

The Separationist

Volume 24, Issue 3

March, 2017

Joshua Berg Atheism in Comedy: Your Funny or Your Life Sunday, March 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.

From Vaudeville to radio in clubs, auditoriums, print, television, film and on the Net -- our February speaker, Joshua Berg, will explore the evolution and impact throughout history, to the present and into the future, of religious belief, non-belief and antibelief in comedy. Joshua will discuss representations in live comedic performance as well as trends in media, from groundbreaking shows like All in The Family, to books like The Cartoon History of Humanism, and films by the likes of Monty Python. The presentation will include video clips and readings from comics, many atheists, but all willing to address faith critically and with humor.

Beginning and ending with a few minutes of Joshua's original atheist stand-up comedy, he will break down the comedians and the jokes. He'll explore motivations and audience reception, including approval and acceptance as well as violence such as that perpetrated against Charlie Hebdo, He'll analyze different comedy genres from stand-up to satire from sociological and historical perspectives.

The presentation, Atheism



in Comedy, Your Funny or Your Life, will be a welcome respite from some of the more serious issues, giving the audience some comic relief: a chance to let go and laugh. More than that, it is an exploration of an overlooked and under analyzed, yet extremely candid and potentially revealing conduit for expression of human belief and disbelief.

Joshua is a humanist who was raised in a liberal Jewish household, where his family encouraged critical thought and analysis. He is a humanist celebrant, who trained with John Figdor, the humanist chaplain at Stanford University as well as the Kochhar Humanist Education Program of the Humanist Institute. He was recently elected to the board of the Humanist Society, and is a contributor to the Humanist magazine and TheHumanist.com.

Joshua spent 11 years as an actor, comedian and producer of theater in New York, 10 years in Los Angeles working as an administrator at Stephen Wise Temple, the largest Reform Jewish Temple and private school in Los Angeles and, most recently, he was the director of community programming at the Savannah Jewish Educational Alliance. His website is

www.humanistweddin gcelebrant.com and you can find him on Faceboook.

When: Sunday, March 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, Joshua will answer your questions and then join us for dinner at a nearby restaurant.

President's Corner

MailChimp, the latest part of SHL communication evolution

When I first got involved with SHL at the very end of the 20th Century, the primary form of communication between the group and members was through printed copies of this newsletter, the Separationist. Address labels were pasted on the outside and they were sent through the US Postal Service each month.

Within the next decade, we were offering the option of a printed newsletter to paid SHL members but encouraging people to get only an email notifying them when a PDF version of the newsletter was posted to our Website. Our Website itself had a program that sent out plain text e-mail notifications not only about the newsletter but also about other upcoming events.

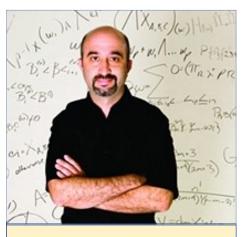
These days, e-mail is really our primary communication tool. And, we make use of the company "MailChimp" to handle the composition, storage and delivery of those messages. Here are some tips to make the best use of that new tool:

- First, make sure that you're signed up to receive our e-mail announcements. If you aren't getting e-mail from SHL with news, event announcements and reminders, you should consider signing up. To do that, you can use this form on our Website (or visit <u>http://lowcountryhumanists.org</u> and select the "E-mail Subscriptions" option from the "More" dropdown menu.
- 2. Then, sign up for the special interest mailing lists that appeal to you. For example, there are mailing lists about the Book Group, Movie Club, and Volunteer Activities. So if you go to any of those (or want to), you should be signed up for those mailing lists to receive those announcements. And, one of the most popular lists is the one that announces every time Herb Silverman publishes a new article. You can select these subscriptions when you first sign up. Or, if you want to change which lists you are subscribed to, click on the "Update Your Preferences" link at the bottom of any e-mail message you receive from SHL.

- 3. If you no longer want to receive e-mail announcements from SHL, you can use the "unsubscribe" link at the bottom of the e-mail messages you receive. But, please also write to shl@lowcountryhumanists.org to let us know why you have unsubscribed. We are notified when people unsubscribe and worry about it. If we know someone is unsubscribing because they are relocating to another state, we know we didn't do anything wrong and wish them luck with their move. But, otherwise, we may wonder either whether we said/did something wrong or if the person unsubscribing is in trouble.
- 4. Finally, do also write to

shl@lowcountryhumanists.org about any of this. If it isn't working as it should, if you are unable to follow the instructions above to subscribe or unsubscribe, if you have suggestions on how we can do a better job of communicating with you, let us know and we'll be happy to help.

