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## *FFRF 'loads bases'* Green light for FFRF church politicking suit

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has "loaded the bases," winning the right to proceed with three historic federal lawsuits that contest preferential treatment of churches and ministers by the Internal Revenue Service.

In addition to receiving a green light Aug. 19 from a federal judge in its significant suit against pulpit electioneering, FFRF, a national state/church watchdog representing nearly 20,000 nonreligious members, has two other cases:

• On Aug. 22, FFRF received a goahead from a federal judge in its challenge to force churches to provide the same annual financial accountability to the public and the IRS as required by other 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofits. (See story, below.)

• FFRF awaits a decision by a federal district judge in its challenge of the "parish exemption." In 1954, Congress passed a law uniquely benefiting "ministers of the gospel," allowing them to deduct from taxable income any church payment given in the form of a "housing allowance." (See related article, page 3.)

Continued on page 3

# FFRF wins standing to sue IRS over 990 Forms

U.S. District Barbara Crabb, Western District of Wisconsin, ruled Aug. 22 that FFRF has standing to pursue IRS inequities favoring churches over other tax-exempt nonprofits.

Crabb previously granted FFRF standing over its federal challenge of the 1954 Congressional "parish exemption" law. That case has been "put to bed" and both sides now await a decision.

what they do with donations, financial oversight policies, salaries of top employees, how much of the income is used for fundraising versus mission or management, etc. Most active nonprofits, such as FFRF, hire a certified public accountant to prepare the form, incurring significant annual accounting costs. "Don't get us wrong. We think the cost and transparency are worth it," says FFRF co-founder Annie Laurie Gaylor. "We're grateful for the privilege of the government designating donations to FFRF as deductible for income-tax purposes. But since we began filing these forms in 1978, we've been aware that churches don't play by the same rules, yet get equal or better privileges." Co-President Dan Barker asks, "What do churches have to hide? Why don't they want to be accountable to the public?" "Look at Jonestown, Guyana, to see can happen when tax-exempt churches are not accountable to the government, or necessarily anyone," Gaylor added. "Had Rev. Jim Jones had to account to the government for the wealth, armory and even the foster children he and his church amassed, I

'Churches don't play by the same rules, yet get equal or better







### Freethought Hall to be 'born again'

Ground was officially broken Aug. 26 for FFRF's major expansion in downtown Madison, Wis. From left, front, wearing hardhats and holding golden shovels are general contractor Robin Roberts, NCI Roberts; Jeff Grundahl, president, NCI Roberts, FFRF President Emerita Anne Nicol Gaylor; FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor; Mike Trapino, NCI Roberts director of operations; (back) John Kaltenberg, project superintendent; FFRF Co-President Dan Barker; and FFRF Director of Operations Lisa Strand. A four-story addition replacing an old apartment building (background with FFRF staff and members) will be attached to the existing building. Champagne was uncorked and enjoyed after the groundbreaking. See page 5 for more.

In her Form 990 ruling, Crabb wrote that the plaintiffs — FFRF and Triangle FFRF, its chapter in Raleigh, N.C. have been injured because "the government is relieving an ongoing burden from some taxpayers on the basis of religious affiliation." She added, "it is not plaintiffs' 'belief' that gives them standing. Rather, it is their status as organizations that are burdened with requirements not imposed on churches."

In exchange for the significant advantage of retaining tax-exemption, all 501(c)(3) organizations except churches must file an annual Form 990. The forms are available for the public to view and reputable charities post them on their websites for easy access.

Tax-exempts report to the public on

privileges.

believe that heinous slaughter in 1978 would have been averted."

The suit also challenges the expensive filing fees which all applicants must pay, except churches. A nonprofit seeking tax-exemption other than a church must pay either \$400 or \$850, depending on income, just for the privilege of applying. The one-time fee is not returned. Crabb ruled that since FFRF and its chapter have already paid the fees, and likely won't incur more, she is planning to dismiss this aspect of the suit.

FFRF noted that because of secrecy regarding church finances, FFRF's challenge in a related lawsuit of church electioneering is all the more important. Read more:

ffrf.org/legal/challenges/ongoing-lawsuits

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Atheist 'Aints' dispel myths about nonbelievers

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Top-winning student college essayists

Pages 12-15

Madison, Wisconsin

September 2013

Meet a Legal Intern



Name: Charles M. Roslof. Where and when I was born: Chapel Hill, N.C., July 14, 1990.

**Family**: Mom (Cindy), dad (Ed), stepmom (Lara), older brother (Rick), younger sisters (Katharine and Lily).

**Education**: Miami Valley School, Dayton, Ohio, 2008; Georgetown University, B.A. in computer science with minors in linguistics and Japanese, 2012; Harvard Law School, J.D. expected in 2015.

**My religious upbringing was**: Methodist until age 9, then Presbyterian.

How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern: I found the position on my school's employer database when looking for constitutional law-related jobs, thought it seemed interesting and applied.

What I do here: Write letters to various agencies of government in response to complaints that they are violating the Establishment Clause, research facts and law related to those letters and occasionally help with computer issues.

What I like best about it: I've been able to work on a wide variety of issues, including some types of First Amendment violations I had never thought of before. It's kept things new and interesting all summer. I've especially enjoyed having opportunities to work on some larger issues and complex complaints involving state and federal statutes and regulations. On top of that, my fellow interns, the legal staff and everyone at FFRF are wonderful people who are great to work with.

Something funny that's happened at work: It's consistently hilarious to learn of some people's far-off interpretations of the First Amendment and what it allows them to do.

My legal interests are: Civil rights, constitutional law and the intersection of law and technology (including intellectual property law).

My legal heroes are: Anyone who, on a daily basis, puts their legal knowledge and training to use in the service of improving the world and the lives of the people in it. Also, Ruth Bader Ginsberg (not that she doesn't fall into that category).

**These three words sum me up**: Nerdy, empathetic, thoughtful.

Things I like: All sorts of music (from They Might Be Giants, Lady Gaga, Indigo Girls, Dresden Dolls and Dixie Chicks to the "Great American Songbook"), well-told stories across all media (television, film, books, podcasts, etc.), chocolate and other food, science fiction, technology, video games (especially Legend of Zelda ones), figuring out puzzles, methods of data organization (spreadsheets, charts, etc.) and the abbreviation "etc."



# Hawaii activists expose alleged church fraud

Whistleblowers (and FFRF members) Holly Huber and Mitch Kahle of Hawaii Citizens for the Separation of State and Church claim in a lawsuit filed in March but only recently made public that five churches have shorted the state Department of Education about \$5.6 million over the last six years in unpaid rent and other fees.

According to Hawaii News Now, the suit alleges the churches are intentionally filing false applications to save money. "By not paying for what they use, they are directly taking money from our state's children," said Jim Bickerton, plaintiff's attorney.

"They're there so long and they're so cozy, they just take a whole bunch of extra time. They come in on Saturday even though they're only supposed to be there on Sunday," said Kahle.

If the court rules in favor of the plaintiffs, damages could be treble, with the churches owing the schools \$16.8 million, Honolulu Civil Beat reported Aug. 15. The suit contends that the churches — New Hope Oahu, New Hope Hawaii Kai, New Hope Kapolei, Calvary Chapel Central Oahu and One Love Ministries — all filed false forms. Ironically perhaps, the three New Hope churches belong to the Hawaii District of Foursquare Churches. claim New Hope Oahu shorted the school \$3.2 million over six years before the roof on the auditorium collapsed.

"The buildings are falling down and the state is still paying to run them and not getting reimbursed. It's tragic. That \$3.2 million might have put a new roof on Farrington years ago," said Bickerton.

The plaintiffs have compiled more than 2,000 pages of documentation they said proves their allegations.

New Hope Oahu Pastor Wayne Cordeiro said in an interview with Hawaii News Now that his church had donated about \$1 million in equipment and upgrades to the Farrington High auditorium before the collapse.

The plaintiffs claim in-kind donations don't count.

Kahle and Huber said they're helping public schools recover money that's rightfully theirs but contend the Department of Education isn't being helpful. "Instead of assisting us, they tried to cover up the information. They told us we were no longer allowed to communicate with the public schools," Huber said. "I would call it stonewalling."

Kahle was FFRF's 2011 Freethinker of the Year and accepted the award in Hartford, Conn., at the 34th national convention.

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**Things I smite**: Dogmatism in all forms, most sports and sports culture, heteronormativity.

My loftiest goal: To become a judge.

In the case of Farrington High School, for example, the plaintiffs

### A Note to Members

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## Parish exemption case awaits decision

## Barker, Gaylor: 'We're not ministers, FFRF isn't church'

The federal government claims it wants to give Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-presidents of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, a clergy tax break for directing an atheist group.

Barker and Gaylor, as plaintiffs in FFRF's parish exemption lawsuit, are saying to the federal government: "No thanks."

And they're asking a federal judge to concur.

"We're having to tell the government the obvious — we're not ministers of the gospel and FFRF isn't a church!" Gaylor said.

Reporter Bob Smietana of The Tennessean in Nashville, covering the amusing but bizarre legal twist, termed the case "part chess match and part high-stakes poker game."

FFRF contested the government's argument in its final brief in late July in its challenge of Section 107(2) of the Internal Revenue Code giving preferential tax breaks exclusively to "ministers of the gospel."

Under IRS provisions adopted in 1954, "ministers of the gospel" are uniquely permitted to deduct payment in the form of a "housing allowance" from their taxable income. The law's sponsor, U.S. Rep. Peter Mack, justified the benefit on the basis that "we are being threatened by a godless and anti-religious world movement," and said ministers of the gospel "are carrying on such a courageous fight" and "caring for our spiritual welfare."

Gaylor quipped, "If we understand the federal government's position correctly, it now wants to reward FFRF for fighting FOR 'godlessness!' "

The legal case, which could have major ramifications for the budget of every church and paid minister in the country, awaits judgment by U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb, Western District of Wisconsin.

Crabb ruled in August that FFRF's separate lawsuit against the IRS for exempting tax-exempt churches from reporting requirements could proceed. (See story, front page.)

Plaintiffs are current executive directors Dan Barker and Annie Laurie



Gaylor, and President Emerita Anne Nicol Gaylor, who, for several years, have had a portion of their salaries or retirement payments designated as a "housing allowance." Under IRS provisions, the trio is not allowed to claim the income exclusion.

Crabb ruled firmly a year ago that FFRF's nonbelieving executive directors had standing to sue over this preferential treatment. FFRF contends the law violates both the Establishment Clause and the Equal Protection Clause.

"Tax-free housing for ministers is not justifiable here as an accommodation of religion, nor is there any historical evidence that Congress enacted such tax breaks to abate government imposed burdens on the free exercise of religion," charged Richard L. Bolton, FFRF's lead attorney in the case. "The high cost of housing is neither a government burden, nor unique to ministers."

The tax provision creates governmental entanglement with religion, requiring "complex determinations relating to the tenets, principles and practices of those churches that provide their clergy with housing or cash housing allowances," the FFRF brief notes. The IRS must "engage in fact-intensive and intrusive inquiries" ensuring the individual is a "duly ordained, licensed, or commissioned" minister of



**Rich Bolton** 

the gospel, and providing religious services "in the exercise of his ministry," and that the employer qualifies as a church.

Even Jewish cantors qualify for the housing allowance, under IRS decisions, as have coaches at parochial schools who are ordained but are paid to coach, not to minister.

In his 66-page brief on behalf of FFRF, Bolton dismissed the government's claim that the plaintiffs qualify as "ministers of the gospel," noting: "The plaintiffs are not ordained; FFRF is not a church; and plaintiffs do not perform religious functions."

Although belief in a deity is not explicitly required by the IRS code (Buddhists, for instance, may be atheistic yet qualify as a religion), the IRS does require that the "minister" be seen as a spiritual leader and provide such services.

The brief points out that freethought has no sacerdotal functions, tenets or practices or forms of worship, and that FFRF's promotion of the separation between state and church "does not constitute the practice of religion."

A wrinkle in the suit is that Barker has an ordination — from a Christian congregation, not FFRF. He claimed the housing allowance while serving as a minister, but is now denied the housing allowance as director of an atheist/ agnostic organization which disavows religion.

FFRF's brief avers, "Section 107(2) creates an incentive for churches to designate a minister's compensation as a housing allowance in order to increase the minister's net income, while reducing the churches wage payments correspondingly" — a significant benefit to religion allowing them to pay clergy much less because tax-free dollars go further.

The purpose of the benefit "was intended to support and induce ministers to engage in religious activity" and to "spread the word of God" — which needless to say does not conform to constitutional dictates.

Read the entire brief and lawsuit background (scroll to *FFRF v. Geithner*): *ffrf.org/legal/challenges/ongoing-lawsuits* 

Green light for FFRF church politicking suit

#### Continued from front page

"These days, winning a court determination that you have standing to take a case is the biggest hurdle to surmount. It's quite an accomplishment to win that right with all three of our IRS challenges at the district court level," said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

FFRF is represented in all three of its IRS lawsuits by Richard L. Bolton of Boardman Law Firm, Madison, Wis.

In its closely watched challenge of church electioneering, FFRF was given standing to proceed by U.S. District Judge Lynn Adelman of the Western District of Wisconsin. The case will continue to discovery, so that FFRF and the public may learn the facts regarding IRS inaction over church politicking. own policies, which prohibit churches, or any 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, from endorsing from the pulpit or engaging in politicking. As Adelman observed, "A condition of this exemption is that the entity not participate in or intervene in any political campaign on behalf of, or in opposition to, any candidate for public office."

Adelman added, "If it is true that the IRS has a policy of not enforcing the prohibition on campaigning against religious organizations, then the IRS is conferring a benefit on religious organizations (the ability to participate in political campaigns) that it denies to all other 501(c)(3) organizations, including the Foundation."

The IRS claimed FFRF lacked stand-

ance but rather its own, particularized interest in receiving equal treatment."

Adelman noted that "the IRS does not dispute that this court has the raw power to issue an injunction preventing the IRS from continuing to follow a policy of favoritism toward religious organizations."

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor blasted the recommendations of a coalition of churches and religious groups released on Aug. 14 urging Congress to permit ministers to endorse from the pulpit. The coalition is closely aligned to the ironically named Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, which is "committed to helping Christ-centered organizations," and now, it appears, to their

## In Your Estate Planning

Arrange a bequest in your will or trust, or make the Freedom From Religion Foundation the beneficiary of an insurance policy, bank account, or IRA. It's easy to do. For related information (or to request a bequest brochure), please phone Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608) 256-8900. FFRF P.O. Box 750 Madison WI 53701

Freedom Depends

The court order came five days after a large, organized coalition of mostly evangelical organizations overtly urged Congress to repeal prohibitions against partisan pulpit politicking.

FFRF filed the suit in December 2012 over the IRS' lack of enforcement of its

ing to sue and that the U.S. is barred by sovereign immunity from being sued. Adelman rejected both claims, noting FFRF itself is a 501(c)(3) and is alleging "disparate treatment," and that "it is the IRS's own policy that is causing the alleged unequal treatment." FFRF is not asserting a "generalized grievlack of financial accountability.

Participating members include those connected to the usual theocratic groups, including the Liberty Counsel, Alliance Defending Freedom, the Christian Legal Society, Campus Crusade for Christ and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, with a few token non-Christian groups thrown in.

"If churches were allowed, despite their privileged tax-exempt status, to endorse candidates and engage in partisan politicking, the result would make *Citizens United* look like child's play," Gaylor added.

"If these churches, which are accountable to no one in government yet get so many favors,— are allowed to engage in tax-exempt politicking, it would be the ruination of our secular republic."

Read more about FFRF v. IRS: ffrf.org/legal/challenges/ongoing-lawsuits



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.* 

Madison, Wisconsin

September 2013

# Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

## How My Light is Spent

Eyes are certainly not necessary to animals having subterranean habits. - Charles Darwin, The Origin of Species

On the subway you thought it couldn't happen to you. But now the doctors are dazzling in white, Science burns in your eyeball: white-equals-black. At last the true dark falls like an eyelid. In the waiting room, your hand reaches out for a white cane: the dark is an old home, you live there in the caves of childhood, with your lovers in lamplight, with the brown hair of your beautiful sisters. In the down elevator you think: *but everybody sees.* What you see in the shine of the car is Science, dazzling in white, Darwin dissecting his blind barnacles; you see moles, bats, fins in the murk of a thousand fathoms; now you know better. At the door daylight staggers you; hands over face, you find the subway. There, in dim fluorescence: the Byzantine mosaic of the walls, I-beams rich with perfect rivets, the silver splendor of the rails, and from a green bench, as the gorgeous graffiti scream in, a woman in a crimson sweater rising like the sun.

> © Philip Appleman 1996 New and Selected Poems, 1956-1996

Philip Appleman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana Universi-



ty. 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.



## **Overheard**

If my sister dressed like that, I would kill her.

Male student overheard after a woman in blazer and slacks passed by, "Afghan youths cling to traditional ways" New York Times, 8-1-13

We're not motivated by the bottom dollar at all. We're motivated by providing a quality education and sharing Christ with the community, too.

