

# 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*

It is the end of a busy year for PAN with a likely busier year for 2025. In addition to our tabling events, regular meetups, and annual events, PAN will be starting a \$1000 scholarship through the Secular Student Alliance in 2025. The scholarship application process will open in April and would be available to full-time high school and college students. We will give more specific information to PAN members next month if anyone is interested in applying for the scholarship.

For 2025, I will also be doing work within the context of PAN secular advocacy as well as my clinical graduate work. I will be doing speaking engagements, teaching, and writing projects. My first speaking engagement will be on January 28<sup>th</sup> at Doubletree hotel in Reading at 7 PM for 'Spirit on Tap'. Spirit on Tap is a monthly event through the United Church of Christ (UCC) of Reading on topics of religion and culture. My topic will be 'How atheists, secularists, and humanists live without faith.' Any PAN member is welcome to attend the event. My next confirmed speaking engagement will be teaching at Osher Lifelong Learner Institute (OLLI) of York on the same topic on May 9<sup>th</sup> at 11 AM.

I will also be hosting a weekly critical thinking Zoom group on topics from the Kitted Thinking Tools created by School of Thought International. Each meeting, I will present and lecture for fifteen minutes on a critical thinking topic and then the group will practice and discuss the topic for the rest of the hour. This group will be open only to PAN members or by special invitation. These Zoom meetings will be weekly, Mondays from 5-6 PM starting January 6<sup>th</sup>. The Zoom link for this group is <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82977312179?pwd=tTTQ8y283hinDTaF0oPQlsCLYq6AK.1> and the passcode to enter the group is: 672806.

For more information on Kitted Thinking check out their website: [https://kitted.app/article/kitted/the-story-of-kitted/0051?\\_gl=1\\*1yue54q\\*\\_gcl\\_au\\*MTAxMjA5MTMwMS4xNzM1NTkwODk2](https://kitted.app/article/kitted/the-story-of-kitted/0051?_gl=1*1yue54q*_gcl_au*MTAxMjA5MTMwMS4xNzM1NTkwODk2)

PA Nonbelievers is still accepting memberships for 2025. You can start or renew your membership on our website: <http://www.panonbelievers.org/>. You can also download and print form on our membership page: <https://panonbelievers.org/home/become-a-member/> and send your membership in through the postal service if you prefer. We will count anyone who has signed up or renewed their membership since September of this year, for the 2025 membership. You can sign up for your 2025 PA Nonbelievers Membership Drive. All 2024 memberships expire on January 1, 2025.

Your membership helps PA Nonbelievers continue to do the work we do on behalf of Atheists, Agnostics, and Humanists in Pennsylvania. Our mission is to create a sense of community, educational outreach, raise secular awareness, and increase rational and critical thinking skills in our greater Pennsylvanian community. I hope that you continue to volunteer and support our community through PAN membership and events next year. Membership also gives you the right to vote and run in PA Nonbelievers elections in March 2025 at our annual meeting.

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



### **When Is Religious Not Religious?**

Wisconsin is fighting with the Catholic church about when a religious organization isn't really religious. According to the *New York Times*, [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com), Wisconsin exempts charities from state unemployment taxes if the organization is "operated primarily for religious purposes."

The charity in question, Catholic Charities Bureau, is described as the "social ministry" of the Catholic Diocese of Superior, Wisconsin. Its mission is to provide "services to the poor and disadvantaged as an expression of the social ministry of the Catholic Church." The state decided that the charity shouldn't be exempt because it "provides essentially secular services and engages in activities that are not religious per se."

The Wisconsin Supreme Court didn't argue with the charity's claim that its services were based on the gospel, and Catholic teachings. But it rules that the activities were secular and did not "attempt to imbue program participants with the Catholic faith nor supply any religious materials to program participants or employees." The Court further pointed out that there were no religious restrictions in who the charity hired, or to whom they provided services.

The charity is being represented by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. A Becket lawyer, Eric Rassbach, argued, "Wisconsin is trying to make sure no good deed goes unpunished. Penalizing Catholic Charities for serving Catholics and non-Catholics alike is ridiculous and wrong."

The charity appealed to the US Supreme Court, claiming that the Constitution does not permit the government "to second-guess the religious decisions of religious bodies."

The Freedom From Religion Foundation notes that if the charity wins, it could lead to Catholic hospitals and universities receiving the same exemption. Patrick Elliott, the FFRF's legal director, says the issue here is not whether the charity is motivated by religion, but will the imposition of the tax hamper religious expression. "The exemption is there to protect churches from interference, and now they're taking it and running with it and saying it covers anything religiously affiliated," he said. "It's not a good system if a religious entity can just opt themselves out even when it's not interfering with their religious practice."

