

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

December 2007

## Special Points of Interest

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## Sunday, December 9, 1:30-4PM SN&R's Joey Garcia Discusses "Secular Spirituality"

Joey Garcia has written the Ask Joey relationship advice column in the Sacramento News & Review for ten years. She is also the founder of Rise Up Belize, advancement through education, a registered non-profit that serves children and elementary school teachers in her native country of Belize, Central America.



She writes: *Increasing numbers of Americans designate themselves as spiritual, not religious, but those committed to religion insist spirituality and religion are inseparable. Part of the problem is clearly the variety of ways the word spirituality is employed. The other issue is the rise in people who are attempting to divorce themselves of religion. Common ground does exist—but in highly unexpected places! You'll find out where to find it and how to nurture it, during this lively dialogue with Joey.*

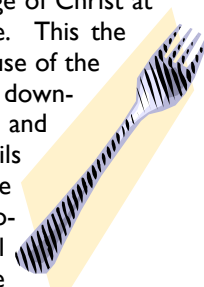
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Sunday, December 23, 1-4 PM

## It's A Winter Solstice Potluck Celebration—Food, Friends, & Song By Paul Storey

Xmas time is upon us. I bet a lot of you share my rejection of the message of Christ at Christmas. We have an alternative, a celebration of the Winter Solstice. This the party will be held on 23 December from 1pm to 4pm at the Common House of the Southside Park Co Housing, located at 434 T in Sacramento, which is in downtown a couple of blocks north east of the intersection of highways 50 and 15. Traditionally, an atheist play is performed by our members and never fails to heartily entertain everyone. Last year a wonderful new lady dropped like Santa Claus and brought a raft of humanist Christmas songs, featuring parodies of the traditional verses sung along to the familiar melodies. We all sang with glee. I used to love to go caroling but about choked on the



(Continued on page 7)

## Recognizing AOF Efforts to Build Local Community

### AOF Line

By Paul Storey

Firstly, I'd like to express from all of us a well deserved thanks to Don Knutson for his two terms as AOF president. Also, thanks to Mynga Futrell as VP, which she continues to do, Jerry Sloan as secretary and Ken Nahigian for his long time stretch as treasurer. The AOF board of Beverly Church, Kay Dickey, and Susan Vergne has provided guidance to our organization, and more importantly, great speakers every month. And a special thanks to Kevin Schultz for furnishing our website, [aofonline.org](http://aofonline.org).

When you Google "atheists Sacramento", we come out on top, and when you Google "atheists California", we are on the first page. Thanks also to Kevin, for putting together this newsletter.

These are the people who make our organization happen, and without them we would go the same route a lot of other organizations have gone—away. I would hate to have to go to the Bay Area or have to get on a plane to meet fellow freethinkers after mental battles with the religionists who seem to surround us and dominate the media. I have always found attending an AOF event to bring camaraderie and companionship to my heart, seeing first hand that I am not the only one

who openly disagrees with the foundations of the thinking of those who adhere to dogma, and so actively try to spread their message. I'm sorry we can't offer eternal happiness in paradise as a reward for our board members, but we can offer the mindfulness of not believing in fairy tales, the intellectual maturity of thinking with our own minds through myths of long ago using the modern tools of science and reason to guide our search for answers to our universe. Also, the quality free-

thinkers posses that sets them free of the bondage of dogma is the bravery, the individual fortitude, to be different than the rest, and to stand on your own two feet accepting responsibility for the fate and fortune of your life, rather than using a divine crutch to find meaning in life and strength through the inevitable ups and downs in life.

I can't think of any incentive better than the creator of the universe listening to your whispered prayers and looking out for you in life, but the leap to believe this requires suspension of too much of my powers of reasoning, observations through life, and knowledge of history. Thanks to you AOFers for showing me I'm not the only one who has reached this conclusion.

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

## November AOF Meeting Audio



Audio of the November meeting is available online:  
<http://media.aofonline.org/aof-november-general-meeting.m3u> (streaming audio)  
<http://media.aofonline.org/aof-november-general-meeting.mp3> (97 MB)

### 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. 7, 2007

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

#### Darwin Day, Feb. 10, 2008:

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](mailto:aofboard@aofonline.org)

ISSN: 1936-4229

AOF BloodSource ID#: 4867

## The Conniving Capitol Ministries

### By Vincent Wales

Every day at work, I receive a copy of the Capitol Morning Report. This is a short publication that lists the goings-on and assorted legislative scuttlebutt taking place across the street in the big building with the dome on top.

One of the things that appears there every Wednesday is the Legislator's Bible Study, which meets at 7:45 in the morning. And another Bible Study for the staff, which meets at noon. Every other Thursday, there's also a special one just for the ladies.