Principal Hank Hobnecke, Westside Christian School, Madison, Wis., on applying to receive public funding to operate a Lutheran voucher school Wisconsin State Journal, 8-1-13

There's no progress. All you see is more and more churches and mosques. All the effort and ingenuity of the people goes into religious activities. It's holding us back.

Clive Aruede, London Black Atheists member, on the situation in his native Nigeria, which has a Christian majority New Statesman, 8-7-13

Before the revolution, people didn't see Islam as the problem, but after the revolution, they saw what political Islam was, and what Islam is.

Fadwa, an 18-year-old Tunisian who said the Arab Spring turned her from detached agnostic to atheist Associated Press, 8-7-13

We mujahedeen are imperfect soldiers trying to form a perfect religion. I apologize for any mistakes I made in this endeavor.

U.S. Army Maj. Nidal Hasan, opening statement in his trial for murdering 13 people and wounding 30 in 2009 at Fort Hood, Texas ABC News, 7-6-13

All the world's Muslims have fewer Nobel Prizes than Trinity College, Cambridge. They did great things in the Middle Ages, though. Evolutionary biologist Rich-

ard Dawkins' tweet, criticized by some, which Dawkins called

going basis sit with the victim-survivors of clergy sexual abuse. Ongoing, not just one or two meetings. Ongoing. Come to know and understand.

James Connell, retired vice chancellor of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and longtime critic of his own church, speaking to the Milwaukee Press Club Associated Press, 8-13-13

There's no place for official public prayer in government-sponsored venues. Christians should not take special advantage of situations where they are able to force their own prayers on others.

Steve Cates, a retired teacher and member of First Baptist Church in Murfreesboro, Tenn., objecting to a county commissioner's prayer at the dedication of a new public high school The Tennessean, 8-14-13

It's my view that it's very wrong for faith leaders to actively encourage their congregations to stop taking their medication.

British pediatrician Dr. Toni Tan, quoted in "HIV patients told by Pentecostal pastors 'to rely on God' " BBC News, 8-16-13

I just don't know what I did to make him do this.

David Nickell, 45, Riverside, Calif., still blaming himself for being molested by a Catholic priest in San Bernadino when he was 11 and 12 years old Riverside Press-Enterprise, 8-20-13

Investigators are doing a better job, and more people are cooperating with law enforcement. There is an understanding now that Catholic priests can and do abuse children.

Patrick Wall, former priest and current canon lawyer in St. Paul, Minn., on "credible accusations" of sexual abuse against more than 6,000 priests between 1950 and 2011 Fresno Bee, 8-17-13

Religions are great at forming communities and providing support for members who are going through various life events such as the birth of a child, unexpected injury or illness, marriages and deaths. On the other hand, religions are also great at breeding ignorance, intolerance and despair. Consider the Christian theological doctrine of original sin that says every baby is stained by the sin of Adam. Not only is this based on spurious mythology, it violates common sense. Newborns are not in any way capable of making moral decisions, and to even mythologically hold them culpable for the sins of a man who never existed is inane. So I oppose religious doctrine that I see as hindering human well-being, but my dedication to freedom of conscience also means that people have a right to deceive themselves if they want to. Steve Ahlquist, Humanists of Rhode Island president and uncle of teen activist Jessica Ahlquist The Providence Phoenix, 8-7-13



### 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

"a storm in a teacup" richarddawkins.net, 8-9-13

All that diversity is fine, but that's not the point. I haven't gotten a note inviting me to do a secular invocation. George Gold, Coalition of Reason coordinator and FFRF member, speaking to the city council about prayers in Chico, Calif.

Chico Enterprise-Record, 8-11-13

The word Messiah is a title, and it's a title that has only been earned by one person and that one person is Jesus Christ.

Lu Ann Ballew, child support magistrate in Cocke County, Tenn., ordering a 7-month-old boy's first name be changed to Martin and FFRF protested, a decision the mother is appealing WBIR, 8-11-13

Pope Francis, please, on a regular, on-

# FFRF awards \$11,050 to college essayists

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has awarded and sincerely congratulates the 19 currently enrolled college students in this year's essay competitions. Students were asked to write about the topic "Why I Don't Believe in God" in 750 to 900 words. There were eight winners in the top five, with two ties for fourth place and a three-way tie for fifth place. There were also 11 honorable mentions. Scholarships totaled \$11,050.

The late professor Michael Hakeem, a sociologist who was an FFRF officer and active atheist known by a generation of University of Wisconsin-Madison students, generously endowed the college essay competition. FFRF would also like to extend a special thanks to Dorea and Dean Schramm in Florida for providing each student with a \$50 bonus, which was added to each total shown below.

First place (\$3,000): **Anne Clymer**, 20, Champlain College.

Second place (\$2,000): **Daniel Munoz**, 21, University of Texas-Austin.

Third place (\$1,000): **Rebecca Tippens**, 23, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Fourth place (\$500): **Chelsey Shannon**, 21, Kalamazoo College.

Fourth place (\$500): Andrew Spalding, 24, Florida State University.

Fifth place (\$300): **Brieanna Kringlie**, 18, University of Wyoming.

Fifth place (\$300): **Daniel Mark Da**vis, 19, College of the Redwoods.

Fifth place (\$300): **Justin Moss,** 21, Pierce College in Lakewood.

Honorable mention (\$200): **Kevin Granger**, University of Arizona.

Honorable mention (\$200): Brandon Cooper, 21, Portland State Uni-

#### versity.

Honorable mention (\$200): **Diana Vasquez-Aliaga**, 19, University of Arizona.

Honorable mention (\$200): **Ashley Bates**, 20, University at Buffalo.

Honorable mention (\$200): Sonia Cruz-Rivera, 19, University of Massachusettes-Lowell.

Honorable mention (\$200): **Megumi Kato**, 19, Paul Mitchell: The School.

Honorable mention (\$200): **Megan Hanna**, 20, Doane College.

Honorable mention (\$200): Lillian Huebner, 18, University of Oregon.

Honorable mention (\$200): **Jake Raymond**, 20, Michigan Technological University.

Honorable mention (\$200): **Parker Buel**, 20, Columbus State Community College.

Honorable mention (\$200): Emer-

**son Hardebeck**, 20, Arizona State University.

"We consider our student scholarships as among FFRF's most important endeavors, to reward students for critical thinking," said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. FFRF earlier this summer awarded \$14,100 to 20 college-bound high school graduates.

FFRF is also announcing that it will be underwriting a \$1,000 scholarship through Black Skeptics Los Angeles to be awarded in 2014. Black Skeptics will award scholarships to "five brilliant youths of color who are first-generation college students," said Sikivu Hutchinson in July.

First- through fifth-place essays start on page 12. Honorable mention essays will run in future issues.

Winners of the graduate essay contest will be announced next month.

# September Building Fund donors

This listing reports donations for FFRF's Building Expansion Fund received from July 30 to Aug. 26, 2013. It is not cumulative except for the total. Donations received before July 30 were listed in the August issue. Freethought today will list subsequent donations in future issues. No donors will be identified by name without express permission. (If you plan to donate and would like such recognition, please be sure to check the box on the donation coupon mailed to you or online at ffrf. org/ffrf-building-fund-contribution-page/ to grant permission. If you gave a gift designated to the fund by or before Aug. 26 which does not appear to be reflected in this or previous monthly issues, please contact FFRF so that we may check our records and publish your gift. Please contact Katie Daniel at (608)256-8900 9-5 CDT weekdays or email to *katie@ffrf.org*.

#### \$5,000

John Parker, \$5,000, VA Victor Makau, \$5,000, CA Mary Naff, \$5,000, CA



#### \$500-\$1,000

Stephen Hirtle, \$1,000 PA Christine Slagle, \$1,000 CA Bonnie and Gary Stormo, \$600 SD Anonymous, \$500 NV

#### \$1-\$499

Anonymous, \$487 OH Anonymous, \$250 FL Jeff Nelson, \$250 AZ Michael Maiman, \$200 CA Marianne Edgerton, \$150 MN Robert Johnson, \$125 NY Anonymous, \$100 WI Anonymous, \$100 IL Anonymous, \$100 CO Anonymous, \$100 CA RT Sorensen, \$100 MN Raymond Moody, \$100 HI Anonymous, \$75, OR Anonymous, \$50 BC, CANADA Kurt Bocksenbaum and Leah Roberts, \$50 WI Stefanie Moritz and Vince Jenkins, \$50 WI

David Lush, \$50 WA Frank Wayne and Marzena Lecka \$50 IL Anonymous, \$25 KS

Donald Evans, \$25 CA Maxwell Taub, \$25 NY



Toasting the new Freethought Hall: FFRF Staffers Dayna Long, Lauryn Seering and summer part-timer Julie Solberg.



Anne Nicol Gaylor, 86, FFRF's principal founder and president emerita, breaks ground on the office expansion. Her son, Ian Gaylor, is also pictured. Anonymous, \$20 CA Russell Sussan, \$20 MN David Parchman, \$20 TN Subtotal: \$20,622

### Cumulative Total: \$941,479

### Goal: \$1.5 million

Notes: Bob and Norma Wittel, MI, converted a canceled convention registration into a \$265 donation to the Building Fund. Robyn Parnell and Mark Waggoner, OR, also converted a convention refund into a \$25 contribution. Jeremy Harris, OH, was listed in the June/July issue as Anonymous, but has since granted his permission to acknowledge his \$1,000 contribution.

FFRF Staff Attorney Liz Cavell with staff and members toasted "Freethought Hall being born again"! (Thanks to Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel for all photos. See more photos in an album on FFRF's Facebook page.)

# FFRF welcomes four new Lifetime Members

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to welcome its newest Lifetime Members: Arthur Heidt, Jack Simpson, Nick Vakula and John Bryant Wyman.

States represented are Arizona, Oregon and Wisconsin.

An individual Lifetime Membership

is \$1,000 earmarked for membership or membership renewal, is deductible for income-tax purposes to the fullest extent of the law, ensures never another renewal notice and goes into safe "rainy day" savings.

Warmest thanks to John, Nick, Jack and Arthur!

## Meet a Member

Freethought Today

## Texas Baptist found, embraced reason

**Name**: Michael Thomas Tower. I go by "Michael," never "Mike."

Where I live: Boulevard, Calif., a small rural community in the mountains 65 miles east of San Diego, on seven hillside acres surrounded by mountains and valleys.

Where and when I was born: Born in Tahoka, Texas, a small farming town 30 miles south of Lubbock, on the last day of 1935. I lived there until I was 12 years old.

**Family**: Four children (three surviving) from a marriage of nearly 20 years, four biological grandchildren, three adopted ones and two step-great-grandchildren.

My closest "kin" now, however, is my life partner of nine years. He is a native of Hong Kong, 59 years old, and a retired mechanical engineer. I also have an older sister.

**Education**: Texas public schools; B.A. from California Baptist College, major in religion, minor in English; master of religious education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

**Occupation**: My first career was in the Christian ministry, but doubts began forming soon and I left after less than three years of full-time activity. After that I made a career in insurance administration, another in graphic design and typography.

How I got where I am today: Four things come to mind, Agony and Exploration, Enlightenment and Relief. There was enormous misery in my early years because (1) I knew I was a homosexual and believed, as I was taught, that was not just a serious character flaw, but an abominable sin; and (2) the conservative religion in which I was born and raised never, ever proved to be what I was constantly told it was.

To get where I am today, I had to fight my way through all the idiocy and ignorance of anti-homosexuality as well as religion. The first barrier I final'I would like to see an Iranian-American pregnant atheist lesbian elected U.S. president.'

ly cleared when I was approaching 40, but it would take another 20-plus years to clear away all the religious sewage.

Where I'm headed: I hope I'm headed toward becoming more the person who is honest and genuine, yet respectful, in feeling free to speak up and stand fast when given the opportunity to advocate for reason and reality. I hope to demonstrate that the life of a nonbeliever can be a worthy life, and that what we believe or don't believe is strength, not fault.

**Person in history I admire**: Is it strange that I can't think of some one person to single out in this way? I guess I think of the multitudes throughout history who stood for reason and fact in the face of unyielding emotionalism, especially those whom we will never know by name who lived simple, quiet lives of extraordinary decency with a determination that strengthens us yet.

**Favorite quotation**: Maya Angelou's formula for any successful relationship — personal, business, social, whatever — is a valued guide: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

These are a few of my favorite things: Sitting on the couch between my partner and my cat, close enough that I can touch them both. The smell of homemade bread fresh from the oven. The hush that falls over an audi-



A 20-something Michael Tower and Michael in March 2013.

ence just before the curtain rises. Being enveloped in the quiet glow of a rose-tinted summer dusk.

**These are not**: The phrases (and those who say them) "slippery slope," "word of God" and "There's nothing you can say that will change my mind." An adult demeaning a child. Strangers who claim they know what's "right" for someone else.

**My doubts about religion started**: By the time I was 8 years old, though I tried to push my skepticism down in order to conform to my upbringing. I started dealing with the doubts while in my 20s, but I still tried to hang on to remnants of religion and didn't completely get rid of the doubts for another 40 years.

**Before I die**: I would like to be able to effectively and acceptably apologize to my children for having taught them to be religious. I would like to be recognized as a playwright of merit [see *MichaelThomasTower.com*]. I would like to see an Iranian-American pregnant atheist lesbian elected U.S. president.

Ways I promote freethought: By gathering the courage to speak out when someone needs to do it. By changing one of my frequent expletives to "Dogdammit," because I do believe in dogs, and I don't believe in false advertising. By establishing the website *ReasonAndReality.com* a few months ago where I can share ideas and let off steam.

**Life for me today is**: I'm nearly 78 years old, and I have never felt stronger or more fulfilled than I do today. There is no misery, no doubt.

I'm never fearful about pleasing some invisible but all-powerful Something whose demands are at best ambiguous and often ludicrous. None of that now! I am happy, as much as one can be in a world torn by so many different voices bellowing "I know the truth!"

What would you do if you were really, really rich? I would bring together a group of freethinking educators to design a program of education of, oh, for lack of a better name, let's call it "Human Behavior."

We need to teach, without the intrusion of religion, that decency, kindness and morality are their own reward, that we should "be good" for no reason except that's what enables human beings to live together peacefully and productively.

# Keep prayer out of government meetings

This op-ed was originally published July 5 in the Tallahassee, Fla., Democrat and is reprinted with permission.



of the person speaking the prayer or of the commissioners, but it is also "intelligently designed" to appeal to the majority in the audience who might vote for the commissioners.

What are the core beliefs of Taltheism? liefs based on faith, selecting leaders and a ritual to promote those beliefs, and discouraging heretics are clearly ways of establishing a religion. Not only that, but the offering of prayer at meetings is unethical.

When a person says aloud a prayer at commission meetings, a prayer initiated and authorized by the commission, that person misuses government positions, space and time for personal benefit, and this is wrong. The prayer serves as an advertisement for or marketing of the person's own religious beliefs. It is a form of proselytizing. We would not tolerate it if a person were to market his private business, political beliefs or food preferences as a regular part of commission meetings. Neither should we tolerate a person marketing his or her own religious beliefs. Offering and authorizing prayers falls outside the job description of city officials; they should stick to what they were elected or hired to do. The City Commission should do the right thing and discontinue prayers at its meetings. Just as this city stopped the practice of racial discrimination in the 1960s, it should now throw out another revered tradition that is unethi-



ne of my good friends recently wrote a letter to the Tallahassee City Commission in which he asked the commission to discontinue prayers at its meetings. The commission has not yet decided on his request, but my friend is certainly correct. For the commission to conduct prayers at its meetings is both unconstitutional and unethical. Why?

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says in part "Congress shall pass no law respecting an establishment of religion." As applied to our city government, this means the City Commission should implement no practice that facilitates an establishment of religion.

Unfortunately, the commission is violating this requirement and is facilitating the establishment of a religious sect that I shall call "Taltheism." This sect mainly reflects the religious beliefs • A supernatural person exists.

• This person listens to communications from humans.

• This person sometimes responds favorably to requests from humans.

• This person wants humans to communicate requests, praises and thanks to him/her.

• Humans should always try to do what this person wants.

What are the rituals of Taltheism? So far, there is only one — regular prayer at commission meetings and presumably at other city events.

Who are the leaders of Taltheism? The city manager, who usually speaks the prayer, is the pastor. The commissioners are the deacons.

What is the basis for the core beliefs? Faith alone.

Whether we agree or disagree with Taltheism is beside the point. For the city to facilitate this religious sect violates our constitution. Promoting be-

Gary Whittenberger wants Florida Taltheists to cut the tie between church and state.

cal and unconstitutional. We await a decision.

FFRF member Gary Whittenberger is a retired psychologist living in Tallahassee.

## In the News

### Calif. atheist parolee entitled to damages

An atheist parolee who was sent back to prison after refusing to take part in a religious drug treatment program must be compensated, a three-judge panel of the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled Aug. 23. A California jury had denied damages to Barry Hazle Jr. after a federal judge agreed his rights had been violated, reported the Sacramento Bee. Hazle, 45, a computer technician, did a year in state prison on a drug conviction. When he got out, his parole agent insisted he enter a treatment program that required acknowledgment of a higher power.

