

# THE ANSELM HOUSE NEWSLETTER *Ampersand* 2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT

**Editor's Note:** This fall, we're delighted to welcome Dr. Arend J. (AJ) Poelarends onto the Anselm House team. AJ will direct our university engagement programs and further develop those initiatives into a new Center for Faith & Learning at Anselm House. Born and raised in the Netherlands, Dr. Poelarends holds a Ph.D. in Astrophysics from the University of Utrecht, where he became interested in cosmology from his desire to learn more about the universe and our place within it. This led him into further studies in theology, earning an M.Div from Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, MO. AJ comes to Anselm House most recently from Wheaton College in Illinois, where he was Associate Professor of Physics and Astronomy, and co-directed the Wheaton College Science Station in the Black Hills. In this *Ampersand* contribution, AJ shares what inspires and animates him as he brings his expertise into the Anselm House mission of connecting Christian faith with all areas of research and learning at the University of Minnesota.

—Andrew Hansen, Program Director

## A Universe Infused with Meaning



**Dr. Arend J. (AJ) Poelarends**  
Director of the Center for Faith and Learning, Anselm House

For thousands of years people have been looking up to the stars above, and have often asked themselves deep questions: **Why are we here? Are we alone in the universe? What is beyond the stars? Why are we so small in this vast universe? Is there something bigger? What is the meaning of it all?** Raised in a Christian family, but confronted with serious challenges to my faith during my early college years, these very questions

led me to pursue studies in astrophysics and theology to explore these issues in the most expansive way.

None of these questions are surprising. Indeed, it is almost as if we are made to ask these questions. For several years I have read Sean Carroll's *The Big Picture* with my students at Wheaton College, where I worked the past 11 years. Carroll's book explores who we are, where we come from, how we can understand ourselves, and whether it makes more sense to understand this reality in naturalistic terms or in theistic terms.

Sean Carroll is a naturalist, who believes that there is only one realm of reality: the material world, described by natural laws. However, he realizes that while this may make sense of the physical world, when you start thinking about life itself, consciousness, and especially morality, this claim becomes more challenging. He therefore suggests an extension of plain naturalism, which he calls 'poetic naturalism' which posits that there are various levels of reality, each with its own domain of applicability, and each with its own story to tell. While the story that physics tells is

the most fundamental story, biology tells its own story, and so does psychology, and so does ethics—all of them emerging from the physical. Still, for Carroll it is the principles of physics that in the end give rise to and govern reality—the steady increase of entropy, the evolution of the quantum wavefunction as described by contemporary physical theories, and the persistent determinism of Hugh Everett’s Many World Hypothesis.

The story that Carroll tells is one where the complexity of human experience is reduced to electrical and chemical potential. Taken together, Carroll’s fundamental principles make any form of human free will ultimately illusory. Carroll’s story is one where human responsibility, morality and meaning is reduced to merely a secondary social construct—a story that may satisfy comfortable urban or suburban intellectuals, but whether it fits the search for meaning the slums of Rio or the Gulag Archipelago is doubtful.

For the past ten summers, I have taught an Astronomy course in the Black Hills of South Dakota in the middle of Lakota territory. Through a personal friendship with a Lakota pastor I gained a deeper appreciation for the Lakota worldview. In Lakota perspective, whatever happens on earth has a connection to the heavens. Their religious sites, positioned throughout and especially around Paha Sapa (the Black Hills) are mirrored in the heavens, in the Sacred Hoop, a shape similar to the winter hexagon in Western astronomy, but here dominated by the large Lakota constellation Tayamni and to a lesser extent by Mato Tipila (Gemini).

When certain stars became visible, Lakota bands would worship at the place that corresponds with the location on the Sacred Hoop, culminating with the Sun Dance ceremony during summer solstice at Mato Tipila or Bear Lodge (also known as Devils Tower). Connected with these religious ceremonies are the ancient origin stories of the Lakota people, the virtues ingrained in their culture, and the intimate interdependence of everything. But these ceremonies are also connected with various practical concerns, like agricultural and hunting practices. The intimate complexity of the Lakota worldview—a deep, rich interconnected tapestry of relationships, all infused with meaning—stands in stark contrast to the often sterile

worldview of many Western people, and in even starker contrast to the sparse meaning of Carroll’s poetic naturalism.

As a Christian, I feel deep sympathy for the Lakota perspective, even though many elements of their beliefs feel foreign to me. One doesn’t have to agree with every facet to still maintain a ‘tender reverence’ for their rituals, beliefs, and practices as Lakota scholar Craig Howe says.

