

PANViews



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

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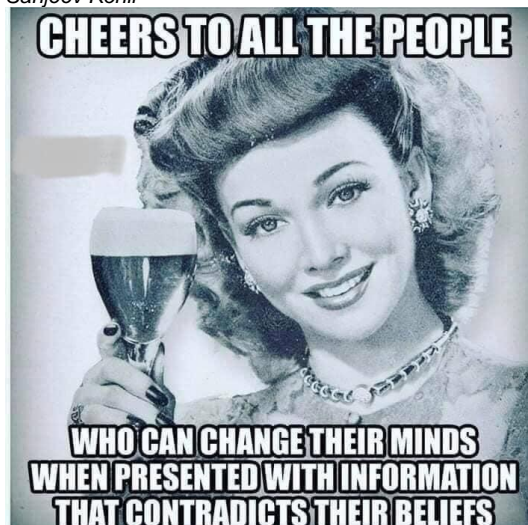
President's Report

Josh CruverKibi

PAN meetings have started in person again in certain areas. York, Chambersburg, Lancaster, and Cumberland County meetings are now in person. A lot of our members have gotten their vaccination and are feeling confident with going back out into the social world. Several members have been getting together in smaller groups, hang outs, and activities as well, which I am sure was needed for many people. A lot of us have had to put living our full lives on hold for the last year, and we know there is a finite amount time to live before we become plant food. We have all had to deal with a difficult moving existential and dissolution line over the last year between the threat of COVID death and our inevitable passing, and fitting as much quality life in before either of those occur. The COVID virus infections have decreased significantly in the last 3 months since people started getting vaccinated, but it is still looming out there with a new variant. If you go out still take the precautions that you feel comfortable and safe with. If you are feeling sick, please do not go out in public, get well, and maybe we will see you at one of our online meetings every Wednesday. You can of course still attend on Wednesdays if that is your preferred hang out and or if you live too far away to visit in person, say England, Florida, or Pittsburgh.

PAN will also be attending two tabling events this summer and fall, Olde Annville Days on August 14 and Pumpkin Fest on October 9 and 10. PAN also has a private secular family group for discussing secular family concerns and to plan activities and meetups. If you are interested in joining the private family group, get in contact with me to join the group.

Sanjeev Kohli



Atheist News in Pennsylvania– The Nation – The World!

Fulton v. City of Philadelphia

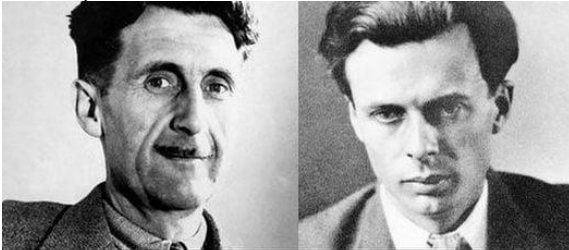
By now, the Supreme Court's unanimous decision in *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia* has been widely reported. The City of Philadelphia had declined to renew Catholic Social Services' foster care contract because CSS did not accept same-sex couples as potential foster parents, citing the Catholic Church's religious objections. Philadelphia claimed that policy violated the city's non-discrimination rules.

The Supreme Court's decision is regarded as extremely narrow. ACLU.org explains that the Court did not accept CSS' claim that it had the right to discriminate against same-sex couples because its objection is religiously based. Instead, the Court said that the city had the ability to offer individual exemptions to agencies, at the city's discretion; therefore, the city could not refuse an exemption to CSS. The Court was careful not to state that religious organizations did not have to abide by non-discrimination laws.

John Culhane, Professor of Law at Delaware Law School, further explained the Court's reasoning in the Philadelphia *Inquirer* (inquirer.com). In addition to the way the contract was written, allowing the city discretion, Culhane says the court found that foster care agencies are not public accommodations, and not subject to anti-discrimination laws in the first place. The Court describes foster care as a "highly selective and customized process," not like renting a hotel room, for example.

What we are left with is a decision that could have been worse. But it could have been better, too.

York Emporium



"What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one...Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance...In 1984 people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we fear will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we desire will ruin us."