The Supreme Court agreed on Friday to decide whether Wisconsin was free to deny a tax exemption to a Catholic charity on the grounds that its activities were not primarily religious.

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### **Ten Commandments – Or Maybe It's Nine**

A tablet with the Ten Commandments carved into it sold at auction for slightly more than \$5 million. The auction house, Sotheby's, described it as the oldest Ten Commandments tablet in the world, dating from

AD 300-800, and had estimated that it would sell for between \$1 million and \$2 million. The auction house said the buyer intended to donate the tablet to an Israeli institution, according to the *New York Times*, [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com).

The tablet had apparently been used as a paving stone. And it is actually the Nine Commandments; it's missing the one about taking the lord's name in vain.

As is often the case with ancient artifacts that appear centuries after the date they were supposedly created, there are questions about its age, and its authenticity.

It was discovered by a man named Jacob Kaplan. In 1947, he wrote about the discovery in *The Bulletin of the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society*. He claimed the stone was found in 1913, near a railroad construction site in what is now southern Israel. It is about two feet long, weighs 115 pounds, and the commandments are inscribed in Paleo-Hebrew.

The Sotheby specialist noted the text is legible, but worn down in the middle, where people walked on it when it was a paving stone. It turned up at an Israeli antiquities dealer in 1995, and then was owned by the Living Torah Museum in Brooklyn. The most recent owner purchased it in 2016, for \$850,000.

Experts urged caution, while noting that it's at least theoretically possible it is authentic. Christopher A. Rollston, the chairman of the Department of Classical and Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at George Washington University, explained that modern forgeries of old inscriptions have been produced for more than 150 years. "Sotheby's is stating that this Samaritan Ten Commandments inscription is circa 1,500 years old," Dr. Rollston said. "But there is no way that this can be known. After all, these were not found on an archaeological excavation. We don't even know who actually found them."

While these commandments don't care about the lord's name, it does add another rule: it requires that people worship on Mount Gerizim, on today's West Bank. Dr. Rollston explained, "Forgers during the past 150 years, when they fabricate their forgeries, often throw in surprising content. And they do this so as to garner more interest in their forgery."

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### Onward, Christian Soldier

There have been lots of news stories about Pete Hegseth, Donald Trump's colorful choice for Secretary of Defense. Despite apparently having a lively personal life, he describes himself as a Christian. The *New York Times*, [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com), describes an aspect of Hegseth's religiosity.

According to the article, Hegseth is an admirer of the Crusades. He has written that people who appreciate Western civilization should "thank a Crusader." He has a tattoo of the words "Deus Vult" which is translated as "God wants it." It was the "battle cry" of the Crusades, Hegseth says.

He even wrote a book about it, "American Crusade," published in May 2020. In it he claims, "Voting is a weapon, but it's not enough. We don't want to fight, but, like our fellow Christians one thousand years ago, we must." Hegseth was not allowed to participate in the military security detail for President Biden's inauguration. He says the reason was a tattoo on his chest of the Jerusalem Cross, which was also used by crusaders. (The Associated Press, among others, reported that the problem was the Deus Vult tattoo, which is used by white supremacists.)

Hegseth uses the Crusades as an analogy to the present day. Just as the Christians had to defeat Islam, he claims, if the US can't defeat today's Islamists, and leftists, "human freedom will be finished." The article says that the Crusades are a common reference point among militant Christians. Matthew Gabriele, a professor of medieval studies at Virginia Tech, notes that when Barack Obama described the Crusades as a time when people "committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ," some conservatives thought they were being insulted.

Hegseth's writing acknowledge that the Crusades were filled with violence and tragedy. But the success of Western civilizations makes it all worthwhile, because Western civilization has encouraged freedom, and equal justice. He is concerned about the growth of Islam in the west, and he wants Americans to use education, media and the law to protect Christian values. In a 2023 religious podcast, he explained, "We're in middle Phase 1 right now, which is effectively a tactical retreat where you regroup, consolidate and reorganize. And as you do so, you build your army underground with the opportunity later on of taking offensive operations in an overt way. And obviously all of this is metaphorical and all that good stuff," he added, laughing, the article notes.

