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HUMANIST Monthly

A Publication of the Capital District Humanist Society
Connecting the Secular Humanist Community of Upstate New York, Western Massachusetts, and Southern Vermont

Sunday, November 14th at 1:00 PM Weirdness!: What Fake Science and the Paranormal Tell Us About the Nature of Science

In a world full of weird claims and a social media environment awash with wild conspiracy theories, it is no longer enough for scientists, pundits, and activists to simply ask the public to trust science. Rather, with increasing public distrust of science, all must better understand how science works, and why science is essential. By exploring many of the odd beliefs embraced by large sections of the public that are rejected by the scientific mainstream, *Weirdness!* makes the case for science in a way that pro-science memes and slogans simply can't.

Taner Edis was born in Istanbul, in 1967, to Turkish and American parents. After completing his undergraduate work at Boğaziçi University, he received his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University in theoretical physics. Taner is currently a professor of physics at Truman State University, his present research interests focus on the philosophy and history of science.

Fascinated by the plethora of supernatural and fringe science beliefs around him, and concerned about the rise of Islamist politics in Turkey, Edis first got involved with skeptical inquiry into religious and paranormal claims during his graduate studies. He has since written and spoken extensively on such subjects, particularly on the topic of anti-evolutionary thought. His writing has characteristically combined scientific rigor with an ability to reach a broad audience.



Taner Edis (right)

His books include *The Ghost in the Universe: God in Light of Modern Science*, an accessible defense of a naturalistic view of the world; *Why Intelligent Design Fails: A Scientific Critique of the New Creationism*, co-edited with Matt Young; *Science and Nonbelief*; and *An Illusion of Harmony: Science and Religion in Islam*, which is a unique examination of science, religion and pseudoscience in a Muslim context. His most recent book, *Islam Evolving: Radicalism, Reformation, and the Uneasy Relationship with the Secular West*, examines conflicts between Islamic and secular liberal political outlooks. His newest book, which is the title of this program is coming out in October of this year.

Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invite to the meeting via e-mail. Anyone who is not a current paid member of CDHS can request an invitation by sending an e-mail request to: webmaster@humanistsociety.org.

November 21st at 2:30 PM at the Sand Lake Center for the Arts

A one-act satirical comedy about four white people trying to devise a politically correct First Thanksgiving play for Native American Heritage Month to be done in the schools. The director, Logan, hires a Native American actor to be their cultural compass. As Logan, Jaxton, and Caden defer to her for guidance, it is revealed that she is white and only plays Native American when she isn't playing other ethnicities. Without the Native voice, these four white people now have to find their way through a crazy thicket of privilege, historical accuracy, and school district rules. Directed by Brian and Melanie Sheldon

COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS: SLCA is committed to providing a safe theater experience for all patrons. They ask that unvaccinated patrons wear a mask at all times while in the building. Temperature checks and contact tracing measures will be performed upon entering the building.

Tickets are priced at \$18.00. Please contact Dee Portzer if you have any questions. Tickets can be purchased at: <https://slca-ctp.org/>



Capital District Humanist Society, Inc.

Established 1986

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CDHS is affiliated with:

The American Humanist Association (AHA)

Center for Inquiry (CSI)

Humanists International (HI)

The Secular Coalition for America (SCA)

Recap of our October speaker's presentation

Kristie Macrakis teaches at Georgia Tech in Atlanta. Her talk was titled "Passing the Global Espionage Torch — How Britain Helped the U.S. Expand its Eavesdropping Capabilities." This was excerpted from her forthcoming book, *Techno-Spy Empire*, about using technology in espionage.

The subject really concerns the gathering of intelligence, e.g., concerning terrorism or other kinds of national security threats. It's basically divided into two genera: "Signals Intelligence" or SIGINT, derived from electronic communications, and "Human Intelligence," or HUMINT, gathered by spies.

Before WWII the British, with their global empire and corresponding global concerns, were the premier practitioners. As Macrakis' title indicated, her talk focused mainly on the Brits passing that torch to America, while still remaining very much in the game, as our partner. She traced the partnership to the WWII era with a close relationship between William Friedman, a U.S. cryptographer, and Edward Travis, Britain's SIGINT head, who worked on the famous breaking of the Nazi cryptography "enigma machine" at Bletchley Park.

