The 2019 Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Ohio Tree of Knowledge Displays

by Margaret Downey

The Freethought Society (FS) is proud to announce that *Tree of Knowledge* displays were put up in three different states during the 2019 winter holiday season. This article will highlight displays in Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Ohio.

In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania a 10-foot-high artificial pine *Tree of Knowledge* was placed in the lobby of the Philadelphia Ethical Society (PES) on Sunday, December 2, 2019. On the day of the installation, PES Leader Hugh Taft-Morales delivered a speech about the joy of serving others. His speech is reprinted and adapted as an article in this publication. After the Taft-Morales speech, the *Tree of Knowledge* was decorated and a holiday reception took place in the upstairs meeting hall.

I put up a temporary *Tree of Knowledge* display at the Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia’s Winter Solstice party. FS supporters Marjory Goldman, Zenos Frudakis and Greg White helped to decorate the wrought-iron decorative tree frame using double-sided laminated book cover ornaments and bright red bells that were made to look like apples.

The display included a snake coiled around the bottom of the frame to reflect the biblical story of Adam and Eve. The mythical account is that God placed Adam in the Garden to tend it but he warned Adam not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God supposedly said, “For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

The serpent tempts Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, but Eve conveys to the serpent what God said (Genesis 3:3). The serpent replies that she would not die if she eats the fruit of the tree. He persuades Eve to eat by saying, “Then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”

According to the Bible story, Eve ate the fruit and then gave it to Adam. He also ate. God, who was walking in the Garden of Eden, discovers the “sin.” To prevent Adam and Eve from eating the fruit of the Tree of Life and living forever, both Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden.

The serpent is punished for its role in the “fall from grace” when God changes the serpent into a snake to forever crawl on its belly and only eat dust.

I enjoy the opportunity to talk about this absurd Bible story with anyone who notices the snake at the base of a *Tree of Knowledge* display and inquires about its significance. Snake superstitions have flourished since ancient times as the creature seems mysterious and feared by many even though snakes are a valuable member of the Earth’s ecosystem.

On Monday, December 2, 2019, a white wire *Tree of Knowledge* was placed in the rotunda of the Rhode Island Statehouse by local members of the Freedom from Religion Foundation. The *Tree of Knowledge* was one of five secular displays in that location. The Rhode Island Humanist Book Club put up a sign featuring the quote by Rhode Island founder Roger Williams; “God requireth not an uniformity of religion to be enacted and enforced in any civil state.” The Humanists of Rhode Island displayed a sign stating “Tis the season to celebrate the birth of Roger Williams (born December 21, 1603) and separation of church and state.” The Rhode Island Skeptics displayed a sign proclaiming axial tilt as the reason for the season. The Rhode Island Atheists displayed a sign, strategically placed next to the *Tree of Knowledge*, featuring the Robert Green Ingersoll quote, “Give me the storm and tempest of thought and action, rather than the dead calm of
ignorance and faith. Banish me from Eden when you will; but first let me eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.”

Religious displays in the Statehouse rotunda included a menorah and three nativity scenes from around the world. Secular displays outnumbered religious ones for the second year in a row.

In Ohio, the Cleveland Humanist Alliance and Cleveland Freethinkers joined forces to celebrate Humanlight, the winter solstice and in general the winter holiday season. A potluck celebration took place at the River Grove Chestnut Shelter in Willoughby Hills, which is an eastern suburb of Cleveland. Leaders and members in both organizations helped to make the event a success.

Carlos Castells created a Secular Jeopardy Game for the celebration. Categories included Bible knowledge, famous secular thinkers, famous rock guitarists, and much more. Game questions included:

**Answer:** This book of the Bible condemns the eating of anything from the water that doesn’t have both fins and scales...

**Question:** What is Leviticus?

**Answer:** This famous atheist authored books such as *The Portable Atheist*, *The Missionary Position*, and *God is Not Great*

**Question:** Who is Christopher Hitchens?

Sharon Hogan organized a book exchange to go along with the placement of *Tree of Knowledge*. She placed books under and around the Tree. Attendees were asked to bring a secular-themed book to swap, with a note from the former owner about why they wanted to share the book. The book exchange was quite a success. Not everyone brought a book to exchange, but some people arrived with five books! All extra books were donated to local community libraries.

A raffle was conducted and many attendees donated prizes. Megan Denman donated a spa basket that contained homemade soap and sugar scrub. Lisa Mosham donated the children's book *Learning Moon*. Mosham wrote the book several years ago. *Learning Moon* is available through Amazon at the following link:


Castells and Hogan unexpectedly donated Cleveland Cavaliers basketball game tickets when they arrived at the event. The tickets became an addition to a gift basket that included wine, cheese and crackers. Suzy Wernet generously donated two beautiful bags she created for the raffle.

The Ohio event was made extra special with live musical performances. Mark Tiborsky played the guitar and the harmonica. Tiborsky also sang rock songs such as *No Sugar Tonight*, *New Mother Nature*, *Lonely People*, *Space Oddity*, and *People Got to Be Free*.

Castells added his voice to the impromptu band when they sang *Celluloid Heroes*, *Blue Christmas*, and *Imagine*. The music was familiar to many in the audience and some audience members were inspired to sing along.

Denman accompanied the musicians by playing the piano, but she also performed solo arrangements from the *Nutcracker Suite* and *A Charlie Brown’s Christmas*.

