

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

Thank you everyone who signed up or renewed their PA Nonbeliever membership for 2024. There is still time to renew or become a 2024 member of PA Nonbelievers so that you can participate in the voting at the Annual meeting in March. If you renew or start your membership by February 24, you will also be able to vote for board members at the PA Nonbelievers annual meeting on Saturday March 2nd, from 12 to 2 PM. If you are interested in joining the board, you can also make yourself available to be voted onto the board at the annual meeting. We will have some current board members whose term will be ending this year.

You can start or renew your membership today at: <http://www.panonbelievers.org/membership/>. You can also use the printable form and send your membership in through the postal service if you prefer. Your donations and participation in PAN events help the mission to educate, challenge, promote, and advocate for non-belief, skeptical rational thinking, the scientific method, civil rights, and the separation of church and state.

We will send out an announcement email invite via punchbowl to current members for the annual meeting at the beginning of February. The meeting will be a potluck like last year with a brief but necessary interruption in the socializing and eating to vote on board members.



Atheist News in Pennsylvania– The Nation – The World!

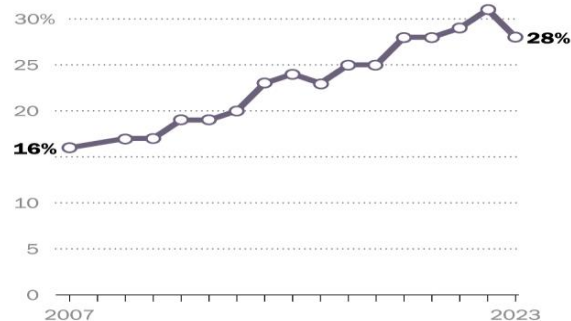
Nones Are Winning

More Americans describe their religious affiliation as “none” than any other specific religion, according to NPR.org.

The number of nones has been creeping up for years. The NPR story quotes a Pew Research study that finds the religiously unaffiliated – a group comprised of atheists, agnostic and those who say their religion is “nothing in particular” – is now the largest cohort in the U.S. They're more prevalent among American adults than Catholics (23%) or evangelical Protestants (24%).

28% of U.S. adults are now religiously unaffiliated

% of U.S. adults who identify religiously as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular”



Source: 2020-23 data based on Pew Research Center's National Public Opinion Reference Surveys, nationally representative surveys conducted online and by mail; respondents recruited using address-based sampling. Data from 2019 and earlier comes from the Center's random-digit-dial phone surveys, including the 2007 and 2014 Religious Landscape Studies.
 "Religious 'Nones' in America: Who They Are and What They Believe"
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The chart at left shows the progression. In 2007, nones were only 16% in Pew's research.

NPR points out that nones are a diverse group. The majority believe in God, or a higher power, but don't ascribe to a particular religion, or attend religious services. Past Pew surveys have pegged the number of atheists in the US at 3% - 4%.

Nones don't necessarily oppose religion, according to the survey. They are more interested in science than strongly religious people, but they don't think everything can be explained by science. The study also explains religious nones are “among the most strongly and consistently liberal and Democratic constituencies in the United States.”

However, while the study notes that nones are less likely to vote than religious people, it makes an exception for atheists and agnostics, who are more likely to be politically active

Pew questioned respondents about other aspects of their lives. Nones are less happy with their communities and social lives than the religious, and likely to use logic or reason when making moral decisions. One of the authors noted that nones say the “desire to avoid hurting other people factors prominently in how they think about right and wrong.” Religious people don't want to hurt others, either, but they also consider their religion, and scripture.

Nones are younger and less racially diverse than religious people; 69% are under age 50, and 63% are white. The study notes that atheists and agnostics are very likely to be white, while nothing in particulars are more likely to be black, Hispanic or Asian.

But digging deeper into the data shows that men are significantly more likely to say they're atheist or agnostic whereas women are more likely to describe their religion as 'nothing in particular.'

