



The Separationist

Volume 24, Issue 1

January, 2017

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About SHL

The *Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry* was founded in 1994 by a group of local non-theists in Charleston, South Carolina.

Our members are freethinkers of many kinds. We call ourselves agnostics, atheists, skeptics, secular humanists, rationalists and scientific naturalists. We welcome you and all who are interested in participating in our friendly community, either as members or observers.

The purpose of our non-profit, educational organization is to promote the non-theistic, human-centered viewpoint as a valid contribution to public discourse and to strive to maintain the First Amendment guarantee of separation of state and church.

Dr. Wynne LeGrow

An Atheist Runs for Congress in the Bible Belt

Sunday, January 15, 2017, 4:00 PM, Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St, Charleston

As you probably know, the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry was founded in the wake of Herb Silverman's campaign for the governorship of South Carolina, as described in his book "Candidate without a Prayer".

Our first speaker for 2017 is *another* atheist candidate, **Wynne LeGrow** of Virginia, who attempted to unseat Congressman Randy Forbes, the founder and chairman of the Congressional Prayer Caucus. As Dr. LeGrow will explain, running as an atheist in a southern Virginia district may not be an easy task, but it is certainly a memorable one. He will tell us how his concern for the wellbeing of the planet led him to run for congress against the incumbent Republican congressman, despite knowing he faced an uphill battle.

In his own book, "Last Leper in the Colony", LeGrow addresses not just his own circumstances in 2010 but the general political situation that continues to this day: "No amount of dishonesty, malfeasance, antisocial behavior, racial or homophobic prejudice, misappropriation of

funds, substance abuse, sexual indiscretion or perversion disqualifies one from being considered a true believer. The one transgression that cannot be forgiven is that of thinking for oneself and coming to an unacceptable conclusion concerning the existence of a deity."

[Read Herb Silverman's review of Last Leper in the Colony in the September, 2016 issue of The Separationist](#)

When: Sunday, January 15, 2017 at 4pm

Where: Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street

Cost: Free!

SHL will provide light snacks during the check-in/social period prior to the meeting.

Following the meeting, Dr. LeGrow will answer your questions and then join us for dinner at a nearby restaurant.

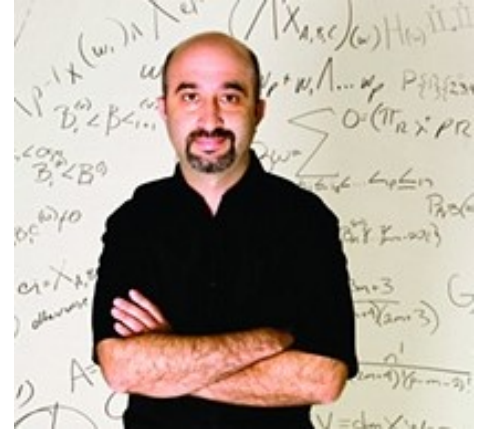


Wynne LeGrow is the son of a Protestant minister father and schoolteacher mother. He graduated from The Ohio State University College of Medicine and then trained in internal medicine and nephrology. He served in the U.S. Army for two years where he was promoted to the rank of major. LeGrow practiced medicine in Emporia, Virginia, for 29 years before running for Congress in 2010.

Message from the President

If you are a Charlestonian who likes seeing talks about atheism, secularism, religious freedom, and other topics of interest to our community, then 2017 is going to be a great year for you.

Usually, it is only our group that brings atheist speakers to the lowcountry. And, we will not disappoint you: SHL has some great speakers lined up for our upcoming monthly meetings. This month's speaker, Wynne LeGrow, is another atheist political candidate just as our founding president was. Next month we will have Rabbi Greg Kanter of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim who will speak to us about Judaism but also about his unique situation as clergy in Charleston who happens to be in a same-sex marriage. Our March speaker will be Joshua Berg, a humanist celebrant who will talk about and demonstrate some atheist stand-up comedy. And, in April we will have the fascinating Jack Weatherford who will tell us about the surprising role that Genghis Khan played in the history of religious freedom.



