

# What is humanism? Might you, in fact, be a humanist?



**CHRIS HIGHLAND**  
HIGHLAND VIEWS

During my years as a Christian minister I was privileged to work side by side with many religious people, including folks from most all Christian denominations. I was invited to give sermons in a variety of churches and always had warm welcomes.

My wife and I were close with Steve, an evangelical pastor, who overcame his initial concerns about interreligious activity to become a strong supporter of cooperative work. He celebrated when Carol and I were married, at a Zen Buddhist retreat, no less.

To everyone's shock and sadness, pastor Steve died the first morning of his retirement. We attended his memorial and offered our comfort to his widow. Such good people.

Steve and I had many differences of opinion when it came to faith, God and views of the supernatural. Thankfully we weren't distracted by these disputes and could simply enjoy being colleagues and friends. When I was the county shelter director, Steve was a leading advocate. His church enthusiastically contributed, opening its doors to "the stranger in our midst."

I shake my head thinking of those

who build high fences around their beliefs and spend their lives defending their orthodoxy ("correct opinions"). I used to spend lots of time defending my beliefs and trying to save souls before realizing that my soul — if I had one — probably needed more attention than fussing over others. Then, over time, I came to see that no one knows anything about "souls." Besides, who has time to worry about what that means anyway, with so much to be done?

Over the past month I've spoken with two humanist groups. In March I addressed the Ethical Humanists here in Asheville. My presentation centered on the wise, natural ethical musings of Henry David Thoreau. It was a lively discussion and I came away feeling that this kind of open exchange of ideas and questions is exactly what we need. In fact, if more religious congregations opened up to these explorations of ideas, maybe there would be a little more understanding between believers and nonbelievers.

There is Humanistic Buddhism and Humanistic Judaism and other "humanized" traditions. But what are the basic principles of humanism?

The American Humanist Association defines humanism as "a progressive lifestance that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead meaningful, ethical lives capable of adding to the greater good of humanity."

Since there's no dogmatic creed, various humanist voices take different approaches to their understanding of humanist practice. One group defines it as, "Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as a part of nature and holds that values — be they religious, ethical, social, or political — have their source in human experience and culture."

Another says, "this is the only life of which we have certain knowledge and we owe it to ourselves and others to make it the best life possible for ourselves and all with whom we share this fragile planet."

An international coalition presents this statement: "Humanism is a democratic and ethical lifestance which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives."

Some merely summarize humanism as "Good without a God."

One remarkable thing about humanists is they have no interest in "converting" anyone to humanism. There are no evangelists because there is no "belief" to "believe in." People who identify as humanist or ethical people are interested in living ethical lives — practicing the good, right and just aspects of being human in human society.

Who could argue with that?

The second talk I gave last month was in Greenville, South Carolina. The humanist group there hosted me for

two hours of great conversation on what I called "Bible Belt and Secular Shoes." Another lively conversation on nature, science and life after faith.

This may sound like I want everyone to become humanists, but that's not my intent. Becoming more human and humane doesn't sound so bad though, does it? Those who feel threatened by "the secular humanists" might consider this.

Master Kung, whom we call "Confucius," once taught, "It is beautiful to make humaneness one's home. If you do not choose to dwell in humaneness, how can you attain knowledge?" (Sayings, chapter 4, verse 1).

Are we at home in our humanity? Pastor Steve and I had another clergy friend who calls himself a "follower of Jesus." Like Steve, he was a good friend, easy to talk with — we would take refreshing walks together. I suspect that was possible because we were friends, worked with some of the same folks in the shelter and avoided the contentious nature of "god-talk games."

These two pastors and I got along so well because we were naturally humanistic people. Something to think about.

*Chris Highland served as a Protestant minister and interfaith chaplain for nearly 30 years. He is a teacher, writer, free-thinker and humanist celebrant. Chris and his wife, Carol, a Presbyterian minister, live in Asheville. Visit [chighland.com](http://chighland.com).*

## RELIGION NOTES

Email information about faith-based events at least two weeks in advance to Bruce Steele at [bsteale@citizen-times.com](mailto:bsteale@citizen-times.com) and Carole Terrell at [cterrell@citizen-times.com](mailto:cterrell@citizen-times.com).

