

# 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*

PAN has moved our meetings online to Zoom meetings until we can meet in person again. You can find the links to the Zoom meetings on Facebook, Meetup, and emails that we send out announcing the meetings. Some of our upcoming tabling events have also been canceled and or rescheduled. We will announce any tabling events in PAN Views, Facebook, and Meetup, once we are able to meet in larger groups again.

Remember Carl Sagan's tools for critical thinking from *The Fine Art of Baloney Detection* when reading and assessing the information that you find online or hear on the news, especially guidances, research, and treatment for the Coronavirus. Independently confirm facts, encourage substantive debate on the evidence by knowledgeable proponents, arguments from authority should carry little weight, develop multiple hypotheses, don't get attached to your favorite hypothesis and asses all hypotheses objectively, try to measure and use quantitative variables in your hypotheses, all chains in your argument must work including your premise, use Occam's Razor to narrow hypotheses, and allow for hypotheses to be tested, verified, and duplicated.

Remember, "Gullibility kills." Carl Sagan, *The Fine Art of Baloney Detection*

*From thenewcivilrightsmovement.com "Jesus is my vaccine" is written on the truck's hood*



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

### **Voting: Just in Case**

Pennsylvania's Primary Election is June 2, and the General Election will be held on November 3. The law has changed to make mail-in voting much easier. Go to [votespa.com/applymailballot](https://votespa.com/applymailballot) to get an application. For the Primary, completed mail-in (and absentee) applications must be received by the county election office by 5:00 pm on May 26. Completed ballots must be received by 8:00 pm on June 2.

### **Coronavirus and Religion**

Here's a sample of religion's greatest moments vis-à-vis the coronavirus pandemic.

*From the Daily Beast (thedailybeast.com):* Some ministers who are prominent supporters of President Donald Trump claim to cure coronavirus cases through miracles and prayer. Kenneth Copeland says that people with the virus would be cured if they touched their TV screens while Copeland prayed. Later, Copeland told his TV flock that God had let him know that the crisis would soon pass, because Christian prayers had "overwhelmed it."

Apostle Guillermo Maldonado posted a YouTube video announcing that he had ordered the virus to "dissolve, disintegrate, die in Jesus' mighty name" and told those infected to "be healed in Jesus' mighty name."

*The Thinking Atheist*



*From The Guardian (theguardian.com):* India's Hindu nationalist BJP party is pushing cow urine as a cure for coronavirus. In fact, they are holding cow urine parties, despite warnings against large gatherings. The president of Tanzania has announced that receiving communion would "burn" the infection away, and in Brazil, a politician said that the spread would be halted if only everybody fasted for a day. The virus is spreading rapidly in the Israel ultra-orthodox community, in part because they refused to close their synagogues and religious seminaries. "The Torah protects and saves," according to the senior ultra-orthodox rabbi, although he later backed down.

*From the New York Post (nypost.com):* Bishop Gerald O. Glenn bragged about his crowded Virginia church, and promised to keep holding services "unless I'm in jail or the hospital." Now he's dead.

*From Kctv5.com:* Church events in Kansas had high morbidity and mortality rates. 44 people were infected after attending the Eastern Kansas Minister's Conference at Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ in Kansas City, KS, from March 16 – 22, and 5 of them have died. A gala at Rising

Star Baptist Church, also in Kansas City, KS, which ended after the order limiting gatherings to 10 or fewer went into effect, resulted in 7 people becoming ill, and 1 death.

*From the Los Angeles Times (latimes.com):* A Sacramento-area Pentecostal church has more than 70 cases of coronavirus among its members. Dr. Peter Beilenson, Sacramento County public health director commented, "Obviously there is freedom of religion, but when it's impacting public health as this is, we have to enforce social distancing." Bethany Slavic Missionary Church claims to have stopped large gatherings on March 18, but health officials think it still may be conducting services in private homes. There may be more sick people; the church draws from surrounding counties, as well. Three of the church's pastors, including the senior pastor, are said to be hospitalized with the virus. The church has been in the news before, because of anti-gay rhetoric, and because a church official was convicted of pedophilia in 2018.