Neil Postman

Amusing Ourselves to Death

More Money for PA Private Schools

For years Pennsylvania has had a program that allows businesses to earn tax credits when they donate money to scholarship funds for private, parochial and other schools. This money goes to primarily to charter and/or religious schools, which concerns public school boards and secularists.

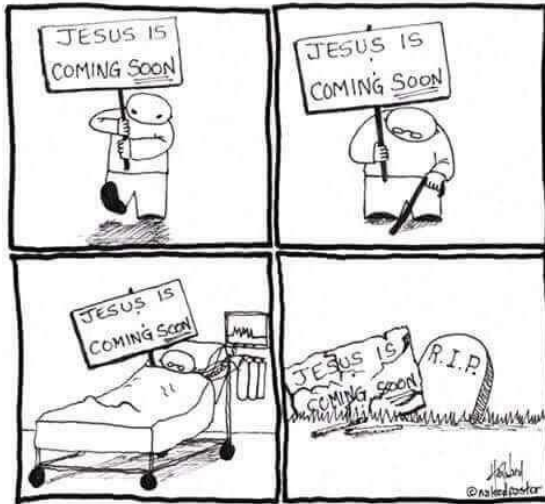
Now, according to pennlive.com, the amount of tax credits may be increased. The Senate Education Committee passed a measure that would nearly double the tax credits allowed, resulting in an increase of tens of millions of dollars.

The bill is entitled Excellence in Education for All, and was assigned Senate Bill #1, which means that it is the highest priority of the majority party. It now goes before the full Senate.

In addition to the increased tax credit, local school boards would no longer be able to exclusively approve or disapprove charter school applications, although local school boards would still provide them with financial supports. Governor Wolf does not support the bill as written, and has said he will veto it.

The bill's primary sponsor is Sen. Scott Martin, Lancaster. While this funding doesn't cost taxpayers anything, it does reduce the commonwealth's tax revenue. According to the *Johnstown Tribune-Democrat*, tribdem.com, the legislation would increase the amount available for the Educational Improvement Tax credits from \$185 million to \$300 million, and it would increase the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credits from \$55 million to \$100 million.

Lancaster Freethought Society



Fun at Home Depot

Police were called to a Home Depot in Dickson City, Lackawanna County, per wnep.com. Why?

Here's what the Dickson City Police's Facebook page said: 3:26pm *Commerce Blvd. @ Home Depot for disorderly people having an exorcism in the lumber isle for the dead trees. They were escorted out of the building.*

Sadly, there's not much more information available. Phillyvoice.com called the police for a comment. The officer responded, "There were two people hanging out in the lumber department doing their little exorcism thing."

The officer went on to say, "Some people at the store started picking up that something was happening that was not necessarily normal. Police were called to the store and they were escorted out of the building."

No charges will be filed. "It was a séance type of thing for the dead," he said.

Catholic Civil War

Catholic bishops and priests are increasingly divided between clergy who are social conservatives and those who are relatively liberal.

A skirmish has broken out in LaCrosse, WI. The Associated Press, apnews.com, reports on Rev. James Altman, pastor of St. James the Less Catholic church. Altman first attracted attention during the 2020 election, when he posted a video on YouTube during which he said, "You cannot be Catholic and be a Democrat." He further admonished people to "repent of your support of that party and its platform or face the fires of hell." More recent videos criticized restrictions on church gatherings due to covid and vaccinations, in similarly incendiary terms.

During a recent sermon Altman announced that LaCrosse's bishop, William Patrick Callahan, had asked for his resignation as pastor. He told his congregation, "They want my head now for speaking that truth. I, a lowly priest, apparently have created enemies among some of the hierarchies."

Callahan confirmed that Altman refused to resign, and that the church would begin to go through the steps to remove him.

Altman told his fans that he wanted to fight removal, but would need money to hire lawyers. They responded generously. Two conservative Christian fundraising sites, LifeFunder and GiveSendGo, quickly together raised more than \$640,000. GiveSendGo posted a message: "As we all know, Fr. Altman has been subject to diabolical persecution just for doing his job as a shepherd to his flock." LifeFunder has videos of Altman calling bishops who oppose him "cowards" and a "brood of vipers," and labeling liberals "left-wing fascist Nazis."

