

# AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

October 2008

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## Freethought Day:

### “Celebrate Our Secular Heritage”

### Sunday, October 12, 12:00—5:00 PM

At the Sunday, October 12 spot on your calendar, put "FTD, Sacramento" so that when that date arrives, you'll be heading to Sacramento for our **7th Annual Freethought Day Fair**.

Freethought Day is a celebration of reason, freethought and church-state separation featuring speakers, live music, education expo, and children’s activities.

Free admission. 12-5 pm, Waterfront Park, Front & L Streets, Old Sacramento.

The event is an opportunity to celebrate values and actions we take for granted today which were once seen as radical and to commemorate the bold and independent thinkers who led our nation to its policy of governmental neutrality toward ultimate beliefs of citizens.

This year Freethought Day is proud to have as its featured speaker **Matthew LaClair, ACLU’s 2008 Youth Scholar**. As a high school junior in New Jersey, Matthew con-

*(Continued on page 3)*

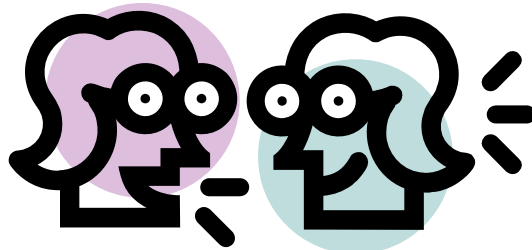
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## AOF Dinner Socials Continue: October 2nd, November 6th

**Thursday, October 2 @ 5:30 PM**  
**Maalouf’s Taste of Lebanon**  
1433 Fulton Avenue, Sacramento

**Thursday, November 6 @ 5:30 PM**  
**Kaveri Madras Cuisine**  
1148 Fulton Avenue, Sacramento



Please RSVP to Suzanne to confirm location: E-mail: [shastaseer@sbcglobal.net](mailto:shastaseer@sbcglobal.net), Phone: 419-2105. Suzanne writes: “Dinner Social held first Thursday of the month. Your restaurant recommendations are welcome! Let me know if you would like to receive an e-mail reminder.”

## AOF Line

# AOF Board Retreats to Move Forward; Dues Reorganizing

From Nancy Gilbert: "Our Board will be meeting later this month for a one day "Retreat" to consider AOF goals, mission, activities, and organization issues.

"We want to evaluate our mission and goals, and how to best meet them. We want to invigorate our organization. We would LOVE to receive your ideas and opinions before then. Try to get them in by October 20th if possible. But, send them whenever you can.

"You can send via e-mail ([aofboard@aofonline.org](mailto:aofboard@aofonline.org)), voice-mail (916-447-3589) or postal mailing address (see contact information on page three)."

Ken Nahigian writes: "Also, the Board has voted to reorganize the AOF membership dues / newsletter

subscription rates, effective Jan 1st, 2009

"The basic per-year membership levels will be the same (\$10 low-income, \$20 individual, \$30 family, \$50 patron) but will no longer include a newsletter subscription.

Subscriptions must be purchased separately.

"A newsletter subscription will be \$12 per year for mailed hardcopy, free for the electronic version (non-members may subscribe). Of course an e-subscriber would have to provide an email address.

"An e-subscriber would still have to renew each year, even if it just means sending a note saying yes, I still want to get the newsletter."

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

## Letters to the Editor

AOF member Robert Poeschel writes:

"This past Sunday, September 21st, I participated in the AOF Adopt-a-Highway Cleanup Event. It's not exactly a glamorous activity. But I'm happy to have an opportunity to do something worthwhile in the name of AOF, and proud to be associated with the public Adopt-a-Highway sign displaying the words Atheists and Freethinker in connection with good works.

"I've been out there several times now, and most of the trash is ... well, trash. Though sometimes there is something that makes you wonder how it got out there. This time I happened across these bills (enclosed). Please accept them as a donation to AOF ... as thanks for making the opportunity possible."

Enclosed we found one \$100 bill and one \$5 bill—we feel honored to accept your find, Robert. Attention AOFers—fortunes await on the highway!



## AOF Board (2007-2008)

**President:** Paul Storey

**Vice President:** Mynga Futrell

**Secretary:** Nancy Gilbert

**Treasurer:** Ken Nahigian

**Directors at large:**

Don Knutson, Kevin Schultz,

Debora Smith, (two vacancies)

## AOF Committees

**Newsletter:** Kevin Schultz (Editor)

Tom Nicolette (Mailing)

**Freethought Day, Oct. 5, 2008**

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

**Darwin Day, Feb. 15, 2009:**

Bronda Silva, Mynga Futrell, Dave Henderson, Ed McConnell, 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:** 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)

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## Call For Nominations

# AOF 2008-2009 Elections

By Ken Nahigian

Announcing: Your chance to serve as an AOF Director!

