



The Enlightenment



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Tiers of Humanist Associations and What They Do.

Humanist associations exist at several levels. Namely: International, National, Provincial or State, Local, and Other. All are non-theistic and serve a specific purpose consistent with their place in the hierarchy. We will start at the International level.

International

Humanist International (formerly the International Humanist and Ethical Union) was founded in 1952 in Amsterdam, Holland. It is now headquartered in London, England. The following, taken from their web site (<https://humanists.international>) explains **what they do**:

Here's the short version: We campaign on humanist issues. We defend humanists at risk of persecution and violence. We lobby for humanist values at international institutions, including the United Nations. And we work to build the humanist movement around the world. We are non-theistic.

Here is the longer version: Through Humanists International, humanists have a place at the table in international affairs. We speak from a specifically humanist perspective, representing our members and supporters at international bodies like the United Nations in Geneva and New York, the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, the Council of Europe, and other bodies. This means we are able to influence international law under the human rights framework, and this is a core area of our policy work.

We also work on policy issues that are global or international in scope, for example on concerns that affect many countries, or in forums that are international in focus. For example we produce an annual report on discrimination against atheists and the non-religious known as the *Freedom of Thought Report*. We run campaigns on topics connected to our policy agenda.

At Humanists International we support our Member Organisations for the growth and development of the humanist movement around the world. Through our Growth and Development programme we are working to encourage the growth of new humanist organisations and we provide resources and direct support to up-and-coming humanist and secular groups. Each year we meet alongside a Member Organisation for our global General Assembly, and every third year the Humanists International World Humanist Congress is hosted by one or more of our Member Organisations in a given country.

National

The American Humanist Association

The forerunner of the American Humanist Association was the “Humanist Fellowship” founded in 1927 in Chicago. To the best of my knowledge this was the first time the word humanist was used by a non-theistic organization.

What We Do - Founded in 1941 and located in Washington D.C., the American Humanist Association advocates progressive values and equality for humanists, atheists, freethinkers, and the non-religious. The AHA has over 34,000 members and supporters and over 225 local chapter groups across the country.

With our extensive local and national media contacts, our lobbying and coalition efforts on Capitol Hill, and the efforts of our grassroots activists, we ensure that the humanist point of view is represented—the idea that you can be good without a belief in a god.

Our adjunct organizations and programs defend the Jeffersonian wall of separation between church and state (Appignani Humanist Legal Center), advance humanist thought in the realm of education (AHA Center for Education), provide aid to those most in need (Foundation Beyond Belief), apply humanism to daily life (Humanist Society), and affirm humanism’s commitment to social justice advocacy (Black Humanist Alliance, Feminist Humanist Alliance, Latinx Humanist Alliance, LGBTQ Humanist Alliance).

In addition to traditional media, we engage the public through a heavy online presence, which includes our profiles on Facebook, Twitter (@AmericanHumanist), Instagram, Flickr, and our channel on YouTube. We also publish the award-winning magazine *The Humanist*, and breaking news and features on TheHumanist.com.

Our annual conference draws hundreds of humanists from across the U.S. to hear world-renowned speakers, connect with fellow nontheists and have a say in the future of the organization. We also work alongside progressive allies—both secular and religious—to work on issues of common concern.

Humanist Canada

Humanist Canada's first president in 1968 was Dr. Henry Morgentaler, an active crusader for women's right to reproductive choice. Humanist Canada continues to be involved in social justice issues including reproductive choice, the right to die with dignity, and the preservation of human rights.

Humanist Canada has grown over the past four decades to become Canada’s national voice of Humanism. We are also an associate member organization of the International Humanist and Ethical Union.

What we do - Humanist Canada (HC) promotes education and awareness of Humanism. We are a resource for secular groups and causes across Canada. We support the advancement of scientific, academic, medical and human rights efforts.

We also recognize people who have fought for human rights and secular freedoms through the *Humanist of the Year Award*. Past recipients have been June Callwood, founder of Casey House, the world's first hospice

for people with HIV/AIDS (2007, posthumous), and professor of bioethics and cognitive evolution, Dr. Christopher diCarlo (2008).

The Humanist Officiant program - The first non-religious group to secure the right to have officiants licensed to perform weddings in Canada, HC maintains an Officiant training program and mentoring service. We train Humanists to perform weddings, funerals, namings, and other rites of passage for the secular community.

Provincial **Ontario Humanist Society**

What we do – We aim to provide services in the broadest sense of the term including expertise, resources, tools, education and information.

