

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

March 2008

Special Points of Interest

Paul Storey Comments on the March General Meeting (page 1)

Flying Spaghetti Monster Costume Party—Arrrr (page 1)

Interested In Corresponding With Prisoners With a Naturalistic Worldview? (page 2)

Ken Nahigian Offers Up The Tale Of "The Great Disappointment" (page 4)

Susan Sackett of Star Trek fame to Speak in March at Humanist Association of Greater Sacramento Area (HAGSA) special event (page 7)

Standard Fare

AOF Line	2
Letters to the Editor	5
Adopt-A-Highway Event	6
Membership Form	6
Selected Community Events	6
Movie Night Announcement	7

Sunday, March 9, 1:30-4:00PM

Leaving Religion: The Highs and Lows of Non-Conformism

A Panel Discussion

Meeting Overview: The AOF meeting this upcoming second Sunday, March 9th, will feature a panel of five local people who were religious and decided to leave. All the panelists have different stories to tell, from different perspectives, and all of their experiences will be fascinating to hear. There will be time allocated at the end for others to share the stories of their own paths in "Leaving Religion".

Join us and bring your friends who may have a few doubts about their faith. This should be a really good meeting.

Perspectives on Leaving Religion

By Paul Storey

Some of us were born and raised in families where religion was not a big deal. Others of us were raised in families where religion was quite a serious matter, and we were very thoroughly immersed in the indoctrination of a belief system, by our parents, our siblings, our teachers and our friends around us. Those of us who were nurtured in the

(Continued on page 3)

Sunday, March 23, 3:00-6:00 PM

Flying Spaghetti Monster Party

By Brian Jones



Ahoy Mateys! Flying Spaghetti Monster Party, Sunday, March 23, 2008 (also known as Easter Sunday), 3-6 PM at the Common House of the Southside Park Cohousing Community, 434 T Street, Sacramento. To honor his noodliness, spaghetti, garlic bread, and more will be served and a costume contest will be held. Musical entertainment to be determined—pirate song karaoke? Program suggestions welcome. For more information about this event: Brian Jones, 530-756-8570, or e-mail fsm@hagsa.org. Suggested donation: \$3. Jointly sponsored by HAGSA (<http://hagsa.org>) and AOF (<http://aofonline.org>).

Editors note: The Flying Spaghetti Monster is the deity of a parody religion called The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster and its system of beliefs, "Pastafarianism". The religion was founded in 2005 by Bobby Henderson to protest the decision by the Kansas State Board of Education to require the teaching of intelligent design as an alternative to biological evolution. Links: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flying_Spaghetti_Monster; <http://www.venganza.org/>.

Committees, Co-mmittees, Committ-ees...

AOF Line

By Kevin Schultz

Committees are forming—won't you join us on an as-needed basis?

The AOF program committee has been resurrected and will meet on **Monday, March 10** for the first time to plan upcoming programs and activities. Mynga Futrell, Nancy Gilbert, and I have already volunteered to meet at Mynga's home on the 10th—it's always a fun activity to get involved in. We socialize as much as we plan, and it's a fun way to get involved in the organization—with very little time commitment. If you have any experience with organizing speakers or programs—we'd love to have you join us. You don't have to do anything beyond come and share your ideas. If you've enjoyed the programs AOF has offered in the past, we'd love to hear your thoughts on future activities.

Do you like to party, or know how to plan one? AOF's 15th Birthday is this year—we need volunteers to help with planning and organizing.

Also coming back from a hiatus is

The purpose of the organization, AOF, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community.

the AOF Reason House committee. Some of you may remember back to about five years ago when AOF, in partnership with the Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area (HAGSA), explored the idea of purchasing property to establish a permanent presence in the Sacramento community. Now that the housing bubble has burst, we've decided that the time may be right to begin anew. Former AOF president Don Knutson is on the committee and is looking for people to meet-up with to move this project forward to a point where we are ready to purchase. Opportunity favors the prepared, as the adage goes.

