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# 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*

As a year in review, PA Nonbelievers had some ups and downs. On the positive side, we started two new regular monthly meetings in Reading and Carlisle, had a few speaking events during the year, and created a new PA Nonbelievers website. Jacob and Dietrich did most of the work on the website along with some contributions from some other PAN members. We are still looking for people interested to contributing to the website, either in writing and/or ideas that you would like added to the website. Please submit your ideas or suggestions to the website or to a board member at one of the regular meetings. We would like to continue to improve the practicality and usefulness of the website for our members.

Atheists and nonbelievers, the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment, and generally the rights of Pennsylvania citizens took some hits during the year. As the primary down for the year, PA Nonbelievers and the other plaintiffs lost their case opposing the PA House of Representatives' discriminatory practice of refusing to let atheists and nonbelievers give an invocation. We had won the case last fall, but it was appealed to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Circuit Court. In the spring of this year, PAN had to issue a Press Release due to representative Borowicz and Turzai blatantly violating the 1<sup>st</sup> amendment establishment clause in the spring with an invocation that clearly favored their religion and proving our point and reason for taking them to court in the first place. But, unfortunately at the end of the summer, the 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decided to uphold the Pennsylvania House's policy of limiting prayer to believers due to historical precedent. The people involved in the case decided not to appeal and the attorney for the case, Alex Luchenitser, gave a statement to the Associated Press that the case would not be appealed but that the court has given the PA House of Representatives to discriminate based on religion.

PAN attended many of our usual tabling events but had to reduce the total number of events that we attended compared to previous years due to the reduced overall participation from membership. It was good that we still attended several tabling events but we have to be realistic about how many volunteer and educational events that we do in a year relative to participation, to prevent burnout for the most active members. Please consider renewing your membership to PA Nonbelievers, so that we can continue to work on educating the community, increasing secular awareness, and promoting rational and critical thinking in the Central Pennsylvania community at large. It is clear that a large section of Central PA community would rather Atheists and nonbelievers not have the same rights as people who join religious groups. They will continue to succeed if we do not make our voices heard.

PA Nonbelievers memberships run on the calendar year, so all current memberships expire on December 31, 2019. If you would like to continue or become a member of PA Nonbelievers, we can take your memberships directly online. You can start or renew your membership today at: <http://www.panonbelievers.org/membership/>. You can also use the printable form and send your membership in through the postal service, if you prefer. Members will bring copies to the regular monthly meetings. If you have an active 2020 membership it will give you the right to vote in PA Nonbelievers elections next spring. There are also some open board positions available if you are interested in helping make decisions and steer the direction of PA Nonbelievers.

***Atheist News in Pennsylvania – The Nation – The World***

**The High Cost of Intolerance**

There were lots of news accounts about the PA House of Representatives' court victory denying nontheists the right to give invocations before the House. But how much did the victory cost?

As reported on [www.pennlive.com](http://www.pennlive.com), the House (i.e., PA taxpayers) paid the law firm of Stradley Ronan **\$1.1 million** to defend their exclusionary policy.

When asked about the large amount of money spent, Speaker Mike Turzai responded, "As Speaker of the House, we were going to defend the longstanding tradition of beginning the legislative day with a prayer." He refused to answer any more questions about the cost – including whether other members of the House were aware of how much the defense cost.

PennLive asked Deana Weaver, a member of Dillsburg Area Freethinkers and one of the plaintiffs in the suit, for her reaction. "Our money is easy for them to spend and our opinions are just as easy for them to negate. Ain't that a shame...I would like to be flattered that it was just so important to them to keep me quiet because that means that what I have to say is of value."

Turzai had been using other House members to offer the invocation while the lawsuit was being heard. He wasted no time after the victory in inviting religious figures again. On October 21, a guest chaplain, U.S. Navy Mid-Atlantic Region Force Chaplain Capt. Glen Wood offered an opening prayer.

