

PANViews



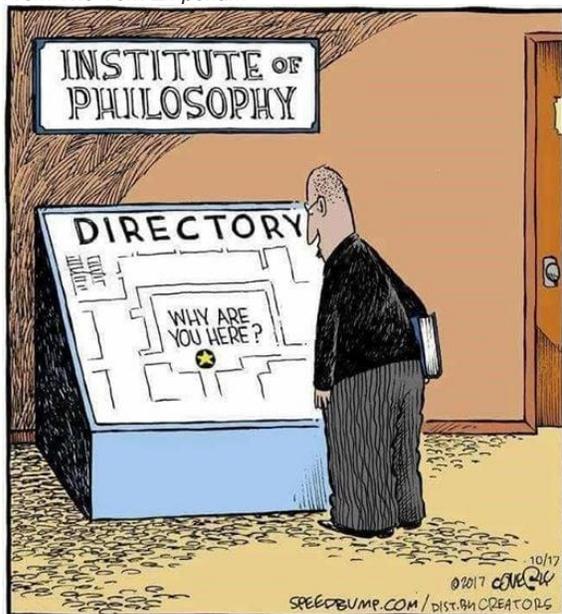
**Newsletter of PA Nonbelievers, Inc., affiliated with American Atheists,
Atheist Alliance International and the Council for Secular Humanism.**

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President's Report

Josh CruverKibi

From The York Emporium



Nearly all of the tabling events that PAN would typically attend have been cancelled and we are waiting for confirmation on just a couple more events. That is except for the annual Pride of the Susquehanna in Harrisburg, it is still on! It is scheduled for Sunday September 13th. There is a lot of open air outside space on the boat that we can practice safe social distancing, with masks. The Riverboat society reported that 25 people are able to be inside the boat and more people can be outside on the lower and upper deck. We need to give them a head count by Labor Day, so if you are interested in riding on the boat please let us know. This has been an annual event for years and is free. You can find out more information about the Pride of the Susquehanna and pictures of the boat on the <https://harrisburgriverboat.com/>.

Most of our meetings are still online via Zoom for the month of August. There are some meetings in person which will be posted on Facebook, Meetup, and in PAN Views. If you attend any in person PAN meetings for the month of August, we ask that members please practice appropriate social distancing guidelines. And of course, if you are feeling sick please be considerate of your fellow human's health and do not attend the event. You should quarantine and or seek medical intervention if you are feeling ill or have been potentially exposed to COVID-19.

Thank you for reading PAN Views and enjoy news assessed from an atheist perspective, comics, and activities.

Atheist News in Pennsylvania – The Nation – The World!

Money for Churches

The Paycheck Protection Act was meant to help businesses with fewer than 500 employees pay those employees while they were closed, due to the pandemic. Reuters (Reuters.com) and the Associated Press (apnews.com) have analyzed recently released data about who received the loans, and guess what? Not only did a lot of religious organizations receive money, many of them have more than 500 employees.

Reuters reports that thousands of religious organizations received a total of \$7.3 billion in aid from the Small Business Administration. The government only releases loan information by range, so precise loan amounts are not available. Among the stalwart Christians who received money, Reuters lists First Baptist Church of Dallas, whose pastor, Robert Jeffress, is a member of Trump’s evangelical advisory board, as receiving a \$ 2 million to \$5 million loan, and Joyce Meyer Ministries, previously investigated by the Senate because of its finances, as receiving a \$5 million to \$10 million loan. Televangelist Pat Robertson’s The American Center for Law and Justice Inc (also known as Christian Advocates Serving Evangelism Inc.), was approved for a \$1 million to \$2 million loan. Jay Sekulow, one of President Donald Trump’s attorneys, is listed as chief counsel on the organization’s website. All loans under this program are forgivable.



**I got \$1,200. You got \$1,200 (maybe).
Evangelical churches got \$7.3 billion.
I pay taxes. You pay taxes.
Churches pay no taxes.**

19 other religious organizations were approved for loans in the \$5 million to \$10 million category.

The Associated Press notes that some religious organizations, like Catholic dioceses received loans, even though they have far more than 500 employees. Religious groups successfully convinced the Trump administration to waive the rule limiting the number of employees. The Catholic Church received at least 3,500 forgivable loans, totaling \$1.4 billion in coronavirus aid.