Last, but not least, can you help us with coordinating the **upcoming April 29 Davis Community Meals event?**

Thanks for considering both of these committees—wishing you all the best in the coming month. Your inputs make all the difference. More info: aofboard@aofonline.org.

Prisoners With a Naturalistic Worldview Seek Pen Pals

If you're over 18 and interested in communicating with a prisoner who holds a naturalistic worldview, please let us know.

Editors note: We suggest using a PO Box address (you can use AOF's), and of course only tell what you want them to know. Prisoners are just like people on the streets—there are some good and some bad. Always use common sense.

For more information, please e-mail aofboard@aofonline.org.

AOF Board (2007-2008)

President: Paul Storey

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Nancy Gilbert

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Alice Corley, Kay Dickey,

Don Knutson, Kevin Schultz,

Debora Smith

AOF Committees

Newsletter: Kevin Schultz (Editor)

Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

Freethought Day, Oct. 5, 2008

Beverly Church, Mynga Futrell, Carla Corbett, Kay Dickey, Jerry Sloan, Tom Ikelman, Kevin Schultz, Brian Krofchok

Darwin Day, Feb. 15, 2009:

Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell,

Dave Henderson, Ed McConnell,

Kay Dickey, Ken Nahigian,

Ad Hoc Committees:

Web Portal (Kevin Schultz, Richard

Langley); Alternate Meeting Place/

Time (Jerry Sloan, Ken Nahigian,

Kevin Schultz); Youth Outreach

(Jerry Sloan, Tina Burgess, Mynga

Futrell); Connections (Kevin

Schultz, Betty Simonsma); Growing

AOF Membership (Jerry Sloan,

Kevin Schultz)

Archive: Kay Dickey, Mynga Futrell,

Ken Nahigian, Betty Simonsma

AOF's Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons:

Mynga Futrell, Kay Dickey (AAI)

Hank Kocol (CSH)

Kevin Schultz (AA)

Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)

Community Service Projects:

Don Knutson

Internet Website: Kevin Schultz

Meetings: Dave Flanders, Ken Nahigian

Jerry Sloan, Betty Simonsma

Membership Database:

Ken Nahigian

We welcome additional involvement from AOF members. Right now we need volunteers to perform very small tasks at our meetings. Just phone the voice mail at **447-3589** if you can help us out. Or, send an e-mail to us at

aofboard@aofonline.org

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2009 To Mark 150- and 200-Year Anniversaries

Darwin Day Write-Up

By Mynga Futrell

Sacramento's 11th annual birthday gala honoring Charles Darwin took place on February 10th in Carmichael. Folks came from far and wide to attend the party...and to learn. Party-time it is—part “just fun, “along with a mild “mental workout.”

“The neighbors” from Roseville, Rio Linda, Granite Bay, Orangevale, Rocklin, Fair Oaks and Citrus Heights were there, of course, and so were folks from Davis, El Dorado Hills, and Dixon. But what if people came from as far away as Paradise, Grass Valley, Chico, and Truckee? Could Sacramento put on a party that would send such folks home, glad they took the time to come spend time indoors on such a beautiful, spring-like day?

According to feedback from a brief emailed survey sent out afterwards (answered by 12 of the 20 randomly selected persons who had provided their email addresses), the attendees overall were well-satisfied indeed.

One of the questions asked was this: “*What do you think - Was it worth coming?*” Each and every person answered the question, and answered it in the affirmative. With a quick copy and paste, I can quote them all here, punctuating their reply exactly as it was typed: “yes // Oh yeah! // yes // The speaker was great & so were the refreshments // I liked it! // It was worth coming to, for sure. // Definitely // I en-

joyed it very much // yes. it was fun & interesting // My girlfriend and i went (i made her come), and we both had a good time. // The speaker from SETI was very good // yes! // Yes.

