

2007 May 1st
Volume 3, Issue 5

Manitoba Humanist

Published by
and for the
Humanist
Association of
Manitoba

President: Barrie
Webster

We're on the
Web!

See us at:

mb.humanists.ca

Contents:

HAC Governance Model	2
School Prayer	3
They Will Be Missed	5
Book Review	6

Reach the editor at:

ham_librarian@yahoo.ca

Editor: Donna L. Harris

Upcoming events

Humanist Association of Manitoba

Monthly Meeting May 12, 2007

Viscount Gort Hotel 1670 Portage Ave. at Route 90

Meet and Greet 5:30

Dinner (may be ordered from coffee shop menu) 6:00

Meeting 7:30

**Discussion Topic: Developing Strategies to Halt Prayer in
Manitoba Schools**

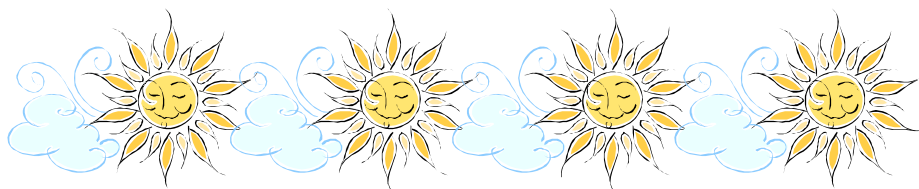
Chris Tait has been invited to attend as a resource person

Another Interesting Meeting!

Everyone is welcome

**Next Month:
June 2007**

June Solstice Party
Tentative Dates: June 16th or 23rd
More Details at the May Meeting



HAC Proposes a New Governance Model

The board of Canada's national humanist organization, the Humanist Association of Canada (HAC), has prepared an initial proposal for a Federation Model of governance.

This proposal was requested by the membership at HAC's 2006 Annual General Meeting.

The current draft model proposes that each Local Association would vote for a representative to send to an Area Council (AC). There would be seven Area Councils, divided approximately according to the population density of each area. The seven

councils would represent:

1. British Columbia
2. Alberta
3. Prairies (SK, MB, Yukon, NWT & Nunavut)
4. Metro Toronto
5. Ontario (excluding Toronto)
6. Quebec
7. Maritimes

Each Area Council would elect a representative from their area to sit on the National Council (NC). The members of the Executive Council (EC) would be appointed by the National Council.

The Area Councils would bring forward proposals for motions, policy suggestions, complaints or general Humanist issues to the NC representative in their area.

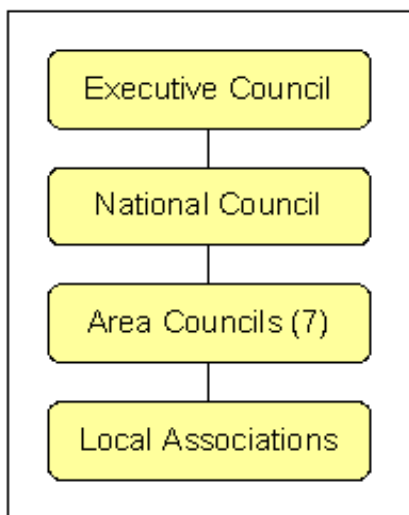
The National Council would represent their local associations in their role of formulating policy and setting objectives and directions for HAC and making motions regarding changes to by-laws and the constitution. The NC would also develop a Policy Paper which would serve as the working document that

the EC would use to implement policies. The role of the Executive Council would be to implement the policies set by the NC for HAC by communicating with the media and general public, as well as the general membership.

Since the Board released this draft, they have received a fair bit of feedback, which they will consider in the next draft model.

The preceding, of course, is just a brief overview of the proposal. As this is a fairly important issue for the membership to consider, it is hoped that you will read the entire proposal. The Federation model draft is available for download in MS Word format on the HAC website, at the following link <http://humanists.ca/news/?m=200704>. It may be a little difficult to find – you must scroll down four paragraphs to find the link to download.

Copies of the proposal will also be made available at the May general meeting.



Draft HAC Federation structure

School Prayer in Manitoba Schools

Imagine being forced to start your work day in a mandatory group prayer. Every day. Even if you don't believe, or if you believe in some other deity or deities. And you don't dare ask to be excused because you've seen how the other workers treat anyone who doesn't participate.

That's exactly what Manitoba used to do to all school children. The school day would start with everyone standing up beside their desk to sing 'O Canada' and/or 'God Save The Queen', then everyone would recite the Lord's Prayer.

At the April 14th HAM meeting, an appreciative audience listened to lawyer Chris Tait as he recounted the events that led up to his stand against school prayer. Or "sit down", if you will, since it was Chris's refusal to stand during the prayer that led to the school suspending him multiple times.

Chris was not alone in objecting to the prayer – which was piped throughout the entire school. Other students also signed a petition.

But Chris stood his ground, and the

Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties eventually took the case to the Manitoba Court of Queen's Bench. In 1992, the Department of Education was forced to change its school prayer policies in the Public Schools Act.

Even though pursuing the case meant that Chris and his family endured threats and intimidation, they also received much support from across the country.

The law may have been changed, but the conflict is far from over. The remaining provision in the Public Schools Act of Manitoba provides for religious exercises to take place, only if the majority of parents petition the school, and then only for those students. These exercises are supposed to take place separately from class time, either before the start of the day or during the lunch break, so that those who don't participate are not singled out or forced to leave the room. Yet certain school divisions are not complying with the intent of the remaining regulations.

Current abuses include:

- Having the religious

exercises in the classroom, while those who don't participate must report to another room.