The Lakota worldview is deeply integrated and whole, connecting beliefs and practices with almost every living and non-living entity, in a way that is not entirely different from the Judeo-Christian worldview.

The Old Testament Psalms provide a window into the Jewish worldview, and it continues to shape Christian belief and worship today. For me, Psalm 19 has been central to my faith. In it, David develops a fascinating view on who God is and his relationship to creation and humanity—indeed, connecting faith in God to all of life.

In the first verse, he announces: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” In the verses that follow, he develops an intimate worldview in which creation reveals and bears witness to its maker, speaking knowledge to all human hearts. While David speaks of God in very personal terms, it is important to note that creation itself is distinct from its creator, and not divine itself. Therefore the natural world as creation can and should be studied, and not just to know more about God.

**When I look at your heavens, the  
work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars, which you  
have set in place,  
what is man that you are mindful  
of him,  
and the son of man that you care  
for him? (ESV, Psalm 8:3-4)**

It continues to amaze me that the questions David asked around 3,000 years ago remain our questions. Who are we? Why are we here? Are we alone in the universe? Is there someone who cares, and why?

If you are willing to go deeper, the questions become even more profound, especially at the interface of philosophy and science. How is it possible that we are even able to think about these questions, that we are able to comprehend

the structure and shape of this universe, this reality?<sup>1</sup> How is it possible that abstract mathematical models are the most appropriate way to describe physical reality? Is mathematics eternal or temporal, discovered or invented? What does it mean that we have a mind that can engage in both abstract and concrete thinking? What actually is a mind and how does it relate to the brain? Where does our innate sense of morality come from? Especially as we discover more about the staggering fine-tuning of our universe for life, the question is unavoidable. Who are we? Why are we here? The questions go on and on.

I love these kinds of questions, and will be asking them for the rest of my life—one reason that I’m so excited to help foster the pursuit of these kinds of questions at the University of Minnesota through Anselm House. Naturally, such questions transcend the Lakota worldview, but my recent encounters with the Lakota culture have helped me appreciate more deeply the connections between the natural world, the human world and the spiritual world, and to see everything as infused with wonder and meaning. This interconnectedness is often missing in modern science—and academic knowledge more generally—where so much is disconnected and put in disciplinary boxes. Is

there maybe more in the relationships than we think? Is the whole more than the parts? Is this world richer and thicker than the sciences alone can capture?

From a Christian perspective it makes sense. It is what we would expect. A personal God, existing in a triune relationship, is the author of a world that exhibits his character in many different ways: the fine-tuning of the universe for life, a mind that is attuned to this reality, the appropriateness of mathematics for the description of physical reality, an innate sense of right and wrong, a sense of awe and wonder when we look up to the skies.

None of this should surprise us—we are made to ask these questions and to discover more of this reality. And I’ve become more and more convinced that when we do, we are drawn toward God in the process, as has been beautifully captured by St. Anselm in the concluding prayer in his *Proslogion*:

Teach me to seek You.  
I cannot seek You unless You  
teach me  
or find You unless You show  
Yourself to me.  
Let me seek You in my desire,  
let me desire You in my seeking.  
Let me find You by loving You,  
let me love You when I find You. 🙏

**Endnote**

1 I resonate with Albert Einstein when he said: “The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible” (Physics and Reality, 1936).

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# Grand Opening



Join us **Thursday, October 26** for the Grand Opening of Melrose Station & the launch of our Center for Faith & Learning with the 8<sup>th</sup> annual V. Elving Anderson Lecture in Science & Religion: **Of Two Minds: A Neuroscientist Balances Science and Faith**. Dr. Newsome will explore whether the ever-increasing knowledge about the detailed structure and function of the brain renders beliefs, values, and faith irrelevant.

William Newsome, Professor of Neurobiology at Stanford and former co-chair of the NIH's BRAIN Working Group is the Harman Family Provostial Professor of Neurobiology at the Stanford University School of Medicine, the Vincent V.C. Woo Director of the Wu Tsai Neurosciences Institute, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and former co-chair of the NIH's BRAIN Working Group.



