversee the preparation of kosher food.

Under the proposed rule, a for-profit company such as Hobby Lobby, whose owners say that their Christian beliefs are integral to their organization, would be able to refuse to hire a gay manager, for example, and not lose their federal contract.

The Labor Department defends the proposed rule, saying that it seeks "to provide the broadest protection of religious exercise recognized by the Constitution and other laws."

The administration is also challenging protections for gay and transgender people. The Supreme Court will hear three cases this fall where the administration claims that federal civil rights laws do not prohibit employers from discriminating against them. The EEOC had ruled that this kind of discrimination is illegal.

The public has 30 days to comment on the proposed rule, after which the department can issue a final version. Many advocates said they would expect a variety of legal challenges if it is enacted.

Another Dirty Word

All *PANViews* readers know that "atheist" is the word that must not be spoken. Now another word that nonbelievers use to describe ourselves is verboten, too.

According to Hemant Mehta, the Friendly Atheist, www.friendlyatheist.patheos.com, Target apparently thinks "Humanist" is too controversial to grace its website.

Target's website featured the pillow, shown below, with the word "Humanist" stitched across it.

But then, Hemant reports, the pillow disappeared from the website. A few may be available in stores, but that's it. What happened? Was there a quality problem, or were there complaints?



Hemant says he poked around online, but couldn't find any organized protest about the pillow. He contacted Target to ask about the situation.

So far, the only response he's gotten has been, "We don't have any information to provide on your inquiry."

That's all it said. There were no other pillows offered with religious or philosophical words.

So, now even the word “humanist” triggers believers.

According to Hemant, people online have said that when they asked Target about the product, they were told that customer feedback lead to it being discontinued – to the extent that orders that were in process were cancelled.

That appears to be that. The American Humanist Association has started a petition asking Target to bring back the pillow.

From Lancaster Freethought



The Cause of Homosexuality

A Christian bishop in Cyprus knows why some people are gay. It's caused by pregnant women who enjoy anal sex during their pregnancy. *Cyprus Mail*, via www.patheos.com/blogs/progressiveseuclar.com reports that the Christian bishop told an audience that, declaring:

Homosexuality is usually a problem transferred to a foetus, when a pregnant woman has anal sex and enjoys it.

Just in case you wondered.

.....

Pushback in Sydney

One of the drawbacks to public transportation is that fanatics can take advantage of the captive audience to rant and rave. Recently, passengers in Sydney, Australia, fought back.

The American Torch of Christ church descended on Australia this spring (you're welcome, Australia!) to spread their message. So confident were they of their success, or so eager to make themselves famous, they filmed many of their interactions with Australians, including this one, which was posted on the church's social media page.

According to the Daily Mail, www.dailymail.co.uk, Philip Blair, a member of the Torch of Christ Ministries boarded a train and immediately started shouting about religion.

His rant was preserved on YouTube: "We care more about saving the whales than we care about saving our unborn children!"

A man sitting quietly, reading a book, courteously responded, "No, thank you." None of the train riders appear interested. As they realize they were being filmed, many of them covered their faces.

One rider fought back. "Why don't you just take your opinion and keep it to yourself," the man told Blair, as he read a book. "All I want you to do is shut up and leave me alone."

Blair told the man he was selfish. The man argued back. "Who's the selfish one here, mate. Who's the one who won't shut up about their opinions?" His fellow passengers cheered.

"Nope, I'm not going to stop because I love you that much,"

As the video ends, a woman can be heard saying, "Shut up, you sound like such a dickh**d!"

Well, At Least He Didn't Abuse Kids

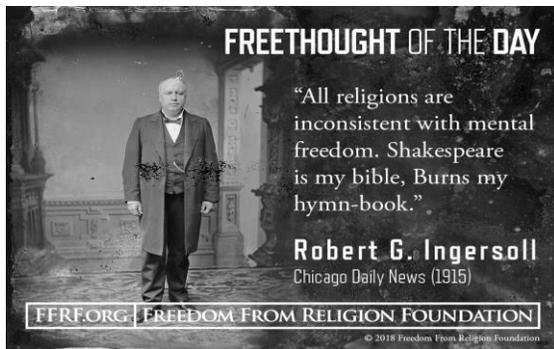
A Catholic priest, former pastor of a Chester County parish, has been charged with stealing more than \$100,000 from the church. What for? Feed the hungry, clothe the naked? Not exactly.

No, the Reading *Eagle*, www.readingeagle.com, reports. Father Joseph McLoone (love the name) spent the money on a beach house in New Jersey, and on men with whom he had sex.

According to the Chester County District Attorney, McLoone, former pastor of St. Joseph's Parish in Downingtown, hid funds in a secret account for more than 6 years. About \$125,000 came from general donations and fees to the church, for the use of its community room, for funerals and weddings, etc. He set up a special collection on All Souls' Day (November 2) and funneled that money – more than \$39,000 over 6 years – into his secret account. McLoone also gave himself a raise, doubling the amount he requested for performing masses, funerals and weddings.

