

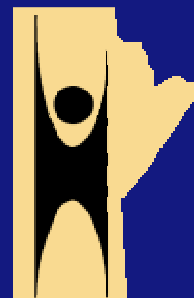
Manitoba Humanist



Happy
Mother's Day!

Published by and for the
Humanist Association of
Manitoba

*"We are beyond
belief"*



www.mb.humanists.ca

MAY MEETING - JOHN HOWARD SOCIETY

The speaker at our **May 14th** meeting is **John Hutton** from the Manitoba branch of the John Howard Society. Mr. Hutton's talk is entitled "Getting Smart on Crime – From A Practitioner's Perspective".

In addition to giving us a basic introduction to the organization, Mr. Hutton will also touch on issues that have emerged in this election campaign, as well as the pardon issue.

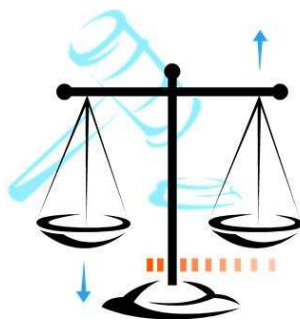
The John Howard Society focuses on working with victims, offenders and communities to respond to the causes and consequences of crime.

They do this in a number of different ways. The Society

offers a range of programming, including topics such as Helping with Pardons, Planning for Release, Employment Preparation, Anger Management, Parenting and Literacy.

Since there are two sides to every story, and two sets of rights – the victim's and the offender's – this should prove to be a most interesting evening.

Mark your calendar and come on out!



May 12 is Manitoba Day

FIELD TRIP TO THE CHURCH OF THE ROCK

Out of sheer curiosity, Diana Goods, Neil Schipper and I attended a Sunday morning service at Church of the Rock on March 13, 2011. Coming from very different religious backgrounds, we all had very different expectations of what we would see and hear.

I was raised in a traditional Anglican church so I was interested in comparing my memories of that to a modern Evangelical setting. I knew it was a very different kind of building (an old converted factory), so I expected it to be large and well-appointed (we all know these mega-churches have lots of \$\$\$), but even so we were amazed when we got inside. I was also a bit surprised that no one welcomed us as newcomers and tried to rope us in. Perhaps this church is so large that not everyone recognizes who is new and who isn't.

It took us about 15 minutes just to tour the place. There is a huge foyer, then a common area where they were serving coffee, then behind that an auditorium with a kitchen, where they were holding a soup and sandwich luncheon to raise funds for missionary work in Uganda. Apparently they have built a church there and need to complete the roof. Is that what the people of Uganda need most??? And what about the Japanese earthquake?

Behind that there are numerous Sunday school and youth group rooms, each at least the size of a public school classroom, most larger. The main sanctuary seats about 2000, but it was not full the day we were there. At the front was a stage, with huge projection screens on either side. There was extensive audio/visual equipment with a couple of guys manning cameras, and parts of the service were accompanied by slideshow/PowerPoint type presentations on the screens.

Some of what startled me was not what I saw and heard, but what I expected and did *not* see or hear. There was/were:

- No prayer books or hymn books of any kind, and no group prayers or hymns

- No bible readings
- No crosses
- No windows at all, let alone stained glass!
- No candles
- No recitation of the Lord's Prayer and only a passing mention of Jesus (which really surprised Neil. Coming from a Jewish background, he expected to hear more about Jesus)
- No altar
- No flowers
- No piano or organ
- No real aisle (there were 3 or 4 aisles but nothing like the main aisle you see in a traditional church)
- No vestments or garments of any kind that distinguished the clergy from the congregation
- No processional or recessional music to indicate the "official" start or end of the service.
- No mention of the season or the fact that it was the first Sunday in Lent.
- No announcements of upcoming services or what type of services are typical – is Holy Communion still celebrated in this church? I couldn't tell.

At 11:30 the "choir" (with a full band and a couple of lead singers) appeared on the stage and began singing an upbeat praise song, with the lyrics on the projection screens, like a music video. While they sang, the congregation gradually drifted in and began singing along. This portion of the service lasted about 15 minutes and consisted of only two very repetitive songs.

The main body of the service, after the initial "praise" singing, consisted of announcements of upcoming events like the pie auction, and neighbourhood outreach (i.e. recruitment), etc. Also there was mention of a number of smaller groups that meet during the week; perhaps there is more bible reading and prayer during those meetings than at the Sunday service. Following the announcements was the sermon, delivered by a guest speaker that day, a slick Hollywood-type psychologist from Colorado who was in town for the Promisekeepers' conference the day before. Lucky us! His talk was very much like what you get from pop-psychology/

motivational speakers, but with the occasional bible reference and mention of god and what he wants us to do. The topic was marriage, and what Diana remembered most from his advice is that the steps to a happy marriage are tithing and blocking pornography on your computer!