Alex Kasman is a math professor at the College of Charleston. He has been on the board of SHL for 15+ years. During that time he has served various roles including volunteer coordinator, newsletter editor, Webmaster and is currently serving as SHL President.

But, this summer we will have many more opportunities to hear talks on these topics. Generally, the American Atheists and the American Humanist Association each gather speakers, famous and not-so-famous, for their annual conventions. Since they do not coordinate with each other, those two conventions are generally in entirely different locations. However, as you know if you've been reading this newsletter, for 2017 they both picked Charleston as their venue! SHL is co-sponsoring the AHA meeting in June and we are very much looking forward to the AA meeting in August that will include an event highlighting the solar eclipse.

SHL will be offering some stipends and volunteer positions to assist a limited number of our members to attend each of these conferences. Keep your eye future issues of this newsletter for more information about these opportunities.

From this perspective, at least, it certainly looks like it will be a Happy New Year!


Alex

Upcoming SHL Events

Events sometimes get added after The Separationist is posted. Keep up to date with SHL events by signing up for our [email lists](#) or [Meetup](#), or check postings on our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) group.

January 2017

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

1  HAPPY NEW YEAR	2	3	4 Happy Hour	5	6	7 Movie Club
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Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

SHL Happy Hour

Wednesday, January 4, 2017, 6:00pm

Liberty Tap Room, 1028 Johnnie Dodds Blvd, Mt. Pleasant

Happy Hour is always a fun and relaxing evening of stimulating conversation over drinks (alcohol is optional) and yummy food among old and new friends!

This month we will meet at Liberty Tap Room in Mt Pleasant. Everyone is welcome. Don't be shy – come join us!

RSVP requested via [Meetup](#) or [Facebook](#).



Pay it Forward

Do you have usable items that you no longer want or are you in need of an item? If so, join the [Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry Pay It Forward facebook group](#). This is a closed group for SHL members to post things they want to give away and for others to claim them. All items are free. Whether you are spring cleaning, looking for a few items for your apartment or dorm, looking for things you can make into crafts, or just want to free up a little space in your

SHL Movie Club

Saturday, January 7, 2017, time TBD

Terrace Theater, 1956 Maybank Hwy, Charleston (James Island)

Join us for a viewing of the film *Hidden Figures* on Saturday, January 7, at the Terrace Theater. **Showtimes are not posted this far in advance so please check [Meetup](#), [Facebook](#), [our website](#), or [subscribe to the Movie Club email list](#) for updates.**

Hidden Figures is the incredible untold story of three brilliant African-American women at NASA -- Katherine Johnson (Taraji P. Henson), Dorothy Vaughan (Octavia Spencer), and Mary Jackson (Janelle Monáe) -- who serve as the brains behind one of the greatest operations in history: the launch of astronaut John Glenn (Glen Powell) into orbit, a stunning achievement that restored the nation's confidence, turned around the Space Race and galvanized the world.



Following the movie we will discuss the film over dinner at a nearby restaurant.

RSVP requested via [Meetup](#) or [Facebook](#).

Interested in an activity but don't see it listed? Let us know! Volunteers are always welcomed to lead events such as bridge walks, bowling, billiards, biking, bocce, board games, etc.

Contact president@lowcountryhumanists.org with your ideas!

Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

Girls Night Out

Thursday, January 12, 2017, 7:00pm

843 Korean BBQ & Sushi House, 6601 Rivers Ave,
North Charleston

새해복
많이
받으세요

A fun night for secular girls to socialize! This month we will be going to 843 in North Charleston. Nursing infants okay, but otherwise adults only, please.