Haven't had your fill of politics? Want more? Then you're in luck, because AOF members will elect a new Board of Directors at the November general meeting.

As you may know, AOF bylaws permit any current member may stand for election as a Director. Now is the time to look into your heart, to decide if you can serve AOF in this capacity.



Duties are simple, and trust us, fun: one meeting a month, generally a week after the general meeting, where you may expound golden wisdom, express your vision for AOF, and hold forth opinions on policy.

If AOF is to survive, we need candidates, candidates, candidates – this year especially – due to a revision in the AOF bylaws that placed term limits on currently serving directors. Several of the reliable standbys will not be able to serve this next year. (Also, as you may know, one of our most reliable founders and perennial directors has left the area.) However, with consent of the new Board, standbys will stay as officers and advisors to assist with routine workload.

Can you serve as an AOF Director this next year? If interested, please contact the Nominating Committee, Ken Nahigian, at [appalonus@netzero.net](mailto:appalonus@netzero.net), or leave a message on the AOF voicemail line, 916-447-3589. (We will ask you to prepare a brief bio and greeting to run in our Election Issue next month.)

(Continued from page 1)

fronted a history teacher who promoted creationism and other personal religious beliefs in the classroom. Despite opposition and harassment, which included death threats, Matthew worked with the ACLU to make sure First Amendment rights were respected and upheld at his school. Thanks in large part to Matthew's courage and tenacity, a Student Education Assembly on Religious Freedom was created at the school.

Lori Lipman Brown, Director and Lobbyist for the Secular Coalition for America, takes time out of her busy schedule to emcee the event.

<http://www.freethoughtday.org>  
[chair@freethoughtday.org](mailto:chair@freethoughtday.org)  
 916-447-3589

## Donations to AOF Represent Tax- Deductible Gifts

### 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.*

**AOF News & Views:** Copyright © 2008 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.

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

# The Children's Crusade

### By Ken Nahigian

A mote of truth began it. Then like a snowflake or pearl, the story took layers, condensed, and crystallized, to become part of the mythology of the Crusades, and its most poignant tragedy.

In the common tale, Jesus himself appeared to a young boy, calling on him to lead an army of innocents to the Holy Land to convert the Muslims. Abetted by miracles and portents, the child gathered 20,000 waifs and orphans. He led them as far as the Mediterranean Sea. Here two merchants offered passage. The unscrupulous merchants then sold the children into slavery (or they were shipwrecked and drowned). The Children's Crusade failed, and the angels wept.

The story has likely roots in two events, which history has muddled and mixed. In 1212 a rabble marched from Germany into Italy, as far as the port of Genoa. The group became dispirited or confused when the sea failed to part as promised. Scattering, they vanished from history.

At about that time, in France, a charismatic shepherd appeared, claiming to bear a letter from Jesus to the French king. He led a mass of poor people to Paris, reportedly working miracles. Finally King Phillip II took notice, and told the crowd to give it up and go home. They did.

As crusades go, both were fairly anticlimactic. No one went to Jerusalem. Why children, why a crusade? One theory suggests a mistranslation—chroniclers writing a generation later mistook the Latin word *pueri*, slang for “country boys,” as literal children. The *pueri* were wandering displaced peasants, somewhat inclined to religious fads and hysteria. But the mental image of children marching to the Holy Land was just too good to be untrue, and people love a story.

More to the point perhaps, the time was just after the Fourth Crusade, a

period of bitterness and anomie for Christendom, as it marveled and grieved over its failure to hold the Holy Land. The romantic story of a Children's Crusade gave an answer. We are sinners; we don't deserve it.



*The Children's Crusade* (cropped), by Gustave Doré. Source: Public domain: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children%27s\\_Crusade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children%27s_Crusade), last accessed September 28, 2008.

In fact and in the broad view, the Crusades were a romantic disaster. Pope Urbane II launched the First (1096-1099). It held Jerusalem for 88 years, but at cost of staggering bloodshed: the invaders killed nearly everyone in the city, Jews, Muslims and Christians. "The slaughter was so great that our men waded in blood up to their ankles," wrote one witness. Another: "Indeed, if you had been there you would have seen our feet coloured to our ankles with the blood of the slain. ... None of them were left alive; neither women nor children were spared." The siege of Antioch on the way was hardly less bloody. By contrast, after the Sultan Saladin took back Jerusalem in 1187, he let most everyone go. And the Muslim world remembered.