The cooperation evolved, in 1954, into the "Five Eyes" — bringing in as well Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. They, together with the U.S. and U.K., are the core group, assisted by others as part of a larger "Fourteen Eyes" intelligence-sharing club. Macrakis also made reference to "Echelon," the monicker for a global eavesdropping network revealed by Edward Snowden.

After the war, as Britain decolonized, Macrakis said, they traded territory for U.S. technology and money. Involving a string of island bases for intelligence gathering, notably on Cyprus, and Diego Garcia, an island in the Indian Ocean, which actually became a new colony in 1965. America provided much of the financing to sustain these bases. There's a giant data center in Utah just for storing all the information collected. Macrakis described the whole system as a "secret empire," operating below the awareness of most of the rest of the world.

NOTE: Thirty members and interested parties joined us for this Zoom session.

Recap by Frank Robinson

Bangladesh to become a secular state in the wake of Islamist riots

The government of Bangladesh, headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has reacted to anti-Hindu violence last week by vowing to drop Islam as the state religion. [The Guardian](#) reported that rioting, that led to the death of a number of Hindus and Muslims, began after a Koran was "desecrated" in a Hindu temple. Claims on social media allege the Muslim "holy book" had been placed on the knee of a statue of the Hindu god Hanuman in a shrine set up for the Hindu holy festival of Durga Puja.

[News Nine](#) reported that Sheikh Hasi's administration decided to tackle radical Islamism "head on" by reverting to the country's 1972 secular Constitution. by Barry Duke in [patheos.com](#) (10/18/21)

Manitoba judge rules against churches that said Covid restrictions went too far

In the summer Of 2020, a group of Christian churches in the province of Manitoba filed a lawsuit against government officials because they claimed the COVID restrictions that limited the size of public gatherings — which also applied to them, like everyone else — violated their religious freedom. Specifically, they said, Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms *guaranteed* their ability to meet in person.

The province's chief public officer defended the restrictions, comparing churches to movie theaters: It was simply unsafe to have lots of people, indoors, in small places, no matter the reason. It's taken a long time to decide the case. The Court of Queen's Bench of Manitoba just ruled that the public health orders were "justified and reasonable." The churches have lost. The judge said in more than 150 pages what any sane person could have told you in a single sentence: There was never any Christian persecution when it came to COVID restrictions. No government officials in the Canada or the US have used the pandemic to prevent the spread of Christianity, as so many conservatives would have you believe. The only goal has been to spread of the *other* virus.

by Hemant Mehta in [patheos.com](#) (10/18/21)



An interesting read:

Sasha Sagan — How secular rituals can give our lives meaning

The late astronomer Carl Sagan once wrote in his book [Contact](#), "For small creatures such as we, the vastness is bearable only through love." It's only fitting, then, that his daughter Sasha Sagan has carried on his legacy with her own book focusing on secular rituals that provide meaning in our lives.

In an exclusive interview, coinciding with the paperback release of [For Small Creatures Such as We](#), Sasha spoke with Rebekah Kohlhepp about what she's learned since writing the book, what religious readers can take away from it, and her own feelings about the word "spiritual."

The interview can be seen at: <https://friendlyatheist.patheos.com/2021/10/05/how-secular-rituals-can-give-our-lives-meaning-an-interview-with-sasha-sagan/>



Sit Down For This One: Anti-Vaxxer Florida School Requiring 30 Day Quarantine-FOR BEING Vaccinated!

A crisis of ignorance is overwhelming our country. We look to children to be the future, but this only works if the people in charge of teaching them have the basic sense necessary not to attempt to put out a fire using kerosene.

I have every reason to believe if this group of people had been around when the traffic light was invented, they would have protested them. "How dare you delay my more important than yours travels?" "Unimpeded brakeless high speed transportation is my right!"

Parents of students at the Centner Academy recently received a letter from its Chief Operating Officer that read in part, "...if you are considering the vaccine for your Centner Academy student(s), we ask that you hold off until the Summer when there will be time for the potential transmission or shedding onto others to decrease." The letter also spelled out a quarantine rule for parents who still choose to vaccinate their children.