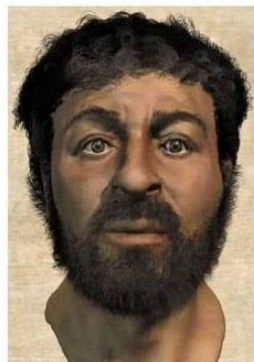
Hegseth's book mentions the possibility of violence in the future: "Our American Crusade is not about literal swords, and our fight is not with guns. Yet."

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## Young Evangelicals and Israel

Evangelicals have been strong supporters of the state of Israel. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, [jpost.com](https://www.jpost.com), that support is slipping among younger Evangelicals, dropping more than 50% in three years.

In 2018, the *Post* reports, 67.9% of young Evangelicals supported Israel, as compared to 33.6% in 2021. In addition, only 5% backed Palestinians in 2018; by 2021, that number had increased to 24.3%. The article notes that older figures in the Evangelical movement, such as Pastor John Hagee, Gordon Robertson, son of Pat, and former vice president Mike Pence, still support Israel. But the younger generation doesn't get its information from outlets such as the Christian Broadcasting Network; they turn to social media.



Strange how some of the most prominent writers and thinkers of the time made no mention of Jesus!

SENECA (4 BC-65 AD)  
PLINY THE ELDER (23-79 AD)  
QUINTILIAN (39-96 AD)  
EPICTETUS (55-135 AD)  
MARTIAL (38-103 AD)  
JUVENAL (55-127 AD)  
PLUTARCH (46-119 AD)  
PHILO-JUDAEUS (15 BC-50 AD)

"In the entire first christian century Jesus is not mentioned by a single Greek or Roman historian, religion scholar, politician, philosopher or poet. His name never occurs in a single inscription and it is never found in a single piece of private correspondence. Zero! Zip references!"

Dr. Bart Ehrman

Professor of Religious Studies  
at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill





Younger Evangelicals don't seem to think that Israel must exist for the Second Coming to occur. Dr. Kirill Bumin of Boston University explains, "Almost seven out of 10 Evangelical and born-again young Evangelicals that we surveyed in Spring 2021 adhere to the postmillennial and amillennial theological views, which see the Jewish people and the state of Israel as no longer necessary in the fulfillment of God's plan for the second coming of Jesus Christ and the End Times."

That being said, support for Israel among Evangelicals in general remains high. According to a survey conducted in June/July 2024 by Chicago Council on Global Affairs, [globalaffairs.org](http://globalaffairs.org), 64% of white evangelicals back Israel, as opposed to 32% of the general population. This compares with support from Catholics, 34%, or non-evangelical Protestants, 31%, and non-religious Americans, 19%.

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We are gathered here today,  
because your "thoughts and  
prayers" didn't work.



### Religion and the Right to Die

The English parliament has voted in favor of a bill to legalize assisted dying in England and Wales, according to the BBC, [bbc.com](http://bbc.com). This is just the beginning of the process. The bill faces months of debate and review. It could win final approval from both houses of Parliament, or it could fail.

The proposed bill has faced opposition in Britain, especially from religious groups. Vatican News, [vaticannews.va](http://vaticannews.va), reports that British Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the President of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, the Anglican Bishop of London Sarah Mullally, Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, Imam Qari Asim Chair of the Mosques & Imams National Advisory Board have signed a joint letter expressing their concerns.

They warn that vulnerable people, such as the disabled or the elderly, could be pressured into ending their lives. The letter says that other jurisdictions (unnamed) that have passed assistance in dying laws have found "promised safeguards have not always protected the vulnerable and marginalised." Instead, they want Parliament to more adequately fund palliative care: "A truly compassionate response to the end of life lies in the provision of high-quality palliative care services to all who need them."

The Catholic Medical Association also found the proposed legislation "dangerous." It feels that the bill does not do enough to protect conscientious objectors and brought up concerns about whether Catholic hospices will be forced to allow the practice. The British Medical Association has been officially neutral on the subject since 2021. According to polls, most of the British public supports assisted suicide for the terminally ill suffering from incurable and painful conditions. However, the article notes the level of approval depends on how the question is asked.

This isn't the first time Parliament has taken up this issue. In 2015, similar legislation was rejected, 300 to 118.

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## Wanna Buy a Church?

The steep decline in church membership has an unexpected result: there are a lot of churches for sale.

An article in the New York *Times*, [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com), points out that the number of people who belong to some type of religious congregation has dropped from around 70% in 2000 to 47% in 2021. The median number of members in an individual church is down to 65 people.