No tax dollars are used for this. Still... The blurb in the Capitol Morning Report lists several "sponsors" of the Wednesday study, including two senators, three assembly members, and something called Capitol Ministries.

Capitol Ministries was easy enough to find. They're at [www.capitolministries.org](http://www.capitolministries.org). Their homepage states: "Capitol Ministries is singularly focused on establishing biblical ministries in State Capitols throughout our nation - and eventually the world - in order to bring the Gospel of Christ to elected officials."

I perused the California section of the site, learning about Pastor Ralph Drollinger, who heads the organization. I even looked at some of the specific "lessons" from this year, all of which are online in PDF format. Essentially, these amount to telling our legislators what they should think (which is essentially what dogmatic Christianity does, anyway), and by extension, how they should vote on particular issues. Such as same-sex marriage and abortion, in case you couldn't guess.

Capitol Ministries is a special interest group representing conservative Christians. They have an agenda, which is to urge legislators to vote according to their Christian principles, thereby causing Christian law to become national law. Every day, the [theocracy](#) inches closer.

*This article originally appeared online at [The Atheist Attic](#) on March 1, 2005; the author reports the Bible studies [continue](#) as of this reprinting. Vincent M. Wales is a former AOF Board Member and the author of One Nation Under God and Wish You Were Here. contacted at [mail@vincentmwales.com](mailto:mail@vincentmwales.com).*

## AOF Oct 28 Highway Clean-up Report

### By Don Knutson

A beautiful and calm Sunday morning greeted the AOF crew which hit the road October 28 to continue our 13-year-old tradition of cleaning Highway 99 north of Elkhorn Blvd. Long time veterans, Don Knutson, Ken Nahigian and Debra & Richard Prowse were joined by newcomers Alice Corley and Brian Jones. The use of the Prowse's van made the work easy as we deployed volunteers to hot spots of trash accumulation much like the fire crews are strategically-assigned to mop up the remains of the wild fire in Southern California. About 20 bagsworth of trash were "rescued" from eventually clogging area tributaries. The next clean-up Date is **January 6**.

### Sacramento Community Events Calendar for 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

# When The Bible Ruled Geneva

By Ken Nahigian

We know fair much about John Calvin, or Jean Chauvin, to use his birth name. Born 26 years after Martin Luther, the prototypical Puritan, he inspired the Presbyterian church and generations of brimstone-preachers. To Calvin, our singular hope is *Grace*, overshadowed by *Predestiny*. Give it up, free will is an illusion; we are each saved (*elected*) or damned already. Like a courtier attending a capricious king, we can only wait, hoping God's whim has favored us.

To be fair, few modern Christians, even conservative Presbyterians, interpret predestination quite as Calvin did. But he was the spit-image of modern religious hard-conservatives in one respect: He yearned for a civil society based on Biblical law. This is about how Calvin had his way, and how that worked out. It is a history with a moral, if not quite the one he might have wanted.

In 1536 Calvin came to Geneva. It was a happy arrival for a certain fiery local preacher named Guillaume Farel. Under Reformation, Geneva had just expelled the old Bishop, and much desired a new city church. Calvin was on the run, having slipped and shown his Protestant sympathies. Farel liked Calvin's style. He persuaded him to stay, to teach, and to help.

Soon they influenced the city council to require church membership for all, with four communions a year. It set spies on slackers, established a moral censorship, and began to excommunicate delinquent citizens. Bit by bit, under the reform, scrip-

ture became a legal code administered by clergy. Calvin even drew up a special (obligatory) catechism for children.



**John Calvin (1509-1564):** Founder of Calvinism, or Reformed Theology

The reform did not go well at first—Geneva kicked out Calvin and Farel in 1538, then invited Calvin back in 1540. On return, he went to work in earnest. His guiding vision was *Sola Scriptura*, (translation: *Scripture Alone*). By the mid-1550's, Calvin had reorganized the church and merged it seamlessly into city government. Civil rule in Geneva was thoroughly Calvinist in structure

and thought, and thoroughly Biblical (as Calvin understood it).

History describes what this rule was like: Laws against blasphemy and profanity, cards and dice, instrumental music, and all holidays except Sunday; public executions for witchcraft and adultery; a young girl beheaded for striking her parents in a moment of anger; a burgher jailed for smiling during a baptism; a peasant boy whipped publicly for flinging a stone; other children hung by their arms in public to show that they deserved execution; some children seriously threatened with execution for playing games on Sunday. Calvin formed a Consistory, a council of elders of the city and church, to meet weekly and enforce Biblical principles. At the height of its influence, according to one historian, many citizens simply stayed indoors as much as possible to avoid being called up before it. Rather than face the Consistory, some even committed suicide.