- Having the religious exercises start right at the beginning of the day, instead of before. Students who don't participate and aren't in the classroom face being marked late if they're not there.
- Sending out registration forms to all parents, asking them to declare their intention to have their child opt in or out. Parents who don't choose an option are contacted at home and asked to decide one way or the other.

Most of these situations are still occurring in certain rural school divisions, such as those in Winkler and Steinbach, and much less, if at all, in the larger centres such as Brandon and Winnipeg.

The discussion also raised the basic issue of the human rights of the school children. It is the parent who decides whether or not the child will participate. Even though by the time

School Prayer...(cont'd)

children are in their teens, they're more than able to make that sort of decision for themselves. It should be the child's choice, based on his or her own beliefs and opinions.

We're grateful to Chris for taking the time to speak to us, and we hope he will return to the May general meeting, when the discussion regarding school prayer will

continue. We would suggest that everyone who is interested call or write to your MLA to ask them to address the school prayer issue. The desired result would probably be to have the remaining section of the Public Schools Act removed entirely.

You may wish to begin with that very question: "what would you think

of a workplace where you were forced to join in a group prayer every day?" And please, remember the irony that, according to their website, the Manitoba Legislature still begins each daily sitting with a daily prayer. Clearly, the battle is not yet over.

"We are all atheists about most of the gods that societies have ever believed in. Some of us just go one god further."

- Richard Dawkins,
The Root of All Evil

Excerpts from Section 84 of the Public Schools Act of Manitoba:

Schools to be non-sectarian

84(1) Public schools shall be non-sectarian and no religious exercises shall be allowed therein except as provided in this section.

Time for religious exercises

84(3) Religious exercises shall be held at such times during the school day as the school board may establish but in no case shall the school time devoted to religious exercises exceed the maximum provided by the regulations made by the advisory board.

Attendance not compulsory

84(4) Where the parent or guardian of a pupil under the age of majority notifies the teacher that he does not wish the pupil to attend religious exercises, the pupil shall not attend and if a pupil over the age of majority does not wish to attend he shall be free not to attend.

Petition for religious exercises

84(8) If a petition asking for religious exercises, signed by the parents or guardians of 75% of the pupils in the case of a school having fewer than 80 pupils or by the parents or guardians of at least 60 pupils in the case of a school having an enrolment of 80 or more pupils, is presented to the school board, religious exercises shall be conducted for the children of those parents or guardians in that school year.

They Will Be Missed



June Callwood, Canadian journalist and social activist, died on April 14, 2007, after a long battle with cancer.

She was a prolific author, but her life was also marked by a strong concern for social justice, especially on issues affecting women and children. Her largest contribution was in activism and lobbying for such causes as health care for

homeless youth, women's rights, and against sexual violence and domestic abuse. In addition to being made a Companion of the Order of Canada, Callwood was a past recipient of the Toronto Humanist of the Year award.



Author **Kurt Vonnegut** died on April 11, 2007, at the age of 84. Vonnegut wrote plays, essays and short

fiction, but it was his novels, such as "Slaughterhouse Five" and "Cat's Cradle" that led to his international reputation

He wrote in his next to last book about belief or lack of belief in an afterlife: "Some of you may know that I am neither Christian nor Jewish nor Buddhist, nor a conventionally religious person of any sort. I am a humanist, which means, in part, that I have tried to live decently without any expectation of rewards or punishments after I'm dead." He added, "My epitaph in any case? 'Everything was beautiful, Nothing hurt.'"

"I am a humanist, which means, in part, that I have tried to live decently without any expectation of rewards or punishments after I'm dead."

Do you know what a Humanist is? I am honorary president of the American Humanist Association, having succeeded the late, great science fiction writer Isaac Asimov in that functionless capacity. We Humanists try to behave well without any expectation of rewards or punishments in an afterlife. We serve as best we can the only abstraction with which we have any real familiarity, which is our community.

We had a memorial service for Isaac a few years back, and at one point I said, "Isaac is up in Heaven now." It was the funniest thing I could have said to a group of Humanists. I rolled them in the aisles. It was several minutes before order could be restored. And if I should ever die, God forbid, I hope you will say, "Kurt is up in Heaven now." That's my favorite joke.

- Kurt Vonnegut

Book Review

From Genesis to Genetics

From Genesis to Genetics: The Case of Evolution and Creationism

by John A. Moore
Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002

Reviewed by Barry Hammond

John Moore is a committed evolutionist. He begins his book with an outline of the Genesis story, noting that there were really two Genesis stories. First the "J version" where J stands for the German spelling Jahweh now known as Yahweh or God. The second or "P version" stands for priestly since it was the work of Hebrew priests. This P version has come to be the accepted one, with a merger of some aspects of the J version into the mainly P account, where the world was created in six days.

Moore then goes into several chapters in which he makes a strong case for evolution by outlining the development of

the size and the feet of horses through the eons from 100 million years ago to the present. As well, he notes the development of carbon dating which put some materials at over 100 000 years old.

As well he goes extensively into the study of Archaeopteryx, the feathered dinosaur, that showed the potential origin of birds about 140 million years ago. Moore ends his book by contrasting the rational mode of thought characteristic of the sciences, technology, medicine and so on, with the romantic mode of thought more often found in music, art, literature, and religion. People use both modes of thought in daily life. For example, a desire to improve the lives of those living in poverty may originate in the romantic mode, while the rational mode may be needed to produce the means of

reducing poverty. Evolution-versus-creationism may be viewed as a conflict between two incompatible paradigms. The creationist theory is easy to understand while the evolutionist story demands a good background in science or else the faith that scientists are presenting their findings in a fair and honest manner. As Moore, Wade Davis and others have pointed out, if we wish to understand humanity in its many diverse forms and experiences, we must employ both the rational and the romantic views about knowing things. To focus on only one view is limiting.