



The Utah Humanist

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Humanists of Utah is a Chapter of the *American Humanist Association*.

We are a nonprofit corporation organized to advocate and promote ethical, rational, and democratic humanism among our membership and the larger community.



Humanism is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. It affirms the dignity of each human being and supports individual liberty consonant with social and planetary responsibility. Humanism advocates participatory democracy, the open society, human rights and social justice. Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as part of nature and holds that values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human nature, experience, and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.

—*The Humanist*,
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Humanist Association

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History of Humanism in Utah

Organized Humanism began in the United States as an effort to maintain the Unitarian Church as the leading “creedless liberal religion” in this nation. Over the years since the Unitarian Church was established as a creedless religion several efforts have been made by overzealous Unitarian leaders to create a “statement of belief.” During the late 1920’s the movement to establish a Unitarian Creed appeared close to gaining approval by the Unitarian hierarchy in Boston.

A group of Unitarian Ministers in Chicago, strongly opposed to the effort in Boston, organized to halt the creedal railroading by the easterners. They were ridiculed as “The Western Movement.” Reverend Ed Wilson was a proponent of the Humanist Philosophy and a Unitarian minister. He and four other Unitarian ministers formed a loose organization including Chicago University professors to publicize the Humanist Philosophy and urge the Unitarian Society to adopt *it’s* ideas rather than adopt an *authoritarian* religious creed. Dr. Wilson was a leading spokesman for the group and helped to write a defining statement eventually referred to as *The Humanist Manifesto*.

The Western Movement was a major factor in defeating the effort in Boston to write a Unitarian Creed of Belief. The task of composing a Humanist Manifesto took about three years. It went through serious discussions, several drafts, and revisions. Some prominent philosophers eventually refused to approve it, some because it was too bold, some because it was too soft.

The final compromised document was signed by thirty-three liberal religious and educational leaders and in 1933 was published for the first time in a Chicago newsletter, *The New Humanist*, edited and published by Ed Wilson. Here are some highlights from this document:

•In every field of human activity, the vital movement is now in the direction of a candid and explicit humanism. In order that religious humanism may be better understood we, the undersigned, desire to make certain affirmations, which we believe the facts of our contemporary life demonstrate.

•Today man’s larger understanding of the universe, his scientific achievements, and his deeper appreciation of brotherhood have created a situation which requires a new

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President's Message

As this year is starting to wind down, my thoughts are with the situation in the world, our nation and our community. It's interesting that we all thought last year was the worst due to the pandemic and that this year would be better than last. To some, it has been better, but for many it has been the same or worse. Whatever your thoughts on the state of the pandemic, it has most definitely been a game changer and that is tough for many. Many have had more time for thinking, self-reflection, searching, and even a quest for something more. As humanists, we believe in the importance of human values and dignity. We propose that people can resolve problems using science and reason. Rather than looking to religious traditions, humanism focuses on helping people live well, achieve personal growth, and make the world a better place instead. Lots of food for thought, if you are looking to further your growth or just want to refresh.

As I write this from my hotel room in Memphis, my thoughts are heavy with the rich history here. I am currently travelling across the country for a wedding and seeing very important places on my way. Today I visited many powerful places within the civil rights movement's history. I walked where Martin Luther King spent considerable time, where he gave his speeches and ultimately where he was killed. There are literally no words. The energy that resides in these places transcend time. The community here, more than 50 years later, still embraces pieces of this time period and even have kept the styles and vibe alive and well in the city. There is a strong sense of helping keep the ideals alive and moving progressively forward toward equality and a better life for all. I have thought about sacrifice. Even though Dr. King was a religious man, his words and his work were for everyone. The ethics were spot on and in his immortal words, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where

he stands at times of challenge and controversy." - Strength to Love, 1963. The turmoil around us all is tough. If you feel isolated and afraid, know that you are not alone. We have a community of strength in the knowledge and empowerment of ethics based on reason and our common humanity. We recognize that moral values are properly founded on human nature and experience. Now is the time to stand tall with your value system and share it with those around you. I admonish you to share the good news about what we believe. Live the life you have chosen and seek to move forward with helping the world be a better place, one step at a time.

I send good vibes to you all and wishes for safety and happiness during these tough times. My thoughts are with you and we, as a community, have a lot to celebrate by adhering with the American Humanist Association (AHA) ideals of "striving to bring about a progressive society where being 'good without a god' is an accepted way to live life. We accomplish this through our defense of civil liberties and secular governance, by our outreach to the growing number of people without religious belief or preference, and through a continued refinement and advancement of the humanist worldview."

Thank you for fighting the good fight and for just being you.

