



The Separationist

Volume 24, Issue 2

February, 2017

Meet Rabbi Kanter Of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim

Sunday, February 19, 2017, 4:00 PM, Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St, Charleston

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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.

The guest speaker at our February meeting will be **Rabbi Greg Kanter**, the newly hired rabbi at Charleston's historical Jewish temple.

Like previous SHL meetings featuring representatives of religions, this will be an interesting opportunity for us to learn about the beliefs and customs of others. But, that's not all!

Rabbi Kanter was one of the first openly gay rabbis in the United States and has a history of activism with the LGBT movement. In addition to talking about Judaism, he will also address his unique situation of being clergy here in "the holy city" while at the same time being a parent in a same-sex marriage.

It is like two talks in one! A chance for those of us who are non-religious to be better informed about the religious people around us, and also a chance to learn about and support an important social justice movement.

Please join us at this free public event!

When: Sunday, February 19, 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, Rabbi Kanter will answer your questions and then join us for dinner at a nearby restaurant.



Rabbi Greg Kanter
of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim

President's Corner

The other day, my wife was reading a book which was written by a young doctor who was dying of cancer. She read me a lot of beautiful and moving passages, and also told me about some of the important and deep ideas the book conveyed.

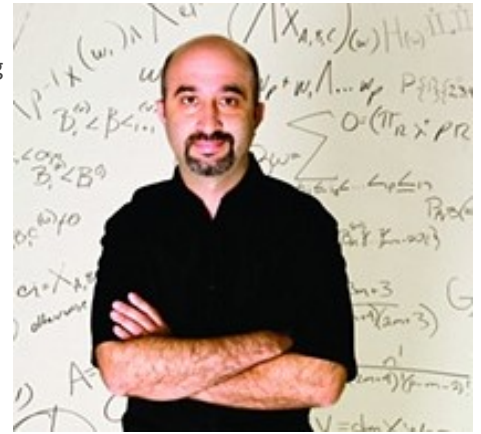
But, we were a bit surprised to see a couple of pages devoted to "what is wrong with atheism". To briefly paraphrase his viewpoint, the author says that despite being somewhat atheistic earlier in his life, he later realized that life has no meaning or purpose without religion and that a worldview based only on science is devoid of things like beauty and love.

Now, arguing against a dead man both seems unkind (if this book was his last chance to voice his views, I should just let him have his say) and unimpressive (since he can hardly mount a rebuttal if my arguments are invalid). On the other hand, I also wanted to give his views fair consideration and see whether I might find his own arguments persuasive. So, over the next few days, I gave some thought to his claims. And, although I would not deny him or anyone else the right to believe in them exactly as he stated them, I can see lots of problems with those claims. If you don't mind, I'd like to share my thoughts with you here and see what y'all think.

Well, he is not entirely wrong. I agree that science is a method used to determine objective truths about reality through experimentation and logical deduction, and as such if one was really limited to a worldview based on nothing but science then that could be a very a very dry and emotionless existence. But, who ever said that atheists had nothing in their life but science? Outside of science but within the grasp of even those who completely reject the supernatural there is still art, theater, literature, music, and philosophy. Moreover, merely by being human, we do experience emotion, We can acknowledge that they are just natural phenomena occurring in our bodies and still fully enjoy them. Ironically, we can even appreciate beauty in things like science...or in this very book which suggests that I can't.

A very different sort of counter-argument that occurs to me has to do with his claim that life is meaningless (and/or purposeless, but I'll just keep using the word "meaning" to stand for both meaning and purpose as they apply in this context). It is important to note that "meaning" is not an objective property that something either has or doesn't have. We can determine the mass of a physical object like a proton and (essentially) all agree upon the answer. But the meaning of a

life depends entirely on the perspective of the person considering the question. Personally, I see the meaning of *my* life as involving two things: participating in the human endeavor of trying to understand this universe we live in and doing what I can to create joy and eliminate suffering. It is hard for me to imagine how the existence or non-existence of a super-being or how the opinions of anyone else would change that, just as they would also not be able to change the fact that I like the taste of really very bitter dark chocolate.



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.

Of course, I recognize that many religious people think some sort of *objective* meaning would come from the existence of a God. Let's forget for a moment that the very idea of such objective meaning doesn't make any sense to me (see previous paragraph) and accept that it would exist if there was a God. But, that still doesn't mean that choosing to be religious will *create* that meaning. Gods are not like Tinkerbell in Peter Pan who exists if you clap for her. If I am correct and there are no real gods at all, then believing in one does not create one or endow life with objective meaning.

Look, I am an atheist and my life does not seem either meaningless or emotionless. But, if someone else finds comfort in believing otherwise, I'm fine with that. I'm also fine with that person writing about it in a book and telling people that life only has meaning with religion...as long as I'm also free to explain why I find that argument entirely unconvincing, as I have tried to do here.


