



# The Separationist

Volume 24, Issue 4

April, 2017

## Mandisa Thomas

### Never an Anomaly

Sunday, April 16, 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 Black community, while still heavily religious, has also produced some of the most talented and prolific authors, entertainers and activists in history. Included in this are those who have challenged the church and religion, from Gordon Parks and James Baldwin, to Richard Pryor and Martin Lawrence. Our April speaker, Mandisa Thomas, will discuss and share some of the works of these mavericks who dared to take on this subject, and displayed the diversity that has always been present within this community. Be prepared to be entertained and enlightened by this presentation which will show that Blacks who dissented with religion were never an anomaly.

Mandisa Thomas, who previously spoke to SHL in 2012, is the founder and President of Black



Nonbelievers, Inc. She has a number of media appearances to her credit, including *CBS Sunday Morning*, *CNN.com*, and *JET* magazine. She has been a guest on podcasts such as *The Humanist Hour* and *Ask an Atheist*, as well as the documentaries *Contradiction* and *My Week in Atheism*. Mandisa currently serves on the Boards for American Atheists and the Reason Rally Coalition, and previously for Foundation Beyond Belief and the Secular Coalition for America.

As the president of Black Nonbelievers, Inc., Mandisa works to encourage more Blacks to come out and stand strong with their nonbelief in the face of such strong religious overtones. "The more we make our presence known, the better our chances of working together to turn around some of the disparities we face. We are *not* alone."

**When:** Sunday, April 16, 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.



Black Nonbelievers, Inc. *walking by sight, not by faith*

# President's Corner

## SHL Merchandise

SHL used to order a few hundred t-shirts in a specific design and then sell them at our meetings until our supply ran out. You've probably seen those old "Non-Prophet Organization" t-shirts with either the starburst design or featuring our current logo. This system worked pretty well, except that it meant there was only one design available at a time and that a volunteer had to store the shirts and bring them to each event.

But, we recently decided to try an online service that would allow us to sell lots of different options. There is a choice of different sayings and designs on various cuts and colors of shirt. No "back stock" is necessary because the items are printed only when someone orders one. There are lots of different companies providing similar services for similar prices, and after comparing them we selected "Zazzle".

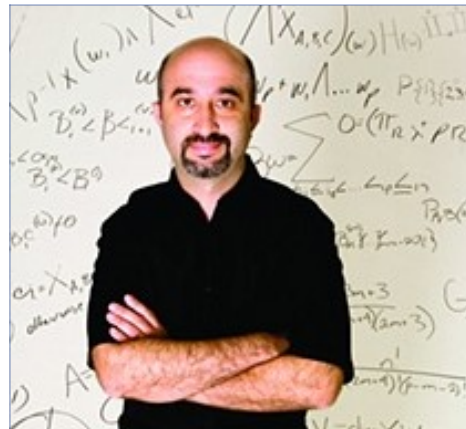


We've been selling t-shirts, mugs, stickers, and bags emblazoned with the SHL logo and sayings at our online store for a few months now. In many ways it has been working well: the items are popular and are selling well. But, it is true that the prices can be a bit intimidating. Here are a few tips to help you get the best items and the best prices:

- Wait until there's a sale. Zazzle always seems to have a sale on something, and if you wait a month or two the item you want is sure to go on sale for 40% off or more.

- You can also buy some of these items at our meetings. Since we bought them on sale, we can sell them to you at a discount, and you don't have to wait for delivery!
- Be careful when making changes to the products. Although it offers you the option of changing things like the color or cut of the shirt, it is up to you to check to make sure that it still looks right after that change. Nothing in the program makes sure that the colors match or that the logo will fit on the other shirt shape. Take a look at the displayed sample with any modifications you choose to make sure it still looks good before buying.

Thanks for showing your pride and supporting SHL through your purchases of items in our Zazzle store!



**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 [email lists](#) or [Meetup](#), or check postings on our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) group.

