

Hard CoR News

The insider bulletin of the United Coalition of Reason

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December CoR Launch



On December 5, 2014 we witnessed a wondrous new era in space travel with NASA's launch of the Orion Test Flight. During December, we also witnessed the launch of a CoR, so let's share in their exciting story!

December 16, 2014: [Las Vegas CoR](http://LasVegasCoR.org)



Las Vegas has enjoyed a LasVegasCoR.org website for several years and it has always been a great starting point for locals looking for secular groups and events in our city. Whenever we participate in joint events we do it under the Coalition's umbrella and our T-shirts (see below) reflect that. In 2014 we had a chance to don our colors at the Gay Pride Festival in September and the Light the Night Walk for cancer research in October.



On December 6th, Las Vegas CoR sponsored a Tree of Knowledge at Opportunity Village - and decorated it with book-covers for ornaments. We were proud to learn that the tree has been endorsed by local magician, Teller and will be viewed by thousands of visitors.

On December 22th, our first billboard was installed. Standing by one of our major highways, we hope to reach those atheists that during this season are still going to church with their family or bowing their heads for prayer at the dinner table but that no longer believe. We know this happens and we understand that not believing in god is the easy part but telling your family about it is the hard part. This billboard is our way of telling all those atheist at the pews "you are not alone".

As Americans, we value diversity in our culture and we rejoice in the opportunity to freely express ourselves through this medium. We're prepared to respond to inquiries at our respective websites and trust we'll increase attendance at our meetings.

We are grateful and proud to be a part of the Coalition of Reason.

--Raúl Martínez
[Las Vegas CoR](#) Media Rep
Member of the Board of Directors of the [AHA](#)
Co-President of [HALV](#)

Will the Ark Encounter Be CoRpedoeed?



In the [November 2014 edition](#) of HardCoR News, we highlighted how the two Kentucky CoRs—Lexington CoR and Louisville CoR—teamed up to stop the state of Kentucky from granting \$18.25 million in tax rebates for [Answers in Genesis \(AiG\)](#) to build a replica of Noah’s ark. Ken Ham (pictured with Bill Nye before their historic [debate](#) on February 4, 2014), president and founder of AiG disagreed with Kentucky’s decision that his organization would discriminate against the hiring of non-Christians and on December 11, he suggested that he would take the state to court. He has now made contacts with [Freedom Guard](#) and the [Center for Religious Expression](#) for representation. Ham’s announcement came as the State of Kentucky informed AiG on [December 10th](#) that “the only way AiG could participate in the rebate program is if AiG would agree to two conditions: 1) waive its right to include a religious preference in hiring, and 2) affirm that it will tolerate no "proselytizing" at the theme park.”

Ham didn’t abandon ship, however, and he answered with a billboard that labeled all of his opponents as being "intolerant":



According to the [World Religion News](#), Ham defended himself by claiming, “No unwilling taxpayers will see their tax dollars used to build the Ark. The money involved from the Kentucky Tourism tax incentive only concerns sales tax that will be collected from people who voluntarily visit the completed Ark when it’s fully operational.”

Since then, Ken Ham’s Creation Museum has been satirized by *Saturday Night Live*. We will have to wait and see the outcome of his challenge of the loss of tax funding for his enterprise.

Chicago Winter Displays Vandalized



BEFORE



AFTER

Last month, we [reported on the winter displays](#) that the Freedom from Religion Foundation—Metropolitan Chicago Chapter (FFRFMCC) and [Chicago CoR](#) placed in the Arlington Heights Park District (AHPD) winter display. The two displays hadn’t been up a week before vandals descended on them! Members of the FFRFMCC discovered the vandalism in the early morning of December 8 and reported it to the authorities as well as to Chicago CoR, FFRFMCC and UnitedCoR. Hemant Mehta immediately ran a [story](#) and then UnitedCoR issued a [press release](#). Within a few hours of receiving the press release, major newspapers such as *Chicago Tribune* investigated and ran their stories.

Fortunately, FFRFMCC and Chicago CoR made some quick repairs to the banners and they were proudly back on display by December 9. The vandalism also prompted Tom Cara, President of the FFRFMCC to write to the Stephen Scholten, Executive Director of AHPD. Upon receiving Tom's emailed letter, Jase then replied to Scholten on December 10:

"I am writing in response to a letter dated December 9, 2014 that I received from Mr. Tom Cara of the *Freedom from Religion Foundation—Metropolitan Chicago Chapter* (FFRFMCC). It should be of no surprise that I am disappointed to have learned of the vandalism that has been directed to nontheistic displays in your district—especially as it has happened for two consecutive years. I trust that your district's police services are investigating these incidents without undue delay, and I am grateful for the work that it being done.

