

Freethought Today

Complimentary Copy
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September 2011

Mississippi school ignored own policy

FFRF
short-circuits P.A. prayer

The Freedom From Religion Foundation's letter of complaint on behalf of Mississippi FFRF members and supporters of secular government to DeSoto County Schools in Hernando, Miss., rankled residents, many of whom responded like pit vipers. Did school officials realize that prayer at football games and other sporting events was against the law and the district's own policy, but choose to look the other way until called on it?

FFRF's complaint dominated TV news and headlines for at least two weeks in August in Hernando and nearby Memphis.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt's



This is what an atheist looks like!

FFRF staff, volunteers and members from the Madison, Wis., area are among those pictured in this "just for fun" photo at the Wisconsin Capitol. All are modeling FFRF's newest "Out of the Closet" T-shirt, which is available in sweatshop-free, unisex and women's fitted tee versions for \$20 postpaid at ffrf.org/shop.

Aug. 10 letter to Superintendent Milton Kuykendall objected to prayer over the loudspeaker at athletic events and prayer at high school graduations. "It is also our information and understanding that students are often encouraged by their teachers to pray before meals. Our complainant also informs us that a prayer each year at the graduation ceremony, some led by students and some led by you, the superintendent. We understand these prayers are mostly Christian-based prayers."

Schmitt noted that it's illegal for a public school to organize, sponsor and lead prayers at athletic events, and that the U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly struck down formal teacher or school-led prayer in public schools. "More importantly, the Supreme Court has struck down pregame invocations even when they are student initiated."

The nation's highest court has also struck down prayers at public high school graduations, noted Schmitt, citing *Lee v. Weisman* and other cases. "It is no defense that graduations are events at which participation or attendance is voluntary. Courts have summarily rejected arguments that voluntariness excuses a constitutional violation."

"The law is clear. High school graduations must also be secular to protect the freedom of conscience of all students."

On Aug. 20, the Desoto Times-Tribune reported that Kuykendall had asked the school's attorney, Keith Treadway, to investigate the legality

of the loudspeaker prayers. Two days later, Treadway met with the School Board. After the meeting, the paper quoted Treadwell: "Our current policy is not to have prayers at football games, and we're going to abide by that which we believe the law to be. We will not have prayer over the P.A. The principals have all expressed they are aware of the law and intend to abide by it."

This is the district's policy on religion, adopted in 2008:

School administrators, teachers and staff shall take a neutral approach regarding the promotion of prayer or other religious activities in schools or at school-sponsored events. They cannot interfere with students exercising their religious rights as permitted by law and they cannot tell or suggest to students that they should pray or participate in religious activities. Prayer over the intercom or at school-related activities shall not be allowed except as specifically stated above. Students may begin the school day with a brief period of quiet reflection of up to 60 seconds. This is not intended to be a religious service or exercise. Administrators, teachers and staff should not conduct themselves in any manner that would suggest that this period of quiet reflection is a time of prayer but should remain neutral in this activity. The Board

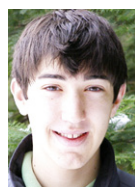
is committed to following the law and to protecting the freedoms of all students, both those who wish to exercise their religious freedoms and those who prefer not to exercise those rights.

Treadway told the Times-Tribune that he knew that FFRF had contested such prayer elsewhere. "I was aware that other districts in Tennessee and Mississippi had received the letter and was expecting something this year or next year."

Under mounting pressure from religious people, Superintendent Kuykendall made this public statement Aug. 24. "In my opinion, most people do not realize that this organization out of Wisconsin doesn't really care if we have prayer in our schools. They see an opportunity to try and accuse us of breaking the law and therefore give them a chance to sue our district and win a

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"Above us only sky"

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Steven Pinker

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Call to
2011
FFRF

Convention
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Meet a Legal Intern

Name: Laura A. Steigerwald.

Where and when I was born: New Year's Eve 1979 in Brookfield, Wis. I grew up in adjacent Elm Grove and moved back to Brookfield when I was 14. Elm Grove is an ultra-conservative, wealthy area known for large Catholic families. It's where my father grew up as the eldest of nine children. I'm sure if it were legal to build a fence around a village, Elm Grove would.

Family: My mother's side is made up of hardworking, liberal Democrats, and my father's side is the complete opposite. I'm much closer to my mother's side. I have one brother, who married a Lutheran a year ago. It was quite sad to witness the controversy stirred up by my militant Catholic aunts (both married to Lutherans) over my brother marrying a Lutheran. Apparently, he will not go to the same heaven as his wife because Catholics go to a higher level of heaven? I'm sure they have computers in heaven, so they can probably Skype. At least now I don't have to explain why I'm an atheist.

Education: I went to Catholic grade school, where I was teased and tormented for my weight and for being a tomboy. After years of my parents fighting over it, they let me transfer in seventh grade to public school, where the teasing stopped. I got my associate's degree in computer information systems from Waukesha County Technical College and then transferred to Carroll University.

The entire time I was in school, I worked in information technology at a medium-sized, global company based in Milwaukee. After several years working in IT, I decided to pursue a legal career. In May, I graduated with a bachelor of business administration in human resources and legal studies from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. I will start law school this fall at UW-Madison.

My religious upbringing was: Cat-lick, in the sense that if the pope (or Virgin Mary hallucination) were to tell grandma and/or my aunts to lick a cat while praying the rosary, they would — seriously. They also believed in the "Three Days of Darkness" set to occur before the year 2000, when "daemons" would roam Earth for three days and you had to board up all your windows and stay inside. Personally, I'd rather get sucked up by a daemon than eat canned corn for three days, another

reason I'm an atheist.

How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern: I've been a freethinker since about age 14 when I refused to participate in the Catholic sacrament of confirmation. Accelerating the process around that time was witnessing the aftermath of my dad leaving my mom for a much younger woman and the hypocrisy of them confessing their "sin" and receiving communion right after they got married, as if nothing had ever happened.

My mom saved an Isthmus [weekly newspaper] article with Dan and Annie Laurie on the cover and showed it to me. That's how I became familiar with FFRF. Then I began following FFRF and all the great things they do. I applied for an internship and feel super-lucky to have gotten one.

What I do here: I help out the staff attorneys with various tasks. I do research on the Internet and draft letters and emails.

What I like best about it: I love the confidence I have that no one here will judge me for my nonreligious beliefs or my sexual orientation. I love being surrounded by freethinkers and LGBT allies. I also love working with Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott, because he is super-nice and patient. Then again, everyone here is super-nice. I'm also learning a lot about the Establishment Clause and First Amendment.

Something funny that's happened: The package that came with "SEE U IN HEL" scrawled on the outside. At least this person admits that he or she is going to hell! Maybe in his or her religion, bad spelling is a mortal sin?

My legal interests are: Labor and employment law (discrimination, EEO, ADA, worker's comp, unemployment, labor contracts, etc.), constitutional law, criminal law and immigration law. I want to fight for the "little guy."

My legal heroes are: Chief Justice Earl Warren (in some ways), Justices John Paul Stevens (loved the bowties), William Brennan, Thurgood Marshall and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Also Russ Feingold, Tammy Baldwin, Harvey Milk, FDR, Obama, Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, MLK Jr. and Gandhi.

Can I also say Judge Judy? I love her.

These three words sum me up: Resilient, idealistic, ambitious.

Things I like: My apricot toy poodle, Macey; friends of all faiths and non-faiths, school (never thought I'd say



Laura Steigerwald has put her "Cat-lick" roots behind her.

that), motorcycles, jet skis, boats, water skiing, "Up North," movies, NPR and Wisconsin Public Radio, Rachel Maddow, computers, the Constitution and the Internet (which, if it were a playground, Google would be the most amazing, multi-functional jungle gym on it).

I like UW-Whitewater and all the amazing professors I've had there, and I love my job at Office of Residence

Life and all the awesome people I work with.

Things I smite: Narrow minds, dogma, oppression, homophobia, sexism, racism, pollution, genocide, theocracies, sunburn, hot and humid weather, things that smell bad, blue cheese, green olives, the Religious Right, FOX News, Rush Limbaugh, tripping and falling over nothing, slow computers and broken printers.

FFRF welcomes 8 new Lifetime Members

The newest Lifetime members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation are:

Bradley Burquest, Stephen Dunn, John Fischer, Beverly Guardino, William Haukoos, Raymond Kliner, Don Shellenberger and Ted Tyler.

States represented are: California, Georgia, Massachusetts, New York and Texas.

To become an FFRF Lifetime Member — which ensures never another renewal notice, supports its future and which goes into a rainy-day "safe" en-

dowment — send \$1,000 designated as an individual membership or renewal. FFRF also offers a slightly tongue-in-cheek "After-Life" membership for \$5,000 for those "who wish their donations to live after them." All dues and donations to FFRF, a 501(c)(3) educational charity, are deductible for income-tax purposes.

FFRF appreciates all 17,153 of its members, and sends special thanks to Ted, Don, Raymond, William, Beverly, John, Stephen and Bradley for their exceptional support!

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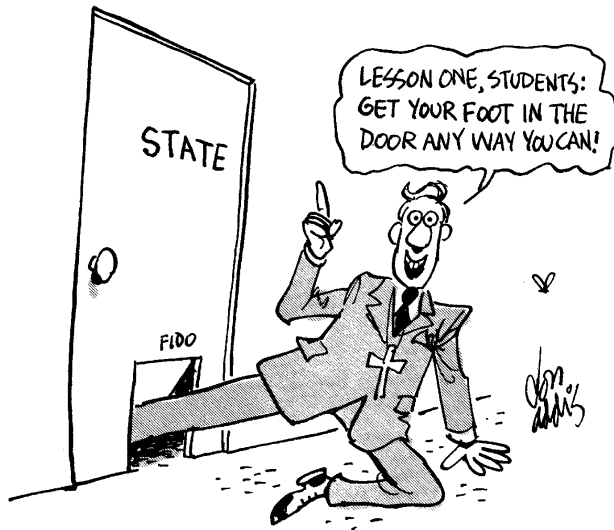
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September 2011

The only freethought newspaper in the United States



FFRF forces Kentucky school to halt prayer

After an Aug. 9 letter of complaint from FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert, Bell County School Superintendent George Thompson, Pineville, Ky., halted the practice of inviting a pastor to “offer prayer” over loudspeakers.

Thompson was quoted in a local news story earlier: “We’re always taken a position that we’re going to do it [pray over the P.A.] until someone makes us stop. And apparently, it appears that time has come for us.”

“While we’re pleased at the quick action to halt this unconstitutional practice, what is so very troubling about this case is that the superintendent admitted freely to media that he knew the practice was a violation,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

“How many students of diverse viewpoints have been knowingly subjected to illegal Christian prayer because the superintendent hadn’t yet ‘gotten caught?’” Gaylor asked. “This is sending a message of contempt for our constitutional principle of separation between religion and government. It is miseducating students, and it is appalling.”

Thompson told the Lexington Herald-Leader Aug. 25 that he sought guidance from the district’s attorney and the state Education Department. Thompson said the department told him that prayer at the football game violated federal court rulings. The department said the school system would lose if someone sued, said Thompson, a former coach. “It’s one of those things, you really have nowhere to go.”

In a related development, the Republican challenger to Democratic

Gov. Steve Beshear in the Nov. 8 general election is trying to make political hay out of the issue. David Williams denounced Beshear, apparently because the state Education Department warned the school district that the prayers were illegal.

Williams issued a self-serving press release Aug. 26 “to denounce this attack on prayer at public functions and lead the efforts of state government to defend our citizens’ right to voluntarily pray anywhere they choose.”

Although Beshear was not involved, Williams said, “It is a travesty that Gov. Beshear will not stand up for freedom of religion in Kentucky, and instead sides with an organization called ‘Freedom From Religion Foundation.’ As governor, I will stand up against out-of-state liberal organizations that want to stomp on our freedom to voluntarily pray in public places.”

Williams also complained that Beshear, as attorney general, ruled that the posting of Ten Commandments was unconstitutional.

“How could Beshear do otherwise? It’s a no-brainer,” said Gaylor. “The Supreme Court correctly and emphatically ruled in *Stone vs. Graham*, a 1980 case out of Kentucky, that such bible postings were unlawful promotions of religion.”

Ironically, Beshear is no defender of state/church separation. He helped lead the effort to apply Kentucky’s sales tax reimbursement program to construction of a Noah’s Ark theme park designed, as Beshear put it, “to bring to life the various stories and places in the bible.”

FFRF stops prayer in Mississippi schools

Continued from front page

lawsuit and take millions of our funds. This is money that is needed to pay teachers and educate our students.”

[Editor’s note: At this point, it’s clear that Kuykendall and Treadway both knew that district policy was not being followed but don’t seem to care.]

In an Aug. 26 letter, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor took Kuykendall to task for his defamatory comments and false allegations. “You should not only be apologizing to our organization for your unwarranted smear, you should be apologizing to past graduates, parents and your community for your clear failure to do your job. The purpose of a public school is to educate, not to proselytize. This should be a ‘teachable moment,’ not an occasion to continue to demonstrate contempt for the law and student rights.

Gaylor continued, “Your district should be explaining to students and parents what the law says, and why that law was adopted — to protect their rights of conscience, to ensure that the rights of parents to instruct their children in religion and religious ritual are not usurped, and to avoid the kind of spectacle it appears your community will put on tonight [at a football game] — a defiant spectacle that will intimidate, embarrass and ostracize non-Christians, Jews, other religious minorities, atheists and people who simply respect the need to keep our public schools free of divisive religion.”

FFRF noted it has never “made money” through litigation. It raises funds in order to be able to sue as a last resort to correct violations. It does not sue to “make money,” and has received damages only once — \$1 for a father fighting religious instruction in elementary schools in Dayton, Tenn. He and FFRF won a victory in the 6th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals.

Gaylor told the Times-Tribune: “We are frugal. We are a nonprofit. “We do not want to spend precious dollars to defend the law in school cases. We always try to negotiate with the school district. We point out that it penalizes the taxpayers and robs the school district. It’s the district’s choice when they

violate the law.

“We get a lot of crank mail and abuse from religious blogs,” Gaylor said. “It’s incredibly depraved, horrible language and grotesque sexual imagery, and we can put up with that, but we won’t put up with a public official trying to defame us.”

FFRF shared several pages of public “input” from the region with the paper, which called it “grotesque and offensive” in a news story. [See Crank Mail on Page 17.]

‘Take a Knee!’ for Jesus

The Times-Tribune reported that “hundreds of parents and students spontaneously gathered to pray aloud” before the opening kickoff of football games across DeSoto County on Aug. 26. Rev. Mike Coker, pastor of the Refuge Church in Hernando led a prayer outside Tiger Stadium before the game and encouraged people in the crowd to pray. After the singing of the national anthem, people in the stands recited the Lord’s Prayer.

“The group prayer was not sponsored by the DeSoto County School system and was led by parents, not teachers or administrators,” the paper reported.

On Sept. 4, about 500 people prayed on the courthouse lawn in Hernando at an event billed as “Take A Knee! DeSoto County.” It was organized by Ronnie Pollard, a candidate for sheriff in the Nov. 8 general election.

In an Aug. 31 editorial, the Times-Tribune referred to emails telling FFRF staff to “burn in hell.” Those are mild compared to other less charitable messages. Did Christ tell the woman at the well to burn in hell? No. [Emails] are signed with patently obvious fake names that sound more like sexual deviants than a reasonable person trying to practice their Christian faith.”

The Memphis [Tenn.] Commercial Appeal supported FFRF in an Aug. 30 editorial. “In the United States, we have the freedom to engage in the faith of our choice or to not practice any faith. Government-sanctioned prayer, such as at high school athletic events, undermines that constitutional guarantee. That’s something DeSoto County residents, upset over the halting of prayers over public address systems at athletic events, should keep in mind.”

On Aug. 25, Schmitt sent the district a letter on a new complaint: “It is our information and understanding that Gideons International is distributing bibles to all fifth-grade students at DeSoto County Schools. One of our complainants informs us that members of this organization came into the classrooms at Oak Grove Central Elementary and asked, ‘Who wants a free bible?’ Other complainants inform us this distribution occurs at DeSoto Central Elementary as well.”

The district hasn’t responded to that letter. On the graduation prayer issue raised in the first complaint, Treadway said the board but will review the policy at a later date.

Read and watch media coverage of FFRF at FFRF in the News at ffrf.org/news/media/ and sign up to get FFRF in the News by email at ffrf.org/signup/news/.

Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

Arrange a bequest in your will or trust, or make the Freedom From Religion Foundation the beneficiary of an insurance policy, bank account, or IRA. It’s easy to do.

For related information (or to request a bequest brochure), please phone Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608) 256-8900.

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Freedom Depends on Freethinkers



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists.

The Foundation’s e-mail address is info@ffrf.org. Please include your name and physical mailing address with all e-mail correspondence.

Foundation members wishing to receive online news releases, “action alerts” and “Freethought of the Day” should contact info@ffrf.org.



Declare and share your nonbelief in FFRF’s online “Out of the Closet” campaign! ffrf.org/out

Heads Up

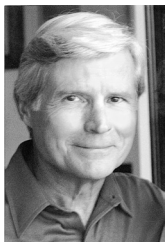
A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

E.R. Waiting Room, 9/11/01

A boy in pajamas is whining,
(his Medicare card somewhere waiting
for the day his dark hair comes up AWOL
and a cataract blurs his bifocals)
begging his Mommy to make it
all right again somehow, the bandage
so itchy he can't keep his fingers
away from the eye that grew older
in seconds as shards from the towers
snowed into the streets all around him,
into the splintering windows,
into the beds and the sleepers —
and so as the holy crusaders
flame up in a vision of heaven,
his eye through the blood sees a wreckage
he knows is his future,
(no matter
how Medicare shelters his bleary
old squint from the endless debris that
the righteous ones scatter behind them
year after year after year, his
brittle old bones all atremble
with the palsy of vengeance)
as Mommy
is gently caressing his cheek, with
a promise she knows will be broken:
that everything soon will be really
all right again, right again, yes.

© 2011 Philip Appleman

Freethought Today is honored to publish this new poem.



Philip Appleman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible* (2011), *Darwin's Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used *Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, and the *Norton Critical Edition of Malthus' Essay on Population*. His poetry and fiction have won many

awards, including a fellowship in poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Center for Science Education. His work has appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *The Paris Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, and *The Yale Review*.

He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both Lifetime Members (four times over) of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. They recorded an excerpt of "Noah," Philip's comic masterpiece, for the Foundation's newest musical CD, "Beware of Dogma," featuring Dan Barker. That CD also includes Phil's poem "Fleas," set to the music of "Trees." *New and Selected Poems* is available for sale from FFRF for \$23 ppd., *The Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, is \$22 ppd., *Kharm, Dharma, Pudding & Pie*, \$27 ppd., *Darwin's Ark*, \$23 ppd., and *Perfidious Poverbs*, \$20 ppd. (ffrf.org/shop/).

Recruit a Member

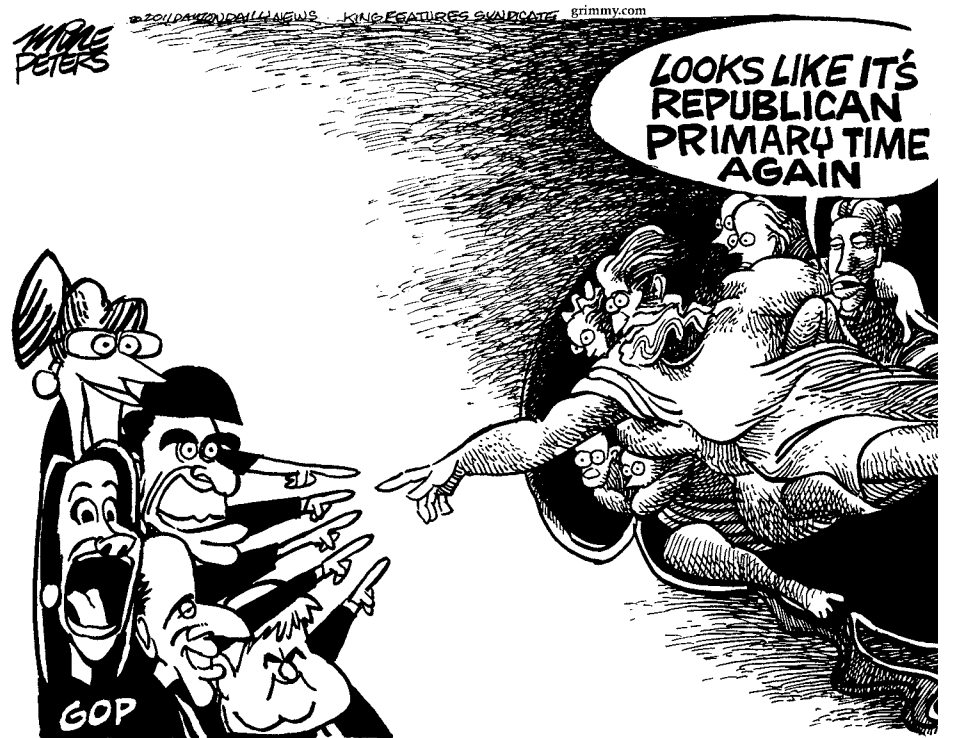
Sample Copies for \$2

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FFRF, P.O. Box 750, Madison WI 53701

Freedom depends upon freethinkers

(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)



Overheard

Atheism is a religion like "off" is a TV channel.

BenB's online comment on negative movie review of "The Ledge"

National Catholic Register, 8-30-11

This country and many of its citizens generally take a dim view of regimes that force or sanction a particular religion upon their citizens. In the United States, we have the freedom to engage in the faith of our choice or to not practice any faith. Government-sanctioned prayer, such as at high school athletic events, undermines that constitutional guarantee. That's something DeSoto County [Miss.] residents, upset over the halting of prayers over public address systems at athletic events, should keep in mind.

Editorial supporting FFRF's school prayer complaint

Memphis Commercial Appeal, 8-30-11

The last time I held a bible, I was smoking it.

Scottish comic Billy Connolly, on tearing out pages from the Book of Revelations with late singer Gerry Rafferty so they could roll cigarettes

The Daily Mirror, 8-25-11

A survey conducted on behalf of the American Bible Society found that 63% incorrectly believed that a verse found in 2 Corinthians was actually a quote from either Martin Luther King Jr., former President George W. Bush, or the patriotic superhero, Captain America.

Christian Post, 8-29-11

The most surprising result here is that the religion does not make black women happier. It gives them certain types of resources, certain types of comfort. But to be a highly religious, prayerful African-American woman does not necessarily lead to a higher level of life satisfaction and can have some boomerang effects, sometimes making black women more judgmental of themselves.

Melissa Harris-Perry, Tulane University professor, on *Sister Citizen*, her new book about deep-seated stereotypes dogging black women

New York Times Style Magazine, 8-21-11

It is a shame how the church continues to abuse the females. Church attendance is shrinking now, and this adds more fuel to the fire on how females are treated as second-class citizens.

Bob Lutz, a Catholic with three daughters, on the decision to stop having female altar servers at Saints Simon & Jude Cathedral in Phoenix

Arizona Republic, 8-21-11

[I]n data we have recently collected, the Tea Party ranks lower than any of the 23 other groups we asked about, lower than both Republicans and Democrats. It is even less popular than much maligned groups like "atheists" and "Muslims." Interestingly, one group that approaches it in unpopularity is the Christian Right.