*From Pittsburgh.cbslocal.com KDKA:* Pastor Jonathan Shuttlesworth wasn't going to let a silly little thing like a pandemic stop him. He had big plans for his Easter service: "I'm gonna announce it. We're gonna hold an outdoor Easter blowout service. Not online. A national gathering. You come from all over, like Woodstock. And we're gonna gather and lift up Jesus Christ." He was contemptuous of European churches who are following common-sense provisions to avoid spreading the disease: "Shame on every European full gospel church, bunch of sissies, that shut down during this thing. If you're putting out pamphlets and telling everybody to use Purell before they come into the sanctuary and don't greet anyone, you should just turn in your ministry credentials and burn your church down — turn it into a casino or something. You're a loser. Bunch of pansies. No balls. Got neutered somewhere along the line and don't even realize it." Somehow sanity prevailed, and Shuttlesworth wound up holding a drive-in service.

*From The Advocate (theadvocate.com), the New York Post (nypost.com), and the New York Times (nytimes.com):* Many sources have reported on the misadventures of Rev. Tony Spell of Life Tabernacle Church in Baton Rouge, LA. Spell continued to hold services despite a state-ordered ban on such events. The coroner reported that a church member, 78-year-old Harold Orillion, died from coronavirus after attending services. Spell disputed the cause of death, telling a local radio station, "That's a lie." Spell's attorney in the fight against the ban on gatherings has now come down with coronavirus, too. Spell has other issues. He has been charged with aggravated assault after he backed up the church bus toward a protestor outside his church. Oh, and now that his original lawyer is unavailable, he's hired Roy Moore, the former Alabama Senate candidate, 10 Commandments installer and accused sexual predator, as his lawyer.



Protesters gathered at the Texas State Capital building on April 18, 2020 i



*From the New York Times (nytimes.com):* Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, has just begun. Usually Muslims all over the world fast from dawn to dusk, and then hold big meals with family and friends. Muslim clerics, and governments of Muslim-majority countries, are closing mosques and encouraging prayers at home.

Except for Pakistan. Prominent imams in Pakistan are encouraging their flocks to ignore lockdown requirements. Large numbers of Pakistanis attended morning prayers and attacked police officers who tried to stop them. Dozens of clerics and leaders of religious parties signed a letter demanding that the government exempt mosques from the shutdown orders or face the anger of God. The Pakistani government caved, agreeing that the mosques could stay open, as long as the worshippers obey certain rules, such as maintaining a 6-foot distance, using their own prayer mats, and doing their ablutions at home.

Muslim clerics are more powerful in Pakistan than they are in other countries because the military needed them in the 1980s, when mosques recruited fighters to go against the Soviet army in Afghanistan. This dependence continues to this day; Pakistani imams use their influence to get their followers to force the government to change policies they don't like. This level of influence is unusual. Other governments in Muslim countries even dictate sermon topics to clerics.

The imams' position on Ramadan comes down to money. Many mosques depend on the large contributions they receive during Ramadan.

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### Hobby Lobby Strikes Again

Last month *PANViews* reported that Hobby Lobby was keeping its stores open where it was legal to do so. According to *Cleveland.com*, there's been a slight change: it's trying to open stores "quietly" wherever it can, including in states with firm shut down orders for non-essential businesses.

The story quotes *Business Insider* stating that Hobby Lobby reopened several northern Ohio stores, as well as 17 of its 20 stores in Wisconsin in early April. Police showed up at stores in a Milwaukee suburb and in Jefferson, Indiana, and forced the stores to close. Hobby Lobby shut down its stores in Colorado after a local TV station reported that they were open. As of a few days ago, at least some stores in Ohio were apparently still open.

Interesting that the devoutly religious owners of Hobby Lobby don't think they have to obey the law. Of course, they probably think Jesus will save them.