RSVP requested via [Meetup](#) or [Facebook](#).

prepared in advance. Setup begins at 12:40pm and serving begins at 1:00pm on the day of the potluck. The potluck is held at Mall Park, on the corner of Columbus and America Streets (near the Trident Palmer Campus), rain or shine. [Sign up here](#) for items to bring or contact our volunteer coordinators at volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org to coordinate needed items.



The potluck will end in plenty of time to attend the monthly meeting at Gage Hall!

SHL Volunteer Activity: Potluck in the Park

Sunday, January 15, 2017, 12:40pm

Mall Park, corner of Columbus & America Streets,
Charleston

The Community Potluck began in 2011 by Occupy Charleston and other volunteers as a way to help those who are disadvantaged. It grew into a weekly event, often feeding up to 60 community members — in some cases this is their only meal of the day.

Local groups now volunteer to help with the weekly potluck, and SHL will provide the potluck on January 15. Volunteers are needed for donating food, preparing the items, and serving the meals. Food can be

SHL Monthly Meeting

Sunday, January 15, 2017, 4:00pm

Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St, Charleston

Join us for our monthly meeting with speaker Dr. Wynne LeGrow. See [page 1](#) for details.

Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

March with the SCA at the Women's March on Washington

Saturday, January 21, 2017

Washington, DC

This is not officially an SHL event, but we thought you might like to know that the Secular Coalition of America (founded by Herb Silverman) will be organizing a contingent of non-religious women to march together as part of the Women's March on Washington scheduled for the day after the inauguration. It would be great if there was some representation there from the Low-country! For more information, see <https://www.facebook.com/events/1159740234141081/>.

On January 21, 2017 women from across the country will march on our nation's capitol to send a powerful message to President Trump. Secular Americans must be a part of this historic event and send a powerful message that we stand in solidarity against religious bigotry and to defend reproductive rights, secular health policies, and LGBT equality. For attendees interested in marching with the Secular Coalition of America, meet at the US Navy Memorial plaza on Pennsylvania avenue between 7th and 9th street, near the Archives metro.

SCA will be there at 8:30 am, then will walk over to join the rest of the march at 9:30 am.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Make America **SECULAR** Again

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

SHL Book Club

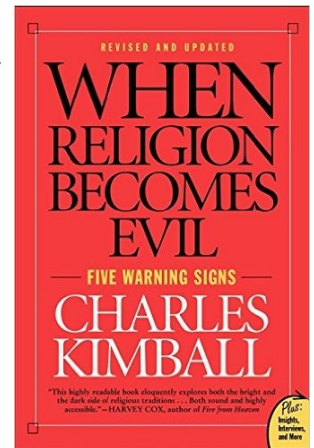
Sunday, January 22, 2017, 4:00pm

Barnes & Noble, 1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd, Charleston

For January, we are reading *When Religion Becomes Evil* by Charles Kimball (2009, 304p). The author is a leading religion and mid-East expert and his book presents an analysis of the factors of corruption in religion that lead to evil and violence in the world.

Join us for lively conversation even if you haven't read the material. We value opinions on such weighty topics as these. Afterward we invite you to join us for dinner at a nearby restaurant where the conversation always continues.

You can purchase a copy from Amazon and a portion of the purchase price will automatically be donated to SHL.



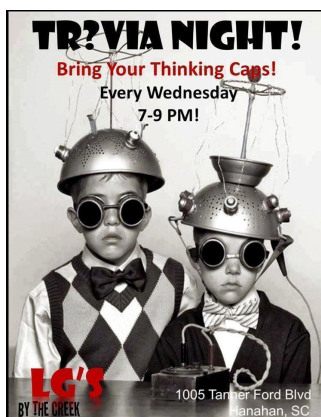
SHL is affiliated with the Amazon Associates program! Our organization earns up to a 15% commission on items purchased at Amazon.com through the links on our Website. So, if you are buying the book club book (or anything else from Amazon), this is a super-easy way to contribute to SHL! Simply use the link at <http://lowcountryhumanists.org/default.php>

Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

Trivia Night

Wednesday, January 25, 2017, 7:00pm

LG's By the Creek, 1005 Tanner Blvd, Hanahan



Come out for a night of trivia and socializing! This is a team event and is free. It's also lots of fun! Any winnings will be used to purchase appetizers for the team at a future trivia night.