Op-ed by David Campbell, associate professor of political science at Notre Dame, and Robert Putnam, professor of public policy at Harvard

New York Times, 8-16-11

YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

produced by the
Freedom From Religion
Foundation



Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

Broadcasts and streams Saturdays at 11 a.m. Central, Progressive Talk The Mic 92.1 FM, Madison, Wis., and over several other stations.

iTunes or podcasts archived at: ffrf.org/news/radio

Slightly irreverent views,
news, music & interviews

FFRF awards \$6,400 in cash prizes to college essayists

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is pleased to announce that it has awarded cash scholarships totaling \$6,400 to 15 currently enrolled college students for their winning essays in FFRF's 2011 college essay competition. The topic was "Why I Am a Freethinker/Why I Am Not a Religionist."

The \$2,000 Michael Hakeem Memorial Award went to **Nathan Held**, 19, a sophomore studying philosophy, psychology and German literature at Ripon College, Wisconsin. His essay and all other winning essays are reprinted or excerpted in this issue (see pages 7-10).

Receiving \$1,000 for her second-place essay was **Clarke Knight**, 19, a

sophomore at Smith College, Massachusetts.

Awards of \$500 each were designated in a tie for third place to **Carlos Anderson**, 21, a senior at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, and **Taylor McGill**, 20, a junior at Rutgers University, New Jersey.

A tie for fourth place resulted in awards of \$300 each to **Simone Anter**, 19, a sophomore at the University of Oregon, and **Samantha Schrum**, 19, attending Butte College in California.

Nine students each received \$200 honorable mention awards: **Casey Brescia**, a sophomore at Buffalo State College, New York;

Hannah Burkhardt, 20, transferring

to the University of California-San Diego;

David Cardoso, 23, a senior at Cal State-Sacramento;

Molly Hernandez, 21, a junior at Front Range Community College, Colorado;

Austin Johnson, 19, sophomore at Morehouse College, Georgia;

Gabrielle Monia, 20, a junior at the University of Oregon;

Sofia Ross Voloch, 20, Austin Community College, Texas;

Jacob Kovacs, 23, a junior at Evergreen State College, Washington; and

Vicky Weber, 21, a Ripon College senior.

"We consider scholarships to free-

thinking students as one of FFRF's most important activities," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

FFRF has been offering a college competition for more than 30 years. Last year, in addition to offering its essay competition for college-bound high school seniors and a second to currently enrolled college students, FFRF debuted a competition for graduate and "older" (25 years and up) students. These winners will be announced in October.

FFRF thanks all the entrants for taking the time to write and offers either a school-year membership or a complimentary book to every eligible student.



Overheard

A lot of parochial schools were really desperate. This gives them a tremendous shot in the arm. It's going to save some of them from going under. I don't think that's accidental.

Indianapolis Public Schools Superintendent Eugene White, on the fact that all of the 45 private schools signed up to take tax money for vouchers are religiously affiliated

Indianapolis Star, 8-17-11

Matt [Stone, "The Book of Mormon" co-creator] still believes that religion is a force for good, and I believe people are good in spite of religion.

Penn Jillette, author of God, No! Signs You May Already Be an Atheist and Other Magical Tales

expressnightout.com, 8-10-11

What makes me libertarian is what makes me an atheist — I don't know. If I don't know, I don't believe. I don't know exactly how we got here, and I don't think anyone else does, either. We have some of the pieces of the puzzle and we'll get more, but I'm not going to use faith to fill in the gaps.

Penn Jillette, "I don't know, so I'm an atheist libertarian"

CNN, 8-17-11

Americans are becoming less religious, with rates of atheism and secularism increasing in each new generation. This demographic transformation has been in progress ever since World War II,

but in recent years it's begun to seriously pick up steam. In the generation born since 1982, variously referred to as Generation Y, the Millennials or Generation Next, one in five people identify as nonreligious, atheist or agnostic. In the youngest cohort, the trend is even more dramatic: As many as 30% of those born since 1990 are nonbelievers. Another study, this one by a Christian polling firm, found that people are leaving Christianity at four times the rate that new members are joining.

Adam Lee, Daylight Atheism founder and FFRF Lifetime Member, "How Godlessness Is Increasing With Each New Generation"

alternet.com, 8-10-11

As religious leaders we should only be preaching about love and peace. We should not mix politics with religion.

Salva Kiir, president of South Sudan, which became a nation July 9 under a secular constitution

Sudan Tribune, 8-21-11

O'Donnell, a Christian, then politely turned down a request from a young man to sign his book on demonology instead of a copy of her book.

News story on Christine O'Donnell's book-signing event for Troublemaker, for which five people showed up in Naples, Fla.

Fort Myers News-Press, 8-27-11

It Pays to Complain

Judge agrees on godless affirmation

A woman who had just completed federal jury duty in a U.S. Southern District of California court contacted FFRF in late June for help with her concern about her jury oath ending in "so help you God." Nancy Stockton noticed that witnesses during the trial were sworn without those words.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt responded, citing specific cases in which courts have consistently ruled that witnesses and jurors must be allowed to affirm without reference to a deity.

"It appears that jurors in your court are unaware that the option even exists," noted Schmitt. "Courts should offer the option upfront, protecting jurors from the potential for embarrassment and from discrimination." She added that the oath called for in California's civil procedure makes no mention of a deity.

Nancy, who retired after 39 years of teaching, shared her July letter to U.S. District Judge Dana Sabraw, in which she praised the overall jury experience and the judge's efficiency but politely and strongly objected to the oath's religious reference. "As an atheist, I assumed a federal court would be more sensitive than most to my First Amend-

ment concerns."

She told the judge how she felt as a fourth-grader in 1949 at her school 30 miles north of New York City when the principal announced students would all say the Lord's Prayer at assemblies, and how the Protestants kept on praying when she was done with her mother's shorter, Catholic version. "I learned right at that moment I was a second-class citizen. To this day, I don't know why any 10-year-old had to be put in that position."

Nancy added that she has volunteered in various capacities all her adult life, votes, answers the call to jury duty and pays taxes without complaint. "And yet I cannot be assured that my right not to believe will be respected."

Judge Sabraw wrote back two weeks later to express his thanks. "I have now instructed my staff to administer an oath that does not contain religious references. It is an oath sanctioned by law and used by some other judges. The court, as you know, is an institution steeped in history and tradition. Change can be slow in coming, but from time to time, as here, it is necessary. . . . Once again, I thank you for your service and for your suggestion."

What Is a Freethinker?



free-think-er n. A person who forms opinions about religion on the basis of reason, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.

FFRF *Victories*

FFRF halts bible as algebra text

A Texas public school superintendent called a math teacher's religious school supply list "a harmless error" after receiving an FFRF letter of objection.

FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt sent a letter Aug. 30 on behalf of a district parent to Superintendent Stan Surratt of the Lindale Independent School District and to Principal Vicki Thrasher at Lindale Junior High School in Lindale, Texas.

The parent alerted FFRF about math teacher Amy Priddy's inappropriate supply list for eighth-grade algebra students. Included under "Classroom Expectations" was "Listen: to the Spirit of the Lord, to all instructions. . ." Another "expectation" was to prepare "your supplies (notebook, textbook, Bible, pencils, graph paper, spiral notebook, red pen, homework, etc.)"

The list imposes the teacher's religious sentiments on her students, and thus violates the U.S. Constitution, Schmitt noted. "Mrs. Priddy's decision to include 'Listen: to the Spirit of the Lord' and a bible as classroom expectations distributed to parents and students crosses the line because she is endorsing and promoting religion while acting in her official capacity as a school district employee."

(This apparently was the teacher's personal list because the district's supply list online was different.)

"It's supposed to be reading, writing and arithmetic, not religion," said Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. "This algebra teacher needs to be told to calculate the distance between church and state!"

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor added, "The bible claims there is nothing new under the sun. But the bible, as usual, is wrong because this type of brazen violation is new even to us! Whoever heard of the bible being used as a math textbook? We think this teacher should certainly know that such behavior is illegal in a public school, and she should be disciplined."

KYTX, the CBS affiliate in nearby Tyler, reported Sept. 2 that the school takes the complaint "very seriously," according to Surratt. "We're very aware of the law. It was just a simple mistake."

Surratt said Priddy never meant for students to get the list. "She knows that's not allowed at our school. It was just a harmless error."

A statement from Priddy said she used to teach in a private school and "used a previous supply list and inadvertently failed to cut [the religious requirements] from the current supply list."

KYTX reported differing views in Lindale. "I would probably be having a conference with the teacher," Barbara Brown said. "I don't think those are things that need to be discussed in our classrooms."

"Kids need to learn about God and Jesus," Bud Morton said. "There's nothing bad that's going to come of it, so why not teach it?"

FFRF blocks Gideon bible distribution

FFRF alerted Meade County Schools in Brandenburg, Ky., to a serious offense. School policy allowed Gideons International to distribute bibles to fifth-graders.

Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney, wrote June 7 to Superintendent Mitch Krump to ask that the district bar groups from distributing religious materials. She noted that the district "need not create an open public forum whereby any private organization may take advantage of school resources and a captive student audience to further its personal goals."

School attorney David Wilson of Skeeters, Bennett, Wilson & Pike responded Aug. 5: "[T]he district has not been historically opposed to permitting the voluntary disposition of bibles to those students who wish to receive a bible. Nevertheless, in light of your above mentioned correspondence and having reviewed the applicable legal authority, the district agrees to preclude the distribution of bibles by the Gideons as requested by your correspondence."

Public school doused with holy water

"Every inch of school was blessed that evening as Rev. Jaison Mangalath

of Holy Ghost Catholic Church led two dozen people around the school for their annual prayer rally." That's from an Aug. 11 story in the Opelousas [La.] Daily World. The priest and a church group called the Blood Covenant Women of God were led through the public Opelousas High School by Principal Rodney Johnson prior to the start of the school year.

"Mangalath blessed classrooms, hallways, offices and meeting areas, sprinkling holy water throughout the school as the group followed behind and recited the Hail Mary," the paper reported. Other prayers were also said.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, on behalf of Louisiana members, sent a letter of objection Aug. 12 to Superintendent Michael Nassif and the St. Landry Parish School Board.

"Opelousas High School is public property and may not be taken over, even temporarily, by religious proselytizers. It is immaterial that none of the parents, teachers and students invited was in attendance. The religious rituals encompassing the entire school were directed at students, parents and staff.

"What next," Gaylor asked, "an exorcism of the school grounds with the principal's consent?"

An open records request accompanied the letter, and FFRF was told the church did not have a contract with the school to use the building. Even if it did, Gaylor noted, "It too would indicate an unconstitutional collaboration by your public school district with an event whose sole purpose was to enact a religious ritual."

The Daily World reported Aug. 16 that the church group had asked Nassif for permission to hold the rally and had been denied. Unbeknownst to Nassif, however, Johnson had already approved the rally. Johnson claimed not to know about Nassif's denial.

"This organization wanted to use the school for religious reasons, and just from experience, I knew that was not something that we wanted it to engage in," Nassif told the paper. "In my conversation with Dr. Johnson, he admitted that it was a weakness and an error in judgment. There is an investigation going on and we will take the appropriate action."

Johnson could be disciplined, Nassif said, adding that principals will be reminded of separation of church and state rules at an upcoming monthly meeting.

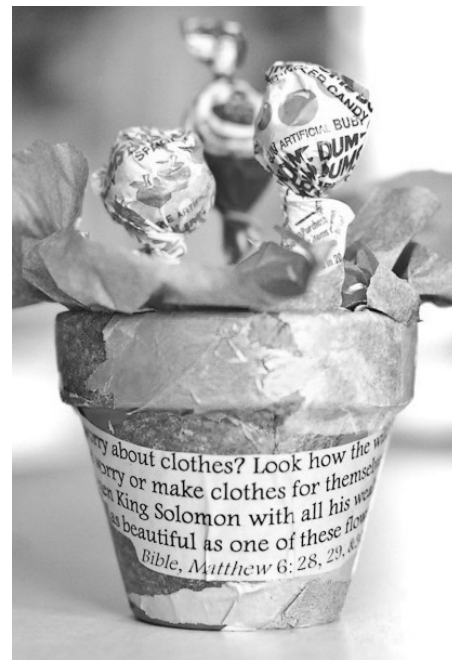
FFRF nixes Christian anti-abortion link at State of Wis. website

The state of Wisconsin removed a link to a religious anti-abortion group from its website after receiving FFRF's July 14 letter of objection.

FFRF wrote Gov. Scott Walker to point out that the state shouldn't be directing residents to Care Net "pregnancy centers" while offering no links to information about legitimate, legal abortion providers. Care Net's vision statement says: "Our vision is a culture where lives are transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and every woman chooses life for herself and her unborn child."

Clicking on "Health & Safety" at wisconsin.gov, the online portal to Wisconsin government, led to (under "Family and Consumer Services") "Family Services Links - NEW!" Clicking that brought up "Care Net Pregnancy Centers" under the "Family" subheading.

"By advertising this organization on



Nipped in the bud

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote a letter of complaint to the Cedar Grove-Belgium [Wis.] School District on behalf of a parent whose 8-year-old brought home from summer school a flower pot with verses from the biblical Book of Matthew, "And why worry about clothes? Look how the wild flowers grow: they do not worry or make clothes for themselves. But I tell you that not even King Solomon with all his wealth had clothes as beautiful as one of these flowers." Superintendent Steven Shaw responded, "By addressing the issues during our fall in-service and by creating a heightened awareness on the part of our administrative team, issues such as were outlined in your letter will not occur again."

a state of Wisconsin website, you are advertising evangelical ideals as well as an anti-abortion stance," FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor wrote. "Such religious propaganda has no place on a government website under 'Health & Safety.'

"Care Net promotes a rabid evangelical Christian agenda, and is hostile to nonbelievers, non-Christians and nonevangelicals, as well as the feminist principle of a woman's right to reproductive self-determination."

The link was removed on Aug. 8, said Chris Schoenherr, state Department of Administration spokesman. "In general, the policy for the Wisconsin.gov website is to provide links to .gov and .edu websites only."

School: No more graduation sermons

Macon County Schools now has a policy barring religious speech at commencement after FFRF expressed serious concerns about a fire-and-brimstone preacher at Nantahala High School in Nantahala, N.C.

Rev. Daniel "Cowboy" Stewart, the speaker, delivered a sermon that featured a volunteer from the audience bound in ropes with a bag over his head. Stewart was quoted in The Andrews Journal as saying, "This is a metaphor for how the devil is out to destroy you and tie you up."

Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney, wrote a letter June 29 to Superintendent Dan Brigman to note that Stewart "obviously abused his speaking opportunity to proselytize a captive audience."

Brigman replied Aug. 4 to say that while Stewart was not invited to deliver a sermon, the district will "ensure that

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10% DISCOUNT

(Available on all menu items)

Quiznos

Quiznos

Sub sandwich discount is toast

FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote a letter of complaint Aug. 15 to Quiznos restaurant owner Flint Noble in Ardmore, Okla., about a violation of federal and state law. The store advertised on its counter, "Sunday Only: Trade Church Bulletin for 10% Discount." FFRF's complainant said that when an employee was asked if a bulletin could be brought in from a non-Christian organization, the response was, "No, it has to be a Christian church." A week later the complainant returned, saw the sign was gone and asked if the discount was still valid. The employee responded, "No, some atheist was threatening to sue us, so we had to stop that promotion." Denver-based Quiznos trails only Subway in North American sub sandwich sales.

The feeling is mutual



Criminal charges were dropped in August against Ellenbeth Wachs, an FFRF member and Atheists of Florida legal coordinator who was subjected to ongoing harassment due to her activism. She's suing Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd and is lead plaintiff in a prayer lawsuit against the city of Lakeland. "Amusingly enough," writes Ellenbeth, "as I was driving to a benefit to raise funds for this nonsense, I passed this church sign."

future graduation speakers refrain from religious speech."

Complaint zips psalm out of post office

On May 16, Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to the postmas-

ter in Juneau, Alaska, about a religious posting on the customer counter. Under the counter glass was a copy of the entire text of Psalm 23.

Markert noted that "by displaying the biblical verse, the Juneau, Alaska, post office branch is illegally demonstrating a preference for religion, specifically Christianity."

After two follow-up letters, the branch manager responded Aug. 23 to say that the bible verse had been removed and had been placed there by an unknown postal patron.

Prayerful teacher resigns in Texas

FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote a letter July 20 to Superintendent Xavier De La Torre of the Socorro Independent School District in El Paso, Texas, after complaints were received about teacher-led prayer and creationism instruction.

Schmitt reported allegations that Laura Varela, Montwood Middle School science teacher and girls soccer coach, promoted creationism in her classroom. "We further understand that on several occasions, Ms. Varela has led her team in prayer prior to the start of a game."

According to a parent complainant, while exploring the "big bang" scientific theory, the teacher allegedly told students that "really, God created the world."

On Aug. 9, Larry Baskind, school attorney, responded that Varela had resigned effective June 30. "Accordingly, there should be no concern regarding actions by her in the future."

Baskind said the school "has been unable to confirm" that the questionable activities occurred, adding that the district "has in place appropriate policies to assure that teachers and other staff comply with applicable law."

Creationism plan dies in Ohio school

The Springboro, Ohio, School Board won't pursue a proposal by board members to teach creationism along with evolution. FFRF Senior Staff



Carolinas Freethinker of the Year 2011

Amy Glenn, a co-founder, board member and secretary of the Triangle Freethought Society, an FFRF chapter based in Raleigh, N.C., will receive the Freethinker of the Year Award 2011 at the Carolinas Freethinkers banquet on Nov. 12. The new award recognizes outstanding achievement in the freethought community. She organized with FFRF the highly successful "Out of the Closet" campaign, which posted a dozen secular billboards across the greater Raleigh area in April. She was instrumental in organizing the first National Day of Reason on the North Carolina State Capitol grounds in May. She served as the team captain for the Triangle Freethought Society's Relay for Life team in June, where her team of 28 members raised over \$23,000 for cancer research and prevention. She serves on the board for Camp Quest South Carolina, as well as on the planning committee for Rock Beyond Belief, a secular festival to be held at Fort Bragg in the spring.

Amy lives in Clayton, N.C. She graduated cum laude from Appalachian State University. Raised in a Southern Baptist home, she began questioning religion in high school and now considers herself an atheist and secular humanist. Amy is a greatly admired member of the secular community for her work and commitment to the freethought cause.

Attorney sent a letter Aug. 2 to board President Don Miller to object to the plan.

"It is wildly inappropriate for the religious beliefs of a few board members to be pushed on a captive audience of public school students," Markert wrote. "Such a practice alienates those teachers and students who practice other religious faiths, those who are nonreligious, and those who believe that science and religion are compatible."

The Dayton Daily News had reported earlier comments by board member Kelly Kohls saying that "Creationism is a significant part of the history of this country. It is an absolutely valid theory, and to omit it means we are omitting part of the history of this country."

Kohls, who heads the Warren County Tea Party, was backed by Jo Ellen Myers, who like Kohls belongs to Educate Ohio, a statewide group of conservative school board members. "If they're teaching the one, why not [both]?" Myers said. She said she believes in creationism but not evolution, because

evolution is "based on a theory that can't even be proven."

Markert told the board in FFRF's letter: "Any board member who feels passionately about the merits of creationism is free to teach that viewpoint to his/her own children or to ask that it be taught in his/her church." She cited six court decisions since 1968 rejecting creationism in public schools.

Markert noted that the board should be wary about committing the district to a course of action that would embroil it in an expensive, losing legal battle.

The Daily News reported Aug. 21 that Kohls had changed her mind and was dropping her proposal. Along with FFRF, ACLU of Ohio had also objected.

Some on the board saw the creationism issue as a distraction during efforts to keep the district financially afloat after several levy defeats. "No way, no how, no place should it be in public schools," said board member Mike Kruse.



FFRF Lifetime Member Ken Crosby proudly staffed the Freethinkers Chapter at the Family Motor Coach Association international convention Aug. 10-13 at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison, Wis. FMCA includes about 180,000 individuals with 90,000 motorhomes. It has some 20 religious chapters, such as Coaches for Christ and Roamin' Catholics. Dr. Crosby, a retired psychologist, began an effort to organize a chapter of FMCA freethinkers in 2004, when the group's president was advocating expansion of religious chapters, writing that "God should be first in every [FMCA] family."

Crosby's efforts succeeded just last year, when enough freethinkers came forward to start a chapter. About 3,600 members attended the Madison convention, which provided the first opportunity to make the Freethinkers Chapter visible. Though only two new members were enrolled at the convention, many pleasant conversations ensued with religious members, who now know that FMCA includes freethinkers.



First place: 2011 FFRF Michael Hakeem Memorial College Essay Competition

Happier without God



By Nathan Held

Nathan received a \$2,000 cash scholarship from FFRF for his winning essay in FFRF's contest for college students.

I'm an atheist. I became one in much the same way others have. My parents weren't religious. I lived in the Deep South and experienced right-wing Christian evangelism like a Native American greeting the conquistadors. I question the legitimacy of all authority. I remain an atheist, and I'm an advocate of atheism on my college campus for a wholly different reason: I'm happier.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence that every person has the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Religion is a threat to each of those rights. It threatens the rights of those who do not believe, and it threatens the rights of those who do.

Indisputably, religion has taken the lives of millions throughout history. Though all other theistic religions have infringed on the rights of humanity, the Abrahamic religions are certainly the worst modern offenders. The litany of sorrows is long and includes human sacrifice, purging of heretics, Sharia law, the Crusades, Protestant Reformation, Spanish Inquisition and witch burnings, which set the stage for the Holocaust, genocides in Bosnia and Sudan, Islamist terrorism and the continuing genocide in Palestine.

All of these conflicts, while complicated by other issues such as land ownership, rights to autonomy, etc., were and are fundamentally founded on religion. Moreover, the religious institutions which perpetrated these crimes have lied to evade responsibility. The results are collective guilt, hate and insecurity of entire peoples.

Similarly, religion systematically denies liberty. It has tried to control every aspect of peoples' lives, from the right to earn a living to what clothing people wear. Christians denied European Jews the right to own land, to freely choose professions and confined them to ghettos for centuries. When Jews became successful years later because of those hardships, that success was used to justify further hatred.

Today, Muslims in Saudi Arabia perpetuate centuries-old inequality and injustice in the name of Allah, using brutal penalties such as stoning and decapitation to enforce their demented laws. The Dutch politician Geert Wilders, leader of the Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom), hypocritically sought to tax and ban headscarves in addition to deporting Muslim immigrants.

God was created by humans to explain the inexplicable.

In the U.S., freedom of knowledge is being attacked by creationists on school boards and from the pulpit, a continuation of their 150-year-old fight against Darwin's scientific findings. Atheists in public schools are discriminated against by administrators, teachers and students, are kicked off sports teams and prevented from forming school clubs. All of these examples of physical constraints are compounded by restrictions on the mind. When "God" is always a factor in thought, the mind is not free to explore the boundlessness of the universe.

