



## **HUSBAY NEWSLETTER**

**OCTOBER 2021**



### ***The New Chief Chaplain at Harvard? An Atheist.***

The elevation of Greg Epstein, author of “Good Without God,” reflects a broader trend of young people who increasingly identify as spiritual but religiously nonaffiliated.

The Puritan colonists who settled in New England in the 1630s had a nagging concern about the churches they were building: How would they ensure that the clergymen would be literate? Their answer was Harvard University, a school that was established to educate the ministry and adopted the motto “Truth for Christ and the Church.” It was named after a pastor, John Harvard, and it would be more than 70 years before the school had a president who was not a clergyman.

Nearly four centuries later, Harvard’s organization of chaplains has elected as its next president an atheist named Greg Epstein, who takes on the job this week.

Mr. Epstein, 44, author of the book “Good Without God,” is a seemingly unusual choice for the role. He will coordinate the activities of more than 40 university chaplains, who lead the Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and other religious communities on campus. Yet many Harvard students — some raised in families of faith, others never quite certain how to label their religious identities — attest to the influence that Mr. Epstein has had on their spiritual lives.

“There is a rising group of people who no longer identify with any religious tradition but still expe-

rience a real need for conversation and support around what it means to be a good human and live an ethical life,” said Mr. Epstein, who was raised in a Jewish household and has been Harvard’s humanist chaplain since 2005, teaching students about the progressive movement that centers people’s relationships with one another instead of with God.

To Mr. Epstein’s fellow campus chaplains, at least, the notion of being led by an atheist is not as counterintuitive as it might sound; his election was unanimous.

“Maybe in a more conservative university climate there might be a question like ‘What the heck are they doing at Harvard, having a humanist be the president of the chaplains?’” said Margit Hammerstrom, the Christian Science chaplain at Harvard. “But in this environment it works. Greg is known for wanting to keep lines of communication open between different faiths.”

The dozens of students whom Mr. Epstein mentors have found a source of meaning in the school’s organization of humanists, atheists and agnostics, reflecting a broader trend of young people across the United States who increasingly identify as spiritual but religiously nonaffiliated. That trend might be especially salient at Harvard; a [Harvard Crimson survey](#) of the class of 2019 found that those students were two times more likely to identify as atheist or agnostic than 18-year-olds in the general population.

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Haiku Quintets: [dandana.us/fivepalms](http://dandana.us/fivepalms)

### My Bucket List

yup, been there, done that  
I have sailed Earth's seven seas  
I've climbed Rockies' peaks

untold adventures  
fill my memory's pages  
life's been great ... still is

old age marches on  
contentment replaces thrills  
small things bring pleasure

gazing on the bay  
admiring other men's boats  
glad they are not mine

my bucket's empty  
joy and meaning fill my cup  
brewing this haiku

### ***From the Restlessknights***

The knights are restless and for good reason.

Texas Talaban

Well, congratulations, Texas, and your Governor, Greg Abbot, not middle-aged, but surely living in the Middle Ages.

Your attempt at copying the policies of the Taliban have been successful, particularly with regard to women's rights.

Texans should be proud of the way Abbot, and the Texas legislature approved the most counter-female rights bill in our nation's history.

And thanks to that Trump-packed Supreme Court, the law won't be challenged, despite how it violates Roe v Wade.

So we owe a special thanks to Turtle Face, AKA Mitch McConnell, who saw to it that Obama's pick for the High Court would not be considered for a Senate vote, because Barack was an outgoing office holder. The same reasoning didn't apply to Trump's last pick, even though his remaining days were considerably less than Obama's when the Donald submitted Amy Coney Barrett for that role.

So my Texas friends, make sure you vote on Election Day, November 8, 2022, to show how much you appreciate the Governor's and legislature's actions.

Democrats are notorious for failing to vote in the Mid-Terms. It's been more than enough time to break that tradition. Stay home, and you'll guarantee that nothing will change.



**MARCH 4—6, 2022**

**Marriot Orlando Airport Lakeside**

***Save the date***

**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](#).

**You Have Life? Good.**  
by **Robert Magill**

You have Life? Good. Then Life has you as well. All of you! Every organ, every drop of blood and, of course, your brain: your mind. But I have free will!, you say. Of course you do. Sort of.

