

Freethought Today

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December 2013

Round 1 in federal challenge FFRF, Gaylor, Barker win 'parsonage exemption' suit

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and plaintiffs Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker won a significant ruling Nov. 22 in federal court declaring unconstitutional the 1954 "parish exemption" benefiting "ministers of the gospel."

The challenge, filed in September 2011, has far-reaching ramifications for up to 83% of ministers who receive a housing allowance. (Read a story on the clergy outcry against this decision on page 17.)

"May we say 'Hallelujah?'" said Gaylor. She and Barker are FFRF co-presidents. "The judge agrees with us that Congress may not reward ministers for fighting a 'godless and anti-religious' movement by letting them pay less income tax. The rest of us should not pay more because clergy pay less."

The government has 60 days to appeal. While enjoining Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew and IRS Acting Commissioner Daniel Werfel from enforcing the tax break, U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb for the Western District of Wisconsin stayed her ruling until the conclusion of any appeal, as is typical in significant cases.

The law allows "ministers of the gospel" paid through a housing allowance to exclude that allowance from taxable income. It is not a tax "deduction" but is a tax exclusion. Ministers may, for instance, use this untaxed income to

purchase a home, and, in a practice known as "double dipping," may then deduct interest paid on the mortgage and property taxes.

Crabb issued a 43-page decision declaring 26 U.S.C. §107(2) unconstitutional. Quoting the Supreme Court, Crabb noted, "Every tax exemption constitutes subsidy."

Crabb wrote, "Some might view a rule against preferential treatment as exhibiting hostility toward religion, but equality should never be mistaken for hostility. It is important to remember that the Establishment Clause protects the religious and nonreligious alike."

"The court's decision does not evince hostility to religion, nor should it even seem controversial," said Richard L. Bolton, FFRF's attorney in the case. "The court has simply recognized the reality that a tax-free housing allowance available only to ministers is a significant benefit from the government and is unconstitutionally provided on the basis of religion."

The benefit to clergy is enormous, saving an estimated \$2.3 billion in taxes in the years 2002-07 alone, according to a 2002 statement by U.S. Rep Jim Ramstad, R-Minn., cited in Crabb's ruling. Clergy may use the housing allowance for rent or mortgages and home improvements, including furnishings, property taxes and maintenance.

In 2002, a case went before the 9th



Sacramento billboard campaign, see pages 11-13.

Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals when the IRS sued Rev. Rick Warren of Saddleback Church. Warren had claimed all or nearly all of his California housing costs for several years as a tax-free parsonage allowance.

The 9th Circuit was poised to rule against Warren, so Congress immediately passed the Clergy Housing Allowance Clarification Act of 2002 to moot the case. From 2002 on, the law restricted the parsonage exemption to "reasonable rental value."

The 1954 bill's sponsor, Rep. Peter Mack, D-Ill., argued that ministers should be rewarded for "carrying on such a courageous fight against this [godless and anti-religious world movement]."

disadvantaged churches and ministers is not a secular purpose and it does not produce a secular effect when similarly disadvantaged secular organizations and employees are excluded from the benefit."

She added, "Under defendants' view, there would be no limit to the amount of support the government could provide to religious groups over secular ones."

Crabb invoked the Supreme Court's 1989 case, *Texas Monthly Inc. v. Bullock*, calling exemptions for religious

Continued on page 17

Have a very Super Solstice



Staff gathered 'round FFRF's traditional winter solstice display in the Wisconsin Capitol. Kneeling are Annie Laurie Gaylor and Andrew Seidel. Standing (left) are Dan Barker, Scott Colson, Katie Daniel, Lauryn Seering, Bill Dunn, Liz Cavell, Sam Grover, Alexis Palmer, Dayna Long, Lisa Strand, Yuna Choi, Patrick Elliott and Jackie Douglas. (Not pictured is Rebecca Markert due to maternity leave.)

Judge: No secular purpose

"I agree with plaintiffs that §107(2) does not have a secular purpose or effect," wrote Crabb, adding that a reasonable observer would view it "as an endorsement of religion." Crabb wrote that "the exemption provides a benefit to religious persons and no one else, even though doing so is not necessary to alleviate a special burden on religious exercise."

All taxpayers are burdened by taxes, Crabb noted. "Defendants do not identify any reason why a requirement on ministers to pay taxes on a housing allowance is more burdensome for them than for the many millions of others who must pay taxes on income used for housing expenses."

Crabb rejected the claim that the 1954 law was necessary to eliminate "discrimination" against ministers not living in parsonages. "A desire to assist

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unwelcome
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Warren Brackmann and Gary Whittenberger standing up for secularism in the halls of government.



Gary Whittenberger with a portion of FFRF's Tallahassee display.

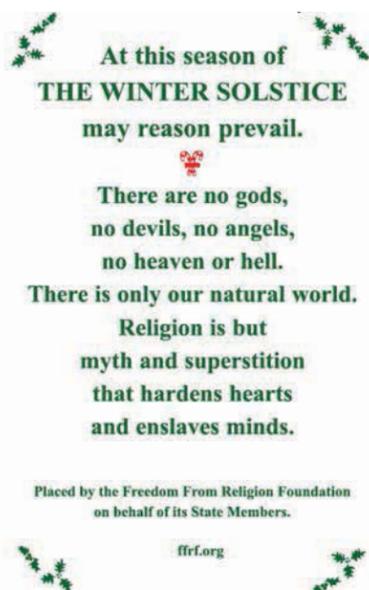
FFRF's 'capital' signs at three state capitols

The Freedom From Religion Foundation by early December had placed freethinking winter solstice signs inside three state capitols — in Illinois, Florida and Wisconsin — to counter nativity scenes there.

When a nativity scene was unexpectedly placed by Religious Right groups in Florida for the first time, FFRF went to work, obtaining a permit, ordering banners and a stand. Tallahassee FFRF members Gary Whittenberger and Warren Brackmann placed the display Dec. 5. The banner depicts the "nativity" of the Bill of Rights (Dec. 15 is Bill of Rights Day), and founding fathers gazing in adoration at a Bill of Rights parchment on a crib. The Chicago area chapter FFRF designed the banner, which was also erected in Daley Plaza. (See story on page 3.)

The manger scene was placed with great religious fanfare, hymns and prayer in the capitol in Tallahassee: "We are not trying to offend anyone, but we are taking a stand for Christ in Christmas, a stand for truth and religious freedom," said Pam Olsen, who organized the event. "And what better place to do this than the heart of our state government."

FFRF begs to differ. "We don't think there should be religion or irreligion in any State Capitol, but if they're going to start allowing religion and call it a public forum, then certainly the non-religious point of view should be there, too," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.



FFRF's "may reason prevail" message was also placed in the Wisconsin Capitol in Madison for its 18th visit during the month of December.

The solstice message was composed by Anne Nicol Gaylor, Foundation co-president emerita, and says:

"At this season of the Winter Solstice, may reason prevail.

There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell.

There is only our natural world.

Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds."

Joining the classic sign is FFRF's tongue-in-cheek "natural nativity scene," which was unveiled in 2011 to challenge a manger scene placed in



Steve Foulkes on his way into the Illinois Capitol with FFRF's solstice sign.

the Capitol by a Wisconsin division of Focus on the Family.

FFRF's display, crafted by Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, features a baby who is black and female, as Botticelli's Venus declares, "It's a girl." The "wise men" are atheists and scientific giants Charles Darwin and Albert Einstein, plus "wise woman" Emma Goldman, a with humorist Mark Twain and founding "father" Thomas Jefferson thrown in for good measure. The sign declares "Celebrate the Solstice, The Reason for the Season."

FFRF placed Anne Gaylor's wording in the Illinois Capitol in Springfield in reaction to a manger scene first

placed there six years ago. FFRF member Steve Foulke, driving eight hours roundtrip, placed the sign Dec. 1 in advance of the religious ceremony when the crèche was put up.

"We're here on our soapbox to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ," said the president and chief legal counsel of the Thomas More Society, Julia Zanoza, chair of the Springfield Nativity Scene Committee. She said the goal is to celebrate the "birth of Jesus Christ" and to promote "private expressions of religious faith in the public square."

Also participating in the prayerful event was the notorious Bishop Thomas Paprocki, of the Springfield Catholic Diocese, who was introduced by Zanoza as a "pro-family warrior." Paprocki notoriously held an "exorcism" on Nov. 20 to protest same-sex marriage being signed into law in Illinois.

At the manger ceremony, Paprocki preached that gay couples must have a true definition of love, and that the truth is not a thing but a person — Jesus Christ, hence making clear the Religious Right import of the "baby Jesus" depicted.

Focus on the Family has announced a goal to get nativity scenes in all 50 state capitols. "If a devotional nativity display is allowed, then there must be 'room at the inn' for all points of view, including irreverency and freethought," said Gaylor.

Thanks to Staff Attorneys Patrick Elliott and Andrew Seidel for coordinating permits.

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Gary Whittenberger

December 2013

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

Freethought solstice display up in Chicago

FFRF and its Metropolitan Chicago chapter unveiled a unique “winter solstice” display the last week of November in Daley Plaza to balance the traditional and divisive nativity scene there.

The 8½-foot-tall lighted “A” stands for “atheist” and “agnostic” and is one of Richard Dawkins’ inspirations.

Beside it is a colorful, irreverent banner depicting a different kind of nativity scene: the birth of the Bill of Rights. It depicts Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and the

Statue of Liberty. A copy of the Bill of Rights, which was adopted on Dec. 15, 1791, is in a manger.

A life-sized nativity scene was first placed in Daley Plaza, at Dearborn and Washington streets, in 1985 by the so-called “God Squad.” After ACLU litigation, a federal judge ruled the plaza a public forum in 1989.

Look for the “A” display on Dearborn Street near the menorah and crèche.



Freethinkers gathered by the unveiled banner Nov. 26 in Daley Plaza.



“A” for atheist, agnostic and effort in Daley Plaza.



Bob Hunter (left) and Tom Cara of the FFRF Metropolitan Chicago Chapter with the solstice banner at North School Park in Arlington Heights. The disclaimer was required this year by the Park District under its newly adopted public forum guidelines. The chapter’s “founding fathers” sign also went up in front of the Niles Village Hall just before Thanksgiving.

“At this season of the Winter Solstice, we celebrate the birth of the Unconquered Sun — the TRUE reason for the season. As Americans, let us also honor the birth of our Bill of Rights, which reminds us there can be no freedom OF religion, without having freedom FROM religion in government.”



It was a special day for another reason for Alexa Kane (left), who turned 14 on Nov. 26 and came with her dad, Evan, who is chapter vice president.



FFRF supporter Kathi Wise lives up to her surname, without a doubt.

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
Madison WI 53701

Freedom Depends on Freethinkers



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

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

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

Reminder
January/February is a combined issue to be received in February

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

Exorcism

Come out of that blighted body, you Sunday
spooks,
you poisonous prayers, you creepy confessions —
Begone, you soporific sermons,
you caterwauling choirs —
Come out of there, you pious praises,
you grinning greetings and fawning farewells —
Get out of that body, the lot of you,
and off to the graveyard with Pluto and Zeus!
You heard that right, you sultans of saintliness:
We're kicking your ashes out of here!
We're putting an end to your End Times!
We're putting a curse on your curses!
We're putting a stop to stupidity!
And
We're putting the **X** back in Xmas!

Acts of God

When heaven bares its teeth and snarls,
earth trembles at what's coming: yesterday
the typhoon, today the quake, tomorrow
the tornado – warnings
that just like the trees and the houses, we're
temporary.
Now in a stricken land
ten thousand miles away
they're searching the rubble
for children, fathers, wives,
and food – water – food
before it's all over.

The suffering is never over.
The sorrow isn't over.
It goes on
and on
and on
here in our hearts.

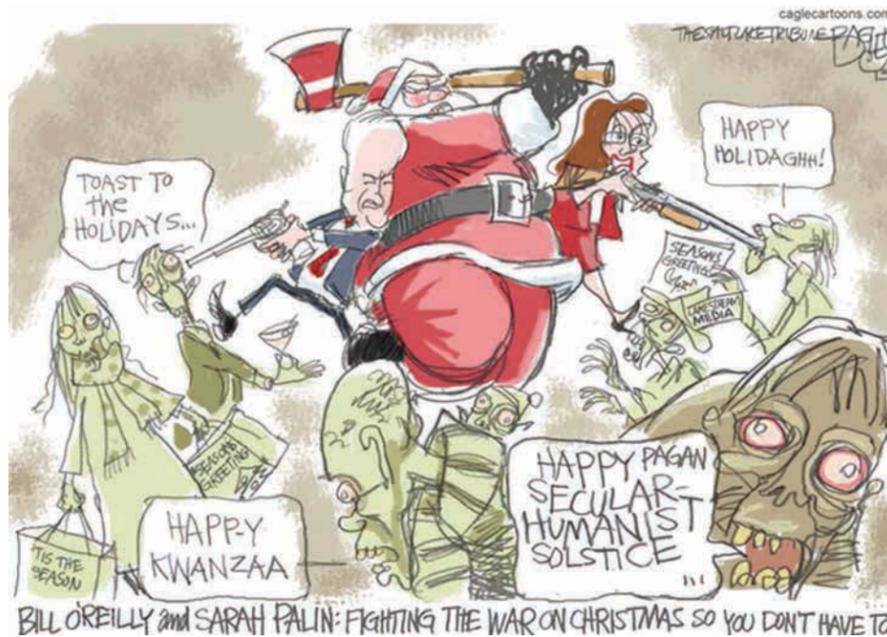
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Freethought Today is honored to publish these new poems.



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/).



BILL O'REILLY AND SARAH PALIN: FIGHTING THE WAR ON CHRISTMAS SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO.

Overheard

Article (2): Islam is the state religion, and Arabic is its official language, and the principles of Islamic Sharia are the main source of legislation.

Section of proposed new Egyptian Constitution

Religion Clause, 12-8-13

So if there is enough evidence to warrant belief in the Quran or the works of L. Ron Hubbard or that Moses parted the Red Sea, we ought to believe those things. There isn't sufficient evidence, and that's why people invoke faith. You would not need to invoke faith if you have sufficient evidence.

Peter Boghossian, philosophy instructor and author of "A Manual for Creating Atheists"

Religion News Service, 11-19-13

God don't make no junk.

Former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, speaking to the Iowa Faith & Freedom Coalition in Des Moines

Des Moines Register, 11-10-13

Every day is a day that we're full of life. We're with our families, we see sunrises, sunsets. We eat, we breathe, we have art. It's a total, total celebration of every single day. Calling someone who loves every day of their life "angry" seems a little bit odd.

Author Penn Jillette, rebutting a Chicago radio host who asked if *Every Day Is An Atheist Holiday* was an "angry" title

chicagoist.com, 11-9-13

In his book *Profiles in Courage*, John F. Kennedy talked about how important it is for public officials to educate public opinion rather than pander to public opinion that has not been informed by the facts. In this situation, the school board chose to pander to a boisterous crowd instead of educate them concerning the requirements of

the U.S. Constitution. And now they have to pay a price — albeit with taxpayers' dollars — for their foolish, cowardly, and illegal decision. (Taxpayers pay the district's insurance premiums, which likely will go up at least in part because of the stupidity that the district has displayed in this matter.)

The ACLU and the Freedom From Religion Foundation should be commended for upholding the law and the rights of religious minorities in this case. All blame should go to the school board and those who egged them on in their unlawful, intolerant, and hopeless course.

Online comment by J.C. Sommer on the successful suit to remove a Jesus portrait in a school in Jackson, Ohio

Columbus Dispatch, 11-30-13

First her pastor convinced her to quit her job to do full-time ministry at the church. Now the pastor is pressuring my wife to sow a financial seed into the ministry, which would mean tapping heavily into our savings.

Comment by "Sicks of These Preachers" to "Ask Tamara: Pastor is Ruining My Marriage!"

Lee Bailey's Electronic Urban Report, 11-4-13

It depends on your luck. You can be an atheist and tell people and nothing can happen to you. Or you can be fired from work, your life can be destroyed, acts of violence can be taken against you. It depends where you are, the circle of people around you. For me, the people at work don't know. The people at school didn't know. You have to keep your opinions to yourself. It's a stressful situation.

Ayman Emam, 28, Cairo, who started the Egyptian Atheists Community on Facebook, on how atheists are threatened

Al Jazeera, 11-18-13

YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

TUNE IN TO
FREETHOUGHT RADIO

produced by the
Freedom From Religion
Foundation



Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

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

Slightly irreverent views,
news, music & interviews

Special thanks to Very Kind Florida Donor and Professor Erickson

FFRF sends 'thank you to all' for building donations

The listing below reports donations for FFRF's building expansion fund received from Nov. 5 to Dec. 5, 2013. It is not cumulative except for the total. Donations received before Nov. 5 were listed in previous issues. Freethought Today will list subsequent donations in future issues.

\$100,000+

Extremely Kind Donor, \$198,997.87, FL

(This donor's cumulative building fund contribution now totals a remarkable \$432,990.02. His identity will be revealed on the fourth-floor auditorium to bear his name.)

Harold Erickson, \$125,000, NC

(The third-floor public relations wing will bear Professor Erickson's name.)

\$5,000 – \$10,000

Anonymous, \$10,000, AZ

Alfred & Karolina Johnson, \$5,000, WI
Ellery Schempp and Arlene Germain,

\$5,000, MA

Linden Bland, \$5,000, Alberta, Canada

Susie & Gary York, \$5,000, NH

\$1,000 – \$4,999

Anonymous, \$2,000, CA

Carsten Smidt Ph.D., \$1,000, UT

Jeff Baysinger, \$1,000, CO

John Steinberg, \$1,000, MD

Anonymous, \$1,000, FL

Anonymous, \$1,000, IN

Anonymous, \$1,000, TX

Anonymous, \$1,000, WI

\$100 – \$999

Marilyn Ewing, \$500, CO

Scott Dittman, \$500, CA

Anonymous, \$300, MI

John Phelps, \$225, GA

Charles Saxton, \$200, AR

Anonymous, \$150, IL

Anonymous, \$100, CA

Anonymous, \$100, NY

Daniel Mahala, \$100, NY

Dave Burrier, \$100, OH

Gary Guillen, \$100, FL

Joe Piesco, \$100, CO

Michele Glenn, \$100, MD

Robert Leonard, \$100, CA

\$1 – \$99

Anonymous, \$60, CA

Anonymous, \$50, CA

Anonymous, \$50, CO

Michael M.T. Henderson, \$50, KS

Rufus Taylor, \$50, TX

Shannon & Kristie Fore, \$50, AK

Stefanie Moritz & Vince Jenkins, \$50,

WI

Stephen Humphrey, \$50, NH

Anonymous, \$25, IN

Elaine & Eric Stone, \$25, CA

Ron Arnon, \$20, MI

Anonymous, \$10, CA

Kathi Houghton, \$10, MI

Michael Seliga, \$10, MN

Mr. Doug Goldman, \$10, NC

John Fostvedt, \$5, WI

Subtotal: \$366,197.87

New cumulative total:

\$1,647,113.64

Update: Gary Grubb, NJ, previously listed as Anonymous, has since granted permission to acknowledge his \$100 contribution by name.

No donors will be identified by name without express permission from the donor. (If you plan to donate and would like such recognition, please be sure to check the box on the donation coupon mailed to you or online at <https://ffrf.org/ffrf-building-fund-contribution-page> granting such permission or enclose a note giving permission with a mailed check.)

If you gave a gift designated to the building fund by or before Nov. 5 that doesn't appear to be reflected in this or previous monthly issues, please contact FFRF so that we may check our records and publish your gift. Please contact Katie Daniel at (608)256-8900 from 9-5 CDT weekdays or email katie@ffrf.org.

Religious liberty is for people, not corporations

FFRF calls for boycott of Religious Right Hobby Lobby

The Freedom From Religion Foundation calls on proponents of separation of state and church to boycott (and "girlcott") Hobby Lobby, a national retail craft store chain. Hobby Lobby characterizes itself as a Christian company, with 561 stores, 21,000 employees and revenues of more than \$2.28 billion a year.

Hobby Lobby's website notes it's committed to "Honoring the Lord in all we do by operating the company in a manner consistent with biblical principles."

FFRF is calling the consumer boycott in response to Hobby Lobby's religiously motivated role in challenging the Affordable Care Act's contraceptive mandate. The Supreme Court on Nov. 26 accepted a case involving Hobby Lobby, which opposes some forms of contraception based on the religious views of its founder David Green, a preacher's son.

"The foundation of our business has been, and will continue to be strong values, and honoring the Lord in a manner consistent with biblical principles," a statement on the Hobby Lobby website reads, adding that it closes on Sundays.

The 10th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals agreed with Hobby Lobby that corporations have the same religious rights as individuals. Other, more reasonable courts such as the 3rd Circuit, have held that "for-profit, secular corporations cannot engage in religious exercise" and that a business owner's religious rights do not allow that owner to impose his religion on his business's employees. That decision, *Conestoga Wood Specialties Corp. v. Sebelius* (3rd Cir., July 26, 2013), will also be reviewed by the Supreme Court

"Corporations don't have a right of conscience, women do," says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. "As Margaret Sanger pointed out long ago, 'No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body. No woman can call herself free until she

can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother.'"

Hobby Lobby's founder objects to Plan B (the "morning-after" pill) and ella (the "week-after" pill), and two types of intrauterine devices. "These abortion-causing drugs go against our faith," Green told NPR.

"What next?" wonders Gaylor. "Jehovah's Witnesses employers claiming insurance coverage of blood transfusions violates their company's religious rights? Scientologists refusing mandates for mental health coverage? Employers do not have the right to impose personal religious views upon employees by denying workers basic health care benefits."

Major medical groups submitted a brief on behalf of the government in the Hobby Lobby case, noting that the morning-after pill is not an abortion and cannot stop pregnancy after fertilization takes place, but instead prevents ovulation.

More than 70 lawsuits have been filed in federal court, at least a third by Roman Catholic dioceses, challenging birth control coverage benefits. FFRF spoke out strongly last year against the interference of U.S. Catholic bishops against the contraceptive mandate, running a full-page ad in The New York Times and several other newspapers, advising, "It's time to quit the Catholic Church."

On Nov. 1, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled 2-1 in favor of the Catholic owners of two Ohio produce companies who oppose the contraceptive mandate. Some of its delivery trucks bear signs saying, "It's not a choice, it's a child." In the majority opinion, Judge Janice Rogers Brown, a George W. Bush appointee, said the company would be forced to be "complicit in a grave moral wrong."