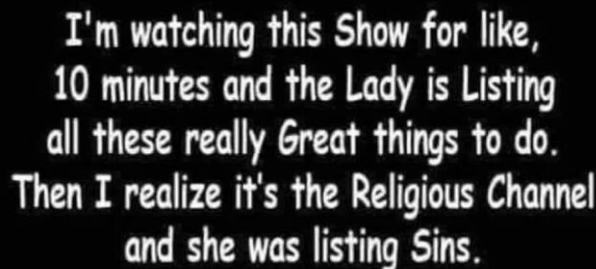
So far most Catholic bishops have said nothing about this case, although Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, TX, tweeted that Altman "is in trouble for speaking the truth. He inspires many to keep the faith during these dark days. Let us pray for him."

Not everyone supports him, of course. Faithful America, which calls itself an online community of Christians, launched a petition opposing Altman because of his remarks about covid, masks, and vaccines.

Altman's appeal will be dictated by the Catholic church's Code of Canon Law. A priest who has been asked to resign can submit a defense. His bishop then consults with two other priests to decide if they still feel the priest should resign. If the bishop upholds the resignation request, the priest can appeal to the Vatican's Congregation of the Clergy. That decision can be appealed to the Vatican.

It is extremely unusual for a priest to publicly defy a request to resign. The article cited two recent examples. In 2002 a priest in Boston refused to resign over an accusation that he abused a child thirty years earlier. He lost his appeal. In 2011 Rev. Frank Pavone, an anti-abortion activist who heads Priests for Life, appealed restrictions over his activities placed by his bishop in Amarillo, TX, to the Vatican. The restrictions were relaxed and Pavone left Texas. He's still active in Priests for Life. As would be expected, he supports Altman's right to appeal. "Bishops err, and sadly, some -- as in my case -- badly abuse their authority," Pavone said via email. "We need to be able to defend ourselves."

Although the media sometimes presents the Catholic church as a monolith, it's clear there are some cracks.



I'm watching this Show for like,
10 minutes and the Lady is Listing
all these really Great things to do.
Then I realize it's the Religious Channel
and she was listing Sins.

Trouble in Paradise

The Southern Baptist Convention is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. However, like many other religions, it has seen its participation drop in the last few years.

July 2021

The Southern Baptist Convention has lost 2.3 million total members — or 14% of its membership nationwide — since its peak in 2006. It has also suffered from the kind of culture wars that have affected lots of large organizations.

For example, Russell Moore resigned from the presidency of the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. Moore was no wild-eyed liberal; he is conservative, anti-choice and anti-gay marriage. However, he once called Donald Trump an "arrogant huckster," expressed sympathy for immigrants, and concern for SBC victims of sex abuse. That made him an outlier in SBC hierarchy, and he resigned. Several other prominent leaders have also resigned, and Rev. Rick Warren, head of the enormous Saddleback Church, recently ordained three women pastors, which is forbidden under the SBC's statement of faith. There has also been infighting over whether critical race theory is compatible with the SBC.

The SBC's annual meeting with 16,000 delegates faced was held recently. Apnews.com reports that while many of the delegates want to discuss these and other issues, it is difficult, because the SBC does not have a central governing body; it is composed of autonomous churches.

Before his resignation, Russell Moore had called for more accountability from SBC leaders about its handling of sex abuse claims. The Executive Committee said it had retained a firm to conduct such a review, but some members felt this would amount to the Committee investigating itself. Moore also wanted to work more on racial reconciliation, which, he said led to "constant threats from white nationalists and white supremacists, including within our convention." Black pastors are leaving the SBC because of what they see as racial insensitivity among a largely white leadership; some white members want the SBC to denounce critical race theory.

One of the main events of the convention was the election of an SBC president. To the surprise of many, according to the New York *Times*, nytimes.com, a moderate, Pastor Ed Litton, beat Al Mohler, Jr., a prominent figure who had been favored. Litton then beat ultraconservative Mike Stone. When the results were announced (Litton won by 556 out of about 14,000 cast) the article reports there was a mixture of cheers and boos.

