

Freethought Today

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October 2012

'God should be in school with our children'

FFRF sues school districts over Ten Commandments

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has filed two lawsuits that contest Ten Commandments monuments at Pennsylvania schools. One suit was filed Sept. 27 in U.S. District Court in Pittsburgh against the Connellsville Area School District for a marker at a junior high school.

FFRF, on behalf of two local "Doe" plaintiffs, seeks a declaration that the display is unconstitutional and should be removed. FFRF is also named as a plaintiff in both suits.

A similar federal suit was filed Sept. 14 against the New Kensington-Arnold School District for maintaining a Ten Commandments monument at Valley High School in New Kensington. FFRF first sent a letter of complaint in March about the illegal monument.

The Fraternal Order of Eagles donated the slabs to both schools in the mid 1950s. FFRF has nearly 700 Pennsylvania members. Pittsburgh-based attorney Marcus Schneider represents the plaintiffs in both suits.

Some *nonmembers* of FFRF were up in arms with dire predictions. At a "Save Our Stone" rally at Valley High, New Kensington resident Mike Hresko

spoke to the "crowd" of 50, according to the Valley News Dispatch. "We don't want it removed. This is part of our community. . . . They'll lock up the churches and we'll be just like a communist country."

At a similar event in Connellsville, a woman told WTAE-4 that the monuments contain "God's principles" and should stay. "I believe that God should be in school with our children."

The legal complaints state that the continued presence of the Ten Commandments on school property unconstitutionally advances and endorses religion. The complaints also note that [each] display "lacks any secular purpose," citing *Stone v. Graham*, a 1980 Supreme Court decision which ruled the Commandments may not be posted in public school classrooms, because "The pre-eminent purpose" for doing so "is plainly religious in nature."

Plaintiffs in the suit against the New Kensington-Arnold School District are FFRF member Marie Schaub, who has a child, Doe 1, in the school district who regularly encounters the bible



The monument in Connellsville, Pa.



The monument at a high school in New Kensington, Pa.



Dawkins draws nearly 900 to convention

God Delusion author Richard Dawkins accepts an Emperor Has No Clothes Award on Oct. 12 at FFRF's 35th annual national convention in Portland, Ore. For more coverage, see pages 11-14, page 22 and the back page. (Photo by Andy Ngo)

edict, and Doe 2, a student at Valley High School, along with Doe 3, parent and guardian of Doe 2.

The Valley News Dispatch reported that Schaub came to a pro-Commandments rally. "I just wanted to hear what they are saying. I find it amazing that people gather in support of breaking the law."

Doe 5 is an atheist member of FFRF who views the Connellsville monument as usurpation of parental rights and who does "not subscribe to the religious statements that are inscribed on the monument." Her child, Doe 4, attends the junior high and comes in regular contact with the prominent monument, which is in view of students boarding or exiting school buses and participating in outdoor gym classes.

The complaint notes, "FFRF and Doe 5 contend that a public school district has no right to instruct its captive audience of impressionable students on which god to have, how many gods to have, or whether to have any gods at all."

The tombstone-like New Kensington monument, about 6 feet tall, is directly in front of the main school entrance, near two footbridges that students, staff and visitors use to enter the building.

School Board President Robert Pallone wrote in March on a Facebook page called "KEEP THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AT VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL," that the district would not "remove this monument without a fight !!!!!"

The Eagles' Commandments campaign started when a devout judge and Eagles member, E.J. Ruegamer — who wanted to promote religion and Minnesota granite — teamed up with film director Cecil B. DeMille, who was advertising his 1956 epic "The Ten Commandments."

In 2002, FFRF successfully removed one of the first such monuments placed on public property in the city of Milwaukee. Actor Yul Brenner, who played Rameses II in the movie, had attended the dedication.

FFRF seeks permanent injunctions directing the districts to remove the monuments from district property, reasonable costs and attorneys' fees and nominal damages to plaintiffs. Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott helped draft both complaints.

Inside This Issue

Members give secular 'invocations'

Pages 9, 23

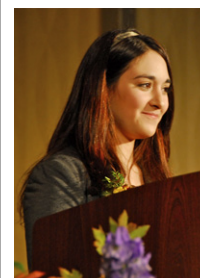


FFRF legal victories make news, end violations

Pages 6-7

Convention '12 coverage

Pages 11-14, 22, 24



Meet a Member

Meet a militant atheist



Steve and Kelly Wagner rented an RV and drove around the U.S. to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary in May 2010, two months before Steve died.

Name: R. Kelly Wagner (the R stands for Rebecca Ann, or possibly for Robot if one happens to be an Asimov fan).

Where I live: Columbia, Md.

Where and when I was born: In Chicago, 50-“mumble” years ago, raised on Long Island around Levittown.

Family: Oh heavens, too many siblings to mention, most of whom are Catholic. The one person I would like to mention would be my late husband, Steve Harsch, who was also an FFRF member until his death in 2010. No kids, lots of pets.

Education: B.S. in accounting, Northeastern University, 1978; MBA with concentration in federal income taxation, St. Edwards University, 1988. I've also taken coursework toward advanced degrees in dispute resolution, actuarial science and educational technology. My CPA license is currently on inactive status.

I'm a lifelong reader. I'm always learning something new. I take knitting and quilting classes, too.

Occupation: Before I retired, I worked as a CPA doing taxes in the 1980s, then spent 15 years as a financial analyst for the Texas Department of Insurance, doing solvency monitoring of property-casualty companies, which was a lot more fun than it sounds to most people. I taught introductory computer science courses at St. Edward's University in Austin for six years.

How I got where I am today: Let's not start too early, but let's go with getting diagnosed with congestive heart failure in December 2002 and my husband and I deciding to move someplace closer to my family, with better medical care and more culture in 2005. Maryland suited our politics much bet-

ter than Texas ever did (though Steve was born there and I lived there for 24 years), and it's a lot easier to be an atheist here than it ever was in Texas. As for all the stuff prior to that, I'd say the short answer is whim and random turns of fate!

Where I'm headed: Various attempts to improve my heart failure via surgery haven't worked out, so mostly I'm spinning my wheels rather than headed anywhere.

Person in history I admire and why: Has Isaac Asimov been dead long enough [1992] to count as history? And do I even need to explain why?

A quotation I like: “Do not let the future disturb you. You will meet it, if you must, with the same weapons of reason that today arm you against the present.” (Marcus Aurelius)

These are a few of my favorite things: Luxury knitting yarns, small pets (especially guinea pigs), playing the saxophone in community bands, sleeping in till noon on Sundays, autumn leaves, public libraries, the hope for universal health care and the Udvar-Hazy Center (part of the Smithsonian's Air & Space Museum, a great example of science and reason).

These are not: The guy at the supermarket who tried to tell me about Jesus last week; slow progress on new treatments for chronic illnesses; long waiting lists at the library for books I want to read *right now*; people who brag about being bad at math; people who “don't believe in” vaccinations (and people who don't believe in paying for public schools and libraries and recreation centers, but then it sounds as though I dislike all libertarians, and I've met a few that I do like).

My doubts about religion started:



Kelly Wagner marched in a Fourth of July parade with the Montgomery Village Community Band.

When I was 15. My family was Catholic, and I was depressed, and the oppressiveness of a god who would deliberately inflict depression on someone, and a religion that considers women second-class, started to weigh on me.

Why I'm a freethinker: Getting rid of organized religion was a start on lifting my depression; getting rid of the idea of gods who can do good things for human lives but arbitrarily, capriciously, and cruelly choose not to, really gave me a boost. Life is so much easier to explain, and so much less cruel, once we know that evil is the acts of humans only, and that prayers don't fix it, only



Photo: Andrew Seidel

Katie Stenz (left) and Annie Laurie Gaylor wear “FFRF Staff” caps that Kelly Wagner knitted. They won the staff “lottery.”

good works by other humans do.

It's like free speech: The answer to speech you don't like is more free speech; the answer to religion is more freethought.

Ways I promote freethought: I fill in “militant atheist” as my religion on forms that ask. I openly discuss my atheist views with anyone who asks. I wear my “Friendly Neighborhood Atheist” T-shirt, and I'm working on a piece of music for concert band that will be called “Freethinkers' March.” When it's done and I get one of my community bands to play it, you'll get a recording of it and rights to it — next spring, with any luck!

FFRF welcomes 16 ‘Lifers,’ two ‘After-Lifers’

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is pleased to announce and welcome its newest Lifetime and After-Life Members. Lifetime Members are Charles Bender, Rick Bentley, Lorraine Holmgreen Bills, Rebecca Bowerman (gift from Lifetime Member Donn Milton), Robertt Brassea, John L. Coppjans, Thomas Dixon, Scott Eppelman, Susan Fallon, Gerald Foreman, Thomas Hays, Naomi Janowitz, David Siverling, Martin Stone, Norman B. Wood, Brian Zeiler.

FFRF welcomes After-Life Members Montgomery Cleworth and Alan L. Hann.

States represented are Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Nevada, Texas, Virginia and Washington.

Many members choose to donate through the Combined Federal Cam-

paign, and several choose to put these funds toward a Lifetime Membership. Robertt Brassea is a new “Lifer” through a CFC contribution.

Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000 designated as a membership or renewal of membership. An After-Life Membership is \$5,000 and may be attractive to members “who do not believe in the supernatural, but do believe in the power of compound interest.” Both membership types ensure nary another renewal notice, go into a safe endowment and are deductible for income-tax purposes for the generous donor, as are all dues and donations to FFRF.

Our warm thanks to Alan, Montgomery, Brian, Norman, Martin, David, Naomi, Thomas, Gerald, Susan, Scott, Thomas, John, Robertt, Rebecca, Lorraine, Rick and Charles.

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.” 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.

Send Us Your Address Change Promptly!

Don't miss a single issue! If you move, notify us directly and promptly. **The Post Office does not forward third-class mail.** FFRF cannot be responsible for replacing back issues if we have not been notified prior to your move. Back issues, while they last, may be ordered for \$2 each.

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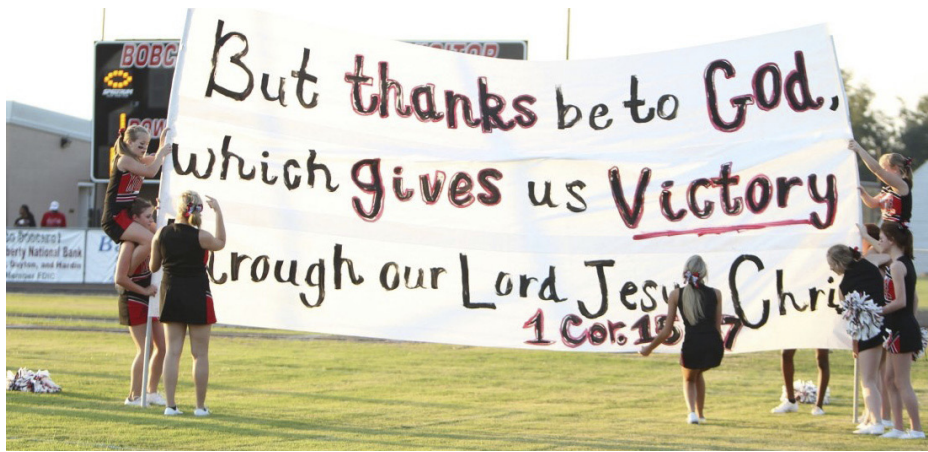
Contributors: Philip Appleman, Tim Earl, Andy Ngo, Andrew Seidel

October 2012

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

FFRF seeks plaintiffs to challenge ruling

Texas judge overrules school on bible banners



Football cheerleaders at Kountze High hold a banner for nonbelievers and non-Christians to run through along with their Christian teammates.

Texas District Judge Steve Thomas of Hardin County implemented a temporary injunction Oct. 18 in *Matthews v. Kountze Independent School District* that allows Kountze High School cheerleaders to make and hold Christian banners for football players to run through before games and for players to carry them around the stadium.

Thomas didn't rule on the actual merits of the case but set a June 24 hearing date for a permanent injunction, thus allowing the banners to be displayed through the end of the school year.

The injunction temporarily overturned the decision Superintendent Kevin Weldon made barring the banners after receiving a Sept. 17 letter from FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt on behalf of a local complainant.

The team ran through banners at home games with bible verses such as "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13); "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:14); and "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Responding to FFRF's complaint, Weldon told a TV station, "I commend [the cheerleaders] for what they stand for. But I called legal counsel and even though it's led by students, it should not be allowed to go on."

Schmitt had cited a long list of court cases that have held such displays

"constitute an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion. A reasonable Kountze student would certainly perceive the banners 'as stamped with [their] school's approval.'" The prevailing precedent is *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, a 2000 Supreme Court case.

According to cheerleaders, the bible banner idea came from an instructional camp they attended. "Coaches preach devotionals before games. We wanted to show our support for our boys," Meagan Tantillo said.

Banner supporters were immediately up in arms at the school's decision. FFRF's phone lines were swamped for several days with angry callers as the story went national, with coverage by major broadcast and print media, including "Good Morning America," the Wall Street Journal and The New York Times. FFRF Co-President Dan Barker faced off with a Liberty Institute spokesperson on Fox News.

Gov. Rick Perry and Attorney General Greg Abbott intervened on behalf of the Liberty Institute, an evangelical law firm, which sued to get the temporary restraining order. Both state officials made inflammatory public statements, as both have done in the past on state/church issues. Abbott called FFRF "menacing and misleading."

The grandstanding attorney general then proclaimed at a press conference with Perry, "We will not allow atheist groups from outside of the state of Texas to come into the state, to use menacing and misleading intimidation tactics, to try to bully schools to bow down at the altar of secular beliefs."

Perry, who repeatedly referred during the press conference to Abbott as "General," also castigated FFRF and, by extension, its 700-plus Texas members. "The underlying problem here is that there's this very vocal, as you shared, and very litigious minority of Americans that are willing to legally attack anybody who dares to utter a phrase, a name that they don't agree with."



A Kountze High Lion parades around the field at a Texas public school stadium.

Perry went on to demonstrate that he apparently has never read the godless U.S. Constitution: "We're also a culture built upon the concept that the original law is God's law, outlined in the Ten Commandments."

FFRF's local counsel Randall Kallinen of Houston filed an amicus brief Oct. 3 on behalf of the school district. (FFRF's four staff attorneys worked doggedly to research and write the brief in less than a week.)

In its brief, FFRF takes issue with the plaintiffs' claim that the banners are an exercise of free speech: "The speech in question is government speech or, at a minimum, school-sponsored speech."

"If the majority of the cheerleaders were atheists, would a court support their 'right' to hold up a banner insulting Christianity or all believers? The District has every right to simply prohibit all run-through and on-field banners."

FFRF contends that the banners are government speech because they are displayed in a context implying school endorsement and because the school has effective control over the messages. "Cheerleading for the school is undeniably a school-sponsored activity, and the banners displayed by the cheerleaders take place during a school-sponsored event."

The New York Times quoted Charles Haynes, director at the Religious Freedom Education Project at the Newseum. "If the cheerleaders aren't representing the school, then who are they [representing]? It would be like saying that the football team doesn't represent the school, they are just individual students just coming on the field and are free to do what they want to do."

The school district could decide to appeal Thomas' ruling, but in what seems like a curious bit of collusion, the district had formally asked the

court to hold "that the Establishment Clause should not be interpreted so as to require Defendants [the school] to bar the religious banners. . ."

While FFRF's complaint started the case, it's not a party to the suit. But if contacted by those with standing to sue, FFRF is prepared to challenge the continuing violation in federal court, where the case belongs.

"We encourage any student or parent with children in the public schools coming into contact with this religious practice at public school functions to contact FFRF," said Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. Plaintiffs with standing might also include school employees coming into regular contact with the banners at school sporting events.

FFRF has taken complaints about the practice spreading to other schools and has recently sent letters of complaint to Newton, Texas; Bossier Parish, La.; Stone County Schools, Miss.; and Thackerville Schools, Okla. FFRF was notified that the Stone County Mississippi School District ordered cheerleaders to stop making religious banners.

"Since the state's top law enforcer, Attorney General Greg Abbott, and its highest executive officer, Gov. Rick Perry, have openly expressed contempt for atheists and the Establishment Clause, this leads to a climate of intolerance. It takes courage to face down the full apparatus of state government, but we need those brave few to contact FFRF," added Barker.

"Don't let collusion, politicking and religious fervor in Texas destroy respect for keeping public schools free of religious divisiveness," Barker added.

The New York Times ("Faith, Football and the First Amendment," Oct. 21) and Washington Post ("Bench the Bible," Oct. 24) editorialized in FFRF's favor.

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
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*Freedom Depends
on Freethinkers*



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.

What Is a Freethinker?



free-think-er n.
A person who forms opinions about religion

on the basis of reason, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.

Heads Up

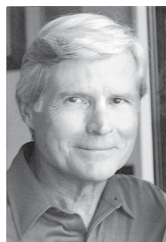
A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

October Spring

When crisp catalpa leaves
come tumbling down the frosty morning air
like tarpaulins for tulips,
it's spring again in little college towns,
October snipping at our brave beginnings,
the new year pruned away to nine lean months
of three-day weeks and fifty-
minute hours. This new year lights
no dogwood, no magnolia to find us
limping through our shrunken moments or
calling courage from our stubborn past,
the long pilgrimage of algae,
sponges, reptiles, flowers,
men. No robins linger
in the haze of this late spring
to whistle, in our fifty-minute hours,
the miracles to come: birds
of brighter plumage, richer songs,
flowers in subtler shades, men and women
walking together in peace.
But the big catalpa leaves
float crippled down the slanting sun,
brown nourishment to our long
hope, and we are clinging to
our thinning years because brown leaves
are clumsy promises: because it's
spring again.

© 1996 Philip Appleman

Reprinted from *New and Selected Poems, 1956—1996*.



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

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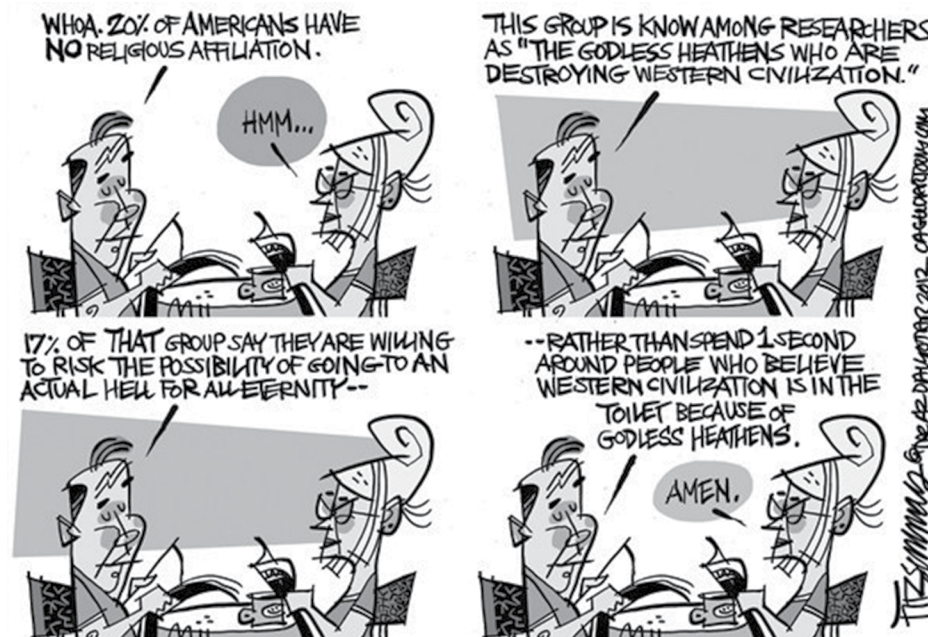


Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

Look what happened in Murfreesboro, Tenn., a city with more than six dozen churches. Muslims wanted one mosque, but the locals would have none of it. Scratch an "oppressed" Christian and watch a hypocrite bleed. **Justin Blair, letter to the editor, on the contention that nonbelievers should just not listen to pregame football prayers over the loudspeaker** *Knoxville News Sentinel, 10-3-12*

I just think they're misrepresenting certain minorities. Judaism, atheism, the lack of a religion, agnosticism or Islam — their God or their lack of God wasn't on this banner. And I think if it were, then that would be equally offensive to the many Christians that are in this community.