Pope Francis In The News

Pope Francis is still having trouble walking a fine line between supporting the LGBTQ community and keeping peace with conservative Catholics. The pope recently announced that priests are allowed to bless gay couples. He was careful to explain that does not mean the church approves gay marriage, or that the blessing should be part of a marriage ceremony, but that gay people can be blessed, just as any other person can be blessed.

This statement caused confusion (and consternation), so the Associated Press, apnews.com, asked Pope Francis to clarify the church's position on homosexuality. In a written response, he reaffirmed that homosexuality is not a crime, but sex outside of marriage is a sin. And, of course, the church continues to oppose gay marriage. In a televised interview, he urged Catholics, including bishops, to show "tenderness" toward gay people, as, he said, God does.

Conservative bishops were not appeased. Bishops in Africa and Poland, among other places, have announced they will not perform such blessings. Others pointed out the statement didn't change anything; gay marriage still isn't allowed.

The African bishops were especially incensed, which is a problem for Francis. 265 million Catholics, about a quarter of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics, live there, and it is one of the few areas where the church is growing. 31 of Africa's 54 countries have laws making homosexuality illegal. The Zambia bishop conference said that blessing were "not for implementation in Zambia." Gay sex is punishable by between 15 years to life in prison, and it is included in the same section of the law as bestiality. Polish bishops said they will not be blessing same-sex couples, and issued a statement that marriage is only between a man and woman, and that any sexual activity outside of marriage is "always an offense against God's will."



The Pope upset more people by calling for a global ban on surrogacy. According to usatoday.com, he claims the practice "violates the dignity of the woman and child." During his "state of the world" address, he called surrogate motherhood "deplorable" and "based on the exploitation of situations of the mother's material needs." He concluded by saying, "A child is always a gift and never the basis of a commercial contract. Consequently, I express my hope for an effort by the international community to prohibit this practice universally."

Tunnel To Where?

Young male members of the Chabad-Lubavitcher Hasidic movement secretly built a tunnel under the movement's headquarters in Brooklyn. Nobody seems to know for sure why they did it.

The New York *Times*, nytimes.com, reports the tunnel was about 60 feet long and 8 feet across, leading from one building to another. It was not reinforced, so it compromised the stability of the two buildings. City inspectors made the Lubavitchers fortify the tunnel, evacuate parts of the buildings, and issued citations against the congregation.

City inspectors became aware of the tunnel and told leaders of the synagogue that it had to be fortified. When a concrete truck arrived to do that, a group of the tunnel builders protested at the site. The protestors, described as students, tried to damage the wall of a prayer space that lead to the tunnel with a

crowbar, tried to sit in the tunnel to keep it from being filled, and fought with police officers who came to disburse them. Nine men were arrested, five were arraigned, and the congregation obtained a court order to keep them out of the Lubavitcher buildings.

The congregation poured concrete to support the walls, under city supervision. There's been no announcement of when the buildings will be safe, but one of them is used for worship, so the Lubavitchers are anxious to have it reopen.

The male students who were arrested are in their late teens or early 20s. None of them were charged with any crimes relating to the creation of the tunnel. Their lawyer said they were students driven by activism. "Students can get a little bit enthused once in a while," he explained. "We see that going on on campuses all across the country." Boys will be boys?

The *Times* writes that the construction of the tunnel was the latest skirmish between mainstream Lubavitcher leaders, and those who oppose them. The movement's leader, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, known as the rebbe, died about 30 years ago. The fight is between current leaders who believe the rebbe is really dead and their responsibility is to continue his teachings, and those – including the tunnel builders – who believe the rebbe was the Messiah and is still alive.

The story lead to many anti-semitic rumors on social media; for example, some claimed the tunnel was built to facilitate sexual abuse of children.

According to the Associated Press, apnews.com, a Lubavitcher leader thinks the young men were trying to "preserve their unauthorized access" to the synagogue. Some of the tunnel builders claimed they were trying to institute an "expansion" plan designed by Schneerson.

Pastor Burnout

Christian pastors are thinking of leaving their jobs at an increased level, due to post-pandemic burnout, according to the Associated Press, apnews.com.