Calvinist Geneva also banished (threatening with execution on return) reticent Catholics, Jews, Anabaptists, and anyone disputing Calvin's theology of predestination. The town became a haven for sympathetic Protestants fleeing Catholic France, who arrived in such numbers, and with such wealth, that they became civil leaders, voting in Calvin's sternest strictures. His followers even staged a little inquisition, executing some of the old civic leaders.

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## Current Events

# American River College Hosts Diversity Panel

## By Hank Kocol

Within the past month or so, the American River College (ARC) *Christian Civilization Club* (now defunct) staffed a table outside the campus library. Several members of that club evidently accosted Moslem and Jewish fellow students with racial and other discriminatory

faith Alliance, Rabbi David Wechsler-Azen, and me.

My presentation began by introducing myself as, *psychologically a freethinker, philosophically a humanist, and religiously an atheist*. I then proceeded to define all three terms and place them within historical

maintained by the Arabs while Europe was in the "Dark Ages."

*Atheism* was defined from its Greek roots, as was *agnosticism*.

After the panel discussion, I was interviewed for the student campus newspaper. Of special concern was the conflict between the Right to



**Diversity Panelists** (left to right): Rabbi David Wechsler-Azen (Temple Beth Shalom), Metwalli Amer (SALAM Center), Hank Kocol (hand raised, Atheists and Other Freethinkers), Dexter McNamara (Interfaith Service Bureau)

slurs. The faculty responded by arranging for a panel of outside representatives from various religious and philosophical groups to discuss the importance of acceptance of diversity. Faculty from the college insisted that a representative of the freethought community be asked to participate along with representatives of the major local religions. I was fortunate enough to be asked to represent that freethought community.

The panel was composed of Dr. Metwalli Amer of the Islamic community; Dexter McNamara, a Presbyterian Minister and head of the Inter-

context.

*Freethought* was defined and related to German immigrants to this nation in the 18th and 19th centuries. My definition of *humanism* was adapted from that published by the American Humanist Association, expounding upon sections of the AHA statement. Thus, when AHA mentions *compassion*, I spoke of care for individual humans and members of other species, with *liberty and opportunity*. I called for rights not dependent upon race, sex, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Humanism was traced to the ancient Greeks and that the knowledge was

Free Speech as opposed to a rational discourse on conflicting opinions. I mentioned the Supreme Court Justice quote, *Free Speech does not include the right to shout 'Fire' in a crowded theater*. I spoke of the responsibility for respect for other people as human beings when trying to have a dialogue on any potentially contentious issue.

The faculty member who arranged the panel, a sociology professor at ARC, told me that some of her students expressed surprise that an atheist would be compassionate and an environmentalist, proving that some education had taken place and much more is necessary.

# AOF Subscription / Membership Form

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

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address (print legibly!) \_\_\_\_\_

## Check your preference:

Newsletter Subscriber Only (\$12)     Family Membership (\$30)

Low-income Member (\$10)     Patron (\$50)



Single Membership (\$20)     Donation (\$ \_\_\_\_\_ )


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

## Tidbits, News, and Events of Interest AOF Family News

- Congratulations to AOF Board Member **Kay Dickey** on the birth of her fourth grandchild! *Niel Delano Gray* entered the world on Nov 9, weighing in at 8 lbs, 7 oz. 
- AOF Member **Cleo Fellers Kocol** has been busy as of late: she's written about the wedding of Ken Nahigian and Ruth Rezos recently in the Roseville section of the Sacramento Bee (<http://sacbee.com/placer/story/450145.html>); she wrote contributed a guest commentary in the Elk Grove-Laguna section of the Sacramento Bee (<http://sacbee.com/elkgrove/story/462556.html>). Congratulations! 
- AOF Board Members Beverly

Church, Jerry Sloan, and Susan Vergne stepped down from the AOF board in November—next time you see them be sure to say *thanks* for their contributions to AOF. 

- **Mike Newdow** will present oral arguments to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals on **Tuesday, December 4**. A rally is being organized by a coalition of Bay-Area groups for 7:30 AM that morning to support his efforts. The Richard Dawkins web site is planning on taping the event. If you'd like to support Mike, call the AOF voice-mail at 916-447-3589 or e-mail [aofboard@aofonline.org](mailto:aofboard@aofonline.org) and let us know you'd like to attend! Car pool rides available! Hope to see you there. 