We did expect the pastor to mention money, and we weren't disappointed. Diana kept track of how many times the topic came up (7 times), and the collection plate was passed (we did not contribute). But I was most startled when the pastor spoke of the upcoming pie auction to raise funds for – you guessed it- the church roof in Uganda. Photos of last year's pies were projected onto the video screens and he said he hoped that the total raised at this year's auction would beat last year's - \$130,000!!! I thought I had heard wrong, but no. Up popped a photo of last year's top-grossing "pie" (actually a large decorated torte), which fetched \$3,000. What the heck? Obviously the members of this church have more money than they know what to do with, or they're eating Kraft Dinner to fund the church. And remember, churches don't pay taxes on any of this.

The speakers, including the pastor and the guest psychologist, came across as likable, were charismatic and had quite a professional command of the use of comedy to maintain audience attention. While urging people to "do better", they stayed away from any harsh or judgmental tones. We could easily see how vulnerable people are drawn in to join this type of church.

Following the sermon, the pastor made his concluding remarks, and that was it! There was no real dismissal, just "see you next time", followed by people wandering out. The whole thing only took just about an hour.

- *Dorothy Stephens, with Diana Goods and Neil Schipper*

SUPPORT OUR CAUSE – BUY A RAFFLE TICKET...OR TEN.

We've decided to hold a raffle to help raise funds for our big Red River Exhibition adventure.

We have some great prizes available:

- An Xbox 360 with Kinect
- A Kobo e-reader
- \$150 gift certificate from McNally Robinsons

Tickets will be available shortly, so please keep us in mind. We would certainly like as many people as possible to volunteer to sell tickets. But if you could only buy one ticket, that would help too! Thanks.

- *Donna Harris*

GOD - THE MICRO-MANAGER

I was organizing the books in the HAM library last week and I came across the book "The Year of Living Biblically" by A.J.Jacobs. I happen to have my own copy of this and I read it with much enjoyment a few years ago.



It is the chronicle of the author's attempt to live one full year following all of the laws in the bible as literally as possible. This was quite a task for the author, as there are 613 laws in total, many of them strange to our modern sensibilities. His beard grew long, his diet became complicated and his days became consumed with countless details ranging from the more mundane, like how much time to spend in prayer, to the bizarre, like avoiding sitting on any seat that may have recently been occupied by a menstruating woman. The author deals with the challenges that he set up for himself with good humour and dedication. He also spent the year travelling, visiting many individuals and communities who try to follow their holy books as literally as

possible. He spent time with Hasidic Jews, an Amish family, conservative evangelical Christians and many more. The author started out his journey as a non-religious Jew and ended up in pretty much the same place, but with a more reverent attitude towards life and a respect for people who try to live their life with sacredness.

I had some different thoughts after reading this book. One of the thoughts that occurred to me while reading this book and others, was that the God of the bible, rather than appearing as a wise being worthy of worship, is instead portrayed as a petty, jealous tyrant, obsessed with details. The bible is filled with his instructions on hairstyles, clothing attire, proper ways to sacrifice animals and specific instructions for building the Ark of the Covenant (and then smiting some poor guy who accidentally touched it). He is apparently obsessed with foreskins, leprosy and categorizing things as clean and unclean. This from the God who did not bother to tell people about the role of microbes and disease.

Jesus of the New Testament does little to clear up this confusing muddle of strange rules, as his message was contradictory about whether the old rules are to be followed or not. He also managed to speak mostly in parables deliberately meant to be difficult to interpret. This collection of seemingly arbitrary rules has led to the followers of these faiths today being split in thousands of different sects, each with their own particular interpretation of which doctrines are correct. Many religious adherents today spend precious time arguing over whether or not God approves of tattoos, Harry Potter, dancing, Halloween, or Coke made with high fructose corn syrup (apparently God wanted us to waste our time developing a special Passover Coke).

I am aware that many followers of these faiths do not spend their time agonizing about how to incorporate these rules, choosing a more liberal interpretation of the Bible, taking out the good and ignoring the rest. But the question remains. Why would an all-powerful, loving, wise God give us books with so many small-minded rules? Where are the guiding principles for helping us with the big questions that trouble us today?

Why so few guidelines on questions regarding human rights, environmental concerns, sharing resources, effective political systems, use of technology, or complex medical-ethical decisions?