RSVP requested via [Meetup](#) or [Facebook](#).

Jazz Night

Thursday, January 25, 2017, 7:00pm

How Art Thou Café, 1956 Maybank Hwy, Charleston (James Island—next to the Terrace Theater)

Join us for SHL Jazz night at the How Art Thou Cafe on James Island, next to the Terrace Theatre. Cost is normally \$7 but we get a \$2 group discount. We will be enjoying music from the great tenor saxophonist, Lew Tabackin. Because of the discount and the demand/room we will need to **RSVP by January 23**. *We cannot guarantee a seat for you if you don't rsvp.*

www.lewtabackin.com

www.howarthoucafe.com



RSVP required via [Meetup](#) or [Facebook](#).

Are You Good To Go? Your End of Life Healthcare Choices


Friday, February 10, 2017, 11:00am

John Wesley Methodist Church, 626 Savannah Hwy,
Charleston

This is not officially an SHL event, but we thought members may be interested. Several years ago, our monthly meeting featured a speaker who spoke on end of life choices (Richard Cote, aka "Uncle Dick", who later became an active SHL member). Free-thought organizations that include the Secular Coalition for America and the American Humanist Association actively support "death with dignity" laws, now enacted in 6 states, but not yet in South Carolina.

"Are You Good to Go?" A presentation by Doug Rice, volunteer with Compassion and Choices, a national non-profit organization working to improve care and expand options for the end of life.

Space limited so please RSVP:
Doug Rice 803 413-7147 or Drice1949@aol.com



COMPASSION & CHOICES SC
Invites you to our presentation:


ARE YOU GOOD TO GO?
YOUR END OF LIFE HEALTHCARE CHOICES

PRESENTED BY:
Doug Rice
Compassion & Choices Columbia

Friday February 10th
11AM

John Wesley Methodist Church
626 Savannah Hwy
Charleston, SC

Space limited so please RSVP: Doug Rice
803 413-7147
Drice1949@aol.com



Compassion & Choices, the oldest and largest national non-profit organization committed to improving care and expanding choice at the end of life. We offer free consultation to individuals and families, advocate lobbying resources, referrals and guidance. We also work to expand end-of-life options by advocating for death with dignity state legislation and the courts. More at www.compassionandchoices.org

Upcoming Conferences

The Holy City will be the host of two, count 'em, TWO major secular conferences/conventions in 2017!

[American Humanist Association](#)

[Annual Conference: June 8-11, 2017](#)

The American Humanist Association, the oldest and largest humanist organization in the United States, has held an annual conference since its founding in 1941



so that humanists, atheists, and freethinkers can gather together for a weekend of informative lectures, networking, and fun activities.

[American Atheists](#)

[Solar Eclipse Convention: August 19-21, 2017](#)

We will present a conference focused on science, space, technology, and (of course) atheism featuring prominent academics, scientists, and community leaders during the weekend and, on Monday, will host an eclipse watch-party (narrated by a surprise special guest!) in Charleston.



Charleston is the last major city in the path of the eclipse's path. This is the first total solar eclipse to cross the continental United States since the 1970s!

There will be opportunities for SHL members to volunteer at the conference and convention. Needs are still being evaluated so stay tuned!

Charity of the Quarter

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Congolese Refugees Coming to Charleston: A Different Sort of SHL COQ

As you probably know, the SHL regularly collects voluntary donations from members and gives the total amount of money collected to four (usually local) charities each year. This "Charity of the Quarter" (COQ) program both allows us to work together to achieve some good in the world and allows us to publicly demonstrate our humanist values. The COQ for the first quarter of 2017 is something a bit different. And we are asking you not only to be more generous with your monetary donations, but also to consider providing other sorts of assistance!

