

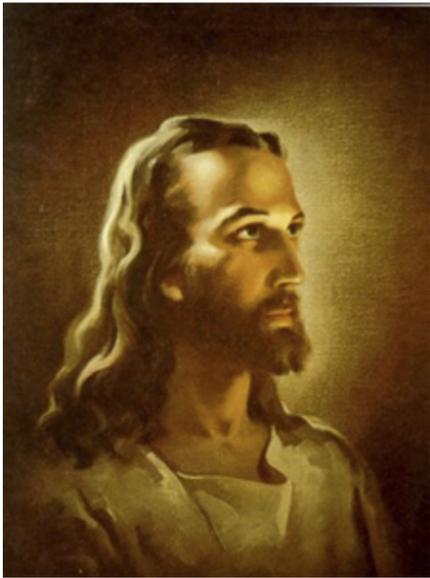
Freethought Today

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March 2013



“Head of Christ”

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio filed a federal lawsuit Feb. 6 on behalf of local plaintiffs to remove a portrait of Jesus from Jackson Middle School in Jackson. The Ohio community of 6,300 residents boasts 41 churches.

Immediately after the suit was filed, threats were posted on social media, one suggesting the plaintiffs ought to

Plaintiffs threatened, protective order granted

FFRF, ACLU sue over Ohio Jesus portrait

be shot, another that they ought to be beheaded. This evidence was brought to the attention of U.S. District Judge Algenon L. Marbley, a Clinton appointee. The judge acted swiftly, granting a motion for pseudonyms and protective order on Feb. 12.

FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent an initial letter on behalf of a local complainant on Jan. 2 to Jackson City School District Superintendent Phil Howard. The superintendent stated publicly that “it would take a court order to remove the picture.” Howard has since been named a defendant, as are the Jackson City Board of Education and the school district.

The suit was filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio on behalf of a child who attends Jackson Middle School, and the parents of children who attend school in the district. The children already visit the school for the annual Christmas concert, and will eventually be enrolled at the middle school.

The portrait of Jesus Christ is prominently displayed high up on an entrance wall at the school, where it has been reportedly located since 1947.

Dan Barker, FFRF co-president and a former evangelical minister, is very familiar with the devotional painting, “The Head of Christ,” having encountered it in countless Christian churches. “It should not require a court order to persuade a public school district to remove a devotional painting of Jesus — identical to millions hanging in churches and Sunday school classrooms around the country — from the entrance of a middle school.”

The 6th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals (where the suit was filed) has previously ruled unconstitutional the display of this same painting in a Michigan public school.

A motion was filed with the legal complaint to maintain plaintiffs’ anonymity, along with a protective motion barring disclosure of their personal information so that they aren’t subject

to potential adverse consequences, including harassment and personal threats. To read the memorandum for protective order chronicling some of the alarming history of harassment of Establishment Clause plaintiffs, turn to the center spread on pages 12-13.

Displaying the portrait violates the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause, the 14th Amendment and Article I, Section 7 of the Ohio Constitution, the suit alleges. The defendants’ actions “have no legitimate secular purpose, and are motivated by a desire to advance a religious purpose.”

Plaintiffs seek removal of the portrait and a permanent injunction barring “any substantially similar display.”

FFRF’s Markert and ACLU of Ohio attorneys James L. Hardiman, Jennifer Martinez Atzberger and Michael Honohan are representing the plaintiffs.

Read legal complaint and documents at: ffrf.org/legal/challenges/ongoing-lawsuits

City of Onalaska, Wis., hasn’t got a prayer!

A proposal to start common council meetings in Onalaska, Wis., with prayer got what the La Crosse Tribune dubbed “a chilly reception,” when council member Jack Pogreba’s pious

suggestion was voted down 4-2 on Feb. 12.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a strong letter of objection Jan. 12 on behalf of local complainants.

Seven people spoke against prayer and five spoke in favor. Pogreba made a motion after the vote to put the prayer matter before voters with a referendum. The motion was ruled out of

order because it wasn’t on the agenda.

Thanks to FFRF member Hank Zumach, members of the La Crosse Area Freethought Society and others who spoke against government prayer.

Inside This Issue



Katherine Stewart on ‘The Good News Club’

Page 10

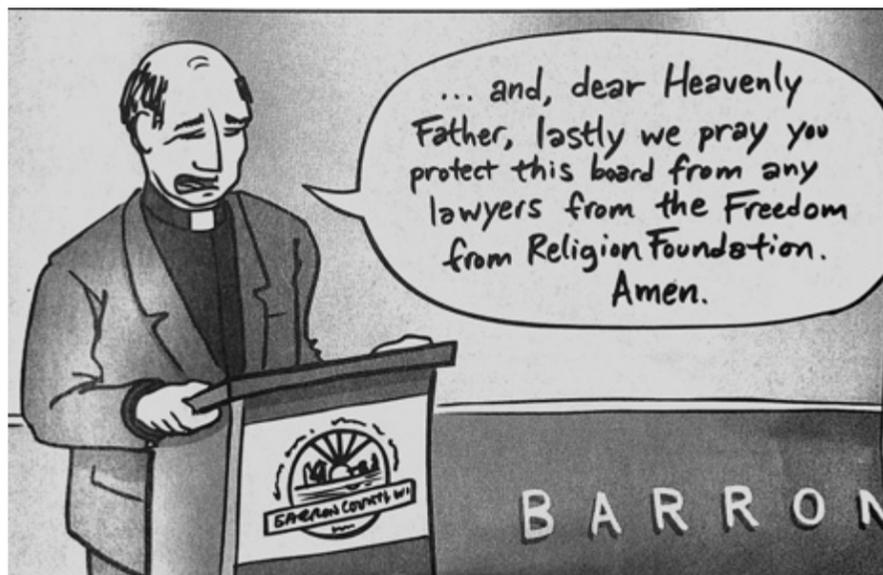
Alarming history of violence against freethinkers

Pages 12–13



Zack Kopplin — Richard & Beverly Hemsén Student Activist Award Honoree

Page 24



We rest our case

The Barron County Board in Barron, Wis., voted unanimously Jan. 21 to return an opening prayer to the regular meeting agenda. Last year, after getting an FFRF complaint letter, the board moved the prayer to before the start of meetings. This cartoon (reprinted with permission) is from a Rice Lake newspaper, in which FFRF is called “a fringe group.” Peter Wilson, Turtle Lake, told the board that audible prayer has been taken out of schools, “And today, our children are shooting each other.”

Nothing fails like church!

James T. Nickell, 23, Sandy Hook, Ky., given a choice of church or jail after being caught stealing guitars and amplifiers at First Baptist Church of Sandy Hook in December, chose church.

WSAZ reported the plea bargain option of a year in jail or attending Sunday services for six weeks. The church option included wearing a sign that said, “I stole from this church” before and after services.

Nickell chose church and started his sentence Jan. 13, but on Jan. 31 he was booked into jail on a charge of theft of under \$500.

Kayla Lykins alleges he stole a tool from her relative’s house. “Yeah he did, and he really doesn’t need to be doing that stuff.”

Meet an Activist Member



Will Dvorak and Lifetime Member Carole Beaton take a break after riding their tandem to the top of Table Bluff in Humboldt County, Calif.

Name: Carole Beaton.

Where I live: Eureka, Calif., on the beautiful Redwood Coast. We have glorious scenery, boatloads of artists, great food and perfect weather — plus a very accepting and diverse community.

Where and when I was born: Spooner, Wis., in 1945, but I grew up in Phoenix.

Family: My only family is my wonderful life partner of almost 25 years, Will Dvorak. We met on a century bike ride (that's 100 miles), and have been riding together (and not just on the bike) ever since. Our "kids" are our 10 cats.

Education: B.A.'s in psychology and education and an M.A. in special education, plus about four more years of "continuing education." In spite of all this "education" I consider myself self-educated. I learned to think sitting in catechism class when I was a child trying to figure out what all the nonsense was about, and I have educated myself by reading everything I could get my hands on all my life. With modern technology, I can even "read" audio books while walking and driving.

Occupation: I quit my paying job to pay to work (really). I was a teacher for 36 years in the public school system. I have taught regular primary students, juvenile delinquents (in Los Angeles) for 13 years and retired after 17 years as a resource specialist teacher in Eureka.

Now I "pay" to work as co-founder and co-director of an animal welfare nonprofit. We assist in spay/neuter surgeries, and I started and coordinate the "Animeals" program for our local senior center. Every week, seniors who

get home-delivered meals also get pet food delivered. I get much of the food donated, and I deliver about half of it myself. Gas and pet food is expensive, not to mention all the other expensive animal situations where I end up with the bill.

How I got where I am today: Here I am in a nice (paid for) house with a great man, 10 cats and a meaningful avocation. How did I manage this? Lots of hard work and lots of luck. No god required.

Where I'm headed: At age 67, I expect I'll end up decomposing within the next decade or two. In the meantime, I plan to keep active by walking at least five miles several days a week, riding our tandem at least 100 miles a week, and especially continuing my animal welfare work. Will and I plan to be buried "naturally" in the same plot to decompose together and eventually return to the universe.

Person in history I admire: Paul Robeson (1898-1976). If you haven't heard of or know much about him, find out. His son, Paul Jr., wrote two excellent books about this black genius who was destroyed by the government because of his "socialism" and because he loved Russia and sent his son to school there to be treated like anyone else. In Russia, race was not an issue.

Paul Robeson was one of the most famous men in the world in the '30s, '40s and '50s. Most Americans now have never heard of him.

A quotation I like: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully." (Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*)

These are a few of my favorite things: Riding our tandem around beautiful Humboldt County, walking in our cool, clean air, reading books and listening to audiobooks, watching educational documentaries on the couch with Will and our cats each evening. Helping low-income people with their beloved pets adds real meaning to my life and is probably my most important favorite thing. It helps pets and people and the whole community.

Pet peeves: Standardized testing (I was lucky to work when I could still teach my students to think), religion infiltrating government on all levels, wars and incompetent journalists.

My doubts about religion started: When I started Catholic school in



Carole Beaton

third grade because my not-too-religious parents wanted me to get a good education. Their money was wasted because I spent all day doing long division and writing my spelling words 100 times a day, etc., but the 45 minutes of catechism really did "educate" me. I'm a born skeptic, so nothing they taught in religion class made any sense to me. It scared me and gave me nightmares because I didn't believe all the stuff these smart adults believed.

As a child, I started to learn all I could about sociology and anthropology and was surprised to find out there were many different ways to live. Margaret Mead's books and James Michener's *Hawaii* finished the job. I

have been openly nonreligious since I was about 16. (It was fine with my parents because they just went to church for social reasons and really regretted putting me through the ordeal.)

Why I'm a freethinker: I can't take any credit. I was born thinking for myself. I have always defied society's norms for women of my generation. I am child-free by choice, got an education, worked for 36 years. I've never let a man pay for my dinner. My company is not for sale.

I have to give the Catholic Church some credit, however. Their absurd dogma was what really got me thinking and made me the good atheist that I am.

Ways I promote freethought: I try to be gentle and funny. When people thank me for spaying their cat and say, "God bless you!" I may say, "Thanks for the nice thought, but I don't think God will be blessing an atheist!" When someone says, "Thank God for the bag of dog food!" I may say, "Thank Petco, they donated the food!"

When I'm in a situation where I'm doing good work and someone praises me, I may say, "Yup, you don't need a god to be good!" I never argue with anyone and always try to smile. (I do stick FFRF noncontracts on the windshields of cars sporting too many religious bumper stickers.)

Beaton adds lawsuit to activism

By Carole Beaton

I met local attorney Peter Martin at a First Amendment meeting during "Occupy," when he mentioned that he was concerned about the prayers before our city council in Eureka, Calif. He said he would work on the issue but needed a plaintiff. Of course, I volunteered and promptly forgot all about it.

Peter filed the complaint/lawsuit on Jan. 25. The lawsuit simply asks the council to stop having an invocation, sectarian or not, before meetings, and for Mayor Frank Jager to stop holding "Mayor's Prayer Breakfasts." He held one last year and had another scheduled for Feb. 7.

The second prayer breakfast was held, although this year (likely spurred by the lawsuit), a rental fee of \$700 was charged for use of the city-owned building. Last year, space was provided for free.

The issue made the front page of the local paper Jan. 31. The council did not make a decision on how to proceed at its Feb. 5 meeting. At this time, it looks like Mayor Jager wants

to contest the lawsuit, but the decision will be made by the council and the city manager. Fighting it will cost the city a lot, and I really hope they will just drop the invocation.

There has not been an invocation at the last few meetings, so just stopping prayer should not be a big step. Under a former mayor, and with threats from the ACLU, there were no invocations at council meetings for a couple of years. This just started under Mayor Jager and a new city attorney.

There have been many letters to the editor, some supporting the lawsuit and me personally (as I am well-known in our small town) and some from the "usual suspects" who write about the wonders of prayer. Most have been quite civil. I'm very proud of our community, as I have had not one nasty phone call, and my number is right there in the phone book.

[Editor's note: The Jan. 28 North Coast Journal quoted the mayor as saying, "Peter Martin, he's a good buddy of mine. We'll invite him to the prayer breakfast. And if he doesn't come, we'll pray for him."]

A Note to Members

Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and "Private Line." If it says March 2013 or earlier please renew! Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 sustaining; \$25-student) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in Jan/Feb and June/July. Send to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

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

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March 2013

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

Meet a Pragmatic Staffer

Name: Lisa Strand.

Where and when I was born: I was born and raised in Wisconsin, sometime before the Summer of Love, but not so much before as to have enjoyed it.

Education: I have a B.A. in political science from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.

Family: My husband and I have been married for nearly 17 years, and we have an 11-year-old daughter. Therefore, we also have two cats and a guinea pig, and we're lobbied regularly for a puppy.

My previous job responsibilities were: I've been in not-for-profit (association) management for about 25 years, including serving for 15 years as executive director of the Wisconsin Library Association. I've also served in volunteer leadership roles for several nonprofit organizations.

It was hard to leave WLA (librarians are more fun than you can imagine), but I was looking for a new challenge, and I'm so glad for the opportunity at FFRF.

What I do at FFRF: As the newest staff member, I'm still learning and developing my role as director of operations. In a nutshell, I'll be taking on a lot of the day-to-day management of the office so that Annie Laurie and Dan can be freed for more strategic duties that will further FFRF's mission.

What I like best about it here: The people! Annie Laurie and Dan and the entire staff here are just great — so knowledgeable and professional. I had the opportunity to meet one-on-one with each of my co-workers during my first two weeks here, and they made me feel so welcomed. They have continued to help me learn the ropes with great patience.

I spend a lot of time thinking about: The pragmatic, rather than the philosophical.

I spend no time thinking about: Eternal damnation.

My religious upbringing was: In a rural, Norwegian Lutheran church, complete with annual lutefisk suppers and basement church ladies.

My doubts about religion started: I



Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

New Director of Operations Lisa Strand brings a winning smile and many talents to FFRF.

was probably about 13 when I thought it seemed very unlikely that, say, rural Chinese would have the "benefit" of learning about Christ and why should they be punished with hell?

Things I like: Gardening, household projects, work, fun with my family, animals, knitting, reading, being outside.

Things I smite: I have many pet peeves, but I don't smite much.

FFRF sues florist in Rhode Island

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is suing a Rhode Island florist in Superior Court in Providence for refusing to deliver FFRF's order of a dozen red roses to Cranston teen Jessica Ahlquist after she won a court case in January 2012.

The complaint, filed Jan. 25, alleges that Marina Plowman, owner-operator of Twins Florist in Cranston, denied FFRF "full and equal access to public accommodations by refusing to fulfill a flower order on the basis of religion (nonbelief), in violation of Rhode Island General Laws."

FFRF filed a previous complaint in January 2012 with the state Commission for Human Rights. A preliminary investigating commissioner determined in October that "probable cause" existed to believe that Plowman

violated state law.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor asked for the following message to be delivered with the roses, "Congratulations, and hang in there. With admiration from FFRF."

At the time, the defendant told ABC 6 television reporter Alexandra Cowley, "It's my freedom of speech. I refuse orders when I want and I take orders when I want."

The parties could have engaged in more conciliation with the commission, but the defendant chose to move the matter to Superior Court.

The suit notes that FFRF feels responsible "to expose the perceived discrimination by notifying the media of the defendant's refusal, as well as the refusal of the other flower shops, in order to educate the public on matters related to nontheism and to defend the civil rights of nonbelievers."

FFRF filed a similar complaint with the commission about Flowers by Santilli's refusal to fulfill the order. Flowers by Santilli chose to pursue mediation through the commission. A hearing is set in March in that case.

Attorney Katherine Godin of Warwick is FFRF's local counsel in the lawsuit.



Photo: Katie Daniel

Thoughtful freethought blooms

FFRF sends delighted thanks to Rhode Island FFRF'er Debbie Flitman for sending our winter-weary staff in Madison, Wis., a beautiful pot of spring bulbs, received gratefully on one of the snowiest days in February. Pictured is flower aficionado Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president, admiring Debbie's gift. FFRF's civil rights complaints continue over refusal by florists in Cranston, R.I., to deliver congratulatory roses from FFRF to teenage Establishment Clause activist/victor and atheist Jessica Alquist a year ago. Debbie ordered the delivery from Glimpse of Gaia in Putnam, Conn., which last year came to the rescue by accepting FFRF's order, and which did a brisk business when other freethinkers followed suit to send flowers to Jessica. At the time, Jessica was under police escort at her high school after winning a federal lawsuit to remove a prayer mural from the school. Jessica had also been labeled "an evil little thing" by her state legislator and received numerous threats of violence. The state Commission for Human Rights has found preliminary "probable cause" of civil rights violations. Debbie was inspired to send flowers after one florist decided to fight harder and moved the case to state court.

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Planning**

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

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

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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.

What Is a Freethinker?

free-think-er n.

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

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

My Sickening Things

(To the tune of "My Favorite Things")

Muslims kill Jews and the Jews murder Muslims,
Sunnis kill Shiites, then die by the dozens,
Christian explosions make Irish ears ring:
These are a few of my sickening things . . .

"On, Christian Soldiers!" defies "Allah Akbar!"
Pork rinds are banned from a Syrian snack bar.
Our sirens shrieking while their rockets zing:
These are a few of my sickening things . . .

Hindu kills Buddhist, and Buddhist kills Hindu,
Neither will reconcile, for it's a sin to.
Infidels tortured and sent to the grave:
Faith all that sickening's simply depraved . . .

When they're praying
And they're saying
That the heretics must die,
Then I remember I'm not one of them,
And I know I'm a lucky guy.

© Philip Appleman

Freethought Today is honored to publish this new poem.



Philip Appleman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible* (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/).



Overheard

Because the florist Marina Plowman no bouquet of roses wanted to deliver a 16-year-old atheist, she was now being sued by the Freedom from Religion Foundation. Twins Florist, a florist business and family business since 1951, in the small town in Cranston, Rhode Island wants people really just be fun.

Online translation of a German story about FFRF suing over a florist's refusal to deliver to Jessica Ahlquist
translate.google.com, 1-31-13

I was a Brownie in 1978 and wanted to become a Girl Scout. It was not to be. I had a hard time fitting in as a kid. My Sunday school teacher's eyes shot daggers at me when, after a lesson on the Virgin Mary, I asked, "Was Joseph a virgin, too?" I just didn't take to the religion thing. Alongside my bible, I read Bulfinch's *Mythology*, and I much preferred the Greek gods. They fell in love and had adventures and didn't seem to take themselves so seriously. There was laughter in heaven. Jesus was sort of OK — I liked some of his sermons. But the bible seemed filled with harsh desert people (mostly men) morbidly obsessed with death and suffering. What had they to do with me?

Lynn Stuart Parramore, "I was an atheist child, and the Girl Scouts didn't want me"
salon.com, 2-10-13

When I think of an army sporting a Christian cross, I think Crusades. Neither my country nor my army force me to swear allegiance to Odin, Jesus, Buddha or Horus. Freedom from religious oppression is pretty much the reason why the United States was founded.

Email from Afghanistan by Sgt. Joel Muhl nickel, objecting to a cross and steeple, which was ordered to be removed, at Forward Operating Base Orgun-E
NBC News, 1-24-13

CNN hasn't flagged this iReport as inappropriate, but some community members have. This is a divisive topic, however it does not violate our Community Guidelines, so we ask people to please stop flagging it.

Daphne Sashin, producer, on a column by Texan Deborah Mitchell headlined

"Why I Raise My Children Without God"
CNN, 1-14-13

As a Christian, I have no personal issues with a prayer being said at a public meeting. But we are elected to serve the public. We need to make the public meeting a comfortable environment for all those that wish to attend.

Councilman Jason Jones, Mount Holly, Pa., questioning Mayor Richard Dow's insertion of a Christian prayer into the meeting without consulting the council
phillyburbs.com, 1-30-13

They operate like the Mafia. They walk into a store and say it would be a shame if your window was broken or you lost your clientele. They might tell the father of a girl who wears a skirt that's too short and he's, say, a store owner, "If you ever want to sell a pair of shoes, speak to your daughter."

Rabbi Allan Nadler, director of Jewish studies at Drew University in Madison, N.J., on "modesty squads" operating in ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods
New York Times, 1-30-13

A few heavenly sources speculated the catalyst for the Divine Creator's most recent bout of existential anguish may have come earlier this month, when one of His routine tsunamis claimed the lives of 6,000 people in the Indonesian port city of Kupang, causing Him to question the meaning of existence in general.

God, quoted in "God Freaks Self Out By Lying Awake Contemplating Own Immortality"
The Onion, 1-31-13

I did not believe my participation to be an act of joint worship, but one of mercy and care to a community shocked and grieving an unspeakably horrific event. I apologize where I have caused offense by pushing Christian freedom too far, and I request you charitably receive my apology.

Pastor Rob Morris of Christ the King Lutheran Church, Newtown, Conn., who was asked to apologize by the president of the Missouri Synod for taking part in "joint worship with other religions"
Reuters, 2-6-13

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**

Honorable mention: high school essay contest

Absolved from confusion

By Abigail Dove

"I hope and suspect that you have not moved into unnecessary confusion," read my grandfather's letter in troubled script.

