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May 2012

## **FFRF** wins **Colorado Day** of Prayer appeal

A unanimous three-judge panel of the Colorado Court of Appeals ruled May 10 in favor of the Freedom From Religion Foundation's challenge, originally filed in 2008, against gubernatorial proclamations of a Colorado Day

Judge Steve Bernard, with concurrences by Judges Alan Loeb and Nancy Lichtenstein, overturning a lower court decision, ruled in favor of FFRF's lawsuit: "A reasonable observer would conclude that these proclamations send the message that those who pray are favored members of Colorado's political community, and that those who do not pray do not enjoy that favored status."

Bernard wrote that the six litigated Colorado Day of Prayer proclamations (from 2004-09) violate the Preference Clause of the Religious Freedom section of Colorado's Constitution because the content is "predominantly



religious; they lack a secular context;

and their effect is government en-

dorsement of religion as preferred

mary or principal effect of endorsing

religious beliefs" and "convey a mes-

sage that religion or a particular reli-

gious belief is favored or preferred."

The 74-page decision noted that the

"inclusion of biblical verses and reli-

aries of the graduation hall, to the

borders of the State." He noted that

The proclamations "have the pri-

over nonreligion."

Governor."

**GOD FIXATION WON'T FIX THIS NATION.** 

# ffrf.org

## **Freedom From Religion Foundation**

No court has ever upheld the day of prayer on its merits under the Establishment Clause.

gious themes," statements urging "that individuals will unite in prayer" and the governor's signature, imprimatur they "reflect an official belief in a God and seal make "no doubt here that the who answers prayer. At the same time, religious message is attributed to the for those who do not believe in such a God, the proclamations tend to indi-Bernard wrote, "The proclamations cate that their nonbelief is not shared serve an exclusively religious purpose," by the government that rules the State. and are "addressed to the public gener-In so doing, they undermine the premally . . . extend[ing] beyond the walls of ise that the government serves believthe legislative assembly, or the bounders and nonbelievers equally."

> The decision continued, "They are not a small part of something larger

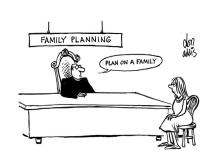
that serves a secular purpose. Rather, they stand, individually and collectively, as a call to 'actual worship or prayer'.... Indeed, the proclamations, by themselves, are reasonably viewed as exhortations to participate in 'official prayers' that have been composed as 'part of a religious program carried on by the government.' This effect is amplified by the biblical verses and religious themes."

The appeals court noted that Gov. Bob Ritter even spoke at a private Colorado Day of Prayer celebration on the steps of the Capitol in 2007.

The judges said that "religious liberty is "abridged when the State affirmatively sponsors the particular religious practice of prayer." The individual has the "right to refrain from accepting the creed established by the majority."

Bernard pointed out that all the proclamations were issued in response Continued on back page

## Inside This Issue



FFRF hits bishops in Washington Post ad

Page 3



From Baptist minister to atheist

Page 17



**Amazing Aussie atheists** 

Page 23

## FFRF banner rises from dead in Illinois

FFRF placed its second "Nobody died for our 'sins.' Jesus Christ is a myth" banner April 11 in a city park in Streator, Ill. The replacement banner featured a postscript, "Thou shalt not steal." FFRF's first banner was erected April 5 and was stolen April 7.

FFRF Attorney Patrick Elliott and student intern Ryan Hettinger made the 6-hour roundtrip drive from Madison, Wis., to Streator to personally rehang the banner.

The 8-foot by 3-foot banner, which was up until mid-April, was placed on behalf of a local resident with city permission to counter a religious cross display that had sat on city property since early March. This is the fifth straight year that park-goers and passersby have been told via a prominent sign that "Jesus died for your sins."

Last December, Elliott had written Mayor Jimme Lansford to protest a nativity scene at the same location, with a sign saying. "Unto you is born the Savior Jesus Christ the Lord," also a recurring violation. The city responded by claiming the park was a "public forum" and other viewpoints could be offered.

"In reality, as this crime reveals, the only viewpoint that is going to be permitted in Streator is the dominant religion," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "There are tax-exempt churches throughout Streator where it is appropriate to place Christian crosses and displays. A public park is not one of them."

FFRF offered a \$1,500 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the perpetrator(s). The

theft and vandalism to the banner's supporting posts are classified as misdemeanors. Since FFRF's nonreligious message was targeted, the act also qualifies as a Class 4 felony under Illinois' hate crime law.

FFRF is a national state/church watchdog with over 18,000 nonreligious members nationwide, including nearly 700 in Illinois.



FFRF's banner was put up Streator, Ill., to counter a Christian cross display.

Page 2 Freethought Today Madison, Wisconsin May 2012



Andrew Seidel (left), FFRF constitutional consultant, with Jade River and Mike Weinstein, founder of Religious Military Freedom Foundation, pictured on April 10 at a post-production "talkback" in Madison, Wis., for "Our Beautiful City," a play about the impact of the Religious Right in Colorado Springs, Colo.

## Meet an Intern

Name: Dustin Clark.

Where and when I was born: Champaign, Ill., Jan. 23, 1988.

**Family**: My mother, Laurie; my father, Randy; and Tyler, my older brother.

**Education**: Millikin University, Decatur, Ill., philosophy, class of 2010; University of Wisconsin Law School.

My religious upbringing was: Methodist. I was full of existential angst for a few years because I thought girls found the brooding sexy (I was wrong). That phase faded away, and I realized I am an atheist. I was pretty passive about my nonreligion aside from the occasional irritation at an irrational action in the name of some old dusty god. I thought it was odd to become impassioned about a nonbelief. Then, some friends and I were sharing a pizza, and I made some offhand, off-color remark, and a friend laughed and said, "Yeah, I could see you doing that because you don't care about anything because you're an atheist."

Hurt, I asked my friend if he thought I did not care about him. It was at that time that I realized that misconceptions like my friend's abound around the subject of atheism, and I have a duty to help eliminate those misconceptions and make sure that our rights are respected and protected.

How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern: I had not heard of FFRF until a spring law clerk position was posted on the Law School's career website. I became excited at the prospect of gaining actual legal experience while helping a cause I stand behind.

What I do here: I conduct legal and factual research into potential church/state violations. I draft legal letters for the staff attorneys.

What I like best about it: I can keep the state from making a kid who al-



**Dustin Clark** 

ready feels different from everyone else feel even more alone.

**Something funny that's happened:** They hired me.

My legal interests are: I would like to be a civil litigator. I enjoy labor and employment and tort law.

My legal heroes are: Well, no one is perfect, but I have always liked Judge Learned Hand and Justice Hugo Black.

These three words sum me up: Salty, pink (inside a blender or black hole), amiable.

**Things I like**: Golf, weight lifting, stand-up comedy (performing and watching), Prague.

**Things I smite**: Brussels sprouts, ice giants, Nietzsche.

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## Meet an Intern



**Svein Hoexter** 

Name: Svein Hoexter.

Where and when I was born: Chicago, July 11, 1990.

**Family**: My mother, Kristine Falck-Pedersen; my father, Daniel Hoexter; and my brother, Geir Falck-Pedersen, 14

**Education**: Lincoln Park High School, Chicago, 2008; University of

Wisconsin, economics and communications, 2012.

My religious upbringing was: Nonexistent. I was raised by two freethinking parents.

How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern: I wanted experience working with legal issues in a field I am passionate about. FFRF was a perfect fit!

What I do here: Research complaints, draft letters and enjoy the freethinking company.

What I like best about it: Contributing to an effort that makes a real difference promoting freethought and keeping church out of state.

Something funny that's happened: Generally confusing Stephanie on a regular basis.

**My legal interests are**: IP law and dispute resolution.

My legal heroes are: The Tom Cruise character Danny Kaffee in "A Few Good Men" and Abraham Lincoln.

These three words sum me up: Wait one sec.

**Things I like**: Yogurt, the Chicago Bulls, mock trial, biking.

**Things I smite**: Spicy food, LeBron James, watery coffee and beer, trash.

**My loftiest goal is:** Winning a case before the Supreme Court.

## In Memoriam

## Ronald Slonneger, 1935–2012

Ronald Wayne Slonneger, 76, Peoria, Ill., died at home Jan. 18, 2012, surrounded by his family.

He was born April 12, 1935, in Peoria to Irvin and Esther (Kinsinger) Slonneger.

Ron graduated from the University of Illinois with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and later earned his MBA. He worked at Caterpillar for 41 years, retiring in 1995.

He and his wife, Jean, shared a passion for sailing and were actively involved in racing at the IVY Club for many years. After retirement, they spent several months a year for 11 years sailing from the Great Lakes to the Bahamas.

Ron was a devoted member of the Universalist Unitarian Church, where he volunteered in many capacities.

He is survived by his wife, Jean

(Zinser), also a member of FFRF; two daughters, Christine (Bruce) Stark of Peoria and Nancy (Nathan) Hancock of Union, Ky.; a son, Andrew (Janet) Slonneger of Crystal Lake; four grand-children; and a brother, Ken (Marybeth) Slonneger of Iowa City, Iowa.

Jean writes: "Ron was an avid supporter of FFRF and loved your podcasts. His memorial service was held at the Universalist Unitarian Church of Peoria, and you would have approved the content of it! He was 'outed' as a devout atheist to the 200 or so in attendance, and people loved it. It was simply and beautifully done."

FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, on behalf of FFRF, send their condolences and warmest wishes to Jean and Ron's family

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Danny B. Crockarell, James Haught May 2012

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

## A Note to Members

Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and "Private Line." If your label shows May or earlier, your membership has expired. Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 sustaining; \$25-student) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in Jan/Feb and June/July. Send to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

## FFRF's 'Quit Catholic Church' ad runs in Washington Post



FFRF's full-page ad, "It's Time to Quit the Catholic Church," ran in The Washington Post (A5, main section) and on the back page of the Washington Express on May 8. The Express is free to Metro riders and D.C. residents. Express distributors were the ad on their vests (see photo).

The provocative ad, couched as an open letter to "liberal and nominal" Catholics, asks, "Will it be reproductive freedom, or back to the Dark Ages? Do you choose women and their rights, or Bishops and their wrongs?"

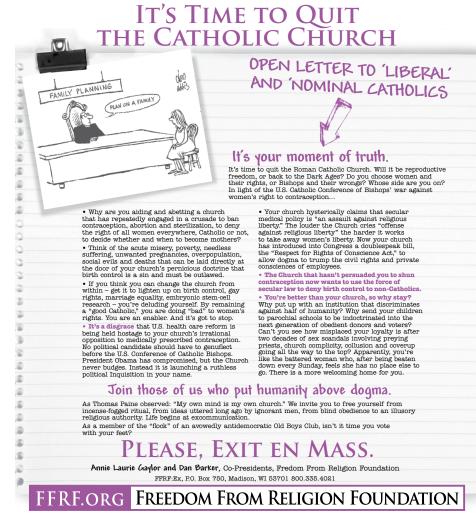
The ad was similar to the full-page ad that appeared in The New York Times in March, which is still creating shockwaves among conservative religionists.

"It's a disgrace that U.S. health care reform is being held hostage to your church's irrational opposition to medically prescribed contraception," the ad states. "No political candidate should have to genuflect before the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops."

"Join those of us who put humanity above dogma," FFRF's ad urges.

The Washington Post ad features a cartoon by the late Don Addis, a longtime FFRF member, showing a priest under a "Family Planning" banner counseling a woman: "Plan on a family." It also includes the line, "Life begins at excommunication."

The ad blasts the church's "pernicious doctrine that birth control is a sin" and the "Respect for Rights of Conscience Act" introduced into Congress to impose church dogma on employees. FFRF warns the liberal Catholic that the church is "launching a ruthless political Inquisition in your



A version ran in Washington Express.

## Plus 4 'After-Lifers!'

## FFRF welcomes 30 new Lifetime Members

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to announce 30 new Lifetime Members and four new "After-Life" Members.

After-Lifers are Sam Babiar, Kenneth Crosby, Thomas P. Dinwiddie and one individual who prefers anonymity.

New Lifetime Members are:

George Anderson, Shirley Brown, Stephen Clamage, Gary DeBoer, Phillip Foremaster, Chris Franks, Mary Ann Fraser, Sharon Friedmann, Belva and Jon Hauxwell, Milton Hebert, Jim Helton, Judd Herrmann, Steven Hewett, Brad Johnson, Maggie Jones, Michael Leasman, Fred Malmsheimer, Blair Moyer, Sonya Newlyn, David Phillips, Paul A. Putz, Jon A. Rand, Lyle Sanders, Arthur Silverberg, Lewis (Sandy) Simpson, Amanda Smith, Jason Stansell, Tim Tully and Lori Worby.

States represented are: Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington and

Lifetime Members are \$1,000 designated for membership or renewal. After-Life Memberships are \$5,000 designated for membership or renewal, for those who want their donation to FFRF "to live on." (Some generous



#### Equal treatment

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker was one of the performers March 31 at Rock Beyond Belief, the first-ever nontheist festival on a U.S. military base. "We're sending a message," said Justin Griffith, an Army sergeant and former evangelical Christian stationed at Fort Bragg who organized event. Griffith, an FFRF member, told Reuters that "Foxhole atheists are out there fighting for your rights. Please return the favor." FFRF and its Raleigh chapter, the Triangle Freethought Society, also hosted a booth.

persons are both Lifetime and After-Life Members.) All FFRF memberships are deductible for tax purposes to the fullest extent of the law.

Warmest thanks to FFRF's newest

Lifetime and After-Life Members! Lifetime Memberships go into a safe "rainy day" savings.

## **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. **FFRF** P.O. Box 750

Freedom Depends on Freethinkers

Madison WI 53701

#### FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • ffrf.org

#### 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.

## June/July

is a combined issue you will receive in July

Page 4 Freethought Today Madison, Wisconsin May 2012

## Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

## A thought for Suse Pollok

Look not behind thee . . . lest thou be consumed.

Fall, at Auschwitz:
rain on broken brick, mist on the hills
of human hair. Stenciled luggage
calls the roll of our unsleeping past:
Gerda Singer, Leipnik;
L. Berman, Hamburg;
Joseph Sanders, Max Ullmann, Suse Pollok —
where would your beauty bloom, if in a fit
of charity your fellow citizens
had trampled out their burning patriotism?
Would you have reached Beersheba, had you not
dropped your primly labeled baggage here
and left behind your golden teeth
and splintered spectacles?

Fall: the fall brings fog, blurring our landmarks — which way to Auschwitz now? What star can point the way to Haifa, Hartford, Kharkov? In the haze of holy causes, one gristly cord in every human heart strains to fire the ovens. Look: everywhere the chimneys go on belching black.

© 1996 Philip Appleman Freethought Today is honored to publish this 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 (2012), 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 "Afterlife" Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. They recorded an excerpt of "Noah," New and Selected Poems, which is available for sale from FFRF for \$23 ppd, The Norton Critical Edition, Darwin, is \$22 ppd., Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie, \$27 ppd., Darwin's Ark, \$23 ppd., and Perfidious Proverbs, \$20 ppd. (ffrf.org/shop/).

#### YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

## TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

produced by the Freedom From Religion Foundation

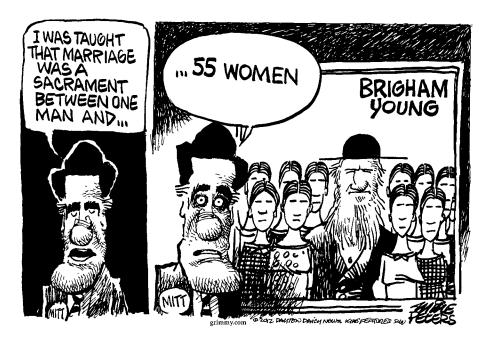


Hosted by Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor

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



## **Overheard**

[T]he National Day of Reason is about taking time to improve our communities. Every year, events are held on this day that demonstrate the desire of secular Americans to help their fellow citizens and our nation as a whole. Community service events, such as food drives and blood drives, are just some of the ways that people will be working to help those in need on the Day of Reason and throughout the year. I encourage everyone to join in observing this day and focusing upon the employment of reason, critical thinking, the scientific method, and free inquiry to improve our world and our nation. Rep. Pete Stark, D-Calif., U.S. House floor statement recognizing May 3 as

the National Day of Reason Congressional Record, 4-27-12

About 1,520 results; About 36 results Google News search results respectively for "National Day of Prayer" and "National Day of Reason," both ob-

served on May 3 google.com, 5-4-12

The truth is way too dangerous. Alex Aan, 30, imprisoned in Indonesia for posting "God does not exist" on Facebook

The Guardian, 5-3-12

In a statement released today, God, the supreme being and creator of the universe, confirmed that he has once again postponed the transfer of the planet Earth to the meek.

Satirical news story

The Smew, 5-1-12

Had the Year of the Bible been declared by the Catholic Church, the Lutherans, the Methodists, the Pentecostals, just about any religious group one can name, there wouldn't be any issue whatsoever. But it wasn't a religious group that drove this designation. It was our state government, and the members of that body should know better

Rahn Forney, editorial page editor, criticizing Pennsylvania lawmakers for declaring 2012 as the Year of the Bible, an action FFRF is suing over Lebanon Daily News, 4-19-12

I think it's time the church ceases to protect the bad priests. The representatives of the church did wrong to cov-

er up and hide this problem.

Mary Mignogno, nurse and Catholic school volunteer, on Pennsylvania parishioners being told Fr. Robert Brennan was removed because he had Lyme disease instead of the real reason, that he was accused of molesting a boy

Norristown Times Herald, 5-8-12

At the time, industry and science reflected an enlightenment mindset. People believed freedom of thought and industrial growth would bind and unify the new country, not religion or God.

Todd Imhof, whose company auctioned for \$1 million a 1792 "silver plug" penny, which says "Liberty Parent of Science & Industry" instead of "In God We Trust"

ABC News, 4-19-12

Nothing fails quite like prayer. One of the reasons we've been fighting the War on Terror is because of religion. You rely on your buddies.

Scott Otto, an atheist and Iraq and Afghanistan veteran, now an anthropology major at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston

 $The \ Daily \ Eastern \ News, \ 4\text{-}18\text{-}12$ 

That's what's unique about both militant nationalists and militant Islamists.

We do believe in an afterlife, at least many of us do, because we are Christiant nationalists and militant Islamists.

Anders Behring Breivik, describing himself as a "militant Christian" in court in Norway at his trial for killing 77 people last July

The Guardian, 4-18-12

## Recruit a Member Sample Copies for \$2

Send \$2 with the name and address of each person you wish to receive a sample copy of Freethought Today to:

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

Freedom depends upon freethinkers

(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)

## Hysteria in Rhode Island over FFRF cross complaint

FFRF's routine letter of complaint April 13 to Mayor Leo Fontaine, Woonsocket, R.I., over a Latin cross at city Fire Station No. 2 has provoked near-hysteria.

Rhode Island Attorney General Peter Kilmartin publicly "applauded" the mayor and City Council for "preparing to fight the attack by the Freedom From Religion Foundation."

State Rep. James McLaughlin, D-Cumberland, introduced an overtly unconstitutional bill, H8143, to classify any "traditional, cultural or community" memorial as "secular property" even if it's religious. Mayor Fontaine called FFRF "a couple of knuckleheads out of Wisconsin," and on a local radio show said "I pray for people like this."

Although FFRF has not sent a ceaseand-desist letter threatening to sue, the city of Woonsocket has raised \$15,000 for a fund to defend against a potential lawsuit. On May 2, more than 600 noisy protesters, carrying flags, crosses, godly signs and "Save the Cross" buttons rallied next to the cross, as "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" played, including many from the American Legion. The Legion mission statement ties "God and country."

Former state Adjutant General Reginald Centraccio said he was drawing a "line in the sand," saying the Legion is "going to battle against these atheists all the way back to Wisconsin." (The "battling" seems to be a plethora of late-afternoon phone calls laced with profanity to FFRF's office.)

Despite denials by city officials that the Latin cross has a Christian meaning, Roman Catholic Bishop Thomas Tobin addressed the rally, saying: "This is about presence of God in our lives and in our society. These are attempts to render our society bereft of moral values. If we don't stand up we are complicit in the death of God in our society. I'm proud to stand here with you today to defend the presence of Christ in our lives."

The cross was a gathering point for local observations of the National Day of Prayer on May 3.

A cross was erected in 1921 as part of a monument in memory of a local soldier killed in France in World War I. In 1952, the cross monument was apparently replaced with a new cross and rededicated both to the WWI soldier and three local brothers who died in World War II.

