

A report to members from the co-presidents

Freedom From Religion Foundation Year in Review — 2015

By Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker

We're not "believers," but as executive directors of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, we "religiously" believe in reporting what FFRF does with membership dues. Below is a summary of 2015 FFRF actions.

Last year was marked by the death of FFRF's principal founder, Anne Nicol Gaylor, age 88. Anne founded FFRF regionally in 1976 (with the assistance of Annie Laurie, then a college student, and Jon Sontarck, an elderly gentleman from Milwaukee who died in 1977). She was asked to take FFRF national in 1978. When Wisconsin State Journal's Doug Erickson asked Anne about FFRF's "in your face" name, Anne replied: "I've never liked euphemisms. If you have something to say, say it." The New York Times' obituary heralded Anne as "An atheist who saw religion as an oppressor of women and the cause of wars."

Anne was one of many valued members FFRF lost last year — including FFRF's honorary director, Oliver Sacks, M.D. The brilliant author touchingly noted in The New York Times op-ed announcing his terminal cancer:

"My generation is on the way out, and each death I have felt as an abruption, a tearing away of part of myself. There will be no one like us when we are gone. . . . When people die, they cannot be replaced. They leave holes that cannot be filled. . . ."

The past year saw completion and the grand opening of FFRF's three-year building expansion, attaching a five-story addition to our original pre-Civil War two-story building and topping that with a full-floor library. We're luxuriating not just in space, adding many much-needed modest-sized offices and work areas, but in creating a showplace for freethought. (More details on our "reborn" Freethought Hall below.)

Also notable, FFRF won five lawsuits in 2015, ended more than 200 state/church entanglements through legal letters, and launched several necessary new lawsuits. (More details in the legal section below.)

Here's to an even feistier 2016, with your help, in our work for reason to prevail!



Ingrid Laas photo

FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor

FFRF reaches more than 23,000 members

Welcome to the 2,000 new members who have joined the Freedom From Religion Foundation last year. FFRF reached **23,467 members** in 2015. Thank you to FFRF's newest 236 Lifetime Members, and several "After-Life" Members (a tongue-in-cheek category for those who wish their membership to live after them).

Increased membership gives FFRF more clout as a national state/church watchdog and the nation's largest freethought (atheist, agnostic, etc.) association. The best source of new members is other members — you! Please spread the word!

Freethought Hall Grand Opening



Ingrid Laas photo

WWII veteran Joseph Cunningham stands next to the Atheist in Foxholes monument outside FFRF's offices.

FFRF hosted more than 400 freethinkers from around the country during its Grand Opening of the Freethought Hall expansion on Oct. 9, kicking off the annual national convention in Madison, Wis. Brunch goodies and Champagne flowed in the beautiful 4th floor **Charlie Brooks Auditorium** and music flowed too, with Dan Barker entertaining on the **Diane Uhl Concert Grand Steinway** piano. Members toured the just-completed **Rose Zerwick Memorial Garden and Courtyard** with members' pavers, the **Atheists in Foxholes monument** honoring freethinking vets, the vestibule with memorial and member tiles, the **Anne Nicol Gaylor Lobby** with plaques naming our generous major donors, the **Brian Bolton Executive Wing** and **Patrick O'Reiley Editorial Wing** (first floor), the **Diane Uhl Legal Wing**, 2nd floor, the **Harold Erickson Public Relations Wing**, the **Joel B. Landon & Wanda Y. Beers Freethought Library**, and the **Stephen Uhl "Friendly Atheist" Studio** — 3rd floor. The Lower Level mailing area is named the **Harry Lonsdale "No Hell Below Us" Wing**, and the cupola with views of the Wisconsin State Capitol is called the **Kenneth Proulx "Above Us Only Sky."** FFRF also erected the first-ever "atheist marquee," an educational digital signboard.

Csam Wheatley's silicone sculpture of Charles Darwin, a life-like, life-sized mannequin, amazes visitors to the library, and serves as a photo op.



Jake Swenson photo

Csam Wheatley shows off the incredibly life-like mannequin of Charles Darwin he created.