I would, however, like to take a moment to respond to your recent comment in the December 8, 2014 edition of *The Chicago Tribune* (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/arlington-heights/ct-atheist-signs-damaged-arlington-heights-tl-20141208-story.html>) in which you state, "The maintenance of those things is the responsibility of the owners of those signs." If this truly is the policy of Arlington Heights Park District (Illinois), then you have stated a matter of fact and are making a clear statement that responsibility is being placed solely on the shoulders of the people whose display has been vandalised. However, in light that this is the second consecutive year of vandalism to the FFRFMCC sign, your statement has struck me as being a response of outright disregard for the nontheistic community. They are the ones who have experienced vandalism and would have appreciated your support as the Executive Director of the District, rather than abdication of responsibility and shun. I have also noted that you did not return a call to the *Daily Herald* 3 days ago, either (<http://www.dailyherald.com/article/20141208/news/141208525/>).

I am also highly concerned to have read from Mr. Cara's letter that the Illinois Nativity Scene Committee—part of the greater organization of the *American Nativity Scene Committee* (<http://americannativityscene.com/>)—was allowed to pressure your district. My concerns are inclusive rather than exclusive. For instance, if our Sikh friends were to have a Vaisakhi parade next April, would the district approve or reject their application and any displays they wish to erect? If our Muslim friends wished to display messages for "Eid Mubarak" or "Ramadan Kareem," would they be allowed to do so, or would the district frown on this? Would the district welcome our Hindu friends' celebration of Holi next March or Diwali next November? Furthermore, from the photographs I have seen of the winter display there in Arlington Heights District Park, I have noted that there were no displays for Rohatsu, Winter Solstice, Festivus, Pancha Ganapati or a holiday that I celebrate—Human Light. Therefore, I question the inclusivity of your district's consideration, when publicly-accessible census data clearly shows that your community is diverse. These questions that emanate from my concerns have real and long-lasting public implications for how the District's welcoming of people of sincerely-held beliefs will be viewed."

Anytime your local CoRs unite as a CoR, you have UnitedCoR's full support, as you have seen with the vandalism experienced in Chicago or in [Butte County](#) last October. If your local CoR suffers any vandalism, please take photographic evidence, write down some notes of what happened and contact UnitedCoR's office for support and assistance.

CoR of the Quarter



Congratulations to Connecticut CoR for being our new featured CoR! Read all about Connecticut CoR [HERE](#).

We would like to feature your CoR in the future. We are asking each coalition coordinator (or someone representing your CoR) to send us the story of your CoR and any images you might have to help tell it. Group shots of members of your CoR (possibly taken in front of your billboard) will also help (but please be sure no one in the pictures minds having their image online).

To read about the CoRs featured so far—and to see the type of thing we are looking for—please see the page featuring San Diego CoR [HERE](#), the page featuring Butte County CoR [HERE](#), the page featuring Dallas–Fort Worth CoR [HERE](#), and the page featuring Pittsburgh CoR [HERE](#).

Send your CoR’s story and pictures to Joseph at Joseph-Stewart@live.com.

Social Media Explosion



Early in the morning of December 9, Joseph rang me and asked “Jase, what happened with the [Secular Directory](#)?” I explained that the post made to UnitedCoR’s Facebook page on December 8th was shared to the American Humanist Association’s Facebook page. When I looked at the counter, it registered that 110,340 people had viewed the post within a 24-hour period! 52 more people “liked” the Secular Directory’s Facebook page. As of the release of this newsletter, there have been OVER 120,000 people who have accessed the Secular Directory and with the addition of the new groups, there are more opportunities for your CoRs to increase its diversity.

Joseph explained to me that "We normally receive 20-40 unique visits to the site on an average day. On the day of the promotion, we received 3,927. The day after, it got 1,138. The next couple of days were 354 and 175. On the day that the Secular Directory was promoted, we received about 15 submissions from groups who wanted to be added to the Secular Directory. We also normally receive about 20-25

emails per day to the site. On the day of the promotion, we received about 125. This included the approximately 15 group submissions and the majority of the rest were new people registering on the site." Joseph's hard work has added to the 635 cooperating groups that are currently participating with local CoRs. Now's the perfect time to find out who else has been added to the Secular Directory and reach out to them to become a part of your CoR!

UnitedCoR is grateful to the American Humanist Association for sharing the link to the Secular Directory. We would also appreciate it if other organizations were to share the Secular Directory on their social media so that as many groups as possible receive representation and recognition. Don't forget, Secular Directory's Facebook is <https://www.facebook.com/seculardirectory> and please be sure to connect with it and UnitedCoR <https://www.facebook.com/CoalitionOfReason> and @UnitedCoR.