"Because of the potential impact on other students and our school community, vaccinated students will need to stay at home for 30 days post-vaccination for each dose and booster they receive and may return to school after 30 days as long as the student is healthy and symptom-free."

You see these MENSA candidates believe that the vaccine being given is live virus. It is not live virus. It is no more viral than a rice cake. It might taste better, however. Wait forget I said that, these people might misread this and try to inject the rice cake.

dailykos.com (10/19/21)

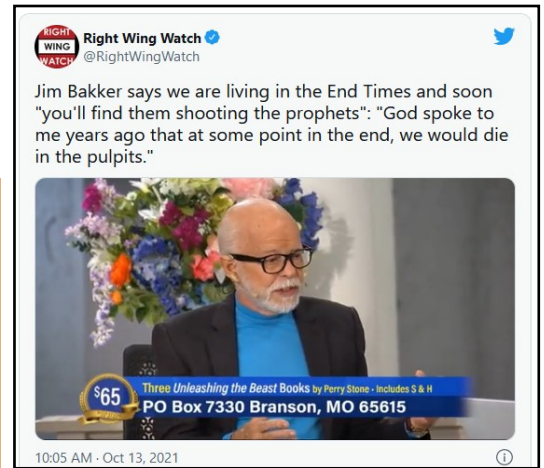
Pseudo-Historian Tim Barton falsely claims constitution was biblically-inspired

There is a belief among many right-wing conservative Christians that everything – literally *everything* – that's in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights comes directly from the Bible. That's a myth that's been primarily pushed by pseudo-historian David Barton, who defends his claim by twisting every sentence in one document in order to make it sound like something in the other one. For example, Barton once cited Luke 11:20 – "But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" – as the Founding Fathers' justification for why we even have a Constitution in the first place...which is a lie.

Now, his son, Tim Barton is getting into the family business by making the exact same claim. "The Founding Fathers referenced very specific [Bible] verses as the reason why we are doing what we do," the younger Barton claimed. "George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Adams all wrote [that] the reason we needed separate powers was because the heart of man is wicked and deceitful and can't be trusted." That phrase comes from Jeremiah 17:9, which prompted Barton to insist the framers of the Constitution "literally quoted and referenced the Bible as the reason we had to have a separation of powers because they knew that the word of God was true."

"There's actually dozens of scripture that the Founding Fathers literally quoted the Bible for what they did, and actually, if you read the Constitution and then read the Bible, you will find phrases that are almost verbatim from the Bible to the Constitution." *Comment by Hemant Mehta: 'phrases like 'and' and 'the.'*

by Hemant Mehta in [friendlyatheist.com](https://www.friendlyatheist.com)



Haiti Earthquake: A Humanist Response Updates

Foundation Beyond Belief (FBB), in partnership with the American Humanist Association (AHA), has been in touch with volunteer team Haitian Freethinkers, a group with members who have family in and deep connections to Haiti. The organizations have joined forces to raise funds to support locally-led responses. Thanks to those who donated, the effort raised \$11,171 through GiveLively and Facebook, in addition to money raised separately by Haitian Freethinkers.

The funds will be split between two causes. The first is Doctors Without Borders, which will use the money to help with their ongoing work in the aftermath of the earthquake, political upheaval, and economic issues in Haiti.

The remaining funds will go toward *Mouvement de la Jeunesse pour la Liberte de la Pensee en Haiti* (MOJELIPH), also known as the Freethinkers of Haiti or The Youth Movement for Freethought in Haiti, a sister society of the Freethought Society. The money will go toward distributing direct aid to vulnerable people in the rural countryside, who otherwise lack access to food, water, tents, sanitation, clothing, and other basic needs.

FBB and the AHA are very grateful to everyone who generously donated to this cause. Haiti has been unfortunate enough to face many challenges within the past few years and, as humanists, it is important to help with efforts on the ground as much as possible.

thehumanist.com (10/05/21)



We are social beings, as exemplified by our get-togethers this month: Our Thursday Lunch Bunch (left) and our Saturday lunch and hike up Huyck Falls in Rensselaerville (right). We thank Rosina Ansaldo for arranging our Lunch Bunch gatherings and Dee Portzer for our socials.



