



Vol. XXXVII No. 3  
March 2023

# 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, March 12th, at 1 PM: Carol Quantock**

## **For The Birds: Identification, Observation, and Protection**

Birdwatching (aka birding) is a very popular activity enjoyed by people of all ages and walks of life. This talk will briefly cover many topics, including: basic identification tips, useful field guides and apps, quality birding equipment, nests and nesting, habitat, migration, birds as pollinators, preventing window collisions and protecting birds from predators.

Carol Quantock is a local environmental advocate. She has been an active birder for over 40 years, and is the vice president of the Audubon Society of the Capital Region as well as editor of the ASCR newsletter, Wingbeats. Her fascination for birds evolved from extensive real-time experience observing nature at an early age, then by gardening and becoming a Cornell Cooperative Extension (Saratoga County) Master Gardener in May of 2021.

Ms. Quantock has a BA degree in geography and urban/regional planning from SUNY Albany, and a Graduate Management Certificate from Cornell University NYS School of Industrial and Labor Relations. She is currently enrolled in a comprehensive bird biology course (Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology) as well as other bird-related mini-courses. She is also an accomplished sewist and has a large doll collection.

This program will take place online, via Zoom, on Sunday, March 12th at 1 PM. Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invite to the meeting via email.



**....and on Sunday, April 9th...**

## **The Latest “Word” on Neurodegenerative Diseases**

Neurodegenerative diseases include Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS/Lou Gehrig’s Disease), among others. Together, these three diseases affect about 12% of the population. While there are attempts at treatment, there are no cures for these diseases. The effects of these afflictions are not only debilitating and demoralizing for those affected, but they can be devastating for the families as well.

Benjamin Wolozin, MD, PhD, is a pharmacologist and neurologist currently at Boston University School of Medicine, and an Elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He received his B.A. from Wesleyan University (Middletown, CT) and his M.D., Ph.D. from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. He is currently a professor of Pharmacology, Neurology and the Program in Neuroscience at Boston University School of Medicine. He is also co-founder and Chief Scientific Officer (CSO) of Aquinnah Pharmaceuticals Inc., a biotechnology company developing novel



Dr. Benjamin Wolozin

The Capital District Humanist Society provides a supportive community for exchanging ideas, heightening our knowledge of the world and ourselves, fostering moral and ethical growth, and promoting the principles of secular humanism. CDHS is a member organization for people with humanist values. Our values include commitment to free inquiry, rational thought, lifelong education, democracy, social concern, and fellowship.

### **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)



## Review of the Presentation by the Speaker at our February Meeting

Our February speaker was Elahe Gol Pari, who lived most of her life in Iran; a playwright, screen writer, film maker, etc. Her talk was titled, "What is the 'Woman Life Freedom' movement in Iran?" Those three words, in Farsi (the Persian language), are "Zan Zendegi Azadi," and became the rallying cry for the protest movement that erupted after the September 16 death of Mahsa Amini, a 22 year old Kurdish Iranian woman. She'd been arrested by Iran's so-called "Morality Police" because her required hair covering was imperfect, and died three days later from injuries inflicted in their custody. While the protests were initially directed against those female dress strictures and the "Morality Police" enforcing them, they turned into a movement against Iran's Islamic regime itself.

While women have taken the lead, a high proportion of men support the movement. These protests have swept the country, and the regime has responded with extreme violence, many hundreds being killed, and great numbers being jailed, where torture, including sexual violence against women (by the "Morality Police!") is endemic. Elahe said that police shooting at women protesters often aim for the eyes, and many girls have been blinded. Furthermore, injured protesters who go to hospitals have been taken out and jailed and further tortured — as have doctors treating them.

Elahe noted that the first Iranian woman to speak before men without wearing a hijab, the full body covering, was Tahira Qarrat Al-Ain in 1848. This was greeted favorably. No, actually, they killed her. Elahe also observed that the headscarf, at least, is traditional Iranian clothing, akin to males wearing hats. But, in 1936, under the modernizing regime of Reza Shah Pahlavi, women were given the freedom to dress as they pleased. In fact, the hijab was banned in schools and government offices. In 1963 women were given the vote. Then, the Pahlavi dynasty was ousted in 1979 with the "Islamic Revolution" under Ayatollah Khomeini, who opposed such liberalizations.