CoR Representation



On the commemoration of Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, Jase represented UnitedCoR at the [MAAF](#)-sponsored wreath-laying event at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. Jase accompanied [Army Major Ryan Jean](#)--a person whose story and struggle for equal treatment for nontheists in the military has been marked with hard work and perseverance due to years of resistance from the military. (Major Jean and [Army Major Raymond Bradley](#) have worked tirelessly for humanists to be granted equal treatment in the U.S. military, and they have recently won the opportunity for soldiers in the Army to self-identify as humanists and to have this [designation on their official records](#). None of the other branches of service allow people to self-identify as humanists yet.) Following this event, Jase teamed up with Susan Corbett--a member of the British Humanist Association and [Liverpool Humanist Group](#)--to send out bags of Thornton's English Toffee and letters to 20 MAAF chapters, thanking them for their service and wishing them happy holidays.

UnitedCoR thanks all local CoRs who have reached out to our military groups across America and who have also supported our troops through [organizations](#) such as the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation.

Charitable to the CoRe...



December 21st was the Winter Solstice. You may remember that [Colorado Coalition of Reason](#) (COCORE) has in past years, celebrated the holidays by putting up billboards and secular signs to spread an atheist view of the season. This year they went around the Denver metropolitan area handing out cards containing \$100 in cash to startled strangers. Everyone seemed delighted to get the money, but the responses varied from ecstatic, to confused, to slightly bemused. One person cried, another blew kisses, and a third said, "I don't understand." The message on the card said, "Winter Solstice, tis the reason for the season," and "Here is a gift from the Colorado Coalition of Reason." The money was handed out to call attention to the Winter Solstice and to show you don't have to be a theistic believer to be charitable.

--Tom Kellogg
CoCoRe Project Leader, and
President, Camp Quest—Colorado

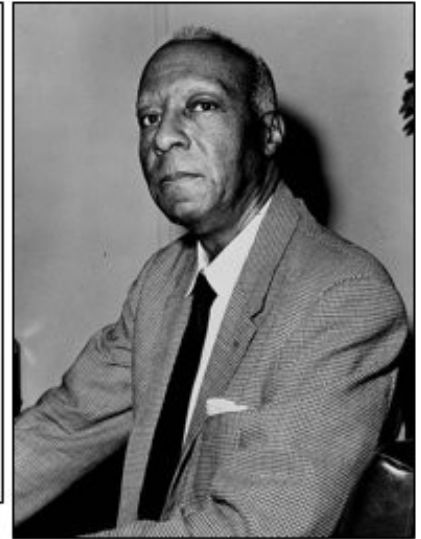
Leadership Needs

Are you an interested volunteer able to help one of these local CoRs? Learn what's needed and how you can help.

- [Detroit CoR](#) (Coordinator)
- [New Mexico CoR](#) (Coordinator)
- [San Francisco / Oakland CoR](#) (Coordinator)
- [Arizona CoR](#) (Site Administrator)
- [Oklahoma City CoR](#) (Site Administrator)

If you are interested, please contact UnitedCoR for more information and for help with leading a local CoR.

CoRrelated Groups



Photographs of A. Philip Randolph and Butterfly McQueen are courtesy of Wikipedia

Last month, our focus on secular diversity highlighted feminist and womanist groups, and this month we want to bring African-American groups to the forefront:

[Black Freethinkers](#): In addition to a [Facebook page](#), Black Freethinkers' website features a large collection of online articles ranging from topics such as national politics, Native American issues, current book reviews, LGBTQ concerns, violence/hate crimes and African-American historical moments. The compilation of articles could easily be used for discussions and presentations within your participating groups. You can also follow them on Twitter: @BlkFreeThinkers.

[Black Nonbelievers](#): The motto of Black Nonbelievers (BN) challenges people to think in "Walking by sight, not by faith!" BN's mission includes everyone: "We strive to connect with other Blacks (and their allies) who are living free of religion and irrational beliefs, and might otherwise be shunned by family and friends." BN began in Atlanta but has quickly spread to other cities like Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, DC, Memphis, and Orlando. In addition to their website and Facebook, BN has a twitter feed, @BNonbelievers,

[African-Americans for Humanism](#): AAH provides support for "skeptics, doubters, humanists, and atheists in the African American community, provides forums for communication and education, and facilitates coordinated action to achieve shared objectives." AAH's [Facebook page](#) and Twitter feed @aahumanism will help your CoR link-in and receive their support.

Black Skeptics: Although Black Skeptics formed and became active in Los Angeles, they have added another chapter in [Chicago](#), to discuss their experiences with religion & church as it relates to the African-American community. Black Skeptics runs a blog as well as [Facebook](#) and Twitter: @blackskeptics

If you CoR becomes part of a [Black-Atheist Meetup](#) group, please make sure that your website pages are updated with any new group and also make sure your group is registered in the [Secular Directory](#), to ensure that you get maximum publicity.