I am "blessed" in the statistical sense to have a father, who, despite being a church elder, will agree to read and discuss selections of Richard Dawkins' writing after only mild coercion, and a mother who volunteers as a Sunday School teacher only out of a profound desire to avoid interaction with the vociferous social conservatives who frequent the adult classes.

I suppose it is fitting that my grandfather's Presbyterian ministry embraces an idealistic simplification of God as the embodiment of love and not the terrifying entity that his denominational fellows theorize entertains himself by dangling sinners over a flaming abyss.

But despite my grandfather's remarkable open-mindedness, he was alarmed when my father inadvertently revealed that I, his supposedly pious granddaughter — whom he personally baptized with water he collected from the Jordan River — was not the staunch Christian he anticipated.

When his concerned letter arrived a few weeks later, my parents advised me to downplay the issue for convenience. Couldn't I, they pleaded, simply feign agreement? Easy for them to say.

The early emergence of my atheism could stunt my relationship with my grandfather. Here I was presented with the perfect gateway to honest, open dialogue. Besides, as a casual skim through the Old Testament will reveal, lying has adverse consequences.

So began our tense correspondence, an ongoing dialogue on belief. In a stream of lengthy letters, he expressed his confusion over why, in my WASP-y world free of creationism, ho-



mophobia, sexism and the other oft-targeted shortcomings of religion, I am so opposed to the church.

I desperately tried to articulate

that his beloved moderate institutions, though conceivably palatable, enforce the notion of religion as an indispensable component of society, thus shielding fundamentalist faiths from criticism and letting hordes of potentially great future scientists and thinkers receive a life of miseducation under the guise of respect for religious diversity.

He remained steadfast in his belief that Christian education spreads essential virtues. I found myself struggling to find a delicate way to express that my Sunday School experience enlightened me only to new techniques of eye-rolling.

I labored over each letter so as to completely address his questions while remaining both respectful of his life's

work. Amid piles of discarded drafts, I questioned whether it was my place to express even courteous disapproval over this wise, gentle man's philosophy. Awaiting his responses, I imagined him poring over my tortured writings, insulted and mired in disappointment.

At his funeral, I sat sobbing in a sea of Presbyterian ministers arguing over the mechanics of when, in the biblically unaddressed circumstance of a fatal coma, the soul leaves the body. "Are you the atheist?" demanded one of the many pastors there. "Your grandfather used to read parts of your letters at some of our meetings. It meant so much to him that one of his grandchildren took an interest in discussing the subject."

In a sense far different from the one my grandfather had in mind, he had absolved me of "unnecessary confusion." I now know with certainty that no decent individual will see ignominy in freethought or free dialogue.

Abigail Dove, 18, Collegeville, Pa., was valedictorian at Perkiomen Valley High School and is attending Swarthmore College to major in neuroscience and minor in cognitive science.

\$15,000 in top prizes offered

FFRF announces three 2013 student scholarship contests

FFRF is announcing topics, rules and deadlines for its 2013 high school, college and graduate/mature student essay scholarship competitions.

FFRF, an educational state-church watchdog that has more than 19,000 members nationwide, has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979. In 1994, FFRF added a separate contest for college-bound high school seniors. To include even more students, FFRF debuted its first "graduate students over age 25" competition in 2010.

This year the awards are \$2,000 for the first-place essay, \$1,000 for second place, \$750 for third place, \$500 for fourth place, \$400 for fifth place and \$300 for sixth place. Several \$200 "honorable mentions" are awarded at the judges' discretion.

Thousands of scholarship programs reward students for blind faith and orthodoxy, but few reward students for using reason! FFRF members are asked to help publicize FFRF's important outreach to the next generation by bringing the contests to the attention of their local high schools, colleges and universities. See ads in the back wrap or visit: ffrf.org/outreach/student-essay-contests/.

William J. Schulz High School Senior Essay Competition

This competition is newly endowed in memory of William J. Schulz, a member of FFRF who left a major bequest to FFRF. William was a farm boy in Edgar, Wis., who became a chemical engineer and built paper-producing mills around the world. He also had a degree in German, held several patents, brewed his own beer and was a recreational pilot. He died at 57 of a stroke.

Topic: Challenges of Being a Young Freethinker.

A freethinker is "one who forms his or her opinion about religion based on

reason, rather than faith, tradition or authority." Write from a personal perspective about the challenges you've faced as a nonbelieving teenager, in your family, your high school or community. Maybe you took flak for being an atheist, stood up for freethought or spoke out against the encroachments of religion in the classroom, at school events, in government, or in your family. Write about how you've dealt with such challenges.

Eligibility: North American high school senior who graduates in spring 2013, going on to college in fall 2013.

Word length: 500 to 700 words.

Deadline: Postmarked no later than June 1, 2013. Winners announced in August.

Submission rules: Essays must be both mailed and emailed. Email your essay no later than June 1 to highschool-essay@ffrf.org with subject heading "Essay [and Your Full Name]," e.g., Essay David Hume. Follow other requirements listed at the end of this article.

Michael Hakeem Memorial College Essay Competition

The late Michael Hakeem, a sociology professor, was an FFRF officer and active atheist known by generations of University of Wisconsin-Madison students for fine-tuning their reasoning abilities.

Topic: Why I Don't Believe in God.

Use a personal (first-person) approach about why you are a nonbeliever. Muster your best intellectual or philosophical arguments for rejecting religion, but frame it within your personal experiences.

Word length: 750 to 900 words.

Eligibility: Currently-enrolled undergraduate college student through age 24, including college seniors graduating in Spring or Summer 2013, attending a North American college or university.



Deadline: Postmarked no later than June 15, 2013. Winners announced by September.

Submission rules: Essays must be both mailed and emailed. Email your essay no later than June 15 to collegeessay@ffrf.org with subject heading "Essay [and Your Full Name]," e.g., Essay Elizabeth Stanton. Follow other requirements listed at the end of this article.

Brian Bolton Graduate/ "Older" Student Essay Competition

The competition is generously endowed by Brian Bolton, an FFRF Lifetime Member who is a retired psychologist, humanist minister and university professor emeritus at the University of Arkansas.



Topic: Why the USA Is Not a "Christian Nation."

Research and debunk the perennial "Christian nation" myth, citing specific, chronic or topical "Christian nation" claims. You may wish to use examples of the harm created by the widespread perception that the U.S. government is based on a deity, the bible, the Ten Commandments or Jesus, or by instances of religion in government.

Eligibility: Currently enrolled graduate student up to age 30, or undergrads ages 25-30, attending a North American college or university, including but not limited to someone graduating or earning a degree in spring or summer 2013.

Word Limit: 750 to 1,000 words.

Deadline: Postmarked no later than July 1, 2013. Winners announced in September.

Submission rules: Essays must be both mailed and emailed. Email your essay no later than July 1 to gradesay@ffrf.org with subject heading "Es-

say [and Your Full Name]," e.g., Essay Robert Ingersoll. Follow other requirements listed at the end of this article.

Rules applying to all competitions

Essays must be submitted both by mail by postmark deadline and email by the specified deadlines. No faxes accepted. All essays must be typed, double-spaced, standard margins and stapled. Must include word count.

Place your name and essay title on each page. Entrants choose their own title and include a one-paragraph biography on separate page at end of essay. Your bio should include name, age and birth date, hometown, university or college, year in school, major or intended major, degree being earned and interests.

High school students should include high school's name, city, state and date of graduation as well as intended college. Do not include a résumé. Provide both summer and fall 2013 addresses (campus and home), phone numbers and email addresses for notification. Winners may be asked to send verification of student enrollment.

Students will be disqualified if they do not follow instructions. FFRF monitors for plagiarism. *Do not write under or over word minimums and maximums.*

By entering, students agree to permit winning essays to be printed in full or in part in Freethought Today, FFRF's newspaper, and posted online at ffrf.org. Winners agree to promptly provide a photograph suitable for reproduction with their essay. Winners will receive a school-year subscription to Freethought Today. All eligible entrants will be offered a subscription to Freethought Today or a freethought book or product.

Mail essays by required deadline to:
FFRF

____ (fill in) Essay Competition
PO Box 750
Madison WI 53701

FFRF Legal Victories

College agrees coach's prayers unconstitutional

Coaches at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., have been instructed to stop proselytizing student athletes after getting a Nov. 8 complaint letter from FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott.

Football coach Jerry Moore, had been inviting preachers to give sermons and pray in Jesus' name at pregame dinners, which all football players attended. Moore also led a bible study class and encouraged players to attend.

Elliott wrote Chancellor Kenneth Peacock, asking him to "discontinue the practice of instituting team prayers, sermons and bible studies for ASU football players."

ASU's general counsel responded Feb. 6 that Moore's proselytizing has "no legitimate place in the University's athletic programs" and that a student could see the coach's "religious observances" as coercive.

"It is highly unlikely that a coach would look favorably upon a student athlete who walked out of a team meeting when a preacher, at the coach's invitation, began to deliver a sermon or a team prayer," the response letter said. "In these circumstances, it would not be unreasonable for a student athlete to consider the atmosphere created by such religious observances coercive."

Moore has left ASU for "unrelated" reasons, but the school's attorney said ASU has reminded all coaches that proselytizing is unacceptable.

FFRF ends Texas coach-led prayer

Religion was forced to take a knee in the Pottsboro [Texas] Independent School District after FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell's Feb. 6 letter of complaint that the football coach was leading players in pregame prayer. The football games of both the middle school and high school also featured a prayer addressing god and Jesus over the loudspeaker.

Cavell's letter to Superintendent Kevin Matthews outlined the constitutional violations.

Legal counsel responded the next day to say that the school had discussed its policy regarding staff-led prayer with all coaches and will discuss the issue with stadium personnel before the next football season starts.

School ditches religion for positive choices

Ohio's Wauseon High School will now have an inclusive spring assembly instead of a proselytizing Easter assembly.

Previous Easter assemblies encouraged students to accept Jesus as their Lord and savior and pressured them to sing Christian songs. A group of students protested the sermon-like assembly by walking out of last year's.

FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt sent Superintendent Marc Robinson a letter last May 7, asking him not to schedule religious assemblies in the future.

Robinson responded Feb. 7 that the district had asked the high school principal to change the nature, speakers and format of the assembly. He said the spring assembly will focus on posi-

tive student choices.

Religious music scratched from schools

Choir concerts at grade schools in Ocean Springs, Miss., no longer include Christian worship songs and are held at the school instead of a church. A concerned parent contacted FFRF after their child participated in a school concert held at a Baptist church, where six of 14 songs were religious.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote to Superintendent Bonita Coleman-Potter on Nov. 12. Schmitt found one of the songs, "Joshua Fit the Battle," particularly worrisome because it proudly recounts a battle in which Joshua is instructed by his god to commit genocide on the people of Jericho. Schmitt quoted Chapter 6 of Joshua where "they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword."

On Feb. 14, FFRF was informed the school's choir and band held a fall concert, which in previous years was called a Christmas concert, on Dec. 3. The concert was held in the school's auditorium and featured entirely secular music.

Georgia teacher warned about religious songs

A sixth-grade science teacher at Lakeview Middle School in Rossville, Ga., will no longer sing Christian songs during instructional time to students.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote a Feb. 1 complaint letter and a Feb. 11 follow-up letter to Catoosa County Public Schools Superintendent Denia Reese. He expressed concern that several co-workers reported the teacher's behavior to administration, but that she allegedly continued to impose her beliefs on students.

District legal counsel responded that the teacher admitted singing inappropriate songs to children. Administrators discussed the law with her and instructed her to stop proselytizing.

FFRF ends Indiana staffer's proselytizing

An elementary school principal in Ligonier, Ind., will no longer push his religious beliefs and judgments on other district employees through religious newsletters and prayers at staff lunches. A newsletter the principal sent to staff read: "People may be able to take away the symbols of Christmas, but they can never take away the meaning of Christmas; that a Savior was born to save the world."

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott called the principal's actions inappropriate in a Dec. 19 letter to West Noble Schools Superintendent Dennis VanDuyne.

VanDuyne responded Jan. 28 that the principal will apologize to his staff and stop promoting religion. VanDuyne added that district policy on separation of church and state will be reviewed by all principals at the next administrators' meeting.

Bible handouts ended at Georgia school

Bible distribution is out at S.L. Mason Elementary, a public school in Valdosta, Ga. The Gideons set up a table in the main hallway. When one girl and her friend refused to take a bible, other school children told them they were going to hell.

On behalf of a concerned parent, FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel contacted Valdosta City Schools Su-

perintendent William Cason in a Feb. 12 letter. "The public schools should protect the personal conscience of students, especially those students of a very young age who were given bibles at the elementary school."

FFRF was informed by the parent complainant that Cason personally contacted her to apologize. Cason said he would update school administrators to let them know the Gideons and other groups are not allowed to enter schools and distribute bibles.

FFRF Complaints



Upon this rock . . .

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott based a Feb. 15 letter of complaint to the attorney for Dawson County Schools in Gainesville, Ga. A parent complainant alerted FFRF to this boulder despoiled by a Latin cross. It's believed the constitutional violation has gone uncorrected for several years. It's located on school property near the high school athletic field. FFRF also had an ongoing issue with proposed bible classes for academic credit at a nearby church, although that appears to be resolved for now because the bible course was not accredited.

Shot across the bow

The screenshot shows the Facebook profile for the City of Slidell, Louisiana. The profile picture is the city's official seal, which includes a flower and the words "EFFORT", "EXCELLENCE", and "SLIDELL, LOUISIANA". The cover photo shows a group of people at an event. The page has 5,833 likes and 269 people talking about it. A post from "City of Slidell, Louisiana - Municipal News" is visible, dated Wednesday. Below it is a promotional post for the Mayor's Community Prayer Breakfast, stating that tickets are available for \$15 at www.slidellprayerbreakfast.eventbrite.com and can also be purchased at the Mayor's Office at City Hall, 2055... See More.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a letter Jan. 22 on behalf of a local complainant in Slidell, La., urging the city to discontinue using city resources and public funding to coordinate and promote Mayor Freddy Drennan's Community Prayer Breakfast. City Attorney Bryan Haggerty responded Jan. 28, admitting that city staffers were accepting payment for tickets at City Hall for the event. Haggerty brushed that off with a specious argument that since the two employees involved were "unclassified" and "not governed by set hours," their involvement was not illegal. FFRF is following up and has filed an open records request. The breakfast was held Jan. 31 at the Municipal Auditorium, with about 300 people attending. Afterward, Drennan announced he intends to make it an annual event.

FFRF 2012 convention Clergy Project panel discussion

Faith-free clergy struggle to escape pulpit

This discussion, edited for print, was part of FFRF's 35th national convention in October 2012 in Portland, Ore.



Dan Barker and "Brother Jerry"

DAN BARKER: Now we're going to be in church for a while. We've got ordained clergy — amen, brother! — on the panel, all of us taking advantage of the housing exclusion by the way, or we used to. We're going to talk about the Clergy Project.

When I was a minister, I used to preach "Give Christ a chance, give Jesus a chance, what do you have to lose?" How many of you have had people come up to you and say, "You know, if you would just try it, you would believe."

Well, on the stage are people who have given Christ more than a chance. They've given their entire lives to the propagation of the gospel. They were educated, they were ordained in the ministry, and they stood up and publicly proclaimed their faith in Jesus and the life-changing message in the gospel.

We have a good cross section from Pentecostal to more moderate to more liberal clergy. The Clergy Project, which Richard Dawkins alluded to briefly last night, is a brand new group that none of you can join.

Isn't that nice, a new group that you don't have to join, unless you are a former clergy or an active member of the clergy? The project exists to offer clergy who are in the ministry an escape strategy. They want some way to land on their feet.

When I was going through my transition, I wish there had been something like that. I wish I could have compared notes with somebody. I wish I could have sympathized or cried with somebody. I wish I could have said, "How did you do it? How did you get through it? How did you tell your family and all that?"

I was collecting stories of former clergy, many of them wrote articles for Freethought Today, and we sort of became a loose-knit club of friends. Daniel Dennett, the philosopher, and his researcher and investigator Linda LaScola, were working on a project on preachers who are not believers. They needed to find clergy who were still in the pulpit to interview.

Since my book *Godless* came out in 2008 and *Losing Faith in Faith* came out before, I hear from some of these people. Sometimes they email me with pseudonyms. "I'm still preaching in the pulpit, but I read your book and I agree with you and I need to get out." I was able to give Daniel Dennett some names.

For a number of years, Richard Dawkins had been talking about how we can help. In Copenhagen in 2010, he suggested starting a group that could offer scholarships to help get clergy out of the ministry. In March of

2011, the Clergy Project officially started with a very generous donation from the Richard Dawkins Foundation to set up the Web page (clergyproject.org/) that would be a private online forum where people's identities could stay private.

About a fourth of them are actively practicing, and three-fourths of us are out now. The Clergy Project started with about 50. We have some of the founding 50 here. Today there are about 380 members. We screen people very carefully to make sure they are the real thing. Adam in Tennessee for two years now has been itching to get out but can't find a way to. Adam is not his real name.

Today we are honored with five clergy. Ray, why don't you say hi? Ray is a former Lutheran.



Left to right: Ray Ideus, Dan Barker, annalise fonza, Jerry DeWitt, Teresa MacBain and Robert Parham, all former clergy who have "seen the light."

RAY IDEUS: I was one of the 52 that Dan sometimes calls the forefathers. I simply struggled my way through it and waited until retirement and haven't gone to church since. Thank goodness for that. For a while, I was waiting for Christ to come again and decided that wasn't going to happen anyway, so I married my wife, who has been a big help to me.

I can't recommend that to everybody because it doesn't work that way. That's why I was rather fortunate in being able to get out of the ministry.

DAN: Ray is involved with the Spokane Freethinkers and has done some state-church activism there as well. We invited four former clergy, all of whom have been guests on Freethought Radio.

annalise fonza was a pastor for six United Methodist churches. Teresa MacBain spent 20 years in the ministry in the South. Jerry Dewitt is the first Clergy Project graduate. He came into the project as an anonymous active Pentecostal preacher in Louisiana. I was Pentecostal, too, so we speak the same heavenly language. Robert Parham is from Tacoma. Robert is currently the project's acting treasurer and was a Southern Baptist minister for 13 years. Why don't we start with annalise?

annalise fonza

You're giving a handheld mike to an ex-preacher? I might break out in song or something! I joined the Clergy Project in June. I've been "out" of the church since 2000, openly as one who

Alice Walker said it's fatal to love a god who does not love you.
— annalise fonza

rejected the central tenets of Christianity for more than a decade, from the United Methodist Church.

Several months ago I posted a blog on Freethoughtblogs [Black Skeptics], which is hosted and edited by Sikivu Hutchinson, a black woman, activist, atheist, feminist, a wonderful woman. At that time, I had already been with

while there may not be as many, and there may be many reasons for that, that that [being black and atheist] be a part of the public discourse so that people don't believe that the discourse around atheism is simply coming from white males or white females, or what have you, that African Americans are contributing to the dialogue, [with] people as I mentioned, Sikivu Hutchinson, myself, Dr. Anthony Pinn at Rice, as well.

Groups are forming all over the country: Black Freethinkers of Chicago; I live in Atlanta [and] Black Non-believers of Atlanta is a group that I am active with; [and] Black Skeptics of L.A.. So black atheism is a movement in a movement, if you will.

I answered "a call" in 1992, I was a student, a law school student in Texas, that was my dream.

I was very excited about being in law school and it was my colleagues, my friends who were the ones who pointed to me and they said there is "a call" on your life, and I was like, "Yeah, God wants me to be an attorney. . . I don't know what you think, but this is what God wants me to be" [laughter], but then I shifted, I spent a lot of time praying and with a very large church in Houston, Texas, Windsor Village United Methodist Church.

Windsor Village had a downtown church that served primarily people who lived on the street and I was very active with them. As time went by, however, and as I got in to the ministry: I answered that call, I went to seminary, I [obtained] the M.Div., I [learned] biblical Hebrew and Greek, and all those things, and, I ended up teaching as well as pastoring.

I started teaching religion in a community college in Illinois, and I finally came to the realization, while I was in my second-to-last appointment, that I did not believe in the atonement theory. I did not believe that, number one, that there is a such thing as original sin, and that Jesus died for the sins of all. And so when I came to that realization, I began to mull that over, and that was about 2000. I took a leave of absence for one year intentionally and the second year by default because the conference folk didn't do the paperwork properly, and I stayed in contemplation for the next year.

At that time I was also moving into another phase of my education, getting a Ph.D., so when I went to the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, I came out of the leave, went back into local church ministry and in that year, while I was practicing, I realized again that that was not the place for me.

I notified my district superintendent, I wrote a letter to the bishop and it was a done deal. I submitted my credential for return, and they, on request, returned it to me stamped "This is to hereby certify that Annalise Fonza is permanently withdrawn from the United Methodist Church." And that was done in June of 2003 [applause].

Ever since then I've been on a journey of continuing to emancipate myself from any other ideology or thinking or behavior that is oppressive. I think Christianity is oppressive, I think the idea of God is oppressive as well as the doctrine of original sin which led

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Photo: Andy Ngo

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me to that point [to leave].

One other thing that was important to me while I was serving under appointment in Illinois was that I was active with a group that was meeting call A-B-C, [or] Alternative Bible Study, a gathering of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans folk, community people who were coming to the church for bible study, basically.

I started attending these bible studies, and primarily to just learn and to undo my own heterosexism. In the course of being there, I really learned to embrace not only same-sex couples, same-sex loving, bisexuality as a valid and legitimate form of self-expression, but then that helped me to embrace my own expression as a heterosexual woman.

So that really was a big thing in my development, this cross-talking of people with differences really helped me, so I just gradually made my way out, and here I am.

It has been a very difficult ride at times. It's not been easy, financially I have struggled since I have left the church, primarily with work. Also, since I'm so public with my nonbelief or disbelief. It is not hard, if I apply for a job, that people will Google me and see something come up [that I am atheist] and perhaps decide, oh this isn't the person we want, especially living in Atlanta, Georgia, if you know what that is like living the bible belt.