There was some discussion of the import of these female dress strictures. They putatively embody the idea of covering feminine charms so as to avoid exciting male sexual appetites [seemingly insulting to men, as if they can't keep their libidos under control; which Western men appear able to manage quite well even on topless beaches — FSR] but it was meanwhile suggested that these dress restrictions are in truth assertions of male power over females.

*Review by Frank Robinson*

### Our March Social

(from Dee Fuller, our Social Activity Chair)

The annual Capital District Garden and Flower Show at Hudson Valley Community College (HVCC) is Friday, March 24-Sunday, March 26 beginning each day at 10 AM, and we intend to be there.

The show itself is not really conducive to doing as a group, so I am suggesting you decide what time and what day you want to go and who you want to go with or meet there. One option is to go Saturday morning, leave for lunch and go back with only the one fee.

Reservations have been made at a restaurant very nearby, Moscatiello's, for 1 PM on Saturday. This will be the group social which you may attend with or without going to the show.

This event is much more than a flower show. It's a craft fair and has scheduled classes that you can sign up for ahead of time. Go to <https://flowerandgardenexpo.com> for details. You can purchase tickets ahead of time or at the door.

It's always uplifting to see all the fresh flowers and get ideas for your own gardens.

**Please RSVP for the lunch only to [candacelf13@gmail.com](mailto:candacelf13@gmail.com) by March 24th .**



## South Carolina Public Schools Must Display 'In God We Trust'

A new law in South Carolina mandates that public schools display the national motto of "In God We Trust." Previously, public schools had been permitted to display the motto, but under the terms of the new law, it's required.

Schools must also post signs displaying two state mottos as well. The law requiring placement of the mottos was passed after a campaign led by a Christian nationalist group called the South Carolina Family Caucus and others, reported the *Charleston Post and Courier*. The law does not specify the size of the mottos, but says they must be "prominently" displayed.

"We had a vision, and the vision was that we could organize Christian conservatives that were in the legislature to have a bigger voice than what they had," state Rep. John McCravy (R-Greenwood) told the *Post and Courier*.

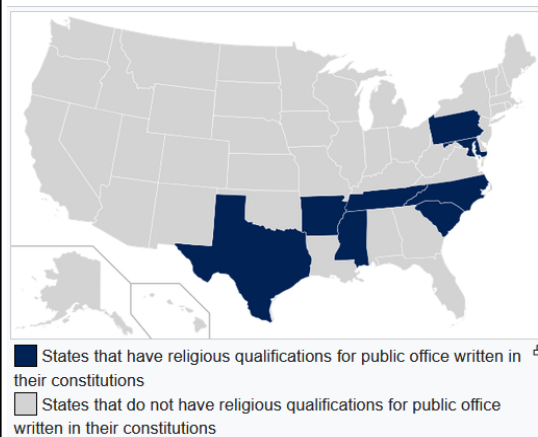
Americans United said the new law is misguided, pointing out that it excludes some children. "They are taught to believe whatever their schools and teachers tell them, and they are prone to feel left out when they don't follow the majority", said Rachel Laser, President and CEO of Americans United.

## Religious qualifications for public office in the United States

Religious qualifications for public office in the United States have always been prohibited at the national level of the federal system of government under the Constitution. Article VI of the Constitution of the United States declares that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States". The First Amendment of the Constitution also prevents the Congress of the United States from making any law "respecting an establishment of religion" (the Establishment Clause).

Neither the First Amendment nor Article VI, however, were originally applied to the individual states, and individual restrictions were utilized by individual states to prevent Jews, Catholics, and atheists from occupying public offices. State-level requirements for public office were not entirely abolished until 1961, when the Supreme Court of the United States struck down religious qualifications for all public officeholders in its decision in *Torcaso v. Watkins*, a case concerning an atheist's right to serve as a notary public under a Maryland law requiring public officials to declare they believed in God. However, eight states still have language in their constitutions that requires such qualifications.