Dillon Nicholson, Vidor [Texas] High School senior, on cheerleaders' Christian football banners at neighboring Kountze High School *KFDM Beaumont, 9-23-12*

As we learn more about the universe, there's less and less need to look outside it for help.

Theoretical cosmologist Sean Carroll, California Institute of Technology, comment in an article headlined "Will science someday rule out the possibility of God?" *"Life's Little Mysteries," 9-18-12*

If we raise a generation of students who don't believe in the process of science, who think everything that we've come to know about nature and the universe can be dismissed by a few sentences translated into English from some ancient text, you're not going to continue to innovate.

Bill Nye, "the Science Guy," decrying creationism *Associated Press, 9-24-12*

As long as there are those who would take innocent life in the name of God, the world will never know a true and lasting peace.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, on the attacks on the U.S. consulate in Libya *C-SPAN, 9-12-12*

You roll your eyes and say why is this going on at a government-subsidized event? It shouldn't be happening. I also see it at all the high school games where they have prayers before games and after games. It's really out of place. It's hurting all those people that don't have that belief and ostracizing them. **Retired ecologist and FFRF member Bob Craig, Oak Ridge, Tenn., on prayers over the loudspeaker before University of Tennessee football games** *Knoxville News, 9-18-12*

As Every Student Every School's name implies, their idea is to proselytize every student in every public school in America through an aggressive "Adopt-a-School" campaign. And the way to do it is to have the kids do what grownups are not allowed to do: establish full-fledged missionary operations inside the schools. A clever map allows viewers to click on their state and type in their area code, revealing every school in the district and determine whether it has been "adopted" by churches or other religious organizations. Kids from those entities are instructed to conduct daily prayer groups during the school day, distribute religious literature and are given numerous other ideas for practicing or promoting their religion at school.

Author Katherine Stewart, who spoke at FFRF's convention in Portland, Ore., "How evangelicals are making children their missionaries in public schools" *The Guardian, 9-25-12*

Critical thinking says it's time we start cracking down on child molesters, whether you are the Boy Scouts, the Catholic Church or affiliated with any other organization. Until we get tough and prosecute to the full extent of the law, more and more horrifying stories are going to come to light, and more innocent young children will continue to needlessly suffer.

Steve Siebold, author of Sex, Politics and Religion: How Delusional Thinking is Destroying America *Huffington Post, 9-26-12*

We're atheists not because we want to gather and engage in collective back-slapping, not because we want to chortle at the foolishness of benighted believers, but because we care about creating a world that's more just, more peaceful, more enlightened, and we see organized religion as standing in the way of this goal.

Adam Lee op-ed, "Atheism's growing pains" *salon.com, 10-6-12*

To permit this name change would be placing unwitting members of the public, including public servants, in the position of having to proclaim petitioners' religious beliefs, which may or may not be in agreement with that person's own equally strongly held but different beliefs. For instance, a calendar call in the courthouse would require the clerk to shout out "JesusIsLord ChristIsKing" or "Rejoice ChristIsKing." **Discussion of a New York court's denial of a petition to change a family's surname from Nwadiuko to ChristIsKing** *volokh.com, 10-13-12*

Help fund FFRF's work through CFC

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has once again qualified for inclusion in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC).

The CFC is the only officially sanctioned program for soliciting federal government employees on behalf of charitable organizations. The CFC conducts annual campaigns in the workplace and allows federal employees to make donations through payroll deductions or other forms of payment to an approved list of charities. It's part of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, was first included on the CFC list of eligible charities in 2008. "Federal workers had contacted the Foundation in the past, noting the many religious charities on the listing, and wishing there were a nontheist alternative," said Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

"We're delighted to announce now again in 2012 that our activities throughout the United States, including the many scholarships we grant students, helped FFRF meet the rigorous eligibility criteria," Gaylor said.

To FFRF's knowledge, it's the only freethought group on the list, which includes hundreds of religious groups. All dues and donations are deductible for income-tax purposes.

"Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc." will appear in the listing of "National/International Independent Organizations" that's published in

each local campaign charity list in the early fall.

The solicitation period for 2012 campaign donations is Sept. 1 through Dec. 15. Deadlines vary by region. The CFC code that donors will use to designate their contribution to FFRF is 32519.

CFC donors contributed more than \$63,000 to FFRF in 2010 and more than \$88,000 in 2011.

Another way to give is via matching grant donations, which have become a significant boost to FFRF in recent years. Many companies offer to match (fully or a percentage of) their employees' donations to charitable nonprofits. These matches multiply the impact of the initial donation to further FFRF's goals.

Gaylor added, "It is recommended that all CFC donors check the box to include their name and mailing address (in addition to your email) with the donation. Donors will receive an acknowledgment from FFRF when we receive pledge notification (throughout the year). If you do not receive that acknowledgment, please contact FFRF to be sure we have been given your name and information about your pledge."

Charity Navigator gives FFRF its highest rating of four stars, which means "exceeds industry standards and outperforms most charities in its cause."



Orlando-area group

David Williamson, director of the Central Florida Freethought Community, a newly formed FFRF chapter, is pictured with Jocelyn Dervis. CFFC's mission "is to provide opportunities for secular activism and engage members in state-church separation efforts on the front lines and behind the scenes." For more information, go to cffreethought.org/ or write Central Florida Freethought Community, Box 621123, Oviedo, FL 32762, or phone (941)840-1808.

They Said What?

Marriage should be reinforced, not redefined. Forcing the church to buy insurance that goes against her teachings is a violation of religious freedom. "When the government tampers with a freedom so fundamental, one shudders to think what lies ahead." (Cardinal Dolan.) Your vote will affect the future and be recorded in eternity. Will you vote the values that will stand the test of fire?

"Test of Fire: Election 2012, Official Catholic Version," video threatening renegade Catholic voters with eternal hellfire, viewed more than 2 million times ("Official Protestant" version viewed about 40,000 times)
youtube.com, 9-16-12

The God I serve wants me to resound, wants me to make a joyful noise, and that's what I intend to do.

Pat Gibson-Hye-Moore, Florence County [S.C.] School District 1 Board secretary, saying neither the Supreme Court nor the ACLU can stop her from praying at board meetings
WMBF, 9-21-12

He who stumbles into the Internet loses his eyes, heart and feelings toward all that is holy. Users have no place in the next world.

Rabbi Shmuel Wosner, an ultra-Orthodox rabbi joining others in calling for iPhone users to burn them and use only "kosher" cellphones
Haaretz, 9-26-12

FFRF investigates election abuse complaints

'Tis the season for FFRF to combat potentially illegal electioneering by churches and pastors. On Oct. 17, Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a letter to the Internal Revenue Service regarding the senior pastor of Summit Church in Wichita, Kan.

Senior Pastor Terry Fox ran an ad in the Wichita Eagle stating that he would speak "about how the Obama administration and its socialistic agenda is [sic] making the way for the Antichrist to take over the world." Fox and Pastor Joe also host the church's weekly radio show, on which they routinely breach the wall of state/church separation.

Fox stated on one show that "There's no question in my mind that the sitting president we have today is far more evil and far more committed to a one-world government. . ."

These pastors also previously violated IRS rules when they endorsed Rick Santorum during the Republican presidential primary. The church's publication, *The Summit Informer*, includes illegal political campaign intervention, including an issue in August which railed against Obama's campaign strategies: "The secular left has mastered use of the Internet to further its extremist goals. In fact, President Obama's web-based 'Organizing for America' propaganda machine may have given him the 2008 election. Let's beat them at their own game."

Romney endorsement

On Oct. 19, Markert wrote to the IRS about a sign outside of Church in the Valley, Leakey, Texas. The church's marquee read, "Vote for the Mormon, not the Muslim! The capitalist, not the communist!"

Markert stated the church violated IRS regulations by expressly advocating its support from presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

Bullies in the pulpit

FFRF's legal staff continues to sift through complaints generated from the so-called Pulpit Freedom Sunday on Oct. 7 that was organized by the Alliance Defending Freedom, a Religious Right law firm formerly called the Alliance Defense Fund. The pastors are thumbing their noses at the IRS, which has stopped enforcing the 1954 Johnson Amendment that requires political neutrality on candidates in order to maintain tax-exempt status.

It was first held in 2008 with 33 pastors taking part in 2008. A record 1,477 participated this year, organizers said.

The San Diego Union-Tribune reported that Skyline Church Pastor Jim Garlow ended his Sunday sermon in La Mesa with this: "Some came to hear to hear an endorsement. My endorsement will be Jesus. I'll tell you whom

I'm going to vote for, but I don't think that makes it an endorsement. I'm going to vote for Mitt Romney, but I'm not telling you to."

The Bloomberg News editorial board summed it up pretty well Oct. 3: "The plan is for pastors to make explicit candidate endorsements in their churches, tape the endorsements and send the incriminating evidence to the Internal Revenue Service. . . . This is not a battle for free speech, in the pulpit or out. It's a test of whether Americans are willing to allow a taxpayer subsidy to be used for partisan political activity."

Voting in churches

FFRF continues to receive complaints from members distressed about voting in churches. FFRF sent three letters in October to elections officials asking them to refrain from selecting churches as polling places in their precincts.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a letter to the Wake County Board of Elections in Raleigh, N.C., regarding a large picture of Jesus right above a voting booth in Christ Baptist Church.

Letters also were sent to the village clerk in Germantown, Wis., and the Orange County supervisor of elections in Orlando, Fla., asking them to "re-

move churches as polling places for future elections."



The voice of anti-choice

FFRF is investigating the details behind this potentially illegal situation at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Richmond, Ill., which was brought to its attention by members of FFRF's newest chapter, the Metropolitan Chicago Chapter. Tom Cara is chapter president.

Legal victories

FFRF saves Tucson taxpayers \$1.1 million

The Freedom From Religion Foundation received word in September that the Tucson City Council has permanently suspended its decision to grant \$1.1 million to the Catholic Diocese of Tucson, Ariz., to repair the church's Marist building.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel had written an Aug. 7 letter to Mayor Jonathan Rothschild, warning that it was unwise policy for the city to offer \$1.1 million to repair a religious building it does not own.

"If you truly believe the best policy is to repair the Marist building, then the diocese should sign the building and property over to you free and clear. Alternatively, given the neglect the diocese has shown for a piece of Tucson history, consider seizing the property through eminent domain. Title should not remain with the diocese if the taxpayers are paying \$1.1 million."

Ward 6 Councilman Steve Kozachik, who was one of two council members to vote against the original funding scheme, noted at the time, "The Catholic Church has neglected it for a decade. If they were serious about this building, they could cancel one of their pro-life ad blitzes and pay for it in a heartbeat."

Seidel echoed this point in his letter. "The diocese is perfectly willing to spend money to restore its other property. Last year, the church spent \$75,000 to restore a crucifix." He pointed out the diocese just spent \$1.1 million raised in the "Treasures of the Heart" campaign to restore St. Augustine Cathedral next door to the Marist building.

According to a Sept. 11 memo by City Manager Richard Miranda, "The diocese of Tucson has informed city staff that they wish to retain ownership of the Marist College so that it can be used by them and the local parish."

Miranda explained that because of the diocese's position, the grant "can not be accommodated" and the city will "take no further action regarding a potential agreement for the use of [grant] funds for the stabilization of the Marist College." The city has already begun allocating the grant funds for other projects, including road and water tower repairs.

"This is a major victory for taxpayers and for the constitutional principle of separation between state and church," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "It pays to complain, or rather in this case, our complaint stops an unconstitutional payment."

Seidel's letter reviewed details on the diocese's healthy finances despite bankruptcy after payouts for more than 100 credible allegations of sexual misconduct with minors involving 26 priests.

FFRF, not Jesus, saves taxpayers

An FFRF letter of complaint Aug. 21 about a wrongful religious tax exemption in Wichita, Kan., resulted in the property being put back on the tax rolls and back taxes assessed. Sedgwick County Appraiser Mike Borchard said in October that Grace Baptist Church owes \$2,194 in back taxes for 2010 and 2011 on a home occupied by a local politician.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote to Borchard after being alerted to the nonexempt use of the home, which has been listed as a parsonage for clergy since 1996. Michael O'Donnell, a Wichita City Council member and Kansas Senate candidate, lives in the home. He's the son of a Grace Baptist Church pastor of the same name.



Patrick Elliott

Pastor Michael O'Donnell said the church will refile a tax exemption request, "essentially appealing the appraiser's ruling," the Wichita Eagle reported Oct. 17. Under state law, there is a presumption that property is taxable. The church will have the burden to show that the house is exempt.

The younger O'Donnell, who has now changed his original story to the newspaper on whether he was paying rent to the church, accused FFRF of having "a political agenda."

Not so, responded Elliott to the Wichita Eagle, "We're an apolitical group, a nonprofit that does not get involved in elections or campaigns, but we are concerned about state-church issues, including churches abusing tax privileges, which was the case here."

The house is taxable for 2012, but because levies aren't set, an exact figure isn't known, Borchard told the newspaper. The church likely faces a total bill for current and back taxes in excess of \$3,000.

FFRF stops city's church collaboration

The city of West Linn, Ore., rescinded an unconstitutional grant to Willamette Christian Church after a Sept. 28 Freedom From Religion Foundation letter of complaint.

It came to FFRF's attention that the West Linn City Council had approved a \$1,300 grant to the church, ostensibly to start a teen center called The Summit. City staff purportedly spent considerable time on the proposal, with the regular fees waived.

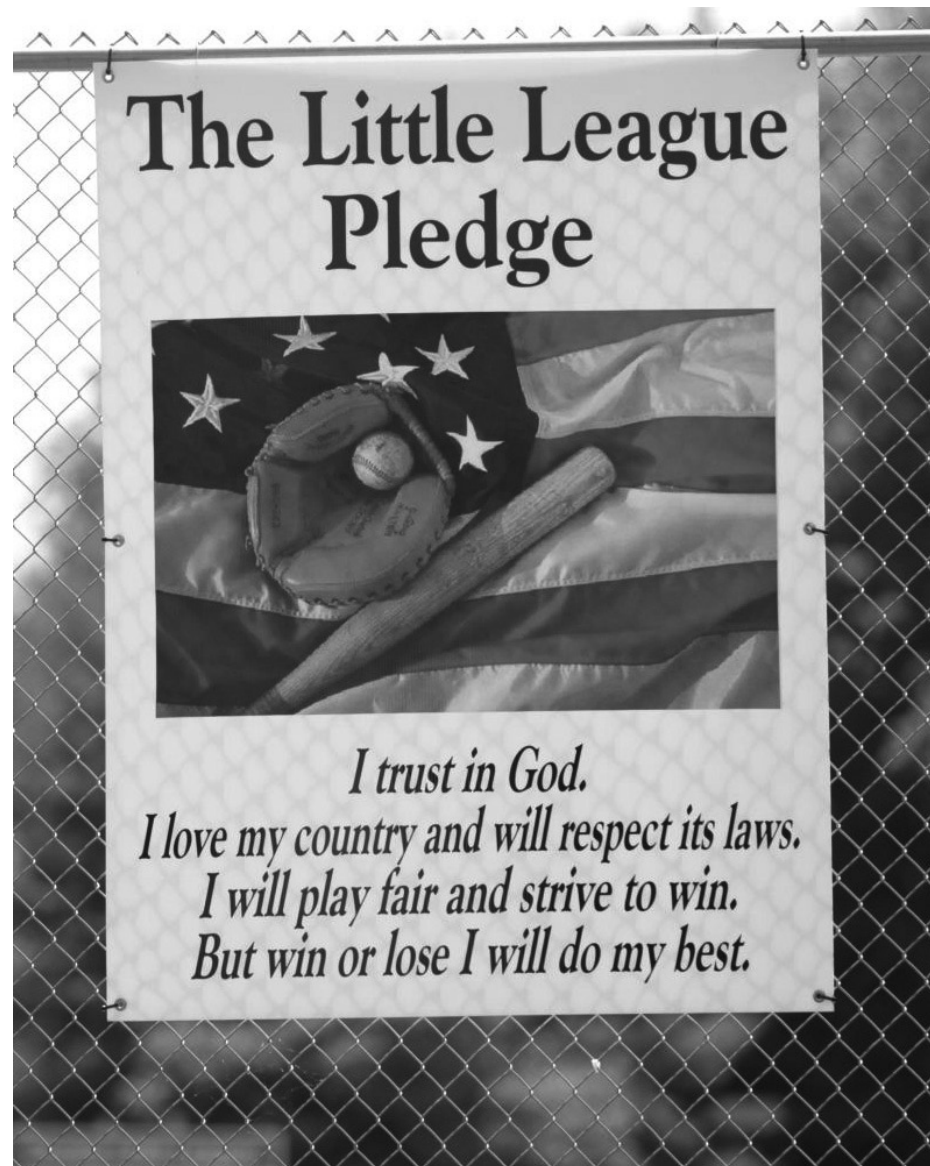
Councilor Mike Jones, who later became a member of the church, was apparently the driving force behind the grant, fee waiver and overall proposal.

"Finding suitable after-school activities for middle school students and providing them a safe place to gather is laudable," wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel. "Teen programming may be a genuine concern for the community, and while WCC is willing to address that concern to a certain extent, the record provides ample evidence that the city's actions crossed appropriate constitutional boundaries."

It's clear that the center, which would have been managed by the YMCA on weekdays, had religious purposes, Seidel noted. "WCC has scheduled 'church-related activities' for twice as much time as teen center activities."

The schedule called for the center to be open 10 hours a week to the general public and 20 hours a week for church activities.

FFRF noted numerous public statements that the main use of the center



Oneida, N.Y.

This sign at Maxwell Field in Oneida was brought to FFRF's attention by a resident. In a July 23 letter, Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote, "The city of Oneida should not be using the power and prestige of the department to impose any religious beliefs onto the many community members of varying faiths or no faith who come to the park for secular purposes." The director of the Department of Parks and Recreation responded that "The sign has been taken down as of Aug. 29, 2012."

would be for church activities.

"The primary effect is to help a church expand by funding new construction," Seidel wrote. "In other words, the council gave WCC \$1,300 to expand their church space."

FFRF suspected the center would be another way to target children who would otherwise not attend WCC.

"The city had no safeguards against religious use or proselytization at the time the grant and waiver were approved, nor does the city have any way to ensure that YMCA involvement continues. WCC is leasing the space, setting the hours and has the final say in all decisions. Should they choose not to partner with the YMCA, the city has no recourse."

The complaint letter noted other problems with the proposal, including waiver of fees, parking impacts, city officials in their official capacity sitting on a church advisory board and Councilor Jones' ties to the church.

While the city has not formally responded, FFRF has learned the proposal is dead, at least for now.

According to an Oct. 2 story in the Oregonian, Assistant City Manager Kirsten Wyatt told the newspaper the city decided to immediately rescind the grant to avoid controversy and a legal battle.

"Our options are either fight this or say, 'Hey, \$1,300 isn't that much money,' " Wyatt said. "We're chalking this up as a learning experience."

FFRF pulls plug on hospital religion

A public hospital in Hollister, Calif., will no longer allow Christian prayers and verses to be displayed on its walls.