*Kindest regards
Melanie White-Curtis*





I've Been Reading A Lot Lately

I have been reading more than usual because of the need to stay isolated during the pandemic. When the pandemic was getting really scary, I wasn't reading much at all. Being a person of high risk due to age and some health issues, I was too distracted with anxiety and was mostly pacing around and watching too much cable news about the horrors this virus is causing. But, after I got myself calmed down with the help of the Veterans Administration, reading became a good way to keep my mind busy.

Yet, even though reading, has been a good distraction, I still stayed informed on current events. Along with the pandemic, the actions or inactions of Donald Trump and his administration in regard to the COVID-19 virus and then his attempts to overturn the election certainly kept anxiety at the door. You would think that with all that has been going on in this country, with Trump at the center of it all, it would make a person shy away from books about the worst President ever. But no, I have three books about that evil man, one was given to me, and I haven't read much of it yet. The other two I have read. First is a book by Mary L. Trump Ph.D., Donald Trump's niece, titled *Too Much and Never Enough*, subtitled *How my family created the world's most dangerous man*. Mary Trump is a clinical psychologist who is a good writer and does a good job of describing the ugly and dark history of their family. As the cover leaf states "she describes a nightmare of traumas, destructive relationships, and a tragic combination of neglect and abuse." It's well written and I recommend it as one of the best ways to gain an understanding how somebody can become as horrible as Donald Trump.

A more recent title about Trump is *I Alone Can Fix It*, by Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker, both correspondents at The Washington Post. With the subtitle is *Donald J. Trump's Catastrophic Final Year*. The book in my opinion is a riveting narrative. Superbly written in stunning detail it describes what was going on behind the scenes in the last year of the Trump administration. I don't think I have ever called a

non-fiction book as riveting as this one. As I read this book more quickly than I usually do I asked myself why. Then it occurred to me that it was partly because we had been living what they were describing in detail in a running narrative. Much of what they wrote about we knew about from the news and his endless "tweets." It was compelling in a strange way to me as a story I already knew about but was eager to have the writers fill in the details. And the details give you pause to realize how badly the Trump administration mishandled the COVID pandemic and how close they came to subverting our democracy to keep Trump in power. Quite frankly, the subversion attempts are still going on to this day. I highly recommend this book and I'm sure it will keep you as riveted as I was.

—Bob Lane

Chaplain's Corner

Professional Decent Human Being

Teaching World Religions is what made me a Humanist. Ph.D. coursework in Biblical Studies required me to get creative with my Mormonism but teaching World Religions made the whole floor of belief crumble into a beautiful agnostic mosaic. Once I was exposed to the grand history of religion, it became obvious that religion was both profoundly powerful and profoundly HUMAN.

With more experience teaching the course, I would motivate and stump students with two questions I'm going to share with you now.

- 1) What cultural institution is more powerful than religion?
- 2) If I wanted to be a professional good person, what job would that be?

We as humans and Humanists need to grapple with these questions. The question of effective approaches to well-being is one I am most passionate about, but I'll come back to that later. Suffice it to say that I am troubled that the most impactful institutions are not the most ethical

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Chaplain's Corner

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ones. Shocking right? (Take a glance at the US defense budget sometime)

In this Chaplain's Corner I want to explore the relationship between religion and goodness. Because though many professions require goodness, only one *specializes* in goodness. A professional good person is... a minister. Traditionally, religious leaders are those who are understood as being specialists in knowing what is right and wrong, knowing how to live well, and helping you do it. I know I'm not the only one who finds it deeply disturbing that US culture has mostly outsourced goodness to religion.

I've had the privilege of working as a Humanist Chaplain, endorsed by the Humanist Society, for almost six years. I specifically sought out hospice and prison Chaplaincy because I wanted to see if I could serve the dying and imprisoned without relying on the idea of afterlife (so far it's gone very well.)

I playfully and seriously call myself a "professional decent human being". And this is where you come in, because as Humanists, you are also dedicated to decency. We all should be, right? But too often we get distracted. I have found that in general, we are as decent as we are incentivized and empowered to be, and overwhelmingly influenced by our contexts.

Two quick stories about goodness. One of my favorite parts of my job as Prison Chaplain is to train volunteers (I call prison "life skills with catastrophic consequences"). In one session a man said, "I don't think I'm comfortable with that word you keep saying."

I responded, "Um, you mean.... Defensible?" I had to admit I'm not surprised that he is not used to needing to account for his actions. Last year I was invited to debate some Evangelical Christians at the University of Utah on the proposition that God is required for morality (They preferred the more audacious claim that Christianity was required for morality, and I gently responded that I don't know whether they want to engage in an ethical critique of Christian history). My succinct summary is that in order for morality to pertain, God does not need to exist. You do.

Traditionally "right and wrong" has been

understood as "how God wants you to live," but we've made a lot of progress in understanding what goodness means. My proposal is that goodness involves effective approaches to individual and collective well-being, which includes respecting self and others as whole people, conscious agents worth taking seriously. If you want to do some Googling, I resonate with Emmanuel Levinas' theory of interpersonal ethics, combined with a pragmatic focus on function and outcome of our actions.

