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# PANViews

***Newsletter of PA Nonbelievers, Inc., affiliated with American Atheists,  
Atheist Alliance International and the Council for Secular Humanism.***

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## ***President's Report***

*Josh CruverKibi*

I hope that most everyone is feeling and doing as well as they can during the recent Coronavirus outbreak, shortages, and mitigation and restriction efforts to reduce the spread of the virus around Pennsylvania. Since thoughts and prayers are useless to us and the efforts to remedy the complex situation that we face, I would instead recommend that we rationalists and humanists do what suits us best. Research and know the facts, so that you can plan for each of your situations. For facts on COVID-19, I would suggest the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Trust the scientists and reputable sources of information. All social media should be suspected, scrutinized, and checked for sources. Help and support each other and the community the best that you can within reason for your personal safety and the safety of others.

For the month of April, PAN will be cancelling all of our in-person county meetings and we will have to monitor to determine if we will have any in person meetings or tabling events for May. PAN members are currently working on setting up and moving meetings online through Zoom or other applications. If any PAN members are already able to use these applications, feel free to set up meetings online with other members you know or contact one of the board members if you would like to offer help setting up PAN meetings online.

PAN had its in person annual meeting and potluck on March 7<sup>th</sup> of this month, just before social distancing became a social imperative. I was glad to see everyone who attended and did not realize at the time that it would be one of the last large group PAN in person social gatherings that we will have for some time to come. Thank you to those who attended and voted in our new board members, Elan Lift and Nicolas Consoli, and voted to continue the board membership of Karen Kemp and myself. I hope we can start meeting in groups again before the summer. Enjoy the PAN Views for now and maybe meet up with members online.

***Atheist News in Pennsylvania – The Nation – The World!***

**Coronavirus Solution in Pennsylvania!**

No need to worry about coronavirus anymore! Rep. Stephanie Borowicz, (R, Center County and Clinton County) has it handled.

*I'm Proud To Be An Atheist*



Many sources, including newsweek.com, report that Borowicz has issued a resolution, calling on Pennsylvania to designate March 30 as "A State Day of Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer." Her resolution states that "During the pandemic of 2020 and the ensuing uncertainty and anxiety of this time, Pennsylvanians may be comforted by turning to a day of humiliation, fasting and prayer." Borowicz thinks this might help in part because the pandemic might just be "punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins."

In fairness to Borowicz, she doesn't exactly say that prayers will cure the coronavirus. But she does say, "the united cry of the nation will be heard on high and answered with blessing no less than the pardon of our national sins and the restoration of our new divided and suffering country to its former happy condition of unity and peace."

She also notes that her language was borrowed from a resolution authored by Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War.

PAN members might remember Borowicz from 2019, when she offered an exceedingly Christian prayer on the opening day of the House session. Of course, it was a coincidence, but that was the same day as Rep. Movita Johnson-Harrell, the first Muslim woman elected to the legislature, was sworn in. Borowicz' prayer was so over-the-top that Speaker Mike Turzai (who fiercely opposed allowing atheists to offer invocations) appeared to try to cut her off.

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**Another Path in Abuse Lawsuits**

Last year some Pennsylvania childhood abuse victims came up with a novel way to get around the statute of limitations. Because the victims' abuse took place many years ago, they were precluded from filing suit. Catholic Church officials had known of the abuse at the time. Why not sue them for fraudulent concealment, which does not fall under the statute of limitations?

According to a usnews.com story (which credited the Associated Press) this passed muster with Pennsylvania's Superior Court. However, the church appealed the decision, and it will be reviewed by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

This particular case, brought by Renee Rice against three priests and the Altoona-Johnstown Catholic diocese, had been cited by other litigants to support their action to sue for fraudulent concealment.

