

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

January 2008

Special Points of Interest

Save the Date—11th Annual Sacramento Darwin Day (page 1)

Ken Nahigian Finds Billy Graham's Better Half (page 4)

Paul Geisert's *Meditating on AOF* (page 5)

AAI's *Commemorating Freethought in the New Year* (page 7)

Sunday, January 13, 1:30-4PM January General Meeting "Healthcare: The Coming Train Wreck"

AOF's January 13 meeting features Margie Metzler, Healthcare Project Manager of the California Gray Panthers, a self-described "network of independent activists bound together by our passion for social justice."

She writes:

"If you've been following the news, or watched the movie "Sicko," you know that the US healthcare "non-system" approaching disaster. While seniors over 65 are happy with Medicare, some children receive healthcare through SCHIP, and some people in poverty have coverage through Medicaid (MediCal in California), people in the middle must rely on an increasingly crumbling network of insurance coverage. Just about everyone knows someone who is uninsured or is themselves, and the numbers grow daily. And millions more are catastrophically underinsured or have coverage cancelled when they get sick.

Sacramento Gray Panthers (<http://www.gpcal.org>) has been involved for years in the struggle to find solutions to this nightmare situation. We know that other countries
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Sunday, February 10, 2:30 PM—Save the Date! 11th Annual Darwin Day Sacramento: SETI Astronomer Dr. Seth Shostak

Sacramento's Darwin Day is Sunday, February 10, 2008
- John Smith Hall, La Sierra Community Center, 5325 Engle Road, Carmichael
- 2:30 PM start—doors open at 2 PM
- Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$5 for students—call 916-447-3589 for details
- Seth Shostak of the SETI Institute (<http://www.seti.org>) is the speaker.
- "Small Bang Band" (1 person down from the Big one we had 2 years back) will entertain before the show.
You won't want to miss it, so....
- Put the event on your calendar, NOW!
- Tell your friends, too!
- Drag your family there if you can! (no pets)
- The more students and teachers invited the better (If you are able please do your part on that score.)

Spirituality or Reality?

AOF Line

By Paul Storey

Joey Garcia gave a great presentation to our last meeting, encouraging lots of interaction the whole time, a freestyle flowing back and forth repertoire that got everyone involved. She asked about our feelings about religion, which then turned into a psychoanalysis of the stereotypical atheist mentality. You sure can't beat her 'have fun and enjoy our place in the universe' attitude, nor her 'being at peace within yourself to be attractive to others'. We as freethinkers have to take this advice deeply to heart in projecting our image to the world.

But how do we arrive at our knowledge, our truth, our model of the world and ourselves? Unlike the ancient religions, the scientific method states that if theories could not be measured by others, and repeated, then they were not worth talking about. This method of obtaining knowledge worked so well that it came to dominate many fields of human inquiry, and became known as science, and revolutionized human history.

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

Each of us can go on a quest to find joy and meaning, and create all kinds of virtual worlds—the results are the vast plethora of religions we see today. We can be very happy in the spiritual state we find—union with god, nirvana, dreamlike state, or computer virtual reality game, but the gazillion dollar question is: *Is it real?* Throughout history, the best way of measuring if something is right has been replicated double-blind experiments—throwing away the theories that don't work and continually improving the models to better fit the external reality.

And this applies to all domains of human inquiry. Religion and spirituality do not have a special place immune from the need for evidence. Just the opposite, the higher the stakes, the more the need for shopping, careful comparison and meticulous analysis before making your final decision.

Let's follow Joey Garcia's advice and make it easier for people to love us. But let's base our ideas on an external, objective, testable reality.

Letter to the Editor

The 11/11/07 AOF meeting was great. It was good to hear Sam Harris speak of the disadvantage of the label "atheist". If I were talking to a religious person as an atheist (a person who denies the existence of God), I might be asked for a proof that God does not exist. I don't have such a proof. I would rather respond by first carefully listening to that person tell of their strong feelings about God, with the understanding that the feelings came from some other part of their brain than the thinking part. Then I would present the following quote from the book DOUBT by Jennifer M. Hecht: "There is no universally compelling empirical or philosophical evidence for the existence of God". Also, I would note some of the horrors that resulted from God

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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. 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 Voluntary

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

ISSN: 1936-4229

AOF BloodSource ID#: 4857

December Speaker Write-Up

By Mynga Futrell, Alice Corley, and Debora Smith

Joey Garcia was an excellent speaker—well-prepared, vivacious, and articulate. By taking a “workshop approach” designed to probe audience opinions, Joey stirred up some excitement. The negatively-framed *What’s wrong with religion?* question underlay a strategy (proved successful) to unleash some audience responses and lay ground for making her points. Her message was tough medicine for some to swallow, as was evidenced by a few exchanges.