Eight states include language in their constitutions either requiring state officeholders to have particular religious beliefs or specifically protecting those who do. However, the requirements are unenforceable because of the 1961 Supreme Court decision. The states are: Arkansas, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.



Pennsylvania specifically protects officeholders with religious beliefs, but is silent on whether those without such beliefs are also protected. The required beliefs include belief in a Supreme Being and belief in a future state of rewards and punishments.

Some of these same states also specify that the oath of office include the words "so help me God". In some cases, these beliefs (or oaths) were historically required also of jurors, witnesses in court, notaries public, and state employees. In the 1997 case of *Silverman v. Campbell*,<sup>[6]</sup> the South Carolina Supreme Court ruled that the state constitution requiring an oath to God for employment in the public sector violated Article VI of the federal constitution, as well as the First and Fourteenth Amendments and therefore could not be enforced.

Wikipedia

## Food for Thought

Human societies have had many gods and goddesses. We know of thousands of them, from Zeus, Yemoja and Shangdi to Juno, Ganesha and the singular gods of the Bible or Quran. And there are no doubt thousands more of them, no trace or memory of which have survived.

Where did all these gods come from? To humanists, they all seem to be the products of human imagination and culture. It's possible to trace the development of such myths and beliefs through time. And it's interesting that old gods looks so much like the human beings who made them.

Desert dwellers invented harsh and dry austere gods. Farmers invented gods of harvest and plenty. It's also true of individuals today: there are no liberals who believe in a conservative god, and vice versa. Kind people believe in kind gods, and cruel people in cruel ones.

from Copson and Roberts: [the little book of humanism](#) (2020)

## MEMBER NEWS?

Do you have any news to share with other members of our CDHS family? This would, hopefully, be good news about you and those who are important to you.

Our members would like to acknowledge and celebrate your joys and accomplishments.

If you'd like to share your good news in the Humanist Monthly, please submit your news to the Editor (FHW). My email address is in the membership directory.





## West Virginia lawmakers file bill allowing "Intelligent Design" in classrooms

It's the Year of Our Lord 2023 and West Virginia Republicans are still trying to inject "Intelligent Design" in public school science classes. State Sen. Amy Grady, along with her colleague Jay Taylor, just filed Senate Bill 619, which would add a clause to the state code permitting teachers to tell kids some Higher Power poofed them into existence. "Teachers in public schools, including public charter schools that include any one or more of grades Kindergarten through 12, may teach intelligent design as a theory of how the universe and/or humanity came to exist."

The bill doesn't define "Intelligent Design." All you need to know about it, though, is that there's no scientific support for the idea. It stands in direct opposition to evolution and is nothing more than a religious myth promoted by Christians as a way to push God into the classroom using a plausibly legal framework since Creationism wouldn't make the cut.

This is nothing more than an attempt to destroy science classes by giving teachers leeway (and legal cover) to spread misinformation to students. In 2005, a federal court found that "Intelligent Design" is creationism and teaching it in public schools is unconstitutional. In that case, the school ended up paying \$1 million in fees. A costly lesson we'd be happy to teach West Virginia about injecting religion into public schools.

by Hemant Mehta in [friendlyatheist.com](https://friendlyatheist.com) (02/16/23)

## MN lawmaker: Schools must say sickness is a "consequence imposed by the Creator"

A proposed bill in Minnesota intended to "advance critical thinking skills" in school is subtly trying to inject God into science classes. [SF 517](#) is sponsored by Republican **State Sen. Glenn H. Gruenhagen**. At first, it doesn't look all that consequential. It sounds fairly sensible, actually, calling on school districts to make sure kids know the science behind sickness, disease, suffering, and death...It's only when you read the rest of the bill that you realize what this is actually about:

"... and how **sickness, disease, pain, suffering, and death are a consequence imposed by the Creator** of complex living organisms." Ah. Gruenhagen just wants his religious beliefs taught in science (and history) class. He thinks sickness and disease are the result of God punishing us, not germ theory or viruses. He doesn't actually care about scientific "facts" or theories.