Pictured above is the 2019 Philadelphia Ethical Society (PES)/Freethought Society (FS) *Tree of Knowledge*. The 10-foot-high tree is in need of replacement as we approach the 10-year anniversary of displaying it at the Ethical Society Building, located at 1906 South Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In December of 2020, PES and FS will host an anniversary celebration. Please watch for details throughout the year. Tax-exempt *Tree of Knowledge* earmarked donations can be made online at:

https://www.ftsociety.org/donate/
Pictured left in front of the 2019 Philadelphia Tree of Knowledge are (left to right) Margaret Downey, Founder and President of the Freethought Society and Hugh Taft-Morales, the Leader of the Philadelphia Ethical Society (PES). The tree was situated in the PES lobby for one month during the Winter holiday season.

A new style of Tree of Knowledge created by the Freethought Society is pictured right. The lightweight iron frame is decorated with laminated book covers and bright red bells that resemble apples. This Tree of Knowledge can be easily transported. Standing next to the tree that was displayed at the Humanist Association of Greater Philadelphia’s Winter Solstice party are (left to right) Marjorie Goldman, Greg White, Downey and Zenos Frudakis.

The Tree of Knowledge pictured above was part of the 2019 holiday display at the Rhode Island Statehouse. The display featured a sign with the Robert Ingersoll quotation, “Give me the storm and tempest of thought and action, rather than the dead calm of ignorance and faith. Banish me from Eden when you will; but first let me eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.” Standing within the display is Rhode Island resident and Freethought Society supporter Tony Houston.

Pictured right is the 2019 Cleveland, Ohio 4-foot-high Tree of Knowledge created by Cleveland Humanist Alliance and Cleveland Freethinkers. It was displayed at the River Grove Chestnut Shelter in Willoughby Hills, Ohio.
I thank the Freethought Society (FS) and its founder and president Margaret Downey for bringing the Tree of Knowledge concept to the Philadelphia Ethical Society (PES) nine years ago. The Tree of Knowledge represents, in part, one of the greatest activities of the human species: the telling of stories. The book covers that are hung from the branches of the Tree of Knowledge are stories of many kinds, from biographies of famous people to slave narratives. There are stories about fights for freedom of conscience and battles for justice. Some are stories about our natural world and most importantly humanist creation stories about the transformation of insentient matter into conscious creatures who built civilizations and told stories.

These humanist stories of transformation and transcendence don’t involve supernatural beings or magical powers. They are stories uniquely and humbly human. In these narratives, human beings rely on their natural-given talents and show how we rely on each other. Both FS and PES share a commitment to doing good. We agree with what Robert Green Ingersoll, “The Great Agnostic,” once said: “The hands that help are far better than lips that pray.” In a world of suffering and need, it’s what we do that matters most. That’s why FS has a Helping Hands Committee that matches people in need with volunteers willing and happy to help.

In this article I’m going to explore some of the links between serving others and storytelling. Way back in high school, during each academic day, there was a 25-minute slot when every student had a small service job to complete, like cleaning chalkboards or sweeping hallways. I remember thinking that the point of that program was less about having a clean learning environment than it was to remind students of the importance of contributing to the common good.

When I became a young teacher and head of the Community Service Program at the Edmund Burke School, I assumed the same. Community service work was a means to instill in young people civic responsibility. There were some students who said it was rewarding. Some even continued on with their volunteering at the service site beyond the required 60 hours, but most students saw it as simply a requirement they checked off a community service list. I knew, however, that the community service projects they were involved in became a valuable part of their education.

The resistance of some students, their parents, and faculty members was challenging. They asked me, “Why do we have to do community service? What’s the point?”

It might have been wisest to give the simplest answer, “Because it’s the right thing to do.” But I didn’t do that. I tried to justify service as being a fundamental part of a child’s education. I said that if they acted altruistically now and then, if they focused on the good of others and not just a life exclusively dedicated to advancing their own self-interest, that it would be a more rewarding life for them. Personal sacrifice for others would, in the end, serve them well. I often used a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. that contains a lot of wisdom: “Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve.”

Every once in a while, a few of my more philosophically-minded students would ask, “If the purpose of service is to promote altruism, and altruism is about sacrifice, then is serving so as to live a rewarding life not real service? Aren’t I just using the need of others to make myself feel better?”

I began wondering about whether volunteering is simply a way to feel good about ourselves. How much credit should we give ourselves in a world of aching need and deep suffering for checking into our local soup kitchen for a few hours each month? Have I become involved in Ethical Humanism mainly because I want to feel that I am ethical? These kinds of questions can lead to paralyzing doubt.

To counter such paralysis, I’ll discuss three aspects of storytelling related to doing good: the importance of being heard; the art of listening; and how stories transform relationships. This transformation is a part of my commitment to serve others in need.

BEING HEARD

One under-appreciated way to serve others is to let them be heard. It counters what some people today call our epidemic of loneliness. In a world where social media crowds our life and where people are living in increasingly crowded environments, people feel more and more lonely. Even a century ago German sociologist Georg Simmel observed, “One nowhere feels as lonely and lost as in the metropolitan crowd.”

Mark Robinson, chief officer of Great Britain’s largest charity that works with older people, said that loneliness kills many seniors. He cited research about how loneliness is more deadly than smoking 15 cigarettes a day!

Great Britain is addressing this epidemic through the Ministry of State for Sport, Media and Creative Industries. When Theresa May was Prime Minister, she called the head of that government agency the “Minister for Loneliness.”

One nonprofit called “Sidewalk Talk” is addressing loneliness in over 50 cities in the United States. Its founder, therapist Traci Ruble, knew that many Americans were deeply lonely, so she set up chairs on sidewalks offering people a chance to be heard. Trained volunteers, she reports, help people feel more connected to life and more worthwhile.

Loneliness can particularly affect those on the margins. Many homeless men, women, and children feel abandoned by the world. Many unemployed feel as if no one cares. Those who are forcibly separated from their friends and loved ones, such as those who are in prisons and jails, often report feeling worthless. Isolation makes redemption harder. It blocks people from trying to get back on a positive track so they can contribute to society.