I sensed in Joey a rather stereotypical view of atheists as personally “unsettled, and seeking,” generally anti-theistic and off-putting folks—akin to fundamentalists.

Joey judged those of us who are atheists as being in need of conducting some serious introspection of our own concepts—the ones that have hold of us internally. In her view, these make for our projecting a negativity that walls us off from fellow citizens who don’t want, and never will want, *whatever it is* we have. No wonder the headcount for (and influence of) atheist organizations is so puny nationwide. Joey also seemed to view the audience as entirely atheistic rather than as a mix of freethinkers of varied stripes.

Alice Corley adds: I was intrigued that Joey acknowledged the existence of atheist rage and said she had observed it also in fundamentalists, two groups at opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum but both feeling equally misunderstood and marginalized. Her point was that we try to reposition ourselves proactively, getting past the anger to project a sense of peacefulness and joy, to exhibit more respect and kindness, less rage and confrontation. Chronic rage is counterproductive and alienating, and probably causes wrinkles.

Deborah Smith adds: Most of what she talked about appeared to come directly from Byron Katie's "The Work" (<http://thework.com>). This is a proposed method for stress reduction and conflict resolution that turns the subject and object of problem statements around (the idea being that much of the way we see others is a projection of how we see ourselves). Joey suggested that this might be a way to resolve anger or other stressful emotions resulting from our relationship with the theistic world. This would make us more attractive, as a group and individually, to potential 'converts'.

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have come up with solutions that provide healthcare for all, and we want that for us as well.

This year, we have expanded the scope of our presentation and now cover a much broader perspective on the looming healthcare crisis. We follow closely all the Federal and State legislative efforts to come up with solutions and have retooled our presentation with this new information and added several fascinating DVD's. It's a moving target, so when you book a presentation with us, you will get the very latest information on what's happening in the healthcare world and how it can affect your members.

Every person in this country will be affected by the decisions that are being made daily. The only way we can change things is to get involve and educated!"

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

Billy Graham's Better Half: Charles Templeton

By Ken Nahigian

Faith is personal, if nothing else—for some a font of life, for others a wound that never closes, but bleeds mystery, fear and grief, and aches within them long after leaving. And some leave but then heal, grow stronger, and return with a power of mind to face down the fear, to glean it and find gold. This was Charles Bradley Templeton.

Who remembers him? We know Billy Graham, of course, who has the grudging respect even of many who scorn the Religious Right. But Graham was once half of a team—the lesser half, in fact—and who recalls his partner, who was also his best friend?

That was Templeton too.

Born October 7, 1915, Charles grew up to be many things: a noted journalist, radio and television star, skilled cartoonist, CTV anchor man, editor of *The Toronto Star* and *Maclean's* magazine, writer, director, inventor, carpenter and charismatic politician—and evangelist. The beginnings were humble.

In 1936, age 19, Templeton worked as an illustrator at a Toronto newspaper, earning twelve dollars a week. Bouts of depression led to a religious experience. Entering the ministry, he blossomed and excelled, propelled by sincerity, a winning smile and a singular hunger of mind.

It brought friends and connections. One was a gangling young Will Graham, whom Templeton met at a Christian youth rally in Chicago. Bonding instantly, they co-founded Youth for Christ International (which has pretty much excised Templeton from its history—you'll see why).

Together, "Billy and Chuck" toured the revival circuit, filling stadiums with crowds of up to 30,000, and earning a nickname, "the gold-dust

twins." As the more eloquent of the two, many expected Templeton, not Graham, to become history's great evangelical preacher. Even critics admired him. Much later, liberal commentator Larry Zolf wrote, "I had heard great socialist orators like Woodsworth, Lewis and Frank Scott speak. But they were nothing compared to Templeton. Templeton went for your heart, plucked it out, recharged it and gave you new life and new hope where none had existed before. Templeton was one hell of a political energizer."