FFRF also complained about the Fire Station's website whose rudimentary "memorial" page shows a guardian angel comforting a firefighter. The site also has a poem entitled "The Fire-Fighters Prayer."

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Market noted in her letter that "The Latin cross at the fire station demonstrates Woonsocket's preference for Christianity over other religions and nonreligion. Such government endorsements of religion runs afoul of the Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution."

The mayor initially opined it may be necessary to move the monument to private property. City Council President John Ward said the city, which is in dire financial straits, couldn't afford a costly legal battle. "I would not vote to pay to defend it," Ward said.

The claim is also made in an April local news story that no local person complained and that FFRF routinely



FFRF member Steve Ahlquist (uncle of first Amendment hero Jessica Ahlquist) took this photo as part of a larger essay demonstrating that no other public war memorials in the area have any religious imagery.

patrols the whole country looking for such violations.

"That charge is absurd," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president, noting that a Woonsocket resident who regularly drives past the Christian display found it offensive and contacted FFRF for help.

"Our small staff is besieged with requests from members of the public who are upset about state-church violations," Gaylor said. "We only wish public officials who knowingly violate the Constitution could be held personally responsible for flouting the law. Nearly 30% of Americans are non-Christians and 15% are not religious. Firefighters should be there to serve everyone, regardless of religious views."

She added, "Of course we have no objection to war memorials, but they cannot be used as a subterfuge to post

large permanent Latin crosses on government land. Cities can't host monuments that appear to say, 'We only care about your service if you are a Christian. Jewish, atheist or other non-Christians killed in U.S. wars don't deserve recognition.' There are many atheists in foxholes, and 24% of FFRF membership are vets or in the military, which is consistent with the number of nontheists in the military generally."

## Virginia judge sends commandments suit to mediator

U.S. District Judge Michael Urbanski, Western District of Virginia in Roanoke, heard oral arguments May 7 in a case brought by a student and parent over a school Ten Commandments display. In an unexpected move, the judge referred the case to mediation. If no settlement is reached, he'll rule on both parties' motions for summary judgment.

FFRF and the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia sued the School Board of Giles County, Va., last September for unconstitutionally endorsing religion by displaying the Ten Commandments in a hallway at Narrows High School in Narrows.

FFRF originally objected to the display in December 2010 when the commandments were posted in all six county schools. The Superintendent responded by taking the displays down, then the school board put them back up after the public pressured the board. On advice of legal counsel, they were again later removed.

Last June the board voted 3-2 to put the Commandments up along with other documents in the misguided belief that the documents would put the display on stronger legal footing. Included were a depiction of Lady Justice, "The Star-Spangled Banner," the Bill of Rights, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, the Declaration of Independence, the Virginia Declaration of Rights, the Mayflower Compact and the Magna Carta.

At the hearing, Urbanski commented on how he viewed the board's vote: "It's clear to me that when the school board voted, there was one thing on their mind. And that was God."

Urbanski suggested compromising by omitting the first four commandments, which have explicitly religious references. He asked both sides if the commandments could be edited and reportedly said, "If indeed this issue is not about God, why wouldn't it make sense for Giles County to say, 'Let's go back and just post the bottom six?'"

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor said she doesn't buy the suggested compromise and referred to the Supreme Court's *McCreary* ruling on the commandments:

"They proclaim the existence of a monotheistic god (no other gods). They regulate details of religious obligation (no graven images, no sabbath breaking, no vain oath swearing). And they unmistakably rest even the universally accepted prohibitions (as against

murder, theft, and the like) on the sanction of the divinity proclaimed at the beginning of the text."

Plaintiffs' briefs highlighted the religious fervor that led to the display and to statements made by board members. In one deposition, board member Joseph Gollehon said he voted for the display because "I am a Christian" and felt that the commandments "was a great thing if you can live by it."

Liberty Counsel, associated with Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, represents the board and helped craft the current display. In briefs, Liberty Counsel argued that the board opened up a forum for private displays and that the school has a secular purpose for the commandments because they're integrated into the history curriculum.

ACLU Attorney Rebecca Glenberg noted at the May 7 hearing that there are no cases that have allowed the commandments in a public school. Walt Hopkins, a professor who studies First Amendment law at Virginia Tech, observed the argument and told the Roanoke Times, "It was not a good day for Giles County."

Mediation with Magistrate Judge Robert Ballou is expected to occur sometime in the next few weeks.

## FFRF announces fund to aid nonbelieving clergy

## Help us save a preacher









Barker

MacBain

**Dennett** Dawkins

FFRF has announced a fund to help "save a preacher," in coordination with the Clergy Project, created to help clergy who have become nonbelievers and are looking for an exit strategy to a secular life.

The project has grown in one year to more than 223 participants, the majority former clergy who act as a support system for about 60 members who are still in active ministry. There are more than 60 pending applications, indicating many secret unbelievers in the pulpits of the world.

Funds donated to the Clergy Project will be used for:

- Scholarships for educational retraining. It's hard for someone with a divinity degree and a history of preaching to find new employment, especially in today's economy.
- Temporary hardship grants. Some of the clergy in the project tell heart-breaking stories of being unceremoniously thrown out into the street (literally, in one case!) and locked out when their nonbelief became known.

• Maintenance of the forum. The Clergy Project forum is a secret, invitation-only online sanctuary where former and active nonbelieving clergy can talk freely, comparing stories, suggesting resources, sharing concerns, asking for help and finding a sympathetic nonjudgmental community of others who have wrestled with this unique situation.

The initial funding came mainly from the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, with many hours donated by former clergy, including forum facilitator Dan Barker, FFRF co-president, and other FFRF members who are former clergy. Many have contacted Dan after reading his books, *Godless* and *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist*, which relate his personal experiences.

Members currently come from the U.S., Ireland, Australia, South Africa, England and Canada, as well as a few non-English-speaking countries.

"It is hard to think of any other profession which it is so near to impossible

to leave," writes Dawkins. "If a farmer tires of the outdoor life and wants to become an accountant or a teacher or a shopkeeper, he faces difficulties, to be sure. He must learn new skills, raise money, move to another area perhaps. But he doesn't risk losing all his friends, being cast out by his family, being ostracized by his whole community. Clergy who lose their faith suffer double jeopardy. It's as though they lose their job and their marriage and their children on the same day. It is an aspect of the vicious intolerance of religion that a mere change of mind can redound so cruelly on those honest enough to acknowledge it."

The Clergy Project arose from discussions between Dawkins, Barker and Tufts University philosophy professor Daniel Dennett. Dennett, best-selling author of *Breaking the Spell*, and researcher Linda LaScola, published a preliminary study of "Preachers Who Are Not Believers," in March 2010 in Evolutionary Psychology and The Washington Post. They are currently

working on a broader follow-up study.

Teresa MacBain, whose recent dramatic "coming out" from the ministry made headline news (including positive interviews on NPR and CNN) has volunteered to be project acting director. Forum administrator is "Adam," still a conservative minister in the South, and "Chris," who started as an active clergy but recently made his escape from the pulpit. "Catherine," a minister from Canada, is acting secretary, under the acting board members, including Barker. FFRF members and former clergy John Compere and Stephen Uhl, recent clergy "graduate" Jerry DeWitt and other former clergy help screen new applicants.

To donate to FFRF's "Clergy Project" fund, select it from the drop-down list at *ffrf.org/donate/* or earmark checks, with donations deductible for tax purposes, to FFRF, P.O. Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

## **Overheard**

I won't point fingers, but it's suspicious, given the circumstances.

High school senior Jacob Nantau, Middle Lake, Saskatchewan, whose car was vandalized several times after he voted against having prayer at a graduation banquet.

Regina Leader-Post, 4-24-12

I think it's time for me to move to Japan. When I said that I was an atheist, everyone insulted me and the legal authorities jumped on everything that I wrote on Twitter. I am perhaps the first person anywhere in the world to be the object of a judicial inquiry for declaring that they are an atheist.

Composer/pianist Fazil Say, on the rise of conservative Islam in his native Turkey

Al Arabiya, 4-23-12

What would Jesus do with the U.S. that religion must consume and influ-

First sentence in a news story headlined "Christians Debate: Was Jesus For Small Government?"

National Public Radio, 4-16-12

Bottom line, we are saying do not attempt to pass a policy based on this statute unless you want to have lengthy litigation.

Wayne Blanton, Florida School Boards Association executive director, on a new law that lets students give "inspirational messages," including prayers, at school functions

Orlando Sentinel, 4-11-12

I invite you to visit the Ali Forney Center, only 30 blocks from St. Patrick's Cathedral, and meet with youths whose Catholic parents drove them from their homes. I want you to hear them tell you what it is like to have their parents be ashamed of them, and tell them that they are against God. I want you to see what their lives are like

alone, unloved, and abandoned in the streets. I hope that by meeting our kids you can understand the pain and anguish you help to cause.

Letter from Joseph Amodeo, Executive Committee member of the Junior Board of Catholic Charities, to Cardinal Timothy Dolan, after which Amodeo resigned from the board

Huffington Post, 4-5-12

Ban on Gideon Bible handout at public schools sparks torrent of hate mail Headline on news story about a Canadian school district

Toronto Star, 4-8-12

We inhabit a polity now saturated with religion. On one side, the Republican

base is made up of evangelical Protestants who believe that religion must consume and influence every aspect of public life. On the



other side, the last Democratic primary had candidates profess their faith in public forums, and more recently President Obama appeared at the National Prayer Breakfast, invoking Jesus to defend his plan for universal health care. Columnist Andrew Sullivan, "Christianity in Crisis"

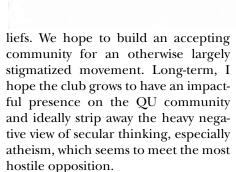
The Daily Beast, 4-2-12

It was kind of like looking at a blackand-white picture and seeing someone wearing a yellow hat. It just seemed odd to me.

Robert Kane, testifying at the trial of Fr. James Brennan how the image has stuck in his head of seeing the priest massage the bare back in 1990 of a boy after a youth baseball game

Philadelphia Inquirer, 4-11-12

I hope this organization helps skeptic students "come out" with their be-



Co-founder Julia Olson of the Quinnipiac University Atheist, Humanist and Agnostic Association in Hamden,

The Quad News, 4-22-12

We understand that in some Islamic states, gay people are persecuted and executed for their sexuality. It was an ideal opportunity to challenge the notion of acceptance and tolerance. As we began kissing, the Muslims began chanting, "Burn in hell."

Gregory Storer, on kissing his partner in front of Muslim protesters at the Global Atheist Convention in Melbourne, Australia

GNN, 4-16-12

Atheists are like snowflakes — no two are the same. You find very few that reach a conclusion to the "God question" the same way. We are just a group of people who lack a belief in God or

gods, but we have different beliefs outside of that.

Brandon Moore, North Carolina State graduate student in biomanufacturing and engineering

Technician, 4-30-12

Even as Republicans try to wrestle women into chastity belts, the Vatican is trying to muzzle American nuns. How can the church hierarchy be more offended by the



Courtesy of Free Inquiry magazine

nuns' impassioned advocacy for the poor than by priests' sordid pedophilia? The church leadership never recoiled in horror from pedophilia, yet it recoils in horror from outspoken nuns. Columnist Maureen Dowd, "Bishops

play church queens as pawns" New York Times, 4-28-12

In reality, as I worked through them, I found that religion had so many holes in it, that I just progressed through stages where I couldn't believe it.

Teresa MacBain, Tallahassee, Fla., a former Methodist pastor who has embraced atheism

National Public Radio, 4-30-12

## FFRF cries 'Mayday!' on multiple public prayer events

Pious mayors, governors and other public officials prayed in record numbers in early May across the land for national and state Day of Prayer events and local prayer breakfasts.

FFRF's legal staff headed by Senior Attorney Rebecca Markert sent letters of objection to Govs. Scott Walker (Wisconsin), Steve Beshear (Kentucky), Mike Beebe (Arizona), Jerry Brown (California), and Rick Scott (Florida). Letters were sent to mayors in Carmel, Ind., Biddeford, Maine; Zephryrhillis, Fla.; Bentonville, Ark.; Tampa, Fla.; and Florence, Ala. A complaint also went to the federal Bureau of Reclamation. Other letters went to:

- Mayor Larry Melton, Odessa, Texas. An open records request showed the city's public information coordinator promoted the mayor's prayer event with a press release and scheduled many interviews promoting it. The city secretary, Norma Aguilar, coordinated the prayer logistics, signed the contracts, etc. This year's keynote speaker, Rev. Don Piper, author of "90 Minutes in Heaven" and "Heaven is Real," charged a \$2,500 honorarium plus expenses. The city actively solicited sponsorships, apparently during the business day.
- Rogers, Ark. Mayor Greg Hines' Prayer Breakfast was organized and sponsored by the Mayor's Office with tickets sold at City Hall.
- Springdale, Ark. Tickets for the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast could be purchased at the Mayor's Office. Markert noted that while Greg Sprouse could attend a privately sponsored event in his personal capacity, "It is absolutely unlawful, inappropriate and unseemly, under the First Amendment to host such an event or work in tandem with event organizers to put on the breakfast"

FFRF received some editorial support for its view, including from the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette on May 14:

"The cities should not be seen as contributing in any way to the organization of these prayer breakfasts which, while open to everyone, are obviously Christian-oriented events (the one in Rogers was held at Cross Church). A city employee using time on the clock to sell tickets or perform other work related to the breakfasts is crossing the line. Someone else can do this kind of work strictly on a volunteer basis without using resources bought by the taxpayers. That might satisfy the group from Wisconsin, but more importantly, it's the right thing to do."

## FFRF keeps fighting nativity nonsense

The Ellwood City, Pa., nativity saga in response to an FFRF complaint continues. In April, the Citizens Nativity Location Committee submitted a plan to create a public forum in front of the Municipal Building.

The forum, consisting of one lot, would only allow displays from Dec. 5 through Jan. 15 and be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. Nonresidents would have to wait 30 days before submitting applications. Borough Councilman John Todorich admitted to the Ellwood City Ledger that the purpose of the policy is to keep out FFRF:

"We need to make it tight enough that we don't have off-the-wall groups come in here and force our hand."

Nativity Committee Vice Chairman Mike Parisi's Facebook comments were illuminating: "This proposal will allow us to keep the Nativity Display right where its [sic] at."

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott, with research and drafting assistance from Andrew Seidel, FFRF constitutional consultant, sent a follow-up letter to the borough's solicitor explaining the pitfalls of the open forum policy:

"Other local governments have opened forums to encourage nativities with disastrous results. Santa Monica, Calif., was swamped with controversial displays and a cumbersome lottery system after opening a public forum. Loudoun County, Va., opened a forum, and the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, the Jedis, and atheists raised displays next to a crèche. Both Loudon County and Santa Monica are considering closing the forums they opened less than three years ago."

Citing Supreme Court precedent, the letter hammered home the fact that "government may not grant the use of a forum to people whose views it finds acceptable, but deny use to those wishing to express less favored or more controversial views."

The letter also cited a string of court precedents to show that "freedom of speech cannot be burdened, inhibited, or contingent upon residency."

The Borough Council has not voted on the proposal and no vote is scheduled.

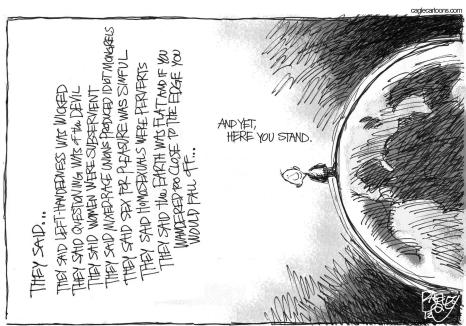
## Town welcomes signs of biblical proportions



"Whether to believe or not believe in 'One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism' is a personal decision protected under our First Amendment as a paramount matter of conscience. Local governments have no place in making position statements on such matters," noted Patrick Elliott, FFRF attorney.

FFRF is working to cement what looked like a victory in Sylvania, Ala., but has stalled after the cooperative mayor was forced to resign in the wake of allegations of sexual misconduct.

The town of about 2,000 features four "Welcome" signs which include bible verses, erected at public expense in various locations. A week after FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott's letter of complaint April 17, Mayor Mitchell Dendy agreed to paint over the uncon-



FOR ALL THOSE WHO ARE CRUELLY MADE TO FEEL OUT OF PLACE IN THIS WORLD

stitutional endorsements of religion.

Then, a few days later, Dendy got a pink slip from DeKalb County Sheriff Jimmy Harris, who fired him as the county's chief jail administrator, the Fort Payne Times-Journal reported. The Town Council accepted Dendy's resignation as mayor May 1. Citizens have also petitioned to rename Dendy Road

Harris said Dendy was fired for repeated violations of departmental policy and procedure directives related to alleged sexual misconduct, improprieties and harassment.

The council called a special meeting May 8 and, without discussion, voted 5-0 to put the verses back on the signs. Council member Tony Goolesby claimed that Dendy never told the council about FFRF's letter or his decision to blot out the verses because the town couldn't afford a legal battle.

"The council doesn't feel like it is a violation," Goolesby said. The quotations are now back on signs.

FFRF would like to sue if the quotes aren't removed, said Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Legally, this is sort of a slam dunk."

## FFRF requests probe of Illinois bishop

FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca
Markert sent a letter April 20 to the
Internal Revenue Service to alert the
agency to political comments by Catholic Bishop Daniel Jenky in his April 14
sermon at St. Mary's Cathedral in Peoria, Ill.

election.

• Add candidat

munication made incompacting in Peoria, Ill.

Jenky sharply criticized President Barack Obama and referred to the 2012 presidential election, stating, "Hitler and Stalin, at their better moments, would just barely tolerate some churches remaining open, but would not tolerate any competition with the state in education, social services, and health care. In clear violation of our First Amendment rights, Barack Obama, with his radical, pro-abortion and extreme secularist agenda, now seems intent on following a similar path.

"Now things have come to such a pass in America that this is a battle that we could lose, but before the awesome judgment seat of Almighty God, this is not a war where any believing Catholic may remain neutral. This fall, every practicing Catholic must vote, and must vote their Catholic consciences, or by the following fall our Catholic schools, our Catholic hospitals, our Catholic Newman Centers, all our public ministries — only excepting our church buildings — could easily be shut down."

Markert's letter to the IRS Exempt Organizations Examination Office in Dallas noted that such speech is illegal campaign intervention for a taxexempt organization, according to IRS regulations which ban participation in "any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office."

While leaders of religious groups may express opinions on political matters as individuals, they are precluded from making "partisan comments in official organization publications or at official functions of the organization."

The letter identified key factors the IRS uses to determine if advocacy is political campaign intervention. Whether the statement:

- Identifies one or more candidates for a given public office.
- Expresses approval or disapproval for one or more candidates' positions and/or actions.
  - Is delivered close to the election.
- Makes reference to voting or an election.
- Addresses an issue distinguishing candidates for a given office.
- Is part of an ongoing series of communications on the same issue that are made independent of any election.
- Is related to a nonelectoral event such as a scheduled vote on specific legislation by an officeholder who also happens to be a candidate for public office.

The letter added, "Despite not saying specifically 'Vote against Barack Obama,' the bishop's comments make it abundantly clear that he is opposed to Barack Obama as a candidate. Given that he gave these partisan comments at an official church function — the 'Call to Catholic Men of Faith' service — Bishop Jenky violated the 501(c) (3) tax-exempt rules, which prohibit electioneering."

The letter requested an immediate investigation and action to remedy any violations.

Page 8 Freethought Today Madison, Wisconsin May 2012

## FFRF's latest legal victories

## FFRF helps student start freethinker group

Colin Mueller, a junior at Walton High School, Marietta, Ga., was denied approval from his school in April to start a new student group titled Freethinkers for Cooperation Acceptance and Trust (FACT). The school has more than 70 approved student groups, including the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the Muslim Student Association.

Proposals for creating new groups were heard April 18 by a school committee. FACT was one of several groups denied approval for the next school year. After receiving a letter from FFRF, the school reversed its earlier decision and granted FACT student group status.

The application for FACT included information on the group's purpose, activities, a list of 10 prospective members and a faculty supervisor. The application described the club this way:

"The purpose of the club is to bring freethinking students together who are surrounded by a predominantly religious society; together the students will be able to find a support group and help each other with problems associated with being a freethinker (such as 'coming out' to your parents that you are not religious, or seeing the meaning in life). The mission of the club is to show the Walton community that freethinkers (atheist, agnostics, Unitarians or other non-mainstream religious affiliates) can very well live a life of high morals and be genuinely good people without reporting to a higher power."

