

Thanks & kudos to [Mick West](#) for his splendid presentation, **How to Talk to UFOlogists**, at the July AOF member meeting. If you missed it, tsk. We hope he will be back.

Photo posted by Roger Zabkie, though actually lifted from Wikipedia. Sneaky, Roger, sneaky.



✧ ✧ **This Month's Main AOF Event** ✧ ✧

➤ **Gun Violence in America: Our Shameful Epidemic**

Sunday, Aug 27, 2023, 2 pm – 4 pm (doors open 1:30pm)

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Rm 675, Sacramento, see map at <https://goo.gl/maps/RwiUqEJ5ESHRhrPu8>.

A hat tip to **Dr. Bill Durston**, who graciously visits AOF to discuss gun violence: The seriousness of our uniquely American gun obsession, with an emphasis on its effect on youth and why Dr. Durston refers to gun violence as "our shameful epidemic."

- Comparisons of the USA with other high income democratic countries in terms of:
 - Rates of gun related deaths
 - Rates of gun ownership
 - Gun control laws
- Definitive measures needed to stop our country's "shameful epidemic," including obstacles to the adoption of such measures and the steps needed to overcome these obstacles

Bill Durston, MD, worked for more than 35 years as a board certified emergency physician in Sacramento, California, during which time he treated innumerable gunshot victims.

Before becoming a physician, Bill was an expert marksman in the United States Marine Corps, serving in combat in Vietnam, where he was decorated for "courage and composure under fire." In March of 2016, Bill co-founded a new national non-profit organization, [Americans Against Gun Violence \(AAGV\)](#), to extend to a national level the gun violence prevention work that Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSB/Sacramento) was doing locally. Bill currently serves as the President of AAGV. It is the position of AAGV that we have not only the ability, but also the moral responsibility, to reduce rates of firearm related deaths and injuries in the United States to levels that are at or below the average for the other high income democratic countries of the world. You can contact Bill by email at "info (at) aagunv (dot) org". But please come hear him speak!

Contact for details: Email "programs (at) aofonline (dot) org", or see <https://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>.

Doors open at 1:30 pm. Free parking for this in-person event. It's OK to bring snacks & beverages, even to share. We provide cool water, because we're nice.



✧ ✧ **Other Upcoming AOF Events** ✧ ✧

➤ **Adopy-a-Highway Cleanup**

Saturday, Aug 12, 2023, 9 am – 11 am

Location: Near W. Elkhorn Blvd & Hwy 99, see map at <https://goo.gl/maps/zw3Rwct9yR52>.

A tidy stretch of Highway 99 runs two miles from Elkhorn Boulevard to Elverta Road - our stretch! Sac-area freethinkers "adopted" it in July 1995. It's tidy because we have cared for it, nurtured it, lovingly rescued it from litter and debris, and received recognition for our work. One of our more successful civic efforts, it proves freethinkers can also serve the community.



So join us! Enjoy a morning commune with nature, and do a deed for the environment and local area wildlife. The refuse we collect would otherwise ultimately be swept by the rain into tributaries and into the ocean, degrading habitat, and leading to a slow death for many sea creatures. *Note, Cal-Trans is now paying a stipend for our work!*

The stalwart activity captain will provide all safety equipment, including comfortable, natty hard-hats and gloves, stylish safety vests, collection bags, and handy trash pickers. The cleanup takes a scant two hours. Please dress for the season. It may be a good idea to bring a backpack or fanny-pack to carry 3 or 4 trash bags.

To get there, travel north from Sacramento on I-5 past the Natomas area. Take the "Highway 99 - Yuba City, Marysville" exit. Exit at Elkhorn Boulevard less than a mile north. Turn left, cross the overpass. Park in the park-&-ride lot if possible, or somewhere near it.

This is a great event for older children, but please leave smalls safe at home. Also, please review the CalTrans Highway Cleanup guidelines at <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/maintenance/adopt-a-highway/covid19>.

Contact for details: Email "programs (at) aofonline (dot) org", or see <https://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>.

In case of rain, fog, excessive mud, rapture or locust plague, the Cleanup will be rescheduled. If unsure, call the Activity Captain (Don).

➤ Davis Community Meal – Feed the Hungry

Tuesday, Aug 29, 2023, 4 pm – 7 pm

Location: St. Martin's Episcopal Church hall, 640 Hawthorne Lane, Davis, CA, see map at <http://binged.it/1uBpi57>.