Refugee families from the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be arriving in the Charleston area soon (possibly as early as this month), thanks to the efforts of the [Lutheran Services Car-](#)

[olinas](#). Although our COQs tend to be entirely non-religious, this time we will be partnering with the Lutheran Services. SHL is just one of many organizations that will be working on the important but daunting task of providing those refugees with all that they will need to become independent.

The easiest way you can help is by donating money to our COQ collections. Upon arrival, the refugees will need toiletries and first aid kits, and SHL will be using your donations to purchase the items that we will be giving directly to these families. In addition, we are told that the families will be in need of winter clothing and blankets (new or "gently used"), and SHL will be collecting those items at any of our upcoming events.

But, we are hoping to do more than just donate. The refugees will be in need of training, jobs, and housing. LSC also needs storage space to store furniture and other items before they can be distributed. If you have time, knowledge, skills, an empty apartment or garage, or other resources that could be helpful, please consider volunteering those. In addition, if you'd like to go through the short orientation session that would allow you to work with the refugees, let us know and we'll put you in touch with Lloyd White of Lutheran Services Carolinas so that you can set up an appointment. In any case, if you are interested in providing any sort of assistance (or if you have any questions), write to us at volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org.



Four times a year SHL collects donations on behalf of a worthy charity. You can donate by cash, credit card, or check at our monthly meeting or by mailing a check to

*SHL
PO Box 32256
Charleston SC 29417-2256*

Make checks payable to SHL and note COQ in the memo line.

Or securely [donate online!](#)

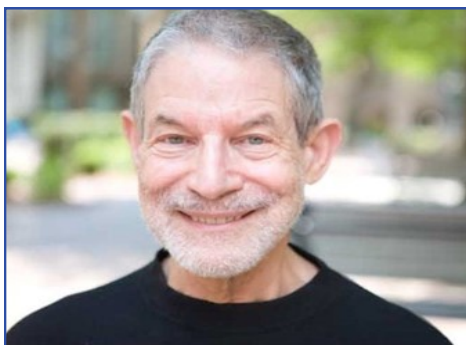
Herb Silverman

His Porn, Her Pain: a review of Mary Klein's book

I was one of those teenagers who really did read the articles in Play-boy, though not before carefully exploring and sometimes masturbating with the centerfold in full view. I mention this because masturbation is an integral part of Marty Klein's comprehensive, insightful, and often entertaining book, *His Porn, Her Pain: Confronting America's PornPanic With Honest Talk About Sex*. (But here's a warning: to the disappointment of some, this book could have been titled *Porn Without Pictures*.)

Former US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart is probably best known for his 1964 comment from the bench that he couldn't clearly define pornography, "but I know it when I see it." Klein doesn't explicitly define pornography either, though for purposes of discussion he indicates that pornography is "sexually explicit material intended to arouse." He also acknowledges that this definition is neither legal nor precise.

As the title suggests, Klein's book primarily addresses porn-related problems in heterosexual relationships (in his work as a sex therapist, Klein says he rarely hears gay or lesbian couples quarrel about pornography) and so he doesn't discuss couples who enjoy porn together. Common pornography complaints by women include their male partner's secret life with porn, his addiction to porn, and her perceived sexual inadequacies compared with the talents of fe-



Herb Silverman is founder and President of the [Secular Coalition for America](#), author of *Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt*, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston.

male porn stars. In response, men usually complain about the insecurities of their partners, and reject the validity of their wives' (or partners') complaints.

In his therapy practice Klein doesn't tell couples porn is good, or even that watching it is okay. He focuses on how best to resolve difficulties in relationships. He tells couples not to focus only on orgasm, which comprises about five seconds of a twenty-minute activity. Sex (and whispering, kissing, talking, and laughing) is for people, while porn is for paid professionals. So you can watch a lot of porn and enjoy sex with a real person. You just have to know which is which. To riff off the old anti-war message, "Make love, not porn."