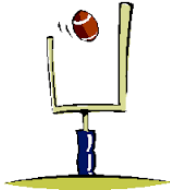




Do you agree with my counter-arguments? Can you think of other important points I failed to mention? Please share them with me at president@lowcountryhumanists.org and perhaps we can print some of those comments in a future issue of the newsletter.

-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.

February 2017

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2 	3	4 Volunteer Activity Theater Night
5 	6	7 Happy Hour	8	9	10	11 Movie Club
12 	13	14 	15	16 Girls Night Out	17	18
19 Monthly Meeting	20 	21	22 Team Trivia	23	24	25
26 Book Club	27	28 				

Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

SHL Volunteer Activity: Adopt a Highway

Saturday, February 4, 2017, 8:45am—10:00am

Bank parking lot, 1011 Harborview Rd, Charleston
(James Island)

In 2016 the SHL re-adopted a piece of Harborview Road to keep clean through January 2018. A road widening project has changed the area quite a bit, but litter still happens! Our next trash pick up will be on Saturday, February 4th.



As always, participants get a sense of accomplishment from making the world a better place, and a chance to talk as we walk. We also have a sign put up by the Dept. of Transportation there that says that the road is kept clean by "Secular Humanists" which helps us let people know that we exist and that we care.

We meet at 8:45 am in the parking lot of the bank at 1011 Harbor View Rd, next to

the Harris Teeter, on James Island. I'll bring the supplies. Please join us if you can.

If you have any questions, please [email our volunteer coordinators](#).

SHL Night at the Theater: Black Comedy

Saturday, February 4, 2017, 7:00pm

South of Broadway Theatre, 1080 E. Montague Ave,
North Charleston (Park Circle)



Join us for a fun night at the theater! We will be going to see **Black Comedy** at the South of Broadway Theatre in North Charleston. We will be getting a group discount when you order online. The coupon code is **SHL** and just apply it when you are buying your tickets on their website: southofbroadway.com

Black Comedy by Peter Shaffer

In one hilarious act, the action supposedly in the dark is illuminated; when the lights are to be on, the stage is the dark. Lovesick and desperate, sculptor Brindsley Miller has embellished his apartment with furniture and objects d'arte "borrowed" from the absent antique collector next door hoping to impress his fiancée's pompous father and a wealthy art dealer, Schuppanzigh. The fussy neighbor, Harold Gorringer returns just as a blown fuse plunges the apartment into darkness and Brindsley is revealed teetering on the verge of very ripe farce. Unexpected guests, aging spinsters, errant phone cords and other snares impede his frantic attempts to return the purloined items before light is restored.

Doors open a half hour before the show. No need to print tickets—your Name will be on a guest list at the door with the quantity of tickets you purchased. Seating is general admission. Free street parking and a free lot behind the theater. Beer, wine, soda and water are available, cash donations are appreciated.

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

Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

SHL Happy Hour

Tuesday, February 7, 2017, 6:00pm

Red Orchids China Bistro, 1401 Sam Rittenburg, Blvd, Charleston (West Ashley)

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 Red Orchids in West Ashley. Everyone is welcome—hope to see you there!

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



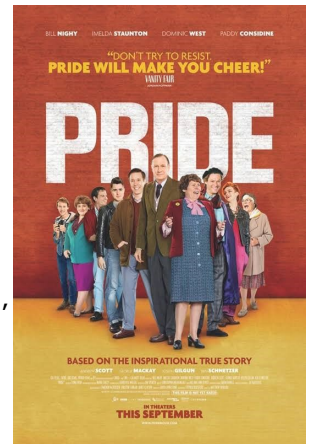
SHL Movie Club

Saturday, February 11, 2017, 3:00pm

Home of Sue Edward, 20 Wespanee Dr, Charleston (West Ashley)

Join us for a viewing of the comedy film **Pride** on Saturday, February 11, 3:00pm at the home of SHL member Sue Edward.

***PRIDE** is inspired by an extraordinary true story. It's the summer of 1984, Margaret Thatcher is in power and the National Union of Mineworkers is on strike, prompting a London-based group of gay and lesbian activists to raise money to support the strikers' families. Initially rebuffed by the Union, the group identifies a tiny mining village in Wales and sets off to make their donation in person. As the strike drags on, the two groups discover that standing together makes for the strongest union of all.*



Bring your own snacks and beverages. Following the movie we will discuss the film over dinner at a nearby restaurant.

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

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, February 16, 2017, 7:00pm

Lotus Vietnamese Cuisine, 1070 E. Montague Ave, North Charleston (Park Circle)

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

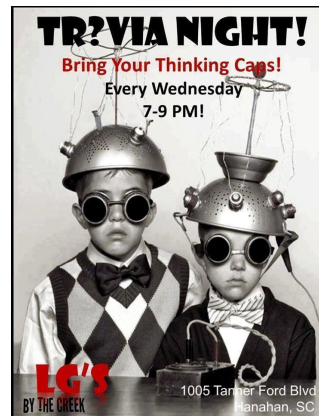
RSVP requested via [Meetup](#) or [Facebook](#).