Fear-based faith

No one can pursue happiness while living in constant fear. Religion, by its nature and its dual assault on life and liberty, is founded on the growth and sustenance of fear. God was created by humans to explain the inexplicable. For centuries, the apparatuses of fearmongering have extended into all realms of life. The fear of not knowing, of being ostracized, of being judged and of imaginary hellfire depress the creativity and appreciation of life for every person who believes in the god of Abraham. Their violent reactions to anyone who would even question the legitimacy of the most trivial belief clarify how insecure they are. Undoubtedly, a lack of personal fulfillment is propagated by religious institutions

throughout the world.

While it is clear that religion is a source of misery in the world, it is important to recognize the alternative. Atheism threatens the life of no one. Atheism protects freedom and is a catalyst to fulfillment. I am not required to wear certain clothing and abide by arbitrary rules, nor do I help to impose such rules on anyone else. I, like many other atheists, do what I can to preserve the separation of church and state, protecting everyone's right to believe what they will.

My life has also become increasingly fulfilling without a belief in a god. I can appreciate the intricacies and beauty of languages without thinking of them as a punishment for building a tower to reach the heavens. Standing on the rocky beach of Lake Superior, listening to waves crashing against boulders and the wind moving swiftly through the blooming trees, I can simply be overcome with awe at the forces of nature, operating in subtle harmony.

There is no need to attribute that stunning order to a higher power. It is the higher power. Freed from the cage of God, I can live life and touch nature for the sake of life, for the sake of that raw experience, untempered by limitation.

Nathan writes: "I am 19 and live in Houghton, Mich., but I lived in Winterwijk, the Netherlands, in 2009-10 and in Natchitoches and Monroe, La., for nine years. I will be a sophomore at Ripon College in Ripon, Wis., where I'm majoring in philosophy, psychology and German literature. Aside from my major interests, I'm interested in physics, biology and history."

College essay contest: second place

God save the teen: From holy high school to secular college

By Clarke Knight

Clarke received a \$1,000 cash scholarship from FFRF for her essay.

Finding fellow nonbelievers and critical thinkers has been one of the most difficult tasks of my young life, though curiously, reaching my position of polyatheism was the easiest and most natural of experiences. My parents raised me on values of self-reliance, skepticism and kindness — no cross loomed over our kitchen table. I never set foot in a church and for that gift, I'm infinitely grateful to my parents.

While my parents accepted and encouraged my disbelief, my deviant stance on the "god question" brought me much trouble with my mostly Christian and Mormon classmates. A friend in sixth grade asked me what church I went to and then gaped when I said I slept in on Sundays. Horrified, she renounced our friendship. I hoped she

would come around and accept our differences, but she never did.

An unhappy truth revealed itself when I was only 11: Many of the devout are rigid and intolerant hypocrites, and following logic secured my place on the outside.

While I was distraught at the time, the experience catalyzed some of the most important growth of my life. I'm someone who takes the more socially painful route that helps me stay true to what I hold dear: rationality and human decency. This realization helped me overcome the disappointment religion brings early on, and it fed further introspection, analysis and thinking about faith.

I frequently contemplate religion, its consequences and its absence in my life. When I rise early in the morning to run, I don't pray for a blessed day but revel in the sunrise and the beauty of nature's rhythms and chaos. Is there a better feeling than meeting reality, seeing its awesomeness and realizing we awake to it every day? I feel neither a cosmic blanket nor the touch of god,

I feel neither a cosmic blanket nor the touch of god.

and consequently, I feel more alive and responsible for my actions.

Simple and arrogant explanations that our universe sprang up because of god never satisfied me intellectually or spiritually. I celebrate reality and rejoice in an existence for the here and now, not the later and "better." I feel blessed to have shelter, a loving family and access to education, but I realize my "blessings" came from the labors of my parents, the framework of our government and the sheer luck of being born in an affluent country. I wish we had more people of faith who practiced reason.

Nation of nonbelievers

The more I wonder about religion

in the U.S., the more I am dismayed, alarmed and desperate to change our attitudes and international image. In a high school history class after the 2008 election, I was shocked that some of my peers were offended by President Obama's statement that we were a nation of nonbelievers as well as believers.

Are we any less patriotic because we don't say "under god" during the pledge? Are we un-American because we don't ask god to bless our nation? Are we traitors because we exercise our right to freedom from religion? The hypocrisy of religion — to exclude and demonize what is different — contradicts our founding principles. I cannot align myself with such a value system.

During my senior year of high school, I wrote a research paper about vitalism, the notion of a mystical "life spark" that distinguishes the living from the dead, i.e., inorganic. I delved into the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, as well as articles from Friedrich

Continued on next page

College essay contest: Third place (tie)

Religion best served to couch potatoes

By Taylor McGill

FFRF awarded Taylor \$500 for her essay.

When I was 5, my mother tells me, I dispelled the myth of Santa on my own. It just doesn't add up, I explained to her. The whole square peg-round hole chimney thing, the Santa-can-be-in-two-places-at-once deal, flying reindeer and his status as a caroler-frightening, telepathic voyeur just didn't sit right.

And I mean, I wasn't a physicist, but what I had observed in a short five years told me that this was all physically

impossible. I was a skeptic at 5.

My mother tried to reassure me, most likely because she didn't want to ruin the excitement of a strange man leaving surprises in my house. It wasn't until the next year that she confirmed my suspicions. When I finally got my first-grade class huddled around me at recess, I laid it out for them very simply: Santa isn't real. As you can imagine, they all took it pretty hard. One girl started crying hysterically, so to console her I said I was joking.

Seven years later in a church basement surrounded by confirmation candidates, the priest asked for anyone who didn't believe in God to raise their hand. Looking around, it seemed I was the only one in my whole CCD class

Religion was betraying me, so I walked out on it.

who wasn't eating what he was serving. But remembering The Santa Incident, I sat on my hands, thinking that Father Tim might throw up or that the nuns would riot.

My Catholic indoctrination started about the time I was dissing Santa and, despite my earlier cynicism, I welcomed it with surprisingly open ears as most impressionable children do. Let me tell you, I was lovin' me some Catholicism. I listened intently, I prayed and even wanted to be a saint like the ones I was reading about, especially the martyrs.

But I lost it somewhere between lectures suggesting that women are inferior to men and that homosexuality is wrong. I was a young lady of 13 with aspirations for a career as a doctor or an author. I was even the only girl at school who played the drums and played them better than most of the boys. I was equal, and there was no way I was going to be a toilet-scrubbing baby factory.

I'd been exposed to unconventional lifestyles by then. My father was a "house husband," while my mom won the bread. A couple of my family members are gay. I've never thought it anything but natural and normal that other families were different from my own. Religion was betraying me, so I walked out on it promptly and with hard feelings. It lied to me (how could you!) about everything, including the existence of god.

I first reasoned how it was impossible for god to exist by taking an historical approach, which made it easy to see gods, and then god, as a human construct. I let myself out of the "cave," as Plato might say. Thus began my atheism.

A woman of action

Now, with religion out of the way, I'm a woman of action and certainly not a couch potato. I'm making up for all the hours spent hunched over in a pew and for all the dollars I dropped into collection baskets. One of my main beefs with religion is the encouragement of nonaction, via prayer and meditation, mistaking it for action. When disaster strikes, a spiritual individual will spend minutes and hours over a lifespan kneeling with their eyes closed, speaking to themselves.

The believer reflects on the issue they wish to ameliorate by repeating an instilled chant. By doing so, they become one step closer to acquiring arthritic knees and nothing more. This is not to say that reflective thought is destructive or nonconstructive. It is prayer that is not productive. The "pray-er" is not devising a plan to physically assuage whatever is distressing them or society at the time. They are just thinking about it.

The difference between secular re-



lection and prayer is that nonbelievers understand that thought, though an effective and appropriate prelude to action, isn't action. This is not to say that believers are never productive, because they can be. There's just one major interference — their belief that nonaction yields consequence. Progress requires doing, because good intentions are not enough. Ironically, believers (particularly Christians) hop to their feet without hesitation to advocate for legislation that makes life complicated for certain groups (*cough*-women, *cough*-gay people, *cough*).

But the main impediment to progress is the whole heaven and hell thing. We get one life to live, and the afterlife is a major distraction to living it. "Life might suck now but no worries, pray a bunch and you will be rewarded in the afterlife."

No, if people do not take steps to better their lives, it will always suck. Besides, if you believe in heaven, then you also believe in its stifling counterpart. Therefore, access to the VIP afterparty is a total coin toss. So where's the motivation, people? If everyone understood how brief the human experience is, there might be fewer drones and more progress.

Fully aware of the true time I have, I take advantage of every opportunity that comes my way. I spend time outdoors, read avidly and travel. I know how much there is to experience in so little time, so I advocate for complete equality so that no one's access to any part of the human experience is infringed upon.

I've gotten over The Santa Incident for humanity's sake. I will have a voice because the crying doesn't bother me anymore. Religion is an obstacle to the complete and proactive life. I am an atheist, not a couch potato.

Taylor McGill, 20, was born in Flemington, N.J., and is a junior at Rutgers University in New Brunswick. She's majoring in English with a concentration in creative writing and is minoring in philosophy. Her interests include writing, poetry, music, film, philosophy and human rights issues.

God save the teen: From holy high school to secular college



Clarke with parents on graduation day.

Continued from previous page

Wöhler's research that showed inorganic material could transform to organic (vital) material, which provided the death blow to vitalism.

I saw how the crutch of god deprived many of freethought and expression, and many more of their lives. I can't forget how the church schemed and lied to the public, decried scientists like Galileo and Darwin, all in the name of religious "truth." Through my research, I saw that "truth" is merely our visceral constructions from a time when we had few tools to objectively understand our world.

Though religious people portray faith as anything from panacea to harmless tradition, the crimes against humanity carried out in god's name show me it is poisonous to our society and a threat to the lives it claims to save. These insights into religious history make me eager to challenge its future role.

Luckily, I attend a liberal arts col-

lege where I've been exposed to more atheists, agnostics and skeptics. To be understood, challenged and accepted is a profound relief and a great source of hope. We may be alone on our singular warm rock in a vast universe, but we do not have to be alone in society, nor do we have to accept religion's current preponderance in our culture and government.

If there is any true cosmic justice, nonbelievers' passion for reality and goodness will be a force for, and the source of, our salvation.

Clarke writes: "I will be a sophomore at Smith College this fall. I'm still undecided about my major, although I'm intrigued by chemistry, anthropology and architecture. My passions include running, crew, traveling, conversation, doodling, flossing, writing and reading and logic puzzles like Sudoku. I was born and raised in Henderson, Nev., a suburb of Las Vegas. I turned 19 on July 21 and celebrated the day I was not brought into the world by god with a large chocolate cake and candles."

College essay contest: third place (tie)

Why I know I'm sane

By Carlos Anderson

FFRF awarded Carlos \$500 for his essay.

This girl, with pigtails and too much makeup, twists around in her seat and asks me, "How can you *not* believe in God?" It's smack in the middle of the first day of Psych 102, right after the tedious introduction portion where we share our religious beliefs, or in my case, the lack thereof.

"It's easy," I tell her, "I have a brain." That answer though is too reductive, lacking the finesse capable of swaying her opinion. It didn't matter. My goal wasn't to argue a counterpoint but rather to become a reflection of the blatant condescension inherent in her question.

With nothing more than flimsy Sunday school dogma, she felt it fair to assume that she was the one completely *in* her mind, and that *I* had gone off the deep end. What follows will be the supporting evidence for why I am sane.

Down the street from my house, there's a minister who cures headaches. The claim is that belief in God works just as well as aspirin. Tithing 10% of your annual income secures heavenly acreage for you. Homosexuality causes earthquakes and colossal hurricanes. They hate us for our freedoms. In the age of science, it seems downright silly to make those correlations.

Will prayer supplant medical treatment? Must we follow a financial plan imposed by the threat of an imaginary afterlife? Do we stop indulging in what brings us happiness because it's condemned in the stories of twisted fiction? The answer, for those in their right mind, is no.

Freud's essay, "Future of an Illusion," is an effective exposé of the human psyche. Freud proposes that humans try to control forces beyond themselves by attributing those forces to entities that can be appeased or angered. He asserts that we should impose these manifestations to satiate the insecurities of our powerlessness.

At first we imbued nature with human characteristics so that we may somehow tame its unbridled power. That has since been narrowed down to a monotheistic God, a catchall that saves us from the absurd randomizing of life, representative of our powerlessness. Essentially, it's an act of self-delusion to avoid confronting this reality. Every poor soul eager to let his life be ensnared by the word of God does so out of fear of the world and a need to fulfill the void of a watchful parental figure.

As a child, I had to attend mandatory theology classes. Faith permeated every lecture. Sheer belief rendered tall tales into fact. What a contemptible request, I thought.

The bible's 'wisdom'

Faith is the backbone of self-deception. Any time a believer is backed up against a wall, cornered by the facts stacked against them, their last desperate act is to cite faith. Like a ham actor's death throes, it's unnecessary and, further, embarrassing.

Invoking faith indirectly refers to the justification of a subjective truth, the last safe haven for theists. Many philosophers, especially of the existential movement, try to uphold this approach to understanding, though what I will argue is that the truth that re-

Faith is the backbone of self-deception.

sults from the outgrowth of the bible's teachings is a harmful one.

Deuteronomy 22:20-21 condones the brutal stoning of a woman who doesn't have adequate proof of virginity after being accused of being promiscuous. 1 Corinthians 14:34 advises women to be silent and submissive. In Deuteronomy 23:2, children of unwed mothers are born into the fatalism of eternal damnation. Ephesians 6:5, Colossians 3:22, Titus 2:9 and 1 Peter 2:18 encourage slavery, offering slaves debasing guidelines to follow.

This is but a sampling of the bible's "wisdom." I've skipped its insights on homosexuality and leasing daughters as sex slaves, with still more ridiculous declarations to bear. Secularism and reason instinctively dismiss these falsities that trespass on basic human rights. Subjective truths are a deserved privilege that we should be allowed to practice and express, but not when it violates universal moralities.

One of the few religions I am on good terms with is Buddhism. A visiting monk drew a picture of a chicken and an egg on the whiteboard. "Which came first?" he asked.

The class erupted with conjectures. No one had anything more than a grade-school interpretation of the idea, but we argued our points passionately. After some time, he raised his hand, webbed with prayer beads, and calmed us into silence.



He then posed another question, a slight smirk starting to break his stoic manner. "Ask yourself," he said, "does knowing this truth affect your life?"

The simplicity of the revelation was striking. Like the Zen koans that can incite a moment of epiphany, the monk had unlocked a new perception for us. People have concerned themselves with seeking the truth about their origins and an afterlife, forcing us to rely on religion to reach where science is not yet capable of treading. In trying to resolve that mystery, we have allowed senselessness to invade our beliefs.

As atheists, we must arm ourselves with education and go into the trenches, fighting a sort of guerrilla warfare that relies on the impervious invocations of logic and fact. In a faith-obsessed society, it has become increasingly important for nonbelievers to make the case for reason and put religious fanatics in their place.

Carlos Anderson, 21, Dededo, Guam, is a University of Guam junior with a literature major and a philosophy minor. He plans to transfer to either Boston University or Emory University. He aspires to write fiction and make independent films.

College essay contest: fourth place (tie)

Not the daughter my mother prayed for

By Samantha Schrum

FFRF awarded Samantha \$300 for her essay.

A lot of people wonder how someone like me, who was raised in a very religious household, could go from attending church every Sunday and youth group every Wednesday to atheism. When people ask why I'm an atheist, I always answer, "Because I am educated and exercise my free will."

As a child, I idolized my mother. Believing in Jesus was one of those things she did blindly, so I gladly followed her example through childhood and early adolescence. Saying I am a disappointment to my mother would be an understatement. She still prays for me every night to become a Christian. Every morning I wake up as the daughter who will never again buy into the fallacy of religion.

As a child, I did not reject religion but had a hard time differentiating between the Disney fairy tales and the Sunday school stories. My sister and I grew up hearing, "God is always watching." I grew up believing in impending doom if I was sinful. As an adolescent, I began to question my faith but didn't tell my mother. She meant a lot to me and still does, and I craved her approval.

She told me when I was 13 to start a confirmation program to become an official church member. She made it quite clear it was not optional, so I went to confirmation class every week for two years. I abhorred going. By 14, I was full of uncertainty. I learned about evolution in school and doubted my faith even more. I was very confused about losing my "faith" and did not know where to turn next.

A week before confirmation, I confessed my doubts to my mother. She was disconcerted and told me I would still be confirmed and then could make my

Our serious problems can't be fixed by blindly following a God.

decision. I remember sitting through the ceremony looking around and seeing my family, all there for me, but I did not want to be there. I stopped attending church. I went occasionally but not enough to pacify my mother.

In my senior year I had an amazing professor who had us memorize a definition for critical thinking: "Focused, organized thinking about such things as the logical relationship among ideas, the soundness of evidence, and the difference between fact and opinion." I remember sitting in church — one of the rare instances when I went — trying to be a critical thinker. I listened to the sermon and heard no truth.

I looked around and saw how blindly comforted everyone was by the pastor's harangue. The ideas were not logical. The only evidence was the bible. The

Continued on page 18



The pledge: Origins and travails



Photo: Brent Nicastro

Instead of ‘under God’ say ‘under law!’

Baptist ministry in Little Falls in the Mohawk Valley of upstate New York. From there he was called to the Bethany Baptist Church in Boston, located on the edge of its working class neighborhood. In 1891, he left the parish ministry (with some encouragement from his congregation) to work for *The Youth's Companion*, a popular national magazine, sometimes described as the Reader's Digest of its day. It contained a myriad of short articles and essays, with a patriotic bent, by various authors and gleaned from various sources.

Daniel Ford, owner of *The Youth's Companion*, had been a congregant at Bethany Baptist Church and had been impressed by Bellamy's sermons. So, in 1891, after Bellamy and the Bethany Baptists had parted company, Ford hired him to work with Ford's nephew and junior partner, James Upham.

In 1888, Upham launched a campaign to place the Stars and Stripes in front of all public schools, not a common practice in those days. The National Education Association and the federal government soon picked up on the idea. Upham, through *The Youth's Companion*, inaugurated a nationwide essay contest on the subject, "The Patriotic Influence of the American Flag When Raised over the Public Schools."

He also produced cards with the inscription, "This Certificate entitles the holder thereof to one share in the patriotic influence of a Flag over the schoolhouse." Schools sold the cards for 10 cents to raise the \$10 necessary to buy a U.S. flag from the magazine. About 25,000 were sold by the end of 1891!

Protestants vs. Catholics

In 1891, Upham conceived and promoted the idea of celebrating the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. This was in the context of a reaction to the immigration of largely Catholics and Jews pouring in from eastern and southern Europe, many of whom were gathering in ethnic neighborhoods and didn't speak English. Catholic immigrants in particular were being encouraged to attend parochial rather than public schools.

Indeed, in some large urban areas,

battles between advocates for parochial and public schools were fierce. Catholics were accused of voting against appropriations for public schools because they opposed having to pay taxes to support them. Upham and many other white Protestants regarded this as a threat and felt that public schools were the way to "Americanize" immigrants and, I suppose, even wean them from the pope.

Laws were passed to thwart Catholics from promoting their schools. These included efforts to compel parents to send their children to public schools, a move declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* in 1925.

The National School Celebration of Columbus Day program was sponsored by the NEA and planned by an executive committee headed by Francis Bellamy. Parts of the official program, including the Pledge of Allegiance and the proposed ritual to be followed in its recitation, were written by Bellamy. *The Youth's Companion* published the program and devoted its whole issue to it on Sept. 8, 1892.

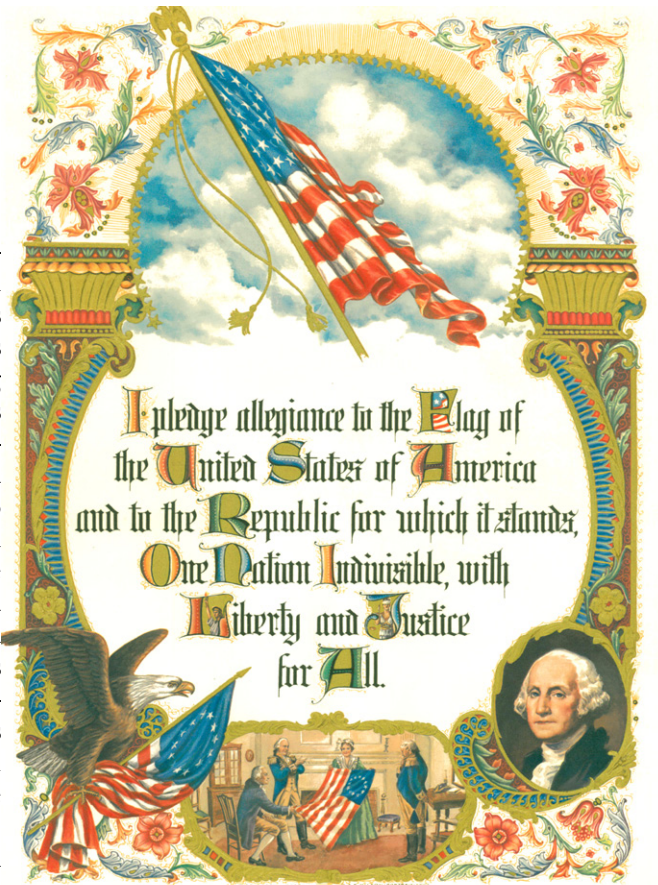
Upham's pledge promotion was so successful that many states later passed laws mandating pledge recitation in public schools to start the day. This spawned lawsuits by those who regarded it as idolatrous, principally Jehovah's Witnesses. After a false start, the Supreme Court finally got it right in its 6-3 decision in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* in 1943. The court ruled, "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein."

After Upham and Bellamy died, Upham's family tried to claim he wrote the pledge, something Upham never claimed. The U.S. Flag Association eventually upheld Bellamy's authorship.

Changes to the pledge

There were four modifications over the years. The first change was by Bellamy himself, who added the word "to" before "the Republic" shortly after it was written. In 1923, the American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution, two of the less enlightened organizations in the country, formed the National Flag Conference. Reacting to a rising tide of immigrants, they feared that immigrants might interpret the pledge's "allegiance to my flag" as referring to the flags of their native lands. So the pledge language was changed from "my flag" to "the flag of the United States."

Bellamy, who died in 1931, objected to that change and to one that added "of America" a year later. And, of course, pursuant to pressure from the



Knights of Columbus, "under God" was added by Congress and President Eisenhower in 1954 in reaction to "Godless communism."

In recent years, Michael Newdow, an atheist physician/attorney, challenged the addition of "under God" by Congress. The Supreme Court on June 13 refused to accept his appeal of an adverse decision by an appeals court. It's highly unrealistic to expect the Supreme Court, with five activist, conservative Catholic justices to ever turn a sympathetic ear to this cause.

While researching this subject, I ran across an acceptable way, at least for me, to deal with the "under God" phrase. Instead, say "under law!" If you want to really make a statement, say it loud enough so that those around you can hear it.

A side note: Bellamy originally considered adding "equality" and "fraternity" to stand with "liberty and justice" but feared it would be too controversial, since the NEA's leaders were sexists and segregationists.

It's also interesting and highly significant to note that although Bellamy was a man of God, he purposely left out any reference to religion or God. Unlike Southern Baptists and their fellow travelers, he felt that the pledge was for everyone and, needed to be secular. Indeed, he even opposed the 1923 and 1924 additions.