So it has been difficult. My family and I, we don't really talk about it a whole lot. It's not a conversation we have. I was born and raised Catholic, but I come from a family that would be considered very typically African American and religious.

My mother was actually a Franciscan nun, and before she decided to take her final vows, she said, "I don't want to do that." I try to remind her every now and then we are a lot alike, but then I say maybe not, not so much [laughter].

Another influence that helped me to move into a very open rejection of the idea of God and the concept of religion was Alice Walker. Alice Walker wrote a piece once called, "The Only Reason You Want To Go To Heaven is That You've Been Driven Out of Your Mind." [laughter]

Hopefully, you know who Alice Walker is; she is a phenomenal writer, but she is also very vocal against organized religion and Christianity in particular, again as a tool of oppression. She has had a huge influence on my life and I went online because I originally heard her talk about this on the radio, I once had my own radio program in Massachusetts, and she this, "It is fatal to love a god who does not love you."

That is so important. I meet lots of people who ask me questions. This decision has affected my life on so many levels, including dating, social interactions, you name it.

One story is that, you know, I have former colleagues who are preachers obviously, and one guy was really ambitious and he found me on Facebook and he requested that I be his friend, and so on and so forth, which we did.

But then day he posted something on his Facebook page and it said, "In times of crisis, Jesus is the first responder." And I couldn't help myself that day, so I wrote back in the comments and said, "Well, if that's the case, then Jesus sucks on the job, next!" [laughter]. The next thing he did was unfriend me within minutes, literally, within minutes.

I thank FFRF for making it possible for me to be here and share in what's happening here. This is a place and also an organization that many should think about joining, so I will definitely talk with the many that I know about coming and joining and being a part of this, so thank you very much.

Teresa MacBain



Photo: Andy Ngo

I've had opportunities to share what has happened to me in my journey, coming out months ago, six months ago [after about 10 years as a Methodist pastor]. In 10 years I'm going to come back and share how it's been for the last decade.

I grew up in Alabama, the daughter of a Baptist pastor. What do you think of when you think of a preacher's kid? They go wild. Not me. I was the good girl. I carried a bible around with me in elementary and middle school.

If I knew you didn't go to church, I was trying to witness you and trying to convert you. I was so far and so deep into it, that that was my entire life. I never questioned it up until about middle school, when I started seeing things that didn't really match up in the scriptures. I asked my dad, who said, "God's ways and thoughts are higher than our thoughts. You need to pray that you have stronger faith."

The message I took away at 12 years old was "doubt equals lack of faith equals sin." You want to know how someone can get trapped for decades — that's it, right there. We're all nasty, rotten, wretched sinners and we have to come to Jesus for salvation.

I felt from the time I was young that I was called to be in the ministry. I had one little problem. In the Baptist Church, what are women allowed to do? Nursery, cook, clean the tables, sing in the choir, play the piano.

Eventually, I came upon a woman going through the process of becoming a Methodist pastor. We became fast friends. I followed through with Methodist doctrine and was studying and reading and taking classes. I came across this quote attributed to John Wesley [documented as the work of a Lutheran theologian]: "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

That was the beginning of the end for me because what it meant was as long as I hold to the core teachings of the church, which is basically the Apostles' Creed, then I had the freedom to think and figure out all these things I had been ignoring in my mind for so many years.

Several years passed as I dealt with all those issues. One day I found myself on the Internet — not looking at what you think I was looking at — typing in a Google search "pastors who feel like

they've lost their faith." Wouldn't you know, Dan Barker's name came up.

I downloaded his book *Godless* and read it in record time. There was contact info at the end for FFRF, and within a very short amount of time, Dan contacted me back. I shared my story and he shared his story. I felt like I had died and gone to heaven [smiles] because there was somebody out there like me.

A little over a year ago, he told me about the Clergy Project and sent me all the information — he taught me the secret handshake, everything. I logged on with my fake name. I was active in the pulpit still. I found about 60 other people who were struggling like me.

The Clergy Project and my friends there have been and continue to be the absolute source of life for me. I came out six months ago during the American Atheists convention in Bethesda, Md., not knowing what atheists were like. I knew what the Clergy Project's folks were like, which was OK, because that was the kind of life that I understood.

I stood before them and started to share my story and was just overcome by the thought that for so many years I had hated people who were not believers. The only thing I could do in that moment was to apologize for those things I had said and the way I had lived my life.

I spoke for about 10 minutes as part of a clergy panel like this. Afterward, I was embraced by the atheist freethought community and it hasn't stopped. It's unbelievable how the freethought community has come to our aid.

None of us knew what was going to happen when we stood up and were honest with the world about what we didn't believe. But I can say for a fact that the response has been one of love, compassion and understanding. So I'll end with a huge thanks and all my love back to you for what you've given me.

Jerry DeWitt



Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

How many of you have already heard my story? I've got a couple of things I can do here in the next 10 minutes. I can tell the story once again. We can go that route, or with your permission, I can *preach* the story. There will be times when you will have to participate. Just know that for 25 years I said, "Can I get an amen?" What we'll do this afternoon is, I'll say, "Can I get a Darwin?" [DARWIN!] Now you know your part. When I want your opinion, I'll give it to you. Haven't you ever been to church?

Brothers and sisters, it's truly a privilege. From the very beginning at the earliest stage that I can remember, I was surrounded by religion, and not just any religion, mind you, but the religion that I am obviously enjoying at this moment, good old heartfelt, Southern-fried, barbecued all the way to the bone, Pentecostal religion. Can I get a Darwin? [DARWIN!]

One of my earliest memories was to lay my head on my grandmother's lap and hear her praying in other tongues for my earache. Some of the first words I heard were unintelligible. You may ask yourself how it is that a person can come this far, that maybe he once stood in a Pentecostal pulpit and preached what he believed to be the gospel, but now he's here, somehow celebrating the notion that the future one day may be free of religion. Can I get a Darwin? [DARWIN!]

For 25 years I traveled down that path. I wanted the creator of heaven and earth to move in my life and relieve in any way possible the sufferings I was experiencing, that I saw so many of my loved ones experiencing, because I love humanity and I love truth. Can I get another Darwin? [DARWIN!]

I wouldn't be here wasting your valuable time if I had found what I was looking for. I know just like many of you, I was told that without faith you would never have happiness. But what I found in the faith of my family was that there was no stopping point. You could never be content, because you could never be good enough. I'm here to tell you that I'm living proof that there is happiness after faith. Now that's when the ushers would know to make their move. There's still room in these pockets for you!

But I'm here to tell you that I've gotten more optimism now than I've ever had. It's because of conventions like this, and because of groups made up of old and young, black and white, every single aspect of the whole broad spectrum of humanity is now represented in a secular movement. Can I get a Darwin? [DARWIN!]

This is hope after faith, which is the name of my book, so I want you to remember that! The greatest damage that religion has done to humanity is teaching us that it's OK to be passive — that we can somehow clear our conscience and not truly be our brother's keeper by simply bowing a knee. It's taught us that there's something larger than us, that this whole ball of wax is completely out of control and there's nothing we can do about it except pray.

I come to you to say there is hope after faith. This hope has made me persevere through the worst year of my life. Last May I reached out and my own personal Jesus, Dan Barker, reached back. He told me every time I say that I owe him tithes.

By coming out publicly, I've lost friends, I've lost family — including my marriage — I've lost finances. I have a hearing next week about my bankruptcy case. I'll admit to you that with the help of friends, the Clergy Project, Dan Barker, and with the help of so many beautiful people like you, I've found strength I didn't know I possessed.

We're told in this country, in the 21st century, of all times, that without God you can't be good. What I've found is just the opposite. In hope, "e" stands for empathy. Religion gives you a different "e" — it gives you an ego. It makes you feel special and gives you an excuse to overlook the sufferings of so many other people because it's not *your* fault if you're more privileged than the next person.

I don't know if the [collection] plates are full, but what I will tell you, and it's what I say to you doubters hiding behind the pulpit: It's not easy, it may be worse than you can imagine, but I can assure you that if this little Southern-fried preacher from the backwaters of Louisiana can do it, then for everyone everywhere there is hope after faith.

Can I get a Darwin? [DARWIN!]

Robert Parham

I'm a former Southern Baptist minister. I grew up in Charlotte, N.C. It's been a series of really interesting coincidences over the last few years. Teresa and I grew up 30 minutes from each other and both went to Stanford University.

We have a member of the Clergy Project, and when I saw his profile, I noticed a few things that looked familiar, particularly the location. So I messaged him a welcome, and it turned out he was our pastor.

I feel very fortunate. I grew up a Southern Baptist. By the time I was 18, I was licensed by my church as a minister and was already serving in my first church as a senior in high school. In my senior year, a good friend and I started a prayer group that met in the auditorium every week. It's still going today, one of the many regrets from my past.

As an undergrad, I was president of the Baptist Student Union. It later became Baptist Campus Ministries. I continued to serve churches part time and full time for 13 years.

What changed for me was going to graduate school and being challenged by issues around diversity — comparing specifically what I learned in this process of graduate school to be true about people who were different, in particular about people who were gay. It flew in the face of everything I had believed and had been taught from the bible. Once I decided that the bible was clearly wrong on that one issue, I questioned what else was wrong.

That's how it all started. My process was a 10-year process, and for most of those years I lived in denial. Many Clergy Project members will tell you that there was a period of depression they went through. Letting go of something that is the foundation of your life is a very difficult thing to do. We have many members who have many stories that are just like Jerry's. That's why I'm a part of this.

I've heard so many heartbreaking stories as a screener the last year and a half. We want to be able to make a real, practical difference for them, for those active clergy who are struggling to get out or who have gotten out only to find there are many, many challenges that they didn't anticipate.

The Clergy Project wants to be able to do more. We want to be able to give scholarships for reeducation and vocational training programs. We want to be able to give hardship grants. As a member of the board, the acting board as we approach incorporation, I feel so honored to be here because this organization as well as the Richard Dawkins Foundation has very graciously agreed



Photo: Andy Ngo

to be a conduit for us.

It is through the Freedom From Religion Foundation that we have already received some donations that have been designated for the Clergy Project. We have a long way to go. I'm sitting here today feeling extra happy because we have wanted to go ahead and be able to help people if we could, and it's only because of FFRF that we can.

I am going to officially, on behalf of the Clergy Project and the Freedom From Religion Foundation, give the first hardship grant to Jerry DeWitt.

Because I made a smooth transition into a secular career, I truly am blessed. Sorry — old habits. I thank Dan, I thank Richard, I thank Daniel Dennett, I thank Linda and I thank you for making the Clergy Project a reality and for allowing me to be a part of it.

Dan Barker

Elizabeth Cornwall with the Dawkins Foundation has also been intimately involved with the project, along with Linda LaScola, the screeners and the board members, in slowly bringing the group up to where we can make a real difference.

I wanted to ask you all if you have an opinion about the percentage of clergy today who are sincere? I was sincere, but I know there were a bunch of phonies. Do any of you have any comments about what you think is the level of hypocrisy among ministers?

Teresa MacBain

I was very sincere. If you watch "American Idol," Randy always says, "In it to win it." That was me, not to win it but to win you.

But since I've come out, I've had so many pastors — male and female — ministers of music, missionaries, people who may or may not have gone into the Clergy Project send me messages.

I've also had children of ministers contact me and say, "I'm an agnostic,

help me. I'm an atheist, help me, I'm struggling." I've even had a handful of pastors' wives contact me, I think because I'm a woman, and say, "My husband is a pastor. He is so on fire and if he knew this, it would be over for us and I would be devastated. What do I do?"

I know that there are plenty. Does that make them hypocrits? I guess technically, based on the definition of the word, but they are struggling with it.

annalise fonza

Umm, I would say the word "sincere" is probably causing me a little hesitation, simply because in the African-American tradition, the idea of God, the church, what have you, is seen as intimately connected with the struggle and the progress of black people. So, I actually think a lot of the colleagues, former colleagues and friends that I have are actually believers. They would not begin to question or reject the idea, and as you know those who do are seen kind of as race traitors.

Particularly it is more difficult for black women when they have come out in this regard, because in terms of society black women are penalized more so when they, or women they've been penalized more so, when they reject faith, the idea of faith, the idea of God, differently because of the normative gender roles, identities that women have had to play in time and history.

So, I would say that many of the people that I know and went to seminary with are believers, I wouldn't say that there's a big percentage of people that are in and want to come out. Hence, I remember when I came in [to the Clergy Project] I asked Robert how many black women or black folk in general are part of it, and he was kind of like, "Umm, ah, eee," [laughter] it was like, "I'm not really sure."

But, that kind of was an indication to me that perhaps there are not that many and there is a reason for that, you know, class, race, gender, sexuality are all tied into one's social location and ability to either have faith or not. So it's really a complicated question for me to answer.

Dan Barker

Well, Robert wouldn't know because only one or two people know all the people. We don't ask skin color.

Adam has been administrator for the forum, doing all the grunt work, and it's been two years now. Adam, who's in Tennessee, can't leave because his wife is disabled and it's a preexisting condition. They need the health care; he can't just leave the ministry.

He's tried this and he's tried that and he can't. He actually told his son,

who was happy to hear it. He hasn't told his wife or daughter yet. He gets up and preaches on Sunday morning, then emails us, "You won't believe the crap I had to say this morning. And I wish I could find a way out."

Adam is just one example.

Ray

I was a Lutheran pastor for 30 years. In Spokane everybody knows I'm an atheist because of an interview on CNN and because I took the police department to court.

I really don't want to be preaching about the goodness of the church, but I think that the Lutheran Church has always been very honest about recent biblical research and criticism, and we were very open to talking about that in seminary and later. I was frequently accused of "psychologizing" the scriptures in sermons.

I don't know of one person who has come to me and said "I've lost my faith." They all know I'm an atheist and they pretty much leave me alone. Not always.

Jerry Dewitt

In the South, Southern Baptist churches are like Starbucks — there's one on every corner. I only have one person from my background who I know does not believe in God any longer. They were honest with me about that and with some other people, but remain in the ministry for their own reasons, philosophical reasons.

I think what happens for a lot of ministers is they start out in a more conservative denomination and as their thinking evolves, they just move to a less conservative denomination.

If I'm not mistaken, the best definition of a hypocrite is an actor, I think that's the root, that's where we derive our cultural connotation from. My answer would be every minister I've ever known is a sincere hypocrite.

He's sincere and is forcing himself to act in ways for the benefit of the congregation or because — here's the loophole — in the modern-day evangelical theology it really doesn't matter what you believe, what matters is what you proclaim — because faith is what adults call pretending.

You don't really have to believe. You just have to live it, you have to proclaim it. A minister can go to bed at night with great confusion and great concern and maybe feel somewhat hypocritical if he is introspective enough.

But at the same time, because of his love for the community and all of these other relationships, he may feel it's the better thing to keep pushing forward and to keep making those declarations. There's an underlying of "fake it until you make it." I think that's what creates the conflict of terminologies.



Photo: Andy Ngo



Photo: Andy Ngo

FFRF 2012 convention speech

Christians mount public school stealth attack

Katherine Stewart gave this speech at FFRF's 35th national convention in October in Portland, Ore. View her speech online at ffrf.org/outreach/convention and click on the 2012 convention recap.



Photo: Andy Ngo

By Katherine Stewart

I'm going to talk to you today about a range of initiatives, many of them under the radar, taken by the Religious Right to infiltrate and undermine our public schools. Although these religious programs aim at all age groups, a surprising number are directed at the youngest school children.

In my research I was surprised to see, over and over again, that one of the distinguishing features of these religious programs designed for public schools, and one of the reasons they don't attract the attention they should, is that they rely on deceit.

Simply put: Many of these so-called bible study clubs and other religious initiatives are not what they say they are. They have an agenda far more sweeping, and potentially threatening to public education, than they let on. The biggest factor driving this insertion of religion into public schools is judicial activism from the right.

I know these are bold claims. Some people will say they're alarmist. I have learned firsthand that they aren't.

Three years ago, when my family was living in Santa Barbara, Calif., I learned that an after-school group calling itself "The Good News Club" was coming to our daughter's public school.

The program describes itself as "bible study" from a "nondenominational" perspective. My first thought was that this just wasn't a big deal. The group required parental permission to join, so I figured let the kids whose parents want them to learn about the bible sign them up.

Let me make clear that I'm a strong supporter of free speech, and I am also comfortable with the idea of teaching the bible in public schools from a non-sectarian perspective, as literature, history or anthropology.

But then I started hearing stories from parents around town whose kids went to schools where Good News Clubs had recently been established. I began to realize that Good News Clubs are less concerned with studying the bible than with turning kids into faith-based bullies.

Let me tell you about Zoe, who was on the playground at recess when a 6-year-old classmate, whom I'll call Ashley, said to her, "You can't go to heaven because you don't believe in Jesus."

Zoe objected, saying, "That's not true." The children's teacher, overhearing the exchange, decided to use this as a teachable moment. Different religions, she told the class, have different perspectives on different issues.

Zoe was fine with this, but Ashley was devastated and burst into tears "How can that be? I know it must be true because I learned it in school, and they don't teach things in school that aren't true. How can they lie to us in school?"

That story gets to the heart of the trouble with the Good News Club. I don't have a problem with children expressing their faith at school, having religious discussions or even proselytizing. But I do have a problem with Ashley believing that her particular religious beliefs are coming from the school. That perception on Ashley's part was no accident.

'One way' to heaven

It soon became obvious to me that the main purpose of the Good News Club is to deceive children into believing that a particular religious creed is sanctioned by and has the support of their public school. The Good News Club wants kids to think that its mission is approved by the school and by the state.

Here's why I think that. When the Good News Club announced it was coming to our school, a number of concerned parents offered the group free and better space in this stunningly beautiful evangelical church located literally next door to the school. Club leaders declined, saying the school was where they wanted to be.

Good News Clubs at other schools make a point of showing up before the bell rings, trailing balloons and laying out spreads of candy and cupcakes in places where the children are sure to see them. They know very well that 5- and 6-year-olds can't make a distinction between what takes place in a school and what is sponsored by the school.

Another layer of deceit is their effort to present themselves as being broadly Christian by using nonthreatening labels like "nondenominational" or "interdenominational." In fact, most activists I met who work with the Child Evangelism Fellowship believe that most people who call themselves Christian really aren't, including most U.S. Episcopalians, United Methodists, Roman Catholics, liberal Congregationalists — the list goes on.

Of course, they categorically reject the legitimacy of all other faiths. Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and freethinkers of all stripes — all these are merely "the harvest" who need to be converted. In many cases, Good News Clubs aim to convert children, who come to the club with parental permission, away from the very same religion of their parents.

While they claim to offer bible study, they are less about study than proselytizing and indoctrination.

It was no accident that Ashley decided to proselytize on the playground. It was the main thing that her Good News Club, or what she thought was the school, taught her to do.

The real purpose of the club is not to teach the students who are enrolled from the beginning by their parents. Many, if not most of those children are already affiliated with churches that are ideologically aligned with the Good News Clubs.

Instead, the purpose of the Club is to pressure those kids to try to recruit their nonparticipating peers. At every Child Evangelism Fellowship training I attended, kids were told to tell their friends that there is only "one way" to get to heaven, and were often given points or prizes for recruiting their peers to the club.

Steeped in fundamentalism

Who's behind Good News Clubs? I decided to investigate and spent three years traveling across the U.S., attending clubs in different public schools and talking to their leadership. I participated in several club trainings, joined a mission project in Boston and attended the CEF's national convention in Talladega, Ala.

What did I find out? The group that sponsors the clubs, the Child Evangelism Fellowship, has a very specific and deeply fundamentalist agenda. They are represented at their national conventions by extremists who rail against the so-called "homosexual agenda," support creationism in public schools and condemn interfaith marriage, referred to as "interracial marriage."

I'm here to tell you that the impending arrival of a Good News Club at our school was not good news for our community at all. Neighbors argued bitterly. Some were attacked for their faith and ethnicity. A father from a country torn apart by religious wars wrote poignant letters to the principal, expressing his shock and dismay that the same kind of thing could be happening here in America.

Several families decided to pull their kids out of public schools and send them to private schools instead. Large numbers of parents, dismayed by the arrival of the club, told me they feared that if they expressed their feelings, their family businesses would suffer.

I was surprised to learn that there are over 3,200 Good News Clubs in public elementary schools around the U.S. Their presence in public schools has grown 728% in the last 10 years. Their numbers double about every three years. If they continue to grow at this rate, they'll reach their goal of placing a club in every public elementary school in America within just two decades.

I soon learned that religious initiatives in public schools are not just limited to the Good News Club. The issue is much broader and deeper.

A year and a half ago, my husband and I moved to New York City and enrolled our children in a public school across the street. One Sunday, just after the school year began, I looked out my kitchen window and saw a group of

The Good News Club wants kids to think that its mission is approved by the school and by the state.

people gathered in front of the schoolhouse door. They had a table, brochures, a tray of lollipops and a 4-foot-tall sign. It turned out that they were part of an evangelical ministry and that our school was their church.

Just pay the janitors

I decided to attend the service at the "church" at our school.

"Notice the names of the children on pieces of paper," the pastor advised his flock. I looked around and saw the posters my children's schoolmates had made. "Pray for them!" the pastor continued. "Pray that the families of this school will come to know Jesus and say, 'This is a House of God!'"

After the service, I chatted with the pastor and asked how much it cost to rent the school. "Oh no," he said. "We don't pay rent! New York is way too expensive! We just pay the custodians' fee."

I learned that the church was using the school not just on Sunday mornings and evenings, but also on some Wednesday and Friday nights, and that it paid a pittance for the privilege. They didn't pay for heat, electricity, air conditioning or wear and tear on the furniture. They had no lease and were paying no rent.

Ours was just one of 160 New York City schools that have doubled as rent-free houses of worship — the vast majority of them evangelical Christian churches — in their off-hours. Thanks to a 2001 Supreme Court decision, churches were now able to plant themselves in public schools across New York City, bypassing preexisting laws that barred partisan political groups as well as worship services from using public schools. I attended services at dozens of these "churches."