With all that we now know about this amazing, awe-inspiring universe, how is it that so many people continue to find the small God of the bible worthy of worship?

- Diana Goods

RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS CAN BE POISONOUS FOR OUR KIDS

Mississauga Ontario seems like it should be a progressive enough town for people who are homosexual to be able to go about their lives without worrying too much about harassment and bullying. The problem is that in Ontario, Canada they have religious schooling that is taxpayer funded. If one of my children were to come out of the closet, St Joseph Catholic Secondary School is the last place I would want them to be.

According to Xtra.ca, a group of gay students attempted to form a Gay Straight Alliance club and were denied by school administrators. The response from the school board stated "students are welcome to form a club that promotes safety, inclusivity and diversity, as long as it's not gay-specific and doesn't have the word "gay" in its name".

I guess a "Gay Safety Club" is out of the question at a school where gay bullying is out of control. Students at the school have indicated that the recent problem with bullying is evidence that they need permission to form a club promoting awareness, safety and inclusiveness. By forming an alliance with other straight kids within the school system they can discuss and deal with issues like bullying, acceptance and inclusiveness in a safe, controlled atmosphere.

One of the main reasons why people send their children to a school for religious education is to instill values that are not generally available in the rest of the public school system. But what

values are these children are being taught? According to the the Catholic Church "*Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation*" being gay is not a valid orientation. It is considered a "sin and immoral". Students are taught that they are somehow disordered if they are anything but straight.

How can any school expect to control the problem of bullying at the same time they are publishing false information about a minority group of students in their care.

Faith is the problem.

The only reason why these school systems accept that homosexuality is a sin, immoral, disordered, unhealthy and generally unacceptable as a viable lifestyle is because they have accepted, on faith, the writings of St. Paul and other old testament scriptures like Leviticus 20:13: "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them."

What's worse is that administrators and the Council of Bishops know that homosexuals are more likely to be bullied and cite this fact in their pastoral care guidelines on page 9. Sadly, they have not figured out that the solution to the problem of bullying is to deal with the bullies first. Merely informing bullies that bullying is unacceptable does not work. There is clearly a need for administrators and students to work together to show full and complete acceptance of these kids instead of hiding behind the defense that homosexuality is a mortal sin and deserving of an eternity in hell or a condition that needs correction. These kids do not deserve what they are getting from this taxpayer funded institution.

Faith has clearly steered this school in the wrong direction. It's too bad that they just won't listen to the rest of society and learn to be kind.

- Jeff Olsson
(reprinted from leavefaithbehind.blogspot.com)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, May 14, 2011

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park, 1405 St. Matthews Avenue

Time: Meet & Greet 5:00 pm

Meeting 5:30 pm

Speaker/Topic: **John Hutton**, John Howard Society, "Getting Smart on Crime – from a practitioner's perspective"

Friday, June 17th through Sunday, June 26th

Red River Exhibition

HAM and Winnipeg Skeptics' Escape to Reality!

Location: Exhibition Place

Come on out and visit us!!!!

Saturday, September 10, 2011

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park

Speaker/Topic: TBA

Executive:

Jeff Olsson, President
Donna Harris, Vice President
Helen Friesen, Treasurer
Heather McDonell, Secretary

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Myrna Donald
Diana Goods
Barry Hammond
Allison Nelson
Jake Peters
Grant Rogerson
Neil Schipper
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Newsletter Editor:

Donna L. Harris
ham_librarian@yahoo.ca

We're on the Web!

See us at:

mb.humanists.ca



Yes, I would like to BECOME A MEMBER of the Humanist Association of Manitoba

New Member Renewal

Membership Category:

- Individual Membership \$25.00
- Individual Limited Income \$10.00
- Household Membership* \$45.00
- Household Limited Income \$15.00

* After July 1st, just pay ½ the yearly fee for the rest of the year. After October 31st, pay full fee and get the entire next year.

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*Household Memberships: Please give the names of all additional Humanists in your household 18 years or over:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

DONATION (Tax receipts issued for all donations of \$10 or more)

I would like to make a donation to HAM of:

- \$10 \$20 \$30 \$50 \$100
- Other: _____

PAYMENT: Cheque Money Order
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Please complete the following if paying by credit card:

Account No. _____

Expiry Date: ____/____

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Signature: _____

Please make cheque or money order payable to:
Humanist Association of Manitoba and mail to:
*Humanist Association of Manitoba, 7 Pinehurst Lane,
Mitchell, MB, R5G 2J3.*

Or bring your form and the fees to any HAM meeting and give it to Helen Friesen, or any member of the executive.