by Hemant Mehta in [friendlyatheist.com](https://friendlyatheist.com) (02/15/23)

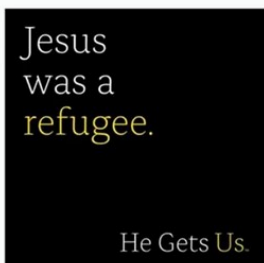
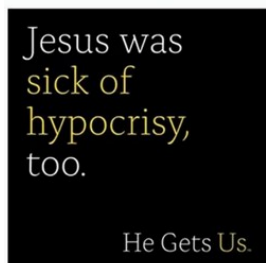
More on this subject can be found at: **Creation, Evolution, and Intelligent Design in Public Schools** ([www.findlaw.com/education/curriculum-standards-school-funding/creation-evolution-and-intelligent-design-in-public-schools.html](http://www.findlaw.com/education/curriculum-standards-school-funding/creation-evolution-and-intelligent-design-in-public-schools.html))

## Selling Jesus like Laundry Detergent

Our Chairman, Don Porterfield, received a letter from John Wood Jr., National Ambassador, Braver Angels. The report is a review of the "He Gets Us" Christian advertisements shown many times during the just-passed SuperBowl. Mr. Wood's remarks are too lengthy to include here. (Braver Angels is a New York-based 501 nonprofit dedicated to political depolarization. The organization runs workshops, debates, and other events where "red" and "blue" participants attempt to better understand one another's positions and discover their shared values.)

What will it take for us to embrace a culture of goodwill in American life and American politics? What will it take for us to heal the wounds of our society? There are many ideas and solutions on offer. Some say it will take electoral reform. Some say it will take a change in institutional incentives. Some argue that we need to abandon the left/right paradigm. And some will say we need the work of groups like Braver Angels. But...maybe we need Jesus?

This is the message of the He Gets Us campaign, which has launched a massive, one-hundred million dollar ad-campaign to "rebrand" Jesus in America.



With beautifully produced commercials that aired to an audience of nearly one-hundred million viewers during the Super Bowl, the people behind He Gets Us presented a Jesus whose teachings and example, they stressed, are the answer to America's deep-seated polarization.

"Jesus loved the people we hate," the ending text of one of the two Super Bowl advertisements declared after unrolling a montage of images depicting bitter social conflict in the United States. "He gets us. All of us." The ad calls upon us, in the words of the Bible, to "Love your enemies."

For many people, religious and non-religious, it was an uplifting message. Yet there was serious backlash to the commercial, and the backlash itself came from remarkably far across the spectrum.

This issue is a hot topic on the internet.—  
check it out, if you can.



Ryan Cook  
@ryan\_cook2021

So Pensacola Christian College planned on having a British Acapella group perform tonight. However some idiot student found out that one of the singers is gay and so the school ended up canceling the event. I personally find this to be extremely dumb.

information that I think is serious. I just found out that the Kings Singers member Edward Button is openly gay on his personal Instagram. His personal Instagram is also in the bio of the Kings Singers Instagram page. I just wanted to let people know because I as a fundamental Christian don't believe that this is right. I also saw that their official website is blocked on PCC WiFi. I just wanted to let you know so people can become aware of it.



## Florida college cancels singing group's concert due to 'lifestyle that contradicts scripture'

CNN.com (02/16/23)

Debates are churning after a Florida college abruptly canceled an appearance by a prominent singing group due to at least one member's sex-

uality. The King's Singers are a highly regarded British a cappella ensemble with more than 50 years of history. The all-male group performs a range of songs, including pop music, classical arrangements and sacred music.

The group says a February 11 concert at Pensacola Christian College was canceled with "two hours' notice" because of "concerns" about the 'lifestyle' of members of our group."

"It has become clear to us, from a flood of correspondence from students and members of the public, that these concerns related to the sexuality of members of our group," a statement from the group, shared on social media, reads.