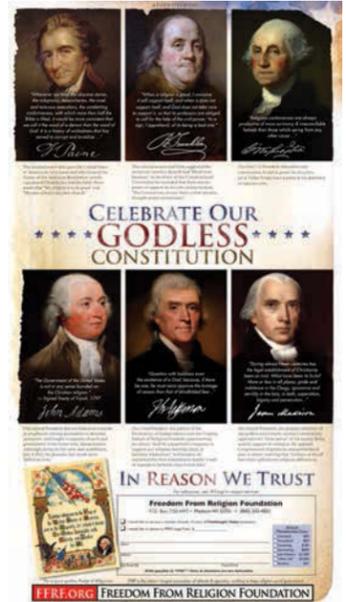
FFRF ran two dozen full-page newspaper ads this year countering Hobby Lobby's annual disinformation campaign, in which it places hundreds of ads on July 4 claiming that America is

a Christian nation. FFRF was censored by only one newspaper during that ad campaign, the Daily Oklahoman, which shares hometown "pride" with Hobby Lobby.

FFRF also fact-checked Hobby Lobby's 2013 full-page ad. To view the interactive exposé researched by attorney Andrew Seidel and designed by Harvard Law School intern Charles Roslof, scroll to the Sept. 3, 2013, press release at: ffrf.org/news/news-releases.

"We ask other secular and feminist organizations to join us in speaking out against religious control of women's bodies," said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. "Hobby Lobby needs to find a different hobby than imposing 'biblical values' on women employees.

"Exercise your freedom — and shop somewhere else!"



FFRF's July 4th ad countering Hobby Lobby's disinformation campaign.

Mark Your Calendar!

Announcing . . .

Raleigh, N.C. FFRF Mini-Convention

Weekend of May 2-3, 2014

(after National Day of Reason, er, Prayer)

Sheraton Raleigh Hotel
421 South Salisbury Street
Raleigh, North Carolina



37th Annual National Convention

Weekend of October 24-25, 2014

Millennium Biltmore Hotel - Los Angeles
506 South Grand Avenue
Los Angeles, California

FFRF legal victories

Be on the lookout for Lookadoo lookalikes

Critical thinking won a solid victory recently when faith-based speaker Justin Lookadoo was publicly berated for a presentation described as sexist that was given at Richardson High School in Richardson, Texas.

Students used social media to express their disapproval, adopting the hashtag #lookadouché when making statements about the misogynistic views portrayed in Lookadoo's presentation. Subsequent to Lookadoo's performance at Richardson, FFRF had sent open records requests to George West Independent School District and Canadian Independent School District, where Lookadoo was scheduled to perform on Nov. 19 and Dec. 11, respectively.

Both districts responded with information that Lookadoo's performances had been canceled. Whether the districts will be refunded the money they paid (over \$3,000 in the case of George West) remains to be seen. Until shortly after the Richardson fiasco, Lookadoo's website also advertised performances early next year at Eagle Mountain Independent School District, Saginaw, Texas; Tonawanda Middle and High Schools, Tonawanda, N.Y.; various schools in Scottsboro, Ala.; and a student council conference at Lufkin High School in Lufkin, Texas.

"The chilling reality is that Lookadoo's strategy of masquerading as an expert in order to disseminate his religious ideology to public school students is not unique," noted Sam Grover, FFRF constitutional consultant. FFRF has received complaints about many "Lookadoo lookalikes" (no, Guy Fieri, we don't mean you).

A number of religious groups go into schools under the guise of offering sex education, anti-drug and other secular programming. Once in the schools, these noncredentialed performers routinely insert a religious message into their talks or exploit the opportunity to speak before a captive audience to invite all students to a proselytizing evening program, usually held at a church.

FFRF has written letters about public school performances by the Christian ministry group You Can Run But You Cannot Hide (and the band Junkyard Prophet), Team Xtreme (part of Youth With A Mission), Team Impact (which also performed at Richardson ISD), The Power Team, Go Tell Ministries (with BMX biker Rick Gage), Christian hip hop musician Kryst Lyke,

B-SHOC, Sons of Thunder, magician/motivational speaker Jason Alvarez (sponsored by Faith Assembly), and Youth Alive-7 Project (with Brian Pruitt Motivational), to name a few.

"It's important that school districts remember their constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion and to properly research any performer before inviting them to speak before a captive student audience," advised Grover.

Too often it falls to students to report violations and to be vocal in expressing their disagreement with messages being conveyed.

"FFRF has a homework assignment for school administrators: Perform due diligence when bringing speakers to public schools. A little homework can go a long way toward preventing Lookadoo-like disasters," added FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott.

FFRF ends school's 'daily devotions'

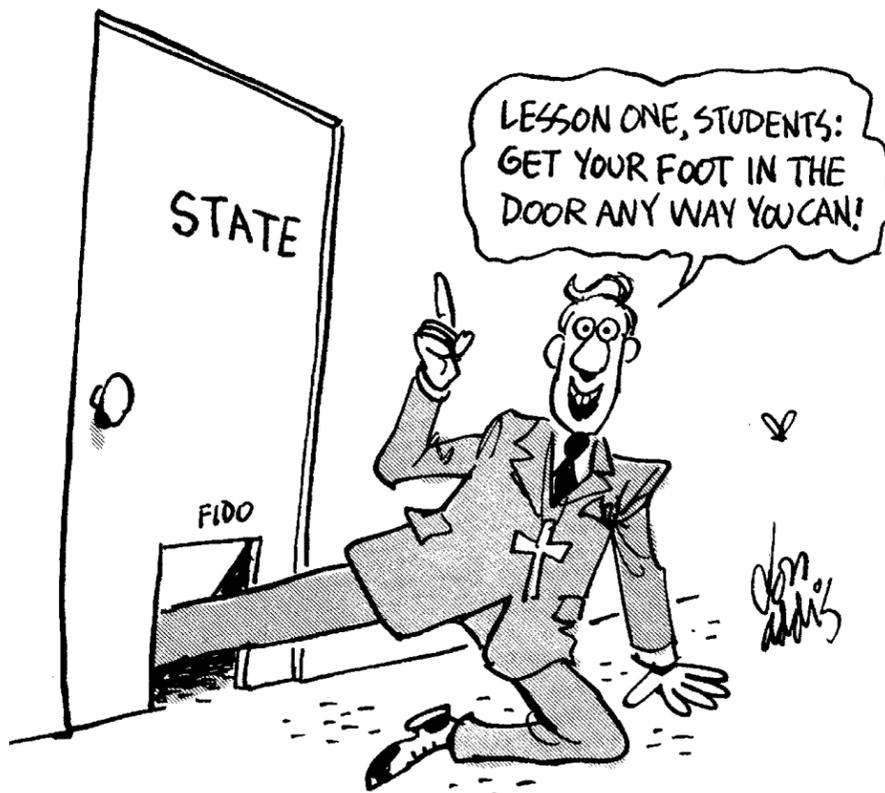
Until October, Hokes Bluff High School in Etowah County, Ala., started mornings with student-led recitations of bible passages over the intercom, a practice approved by school administration. A concerned student reported the practice to FFRF, and Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter Sept. 24 to Superintendent Alan Cosby.

"Nothing in the law prevents students, teachers or school employees from freely exercising their religion on their own time and in their own way," wrote Seidel. "But a public school itself must not broadcast a decidedly religious message to a captive student audience, thereby isolating and excluding those students who are non-Christian or nonreligious." FFRF has not received a reply directly from the district regarding the illegal readings, but the complainant informed us, "As of now they have not been doing 'daily devotions.'"

No more 'blessings' at school meetings

FFRF successfully ended prayers during annual in-service meetings for transportation employees at the Berkeley County School District in South Carolina.

The complainant informed FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott that formal prayer had become a part of the mandatory event in the current and preceding years. Elliott addressed the unconstitutionality of the practice in



an Oct. 24 letter to Superintendent Rodney Thompson: "The prayer at district in-service meetings appears to be an endorsement of religion, particularly Christianity. This is exactly the type of government endorsement that is prohibited by our Constitution's Establishment Clause, and could also be perceived as workplace harassment."

An attorney representing the district responded Nov. 19: "While there was no blessing or prayer offered as part of a program or included as a formal part of the in-service, an employee did offer a blessing for the food before the employees ate the meal. There was certainly no intent to offend any employees. Further, in order to avoid any misunderstandings in the future, the district will not offer a blessing before the meal."

Chain stops discount for church bulletins

Luna's Friendswood, a Mexican restaurant with six different locations in Texas, has stopped offering a 10% discount to dine-in customers who presented a current church bulletin on Sundays.

FFRF Staff Attorney Liz Cavell and constitutional consultant Sam Grover sent a letter Oct. 10 to the owner, explaining that under the federal Civil Rights Act, places of public accommodation are not allowed to discriminate on grounds such as race, color, religion or national origin.

"Your restaurants' restrictive promotional practices favor religious customers, and deny both customers who do not attend church as well as nonbelievers the right to 'full and equal' enjoyment of Luna's Friendswood," FFRF's letter said.

On Nov. 8, Luna's responded, stating, "As of Nov. 4, this 'discount' has been eliminated."

Ohio school strikes prayer after letter

FFRF advised the administration of Western Brown High School in Mount Orab, Ohio, to stop including prayers at school events after a concerned parent informed Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel that prayer was part of the National Honor Society induction ceremony

earlier this year.

In his Oct. 3 letter to Superintendent Peggy McKinney, Seidel noted that prayer at any event endorsed by the school, regardless of whether it takes place before or after school, is illegal. "Federal courts consistently strike down school-sponsored prayer in public schools because it constitutes a government endorsement of religion, which violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and interferes with the personal conscience of students."

There were also allegations that the administration had discriminated against the Secular Student Alliance by delaying approval of an SSA chapter for more than six months and complaints that the Christian club received preferential treatment.

"As you are no doubt aware, the Equal Access Act requires schools to treat all noncurricular clubs equally," warned Seidel.

While the administration denied any wrongdoing, legal counsel informed FFRF on Oct. 22 that the school has dropped prayers from the ceremony "in the interest of not having misleading programs or confusion in the future."

The school claimed the delay in SSA approval was due to a "coincidental change" in administration and logistical inconvenience.

Just say 'Aloha' to football prayers

Prayers are dropped from pregame routine in Oregon high school (October 29, 2013)

The Aloha [Ore.] High School football team will no longer include prayers in its pregame routine, thanks to a concerned student who reported the practice to FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.

Seidel sent a letter of complaint Oct. 25 to Superintendent Jeff Rose. "As a general matter, it is illegal for a public school to organize, sponsor, or lead religious messages at school athletic events," noted Seidel.

The principal informed FFRF on Oct. 29 that the team has eliminated prayers and any faith-based rituals before games. The school is part of the Beaverton School District.

Thanks to intern Yuna Choi for help compiling victories.



Powered by Porsche, not prayer

"I think the message is clear, but have NOF8H anyone else does," writes Florida member Dwayne Free about his GR8 plate.

Overheard

During the service, attendees stomped their feet, clapped their hands and cheered as Jones and Evans led the group through rousing renditions of "Lean on Me," "Here Comes the Sun" and other hits that took the place of gospel songs. Congregants dissolved into laughter at a get-to-know-you game that involved clapping and slapping the hands of the person next to them and applauded as members of the audience spoke about com-

munity service projects they had started in L.A.

News story on the Sunday Assembly, which envisions "a godless congregation in every town, city and village that wants one"

Associated Press, 11-11-13

You're a good Catholic fellow as I am. That's not the way Catholic people — that's not the way anybody with morals — should do anything.

Statement at sentencing by

Florida Judge Russell Healey which resulted in the appeals court ordering the defendant to be resentenced by a different judge

Florida Times-Union, 11-7-13

We were disappointed to learn that former President George W. Bush has decided to move ahead with his plan to speak at a fundraising event for an evangelical proselytizing group whose stated goal is to convert Jews to Christianity.

Abraham Foxman, Anti-Defamation League national director, on Bush's speech to the Messianic Jewish Bible Institute in Dallas

Politico, 11-11-13

The bible does not specifically speak about sequester cuts, or any other fiscal proposal or funding law enacted by the U.S. Specific directions for tax policy are never spelled out in scripture.

Rob Schwarzwald, Family Research Council vice president, "God and the IRS: What the bible can teach us about tax policy"

Washington Post, 11-11-13

God is still there. The Filipino soul is stronger than any typhoon.

Fr. Lito Capeding, pastor of Shrine of the Holy Cross, Daphne, Ala., on Typhoon Haiyan

Mobile Press-Register, 11-12-13

All politicians now have the moral obligation to work for the repeal of this sinful and objectionable legislation. We must pray for deliverance from this evil which has penetrated our state and our church.

Thomas Paprocki, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Springfield, Ill., announcing he'll offer "prayers of supplication and exorcism" Nov. 20, the day when Gov. Pat Quinn was scheduled to sign a same-sex marriage bill into law

State Journal-Register, 11-14-13

Paprocki might consider directing that exorcism toward his own heart. He might be surprised at what demons fly out.

Columnist Neil Steinberg, noting that 47% of Catholics attended Mass once a week in 1974 compared to 24% now

Chicago Sun-Times, 11-17-13

If I won the lottery and could afford to live in Manhattan, no one would care, but here, I can have an effect. Not to create more atheists, but to simply create a place that the secular can call home. I would never say that I am the answer for DeRidder [La.], but for this community I know I am the question.

Jerry DeWitt, former evangelical pastor who stayed in DeRidder to "minister" to atheists and the secular community

The Daily Beast, 11-17-13

I looked up the verse Jeff put on the bag [Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"] and had to laugh. How can someone so smart be so gullible? The idea of trusting or believing that someone has control over your future is the definition of insanity. I will continue to trust people I've actually met to help chart my course.

Virginia businessman Brian

McMahon, an atheist, canceling his sponsorship of aspiring pro golfer Jeff Cochran

theblaze.com, 11-25-13

One sign that caught the attention of the local newspaper was the message I put up after Michael Jackson died last year. It read: THE KING OF POP IS DEAD. THE KING OF KINGS STILL LIVES.

Darrel Brandon, pastor at Clay City [Ill.] Christian Church, "How I devise my church sign messages"

CNN, 5-20-10

If you want to do something about the climate, you want to do something about the weather, there is only one thing that we can do to affect climate or affect weather and that is to pray to Yahweh.

Bryan Fischer, American Family Association

"Focal Point With Bryan Fischer," 9-13-13

[Los Angeles Cardinal Roger] Mahony and his aides insisted on secrecy even when lives were at risk. In one case, the archdiocese was informed that a man dying of AIDS had been having sex with a parish priest, who in turn was abusing high school students. At the time, the average life expectancy after an AIDS diagnosis was 18 months. Yet church officials did nothing to alert the priest or the students.

Newspaper story on cover-ups of sex abuse by clergy

Los Angeles Times, 12-1-13

I want to wish everyone a really, really merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah, all the holidays — all you infidel atheists out there, I want to wish you the very best also. I don't know what you celebrate during the holiday season, I myself celebrate the birth of Christ, but it's your choice, and I respect your choice. If you want to celebrate nothing, and just get together with friends, that's good, too. All the best.

Brian Pallister, Conservative Party of Canada member, speaking in the Legislative Building

Winnipeg Free Press, 12-2-13

I'm sure that right-wing advocacy groups raise a lot of money this time of year by hyping a fake war on Christmas. But the truth is that the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution already protects schoolchildren's religious freedom — whether they are Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu or none of the above — and nothing that the Texas Legislature passes is going to improve on what the Founders gave us.

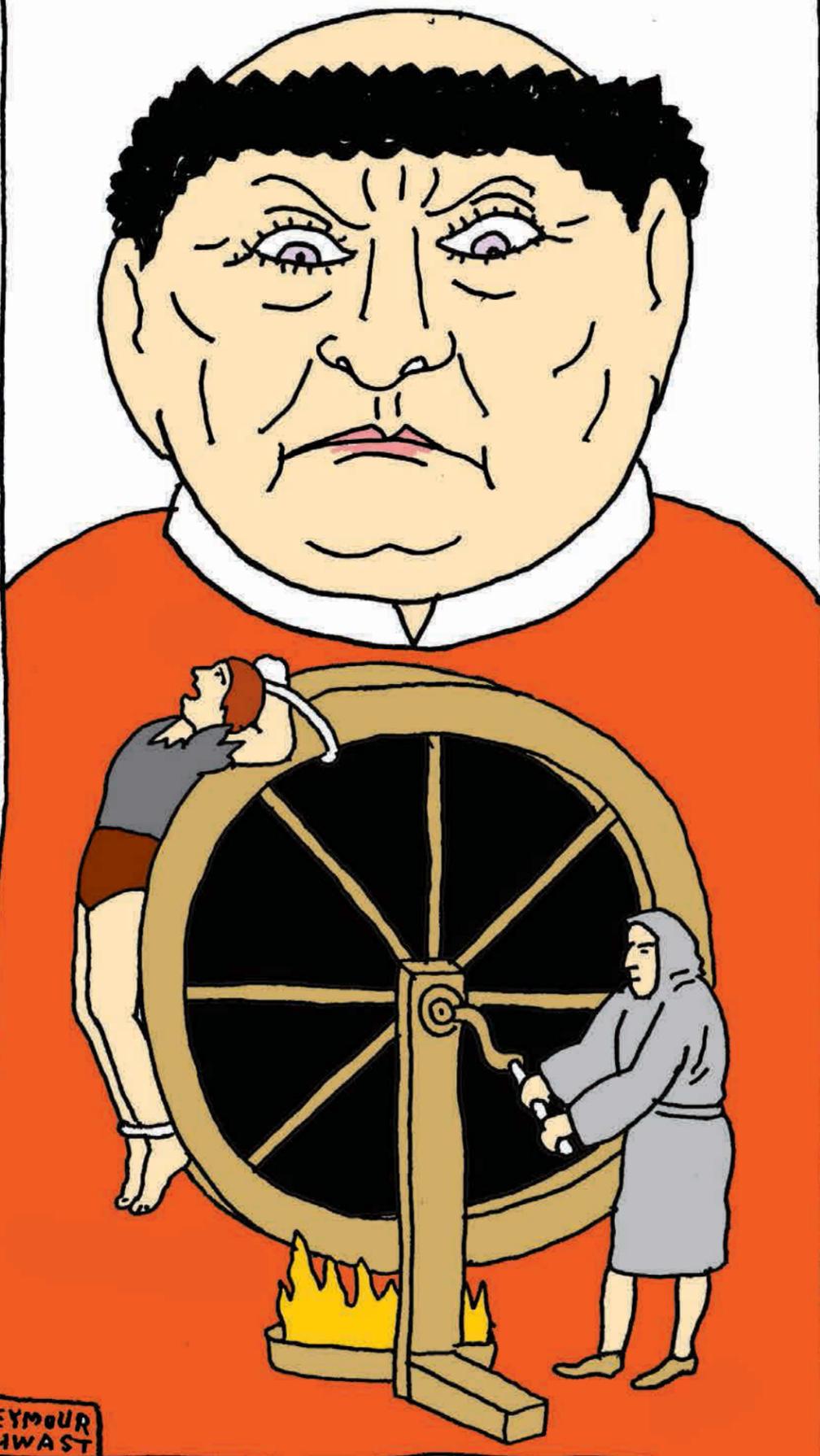
Terri Burke, executive director, American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, on the new Texas "Merry Christmas" law

Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 12-7-13

Memorable Moments in Monotheism

In 1478 Tomas de Torquemada, a Dominican monk, the Confessor of Queen Isabella, procured a papal bull in order to detect and suppress heresy. Anonymous accusations were received and acted on; no witnesses were allowed and torture was used to extract confessions. This was carried out in vaults where the cries of the

tormented could not be heard. It was computed that in over 18 years he caused 10,220 people to be burned at the stake. Another 97,325 were otherwise punished with imprisonment and torture. The papal government profited very nicely by selling dispensations to the rich, who then avoided the Inquisition.



FFRF 36th annual convention award — Emperor Has No Clothes

Savage's 'perfect Catholic family' fell apart fast

Acclaimed author, gay rights advocate and nationally syndicated columnist Dan Savage graciously accepted FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award at the 36th national convention in September in Madison, Wis., where he gave these remarks (edited for print).



By Dan Savage

In the early 1980s, the Catholic cable channel in Chicago did a special on my family because we were the "perfect Catholic family." My dad was an ordained deacon and my mom was a lay minister. They ran Catholic marriage encounter sessions in Illinois and Wisconsin and Indiana. All four of their children had been confirmed in the church. I was in the seminary. I was going to be a priest.

My dad was also a Chicago homicide detective. So, sort of a "gun in the pulpit" perfect Catholic family special. Two years later, sitting around the kitchen table with my mom and my siblings, we laughed at the idea of the television program returning and doing a "Where are they now?" special. My father had left and divorced my mother and had been defrocked as a deacon. I'd come out of the closet. My brother Billy, my oldest sibling, had gotten a preemptive vasectomy. We had birth control in the house. There had been an abortion. My mother was sleeping with a married man.

By that time, when I was 17 or 18, I was a hardcore agnostic because I had a lot of questions. It was my sexuality that brought me into conflict with my faith. I was inquisitive and, ironically, my parents encouraged their kids to question authority. From a very early age, I had been asking the inappropriate or awkward questions.

In some ways I'm so grateful for being gay despite the chaos that that caused when I was 15, 16, 17 years old. If I hadn't been gay, I sometimes wonder if I would've questioned my faith.

But my sexuality was the thread that — once I began to pull on it — ultimately unraveled the garment of faith and irrational belief. Not all gay people do that. Some gay people, after realizing their faith is in conflict with their sexuality, move on to some new faith

We should acknowledge the unknowable, embrace ambiguity and think for ourselves.

that isn't in quite as much conflict.

But for me, faith fell apart because I figured that if the church was this wrong about me — well, it stood to reason that the church was wrong about other stuff. The church, this human institution, was pretending to know things that no human being could possibly know.

And it's generally a bad idea to trust people who pretend to know the unknowable, to take things — hugely consequential things — on faith alone. Better to acknowledge the unknowable, embrace ambiguity and think for ourselves — and date boys.

I call myself agnostic or an atheist, but sometimes I have to admit to being an agnosti-theist because, well, I do cross myself on airplanes. I flew here today and crossed myself. I have a superstitious hangover.

Remember Ann Landers? I'm sure all of you do. I was talking to somebody in their 20s just yesterday, and I mentioned Ann Landers and she said "Who?" Sometimes, people in their 20s make me feel as old as I am, which is 49, and also make me feel like slapping them.

Anyway, about 10 years ago, I went



to an auction of Ann Landers' effects. Her daughter, Margo Howard, had packed up her mother's big condo on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago after she died. I read about the upcoming auction in the paper. Included was the desk on which Landers had written her advice column — for 40 years. And I thought, I want to have that desk.

