

November 2019

PANViews



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

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Follow us on Twitter @panonbelievers

President's Report

Josh CruverKibi

PA Nonbelievers cannot endorse specific candidates due to being 501(c)(3). However, that does not preclude us from suggesting that you should vote your conscience this next Tuesday, November 5th. This upcoming vote will primarily be for local judges, an amendment to the constitution, school boards, county seats, and whether to retain current judges, which can be fairly consequential.

For example, some of the local judge placements will be for up to 10 years if voted in. But to effectively vote your conscience you will need to do your research on your local candidates. As rationalists, it makes sense to educate ourselves to make our most informed and logical vote. Through my research, I have come to find that some of the judges on my local ticket have registered as Republicans and Democrats despite their websites listing their policy positions being for the opposite party. They may be running cross ticket hoping and expecting that many people will vote straight party tickets or not research them to find out what they plan to do when they are voted in. Another reason to not vote straight party is that there might be a candidate that you like in a different party besides your preferred party.

Please take some time to check your local ballots and research your candidates to make your most informed choices. Most candidates have their own website, but it is hard to research a candidate if you do not know who is on the ballot. One resource for researching ballots and your candidates is 'Vote411'. Also, some Pennsylvania counties have sample ballots available on their website.

It is also time for our 2020 PA Nonbelievers Membership Drive! 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. We'll be bringing copies to our meetings over the next few months.

Your membership helps us continue to do the work we do on behalf of Atheists, Agnostics, and Humanists in central Pennsylvania. There continues to be a need for a sense of community, for education, secular awareness, and rational and critical thinking in our atheist humanist rational community and also in the Central Pennsylvania community at large. Please continue to help support our community through PAN membership and participation in our monthly meetings, tabling events, and social outreach events.

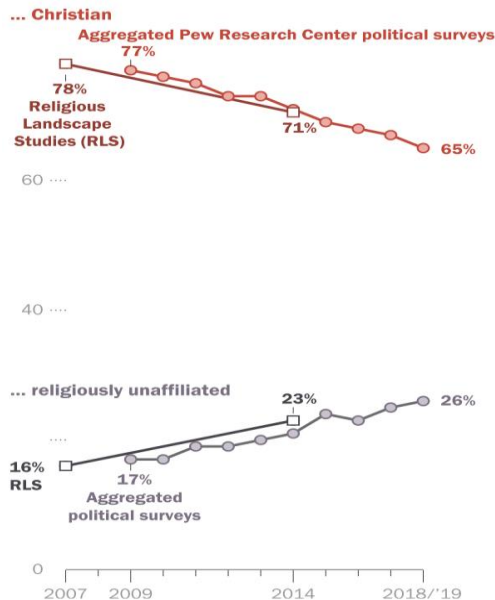
Membership also gives you the right to vote in PA Nonbelievers elections in the spring.

Atheist News in Pennsylvania – The Nation – The World

It's Not Just That We're Winning

In U.S., smaller share of adults identify as Christians, while religious 'nones' have grown

% of U.S. adults who identify as ...



Source: Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Studies (2007 and 2014). Aggregated Pew Research Center political surveys conducted 2009-July 2019 on the telephone.
 "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace"
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

It's that the Christians are losing. The information in the above Pew Research Center survey has been widely distributed, with much discussion about what it means.

"Nones" at 26% is not a big surprise. They have been the largest individual belief subset for a few years, outpacing Catholics.

The newsworthy part of this survey is the large drop in the number of Christians, going from 77% in 2009 to 65% in 2019.

The conservative group Focus on the Family, www.focusonthefamily.com, doesn't think that Pew's results are all bad news. It points out, "In 2007, largely half of all Protestants (51%) identified as evangelical, whereas

today, 55 percent of all Protestants identify as evangelicals."

FOTF is clearly on the evangelical team, buying into paranoia about how they are described in the media. The article notes the decline in mainstream Protestantism, and goes on to say: "What about other Protestants, such as evangelicals? Well, these are the rigid, judgmental, busy-bodied fundamentalists who of late have become both hateful and bigoted. We know this because the elites in New York, Los Angeles and Washington DC keep telling us so...repeatedly."

Another Pew survey makes it clear that, paranoia notwithstanding, evangelicals have as much to worry about as other Christians sects. It shows 36% of Americans ages 18-29 as nones – and only 20% of them as evangelicals. From ages 30-49, the percentages are tied, at 25%. (For the record, it's 28% evangelicals to 17% nones from ages 50-64, and 29% evangelicals to 12% nones over age 65). The wave is going our way.