And it was the speaker from SETI who was both the prime attraction and main reason for the expressed enthusiasm. It wasn't the fancy cake with all the different animals prancing across the icing that stole the show. Nor was it the “science songs” singer. It was Dr. Seth Shostak, whose presentation about detecting signals from outer space was so lighthearted and humorous.

The next day, the science writer for the *Sacramento Bee* briefly glossed the science information that puts the “educational” into the Darwin Day Educational Galas planned each year by our industrious DD committee. But, you really just had to be there to get the full enjoyment of the affair. (To read the *Bee* article, go to: <http://www.sacbee.com/303/story/702632.html>)

As one survey respondent remarked about this year's event: “I was especially pleased to note there were plenty of women in attendance. I had thought it might be a male-dominated thing, like so much science-related stuff is.” Another said, “I thought the speaker was outstanding and enjoyed the party too.”

(Continued from page 1)

God-centered mindset at one point had to experience a beginning of doubt. A question arose about the faith, religion, or God, which just did not seem right. To some of us, to doubt at all was the cardinal sin, because doubt was the force of evil at work in your mind, pulling you away from God. The bigger your doubt, the bigger your distance from God became. To think in a way you were expressly told not to think was especially difficult because God was the ultimate Big Brother. God could read your thoughts! To look deeper into your doubts, to start to place higher trust in your doubt than the dogma, constituted a severe trauma, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally and socially. You were questioning the authority of the creator of the universe, going against His stated rules, endangering His personal protection of you and His offer of eternal happiness. This was dangerous territory and the stakes were your im-

(Continued on page 7)

Calendar of Events for Sacramento Community Freethinkers



<http://sacportal.humanists.net/calendar>

Subscribe to all the local happenings online!

Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is one of 50 member societies of the **Atheist Alliance International** (“a positive voice for atheism”). AOF

also maintains affiliations with the Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and the American Humanist Association.

AOF's Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding and acceptance of atheism in our community. To accomplish this purpose, AOF will, through educational programs, projects, and publications, extend atheistic perspectives concerning the separation of church and state and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

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Subscription \$12 per year (free to members).

Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited.

Historical Figures Series

William Miller and The Great Disappointment

By Ken Nahigian

Poor William Miller. Deism just wasn't working for him. After harrowing experience in war and the deaths of his father and sister, he was a haunted man: haunted by mortality, haunted by thoughts of final things. The affluent, well-educated, liberal freemason and New York farmer resolved to return to his Baptist roots. He joined a local church. It was 1815.

One Sunday, delivering a guest sermon in the minister's absence, he fell into tears. "Suddenly the character of a Savior was vividly impressed upon my mind," he wrote. When deist friends scoffed, he began to read the Bible, closely and carefully for perhaps the first time. Much troubled him at first. But soon the disparate fragments began to click together, a mosaic of subtle hints and prophecies that pointed to the Second Coming—if you could but see. And Miller saw.

For example, Daniel Chapter 8, which described the fall of Jerusalem: "Unto two thousand and three hundred days," said verse 14, "then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." But verses such as Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:5-6 clearly equated days to years. The truth was like lightning. The Persian king rebuilt Jerusalem in 457 B.C.; so Jesus would return 2,300 years later to "cleanse," rebuild, the earth. That would be 1843, or thereabouts.

Miller recorded, "I was thus brought... to the solemn conclusion, that in about twenty-five years from that time 1818, all the affairs of our present state would be wound up."

In 1831 he began to preach. Few listened until a spate of meteor showers and comet sightings stirred popular interest in the apocalypse. Prophets were suddenly in fashion. By early 1843 the New York Herald saw fit to publish Miller's forecast of the world's end within the Jewish year beginning that March 21, and how "Jesus Christ will come again to this earth, cleanse,

purify, and take possession of the same, with all the saints...". This brought a surge in suicides and suicide-pacts among believers who wanted to reach heaven ahead of the rush.