The delegates also voted to create an independent task force to investigate its handling of sexual abuse. This was a surprise. The leadership had planned to refer this proposal to the Executive Committee, but church representatives voted to let the delegates vote on what to do.

Not everything has changed. The SBC still strongly opposes abortion, issuing a statement that says it is a "crime against humanity that must be punished equally under the law." The SBC managed to hold itself together, at least for now.

Atheist Planet

40 People Missing After First Flat Earth Surfing Championship



Boris Johnson's Exceptional Wedding

Boris Johnson married his fiancée, Carrie Symonds, a few weeks ago. The New York *Times*, nytimes.com, reports that Brits, including Johnson's closest advisors, were surprised.

British Catholics were even more surprised. Johnson and Symonds, both baptized Catholics, were married in a Catholic ceremony at Westminster Cathedral, which is interesting because Johnson has been divorced twice.

The reason is simple. Symonds had never been married before, and neither of Johnson's previous marriages had Catholic ceremonies.

Therefore, as far as Catholics are concerned, those don't count - even though his second marriage lasted for 27 years, and produced 4 children. Other commentators noted that in addition Johnson had been confirmed in the Church of England while he attended boarding school. Was he even still a Catholic? That one's easy: as far as the Catholic church is concerned, once a Catholic, always a Catholic.

English Catholics were annoyed by the double standard. Divorced Catholics who wish to remarry in the church don't always get the same level of understanding; and, of course, same sex marriage is completely unacceptable. "Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were married within the rules of the Catholic Church. And I wish them well," the Rev. James Martin, a Jesuit priest and the editor at large of "America" magazine, wrote on Twitter. "I also wish that the same mercy and compassion that was offered to them, recognizing their complex lives, could also be extended to same-sex couples who are lifelong Catholics."

God Is Still Laughing

Banned from Facebook

Facebook has banned the ultraconservative website LifeSiteNews, because it violated Facebook's policies regarding covid-19, according to the National Catholic Reporter, ncronline.org.

LifeSiteNews often posted faith-based material. Snopes.com described it as "a known purveyor of misleading information." LifeSiteNews' marketing director described the decision as "another case of Big Tech silencing free speech on their platform."



LifeSiteNews says that Facebook told it that the site was being banned for publishing "vaccine discouraging information on the platform," and "false information about COVID-19 that could contribute to physical harm."

Facebook specifically pointed to an article, "The Dark Side of Vaccines." This article refers to reports of people dying after receiving covid vaccines, but presents no link between the vaccines and the deaths. One of the anecdotes linked to another article which quoted a doctor as saying there was no connection between the vaccine and the death, but the LifeSiteNews story didn't mention that.

LifeSiteNews also said it was recently banned from YouTube.



Noah's Ark Trouble

Fake Noah's Arks are not just a US phenomenon. The New York Times, nytimes.com, reports that Europe has problems with this silliness, too.

A Dutch TV and theater producer named Aad Peters has a 21,528 square foot ark. It doesn't have an engine, and has to be towed. This new faux ark is a Bible museum, and it has traveled to Denmark, Germany and Norway.

Britain, however, has standards. Britain's Maritime and Coast Guard Agency impounded the ark in November 2019, even though it remained open to the public in that pre-covid time. British officials said it lacked certification of the ship's seaworthiness, or that it was not coated with any material that might kill sea life. The museum's owners pointed that since it was not a real ship, but a "noncertified floating object," there was no reason for it to comply with those regulations.

The ship is docked at Ipswich, which wants it to leave; it's taking up valuable waterfront space. The owners have been fined more than \$17,000, and Ipswich is now fining it an about \$700 per day.