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia apparently was unaware of the secret account until McLoone was accused, in 2018. The story states that authorities have recovered “some” of the money.

The St. Joseph parishioners have had a tough couple of years. McLoone took over in 2011 from Msgr. William Lynn, who has the distinction of being the first Catholic official convicted of covering up clergy sex abuse. (His 2012 conviction was overturned, and he is awaiting retrial.)



Quite a Puzzle

Part of the fun, when PAN has a booth at local events, is visiting the other booths. A

couple of times this year, the Falun Gong has had a booth, giving away copies of its newspaper *The Epoch Times*. As described below, the news in the paper can be a bit bizarre, but PAN members like its great puzzle section.

Falun Gong is a Chinese spiritual group that practices meditation, and is emphatically anti-communist. The Chinese government has tried for years to eliminate it, possibly because it is outside the control of the government, or, the government says, it wants to overthrow the government. The government is intent on stamping it out, and reportedly has tortured proponents.

Recently NBC News investigated Falun Gong. Here's a summary of the major conclusions of its investigation, as summarized in www.mediaite.com.

1. *The Epoch Times* believe President Donald Trump was heaven-sent to defeat communism. Epoch Times spent more than \$1.5 million on 11,000 Trump ads on Facebook in the last six months. After the NBC report aired, Facebook banned *The Epoch Times* from buying ads.

2. Falun Gong is a community dedicated to the takedown of China's government, which explains why *The Epoch Times* is blocked in mainland China. Followers of Falun Gong think the end of the world is near, at which time the communists will be sent to hell. They define “communists” broadly; for example, Hillary Clinton, movie star Jackie Chan and former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan are included.

3. *The Epoch Times* has recently become more popular, apparently because it has begun to espouse US conservative views. It deliberately does not cover popular culture, and focuses on what it thinks are traditional values.

4. The founder of Falun Gong, Li Hongzhi, enforces some pretty radical views. The Falun Gong oppose homosexuality, feminism and popular music. When it covered the Pulse shooting (because it opposes radical Islam) it did not mention that Pulse was a gay nightclub. Li claims that he can levitate and walk through walls. He

preaches that illness is a sign of evil that can be cured by meditation, and that computers and airplanes corrupt human minds, and are the product of aliens from other dimensions.

5. The Epoch Times is key in peddling the internet’s fringier conspiracy theories. It puts out videos that explain alien abductions are real, and the drug epidemic is government plot. It backs QAnon (a right-wing conspiracy group), and claims that Trump has taken down a global pedophile ring.

Puzzle section’s still great, though.



From dykewriter.wordpress.com



Adults Are Victims, Too

Several adult men have accused a Presbyterian minister in New Jersey of using Native American exorcism rituals, gemstones and oral sex to extract evil spirits from them.

As reported on www.mycentraljersey.com, the accused minister, Rev. Dr. William Weaver, served as pastor of Linden Presbyterian Church for 39 years. In addition to his church activities he was the chaplain for a county police department, and at a local hospital. His “healing” activities date back at least to 1999.

His accusers reported him to the church; they did report the encounters to the authorities. He was supposed to face his three accusers at an internal church trial, but one day before That adult men would undergo this “ritual” underscores how powerful ministers can be.

the trial was set to begin, he renounced the jurisdiction of the Elizabeth Presbytery. That means he is no longer a minister, or a member of the church. That would be the punishment he would have received had he been found guilty by the Presbytery.

Weaver held “counseling” sessions in the bedroom of his house, which is the property of the church where he was minister. He would open a suitcase and take out the following items: feathers, assorted stones, buckeyes, a magnetic strip, an angel coin and Ziploc bags. An “angel coin” is a coin with an angel or saint printed on it, to be used in prayer.

Weaver would tell the man seeking help to undress completely and lie on the bed. He would then place the angel coin on the victim’s head, wrapping the magnetic strip around his head, to keep it in place.

He would then arrange the stones around the man, and on his feet, telling the victim that to “get everything out of him” he had to lay still, and not move the stones off his feet. Weaver would then use the feather to scan the man’s body, from neck to stomach.

After that Weaver would open the victim’s mouth, place his tongue inside, moving his tongue around. He told his victims this was to see if they had anything in their mouth or throat.

And then it got really weird. Weaver would engage in oral sex with the victim, ingesting the ejaculate, and he would then spit up multiple pieces of plastic or metal into the Ziploc bag.

At least one of the men asked Weaver why ritual was necessary, and if he used the same technique on women. The man stated that Weaver told him “everything would come out of a woman’s navel and every 30 days their cycle would clear them out.”