Among the most spectacular examples, the Associated Press notes that the Archdiocese of New York received 15 loans worth at least \$28 million for its executive offices; St. Patrick’s Cathedral got at least \$1 million. The Orange County, CA, diocese, where a \$70 million glass cathedral just opened, was approved for 4 loans worth at least \$3 million. And the diocese for Wheeling-Charleston, WVA, was awarded at least \$2 million, despite a church investigation last year showing that the former bishop embezzled funds (and made advances toward young priests.)

The AP notes that the records the government released are far from complete. The government did not list recipients of loans less than \$150,000, where many churches would fall.

Religious? Discrimination's Okay!

After the Affordable Care Act went into effect, religious groups sued to keep from having to provide access to birth control. Now, the Supreme Court has upheld a Trump administrative regulation that allows any employer who states that it has a religious or moral objection to birth control to withhold coverage for it.

The New York *Times*, nytimes.com, reports that Pennsylvania and New Jersey challenged this regulation, stating that taxpayers in those states would wind up providing birth control to women whose employers opt out.

From Cracked.com via Yen Liang Li Chen



The new regulation was much broader than the previous one. It allows an exception for employers “with sincerely held moral convictions opposed to coverage of some or all contraceptive or sterilization methods.” This includes private organizations, not just religious schools or hospitals.

According to the Pennsylvania *Capital-Star*, penncapital-star.com, PA’s Chief Deputy Attorney General Michael Fischer told the Supreme Court that the rule change would allow “virtually any employer or college to opt out of providing contraceptive coverage entirely, including for reasons as amorphous as vaguely defined moral beliefs.” And now they can.

Aid to Religious Schools? That's Okay, Too!

The Supreme Court struck again, effectively ending constitutional provisions in approximately 38 states that bar the use of tax money in parochial schools.

Npr.org explains that this case began in Montana, in 2015. Montana passed a bill allowing a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for donations to organizations providing scholarships to private schools. An organization, Big Sky, raised scholarship money for 13 schools, 12 of which were religious. The Montana Supreme Court struck down the program for all schools, religious or non-religious, ruling that the Montana constitution barred state aid to religious education, whether direct or indirect.

Chief Justice John Roberts, writing for the 5-4 majority, explained that "A state need not subsidize private education, but once it decides to do so it cannot disqualify some private schools because they are religious." Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg dissented, writing that because the Montana Supreme Court disallowed the entire program, it did not discriminate against religious schools.

Justice Samuel Alito concurred with the majority. He discussed the “baby Blaine amendments,” named after Senator James G. Blaine. In 1875 Blaine proposed a constitutional amendment to ban government aid to religious schools. It failed, but 38 states eventually passed similar state constitutional amendments. These amendments were mostly a hostile reaction to Catholic immigrations. While most of these state amendments were passed in the late 19th century, Montana’s constitution was rewritten in 1972.

The Trump administration had supported the challenge to Montana’s constitution. Press secretary Kayleigh McEnany stated: "The Trump administration believes that school choice is a civil rights issue, and that no parent should be forced to send their child to a failing school."

But Lily Eskelsen García, head of the National Education Association, disagreed: "At a time when public schools nationwide already are grappling with protecting and providing for students despite a pandemic and mounting budget shortfalls, the court has made things even worse opening the door for further attacks on state decisions not to fund religious schools."

How Encouraging!

Aborted Dreams, courtesy of Yen Liang Li Chen



The Vatican has taken another small step in its approach to sexual abuse by religious figures. It now encourages bishops to report such cases to authorities, even when it is not legally required to do so.

According to the *New York Times*, nytimes.com, the Vatican went even further, urging bishops to investigate claims that may be "doubtful," or that are made anonymously.

Many observers quickly noted that the rules aren't binding, and weren't made part of canon law. Essentially, they are suggestions.

It was only last year that bishops were required to report abuse allegations to their superiors, and until now, were only instructed to report abuse allegations to police or prosecutors when legally required to do so. Not all countries – or American states, for that matter – have such laws.

The Vatican also reaffirmed that crimes reported during confession cannot be reported, but advises the confessor to "seek to convince the penitent to make that information known by other means." In addition, the new rules also tell bishops that it's a bad idea to transfer accused priests to another location.

Advocates for abuse victims were predictably underwhelmed. The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priest (SNAP), which had called for mandatory reporting in the past, called these new rules "a step forward, but the smallest of steps."

Win One, Lose One

Most people were happy when the state of Mississippi eliminated the Confederate battle flag from its state flag. But religionnews.com noticed something else. The legislation removing the Confederate symbol contained this directive: "The new design for the Mississippi state flag recommended by the commission shall not include the design of the Confederate flag, but shall include the words 'In God We Trust'".