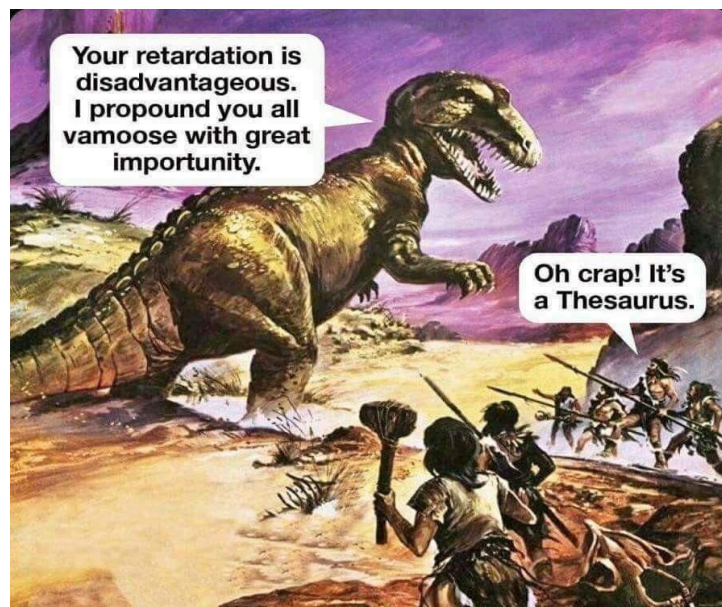
The owners say that they would be happy to move the ark back to the Netherlands. But there's a problem. The ark is not registered as a boat in the Netherlands, because, the owners point out, it's not a boat. That means, however, that British maritime officials cannot request an exemption from the Dutch to let the ark travel back home.

The ark is one of two built by a Dutch carpenter, based on biblical descriptions. Peters purchased it in 2010 for \$3 million. Interestingly, Peters says that he used to have live animals on board, but stopped because they "caused too many problems." How did Noah manage?

It has had issues before. A few years ago, it crashed into a Norwegian Coast Guard boat in Oslo in 2016, which gave rise to comments on Twitter: *Noah's ark crashed into docked coast guard vessel in Norway. The 900-year-old captain has been detained.*

He was distracted by the roughly 18 million animals on the rather small boat. An accident of biblical proportions.

In 2016, Peters was asked if the ark could survive a flood like the one in the Bible. He replied, "Sadly, no. I don't like to use the word 'miracle,' but it is a miracle that we got to Norway."



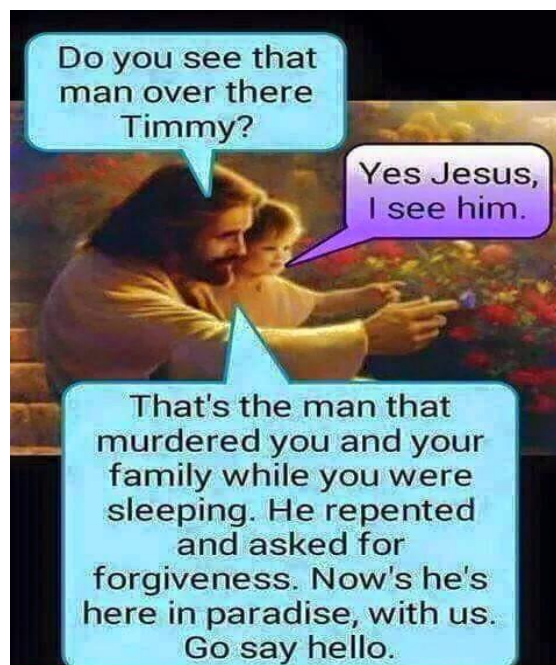
Canadian Revenge?

PANViews had a story last month about the recent discovery of mass graves at the site of schools for indigenous children in Canada. Canada has been dealing with the history of atrocious treatment that indigenous children received at these largely religious schools.

Now it appears that some people may be seeking revenge. There have been a series of suspicious fires in the last few weeks at churches on indigenous people's lands, most recently two within hours of each other. The New York *Times*, [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com), reports that the fires took place on National Indigenous Peoples Day. Officials thought it was possible that the fires were set by opponents of indigenous peoples. But since the two churches are only about 120 miles from the schools where the mass graves were found, they are also considering the possibility that the fires were set in reaction to that discovery.

Some leaders of the community expressed mixed emotions about the fires. Greg Gabriel, chief of the Penticton Indian Band, said that while the community was pained by the memory of the Roman Catholic church some members were unhappy that a place of worship, that had been part of the community for 110 years, had been burned down.