# April 2017

Sun      Mon      Tue      Wed      Thu      Fri      Sat

						1
2	3	4	5 <a href="#">Happy Hour</a>	6	7	8
9 <a href="#">Children's Egg Hunt</a>	10	11	12	13	14	15 <a href="#">Volunteer Event</a>
16 <a href="#">Monthly Meeting</a>	17	18 	19	20	21	22 <a href="#">March for Science</a>
23 <a href="#">Book Club</a>	24	25	26 <a href="#">Team Trivia</a>	27	28	29
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# Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

## SHL Happy Hour

Wednesday, April 5, 2017, 6:00pm

Manny's Neighborhood Grille, 1680 Old Towne Rd  
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 Manny's in West Ashley. Everyone is welcome—we hope to see you there!

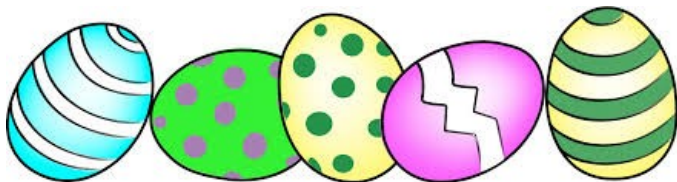
*RSVP requested via [Meetup](#) or [Facebook](#).*

## SHL Children's Egg Hunt

Sunday, April 9, 2017, 11:30am

Hampton Park—McMahon Playground, 30 Mary Murray Dr, Charleston

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



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

## SHL Volunteer Event

Saturday, April 15, 2017, 9:00am—noon

Lowcountry Food Bank, 2864 Azalea Dr, North Charleston

Our get together this month to give back to the community is at the Lowcountry Foodbank. We'll meet in the lobby of the Food Bank a few minutes before 9 am. Look for me and others wearing SHL T-shirts. The work will be in a large warehouse, so dress appropriately for the day's weather and wear close toed shoes for safety. Kids 12 and up are welcome. In past volunteer days at LCFB we have sorted and wiped down pallets of donated food items and packed bags of non-perishable snacks for school kids at risk for hunger at home. We always feel like we made a difference. Comment below if you have any questions.



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

## SHL Monthly Meeting

Sunday, April 16, 2017, 4:00pm

Gage Hall, 4 Archdale St, Charleston

Join us for our monthly meeting with speaker Mandisa Thomas. [See page 1](#) for details.

# Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

## March for Science

Saturday, April 22, 2017, 1:00pm

Depart from Marion Square, Four Corners of Law, or the Visitor's Center and march to Liberty Square (near the Aquarium), Charleston

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. For more info, see [marchforsciencechs.com](http://marchforsciencechs.com)

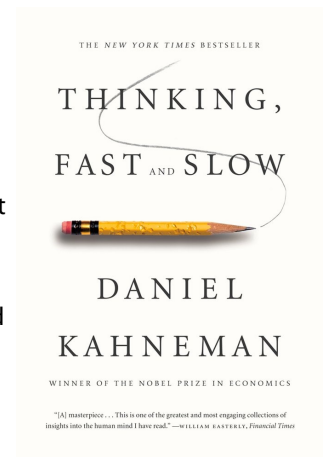


## SHL Book Club

Sunday, April 23, 2017, 4:00pm

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

In April, we are reading **Thinking Fast and Slow** by Daniel Kahneman (2011, 512p). This Noble 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 this area of exploring the human mind. *Available in all formats except Audible.*



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 before hand can contribute interesting insights to the topic and then are compelled to do further reading. Always a good thing.

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 here](#).

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

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

# Upcoming SHL Events, cont.

## SHL Book Club, cont.

If you wish to read ahead, in May, we are reading **The Myth of a Strong Leader: Political Leadership in the Modern Age** by Archie Brown (2014,482p). In this wide-ranging survey of political leadership over the past hundred years, renowned Oxford politics professor Archie Brown challenges the widespread belief that strong leaders – meaning those that dominate their colleagues and the policy-making process – are the most successful and admirable. *Available in all formats including Audible.*

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>

Why don't I see Movie Club or Girls Night Out events this month? [See page 8!](#)

## Trivia Night

Wednesday, APRIL 26, 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](#).**

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 home, this is the place to post/find them.