According to a survey conducted by The Hartford Institute for Religion Research in 2023, more than 4 out of 10 clergy have thought about leaving their congregations since the pandemic, in 2020, and more than half have considered leaving the ministry altogether. The survey ascribes this level of dissatisfaction to the "collective trauma" of Covid.



Covid appears to have exacerbated trends that predated the pandemic. In-person church attendance has decreased steadily for years, especially among younger participants. The people who remain are less willing to see any changes in the church, or its services, the survey said.

The reasons for the unhappiness can sometimes be attributed to outside factors. Perhaps the congregation is located in a rural town that is losing population; the survey's author noted: "That has an effect on volunteering. It has an effect on aging. It has an effect on what kind of possibility you have to grow."

Most clergy mentioned conflicts with their members, with those thinking seriously about leaving report higher levels of conflict. They were also more likely to be pastors of smaller churches, who don't have staff to help out. Mainline Protestants were the most unhappy, followed by evangelical Protestants, with Catholic and Orthodox priests being the least likely to consider quitting.

Who Do You Trust?

Perhaps one of the reasons pastors are burning out is that people don't trust them as much as they once did. Christianitytoday.com reports only about 37% of people in a recent Gallup survey indicated a high level of trust. The survey showed people are more impressed by the moral standards of nurses, police, or chiropractors than clergy. There is some good news – clergy are more trusted than politicians, lawyers or journalists.

The story quotes Nathan Finn, executive director of the Institute for Transformational Leadership at North Greenville University: "As American culture becomes increasingly pluralistic and post-Christian, we can't assume that Americans in general default to a positive view of clergy. Ministers must work harder to gain public trust than was the case even a generation ago." Finn goes on to point out the obvious – sex abuse scandals, political involvement, and evangelicals' "countercultural" moral positions don't help.



The most dramatic drop in clergy trust occurred in the early 2000s, when the Catholic sex abuse scandal saw the light of day; positive ratings went from 64% to 52%. Political affiliation doesn't matter much; only 38% of Republicans and 36% of Democrats thought clergy had high levels of honesty and ethical standards.

Gallup has been surveying the US about how people feel about faith leaders for about 40 years. Clergy trust hit a high point in 1985, when 67% of Americans thought they had "high" or "very high" ethical standards. Some individual religious leaders are still admired; for example, Gallup shows Pope Francis as the fourth-most-admired man among Americans, with the Dalai Lama as the eighth.

By the way, who do Americans admire? Nurses almost always top the list as most trustworthy; the one exception occurred after September 11, when firefighters outranked them. And who do we admire the least? Members of Congress, who get a "low" or "very low" rating by 58%.

India Continues to Push the Hindu Religion

Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, continues to expand the dominance of the Hindu religion in India. Recently, in anticipation of a general election, Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) held an elaborate opening celebration for a temple in Ayodhya dedicated to Lord Ram. The temple was built over a razed mosque, but that doesn't tell the whole story. The site was overrun by Hindu mobs who demolished the 16th century Babri mosque in 1992. After a long legal fight, Hindus won the right to build a Hindu temple there in 2019. Most of the BJP's political opponents didn't attend the opening ceremony.

The Associated Press, apnews.com, explains the significance of the site of the temple. Hindus believe Lord Ram was born at this site. Most Hindus believe that chanting Lord Ram's name in times of trouble will bring peace and prosperity, and many Hindus keep idols of Ram in their homes; the major festivals of Dussehra and Diwali are associated with him. The Hindu epic "Ramayan" is about Ram, and there was a TV series based on the epic in the 1980s, which people still watch.

Although the opening was celebrated, the temple isn't complete. It is expected to cost about \$217 million. 42 of its 46 doors will have a gold layer.

This is not the first time Modi has used the temple to emphasize Hindu dominance. The BJP promised to build the temple as part of its election platform. There was a huge celebration when ground was broken at the temple in 2020. Hindus do comprise 80% of India's population, but it is home to 200 million Muslims as well, who have often been attacked by Hindu nationalists.

Modi asked Indians to celebrate the temple by lighting lamps in their homes and local temples. Observers see the mobilization of Hindu voters as an important party of Modi's campaign for a third term as prime minister.