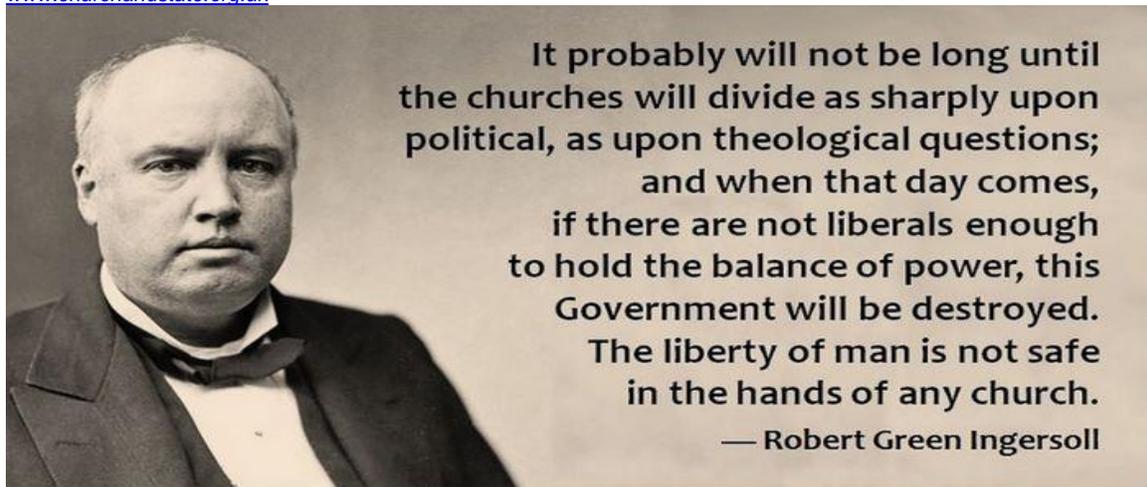
The Supreme Court justices will specifically consider whether it was appropriate for the Superior Court to let the plaintiffs sue for civil conspiracy. Was it proper to allow the plaintiffs to bypass the statute of limitations and the discovery rule for civil actions when too much time has passed to allow a suit based on the primary cause of action – in this case, the sexual abuse?

The Supreme Court stated that it will also consider if the lower court was correct in establishing that a fiduciary (the church, and church officials) owed “a never-ending duty to speak after the end of the relationship, thereby eliminating a plaintiff’s duty to exercise due diligence and conduct a reasonable investigation.”

Rice alleges that Rev. Charles F. Bodziak molested her while he was a parish priest at St. Leo’s in Altoona, 40 years ago. Bodziak denies the charges (which were included in the 2016 grand jury report) and a previous lawsuit against him was dismissed in 2017 because of the statute of limitations. The lawsuit claims that the bishops and diocese knew or should have known that Bodziak molested girls when he was sent to St. Leo’s. He asked Rice’s parents if their daughter could clean the parish rectory, where he molested her between the ages of 9 and 14.

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[www.churchandstate.org.uk](http://www.churchandstate.org.uk)



### **Day of Prayer**

President Trump called for a national day of prayer on March 15. It is worth noting that on March 14, there were 414 coronavirus cases in the United States. By March 20, there 4,800, proving yet again the power of prayer.

The president said that he would watch Rev. Jentezen Franklin’s service that day, via the internet. Franklin has been part of the president’s minister group, but he is not widely known outside of religious circles. (Despite that, his estimated net worth is \$13 million, according to 11alive.com.) His Franklin Media Ministries is most famous for sponsoring a 21-day fast every year; the president does not appear to participate in this activity.

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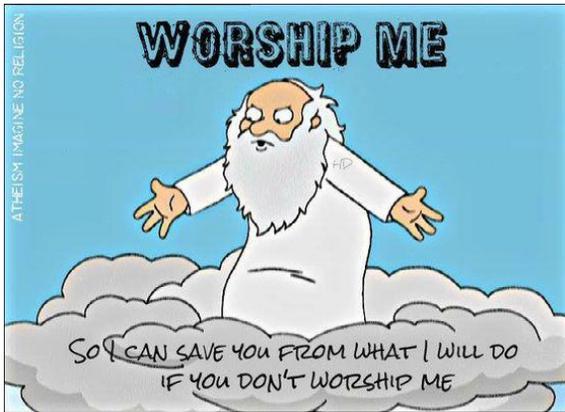
### **“Religious Freedom” Training**

The Justice Department has instituted training on religious liberty laws for its attorneys, because of Attorney General William Barr’s desire to prioritize religious freedom cases.

The New York *Times*, [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com), reports that long-time DOJ attorneys can’t remember similar week-long training sessions available to all employees, on any other subject.

Some of the attorneys thought that the sessions were training them on how to limit civil rights

protections for gay and transgender people. Earlier this year, the DOJ filed a statement of interest in a Kentucky federal court case supporting the right of a photographer to refuse to work at same-sex weddings, because they violate her religious beliefs. Last fall the department supported an appeal to Maine's state law banning religious schools from the state's school tuition program.