Hazle complained, was removed from the program and resentenced to three months and 10 days. He sued the state in 2008.

U.S. District Judge Garland Burrell Jr. found in Hazle's favor, but when the case went to trial on the issue of money, the jury refused to award damages. Burrell denied Hazle's motion for a new trial. The appellate judges sent the case back to Burrell for a new damages trial and directed him to instruct the jury that Hazle is entitled to damages.

The panel also said Hazle is entitled to a new trial as to emotional distress damages because of erroneous jury instructions and because the verdict form was flawed. The unanimous opinion also reversed Burrell's ruling that let defendant Westcare California Inc. off the hook. The company contracts with the state to coordinate drug treatment for parolees.

The ruling said there's "a genuine issue of material fact" whether Westcare contributed to the violation of Hazle's constitutional rights when it chose to contract with treatment facilities offering only religious-based programs and when it arranged for Hazle to attend one while knowing that as an atheist he objected.

# N.C. board prayed behind closed doors

According to the Salisbury [N.C.] Post, Rowan County, N.C., commissioners went behind closed doors to pray Aug. 5 to avoid violating a court order barring them from saying sectarian prayers to start their meeting,

Commissioners Chairman Jim Sides started the meeting by reading a statement about the injunction issued last month by a federal judge in an ongo-

# Nemorable Moments in Monotheism.



ing lawsuit over prayer at board meetings.

"We believe this injunction is unconstitutional," Sides said. He said if board members prayed in the open meeting, they would use language that does not mention Jesus.

Commissioner Jon Barber moved that the board recess to pray. They left the meeting chambers for about three minutes.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed suit in March on behalf of three residents trying to stop the overwhelmingly Christian prayers that open meetings.

Barber told the newspaper he "will always pray in the name of Jesus" and doesn't fret about it. "I have already won this war through my salvation in Jesus Christ. God will lead me through this persecution and I will be his instrument."

## James S. Schiller Memorial Student Activist Awardees

## Gutsy students force school to cancel formal prayer

Luis Lucas-Tzun and Michael Thorpe, seniors at Jordan-Matthews High School in Siler City, N.C., were successful (with FFRF's help) in getting their school to remove formal prayer from their graduation program in June.

In recognition of their activism, they will share the James J. Schiller Memorial Student Activist Award, generously endowed as a one-time memorial by FFRF member Susan J. Schiller following the death of her husband, James, in late 2012. James earned a postmaster's at Johns Hopkins University and taught in Atlanta and Baltimore, retiring in Denver.

Luis and Michael will each receive \$500. FFRF also commends two other Jordan-Matthews students, Shannon Dwyer and Josue Turcios, for their efforts.

By Luis Lucas-Tzun

One day in class, I spoke to a classmate who was complaining that her week hadn't been so great and how she would be delivering the prayer at graduation. I had attended last year's graduation, but it was so long ago that I didn't realize there had been a prayer.

I decided that same day I needed to fight this. I wasn't sure how to initially, but then I remembered a post on *reddit.com/atheism* about a boy named Gage Pulliam and how he got the Ten Commandments removed from his school's classrooms. I reread the article and found that the Freedom From Religion Foundation had been the force that pushed the district to act.

I went on FFRF's site, filled out the form and waited. I had a reply the next day and on May 23 received a copy of FFRF's letter to the school board. I showed the letter to my friends, Shannon Dwyer, Michael Thorpe and Josue Turcios. I also showed a few teachers I trusted.

One day, Michael and Josue went to our principal's office, showed him the letter and asked that he cooperate. He was on board and said he would notify Superintendent Robert Logan, and suggested we voice our concerns at the board meeting that same day. So I called for a group discussion and we decided to write the board, raising our concerns about the illegal prayer.

Ultimately, only Michael and I spoke at the meeting, and soon thereafter FFRF sent another, much more forceful letter. This time the backlash was overt. The local right-wing news ran an article and published our names. The photo in the article was all over Facebook and Twitter, and we became the target of some very heavy and nasty verbal abuse.



Michael Thorpe (left) and Luis Lucas-Tzun of Siler City, N.C.

companionship of my three comrades also made the ordeal much more tolerable, and I'm glad that I went through this with them.

I will be attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to study biology. I love music and play guitar, piano, ukulele, sing and write songs. I started a musical group with Shannon, who did a lot of behind-the-scenes work on our graduation prayer. We're called Shannon and Luis. Maybe find us on Facebook and give us a like!

I also plan on finding a group like the Secular Student Alliance so that I can continue to support separation of church and state.

#### By Michael Thorpe

**LVL** y interest in the cause began when Luis showed me the first messages of his correspondence with FFRF. I had overlooked the fact that there was a constitutional violation in my own high school but was made aware of it thanks to Luis.

As his correspondence with FFRF continued, I thought, "Wow, this might actually get accomplished." I only wish we had realized the violation sooner.

On the day of our baccalaureate service, Luis and I agreed to talk with our principal to see what he could do to help us because up until that day, we had had no help from the school board. We were able to secure the support of our principal by talking to him and also decided speak out at the school board meeting during the public comment section. that were building among community members and classmates.

Even some teachers who valued us as exceptional students turned their backs on us for messing with the order of things. The indirect hatefulness continued over the next few days up through graduation.

Even on graduation day, Superin-

## Some of my teachers never spoke to me again

tendent Logan seemed to think that the matter could have been kept quiet, and he still denied having received FFRF's letter before June 3. [FFRF sent it electronically May 23.] Students and parents prayed at our graduation during what was supposed to be a silent meditation for all. But to the people who wanted to pray out loud, being disrespectful and having their way was more important than being fair.

As time goes on, I will continue to think about this experience as my own realization that one cannot always wait for change to happen. Even if the fearful, ignorant community, the biased media and petty adults are all against you, the struggle to make the right change must be fought by someone.

I am going to Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, N.C., this fall. I don't know what I want to major in because I would like to keep an open mind for a while. What I hope to gain from my college experience is learning how to make a greater difference in the world and inspire change in places where change is long overdue.

### In the News

### Survey finds but one 'none' in Congress

BuzzFeed online "mapped out" the religions of all 435 U.S. House members by using how they've publicly identified, along with statements their spokespersons made.

There are 31 religions represented, including 26 different sects of Christianity. Catholics make up the largest group with 136 members, followed by Baptists with 66, Methodists with 45, Anglicans/Episcopalians with 35, Presbyterians with 28 and Jews with 22. There is only one atheist.

Most Catholics and Jews are Democrats and most Anglicans/Episcopalians, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, Mormons and Presbyterians are Republican.

Rep. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., is list-

reason for prohibiting an atheist group based on evidence that only two inmates had any interest in such a group. Kaufman challenged the finding that he was one of only two inmates interested in atheism.

As reported by Courthouse News Service, Kaufman argued that atheism is not an option on the prison's "religious preference" form, which allows inmates to select one of seven recognized religious umbrella groups. The only other options are "no preference" or "other," in which an inmate can write in a religion.

"He contends that the prison made it impossible to know how many inmates would have joined such a group, because it ignored 'write-in' votes for atheism (or related schools of thought) and recharacterized them as 'No Preference,' " Judge Diane Wood wrote for the three-judge panel. Kaufman "points to general evidence such as almanacs suggesting that as many as 10 to 14% of the population self-identifies as atheistic, and he suggests that hidden in the mass of 'No Preference' inmates are enough people to justify a group that would meet once or twice a month," she added. Based on Kaufman's claim, 206 out of Stanley's 1,465 inmates, 14%, are of unknown religious affiliation. Applying Kaufman's citations that between 7 and 14% of adult Americans describe themselves as being atheist, agnostic or humanist, it is possible that between 102 and 206 of Stanley's inmates might fall within Kaufman's proposed group. "Only a credible survey of the inmate population, or the simple expedient of adding 'atheist, agnostic, or humanist' to the preference form and collecting new data, can resolve this uncertainty," Wood wrote.

The faculty were discussing the issue as well and the division and dissent in the community was clear. Some of my teachers never spoke to me again, nor did some of my peers

My friends and I agreed before the graduation that if students did their own prayer, we would remain composed and indifferent. Sure enough, they did, which was OK since it was of their own accord.

We accomplished what we wanted and we had a great graduation. The only issue that was ever at hand was the legality of a public school supporting a prayer as a part of its graduation ceremony. I can't possibly describe my gratitude to FFRF for supporting us. The That was on a Monday. That Wednesday, things started to heat up. Some students protested at the Chatham County Schools office to gain support to keep the prayer. Social media blew up with statuses and comments showing widespread distaste with the board's decision to remove prayer.

Also that day, the Chatham News published an article about Luis and me speaking at the meeting. The story ended with "The school board thanked them and no action was taken on the matter." (The paper is prone to getting things wrong and having bad reporters anyway.) They fanned the flames ed as the only "none," and Rep. Ami Bera, D-Calif., is a Unitarian.

# Wis. inmate wins study group appeal

A Wisconsin inmate's request to form an atheist study group deserves the same consideration afforded to a recognized "religious" group, the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled Aug. 16.

Inmate James Kaufman sued after being denied a request by the warden to form a group "for the study of the history of religion, where and how religious beliefs originated, the origins of belief, and the possible future of belief systems; responsibilities and privileges in society; right versus wrong, and ethical issues."

U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb previously ruled that Stanley Correctional Facility had a legitimate secular

## FFRF Legal Victories

## Graduation prayers vanquished at LSA

An FFRF complaint ended prayers that were formerly a part of Louisiana State University's graduation ceremony in Baton Rouge.

Concerned students contacted FFRF about the prayers, which have been going on for years. The 2013 graduation included a Catholic priest leading opening and closing prayers.

Staff Attorney Liz Cavell contacted the LSU president and chancellor of LSU in a June 21 letter. "Thank you in advance for considering the point of view of this country's increasingly large segment of nonreligious Americans, and honoring America's foundational principle of separation between religion and government," she wrote.

The school's legal counsel responded Aug. 7 that LSU "has discontinued prayer during its graduation ceremonies."

## Official prayer dropped at Pa. graduation

Wallenpaupack Area High School in Hawley, Pa., dropped religious rituals from graduation after getting an FFRF letter of complaint. A minister led an invocation and benediction at the June 14 ceremony. The official graduation program listed the prayers.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a June 24 letter to Superintendent Michael Silsby: "Students wishing to participate should not be forced to forgo this momentous occasion in their lives simply because Wallenpaupack Area High School deems it necessary to include prayer in the ceremony," Markert wrote, referring to nonreligious graduates.

Silsby responded Aug. 20: "The district will no longer have religious rituals as part of the commencement ceremony."

## FFRF gets misleading quote off website

The Freedom From Religion Foundation successfully petitioned an Oklahoma county to remove a misleading, partial quote from President George Washington that was displayed on the county website.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent Creek County Clerk Jennifer Mortazavi in Salpulpa, Okla., a June 25 letter outlining why the quote, which endorsed religion and disparaged nonbelievers, enough for me to turn preacher, when my present appointment ceases; and, therefore, I shall add no more on the Doctrine of Providence."

Seidel noted in his letter that Washington rarely attended church, never included the name of Jesus in his several thousand letters and refused to have a priest or religious rituals at his deathbed. The full quote "shows Washington's discomfort with and rejection of mixing religion in his official capacity. He was unwilling to discuss it an any length until his 'present appointment cease[d]' — his appointment as commander of the Continental Army."

FFRF received a response from Mortazavi on Aug. 23 that Creek County had removed the quote.

### Students can give godless thanks now

A concerned resident in Mount Vernon, Ohio, brought a constitutional violation to FFRF's attention after a local newspaper featured a photo of praying students at Pleasant Street Elementary School's 2012 Thanksgiving feast.

The newspaper reported that a minister led the students in a prayer before they ate their Thanksgiving meal.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a Dec. 6 letter to Norwalk City School Superintendent Dennis Doughty asking that the school not sponsor prayers in the future.

Doughty finally responded July 29: "The principal contacted the individual [who said the prayer] and asked that the process not take place again," Doughty wrote. "We have many individuals of different races, ethnicity, religious and cultural backgrounds in our schools and we respect those differences."

Mount Vernon is where the school board fired creationist science teacher John Freshwater after a long legal process, which isn't yet over. The Ohio Supreme Court heard oral arguments in February in Freshwater's appeal but hasn't yet ruled.

# Bible quote out of principal's office

An FFRF objection to religious quotes placed prominently in the principal's office at Riley Elementary School in San Bernardino, Calif., resulted in positive action.

The quotes were from Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and the bible. The biblical quote was Proverbs 22:6 — "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."



for Sept. 7 at a historic site in Victor and would have been part of a larger series of events to celebrate the town's incorporation.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a July 9 letter to Victor Supervisor Jack Marren: "It is a fundamental constitutional principle that public institutions cannot support, promote or otherwise endorse religion or engage in religious exercises," Markert wrote.

Marren responded in an Aug. 23 email: "The prayer service has been canceled!"

### Ohio high school rethinks team prayer

An FFRF complaint has apparently stopped team prayer led by a high school wrestling coach in New Lexington, Ohio.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a June 13 letter to Superintendent Tonya Sherburne: "New Lexington City Schools must take immediate action to ensure that coaches do not lead, organize, invite clergy to deliver, encourage, or participate in prayers with their teams," Markert wrote.

Sherburne responded Aug. 20 that the school district conducted an internal investigation. She said meetings were held with district staff to discuss the legalities raised in FFRF's letter.

"I have taken measures within the organization to address the general matters presented in your letter," she wrote.

## Thousands donate food, skip Mass

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has been hard at work for the past few years ensuring attendees at several annual festivals in Milwaukee do not need to attend Catholic Mass to receive festival admittance discounts. Polish Festival, Irish Festival, Mexican Fiesta, Festa Italiana, and German Fest all include a worship service as part of their festival activities, and all of them used to give special discounts only to those who attended the service.

Thanks to Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott, almost all have changed their discounts to include attendees of all faiths and no faith. Elliott is still working to change Festa Italiana's policy so it doesn't violate state and federal laws.

Irish Fest changed its policy late last year from giving free admission only to attendees who both attended Mass and donated a food item to the Hunger Task Force, to giving free admission to everyone who brought in food on Sunday morning prior to the start of the festival.

The outcome was win-win-win. The Hunger Task Force reported a 25% increase in food donations from the previous year. Although the festival does not release exact attendance numbers, thousands of people who were not attending Mass were observed enjoying Irish Fest Sunday morning, a clear benefit to Irish Fest itself. And, of course, everyone, no matter their religion or nonreligion, received the same discount.

Not only were food contributions up 25% from 2012, this year's contributions reportedly set an all-time record, topping the previous high in 2008 by about 20%.

After Irish Fest changed its policy last year, Atheist Ireland received word of the change and donated \$100 to the Hunger Task Force via FFRF.

"We are glad to have created a new opportunity for non-churchgoers to enjoy Milwaukee's summer festivals and help feed the hungry," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Who says atheists aren't generous?

— Sarah Eucalano

should be removed.

The questionable quote: "The Hand of providence has been so conspicuous in all this, that he must be worse than an infidel that lacks faith, and more than wicked, that has not gratitude enough to acknowledge his obligations."

"Although some of us choose to wear the term 'infidel' as a badge of courage, the government cannot label us 'wicked' for our lack of religious beliefs," Seidel wrote.

Washington's quote, when put in context, is actually a reiteration of his belief that government officials should not mix religion with government. The full quote reads:

"The hand of Providence has been so conspicuous in all this, that he must be worse than an infidel that lacks faith, and more than wicked, that has not gratitude enough to acknowledge his obligations, but, it will be time Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a June 26 letter to Superintendent Dale Marsden. "Considering the very young age of the students, concern over coercive religious displays should be especially high in elementary schools like Riley," Seidel wrote.

Assistant Superintendent Kennon Mitchell responded July 19 that the sign containing the bible quote was removed.

# Prayer removed from bicentennial event

A New York town removed a prayer service from its government-sponsored bicentennial anniversary celebration after being contacted by FFRF.

The prayer service was scheduled



### Frank J. Crawford, 1936 – 2013

Frank J. Crawford, 77, Pierce, Idaho, died July 26, 2013, in Pierce, where he'd lived since 1967. He was born July 21, 1936, to Riley and Virginia Crawford in Seattle.

He studied politics, astronomy, weather and physics and received a B.S. from the University of Idaho. He was employed at Eastern State Hospital and retired from Jaype Plywood Mill, where he worked from 1966 to 1998. A heart condition prevented him from serving in the U.S. Air Force, which had initially accepted him.

Frank had many interests in life. He studied many religions — Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and lesser known ones. He was a freethinker and member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. He attended an atheist seminar in 1984 in Los Angeles, which gave him a new perspective. He was raised Catholic but left the church in 1965.

Frank loved animals, philosophizing, joking and kibitzing with people.