I had just gotten a book deal that paid a stupid amount of money, so I called Margo. We'd been on the radio together after Ann died. A producer put us on together to pit us against each other. They thought Margo would



Dan Savage accepting his statuette from FFRF's Dan Barker.

talk about how great her mother was and how important and meaningful her column was. And me, being the author of the rudest and dirtiest sex advice column in the world, would dump all over Ann Landers and say that she sucked.

It's actually the people who *do* believe in God who have some explaining to do.

I *can* be an asshole, but I'm not going to go on a radio program with someone's grieving daughter and talk about how horrible her mother was.

Also complicating the producer's scheme was the fact that I loved Ann Landers and her column. I didn't always agree with her, but who always agrees with anybody? I don't always agree with myself! Sometimes I read columns I wrote 10 years ago and I think, "What was I smoking? Or thinking? Or smoking and thinking?"

I wanted Margo's "permission" to go to the auction because I knew it would get written about as somehow disrespectful. I'm really embarrassed to say this, but I took \$10,000 in *cash* to the auction. I took that much because I thought I'd be bidding against the Smithsonian for her desk, on which so much had been written about the culture, sexual mores and relationships over the decades.

So I took all this money, thinking, "Oh, it's going to be me versus the Smithsonian because they're going to want to put her desk next to Archie Bunker's chair in the museum, but I'm going to get it and take it home."

I bought Ann Landers' desk for \$197. I know, right? No one was there from the Smithsonian bidding against me.

Then they began to auction off all of Ann Landers' many awards and honorary degrees, from the American Cancer Society, the American Leuke-

mia Foundation, General Motors, Illinoisan of the Year, Chicagoan of the Year, medallions, plaques, tchotchkes. One award had been given to her by the pope when he visited Chicago in the 1960s, which now sits on my mantel. There is something in my house that a pope has touched, and it's not a 10-year-old boy. Imagine that.

When people ask me during my college speaking gigs — often I get a card, especially when I speak in the South — "Do you believe in God?," it's a game for me to just read that question and say "Nope" and go right on to the next question. Because it's the people who *do* believe in God who have some explaining to do, not those of us who do not.

I will take a photo of my Emperor award sitting next to the award from the pope on my mantel and post it on Instagram. Thank you all very much for this, it's very meaningful. I can't express it enough.

I was told to not run my mouth too long because they wanted some time for Q&A, which is my preferred format in everything. So I'm happy to answer any questions.

Q&A with Dan Savage

Q. Would you take \$500 for the desk?

A. No! I have to write my column on it for four more decades so that there is a hundred or 80 years of sex columning and advice columning at this desk. Then maybe the Smithsonian will want it.

Q. How much cash did you have left after the auction?

A. About \$9,200. So I took my mother to lunch.

Q. Was it weird having that much in cash?

A. That felt stupid, carrying that much money around. I felt very "First World and starving orphans" at that moment. But what can you do? You give a gay dude a lot of money and he's going to spend it on stupid stuff. Like this jacket!

Q. Will you tell us more about the It Gets Better project? What motivated you?

A. The story behind why I started it

We don't jump fully formed out of the backs of gay bars at age 21, pride beads around our necks.

is a downer. A 15-year-old kid named Billy Lucas killed himself in Greensburg, Ind. He'd been very brutally bullied in middle school and high school because he was perceived to be gay. He'd never come out to anyone as gay, so he may not have been gay. Not all victims of anti-LGBT violence and bullying are gay, but he likely was gay.

"Gaydar" is strong with middle schoolers and high schoolers. "Good" Christian kids said because he was sick and sinful, God hated him. They said he was going to hell and might as well get it over with. [Billy was found hanging from the rafters in his grandmother's barn.] I wrote about it from a place of real rage.

I get really weepy when I try to talk about this. His parents created a Facebook memorial page for him, and the same kids who had been bullying him went to the Facebook page to celebrate his death, to call him a faggot again and to say in front of his grieving parents that they were glad he was dead. I wrote about that from a place of white hot rage.

I was reading the comments on a blog post I'd written, which drew similar outrage and fury. A woman whose handle is Despicable Me cut through everyone's anger by writing, "I wish I had known you, Billy, and had been able to tell you that things get better. Rest in peace."

That "things get better" kind of gutted me, along with that desire to have had a chance to speak to him, because things *do* get better. And they have gotten better — at a macro level for LGBT people and at a micro level personally for so many of us in our lives after escaping high school.

Vicious 'family' values

When I came out to my parents in the early 1980s, I was not just telling my mom and my dad. I was not just burning them with mental images that took them years to stop seeing. They could look at my sister's boyfriend without seeing his dick in her mouth, but they couldn't look at mine, couldn't make the same leap with my boyfriend for a while.

But telling my very traditional parents I was gay in the early 1980s meant telling them that I would never marry, never have kids. I would have a marginal career if I had any career at all, and that I could never be a Marine.

And here we are in just the course of my adult life, since age 18, and I am married to the same guy for 20 years. We have a 15-year-old son that we raised from birth together. Now I can be a Marine. I don't want to be a Marine, much to the relief of the United States Marine Corps. But the kind of gay people who could be Marines and would like to be Marines and would be good Marines can now be Marines and serve openly.

I need to talk to the next Billy Lucas before he harms himself, but I would never get an invitation to a high school to speak to that kid, the queer kid, who most desperately needs to hear from LGBT adults. Kids who are queer are at four times greater risk for suicide. That doubles if their parents are openly hostile.

That is why I say that Tony Perkins [of the Family Research Council] sits on a pile of dead gay children every day when he goes to work. He encourages parents to do what he damn well knows doubles the already quadrupled risk of suicide for their queer kids. Then he points to the suicide rate that he's helping to drive up as proof that the gay "lifestyle" is unhealthy and dangerous.

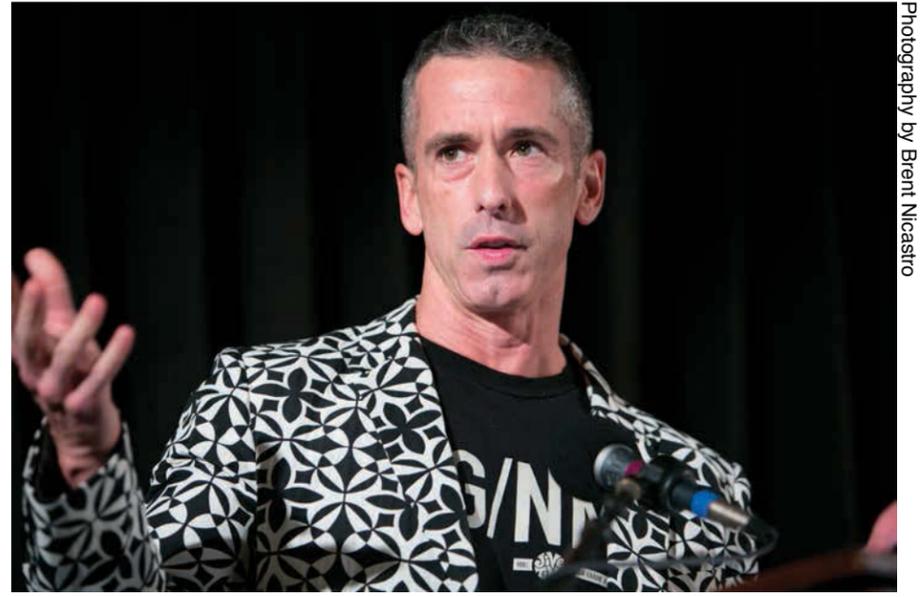
I would never be able to get permission from that parent who's following Tony Perkins' lead to speak to their kid, to tell them that things get better. Then it occurred to me on the train to JFK that I'm in the YouTube/Facebook/Twitter era and no longer need permission to speak to queer kids.

I could record a video, use my column and my podcast to encourage other adults to make videos, upload them to YouTube and encourage kids to watch them. And bring the LGBT youth support group to that kid whose parents would never allow them to attend one. And it worked.

A girl in Texas

The letter that most sticks with me was from a 15-year-old lesbian kid in Texas. I usually don't say the name of the state, so don't remember that. Growing up in a shitty state with a shitty governor. (See, I could have said Wisconsin, which is a wonderful state with a shitty governor!)

She came out to her parents because she was being bullied and needed their support. She was perceived to be a lesbian, which she is. She went to her parents and came out to them, and they did what Tony Perkins tells par-



Photography by Brent Nicastro

ents to do.

They threatened to disown her, throw her out of the house, cut off all her contact with her siblings and not pay for her education if she didn't go into counseling at their megachurch. They said she had to take it back — not be a lesbian.

So she did what so many queers before her have done. She lied to her parents under duress and told them that she was mistaken, that she was not a lesbian, that she was confused. She went home from her counseling session and put up a poster of Justin Bieber, because that's as close to lesbianism as she could get for a while. (I'm not making fun of effeminate boys. Anyone who's ever met anybody I've ever dated knows that effeminate boys are my favorite.)

She wrote me at [my column] Savage Love to tell me that she was watching It Gets Better videos on her phone, in her bed, in her bedroom, under the covers in her parent's house in the middle of the night. *That* was what we wanted to do. We kicked down her parents' front door, marched into their daughter's bedroom and climbed into bed with her. We brought the queer youth support group to her, the one her parents wouldn't let her attend. She said that it *was* helping. She was seeing families of gay people, bi people, and trans people, whose families had the same reaction as hers, coming around. She was seeing lesbians with families of their own and wives and children and colleagues who respected them and friends who loved them for who they really were.

It was giving her hope for her future, and it was getting her through this time when she was being pushed toward suicide by her parents.

'Game over'

You can't stop us anymore by accus-

ing us of "recruiting" or being pedophiles. You can't! The culture has to stop pretending that there is no such thing as queer kids. Because there are. We don't jump fully formed out of the backs of gay bars at age 21, pride beads around our necks.

So I kept saying on TV, "game over." We're going to talk to your queer kids whether you want us to or not. And I would say we're going to talk to your queer kids whether preachers, teacher or parents like it or not. And she wrote, this Texas kid, that not only were the videos giving her hope for her future, they were giving her hope for her parents. Because she was seeing people whose parents were like hers and had come around. She was seeing parents like my parents, who came around. Right?

What she said at the end of her letter, which changed the way I talk about the It Gets Better project on television, was just so shattering.

She said, "Every day I get up and go downstairs and I look at my mother and my father and I love them for who they're going to be in 10 years."

Terry and I made one out of 150,000 "It Gets Better" videos. We made one, but because so many other people made them and shared their stories, we convinced her that that was possible, even for her family. And one day, her parents are going to thank us for what we did for their daughter.

She is the success story of It Gets Better. That we reached that kid, at that moment and gave her what she needed to get through it but also gave her the insight that allows her to love her parents at a time when they are failing her. And incapable of loving her.

Thank you very much!

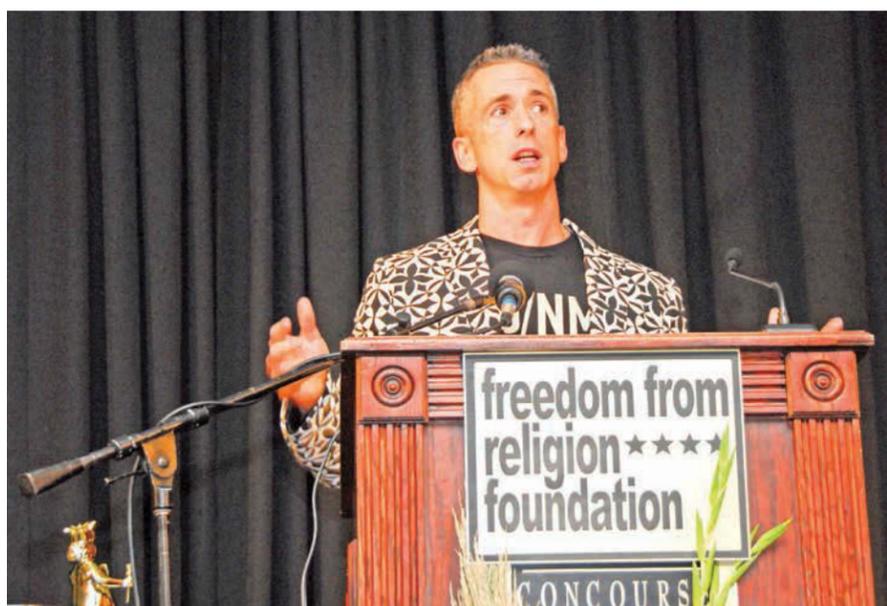
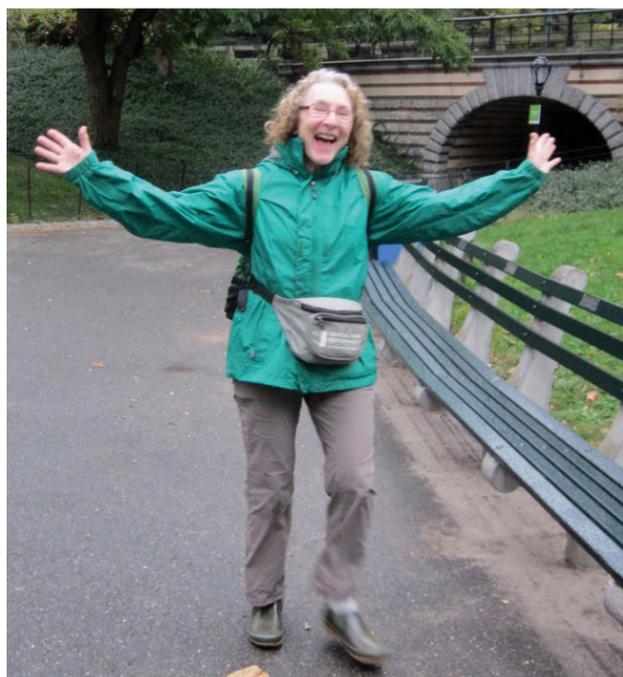


Photo: Andrew L. Seidel



Photography by Brent Nicastro

Religious well-wishers' healing wishes unwelcome



Joan Reisman-Brill on her first day back at work as a volunteer gardener assistant in Central Park.

By Joan Reisman-Brill

On June 30, at the very end of a lovely vacation in Spain, I was struck by a Barcelona city bus, which came to a stop on my feet (crunch), then backed off (double crunch). I was bleeding from the head, scraped on one side, bruised on the other, and my feet were throbbing.

Although I never completely lost consciousness (and accurately told the emergency medics my name, where I was and that I thought my feet were broken), for a while I literally didn't know what hit me.

After a round of medical imaging, it was determined that my brains and ribs were intact, but I had fractured multiple bones in both feet and had a very nasty "road burn" on one ankle near the bone. I was told that if it became infected, I could lose that foot. After a week back in the U.S., it did become infected and I was hospitalized for four days of IV antibiotics, followed by skin graft surgery.

Although my husband practices Judaism and we have friends who are devout Christians, I'm an atheist — something I don't hide, but I also don't constantly advertise. Despite doing all we could to head it off, we were inundated with religious friends and acquaintances (even people I thought disliked me because of my atheism) avidly praying for me in synagogues and churches and sending cards, flowers, gifts and platitudes.

It's not that we have that many friends or are particularly beloved, it just seems to be what religious people are conditioned to do. People told me how I should thank God that I wasn't killed, that I sustained no additional damage, that my injuries would heal "all in good time."

When I said I wasn't thankful to *any* god who would throw me under a bus, but that I was thankful for the excellent care my husband and I had pulled together, the worshippers didn't seem to hear.

I abandoned my wheelchair and crutches after 10 weeks and started walking without as much as a cane. I am now going up and down stairs and hills with increasing ease and decreasing discomfort, and I expect to be fully recovered soon, with just a couple of

scars as reminders.

Weeks after I was out of the hospital and "out of the woods" in terms of serious health risks, I received an email from the family rabbi, who had just heard what happened. She (yes, she!) apologized for not being aware sooner and asked if there was anything I needed. I said no thanks, we're doing fine. And that, I thought, was that.

But last weekend my husband was in the synagogue and mentioned my accident to a woman who is aware of my godless views. She asked him if this experience had changed my tune, and he reported, "Not at all." (I'm told I'm hard-headed, in more ways than one.)

Then we got a call from a synagogue committee lady we've never met. She had just been told (by that woman) about my injuries. The committee wanted to send food and social services and visitors — strangers! — to pray over me immediately. I did my best to convince the nice lady that I'm literally back on my feet already.

Minutes later, we got a call from another woman, who basically runs the synagogue. She wanted to double-check with us because the committee lady was arranging to unleash all that stuff upon us, despite the fact that we had firmly declined.

This time my husband succeeded in calling off the dogs. But he also assured everyone that the rabbi had personally been in touch with me, so no one could accuse her of being remiss in her duties. We'd hate to get anyone in trouble because I didn't want an avalanche of well-meaning but unwelcome outpourings.

Chicken soup helps whom?

Just as I have a need to do community service as much as the community needs my service, I'm sure these lovely people require unfortunate souls to whom they can bring chicken soup and prayers for their own fulfillment. Imagine how disappointing it would be for a prayer group to rush over and find me up and about. I'd have to drag the wheelchair out of the closet and sit in it with a pained smile to make them feel good about themselves. Then after the prayers, I'd leap up and declare myself miraculously healed. Hallelujah!

Although I hardly think the "caring community" component is sufficient cause to convert anyone, the kind of services typical of religious organiza-

I was 'saved' for a higher purpose: to reaffirm my atheism.

tions could be extremely beneficial to nonbelievers in times of adversity (as well as good times, such as weddings and births), if they could simply dispense with all the god talk and focus on what would truly be helpful.

Like doing only things that would lighten the load rather than add to it. My husband and I expended a lot of energy fielding phone calls and politely fending off or entertaining prayerful visitors when what we both really needed was rest and time to take care of ourselves.

It would be great if nonreligious people could, like our religious counterparts, instantly hook up with helping hands — without anyone blathering about God's mysterious ways and

how we should be thankful that things aren't worse. We would have been glad to accept "productive" support that didn't come with invisible (but audible) strings attached.

Many people told me my accident is a clear sign that I was saved for a higher purpose. I agree. That purpose is to reaffirm my atheism, to serve as an example that with excellent medical care, wonderful family and friends and taking responsibility for ourselves, we can survive and thrive after traumatic episodes — without resorting to piety in moments of weakness.

I want to spread the good news: People who rally around injured associates can help them get back on their feet faster if they skip the prayers and focus on things that really help. I would also remind people to always be super careful crossing the street, no matter what the light says.

That's my mission, and I choose to accept it. It's not impossible.

New York FFRF member Joan Reisman-Brill writes a humanist column titled "The

Saint-Johnson wedding



FFRF's Greater Sacramento Chapter president, Judy Saint (right), and her new wife, Kathy Johnson.

Not only are same-gender marriages happening to the chagrin of fundamentalists everywhere, but our own Greater Sacramento Chapter president, Judy Saint, seen here with her new wife, Kathy Johnson, joined in the vanguard movement, themselves. Unable to wed five years ago when they were ready, due to religious money and fear-mongering behind Prop 8, they happily tied the knot before a gathering of almost 100% freethinkers October 24.

This Very Secular Wedding, as Judy calls it, felt more like a celebration and party. Held in a beautiful community center, officiated by renowned ERA activist Cleo Kocol, a good friend of the couple's [and a Lifetime FFRF Member], many words were spoken reflecting our earthly dependence on each

other and on our integrity as thoughtful people, even referring to the Good Books of Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes, and Douglas Adams.

The soloist, Andi Griffith, rewrote the lyrics to Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" especially for this secular, long-fought lesbian wedding: a real tear-jerker. The first song by the live band, "We Are Family," drew the entire gathering of 70 guests immediately to the dance floor. Laughs were had, most had tears, the few believers were educated, but what surprised Judy and Kathy the most was the thunderous and non-stop standing ovation they received. Guests all said they were overwhelmed by the "real" aspect of the evening — eschewing tradition where appropriate, and above all, loving all around in the most beautiful secular way.

"Reason. Equality. Doing Good.
— All without gods."

Judy Saint, Kathy Johnson, Roseville.
Volunteer, Social Worker . . . Atheists

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

Record 55 nontheist billboards unveiled in December

FFRF sponsors 'non-sacramental' Sacramento billboard blitz

What do nonbelievers do during the month of December in Sacramento, Calif.? They "come out of the closet" very publicly.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and its new Sacramento chapter unveiled the largest freethought billboard campaign ever launched in one area: 55 affirmative billboards placed throughout California's capital city and suburbs. The personalized billboards each feature the smiling face and unapologetically forthright view of an area nonbeliever.

The motto of the campaign is "Many faces make Enlightenment work." More than 55 participants are actually involved, since some of the messages feature couples, friends or families.

Newlywed Judy Saint, chapter director, is featured with her wife, Kathy Johnson, saying: "Reason. Equality. Doing Good. — All without gods." (See their billboard on opposite page.) They're one of six featured couples.

Making the world better is a common theme. Other themes are believing in and trusting oneself and humanity (rather than a god), embracing healthy skepticism, promoting science and living, loving, being moral and doing good without god. As Sacramento teacher Liz Shoemaker, put it, "I believe in people, not gods."

Other messages are simply plain-spoken: "Reasonable faith is a contradiction in terms," says aerospace engineer Bryson Sullivan.

Some turn religious testimonials on

their head, such as 20-year-old Reace Niles' message of "I'm an atheist, and I've never been happier," and Sacramento student Noel Navarro, who has a message for Oprah Winfrey: "I'm not a believer, and life is still awesome!"

Quilters and friends Karla Sprandel and Susan Myers, Sacramento secular humanists, show off their quilts and their philosophy: "No gods, no devils, no worries." Other playful messages include Rancho Cordova homemaker Maggie Johns' quip: "I don't believe in Odin, either."

While most participants self-identify as atheists, some prefer the description of agnostic, humanist or secular humanist. There's even one "Pastafarian," Sacramento tech support worker Elizabeth Porter, a devotee of the whimsical Flying Spaghetti Monster.

The 55 billboards became national news in late November, even before they went up. Nearly all reporters turned to religious leaders for comment. Sacramento Catholic Bishop Jaime Soto of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament told Fox affiliate KTXL that the billboards were "propaganda." One local imam called the affirmative messages an "attack" on his faith.

"We're proud of our Sacramento chapter and its confident membership," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "We had to lease more boards from a second outdoor company just to keep up with the demand." Sacramento is the sixth city to which

FFRF has taken its "out of the closet" public relations campaign. Previous cities include Madison, Wis. (where FFRF is based), Tulsa, Raleigh, Columbus, Phoenix and Spokane. A similar campaign also went up last year in Portland, Ore., featuring local freethinkers saying "I'm secular and I vote" and "This is what an atheist looks like."