### Author Cindi Wood at Hendersonville Presbyterian

HENDERSONVILLE - Here's some of what's going on at Hendersonville Presbyterian Church, 699 N. Grove St. To learn more about these events, call the church at 828-692-3211:

» **Author Cindi Wood** speaks at weekly Table Talk, 6:25 p.m. May 10. Learn women can live with greater peace and purpose, and how all can support them. Free event. Dinner before hand includes a small charge and requires RSVP.

» **The next Bluegrass Bash** will be at 7 p.m. May 21, with live music and complimentary ice cream and cookies. It's free to attend.

### Event benefits local burn victims

WEAVERVILLE - First Born Baptist Church, 45 Pleasant Grove Road, will host a fundraiser from noon-7:30 p.m. May 6 that will include an auction, raffle, hot dog lunch, barbecue dinner and gospel singing to raise funds in support of the Ventura family of Barnardville.

The family, Robert, Sarah and Cayden, was severely burned in a gas explosion in January 2016.

The hot dog plates are \$5, noon-1 p.m. Dinner begins at 5 p.m., and plates are \$10. All money raised will go directly to the Ventura family. To learn more, call Jerry Jamerson at 828-775-4762.

### Immigrants, 'Bridges not Walls'

HENDERSONVILLE - Here's some of what's going on at First Congregational United Church of Christ, 1735 Fifth Ave. W. For more, visit [fccc Hendersonville.org](http://fccc Hendersonville.org) or call 828-692-8630:

» **Immigrant Rights Sunday** is at 10:30 a.m. May 7. Come and listen to hear where God is leading regarding issues of immigration.

» **'Bridges not Walls' art show**, opening reception 10 a.m.-4 p.m. May 20, in the Felix Building. This multimedia exhibit features works by local artists illustrating their visions of compassionate collaboration between peoples. The reception will feature music and poetry readings with light refreshments. The free show may be viewed through May 28 during the church's open hours, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Tuesday-Friday and 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Sundays.

### St. James AME hosts fashion, talent show

ASHEVILLE - St. James AME Church, 44 Hildebrand St., invites the community to the Pew Rally and the Little Big Shots Fashion and Talent Show at 3:30 p.m. May 7.

Make a donation to help each Pew Captain. Call 828-253-5191 for more information.

### Event to help keep meals coming

ASHEVILLE - A fundraising event for the Downtown Welcome Table will be 6-10:30 p.m. May 9 at Rhubarb/The Rhu, 7 S.W. Pack Square.

A multicourse meal will be prepared by eight of the Downtown Welcome Table's partner chefs. Beer will be provided by Wicked Weed Brewing. Silent

and live auctions will be held.

Tickets are \$125. Visit [haywood-street.networkforgood.com](http://haywood-street.networkforgood.com) for tickets. To donate or learn more, visit [haywoodstreet.org](http://haywoodstreet.org) or call 828-575-2477.

### Stephen Lynerd Group concert

ASHEVILLE - The Stephen Lynerd Group presents old and new hymns with a contemporary jazz flair featuring vibraphone, piano, bass and drums at 7 p.m. May 11 at St. Mark's Lutheran Church, 10 N. Liberty St.

Admission is free, with a reception to follow. To learn more, call 828-253-0043 or visit [stmarkslutheran.net](http://stmarkslutheran.net).

### Prayer time at Grace Lutheran

HENDERSONVILLE - Here's some of what's going on at Grace Lutheran Church, 1245 Sixth Ave. W. To learn more about these events, call the church at 828-693-4890 or visit

[GraceHendersonville.com](http://GraceHendersonville.com):

» **Healing prayer time**, 1-2 p.m. the second Friday of every month. Next meeting May 12. Arrive by 1:30 p.m.; stay at least 30 minutes. Prayers offered for those attending; all welcome.

• **High school grads receive quilts** at the 11:15 a.m. service May 14.

### NAMI meets at FCUCC

HENDERSONVILLE - Here's some of what's going on at First Congregational United Church of Christ, 1735 Fifth Ave. W. To learn more about these events, call the church at 828-692-8630 or visit [fccc Hendersonville.org](http://fccc Hendersonville.org):

• **A NAMI Connection meeting** is held 6:30-8 p.m. the second Thursday of each month. The next meeting is May 11. This is a free support group for adults living with mental illness, led by trained facilitators.

• **Bible Study** meets 5-6:30 p.m. Wednesdays. No registration required.

