

SECULAR
HUMANISTS



The Separationist



Midsummer 2020 Special

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.

Contact to the newsletter editors is currently unavailable. Stay tuned.

President's Corner

07/11/2020

Context and the Harpers Letter

An open letter in *Harper's Magazine*, signed by writers, journalists, scholars, and educators on the left and right, argues that cancel culture has gotten out of hand. Of "wider calls for greater equality..." the essay argues that "...this needed reckoning has also intensified a new set of moral attitudes and political commitments that tend to weaken our norms of open debate and toleration of differences in favor of ideological conformity."

The letter's argument against intolerance on "both sides" recalls President Trump's insistence that there were fine people on both sides of the deadly August 2017 Charlottesville white supremacist rally and its counter-protesters. The Harpers letter decries calls for "swift and severe retribution." But aren't even unreasonable calls for consequences allowable in our society? Can't we disagree with calls to "lock her up," referencing the never-charged Hillary Clinton, while supporting the crowd's right to chant it?

Vox's Emily VanDerWerff, a trans woman, argues that the letter includes "dog whistles toward anti-trans positions." On its face, there's nothing in the letter about trans people. The anti-trans dogwhistles to which VanDerWerff alludes aren't obvious to me. That doesn't, however, mean they don't exist. If we're debating in good faith in order to advance society's understanding of complex issues, why would anyone argue the letter isn't offensive to transgender people - without first making a real effort to understand that same position?

Context is so often essential in understanding offensive speech, and we'll miss context sometimes, given our motivations and experiences or lack thereof. "All Lives Matter" isn't at all inflammatory without the context in which it originated - a widespread awakening of our culture to police violence against black people, and the "Black Lives Matter" movement that preceded it. White people darkening their skin for Halloween isn't repugnant in itself, without the context of minstrelsy and white supremacy.

When I was a child, my extended family was watching a boxing match between a white boxer and a black boxer. I wondered aloud why they referred to the boxers by their shorts color rather than their skin color. My family explained that it would be racist to refer to the boxers by skin color. I objected, probably saying it was dumb, but it stuck with me. Over time, as I learned the history of race in America, I finally understood.

Context is essential. We have to debate, but, more importantly, we must listen to each other. We need to have honest and specific discussions about what kinds of disagreements are simply disagreements, and which kinds merit consequences - whether from the government, employers or the wider culture. Is hate speech acceptable? What, exactly, constitutes hate speech? Do employers have the right to fire employees for statements that might harm their business reputation? Is it intolerant to boycott businesses when you disagree with their political positions?

Our brains' natural confirmation bias glitch makes it ever-so-easy, even when presented with opposing information, to continue believing what we already believe. Understanding full intent and context requires both critical thinking and a purposeful search for our opponent's perspective and arguments. One in our society's current information silos, one can be effortlessly ignorant of the context making "All Lives Matter" intolerant.

If we truly want open dialogue, both those calling out intolerance, and those who are accused of intolerance must be heard. The *Harpers* letter calls out people who punish others for their (intolerant) viewpoints, but it misses calling out people who are defensive when told they harm others.

The context of the Harpers letter is a global pandemic disproportionately affecting black and

brown people and widespread protests against police murders of black people. Is that really the time to publish a letter whining about (usually powerful) people suffering the consequences of their bad behavior?

Read the *Harpers* Letter: <https://harpers.org/a-letter-on-justice-and-open-debate/>
Vanderwerff: <https://twitter.com/emilyvdw/status/1280580388495097856/photo/1>

Bonnie Cleaveland
President, Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry
president@lowcountryhumanists.org

Want to fight creeping Christian Nationalism?

Join and donate to organizations that defend the First Amendment.

American Humanist Association	https://americanhumanist.org
Secular Coalition for America	https://secular.org
Freedom from Religion Foundation	https://ffrf.org
Satanic Temple	https://thesatanictemple.com
Americans United for the Separation of Church and State	https://www.au.org
American Civil Liberties Union	https://www.aclu.org
Center for Inquiry	https://centerforinquiry.org

Interested in reviewing information and videos from the

FFRF National Convention?

Click Here!



You can make a difference.



Get Involved

Keep Informed

Join or Donate

United States **Take The**
SECULAR SURVEY **Survey**

STAND UP AND BE COUNTED IN THE LARGEST SURVEY OF SECULAR AMERICANS!

The U.S. Secular Survey is now open!

