



The Separationist

MARCH 2019

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 Separationist is 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.

Please contact the SHL newsletter editor's with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions such as short articles, news items, letters to the editor, or other information of interest to SHL members are always welcome.

The editors can be contacted at:

newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org

President's Corner

* Editor's note: The following is an introduction to readers about a letter which begins here and is continued in the section [The Leading Edge of Reason](#), on page 6.

Fellow Free Thinkers,

I wrote this open letter to Rep. Burns (R-Greenville) in response to a comment he made to the news. It might be good for the President's Corner. Here's a blurb that can go with it.

On February 8, reporter Aaron Ladd (WMBF in Myrtle Beach) interviewed state representative Mike Burns (R-Greenville) about proposed SC legislation he co-sponsored to teach religion classes in SC high schools.

The bill is problematic, but what specifically got my attention is Burns' quote denying that the separation of church and state is in the US Constitution. We've seen this false idea trotted out frequently, and we must contradict it publicly.

I wrote a long, open letter to Rep. Burns and asked other secular leaders throughout the state to sign on. We sent the letter to the Myrtle Beach reporter, Aaron Ladd at WMBF, who originally reported the story and secured Burns' quote. We'll also send a copy to Rep. Burns. False ideas spread quickly and

take hold firmly. Let's challenge these ideas wherever we find them.

Bonnie Cleveland,
President: Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

→
The Honorable Mr. Mike Burns
326B Blatt Bldg.
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Rep. Burns:

It seems that you have been misinformed.

The US Constitution does not mention God nor Christianity. Though most of our founding fathers believed in God, they were clear that our government should be secular. They knew that our country was founded on religious freedom, their predecessors having fled religious oppression.

John Adams, in the 1797 Treaty of Tripoli, said, "...The Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."

As retired minister David Black beautifully stated in the Richmond Times-Dispatch in 2014, Thomas Jefferson considered his Virginia Statute

Continued on pg. 6 Article 2

SHL Main Events

Volunteer Activity: Adopt a Highway

Saturday, May 4, 2019
9:00 AM to 11:00 AM
Details in coming issues.

SHL had a great highway cleanup on February 2nd with eleven volunteers making a difference in our Lowcountry Community. Here is a photo of your Happy Humanists at work.



Picking up trash at the side of the road is a lot more fun than it sounds. We enjoy each other's company and conversation. It is a pleasant walk in the fresh air. And we usually find some interesting items.

As always, participants get a sense of accomplishment from making the world a better place and enjoy 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 our group exists and that we care about our community.

SHL will provide the necessary supplies, including trash bags, gloves, and reflective vests. Please join us if you can.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email our volunteer coordinators.

Hosted by Laura Kasman



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 be meeting at Myles and Jun Yakitori Summerville. Hope to see you there!

Hosted by: **Elizabeth Taylor**



Where?
Myles and Jun Yakitori
710 Bacons Bridge Rd.



When?
Wednesday, March 13,
6:00 PM



February Happy Hour at the Muse



SHL Music Day

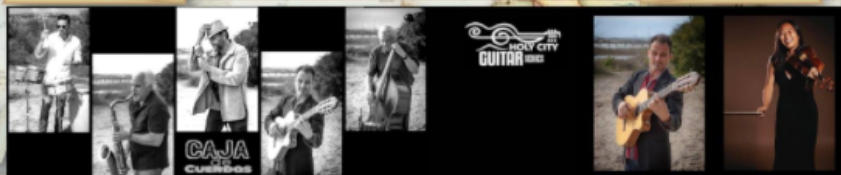
Where: Queen Street Playhouse

When: Saturday, March 2, 2019

7:00 PM to 10:00 PM

VIVA LA MUSICA II

CAJA DE CUERDAS LATIN BAND
& GUAY-LEE GUITAR & VIOLIN DUO



Queen Street Playhouse

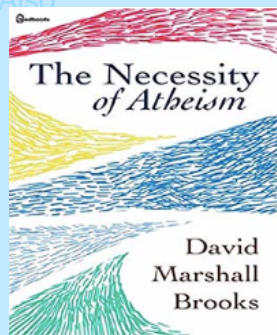
Please join us at the 4th annual Holy City Guitar Series, a musical journey through Latin America: VIVA LA MUSICA II. Featured musicians include guitar and violin duo Gregory Guay and Gloria Lee performing tango duets followed by the exciting Caja De Cuerdas Latin Ensemble. The ensemble will premiere their Latin inspired original music as well as classics from Latin American artists in the likes of Gipsy Kings.