The original copy of the pledge is in the Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester. More information about its history and author are detailed in Dr. John Baer's book *The Pledge of Allegiance: A Revised History and Analysis* and in Bellamy's papers archived in the Rush Rhees Library.

By the way, *The Youth's Companion* was published by the Perry Mason Co., later Perry Mason & Co., a name chosen by Daniel Ford to protect his privacy. Erle Stanley Gardner, an avid reader of the magazine as a child, got the name of his famous lawyer character from it.

FFRF Lifetime Member Jim McCollum is a retired attorney and educator now living in Arkansas. Jim received a Champion of the First Amendment award from FFRF in 2006. Jim's mother, Vashti McCollum, brought on his behalf the landmark Supreme Court case McCollum v. Board of Education (1948), in which religious instruction in public schools was ruled unconstitutional.

This speech was delivered at FFRF's Lake Hypatia Freethought Hall on July 2, 2011, at the Alabama Freethought Association's annual July gathering.

By James T. McCollum

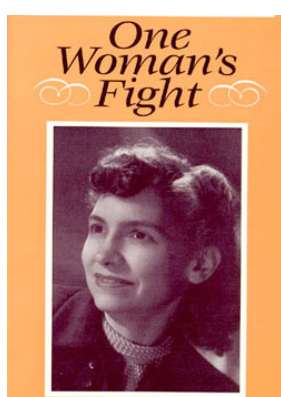
I pledge allegiance to the flag of my country and the republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. — Francis Julius Bellamy, 1891

Ever since the founding fathers created a secular foundation for this country and enshrined it in the Constitution, specifically Article 6 and the First Amendment, Christian activists have steadfastly connived to revert back to the bad old days of a government based on religion — their particular brand of Christianity, of course.

There is no more graphic example of this than in the story of the Pledge of Allegiance. There has been much discussion of late about it, much of it centered around Michael Newdow's litigation to have the offending phrase "under God" removed. Much misinformation is out there in the public forum. I believe it is high time that the myths be exposed.

The pledge was composed by Francis J. Bellamy, an ordained Baptist minister and Christian socialist. He was a first cousin of Edward Bellamy, a famous American socialist and novelist, whose most notable novel was entitled *Looking Backward*. Published in 1888, it described a socialist utopia in Boston in the year 2000.

Francis graduated in 1876 from the University of Rochester in New York and from the Rochester Theological Seminary a year later. He entered the



by Vashti McCollum

One Woman's Fight

How a historic 1948 Supreme Court decision ending religious instruction in the public schools was won.

Warmly told from family's perspective, with family photos. Ppb, 240p

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‘Above us only sky’

Churches I have met and liked

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

My paternal grandmother never saw a church she didn't like. "What a pretty little church," she would exclaim, no matter how ugly, or large, the church was.

We kids loved our grandmother, a warm, slightly plump Missouri acolyte of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). So we knew not to snicker in her presence or say anything disrespectful, even though her comments were partly directed at us heathens for our betterment. But in private, Grandma's admiration for all structures ecclesiastical became a bit of a standing family joke.

Since returning from a trip with me to Ireland and Scotland this summer, Dan announced a new standing joke. While Grandma never met a church she didn't like, Dan says I never met a ruined church I don't like!

But a church need not be ruined. Few modern churches can aspire to the kind of breathtaking beauty of the ruined Parthenon, after all. To meet with my approval, I am happy to see them turned to secular uses. As the Scottish freethinker-turned-American-reformer Frances Wright advised so sagely in 1828, "Turn your churches into halls of science. . . . Fill the vacuum of your mind."

Wright should be applauded for taking her own advice, literally purchasing a church in New York City and turning it into a Hall of Science, which, for a time, became a trend in the freethought movement of the early 1800s.

Dan and I took advantage of an invitation to speak at the World Atheist Convention in Dublin in early June to extend our stay into a short exploration of southwestern Ireland and Scotland. "Ruined churches," through no deliberate planning, ended up becoming a vacation "theme."

The blasphemy started at the Church Bar in Dublin, formerly St. Mary's Church of Ireland, a galleried church. Convention planners, including Atheist Ireland Chairperson Michael Nugent, had invited conference speakers to rendezvous there before the conference for an irreverent dinner at what used to be a cavernous church.

Post-conference, Ciarán, with Michael as passenger, kindly offered to drive Dan and me around the area. We felt very fortunate when we ended up being whisked away into the country to Wicklow mountains and the beautiful Glendalough. Glendalough, "Valley of the Two Lakes" ("lough," as in the Scottish "loch," means lake), also boasts a mysterious round tower built by monks for some kind of safekeeping of property (probably acquired corruptly from the poor), and, you guessed it, a ruined church in a very pretty setting. Wild purple rhododendrums set off ancient tombstones, mottled aesthetically by decay, which were pitched at creepy, impossible angles.

We hadn't known Ciarán would so kindly give us a tour of these parts, so we had prebooked a coach tour of

County Wicklow for the next day. We smiled as we ended up back at the very same cemetery, via a different and equally picturesque route. What a difference tour guides make! Ciarán and Mike had kept up an amusing freethought commentary on all matters, including the hermit monk, Kevin, who had fled to Glendalough to get away from it, only to attract followers and end up founding a settlement in the 7th century.

The Irish Catholic tour bus driver, taking us over much the same territory, solemnly informed us and other tourists that a woman follower (perhaps not human, maybe a demon?) tried to tempt "Saint Kevin" while he slept. (The masochistic Kevin supposedly slept on a perilous precipice, now known as "Saint Kevin's Bed.") The driver cheerfully informed us that the holy Kevin cold-bloodedly strangled her as a temptress and threw her in the lake, which might, he informed us, still be haunted. Maybe we should be afraid of this woman, he suggested. In a sotto voce aside to Dan, I said, "Maybe we should be more afraid of lunatic misogynist hermits, and their followers!"

This same tour bus driver confided, when Dan and I chatted with him over tea, that the movie, "The Magdalene Sisters," was "only t'e haf' ov it." Yet, despite more developments on a Vatican cover-up announced daily on radio and in newspapers during our trip, the guide insisted the scandals had been all cleaned up now and no more pedophile priests exist in Ireland. (Not even one?) Why was I surprised? Religion is, after all, a game of willful self-deception.

On to Scotland

We took a church-free, four-day trip to the isle of Skye, ancestral home of my mother's Nicol clan, where we rode on a steam train that took us over the famous "Harry Potter" viaduct bridge. Returning deathly ill, I checked into a Glasgow hotel with Dan, just in time to take an early morning ambulance ride to the hospital emergency room (no questions, no charge!).

We took it easy that day, giving my medicine time to work, and discovered we were across the street from yet another church that has been converted into yet another restaurant! We didn't have time to dine there but took a souvenir photograph.

During a hasty day trip to Edinburgh, we took a self-guided tour of the Palace of Holyroodhouse, still officially occupied by the Queen. This is the castle where the Roman Catholic and very pregnant Mary Queen of Scots was essentially imprisoned by her husband Lord Darnley, and where he had her private secretary David Rizzio slain in front of her in her private chambers.

Our tour ended at a ruined church, Holyrood Abbey, that used to be part of the castle. It turns out the Catholic church was sacked for good, after various previous attacks, in 1688, and had been left in its state of beautiful disrepair ever since. The roof collapsed in the 1700s. Dan, who had read a book about stonemasons, blissfully wandered around admiring the handiwork. I could only smile and think,



The Church restaurant & bar, Dublin.

"Above us only sky."

On our final day in Scotland, with Dan courageously driving a left-handed stick shift on the "wrong side" of the highway, we spent half the day on a wild-goose chase to see Maxwelton's House near Moniaive, south of Glasgow. I was named in part for the Scottish ballad, "Annie Laurie," a poem beginning, "Maxwelton's braes are bonnie." The braes (soft hills) are indeed bonnie, but it turns out the website advertising that the house was still open, was woefully outdated.

The owner started to chase us away when we drove up, but once she heard our accent (and my first name), she settled in for a friendly chat about the difficulties of trying to keep up a manor. There was once a chapel; if it's in ruins, we didn't see it.

We ended our Scottish touring on a freethought note by driving to see the newly opened Robert Burns Birthplace Museum in Alloway, Ayrshire, next to Burns' birthplace (a few tiny rooms with attached barn predominating), and the gorgeous real "Brigadoon" (bridge over Alloway River). The touring area included the tiny but eerie churchyard with its ruined kirk, which inspired Burns' famous poem, "Tam O Shanter."

Even when Robbie was a young lad, the church was in ruins, although burials continued there. That is where Burns' father was buried, with a loving elegy penned by his son. Burns' "Tam O Shanter," which warns of "Alloway's auld, haunted kirk," is carved, in part, on steppingstones all around the ruined church. It felt like Halloween there, even in June.

Speaking of Burns and churches, one of his most famous (and impious) poems is set in a church: "To a Louse, On seeing one on a lady's bonnet at church." Burns castigates "Ye ugly, creepin, blastit wonner, / Detested, shunn'd by saunt an' sinner," after spying one in "miss's bonnet." The humorous poem ends:

*O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion:
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
An' ev'n devotion!*

I feel sure that the icon-blasting Burns, had he lived long enough, would have seconded Frances Wright's advice to turn churches into halls of science, or even would have settled for my own less lofty ambition to turn them into restaurants. Unfortunately, it's difficult imagining what use civilization can put to church architecture circa 21st century America, with its hideous huge "box" megachurches.

Not even my fond grandmother could have called them "pretty little churches."

Annie Laurie Gaylor is a co-founder and co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. She is author of *Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So* and editor of *Women Without Superstition – 'No Gods, No Masters': An Anthology*.



Eerie Glendalough graveyard, Ireland.



The Brasserie, another church-turned-restaurant. Glasgow.



St. John The Evangelist Catholic church, famously without spire in rural Ireland. They ran out of money (and had their priorities straight)!



Burns' "auld, haunted kirk."



Above us only sky. Ruined Catholic Church, Holyrood Castle, Edinburgh.

Bonds of blasphemy at Perry prayer rally

The following is an excerpt from Jana Dubke's account of her participation as a Texas FFRF member and Golden Triangle Freethinker in FFRF's Aug. 6 protest in Houston of Gov. Rick Perry's stadium prayer rally. She got up at 5 a.m. and got lost on the way to her new friend Melissa's house, where they hit the road for the two-hour drive to Houston. Thank you, Jana, for your stellar support!

By Jana Dubke

We had our signs and our water and hats and sunscreen and found the FFRF group first, standing on the sidewalk in the full shade of the stadium. I spent a lot of time holding one end of the banner that said, "Beware Prayer by Pious Politicians" and "Get off your knees and get to work."

At times a truck would pass by that advertised the same message in a bigger, bolder way. We managed to run out there and pose in front of it a couple of times before the police ordered the drivers not to block traffic. There was also the airplane flying by all day streaming "GOV: KEEP STATE CHURCH SEPARATE. FFRF.ORG." Yay!

I got to chat with lots of people, admired lots of signs, and had several people express approval for my T-shirt (which was designed by comedian and FFRF member Richard Halasz). It's always fun to spread the blasphemy to those who appreciate it. I was so happy to be there I couldn't keep the smile off my face and didn't even mind the heat too much.

After some time, though, Melissa and I decided to check out the stadium and bask in some air conditioning. We'd heard only about 8,000 had registered, but the number was much

Sometimes I'm so embarrassed to be a Texan.

greater than that. I hear now that the total was more like 30,000 and that seems more accurate.

Sometimes I'm so embarrassed to be a Texan.

In the belly of the beast

The blast of cool air that hit us when we entered the stadium was chilling in more ways than one. There were people to greet us and bless us, and I didn't even like the feel of the handshakes. We meandered around, stopping to watch the spectacle, trading looks of abhorrence at the numbers of people swaying in the stands, arms outstretched, paying homage to the "slave master" as Dan Barker put it. Creepy!

After 15 or 20 minutes, we decided the oppressive heat outside was better than feeling oppressed by the atmosphere of delusion.

We rejoined the ranks on the sidewalk and I gratefully took up one end of the FFRF banner again. Ah, much better to be sweating but in the company of rational people than cool and exposed to the lunacy.

An Associated Press reporter came by, asking me if I could answer some questions. I introduced her to Annie Laurie, who did an excellent job explaining the reasons we were there and how the governor was abusing his position by promoting the exclusionary event. Later, Dan relieved Annie Laurie of banner-holding duty and also did an excellent job when an ABC reporter came calling for an interview. I was so



Jana Dubke's sign at Reliant Stadium in Houston said a lot without using a single word.

honored to be in the company of the FFRF co-presidents.

I watched Dan participate in a couple more interviews while hogging my spot at the banner's end. Dan demonstrated some of his Prometheus Society ingenuity by using a rainbow flag streamer to attach the "pious politician" banner and the "FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION" banner together so he could be free to turn around and speak into the cameras. That left me and Tommy, a new friend, to hold up the banners between the two of us for a while. Banner-bonding!

Back to the beast

Then, we decided to trudge back inside for more exposure to the hys-

teria and the A/C. We paid an exorbitant price for cold drinks and sat and watched.

What timing! John Hagee was about to speak. Such a treat! He told us we were gathered together from the length and breadth of America and our only hope was a nation under God who is the creator of heaven and earth (I suspect he hasn't read Stephen Hawking) and who held the seven seas in the palms of his hand (perhaps his explanation for how the tides never miscommunicate?), who raised the mountains (he's obviously never heard of plate tectonics), is the everlasting of the everlasting (nor the "Big Freeze"), the God of Israel and the Great and Majestic Something or Other.

We were next encouraged to huddle in groups of three to pray and make agreements, because everyone knows when at least three people pray and agree on something to ask god, god will do it. Unless, of course, it's not his will.

Our little group of three didn't pray, but we did watch all the huddling and swaying and hands reaching skyward. It gave me the same uncomfortable feeling I get watching a game show: embarrassment at the behavior of people getting so worked up over winning money or prizes. And since they were all behaving like idiots, they didn't realize they were behaving like idiots.

After a little more time outside on the sidewalk, we wilted in the heat and went to Joe's Crab Shack (shellfish!) and then headed home.

We made it safe and sound, full of ourselves for making the trip and letting our voices be heard. We might not have made a huge impact on the outcome, but we felt like we did our part.

We were there.

They Said What?!

I don't know how much God has to do to get the attention of the politicians. We've had an earthquake; we've had a hurricane.



He said, "Are you going to start listening to me here?"

U.S. Rep Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., quoting God at a Shrine temple in Sarasota, Fla.

St. Petersburg Times, 8-29-11

You start out the day on your knees in prayer.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, son of a Baptist minister, on how he keeps his cool amid controversy about his policies

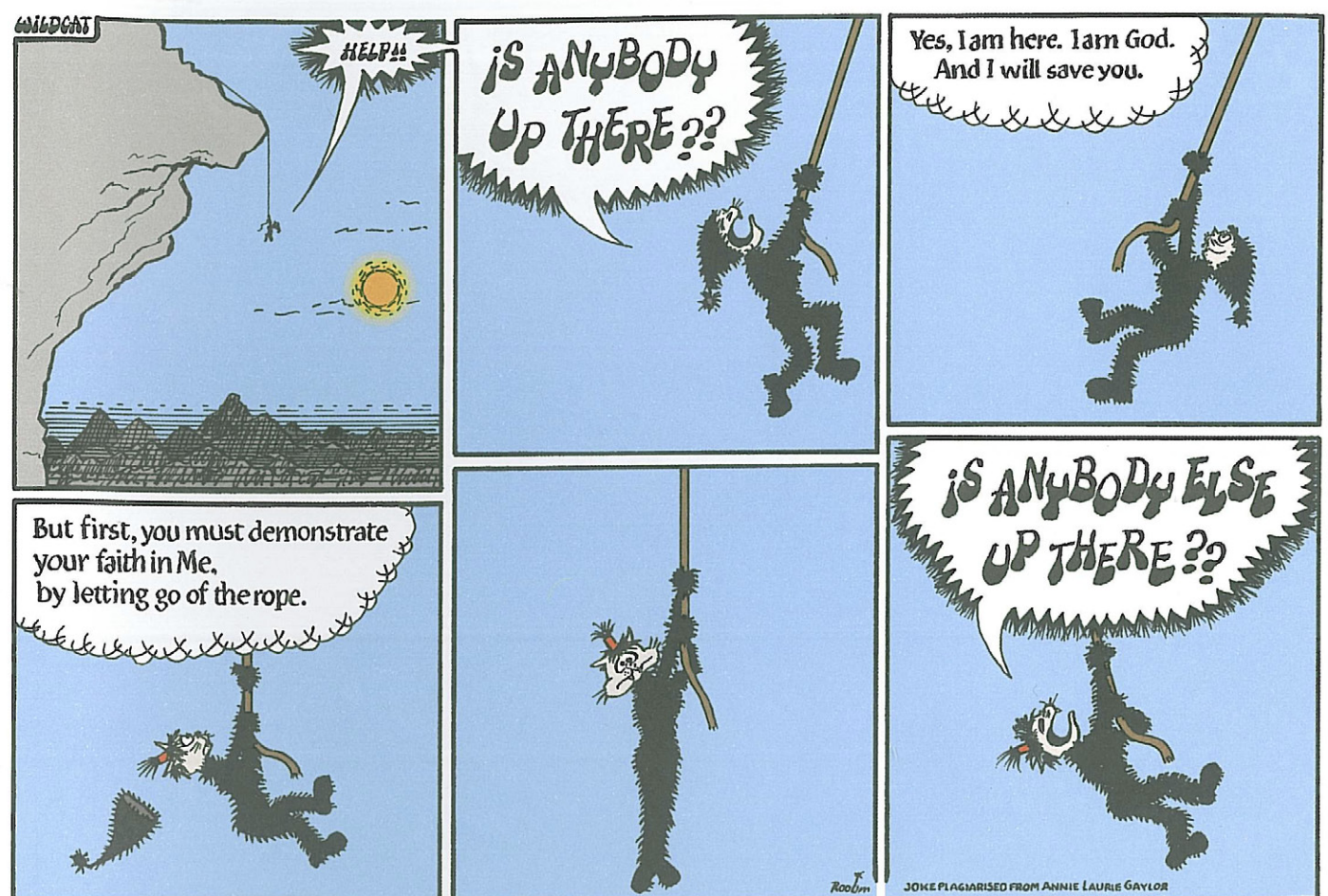


Wall Street Journal, 8-20-11

I believe in evolution. I think it's part of God's plan.

GOP presidential candidate Jon Huntsman

"Fox & Friends," 8-29-11



The above cartoon by Donald Room, jokingly says at bottom, "Plagiarized from Annie Laurie Gaylor." Annie Laurie, who directs FFRF with Dan Barker, notes this is one of the few jokes she can remember well enough to use in occasional public appearances and adds, "It is a well-known joke of unknown origin I learned from Dan, so plagiarize away!" Donald, a British cartoonist, kindly sent FFRF a copy of his new book, *Wildcat Keeps Going*, cartoons by Donald Room, colored by Jayne Clementson, published this year in the U.K. by Freedom Press.

State/Church Bulletin

Court OKs teacher's anti-creationist stance

The 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals dismissed a student's lawsuit Aug. 10 against James Corbett, an advanced placement history teacher at Capistrano Valley High School in Mission Viejo, Calif. Sophomore Chad Farnan alleged that Corbett made hostile remarks about creationism and religion, thus violating the First Amendment's mandate that government remain neutral in religious matters.

A three-judge panel ruled unanimously that Corbett was entitled to immunity. "We are aware of no prior case holding that a teacher violated the Establishment Clause by appearing critical of religion during class lectures, nor any case with sufficiently similar facts to give a teacher 'fair warning' that such conduct was unlawful," Judge Raymond Fisher wrote for the court.

Among the comments Corbett made in a 2007 lecture, according to the transcript, was that "real" scientists try to disprove the theory of evolution. "Contrast that with creationists. They never try to disprove creationism. They're all running around trying to prove it. That's deduction. It's not science. Scientifically, it's nonsense."

Corbett, a Foundation member, discussed the case and the hurdles that nonreligious teachers face in public schools in an Aug. 27 Freethought Radio interview: ffrf.org/news/radio/shows/.

Calif. DOT removes encroaching crosses

The state Department of Transportation removed three decades-old crosses from Inspiration Point just off California Highway 79 outside Julian in San Diego County, the Los Angeles Times reported Aug. 23. Workers put the crosses in storage and plan to relocate them two miles away at Hillside Community Church.

The DOT deemed them an improper encroachment on public property. They were also erected without proper permits. "Save Our Crosses" supporters objected to the move and claimed the church property affords less visibility.

Bible restricted at Idaho charter school

The 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals upheld on Aug. 15 a lower court's dismissal of a lawsuit brought by Nam-

pa Classical Academy, an Idaho state-funded charter school, and two of its teachers challenging the state's Public Charter School Commission. The commission and state attorney general ruled that using religious texts like the bible as primary source documents in a public charter school classroom violated the Idaho Constitution.

The 9th Circuit held that the school, as a government entity, can't sue the state, but that teachers had standing. But the court ruled that the curriculum is government speech, not teacher speech, and thus exempt from scrutiny under the First Amendment.

Pastor is probed for Texas recalls

District Attorney Jaime Esparza said he's investigating if Rev. Tom Brown and Word of Life Church violated Texas and federal laws by working to recall Mayor John Cook and two council members for supporting domestic partner benefits, according to an Aug. 13 El Paso Times story.

"We're getting more reports from more people that Tom Brown's folks are hitting the houses of worship hard and directly asking them to permit them to circulate petitions at the churches, or have the churches circulate petitions," Cook said in an email.

Brown also promotes his group, El Pasoans for Traditional Family Values, and the recalls at his Tom Brown Ministries website.

Indiana judge blocks city land transfer

Indiana U.S. District Judge Robert Miller Jr. on Sept. 7 blocked the city of South Bend's \$1.2 million expenditure to buy and demolish a commercial property and turn it over to St. Joseph's Catholic High School to use for new athletic facilities.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter of objection June 14 to South Bend's Common Council, which voted 5-4 in August to approve the plan. FFRF followed up with an Action Alert to members June 23. The ACLU and Americans United and local residents sued in federal court.

In a 36-page ruling, Miller wrote that a reasonable observer would think "the city is endorsing St. Joseph's High School, the local Catholic community, or the Diocese that operates the school."

The South Bend Tribune reported



No room for doubt

Lifetime Member David Etter's California plate on his other BMW is NO GOD.

Sept. 8 that city officials were mulling an appeal. Common Council Vice President Oliver Davis applauded the ruling. "I think everything starts from the drawing board. St. Joe will move forward. We'll come together and figure out what's best for the facility without the use of public dollars."

The property was set to take place Sept. 15.

Davis said he favors the city lending its support through infrastructure and won't back an appeal. "I think St. Joe can find someone else to buy it."

Church baptism barred on Capitol grounds

The Washington state Department of General Administration denied a permit for Reality Church of Olympia to hold a baptism along with a barbecue on the Capitol grounds, the Olympian reported Aug. 14.

"We are approving their use of Heritage Park for the purpose of a picnic, a barbecue. We are denying their permit for the purpose of holding a baptism," said agency spokesman Jim Erskine. Acting Director Jane Rushford referred to the state Constitution: "No public money or property shall be appropriated for or applied to any religious worship, exercise or instruction, or the support of any religious establishment."