Frank was preceded in death by his parents. Survivors include Elaine, his spouse; Terry, a brother-in-law; cousins Henri (Cindy) Germain and Robin Germain; five felines, Houdini, Samsara, Blackjack, Moma Kat and Hobbs; and Tag, his faithful canine, Tag.

The FFRF staff offers sincerest condolences to Elaine and the family and all of Frank's dear friends. Page 10



Elliott Estebo in Moscow with the Kremlin behind him.

## Meet a Diplomatic Member

Name: Elliott Estebo.

Where I live: At this exact moment, I'm living in the driver's seat of my Toyota RAV4, but in about a week I'll be moving into a house in Malden, Mass.

Where and when I was born: St. Paul, Minn., in June 1986.

Family: My mother, Dorrie; father, Larry; brother and sister, Jeff and Mellisa.

Education: In 2010 I graduated from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and Russian. I also learned quite a lot while living in Moscow for the last two years teaching English and studying Russian and traveling across Ukraine and America this summer!

**Occupation**: I spent the last three years teaching English, but in less than a month I'll become a student again, this time at Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Military service: I've never served in the military, but I'm proud to have spent a year volunteering for Ameri-Corps at Anoka-Ramsey Community College.

How I got where I am today: By not giving up on the goals that I set for myself, and of course, with a lot of help from family, friends and kind strangers. (Like Blanche DuBois, I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.)

Where I'm headed: Literally, I'm Detroit, Toronto and finally Boston, but my goal after Tufts is to pass the Foreign Service exam and work in diplomacy.

society, free from all kinds of tyranny. I especially think Thomas Paine should be a hero to all Americans. I also admire all the people who work to keep state and church separate in America today, and to make them separate all around the world.

A quotation I like: I couldn't possibly count all the great quotations that I've heard over the years on Freethought Radio. Two of my favorites are Mark Twain's "Heaven for climate, hell for company" and Robert Ingersoll's "With soap, baptism is a good thing."

These are a few of my favorite things: Sleeping in on Sundays, the summer sun and the sea, watching baseball, exploring a new city (especially on my bicycle) and books that are so good I can't stop reading.

These are not: Underpaid Moscow bus drivers, pickpockets in the Kiev metro and pious politicians in the U.S. and abroad.

My doubts about religion started: When I first found out what religion was! I remember feeling certain that I lacked religious faith when I was about 12. I took a church-organized youth group trip to Florida, and in between many group prayers and events one day, there was about an hour-long break where the youth pastor instructed us to read the bible independently.

I started reading, and when I came to the story of the flood, and read it headed to Chicago this weekend, then for the first time myself, I was appalled to realize that the God everybody was worshipping and praising was really a genocidal maniac! Luckily, I could never believe any of it. Before I die: I hope we will see a permanent shift in American society's acceptance of freethought - something like the change we have seen regarding homosexuality in the last generation. I'd also like to spend time living on every continent and seeing as much of our world as possible. Ways I promote freethought: I try to always be honest about what I believe and don't believe when asked. I think that when more freethinkers are honest with themselves and others, and can come out of the closet, so to speak, we'll find that there are a lot more people with doubts about religion in America than it seems now. I also hope to volunteer with FFRF or a campus freethought group in Boston somehow soon.



### From whom all root beer flows

Menorah House A&W in Frisco, Colo., wears its messianic "Jews for Jesus" leanings on its sign and all over the restaurant's inside, notes a friend of FFRF who sent the photo.

### ACLU, Oklahomans sue over Commandments

The American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma and the national ACLU filed suit Aug. 19 in Oklahoma County District Court on behalf of several residents challenging the constitutionality of a large new Ten Commandments monument at the State Capitol.

"When the government literally puts one faith on a pedestal, it sends a strong message to Oklahomans of other faiths that they are less than equal," Ryan Kiesel, ACLU of Oklahoma's executive director, said in a news release.

Other plaintiffs in the case include Oklahoma City residents Jim Huff, a former educator. and retired businessman Donald Chabot, and former social studies teacher Cheryl Franklin of Enid.

## They Said What??

Maricón [faggot].

Nicolás de Jesús López Rodríguez, Catholic cardinal, describing at a press conference the openly gay nominee to be U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic

New York Daily News, 8-15-13

What a day. My goodness, what a day. It's been an unbelievable day like I have never seen in my life. But thanks to Jesus Christ, who died for our sins so that we could be one with God. Billy Coleman, public school superintendent, speaking at a "prayer caravan" rally he organized in Cullman, Ala., an event which FFRF formally complained to the school district about christiannews.net, 8-11-13

only touch fingertips and avoid handshakes that can cause "sinful thoughts" Press TV, 8-13-13

You will be checking under your car every day because maybe today is the day someone places an explosive under it. Angel Dillard, 2011 letter to Dr. Mila Means, who had announced plans to open an abortion clinic in Kansas, a statement which U.S. District Judge J. Thomas Marten determined was not a "true threat" in dismissing the case against Dillard on Aug. 15 Religion Clause, 8-18-13

Person in history I admire and why: I will always admire the American founders who fought to create a secular

> Last Call! **36th Annual National FFRF Convention** Weekend of Sept. 27-29 Madison, Wis. FFRF.org/outreach/ convention 1-800-335-4021

Socialism requires that government becomes your god. That's why they have to destroy the concept of God. They have to destroy all loyalties except loyalty to government. That's what's behind homosexual marriage.

Pastor Rafael Cruz, father of Texas U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz, speaking at the Family Leadership Summit in Ames, Iowa

Des Moines Register, 8-10-13

This new prohibition will ensure the holiness of our next generation.

Hasidic Rabbi Abraham Silberberg, an education official of the Gur sect in Jerusalem, ordering males to, at most,

It's in the midst of these terrifying moments when you see God's ways. We are blessed.

Terry Rolen, Bayside Community Church senior pastor, after firefighters extinguished a blaze caused by lightning at his home in East Lake, Fla. WTSP Tampa, 8-17-13

In public schools, children are forcefed an unbiblical diet of Darwinism, mixed with contempt for human life, marriage and biblical values. They're even encouraged to experiment in sexual activities.

Fundraising letter from Alliance Defending Freedom, a conservative evangelical law firm based in Scottsdale, Ariz.

alliancedefendingfreedom.org, 8-15-14

## As American as apple pie and atheism

# Atheist 'Aints' dispel stereotypes about nonbelievers

The following, reprinted with permission, first ran July 29 on **minnpost.com**, which publishes six days a week online from Minneapolis. Eric is president of Minnesota Atheists and an FFRF member.

#### By Eric Jayne

A theism and baseball may seem like an unlikely combo, but nevertheless, the Minnesota Atheists organization is celebrating America's national pastime for the second year in a row. Our group will again be "secularizing" the St. Paul Saints to the Mr. Paul Aints during their Aug. 9 game against the Sioux City Explorers.

The purpose isn't to proselytize atheism or disparage other's beliefs. Like last year, our agenda is simply to have fun, build camaraderie and exhibit our happy and friendly disposition.

According to some recent studies and anecdotal evidence, atheists are perceived by many to be untrustworthy, unethical and immoral, as well as unelectable to public office. Many have been shunned by work colleagues, friends and even family for revealing their atheism.

We clearly have public relations issues to address. Intellectual arguments about the existence of a god(s) and church/state separation have an important place in public discourse, but they don't help portray our happy and friendly nature in the public eye.

One of the major functions of Minnesota Atheists is to promote positive atheism, partly through community outreach and volunteerism and partly by providing a safe and positive social outlet for other freethinkers, whether they identify as "atheist" or not.

By partnering with the St. Paul Saints, for what is being billed as "A Night of Unbelievable Fun: The Second Coming," we are working to dispel unfair, preconceived notions about atheists while emphasizing our ability to have fun like everybody else.



President - Minnesota Atheists

Minnesota Atheists President Eric Jayne can be a real card at times.

Part of the fun will be the unique Mr. Paul Aints jerseys the players will wear during the game. The jerseys will be auctioned off at the end of the game, with a portion of the proceeds going to the Family Place homeless shelter in St. Paul.

There will be several other atheistthemed gags during the game. Don't be surprised if you see a Doubting Thomas at Midway Stadium questioning some of the umpires' calls!

We had nearly 300 people in our group section at last year's game, including many families with children. It's often difficult for families to connect with other freethinking families, even though we hold several family events throughout the year. Publicly celebrating who we are is incredibly empowering.

The Minnesota Atheists are grateful that the St. Paul Saints have shown exceptional tolerance in accepting us as a business partner again this year and helping us to showcase our happy and spirited character.

Our hope is that soon, all of our families, friends and colleagues will be as accepting and will also want to play





Heather Hegi, Minnesota Atheists chair and FFRF member, with an Aints player in 2012.

ball with atheists.

#### "The Mr. Paul Aints Game (Let's All Go to the)" To the tune of "Take Me Out to the Ball

Game"

Let's all go to the Aints game.

Let's all show who we are.

The big red A says a lot about us. We're here for fun, so please don't

make a fuss. So we'll root for the Mister Paul Aints

team.

For they accept us by name. So it's hip, hip, hip, hip hooray At the Aints ball game.

Let's have fun at the Aints game,

Tail-gate party supreme. Hamburgers, hot dogs, and drinks for all.

Under our banner we'll all have a ball. We will root, root, root for the pigs' race.

In Pig's Eye town there's no shame. For it's one, two, pick up the pace At the Aints Ball Game!

- lyrics by Paul Heffron and Jerry Rauser



FFRF Lifetime Member Rachel Wilson (left) with Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor at the second annual "Aints" game in St. Paul. Annie Laurie was one of many speakers at the Minnesota Atheists regional conference Aug. 10 and was also featured on the group's Sunday radio show "Atheists Talk." The interview was hosted by Lifetime Member August Berkshire, a founder of Minnesota Atheists. (Photo by August Berkshire)

The St. Paul Saints baseball scoreboard was transformed Aug. 16 when Minnesota Atheists negotiated naming rights for the team for a day. The photo is by August Berkshire of Minnesota Atheists and an FFRF Lifetime Member, who suggested the "Mr. Paul Aints" name.

## Michael Hakeem Award: first-place college essay

# 'We're all near impossibilities'



By Anne Clymer

Anne received \$3,050 from FFRF for her winning essay. \$50 bonuses provided by FFRF members Dean and Dorea Schramm.

In 2010, advanced placement statistics was not my strongest course. In fact, I've never really excelled at math.

Looking back, I don't know why or how I found myself sitting in Mr. Best's seventh-period class. But I'm glad I was there, because that class changed the way I view the universe and my place in it.

I grew up on a street that was a suburban family's dream. Kids playing kickball in the road after school. Neighbors were best friends. We held block parties and street-wide yard sales. In the evenings, children would run through neighboring backyards, catching fireflies.

My best friend at the time, Alice, lived at the very end of our street. One day, she and I sat on the curb eating dry Lucky Charms out of plastic cups, watching the wiffleball game going on in the road.

Alice turned to me and said, "We're sisters, you know." And I thought, yes, we're just like sisters, but not real sisters. So I said, "Not real sisters, though."

She went on to explain to me that we were real sisters because of Adam and Eve and because we're all God's children. "But my family doesn't believe in God," I told her.

She didn't hesitate. "Then you're going to hell."

I lay awake that night terrified that she was right, that I would end up in hell. It wasn't my fault that my parents never taught me about God, surely He would understand and accept me into heaven, right? And for the first time in my life, I prayed. I made a deal with Him: If I promised to be good for the rest of my life, He wouldn't send me to hell.

As the years began to fall away, my pact with God did not. Though I had no formal religious teaching, I trusted that being "good" would be good enough for Him. I found myself doing the "right thing," like being nice to my little sister and not cheating on tests. Because I knew that if I did, I wouldn't get into heaven.

Then, in 2009, my dog died. Satch was a collie we'd adopted 10 years before and was a better friend than most humans I knew. One day she stopped eating, so we brought her to the vet. A week later, she lay on the floor of the vet's office, her breaths slowing, her

## Good and bad things happen. It's all just chance and probabilities.

heartbeat becoming fainter. There's still a hole in my gut every time I think about her and the way we lost her.

It made me ask, still makes me ask, the age-old question: Why do bad things happen to good people, or dogs?

Statistics.

AP statistics was simple enough at first, percentages and fractions and graphs — mostly things that I had seen before but never really knew were statistics. Then we got into the more complicated areas. We had to do problems that weren't just, "What are the chances of this happening?"

We had to figure out the chances of A happening if B and C also happen. It got messy and I wasn't very good at it, too many formulas to remember.

Then it hit me. As Mr. Best went on about standard deviations, I found myself wondering how many things had to go the way they did for me to even exist. What if my mom had gone to a different bar the night she met my dad? What if my grandma married the man she was first engaged to instead of my grandpa? What if my great-great grandparents decided to not move to America?

Going back to the beginning of time, what was the chance of all the things happening that needed to happen for me to exist? The big bang, planets aligning, life beginning, evolution, dinosaurs, mass extinctions, the Stone Age, farming, the Industrial Revolution, everything up until the moment I was conceived.

What are the chances? Next to nothing, such a small chance that it must be a near impossibility.

We're all near impossibilities, then. Every single one of us. Every animal and insect, every person you've ever met. A left turn instead of a right, a decision to stay in one night instead of going out, deciding to marry your first love instead of your true love. Every decision ever made had to be made for any one of us to be alive right now. All living things have this in common.

The fact that I so easily could have never even come close to existing is what makes me want to be a good person, to be kind. Appreciating the moments we almost never had is something we should all do, and not because we think some god will send us to the hell of which we have no proof. Good and bad things happen. It's all just chance and probabilities.

That I can feel kinship with my dogs and with the grass and even the spiders that make the back of my neck prickle, is something more beautiful than anything that some god created intentionally.

We're all just happy accidents, near mathematical impossibilities. Isn't that great?

Anne Clymer, 20, Danbury, Conn., is a junior at Champlain College in Burlington, Vt. Her major is professional writing with an emphasis on screenwriting and her "true passion in writing is poetry."

## Second-place college essay contest

# Why ethics is evidence for atheism



last another seven years, began with a simple question: "Is Irving going to hell?"

"Well, yes," my dad admitted, sounding a bit unsure of himself. "Yes, he is."

By this point, I'd stopped listening. I was lost in thought, exploring dangerous, new parts of logical space. God was sending Irving to hell, where he certainly didn't belong, but God was supposed to be all-loving! My beliefs about God and morality were in direct conflict. How was I supposed to know what was true? I started with what I knew for certain: Irving didn't deserve infinite torture merely for being Jewish. How could I doubt that? Eventually, desperate for a rational answer, I questioned the unquestionable: "If I'm right about morality, does that mean I'm wrong about God?" Fifteen years later, as a 21-year-old atheist, I'm almost certain that I was wrong about God. It's an ethical truism that no one deserves an eternity of torture just for having the wrong theology. Even if there were an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent god who sits in judgment of the living and the dead, such a being wouldn't judge us according to our religious beliefs, but according to our moral character. If the deity were to punish nonbelievers like Irving and Gersa (and me), that wouldn't be benevolent — it would be arbitrary and cruel. Therefore, there can't be a "triple-O" god who sends nonbelievers to hell just for

#### By Daniel Muñoz

Daniel received \$2,050 from FFRF for his essay.

hen I was 6 years old, my father told me about hell. Christianity isn't all manna and miracles, it turns out, and at some point every believer has to struggle with the dark side of scripture. My struggle, which would

Irving Statman lived in the house next door to ours, where my brother and I spent countless afternoons playing with his model trains and jumping off of his creaky backyard swing set. Irving's kids had gone off to college several years before I was born, and he and his wife Gersa were delighted to open their home to children again.

By any reasonable account, the Statmans were loving parents, kind neighbors and all-around good people. But as followers of Judaism, they didn't accept the divinity of Jesus Christ, and as I'd just learned, that meant they were doomed to an eternity in hellfire.

"Why doesn't Irving just become a Christian?" I asked. "That way, God will let him into heaven." (Pascal would have been pleased.)

"It's not like that," my dad explained. "Irving and Gersa were just brought up differently. They've been Jewish their whole lives." being nonbelievers.

As I've since discovered, this isn't the worst of the theist's problems. According to Christian teachings, Jesus suffered an excruciating (though temporary) death by crucifixion to absolve humanity of its sins, serving as a divine scapegoat. But according to commonsense morality, if someone deserves to be punished, it doesn't make sense to punish a scapegoat, especially not one who's perfectly innocent.

If I deserve to pay for my sins, I should pay for my sins! Though the logic of moral scapegoating is perverse, God demands scapegoating both from his followers in the Old Testament and from his son in the gospels. Jesus' death was a sacrifice, just like the Israelites' slaughtering of goats and lambs. But why should atheists grant the moral high ground to a religion founded on human sacrifice, one of the worst moral catastrophes of all time?

Another, more famous worry for the theist is the Problem of Evil, more properly called the Problem of Suffering. It's necessarily true that an omnibenevolent god would try to create the best world it could. Given that the God of Christianity is also omnipotent and omniscient, it follows that He can't fail to create the best of all possible worlds.