In public school classrooms, I learned about creationism and was taught that all children who do not believe in Jesus will go to hell. At a public school in Greenwich Village, I heard a congregant praise the anti-gay ministry that is affiliated with the church planted at that school. From my seat in a public school library, I was instructed to pray for the glorious day that America's systems of government, law, finance, media and education would be overtaken by Christian control.

All of this happened at taxpayer-funded public schools.

In many instances, the churches in question were not spontaneous expressions of faith created by members of the local community. They were part of national groups that realized they could use a state subsidy to open up a branch office. National and inter-

These groups are determined to turn America into a so-called Christian nation, and they have public schools in their sights.

national “church-planting” organizations, determined to save New York from its alleged Godlessness, rushed to establish taxpayer-subsidized houses of worship throughout New York City in each neighborhood’s best piece of real estate — the public schools, where the kids are! Your tax dollars at work.

‘Just’ speech?

What happened to separation of church and state? Why is this happening now? It’s the direct result of a 2001 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Good News Club v. Milford Central School*, in which the court appeared to suggest that keeping religious groups out of schools was a violation of their free speech.

The court held that religion is nothing more than speech from a certain point of view, and therefore all these religious activities are protected by the First Amendment.

Is religion nothing more than speech from a certain point of view? I don’t think so, and our founders didn’t think so either. That is why they inserted two clauses in the First Amendment, the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause, that treat religion as something distinct from speech.

Our tax code doesn’t treat religion as “just” speech either, which is why religions enjoy significant tax privileges. Our legal code doesn’t treat religion as nothing more than speech, which is why religions don’t have to adhere to the same antidiscrimination laws, for instance, that other for-profit and non-profit groups must abide by.

More to the point, religions are free to promote the kinds of doctrines — the idea that same-sex activity is an abomination, for instance — for which they are rightly excluded from government institutions. But in this case, the court overlooked all of that, and initiatives that force an inappropriate entanglement between church and school, such as Good News Clubs, are the direct result.

Subsequent federal rulings effectively forced the city to let churches in.



Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

Author Katherine Stewart poses with a young convention-goer.

In 2002, there was one church operating out of a public school in New York City. By 2011, the number had grown to over 100.

After a long legal battle culminating in a decision by the 2nd Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, the religious groups were told to vacate the schools. But this is only a local victory, and the issue is far from settled. Legal advocacy groups of the Religious Right have vowed to continue the fight to overturn the 2nd Circuit’s decision.

Evangelism by peers

In the course of researching my book, I discovered that church-planting and Good News Clubs were not the only religious initiatives in public schools.

I became aware that there are enormous resources being devoted to something called “peer evangelism” — getting kids to be more visibly religious on campus in order to create a sense of a religious or “in-group” and thus convert their peers.

To reiterate, I support the right of kids to talk about their religion with their friends at school. But many of the peer evangelism efforts I witnessed can’t be really defined as “student-led.”

For instance, last fall I participated in an annual prayer event that takes place on thousands of America’s public school campuses called “See You at the Pole.” It’s well-established that students are allowed to pray in school, and the legal understanding is that as long as they lead the prayers themselves it’s perfectly acceptable.

But it turns out that even though the prayers themselves were led by students, the event simply wouldn’t have been the spectacle that it was without adults.

Churches order materials including signs, booklets and T-shirts from See You at the Pole’s central offices near Fort Worth, Texas, allowing adults to organize the event on behalf of their youth groups. At the See You at the Pole I attended, pastors in the area produced a slick video telling kids to participate and put it on YouTube.

Many of those same pastors showed up and participated at the event. The vast majority of the kids who attended the See You at the Pole event on school grounds also attended a party afterward at a local megachurch. The church event was staffed by adults wearing “See You at the Pole” T-shirts.

The event was “student-led” in the same way that a pee-wee soccer league is. It may be the kids kicking the ball, but it wouldn’t happen without adults on the sidelines telling them what to do, cheering them on and funding and

promoting the whole event.

The idea that “it’s OK as long as the kids do it” is now so pervasive among those who view the public schools as missionary fields that leaders of religious advocacy groups are publishing books with titles like *Reclaim Your School: 10 Ways to Legally Evangelize Your School*. Their ideas include organizing on-campus “revival rallies” and turning oral reports into opportunities for kids to “witness” to their peers.

‘God-given loophole’

The Life Book Movement is a project of Gideons International, which attempts to distribute bibles onto public school campuses, with mixed success. But they’ve hit the jackpot with the peer evangelism exception. The Life Book Movement gets kids to distribute “Life Books,” or evangelical books written with teens in mind, to other kids in school.

Using kids to do what grownups are not allowed to do is “a God-given loophole,” in the words of a movement leader. It “brilliantly threads a separation of church and state loophole.” In just three years, the Life Book Movement claims to have distributed nearly 3 million of these books on public school campuses.

Student athletics also provides the Religious Right with opportunities for peer evangelism. I don’t have a problem if, at the high school level, Christian athletes or Jewish athletes or Muslim athletes want to get together after school, perform acts of worship and talk about their religion. The problem is that many of these groups make their prayers part of the normal school day, forcing all kids to take a stand.

The largest of these athletic programs is the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, which instructs children on how to pray before, during and after school sports activities. The FCA seeks to present an open face of tolerance, thereby drawing in Christians of all types, but its leadership and support are hardline evangelical. Over the past 20 years, the FCA has grown from having 100,000 students involved to reaching nearly 1.8 million children.

Fellowship of Christian Athletes claims to use athletic fields to develop “character.” Of course, membership in such clubs is technically optional.

But other evangelizing groups bring “character education” inside the school, and all children are required to participate.

There are hundreds of groups that use “character education” as a cover for religious proselytizing. Team Impact, Commandos! USA, the Power Team, Answering the Cries, Go to Tell Minis-

tries, the Todd Becker Foundation and the Strength Team are just a few of the faith-based groups that come into the public schools with programs on drug addiction, drunk driving and other important topics and aim to leave with a collection of young religious converts.

Judicial activism

What do all these initiatives have in common? They have strong backing and support from Christian legal advocacy groups like the Alliance Defending Freedom, Liberty Counsel, the American Center for Law and Justice and the Pacific Justice Institute. You may not have heard of them, but they have combined budgets of over \$100 million per year. These groups are determined to turn America into a so-called Christian nation, and they have public schools in their sights.

This brings me to one of my main points: judicial activism from the right. The pivotal moment was the 2001 Supreme Court decision *Good News Club v. Milford Central School*. In that decision, the court pushed free speech so far that the Establishment Clause, which prohibits government endorsement or funding of religion, has been eviscerated.

They’ve used the distinction between school-sponsored speech and student speech as a kind of loophole. The Supreme Court opened the doors to let programs like the Good News Club turn public schools into mission fields.

In conclusion, there isn’t much doubt that the separation of church and state is being undermined. These multiple initiatives are breaches of the spirit of constitutional law, if not the letter. But much more important than these individual breaches is the ongoing and largely successful project of undermining public education.

All of these religious initiatives in the schools, aggressively pursued, will chip away at the credibility and standing of the public school system. The work of the Good News Club and its friends creates precisely those ills against which the separation of church and state was intended to defend. That separation is not just a luxury of our system of government. It is the foundation of it.

Sometimes we deceive ourselves about the nature of the problems we face. We suppose for legal purposes that a school building is just a building, when it is not. We suppose that education is just another transaction, when it is much more than that.

We have grown so used to the idea that collective action is never more than an infringement on individual rights that we easily overlook one of the most successful collective efforts in our history: the public schools.

We may well find, in a future world, where the rich have their schools, the religious have theirs, the poor don’t get educated at all and everyone is schooled in contempt for those who are different, that we have kept all of our rights, yet lost everything but the pretense of democracy.

*Investigative journalist and author Katherine Stewart’s latest book is **The Good News Club: The Christian Right’s Stealth Assault on America’s Children**. She’s written for the Village Voice, Newsweek, Rolling Stone, Marie Claire, New York Times, Daily Beast, Bloomberg View, Religion Dispatches and The Guardian. She lives with her family in New York City.*



Photo: Andy Ngo

To nonbelievers and state/church plaintiffs

New suit documents ‘alarming history of violence, threats’

Below is an excerpted version of the memorandum in support of a motion to use pseudonyms and request a protective order for plaintiffs in *Doe v. Jackson City School District*, a federal lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio by FFRF and the ACLU of Ohio in early February. (Deleted are numerous legal citations. You can read the entire legal memorandum: ffrf.org/uploads/legal/Jackson-Jesus-Complaint.pdf. The judge granted the order.)

The memo references many FFRF members such as Richard Rohrer or activists who have received FFRF awards, as well as *Doe v. Porter*, an important victory won by FFRF in Dayton, Tenn. The decision barred religious instruction in public schools and was upheld by the Sixth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in 2004. It also cites the harassment of the McCollum family in winning their landmark lawsuit, upon which the other religion-in-school Supreme Court precedent rests. March 8 marks the 65th anniversary of the McCollum decision. Jim McCollum, on whose behalf his mother Vashti brought the case, is now a Lifetime Member.

Plaintiffs have filed this lawsuit using pseudonyms rather than their true identities. As alleged in the Complaint, the individual plaintiffs are citizens and residents living in or near Jackson County within the Jackson City School District (JCS). The suit is also brought on behalf of a minor plaintiff who is a student enrolled within JCS. Plaintiff Sam Doe 1 is the parent of a minor currently enrolled at Jackson Middle School. Plaintiff Sam Doe 2, is a minor and a student currently attending Jackson Middle School. Plaintiff Sam Doe 3 has children currently attending a public elementary school within JCS and Plaintiff Sam Doe 3's children expect to attend Jackson Middle School in the future. The Plaintiffs fear for their safety if their identities are disclosed.

Introduction

Jackson Middle School, a public school in Jackson, Ohio, has displayed a portrait of Jesus Christ in one of its hallways for some years. Plaintiffs bring suit to challenge the portrait of Jesus hanging at the middle school. Due to the highly personal and sensitive nature of the religious matters involved in this case and the potential for retribution against the Plaintiffs, Plaintiffs seek to proceed pseudonymously.

Argument

Generally, pleadings must disclose the identities of the litigants. While there is a presumption of open judicial proceedings pursuant to this rule, there are exceptions when the issues involved are of a sensitive and highly personal nature. Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(c) (1) allows a court to issue a protective order that allows Plaintiffs to proceed under pseudonyms and protects against the public disclosure of the Plaintiffs' personally identifiable information. Courts have granted such

protective orders when there is a concern that the privacy and safety of the Plaintiffs will be threatened if their names and identities are disclosed to the public.

The Sixth Circuit identified factors a court must weigh to “determine whether a plaintiff’s privacy interests substantially outweigh the presumption of open judicial proceedings.” *Doe v. Porter*, 370 F.3d 558, 560 (6th Cir. 2004) [Editor’s note: *Doe v. Porter* was a victorious lawsuit brought by FFRF]. These factors are:

“(1) whether the plaintiffs seeking anonymity are suing to challenge a governmental activity; (2) whether prosecution of the suit will compel the plaintiffs to disclose information ‘of the utmost intimacy’; (3) whether the litigation compels plaintiffs to disclose an intention to violate the law, thereby risking criminal prosecution; (4) whether the plaintiffs are children.”

In this case, the *Porter* factors weigh heavily in favor of pseudonymity and a protective order. The Plaintiffs are suing a governmental entity; they will be forced to reveal information of the “utmost intimacy;” and one of the Plaintiffs is a minor child. The other *Porter* consideration — whether litigation compels Plaintiffs to disclose an intention to violate the law — is not applicable in this case.

I. The Doe Plaintiffs Are Challenging a Governmental Activity

The Doe plaintiffs are suing Jackson City Schools. As averred in the Complaint, Jackson City Schools is a public school district in Jackson, Ohio. Since at least 1947, Jackson City Schools has posted a portrait of Jesus Christ, known as Head of Christ, in the Hall of Honor at Jackson Middle School. Plaintiffs are challenging the posting of religious iconography in a public school and are suing to remove this religious imagery from the walls of a public school.

II. The Doe Plaintiffs Will Be Forced to Reveal Information of the “Utmost Intimacy”

The Plaintiffs will be forced to reveal information of the “utmost intimacy,” in particular their religious beliefs, or lack thereof, and their views on separation of church and state. Courts have recognized that “religion is perhaps the quintessentially private matter.” The “preservation and transmission of religious beliefs and worship is a responsibility and a choice committed to the private sphere.” *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577, 589 (1992).

Even if the Plaintiffs would not have to “directly state their religious affiliations, or lack thereof,” Plaintiffs will nonetheless have to explain their injuries — a requisite element to prove standing — which will necessarily “require [them] to reveal [their] beliefs concerning the proper interaction between government and religion.” “The court recognizes that such concerns can implicate privacy matters similar to those associated with actual religious teachings and beliefs.”

In *Doe v. Porter*, a case in which the Plaintiffs sought to enjoin a public school district’s decision to allow re-

The threats were far from empty: The Bells’ home was burned down.

ligious instruction in its schools, the Sixth Circuit aptly noted the uniquely controversial aspect of religious issues involved and found that forcing the Plaintiffs to reveal their identities could “subject them to considerable harassment.”

The Plaintiffs in this case face a unique risk inherent in Establishment Clause cases, which typically involve highly charged matters relating to religion. “Lawsuits involving religion can implicate deeply held beliefs and provoke intense emotional responses.”

A. Establishment Clause Plaintiffs Routinely Face Harassment and Threats Including Physical Violence

Plaintiffs would like to draw to the Court’s attention the alarming history of violence and threats of violence against Establishment Clause plaintiffs. Vashti McCollum brought a suit in 1945 objecting to the practice of allowing public school students to attend religious classes held in public school classrooms. See *Illinois ex rel. McCollum v. Bd. of Educ.*, 333 U.S. 203 (1948). Ms. McCollum’s house was vandalized, she received hundreds of pieces of hate mail, and her sons were physically attacked.

In 1981, Joann Bell and Lucille McCord filed suit to block religious meetings and the distribution of Gideon Bibles in their children’s schools. See *Bell v. Little Axe Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 70*, 766 F.2d 1391 (10th Cir. 1985). The plaintiffs’ children were consequently branded as “devil worshipers.” “An upside-down cross was hung on thirteen-year-old Robert McCord’s locker,” and the Bells received threatening phone calls. “More than once a caller said he . . . was going to break in the house, tie up the children, rape their mother in front of them, and then ‘bring her to Jesus.’” The threats were far from empty: The Bells’ home was burned down.

In 1994, Lisa Herdahl brought an action challenging prayer practices in her children’s schools. See *Herdahl v. Pontotoc Cty. Sch. Dist.*, 887 F. Supp. 902 (N.D. Miss. 1995). As a result, her children were called “atheists and devil worshipers” by their classmates. Other children were threatened with beatings by their parents if they were caught talking to, or playing with, the Herdahl children. There were reports that a boycott would be organized against the convenience store where Lisa Herdahl worked. Herdahl gave up her job “because of threats against her children.” She received death threats and threats that her home would be firebombed.

The son of the plaintiff in *Chandler v. Siegelman*, 230 F.3d 1313 (11th Cir. 2000) (a challenge to prayer at school-related events), was “harassed at school almost daily.” And even though she



Photo: Brent Nicastro

FFRF Life Member Jim McCollum and his brothers were beaten up going to and from school during their family’s lawsuit.

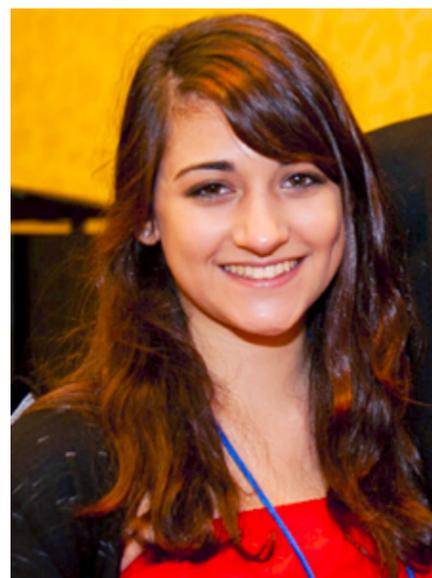


Photo: Jeff Yardis

Victorious state/church plaintiff Jessica Ahlquist, FFRF’s 2012 Freethinker of the Year, needed police protection at her high school.



FFRF Life Member Richard Rohrer got a calling card from the Ku Klux Klan for protesting 16 Jesus paintings in a public park. He was 1990 Freethinker of the Year.



The son of plaintiff Michael Chandler, a teacher and FFRF’s 1997 Freethinker of the Year, was harassed repeatedly.

was not a plaintiff but merely a vocal opponent of the school prayer policy challenged in *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290 (2000), Debbie Mason received threatening phone calls and was followed home by persons trying to scare her. Eventually, her hus-



Vashti McCollum's cat was killed, and her family was shunned by the community.



Supreme Court victor Ishmael Jaffree, who was FFRF's first Freethinker of the Year (1985). His children were ostracized, subjected to racial epithets and physically harassed in Mobile, Ala., after he challenged classroom prayer.



FFRF Life Member Ellery Schempp's family was deluged with hate calls and mail.



Joann Bell's Oklahoma home was burned to the ground after she sued over Baptist "Son Shine" services at her children's public school.

band and children became unable to find work in the town where they lived.

Tammy Kitzmiller, the lead plaintiff in a high-profile case challenging a Pennsylvania school district's promotion of intelligent design, received death threats, among other hate mail. "Judgment Day: Intelligent Design

on Trial" (PBS "NOVA" television broadcast Nov. 13, 2007); see generally, *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area Sch. Dist.*, 400 F. Supp. 2d 707, 721-22 (M.D. Pa. 2005). New Jersey high school student Matthew LaClair also received a death threat after he tape-recorded and publicly objected to his history teacher's frequent proselytizing of students. After speaking out, LaClair was quickly ostracized by his classmates.

In the case of *Wynne v. Town of Great Falls*, 376 F.3d 929 (4th Cir. 2004), the plaintiff suffered extreme harassment at the hands of her neighbors after she sued to enjoin a town council from opening its meetings with sectarian prayers. Individuals unhappy with the suit broke into the plaintiff's home and beheaded her pet parrot, leaving behind a note reading, "You're next." In addition, several of the plaintiff's pet cats were killed and her pet dog was beaten.

Tyler Deveny, the eighteen-year-old plaintiff in *Deveney v. Board of Education*, 231 F. Supp. 2d 483 (S.D.W. VA. 2002), endured a beating of his own after successfully challenging the invocation planned for his high school graduation ceremony. A group of eight teens evidently displeased with the outcome attacked Deveny in a public place, with one saying, "Oh, you hate God," before striking Deveny in the face.

Unlike Deveny, the Dobrich family — plaintiffs in *Dobrich v. Walls*, 380 F. Supp. 366 (D. Del. 2005) — did not suffer physical violence after challenging their public school district's practices of permitting teachers to proselytize and distribute bibles to non-Christian students and of rewarding students who attended school-sponsored bible clubs. But the harassment, anti-Semitic taunts, and veiled threats the family endured from fellow community members ultimately drove them to move to another county.

And in a case from the Seventh Circuit challenging the display of Christian paintings by the City in a public park, Judge Cudahy gave this description of events surrounding the substitution of a new, anonymous plaintiff for the original, named one:

The record indicates that the original plaintiff in this case, Richard Rohrer, was, in effect, ridden out of town on a rail for daring to complain about the City's conduct. The present plaintiff has concealed her identity to avoid suffering the same treatment. However much some citizens of Ottawa [Ill.] may disagree with the position that the Plaintiffs have taken, however much they may think the Plaintiffs annoying and overlitigious, the conduct of some of them has been deplorable. *Doe v. Small*, 964 F.2d 611, 626 (7th Cir. 1992) (Cudahy, J., concurring in the judgment).

Finally, just recently in a similar case over religious iconography in school, the publicly identified high school student plaintiff, Jessica Ahlquist, faced "bullying and threats at school, on her way home from school and online." *Ahlquist v. City of Cranston ex rel. Strom*, 840 F. Supp. 507, 516 (D.R.I. 2012). After filing the lawsuit, Ahlquist was "subject to frequent taunting and threats at school, as well as a virtual on-line hate campaign via Facebook." *Id.*

B. Plaintiffs in this Case Have a Reasonable Fear of Facing Harassment and Threats Including Physical Violence

"To proceed anonymously for fear of retaliation and harassment a 'plaintiff must demonstrate that . . . retaliation is not merely hypothetical but based in some real-world evidence; a simple fear

is insufficient." As discussed below, the Plaintiffs in this case have a reasonable fear of facing harassment, retaliation, and threats including physical violence based on commentaries made on the Internet, in news media accounts and on social media networks.

The issues involved in this case have already elicited a considerable amount of public outcry and will only elicit further community outrage directed at the Plaintiffs. Here, there has been a bombardment of Internet-based speech against those who oppose the continued hanging of the Head of Christ in Jackson Middle School. On Facebook and in online commentary to media accounts, individuals have expressed the desire to suppress minority viewpoints, and have alluded to a desire for those in disagreement to leave Jackson, Ohio, or have the students go to another middle school. The comments also show veiled threats of physical violence. Thus, it is reasonable that Plaintiffs fear social ostracism, harassment, intimidation and other threats including physical violence. The following demonstrates that this fear is not based on the hypothetical, but rather based on the comments made by real persons online.

Social media sites appear to be the hotbed of this threatening and harassing activity. In addition to comments on public Facebook pages, particularly news stations' fan pages, residents of Jackson have expressed their displeasure with the opposition on their own Facebook pages.

Comments posted on Facebook have demonstrated veiled threats of physical violence. For example, John Davis commented on Lacey Williams Sturgell's Facebook page, "Hunt down whoever complained and get them," to which Ms. Sturgell replied, "John Davis if they remove the picture I think it might get a little ugly in this small town & it will turn so quickly they won't have a chance 2 get away! I can't stand people like this!"