Now Life is normally quite placid. Even though Life lives on by consuming itself; the feasting is benign, as it is with all Life's wards; with one notable exception. You. And the rest of the human race.

We are Life consuming gluttons extraordinaire. Think Gettysburg, Dachau, Hiroshima and ...factory farming: ad nauseam.

This is not new, of course. Our behavior is old news. Life has cut slack to humans because we have a uniqueness that has warranted observation over time. Time may have just run out. Humans now have the ability to destroy the biosphere. Our pernicious conduct may have convinced Life that without its prompt interjection; it is inevitable.

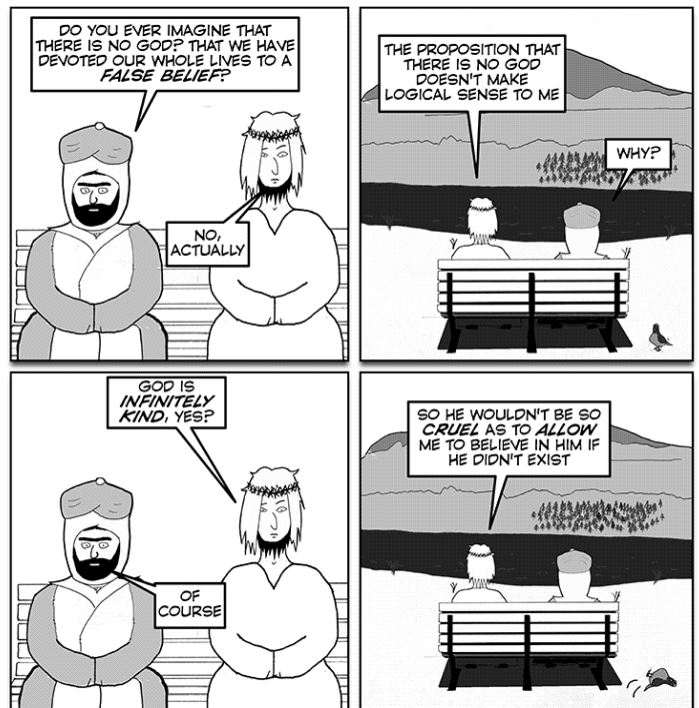
Enter Mr.Covid 19. Force Majeure of modern plagues. Sponsor of the blame game to end all blame games. Seven billion people have an opinion...and an asshole. The ones who have a microphone or a computer demonstrate both,

daily. Think Life has a hand in all this? Maybe the plague is a worldwide distraction to give the Biosphere a little breathing room to heal from ongoing human assault? Hmmm.

Millions are dead. Millions are becoming infected every day. The virus twists and turns and presents a new face constantly. We rush to keep up but seemingly always lag behind. How so? Is it out of our hands?

Note: I appear to have become hostage to this topic. Could I be prompted by the Life force to do its bidding? Quien Sabe?

*About Robert Magill: My wife Mary and I have been members of HUSBAY since the first year of its existence. I am a retired film maker and author. Since moving from Key West, we have lived in Sarasota for twenty plus years. For six of those years we founded a commune in Powell River, British Columbia during the summer months. In addition to a motel in Key West, we owned another in Perry for ten years. They were AYH International Youth Hostels as well. We were the Houseparents. Prior to Florida, we homesteaded on a mountain in Upper Bucks County and raised our family there. The usual high school and college, Rutgers, in New Jersey growing up.*



jesusandmo.net

## Special Interest Groups

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

### **SIG Names**

**Current Affairs (CAF):**

**Life's Experiences (LEX):**

**Non-Fiction Review (NFR):**

**Creativity (CRE):**

**Roundtable (RT):**

**Science Technology & Medicine (STM):** What have you learned, and would like to share

**Open Forum (OF):**

### **Focus of the Group**

Events discussed during the current news cycle

Your memorable experiences to share with the group

Reviews of non-fiction books, magazine articles, films and TV  
Includes short stories, poetry, blogs; in other words fiction  
writing (including reviews) as opposed to non-fiction review.

A discussion of a topic selected by the SIG hosts

What have you learned, and would like to share

This SIG will happen on dates when no one has stepped up to  
do a presentation on any of our previously existing categories.