"Charles Templeton was the most versatile of all of our preachers," Dr. Torrey Johnson of Youth for Christ proclaimed in 1984. And Billy Graham said, "Chuck was the most brilliant, able man I've known. He was a true intellectual. He could do anything. ... He was a genius, I think."

Soon Templeton was hosting his own national religious show on CBS, "Look Up and Live." But self-doubt punctured him, a fear he was getting by on sheer good looks and magnetism, flash and dazzle. He yearned to study the origins of his faith, examine it critically—as he said, "to get some buttressing." Applying to Princeton Theological Seminary, he begged Graham to go with him. Graham refused—it seemed just too embarrassing. So in 1948, Templeton went alone.

By 1957, he was an agnostic.

In revivalist circles it was a seismic event, a tsunami, an earthquake, as if Graham himself had renounced Jesus. In a memoir, *Farewell to God*, Templeton explained his reasons: difficulties of the Creation myth, bigotry in the Bible, sexism, historical problems of Jesus, failure of prayer, the mysteries of evil, suffering and death. As compelling as his best sermon, full of ragged grief, the closing

words are, "I believe." But search the web, and you will still find rancor.

Divided from colleagues and friends (though he and Graham remained close), even losing his wife, Templeton went back to journalism. He met his second wife on the set of a CBC television drama. 13 months after they wed, he had a son. He also acquired a step-son and -daughter—one of them, Ty Templeton, today, is a world-class comics artist.

He went on to try his hand at politics (nearly becoming Premier of Ontario) before returning to radio and TV newscasting. And he wrote plays and a bestselling novel, *Act of God*, about an archaeologist who discovers the bones of Christ, and his lifetime friend, now a Cardinal and papal candidate, who decides to kill him to protect the Church.

Life was full if not easy. Finally, in 1982, he fell prey to Alzheimer's disease. Retiring from public life, he fought for each inch, according to his son, stretching his memory and performing daily exercises such as spelling words backward. He kept his vocabulary almost until the end, when the disease shut down what his brain needed to live. He died on June 7th, 2001, age 85.

The *Toronto Star* put his picture on the front page and gave him a full-page obituary. Even Billy Graham eulogized him.

"I love Chuck to this very day," he had said. "He's one of the few men I have ever loved in my life. He and I had been so close. But then all of sudden, our paths were parting. He began to be a little cool to me then. I think ... that Chuck felt sorry for me."

Read Templeton's story in his own words at <http://templetons.com/charles/memoir/>.

Current Events

Meditating On AOF In the New Year

By Paul Geisert

I recognize that the speaker at our December meeting was addressing the audience as individuals, and not the organizational whole. Nevertheless, the talk by Joey Garcia got me to thinking about AOF itself, especially as there is new leadership to take the group forward in 2008.

Ms. Garcia’s presentation echoed in my mind another that I had heard recently. The speech was by Sam Harris, and I heard it at the recent Atheists Alliance International conference in Washington, D.C. There, Sam presented the fact that he was deeply into meditation. Meditation, incidentally, is an activity that can be a legitimate aspect of a naturalistic worldview. Nevertheless, the fact that the author of *The End of Faith* engaged in meditation was a concept that was very difficult for a great many attendees to understand. (The AAI conference was a largely atheist gathering, although I assume some others attending had situations similar to my own—not atheist.)

My interpretation of Ms. Garcia’s talk was that she wanted to get across a concept consistent with much meditation—the idea that one must pay great attention one’s own thoughts and life, and try to get everything right in that domain *first*. In short, one doesn’t try to get others to change their lives (through criticism, argument, discussion, etc.); rather, one works on making their own thoughts and life better. I think she was also making the point that, when it comes to changing a situa-

tion, one has to be responsible for casting out of one’s life the negative aspects of personal being that are “counterproductive” to being at peace and happy.

