

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

December 2009

Special Points of Interest

Joint HumanLight / Winter Solstice Festivities! (page 1)

November Meeting Recap, by Jillian Stanley (pages 3, 7)

The Pros and Cons of Proselytizing, by Paul Storey (page 6)

AOF Election Candidate Statements (pages 4, 6)

Sunday, December 13, 1:30-4:00 p.m. Elections! Plus: CSUS Professor Dr. Matt McCormick on His Forthcoming Book, "The Case Against Christ"

In addition to AOF's annual elections (full details begin on page four), AOF is pleased to welcome the holiday season by hosting Matt McCormick, associate professor of philosophy at CSUS, as our December speaker. Dr. McCormick is working on a new book about "The Case Against Christ," and will be discussing various examples of how Jesus belief is out of whack with people's good sense and reasonableness.

The following is an abstract of Dr. McCormick's book:

The book makes the case that the average, educated 21st century American should not believe that Jesus was a divine being who was resurrected from the dead 2,000 years ago. Believing that Jesus was resurrected from the dead on the basis of the evidence available to us—primarily a small group of testimonial stories recorded in the Gospels—is inconsistent with our other conventions concerning belief and evidence.

(Continued on page 3)

Standard Fare

AOF Line	2
Membership Form	6
AOF Upcoming Events	8

5th and T Street, Southside Co-Housing Common House Sunday, Dec 20 @ 1:00 p.m.: Celebrate HumanLight / Winter Solstice With Joint AOF + HAGSA Festivities

Again, this joint HAGSA/AOF event will include a celebration of the Winter Solstice and will be sustained by the usual potluck fare. As it was for the last two years, it will be at the Southside Park Cohousing Common House. It's at 434 T Street, but cannot be seen from T. The community in which it is situated is at the southwest corner of 5th and T streets, which can be entered from either 5th or T Street. The Common House is within the complex. If you enter the complex from T Street, you'll see the Common House, within the courtyard, almost straight in front of you. As it's the only non-residential building, it's unmistakable. If you enter from 5th Street, you'll see the Common House on the left side of the courtyard.



Potluck dishes encouraged but not required; everyone is welcome! The event begins at noon and runs for several hours. For more info, contact board@aofonline.org.

AOF Line

Has It Really Been A Year?

By Kevin Schultz

Congratulations to our 2010 AOF board candidates: David Flanders, Paul Geisert, Brian Jones, Ken Nahigian, Mario Sandri, and Jillian Stanley. Stepping down this year from their stewardship will be Mynga Futrell, Don Knutson, and Debora Smith.

With the changing of the board, it is an appropriate time to revisit AOF's mission statement and contemplate how our actions may best fulfill the organization's charter.

AOF's position in the community is educational: encouraging freedom of conscience; speaking out in support of civic equality; and acting as ambassadors of free-thought, critical thinking, and Enlightenment ideals in our local communities. Wishing the 2010 candidates all the best as they work to further these goals.

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



On Saturday, November 7, a rugged crew from AOF hit our two-mile stretch of Highway 99 north of Elkhorn Blvd. to do what we have been doing on a periodic basis for 14 years--cleanup a filthy highway and have fun doing it! Some 18-20 bags worth of trash were apprehended before it could further contaminate our environment. This trek's crew included from left: Mynga Futrell, Robert Poeschel, Carolyn Lignus, Joe Kiffick and Eric Cyrenne. Not pictured: event coordinator and photographer Don Knutson, and "last but certainly not least" Mario Sandri. AOF next addresses the highway Saturday, January 9 @ 8a.m. to greet the New Year.

AOF Board (2009)

President: Beverly Church

Board Chair: Don Knutson

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jillian Stanley

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large:

Steve Campbell, Debora Smith, Jillian Stanley

AOF Standing Committees

All AOF members are urged to volunteer in the organization. There are openings in every committee listed here. Please contact the chair or coordinator of any area of interest to you to learn details of getting involved. We would love to have your participation! Phone AOF 916-447-3589 or e-mail aofboard@aofonline.org for direct contact to relevant personnel.

