



Founder, Noel Smith (1933-2022)

HUSBAY NEWSLETTER

February 2024

Church without God: How secular congregations fill a need for some nonreligious Americans

Shared testimonies, collective singing, silent meditation and baptism rituals – these are all activities you might find at a Christian church service on a Sunday morning in the United States. But what would it look like if atheists were gathering to do these rituals instead?

Today, almost 30% of adults in the United States say they have no religious affiliation, and only half attend worship services regularly. But not all forms of church are on the decline – including “secular congregations,” or what many call “atheist churches.”

As a sociologist of religion who has spent the past 10 years studying nonreligious communities, I have found that atheist churches serve many of the same purposes as religious churches. Their growth is evidence that religious decline does not necessarily mean a decline in community, ritual or people’s well-being.

What is an atheist church?

Secular congregations often mimic religious organizations by using the language and structure of a “church,” such as meeting on Sundays or hearing a member’s “testimony,” or by adapting religious language or practices in other ways.

For example, there are a growing number of [psychedelic churches](#), which cater to people looking to experience spirituality and ritual [through drug use](#).

There are also secular organizations that promote the idea that people can live forever, such as the [Church of Perpetual Life](#). Members believe they [can achieve immortality](#) on Earth through radical life-extension technologies such as gene editing or cryonic preservation – [freezing bodies after death](#) in hopes that they

can someday be resuscitated.

These secular congregations often appeal to atheists and other secular people, but their main purpose is not promoting atheism.

However, “atheist church” organizations like the [Sunday Assembly](#) and [the Oasis](#) explicitly celebrate atheists’ identities and beliefs, even though [not everyone who attends identifies as an atheist](#). Testimonies and activities extol values like rational thinking and [materialist philosophies](#), which promote the idea that only physical matter exists.

There are also long-standing humanist and [ethical communities](#) that promote secular worldviews and provide secular ceremonies for major life transitions, like births, funerals and weddings. The [American Humanist Association](#), for example, describes its values as “Good without a God.” And for decades, Unitarian Universalist congregations, which grew out of Christian movements, have drawn on teachings from both religious and nonreligious traditions, without imposing specific creeds of their own.

But there has been a recent rise in secular congregations that explicitly mimic religious organizations and rituals to celebrate atheistic worldviews. Many have just one or two chapters, such as the [Seattle Atheist Church](#) and the [North Texas Church of Freethought](#).

However, Sunday Assembly and the Oasis have networks with dozens of chapters, and Sunday Assembly has been dubbed the “[first atheist mega-church](#).” Many chapters of Sunday Assembly see hundreds of attendees at their services.

Testimonies, singalongs – but nothing supernatural

Many features of atheist churches in the U.S. are directly borrowed from religious organizations.

Continued Page 4

ADHD for Smart Ass Women: How to Fall in Love with Your Neurodivergent Brain

A reprint from New York Journal of Books

Reviewed by: Karen R. Koenig

“evidence-based practices and real world examples of women with ADHD succeeding, not in spite of having ADHD, but perhaps because of it.”

Whether you have ADHD or are close to someone who has it, are female or male, young or old, this book will brighten your outlook on it. Rather than focus solely on how to remedy its disadvantages, certified ADHD coach, attorney, and podcast host, Tracy Otsuka—who carries the diagnosis herself—offers an upbeat view of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and shows how understanding its brain-based causes and managing them effectively will set and keep you on the road to success.

Otsuka’s goal is to make this book for women with ADHD “fun and easy so that you feel good reading about it—and keep reading it.” Encouraging curiosity rather than judgment about what she views as this *spectrum condition*, she advises that those with it find their own unique ways of managing it rather than copying what works for others. She writes from the stance that “ADHD is *not* a deficit of attention” because those with it may as easily hyperfocus as become distracted, and objects to the term “disorder” because it implies only defectiveness.

The book begins with a rousing foreword by another expert who has ADHD, world-renowned psychiatrist, Dr. Edward M. Hallowell, whose seminal books on ADHD helped demystify the diagnosis. He and another ADHDer, John Ratey, MD, view it as “a term that describes a way of being in the world. It is neither entirely a disorder nor entirely an asset. It is an array of traits specific to a unique kind of mind. It can be an advantage or a curse, depending on how a person manages it.”