♥Our unique website will be structured as a communication hub where individual humanists and local associations will be able to communicate their news, views and events to other groups

♥In collaboration with local associations, our outreach committee will also engage politicians, interest groups and the general public on current political issues of significance to Humanists under provincial jurisdiction and beyond.

♥We intend to provide the resources and expertise to allow for personal services such as ceremonies and compassionate care to be available to groups and individuals throughout the Province, not only to humanists but to any who may need them. To this end, OHS officiants will perform provincially sanctioned weddings as well as funerals, child namings and other ceremonies. Local groups will be assisted in the establishment of compassionate care services at times of hardship, illness and bereavement.

British Columbia Humanist Association

The British Columbia Humanist Association has been providing a community and voice for Humanists, atheists, agnostics, and the non-religious of Metro Vancouver and British Columbia since 1982. We support the growth of Humanist communities across BC, provide Humanist ceremonies, and campaign for progressive and secular values.

We are a registered charitable organization. **What we do:**

- promote the ideas and philosophy of secular humanism by all available means of education and communication;
- serve the educational needs of its members and others of humanistic, scientific and naturalistic outlook, in a democratic, non-dogmatic manner free from authoritarian doctrine;
- provide opportunities for fellowship, study and service at all levels of humanistic endeavour, and to advance the values and welfare of humanity in dedication to the continuing enhancement of human life through human effort and understanding;
- offer and provide meaningful ceremonies to members and non-members at significant times such as marriage and death;
- elaborate and express publicly Humanist positions on issues of concern to people, including values, morality and ethics

Other Humanist Associations

Freedom from Religion Foundation

Based in Madison Wisconsin, FFRF works to promote non-theism and defend the constitutional separation between religion and government. With more than 30,000 members, FFRF is a non-profit non-religious organization, working as an effective state/church watchdog and voice for freethought (atheism, agnosticism, skepticism). Co-presidents are Dan Barker and his wife Annie Laurie Gaylor, daughter of the founder Anne Nicol Gaylor. From time to time atheist Ronald Reagan Jr. (son of President and Nancy Reagan) appears on national television soliciting donations.

What Does the Foundation Do?

- Takes legal action challenging entanglement of religion and government, government endorsement or promotion of religion
- Publishes the only freethought newspaper in the United States, Freethought Today
- Sponsors annual high school, college and grad student essay competitions with cash awards
- Conducts lively, annual national conventions, honoring state/church, student, and freethought activism
- Bestows “The Emperor Has No Clothes” Award to public figures for “plain-speaking on religion”
- Promotes freedom from religion with educational books, literature, music CDs
- Provides speakers for events and debates
- Broadcasts Freethought Radio and Freethought Matters (TV show)
- Places freethought billboards and bus signs
- Supports local chapters

Canadian Secular Alliance

The Canadian Secular Alliance (CSA) is a non-profit, public policy research and advocacy organization advancing church-state separation and the neutrality of government in matters of religion. They advocate:

- **A free marketplace of ideas** by ending tax exemptions and other state-awarded financial privileges for organizations whose only purpose is to advance religious belief
- **A single publicly funded secular school system** by ending public financing for faith-based schools;
- **Freedom of expression** by ending legal penalties for either the expression or criticism of religious opinions
- **Equality for all under the law** by ending exemptions from laws and policies now available only to members of certain religious groups
- **Secularization of government proceedings** by removing references to any deity in the national anthem and Charter of Rights, and by ending the recitation of prayers in legislatures and assemblies.

Thanks to sustained lobbying on the part of the CSA at the federal level, Canada no longer has blasphemy laws on its books. These laws were repealed in December 2018.

Center for Inquiry

The Center for Inquiry was established in 1991 by philosopher and author Paul Kurtz. It brought together two organizations: the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and the Council for Secular Humanism

By 1995 CFI had expanded into a new headquarters in Amherst, New York, and in 1996 opened its first branch office in Los Angeles, CFI West currently named CFI Los Angeles. In the same year, CFI founded the Campus Freethought Alliance, organizing college students around its areas of interest.

In 2005, CFI was granted special consultative status with the United Nations. Since 2006 CFI has been expanding rapidly with a series of new branches in cities across North America and around the world. These include new Centers for Inquiry in Toronto, London, Washington, D.C., Indianapolis, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Austin, Texas. The branch in Washington is headquarters to CFI's Office of Public Policy, which represents CFI's interests on Capitol Hill.

In 2010 Paul Kurtz resigned from CFI due to tensions over the future of humanism. Kurtz advocated for a more accommodational approach to religion while others argued for a more adversarial approach.

In January 2016, CFI announced that it was merging with the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, with Robyn Blumner as the CEO of the combined organizations.