The Second Crusade (1147) tried to expand the conquest, but fizzled. The Third (1187–1192) failed to recapture the Holy City. The Fourth (1202–1204) was another try, but short funds plus some intrigue motivated the crusaders to attack Constantinople instead. Sacking it, they finalize the Great Schism between Catholic and Orthodox Christendom. Pope Innocent III was mortified. Eight hundred years later, Pope John Paul II was still apologizing.

And between the big numbered ones were mini-Crusades, like the Paupere's Crusade (1096) or the Crusade of 1101, and at least five big campaigns after the Fourth. The full history is complex, even Byzantine. Never mind; none of it had a lasting effect on political geography. The mood of an era, its spirit, its cultural and collective climate, is rarely in the details—but in fads and myths, in mania and fashion, in rumors and sentiment. These are the true movers of history.

The Children's Crusade, just a story, distilled the ebullience and despair of a medieval Christian world, which equated the New Jerusalem (God's Kingdom) to the old. Wouldn't a successful conquest set the stage for Christ's Return? For now men may lack the humility and purity to achieve this. But here was a new idea: that people can have an active role in bringing the Last Days. Just try enough, sacrifice enough, spill enough blood, and perhaps, perhaps ...

Urbane II simply wanted to fence in the growing Muslim empire, help the Eastern Christians, and heal the rift in the Church. He did not expect Crusade fever to get out of hand, inflame Europe, and begin a holy war that would span centuries.

But so it happened. Today, we are still fighting.

## President's Message

# Choosing Fantasies Over Reality

By Paul Storey

Do you believe in a magical giant who lives in the sky and can read your mind and grant wishes?

The first wish anyone would make would be that they would live forever. The second wish anyone would make would be that they would be perfectly happy. The third wish might be that a powerful creature would protect me from any and all danger. Since we are going to extremes, might as well wish for the most powerful creature in the world. Why stop there? Make it the most powerful creature in the earth and the sky. Plus the cost you would have to pay for all these wishes to come true would have to be zero. You could have your fondest fantasies for free! Well guess what? The deepest desires of humanity have all been collected into one package called religion. You only have to be gullible enough to accept it.

There is a downside. Anyone believing all this nonsense has the concepts at the center of their mental hierarchy which are based on pure fantasy. This can have serious disadvantages in critical decisions in life. Do you run from a saber tooth tiger or rely on your protector to save you? The ones who took their fantasies too seriously got eaten. The ones who ran first and fantasized later lived to tell the story. Afterwards, they could embellish the experience as they saw fit. So fantasies were enforced by natural selection to remain secondary to decisions based on immediate reality.

Fantasies with the most allure to the human ego became embodied in tradition and culture. People, being self centered as we are, chose those traditions that gratified them the most and had the least restrictions on making them happy. So power-

ful rulers adopted religions that allowed them to slaughter their enemies, have many wives, concubines, slaves, and unrestricted wealth.