Otsuka tells her own story of how she not only realized she had ADHD after her son was diagnosed with it, but recognized the ways it could benefit her and decided to focus on helping other women with this condition live up to their potential as she had learned to do. Through research, case studies, and resource lists, *ADHD for Smart Ass Women* sends out the consistent message that those with this condition can be successful, happy, and exceed their wildest expectations by

rejoicing in and leading with its positive aspects and reigning in its problematic ones.

The book explains the cause of ADHD: a brain deficiency in the production of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that “increases mood, attention, motivation, and memory” and impacts other mind/body functions. It describes ADHD types and symptoms (Hyperactive and Impulsive, Inattentive, and Combined), heritability, lack of correlation with intelligence, ways it can be negatively impacted by trauma, and how it may correlate with other neuro-divergent conditions such as Dyslexia and Autism Spectrum Disorders. Although ADHD is a common developmental condition in children, it is also prevalent in adults and most often diagnosed in men.

However, Otsuka maintains that most adults with ADHD don’t know they have it: “Less than 20 percent of adults with the condition are aware that they have it . . . and girls and women are more likely to go undiagnosed than boys and men.” This discrepancy is due to ADHD manifesting differently in males and females as well as to our (erroneous) popular view that it consists of behaviors such as “fidgeting, misbehaving, or doing poorly in school.” Otsuka explains why women are so often underdiagnosed with ADHD: They are “more vulnerable to hormone-related mood disorders . . . and post-partum depression” and society holds exceedingly narrow, stereotypical expectations of gender characteristics and roles.

She describes ADHD’s “superpowers” as optimism, the ability to tirelessly hyperfocus on subjects of interest, creativity, thinking outside the box, and being driven. This is because ADHD brains are wired for “interest, not information” and those with it tend to zigzag through life rather than take a linear path because their brains “are never at rest.” Using these superpowers to find a purpose in life, for example, Otsuka suggests focusing on activities that involve the overlap of personal values, character strengths, talents, and skills.

She describes ADHD’s “superpowers” as optimism, the ability to tirelessly hyperfocus on subjects of interest, creativity, thinking outside the box, and being driven. This is because ADHD brains are wired for “interest, not information” and those with it tend to zigzag through life rather than take a linear path because their brains “are never at rest.” Using these superpowers to find a purpose in life, for example,

Continued page 3

Haiku Quintets: dandana.us/fivepalms

How Do You Not Ask?

do you not wonder,
is your faith the correct one
among the others?

how to reconcile
settled science with your faith,
since both can't be true?

does your life's work rest
on confidence that you're right
without crippling doubt?

since youth, I've searched this
inescapable question
I could not NOT ask

not debating truth
—I'm simply seeking to know,
how do you not ask?



Photo: Franciscan friar (London, 9/18/ 2023): vows: *no money, no honey, no doubt* (poverty, chastity, faith).

Professional clergy (Franciscan friar, Yale divinity grad, Oxford theology professor, Cambridge theologian, various pastors, priests, rabbis, imams) answer: *Just have faith.* But, how?

NOEL W. SMITH DARWIN DAY 2024
Our Annual Celebration of the Life of
Charles Darwin
February 17, 2024

Speaker: Michael Middlebrooks, Ph.D.

Topic: The Evolution of “Superpowers” in Mollusks

Michael Middlebrooks, Ph.D., is an invertebrate zoologist and an advocate for the tiny wonders of the animal kingdom. He is an avid scuba diver and passionate about underwater exploration. His enthusiasm for sharing the world of micro-fauna is evident in his talks about the small but spectacular snails, shrimp, and sea slugs that make up just a fraction of the underwater animal kingdom. He is an Associate Professor of Biology at the University of Tampa where he teaches hands-on courses in Invertebrate Zoology, Global Sustainability, and Coral Reefs. His classes feature photographs of marine invertebrates that he has taken during his adventures in underwater exploration around the world.