The campaign's objective is to reveal to communities the diversity of nonbelievers within their ranks.

"Many people have met, do business with and are friends with atheists — but don't realize it," Gaylor added.

It's also a chance for freethinkers to openly express themselves. In December, Gaylor noted, the views of non-Christians, especially nonbelievers, are often suppressed. "Those of us who are free from religion, who work to keep dogma out of government, science, medicine and education, have a lot to offer society."

FFRF, with nearly 20,000 members,

has about 3,000 in California.

FFRF sends "awed thanks" to professional photographer Matt Martin, who volunteered his services, and is pictured on a board with his wife, Kimberley, who is also an atheist. Their message: "Integrity and compassion require no gods."

FFRF also warmly thanks Judy Saint for superb coordination and energy, and all participants for making freethought history!



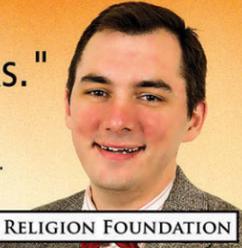
"Good without god(s)."



Monu Khunkhun, Lycia Vang, Rocklin.
System Analyst, Educator . . . Atheists

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

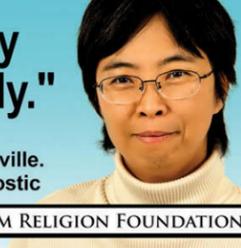
"Science. It works."



Dan Pemberton, 28, Sacramento.
Student . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

"Live bravely and think freely."



Shiu-chin Linda Hsu, Roseville.
Graphic Designer . . . Agnostic

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

"Your friendly neighborhood Atheist."



Luisa Morco, Sacramento.
Writer, Volunteer, Student . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

"Free your mind."



David Manhart, Sacramento.
Programmer Analyst . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

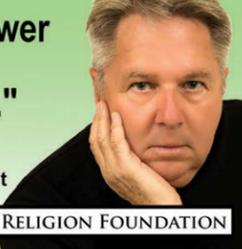
"Morality doesn't require religion."



Michelle Baer, Sacramento.
Computer Geek . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

"The only higher power I have is on my microwave."



Billy Nilva, Sacramento.
Retired Administrator . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

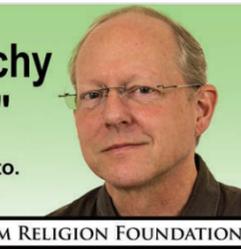
"Real love doesn't demand worship."



Meghan Dingman, Davis.
Culinary student . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

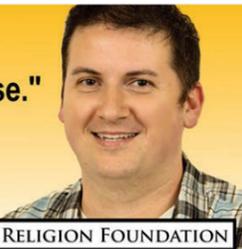
"Religion is catchy — like a virus."



Roy Sablosky, Sacramento.
Editor . . . Humanist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

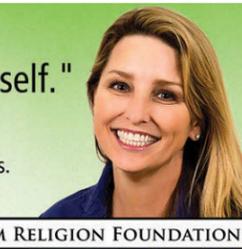
"Evidence matters. Skepticism makes sense."



Paul Cox, Sacramento.
Analyst . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

"Free to think for myself."



Andrea Griffith, El Dorado Hills.
Speaker, Author . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

"Heavens? No."



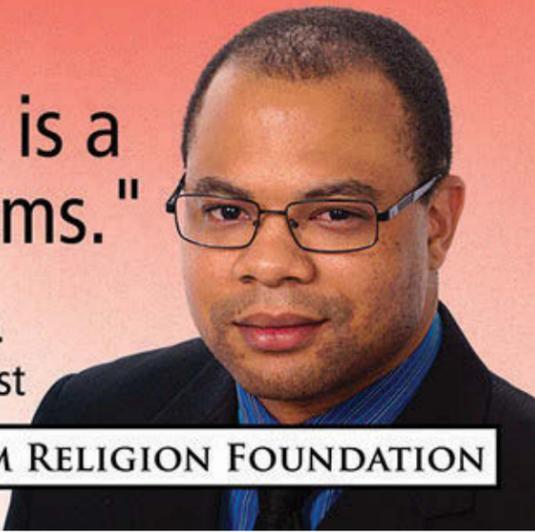
Beverly Miller, Davis.
Nutritionist . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

"Reasonable faith is a contradiction in terms."

Bryson T. Sullivan, Sacramento.
Aerospace Engineer . . . Humanist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Science is my Sacred."

Elizabeth Porter, Sacramento.
Tech Support . . . Pastafarian

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Doing our best to make this life better."

Julie & Chris Wedge, Rocklin.
Consultants . . . Atheists

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Because I believe in myself, not a god."

Carly Beard, Turlock.
Marketing . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Just follow The Golden Rule. (Religion not required.)"

Juliette Turner, Sacramento.
Teacher . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"We are descendants of stardust!"

Jessica Chappell, 24, Sacramento.
Student . . . Atheist

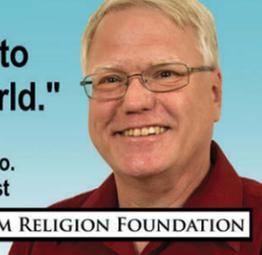
SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"No god needed to understand the world."

Richard Kersten, Sacramento.
Data Base Analyst . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"History has thousands of gods. I choose none."

Janet Thew, Loomis.
Volunteer, tree hugger . . . Atheist

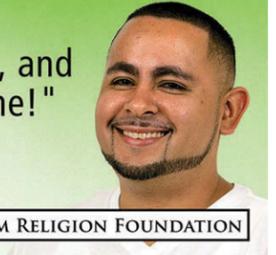
SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"I'm not a believer, and life is still awesome!"

Noel Navarro, Sacramento.
Student . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"God free, happy, and inspired by wonder."

Will Scharff, Sacramento.
Technology Analyst . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Embrace skepticism!"

Eduardo Medina, 23, Sacramento.
Undergrad student . . . Agnostic

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Evidence > Faith"

Derek Sorci, Rocklin.
Network Technician . . . Atheist

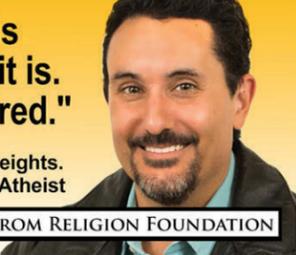
SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"The world is fascinating as it is. No myths required."

Rick Tracewell, Citrus Heights.
Dad, business owner . . . Atheist

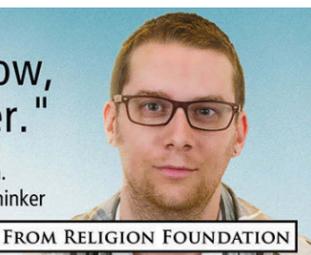
SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Live for now, not for after."

David Black, Folsom.
Car Enthusiast . . . Freethinker

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"I believe in one less god than you."

Catherine Roy, Sacramento.
Knitter . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"I worship nothing and question everything."

Dylan McDonald, Sacramento.
Archivist, ex-Mormon . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Believe in yourself."

Julia Verdugo, Sacramento.
IT Manager . . . Humanist

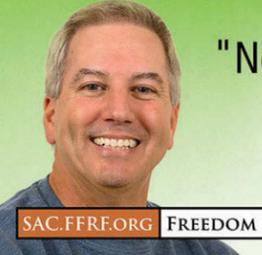
SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"No magical strings attached."

John Lucas, Granite Bay.
Consultant . . . Atheist

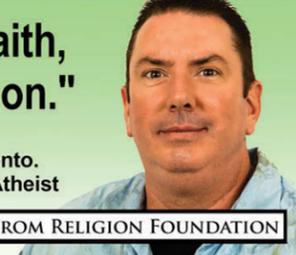
SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"By losing faith, I gained reason."

Jeff Ford, Sacramento.
Computer gamer . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"A life of love, no gods required."

McMillin family, Carmichael.
Engineer, musician . . . Atheists

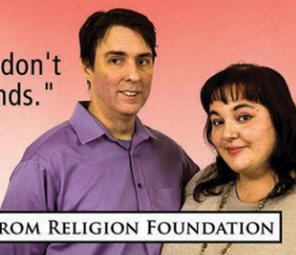
SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Kindness & morality don't require imaginary friends."

Rowan & Alec Aftyn, Sacramento.
Writer, Programmer . . . Atheists

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



**"Know more every day.
Lessen the
suffering of others."**



Rich Wilson, Rocklin.
Father, runner . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"I don't believe in
Odin, either."**



Maggie Jones, Rancho Cordova.
Homemaker . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"Question Everything...
Worship Nothing!"**



Andrew Anchell, Elk Grove.
Respiratory Therapist . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"I believe in humanity,
not god."**



Brooke Byrd, Sacramento.
Volunteer . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

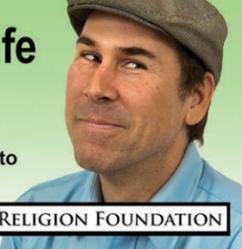
"Freedom from belief."



Sara A. Dowling, Rio Vista.
Dietary Manager . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"I believe THIS life
is important."**



Keith Lowell Jensen, Sacramento
Comedian . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"No gods, no devils,
no worries."**



Karla Sprandel, Susan Myers,
Sacramento.
Quilters . . . Secular Humanists

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"Studying the bible
made me an atheist."**



Scott Bunnell, Roseville.
Educator . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"I trust reason
over legend."**



Aaron Harmon, Sacramento.
Accountant . . . Humanist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"Without god I am
full of love."**



Lucila Morales Barcena, 18,
Sac State student . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"I value freedom and democracy
over theocracy."**



Kayla Moreland, North Highlands.
Administrative Assistant . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"Integrity and compassion
require no gods."**



Matt & Kimberly Martin, Sacramento.
COO, Care Specialist . . . Atheists

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"Morality does not require
supernatural supervision."**



Gary Alexander, Sacramento.
Civil servant . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"I believe in people,
not gods."**



Liz Shoemaker, Sacramento.
Teacher . . . Atheist/Skeptic

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"We believe in making the
world a better place."**



Barri Babow, Mike Kirkland, Folsom.
Cancer Survivor, Cat Lovers . . . Humanists

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

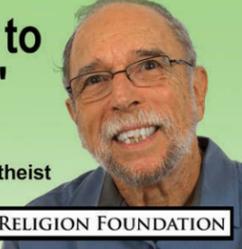
**"I'm an atheist, and I've
never been happier."**



Reace Niles, 20, Orangevale.
College student . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"Tis the Season to
Seek Reason."**



Al Gravitz, Sacramento.
Retired Biology Professor . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

**"Skepticism is healthy
for children and
other living things."**



Linda Hirst, Winters.
AIDS Researcher . . . Atheist

SAC.FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

FFRF's Barker debates bible school dean

By Gary Whittenberger

A question long discussed around campfires, in caves, dorm halls, churches, classrooms, coffee shops and various other settings throughout history is "does God exist?" And so it was on Sept. 10 at the Challenger Learning Center in downtown Tallahassee, Fla.

Arguing for the affirmative position was Bryan O'Neal, professor of theology and dean of faculty at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. Taking the negative position was Dan Barker, an evangelist turned atheist and co-president of the Freedom from Religion Foundation in Madison, Wis. Debate moderator was Mark Hohmeister, associate editor of the Tallahassee Democrat.

The event was hosted by the Center for Inquiry-Tallahassee. Co-sponsors included Ratio Christi, Freethinkers' Forum, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tallahassee, Tallahassee Atheists, First Coast Freethought Society, Humanists of Florida Association, Joan Patterson, Neil Mooney and Richard and Elaine Hull.

For more than two hours, the debaters vigorously defended their positions before an audience of 175 and afterward answered audience questions and engaged in informal discussions and book signings.

Seventy-eight percent of the audience completed an opinion survey consisting of one question posed before the debate and two questions posed after the debate. They were asked to answer the question "Does God exist?" (pre- and post-debate), choosing

among five options: "definitely yes, probably yes, can't decide, probably no, and definitely no."

The definition of "God" used in the survey was one commonly held among believers in the "Abrahamic faiths" and one which the debaters had agreed to use prior to the debate. "God" was defined as "a being, intelligent agent, or person who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly good, who created the cosmos and is the supreme moral authority."

Audience members were also asked near the conclusion "Who won the debate?"

Before the debate, 21.3% of those who completed the survey answered they were theists or believers in God, 5.1% said they were agnostics or undecided, and 71.3% identified as atheists or nonbelievers. Overall, 11.8% thought O'Neal won the debate, 69.9% thought Barker won and 11% thought it was a tie. Given the composition of the audience, this result was not too surprising.

Minds were changed

Although most people (82.4%) didn't change their opinions about the existence of God from before the debate to afterward, 24 persons (17.6%) did. Of these individuals who had a change of mind, 16 (66.7%) changed in the direction of diminished belief in God, four (16.7%) changed in the direction of increased belief, and for four others (16.7%), the direction of change was ambiguous.

For those who began the debate as atheists, 3.1% thought O'Neal won, 84.5% thought Barker and 8.2% thought it was a tie. For the agnostics (who marked "can't decide"), 14.3% favored O'Neal, 57.1% favored Barker and none

Meeting up in Jacksonville were Mark Renwick, Dan Barker, Carrie Renwick and Earl Coggins. Carrie and Earl are vice president and president, respectively, of the First Coast Freethought Society.



Florida freethought

From left at the Tallahassee debate were Gary Whittenberger, Dan Barker, Bryan O'Neal, Mark Hohmeister and a representative of Ratio Christi.

thought it was a tie.

The most surprising result came from the theists, among which 37.9% thought O'Neal won, 31% thought Barker won and 24.1% thought it was a tie. Almost as many believers perceived Barker as the winner as thought O'Neal won.

For those who changed their belief about the existence of God, changes were in small increments, as might be expected in a 150-minute debate. Twenty of 24 (83.3%) who changed their minds did so by only one level. For example, the most common change to "Does God exist?" was from "probably no" to "definitely no."

One surprising and rather disappointing fact was that before the debate, the religious community of Tallahassee did not come forward to support O'Neal even though he is an articulate apologist and a Presbyterian. Of five local Presbyterian churches which were

invited to be debate co-sponsors, two declined and three never responded. Of approximately seven other religious groups invited to be co-sponsors, only one (Ratio Christi) agreed to support O'Neal and the debate's goals.

This general lack of support seems inconsistent with a well-known bible verse (1 Peter 3:15): "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."

These survey results are consistent with a general U.S. trend toward secularization. On religious issues, most people are not changing their minds but some are, and among those who are, most are becoming less religious.

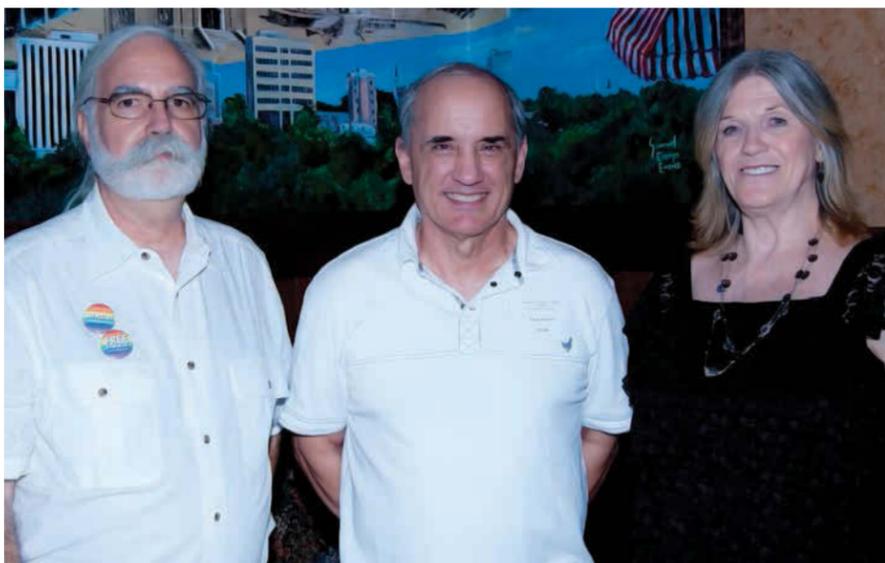
FFRF member Gary Whittenberger is a retired psychologist and current secretary of the Center for Inquiry-Tallahassee.



Meeting up in Jacksonville were Mark Renwick, Dan Barker, Carrie Renwick and Earl Coggins. Carrie and Earl are vice president and president, respectively, of the First Coast Freethought Society.



Marci Whittenberger, Dan and Gary Whittenberger.



Warren Brackman (left) took photos and with his partner Marilyn drove Dan to and from Jacksonville.



Dan with Nathaniel Hall and Charleen (Charlie) Rose Case.

State/Church Bulletin

Religious music flap brings hate mail

Kathleen Williams, superintendent of the Wausau School District in Wisconsin, was subjected to a spate of threatening, mostly anonymous, phone calls and emails after the district limited the amount of religious music that holiday programs could have.

Some were full of invective and obscenities, Williams told the Daily Herald. One person called her at home and said she had a lot of trees in her yard and "wouldn't I [Williams] look good hanging from one."

Williams added, "The classic irony to me, is that all this ugly email, hoping I'm hurt, all is in the name of Christ."

A motion at the Nov. 11 school board meeting to require Williams to write a letter of apology to the community failed 7-2.

She said the intent of the music review procedure was not to quash Christmas but to ensure all students felt comfortable in participating in music programs, whether they are Christian or not.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter Oct. 10 to explain to the board why religious music in public schools is problematic. FFRF also sent an action alert urging area members to tell the board that the music curriculum shouldn't make religion its primary focus.

Mass. taxes paying for church rehabs

Ten residents of Oak Bluffs, Mass., suing to block the town from using taxpayer money to restore stained glass windows at Trinity Methodist Church, were thwarted by Superior Court Associate Justice Richard Moses.

Moses ruled against the motion for a preliminary injunction, saying "there has been an insufficient showing of a likelihood of success on the merits." Notice of the decision was mailed Nov. 25, reported the [Martha's] Vineyard Gazette.

Oak Bluffs voters approved the \$32,000 outlay at the April 2013 town

meeting. The funds will come from the Community Preservation Act.

The town opposed the injunction, claiming the practice is common statewide: "The Massachusetts Historical Commission has funded at least 12 rehabilitation and restoration projects of historic churches since 2002."

Religious 'Friends' back discrimination

Oregon gay marriage opponents announced Nov. 21 they've filed a proposed ballot measure to let businesses refuse to provide services at gay ceremonies that violate owners' religious beliefs.

"We are deeply concerned that even Oregon elected officials are becoming hostile toward religious freedom," Teresa Harke of Friends of Religious Freedom told The Oregonian. Harke is also communications director for the Oregon Family Council, a group opposing the proposed initiative to legalize same-sex marriage.

Jeana Frazzini, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon, said in a statement that "while we are all entitled to our religious beliefs, those beliefs don't entitle any of us to discriminate against others, or disobey laws that are already in place to ensure that everyone is treated equally."

Rachel Cryer and Laurel Bowman of Portland filed a complaint with the labor commissioner in August against Sweet Cakes by Melissa. Bakery owners Aaron and Melissa Klein have said they don't want to provide services for same-sex weddings because of their religious beliefs.

In November, Hawaii and Illinois became the 15th and 16th states to legalize same-sex marriages. Twenty-nine states still have constitutional amendments banning them, and ballot challenges for 2014 and 2016 are being readied in Oregon, Arizona, Colorado, Michigan, Nevada and Ohio.

UCoR sues Pittsburgh for ad rejection



Marquee Madness

Frank Gordon, Pennsylvania, points while thinking of Abraham Lincoln saying, "How many legs does a dog have if you call the tail a leg? Four. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg."

The United Coalition of Reason filed a lawsuit Nov. 26 against the Port Authority of Allegheny County, Pa., for initially accepting and then refusing to run \$5,700 worth of bus ads in the Pittsburgh area that would have said, "Don't believe in God? You are not alone." The ads were scheduled to run from Dec. 12, 2011, to Jan. 11, 2012.

"We tried to support the Port Authority by buying ads," said Nicole Curivan of Pittsburgh CoR. "I take the bus to work every day in my personal effort to support them. But we also want to be treated with the same fairness, dignity and respect as other groups. We just want the Port Authority to run our ads. We want nonbelievers to know they're not alone."

Judge won't block church graduations

U.S. District Judge Ross Anderson Jr. denied a motion Dec. 3 for a preliminary injunction to block Greenville County schools in South Carolina from holding events in places of worship and allowing student-led prayer. Anderson said the American Humanist Association's allegations made "a mountain out of a mole hill."

According to the Greenville News, the judge also told an AHA attorney that "with all due respect and apologies," he'd never heard of the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit founded in 1941.

The suit was filed Sept. 4 on behalf of John and Jane Doe and their minor child after Mountain View Elementary in Taylors held graduation in the chapel of North Greenville University, a Christian school. Two student speakers were asked to write a prayer for the ceremony, according to the suit.

Will Satanists get Capitol monument?

The New York-based Satanic Temple has asked state officials in Oklahoma to be allowed to submit designs for a monument to honor "the historic/literary Satan" to be placed near the Ten Commandments display at the Oklahoma City Capitol. The Associated Press reported Dec. 8.

Temple spokesman Lucien Greaves said one design involves a pentagram and another would be an interactive display for children. He estimated the cost at about \$20,000.

A privately funded, \$10,000 Ten Commandments marker was placed at the Capitol in 2012. The American

Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma is suing to get it removed.

Brady Henderson, ACLU-Oklahoma legal director, said the best solution would be to ban all religious displays. "But if the Ten Commandments, with its overtly Christian message, is allowed to stay at the Capitol, the Satanic Temple's proposed monument cannot be rejected because of its different religious viewpoint."

Cake OK for dog marriage, not gays

Judge Robert Spencer of the Colorado Office of Administrative Courts ruled Dec. 6 that Masterpiece Cakeshop in Lakewood unlawfully discriminated against David Mullins and Charlie Craig by refusing to sell them a wedding cake.

Masterpiece owner Jack Phillips allegedly told the couple that selling them a cake would be against his religious beliefs.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado said the decision noted evidence that Phillips was willing to take a cake order for the "marriage" of two dogs but not for the commitment ceremony of two women, and that he would not make a cake for a same-sex couple's wedding celebration "just as he would not be willing to make a pedophile cake."

