

Community

"Extraordinary claims
require extraordinary
evidence"

Carl Sagan

OPENING THE DEBATE ON RELIGION

A new society challenging the influence of religion on secular society has been launched in South Australia.

"Two central factors were the catalyst for giving voice to Adelaide's real silent majority: that vast community who don't believe in God, or practice any form of religion," says Brian Morris, president of the newly-formed Atheism SA Inc.

"Non-believers of all shades have passively sat back for far too long while minority groups of religious fundamentalists have dominated the political debate on a swathe of important social-policy issues," Morris says. "It's been more than 40 years since the national body, the Atheist Foundation of Australia, first started in South Australia, and while there are various 'social groups', there have been no other genuine 'active' organisations."

Morris says Atheism SA will represent those who have a non-religious stance on a variety of current issues – a list that includes teaching ethics classes in all schools, replacing school chaplains with professional

counsellors, ending the annual \$31 billion "tax and grant rort" by religious businesses, and support for freedom of choice on such important and personal issues as marriage equality and voluntary euthanasia.

The issue of same-sex marriage is an area Atheism SA is interested in, Morris says, because he believes the only real objections to marriage equality are dictated by religious belief, not logic.

He says irrespective of whether policy was a state or federal domain, South Australians "need to be heard": "Our aim is to impact on a raft of progressive legislation that, due to the political influence of church hierarchies, is constantly misrepresented to the general public, and consistently blocked by parliament."

A new website has been launched — atheismsa.org — which is the focal point for the organisation's activities.

Morris says all those interested in secular issues are

welcome to contribute ideas and information, to write articles for the website and to participate in scheduled activities. People of faith are also encouraged to make comment on website content.

"We will also host monthly Open Forums with films and prominent speakers. Through the website, people will suggest issues they wish to discuss – or take action on – and keep track of events organised by ASA.

"Religion is no longer a sacred cow, it needs to be challenged openly and responsibly. The social and political ramifications are far too serious to allow Bronze Age dogma to hold sway, as it has for the past 2,000 years.

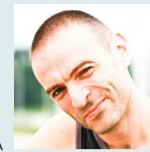
"With the wave of new critical thinkers like Dr Richard Dawkins, Professor Lawrence Krauss, *et al*, atheism has a clear and respectable voice that confronts religious myths and doctrines which undermine science, health and education."

atheismsa.org

LGBTI HEALTH

ACSA NEWS

Paolo Polimeni is a Gay Men's Health Outreach Officer with the AIDS Council of SA



COME HAVE A (SOFA) CHAT WITH US

It is one of those memories that stays with you forever: Rwanda, central Africa, 1996; I was there for volunteer work. We visited a place where people with advanced AIDS were assisted by a small charity. A tiny little place with two rooms, dividing men and women. Treatments were not as good back then, and it was too hard to get them delivered anyway. A beautiful woman among the patients: she was badly sick, and for some reason she decided to make this huge effort to smile at me. While leaving that place behind, I turned back once more, and saw her at the window, giving me a last, big, wonderful smile. It was the best gift I could have received from that long day trip. Some time later, I started remembering this as a baton passed on to me. I would have soon after become involved in HIV work: back to Africa for a second time, then Europe, Asia and most recently in Australia.

Today my volunteer work sits in my bag: more precisely, in an iPad application, Jack'd, which is normally used for hook-ups. On my profile I invite people with questions about HIV to feel free to ask. I receive an incredible amount of queries, which is fantastic! From the chat on Jack'd, we may then decide to talk over the phone or meet at a café to talk about best practices to stay healthy. I

also run a gay men's group, which now has around 55 members, we are a social group of health-minded gay and bisexual men in Adelaide, focused on healthy living and friendship (find out more at <http://www.meetup.com/Friends-Gay-Men-Adelaide/>).

Feeling very lucky and privileged for having been able to help some people with advice on safe

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sex, PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) and sexual health, today I have a new and exciting commitment towards the local gay community: working with ACSA once per fortnight on a Friday for 'Sofa Chat', I am now offering confidential information and referral advice on sexual health at Pulteney 431 in Adelaide.

If you are a client at the sauna, please feel free to pop in during a 'Sofa Chat' session: Logan, Wills or I will be there every Friday from 7-10pm in the lounge room downstairs; and are always happy to share a story or have a chat with you.

Single hairy male
looking for a
loyal companion.

Looking
for love?

RSPCA
adoptapet.com.au