Programs and Events Committee

Program Planning (Team Coordinator, Debora Smith)
Meeting Matters / Logistics (Team Coordinator, Open)
Social Activities (Team Coordinator, Open)

Membership Committee

Members Tracking (Team Coordinator, Ken Nahigian)
"Freethought Friends" (Team Coordinator, Jillian Stanley)
Outreach / Recruiting (Team Coordinator, Steve Campbell)

Communications Committee

Beverly Church, Chair
AOF News Team (newsletter editor, events editor, public editor, postmaster, webmaster)

Education, Activism and Service Committee

Service Projects Coordinator: Don Knutson
Education/Action Coordinator: Mynga Futrell

Freethought Day 2010: Date to be announced

Beverly Church, Chair. (Save the date! – It's a celebration of reason and church/state separation)

Darwin Day 2010: Sunday, February 7

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs
(Save the date! – It's a celebration of science and humanity)

AOF Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons

Mynga Futrell (AAI)
Kevin Schultz (AA)
Beverly Church (AHA/HAGSA)
Hank Kocol (CSH)

AOF News Team

Newsletter Editor: Kevin Schultz
Postmaster: Jerry Sloan
Webpeoples: Pat Kelley, Robert Poeschel, Kevin Schultz
(Openings for Events Editor and Public Editor)

ISSN: 1936-4229

AOF BloodSource ID#: 4857

AOF Federal Tax ID#: 68-0325762

AOF Voice Mail: 916-447-3589

El Porvenir Founder Carole Helper November Meeting Recap

By Jillian Stanley

At the October general meeting, Carole Harper, co-founder of the organization El Porvenir (“the future”) talked about the revolution and political situation in Nicaragua, where she lived from 1986 to 1989, working with Habitat for Humanity. She described the revolution by using the stages of a revolution as described in Crane Brinton’s book, *The Art of Revolution*, published years before the events in Nicaragua. In Brinton’s analysis of several revolutions around the world, one step is when intellectuals take on a new belief; later comes the “Reign of Terror and Virtue” which is a type of religious fervor; this is succeeded by “thermidor,” a time of calm and moderation. (Note: Wikipedia says that this term, from the French Revolution, “has come to mean the phase in some revolutions when power slips from the hands of the original revolutionary leadership



El Porvenir founder Carole Helper delighted in November!

and a radical regime is replaced by a more conservative regime.”)

In Nicaragua, by the time the people revolted against long-time dictator Somoza in 1979, he had only his personal guard for support. After the overthrow of Somoza, the country was governed by the Sandinistas (FSLN), and in 1984 Nicaragua held its first free elections in seventy years. There was a 90% turnout, and Daniel Ortega was elected president. In spite of the opposition of the Contras, which were backed by the CIA, the new government was able to implement many of its election promises, including land reform and clean energy. The government, however, did not emphasize freedom of speech. Carole recounted her own experience of being arrested for taking a photo of a government building. (She was released, but without the photo.)

(Continued on page 7)

AOF Program Continuation

(Continued from page 1)

There are numerous other ordinary cases where we have a body of comparable evidence, yet we would reject the analogous conclusion for a supernatural claim like the resurrection. In fact, there are numerous cases where we have better evidence—both in terms of quantity and quality—and we reject the conclusion, so accepting the Jesus story is grossly out of synch with our other beliefs. The Salem Witch trials and a hypothetical alien abduction cases illustrate the point. I give several other considerations that fortify the doubts; problems with the transmission and reliability of the Jesus story made clear by probability theory, modern developments in epistemology and recent empirical research psychology all undermine our accepting the Jesus story as communicated to us by the early Christians through the Bible. I then turn to several additional discussions that complete the case against Christ: the existence of so many other religions and “dead” gods presents a problem for Christianity, performing miracles cannot be reconciled with the characterization of God as the all powerful, all knowing creator of the universe, several problems arise from the faith response and from a non-literal approach to Christian doctrines.