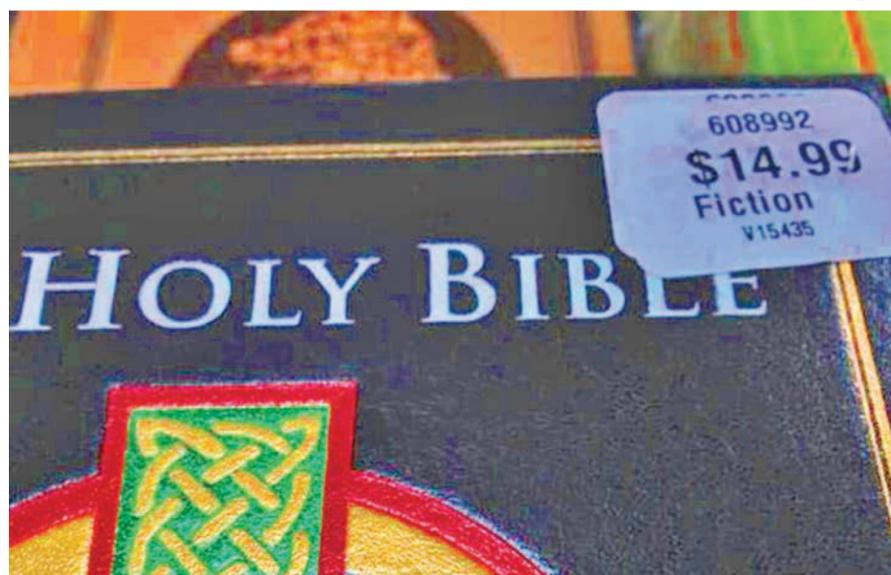
Sara Neel, ACLU staff attorney, said, "Masterpiece Cakeshop has willfully and repeatedly considered itself above the law when it comes to discriminating against customers, and the state has rightly determined otherwise."

Religious assemblies stopped in Miss.

The American Humanist Association and the Rankin County [Miss.] School District have settled a lawsuit filed in April over allegations that high school students were forced to attend a religious assembly. In a court filing Nov. 22 in U.S. District Court in Jackson, the school district agreed to comply with its Religion in Public Schools Policy adopted in July.

The suit was brought on behalf of a 16-year-old Northwest Rankin junior. A video provided to The Associated Press purportedly of the assembly showed a student talking about the role Jesus has played in his life. The suit described assembly presenters as representatives of Pinelake Church, the largest Southern Baptist church in Mississippi. The church denied taking part in the assembly.

Overheard



All the bibles were labeled as fiction. It seemed bizarre to me.

Caleb Kaltenbach, Discovery Church pastor, after finding "\$14.99 Fiction" stickers on every bible at a Costco store in Simi Valley, Calif. [Costco later apologized.]

United Press International, 11-19-13

Newsnotes

Catholic bishops sued over care denial

The American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Michigan have filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on behalf of Tamesha Means, a pregnant woman who miscarried and was denied appropriate care by a Mercy Health Partners hospital in Muskegon.

According to a Dec. 2 ACLU press release, Means rushed to Mercy Health when her water broke after 18 weeks of pregnancy. "Based on the bishops' religious directives, the hospital sent her home twice even though Tamesha was in excruciating pain; there was virtually no chance that her pregnancy could survive, and continuing the pregnancy posed significant risks to her health.

"When Tamesha returned to the hospital a third time in extreme distress and with an infection, the hospital once again prepared to send her home. While staff prepared her discharge paperwork, she began to deliver. Only then did the hospital begin tending to Tamesha's miscarriage."

The directives prohibit "pre-viability" pregnancy termination, even when there's little or no chance that the fetus will survive, and the life or health of a pregnant woman is at risk.

City turns down atheists' \$3K check

Friendly Atheist blogger Hemant Mehta's charitable check for \$3,000 was returned, not for insufficient funds, but because of political cowardice that shows the divisiveness of religion.

Mehta, 30, Naperville, Ill., a public school math teacher (and FFRF member), sent the check to the Morton Grove Park District after a local American Legion post dropped its \$2,600 annual subsidy because a park board member refused to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. In October, Commissioner Dan Ashta took a public stand against the pledge, saying no one should have to pledge allegiance to any government, adding that people with religious objections shouldn't have to feel isolated for not standing.

In an email to Mehta, Park District Executive Director Tracey Anderson said the board "has no intention of becoming embroiled in a First Amendment dispute."

Ashta is a lawyer specializing in constitutional law, according to the Chicago Tribune. Mehta said his fundraising effort was in appreciation of Ashta's stance.

"I know everyone who gave money wanted to help the Park District make up for that injustice that happened," he said. "Unfortunately, the Park District would rather lose money than take the charity of atheists and their supporters."

Ad company refuses skeptical billboards

Billboard ads planned to be placed in Vancouver by the Centre for Inquiry Canada were rejected by the advertising agency Pattison Outdoor. The ads showed a woman and the words "Jenn 13:1 Praying won't help. Doing will. Without God. We're all good."

Pattison Outdoor didn't respond to a request for comment from the Van-

couver Sun. Pat O'Brien, a CFI Canada board member, said CFI may file a complaint with the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal.

In October, LifeSiteNews.com reported that Pattison designed a billboard called "Signs for Life." The ad showed the head of a fetus and the words "Abortion: Aren't we forgetting someone?"

"If they don't like controversial ads," O'Brien said, "they certainly ran anti-abortion ads in Halifax."

Pattison is the third-largest privately held company in Canada. According to Funding Universe, comedian Bob Hope once called British Columbia a suburb of Jim Pattison [who gives millions of dollars to Christian schools and other Christian entities].

Christian student body head is atheist

Eric Fromm, student body president at Northwest Christian University in Eugene, Ore., "came out" as an atheist in an article in the school's online newspaper, said a Nov. 7 story in the Eugene Register-Guard. "I don't have to hide anymore," said Fromm, 21. "I know that people accept me for who I am."

In the Beacon Bolt story, communications major Fromm, baptized Lutheran and raised Methodist, wrote, "I couldn't force myself to believe in God."

Student reaction has been mixed, he said. Some peers have stopped talking to him, others have ridiculed him, but a surprising number have been supportive.

Michael Fuller, NCU vice president for enrollment and student development, called Fromm "a man of very high character and respect. He's a great advocate for our student body, which is exactly what he's supposed to be and do."

"If we all had our wishes, we wish Eric would be a strong Christian man," Fuller added. "We're an open and welcome community, and we meet students exactly where they're at."

Fromm said he still attends chapel meetings almost every week. "I use it as my own personal time, to gather my thoughts."

Breyer's cryptic remark fuels speculation

Is Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer a closet atheist? A comment by Breyer, who is Jewish, during Nov. 6 oral arguments in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, a government prayer case, fueled speculation he may be.

Breyer's remark came after Catholic Justice Antonin Scalia asked a lawyer for the town, "What is the equivalent of prayer for somebody who is not religious?" The lawyer, Thomas Hungar, had trouble formulating an answer, according to the Huffington Post.

Breyer then appeared to suggest that Scalia's question may have been directed at him. "Perhaps he's asking me that question and I can answer it later," Breyer said.

The story said, "Nonbelievers have responded with excitement to the possibility that Breyer may not have a religious faith at all."

Breyer's daughter is an Episcopal priest.

Kansas City atheists' help not wanted

The Kansas City Atheist Coalition was told by the Kansas City Rescue Mission that nonbelievers couldn't help deliver Thanksgiving food to the poor and elderly.

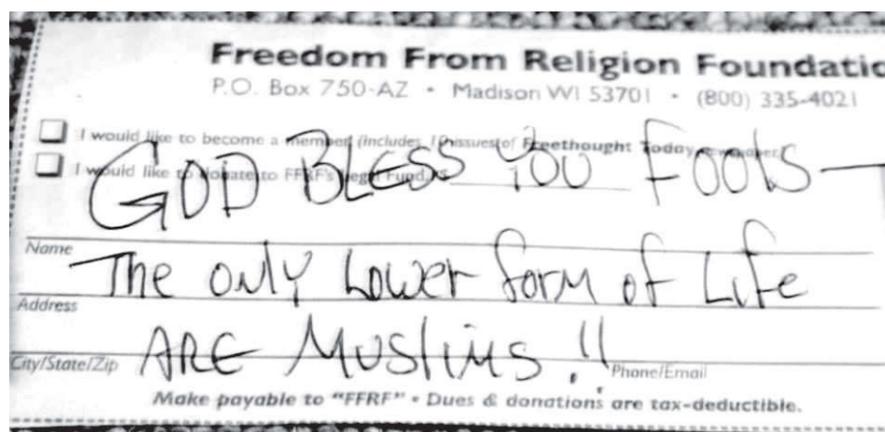
"We are an unapologetically Christian organization, and we always have been," said Julie Larocco, development officer. Larocco told the Kansas City Star, "We want to share the mes-

sage with the people we serve that 'God loves you, and you are not alone.' It seemed to us that this group probably would not want to deliver those meals."

Atheist Coalition President Josh Hyde posted on the group's website that the mission told the coalition it "would not be a good fit" for its charitable work.

Larocco confirmed that each meal and food box contained a religious message.

Sharing the Crankmail



A sampling of the voluminous crank mail recently received by FFRF, printed in all its grammatical glory:

You say there is no afterlife: One day when you stand before Jesus himself and look into his all knowing eyes ready to be judged and cast into hell-fire you will know then that there is afterlife. But also if you die before that and the instant you die you will drop into the pits of hell-fire itself instantly. You should talk to a doctor that while resuscitating a dying man he heard the man as he regained conscienceness began to scream "I'm in hell pull me out" and begged the Dr. to not let him die. That doctor was an atheist until then, but he became a believer after seeing the fear in that man's face shaking horribly. — Homer Bentley, Texas

Christmas/winter sulstice: Why aren't you brave enough to attack other religions like Islam, Satanism, Buddhism etc. Are you really that gutless that you only pick on Christianity, the religion you know won't attack you back. I pity you as you must be miserable bastards. — Gary Hooper, Kemp, Texas

Free thought: Your organization is setup almost exactly like a church ie: your president/copresident are your pastor and his wife, then your vice presidents are top deacons or elders, then you have the rest of your deacons and staff that work at the church during the week between services. Just thought you should know. — Monroe Smith II, Bryan, Texas

Hypocrites: Some police officers decided they wanted to march against violence with some people of faith. Your group threatened a law suit against the police department? Who the f**k do you think you are? I'm not even a full blown christian. I was once an athiest, on my way converting to Christianity. Take your threatened lawsuit and shove it up your ass. — RYAN MCGAHA

Hell: Have fun in HELL.....it is HOT...JESUS SAVES YOU FROM THIS!!!!!! — John Thompson, California

separation of church and state: Satan would be proud as you have followed every deceit possible. i mourn for your soul as i looked at the site. I am glad that you help people as this is good, but other than that, it is scary. I pray to the only true God that you may return to truth as you once knew or at least participated in. — Paul Sommer

Pathetic: The name GOD or a cross or commandments on a building needs to be removed because it offends you? Bunch of damn cry babies. Don't look at it when you go by. Religion offends you but a strip club doesn't or a xxx video store doesn't? So its ok for your children to look at strip clubs or porn movie stores. Wow what great parents you are. I don't see you suing any satanic cults or these groups that sacrifice live animals. — Paul Smith

To Dan Barker: We say Merry CHRISTmas at our house and no it's not a myth. It turns out that the winter solstice you reference is not on Christmas Day, something you may or may not know. — d w

Upon reflection: I was going to contribute to your group, but after rationally thinking about it, I don't believe you actually exist. I'll put the checkbook away. — Yes Abs

Hoover High School church graduation: Some anonymous person complained about this ceremony? I find that hard to believe. If the person truly complained, they should come out from behind the coward's cloak of anonymity and face the people of North Canton's Class of 2014. The ceremony has now been relocated to an inferior facility that is a dinosaur in a terrible section of downtown Canton. Because of your organization, my son's 89 year old grandmother, who is oxygen dependent and in a wheelchair, will not attend his graduation as she considers it too much of a burden on us to get her back and forth and into the facility. Keep that in mind as you high five each other over this "victory". — Drew Gonyias, North Canton, OH

religious freedom: You will never win. Our faith in GOD as christians will ALWAYS trump your lack of it. Enjoy this short life...hell fires burn hot...you're not against BB-Q right? — JoLynn Bolden

Your wrong: I thought that I had seen it all in this End Time generation, but now what I am seeing from our Atheistic community is the worst by far. There has always been unbelievers, and as we get closer to the tribulation, the bible predicts that this situation want get better but worse. However, in previous generation atheist understood that you can't have democracy with out Jesus and the bible, so they respected what the religious community did for the world by giving hope to the hopeless. A belief in God is what helps a drunk, put down the bottle after 20 years of hard drinking, and helps a prostitute, give up there life of selfish, pursuits to live a saintly life with Jesus. If life is so great without God why not move to atheistic China, or Russia were there a dictator telling you what to wear, and how to wear it. — Jordan Wells, Indianapolis

You are all fuck heads: Go die! — Jesus Christ, gofuckyourself@fuckyou.com, 1234 Fuck YOU PL. 101 Suite Fuck YOU, Sacramento, CA

ur assholes: u r ass==== and penis lickers. — bart simpson, 10 dick drive, irwin, pennsylvania

bill boards: How dare you push your communist ideals off on my children. Its your business if you are atheists, but my business when you put up nasty dirty bill boards for my children to see. If your the children of the devil that is your business, but don't try to push your nasty evil views on all of us. — sharon howard, madera, calif.

Check Your Selves: Check your selfs an tread lightly. i have names — @aol.com

God loving: i learned about your bogus bullshit trying to look at some news you are not news you are not america maybe you you would be better off in russia, maybe iran i have no respect for you or your rights if you notice i did nt call you out you called us out get over it and go ahead and get out of our good country nazi trash like you have ruined america for all of us. — good ol religious arky

FFRF, Gaylor, Barker win 'parsonage exemption' suit

Continued from front page

publishers from having to collect state sales taxes "unjustifiable awards of assistance to religious organizations."

"If a statute imposed a tax solely against ministers (or granted an exemption to everyone except ministers) without a secular reason for doing so, that law would violate the Constitution just as §107(2) does," Crabb reasoned.

Other cases pending

Crabb dismissed as implausible the government's bizarre argument that atheists Gaylor and Barker could "conceivably" qualify as "ministers of the gospel." The government put forth that argument seeking to deny them standing and thus get the challenge dismissed.

Gaylor and Barker, as directors of an educational organization advocating atheism and freethought, earned standing because they have not been entitled to claim the housing allowance FFRF designates for them, while any "minister of the gospel" may do so for promoting religion.

Crabb's decision noted that Treasury Secretary Donald Regan wrote a 1984 memorandum advising repeal of §107 because there "is no evidence that the financial circumstances of ministers justify special tax treatment." Ministerial compensation may be low compared to other professions, but "not compared to taxpayers in general." The recommendation was withdrawn after clergy protests.

In 1921, Congress passed a law allowing ministers to exclude from gross income the rental value of housing, such as a parsonage, received as part of compensation, saying it was for the convenience of the employer. Since FFRF does not provide Gaylor and Barker with a house, FFRF voluntarily dropped that portion of its challenge.

The far-ranging ruling makes interesting reading, even working in Robert Ingersoll's maxim, "With soap, baptism is a good thing" (included on FFRF's "Debaptism Certificate").

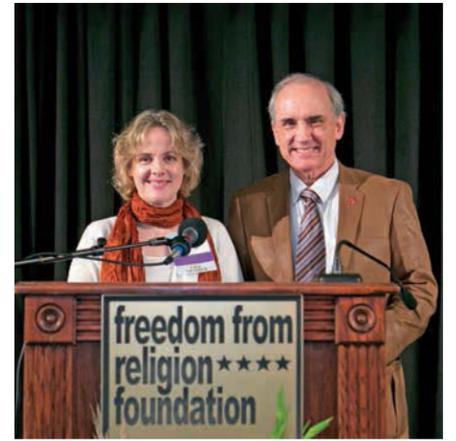
FFRF has three federal lawsuits against the IRS for preferential treatment of religion versus irreligion.

FFRF and its plaintiffs have been found to have preliminary standing in a challenge to the IRS for failure to enforce church electioneering restrictions.

FFRF has also been found to have standing to pursue its challenge of an IRS provision which exempts church denominations from an annual reporting requirement that applies to all other 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations, essentially shielding them from public accountability.

Read the ruling:

ffrf.org/legal/challenges/ongoing-lawsuits#id-12512



Georgia chief pushing religion

Police Chief Gary Jones in Harlem, Ga., has apparently been using the Department of Public Resources Facebook page not only to proselytize but to promote his church and even the corporal punishment of children in the name of Jesus.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter on Nov. 21 to David Sward, director of the Harlem Department of Public Safety, about Jones' egregious conduct.

Jones' Facebook posts include remarks such as, "No, it is not reasonable to strike a child with a bat or some other object, but you can use a belt and strike their rear-ends. Parents be nosy, check behind your kids and never as-

sume that they will always be truthful. Doing these very things just may save the life of your child. Fathers you are the head of the home and God will hold you accountable."

In another post, Jones said, "I am certainly not trying to turn this into a so-called religious site. However since my last posting about 30 minutes ago, my wife called and said our 5 year old daughter was eating breakfast this morning and plainly told her mother that she wanted to accept Jesus as her Savior and ask him into her heart. Her mother prayed with her and afterwards she said this means I am going to heaven now."

Seidel's letter said if Jones wishes to

disseminate such sentiments, he must do so on his own Facebook page. "He cannot use the machinery of the government, or even his own title, to push people to live in accordance with his religion or go to church."

Jones wasn't apologetic about advertising the church he attends. "I will continue to post and most of the people in Harlem are of Christian belief and I've gotten a lot more support than the people that don't support it."

"The solution is simple," wrote Seidel. "Jones must stop using a government office to promote his personal religion."

FFRF has about 380 Georgia members.

Clerical press indignant

Crabb ruling 'sends shockwaves through religious community'

What would taxpayers save if FFRF ultimately wins its challenge of the parsonage exemption and the housing allowance tax benefit for ministers is abolished?

The congressional Joint Committee on Taxation reports that the exemption amounts to \$700 million a year in lost revenue. The committee doesn't break down in-kind housing, provided for in §107(1), which the decision doesn't affect, and §107(2), which the decision declared unconstitutional.

"Church-owned parsonages have gone out of favor in the last several decades, so I would put a fair estimate of the effect of this decision at about half a billion per year," said Forbes contributor Peter J. Reilly.

Religious News Service calculated it could reduce the take-home pay of some pastors by up to 10%. RNS erroneously reported only 44,000 clergy would be affected. Christianity Today found that 84% of senior pastors get a housing allowance of \$20,000 to \$38,000 in added (but not reported) compensation to their average base salary. The base salary of a full-time senior pastor in 2012-13 ranges from \$33,000 to \$70,000, according to Christianity Today.

ABC-TV reporter Stuart Watson has been investigating the impact of the parish exemption on megachurch pastors such as Steve Furtick, a Charlotte, N.C., pastor who's building a \$1.6 million residence.

William Thornton, a Georgia pastor

and blogger, told Forbes, "No reasonable, thinking Southern Baptist minister can avoid one conclusion in all of this: The manner in which our housing allowance has been used borders on clergy malpractice. A growing subset of ministers who are very highly paid and who live in multimillion dollar mansions are able to exclude hundreds of thousands of dollars from income taxation.

"Do we really think it fair to shift taxes from wealthy clergy living in mansions to the less highly compensated? Surely not. Add to that the practice of churches ordaining ministry associates in administrative or peripheral church jobs solely so that they can be qualified for the housing allowance."

Sampling of reaction

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie said, "The reaction of the religious press to our court victory reveals how deeply the idea of clergy prerogative and privilege runs. They truly believe clergy should not have to pay their fair share of taxes."

Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability: The decision is "sending shockwaves through the religious community.

"This ruling in effect would force clergy of nearly every religion across America to pay additional taxes, regardless of faith or creed. This will either force congregations to increase clergy compensation to offset these

taxes or require pastors to dig deep to see if they are able to absorb these taxes."

Southern Baptist Convention: "The clergy housing allowance isn't a government establishment of religion, but just the reverse," claimed Russell Moore, president of the SBC's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. "The allowance is neutral to all religions. Without it, clergy in small congregations of all sorts would be penalized and harmed."

GuideStone Financial Resources: GFS, a financial division of the Southern Baptist Convention, called the housing allowance "the most important tax benefit available to ministers." President O.S. Hawkins said GuideStone would join a legal brief supporting the allowance when the case is appealed.

"This decision, while not unanticipated, is sadly symptomatic of our culture today," Hawkins said. "We count it a privilege to be an advocate for those who have given their lives to ministry, and we will not forsake our mission to undergird those who so faithfully serve our churches and ministries."

Family Research Council: "We have seen many courts over the years attempt to banish God in various ways from the public square, but this case in particular reveals a level of supreme arrogance," said President Tony Perkins in a statement. "Once again, Judge Crabb has neglected to consult the Constitution that she has sworn to up-

hold."

The Rabbinical Assembly: "[Disallowing the exemption would put many rabbis] at risk of losing their homes," said Rabbi Julie Schonfeld, executive vice president of the international group of Conservative rabbis. "Owing to dramatic increases in housing costs across America, many of our synagogues are located in areas where the cost of a home in walking distance of the synagogue is out of reach of any rabbis' salary or the synagogues' resources to pay them. Homes were purchased taking into account the exemption to make the budget work."

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism: "[The Reform movement is] confident in the end that we will be able to protect the financial well-being of our clergy and our synagogues," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director.

Jewish Federations of North America: "The parsonage allowance has a long-standing history in the United States, as a demonstration of the great importance our nation places on the role of clergy in American civil life," said William Daroff, the group's chief Washington lobbyist.

"Congress quickly and virtually unanimously came to the defense of the parsonage allowance when it was subject to attack over a decade ago, and we are certain that it would, with our support, again protect this provision that has been part of the fabric of our tax law and civil society for almost 100 years,"

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Wiley G. Leverett, 53, Centerville, GA: Aggravated sexual battery, 3 counts of child molestation and 4 counts of sexual battery. Leverett is pastor of Solid Rock Community Church and owns Leverett's Auto Sales in Warner Robins.

Sheriff's Capt. Randall Banks said 4 alleged victims, as young as 8, have been identified. All are girls. *Source: macon.com, 12-4-13*

Jules Derosier, 56, Pembroke Pines, FL: Grand theft for allegedly stealing 11 checks totaling \$2,690 and depositing them in his personal bank account. Bank surveillance video showed Derosier, who is pastor of New Life Assembly of God, depositing at least 10 of the 11 checks that were written to the church. *Source: Sun Sentinel, 12-3-13*

Jonathan D. Masteller, 23, Kinzers, PA: 4 counts of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, 3 counts of indecent assault, 2 counts of sexual abuse of children and 1 count each of aggravated indecent assault, corruption of minors and unlawful contact. Masteller, a youth pastor at Community Gap Church and a junior high boys basketball coach, is accused of repeated sexual assault of a 13-year-old boy.