In Dr. Middlebrooks' academic research, he uncovers the intricate relationships that colorful “lettuce” sea slugs have with the food they eat. Specifically, he focuses on the behaviors of photosynthetic or “solar powered” sea slugs which can steal chloroplasts from the algae they eat and store them inside of their own cells to make energy. Dr. Middlebrooks also conducts research on seagrass restoration and examines the animal communities that live in, and depend on, seagrass beds.

Sign up sheet on page 7.

From page 2

Otsuka suggests focusing on activities that involve the overlap of personal values, character strengths, talents, and skills.

Otsuka explains that “As ADHDers, we can be fun, spontaneous, and full of exciting and creative ideas. But we can also be pains in the asses to live or deal with,” facing greater interpersonal problems due to poorer brain-based executive functioning skills than people who are neuro-typical. She explores the role of trauma in connection with ADHD and how together they may correlate with rumination, depression, and anxiety; feelings of overwhelm, overthinking and self doubt; heightened sensitivity to rejection; obsessive-compulsive behaviors; and Oppositional Defiant, Borderline Personality, and Bipolar Disorders. She spends time explaining the emotional dysregulation that often accompanies ADHD in women, offering solutions for managing it to improve self-esteem and enhance relationships. She tackles how to be a better friend, romantic partner, and parent by exploring how ADHD women can fit in while remaining

non-conforming and true to themselves and improve at recognizing and managing social cues with which many have difficulty.

One of her most useful chapters includes strategies and tips for planning and time management which will help even people who do not carry an ADHD diagnosis. Because procrastination is a hallmark of ADHD, she sets out step-by-step ways to get things done by planning, embracing external cues, and using the brain's craving for dopamine to self-reward for tasks accomplished. She also addresses ways to overcome problems with food, spending, and sleep dysregulation through nutrition, exercise, psychotherapy, ADHD coaching, and practicing healthy habits which will all help build new and healthier neuro pathways in the brain.

This book is full of honesty, vulnerability, wisdom, compassion, understanding, guidance, cutting edge knowledge, evidence-based practices, and real-world examples of women with ADHD succeeding, not in spite of having ADHD, but perhaps because of it.

From page 1

At Sunday Assembly, where I spent three years doing research, services include collective singing, reading inspirational texts, silent reflection and collecting donations. They center around a central lecture given by a member of the congregation or a member of the larger local community. I attended one service where an astronomer gave a talk about the [New Horizons spacecraft's mission to Pluto](#). At another service, a member of a local community garden organization talked about building community through her community garden program.

Atheist church organizers I met told me that they intentionally borrow the structure of a church because [they see it as a good model](#) for building effective rituals and communities. More generally, the structure of a “congregation” is popular and familiar to most attendees.

However, there are key differences. Sunday Assembly has no hierarchical structure, and there is no pastor or minister, meaning that decisions are made by the community. Attendees share duties for running the services and finding speakers and readings.

The other key difference is the complete lack of reference to the supernatural. Lectures and [rituals I have encountered](#) at atheist church services are centered around affirming atheistic beliefs, celebrating science, cultivating experiences of awe and wonder for nature, and creating communities of support.

Sociologists of religion call these practices “[sacralizing the secular](#)” and “[secular spirituality](#)”: activities that enable nonreligious people to express their shared beliefs and cultivate a sense of belonging and purpose.

One example is collective singing: borrowing a familiar aspect of religious services that can give members a sense of transcendence. Most Sunday Assembly chapters have church bands that lead singalongs to pop songs like “Livin’ on a Prayer” by Bon Jovi and “Brave” by Sara Bareilles. When the astronomer talked to Sunday Assembly about NASA’s mission to Pluto, the congregation sang “Across the Universe” and “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” by the Beatles to reinforce their reverence for the vastness of the universe.

Another borrowed ritual is the sharing of testimony. Many Sunday Assembly services involve a member standing in front of the congregation to share something they learned recently, to express gratitude, or to affirm their atheistic beliefs by sharing why they left religion.

