



humanistcanada

reason • ethics • dignity • equality

**promoting the separation of religion from public policy
and fostering the development of reason, compassion and critical thinking
for all Canadians through secular education and community support**

Winter 2009

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*send us your news,
articles, event
listings and ideas!*

president's message

I wish to begin my address by thanking those members who travelled all the way to Nova Scotia to attend our annual general meeting in August. I would also like to thank those members who chose proxies to represent them if they could not attend. Your interest and support of our efforts means a great deal to us.

This meeting was especially significant for Humanist Canada; not only because this was the first time in our 40 year history that the East Coast was chosen as the site of AGM, but also because we were conducting a vote on the new bylaws that included our new federation model. Several people had worked hard on the bylaws and the federation model concept over the last three years, with the final draft composed in consultation with Industry Canada this past summer. Official government approval of our bylaws was granted on August 10.

Now that we have an improved set of bylaws to work with, we can move forward with strategic planning and accordingly with fundraising campaigns in 2010.

executive director's message

Further to my letter of a few weeks ago, I would like to offer a recap of the key board developments that have materialized over the last few weeks. First, Dorothy Hays is now our incumbent President, having assumed this role upon Pat O'Brien's resignation last month. This is a historic time for Humanist Canada as it means that we now have a female President - a development that we have not seen in our organization for 25 years. Dorothy, who was past Vice President of Humanist Canada, is a retired social worker and a dynamo in advocating for humanism and secularism wherever she goes. In addition to being a dedicated member of Humanist Canada for over 15 years, she is President of the Thunder Bay Humanists, has served on the Unitarian Fellowship Board, and is the Humanist Canada liaison to the Atheist Alliance International Board of Directors. As a social worker, Dorothy was also President of the Thunder Bay Chapter of the Ontario Professional Association of Social Workers. We were pleased to have Pat at the helm of Humanist Canada during our first national convention in August 2008, during our first public transit ad campaign in early 2009 "You Can Be Good Without God", and during our first lecture series in April 2009. For over two years, Pat chaired the Federation Model Committee and was also actively involved in the creation of our revised bylaws

Dorothy Hays, B.A, B.Ed, HBSW

Please take a couple of minutes to vote in our strategic planning poll on potential initiatives that, once approved by Industry Canada and the CRA, will carry us through the next 2 to 5 years. Here is the link to the poll:

www.humanistcanada.com/strategic-planning-poll

In an effort to improve communications with our members, we will be improving our discussion channels and ask that you use the online Feedback Form to communicate ideas to us. Here is the link to the form:

www.humanistcanada.com/feedback

Finally, elections will take place on January 22, 2010, for Regional Director, Director-at-large, and executive positions. Details will be in the packages to be sent to members later this month. If you are interested in a Board position, you must have been an HC member in good standing for a minimum of 12 consecutive months preceding your application or nomination to serve on the Board. Good luck to all applicants and thank you again for your patience and continued support.

Kathy Meidell, B.A, E.C.E

that reflect our new style of governance. As Executive Director, I was pleased to serve Humanist Canada under Pat O'Brien's presidency and look forward to working alongside Dorothy Hays as well. Second, I would like to welcome three new members to the Board of Directors: Doug Thomas, who is our new Secretary; Barrie Webster, who is the Director for Region 4; and Simon Parcher, who is the Director-at-Large. Barrie and Simon will be serving only until elections in January, to effect a smoother transition to the federation model in the new year. All three gentlemen are longtime members in good standing of Humanist Canada.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank this year's Officiant Conference organizers, Sheila McKillop and Joan Pella, and our Governing Official, Age Smies, for their hard work in preparing a lively two-day event. About 40 people attended, including 19 Officiants, members of the Humanist Association of Sudbury, city officials from Sudbury, and HC members from Quebec. It was lovely meeting the new Officiants (7 trained this year) and spending time with old friends. It is our hope that our flagship program - training and certifying Officiants to perform non-religious ceremonies while actively promoting Humanist Canada - will be broadened to a national scope.

strategic planning

Following our 2008 annual general meeting, a not-for-profit management consultant advised the Board, employees, and volunteers of Humanist Canada on how to improve governance and facilitated discussions on strategic planning to sharpen our overall business focus.

Over the last few months, the Board, with input from ideas submitted by our members via our online Feedback Form, drafted a list of potential initiatives that we could possibly undertake. Now, we now want to hear from you, our loyal members, as to which programs you would like to see developed and implemented.