Tickets can be bought online at www.queenstreetplayhouse.org or by calling the box office at 843-722-4487. 20\$ in advance/10\$ Student/25\$ at the door.

Hosted by: Elizabeth Taylor-
Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

Book Group for March

Also



"There are no problems related to human progress and happiness in this age which any theology can solve, and which the teachings of freethought cannot do better and without the aid of encumbrances. ... Agree or disagree with this contention you may, but only when you are made aware of the facts that can be brought to the aid of this conviction. ... The supernaturalist's armamentarium of God, Bible, Heaven, Hell, Soul, Immortality, Sin, The Fall and Redemption of Man, Prayer, Creed, and Dogma, leave as much impression on the mind of intelligent man as would an arrow against a battleship."

*This book is available as an ebook for free online at <https://www.gutenberg.org> This will open the site for free reading called **Project Gutenberg**.

The book is also available online at **Amazon** Books, and can also be listened to for free by opening it in youtube.com and using their search engine. Remember if you go to the SHL and use the hot link to Amazon, SHL receives a monetary credit.

**Where: West Ashley Barnes and Noble
Sam Rittenberg Blvd. West Ashley**

**When: 4:00 to 5:30
4th Sunday of March 24th.**

Book Group had a rewarding discussion, with six in attendance at the February review of *The Coddling of the American Mind*. Book Group is an opportunity to share the Secular experience with like minded free thinkers. If you like to read, this is the place for you. Hope to see you at the March meeting.

The Leading Edge of Reason

Contributions from our Community of Free Thinkers

Article 1

Herb Silverman's interview, By Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Herb Silverman is the Founder of the Secular Coalition of America. Here we talk about his life, work, and views.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was early life like for you, e.g., geography, culture, language, religion or lack thereof, education, and family structure and dynamics?

Herb Silverman: I was born in Philadelphia, where I lived for 21 years until I ran away from home to graduate school. My family consisted largely of Orthodox Jews, though my parents were more cultural Jews motivated by anti-Antisemitism. Having had relatives who died in the Holocaust, they did not trust any Goyim (Gentiles), and had as little contact with them as possible. We lived in a Jewish neighborhood and after public school I would go to an Orthodox Hebrew school. My mother was an authoritarian, who made all the family decisions. My father worked in a warehouse his entire life, packing Hershey bars that were shipped to underground subway stands. In another era, my mother would have had a job (other than cleaning house and "taking care" of me), which would have made both of us happier.

Jacobsen: What levels of formal education have been part of life for you? How have you informally self-educated?

Silverman: My formal education consisted of a Bachelor's degree from Temple University in 1963 and a Masters (1965) and Ph.D. (1968) in mathematics from Syracuse University.

My informal education consisted of learning to think for myself and figuring out when to go along with

conventional wisdom and when to step to the beat of a different drummer.

Jacobsen: You have a number of illustrious merits to the personal record. One is the founding of the Secular Coalition for America. Another is the founding of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry. A third is the founding of the Atheist/Humanist Alliance student group at the College of Charleston. This leads to some obvious questions. Why found each one of them?

