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**Q-Notes' first annual QList voting begins April 4**

Hot bars. Cool clubs. Great food. Influential community leaders. Who is the best and the hottest of the LGBT Carolinas? *You get to decide!*

**The QList, Best of the LGBT Carolinas** is your

chance to have a say in the who, what, when and where of North and South Carolina. Starting April 4, log on to [www.q-notes.com/qlist](http://www.q-notes.com/qlist) to vote for the best Carolinas bars and clubs, restaurants, coffee shops and cafes, retail shops, faith institutions, non-profit community groups, community leaders and more.

the first annual  
**QList**  
The best of the LGBT  
Carolinas Readers' Pick

*Here's the cool part* — Submit your ballot and be entered in a chance to **win a free iPod Shuffle and other great prizes!**

The QList has two ballots; one for Carolinas-wide voting and another for specific, geographic voting. You *can* vote in both. In fact, we encourage you do. Two ballots, means two chances to win that iPod!

So, grab your friends and all your club buddies and fellow non-profit volunteers and *let the battle begin!*

Vote online April 4 through May 13  
[www.q-notes.com/qlist](http://www.q-notes.com/qlist)

## Editor's Note

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

### Dying faith

In the past month, a lot has been made of religion and its place in America. While the religious right continues along their delusional path of believing our country is a "Christian nation," new information from the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), as reported by *USA Today*, shows a surprising drop in numbers for those Americans claiming to belong to traditional systems of faith and belief. Even more surprising was the jump in those claiming to be atheists, avowing a belief in no greater being or religion at all.

At its most simplistic level, religion exists to offer humanity two things: first, hope and, second, explanations for what we fail to understand or explain ourselves. Humans seek out religion to answer a myriad of questions, from simple issues of everyday life to more perplexing issues of eternity: Is it wrong to steal? Is it wrong to lie? How should I treat my brothers and sisters? How should I live my life in a way that is best for me, my family, my community and my world? Why are we here and where did we come from? What does life mean? What happens to us when we die?

When religion can longer answer these questions, or when the available answers no longer make sense or fail to apply to the everyday lives of those who are asking them, religious systems and faith traditions falter.

In the ARIS survey, researchers found that since 1990 the number of those claiming to be atheists had risen from 8.2 percent to 15 percent. Atheism is now the third largest "religious group" in America, following Catholicism (25.1 percent) and Baptists (15.8 percent). Other Christian denominations have also seen decreases in membership.

The reasons for the decline in Christian belief, I think, are simple enough. In the last issue's column, I said that the religious right in North Carolina was digging its own grave. Likewise, the radical and hate-filled theology of fundamentalist Christians nationwide is fueling an exodus. People are leaving the Christian church in droves. Some of them, no doubt, continue to believe in Christ but can't bring themselves to be labeled as "Christian."

Even I find it hard to label myself a Christian, at times. The word has been co-



opted by the religious right and has come to symbolize everything that is wrong with America, linking it to our segregationist past and our homophobic, anti-LGBT present. It seems more and more people are finding it harder to affiliate themselves with

"Christians" — a group the religious right has turned into a powerful and ever-present representation of division, bigotry and stupidity.

Whether it's the Pope condemning condoms in Africa, Focus on the Family or the American Family Association telling people their gay brothers and lesbian sisters are deranged and evil or "family" and "American" values groups trampling centuries-old American ideals and constitutional principles — there's no doubt that fundamentalist Christianity is taking over. The end result, however sad it might be to those who still profess faith in Christ, is that Christianity is on the outs. The faith is slowly dying, and it is headed toward its grave because of the actions of none other but its own, arguably misguided adherents.

But, for progressive and compassionate Christians who have yet to jump ship, the faith is still a comfort and an aide. There are even those who are slowly changing the faith from one of condemnation and fear to a more inclusive and tolerant one. Take, for instance, the story of Episcopal priest and ordained Buddhist lay leader Kevin Thew Forrester. He's up for ordination as the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern Michigan. That's managed to draw the ire of radical, fundamentalist Christians across the globe.

I find it amazing that Forrester is able to blend his peaceful, meditating Buddhist practices into his traditional Christian theology. It makes sense, really. Two religious and faith traditions that, at their core, teach peace, love, forgiveness and humility.

It is a shame fundamentalist Christians can't get with the program. I can only imagine Christ looking down on his followers with blushed cheeks of shame and embarrassment. If fundamentalist quacks would take the time to focus on the true tenets of their faith, perhaps its coming death would be staved off.

It takes an awful long time for religions to die out. So, if you're among the compassionate faithful who want to see your great faith tradition stay around for another couple thousand years, you'll have a long time to get the problems fixed. The first step: reclaiming the word "Christian" from the loonies.