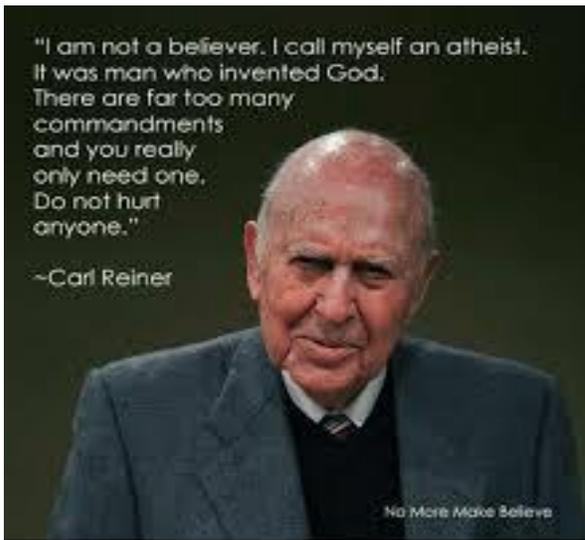
Ministers, and some politicians, claim that the phrase will unify Mississippians, adding it was the brainchild of two Mississippi politicians, Attorney General Lynn Fitch and Lt. Gov. Delbert Hosemann.

The Associated Press quoted Fitch's explanation: "It is my personal belief that it is time for us to change our state flag to reflect the love, compassion and conviction of our people. The addition of

'In God We Trust' from our state seal is the perfect way to demonstrate to all who we are." The state seal of Mississippi has included the phrase since 2014.

Americans United for the Separation of Church and State pointed out that it is commonly invoked by Christian nationalists. AU described deleting the Confederate flag while adding "In God We Trust" as "a white nationalist symbol for a Christian nationalist one." Sam Sokol, a policy advocate for AU, noted that adding the phrase on license plates and displaying it in public schools is a key goal for Project Blitz. Wikipedia describes Project Blitz as a coalition of Christian right groups, including the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, and Wallbuilders Pro-Family Legislators Conference. The group's mission is to "protect the free exercise of traditional Judeo-Christian religious values and beliefs in the public square, and to reclaim and properly define the narrative which supports such beliefs."

AU's Sokol further points out that 1 in 4 Mississippians identify as nonreligious. Regardless, it's more religious than most states; according a 2016 Pew Research report, it was tied with Alabama for religiosity. When all US states and territories are compared, it is surely a coincidence that Mississippi ranks 51st, and Alabama 46th, in percentage of college graduates.



Some Rights are Righter than Others

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo recently gave a speech at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia to announce the draft report by the Commission on Unalienable Rights that he established a year ago. In his speech Pompeo asserted that private property and religious freedom are more important than the other rights established in the US Constitution.

The Guardian, at theguardian.com, reports that Pompeo said that because some US and international organizations are asserting so many rights, these two most important rights are being diluted:

"Many are worth defending in light of our founding; others aren't." *The Guardian* notes that Pompeo did not say which rights were less important, but that under his leadership the State Department has aggressively opposed the mentioning of reproductive and gender rights in official UN and other documents.

The actual draft report stated that the authors could not agree on how human rights standards should be applied to issues like "abortion, affirmative action, and capital punishment, to name a few".

Pompeo's speech did not mention freedom of the press, and he in fact attacked the *New York Times*, claiming it expressed Marxism. He made his opinion quite clear: "America is fundamentally good, and has much to offer the world, because our founders recognized the existence of God-given unalienable rights, and designed a durable system to protect them. As the report emphasizes, foremost among these rights are property rights and religious liberty. No one can enjoy 'the pursuit of happiness' if you can't own the fruits of your labor! And no society can retain its legitimacy – or a

virtuous character – without religious freedom. Our founders knew faith was also essential to nurture the private virtue of our citizens.”

Jay Holland, via *Still Here? Silly Christians*



Racism and the Catholic Church

The US Catholic Church was linked to both slavery and segregation, but that history has been largely ignored in the curriculum of Catholic schools. According to the Associated Press, apnews.com, that may be changing.

The National Catholic Educational Association has formed a committee to see how this might be accomplished, following the lead of the archdioceses of Chicago and New Orleans, which have already called for more attention to be paid to Black Catholic history. For one thing, there's been a call for the NCEA itself to become more racially diverse.