Colin received a rejection letter that said:

"There are so many clubs existing at Walton that part of the decision-making process includes making sure that clubs do not compete for the same members. Additionally, we cannot accept a club that holds or espouses any particular religious, political or philosophical beliefs, is physical in nature or does not have a service or curriculum component."

Colin appealed but was told that the denial was final and that the committee only approved the "best" of the proposed groups.

After the denial, FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter of complaint to the Cobb County School District. Elliott wrote that the denial was a violation of both the federal Equal Access Act and the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment. The Equal Access Act provides that schools receiving federal funds cannot deny equal treatment to noncurriculum student groups on the basis of their religious, political or philosophical views.

Elliott said, "If FCA [Fellowship of Christian Athletes] is allowed club status, then the school may not censor FACT. . . . Minority views are protected under the First Amendment. It is not permissible for a committee to vote on group approval based on which views will be the most popular. The school should train any persons who make approval decisions, whether staff or students, on how to make decisions in a viewpoint neutral manner."

On April 29, Colin was informed that his group was approved. Ironically, his initial application focused on the mistreatment of atheists: "This club would not be formed if it were not for the lack of acceptance of freethinkers in the USA. In this day, there are still 50% of Americans who say that they would not vote for a well-qualified atheist candidate solely based on the grounds that said candidate is an atheist."

## Florida school ends adult-led prayers

After receiving a complaint from a student and FFRF, Highlands County Schools, Sebring, Fla., took action to limit the reach of a Christian group that was interacting with Lake Placid Middle School students before school.

A student reported that an adult from a group called Youth for Christ was regularly in the gym playing Christian music and leading students in prayer. All students were subject to the music and prayers because students who arrive early to school are required to be in the gym.

In March, FFRF sent a complaint stating that the school's grant of access to a minister to proselytize a captive audience violated the Establishment Clause. Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott also wrote, "This predatory conduct is inappropriate and should raise many red flags."

John McClure, Highlands County Schools general counsel, replied, saying that use of the gym for prayers has been stopped. But his letter also said that the school will allow the meetings to continue if the group is operated as a student club not run by adults.

McClure said, "Upon becoming aware of the circumstances, the school principal has changed the meeting place and reinforced with the club the requirement that the club be student led.

"Further, the Deputy Superintendent of Schools is publishing the issues at the monthly principal's meeting so that the requirements can be reinforced throughout all schools in the school district, which I think was one of your primary concerns."

## '9 Commandments' judge loses robes

FFRF started fighting a proposed Ten Commandments display and the judge pushing it in July 2010 at the Hawkins County Justice Center in Rogersville, Tenn. It was a pet project of Juvenile Judge James "Jay" Taylor, whose personal website was plastered with piety. As it turns out, all that piety blew up horrendously in his face after FFRF took an interest in the case.

The Knoxville News Sentinel reported that Hawkins agreed to resign May 1 in an agreement with the Tennessee Court of Judiciary, which charged him with taking \$9,000 from clients for personal gain. "He is a charlatan, and his charlatanry is about to come to an end," said Morristown lawyer Paul Whetstone, who represents two clients who have filed civil suits.

The Court of the Judiciary earlier sanctioned Taylor for lobbying the County Commission to support the "Foundations of American Law and Government" display and fundraising for it.

A county committee had approved the display, heavily weighted with religious elements, including the Ten Commandments, all obviously meant to show that America is a Christian nation. Besides the constitutional violations, as FFRF noted in a followup complaint, shouldn't a decalogue that's supposed to be historical at least have ten commandments? Taylor's proposed plaque listed only nine (omitting adultery — hmm — see below), and mixed up the Roman numeral XI for IX. Local media neglected to pick up on the errors, which Taylor corrected after FFRF's letter pointed them out. The display, which has never been put up, also contained numerous historical inaccuracies.

A petition for discipline filed in February by the Board of Personal Responsibility alleged Taylor used about \$6,000 of display donations for his personal use.

Taylor is also the subject of a \$3 million lawsuit by a former employee alleging he violated her civil rights, made "unwelcome and unwanted" sexual advances and unlawfully fired her.

## FFRF starves out N.C. church discount

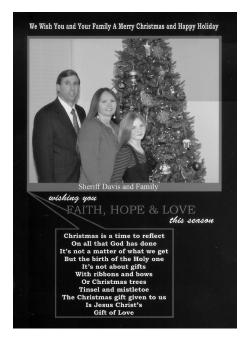
An FFRF complaint put an end to an illegal church bulletin discount at the Fisherman's Quarters II in Asheville, N.C. The restaurant regularly offered a 10% discount to church-going patrons. The promotion was at the top

the list of discounts on its website.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt first wrote to the owners in October 2011: "Fisherman's Quarters II's restrictive promotional practice favors religious customers and denies customers who do not attend church as well as nonbelievers the right to 'full and equal' enjoyment of Fisherman's Quarters II."

After Schmitt sent two follow-up letters, a restaurant representative said in late March that the discriminatory practice had ended.

## Religion stripped from Ala. sheriff's sleeve



Chilton County, Ala., Sheriff Kevin Davis will no longer send his constituents an overtly sectarian Christmas card, thanks to FFRF's action. Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt first wrote Jan. 20 to Davis that his card was "grossly inappropriate."

It showed Davis and his family in front of a Christmas tree and was signed "Sheriff Davis and Family." The card also contained a religious poem ending with "The Christmas gift given to us is Jesus Christ's gift of love."

Schmidt added, "We strongly urge you to consider your status as one of the highest elected officials in Chilton County and the importance of the constitutional principle of separation of church and state before you send out holiday cards promoting your personal religious beliefs and viewpoints."

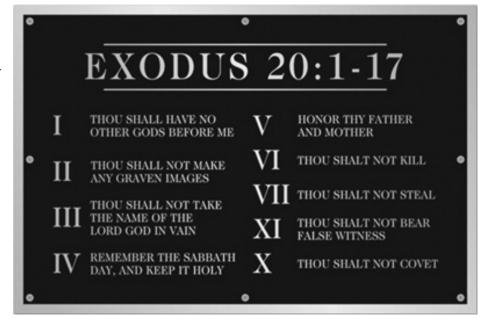
Davis spoke with Schmitt on March 19 and assured her that the card will be changed for the upcoming holiday season. He said he had "no intentions of offending anyone."

## FFRF opens Nevada libraries on Easter

The Washoe County Library System in Reno, Nev., will be open during Easter next year.

FFRF and a local complainant took issue with the library's holiday closure policy. Before FFRF's involvement, all county libraries were closed each Easter Sunday, even libraries that had typical Sunday hours.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to Library Director Arnie Maurins on Feb. 16: "Easter is neither a federal holiday nor a Nevada state



holiday. It is unconstitutional and inappropriate for a public library system to close on Easter."

FFRF learned that library employees are forced to make up the hours they missed for the mandatory Easter shutdown by working at another branch unless they took vacation time. "Government employees should not be inconvenienced or punished so that Christian employees can celebrate a holy day," asserted Markert.

Maurins replied March 12 and said the policy will change in the future, and staff would be directed to "take the necessary steps to enable libraries with Sunday hours to be open on Easter."

#### FFRF letter muffles Christian rock band

Lewis County Schools in Weston, W.Va., canceled a Christian concert after receiving an FFRF letter of complaint. Both the Lewis County middle school and high school were scheduled to interrupt instructional time to host the Jason Lovins Band, a Christian rock group with a clear mission to "take the focus off themselves and point it to the One they sing about."

Lovins is known to "testify" at performances and frequently insists "life begins at conception." He claims he was conceived as the result of rape and warns students against abortion. The event was sponsored by Youth Alive a student Christian club.

"We are concerned that this assembly will be utilized by the Youth Alive club and their guest to push their religious agenda and religious values on a captive audience of students," wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt.

A school representative confirmed March 9 that the middle school assembly was canceled. While the high school assembly took place, "no religion was brought into the assembly," the school said, assuring Schmitt that it will "stay within the proper guidelines of separation of church and state."

#### FFRF hunts down Tenn. Easter event

FFRF persuaded the city of Mt. Juliet, Tenn., to stop promoting "the Great Easter Bash," a Christian event set to take place on April 7 in a public park. The city Parks and Recreation Department was the designated host, with Friendship Community Church as a co-sponsor.

The city advertised the event on the department's website and on mass-distributed postcards. Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote April 4 to Parks Director Jay Cameli to protest city sponsorship of a religious event.

Schmitt received confirmation April 6 that the city removed all information about the event: "[The Parks Department] removed the city logo, as well as all references to the 'City of Mt. Juliet' on the printed materials that will be distributed at the event." Employees were instructed to treat the event as they would any other.

## Bible-pushers banished at UW Hospital

The University of Wisconsin Hospital in Madison, Wis., will no longer allow Gideons International to unlawfully distribute bibles on public property, thanks to FFRF's vigilance.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt sent an advisory letter March 22 to UW Hospital President and CEO Donna Katen-Bahensky: "Permitting members of the Gideons or other bible distribution organizations the privilege of passing out their religious literature in the entrance of a state-run hospital constitutes blatant state endorsement of these Christian publications."

A local complainant noted that security officers regulated the area in question, but claimed they were unable to take any action because it was in "a public space," even though it was by the main hospital entrance. Many of the security officers stated that "they were getting a lot of complaints" and admitted being upset about the situation.

Katen-Bahensky sent a positive reply April 9: "In reeducating our Security Department on the nonsolicitation policy earlier this year, we did discover that there had been some confusion with respect to the Gideons, but that confusion has been clarified. All solicitors, including members of the Gideons, will be asked to leave the area if they are soliciting there."

FFRF had protested the practice on behalf of patients, families and staff for many years.

#### FFRF to Ga. judge: Send aid, not bibles

A judge in Douglasville, Ga., was ordered to stop using county resources to promote Christianity after Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt sent a complaint letter April 13. Magistrate Court Judge Barbara Caldwell was soliciting donations of new and used bibles in the county newsletter and collecting bibles at the courthouse.

An aide to the chief magistrate promptly responded to Schmitt and confirmed that bibles will no longer be accepted at or delivered to the courthouse. She added that there will be no more newsletter bible ads.

#### 'Homeboy' Jesus loses N. Carolina homeroom

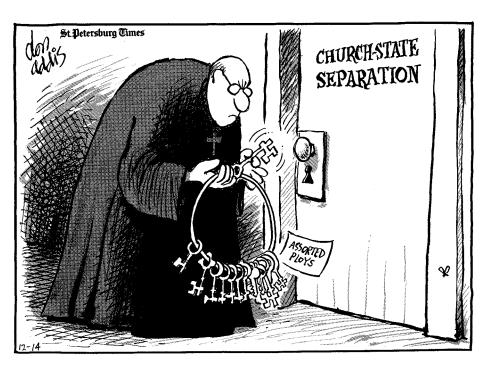
An eighth-grade teacher at Starmount Middle School in Booneville, N.C., will no longer proselytize to her students. The teacher said in class that "God is the only creator of the universe," and "Evolution is not allowed to be considered." She also used skeletons adorned with T-shirts as teaching aids, including shirts that said "Jesus is my Homeboy" and "Mary is my Homegirl."

The Secular Student Alliance sent two emails to the teacher, asking for the removal of the offensive shirts. A third email went out to the school principal but garnered no response. FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert intervened on Feb. 28: "Public schools are prohibited from teaching creationism or 'intelligent design.' Courts have routinely found that such teachings are religious and unconstitutional."

In a March 8 reply, Superintendent L. Stewart Hobbs confirmed that the shirts had been removed.

## FFRF 'deletes' biblical emails in Georgia

Inappropriate use of employee email at the Harris County School District in Hamilton, Ga., ended after FFRF's involvement. The school district allowed "principals and other leadership staff to send emails to their subordinates which include bible pas-



sages.'

One correspondence took place between an elementary school principal and the district's director of transportation. The emails contained "relevant" bible passages intended to "guide" the recipient.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote to Superintendent Craig Dowling on March 15: "No public school employee may urge religious points of view on students, parents, or employees. This includes bible verses and talking about 'following God.'"

Dowling responded March 23: "The Harris County School District will take such action as it deems appropriate regarding such communications to fulfill its responsibilities to avoid the advancement of religion and remain neutral in respect thereto."

## Mandatory school staff prayer is stopped

The Wichita Falls [Texas] Independent School District has barred sectarian prayer at mandatory staff events. The district held its August convocation at the First Baptist Church. Local complainants told FFRF that School Board President Reginald Blow delivered the sectarian prayer "in Jesus' name" at the mandatory meeting.

FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote three complaint letters, starting last August, before Superintendent George Kazanas answered March 7 that "future convocations will not include a prayer."

## 'Faith & Family Day' ousted at Ohio college



FFRF informed a Cleveland university that faith does not mean family Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio, sponsored "Faith & Family Day" on Jan. 7 during a men's basketball game. It was promoted with a logo featuring several Christian crosses.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to CSU President Ronald Berkman on March 13 about the inappropriate religious endorsement. The school responded March 26: "Immediately upon being notified of this, all posters, fliers and marquee messages within the Wolstein Center were removed [and] appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that there will not be any future advertisements or promotional events sponsored by the university that will in any way suggest that the university endorses religion or any religious preference."

## 'Pagans' remove Gideon bibles from Hagan

Hagan Elementary School in Williston, N.D., will no longer permit representatives of Gideons International to distribute bibles to students.

In a letter of complaint to Superintendent Viola LaFontaine, Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt took issue with fifth-grade students getting bibles. Students returning one day from music class found bibles on each of their desks. The teacher then led the class in a discussion of the bible.

Schmitt wrote that Williston Schools may not allow Gideons or any other religious group to enter school property to distribute religious literature, or to engage in bible discussions.

In an April 9 response, LaFontaine wrote, "Please be assured this will not happen again and bibles will not be distributed in any of the Williston Public School District #1 Schools."

## FFRF stills Kentucky loudspeaker prayer

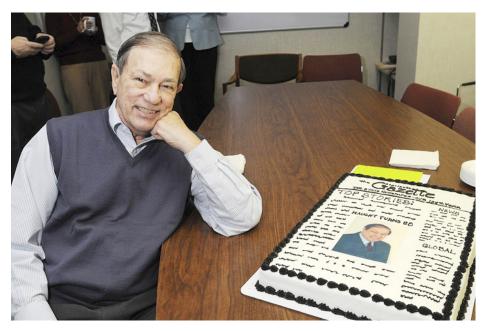
FFRF stopped a preacher from delivering pregame basketball prayer over the loudspeaker March 6 at Madisonville-North Hopkins High School in Madisonville, Ky. A local complainant informed FFRF about the pastor's Christian prayer, which was allowed even though the school was warned last fall about it.

FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor sent a statewide memorandum to all Kentucky superintendents prior to the 2011 athletic season. Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert followed up with Superintendent James Stevens in a March 12 letter: "As was made clear last fall, it is illegal for a public school to organize, sponsor and lead prayers at public high school athletic events."

A school district attorney responded March 20: "We appreciate your reiterating [the law] and we have taken steps to ensure compliance with federal law on this issue." The district directed Stevens to address the issue with all principals and administrators to ensure compliance.

Page 10 Freethought Today Madison, Wisconsin May 2012

## Religion's bucket leaks like a sieve



The day Jim Haught turned 80 in March, @gazette\_opinion tweeted, "Just had cake for Gazette Editor Jim Haught, who is 80 today. He said he became a reporter back in '53 to get girls."

This essay by longtime Charleston [W.V.] Gazette Editor James Haught, a FFRF member, is part of an upcoming book edited by John W. Loftus titled "Christianity Is Not Great."

#### By James A. Haught

he worst aspect of Christianity is that it makes no sense, and most of its 2.2 billion believers around the planet cannot see the illogic. Let me explain:

More than any other faith, Christianity teaches that an all-loving, all-merciful, all-powerful, benevolent father-creator made the universe and everything it contains. Ministers focus on God's special fatherly love for his favorites: people.

But if a supernatural spirit made everything, he also made breast cancer that kills women, leukemia that ravages children, brain tumors, malaria, tapeworms, spina bifida, Down syndrome, flesh-eating bacteria and many other torments that sicken or kill his human offspring. Further, he must have made tornados, earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanoes, floods and sundry disasters that mangle and maim great masses of people. Remember the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that drowned 200,000, mostly children? Did "our father which art in heaven" just watch as a spectator?

How many desperate parents pray fervently for God to save their cancerstricken children — to no avail? Their anguished hopes find only silence.

In addition to this cruelty toward people, the animal kingdom that the loving creator supposedly made — "every living creature that moveth" — is a hell of killing and eating. Tennyson wrote of "nature, red in tooth and claw." Did you know that rabbits scream when ripped by a fox's fangs? I heard it once, and I still feel my shudder. Also, with my grandchildren, I put corn in trees for squirrels, until a hawk swooped away with a muncher.

Mark Twain wrote: "The spider kills the fly, and eats it; the bird kills the spider, and eats it; the wildcat kills the goose; the — well, they all kill each other. It is murder all along the line."

Charles Templeton, a brilliant Canadian evangelist who toured with Billy Graham, later lost his faith and denounced the absurdity of believing

in a kindly father-creator. Here's his observation:

"All life is predicated on death. Every carnivorous creature must kill and devour another creature. It has no option. . . . Why does God's grand design require creatures with teeth designed to crush spines and rend flesh, claws fashioned to seize and tear, venom to paralyze, mouths to suck blood, coils to constrict and smother — even expandable jaws so that prey may be swallowed whole and alive? . . . Life is a carnival of blood. . . . How could a loving and omnipotent god create such horrors?"

Some insects even plant their eggs inside others, so the hatching offspring can devour the hosts alive, from within. If a mighty Intelligent Designer devised all these things, he's a monster, not a merciful father. No human would be so cruel. Why would anyone worship such a vicious creator, and insist that the heavenly father is Pure Love? See what I mean about illogic?

Rationality doesn't rule out a malicious, sadistic creator-god, but it definitely scuttles the possibility of a merciful one. In philosophy, this inescapable conclusion is called the "problem of evil." It was first articulated 24 centuries ago by Epicurus in ancient Greece.

Ever since, holy men have twisted themselves into pretzels trying to concoct rebuttals that hold water, but they all leak. A successful rebuttal is impossible. Instead of trying to warp reality to fit theology, a wise person concludes that there is only one believable answer: An all-loving, all-powerful fathercreator cannot exist. Nature alone wrought the world's evils.

#### Freud explains religion

Christianity is illogical in various other ways. Consider these:

- The bewildering dogma of the Trinity says father, son and holy ghost are separate, yet the same being, and all three have existed eternally. Does this mean that Jesus impregnated his own virgin mother, causing himself to be born?
- Homo sapiens sapiens has existed in fully modern form for perhaps 100,000 years, more than 3,000 generations. But Christianity has existed only 2,000 years. Some churches say Jesus is the only conduit to heaven. So what happened to the 2,940 generations of peo-

# An all-loving, all-powerful father-creator cannot exist.

ple who died in the preceding 98,000 years? Posthumously, were the "saved" among them declared retroactive Christians?

- Hundreds of past gods and religions have vanished, such as the Aztec faith, whose priests sacrificed victims to an invisible feathered serpent. Are Christianity's three gods (or one) less perishable?
- Many Christian end-of-the-world predictions, including one in 2011 by an American evangelist, proved false. New predictions undoubtedly will emerge, and be just as silly.
- No scientific evidence supports any of the church's miracle claims. The only supposed proofs are ancient writings similar to mythology tales.
- It's often asserted that Christianity makes people better. If so, why do hundreds of priests and evangelists molest children and commit other "black-collar crimes"? And why did believers inflict centuries of faith-based killings in Crusades, witch hunts, the Inquisition, Reformation wars, pogroms against Jews, drowning of Anabaptists, etc.?
- Most of the brightest thinkers throughout Western history philosophers, scientists, writers, democracy reformers and other "greats" have doubted the church's supernatural claims. Current skeptics stand alongside those towering minds.

In the face of such evidence, why does much of humanity still believe in a father-god? Sigmund Freud saw a clear explanation, as follows:

Tiny tots see a huge father looming over them, loving them, punishing them, protecting them. The image embeds in the infantile subconscious. Years later, when their biological father has lost his awesome majesty, they're told that an invisible, divine father looms over them, loving them, punishing them, protecting them. Bingo — the buried subconscious image makes the god claim seems true.