FFRF makes the news every day

FFRF's state/church work, litigation and educational campaigns generated over **2,394 bonafide news stories** about FFRF in daily and online newspapers in 2015, plus more than **304 local and some national TV news segments**. Among staff appearances, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor appeared on national "CBS This Morning" on Sept. 3, talking about the mass baptism of Georgia high school football players — which our complaint halted for the future. She also appeared on Sean Hannity on July 9, where it was famously four against one! You can Google these shows, or read and watch media coverage daily at ffrf.org/news/media.

FFRF generates own media. At the year's end, we said goodbye to **Bill Dunn** as editor of Freethought Today, published 10 times a year, and welcomed his colleague, also a former staff member at The Capital Times newspaper, **PJ Slinger**. Bill will stay on part-time to continue to compile Black Collar Crimes.

Freethought Radio, a weekly radio show and podcast, hosted by **Dan Barker** and **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, celebrated its 500th show in early December. In December, FFRF hit another landmark, beginning to broadcast from its own **Stephen Uhl "Friendly Atheist" Studio**. The radio show broadcasts originally in **Madison, Wis.**, 92.1 FM., streaming on Saturdays at 11 a.m. CST. All-time stats: Freethought Radio has had 6.3 million podcast listeners since 2006, and averages 13,000 downloads per weekly show. (See wrap for other broadcast cities.)

FFRF maintains a timely and detailed website full of news, views, blogs, archives, online versions of Freethought Today, ads, films and photos. FFRF posted and sent media **341 press releases** and 49 public action alerts (plus many unpublished alerts to members in particular regions or states).

New Freethought Now! blog. FFRF posted 87 blogs this year, including 54 "Freethought Now!" commentaries at our new blog site hosted by Patheos. FFRF's blog is part of the Atheist Channel, which includes Hemant Mehta's popular "Friendly Atheist" blog. We thank **Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel** for his initiative in suggesting and setting this up. Access FFRF's blog at patheos.com/blogs/freethought-now/. Analytics show that the blog is introducing a younger audience, 46% female, 54% male, logging more than 275,000 page views and generating a modest income for FFRF.

FFRF has 351,658 "friends" on **Facebook**, and 37,154 followers on **Twitter**.

Look for FFRF's new TV show later this year, produced in the Stephen Uhl Friendly Atheist Studio!

PR/educational campaigns continue

TV advertising. FFRF placed the effective **Ron Reagan TV commercial** on CNN periodically in 2015 and ran Ron's ad on the penultimate "Daily Show" (Comedy Central). All other major networks have censored our ad. Apparently, when the son of a former Republican president comes out "unabashedly" as an atheist, "not afraid of burning in hell," it's too powerful a message!

Print advertising. FFRF is running successful monthly one-third page ads in



Ingrid Laas photo

Ron Reagan

Scientific American featuring testimonials by scientists or scientific thinkers, many of them honorary officers of FFRF, including FFRF's **Honorary President Steven Pinker**. FFRF placed several prominent full-page ads protesting the pope's address to Congress in September, and a two-page ad in the New York Times on Bill of Rights Day (Dec. 15).

\$35,850 in student essay scholarships

In 2015, the **William J. Schultz Memorial Scholarship**, for college-bound high school seniors, helped a record number of students. Seniors picked from two topics, "Why I'm good without God" or "Atheist/Nonbeliever of color." FFRF awarded top winners in both categories for a total of 23 students and \$17,950 in prizes. The college competition, a memorial to **Michael Hakeem**, a sociology professor, awarded a total of \$9,250 in scholarships to 11 college students. Lifetime Member **Professor Brian Bolton** sponsors the graduate student essay competition, which had eight winners receiving a total of \$8,650 in prizes.

Dorea and Dean Schramm provided each winning student who is a member of a secular student club (or FFRF) with a \$50-\$100 bonus.

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\$32,000 awarded to 11 student activists



Andrew Seidel photo
Jarvis Idowu

Ten thousand dollars from the **Catherine Fahringer Memorial Student Activist Award** was awarded to four ongoing, freethinking college students of color with financial need, in partnership with Black Skeptics of Los Angeles.

Awarded \$2,500 each were: Mercedes Hawkins, Zera Montemayor, Adrienne Parks and Therrin Wilson.