The **Davis Community Meal Project** is serving up meals to the hungry, the poor, the indigent, the outcast. It happens in bucolic Davis city, so near to us, where compassionate citizens have developed a secular solution for the problem of hunger, and are asking for our help.

So join us, join us in this effort! Your reward will be an opportunity to meet new minds and hobnob with your freethought friends, a likely free meal, jazzy music, and the rosy hearts-glow of benevolence. Also, seriously, it's a blast!

Cooking? Dish washing? Pah, none required. The Community Meals team will perform all the food prep and kitchen work. Our job is simply to set up chairs & tables, serve, smile, put things away at the end, and clean a bit (with a minimum of mopping). Extra points if you can arrive for setup, but if you can't, that's OK, any help is good help. Setup begins about 4:30 p.m., food service at about 5:45. At 6:30 we clean up, leaving the hall as we found it.

For details, see [Davis Community Meals](#). For a map to the site, see <https://goo.gl/maps/AVSUXxyCsRayQUZP6>. (Yes, it's a church hall, so what?)

Contact for details: 916-805-9337 (Don Knutson), or see <https://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>.

Carpooling may be available. For info, please contact the Service Project Coordinator (that's Don).



✧ ✧ Upcoming Non-AOF Events ✧ ✧

Look, it's complicated. Sacramento has other freethought groups; AOF is just one. We advertise their events as a courtesy, because we're all friends. Here are a few. Please show them some love.

➤ Recovery from Religion (RfR) Virtual Support meetings

Sunday, Aug 6, 4pm – 6pm (attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7287067292>)

Saturday, Aug 12, 5pm – 7pm (for women & non-binary, attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87403436249>)

Saturday, Aug 19, 7pm – 9pm (attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7287067292>)

Sunday, Aug 20, 12 noon – 2pm (for LGBTQA+ folk, attendance link <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7287067292>)

Providing ongoing and personal support to individuals letting go of religious beliefs. Please be sensitive and tolerant, and cut others some slack, because *slack* binds us together. "RfR" is here to help.

➤ Deconstruction on the Spectrum

Monday, Aug 7, 2023, 5pm - 7pm

A Recovery from Religion online program. Anthony Dominello, and RfR support group leader, will discuss how autism affects deconstruction and deconversion from religion. Attend by online teleconference; a Q&A session will follow.

Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/186729414>.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/rfr-sacramento-ca/events/295194471/>.

➤ Suicide Loss Survivors Discussion and Support

Tuesday, Aug 8, 2023, 5pm – 7pm

Online survivor support in a compassionate, secular way. Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82683645189>.

➤ Free Movie Nights

Friday, Aug 11, 2023, 7 pm – 10 pm (at Reason Center)

Wednesday, Aug 16, 2023 7 pm – 9 pm (via streaming teleparty)

Join us for some fun movies! Free, but Reason Center does appreciate donations (hint).

The Aug 11 movie (at Reason Center) will be a documentary, **Baraka**. "A collection of expertly photographed scenes of human life and religion, 1992, unrated, by Director Ron Fricke" (IMDB); "a journey of rediscovery that plunges into nature, into history, into the human spirit and finally into the realm of the infinite" (Washington Post). Wow.

The Aug 26 movie (via Internet viewing) will be **The Imitation Game** (2014), starring Benedict Cumberbatch as the English mathematical genius Alan Turing.

Location for Aug 11: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Rm 675, Sac., map at <https://goo.gl/maps/RwiUgEJ5ESHRhrPu8>.

Details for Aug 16: See <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/wzhcgtyfclbv/> (RSVP for instructions).

Contact for details: See <https://reasoncenter.org/contact>.



➤ Blasphemy Breakfasts - and a Brunch

Saturday, Aug 12, 2023, 10am – 11:30am (Folsom)

Sunday, Aug 13, 2023, 9:30am – 11:30am (midtown Sacramento)

Sunday, Aug 20, 2023, 9:30am – 11am (Rocklin)

Aug 12 location: Mel's Diner, 13399 Folsom Blvd, Folsom, CA, map at

<https://goo.gl/maps/ri6JvaBoSZVHTdnU6>.

Aug 13 location: Mel's Diner, 3000 J Street, Sacramento, CA, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/toijMkseMWMtanVP7>.

Aug 20 location: Mel's Diner, 6708 Lonetree Blvd, Rocklin, CA, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/ZUY2gq72KkmcC4bU6>.

Like to hang out with like-minded people? Want to meet freethinkers in smaller groups? Or do you just get the morning munchies? Join us for our "Blasphemy Breakfast." We really don't blaspheme all that much, but dark mutterings may emerge ... be warned. A great place to speak your mind, and a good starter if you are new to meetups. Please RSVP.