Another Facebook commenter, Steve Hayburn, commented, "Find out who complained about it and settle this out in the parking lot." Glen Smith commented, "But, alas, I believe in freedom of speech unconditionally unless it lessens or severs my Liberties and Freedoms . . . in which case I must invoke my 2nd Ammendment [sic] Rights upon you and your unjust endeavors."

Equally alarming are the attempts already to find the identities of the attorneys involved. Commenters have targeted the attorneys representing the Freedom From Religion Foundation, which first contacted Superintendent Howard about the constitutional concerns regarding the portrait in January 2013. FFRF attorneys are co-counsel in this matter. CARL_IN_OHIO suggested, "Why not post the home addresses of these lawyers in Wisconsin? Let's send THEM cards, phone calls, and emails."

Adding to the mob mentality, many commenters espoused a "you're either with us or against us" philosophy. On the Telegram News Facebook Page, J Matthew Thomas commented, "Support us. Or else." On her own page, Lacey Williams Sturgell commented, "If they do remove it, I would say its not gonna be so happy go lucky in this little town of ours bc so many ppl I know disagree with removal."

Others suggested those opposing the portrait were Satan worshippers or the "Anti-Christ." Posting in response to an article on www.theblaze.com, Cyber Geezer commented, "It's about time

someone stood up and told these anti-Christ nut cases to take a flying leap off a tall building! This is such a fine upstanding group to be challenging what we do. They are all so proud of their beliefs that they keep a low profile so that no one in their own communities even know they are one of the Anti-Christ and self-glorifying atheists!"

Another woman posted "What a shame, This group That wants It taken Down Is Of Satan."

Many commenters suggested those opposing the portrait of Jesus in Jackson Middle School leave the country or find another school. Samantha Ostrander commented on Ms. Sturgell's Facebook page, "I am not even a huge Christian and believe the complainer and this so called 19,000 member cult are Fucking crazy. If they don't like it, go to school somewhere else." Hannah Nichelle Vance commented on Lauren Schmoll WSAZ's Facebook page that "No one told you that you had to look at it. If you have a problem with it then don't go into the middle school."

"Pardon my French but these assholes need to get away from our schools PERIOD . . . get the hell out of our states, our region and our schools!" stated Sam Songer on WOWK13's Facebook page. In addition to suggesting the Plaintiffs leave Jackson, some commenters wished eternal damnation upon the opposition. Pat Grochowski Mihaly commented, "To those who want it down, when you die I hope God sends you 'down'. You wacko, sicko liberals are denying others their constitutional rights! Go find a deserted island and start a Liberal Colony. You are as much wanted in GOD'S COUNTRY as the lepers."

The Plaintiffs have stated in declarations included with this filing that they fear experiencing social ostracism, harassment or threats. The Plaintiffs are aware of the online commentary directed at those opposing continued hanging of the Head of Christ at Jackson Middle School. Under these circumstances, it is unsurprising that Plaintiffs fear social ostracism, harassment, intimidation, and physical violence should their association with this lawsuit become known.

III. One of the Doe Plaintiffs is a Minor

The potential harm to children in Establishment Clause cases is great and thus, courts have frequently allowed minor Plaintiffs to proceed using pseudonyms. In *Doe v. Porter*, the Sixth Circuit noted, "this case is brought on behalf of very young children, to whom we grant a heightened protection."

As a minor, Doe 2 is particularly vulnerable in this litigation. Recognizing the vulnerabilities of minors in litigation, the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure require minors to be identified by their initials. This measure of protection is not sufficient in this case, however, due to the highly publicized nature of the controversy and the size of the school and city of Jackson, Ohio. Because the Plaintiffs are drawn from such a small pool of individuals, even the use of initials for the minor plaintiff would make the Plaintiffs easily identifiable.

Sam Doe 2 is a minor child in this litigation and is thus deserving of "heightened protection." Doe 2 will not participate if identified. Additionally, Sam Doe 3 is the parent of minor children. Doe 3's anonymity is necessary to protect Doe 3's minor children, not party to this lawsuit, but nevertheless affected by it should the identities of their parents become known.

Continued on page 22

Ten truths about Easter

By Brian Bolton

The foundational belief of Christianity is that Jesus was resurrected from death, an event that is commemorated at Easter each year. As the most important celebration in Christendom, Easter is focused on the risen savior as a guarantee of everlasting life for believers.

The 10 themes enumerated below provide the historical, cultural and theological context for understanding the Easter observance.

- The name Easter derives from the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring — Eostre or Ostara — whereas the Christian festival that celebrates Jesus' resurrection developed from the Jewish Passover and includes prominent vestiges of Roman paganism.

- The annual Christian commemoration of the resurrected savior is held on the first Sunday after the first full moon that occurs on or after March 21 and before April 25, a method of calculation that was decreed by the First

Council of Nicaea in 325 CE.

- The Easter celebration evolved from the Jewish Passover observance, which was adapted from earlier Canaanite festivals that included the slaughter of a lamb, which was related by the Hebrew priests to deliverance of the Jews from bondage in Egypt, i.e., they were saved by the blood of the lamb.

- Jesus died on Passover after sharing a "Last Supper" or Passover meal with his disciples, thereby serving as a redeeming blood sacrifice represented as the Paschal Lamb or the Lamb of God. Jesus instructed his followers to observe the Lord's Supper on that day in remembrance of him.

- The Christian observance also incorporates major elements of the festival of Attis, which was celebrated in March by Roman pagans. The yearly ritual included the crucifixion of an effigy and the enactment of an empty tomb, demonstrating that Attis was resurrected and providing assurance that devotees would achieve immortality.

- Crucifixion was invented by the Phoenicians and subsequently adopt-

ed by the Assyrians, Egyptians, Persians and later by the Romans. The original procedure entailed securing the criminal to a vertical stake and allowing him to die slowly of thirst and exposure.

- Some scholars assert that Jesus was crucified on a vertical stake, not a cross, because the Greek words used in the bible translate as "torture stake" or "execution stake." Christian tradition says it was a cross because a dozen pagan savior gods were crucified on crosses, two of them between two thieves.

- The cross was a widely used religious symbol found in various early cultures, including Egyptian depictions of their gods, as well as by Hindus in India, Buddhists throughout Asia and by some American Indian tribes. There is no evidence of use of the cross by early Christians.

- The empty tomb story presented in the Gospels is not the first report of the Easter event, nor is it conclusive evidence of the resurrection claim. Two decades earlier, Paul described a series of appearances of the risen Jesus to more than 500 followers.

- Jesus' resurrection was not a



Brian Bolton

unique biblical occurrence, because at least eight and possibly 10 or more scriptural characters died and were subsequently restored to life by Jesus, his apostles, Hebrew patriarchs or some unspecified agent. Of course, the dozen pagan savior gods were also resurrected.

Brian Bolton, Texas, is an FFRF Lifetime Member who is a retired psychologist, humanist minister and university professor emeritus at the University of Arkansas. He endows FFRF's graduate/mature student essay contest.

Meet a foxhole atheist



By Keith Taylor

To start with, I am neither evil nor unpatriotic. I served my county, in uniform, for 22 years, 9 months and 11 days.

As a Navy cryptologist, both enlisted and as an officer, I held the nation's highest security clearance. I have voted in almost every election since Truman and Eisenhower.

As a civilian, I do the requisite community work to be considered a good citizen. The local Optimist group once dubbed me Optimist of the Year. I participate in elections, often walking the precinct for candidates of my choice. I make phone calls, at my own expense, to people in the battleground states.

I believe in the First Amendment so much that I have used it to defend my opinion on a myriad of things. For many years, hundreds of my opinions appeared in Navy Times, a Gannett weekly. Not all pleased everybody, but all were based on verified facts. Other pieces appeared in papers and magazines across the country. I could go on and on, but you get the idea.

I insist I'm a good citizen, even a thinking one. Still, I carry the onus of not being worthy of respect, and it is for a very strange reason: I just cannot

Half our population would not vote for you, not even if you were as smart as Einstein, as wise as Bertrand Russell or as uniquely American as Mark Twain.

swallow stories such as the Earth being created in seven days, a woman talking to a snake or that whopper about a man living in the belly of a big fish for three days.

I am an atheist.

Nor am I mollified by the 21st century claims such as, "Oh, they're just apocryphal. You don't need to take them literally." Oh no? Ask any kid about the stories they teach him in Sunday school.

Defense of weird ideas comes with attacks on science and scientists. By the fourth century, Alexandria, Egypt, was home to the most impressive library ever seen. It held scientific and historical documents, many of which contradicted bible stories.

The custodian of the library was Hypatia, a mathematician and scientist. Carl Sagan, the magnificent chronicler of science, told us Hypatia was beset by a mob, followers of Cyril, the archbishop of Alexandria. The mob raked her flesh from her body with abalone shells. This magnificent woman was mostly forgotten.

Cyril was made a saint.



Chief Petty Officer Keith Taylor on guard duty in about 1960.

To this day, publicly denying a belief in the "accepted" religion of any area will ensure one's never being able to hold office. This is as true of Christianity as it is of Islam, Buddhism or any other religion.

Say you're an atheist just once and your world changes. The Boy Scouts won't have you. According to polls, more than half our population would not vote for you, not even if you were as smart as Einstein, as wise as Bertrand Russell or as uniquely American as Mark Twain.

It matters not that atheists in general are in league with the members of what is arguably our country's most prestigious group, the National Academy of Sciences. According to a recent poll, 93% of its members do not believe in a personal god. Such observations are blithely dismissed with the old bromide, "Oh, scientists don't know everything."

Of course they don't, and every scientist has to realize that, but they do not have to believe in myths. About half the country seems to agree with former president Richard Nixon.

Some years ago he replied to a question that he did not think a person could be president without a belief in God.

His vice president and successor as president emphasized it further. In 1988, George H.W. Bush was asked by a Chicago atheist journalist about his views on atheism. Bush replied that in his opinion atheists couldn't be patriotic. The comment has been repeated across the country, even in The New York Times. Bush has never denied it.

The consensus is everybody has to believe in something, and that something better be supernatural.

The country which has idolized the man who said, "I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death" now demands we all follow the same course when it comes to accepting things without proof.

Keith Taylor, Chula Vista, Calif., is a retired U.S. Navy officer and past president of the San Diego Association for Rational Inquiry.

Theocracy Alert!

The bible is replete with instructions. Our laws of our land come from the bible. It's frightening to think how lawless this land might be were we not to have guidance given in that book.

Bill Clayton, Common Council member in Rapid City, S.D., where FFRF sent a letter of complaint about meeting prayers

Rapid City Journal, 2-6-13

Introducing our brand new website: When firewalls fail, rely on the Holy Spirit. No antivirus software protects your computer for the full 100%. There's always a chance something unforeseen strikes down. We designed a label that keeps your computer from any digital harm. The label was blessed by the Archbishop of Seville, hometown of the Internet's own patron saint, St. Isidore.

Online blurb for Leo Burnett ad agency in Brussels

leoburnett.be, 2-8-13

There is no other county in Florida that has even talked about or even done anything about prayer in schools. But maybe we can revitalize [prayer] and be proactive versus reactive.

Flagler County School Board member John Fischer, Bunnell, Fla., calling for prayers in schools and at board meetings to counteract "all this hate"

Daytona Beach News-Journal 2-8-13

Praying for our president, who today will place his hands on a Bible he does not believe to take an oath to a God he likely does not know.

Tweet by Mars Hill Church Pastor Mark Driscoll, Seattle, on President Barack Obama taking the oath of office

twitter.com, 1-21-13

Stand Up America Now is calling for a nationwide burning of effigies and images of President Hussein Obama to express our disgust for him, his policies and his continuous lying to the American people. He is destroying the moral and financial fiber of our country.

Florida Pastor Terry Jones, Dove World Outreach Center press release, in which he asks for similar treatment of effigies of former President Bill Clinton

standupamericanow.org, 1-4-13

Do you have to tell that you once had diarrhea? It's embarrassing but nobody's business.

Chabad Rabbi Manis Friedman, dispensing advice on whether to admit child sex abuse to a girlfriend

Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 2-1-13

There are predators lurking among us, trying to sow the bacteria of civil marriage in Lebanon, but they should know that the religious scholars will not hesitate to do their duty and prevent the passage of such a bill.

Fatwa issued by Sunni Grand Mufti Shaikh Mohammad Rashid Qabbani in Beirut

Gulf News, 1-29-13

God, without knowledge of you, they cannot possibly lead with the righteous rule. We ask you, God, to change hearts and where hearts refuse to change, we ask you to replace these people.

Former South Dakota state senator Gordon Howie, now CEO of the conservative Christian Life & Liberty Group, leading prayer at the State

Capitol during a two-hour Restoration Prayer Rally

Rapid City Journal, 1-12-13

He rewards those who diligently seek Him, not just for one moment, or one day, but for every moment, and every day. As Christians, we place our faith in the nail-scarred hands of Jesus Christ. But so many other Americans also know the close embrace of faith — Muslims and Jews, Hindus and Sikhs. And all Americans, whether religious or secular, have a deep and abiding faith in this nation.

President Barack Obama, speaking at the National Prayer Breakfast at the Washington Hilton

whitehouse.gov, 2-7-13

Do you think using an iPad bible app for a New Jersey firefighters swearing-in ceremony breaks too much from tradition?

Question posed at the end of a news story on the oath of office taken at City Hall in Atlantic City by new fire captains and battalion chiefs

inquisitr.com, 2-10-13

[Answering whether she thinks gays have a purpose in life]: No, I honestly don't. Sorry, but I don't. I don't understand it. A gay person isn't going to come up and make some change unless it's to realize that it was a choice and they're choosing God."

Diana Medley, Indiana public high school special education teacher, speaking at a church in favor of a ban on lesbians and gays at a neighboring district's prom

WTWO, 2-11-13

On behalf of Americans everywhere, Michelle and I wish to extend our appreciation and prayers to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. Michelle and I warmly remember our meeting with the Holy Father in 2009, and I have appreciated our work together over these last four years. The Church plays a critical role in the United States and the world, and I wish the best to those who will soon gather to choose His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI's successor.

President Barack Obama, statement on the pope's resignation

whitehouse.gov, 2-11-13

We want to give this message to our youths that in an environment where devilish civilization is hoodwinking the Muslim women in the name of so-called freedom, we should be steadfast to guard the culture of modesty.

Asadullah Bhutto, head of Jammate-Islami, Pakistan's largest Islamic party, urging celebration of Hijab Day instead of Valentine's Day

onislam.net, 2-13-13

Luke 22:36 very clearly — and this is Jesus speaking — said, quote: "If you have a purse take it and buy a bag, and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one."



Reduce, reuse and resurrect!

David Vangness got a huge chuckle out of this scene in Clearwater, Fla.

Pope decides to operate as mere mortal



Australian clergy abuse victims welcomed the news of the pope's abdication.

Josef Ratzinger, aka Pope Benedict XVI, announced Feb. 11 he would abdicate his papacy and position as Vatican head of state on Feb. 28. He's the first pope to quit his job since Gregory XII in 1415. Benedict, 85, was elected in April 2005 when he was 78.

It's unlikely there's a Wallis Warfield Simpson waiting in the wings like there was for England's King Edward VI. Benedict, in abdicating and giving up his papal state of infallibility, said he would continue to serve the church "through a life dedicated to prayer."

Official sources attributed the move to the pope's frail health. He's nearly blind in his left eye, has a pacemaker, has fallen several times recently and is unable to walk for more than a short distance.

Other sources suspect there are other reasons. According to the Italian newspaper La Repubblica, the decision was due at least in part to the contents of an internal report revealing significant adultery and theft problems in the Vatican.

La Repubblica's report said the information was "all about the breach

of the sixth and seventh commandments," referring to commandments that followers neither steal or commit adultery. The theft reference may be about questionable practices at the Vatican's Bank, which was hit with accusations of theft and money-laundering that forced its chairman to quit last year. In December, the papal butler was convicted of theft. Benedict visited him in jail and pardoned him.

Michael D'Antonio, author of *Mortal Sins, Sex, Crime, and the Era of Catholic Scandal*, had a piece on Huffington Post headlined "Immunity for Rome's Rottweiler: Why The Pope Resigned."

Valid health reasons are certainly part of the story, D'Antonio wrote, "but they are the least relevant elements. More significant is the evidence linking crimes to the Vatican. In the abuse scandal, all roads do lead to Rome. By stepping down now, and allowing for someone untouched by the cover-up scheme to take his place, Benedict can save the papacy from a direct confrontation with criminal authorities. His choice is the perfect one for a man who reached the highest point in the clerical culture of privilege."

In September 2011 at the Hague, sexual abuse victims presented 20,000 pages of documents linking the cover-up to the highest levels of the Vatican.

Ratzinger was at the center of the church response to the scandal as a cardinal heading the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "formerly the Inquisition," D'Antonio wrote wryly.

— Bill Dunn

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State/Church Bulletin

Governor eyes dropping parish exemption

On Jan. 30, the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation published an analysis of Gov. Deval Patrick's FY 2014 tax proposal, reported Religion Clause. "Among the 44 personal exemptions and deductions the governor proposes eliminating from the state income tax is the exemption for the rental value of parsonages provided to members of the clergy. It is estimated that the elimination of the parsonage allowance will increase state revenues by \$2 million to \$2.5 million."

FFRF filed a suit in federal court in 2011 to challenge the parish exemption, which gives preferential tax benefits to "ministers of the gospel." U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb ruled last Aug. 29 that FFRF had standing to challenge the 1954 law.

Resident successful in stopping prayer

Ricky Smith, Danville, Ky., stated publicly he's the person who met privately with Boyle County Judge-Executive Harold McKinney about Judeo-Christian prayers at public meetings. As a result, county magistrates voted to change the invocation to a "moment of silence."

Smith, 46, was profiled in the Jan. 27 Central Kentucky News. He's lived in the county all his life.

"Being expected to pray just to be a part of local government is not going to work for me, nor would it work for Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, pagans or Wiccans," Smith said.

He's also tried unsuccessfully several times to meet with Danville's mayor about prayers at city commission meetings. Although he worked behind the scenes, Smith was "outed" online. He's had a few harassing phone calls. "They're getting downright mean," Smith said.

"I've become a better person since I realized I was an atheist," Smith told the paper. "I am much more tolerant now."

Iceland boosts secular groups' status

Iceland's parliament, the Althing passed a law Jan. 30 giving secular

groups the right to apply for equal legal status with religions.

"For the first time in Icelandic history, the government recognizes and guarantees equality between secular and religious life stances," said Hope Knutsson, president of Sidmennt, the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association. The law also provides that newborn babies will no longer automatically be registered into the religion of the mother, but rather according to the religious or life stance registration of both parents, and only if the registrations match.

Sidmennt members said it's a human rights violation for government to be involved at all in registering people's religious affiliations. The Evangelical Lutheran State Church enjoys special legal and financial status in Iceland.

Christians continue war on yoga

The National Center for Law & Policy, a law firm focusing "on the protection and promotion of religious freedom, the sanctity of life, traditional marriage, parental rights and other civil liberties," is suing the Encinitas [Calif.] Union School District for its Ashtanga yoga program. NCLP President Dean Broyles, is representing plaintiffs who have children in the district.

"This is frankly the clearest case of the state trampling on the religious freedom rights of citizens that I have personally witnessed in my 18 years of practice as a constitutional attorney," Broyles said.

The lawsuit alleges that the yoga program, which includes two 30-minute classes per week, is pervasively religious, with roots in Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist and metaphysical beliefs and practices.

"We're not teaching religion," said Superintendent Timothy Baird. "We teach a very mainstream physical fitness program that happens to incorporate yoga into it. It's part of our overall wellness program. The vast majority of students and parents support it."

Misguided Virginia bill appears dead

Sen. Bill Stanley "reluctantly" sent his resolution enshrining prayer rights in the Virginia Constitution back to



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committee Feb. 5, where it likely will die, reported the Richmond Virginian-Pilot.

Stanley claims a constitutional amendment is necessary to preserve Virginians' "right to free exercise of their religion as they see fit in public and private places."

The newspaper said the amendment would ensure the right to pray on government property and allow clergy to pray before public boards. It specifies public school students are free to express religious beliefs in prayer as well as assignments and would exempt them from doing assignments which violate their beliefs.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia said the amendment is unconstitutional.

Appeals court denies girl's prayer claim

The U.S. 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals on Jan. 30 denied a 2010 free speech claim by a New York eighth-grader who was barred from including a religious blessing during her school's Moving-Up ceremony. According to Religion Clause, "the court concluded that the ceremony was a school-sponsored expressive activity and that the student's speech would be perceived as being endorsed by the school."

In a deposition, the girl said some of her classmates weren't religious.

"[I]t's my job to talk about God and see if they like it. In God's word, it says that I should — well, I was put on this Earth for a purpose and my purpose was to talk about God and try to get as many people to follow him."

Two cities tie for 'least bible-minded'

The American Bible Society, partnering with the Barna Group, has identified America's most "bible-minded" cities, based on "highest combined levels of regular bible reading and belief in the bible's accuracy."

Most bible-minded was Knoxville, Tenn. Tied for "least bible-minded" were Providence, R.I., and New Bedford, Mass.

Others in the top 10 "most" category (in descending order): Charleston, W.Va.; Huntsville, Ala.; Roanoke/Lynchburg, Va.; Charlotte, N.C.; Springfield, Mo.; Jackson, Miss.; Birmingham, Ala.; Chattanooga, Tenn.; and Shreveport, La.

Others in the top 10 "least" category (in descending order): Buffalo, N.Y.; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Phoenix, Ariz.; San Francisco; Boston; Hartford/New Haven, Conn.; Portland, Maine; Burlington, Vt.; and Albany, N.Y.

FFRF's home base of Madison, Wis., was No. 56 in the "least" category. [We wuz robbed!]

In the News

Mormons sponsor most Boy Scout troops

According to the Feb. 4 Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the Boy Scouts' decision whether to accept gays would affect many churches. About 70% of Scout troops are sponsored by churches. The three largest religious sponsors are the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (37,000 units), the Methodist Church (11,000 units) and the Catholic Church (8,000 units). The most outspoken criticism of the proposed change has come from Baptist churches (4,000 units).