Les Reid shared a link
3h · 🌐

Humanists UK have launched a series of online videos to broadcast the central ideas of humanism. They are in cartoon format and the first one is about happiness. I think they could be used in schools, but I wonder if they are too sweet?



YOUTUBE.COM

How can I be happy? | Narrated by Stephen Fry | #ThatsHumanism

I think you will enjoy this short video from the Humanists UK at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?>



ELECTION NEWS

Kevin Smith reports that he received a total of 47 completed 2021 CDHS Executive Council election ballots; All candidates have been elected (or re-elected as the case might be).

From the Editor:

For the longest time, I have been running draft copies of this monthly through Rosina Ansaldo. I can't 4 that her enough for her proofreading skills and effort.

Texas School Official Suggests Teaching Both Holocaust Books And ‘Opposing’ Views: Report

SOUTHLAKE, Texas — A top administrator with the Carroll Independent School District in Southlake advised teachers last week that if they have a book about the Holocaust in their classroom, they should also offer students access to a book from an “opposing” perspective, according to an audio recording obtained by NBC News. The administrator's comments came in response to a Texas law that seeks to limit how teachers discuss white supremacy and systemic racism in public schools.

Gina Peddy, the Carroll school district's executive director of curriculum and instruction, made the comment Friday afternoon during a training session on which books teachers can have in classroom libraries. The training came four days after the Carroll school board, responding to a parent's complaint, voted to reprimand a fourth grade teacher who had kept an anti-racism book in her classroom.

A Carroll staff member secretly recorded the Friday training and shared the audio with NBC News. “Just try to remember the concepts of [House Bill] 3979,” Peddy said in the recording, referring to a new Texas law that requires teachers to present multiple perspectives when discussing “widely debated and currently controversial” issues. “And make sure that if you have a book on the Holocaust,” Peddy continued, “that you have one that has an opposing, that has other perspectives.”

“How do you oppose the Holocaust?” one teacher said in response.

“Believe me,” Peddy said. “That’s come up.”

Sarah Ruiz-Grossman in [nbcnews.com](https://www.nbcnews.com) (10/14/21)

A MAGA-loving, Gun-Obsessed Christian Sect just bought a 130-acre property in Tennessee

A few years ago, shortly after a school shooting in Florida, a Pennsylvania church made news for blessing AR-15's. The fact that hundreds of people were slated to attend with their weapon-babies and the whole thing was taking place across the street from an elementary school only led to more headlines. One of the church's leaders Tim Elder, said at the time, there was biblical justification for what they were doing: the Bible talks about Christ “ruling with a rod of iron”.

Therefore, I guess guns must be anointed in the name of Jesus. Obviously, this wasn't a traditional church (though honestly, this incident wouldn't be all that far-fetched at some evangelical mega-church in Texas.) This was the World Peace and Unification Sanctuary - an offshoot of the controversial Unification Church founded by Sun Myung Moon - and was led by Moon's son, Reverend Sean Moon.

The same Christian sects run by Sean Moon, known as Rod of Iron Ministries, is back in the news this week because, while the gun-obsession hasn't changed, they're expanding: the group has purchased a 130-acre property in eastern Tennessee that will eventually serve as a “training center.” Because nothing says holiness like a bunch of armed Christian nuts heading to the mountains of Tennessee to prepare for a war that exists only in their minds, under the guidance of a man who wears a crown of bullets.

Hemant Mehta in [friendlyatheist.patheos.com](https://www.friendlyatheist.patheos.com) (10/14/21)



At a recent meeting of the CDHS Executive Council, council members voted to make a contribution of \$5000 to the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York.



**Regional Food Bank of
Northeastern New York**

October 18 at 9:30 AM · 🌐

Thank you to the Capital District Humanist Society for stopping by last week with a donation that will provide 20,000 meals to our neighbors in need!

The Sleeper SCOTUS Case That Threatens the Separation of Church and State

Carson v. Makin could set a new precedent for how taxpayer dollars are used to fund religious education.

The Supreme Court's upcoming abortion- and guns-rights cases are getting much of the attention right now, but a third, relatively overlooked case could transform one of the most consequential areas of American law: the separation of Church and state. If the plaintiffs win, states and municipalities could be required to use taxpayer dollars to supplement strands of private religious education that many Americans would find deeply offensive, including schools that exclude non-Christian or LGBTQ students, families, and teachers.



