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Charles Darwin, aged 51

Less than a month remains before Darwin Day! And since 2009 is the bicentennial of Darwin's birth and the sesquicentennial of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, it promises to be a particularly exciting celebration. Colleges and universities, schools, libraries, museums, churches, civic groups, and just plain folks across the country — and the world — are preparing to celebrate Darwin Day, on or around February 12, in honor of the life and work of Charles Darwin. These events provide a marvelous opportunity not only to celebrate Darwin's birthday but also to engage in public outreach about science, evolution, and the importance of evolution education. NCSE encourages its members and friends to attend, participate in, and even organize Darwin Day events in their own communities. To find a local event, check the websites of local universities and museums and the [registry](#) [4] of Darwin Day events maintained by the Darwin Day Celebration website. (And don't forget to [register](#) [5] your own event with the Darwin Day Celebration website!)

And with Darwin Day comes the return of Evolution Weekend! Hundreds of congregations all over the country and around the world are taking part in Evolution Weekend, February 13-15, 2009, by presenting sermons and discussion groups on the compatibility of faith and science. Michael Zimmerman, the initiator of the project, writes, "Evolution Weekend is an opportunity for serious discussion and reflection on the relationship between religion and science. One important goal is to elevate the quality of the

discussion on this critical topic — to move beyond sound bites. A second critical goal is to demonstrate that religious people from many faiths and locations understand that evolution is sound science and poses no problems for their faith. Finally, as with The Clergy Letter itself, Evolution Weekend makes it clear that those claiming that people must choose between religion and science are creating a false dichotomy." At last count, over 843 congregations in all fifty states (and thirteen foreign countries) were [scheduled](#) [6] to hold Evolution Weekend events.

In a January 27, 2009, story at Religion Dispatches, Lauri Lebo — the author of *The Devil in Dover* (The New Press, 2008), the latest book about the Kitzmiller v. Dover trial — [discusses](#) [7] the genesis of Evolution Weekend and the Clergy Letter Project. Michael Zimmerman told her that after organizing a number of letters in Wisconsin to counteract a local attempt to undermine the teaching of evolution, it struck him: "All of a sudden, here it was ... I realized, OK, I have this letter signed by 200 people in one state. I did the calculations, and figured I could come up with 10,000 signatures nationwide. I thought if I could get the signatures, I could put an end to this silliness." He added, "It never crossed my mind how big 10,000 is." (There are presently 11,814 signatories.) Lebo continues, "Despite its success, Zimmerman is under no delusion that the Clergy Letter Project will end the attacks on evolutionary education by those of fundamentalist faiths. ... Instead, he's trying to reach out to people of more mainstream faiths, who are open-minded but scientifically illiterate."

Writing on the Beacon Broadside blog in February 2008, NCSE's deputy director Glenn Branch [asked](#) [8], "Why make such a point of celebrating Darwin Day, as opposed to, say, Einstein Day on March 14?" He answered, "A crucial reason, particularly in the United States, is to counteract the public climate of ignorance of, skepticism about, and hostility toward evolution," citing a number of current attempts to undermine the teaching of evolution in the public schools. The onslaught continues in 2009, with struggles in [Texas](#) [9], [Louisiana](#) [10], [Mississippi](#) [11], [Oklahoma](#) [12], and elsewhere. "So that's a fine reason," as Branch recommended in 2008, "for you to devote a day — at the museum or in a pew, at a lecture hall or in a movie theater, out in the park or indoors on a badminton court — to learn about, discuss, and celebrate Darwin and his contributions to science, and to demonstrate your support of teaching evolution in the public schools."

Revised on January 29, 2009, to add the third paragraph.

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