Postscript

Alabama recently executed Kenneth Smith, convicted of a murder committed in 1988. The stories about the execution mostly described the new, untried method being used, nitrogen gas. Some mentioned in passing that Smith had been convicted of murder for hire of a pastor's wife.

What exactly did he do? According to al.com, which reports Alabama news, Smith was hired to kill Elizabeth Sennett, wife of Church of Christ pastor Charles Sennett. She had been stabbed and beaten with a fireplace implement. Investigators quickly figured out the scene had been staged to look like a home invasion and robbery and focused on the pastor. The first deputy to arrive couldn't find a pulse on the woman, but when one of the rescue workers said he'd heard a heartbeat, the pastor was clearly startled. However, she was declared dead at the hospital.

From The Thinking Atheist



theadtheistfig.com

As the sheriff's department investigated, one of the deputies realized he had met Pastor Sennett before. He had been working on another murder case a few weeks earlier, the shooting of a service station owner, when he saw Sennett, a member of the rescue squad, following him around. It got to be so intrusive the deputy asked Sennett to leave, but he kept coming back. After Mrs. Sennett's murder, he wondered if Sennett had been watching him, trying to see what murder investigators look for.

A caller to CrimeStoppers provided the names of the men who actually committed the murder. The investigators interviewed Sennett again. He continued to deny any involvement. As he got up to leave, though, an investigator asked if he knew Kenny Smith. Sennett was startled, and, the investigator said, turned "beet red." He went home and told his sons that he had been having an affair, and that he was responsible for their mother's death. Sennett then went out to his pickup truck and shot himself.

Investigators discovered in addition to the affair, he also had substantial debts, and had taken out a large insurance policy on his wife. He paid the two killers \$1,000 each to commit the murder.

What refutes science:

-Better science

What doesn't refute science:

-Your feelings

-Your religion

-Your favorite politician

-Your half-baked opinion

after watching two YouTube
videos

Being Fired As a Good Career Move

Joseph Strickland, former bishop of Tyler, TX, hasn't let his being removed by Pope Francis from his post slow him down. The National Catholic Reporter, ncronline.org, explains. Strickland will be the keynote speaker at Conservative Political Action Committee's February Ronald Reagan dinner in Washington, DC.

The annual CPAC conference is an annual gathering of the right and far-right. To be asked to speak at the event cements Strickland's position as a conservative icon – and martyr.

The Vatican began an investigation, known as an apostolic visitation, into the Tyler diocese in June 2023. The investigation concentrated on Strickland's handling of finances, and his management style, including its effect on the morale of the diocese's priests. Strickland was relieved of his post in November, after, according to the Vatican, he refused to resign.

Strickland had been involved in a lot of dustups with the church. He attacked the Pope on social media; among other things, he endorsed a video describing Francis as a “diabolically disoriented clown.” He questioned the safety of Covid-19 vaccines, recommended a video that indicated Catholics shouldn't vote for Democrats, and addressed a political rally dedicated to overturning the 2020 presidential election.

Being effectively fired hasn't hurt his secular political standing. He has prayed with like-minded people in Baltimore outside of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' meeting, won awards from many groups such as Priests for Life (an outspoken anti-abortion organization) and continues to speak out, on his personal website, on Catholic issues. And, of course, he recently he opposed Francis' call to priests to bless gay couples.

Speak Up, God

So, the online pastor has an explanation as to why he sold worthless cryptocurrency. God told him to! Although he now adds, maybe he “misheard.”

According to the Washington *Post*, washingtonpost.com, Colorado has charged Eligio Regalado and his wife with civil fraud for selling INDXcoin to members of Denver's Christian community. The couple sold the “asset” to more than 300 investors and raised nearly \$3.2 million.

They told their buyers the cryptocurrency was a “low risk, high profit investment” while the state claims it is “illiquid and practically useless.” The Regalados are being charged with violating Colorado's anti-fraud, licensing and registration laws.

"The Lord said: I want you to build this," Regalado said. "We took God at his word and sold a cryptocurrency with no clear exit."