He allegedly had sexual contact with the teen at least 6 times since September. *Source: lancasteronline.com, 12-3-13*

Florencio Garces, 70, Borja, Spain: Suspicion of misappropriating funds, money laundering and sexual abuse. Garces, pastor at the Catholic parish of Santuario de la Misericordia, is suspected of embezzling \$310,000 of church funds. The scheme allegedly involved 5 others. Details of sexual abuse allegations weren't made public. *Source: Digital Journal, 12-3-13*

Roy D. Harriger Sr., 70, Johnson Creek, NY: 2 counts each of incest and 1st-degree course of sexual conduct against a child and 4 counts of first-degree sodomy. Harriger, pastor at Community Fellowship Church, is accused of alleged crimes in 2000-01 when he was pastor of Ashwood Wesleyan Church in Lyndonville.

State Police Lt. Kurt Schmitt said the alleged victims, a male and a female, were between 7 and 9 years old at the time. Schmitt said the number of alleged victims dating back to 1974 is "approaching 10." *Source: Buffalo News, 11-27-13*

Jeremy Grinnell, 40, Grand Rapids, MI: 2 felony counts of surveilling an unclothed person. Grinnell, an assistant professor of systematic theology at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary and pastor at Bella Vista Church, is accused of using a ladder to look through a 37-year-old woman's bedroom window to watch her having sex with her male partner.

Kent County Undersheriff Jon Hess said the partner saw Grinnell, who then allegedly took off. He came back the next night and was confronted by the partner. Hess said Grinnell told officers he came to the residence to pray for the woman. *Source: WOOD-TV, 11-27-13*

Larry Clark, 61, Buena Vista, VA: 6 counts of taking indecent liberties with a child and 2 counts of endangering the morals of a minor. Clark, pastor for 12 years at Pentecostal Outreach Church, is accused of molesting several teen boys in 2011-12.

Clark was convicted of embezzlement in 1982 and larceny in 1983. *Source: WSLs, 11-26-13*

Ronald Lawrence, 76, McAlester, OK: 19 counts of sexual abuse. A woman now in her 40s accused Lawrence, an elder at Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, of raping her in his bathtub when she was 8.

Two other accusers, also in their 40s, have come forward with similar allegations. Lawrence told police he has been "disfellowshipped" from the church due to the allegations. *Source: KJRH, 11-26-13*

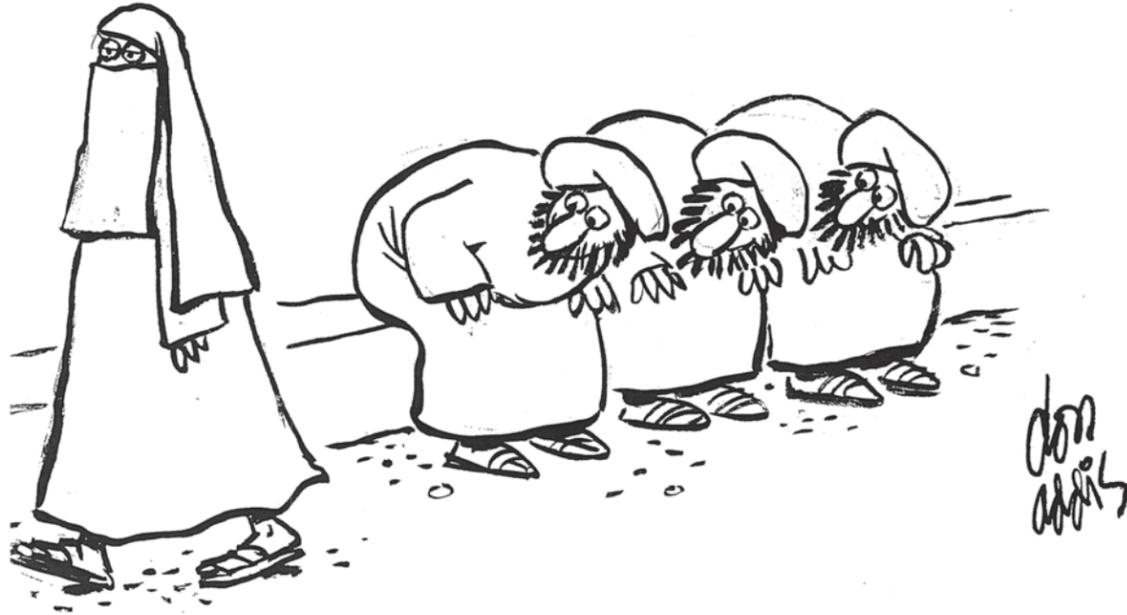
Andrea Lewis, 54, Shreveport, LA: 3 counts of transportation of a minor with intent to engage in illegal sexual activity. Lewis, pastor of Act on Faith Ministries, allegedly took 3 girls under age 18 to Texas and had sex with them between January 1994 and December 2000.

Lewis also directs the church choir. The girls were allegedly molested on choir trips. *Source: WAFB, 11-25-13*

Ray S. Teets, 66, Springhill Township, PA: Indecent assault, unlawful restraint, interference with custody of children, corruption of minors, unlawful contact with a minor, concealing the whereabouts of a child, child luring, stalking and criminal trespass. Teets, pastor at Fallen Timbers Community Chapel, is charged with molesting an 11-year-old girl who attended the church.

The girl alleged to police that Teets took her in a shed behind her home and touched her genitals and put her hand inside his pants.

Attorney Stephen Markey III said he notified the Kentucky Baptist seminary Teets attended in



the 1990s that he'd pleaded guilty to child sexual abuse in 1988 in Baltimore. He was ordered to pay a 15-year-old female victim \$500,000 in damages in a civil suit.

Markey, who represented the girl, said he gave conviction information to the seminary "solely to let them know that they are teaching a rapist — that they are going to make a rapist a minister. I never heard back from them." *Source: Huffington Post, 11-23-13*

Gary Adkins, 52, Lenore, W.VA: 2 counts of 3rd-degree sexual assault and sexual abuse by a person in a position of trust of a child. Adkins, former pastor and youth leader at Parsley Bottom Freewill Baptist Church, is accused of molesting his 7-year-old niece in 2012.

The child alleged that Adkins made her "play with his belly button" and touch his genitals inside his pants.

The girl's mother told police her daughter asked repeatedly if she was "nasty on the inside and out" and asked God to forgive all her sins. Another family member, now 28 and living in Indiana, later made similar allegations. *Source: Floyd County Times, 11-23-13*

Mark Huberty, 43, Maplewood, MN: 4th-degree criminal sexual misconduct. Huberty has resigned as pastor at Church of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the wake of allegations by a married woman "under his spiritual care" they had sex for in her home, at the church and in Huberty's car.

Huberty met with the woman in 2008 for counseling after the death of a family member. An affidavit said he set up rules to allow touching above the waist and with clothes on, but later the rules changed and he would take off his pants so she could touch his genitals. Huberty allegedly told her sex like that was only a venial sin. *Source: Star-Tribune, 11-21-13*

David A. Neese, 57, Sheboygan, WI: Felony theft. Neese, an elder at First Presbyterian Church, is charged with stealing 4 cases of handbells valued at \$10,500 from the church and pawning them. A California man told church officials that bells he bought on eBay had labels with the church's name on them. *Source: Sheboygan Press, 11-21-13*

Dylan Mays, 43, Bardstown, KY: Theft by unlawful taking. Mays is accused of using church credit cards to buy numerous firearms, firearm accessories, ammunition, tools and electronics, including iPhones and computers, from 2009-13. *Source: WAVE, 11-20-13*

Yakov Y. Roth, Monsey, NY: Visa fraud. Roth, a Hasidic rabbi, allegedly lied on his application in August that he'd never been arrested or convicted of a crime.

But he'd actually just finished serving a 16-year sentence in 2013 on a 1997 conviction in Tel Aviv for raping a child relative, the complaint said. *Source: NY Post, 11-20-13*

Scott Gilliam, 42, Olive Hill, KY: Conspiracy to distribute oxycodone and possession of oxycodone with intention to distribute. Gilliam, pastor of Holiness Tabernacle Church, was arrested with Brandon Logan, 28, who faces similar charges.

More than \$1 million in currency and assets were recovered. "Tens of thousands of pills were being shipped through this organization," a police spokesperson said. *Source: Ledger Independent, 11-17-13*

Yona Metzger, 60, Jerusalem: Bribery, money laundering, obstructing an investigation and fraud. Metzger, former Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, allegedly accepted bribes of money and goods from heads of various non-profit groups while he was chief rabbi. Millions of shekels allegedly changed hands.

Police said Metzger stashed about \$200,000 with his sister in Haifa. A search of his home allegedly turned up \$11,300 hidden in various

books.

A public corruption unit has been investigating Metzger for several months. Police also suspect he tried to suborn witnesses. *Source: Haaretz, 11-18-13*

Ronald Lauber, 55, North Platte, NE: Obstructing a police officer. Lauber, senior pastor at Harvest Christian Fellowship, was cited while being ticketed for violating an animal-at-large ordinance for allegedly letting a dog run free.

According to a news report, "Lauber insisted that the officer take him to jail and, at one point, turned around and placed his hands behind his back to be handcuffed. As the officer attempted to reason with Lauber, he stated that he was not going to cooperate and began to walk toward his residence. When the officer ordered Lauber to stop, he continued walking. As a result, the officer placed Lauber under arrest for obstruction of justice." *Source: The Telegraph, 11-16-13*

Andrew Hamblin, 22, LaFollette, TN: Possession of class I wildlife (wildlife inherently dangerous to humans). Hamblin, pastor of the 60-member Tabernacle Church of God, was cited for having 53 venomous snakes that he "handles" during church services.

"That is my God-given right in the United States; if God moves on me to take up a serpent, I can take up a serpent," Hamblin said to a crowd on the courthouse steps before arraignment. He has appeared on the National Geographic reality show "Snake Salvation." *Source: WBIR, 11-16-13*

Avery Hanna, Augusta, GA: Theft. Hanna, assistant pastor at St. Mary on the Hill Catholic Church, is accused of stealing about \$1,700 in petty cash, candle money, tithes and poor box money from the church office. Hanna, a native Bahamian who was just ordained in June, is on administrative leave. *Source: WJBF, 11-11-13*

Yoram Abergel, Netivot, Israel: Extortion and vote tampering. Abergel, a senior ultra-Orthodox rabbi who heads a Talmud studies network with thousands of students, was arrested while boarding a plane to China.

He allegedly conspired with reputed mobster Shalom Domrani to threaten Yaakov Ifegan and other rabbis who supported a mayoral challenger of the incumbent. *Source: failedmessiah.com, 11-10-13*

Larry Clark, 61, Buena Vista, VA: Acting with cruelty and causing injuries to children and 2 counts of knowingly and intentionally taking indecent liberties with a child under the age of 18 with lascivious intent. Clark, pastor at Pentecostal Outreach Church, is accused of molesting 2 male minors in his home in 2011. *Source: News-Gazette, 11-10-13*

Alex E. Thompson, Crestview, FL: Child neglect without great bodily harm. Thompson is pastor at Harvest Vineyard Ministries, where officers found nearly 80 people, including convicted felons and sex offenders, living with children, said Crestview Police Chief Tony Taylor.

Police have heard allegations of food stamp misuse and residents living in servitude, Taylor said, adding that further charges may be pending. *Source: News Bulletin, 11-7-13*

Brian M. Norris, 29, Chesapeake, VA: 4 counts of indecent liberties by a custodian. Norris, for 6 years a youth minister at Western Branch Baptist Church, allegedly had inappropriate relations with minors. It's believed there are 2 victims.

Head Pastor Walter Black said Norris has been placed on administrative leave. *Source: WAVY, 11-6-13*

Bennett Smith, 49, Columbus, OH: Menacing and telecommunications harassment. Smith, former senior pastor at The Church at Polaris, had a congregation member file for a protection order against him. The church, which fired him in August, also wants a restraining order.

A lawsuit alleges Smith was drunk several times at services, including at youth camp. The suit claims he told a church staffer to transfer a "significant amount of funds from one of TCAP's bank accounts" after he and his wife Kim, the church administrator, were fired. *Source: NBC Columbus, 11-4-13*

Bradley S. Bieganski, 57, Pine-dale, AZ: Indicted on sexual molestation charges involving 2 alleged victims. He operates Kingdom Flight Ranch, a Christian foster home for Native American children.

A sheriff's report said 2 girls of elementary-school age reported Bieganski touched their private areas while they were bathing and alleged he'd done the same to others. Six Apache girls living at the ranch were removed by social services.

"We believe in demonstrating Christ's love through our actions by meeting physical needs and by building long-term relationships," says the facility's website. *Source: USA Today, 11-1-13*

Pleaded / Convicted

Frank G. Klep, 70, Sunbury, VIC: Pleaded guilty to rape, attempted buggery and 12 counts of indecent assault. The former Catholic priest admitted molesting 14 students while he was principal at Salesian College Rupertswood in the 1970s and '80s.

Klep was ordained in 1972 and defrocked in 2006. He was convicted in 1994 of indecently assaulting 2 victims and pleaded guilty in 2005 to 14 counts of indecently assaulting boys. *Source: AAP, 12-2-13*

Chris A. Phillips, 51, Mechanicsville, VA: Pleaded guilty to theft. He was accused of embezzling \$87,000 from Advent Christian Church, where he was youth pastor, to pay off a woman who was blackmailing him. The woman, who advertised her services online, threatened to make public the photos of them having sex, prosecutor Angela O'Connor said. *Source: Times-Dispatch, 11-25-13*

John M. Altizer, 55, Roanoke, VA: Guilty by jury of 2nd-degree murder. Altizer, an ordained minister who counsels inmates between stints of over-the-road trucking, was convicted of the shooting death of his stepson, Gabriel F. Gomez, 31.

When he learned his wife Delia was letting Gomez to stay at their house while he was out of town, tensions flared, all caught on tape: "I will snap his friggin' neck, watch him hit the ground and piss on his sorry ass," the pastor shouted on the recording played in court. *Source: Roanoke Times, 11-20-13*

Eric Dejaeger, 66, pleaded guilty to 8 counts of sexual assault against young Inuit students while he served as a Catholic Oblate Order priest between 1978-82 in the Canadian Arctic hamlet of Igloodik. He is being tried on 68 other abuse counts.

Dejaeger was supposed to be tried in 1995 but he returned to his native Belgium. In 1995, he'd just finished a 5-year sentence, most of it served in a halfway house and on probation, for sexual assaults of children. He lived in Oblate communities before being extradited in 2011.

A girl testified how, when she was between ages 5 and 9, Dejaeger repeatedly assaulted her in a church building. "I was crying. I didn't know how to stop him. He was really strong. I was trying to think of any way I could to make him stop."

She said she got him to stop by defecating, after which he took her to a river that was mostly frozen and left her alone.

Authorities also confirmed they have an arrest warrant out for Oblate priest Joannis Rivoire, who served in the Rankin Inlet area between 1968-70. He then left Canada for Avignon, France. *Source: Toronto Star, 11-18-13*

Stephen Shield, 53, Lancaster, UK: Guilty by jury of 3 counts of indecent assault. Shield, dean at Lancaster Catholic Cathedral, was accused of sexually assaulting a male in the presbytery at English Martyrs Church between 1985 and 1992 when the victim was between the ages of 18 and 24.

The victim told the court he felt sickened that Shield celebrated Mass within hours of abusing him. He said he feared he wouldn't be believed

if he complained because Shield had trained at a prestigious seminary in Rome. *Source: Evening Post, 11-15-13*

Todd M. Edwards, 49, Murrieta, **CA**: Pleaded guilty to sexual battery and sexual penetration with a foreign object. Edwards, bishop of the Menifee Ward of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was also charged with dissuading a victim from reporting a crime, a charge which is likely to be dropped in a plea agreement.

Prosecutor Amy Barajas said the sexual penetration occurred in November 2006 and involved a girl who was then 16. The next incident was in February 2012 when the victim was 18.

Mormon bishops are volunteer lay clergy, not ordained. *Source: Press-Enterprise, 11-13-13*

David F. Dzermejko, 65, Braddock, **PA**: Pleaded guilty to possession of child pornography. Dzermejko, a retired priest and former pastor of Mary, Mother of the Church in Charleroi, used the screen name "Lord Winchester Cuthbert Thurston VII" and uploaded an image of a naked, prepubescent boy to the Internet, said Assistant U.S. attorney Carolyn Bloch.

She said his collection contained images, but no videos, of pre-pubescent and post-pubescent boys naked or involved in sex acts. Dzermejko told investigators he'd been viewing child porn "for perhaps the last 10 years" and said he went to Thailand several times to meet teen boys for sex. He was removed from public ministry in 2009 but never criminally charged. *Source: Post-Gazette, 11-7-13*

Finian Egan, 71, **Sydney**: Pleaded guilty to 7 counts of indecent assault and 1 count of rape for attacks on girls aged 10 to 17 in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s while he was a Catholic priest. He was removed from public ministry in 2011.

A victim told of being assaulted in the church sacristy when she was 10 and living at St. Martha's Institution For Disadvantaged Girls. "Father Egan pulled me onto his knee, he put his hands up my dress, pulled down my underwear and put his hands into my vagina. He had an erection."

The woman alleged he told her she had beautiful hair, leading her to ask a nun to cut it off. "I thought if I didn't have nice hair, he wouldn't be interested in grabbing hold of me." *Source: Morning Herald, 11-4-13*

Sentenced

Steve Harding, 61, New Palestine, **IN**: 2 years in a community corrections program and 1 year of probation after pleading guilty to sexual misconduct with a minor. Harding was a United Methodist youth pastor, school board member and wrestling coach when the 2 incidents with a girl allegedly occurred, the first when she was 13 and staying overnight in Harding's home. *Source: Indianapolis Star, 12-4-13*

Quentin L. Respress, 44, Reynoldsburg, **OH**: 5 years' probation and \$54,000 restitution after pleading guilty to theft and forgery. Respress, pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church, told the judge at sentencing that "At no point did I ever seek to maliciously take from God's church."

Congregation member Edna Payne disagreed, telling Respress, "You robbed us blind. You have demonstrated uncontrollable greed." *Source: Columbus Dispatch, 12-4-13*

Slawomir S., 49, Rawa Mazowiecka, **Poland**: 8½ years in prison for molesting 5 boys under age 15. The priest allegedly gave the boys money and put minutes on their phone cards. *Source: AP, 12-2-13*

Dannie Carter, 55, Madison, **WI**: 2½ years in prison and 3 years' probation for soliciting a child for prostitution and 90 days for disorderly conduct. Carter, a deacon at Christ the Solid Rock Baptist Church, allegedly told a 17-year-old congregation member at her home in Sun Prairie in 2012 that he would give her money for sex. The girl locked herself in a bathroom and called her aunt, who called police. *Source: State Journal, 11-28-13*

David K. Allen, 51, Gatesville, **TX**: 30 years in prison after pleading guilty to arson causing death for a 2011 mobile home fire in which his wife died. Gates, pastor at New Life Church of Restoration, married a 28-year-old woman after his wife Paula, 54, died. Perjury charges were dropped against Megan Allen in exchange for her husband's guilty plea. *Source: Killeen Daily Herald, 11-20-13*

Lee Moore, 48, Mercer, **PA**: 9 to 25 years in prison on convictions of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, unlawful contact with a minor, statutory sexual assault, corruption of a minor and indecent assault. Moore was pastor of Mercer United Methodist Church when the abuse occurred from 2004-08.

Moore allegedly found the victim, then 13, watching pornography and told him he wouldn't get in trouble if he let Moore perform sex acts on him. *Source: Sharon Herald, 11-16-13*

Robert Byars, 33, Benton, **KY**: 8 years in prison after pleading guilty to unlawful transaction with a minor. The former Walnut Street Baptist youth pastor was originally charged with 15 counts of unlawful transaction with a minor and 5 counts each of sodomy and rape, each in the 3rd degree.

He was charged after police got a complaint Byars was having sex with a 16-year old female

congregation member. *Source: WPSD, 11-13-13*

Dale Richardson, 49, Summerville, **SC**: 20 years in prison for convictions of 3 counts each of kidnapping and 1st-degree criminal sexual conduct. Richardson, pastor of Freedom Free Will Baptist Church, was accused of kidnapping, binding and raping 3 women in separate incidents in 2010-11.

Judge Maite Murphy told him at sentencing that while his victims, who were all prostitutes, put themselves in dangerous situations, they didn't deserve to be kidnapped and forced to have sex at gunpoint. "You were the pastor of a church. Rather than healing the people who most needed it, you took advantage of them in the most horrible way." *Source: Post & Courier, 11-13-13*

David W. Smith, 35, Poquoson, **VA**: 3 years in prison and 30 years' probation after pleading guilty to 10 counts of possession of child pornography, which he viewed in his pastoral office at Trinity Lutheran Church. Investigators found images of girls aged 6 to 11 engaged in sexual acts with men, according to court records. He is married with 3 school-age children. *Source: Virginian-Pilot, 11-6-13*

Larry Williams, 49, and **Carri Williams**, 42, Sedro-Woolley, **WA**: 28 and 37 years in prison, respectively, on manslaughter and homicide by abuse convictions in the death of their adopted daughter Hana, 13. The couple used biblical discipline techniques found in the controversial child-rearing book *To Train up a Child* by Michael and Debi Pearl. An adopted boy was also abused. The couple have 6 biological children.

Judge Susan Cook said the 2 adopted children "fell into a black hole. At the bottom of that hole they did not find the land of milk and honey. They found the land of frozen vegetables and water-soaked sandwiches."

Reports said the children were beaten, starved and made to endure cold weather as part of a fundamentalist Christian regimen of corporal punishment. *Source: examiner.com, 11-3-13*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

"Jane Doe," a suburban Chicago woman, has filed suit against **Cherie Carlson** for alleged sexual abuse in the 1990s when Carlson worked at the North Side Gospel Center in Chicago and the Awana Summer Camp in Fredonia, **WI**. Carlson now teaches middle school in Buffalo Grove, **IL**.

The plaintiff alleges Carlson began molesting her, including oral sex and penetration, when she was 16. "I am very passionate about Jesus," says Carlson in a YouTube video during a religious seminar she was conducting.

The plaintiff told "NBC5 Investigates" she considered Carlson her spiritual mentor. "It started with holding hands while praying and her hand would touch my leg and move from there. We met at her parents' house for a movie and she put her hand down the top of my shirt and fondled me.

"She said she was showing me God's love. Eventually the physical demands became constant. Sometimes maybe 4 times a week," Doe alleges, saying she didn't tell anyone for fear Carlson would kill herself. *Source: NBC Chicago, 11-26-13*

"John Doe 27," a Minnesota man in his 30s, has filed suit against **St. John's Abbey**, former Hastings priest **Francis Hoefgen**, the **Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis** and **St. Luke Institute of Silver Springs, MD**, a treatment facility.