Three young high school students in New England who challenged their high school's Pledge of Allegiance each received \$1,000: Gabriella Ferrell, the **Allen P. Wilkinson Student Activist Award**; Lily San Giovanni, the **Strong Backbone Student Activist Award** (endowed by a New York member, age 81); and Morrigan Turner, **in memory of Tony Ross**. Legal Intern Jarvis Idowu, who worked all three years of law school for FFRF, received \$1,000 from the **Paul J. Gaylor Memorial Scholarship**. Ewan McCartney, grade 8, received the **Minglin Zhang Student Award** of \$1,000 for sitting down for his rights (protesting the religious Pledge of Allegiance) in Seattle. Benjamin Oyakawa received the \$1,000 **Thomas Jefferson Youth Activist Award** (endowed by Len and Karen Eisenberg) for bravely speaking out against religious entanglements.

Three special teenagers each received the \$5,000 **Richard and Beverly Hermesen Student Activist Award** for significant achievement. They include the student plaintiff in FFRF's victorious challenge of a Ten Commandments marker at a Pennsylvania school, and the student involved in similar litigation in another Pennsylvania school. Also receiving \$5,000 was Thomas Sheedy, a New York teenager who fought his school for two years for the right to start a secular club.

FFRF creates Nonbelief Relief

Nonbelief Relief, Inc., was newly incorporated in mid-2015, with FFRF as its sole member. The board is made up of Annie Laurie Gaylor, Dan Barker, Jim Zerwick, Stephen Hirtle and Lisa Strand as secretary/treasurer. Nonbelief Relief seeks to remediate conditions of human suffering and injustice, whether the result of natural disasters, human actions or adherence to religious dogma. It also seeks to provide assistance for individuals targeted for non-belief, secular activism or blasphemy. Non-belief Relief additionally will be challenging the IRS's privileging of churches and their charities by seeking tax exemption without filing the annual Form 990 (although it will post the form for the public). In 2015, Non-belief Relief gave \$74,500, including:

\$20,000 to **Doctors Without Borders** after the Oct. 3 aerial bombing by the U.S. military of the group's hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, killing 22 people and injuring 37.

\$10,000: **Camp Quest** scholarships to help needy students who could not otherwise afford to attend 2016 camps.

\$12,000: **Occupy Madison Tiny Houses**. For one "tiny house" for a homeless person who contributes "sweat equity," in Madison, Wis.

\$10,000 pledge to the **city of Madison**, contingent on city approval of a proposal to put permanent lockers for the homeless in or near downtown.

\$2,500: **Second Harvest Foodbank** of Southern Wisconsin.

\$20,000: **World Food Program USA**, designated for Syrian relief.

FFRF's legal accomplishments – 2015

FFRF logged just under 5,000 requests for help to end state/church violations from the public! (All complainants received educational responses.) FFRF's five staff attorneys, with intern help, sent out **1,186 formal complaint letters** to public officials in 2015, achieving a whopping **241 total victories** (with more to come). That total doesn't include follow-up letters, open records requests, or mass mailings, such as 420 letters to Wisconsin superintendents regarding vouchers.

Top 10 states (with the most state/church violations): 1. Texas 2. Florida 3. Alabama 4. Illinois 5. Wisconsin 6. Missouri 7. Oklahoma 8. Ohio 9. California 10. Georgia

Top 10 issue areas: 1. Violations in public schools. 2. In God We Trust. 3. Miscellaneous. 4. Religious Displays 5. Nativities 6. Crosses 7. Funding 8. Government Prayer 9. Legislation 10. Legislative Prayer

FFRF had **180** school victories, including halting: prayer or praying faculty in **40** public school; school board prayer in **5** districts; **12** bible distributions on school grounds plus removing **22** religious displays from public schools.

FFRF removed **5** crosses from public property; **7** other religious displays from public property (including "Jesus Loves You" sign in Hawkins, Texas).

Five victories stopped public funding of religion (including city sponsorship of a Gospel Fest in Jonesboro, Ga., and rescinding of a \$3,000 grant from Covington County, Ala., to a Baptist ministry).

Among notable victories:

- Portland schools stopped school concerts at the Grotto (Roman Catholic) shrine.

- University of Florida added a Thomas Paine quote to a new building.