Details for Aug 12, see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/bbfggtyfclbqb/>.

Details for Aug 13, see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/btpcgtyfclbrb/>.

Details for Aug 20, see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/pwwnssyfclbbc/>.



➤ Sacramento Skeptics in the Pub

Saturday, Aug 12, 2023, 6pm – 9pm

A social meetup for the skeptical minds, a community of people, friends, and families that champion the methods of science and critical thinking. Visitors and new skeptics most welcome!

For details see <https://www.meetup.com/sacskeptics/events/lzkdgtyfclbqb/>.

Location: Duke's Pints & Plates, 510 La Sierra Dr, Sacramento; map at <https://goo.gl/maps/aNzV4j33cnizW9j77>.

➤ Sunday Assembly

Sunday, Aug 13, 2023, 11am - 1pm (doors open 10:30am)

Sunday Assembly is a secular celebration with music, readings, food and speakers, plus entertainment for children. For the potluck lunch, bring your favorite dish to share, and be hungry. Kids welcome, visitors welcome.

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Suite 675, Sacramento, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/S5MR1e8ZodBzb4TG8>.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/mqhlftyfclbrb/>.

➤ Library Hours at Reason Center

Thursdays, Aug 17 & Aug 31, 3:30pm – 6:30pm

Come browse the Reason Center library. It has an extensive collection of fascinating books, and anyone who has signed up at <https://reasoncenter.org/join> may borrow them. Otherwise, it is OK to browse & schmooze.

Location: Reason Center, 1300 Ethan Way, Suite 675, Sacramento, map at <https://goo.gl/maps/S5MR1e8ZodBzb4TG8>.

Details at <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/hijhgtfyfclbwb/> or <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/hijhgtfyfclbpb/>.

➤ Ancient Christian Study Group

Sunday, August 20, 12pm - whenever

Location: Shine Café, 1400 E Street, Sacramento, CA

The history of ancient Christianity is endlessly fascinating. Don Fox and Steve Thoreson are facilitating this meet up to review the history of Rome, religions of the Roman Empire, Gnosticism, Mystery cults, history of Christian persecutions, biographies of major Christians, Bible writings and many other related topics. If you ever wanted to sort out Eusebius from Clement, or Constantine from Diocletian, or the Vulgate from the Septuagint, then this group is for you. Previous biblical knowledge not required.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/ndfzqyfclbbc/>.

➤ Black Humanists & Non-Believers Book Club

Saturday, Aug 26, 2023, 3:30pm – 5:00pm

An online book discussion open to all. Book topic to be announced. RSVP to attend, and the location will be revealed.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/bhnb-sacramento/events/whnfftyfclbjc/>.

➤ **Coffee and Community on Zoom**

Sunday, Aug 27, 10am – 11:3 am

Please join us online (via Zoom) for casual conversation on topics of the day. Hosted by Nancy Sneed and Lucila.

We meet via teleconference for the summer months; bring your own coffee and treats. Hope to see you!

Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88317332021?pwd=OVI6M3IRQm52L0hQUmhwd0pucENEQT09>.

Details: <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/ssgcqtyfclbkc/>.

➤ **Porch Talk**

Wednesday, Aug 30, 7pm – 8:30pm

A social gathering on the virtual front porch. Join online (via your personal computer) for a chat on topics of the day; just click the link and follow the instructions. Your discussion suggestions are welcome. Hosted by Nancy Sneed.

Attendance link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88417809715?pwd=UGx1Q3hpU25iWkwrZjZaTWZFMEMxZz09>.

Details: see <https://www.meetup.com/sacfan/events/xcnkftyfclbfc/>.

➤ **More Events - Event Calendars**

There's more! Believe us. And plans keep changing, so don't trust the static list above. To keep track of all those other events, bookmark & follow these links:

- Sacramento Freethinkers, Atheists and Nonbelievers, <https://www.meetup.com/SacFAN/events/calendar/>
- The Reason Center calendar, <https://www.meetup.com/ReasonCenterEvents/events/calendar/>
- Black Humanists of Sacramento events, <https://www.meetup.com/bhnb-sacramento/events/calendar/>
- Recovery from Religion Sacramento, <https://www.meetup.com/RfR-Sacramento-CA/events/calendar/>
- Sacramento Skeptics events, <https://www.meetup.com/sacskeptics/events/calendar/>
- Compassionate Humanists of Roseville, <https://www.meetup.com/compassionate-humanists/events/calendar/>
- Sunday Assembly Sacramento events, <https://www.meetup.com/sunday-assembly-sacramento/events/calendar/>
- Central Valley Alliance of Atheists & Skeptics, <https://www.meetup.com/fresno-cvaas/events/calendar/>

You can help. Here's how.