Some atheist communities, although not Sunday Assembly, even engage in “[debaptism](#)” ceremonies in which they renounce their former religion. Some atheists I interviewed sent their debaptism certificates to their former churches as a way of solidifying their new nonreligious identity.

Change ahead?

As rates of religious affiliation continue to decline, many scholars and pundits have argued that there will be a [decline in community engagement and other important indicators of well-being](#), such as health, happiness and people’s sense of meaning and purpose.

However, atheist churches are an example of how nonreligious Americans are finding [new ways to meet those needs](#). A member of Sunday Assembly told me: “I honestly can’t think of a word to describe it. I mean, ‘life-changing’ sounds stupid, but Sunday Assembly just helped so much. I’ve always struggled with depression, and I’m so much happier now that I have this group of friends who share my beliefs and who are trying to do good out in the world with me.”

Atheist churches are still fairly new, but [studies have shown that participation in them and other types of atheist organizations can bring social and emotional benefits](#). In particular, it can help [atheists buffer the negative effects of experiencing stigma or discrimination](#).

Whether the atheist church trend will continue remains to be seen. But such churches’ recent growth is evidence that they can work much like religious organizations to build community, cultivate rituals and bolster well-being in a time of religious change.

Jacqui Frost, Assistant Professor of Sociology, [Purdue University](#)

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER

Special Interest Groups

Here is a list of Special Interest Groups (If you have an idea for one, please let us know).

SIG Names

Focus of the Group

Thoughts of the Day (1st Wed)	Attendees discuss non-political topics that effect most of us.
Current Affairs (CAF): (3rd Wed)	Events discussed during the current news cycle
Open Forum (OF):	This SIG will happen on dates when no one has stepped up to do a presentation on any of our previously existing categories.
Life's Experiences (LEX):	Your memorable experiences to share with the group
Non-Fiction Review (NFR):	Reviews of non-fiction books, magazine articles, films and TV
Creativity (CRE):	Includes short stories, poetry, blogs; in other words fiction writing (including reviews) as opposed to non-fiction review.
Roundtable (RT):	A discussion of a topic selected by the SIG hosts
Science Technology & Medicine (STM):	What have you learned, and would like to share

Check our website for specific information by clicking [HERE](#).

Monthly Meetings

All programs begin at 6:30pm with a social gathering and presentation at 7:00. Times for other events are noted. Presentations are held at the UU of Sarasota, 3975 Fruitville Rd. Sarasota FL. 34232

Saturday February 17, 2024
Sunday April 7, 2024

Marina Jacks
Turtle Beach Pavilion

Darwin Day Luncheon
Carl Sagan Day Picnic

Chat & Chew Meets every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month at Perkins restaurant at Fruitville and Cattlemen at 12noon. All are welcome at Chat & Chew regardless of membership status. Enjoy the company of like minded folk and have a leisurely lunch and some stimulating conversation.

President's Message

February 2024

February marks the month of Darwin's birthday. It also marks the beginning of our 25th anniversary celebration as an organization.

In 1999, a few Sarasota humanists got together for lunch, led by Noel Smith, to begin forming Humanists of Sarasota Bay (HUSBAY). The rest is history.

Today we have 100 members.

Only one original member of that founding group, Bob Philloppoff, is still living. We have some early members still among us. We hope to identify our long-term members before the luncheon.

If you attended the 15th anniversary celebration thanks for your years of support. I remember that 15th anniversary celebration which was a small affair filling a small meeting room at BiJou café downtown.

The Board and I are busy looking into a special event we can hold this year to mark our 25 years of support for humanism in the Sarasota Bay area. We look forward to getting your ideas and support as well.

Let's make this a special year for all of us, and for those members who have been with us over the long haul, keeping HUSBAY live and well.

Dave Helgager

Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, *without theism or other supernatural beliefs*, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good. To learn more go [here](#).

**Breaking News! Florida End-of-Life Options Act
and the Death with Dignity Act have been submitted to committees for review!**

The Florida End-of-Life Options Act, HB561 was filed in the Florida House of Representatives and *The Death with Dignity Act, SB1652* was filed in the Senate. This legislation states that a terminally ill, mentally competent adult, with less than 6 months to live, may legally request medication from their doctor, which they could self-administer to achieve a peaceful death.