Own attorney causes church fetal pain

Catholic Health Initiatives and St. Thomas More Hospital in Cañon City, Colo., said Feb. 4 it was morally wrong for their attorneys to defend a malpractice case in the death of unborn twins by arguing Colorado law doesn't consider fetuses to be persons, the Denver Post reported. CHI operates

170 health facilities in 17 states.

The state's three Catholic bishops called for a review of litigation over the death of Lori Stodghill. She died while seven months pregnant with twin sons on Jan. 1, 2006. Stodghill's husband, Jeremy, filed a wrongful death lawsuit, alleging the on-call obstetrician didn't answer a page and didn't tell the emergency room staff to perform a caesarean section, the Colorado Independent reported Jan. 23

Lori Stodghill, 31, died less than an hour after arriving at the hospital when a pulmonary artery became blocked, causing a heart attack. The twins died in her womb.

Attorney Jason Langley argued in a defense brief that the court "should not overturn the longstanding rule in Colorado that the term 'person,' as used in the Wrongful Death Act, encompasses only individuals born alive. Colorado state courts define 'person' under the Act to include only those born alive. Therefore Plaintiffs cannot maintain wrongful death claims based on two unborn fetuses."

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Kevin Sutherland, 45, Miami, FL: 2nd-degree grand larceny. Sutherland, founder with his wife of Miami Mosaic Church, was arrested in New York City for attempting to sell alleged forgeries of paintings by British artist Damien Hirst to Sotheby's. *Source: N.Y. Times, 2-10-13*

An **unidentified priest** associated with Our Lady of Refuge Catholic Church, Pacific Beach, CA, was arrested on suspicion of drunk driving about 7:30 p.m. after driving his car through his garage into an adjoining apartment building, coming to rest in the bedroom of an apartment. No one was injured.

Police said the priest may have hit the accelerator by mistake. *Source: CBS 8, 2-9-13*

Tony McSweeney, 66, Norwich, UK: Suspicion of sexual offenses. McSweeney, pastor at St. George's Catholic Church and a director at Notre Dame High School, was arrested along with another man on allegations dating from the early 1980s.

Allegations are linked to the former Elm Guest House and the now-closed Grafton Close children's home in London. It's alleged the guest house was the site of sexual abuse of boys from the home. *Source: Norwich Evening News, 2-7-13*

Frank G. Klep, 69, Samoa: 6 counts of indecent assault. Charges stem from Klep's time as principal at two Catholic colleges in **Australia** in 1974-84. He's a Salesian Order priest who was allegedly moved to Samoa after probes into the assaults started.

A former priest, **Wilfred Baker**, Eltham, was also arrested in a sweep called Taskforce Sano, set up to investigate child sex abuse. He's charged with serious sexual offense, indecent assault and gross indecency for alleged incidents in 1966-74. *Source: The Herald, 2-8-13*

Charles T. Kadhufu, 34, Chitungwiza, ZIM: Rape. Kadhufu, pastor at Christ Kingdom Church is accused of raping and impregnating a 15-year-old member of his congregation last July at his home. The girl's mother allegedly left her in his custody temporarily.

The girl told police Kadhufu threatened to kill himself if she told anyone, but she ended up telling her mother after she became pregnant. *Source: The Herald, 2-6-13*

George S. Brooks, 52, Killeen, TX: Burglary of a habitation/entry with commission of a felony. Brooks is employed by Real Talk Ministries, according to the ministry's website, which lists the same address as his residence.

An arrest complaint shows Brooks, a registered sex offender, was identified as a suspect in a burglary and sexual assault in Copperas Cove in June 2012. DNA recovered at the scene led to his arrest. *Source: KWTX, 2-1-13*

Yoel Malik, 33, Brooklyn, NY: Forcible touching, 12 counts of sexual abuse, 11 counts of endangering the welfare of a child and 4 counts of criminal sexual acts. Rabbi Malik, a father of 5, taught at Ohr Hameir Yeshiva, a facility for troubled youths. All of the alleged male victims, ages 13 to 16, were students there.

Malik is accused of taking them to motels. A police source said Malik blamed the youths for "coming on to him." *Source: N.Y. Daily News, 1-31-13*

Fabio R. Rodrigues, Bogota, COL: Cocaine possession. Rodrigues, a Catholic priest, was arrested at Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport in possession of 18 containers of cocaine, 13 of which were inside condoms in his stomach and intestines. Airport security officials were made suspicious by his pallor and nervous behavior. *Source: Moscow News, 1-30-13*

Theldon Williams Jr., 44, Raleigh, NC: Statutory rape and indecent liberties with a child. Williams, a youth pastor for several area churches, is charged with alleged incidents last fall when the child was 14. *Source: NBC 17, 1-29-13*

Valdeci S. Picanto, an evangelical pastor in **Brazil**, was arrested on unspecified sexual abuse charges after alleged victims told police he claimed his penis was blessed by the Holy Spirit.

According to a victim, "He convinced us that God could only come into our lives through our mouth and that's why he would do what he did. Often after worship, Pastor Valdeci would take us to the where the funds were kept at the back of the church and ask us to have oral sex with him until the Holy Spirit would come through ejaculation." *Source: vaticancrimes.us, 1-28-13*

Leo Akpan, 43, Dayton, OH: Soliciting, resisting arrest, obstructing official business and possession of criminal tools. Akpan, pastor at Glorious Christian Assembly of God, was arrested during a police sting through the website Backpage.com.

An incident report said Akpan called the number police listed on the site and offered to



pay \$100 for "everything." When police entered the apartment during the sting, he allegedly told them he was trying to convert the woman and get her to join his church. *Source: WPXI, 1-28-13*

David Lawson, 38, Mandarin, FL: 4 counts of lewd and lascivious molestation. Lawson, stewardship minister at Christ's Church in Jacksonville, is charged with having sex with a 15-year-old girl. He is married and has children. *Source: First Coast News, 1-15-13*

Pleaded / Convicted

Charles Engelhardt, 66, Philadelphia: Guilty of indecent assault of a child under 13, corruption of a minor and conspiracy. The jury deadlocked on a charge of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with a child. Engelhardt, a Catholic priest, was accused of molesting an altar boy in 1998.

The same jury, which deliberated 4 days, convicted Catholic school teacher **Bernard Shero**, 50, of molesting the same boy, now 24 and living in Florida, in 2000. He and Engelhardt both worked for St. Jerome Parish. Shero was found guilty on all 5 counts, including rape and conspiracy. *Source: Daily News, 1-30-13*

Arthur Pearson, 39, Grand Rapid, MI: Pleaded no contest to embezzlement of between \$50,000 and \$100,000 from Pilgrim Rest Missionary Baptist Church, where he was pastor. Some church members allege he spent much more, as much as \$200,000, at retail stores and restaurants, including the Electric Cheeta, Macy's, Victoria's Secret and Hearthstone Bistro. *Source: mlive.com, 1-25-13*

Arthur B. Schirmer, 64, Reeders, PA: Guilty of 1st-degree murder and evidence tampering in the 2008 death of his wife, Betty Schirmer, 56. Prosecutors alleged Schirmer, a Methodist pastor, killed her with a crowbar and staged a car accident to conceal the crime.

Schirmer awaits trial for murder in the 1999 death of his first wife, Jewel Schirmer. He claims she fell down the basement stairs while vacuuming and that he found her with the vacuum cleaner power cord wrapped around her ankle.

First Assistant District Attorney Michael Mancuso called that "staging 101." The judge allowed testimony about Jewel Schirmer's death into Schirmer's trial for his second wife's death. *Source: AP, 1-23-13*

Sentenced

Stephen D. Berry, 38, Jonesville, SC: 15 years in prison after being found guilty of 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor. Berry, associate pastor of New Life Baptist Church, was charged with having sex multiple times with a 15-year-old in 2010. The jury couldn't reach a verdict in his first trial.

He was later arrested for sex/lewd act upon a child under 16 for alleged sexual touching of a 13-year-old girl numerous times in 2008. A few months later, he was charged with 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct. The alleged victim was not a minor but was described in the police report as mentally challenged. The charge was dismissed in August after the victim died. *Source: Union Daily Times, 2-9-13*

Timothy S. Holder, 57, Toms River, NJ: 2 years' probation and \$24,500 restitution for 3rd-degree theft by deception for writing and cashing more than \$35,000 in checks from the Episcopal Church of the Ascension, where he was rector in 2007-09. *Source: Atlantic City Press, 2-9-13*

Sam Mullet Sr., 67, Bergholz, OH: 15 years in prison on federal hate crimes charges for orchestrating hair- and beard-cutting attacks on Amish men in 5 communities. Also sentenced to prison terms of between 1 year and 1 day to 7 years were **15 other family members**, 9 men and 6 women.

"These were violent, religiously motivated home invasions that left the victims bloody, bruised and beaten," said U.S. Attorney Steven Dettlebach. *Source: justice.gov, 2-8-13*

Gregory Goner, 42, Milwaukee: 2 years' probation, 4 months of home confinement and \$68,128 in restitution for filing a false income tax return. Goner, pastor of Spirit Governed Baptist Church, also was president and chief administrator of K-12 Excel Academy, which received about \$100,000 in federal grants. The indictment said Goner used money intended for the school on personal expenses such as mortgage payments and cars. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 2-5-13*

Michael Salman, 39, Phoenix: 3 years' probation for theft and forgery plus 40 hours' community service and a \$9,200 fine. Salman, pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship Community, and his wife, **Suzanne Salman**, 34, and brother, **Frank Salman**, 37, were involved in defrauding the state Medicaid system and underreporting income.

Before sentencing, the couple, who have 6 daughters, paid restitution of \$73,809. *Source: azfamily.com, 2-4-13*

Kenneth N. Allen, 36, East Prairie, MO: 11 years in prison on 2 counts of 1st-degree child molestation. Allen, pastor of Grace Apostolic Church, pleaded guilty to molesting children at his home. His wife, **Beth L. Allen**, 36, is charged with endangering the welfare of a child.

Statutory sodomy and possession of child pornography charges against both were dismissed. Beth Allen is a state-paid child care provider. One mother became suspicious when she went to pick her son up and he came out wearing only boxer shorts and had lotion all over him. *Source: Southeast Missourian/KFVS, 2-4-13*

Efrain Umaña, 57, Council Bluffs, IA: 30 years in prison for 1st-degree sexual assault of a child. Umaña, pastor of Templo Monte Horeb, molested an 11-year-old girl who sought counseling on how to get along with her family. Umaña had sex with the girl at the church, in his van and in the basement of her parents' Omaha home. He was sentenced in 2011 to 35 years for other sexual assaults.

Judge J. Michael Coffey called the pastor's presentence report "pretty pathetic, especially for someone who was able to bear the title of reverend." *Source: World-Herald, 2-1-13*

Thaddeus S. MacMoran, 27, Huntersville, NC: 222 to 276 months in prison for statutory sex offense of a person 13, 14 or 15 years old, crime against nature and 4 counts of taking indecent liberties with a child. He met the alleged victim at a church where he served as a youth pastor.

MacMoran was a volunteer with the Lake Forest Church teen ministry. A spokesperson for Lake Forest Church said the crimes occurred at another church before MacMoran became a volunteer at Lake Forest. *Source: WBTV/Charlotte Observer, 1-31-13*

Terrence Rafferty, 50, Newry, N.IRE: 3 years' probation, 100 hours of community service and no contact with children or vulnerable adults for 10 years after pleading guilty to 4 counts of indecent assault. Rafferty, pastor at St. Peter's Catholic Church, was charged with molesting a teen girl in 2001. *Source: Lurgan Mail, 1-31-13*

Sagarsen Haldar (aka Gopal Hari Das), 33, Milwaukee: 3 years in prison. Haldar, head priest of a Hare Krishna temple, was convicted of conspiracy to defraud the government by bringing sham priests to the U.S. People who paid up to \$30,000 to Haldar were more like indentured servants who worked at convenience stores and drove cabs, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Gregory Haanstad. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 1-29-13*

'These were violent, religiously motivated home invasions that left the victims bloody, bruised and beaten.'

—U.S. Attorney Steven Dettlebach

Joe Tapia III, 47, El Paso, TX: 30 years in prison after pleading guilty to solicitation of material relating to the sexual exploitation of children.

While serving as youth minister at San Jose Catholic Church, Tapia admitted he recorded video and took photos of boys ages 12 and 13 while they were changing clothes before a church performance. He used those images to solicit other sexually explicit images of children, the U.S. Attorney's Office said.

Tapia also had sexually explicit chats with multiple minors on his home and work computers. He was an admissions service representative at Excel Learning Center.

Tapia claimed he found the photos in a spam email and that he started posing as a 16-year-old on the Internet "out of fun" after his wife, his junior high school sweetheart, was diagnosed with cancer.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Brandy Gardes replied that "Spam is not asking someone 'How long is your fill in the blank?'" It might have escalated [when his wife got cancer], but it started in January 2009." *Source: El Paso Times, 1-26-13*

Joel Hochmuth, 53, Waukesha, WI: 4 years in prison and 5 years' extended supervision for violating conditions of his probation on a 2012 conviction for possessing child pornography. He was fired as Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod communications director after charges were filed.

Paul Bucher said Hochmuth, after failing a polygraph exam, admitted he'd watched a boys cross country team running several times. A report said Hochmuth also masturbated while naked in the woods at his work-release landscaping job and inside his workplace, arranged Internet access on his cellphone while not telling his parole agent and had "drive by" contact with minors.

"The evil side of Joel Hochmuth won," said Judge Kathryn Foster during sentencing. *Source: Journal Sentinel/Waukesha Patch, 1-25-13*

Ronald Pyles, 59, North Jackson, OH: 10 years in prison on rape and gross sexual imposition charges. Pyles, pastor at Victory Harvest Ministry, denied his guilt at sentencing.

The alleged victim did not attend the hearing. The prosecution stated she was 20 at the time of the rape, has an IQ of 58 and the mental capacity of a 2nd-grader. *Source: WKBN, 1-25-13*

Andrew Jordan, Swatara Township, PA: Up to 1 year probation, \$500 fine and 50 hours' community service for his part in staging a mock "terrorist raid" during a youth group program at Glad Tidings Assembly of God. The church was fined \$10,000.

The mother of a 14-year-old girl "kidnapped" during the March 2012 raid called police. One man armed with an unloaded gun and 3 others rushed into the meeting, put pillowcases over the youths' heads and forced them into a van, allegedly to show them the dangers missionaries face. *Source: Patriot-News, 1-25-13*

Kenneth J. O'Keefe, 82, Toronto: 9 months' house arrest for gross indecency and assault of a 17-year-old boy over the course of 4 months in 1969. O'Keefe is a retired priest who taught at various Catholic schools.

Last September he pleaded guilty to a 1974 assault against a 16-year-old student. The boy had been fighting with his parents and went to see O'Keefe, who was his homeroom teacher. O'Keefe invited him to sleep over. The boy later woke up to find O'Keefe grinding against him from behind and reaching in the boy's underwear. The boy testified his parents called the principal the next day but got no response. *Source: Ottawa Citizen, 1-24-13*

Luis J. Cuevas, 67, Long Beach, CA: 5 years' probation, 40 hours' community service and register as a sex offender after pleading no contest to 2 counts of misdemeanor sexual assault. Cuevas, pastor at St. Athanasius Catholic Church, pleaded no contest to 2 misdemeanor sexual assaults in 2012 and a felony lewd act upon a child in 2010. The female victims were

14, 19 and 19.

"God be with you because you need him now more than we do," Deputy D.A. Jennifer Zepeda told Cuevas, reading from a victims' statement. *Source: L.A. Times, 1-23-13*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Several donors to 2 nonprofit groups formed to educate the public about Islam are suing the groups' founder, **Imam Feisel Abdul Rauf**, in Manhattan, **NY**, Supreme Court, alleging he diverted \$167,000 from private donations and \$3 million from the Malaysian government for his personal use. Plaintiffs seek \$25 million in damages.

The suit accuses Rauf of falsifying the groups' tax returns. Rauf spearheaded a plan in 2010 to build a Muslim cultural center and mosque near the site of the World Trade Center attacks and was ousted as the project's chief religious leader in January 2011. *Source: Reuters, 2-5-13*

Plaintiff "Jane Doe" is suing the Catholic **Archdiocese of Chicago** and the **Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus** for \$300,000 for negligence for allowing a priest to serve at St. Francis Xavier Parish in La Grange. The woman alleges the **unidentified priest** coerced her into a sexual relationship.

The suit claims the priest, who's also a licensed clinical psychologist, was counseling for her for depression and that he took advantage of Doe's "emotional dependence." *Source: Sun-Times, 2-2-13*

Eight **California** families with preschool students at **First Lutheran Church of Carson School** are suing the school for sexual activity by 4- and 5-year-olds that allegedly took place at the school, which has now closed. The state Department of Social Services cited the school for at least 1 sexual incident and for improper teacher-child ratio.

Richard McCarthy alleges his 4-year-old son and another boy often received oral sex at school from a 5-year-old girl. Plaintiffs' attorney Greg Owen alleged that the same girl drew on McCarthy's son's body during naptime.

"When I took his pants off to put him in the shower, he's got Magic Marker all over his privates and all over his butt," McCarthy said. *Source: KABC, 2-12-6-13*

An **Iowa** lawsuit accuses **Patrick Edouard**, pastor at Covenant United Reform Church in Pella, of assault, sexual exploitation and breach of fiduciary duty. The suit also accuses Edouard, church elders and the nationwide governing body of Reformed Churches of negligence, defamation and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

Edouard was convicted in October and sentenced to prison for pressuring women for sex after they came to him for counseling. The plaintiffs are sisters-in-law Valerie Bandstra and Anne Bandstra and their husbands.

"You are not victims," court papers quote church elder Clarence Hettinga as telling the Bandstras. The suit also quotes Hettinga as allegedly saying, "Unless he was holding a knife to her throat, it wasn't rape." *Source: Des Moines Register, 1-29-13*

Luis and Rocio Garcia of Irvine, **CA**, are suing 5 **Church of Scientology** entities in federal court. The couple allege they donated \$420,000 for a "Super Power" building in Clearwater, **FL**, that has never opened after construction started 14 years ago, for services they never received and humanitarian projects that never materialized.

The suit alleges the church financed Scientology leader David Miscavige's "lavish lifestyle" and harassed critics with private investigators and lawyers. The Garcias say they donated \$1.3 million to Scientology causes over 28 years. *Source: Tampa Bay Times, 1-24-13*

Legal Developments

Fr. Tim Keppel, now of **Chicago**, where he lives with his religious order the Congregation of the Resurrection, will not be charged criminally on sex abuse allegations in California due to the statute of limitations, authorities announced. Keppel served several parishes in the Diocese of San Bernadino. The allegation is from the 1970s.

A letter was read to parishioners Jan. 12-13 that said "there is reasonable cause to suspect that inappropriate sexual behavior with a minor did result" and that the case will be sent to Rome. *Source: Lake Arrowhead Mountain News, 1-31-13*

A federal judge ordered **Kenneth Miller**, a **Virginia** Mennonite pastor, jailed for at least a week for civil contempt for refusing to testify before a grand jury investigating a mother who fled the U.S. during a custody battle with her former civil union partner.

Miller was convicted of helping the woman leave the country and is due for sentencing March 4. He faces up to 3 years in prison. *Source: Free Press, 1-30-13*

Rhode Island Superior Court Judge Michael Silverstein ordered court documents unsealed in a case involving the **Catholic Legion of Christ's** relationship to elderly wealthy patrons.

The Associated Press, New York Times, Providence Journal and National Catholic Reporter sought the order. The documents are

'The evil side of Joel Hochmuth won.'

— Judge Kathryn Foster

from a lawsuit filed by a woman contesting the will of an aunt who left the Legion \$60 million.

The Legion, founded in Mexico City in 1941, was taken over by the Vatican in 2010 after determining that its late founder, **Fr. Marcial Maciel**, had sexually molested seminarians and fathered 3 children by 2 women.

A Connecticut man also is suing, alleging the Legion used "predatory" means to get his ailing father to hand over hundreds of thousands of dollars. *Source: AP, 1-23-13*

Removed / Resigned

Bishop Edward Braxton, Diocese of Belleville, **MO**, announced the Vatican's laicization of **Raymond Kownacki**, 78, **St. Louis**. "It was a complete surprise. I had no idea it was in the works," said Mike Weilmuenster, the attorney who successfully sued the diocese in 2002 on behalf of James Wisniewski, who alleged he was repeatedly molested by Kownacki for years in the 1970s.

Wisniewski testified Kownacki showed him a handgun at times and threatened to kill his parents if he told. The church has paid \$7.5 million to settle abuse suits against Kownacki. *Source: AP, 2-9-13*

The Vatican removed **William Casey**, 77, from the priesthood in late 2012 after Casey's 2011 sexual abuse conviction and prison sentence of 35 to 40 years for raping an altar boy in Kingsport, **TN**, in the 1970s. Casey's accuser, now 46, testified Casey was romantically involved with his mother. *Source: AP, 2-8-13*

Joseph Pina, 66, a former priest and suspected child molester who left the **Los Angeles Archdiocese** in 1998 to work for L.A. Unified Schools will no longer be employed by the district, Superintendent John Deasy said.

Pina's name emerged in documents released recently to comply with a court order. An internal 1993 psychological evaluation told how Pina was attracted to a victim, an 8th-grade girl, when he saw her dressed as Snow White:

"I had a crush on Snow White, so I started to open myself up to her. I felt like I fell in love with her. I got sexually involved with her, but never intercourse. She was about 17 when we got involved sexually, and it continued until she was about 19."

Deasy said the district is looking into Pina's hiring. "I also want to understand what knowledge that we had of any background problems when hiring him." *Source: L.A. Times, 2-4-13*

Stan Archie, pastor at Christian Fellowship Baptist Church in **Kansas City** and president of the Missouri State Board of Education, resigned in the wake of 2 lawsuits alleging sexual misconduct.

A former congregant, now 23, alleges in the latest suit that Archie made lewd comments about his sexual prowess during counseling that started when she was 15. Archie, married with 3 children, also urged her to act promiscuously and report her experiences to him, she alleges.