March 21 passed without incident. Miller then adopted a new deadline, April 18, based on the Karaite Jewish calendar (as opposed to the Rabbinic). This date also passed. Undaunted, Miller confessed his error: "Yet I still believe that the day of the Lord is near, even at the door."

One of his camp greeters, Samuel S. Snow, delved deeply into scripture to find that Christ must return on "the tenth day of the seventh month of the present year, 1844." Again using the Karaite Jewish calendar, he computed the date as October 22. "There is no possibility of a mistake in this time," he warned; "Those who reject this light will be lost." Desperation of belief among the "Millerites," who by then numbered near 50,000, was near frenzy. Many had already sold homes, resigned employment, abandoned farms or given possessions to charity. On the evening of the day, groups in white ascension robes gathered in fields and on hills to greet the Advent. Some stood by open graves. Some stood on rooftops, convinced that closer was better.

Morning came. And to the Millerites, October 22 was the Great Disappointment. "Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted," wrote one, "and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before... We wept, and wept, till the day dawn." Many lost their faith. Many did not. Rationalizations proliferated. Miller was sure the "Blessed Hope" would yet be soon—"the year of expectation was according to prophecy; but ... there might be an error in Bible chronology, which was of human origin, that could throw the date off somewhat and account for the discrep-

ancy." He never left his belief. He died five years later, still certain.

Miller's grave is in Low Hampton, NY, where his old homestead is a National Historic Landmark and museum.

What of the faithful remnant? They debated, factioned and splintered. The movement spanned denominations, so schisms naturally followed the fault lines of theology. A Methodist-Millerite who led the main group, Hiram Edson, explained the Disappointment with glib facility: Christ had indeed been moving that day, not to Earth, but from his "Heavenly Sanctuary" to the "Holy of Holies," an invisible staging area for Armageddon. A simple mistake; anyone could make it. And the true Advent would surely be soon. When? Don't ask.

From Judaism and the Seventh-Day Baptists, Edson drew the idea of a Saturday Sabbath, while in Maine young Ellen White had fervent visions that expanded on his theology. Faith bloomed like flowers; Millerism found a new spring. And thus began the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Other splinters had other stories. Like young Charles Taze Russell who wandered into a Pittsburg hall where an Adventist was preaching in 1870, felt the breath of revelation, and founded the Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society (the Jehovah's Witnesses). Or Herbert W. Armstrong in Des Moines; a former Quaker, he mixed early Millerism with Anglo-Israelism in 1934 to establish the Radio Church of God (later the Worldwide Church of God). Even the Branch Dravidians (Waco) had a shady connection, cast out from a Dravidian Adventist sect in 1929.

As ever, faith is a story of Dickensian connections, a tapestry or labyrinth, a web strung between the dark mischief of hope and the hammer of our blood, into which you can wander, or fall. And many fall forever.

Current Events AOF Letters to the Editors

My friends at AOF,

Thank you so much for your kindness, for granting me a free one-year membership.

I do want to explain my situation. I don't know how much longer I have to live. I have been in prison 23 years, with 12 to go. I am a kidney dialysis patient. What I've dedicated my remaining years to is leaving a better world. I work in the prison laundry, \$60 a month, and I also get about \$40 a month from my parents for rent on my house. My goal for my remaining years is to do everything I can to help the Secular and Atheist movement to grow.

I have taken the \$20 you sent back to me, added \$5 more of my money and sent it as a donation to the Secular Student Alliance!

I do not want in any way to be a burden on the Atheists or Secular movement. I plan on renewing my membership AOF as long as I'm alive at the full \$20 cost. I am also a member of AAI, AA, AHA, CSH, at the full yearly membership cost.

Other organizations I am a member of: Amnesty International, Americans United for Separation of Church & State, ACLU, Atheists United, National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty and the Free-

dom From Religion Foundation, all at the full yearly membership cost.