Of the many amazing conversations I have with my children, a favorite is when I asked whether it's possible to do anything wrong in a video game. My youngest immediately piped up, "Playing video games can make you do things that are wrong in real life". In seconds she intuited the principle that it is consciousness that makes something ethical. As best as we can tell, we can't hurt a rock's feelings. The greater the consciousness, the greater our ethical responsibility. My ethical formula is this: every action should be defensible to the ideal version of all those impacted by that action.

I distill my concept of spirituality down to two words: Show up. Life invites us to show up to the conscious experience, show up to ourselves, show up to each other. In my experience, we show up as much as we are incentivized and empowered to do so. As a Chaplain, I have the privilege and responsibility of showing up for people in their hardest moments, where life breaks open. My favorite thing about Chaplaincy is that it trains behavior and skills that are just good living, things we all should be doing for ourselves and each other.

And that's why in the same way I am a professional decent human being, you all are amateur Humanist Chaplains. So as members of Humanists of Utah and humans in general, I look forward to showing up, humaning well, and living better.

I'd like to officially offer to be your Humanist Chaplain.

—Jared Anderson

To be continued next month...



History of Humanism in Utah

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statement of the means and purposes of religion.

- We therefore affirm the following:
- Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created.
- Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as the result of a continuous process.
- Humanists find that the traditional dualism of mind and body must be rejected.
- Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science make unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values.
- Religious humanism considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of man's life and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now.
- The enhancement of human life is the purpose and program of humanism.
- We assert that humanism will: (a)affirm life rather than deny it; (b)seek to elicit the possibilities of life, (c) endeavor to establish the conditions of a satisfactory life for all.

So stand the theses of religious humanism.

Ed Wilson continued his role as a spokesman for humanism, and his Unitarian ministerial career. In 1946 he was invited to be the minister of the Salt Lake City Unitarian Society. While here he continued his dual role as a Unitarian Minister and as editor of *The Humanist* magazine.

During his three years in the Salt Lake City pulpit his leadership in both capacities was instrumental in the acceptance of humanism within Unitarianism. This congregation was one of the first Unitarian Societies to adopt the *Humanist Manifesto* as an inspirational document. By the 1960's, 80% of the US Unitarian membership identified themselves as humanists. Today that percentage is slightly less than 50%, but it continues to be the largest sub-group in the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Dr. Wilson remained as chief editor *The Humanist Magazine* for 16-years, from 1941 to 1956. He was one of the founders of the American Humanist Association and served as its executive director for 21-years, from 1949 to 1970. In 1952 he participated in the formation of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, uniting

the humanist movement worldwide.

The illness of his wife was a factor in Ed Wilson retiring from active leadership roles in both the Unitarian Ministry and the American Humanist Association. Upon the death of his wife, he decided to return to Salt Lake City where one of his sons was a physician at the Veterans Hospital. He was instrumental in forming this local chapter of the American Humanist Association.

I had the privilege of interviewing him after we had organized the chapter. That interview is [available here](#).

He was a brilliant scholar, thoughtful, intelligent and an excellent communicator. He talked primarily about his early life

Ed Wilson's goal was to live to welcome in the year 2000. He wanted to be one of the few people who could be recognized for living in three centuries, the 1800's, the 1900's and two thousand. But his desires exceeded reality. He died shortly after our interview. Consequently, his personal voice regarding the struggle to form the American Humanist Association was never electronically recorded. It is available in this book published a few years after his death, but I would have been more than pleased to have had his personal observations of organizing the AHA recorded in the first person!

A few years earlier he did have an oral history interview at the University of Utah Marriott Library. In that interview he related some of the details about organizing humanism and he told Lorille Miller his ideas about how the words "religion" and "religious" have quite different implications. His comments reveal clearly, I think, how he felt comfortable being both a humanist leader and a Unitarian Minister. Here is an excerpt:

"The Humanist Association was intended to be an educational association, not a church or a denomination. We were not going to call it a religion but did want religious values to be included in its general approach to life.

"Religions set up a creed which people are required to affirm. The emphasis in their faith is on 'right belief'...it is often dogmatic and rigid whereas 'religious' is a quality of life and includes wonder, awe, and commitment to ideals."

Ed was the energizer in organizing this chapter

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History of Humanism in Utah

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of his American Humanist Association. He and seven others met in the chapel next door on a November evening in 1990 and voted to organize the Humanist of Utah. Our charter was officially granted by the AHA May 9, 1991. Our Articles of Incorporation as a non-profit Corporation were granted by the state of Utah August 3, 1992. The chapter's original statement of belief and purpose read:

Humanism is a natural way of life that promotes living joyfully and compassionately in the present, using innate intelligence, science, the humanities and experience as the methods for discovering truth.