RAISE YOUR VOICE. TELL YOUR STORY. CLAIM YOUR POWER.

SHAPE THE FUTURE OF SECULARISM. MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD.

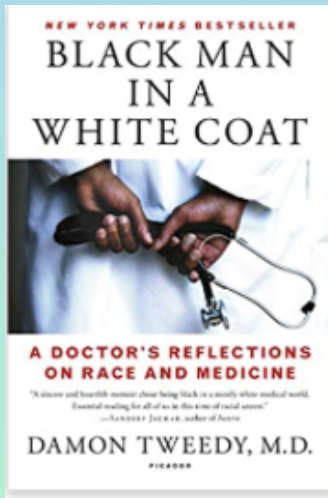
DON'T SIT ON THE SIDELINES. GET IN THE GAME.

SHL Main Events

Activities and Events Past and Future

A Midsummer Book Group

Book Group is taking the month of July off, but the following book will be reviewed on August 30 as a Zoom event. Hope you enjoy the book and look forward to seeing you.



***Black Man in a White Coat* by Dr. Damon Tweedy (2016) pgs. 304.**

A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER · ONE OF TIME MAGAZINE'S TOP TEN NONFICTION BOOKS OF THE YEAR. A LIBRARY JOURNAL BEST BOOK SELECTION AND A BOOKLIST EDITORS' CHOICE BOOK SELECTION.

"In this fascinating, heartbreaking memoir, Tweedy documents his experiences as an African American doctor in a medical system that can be 'just as sick as its patients.'" *O. The Oprah Magazine*

Observing protocols for our pandemic Book Group, we will be using Zoom online for the foreseeable future. Join us at 4:00 on August 23rd. Details will be announced by email and Facebook as the event draws near.

FOR CONSIDERATION FOR FUTURE BOOK CLUB MEETINGS:

Leaving the Witness: Exiting a Religion and Finding a Life by Amber Scoria (2019)

Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present by Frank M. Snowden (2019)

Lifespan: Why We Age and Why We Don't Have To by David A Sinclair, PhD, with Matthew D. LaPlante (2019)

Until the End of Time: Mind, Matter, and Our Search for Meaning in an Evolving Universe by Brian Greene (2020)

The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life by David Brooks (2019)

The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism by Katherine Stewart (2020)

Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States by Andrew L. Whitehead (2020)

If you shop at Amazon, go to Amazon Smile to make SHL your charity (<https://bit.ly/SHLamazon>), and 0.5% of the purchase price is donated to your favorite local humanist organization!

The Leading Edge of Reason

Contributions from our Community of Free Thinkers

The following is an article from the Freethought Society News. For further reading you can open the Freethought Society News at the following link.
<https://www.ftsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/July-August-2020-Ezine-web.pdf>

Healthcare and End-of-Life Choices

by Herb Silverman

“If God had decreed from all eternity that a certain person should die of smallpox, it would be a frightful sin to avoid and annul that decree by the trick of vaccination.” So said **Timothy Dwight**, president of Yale University from 1795 to 1817. He was speaking passionately against **Edward Jenner’s** new medical invention called vaccination.

It was not then a particularly extremist view. Vaccination and inoculation, though highly successful, were denounced by many religious leaders. Today, during the pandemic, religious fundamentalists will not say that God changed His mind and no longer condemns medical interventions that can save lives. Most, but not all, will simply find interpretations of their holy book that oppose those of previous generations. It isn’t hard to do. You just focus on one particular passage and ignore a contradictory passage.

There are religious reasons to decline a vaccine, there are valid reasons to decline a vaccine, but there are no valid religious reasons to decline a vaccine. I think an adult should have maximum decision-making freedom on issues that involve him or her alone. However, since most viruses are contagious, ethical considerations demand taking into account how declining a vaccine may affect others. This includes COVID-19, should a legitimate vaccine be found.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, it makes sense to discuss how to decide who gets what kind of healthcare. We generally accept that people with more money can afford more things. I don’t have a problem with this, except when we treat a necessity like quality healthcare as if it were just a consumer product. I wish all Americans would recognize the need to make healthcare both a moral and financial priority.

I stand with progressive people of faith who want to expand healthcare coverage, though I don’t need biblical

justification. If I did, I could quote from the Genesis 4 myth. After Cain murders Abel, (interestingly, the first murder in The Holy Bible follows the first religious act), God asks Cain where Abel is. Cain resorts to the familiar tactic of answering a question with a question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

God did not respond to Cain, but had I been God I would have said, “Damn right you are your brother’s keeper. That’s an integral part of my post-garden healthcare plan.”