But how could a world where innocent people are raped, murdered and prone to disease be the best that God could do? We must either deny that this undeserved suffering really is bad - a morally grotesque proposition or deny that God exists. The choice, I think, should be easy.

These arguments attack religion where it's usually assumed to be at its strongest: ethics. Religious belief serves two intellectual functions: to explain the natural world and to give our lives meaning. As our scientific theories and methods have matured, more and more thinkers have become satisfied with scientific explanations of nature, no longer feeling the need to appeal to religion.

But when it comes to the meaning of life — ethical questions of right and wrong, good and bad, life and death — many still can't help but feel that without a god, there can be no explanation. Some even claim that without a god, there wouldn't be anything to

## Like science, ethics needs no help from supernatural assumptions.

explain, that life would be meaningless and morality would be a sham. As Dostoyevsky's dictum warns us, "without God, everything is permitted."

Though prima facie plausible, this idea is profoundly mistaken, as I have argued. Like science, ethics needs no help from supernatural assumptions; like science, ethics reveals deep truths about the world that make a religious worldview untenable.

The dark side of scripture tells us that the torture of nonbelievers is good, that human sacrifice is just, and that undeserved suffering isn't really bad. Since these claims are false, it's clear that ethics doesn't give us evidence that God exists. It gives us evidence that He can't.

Daniel Muñoz, 21, was born in Dallas and is a senior philosophy and linguistics major at the University of Texas-Austin. He co-founded Texas Secular Humanists on campus in 2011 and is currently its president.

## Third-place college essay contest

# On why I choose science

**By Rebecca Tippens** 

Rebecca received \$1,050 from FFRF for her essay.

remember the day I first realized that science was at odds with my Christian faith. I was 12 years old, and I had just learned about radiocarbon dating in a junior high biology class.

My grandfather arrived to pick me up from school, and I began excitedly describing the things I'd learned that afternoon before we'd even pulled out of the drive. Still navigating the topics as I recounted them, I concluded by wondering aloud, "The thing is, my teacher says that means the Earth is more than 4 billion years old — but that's not what they tell us in church. How do we know who's right?"

To my grandfather's credit, he didn't attempt to persuade me either way. He knew the inherent value of questions of this sort and withheld judgment, saying only: "You'll have to decide for yourself, Rebecca."

I thought about that a lot in the days, months, even years, that followed. By 15, I knew that I wanted to be a scientist. As my passion for science deepened, my religiosity waned. I came to believe that scientific inquiry is our greatest tool in the pursuit of truth and, frankly, pretty compelling evidence contrary to the existence of any supreme being.

## Cosmology has no place for God.

There are some - perhaps most notably the late Stephen Jay Gould — who would argue that science and religion occupy "non-overlapping magisteria," meaning they address fundamentally different questions and, in doing so, never actually contradict one another. But my own experiences have suggested otherwise time and time again.

As is typical of religion, the Christianity of my upbringing made many radical claims about our existence: The Earth is 10,000 years old. Humans were created by God in his image and are fundamentally different from all other life forms. We occupy a special place in the universe.

Statements like this are innately scientific, and they simply cannot hold their own against any sort of empirical scrutiny. In the wise words of Richard Dawkins, "A universe with a supernatural presence would be a fundamentally and qualitatively different kind of universe from one without."

As I near the completion of my degree in physics and prepare for my doctoral studies in astrophysics, I could not agree more. Cosmology has no place for God. Its most basic tenets plainly contradict religious claims.

The Copernican Principle, for instance, asserts that the Earth and its inhabitants do not occupy any special

place in the universe. And the Cosmological Principle adds that, indeed, there are no "special places" to begin with. On large enough scales, the universe is pretty much the same everywhere we look.

Where would a God even fit into this model? If I put any credence at all in religious doctrine, these inconsistencies would be enough to keep me up at night. Clearly, the "non-overlapping magisteria" argument is patently false.

Other theologians cling to the socalled "God of the gaps," the idea that God explains that which science yet cannot. But gaps in our scientific body of knowledge are not static. With each passing day, they are shrinking, rearranging, and the scientific community cheerfully embraces them. For every question we answer, new ones arise.

Prevailing theory is updated and improved upon or, when appropriate, replaced entirely. This is the essence of scientific inquiry, and it delights and fulfills me in a way that religion never could.

Anyway, the "God of the gaps" strikes me as a vague and unsatisfying copout. This God lacks any clear capability or purpose. Rather, as Neil deGrasse Tyson aptly put it, it's little more than "an ever-receding pocket of scientific ignorance."

How could any true believer reasonably invoke this argument? If anything, it betrays doubt and cowardice. It allows the person invoking it to acknowledge undeniable, empirical truths without taking that final, uncomfort-



able step toward nonbelief.

I can honestly say that I always had doubts. My faith never offered me much in the way of truth. Instead, it taught me complacency. It taught me not to ask questions, because the answer was never anything more interesting than a sort of existential "because I said so." This was and continues to be reason enough for me to reject religious superstition.

It is not in my nature to stop asking questions or seeking truth, and the scientific method is my means to do so. I can't help but notice that, time and time again, for every question we pose and every experiment we conduct and painstakingly review, the answer is emphatically not God.

Rebecca Tippens, 23, Cary, Ill., is a senior at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign working toward a degree in physics with added coursework in astronomy and scientific writing. She plans to pursue her doctoral degree in astrophysics with an emphasis on cosmology and/or black hole studies. She's active as an executive officer in the Illini Secular Student Alliance and as a volunteer for Physics Department's "Ask the Van" outreach program.

## Fourth-place (tie) college essay contest

Coping with my father's death

#### By Chelsey Shannon

Chelsey received \$550 from FFRF for her essay.

ypically, or perhaps stereotypically, a lack or loss of belief in a god is assumed to be the product of a traumatic experience, a sort of temporary act of rebellion against God, a phase that

will be completed once life returns to stasis, or if, in the healing process, the person feels ill-equipped to deal with circumstances on their own and must turn to a higher power for guidance. All of the components of this narrative are present in my own story: I stopped believing in God shortly after my father was murdered in his hotel room in the U.S. Virgin Islands in 2006 when I was 13. But my motivations for this shift were complex and multifaceted, and for that reason, I chose not to "come out" as an atheist for quite some time. I didn't want my fledgling atheism to be chalked up to some sort of pitiable outlet for my grief.

Even so, looking back, it is difficult for me to pinpoint why exactly I stopped believing in God. It wasn't that I was "angry with God," as many wellintentioned yet misguided friends and relatives suggested after I did become more open about my atheism. It wasn't that I couldn't believe in an omnipotent being who would allow my father,



whom I loved most in the world, to be Continued on next page

Madison, Wisconsin

#### Continued from previous page

taken from me in such a violent, sudden manner.

If anything, my atheism was caused by the inverse of this thinking: Why had I believed, before my father's death, that we would be protected from such tragedy because we were basically "good people"? Why had I felt that my family didn't "deserve" for this to happen? Didn't that imply that some other family did?

Why had I and my family, in the early days following my dad's death, clung to the belief that God was sticking with us through this hardship, when very little was said of God during the good times?

Perhaps most disturbing to me were the oft-repeated lines of predestination and "God's plan," i.e., that "God doesn't give us anything we can't handle" and "It was his time to go" and "Everything happens for a reason."

I realize that to some people, these lines can be comforting, whether in their familiarity or in their surrender of power and responsibility in difficult

## I realized that all of these circumstances and life events were products of random chance.

times to a higher being. I also realize that it is difficult to find adequate words to say to someone who has just lost someone important to them, that sometimes all that comes to mind are tired platitudes.

But back when I was first hearing those words right up to this moment, all I can hear in these statements is the implication that my father's murder was merely a plot point in the story of the living, that the violence and prematurity of his death, and the rich relationships and successful career it permanently halted, were less tragic because it was, after all, what was supposed to happen.

I realize this argument smacks of one I claim to not agree with: "There can't be a god who would let this terrible thing happen to me, so there is no God." Maybe this is true for me, superficially, the God I was raised to believe in was, theoretically, not supposed to allow bad things to happen to good people. But, and this is the key, when he (always "he") did, it was for the purpose of teaching the good people a lesson.

I refuse to believe that my father's death was part of some divine plan to unlock life lessons for me, as it was so often implicitly and explicitly framed by others in the aftermath of his murder. I refuse to see it as anything less than a painful, life-altering tragedy.

When I applied this line of thinking to greater societal tragedies, such as poverty, rape culture, and racism, I realized that these social structures, like my father's death, were humancreated and sustained, that no higher being was monitoring these injustices and keeping those who benefited from them in check, whether in life or after death.

I realized that all of these circumstances and life events were products of random chance. Certainly, I would ask why — why us, why me, why my dad? But I also learned to ask why *not* us, or me, or him? Why did I think we were so much more exalted than any of the other 7 billion people on the planet?

We live in a world created by humans, and all of us are equally vulnerable to the conditions we co-create, both negative and positive. My family's number had simply come up, and we were forced to deal with the reality of the human condition of which we were a part.

God, I came to realize, had absolutely nothing to do with it.

Chelsey Shannon, 21, Cincinnati, is a senior at Kalamazoo College majoring in human development and social relations and women, gender and sexuality studies. She is interested in literature, feminism and food.

## Fourth-place (tie) college essay contest

1 Corinthians 13:11

By Andrew Spalding

Andrew received \$550 from FFRF for his essay.

Abandoning my belief in God didn't happen overnight. Growing up on the mission field, attending a private Christian school and college all played key roles in ensuring that I was thoroughly indoctrinated in my faith. Yet somehow despite all that, today I stand unshackled from the oppressive and controlling religion of my childhood.

My experience with religion can be neatly summed up by a passage from 1 Corinthians 13:11, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways."

I can trace the beginnings of my uncertainty back to my childhood. The first six years of my life were spent in Africa because my parents were missionaries. It was after one of our nightly bedtime bible stories that I had my first personal experience with Christianity as I asked Jesus to save me from eternal suffering in hell. Although I accepted everything told to me by my parents, even at a young age I remember wondering why it was that some people had to spend eternity in hell for the sole crime of never having heard the Gospel.

## Instead of distributing food to the poor, we gave them bibles.

I was a teenager that I first started to notice the hypocrisy of religion. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with one of the highest rates of illiteracy, yet instead of distributing food to the poor, we gave them bibles. Instead of teaching them to read, we handed them pamphlets about God and told them to have someone else read it to them.

Being a pastor in Haiti was an obvious profession, not a calling from God. Many pastors were able to live a luxurious lifestyle while their congregations lived in extreme poverty. I looked around and saw people starving, unable to afford an education and dying from preventable diseases. In a nation where 96% identify as Christian, I couldn't help but wonder why God seemed to have forsaken them. After leaving Haiti, I spent a year attending Bob Jones University, one of the most renowned conservative Christian colleges in the U.S. I had many unanswered questions, but I continued to push the doubt aside.

friends had died in the earthquake, crushed as the five-story classroom building she was in collapsed.

Along with an estimated 600,000 deaths and casualties, millions were displaced. I sat with tears in my eyes and wondered how God could let such a terrible thing happen.

As I allowed the doubt to seep in, slowly I embarked on a quest for answers. I began to study other religions and see their absurdity. I realized I had easily dismissed supernatural claims of other religions while blindly accepting Christianity's claims.

In short, I came to the realization that I was already an atheist about every religion except Christianity. My de facto "atheism" had not required me to systematically examine each religion and find tangible proof that each claim was incorrect. Instead, I simply wrote off all other religions because the bold claims that they made had no evidence to show that they were true.

This led me to try to objectively examine my own beliefs to see if they were equally as absurd. I saw within the church an apocalyptic fanaticism, where Christians longed for the destruction of the Earth. Instead of love for one another, I saw hate for anyone who was different from them. These "followers of Christ" were more concerned with fighting abortion than preventing genocide or curing AIDS.



evidence" and there was little proof for what I believed.

Again I thought about the earthquake in Haiti and came to this conclusion: God was either evil, impotent or nonexistent. When you look at the millions who call upon the name of the Lord only to receive silence in return, in the words of Herb Silverman, "Some days the best thing you can say about God is that he doesn't exist."

I was afraid to take that final step and turn my back on everything I had grown up believing. I mulled all of this over for months, and in discussing it with a friend was challenged to live my life for just one week like God didn't exist.

My parents moved on to be missionaries in Haiti, and it was there while I remember vividly the day I first allowed doubt to creep in. It was Jan. 15, 2010, after receiving a call from my parents in Haiti, who confirmed what I knew to be the inevitable: one of my I asked myself why faith, which is abandoning the use of reason, was considered to be the most important trait of Christianity. I came to realize that, in the words of Carl Sagan, "extraordinary claims require extraordinary

As I walked outside that day, I looked up at the sky and was finally able to give up my childish ways and accept that there is no God.

Andrew Spalding, 24, was born in Paris but moved from France to Benin with his missionary parents when he was 6 weeks old. He is a senior studying business management and French at Florida State University.

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#### Freedom depends upon freethinkers

(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)

## 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.

## Fifth-place (tie) college essay contest

# I'm the inhuman one?

#### By Brieanna Kringlie

Brieanna received \$350 from FFRF for her essay.

hy don't I believe in God? It's for the same reasons I don't believe in unicorns or subterranean fairy folk. Perhaps God isn't even the right term; maybe gods would be more apt.

It would be a waste of time and words to prattle on about the lack of evidence, inconsistency and sometimes outright lunacy expressed in whisperthin pages. The highlighted text and fluorescent sticky notes in my little purple bible would be more than enough to fill another, but that's been done before by people far more skilled than I.

That makes the affront impersonal and impartial, dissecting it like a thesis, but for so many, the offense is personal.

I cannot remember when I lost my faith, or if I ever had any to begin with. I remember big white steeples with stained glass and kind-faced pastors, but I do not remember God. Sunday school was Oreos and hot chocolate and no different from the other fairy tales collected on my small bookshelf. This was by no means an overwhelmingly oppressive environment, and I never felt like I couldn't talk about my disbelief when I felt the need, but then again I'm not the type to hold my tongue anyway.

Nevertheless, I'm still absolutely terrified to the point of tears on occasion.

## I've been called inhuman, empty and psychopathic because of my nonbelief.

No, I'm not afraid of God or hell, I'm afraid of what it makes of the people I love

On Nov. 11, 2010, my family got a late-night visit from an officer. My older brother had been killed in a car crash. He was drinking with a friend and not wearing his seat belt. Death is a struggle in any form, and the first question is always "why"?

With a faith in God, the answer is usually something along the lines of "it was his time" and "God must have needed another angel." This was not the answer for me, and from my perspective, gave my brother's death even less meaning than it had to begin with. I understood that people die, whether by accident or with purpose. I knew my brother could have lived.

Seat belts save lives and alcohol doesn't make you invincible, contrary to popular belief. But I watched as religion tore at my family and tainted my brother's death with purposelessness. If we can only wallow in sadness and provide flimsy reasons for death, how can we ever hope to defeat it? If we cannot point at a cause of suffering and tell ourselves we are responsible for fixing it, not just watching it happen, how do we ever hope to see its end?

Voltaire's Candide asserts that regardless of the existence of God, we must "cultivate our own garden." For what concern does a pharaoh have for the rats that struggle in the water at the bottom of his boat? None, they must find their own way to survive the plights put upon them.

Regardless of God's existence, human suffering is not about to end on his account or authority, so that leaves only us to solve our own hardship.

This comes to my second fear, what religion does to the world I hope to see rise around me. A space race we once approached with gusto has given in to apathy. I see the most powerful men and women of our nation bound up in petty squabbles over gay marriage, and they can't be bothered to care about the world we can create because they're too busy trying to preserve the one we have.

It scares the daylights out of me that perhaps 70% of the people of this nation and their representatives believe we will see the end of humanity. They think it's something to welcome because they can't fathom actually coexisting with people who think differently from themselves. They envision a white-robed savior smiting evil and condemning over half the world's population to eternal torture.

I cannot comprehend how I'm the immoral one. I've been called inhuman, empty and psychopathic because of my nonbelief, but the thought that so many could envision the suffering of those around them and not feel the urge to revolt against that fate is what I



find disheartening.

I cannot imagine what it must be like to look upon the Earth and humanity and not see the possibilities we possess. What I hope are eventualities human colonization, interstellar travel, extraterrestrial communication and perhaps Starfleet command — are not even considerations to such shortsighted, narrow-minded, unimaginative people. If you cannot imagine the future, how could you possibly hope to make it happen?

If all you can see within humanity is its faults and feel they are insurmountable obstacles, you regulate humans to an existence of finite potential, because to strive for better would seem pointless and challenge what God has in mind. Religion will always put humanity in second place, because we are not worshipping our own abilities and achievements, but putting what we cannot do into a little box of divinity and never opening it again.

We can be our own masters, but with the responsibility of our successes also comes that of our failures, and that scares us.

Brieanna Kringlie, 18, Newcastle, Wyo., is a sophomore majoring in graphic design at the University of Wyoming and is considering minoring in Japanese.