Billy Graham Lives

Ever hear of the Billy Graham rule? Some conservative Christians follow a practice they say was promulgated by Graham: Never be alone with a woman who is not your wife, to avoid temptation and any accusations of sexual impropriety.

What happens when your job requires that a man and a woman work alone together? Well, nowadays the man files suit.

As reported in *Christianity Today*, www.christianitytoday.com, Manuel Torres requested a religious accommodation when he was told to train a female deputy sheriff. The training would require him to spend time alone in his patrol car with the female trainee. In his lawsuit, Torres, a Baptist deacon, stated that he "holds the strong and sincere religious belief that the Holy Bible prohibits him, a married man, from being alone for extended periods of time with a female who is not his wife."

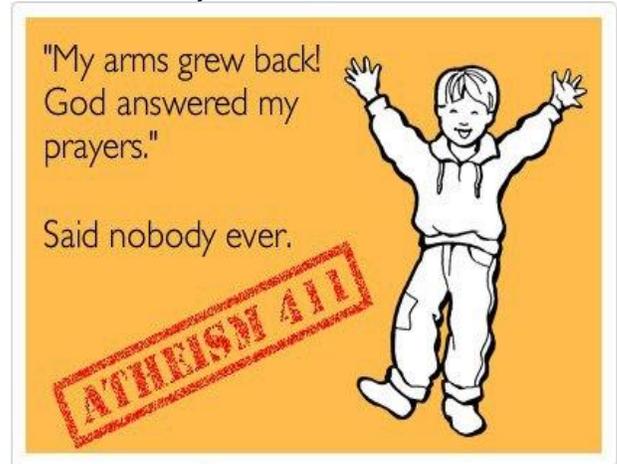
Torres claims that the sheriff's department went back and forth about whether it would honor his request, and then fired him, without any explanation. He also claims that another deputy refused to respond to a call for back-up he issued at a "multi-vehicle accident in an unsafe area" because of the requested accommodation.

Interesting that women don't appear to invoke the Billy Graham rule when asked to work alone with men. Interesting, too, that there doesn't seem to be any consideration about the effect on a woman's career when a man invokes the rule.

The story quotes Howard Friedman, a University of Toledo law professor and a religious liberty blogger as saying that he is unaware of any other "Billy Graham rule" lawsuits, but it is one in a growing number of cases "in which religious freedom clashes with non-discrimination norms." Friedman offered as examples the case of Kim Davis, the Kentucky court clerk who refused to issue

marriage licenses to same-sex couples, or the situation in the state of Washington, where pharmacists were required to issue emergency contraception pills, even though it violated their religious beliefs.

From Still Here? Silly Christians



A Course in Miracles

Marianne Williamson's bid to become the Democratic presidential candidate has drawn attention to her background. She became well-known after an appearance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in 1992 where she discussed *A Course in Miracles*.

What exactly is that? According to Wikipedia, it's a 1976 book by Helen Schucman that guides its readers in achieving spiritual transformation. Schucman claims that the book was given to her by Jesus, through a process she described as "inner dictation." The course purports to guide followers on how to gain an "awareness of love's presence."

The book sold steadily, but after Williamson's appearance on Oprah, more than two million volumes were sold.

A quick review of the internet shows mixed reactions from Christians. Generally, they are skeptical; the Course is not Bible based, and it doesn't encourage Bible study. Quotes from it seem to be standard new age woo:

"What you think you are is a belief to be undone."

"Nothing real can be threatened. Nothing unreal exists. Herein lies the peace of God."

"To take offense is to give offense."

"Infinite patience produces immediate results."

Love that Christian Charity

One would think that ministers would have better things to do than hope for the death of a comedian.

Well, some of them don't. *Newsweek*, www.newsweek.com, reports comedian Sarah Silverman put a film clip on Twitter that shows a Christian pastor's tirade about her. Silverman added that she was afraid that the minister would "get me killed."

Silverman is an edgy, taboo-challenging comedian who can be controversial even among the non-religious.

In the video clip, Christian minister Adam Fannin spits out: "You know these Jewish false prophets, anti-Christian, anti-God, they're willing to put Jesus to death again. You heard this comedian Sarah Silverman? You guys know who I'm talking about? She brags about 'I'd do it again.' Listen, she is a witch. She is a Jezebel. She is a God-hating whore of Zionism.

"I hope that God breaks her teeth out and she dies. She is a wicked person and she is like the perfect representation of religious Judaism.

"She is Satan's scoffer and she is there to take the world and make 'em laugh and then diss Jesus, try to take away the respect from Jesus."

Silverman knows what set Fannin off: "It goes like this: Someone on the right made a meme of a joke from "Jesus Is Magic," a comedy special I did in character, and presented it as if I was saying it at a press conference.