One organization that reaches out to incarcerated people is called “The Listener Scheme.” In one-on-one dialog, prisoners are heard, and this brings meaning to their lives.
This was clear to my friend Randy Best, the Leader of the Northern Virginia Ethical Society, who regularly visited Kwue Teague, an inmate in North Carolina, who claimed to be unjustly sentenced. Best, who worked with Teague to get the criminal justice system more open to humanist clergy serving inmates, said that Teague most appreciated just having someone to talk to.

Many inmates don’t have such a lifeline to the outside world. Their isolation contributes to a suicide rate that is four times as high for inmates as for those outside of prison. Even after release back into society, they can feel like outsiders, marked with a scarlet letter, denied social services and employment necessary to succeed. They fall back into addiction and crime and return to prison again.

To counter this, the interfaith organization I’m involved with, Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), offers a program called “Turnaround Tuesday.” One of Turnaround’s co-directors, Terrell Williams, knew firsthand how it felt to be isolated and alone. As an ex-offender, feeling branded by others as unreliable or untrustworthy, he struggled to finish his education and find employment. He succeeded once he began to tell his own story in a way that transformed it from one of mistakes and failure to one of persistence and success.

At weekly Turnaround meetings, attendees are taught that if they don’t tell their story then others will tell it for them in ways that don’t serve them. Williams offers ex-offenders an opportunity to grow beyond their suffering. He encourages them “to make your pain your purpose.” By sharing the pain of their struggles through personal narrative, Williams explains, they can reclaim their lives. He told them that, “You can’t really hide your past mistakes, because your record follows you into a job interview.” So, reclaim your narrative. Transform the past by linking it to a fresh start through storytelling.

At one Turnaround session I attended, everyone was asked, “If you were given two minutes to ‘tell your story, what would you say?’”

Those who hesitated, mumbling with their heads down, were coached how to craft a redemption tale they shared with enthusiasm and pride. Storytelling offers transformation and liberation to previously incarcerated people.

LISTENING WELL

Every storyteller, of course, needs people who listen well. Listening is not always easy. Many of us are too impatient, too focused on our next task to listen deeply to the words of others. I think I sometimes do that. I try to offer an answer rather than really listen deeply. Stephen Covey, author of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, wrote that “most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

Our caretakers sometimes fall prey to this. I remember when one of my children was very ill. I took him to a clinic. A new doctor, whom I did not know came in, looking down at his tablet. He said my child’s name, read out some notes that were accessed, asked some questions, and proceeded to type up our answers. All this was done without looking at me or my child. It was weird. When the doctor finally examined my child, I felt that we were almost a nuisance, preventing them from moving on to the next patient.

Listening is a skill that is only relatively recently being taught more and more in medical school, and in other lines of work.

“Active listening,” as it’s been called for a while in social work, is about being fully present to a client. It involves simple things like nodding, keeping eye contact, offering encouraging phrases, and then reflecting back what was heard. Active listening builds trust.

Social worker Patricia Smith emphasizes that a therapeutic relationship means “listening, really listening, to the person sitting in front of you.” She explains, “In today’s busy world of technology, doing more, and pressures to meet deadlines, a client’s need to be listened to is sometimes rushed.”

Active listening allows the speaker the confidence to know that it’s alright to vent, that the listener feels empathy for them, and someone really wants to understand how they feel. Most of all, the listener stops thinking “What is wrong with this person?” Perhaps the listener begins to think, “What happened to this person?” People who are in need, lonely, or scared are often somewhat healed when they are heard.

This is central to hospice work. Mike Providence, who manages a training service for hospice workers, said that, “the primary thing we’re looking for is people who are really good listeners. It’s the most critical skill for this type of work.”

Some of the most horrible stories I have heard about end-of-life situations is when the person dying feels that they are a burden on others. Some research has even shown that medical professionals may subconsciously spend less time on patients who are dying because they don’t want to be reminded of a case in which they feel they have failed.

More and more, however, medical professionals are accepting that dying is a part of life, an important part that they need to work with. A number of chaplains I know who work in hospitals tell me that their clients usually care little about what tradition their chaplain represents. What they really want is someone who listens when they speak, and just sits with them when they are silent. It shows they matter.

Jane Addams, a settlement house founder and one of my ethical inspirations, had to learn how to listen to people first rather than rushing to fix them or to judge them. One well-known example was a rumor that began to circulate in the working-class neighborhood of Chicago that a “devil baby” was born, complete with horns, a curse as a punishment for the misdeeds of the father of the child. Rather than mocking this seemingly irrational hysteria, rather than dismissing the “gawkers” who wanted to see this creature, she listened to them in order to understand this myth and the human need it answered. Addams said, “Whenever I heard the high eager voices of old women, I was irresistibly interested and left anything I might be doing in order to listen to them.”

A 2015 dissertation by Mike Jostedt at Southern Illinois University linked Addams to the work of philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, who distinguished three types of listening: listening-for, listening-to, and listening-with.

Listening-for is a very superficial type of listening in which one is almost simply “listening for my moment to speak.” Listening-for is merely a method to take center stage when circumstances permit. The egocentric nature of the listener dominates, and the speaker is hardly acknowledged. We do this all the time.
Listening-to, while at least bringing more fully into consciousness the existence of the speaker, still locates the speaker as an object out there, separate from, and independent of, the listener.

Listening-with, however, is a deeper form of listening, one in which the listener not only hears the speaker, but develops empathy with the speaker. It asks the listener to imagine being in the shoes of the storyteller. In the example of the “devil baby,” Addams tried to get inside the minds of those propagating this myth to understand why they were doing it. As Jostedt puts it, Addams “realized that the older women were using the story for a purpose. They were attempting to speak the truth of an old myth to expose their own suffering. Addams eventually came to listen-with these women as she saw herself caught up in the pain and struggle of their plight.”