Both of these interventions differed from the DOJ's positions under the Obama administration, and have been criticized by gay rights activists, and believers in church/state separation.

The DOJ notes that the training was voluntary, and meant to improve the participants' understanding of their own religious rights in the workplace, as well as instructing them on protecting places of worship and individual religious rights.

Emails reviewed by the *Times* are reminiscent of Barr's speech at the National Religious Broadcasters' convention, where he said that "Augustinian Christianity" is at the root of our democracy, and that Americans "providentially enjoy its blessings today." He went on to conclude, "In my view, liberal democracy has reached its fullest expression in the Anglo-American political system. The wellsprings of this system are found in Augustinian Christianity."

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [iep.utm.edu](http://iep.utm.edu), summarizes Augustine's philosophy as follows: *Augustine held that all creation partakes of truth in varying degrees, that man as the highest part of creation, created in God's image and thus sharing to some degree the divine nature, is able to know truth through the divine light and the light of his own mind.*

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### **Christian Health "Insurance"**

Even before the coronavirus pandemic hit, many Americans worried about health insurance. Some didn't have any insurance, were worried about whether they would be left with huge bills their coverage wouldn't pay, or about whether they could continue to afford the premiums in the first place.

According to the New York *Times*, [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com), approximately one million Americans think they have found a solution. They contribute to Christian groups that assert they will pay their members' medical bills. The idea behind the plans is that Christians, banding together, will help each other through hard times. The members pool their money, and an administrator pays the members' claims. The only requirement for membership is that members must live a "Christian lifestyle."

The monthly "premiums" for such groups are low, for a simple reason: the groups are under no legal obligation to pay anything.

Many of these groups were grandfathered in through a religious exemption in the health care law. They don't have to follow the normal rules insured health plans follow. The plans can refuse to cover pre-existing conditions (or people with them), or mental health care. They can set arbitrary dollar limits to what they pay out in any situation.

The plans insist that they clearly explain to potential members that they are not insurance. States regulate insurance products; that these plans aren't insurance has meant that they can operate

without any state oversight. State regulators in New Hampshire, Colorado and Texas are beginning to question how well-informed participants are, and to investigate claims that members had no idea of how little reimbursement they would receive in the event of a serious medical situation.

Washington state recently fined Trinity Healthshare, one of the larger groups, \$150,000 because it was acting as an insurer. Insurance regulators in Nevada warn that the plans may look “enticing” because their cost is low, and they appear to be insurance. And since there are no guarantees, members have no legal avenue to use in appealing the plans’ coverage decisions. Some groups advise their members to beg hospitals and doctors to write off unpaid care, which has resulted in medical networks refusing to provide services to plan members.

Critics note that some of the plans pay commissions to brokers to recruit new members. Some states – most notably California – assert that the brokers do not explain how the plans really work.

Trinity Healthshare’s administrator, Alera Healthcare, responded to states that are trying to stop it from offering its plan: “...it’s deeply disappointing to see state regulators working to deny their residents access to more affordable alternatives offered by health care sharing ministries.” Trinity maintains that its website explains how the plan works, and that it is not health insurance.

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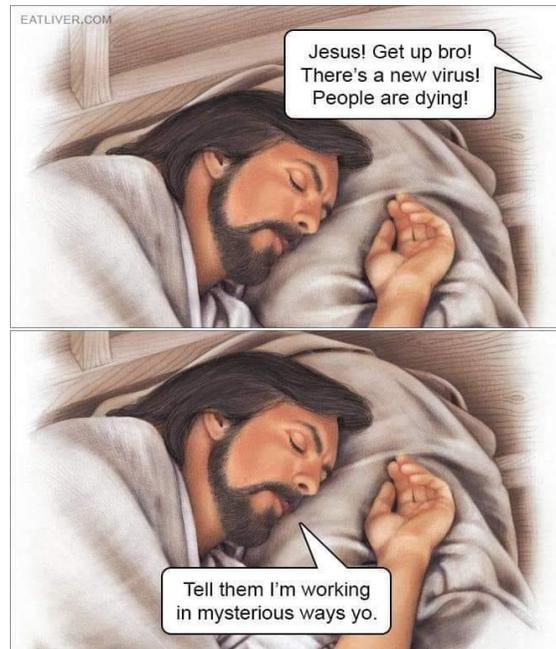
### Hobby Lobby in the News

Hobby Lobby, the craft store chain, first entered the religion wars when it objected to having to provide birth control under its group medical plans.