The *Times* article gives several examples of how the now-empty churches have been repurposed. St. Mary Magdalene, in Homestead, PA, is now a ropes course. St. Liborius, in St. Louis, burned down, and the property was turned in a skatepark by a community group.



"Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, "Don't do it!"  
He said, "Nobody loves me."  
I said, "God loves you. Do you believe in God?"  
He said, "Yes."  
I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?"  
He said, "A Christian."  
I said, "Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?"  
He said, "Protestant."  
I said, "Me, too! What franchise?"  
He said, "Baptist."  
I said, "Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?"  
He said, "Northern Baptist."  
I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?"  
He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist."  
I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region."  
I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?"  
He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912."  
I said, "Die, heretic!" And I pushed him over."

-Emo Philips

According to Eric Knowles, who leads the religious and educational facilities group at real estate brokerage Kidder Matthews, there are about 1,100 unused churches for sale in the US. Of course, the size and design of the churches can make it hard to convert them to another use. Knowles explains, "If a small, rural church doesn't have parking then it has a pretty limited commercial conversion potential, which means most of the time it ends up becoming a residence."

There are other problems. While churches are often cheap in a price-per-square-basis, prospective owners face other challenges. Some of the churches have historic designations, and the conversion to another use, even if it's allowed, often requires that they be rezoned. They don't have enough bathrooms, or a kitchen. If the congregation had been low on money, normal maintenance might have been neglected, leading to HVAC and plumbing issues.

Even with all the potential pitfalls, the internet is filled with stories and pictures of people who have turned a church into a home.

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## Abusive Priest in Scranton

Sexual abuse by religious leaders isn't in the news that much these days. That doesn't mean it's disappeared.

For example, the National Catholic Register, [ncregister.com](https://www.ncregister.com), reports the Vatican has authorized the diocese of Scranton to remove a priest after an investigation confirmed he assaulted two children several years ago. The priest, Martin Boylan, was originally removed from "priestly ministry" in 2016 after he was accused of sexually assaulting a minor. There were four more allegations after that.

Boylan appealed his removal to the Vatican twice and was turned down both time. Scranton Bishop Joseph Bambera said, "We must ensure that our Church is a safe haven for all, and it is our collective duty to protect, to listen, and to stand against any form of abuse."



Boylan, age 76, was ordained in 1980, and served at many parishes. He was one of the priests named in the 2018 Pennsylvania grand jury report on sexual abuse in the PA Catholic church; however, he was not criminally charged.

Technically Boylan has been dismissed from the clerical state, which is, according to the Scranton diocese, "the most severe penalty that the Catholic Church can impose on a cleric." He cannot operate as a priest – he cannot celebrate Mass, hear confessions, or administer any sacraments.

The Wilkes-Barre Citizens Voice, [citizensvoice.com](http://citizensvoice.com), notes the diocese reported the allegations against Boylan to law enforcement. In 2017 Pennsylvania State Police announced it had closed an inquiry into Boylan's activities due to "investigative difficulties" and the statute of limitations.

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## Different Religious Take on Abortion

A Baptist and a Presbyterian minister and a Jewish cantor gathered recently at an abortion clinic in Cumberland, MD. To protest, one assumes? Not this time. They were there to bless the facility.

The Baptist minister, Rev. Katey Zeh, leads the Religious Community for Reproductive Choice, a multifaith organization. According to the New York *Times*, [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com), the organization provides training for "religious leaders who want to counsel people through reproductive decisions." Its goal is to end the religious stigma regarding abortion. During the facility blessing, Rev. Zeh told the staff members, "You all are blessings to those who come to you for care during some of their most vulnerable and sometimes painful moments."

The organization has held 10 blessings at abortion clinics since 2017. Some of the clinic staff at the Cumberland blessing had driven from the Women's Health Center of West Virginia, in Charleston. That clinic had provided abortions since 1976, but stopped in 2022, when West Virginia restricted abortion. The clinic stayed open, providing reproductive services, but to continue to offer abortions, it opened the facility in Cumberland, since Maryland allows abortions.

Although the clinic is legal, Cumberland is a conservative place, and it has drawn protests. Local ministers have led protests and prayer groups at the clinic, and a local Right to Life chapter restarted, and a local Facebook group used to organize anti-abortion activities has 860 members.

When the clinic employees heard a blessing ceremony was being planned, they thought it was a joke. But support for abortion has long existed in West Virginia. The first office of the Women's Health Center of West Virginia opened in an Episcopalian church in Charleston in the 1970s.