Hazel Hawkins Hospital formerly displayed Christian prayers, including a plaque entitled "Nurse's Prayer" on the wall in the medical surgical unit.

In a June 26 letter, FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt warned, "Government-run hospitals have a constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion."

On Sept. 17, FFRF received assurance from hospital management that they "have taken all appropriate actions to address the areas identified and respect constitutional rights of all employees."

Lord's Prayer out, silence is in

Another Pennsylvania school board has decided to drop prayer at board meetings after getting a letter from FFRF.

The Octorara Area School Board in Atglen voted to substitute a moment of silence for Christian prayer to open meetings.

FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert had written Aug. 17 to board President Lisa Bowman on behalf of a local complainant about the illegal recitation of the Lord's Prayer

as an invocation. She reminded the board of numerous court rulings that said scheduled prayer at school board meetings is unconstitutional.

While the school hasn't formally notified FFRF of the change, according to a LancasterOnline story, the decision was made Sept. 17. The story said Vice President Brian Norris told the board it must honor the law and that members could meet privately to pray before meetings.

The advice to pray privately didn't sit well with everyone, the news story said: "Three school board members, however, stepped down from the official table to protest the change. Board member John McCartney Jr. walked to the end of the table and knelt in prayer as the school board began its new tradition of a moment of silence."

Bowman was out of town but told the board in a letter: "The board should not put the district at [financial] risk. It could affect taxpayer and student programming."

The Greencastle-Antrim, Eastern Lancaster County, Grove City and Big Spring school boards also voted recently to stop praying before meetings after getting FFRF letters.

Georgia district drops team chaplain

FFRF has followed up on Walker County Schools' (Ridgeland, Ga.) response to its request to investigate unusual constitutional violations by Ridgeland High School football coach Mark Mariakis. Although praising the superintendent's "commitment to upholding the Constitution," the letter raised some lingering concerns.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel's Aug. 21 letter of complaint had detailed allegations FFRF had received over a number of egregious public sports-church entanglements at Ridgeland High School. Most notably, they included the coach taking public school football teams to pre-game church meals where pre-meal prayers are conducted.

FFRF also asked for an investigation into the allegation that Mariakis regularly prays with his teams, had pressured public school students to attend a "Christian football camp" and that the team had adopted a "team chaplain."

Superintendent Damon Raines responded Aug. 30 that "the district will not have a team chaplain nor will school officials or employees, including coaches, organize, lead or participate in any prayers. Staff will also refrain from participating in the FCA [Fellowship of Christian Athletes]."

The district indicated pregame meals will no longer include "religious references."

As Seidel stated in his Sept. 11 reply, "taking public school teams to church still involves constitutional concerns." Quoting legal precedent that prohibits public schools from holding graduations in churches, Seidel argued that regardless of the purpose in choosing to have a pregame meal in a church, "the sheer religiosity of the space create[s] a likelihood that high school students . . . would perceive a link between church and state." FFRF suggested that the district could avoid legal liability and save money on transportation by hosting a "potluck" at the school and allowing "any organization, restaurant, or business to donate meals."

FFRF was alarmed over Mariakis' attendance on Sept. 9 at a "Rally to Pray"

by those who wish to "keep prayer in the practices and before games." FFRF's response called the coach's appearance inappropriate, saying, "It seems to send a message that he is unrepentant and hostile to First Amendment limitations on his proselytizing."

The letter asked the schools to investigate the context of his remarks and to "ensure that Mariakis understands he cannot use his position as coach to 'share the Gospel' with his team and other public students."

FFRF urged the district to adopt a written policy over religion in the schools "clearly prohibiting proselytizing and prayer by school officials or at school-arranged and sanctioned events."

FFRF also noted that it appears public school buses and drivers are taking players, coaches and staff from the school to churches for meals. FFRF further requested a response to an unanswered allegation from its original complaint that the football program has used the bible as a motivational tool.

Faculty now barred from Christian club

A teacher in Abbeville County Consolidated School District, Abbeville, S.C., will no longer be allowed to actively participate in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes student club.

The Wright Middle School science teacher was the group's faculty sponsor but actively participated in its 2010 prayer meeting and praised its Christian agenda. She stated in an article on the South Carolina FCA website that the 200-student prayer group was "very sweet and moving" and that at each FCA meeting they've had a student come to Christ.

A June 18 letter from Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert warned, "The Supreme Court has stated that public school employees, including teachers, must refrain from actively participating in religious activities while acting within their governmental role."

An attorney responded Sept. 14 that the district would "ensure that school faculty understand their role with regard to the sponsorship of religious [clubs] so that no further concerns will occur."

FFRF halts discount at Miss. restaurant

A restaurant in Wiggins, Miss., will no longer offer a preferential discount to church-going patrons.

Western Sizzlin' Steakhouse promoted a "half-off buffet" to customers who presented a "church member appreciation card." The discount was valid only for members of three local Baptist churches.

In a June 11 letter, FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt warned the manager that the restaurant was in violation of the Civil Rights Act and that "it is illegal for Western Sizzlin' to discriminate, or show favoritism, on the

basis of religion."

In a Sept. 11 response, management confirmed the business will "discontinue including churches in our discount promotions and programs moving forward and will only offer them to other local businesses and companies that are not religious in nature."

Michigan board drops opening prayer

The Pellston [Mich.] Public Schools board meetings no longer open with prayer after FFRF letters of complaint. The prayers were often delivered by a board member.

FFRF first sent a letter in July 2011. An attorney for the board responded that he didn't believe the prayers were illegal.

In a November 2011 follow-up, Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt clarified the law. She urged discontinuation of the practice immediately to "eliminate the need for costly and protracted litigation of an issue that is settled by the courts."

The attorney responded Sept. 10 that "the Board of Education no longer opens its meetings with a prayer. Instead, the Board observes a moment of silence which is not intended to promote religion."

Teacher uses FFRF's letter against student

A Cheektowaga [N.Y.] Central High School teacher who posted bible verses and a drawing of three crosses in her classroom has been admonished.

She also invited a guest speaker to her advanced placement anatomy class who used bible verses to encourage students to "head down the right path, according to FFRF's student complainant.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert objected in a June 7 letter to Superintendent Dennis Kane. The student reported that the teacher shared FFRF's letter with the class on the last day of school and verbally attacked the student anonymously, alleging that the person who had complained to FFRF lacked integrity and character and was on the same level as a student who had cheated on the class's final exam.

Markert sent another letter June 14 to the school district outlining the teacher's egregious reprisal. In a series of replies on June 20, June 22 and Sept. 11, Kane informed FFRF that he took the complaint very seriously, had done an extensive investigation and confirmed that the student's allegations were true.

Kane told FFRF that all religious displays were removed from the classroom and said the teacher was reprimanded and directed not to discuss religion in her classroom.

Arkansas teacher told to stop religious talk

An elementary teacher in the Little Rock [Ark.] School District who "referred to Jesus and God in several conversations" has been warned to stop. A June 21 letter from Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott cautioned the district "to make certain that 'subsidized teachers do not inculcate religion.'"

The district responded Sept. 13, assuring FFRF that the administration told the teacher that her conduct "was inappropriate and that she must follow the LRSD 5th Grade Curriculum."

FFRF action stops football prayers

Monroe High School in Alexandria, Ind., will no longer permit coaches to participate in or facilitate pregame prayer. In a May 23 letter to the Alexandria Community School Corp., Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel informed the district that coaches were violating the law.

The superintendent responded Sept. 12: "The administration has undertaken measures to correct behavior by providing reference to our school policy and the case law . . . as well as your original correspondence to the building principals and athletic director."

Pregame prayers will no longer be broadcast over the loudspeaker at West Jones High School football games in Ellisville, Miss.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote an Aug. 26 letter to the school district. After several follow-up letters, FFRF has learned that prayers have been replaced by a moment of silence.

Epic fail for teacher's 'Critical Thinking'

A Suwannee High School teacher in Live Oak, Fla., is no longer permitted to display religious images in his "Critical Thinking" classroom. FFRF was alerted that the teacher had a Ten Commandments statue on his desk and a poster with a quotation exhorting people to pray.

"It is unconstitutional for the school to promote a religious message to students through calls to prayer and religious iconography put on display by a school official," Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote Aug. 28.

Three days later, the superintendent responded that "religious statutes, posters, or messages" had all been removed from the classroom.

Religious commercial forced off air

The New Mexico Department of Health has stopped airing an anti-smoking TV ad containing religious messages. The ad featured a woman in a church pew praying, lamenting her ability to quit smoking and making the Catholic sign of the cross.

In a May 3 letter, Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor noted "this imagery tends to send the message that the New Mexico Department of Health endorses the Christian religion."

On Sept. 5, the agency answered that "The ad is no longer being placed and there is no plan to renew the license for that spot of others in the 'Dear Me' series at this time."

Water board can't pray for rain in Oklahoma

The Oklahoma Water Resources Board stopped opening its meetings with Christian prayers after getting an Aug. 1 letter from Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.

An attorney for the board responded Sept. 10 that "the OWRB has discontinued the invocational prayer at the beginning of its regular monthly meetings."



Rebecca Markert



Stephanie Schmitt

Legislative immunity trumps judicial 'alarm'

Judge chastises pandering Pennsylvania House but dismisses FFRF suit

U.S. District Judge Christopher Conner on Oct. 1 dismissed the Freedom From Religion Foundation's lawsuit against officials of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives for declaring 2012 as "the Year of the Bible," while at the same time chastising state officials for "premeditated pandering" for religious and political purposes and expressing alarm that it passed unanimously.

FFRF sued in March after the House passed the resolution Jan. 24 that exhorted citizens and government officials to "study and apply the teachings of the Holy Scriptures." It challenged the resolution for violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and Article I, section 3 of the Pennsylvania Constitution.

In his Oct. 1 decision, Conner ruled that FFRF and its local plaintiffs had standing to sue, "which is a major victory in itself these days," commented

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. Conner also ruled that House officials had absolute legislative immunity. Conner, who was appointed to the federal bench in 2002 by President George W. Bush, has notably also ruled against the Affordable Care Act signed into law by President Barack Obama.

While granting the defendants immunity for a "legislative act," Conner noted that the immunity "should not be viewed as judicial endorsement of this resolution. It most certainly is not."

Conner wrote, "At worst, it is premeditated pandering designed to provide a reelection sound bite for use by members of the General Assembly. But regardless of the motivation. . . its express language is proselytizing and exclusionary. . . . The court is compelled to shine a clear, bright light on this resolution because it pushes the Establishment Clause envelope behind the safety glass of legislative immunity. That is passed unanimously is even

more alarming."

The resolution passed 193-0, although several members soon expressed regret that they voted for it. It was included in a stack of "noncontroversial" resolutions that are usually approved pro forma.

The "blatant use of legislative resources" contravened "the spirit — if not the letter — of the Establishment Clause," Conner wrote scathingly.

He concluded, "At a time when the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania faces massive public policy challenges, these resources would be far better utilized in meaningful legislative efforts for the benefit of all of the citizens of the Commonwealth, regardless of their religious beliefs."

"The Establishment Clause, prohibits all government speech endorsing religion — without or without coercion. The government is precluded from taking a position on the merits of religion, contrary to the clear import

of the Year of the Bible Resolution in this case," said Barker.

The lawsuit was filed by attorneys Lawrence M. Otter, Doylestown, Pa., and Richard L. Bolton, Madison, Wis., on behalf of FFRF and 41 named Pennsylvania members.

In a related story, the House on Oct. 17 approved another "noncontroversial" resolution that was introduced Oct. 15 declaring October in Pennsylvania as "Prayer Month for the purpose of setting aside time to pray. . ."

FFRF sent out an Action Alert but the resolution passed 189-2.

"It's absurd to declare that a month of prayer should be observed by all citizens, including many who never pray or certainly don't say Christian prayers," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Even more absurd is that they didn't pass the resolution until the month was more than half over. I guess we should at least be thankful for that."

Sharing the Crank Mail

A sampling of letters and emails, grammar and spelling uncorrected, from people you might say are on the fence about FFRF's work:

TEXAS Cheerleaders

Haven't you puppets of Satan learned your lesson yet? What do you not understand about DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS!! — *Sally Chamberless*

Bible banners

Stay out of Texas, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico. Heck, stay out of all 48 states. WI and CA dont count. — *Johnathan King*

jesus

keep your God hating out of Texas and AWAY FROM MY CHILDREN! You are horrible people and i can only hope god will wipe the earth clean from freaks like you!!!! — *Stephanie Roberts*

Godless bastards

You heathens should rot in hell. You are all a disgrace to this country and no doubt lack patriotism and faith in the USA. Go someplace else and practice your depraved desires. — *Ian Scott, Lake Forest*

Hey freaks

Texans believe in God. Take your athiest beliefs and stick them where the sun does not shine. — *Steve*

religion

i hope you keven waldon and all your followers die a horrible death, you will pay for your actions. you are some of the lowest life forms on the earth. i spit on your grave.

Religion

You people must live under a rock. You are the lowest form of life on this earth. Do you slither out each day thinking how you can force your will on people? I'm sure you are slimey scum that really hate yourself and want others to join you under your rock, Slimey scum bags, I hope your spouse gives you AIDS. — *Mike Pahl, Mt Home*

Your foundation

FUCK YOU, BASTARDS AND SONS OF SATAN! GO TO HELL FROM WHERE YOU BELONG. BURN, BASTARDS, BURN! — *Thomas Greene, Clarksville, Tenn.*

Taking out the trash

FREEDOM FROM ASSHOLES AND BLITHERING IDIOTS. Our goal is to round up all the

liberals, fags, perverts, atheists, anarchists, secular stooges, victims of cranium void, those that are stuck on stupid, and the rest of the human swill soiling our country and ship them to anywhere but here. — *Zen Ram*

All Public Prayer

When we pray, plug your ears, walk away, do a little dance or stand on your head. Build your own schools, restaurants and malls. Keep your taxes to fund your non religious community. We do pray. We will pray. If it bothers you, run! You need to go away and establish places where religious freedom is not allowed (build a compound). Your organization and all of those who feel religious freedom is wrong are guilty of committing treason. What a shame there is no prison that has a Zero tolerance for religion. — *Susan Voce, Madison*

Stay the &^%\$ out of PA

THIS COUNTRY WAS NOT FOUNDED ON MINORITY (WHINERS) RULE. I HAVE NO PROBLEM WITH YOU BEING AGNOSTIC. SCREW YOU ASSHOLES. — *Greg Sensabaugh, South Park*

Austin Texas Cheerleaders

Take that law suit hang out your ass like an anchor and chain aboard ship! — *Arthur Windell, Caldwell*

I love JESUS

your a retard and your wasting your life. SUCKS TO BE YOU — *Sam Stevens*

About Texas

I hope when you sue that town in Texas for displaying religious freedom, you will lose. I hope that they squat over your atheist chest and take a fat dump on it. — *Regards, Scott T.*

Freedom of Religion

If you are right about religion, you are going to buuuuurn for your lies, deception and trickery. I hope you fall on your butt and there is a very very large and sharp stake underneath you. — *Steve Smith*

your sin

God is watching you Judas' and you will surely be punished for denying his existence. Ignorant fools. — *Phil Selfridge*

I am OFFENDED!

All I have left to do now is to pray for you LOUDLY in every government funded place I am in. God BLESS You. — *Steven R. Phillips, Waukesha, WI*



Champaign, Ill.

"This is true," writes Jay Hurt from Illinois. "I have seen the evangelists' TV shows."

Ahlquist not buffaloed by family institute

Rhode Island freethought activist Jessica Ahlquist, 17, spoke Sept. 18 at York High School in Elmhurst and at two other Illinois high schools despite pressure from the Illinois Family Institute to get schools to cancel her speeches during Constitution Week events.

FFRF sent an Action Alert to members Sept. 17 urging their support of Ahlquist's efforts to bolster the First Amendment.

The Elmhurst Patch reported students were eager to ask her questions. "Why did it bother you so much? Couldn't you just look away?" one student asked.

"Because it's illegal," Ahlquist said. "Because it's my right and I feel strongly about my rights and I feel other people should too."

Charles Ovando, social sciences division chairman, said the discussion was more about Ahlquist being threatened, which was a good message for students to hear.

"When you talk about exercising your constitutional rights, that sometimes comes at a cost. It's not just a joy ride to speak up."

Former Tiller clinic reopening in Kansas

The Wichita, Kan., clinic formerly operated by the murdered Dr. George Tiller has been bought by an abortion-rights group and will reopen as a family and women's health center that will offer abortions and other services.

Julie Burkhart, executive director of Trust Women Foundation Inc., said the nonprofit bought the clinic in August. An attorney for Tiller's widow, Jeanne, confirmed the sale Sept. 26 to The Associated Press.

The state has been without abortion services except for the Kansas City area since religious zealot Scott Roeder fatally shot Tiller in church, where he was ushering, in 2009. Tiller was wearing body armor because of death threats but was shot in the head.

Property tax records online listed the property's appraised value at \$734,100. Burkhart said she was unsure when the clinic would open. "Thousands of women right now have to travel three hours-plus for medical services. It's a burden on women. It's a burden on women's families."

Gives freethought 'invocation'

Michigan atheist makes a difference

By Tim Earl

In the fall of 2011, after hearing one too many invocations praising Jesus at our City Council meeting in Portage, Mich., I decided to do something about it.

I was still thinking about it when Dan Barker spoke at a Center for Inquiry event in Grand Rapids. Afterward, as Dan was signing my copy of *Godless*, I mentioned it to him. He encouraged me to address the issue with the council.

When I said that I had tried without success to find a "secular leader" to give a secular invocation, Dan suggested that I offer to do it myself. So, in my letter to the council, I did make that offer. They did not address it at the next meeting, but it was on the agenda for the one after that, but unfortunately I was out of town on business and couldn't attend.

I watched the video later and was told by the city clerk that I would be scheduled to give a secular invocation at a later date. (In November, I received a copy of the 2012 invocation schedule which included my name for a July meeting, with a form letter



Freethought ambassador Tim Earl.

thanking me for serving the community by participating in the process).

When I attended the next meeting and thanked them for considering the matter, one council member came up to thank me for bringing it up, saying she thought on occasion that the invo-

cations went too far.

It was interesting to watch the video of the council's discussion about my letter. The city attorney said that he felt the council was not violating any law. One council member asked if there were invocation guidelines given to people, for example, to avoid overly sectarian language. The attorney advised the council against doing that, fearing it would become de facto policy and open the city up to a lawsuit for violating it later.

Here is the text of my invocation:

"I represent no congregation or denomination. But I appreciate the invitation to give this invocation on behalf of the nonbelievers in our city, which includes those who do not subscribe to any particular religious sect and those who deny the existence of a god altogether.

It can be easy to forget or pretend that we don't exist because we are a small minority, but we are a rapidly growing minority, so we do appreciate the chance to get our seat at the table.

We include doctors, lawyers, teachers and people of all walks of life who live moral lives and contribute to the welfare of our community. As a veteran, I can even assure you that there are indeed atheists in foxholes. With that said, thank you again for the opportunity.

And so, while I would prefer that the practice of invocations be discontinued, I recognize that that is unlikely to happen here in the near future, so I thank you again for this opportunity to represent a minority viewpoint.

And so, without appealing to a higher power which I do not believe exists, I ask each one of you to put forth your best effort to listen intently, resolve differences, find common ground and advance the progress and prosperity of our community.

Because with or without prayer, that's what needs to be done, and prayers don't pay the bills, or maintain the roads, or do any of the work that this council and our city manager do so effectively on our behalf. As human beings, all we can do is use the talents and wisdom which nature, our education and experience have given us to overcome the challenges we face.

And when the task before you is difficult, I ask that you not to look upward for guidance from some higher power which is most likely an outgrowth of our own fear of mortality, but instead look inward to your own sense of morality and reason, and also look outward to the members of this community who come forward to lend their support and assistance.