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**Progress on PA Statute of Limitations**

The Pennsylvania legislature finally caught up to other states, and passed legislation eliminating the statute of limitations in child sexual abuse cases, and increasing the time victims have to sue, according to the Philadelphia *Inquirer* ([www.inquirer.com](http://www.inquirer.com)).

These reforms are a two-step process, and it will be years before they are complete. One of the recommendations in the grand jury report on sexual abuse was that a two-year window be opened to allow adult victims to sue retroactively. This change requires an amendment to the PA Constitution. The legislature approved a constitutional amendment allowing this window. However, the rules require that it be approved by the legislature again next year, and then it is presented in a referendum to voters.

The new, non-constitutional-amendment reform eliminating the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse crimes will happen more quickly. It also allows victims who were sexually abused at age 23 or younger to sue their abusers until they turn 55; currently the age limit is 30. Gov. Tom Wolf is expected to sign the law.

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**Non-Religious Recovery**

Non-religious people looking for addiction recovery options are sometimes put off by the religious slant of some 12-step programs.

SMART Recovery is a secular, science-based program for those looking for help in fighting addiction. Its website, [www.smartrecovery.org](http://www.smartrecovery.org), explains its philosophy: *Self-Management And Recovery Training (SMART) is a global community of mutual-support groups. At meetings, participants help one another resolve problems with any addiction (to drugs or alcohol or to activities such as gambling or over-eating). Participants find and develop the power within themselves to change and lead fulfilling and balanced lives guided by our science-based and sensible 4-Point Program®.*

The 4-Point Program, which SMART Recovery describes as “self-empowering,” is as follows:

1. Build and Maintain Motivation
2. Cope with Urges
3. Manage Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviors
4. Lead a Balanced Life

A few years ago, there weren't many SMART Recovery meetings in Central PA, but that's changed. Meetings are available in York, Hanover, Harrisburg, Camp Hill, Chambersburg, Mechanicsburg, Newport, Lancaster and Waynesboro at various days and times. Some of the meetings – for example, the ones in York – are held under the auspices of other addiction recovery programs. Specific information about in-person and online meetings can be found at the website. It's great that Central PA has an option for secularists seeking help.

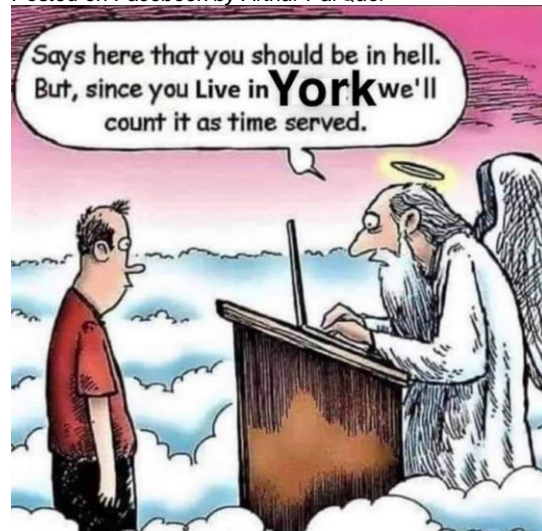
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### Who You Gonna Call?

Think living in Central PA means you don't have access to first-class paranormal detectives? Think again!

The Dover Paranormal Research Team is ready to help. Here's how they describe themselves, at <https://dover-paranormal-research-team-1.ueniweb.com>: *Are paranormal phenomena occurring around you? Need help? Come to Dover Paranormal Research Team, a team of highly capable paranormal investigators. It does not matter if you think something is trivial or major. Putting your worries at ease is our responsibility. We will thoroughly investigate the specified area using the latest equipment and techniques.*

Posted on Facebook by Arthur ParQuer



The website claims to provide “video” evidence, to prove they aren't conning people. They just want to help, according to the York *Dispatch*, [www.yorkdispatch.com](http://www.yorkdispatch.com). The team recently investigated a York bookstore, the York Emporium, as part of the Emporium's annual Halloween Celebration, Horrible Saturday. On two different occasions, they brought their special equipment to the bookstore. The equipment includes a K-2, which they say detects electromagnetic fields; a motion sensor, cameras, and audio recorders. Guess what! They found that the Emporium is haunted.