Silverman: Regarding the formation of the Secular Coalition for America, I learned in the 1990s about national organizations that identified as atheists, agnostics, humanists, secular humanists, freethinkers, secularists, and more. They all promoted causes I supported, like church-state separation and increasing respect for nontheists. However, each organization was doing its own thing without recognizing or cooperating with worthwhile efforts of like-minded groups. I thought this was a shortcoming that needed to be addressed if we were to make a difference in our culture. So, I contacted all the organizations I could, and some agreed to meet at the Godless Americans March in Washington in 2002, where we decided to form a new coalition. Regarding the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry in Charleston, South Carolina, whenever I received media attention I would get calls from people thanking me and saying they thought they were the only atheist in South Carolina. I took their names and we formed the SHL in 1994. Regarding the Atheist/Humanist Alliance, a student came to my office in 1998 and asked about starting a student group at the College of Charleston similar to the

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry. I was thrilled and agreed to be its faculty advisor. Despite an attempt by a few Christian students in the Student Council to oppose giving official club status to the group, we prevailed.

Jacobsen: How have these initiatives, founded by you, grown over time?

Silverman: The Secular Coalition for America started with 4 organizations and no budget, and we have grown to 20 national organizations with a dedicated board and staff.

We were the first organization to lobby Congress, in Washington DC, for the rights of nontheists. Initially, I hoped just to have our organizations cooperate on the 95% we had in common instead of arguing about the 5% that set us apart, like which label to use.

We succeeded far beyond my expectations, since we've become a respected and productive lobbying organization in our nation's capital. The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry has grown from a few people who met informally into a vibrant organization that meets regularly for lectures, book discussions, social and charitable events. When the Atheist/Humanist Alliance first met, several students talked about friends or roommates who shunned them because of their non-belief. These atheist students came to meetings because they needed a supportive community. Gradually attitudes at the College of Charleston have changed and now students worry far less about becoming unpopular because of openly being atheists. I've even heard students say they joined the club because atheist students are pretty cool. They are, but they were also cool in 1998. I'm encouraged by the younger generation's wider acceptance of diversity.

Leading Edge of Reason (Continued)

Jacobsen: As a Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston, how has acquired knowledge, developed skills, and recognized and nurtured talent in mathematics provided a foundation for secular humanist philosophy? In that, I assume this produced a way of thinking apart from revelation, magical thinking, and assertions of a there-before or a here-after.

Silverman: My secular humanist philosophy started long before I became a math professor. As a teenager, I decided to take from my Orthodox Jewish background only what made sense.

The good works (secular humanism) remained, but not the irrelevant rituals and beliefs. Pretty soon, I realized that the God I once accepted made no sense. When I read Bertrand Russell's *Why I am Not a Christian*, I realized that there were others who thought like me. In fact, Russell might have inspired me to become a mathematician.

Jacobsen: Why did you run for Governor of South Carolina in 1990? What was the outcome? What are the lessons for others to learn from this experience?

Silverman: I had been a quiet atheist until a colleague at the College of Charleston pointed out that our South Carolina Constitution prohibits atheists from becoming governor. I knew the US Constitution prohibits religious tests for public office. So, I went to the American Civil Liberties Union, and its lawyer told me that an atheist would need to mount a legal challenge by running for governor. He said that the very best candidate would be me. I looked around, and didn't see any competition. After giving it some thought, I agreed to be the 'Candidate Without a Prayer.' To the surprise of no one, I lost the gubernatorial election. But after an eight-year legal battle, I won a unanimous decision in the South

Carolina Supreme Court, nullifying the anti-atheist clause in our state constitution. One lesson is that any individual can make a difference by going outside his or her comfort zone, especially when you have right on your side.

You also get to meet many interesting people. The best for me personally is that I met Sharon Fratepietro, who volunteered for my campaign, became my campaign manager, and my one and only groupie. We have been happily together for 29 years, and she doesn't mind being married to someone who never became governor.

Jacobsen: As an author in the secular humanist tradition, what is important, now, in the continual growth of secular humanist literature? If you were a young person reading this, what authors or books would you recommend for them on secular humanism? If you were an advanced graduate student, what would you recommend for them, in terms of reading in the same genre?