Air Force religious materials challenged

The U.S. Air Force's use of Christian religious messages extends to training for ROTC cadets, CNN reported Aug. 9.

In a "core values" lesson, the Ten Commandments and Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" were used as ethical examples. Slides explained seven of the Ten Commandments. A USAF instructor uncomfortable with the training provided slides to the Military Religious Freedom Foundation.

The Air Force said headquarters officials didn't know about the religious component of the ethics course. It's been taught for almost 20 years by chaplains.

Judge stops Colorado voucher program

U.S. District Court Judge Michael Martinez issued a permanent injunction Aug. 10 in Denver to block the Douglas County School District from enacting its voucher program until a constitutional challenge is resolved.

Martinez ruled in a 68-page opinion that the program "violates both financial and religious provisions set forth in the Colorado Constitution." The

"defendants have provided no legal authority supporting a limitation on the scope of the religious provisions of the Colorado Constitution and this court declines the invitation to craft one now," he wrote.

The ACLU of Colorado, Americans United for Separation of Church and State and several residents had sued, alleging the pilot Choice Scholarship Program illegally gives tax money to private schools.

Douglas County's program lets up to 500 students get up to \$4,575 for private school tuition.

Religious theme park gets tax breaks

The city of Williamstown, Ky., will give a biblically themed amusement park a property tax discount of 75% for the next 30 years, the Lexington Herald-Leader reported Aug. 9.

The deal with Petersburg-based Ark Encounters LLC is on top of about \$200,000 given to the company to locate there, along with 100 acres of reduced price land on the 800-acre site.

It gets better: The state has promised \$40 million worth of sales tax rebates and a possible \$11 million in improvements to the interstate near the park.

Orthodox Jews object to church voting

An attempt to move a New York polling place to St. Agatha's Catholic Church in Brooklyn was denied due to objections by Orthodox Jews, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported Sept. 6.

Assemblyman Dov Hikind, an Orthodox Jew, intervened after residents were notified that their precinct was being moved from a public school to the church, which has large interior and exterior crosses. "Who knows how many Orthodox Jewish or other voters would have been disenfranchised by the Board of Elections' decision to move these voters to a church?" Hikind said in a statement.

Because a new site wasn't selected in time for an upcoming judicial primary, voters were allowed to cast a ballot at the Brooklyn Board of Elections by selecting the "Religious Scruples" box.

Commandments cases costly for counties

Pulaski County, Ky., will take out a loan to pay \$231,662 to the ACLU of Kentucky for its share of court costs in a losing 11-year battle to post the Ten Commandments in the courthouse, the Lexington Herald-Leader reported



Sept. 10.

Pulaski and McCreary counties owed the ACLU more than \$460,000 in legal fees and interest. McCreary County hasn't paid its share of the judgment.

Officials in both counties plan to solicit donations from groups like Focus on the Family and the Trinity Broadcasting Network. David Carr, a Christian broadcaster in Somerset, has been raising money on his King of Kings radio network. Pulaski County has received only about \$20,000 so far in donations.

The case started in 1999 and made it to the U.S. Supreme Court in 2005. Not until this year did Commandments supporters decide to throw in the towel. Federal appeals court judges ruled adding other documents later to the Commandments displays was a sham to cover "blatantly religious" motives.

Wisconsin church graduations upheld 2-1

The 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in Chicago ruled 2-1 on Sept. 9

that two Brookfield, Wis., high schools didn't violate the Constitution by holding graduations at Elmbrook Church.

"There is no realistic endorsement of religion by the mere act of renting a building belonging to a religious group," Judge Kenneth R. Ripple wrote for the majority.

The issue began in 2000, when Brookfield Central seniors voted to move graduation from the school's "hot, crowded gymnasium" to the evangelical Christian church where Superintendent Matt Gibson was a member of the church. Brookfield East moved its ceremony there two years later.

Complaints flowed in quickly.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State filed a federal lawsuit in 2009 on behalf of nine students and parents. Last spring, after the two schools held graduations at a new fieldhouse, the school district tried to moot the case but the appeals court refused.

Dissenting Judge Joel Flaum wrote, "The sheer religiosity of the space created a likelihood that high school students and their younger siblings would perceive a link between church and

state. That is, the activity conveyed a message of endorsement. The only way for graduation attendees to avoid the dynamic is to leave the ceremony. That is a choice . . . [the Constitution] does not force students to make."

Hindu joins Colorado Christian prayer caucus

Lawmakers announced Sept. 6 the formation of the Colorado Legislative Prayer Caucus. Its goal is to "uphold Judeo-Christian principles." While the caucus is technically bipartisan, only two of its 27 members are Democrats. One is Hindu, Rep. Janak Joshi, R-Colorado Springs, the only Hindu in the Legislature. No caucus members are Jewish.

A press release said the group's goals are to:

- Ensure that Christian beliefs have unfettered access in the marketplace of ideas.
- Reverse the dismantling of our nation's Judeo-Christian foundation.
- Sustain and equip leaders to up-

hold Judeo-Christian principles in government.

- Communicate the constitutional truths that establish America's freedom.

- Protect public expression of prayer and faith in God.

N. Carolina commission wants prayer appeal

The Forsyth County Board of Commissioners in Winston-Salem, N.C., voted 6-1 in August to challenge a federal appeals court ruling that barred it from opening meetings with sectarian prayer.

The board made its appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court contingent on conservative foundations continuing to pay its legal bills, including attorney's fees if the county loses.

The county stopped prayers after a U.S. District Court judge ruled against the board last year.

In the News

Secular studies journal set for 2012 launch

The world's first journal dedicated to the exploration of secularism and nonreligion will debut in January 2012. Secularism and Nonreligion is a joint venture of the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture at Trinity College in Hartford, Conn., and the Non-religion and Secularity Research Network, an international and interdisciplinary network of researchers founded in 2008.

Co-editors are Ryan Cragun, assistant professor of sociology at the University of Tampa, and Barry Kosmin, research professor of public policy and law at Trinity.

Articles, written in English, will be accepted from experts in the social science disciplines of psychology, sociology, political science, women's studies, economics, geography, demography, anthropology, public health, public policy, law and religious studies. Contributions also will be considered from researchers in the fields of history, neuroscience, computer science, biology, philosophy and medicine.

Articles published in the new journal will focus on the secular at one of three levels: the micro or individual level, the meso or institutional level, or the macro or national and international level.

All articles will be freely available and able to be downloaded on the journal's Web site: secularismandnonreligion.org/. The editors are now accepting submissions of academic articles and book reviews. Information on how to submit papers and publication procedures can be found on the Web site.

Female rabbi presides at Bush wedding

Lauren Bush, granddaughter of President George H.W. Bush and daughter of Neil Bush, was married Sept. 4 in a ceremony presided over by a rabbi. Bush and David Lauren, son of designer Ralph Lauren, were married at a ranch in Colorado.

Angela Buchdahl, senior cantor

at Manhattan's Central Synagogue and also an ordained rabbi, presided. Born in Korea to a Jewish father and a Buddhist mother, she's the first Asian American to be ordained as a rabbi.

The bride's grandparents were unable to attend because of the altitude at the ranch, according to the New York Post. Bush will now be known as Lauren Bush Lauren.

Foxhole atheist's brother advocates for him

FFRF member Stuart Bechman's efforts to get Simi Valley, Calif., to remove a City Hall "salute to troops" poster display that says "God Bless America" and "God Bless You" were rebuffed, but he's not giving up. Bechman, 51, has asked the city to display a second poster to honor "atheists in foxholes" like his brother Kevin, who's been in the Air Force for 25 years.

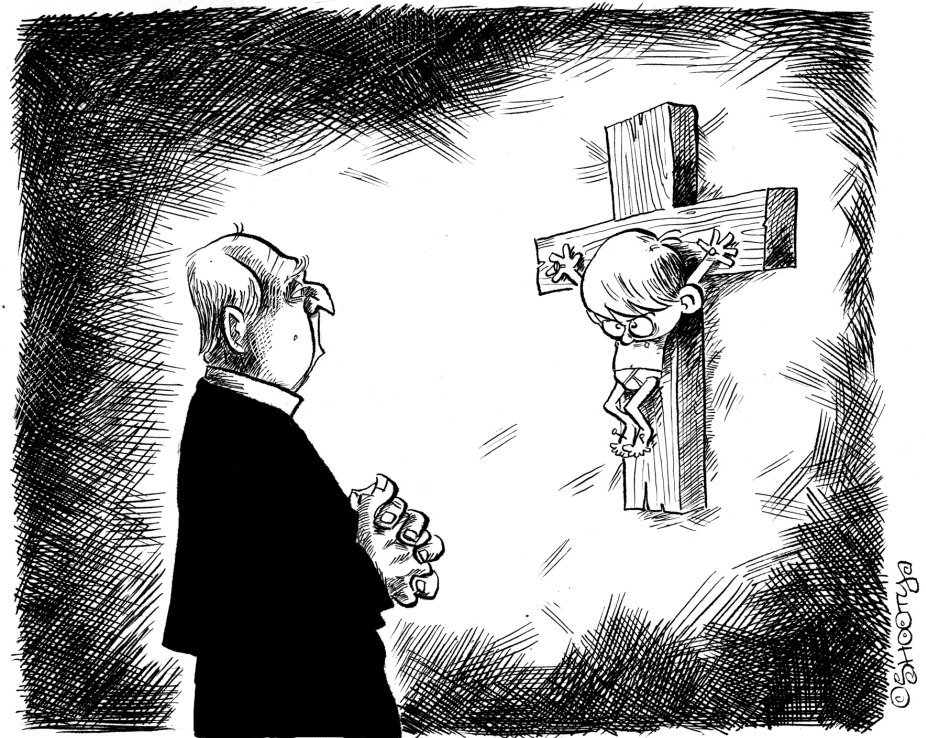
In a written complaint in July, Bechman argued the poster "ignores those soldiers and their families who hold no religious beliefs." Bechman told the Ventura County Star that he estimates, going by national averages, that about 18,000 Simi Valley residents are "Nones."

'Trust in God' legislator loved the view

A Republican Indiana legislator who co-authored the bill to create an "In God We Trust" license plate refused to resign and denied he's gay after admitting he met an 18-year-old at a hotel for a "casual encounter."

Emails given to the Indianapolis Star showed that Rep. Phillip Hinkle, 64, answered a Craigslist posting and offered the man, Kameryn Gibson, \$80 plus tip for "a couple hours of your time tonight" at a Marriott hotel.

The Star reported Aug. 12 that Hinkle didn't contest sending the emails and admitted meeting Gibson but denied they had sex. Hinkle allegedly told the paper that they just talked about "baseball and the view" from the



room. "I went to the edge," Hinkle told the Star, "but I didn't fall over the edge."

Gibson's ad said, "I need a sugga daddy." "Cannot be a long time sugga daddy," Hinkle allegedly answered, "but can for tonight." The email, sent from phinkle46@comcast.net, added, "I am an in shape married professional, 5'8", fit 170 lbs, and love getting and staying naked."

Gibson said after he learned Hinkle's identity, he got "cold feet." His sister went to the newspaper with the emails.

Hinkle lists his occupation as coordinator for community partnerships for Wayne Township Schools on the Indiana House website.

Judge clears way for atheist ads

U.S. District Judge Susan Webber Wright ruled Aug. 11 that the Central Arkansas Transit Authority and its ad agency shouldn't have denied the Coalition of Reason \$5,000 worth of ad space on 18 city buses in Little Rock on Memorial Day weekend.

The ad said, "Are you good without God? Millions are." The transit authority and On The Move Advertising had required payment of a \$36,000 deposit. The group then changed that to a

\$3 million insurance policy in case of bus vandalism by angry Christians, Reuters reported.

Wright ruled that a \$15,000 bond be put in place for the Coalition of Reason. If a bus suffered any damages, the bond would cover the costs.

They Said What?!

I hear your mom was asking about evolution and, you know, it's a theory that's out there. It's got some gaps in it, but in Texas we teach both creationism and evolution in our public schools. Because I figure you're smart enough to figure out which one is right.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry, talking to Sam Beane, 9, in Portsmouth, N.H.
NPR, 8-18-11

We saw today an earthquake. The Jerusalem Talmud tells us that one of the reasons that God brings earthquakes to the world is because of the transgressions of homosexuality. The Talmud states, "You have shaken your male member in a place where it doesn't belong. I too, will shake the Earth."

Rabbi Yehuda Levin, Congregation Mevakshei Hashem, Brooklyn, N.Y., on the cause of the Washington, D.C., earthquake
Dallas Voice, 8-24-11

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Rev. Travis Payne, Texarkana, AR: Sexual assault. Payne, pastor at a south Texarkana Baptist church, is charged with inappropriately touching a 3-year-old girl at a revival service.

A woman on the way to the restroom at the April service told police she saw Payne touching the child and said the girl's pants were down. *Source: Texarkana Gazette: 8-26-11*

Rev. Tedd Butler, 46, Walker, MI: 2nd- and 1st-degree criminal sexual conduct. Butler, pastor at Gospel Light Baptist Church, is accused of sexual assaults against 2 minors. Police believe Butler knew the alleged male victims "through church activity."

One victim was allegedly assaulted 50 to 60 times between 1984-92 at the now defunct Landmark Baptist Church, where Butler was a youth minister. *Source: Grand Rapids Press, 8-25-11*

Robert Williams, Georgetown, Guyana: Breach of the peace. Williams, a bible instructor, is charged with threatening O'Neal Taylor. Williams is also a clothes vendor. *Source: Stabroek News, 8-24-11*

Rabbi Menachem Youlus, 50, Wheaton, MD: Mail fraud and wire fraud. Youlus, founder of Save a Torah, is accused by federal prosecutors of embezzling money from his charity and fabricating stories about rescuing Torahs lost or hidden during the Holocaust and then selling them.

"Menachem Youlus called himself the 'Jewish Indiana Jones,' but his alleged exploits were no more real than those of the movie character he claimed to resemble," said Preet Bharara, U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York. Bharara said Save a Torah raised \$1.2 million in contributions from 2004-10. *Source: Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 8-24-11*

Fr. Richard G. Armstrong, 39, Knoxville, TN: Criminal trespassing. Armstrong, assistant director of the Diocese of Knoxville's Christian Formation Office, was charged in connection with an anti-abortion protest at which Deborah Walsh, director of the Volunteer Women's Medical Clinic, was assaulted.

Walsh removed a cross Armstrong had stuck in the ground, then **William Grogar, 52, Knoxville,** allegedly struck her, grabbed the cross and pushed her to the ground with it. Grogar was charged with assault and criminal trespassing.

A statement from the diocese said, "Fr. Armstrong is not a Roman Catholic priest, but a priest of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. He is affiliated with the Eparchy of Parma, Ohio. He is employed by the Diocese of Knoxville to perform some duties. His activities on Thursday, however, were not as an employee of the Diocese, but as a Ukrainian Catholic priest." *Source: WATE News, 8-19-11*

Rabbi Uzi Rivlin, 63, Teaneck, NJ: 2 counts each of aggravated criminal sexual contact and endangering the welfare of a child. He's accused of molesting 2 economically disadvantaged boys, both 13, who came to the U.S. from Israel and stayed at his home in 2009-10. The boys reported the alleged abuse to police after returning to Israel.

The boys were pen pals with students in Rivlin's religious school classes at Temple B'nai Abraham in Tarrytown, NY, where his wife and daughter also teach. *Source: Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 8-18-11*

Kelly Saucier, 45, Southington, CT: 1st-degree larceny. Saucier, treasurer at Plantsville Congregational Church, is accused of embezzling \$293,385 from the church while she worked there from 2005-10. *Source: New Britain Herald, 8-18-11*

Rev. Carolyn Wilson, 55, Guilderland, NY: 2nd-degree sexual abuse and endangering the welfare of a child. Wilson, an ordained Baptist minister without a congregation, is accused of having sexual contact with an 11-year old girl. *Source: WYNT News, 8-18-11*

Mohammad Masroor, 48, Toronto: 13 counts of sexual assault and making threats. Masroor, who uses 3 aliases, is imam at Baitul Mukarram Islamic Society. Charges stem from alleged incidents in 2008-11.

"The victims are both male and female," Detective-Constable Karen Armstrong said. "We believe there are other victims as [Masroor] has lived and worked worldwide." *Source: Toronto Star, 8-17-11*

Steven M. Bowers Jr., 32, Orange, VA: 6 counts of taking indecent liberties and 2 counts of sexual object penetration. Bowers has been relieved of his duties as a youth minister at Salem Fields Community Church and as girls soccer coach at Orange County High School. He also was charged in March with 2 counts of forcible rape.



The acts were allegedly committed in 2007-08 and involve female minors who didn't attend Orange High. Bowers is married and has 3 children. *Source: Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star, 8-15-11*

Rev. Dale Richardson, 46, Summerville, SC: 3 counts of criminal sexual conduct, possession of a firearm and 4 counts of kidnapping. Richardson, pastor at Freedom Will Baptist Church, is charged with raping 3 women at gunpoint — two of them in a trailer home behind the church — and kidnapping another who was not sexually assaulted.

Police detailed an alleged incident involving a 20-year-old woman. Richardson allegedly bound her hands, put a pillowcase over her head, raped her and forced her to perform oral sex at gunpoint. *Source: ABC Charleston, 8-15-11*

Erik S. Olson, 24, Tulsa, OK: Rape by instrumentation. Olson, a teacher at Mingo Valley Christian School, is accused of sexually assaulting a 16-year-old female student in April. He has been fired. *Source: Tulsa World, 8-14-11*

Harvie Lee Hunt, 59, Irvington, AL: 2nd-degree assault. Hunt, a deacon at New Welcome Baptist Church, is accused of stabbing Agolia Moore, mother of Simone Moore, New Welcome's music minister. **Simone Moore** was charged with 3rd-degree assault for allegedly using a stun gun on Rev. Darryl Riley after the pastor told Moore his services were no longer needed. The incidents happened at the church on a Sunday. *Source: Mobile Press-Register, 8-12-11*

Rev. Joseph Taylor, 65, Edinburgh, IN: Felony child molesting. Taylor, pastor of Freedom in Christ Christian Church (now closed), is accused of having sex over a 4-month period with a girl, 13. The girl's mother said Taylor starting teaching his daughter in church school when she was 7 when he was pastor at Who So Ever Will Community Church.

The girl helped Taylor clean apartments which he managed with his wife. They allegedly had sex in vacant apartments. "It happened several times a week," said Edinburgh Deputy Police Chief David Lutz.

Evidence in the case is strong, Lutz said. "She knows some things about his body below the belt that nobody should know." *Source: WXIN News, 8-12-11*

Rev. Edward Warnakulasuriy, 53, Simsbury, CT: 3 counts of 4th-degree sexual assault. Warnakulasuriy, administrator at St. Bernard's Catholic Church in Tariffville, is a native Sri Lankan. He was put on administrative leave.

According to court documents, a male parishioner, 18, went to the priest's residence for confession. While there, Warnakulasuriy allegedly asked the man to unzip his pants and then held a crucifix to his genitals. *Source: nbccconnecticut.com, 8-12-11*

Rev. Jimmie Lee Blake Sr., 47, Sanford, FL: 2 counts of child rape. Blake is pastor of Morning Glory Missionary Baptist Church and teaches children with learning disabilities at Winter Springs High School. He's accused of molesting a teen "countless" times between 1998-2002.

The accuser alleges most of the abuse occurred at Blake's home, but that one morning it happened before class in a bathroom. The man told police Blake threatened to kill him if he said anything.

The school district put him on paid leave. *Source: Orlando Sentinel, 8-11-11*

Rev. David Szatkowski, 37, Franklin, WI: 2nd-degree sexual assault of a child younger than 16. Szatkowski, is accused of grabbing a 15-year-old girl's breast outside a La Crosse hotel. He resigned as assistant professor of canon law at Sacred Heart School of Theology,

the largest U.S. Catholic seminary that prepares men older than 30 for the priesthood.

The girl told police a drunken man groped her. Her friend took a cellphone photo, which led police to Szatkowski, who'd gone back into the hotel. He's not assigned to a parish.

Szatkowski spent 5 years in Rome earning his doctorate in canon law. His doctoral thesis focused on the authority of leaders of religious orders to do justice in cases of child sex abuse, according to an interview on the Sacred Heart website.

"When I researched the story of abused children, I was angry," he said. "It is a crime against nature!" *Source: La Crosse Tribune, 8-11-11*

Thomas J. Fortenberry, 30, Pasadena, TX: 2 counts of improper photography. Fortenberry allegedly admitted to police that he videotaped girls in the shower in 2007 at Greater Harvest Community Church. Prosecutors said charges may be dropped due to a 3-year statute of limitations.

He's accused of picking 4 teens for a church game similar to the TV show "Fear Factor" and involved coating the girls with honey. Fortenberry later started dating one of them and told her he'd taped them in the shower washing the honey off. *Source: Houston Chronicle, 8-8-11*

Rev. Samuel W. Chapman, 58, Decatur, GA: Child molestation, solicitation of sodomy and enticing a child for indecent purposes. Chapman, pastor at a Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jonesboro, is accused of a sexual act in front of a 15-year-old boy and asking for oral sex. *Source: Clayton News, 8-7-11*

Rev. Richard C. Rogers Jr., Upper Dublin, PA: Indecent exposure, open lewdness, disorderly conduct and harassment. Rogers, former senior pastor at Jarrettown United Methodist Church, is accused of twice exposing himself to women affiliated with a music school that rented space in the church.

"Each woman was walking in the hallway and passed a doorway, and the pastor was standing there with his pants down and exposing his genitals," said prosecutor Samantha Cauffman. *Source: Times Herald, 8-11-11*

Rabbi Yaakov Vimer, 52, Bnei Brak, ISR: Sodomy and sexual assault. Vimer allegedly raped a male student, starting when he was 12, in 2002-03 on dozens of occasions during breaks and after school, when he would lock himself and the victim in a classroom. Vimer held the boy against a wall, forced him to strip and sexually assaulted him, the indictment said. *Source: Jerusalem Post, 8-5-11*

Fr. Jaime Duenas, 87, Bronx, NY: Forcible touching, sexual abuse and endangering the welfare of a child. Duenas, pastor at Our Blessed Lady Catholic Church, is accused of molesting a 16-year-old girl who'd just started working in the church rectory. The Archdiocese of New York has suspended him.

"She didn't protest to getting a massage," Duenas said in his cell while awaiting arraignment, prosecutors reported. "She was wearing short skirts." *Source: UPI, 8-4-11*

Rev. Michael Angeloni, 62, Wilmington, DE: Theft of more than \$100,000. Angeloni is accused of stealing \$305,000 from an elderly female congregant at Church of the Holy Child, where he was assistant pastor. *Source: Newark Post, 8-3-11*

Rev. Carl Smith, Greer, SC: Solicitation of prostitution. In the police report, Smith listed his place of employment as Redeeming the Time Inc.

"We were working that day, and he approached one of our females on the street and did enough to where he was arrested," said Lt. Jim Holcombe. *Source: WYFF News, 8-2-11*

Jimmy Ray Pratt Jr., 32, Pascagoula, MS: Dissemination of sexually oriented material

'She knows some things about [Rev. Taylor's] body below the belt that nobody should know.'