Only through a spirit of cooperation and unity can we continue to make the city of Portage such a wonderful place to live, work, and raise our families.

In closing, it's important to remember that you don't need a god to hope, to care, to love or to live. And we don't need one to help conduct city business.

Thank you."

During the meeting, the council approved four churches as polling places (out of 21 precincts). I told the council I opposed "forcing citizens to enter a house of worship to exercise their most cherished democratic right." I noted



Lt. Cmdr. Tim Earl, chief engineer on the USS Fletcher in 2003, deployed during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

studies that have shown a link between how people vote and where they vote.

After the meeting, a council member thanked me for coming and said she was going to share the video with her atheist friend. She asked about alternative voting locations. The mayor and others joined in and we had a nice discussion. They gently suggested that, having brought it up, I should be willing to help find a solution. I'm still working on that.

Two interesting things happened at the next meeting two weeks later. Before the meeting, the mayor took the Catholic priest scheduled to give the invocation aside and appeared to ask him to avoid sectarian language (which he avoided). I'm not sure if the mayor did that because he saw me there or not, but I found it encouraging.

Then, as I was leaving, a man asked to speak with me. (He was a police detective, I learned during the conversation. City policy is to have at least one officer at every meeting.) He said he found my invocation at the previous meeting offensive. He felt that I had insulted religion in general and Christianity in particular.

We had an interesting discussion, which brought out all the same tired old arguments like "the minority forcing the majority to accept their position." I shot them all down. After about 10 minutes, he said we would never agree but said he felt better talking about it.

FFRF member Tim Earl was born and raised in Detroit by a non-practicing Protestant father and a "pre-Vatican II" Catholic mother and attended Catholic schools K-12, including an all-male Christian Brothers high school. He served in the Navy from 1996 to 2004, including service as chief engineer of the destroyer USS Fletcher in the opening months of the 2003 Iraq War.

*"Part of what finally pushed me over the edge to nonbelief was being exposed to Islam firsthand while in the Middle East. Seeing how passionate these people were about their beliefs, I started thinking about the mutual exclusivity of the world's major religions. I finally finished this journey of self-discovery when I read *The God Delusion*. I realized that I was indeed an atheist and that there was nothing wrong with that. When I told my wife, a secular Jew who had never really discussed religion with me, she said, "It's about time. Welcome to the club." We now raise our two daughters, ages 4 and 7, with no religious tradition.*

In the News

Pew: 1 in 5 'nonreligious'

The U.S. for the first time ever does not have an adult Protestant majority, according to a new study by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. The percentage of Protestants has fallen to 48%.

Contributing to the decline, The Associated Press reported Oct. 9, is the fact that about 20% of adult Americans say they have no religious affiliation. That's up 5% from five years ago.

According to Pew, the category includes people who say they pray or consider themselves spiritual but not religious. "Still, Pew found overall that most of the unaffiliated aren't actively seeking another religious home, indicating that their ties with organized religion are permanently broken, AP reported.

In 2007, 60% of people who said they seldom or never attended religious services still identified themselves as part of a particular religious tradition. In 2012, that statistic fell to 50%, according to the Pew report.

Pew predicts more growth in "nones," saying that one-third of adults under age 30 have no religious affiliation, compared to 9% of those 65 and older.

Man kills rather than spoil his child

Benjamin Edetanlen, sentenced to 18 years in prison Oct. 11 in DeKalb County, Ga., for killing his 5-month-old son and beating his two other children in 2004, blamed the bible.

Assistant District Attorney Dalia Racine told the court that "The defendant stated that he disciplined the children according to the Book of Proverbs in

the bible."

Edetanlen told authorities that Proverbs 13 taught him "Spare the rod, spoil the child."

Italian churches losing tax exemption

The Catholic Church in Italy will be forced to pay taxes starting in 2013 after the European Union pressured the government to pass a law stripping the church of its property tax exemption, La Repubblica daily newspaper reported Oct. 12.

Historically, all church property, even if used commercially, (for a bed and breakfast with a chapel in it, for example) has been tax-exempt.

The move will net estimated annual revenues of 500 million to 2 billion euros.

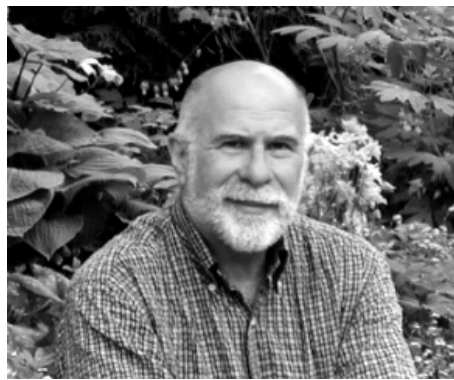
Einstein 'God' letter sells for \$3 million

A handwritten letter in which Albert Einstein questioned the existence of God sold for \$3,000,000,100 to an anonymous bidder on eBay. The minimum acceptable bid was \$3 million for the online auction held Oct. 8-18. Only two bids were received.

Einstein wrote the so-called "God letter" in German on Princeton University stationery, a year before he died in 1955. It said, in part, "The word God is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses, the Bible a collection of honorable, but still primitive legends which are nevertheless pretty childish. No interpretation, no matter how subtle, can (for me) change this."

The letter and envelope last sold in 2008 for \$404,000.

Finding secular alternatives to AA



By Henry Steinberger, Ph.D.

When people have a problem with addictions, where can they turn? Most people can name only Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step groups. Most treatments centers and courts refer people to them, but many people have a problem with this.

Though some people manage to take the helpful fellowship and ignore the higher-power/god talk, many of us who reject theism and supernaturalism will forgo help rather than seek a so-called “spiritual awakening” and accept a “higher power,” who, if prayed to in the right way, removes one’s “defects of character.”

Worse, when a person rejects the 12 steps for all of these legitimate reasons, they are accused of being in denial about their problem and receive threats that they will end up in jail, insane or dead if they don’t accept the 12-step solution, as if there is no other path to recovery.

U.S. courts have consistently ruled that 12-step programs are religious for purposes of the First Amendment and forbid their mandated or coerced imposition. Further, research has demonstrated that although participation in these groups is usually helpful, regular attendance and real participation were more likely when the individual’s degree of religiosity was congruent with that of the group (Atkins and Hawdon, 2007).

But accurate information about secular options rarely comes from the underinformed and biased sources often unwillingly providing it. After all, religious movements have a commitment to winning new converts, not providing alternatives.

But secular alternatives do exist.

SMART Recovery (SR) has built its science-based, self-empowering, abstinence program on empirically tested methods. Besides the mutual support found in its almost 800 face-to-face meetings worldwide and daily online meetings, SR offers recovery tools proven effective in research. Its Four Point Program aims at (1) motivation to abstain, coping with cravings, managing problems such as negative emotions, and finding a life with balance. Like AA, lifetime abstinence is the goal, and meetings and help are free. Unlike AA, lifetime abstinence need not require lifetime attendance at meetings.

SMART stands for Self-Management And Recovery Training and is not claiming to be smarter than other groups. It’s recognized by many professional health organizations and governmental agencies, which are listed and linked at smartrecovery.org/linkpage.htm.

SR’s website (smartrecovery.org) pro-

vides links to other secular groups, which do not always reciprocate. SR’s tag line is “Discover the Power of Choice.” That includes the choice to quit using and the choice of one’s recovery path.

Other secular recovery

These recovery programs are also secular and free:

Women For Sobriety aims for abstinence and offers volunteers the opportunity and training to become meeting “moderators.” Dr. Jean Kirkpatrick started WFS out of dissatisfaction with AA’s focus on lessening hubris — more of a problem with men, whereas women (and minorities) often need to be empowered rather than further humbled.

Her “New Life” program is based on positive thinking and metaphysics, so it may not meet everyone’s definition of secular, but it’s not a theistic spiritualism. The website (womenforsobriety.org) doesn’t link to other groups or list its meetings (perhaps for security), so you have to contact the central office to find a group.

Secular Organizations for Sobriety (aka Save Our Selves) is affiliated and supported by the Center for Inquiry of Los Angeles, thus affirming its humanist credentials. A dominant figure, James Christopher, started SOS. Meeting leaders are all recovering people.

The program might be described as the 12 steps minus the god stuff. The website (cfwest.org/sos) provides a list of meetings but no links to other programs.

LifeRing started when Martin Nicolaus, head of SOS publishing, broke with that organization to start a group “not affiliated” with any other (like CFI). He claims that each person creates their own program, but his books provide theory and structure. Volunteer “conveners” are all recovering people. The website (lifering.org) lists meetings but does not link to other groups.

Moderation Management, unlike all the other groups, is not abstinence-based. The secular, science-based program is not for alcohol-dependents (alcoholics). MM provides safer responsible drinking limits and guidelines. It’s a 9-step program to help people cut down or quit, and either outcome is considered a success.

Volunteers include people who have never had an alcohol problem. The website (moderation.org) lists live and online meetings and links to other programs.

For the “never addicted” reader who wants to help, SMART Recovery volunteers include both never-addicted and recovering people, all of whom receive training in facilitating meetings.

Rational Recovery is often mistakenly offered as a secular alternative to AA, but RR stopped offering free self-help meetings in the mid-1990s. It’s a for-profit company that sells seminars, DVDs and some fine secular self-help books, but it’s not a self-help group.

Why am I interested in providing secular options?

My step-grandfather, Jacob Benjamin, who wrote “Did Jesus Ever Live or Is Christianity Founded Upon A Myth?” under the pseudonym Historicus, was a devout atheist and science-

minded for his time, but he engaged in secret maintenance drinking during the day and a family-destroying binge every night. He ruined my mother’s life and his own, which revealed to me a societal need.

I believe he might have been helped if there had been a secular alternative available back then. It is my hope that with this information more people in our FFRF and related communities will support and volunteer to help offer these secular options.

*Dr. Steinberger, an FFRF Life Member, is a licensed psychologist. He holds the Certificate of Proficiency in the Treatment of Alcohol and Other Psychoactive Substance Use Disorders from the American Psychological Association and is a past member of the SMART Recovery board of directors. He’s the editor/author of **The SMART Recovery Handbook** (2nd Ed., 2004) and is a volunteer adviser to SMART. He specializes in science-based, secular approaches to addiction treatment.*

In the News

Scouts forced to open ‘perversion files’

About 14,500 pages of Boy Scouts of America detailing sex-abuse allegations from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s were made public Oct. 18 by an Oregon court, including internal reports of alleged child molestations by more than 1,200 U.S. scoutmasters and other adult volunteers. The records, formally called the Ineligible Volunteer Files but commonly known as “the perversion files,” were submitted as evidence in a 2010 lawsuit.

Kelly Clark, a Portland attorney who won the landmark 2010 suit, told The Associated Press that the documents show that even though the Scouts have been collecting the files nearly since the Boy Scouts’ founding in 1910, the organization failed to use them to protect boys from pedophiles.

The decades-long cover-up is being compared to the failure of churches, the Catholic Church in particular, to report sex abuse allegations to police. In fact, many Scouting troops were sponsored by and met in churches. Pastors were leaders in some instances.

Religious Right groups’ coffers overflow

The top 10 Religious Right groups have total revenues of \$1.177 billion, according to a new study from Americans United for Separation of Church and State. [FFRF’s annual budget is less than \$2 million.]

The revenues, in parentheses, come from official IRS filings and other reliable sources.

1. Jerry Falwell Ministries/ Liberty University/Liberty Counsel (\$522,784,095)
2. Pat Robertson Empire (\$434,971,231)
3. Focus on the Family (\$104,463,950)
4. Alliance Defending Freedom (\$35,145,644)
5. U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (Lobbying expenditures: \$26,662,111)
6. American Family Association (\$17,955,438)
7. Family Research Council (\$14,840,036)
8. Concerned Women for America (Tim and Beverly LaHaye: \$10,352,628)
9. Faith & Freedom Coalition (\$5,494,640)
10. Council for National Policy (founded by Tim LaHaye: \$1,976,747)

Taliban targeting Pakistani girls

A British hospital in Birmingham is treating Malala Yousufzai, a 15-year-old Pakistani girl shot in the head on a school bus Oct. 9 by the Taliban in Mingora in retaliation for championing education for girls. She was alert after surgery and is expected to live but the extent of her recovery is uncertain. Another girl was slightly injured in the attack.

A Taliban spokesman, Ehsanullah Ehsan, said the girl’s activism needed to be stopped: “This was a new chapter of obscenity, and we have to finish this chapter.”

Malala received Pakistan’s first National Peace Award in 2009 for publicizing violence by hardline Islamists against education, The Guardian reported.

Another girl, 17-year-old Hina Khan, has received Taliban death threats and has had a red cross painted on her family’s home twice because of her views on female education.

Scandal topples D’Souza at Christian school

Dinesh D’Souza’s conservative Christian “family values” reputation took a big hit in past weeks amid rumors the married 51-year-old was having an affair with a woman in her late 20s. The shoe dropped Oct. 18, when he resigned as president of King’s College, a small Christian university in Manhattan, reported The New York Times.

The school announced the resignation two days after a Christian magazine reported he had checked into a South Carolina motel with a woman he introduced as his fiancée. The magazine reported he filed for divorce the same day its reporter contacted him. D’Souza and his wife Dixie, 44, live in southern California and have one daughter.

He’s also the director and co-producer of the conservative documentary currently in theaters, “2016: Obama’s America.”

His fiancée, Denise Odie Joseph II, 29, is also married and has written extensively about the importance of so-called family values.

Awards & Speeches



Photo: Andy Ngo

Honoree Richard Dawkins accepting the Emperor Has No Clothes Award from FFRF Officer Jim Coors. The statuette honors public figures for “telling it like it is” about religion.



Photo: Andy Ngo

Richard Dawkins with the Emperor statuette.



Victorious student litigant Jessica Ahlquist with her Freethinker of the Year Award.



The Clergy Project panel, all former ministers turned nonbelievers, include (left, kneeling) FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, a founder of the new support group which helps ministers who have lost religion find new avocations, and its first graduate, Jerry DeWitt, La., a former Pentecostal minister. Standing, from left are FFRF member Ray Ideus, a former former Lutheran pastor, Wash.; annalise fonza, Atlanta, a former Methodist minister; former Methodist minister, Teresa McBain, N.J.; and Robert Parham, Wash., a former Southern Baptist minister.



Photo: Andy Ngo

Student activist awardee Matthew “Max” Nielson talked about becoming a plaintiff in FFRF’s federal lawsuit against graduation prayer at Irmo Public High School, S.C.



Photo: Andy Ngo

Versatile FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel debunked the “Christian nation” myth and also served as official convention photographer.



Peter Boghossian, instructor of philosophy at Portland State University, who has a new book coming out soon, *A Manual for Creating Atheists*, pinch-hit as a replacement for mystery writer Sara Paretsky, who was taken ill before the conference.



Photo: Andy Ngo

Investigative journalist Katherine Stewart autographed copies of her book, *The Good News Club: The Christian Right’s Stealth Assault on America’s Children*.



Actress Julia Sweeney entertained with excerpts from her “Church-a-Week” project, and afterward autographed many copies of the DVD of her play “Letting Go of God.”



Nancy Curran, Oregon, and others share a hearty laugh.

The 35th annual FFRF convention Oct. 12-14 in Portland, Ore., was at capacity with more than 880 attendees from 43 states, two Canadian provinces and six countries! That's student awardee Max Nielson on stage.

The Irreverent Audience

*35th Annual FFRF Convention
Photography by Andrew Seidel*



Student honoree Max Nielson, his mother, Jeanette Miles, both of South Carolina, and Stephen Hirtle, Pennsylvania professor and FFRF Board Member.



New friends from far-flung spots: Thomas Lawson, British Columbia; Joe Harris, Michigan (wearing FFRF's newest shirt, a baseball jersey saying "Ask an Atheist"), and Anthony Magnabosco, Texas.

And the winners are. . .

'Clean Money' drawing



The winners of the "clean money" drawing were selected by the convention's youth: Kyla and Alyx Powell, Washington, Molly Taylor, Washington, and Sophie Perea, Montana. Standing between Molly and Sophie is Alan Goldberg, Wisconsin, an attorney who very graciously manned the table selling chances.

"Clean money" winners (front, left): Alice Elliott, Montana, who won the \$100 grand prize \$100; Reed Byers, Oregon, \$1 1950B (contributed by Monty Cleworth); Marilyn Czape, Indiana, \$10 1950B (contributed by C.W. Mitchell); Joan Westhoff, Washington, \$1 1935A (contributed in honor of Dillard Henderson by Norma and Joe Cunningham); Mike Solomon, Missouri, \$1 1935E; Karen Firestone, Oregon, \$1 1935D.

Back, left: Michael Garstin, Texas, \$20 series 1934; Melanie Lawrence, California, \$2 1928F; Larry Hothem, Maryland, \$1 1935G (contributed by Life Member Bruce Lowerre); Cal Hutson, Missouri, \$1 1935B (contributed by Paul O'Brien), and a partially obscured winner we are sorry we could not identify.

FFRF Staff & Officers



Photo: Andy Ngo

Richard L. Bolton, of Boardman Law Firm, has handled more than 20 lawsuits for FFRF.



FFRF Executive Council members met Oct. 12 in Portland, Ore. Seated (left) are Vice President Patricia Cleveland, Ala.; Vice Presidents Joe and Norma Cunningham, Ill., (Norma turned 95 in October); FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, Wis.; (standing) FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, Wis.; Secretary Wendy Goldberg, Wis.; Vice President Jim Coors, Wis.; Treasurer Jim Zerwick, Wis.; and Chair David Groethe, Minn.



Registering more than 880 participants were (left) former staffer Lynn Lau, who flew from British Columbia to volunteer; Wendy Goldberg, Wisconsin, an "unpaid staffer" and FFRF officer; FFRF Publicist Katie Stenz; and Office Manager Jackie Douglas. (Warm thanks to Lynn and Wendy, who also spent many hours in convention preparation.)



Freethinking celebrity Julia Sweeney between FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker.



Jackie Douglas and FFRF Bookkeeper and Executive Assistant Katie Daniel glammed it up for the Oct. 13 dinner.



Photo: Andy Ngo

FFRF's fourth staff attorney, Andrew Seidel, surrounded by his family, who all volunteered at the convention. FFRF thanks Andrew's mother Robin Greene and stepfather Wally Greene, of Texas, and Liz Cavell, Wisconsin, who is married to Andrew, and is also an attorney.

Volunteers & Helpers



“Helping hands” couple Wendy Goldberg, a retired attorney and FFRF Officer, and Alan Goldberg, an attorney, staffed the busy table selling chances for “clean,” pre-“In God We Trust” money.



Karen and Len Eisenberg, Oregon, who generously endow an annual \$1,000 student activist award, helped present awards to student activists Max Nielson and Jessica Ahlquist.



Local Portland member Cheryl Kolbe not only helped staff sales tables, but also provided a gracious “welcome” speech to convention-goers.



Scott Taylor, Washington, a professional videographer, kindly volunteered his services to the convention, working long hours.

*Convention 2012 — Portland
Photography by Andrew Seidel*



Caitlin Woodyard, Oregon, and Liz Cavell, Wisconsin, “woman’ed” book tables.



Volunteers Robin and Wally Greene, Texas

State/Church Bulletin

Buddhist stupa ordered out of park

A 10-foot-tall Buddhist stupa was removed in September from New Mexico's Petroglyph National Monument after an opinion from the Department of Interior's solicitor general that it endorsed religion.

The agency bought the stupa, a mound-like structure housing relics, when it acquired park land in 1990. It will be donated to the Buddhist community in Albuquerque.