There are about 3 million Black Catholics in the US, which is roughly 4% of the total number of Catholics. However, there are only 250 Black priests, less than 1% of the total 36,500 priests, and 8 Black bishops, 3.2% of the total 250 bishops. Xavier University in New Orleans is the only historically Black Catholic university.

Among the topics that are ignored in Catholic textbooks are the number of Catholic institutions that owned slaves. Last year, Georgetown University apologized for its slave owning history, and promised to provide financial help to the descendants of people it had enslaved. Charles Carroll of Carrollton, a Maryland resident, is lauded in Catholic schools as the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence, but those books rarely mention that he owned slaves.

Catholic schools were segregated in the South, although most of them desegregated before public schools did. For example, according to Wikipedia, St. Louis Catholic schools desegregated in 1947, Washington, DC schools in 1948, Tennessee schools in 1954, Atlanta in 1962, and Mississippi in 1965.

The NCEA noted that Catholic schools with a predominantly Black student body already learn some of this history. Shannen Dee Williams, a history professor at Villanova, has pushed to make this history part of the curriculum at all Catholic schools and seminaries: "Black Catholic history reminds us that the Church was never an innocent bystander in the histories of colonialism, slavery or segregation. Black Catholic history encourages us to acknowledge, confront and atone for this painful history."

There's One Born Every Minute

Peter Popoff is a resilient religious con artist. He's survived bankruptcy, and exposure as a scammer by Johnny Carson. (Turns out Peter knew his audience members' secrets because his wife whispered them to him using a hidden microphone.)

Popoff has been back for the last few years with TV commercials hawking "Miracle Spring Water." The website Truth in Advertising, truthinadvertising.org, originally published an expose of the Spring Water a few years ago. However, it now notes that Popoff has updated his webpage. The TV commercials show happy suckers explaining that they received huge amounts of money after anointing themselves with, or drinking the spring water.

Apparently, this imbibing concerned some lawyer because the website now has a warning in big red letters: "DO NOT INGEST THE MIRACLE SPRING WATER." Truth in Advertising notes that GQ had previously revealed that the water is actually Poland Springs water with a bit of holy water.

Popoff does not request a donation for the spring water; he's happy, he explains, to send it to anyone who asks, so that money will rain down on them. The website, however, says that there is "nothing magical or mystical" about the spring water.

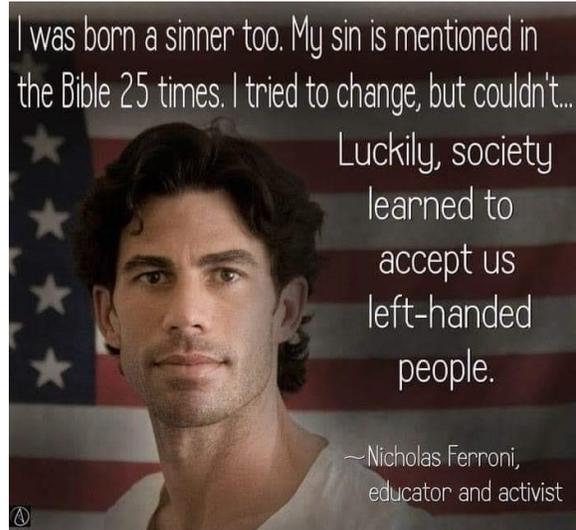
In its original article about Popoff, Truth in Advertising explains that it requested the water in October 2018. The water arrived, with a letter from Popoff, predicting that the recipient would soon receive money, "somewhere between \$1,900 and \$19,000. Oh, and by the way? Popoff requests \$19. Why that amount? The cover letter explained: "SEND EXACTLY \$19.00. Because 1 is the number of the Father ... and 9 is the number of NEW BIRTH." Truth in Advertising sent in the \$19.

A few weeks later it received a thank you note from Popoff, asking that it notify Popoff when the "bountiful Harvest of Great Blessings" arrived. At the time of article, it had been 5 months, but no money. (Presumably Truth in Advertising would have mentioned it if they had subsequently received an unexpected windfall.)