## Fifth-place (tie) college essay contest

# Loss of sister brought on loss of religion



ventricle double outlet hypoplastic left heart." It basically means that she had a hole in her heart. We did not know about this until she was about 8, which is eight years later than doctors usually discover it.

Before she turned 16, she had undergone about eight open-heart surgeries. All of them made it a little better each time, up until Aug. 14, 2010, when she died due to complications from what was her last surgery.

ceived a "patriarchal blessing" (a blessing bestowed by a man who has likely never met you but talks to God and predicts your future).

"If there really is a God, there are only two explanations for this," I thought. "Either he could not have saved her, which would mean that he is not all-powerful, or he did not want to save her, which means he is a bastard."

My extended family all had things say that were meant to console and comfort. Things like "Oh, it's all in God's plan!" and "She is in a better place now." Bullshit. There is no God, there is no plan, and the place that she is in is a cemetery in Utah. I know these things now, because I took her death as an opportunity to think critically about what I believed. I was in Army Advanced Individual Training when all of this happened, far away from my family and the rules they enforced when I lived in their house. I stopped going to church. I stopped praying and reading the scriptures. I even started questioning why God could have let this happen. A few months later, I was deployed to Afghanistan, which meant that I was unable to serve a mission for the church. While I was there, I met a colonel who used to be a Mormon. He changed his mind about religion after reading a book called The God Delusion

by a certain Richard Dawkins and suggested that I do the same.

I read the book, and it flipped virtually everything I thought I knew upside down. I read 11 more books in the next few months that taught me about evolution, the truth about religion and why blind faith and churches are one of the great plagues on Earth.

When I got home, I was eager to tell my parents about my new beliefs, and as you could imagine, they took it quite well. Just kidding! It was a huge blow for them, and they essentially think I'm a wayward, stupid person who is wrong about everything. (Ironic, isn't it?) They still love me, I'm sure, but things just aren't the same. Maybe it's a good thing. For whatever reason, after my sister died, their faith somehow got stronger. Their 15-year-old daughter dying made them question God even less. They say that it is "proof" that God loves them because he let her live for 15 years. I cannot understand them, although I surely have tried. It is my belief that there is no God, that we evolved from a common ancestor of modern apes and that Mormonism, along with every other religion, is bogus.

#### **By Justin Moss**

Justin received \$350 from FFRF for his essay.

was born into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Up until about age 18, I was so sure of my "knowledge" that the church was true that I was willing to dedicate two years, unpaid, to telling people in Brazil about my church.

Fast-forward a few years, and now I'm proud to say that I am an atheist.

My little sister was born with a congenital heart defect known as "single

My "faith" had never actually been tested. I had lived a semi-charmed life. This was the worst day of my life.

What was so shocking to me at the time was how sure we were that she was going to get better. She was in one of the greatest children's hospitals in the world, being treated by some of the most skilled cardiac surgeons.

My dad and I had given her several "priesthood blessings," which were supposed to make her recover. A priesthood blessing is a Mormon ritual consisting of little more than dabbing "sacred" olive oil on top of a person's head and saying a prayer. But she never got better.

I cannot accurately describe how painful and earth-shattering it is to lose a younger sibling at age 15. It feels like having your heart ripped out and your head smashed into the ground. She should have gotten better and gone on to live a full, happy life. She'd even re-

Justin Moss, 21, Provo, Utah, is majoring in biology at Pierce College, Lakewood, Wash. He's interested in a career in medicine.

# Honorable mentions: High school essay contest Resisting religion, promoting progress

Below are excerpts of 6 of the 10 honorable mention winning essays in FFRF's annual competition for college-bound high schoool graduates. All were awarded \$200 from FFRF, plus a \$50 bonous provided by Dean Dorea Schramm. The top winning essays appeared in the August issue.



By Gabriella Johnson

L here's a great deal of undeserved disadvantage that comes packaged with being a young person: We can't vote, we have curfews and our parents can legally hit us in some states. In addition, many older people find us less credible and don't really respect our opinions.

Then, if we come up with some "wacky" progressive ideas that diverge from those accepted in "the good ol' days," our freedoms of thought and speech are further suppressed. As I embark on this new journey called college, I recognize that I will face many more challenges to my freedoms, especially since one thing I'm passionate about is gay rights. I foresee much resistance to that advocacy because of major opposition from many churches.

Young freethinkers face huge challenges. As Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, set in the theocratic Republic of Gilead, illustrates, religion can act as an enormous barrier to freethought and progress.

A situation that stands out to me from high school was when I heard about the Tennessee lawmaker who wanted teachers to report students' "gay activity" to their parents. Apparently, if "the gay" is caught early enough, it can be effectively treated and cured. This is completely absurd and an infringement on identity. The premise that "gay" is a disease is rooted in religious conservatism. It shows the way that previous generations try to dictate to youths how they should think and act. It's paradoxical that something that is supposed to free the soul and spread love, like religion, is used to teach hatred of certain groups. In this way, I see past influences pervading the present, oppressing freedom of thought and new ideas and creating the world that Atwood warned us about. One of my responses to this issue was to sing a protest song for my English class. I was also involved with my school's Gay/Straight Alliance and engaged in debates with others about homophobia and its roots in religion.

and hopefully prevent a regime like Atwood's Gilead from ever becoming our reality.

Gabriella Johnson, 18, Milwaukee, is attending Stanford University. Her academic interests include African and African-American studies, premed, chemistry and music. In high school, she was a National Achievement Scholarship recipient, scoring in the top 1% of African-Americans on the PSAT.

### Flying in the face of faith



By Darby Oldham

 $oldsymbol{A}$ s a transgender boy at a Catholic high school, I have not enjoyed a warm and welcoming environment. While I've only received one detention and have never had my "knuckles bruised by a lady in black" ("I Will Follow You Into the Dark" by Death Cab for Cutie), my school has not been a safe place for freethought, rationalism or atheism.

Most blatantly infuriating were the weekly mandatory chapel services. Then came a day in my junior year when I had had quite enough of chapel, which earned me a lecture from a teacher pretty quickly, as it was seen as a lack of respect for the teachers and the school itself, instead of as a lack of belief, despite my protestations to the contrary. It was more than chapel. Advanced placement biology was taught by a monk who had actually taught one of my classmates' fathers 30-some years ago. While he saw no issue with expounding upon his ideas about God's hand in the creation of the universe, whenever I tried to express my view, I was promptly told that this was biology, not philosophy. This semester, English has primarily consisted of us being lectured about how rationalism is insufficient to explain the world and then being instructed to come up with examples from our own lives to support that notion. There was one class discussion wherein I expressed the idea that a world where people did not rely on religion to guide their thinking would be a better place.

atheism was offensive and wrong, and while it wasn't suggested that I kill myself, I was treated in a hostile manner and certainly not taken seriously.

I have done my best to defend my expression of dissent, but have been met with a fair bit of scorn. In response to this onslaught of dogma, I have turned (as is so typical for my generation) to the Internet.

I have been unable to have much in the way of genuine intellectual conversations in class, because of the way the eyes of my teachers and classmates are so clouded by Catholic tradition.

But even the teacher who told me off for not standing up in chapel has said that my actions and words have been thought-provoking. So despite the negative responses that I have faced, I think that at least some of what I have said and done has made an impact.

Darby (Darbus) Oldham, 17, Los Gatos, Calif., is enrolled at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania and is interested in engineering, psychology, Japanese, history and linguistics. He was on the robotics team for four years (qualifying for the world championships his sophomore year), took part in 11 theater productions and was a National Merit finalist.

## Asking 'why' as well as 'what'



**By Marianne Fuentes** 

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m here\ is\ no\ shortage\ of\ challenges}$ able role in my life. I was raised by two nonreligious parents who grew up in religious environments. My mom attended a Catholic boarding school, and my father was raised with strict Catholic values and traditions. Both had a skeptical nature, though, and struggled with unanswered questions as well as apparent gaps in logic that religion offered and eventually split from religion altogether. They still imparted these values to my sister and me by teaching us to be good people, yet believed these values should be taught not out of fear of a higher power but as common sense about what is right and what is wrong. My father encourages me every day to be a critical thinker and question everything, and I am proud to say that I am a caring, just person without being religious. Having a god in your life does not necessarily make you a better person.

My personal beliefs on religion are based mostly on reason and logic. If I hear a so-called fact, I need to have evidence to back it up. Otherwise, how do you know if anything you hear is true?

But I live in a small town in New Hampshire that has a high religious population, and I'm friends with many people who think differently than I do. Oftentimes, the "what" is good enough, and the "why" seems irrelevant to them. I often wonder why my friends settle for the easy answers to things, instead of having the confidence that comes with evidence.

This simplicity of thought permeates my town but has never deterred me from the logical side of things. If anything, it has made me strive harder to be a rational freethinker and hopefully to show my friends along the way that asking "why" is just as important as asking "what."

Marianne Fuentes, 18, was born in Montreal and grew up in Bedford, N.H. She will major in psychology at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and hopes to eventually earn a doctorate in clinical psychology.

### **Fighting against** discrimination



**By Lindsey Foster** 



I will continue to resist all of the challenges to my freedom of thought

The teacher and my classmates were shocked and rushed to tell me why my that come with being a freethinker. We are reminded every day that we are not like most of the people around us. Some of us are forced to pray at dinner time, some feel left out around the holidays, none of us stands a chance at becoming president, and we all have "In God We Trust" scrawled across our currency.

Once I even got a phone call from a stranger criticizing my beliefs. He told me to find Jesus and said that I would burn in hell, among other vile and inappropriate curses. The caller must have seen that I was atheist from some social media site, or maybe it was a former friend.

I struggle more with religion at school than anything. Every day for 13 years, I had to stand, hand over heart, and recite "one nation, under God." Living in the bible belt, I also had to watch my tongue in class, careful not to Continued on page 22

## FFRF state/church complaints make headlines

### They called his name 'Messiah'

FFRF has called for a probe of a Tennessee magistrate who ordered a child's legal first name changed because it offended her Christian sensibilities. FFRF wrote a letter of complaint Aug. 14 to the Tennessee Board of Judicial Conduct over the impropriety, suggesting disciplinary action may be in order.

Lu Ann Ballew, a child support magistrate for the Fourth Judicial District of Tennessee, presided over a now notorious child support hearing Aug. 8 in Cocke County Chancery Court to settle a dispute over a 7-month-old's *last* name. But at the hearing's conclusion, Ballew ordered the boy's first name changed as well: from Messiah DeShawn Martin to Martin DeShawn McCullough. Messiah ranked fourth among the fastest-rising baby names in 2012, according to the Social Security Administration's annual list of popular baby names.

Bellew told WBIR-TV in Knoxville the name change was warranted because "[t]he word Messiah is a title, and it's a title that has only been earned by one person and that one person is Jesus Christ."

Martin, who told reporters she will appeal, said she likes how Messiah sounds alongside her son's two siblings, Micah and Mason.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert Markert noted the magistrate violated Canons 1 and 2 of the Tennessee Code of Judicial Conduct through her actions. "Her statements regarding her decision to change the child's name imposed her own personal religious beliefs upon parties coming before her, thus calling into question her ability to conduct herself in a manner that 'promotes public confidence in the independence and impartiality of the judiciary.' "

Markert added that Ballew has "shown a lack of respect and compliance with the law by using her position as a child support magistrate to endorse a Christian viewpoint in violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment."

FFRF's call for a probe received widespread news coverage.

### Prayer caravan becomes religious circus

FFRF's protest of an Aug. 10 "prayer caravan" called by the superintendent of schools in Cullman County, Ala., dominated news that weekend across the state, after the official refused to cancel the inappropriate event.

## FFRF blasts Alabama religious dorms

In another highly publicized complaint in August, FFRF sent a letter to the chancellor of Troy University, Troy, Ala., protesting its newly unveiled faithbased campus dormitories.

Troy opened a 376-bed, \$11.8 million student housing complex specifically designed to give students a "faithbased collegiate experience." Included is a 2,300-square-foot Newman Centre leased and operated by the Catholic Archdiocese of Mobile.

Three Catholic and three Baptist resident advisers will be named. Media reported that preference will go to students who "maintain an active spiritual lifestyle," are actively engaged in a campus faith-based organization and are Christian, with nonreligious only considered if there is space available, according to a university spokesperson.

Troy is known as Alabama's international university, many of whom are not Christian.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel noted in a complaint that the university cannot lawfully "make a determination of how religious a person is, and then discriminate among students based on that determination." To stay in good standing, students will have to engage in a service project tied to a church at least semi-annually.

Seidel noted the arrangement violates not only the principle of separation between church and state, but arguably the most important purpose of higher education: "to broaden horizons, to meet new people from different backgrounds, to collide with new ideas that challenge and stimulate."

The 5-acre property the complex is located on is leased from the university and was paid for through Troy's foundation, a private entity.

# FFRF to USDA: No religion for lunch

FFRF has called on the U.S. Department of Agriculture to adopt more safeguards to separate religion from a free summer lunch program. Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack urging him to bring the Summer Food Service Program into compliance with executive directives that protect aid recipients from proselytizing.

While lauding the program's goal of providing nutritious lunches during the summer, FFRF noted the program is another case where "religion gets the credit and taxpayers get the bill."



program materials don't explicitly prohibit religious discrimination, and fail to mandate safeguards to keep religious activities separate from meals.

"Impressionable children are receiving federally funded meals in the same location as they receive religious instruction," FFRF noted. "Churches should not be locations for children to receive free meals at public expense any more than they should be where low-income families must pick up SNAP EBT cards or college students sign up for federal loans," Elliott added.

The USDA has failed to give incentives to secular sites, much less to give preference to public schools, the ideal location for free lunch programs for young children.

An executive order specifies that religious activities be kept clearly separate from lunches provided using federal funding, but FFRF noted there is no monitoring required or rules on religious symbolism where children eat.

### New Hampshire 'church lady' update

As noted in the August issue, FFRF's complaint about a woman praying loudly, arms outstretched and bible in hand, at high school students in Concord, N.H., got the woman banned from Concord High School.

Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert notified the superintendent about the aggressive evangelizer, who recited bible verses for at least 15 minutes each day at the school's entrance, with permission from the principal. an Establishment Clause analysis."

Markert sent a July 31 follow-up citing multiple federal court cases, as well as historical examples that clasped hands are both legally and traditionally understood to be a religious image.

No branch of federal government can take any action that demonstrates preference for or endorsement of religion over nonreligion. This prohibition extends to those contracting with the federal government to carry out governmental duties like mail delivery, Markert noted.

"The simplest, most rational course of action would be to remove the religious symbols from the vehicle and any other vehicles which may bear similar imagery that are being used in the service of the Postal Service," wrote Markert.

### FFRF protests Marine Corps labeling

FFRF has protested a U.S. Marine Corps policy that labels a "lack or loss of spiritual faith" as a risk indicator.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent Commandant of the Marine Corps General James Amos an August 9 letter requesting that the U.S. Marines stop violating the freedom of conscience of nonreligious Marines. FFRF's letter follows one sent by the Military Religious Freedom Foundation previously requesting the offending clause in the order be changed.

The order lists factors that could lead to "loss of life or diminished functioning." Under the "guidance/moral compass" category the U.S. Marine Corps lists "lack or loss of spiritual faith" as one of four risk factors. "It is deeply offensive and grossly inappropriate for the military to suggest that Marines are at risk because they 'lack spiritual faith'," Seidel wrote. "Imagine how it feels to be told by the military that your reasoned, intellectual conclusion that unsupported religious claims are untrue is dangerous 'risky behavior' that requires monitoring." Seidel referenced the House of Representative's offensive July 23 vote to prohibit the appointment of chaplains to serve nonreligious service members. FFRF submitted an open records request to the Corps to verify the corps' claim that the risk factors are based on scientific studies and to learn more about the policy.

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley even got in the act, publicly condemning FFRF's work to stop the third annual "prayer caravan" called by Superintendent Billy Coleman.

Bentley stated, "I personally believe that one of the problems we have in this country is taking God out of, not only our lives, but out of government."

Coleman not only organized but spoke at the Christian rally that preceded a ritualistic visit to 29 area public schools, quoting the bible's admonition to "pray without ceasing." After the complaint by Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel was publicized, FFRF received complaints from seven additional area families about widespread abuses in Cullman County schools. Stay tuned! "Parents must not be forced to choose between their children going to religious 'activities' and their children not getting a proper meal. Such religious coercion is unconstitutional," Elliott wrote.

The federally funded food service and the organization's religious activities are frequently combined, making it difficult for a family to opt out of religious propaganda if they want children to receive the free lunches. The program encourages providers, including churches, to accompany such meals with "educational, enrichment and recreational activities."

The USDA's Food and Nutrition Service even gives as an example "faithbased organizations or churches that offer religious study day camp sessions." Current USDA regulations and

According to the Concord Monitor, the theocratic Alliance Defending Freedom has offered to provide legal services to Lizarda Urena to challenge the decision to remove her from school property. As of press time, no lawsuit had been filed.