School avoids prayer ban by singing

Republican state Rep. Justin Harris told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette on Sept. 29 that in order to get around a ban on religion in state-funded preschools, he will have children sing prayers at the school he operates through Growing God's Kingdom in West Fork, Ark.

A new rule, which went into effect Oct. 26, allows religious music under certain circumstances. Records show Growing God's Kingdom has received \$2.6 million from the state since 2005.

No coach-led prayer, says Portales, N.M.

Coach-led prayers will not be allowed in Portales, N.M., city league sports, the Portales News-Tribune reported Sept. 13.

League Director Mike Doerr told coaches he's watched them leading prayers. "We have multiple ethnicities, nationalities and religious backgrounds involved in our city leagues. As much freedom as everyone has to express religious views, we must have the courtesy to respect the views of others."

Players still have the freedom to pray or observe a moment of silence at practices and games, Doerr said.

Delaware vote for Psalm 23 is 3-2

The Sussex County Council, Georgetown, Del., voted 3-2 on Sept. 11 to substitute Psalm 23 for the Lord's Prayer to open meetings.

Four county residents had sued to stop the Lord's Prayer. U.S. District Judge Leonard Stark ruled in May that the plaintiffs would likely win the case

because use of a Protestant version of the prayer "constitutes government endorsement of the Christian faith."

County attorney J. Scott Shannon explained the perceived legal difference to the Sussex Countian: "Because The Lord's Prayer is from the New Testament, the judge in this case found that it was specifically Christian and therefore not permitted under the Constitution. Psalm 23, on the other hand, is a recognized prayer in Judaism and Christianity and also is acknowledged in Islam, so it meets the Supreme Court's test."

2 of 3 Pussy Riot sentences upheld

One member of the Russian punk band Pussy Riot had her sentence overturned by a Moscow appeals court Oct. 10, but the court upheld two of her bandmates' sentences for "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred."

Yekaterina Samutsevich, 30, was freed after serving six months. She and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, 22, and Maria Alyokhina, 24, were sentenced to two years in August for a "punk prayer" on the altar of the city's main cathedral. The prayer asked the Blessed Virgin to rid Russia of Vladimir Putin.

Defense lawyer Mark Feigin told Reuters the only difference was Samutsevich spent 15 seconds at the altar compared to 45 seconds for his clients.

"We did not want to offend believers," Alyokhina told the court. "We came to the cathedral to speak out against the merger between spiritual figures and the political elite of our country."

Wisconsin board votes against cross logo

The combined Catholic and public school Messwood football team in Shorewood, Wis., replaced a religious logo on players' helmets after the Shorewood School Board on Oct. 9 unanimously agreed after a district parent complained to the district that a Christian cross on the logo violated separation of state and church.

The new logo has "2012 PLAYOFFS" in red set on a blue football and replaces the old one. The Catholic Messmer High School and the public Shorewood High School have co-oped in football for 12 seasons.

"It's clearly a Christian cross," board member Michael Mishlove said. "I



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think it's inappropriate to have on a uniform or any sort of school-authorized clothing, as I think it could be viewed as an endorsement," reported Shorewood Now.

"We are not happy about it," Brother Bob Smith, Messmer president, told WTMJ Radio. He called the decision "hurtful for the team."

Pastor banned from Ind. school lunchroom

The Associated Press reported Oct. 20 that the Southwest Allen County School District, Fort Wayne, Ind., has banned a youth pastor from addressing students in the lunchroom.

It announced the policy less than an hour after John and Linda Buchanan, whose 11-year-old daughter attends Summit Middle School, sued in U.S. District Court. The family is represented by the American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana.

The minister, from a nondenominational church called The Chapel, was allowed to hand out materials and move from table to table, talking with children, the claim stated.

Linda Buchanan, 44, said her daughter brought home religious anti-abortion literature. "We're not a bunch of heathens," she said. "We're not anti-religion; we're anti-religion in public school."

They Said What?

We believe the best way to ensure religious freedom is to protect all religious references and symbols; including those on public buildings, lands, or documents. This includes prayer in public schools, thanking God in a graduation speech, and religious symbols being placed on public property during their appropriate holiday season. . . BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Republican Party of Wisconsin . . . believes that school boards should have discretion as to the teaching of intelligent design within their districts. **Wisconsin GOP platform** wisgop.org, 5-13-12

Somehow or another there's this, ya know, steel wall, this iron curtain or whatever you want to call it, between the church and people of faith, and

this separation of church and state is just false on its face. We have a biblical responsibility to be involved in the public arena proclaiming God's truth. **Texas Gov. Rick Perry, participating in a conference call with evangelicals preparing for Rev. Rick Scarborough's "40 Days to Save America"** Dallas Morning News, 9-19-12

I grew up in a religious environment, and I'm proud of it. I was going to be a priest; I'm proud of it. And I thank God I believe in God, or I would probably be enormously angry right now. **Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, public interview at the National Archives on the 225th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution** New York Times, 9-17-12

FFRF florist complaint gets green light

In early October, the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights notified FFRF's local attorney Katherine Godin that "a Preliminary Investigating Commissioner carefully reviewed and considered the information gathered during the course of the investigation by members of the Commission staff. The Commissioner has determined that there is 'probable cause' to believe that the respondents have violated the Rhode Island Hotels and Public Places Act. . ."

FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert filed a complaint in January after four florists refused its order of flowers to congratulate Jessica Ahlquist, the Cranston, R.I., teen who had just won a major ruling in her favor by a federal judge, who agreed a prayer banner in her high school's auditorium was unconstitutional. FFRF had to contract for the services from

a Connecticut florist in order to get the flowers delivered. FFRF filed the complaint against two of the Cranston florists.

FFRF alleges "illegal discrimination based on religion" for failure to fill the order. Markert cited the state law that says it's unlawful for a place of accommodation to deny services "on account of religion."

The commission's preliminary finding further states, "Since the finding of probable cause, the parties [FFRF, Twins Florist and Flowers by Santilli] have begun conciliation endeavors. Should the parties not come to an agreement or settlement, the Commission will order a hearing to determine whether the statute was violated. Either party also has a right to request a transfer of the case to Superior Court."



Michael Hakeem College Essay Contest: Honorable Mentions

The following are abridged versions of the students' essays. FFRF awarded each honorable mention a \$250 scholarship.

Tearing off religion's mask



By Leah Aeby

I was raised by Roman Catholic parents in central Wisconsin, where you can still feel the Polish ancestry. Hearing "Wimi Ojca i Syna, Duchą wi tego, Amen" (In the name of the

Father, Son, Holy Ghost, Amen) meant my grandparents were either very happy or very distressed.

Even though I heard that phrase throughout my childhood, I noticed that my grandparents never went to Mass every Sunday like we did. I asked my parents why, but it wasn't until I was 15 that they finally told me the real reason: My grandparents stopped going to church after their priest was accused of sexually molesting several young boys, most of whom were my uncle's age.

Like all other good Catholic kids my age whose parents didn't send them to the actual Catholic schools in town (one of which was named after Cardinal Pacelli, whose silence as Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust is still controversial), I had to attend CCD class every Wednesday night until eighth grade.

In my freshman year, during confirmation classes, two distinct moments have stuck with me. My mom and I had talked about transubstantiation, the process by which the communion host turns into the body and blood of Christ. Catholics are taught to believe that this is the real deal.

I asked my priest about it later, and he told our class, "When you question what God does, you put limits on what he can do." That was no answer. Yes, that was exactly what I was doing. I was questioning what God could do, and I wanted a real answer. No one was giving me one.

Kids shouldn't feel what I felt. Young adults should not feel ashamed or sad that they are using reason and logic to discover truths for themselves. My parents never made me feel this way, but the church did. All churches do. It's in the job description! "Believe this or you burn!" What kind of society do we

live in that we uphold institutions that preach this?

After I was confirmed, I stopped attending Mass and started doing some research. I slowly but surely struggled through books like *The God Delusion* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*. For every atheistic book I read, I read a Christian book. I shared what I found with my already doubtful parents. After my childhood priest was arrested for child pornography and a prominent church member was asked to leave a volunteer group when other churchgoers saw an Obama sign in his yard, my parents, too, had had enough.

I have quietly accepted countless cross necklaces from aunts and uncles and have dealt with friends who tried to save my soul. I used to stay quiet as people berated me for "following Satan." I decided last year that I will not be quiet anymore. Atheists and agnostics have been quiet for too long.

I have chosen to come "out of the closet" because it is the only thing that makes sense to me. The mask of religion is just that, a mask, there to provide comfort that never existed. This was a tough realization to handle, especially when you're young.

But we don't have an imaginary friend. If there is someone out there, content with watching suffering and pain, they are no friend to us at all. Why are the ones who know that we only have this life content with spending it in the closet?

Leah Aeby, 19, Plover, Wis., is a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, majoring in communication and political science.

What good has religion wrought?



By Omar De Los Santos

I vividly remember the last time I ever attended Mass shortly before the 2008 presidential election. Californians were deciding on much more than just a new president. They would also be voting on a same-sex marriage ballot proposition.

Coming from a community made up predominantly of first generation and Latino immigrants, most of whom are Catholic, it came as no surprise to see lawns sprinkled with "Protect Marriage — Yes on 8" signs on my walk to school. But my greatest bewilderment came one Sunday only weeks before

the election. The entire sermon was devoted to Prop. 8, a proposition that, if passed (which it did), would severely limit the definition of marriage to a union between a man and a woman, nullifying legal gay marriages in cities that had previously legalized them.

I looked on in disgust as the priest played victim to a hate law that would do nothing more than allow two consenting, loving adults to marry. This service lacked the love and compassion that I previously believed Catholicism to be founded on. I knew that I could not come back to an institution that promoted so much hatred.

Later, after I had already come out to my parents (to this day, the most difficult thing I've ever done), I attended my aunt's birthday party. My uncle announced, "We can't vote for Obama because of his attacks on the Catholic Church. There is already so much suffering in this country because God is abandoning us because ignorant legislators are passing laws that allow men to marry men and women to marry women."

Four years of silence were too much for me. Although my father's face continued to drop more and more as I stood up and defended my beliefs, mine only rose higher as I defended not only atheists, but homosexuals who should not have to abide by the "morals" of a religion to which they do not belong. As insignificant as the gesture may seem, that night I changed my Facebook religious affiliation to atheist.

The world faces endless suffering, but religion has done very little to alleviate the problem. In fact, religion seems to be the biggest reason for the world's conflicts. Though the United States may be an exception, poverty only increases as a nation becomes more religious. All I have to do is look at my parents' home country, Mexico, in order to see a phenomenon that just baffles me. Having attended church in Mexico before, I know just how highly Mexican Catholics value their religion. It, therefore, comes as a huge surprise that this same country suffers from the disappearance and rape of thousands of women in Juarez, violent drug wars in Michoacán, and countless mass executions across the border. Meanwhile, citizens kneel in church and do little to bring about change.

I reject religion because the United States is not a Christian nation — it is a nation of countless religions and spiritualities, as well as atheism. I reject religion because Americans regard atheists as the most hated minority, and their chances of entering public office should not be hindered by their rejection of god. I reject religion because history books should not dismiss centuries of religious murders and inquisitions. Finally, I reject religion because it has bitterly divided my family, and they will always see me as the one who made it to Yale — but, as an atheist, falls short of success.

Omar De Los Santos, 19, South Gate, Calif., writes, "I am eighteen years old. This fall I will be a sophomore at Yale University in New Haven, Conn. I currently live in South Gate, Calif., a city right outside Los Angeles made up predominantly of Latinos

and Latino immigrants. Though I have not yet declared a major, I intend to earn a Bachelor's degree in political science in order to enter a law school and become an immigration lawyer. My greatest interests are advocating immigrant rights, swimming, and playing the piano. Both of my parents are Mexican immigrants, and I am a first-generation college student. My parents are devout Catholics, and, as far as I know, I am the first atheist in my family."

Parting a sea of crosses



By Lukas Deem

Crosses on doors, crosses on cars, crosses on chests and crosses on skin. I see them everywhere in the Bible Belt. I went to a Presbyterian church with my family, but we stopped attending when I was very young.

Religion wasn't a concern for me until middle school and high school, when evangelical churches start sending out their youth on their great mission. "What church do you go to?" "Have you been saved?" "Do you love Jesus?" As these questions came at me, I didn't think much of them at first.

Then, through a concerted effort of a few friends, I was given a bible and taken to an evangelical church. It was also quite sensationalist: speakers with strong voices and emotional, contemporary worship music. I read a few books and became a Christian.

For two years, I stopped cussing and masturbating and got involved in leadership at church. In my senior year, I made a conscious decision to relax my Christian morals and practices due to the realization that I had not experienced any improvement in my life, along with my rational doubting.

I became apathetic toward religion, and agnostic was the label I began to identify with. This was the start of my path to where I am now, atheist.

I do not believe in a cosmic or earthly divine being or beings or any kind of supernatural power. My family doesn't like this, so we just don't talk about it. I am lucky that my parents do not treat me differently because of my choice.

It was very rewarding to help start and maintain the Secular Student Alliance at the University of Central Arkansas. Just knowing that we were in a room where we were not being judged for our lack of religion was special. Our "visibility campaigns" included tabling in the Student Union and holding "Hug an Atheist" signs. Another campaign involved choosing days to wear stickers that say "Atheist, ask away."

During our campaigns, it was very interesting to see reactions of class-

mates, friends and faculty as they realized I had, in fact, been an atheist the whole time. I didn't see instant hate or fear as one might think. I was still the same Lukas they had known, but I saw something deeper. I saw the cogs of acceptance and changing perceptions starting to turn in their minds.

Atheists need to "come out" because people need to be aware that they are sitting next to them in class, working with them and drinking with them at the bar. Atheists need to speak up so that other atheists know they are part of a supportive community.

Often I read or hear people say that atheists are "too loud." The next time you hear that, point out the number of crosses you encounter in a day. There's no comparison.

We are only struggling to be accepted and build a community among a sea of crosses.

Lukas Deem, 21, Conway, Ark., is a senior majoring in sociology and minoring in fine arts at the University of Central Arkansas.

'Out' to change the world



By Michaelyn Everhart

I was raised in a rural Midwest town heavily inundated with religion and was one of very few children whose family did not attend church. At age 9, I learned not to share that I did not subscribe to any specific religion, because when I first admitted to my friends that I did not know if there was a god, they were aghast.

From then on I did my best to keep my thoughts to myself. When I had to bow my head in prayer with friends before dinner or even before a play performance, I would stay quiet. I was afraid to express doubt and to really be myself.

Just two years ago, I said for the first time that I was an atheist. That moment was so freeing for me. For the first time in my life I was me, not a projection of what the world wanted me to be. Being honest about who I am allows me to live comfortably in my own skin, and it empowers others around me to live similarly.

I put a proud face on atheism. I make others see that their friend, their family member, their classmate is an atheist. By coming out of the closet, we show people that they already love atheists. You cannot demonize what you love.

I have experienced a bit of confrontation with those who see the world from a different perspective. Sometimes people even get angry at me for simply wearing a shirt that says, "Atheist." I have found though, that honesty and patience often works out for the better.

My absolute favorite reaction: "Wait. You're an atheist?!" It's as if they were expecting me to have horns and a tail. Perhaps they think that I am too happy or too friendly to be an atheist, and

that's exactly the point. Atheists come in all shapes and sizes, but because of the social stigma, people are afraid to admit it, which leads to misconceptions being passed on.

Apart from the personal freedom and peace of mind, I came out of the closet because the lives of others are destroyed when religion controls us. Whether it's someone losing their job because their employer found out about their disbelief or a teen getting kicked out of their home, the malicious effects of religion are easy to see. If more of us continue to make this a personal fight, then future generations will not have to be afraid to seek out the truth.

In short, coming out of the closet is how even the little people like me can change the world.

Michaelyn Everhart grew up in Burlington, Kan., and is a junior physics major at the University of Kansas, where she is president of the Society of Open-Minded Atheists and Agnostics.

Leaving blind faith behind me



By Kate Heetland

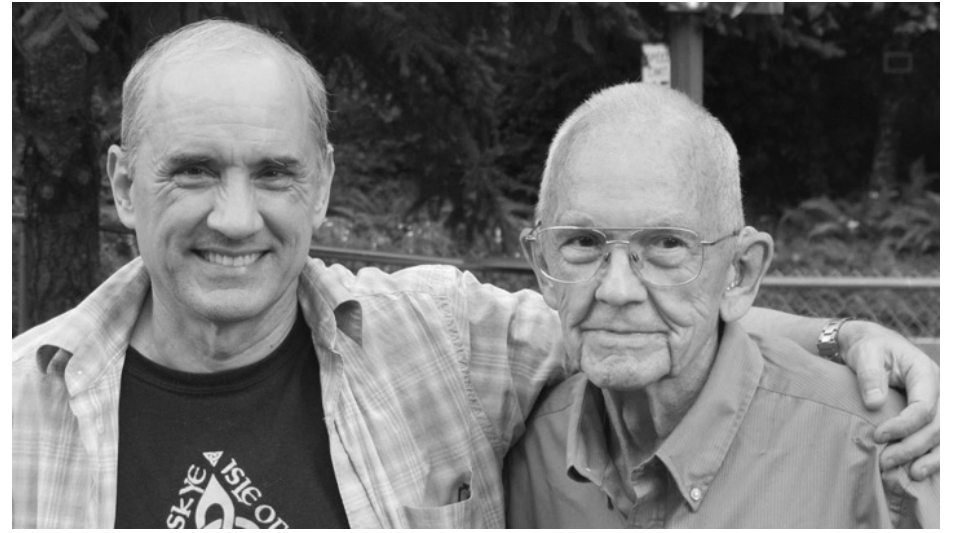
The scariest, and yet most liberating, change I have gone through in my life was transitioning from devout Christian to atheist. It started with a combination of red-flag Lutheran sermons, a feeling of abandonment by my god and a copy of *The God Delusion*.

I have, fortunately, not experienced a lot of opposition in coming out as an atheist. Maybe it is because I braced myself for the worst, expecting to be thrown out of the house and ridiculed by friends. Instead, my father tosses God into the conversation more than regularly, and my mother gives me unfounded warnings like, "Just make sure you don't get caught in a cult mindset, honey."

I have also been relatively comfortable at school and in public, being able to turn aside from rude comments and Internet fights. My ease in being an open atheist is probably more due to the community I have surrounding me. I am happy to go to a school with a very active skeptics' group, which provides me with welcoming friends and works to remove the stigma surrounding the word "atheist."

I held off on coming out to my father for a long time. When I first touched on the subject, he likened my Dawkins literature to porn and threatened to take away a number of privileges. He told me that I was disrespecting him, his god and his parental authority. I am embarrassed to say that I was

Happy 87th, Norm Barker!



Norman Barker, shown with his son and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, turned 87 on Aug. 13 in Washington state. Dan dedicated his first book, *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist*, to "Norman S. Barker, my only father." Dan's parents gradually followed him out of religion to freethought. Patsy Barker died in 2004.



Norm is still playing his trombone every day, although he's traded brass for lightweight plastic. He's played professionally in a variety of bands, including with Hoagy Carmichael. He's at left in this scene with Judy Garland in the 1948 film "Easter Parade," accompanying her singing Irving Berlin's "I Wish I Was in Michigan." Search on YouTube for "wish i was in michigan" and "garland."



About 40 freethinking FFRF members and friends met Sept. 16 in Skokie, Ill., at an informal reception for FFRF's new Chicago-area. FFRF Co-President Dan Barker is kneeling, with Tom Cara, interim chapter president, to his left. Dan also spoke to the Ethical Humanist Society in Skokie that morning.

scared into submission and kept my mouth shut for a couple more years.