Yes, MailChimp is just the latest in an ongoing evolution of communication tools SHL uses to communicate. One thing we can be sure of is that it too will eventually be replaced. Who knows when e -mail will start to seem old-fashioned or what will replace it?



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.

Upcoming SHL Events

Events sometimes get added after The Separationist is posted. Keep up to date with SHL events by signing up for our <u>email lists</u> or <u>Meetup</u>, or check postings on our <u>website</u> and <u>Facebook</u> group.

March 2017

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4 <u>Movie Club</u>
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12 7 6 5 7 6 5	13	14 <u>Happy Hour</u>	15	16	17	18
19 <u>Monthly Meeting</u>	20 Spring	21	22	23	24	25
26 Book Club	27	28	29 <u>Team Trivia</u>	30	31	

Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

SHL Movie Club

Saturday, March 4, 2017, 2:30pm

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

Join us for a viewing of the movie **A United Kingdom** on Saturday, March 4, 2:30pm at the Terrace Theater. We will meet in the lobby at 2:15—if seating has started, go in and get your seat (most of us like to sit near the back but feel free to sit wherever you like).



<u>A United Kingdom</u> is the dramatization of the reallife romance between white Londoner Ruth Williams (Rosamund Pike) and African law student Seretse Khama (David Oyelowo), who began their love affair in 1947 when Williams was unaware that Khama was the heir apparent to the throne of the Bamangwato tribe of the British protectorate of Bechuanaland

(modern-day Botswana). After deciding to marry, the couple return to Africa so he can assume his royal duties, but their interracial marriage faces opposition from both Khama's family and neighboring South Africa, whose apartheid government leans on Britain to break up their union.

Following the movie we will discuss the film over dinner at a nearby restaurant. Please wait for everyone in the lobby—some of us like to watch the entire credits.

RSVP requested via Meetup or Facebook.

SHL Happy Hour

Tuesday, March 14, 2017, 6:00pm

Frothy Beard Brewing Company, 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 the new location of Frothy Beard Brewing Company/ Zombie Bob's Pizza in West Ashley (where Legacy Church used to be!)



Everyone is welcome-we hope to see you there!

RSVP requested via Meetup or Facebook.

SHL Monthly Meeting

Sunday, March 19, 2017, 4:00pm

Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St, Charleston

Join us for our monthly meeting with speaker Joshua Berg. <u>See page 1</u> for details.

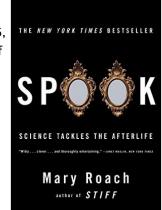
Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

SHL Book Club

Sunday, March 26, 2017, 4:00pm

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

In March, we are reading Spook: Science tackles the Afterlife by Mary Roach (2006, 313p). While rigid students of theology might take exception to Roach's conclusions (namely, we're just a bag of bones killing time before donning a soil blanket) it's hard to imagine anyone not enjoying this impressively researched and immensely readable book. And since, as



Roach suggests, each of us has only one go-round, we might as well waste downtime with something thoroughly fun.

Please note that it is not a strict rule that you have read the book by the time of the club meeting. We find that those who have not read the material beforehand can contribute interesting insights to the topic and then are compelled to do further reading. Always a good thing.

Following the meeting we will continue the discussion over dinner at a nearby restaurant.

RSVP requested via Meetup or Facebook.

For those who want to read ahead, in April we are reading *Thinking Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman (2011, 512 p). This Nobel Prize winning author tours the mind and explains two systems that drive the way we think and make judgements. This book has served as the springboard for new explorations in the area of the human mind.

We have a list of books we are considering for future book club meetings. At our monthly meetings we then vote on which books from this list are to be read when. And we strongly urge each of you to make suggestions for books that you feel would be appropriate for our book club. To see our book list click <u>here</u>.

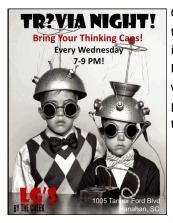
SHL is affiliated with the Amazon Associates program! Our organization earns up to a 15% commission on items purchased at Amazon.com through the links on our Website. So, if you are buying the book club book (or anything else from Amazon), this is a super-easy way to contribute to SHL! Simply use the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

Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

Trivia Night

Wednesday, March 29, 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 <u>Meetup</u> or <u>Facebook</u>.

The monthly volunteer activity has not been finalized at the time of publishing the newsletter. Please check Meetup, Facebook, our website, or subscribe to the SHL email list for updates.