"The god-creator is openly called Father," Freud wrote. "Psychoanalysis concludes that he really is the father, clothed in the grandeur in which he once appeared to the small child. The religious man. . . looks back on the memory-image of the overrated father of his childhood, exalts it into a deity, and brings it into the present and into reality. The emotional strength of this memory-image and the lasting nature of his need for protection are the two supports for his belief in God."

When all evidence and knowledge are tallied, thinking people should reach the inevitable conclusion that all gods, devils, heavens, hells, angels, demons, miracles, saviors and other supernatural entities are just fairy tales — fantasies that grew in the fertile human imagination.

Evangelist-turned-skeptic Charles Templeton ended his book, *Farewell to God*:

"I believe there is no supreme being with human attributes — no god in the biblical sense — but that all life is the result of timeless evolutionary forces. . . . I believe that, in common with all living creatures, we die and cease to exist."

An honest person can reach no other conclusion.

# Yahoo! Answers: How to save your child from atheism

Yahoo! Answers lets readers online ask questions which other readers respond to.

Q. What is the best way to stop your child from becoming an athiest [sic]? I don't want any of my children to be punished by God.

A. David M.:

Do not educate them, or expose them to critical thinking, logic or science. Lie to them constantly about how the world works. Feed them a steady diet of mumbo-jumbo dressed up like real knowledge — the [creationist] jumbo jet in the whirlwind, for example — and pretend that it is deep wisdom.

Make them loathe their own natural bodies and functions. Convince them they are small and weak and worthless and need redemption. Tell them everything enjoyable is grievously wrong to even think about, and that their only fun should be in grovelling to an invisible friend.

Ensure that they resent anyone who is not like them in every way — skin color, nationality, political opinion but especially creed. Make such

people out to be evil and vile and give them — impotent minorities all — the fictional power to somehow oppress and persecute the vast majority who do think like you.

Teach them to laugh at and dismiss out of hand any faith but their own. Early — early mind you — make sure they are taught the difference between superstitious deadly error — that one raving lunatic in the desert told the truth about a vicious god who killed people, and divine eternal truth — that another raving lunatic in the desert told the truth about a vicious god who killed people.

Instruct them with all severity and import to never question for themselves — to never think for themselves — to never live for themselves — but to seek answers only in one — just one — particular set of semiliterate Bronze Age folk tales.

Above all, and this cannot be overemphasized, make sure they cannot spell, use correct grammar or understand basic English words.

That should do the trick.



## Raleigh Day of Reason

The Triangle Freethought Society, a lively chapter of FFRF based in Raleigh, N.C., displaced the usual Day of Prayer crowd at the State Capitol on the National Day of Prayer for the second consecutive year by receiving a permit to hold a Day of Reason rally on May 3. Among the speakers was Dan Barker, FFRF copresident, who also performed freethought tunes with a local band. Dan also spoke to freethought clubs at North Carolina State University, North Carolina Central University, the Wilmington-Cape Fear Humanists and at chapter social events. Dan thanks his hosts Robin and Dan Wascher and chapter director Harry and Charlotte Shaughnessy.

## Pennsylvania freethinkers



Dan Barker participated in a "Religious liberals meet the nonreligious" panel discussion April 29 at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in State College, Pa. From left are organizer Chuck Berry, director of FFRF's Nittany Freethought chapter; Coqui Conkey, interim pastor at Faith United Church of Christ; Dan Barker; Rev. Mark Hayes, minister of the UU Fellowship; and Bob Seibel, retired professor of cognitive psychology and philosophy of science.



A Penn State campus freethought parade stopped outside the football stadium by the statue of the late head coach Joe Paterno, whose legacy was tarnished when it was revealed how the program had covered up sexual abuse by an assistant coach for years. (Dave DeGroote photo)



Declare and share *your* nonbelief in FFRF's online "Out of the Closet" campaign! ffrf.org/out



#### Starke reality

FFRF sent a letter of complaint May 14 to the Bradford County Commission in Starke, Fla., about the new Ten Commandments monument at the courthouse. That it was donated by a private party doesn't make it legal, wrote Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott. During the unveiling and dedication May 3 on the National Day of Prayer, James Jones intoned, "Lord, most of all I thank you for looking beyond all our faults and allowing our time to go on, because it's not by what we done [sic] and it's not about the amount of money we have in the bank and it's not about our education. It's all about what you done [sic] one Friday afternoon on a place called Calvary — where you allowed them to hang you high and stretch you wide."

## Ask a skeptic

# White cover worked fine for The Beatles

Why is the FFRF publication concealed or shrouded in a plain white cover? What are we trying to hide? What is the reason, merit or necessity for your present policy? Might a plan for an interesting, provocative cover promote attention to FFRF and be an advantage to our cause?

— Hugh in Washington state
Thanks for writing. We hear similar comments from others. However, a lot of members, particularly in small towns, don't want to be "out." And actually, you're only being outed to Postal Service personnel. Freethought Today is sent in a wrap, as are most smaller periodicals such as weekly newspapers, for several other reasons:

1) It protects paper. You'll notice the inner newspaper doesn't arrive messy or torn (we hope). Freethought Today

is necessarily sent third-class bulk rate, which takes from one to four weeks to get there, so it gets a lot of handling before delivery.

2) You'll notice the outside of the wrap has your label, barcode and mailing permit number. These must go in a particular spot now, thanks to changing postal regulations. Putting this information on the front of the paper would look unattractive on Page 1 and diminish space, which is already at a premium for our 10 issues a year.

3) The wrap is a bonus for members. We're able to run the monthly calendar of famous freethinkers and additional itmes like recipes and ads we hope readers will clip and send to schools to publicize our student essay competitions and other events.

Page 12 Freethought Today Madison, Wisconsin May 2012

## Marquee: 'You Are Toast!' without Jesus

By Danny B. Crockarell



hile traveling back and forth on U.S. 70 from Lebanon, Tenn., to Nashville each day, I can't help but notice the many church signs

along this stretch of road speaking silently to passersby. Most of the time they are benign sources of information — silly, antiquated and sometimes amusing forms of "church marketing."

Reference to the "F-word" as Forgiveness is common, along with wordplay like, "If you think life stinks, come in and sit on one of our PEE-EWWS." Another warned against "Opening Our Minds Too Much Lest Our Heads Fall Through." And, "If You Do Not Have the Bread of Life — You Are Toast!"

Socrates taught us about 2,500 years ago that life's greatest endeavor is the search for knowledge, while never making the mistake of thinking you have all the answers. An open mind, though not a sufficient condition for this, would certainly be a necessary one. To suggest otherwise to anyone, especially children, is abusive.

I recall a prominent church in Mt. Juliet about 15 years ago gathering all the kids on the grounds and burning old, sinister and devilish Chicago and Three Dog Night albums. What next? Books?

I think to suggest that "You Are Toast" means you're about to face the schoolyard bully or be destroyed completely in some painful way. I know exactly what this bullying preacher meant, and so does anyone reading

this: deserving of eternal torture by burning in hell. Most of us driving along this road would not be in that category.

Jesus is said to have suggested avoiding anything that might cause someone else to stumble. The pastor's response to my subsequent inquiry and suggestion that he may be running people off instead of drawing them into church was a very terse, "I have to witness."

I have patients whom I consider dear friends who certainly must represent many different beliefs, whether Christian, Jew, Jewish-Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu or "spiritual." I have agnostic and atheist patients. I would never want to see any one of them hurt or discriminated against because their belief system was different from mine or anyone else's.

Logically, they can't all be true, but certainly the most difficult position to defend is that only one of them is. That sort of dogma frightens me most when I think about the ultimate religious war fought on the fatuous, naive, battleground of the tenacious willingness to proclaim "one true religion."

Some signs indicate a new level of tolerance and willingness to try to understand each other's differences. I'm fairly certain that Franklin, Jefferson and Paine understood freedom *of* religion as one of the most important foundations of America. "You Are Toast" makes me yearn for freedom *from* religion. Freud probably described it best

in *The Future of an Illusion*. I highly recommend it for the pastor of the "Toast" church.

Finally, I think it should be at least considered that all of this — from signs or marquees, whether silly or amusing or profane and threatening, to histrionic displays such as the three men "crucified" on telephone poles on Good Friday in the 5 o'clock traffic on Route 70 — seems to be taking on a carnival atmosphere.

I have to ask: Wouldn't the contemplation of something as central and important in one's life as the concepts of "God and Ultimate Reality" be deserving of more respect, dignity and even, awe?

When I was in college the "Honk if you love Jesus" bumper stickers were very popular. I'll never forget when my music theory professor, Dr. Howard, was asked his opinion of them. "Why, I just don't think Jesus would appreciate all the noise!" he said tersely.

Maybe that's why the gospel writers appear to agree on one thing, that Jesus was always "going to a quiet place."

FFRF member Danny Crockarell has practiced dentistry in a Nashville suburb for 28 years. "It's not easy being an atheist in the bible belt, and I feel like I'm always on the edge in my practice. Last year in response to more 'marquee madness' than I could take, as well as a Good Friday display that almost caused several car wrecks, I decided to write about the phenomenon described above."



## 'Is this not the carpenter?' (Mark 6:3)

"I'm not sure whether the damage to this sign was due to vandalism or an act of god," writes Robin Hamilton-Pennell about this Baptist church sign in Portland, Ore., "but I find the latter far more amusing."



#### Officer, arrest this sign

Ronald Spikloser, Maryland, asks about this sign for a church near Baltimore, "They not only don't know the Constitution, but aren't churches supposed to stay out of politics because they're tax-exempt?"



#### You snooze, you lose

Tony Rush, Alabama, spotted this warning in Dothan. A word to the wise: "And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man."



#### A word to the wise

"Finally, religion comes with a warning label," writes an Iowan wanting anonymity.



#### Clear as mud

Hal Webre spotted this sign in northwest Florida and writes: "Coincidentally, the day after I sent you this, I was listening to one of my favorite podcasts, 'The Bible Geek,' with Robert M. Price, when he mentioned the quotation on the marquee. It turns out to be from Mark 9:24. At first I was slightly embarrassed that I didn't recognize it earlier as scripture and had assumed it was the bewildering coinage of the pastor. Then I thought, 'It comes from the bible, it's no surprise that it doesn't make any sense to me.' "



#### What will I wear?

And what better spot than outside Tractor Supply Co., where she will be beating swords into ploughshares? Gary Grant photographed this scene off Interstate 30 in Little Rock, Ark.



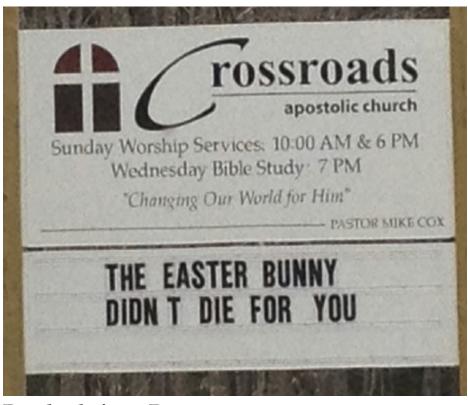
## You don't say?

This angel all in white showed up after an earthquake, told you the body of the man they killed Friday is gone without a trace, but he isn't dead anymore? Hmmm. Scott Putty and Carolyn Meehan, on their way to meet up with the Metroplex Atheists near Dallas, couldn't help but see double trouble on a Granbury marquee.



## 'Out' but not 'of shape'

Bill Smythe, Oregon, wears his Friendly Neighborhood Atheist T-shirt at a rest stop at a Christian retreat center on the Portland Century 100-mile bike ride in August. He says he got a lot of smiles at rest stops and supportive comments. "I appreciate that you have in the guts to wear that," one rider told him. Several people asked if he reads the bible. "My standard reply was, 'Yes, that's how I became an atheist.'"



## **But he brings Peeps**

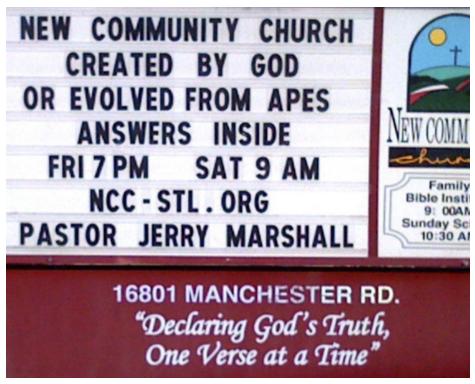
"I thought you would enjoy adding this to your gallery of inappropriate church signs," writes Amy Tan, Maine.

# Marquee Madness



#### Fade to black

Jerry Agin, Pennsylvania, writes about this church in Pittsburgh: "Darkness and light are obvious metaphors for ignorance and knowledge. The sign may be paraphrased, 'I'd rather defend my religion than seek the truth.'"



## Feel itchy in these pews

"The first thing that came to mind was, BUZZZZZ — wrong answer, Jerry," says John C. Walter. The church is in Grover, Mo.

Page 14 Freethought Today Madison, Wisconsin May 2012

## In the News

## Gay rights fight: Win some, lose some

North Carolina voters approved a constitutional amendment May 8 to ban gay marriage, which was already illegal by statute. Of the 2.1 million votes, 61% favored and 39% opposed the amendment. It adds two sentences to the section on marriage:

"Marriage between one man and one woman is the only domestic legal union that shall be valid or recognized in this State. This section does not prohibit a private party from entering into contracts with another private party; nor does this section prohibit courts from adjudicating the rights of private parties pursuant to such contracts."

Churches were very involved in the election, with the vast majority opposed to same-sex marriage. Patrick Wooden, a black Pentecostal pastor in Raleigh, denounced Barack Obama from the pulpit for being "in support of sin" a few days after the amendment passed and Obama came out publicly for equal marriage rights for gays.

The LGBT issue is dividing congregations and denominations around the U.S. United Methodists voted in May to uphold a ban on ordaining gay ministers.

In Colorado, a civil unions bill opposed by most churches was killed 5-4 in committee May 14 after the governor called a special session to deal with the bill that Republicans had filibustered in regular session.

Also on May 14, Rhode Island Gov. Lincoln Chafee signed an executive order declaring the state will recognize same-sex marriages performed elsewhere, giving gay couples the same rights as heterosexual ones.

## In Arizona, Pius X trumps Title IX

Paige Sultzbach, 15, is the only girl on her Mesa, Ariz., baseball team. A team from Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic School in Phoenix forfeited the championship game to Mesa on May 10 rather than face a female player.

Paige sat out two earlier games against the Catholic team but refused to miss the championship game.

The school said in a statement that "proper boundaries can only be respected with difficulty" in co-ed sports. The ultra-conservative Society of Saint Pius X operates Our Lady of Sorrows.

## Study: Church scams total \$35 billion

The Wall Street Journal reported May 7 that of the \$569 billion that churchgoers and others are expected to donate to Christian causes worldwide in 2012, about \$35 billion or 6% of the total will end up in the hands of "money launderers, embezzlers, tax evaders or unscrupulous ministers living too high on the hog." The articles cites a study by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass.

The article notes that churches aren't required to file IRS Form 990 that other 501(c)(3) nonprofits must file. [FFRF does file the 990, which makes its financial operation transparent for donors and the public.]

## Study: 'Modest' decline in religious belief

A recent study by University of Chicago sociologist Tom Smith, "Beliefs about God across Time and Countries," summarized May 14 in Foreign Policy, looked at "belief in God" in 30 countries between 1991 and 2008. Citizens of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany) had the highest rate of atheism at 52%.

Nations with high numbers of non-believers: The Czech Republic, 40%; France, 23%; the Netherlands, 20%; and Sweden, 19%.

The most religious country in the survey was the Philippines, where 84% are sure God exists. In the U.S., 61% are sure of the existence of God. The study concludes, "Belief in God has decreased in most countries, but the declines are quite modest."

## Judge Roy Moore back to high court?

Roy Moore, the former Alabama Supreme Court chief justice famous for a 5,000-pound Ten Commandments monument, won 50.14% of the Republican primary vote in March and will face a Democrat in November in the race for Supreme Court chief justice. Moore, 65, held the job in 2001-03 but was forced out when he defied a federal order to remove the monument in the rotunda in the Judicial Building in Montgomery.

A nine-member judicial ethics panel voted unanimously to remove Moore from office for flouting the order.

"Roy Moore is a walking, talking argument against judicial elections," Alex Koppelman wrote March 14 in The New Yorker.

## Compassion motivates nonbelievers more

A new study from the University of California-Berkeley shows "highly religious people are less motivated by compassion to show generosity than are nonbelievers."

The results challenge a widespread assumption that acts of charity are largely driven by feelings of empathy and compassion, researchers said.

Social psychologist and study coauthor Robb Willer said, "Overall, we find that for less religious people, the strength of their emotional connection to another person is critical to whether they will help that person or not. The more religious, on the other hand, may ground their generosity less in emotion, and more in other factors such as doctrine, a communal identity or reputational concerns."

## Singer's fans go gaga, Islamic groups don't

Reuters reported that pop star Lady Gaga has been banned from performing as scheduled June 3 in Jakarta, Indonesia, because of objections by Islamic groups about her "vulgar" style.

While Indonesia is officially a secular state, it has the world's largest Muslim population.

"She's a vulgar singer who wears only panties and a bra when she sings, and she stated she is the envoy of the devil's child and that she will spread satanic teaching," said Salim Alatas of the Islamic Defender Front.

More than 30,000 tickets had been sold, ranging in price from 465,000 rupiah (\$50.35) to 2.25 million rupiah (\$240).

## Study: Churches too involved with politics

A Pew Forum poll conducted March 7-11 asked, "Should churches and other houses of worship keep out of political matters or should they express their views on day-to-day social and political matters?"

Results: Keep out, 54%; express views, 40%

Another poll statement: "There has been too much expression of religious faith and prayer by political leaders."

Nearly half of Democrats (46%), 24% of Republicans and 42% of independents said there's been too much discussion.

## Oregon couple charged in son's death

Brandi and Russel Bellew, Creswell, Ore., are charged with second-degree manslaughter in the December death of Austin Sprout, 16, of an "undisclosed treatable ailment." The family attends the General Assembly and the Church of the First Born, which puts prayer over medical care. Both of the Bellew's previous spouses died at young ages, as did two of Russel Bellew's children from his first marriage, according to a story in the Eugene Register-Guard.

Six of the couple's children were made wards of the state April 16 while they await trial.

## Egyptian, 17, sentenced for mocking Islam

An Egyptian court sentenced a 17-year-old Christian boy to three years in jail April 4 for publishing cartoons on his Facebook page that mocked Islam and the prophet Muhammad. Gamal Abdou Massoud was also accused of distributing his cartoons to friends in the city of Assiut.

About 10% of Egypt's population of 80 million are Christians.

## 'Monkey bill enacted in Tennessee'

Tennessee joined Louisiana April 10 as the second state to authorize teachers to "teach the controversy" about evolution and global warming. The Tennessee bill became law without Gov. Bill Haslam's signature. Haslam refused to veto the bill, which he called flawed: "Good legislation should bring clarity and not confusion."

The National Center for Science Education headlined the story on its website as "Monkey bill enacted in Tennessee."

"Telling students that evolution and climate change are scientifically controversial is miseducating them," said Eugenie Scott, the group's executive director

## Florida robber made his victim pray

Tampa Bay Online reported April 13 that a robber made his victim, a pizza delivery driver, pray while he pointed a gun at him and took \$100, according to sheriff's deputies in Manatee County, Fla.

The robber made the victim lay on the ground. Then the robber said a prayer and made the victim repeat the prayer.

## Actor dies portraying Judas' suicide

Tiago Klimeck, 27, died on Easter Sunday from accidental hanging while reenacting the suicide of Judas on Good Friday in Itarare, Brazil. Klimeck was hanging for about four minutes before fellow performers realized something was wrong.

## Faith-healing case to Wis. high court

A Wisconsin state appeals court has asked the state Supreme Court to decide if jurors wrongly convicted Dale and Leilani Neumann for the 2008 death of their daughter, Kara, 11, of undiagnosed diabetes. The couple prayed but sought no medical help.

"We submit that it is appropriate for Wisconsin's highest court to determine the scope of the prayer treatment exception and to inform trial courts regarding the appropriate jury instructions when the exception is raised in a reckless homicide case," said the May 1 ruling from the Wausau-based Third District Court of Appeals.

The parents were sentenced to six months in jail, 10 years' probation and 120 hours of community service, with the jail terms stayed pending appeals.