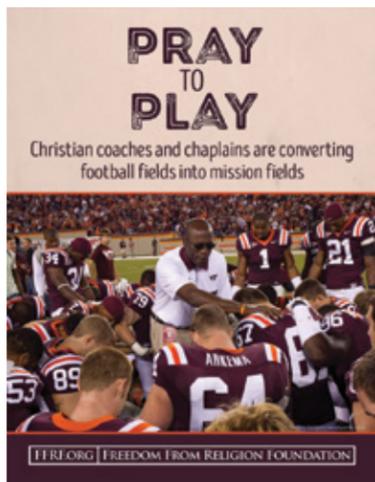
- Norfolk State University included a secular message at its Founder's Day event.

- Coral Springs and Deerfield Beach, Fla., dropped invocations from city meetings.

- Chanute Schools (Kansas) removed a Jesus painting from a public school.

- "Bible Man" was ousted from Grundy County Schools, Tenn.

FFRF's legal team issued a "pray to play" exposé condemning more than 25 public universities for allowing football coaches to impose their personal religion on players by hiring Christian chaplains. The report, released in August, involved more than a year of work and research by **Staff Attorneys Andrew Seidel, Patrick Elliott** and interns.



The cover of FFRF's 'Pray to Play' report.

FFRF 2015 lawsuit victories!

- Michigan.** FFRF and member plaintiff Douglas Marshall (named **FFRF's 2015 Freethinker of the Year**) won our challenge in Warren, Mich., taken with Americans United and the ACLU of Michigan. A federal district court approved a settlement requiring the city to give Doug equal access to city hall. His "reason station" now balances a longstanding church "prayer station" in the city atrium.

- Florida.** FFRF, our Central Florida Freethought Community chapter and plaintiff David Williamson won the right to unfettered distribution of freethought literature to balance a bible table in Orange County (Fla.) public schools. The school board adopted an even-handed policy, then closed the forum altogether!

- Pennsylvania.** In August, U.S. District Judge Terrence McVerry found in our favor against a Ten Commandments monument at a junior high in Connellsville Area School District. On Oct. 9, the monument was removed from public school property, ending the 3-year-old suit. A twin challenge in New Kensington, Pa., in which the same judge ruled a parent and high school student lacked standing to challenge a decalog in front of the high school, is on appeal.

- Indiana.** FFRF, with the ACLU of Indiana and two local plaintiffs, sued Franklin County over a nativity scene at its courthouse in Brookville. The county opened it up as a public forum, then refused FFRF's solstice displays (necessitating a second



Banished to private property



Chris Line photo

FFRF current staff photographed by solstice displays at Wisconsin capitol

lawsuit), then agreed to the displays. After FFRF's banner was stolen (twice!), the city of Brookville, which owned the crèche, announced it will move it to private property in the future.

- Georgia.** FFRF settled a federal lawsuit against Emanuel County Schools, which inflicted daily prayer and pressure on FFRF's kindergarten and first grade plaintiffs. Emanuel teachers received educational training, the primary offending teachers no longer work in the district, and the Doe family was financially compensated.

New litigation filed: Florida: Working with Americans United, ACLU and ACLU of Florida, FFRF filed suit in July against the Brevard County Board of County Commissioners, for rejecting atheists, humanists and nontheists from delivering opening messages at governmental meetings. **Indiana:** FFRF, the ACLU and the ACLU of Indiana filed suit in October to halt an annual live nativity enactment at Concord High School in Elkhart, Ind., with a parent and student plaintiffs. FFRF won a preliminary injunction to halt the live nativity and the case proceeds. **New Jersey:** FFRF and its member David Steketee filed suit in December against Morris County in state court over egregious public funding of church repairs.

Outreach – Campus and freethought events

FFRF staff made 43 appearances. **Co-President Dan Barker** spoke at 29 events in 16 states, including 4 debates, 7 FFRF chapter events (Northern Ohio, Sacramento, Denver, Albuquerque, twice in Chicago and Duluth), several local or regional meetings, such as CFI Indianapolis, Ethical Humanist Society in Skokie, N.J. Humanists, and at 7 college campuses. He addressed 5 conferences, including in Cologne, Germany, with **Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor**. She had six other events: Texas Secular Convention, campuses in Portland (co-sponsored by FFRF's chapter), Northern Illinois University, and Georgetown, and spoke to Americans United chapter, Rochester, N.Y.