For A Better World, I Love You All,

Sincerely,

Calven A. Newnam
Bismarck, North Dakota

(The writer of this letter is an inmate of a penal institution).

Dear Kenneth,

Thank you very much for your letter, I look forward to receiving your newsletter.

In all California prisons there is no Atheist material at all!

Their library only has "burning bush god" propaganda and a lot of it! Nothing that was written by a person with more intelligence than a dead snail.

It will be very refreshing to be able to read again!

No, we can't get near their computers or I would've met you there. They don't let us near anything educational at all.

Sincerely,

Taylor Allen
Ione, CA

(The writer of this letter is an inmate of a penal institution).

Current Events Wanted: Liaison for American Humanists Association and Humanist Association (AHA) of the Greater Sacramento Area (HAGSA)

If you're a member of the American Humanist Association (AHA) or the local AHA chapter Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area (HAGSA), and might be willing to volunteer one hour of your time per month (if that), please let us know.

The liaison position for AHA and HAGSA is a great way to get involved with both organizations (and AOF) in a way that requires very little of your time. Duties include receiving e-mails from the AHA and HAGSA and communicating them to the AOF board, and vice-versa.

If interested, please contact: aofboard@aofonline.org.



AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, P O Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership)

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Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to organizations similar to AOF.

Please check here if you DO want to be on our AOF activist list.

We can arrange to deliver your monthly newsletter electronically via the e-mail address you print above. Please check the mode you prefer. E-mail Postal mail

Sunday, March 23, 8-10 AM

AOF Adopt-A-Highway Event By Don Knutson

Start off the New Year right by doing a favor for the environment and join us Sunday, March 23 @ 8 a.m. when we clean our 2-mile stretch of Highway 99 north of Elkhorn Blvd. (one mile north of the 99, I-5 split). We meet at the Elkhorn Park & Ride west of 99. We provide hard hat, orange vest, gloves, picker and trash bags. It is a good idea to bring a backpack or fanny pack so that you can carry 3 or 4 trash bags with you



Do you have any family info that you'd like to share or showcase to AOF members? Please submit items to: newsletter@aofonline.org and specify in the e-mail that you'd like to announce the information in the Family News section.

along with some libation. We haven't had a chance to go out for a while and so there is certain to be much to discover and collect along the highway. **Rain or wet conditions cancel.** Any questions can be addressed to 447-2169.

Community Events of Interest to AOF Members

- **Humanists of Sun City, Mar 2, 1PM:** The March meeting features Bob Schmidt, a retired reporter who will discuss the current problems of the media—internet, consolidation of ownership, other changing technologies.
- **First Amendmist Church of True Science (FACTS), Mar 7, 7-9PM:** General Meeting. Home of AOF board member Bev Church, 120 Eastbrook Circle, Sacramento. More info: <http://restorethepledge.com/FACTS/>
- **Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area (HAGSA), Friday, Mar 7, 7-9PM and Sunday, Mar 23, 3-6 PM:** Susan Sackett, CSUS; and joint Flying Spaghetti Monster party (see page one). More info: <http://hagsa.org>
- **Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking (SORT), Tuesday, Mar 25, 7:30-9PM.** Topic to be announced. More info: <http://home.surewest.net/kitray/>

Save the Date! HAGSA Special Event

Star Trek's Susan Sackett to Speak: Friday, Mar 7 @ CSUS

Friday, March 7, from 7-9 PM at the Sacramento State Alumni Center, **Susan Sackett** will present *Humanism in Star Trek*.

From the HAGSA web site (<http://hagsa.org>):

Susan Sackett is the president of the Humanist Society of Greater Phoenix, a member of the American Humanist Association board, and the author of several books.

Susan spent about twenty-six years in Hollywood, during seventeen of which she worked with **Gene Roddenberry** on the "Star Trek: The Next Generation" TV series, including writing two of the scripts, and on "Star Trek: The Motion Picture."