The fires were set within two hours of each other, and an accelerant was used. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police continue to investigate.



Foul Ball

Ben Zobrist is a former baseball player, most famous for winning the 2016 World Series Most Valuable Player Award while a member of the Chicago Cubs. Like many athletes, he's quite religious. Or at least he was.

According to the Chicago *Tribune*, [chicagotribune.com](https://www.chicagotribune.com), Zobrist has filed a lawsuit accusing his former minister of having sex with Zobrist's wife while he was defrauding Zobrist's charity foundation.

Byron Yawn, CEO of the counseling firm Forrest Crain and Co., was the Zobrists' marriage counselor and executive of Zobrist's charity. The suit contends that Yawn "usurped the ministerial-counselor role, violated and betrayed the confidence entrusted to him by the plaintiff, breached his fiduciary duty owed to the plaintiff and deceitfully used his access as counselor to engage in an inappropriate sexual relationship with the plaintiff's wife."

Yawn is not exactly denying the adultery part; his attorney says, "At the end of the day, a woman has the right to choose who she wants to be with." The Zobrists met Yawn when they joined Community Bible Church in Nashville, where Yawn was pastor. He was their pre-marital counselor in 2005, and Zobrist received individual sessions with Yawn because he suffered from anxiety and depression. The suit states that Yawn began individual counseling sessions with Julianna Zobrist in 2018, and the affair began shortly thereafter.

Yawn was also working for Ben's charity, which paid him \$36,000. He and Julianna were working on increasing the charity's social media presence. By February 2019, Zobrist had permission from the Cubs to miss spring training. He emailed Yawn, "Was hoping to be at spring training but can't leave yet. You should know that Jules told me she has spoken with a divorce lawyer twice. I care too much about my marriage and family to be away during such a critical time." Yawn responded, "That's heavy friend. Yawns love you and your family. Whatever you need. Whatever you need to do. Grace."

Yawn's wife discovered a burner phone. She contacted Zobrist to tell him about what she thought was an emotional affair. Zobrist's charity, Patriot Forward, which promotes mental health among athletes and helps them transition once their career is over, discovered that Yawn continued receiving paychecks after his employment was terminated. His pay was in addition to Zobrist's tithing \$10,000 per month to Yawn's church, and paying more than \$10,000 for a pastoral trip for Yawn and his family.

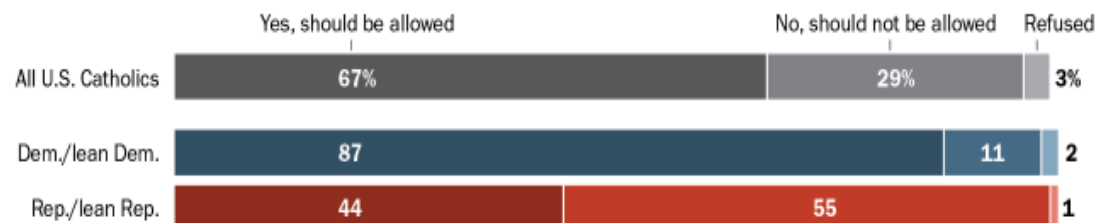
The lawsuit seeks damages for breach of fiduciary duty and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

Catholic bishops want to refuse communion to Joe Biden because of his support of abortion rights. But do Catholics care?

And do they understand what the church's doctrine regarding the Eucharist?

Most U.S. Catholics think Biden's abortion views should not disqualify him from Communion

Thinking about Biden and his views about abortion, do you think he should be allowed to receive Communion in the Catholic Church? (Based on U.S. Catholics)