FFRF Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert spoke at the Orange County (Calif.) Freethought Alliance. **Staff Attorneys Sam Grover** and **Maddy Ziegler** presented at the Secular Student Alliance's annual Cleveland conference. Sam spoke at the Southwest Secular Student Conference in Claremont, Calif. **Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott** spoke, along with **Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel**, at Freethought Festival 4. Andrew, with Dan, appeared at Freethought Florida Conference. Andrew spoke to a University of Arkansas student club.

Chapters: FFRF has 20 current chapters run by hardworking volunteers. Look for one in your area:

ffrf.org/about/ffrf-chapters

2015 Office/Staff/Board

FFRF's Executive Board of Directors are: **Dan Barker** (co-president, half a vote), **Jim Bredeson**, secretary; **Pat Cleveland**, director at large; **Joseph Cunningham**, director at large; **Annie Laurie Gaylor** (co-president, half a vote), **Stephen Hirtle**, chair, **Todd Peissig**, director at large, **Steve Salemsen**, treasurer, **James Zerwick**, director at large, and **Mike Cermak**, director at large.

Our staff of 17 is overseen by **Lisa Strand**, director of operations. We said goodbye to longtime employee **Katie Daniel** and welcomed new bookkeeper **Eleanor McEntee**. We also said goodbye to **Charlotte Stein** and **Dayna Long** and welcomed as new director of "first impressions" **Lisa Treu** and new assistant **Alysa Schaefer**. Our first graphic designer, working part-time, is talented **Jake Swenson**. **Takara Scott-Johnston** and **Bekki Huelsman** provided part-time student support. **Cheryl Becker** and **Stephanie Moritz** came out of library retirement to oversee cataloging of the new library.

Legal staffing. Joining FFRF's five staff attorneys (**Rebecca Markert, Patrick Elliott, Andrew Seidel, Liz Cavell** and **Sam Grover**) in handling legal complaints over state/church entanglements in 2015 is super-capable **Calli Miller**. FFRF debuted FFRF's first legal fellowships: the **Diane Uhl Legal Fellowship**, filled by new attorney **Ryan Jayne** (a spring 2015 legal extern from Lewis and Clark Law School) and the **Cornelius Vanderbroek Legal Fellowship**, filled by **Maddy Ziegler**, a UW-Madison law school grad who's also worked as legal publicist. **Katherine Paige** completed her legal fellowship, funded by William & Mary Law School.

Other interns and externs: **Jarvis Idowu** (University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School); **Liana Kapeke-Dale**, **Chris Line**, **Neal Fitzgerald**, (both UW-Madison), **Seth Wrinkle** (Lewis and Clark Law School in Oregon). Two undergrad interns: **Bekki Huelsman**, UW-Madison, and **Adam Grudman**, University of Maryland.

Volunteers. FFRF thanks student essay readers **Jeff Brinkman**, **Tom Brock**, **Chuck Hoornstra**, **Dan Kettner**, **Bob Ramsdell**, **Linda Josheff**, **Sue Schuetz**, **Anita Weier** (all Madison, Wis., area). Sue and Linda, who are sisters, also help with office work, as does versatile Board Member **Todd Peissig**, who volunteers a day every six weeks. Convention volunteers were **Eric Lawrence**, **Jessica Kopish** and **Beth Taylor**.



Taslima Nasrin



Ingrid Laas photos
Ernie Chambers

39th convention in Pittsburgh

FFRF's 38th annual national convention in Madison, Wis., attracted about 600 participants from 39 states (plus the District of Columbia), Australia, Canada and Uganda in October. Notably, we had a first, as Madison **Mayor Paul Soglin** welcomed us. Notable activists, authors and "unabashed atheists" and freethinkers spoke, including "Emperor Has No Clothes" honoree **Nebraska State Sen. Ernie Chambers** and "woman without a country" **Taslima Nasrin**, under a death fatwa from "holy men" in Bangladesh.

Mark your calendar now for the **39th annual FFRF convention at the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Downtown Hotel**, Pittsburgh, Pa., the weekend of **Oct. 7-9, 2016**. There's an option pre-convention side trip to Frank Lloyd Wright's **Fallingwater**. More details will follow.



Lauryn Seering photo

FFRF attorneys Sam Grover, Liz Cavell, Rebecca Markert, Patrick Elliott, and Andrew Seidel