This is a form of what Addams called “sympathetic knowledge.” Sympathetic knowledge is an understanding that grows through relationships and friendship. Addams claimed that “the only way of approach to any human problem” was to know one another better, and so understand the personal and social context that supports one’s perspective. This approach to learning animated the intellectual and social world Addams created. It helped build the foundation of Addams’ ethical philosophy, an early form of what is now known as the “ethics of care.”

The ethics of care theory draws lessons from actual relationships in social contexts and allows more subtlety, paradox, and exceptions to the rules. It honors for the richness of human experience, rather than forcing experience to fit into moral theories. Care ethics requires empathy and respect for the unique experience of others, things that are too often overlooked in our world. Deep listening requires compassion, empathy, and care for a shared life.

**HOW STORIES TRANSFORM RELATIONSHIPS**

This brings me to the final part of my article. I’ve discussed the importance of being heard. I’ve explored the challenge of listening deeply. I now want to emphasize the transformational process that occurs when someone gets to tell their story and another person really listens.

In my early experience with the community service program at Edmund Burke School, I focused most on my duty to the students involved and how the program might develop in them a sense of civic responsibility. I cared as well about those we served — the nonprofits and their clients. I didn’t want to use those in need as merely a means to nurture good citizens. What I had to learn more about was a deeper transformation.

What I began to appreciate more and more was that the sense of identity of those who serve and those who are served can become wrapped up in meaningful, ethical relationships. That their individuality can be complemented by becoming embedded in each other’s lives.

Addams learned this. She appreciated that when she built trust, insight, and a deeper relationship with those she served, that her identity shifted from being dominated by “me” to being enriched by “us.” Her autonomy was not threatened by relationship, but balanced by it. By being willing to be vulnerable and to open to others, she became more complete. This transformation fascinates me.

It fascinated me when I witnessed it in my children. I’ve spoken here a number of times of their participation in a program through the Washington Ethical Society, where young teens and adults did service work in El Salvador. As all good Ethical Culture work does, it started with relationships.

My youngest child, Justin, wrote in a college essay how his family heritage and life experience (which included travel to Mexico, Guatemala, and Nicaragua) prepared him for his experience in a small rural village in El Salvador called El Rodeo. He wrote about how the Washington Ethical Society (WES) trip was built on “community capacity building” and cultural solidarity. Rather than rushing down to El Salvador with a prepackaged service project developed in isolation, the WES group first got to know the local community. El Rodeo shared with them their history, their joy, and their pain, particularly the trauma caused by a civil war in the 1980s that killed 75,000 civilians.

The fact that United States policy contributed to the suffering was not lost on the delegation. Caught up in Cold War ideology and a commitment to capitalism over Salvadoran communities, our nation prolonged devastating civil strife that left residents with horrifying stories — stories of the massacre of entire towns, of 500-pound bombs that left craters in the landscape, of a make-shift hospital where amputations without anesthetic required nurses to muffle the patients’ screams. For those that survived the war, as Williams put it in describing the work faced by returning citizens, their purpose was their pain. By sharing their suffering, it transformed their story into one of resilience. By listening, the delegates became a part of the healing process. The relationship became a part of both.

In some ways for my children, listening was traumatic. They had to process this trauma during and after their trip. Both sides of the relationship — those from the United States and those from El Salvador — had to be vulnerable. The storytellers had to trust those who listened not to misuse their story, not to deny, deflect, or manipulate their story, and the listeners had to be vulnerable by listening with an open heart.

In the end, a deep bond was created between the WES delegates and their most generous and appreciative hosts. This was fundamental in developing a clearer vision of the needs, resources, and capacities of El Rodeo. The two groups settled on a project to make clean water regularly available to the residents of El Rodeo.

Such vulnerability was also a big part of the Humanist Service Corps trips, such as the one in which **Christian Hayden** was involved. I was intrigued how much Hayden spoke before he went about learning the local language. I believe he had a more intuitive understanding that for a service trip to be most fulfilling it must center on sharing, listening and hearing. Organized as part of the Foundation Beyond Belief, this trip to Tamale (toh-moh-lee) in northern Ghana brought young humanists to an area where many...
women were accused of witchcraft, ostracized, and isolated in refugee camps.

Maybe Hayden was attracted to this trip for the same reason he was attracted to Ethical Culture — both required partnership over paternalism and an openness to relationship building. Both involved not simply the willingness to observe another community in a foreign culture, but to be inside it. Both programs asked those who served (those with resources and power) to put themselves in the shoes of those they served.

When I think back to the conversations I had with my students, I realize that I was wrong to emphasize why service was valuable to them — how it helped them grow. But it was also incomplete only to emphasize the positive impact it had on the client, on those they helped. What is more profound is that when service involves the sharing of stories, the dynamic of volunteer and client, of giver and taker, fades into the background. The relationship and the connection bonds people together.

Today division and opposition seems to dominate our lives. As an Ethical Humanist, I see it as my job to emphasize connection, community, and relationship in all the work I do. One way to do this is to tell our story and to listen to the stories of others.

One of the deepest divisions is between those who have and those who have not. The chasm between a volunteer serving a client is exacerbated by a power differential. As one who is committed to a transformational philosophy of life, I have found that one way to bridge this divide is to listen — to listen especially to those who are silenced by poverty, oppression, and loneliness.

This type of communication is not always practical. Many of our volunteer opportunities do not include direct connection with those we serve. Making a monetary donation to a cause does not bring you into conversation with a needy citizen, but it brings you closer. It allows you at least to imagine a connection to broader and broader circles of humanity.