Dr. McCormick is a contributing author to “The Impossibility of God,” edited by Michael Martin and Ricki Monnier. At CSUS, Dr. McCormick teaches a philosophy seminar on atheism, the only one of its kind in the nation.

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 of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community. Through educational programs, projects, and publications, AOF will extend secular perspectives, including the separation of religion and government and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

AOF News & Views: Copyright © 2009 by Atheists and Other Freethinkers, PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182. The contents of News & Views are informational and educational. Views expressed via the articles in this publication are not necessarily those of Atheists and Other Freethinkers.

Print subscription \$12 per year, e-mail subscription free to all on request.

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.

AOF Board Elections for 2010 Candidate Statements

AOF requested candidates submit a statement limited to 300 words. Please take the time necessary to read the candidate statements below. For information on conditional candidates, please see page three of this newsletter. Elected candidates start in January of 2010.

Beverly Church (incumbent)

Beverly elected to verbally present her candidate statement to the members, an option available to all candidates.

David Flanders

Please elect Dave Flanders for the AOF board. I have served in the past and I look forward to serving in the future.

Paul Geisert

I am running for the board because maintaining the foundations of the organization is a worthy endeavor.

"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."

I would like to see AOF actually engage the above statement.

Brian Jones

As an active member of AOF and the freethought community in the greater Sacramento area for the last four to five years, I am for the first time offering to serve on AOF's board of directors.

Let me begin by letting you know some of my related activities. In the

past four years I've been involved with AOF, HAGSA, Flying Spaghetti Monster Pastover Celebration (aka spaghetti feed) and Free-thought Day all in organizational capacities (board member, program committee, primary organizer and sound/logistics respectively.) I am the publicity coordinator for all of the above and Darwin Day. In addition, I am a member of the Brights, Atheists United, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, FAN Meetup, and FACTS Church. In 2008 I attended the Atheist Alliance International Conference in Long Beach.

As an AOF board member, I would be likely to follow a path true to the organization's roots as I understand them -- promoting atheism throughout the community as a positive world view -- demonstrating that atheists are positive, productive and social.

I am currently a student studying law to become a paralegal. In the past I have been a database administrator, bookkeeper, office manager and general manager for companies such as a benefit insurance brokerage, major insurance carrier, catering company, private real estate concern and plastics injection molding plant among others. I hold an Associates degree in business.

Ken Nahigian (incumbent)

Ken Nahigian, incumbent AOF Board member, is also the AOF treasurer & registrar. The recent amendment to the AOF Bylaws will allow him to serve on the Board for yet another year, if you are willing. Otherwise he'll be going to Disneyland.

Almost but not quite an AOF founder, Ken joined AOF in December

1993, serving as Treasurer since 1995 and as Membership Registrar since about 2004. With a small, brittle, blinkered mind, Ken finds an obscure joy in balanced columns and niggling minutia, making him ideal for such duties. Even if not re-elected, he will continue as treasurer & registrar in any case, at the Board's pleasure.

Before joining AOF, Ken had a checkered history of religious belief and doubt, weighed with a lot of guilt. The guilt was crushing and the bouts of stigmata were messy, so in his mid-20's he became a freethinker. Finding the freethought community was like a first breath of sweet fresh air. He still looks back, but always with a sigh of relief.

As treasurer, Ken's vision for AOF is to pinch pennies, sell buttons and bumper stickers, and keep us solvent. As registrar he works to expand AOF's membership. As a Director he hopes to build bridges to the many other freethought and skeptical groups within the Sacramento area, creating a true Community of Reason. Finally and most, as a freethinker and humanist, his views continue to evolve. Once stridently anti-religious, he now sees opportunity for cooperative action between AOF and many liberal believers. Freethought has escaped the intellectual ghetto that held it for almost a century; the horizon is open if our hearts are open, and if we do not fear to adapt and change. Vote for Ken if you agree. (If you don't, Space Mountain awaits!)