*From I Crave Reason*



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### Glimmer of Hope

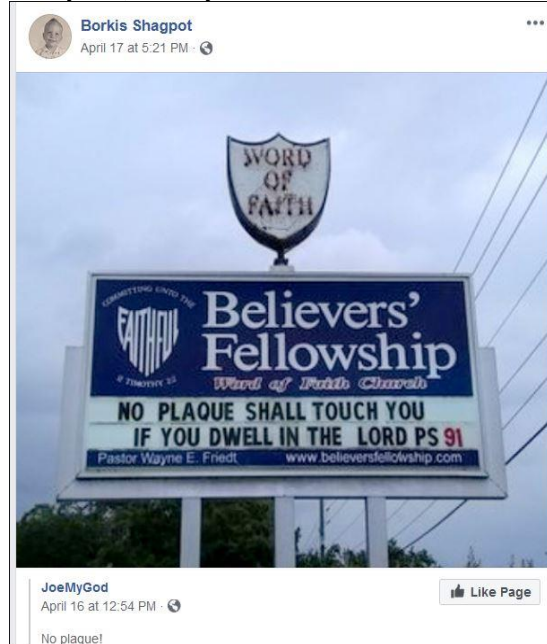
It's not all bad news. *Religionnews.com* reports that Christian pastors are beginning to think that just maybe there's something to this global warming thing.

LifeWay Research conducted a survey that shows, for the first time, that most US Protestant pastors agree with the statement “I believe that global warming is real and man-made.” 53% agreed, with 34% strongly agreeing. 38% said they disagreed, while 10% were unsure.

There are differences between denominations, and demographic groups. More than 75% of African American pastors believe global warming is real, and 71% of mainline pastors do, as well, compared to 39% of evangelical pastors. Other examples are Methodists at 80%, Presbyterian at 67%, Lutheran at 63%, Baptists at 37% and Pentecostals at 32%.

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*Joe My God, courtesy of John Wolff*



### Update on Insurance Scam

Remember the Christian “insurance” scam? Christians are recruited to join so-called members’ groups, paying a monthly contribution into a fund. Members are assured that money will be available to pay their health care bills. It’s nonsense; larger bills are going unpaid, and the members are encouraged to ask medical care providers to forgive the debt.

The New York *Times* (nytimes.com) reports that members in three states are suing one of the groups behind the fake insurance. Insurance regulators are working to stop them from soliciting members in their states.

A lawsuit has been filed in Missouri against Trinity Healthshare, the Christian group, and Alera, the for-profit company that markets its plans.

The suit claims that the two companies “sold inherently unfair and deceptive health care plans to Missouri residents, and failed to provide them with the coverage the purchasers believed they would receive.” It goes on to say that the plans were designed “to look and feel like health insurance that would provide meaningful coverage for the purchasers’ health care needs.”

New York State has written a cease-and-desist letter to the companies, on behalf of the approximately 8,000 New Yorkers who have joined them. New York regulators are particularly concerned that people who have lost their jobs, and their insurance, due to the coronavirus crisis, will be vulnerable to these cheaper, worthless plans.

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### Emergency Money to Churches

The first coronavirus relief bill included about \$350 billion for the Small Business Administration to loan to small businesses to help them through the crisis. According to npr.com, churches and other faith-based organization qualify as businesses, even if their sole purpose is religious.

The SBA issued a statement explaining this position: “Faith-based organizations are eligible to receive SBA loans regardless of whether they provide secular social services. No otherwise eligible organization will be disqualified from receiving a loan because of the religious nature, religious identity, or religious speech of the organization.” The article notes that this money will be especially important to churches that depend on weekly collections. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin

explained that both President Donald Trump and Vice-President Mike Pence “made sure” that churches would be eligible for financial help from the program.