Support Reason Center

Since Reason Center opened in July 2014, it has hosted hundreds of events and accrued twelve partner organizations. Its mission is to support a social and intellectual community for freethinkers, contribute to society through education and community service, advance the civic understanding and acceptance of freethinkers, and uphold the separation of religion and government. All good work.

But to continue, "RC" relies on members and donors. Please stand up for Reason Center, because it stands up for you. To join or donate, visit ReasonCenter.org.

Suggest a Meeting

Know a compelling speaker, have a great meeting idea? Tell the AOF Program Committee! Go to <http://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>, click "Program Committee" in the drop-down line, and enter your thoughtful suggestion. (Reasonable honorariums paid to speakers.)

Volunteer?

Give it a chance. See <http://www.aofonline.org/learn/committees.html> for opportunities.

✧ ✧ **Secular Holiday** ✧ ✧

➤ **Ingersoll Day**

Friday, August 11, 2023

Ingersoll Day marks the birthday of [Robert Green Ingersoll](#), honoring the life and work of one of the most noted freethinkers in US history. Ingersoll was also the most successful orator in nineteenth century America, heard by more Americans than any human before the advent of motion pictures and radio. A leading political figure, he campaigned against slavery and for the rights of women and minorities. They called him the "Great Agnostic." He attracted huge crowds to lectures that criticized religion and promoted freethought. Walt Whitman and Mark Twain greatly admired him.



Celebrate Ingersoll Day with a visit to the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum, or by reading excerpts from the Complete Works of Ingersoll.

"When I became convinced that the universe is natural, that all the ghosts and gods are myths, there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom. The walls of my prison crumbled and fell. The dungeon was flooded with light and all the bolts and bars and manacles became dust. I was no longer a servant, a serf, or a slave. There was for me no master in all the wide world, not even in infinite space. I was free -- free to think, to express my thoughts -- free to live my own ideal, free to live for myself and those I loved, free to use all my faculties, all my senses, free to spread imagination's wings, free to investigate, to guess and dream and hope, free to judge and determine for myself . . . I was free! I stood erect and fearlessly, joyously faced all worlds."

-- Robert Green Ingersoll, "Why I Am an Agnostic"



Not yet an AOF member? Please join us!

Atheists and Other Freethinkers is a 501(c)(3) non-profit association, FEIN 68-0325762, incorporated in 1993. Meetings are free and open to the public. AOF also hosts civic service projects, dinners, movies and parties! See what awaits you at www.aofonline.org.

AOF President: Prolific Pamella Rivera
Vice-president: Marvelous Mynga Futrell
Secretary: Rapid Ruth Rezos
Treasurer & Registrar: Kinetic Ken Nahigian
Webmistress: Palpable Pat Kelley
Program chair: Super Susan McLean
Facebook page: Keen Kaeleigh Pontif
Directors at large:
Roger Zabkie, Fran Evanisko, Kaeleigh Pontif

How to Contact AOF:

- Call 916-304-3796 (voicemail)
 - Or write to PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182
- Or visit <http://www.aofonline.org/contact> to e-message us.

How to Join AOF:

Visit <http://www.aofonline.org/join>, or come to a meeting. We have forms.

AOF's Facebook pages (two):

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1525411971087089/>
<https://www.facebook.com/Atheists-and-Other-Freethinkers-AOF-104763721971742>

AOF is affiliated with the Alliance of Secular Humanist Societies (ASHS), Atheist Alliance of America (AAA), American Atheists (AA), American Humanist Association (AHA) and the Sacramento Coalition of Reason (SCoR).

AOF Mission Statement:

"The purpose of Atheists and Other Freethinkers (AOF) 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."

What is a Freethinker? One striving to form opinions of life, religion, politics and philosophy on the grounds of reason and experience, rather than tradition, authority or custom. He or she need not be an atheist, though in a religious society most atheists do tend to be freethinkers.

AOF supports a benign separation of Church and State as the best means to protect the liberty and intellectual commerce of citizens. "... to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries" (James Madison, 1803).