Two spirits were discovered, the team said. One appeared to be a young man, whom they heard saying “help” on a “spirit box.” Spirit boxes switch quickly between AM radio stations. Donna Golob, a member of the Dover group, claims that because it cycles through radio stations quickly, it doesn't pick up any interference from the stations. Another researcher explained that the man said he died in a fire, in the early 1900s. There is no record of a fire at the site, ever, but paranormal researchers

are hard to discourage. Maybe the fire occurred elsewhere, and the spirit is visiting, Jessi Unger posited.

Store patrons have reported seeing a lady in white, reaching for a book, in the past. It's not surprising that the investigators detected her as well.

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### India Continues Down a Hindu Path

India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party have made no secret of their desire to make India an openly Hindu country. According to [www.apnews.com](http://www.apnews.com), a recent court decision has given them a major victory. India's Supreme Court agreed that land on which a Muslim mosque had stood was in fact the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram, and that therefore Hindus were entitled to build a temple there. Muslims would be given an alternative site on which to rebuild their mosque.

This issue has been a matter of serious dispute in India for more than 100 years. Muslims had built the Babri Masjid mosque on the site in the town of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1992, a Hindu mob destroyed the mosque, and the resulting violence led to 2,000 deaths.

Building a temple to the god Ram on this land was a major goal of Modi and the Bharatiya Janata party. The judges ruled that the 1992 destruction of the mosque was "in violation of the status quo orders of this court." However, they did not penalize anyone who was involved with the destruction, including top leaders of the Bharatiya Janata party, who were present when it happened.

The judges' decision stated that the Hindu belief that Ram was born on the site "is undisputed."

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John Bilgard The Official Zombie Jesus Fan Club



### Mysterious Ways

Rapper Kanye West knows why he received a \$68 million tax refund. The Trump tax cut? No, of course not. It's because he is "in service to Christ."

According to the blog [www.patheos/blogs/progressivesecularhumanist.com](http://www.patheos/blogs/progressivesecularhumanist.com), reports Kanye told tv host James Corden, on Carpool Karaoke, that God is using Kanye to "show off." He explained, "Last year, I made \$115 million and still ended up \$35 million in debt. This year, I looked up, and I just got \$68 million returned to me on my tax returns. And people say, 'Oh, don't talk about these numbers.' No, people need to hear someone that had been put into debt by the system talk about these kind of numbers now that they're in service to Christ."

Kanye has been hitting a lot of religious marks lately. He gave a "worship service" at the Harris County (TX) jail. Andrew Seidel, Director of Strategic Response for the Freedom From Religion Foundation ([www.ffrf.org](http://www.ffrf.org)) objected, noting that West's service was a "constitutional violation" which "is particularly egregious because it imposed religion on inmates -- literally a captive audience."

Kanye also performed at a service at Joel Osteen’s megachurch. Osteen interviewed Kanye, and he has some interesting things to say. Here’s a sample, courtesy of the Los Angeles *Times* ([www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com)): “You start to feel like Satan is the most powerful, and you start to feel like if you service God, that in life it means you will not prosper, and the only way to prosper is in service to fame.”

“Now the trend, the shift is going to change. Jesus has won the victory — I told you about my arrogance and cockiness already. Now the greatest artist that God has ever created is now working for him.”

For those *PANViews* readers unfamiliar with him, Kanye West is an extremely successful American rapper, singer, songwriter, record producer, entrepreneur, and fashion designer. He’s also controversial, given to odd pronouncements. He is married to Kim Kardashian, and they have four children: Saint, Psalm, North and Chicago West. In addition to recently becoming aggressively Christian, he is a fan of Donald Trump. His friendship with the president culminated with a strange, rant-filled meeting in the Oval Office, leaving the president and all the other attendees looking confused.