As an alternative to traditional religion, Ethical Culture does not offer connection with a divine realm. It is simpler and deeper than that. It brings you closer to being part of a species that embraces the brotherhood, sisterhood, and peoplehood of all humans. I urge you to carry this broad, idealistic vision with you wherever life takes you. I encourage you to let it enrich your relationships with all those you connect with, including those who serve you and those you serve. When you do help others in need, give them one of the greatest gifts: listen to their story.

Whether you’re supporting a young relative seeking your advice, listening to a service worker explain their need for a living wage, buying an edition of One Step Away from a reporter who happens to be homeless, or spending time with a home-bound person, open yourself to their story. It might transform both you and the storyteller, dissolving loneliness, growing connections, and nurturing the ethical community. As Ed Ericson puts it in The Humanist Way, what we hold out as an ideal before us is the chance to participate in “the oneness of humanity.”

Secular Week of Action

The Freethought Society (FS) is participating in the second annual Secular Week of Action taking place April 27 to May 4, 2020. The Secular Week of Action is a call to nontheist individuals and organizations across the United States to put secular values into community service projects. The intent is to highlight the fact that a national day of prayer is useless in comparison to the good works humans can actually accomplish.

In 2019, FS partnered with the organization Muslims Serve to work at the Hub of Hope located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. FS volunteers also conducted a Dr. Seuss-themed Senior BINGO game at the Pocopson Home, a state-run rehabilitation and elder care facility. Unfortunately, a planned 2019 road cleanup effort was cancelled due to a thunderous rainstorm.

FS is now looking for volunteers to participate in a variety of 2020 community service projects. Currently, there are two 2020 Secular Week of Action events as described below. Please watch for more event announcements at the FS Meetup page, website, Facebook page, and the FS Discussion Group. Please sign up as a volunteer by contacting the FS 2020 Secular Week of Action Coordinator, Margaret Downey, at: Margaret@FtSociety.org

Volunteer Opportunities

will help pack and sort donated food to prepare it for distribution. Of the people Philabundance serves, 30 percent are children and 16 percent are seniors. Others who seek food assistance include people with disabilities, single parents, veterans, students, and working-class families.

Check in starts at 6:00 PM. Orientation begins at 6:15. Volunteers could be packing canned goods, produce, meat, or helping with various warehouse tasks. Volunteers must be at least 16 years old. Volunteers must wear closed-toe shoes (no sandals or flip-flops allowed). Volunteers may be selected to pack/sort frozen meat or produce in the refrigerated area, therefore, please dress in layers and bring gloves.

May 3

FS is partnering with volunteers from Muslims Serve to feed the hungry and homeless on Sunday, May 3, 2020 at the Hub of Hope. Volunteers will meet at Dilworth Park Café & Air Grille, located at 15 North 15th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Volunteers will meet at the Café no later than 3:15 PM. We will then go to the Hub of Hope location, which is under the Municipal Building/Thomas Paine Plaza (1401 JFK Boulevard, Philadelphia). Along with serving dinner to guests, other volunteer activities include washing dishes, making food plates, setting up and breaking down tables, place settings, bussing tables, packing and distributing items, cleaning, recruiting more guests to eat, and lifting/pulling furniture. Bring your own apron if you desire. Wear comfortable clothing and shoes. FS shirts will be available to volunteers with an option to buy.

April 28

FS is partnering with members of the East Brandywine Baptist Church on Tuesday, April 28, 2020 at the Philabundance’s Hunger Relief Center, 3616 South Galloway Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Volunteers

FS is now looking for volunteers to participate in a variety of 2020 community service projects. Currently, there are two 2020 Secular Week of Action events as described below. Please watch for more event announcements at the FS Meetup page, website, Facebook page, and the FS Discussion Group. Please sign up as a volunteer by contacting the FS 2020 Secular Week of Action Coordinator, Margaret Downey, at: Margaret@FtSociety.org

Volunteer Opportunities

will help pack and sort donated food to prepare it for distribution. Of the people Philabundance serves, 30 percent are children and 16 percent are seniors. Others who seek food assistance include people with disabilities, single parents, veterans, students, and working-class families.

Check in starts at 6:00 PM. Orientation begins at 6:15. Volunteers could be packing canned goods, produce, meat, or helping with various warehouse tasks. Volunteers must be at least 16 years old. Volunteers must wear closed-toe shoes (no sandals or flip-flops allowed). Volunteers may be selected to pack/sort frozen meat or produce in the refrigerated area, therefore, please dress in layers and bring gloves.

May 3

FS is partnering with volunteers from Muslims Serve to feed the hungry and homeless on Sunday, May 3, 2020 at the Hub of Hope. Volunteers will meet at Dilworth Park Café & Air Grille, located at 15 North 15th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Volunteers will meet at the Café no later than 3:15 PM. We will then go to the Hub of Hope location, which is under the Municipal Building/Thomas Paine Plaza (1401 JFK Boulevard, Philadelphia). Along with serving dinner to guests, other volunteer activities include washing dishes, making food plates, setting up and breaking down tables, place settings, bussing tables, packing and distributing items, cleaning, recruiting more guests to eat, and lifting/pulling furniture. Bring your own apron if you desire. Wear comfortable clothing and shoes. FS shirts will be available to volunteers with an option to buy.

April 28

FS is partnering with members of the East Brandywine Baptist Church on Tuesday, April 28, 2020 at the Philabundance’s Hunger Relief Center, 3616 South Galloway Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Volunteers
During America’s early history, women were denied basic rights enjoyed by male citizens. For example, married women couldn’t own property and had no legal claim to money they might earn, and no woman had the right to vote. Women were expected to focus on motherhood and housework, not politics. In 1848, the movement for women’s rights was launched on a national level with the Seneca Falls Convention organized by Elisabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. More than 300 people attended, mostly women, but also some men, including former African-American slave, orator, author, and activist Frederick Douglass.