The earlier suit involves a former assistant who alleges Archie harassed and defamed her after she broke off their relationship. *Source: AP, 1-25-13*

Edward Belczak, 67, pastor at St. Thomas More Catholic Church in Troy, **MI**, was suspended while police and the Archdiocese of Detroit probe whether he embezzled \$429,000 to benefit himself and an unnamed ghost employee.

Belczak has been "temporarily excluded from the office of pastor," the archdiocese said. *Source: Free Press, 1-23-13*

Other

A letter of support from an Orthodox rabbi which minimized crimes by **Dr. Aubrey Levin**, 74, a prominent psychiatrist convicted of molesting patients, has stirred passions in the Jewish community in Calgary, **ALB**.

In a letter read at sentencing by Levin's attorney, **Rabbi Yisroel Miller** of House of Jacob Mikveh Israel called the crimes "minor" offenses. Levin's wife is under house arrest after an alleged attempt to bribe a juror.

Andrea Silverstone, domestic violence coordinator for the Jewish Family Service, said Levin's ties to the Jewish community generally flew below the radar until Miller's letter was read in court. "I couldn't believe a rabbi from Calgary would do that."

"Not condemning the actions of the perpetrator makes the suffering of his victims worse," Silverstone said. *Source: Daily Forward, 2-7-13*

Michael Fugee, a priest living in the rectory at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Rochelle Park, **NJ**, was "in the process of moving" after media reports about his criminal history, Sacred Heart Pastor Robert Wolfee announced at Sunday Mass.

Newark Archbishop John Myers came under fire earlier when it became known Fugee was working as an administrator. He was convicted in 2003 of aggravated criminal sexual contact for grabbing the crotch of a 14-year-old boy while wrestling with him at the teen's home and on a vacation.

Under questioning by detectives, Fugee allegedly admitted the touching aroused him and he knew it was a "violation." *Source: Star-Ledger, 1-3-13*

Rabbi Ephraim Padwa, leader of the UK's **Strictly Orthodox Jewish community**, was videotaped telling an alleged child abuse victim it was "mesira" [forbidden] to report a suspected Jewish sex offender to a non-Jewish authority. The Strictly Orthodox, or Charedi, community numbers about 40,000 people, about 16% of British Jews.

The video shows Padwa being asked, "Is it a good idea to speak to the police about it?"

"Oh no," Padwa answers, "the police is [sic] not the solution." *Source: The Independent, 1-30-13*

Brother Stephen Baker, 62, was found dead of a self-inflicted knife wound at the St. Bernardine Monastery in Hollidaysburg, **PA**, said Blair Township Police Chief Roger White.

Baker, a Franciscan friar, was named in recent legal settlements with 11 men who alleged he sexually abused them at John F. Kennedy High School in Warren, **OH**, in 1986-90.

After the settlements were announced, the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese said it received complaints in 2011 of possible abuse by Baker involving 3 students in the 1990s at Bishop McCort High School in Johnstown, **PA**. *Source: AP, 1-26-13*

The list of Boy Scout leaders and volunteers accused of sexually assaulting children in Wisconsin had 20 names added to it and was published by the L.A. Times. Included: a 6-foot 5-inch, 300-plus-pound man known as "Big-

foot," accused of molesting boys at St. John's School for the Deaf in St. Francis, **WI**, in the early 1970s.

Thomas "Bigfoot" Tannehill, deaf himself, was never criminally charged in Wisconsin. He was a dorm supervisor at St. Francis and an assistant scoutmaster with 3 units in the Milwaukee County Council in the 1980s.

He was banned from the BSA in 1990 after a conviction for molesting 2 boys at the Indiana State School for the Deaf, where he was also a scoutmaster, according to records ordered released by an Oregon court. He died in 2007. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 12-30-12*

The Diocese of Yakima, **WA**, acknowledged it has received credible evidence that **Fr. Hilario Ramirez**, a visiting priest from Mexico, molested 4 boys ages 7 to 13 while staying with 2 families from Our Lady of Fatima Parish.

Ramirez is thought to have died in a car crash in Mexico in the early 1980s, church officials said.

The diocese is providing counseling to victims and their families and negotiating other unspecified forms of help. *Source: Express-News, 12-18-12*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

L.A. cardinal's censure is unprecedented

Cardinal Roger Mahony, former archbishop of the Los Angeles Archdiocese, is persona non grata even among some Catholics after the court-ordered release of tens of thousands of pages of secret personnel files of 122 priests accused of sexual molestation. Archbishop Jose Gomez announced Jan. 31 he'd relieved Mahony of all public duties. Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Curry, who worked with Mahony to conceal abusers from police in the 1980s, resigned in Santa Barbara, Calif.

Memos written in 1986-87 by Mahony and Curry were full of damning details. The archdiocese fought release of the files for six years in court.

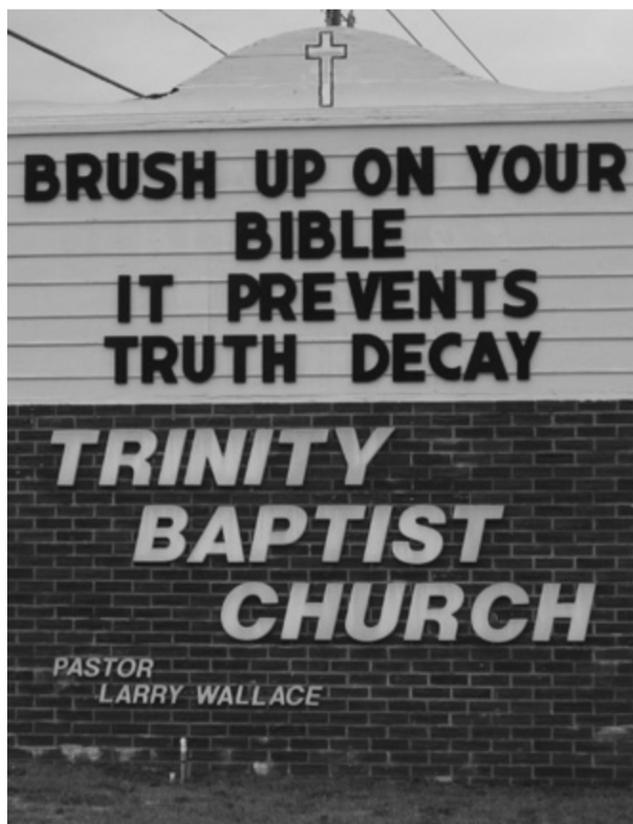
"I find these files to be brutal and painful reading," Gomez said in statement. "There is no excuse, no explaining away what happened to these children. The priests involved had the duty to be their spiritual fathers and they failed."

The public censure of Mahony, 78, one of the most powerful U.S. prelates, is unprecedented, experts told the Los Angeles Times. He lives at a North Hollywood parish.

Mahony will be eligible to vote for pope until he turns 80. Some have publicly called for him not to participate in the conclave to select Pope Benedict's successor. He was also scheduled to speak in Milwaukee in May at a priests' assembly. A local priest called on Archbishop Jerome Listekci in an open letter to disinvite the cardinal.

How does Mahony explain his behavior that allowed clergy to prey on children? In a letter posted on his blog, he claimed that "Nothing in my own background or education equipped me to deal with this grave problem." Mahony alleged that in reaching out to other bishops, he was told to "remove priests from active ministry if there was reasonable suspicion that abuse had occurred, and then refer them to one of the several residential treatment centers across the country for evaluation and recommendation."

Mahony claimed he was never told that dealing with perpetrators in this manner was "not effective."



Lake Wales, Fla.

Sally Lider, Washington state, found this oddity on the opposite coast.

Letterbox

Ex-Benedict (deservedly) gets no respect

Thanks for all you do. I'm a member of lots of organizations with publications, but when a copy of Freethought Today comes, I cancel the afternoon's plans to read it. Combating religion-driven ignorance is one of the greatest challenges in America today.

With that in mind, I want to take personal credit for a major victory, the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI. I'm not kidding. I think I forced him off the throne of Peter.

You may remember that it was a big story in December when he opened a Twitter account and started tweeting. I started tweeting back. I am under no illusions that he read my responses but someone did!

There's no question in my mind that those of us who have called him an enabler of child abuse had a significant impact on his decision to resign.

Phil Weber
Pennsylvania

•••

Considering the global economic and social practices of the Catholic Church, it is questionable if the pope is resigning or going into hiding.

Charlie McKay
Ontario

Why I'm spiritual but not religious

Religious people like to claim that reason alone cannot create a moral society, that only divine inspiration can accomplish this, but if closely examined, all true morality has its basis in reason. Moral structure enhances social cohesion and thus human survivability.

The nature of emotional thought and reflection are all strategies that create the social structures required for human success. But one is still left with that mindful event that cannot be explained with reason. What is to be made of intuition — knowing without thought? Many animals react to changes in their physical environment that science can barely measure. How is this accomplished? What sophisticated program can kick in?

We've all had that uneasy feeling of something being wrong without knowing why. We also have had the "aha" moment when an idea pops into our head seemingly out of nowhere. It is this intuitive process that religion is often based on, but it is so caught up with our imagination that it cannot be relied on as a source of definitive information. It can, however, tell our analytical mind to look closer at something.

It is the harmonious balance between the intuitive and analytical mind that gives us our greatest successes. There is another aspect to the intuitive mind that is often described as spirit. It is something that connects to a non-material aspect of the universe.

Science and reason can only take us so far in understanding the cosmos. It must be our foundation, but upon this the mind must be free to build a greater understanding, one that cannot be described adequately by words. It is a feeling of connection to all things, of being in all places at all times. It is a feeling of the eternal. It inspires the mind to reach beyond what is and on to what can be.

Religions try, and fail, to put this into words for all to understand. All they accomplish is to destroy true spirit by putting it into a dogmatic cage. True spirituality can only be experienced and not defined. That is why pantheists like myself say we are spiritual, but not religious.

I'm no closet atheist. I referred to myself as an atheist as soon as I knew what the word meant. It is only with my later experiences in nature that I knew I was more than that.

Peter Hall
Oregon

A pound is a pound, compressed or not

This is a little off the usual subject of religion and separation of church and state: the recipe for Butterscotch Pound Cake [Jan/Feb13] looks like it would be worth trying. I like butterscotch, and I like pound cake. However, what difference can it make for one pound of brown sugar to be firmly packed?

Keep up the good work. I especially liked Andrew Seidel's article "Debunking the Christian nation myth."

Al "The Pie Man" Schneider
Ohio

Pa. support offered in commandments case

I was glad to see in the January/February issue that your case is going forth regarding the Ten Commandments issue in the New Kensington School District near Pittsburgh, Pa. We don't live too far from there. Good job on that!

In the school district where my husband and I grew up, I'd been disturbed for years about their "release time" education, or "brainwashing," as I called it. I didn't permit our daughter to go. It was legitimized in the school district's eyes by holding it at a church (one I grew up in, by the way, also much to my dismay) only a block from the elementary school.

The administration couldn't understand why I chose to keep our daughter out. I gave them no explanation — just that I preferred for her to stay in a study hall during that time.

My husband ended up teaching elementary school in that same school district and retired from there. I wanted to have him deal with that issue during his early teaching career, but he wasn't in a position to do so.

That town was and still is a very small place with a church on every corner, and had he attempted to eliminate that program, he would have been driven clear out of the school district. You know how it is with those "loving" Christians!

Gail Fields
Pennsylvania

Atheist dad did kids and world big favor

Kudos to Ben Kauffeld for "Free-thinking dad explains atheism to fourth-graders" [Jan/Feb13]. Never underestimate how much those kids will retain from that single session. It's very likely many of them will remember "the atheist dad" for the rest of their lives. They will fan out all over the world and likely be in positions of

Benedict XVI @Pontifex Dec 12
We can be certain that a believer is never alone. God is the solid rock upon which we build our lives and his love is always faithful
Expand

Phil Weber @PHWeber Dec 12
@Pontifex His love is always faithful. Unlike those blabber-mouthed altar boys!
Hide conversation Reply Delete Favorited More

Benedict XVI @Pontifex Dec 12
Offer everything you do to the Lord, ask his help in all the circumstances of daily life and remember that he is always beside you
Expand

Phil Weber @PHWeber Dec 12
@Pontifex With the Lord beside me and an altar boy beneath me, how can I go wrong?
Hide conversation Reply Delete Favorited More

Benedict XVI @Pontifex Dec 12
How can we celebrate the Year of Faith better in our daily lives?
Expand

Phil Weber @PHWeber Dec 12
@Pontifex Well, we could treat women like People, prosecute pedo priests instead of moving them around, and hand out rubbers. For a start.
Hide conversation Reply Delete Favorited More

Phil Weber goes toe to toe with @Pontifex.

leadership wherever they go.

While many children are exposed to other faiths, not nearly enough become aware at an early age that there are people living full and wonderful lives with no faith at all. That's a quantum leap. Thanks to Mr. Kauffeld for taking it, and with such tact and sensitivity.

Joan Reisman-Brill
New York

Government really doesn't have a prayer

We had problems with government prayer at Santa Rosa City Council meetings in 1990-91. It took seven weeks of taking in protest signs and speaking for three minutes each before the council, but we prevailed. After they voted, the front-page headline said, "City Council Doesn't Have A Prayer."

One of my strong oppositions to religion is that religion is not democratic. Example: If a person accepts the beliefs, they are embraced. If a person gets caught breaking rules, they get excommunicated (religious persecution).

The United States is not a Christian nation, as so many people want the rest of us to believe. This is a democracy for all peoples for all times.

Bud Myrick
California

Contributors add new 'Life' to Foundation

I've been a member of FFRF for several years, have attended FFRF functions and hosted Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor in Vancouver some years ago. When Freethought Today arrives, I usually sit down and read it from cover to cover.

It was my and my wife Lorraine's intention to attend the recent conference in Portland, Ore., but some minor medical maladies intervened. However, when I calculated how much it would have cost us to attend, including travel costs, registration, hotel accommodations, meals, gratuities, etc.,

the sum approaches \$1,000.

So I figured, as I do in fact support the objectives of FFRF, and as I apparently saved \$1,000 by not attending that conference, I could use that money to create a Lifetime Membership.

Accordingly, I enclose a money order in that amount and ask to be enrolled as a Life Member.

Glenn M. Hardie
British Columbia

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Thank you, Dan, for writing that brilliant letter to the Washington Post on the "reason for the season" and for everything the FFRF team does all year every year. Please accept the enclosed check as the first installment toward an After-life Membership.

Bruce Baldwin
Pennsylvania

Plea made for Secular Broadcasting Network

The enclosed contribution of \$2,000 is my way of saying thanks for the work you are doing to deliver humankind from ignorance and religious superstition.

Down here in the most fundamentalist county in the bible belt, as one tunes across the FM radio dial, one encounters one after another of a plethora of religious broadcasting stations, ranging from fundamentalist bible-thumpers to the Bob Jones "fine music/easy listening" station (the latter complete with periodic "Back to Genesis," "Creation Moments," "Let the Bible Speak," etc., ad nauseam).

One cannot blame the people in this area for being such narrow-minded religionists because, unfortunately, there's no "Secular Broadcasting Network" to present an alternative, scientifically oriented view. The time is ripe for such a station to fill this gap.

Robert Detjen
South Carolina

Editor's note: We agree. FFRF's first step was Freethought Radio, a weekly broadcast/podcast (ffrf.org/news/radio/). Members have arranged to get the broadcast on local stations. Contact us if you can help.

Oath of office outdated as godless increase

President Obama's excellent inaugural speech included noting the many minorities that are now accepted. However, there is one growing minority that is still demeaned by most Americans and one that Obama has always ignored.

I speak of nonbelievers or atheists. The inauguration is still embedded with frequent references to a deity. As an atheist, I find this distracting, troubling and unwarranted in a nation where church and state are allegedly separate.

Australia has an atheist prime minister. No atheist in America could hope to be elected president, a barrier African Americans knew to be true years ago. For that minority, this is no longer true, but it is clearly true for atheists.

When that barrier falls, we can say that America is truly free and embraces rational government.

Jeffrey Dean
Arizona

Editor's note: Read FFRF's Jan. 21 statement on the oath at ffrf.org/news/.

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Is it possible to ignore the stunning hypocrisy of the swearing-in ceremony of both the president and vice president, whereby they both swore to uphold the Constitution, yet both had their hand on a bible and concluded their oaths with "so help me God"?

Their very first act was thus a violation of the Constitution they swore to uphold.

David Hansell
Wisconsin

Good student essays, convention speeches

A very good Jan/Feb Freethought Today, especially Andrew Seidel's and Peter Boghossian's convention speeches. The essays by younger folk were also good. I'm surprised how good the high school ones were — our future!

I continue to insist that the space devoted to "crank mail" and "crime blottering" is grossly excessive. It's all so negative and duplicitous.

"Emphasize the positive and eliminate the negative." May the Lord be with you — just kidding!

Your efforts are much appreciated.

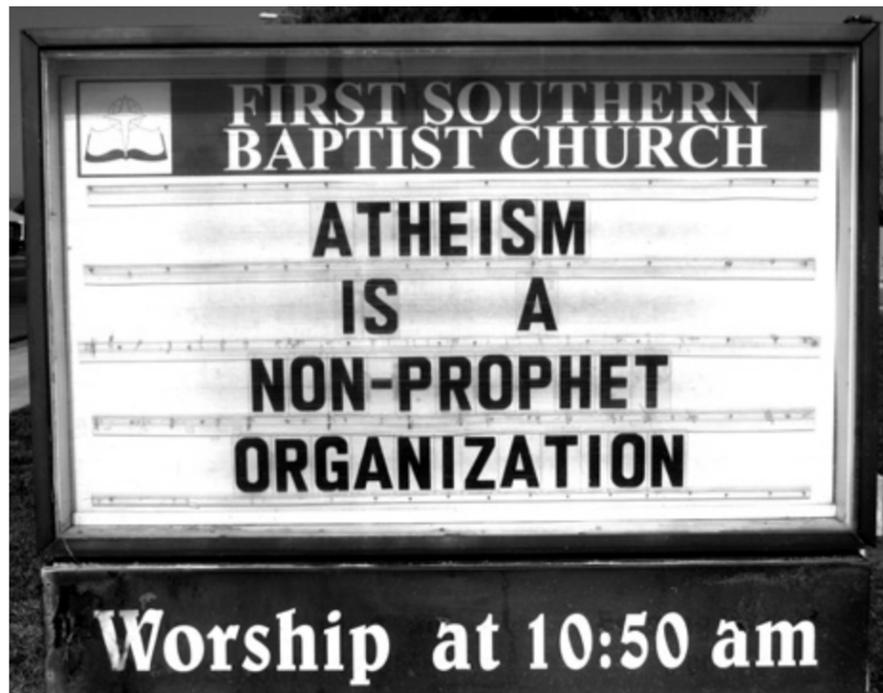
Wendell Funk
Illinois

'God makes Satan look like Peter Pan'

Thank you so much for the hilarious column from the crank mail people. Their language and thoughts only prove how nasty, vulgar and illiterate they really are.

They claim that God is real. Really? Then bring him here, we'd like to meet him. He's about as real as a three-dollar bill. Archaeologists and scientists have done a great deal of research on their book of fairy tales. They have discovered that the Egyptians kept extensive records of all daily activities, with not one word about someone leading 600,000 people out of Egypt. It never happened. Some other crackpot living for three days in the stomach of a whale. Never happened. The resurrection. Never happened.

I gave up religion years ago. I spent several years caring for my wife, who was stricken with Alzheimer's and a stroke. At the time, I prayed for help



We know!

"I could not have said it better!" writes California member John Luoma about this marquee in Hanford, Calif.

for my wife. What did their God do? Absolutely nothing. Their god is so evil and tyrannical that he makes Satan look like Peter Pan.

Eugene T. Bernascone
New Jersey

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I'm always delighted to see Freethought Today arrive in my mailbox! The combination of humor, news and essays is perfect. I'm always pleased to see the legal victories on behalf of church-state separation, entertained and shocked by the semiliterate, hateful crank mail, and impressed by young essay award winners. Thanks for your great work.

Chas. Kennedy
Wyoming

Solution is simple for anti-choice Catholics

I always enjoy the Freethought of the Day, but the Feb. 4 entry about Eugene MacDonald and The Truth Seeker newspaper left me wondering what ever happened to the blue laws and the 1893 World's Fair. It turns out that the World's Fair committee returned the congressional funding to the government so that they could open on Sundays.

They were sued, but the U.S. attorney general refused to mount a Supreme Court appeal, noting that the case could not be taken until the fair was over. So there was a legal victory of sorts that allowed people to enjoy the fair on a Sunday, likely the only day most working folks could go.

This is exactly what the Catholic hospitals should do regarding the health care contraception mandate — return the government money so they don't have to do what the government says.

Paul Tucker
Pennsylvania

*Editor's note: The noted 19th century freethinker and feminist champion Elizabeth Cady Stanton was so incensed by the call to close the 1893 Columbia Exposition on Sundays that she wrote, paid for and distributed her own flyer about it, "Shall the World's Fair Be Closed on Sunday?" Part of that long-lost flyer was resurrected and may be read in the anthology of 19th and 20th century women freethinkers, *Women Without Superstition: No Gods — No Masters*, edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor and published by FFRF. FFRF members may sign up to receive daily "Freethought of the Day" calendar blurbs at ffrf.org/news/day/.*

Dan demolishes debate opponents at Oxford

Kudos to Dan Barker for "This house does not believe in God," recounting his debate at Oxford Union [Dec. 12]. Theist debater John Lennox's contention that "Atheism is illogical, nothing comes from nothing," is demolished by Dan's rejoinder, "If nothing comes from nothing, God cannot exist," rendering Lennox's perspective untenable, because if God does exist, he is not nothing, but something that came from nothing which something cannot come, the epitome of religious fantasy.

Peter Hitchens' outlook is even more absurd. Asking "why would anyone want the universe to be pointless and chaotic" leads one to ask, *why* is it pointless and chaotic?