# Postal Service trucks religious imagery

After receiving a complaint about an image of praying hands on the side of a truck carrying U.S. mail, FFRF sent a letter to the U.S. Postal Service about inappropriate religious imagery on contract vehicles.

Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a July 2 letter to the Postal Service's counsel. Counsel for USPS replied that the Postal Service takes no position on whether an image of clasped hands "constitute[s] religious imagery under

# Black Collar Crime Blotter

#### Compiled by Bill Dunn

#### Arrested / Charged

**Carroll F. Pennell**, 68, Cushing, **TX**: Conspiracy to commit Social Security fraud and theft of government funds. Pennell, former pastor at Word of God Fellowship Church in Brunswick, **ME**, allegedly received nearly \$150,000 in illegal disability benefits between 1999 and 2010 when he conspired to have his wife paid for work he did.

"Carroll Pennell instructed church treasurers to issue paychecks to his wife Glenna so as not to interfere with his obtaining and maintaining his Social Security benefits." Source: Bangor Daily News, 8-21-13

An **unidentified Catholic priest** from the Diocese of Oslo, **NOR**, "will never work as a priest again," according to Bishop Bernet Eidsvig, who said the priest has admitted having sexual relations during a period of a week with a 15-year-old girl in Bergen.

"We've been criticized by the police for reporting this, but it was already known in Bergen," Eidsvig said. The police apparently wanted to complete their own investigation before the allegation of sexual assault was public.

Eidsvig said the girl is not Catholic. *Source:* newsinenglish.no.com, 8-21-13

A retired Australian Catholic priest, 72, is charged with 2 counts of possessing child abuse material. Detectives seized computer equipment and a DVD for forensic examination. He will appear in court in Wyong, **NSW**. *Source: Newcastle Herald, 8-21-13* 

Larry M. "Matt" Pitt, 30, Birmingham, AL: Impersonating a peace officer. Pitt is a youth evangelist and founder of a ministry called The Basement.

Sheriff's Deputy Randy Christian said authorities responded to a citizen complaint. Pitt is on 2 years' probation for conviction on a similar charge in 2012 when he flashed a badge at a police officer during a traffic stop. He said after that arrest, "We're not perfect, we're only forgiven."

Christian said deputies got a tip that Pitt was on his way to a TV studio. He ran from officers, jumped off a 45-foot overlook and struggled while being arrested, the report said. *Source: Times Free Press, 8-17-13* 

**Rolando Rodriguez**, 45, Pawtucket, **RI**: 2nd-degree sexual assault. Rodriguez, pastor of Light and Hope Methodist Church, is charged with assaulting an 82-year-old woman in her home. It took the woman 5 days to overcome her embarrassment and report the incident, a police report said.

He's accused of pinning her arms while rubbing his genital area over her chest and face. "She then bit Pastor Rodriguez," the report said. *Source: NBC 10, 8-16-13* 

**Terry L. Greer**, 54, Gardendale, **AL**: Murder and attempted murder. Greer, senior pastor at Mt. Vernon United Methodist Church, was indicted for the Jan. 10 murder of his wife, Lisa, 52, and the shooting of his daughter, Suzanna, 18. who has recovered.

Police said after his daughter ran to a neighbor, Greer stabbed himself in the neck and chest before being restrained. *Source: al.com*, *8-16-13* 

Nermin Spahic, 40, Des Moines, IA: 2 counts each of 3rd-degree sexual abuse and sexual exploitation by a counselor. Spahic, a Muslim imam, is accused by a Johnston woman, 42, and her daughter, 18, of assaulting them after the mother sought his help and religious



Observer-Dispatch, 8-14-13

Arash N. Hakakian, and Sara Hakakian, both 37, Monsey, NY: 3rd-degree grand larceny and 1st-degree offering a false instrument for filing. Arash Hakanian, a rabbi, and his wife are accused of falsely obtaining \$7,494 of property tax exemptions on their second home from 2004-11. *Source: lohud.com, 8-14-13* 

**Romulo Jimenez**, 67, **Houston**: Continuous sexual abuse of a child. Jimenez, pastor at Centro Christiano Vida Nueva, is charged with molesting a congregation member starting when she was 8 for a period of several months in 2012.

A church member alerted the girl's parents after she saw Jimenez coming out of a bathroom where the church member allegedly found the girl with her underwear down. The parents confronted Jimenez at his home, where he allegedly admitted his guilt.

In a statement to investigators, Jimenez's wife said he has "repented for his mistake." *Source: KHOU, 8-13-13* 

**Demetrius A. Lewis**, 38, St. Petersburg, **FL**: Grand theft and money laundering. Lewis, former pastor at Grand Central Progressive Missionary Baptist Church, is accused of stealing about \$150,000 from an elderly woman who could no longer afford to live in her home.

Lewis also owned a business called Help Is Here Foreclosure Prevention and Credit Repair, though state records show it's inactive.

Lewis was charged with tax fraud in 2012 for allegedly cashing fraudulent tax refund checks. *Source: Tampa Tribune, 8-7-13* 

**Teofilo Santiago**, 57, **Philadelphia**: Arson, insurance fraud, attempted theft by deception, conspiracy and causing or risking a catastrophe. Santiago, a Pentecostal pastor, is accused of falsely reporting his 2004 Nissan Quest, valued at \$7,547 and later found burnt to a shell on the railroad tracks, as stolen. *Source: CBS Philly, 8-6-13* 

Arthur Coyle, 62, Lowell, MA: Sexual conduct for a fee. Msgr. Coyle, episcopal vicar for the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston, was arrested in his black Chevrolet Equinox with a known prostitute when he was stopped outside the Polish Cemetery at 5:45 p.m.

Coyle told police he offered the woman, **Siriwan Kongkaew**, 38, who was also charged, \$40 for oral sex but claimed the act wasn't completed. Coyle is on voluntary administrative leave. *Source: Boston Herald.* 8-6-13

Luther Jones, Bon Wier, TX: Murder. Jones,

than 13. Daley is pastor at Beth Eden Lutheran Church. His wife, **Margaret Daley**, who operates a day care facility in their home, is charged with failure to report child abuse or neglect and cruelty and injury to children. *Source: WHSV*, 7-21-13

**Paul J. Martin**, 42, Columbiana, **AL**: Possession of a controlled substance and unlawful possession of drug paraphernalia. Martin, who was fired as pastor at the Church of Christ after his arrest, was in possession of heroin and a syringe when police responded to an accident and allegedly found him passed out with the vehicle still running, court documents said.

Martin allegedly told a Birmingham police officer that he was fine and was "just riding around Atlanta." *Source: al.com, 7-20-13* 

#### Pleaded / Convicted

**Orlando R. Pinuer**, 53, Temuco, **CHILE**: Convicted of sexual abuse of 4 teen victims in 2006-11 at a boarding school while he was administrator there and serving as pastor at Immaculate Conception Parish of Cunco.

"The evidence we presented showed that these same acts had been occurring for at least the last 20 years," prosecutor Omar Merida said. Pinuer was accused of giving victims alcohol and spending money to perform sexual acts on him. *Source: channelstv.com, 8-20-13* 

John Lillis, 63, Windsor, UK: Convicted of attempted rape and 2 counts of indecent assault. Earlier he'd pleaded guilty to 4 other counts. Lillis, a Catholic priest, molested 2 brothers in Surrey between 1976-82.

Testimony showed the boys were kicked out of the church choir and a bishop lectured the family about the need for "forgiveness."

In written evidence to the court, the victims' father said he and the parish curate had confronted Lillis, asking if it was true he had molested the two boys. Jurors heard that the defendant replied: "Yes it is. It will not happen again."

Lillis was still allowed to work around youths for several years. *Source: Daily Express, 8-15-13* 

**Joe Seephis Hardie**, 68, Bartow, **FL**: Found guilty by a jury of scheming to defraud, grand theft and money laundering. Hardie was charged with stealing more than \$100,000 from New Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in 2007-09 when he was pastor. *Source: WKMG Orlando, 8-14-13* 

**Mordechai Elon**, 53, **Jerusalem**: Guilty of 2 counts of forcible sexual assault against a minor. Elon, a rabbi who headed the Yeshivat Hakotel, was charged with molesting 2 students in 2003 and 2005, both boys age 17.

### 'Father Glenn Davidowich was a serial pedophile.'

— plaintiff's attorney Mitchell Garabedian

eos but said he wasn't addicted, said Assistant State's Attorney Louisa Nuckolls. "He felt he had a problem, not an addiction.

Wheaton fired Ratcliff and his wife filed for divorce. *Source: CBS Chicago, 8-5-13* 

#### Sentenced

**Thomas P. Shoback**, 66, Wilkes-Barre, **PA**: 5 to 10 years in prison for conviction on 7 counts of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse and criminal attempt to have involuntary deviate sexual intercourse; 6 months to 2 years in prison for endangering the welfare of a child; to be served concurrently.

Shoback was charged with molesting an altar boy while he was pastor at St. Mary's Catholic Parish in Blossburg from 1991-97, starting when the boy was 11 or 12. He testified that Shoback would perform oral sex on him and twice tried to have anal intercourse.

He said he kept quiet till 2011 when the Jerry Sandusky/Penn State scandal erupted "because it was the right thing to do and that he didn't want it to happen to another kid." *Source: Williamsport Sun-Gazette, 8-22-13* 

Mariusz Skowron, 46, Kabwe, ZAM: Skowron, pastor at St. Mary's Catholic Church, was fined 2,500 kwacha, or 49¢ [life is cheap in Zambia], after pleading guilty to causing death by dangerous driving.

Rabson Siwila was struck on his bicycle by a Nissan pickup driven by the priest, who told police he fled the scene for fearing of being lynched. He later turned himself in.

The victim's family will receive an insurance payment of K25,000 [\$4.75].

Kabwe High Court Judge Elita Mwikisa warned Skowron that "I will have no option but to send you to prison" if he reoffends. *Source:* allafrica.com. 8-21-13

Michael Miller, 43, Berlin, CT: 20 years in prison, with 15 suspended, and 20 years' probation for convictions for possession of child pornography, obscenity and 3 counts of risk of injury to a minor. Miller was pastor at St. Paul Catholic Church. His victims were church members, students at the church's school or both.

"Father Mike assured me that he would be keeping a watchful eye on my son," a mother named Pat said at sentencing. In health care, she said, there's a code of ethics: Do no harm. "What code of ethics do you practice, Michael Miller?" *Source: Hartford Courant, 8-16-13* 

**David Valentine**, 47, New Milford, **CT**: 5-year suspended sentence and 5 years' probation for 3 convictions of 1st-degree larceny. Valentine, executive pastor of Faith Church, must also make restitution of \$93,651 and get counseling.

Court documents said he's already repaid \$130,000. Valentine stole the money from Squeaky's Car Wash in Danbury, which is owned by officials of the megachurch. *Source: News-Times, 8-16-13* 

**Pedro Fernandez**, 41, Oberá, **ARG**: 17 years in prison for sexual abuse with aggravated repeated sexual intercourse. Fernandez, an evangelical pastor and religious broadcaster, was found guilty of molesting his daughter for 7 years, starting when she was 13. He told the court "We had a dating relationship."

guidance for her daughter's personal issues. *Source: KCCI, 8-14-13* 

Jack D. Hibbs, 57, Marietta, GA: 4 four counts of aggravated child molestation. Hibbs, principal at Faith Lutheran School, is charged with molesting a 15-year-old male victim at a residence. *Source: Journal-Constitution, 8-14-13* 

**Ryan M. McKelvey**, 27, Des Moines, **IA**: 2 counts each of 3rd-degree sexual abuse and sexual exploitation by a counselor. McKelvey, youth pastor at Heritage Assembly Church, is accused of molesting 2 female teens in the congregation. He's married and has a young child.

According to the police report, the church's pastor James Snow said McKelvey was fired for laziness and "spending too much time with female juveniles of the church." *Source: Des Moines Register, 8-14-13* 

Stephen Enea, Utica, NY: 2nd-degree grand larceny, 1st-degree scheme to defraud and 4 counts each of 3rd-degree grand larceny and issuing a bad check. Enea, archbishop of the Italo-Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of the Americas and Canada, is accused of stiffing contractors for about \$500,000 for renovations to the archdiocese's cathedral. Renovations were put on hold about a year ago.

The church's chief operating officer, Phillip Barker Jr., faces the same charges. Source:

pastor at Belgrade Baptist Church, is accused of shooting his nephew, Curtis P. Jones, 34, outside the church.

Family members said Curtis Jones was recently released from prison and that there had been an ongoing feud between the men. They also said Curtis was going to church to get his life back on track. *Source: 12 News Now, 7-29-13* 

**Joshua D. Swain**, 32, Cobden, **IL**: Theft and aggravated identity theft. Prosecutors allege Swain, pastor at The View Church in Carbondale, formerly First Baptist, used the name of a congregation member to obtain more than \$100,000 from a bank. *Source: Daily Herald*, 7-27-13

Anthony McSweeney, 66, and John Stingemore, 71, London: McSweeney, a Catholic priest, is charged with taking indecent images of a child, possessing indecent images of a child and 3 counts each indecent assault and making indecent images of a child. Stingemore, an administrator, is charged with 8 counts of indecent assault, 2 counts of taking indecent images of a child and conspiracy to commit buggery.

The abuse is alleged by 7 victims at a children's home, all aged between 9 and 15 in the 1970s and 1980s. *Source: Daily Mail, 7-22-13* James R. Daley, 70, Luray, VA: 12 counts of aggravated sexual battery of a victim younger Less than a week after he was found guilty, Elon was invited by Chaim Druckman, another prominent Zionist rabbi, to deliver the weekly Torah lesson Druckman's yeshiva.

"Unfortunately, [Druckman] is pursuing a policy of covering for assaulters, throwing the students to the dogs," said Ayelet Vider-Cohen of Jewish Women's Voice. *Source: Haaretz, 8-7-13* 

**David W. Smith**, 35, Poquoson, **VA**: Pleaded guilty to 10 counts of possession of child pornoraphy. Smith, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, was arrested in March during Holy Week after an investigation found images on his church computer of girls ages 6 to 11 having sex with men, according to court records.

Smith is married and has 3 school-age children. Source: Virginian-Pilot, 7-18-13

**Donald Ratcliff**, 61, Wheaton, **IL**: Pleaded guilty to possession of child pornography. Ratcliff, who taught religious education at Wheaton College, a private Christian school, and has written 10 books on children's spirituality, had 9 other felony counts dropped in a plea bargain.

Prosecutors said he had at least 500 pornographic images of children, some of whom appeared to be younger than 13, on computers. Ratcliff admitted downloading images and vidFernandez's wife found a video in 2011 on their computer of him raping their daughter in the couple's bed.

"It's the lowest act a person can commit," said prosecutor Estela Alarcon Salguero. *Source: clarin.com, 8-15-13* 

**Malcolm McLennan**, 69, Gloucestershire, UK: 3 years' community order [a form of probation] after pleading guilty to indecent assault for sex crimes against a boy in 1989 when he was assistant pastor at St. Simon Stock Catholic Church.

A victim, now in his 30s, said after sentencing, "I am devastated. Justice has not been served."

The court heard how McLennan would rub himself up against the victim when the boy was changing into his altar boy's cassock and surplice. One day he put his hands inside the boy's underpants, which the boy reported.

The next week, the bishop visited and allegedly told him, "We'll have no more of your silly talk."

McLennan now works as an infirmary assistant looking after ill monks. *Source: Kent & Sussex Courier, 8-15-13* 

### 'I don't understand. Anything I want,

**I get.'** — alleged statement by Pastor José Burroughs to a secretary who spurned his advances

An **unidentified pastor** in his 50s from central Sweden was fined 15,000 kronor [\$2,300] for hiring a prostitute, after which he was temporarily relieved of his duties with the Church of Sweden.

The case was tied to a large pimping operation through which young women from Romania were sold for sex to clients in Sweden. "These woman were used as if they were on a conveyor belt," said Detective Anders Nilshagen. *Source: thelocal.se, 8-14-13* 

**David A. Grosse**, 79, Colorado Springs, **CO**: 10 years to life in prison after pleading guilty to sexual assault on a child by one in a position of trust under a plea bargain that dropped several other counts. Grosse, a retired Air Force chaplain and ordained pastor, apologized in court.

"Your claims of sorrow are not as legitimate as you would have us believe," said Judge Larry Schwartz, citing a presentencing report that Grosse tried to blame the girl and her parents.

"He's spent so much time over the past 10 years lying to us," said his daughter-in-law, Michelle Grosse of North Carolina. Does 'sorry' really cut it?"

Grosse was arrested in 2012 on suspicion of sexually abusing 4 granddaughters, allegedly coaxing them to accept his touching as part of their "special relationship."

According to an online biography, Grosse holds an advanced degree from Yale University Divinity School and served as a pastor in Connecticut, Kansas, California and Wyoming. *Source: Colorado Springs Gazette, 8-14-13* 

Louis Bristol, 28, Carpinteria, CA: 1 year in jail and 5 years' probation. Bristol, a youth pastor at Carpinteria Community Church, admitted to committing a lewd act on a 14-year-old, having sexual intercourse with a 16-year-old, giving marijuana to minors and sending video of himself masturbating to an adult victim.