The Declaration of Sentiments, mainly authored by Stanton, was presented at the Seneca Falls Convention and paralleled the American Declaration of Independence, but with women included. It asserted that both men and women are endowed with unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Stanton explained how the government and a patriarchal society oppressed women. She called for women’s suffrage as well as participation and representation in the government. She also referred to women’s lack of property rights, and inequality in divorce law, education, and employment opportunities. The document insisted that women be full citizens, granted all the rights and privileges that are granted to men.

Following the Convention, the demand for the vote became a centerpiece of the women’s rights movement. Stanton and Mott, along with Susan B. Anthony and other activists, raised public awareness and lobbied the government to grant voting rights to women. In 1866, Stanton, Anthony, and several other suffragists drafted a universal suffrage petition demanding that the right to vote be given without consideration of sex or race. Thaddeus Stevens, a congressman from Pennsylvania and ardent abolitionist, agreed that voting rights should be universal and introduced the petition in the United States Congress. Despite these efforts, the 14th Amendment, which provided equal protection under the law and gave former slaves the right to vote, was passed in 1868 without an adjustment to allow women the right to vote.

The National Woman Suffrage Association was founded in 1869 by Anthony and Stanton, who served as its president for 21 years. They focused not only on female suffrage, but also on women’s broader rights like gender-neutral divorce laws, a woman’s right to refuse her husband sexually, increased economic opportunities for women, and the right of women to serve on juries. They were joined by Sojourner Truth, a former slave and feminist, as well as Matilda Joslyn Gage, who later helped Stanton write The Woman’s Bible.

Even though Anthony was an agnostic, she didn’t like Stanton’s open criticism of religion because she feared it would lose supporters for the suffragette movement. In particular, Anthony was displeased with Stanton’s publication of The Woman’s Bible. The book was justifiably critical of religion. In The Woman’s Bible, Stanton said, “The Bible and the church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the emancipation of women,” and “Surely the immutable laws of the universe can teach more impressive lessons than the holy books of all the religions on earth.”

Stanton also said, “I have endeavored to dissipate religious superstitions from the minds of women, and base their faith on science and reason, where I found for myself at last that peace and comfort I could never find in the Bible and the church.”

The National Woman Suffrage Association tried unsuccessfully to include women in the 15th Amendment, passed in 1870, prohibiting the government from denying a citizen the right to vote based on that citizen’s “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

With the hope that the United States Supreme Court would rule that women had a constitutional right to vote, suffragists made several attempts to vote in the early 1870s and then filed lawsuits when they were turned away. Anthony succeeded in voting in 1872 but was arrested for that act and found guilty in a widely publicized trial that gave the movement fresh momentum. After the Supreme Court ruled against them in 1875, suffragists began a decades-long campaign for an amendment to the United States Constitution that would enfranchise women.

Activist Alice Paul in 1917 established a group called the Silent Sentinels which began protesting outside President Woodrow Wilson’s White House. For more than two years they spent six days a week holding up signs including, “How long must women wait for liberty?” and “Mr. President, what will you do for woman suffrage?”

When policemen began arresting Silent Sentinels for obstructing traffic, Paul organized a hunger strike in prison. Finally, President Wilson became a supporter of the right for women to vote.

Senator Aaron A. Sargent, a friend of Anthony, introduced into Congress a women’s suffrage amendment in 1878 — the wording echoed the Declaration of Sentiments. More than forty years later it would become the 19th Amendment with no changes to its wording. Its text is identical to that of the 15th Amendment except that it prohibits the denial of suffrage because of sex rather than “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

The House and Senate passed the 19th Amendment in 1919, but it still needed three-fourths of the states (36) to approve. By March of the following year, a total of 35 states had approved the amendment, one state shy of the necessary three-fourths.

Southern states were adamantly opposed to approval of the Amendment. Giving women the right to vote seemed like
an expansion of the right to vote that had been “recently” (50 years prior) extended to blacks — a move the South had forcefully opposed. The South viewed the proposed constitutional amendment as an encroachment on states’ rights. Also, southern white men believed the role of women in public should be very limited.

Seven southern states (Alabama, Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina, Maryland, Mississippi, and Louisiana) had rejected the amendment before Tennessee’s vote on August 18, 1920. The outlook looked bleak for Tennessee’s voting to ratify the 19th Amendment. The state’s decision came down to 24-year-old Representative Harry T. Burn to cast the deciding vote. Although Burn opposed the amendment, his mother convinced him to approve it. Febb Ensminger Burn reportedly wrote to her son on the day of the vote: “Don’t forget to be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt put the ‘rat’ in ratification.” Carrie Chapman Catt, who campaigned for the 19th Amendment, served as president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and was founder of the League of Women Voters. Representative Burn later said, “I know that a mother’s advice is always safest for her boy to follow.” The 19th Amendment was finally ratified, 72 years after the Seneca Falls Convention promoting women’s rights and suffrage.

On November 2, 1920 more than 8 million women across the United States voted in elections for the first time. It took almost 64 years for the remaining 12 states to ratify the 19th Amendment.

My home state of South Carolina did not ratify it until 1969. While women began to vote in South Carolina in 1920, a new law prevented them from serving on juries until 1967. Mississippi was the last state to ratify the 19th Amendment, on March 22, 1984.

The Equal Right Amendment (ERA), which would prohibit all discrimination based on gender, received the necessary ratification in 38 states. Yet because of the length of time it took for ratification, is still being litigated to determine if the ERA Amendment should be added to the Constitution. The 12 states that failed to ratify the ERA Amendment, including my home state of South Carolina, are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Mississippi, Georgia, Utah, Florida, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Louisiana.