Do you have usable items that you no longer want or are you in need of an item? If so, join the <u>Secular Hu-</u> <u>manists of the Lowcountry Pay It Forward face-</u> <u>book group</u>. 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

Family Event: SHL Egg Hunt

Sunday, April 9, 2017, 11:00am

Hampton Park, 30 Mary Murray Dr, Charleston

Meet us at the picnic tables for an egg hunt and then a picnic lunch. Bring your own lunch and we'll have the eggs hidden and ready at 11:30!



RSVP requested via Meetup or Facebook.

SHL Events, cont.

March for Science

Saturday, April 22, 2017

Charleston-time and location TBA

The March for Science is a celebration of our passion for science and a call to support and safeguard the scientific community. Recent policy changes have caused heightened worry among scientists, and the incredible and immediate outpouring of support has made clear that these concerns are also shared by hundreds of thousands of people around the world. The mischaracterization of science as a partisan issue, which has given policymakers permission to reject overwhelming evidence, is a critical and urgent matter. It is time for people who support scientific research and evidence-based policies to take a public stand and be counted.

SHL is a sponsor of the march in Charleston which will correspond with the primary march in Washington, DC and satellite marches around the globe. Stay tuned for further details.



Upcoming Conferences

The Holy City will be he 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!

The Separationist

We Need YOU!

SHL would not be able to provide our members with such a large variety of activities without dedicated volunteers to lead them.

We are currently looking for volunteers to lead the following activities—without volunteers we are in danger of losing these activities. Can this be you?

Movie Club Coordinator—the Movie Club Coordinator schedules film viewings at local theaters or in someone's home, creates an event listing in facebook and meetup and/or sends the info to the newsletter editor, welcomes Movie Club attendees, and facilitates choosing a post-movie restaurant. Time commitment: once per month.



Happy Hour Coordinator—the Happy Hour Coordinator selects a bar/restaurant (choosing various locations around the area), reserves a table large enough for the group, creates an event listing in facebook and meetup and/or sends the info to the newsletter editor, and welcomes Happy Hour attendees. Time commitment: once per month.

Girls Night Out Coordinator—the Girls Night Out Coordinator selects a bar/restaurant (choosing various locations around the area), reserves a table large enough for the group, creates an event listing in facebook and meetup and/or sends the info to the newsletter editor, and welcomes Girls Night Out attendees. Time commitment: once per month.

Have something else in mind? We are always open to offering new activities for our members—either regularly scheduled or one-time events. Some of these may be game nights, bowling, bocce, bridge walks, billiards, political discussions, river floats, kayaking, biking, teen activities, etc.

If you are interested in one of the above volunteer positions or in organizing another event, contact <u>pres-ident@lowcountryhumanists.org</u>. THANK YOU!



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 <u>Lutheran Services Carolinas</u>. 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 <u>volun-</u>

teers@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.

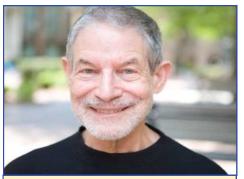
Or securely donate online!

Herb Silverman Catholic Hypocrisy or Atheism?

What should an atheist like me make of a recent comment by Pope Francis who said that it's better to be an atheist than to be a Catholic who leads a hypocritical double life? It's nice to hear a religious leader say something that might be considered positive about atheists, however backhanded, but I'm sure Catholics wouldn't feel complimented were I to say that it's better to be a Catholic than a hypocritical atheist who does bad things.

I think Pope Francis had good intentions in calling out Christians who exploit people, show no compassion for the less fortunate, and refuse to aid refugees. I can't help but think that some of the Pope's message was also directed at so-called Christian Donald Trump.

The Pope associates true Catholicism with a high moral code that hypocritical Catholics don't follow. But his statement can leave the false impression that atheists have an inferior or no moral code. To his credit, Pope Francis once said that Christians should see atheists as good people if they



Herb Silverman is founder and President of the <u>Secular Coalition for America</u>, author of <u>Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography</u> <u>of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt</u>, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston.

do good. To this I would add that atheists should see Christians as good people if they do good.

There's another kind of Christian hypocrisy that I wish Pope Francis would address: people who claim to be Christian because it benefits them socially or politically, and who fear being ostracized if they come out of the closet as atheists. Yes, there are atheist hypocrites as well as Christian hypocrites. Would that we all could be honest about who we are.

Pope Francis promotes human rights more than most previous popes (I'm grading on a curve), but he still seems limited in significant

ways because of church doctrine. I think the world and the church would be much improved if the church were to stop treating women as second-class people; end celibacy for priests; promote birth control to diminish family poverty caused by having too many children; recognize that masturbation is natural and healthy safe sex; and bless unions of responsible, mature people of the same sex who are in committed, loving relationships. Anachronistic church doctrine has turned many people into ex-Catholics or `Cafeteria Catholics"—those who follow only doctrine that make sense to them. By not accepting extraordinary claims without evidence, they are much like atheists and humanists.

