

# **HUMANISM**

## **Religious Practices**

- Required Daily Observances
- Required Weekly Observances
- Required Occasional Observances/Holy Days

## **Religious Items**

- Personal Religious Items
- Congregate Religious Items
- Searches

## **Requirements for Membership**

- Requirements (Includes Rites of Conversion)
- Total Membership

## **Medical Prohibitions**

## **Dietary Standards**

## **Burial Rituals**

- Death
- Autopsies
- Mourning Practices

## **Sacred Writings**

## **Organizational Structure**

- Headquarters Location
- Contact Office/Person

## **History**

## **Theology**

## **Religious Practices**

### **Required Daily Observance**

No required daily observances.

### **Required Weekly Observance**

No required weekly observances, but many Humanists find fulfillment in congregating with other Humanists on a weekly basis (especially those who characterize themselves as Religious Humanists) or other regular basis for social and intellectual engagement, discussions, book talks, lectures, and similar activities.

### **Required Occasional Observances**

No required occasional observances, but some Humanists (especially those who characterize themselves as Religious Humanists) celebrate life-cycle events with baby naming, coming of age, and marriage ceremonies as well as memorial services.

Even though there are no required observances, there are several days throughout the calendar year that many Humanists consider holidays. They include (but are not limited to) the following:

**February 12.** Darwin Day: This marks the birthday of Charles Darwin, whose research and findings in the field of biology, particularly his theory of evolution by natural selection, represent a breakthrough in human knowledge that Humanists celebrate.

**First Thursday in May.** National Day of Reason: This day acknowledges the importance of reason, as opposed to blind faith, as the best method for determining valid conclusions.

**June 21 - Summer Solstice.** This day is also known as [World Humanist Day](#) and is a celebration of the longest day of the year. (Both the summer and winter solstices are important astronomical events that for millennia have been important days in various human cultures, and therefore these days are recognized by Humanists as a means of connecting in a symbolic way with past generations.)

**December 21 - Winter Solstice.** A celebration of the start of increasingly longer days. Some Humanists hold a celebration known as [Human Light](#) around the time of the winter solstice. Human Light is a celebration of humanity and may include music, food,

games, and other festivities with family and friends. (Both the summer and winter solstices are important astronomical events that for millennia have been important days in various human cultures, and therefore these days are recognized by Humanists as a means of connecting in a symbolic way with past generations.)

## **Religious Items**

### **Personal Religious Items**

- Symbolic medallion and chain

Humanists do not generally have or use personal religious items; however, some Humanists wear jewelry and other items which include symbols that reflect Humanistic or non-theistic values and outlooks. None of these items are considered mandatory, but are seen as a means of expressing Humanist belief and identity.

### **Congregate Items**

Humanists do not generally have or use congregate religious items. There are no known congregate items that need to be present when Humanists congregate.

### **Searches**

Even if the symbolic medallion is not considered religious, it should be treated with the same respect afforded religious medallions.

## **Requirements for Membership**

### **Requirements**

There are no requirements for membership to be a Humanist. There are various Humanist groups/associations which may have their own procedures for determining if someone is considered a member of their group/association (e.g. The American Humanist Association (AHA), Council for Secular Humanism, The Secular Humanism Society). There are no rites of conversion involved in becoming a Humanist.

To be a Humanist, individuals normally embrace the core values of Humanism:

- Scientific approach to knowledge, pursuing truth via reason and science while rejecting superstitious and supernatural explanations.

- Compassion for all of humanity, strengthened by cultivating empathetic understandings of others' situations.
- Egalitarian sense of fairness, understanding that human worth and dignity is shared by each and every one of us. Humanists hold a responsibility to lead an ethical life of social responsibility that adds to the greater good of humanity.

## **Total Membership**

There is no precise way to determine the total number of people who consider themselves Humanists. Many sources believe that the number of Humanists worldwide is in the millions.

## **Medical Prohibitions**

Humanists have no religiously based medical prohibitions.

## **Dietary Prohibitions**

Humanists have no religiously based requirements or restrictions regarding diet.

## **Burial Rituals**

### **Death**

Humanists have no religious requirements regarding dying and death.

### **Autopsies**

Humanists have no religious requirements or restrictions regarding autopsies.

### **Mourning Practices**

Humanists have no religious requirements regarding mourning practices.

A Humanist memorial service that emphasizes the life and positive impact of the deceased is appropriate.

## **Sacred Writings**

Humanists do not consider any writings to be sacred. Humanists may consider a variety of writings to be valuable, important or even foundational to human understanding and ethical behavior. The key tenets of Humanism are most popularly articulated in a document called Humanism and Its Aspirations, also known as *Humanist Manifesto III*, which has been endorsed by 22 Nobel laureates and thousands of others.

## **Organizational Structure**

Humanism has no centralized authority or structure. The type and extent of organizational structures vary as greatly as the number of different groups/associations that call themselves Humanist.