Non-ChoReographed Holiday Photographs

During the winter holidays, some local CoRs made winter displays, others placed a Tree of Knowledge in prominent places, others did food drives for charity, and some held other celebrations that drew their communities together.

Check out the photographs from December 2014 and share in the season of reason:



[Columbus CoR](#)'s Charity Food Drive



[Rhode Island CoR](#)'s Tree of Knowledge



2nd Annual Human Light Food Donation: [Connecticut CoR](#) (thanks for the photo and story, Pat McCann!)



[Inland Empire CoR's Food Drive](#)



[Philly CoR's Tree of Knowledge with Margaret Downey](#)



[San Diego CoR Winter Solstice Party](#)



[Sunday Assembly San Diego](#)



A sign erected by Washington Area Secular Humanists (a cooperating group in [Washington DC Area CoR](#)) in Front Royal, VA

From the Heap



Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "Stone of Hope" NPS Monument—Washington, DC

Long before I began studies towards an M.Div. at Brite Divinity School--TCU, the social thought and civil action of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had always fascinated me. There was something special about his story and dedication to his cause that appealed to me. I remember one course that I took-- African-American Experiences in Social Ethics--that caused me to look beyond the romanticized portrayal of people such as King who have become memorialized and part of the “institutional fabric” of our nation. The course also forced me to grapple with his ideas, prickly though they were during his time. When we read or listen to his “I Have a Dream” speech delivered during the March on Washington For Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963, do we really appreciate the forces he and his followers were up against, and just how radical his words were?

It might be unusual for a non-theistic newsletter to draw attention to a theistic Rev. Dr., but there are some lesser-known lessons from King’s career that I’d like for us to reflect on. I think that these lessons ring true with our work as non-theists and that an interpreted parallel can be drawn and applied to us today. I’ll take some quotes from King and will point to recent CoR activities that embody King’s words.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Some of our billboards have been the victims of hate-crime—damaged over the years with paint, being slashed and one being [rammed](#). When people say “enough is enough,” they are standing up against injustices. When collective voices say “enough is enough,” it demonstrates solidarity amongst people all around the country who are looking after each other and are prepared to support one another. That being said, what was directed towards non-theists in Chico, CA, St. Augustine, FL, Des Moines, IA, Little Rock, AR, Pittsburgh, PA, Cincinnati, OH, Sacramento, CA, Detroit, MI, Fresno, CA, Roanoke, VA, Salem, VA, or Arlington Heights, IL is felt by non-theists everywhere.

People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they have not communicated with each other. When Jennifer Goulet ([Mid-Columbia CoR](#) coordinator) gave her interview on [November 18, 2014](#), she spoke of how shocked that some people were to discover how thoughtful and friendly non-theists are. Jennifer’s comments about one reaction in particular illustrate King’s point: “Oh, you seem so nice! I've never met an atheist before and I'm surprised you're nice.” To me, the most important part of this response isn’t that the person hadn’t met an atheist before--rather, they might have met an atheist but didn’t know it--but that their preconceptions about what an atheist is about was challenged. Could it be that their fear was unfounded because they hadn’t had an open line of communication with a non-theist? Keep in mind that YOU might be the first open non-believer that a person meets.

There is no gain without struggle. Not taking “no” for an answer when you know that “yes” is the answer you should receive makes us take the road less traveled, and sometimes this leads to struggle. It wasn’t easy for the [secular invocations](#) from George Gold ([Butte County CoR](#)) or Paul Tjaden ([Orlando CoR](#)) to be accepted by their local governments, but with perseverance, they got there in the end. The gain: public, equal representation for non-theists at local government assemblies and a staunch reminder that free speech expression is not a right reserved for a few.

More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will...We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right. When [OmahaCoR](#) emailed me a few weeks ago about the [nativity scene](#) that was erected in the Nebraska state capitol, I was completely unaware to discover that Nebraska was another target for groups like the [American Nativity Scene Committee](#) and the [Thomas More Society](#) to advance a narrow agenda. After researching these two groups and speaking with local leaders in many states, it became clear that the situation in Nebraska wasn’t isolated, but a well-planned, systematic series of actions to force this agenda on to everyone and then brand it as a “victory for liberty.”

There can be unity without uniformity. Each month’s newsletter section that highlights “CoRrelated Groups” clearly demonstrates the diversity of the non-theistic community. We not only welcome, but actively seek multiple perspectives on issues that concern us. We not only value diversity, we celebrate it and make it part of our local and national identity. We not only want there to be a “place at the table for everyone,” if the table doesn’t look big enough, we find another one so that all are included and feel like

they belong. We do not shy away from our differences or things we do not understand, but through reason and open discussion, we learn how to welcome everyone. King's message and legacy can easily be summed-up as the African-Americans for Humanism web page states, and speaks to our collective experiences: "In an irrational world, those who stand for reason must stand together."

-Jason D. Heap