Our purpose is to offer an affirmative educational program based on developing one's natural inner strengths in order to practice the art of living; to promote meaningful activities and compassionate services which champion Humanism; and to be an association where all can have a sense of belonging to a larger community that supports a positive philosophy of reason, integrity, and dignity.

Membership growth was slow but by 1996 one-hundred-and-forty people had paid dues to be recognized as members supporting humanist principles. The main characteristic shared by all humanists is 'an inquisitive mind seeking rational answers to life, nature and the universe.'

Humanism is a broad category of ethical philosophies that affirm the dignity and worth of all people, their intellectual ability to determine moral values, their emotional strength to determine right and wrong based on human experience and evolution, rather than ancient Biblical dictates.

Humanism entails a commitment to the search for truth and morality thru reason rather than revelation, human means in support of human interests. In focusing on the capacity for self-determination, Humanism rejects the validity of transcendental justifications such as faith and supernaturalism. They respect reason and reject revelation as a source of discovering truth.

Humanism features an optimistic attitude concerning the capacity of people. Their ultimate goal is human flourishing, making life better for all

humans. The focus is on doing good and living well in the here and now, and by their efforts leaving this world a better place. They believe the rewards of living the good life will be enjoyed during this life, not in a life after death.

At the conclusion of a recent panel discussion of several Utah religious leaders the moderator invited each of us to respond to the question:

"How would Utah be different if 70% of its citizens were members of your religion or philosophy?"

My response was:

1. Education would be tuition free thru college graduation.
 2. Students would be encouraged to develop their innate talents and self esteem.
 3. Sex education would be a subject of public education where students would learn the responsibilities of sexual expression.
 4. Public housing would be available for the homeless.
 5. Meals would be available for the hungry.
 6. Medical services would be available for everyone.
 7. Appropriate jobs would be available for the unskilled.
 8. People would be required work no more than 8-hours a day, nor more than 5-days a week.
 9. Public transportation would be affordable for everyone.
 10. Electronic media would be required to present all sides of political and social questions.
- Prisons would be operated for rehabilitation rather than punishment.

I feel fortunate to have been a charter member of this organization; to have had an opportunity to serve on the board of our national organization for 8-years; To have served as a certified Humanist Counselor and officiate for fifteen years; and most of all I feel a deep gratitude for having had the personal guidance and wisdom of one of the outstanding world leaders of humanism.

The characteristic shared by all humanists is an inquisitive mind seeking reasonable answers to the questions of life, nature, and the universe.

-Flo Wineriter



Humanists of Utah meetings are open to the public and free of any admission charge. A discussion and light refreshments follow the speaker's presentation. Come join us and **bring a friend!**

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of Humanists of Utah nor the American Humanist Association. Reprinting of articles is permitted for humanist groups promoting the interests of humanism if attribution is properly stated.



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Key Contacts:

Melanie White-Curtis—385-495-3786
 melaniewhitecurtis@gmail.com
 Wayne Wilson—801-561-0406
 wwilson@xmission.com

Website:

<https://HumanistsOfUtah.org>

Newsletter Contributors:

Jared Anderson
 Melanie White-Curtis
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Humanists of Utah urges you to support the American Humanist Association.

The AHA is dedicated to preserving individual rights and promoting nationally the philosophy of humanism.

Membership brings you the *Humanist* magazine and *Free Mind* newsletter six times a year.

Annual membership is only \$45.00 (**\$35 Introductory Rate**) and can be paid with plastic. Phone (800) 743-6646 or write to:

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 - Please send a *FREE* trial Subscription to the Utah Humanist
 - \$_____ additional contribution to help promote public awareness of humanism
- ⇒ All contributions in excess of the \$20 subscription fee tax deductible.
 ⇒ *Members* have the right to vote in Chapter elections and participate in Chapter decisions.
 ⇒ Dues provide for information packets, honoraria to speakers, expenses of newsletter publication, trial subscriptions, copies to libraries, and newsletter exchange with other chapters.

Humanists of Utah
P.O. Box 1043
West Jordan, UT 84084

Now you can pay online with PayPal!

Notes:

- ◆ *General Meetings* are for all members and the general public. There are no admission charges.
- ◆ *Discussion Group* meetings are open to everyone. A different book or topic is covered every month.
- ◆ *Board Meetings* are planning and business sessions. They are open to all members.
- ◆ Eliot Hall is in the First Unitarian Church located at 569 South 1300 East in Salt Lake City.
- ◆ RE 201 is upstairs in the East Educational Building at the First Unitarian Church.

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All Public in person
meetings are CANCELLED
again until further notice
Due to the Pandemic



Humanists of Utah

A Chapter of the American Humanist Association

P.O. Box 1043
West Jordan, UT 84084