A few years ago, the Green family, the chain’s founders, were the primary backers of the Museum of the Bible, located in Washington, DC. One of the Museum’s early triumphs was its exhibit of Dead Sea Scroll fragments.

Several of the fragments were almost immediately revealed to be fakes. Now it appears they all are.

*The Smithsonian Magazine*, smithsonianmag.com, quotes *The National Geographic*’s story about what happened.



The Dead Sea Scrolls exist primarily as small fragments. Independent researchers spent 6 months using 3-D microscopes, electron microscopes and microchemical tests to examine the fragments the Museum had purchased.

Apparently, during the 1950s, an antiquity dealer in the Middle East started buying purported Dead Sea Scroll fragments from local Bedouins, and reselling them to collectors. In 2002, 70 new fragments made their way to market; it was thought that the antiquity dealer’s family had released pieces that they had secreted in Switzerland. The Green family purchased their Scroll fragments from the 2002 collection. Biblical scholars published a book about the Museum of the Bible purchases, but there was no scientific analysis until now. The Greens helped fund this recent scientific study, which proved that all their fragments were modern forgeries, and cast doubt on all

the 2002 fragments.

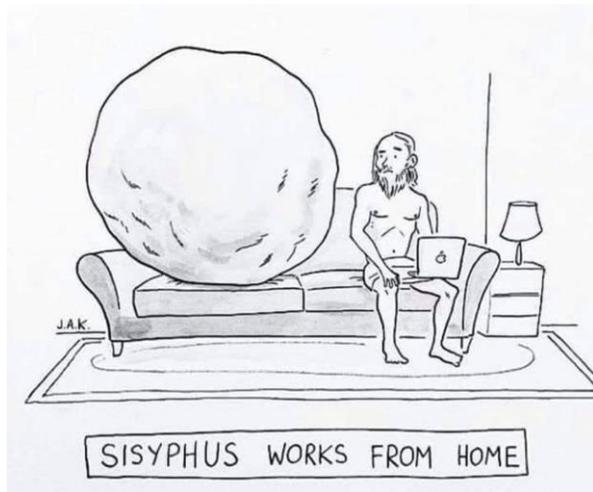
This has done nothing to weaken the Green family faith. Hobby Lobby is keeping its stores open during the coronavirus pandemic where it is legal to do so. In an open letter to its employees, David Green, the CEO, explains why. God sent a message to David's wife, Barbara. According to [lgbtqnation.com](http://lgbtqnation.com), David describes Barbara in the letter as the family's "prayer warrior." He goes on to explain, "In her quiet prayer time this past week, the Lord put on Barbara's heart three profound words to remind us that He's in control. Guide, Guard, and Groom."

Which means what? David goes on: "We serve a God who will guide us through this storm, who will Guard us as we travel to places never seen before, and who, as a result of this experience, will Groom us to be better than we could have ever thought possible before now...we can all rest knowing that God is in control." The letter ends, "I ask that you all pray for our health and a return to normalcy very soon."

Some observers note that the Greens, who are worth over \$6 billion, do not provide benefits or sick leave to many of their employees. Well, of course they don't: Guide, Guard and Groom!

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Glenn Marcus



### Coronavirus, Explained

There are lots of examples of Christians saying and doing awful things during the pandemic. Here's one:

The *New York Post*, [nypost.com](http://nypost.com), reports on Pastor Rick Wiles, an evangelical pastor. Wiles used his TruNews webcast to explain that coronavirus is God's "death angel," a response to people who are "transgendering little children" and who put filth on TV and movies.

Wiles told his flock that the virus started in China because China has a "godless communist government that persecutes Christians" and forces abortions.

And the US could be next. "God is about to purge a lot of sin off of this planet," he warns. "Look at the United States, look at the spiritual rebellion in this country — the hatred of God, the hatred of the Bible, the hatred of righteousness."

As is so often the case, God is killing us to save us. "Folks, the Death Angel may be moving right now across the planet. This is the time to get right with God," Wiles says. He ended with another cheery thought: the government may wind up "incinerating" cities.