Women fighting for equality during the early part of the twentieth century focused on political equality. Yet to come were issues like workplace inequality, gender pay gap, sexual harassment, violence against women, and the #MeToo movement. Wifehood and motherhood are no longer regarded as women’s most significant professions.

Women now have more educational opportunities than ever before. Nurse and teacher (and maybe Catholic nun, if you consider that a profession) used to be pretty much the only professional positions open to women. In 1900, women earned only 19 percent of bachelor’s degrees. Since 1980, women have surpassed men in the number of bachelor’s degrees conferred annually in the United States.

American women have certainly come a long way in many aspects of life, but progress won does not mean the struggle is over. Workplace discrimination and limited political power are good examples of issues still in need of progress.

Marty Mann and Nellie Dixon are back for another irreverent, liberal, twisty, time-travel comedy!

Time Is Irreverent 2: Jesus Christ, Not Again! is thought-provoking satire that answers the question, “What would happen if Jesus time traveled to 2020 America?” Would today’s evangelical Christians accept a profanity-loving brown-skinned Jesus, who preached in favor of liberal values? Find out in this hilarious sequel to the Amazon #1 Best-Seller.

Buy the trade paperback at your favorite internet bookstore. Also available on Kindle and audiobook.
Since 1993, the Freethought Society’s (FS) Thomas Paine Memorial Committee (TPMC) has honored the life and legacy of Paine in many ways. TPMC has conducted educational and entertaining programs promoting the philosophy of freethought and the ideas of Thomas Paine. TPMC has received local, national and international recognition for its efforts.

In 2019, the FS board unanimously agreed that the Thomas Paine sculpture would be designed and created by the talented sculptor Zenos Frudakis after FS was named a benefactor in the will of Walter A. Schmitz (see: “The Thomas Paine Memorial Committee Receives a Financial Boost” article printed in the March/April 2017, Volume 8, Number 2 issue of The Freethought Society News). Frudakis is considered one of the top 25 sculptors in the world. He is a Pennsylvania resident and has been a supporter of FS for more than 5 years.

In addition to the Schmitz estate, money for the statue project has come to FS from The James Hervey Johnson Charitable Educational Trust, The Stiefel Freethought Foundation, and two other donors. Currently, the statue fund has reached $25,300. The estimated project cost is approximately $400,000. Washington, D.C. is the preferred site, but another ideal location would be in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Location research is ongoing and many possibilities are being considered.

A major project such as this requires the help and support of many individuals, and other groups in addition to FS. FS is anxious to work with people and organizations who value honoring the life and work of Thomas Paine.

Donation Form for a Thomas Paine Statue

Yes! I would like to donate to the project. Please process the following financial donation for:

Name (first and last): ____________________________________________________________________________________
Street Address: _________________________________________________________________________________________
City, State, and Zip Code: _________________________________________________________________________________
Phone Number: _____________________________Email Address: _______________________________________________

Note: Any donation amount is appreciated! Charge cards can be used at: FtSociety.org Gifts mentioned below are limited and will be mailed safely via USPS.

For a donation of $50 or more, receive ten Thomas Paine lapel pins.

For a donation of $100 or more, receive a CD of the writings of Thomas Paine, and ten Thomas Paine lapel pins.

For a donation of $200 or more, receive a CD of the writings of Thomas Paine, ten Thomas Paine lapel pins, and a color portrait of Thomas Paine suitable for framing.

For a donation of $300 or more, receive a CD of the writings of Thomas Paine, ten Thomas Paine lapel pins, a color portrait of Thomas Paine suitable for framing, and a Thomas Paine collectible book.

___I do not need a gift. I am donating the following amount to the Freethought Society’s Thomas Paine statue project: $___.

 Please mail donations by check, with form above to: The Freethought Society, P. O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366. Donations can be made online at: https://www.ftsociety.org/menu/thomas-paine-memorial-committee/
April 4
Please join Freethought Society (FS) founder and president Margaret Downey for a West Chester, Pennsylvania 3-D social event on Saturday, April 4, 2020. 3-D stands for “drinks,” “dinner,” and “dessert.” Those interested in meeting for drinks can look for an FS 3-D sign in the bar area of Kildare’s Irish Pub located at 18 West Gay Street, beginning at 5:00 PM. Individual cash and credit card payments are accepted at this location.

At 6:00 PM, the group will walk around the corner to the dinner location by 6:30 PM. The walking time is much shorter, but Downey will point out interesting items along the way. FS has dinner reservations at Mercato Italian Restaurant located at 33 Market Street. Prepare for individual cash or credit card payment.

After dinner (around 8:00 PM), the group will cross the street and walk one block to enjoy dessert at Gemelli, an artisanal gelato and dessert café. The address for Gemelli’s is 12 Market Street. Individual cash and credit card payments are accepted at this location.

The recommended place to park is Bicentennial Parking — a four-story structure located at 20 South High Street. Parking is inexpensive and convenient to all 3-D sites. RSVP required to attend the dinner as space is limited to 25 people. No limit on people or reservations needed for the drinks and dessert portions of this 3-D event. Reserve at the FS Meetup page. Reservations for this event can be found at: http://bit.ly/2QYHgkR

April 18
FS will participate in the 2020 International Spring Festival being held on Saturday, April 18, 2020. The one-day event will be held at the North Penn High School, 1340 South Valley Forge Road, Lansdale, Pennsylvania.

The FS table needs to be setup by 11:00 AM. Volunteers are needed for the task of preparing the table (at 9:30 AM) and to act as representatives of FS until the conclusion of the event at 5:00 PM.