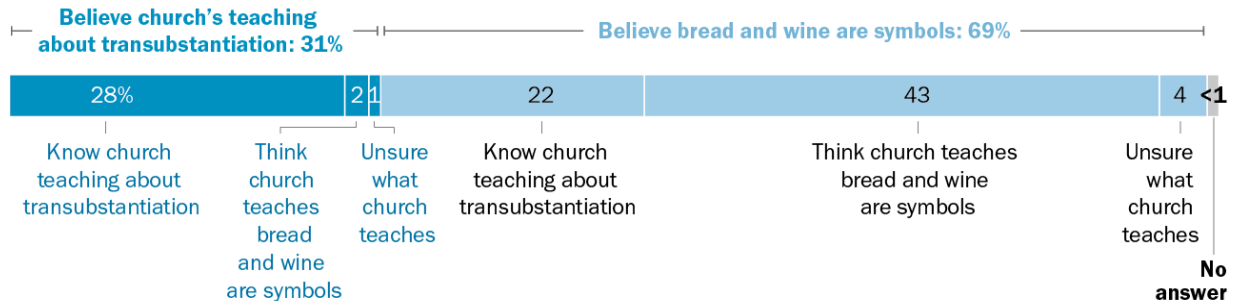
Source: Survey conducted March 1-7, 2021, among U.S. adults.

"Most Democrats and Republicans Know Biden Is Catholic, but They Differ Sharply About How Religious He Is"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Seven-in-ten U.S. Catholics believe bread, wine used in Communion are symbolic

% of U.S. Catholics who ...



Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-19, 2019, among U.S. adults.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Alabama Enters the 21st Century

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, ffrf.org, has won another important legal battle.

Alabama was the only state that forced voters to sign a religious oath, concluding with “so help me God,” in order to register to vote. The FFRF filed suit on behalf of 4 Alabama residents who had gotten in touch with the Alabama secretary of state to see if they could register without the oath. They were told it was not possible.

This was particularly odd because Alabama already allowed attorneys, jurors, witnesses and others to make a secular affirmation instead when they are unable to swear “so help me God” as a matter of conscience.

The secretary of state has amended all voter registration forms to allow voters to check a box that says: “OPTIONAL: Because of a sincerely held belief I decline to include the final four words of the oath above.” The secretary of state also adopted a new administrative rule that allows voters to strike out “so help me God.”

Member Submissions

A member suggested that we ask *PANViews* readers to suggest a response to a question. She was wearing a mask, and a stranger asked her, "Why are you wearing that diaper?" The member couldn't think of a good answer. Any suggestions?

David Jordan: "So I don't get your baby poop on me. So I don't have to smell your bad breath. I've got bubonic plague and I'm trying not to give it to you. Obviously, no need for a logical response."

SMartin: "Because I don't need any shit from assholes like you."

Jim Eshleman: "If you can't tell the difference between a mask and a diaper, I hope you haven't had any children." Or, if you think you can get away with it, "After what just came out of your mouth, you should be wearing a diaper over your face."

Priscilla Oppenheimer:

1. "It keeps me from asking impertinent questions of strangers."
2. "It controls my incontinence when I meet anti-maskers."
3. "A clean diaper is superior to a foul mouth."