Mario Sandri

I feel honored to have been asked to throw my hat in the ring and become a candidate for the AOF

(Continued on page 6)

A Personal Success Story

The Pros and Cons of Proselytizing

By Paul Storey

I parted with the Catholic Church in sophomore year of high school and started to pronounce myself as being an atheist early in college. From that time onward, a huge battle of words and ideas ensued between the rest of my family and myself. We freely engaged in debate over the outstanding unresolved contradictions inherent in god and evil, a loving god punishing his creations in hell for eternity, especially since He knew before He made them what they would choose to do in life. Freewill versus omniscience, progression of mythologies to one invisible all powerful god, the vague forever undefined nature of heaven, science versus simplistic theological reasoning, the woefully inadequate explanation offered by religion as to the nature of our world, changing morality and ethics over time versus a divinely inspired word of god written in stone in a Bible locked in antiquated ideas - these questions haunted my mind and my family bore the brunt of my criticism and intellectual challenge for years.

My dad and I were best friends throughout his whole life, we were as tight as any father and son I ever met, but he was a die-hard Catholic and I continually ridiculed the Church's teachings, relevance to society, and importance to an individual's happiness. I guess we reached an equilibrium where we knew where each of us stood, and his beliefs became less important than other aspects of our relationship. I will never forget a time I was dissecting a rat and dad asked me how something that complex could have evolved. I countered how could something this complex have been invented by a god? My dad died in 1992 and I went to his service in the church where I as an altar boy had assisted the priest in serving mass for 40 consecutive days in lent for 5

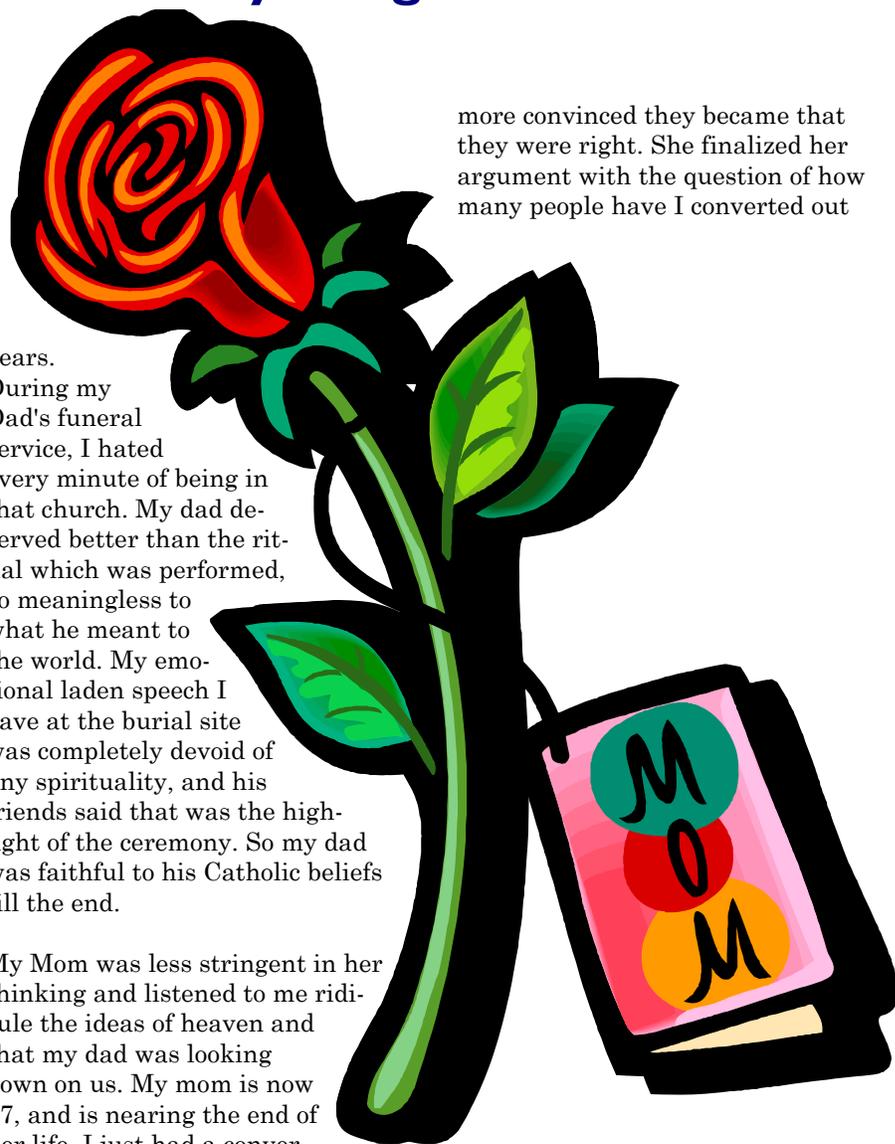
years.