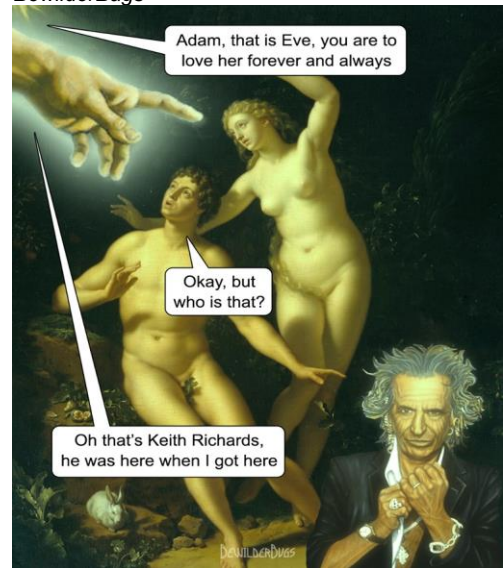
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### Now We Know

Many people wondered why Donald Trump removed US troops from Syria. Anne Graham Lotz (daughter of Billy, sister of Franklin) thinks she knows why. It’s all about the last days.

According to [www.christianheadlines.com](http://www.christianheadlines.com), Lotz explained her thought process while appearing on “The Jim Bakker Show.” She admits that she was puzzled by the withdrawal at first. “But because I believe God has used him, whether he really knows it or not, I believe like King Cyrus or others in the Old Testament, Nebuchadnezzar, God uses them. So I thought, has God caused him to go against all his advisers, all the military people, and done something that God wanted him to do—whether he knows it’s God or not, maybe he’s just bullheaded or stubborn or somebody rubbed him wrong?”

*BewilderBugs*



But then she thought about Ezekiel 38, which prophesies about a future battle: “There is a war that is predicted, that has never happened. When Gog, the prince of Magog—who some people believe is Putin in Russia—they come down from the north and they align with Turkey and Syria ... and the Sudan and Libya and then they come up and they go against Israel. Ezekiel 38 says, ‘God has done it,’ because He’s bringing them against Jerusalem because He is going to judge them and He’s going to destroy them.”

So, she thinks, maybe God inspired Trump to move US troops, so that the Russians can come right down? Anne says yes: “Then a friend who is in the news business sent me a picture of our American base in northern Syria that, the day after we left, was filled with Russian troops and they had moved into our base. They are now in northern Syria. So, I’m just wondering if it’s like a chessboard and if the pieces are being moved to set up maybe the last of the Last Days.”

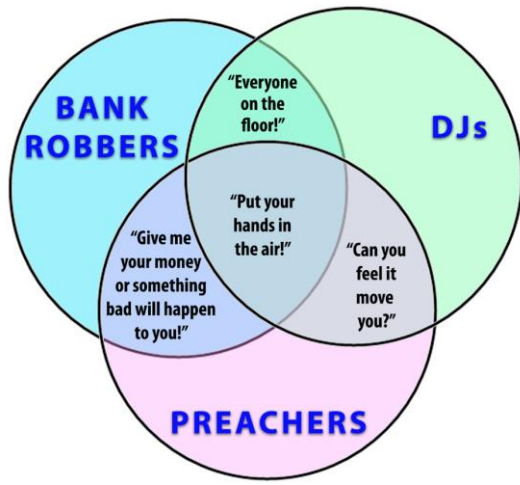
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Mrs. Betty Bowers, America's Best Christian

### Your Conscience v. Our Rights

The Trump administration issued a rule that expanded existing Federal "conscience rules." Conscience rules allow medical personnel to refuse to perform health care services that conflict with their religious beliefs. The expansion gave this same right to people who counsel, refer, train or make arrangements for treatments, and included medical laboratories and pharmacies.