From now until January 18, we will be collecting your input via our strategic planning poll below. The top two initiatives will be reviewed by Industry Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency for regulation compliance and, if feasible, will, along with our Officiant program, make up the three key programs that Humanist Canada runs for the next two to five years.

Choose two of the initiatives below, list them in order of importance to you, then vote online. Or, you may complete the facing page and fax in your choices at: **613.739.9569**. The online voting address is: **www.humanistcanada.com/strategic-planning-poll**

1. Annual Speaker Conference (Reason Out Loud)

Building on the success of our first conference series, "Reason Out Loud" during the 200th anniversary year of Charles Darwin's birth, Humanist Canada could make Reason Out Loud an annual event. This past April, five prominent speakers, from both the Christian and Humanist communities, debated some of the hottest topics today, including abortion, gender and biotechnology. The format of future Reason Out Loud conferences could vary from debates, to lectures, to panel discussions, to film and discussion evenings, and feature Canadian and international speakers. Already we have seen that this year's debate stimulated public interest in humanism and secularism and generated membership growth. Although this past event was held in Toronto and drew a crowd of over 100 people, we feel that our membership could benefit even more from holding Reason Out Loud in different cities. Input for future event themes and speakers would be encouraged from our all our members and the general public.

2. Next Generation Connection

Drawing on the importance of reaching people at a young age to teach them about humanist and secular values and on the reality that we live in an ever-changing and fast-paced technological age, students who have embraced the humanist lifescape will be invited to join a new Facebook site hosted by Humanist Canada. Here students from across the nation will be able to exchange notes, jokes, news stories, and watch videos related to humanism. These sites are very popular and are a quick and efficient way to attract younger Humanists and encourage those who are curious about humanism to learn more. Once a year, Humanist Canada could host a Next Generation Humanist Video Contest. Students would be invited to create and submit a humanism-themed video to win a monetary prize. Judges would be other students and voting would be done online. Prizes awarded to be determined upon donations received.

3. Media Watch

This group would monitor the media looking for stories that either show Humanists/Atheists in a bad light or unnecessarily put religion on the pedestal we want to knock them off of. This group would also look for sympathetic reporters and outlets to help us get our message out. They could monitor the media for stories we want to write press releases on. It is important to stay current as the news cycle, even at 24 hours, dies after the story has run its course.

4. Advocacy and Awareness

This team would research and provide profiles and contact information of MPs and MPPs and their respective religious affiliations and attitudes toward important subjects and issues affecting our civil rights, public policy, and health and education systems. Knowing who to contact, about what, and when, would help us target our efforts to increase awareness of the importance and relevance of humanism and secularism. The National Council could play a vigorous role in advocacy awareness.

5. Secular Parents Association

Made up of parents from various organizations, regardless of belief systems, concerned about children's education. This group would send letters to the editor and attend protests, school board meetings and public hearings to represent secular education each time an issue of interference in education on religious or other spurious grounds arises. It could also forge relationships with other education groups and engage local candidates on secular education issues during election campaigns. Humanist Canada may provide promotional materials, an online discussion form, and a web page with links to various resources. Group membership fees (e.g. \$10-\$20) would be charged to cover the cost of resources.

strategic planning poll

Choose one initiative as your first choice and one for your second choice and vote online or fax in your choices.

FIRST CHOICE

- Annual Speaker Conference
- Next Generation Connection
- Media Watch
- Advocacy and Awareness
- Secular Parents Association

SECOND CHOICE

- Annual Speaker Conference
- Next Generation Connection
- Media Watch
- Advocacy and Awareness
- Secular Parents Association

First name: _____ Last name: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____

Street address: _____

City: _____

Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Do you also belong to a regional Humanist group? Yes No

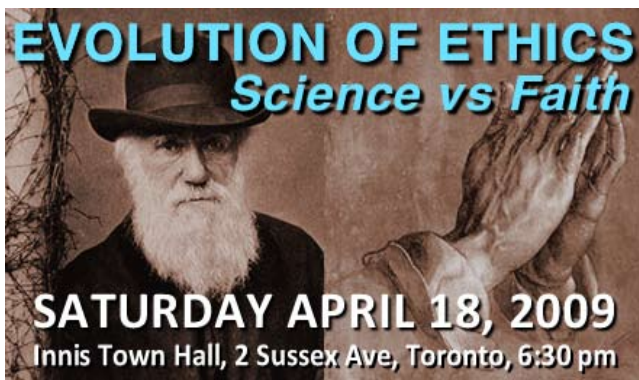
If yes, which group? _____

Is your group affiliated with Humanist Canada? Yes No

top 5 benefits of affiliation

1. Complimentary online promotion of group events
2. Having your group represented through one of our Regional Directors
3. Priority access to Speakers Bureau
4. Priority access to funding
5. Receiving tax receipts for donations to your group