Atheists and other skeptics must work to make religion's intolerant beliefs unacceptable. It is one thing to preach fairy tales — the idea of heaven does not hurt anyone — but it is another to promote hate and self-righteousness. The pain that religion causes is exactly why it is so important to be "out of the closet."

Our humanist values and morality free of punishment or reward will go further than missionary projects. Unbiased, we can act on the problems we see: hate crimes, intolerance of opinion, lack of contraception education.

I am lucky to have had such ease in my coming out, and I know that many others are not as fortunate. But regardless of each person's situation, it is not worth faking faith. More importantly,

the movement needs you.

I am prouder to identify myself as an atheist than I ever was to call myself Lutheran or Christian. Now when someone inquires about my beliefs (or lack thereof), I speak of the power of our movement, of our service and of our logic. I speak about the great community of skeptics that I have found on my campus and how I immediately felt respected by them.

Since I have come out, my belief in myself has grown and I face problems more realistically. I encourage others to do the same and enjoy the benefits that come from a life that is void of God's judgment.

Kate Heetland, 19, Cedar Falls, Iowa, is a sophomore at the University of Northern Iowa, where she studies vocal performance and serves as director of outreach for UNI Freethinkers and Inquirers.

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Prosecutors in Faribault, MN, charged **Lynn Seibel**, 70, a former teacher at Shattuck-St. Mary's, an Episcopal boarding school, with 17 counts of criminal sexual conduct related to alleged abuse of 6 male students in 1999-2003. Seibel is incarcerated in Los Angeles on unrelated child pornography charges.

The complaint says Seibel held private sessions with students in which he asked them to masturbate. At times, it's alleged, he also touched them inappropriately. He resigned in 2003 after school officials confronted him about 14,000 porn images on his work computer.

Police said they were never told about Seibel or about the school's director of residential life, **Leonard Jones**, 34, fatally shooting himself in 2008 after being confronted about a 3-year sexual relationship he'd allegedly had with a foreign student, starting when she was 15. *Source: AP, 10-10-12*

Joseph A. Olvera, 54, Fullerton, CA: 2 counts of touching an intimate part of another person. Olvera, pastor at Lifeline Ministries, is accused of reaching under the shirt and fondling the breasts of an 18-year-old woman who was in bed at the church's live-in facility for at-risk youth. He allegedly slapped her buttocks 3 days later in a church hallway.

The woman contacted police, who said they're concerned there may be other victims. *Source: L.A. Times, CBS News, 10-10-12*

Todd R. Newman, 49, Sumter, SC: Breach of trust with fraudulent intent. Newman is charged with stealing \$155,869 from Plaza Church of Christ, where he was finance director for 7 years.

A police report said the investigation started in 2008, with new information uncovered recently during an audit. Newman denies guilt.

Court documents show that Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Co. paid the church \$10,000 in 2008, the policy limit for employee dishonesty. A plaintiff in a civil suit alleged Newman took funds from the church in 2007 without permission. The suit was later dismissed. *Source: WIS-TV, 10-4-12*

Nathan Hasty, 34, Huntington, IN: Receipt and possession of material depicting the sexual exploitation of a minor. Hasty, a middle school campus life director for Youth for Christ for 9 years, is accused of soliciting nude photos from minors, including children in his own youth group.

An FBI affidavit alleged Hasty used false Facebook identities. It's alleged he pretended to be a 16-year-old girl and a 19-year-old man to flirt with males and females and ask for nude photos and webcam sessions, including masturbation. *Source: WANE, 10-2-12*

Wilbert D. Brassfield, 48, Palmyra, VA: 5 counts of embezzlement. Brassfield is accused of embezzling more than \$10,000 from Courts of Praise Christian Fellowship, where he was pastor until 2010. He was fired as a school resource officer for the Charlottesville Police Department after he was charged. *Source: AP, 10-1-12*

Gustaro R. Talabera, 39, West St. Paul, MN: 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct and 2 counts of deprivation of parental/custodial rights. Pastor Talabera, who is married, allegedly tried to run away to Mexico with a 16-year-old parishioner with whom he has been accused of having an affair. Police wouldn't disclose the name of the church for fear of identifying the girl.

The girl eventually texted her parents to tell them "she wanted to start a new life with Gustaro," court documents said. Talabera was arrested in Joliet, IL. *Source: Star Tribune, 9-28-12*

Arthur B. Schirmer, 64, Lebanon, PA: Murder. Schirmer was pastor at Bethany United Methodist Church in 1999 when his wife, Jewel Schirmer, 50, died of traumatic brain injury, allegedly from a fall.

Investigators reopened the case after the July 2008 death of his second wife, Betty Jean. He's accused of staging a car accident to cover up her death. His murder trial for her death starts in January.

In October 2008, church member Joseph Musante, 50, committed suicide in the church. Police believe Schirmer was having an affair with Musante's wife, a church employee. *Source: Pocono Record, 9-28-12*

Henry E. Lackey, 59, Auburn, GA: Enticing a child for indecent purposes, child molestation and aggravated sodomy. Lackey, pastor at Free Will Pentecostal Church in Buford, became the subject of an investigation after the alleged victim came forward.

"The child was 10 years old at the time and resided in the same neighborhood as Mr. Lackey," said police Lt. Michael Fugett. *Source: Access North Georgia, 9-26-12*

Michael Whitsey, 49, Murfreesboro, TN: 10



counts of money laundering. Whitsey, known to his congregation at Abundant Life Christian Center as Apostle Mike, is accused of conspiring to conduct \$375,000 in criminal transactions tied to alleged narcotics sales in 2008. He and his wife, known as First Lady Michele, started the church in 2000. *Source: Daily News Journal, 9-26-12*

James Bertrand, 50, Cypress, TX: Possession of cocaine (1 to 4 grams) and 1st-offense DWI. Bertrand, pastor at Power Church International in Lake Charles, LA, and a professed recovering drug addict, received considerable media attention for his "Just For Jesus" student rallies at the Lake Charles Civic Center. *Source: KPLC, 9-25-12*

Bradley Moss, 38, Hickory, NC: Indecent liberties with a minor. Moss, the married pastor of Victory Empowerment Church, is accused of molesting a 13-year-old member of his church. Court documents alleged he texted the girl, "Babe everything in me wants to be with you. I want you to be MINE. . . I'd want you to have my baby — no adoption — you receiving my seed and carrying it and birthing him."

The girl told police Moss touched her breasts, legs and derriere and kissed her lips. *Source: WCNC, 9-24-12*

David Grosse, 78, Colorado Springs, CO: Suspicion of sex assault on a child by a person in a position of trust. Grosse, who retired as an Air Force chaplain in 1993, was arrested after a North Carolina state agency referred the case to Colorado police.

Assaults are alleged during the past 18 years, said the arrest warrant. Grosse worked after leaving the USAF for the Church of the Nazarene in various positions.

Grosse's assaults on the alleged main victim happened "nearly every time she saw him," or "any time the opportunity presented itself to him," an affidavit said. The girl alleged the assaults started when she was 4 and included fondling and Grosse asking her to hold his penis while he urinated.

The affidavit described Grosse's alleged encounters with 3 other young girls in 2003 or 2005 and 1994-95. *Source: Colorado Springs Gazette, 9-21-12*

William Jackson, 57, New Cumberland, PA: 3 counts of indecent assault of someone less than 13 years old, 9 counts of corruption of minors, 7 counts of unlawful contact with a minor/sexual offenses, 3 counts of indecent assault without the consent of others and indecent assault of someone less than 16 years old. Charges involve 7 alleged victims, all male.

Jackson, who has 9 children, has been fired from Bible Baptist School in Shiremanstown and from his position as minister of music. Alleged victims were either students at the school or private piano students.

According to court documents, "Victim 2," 17, told police Jackson touched him in the groin several times and allegedly asked, "Why don't you just pull it out and masturbate?" *Source: Patriot-News, 9-20-12*

Chris Denman, 20, Tulsa, OK: 1st-degree rape, forcible sodomy, lewd molestation and use of a computer to facilitate a sex crime. Denman, an employee at the 17,000-member Victory Christian Center, allegedly raped a 13-year-old girl in a stairwell before church. He's also charged with molesting a 15-year-old girl.

Former Victory Christian employee **Israel Shalom Castillo**, 23, is charged with making a lewd or indecent proposal to a child and using a computer to facilitate a sex crime. Several other employees face child abuse charges for not reporting the alleged incidents to police: **Paul Willemstein**, 32, **Anna George**, 24, **Harold F. Sullivan**, 73, **Charica D. Daugherty**, 27, and **John S. Daugherty**, 28. *Source: Tulsa World, 9-18-12*

Darrell W. Blair, 43, Crowley, TX: Sexual assault. Blair, pastor of New Breed Christian

Church in Ft. Worth, is accused of having sexual encounters with a woman, starting when she was 14 until 2000 when she was 18.

The woman told police she didn't complain until recently because "only now as an adult could she find the strength to face him," the report stated. She described alleged encounters in detail, and her friend confirmed she'd told her in 2000, authorities said. *Source: Star-Telegram, 9-17-12*

Kenneth N. Allen, 36, East Prairie, MO: 4 counts of 1st-degree statutory sodomy and possession of child pornography. His wife, **Beth L. Allen**, 36, is charged with endangering the welfare of a child. Kenneth Allen is Grace Apostolic Church pastor.

The probable cause statement said Beth Allen offers day care and knew her husband would enter the bathroom when boys were bathing and would sleep with them in the Allen home. *Source: KFVS, 9-11-12*

Joseph J. Ostrowski, 28, Wilkes-Barre, PA: Felony cyberstalking. At the time of the allegations, Ostrowski was head football coach at Holy Redeemer High School. An earlier grand jury indicted him for threatening extortion and producing and attempting to produce child pornography.

Ostrowski's Facebook and Skype scheme ran from March 2010 through last Christmas Eve, the indictment said. *Source: Citizens' Voice, 8-31-12*

Pleaded / Convicted

Travis J. Branstetter, 31, Logan, OH: Pleaded guilty to 3 counts of attempted gross sexual imposition. Branstetter, an ordained youth pastor at Church of the Nazarene, was indicted for 3rd-degree sexual battery but pleaded to lesser charges involving a 13-year-old girl in his congregation.

Prosecutor Laina Fetherolf said she was prepared to try the case but negotiated an agreement to spare the girl and her family further emotional stress. *Source: Columbus Dispatch, 10-3-12*

George A. Smith, 74, Corner Brook, NEWF: Pleaded guilty to 40 sexual assault counts involving boys in alleged incidents that go as far back as 1968. Smith, a Catholic priest, also faces 30 other charges. *Source: Western Star, 10-2-12*

Jack A. Schaap, 54, Dyer, IN: Pleaded guilty to transporting a person under the age of 18 across state lines with the intent of having sexual activity. Schaap, pastor of First Baptist Church and superintendent of Hammond Baptist Schools, admitted having sex 3 times with a girl he was counseling, once when she was 16 and twice when she was 17.

Schaap told the judge he had someone else, not named during the proceedings, drive the victim to locations in Illinois and Michigan for the encounters. *Source: nwtimes.com, 9-26-12*

Samuel Mullet Sr., 66; **Johnny S. Mullet**, 39; **Daniel S. Mullet**, 38; **Levi F. Miller**, 54; **Eli M. Miller**, 32; **Emanuel Shrock**, age unknown; **Lester Miller**, 37; **Anna Miller**, age unknown; **Linda Shrock**, age unknown; **Emma J. Miller**, age unknown; **Kathryn Miller**, age unknown; and **Lovina Miller**, 32, all of Bergholz, OH; **Raymond Miller**, 27; **Freeman Burkholder**, 31; **Elizabeth A. Miller**, age unknown; and **Kathryn Miller**, age unknown, all from Irondale, OH; and **Lester Mullet**, 27, of Hammondsville, OH, were found guilty of conspiring to violate the Matthew Shepard-James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act.

The jury also convicted various groups of defendants with 4 counts involving kidnapping. Samuel Mullet Sr., Lester Mullet and Eli Miller were also convicted of concealing or attempting to conceal evidence.

Convictions stemmed from assaults in 4 Ohio counties last fall in which defendants forcibly removed beard and head hair from practi-

'You are a predator.'
— Judge Steven Bromberg to Oscar Perez before sentencing him to 30 years

tioners of the Amish faith with whom they had ongoing religious disputes. *Source: U.S. Department of Justice, 9-20-12*

Timothy L. Dampier, 39, Seattle: Pleaded guilty to 22 counts, including 1st- and 2nd-degree rape of a child; 1st-, 2nd- and 3rd-degree child molestation; sexual exploitation of a minor; and possession of child pornography. Dampier, a church musician with ties to several Seattle-area churches, is accused of molesting 10 boys in 1997-2011. He also worked at the group home Samuel House and Union Gospel Mission.

The probe started when an alleged victim told police in 2011 that Dampier started molesting him when he was 10. Another man alleged Dampier raped him, masturbated in front of him and showed him child pornography when he was 12. *Source: Seattle Times, 9-13-12*

Sentenced

Menachem Youlus, 51, Baltimore: 51 months in prison, 3 years' probation and \$990,366 restitution after pleading guilty to 2 counts of fraud. Rabbi Youlus, the self-proclaimed "Jewish Indiana Jones, admitted defrauding contributors to his Save a Torah Foundation by selling Torah scrolls with bogus Holocaust provenance. *Source: Washington Post, 10-12-12*

Gary L. Elg, 60, Inver Grove Heights, MN: 1 year probation, \$626 in costs, 2 days of community service and course completion at Breaking Free, aka "john school," after pleading guilty to engaging in prostitution. Elg, pastor at First Presbyterian Church responded to a decoy newspaper ad by police. At the hotel, he handed \$100 to an undercover officer "for a full," court documents said.

He resigned from the church shortly after his arrest. *Source: Pioneer Press, 10-12-12*

James Harris, 65, Belle Glade, FL: 30 years in prison on convictions for lewd or lascivious battery, unlawful sexual activity with a minor, lewd or lascivious conduct, 2 counts of promoting sexual performance by a child and showing obscene material to a minor. Harris is former pastor at Second Baptist Church and a fixture on the sidelines at high school football games.

The jury watched two videos, one showing a boy masturbating under Harris' direction as a porn movie played, and another showing the boy having sex with his girlfriend, 14, who didn't realize at first that Harris was recording them. *Source: Sun Sentinel, 10-9-12*

A defrocked Irish priest, 76, was convicted in Dublin of 5 counts of indecent assault and sentenced to 18 months in prison. The priest, who can't be named for legal reasons, pleaded guilty to molesting 5 schoolboys in 1979-81 when they were between 11 and 13. He was laicized in the 1980s. *Source: Irish Times, 10-9-12*

Patrick Hughes, 56, Galion, OH: 6 years in prison and 5 years' probation on convictions for attempted rape and attempted unlawful sexual conduct with a minor. Hughes, pastor at Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral, was charged with trying to set up a sexual encounter with 2 boys.

Sheriff Zach Scott said Hughes was arrested when he was supposed to be teaching bible study class. "He posted online and thought he was coming down here to meet a parent who was going to offer up his 9-year-old and 14-year-old boys, and so he actually thought he was talking online with a parent." *Source: News Journal, 10-3-12*

Richard Nachajski, 66, York, PA: 2 to 7 years in prison for theft, which totaled \$425,000, from St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, where he was pastor in 1998-2009. He begged Judge Scott Keller not to put him behind bars.

"If incarcerated, how could I volunteer to help an elderly friend shovel a driveway?" Nachajski said. "I stand before you in fear of my safety."

"You betrayed their trust," Keller answered. "You do not resonate with the strength of true remorse." *Source: Reading Eagle, 9-28-12*

Luckner Sylvain, 49, Norwich, CT: 2½ years in prison and 10 years' probation for risk of injury to a minor after pleading guilty to molesting a 12-year-old girl multiple times while she lived with his family in 2006.

Sylvain co-founded the Bethany Foundation, which claimed to be raising money to help Haitian children affected by a 2010 earthquake, and was affiliated with First Haitian Baptist Church in Norwich. *Source: theday.com, 9-26-12*

Matt Pitt, 28, Birmingham, **AL**: 2 years' unsupervised probation after pleading guilty to attempting to impersonate a peace officer. Pitt, a Christian evangelist and founder of "The Basement" youth revival movement, was arrested after allegedly flashing a badge and telling police he was a deputy sheriff.

He was stopped by police for flashing blue lights at motorists on I-65, forcing them to pull over before speeding past them. About 2 weeks after his arrest, he told his followers, "We're not perfect, we're only forgiven." *Source: abc3340.com, 9-26-12*

James Cain, Orrum, **NC**: Pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter in the 2002 death of his wife, Norma Cain, 60, and was sentenced to 3 years' supervised probation and 16 to 20 months in prison suspended. Orrum, a Baptist pastor, was first indicted for 1st-degree murder.

Norma Cain died from a lethal dose of the prescription narcotic Temazepam, which was prescribed to James Cain. Prosecutor Tripp Watson said her husband provided Temazepam and insulin. "He encouraged her to continue to take the medicine, and that was the cause of her death." *Source: Fayetteville Observe, 9-26-12*

Edward Warnakulasuriya, 54, Newington, **CT**: 1 year in jail suspended and 3 years' probation on 3 counts of 4th-degree sexual assault. Warnakulasuriya, a native of Sri Lanka and former pastor at St. Bernard's Catholic Church in Simsbury, was charged with sexual touching of an 18-year-old male who had gone to the rectory for confession.

Court documents allege that on more than one occasion, the priest had the youth untuck his shirt and unzip his pants for a "blessing." After the blessing, the arrest warrant stated, Warnakulasuriya touched the alleged victim near or on his genitals. *Source: Simsbury Patch, 9-21-12*

Oscar D. Perez, 69, Laguna Hills, **CA**: 330 years in prison for sexual assaults on 5 youths he allegedly was grooming as "ministers" at Iglesia Antigua, a breakaway Catholic sect. Perez was a church bishop.

"You are a predator," Judge Steven Bromberg told Perez. *Source: Lake Forest Patch, 9-15-12*

Gregory M. Oats, 32, Roseville, **MN**: 6 months in jail and 10 years' probation after pleading guilty to financial exploitation of a vulnerable adult. Oats, pastor at Word of Faith Ministries, admitted stealing \$25,000 from a 78-year-old parishioner with Parkinson's, diabetes and paranoid schizophrenia. Oats was the man's care agent and held his power of attorney. *Source: Pioneer Press, 9-14-12*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

A Colorado man, 49, is suing the **Catholic Diocese of Bismarck, ND**, alleging **Fr. Maurice McNeely** molested him at an Army base in **Hawaii** in 1974 to 1975. The plaintiff was an altar boy at a Fort Shafter chapel where McNeely ministered to military families. McNeely, in his 80s, now lives in **Michigan**.

The priest forced the plaintiff to perform oral sex on him in the sacristy, the complaint alleges. A separate suit filed by the same plaintiff in Honolulu last year names McNeely and the diocese as defendants. *Source: Dickinson Press, 10-4-12*

A California man, 25, is suing **Fr. Don Flickinger**, the Catholic archbishop of **San Francisco**, the **bishops of San Jose and Fresno**, the **Fresno Education Corp.**, **St. Frances Cabrini Church** and **St. Frances Cabrini School**, for allegedly molesting him when he was 10 and covering it up. The plaintiff alleges defendants tolerated Flickinger's serial abuse of boys and at least 1 girl in California parishes and schools.

The complaint said Flickinger was transferred 20 times as a priest. He now lives at a retirement facility.

Flickinger's conduct was so frequent that students warned each other to watch out for him and called him "Fr. Fuckinger," the complaint said. The plaintiff alleged the priest convinced his parents he needed private counseling and examined his genitals "to make sure everything works." *Source: Courthouse News Service, 10-1-12*

"Jane Doe 51," now 31, is suing the Catholic **Diocese of Stockton, CA**, for covering up alleged abuse by defrocked priest **Oliver O'Grady** in 1991-92 when he was pastor at St. Andrew's Parish in San Andreas.