"It's a picture of me with the quote, 'I'm glad the Jews killed Jesus. I'd do it again!' And THAT is what triggered the pastor. So, the person who made the meme knew it was comedy and intentionally repurposed it as real, knowing it would influence a swath of people who see it and share it every day. And that's America today. Incitements of violence based on lies and the disingenuous re-framings of truth."

Fannin has a colorful past. He was formerly connected with the Jacksonville, FL Stedfast Baptist Church (where they apparently don't know how to spell "steadfast"). He left Stedfast after a scandal involving the head pastor and prostitutes (to be fair, Fannin wasn't implicated.) However, according to *Newsweek*, www.newsweek.com, he does not seem popular with his former brother ministers. Current Stedfast pastor Jonathan Shelley claims that Fannin was fired from the church, about six months ago, because the church found out that he was a "liar," "railer," and "super selfish." He is now connected to the Law of Liberty Baptist Church, also in Jacksonville. He has continued to preach against Sarah Silverman.

Member Submissions

Uplifting News

Priscilla Oppenheimer reports uplifting news from Lancaster:

Marquee on Rohrerstown Mennonite Church, facing busy route 741:

GOD'S MIND IS MADE UP. HE LOVES YOU!

September 2019

Unfortunately, not enough room to add: "But he had to think about it a really, really long time." A letter writer explains why we all may be under threat of gun violence:

Because kids are no longer taught in school that we were created in God's image, but that we are evolved from monkeys, "to kill someone who evolved from a monkey is not a very big deal."

So, I guess it's O.K. to go out and shoot monkeys, not to mention any other humans, evangelicals excepted, who might be their relatives.

PAN News & Update

Karen Kemp has joined PAN's board. She was elected, per our bylaws, to fill an unexpired board term. Karen is a 36-year-old software engineer and former journalist who lives in Shrewsbury with her husband, Brian, and their three cats. She has been attending PAN meetings and events since 2015. Born in Chicago to two non-practicing Catholics, she describes herself as a lifelong atheist who, as a child, was surprised to learn that belief in god was something people didn't simply grow out of and that evolution denialism wasn't just a thing of the past. She is an ardent supporter of the First Amendment and an advocate for skepticism in an age where any belief can be validated by a five-minute search on the Internet. As a member of the board, Karen would like to help increase membership, both at events and via an online presence.

Volunteer and Activist Opportunities

Susquehanna Riverboat Ride – PAN's annual ride on the Pride of the Susquehanna, September 15, 10:00 am. Spend a Sunday morning right, with an hour-long trip in the company of your fellow non-believers.

Meetings - For more details about our meetings, go to www.panonbelievers.org, or find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers.

Carlisle – Fourth Friday of the month, September 27, 5:30 pm, Desperate Times Brewery, 1201 Carlisle Springs Rd.

Chambersburg – Third Tuesday of the month, September 17, 7:00 pm, Montezuma Mexican Restaurant, 1495 Lincoln Way East.

Harrisburg– First Wednesday of the month, September 4, 6:30 pm, Midtown Scholar, 1302 N. Third St.

Lancaster – Fourth Wednesday of the month, September 25, 6:30 pm, Isaac's Famous Grilled Sandwiches, 1559 Manheim Pike.

Lebanon - Second Wednesday of the month, September 11, 7:00 pm, Batdorf Restaurant, 245 W. Main St., Annville

Reading – Fourth Thursday of the month, September 26, 6:00 pm, Oakbrook Brewing Company, 628 Park Ave., Reading

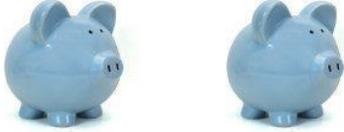
York – First Saturday of the month, September 7, 10:00 am, UUCY Carriage House, 925 S. George St., Rear.

How to Contribute to PAN



Amazon - You can contribute to PAN every time you shop online at Amazon by going to PAN's home page and clicking the black part of the Amazon logo there *before you shop*. If you click the link before you buy anything from Amazon, PA Nonbelievers will receive a cut of the proceeds - helping our organization!

Giant Cards - We will have Giant grocery store cards available for purchase at PAN meetings. You pay face value for the card and use the face value at the store, but Giant let's PAN have 5% of that face value. If you shop at Giant, anyway, use the cards in lieu of cash and help PAN. What could be easier?



Pennies for PAN - Finally, we are happy to take money the old-fashioned way. You can give your tax-deductible contribution to a Board Member at one of our meetings or events, you can donate via PayPal on our website, www.panonbelievers.org, or you can mail a check to us at PANonbelievers, Inc. PO Box 702, York, PA 17405. Remember when you donate you can indicate what fund you want your donation to go to, you can find the list of our funds on the PAN website in the Donate section.

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PAN Views is published by: PA Nonbelievers, Inc. PO Box 702 York, PA 17405 PAN Views Editor: Pam Zerba