Silverman: For young people I would recommend *The Magic of Reality* by Richard Dawkins, and for even younger people I would also recommend *Maybe Yes, Maybe No: A Guide for Young Skeptics* by Dan Barker. I wouldn't distinguish books for advanced graduate students from books for all adults. We have a disproportionate number of people in our movement with advanced academic degrees, and I hope we can significantly broaden our base. A small subset of books I recommend are *A Demon Haunted World* by Carl Sagan, *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins, *God is Not Great* by Christopher Hitchens, *Freethinkers* by Susan Jacoby, and *the History of God* by Karen Armstrong. And to be unabashedly self-promoting, I also recommend my two books *Candidate Without a Prayer* and *An*

Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land.

Jacobsen: In an examination of the current fiascos of the Trump Administration, what do you see as the more important areas of work for the activists of secularism and humanism?

Silverman: Well, first the good news. Donald Trump has unintentionally become perhaps the best fundraiser for atheist and humanist organizations. Many apatheists now realize the need to get involved politically and to promote our point of view instead of being demonized by the fake news coming from Trump. Just as evangelicals have recently apologized for their support of slavery and segregation, I predict that one day evangelicals will apologize for their support of the "Christian" Donald Trump. In the meantime, join and support organizations that promote our issues and are fighting to keep our secular democracy from turning into a theocracy.

Jacobsen: How can people become involved through the donation of time, the addition of membership, links to professional and personal networks, giving monetarily, exposure in interviews or writing articles, and so on?

Silverman: Start locally, and then think about becoming active nationally. Join a group if one is near you or perhaps start a local group. Check the Internet for national organizations that support forming local groups. Do what feels right for you and what makes you feel good. It could be coming out of the closet as an atheist or humanist, writing letters to the editor, enlighten people who assume we are all Christians living in a Christian country. Also, consider running for public office (not necessarily for governor). For all the faults of the Christian Coalition, they had a good strategy of taking over local offices and school boards. We even chose the name *Secular*

Coalition in opposition to the Christian Coalition. If you can, donate to organizations you admire. There is an expression "Give until it hurts," which is better modified to "Give until it feels good." This usually means giving to organizations that do good and where you know your money will make a difference. That's why I feel good about my largest donation going to the Secular Coalition for America.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts based on the conversation today?

Silverman: I'm cautiously optimistic about the future because the largest growing demographic are the "nones," those who don't identify with any religion. They are disproportionately large among young people. My goal as an old fart (76) is to help pave the way for younger people to increase the visibility of and respect for nontheists in our culture. To those who are less optimistic that their actions will make a difference, remember that if you do nothing, then nothing will change. Find something to do, and do it!

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Silverman.

Silverman: And thank you for the opportunity to spout off.



Article 2 Continued from President's Corner.

for Religious Freedom, a precursor to the establishment clause in the US Constitution, one of his greatest achievements. The "wall of separation" verbiage comes from Thomas Jefferson, in his 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association. "I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act (Amendment 1) of

the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State."

James Madison knew that religion was freer without government interference, opining that, "Religion flourishes in greater purity, without than with the aid of government."

South Carolina's own Constitution signatory Charles Pinckney argued to prevent religion as a test for eligibility for office.

The founding fathers' writings are important, but the Constitution speaks for itself. Supreme Court rulings over time have, of course, affirmed the founders' beliefs in the wall of separation which they enshrined in the Bill of Rights.

In 1947, the Supreme Court opined, "The First Amendment has erected a wall between church and state. That wall must be kept high and impregnable." (Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing). A ruling the following year emphasized the particular importance of the separation when it came to public schools: "No activity of the State is it more vital to keep out divisive forces than in its schools, to avoid confusing, not to say fusing, what the Constitution sought to keep strictly apart." (McCollum v. Board of Education, 1948).

In the next decade's *Zorach v. Clauson* (1954) case, SCOTUS was forceful. "There cannot be the slightest doubt that the First Amendment reflects the philosophy that Church and State should be separated. And so far as interference with the "free exercise" of religion and an "establishment" of religion are concerned, the separation must be complete and unequivocal. The First Amendment within the scope of its coverage permits no exception; the prohibition is absolute."