## **History**

The world has had influences of reason-based, non-supernatural ethical thinking to ground morals and understand life since the civilizations of Ancient Egypt, China and Greece. Through many time periods and many thinkers (Ancient/Aesop; Renaissance/Shakespeare; Enlightenment/Hume; Scientific/Charles Darwin; to modern philosophers and intellectuals), Humanism has developed an extensive following and legitimacy in the United States and around the world.

Humanism as it is known today in western society began arising during the Italian Renaissance in the 13th and 14th centuries. At this time, there was a rebirth in Europe in regards to how people thought. Scholars such as Coluccio Salutati and Poggio Bracciolini were among the first Humanists to begin to place an emphasis on human culture and the subjects of the humanities: grammar, rhetoric, language, etc. Doing so would help some people actively engage in civic life at a time when the sole method of doing so was usually through the church. This phenomenon expanded during the Enlightenment and Age of Science 17th and 18th centuries, as the importance of rational thinking grew and the role of theology diminished. Humanistic outlooks and values eventually found popularity throughout much of Western Europe and into the Americas. Religiously, in America in the 19th century, Humanism was particularly influential in the Ethical Culture movement led by Felix Adler and in the Unitarian Church. In 1933, in an effort to combine the thoughts of the Western Unitarian Conference members like Charles Francis Potter, Raymond Bragg wrote the *Humanist Manifesto*, which was one of the first documents that officially outlined the pillars of modern Humanism. *Humanist Manifesto II* and *III* were crafted in 1973 and 2003,

respectively. The full text of *Humanist Manifesto III* can be found below. Humanism draws from a variety of nontheistic views (atheism, agnosticism, rationalism, naturalism, secularism, and so forth) while adding the important element of a comprehensive worldview and ethical values – values that are grounded in reason and compassion, informed by scientific knowledge, and driven by a desire to meet the needs of people in the here and now.

## **Theology**

Humanists generally declare that their belief system is not religious but philosophical, and based not on faith, but on reason. They generally characterize their thinking as philosophy, not theology. Most Humanists would agree that Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life which, without theism or other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity. Humanists believe that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals without reference to deity. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.

*“Religious Humanism largely emerged out of Ethical Culture, Unitarianism, and Universalism. Today, many Unitarian Universalist congregations and all Ethical Culture societies describe themselves as humanist in the modern sense.*

*The most critical irony in dealing with Modern Humanism is the tendency for its advocates to disagree on whether or not this worldview is religious. Those who see it as philosophy are the Secular Humanists while those who see it as religion are Religious Humanists. This dispute has been going on since the beginning of the twentieth century when the secular and religious traditions converged and brought Modern Humanism into existence.*

*Secular and Religious Humanists both share the same worldview and the same basic principles. This is made evident by the fact that both Secular and Religious Humanists were among the signers of Humanist Manifesto I in 1933, Humanist Manifesto II in 1973, and Humanist Manifesto III in 2003. From the standpoint of philosophy alone, there is no difference between the two. It is only in the definition of religion and in the practice of the philosophy that Religious and Secular Humanists effectively disagree.”<sup>1</sup>*

Although there is no sacred text or Holy Book for Humanism, *Humanist Manifesto III* is accepted and adopted by the American Humanist Association to be the official document that outlines modern day Humanism in America. The full text of the *Humanist Manifesto III* reads:

*Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.*

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<sup>1</sup>Edwards, Fred. “What is Humanism” [http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/What\\_is\\_Humanism](http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/What_is_Humanism) (accessed January 15, 2016)

*The lifestance of Humanism—guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience—encourages us to live life well and fully. It evolved through the ages and continues to develop through the efforts of thoughtful people who recognize that values and ideals, however carefully wrought, are subject to change as our knowledge and understandings advance.*

*This document is part of an ongoing effort to manifest in clear and positive terms the conceptual boundaries of Humanism, not what we must believe but a consensus of what we do believe. It is in this sense that we affirm the following:*

*Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis. Humanists find that science is the best method for determining this knowledge as well as for solving problems and developing beneficial technologies. We also recognize the value of new departures in thought, the arts, and inner experience—each subject to analysis by critical intelligence.*

*Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change. Humanists recognize nature as self-existing. We accept our life as all and enough, distinguishing things as they are from things as we might wish or imagine them to be. We welcome the challenges of the future, and are drawn to and undaunted by the yet to be known.*

*Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience. Humanists ground values in human welfare shaped by human circumstances, interests, and concerns and extended to the global ecosystem and beyond. We are committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity, and to making informed choices in a context of freedom consonant with responsibility.*

*Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals. We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. Humanists rely on the rich heritage of human culture and the lifestance of Humanism to provide comfort in times of want and encouragement in times of plenty.*

*Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence. The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all.*

*Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness. Progressive cultures have worked to free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society, and develop global community. We seek to minimize the inequities of circumstance and ability, and we support a just distribution of nature's resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a good life.*

*Humanists are concerned for the well being of all, are committed to diversity, and respect those of differing yet humane views. We work to uphold the equal enjoyment of human rights and civil liberties in an open, secular society and maintain it is a civic duty to participate in the democratic process and a planetary duty to protect nature's integrity, diversity, and beauty in a secure, sustainable manner.*

*Thus engaged in the flow of life, we aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.*