Another Church Embezzlement

Another church has reported that a trusted employee has stolen a large amount of money from it. As always, *PANViews* wonders, where did all the money come from, and why didn't anybody notice?

A husband and wife have been charged with stealing almost \$1 million from a Pittsburgh area church, Westminster Presbyterian, according to www.wpxi.com

David Reiter was the church's administrator and stole the money over about 10 years. Reiter actually went so far as to impersonate an auditor in a telephone conversation when church officials finally started to catch on. The Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette*, www.post-gazette.com, reports that Reiter confessed to the church pastor that he stole \$500,000 to

\$530,000, and that he wanted to resign. Reiter (who deposited the money in an account in both his and his wife's name) wasn't even honest in his confession. Later, he admitted that he also stole \$100,000 from the church's Early Childhood Education Program. When the theft was discovered, the program had 58 cents in its bank account. He also failed to pay the church's payroll taxes.

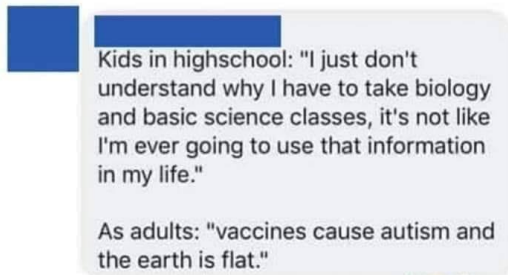
Why did they steal the money? Medical expenses? Unexpected family tragedy? Not exactly. The *Post-Gazette* said that the Reiters used the funds for trips to Disney World, Cedar Point and Hershey Park, as well as music lessons, sporting goods and baseball school.

Connie Reiter complained to reporters that she and her children are being harassed.

Church officials note that as Christians they believe in forgiveness. However, they want the Reiters prosecuted, at least in part because they want to rebuild confidence among donors that their contributions are going to good causes. The church did not have insurance, and Reiter was not bonded.

A judge has signed a restitution order in the amount of \$1,227,423.

From Andy Slater's Photos



A Bible for a Killer

After Dallas police officer Amber Guyger was convicted of murdering her neighbor, Botham Jean, observers were surprised that his brother hugged her. Atheists were surprised and appalled when the judge, Tammy Kemp, gave her a Bible.

Here's what Kemp said, after handing Guyger a Bible. *I have three or four more at home. This is the one I use every day. This is your job for the next month. Right here. John: 3:16. And this is where you start, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." He has a purpose for you. This will strengthen you. You just need a tiny mustard seed of faith. You start with this. It's not because I'm good. It's because I believe in Christ. I'm not so good. You haven't done as much as you think you have, and you can be forgiven. You did something bad in one moment in time. What you do now matters.*

Even some religious people were struck by Kemp's sympathy for a police officer who had, let us remember, just been convicted of murder.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, www.ffrf.org, filed a complaint with the Texas State Commission on Judicial Conduct, making the obvious point that government employees cannot use their office to preach. In a letter to the Commission, the FFRF notes, *it violates the constitutional separation between state and church for a sitting judge to promote personal religious beliefs while acting in her official capacity. She was in a government courtroom, dressed in a judicial robe, with all of the imprimatur of the state, including armed law enforcement officers, preaching to someone who was quite literally a captive audience. Delivering bibles, bible studies and personal witness as a judge is an abuse of power.*

The FFRF agrees that compassion is an important part of the judicial system, but says "here compassion crossed the line into coercion." The letter concludes by asking the Commission to educate Kemp on the necessity of keeping her religious views out of the courtroom.

The Fight Against Conversion Therapy

Currently only 18 states have banned "conversion therapy." Pennsylvania isn't one of them.

Wikipedia defines conversion therapy as the pseudoscientific practice of trying to change an individual's sexual orientation from homosexual or bisexual to heterosexual using psychological or spiritual interventions.

There's hope for Pennsylvania. House Bill 1293 would ban "mental health professionals from engaging in conversion therapy with an individual under 18 years of age." It is currently before the Health Committee. Primary sponsors are Brian Sims (Philadelphia County) and Gerald Mullery (Luzerne County).

Although it is still legal state-wide, 8 cities have prohibited the so-called "therapy:" Allentown, Bethlehem, Doylestown, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Reading, State College, and Yardley Borough.

The fight to ban conversion therapy seemed to be making progress in Utah, of all places, but the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (remember, they aren't Mormons anymore) has opposed a proposed rule against it.