Hoefgen, now 63, admitted to police in 1984 that he sexually abused a minor, then was assigned the next year to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Hastings after an evaluation at the institute, said plaintiff's attorney Jeff Anderson in a statement.

The plaintiff alleges Hoefgen, who left the ministry in 1992, assaulted him in Hastings. *Source: Pioneer Press, 11-19-13*

The family of a Pennsylvania man who died of a drug overdose at age 26 in October is suing the **Archdiocese of Philadelphia**, **Msgr. William Lynn** and the man's alleged abuser, **Fr. Robert Brennan**.

The late Sean McIlmail's mother, Deborah, alleges Brennan's abuse lasted 4 years and started when Sean was 11. The criminal case against Brennan was dropped after Sean's death. *Source: CBS, 11-14-13*

Craig Mateer, Orlando, **FL**, is suing **World Hope Inc.** and Orlando Baptist **Pastor David Janney** to get back the \$117,000 he donated. Mateer alleges World Hope diverted some of the money he donated for 2 Kenyan chicken farms into Janney's personal bank account. *Source: 11-3, Orlando Sentinel*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Archdiocese of Chicago** has agreed to pay \$2.3 million to a young man molested by **Fr. Daniel McCormack** between 2004-06. The archdiocese will also release files Jan. 15 on McCormack and **29 more priests** who allegedly sexually abused children.

McCormack was defrocked in 2007 and pleaded guilty to molesting several boys at St. Agatha's Catholic Church. *Source: UPI, 11-27-13*

A federal jury in Delaware awarded \$2.4 million to Brian Elliott, 44, Cedar Knolls, **NJ**, after finding that **Damian Galligan**, a Marist Catholic brother teaching in New York, molested him from 1977-83, starting when Elliott was 8.

Galligan is 86 and lives in a Missouri retirement facility. It's believed he has no significant assets to pay the award. Jurors also heard testimony from Peter Marghella, another alleged Galligan victim who's the new director of the New York State Office of Emergency Management. *Source: News Journal, 11-19-13*

Legal Developments

Gerald Howard, whose name was **Carmine Sita** when he was a priest at St. Aloysius Catholic Church in Jersey City, **NJ**, appears headed for trial in **Missouri** on 2 counts of kidnapping and 3 each of forcible sodomy and attempted forcible sodomy. Authorities allege he molested 3 minors in Boonville between 1984-87.

He was sentenced in 1983 in New Jersey to 5 years' probation for molesting a 17-year-old. He changed his name after leaving a treatment facility.

A Virginia man allegedly molested by Howard in Missouri received \$600,000 in 2009. He's been jailed in Missouri since 2010. *Source: Jersey Journal, 11-26-13*

German Catholic **Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst**, 53, of Limburg, the so-called "bishop of bling," has paid a fine of \$27,000 to end a case for lying under oath. He was accused by prosecutors of making false statements about a 1st-class flight he took to India to visit slum dwellers. *Source: Deutsche Welle, 11-18-19*

Circuit Judge Robert Dierker upheld his own order in a civil suit against **Joseph Ross**, a defrocked Archdiocese of **St. Louis** priest.

The suit alleges Ross molested a 5-year-old girl in 1997 and continued the abuse until 2001. Dierker ruled in May that the archdiocese must produce 20 years' worth of records for any of its employees who had complaints of sexual abuse against them. The archdiocese argued that was too long. Dierker stood by 20 years for clergy but reduced the time for non-clergy employees to 5 years.

In a separate case, Ross was convicted of sexually assaulting an 11-year-old boy during confession in 1988. *Source: Fox St. Louis, 11-15-13*

New Jersey Catholic priest **Michael Fugee**, 52, will petition the Vatican for permanent removal from the priesthood but will not face criminal prosecution under a court-approved agreement which includes no unsupervised contact with minors for the rest of his life.

A jury convicted him of criminal sexual contact in 2003 but the conviction was reversed on appeal due to improper jury instructions by the trial judge. A 2007 memorandum of understanding required Fugee to undergo counseling and stay away from children.

In announcing a consent order signed by Fugee to avoid retrial, prosecutor John Molinelli rebuked Newark **Archbishop John Myers** for failure to monitor Fugee. "If something like this were to ever happen again, I have no intention of relying on the archdiocese to monitor these priests." *Source: Star-Ledger, 11-11-13*

Shaun M. Ross, 32, Clay, **NY**, was put in charge of children's programs at **Victory Christian Center** in North Syracuse while facing molestation charges stemming from 2008 when he was director of student ministry at Calvary Assembly Church in Walkersville, **MD**.

Ross is scheduled to be tried in January in Maryland on 2 counts of sexually abusing a minor. He and his wife Brandi have been living with his father, senior pastor at Victory Christian Center. The church's Facebook page announced, "We are excited to announce that Shaun and Brandi Ross will be assuming leadership in our children's ministry. Bring your children this Sunday for Kidz Revolution! They will love it!" *Source: syracuse.com, 11-9-13*

A judge ruled that **James Schook**, 66, a terminally ill Catholic priest accused of abusing 2 boys at a Louisville, **KY**, church in the 1970s, is not too sick to stand trial March 31 on sodomy charges.

A doctor called by prosecutors testified Schook, who has skin cancer and other ailments, can "rationally participate in his defense." Schook came to court using a walker, but a witness testified she'd seen him recently without one at Panera Bread. *Source: AP, 11-7-13*

The **Minnesota** Supreme Court voted 4-1 to deny a new trial for **Christopher Wenthe**, 49, a Catholic priest convicted of 3rd-degree criminal conduct for having sex with a 21-year-old female parishioner he was counseling in St. Paul.

The decision reversed an appeals court ruling that held the conviction was "based on evidence that was excessively entangled in matters of religion" and thus violated the Constitution. *Source: MPR, 11-7-13*

Allegations

Board members at Davis Memorial Church of God in Christ in Grand Rapids, **MI**, have asked **Pastor Eric Slack**, 60, to resign due to alleged but unspecified financial irregularities. A police spokesman said a detailed forensic analysis is under way. *Source: WOOD TV, 12-4-13*

Alleged victims of sexual abuse held a press conference to condemn the Catholic **Diocese of Providence, RI**, for failing to properly investigate 831 allegations over the past 20 years.

Jeffrey Thomas of Massachusetts and Helen McGonigle, a lawyer from Connecticut, alleged they were raped as children by **Brendan Smyth**, an Irish priest who was at Our Lady of Mercy Church in East Greenwich from 1965-68. He died in prison in 1997 in Ireland. The victims want state and federal authorities to start an in-depth investigation. *Source: Providence Journal, 11-21-13*

The Catholic Diocese of Marquette, **MI**, announced sexual abuse allegations have been made against **Bernard Van de Schueren**, a Jesuit priest who died in 2009. Allegations stem from an incident with a boy that reportedly took place in 1989 at St. Michael Parish in Marquette. *Source: Upper Michigan's Source, 11-15-13*

Three more people allege they were molested as children at homes operated in the 1960s by **Jewish Care Victoria** in Melbourne, **Australia**. Jewish Care has reported allegations to authorities, said its president, Mike Debinski.

The Australian Jewish News quoted Ana Loughman, who is leading an investigation into child sexual abuse in Sydney, saying, "We have information that people who may have been victimized may have entered into agreements for payment with other people not to disclose, report or come forward." *Source: Haaretz, 11-14-13*

Tribal authorities on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in **South Dakota** are investigating alleged sexual abuse of children by Clarence Vavra, a Catholic priest who retired in 2003 and lives a block from a school in New Prague, **MN**.

Supervisory special agent Grace Her Many Horses said authorities are trying to find several men who may have been molested as boys in the 1970s. Vavra admitted in a May 1995 psychological evaluation that he'd attempted to anally rape a South Dakota boy. The report was stored in the vicar general's filing cabinet at the chancery of the **Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis**.

Church officials never contacted police about admissions in the report. *Source: MPR, 11-12-13*

Authorities in Boulder County, **CO**, criticized but haven't charged 5 officials of **Vineland Church** in Longmont for covering up alleged sexual abuse of a teen girl by youth pastor **Jason Roberson**, 35.

Roberson faces 3 abuse counts and is on administrative leave. His father, Walter Roberson, is senior pastor. The church ignored a court order to turn over records of its internal investigation, said police Detective Brannon Winn in a report. Only after contempt charges were threatened did the church turn over documents, Winn said.

The alleged victim, now 24, worked for the church and told police her relationship with Roberson started when she was 15 and continued for 7 years. *Source: Christian Post, 11-10-13*

The Archdiocese of Baltimore said it's cooperating with a probe of **Michael Kolodziej**, a Franciscan friar who taught at Curley High school in **Baltimore** from 1975-79. Kolodziej, 69, who most recently served a Catholic parish in Jonesboro, **GA**, was suspended after a former student alleged he was molested while wrestling with him. *Source: AP, 11-7-13*

Gleb Grozovsky, 34, a Russian Orthodox priest and former rector of a **St. Petersburg** parish, is being sought on allegations he sexually assaulted 2 girls ages 9 and 12 who were attending a religious summer camp in June on the Greek island of Kos. *Source: AFP, 11-6-13*

Removed / Resigned

Ireneusz Chodakowski, pastor at St. Peter's Catholic Church in Kenosha, **WI**, was put on administrative leave and might not return to the congregation. A church deacon said that Chodakowski had exercised "a lack of good judgment."

Police confirmed they were investigating a case involving a priest who had been removed because of his use of Facebook. Chodakowski belongs to the Marians of the Immaculate Conception, an order based in Stonebridge, MA. *Source: Fox 6, 11-21-13*

Kevin Duggan, pastor of St. James the Less Catholic Church, Jamesburg, **NJ**, was put on leave due to an allegation of sexual assault of a developmentally disabled adult about 20 years ago in Woodbridge.

"Father Duggan adamantly denies these charges," said the Most Rev. Paul Bootkoski of the Diocese of Metuchen. Duggan has been in the Guest House rehabilitation facility in Rochester, MN, the past 4 months for treatment of alcoholism, Bootkoski said. *Source: Edison Sentinel, 11-11-13*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

Letterbox

Parsonage legal victory is great news

FFRF's victory in the parsonage exemption lawsuit is truly exciting. It's great to know that in this fundamentalist religious country of ours, there are still judges who have the honesty, understanding and courage to stand up for the First Amendment.

I'm so excited about this momentous decision that I feel compelled to make an additional donation to FFRF. I leave it up to you to decide whether your greater need is to have this allocated to the building fund or legal fund. (You can be sure that this case will be appealed and that you will have significant legal expenses going forward.)

Paul Newman
Indiana

•••

Heartiest congratulations on and thanks for your second victory in the IRS "parish exemption" suit. I realize that it's only the second step (the first one having been granting of standing) in what may be a very long process, but it is an extremely important achievement, and all secularists are indebted to FFRF.

Ken Crosby
Texas

•••

I've never been prouder to be an FFRF member. I just read about the victory declaring the parsonage exemption unconstitutional. I immediately posted it on Facebook and declared myself a proud FFRF member.

Thanks so much for what you do!

Jacqueline Bichsel
Illinois

Beware of 'history' as Barton tells it

I enjoyed reading Zack Kopplin's story [Nov13] about opposing the teaching of creationism in the public schools, but it also provoked some additional concerns. Kids who are being taught creationism as science are probably also being taught David Barton's fantasies as American history.

If this alternate "history" is taught to too many kids, we may be setting ourselves up for a future where the Christian nation believers gain enough support to attempt constitutional amendments.

Lee Helms
Michigan

October illustration needs explanation

I've been enjoying Edward Sorel's "Memorable Moments in Monotheism." His October 2013 illustration requires two historical qualifiers.

He uses the story that papal legate Arnaud Amaury authorized the mass slaughter of the population of the Cathar-held southern French city of Beziers on July 22, 1209, without trying to separate the loyal Catholic residents from the Cathar "heretics," declaring, "Kill them all, God will know his own."

First, scholars consider this story to be fiction. When the crusaders reached Beziers, the nobles, including Amaury, set up camp some distance away while the common soldiers began the siege works. Some of Beziers' defenders sortied out the main gate to try to disrupt

the siege preparations, but were defeated by the soldiers.

Soldiers pursuing the defenders back into the city were able to enter before the gates could be closed, and the massacre began. By the time the nobles and Amaury arrived, no one was waiting around for his approval of the butchery, which was well under way.

Second, the story might be a distortion of something far nastier. Contemporaries said the crusade leaders had adopted a policy of terrorism toward the Albigensian population. Historians agree that this would explain the extreme, unrestrained brutality of the crusaders toward any resistance.

Mass slaughter of women and children and, most notably, clergy, was not normally condoned then (not that it didn't occur at times). At Beziers, the nobles stopped the looting of the city (they were entitled to much of its wealth), but made no attempt to stop the killing, not even of priests in the churches. A deliberate policy of terrorism seems likely then.

William Sierichs Jr.
Louisiana

God on money is definitely sacrilege

I appreciated David Quintero's letter about In God We Trust on money, especially the Teddy Roosevelt quotation calling it "dangerously close to sacrilege." I contend that it *is* sacrilege. Christians claim in their bible that Jesus threw money changers out of the temple, but insist that approval of God should appear on our nation's money.

If that isn't sacrilege, to say nothing of a galloping contradiction, exactly what is it? Get out your Sharpies, people!

Kathleen Yagelo
Michigan

Catholic care hazardous to women's health

A Michigan Catholic hospital's willingness to let a young woman almost die rather than tell her the risks of continuing a dangerous pregnancy and sending her home is an outrageous example of allowing the Catholic Church to exert control over medical practices.

Since the Catholic Church insists on establishing and maintaining hospitals that serve the general public, they should be required to serve the best interests of the general public. For way too long, these hospitals have been able to hide behind the sectarian curtain of Catholic dogma in the rendering of medical services.

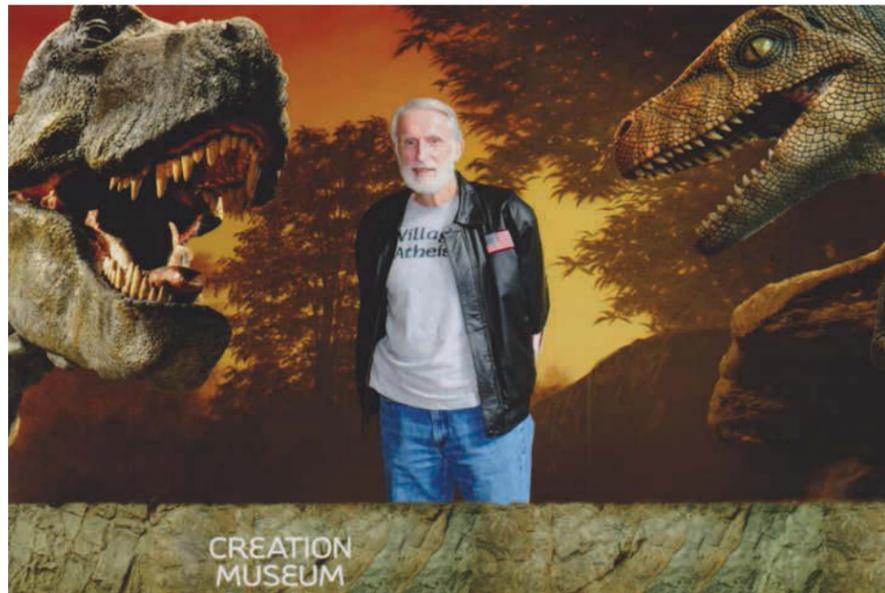
As to these bishops' layers of insulation from responsibility for this case, let us hope that they can be peeled away, just as they have been in child abuse cases!

Jim McCollum
Arkansas

Will supreme being repair our roads?

An Iowa member's letter answering an editorial promoting government prayer was published Nov. 22 in the Cedar Rapids Gazette (appropriately on the 50th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's death):

Why include prayer with any sort of government meeting? Will a supreme being fix our roads or provide tax re-



Ohio member Al Schneider wore his FFRF T-shirt to the Creation Museum on Veterans Day in Petersburg, Ky., where he got in free (saving \$30) as a 1981 Air Force retiree. An employee spent some time trying to convince Al of the literal truth of the bible. "He wasn't very convincing. Otherwise all I got was some puzzled glances. I'm planning on going back on Christmas Eve, when everyone gets in free, with a group from Freethought Dayton."

lief? The current case before the Supreme Court shows just how divisive this issue has become. People are free to pray whenever and wherever they want; let each individual decide when or if prayer is appropriate.

Even when communities invite a variety of speakers, it seems that the majority of invocations end up sectarian. If necessary, a moment of silence could be observed, so each person could follow their own conscience. Prayer and proselytizing should never be part of public meetings, especially considering the increasing diversity of our population.

Keep church and state separate, for the benefit of everyone.

Alan Remington
Iowa

Believers won't give me a straight answer

I have been an atheist most of my life; religion never made sense to me at all. When I was in high school, I would hear them pray at football games and wonder why God would intervene in a silly football game but not to stop the murder of an innocent child or any of the other bad stuff going on in this world.

If football is more important to him than a child's life, then he is not worth praying to, much less worshipping. That's when I started to be an atheist. It's so simple. I can't understand why they can't see that. I have talked to many religious people about this, and none of them can give me a straight answer.

Keep up the good work. We must do all we can to keep religion out of the government.

Charles Saxton
Arkansas

Donation is 'penance' for Christian emissions

Due to the demise of two very old cars, we have had to shop for a car for the first time in 10 years. Because we wanted to make an intelligent choice and with limited time and a financial need to wrangle the best deal, this process took over a month, and we had to wrap it up before the wrath of baby Jesus brought us a blizzard, ice storm or tornado.

We reluctantly chose to go with a professed "Christian" used car dealer-

ship.

We certainly didn't feel that we received good service from this dealership. They withheld information about the car that would have been apparent in their own supposed mini inspection that they bragged about, things that our own mechanic found for us. They still have not contacted us to thank us for our business, which I would think would be standard procedure. It was clear to us that they were glad to be done with us because we were too much work and demanded a fair price.

The Christian craft store chain Hobby Lobby and a Mennonite company called Conestoga Wood Specialties are in the news, with the Supreme Court agreeing to hear their challenges to the Affordable Care Act. We abhor the efforts of these and other companies to prevent their female employees from receiving contraceptive care. We wonder if there is such a thing as a "free-thinker's buying guide."

We are making a donation of 1% of our recent car purchase to your legal fund with hopes of offsetting our "Christian emissions" and assuaging our guilt. We hope we can inspire other FFRF members who find themselves in similar situations to do likewise.

Becky Hall and Bryan Fish
Minnesota

Quietly doing good for goodness' sake

You might find this article [on the real reasons for religious charitable giving] interesting. Julie and I give to the local food bank. We also support Doctors Without Borders and Burners Without Borders [a Burning Man charity] and make sandwiches for the homeless without any attachment to any organization. When they ask what organization we are from, we just say from Point Roberts, Wash.

Keep up the good work.
George and Julie Iddon
Washington

Billboards, being on board from Sacramento

We are all thrilled about our new chapter in Sacramento and the amazing billboard campaign. We're so grateful to all of you for honoring us with this huge effort. Thank you!

Janet Thaw, board member
California

Life Member: ‘Thanks for the memories’

I have truly enjoyed being a Life Member of your outstanding organization over these past many, many years. A great big thank-you goes to Annie Laurie and Dan for their numerous kindnesses over the years, for taking the time to read and print many of my essays and for simply being there. You are a great team.

For your remarkable contributions to reason and freethought, every thinking person in Hometown USA takes their hat off to you. Continued success in all your endeavors, projects and ventures.

Norman LeClair
Florida

Septuagenarians: Now’s the time to be ‘Lifer’

Enclosed is my \$1,000 check for my Lifetime Membership. Your organization is a breath of fresh air and I appreciate all that you do.

My acceptance of religion long ago changed to appreciation for what people can do. So I understand, at age 77, that some of my friends need to do good acts through their church. But really, the church is only a group of individuals, some good, some not so good.

I loved Philip Appleman’s poem “Thank You God” in the November issue.

Barbara Bond
Colorado

•••

Please find enclosed a check for \$1,000 for Lifetime Membership to help keep up the vital work fighting for church-state separation. It is vital to keep them separate, as the religious mindset leads inevitably to wars, poverty ignorance, etc. The history of the world shows that is so.

Even though I turned 72 on Dec. 11, I still work to support the good work that FFRF does and will continue as long as I live.

Raymond Borkowski
California

Rereading the bible sealed the deal

Enclosed is my donation of \$5,000 to your building fund. I’m a Canadian, an atheist and Lifetime Member of your fantastic organization. I was born into an Anglican family and was administered the Sacrament of Holy Baptism at the age of 3 months, before I could have any say in the matter. I believe I first became an atheist when I was being confirmed at about age 12.

I believe it was the Second Commandment that first aroused my suspicion that religion just could not be true. How could a good God punish children to the third and fourth generation for something their parents did? It meant I might just have to suffer for what my great-grandfather did. Even at age 12, it made absolutely no sense.

A few years ago at age 71, I decided I should reevaluate the whole subject to be certain of my decision since it would not be all that long until the moment of truth, the end of my life. At that time I read the bible from cover to cover. How anyone reading the bible can call it the “good book” is beyond my imagination. The Old Testament in particular depicts God as the most despicable, cruel, grotesque being I ever encountered in fiction or nonfiction. He participates and/or condones tor-

ture, murder, rape, slavery, theft, child abuse and animal cruelty. He regards women as property and of little value. Gays are to be murdered.

I also read books by Dan Barker, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Ruth Hurmence Green, John Loftus, Jason Long and many others. This research confirmed my decision to remain an atheist.

Since religion is such a worldwide fraud, I think my best way to help is through your organization. Thanks for all your courageous hard work.

Linden Bland
Alberta, Canada

Student thankful for essay honorable honor

Thank you for awarding my essay an honorable mention. It’s an honor to be recognized by an organization that does so much good for the much attacked group that is humanists.

Nathan Stevens
Texas

FFRF ‘most effective’ at getting job done

I’m grateful for all the organizations that protect freedom from and of religion. The ACLU, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Council for Secular Humanism and People for the American Way are all excellent. FFRF is the most recent group I joined (over 20 years ago).

You are the most recent, but you are the most effective at getting the job done for all of us. Here is my contribution to help continue what you are building.

Floyd LeBouton
Michigan

Watch out lawbreakers, we’re everywhere!

Enclosed is my check for the FFRF legal fund. I’d tell all who support the First Amendment that “FFRF Legal” (yes, it should be a show) is where you get bang for your buck.