Of course, religion causes women who seek abortions to suffer guilt. A table in the abortion center's recovery room has a notebook, where patients can write messages. Many of the messages talk mention "uncertainty about God's plans for them." One patient wrote: "God will forgive me for my decision."

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## Catholic Church and “Conclave”

### SPOILER ALERT: THIS ARTICLE REVEALS PLOT DETAILS ABOUT THE MOVIE

The Catholic Church isn't happy about the movie “Conclave,” reports the Catholic News Agency, [cna.com](http://cna.com).

The movie depicts a papal conclave, where Catholic cardinals gather to pick a new pope. Bishop Robert Barron, bishop of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, MN, writes on X that the movie “checks every woke box.”

The movie shows traditional cardinals fighting with more modern cardinals, who are willing to consider changes to Catholic doctrine.



Barron's X post continues: “If you are interested in a film about the Catholic Church that could have been written by the editorial board of the New York Times, this is your movie. Conservatives are xenophobic extremists and the liberals are self-important schemers. None can escape this irredeemable situation.”

In the movie, the new pope has female chromosomes, and an intersex disorder. Of course, priests, and therefore bishops and popes, must be biological men. Pope John Paul II made this point in an apostolic letter: “...the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and ... this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.” Pope Francis agrees.

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights has this to say about the movie, and the book upon which it is based: “‘Conclave’ is more a piece of anti-Catholic propaganda than it is a work of art. It might have stunning cinematic sequences and a star-studded cast, but those things do not redeem the underlying ugliness of the project, namely it aims to paint the Catholic Church in the most negative light possible.” The statement points out the book's author, Robert Harris, is not only just not Catholic – he's not religious at all.

The article ends with a quote from Father Carter Griffin, the rector of St. John Paul II Seminary in Washington, DC: “...a stable, secure, and well-ordered sexual identity is a necessary condition for priestly formation and ordination. It is our individual and unique creation as either male or female that identifies us as man or woman, not our subjective feelings or choices,” he said.

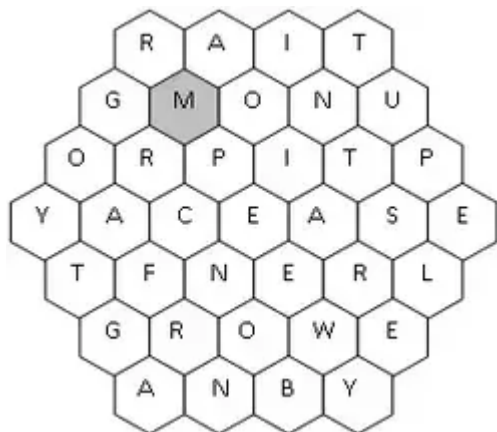
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# FUN!



## Buzzword



The shaded M and the six letters surrounding it spell PROGRAM which matches one of the clues below.

In the same way, find a 7-letter word for each of the remaining clues. Keep track of the center letter for each answer you find.

1. broadcast program-M
2. brand-new baby
3. fee for college classes
4. liquid paste for walls
5. to make people obey a law
6. production site
7. arched line of hair above the eye

Find the BUZZWORD for this puzzle by unscrambling all 7 of the center letters to find the answer to this clue:

Frosty, for one \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

### ***PAN News & Updates***

**Kitted Thinking Tools Zoom** meeting, every Monday from 5:00 – 6:00 pm. Open to PAN members (or by special invitation). The Zoom link is

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82977312179?pwd=tTTQ8y283hinDTabFOoPQlsCLYq6AK.1> and the passcode to enter the group is: 672806.

**Spirit on Tap**, January 28<sup>th</sup> at Doubletree Hotel, 701 Penn Street, Reading, 7:00 pm. Spirit on Tap is a monthly event through the United Church of Christ (UCC) of Reading on topics of religion and culture. Josh CruverKibi will be speaking about “How atheists, secularists, and humanists live without faith.”

**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](mailto:guyinnagorillasuit@gmail.com)

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

**Cumberland/Mechanicsburg** –Third Thursday of the month, 7:15 pm, Ever Grain Brewing Co., 4444 Carlisle Pike, Mechanicsburg

**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** - This meeting is currently on pause.

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

**York** – 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](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.

#### **PAN Board of Directors**

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Brennan Hillyard, Secretary	Dietrich Dellinger	Jim Waldie
Doug Ross, Treasurer	Carl Dreiblebis	Pam Zerba

#### **Puzzle solution:**

2. newborn – O
3. tuition – N
4. plaster – S
5. enforce – N
6. factory – A
7. eyebrow – W

**Buzzword: Snowman**