This meeting is very special, in that it is expected to draw a fair number of young people, including Sacramento State students. The room being used will accommodate up to 250 people. This is one that is not to be missed. Directions: contact AOF—aofboard@aofonline.org or 916-447-3589.

(Continued from page 3)

mortal soul! To some of us, our rational thoughts continued in spite of our fear and we continued our analysis of our religions, finding more and more that seemed illogical, nonsensical. Religious tenets morphed into becoming more like fairytales and allegories than anything to be taken literally.

The persistent and growing doubts pulled us away from fundamentalism, but the process didn't stop there. Each failing religious concept took the support out from under the next concept, till they began toppling like a string of dominoes. We had reached a point of independent thinking, believing in our rational minds more than believing in dogma based on faith. This was the beginning of the process of taking God out of our minds, hopes, our reverence, and putting in natural human concepts in their place.

One woman who came to our meeting described her process of deconversion. She watched Rev. Pat Robertson blame the cause of the tsunami as God's punishment for the sins of homosexuals. It seemed so obviously wrong to her that it started a crack in her belief system, and the crack would not go away. The crack of disbelief grew from one concept to another, over the course of a few years, eventually toppling her entire belief system.

Having determined that religion with its offer of a divine father figure was not real, we then had to summon the courage to stand on our own two feet, and accept that we were the only ones able to control our lives. We had to accept our being finite, and enjoy our years here on earth, rather than looking at a vague and undefined dream of eternal happiness. Also, we had to walk away from the comfort of the masses. Some of us had to intellectually depart from cherished bonds with families and friends.

In organizing the panel for AOF's March meeting, I wanted to mainly focus on people who were under the spell of religion, and had to struggle to overcome its grips on their minds and hearts [notice I didn't use the word soul here]. Please join us.

Newsletter Submissions

Submit your newsletter items to the N&V submissions editor at this e-mail address:

newsletter@aofonline.org

or mail item to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.

Preference is given to material in a PC-compatible word processing format such as *Word*, *Wordpad*, or *Notepad*. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF also welcomes succinct and substantive letters to the editor. Note: All letters are prioritized by AOF's publishing criteria deriving from the organization's Statement of Purpose.

Movie Night: Fri March 14, 7-9PM

The Joint AOF/Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area (HAGSA) movie night continues in March with the selection to-be-determined.

Join us for pizza and socializing as we watch one (and sometimes two) movies in the comfort of Beverly Church's luxurious home. Refreshments provided, but we ask people to bring their own popcorn if they like.

For more information, please contact: aofboard@aofonline.org.

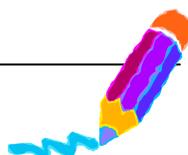
Location: 120 Eastbrook Circle, Sacramento. Lost? 916-359-5423.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

We'll be pleased to send one free newsletter to any person upon request, but after that time, please subscribe to AOF's newsletter for only \$12 per year. Or, better yet, why not become a member? That way, you'll get our newsletter FREE as part of your membership!

Want the latest AOF board minutes?

E-mail aofboard@aofonline.org





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We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

March Calendar of Events

March AOF General Meeting	Sunday, March 9, 1:30-4 PM
Joint AOF-HAGSA Movie Night	Friday, March 14, 7-9 PM
AOF Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup Event	Sunday, March 23, 8-10 AM
Joint AOF-HAGSA Flying Spaghetti Monster Party	Sunday, March 23, 3-6 PM
Davis Community Meals Event	Tuesday, April 29, 4-7 PM

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 1:30 - 4 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. Note: The months of February and October are exceptions, since AOF co-produces two public education events: (1) an outdoor fair in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (2008-10-05), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2009-02-15). Watch the newsletter for details.

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. AOF Board meetings are held at alternating sites, so please inquire about the location. For AOF's 24-hour recorder, call 447-3589. Leave your name and a number (repeat for clarity) and someone will phone back to answer your questions about AOF.