Pensacola Christian College, a private independent Baptist institution, released a statement with their reasoning. "PCC canceled a concert

with The King's Singers upon learning that one of the artists openly maintained a lifestyle that contradicts Scripture," the statement reads. A section referring to sexuality in the school's articles of faith notes: "We believe that God has commanded that sexual activity be exclusively reserved to a man and a woman who are legally married to each other." It goes on to say that scripture forbids "sexual immorality including adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography." The college also said the artists were "treated with dignity and respect when informed of the cancellation."

The King's Singers said they have performed at the college before.

The controversy has resonated both within the small liberal arts college and beyond. Fans and supporters of the group questioned PCC's reasoning, mentioning the college's performances in recent years of works by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and Francis Poulenc, two classical music titans widely known to have had male romantic interests.

Supporters of the college commended the institution's commitment to its interpretation of the Bible, which it calls "the foundation for our sincerely held beliefs."

Can you tell which one of these men is gay?



### Selected Tweets in response:



**Sergio Quintana** @svqjournalist · Feb 16

Replying to @WFKARS and @ConnectPCC

So, is it fair to say this college also doesn't ever serve shellfish and they monitor student and faculty clothes to make sure no blended fabrics are ever worn?

...



**Mikah Meyer** @MikahMey · Feb 14

Replying to @ConnectPCC

Treating people poorly is a lifestyle. One's sexual orientation is part of how He made them. You don't choose your sexuality, but you do choose how you treat people.

...



## The ACLU hails first 'After-School Satan Club' meeting at Virginia elementary school 'a victory for free speech and religious liberty'.

Students at a Virginia elementary school attended their first after school Satan Club meeting on Thursday, February 16th. The club is sponsored by The Satanic Temple.

The ACLU called it "a victory for free speech and religious liberty." Students at a Virginia school held their first After-School Satan Club meeting on Thursday after being put on hold for months, the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia announced.

The meeting at B.M. Williams Primary School in Chesapeake, Virginia was held "despite efforts by some to shut down the club and prevent it from gaining equal access to school facilities," the ACLU said, describing it as "a victory for free speech and religious liberty."

The Virginia Pilot reported last fall that the idea of the club was requested by parents as a response to the Good News Club, another student club run by the Child Evangelism Fellowship. According to the Pilot, parents wanted the club, which is sponsored by The Satanic Temple, for their nontheistic children.

Reaction from individuals opposed to the club came swiftly. A sign on the school's front door stated there was on a level 1 lockdown, which means there is a threat (potential shooter, criminal, etc.) nearby, but the school itself is not necessarily being targeted. The school was to be locked until law enforcement officials gave the all-clear.

Officials have not confirmed whether the bomb threats are related to the club. [Coincidence? –FHW] The text of the email mentioned threats toward a Chesapeake school board member, the Chesapeake schools superintendent and the organizer of the After School Satan Club. The email reads: "You are evil, there is no other way to put it." It goes on to say, "You promote devil worship and Islamic values."

*friendlyatheist@substack.com (02/14/23)*

### What does the Satanic Temple believe?

The Satanic Temple says it has seven fundamental tenets:

1. One should strive to act with compassion and empathy toward all creatures in accordance with reason.
2. The struggle for justice is an ongoing and necessary pursuit that should prevail over laws and institutions.
3. One's body is inviolable, subject to one's own will alone.
4. The freedoms of others should be respected, including the freedom to offend. To willfully and unjustly encroach upon the freedoms of another is to forgo one's own.
5. Beliefs should conform to one's best scientific understanding of the world. One should take care never to distort scientific facts to fit one's beliefs.
6. People are fallible. If one makes a mistake, one should do one's best to rectify it and resolve any harm that might have been caused.
7. Every tenet is a guiding principle designed to inspire nobility in action and thought. The spirit of compassion, wisdom, and justice should always prevail over the written or spoken word.

Though the Temple says it doesn't have any required rituals, TST acknowledges some rituals that members have participated in. In addition to the aforementioned Unbaptism, there are also Destruction rituals (participants destroy objects symbolizing pain in their lives) and Defiance rituals (participants take a pledge to challenge the status quo in a personally meaningful way).