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

**We need members to step up and help** us develop programs for our SIG (Special Interest Group) meetings! Do you have a story to tell? A book to review? A rant? Do you have a career experience or hobby to share? A talk about a technology you like? A topic you would like covered? (We can find a speaker.) Have you written a book? Let us know ASAP!

Please respond to Dave Helgager at [dbhelgager@comcast.net](mailto:dbhelgager@comcast.net) or

Barry Zack at [barryzed@gmail.com](mailto:barryzed@gmail.com)

## Monthly Meetings

**ALL LECTURES, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED, WILL BE AT THE CENTER FOR ARTS AND HUMANITY, 1226 N. TAMIAMI TRAIL, SARASOTA 34236** (Corner of 13th and Tamiami Trail) Suggest if coming west on Fruitville, you turn right at Coconut and proceed to 13th St., turning left. All lecture dates are on Mondays.

November 1--7 Words That Can Change the World--Joe Simonetta, author, speaker

December 6--Sarasota County Homeless Project for the Mentally Challenged, Megan Howell, Executive Director, Founder, Second Heart Homes

December 1--Renew your membership

December 20--Annual Meeting 7pm (Most likely on Zoom but not final.)

January 3--New Year's Party, 7pm-9pm (Drinks, Snacks, Music provided.)

January 17--Miracles of Science--Brian Dunning, Science Writer and producer of Skeptoid Podcast ([skeptoid.com](http://skeptoid.com))

February 12--Darwin Day Luncheon, Saturday, 11:30 at Marina Jacks, Scientist from Mote Marine (Speaker and subject yet to be determined.) This year we celebrate on Darwin's actual birthdate. Details for reservations, etc. in January.

March 7--Dr. Matthew Edlund, What Constitutes Good Sleep Health?

April 3--Annual Carl Sagan picnic--4-7pm at Turtle Beach Pavilion (Directions and what to bring will be provided at a later date.)

SPECIAL NOTE: Summer lectures under consideration and will be announced sometime in 2022.



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Like many of you, Judy and I have been doing all we can to stay safe, including getting fully vaccinated. The recent surge as a result of the delta variant has made it necessary for us to once again mask up and be very careful about where we go and how we protect ourselves. I find it difficult to reconcile those tenets of Humanism regarding human kindness toward those who can but won't get vaccinated. Masking up everywhere and avoiding crowded places where few people are masked is constant frustration.

I often think, I lived to be 80 and now this? But then I realize I have the friendship and support of our organization and its members. The weekly SIGs allow me to converse with divergent views, and the upcoming lectures, hopefully live, will allow me to converse with people of like mind who have taken the step to be fully vac-

inated and careful.

The Board and I have struggled with when will it be safe to start our luncheon meetings? Can we start the lectures in November? All of this to be determined based on the success of the growing numbers of vaccinations and how well the variant finally runs its course. Looks like October will not be a beginning for us. But....

Dave Helgager



## From page 1

"Greg's leadership isn't about theology," said Charlotte Nickerson, 20, an electrical engineering student. "It's about cooperation between people of different faiths and bringing together people who wouldn't normally consider themselves religious."

The Harvard chaplains play an outsize role on campus, touching hundreds of students' lives whether through Mass offered by the Catholic Student Center or Shabbat dinners at Harvard Hillel. Its leader reports directly to the office of the university president.

To Mr. Epstein, becoming the organization's head, especially as it gains more recognition from the university, comes as affirmation of a yearslong effort, started by his predecessor, to teach a campus with traditional religious roots about humanism.

"We don't look to a god for answers," Mr. Epstein said. "We are each other's answers."

Mr. Epstein's work includes hosting dinners for undergraduates where conversation goes deep: Does God exist? What is the meaning of life? He previously ran a congregation of Boston-area humanists and atheists who met in Harvard Square for weekly services that centered on secular sermons. In 2018 he closed that down to focus his time on building campus relationships, including at M.I.T., where he is also a chaplain. Mr. Epstein frequently meets individually with students who are struggling with issues both personal and theological, counseling them on managing anxiety about summer jobs, family feuds, the pressures of social media and the turbulence endemic to college life.

"Greg is irreverent and good at diffusing pressure," Ms. Nickerson said, recalling a time he joked that if her summer internship got too stressful she could always get fired — then she would have a good story to share.

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