"You're about to be shocked what governments will do for survival," he insisted.

Of course, there are crazy people, not necessarily Christian, who have known all along that this would happen. CNN.com tells the story of Sylvia Browne, a psychic. In the summer of 2008, Browne, who died in 2013, published a book that contained this ominous prediction:

"In around 2020, a severe pneumonia-like illness will spread throughout the globe, attacking the lungs and the bronchial tubes and resisting all known treatments. Almost more baffling than the illness itself will be the fact that it will suddenly vanish as quickly as it arrived, attack again ten years later, and then disappear completely."

Nobody paid much attention at the time. Now the book, "End of Days: Predictions and Prophecies About the End of the World" is number 2 on Amazon, and copies are selling for hundreds of dollars.

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### Religion and Politics

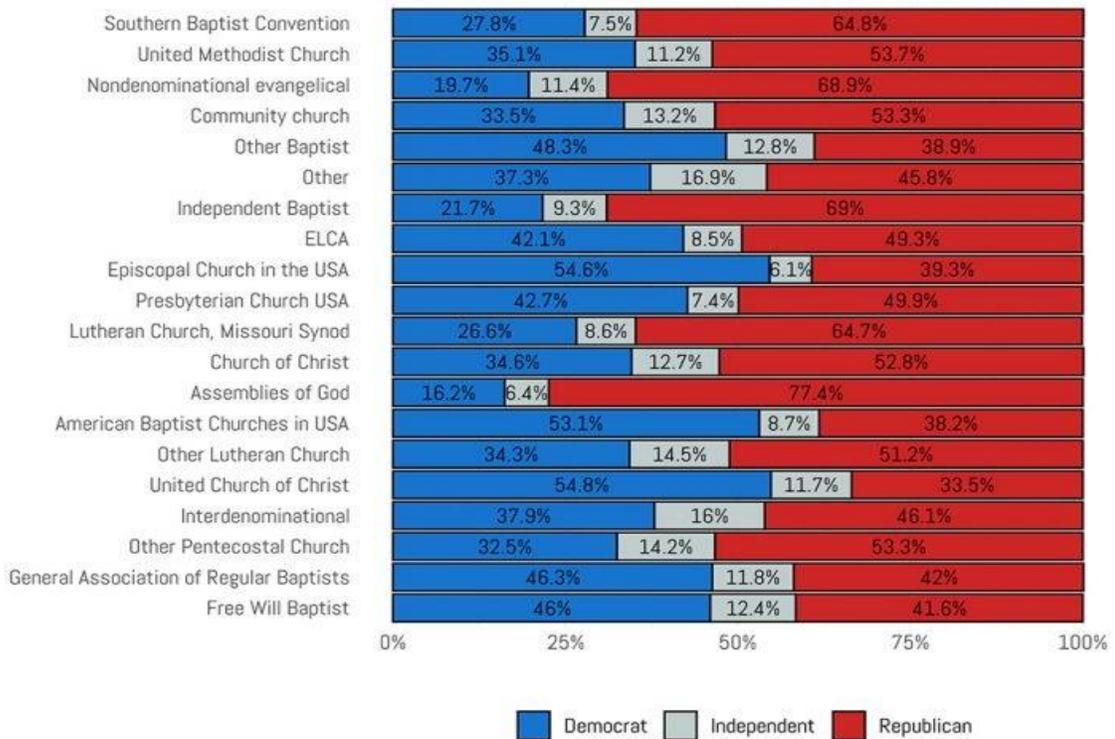
Thomas Edsall, a New York *Times*, nytimes.com, columnist, wrote recently about how mainstream Christian denominations are fading, and what effect that has had on politics.

Edsall describes a study performed by Ryan Burge of Eastern Illinois University. In 1988, 55.7% of Americans were members of traditional, mainstream denominations, 36.6% were members of evangelical and born-again denominations and 7.7% said they were not religious. As PAN members know, that has changed; by 2018, mainstream denominations only represent 35.5%, born-again are 41.4%, and 23.1% are not religious. Burge told Edsall, "in just a few years there will be no moderate Protestants left."