A major activity of CFI is the publication of the magazine *Free Inquiry*, a bi-monthly journal of secular humanist opinion and commentary. Paul Kurtz was the editor-in-chief until he stepped down in 2010, and Tom Flynn is the current editor. Feature articles cover a wide range of topics from a freethinking perspective. Common themes are separation of church and state, science and religion, dissemination of freethought, and applied philosophy. Regular contributors include well-known scholars in the fields of science and philosophy. Free Inquiry may well be the most widely read humanist journal in the world. (Excerpted from Wikipedia).

Summary

Hopefully the foregoing gives an adequate idea of what International, National, Provincial and a few other humanist organizations are all about. A few of the main observations are:

- All of these organizations are secular and non-theistic.
- All promote secular democracy and separation of church and state.
- All are concerned with the status of human rights in their respective jurisdictions.
- Many lobby politically in order to instigate changes that are in line with humanist values.
- Some provide officiants for conducting secular weddings, funerals and other rites of passage.
- Some promote the existence of one public supported education system. No public funding for religious schools.

Having briefly outlined what a few of the upper tiers of humanist organizations do, it is time to move on to the smaller local associations. What do they do? What should they be doing?

Local Humanist Associations

Many of the larger cities in Canada have local humanist associations. There are at least ten in Ontario stretching from Windsor to Ottawa, including HALA here in London. They all provide an opportunity for non-believers to get together with like-minded friends, a primary reason for their existence. They all have a web site usually containing a definition of Humanism, notices of upcoming monthly meetings and other events often of a social nature. Meeting topics usually have a connection to humanism in some way, but not always. Some smaller groups will meet at a restaurant before the monthly meeting. Others hold a pub night once a month, sometimes with an informal discussion. Many are on Facebook. Some have podcasts of meetings. This is of benefit for members that are unable to attend a monthly meeting.

Outside of Ontario, the Vancouver and Victoria humanist groups are of particular interest because they both meet on Sunday mornings at 10:00 am (church time). Vancouver meets every Sunday, Victoria every second Sunday. Victoria holds a Sunday morning breakfast before the meeting. They also hold a Humanist Café twice a month with moderated discussions. Like HALA at the present time, they are short two board members, in their case a secretary and vice president. Vancouver humanists get political, advocating for one secular public-school system, ending funding for religious schools, as well as claiming religious institutions should not be fully exempt from municipal taxes.

Our Local Association, HALA – What Lies Ahead?

Before contemplating the future of HALA, a brief history would be in order. The entity that eventually became the Humanist Association of London and Area (HALA) began as a small study group in the year 2000 at the Unitarian Fellowship. It consisted of about twenty individuals meeting once a month at the Fellowship to discuss topics of a non-theistic nature. In January of 2004 it was decided to become affiliated with the Humanist Association of Canada (HAC). It was at that time that HALA was founded with a set of bylaws and a board of directors. Derek Kaill was president. In 2005 meetings moved to the Cross Cultural Learner Centre and the first Enlightenment was published also in that year. The first special event was a celebration of Darwin's 200th birthday in 2009, with four presentations at the Wolf Performance Hall. In 2010 HALA obtained charitable status from the CRA under the education category and sufficient charitable donations were received to finance six more special events, five in Wolf Hall. Along the way a web site was added, and social events consisting of summer and winter solstice celebrations were held. Membership numbers grew gradually and leveled out at about eighty, not counting spouses or partners.

In order to obtain charitable status, it was necessary to prepare a Constitution with a stated purpose which is:

The purpose of The Association shall be to educate and increase the public's understanding of the principles of secular worldviews, including humanism through the provision of seminars, conferences, and newsletters.

For many years HALA went along adhering to this specified purpose of obtaining interesting and informative speakers, holding special events at Wolf Hall and publishing *The Enlightenment*. Monthly meeting topics often dovetailed with one of the twelve Humanist Canada Principles. These included scientific subjects, secular democratic societies, concerns with the welfare and freedom of all individuals, the preservation of

human rights and the subject of humanism itself. Fortunately, enough willing volunteers came forward each year to keep things running smoothly. At most meetings there was ample time for an interesting Q and A after the presentation. More recently, monthly meetings moved to a better location at the central library.

Then at the beginning of 2019, HALA was at a crossroad, because the organization was not able to obtain a new president, and only four individuals had volunteered to fill the seven positions on the board. Wolf Hall events were no longer being held, largely because of the difficulty finding enough people to take on the work of organizing them. Regarding *The Enlightenment*, I had no idea how many actually read it and I wondered if it was worthwhile continuing.