This isn't the first time the Trump administration has changed to rules to give money directly to religious entities. In 2018 FEMA made them eligible for direct disaster aid. This recent SBA program provides loans of up to \$10 million, with 75% going to cover payroll. The loans are largely forgivable, so the houses of worship won't have to pay them back.

Alison Gill, legal and policy vice president of American Atheists, objects. "The government cannot directly fund inherently religious activities. It can't spend government tax dollars on prayer, on promoting religion [or] proselytization. That directly contradicts the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. This is the most drastic attack on church-state separation we have ever seen."

Steve Zink

*"No, prayers aren't "nice and all". Prayers are dangerous. Prayers are a way for people to convince themselves they've done something, when they've actually done nothing. Prayers seem to absolve people of taking on the responsibility of demanding change. Prayers pass the buck to an imaginary being. Prayers ensure that the problem will persist."*

*Anonymous Source*

Religionists argue that denying religious institutions funds that are provided to nonreligious institutions is discrimination, and the Supreme Court has not challenged that position. The article quotes John Inazu, who specializes in religion and law at Washington University in St. Louis' School of Law: "In the last 15 years, the Court has moved increasingly in a permissive direction. There's just an increased willingness by the court to allow for direct funding of religious entities."

Current SBA regulations do not allow loans to for-profit religious institutions. The regulations state that businesses "principally engaged in teaching, instructing, counseling or indoctrinating religion or religious beliefs, whether in a religious or secular setting" are not eligible for help. The SBA intends to ignore this rule; its statement about the new loan program states that some of its regulations "impermissibly exclude some religious entities. Because those regulations bar the participation of a class of potential recipients based solely on their religious status, SBA will decline to enforce these subsections and will propose amendments to conform those regulations to the Constitution."

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### **Judge Has Religion on the Brain**

Justin R. Walker, on the US District Court for the Western District of Kentucky, is so religion-obsessed that he recently issued a Christianity-soaked opinion that had little to do with the facts of the case.

Walker is a recent arrival on the federal bench, approved by the Senate in October 2019 despite an American Bar Association determination that he was "Not Qualified."

According to slate.com, the trouble started when Louisville Mayor Greg Fisher announced that he would not permit churches to hold services on Easter Sunday, because of the coronavirus pandemic. Kentucky has a religious Freedom Restoration Act, which would not have allowed Fisher to ban drive-in services. Fisher clarified that he didn't intend to do that, and that in fact police weren't going to be arresting pastors. He just wanted to discourage such gatherings, and that the police would hand out information explaining the health reasons why group services were a bad idea. Drive-in services would be allowed.

*God, Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny*



On Fire Christian Center in Louisville planned to have a drive-in service, and even though it was going to be allowed, filed a lawsuit in federal court, requesting an injunction that would let them hold that service. Without giving the mayor a chance to respond, Walker issued an opinion. What follows is a long quote from that opinion; reading it, it is hard to believe that it was issued in federal court.

*On Holy Thursday, an American mayor criminalized the communal celebration of Easter. That sentence is one that this Court never expected to see outside the pages of a dystopian novel, or perhaps the pages of The Onion. But two days ago, citing the need for social distancing during the current pandemic, Louisville's Mayor Greg Fischer ordered Christians not to attend Sunday services, even if they remained in their cars to worship – and even though it's Easter.*

*The Mayor's decision is stunning.*

*And it is, "beyond all reason," unconstitutional.*

The opinion goes on (note the gratuitous shot at nonbelievers):

*The Christians of On Fire, however, owe no one an explanation for why they will gather together this Easter Sunday to celebrate what they believe to be a miracle and a mystery. True, they can attempt to explain it. True, they can try to teach. But to the nonbeliever, the Passion of Jesus—the betrayals, the torture, the state-sponsored murder of God's only Son, and the empty tomb on the third day—makes no sense at all. And even to the believer, or at least to some of them, it can be incomprehensible as well.*

*But for the men and women of On Fire, Christ's sacrifice isn't about the logic of this world. Nor is their Easter Sunday celebration. The reason they will be there for each other and their Lord is the reason they believe He was and is there for us. For them, for all believers, "it isn't a matter of reason; finally, it's a matter of love."*

Mayor Fischer was puzzled: "I regret that the judge did not allow us to present evidence that would have demonstrated there has been no legal enforcement mechanism communicated. We attempted twice to contact the court." Instead Walker wrote 22-page decision with 86 footnotes because – well, Jesus.