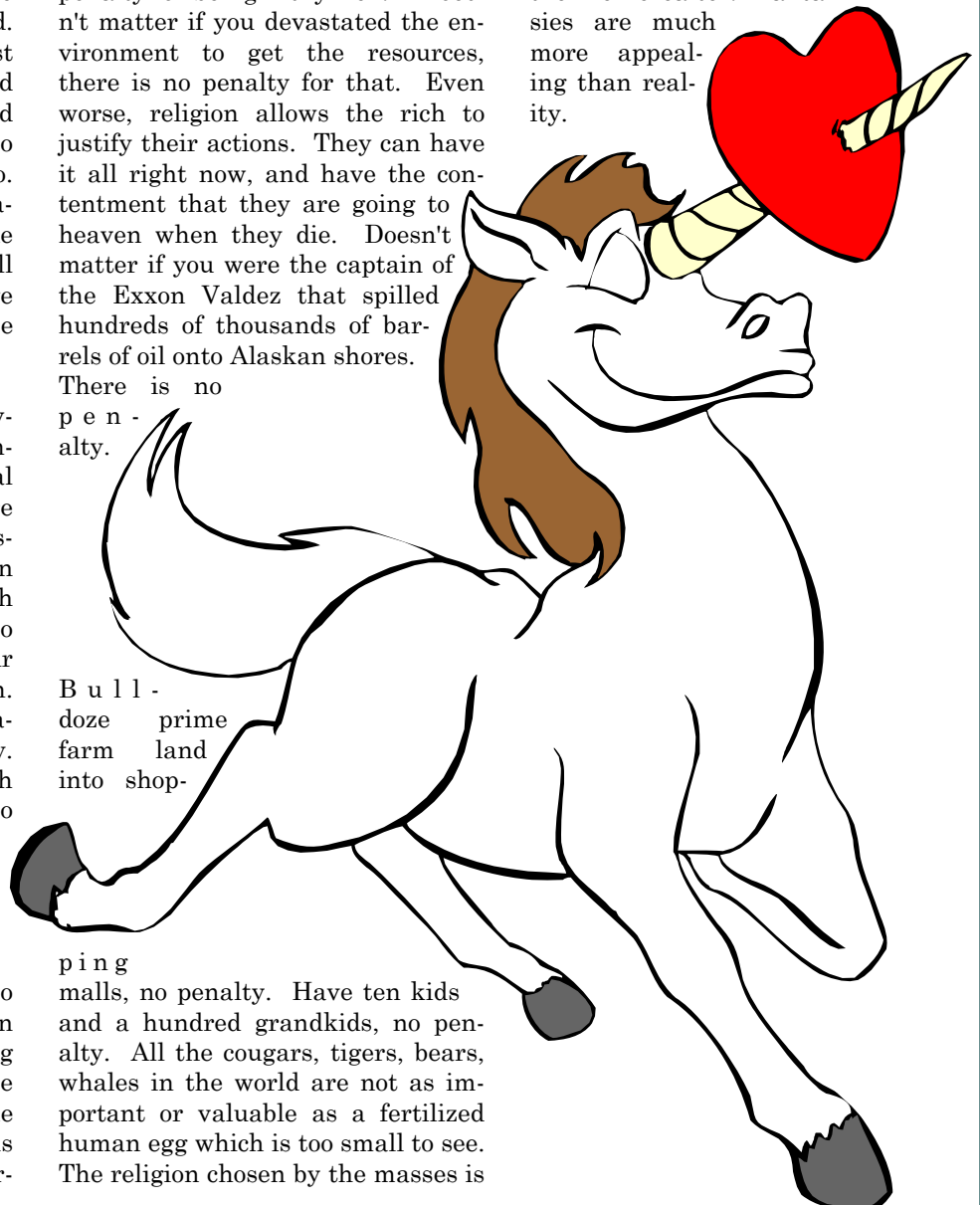
Over time, the poor uprose and deposed those rulers, so religion changed to cater to the best interests of its new supporters. We can see the results today. Everyone wants to be wealthy, so of course they choose a religion that has no penalty for being filthy rich. Doesn't matter if you devastated the environment to get the resources, there is no penalty for that. Even worse, religion allows the rich to justify their actions. They can have it all right now, and have the contentment that they are going to heaven when they die. Doesn't matter if you were the captain of the Exxon Valdez that spilled hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil onto Alaskan shores. There is no penalty.

B u l l -  
doze prime  
farm land  
into shop-

ping malls, no penalty. Have ten kids and a hundred grandkids, no penalty. All the cougars, tigers, bears, whales in the world are not as important or valuable as a fertilized human egg which is too small to see. The religion chosen by the masses is

very homocentric, and chosen to be very short sighted, because the ones doing the choosing are short sighted.

The long range survivability of the ecosystems are not as important as going to church on Sunday. Preachers don't talk about global warming. Their attendees will go to other churches that dwell on the beauties, perfection and infinite happiness of the life hereafter. Fantasies are much more appealing than reality.



# 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)

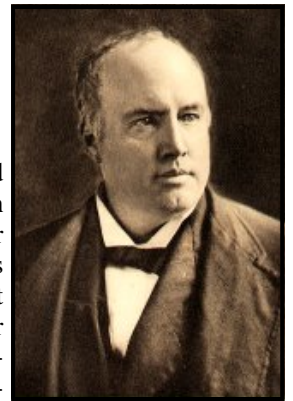
Single Membership (\$20)     Donation (\$ \_\_\_\_\_ )

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 (e-mail address required).