In the end, the four remaining HALA Board members had to decide whether to wind up the Association or attempt to carry on with Carl as Acting President, Brian as Treasurer, Elizabeth as Secretary and Sherry performing multiple duties including Membership and Website. The decision was made to carry on. A fifth volunteer, Mitch Young, has come on the Board and a new modern web site has been developed with the following introduction:

We strive to live a meaningful, ethical, and joyful life without belief in religion or the supernatural. If you believe in reason, compassion, critical thinking, science, justice, integrity, equality, and tolerance ... welcome to our community!

A survey revealed that 70 people read *The Enlightenment* so it will continue. Now the Board must decide on what direction HALA will take in the future. Will it be possible to eventually find a permanent president and enough volunteers to fill the other six positions on the board, willing to share the load and proceed with a common understanding of a realistic way forward? Will the purpose remain the same, maintaining the charitable status, or will another purpose be considered? I asked Acting President Carl Goldberg if he could provide an indication of what he sees for the future of HALA and here is his reply:

I joined HALA about 6 years ago and joined because it seemed to provide me with a social outlet with people who have similar values and beliefs as I do. We may not necessarily agree on all issues, but I found that the membership was open minded and interested in the way we came to our conclusions.

To that end my wife and I found HALA to be a venue where we can learn and discuss topics that reflect on the principles of Humanism. I believe this was the original purpose of the Association – to ‘educate and increase the public’s understanding of the principles of secular worldviews ... through the provision of seminars, conferences and newsletters’.

I have found that most non-humanists know only about what we don’t believe in, ie., God, Supernaturalism etc., so I try to let them know about what we do believe. We are not just a group of atheists. Basically, we are interested in the welfare of humanity and to this end we need to understand how best to learn about the universe we live in and what factors affect our ability to make it the best life possible.

I hope that HALA will be able to provide an opportunity for fellowship by learning and discussion with others in our community. Our goal is to provide interesting speakers on various topics – religious, philosophical, economic, scientific or social – that will help us lead ethical lives. Your Enlightenment issues are a big part of this Don, and I thank you for the effort you put into them. This overall interest in so many areas of the human condition, can be problematic for our local group. There are many social issues that we are concerned with and could take a more active part in. It is my hope to provide speakers on these issues so members who wish to take a more active role will have the information required.

This organization has expanded into the digital age with a new website that has increased our visibility, along with our Facebook, Instagram and podcasts. We have some very interesting speakers lined up for the rest of the year and our Solstice events are confirmed. We will keep open the possibility of a Wolf Hall speaker and are considering having a booth at community events at Victoria Park and other sites. Cost is a concern of course and we must weigh that in our thinking. It will also require the active participation of members to volunteer.

I will be attending the 2019 Humanist Canada AGM and hope to maintain contact with HC and other local Humanist groups. Perhaps sharing ideas, speakers, and events.

As you know, at one point, when Rod announced his decision to step down (and Brad could no longer be on the Board), there was discussion that perhaps HALA could no longer continue. Myself, Elizabeth, Brian and Sherry felt that we could work together to keep HALA operating. Mitch Young has since joined the Board and we feel confident that this organization will continue to provide a social place for fellow Humanists to get together, share ideas and continue with the original purpose of HALA.”

I wish to thank Carl for letting *Enlightenment* readers know that HALA will continue on with its original purpose and also thank the current Board of Directors for their efforts today and in the future. (DAH).

More on the Word Humanism

An article in the March Enlightenment noted that the word humanism is a homonym, a word spelled the same and sounds the same, but has different meanings. Here are three different dictionary definitions that illustrate this point.

1. **humanism** - the doctrine that people's duty is to promote human welfare
2. **humanism** - the doctrine emphasizing a person's capacity for self-realization through reason; rejecting religion and the supernatural
3. **humanism** - the cultural movement of the Renaissance; based on classical studies.

It is according to the first definition that the word humanism is being used by the media today. The second is the definition used by Humanist Associations, and the third refers to the rediscovery of Greek and Roman classics at the time of the Italian Renaissance.

The Board of the Humanist Association of London and Area (HALA)

Acting President – Carl Goldberg – 519-494-2957 -- email – carlg1948@gmail.com
Secretary – Dr. Elizabeth Bright-See – 519-471- 3963 – email – ebright@uwo.ca
Treasurer – Brian Prachar – 519-668-0237 – email – brianprachar@hotmail.com
Member at Large – Mitch Young – email – mbyoung@uwo.ca - Membership
Member at Large – Sherry Keddie – 226-926-2426 – email – sherrykeddie@gmail.com – Social
Member at Large – Vacant
Member at Large – Vacant