Reason Out Loud - annual lecture series



In honour of legendary naturalist Charles Darwin's 200th birthday anniversary, on Saturday April 18 at the University of Toronto, Humanist Canada hosted a lively and thought-provoking symposium on the evolution of ethics. Five renowned speakers, from both the faith-based and humanist communities, debated some of the hottest issues today, including abortion, gender and biotechnology. Our panel of engaging speakers included: Christopher diCarlo (award-winning professor of Philosophy of Science and Bioethics, University of Ontario Institute of Technology); Michael Coren (outspoken Christian writer, radio and TV host); George Dvorsky (popular transhumanist, animal rights activist); Tony Costa (public speaker, Campus for Christ); and Jean Saindon (acclaimed professor of Natural Science and Technology, York University). Encouraged by the impressive turnout of over 100 people, that also stimulated interest in our organization and generated some memberships, we hope to continue to host such events on an annual basis in the Spring.

2010 Atheist Alliance International Conference

We are pleased to announce a strategic partnership with Atheist Alliance International (AAI) to help organize and host the 16th annual AAI conference in Montreal, Quebec next autumn. This is the first time that such a prestigious conference will be held in Canada and we are honoured to be working with AAI on this important endeavour. The tentative timeframe of the conference is October 1 - 3, 2010. More details will be forthcoming in the months to come.

AAI is an umbrella organization of groups and individuals in the United States and around the world committed to promoting and defending reason and the atheist worldview. Their vision is to transform society into one that supports and respects a worldview based on the values of reason, empiricism and naturalism, and respects and protects the separation of religion and government. Their mission is to develop and provide educational, advocacy, and community-building programs for the atheist community.

2009 Humanist Canada Officiant Conference

Simon Parcher

October 26, 2009

I arrived home this evening from my weekend in Sudbury. I feel so motivated that I am compelled to provide a short synopsis of the conference weekend, for everyone, but especially for those who could not attend this year.

First, congratulations to our Chair, Age, and Sheila and Joan, for organizing the conference for all of us. A lot of work went into it and the event was a real success. Thank you!

We had about 19 officiants in attendance, and about 15 other Sudbury members, presenters and spouses/partners, at different times. One of the Sudbury City Council members, and his wife, joined us for dinner on Sunday evening.

In my opinion, the workshops were very good to excellent. The accommodations and food were also very good. The business meeting lasted just over 2 hours and it was a success too. As always, the best part was to be among such warm, caring and interesting people; old friends and new friends. The officiants group really does exemplify humanism and what it means to be humanists.



Conference dinner photo courtesy of Age Smies

This year, the professional development component was largely about the ceremonies business. This was well done and very appropriate, as optimizing our ceremonies businesses means providing more Humanist ceremonies, and more promotion for Humanism. Next year, the focus may be on what we can do as Humanists to promote Humanism, and how to incorporate more of that into our ceremonies; from ethics, to principles, to ideals. We will also try to find time for an open forum where we can share other ideas, tools and secrets of success.

Thanks to Doug Thomas, and Kathy and Chris Meidell for the video production of Doug presenting an after dinner speech to the group. It was well-done, and the Officiants appreciated this recognition from the HAC Board.

Highlights from the business meeting are that we had 7 members volunteer for 4 open OPC-O positions. The election results are that Laura-Lee Balkwill, Suzanne Peters, Martin Frith and Simon Parcher, will join Age Smies and Walter Ewing, on the Committee.

Other news is that the next meeting will be held on Saturday and Sunday, October 23-24, in Ottawa. There will likely be registration and a welcoming reception on the Friday evening. It's not too early to start sending Age suggestions for this next conference.

More business meeting details will be provided in the minutes by our meeting Secretary, Kathy Meidell.

It was wonderful to see those who attended this year, and I missed enjoying the company of those who could not be there. I hope to see everyone next October in Ottawa.