I feel the same about separation of church and healthcare as I do about separation of church and state. People have the right to follow the god of their choice, and denominations have the right to make rules for their flocks. A religion need not accept government funds, but any money a religion receives from our secular government should only be used for secular purposes.

Under current law, people may have some “spiritual care” covered by Medicare and Medicaid, including Christian Scientists who are prayed for when they are sick. Numerous children have died while receiving this “spiritual care” when modern science could easily have saved their lives. Placing the government stamp of approval on non-scientific practices such as “spiritual care” risks lives.

Society has a special duty to protect children from abuse and physical harm, without regard to religious motivation. If a child dies from a burst appendix because parents neglected to seek effective medical care, it makes no difference to me whether the parents preferred instead to pray or watch television. I don’t doubt the sincerity and concerns of most religious parents. However, abuse by any other name is still abuse, and that includes incurring illness that could have been avoided by a vaccine.

For financial reasons, some secular hospitals have merged with church-affiliated hospitals. If they don’t publicize what they offer (or, more likely, what they don’t offer), patients probably won’t know. I’d like to see truth in advertising where all hospitals are required to prominently display what religious restrictions they place on healthcare. Perhaps we would see signs like: “We are more likely to pray over you than give you a blood transfusion.” or “Exorcism is among our psychiatric services” or “Our sexual advice to couples comes from celibate priests.”

Given the limited amount of money our government is willing to spend on healthcare, I think we need to stop devoting so much of our resources to the last few months of life. Regardless of age, if a very ill person has a chance to recover and live a life with quality, then by all means go for it. Yet many people never have the opportunity to become old because they lacked the financial means to obtain adequate healthcare. If a re-allocation of resources

can transform a few expensive brain dead weeks into a combined hundred years for others, I would call it “rational rationing.” If it is clear there is no hope for recovery, we should put no more public money into it.

A few years ago, there was a license plate war in my home state of South Carolina. The legislature wanted to authorize our Department of Motor Vehicles to distribute, at no additional cost, license plates with the anti-abortion motto “Choose Life.” When Planned Parenthood objected, a state representative from my county suggested that Planned Parenthood sponsor a “Choose Death” plate. Though not what the legislator intended, choosing death can sometimes be a good idea when it comes to end-of-life decisions.

Some religious fundamentalists use biblical justification to condemn those who don’t use all possible scientific technology to extend the lives of sick people who never will, regain any quality of life. Such views didn’t exist 1,000 years ago, when most believed that the terminally ill were in “God’s hands.” With scientific breakthroughs the terminally ill are often in technology’s hands. It’s up to humans to decide the extent to which that technology should be used. For me, regardless of age, the bottom line is about quality of life, not just length of life.

Patients and their families who seek information about end-of-life care should certainly be provided with available options so they can make informed decisions. But I would also like doctors to make this information routinely available, whether requested or not. Some patients are ignorant or afraid to bring up these kinds of unpleasant matters. Contrary to the cliché, ignorance is not bliss in this case.

The time to start planning for end-of-life care is now. Advance planning involves making thoughtful choices, putting them into a written advance directive and discussing those choices with others. Such choices are not just for the elderly, because we don’t know when our time might be up. Actions taken now can preserve autonomy and dignity later.

Medical aid in dying empowers terminally-ill patients with the choice to die on their own terms, at the time and place of their choosing, and in accordance with their conscience and beliefs. Seven states (California, Colorado, Hawaii, Montana, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington) and the District of Columbia have authorized medical aid in dying: the ability for a terminally ill, medically competent adult to request and receive prescription medication to bring about a peaceful death. An excellent resource for information and documents to help in end-of-life planning is available at the organization [Compassion & Choices](http://www.compassionandchoices.org/end-of-life-planning). Below is a link to the website: www.compassionandchoices.org/end-of-life-planning

I certainly wish more states had such provisions, but I have a problem with one feature. I think I would like to stay alive as long as I am able to communicate effectively, but if I develop some form of dementia like Alzheimer’s then I may be unable to request a peaceful death. I told my wife Sharon that if she won’t then kill me, she should hire a hit-man or a hit-woman who would. One sign to pull the plug on me would be if I said, “I believe in God!”