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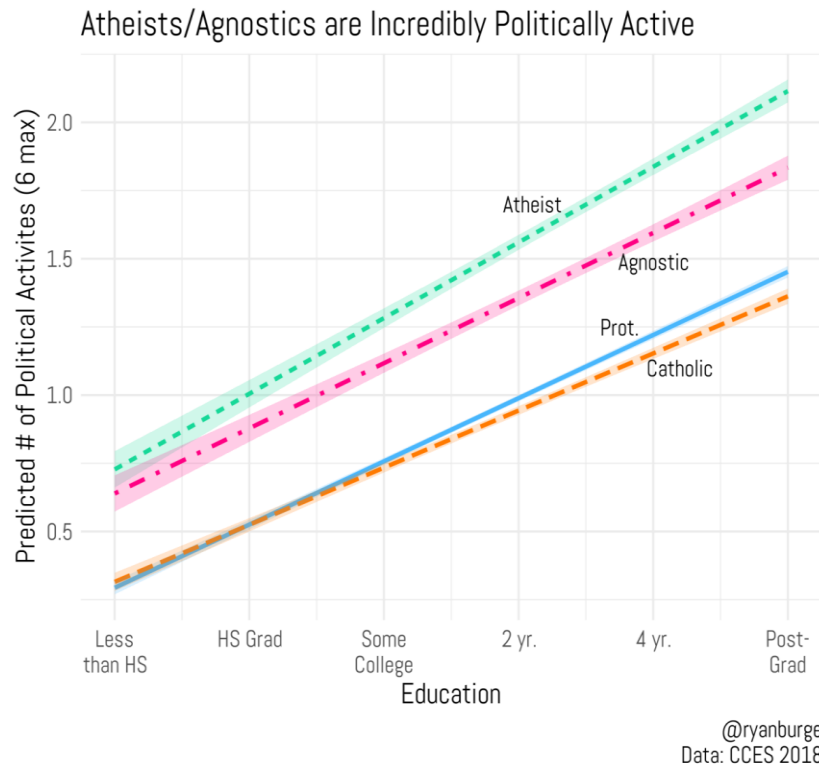
## **Atheists and Politics**

It's often been reported that atheists and agnostics don't vote in proportion to our percentage in the US population. A new study by Ryan P. Burge, Eastern Illinois University, <https://religioninpublic.blog/>, offers a somewhat contradictory view. Burge maintains that atheists, in particular, are far more likely to participate in politics than religious people. For example, Burge's data shows that in 2018, 25% of atheists attended a march or protests, as compared to 4.4% of



white evangelicals. 40% of atheists have either contacted a public official or donated money to a candidate, much higher, the study says, than any Christian group.

The chart below illustrates the results from The Cooperative Congressional Election Survey. Participants answered a series of questions about political activity. The outcomes are mapped by religion and education.



### Yet Another Crazy Religion

There's a Japanese religion with the wonderful name, Happy Science, that is sometimes compared to Scientology. The New York *Times* ([nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com)) describes it as secretive, and it has a tiered membership system requiring payments to progress. Happy Science has its own "scripture," with UFOs, lost continents and demonic warfare. It claims millions of followers, and missionary outposts throughout the world.