Meaningless theistic conjecturing has in fact nothing to do with reality, so convincingly evidenced by the reflexive responses of those whose all-consuming mindbenders are just that, all-consuming. And, I might add, utterly out of touch with rationality.

William R. Lamppa
Minnesota

Make creationists own nonsensical claptrap

If you're ever in a conversation with someone who believes that creationism or "intelligent design" ought to be taught in high school biology classes as viable alternatives to evolution (sometimes the way it's framed with a veneer of reasonableness is that we should "teach the controversy"), here's an effective way to get to the heart of the matter: Remind (or more likely, inform) your interlocutor that the central qualification of a scientific hypothesis is its falsifiability. Unless there is some potential data, some conceivable, imaginable evidence that would force you to reject or revise your theory, then it is simply isn't science. Falsifiability is the critical hallmark of science.

Now, you ask, please describe some data, any conceivable fact or facts which, if established, would force you to reject or revise your so-called scientific theory of creationism. Your question is certain to be met with a blank stare, because there simply are none. You then repeat: If there's nothing that would ever, under any circumstances force you, rationally, to reject or revise your "theory," then it's a leap of faith,

not science.

This is why we don't, for example, present the idea that life was created and is completely controlled by an undetectable Flying Spaghetti Monster living between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter as a viable alternative to evolution.

Every high school science classroom should have a sign over the door reading "Let only those ideas enter here that can be falsified."

Paul Oppenheim
Maine

Day of Prayer tramples on Bill of Rights

As a lifelong, dedicated and unrepentant atheist, I'm delighted to be a new member of FFRF. While reading your wonderful newspaper, I was reminded of something here in Vero Beach which has irritated the hell out of me for the nearly 40 years I have lived here.

On the first Thursday of every May, the National Day of Prayer tramples on our Bill of Rights by allowing about 100 or more people to congregate on the steps of City Hall and pray their guts out. Many local pastors and other religious people are encouraged to offer a few words in support of this travesty. I have never publicly complained because my house would probably be fire-bombed by good "Christians."

The Internet told me of your suit against this practice, but I thought perhaps you might like to write a letter to our City Council reminding them of our First Amendment and the history of separation of church and state in the U.S. If, by some miracle, your letter is successful, the same people will immediately appeal to our County Commission for permission to conduct their services either at the courthouse, which is only a few blocks from City Hall, or at the County Administration Building complex to the north of the city.

Stuart A. Miner
Florida

Sky pilot doesn't guide them to end zone

What is this with football players all pointing at the sky after they score? Some point with one index finger, others with both. Professional, college, even high school football players. The sky had nothing to do with their scoring. They should point at the lovely emerald turf over which their feet have just carried them.

John Tindale, Life Member
South Carolina

Only 5 justices blind to Establishment Clause

Student essayist Wilson Melón ["The First Amendment and Democracy," Dec. 12] states in part ". . . the religious predisposition of merely nine judges." In my opinion, the statement should have said ". . . the religious predisposition of five right-wing Christian Supreme Court justices."

Recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings on Establishment Clause cases have been 5-4 decisions, with Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Antonin Scalia, Anthony Kennedy, Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito (all Catholics) voting to eviscerate the Establish-

Continued on next page

Letterbox

Continued from previous page
ment Clause.

It's very obvious that the above five men have been making outrageous efforts to ignore the U.S. Constitution, nullify the Establishment Clause and impose their personal Christian ideologies on all American.

Otherwise, a very good essay and I congratulate Wilson on his award.

John D. Dunn
California

Member's had it with small-minded thinking

I'm not a "cause" guy, but I just wanted to write why I joined FFRF, which I found out about through your podcast. Sometimes I think your fights are a little silly, but I'm an atheist (and have been since I reached the age of reason) and now feel the need to do more.

My parents, who are in their 60s, have turned toward a church and are using the bible as a source for hate and a nonscience way of thinking. Couple that with Mike Huckabee's comments (among others) about the Connecticut shootings, and I just feel I'm about done with this small-minded thinking and religious people believing they know all the answers.

So I did my small part to help your organization. Thanks!

Raymond Tator
New York

Editor's note: Huckabee said this, "We ask why there is violence in our schools, but we've systematically removed God from our schools. Should we be so surprised that schools would become a place of carnage because we've made it a place where we don't want to talk about eternity, life, what responsibility means, accountability?"

Here's how to waste 21 years of your life

To all nonbelievers I have good news. If you and a devout Christian both attain the age of 80, you will have enjoyed life and your family for as much as 21 years longer than the Christian.

A person who goes to church every Sunday and spends the day or evening studying the bible wastes 96 days a year

or 7,680 days in a lifetime. While you were enjoying the one life you have, the Christian was on his or her knees mumbling prayers to some god who will not even respond.

The worst part is what they are doing to their children. Brainwashing is a vicious torture that will last a lifetime for many.

Tom Gogan
Missouri

I won't let Christians put label on me

The Catholic Church equates sex abuse to the sexual revolution of the 1960s. In retrospect, the availability of young boys goes back to Pope Fabian in 230-250. He instituted the minor orders.

The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire by Edward Gibbon (1946), Vol. I pp. 399-400, says there was no darkening of the sun or earthquakes during the supposed passion of Christ.

Vol. II, page 1,427, says Christian writers borrowed the scene from Caesar's death in 44 B.C.E., when a comet darkened the sky.

To me, the word atheist is a word made up by religionists. I do not label myself by their word.

Larry Ackerman
Missouri

Time to stop undignified bowing and scraping

Some of these quotes have been around. Maybe FFRF should begin cataloguing them and make a phrase dictionary that members can use. It might be best to copyright them, if new, so other groups can't prevent their usage.

Jesus Saves, We Invest; Schools Are for Teaching, Not Preaching; Stop Discrimination, Quit Your Religion; There Are No Gods, Never Have Been, Never Will Be; Save 10%, Stop Tithing;

Relax, Imagine No Church Service; To Stay, You Pay, Pray and Obey; In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash; No More Bowing, Raise Your Head in Dignity; Join FFRF, Get Out of Hell Free.

Members can come up with some great ones that others can use.

Scott Hunter
Arizona

ism.

Mark Chancey, professor of religious studies at Southern Methodist, in a report on bible courses in Texas public schools

Texas Freedom Network, 1-16-13

Hey Catholics, news flash — if the pope can quit, it's OK for you to quit, too. ... Every poll of American Catholics shows they find most Vatican teachings to be irrelevant. Catholics use birth control, they get divorced, they have premarital sex, they masturbate, sometimes all in one night.

Entertainer Bill Maher, suggesting Hillary Clinton as a replacement for Pope Benedict because she "knows how to handle a guy who can't keep his hands to himself"

"Real Time With Bill Maher," 2-15-13

Percentage of freshmen at four-year



Meredith "Dick" Springer



Member among hundreds returning Eagle awards

This is Maine FFRF member Meredith "Dick" Springer's letter in September to the Boy Scouts of America:

In 1943 I proudly received my Eagle Scout badge from the Boy Scouts of America. At that time I was a sincere religious believer.

As I later critically examined my beliefs I realized that I no longer could honestly believe in God. I fail to understand how reaching this conclusion made me unfit to belong to your organization. Now my self-respect as a nonbeliever as well as my conscience compel me to join hundreds of others in reluctantly returning my badge to the BSA to express my disgust with your discriminatory policies.

The Boy Scouts of America accepts for membership all boys except those in two groups that are unpopular in much of America, gays and nonbelievers in God. Stigmatizing these groups clearly sends a message to your members that only reinforces prejudices many already have. The BSA also denies a religion badge to boys who are Unitarians because their church passed a resolution in 1992 opposing your discriminatory practices.

Many scouting associations around the world do not require their members to have specific religious beliefs. In the United States, the Girl Scouts of the USA voted overwhelmingly in 1993 to allow its members to substitute another word or phrase for God in its oath, saying that the change was "a very strong statement that Girl Scouts

... have strength in diversity and that we are an inclusive organization." The Girl Scouts also permits lesbian girls to participate.

The BSA has never established a relationship with the Girl Scouts, but it has partnered with American Heritage Girls, a new organization formed by intolerant opponents of the nondiscriminatory policies of the Girl Scouts, with a "memorandum of mutual support [that] recognizes the common values and goals of both organizations."

As a private organization the BSA can do anything it wants, but as an American icon comparable to apple pie, it has a special moral obligation to teach the best American values. These values include religious tolerance and recognizing the worth of all of us.

Sincerely yours,

Meredith N. Springer

The Feb. 10 Maine Sunday Telegram also published Springer's thoughts on the issue (which he'd sent as a letter to the editor) as an op-ed. As of Feb. 9, 222 Eagle Scouts had shared their photos and letters renouncing their Eagle awards on the website Eagle Scouts Returning Our Badges.

Violence against atheists

Continued from page 13

Pseudonymity Traditionally Granted when Plaintiffs Uniquely Vulnerable to Stigma

Pseudonymity has traditionally been granted when Plaintiffs are uniquely vulnerable to stigma. For example, pseudonymity has been granted to: a bipolar plaintiff, a plaintiff seeking an abortion, and a gay plaintiff challenging a sodomy law. The Plaintiffs in *Porter* who were challenging religious education in public schools were vulnerable due to the fact that they espoused a minority viewpoint in their small, rural town. So too, Plaintiffs in this case are particularly vulnerable to stigma for espousing what appears to be the minority viewpoint in their small, rural town and for being individuals on record to challenge this religious display. Plaintiffs clearly fit within the traditional purpose of pseudonymity.

Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, plaintiffs respectfully request that their Motion for Leave to Use Pseudonyms and For Protective Order be granted.

A portion of the information for this brief was compiled and graciously shared by the American Civil Liberties Union.

Overheard

Our best estimate is that 700 people give up reading the bible every single day.

Paul Caminiti, vice president for bible engagement at Biblica [formerly the International Bible Society], Colorado Springs, Colo.

Mission Network News, 4-6-12

A number of courses and their instructional materials incorporate pseudo-scholarship, including claims that the bible provides scientific proof of a 6,000-year-old Earth (young Earth creationism) and that the United States was founded as a Christian nation based on biblical Christian principles. At least two districts' bible courses include materials suggesting that the origins of racial diversity among humans today can be traced back to Noah's sons, a claim that has long been an important element of some forms of rac-

Residents support humanist book display



By Deanna Sewell

“Library Display Criticized” was the heading of a recent letter to the editor published by *The Columbian*, a newspaper in Vancouver, Wash. The letter read in part:

“Upon entering the Cascade Park Community Library ... I was disturbed by the blatant promotion of atheist/secular humanist authors and books displayed prominently in the front window. Included were atheist authors such as Richard Dawkins, Bill Nye, Christopher Hitchens, with books titled *Living Without God*, *The Portable Atheist* and *Women Without Superstition*.”

The letter continued: “I was think-

ing to myself, is this even constitutional from an American First Amendment perspective? Also, even if it is legal, is this something the taxpayers of Vancouver would approve of, considering it is their millions in tax revenue that keep the library up and running?”

Well, this “unconstitutional” display was put up by the Humanists of Greater Portland, which has been placing displays in public libraries and colleges for more than 10 years. This was only the second time that patrons have voiced a concern about our displays. (The other time was when some church members questioned the display, but then they put up their own bible-based display a month or two later.)

We set up our book display at the Cascade Park Library in early January. The very next day the librarian called asking us if we had a list of the books in the case. She said that a number of people had already expressed interest in the display.

One of our members quickly made copies of the list and dropped them off at the library. One library patron commented on our HGP Facebook page that she “almost cried with joy” when she saw the titles of the books in the display case.

The letter critical of our display was published in the paper late in January, and the online comments immediately poured in, coming from as far away as New Jersey and New York. The online response was overwhelmingly positive and supportive:

- “Fantastic! I know the library has featured differing philosophies and religions in the past, so in fairness this is a good thing.”

- “Libraries are among the last bastions of free speech and the open exchange of ideas in our culture. We cannot grow as human beings unless we challenge and question, and allow others to challenge and question our received beliefs and opinions. I applaud



Deanna Sewell stocks the humanist “shelf help” display at a public library in Vancouver, Wash.

the staff at Cascade Park . . . for their willingness to initiate a conversation about true freedom of (and from) religion. (I am not an atheist, by the way.)”

The icing on the cake was a follow-up letter to the editor from the executive director of the Fort Vancouver Regional Library District. She wrote in part:

“I was heartened to read the many online comments about the letter that articulated the important mission FVRL has as a public library in supporting diverse points of view and interest through our collections, services and programs.”

The director continued: “Public libraries exist to offer access to ideas and information from a variety of perspectives. A democracy can only be healthy and vigorous if we both learn and explore our differences as well as our common ground. If we are fulfilling our responsibility, FVRL libraries will promote understanding, prompt a conversation, encourage a healthy

debate, and — yes — sometimes strike a nerve. It’s what good public libraries do.”

Our humanist group has been overwhelmed by the response of the citizens of Vancouver, the staff at FVRL and the online comments in support of our display at their library. We hope the person who wrote the initial letter to the editor criticizing our display will apply through the library to set up a display of books that support his position.

The library director said it best: “Public libraries exist to offer access to ideas from a variety of perspectives.”

Deanna Sewell is a longtime member of FFRF and the Humanists of Greater Portland. For the past eight years, she’s been putting up six or seven humanist book displays at area public libraries each year. Deanna is also the proud owner of goddess “clean” money she won at the 2001 FFRF national conference in Madison, Wis.

FFRF opposes vouchers for religious, private schools

By Patrick Elliott

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott’s op-ed opposing school vouchers ran in Wisconsin’s two largest newspapers — the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and the *Wisconsin State Journal* — in late January. It was also picked up by numerous other publications and websites.

With voucher advocates trumpeting “National School Choice Week,” it is a fitting time to examine the proposed expansion of private school vouchers in Wisconsin. Some politicians are intent on slowly doing away with our public education system in favor of privatized education paid for with taxpayer money.

Voucher money largely flows to religious schools. In the newly expanded “choice” of schools in Racine, 10 out of the 11 schools are parochial schools. Based on a review of Department of Public Instruction data on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, more than 21,000 of nearly 25,000 enrolled students at the beginning of this school year attended readily identifiable reli-

gious schools.

This amounts to more than \$133 million in taxpayer money going to religious institutions in Milwaukee this school year alone.

Funding private and religious schools through vouchers is an end run around our constitutionally created public education system. The Wisconsin Constitution requires the Legislature to “provide by law for the establishment of district schools, which shall be as nearly uniform as practicable; and such schools shall be free and without charge . . . and no sectarian instruction shall be allowed therein.”

Proposals to continue to chip away at public education and expand vouchers by increasing the geographic area, income limits and funding are contrary to our long-valued public education system.

Schools do not exist just to benefit parents. They serve to educate the next generation to create an educated citizenry and to ensure the vitality of the



Patrick Elliott

state. This is a public good supported by all, including those who do not have school-aged children. This social value is recognized by our constitutionally created public schools and our compulsory education laws.

While parents pick the school of their choice in using vouchers, taxpayers pay the bills. And taxpayers have no means of holding voucher schools accountable. Low performing voucher schools, which have little state oversight, can do as they please. Voucher schools are not governed by publicly elected school boards that have to answer to constituents.

Some of the Milwaukee choice schools are not holding up their duty to provide a comprehensive education. Take, for instance, the Clara Mohammed School. According to its IRS filings, the school’s purpose is to engage in “a Qur’an-guided journey toward active global citizenship.” It is funded almost exclusively through vouchers. In 2011, only 0.8 percent of its students (1 out of 123) tested proficient in math and 5.7 percent tested proficient in reading on state exams.

Other Milwaukee choice schools are

using unscientific and outdated curriculum from fundamentalist Christian textbook publishers such as A Beka Books. Carter’s Christian Academy in Milwaukee describes the A Beka materials, covering normal school subjects, as being “presented from God’s point of view.” Of the 69 Carter’s Christian students tested in 2011, none tested proficient in reading by state standards and only three tested proficient in math. IRS records show the principal got \$109,000 in 2011 compensation.

Both the Clara Mohammed School and Carter’s Christian Academy have increased enrollment this year. While they enroll a small number of students, they are a symptom of a larger problem. The schools can take public money and teach what they want. The schools do not have to have licensed teachers or even safe outdoor space for students to play. Parents will continue to send their students to these schools, whether for religious reasons or because they mistakenly believe school leaders are up to the task of providing a sound education.

The voucher school program needs elimination rather than expansion.

Early bird notice – Madison, Wis., Sept. 27-29, 2013

Plan ahead for FFRF's 36th annual national convention

The Freedom From Religion Foundation will host its 36th annual national conference with a "home convention" Sept. 27-29 at the downtown Concourse Hotel at 1 W. Dayton St. in Madison, Wis.

"Early bird" announced honoree will be 19-year-old **Zack Kopplin**, a Louisiana student activist who made national news with his work to repeal a stealth creationism law in his home state. Zack's repeal effort has been endorsed by 43 Nobel laureates, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Association of Biology Teachers, the Clergy Letter Project and other groups.

Zack also persuaded the New Orleans City Council to vote unanimously to support repeal of the Louisiana Science Education Act of 2008. Zack, a sophomore at Rice University studying history, will be the first recipient of the newly endowed annual **Richard and Beverly Hermsen Student Activist**

Award of \$1,000.

Receiving her Freethought Heroine award a year late will be mystery writer **Sara Paretsky**, an ardent supporter of separation of state and church, and creator of the famous V.I. Warshawski detective series. Paretsky took ill just before the Portland, Ore., conference and wasn't able to fly in from Chicago.

Also speaking will be Establishment Clause legend **Jim McCollum**, a previous "Champion of the First Amendment" honoree, in recognition of the 65th anniversary of the 1948 *McColum v. Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court. The case was brought by Vashti McCollum on behalf of Jim after public schools in Champaign, Ill., began devotional religious instruction.

Vashti wrote about how she took and won the landmark decision, the bedrock upon which all other religion-in-school precedent rests, in her memorable book *One Woman's Fight*, which



Photo: Brent Nicastro

Jim McCollum

has been kept in print by FFRF. Jim is a retired attorney living in Arkansas who is, appropriately, teaching constitutional law.

Rooms may be booked now at the Concourse for the convention rate of \$149 plus tax single, double, triple and quadruple. Phone 1-800-356-8293 or locally 608-256-7000, or register online indicating you are with the Freedom From Religion Foundation room block. The registration number to verify the room block is **211725**.

The modestly priced event will include an afternoon reception on Friday, Sept. 27, with early registration

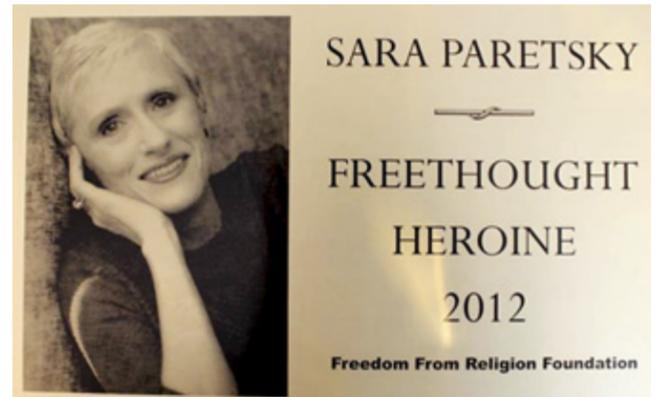


Zack Kopplin

and some workshop presentations. The convention formally opens at 7 p.m. Friday (including a complimentary cake reception) and continues through Saturday night. Two optional group meals are offered, the Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast and the banquet dinner. The membership and Board of Director meetings take place Sunday morning (just to be sacrilegious), adjourning by noon.

Plan ahead and book now to avoid disappointment!

Look for full details and formal convention registration in April, both online and in Freethought Today.



FFRF staffers (left) Mel Knier, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Katie Daniel, Katie Stenz and Jackie Douglas gather round Sara Paretsky's 2012 Freethought Heroine award last October after learning the humanist/feminist author was too ill to attend FFRF's Portland convention to accept it. (We put it on ice for you, Sara!)

FFRF welcomes 12 Lifetime Members

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to announce a dozen new Lifetime supporters. They are:

Wm. Carolan, John Ehrhardt, Ellen and Danny Flick (wedding gift from Ellen's mom, Dianne Centa, herself a

"Lifer"), Keith Hughes, David W. LaValley, Terry Mellendorf, John Parker, Richard Pope, Judith Pratt, Wayne Schmitt and Christopher Shera.

States represented are Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, New

Jersey, Ohio, Virginia and Washington.

Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000, go into a rainy day endowment and mean never another renewal notice for the kind donor.

Warmest thanks to Christopher,

Wayne, Judith, Richard, John, Terry, David Keith, Dianne, John and William, and warmest wishes to the March newlyweds Ellen and Danny.

One Woman's Fight

by Vashti McCollum

Celebrate 65th anniversary of McCollum ruling!

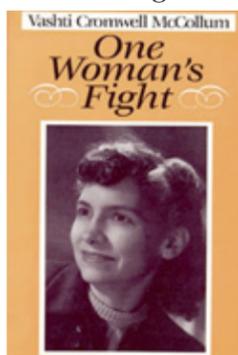
Historic legal battle to a Supreme Court victory removing religious instruction from the public schools.

240 pages, with photographs.

\$15.00 postpaid

\$20.00 nonmember

ffrf.org/shop



Gallup: 31% of U.S. adults 'nonreligious'

The Washington, D.C.-based Gallup polling firm surveyed 353,492 adults about religion throughout all of 2012. Survey says:

- About 40% of respondents said they're "very religious" (religion is an important part of their daily lives and they attend services every week or almost every week).

- Another 31% are "nonreligious" (religion is not an important part of their daily lives and they seldom or never attend services).

- The remaining 29% are "moder-

ately religious" (religion is important but they do not attend services regularly, or because they say religion is not important but they still attend services).

"Most religious" states were Mississippi (first), Utah/Alabama (tie), Louisiana, Arkansas, South Carolina, Tennessee, North Carolina, Georgia, Oklahoma, Texas and South Dakota.

The "least religious" states were Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Nevada and Hawaii.