I know that COVID-19 is particularly hard on older people. I’m seventy-eight and Sharon is eight-two. Fortunately, we are both in good health. I also take comfort from this Mark Twain quote: “Do not complain about growing old. It is a privilege denied to many.”



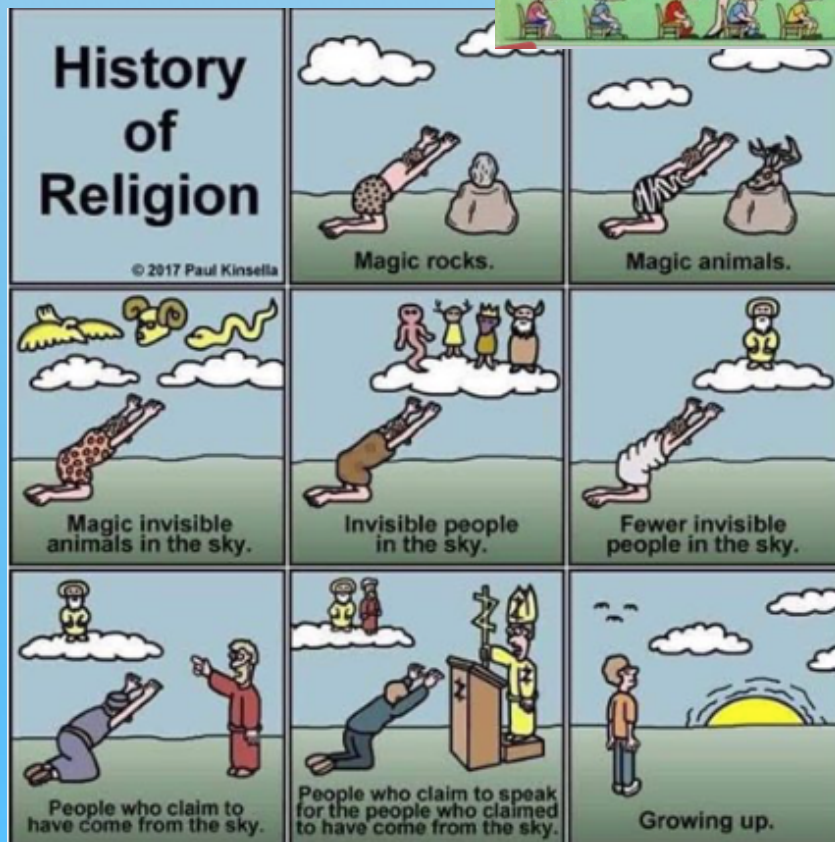
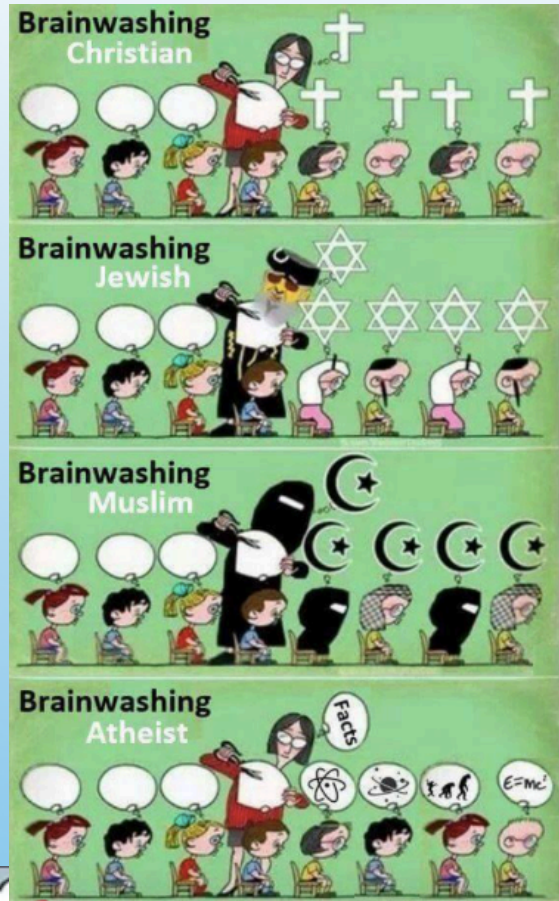
Herb Silverman is founder and president emeritus of the **Secular Coalition for America**; founder of the **Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry** in Charleston, South Carolina; and founder and former faculty advisor to the College of Charleston student Atheist/Humanist Alliance. Herb is also the author of two books, ***Candidate Without a Prayer*** and ***An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land***.