Another concern Klein hears from women is whether a husband or partner is being unfaithful when he masturbates to porn. In therapy,

Klein prefers to start with behaviors that cause pain and what to do about it. Sometimes they are porn related, but more often than not porn is a symptom rather than a cause of problems. With Klein's guidance, the couple usually winds up working more productively on how better to communicate with each other and improve their relationship.

He does stress that masturbation shouldn't be seen as something people in a relationship eschew or something people outgrow. It isn't only for the young, Klein notes, but that's when it starts. "Masturbation gives young people a sense of ownership of their bodies, and it helps develop the sexual self-awareness that can make later partner sex more enjoyable." Klein also mentions that kids often get inaccurate or no sex information from adults, and mistakenly assume that porn is what real sex should be.

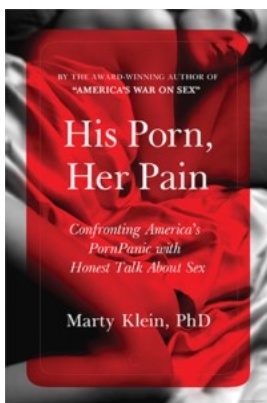
The Internet has changed how porn is promoted, and authorities can no longer stop suppliers and users. Moreover, religious shaming is not as effective as it once was, so government, decency groups, and churches have switched from condemning porn as a moral threat to calling it a public health hazard. Klein describes how various "porn panics" have always been accompanied by misinformation.

Whatever the perceived ills of porn may be, Klein points to compara-

Herb Silverman cont.

ble societal issues. (One of the takeaways I got from this book is what I would call the banality of porn.) Every citizen should be concerned about any consumer product whose use inevitably leads to violence, mental illness, and community dysfunction—as anti-porn activists assert about pornography. Most media products depend on inaccurate ideas about human beings to sell their products. If it seems worse when sex is involved, that probably reflects our attitude about sexuality. There will always be people who misuse every technology. Klein adds that we've had radio for generations, and people still listen to Rush Limbaugh.

At the risk of being too tangential, I think of *His Porn, Her Pain* as a non-fiction heir to three novels by atheists:



1. *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) by

Philip Roth dealt with masturbation in ways that many have found funny and disgusting, but one could say it's pornography with redeeming social value. Roth wrote about uncomfortable but real thoughts and feelings people have, including those of an active fantasy life. The book ends with the psychoanalyst Dr. Spielvogel about to respond to Portnoy's book-length monologue. My fantasy is to hear Klein's re-

sponse to Portnoy.

2. *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) by Robert Heinlein is about a human born and raised on Mars. When the human Martian visits a strange Earth, he successfully challenges social mores and encourages humans to be open-minded and reevaluate such institutions as religion, monogamy, and fear of death. The controversial free love and communal living inspired many in his generation. Heinlein shows his distaste for religion and prudery in one sentence: "Of all the strange crimes that humanity has legislated out of nothing, blasphemy is the most amazing—with obscenity and indecent exposure fighting it out for second and third place."

3. *Fear of Flying* (1973) by Erika Jong was controversial because of its feminist portrayal of female sexuality. In it, Jong coined the phrase "zipless fuck," defining it as a sexual encounter between strangers free of all remorse and guilt and absent any power struggles or ulterior motives. Jong called the zipless fuck the purest thing there is, more rare than the unicorn. (I disagree, since the number of known unicorns is zero.) The book helped challenge sexual norms and taboos and showed that women can make and enjoy porn.

I'll close with two interesting stories about porn, one is political, and the other evolutionary. On September 29, 2016, the Daily Intelli-

gencer ran a story with the headline: "Many Civic-Minded Masturbators Took a Break from Porn to Watch Monday's Debate." It seems that at the start of the first presidential debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, viewership on Pornhub (one of the world's largest porn sites) dropped 16 percent and didn't return to its usual traffic until the debate ended. Who knew that delayed gratification could be patriotic? The following day Trump became the first presidential candidate in history to encourage Americans to watch porn. He asked his supporters to check out a (nonexistent) sex tape of the former Miss Universe who had criticized Trump's fat-shaming and racist behavior.