O'Grady, convicted of molesting 2 boys from Turlock, served 7 years of a 14-year sentence before being deported to his native Ireland, where he's in prison for child pornography. *Source: Modesto Bee, 9-24-12*

Three Canadian men, ages 49, 62 and 63 (including 2 brothers), are suing the Catholic **Diocese of Antigonish, NS**, alleging they were molested by priests in the 1960s and 1970s. The accused priests are twin brothers **Clair and Claude Richard**.

One plaintiff alleges he was hitchhiking home from skating when one of the priests picked him up, showed him pornographic photos and "made a move across my leg."

"I told him to stop the car or I'd cut him with my skates," the suit alleges.

The man's brother said he told his parents

about the alleged abuse. "They said I was going to burn in hell for saying those lies about the priest."

The Richard twins have been convicted of multiple sex abuse counts. *Source: Halifax Herald News, 9-24-12*

Andrew Druding and Michael McDonnell, alleging sexual assault, are suing the Catholic **Archdiocese of Philadelphia, church officials and 3 priests**.

"What you did didn't define me," said Druding, at a press conference. "I may be damaged goods, but I'm not going to allow you to beat me."

Druding, 51, accused **Fr. Francis Feret**, then choir director at St. Timothy Parish in Mayfair. "You took advantage of a 9-year-old boy who loved to sing and who was afraid to tell because you were a priest, God's messenger on Earth and the most holy person in my life," Druding said as his wife wept in the front row of seats.

Feret, 75, was found "unsuitable for ministry" in May.

McDonnell, 44, alleged he was abused as a St. Titus Parish altar boy by Revs. **John Schmeer** (now removed from public ministry) and the now-defrocked **Francis Trauger**.

Several more suits were announced by other alleged victims. *Source: Inquirer, 9-19-12*

Jody and Derek Gallagher have sued **Dale L. McFarland, Radiant Church Assembly of God and the Arizona District Council of the Assemblies of God**, alleging McFarland, while pastor of a Surprise church, "breached his duty as a pastor and counselor when [he] began manipulating a vulnerable Jody for his personal, perverted sexual pleasures."

The Gallaghers claim McFarland persuaded Jody to exchange nude pictures with him and explicitly described his desire to [expletive] her on his Harley. *Source: Courthouse News Service, 9-19-12*

James Fairbanks, 57, and Alain Beret, 59, Sutton, **MA**, are suing the Catholic **Diocese of Worcester** for discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation in the course of a real estate negotiation, alleging the church backed out of a property sale after it found out the men were a married gay couple.

"I have lived quietly in the mainstream for nearly 60 years, and I expected to continue that," Beret said. "But I will not continue that at the expense of my dignity." *Source: Boston Globe, 9-18-12*

A Florida man, 57, alleges in a lawsuit against the Catholic **Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, MO**, that he was molested by **Fr. Jerry J. Wegenek** when he was about 11. Wegenek died in 2011 at age 73.

The diocese said Wegenek was removed from the ministry in 1994 after allegation he was involved in sexual misconduct with a teen boy in the 1970s. *Source: Kansas City Star, 9-13-12*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

A federal jury awarded \$280,000 in damages, including \$100,000 in punitive damages, to an employee of the Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority in Albuquerque, **NM**, who claimed he was denied promotions because he resisted the religious proselytizing of his supervisor, **John Stomp**.

A jury rejected James Chávez's claim he was discriminated against on the basis of race but agreed he was denied promotion because of his [lack of] religious beliefs.

Stomp repeatedly tried to get him to attend his church and gave him a bible, according to the suit, but Chávez, an engineer, resisted. *Source: Albuquerque Journal, 9-18-12*

Finances

The Ontario Securities Commission ordered Scarborough pastor **Marlon G. Hibbert**, founder of **Dominion World Outreach Ministries**, to pay \$5.6 million to investors and the commission after bilking parishioners in a scam.

"In 32 years, I have never encountered a more vile, more heinous fraud than that perpetrated by Hibbert on his unsuspecting parishioners," OSC adjudicator James Carnwath wrote. *Source: Toronto Star, 9-27-12*

— 'They said I was going to burn in hell for saying those lies about the priest.'

Comment by his parents to a Canadian abuse victim

Legal Developments

A Michigan judge ruled a lawsuit against the **Boy Scouts of America** and other entities by plaintiffs seeking damages for molestation charges will go forward.

The suit was filed in 2011 by Mid-Michigan Guardianship Services on behalf of 2 brothers who say they were molested by Assistant Scoutmaster **Roger Young**, who had worked with the Chief Okemos Council since 1979 and was charged with criminal sexual assault and possession of child pornography. He killed himself in 2009.

Jim Jamo, an attorney representing People's Church, where the troop meetings were held, said the church "continues to pray for all who are victims of any type of abuse and their families."

Attorneys allege the Scouts were notified 3 times of Young's suspicious behavior and a pending criminal sexual conduct investigation in 2007 but no one took action to restrict him from working with children. *Source: Lansing State Journal, 9-27-12*

Allegations

Yoshiyahu Y. Pinto, 38, and his wife, **Dvora Rivka Pinto**, Ashdod, **ISR**, are under house arrest after being questioned on allegations they tried to bribe an Israeli police investigator with \$100,000 to get information on a case in which they're suspected of money laundering.

Rabbi Pinto, founder of the Shuva Israel Yeshiva, has an influential following in Israel and the U.S., including ties to several U.S. lawmakers. In August, the FBI arrested his former top aide, who had worked as a fundraiser for New York Rep. Michael Grimm. Al-Monitor reported then that the 7 top donors to Rep. Eric Cantor's 2008 campaign were from Pinto's followers.

Dvora Pinto attempted suicide by taking an overdose of pills during police questioning at their home. She is expected to recover. *Source: Al-Monitor, 10-12-12; Jerusalem Post, 10-14-12*

Removed / Resigned

Leo Casas was suspended as a priest by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the **Philippines** for filing a certificate of candidacy for a gubernatorial race. "The Church continues to maintain that the governance of political life is the role of the laity," said Masbate Bishop Jose Bantolo.

"Priests have no place in politics," said Luzon Archbishop Oscar Cruz. *Source: Gulf News, 10-12-12*

Loren O'Dea, 83, Waterford, **MI**, a retired priest who assisted with services, was placed on leave from Our Lady of Sorrows by the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit after allegations of sexual misconduct involving 2 minors were "deemed substantive."

O'Dea retired as pastor at Our Lady of Sorrows in 1997. *Source: Observer & Eccentric, 10-11-12*

John Lipinski, 43, St. Paul, **ALB**, was relieved of pastoral duties by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada after a company he co-owned with his wife and another man was fined \$215,000 for bringing in welders and machinists from Europe and exploiting them for profit.

The firm, **Kihew Energy Services Ltd.**, pleaded guilty to breaching the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. In exchange, charges were dropped against the Lipinskis and Calvin Steinhauer. The court was told that Kihew made about \$1 million from the scheme. *Source: Calgary Herald, 10-10-12*

Marco Antonio Ordenes Fernandez, 47, resigned as bishop of Iquique, **Chile**, after allegations of sex abuse of a minor. Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi said the link between resignation and investigation "can be considered obvious."

Ordenes is accused of molesting an altar boy. His accuser, Rodrigo Pino, 30, alleged the abuse began when he was 15. *Source: BBC, 10-9-12*

Gary Miller, Evergreen Park, **IL**, resigned as pastor at St. Bernadette Catholic Church in Evergreen Park, IL. The Archdiocese of Chicago removed him from public ministry amid allegations he engaged in sexual misconduct with a minor while assigned to St. Leonard Parish in Berwyn more than 30 years ago. *Source: NBC Chicago, 9-26-12*

The Archdiocese of Boston placed **James E. Gaudreau**, 69, pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Lynn, **MA**, on administrative leave after receiving an allegation of sexual abuse of a child in 2006, according to a statement. *Source: Daily Item, 9-24-12*

Bishop R. Daniel Conlon, Catholic **Diocese of Joliet, IL**, removed **Fr. F. Lee Ryan** from public ministry after earlier reinstating him. Ryan was first removed by Conlon's predecessor in 2010 due to an alleged relationship with a teen in the 1970s.

A Florida man, 52, alleged that he and Ryan had a relationship that lasted for more than a year, starting when the accuser was 14. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 9-18-12*

Theodore Podson, 64, was removed from active ministry as a Catholic priest by the Rome-based Piarist Fathers on allegations he molested a 13-year-old Devon, **PA**, student in the 1990s. Podson was among 7 priests on a 1994 Archdiocese of Philadelphia list of dozens who admitted or were suspected of sexually abusing minors. *Source: Inquirer, 9-17-12*

Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput in May said **Fr. Michael Chapman**, 56, was ready to return to active ministry but reconsidered after the archdiocese received a new accusation that Chapman had molested a minor at Ascension of Our Lord Parish in Kensington about 30 years ago.

Chapman was among 2 dozen priests placed on leave in March 2011. Chaput permanently removed 7 of them after finding allegations credible.

The first allegation against Chapman involved "boundary violations," which include inappropriate comments, touching or conduct that could be considered grooming of victims, church officials said. *Source: Inquirer, 9-18-12*

Laddie Pierce, 66, pastor of West Pensacola Baptist Church in **Florida** resigned for unspecified reasons after a "family meeting" at the church. Randall Markham, 72, shot Pierce in the thigh in the church parking lot Sept. 5, said a sheriff's report.

Markham told detectives he shot Pierce because he believed he was having an affair with his wife, who works at the church day care center. *Source: News Journal, 9-18-12*

Legal Developments

Charges of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, sexual assault and statutory sexual assault were reinstated by a **Philadelphia** judge against **Andrew McCormick**, a Catholic priest accused of forcing oral sex on a 10-year-old altar boy in 1997.

The charges were dismissed by another judge at an August preliminary hearing at which the alleged victim, 24, testified that McCormick, 56, put his penis on the victim's lips and teeth in the rectory of St. John Cantius Church in Bridesburg.

McCormick was put on leave in March 2011 by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. *Source: Inquirer, 10-3-12*

Other

Tom Brennan, 74, Toronto, **NSW**, the first Australian Catholic priest to be charged with concealing sexual abuse by another priest, died of cancer 6 months after he was forced to retire and while his case was pending.

Brennan was also convicted of making a false statement to police in 2009 in which he denied receiving reports about the teacher/priest, who can't be named for legal reasons, who was accused of molesting children in the 1970s at St. Pius X School.

Along with 2 counts of concealing the other priest's abuse, Brennan was charged with sexually assaulting a boy, 8, in the 1980s. He was also charged with assaulting 2 boys by caning them for reporting the other priest, who allegedly molested 31 boys after Brennan was told of the situation in 1978.

One of the alleged victims, John Pirona, committed suicide in July after leaving a letter saying he was in "too much pain." *Source: Morning Herald, 10-2-12*

Paul A. LaCharite, 65, Somerville, **MA**, was found dead in a parking garage, victim of an apparent drug overdose. LaCharite, former pastor of St. James Episcopal Church, faced charges of assault with intent to rape a child and 3 counts of indecent assault and battery on a child under the age of 14.

The abuse allegedly occurred for about a decade. *Source: Boston Herald, 9-27-12*



Letterbox

Readers send kudos for convention

Thank you so much for giving us the opportunity to visit fabulous Portland, Ore. We loved it there and would like to make a return visit. Thanks also for the well-organized, interesting and fun convention. We look forward to attending the convention next year in Madison.

In the hotel I encountered a stack of bibles stacked on freshly laundered bedding and towels. I asked at check-out why the bibles were placed in rooms and said I found that offensive. I asked why bibles weren't just placed in common areas where people could pick them up, if they wished.

His answer was if they're left out, they get stolen! He also said if there are no bibles in the room, people call to ask why not.

How often does that really happen?

Sue Schuetz
Wisconsin

•••

Just a note to say what a pleasure it was to attend the conference in Portland. I'd not been to an FFRF convention before, despite living nearly next door in Milwaukee. Thanks to everyone who worked to put the conference together!

Gregory James
Wisconsin

•••

My deepest gratitude for all you did in Portland. My wife and I met and talked with so many kindred spirits and by chance had lunch and a wonderful talk with annalise fonza, while surrounded by 20 or more Catholic priests at their meeting. (We did get the odd stare now and then.)

It could not have been more perfect.

Russell Case
Washington

•••

Thanks for the glorious opportunity to learn so much and be with so many great folks at the Portland convention. I am proud to be a Lifetime Member.

Jerry Foreman
Nevada

Crank mail upsets some, entrances others

I've been reading the crank mail letters and I must say, they are hilarious.

These letters are obviously written by people of extremely limited intelligence. These letters are written by the hypocritical, brainwashed, bible-thumping lunatics who claim to be so holy and good. Not with the vulgar language that they use.

I'd like one holy roller to prove to me that there is a god, and I'll prove to them that there isn't and never was. The bible is even more farfetched than fiction. Their god is the meanest and most unpleasant person in all of fiction.

My life is so wonderful without god and religion.

Eugene T. Bernascone
New Jersey

•••

The essays by college students are most edifying, but the crank mail debases an otherwise excellent publication.

John Tindale, Life Member
South Carolina

•••

"Cranksters to FFRF'ers: 'Get packing,' " [Sept12] was an ugly compilation of bible-thumpers mired in their own hypocritical temerity, from which they have no desire to extricate themselves.

The perniciousness of the muddle-headed nincompoops and their obnoxious drivel is but reflective of the "bigot's handbook" they are so enamored with.

William R. Lamma
Minnesota

•••

For at least 83 of my 91 years I have been an atheist. For the past 25 years or so I have been a member of "that church for atheists," Unitarian Universalist. Many members do not share our "faith" in unfaith, but we get along.

I am writing about the September crank mail collection. Did you have to print so many? It was repetitive and disgusting. It made my wife laugh, and she just had to read them to me. Unfortunately, I could not share in her merriment. I found it sad that there are so many illiterate people who just don't get it.

Morton Nadler
Virginia

AA has supporters and detractors

RE: "Religious Rehab: Fishing for the Weak" [Sept12]. Bailey Rahn and Chance Campbell fall into the same generality as those who believe there are no atheists in foxholes. The fact that the Alcoholics Anonymous program underscores belief in a "higher power" doesn't mean that there aren't plenty of hardcore atheists like myself in successful recovery from alcoholism through AA. Like atheists at weddings, we can enjoy ourselves while ignoring the liturgical baggage.

I'm in my 40th sober and happy year attending AA meetings. As AA's official description states, AA is a "fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and helps others to recover from alcoholism." Nary a word about "spirituality."

That being said, AA is at fault for continuing to emphasize this obsolete concept dating from its founding in the old Oxford groups. By so doing, we in AA limit our ability to reach out to suffering alcoholics, many of whom use our perceived religiosity to perpetuate the denial of their condition, to their peril.

A.K.

Hawaii

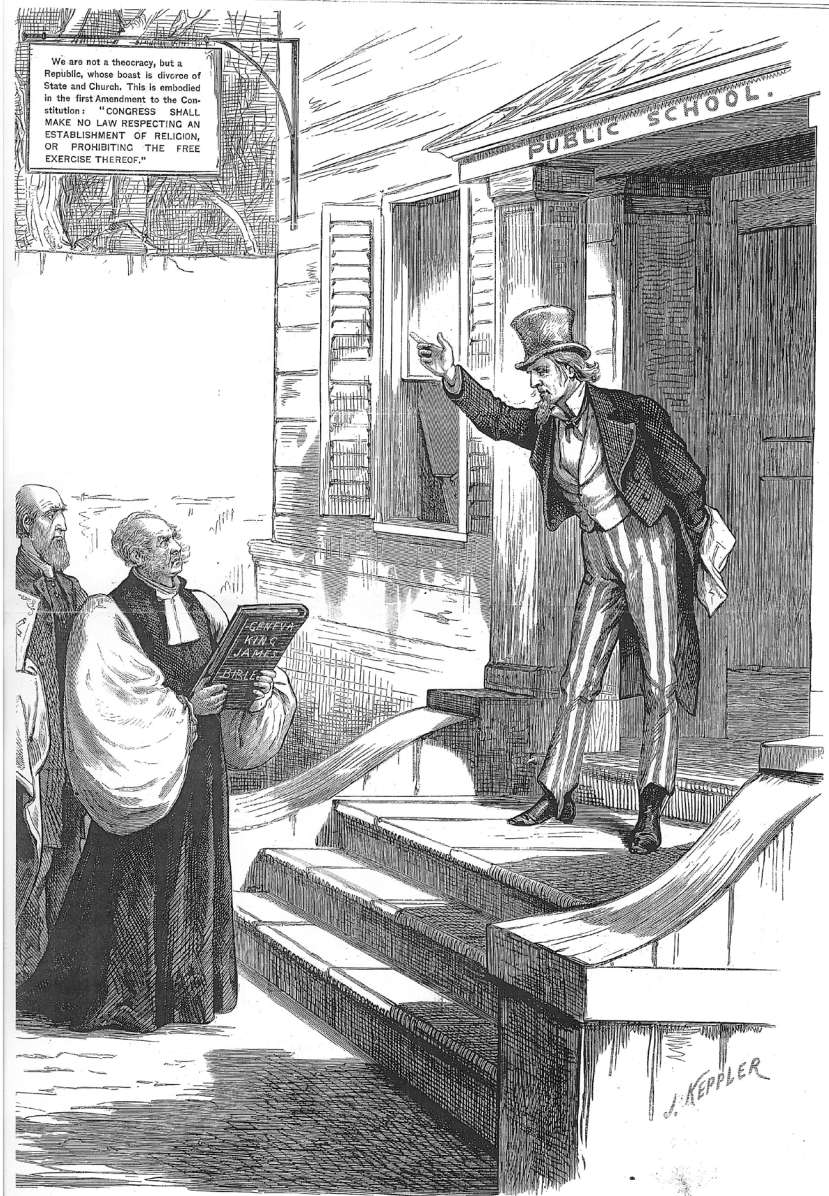
•••

The September article "Religious Rehab: Fishing for the Weak" was interesting to me on several levels. I am a retired professional in chemical dependency treatment, an atheist and a longtime member of a 12-step recovery group.

The intent of the article is important — the knowledge of recovery resources for alcohol and drug treatment and the pros and cons of any treatment. And like FFRF's never-ending battle to keep religion out of government, the history of religious-based treatment for alcohol and drugs is a sad story of failure, primarily because they view it as a sin rather than a medical and psychological issue. But that doesn't stop them.

TED NEWSPAPER.

FEBRUARY 5, 1876. 353



"MITTED, WHY NOT ALL?"

ties of worship; there you are free to study them, but the spirit of our republican institutions forbids their introduction here."

As a Life Member and the attorney in the original Ten Commandments case (Stone v. Graham, 1980), I want to thank FFRF for its aggressive efforts to stop the continuing displays of the Ten Commandments in public schools.

William Cameron Stone
Kentucky

"Efforts to get religion in the public schools are not new!" notes attorney **William Cameron Stone**. The illustration above is from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly in 1876, which shows secular Uncle Sam confronting representatives of various worldwide religions and belief systems.

I would however like to clear up the article's shortcomings. Despite my years of experience, I have no idea what is meant by "religious rehab programs." They couldn't mean AA, because AA is simply a voluntary self-help group which doesn't charge for its services.

If the writers meant "fire and brimstone, find god now or burn in hell" programs, I would agree with them. In my area we have the Cleveland Clinic, considered one of the best hospitals in the world. This hospital has an alcohol/drug program which tells patients to attend AA meetings for help to stay sober. Is the clinic a religious rehab? Secular? Both? The psychiatrists, nurses, internal medicine physicians, social workers would like to know!