— Deputy Police Chief
David Lutz

to a person under the age of 18 and unlawful touching a person for lustful purposes when the person occupies a position of trust or authority over the child. Pratt, assistant to the youth pastor at an unidentified Pascagoula church, allegedly sent a nude photo of himself to the victim, with the touching alleged at a later date. *Source: WLOX News, 8-1-11*

Rev. Derrian Moye, 23, Hattiesburg, MS: Probation violation and contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Moye, a pastor involved in community outreach programs to get youth off the streets, and Anthony Brown, 38, were found with 2 female juveniles at Moye's home after a mother called police to report her daughter missing. *Source: Hattiesburg American, 7-26-11*

Jonathan Rose, 35, Edenton, NC: Solicitation of a child by computer to commit illegal sex acts. Rose, music and children's minister at Rocky Hock Baptist Church, is accused of engaging in illegal communications with a minor. Rose, who's married with 4 children, was arrested when he stepped off the church camp bus at Ridgecrest Boys Camp. *Source: WITN News, 7-26-11*

Pleaded / Convicted

Rev. Christopher Iruke, 60; Connie Ikpoh, 49, Los Angeles: Found guilty of fraud and conspiracy to commit fraud. The husband-and-wife co-pastors of Arms of Grace Christian Center were charged with defrauding and attempting to defraud Medicare of \$14.2 million using several medical equipment supply firms. He got about \$6.6 million in reimbursements.

"He was using Medicare as his personal piggy bank," said Assistant U.S. Atty. David Kirman. *Source: L.A. Times, 8-11-11*

Richard Taylor, 61, Fairview, AK: Pleaded guilty to attempted sexual abuse of a minor. Taylor, deacon at True Vine Ministries, was accused of multiple attempts from 2009-10 on his victim, starting when she was 11. An affidavit said he fondled her at least 9 times and stuffed cash in her bra. *Source: Anchorage Daily News, 8-3-11*

Christopher Jarvis, 49, Plymouth, ENG: Pleaded guilty to 12 counts of making, possessing and distributing indecent images. Jarvis, a married father of 4, was suspended as child safeguarding coordinator for the Catholic Diocese of Plymouth after 4,000 pictures of child pornography were found on 2 computers. *Source: Sunday Mirror, 7-31-11*

Rev. Isaac K. Aryee, 43, Aurora, CO: Guilty of sexual assault on a child using force, sexual assault on a child with a pattern of abuse and 3 counts of sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust. Aryee, pastor at Praise Chapel International Ministries, first molested the girl when she was 14. She was a member of the congregation from Sierra Leone. After she gave birth in 2010, tests showed Aryee was the father. *Source: Denver Post, 7-27-11*

Sentenced

Rev. Sandy McGriff, 51, Dallas: 5 years' probation. McGriff, pastor of Church of the Living God, was found guilty of breaking into a parishioner's home on Christmas Eve and stealing \$10,000 worth of the woman's possessions. Judge Andy Chatham told McGriff at sentencing that her actions broke the Ten Commandments related to stealing, lying and coveting.

The pastor had claimed she was only protecting the valuables after she found a broken window at the home. *Source: AP, 8-26-11*

Michael S. Aulsebrook, 55, Sunbury, AUS: 2 years in jail with 15 months suspended after pleading guilty to sexual assault in 1983, when he was a brother in the Catholic Salesian order. The alleged victim was a 12-year-old male student at Rupertswood School. Aulsebrook would sit the boy on his knee and fondle his genitals as they listened to the radio or watched TV, prosecutors said.

Aulsebrook was ordained as a priest in 1987 and had another sexual abuse complaint lodged against him in 1993 but wasn't charged. His superiors sent him to counseling. In 2004, after he quit the priesthood, the order paid a settlement to the victim. *Source: Melbourne Herald Sun, 8-21-11*

'I stay up at night with the bastard on my mind and his hands on my body.'
— Testimony by victim 'AB'

Rev. Dirk P. Jackson, 32, Port Orchard, WA: 41 months in prison on 2 counts of indecent liberties. Jackson admitted to sexual contact, including forcing a 12-year-old female student to perform oral sex on him at Manchester Christian Academy in 2003. A charge of 2nd-degree child rape was dropped in a plea bargain. He was fired as pastor at a Baptist church after being charged.

The woman, now 21, said Jackson took advantage of her as a troubled youth. "I don't want him doing the things he did to me to any child," she tearfully told the judge. "I don't want anyone else to be in my shoes, ever." *Source: Kitsap Sun, 8-17-11; Port Orchard Independent, 8-16-11*

Rev. Leonel Pelayo, 45, Los Angeles: 1 year in jail and 4 years' probation after pleading no contest to having unlawful sex with a 14-year-old girl who was a member of his congregation, Iglesia Apostolica Monte de Horeb. In a plea bargain, the state dismissed 5 felony counts of lewd acts on a child and unlawful sexual intercourse. *Source: L.A. Times, 8-15-11*

Rev. Denny G. Wall, 51, Graham, NC: 4 years in prison and 5 years' probation after pleading guilty to 10 counts of sexual act with a student.

Wall, a former pastor at Hico Baptist Church who taught and coached at Alamance Christian School, carried on a sexual relationship with an 18-year-old student who had earlier been in his 9th-grade bible class and coached her in soccer.

Wall's counseling of the student in her junior year led to the relationship, Burlington Police Detective Mike Grusky testified. Wall sometimes called her "C.T." — short for "cute tush" — in emails that got increasingly flirtatious, Grusky said.

"I can't think of a more despicable crime this man could be committing in broad daylight in this county," said prosecutor Gene Morris. *Source: Burlington Times-News, 8-16-11*

William T. McLaughlin, 47, Castle Rock, CO: 6 years to life, followed by 10 years to life probation. McLaughlin, volunteer youth pastor at Denver Church of Christ, pleaded guilty to 2 counts of sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust.

Initial reports quoted a church spokesperson who said the alleged victim is "a young man." All 4 alleged victims were teens, prosecutors said later. *Source: ABC Denver, 8-15-11*

Monica Rankin, 31, Franklin, TN: 6 months in jail with suspended sentences of 2 to 5 years, running concurrently. Rankin, youth group leader at The People's Church, pleaded guilty to 9 felony counts stemming from sexual contact with a 16-year-old male member of her group. She sent him nude photos of herself and engaged in sexual touching with him under a blanket while watching a movie with the group. Her [now-ex]husband was in another room.

Rankin concocted and texted detailed scenarios that she sent to the boy, including an orgy fantasy with females in the youth group. In a leniency plea, Rankin said her ex-husband treated her as a sex object. Her lawyer told the judge that 3 therapists predicted she's not likely to reoffend. *Source: The Tennessean, 8-5-11*

Rev. John Schneider, 58, Asheville, NC: 1 year probation, 100 hours of community service and a \$100 fine after pleading guilty to obstruction of justice. Schneider resigned as pastor at St. Eugene Catholic Church after being charged for deleting pornographic images of children from parish music director **Paul Berrell's** computer. Berrell was sentenced earlier to 28 years in federal prison. *Source: WXII News, 8-5-11*

Frs. Charles Pulis and Godwin Scerri, Sta Venera, Malta: 6 and 5 years in prison, respectively. The Catholic priests were found guilty of sexually abusing boys at an orphanage run by the Missionary Society of St Paul in the late 1980s.

The Vatican has defrocked Pulis, who will remain a "lay brother" of the society. *Source: Times of Malta, 8-4-11*

Rev. Cederick McMillan, 26, Prichard, AL: Sodomy and sexual assault. McMillan, pastor at New Birth Community Church, is accused in an "ongoing series of incidents" with a 14-year-old female relative, said Assistant District Attorney Nicki Patterson. He's also president of the Prichard Chamber of Commerce and a former headmaster at Prichard Prep School. *Source: WALA News, 8-4-11*

Paul McGennis, 81, Dublin, IRE: 6 years in prison with 4 years suspended. McGennis, of Holy Cross Diocesan Centre, pleaded guilty to 8 counts of indecent assault on a young girl in 1980-1984. He was also convicted in 1997 on 4 indecent assault counts for 1977-79 crimes.



McGennis started molesting the girl when she was 11. He gave her candy, toys and money after having sex, an officer testified, adding that she had trouble breathing during the abuse because she was asthmatic. *Source: Irish Times, 7-30-11*

Edward Williams, 79, Coshocton, OH: 2 consecutive 12-month prison sentences on 2 counts of gross sexual imposition. Williams, former pastor at Baltic United Methodist Church, was accused of incidents alleged to have occurred in 2002-03 with a female victim age 6 or 7.

The judge read the girl's victim impact statement, in which she accused Williams of stealing her childhood: "I am broken, and it's all your fault." *Source: Coshocton Tribune, 7-26-11*

Robert C. Best, 70, Melbourne, AUS: 15 years in prison. Best, a Christian Brother, was found guilty of 27 child-sex offenses in 6 separate trials. He was accused of molesting 11 boys between the ages of 8 and 11 at Catholic schools where he taught.

"I stay up at night with the bastard on my mind and his hands on my body," victim "AB" told the court. He said he was a "plaything" for the Christian Brothers.

Prosecutor Amanda Forrester said other clerics were present during some of the abuse, alleging that a Christian Brother came in a room where Best was raping a boy and forcing another boy to lick the victim's buttocks. The priest said "Oh," chuckled and left, Forrester said. *Source: The Courier, 8-8-11; Herald Sun, 7-25-11*

Joshua O'Bannon, 27, Gilbert, AZ: 15 years in prison. O'Bannon pleaded guilty to 4 counts of sexual battery and 3 counts of unlawful sexual conduct with a minor. The youth pastor at First United Pentecostal Church in Parma, OH, was accused of molesting girls ages 14 and 15 who attended the church in 2008. The girls went to police after O'Bannon was arrested in 2009 for the sexual assault of a 14-year-old girl at a church in Tempe, AZ. *Source: WKYC News, 7-25-11*

Rev. Michael Nowak, 58, Racine, WI: 30 days in jail with another 30 days if he violates his 1-year probation after pleading guilty to 2 counts of unlawful use of a telephone. As pastor at St. Therese of Lisieux Catholic Church, he made indecent phone calls to girls ages 14 and 17.

In February, he called the 17-year-old girl for a Valentine date, the complaint said. "Oh yeah, wear a low-cut shirt to show off your cha-chas," Nowak said. In May, after the 14-year-old and her family went with Nowak to a custard stand, he called her to describe thinking about her legs and said "she was driving him crazy." The complaint said Nowak offered to perform oral sex on her. No physical contact was alleged.

Nowak denied alcohol was a factor. "So, stone cold sober, you picked up the phone and made those calls?" the judge asked.

"I believe there was a spiritual component there, too," said Nowak, who was ordained at age 44. "As a Christian, I believe I was under other things, too, other duress there of an evil nature." *Source: Kenosha News, 7-21-11*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Fr. Don Flickinger of St. Paul Catholic Church, San Francisco, is being sued by a San Jose, CA, man who alleges the priest sexually abused him 10 years ago when he was a 13-year-old altar boy at St. Frances Cabrini Church in San Jose. The suit also alleges 2 dioceses and an archdiocese knew about the abuse and failed to stop it.

Flickinger retired and moved out of the rectory about 3 months ago.

The plaintiff's attorney, Tim Hale, said, "We strongly believe there are many other victims." *Source: KTVU News, 8-10-11*

The Catholic Diocese of Charlotte, NC, is being sued by a former altar boy who alleges the diocese hid abuse by former priest **Richard Farwell** while he was pastor at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in 1983-84 in Salisbury.

The plaintiff alleges he was sexually abused

when he was 14, and that during the Thanksgiving holiday in 1984, Farwell performed oral sex on him. The victim's father trusted Farwell and encouraged his son to meet with the priest to receive counseling for behavioral issues, the suit alleges. The suit details another victim, listed as John Doe 2, who alleges he was abused by Farwell at Sacred Heart.

The diocese paid for several of Farwell's stays at the House of Affirmation, a facility to treat priests with sexual abuse and sexual addiction issues, the suit said. *Source: Salisbury Post, 7-21-11*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

A suit filed in Trenton, NJ, by 5 former altar boys who alleged **Fr. Ronald Becker** of Incarnation Church in Ewing molested them in the 1970s and 1980s was settled for \$1 million. Becker died in 2009.

The Diocese of Trenton settled and agreed the allegations were credible and asked victims to speak out. One boy was molested about 150 times, lawyers said.

"He would tell them it was a physical act that would show the love of God," said Boston attorney Mitchell Garabedian. "The question remains: Where were the supervisors?" *Source: AP, 8-17-11*

The Catholic Diocese of Belleville, IL, handed over checks totaling \$6.3 million to James Wisniewski's attorney to settle a sex abuse case from the 1970s. Wisniewski, now in his 50s, alleged **Rev. Raymond Kownacki** sexually abused him as a child.

Kownacki was removed from the ministry in 1995. A former housekeeper also accused him of raping her and performing an abortion on her in the 1970s. That case was dismissed after the state Supreme Court ruled it exceeded the statute of limitations. More cases are pending that allege Kownacki molested other boys. *Source: St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 8-10-11*

The Catholic Diocese of Bogota, COL, was ordered to pay \$220,000 in restitution to 2 youths who were molested as 7- and 8-year-olds by **Rev. Luis Enrique Duque** in Libano. The priest is serving 18 years in prison. *Source: AP, 8-10-11*

Legal Developments

An unsealed arrest warrant affidavit shows **Rev. Michael Miller**, 41, a Franciscan friar at St. Paul's Church in Berlin, CT, had multiple online chats about sex acts with a 13-year-old boy. The warrant says Miller confessed to offering oral sex to the boy. Miller was charged in July with 5 counts of felony risk of injury to a minor and 1 count of attempted obscenity.

When detectives confronted Miller, he said he used the alias Brenden Duvoy on Facebook to avoid "stalkers" from the church. He said the nuns don't approve of Facebook. No physical contact between Miller and the boy is alleged. *Source: Berlin Patch, 8-17-11*

Former **Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua** has been ordered to testify about clergy sex abuse in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, PA. **Msgr. William Lynn**, 60, is facing trial on child endangerment charges, the first instance of a priest not directly accused of molesting children being tried for moving suspected pedophile priests to different assignments.

Bevilacqua, 88, suffers from dementia and diminished memory, his lawyers claim.

Dan Bartley, president of Voice of the Faithful, a Catholic reform group, called the allegations against Lynn and several other priests deeply disturbing. "[I]t's further proof that the bishops are incapable of protecting our children and policing themselves."

Speaking about Lynn, Bartley said, "Any person — Catholic or non-Catholic — who reads the grand jury report cannot be other than absolutely appalled by his behavior." *Source: Irish Central, 8-7-11*

Removed / Resigned

Rev. Emil S. Payer, 66, Yukon, PA: Payer, pastor at Seven Dolores Catholic Church, was placed on administrative leave by the Diocese of Greensburg.

Creep of the Month



Rev. Dino Cardelli, 50, former pastor of Calvary Chapel, Arcata, CA, was sentenced to 18 years in prison for molesting his adopted daughter and using bible verses to justify his assaults, which started when she was 13. Prosecutors said he molested another adopted daughter at least 3 times. Cardelli pleaded guilty in June to continual sexual abuse of a minor, child molestation, attempting to dissuade a witness and 25 counts of violating a court order not to contact his victim.

"It seems very disturbing, as a pastor, to be using the bible to induce the victim to participate, in essence, seducing her with bible passages," Judge Bruce Watson said.

Jane Doe 1 told the court she also bears the burden of her adoptive mother's suicide 6 months before Cardelli was arrested. Nancy Cardelli had moved out of the house and told several people she suspected he was having sex with their daughter before she took a fatal overdose of pills.

Defense attorney M.C. Bruce said much of Jane Doe 1's pain and stress was due to the media, adding that Cardelli had no control over what was written about his daughter or what "newspapers have done to ruin her life."

Prosecutor Kelly Neel said Cardelli sexually groomed a little girl whom he'd adopted at age 5 and that he repeatedly referred to his crimes as simply "as a romantic relationship." "What possible mitigating circumstances could there be for a 50-year-old man to molest his daughter — to molest two of his daughters?" Neel asked. *Source: Eureka Times-Standard, 8-23-11*

Westmoreland County D.A. John Peck confirmed that his office is investigating parish finances. *Source: Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, 8-27-11*

Rev. Matthew Wydmanski, 46, Buffalo, NY, has been removed as administrator of Corpus Christi Parish after fleeing to his native Poland to avoid a charge of felony reckless endangerment.

On Aug. 6, police saw a 2011 Chevy Equinox with a flat tire and Wydmanski passed out at the wheel, an arrest report said. He drove off when an officer tapped on the window, nearly striking the officers. His blood-alcohol level was 0.21. He also was charged with reckless driving and fleeing an officer in a motor vehicle.

Rev. Joseph Olczak, Pauline Fathers provincial superior, said Wydmanski left the U.S. without the permission of the order. The U.S. and Poland have an extradition treaty that would allow Wydmanski to be returned to Buffalo. *Source: Buffalo News, 8-23-11*

Rev. Joseph A. Muha, 77, Boise, ID, has been told by the Catholic Diocese of Boise not to celebrate public Mass and encouraged him to seek counseling. Diocesan spokesman Michael Brown declined to describe the complaint, but said it went before a board which typically reviews possible sexual misconduct with a minor. The board found no misconduct involving a minor, Brown said. Muha, who was ordained in 1960, is retired. *Source: Idaho Statesman, 8-23-11*

Rev. Julian Medina, 64, Sacramento, CA, has been suspended as parochial vicar at All Hallows Catholic Church after parents alleged he showed up an hour late and appeared to be drunk at a baptism of 15 children.

Medina slurred his words, had difficulty walking and fell down, witnesses said. Church members carried him to the rectory, and a deacon was called in to finish the baptism.

"If he does have a drinking problem, then he will get the help and treatment he needs," said Rev. Santiago Raudes, diocesan canon lawyer. *Source: Sacramento Bee, 8-23-11*

The Archdiocese of Boston placed **Rev. John Mendicoa** of Sacred Heart Parish in Roslindale, MA, on administrative leave after an allegation of sexual abuse of a child in the 1980s was made. *Source: AP, 8-15-11*

Other

Autopsy results were inconclusive for **Rev. Zachery Tims**, 42, senior pastor at New Destiny Christian Center in Apopka, FL. Tims was found dead in his room at the Hotel W on Broadway in New York City. A glassine envelope containing white powder was found in his pocket, a police source said.

Police believe Tims was alone when he died because hotel staff had to break through the door's security bar, which can only be put in place from the inside.

Tims and his wife, Riva, founded the church in 1996. It now has 8,000 members. They divorced 2 years ago after he admitted having an affair with a stripper. *Source: N.Y. Daily News, 8-15-11*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

gospels were not even written until after Jesus' death, so how accurate could they be? I realized the bible was based on opinion and belief, not fact. That was the exact moment I decided I was an atheist.

Let's abandon religion

I am an atheist because I choose to reject any form of God. I hope the religions practiced today soon will have no more value than Greek mythology. Some people who devote their lives to religion only inflict harm on the world. Westboro Baptist Pastor Fred Phelps is one. He and nine of his 13 children work to make homosexuals' lives miserable, all in the name of God.

To progress as a country and a culture, we need to abandon religion. The Kaiser Commission puts the number of Americans without health insurance at 50 million. Unemployment is above 9%. Our serious problems can't be fixed by blindly following a god. We need educated, open-minded individuals willing to take responsibility for their actions.

My journey with religion has taken a toll on my relationship with my mother. On the surface we are happy, but she will never look at me the same way again. I choose to exercise my freedom of, and from, religion, which is guaranteed to us in this country. My mother always tells me she cannot imagine living a day without God, but unlike my

mother, I accept that I was created by nature and that one day, like every other living thing, I will die.

Our biggest issue as humans is an awareness of our own mortality. As a culture we spend so much time worrying about death and attempting to prolong life as long as possible. Those who are religious spend a good deal of time ensuring their access to heaven or an eternal paradise and oftentimes ignore the beauty here on earth.

I am not the girl my mother prayed for. I am a girl who will stand up against the norm of her family, friends and culture and be a nonbeliever. I am a girl who accepts death without the need of a glorious afterlife. I do not fear death because I do not fear the choices I have

made in life. I live my life without the need of satisfying a god, so I can truly live.

I am a girl who is an openly proclaimed atheist. I have become a woman who can love and accept myself without the approval of the one I need it from the most, my mother.

Samantha Schrum, 19, is a sophomore at Butte College near her hometown of Paradise, Calif. She's working toward a certificate in peace and global studies and intends to transfer to Humboldt State University before joining the Peace Corps.

College essay: fourth place (tie)

Of god, women and Natives

By Simone Anter

Simone was awarded \$300 by FFRF for her essay.

I'm an atheist because I'm a woman. In the varied and rich mix of my background, I'm also Jicarilla Apache and Pascua Pueblo Yaqui. To be a believer would be a renunciation of my Indianhood and of my true self as a woman. Religious zealots have been persecuting my ancestors, both women and Natives, for generations.

I grew up in a blended Native American household in rural Montana. My father's progressive traditions blended harmoniously with my Italian mother's encouragement of independent intellectual pursuit. My father's Native teachings simply explored a kinship with the natural world — a relationship I've always understood as a shared evolutionary bond, a mutual dependency that has always ensured survival and not something steeped in absurdity like a belief in god.

In our little town, Christianity was pushed on me from all sides. Teachers wanted to convert me. My classmates' parents made church attendance a prerequisite for playing with their children, something neither I nor my parents cared to abide by.

Every year my parents would complain to my elementary school principal about the church spaghetti dinner advertised on school property. Every Christmas they would object to the severe Christian bent of the "winter program." These small acts of resistance tried to safeguard the separation of church and state and to ensure that the only heathen in school would be slightly protected.

These very Christian people, teachers, parents and even the school nurse, often exhibited a ruthless and deep-seated aversion toward those whom they perceived as different, like my father with his long braid or my mother with her foreign accent. I learned early on that intolerance seemed to go hand in hand with a belief in god, and that no amount of church attendance seemed able to curb their mistrust of the heretic.

Unlike several of my friends, I had unfettered access to all kinds of books, including Harry Potter books, which



for some absurd reason were considered by those circles to go against the teachings of god. The incongruence of my experience — intellectually nurtured and living in harmony with the natural world at home, and nearly ostracized by the school and social environment — greatly affected my views.

A bible and a gun

As I got older, I was greatly influenced by the history of my Native people and their plight. Their oppressors brandished a bible in one hand and a gun in the other. I soon discovered that the gun will kill you immediately, but the intellectual death brought about by the bible with its misogynistic and cruel views is much more insidious, especially for women.

As I learned about different religions, I also realized that the debasement of women seemed to be an integral part of all of them, where lip service is often paid to women's roles but always translates into acts of violence, domination and exclusion.

When people asked why I didn't believe in god, I said, "How I could believe in a god who gave settlers the right to kill Indians? How could I believe when the devout Columbus came to the 'New World' and burned 13 Indians alive over green wood in honor of Jesus and the 12 apostles?" [as recounted historically by Fr. Bartolomé de las Casas, a Dominican priest].

History is full of horrific people who destroyed entire tribes in the name of god. The greatest atrocities have always been committed in the name of and for the glory of god, and they go on to this day.