I read the case updates in Freethought Today, and I especially love the excerpts from letters sent to hapless mayors and school superintendents, nailing down the pertinent law in crisp language (minus the snark I’d be guilty of.)

I love when they have no wiggle room and start howling. Best of all was the superintendent caught in a second round of violations who complained that FFRF must have moles in his building. You bet, we’re everywhere!

I’ve never been prouder to be an FFRF Lifer.

Dave Pitts
Ohio

Nonbelief study story seriously flawed

The October item “Where do you fall on the nonbelief scale?” is not a scale. It’s a set of conclusions drawn by a research group. It reads a lot like a kind of horoscope. I do not find myself in any of the categories, so they missed something, maybe a lot.

Under “seeker/agnostic,” people are described as always searching for the scientifically wondrous and experientially profound confirmation of life’s meaning. They recognize current



No debaptism needed

John Smail, proud FFRF Lifetime Member of Berkeley, Calif., became an equally proud grandfather Aug. 31 to Marie Antonia Shearing, who has the potential to become a fifth-generation freethinker. As a teen, her maternal great-great-grandfather, Oscar E. Lawrence, fled Sweden and the Lutheran Church to become a U.S. labor activist, progressive politician and avowed atheist. Oscar’s children and grandchildren were raised without religion, while Marie’s parents, Margaret and Jake (pictured), were married in a humanist ceremony.

scientific limitations and embrace scientific uncertainty. I wonder how all that would come out in words we can swallow one at a time?

Whatever limitations there are on science, they are current only because now is now, not some time past. They were current back then, too. To embrace scientific uncertainty is to embrace religion. That’s the way they like it.

This study of nonbelief might well be done better by another group.

Robert McCurdy
Pennsylvania

Did ‘friendly’ Jesus dream up hell?

A few years ago I had a job in a bank building as an operating engineer (operating boilers and chillers for comfort control). One Sunday afternoon, my relief came in and saw me reading Jerry Coyne’s book *Why Evolution Is True*. Somewhat derisively, he asked if I thought we came from “pond scum.”

He then blurted out something about the bible. I reminded him of the two most commonly known bible stories: God drowning everyone in the world except for eight people and killing all the firstborn of Egypt before the Exodus (for which there is no archaeological proof).

I also told him that there’s no mention of hell in the Old Testament, and that nice, “friendly” Jesus dreamed that one up. He blurted out, “How do you know about the bible?”

I know enough about it, I replied.
John F. Oman
Michigan

Speak up to stop government prayer

Prayer, so public, pervasive and accepted in American society, is a holy and wholly superstitious and purposeless ritual, an absurd diversion from whatever business may be at hand. Unfortunately, for many of us, at gatherings or functions, we hear those words, that ominous call, “Let us pray.”

Mostly we’re polite and respectful while others pretend, even if they truly believe to be communicating with or

appealing to some higher power. But silent and with heads bowed, while others pray, nonbelievers reflect on how marginalized and ridiculous we, who reject supernaturalism, deities and dogma, are made to feel in these circumstances.

Yet, without consideration or regard for our worldview from friends, neighbors and co-workers, we’re repeatedly coerced into public prayer. It’s imposed on us, intentionally and with a larger, objectionable purpose: encouraging and reinforcing Christian faith.

Mostly we tolerate and endure these impositions. We know all too well the negative social and employment consequences which anyone who openly objected to or publicly disrupted prayer would surely suffer. So, are we cowards? I hope and think not. Rather, consider and embrace that with each indignity we absorb, we become more resolute and determined — observing, assessing, planning and gaining strength. The we pick our battles, at the times and places of our choosing.

Even if at some point we successfully convince a majority of people that sectarian public prayer is unconstitutional and un-American, many Christians will not readily abandon the practice. They would “rather fight than switch.” We’ve already seen examples of how some prayer supporters react to challenges: by offering even more outrageous prayers and competing to see who can say “Amen” the loudest.

We should work in hopes of seeing the day when public prayer is widely considered to be politically incorrect. Public prayer advocates are many in number and are well-financed and firmly entrenched. They will not step aside without a fight. But if we are to effect change, battle and fight we must!

Until recently, for the most part, we have allowed prayer supporters to cow us into submission. Enough! We must stand up, speak out and be the change we seek in America.

Gary McIntyre
Kentucky

Faith is believing what you know ain’t so — Mark Twain

Meet a Michigan Member

Name: Eric C. Sanders.

Where I live: Macomb County, Mich.

Where and when I was born: Detroit, Jan. 19, 1950.



Education: Two semesters at Wayne State University; the full course at Electronic Computer Programming Institute, Detroit (1971); variety of trade courses from McCormack & Dodge and IBM, along with lots of on-the-job training.

Occupation: First I was a kitchen boy at a Girl Scout camp, then everything from short-order cook and pizza delivery boy to mainframe computer operations, to 20 years' mainframe computer programming to cabbage, and now retail service in a gun shop.

How I got where I am today: Luck. My bum knee got me out of the Army on a medical discharge after being drafted in spite of a doctor's note, but my discharge was a week too early to qualify for G.I. benefits. As a result, I never finished a degree and lost a house. While a student at computer school, though, I met a fellow who wound up recommending me for progressively better jobs in information technology.

Finally, my job was eliminated, and I was invited to go someplace where my lack of a degree would not be important. Then an acquaintance was fired from the job I now hold. That's only half of the story. I *know* no one up there likes me.

Where I'm headed: Short term? I'm going to find out whether my investment choices, along with Social Security and what earnings I can garner, will support me the rest of my life. Long term? Recycling, obviously.

Persons I admire: Anyone who can stay cool while his tectonic plate heads hellward — haven't known that many such people, certainly not admirable ones.

Not personally known? Writers Bob Heinlein and Louis L'Amour, Medal of Honor winners Audie Murphy and Rodger Young, cartoon creators R. Crumb and Michael Maltese, and singers Eddie Van Halen and Janis Ian. Plus the person who first thought up

writing and reading — greatest invention in history.

A quotation I like: There are a bunch. Ecclesiastes 9:11. 1 Corinthians 13:2. Matthew 25:40. Henry James on the three things important in human life (all end in "be kind").

"People said there was one law for the rich and one law for the poor, but it wasn't true. There was no law for those who made the law, and no law for the incorrigibly lawless. All the laws and rules were for those people stupid enough to think like Cockbill Street people." (Terry Pratchett)

And lastly, Abraham Maslow: "He that is good with a hammer tends to think everything is a nail."

These are a few of my favorite things: A companion who listens. Foley that means it [accurate sound effects]. Tenderloin (skillet fried). Meatloaf that's meatloaf. Snacks unconcerned with nutrition. Beautiful women who love to eat and drink. A book, or a movie, that is its own story. Any pistol with inverse rails. Folks who carry concealed, unconcerned with fashion. Manual transmissions. Air conditioning (thank Willis Carrier)!

These are not: Wal-Mart. Nutritious "snacks." Religious people who do not know God, let alone Her shoe size. Teachers who don't. Cooks more concerned with presentation than with comfort. Parents who shouldn't. Governments.

My doubts about religion started: My childhood researches into the art and science of shoplifting led to me being sentenced to read the Revised Standard Version from cover to cover. The content was my first real brush with formal English literature, but it did not persuade me that its writers knew anything that I didn't. It was just too inferior to really imaginative fiction, such as the works of Heinlein or Conan Doyle.

What I wished for as a child: Real proof that I was important to someone else — important for a reason unique to me.

Ways I promote freethought: Speaking and writing to anyone and everyone, always the truth as closely as I can discover it.

In Memoriam

Bly Allen, 1920–2013

Freethought Today is very sorry to report the death of longtime FFRF member Bly Marion Allen, 93, Altoona, Wis., on Nov. 1, 2013.

Born in Lindsborg, Kan., on July 12, 1920, Bly was one of nine children born to Eben and Dora (Herman) Johnson. She married Roy Allen in 1957. Roy was a widower with two young children, Michael, 8, and Peggy, 7. They were married 45 years.

Bly earned a B.A. in 1946 from Marymount College in Salina and an M.A. in 1950 from the University of Chicago. She was assistant dean of women and a counselor for 20 years at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. Her passion for education continued throughout her life. She was an avid reader, gardener and political activist and loved to write about her memories of growing up on a farm in a Swedish community. She was a member of the Unitarian Universalist congregation in Eau Claire. Her dream of control-

ling her manner and time of death was realized as she passed away peacefully under hospice care within days of leaving her independent living situation.

Bly will be dearly missed and is survived by her daughter, Sarah (Ted) Welter; stepson, Michael (Christine) Allen; son-in-law, Steve Arnold; three grandchildren, Kate (Dave) Ullman, Charles and John Welter; and two sisters, Wanda Block and Minnie Beck. She was preceded in death by husband, Roy Allen, and daughter, Margaret (Peggy) Allen.

Bly attended many Wisconsin-based FFRF conventions and was an occasional visitor at Freethought Hall over two decades. Anne and Annie Laurie Gaylor and FFRF staffers recall many lovely conversations with Bly, an ardent freethinker and supporter of state/church separation.

A Unitarian Universalist memorial service was held Nov. 10 in Eau Claire.

Eggnostics in spirit

This is by far the absolute best egg nog ever. It is guaranteed to turn your religiously-oriented friends into egg-theists, (or at least egg-nostics). The secret is the light, foamy texture combined with a decadently rich taste. You will never be satisfied with store-bought cartons again. Hope you like it! — Sugarboy (a big fan and admirer of FFRF)

World's Best Holiday Egg Nog

12 eggs
1 pt. whipping cream
1 lb. powdered sugar
1 qt. low fat milk
2 tbs. vanilla

Separate eggs. Whip whites until thick and foamy. (Whites will not whip if speck of yolk is present).

In separate bowl, whip yolks, adding 1 cup milk. Blend powdered sugar into yolk mixture. Add remaining milk.

In another bowl, mix cream and vanilla to whipped cream consistency.

Gently fold all ingredients into large bowl.

Enjoy straight or with brandy and nutmeg as desired.

Look with dread on the Book of Fred

(The following letter by FFRF member Marty Rush was printed Nov. 5 in The Mountain Mail in Salida, Colo. It's part of an ongoing debate between Marty and a local fundamentalist Christian.)

Dear Editor:

You have to admire Ide Trotter for his everlasting effort to convert me to Christianity. The effort is unnecessary, however, since I already believe in a higher power. I know it sounds crazy, but I have an omnipotent imaginary friend and he runs the universe.

His name is Fred.

Fred created everything that exists from nothing between 6,000 and 14 billion years ago. Which pretty much makes him omnipotent.

I say Fred is imaginary because no one really sees him but me.

Not that I see him in the normal way. No, Fred is more like — a presence. I can feel him sometimes, flowing through me. But even without seeing him face to face, I know Fred is real.

I talk to him. And he talks to me. In fact, we have regular conversations, Fred and I.

Fred tells me all kinds of things. How to judge right from wrong. What goals I should have in life. Even what to eat for breakfast sometimes. But it's more than that.

Fred has also revealed the secrets of the universe to me. How he created our world. And how it will end. (In a violent cataclysm, unfortunately.) Fred has a plan for humanity, you see.

My friends are concerned about my belief in Fred. Maybe it's the suddenness of it.

I just found Fred last week. Before that, life was truly bleak. Outwardly, I seemed OK, but inside, I was miserable. I didn't know why I was even

alive. And I was afraid of dying.

Fred has changed all that. Now my life has meaning. I understand how I fit into Fred's cosmic design. Plus, I get to talk with the guy who created it all. Pretty cool.

But people have doubts about me, and about Fred. They say Fred doesn't exist. They think I'm having some kind of hallucination.

I beg to differ. I'm confident in the truth of Fred's existence. I know Fred is real, and I can prove it.

It's in the Book of Fred.

The Book of Fred was written, a long time ago, by someone who apparently had the exact same omnipotent imaginary friend as me. The Book of Fred says that Fred created the universe. It lists Fred's rules for ethical living and recounts Fred's many miracles.

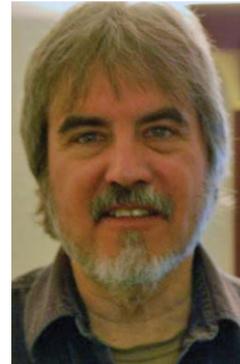
It's all there in black and white.

Sadly, my friends dispute the truth of the Book of Fred. But as it says in the book, "Anyone who disputes the truth of the Book of Fred is way stupid and eternally damned."

Of course, I've been adding to the book all the new stuff Fred is telling me, so I have the true updated word of Fred (if anyone's interested).

Personally, I'd hate to be caught unprepared when Fred finally gets fed up and destroys the world. He's going to do it, too.

But omnipotent imaginary friends are like that, as Ide could certainly tell you.



Marty Rush

What Is a Freethinker?

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



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker debated John Mark Reynolds, Houston Baptist University provost, Nov. 9 in Houston on “Does God Exist?” Dan also was musician of the day at Houston Oasis (a freethought group), where he spoke at a luncheon. From left are TC Smythe, Janey-Ali Rizvi, Dan Barker, Mike Aus (former pastor and Clergy Project member), Sara Sheppard, Lynae Vingle and Stephanie Rona. Sara was the fourth-place winner in FFRF’s 2013 high school essay contest.



Dan Barker spoke Dec. 5 to the Secular Alliance at William Paterson University in Wayne, N.J. From left, back are Erika Dragonetti, Andre Astete (vice president), William Stone (public relations), Rebecca Beighley (treasurer) and Stephanie Organ (secretary). President Joseph Snider is in front with Dan.



“The Battle of Church and State” was the title of Dan Barker’s Dec. 8 address to about 90 Red Bank Humanists in Red Bank, N.J. From left are Paul Auer, Tim Zebo, Carol Auer, Eric Seldner, Stephen Mitchell, Adam Green, Trudy Lagan, Irma Lester, Pat Barr and Ron Steelman. All are members of the board or programming committee. Ron and Eric founded RBH, and Stephen is current president.

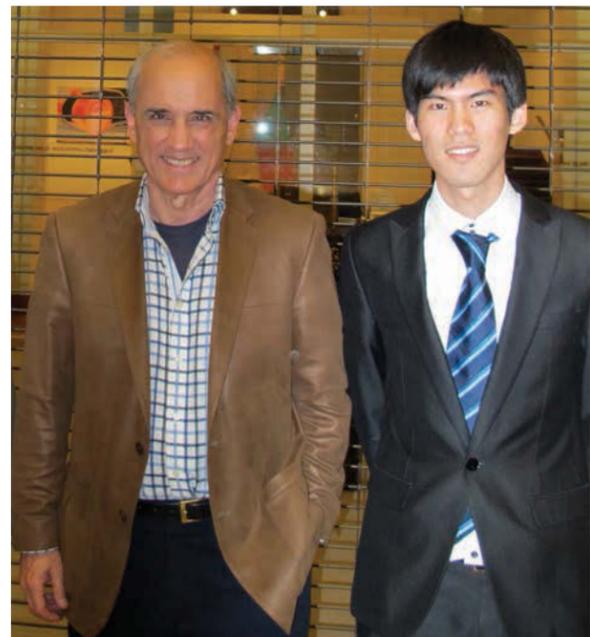


Dan Barker spoke Dec. 6 about state/church separation to the Secular Student Alliance at Brookdale Community College, Linville, N.J. Samantha Klaus (left) is club president. Behind Dan is Brian McNamara, anthropology professor and faculty adviser. Adam Green and Brian are to Dan’s left.

FFRF on the Road



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker debated Bryan O’Neal, theology department dean at Moody Bible Institute, Dec. 3 at Loyola University on whether God exists. It was sponsored by FFRF’s Metropolitan Chicago Chapter and the new Layola Secular Student Alliance. From left are SSA members Marta Kondratowicz, William Hendrickson, Andrew Kletzien (Loyola SSA president), Bryan O’Neal, moderator and Chicago Tribune columnist Eric Zorn, chapter president Tom Cara and Dan Barker. About 200 people attended. An exit poll showed about 61% identified as nontheist, 35% as theist and 4% undecided.



Dan Barker spoke Dec. 7 to the Princeton [N.J.] University Society of Humanists in McCormick Hall on “Can We Be Good Without God?” He’s pictured with Leo Kang.



Dan Barker spoke Nov. 16 in Mexico City at the annual conference of Ateos y Librepensadores Mexicanos Asociación Civil, which works on behalf of atheists and to maintain a secular government. From left are Ariel Albarrán, Liliana Bazet, Gino Bichicchi, Luis Mochán, Geovanni Avila, Gricha Raether, Gabriel Gómez, Rafael Tejada, Diana Sanchez, Humberto Diaz, Ana Luisa Carrasco, Mr. Mochan’s wife, Carlos Julio Pino, Gerardo Romero, Paulina Sanchez, Beto Cedillo, Armando Coronado, Veronica S. and Antonio Lemus. Gerardo is the group’s founder. Diana is the current president.

Appleton, Wis.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Spoke on “Women Without Superstition” Nov. 6 as part of Women’s Empowerment Week at Lawrence University, Appleton, Wis. She was invited by the Secular Student Alliance affiliate, working with the school’s Committee

on Diversity Affairs.

Women Without Superstition: No Gods—No Masters is also the title of an anthology edited by Gaylor of women freethinkers in the 19th and 20th centuries. The book is available at ffrf.org/shop.

FFRF welcomes 25 Lifers, 4 After-Lifers

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to announce 25 New Lifetime Members, 2 After-Lifers, and 2 "Post-After-Lifers," representing 15 states plus the District of Columbia.

Two anonymous New York After-Lifers became Post-After-Lifers with a \$10,000 donation.

Thank you and welcome to our newest Lifetime Members: Kamesh Aiyer, Bernard Barwick, Greg Bernstein, Lowell Blankfort, Barbara Bond, Howard Deutch, Stan Deutsch, Fred Dix, Jeffrey Harvey, Peggy Henderson, Robert Karsh, Karl Kuhn, Clorine Law, Tom Link, Sybille Redmond (gift from a kind member who prefers anonymity), Jonathan Reel, Jay Rosenstein, Donald Salter, Kenneth Schmidt and Marie C. Logue and Dr. Peter Lynn Vachuska.

Additionally, FFRF warmly thanks Dr. Harold Saferstein, himself a Lifetime Member, for gifting four new Lifetime Memberships: Rebecca Beltran, LuAnn Dahlman, Arizona state Rep. Juan Mendez and Linda Wendler.

Additionally, FFRF welcomes two After-Life Members: Lyle E. Black and

Robert Stachnik. A most generous New York couple who prefer not to be named doubled their previous After-Life Membership in December as well.

Along with the District of Columbia, states represented are Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, Texas and Wisconsin.

Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000 per individual designated as a membership or membership renewal, go into a rainy day reserve account and ensure never another renewal notice. After-Life Memberships, which are slightly tongue in cheek, are \$5,000 per individual and are a membership category for those who want their membership to live after them. All donations to FFRF, a 501(c)(3) educational charity, are deductible for income-tax purposes to the fullest extent of the law.

FFRF is very close to surpassing 20,000 members in North America and is grateful to all members of any category.



Atheist out of foxhole

Longtime Wisconsin FFRF member Ken Proulx, 89, holds his World War II dog tag, in which he has drilled a third hole — to remove the "C" identifying him against his will as "Catholic." Ken carries the corrected tag on his key chain.



Happy Birthday!

FFRF President Emerita Anne Gaylor, who turned 87 on Nov. 25, is pictured at her apartment in Madison, Wis., with her son Ian and daughter-in-law Nancy McClements, who created the luscious lemon cake with mascarpone-whipped cream frosting.

THEOCRACY ALERT!

GOD, PRAYER & GOVERNMENT
A DANGEROUS MIX



- ★ The framers didn't pray during the Constitutional Convention when they adopted our entirely godless and secular Constitution.
- ★ Government prayer excludes a fifth of U.S. citizens (and a third of young people) who are not religious. Source: Pew survey, Oct. 9, 2012

For more background, read FFRF's amicus brief against government prayer in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, the pending Supreme Court case on opening city meetings with Christian prayer: ffrf.org/amicus.pdf

Government should not take sides on matters of religion.

Ask for a free issue of our newspaper,

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Join today at 1-800-335-4021

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION foundation

FFRF.ORG/reason-must-prevail
FFRF is a 501(c)(3) educational charity

THEOCRACY ALERT!

★ **PUTTING THEOCRATS ABOVE THE LAW**
[Clergy tax breaks a "clerical error"? Hardly. The law grants churches a free ride.]

- ★ Religion receives \$71 billion in estimated annual government tax breaks. Source: University of Tampa study, USA Today, 6/16/12
- ★ The IRS halts investigations into illegal electioneering by tax-exempt churches, as evangelical coalitions lobby Congress to let ministers endorse from the pulpit. Source: ABP, Aug. 14, 2013
- ★ FFRF takes on IRS preferential treatment of churches in 3 active federal lawsuits, notably challenging • The parish exemption uniquely benefiting clergy – clergy pay less taxes, you pay more • Church exemption from filing Form 990 accountability forms required of secular tax-exempts, and • Suing the IRS to enforce its own rules against church politicking.

★ **Make a donation to FFRF's Legal Fund today: ffrf.org**

Support Freedom From Religion Foundation, the nation's largest association of free-thinkers (atheists, agnostics), working to protect freedom of conscience.

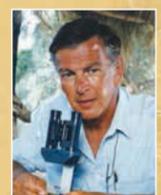
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FFRF is a 501(c)(3) educational charity

What do these scientists have in common?



They have rejected the supernatural.*
They have worked to improve *this* world.

* 93% of elite scientists reject belief in a personal god or human immortality. (*Nature*, Vol. 394, No. 669, 1998)
For details on these and other famous freethinkers, visit ffrf.org/news/day.

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the nation's largest association of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics) working since 1978 to keep state and church separate. Phone for a sample of our newspaper, *Freethought Today*. Help reason prevail.

1-800-335-4021

FFRF.ORG

FFRF is a 501(c)(3) organization that educates, broadcasts, publishes and litigates to defend the First Amendment.

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I would like to join. (Dues & donations are tax-deductible. Membership includes 10 issues of *Freethought Today* newspaper.)

I would like to give a tax-deductible gift to the Freedom From Religion Foundation's Legal Fund.

Annual Dues: Individual: \$40 Household: \$50 Sustaining: \$100 Life Member: \$1,000 "After Life": \$5,000

Name _____ Phone/Email _____

Address/City/State/Zip _____ Make check payable to "FFRF" (U.S. \$ only). Or join online at ffrf.org/donate. FFRF protects membership confidentiality and does not divulge, rent, sell, or give away its mailing list.

These ads all ran in *Scientific American*.