During my Dad's funeral service, I hated every minute of being in that church. My dad deserved better than the ritual which was performed, so meaningless to what he meant to the world. My emotional laden speech I gave at the burial site was completely devoid of any spirituality, and his friends said that was the highlight of the ceremony. So my dad was faithful to his Catholic beliefs till the end.

My Mom was less stringent in her thinking and listened to me ridicule the ideas of heaven and that my dad was looking down on us. My mom is now 87, and is nearing the end of her life. I just had a conversation with her at her bedside in the nursing home after a heart attack and she admitted she really didn't take the church seriously. Did she want to attend mass? No. Did she want to see a priest before she died? No. Wow, that was something! I even took a video of our conversation, which I may put on the web in a few years.

My ex-girlfriend always told me I was wasting my time arguing with believers. As a psychologist, she felt the more you challenged the believers, the harder they dug in their heels fighting against you, and the

more convinced they became that they were right. She finalized her argument with the question of how many people have I converted out



of being religious. I had to honestly answer I didn't know if there was even one.

Well, now I have a different answer to that question. I was able to help one person see the follies of religion, and to see through its false hopes to a place of questioning more than believing. So I can honestly say that my efforts did succeed with someone, someone very special to me, who I will remember for the rest of my life, my mom.

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

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

Name(s) _____ Phone: _____

Street _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP + 4 _____

E-mail address (please print!) _____

Membership Level (please circle one):

Patron (\$50) Family (\$30) Individual (\$20) Low-income (\$10)

Note: Membership does not include a newsletter subscription

Newsletter subscription:

___ Send my printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)

___ Send my newsletter by email (*Free!*) – my email address is above

Additional Donation: \$ _____

Total enclosed: \$ _____

AOF is a 501(c)(3) Educational Association – Dues & Donations are tax-deductable as

permitted by law. Non-members may receive the AOF Newsletter (same rate - \$12 printed, free via email).

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

Please check here if you DO want to be an AOF Activist (e-mail address required).

AOF Board Elections for 2010 Candidate Statements, Continued

(Continued from page 4)

Board of Directors. Though born into a family that was nominally catholic - I guess it was just kind of the norm to be catholic in that particular region of the world that I grew up in - I never bought into any of it, like almost everybody else I knew from my generation. As a result there was never a need to be outspoken about my non-believe. If you went to church, that meant you didn't have any friends and there was something wrong with YOU. When I moved here things were a little different.

It's exciting to see so many local groups emerging and I see one of AOF's primary missions in the future to focus more on networking with other groups as well reaching out to the community and to the ones that are seeking for alternatives to religious stupor. Let's not just preach to the choir and talk about how few atheists are in prison and that the states in the Bible Belt have much higher crime and abortion rates, more teen pregnancies etc., we all know that. Let's go out and mingle with the ones that have open minds but would never think of atheists as valuable members of their communities. This is how I believe we can change the world!

Jillian "Zazie" Stanley (incumbent)

I have been attending AOF meetings for only a few years (since I first learned about AOF), but I have considered myself an atheist since about the age of fifteen (wow—that's getting to be a long time!). Last year I volunteered to do what I could for AOF and was made secretary on the Board. It's been very interesting to work "behind the scenes" with the very dedicated and hard-working other Board members, and I will be glad to continue serving on the Board for another year if elected.