The pernicious influence of religion

No gods or spirits, just the utter joy of the natural world awakening after winter.

has been so pervasive in Native American communities that Indians have actually had to adapt their ancient rituals in order to keep them alive. There's a celebration on my Yaqui reservation called the deer dance. Traditionally, it welcomed spring and celebrated kinship with the deer and all that blooms after winter.

Now it's held during Easter and is sponsored by the Catholic Church. Instead of welcoming spring, the celebration surrounding the deer dance is steeped in Christian rhetoric and commemorates Jesus' death. Yet in the

main square of Pascua Pueblo, set apart in a small and dark "ramada," covered with paper flowers made by children, the deer dancer welcomes spring each year. No gods or spirits, just the utter joy of the natural world awakening after winter.

I'm an atheist because reason tells me that the world is what we make it. We are part of this planet, and like all things, we have to live in the cycle of life and death. No one is there to "save" us or to rid us of our bad actions.

Religions and god seem to have developed as tools to control others through fear and to defile the intellect. As a reasoning human being, I will neither be defiled nor controlled.

Simone Anter, 19, lives in Portland, Ore., with her parents, her dog Leftovers and her ferret Nigel. She's a sophomore at the University of Oregon-Eugene and is majoring in sociology and philosophy. Her goal is to become a civil rights lawyer. She enjoys lacrosse, politics, current affairs and history.

Honorable mentions

These are excerpts of the honorable mention-winning essays.

Why I can't be a Christian

By Casey Brescia

Casey was awarded \$200 for his essay.

For purely academic reasons I was sent to a Catholic high school, which for the purposes of this essay, I'll call "Our Lady of Perpetual Suffering." I was forced to take theology and had my formal introduction to the Catholic faith and Christian apologetics.

I watched with morbid curiosity and genuine horror as we were taught the inerrancy of the bible, the reality of demonic possession (and how to guard



I'm an atheist. My commitment is to intellectual honesty.

against it), the immorality of condom use, and the great homosexual threat to society.

In history class, I learned how our country was founded on uniquely Christian values, how the Inquisition really wasn't that bad, and about the Catholic Church's often overlooked role in resisting Nazi oppression. While I was embarrassed for my teachers that they were able to spout such nonsense and keep a straight face, I was ashamed for myself that I didn't do more to speak up or challenge the blatantly immoral rhetoric we heard day in and day out.

No longer can I be a bystander in the conflict between reason and faith, knowing how many trusting students have been lied to by religious dema-

gogues. They preach with utter certainty about things that are clearly untrue or about which there can be no certainty.

I'm an atheist. My commitment is to intellectual honesty. Now I am, for lack of better words, attempting to atone for my sins for having stayed silent for so long. During my sophomore year at Buffalo State College, I founded Buffalo State Freethinkers, a group dedicated to freethought, free speech and skeptical inquiry. We've held several well-attended events, including debates with campus Christians, a workshop exposing psychics and a presentation by an undercover journalist on Christian-run "gay conversion" camps.

Many students see challenging of their beliefs as ignorant and mean-spirited. But among those who won't listen are so many who have simply never had the chance.

My secular upbringing gave me a skepticism about certainty. I feel I have almost a moral duty to share my skepticism. Atheist can no longer be a dirty word. It must become a synonym for honesty, and while statistics say we are a minority, I know it's not for long.

After all, everyone is born an atheist.

Casey Brescia, of Wappingers Falls, N.Y., is a sophomore social studies education major at Buffalo State. "Promoting freethought and skepticism is my passion, and I want to share that with as many people as possible. Becoming a teacher will, hopefully, give me the means to teach kids the value of learning and skepticism."

Why I'm an atheist

By David Cardoso

David was awarded \$200 for his essay by FFRF.

When I discovered that a person's religion is based solely on family, geography and period of time, I realized the only reason I was a Christian was due to an accident of birth. God's message was not universal: Born in India, I would be a loyal Hindu; born in Iraq, I would likely be a Muslim; born in Egypt 3,000 years ago, I would have praised Ra, Osiris and Horus.

I was not losing any sleep over not believing in the other gods, yet I still firmly believed in Jesus. Something was wrong. The ease with which I was able to disavow beliefs in other gods made me reach a startling conclusion: I had never considered a belief in Jesus to be absurd because I had always been told it was the truth.

Rather than make an excuse, the simplest and most effective track was to disbelieve the divinity of all gods, including Jesus. I took my newfound, objective approach to Christianity toward the best-selling, most influential book of all time.

After reading the bible in depth, I realized that a lowly primate like me was morally superior to God. This troubling discrepancy disappeared when I considered the possibility that the God I knew for 21 years did not exist. Any attempt to redefine God as just or make special pleas to rationalize a lov-



To remain a Christian, I would have to defend the indefensible.

ing God only convoluted the matter.

To remain a Christian, I would have to defend the indefensible notion that genocide, sacrifice and slavery were permissible. For the first time in my life, faith was no longer synonymous with morality, because it enabled otherwise ethical people capable of defending the most outrageously immoral acts imaginable, while reason renounced them.

Those who refuse to join the religious community may be labeled as wicked, but I firmly believe those who make the sign of the cross are defending an unreasonable, immoral religion.

David Cordoso, of Vallejo, Calif., is a senior English major at Cal State-Sacramento. His interests include reading, writing, video games, astronomy and "being an all-around skeptic."

The path less taken

By Austin Johnson

Austin was awarded \$200 by FFRF for his essay.

Growing up as an African-American, I was indoctrinated to believe that Christianity is the singular path to redemption. Although my parents consider themselves spiritual and not religious and have exposed me to a variety of options, I was told by society that everything that happens is by God's will.

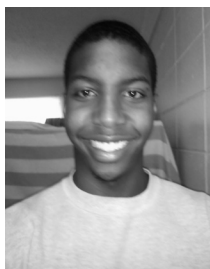
In college, I have been criticized for my lack of belief. I'm so very proud of my parents and how they have strong convictions that serve as a beacon of light for me. I aspire to be as loving, nurturing and alive as my parents. They have demonstrated why morals and ethics are about individual decision and choices.

I live a life of acceptance of others, but I'm not afforded the same by my peers. I used to keep it a secret that I wasn't a Christian until I became more independent in thoughts and deeds. That posed its own set of problems. I've been called stupid, and I've been told I was going to go to hell. Thank "god" that I don't believe in heaven or hell, because people are so quick to send you there.

I believe in life. I've learned to listen, but also to defend my position without apology. Once when I was with all my closest friends on campus, religion came up. I normally sit back and just listen, but the statement that "anybody who doesn't believe in god has no purpose in life" got a response out of me. I interjected that "I don't believe in religion."

They asked why. "Religion has too many unanswered questions," I said, "and the majority of people who practice some sort of dogma and or denomination don't think for themselves but practice what is passed down to them."

I know in my heart and in my mind



that life is to be enjoyed and cherished because this may be our only one.

Austin Johnson, from Stone Mountain, Ga., writes: "I was referred to by many as 'not college material.' I knew that I had a desire to learn and pursue a degree, so I attended Valdosta State University as a freshman. Through diligent study, I earned a 3.52 GPA my first year and made the dean's list. I've been accepted at Morehouse College, where I will major in political science and minor in business with an emphasis in communications."

Choosing reality over religion

By Gabrielle Monia

Gabrielle received \$200 from FFRF for her essay.

The idea that we as humans can't control what happens after we die is not something everyone can come to terms with. It doesn't matter how many church services are attended, how many prayers are said or how many people are converted to a given faith, we cannot evade or predict our inevitable end.

Heaven and hell are imaginary constructs that will only exist as long as we let them. There was a time in my life when I believed everything I was told in church. I went to church with friends whose families were religious because I felt I was missing out on something. After leaving church services, I remember coming home with feelings of guilt. I wasn't doing what God wanted, I wasn't praying enough, wasn't living life the "right" way. The idea of hell terrified me.

Thankfully, after attending a religious university, and taking several science classes and a history of religions class, I experienced an awakening.

I'm no longer a Christian because I realize that religion is simply a false comfort. It lets those who cannot fathom the reality of death believe that there is a better place waiting for them after this life. It also gives their life a clear purpose and makes people feel that they are significant and special.

I understand that comfort and the predictable fear that comes from taking it away. I realize that many customs and morals come from religion and that it is often embedded in one's past, family and culture, making it hard for many to reject their faith.

I feel a sense of freedom and empowerment from giving up religion. I no longer do things to please a god. I simply do not see the rationality in serving a god through strict rituals and oppressive rules.

Rather than praying for things to change, we should attempt sincerely to change them. I take pride in living the life I have on Earth instead of waiting for an imaginary afterlife. I believe in the value of community service to improve the conditions of our world and in helping others in need.

Life is often difficult, but I find the idea of people helping and supporting each other far more comforting than that of a creator leading his followers.

Gabrielle Monia, 21, attended Seattle



University for a year and is now a psychology major at the University of Oregon-Eugene. She works for Womenspace, a nonprofit which works to stop domestic violence and to empower women. She's passionate about LGBT rights and loves to dance, read, do yoga and hike.

Why I'm an atheist

By Hannah Burkhardt

FFRF awarded \$200 to Hannah for this essay.

I grew up in a nonreligious family in a very nonreligious area of Germany. But with my mother originating from a religious family, we went to church regularly until I was about 5. My mother then became an atheist and we stopped going to church.

I have not seriously thought about religion since then, except for the occasional feeling of disbelief that someone "actually believes what the bible says." I used to tend to make fun of religious people, but since I came to America at age 18, I have learned that here, religion is more than just a collection of ridiculous beliefs — it is a powerful institution. Everyone needs to be aware how great the church's power really is.

Back in Germany, religion is not really an issue in everyday life outside of church, at least in the region I come from. There is no oath on the bible for the head of state, no politicians that want to outlaw abortion because it's not in accordance with their beliefs, no denial of global warming based on the bible, not even "God bless you" when someone sneezes. We say "Gesundheit."

Imagine a nation where everything is interwoven with religion enough to allow the church to start overthrowing government, secretly and slowly of course. People would be ashamed to admit that they do not believe, even to their friends. Presidential candidates would have to believe in order to be considered for office, no matter what their qualifications were. Sects would

We say 'Gesundheit.'

be allowed to ring your door at any time of the day, trying to convert you. Politicians would gain votes by denying evolution and favoring religious teachings in science class.

This is the image I have in my mind of a nation that is very vulnerable, a nation that does not think for itself but blindly believes dogma. This image is America, and it scares me.

I'm not just a nonbeliever anymore. My experience in the U.S. has made me a proud atheist.

Hannah Burkhardt, 20, Escondido, Calif., was born in Würzburg, Germany, and lived in Martinroda until moving to the U.S. after high school graduation. She attended community college in Pennsylvania before transferring to the University of California-San Diego. Her main academic interest is science.





Letterbox

FFRF supporters step up to push back

Enclosed is \$1,000 for a Lifetime Membership, sent on the day of Rick Perry's prayer-a-palooza. Please keep up your good and necessary work. Feel free to list my name, state, etc., as a supporter.

Dan Shellenberger
Georgia

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Please accept my \$1,000 check for Lifetime Membership. I have been meaning to send this check for quite a while and always put it aside. However, more than ever, the Freedom From Religion Foundation can use this money. In addition to the above, I just want to let you know I have been freed, unbaptized and living a great life!

Beverly Guardino
California

•••

Here's my \$500 check for the legal fund. Your legal team has stepped forward to assume watchdog duty for all of us heathen freethinkers. Wherever proselytizers push an agenda, especially on children, they are likely to find FFRF defending the constitutional bulkheads.

I love it when religionists howl that freethinkers are forcing atheism on the culture. The irony is always lost on them. Church/state separation can be stated in four words: Let religion be private.

Joining FFRF is one of the best decisions I ever made. That's clearer than ever. The Foundation's drive, focus, and courage are a cause for hope in this bible-obsessed country.

A special shout-out (Booya!) goes to Mike Huckabee, who contributed an absurd quote to the June/July issue.

Dave Pitts, Lifetime Member
Ohio

•••

Thank you for bringing the lawsuit against Rick Perry for using his office to endorse a religious agenda. The nice sign, the mobile billboard and the airplane banner were just amazing touches. Thank you very much for the support.

Summer Eiman
Texas

•••

On Aug. 6, I was watching the news when they showed that disgusting prayer rally in Texas, led by GODvernor Perry. Keep up the good work!

Nick Zbiciak
Michigan

•••



Driving home from work, I was thrilled to see the FFRF billboard going up in Terre Haute by the fairgrounds, saying "Imagine No Religion." Thousands and thousands of cars go by that billboard, and next week will be a regional diesel howl at the fairgrounds. People from all over the Midwest come to see tractor pulls and big diesel engines. This should be great exposure!

Bill Cain
Indiana

Morals come from human experience

As an atheist I am irritated by the prevalent God talk in the United States in this scientific age, especially by politicians who feel that they must end their talks by asking God for help. I am pleased that FFRF has launched a campaign to get atheists out of the closet to promote reason and freethought and point out that we are decent, law-abiding people. We need to be civil in doing this.

When confronted by militant believers, atheists should ask them what they mean by God and why one should believe in their God. Do they mean a creator God we should revere and obey? Believers contend that morals come from God and that one must believe in God to be a moral person. That is not so. Morals have come from human experience. The creator God people believe in is imaginary and preposterous.

Arthur Engvall
California

Freethinkers in South will rise again!

I cannot thank you enough for trying to stop prayer at DeSoto County Schools. I graduated from Hernando High School in 2005. I remember how it felt when they prayed at graduation. I was also in band, and before every performance, our band director (now a principal at another school) would ask someone to lead us in prayer.

Most of my friends and I would stand in the back and get stared at, and people afterward would make derogatory comments and look at us funny and bombard us with questions because we didn't pray. I remember I was appalled the first time that happened.

People should not be singled out because they are not praying. I voiced my concerns to the band director. He told me not to pray. Well, I am *still* not praying.

Thanks for what you do. It means a lot to me.

Laura Simpson
Mississippi

•••

[The following letter from an FFRF member to the editor of the Memphis Commercial Appeal was printed Aug. 30. It commented on the paper's Aug. 27 story, "Prayer supporters rally at DeSoto football games."]

No one should be forced to listen to prayers or religious ceremonies of any kind while attending any event funded at all with taxpayer dollars. This is the law and has been decided by the Supreme Court, whether you like it or not.

For many years, the Freedom From Religion Foundation has worked tirelessly to represent individuals who find themselves in these kinds of situations and have, absolutely, no chance of getting any help locally. The FFRF is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization and has never initiated a lawsuit for profit.

The only bigotry and intolerance I see is directed at the minority by the majority (Christian fundamentalists — "My country, love it or leave it" mob). If Christians would just follow the teachings of their own Messiah, these situations would never even occur and there would never have been such a case brought to court. But, of course,



Don't 'Acts' me again

Casey Broadwater writes: "I found this quote from 'Imagine' spray-painted on the sidewalk about a block from the Mars Hill Church in Seattle, home of Mark Driscoll." Driscoll, an evangelical preacher, is "planting" churches willy-nilly worldwide and is the founder and "lead visionary" of Acts 29, the organization that's "passionate about churches planting churches." Note: The Book of Acts has 28 chapters. Driscoll is writing the sequel.

then they wouldn't have gotten to burn all those witches! Or would they?

Gary Plunk
Mississippi

•••

Thank you for your efforts to remove prayer and Christian ideology from public schools in Desoto County, Miss. Please keep up the good work.

Name withheld
Mississippi

Editor's note: The writer requested anonymity, saying, "I'd prefer to not have my car keyed, my house egged, and much more importantly, my son bullied."

•••

Thank you for what you have done and what you continue to do. Hernando, Miss., needed its eyes opened. This was my comment to the Desoto Times Tribune:

"Congratulations to the parents who wrote to the Freedom From Religion Foundation! I wish I had known about FFRF when my child was in school. I would have submitted a letter 20 years ago. Instead I had to endure Christian-based prayer at school events year after year. I'd look around during forced prayer and give a nod to all the other parents who were also refusing to bow their heads. There is such stigma attached to not being part of the mainstream that stating one's opposition to prayer is the equivalent of kicking a hornet's nest. Why would anyone want to be singled out? I applaud FFRF for educating and insisting that laws be enforced. Love thy neighbor? That disappears the minute you speak out against religion. A moment of silence is appropriate, but stop pushing your sectarian religion on me. Thank you to FFRF."

Freethinker
Mississippi

Editor's note: The letter writer adds, "Down here one could 'end up in a ditch' for speaking your mind. It's quite difficult living in the bible belt and supporting FFRF. I've been called Satan more than a few times by the bloggers in the newspaper."

•••

I would like to thank all of you at FFRF for your actions against public prayers led by schools. As you know, people in the South (especially Mis-

issippi) love their Jesus. I have lived here all of my life and have had religion, mainly Christianity, shoved in my face for most of it. It feels good to have some support. Keep up the good work!

Nick Grosjean
Mississippi

•••

I would like to thank all of you for FFRF's actions against prayers at public school events involving school officials. As you know, people in the South (especially Mississippi) love their Jesus. I have lived here all of my life and have had religion, mainly Christianity, shoved in my face for most of my life.

It feels good to have some support. Keep up the good work!

Name withheld
Mississippi

Readers write about what they like

How nice it is to get my dose of reason and logic in one monthly gulp of Freethought Today. The hoof-in-mouth evangelicals are stirring up the sands of darkness and doom over our fine, secular and constitutional nation. I feel badly for those American voters who are paying tribute to the lies, deceitfulness, ignorance, animosity, etc., spewing from the mouths of those vying for Saint James Dobson's magic wand of forgiveness, blessing and White House residency.

I will feel worse if their policies are ever enacted and our federal and state constitutions disappear.

George West
New Mexico

•••

One page of these emails and letters [Crankmail Aug. 11], foaming with inchoate, illiterate rage is worth all the well-reasoned essays you could ever publish in terms of portraying a certain element of the Christian Right. These folks do all of us on the other side of the issue a great favor with their hateful, muddled screeds. Also, they are hilariously funny.

John MacCormack
Texas

I just read the latest Freethought Today (cover to cover) and enjoyed, again, the student essays. I'm envious that these bright young people "got it" at such an early age and sorely regret that it took me so long in comparison.

These essays reflect such admirable, intelligent open-mindedness. I commend these young people for jobs well done. Keep up your good work!

Jack Red
North Carolina

•••

I just read the August article about the two FFRF'ers who defected from the Catholic Church. It really struck me when I read the bishop's comment "There is nothing that I can do to de-baptize you." As if Scott Brzezinski were asking *him* to do it! What arrogance. Their conceit knows no bounds!

Heidi Johnson
Maryland

•••

I enjoy reading Freethought Today. It gives me strength and delight to know there are like-minded people out there. I dream of the day when I will come out of the closet as an atheist. A first step was creating my FFRF virtual billboard as an out-of-the-closet atheist from Ohio.

Pervasive deference to Christianity throughout our culture makes me want to help people realize that we atheists live and work right next door and are respectable members of society. After discovering that the majority in my workplace are "Nones" who quietly tolerate the open acceptance of Christianity, I have been wishing to adorn myself with an atheist necklace to counter the cross around a co-worker's neck. I finally purchased a silver A to dangle on my neck from Richard Dawkins' Foundation for Reason and Science. Since I still wanted to wear my diamond pendant, I slid it onto the silver chain. I think that tops a golden cross of torture any day.

Sarah Maxwell
Ohio

Editor's note: Create your own Out of the Closet virtual billboard at: ffrf.org/out

Kudos for godless affirmation help

We and our freethinking/atheist friends want to thank you for getting New Jersey's acting education commissioner to create a godless affirmation on the teacher licensure form. (We had written to you about this very thing last year.) We just saw the "pays to complain" in Freethought Today are ecstatic! It's nice to add another plate of armor to the suit of all freethinking people everywhere — not just teachers! Something like this could have a butterfly effect beyond our state.

Thank you so much for your tireless work on behalf of freethought. FFRF is lucky to have such an intelligent, astute attorney Patrick Elliot. Thank you again.

Ilona and Russell Knudson
New Jersey

Evangelical law firm fundraises off FFRF

The American Center for Law and Justice is using very shady and underhanded methods for gathering petition names in their phone campaign against FFRF's actions on prayer and government. They call and in a rapid-fire manner play a taped Sekulow screed blathering about prayer. Then, without my approval, they thanked me for the use of my name on their petition, much akin to the style of telemar-

keting pimpsterism.

Steve Nelson
California

Member gets creative with prayer ideas

[Editor's note: An Oklahoma member responded to an FFRF Action Alert about sectarian prayer at government meetings with this Aug. 12 open letter to the Sand Springs Leader.]

Dear Sand Springs City Council Members:

Your prayers have not been inclusive in the past, but now is your opportunity to show that you do not discriminate regarding religion. My friends and I would like to pray at your next five meetings. At the September meeting, we will show respect for Santarians by performing an important religious ritual. You need do nothing; we will supply the hen to be sacrificed.

At the October meeting, we have invited several Catholics to partake of the blood and the body of Christ. Again, we will bring our own "blood" and "body," transformationally speaking.

The November meeting we would like to pray to Allah for his blessings and protection. Again, you do not need to supply anything, but you may bring your own prayer rug if you prefer.

Appropriately, in December we will celebrate Kwanzaa and all the blessings of the bountiful Earth.

Then in January, a rabbi has agreed to read from the Torah. This should be more pleasing and comfortable for the council members, since Jesus was a Jew.

Or we could allow each person to practice his or her own religious rituals outside of government meetings.

Think about it.

Lisette Caveny
Oklahoma

Not all morals are created equal

I note in the August issue that some of the scholarship essay writers seemed to have difficulty answering the question from classmates, "How can you have any morals if you don't believe in God?" One mentioned having read Richard Dawkins' ideas about secular morality, but I think all they need to do is turn the question back on the questioners: Do they mean basic morality or cultural morality?

Basic morality is about preventing the kind of interpersonal violence and dishonesty that universally destroy trust. Cultural morality is about tribal identity customs.

Basic morality is Darwinian: Humans survive best when we live in groups. Group living requires trust, so a tribe whose members indulge in violence or dishonesty toward each other would most likely disperse, losing the ability to defend themselves. Tribes whose members refrained from violence or dishonesty toward each other would have had a much better chance to prosper. That dynamic is basic to any cooperative, social species. Even chimpanzees and wolves generally refrain from killing their tribe/packmates.

Cultural morality is about what worship, sexual and reproductive practices one must or must not engage in, what items of clothing or jewelry may be worn, what foods may be eaten, and so on. Darwinian processes have nothing to say about the rightness or wrongness of most tribal customs. It matters not whether one's nutrition comes from kosher or nonkosher items or beef or fish eaten on Friday. Getting sufficient nutrition is what counts.

The most likely reason for mixing basic and cultural moral rules in moral codes like the Ten Commandments is tribal leaders' hope that people would give the arbitrary and questionable rules of cultural morality the same respect commanded by the undeniable rightness of Darwinian basic morality.

They seem to believe that anyone who violates their cultural moral rules must be suspected of also being capable of violating basic moral rules. That probably explains why some people think it unwise to trust anyone who does not follow their own tribal customs and cultural morality, and why some people may even feel that "outsiders" are fair game for treatment that violates basic morality. It reflects a primitive, paranoid tribal concept of humanity. Everyone is an "outsider" to someone else's tribe.

