

Atheists Try to Plant Secular Church—Guess What Happens

Justina Walford loved God and church, but her life changed when she began to question how one religion could hold the keys to truth. Her doubts drove her away from organized religion—until she came across an atheist church. Little did she know it wouldn't turn out the way she hoped.

The Atlantic recently reported on Walford's spiritual journey into Sunday Assembly, a secular community with meetings much like church services but devoid of God.

The church was comprised of members who didn't believe in God but missed the communal elements religious churches provided. It was a perfect solution for people who were even uncomfortable with the spiritual aspects of Unitarian Universalism, which purports that all religions are valid and lead to God.

As time passed, Walford discovered that it was difficult to maintain a secular church. The few volunteers they had found it difficult to keep up with the weekly demands of putting on "a big show." In addition, any members were skeptical of requests for donations, so funds were limited. And then leaders had to navigate the conflict of some members wanting to rail on religion.

With all these issues, the chapter shut down three years after it started.

Walford is certainly not alone in her journey of non-religious identity. Pew Research reported in 2012 that the percentage of "religious nones" in the U.S. is on the rise. And many of them say their beliefs started with what they saw as an important season of questioning their religious identity.

But many former atheists are now sharing their stories of how their spiritual dissatisfaction drove them to believe in Christ—even after years of denying His existence.

One such former atheist is apologist Ray Comfort. He's best known for his interview-style street evangelism and projects like *180*, *Noah and the Last Days* and *Audacity*. His latest project, *7 Reasons*, explored the biggest barrier that prevents people from embracing God and the Bible.

"The reason atheism is so attractive to the unsaved is because it gets rid of moral accountability," he says. "If there's no God, there's ultimately no right or wrong, and there's no punishment for right and wrong."

Comfort grew up in a non-religious household and didn't think he needed Jesus. But as an adult, he had a revelation of how fleeting his life was and wrestled for six months with his desire to hold onto his sin. The next time someone shared the gospel with him, the truth resonated with Comfort's spirit and he put his faith in the cross.

Likewise, former Australian politician Bill Hayden lived as an atheist most of his life until he surrendered to Jesus at the age of 85.

He initially turned away from faith in God when he lost his daughter and couldn't find solace in prayer. But a nun continued sharing the truth while she helped him introduce Medibank, now known as Medicare.

"I feel better now," Hayden tells CBN News. "In my body, I feel much better and in my mind. I'm looking forward to playing a more active role in the church in Ipswich."

Similarly, comedian Jeff Allen was an atheist for many years. But after he realized he couldn't keep living with his addiction to drugs and alcohol, he tried every ideology he could. He read humanistic self-help books and investigated New

Age philosophy and Buddhism.

Soon Allen discovered Jesus Christ was his only hope for true freedom. Now, he seeks to honor God with clean comedy.

As secular churches like Sunday Assembly struggle to pass their non-faith on to the next generation, former atheists like Comfort, Hayden and Allen are eager to share the truth that set them free.