Editor’s note: The Leading Edge reflects the writings of our own SHL freethinkers. Currently the editors cannot be reached directly but suggested writings by membership will be looked for in our social media sites.

Reasonable Humor & Secular Wisdom

Quips and Cartoons offered by membership from online sources



The Gathering at Gage Hall

As usual, SHL will not hold regular summer meetings. However, look for more information for Friday evening Zoom events in your email or at the SHL Facebook and Meetup sites. Bonnie is asking for volunteers to host the Zoom meetings during the summer.

Voices Beyond SHL

Articles and Opinions Beyond Our SHL Community

The following is an article from the Freethought Society News. For further reading you can open the Freethought Society News at the following link.

<https://www.ftsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/July-August-2020-Ezine-web.pdf>

COVID-19 Virus Destroying the Jeffersonian Wall of Separation

by Margaret Downey

Since early Spring of 2020, violations of religion and government separation took place as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and resulting economic crisis. Below are two examples:

1. Religious Freedom

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, federal, state and local governments instituted social distancing mandates. The closing of nonessential businesses, schools, and other venues that normally attract large gatherings found houses of worship wrestling with the question of whether they close or claim “religious freedom” in order to stay open. Most religious congregations suspended services and many moved to digital communication. Some began offering services in parking lots. There were, however, churches that continued meeting as if there was not a pandemic, ignoring almost every Center for Disease Control (CDC) suggestion and government mandate. Those places of worship claimed that they operate solely under the First Amendment’s Free Exercise Clause. National nontheist organizations called for churches to be held to appropriate standards of safety for the public good. On March 20, the CDC confirmed that guidelines for reopening the country were loosened to accommodate places of worship. The CDC had originally included recommendations that large crowds should be avoided, no choirs should be conducted, books/hymnal sharing should be limited, no passing of collection plates and close contact during rituals should be restricted. This CDC change was obviously politically motivated to appeal to the religious community of voters.

2. Money Going to Religious Entities via The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act

When the Small Business Administration (SBA) announced that faith-based organizations were eligible to receive financial assistance under the CARES Act, including the Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loans, many in the nontheist community were shocked and dismayed. Hundreds of thousands of places of worship as well as many other faith-based organizations are now receiving federal funding! Previous to the COVID-19 crisis, religious organizations were restricted from receiving SBA business loans. Separation of religion and government suffered another blow due to the new SBA provision that allows loans to religious institutions. SBA justifies the decision by stating that the second clause of the First Amendment prohibits discrimination based on religious belief. Even the salaries of ministers and other staff engaged in the “religious mission” of the institutions can be covered under the grant, as well as rent, mortgage and debt payments. When federal funds are given to houses of worship they should automatically consent to a certain degree of government regulation. However, houses of worship are not required to file yearly paperwork with the IRS and the accountability of funding is sorely lacking.

The above separation violations are just a few samples of what needs to be protested. The Freethought Society (FS) is working with other nontheist groups to counter violations of the separation of religion and government by promoting and using established computerized action alerts. Groups larger than FS have developed and maintain databases that enable instant connections to local, state and federal legislators. FS does not have a large enough budget to provide an action alert program. Consequently, FS urges all readers to sign up to receive action alerts and become online activists through the following groups: [American Atheists](#), [American Humanist Association](#), [Center for Inquiry](#), and [Freedom From Religion Foundation](#). Someday FS will have an action alert system in place, but until then, please make your voices heard by signing up via the hotlinks we have provided.



The following article is from the June issue of **Secular Seasons**. For those interested here is the webpage address.

<https://secularseasons.org>

Chevalier de la Barre Day

July 1

Mainly a French observance, Chevalier de la Barre Day is a day that can be celebrated by anyone who opposes religious oppression. The annual commemoration marks the execution of the Chevalier de la Barre for impiety on July 1, 1766.

Jean-Francois de la Barre (known as the "Chevalier de la Barre", because he held the formal title of Chevalier or "knight") became a symbol of religious injustice after being tortured and killed for impiety, including the possession of banned books by Voltaire. Voltaire, one of the most famous writers of his day and a leading critic of the Catholic Church, helped make the case of the Chevalier De La Barre into a cause célèbre. Voltaire was especially haunted by 'this sentence so execrable, and at the same time so absurd, which is an eternal disgrace to France', because a key piece of evidence used against La Barre was his possession of Voltaire's "Philosophical Dictionary".