#### 'Wasted Without Jesus' shirt roils school

William Swinimer, a high school student in Chester Basin, Nova Scotia, was suspended for five days for wearing a shirt that said "Life Is Wasted Without Jesus" and for repeatedly proselytizing schoolmates. When he returned May 7, reported the Halifax Chronicle Herald, students held a forum to discuss religious beliefs and freedom of speech.

William was unable to participate though, because his father came to school waving the bible at media and took William home. "He will not attend this school unless they are having readin', writin' and 'rithmetic, good old-fashioned academics. When they're having forums, when they're having other extracurricular activities, he will not attend that school."

Judith Sullivan-Corney, School Board chairwoman, said she could not discuss all the issues involved due to confidentiality. "Unfortunately, it all became about the T-shirt."

Riley Gibb-Smith, 15, said, "This thing never was about a shirt. He's telling kids they'll burn in hell if they don't confess themselves to Jesus."

#### Overheard

There is no nice way of saying it. Our [ultra-Orthodox Jewish] community protects molesters. Other than that, we are wonderful.

Pearl Engelman, whose great-grandson reported he was molested as a child at the United Talmudical Academy, which allowed the alleged perpetrator to return to teaching

New York Times, 5-10-12

## Rhode Island prayer banner decision appealed

The Associated Press reported May 14 that seven people are plaintiffs in an appeal of a federal judge's decision ordering removal of the prayer banner from Cranston West High School in Rhode Island. Three are Cranston West students, three are graduates and one is from North Providence.

The Cranston School Committee has agreed to pay half the \$150,000 legal costs the city was ordered to pay the ACLU, which represented Jessica Ahlquist, the student who contested the banner in her school auditorium. She's received a student activist award and \$10,000 from FFRF.

Superintendent Peter Nero said the banner, which was glued to the wall, was removed March 3 at a cost of about \$2,500 and is stored in an undisclosed location. It took 11 hours to sandwich it between two plywood boards and carve around the boards to extract a 4-foot by 8-foot slab of sheetrock.

Jessica and her family are still being threatened. She made public a letter she received in April:

"The cops will not watch you forever. We will get you good. Tell your little asshole sister to watch her back. There are many of us, 'Crusaders,' we have a better [sic] pool going to see who gets you first! Your fuckin old man better move or keep you locked up if you know whats good for you. We know where he works, what kind of cars you have + the plate numbers of the cars. Get the fuck out of R.I. you bitchin whore. You are nothing more than a sex-toy of a slut. Maybe you will gang-banged before we throw you out of one of our cars. WE WILL GET YOU — LOOK OUT!"

## Arizona religious bills signed into law

Ariz. Gov. Jan Brewer signed a bill May 11 to let religiously affiliated employers exempt contraceptive services from employees' health insurance plans. The new law will apply exclusively to those entities whose religious beliefs are central to their operating principles, and for whom providing coverage for contraception could pose a moral conflict or religious objection.

The law expands the definition of a "religiously affiliated employer" to include any organization whose articles

of incorporation explicitly state a religious purpose, and whose religious beliefs play a fundamental role in its function.

Brewer also announced she has signed a bill that expands the "conscience clause" so that pharmacists, physicians and other health care workers won't lose their professional licenses for denying services on religious grounds.

The Associated Press reported that proponents admit there are no known incidents of "faith-based discipline" in Arizona. Republican Sen. Steve Yarbrough, bill sponsor, said it's "fundamentally wrong" that if "you don't affirm the particular lifestyle, then your license is going to be at risk."

[Editor's note: Yarbrough must believe that women having reproductive choice, even in cases of rape or incest, is a "lifestyle."]

Brewer signed a bill into law April 17 to let public high schools offer an elective bible course called "The Bible and Its Influence on Western Culture." Guidelines say the course must address the influence of the bible on laws, history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values and culture.

Arizona is the sixth state to allow such a course.

## Georgians can choose plates praising God

Nontheists will subsidize believers starting July 1 in Georgia, when new license plates with an "In God We Trust" option become available.

All plates are being replaced by a new design. The free "In God We Trust" sticker replaces the county of residence designation.

## Kansas board shies from sectarian prayer

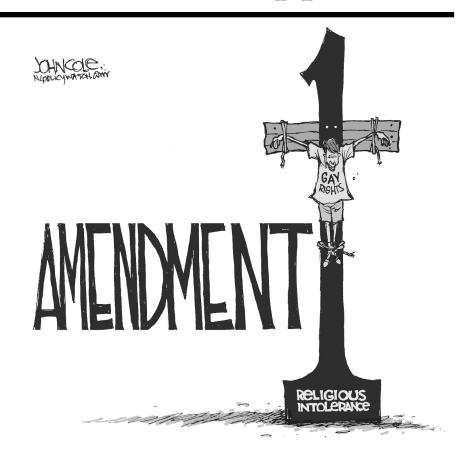
The Reno County Commission, Hutchinson, Kan., directed legal staff to draft a new prayer policy despite pleas to continue a long tradition of mostly Christian prayer to open meeting, the Hutchinson News reported May 8

The board agreed to seek clergy to offer nonsectarian prayers, but if no one is available, to ask for a moment



## Mirthful Montana myth

Each Good Friday, the Miles City Ministerial Association sponsors "Walk With the Cross," during which Christians gather at a church at one end of Main Street and march a large wooden cross to Riverside Park at the other end of the street. A service is held and the cross is planted in the public park for Easter weekend. FFRF member Kelly Thibault has protested with an FFRF banner in the past, and this year was no different. Thank you, Kelly!



of silence of have a commissioner lead the prayer.

## Florida board allows adult-led prayer

The Clay County School Board, Green Cove Springs, Fla., voted 3-2 on April 19 to allow prayer on school grounds by outside groups. First Coast News reported that all adults must give name, address and birth date 10 days in advance so a background check can be done. Prayers have to end 30 minutes before the school bell. The organizer has to provide insurance coverage for every person attending.

Pastor Ron Baker's insistence on praying on school grounds drove the new policy. Baker said he will hold prayer events one foot off school property every morning. FFRF had complained, prompting the school district to shoo Baker away. Then the district reneged.

"I was convinced from the beginning we'd find some unity in this to protect the rights of our students, who always have the right to have prayer at the school," said Superintendent Ben Wortham.

Noted FFRF Co-President Dan Barker: "This is predatory conduct involving adults praying at school as small children arrive."

## Parents 'privatize' so graduates can pray

Students and parents at Lakeview Public High School in Columbus, Neb., thumbed their noses at the Constitution again this year by opening and closing the May 13 graduation ceremony in the school gym with prayer.

ACLU of Nebraska has been contesting the prayers since 2001. To get around the law, graduations are organized and sponsored by parents, who rent the gym (\$150 this year). The printed program and an announcement said the graduation was "private" and "not sponsored by Lakeview Community Schools." Attendees were asked to stand for prayers.

"People who don't have religion, we respect them by not making them pray,

and then they can respect us by just sitting there in silence and they don't have to pray," senior Aysha Janssen told KTPM News.

## Mojave cross allowed back on mountain

The latest decision in an 11-year court battle over a Latin cross called the Mojave cross on federal land in the desert near Baker, Calif., came April 23. U.S. District Judge Robert Timlin signed an order allowing the cross to return to Sunrise Rock, where it was first placed in 1934 and branded as a war memorial.

The ACLU sued in 2001. After Congress in 2003 approved a sham "public for private" land swap with the pretense that the cross would no longer be on public land, the legal wrangling continued. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court in 2010, when a 5-4 decision said the cross could stay but sent it back to lower courts to review the land swap.

Timlin's order said the National Park Service will transfer the title for the one-acre public parcel the Barstow Veterans of Foreign Wars Post in exchange for five acres of donated land near Cima.

The Park Service will fence the site, with visitor access, and post signs saying it's private land. A plaque will say it's a veterans memorial.

#### Gideons get booted by Ontario school

Christian bibles and materials from all religious groups are banned in the Bluewater School District in Chesley, Ontario. The 8-3 vote by district trustees April 17 ended more 60 years of free bibles distributed by Gideons International to fifth-graders.

"We cannot include everyone's God, so we should not allow any," trustee Fran Morgan told the Owen Sound Sun Times.

"This is a secular school system," said trustee Marg Gaviller. "There are lots of other opportunities for people to get their bibles."

## Sharing the Crank Mail

A sampling of recent kudos received by FFRF from around the nation, original spelling and punctuation retained.

#### Love this site

Why dont you assholes get a fucking life and leave everybody alone with your bullshit agenda. FUCK YOU PRICKS !!! YOU CANT WIN !! Gordon Brown

#### **Athens Texas**

All you non beleivers are idots. There is a god and one day you will have to stand before him on judgement day. Perhaps you have not heard the phrase, (Don't mess with Texas). You come down here and we will kick your butts. -Captain Griffin, Scurry, Texas

#### come to ri please

Please come to Rhode Island and fuck with us personnaly, you bunch of fucking pansies, have to do shit by email, bring your silly asses to RI, we are waiting for ya - Bob Kennedy

#### bunch of fucking haters

I hope you all die and go to hell. - Joe Smith, Harmony, R.I.

#### The Warning

Prepare yourselves for the warning. You will be shocked when you see how satan has been controlling your minds. — Christina Castagnaro

#### ffr banner

I hope whoever did it burns it. - Richard Thorpe, Pasco, Wash.

#### i have a complaint

if you dont like religion then move to russia they are all athiasts but i am catholic and proud and trust me even the russians would not put up with you — Scott Weaver, Buffalo, N.Y.

#### burn in hell

deadened fucks keep your demonic shit to yourself degenerate fucking lowlifes - adzy

#### 10 Commandments

If you don't like it, look the other way. -Keith Piecka, New Kensington, Pennsylvania

#### **New Kensington**

i went to Valley an graduated in 2005. it wouldn't be Valley without it being in the original location! that it was put in. why go an change the location. why not worry about other things that is going on there other then the location of the commandments. — Amber Mascara (Kelly), picayune, Mississippi

#### Valley High School

THE PROBLEM TODAY IS WHEN THEY TOOK RELIGION OUT OF THE SCHOOLS THATS WHEN THE GUNS STARTED TO COME IN. - karen Burkey, New Castle

#### Get fucked

Get fucked commie bastards!!!!! - "Santa Claus"

#### You people are idiots

for trying to shut down the Chrim stian Religion. - Danny Lewis

#### In God We Trust

SO If you don't like it, get the Fuck out of this country you atheist communist assholes. GO FUCK YOURSELVES! Seriously drop dead you fucking maggots. — Gordon Gekko

#### **Your Awesome Website**

I'd like to donate \$0 to your worthless cause.

Seriously you are all fucking pathetic. You are all fucking clueless atheist communist fucking losers. Drop dead. - Jack Meoffer

#### Woonsocket FD

Ms. Market as well as the rest of you can wipe the asses God gave you with her letter. Keyword here fireFIGHTER. We are not little wimpy cowards who have nothing to do in their cubicals hiding behind their computers attempting to destroy this great nation. Go to Iran or Seria and play your games. — Alfred Cohol

#### [Conversation between FFRF staffer and unknown caller]

Q: Is this the organization trying to get the cross down in Rhode Island?

A: Yes sir, what can I do for you?

Q: We're going to take that cross down, and we're going to come to Wisconsin and shove that fucking cross up your fuckin asses you fuckin faggots.

It is obvious, this organization is actually an Islamic coverup, funding terrorist in the middle east. Why not just let us be & try to develop your own country,instead of just high-jacking one already built up? — James Tee

#### Woonsocekt

Friggin hethans ... or are you just communist puppets... be very careful what you wish for fools. - Brain O'Connor

#### **Woonsocket Memorial Cross**

You people are a bunch of disgusting fucksticks. Go fuck yourselves. — Brady Lynx

#### You Fucking Queer Lesbian Bastards.

What do we need to do to get rid of all of you as this nation is almost done. - Stu Gotz, Woonsocket, R.I.

#### Tennessee

You best keep your sorry butts away from Tennessee. We don't want you pigs here. You're nothing but a bunch of troublemakers — Dutch

#### In God We Trust

if you don't like it, drop dead you fucking communist atheist loser motherfuckers. Drew Peeballs

#### **Jesus Christ**

I love God becasue he is real and you would have to be brainless not to believe that. How can you be such an asshole. — Joe Decarlo

#### Mind your business

You bother me, maybe I should move to have you disbanded. Get out of Rhode Island. Donna Dumont

#### Christian nation

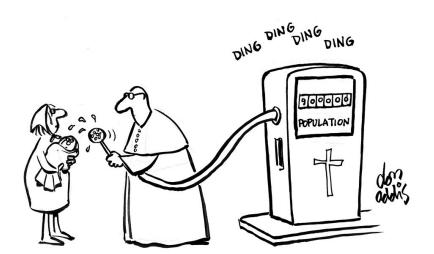
You 'people' should just continue to worship nothing and not worry about the rest of what everyone else thinks. In other words: SHUT THE FUCK UP! — fu

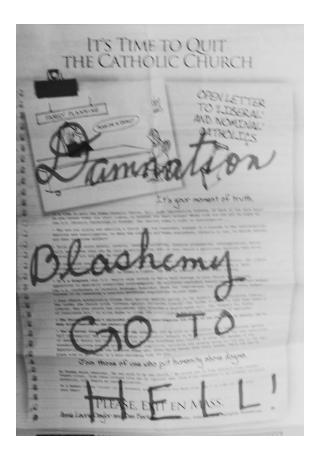
#### fox news

I watched on sunday and saw Annie Laurie Gaylor talking about the cross in woonsocket. All I can say is "I have finally seen a walking, talking cunt!' - Mike L

#### Veteran's Memorial in Rhode island

You only want your 5 minutes of fame (infamy) on TV and care nothing about Vets, or their sacrifices for freedoms, so you can run your stinking foul mouth against America. -Thanks, Bill





## **Overheard**

Don't just read verbatim the text on I don't think there's been anything a PowerPoint slide or merely describe an image being shown. "That's a totally naked man" adds no real informational value to the presentation. Tell us something about the naked man we don't know just from looking at his picture. Maybe he loves soccer, maybe he's a Freemason. Make him more than just another naked man who showed up mysteriously in your presentation. Otherwise the audience will end up in "PowerPoint Hell."

Columnist Chris Nerney, on an Irish priest whose photos of nude men were mistakenly shown to parents of children preparing for First Communion IT World, 4-30-12

Harbor of Light Publishing Releases Simple-Minded Guides for Bible Read-

Press release headline from Newnan, Ga., company on its Redneck's Guide

argstuff.com, 5-2-12

I am a victim of rape by a priest.

Megan Peterson, 22, speaking outside the Pastoral Center of the Diocese of Winona, Minn., about being raped at age 14 for 10 months by a Catholic priest who fled to India

Winona Daily News, 5-2-12

Obviously, there are millions of very smart and generally rational people great level of intolerance for people of who believe in God. Obviously, this study doesn't prove the nonexistence of God. But it poses a challenge to believers: If God exists, and if believing in God is perfectly rational, then why does increasing rational thinking tend to decrease belief in God?

#### Harvard University psychologist Joshua Greene

Scientific American, 4-26-12

Courtesy of Free Inquiry magazine

This service has a very right-wing bent, a born-again slant. It's not inclusive to any religion.

Paul Goleb, New Britain, Conn., an atheist protesting the National Day of Prayer event inside City Hall in Middletown, Conn.

Middletown Patch, 5-4-12

I've gotten a lot out of [the atheist] community. This is kind of a way for me to do something for the community that uses my skills and knowledge. done like this.

Bill Lehto, Farmington, Minn., who founded Freethought House to publish a collection of 35 essays by Minnesota atheists

Farmington Independent, 5-5-12

Residents of states that have laws banning gay marriage have 11% more porn subscribers than states that don't restrict gay marriage. I wonder what passage of the bible they twist around to rationalize that little hobby.

Syndicated columnist Lloyd Garver Springfield State Journal-Register, 5-10-12

Evidently Jesus was so filled with rage that he was speechless. I am confident he condemned [gay marriage] all the time in private, when he was hanging out with those other 12 dudes at their elaborate dinner parties, where they all sat on the same side of the table, just living the bachelor life together, drinking wine and working on their washboard abs.

Stephen Colbert, on being unable to find any words about homosexuality attributed to Jesus

"The Colbert Report," 5-10-12

The larger concern with secularism is that it damages people, and that it actually keeps people from being reasonable with one another. It creates a faith. I think secularism for Pope Benedict is a feature of this growing bifurcation between faith and reason.

#### Chad Pecknold, assistant professor of systematic theology, Catholic University of America

Catholic News Service, 4-20-12

Research scientists have proven that the miracles described in The Bible and in films like The Ten Commandments really DID occur, The ENQUIR-ER has learned!

News story, "Scientists: Bible Miracles Really Happened!"

National Enquirer, 4-5-12

He's an atheist like the rest of his party. They're all atheists.

Conservative pundit Ann Coulter, who also called President Obama "the jugeared lunkhead in the White House" in a speech at Missouri State University Springfield News-Leader, 4-11-12

## From a Baptist minister to atheist member

Name: John Senter Compere.

Where I live: Chandler, Ariz.

Where and when I was born: Ellisville, Miss., Oct. 17, 1934. When I tell people I grew up in Mississippi, I usually add, "Please don't hold that against me. I left as soon as I found out you could!"

Family: Joyce Compere, wife; Layne Starling, daughter; Virginia Starling, granddaughter; LouAnn Vaughn, daughter (husband Scott Vaughn); Padgett, Rachael and Sydney Vaughn, granddaughters; Lee Compere, son; Shelly Baldenegro, daughter (husband Art Baldenegro); Ashley and Lindsey Baldenegro, granddaughters.

Education: Central High School, Jackson, Miss., 1952; Mississippi College, Clinton, Miss., B.A. in English and history, 1956; Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., bachelor of divinity, 1961; School of Pastoral Care, Baptist Hospital, Winston-Salem, N.C., certificate in pastoral counseling, 1963; Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, M.A. in psychology, 1969; University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Ph.D. in clinical psychology, 1972; Jung Analytic Institute, Zurich, Switzerland, post-doctoral training in psychology, 1977.

Occupation: Clinical psychologist and professional speaker (retired).

Military service: During graduate school, I was a civilian auxiliary chaplain at a North Carolina Air Force radar station.

How I got where I am today: I was ordained at 18 and served as a student summer missionary in Alaska (1952, 1955). I was pastor at rural Baptist churches during college and youth minister at a campus church during seminary, then full-time pastor at two Baptist churches. I left the ministry in 1967 at age 32 and went back to gradu-

After receiving my Ph.D., I taught psychology at Wake Forest University, 1972-77 and maintained a private practice from 1972-89. I started speaking professionally in 1981 and still speak occasionally on my journey from fifthgeneration Southern Baptist minister to atheist.

Where I'm headed: I'm clearly headed where we all are headed, to the oblivion of death, for me, sooner than later. I do not fear it, though I cannot imagine not existing. Until then, I will continue trying to live each day to the fullest, with honesty and kindness to people and animals.

Person in history I admire: Nelson Mandela, a true statesman if ever there was one, and American Revolution-era writer Thomas Paine.

**A quotation I like:** "The world is my country. To do good is my religion." (Thomas Paine)

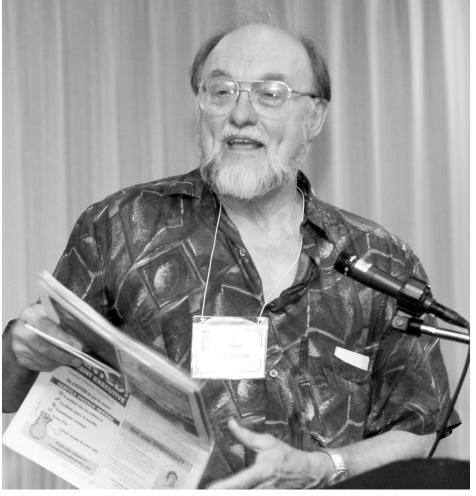
These are a few of my favorite things: Classical music (including good religious music), babies and young children, Yorkshire terriers, cats, wellwritten editorials, tennis, raquetball, cycling, seeing (or helping) someone live up to his/her potential, Low Country barbecue (vinegar-based sauce), well-delivered oratory, a poignant story, serious programs about cosmology.

These are not: Violence in movies or on TV, people talking loudly on cell phones in public, rap music, auto races, most conservative politicians.

My doubts about religion started: In my freshman year in college. I was already an ordained minister and was preparing to deliver a sermon in a large "First Baptist" church. Out of the blue, I found myself asking if there could possibly be such a thing as eternal punishment for finite "sins." I had not met or read or talked to anyone who challenged religion and had always taken what I learned in church as the absolute truth.