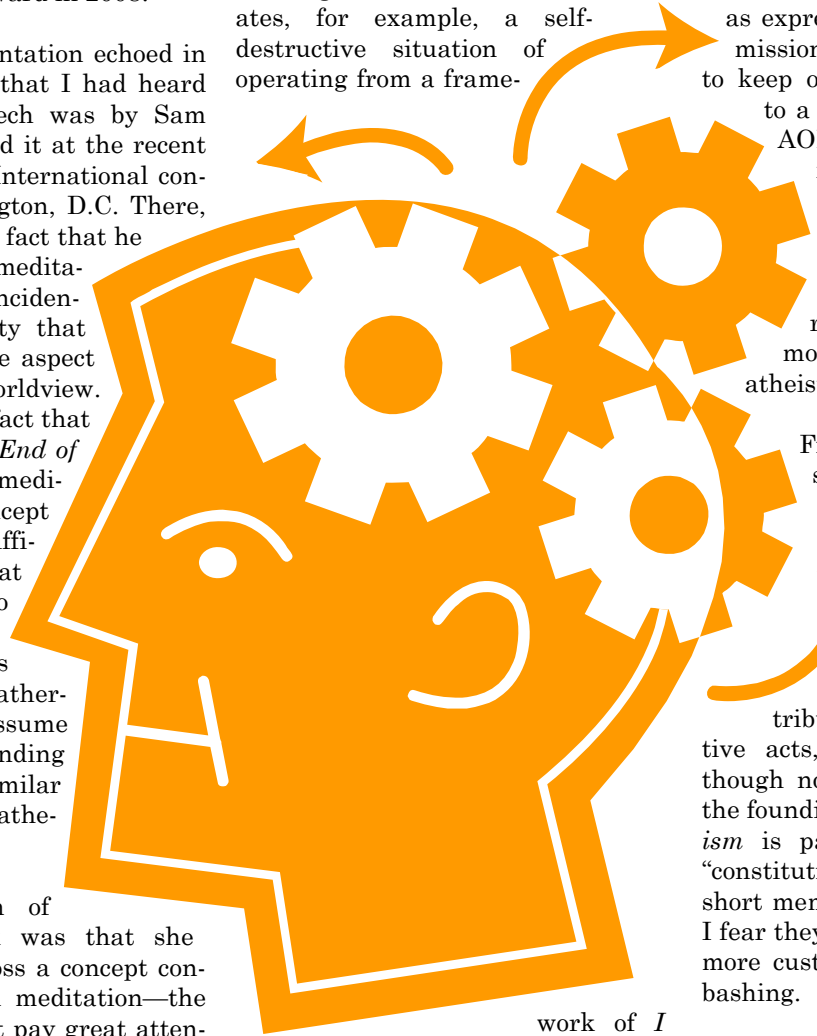
Ms Garcia surely made clear that focusing on the “evils of others” creates, for example, a self-destructive situation of operating from a frame-

work of *I hate religion* and thereby creating a festering personal problem that needs to be solved, but that can *only* be solved by a change in one’s own self. Ergo, in her view, an individual AOFer’s responsibility is to clear out self-damaging thoughts and behaviors. Hating *religion* is one of those self damaging thoughts.

Which brought me to thinking of AOF itself. Might an *organization* have its own self-damaging “thoughts” and actions? If so, how best can the organization avoid engaging in behaviors that are counterproductive to its own “health?” Thankfully, the “thoughts” of AOF, as expressed in its organizational mission statement, have served to keep organizational self-damage to a minimum. The purpose of AOF is typically read at every meeting, and I appreciate hearing that statement read aloud in full, as a reminder to AOF to avoid the classical pattern of religion bashing that is the modus-operandi of so many atheist groups.

From the over fifty member societies in AAI, AOF was the one—the very first one—to win AAI’s national community service award the first year the honor was bestowed. It earned that tribute on the basis of its positive acts, not negative ones. Although not explicitly recognized at the founding of AOF, a *positive atheism* is part and parcel of AOF’s “constitution.” Some atheists have short memories, and as time passes I fear they will began to fall into the more customary pattern of religion bashing.

So, as we enter the New Year and with Ms. Garcia’s message to individuals fresh in memory, I hope board members and AOFers alike will themselves do some *meditation* on the organization’s overall purpose. Let’s contemplate what is ingrained within AOF’s organizational “thoughts”, and act accordingly.



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



Cleo Kocol performing *An Afternoon With Margaret Sanger* as part of the Los Angeles group Atheists United's Nov 25 meeting. Cleo also performed several pieces of poetry.

Do you have any info that you'd like to share with the AOF membership? 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. Thanks!