But Popoff hasn't forgotten. Truth in Advertising has received multiple requests for more money. It includes a sample:

- OBEY GOD IN SOWING A SEED OF \$27.00. If you have to borrow it, or let something go for a few days. . . DO IT! I SEE A NEW ENDEAVOR THAT WILL BRING MAGNIFICENT REWARDS IN 3 MONTHS FROM THE DAY YOU OBEY GOD IN THIS. (Bottom of page 7.)
- STEP 4 — Psalm 34:19 is the key to unlocking your MIRACLE PROVISION. Open your check book and write a check in the amount of \$34.19 and write "MY MIRACLE SEED" in the memo. If you want to sow a seed for a loved one, write a second check for \$34.19 and write "MIRACLE SEED for a loved one" in the Memo. If you send an additional

From Scott Rhoades



check, I will prophetically seek the Lord on their behalf — as well as yours. (Top of page 12.) (PANViews note: *PAGE 12!?!!*)

- ... I feel led of God as His Prophet of Prosperity... to ask you in Jesus' Name to sow a seed with the Number 8 in it ... and the seed God showed me is \$28.00. ... Don't let satan talk you out of sowing this \$28.00 SEED OF NEW BEGINNINGS... (Bottom of page 9.)
- Try and write back within 24 hours. There are further Prophetic Instructions I must share with you when I receive your "Worthy Portion" offering of \$33 and your prayer page back this week. (Middle of page 4.)
- As God's prophet of increase... I am directed to ask you to sow a seed of \$40.00. This is the seed God will use to break loose your harvest of miracles. (Middle of page 10.)

Popoff often sends tchotchkes with his letters: a green prayer cloth, which he says "saturate ... with positive thoughts of money windfalls and opportunities," and a wristband with several \$1,000s printed on it which is supposed to be worn for exactly 8 minutes.

The original Miracle Spring Water ad debuted in March 2016. As of the date of the original Truth in Advertising article in 2018, it had run more than 4,300 times, at a cost of \$6.3 million. The website celebritynetworth.com estimates Popoff's net worth at \$10 million.

Member Submissions

The following letter doesn't specifically address nonbelief, but Jim is exposing the attitude many central PA Christians have: I'm right, and I get to do what I want.

Wear Masks For Common Good

Jim Eshleman, published in LNP, July 5, 2020

Dear merchant:

If I enter your place of business and discover that you are not enforcing the "face covering required" directive, I will leave immediately, and never come back. My recourse might be to shop online.

When I read that someone, when asked to wear a mask, complains about an infringement of their rights, there is a ringing in my ears that goes back 60 years to elementary school. When a classmate resisted authority, I would often hear, "I don't have to do that – it's a free country." That immaturity has not waned.

No rights are absolute. They come up against the rights of others, or the rights of all of us (the common good.) You may have a right to own a gun, but not to murder anyone. You may have a car, but not stopping at red lights is illegal. You may own your property and a dozen tires, but burning them within municipal limits is not acceptable. And, of course, yelling "fire!" in a crowded theater when there is no fire cannot be permitted.

How incredibly minor is the imposition of wearing a mask if it means protecting those you love? Grow up and wear the mask.

Jim also sent in a letter the LNP printed from a seventh grader. The writer describes how mindfulness and healthy eating will help us get through the coronavirus. Harmless enough, if not

August 2020

especially original, but here is how she ends her essay: “Cast ALL of YOUR ANXIETY on HIM because he CARES FOR YOU.” – 1 Peter 5:7 “The Lord is my STRENGTH and my SHIELD; in him, my HEART TRUSTS.” – Psalms 28:7.

Wonder if she has ever considered why the Lord who cares for her allowed the pandemic to happen?

“Born Again?”

Priscilla Oppenheimer

Yes, our world has lately been turned upside-down, but some of us already live in a topsy-turvy world. Letter-writer to Lancaster newspaper today reports that James Dobson claims that our president is “born-again.” (I had not read that anywhere, but then again, I obviously read the wrong sources).

The letter-writer would rather be in the president’s shoes at the Last Judgement than those of the “sinner,” Biden, who is pro-choice, not to mention other dangerous “pro-’s.”

Let us be aware of the closer upcoming Judgement Day in November and trust that the born-again candidate will become a born-again civilian.