The case, *Carson v. Makin*, involves a challenge to the Maine Department of Education's use of state tuition dollars to supplement "nonsectarian" schools. Under Maine's constitution, the state legislature must require "towns to make suitable provision, at their own expense, for the support and maintenance of public schools." But more than half of Maine's 260 school districts—which it calls "administrative units"—do not have their own public schools. The Maine legislature passed a statute allowing those districts to either contract with established public schools or approved private schools in nearby districts to educate their children, or to "pay the tuition ... at the public school or the approved private school of the parent's choice."

To qualify as an "approved private school" eligible for public tuition assistance, the law requires that the private school be "a nonsectarian school in accordance with the First Amendment of the United States Constitution." The case boils down to a debate over the "nonsectarian" requirement, and whether the Constitution guarantees families a sectarian—or religious—option.

Two sets of parents whose children live in districts that operate no public secondary school selected the private, nonprofit Bangor Christian School "because the school's worldview aligns with their sincerely held religious beliefs and because of the school's high academic standards." A third family chose a school called Temple Academy for similar reasons. None of the families actually sought public tuition for these schools, because, "they allege, given the 'nonsectarian' requirement, 'such a request would be futile,'" according to a decision by the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit rejecting their constitutional claims. The families nonetheless filed suit, claiming that Maine's "nonsectarian" requirement violates a number of their constitutional rights, including their First Amendment right to the free exercise of religion. They lost in the lower courts, and the Supreme Court has now taken up the case for consideration.

Bangor Christian School has a mission of "instilling a Biblical worldview" that is "completely intertwined" with the curriculum and identifies the Bible as its "final authority in all matters." Under the school's "high Biblical standards," it declines to hire teachers who are gay or "identify as a gender other than on their original birth certificate." Temple Academy likewise offers a "biblically-integrated education" and will not hire gay instructors. Moreover, neither school will accept public-tuition payments if doing so would require compliance with the Maine Human Rights Act, which bars discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The schools concede that they would "consider" accepting public funding only if doing so would not force them to change their policy of discriminating against LGBTQ applicants in their faculty hiring policies.

Kimberly Wehle in *The Atlantic* (October 14, 2021)

Why does a Christian ministry in Indiana have access to public school students?



Usually, when we hear about Christian ministries infiltrating public schools, it's something limited to a small group of kids - like a chaplain of the school's football team, but in Evansville, Indiana, the situation is much bigger and more problematic.

The Dream Center is a ministry that works to "connect children and families to God's will for their lives." But since 2018, Dream Center staffers have become a fixture at Delaware Elementary School, under the guise of providing help. Called Peace Makers, the staff not only functions as *de facto* assistants for teachers where needed, but also as a bridge between the classroom and home for students. While I don't blame the principal for accepting voluntary help when she's already stretched thin, but there is a serious problem when staffers of a Christian ministry have made it clear that they see kids as targets for conversion.

Principal Underwood even filmed an ad of sorts for the ministry. It's odd that religion doesn't come up at all in the seven minute video, but it's not because religion is absent during the interactions between the Dream Team staffers and the children. In fact, in a different promotional video for the ministry—one that includes a clip of the principal speaking - the Dream Center bragged about how they are winning new converts. "We serve and do whatever it takes to help our kids be ready to learn at school each day in our afterschool programs. Peacemakers play, teach, and walk alongside our kids, helping them grow in their faith in Christ..."

It gets worse. In a job listing online, the Dream Center said it's looking to hire a Peacemaker to work at public schools, adding that the new hire would be responsible for developing an evangelistic environment around them that nourishes participants walk with Christ. The Freedom From Religion Foundation's legal fellow Karen Heinemann has written a letter to the Evansville Vandenberg school Corporation calling for this partnership to end in its current form. "It is inappropriate and unconstitutional for the school to offer an evangelical Christian ministry unique access to its students during the school day and to have the principal publicly promote the relationship."