The Associated Press, [www.apnews.com](http://www.apnews.com), reports that a federal judge has struck down this expansion. US District Judge Paul A. Engelmayer pointed out that this could damage emergency care – receptionists or elevator operators could refuse to participate in helping patients who need procedures the employee disapproved of.



Venn Diagram of Preachers, DJs, and Bank Robbers.  
— with [Eliza Beth](#).

Engelmayer also objected to the one of the US Health and Human Services Department's rationale for the expansion. HHS claimed that there had been a "significant" increase in employees complaining about having to violate their consciences. The judge called that "flatly untrue," and called the rule a "solution in search of a problem."

The current administration hasn't given up on instituting religious preference, though. It's proposed another new rule that would allow faith-based foster care and adoption agencies to keep federal funding even if they use their religious beliefs to exclude participants. LGBT families are the ones most often excluded, although a Christian agency recently excluded a Catholic family.

Religious-based agencies have typically turned the requirement that they not discriminate on its head, claiming that the requirement hurts children by limiting the number of foster care and adoption agencies. They do not acknowledge that it is faith-based prejudice that reduces the number of available agencies.

Predictably, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops was happy with this new rule, stating that the Obama-era rule forcing them to serve all families was unfair and served no one, "especially the children in need of those services." Family Research Council President Tony Perkins was enthused as well: "Thanks to President Trump, charities will be free to care for needy children and operate according to their religious beliefs and the reality that children do best in a home with a married mom and dad."

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### Holiday Story

What would the December issue of *PANViews* be without a War on Christmas story?

According to the Milwaukee *Journal*, [www.jsoline.com](http://www.jsoline.com), a big fight emerged in the Wisconsin legislature. Over highways, or farmers, or taxes? Of course not. What are they going to call the big green tree in the capitol rotunda?

60 Republicans and 4 Democrats voted to call it a Christmas tree. The Republican lawmakers who sponsored the resolution claimed that it's traditional to honor the Christian faith during the holidays (but they have a menorah, as well.)

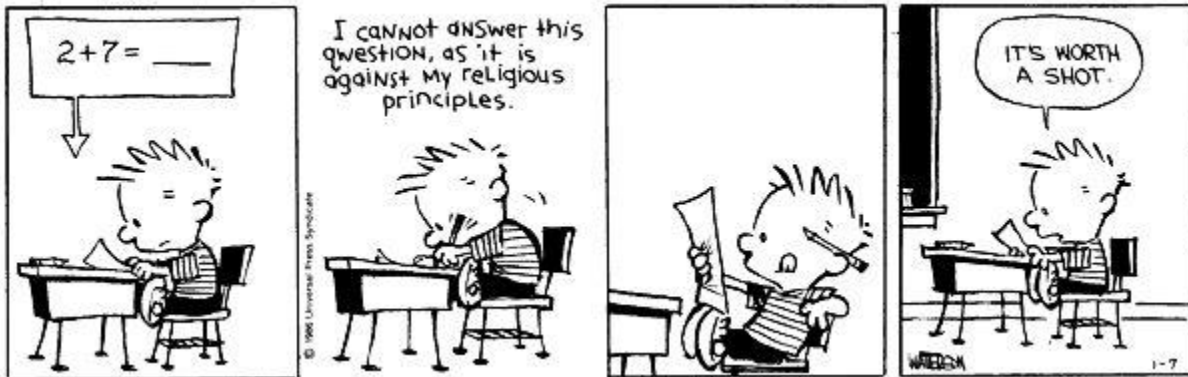
Democrats responded that insisting on calling it a Christmas tree would just divide Wisconsinites.

"I grew up in a world where it was made clear to me time and time again that I was in the minority religion," said Rep. Lisa Subeck, a Democrat from Madison who is Jewish. "That said, I also know what sits in the middle of this rotunda is a Christmas tree. ... We know we are not in the majority religion. You don't need to beat that into our head again and again and again."