And did you know that female pandas are choosy and male pandas have notoriously low libidos? They usually prefer eating to mating. A 2010 article in *Scientific American* gave the solution to help preserve the species: panda porn. I won't go into any salacious details, but suffice it to say that more than 60 percent of the panda porn viewers are now capable of and interested in having sex—up from just 25 percent twenty years ago. Nothing to panic about there.

This book review was originally published in the December 22, 2016 issue of [The Humanist](#) magazine.

Membership

Are you a dues-paying member of SHL? While our meetings and events are open to everyone, membership dues are used to bring in national speakers at our monthly meetings, pay the Gage Hall rental fee, provide snacks at the monthly meeting, provide materials given away at outreach events such as the Flowertown Festival, and more. In addition, only dues-paying members are eligible to apply for stipends for attending secular conferences or summer camp. Most importantly, members vote for the SHL board members at the annual May potluck.

Annual memberships are

- Individual - \$35.00
- Family - \$50.00
- Individual/Family - Sustaining \$100.00
- Individual/Family - Benefactor \$150.00

Lifetime membership is \$500.00

Dues are tax-deductible, as we are a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation. (As we like to joke, we are also a "non-prophet" organization!)

There are 3 easy ways you can join/renew:

- You can pay by cash, credit card, or check at our monthly meeting.
- You can also mail a check to:

SHL
PO Box 32256
Charleston SC 29417-2256

Make checks payable to SHL and note "Membership" and level in the memo line. Please include your name, address, phone number, and email address.

- Or securely [pay online](#) and select your membership level in the dropdown box.

Stipends

SHL offers five stipends annually to dues-paying members to help offset costs associated with attending an atheist/freethought conference or convention, or to attend a freethought summer camp. Some examples of eligible events are the Freedom From Religion Foundation convention, Atheist Alliance convention, Camp Quest, and Camp Inquiry, among others.

Stipends are available to dues-paying members. A member may not receive a stipend two consecutive years, however different members of a family membership are eligible even if another family member received a stipend the previous year.

For out-of-town conventions and camps, stipends cover up to \$200 of registration, travel, and lodging costs. Food and drink expenses are not eligible for stipends. **Special for 2017:** SHL is offering 20 additional \$50 stipends to be used for either the American Humanist Association or American Atheist conventions to be held in Charleston.

A stipend request must be pre-approved before attending your event. To see whether your event qualifies or to inquire about stipend availability and to apply, or if you have questions about the stipend program, contact treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org.

Stipend recipients must write a short essay about their event experience and submit it along with their receipts to treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org within 30 days of the completion of the event. The essay will be published in an issue of *The Separationist*. Parents may assist young children who attended camp with their essays but the essay should reflect the child's own words as much as possible.

Thank you, Herb!

SHL's annual December potluck and book auction was a big hit. While most of the books sold in the \$5-15 range, one special book donated by Herb Silverman was the subject of a bidding war between Alex Kasman and Sue Edward, with Alex placing the seemingly winning bid of \$14,000! Herb then decided to bid \$15,000 in order to keep the book he had donated.

It took awhile for the crowd to catch on, but this was a fun way for Herb to give a special gift to SHL. Why do it at the book auction? Well, 10 years ago one of SHL's founding members, Bill Upshur, stunned the crowd in a similar bidding war against Herb, ultimately "winning" with a \$20,000 bid.

Rest assured that Herb's generous gift will be put to good use. THANK YOU, HERB!



SHL Store

SHL is pleased to announce that t-shirts, mugs, bags and other merchandise featuring our logos and slogans can now be purchased at our [online Zazzle store](#).