Once the questions began, I couldn't stop them. I continued in the ministry and the faith for 14 more years, before I admitted to myself that I no longer believed any of the dogma I had been taught and had been preaching. I knew many of my liberal minister friends had asked some of the same questions I was asking, but they had somehow been able to stay in the ministry, while casting doubt and joking in private about many of the faith-based tenets they were professing in public.

I had to leave the ministry to avoid doing that and becoming what I call



John Compere addresses the FFRF national convention in Seattle, Nov. 7, 2009.

## **My Ten Commandments**

- 1. Make no claims regarding ultimate truth.
- 2. Never enslave another human being.
- 3. Do not commit rape or any sexual aggression against a weaker
- 4. Do no violence, except in self-defense or defense of another.
- 5. Be kind to all living beings under your care: children, the infirm and animals.
- 6. Pass no laws restricting the acquisition of knowledge.
- 7. Never ridicule people trying to do their best, even if their best fails to meet your standards; save your ridicule for tyrants.
- 8. Do not knowingly cheat another person.
- 9. Be ready to help persons/animals in distress whose paths you cross.
- 10. Treat our planet and all its resources in a way that will allow all living things on Earth to continue to call it home.

— John Compere

"publicly phony and privately cynical."

Why I'm a freethinker: I'm basically a scientist at heart and believe in evaluating evidence. Once the blinders were off, my study of the bible made it clear to me that this book was anything but a "holy" book. In fact, it's a horrible book, with a few inspiring passages in it. It's a collection of myths and suspicious "history" from Bronze Age ignorant people and has little, if any, relevance to the real world of today.

Ways I promote freethought: I'm

vice president of the Valley of the Sun FFRF chapter and a member of the Humanist Society of Greater Phoenix. I've published a book, Towards the Light: A Fifth-generation Baptist Minister's Journey from Religion to Reason, and I am asked fairly often to speak on subjects of the various chapters in my book. I'm also one of the early members of the Clergy Project and coordinate the screening process we use with new applicants to our private online site.

## They Said What?

Hitler and Stalin, at their better moments, would just barely tolerate some churches remaining open, but would not tolerate any competition with the state in education, social services and health care. In clear violation of our First Amendment rights, Barack Obama, with his radical, pro-abortion and extreme secularist agenda, now seems intent on following a similar path.

Bishop Daniel Jenky, Diocese of Peoria, Ill., addressing "A Call to Catholic Men of Faith" rally and march

The Catholic Post, 4-14-12

It's imperative that we reach into the arsenal of history and discover the weapon that defeated Adolph [sic] Hitler.

Christian author Brad Fenichel, calling for a May 3 National Minute of Prayer, a World War II "phenomenon which was widely credited, by contemporary people of faith, for the demise of the Third Reich"

Christian Newswire, 4-16-12

At first she was talking about public displays of affection, and she turned around and she directly pointed to the gay people and said, "If you're gay you're going to hell, and if you're pregnant, your life is over."

Student Amber Whittiemore, on remarks made to students by Dorothy Bond, high school principal in Brownsville, Tenn., who resigned after they were made public

ABC 24, 2-28-12

I would not vote for a man who was an atheist because I believe you need to have an acknowledgement or a reverence or a fear for almighty God.

Anne Graham Lotz, Rev. Billy Graham's daughter

"Meet the Press," 4-8-12

As much as we love the Brewers, unlike Jesus, they didn't die for your sins. With regard to beer and brats on Good Friday, let's just say that's why God created the three-game series.

Milwaukee Archbishop Listecki, telling Catholic baseball fans they must be wiener-less

McClatchy News Service, 4-7-12



John Compere in graduation garb.

Page 18 Freethought Today Madison, Wisconsin May 2012

## Black Collar Crime Blotter

#### Compiled by Bill Dunn

#### **Arrested / Charged**

Luckner Sylvain, 49, Taftville, CT: 1st-degree sexual assault, 4th-degree sexual assault and 2 counts of risk of injury to a minor. Sylvain, former pastor at First Haitian Baptist Church, is accused of molesting a 12-year-old girl starting in 2006. He left the church in 2008.

The girl alleged to authorities that Sylvain told her "he was teaching her a lesson for when she gets older so she'll know what to expect." Source: Norwich Bulletin, 4-25-12

**John L. Matkin**, 56, Longview, **TX**: DUI. Matkin, senior pastor at First United Methodist Church, was suspended from his duties after his arrest

"It was our understanding that [Matkin] was coming home from a hunting trip," said church spokesman Ed Moore. "I was shocked. I think we were all shocked." The church will offer counseling for members who request it. Source: News-Journal, 4-25-12

Eric D. Sanders, Baton Rouge, LA: Felony theft and exploitation of the infirmed. Sanders, pastor of The House of Repentance Baptist Church, is charged with stealing \$13,459 from the bank account of a 53-year-old woman who attended his church in 2010.

The woman is mentally ill and gets monthly disability checks, the arrest warrant said. She told police she needed help with her finances after her husband's death. Source: The Advocate, 4-18-12

Geoffrey A. Kledzik, 43, Largo, FL: Felony lewd and lascivious exhibition. Kledzik, was put on paid leave as student activities director and campus ministry director at Clearwater Central Catholic High School. The arrest report said he was masturbating in his car on Gandy Beach "in the presence of several witnesses." He told police, who cited him for driving the wrong way on a one-way after leaving the beach, that he was just changing into his swimsuit before grading papers.

A school alumni website says Kledzik's wife works for the Diocese of St. Petersburg and that they have 2 young sons. *Source: Bay News 9,* 4-17-12

**Dannie Carter**, 54, Madison, **WI**: Child enticement, solicitation of a child for prostitution and disorderly conduct. Carter, a deacon-intraining at Christ the Solid Rock Baptist Church, allegedly asked sisters, ages 16 and 17, to have sex with him and offered money.

One girl told police Carter said he could "teach" her some things while her mother was gone on a trip. The girl then locked herself in a bathroom and called her aunt, who called police, the complaint said. *Source: AP/WKOW,* 

Panayiotis Triantafyllou, 37, Nicosia, CYP: Illegal possession and suspected trafficking of drugs. The Orthodox Christian priest, a Greek national, was arrested at the airport with 6.6 pounds of cannabis. Triantafyllou was suspended pending an ecclesiastical court review of the incident and new information received related to previous complaints, a church statement said. Source: Bloomberg, 4-6-12

Ranulfo L. Raposo, 51, Foxboro, MA: Attempted larceny, identity fraud and uttering a false document. Raposo, a Seventh Day Adventist pastor, allegedly victimized people in their 70s and 80s after convincing them to disclose their Social Security numbers by telling them they were lottery winners.

He then allegedly tried to have their checks, totaling about \$8,000, deposited to his checking account. *Source: Attleboro Sun Chronicle,* 

Jay J. Bertrand, 47, Richmond, VA: Driving under the influence of drugs and reckless driving. Bertrand, pastor at Varina Baptist Church, was arrested after being involved in 2 car accidents hours apart, including crashing into a Krispy Kreme doughnut store. His brother-inlaw, Brandon Pickett, said Bertrand is taking medication for severe back spasms. Source: Times-Dispatch, 4-5-12

Lonnie Remmers, 54, Corona, CA: Kidnapping, torture, child abuse and conspiracy. Remmers, pastor of Heart of Worship Church, Nick Craig, 22, and Darryll Jeter, 28, allegedly were asked by a 13-year-old boy's mother to discipline him at a group home run by the church.

Corona police said in a press release the men tried to "scare" the boy: "The suspects forced the 13-year-old victim to dig a grave and then threatened to kill him."

Remmers allegedly later tortured the boy with pliers at the pastor's home bible study session. The boy, who didn't need hospitalization, and his 7-year-old sister were taken into Child Protective Services custody. Source: KPCC, 4-4-12; Valley News, 4-2-12

Samuel Nuckolls, 33, MS: 13 counts of vid-



eo voyeurism. Nuckolls, a traveling Mississippi evangelist, is accused of secretly filming women and girls with a pen camera with a flash drive in bathrooms. Arkansas and Texas authorities are also pursuing charges.

Police Chief Bobby Trump, Gosnell, AR, said the wife of a youth minister with whom Nuckolls was staying found the pen camera in her bathroom. "Lo and behold, there's her on the video getting undressed," Trump said. "I hope he pleads not guilty and goes to trial and embarrasses [himself] some more." Source: Star-Telegram, 4-2-12

**Gabriel Toledo**, 50, Passaic, **NY**: Possession of child pornography. Toledo, a rabbi in the U.S. on a visa from Argentina, does not lead a congregation but worked at Foremost RAM Caterers to ensure its food was glatt kosher.

More than 1,000 pornographic images involving children were found in his home, the affidavit said. His Honduran roommate, Joseph Vasquez, 22, is charged with distribution of child pornography. Source: The Record, 3-30-12

Bill Bates, Centralia, WA: Unlawful use of an air gun and willfully or recklessly killing or injuring a pet. Bates, pastor at Destiny Christian Center, an Assemblies of God church, and a City Council member, is charged with fatally shooting his neighbor's cat, Susie.

Bates told reporters he only meant to scare Susie, who had been using his yard as a litter box and walked on his vehicles. *Source: KATU,* 2.27,12

Mark A. Broussard, 52, Duson, LA: 2 counts of aggravated rape and 52 counts of sexual battery involving a minor. Charges stem from Broussard's time as pastor of St. Henry Catholic Church in Lake Charles in 1988-91. He left the priesthood in 1994.

"The victim and I first met personally on Dec. 22, 2011, and he reported to me his dreadful ordeal," Diocese of Lake Charles Bishop Glen John Provost told parishioners at Mass. *Source: American Press*, 3-26-12

Michael Clare, 40, Bronx, NY: Rape, sexual misconduct and sexual abuse. Clare, pastor at Harvest Worship Center, is accused of starting a 2-year relationship with a girl when she was 14 and was a student at the church's Preparatory Academy. Clare also faces charges for allegedly raping another girl, starting when she was 12. She got pregnant and DNA evidence implicated Clare, prosecutors said. Source: N.Y. Daily News. 3-23-12

Charles Hughes, Monette, AR: 1st-degee sexual assault, obstructing governmental operations and contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Hughes, pastor at Monette Church of Christ, is accused of molesting a 17-year-old runaway. The girl is a cousin to Hughes' wife. Police found her in a mobile home rented by Hughes.

While the age of consent in Arkansas is 16, Hughes, as a pastor, is considered an authority figure and mandatory reporter required to report any suspected abuse. *Source: Lincoln Journal Star, 3-23-12* 

Jesse D. Ruhl, Chico, CA: Child molestation. Ruhl, assistant pastor at Pleasant Valley Baptist Church, is accused of having sexual contact with a 16-year-old girl. He was fired from the church. Source: Enterprise-Record, 3-22-12

Malcolm J. Fraser, 39, Enumclaw, WA: 1st-degree rape of a child. Fraser, assistant pastor at Sound Doctrine Church, is alleged to have had repeated sexual contact in 2005-06 with a girl who is now 17. The victim told police Fraser said she would go to hell if she told anyone. Source: Courier Herald, 3-22-12

 $\textbf{Grady Evans}, \ 34, \ Union \ City, \ \textbf{TN} : \ Use \ of$ 

a communications device to solicit a minor. Evans, pastor at First Church of God, was arrested after an Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force got a warrant to search the church. Source: Jackson Sun, 3-20-12

Rudolph Bullman, 67, Kalispell, MT: Felony sexual abuse of children for possessing images of naked boys. Bullman, pastor at Risen Christ Catholic Church, was charged after a woman reported child porn on a Nintendo she bought from him. More images were found on his computer.

The Diocese of Helena put Bullman on administrative leave. Source: Helena Independent Record, 3-20-12

Joseph T. Hackett, 31, Asheville, NC: Multiple counts of theft and fraud related to alleged false Medicaid claims of \$1.5 million. Hackett is described on Leviticus Ministries' website as an "author, entrepreneur and motivational speaker" and an "Apostolic Overseer covering 30 churches, leaders, and businesses in both the United States and in Africa."

It adds, "Pastor Hackett advises marketplace leaders on how to use kingdom principles to sustain their businesses." *Source: Times-Dispatch, 3-20-12* 

#### Pleaded / Convicted

Joseph M. Steele, 71, Dublin: Pleaded guilty to 8 counts of indecent assault and 2 counts of gross indecency, committed on a boy in 1967-71. Steele, a former Catholic priest with the Order of the Holy Ghost, confessed in 1996 to gross indecency and 11 counts of indecent assault in 1969-83 when he was a pastor and chaplain of a children's home. Source: RTE News, 4-20-12

**Leon W. Jones**, **Baltimore**: A jury found Jones, founder of Renewed Hope Christian Church, guilty of 8 counts of 2nd-degree sexual offense for offenses allegedly committed from 2000-02

The victim, now 27, was introduced to Jones by her mother, who participated in the abuse and was convicted of 5 counts of child sexual abuse. *Source: Baltimore Sun, 4-19-12* 

Geody Harman, 38, Magna, UT: Pleaded guilty to 3rd-degree felony unlawful sex with a minor in 2005-06. Harman, an officer of the Church of the Firstborn of the General Assembly of Heaven, was first charged with rape of a 15-year-old girl but pleaded to a lesser charge in exchange for testifying against Terrill Dalton, church president.

Dalton, 45, was convicted in March of 2 counts of rape. He told the girl he was "the Holy Ghost," officials said.

The prosecutor told the court Dalton "served her up on a platter" to Harman, who was the church's second in command. *Source: Salt Lake Tribune. 4-17-12* 

Clyde D. Myers, 63, Prattville, AL: Pleaded guilty to 2 counts of possession of child pornography. Myers, pastor at Prattville Community Church, admitted to the judge he had images of people younger than 17 in sexual situations on computers at home and church. Source: Montgomery Advertiser, 4-11-12

**Earl David**, 48, **Toronto**: Pleaded guilty to wire fraud and conspiracy and agreed to pay \$2.5 million in forfeiture. David, a self-proclaimed rabbi and Torah scholar, fled New York in 2006 to join Congregation Shaarei Tzedec after he learned that his law firm was being investigated for immigration fraud from 1996 to 2006.

David and his colleagues charged up to \$30,000 for filing fake employment letters on behalf of illegal immigrants. *Source: JD Journal*,

Keith J. Boyd, 44, Slidell, LA: Convicted of

# 'Everyone is sorry when they get caught.'

The father of Matthias
 Anderson's victim

of carnal knowledge and indecent behavior with a juvenile. Boyd, pastor of Open Door Apostolic Church, was accused of having a consensual 3-month sexual relationship with a 16-year-old girl in which they exchanged some 2,000 text messages.

A reporter visiting the church after the trial saw a sign that said, "Pastor Keith J. Boyd & Lady Kendra W. Boyd. Jesus Opens Doors That No Man Can Shut." *Source: Times-Picayune*, 3-26-12

**Craig R. Cosby**, 70, Marcus, **WA**: Guilty of 1st-degree murder in the 2009 death of his wife, Susan, 53, who was leaving him. A jury found Cosby, a retired Protestant pastor, shot her 10 times with .40-caliber handgun.

He told a 9-1-1 dispatcher, "She just kept pushing and pushing and pushing [and] pushed me over the edge finally." *Source: Spokesman-Review, 3-30-12* 

Philip Caminiti, 54, Black Earth, WI: Guilty of 8 counts of conspiracy to commit child abuse. Caminiti, pastor of Aleitheia Bible Church, advocated spanking children as young as 2 months on the bare buttocks with wooden rods and spoons to make them behave.

He wasn't accused of hitting children himself, but testimony showed he told other parents, including his own adult children and brother, to hit children for "selfish" crying.

"What we have here are babies and children trying to develop into individuals," Prosecutor Shelly Rusch told the jury, "and it's being beaten out of them."

His brother, **John Caminiti**, pleaded guilty last year to causing mental harm to a child and child abuse and was sentenced to a year in prison and 8 years' probation. Six other family members still face similar charges. *Source: Wis. State Journal, 3-21-12* 

#### **Sentenced**

Anthony C. Morris, 48, Tukwila, WA: 40 months in prison and \$1.8 million in restitution after pleading guilty to wire fraud and money laundering. Morris, pastor of New Covenant Christian Center, admitted running a Ponzi scheme with money he took from about 2 dozen investors.

Morris falsely told victims their money would be placed in an overseas trading program or invested in property for his church, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office, with returns as high as 400% in a few weeks. Source: Seattle Times, 4-28-12

Jerrod D. McCabe, 35, Cary, NC: 6 to 17 months' probation and placement on a sex offender registry after pleading guilty to 3rd-degree sexual exploitation of a minor. McCabe, youth director at Raleigh Chinese Christian Church, was originally charged with 20 child pornography counts. Arrest warrants said images of girls between 4 and 7 years old were found in his possession. Source: AP, 4-24-12

Jose Davila, 53, San Diego: 3 years' probation, \$200 fine and 150 hours of community service after pleading guilty to unlawful touching of an intimate part. Davila, associate pastor at St. Jude's Shrine of the West, was accused of touching a 19-year-old woman at his home Dec. 30. He surrendered to police on New Year's Day. Source: L.A. Times, 4-22-12

**Brian Spillane**, 69, Bathurst, **NSW**: 9 years in prison after being found guilty of a series of sexual assaults on girls while he was on the staff of Stanislaus College, a boarding school for boys. Spillane, a Vincentian Catholic priest, left the priesthood in 2004. He denies all charges, including about 100 related to alleged assaults on boys at the school. *Source: Morning Herald*, 4-19-12

Francis J. Drabiska, 61, Pittsburgh: 7 years' probation and \$500 a month restitution after pleading guilty to theft. He was charged with stealing \$125,000 to \$180,000 in Mass collections from 1999 to 2009 when he was pastor at Word of God Catholic Church.

He made about \$1,400 a month as a priest, according to an affidavit. Source: Tribune-Review. 4-18-12

Laneer Fisher, 39, Aliquippa, PA: six to 24 months in jail with work release privileges after being convicted of indecent assault. He was accused of having illicit contact with a teenage member of his congregation at Miracle Church of God.

Fisher faces trial on similar allegations by

## 'Father Nunan tormented [my son] for years. He is a monster.'

#### Carol Morales

another teen later this year. Source: AP, 4-13-12 Gary Welch, 43, Corsicana, TX: 55 years in prison after pleading guilty to aggravated sexual assault of a child, sexual assault of a child, sexual assault and indecency with a child/sexual contact. Welch, youth minister at Northside Baptist Church, was charged with molesting a 16-year-old girl starting in 2009. Source: Daily Sun, 4-13-12

**Stewart Newman**, 40, Omaha, **NE**: 50 to 80 years in prison for sexual assault of a child and 6 counts of child pornography. Newman worked with his wife in a youth ministry called Presenting Arts Through Him that met at King of Kings Lutheran Church.

Prosecutors alleged he assaulted a girl over a 4-year period starting when she was 6. Source: AP, 4-11-12

Robert Borne, 63, Eganville, ONT: 5 months of house arrest and 4 months of community service for indecent assault and gross indecency. Msgr. Borne was convicted of assaulting a 16-year-old boy in 1979 at a rectory where he was filling in for a Catholic priest. He was acquitted of similar charges in an alleged 1981 incident. Source: Ottawa Citizen, 4-17-12

Timothy Jackson, 48, Detroit: A minimum of 40 years in prison for conviction on multiple counts of 1st-degree criminal sexual conduct. Jackson was accused of molesting a girl, starting when she was 11, when he was pastor at Abundant Life Church in 2009-10. He claims he's innocent.

"The activity you engaged in that you were found guilty of by a jury of your peers is heinous," said Judge Michael Callahan. "It's unspeakable." Source: Detroit News, 4-16-12

**Shaul Spitzer**, 19, New Square, **NY**: 7 years in prison after pleading guilty to 1st-degree assault. Spitzer apologized for trying to set Aron Rottenberg's house on fire and then setting off a device that set himself and Rottenberg, 44, on fire

Rottenberg became Spitzer's target because the older man refused to worship in Grand Rabbi David Twersky's conservative synagogue and instead prayed with the village's nursing home residents. Rottenberg sued, claiming Spitzer acted at Twersky's direction. The rabbi was not charged, but Rottenberg received a \$2.3 million settlement.

Defense attorney Kenneth Gribetz said he fears for Spitzer in prison because he has "never seen TV, never been on the Internet, doesn't know who Babe Ruth and Derek Jeter are."