Trivia Night

Wednesday, February 22, 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](#).

SHL Monthly Meeting

Sunday, February 19, 2017, 4:00pm

Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St, Charleston

Join us for our monthly meeting with speaker Rabbi Greg Kanter. See [page 1](#) for details.



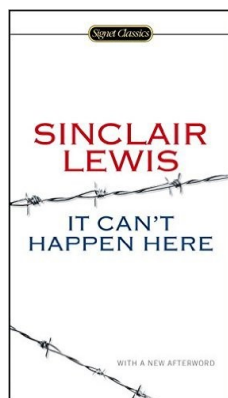
SHL Events, cont.

SHL Book Club

Sunday, February 26, 2017, 4:00pm

Barnes & Noble, 1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd, Charleston
In the music section—right side of store midway back

For February we are discussing this month's selection: **It Can't Happen Here** by Sinclair Lewis (1936). Surprisingly, Sinclair Lewis' darkly humorous tale of a fascist takeover in the US "It Can't Happen Here" has overtones familiar to America today. It starts with the highly contested election of an oafish yet strangely charismatic president, who talks like a reformer.



Join us for lively conversation even if you haven't read the material. We value a wealth of 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.

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

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 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!

Other Events of Interest

The following are not official SHL events, but we thought members may be interested.

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

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). Freethought 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 nonprofit organization working to improve care and expand options for the end of life.



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 consultations to individuals and families, assist with advance directives, wills and guardians. We also work to expand end-of-life options by advocating for death with dignity in state legislatures and the courts. More at www.compassionandchoices.org

Darwin Week

February 12—17, 2017

College of Charleston



Each year the College of Charleston and its sponsors celebrate the life of Charles Darwin and his contribution to science by hosting a thought provoking, week-long series of guest speakers who's research directly relates to Darwin's popular theories.

[Click here](#) for schedule and information.



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 Carolinas](#). 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 im-

portant 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.

The presidential ban on citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries is interfering with the LSC resettlement services. However, four families are already resettled: three from the Congo and one from Iraq and they need help with supplies.

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!](#)

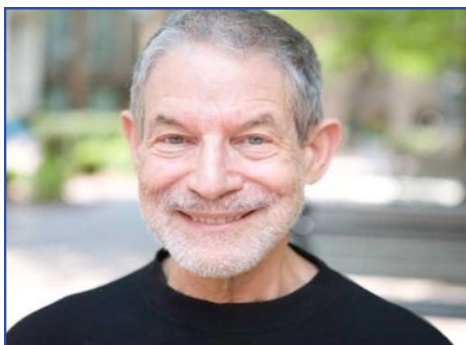


Herb Silverman

What People Don't Criticize About Jeff Sessions, But Should

In 1986 Jeff Sessions, current nominee for attorney general, was nominated and rejected for a position in Alabama's district court, primarily for having made racially insensitive remarks. There are differences of opinion over whether Sessions was then and is now a racist, which is why he is a controversial nominee whose record is being carefully examined by civil rights activists. People do change over time. Former Ku Klux Klan members Hugo Black and Robert Byrd served honorably in the U.S. Supreme Court and U.S. Senate, respectively. Has Sessions changed? Perhaps, but I'm troubled by his 2015 statement calling removal of the Confederate flag from public buildings as attempts to delegitimize the "[fabulous accomplishments](#)" of our country. Even after the June 17 massacre of nine African-American worshippers at Emanuel AME Church in my home town of Charleston, South Carolina by a white racist who revered the flag as a symbol of white supremacy, Sessions said he was no fan of any attempt to erase history, recalling his own family's role in the Civil War.

I watched a [C-SPAN discussion](#) on January 9 with Steve Flowers from Alabama, a strong supporter of Sessions. He said Jeff Sessions is



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.

not a racist, using as evidence that Sessions is a former Eagle Scout and a *very* religious Christian. This reminded me of another religious Christian from my state who influenced national politics for decades—former segregationist Strom Thurmond.

While some of my best friends are Christians (really), mixing politics and religion is usually problematic. And this brings me to my reason for writing about Sen. Sessions.

Thomas Jefferson in 1802 described the First Amendment as erecting a "wall of separation between church & state." While Sessions doesn't want to erase the proud history of the Confederacy, he does want to erase Jefferson's wall, the foundation of this coun-

try's religious freedom, which he called a [recent creation and not historical](#). And Sessions has, unfortunately, been consistent with his views about mingling church and state. Here are just a couple of examples out of many.