The Salt Lake City *Tribune*, www.sltrib.com, reports on the issue. The state's Division of Occupational and Professional Licensing held a hearing, and LGBTQA advocates thought they had negotiated a compromise that the LDS church could live with, and even recruited two Republican legislators to sponsor the ban.

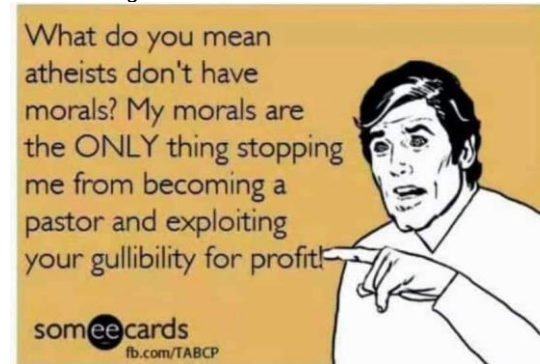
However, the agreement didn't hold. The Church says that it believes that members of the LGBTQA community deserve compassion and respect. However, it also said that, "We teach the right of individuals to self-determination and the right of parents to guide the development of their children. We also believe faith-based perspectives have an important and ethically appropriate role in professional counseling."

Not unsurprisingly, Equality Utah found the Church's statement "profoundly disappointing."

The conservative Eagle Forum of Utah was happy. A spokesman said, "Parents have a right to take their minor children to a therapist

and get real honest therapy from that therapist, not muffled conversation only affirming the child's concerns. I mean that's just wrong."

The Phil Ferguson Show



Falwell Strikes Again

Jerry Falwell, and his fiefdom, Liberty University, are open-minded when it comes to new hires in its sports department. Background issues that would make another prospective employer hesitate don't seem to trouble them.

According to www.slate.com, Liberty just hired Emily Austen as a sports anchor on the school's sports show, "Game On." Austen was fired by Fox Sports Florida in 2016. Her problem? Repeated racist remarks.

Here's a sample: Several times, Austen called Cleveland Cavaliers player Kevin Love a "little bitch," explained that the "Chinese guy is always the smartest guy in math class," and said she "didn't even know that Mexicans were that smart." She finished off by noting "Jews in Boca" who "bitched about everything" and were "stingy."

Austen was careful to toe the company line in the university statement announcing that she had been hired: "This is much more than a second chance at my 'dream career,'... I am here to honor God, share the Gospel through athletics, and promote Liberty student-athletes, coaches and staff and their walks with Christ."

Liberty's forgiving attitude allowed it to hire Ian McCaw in 2016. McCaw was the athletic director at Baylor University when it

attempted to cover up the sexual assaults committed by its athletes.

In 2018, Liberty hired Hugh Freeze, a loud and proud evangelical as its football coach, after the University of Mississippi fired him. Why? Moral turpitude. Turns out that Freeze made many calls to escort services on a university issued cellphone.

PANViews readers who are football fans have a hard decision coming up. On November 9, Liberty plays Brigham Young. Who to root for?

From For the Greater Glory of Science



It looks like you're writing about a science topic you don't understand. Would you like to quote from the Bible?

Another Problem with Catholic Hospitals

PANViews has written about the spread of Catholic hospitals before. Mergers have allowed Catholic organizations, often with non-religious sounding names, to take over secular hospitals. The new hospital then follows Catholic rules regarding abortion, tubal ligation, vasectomies, and end of life care, often leaving patients in small town or rural communities with no way to access those services.

NPR, www.npr.org, reports on another problem with Catholic hospitals. They are not covered by the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp. (PBGC), which protects pension plans. In 2017, the Supreme Court ruled that the pension plans of religious hospitals qualified as "church plans" exempt from federal pension rules.

The AARP Foundation estimates that approximately 1 million workers are covered

by pension plans sponsored by hospitals that have withdrawn from PBGC coverage. The pensioners of one such hospital, St. Clare's of Schenectady, NY, have filed suit over their terminated pension plan, which had a \$35.5 million dollar shortfall. More than 600 workers lost their pensions. A few older retirees were had their pensions reduced.

The suit names the Catholic Diocese of Albany, because of its involvement with the hospital. The Albany *Times-Union*, www.timesunion.com, points out that the bishop of Albany was a member of the hospital's pension board, and appointed 4 other members of the board. The hospital's pension board met at the diocesan office. The diocese has made sympathetic statements about the situation, but maintains it had no responsibility for managing the pension fund.