Burge's study then maps where the members of the largest, predominantly white Protestant denominations fall politically:

## Political Partisanship

Among the Twenty Largest Predominantly White Protestant Denominations



@ryanburge  
Data: CCES 2018

By The New York Times | Note: Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Source: C.C.E.S. 2018

### **Just When You Think You've Heard It All**

Did you hear the one about the recruiter for a Christian college who lined up a bunch of prep school kids by skin color, light to dark, and by who had the "nappiest" hair? Incredibly, it's not an inappropriate joke. It really happened. In 2020.

According to the New York *Post*, [nypost.com](http://nypost.com), a white recruiter (?!?) for Oklahoma Christian University visited Harding Charter Preparatory in Oklahoma City. The *Post* story quotes a student interview from KFOR-TV. The recruiter told the kids that he wanted to play a game, and then had them line up by skin tone, and by the kinkiness of their hair. He did not explain or justify the request.

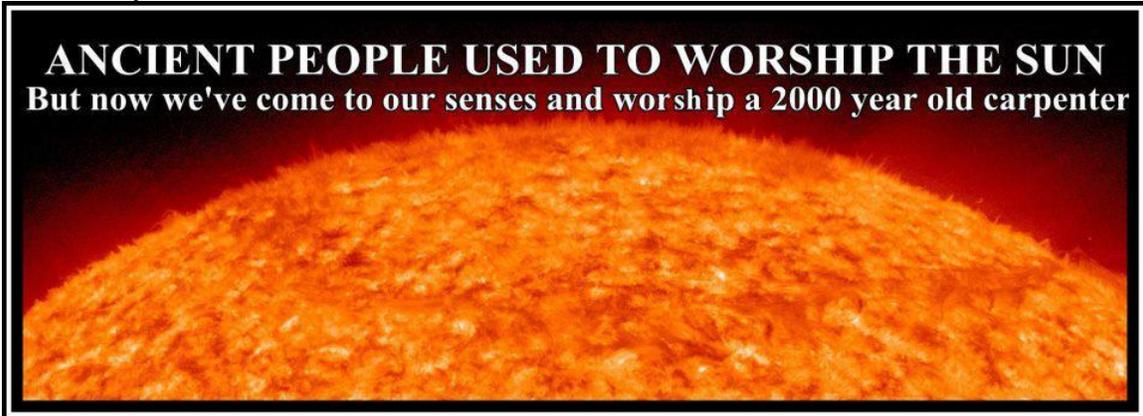
Other students, and teachers, confirmed the account. Some of the teachers were reportedly in tears.

The university fired the recruiter, and issued a statement that said in part, "'OC admissions leadership did not approve the inappropriate activity in advance and has communicated closely with Harding administration since the visit. Admissions staff are scheduled to visit the academy Monday to apologize to Harding students and staff on behalf of the University.'

The recruiter, Cedric Sunray, is unrepentant. The exercise is an "icebreaker," he says, and he has done the same exercise 87 times in the past 12 months. "I break the groups into four teams and then I say line up darkest to the front and lightest to the back," Sunray said. "From the largest afro to the tightest braid to the blondest with blue eyes. They all want to know they are valued and warranted. And that is what I provide." He does allow that in future, he will explain what he hopes to accomplish before the exercise starts.

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*Still Here? Silly Christians*



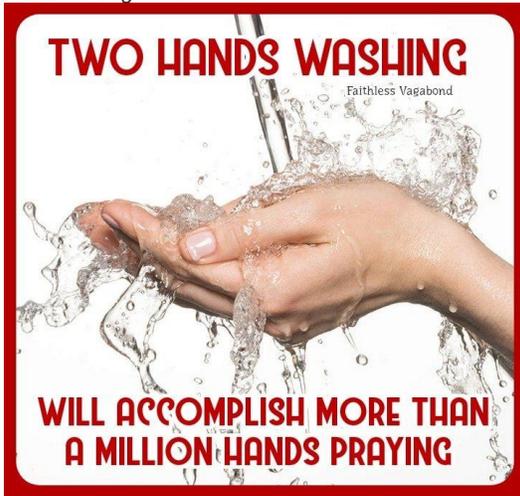
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### **Lacking Faith in Faith Healing**

You're the pastor of a faith-healing church. What do you do about the coronavirus?

The Sacramento *Bee*, [sacbee.com](http://sacbee.com), describes Bethel Church, a Northern California mega-church renowned for its belief that prayers can heal the sick and raise the dead. Fortunately, the church isn't completely crazy: members are being encouraged to wash their hands, stay home if they are sick, cancel mission trips. The church also told its faith healers to stay out of local hospitals for which local patients must be grateful.