Hemant Mehta in <https://friendlyatheist.patheos.com/2021/10/15/>

Pastor in deep-red KY county says God told him to protect his flock by getting them vaccinated

In the end it was the delta variant that drove Rose Mitchell, 89, down the winding mountain road in Smilax, Ky., to the Full Gospel Church of Jesus Christ to get the shot. Her pastor, Billy Joe Lewis, had told his congregation that, No, ma'am, a COVID-19 vaccine would not leave the "mark of the beast" nor rewrite their genetic codes. Mitchell, who has known the deaths of eight of her 13 children over the years, was done taking chances with the virus stealing up the valleys along Cutshin Creek. "That stuff's getting so bad, I was afraid to not take it," she says, sitting in her daughter's car in the church parking lot. "I said, 'Well, if all the rest of them are going to take it, I'll take it too.'"



Some church leaders have refrained from encouraging vaccination, afraid of offending congregants in a state where mistrust of government intrusion runs deep. But not Lewis, who helped build Full Gospel Church on a rare flat parcel of land in 1972 and has led it ever since. Lewis, who has thick silver hair and a luminous smile, spends long stretches of the day in prayer, and he says God told him to protect his flock.

Charles Jay in [dailykos.com](https://www.dailykos.com) (10/18/21)

When a Miscarriage Is Manslaughter

Brittney Poolaw, then 19 years old, showed up at the Comanche County Memorial Hospital in Oklahoma last year after suffering a miscarriage at home. She had been about 17 weeks pregnant. According to an affidavit from a police detective who interviewed her, she admitted to hospital staff that she had recently used both methamphetamine and marijuana. A medical examiner cited her drug use as one of several "conditions contributing" to the miscarriage. Poolaw was arrested on a charge of manslaughter in the first degree, and because she couldn't afford a \$20,000 bond, jailed for a year and a half awaiting trial.

The trial finally took place this month and lasted one day. According to a local television station, an expert witness for the prosecution testified that methamphetamine use may not have been directly responsible for the death of Poolaw's fetus. Nevertheless, after deliberating for less than three hours, a jury found her guilty, and she was sentenced to four years in prison. Poolaw's case is an injustice, but it is also a warning. This is what happens when the law treats embryos and fetuses as people with rights that supersede the rights of those who carry them. And it offers a glimpse of the sort of prosecutions that could become common in a world in which Roe v. Wade is overturned, one we could be living in as soon as next year.

Michelle Goldberg in [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com) (10/18/21)

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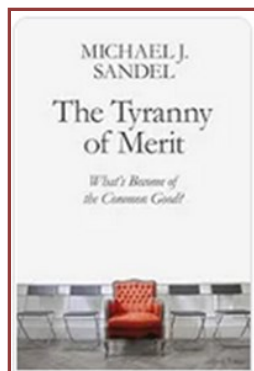
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CDHS BOOK CLUB

The Book Club is discussing The Tyranny of Merit by Michael Sandel.

The group meets on second and fourth Thursdays of each month, between 1 and 3.

If you are interested, contact Frank Robinson and he will send you a link.



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The Capital District Humanist Society (CDHS) is an independent, non-profit (and non-prophet), non-partisan and strictly non-religious educational and social organization for those who share humanist values: commitment to education, rational and free inquiry, democracy, social concerns and fellowship. CDHS is affiliated with the four major humanist organizations - the American Humanist Association (AHA), the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) and the Humanists International (HI).

There are six types of CDHS member support: Individual, \$50/yr; Family, \$80/yr; Student \$25/yr; Sustaining, \$100/yr; Patron, \$150/yr; Lifetime Member, one contribution of \$1000 or more.

Members receive our publication, *The Humanist Monthly*, and vote by mail each September on the make-up of the governing Executive Council. Members are eligible for election to the Executive Council and may also serve as appointed officials. Members are welcome to attend Executive Council meetings.

The IRS recognizes CDHS as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Therefore, all donations, both cash and materials with established "fair market value", qualify as charitable contributions for income tax purposes.

Donations are gratefully accepted to help speed our growth. CDHS is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization under the IRS Code. Financial disclosure information and our annual report are available upon request.

If you know of someone who may be interested in CDHS, please pass this newsletter along or give us the name; we will send a sample copy or two with no obligation.

We value your input. In the best humanist tradition, CDHS has no rigid picture of itself. We ask you to join us, not follow us. What activities and services would you like CDHS to provide its members? Send us your suggestions, questions, and comments.



CDHS

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