## RELIGION CALENDAR

Share your event at least two weeks in advance online at [events.citizen-times.com](http://events.citizen-times.com). Click on "Add your event" to submit details.

### May 6

**Kehillat Yeshua Messianic Congregation:** 10:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturdays, Kehillat Yeshua Messianic Congregation, 661 Long Shoals Road, Arden. Weekly Messianic Jewish worship, teaching, fellowship with Oneg (potluck) following.

**Annual plant and craft sale:** 9 a.m.-noon, Calvary Episcopal Church, 2840 Hendersonville Road, Fletcher. Benefiting Calvary Episcopal Church food pantry.

**Learn to Meditate:** 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Meditation In Asheville, 1070 Tunnel Road, Unit 20 (behind Pomodoro's), Asheville. \$20, \$15 students and seniors. With Buddhist teacher Sharon Lovich. The purpose of meditation is to make our mind calm and peaceful. [www.MeditationInAsheville.org](http://www.MeditationInAsheville.org).

### May 7

**Jealousy, Competitiveness, and Pride: A Buddhist Psychological Perspective:** Drop in series: 7-8:30 p.m. Sundays to June 4, Meditation In Asheville, 1070 Tunnel Road, Asheville. \$10, \$5 students/seniors. With Buddhist teacher Sharon Lovich. [www.MeditationInAsheville.org](http://www.MeditationInAsheville.org).

**Bible conference "Counter Cultural Living in the 21st Century: Ephesians":** 11 a.m. May, 6:30 p.m. May 8-12, West Canton Baptist Church, 75 Lowe St. (off Old Clyde Road), Canton. Different speaker each night. 828-648-5561.

### May 8

**Senior Celebration: Through His Eyes-Seeing as Jesus Does:** May 8-10, Billy Graham Training Center at The Cove, 1 Porters Cove Road, Asheville. With Pete Briscoe, Buddy Greene and Jeff Taylor. \$109-\$536. Visit [www.thecove.org](http://www.thecove.org). To register for free seminar plus optional meals, call 800-950-2092.

### May 9

**Introduction to Buddhism:** 7-8:15 p.m. Tuesdays through June 6, Meditation In Asheville, 1070 Tunnel Road, Asheville. \$10, \$5 students/seniors, free for monthly members. May 9 topic is "What is Meditation?" 828-668-2241 or

Find the full religion calendar online at [CITIZEN-TIMES.com](http://CITIZEN-TIMES.com).

[www.MeditationInAsheville.org](http://www.MeditationInAsheville.org).

### May 10

**Kids For Christ after school program:** 2:30-7:15 p.m. Wednesdays during school year at First Baptist Church, 63 N. Main St., Weaverville. For grades 1-6. Buses run from Weaverville Primary School, Weaverville Elementary and North Windy Ridge. Snack, recreation, Bible study, choir, hand bells, help with homework. Then supper followed by mission groups. 828-645-6720.

### May 11

**Mindfulness meditation, Dharma reading, discussion:** 7-8:30 p.m. Thursdays, Asheville Shambhala Meditation Center, 60 N. Merrimon Ave., Suite #113 in Reynolds Village. Sitting and walking mindfulness meditation. No experience necessary. Meditation instruction available. Followed by tea, Dharma reading and conversation. Donations appreciated.

### May 13

**Outdoor flea market and bake sale:** 7:30-11 a.m., Grace Lutheran Church, 1245 Sixth Ave. W., Hendersonville. Fundraiser for the preschool. 828-693-4972 or [www.facebook.com/gracepreschoolhendersonville](http://www.facebook.com/gracepreschoolhendersonville)

### May 15

**Counterfeit Christianity: Recognizing False Teaching in Order to Live the True Gospel with Larry Crabb:** May 15-17, Billy Graham Training Center at The Cove, 1 Porters Cove Road, Asheville. Counterfeit Christianity promises in this life what only heaven will give and hinders spiritual growth. \$109-\$536. To register for free seminar plus optional meals, call 800-950-2092. Visit [www.thecove.org](http://www.thecove.org).

### May 19

**Sacred Current retreat:** 2 p.m., Prama Institute, 310 Panhandle Road, Marshall. \$200 includes workshops, meals, camping, and parking. For student discount and dorm rates, visit [www.prama.org](http://www.prama.org). Three days of immersion and transformation through Kundalini Yoga with time for contemplation, relaxation, hiking, swimming and fire circles.

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