The Supreme Court ruling *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971) resulted in a three-prong Establishment clause test. Laws are Constitutional if they have a primarily secular purpose, do not aid or inhibit religion, and do not excessively entangle government and religion. 1980's *Stone v. Graham* ruling used the *Lemon* test to find that a Ten Commandments display in public schools violated the Constitution.

An Alabama case, *Wallace v. Jaffree* (1985), advanced to the Supreme Court, ruled that a period of silence for "meditation or voluntary prayer" was unconstitutional because it used the word

prayer, a government endorsement of a religious practice.

Our founders, understanding the devastating effect that governmental meddling can have on religion and vice-versa, were brilliant in their forethought. Thoughtful religious leaders of many sects applaud the first amendment, since US Supreme Court rulings have protected religious practices.

For example, *Cantwell v. Connecticut* (1940) affirmed that governments could not require permits for religious people to exercise their first amendment rights. School-day religious exercises in public schools are disallowed, ensuring that parents, not schools, can direct their children's religious education. After school clubs can include religious clubs as long as no particular religious (or non-religious) clubs are excluded.

While your own religion is in the majority, it may seem that state-sponsored religion is a good idea. I think you might, however, find that it's not as palatable when a different religious group holds the majority. Laws separating church and state are for everyone's protection.

Sincerely,

Bonnie F. Cleaveland, PhD
President, Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry
PO Box 32256 Charleston, SC 29417
president@lowcountryhumanists.org



Editor's note: The leading edge reflects the writings of freethinkers. Rather than ask for submissions we will be reviewing various local social media to be included each month on this designated page in the Separationist. Suggested writings are welcome. Please send letters or articles to newsletter@lowcountrynewsletter.org .

Reason Without Borders

Articles and Opinions Beyond the SHL Community

Lawsuit Claims Discrimination by Foster Agency

NYT Article
The Associated Press
Feb. 15, 2019

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A Catholic mother accuses a federally funded South Carolina foster agency of not working with her because she's "not the right kind of Christian," her lawyers say.

In a federal lawsuit filed Friday, Aimee Maddonna and her lawyers say Miracle Hill Ministries is unconstitutionally discriminating against non-Protestants. The lawsuit challenges a waiver granted this year to the Greenville agency, which previously has come under fire for denying services to same-sex couples and non-Christian families.

Last year, South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster requested a waiver exempting the state from an Obama-era regulation preventing publicly licensed and funded foster care agencies from servicing specific religions. That request was granted last month.

But years before Miracle Hill's actions toward non-Christians became an issue, Maddonna says the agency first encouraged her to become a foster parent but then cut off ties when they realized the Simpsonville mother is Catholic and not a "born-again" Protestant, as the agency's rules require.

Maddonna first reached out to Miracle Hill in 2014, when the mother of three decided that it was time to welcome more children into her home. Maddonna, who grew up in a household full of foster children,

many with special needs, told The Associated Press in an exclusive interview she wanted her children to be able to develop the same foster sibling bonds she had.

"I wanted to open up my family and my home to kids in need," Maddonna said. "I have the view that every child has the ability to enrich the lives of adults around them, too."

For weeks, Maddonna says conversations continued with Miracle Hill officials, who set up a final interview before she was to be approved as a foster parent. In a conversation ahead of that meeting, Maddonna says she was asked to give the name of her church.

"By the name, you can tell it's a Catholic parish," Maddonna said. She says the Miracle Hill representative "immediately responded back with, 'I'm sorry, we only employ volunteers and mentors who are Protestant Christian.'"

"I've never considered myself a religious minority until that moment," Maddonna said. "I had to tell my kids that, because we're Catholic, we can't take these kids out for ice cream and cheer them on at their games. I was devastated"

**Shared by:
Sharon Fratrepietro**



FEBRUARY 16, 2019

This is a guest post by Andrew Seidel. He is an attorney for the Freedom From Religion Foundation and his first book, *The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism is Un-American* will be released in May.