## Other Events

### Judaism without Belief: Jewishness from a Post- Religious Perspective

Thursday, April 6, 2017, 7:30pm

Stern Center Ballroom, College of Charleston

*This is not an SHL sponsored event, but it certainly seems like something that would be of interest to SHL members so we are including it here.*



**Shulem Deen**, author of *All Who Go Do Not Return* and recipient of the 2015 National Jewish Book Award will present Judaism without Belief: An Exploration of Jewishness from a Post-Religious Perspective on Thursday, April 6, 2017 at 7:30PM

in the Stern Center Ballroom (4th floor), 71 George Street, Charleston, SC.

After decades steeped in Jewish faith and observance, Deen rejected Judaism's foundational principles, and consciously detached from faith and observance. Nevertheless, he still feels the tug of heritage and bonds of kinship. As American Jews experience an unprecedented paradigm shift in their relation to both peoplehood and religiosity, many are asking, what does Jewishness mean today? In this personal and provocative presentation, Shulem Deen will offer thoughts on the continued relevance of Jewishness in his own life, and how we might engage with tradition in a post-religious, post-ethnic American Jewish reality.

## 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 hu-

manists, atheists, and free-

thinkers can gather together for a weekend of informative lectures, networking, and fun activities.

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

### [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!

# 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 [president@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:president@lowcountryhumanists.org). THANK YOU!





# Charity of the Quarter

## Turning Leaf Project



Our in-house screen printing business gives the men a chance to practice the skills they are learning in the program.  
Support our screen printing business.

**Turning Leaf Project** is a rehabilitation and reentry nonprofit organization serving adult men who are assessed at a medium to high risk of re-incarceration. We are both an education and employment program. Our first focus is on helping our students increase their thinking, decision and problem-solving skills. Our second priority is job placement. We choose to work with men who have repeat criminal convictions; men who have not changed their behavior as a response to incarceration and who need assistance to change their life direction.

Turning Leaf is different from other reentry efforts in South Carolina, and across the country, for various reasons. We are based on what evidence shows us works to reduce re-offending. We only work with individuals who are at a medium to high risk of re-arrest. We focus on helping our students change their thinking, attitudes, belief and peers – the risk factors most closely associated with criminal behavior. We spend very little time and resources helping our students with food, transportation, clothing and housing. These needs are not shown to be drivers of continual criminal behavior. We offer a reentry program

for men returning from prison and jail and an alternative sentencing program for federal detainees. Our center based program is comprehensive. The men participate in 15 hours of rehabilitation classes at the Turning Leaf center each week. Making progress in classes earns them a job placement with the City of Charleston, North Charleston or Charleston County. The men are paid an educational stipend of up to \$150 a week for their time in classes prior to being placed in transitional work.

The issue of reentry is especially relevant for South Carolina and the Charleston area. Charleston County manages the largest jail in the state (daily population of 1,200). More than 31,000 inmates processed through the Charleston County Detention Center in 2011. Approximately 600 individuals return to Charleston County from state prisons alone every year. The growth in South Carolina's prison population mirrors the national trend. Research and data shows that the increase in national prison population was driven not by an increase in crime, but by state decisions to put more low-risk, non-violent offenders behind bars, to increase prison terms for violent

and non-violent offenders, and to neglect community corrections and reentry programs. As a result, a significant number of parole and probation violators return to prison. South Carolina's state incarcerated population has nearly tripled in the last 25 years, now over 22,000 state inmates, a number that does not include those in SC jails or federal prisons. This growth has come at a significant financial cost to taxpayers. Since 1983, state spending on prisons increased by more than 500 percent to \$394 million. Few organizations exist in Charleston to help the formerly incarcerated population. Those that do operate in silos, providing fragmented and uncoordinated services in separate locations. Most importantly, local rehabilitation efforts typically don't focus on the risk factors that research shows us most correlate to reoffending.