La Barre and two others were accused of defacing a crucifix in the French town of Abbeville. There were no eye witnesses to the act, but after constant and continued harassment by clergy, churchgoers remember three youths who had not removed their hats when a Catholic procession passed by. At this time religion controlled all aspects of people's lives. The fear of excommunication was far too great, so people identified the three young men who were viewed as anticlerical. Once the charges were put forth by the courts, one of the youths fled to Holland, and one was only 15 and simply fined; only the 19 year old La Barre remained. When a search of his home

revealed three forbidden books, including Voltaire's "Philosophical Dictionary," the courts and the church had their ideal suspect. La Barre was tortured mercilessly, had his tongue cut out for the crime of singing lewd songs, was then decapitated, and eventually burned on a pyre along with his copy of Voltaire's "Philosophical Dictionary."

In 1905, a statue of Jean-Francois, Chevalier de la Barre was built in Montmartre, on the outskirts of Paris. It was removed in 1941 and melted down for munitions for the Nazi war effort – while statues of saints and kings were left intact.

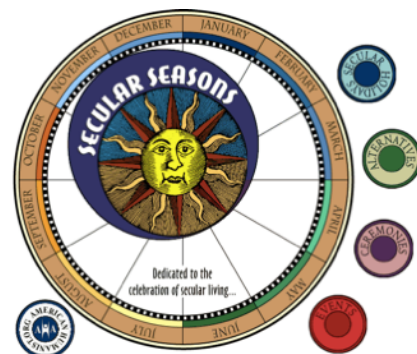
In France, Chevalier de la Barre Day often features demonstrations in his memory. Today, freethinkers in France and the West experience large amounts of freedom in their lives, but freethinkers are still tortured and killed for their beliefs in many other countries. Chevalier de la Barre Day is therefore a day to remember all those men and women persecuted by religion and to campaign for the rights of those still being persecuted today.



Indivisible Day - July 4

In addition to Independence Day, the state of Minnesota celebrates Indivisible Day in recognition of the importance of the separation of Church and State. Click on the title link for more information.

<https://secularseasons.org>



Editor's Note: Voices Beyond SHL is a section dedicated to reaching out beyond our SHL community.

DISTANT *but* **together**



A Virtual Celebration of Humanism American Humanist Association 2020 Conference

**#AHACon
2020
Register
Today!**

For complete
information
and registration
instructions
[Click Here](#)



**A Virtual Celebration of Humanism
August 8, 2020**

Each year, the American Humanist Association brings together humanists from across the country to celebrate the values of humanism at our Annual Conference. This year, in continuing to keep our movement connected and inspired, we are pleased to invite you to join us for an exciting virtual conference, Distant but Together: A Virtual Celebration of Humanism.

Although we can't all gather in the same place, humanists across the country will come together virtually on August 8th to hear from terrific humanist speakers who will explore the values and principles that undergird our community.

SHL's Charity of the Quarter

Community Resource Center, Summerville



Please help SHL make a difference:
 Contributions can be made at the SHL
 website: <https://lowcountryhumanists.org>

Midsummer

July 2020



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 Chevalier de la Barre Day	2	3 SHL Zoom Social	4 Independence Day
5	6	7	8	9	10 SHL Zoom Social	11
12	13	14	15	16	17 SHL Zoom Social	18
19	20	21	22	23	24 SHL Zoom Social	25
28 Next Book Group is Aug. 23	27	28	29	30	31	

SHL Board for 2019-2020

Bonnie Cleaveland, President
Steffi Green, Vice President
Beth Dillenkoffer, Treasurer
Member-at-Large, Tom Jhou
Member-at-Large, Joshua Pershin
Member-at-Large, Amy Monsky

Volunteer Coordinator, Laura Kasman
Newsletter Editors, John and Barbara Childs
Newsletter Proofreader, Sharon Fratepietro

SECULAR HUMANISTS



OF THE
LOWCOUNTRY

Contact us!

SHL
P.O. Box 32256
Charleston, SC 29417-2256
(843) 224-0421
president@lowcountryhumanists.org

SHL is a non-prophet
organization

Stay Connected

You can find us all over the Internet, we're (nearly) omnipresent.
Follow Us, Interact, and Share

 <https://lowcountryhumanists.org/contact/>

 [Meetup](#)

 [Facebook SHL Lounge](#)

 [Facebook Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry](#)

 [YouTube](#)

 [Twitter](#)

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry – a *Non-Prophet* organization