Quick
Quote

“

Your greatness is not what you have; it is what you give.

”

(Continued from page 3)

The election of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (widow of the assassinated newspaper editor) as president in 1990 represents "thermidor," in Carole's interpretation. The Sandinistas still were represented in the legislature, but the tone of the government was more moderate, and many exiles returned, bringing a business class back to Nicaragua. The 2007 elections seem to be contrary to Brinton's theory of revolution, as the FSLN returned to power. But even Ortega seemed less radical: he married his girlfriend in the Catholic church. The speaker was honest about both the failings and accomplishments of the Nicaraguan government. Abortion is illegal, a victory for the conservative side. But the agrarian land reforms stand, and there is universal education and free health care. The Popular Army, led by Sandinistas, is trusted and respected by the people.

In response to an audience question about attitudes towards homosexuality, the speaker acknowledged that homophobia is the norm in Latin America. However, there is a gay-rights march every year in Nicaragua, which, she observed, takes "real guts." About unions, she stated that the Sandinistas have given people the right to unionize, but there are sweatshops owned by companies from Taiwan and Korea that have been accused of killing union organizers. Answering questions about U.S. policy towards Nicaragua, the speaker stated that in spite of Obama's election, some people in the State Department have been there since the Reagan era, and she characterized Secretary of State Hilary Clinton as a hawk. Questions were also asked about Honduras and Cuba. Honduran president Zelaya had been turning more to the side of the poor and was thus seen as a threat by the right-wing business class—hence the military "coup" last summer. The Cuban revolution did not follow Crane Brinton's outline, as after the victors took power, no moderates remained—they were all in exile.

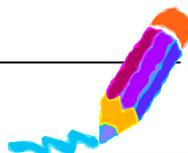
The following change regarding **term limits for AOF Board of Directors**, having been approved by the Board, was presented to the members by Mynga Futrell and was approved by vote: "Directors having served three consecutive years shall then be ineligible to serve for a period of one year. No more than two directors may be deemed ineligible in a given year. If more than two members have served three or more consecutive years, the member(s) remaining eligible to hold office will be subject to approval by the board of directors."

The new wording will allow for a transition to the term limit requirement without undue disruption of the board's function.

Bev Church announced that AOF is now a member of the **Sacramento Area Coalition for Reason**. ACOR will fund a bus ad, which will feature our name and website link; this is targeted to occur in January.



Want to send a letter to the Editor?
E-mail newsletter@aofonline.org



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.

AOF Online...

Outgoing AOF board member Mynga Futrell just also happens to be the co-Founder and director of The Brights Net (<http://the-brights.net>). She submits for your consideration this short YouTube interview, taped by an attendee of the Atheist Alliance International 2009 convention: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8vOqMdUEE4>.

Note: your hard-working AOF News and Views editor is a board member of The Brights Net, a 501(c)(3) non-profit.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

This newsletter is free by e-mail to everyone. Just send your e-mail address. If you prefer printed copy by postal mail, AOF will send one free issue on your request; after that, please subscribe at \$12 per year. For details, see the signup form on page six.



P.O. Box 15182
Sacramento, CA 95851-0182

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

December/January Calendar of Events

AOF Dinner Social @ Andy Nguyen's, 2007 Broadway. Contact: 419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net	Thursday, December 3, 6:30 p.m.
AOF Elections + December General Meeting	Sunday, December 13, 1:30-4:00 p.m.
Joint AOF/HAGSA HumanLight + Solstice Party	Sunday, December 20, 1:00-5:00 p.m.
AOF Davis Community Meals Event	Tuesday, December 29, 4:00-7:00 p.m.
AOF Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup Event	Saturday, January 9, 8:00-10:00 a.m.
AOF January General Meeting	Sunday, January 10, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

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" (Oct 2010), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2010-02-07). 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.