**Thursday, October 26 | 7 - 8:30 p.m.**

**McNamara Alumni Center**

RSVP at: [anselmhouse.org/of-two-minds](https://anselmhouse.org/of-two-minds)



*Join us at the Grand Opening to get a copy of our commemorative 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary book!*

## Discipleship Across Decades

Dr. Mark & Jinjer Menge met in their freshman dormitory in 1988. Jinjer was a Christian, and Mark was an agnostic. Through Christian Student Fellowship (a precursor to Anselm House) they found rich Christian faith, hospitality, and community. They married in 1995 and recently celebrated their son's graduation from the U. **Read more of Mark & Jinjer's story—one of forty stories—in our forthcoming 120-page book celebrating 40 years of ministry.**



See a preview at: [anselmhouse.org/book](https://anselmhouse.org/book)

# Financials

## MINISTRY FINANCES

INCOME	2020 - 2021 Actuals	2021 - 2022 Actuals*	2022 - 2023 Goals
Donations – Undesignated	\$ 688,061	\$ 720,698	\$ 825,000
Release from Donor Restriction	\$ (see below)	\$ 65,349	\$ 350,000
Donations – Designated	\$ 258,836	\$ 19,517	\$ 208,000
Other Income	\$ 138,675	\$ 27,086	\$ 17,500
<b>SUB-TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$ 1,085,572</b>	<b>\$ 832,650</b>	<b>\$ 1,400,500</b>
<b>EXPENSE</b>			
Program	\$ 740,471	\$ 697,364	\$ 1,130,600
Management	\$ 79,261	\$ 73,406	\$ 95,415
Fundraising	\$ 57,656	\$ 146,813	\$ 130,400
<b>SUB-TOTAL EXPENSE</b>	<b>\$ 877,388</b>	<b>\$ 917,583</b>	<b>\$ 1,356,415</b>

## FROM THE HEART CAMPAIGN

INCOME	REMAINING GOAL		
Donations w/ Donor Restriction	\$ 6,868,658**	\$ 5,233,474**	\$ 1,685,000
<b>EXPENSE</b>			
Acquisition & Remodel Expenses	\$ 531,828	\$ 11,064,479	
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>\$ 7,076,842</b>	<b>\$ (5,915,938)</b>	
<b>Net Assets, End of Year</b>	<b>\$ 11,289,888</b>	<b>\$ 5,373,950</b>	

\*2021-2022 financials (with year ending June 30) were unaudited at the time of printing. Audited financial statements are available upon request and can also be found at [anselmhouse.org/give](https://anselmhouse.org/give). All real estate assets have been transferred to a type-1 supporting organization, d/b/a Anselm Holdings, with real estate management provided by Frauenshuh Properties Inc and Wits Realty. Anselm Holdings and Anselm House financials are being combined at year end and will be audited by an independent accounting firm.

\*\* This number is an estimated value of pledges made during the fiscal year.



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THE  
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Launched in 2019, the From the Heart Campaign is a vision to wholeheartedly serve the U of M for generations to come from the heart of our four passions: **Community, Our Callings, Campus, and The Christian Story.**

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Total raised: \$17,500,000

**Only \$1,685,000 remains!**

Learn more & give at: [anselmfromtheheart.org](https://anselmfromtheheart.org). Contact us if you have any questions—we would love to speak with you!

Byronie Moon, Development Director  
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# EVENTS

Find Christian community at  
the University of Minnesota!

[anselmhouse.org/events](https://anselmhouse.org/events)

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## Public Events

***Between Cities* 5K Fun Run/Walk**  
Saturday, Sept. 10 | 8 - 10 a.m.  
REGISTER: [anselmhouse.org/5K](https://anselmhouse.org/5K)  
***Student registration is FREE!***

**Loving Strangers: A Modern  
Philosophical Defense**  
**WITH DR. MEGHAN SULLIVAN**  
Thursday, Sept. 22 | 7 - 8:30 p.m.

**Of Two Minds: A Neuroscientist  
Balances Science and Faith**  
**WITH DR. WILLIAM NEWSOME**  
Wednesday, Oct. 26 | 7 - 8:30 p.m.  
*A post-lecture reception will be  
held across the street celebrating  
the Grand Opening of Melrose  
Station—Anselm House's new  
study center presence at the  
heart of the U's East Bank*

**Christianity and West African Cul-  
tures: Tensions and Resolutions in  
*Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe**  
Alternating Mondays, Oct. 17 -  
Dec. 12 | 6 - 8:15 p.m.

**Short Course: *Out of the Silent  
Planet* by C.S. Lewis**  
Mondays, Nov. 14, 28 & Dec. 12 |  
6 - 8:15 p.m.

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## UMN Community Opportunities

**Fall Kickoff**  
Wednesday, Sept. 7 | 4 - 7 p.m.  
McNamara Alumni Center Lawn

**Fridays@Anselm**  
Fridays starting Sept. 9 | 4 p.m.  
McNamara Alumni Center Lawn

In addition to regular film nights,  
reading groups, social events and  
outings, and more!

[anselmhouse.org/events](https://anselmhouse.org/events)

ANSELM HOUSE

PO Box 141007  
Minneapolis, MN 55414  
[anselmhouse.org](https://anselmhouse.org)

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