## CFI Investigations Group: Doubling Down on the Paranormal Challenge

by James Underwood in [The Center for Inquiry Newsletter](#) (Vol. 9, No. 1)

The Center for Inquiry Investigations Group (CFIIG) has a big announcement. This year, they have doubled the prize for CFIIG's Paranormal Challenge to \$500,000. That's right—there are now half a million reasons for people to step forward and attempt to prove their claims of superpowers. The CFI Investigations Group has been investigating and testing paranormal claims for 23 years.

CFIIG most recently tested an alleged healer just before Christmas of last year. His name was Jesus (no kidding!), but the test was no joke. Jesus claimed to be able to remove a lipoma from the neck of one of our investigators. He also attempted to heal a scab on my leg. Neither of these promised Christmas miracles occurred, and Jesus was sent home without the prize money.

Visit [cfiig.org](http://cfiig.org) to read the whole story.





## Local leaders in Victoria (Australia) want to end Christian prayers at meetings

Open Letter to the Premier, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner, the CEO and Board of the Municipal Association of Victoria, and the CEO and Board of the Victorian Local Governance Association.

"Dear Premier, Ministers, Commissioner, and CEO and Board members of the MAV and of the VLGA, we write as elected Councillors in our individual capacities about the widespread practice of Victorian Councils including religious prayers as an official part of Council meetings. These practices are a matter of some controversy. Some Councillors object to being compelled by their Council's governance rules to participate in a religious ritual as part of their role. Freedom of religion necessarily includes freedom from religion. Some Councillors take exception to their Council having an official prayer derived from the traditions of a single religion, pointing out that this is inconsistent with the multicultural and multi-faith diversity of the communities the council represents. The practice excludes the non-religious and adherents of minority faiths. Some Councillors oppose as a matter of principle government organs such as councils being anything other than neutral in matters of religion."

Some councils have already gotten rid of the invocations but that didn't happen without pushback. That's where the requested guidance would be helpful. Victoria doesn't *require* councils to say a prayer at meetings, but by not addressing the matter at all, everyone is stuck creating their own rules.

**Even when prayer has been nixed, its defenders are using the same arguments that Christian Nationalists use in the United States:**

In the state's north-west, six of nine Mildura Rural City Councillors voted in favour of removing the prayer to God from council meetings in September 2022. Councillor Glenn Milne was one of the three who defended the prayer. He said the letter seeking religion be taken out of council affairs was not reflective of local values. **"Most of our laws are based on Christian values anyway," he said.**

Besides that being factually untrue, other [arguments] are just horrible for perpetuating a tradition that has outlived its usefulness. Christian officials who want to pray are welcome to do it whenever they want—in private. Wasting meeting time with a specifically Christian invocation, however, is a form of privilege these councils are better off eliminating.

*friendlyatheist.com (02/04/23)*

### CDHS Executive Council

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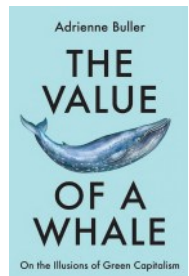
### Appointed Positions

Hospitality	Mira Peck
Room Arrangements	Frank Robinson

## The CDHS Book Group

is reading and discussing **"The Value of a Whale" by Adrienne Buller.**

**Contact Frank Robinson if you want to join the spirited and informative discussion.**



Check out this Interesting discussion from the Brookings Institute at:

<https://youtu.be/rZLpF-w8-IE>

**"Understanding the threat of white Christian nationalism to American democracy today"**

**Capital District Humanist Society, Inc. PO Box 11209, Loudonville NY 12211-0209**

**(518) 533-2666 E-mail us at [CDHS.albany@gmail.com](mailto:CDHS.albany@gmail.com)**

**Visit us on the web at [Humanistsociety.net](http://Humanistsociety.net)**

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

PO Box 11209

Loudonville, NY 12211-0209

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CDHS ++ PO Box 11209, Loudonville, NY 12211-0209 ++ (518) 533-2666

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All this information will be included in our Directory, which is distributed to members only, unless you request otherwise by checking and signing here [ ] I do not want to be listed in the CDHS Member Directory \_\_\_\_\_

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**Annual Payment**

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