Our vision: to be a venue where secular and unchurched citizens can socialize, dialog, develop friendships and enjoy shared company. AOF does not discriminate on such grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, physical debility or (*cough*) religion. We welcome the fair-minded of all political persuasions and preferences. Any who will treat others with respect and dignity may join.

Donations to AOF are tax deductible, and the newsletter is free by email. Please share with sympathetic friends.

Letters, submissions? We love them! See:

<http://www.aofonline.org/read/submission-guide.html>.

Apparently putting
Alka Seltzers in
my mouth while
getting baptized
and pretending I'm
possessed by the
Devil is not funny.

Happiest nations on Earth are strongly secular

by Phil Zuckerman, Mar 20, 2022, <https://onlysky.media/pzuckerman/the-happiest-nations-on-earth-are-strongly-secular/>

What happens when millions of people in a given society stop going to church and lose their faith in God? Does that society descend into despondency and despair?

Not according to the latest [World Happiness Report](#), released this past week.

Based on an analysis of a host of sociological, economic, and psychological factors, the nation that is currently the happiest on earth – for the fifth year in a row – is Finland. Following Finland, in the top ten, are Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway, Israel, and New Zealand.

And it just so happens that all of them are among the [most secular/least religious](#) nations on Earth. Aside from outlier Israel – which is growing more religious as it grows more brutal and undemocratic – all of these top-10 happiest nations have experienced [dramatic degrees](#) of secularization over the last century.

For instance, Norway has not only seen its church membership [plummet](#) to unprecedented levels, but for the first time ever, more [Norwegians](#) today don't believe in God than do. In neighboring Sweden, church attendance is also at an all-time [low](#), and nearly [65%](#) do not believe in God, another all-time low. In Denmark, nearly [half](#) the population does not believe in God – also an all-time low. In New Zealand, back in 2001, about 30% claimed to have no religion, but today that is up to a record high of nearly [50%](#); in the Netherlands, almost 40% of the population attended church regularly back in the 1970s, but today it is down to only 15%, and for the first time in Dutch history, a majority of people claim to have [no religion](#). In Iceland today, a whopping [0.0%](#) of people under 25 believe that the world was created by God. And as for the leader of the happy pack, Finland, back in 1900, 0% of [Finns](#) claimed no religious affiliation, but today, 30% are religiously unaffiliated, and only about one third believe “there is a God” – another all-time low.

To many observers, such dramatically low levels of religious involvement and faith should spell emotional dourness at best, existential disaster at worst. But neither outcome is the reality. Rather, high degrees of happiness reign.

Of course, happiness is a doggedly subjective concept. Personally, having lived in Scandinavia for over two years, I would not describe Nordic folks as “happy,” per se. Aside from our dear friends and relatives there who are warm and loving, I'd describe the average Scandinavian you pass on the street as fairly taciturn, earnest, private, and a tad aloof. But happy? Uh...*no*. Certainly not compared to all the extremely jolly folks that work at my local Trader Joe's.

But given the variables included in the study – such as subjective measures of well-being, calmness, and feeling at peace – the rankings make sense, if by “happy” we don't mean ecstatically joyful, but rather, experiencing a general sense of contentment. On that front, the strongly secular nations that are in the top-ten certainly deserve to be there: with their extensive systems of welfare-capitalism, they experience the highest degrees of freedom in the world, while also the lowest levels of inequality. They enjoy free or highly subsidized health care, childcare, elder care, education, and so forth. Their societies are extremely safe and humane. No wonder their citizens are the most content and happy in the world.

But what, exactly, is the relationship between these nations' happiness and their secularity?

To assert that they are happy *because* they are secular is not statistically warranted; it would be a bald case of apparent correlation but not proven causation. That said, for those who persistently claim that religion is a *necessary* component of a healthy, happy society – insisting that if religious faith and involvement fade, the results will be deleterious – well, that position is demonstrably untenable; the data presented in this latest World Happiness Report, with highly secular nations consistently holding the top positions, render the argument that society needs religion in order for its citizens to thrive, as simply not true.

There are certainly many reasons that these nations experience such high degrees of happiness and well-being. In addition to their strong social welfare systems mentioned above, they enjoy economic prosperity, healthy democratic institutions, equal rights for women, highly educated populations, clean streets, well-manicured parks, thriving arts, low murder rates, and – at least in the Nordic world – copious amounts of herring. But whatever the various reasons are that produce such happy societies, they don't seem to be religious or spiritual in nature. Bible study, church attendance, prayer, faith – clearly such things can decrease and diminish, without causing widespread anguish or depression. Indeed, it seems that just the opposite can be the surprising result.