St. Clare's withdrew from the PBGC in 1995, receiving a refund of about \$88,000 in PBGC premiums. About 10 years ago St. Clare's merged with Ellis Hospital. St. Clare's says that it requested \$47 million from the state for the pension fund at the time of the merger, but only received \$28.5 million. It wasn't enough.

Biblical Mistakes

PANViews readers will not be surprised to learn that the Museum of the Bible has issues with the authenticity of some of its artifacts.

According to www.usatoday.com, the latest problem involved a miniature Bible that was supposed to be one of a handful a NASA astronaut took to the moon in 1971. An expert recently cast doubt on its authenticity.

Why, by the way, were miniature Bibles on the moon in the first place? Apparently, there was something called the Apollo Prayer League that arranged for Apollo 14 astronaut Edgar Mitchell carry tiny Bibles with him on his moon trip.

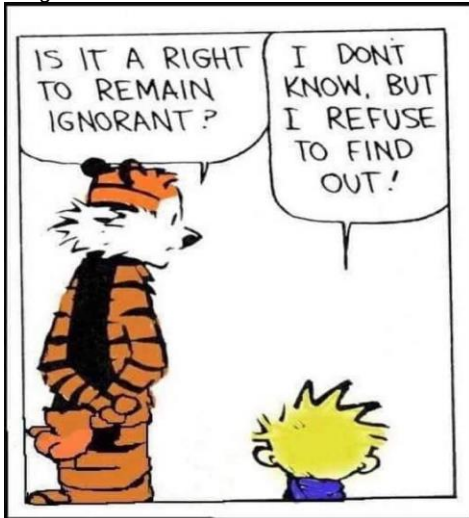
Last year, the Museum announced that at least 5 of the 16 Dead Sea Scrolls it had on display were apparently fakes. It is testing the 11 remaining fragments. National Geographic, www.nationalgeographic.com,

reports that the Museum, funded primarily by the Hobby Lobby's Green family, now concedes that its original acquisition practices were "too aggressive," and has hired a Biblical scholar to oversee its purchases.

Last year the Greens bought thousands of artifacts from Iraq, paying \$1.6 million. They turned out to have been smuggled out of Iraq. The Greens returned them and paid a \$3 million fine.

Not a big surprise that people who believe in the literal truth of the Bible would be easy fooled.

Greg Orme



Christian Giving

The National Christian Foundation is the eighth-largest nonprofit in the US, and describes itself as the largest Christian grant maker, and one of the largest donor-advised funds. As an article on www.newsweek.com explains, it's an excellent way for people to make anonymous contributions. Individuals can send tax-deductible contributions to the NCF, telling them to whom the money should be forwarded. No one else – not the recipient, or the IRS, for that matter – knows who is contributing the money.

To whom do their donors wish to give? Among others, the Alliance Defending Freedom, the organization that encourages municipalities to file suit over religious issues

that they won't win (without warning the municipalities they'll have to pay the winning side's legal fees when they lose). The article notes that most of the NCF contributions go to organizations that oppose LGBTQA rights, such as the Family Research Council. Anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant organizations receive money as well.

Since its founding in 1982, its website states that, since "we've mobilized more than \$11 billion for 63,000 charities through a giving platform that includes Giving Funds (donor-advised funds.)"

Bingo!

Catholic churches have used bingo as a fund-raiser for decades. While it might conjure up a warm picture of fun and friendship for some, there's a seamy underbelly to the supposedly harmless game.

The Cherry Hill, NJ *Courier Post* www.courierpostonline.com, reports on a game at the St. Maria Goretti Church Hall. Two women stepped forward to claim the prize for the same game.

Rev. Joseph Ganiel, the pastor, explains that there was a procedure in place to foil cheaters. (Note: They had a procedure in place?) Always doublecheck cards that have tape on them, by holding them up to a light, to make sure the same number shows through, front and back.

The volunteer did so and called the pastor over. He took one look at the card in question and called the cops.

Teresa Davis, age 71, and Keasha Brockington, age 38, were charged with violating a local ordinance against improper behavior. The pot they were trying to collect was almost \$200.

Rev. Ganiel notes that it's the first time they've had a problem in over 20 years of running the game.

Kentucky Loves That Bible

Kentucky governor Matt Bevin has a great idea. Students should participate in "Bring Your Bible to School Day." *US News & World Report*, www.usnews.com, explains that this foolishness is a project of our friends at Focus on the Family. As with all such activities, it is supposedly student-lead.

On a video released on Twitter, Bevin exhorts the students. "And I would encourage you please, don't just bring your Bible to school, but read your Bible. Bring it, share it with others. If you have an extra Bible, bring it and share it with someone who maybe doesn't have one, (who) maybe has never read this book."