Seattle Times



God Pays Attention to English Sports, Too

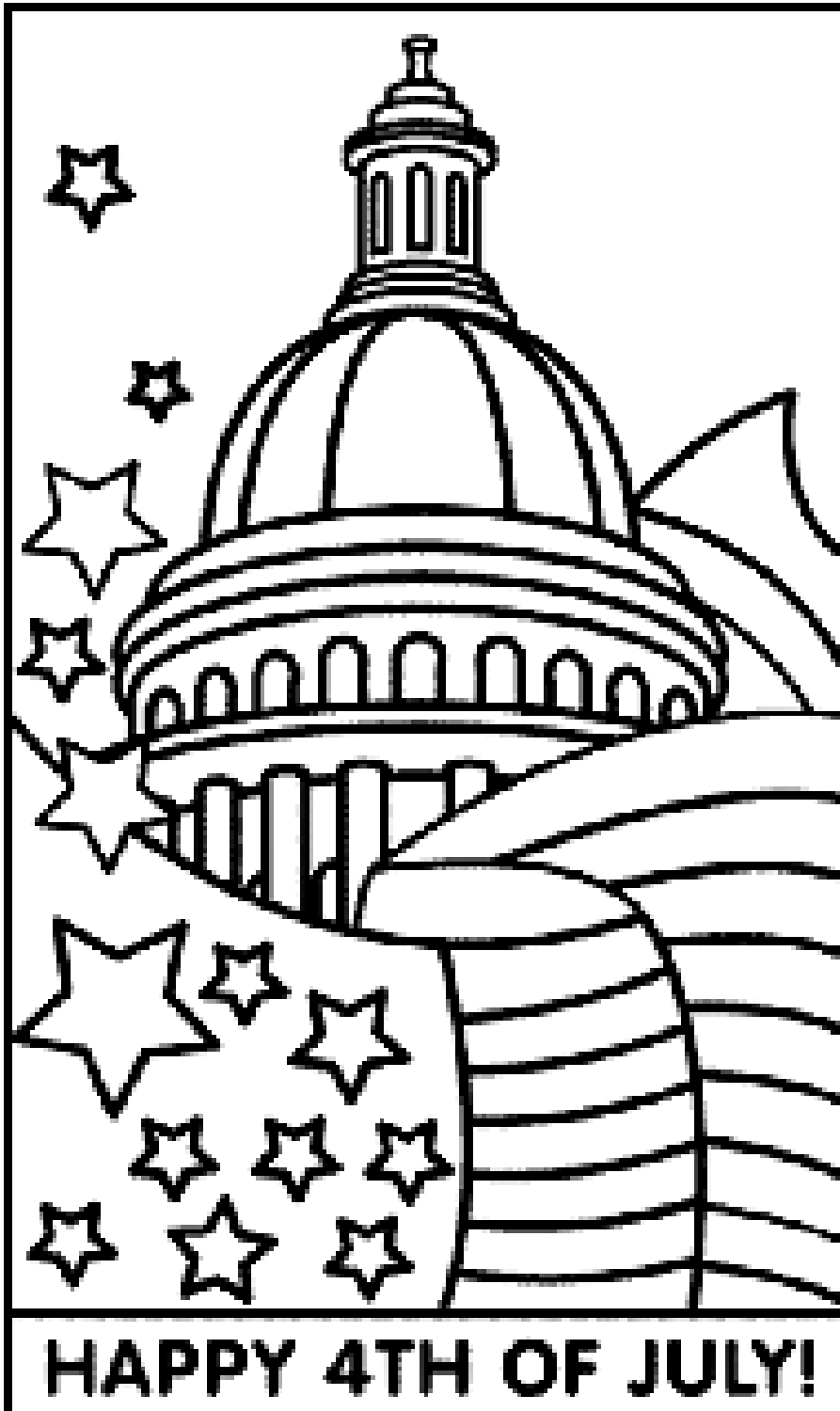
David Jordan

In May, Liverpool goalie Allison Becker scored a goal at the other end of the pitch. He headed the ball in from a corner kick in the last moments of the game. This was a great moment for soccer fans, it's very rare for a goalie to score a goal for his team. But it was a head scratcher for this atheist to hear Becker in the post-match interviews.

1. God helped him head the ball into the goal.
2. He dedicated the goal to his recently deceased father, who, at 53, drown while swimming at the family's summer house in Brazil.
3. He was sure his father was sitting beside God watching this soccer game.

Where to begin....well, keeping it positive, my dream statement would be "I was thrilled to make this goal to help my team win. To honor my father, who passed away in a drowning accident this year, I want to remind people we are a land animal. This is serious, there are a quarter million accidental drowning death each year. When you are swimming have a partner, swim sober, and there is no shame in wearing a life vest... they are very comfortable these days. Let's work to reduce the number of drowning deaths. Swim safe to honor my father. God bless.

FUN!





PAN News & Update

Meetings –PAN is holding virtual meetings at 6:00 pm on Wednesdays for the time being. Get more information on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers.

Check on Facebook to verify which meetings are being held in person.

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

Chambersburg – Second Thursday of the month, 7:00 pm. Please check website/Facebook for location.

Harrisburg– First Wednesday of the month, 6:30 pm, Midtown Scholar, 1302 N. Third St. Midtown Scholar has not yet fully reopened, so for the time being, this meeting is virtual.

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 – Normally first Sunday, but for July, second Sunday of the month, July 11, noon, I-ron-ic, 256 E. 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 lets 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, 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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