Nearly all of New Square's 7,000 residents belong to the Skver Hasidic sect. *Source: CBS,* 4-16-12

Cornelius Taylor, Sacramento, CA: 7 years, 8 months in prison for 8 counts of sexual assault. Taylor, pastor of Whole Life Revival Center, was charged with molesting a troubled girl with no family support who moved in with Taylor and his wife when she was 16. Source: Sacramento Bee, 4-14-12

Cyprian Meier, 68, Mandan, ND: 18 months in prison, with all but time served suspended for 5 years, 60 hours' community service and restitution of \$29,008 after pleading guilty to exploitation of a vulnerable adult. Meier, who left the Catholic priesthood in 2005 after taking part in Internet scams with church money, admitted using a paralyzed man's ATM card 86 times to transfer money to his own account.

Meier provided home health care for the 56-year-old Bismarck man for several months in 2011. The man died Dec. 3. *Source: Bismarck Tribune, 4-10-12* 

**Michael Angeloni**, 62, Wilmington, **DE**: 1 year in prison after pleading guilty to theft of more than \$100,000. Angeloni, assistant pastor of Holy Child Catholic Church, was ordered to pay \$305,425 in restitution to the 86-year-old victim and to have no contact with gaming establishments or the victim. *Source: WBOC, 3-30-12* 

**Joe Ivey**, 74, Walkersville, **MD**: 4 years in prison with 16 suspended and 5 years' probation after pleading guilty to 2nd-degree sex offense. Ivey, senior pastor at Barnesville Baptist Church, admitted molesting a girl at his home in 2010. *Source: NBC Washington, 3-29-12* 

Edward Avery, 69, Philadelphia: 30 months to 5 years in prison after pleading guilty to involuntary deviate sexual intercourse and conspiracy to endanger the welfare of children. The defrocked Catholic priest chose to plead on the eve of his trial, admitting he forced a 10-year-old altar boy to strip naked after Mass in the sacristy and "engaged in oral sexual intercourse."

The trial continued with defendants **Msgr. William Lynn**, 61, the first U.S. Catholic official charged with concealing priest sexual abuse, and **Fr. James Brennan**, 48, charged with raping a boy. *Source: philly.com*, *3-23-12* 

**Darlene Vodvarka**, 57, Oak Creek, **WI**: 3 years in prison and 5 years' probation after pleading guilty to embezzling nearly \$200,000 for St. Matthew Catholic Church, where she was secretary for 14 years. *Source: Fox 6, 3-20-12* 

Moshe Zigelman, 64, Brooklyn, NY: Jailed for up to 18 months for contempt of court for refusal to testify before a federal grand jury. Zigelman, an Orthodox rabbi, said his beliefs stop him from testifying against fellow Jews.

He previously pleaded guilty and served time for tax evasion. After his release, he was subpoenaed to testify before a Los Angeles grand jury continuing its probe. *Source: L.A. Times. 3-19-12* 

Matthias Anderson, 41, Hemet, CA: 9 years, 4 months in prison after pleading guilty to 3 counts of lewd acts with a minor. Anderson, founder of New Wine Ministries, carried on a long relationship with a girl, now 16, who described in court how it started when she was 13.

"He would call me to the back of church in the Sunday School room, then after being with me, go preach for God," she said. "It made me feel ashamed. He said I was so special to him that he was putting his whole life at risk for me."

Anderson's court apology didn't impress the girl's father, who said, "Everyone is sorry when they get caught." Source: Riverside Press-Enterprise, 3-16-12

#### **Civil Lawsuits Filed**

**Wyndgate Country Club**, Rochester Hills, **MI**, is accused in a suit filed by Center for Inquiry-Michigan of denying use of the club for an event that featured Richard Dawkins.

The suit alleges the club violated state and federal civil rights laws by canceling after it had agreed to host the Oct. 12 dinner with Dawkins as one of the speakers.

CFI claims employees under the direction of owner **Larry Winget** called to cancel the event because Winget "does not wish to associate with certain individuals or philosophies." *Source: mlive.com*, 4-28-12

Trinity Lutheran Church and School in Houston is being sued for allegedly letting a convicted sex offender become a pen pal with a dozen fourth-graders. According to the suit, Rickey Rowlett wrote the letters from jail before he was convicted of sexually assaulting a girl under age 14.

Laura Perry, the teacher who organized the letter exchange, has been fired, and the principal has been put on administrative leave. Records show Perry's husband, Blake Perry, who coached soccer at the school, faces child pornography charges. Investigators said Rowlett is a friend of Laura Perry's family. Her father testified on his behalf. Source: KENS, 4-13-12

Plaintiff "John W. Doe" is suing the Archdiocese of Chicago for failure to stop alleged sexual abuse at the hands of Fr. John Curran at the St. Christina Parish rectory in 1987 when Doe was an altar boy. A church registry lists Curran among priests against whom there are "substantiated claims" of abuse. The registry shows Curran died in March 2000.

The archdiocese in 2005 settled suits filed by 24 persons alleging they were abused as children by 14 priests, including Curran. *Source: AP. 4-25-12* 

Gerald Funcheon, a Catholic priest thought to be living in Missouri, is being sued in Minnesota for allegedly molesting Chris Spedden, a Palma Catholic High school student in Salinas, CA, in 1984-85. Co-defendants are the school and the Canons Regular of the Holy Cross, an order also known as the Crosiers, formerly headquartered in Minnesota. Spedden was 13 when he was molested on a ski trip, the suit alleges.

Documents released after settlement of a separate 2009 lawsuit against Funcheon show church officials in the Midwest and a principal at **Damien High School** in **Hawaii** were concerned about the priest's "inappropriate" behavior with students as far back as three decades ago. Funcheon taught at Palma after working at

The Crosiers settled the suit for \$1.7 million in 2009, admitting that Funcheon and three other clerics had abused children. Court records show Funcheon's long history of abuse allegations and a lifetime moving from job to job around the country. Source: Monterey Herald,

William H. Marshall, 89, Windsor, ONT, sentenced to 2 years in prison in 2011 for molesting 17 youths while serving as a Catholic priest and educator, faces 4 civil suits. Also named are the Basilian Fathers of Toronto, the Sudbury Catholic District School Board, the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie and Bishop Ronald Fabro. Source: CBC News, 3-28-12

Televangelists **Paul and Jan Crouch**, who started the **Trinity Broadcasting Network** in 1973, are being sued by their granddaughter, Brittany Koper, 26, whose suit alleges \$50 million in financial shenanigans. Koper's attorney said she realized soon after becoming CFO at TBN that there were problems.

A similar suit filed by her husband Michael's uncle, Joseph McVeigh, alleges TBN bought a \$50 million jet with a sham loan and an \$8 million Hawker jet for Jan Crouch's personal use,

bought a \$100,000 RV for her dogs and owns 13 mansions and homes for Crouch family use. *Source: AP. 3-22-12* 

#### **Civil Lawsuits Settled**

A **Kentucky** jury awarded \$2.15 million in damages to the estate of Jamie Mitchell, 13, who died in 2009 in an accident when **Derek Coulter**, 26, youth minister at Big Springs Assembly of God Church, let him drive his Chevy

Coulter and the church were each found liable, but the verdict will be reduced because Jamie was found to be 20% at fault. Coulter was convicted earlier of reckless homicide and sentenced to 5 years.

He first told police he was driving and lost control avoiding a deer and repeated the story at Jamie's funeral. A girl who was a passenger later came forward with the truth. Source: Courier-Journal, 4-26-12

Catholic priest **Michael Kelly**, 62, Lockeford, **CA**, fled to his native Ireland several days after being found civilly liable for molesting an altar boy in the mid-1980s at the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Stockton. The **Diocese of Stockton**, where Kelly has served since 1973, will pay \$3.75 million to plaintiff Travis Trotter, 37

Kelly wrote a letter to the bishop complaining of insomnia, weight loss and chronic bowel problems. "I hope you will understand that right now I need to be with my family, whose support and love for me are unconditional."

The plaintiff's attorneys also argued Kelly had victimized multiple children, but testimony from an alleged second victim was not allowed at trial. Source: Modesto Bee, 4-20-12; Irish Examiner, 4-23-12

The Catholic **Archdiocese of Boston** settled sexual abuse cases involving 2 priests: **Richard O'Donovan** of Brockton, who died in 2000 before allegations were raised, and **James Lane**, a former Boston police chaplain, who died in 2007.

Boston lawyer Mitchell Garabedian said on his firm's website that he settled both cases for 5- to 6-figure amounts with no admission of guilt. The church confirmed the settlements.

Robert Perron, 57, said at a press conference that O'Donovan molested him more than 20 times starting at age 9. "I was able to heal, after 48 years of torment."

According to records, Lane told church officials in 1984 that serial abuser Fr. John Geoghan, accused of assaulting 130 children at 6 parishes, had abused children at the parish where Lane served. Geoghan wasn't convicted until 2002 and was murdered by an inmate in 2003.

Garabedian said there was overwhelming proof Lane molested his client when he was 10 and again when he was 15. He said his client, a 56-year-old from New Hampshire, decided to sue after heart bypass surgery. "He came forward because he wanted to make peace with his Lord." Source: Boston Globe, Brockton Enterprise, 4-11-12

#### **Legal Developments**

A Manila appeals court ordered extradition of **Fernando Sayasaya**, a former priest in the Catholic Diocese of Fargo, **ND**, who faces decade-old felony sex charges involving 2 minor boys

Sayasaya, now defrocked, was removed from parish duties in 1998, after 2 brothers accused him of molesting them. Sayasaya's case was highlighted by the Dallas Morning News in 2004 as an example of how Catholic officials help accused priests evade justice by fleeing overseas. Source: Grand Forks Herald, 4-4-12

The **Delhi High Court** upheld a 7-year prison sentence in 2010 for **Prem Dass**, a priest with **Lord Shiva Temple**, for serially raping a 16-year-old girl.

"The heinous offence was committed by a priest who is respected in the society and considered to be a trustworthy person," wrote Justice M.L. Mehta, in dismissing Dass' appeal. Source: Indian Express. 4-1-12

A lawsuit by 6 brothers alleging sexual assault by **Donald Broderson**, a priest in the Catholic Diocese of Oakland, **CA**, in the early 1970s, was dismissed due to late filing, the state Supreme Court ruled.

Broderson, who died in 2010, was never criminally prosecuted.

The Quarry brothers relied on a 2002 law allowing victims of sexual abuse to sue institutions for failing to protect them from molestations many years earlier. The high court ruled 5-2 the law gave alleged victims only a year, through the end of 2003, to sue. The suit was filed in 2007. Source: S.F. Chronicle, 3-3-12

A jury found **Paul Nelson**, 61, pastor of St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mason City, **IA**, not guilty of simple assault for striking a teen for swearing during confirmation class in 2011. Nelson testified he hit the boy 3 times in the upper arm with his open hand to "get his attention" after the boy swore. When the boy swore again, Nelson said he hit him 3 more times. "I never ever remember hearing anyone use that word," he said.

The boy, 15, said he was using phone to text a friend about the homecoming football game.

He testified he said, "What the [expletive]?" after Nelson grabbed the phone. Source: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier, 3-30-12

Circuit Judge Susanne Hoseth Kreeger upheld another court's dismissal of charges against **John Prominski**, pastor at Resurrection Life Church, Ionia, **MI**, for not reporting his suspicions about a man molesting his stepchildren

Prominski had invoked the clergy-penitent privilege regarding his 2009 conversation with a woman who allegedly told him she thought her husband may have been abusing her daughters by having them touch themselves in front of him. He didn't report the allegations but counseled the man, who denied them.

The woman returned 2 years later with more allegations. Prominski told her to go to the police or he would. The man was convicted of criminal sexual conduct and is still behind bars. *Source: Wood TV. 3-29-12* 

The lawyer for an Alto Pass, IL, pastor accused of molesting a 4-year-old girl in 2010 wants a new mental fitness hearing for his client

**Bill Vandergraph**, 72, pastor of Full Gospel Pentecostal Church, reportedly confessed on video and is charged with predatory criminal sexual assault and 2 counts of aggravated criminal sexual abuse, including "sexual penetration." *Source: The Southern*, *3-26-12* 

A judge ruled that Shannon Oates' suit against the Catholic **Diocese of Little Rock**, AR, can proceed. Oates, 42, alleges the diocese knew or should have known she had been lured into a sexual relationship with **Fr. Charles Kan**u

Oates alleges Kanu romanced her while mentoring her as she converted to Catholicism, and that he used "sensitive information" from her to "manipulate and exploit her into complying with his sexual demands.

"He repeatedly told her that their sexual experience was to her benefit and was part of God's plan for the two of them." Source: AP, 3-19-12

#### **Allegations**

**Tom White**, 64, executive director of Voice of the Martyrs, a Christian ministry in Bartlesville, **OK**, is believed to have killed himself while under investigation for molesting a 10-year-old girl. He disappeared the same day police received a report about the alleged molestation.

"Rather than face those allegations, and all of the resulting fallout for his family and this ministry and himself, Tom appears to have chosen to take his own life," the ministry said in a statement. His body was found at the ministry. Source: AP, 4-23-12; Christian Post, 4-20-12

According to the Israel Tax Authority, **Rabbi Yekutiel Abuchatzeira**, **Ashdod**, failed to report millions in earnings in 2003-09 and owes \$2.6 million in back taxes.

The Tax Authority said Abuchatzeira has been questioned but is refusing to cooperate, an allegation his associates denied. Source: ynetnews.com, 4-16-12

Australian police reports detail the suicides of at least 40 people sexually abused by Catholic clergy in Victoria. Detective Sgt. Kevin Carson said investigators found "an inordinate number of suicides" perpetrated by a small number of pedophile clergy, including Gerald Ridsdale, Bryan Coffey, Paul Ryan, Robert Best and Edward Dowlan.

One report includes a list of victims' names, dates of births, manner of death and locations where abuse is suspected or known to have taken place. Most victims were abused between the 1960s and late 1980s. Carson's inquiries tie 34 deaths to Ridsdale and Best, both serving long sentences on sex convictions.

Rob Walsh, his brothers and cousin attended St. Alipius boys' school, where all were molested. The Age reports:

"Rob Walsh is the only one of them still alive. He was a 12-year-old altar boy when he was raped. It was not until many years later, after problems with alcohol and truancy, that he was able to tell anyone.

"Noel Walsh, 19, died in a single car crash which Mr. Walsh only later determined, by talking to police, doctors and classmates, had been suicide.

"Martin Walsh was about 22 when he shot himself, and Damien Walsh was 46 when he hung himself in his garage."

Rob Walsh says he's now aware of about 12 others from the school who were sexually abused. *Source: The Age, 4-12-12* 

#### Other

Michael Hutchison, 44, Akron, OH, died April 4 at home. Hutchison received \$2.7 million after suing the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, PA, in 1988 for covering up alleged sexual abuse by Fr. Francis Luddy, a family friend since defrocked. It took 20 years for the case to work its way through the courts.

The coroner said cause and manner of death were pending toxicology results. Source: Altoona Mirror, 4-6-12

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

#### Removed / Resigned

Madison. Wisconsin Page 20 Freethought Today May 2012



## Letterbox

#### Tennessee 'survivor' commends Krystal

I got the surprise of my life with the April front-page story of Tennessee "atheist student whistleblower" Krystal Myers, from Lenoir City High School, where I graduated in 1956. I could hardly believe it!

Although things are bad enough now, they were much worse when I was a student there. A local minister would regularly speak at assembly meetings. I wished so much that I could have stayed in study hall. What I remember most were the out-and-out revival meetings they had yearly, with heartfelt pleas from preachers to students to come to the stage and accept Christ, as girls in the captive audience would be crying.

I would sit and watch, seething and cringing, thinking all the while, "This should not be permitted!" From first grade on, a bible verse and a prayer began class every day. Religion in high school went way beyond that.

When I graduated, as salutatorian, I was required to give a speech at graduation. I had always thought the honor students were supposed to write their own speeches, but no, we were handed speeches to memorize. My topic was how "God was important in my life." I enjoyed the irony. Again, I kept my mouth shut. Now I'm ashamed that I didn't object, or at least end my speech with a caveat: "I was given this speech to present to you, and I want to make it clear that none of what I just said is true. Thank you."

Now, 56 years later, I still don't advertise my atheism, for there are many religious people here. But my close friends know about it, and I'm sure I have a lot more company than I did in Lenoir City — my family, for one. My daughter and daughter-in-law are atheists, my son is an agnostic and my husband says he is a Buddhist, but he eats meat all the time, so what kind of Buddhist is that?

I am so glad these instances of endorsements of religion were brought to your attention. I really admire Krystal for speaking up. I wish I had had the courage to do that!

Nancy Lo **New York** 

#### Reader gives kudos to student activists

I want to convey my respect for student activists Jeff Shott and Krystal Myers. Like Jessica Ahlquist, these young people have stood proudly against insurmountable odds in their communities for what they believe. I tip my hat to them for their fortitude in not capitulating to tremendous pressure.

I also commend them for seeing the light at their young age and "coming out" with such determination. I was 65 before I discovered I'd been brainwashed by the traditional church and left it. I am angry for letting myself be browbeaten for so long without "figuring it out," and for not questioning what was being crammed down my throat. How much time I have wasted on hypocrisy and delusion?

When I was in high school, as these young people are now, I would never have had the stamina to stand alone against such a wave of bigotry, hatred and prejudice that these youngsters

have stared down. I am in awe of their strength, and thanks to you FFRF for recognizing them, encouraging them and standing with them.

Jack M. Red North Carolina

#### Thanks for help with Good Friday

Thank you for your help in my dealings with the Washoe County Library System here in northern Nevada and particularly to your law clerk Susan Lund.

For decades the library system here has closed all of its branches on Easter Sunday, even though it is not an official holiday. As a result of your letter, we got what I would call half a loaf. The libraries will no longer close on that day, but the new policy won't go into effect until next year.

The director of the library system justified the closings this year with practical reasons such as staffing. I pointed out to him and the library board that these reasons do nothing to make the closings any less unconstitutional, and that it still marginalizes the tens of thousands of county residents who are not practicing Christians.

I consider it to be a victory for those of us who value the Constitution and defend its Establishment Clause, and I promised that the money I may have needed to mount a legal challenge I would instead be sending to you to keep up the important work of protecting the Constitution.

Accordingly, please accept the enclosed check to upgrade my membership to Lifetime.

**Rex Gunderson** Nevada

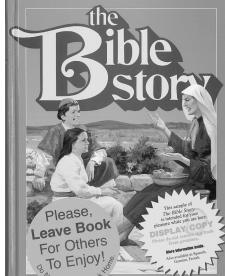
#### Reason rides to rescue in Idaho

I have been free from religion for about five years and have been lucky to live in one of the least religious states. I was horrified to see all of the religion promoting billboards throughout the country on a recent road trip, yet happy to be listening to your podcasts for much of the drive — reason to the

Please apply this small contribution to your billboard fund and keep up your excellent work!

Caitlin Woodvard Idaho





Bible book jolts

with asininity

In the bible belt South, at least one copy of "The Bible Story" will be found in the waiting room of every health practitioner. Occasionally it is the only reading material available, as was the instance leading to my borrowing a copy. Having nothing else to do, I began browsing the book and was jolted by its asininity.

On my return home I read it cover to cover. My initial reaction was, "This was written by an idiot, for idiots." When rational thought returned I realized that it is brilliant propaganda. The author, Arthur S. Maxwell, has been dead 42 years, and sales are in the millions.

I visited thesbiblestory.com and learned that Home Health Education Service, based in Decatur, Ga., offers health seminars and distributes books and magazines on religion, health, family life and education: "We believe that sickness comes upon us because of one of three reasons: The glory of God, the violation of natural laws and/or the violation of spiritual laws. We believe that once these issues are addressed, health will spring forth speedily or that God's grace will be sufficient for thee."

Why do so many health care providers go along with this scheme?

**Jack McKinney** Georgia

## Thrilled, surprised by ad on CBS

My favorite TV program is "CBS Sunday Morning" hosted by Charles Osgood. To my shock and pleasant surprise at about 6:45, there was an ad with John F. Kennedy talking about keeping state and church separate. I sat there and said to myself, "I agree with that,"

"Open your mind." California

Irene Stephenson, Lifetime Member

How thrilling that was to see. A

Christian recently suggested that I keep an open mind. I countered with,

#### Donation strikes a blow for reason

and then there was ffrf.org.