## Community Events of Interest to AOF Members

- **Humanists of Sun City** will not hold a meeting in December or January. Hank and Cleo plan to resume with a February meeting featuring Bruce Joplin who will speak about Pakistan. In March, they will host Bob Schmidt who will discuss current media issues.
- **FACTS, Thursday, Dec 10, 7-9PM:** General Meeting. Home of AOF board member Bev Church, 120 Eastbrook Circle, Sacramento. More info: <http://www.restorethepledge.com/FACTS/>
- **HAGSA, Friday, Dec 7, 7-9PM:** Brigitte Jaensch on *Muslims in America*. Room 7/8, Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS), at 2425 Sierra Boulevard, Sacramento. More info: <http://hagsa.org>
- **SORT** will not hold a meeting in December. Kit and Ray plan to resume with a Sunday, January 29 meeting.

*Do you have any info that you'd like to share with the AOF membership? Please submit items to: [newsletter@aofonline.org](mailto:newsletter@aofonline.org) and specify in the e-mail that you'd like to announce the information in the Family News section. Thanks!*

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Ironically, prior to the Reform, Geneva had been Europe's gem, its richest city and its first free republic, with a fair degree of religious tolerance. For this, Calvin cared not a whistle. A man of principle, he only wanted a society true to scripture—of course that meant his own reading of scripture. And so before long, the wealthiest, freest nation in Europe, a center of intellectual commerce where faiths mingled, where diverse books were published, where trade and industry bloomed, declined, decayed, and became a backwater. Calvinism took it down.

Along the way, almost as a footnote, Calvin persecuted Michael Servetus, the great physician, humanist and Unitarian, and had him burned. Of all of it, that seems the most difficult to forgive.

Meanwhile the truer *free* thinkers of the day were the Anabaptists, far on the fringe and persecuted alike by Lutherans, Calvinists and Catholics. They alone called for "no official state church," and "freedom of conscience and belief." Few heard them—the concept was unthinkable.

Fortunately, things change. After Calvin died (1564), Geneva had second thoughts, and began to roll back some of the reforms. Two centuries after the Bible ruled Geneva, the college Calvin founded (later a university) was a wellspring for the doubts and questions of humanistic Deism.

So flowers will bloom from mud and dung, and history draws us into light, though the trek may be through a labyrinth of grief.

Worth reading is the study by Stefan Zweig, *The Right to Heresy: Calvin and Castellio*.

—Ken Nahigian, Oct 2007, with thanks & acknowledgements to Ed Babinski for much of this history.

(Continued from page 1)

words contained in most of the songs. What a refreshing alternative, it brings joy to my heart. Enough sheets will be available for everyone to join along. The songs provide great one liners to slip in to your holiday fun. Check out some of the unforgettable lyrics by Googling "Humanist Hymnal".

Also, the food is superb, worth coming for that alone. It is a potluck so bring your favorite dish. Everyone invited, and bring one of your non religious or teetering religious friends, you can't go wrong on this one. The event is co sponsored by the humanists at HAGSA.

*Away With The Danger (To the Tune of Away In A Manger)*

Away with the dangerous lies we've been told,  
Of deities, virgins, and streets paved with gold.  
Beliefs are the products of primitive minds.  
Try asking some questions; and answers you'll find.

The answers you find may upset you at first;  
But you can't ignore them. For knowledge, you  
thirst.

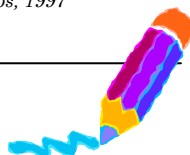
Although it's more painful, it's better to know  
That the Bible can't help you---it just isn't so.

So, where do you turn when you're lost and  
confused?

Look into your own mind. It's time it was used.  
Responsible people have always known,  
To be strong in this world you must stand on  
your own.

You're better off knowing just where you stand.  
The promise of heaven is built upon sand.  
There is no tomorrow, so live for today;  
And help all your brothers you meet on the way.

—Jerry Phillips, 1997



## Newsletter Submissions

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

[newsletter@aofonline.org](mailto: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 Volunteer Opportunities!

Calling all volunteers! Send us your ideas for projects and/or volunteer using the contact info on page two. Open positions:

- *Post-meeting lunch coordinator*
- *General Meeting Greeter*
- *AOF Librarian*
- *Program Committee Volunteer(s)*
- *Caring Committee Volunteer(s)*
- *Publicity Volunteer*
- *Freethought Day/Darwin Day*

Interested? Call 916-447-3589! Thanks

## 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](mailto:aofboard@aofonline.org)



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

*We're on the Web!*  
**aofonline.org**

## December Calendar of Events

**December AOF General Meeting (page 1)    Sunday, December 9, 1:30-4 PM**

AOF Board meeting    *Not held in December*

AOF January General Meeting    Sunday, January 13, 1:30-4 PM

SORT Monthly Meeting (<http://home.surewest.net/kitray>)    *Not held in December*

HAGSA Semi-Monthly Meeting ([hagsa.org](http://hagsa.org), page 6)    Friday, December 7, 7-9 PM

**AOF-HAGSA Winter Solstice/HumanLight Event    Sunday, December 23, 1-4 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" (2008-02-10). 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.