- The latest Secular Nation includes an article by AOF vice president **Mynga Futrell** entitled *Let Loose with Liberty of Conscience!* See: <http://atheistalliance.org/secular/index.php> for additional information.
- Former AOF Member **Leah Levine** sends along her best wishes to all of her friends in AOF from the pastoral countryside of **France**. She has no plans to return. If you wish to contact her, please e-mail newsletter@aofonline.org.
- Longtime AOF Member **Joy Fisher** has resettled in **Victoria, British Columbia**, and sends fond regards to all her AOF friends. She writes: *Please spread the word that my guest rooms are all set up upstairs, and I would welcome visitors from AOF. This is not a commercial endeavor and I am not charging for the rooms, they are just there for people who would like to come and explore Victoria. I'd be delighted to see folks:* newsletter@aofonline.org

Community Events of Interest to AOF Members

- **Humanists of Sun City** will not hold a meeting in January due to a late December potluck. They resume meetings in February meeting featuring Bruce Joplin who will speak about Pakistan. In March, they will host Bob Schmidt who will discuss current media issues.
- **First Amendmist Church of True Science (FACTS), Jan 8, 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, Jan 4, 7-9PM:** Program meeting, Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS), at 2425 Sierra Boulevard, Sacramento. More info: <http://hagsa.org>
- **Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking (SORT), Tuesday, Jan 29, 7:30-9PM.** Topic to be announced.

Atheist Alliance International Connection Commemorating Freethought: A Few Event Ideas

Looking ahead to the new year, Stuart Bechman, AAI Vice President, sent along the following "event suggestions" to representatives on AAI's board. If any strike you as something you'd like for AOF to either acknowledge or do—and if you are willing to take the lead to make it happen (if not this year, then next) – then be sure to make your interests known to AOF's board.

– *Mynga Futrell, AAI Co-Liaison*

February is probably one of the most crowded months for freethought. Feb. 12 is the birth anniversary for both Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln; and Feb. 15 is shared by Galileo Galilei, Jeremy Bentham, and Susan B. Anthony. Feb. 19 is the birthday of Nicholas Copernicus. In addition, President's Day in the US (the 3rd Monday in February) is often promoted by secularists as Church-State Separation Day, and local and state executives are asked to proclaim this holiday. [Note: If your freethought group chooses to seek a proclamation from an official, draft your proclamation early and personally deliver the proclamation along with a request to your government office at least two months ahead to give the executive time to consider and authorize the proclamation and for you to announce the proclamation in a press release. A copy of a sample proclamation and request letter may be gotten from your Atheist Alliance International member society for your group's use.]

March of course is the month of the Spring Equinox. In addition, freethought idol James Madison's birthday is March 16. Equinoxes and Solstices are "natural" excuses to throw a party as the earth skids around the Sol; and Madison's birthday can be celebrated with an "Ides of March" event where you mock as many superstitious ideas as you can come up with - Astrology charts, black cats, walking under ladders, infallible Popes, etc.

April - typically the month of Easter as well as Spring Break for many high schools and colleges across the country – includes the birthdays of Clarence Darrow (April 18), Mary Wollstonecraft (April 27), and David Hume (April 28). A group might consider hosting a theatrical recreation of the Scopes Monkey Trial; or showing the original B&W silent movie classic, "Frankenstein", and discussing how Wollstonecraft's atheism underlay the political philosophy behind her classic book; or providing a lecture about the man referred to as the Atheists' Philosopher and the ideas he put forth that laid the foundation for the Enlightenment.

(Continued from page 2)

delusions. If I accept a label for my attitude about God that says I am absolutely certain there is no God, then I am vulnerable to some of the criticism I apply to God deluded people.

—Mel Krom

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.

Volunteer Openings

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

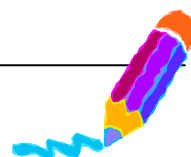
- *Post-meeting lunch coordinator*
- *General Meeting Greeter*
- *AOF Librarian*
- *Program Committee Volunteer(s)*
- *Caring Committee Volunteer(s)*
- *Publicity Volunteer*
- *Freethought Day/Darwin Day*

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





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

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

January Calendar of Events

AOF January Movie Night: "Instinct" Friday, January 11, 7-9 PM

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

AOF Board meeting Sunday, January 20, 9:30-12 PM

HAGSA Semi-Monthly Meeting (<http://hagsa.org>) Friday, January 4, 7-9 PM

First Amendmist Church of True Science (FACTS) Tuesday, January 8, 7-9 PM

SORT Monthly Meeting (<http://home.surewest.net/kitray>) Tuesday, January 29, 7:30-9PM

2008 Darwin Day Gala Celebration Sunday, February 10, 2:30 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.