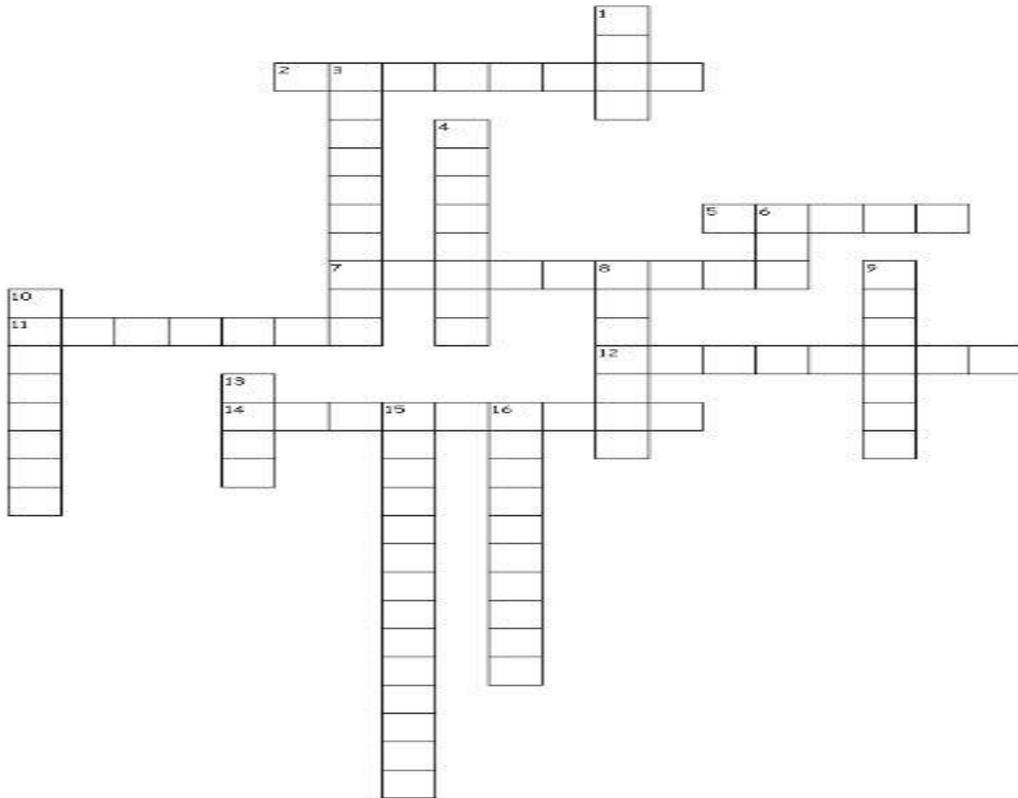


From Jeannie Hess

I found this old photo while scrolling through my photo application. I was a bit horrified when I took the photo back in 2010 in the Weis Market parking lot in Ephrata. What really horrified me was the people: a Mennonite lady with her two preschool girls, everyone dressed in flower print dresses. Such a contrast! Should little kids even be thinking about such a place as hell?

FUN!

Crossword courtesy of Josh CruverKibi



Across

- 2. acts for political or social change
- 5. _____ Lives Matter
- 7. lack of knowledge or information
- 11. view not necessarily based on facts
- 12. fair status, rights, opportunities
- 14. knowledge or perception

Down

- 1. face covering used to prevent spread
- 3. dishonest fraudulent conduct
- 4. reasonable or logical
- 6. purposefully deceive others
- 8. no belief in gods
- 9. practices of preventing disease
- 10. The longest day of the year
- 13. repeated replicated measured observation
- 15. personal duty or necessity
- 16. The day Juneteenth is celebrated

From cloudsfall



- | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1 = BLUE | 6 = ORANGE | 11 = GRAY |
| 2 = LIGHTER BLUE | 7 = RED | 12 = DARKER GRAY |
| 3 = GREEN | 8 = PURPLE | |
| 4 = LIGHTER GREEN | 9 = BROWN | |
| 5 = YELLOW | 10 = DARKER BROWN | |

Color in each number, find the dinosaur!

PAN News & Update

Meetings - For more details about our meetings, which will remain virtual on Wednesdays for the time being, find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers.

Here's where they are held, when we are able to have them in person:

Carlisle – Fourth Friday of the month, 5:30 pm, Hops and Barley, 398 North York Street, Mechanicsburg

Chambersburg – NEW MEETING DATE AND LOCATION: Second Thursday of the month, 7:00 pm, Montezuma Mexican Restaurant, 820 Wayne Avenue, Chambersburg. This restaurant has outdoor seating, so they will be meeting in person.

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

Lancaster – Fourth Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Centerville Diner, 100 S. Centerville Rd.

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

Reading – Third Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Oakbrook Brewing Company, 628 Park Avenue

York – First Sunday of the month, noon, I-ron-ic Coffee Shop and Art Boutique, 256 W. Philadelphia St.

How to Contribute to PAN

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 PA Nonbelievers, 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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