In 2001, Sessions [rebuked](#) then-Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) for swearing in witnesses without requiring them to use the phrase "So help me God," which is not a constitutional requirement. Sessions argued, "Ninety-five percent of the people believe in God," as if majority rules when it comes to religious freedom. Sessions also equated swearing to God with telling the truth.

When Sonia Sotomayor was a U.S. Supreme Court nominee, Sessions apparently thought this practicing Catholic wasn't religious enough. He pontificated during the hearing, "If you don't believe in a higher being, maybe you don't believe there is any truth." At the Faith and Freedom Coalition's Road to Majority conference in June, Sessions said he wanted to keep a "[secular mindset](#)" off the Supreme Court, a mindset he claimed was directly contrary to the founding of our republic.

Herb Silverman cont.

Maybe Sen. Sessions should read our secular U.S. Constitution, Article VI in particular, which prohibits religious tests for public office. I had first-hand experience with an unconstitutional religious test in South Carolina when I was denied the right to hold public office because I am an atheist. I won a South Carolina Supreme Court victory in 1997, which I wrote about in my book, [Candidate Without a Prayer](#).

If Sessions worries about Supreme Court justices (all of whom are religious) having secular mindsets,

imagine how he would treat a nominee who is an open atheist. Unfortunately, if Sessions is confirmed, one of his roles will be to recommend federal judicial appointments to President Trump. I think it is safe to say, "No atheists or secularists need apply." I worry that future justices would find or make up constitutional reasons to privilege one religion over another or religion over non-religion. So much for freedom of and freedom from religion.

I don't know if Sen. Jeff Sessions is a racist, but neither he nor any

politician these days would say openly that he or she refuses to appoint qualified African-Americans to a public office. This is certainly a change for the better from our not-so-proud history. If a politician were to defy political correctness in this manner, a bipartisan national outcry would call for his or her immediate resignation. Why is there mostly a bipartisan silence when someone just as blatantly discriminates openly against atheists?

This post was originally published in the [The Huffington Post](#), January 10, 2017.

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>.



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.

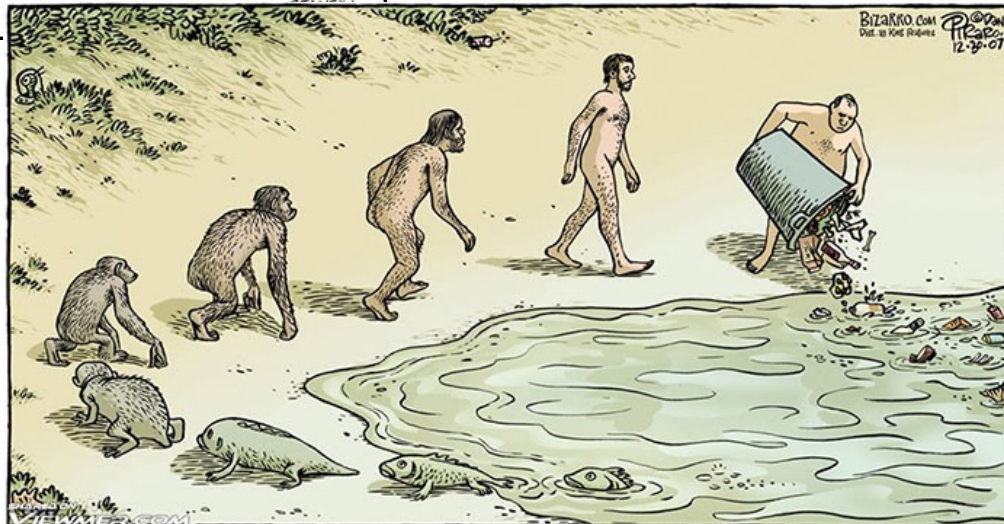
A stipend request must be pre-approved before attending your event. To see whether your event qualifies or to inquire about stipend availability and to apply, or if you have questions about the stipend program, contact treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org.

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.

Just for Fun



The Blob family at home



SHL Board for 2016-2017

Alex Kasman, President

Sue Edward, Vice President

Garrett Gehlhausen, Treasurer

Bonnie Cleaveland, Secretary

Ed Stephens

Tom Amon

Steffi Green

SECULAR HUMANISTS



OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

Contact us!

SHL
Post Office Box 32256
Charleston, SC 29417-2256
843-670-0290
president@lowcountryhumanists.org

SHL is a non-prophet
organization!

Find us online! We're (nearly) omnipresent!



[Meetup](#)



[Facebook Group](#)



[YouTube](#)



[Facebook Lounge](#)



[Web](#)



[Facebook Families Group](#)



[Email Lists](#)



[Yahoo Families Group](#)



[Facebook Page](#)

The Separationist

The Newsletter of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

Opinions expressed in The Separationist are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of SHL.