Many Floridians have watched a terminally ill family member suffer needlessly at their end of life and know their loved one would have chosen medical aid-in-dying if it were legal in Florida. When someone is actively dying, they may suffer for days or weeks in pain and agony that can't be effectively alleviated. Individuals in this difficult situation want to make healthcare decisions in accordance with their own values and beliefs.

There are 10 states, plus Washington DC, that have existing medical aid in dying laws. These laws have strict requirements and safeguards to ensure this is the personal decision of the individual. In fifty years of cumulative data from states with these laws, there has never been a case of abuse or coercion. This legislation is modeled after these existing laws.

You Can Help Make This Happen with Only Two Emails to the House and Senate!

If you want *The Florida End-of-Life Options Act* to be available to qualified, terminally ill Floridians, then email the House Healthcare Regulation Subcommittee Chairperson Michelle Salzman (michelle.salzman@myfloridahouse.gov) and Co-Chair Kimberly Berfield (kim.berfield@myfloridahouse.gov) and ask them to "*please add HB561, The Florida End of Life Options Act, to the Healthcare Regulation Subcommittee's agenda to be discussed by its members.*" Please use "Florida End of Life Options Act, HB561" as your subject title, and sign with your name and city.

Please email the Senate Health Policy Committee Chairperson Colleen Burton (burton.colleen@flsenate.gov) and Co-Chair Jason Brodeur (brodeur.jason@flsenate.gov) and ask them to "*please add SB1642, The Death with Dignity Act, to the Health Policy Committee's agenda to be discussed by its members.*" Please use "Death with Dignity Act, SB1642" as your subject title, and sign with your name and city.

Finally, we need volunteers to help share our message:

[Write letters to the editors](#) of your local newspapers;

[Tell us your story](#) - why do you support medical aid-in-dying?

Send emails and/or call Florida's legislators – email Volunteer.fldwd@gmail.com for details.

Follow us on Facebook and 'Share' our posts to your Facebook page --[Facebook/FloridaDeathwithDignity](https://www.facebook.com/FloridaDeathwithDignity)

Thank you for your support.

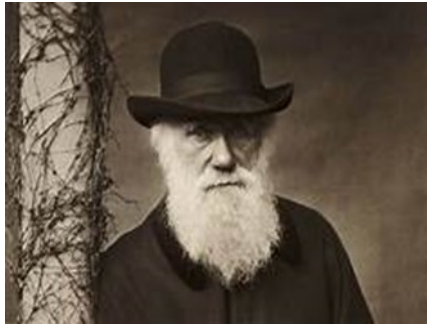
Sincerely,
Tony Ray, Founder
Florida Death with Dignity
www.FloridaDeathWithDignity.org

HUSBAY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

David Helgager, President
Barry Zack, Vice President
Holly Downing, Treasurer
Donna Gannon Secretary
Paul Jacques, Bob La Salle, Sandie Zellick

This is Vol 6 Issue 2 of the HUSBAY
Newsletter edited by Bob La Salle.

It is published monthly and delivered by email to our
members. If you have anything you would like published
herein, please send it to: rlasalle390@gmail.com



HUMANISTS OF SARASOTA BAY, INC.
Presents
NOEL W. SMITH DARWIN DAY 2024
Our Annual Celebration of the Life of Charles Darwin

Speaker: Michael Middlebrooks, Ph.D.
Topic: The Evolution of “Superpowers” in Mollusks

Date: February 17, 2024
Time: Social Mingle 11:30
Luncheon 12:15 pm
Location: Marina Jack
Members and Guests
Price: \$35.00 must be prepaid

Please send payment on or before February 12, 2024 to:

HUSBAY
P.O. Box 52989
Sarasota, FL 34232
MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO HUSBAY

MEAL CHOICE

Person 1: _____	Person 2: _____
Chicken Piccata _____	Chicken Piccata _____
Grilled Salmon _____	Grilled Salmon _____
Vegetarian Risotto _____	Vegetarian Risotto _____