



President's Report 2021

Friends, humanists, freethinkers, atheists, agnostics, and all my friends in the Halton Peel Humanist Community,

What a year. Whatever the future will hold, I doubt any of us will forget what the last 16 or so months have been like.

For us at HPHC, this has been a year of challenges and of adapting to them. Some of these challenges were clear; we could not meet in person so we adapted by meeting virtually, and we contributed to making the Zoom brand a common noun and also a verb. Other challenges were less obvious; speakers who we hoped to line up for planned events had to beg off as their schedules and work load changed. Our Video Documentary nights at Franklin House gave way to playlists of short videos to watch together on Zoom, and to then discuss. And we got to see each other's office spaces, living rooms or chosen backgrounds of far away mountains or islands.

But we managed. We adapted by recognizing that in a virtual world, distance is no obstacle. We lined up speakers and participants from across the world. The hp-hc.ca highlight for me was inviting and introducing my friend Rabab Kamal to join us from Cairo in Egypt to speak about Women's rights in the Middle East under the title "How the Silent Revolution is no longer silent".

Our other speakers included Andrew West, then candidate for Green Party Leadership, who talked to us about the One School System campaign. Over the winter and spring we marked Black History Month with video clips celebrating black humanists, then a few weeks back we had another video night themed around how others, that is non-humanists, saw us and this was titled Outsider Perspectives on Humanism.

Jointly with our affiliate "Cafe Scientifique Mississauga", we marked Darwin Day with a talk on the evolution of viruses by Ryerson's Professor Catherine Beauchemin, and a month later, we enjoyed a humorous and informative talk on Aging by Dr. Joe Schwarcz from McGill University. And In April, Marc Schaus shared with us his optimistic outlook on how technology would address and hopefully solve environmental challenges, which was the subject of his book "Our Livable World".

Last December, we also took a tour of the misinformation pandemic with videos about Conspiracies, mainly about Covid, and so illustrating the price to all of scientific illiteracy and the absence of critical thinking.

Beyond events, the main news of the last year was that HPHC has been incorporated under the Ontario Not-for-profit Corporations Act as the Halton Peel Humanist Community Inc. Credit for carrying out all the steps leading to incorporation go to Kelly and to Richard.

Thank you both. The principal benefit of this move is to protect the directors from legal liabilities, and to clarify our status with financial institutions. Incorporation will also add transparency and support our viability and continuity.

We are no longer just an informal group of buddies sharing ideas over drinks and food, though we still are that.

One of the first consequences of incorporation has been the need to overhaul and replace our Bylaws with new Bylaws which we will present to you in a few minutes for your approval. The rewriting of the Bylaws occupied us for the last three months and the document you now have is the result of the combined effort of a committee of Kelly, Jerry and myself, and to which the rest of your Directors contributed feedback and critiques.

I now want to recognize two of our current directors who have indicated that they would be stepping down from the Board: I refer to John Setterfield and to Donald Funston. Both will be missed. John served as event organizer as well as membership coordinator for several years. Donald was a member at large and contributed sober second thoughts and feedback to many of our deliberations. Thank you John and Donald.

Now, as we look forward to the coming year, I am cautiously hopeful that we will soon, I am guessing by September, be able to resume physical, in-person meetings. HPHC is primarily a local organization, and our events should be a platform for local humanists to share their ideas, and become known. However, our experience over the last year highlighted the reality that we are part of a global community, and that we need to live by the old motto "Think globally, act locally". I do hope that we do not turn our back on virtual events, but that when opportunities present themselves we embrace them by continuing to welcome global speakers, while also making our local events accessible in real time globally via YouTube or Facebook. Yes, there will be technical challenges, but I believe we can and will overcome them.

Thank you all.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'George Cordahi', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

George Cordahi
President HPHC 2020-21

[delivered at 2021 Annual Members' Meeting, June 15, 2021]