The resolution was a reaction, mostly by Republicans, to Democratic Gov. Tom Evers asking students to send in ornaments for the capitol's Holiday Tree. While Republicans have complained about using the "Holiday Tree" name, it was in fact what the tree had been called in the past, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, before Republican Scott Walker was elected governor.

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Supplied by Jacob Zentichko



### Don't Confuse Them With Facts

The Ohio House of Representatives has taken the next logical step in the bogus war to preserve religious rights. Now, it appears, students' school assignments, even ones in science courses, don't have to align with actual facts, when faith-based answers disagree.

*The Huffington Post*, [www.huffpost.com](http://www.huffpost.com), reports on the Ohio Student Religious Liberties Act of 2019, which just passed, 61-31. The stated reason for the bill was to protect public school students' rights to express their religious beliefs at school. But part of the bill goes a little farther: schools can't "penalize or reward a student based on the religious content of a student's work." The bill says that students' right to religious expression includes homework, artwork and other assignments. It adds that grades must be awarded "using ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance, including any legitimate pedagogical concerns."

What does that mean? Some people – for example, Ohio House Minority Leader Emilia Strong Sykes - think that the bill would allow students to reference Noah's Ark as an actual historical event, for example. Gary Daniels of the Ohio ACLU notes that the ACLU supports religious liberty, but considers this law redundant, since religious rights are protected by the First Amendment and the Ohio Constitution.

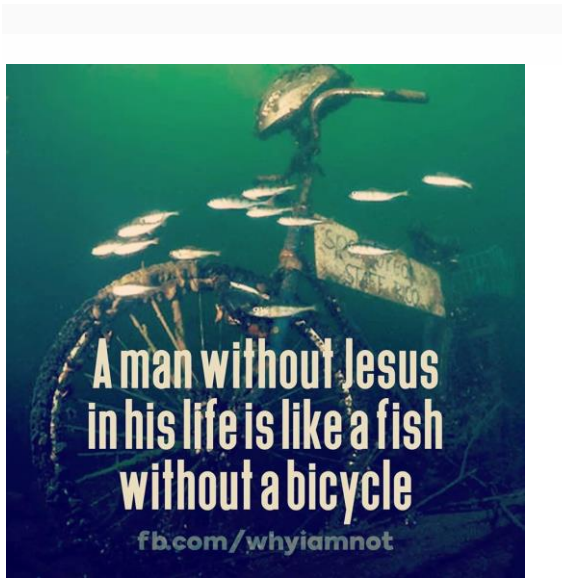
Daniels points out that another part of the bill requires that religious students must be allowed the same opportunity to express their beliefs as secular students. What if a group of students puts together a suicide prevention assembly, from a clinical perspective? He wonders if that means religious students could insist on offering a suicide prevention seminar where the only advice was to turn to God.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Timothy Ginter, claims that the reaction to this legislation is based on "urban myths." He says, for example, that students in a class on evolution would have to

demonstrate that they understand the subject, as it was taught. On the other hand, if a student were assigned to write a book report on a book of their choice, a report on a religious book would be acceptable.

Ginter says he wrote the legislation because groups “biased against Ohio students’ religious freedoms are pressuring the schools...Many school officials are confused and frankly, intimidated by the threat of litigation from these well-funded groups.”

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### Abortion, Birth Control Are All That Matter

Two recent incidents confirm the Catholic church’s creepy obsession with sex and birth control.

Kansas is considering expanding Medicaid coverage for 150,000 low-income residents under the terms of the Affordable Care Act. Not so fast, the Catholic bishops of Kansas say. In a statement reprinted at [www.catholiccharitiesswks.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesswks.org), the bishops stress that they think expanding coverage would be great – except that Medicaid covers “contraception, sterilization, drugs that may induce abortion, and even, in rare cases, a small number of abortion procedures.”

The statement concludes by saying, “At a time when the federal government is coercing people to violate their consciences and religious teachings in order to participate in religious or charitable endeavors, it is difficult to embrace it further as a partner in providing health care.”