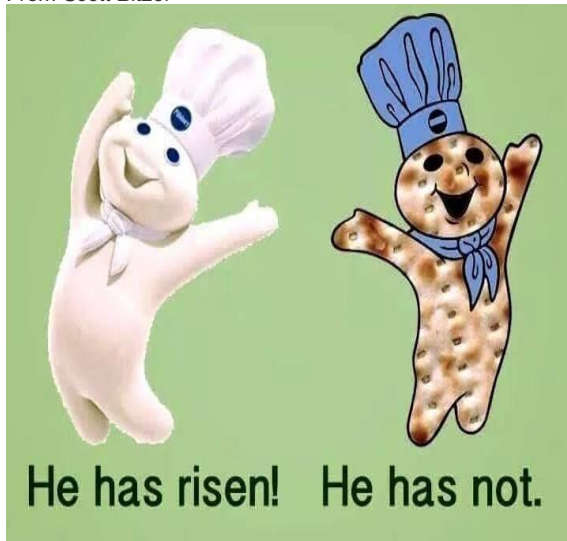
Happy Science has jumped on the coronavirus bandwagon. It is selling "spiritual vaccines." Adherents can receive a blessing to ward off or cure the disease – for a fee.

The founder of this cult is Ryuho Okawa (born Takashi Nakagawa in 1956), a former Wall Street trader. His followers believe that he is the reincarnation of god from the planet Venus. Okawa tells them that he channels such varied spirits as Freddie Mercury, Barak Obama and Steve Jobs.

He was living in New York in the 1980s when he began to think that he was in contact with ancient wise men, including Buddha and Jesus. They inspired him to self-publish several books such as "The Terrifying Revelations of Nostradamus" and "The Great Warnings of Allah." Building on their success, he kept writing, the books becoming more bizarre. Eventually he stopped claiming to be channeling ancient spirits and declared that he was God.



From Scott Bitzer



Okawa described a creation mythology, explaining that life on earth was started by a god from Venus.

Hard to believe though it may be, his new religion was wildly successful. Happy Science held ceremonies and spectacles that filled stadiums. And of course, he made money – approximately \$45 million per year.

Such success generated enemies. Another crazed religion, Aum Shinrikyo, tried to assassinate Okawa, and then attacked the Tokyo subway with sarin nerve gas, killing 13 people and injuring many more. Happy Science strove on, entering right-wing politics, with limited success.

There have been dissenting voices, with former members pointing out that its membership levels are essentially a pyramid scheme.

Happy Science opened a Manhattan office in 2008 and has attracted followers here. The believers think that the coronavirus was created as a bioweapon by China. However, it puts its own twist on what happened next: the virus was then unleashed by a UFO to punish the Chinese for their godlessness, and it is infecting other faithless countries.

But there's hope. Happy Science is selling DVDs and CDs of Okawa lecturing about the virus, because his voice alone will boost immunity. It also offers a special blessing, given in private at its temples, to cure the virus. Ads in Japan mention a variety of virus-curing blessings, ranging from \$100 to \$400. The blessings are being sold at the Manhattan office, although, despite the blessings supposedly curing the virus, Happy Science now only offers the blessing cures remotely.

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### **Good, Old-Fashioned Corruption**

Lost in all the news about the coronavirus scandal is a traditional Vatican financial scandal.

According to the New York *Times* (nytimes.com), the Vatican has been investigating its Secretariat of State's purchase of a stake in a London luxury residence in 2012. After the Vatican bought out its fellow investors in 2018 it discovered that there was a large mortgage on the property, and that it was being charged tens of millions of euros in fees by Italian middlemen.

Apparently, the investigation by the Vatican's Financial Information Authority, known by its Italian acronym, AIF, was getting a little too close to implicating key Vatican officials. So, Pope Francis replaced the AIF's director; in October, police raided the AIF's offices. In November the Pope had replaced the AIF's president. Half the AIF Board resigned in protest.

That's interesting because both the director and president had made progress in eliminating the Vatican's role as a tax haven, and a facilitator of international money-laundering. They had rewritten the Vatican's anti-money laundering laws and helped manage the Vatican's relations with the Council of Europe's Moneyval evaluators. In addition, they worked on assuring agreements with more than 60 nations to exchange financial information in the fight against money laundering and tax evasion.