FS volunteers will also be responsible for the clearing of the FS table. The cleanup process will take approximately 30 minutes. After the cleanup, volunteers will go to a Dutch treat dinner to exchange information about the experience and to celebrate a worthwhile endeavor. Contact FS at: volunteers@FtSociety.org

Please stop by this free and open-to-the-public event if you live in the area and plan to join the volunteers for dinner after the cleanup is done.

April 23
FS is pleased to host author and attorney Andrew L. Seidel on Thursday, April 23, 2020 at 7:00 PM. The free and open-to-the-public talk will take place in the Community Meeting Room of the Ludington Library. The Library is located at 5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. A SEPTA stop is conveniently located across the street from the Ludington Library.


Seidel is the Director of Strategic Response at the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF). When not fighting for the First Amendment with FFRF, Andrew writes for Slate, ThinkProgress, Religion News Service, Rewire News and many other publications.

Renowned constitutional scholar Erwin Chemerinsky described The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism is Un-American as “a beautifully written book” that “explodes a frequently expressed myth: that the United States was created as a Christian nation.”

Seidel’s book illustrates that not only is the United States not a Christian nation but Judeo-Christian principles are fundamentally opposed to the values on which America was founded. Religion, law, and history will collide in this provocative conversational-style presentation. Seidel will discuss his book and field questions.

May 6
FS is pleased to host award-winning author and USA Today columnist Tom Krattenmaker on Wednesday, May 6, 2020 at 7:00 PM. The free and open-to-the-public talk will take place in the Community Meeting Room of the Ludington Library. The Library is located at 5 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. A SEPTA stop is conveniently located across the street from the Ludington Library.

Krattenmaker’s speech, “A New Vision for Secular Transcendence,” will address how religion has faded from importance in contemporary life along with a sense of transcendence, which is traditionally understood as the experience of “rising above” the mundane, ordinary aspects of our lives. Krattenmaker will present his alternative vision for a secular, or horizontal, transcendence that does not depend on belief in a deity or supernatural ideas but, rather, on people’s connections to one another and to life on our imperiled planet.

As a columnist, Krattenmaker specializes in beliefs and values in public life. He is the author of three award-winning books: Onward Christian Athletes, The Evangelicals You Don’t Know, and, most recently, Confessions of a Secular Jesus Follower, which was named one of the top two religion books of 2016 by the Religion News Association.
The Freethought Society (FS) promotes freedom of thought, expression, and choice. FS also advocates separation of religion and government. FS publishes *The Freethought Society News* every other month. The publication is delivered as an ezine via email and is complimentary to supporters, donors, like-minded individuals and those who are interested in learning more about freedom of thought.

Monthly events take place in locations across the United States, with emphasis in the tristate area of Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey as well as Southern California. FS activities and services depend on financial contributions from supporters. Funds may be sent using this form or via the FS website ([www.FtSociety.org/donate/](http://www.FtSociety.org/donate/)). All contributions to FS are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law (Tax ID Number: 23-2738574). Please donate generously.

Yes! I would like to:

( ) become a supporter / renew support of FS (Please enclose checks payable to the Freethought Society):

- $30 Individual Supporter
- $40 Family Supporter
- $20 Student
- $1,000 Supporter for a Lifetime

( ) become a “Freethought Star” by setting up an automatic monthly donation to FS from my bank or through PayPal in the amount of (circle one): $5 $10 $15 $20 $25 $30 $35 $40 $45 $50 $55 $_____ other (per month)

( ) earmark a donation to (insert project, event or committee name): _____________________________________________

Name: ______________________________________________________________________________________________

Street Address: _______________________________________________________________________________________

City, State and Zip: ____________________________________________________________________________________

Email Address: _______________________________________________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ Cell: ___________________________

( ) Check here if you prefer your sponsorship to remain anonymous.

FS will send a complimentary ezine (or hard copy upon request) to potential supporters. Please provide contact information for anyone who might be interested in receiving an FS publication.

Name: ______________________________________________________________________________________________

Email: _____________________________________________________________________________________________

Mail this form to: Freethought Society, P.O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366
Scan and email this form to: Ezine@FtSociety.org

**Volunteer Opportunities Through the Freethought Society**

Supporters of the Freethought Society (FS) often want to do more than just donating money. Listed below are various committees organized by FS. The committees are designed to fulfill the mission, goals and vision of FS. We assist nontheists, educate the public about nontheism, and provide social opportunities where like-minded individuals can meet, socialize and share ideas. Please see the FS website or contact FS to volunteer at: volunteers@FtSociety.org.

**Anti-Discrimination Educational Committee**

*nonthesim explained in classroom settings*

**Anti-Discrimination Support Network**

*assist Secular Coalition for America gathering reports*

**Community Outreach**

*locate tabling opportunities*

**Diversity Outreach Committee**

*brainstorming about and developing programs to appeal to minorities*

**Free Speech Zone Committee**

*research and implement displays in public venues*

**Helping Hands**

*provides helpers to seniors in emergency situations*

**Jump into the Jean Pool**

*collection of jeans for the homeless*

**Meetup Committee**

*social events and improving online communications*

**Monthly Meeting Coordinators**

*schedule and manage speakers and venues*

**Secular Celebrations**

*develop, organize, and implement new nontheist celebrations*

**Speakers Bureau**

*provide FS a resume, photo and speech subjects/titles*

**Special Events**

*coordinate unique events of interest to nontheists*

**Sole Searching**

*collection of athletic shoes for donation to the homeless*

**Thomas Paine Memorial Committee**

*assist with assemblies, city proclamations, and work on themed events*

**Tree of Knowledge/Winter Display Committee**

*make ornaments, find venues, write articles, and support the Winter symbol concept nationwide*