Faithless Vagabond



The church explained its reasoning: “Through email communications, signage, and church announcements, we are actively encouraging health practices and precautions to our whole community. We believe that wisdom, modern medicine, and faith are meant to work together, and express the value for each in the pursuit of continued health and healing.”

Bethel is quite an institution. It has more than 9,000 members, with more than 6,000 regularly attending services. Approximately 2,400 attend its School of Supernatural Ministry. Church members are renowned for their aggressive approach to proselytizing.

They go up to strangers at health care centers and offer to touch them and pray away their conditions. A local woman told the newspaper that she was recently approached by two Bethel students in an emergency room. The students said “they would pray over the people there and put Jesus in their hearts and this would heal us all and we didn’t need to stay at the ER and could go home.” The woman complained to the hospital because one of the students touched her 5-year-old without requesting permission. The church responded: “Though we believe in a God who actively heals today, students are not being encouraged to visit healthcare settings at this time, and moreover, are taught that even under normal circumstances, they must receive permission from both the facility and the individual before engaging in prayer.” The church statement went on to say that the students thought the mother gave them permission.

Many people pointed out the irony of a an aggressively faith healing church now requesting people wash their hands. “It’s clear that when it comes to something really serious like coronavirus, their actions speak louder than their words,” points out Michael Shermer, editor of *Skeptic* magazine, and a professor at Chapman University. “So, God is omniscient and omnipotent and can cure diseases if he wants, but just in case: wash your hands!”

In 2008, the School of Supernatural Ministry student started a dead-raising team to work on bodies found during emergency calls. The church generated some local publicity last year when hundreds of members tried to resurrect a 2-year-old. Thousands of people used the hashtag #WakeUpOlive to no avail. A quick Google check does not show any indication that church members have risen anyone from the dead – of course.

The church’s founder, Bill Johnson, posted on his website that not everybody will be cured. “Many visit Redding weekly, hoping that God will touch them. I am happy to report that many leave well and whole,” Johnson wrote. “But many others leave in the same condition in which they came. I refuse to blame God for this, as though He has a purpose in their disease. While Jesus did not heal everyone alive in His time, He did heal everyone who came to Him. His is the only standard worth following.” As always, if it doesn’t work it’s your fault – not God’s.

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### Who Didn’t See This Coming?

Pastor posts that the coronavirus pandemic is a hoax. Pastor dies of coronavirus.

Michael Stone, who writes at [patheos.com/blogs/progressivesecularhumanist](http://patheos.com/blogs/progressivesecularhumanist), tells the story of Landon Spradlin, a Virginia pastor. Spradlin was sure that “mass hysteria,” and the media’s hatred

of President Trump, were behind all the stories about the coronavirus. According to reports, Spradlin, a 66-year-old Christian “musical evangelist,” fell ill while on a missionary trip to New Orleans with his wife. Stone quotes [The Friendly Atheist](http://friendlyatheist.patheos.com), friendlyatheist.patheos.com, as reporting Spradlin went to New Orleans to “wash it from its Sin and debauchery.”

On his Facebook page Spradlin shared a misleading meme attempting to minimize COVID-19, comparing the virus to the swine flu, and suggesting that the response to the coronavirus pandemic was media created to damage Trump.



Spradlin shared the post at right on his Facebook. Its point is that the media overlooked anything that went wrong on Obama’s watch, while criticizing Trump.

He also passed along a post from another missionary pastor, who claimed that he had protected himself from bubonic plague with the “Spirit of God.”

Finally he passed along good news from a pastor claiming that a missionary in South Africa “protected” himself from the bubonic plague with the “Spirit of God.” A quote from the post reads: “As long as I walk in the light of that law [of the Spirit of life], no germ will attach itself to me.” Spradlin died on March 25.

There’s a Darwinian point to be made here. But mostly it’s just sad.

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## Problems Atheists Just Don’t Have

Atheists don’t have to worry about lots of things that religious people do. For example, atheists don’t have to worry about giving something up for Lent. Many Christians make a sacrifice for the 40 days of lent, to replicate Jesus’ fasting for 40 days in the desert.