When Pope Francis was elected to the papacy, one of the things he was tasked with was cleaning up the Vatican's shady financial behavior. Even people who were disappointed in Francis' failure to aggressively address the sexual abuse crisis, or to improve the role of women in the church, pointed to his financial reforms. Now it appears there's a limit to how far he is willing to go.

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### Ministering Cop

Is it possible that a police officer would not understand that he can't preach the gospel while working? And in uniform?

In Harford County, MD, it looks like it is. The Baltimore Sun ([baltimoresun.com](http://baltimoresun.com)) reports that Matthew Gullion has been the pastor of Harvest Community Church since September 2017, and he's been a police officer for 17 years. In the last couple of months, the church's Facebook page has posted 3 videos showing him preaching away.

In the first video, Gullion is seated in a police car and wearing his badge. Police radio chatter can be heard as he reads from Hebrews 12.

He explains: "I am working my primary job today. I wanted to bring you just a quick word of encouragement."

A couple of weeks later, another post shows him, again in uniform, in a police car, reading scriptures and discussing them. The third video was posted on Good Friday. Gullion appears at the beginning and the end of the video; he says that he was interrupted by a service call. During the video he discusses the issues churches are having holding services because of the coronavirus. He then takes communion and reads from Mark 14. Since he's not allowed to drink on the job, Gullion tells viewers, he replaced wine with a soft drink.

Once the police department was made aware of the videos it directed Gullion to have them removed, and to stop making them.

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### Some Things Never Change

An Amish bishop in Lancaster County did not notify anyone in law enforcement after a church member confessed to sexually assaulting 3 girls.

According to the Associated Press, [apnews.com](http://apnews.com), the bishop, Levi Esh, Sr., was arraigned on misdemeanor charges, with \$25,000 bail. Witnesses told authorities that the confessing member was excommunicated, and that Esh handled the situation internally to "keep it quiet."

Awful, but not exactly newsworthy at this point, except for one thing. The incidents occurred in 2012 and 2013. Some religious apologists talk about how the sexual abuse scandals are in the past. Apparently not all of them.

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*Well, Owl Be Damned*

For all the flat earthers, this is a chocolate egg.



The York Emporium



## Member Submissions

### **"I'm Ain't Afraid"**

Cheryl Huber

Background: Back in November 2019, I and another singer in the Central PA Womyn's Chorus were asked to create a dialogue illustrating things that religious and non-religious people might agree on. We then read it as an introduction to the song "I Ain't Afraid" by Holly Near. The lyrics in that song say things like "I ain't afraid of your Bible, I ain't afraid of your Torah, I ain't afraid of your Koran. I'm afraid of what you do in the name of your god."

Here's what we wrote, starting with gentle chit-chat and then getting to the meaningful stuff:

Christian: My name Cheryl (pronounced Shirl)

Atheist: And my name is Cheryl (pronounced Share-uhl)

Christian: We pronounce it differently

Atheist: but we spell it the same.

C: We have other things in common

A: Yes, we were both born in April

C: but not the same year.

A: We are both married. Me to a man.

C: and me to a woman.

A: We both love to sing.

May 2020

C: I'm an alto

A: and I'm a soprano

C: I am a Christian

A: I am an atheist.

C: But again, there are things we agree about.

A: We agree that everyone should be able to believe as they wish.

C: and that no one should be judged by appearances or labels, but rather for their actions.

A: We both enjoy learning about different cultures and beliefs.

C: We agree that no one should be persecuted, tortured or killed for their beliefs

A: and that the government should not promote any one belief system!

C: And we certainly agree that we are terribly afraid and horrified by things people have done in the name of their beliefs!

The song "I Ain't Afraid" immediately followed. Listen to Holly Near here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZV2nDwcjUY>

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

**Meetings** - For more details about our meetings, which will remain virtual for the time being, find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers](https://www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers).

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.

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 PA Nonbelievers, 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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