The editors of the Kansas City *Star* ([www.kansascity.com](http://www.kansascity.com)) responded. The editorial explains that the bishops want the state legislature to pass anti-abortion legislation, and a constitutional amendment specifying that, contrary to a Kansas Supreme Court ruling last year, abortion is not a right under the Kansas constitution. The bishops will oppose the Medicaid expansion unless the new law and constitutional amendment are passed.

One problem, the editorial points out, is that a constitutional amendment wouldn’t be on the ballot for at least another year – which means 150,000 people would have to wait for health care. “And then they continue to wonder why critics accuse them of being not so much ‘pro-life’ as ‘pro-birth,’” the editors say.

Joe Biden recently fell victim to the Catholic abortion obsession. A priest in South Carolina refused to give him communion. According to [www.apnews.com](http://www.apnews.com), the priest, Rev. Robert Morey issued a statement explaining that his decision was based on Biden’s support for abortion, something Morey said the church cannot condone. Former Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry and vice-presidential candidate Tim Kaine, both Catholics, also were occasionally denied communion because of abortion.

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**Identity Issue**

A federal court has ruled that Kentuckian Ben Hart may buy a personalized license plate reading “IM GOD.”

Hart originally applied for the license plate in 2016, according to [www.ffrf.org](http://www.ffrf.org). Kentucky has previously approved of other religious-themed plates, but called Hart’s request “obscene or vulgar.” The commonwealth later moderated their tone, calling it merely “not in good taste.”



The FFRF and the ACLU jointly challenged the denial. The US District Court for the Eastern District of Kentucky agreed that the restriction made no sense, given some of the license plates Kentucky had previously permitted. “To allow such plates as ‘IM4GOD’ and ‘LUVGOD’ but reject ‘IM GOD’ belies viewpoint neutrality,” the court noted.

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**#ChurchToo**

A movement using the above hashtag has begun in Protestant churches. The participants hope to encourage women, particularly those in conservative or evangelical churches, to tell their stories of sexual abuse in the church.

The #ChurchToo movement has gained some momentum recently through a scandal involving Evangelical comedian John Crist. He had a Netflix comedy special, *I Ain’t Praying for That*, scheduled to premiere on Thanksgiving, and a book deal with a Christian publisher. He has over 526,000 YouTube followers, and one of his videos, “Christian Mingle Inspector,” had over 2.8 million views. (Christian Mingle is a Christian dating site.)

But then *Charisma News* ([www.charismanews.com](http://www.charismanews.com)) published an expose, stating that Crist had tried to force women to have sex with him. As a result of the article, the Netflix special and his book deal was canceled, as were some prospective tour dates. Crist apologized, although he also said that he was not guilty of everything he’d been accused of.

*Charisma News* published an editorial about why it printed the article. It claims that non-religious people might not see what Crist did as that serious, but as Christians, “We know there are always consequences to sexual sin, whether we see it as a “big deal” or not.” The women in the *Charisma News* story are identified by pseudonyms, which some other journalists criticized. *Charisma News* defended that decision: “But I felt we needed to use pseudonyms to protect our sources from harassment or criticism from the parts of the Christian community who would side with Crist.”

An article on [www.thecut.com](http://www.thecut.com) points out that it may be easier for Crist to reclaim his career than it has been for other accused performers. After all, what he did is a sin. And God forgives sinners.

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# PAN News & Update

**After December, the York meeting will no longer be held at the UUCY. We are looking for ideas to revive this PAN group – would another day of the week or time be more attractive? Please email [mpz224@comcast.net](mailto:mpz224@comcast.net), or leave a message on Facebook, with suggestions.**

**Meetings** - For more details about our meetings, go to [www.panonbelievers.org](http://www.panonbelievers.org), or find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers](https://www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers).

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

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

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

Lancaster – No December meeting

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

Reading – Second Wednesday of the month, December 11, 6:00 pm, Oakbrook Brewing Company, 628 Park Ave., Reading

York – First Saturday of the month, December 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](http://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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