I am an atheist and have atheist friends at meetings I attend. In the case study, Will saw "weathered desperate faces." Wrong again. I have a weathered face after 40 years in recovery, but anyone who attends an AA meeting will see meetings made up primarily of young people, from teenagers on up. But the average age is quite young and far from the stereotype of the down-and-outer clutching a wine bottle. And AA meetings are much more known for the laughter, friendship and hope that permeate them than any desperation.

My higher power is the power of the people and principles of AA, not god. The "cleverly ambiguous" Step 2 [submitting to a higher power] got me out of dependency, not into it. In a way, it is cleverly ambiguous. I am powerless over alcohol. Knowing that, I was able

to not drink, find my inner strength and go out in the world and live a useful life.

If AA is as devious as Will and the article's writers make it out to be, I think the CIA should attend meetings and learn about covert operations.

John Finnegan
Ohio

Missouri billboard much appreciated



Thank you so much for putting up the new billboard in Smithville, Mo. My husband and I have both been frustrated about the awful Catholic billboard and were thrilled when we saw the new one from FFRF go up.

It's been difficult to live in an area where there are so many religious fanatics, so it's good to know that there are other like-minded people close by. Thank you again.

Martha Schroer
Missouri

Second Amendment trumps the First

Your response to Danny Miller's September letter (regarding the Second Amendment) was an inappropriate dismissal of a serious criticism. The cartoon Mr. Miller objected to had no bearing on freedom from religion, and its inclusion in Freethought Today was

a gratuitous slap in the face to your readers who value the right to keep and bear arms.

I am a lifelong atheist and I regard the right to self-defense as fundamental as the right to free speech. Mr. Miller was correct that the Second Amendment protects all other rights, and your slighting of it in favor of the First was shortsighted. Are you equally dismissive of the Fourth Amendment? The Fifth?

Reading Freethought Today reminds me that I'm not alone in my rejection of superstition, but now I feel like an outsider again. I was considering buying an FFRF Life Membership to complement my NRA Life Membership, but now I'm undecided.

Atheists come in all shapes and sizes. We will disagree with each other on many subjects. FFRF should work at representing all of us.

Jim Williams
Washington

New Lifers in for the long haul

Enclosed is my long overdue payment for Lifetime Membership. I can't think of a better way to help myself than by supporting the great work that you do.

FFRF gets results, and you do it with dignity and style. Keep fighting the good fight.

Scott Eppelman
Texas

•••

Enclosed find my check for \$1,000 for Life Membership. I like and strongly support what you people are doing.

It seems that we are slowly achieving growth in the percentage of people who have shrugged off the straitjacket of religious dogma.

John L. Coppejans
California

Tell religious nuts what you think

As I read the stories of the essay award winners, I was disturbed by the trouble that young people have when asked about their beliefs. I can understand that they are young and not accustomed to being aggressive when asked, "What church do you go to?"

As a person born into atheism, I want to tell you how I handle people who question my beliefs:

RELIGIOUS NUT: What church do you belong to?

ME: And what church do you belong to?

RELIGIOUS NUT: I belong to the (usually Baptist in Oklahoma) church.

ME: Let me get this straight. You believe that some man up in the sky somewhere has been there for all eternity and that one day, before there were days, he decided to create the Universe. And after it was created in six literal days, he created a man (Adam) from whom he took a rib and created a woman (Eve), who ate an apple and angered this man so much that he decided to flood the Earth and murder all but eight people and most of the animals.

This man in the sky decided that the humans he created couldn't please him enough to get eternal life, so he decided that he would have a ghost impregnate a woman who would bear his (God's) son. This son, called Jesus, went running around Israel, ignoring China, Russia, North and South America and the rest of the world, telling everyone that if they believed he was God, then they could live forever, and

if they didn't, then he would torture them with fire for the rest of eternity. Is that what you want me to believe?

RELIGIOUS NUT: (silence).

ME: And the only reason you know this is because 65 to 300 years after Jesus died, a bunch of unknown people wrote it all in a book and quoted the exact words Jesus said. That is amazing since no one took notes at the time Jesus supposedly lived or had a tape recorder. I find your story unbelievable.

RELIGIOUS NUT: You should not talk about my Lord and Savior Jesus that way!

ME: I don't give a damn about your religious sentimentalities. You have a book, the bible, which says that if I don't believe in Jesus, I am going to burn in hell forever. You think I am so worthless that I deserve to be tortured forever. You don't care about my feelings, so why should I give a damn about your religious sentimentalities?

These student essayists don't have to take any guff from the deluded religious freaks. Just show them how ridiculous their beliefs are.

Jim Worrell
Oklahoma

Howler: Canine averse to holy water

I drove a friend and her big old cat to a very small gathering (four women) at the local monastery on St. Francis' Day. One lady joked that her little dog had howled when sprayed with "holy" water.

"You know why," I said, "animals are atheist. He didn't want to be blessed."

They all LOL'd and nobody took offense!

Sheila Somner, Life Member
Arizona

Taking freethought across the border

I'm a retired psychologist and After-Life Member who has founded a freethinkers chapter within the Family Motor Coach Association. The Lake Chapala area south of Guadalajara, on Mexico's biggest natural lake, hosts the largest concentration of Americans living outside the U.S. Expatriates here, mostly retired, are estimated at between 6,000 to 10,000 (the latter in the winter when snowbirds arrive).

This area, known as Lakeside, is full of churches, bible study and prayer meetings. Missionaries go door-to-door to spread "the good news." A Baptist church has given a "course" on "How Science Points to the Existence of God." I knew only four freethinkers after living there nine years.

Inspired by attending the Reason Rally, which FFRF helped sponsor in March in Washington, I placed ads in the weekly English-language newspaper inviting freethinkers interested in forming a discussion and fellowship group. About 30 people responded.

Now the Lakeside Freethinkers number about 60 and meet twice a month. Our steady growth demonstrates we're meeting a real need. Members, perhaps encouraged by knowing that we are not alone, are becoming more outspoken on religion's impositions in the community such as the attempted takeover by U.S. evangelicals of a facility for abandoned and abused children.

The Baptists should not expect to offer their "course" again without it being countered by accurate information.

Ken Crosby
Texas

Two topics all for the price of one

There's one compelling argument in favor of gay marriage which trumps all others: One child in so many thousand is born with *both* sexes. I'm a marriage officiant. What do I do in a case like this?

Sometimes these children (hermaphrodites) are assigned a sex at birth. It's "easier" to assign female than male, so you have a person who feels male in a female body, or vice versa. Are they barred from marriage? Marriage is a civil union. It's only religious if it's performed by a cleric. Any two people can enter into a civil contract.

On another topic, I don't believe Jesus ever existed, but if he did, there's no doubt he was a Jew. At what point did he relinquish his Jewish identity? Apostasy (renouncing one's religion) is punishable by death in some countries today and certainly was 2,000 years ago. He and his followers couldn't have been preaching Christianity because it didn't exist.

There have been rumors lately that Jesus was married. If he was, he would surely marry a nice Jewish girl. And every Sabbath, like Jews everywhere, Jesus must have celebrated it with the age-old rituals and prayers.

If the Last Supper actually took place, it was surely a seder. In short, the whole family would be turning over in their graves if they knew that someone changed their religion on them. Preposterous!

Kate Talbot, Life Member
California

Celibacy as policy an utter failure

I have arguments at times with religious people, rarely with any positive results. Mostly we just argue and give up. Although I'm not trying to reform the unreformable, there's a question I like to ask the religious arguee, especially Catholics:

Why not, at least, allow priests to marry and not to be bound by vows of chastity? (The various justifications for chastity have an interesting history, but aren't necessary to recount here.) Allowing clergy to marry should allow for at least some reduction in child molestation, as the clergy would be allowed to get some sexual relief.

At the least, forcing the hierarchy to deny this simple, once-practiced policy, would get all the cards on the table.

Jerry Weinberg
Vermont

God picking winners must need losers

Everywhere we look, every day, a business, a city government, a town council, football coaches, basketball coaches, you name it, God is asked to "favor" the supplicant: "We can't win a basketball/football/baseball game without god on our side. We ask for special favors — we ask to win."

From that request, we are asked to believe that winning or losing a game or the success of a business or town council are all dependent on the whims of an unknown, unseen "something" out there. The talents of the quarterback are negligible, the mayor of the town could very well be illiterate. The skills of leadership are totally unnecessary to the success of any endeavor because we (the town, the coach, the priest, the minister) have begged god to intercede and provide us with a "Win!"

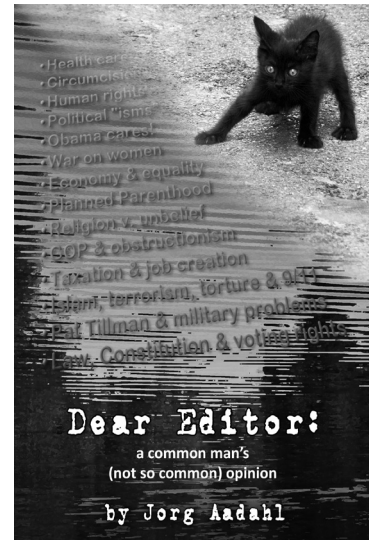
Is there any reasonable person who would buy into and promote this theory? Does god pick the winner of the All-Star Game, the World Series, Olympic events, political contests?

Is all life reduced to god's lottery? What happens when we find that money bought the outcome of the game, the election, the Academy Awards? Does that mean that god favored the money side and not the side of right? Does *anyone* believe this? Unfortunately, it seems, more often than not, people do believe.

What kind of just god would always have to have a loser? They want me to believe this is the way the world is run? There are very valid reasons I am an atheist. These are just a few.

Jeanne Owers
Texas

Member offers e-book as letter template




Dear Editor: a common man's (not so common) opinion, is an e-book that includes my letters to the editor that FFRF has published as well as other letters with a progressive bent on religion, atheism, humanism and related topics.

The book is now available at smashwords.com/books/view/236040. It can be downloaded for a small fee or by browsing the first few pages for free. As explained in the Introduction, I encourage readers to copy, modify or embellish any letter with my name under and republish under their own name.

I'm hoping for a grassroots movement to spread the "gospel" of this letter collection, of which I'm sure there is enough to offend just about anybody, but hopefully also something to inspire and provoke some thinking. As you'll see, I have included comments from others, from one extreme to the other, good and, if not "bad," at least amusing! You be the judge, and don't shy away from letting me know if you have any comments.

Jorg Aadahl
California

Stillwater Christian School
Raffle Tickets



NEMO Standard Battle Light 2.0 AR-15
(\$1905 Value or equivalent towards custom build)
Ticket Prices: \$25 each or 5 for \$100
Only 1000 tickets sold

Drawing October 13 at our Shoot Out event

www.stillwaterchristianschool.org
255 FFA Drive, Kalispell, MT
406.752.4400

Onward. . .

"I have to think that if this represents Christian values, I'm glad to be an atheist," writes Bill Breen from Montana.



Filmmakers and FFRF members Scott Mullin, Oregon, and Sean Namanny, California, videoed parts of the conference and interviewed speakers as part of an upcoming documentary.



Partners Todd Peissig, a Life Member from Wisconsin, and Eric Lawrence, Illinois.

Convention Mementos



The filmmakers (above) surprised FFRF staffers with these beautiful flower posies. Pictured admiring them are Jackie Douglas, Katie Daniel, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Katie Stenz and Lynn Lau.



Wet but clearly enjoying the optional preconvention tour of the Columbia Gorge/Multnomah Falls was this group of FFRF'ers.



At Multnomah Falls: Jeanette Miles, S. Carolina; her son, Max Nielson, 2012 Student Activist Award recipient; and Jessica Ahlquist, 2012 Freethinker of the Year.



Molly and Beth Taylor, Washington. Molly is in the eighth grade.



"Audio guy" Buzz Kemper, Wisconsin, recorded speeches.

Meet a Member

Church retreat in 1966 backfired

Name: Dan Nerren.

Where I live: Sand Springs, Okla., a Tulsa suburb.

Where and when I was born: Tupelo, Miss., 1948.

Education: B.S. in education, Southwest Missouri State University, 1971.

Occupation: Retired railroad worker.

Military service: U.S. Army, 1971-73, Würzburg, Germany.

How I got where I am today: Life is much about unlearning incorrect ideas. Unfortunately, many people never see this. Few there be who have a sense of their own acculturation.

Person in history I admire: Carl Sagan.

A quotation I like: "For me, it is far better to grasp the Universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring." (Carl Sagan)

These are a few of my favorite things: Playing piano, reading, volkswalking [noncompetitive, 5K or 10K outdoor walk].

My doubts about religion started: I spent the summer of 1966 working at a church retreat in New Mexico. I was exposed to many sermons. It was there that I began to question the whole scheme.

Ways I promote freethought: I've been a Foundation member since 1989. I'm active in a local Unitarian Universalist congregation, Church of the Restoration, so named to indicate the congregation's desire to bring restoration to the Greenwood District of



Dan Nerren prepares to tickle the ivories.

Tulsa. Greenwood was destroyed in the infamous 1921 race massacre in north Tulsa, where vigilantes took to the skies in aircraft to strafe the helpless black citizens below.

I was instrumental in founding the American Humanist Association chapter in Tulsa in 1988. I later organized an atheist meetup group and stay active in other freethought groups. My next project will be leading a Unitarian Progressive Book Club discussion group, starting with Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*.

Editor's note: Dan also performed an invaluable service for FFRF several years ago by indexing and binding 10 years' worth of Freethought Today issues. This is a tremendous resource for research and for the legal staff.

Dan Nerren's secular invocation

On Thursday, Aug. 30, Dan Nerren treated the Tulsa City Council to a first — the first atheist "invocation" at a Tulsa council meeting.

For months the council had refused to stop praying to open its meetings, then eventually agreed to let previously excluded groups address the council. A local Americans United member asked Dan if he would give a secular address.

"I went to the Internet to see what

was out there and soon discovered a secular invocation written by Andrew Lovley of the South Maine Association of Secular Humanists, which he had used to speak to his local governmental body. I adapted Lovley's words to the Tulsa situation."

The speaker is also expected to lead the Pledge of Allegiance. A TV reporter noted Dan omitted "under God."

"Had he been listening carefully, he would have discovered another change I made to the pledge," said Dan. "I closed the pledge not with 'with liberty and justice for all' but with 'with liberty and justice its goal.' Liberty and justice have not become a reality for many citizens. My son, watching from his home on the cable access channel, caught my change."

In what could be called a sad commentary, extra security was in place for the meeting because it was announced beforehand that a godless person was giving the invocation. However, Dan said, "There were no problems, no protesters. Everything went smoothly."

The invocation:

Let us open our hearts to the welfare of all people in our community by respecting the inherent dignity and worth of each person, and realize that our differences of race, religion and party affiliation are merely superficial. Our common humanity unites us all, and may we recognize that through our interdependence we share a common fate.

In order to achieve the greatest good as citizens of Tulsa, it is important for us to maintain an open mind, and honor and respect the human rights of each other. We should consider the benefit provided by differing perspectives, and be willing to question assumptions that serve only to obstruct our path to progress.

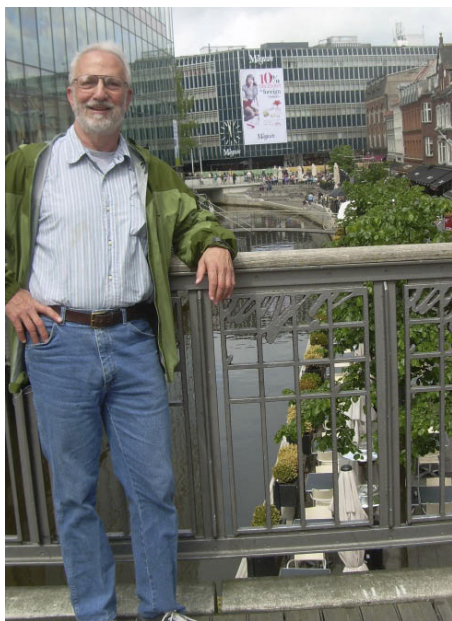
Rather than bowing our heads and closing our eyes in deference, we should open our eyes widely to face the reality that confronts us, without losing sight of our ideals of what we could achieve.

Through the prudent use of reason and compassion, we can ensure the success of this great city.

Lastly, we must remember that in the face of adversity we need not look above for answers, but instead recognize the proven potential within ourselves and in each other to overcome any challenges we face.

Thank you.

Meet a multitalented volunteer



Steve Salemsen visited Aarhus, Denmark, the nation's second-largest city, in June.

Name: Steve Salemsen.

Where I live: In a condo on Madison's southwest side.

Where and when I was born: Louisville, Ky., in 1943.

Family: One younger sister, two sons and daughters-in-law, three delightful grandchildren.

Why I volunteer for FFRF: I want to support the organization in addition to

simply being a dues-paying member.

What I do as a volunteer: Help around the office with anything that needs doing.

What I like best about it: The fascinating people who work there.

My day job was: Associate director of the University of Wisconsin Press (now happily retired).

Education: Four years of music studies at the Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris, playing French horn in the Haifa Symphony Orchestra, B.A. in linguistics from Queens College (City University of New York), M.A. in liberal studies from Duke University.

These three words sum me up: Inquisitive, broad-minded, multilingual (fluent in English, French and Hebrew, somewhat less fluent in Macedonian and conversant in German, Spanish and Italian).

My freethought heroes are: Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, Joe Hill.

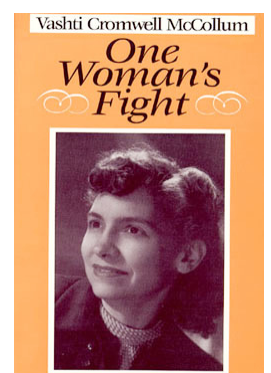
Things I like: Balkan folk dancing, biking, downhill skiing, Paul Robeson recordings, the Green Bay Packers, Schubert lieder and Mahler symphonies, doing The New York Times crossword puzzle every day, and almost any ethnic cuisine.

Things I smite: Xenophobes, cockroaches, the New York Yankees.

One Woman's Fight

by Vashti McCollum

Historic legal battle to a Supreme Court victory removing religious instruction from the public schools. 240 pages, with photographs. \$15.00 postpaid \$20.00 nonmember ffrf.org/shop





FFRF Co-President Dan Barker debuts his newest song, "Poor Little Me," lyrics by Dan and music by Broadway legend Charles Strouse, who received FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award in 2011 for outing himself as a nonbeliever.



The collaboration gets a big "thumbs up" from the audience.

FFRF Convention '12 Highlights

*Photography by Andrew Seidel
unless otherwise noted.*

More photography on pages 11-14, 22.



Lorraine Ideus, former minister-turned-atheist Ray Ideus, freethought celebrity Julia Sweeney and Dan Barker.



Jerry DeWitt had the crowd in his pocket (see the "love offering" he's waving in his hand) during The Clergy Project panel, when he delivered his freethought talk in the mode of a Pentecostal preacher. (Jerry requested the crowd affirm his statements by saying "Darwin" instead of "amen.") Jerry is the first graduate of The Clergy Project, which works to help ministers who have lost their faith leave the pulpit.



Photo: Andy Ngo

Richard Dawkins autographed hundreds of copies of his international blockbuster *The God Delusion* after receiving his Emperor Has No Clothes Award.



Douglas Marshall, Michigan, principal plaintiff in FFRF's lawsuit against the mayor of Warren, Mich., gave a first-hand account of the case, in which the mayor approved a nativity display while censoring FFRF's solstice sign. Douglas and FFRF are appealing the case to the 6th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals with pro bono help.