Most recent national data reports that 67% of everyone leaving prison will return in three years. Although we are a new organization with limited data, our initial results are promising. Our three year goal is a re-incarceration rate of less than 30% for program graduates.

*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

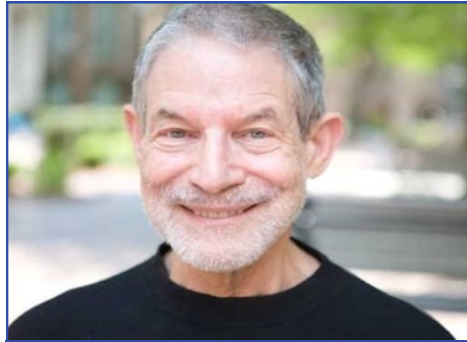
## Freedom or Theocratic Caucus?

Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX) quit the Freedom Caucus in anger because the overwhelming majority of its members objected to the recently proposed American Health Care Act. In an attempt to denigrate the Freedom Caucus, Poe added, "I got the opinion that there's some members of the Freedom Caucus, [they would vote no against the Ten Commandments](#) if they came up for a vote." I should hope they would all vote "No." If the Freedom Caucus stands for freedom, they would be required to vote against promoting the Ten Commandments as the law of the land.

The first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods," conflicts with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that guarantees freedom of religion—the right to worship one, several, or no gods. In fact, strict adherence to this commandment might be problematic for a Christian like Poe because the one "true" god is Yahweh, not Jesus. The next two commandments (no graven images, not taking God's name in vain) describe how to worship and pay homage to a jealous and vindictive God who punishes several generations of children because their fathers did not worship in the correct way. Our secular laws don't hold children responsible for misdeeds or "sins" of their parents.

The fourth commandment, keeping the Sabbath day holy (Saturday, not Sunday), describes a God who created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. In other words, this commandment would require the teaching of creationism in public schools.

The tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's



**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.

house, wife, slaves, ox, donkey, or any other property," condones slavery and treating women as property. Furthermore, support for this commandment would mean that the Freedom Caucus opposes an important component of American capitalism and advertising, which rely heavily on coveting our neighbor's possessions.

Americans have the freedom to follow or ignore religious commandments. Would Rep. Poe really want to make the Ten Commandments the law of the land, which would turn our freedom-loving, pluralistic, and democratic society into a theocracy? Perhaps Poe only wants members of Congress to personally endorse religious commandments, rather than impose them on all Americans. If so, such a religious test for public office would still be wrong and unconstitutional.

However, Poe's motives might be even more sinister. In 2011, AlterNet reported that Poe wanted to remove the right of deceased soldiers' families to choose which prayers, if any, were to be read at

a soldier's funeral. Incredibly, if the story is true, he and two other politicians [attempted to impose Christian ceremonies on the military funerals](#) of everybody who has served in the military, regardless of whether the deceased was Christian.

Requiring non-Christians to have Christian funerals would rival the antics of Westboro Baptist Church, best known for its [God Hates Fags](#) slogan and for picketing funerals of those who don't meet their strict Christian standards. As long as members of Westboro Baptist Church don't prevent others from partaking in "sinful" ceremonies, they are exercising their constitutionally guaranteed right to free speech, however odious the speech. (Note: This is an endorsement of freedom, not Westboro Baptist Church.)

I hope members of the Freedom Caucus and all political leaders can endorse the freedom of Americans to worship or not worship as they please, without government interference. Individuals may place the Ten Commandments or passages from the Quran on their private property or houses of worship, but our secular government may not endorse one religion over another or religion over non-religion. One of the best ways to support freedom for all Americans is to promote the separation of religion and government. Were members of the Freedom Caucus to endorse the Ten Commandments as the law of the land, they should then change their name to the Theocratic Caucus.

This post was originally published on [herbsilverman.com](http://herbsilverman.com) 3/29/2017.

## 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 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 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 [treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org).

Stipend recipients must write a short essay about their event experience and submit it along with receipts to [treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto: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.

## 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](mailto: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.*