Paranoid tribalism may have helped strengthen internal tribal bonds, back when humans lived in small, well-separated tribes, but these days, most Americans live in metropolitan areas too crowded to offer the luxury of separating from "foreign" cultures. If we are to minimize conflicts, we must accept as equals the people who practice vastly different cultural customs. All that can reasonably be expected of anyone else is obedience to basic morality.

Lee Helms
Michigan

Is Christianity a real homewrecker?

Just a note to say how glad I am to be a member of FFRF. Statistics may or may not bear this out, but I'm of the opinion that there are probably almost as many broken homes as a result of religious differences as there are because of divorces. I'm writing a short article, "Christianity, the incredible hoax," which I firmly believe to be true.

Robert Allard
Ohio

Stay skeptical about Catholic justices

Most of us, I think, are afraid to publicly accuse the six Catholics on the U.S. Supreme Court of favoring their church over our secular Constitution. But history shows we have good reason to be skeptical. Consider the following quotes:

- Pope Leo XIII stated in 1885 in *Immortale Dei* that all Catholics "must penetrate, wherever possible, in the administration of public affairs; must constantly exert the utmost vigilance and energy to prevent the usages of liberty from going beyond the limits fixed by God's law. All Catholics should do all in their power to cause the constitutions of the states and legislation to be modeled on the principles of the true church."

- In his 1929 encyclical "On the Christian Education of Youth," Pope Pius XI stated, "It is the duty of the state to help the church maintain its religious schools by aid from public funds."

- Gary Potter of Catholics for Christian Political Action wrote in 1980, "All of us do want the nation's laws and policies to reflect the values, beliefs and principles of America's Christian majority."

- President Ronald Reagan, in 1982, to the National Catholic Education Association, "I am grateful for your help in shaping American policy to reflect God's will."

- Catholic Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, in a 1985 speech to

the Heritage Foundation [before he was on the high court], "My mother says that when they took God out of schools, the schools went to hell. She may be right."

Add to those ominous quotes the common knowledge that much of the news media and most of Congress and the courts are in thrall to religion, and it appears that America stands at the threshold of theocracy. Those who don't remember the past are doomed to repeat it.

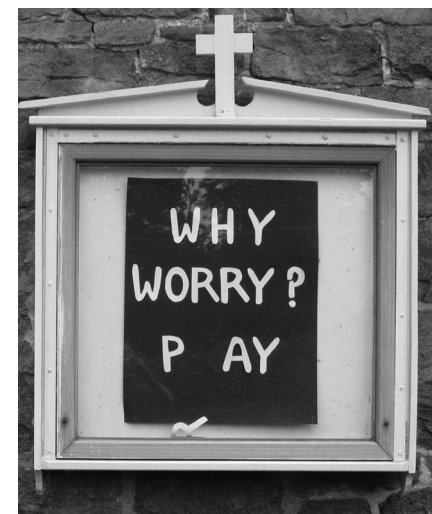
Herb McClelland
Ohio

Marquee Madness



Limited run

Glenn Hardie, British Columbia, wonders what other days they tried first at this church in Victoria.



Freudian slip?

Dr. J.K. Folmar, Pennsylvania, writes: "As I drove by this rural church, named Howe Meth. (another interesting name), which is near California, Pa., I almost wrecked trying to turn around and take this photo."



Wouldn't it be nice?

Rebecca Mark, California, encountered this carving at a roadside gift shop along Highway 101 just north of Leggett, Calif.

Sharing the Crank Mail

FUCK OUT OF MY COUNTRY

Get the FUCK OUT OF MY COUNTRY YOU FUCKINGASSHOLES. Have any of your sorry bearded hippymutherfuckers ever served in the military - I thought not you wimpasses! p.LickMyDick! — *Barry Soetoro*

National Day of Prayer

Sir [to Dan Barker], Why are you ex-protestant? Did you do something wrong and that is why you are no longer in the church? — *Diana Clinton*

freedom of religion

Just who in the hell do you pricks think you are trying to tell other people how to live their life style and what they can and can not say. By the way, us Christians are not all perfect holy saints as you supposedly think we believe ourselves to be. We're just forgiven for our sins. Well I guess I am sinning now. I AM SICK OF BULLSHIT ASSHOLES like you people trying to kick religion out of our country all together. how DARE YOU piece of shit liberal groups try to force your agenda and keep others from practicing their beliefs openly. — *Robert Wilson*

Ignorance is bliss

It never ceases to amaze me that a group of

Overheard

To Jews, Muslims, nonbelievers and even many Christians, the biblical bully that is Rick Perry must sound downright menacing, particularly when he gets into religious absolutism. "As a nation, we must call upon Jesus to guide us through unprecedented struggles," he said last week. As a lone citizen, he's free to advocate Jesus-driven public policy imperatives. But coming from someone who wants to govern this great mess of a country with all its beliefs, Perry's language is an insult to the founding principles of the republic. Substitute Allah or a Hindu God for Jesus and see how that polls.

Timothy Egan op-ed, "Rick Perry's Unanswered Prayers"
New York Times, 8-11-11

At this point, Perry and his spiritual warriors are still circling the wall of separation between church and state, waiting for God's signal to give a shout and break it down. Those of us not among the army of spiritual warriors anxious to break down that wall would be wise to make sure we are prepared to prop it up.

Report on The Response evangelical rally Aug. 6 in Houston
JewsOnFirst.org, 8-11-11

After years of political activity and increasing power inside the American Religious Right, the New Apostolic Reformation has suddenly been propelled into national press coverage by presidential candidate Rick Perry and his supposedly nonpartisan and nonpolitical prayer rally. Now that he has been chosen and anointed by the movement's apostles, the prayer warriors across the nation can be mobilized on his behalf.

Rachel Tabachnick, "Meet the Christian Dominionist 'Prayer Warriors' Who Have Chosen Rick Perry as Their Vehicle to Power"
AlterNet, 8-15-11

Do you favor a law allowing marriage licenses for same-sex couples that protects religious freedom by ensuring no religion or clergy be required to perform such a marriage in violation of their religious beliefs?

Referendum question that will appear on the November 2012 ballot in Maine if 57,277 signatures are gathered
Portland Press Herald, 8-19-11

The FaithShares folks will close and liquidate their entire line of Exchange Traded Funds (the Baptist, Catholic, Christian, Lutheran and Methodist Values ETFs). The ETFs in question were fine investment vehicles except for two small flaws: (1) poor returns and

(2) utterly no investor interest. FaithShares will then change their name to Exchange Traded Concepts LLC. And what will ETC LLC do? Invoking the "those who can't do, consult" dictum, they propose to sell their expertise as ETF providers to other aspiring investment managers. Their motto: "Launch your own ETF without lifting a finger." Yep, that's the level of commitment I'd like to see in an adviser.

David Snowball, investment analyst and professor of communication studies at Augustana College, Rock Island, Ill.

Mutual Fund Observer, 8-1-11

Sometimes I feel like Christopher Columbus on an expedition to an unknown continent. For example, many believe that the U.S. population is steadily becoming more religious, but this is an optical illusion. Many evangelicals have simply become more aggressive and more political.

Barry Kosmin, director of the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture at Trinity College, Hartford, Conn.

Der Spiegel, 8-11-11

We are based on the Judeo-Christian ethic. We derive a lot from it. But if you say we're a Christian nation, what about the Jews, what about the Muslims, what about the nonbelievers? I mean, one of the great things about our country is the First Amendment guarantees you the right to believe or not to believe, as you choose.

Political consultant Karl Rove
"On the Record with Greta van Susteren," 8-16-11

SATAN CALLED: HE WANTS HIS WEATHER BACK

Sign outside the First Church of God, Mannford, Okla.

Sand Springs Leader, 8-10-11

But even if a majority of the Texas state board voted tomorrow to teach creationism alongside evolution in science classrooms, public schools may not do so without violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. So-called "balanced treatment" — when you teach one, teach the other — was explicitly struck down as unconstitutional promotion of religion in public schools by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1987 (*Edwards v. Aguillard*).

Op-ed by Charles Haynes, First Amendment Center senior scholar
Murfreesboro Daily News Journal, 8-30-11

unedicated pagans continue to file bogus and ridiculous law suits. Do you bunch of morons think that you can accomplish the very things that greece, rome, nazies and many other perverted groups have failed to accomplish? I hope that you can get enough sunscreen spf 10,000 to help ease the discomfort from hell fire to cover all of your perverted pathetic followers as well as those bunch of aciu morons. — *Robert Keyes, Running Springs, Calif.*

JESUS

You see that Earthquake in VA and Hurricane in NYC JESUS is speaking up and there are people in this country who stand for what is right and we will not stop Praying or saying Merry Christmas. We will not take Christ out of things or stop flying the American Flag and if you don't like it I say Too bad, so sad my dad. He will return and when he does you are gonna be a sorry bunch of people. — *Sam Manguno, New Orleans*

Prayer

Don't bother to answer me back. Its'people like yourself that is excepting gay marriages and drugs in school and rape and children getting killed. i will fight with Govenor Perry to pray. — *Diane Tabb, Spring TX*

Response Event

You have the freedom form religion. Stay out of it, Perry has more going for him then anyone on your board. You can continue to preach anti-God propoganda and at the end when your time comes you will screaming for God to hear you. I am sure Madilian Murry screamed loud and clear, and so will you. THINK ABOUT IT!!! — *Edward Fresquez, Sugar Land, Texas*

Try this!

Oy Vey! Why not move your operation to Russia, China, Cuba, Iran, N.Korea or go south and move in with the fat little dictator Hugo Chavez? Anyways as you continue to undermine the moral fabric of this nation take the above suggestion and good ridance! — *Marv Goldberg*

trample on others rights to worship God

your so gun-ho about america and its rights yet you try to trample on others rights. get a life or move to another country!!! — *Sandra A*

You lose in Texas

You are all pushy atheist "PIGS"!! From your leader down to your mailroom clerk. Start acting more like "Cows" in this one character trait regarding any and all religious settings: "CONTENTMENT!" (Respond if you have the gonads.) — *Rick Schlecht*

Pathetic

I would name Kay Staley and others in your organization simply as pathetic humanists, except for your aggression against the US Constitution by distorting its meaning. I believe that your goals are the subversion of the USA. Free thinkers? Hardly.

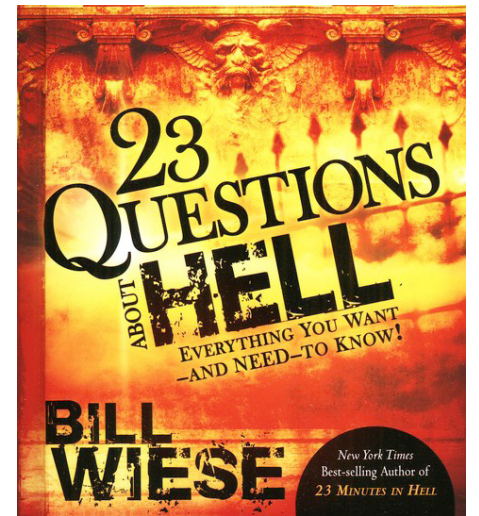
Marxist enslavement thinkers is closer to the truth. — *Pauline, SC*

The Response Prayer Rally

Please take comfort in knowing that we will be actively exposing the BIG LIE, the BIG MYTH of the Church-State Separation argument that your organization and the liberal media likes to put forth and erroneously toss around as fact. Until next time, In the Name of the One and only true Potentate, — *Ms. LaShawn Washington, His Servant, Ms. LaVonne Washington, His Servant*

hi

well, i guess your trying to ban our RELIGIOUS FREEDOM didnt work did it?> another one of you stupid mother fuckers who think be-



"Have fun in Hell," advises Layla Jake, Lubbock, Texas: "It's sad how ignorant you and your organization is and that your efforts will only encourage others to end up in Hell. Please read 23 Minutes in Hell. You need to enjoy life here because sadly, you are going to spend eternity in misery. You were created by God, not some man-made theory."

cause a few of you dont like religion then its law for the rest of the Country...fuck YOU and go to a 3rd world Country asshole — *ric martin*

hi again

and let me tell you something else.....you cannot stop prayer...you dont have a clue you mindless blubbering pieces of shit. — *ric martin*

what was this country founded on

this country was founded on the bible what makes you think that state and church should not be as one i am sure that the are more of gods people then not. saying that a school should not pray is wrong why dont you try nas-car they pray at every event. — *clois wright*

Religious holidays

You must sue yourselves over your religious holiday celebrated by many; April 1 (April Fools Day). You are so missinformed about the constitution that it IS funny. Your rejection of Jesus Christ is your death sentence. I would rather believe and find out that I didn't have to than not believe and find out that I had to. Who's the LOOSER. NOT ME. PRAYING FOR YOU AND THOSE WHOSE BLOOD IS ON YOUR HANDS, — *Sandor Lipcsik*

Outragged

I happen to live in Desoto county MS I believe in prayer in our schools thats whats wrong with our society today people like you push God out of our schools I be damned if you stop it in our homes. — *brenda m*

Kentucky

Don't you morons have anything better to do? Get a life already. I'm not even religious, but you're not wanted in Kentucky. If you liberals want to parade around New York and California have at it, but leave us alone. — *Don Watkins*

Dan Barker in for rude shock

Mr Barker, After after hearing you talk on Fox News today about your belief that there is no God, all I can say is you are for a rude shock when you die and come face to face with him. You are going to be sorry that you were ever born as he has a special place for you. — *Ver-non Donaldson, Leander, TX*

In Memoriam

Pauline Dolinski, 1943–2011

Pauline Dolinski, 68, Fredericksburg, Va., died April 27, 2011. Pauline had been a member of FFRF since 2004.

Her husband, Voytek Dolinski, writes:

"On April 27, Pauline returned to the cosmos from whence she came. She lived a life full of intelligence, cu-

riosity, adventure, passion and dreams. Her professional life was dedicated to teaching children that realizing one's dreams is possible. It is remarkable how many of her own dreams she realized. I had the honor and good fortune to be part of that life."

FFRF offers sincere condolences to Voytek and all of Pauline's loved ones.

FFRF's freethought activists



10 years of New Orleans freethought

FFRF member Harry Greenberger, founder and director of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association, is pictured with FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. Annie Laurie was invited to address the 10th anniversary dinner of NOSHA in August, and thanks Harry and all her wonderful hosts for their incomparable hospitality.



'It's easy if you try'

A 14x48-foot billboard emblazoned with "Imagine No Religion" went up in Terre Haute, Ind., in late August near the fairgrounds off U.S. 41. The billboard, sponsored by FFRF with local support, is lit at night and will be up for a month. Since 2007, FFRF has placed billboards in more than half the states and over 50 cities. FFRF placed its first Indiana billboard in Indianapolis in 2009. "There are many nonbelievers in America, including in Indiana, and we want them to know they are not alone. We'd also like to invite believers to imagine a world free from religious wars, sectarian strife and superstition," said Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. FFRF thanks a "camera-shy benefactor" in Terre Haute who wants to remain anonymous, but suggested and paid for the billboard. Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor called it "personally very meaningful" to place the message in Terre Haute, as it was home to two of FFRF's first national officers, CJ and Margaret Richards, in the late 1970s. Margaret was FFRF's first volunteer bookkeeper, and CJ was also an officer. Both were what Gaylor called "devout atheists."



Kentucky State Fair

Freethought groups sponsored and staffed a booth in late August at the fair. FFRF member Ed Hensley reports that FFRF nontracts and brochures "were a big hit" and that he looks forward to substantial growth for FFRF in Kentucky.



Washington freethinkers speak up

Several members of the North Central Washington Freethinkers gathered at the billboard the group co-sponsored starting in May with FFRF in Wenatchee, Wash., to coincide with the National Day of Prayer. Organizers Kate and Jerry Humrich note that the billboard company kept the display up for two additional months at no charge. NCW Freethinkers, with about 40 members, raised \$700 toward the billboard's cost. "One of the benefits of being able to participate with you in this national campaign was that we were invited to speak on a local conservative radio talk show (Maddog Mike, who had publicly called the billboard 'crazy') for a 30-minute spot to explain our involvement with the campaign," writes Kate, who works as a registered nurse. "It also gave us the opportunity to make our group's presence known to our neighbors across an area with more than 70,000 people. While we did have one initial, poorly thought out negative comment published in our local paper editorial column, we were all gratified to see an abundance of many well-written, supportive comments that followed. Our group will continue to happily support the work of FFRF as we all advocate for our common causes!"

From left are Carl Luis, John Crew and Suzanne Harper, Maureen Luis, Kurt Wyant (co-organizer), Francois Tremblay, David (co-organizer), Kate and Jerry Humrich (NCW Freethinkers organizers), and the group's most senior members, Charlie and Ruth Mason (Ruth turned 95 this summer).



Oregon freethought

The Corvallis Secular Society placed a king-sized exterior bus sign designed by FFRF on a bus for a month in August in Corvallis, Ore. The sign stating "The United States is not founded on the Christian religion" excerpts a quote from the 1797 Treaty of Tripoli negotiated under President George Washington and signed by President John Adams. "We are seeking to lay to rest that dangerous revisionist myth that the U.S. is a 'Christian nation,'" said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Our founders are to be praised for adopting the very first secular and godless Constitution in the world."

"This is a small but significant victory for our city," noted Robert Neary, who worked with John Dearing, president of the Corvallis Secular Society, to place the sign. FFRF has more than 450 members in Oregon and will hold its 35th annual national convention in Portland in October 2012.



Still time to register for Hartford convention

Publicizing the upcoming 34th FFRF annual convention in Hartford, Conn., on the weekend of Oct. 7-9 was FFRF member Luther Weeks. Luther kindly arranged a booth at the September Hope Out Loud Peace Festival in Hartford to let locals know about FFRF's national event in their backyard. The Mark Twain banner honors the fact that the author lived in Hartford for many years. An optional preconvention tour of Twain's Victorian home is available on Friday, Oct. 7 for those who preregister. Go to ffrf.org/outreach/convention/ for full information and to register online. You can also call 1-800-335-4021 from 9-5 Central Time weekdays by Friday, Sept. 30, to preregister by credit card. You can register at the door, but no meals or Twain tour tickets will be available. When making room reservations at the Downtown Marriott Hartford, be sure to mention you are attending the Freedom From Religion Foundation convention. Convention rates may be honored as rooms remain available.

FFRF Con 2011 meets in Hartford Oct. 7-9



Steven Pinker



Rebecca Newberger Goldstein



Charles Strouse



Jerry Coyne



Joe Taylor



Dylan Galos



Annie Laurie Gaylor



Dan Barker



Jessica Ahlquist



Mitch Kahle



Harrison Hopkins



Steve Trunk

Meet legendary Broadway composer **Charles Strouse**, ("Bye, Bye, Birdie," "Annie"), a freethinker and author of *Put on a Happy Face*. Attend one of the first speeches by Harvard professor and evolutionary scientist **Steven Pinker** on his Oct. 4-debuting book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Declined*.

Hear MacArthur Fellow **Rebecca Newberger Goldstein**, author of the weighty but humorous freethought novel, *36 Arguments for the Existence of God*, talk about "36 (bad) arguments for the existence of God." Get your copy of *Why Evolution Is True* autographed by well-known freethinking scientist **Jerry Coyne**, the evolutionary biologist and author. Coyne is professor in the de-

partment of ecology and evolution at the University of Chicago, and, with Strouse, will receive FFRF's "Emperor Has No Clothes Award."

A recently announced speaker is **Dylan Galos**, who will be honored with a \$1,000 student activist award at the conference. Also newly announced is **Joe Taylor**, who will tell his story of going from Christian rocker to non-believing educator. Joe is the founder, principal songwriter, producer and keyboardist for the seminal rock group Undercover.

Convention-goers may opt for a preconvention Mark Twain House and Museum tour on the afternoon of Friday, Oct. 7 for \$16 (\$14 for students).

Rooms may still be available at the FFRF convention rate of \$159 single, double, triple and quadruple plus tax (be sure to ask) at the Marriott Hartford Downtown, 200 Columbus Blvd. Phone 1-866-373-9806 (or reserve online requesting the "Freedom From Religion Foundation" Group Block).

Convention registration is the best deal in the freethought world! — only \$50 per FFRF member (\$55 for non-member spouse or companion accompanying a member), and, this year, **free** to students. To have your registration waived, students must preregister and email a copy of their student ID to info@ffrf.org.

Early registration opens at the

hotel by 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 7 (Friday dinner is on your own), and continues throughout the convention. The convention program opens formally Friday at 7 p.m. with honorees, speeches and dessert, continues all day Saturday, and concludes by Sunday at noon following the annual membership and Board of Director meetings.

Following the nonprayer breakfast Saturday, two students along with **Dylan Galos**, will be honored with student activist awards of \$1,000:

- **Jessica Ahlquist**, 16, who is suing her Rhode Island school over its promotion of prayer, and has faced reprisals.

- **Harrison Hopkins**, who, with FFRF, stopped his school's scheduled "vote" on whether to have illegal prayers at his high school graduation (and also faced reprisals).

The Saturday morning program will include a PowerPoint report of FFRF highlights during the last year, a short report by staff attorney **Patrick Elliott** on FFRF legal victories, and the Freethinker of the Year award to **Mitch Kahle** for stopping government prayers in the Hawaii Senate.

The afternoon program includes Joe Taylor's talk, "Finding My Way By Losing It: A Christian Music Icon's Path to Disbelief." **Steve Trunk**, a Vietnam War veteran, will receive an Atheist in Foxhole Award as a victorious plaintiff in the long-awaited victory to declare unconstitutional the Mount Soledad cross in San Diego. **Dan Barker** will entertain at the piano with his irreverent freethought tunes.

After the banquet dinner and drawing for "godless" money, FFRF will award its Emperor Has No Clothes Award to Strouse and Coyne.

Visit FFRF's convention site for maps, direction, details on the hotel, convention schedule, menu, convention and Hartford FAQ and speakers:

ffrf.org/outreach/convention/.

Although you may register at the door to attend the conference, no food or Twain tickets may be purchased at the door. Those must be received by FFRF no later than Friday, Sept. 30. **Phone 1-800-335-4021** or register online at ffrf.org/outreach/convention/.

Return to: FFRF, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701

Freedom From Religion Foundation's

34th Annual Convention

October 7-9, 2011

Make checks payable to "FFRF" **Marriott Hartford Downtown Hartford, Conn.**

No. registering

_____ FFRF Member registration(s) @ \$50 per person	\$ _____
_____ Non-member spouse or companion accompanying member @ \$55.....	\$ _____
_____ Non-member registration(s) @ \$95	\$ _____
(or join for \$40, save \$5!)	
_____ Student registration(s) @ FREE (Photocopy student ID)	\$ _____
_____ Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast @ \$25* per person	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian option ___ no. of vegetarian <input type="checkbox"/> Vegan option ___ no. of vegan	
_____ Saturday Night Dinner @ \$45* per person	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian option ___ no. of vegetarian <input type="checkbox"/> Vegan option ___ no. of vegan	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gluten-free dinners required on above selections	
* Meal prices include 21% gratuity and 6% sales tax	
_____ Mark Twain Tour (includes shuttle) @ \$16	\$ _____
_____ Mark Twain Tour (student) (includes shuttle) @ \$14	\$ _____
	Total: _____

Name(s) Please include names of all registrants for nametags

Address

City/State/Zip Please include phone/e-mail (in case we have a question about your registration)