Pope Francis might not realize that he implied atheists are better than some Catholics who are hypocrites in the best sense of the word. Such Catholics go through the motions of taking communion, while just pretending to believe they are literally eating the body and drinking the blood of a Jew who died 2,000 years ago. They are not that irra-

Herb Silverman cont.

tional. Also, unlike Pope Francis, very few Catholics believe what the world needs now is more exorcists. To combat the perceived problem of demon possession, the Vatican sponsored an intensive eight-week training course in Rome for future priestexorcists. I could have provided a two-second course with a 100 percent success rate: Rational Thinking. People who don't believe we are living in a demonhaunted world are never possessed by demons.

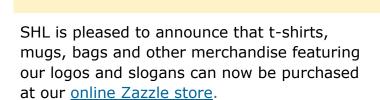
As a secular humanist, I consider morality more essential than theology. Our deeds are more important than our creeds. We don't have to believe in a certain type of god, or in any god, to be kind and compassionate to our fellow human beings. And while we may differ about belief in a future life, we atheists, Christians, and others can work together on concerns that matter in this life, like racial and religious discrimination, climate change, poverty, peace, and other

SHL Store

social justice and human rights issues.

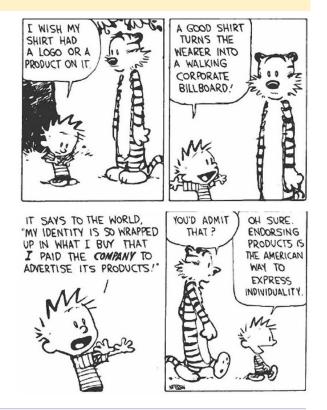
I try to live a rational life without superstition, which is why I think Catholicism is based on "fake news." Here's how I would shorten the Pope's comment that it's better to be an atheist than to be a hypocritical Catholic: It's just better to be an atheist.

This post was originally published in <u>On Faith, February 27, 2017</u>.



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





The Separationist

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 <u>pay online</u> 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 conference or the American Atheist convention being 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 <u>treasurer</u> @lowcountryhumanists.org.

Stipend recipients must write a short essay about their event experience and submit it along with receipts to <u>treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org</u> 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.

Letter to the Editor



The following letter was published in the <u>Post & Cou-</u> rier on February 23, 2017

Politics in Church

President Donald Trump seems to have divided Americans in just about every way, so I was not surprised by a Feb. 12 article about how pastors are struggling with how to maintain the allegiance of parishioners whose political views conflict with Scripture the pastor wants to preach.

Although I'm an atheist, unlike "so-called" Christian Donald Trump, I've worked with religious groups on matters like helping refugees and homeless, addressing racial issues, climate change and other social justice concerns.

More than 80 percent of white evangelicals voted for Trump, the least religious president in my lifetime. I can't picture Trump believing in a power higher than himself.

My favorite Trump quote is what he said after claiming he couldn't reveal his tax returns because of purported ongoing government audits: "Maybe I get audited so much because I'm a strong Christian." Really? How much faith does that statement require?

The newspaper article also mentioned local Rev. Kevin Baird's hope that Trump will fulfill his promise to repeal the 1954 Johnson Amendment, which bars all tax-exempt organizations, including churches, from endorsing political candidates.

Under our current tax code, religious nonprofits already enjoy the privileged status of being exempt from both taxes and financial disclosure. The repeal of the Johnson Amendment would unleash a new wave of dark money into the political system, effectively transforming houses of worship into the equivalent of religious Super PACs. Churches would be permitted to collect tax-deductible offerings to donate to partisan campaigns.

I hope Americans of all faiths — and of none — will oppose repeal of the Johnson Amendment and defend the wall of separation between church and state.

When faith groups become embroiled in politics, our nation moves closer to becoming a theocracy. Perhaps such concerns are why the fastest growing segment of the American population are the "nones," those with no religious affiliation.

These non-religious citizens now outnumber Jews, Muslims, and most individual Christian denominations. They are not all atheists, but they are disturbed by the hypocrisy they see in religious organizations.

Herb Silverman George Street Charleston

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 <u>The Separationist</u>, please send it to:

newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org

SHL Board for 2016-2017

Alex Kasman, President Sue Edward, Vice President Garrett Gehlhausen, Treasurer Bonnie Cleaveland, Secretary Ed Stephens Tom Amon Steffi Green

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!



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.