...Christian nationalists are always looking for ways to use our public schools to promote their warped, revisionist version of U.S. history. Myths like Christianity and the Bible playing a central role at the Constitutional Convention (nope, and it didn't include a formal prayer either), like George Washington praying in the snow at Valley Forge (he didn't), or the Ten Commandments forming the basis of our laws (not even close). Oklahoma State Senator David Bullard (below) is wading into those dissembling waters with a new bill, SB 572, which encourages history teachers to "discuss the role of religion, including but not limited to Christianity and the Bible, while discussing the foundational documents and principles of the United States." Bullard especially wants direct quotes from the founding fathers, including "Noah Webster, Joseph Story and John Adams."

We all know where this is going. Bullard is seeking to use the machinery of the state to promote Christian nationalism and its bad history. He wants public school history classes in Oklahoma to be live versions of Hobby Lobby's wildly misleading July 4 ads.

The bill is flawed from the start, if only because it fails to understand that most scholars do not consider

Webster and Story to be “Founding Fathers” — they weren’t part of the Continental Congresses or Constitutional Convention, and Webster never held a national office. Story was born three years after the colonies declared independence and was only ten years old when the Constitution was written.

Story did go on to become a Supreme Court justice and no doubt Bullard wants teachers to repeat this Story quote: “I verily believe Christianity necessary to the support of civil society.” That line comes from a private letter, but in his public writings — the first definitive legal commentaries on the Constitution — Story explained that the U.S. Constitution “cut off for ever every pretence of any alliance between church and state in the national government.” Does Bullard want that taught, too?

Back when Bullard was just a history teacher running for office, one puff piece said Bullard “has spent many years studying the Christian and Constitutional heritage of our country and researching the words of the founding generation on that subject.” “Studied” must be a euphemism because any fair, unbiased, or scholarly survey of America’s founding makes it clear that religion played little role. (I’m actually surprised the Freedom From Religion Foundation, where I work as an attorney, never got a complaint about Bullard.) The Ten Commandments, the Bible, and Judeo-Christian principles did not positively influence America’s founding, our government, or our Constitution. Instead, the founders chose to keep state and church separate. The “wall of separation” between state and church is an American original. The idea was floating around in the Enlightenment, but it was first implemented in the American Experiment. It’s right there in the first words of our Constitution: “We the people.” Those words are poetic, but also declare that power comes from people, not gods. That was revolutionary. America invented the separation of state and church, and we ought to be proud of that fact.

American pride should demand the death of SB 572.

We don’t need Christian nationalist lies and myths muddying up our nation’s history or our civic pride. The truth is more than enough

Coalition for America
<Casey@secular.org>

Sent: Tuesday, February 19, 2019
10:48 AM



Reasonable Humor

Quips and Cartoons offered by membership from online sources



Charity of the Quarter



“Fresh Future Farm leverages unused city assets to create food and job opportunities that will transform the current food desert into a more self-reliant and robust community.” “Established in late 2014 on a vacant North Charleston, SC lot, Fresh Future Farm sows healthy food to harvest community and independence. Food access is an \$11 billion business in South Carolina and a comprehensive way to bring green jobs to blighted communities.” They have a store in a food desert in N. CHS, providing fresh produce to underserved neighborhoods.

Please help SHL make a difference: Contributions can be made at the Monthly Gathering at Gage Hall or contact our SHL Treasurer: Garrett Gehlhausen at treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org .



MARCH



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2 SHL MUSIC NIGHT
3	4	5	6	7	8 International Women's Day	9
10 Daylight Savings	11	12	13 SHL Happy Hour 	14	15	16
17 SHL Gathering TBA	18	19	20 Full Moon Spring	21	22	23
24 SHL Book Group 	25	26	27	28	29	30/31

SHL Board for 2018-2019

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Steffi Green, Vice President
Garrett Gehlhausen, Treasurer
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00 00 00
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SECULAR HUMANISTS



OF THE
LOWCOUNTRY

Contact us!

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president@lowcountryhumanists.org

SHL is a non-prophet
organization

Staying Connected

You can find us all over the internet, we're (nearly) omnipresent.

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Meetup: <https://www.meetup.com/owcountryhumanists/>

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Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

a *non-prophet* organization