In 2017 Bevin signed a law that made Kentucky the first state to offer Bible literacy classes in its public schools. Georgia and Arkansas soon followed. (In a separate article, *US News* ranks the states by the education they offer. Kentucky ranks 38th and Arkansas, 42nd. Georgia is 30th, but Pennsylvania can't be snobby about that; we're 32nd.)

President Donald Trump is a proponent of these religious classes. He tweeted in January, "Numerous states introducing Bible Literacy classes, giving students the option of studying the Bible. Starting to make a turn back? Great!"

Fortunately, it doesn't appear if Bible literacy classes are making much progress state-wide in Pennsylvania, although some individual school districts do offer these courses.

Married Priests?

There's been some breathless reporting that Pope Francis may soon approve married priests. Not exactly.

The story originated at the Special Assembly Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region, held at the Vatican. There is a severe shortage of priests in remote parts of the Amazon, even more than in other parts of the world.

According to the New York Times, www.nytimes.com, what the Synod wound up approving was a request to Pope Francis to study the possibility of ordaining married deacons to serve in this part of the world. (Deacons have been allowed to be married for many years.) There is no thought to allowing bachelor priests to marry.

In addition to allowing the Church to address the priest shortage, some speakers at the Synod said that the indigenous peoples of the Amazon region, who the priests are trying to convert, were puzzled by celibacy.

Another way to address the priest shortage would be to allow women to be priests, of course. That was not up for discussion, although the possibility of letting women become deacons was on the agenda. To no one's surprise, the bishops voted that idea down.

Lancaster Freethought Society



Christianity in the Classroom

Some Christian teachers don't understand that they can't bring their religion into a public-school classroom

The presence of LGBTQA students seems to be especially triggering. Chandler Unified School District in Arizona recently fired an art teacher for discriminating against a

transgender teenager and using her classroom as a platform for her religious views.

As reported on www.eastvalleytribune.com Annella Krom brought a box of Bibles to her classroom, and frequently discussed religion.

For example, she challenged a student who was pro-choice, giving the student a Bible, and encouraging to rethink her position.

When this student identified to Krom as atheist or agnostic, Krom lowered the student's grade. The school district's investigation agreed that the student's lack of religion was the reason the grade was changed. Krom also shared her opinion that gay students were "just confused," and refused to use the pronouns a transgender student requested.

The final straw came when she rejected a transgender student's proposed art project about the personal journey through transgenderism. Krom freely admitted that she rejected the project idea because it conflicted with her religious beliefs. She told the principal, "Either this topic is the priority or the word of God is."

The teacher gave the student a zero on the project. Krom wrote to the student. "I understand that you are probably unwilling to change your topic at this point, but I cannot

be forced to compromise convictions." Krom did not appeal her termination.

Another Argument for Vegetarians

Not impressed with the ethical or health-related reasons to become a vegetarian? Maybe this will motivate you. Rick Wiles, an "End Times" broadcaster, reveals the hidden truth about the vegetarian agenda on his show, "TruNews." As reported on www.rightwingwatch.com, the rise of vegetarianism is a satanic plot to alter human DNA. Wiles explains that food such as impossible burgers are fake food, produced in a laboratory. He goes on: "This is the nightmare world that they are taking us into. They're changing God's creation. Why? Because they want to be God."

And there's more: "God is an environmentalist. He takes this very seriously. He created this planet, he created the universe and he's watching these Luciferians destroy this planet, destroy the animal kingdom, destroy the plant kingdom, change human DNA. Why? They want to change human DNA so that you can't be born again. That's where they're going with this, to change the DNA of humans so it will be impossible for a human to be born again. They want to create a race of soulless creatures on this planet."

Too bad it's not true.

PAN News & Update

Volunteer and Activist Opportunities

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, November 22, 5:30 pm, Desperate Times Brewery, 1201 Carlisle Springs Rd.

Chambersburg – Third Tuesday of the month, November 19, 7:00 pm, Montezuma Mexican Restaurant, 1495 Lincoln Way East.

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

Lancaster – Fourth Wednesday of the month, November 27, 6:00 pm, Isaac’s Famous Grilled Sandwiches, 1559 Manheim Pike.

Lebanon - Second Wednesday of the month, November 13, 7:00 pm, Batdorf Restaurant, 245 W. Main St., Annville

Reading – Second Wednesday of the month, November 13, 6:00 pm, Oakbrook Brewing Company, 628 Park Ave., Reading

York – First Saturday of the month, November 2, 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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