Since renewing my membership in April, I've had time to rethink. Since reading "Sex and the Vatican City" [Mother Jones May/June 2012], I've decided that I have to strike a blow for reason (before I drop dead). Please accept the enclosed Lifetime check with best wishes to all of you.

**Blair Moyer** Florida

#### Support for FFRF's Rhode Island stand

FFRF was vilified in a recent article in the Providence Journal regarding a stand the Foundation is taking on a World War I monument in Woonsocket, R.I. I read that article and decided it is time to support your work publicly.

Payment for Lifetime Membership is enclosed.

Peter Snyder **Rhode Island** 

#### Reason Rally + 4 issues = priceless experience

Congratulations and thank you for a well-run Reason Rally. I enjoyed meeting all those freethinkers and assisting in the FFRF booth under the big white

I joined in December 2011 using the coupon in your New York Times ad. The Reason Rally and four issues of Freethought Today easily convinced me to become a Lifetime Member.

Enclosed is my check for \$1,000. Thank you for the work you do.

Mary Ann Fraser New Jersey

Although I've read the New York Times "religiously" for more than 50 years, I was completely unaware of your ad until I saw it mentioned in the April issue. You see, during the week I read it online using the Times' reader app, which doesn't have any of the advertising. In any case, congratulations. It's a great ad, and I'm delighted to see it.

Richard Dalin, Lifetime Member New Jersey

#### Help welcome for 'Year of Bible suit'

Enclosed please find a check for \$1,000. Please use it to help fund the anti-"Year of the Bible" case in our wonderful commonwealth of Stupidavania!

J.K. Folmar Pennsylvania

#### FFRF a cheap date compared to church

Although times are tough and I am extremely frugal by nature, I just did a little calculating on how much I've saved since I gave up on religion forever back in 1963:

Forty-nine years times, say, an average of 40 times per year at church, equals 1,960 wasted Sunday mornings.



## Easy if you try

Danilo Balsamo, North Carolina, echoes John Lennon's sentiment in hoping "someday you'll join us and the world will live as one."



#### GR8 PL8

Ohioan Anthony Proto says, "Just representing us here in Columbus. Keep up the good work!"

Assume a modest \$10 donation per service. That yields a result of \$19,600.

This figure led me without hesitation to write this letter and enclose my \$1,000 check for my Lifetime Membership. I've subscribed to Freethought Today for many, many years but shied away from this as being "too expensive." What a fool I've been!

Judd Herrmann Minnesota

## Two team up to sponsor essay ad

Last year I attempted to persuade the local daily paper to publicize the high school essay contest as a public service to all graduating seniors in the local school district. I was not success-

This year I met with an advertising representative from the same paper, and after pricing an ad of sufficient size, I enlisted a friend and fellow FFRF member in splitting the cost of a quarter-page ad in our daily newspaper.

Obviously, money talks.

Retired university professor Dr. Roger Rollin and I were glad to subsidize the cost of the ad in the hopes of soliciting the submission of an essay from a district student. It is also our wish to promote and encourage other area freethinkers to learn about and join FFRE.

Thanks for the work you all do! **Kevin Larkin** 

#### South Carolina

Editor's note: Thank you so much! FFRF members may also arrange for paid advertising by donating costs to FFRF, which are deductible for income-tax purposes, and having FFRF pay the bill. We appreciate any local efforts to publicize FFRF's student essay contests (see ads on back wrap), including contacting area high schools, colleges and universities.

## Which came first, ignorance or religion?

Enclosed is a check for renewal and a \$10 donation. Thanks for all you do. You are truly my heroes. Reading your hate mail is a grim reminder that the war against the Enlightenment continues.

Many years ago, when I was living in Spain, I read the Madrid newspaper, El Pais. A brilliant woman named Rosa Montero, who was all of 21 at the time, was a columnist. In one of her columns, she denounced a widespread aversion to books in post-Franco Spain and commented that the situation re-

called "the sad, old question of whether a country was Catholic because it was ignorant, or ignorant because it was Catholic."

The vile letters you receive evoke a similar question. Are the people who write these letters ignorant because they're Christians, or Christians because they're ignorant? I often worry about you.

Louis S. Bedrock New Jersey

## Stealth tactics to advance freethought

I have an idea for a possible national project to promote state-church separation. I am presently encouraging our local group to employ a permanent marker pen to obliterate god from our currency. It only takes a second on each bill and makes a useful point. If this could be expanded to a national project, with the press informed, I think people would start to take notice, especially when they receive an offending bill.

Name withheld Tennessee

I have an unusual pastime. I like to buy FFRF bookmarks and insert them in library books in the religion section. **Ron Starr** 

Nevada

## More ads, please, about 'coming out'

I've been a FFRF member for several years and I was so pleased to see your ads on NBC and MSNBC. I totally support this use of my membership contribution and hope to see more of it.

We should take a cue from LGBT activists who have achieved very positive change regarding public perception of their constituency by encouraging people to "come out," scary though that may be, and making it clear that everyone has friends, relatives and colleagues who are LGBT.

Atheists are probably misunderstood, feared and hated nearly as much, so it's great that we and our organizations are also "coming out."

Bob Van Fleet California

I just want to tell you how very pleased I was on Sunday morning (April 1), while I was watching "Meet The Press" on Channel 4 in Detroit and a commercial for FFRF came on.

Made my day!

Nick Zbiciak Michigan

## FFRF inspires citizen to take action

I am extremely proud of Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk. I was told today that following much deliberation and legal consultation initiated by my complaints, they have decided to eliminate prayer from all school functions. Today, EVMS can honestly say that they are unbiased towards religion. I'm proud to celebrate this victory for the Constitution and religious equality.

Your actions really helped in this, too. I didn't get FFRF involved, but I threatened to call larger national organizations (like yours), and only then were my complaints taken seriously. Your presence on the stage made a difference. Thank you.

Josh Claypool Virginia

## Unrelenting assault on Constitution

When I first started reading Freethought Today, I felt uplifted and grateful for all that you do. But after a couple of years, I am finding it to be more frustrating and saddening — the fight never ends. It never even takes a breather. In fact, the constitutional violations just seem to get bigger and bolder every issue!

Then I realized you are working on just one facet of a much larger problem: The U.S. Constitution is being systematically attacked on all fronts. Freedom of speech? Sure, except for government surveillance of phone and Internet communications. The right to assemble in peaceful protest? Look at the extreme violence used against peaceful Occupy protesters.

Abortion and birth control are legal, except that extremists make them inaccessible. Free elections? They are auctions to the highest corporate bidder. Freedom of religion? Only where FFRF intercedes, otherwise we are a defacto Christian state. And on and on.

This doesn't detract from the importance of the work you do; it demonstrates just how important it is. Everyone, including mainstream religionists, should care that our constitutional rights are being neglected, overturned and abused. Thank you for defending separation of church and state and for persisting in the long, long fight. Eternal vigilance indeed!

Linda Palter Michigan

## Holy 'Family' doesn't set best example

As per the April 4 New York Daily News: Thomas (Tommy Shots) Gioeli, boss of the Colombo crime family, confronted with a flurry of federal subpoenas, took refuge at the Rosary Walk and Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Massapequa Park, "where he frequently prayed and had allegedly ordered the 1999 murder of capo William Cutolo."

He was joined in this serene setting by capo Dino (Big Dino) Calabro and "soldier" Joseph (Joey Caves) Competiello, and the three discussed whether the "good times" had come to an end. In a profound offer of self-sacrifice that no doubt earned him brownie points in heaven, Competiello offered to take the fall for the murder of a fellow mobster, but Gioeli, in an act of Christian charity, would not allow it.

We atheists can learn so much from our moral superiors in the Catholic Church!

Dennis Middlebrooks New York

## Please be careful what you worship!

I worked with a woman who considered herself an atheist, largely because of the horrors of World War II. (On this, rent the movie "God on Trial.")

Her husband died young from illness (for which she might have blamed a god but didn't). She took some solace in hoping there was a god. I considered myself an agnostic at the time (before Stephen J. Gould, Richard Dawkins, Bertrand Russell and you folks won me over to reality).

We were talking one day, and with passion she asked, "When things go wrong in a terrible way, don't you ever find yourself saying, 'Oh god!'"

I replied, "Yes, I do. But I also say, 'Oh sh\_t! But I don't worship sh\_t.' "

She laughed. I hoped she'd think about it and perhaps it might help in the future.

Jerry Weinberg Vermont

## Tennessee bill assaults reason

An April 27 op-ed titled "God and Man in Tennessee" by Amy Greene decries the extent to which faith has been politicized in her state, including a bill that bans discussion by teachers of things like kissing or holding hands in schools as "gateway sexual activity." It's part of abstinence-only sex "education."

In this day and age, that a state could legislate successfully such teaching is one of the most depressing aspects of our education system. It's all the more critical that *someone* gets to these people to override such nonsense! We need a multifaceted attack on the creationists and anti-science loonies who have learned little else but to make the Internet and courts work to their own ridiculous ends.

I'd better make another donation to FFRF, as they'll surely take this on, along with the hundreds of other challenges they mount each year.

**Clover Gowing Washington** 

# Losing Faith In Faith: From Preacher

To Atheist

by Dan Barker
"An arsenal for
skeptics.
A challenge to
believers."

Hardback, 342 pp., with photos. Member price: \$20 Nonmembers: \$25



FFRF, PO Box 750, Madison WI 53701 ffrf.org.shop/books/

Madison. Wisconsin May 2012 Freethought Today Page 22

## Meet a theatrical member



Sgt. Tobin Atkinson (left) and members of his Army unit at Kandahar Airport on New Year's Day 2003.

Name: Tobin Atkinson.

Where I live: Salt Lake City, Utah, where I was born and raised.

**Family**: I've been married to northern Virginia native Marynell Hinton since 2008.

Education: B.S. in theater and history, Southern Utah University; master's in directing, University of Utah; MBA in entrepreneurship, American Military University.

**Occupation**: Education specialist, Veterans Administration; artistic director, Meat & Potato Theatre (meatandpotato.org). The name Meat & Potato stems from the meaning "of fundamental importance: basic; also: concerned with or emphasizing the basic aspects of something."

Military service: U.S. Army Infantry, 2000-04 (special assignment to Army Entertainment, where I was tasked to take a play to Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, Korea and Japan). I was stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, and Fort Belvoir, Virginia. One month before my separation from the Army, I joined the Atheists in Foxholes march on D.C., a small, but fun-loving group. We had a great

How I got where I am today: Hard work, clean living, pure heart and a winsome smile. LOL! But seriously, it's good people that kept (and keep) me honest. This includes parents, NCOs, theater directors, teachers and an incredible wife.

A quotation I like: "There is nothing more satisfying than watching the self-righteous fall." (My mother after watching a news story on Ted Haggard)

"I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." (Evelyn Beatrice Hall)

"You put your hand on the bible and swore to uphold the Constitution; you didn't put your hand on the Constitution and swear to uphold the bible." (Maryland lawyer/now-state Sen. Jamie Raskin, testifying on a same-sex marriage bill in 2006)

These are a few of my favorite things: I've always loved the theater, on which most of my education has focused. I'm a member of the actors' union, and I co-founded Plan B Theatre and Meat & Potato Theatre in Salt

These are not: Religious hypocrisy (seriously, if you're going to look down

your nose at me, you had better be living a better life than I am, but most

My doubts about religion started: I grew up in a nonreligious family, so doubt started very, very early. Being a freethinker in the theocracy of the Beehive State forces you to start defending your nonbeliefs at a very early age.

Early high school was my first encounter with "I don't have to explain why I don't believe in god. You're the one saying there's an invisible man up in the sky. Explain that, Jack."

Why I'm a freethinker: I was raised as one. My father quit the Mormons at about age 16. My mother quit even earlier. She started asking questions in Mormon Sunday school, and the next week she was ushered into the nursery to take care of babies while mothers were in sacrament meeting. It was the last time she went to church.

I grew up being taught to rely on my own cognitive abilities, so that's the way I lived life. People have always accomplished more than god. Hard, intelligent work has done more good than a billion prayers ever will do. ("No supernatural ingredients were used in the making of this life.")

Ways I promote freethought: Over the years, I've adopted a much more subtle, almost subversive, approach to promoting freethought. Gone are the days of the toe-to-toe arguments. I let characters in the plays I write have those rants. Instead, I will usually have an exchange in private with someone. I've found that it gives them the opportunity to open up and really say what they're thinking.

I try to use humor to call attention to religious hypocrisy, an illogical religious assumption or a lie. I'm surprised at how many closeted liberals there are in Utah, and when I find one, I always remind them that no one knows whom they vote for when they go into that

Most of the plays we produce with Meat & Potato promote freethinking. We did a "1984" in which party members' armbands had a Christian cross in a white circle on a field of red (akin to the Nazi armband). In a recent adaptation of "The Odyssey," we purposely never mentioned any of the Greek gods from the original text. Odysseus and the others created and solved their



Tobin Atkinson with his wife, Marynell Hinton.

problems without being able to blame them on some supernatural power.

There's also an incredibly subtle thing we do with plays to promote freethinking. We always admit that the thing we are creating and you are watching is a play. It even states in our mission that we will create plays that are overtly theatrical: farces, musicals, dumbshows (pantomime), puppets, masks, etc. Why? Because doing so invites the audience to participate in the

We take as our cue the idea that thousands of years ago, theater evolved from one person of the tribe sitting on that side of the fire telling a story to people sitting on this side of the fire. There is no "fourth wall" (the imaginary boundary between a fictional work and its audience).

We never ask audiences to "suspend their disbelief," because that's religion's job, not ours. (Suspension of disbelief is when people know that those are actors on stage, they know it's not real, and yet they are willing to accept that what is happening is real.) Our job in the theater has always been to entertain, to tell a good story, to watch a hero struggle so that we don't have to. And when the play is over, we know what we saw was fantasy.

actually happened — unlike those who read certain religious texts.



## **Theocracy** Alert

There are times where we have questions for God's plan relative to us, but that's precisely when we should remember Christ's own doubts and eventually his own triumph.

President Barack Obama, remarks at the White House Easter prayer breakfast

CNN, 4-4-12

The question I have for you all is, like Pontius Pilate, what are you going to do with Jesus? Ultimately, if you don't have a relationship with him, and you don't really have a bible-believing mentality, really, anything goes.

Ron Brown, University of Nebraska assistant football coach, testifying at an Omaha City Council meeting against equal protections for gays

USA Today, 4-26-12

Though we know that 90% of Catholics practice artificial birth control if they are able to, if artificial birth control was to be paid for by this enacted insurance program, it seems to me that if Catholics don't want to use it, they're free not to use it. I don't understand why the bishops are allowed to get away with the lie that they are speaking for all Catholics.

Tom Murray, member of the Catholic group Call to Action

*The Observer, 4-26-12* 

I think that one of the greatest mistakes America made was to allow women the opportunity to vote. We should've never turned this over to women. And these women are voting in the wrong people. They're voting in people who are evil who agrees [sic] with them who're gonna take us down this pathway of destruction.

Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson, pastor of The Brotherhood Organization of a New Destiny and Fox News contributor, speaking to his Alabama congregation The Christian Post, 5-8-12

A true marriage is male and female and God.

Marquee at Devon Park United Methodist Church, Wilmington, N.C., which was a polling place for voters on a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, which passed statewide, 61%

WECT, 5-8-12

America may not forgive you, but God

Gov. Rick Perry, proclaiming May 3 as Texas Day of Prayer and making light of his "oops" presidential debate comment when he couldn't name the three federal agencies he would eliminate KVUE, 5-1-12

Our audiences never walk out of our theater thinking that that really,

Page 23 Freethought Today Madison, Wisconsin May 2012



Speakers gather for a group photo with some GAC planners.

# Athles facilities in the state of the state



FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker addressing the crowd.

## Global Atheist Conference — Melbourne, Austrailia



David Nicholls, president, Atheist Foundation of Australia, opening the Global Atheist Conference, April 13-15, 2012, Melbourne, Australia. With 4,000 attendees from more than 20 countries, GAC is the largest convention of atheists in history. Speakers from around the world included three of the "Four Horsemen": Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris, and there was a memorial to the missing fourth, Christopher Hitchens. Ayaan Hirsi Ali joined them in a roundtable.

## Photography by Rocco Ancora



Amazing Aussie Atheists: The hardworking "12 apostles" as volunteers put on the world's largest atheist convention and ran an incredibly organized conference, plotting every detail down to the minute. Hat's off to you from Dan and Annie Laurie, recipients of unparalleled hospitality.



The first day of GAC, Christian zealots picketed.



The second day, Muslim extremists took their place.

Madison, Wisconsin Freethought Today Page 24







On I-70, Denver

FFRF's Colorado Springs billboard

## FFRF wins Colorado Day of Prayer appeal

Continued from front page

to annual demands from the National Day of Prayer Task Force, based in Colorado Springs, Colo., which was seeking gubernatorial support for its overtly theocratic mission.

FFRF won a historic federal district court ruling, FFRF v. Obama, in 2010, when U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb declared the federal National Day of Prayer unconstitutional. FFRF demonstrated the religious origins of the 1952 and 1988 acts of Congress,

introduced by Rev. Billy Graham and other evangelists. The evangelical National Day of Prayer Task Force based at Focus on the Family headquarters — has essentially served as an arm of the government since 1988 by organizing government prayer day events that exclude non-evangelical Christians.

In 2011, the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals threw out FFRF's standing, but the Colorado appeals court affirmed standing to sue, without offering a legal judgment on the National Day of Prayer itself. No court has ever upheld the day of prayer on its merits under the Establishment Clause.

The appeals court is remanding the case to the trial court to consider whether a permanent injunction should be entered.

"We're exulting over the fact that reason has prevailed and constitutional rights have been affirmed," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

FFRF thanks its local plaintiffs and

members Mike Smith, David Habecker, Timothy G. Bailey and Jeff Baysinger, who made the challenge possible. FFRF congratulates its litigation attorney Richard L. Bolton.

FFRF, with Arizona members and pro bono help from attorneys Richard Morris and Marc Victor, is also in state court in Arizona challenging the Arizona Day of Prayer.

Read the Colorado appeals court decision at ffrf.org/news/ (scroll to May 10, 2012).

## Sign up for 35th annual FFRF convention in Portland Oct. 12–13

It's not too soon to register for FFRF's 35th annual national convention the weekend of Oct. 12-13, 2012, at the downtown Hilton Portland & Executive Tower, 921 SW Sixth Avenue, Portland, Ore.

Joining previously confirmed speakers Richard Dawkins and mystery novelist Sara Paretsky are journalist Katharine Stewart, author of The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children and Clergy Project "graduates," Jerry DeWitt and Teresa MacBain.

DeWitt, director of Recovering from Religion, openly parted with the Pentecostal ministry last year. MacBain, who is now acting director of the Clergy Project, left the Methodist ministry in March with much media attention. (See more on Clergy Project, Page 5.)

Hotel rooms are \$149 single to quadruple, plus taxes and fees. Call the Hilton Portland at 1-503-226-1611 or use the personalized reservation link: http://goo.gl/PHRmB

Optional meals include the Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast, \$25: Country scrambled eggs, broiled tomato, bacon, potato pancake, orange juice, apple pastry, cranberry muffins, pumpkin scones, fresh fruit garnish, freshly brewed coffee and teas, \$25, with vegetarian substitute for bacon.

Dinner is fresh salad, roasted local organic chicken or vegetarian strudel followed by pear tartlet (pear is Oregon's state fruit), \$55. Meals include 22% service charge. Vegan and glutenfree options available.

FFRF registration is \$60 per member, \$65 for nonmember companion accompanying member, and \$110 per nonmember (join for \$40 and save

Sign up for a preconvention tour of gorgeous Columbia River Gorge, including Multnomah Falls, from 1 to 5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 12, for a group rate of \$45. Buses will leave from the hotel at 1 p.m.

Official events begin at Friday at 7 p.m. with dinner on your own. Dawkins will speak Friday night.

Watch for updates and more details at ffrf.org/convention.



**Dawkins** 



**Paretsky** 



**DeWitt** 





MacBain

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

## Freedom From Religion Foundation's 35th Annual Convention October 12–13, 2012 **Hilton Portland & Executive Tower**



Portland,	Oregon
Make checks payab	ele to "FFRF"
No. registering	
Non-member registration(s) @ \$ (or join for \$40, save \$10!)  Student registration(s) @ \$25 (A  Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast @ Vegetarian option	\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\\$\
Name(s)	Please include names of all registrants for nametags
Address	
City/State/Zip Please incl	ude phone/e-mail (in case we have a question about your registration)