There’s a new wrinkle this year. Catholics are specifically forbidden from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and on every Friday during Lent. The *Chicago Tribune*, [chicagotribune.com](http://chicagotribune.com), reports that the explosion of plant-based meat substitutes has caused some Catholics to wonder: Can I eat an Impossible Burger if it tastes exactly like a hamburger?

The Catholic church frowns on such stratagems. A spokesperson for the Chicago archdiocese explains: “What’s behind the whole tradition in practice is to go without in order to be in solidarity with those who are hungry, with those who can’t afford meat. By going without that we are reminded of others. We experience hunger ourselves. So it’s a bit deeper than whether it’s just a meat product.” However, there’s been no official ruling against meat substitutes.

In the spirit of American enterprise, *Newsweek*, [newsweek.com](http://newsweek.com), reports that Wayback Burgers, a national chain, will specifically introduce meatless burgers during Lent.

## ***Member Submissions***

### **So Much Time to Think; So Many Things It Doesn't Do to Think About!**

*Priscilla Oppenheimer*

Missing the camaraderie and irreverent discussions of our PAN meetings!

So I'm spending my free time pondering puzzles the papers have reported, learning what God has been concerning himself with lately.

How will He handle not being addressed by penitents in the confessional, when they can't be there in person? Well, the Pope says they can just inform Him in their private confessions that they will, indeed, eventually be able to catch up in person by attending a valid confessional with a live priest.

Query: How's He going to handle the deluge raining down on him when in-church confessions resume? How will you know whether or not he's really listening?

Also, instead of banishing nasty Covid-19, he's worried about how Hobby Lobby is going to maintain its profits if it has to shut down? He spoke recently (Twitter? Phone? Mirror-on-the-wall?) to the wife of the CEO of Hobby Lobby, informing her that by all means H. L. should stay open during this crisis. What could be more useful to professionals fighting the disease than to have a nice, relaxing shopping expedition? And absorb a bit of fundamentalism to boot?

Is He missing the weekly dose of adulation from certain evangelical churches across the country? Several pastors have been informed that of course He wants people to come together to praise Him! Would He allow people to become infected when these meetings take place on His turf? No, He says, they must not shut down weekly services!

How's that working for you, fellows?

Lots more, if you just look, to keep an inquiring mind occupied during lockdown.

## ***PAN News & Update***

**Meetings** - For more details about our meetings, find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers](https://www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers). We're not sure when we will be able to meet in person again. For future reference, the list below shows when the meetings fall during a month.

Carlisle – Fourth Friday of the month, 5:30 pm, Hops and Barley, 398 North York Street, Mechanicsburg

Chambersburg – Third Tuesday of the month, 7:00 pm, Montezuma Mexican Restaurant, 1495 Lincoln Way East

Harrisburg – First Wednesday of the month, 6:30 pm, Midtown Scholar, 1302 N. Third St.

Lancaster – Fourth Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Centerville Diner, 100 S. Centerville Rd.

April 2020

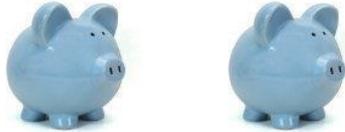
Lebanon - Second Wednesday of the month, 7:00 pm, Batdorf Restaurant, 245 W. Main St., Annville

Reading – Third Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Oakbrook Brewing Company, 628 Park Avenue

York – First Sunday of the month, noon, I-ron-ic Coffee Shop and Art Boutique, 256 W. Philadelphia St.

### ***How to Contribute to PAN***

**Giant Cards** - We will have Giant grocery store cards available for purchase at PAN meetings. You pay face value for the card and use the face value at the store, but Giant let's PAN have 5% of that face value. If you shop at Giant, anyway, use the cards in lieu of cash and help PAN. What could be easier?



**Pennies for PAN** - Finally, we are happy to take money the old-fashioned way. You can give your tax-deductible contribution to a Board Member at one of our meetings or events, you can donate via PayPal on our website, [www.panonbelievers.org](http://www.panonbelievers.org), or you can mail a check to us at PANonbelievers, Inc. PO Box 702, York, PA 17405. Remember when you donate you can indicate what fund you want your donation to go to, you can find the list of our funds on the PAN website in the Donate section.

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**PAN Views is published by: PA Nonbelievers, Inc. PO Box 702 York, PA 17405 PAN Views Editor: Pam Zerba**