The Regalados used the proceeds to live what prosecutors describe as a "lavish lifestyle." Regalado released a video message in which he confirmed he and his wife made a profit of \$1.3 million, and spent "a few hundred thousand dollars" on "a home remodel that the Lord told us to do."

Regalado explained, "Either I misheard God, and every one of you who prayed and came in — you as well." But maybe not. He continued, "Or two, God is still not done with this project."

Why did Regalado do this? He had no experience in trading cryptocurrencies, but he notes, "God is in the business of doing new things and breaking seals. And he did tell us to do this."

"I said: Lord, I don't want to do this. I don't know how to do this. I don't have any experience in this industry. I don't know what I'm doing. I don't want to be caught up in something."

People who bought INDXcoin were unable to convert it to cash because of technical issues, Regalado said. "We launched an exchange. The exchange technology failed. Things went downhill. I know this looks terrible."

Regalado complains he has been overwhelmed by negative comments online and suggests his investors "stop being ruled by mammon (chasing money)."

Pearls Before Swine



FUN!

Make the sharks any color you want!



Word Search *(Answer at the end of PANViews)*



AGREE
 ANGRY
 ARGUE
 ARGUMENTS
 BEST FRIENDS
 BIG FIGHT
 CALMLY EXPLAIN
 CAMPOUTS
 COMPROMISE
 DIFFERENT IDEAS
 DISAGREE

FRUSTRATED
 HAPPY
 HURT
 INSEPERABLE
 IS IT OKAY TO ARGUE
 LISTEN
 MARK
 MIKE
 MUD PUDDLES
 OPINIONS
 POINT OF VIEW

RIDE BIKES
 RUN RACES
 SCARY STORIES
 SLEEPOVERS
 SOLVE
 SPLASHED
 STOMPED
 TALK
 TOGETHER
 UNDERSTAND
 UPSET

PAN News & Updates

Meetings – PAN holds in-person and online meetings. Locations, times, and dates below.

Online meeting: Fourth Thursday of the month at 6:00 pm. We hope to split the meeting into an hour of chat and an hour of presentation or more structured discussion. Anyone with a book/movie review, discussion topic, or potential guest speaker should contact Dietrich

Dellinger @ guyinnagorillasuit@gmail.com

Chambersburg – Second Thursday of the month, 6:30 pm, Volcano Japanese Restaurant
955 Wayne Ave, Chambersburg

Cumberland/Mechanicsburg – NEW DATE Third **Thursday** of the month, Gather Your Party Gaming & Hobby, 219 North Hanover Street, Carlisle, PA. This group plays board (atheist) games!

Harrisburg– First Wednesday of the month, 6:30 pm, Zeroday Brewing Company Taproom, 923 North 3rd Street.

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

Lebanon - Second Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Plaza Azteca in Myerstown.

Reading – Third Thursdays at 7:15pm, 3rd & Spruce Drafthaus, 238 S 3rd Ave, Reading, PA 19611

York Meeting – First Sunday at noon, Mexitaly Brick Oven Brewhouse, 2440 East Market 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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Word Search Answer/Hints

The words below are listed with their starting row and column

AGREE 5:11	FRUSTRATED 3:19	RIDE BIKES 21:13
ANGRY 22:21	HAPPY 4:21	RUN RACES 2:9
ARGUE 6:12	HURT 20:15	SCARY STORIES 11:4
ARGUMENTS 1:12	INSEPERABLE 13:9	SLEEPOVERS 19:10
BEST FRIENDS 6:17	IS IT OKAY TO ARGUE 1:3	SOLVE 12:8
BIG FIGHT 19:14	LISTEN 17:2	SPLASHED 2:3
CALMLY EXPLAIN 7:10	MARK 21:19	STOMPED 22:22
CAMPOUTS 15:9	MIKE 19:21	TALK 9:6
COMPROMISE 3:5	MUD PUDDLES 17:11	TOGETHER 11:14
DIFFERENT IDEAS 9:18	OPINIONS 16:15	UNDERSTAND 1:13
DISAGREE 4:18	POINT OF VIEW 18:12	UPSET 22:7