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

## Robert Green Ingersoll's Life



Born of love and hope, of ecstasy and pain, of agony and fear, of tears and joy -- dowered with the wealth of two united hearts -- held in happy arms, with lips upon life's drifted font, blue-veined and fair, where perfect peace finds perfect form -- rocked by willing feet and wooed to shadowy shores of sleep by siren mother singing soft and low -- looking with wonder's wide and startled eyes at common things of life and day -- taught by want and wish and contact with the things that touch the dimpled flesh of babes -- lured by light and flame, and charmed by color's wondrous robes -- learning the use of hands and feet, and by the use of mimicry beguiled to utter speech -- releasing prisoned thoughts from crabbled and curious marks on soiled and tattered leaves -- puzzling the brain with crooked numbers and their changing, tangled worth -- and so through years of alternating day and night, until the captive grows familiar with the chains and walls and limitations of a life.

And time runs on in sun and shade, until the one of all the world is wooed and won, and all the lore of love is

taught and learned again. Again a home is built with the fair chamber wherein faint dreams, like cool and shadowy vales, divide the billowed hours of love. Again the miracle of a birth -- the pain and joy, the kiss of welcome and the cradle-song drowning the drowsy prattle of a babe.

And then the sense of obligation and of wrong -- pity for those who toil and weep -- tears for the imprisoned and despised -- love for the generous dead, and in the heart the rapture of a high resolve.

And then ambition, with its lust of pelf and place and power, longing to put upon its breast distinction's worthless badge. Then keener thoughts of men, and eyes that see behind the smiling mask of craft -- flattered no more by the obsequious cringe of gain and greed -- knowing the uselessness of hoarded gold -- of honor bought from those who charge the usury of self-respect -- of power that only bends a coward's knees and forces from the lips of fear the lies of praise. Knowing at last the unstudied gesture of esteem, the reverent eyes made rich with hon-

est thought, and holding high above all other things -- high as hope's great throbbing star above the darkness of the dead -- the love of wife and child and friend.

Then locks of gray, and growing love of other days and half-remembered things -- then holding withered hands of those who first held his, while over dim and loving eyes death softly presses down the lids of rest.

And so, locking in marriage vows his children's hands and crossing others on the breasts of peace, with daughters' babes upon his knees, the white hair mingling with the gold, he journeys on from day to day to that horizon where the dusk is waiting for the night. At last, sitting by the holy hearth of home as evening's embers change from red to gray, he falls asleep within the arms of her he worshiped and adored, feeling upon his pallid lips love's last and holiest kiss.

## AOF Adopt-A-Highway Event Highway Cleanup Write-up

A skeleton AOF crew of Carolyn Lignos, Tom Nicolette, Robert Poeschel and Rich Prowse hit the highway on California's Coastal Cleanup Weekend regarded by the Guinness Book of Records as the largest coordinated effort to cleanup trash in the world. And AOF profited handsomely that day, September 21, when Robert donated the 100-dollar and 5-dollar bills he found along the highway. And terrific appreciation goes to Rich for coordinating the effort. We plan to return to the scene Saturday, November 8 @ 8a.m. to carry on this noble task.



## Announcing: New AOF Dues/ Subscription Schedule

Change is coming. On Jan 1, 2009, AOF will have new membership and newsletter subscription rates. And for some, fees will actually decrease.

In a nutshell, basic per-year membership levels will be the same (\$10 low-income, \$20 individual, \$30 family, \$50 patron) but will no longer include a newsletter subscription.

A newsletter subscription will be **\$12 per year** for mailed hardcopy, **free** for the electronic version.

Non-members may still subscribe, of course. To be an "e-subscriber," you must provide an email address. And you can still join, renew or subscribe via the AOF website, link <http://www.aofonline.org/support>.

In all cases, AOF will continue to accept membership and subscription renewals at the old rate until Jan 1st. So to save big bucks, check your mailing label, renew or extend your membership *now*.

### 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.

### Our THOUGHTS

### Lead to ACTIONS

### Which form HABITS

### Which define our VALUES

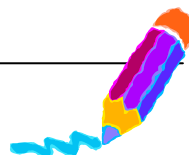
### And determine our DESTINY

### Derived from and demonstrated by GHANDI

### 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**

## October Calendar of Events

October Dinner Social @ Maalouf's Taste of Lebanon	Thursday, October 2, 5:30 PM
<b>Freethought Day—No October General Meeting</b>	<b>Sunday, October 12, 12:00—5:00 PM</b>
AOF Board Meeting	Sunday, October 19, 9:30AM—12:00 PM
Adopt-A-Highway Event	Saturday, November 8, 8—10:00AM
Davis Community Meals	December 30, 4—7:00 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" (2008-10-12), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (2009-02-15). Watch the newsletter for details.

### Directions to AOF's General Meetings

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