We hope you will show your pride and help support SHL by shopping at our new store: <http://www.zazzle.com/lowcountryhumanists>.



Letters to the Editor

The following letter was submitted to the editor of the Post & Courier, December 21, 2016

This letter concerns bill H. 3345, recently proposed by Representatives Chummy, Burns and Long to allow “public school teachers [to] conduct or participate in any student-led prayer.” I am writing to urge readers of this paper and politicians to consider the viewpoint of religious minorities as they decide whether to support this proposed legislation.

The subject of individual rights always becomes controversial when the freedoms of one person become a violation of the freedoms of another. To make a fair and just decision in such cases, we need to consider both points of view. The wording of the bill itself suggests that the restriction on religious activities at public schools was designed to deny teacher’s of their freedom of expression and to hide “ideas or facts [that] are inconvenient to external political groups or authorities”. However, that is a misrepresentation and it fails to acknowledge the other viewpoint that is relevant in this discussion. Indeed, the courts have determined that these restrictions are not a violation of the teacher’s freedom because they are necessary to protect religious freedom of the students and their families.

It is not the job of a public school to guide the students to adopt a certain religion or to dissuade them from believing in the religious views of their parents. The material covered in the curriculum itself might affect a child’s religious opinions, but that is unavoidable as covering the curriculum is indeed the school’s purpose. However, beyond that, it would be inappropriate for a public school or its employees to be interfering in the religious education its students. For example, I know of an instance in a neighboring state in which the principal of a public elementary school was telling students at

school assemblies that unless their parents belonged to the same denomination of church that he attended, they would all be suffering eternal damnation. I believe most people reading this letter would agree that this was inappropriate behavior for a public school official. Note that in this case, his freedom to express this honest religious viewpoint comes in conflict with the religious freedom of the parents and students.

The situation described in the bill is certainly more subtle than that, but it raises the same issues. Because of the authoritative role that school employees play in the lives of young children, the courts have determined that teacher endorsement of and participation in religious activities at schools becomes a problematic violation of the religious freedom of the children and their families. Thinking not only of the non-religious families in my own organization but also followers of non-Christian religions and members of smaller Christian sects whose children would interpret such actions as an indication that the public schools were endorsing religious views different from those they were being raised with at home, I must say that I believe the proposed bill would do greater harm than good.

Alex Kasman, President
Secular Humanists or the Lowcountry



**LETTERS
TO THE
EDITOR**

Letters to the Editor, cont.

The following letter to the editor appeared in the Post & Courier, December 8, 2016

Letter: Freedom and the Flag

A Dec. 5 letter, "Loyalty to the flag," harkens back to the days when school began with children "standing, hand over heart, saluting our flag, and praying the Lord's Prayer." The letter writer decries the removal of this "freedom."

Along the same lines, Donald Trump has declared we are one people under one God (presumably the Christian one), saluting one American flag. He also wants to criminalize flag burning.

Since when is religious freedom consistent with telling American children to recite daily a Christian prayer and pledge allegiance to one nation "under God"? Indoctrinating public school students to salute a flag and mindlessly regurgitate a daily pledge is not patriotic, unless patriotism just means obediently following orders of those in power. And criminalizing flag burning, however unpatriotic most Americans consider it to be, is an unconstitutional attack on our cherished freedom of speech.

We tend to view our founders as role models, but we act more like them when we question the old order and try to improve it. In fact, starting the school day with discussions about our Bill of Rights would be educational and might lead to informed, active citizenship. Understanding our Constitution and working to make our country better is definitely patriotic — a lot more so than merely reciting pledges and prayers, or waving or burning flags.

Herb Silverman
George Street



"MY LETTER TO THE EDITOR LOST A LOT OF ITS PUNCH SINCE THEY MADE IT FIT TO PRINT."

If you have written a letter to the editor or an original article or essay that you would like to have considered for inclusion in [The Separationist](#), please send it to:

newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org

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