The adult woman told authorities Bristol texted her "about not being sexually satisfied by his wife and needing to look elsewhere for sex." *Source: Santa Barbara Independent, 8-8-13* 

**Uriel Ojeda**, 33, Woodland, **CA**: 8 years in prison after pleading no contest to molesting a 13-year-old girl while he was a priest at Holy Rosary Catholic Church in 2007-09. The state dropped 6 other counts in exchange for the plea.

"May God shepherd his people toward healing and hope," Sacramento Bishop Jaime Soto said in a statement.

Court records show Ojeda entered the girl's bedroom when everyone was asleep. She woke and found him lying next to her and said he touched her in a way that was deemed "substantial sexual conduct." *Source: Catholic News Service, 8-7-13* 

**Ralph Lang**, 65, Marshfield, **WI**: 10 years in prison for attempted 1st-degree intentional homicide. Lang admitted planning to kill a doctor at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Madison in 2011.

"I think what applies to me is we do heaven's will and not our will," Lang testified. He said he took to heart a voice he heard at the Necedah Shrine that told him any doctor who performs abortions will be driven insane by God and that hell awaits women who abort.

His sentence will be reduced by about 30 months for time already served. Source: State

which alleged Oswald molested 2 boys between 1988 and 1995, for \$1.3 million in 2009. Oswald died in 2010 at age 65.

Oswald was the 17th priest in the diocese to have been accused of sexual molestation. The diocese has paid nearly \$25 million to settle claims against 6 priests. Source: Press Democrat, 8-22-13

Grecia Mena, 40, Queens, NY, a secretary at the Jamaica, NY, headquarters of the Seventhday Adventist Church, is suing **Pastor José Burroughs** for sexual harassment for repeated come-ons, even though both are married.

"I don't understand," Burroughs, 53, allegedly told her once after she refused his advances. "Anything I want, I get."

Mena alleges harassment began in 2008 and culminated with Burroughs exposing his genitals in 2011 and asking her to perform oral sex in a church office.

The suit alleges that after Mena's husband complained, she was demoted and the rent was doubled on their church-owned apartment. *Source: N.Y. Post, 8-19-13* 

Parents of a girl allegedly molested as a 15-year-old are suing the **Archdiocese of St.** Louis. The suit alleges that Archbishop Robert Carlson "knew that Father [Xiu Hui "Joseph"] Jiang was dangerous to children" when he served as an associate pastor at the St. Louis Cathedral Basilica.

Jiang, 30, eventually was charged with 1stdegree endangering the welfare of a child. The lawsuit claims Jiang first began visiting the girl's house in early 2011, but he later resolved to stay away after her parents confronted him about being "too affectionate and too touchy" with their daughter.

When confronted in June 2012, Jiang allegedly confessed and later that night put a check for \$20,000 on the family car and texted the girl's mother, saying he left the money because of his "stupidity," according to the suit. Source: Post-Dispatch, 7-17-13

#### **Civil Lawsuits Settled**

The Catholic Diocese of Peoria, IL, has agreed to pay \$1.35 million to settle a lawsuit that claimed John J. Myers, its former bishop and now the archbishop of Newark, failed to keep Thomas J. Maloney away from children.

According to the suit, the diocese got a 1995 complaint from a woman that she'd been molested by Maloney, who died in 2009. In 1996, the suit says, Maloney went on to abuse 8-yearold Andrew Ward, the plaintiff in the case. Ward and at least 3 others were molested by Maloney after the woman came forward, said attorney Jeff Anderson.

Ward's mother, Joanne, alleges her son was molested as a second-grader. "Maloney molested Andrew once in the church sanctuary before school and once behind the altar after 10:30 Mass on a Sunday." *Source: northjersey. com, 8-13-13* 

#### Legal Developments

The **New Mexico** Court of Appeals upheld the 2008 conviction of **Wayne Bent**, 72, leader of The Lord Our Righteousness Church, a religious community near Clayton. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison for sexual misconduct with a teenage female follower but was acquitted of molesting her younger sister. He was alleged to have laid naked in bed with them separately as part of a spiritual "healing" process.

The appeals court had reversed Bent's convictions based on problems with the grand jury indictment. The state Supreme Court reversed that decision and instructed the appeals court to consider the rest of Bent's appeal arguments on remand. *Source: Religion Clause, 8-15-13* 

U.S. District Judge Michael Ponsor ruled in Springfield, **MA**, that international law applies in a case against evangelical pastor **Scott Lively** for persecution on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and that the case can go forward. allegedly assaulted the male victim 8 times in a bedroom over 6 weeks. *Source: Courier & Press, 8-13-13* 

Freethought Today

Superior Court Judge Kevin Dubay refused to strike claims against the **Catholic Diocese of Norwich, CT,** for failure to report, supervise and remove a priest charged with child abuse, including claims for breach of fiduciary duty. The diocese argued that the claims excessively burden its exercise of religion.

The plaintiff alleges she was molested by **Fr. Thomas Shea**, who died in 2006, numerous times between 1967-86. *Source: Religion Clause, 7-30-13* 

#### Allegations

The Milwaukee County, **WI**, district attorney's office is investigating possible theft from the Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church by a former priest.

After discovering financial "discrepancies," the parish council voted unanimously to request a probe, said a church press release.

In a letter from the church to the district attorney obtained by the Journal Sentinel, Emmanuel Mamalakis, a lawyer representing the church, said the council believes it has found "ample evidence" that former pastor **James Dokos** had committed felony theft.

The letter says Dokos, now a priest at Sts. Peter & Paul Orthodox Church in Glenview, **IL**, spent more than \$100,000 from a trust for personal expenses.

Annunciation's main building in Wauwatosa was designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright and is on the National Register of Historic Places. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 8-12-13* 

#### Removed / Resigned

**Richard Shahan** has taken paid administrative leave as associate pastor at First Baptist Church of Birmingham, AL, after the murder of his wife, Karen Louise Shahan, according to the church's Facebook page.

Shahan, 53, was taken into custody for "investigative purposes" but was released about 48 hours later without being charged with any crime.

Homewood Police Lt. Ken Atkinson said no one has been ruled out as a suspect. The body was discovered July 23 inside the family's home after the pastor's wife failed to show up for work at Hobby Lobby. Sources said she was brutally stabbed to death and was found on the couch. The couple filed for bankruptcy in 2010. *Source: al.com, 8-10-13* 

Alejandro Flores, 40, a Catholic priest convicted of molesting an 8-year-old boy from St. Charles, IL, was deported to his native Bolivia, accompanied by 2 immigration agents on a commercial flight.

"Flores held a position of trust in the Catholic Church and has proven to be an extreme danger to our children," said Ricardo Wong, field office director for ICE's Chicago Enforcement and Removal Operations.

Flores was detained by federal officials after his release from a 4-year prison term. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 8-8-13* 

**Glenn Davidowich**, 49, Manitowoc, **WI**, a Byzantine Catholic priest, has been laicized after being on leave since at least 2011 from the ministry over sexual allegations in **New Jersey**. The Eparchy of Passaic reached a \$200,000 settlement with one of his alleged victims.

The eparchy later settled with another alleged victim, said plaintiff's lawyer Mitchell Garabedian. "Father Glenn Davidowich was a serial pedophile," Garabedian said.

Davidowich made headlines in 2002, when he was identified as founder of the Junior Pro Wrestling Association, which produced and sold sexually suggestive videos of boys wrestling in skimpy, bikini-style bottoms.

The teens were given pseudonyms such as "Bad Brad" and "The Hardcore Kid." Several of the videos were shot on church property. *Source: Star-Ledger, 7-26-13* 

**Thomas Iwanowski** resigned as pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Oradell, **NJ**, after complaints that a priest accused of molesting a teen boy in the 1970s was allowed to live in the rectory.

The accused priest, **Robert Chabak**, was removed from ministry in 2004. The statute of limitations had expired and Chabak was not criminally charged. Iwanowksi said he met with Newark Archbishop John Myers and it was mutually agreed that he should move "forward in faith."

Chabak was supposedly barred from St. Joseph in February and transferred to a retirement home for priests in Rutherford. But parishioners said he often came back to the rectory overnight. *Source: Star-Ledger, 7-21-13* 

#### Other

**Michael Brooks**, 51, a **Kansas City** city councilman and senior pastor at Zion Grove Baptist Church, has admitted sending nude photos of himself to a woman he met on Facebook and was having a relationship with.

The married father of 4 claims the unidentified woman blackmailed him and asked for \$60,000 to keep quiet. He instead went to the FBI, Brooks said.

"Not good," was all Councilman Ed Ford would say as he left the council chambers. *Source: Kansas City Star, 8-15-13* 

"In therapy sessions, the priest confessed the shocking details he'd kept hidden for years: He had molested more than 100 boys, including his 5-year-old brother. He had sex with male prostitutes and frequented gay strip clubs."

That's how an Associated Press story started on admissions by **California priest Ruben Martinez** which were made public as part of a settlement with abuse victims. Other church files on abusive clergy were also unsealed. Martinez's file was more than 500 pages. He was a member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and started serving as a priest in 1969.

Martinez, now 72, has a most recent address at the Oblate Mission House in Oakland. He's never been criminally charged. Most of his alleged abuses weren't reported until years later.

One alleged victim, now 50, got a settlement in 2007 from the Los Angeles Archdiocese. He told the AP that Martinez took 6 boys to an amusement park, but stopped on the way at an apartment. He and another man went inside with one of the boys and left the others in the car and didn't return for several hours. The boy kept sobbing for several hours after he returned, the man alleged.

A 2005 psychiatric assessment in his file said Martinez claimed he'd learned to control his impulses. It said that at age 13 he'd molested his younger brother and went on to molest "about 100 male minors." *Source: AP, 8-1-13* 

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

Sharing the Crank Mail

FFRF's formal objection to a "prayer caravan" led by an Alabama school superintendent that went all day and stopped at all 29 public schools in the county drew the most wrath last month.

ment & our country. — Penny Kelley, Lacey's Spring, Alabama

**Cullman County Schools "Prayer Caravan":** What kind of monster would instill the fear in a child that his personal beliefs are a crime against his country? Your actions are a contributing factor in the growing division of Americans. Take your efforts elsewhere and use them for things that will bring unity to this country! — *Meredith Brewster* 

Journal, 8-6-13

**Ronald W. Brown**, 58, Largo, **FL**: 20 years in prison and lifetime supervision after pleading guilty to possessing and receiving child pornography. Brown was an active member of his church's youth ministry, drove children to church and performed puppet shows there. He was also featured on a local Christian Television Network show, "Joy Junction."

A criminal complaint revealed Brown's desire to rape and cannibalize a boy at Gulf Coast Church at Easter: "I imagine him wiggling and then going still," Brown said in an Internet chat, where he went on to describe strangling a 3-year-old girl and "snuffing" other children.

He also had computer images of children bound, gagged and blindfolded and solicited photos of dead children online. *Source: Huffington Post, 7-30-13* 

#### **Civil Lawsuits Filed**

A California man is suing the Catholic Diocese of Santa Rosa and St. Mary Immaculate Parish in Lakeport for failing to protect him from molestation by Fr. Ted Oswald when he was 16 in 2007.

The plaintiff "essentially was being abused at the same time other people were mounting lawsuits" against Oswald, said his attorney Skye Daley. The diocese settled an earlier lawsuit, "Widespread, systematic persecution of LG-BTI people constitutes a crime against humanity that unquestionably violates international norms," Posner wrote.

The case is being brought by the Center for Constitutional Rights on behalf of Sexual Minorities of Uganda. The suit alleges that Lively's actions in Uganda, most notably in promoting the notorious "Kill the Gays" bill, are a crime against humanity.

Lively, 47, has also been active in Russia, where a new law criminalizing gay rights advocacy was recently passed. His Abiding Truth Ministries is based in Springfield. *Source: Center for Constitutional Rights, 8-14-13* 

John H. Brothers Jr., 44, West Monroe, LA, will finally be tried in Colorado after a year's delay on accusations he committed 16 counts of sexual assault on a child while he was employed as a teacher at a Christian school in Steamboat Springs in 2006-08. He also served as a pastor at a Baptist church in Yampa before taking a job in Henderson, KY, with Hyland Baptist Church.

He also faces 2 counts of 1st-degree sexual abuse in Henderson.

According to the Steamboat Pilot & Today, Routt County Sheriff's Detective T.J. Sisto testified at the preliminary hearing that Brothers

You are drinking idiocy juice: May God have mercy on your devil deluded souls. - MRED You people are ignorant jerks: Christianity is not a religion. It is a family and a way of life. There is no constitutional seperation of church and state. Jerks like you and the idiotic judges who go along with you are hindering the free exercise of Christianity. You are devil deceived people who will spend eternity in the fires of hell with the devil listening to him laugh at you for believing his lies. May God have mercy of your deluded souls. - Edwin Slaten, Alabama Hello: iam a 4th DEGREE KNIGHT OF CO-LUMBUS AND DARN PROUD OF IT. IN CASE YOU FORGOT WE GOT ONE NATION UNDER GOD PUT IN THE PLEDGE OR DID YOU FOR-GET THAT BTW THIS COMMING CHBIST-MASS.SEASON WE INTEND TO GET THE NATIVITY IN EVERY MALL AND CITY HALL PUT THAT IN YOUR PIPE AND SMOKE IT GOD BLESS. - KENNETH BRIGANTI, Florida Prayer: Why are you so worried about public Christian prayer? All other religions are allowed to practice their faith in public, why not Christians? I was raised with school prayer, the 10 commandments. Pledge of Alliagence, punishment for when you did something bad & praise for the good things. I was spanked & I received lots of love also. The way our country is, I'll take all the help I can get - pray for me, our govern-

**Keep pushing**: Keep pushing your Godless ways; soon enough, you shall regret it. Eventually, you will anger the wrong person. Only God can help you at that point, remember though, you pushed God out, so your on your own. — *Will Garrett* 

Trying to take away our rights to PRAY: I have a right to pray and speak anywhere I want to about MY GOD. And y'all can stay in the darkness y'all are in and may God have mercy on y'alls souls. I am sick and tired of people trying to take away "MY RIGHTS" cause God is in Control and we are not ashamed to stand for what we believe. — Betty Green, Hanceville, Alabama

**your Wisconsin division**: I just read an article that stated you are bullying a mother who prays on the steps of her two childrens school every morning. You cant be serious? She is doing what she feels is best for her children. Pushing God out of the public schools is why society is so corrupt. *— Lisa T.* 

**Nerds burn in hell**: Take your liberal hippy bullshit to another country. Real Americans don't want you here. — *Cavan Scheer, Minneapolis* 

## Letterbox

## Channeling rage at religion constructively

Thank you for "Hearing Jack's Deathbed Confession" [Aug13] by Sarah Jones. It really resonated with me. I'm 75 (in pretty good shape, not dying quite yet). But like Jack, I was a "cradle" Catholic. I left the church at age 32 to become a Presbyterian. Even though I had doubts all along the way, I kept trying to make the God thing work.

Then, at about age 68, I was browsing in a bookstore and saw Sam Harris' *The End of Faith*. I read it and had to say to myself, "Who have you been kidding? You haven't believed in God for a long time. Give it up!"

Now, like Jack, I am angry at religion and at myself for hanging on for so long. I am angry at people who use religion to keep women down. Religion is even used to deny climate change. (God will fix it.)

I am trying to channel the rage constructively. It was comforting to read I was not the only one feeling this way. **Rosalind McMahon California** 

### Will you still need me (when I'm 95)?

I always thought, "Wouldn't the organization receive more money if each member paid \$40 a year instead of a one-time Lifetime Membership of \$1,000?" Then I did the math.

My 70th birthday is in October. If I pay for a Lifetime Membership, that will take me all the way up until I'm 95! Whoops! As you can see, I'm not very good at math.

Here's my check for \$1,000. Thanks for being there! Mrs. Pat Hall California

## Student essayists inspire ex-Jehovah

I don't always read the complete essays in our beloved fish wrap, but this time I read them all. I was so impressed by the depth of perception of these teens. Would that it might have been that way when I was young.

I was bred by a Jehovah's Witness father and a truly unemancipated mother who tread the party line. My discomfort with the "teachings" began at an early age.

I was in the fifth or sixth grade (1945 or 1946) when the phrase "under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance. (How, exactly, does one pledge allegiance to a piece of cloth?) I remember refusing to say those two words. In fact, I "pledged" even more loudly so that my refusal to say the new phrase would be more obvious. Alas, who noticed? I was 12 when asked to sign a blue card indicating my "free choice" to adopt Jehovah's will. I refused and eventually became completely estranged from my father. My "fellow traveler" mother always kept in contact with me but would never discuss with me the merits of the mythology. I left Southern California as soon as I could, and even to this day (I am almost 77), I do not like to go back there. How much less painful my childhood might have been if I had had the support of people such as these essayists. They give us great hope for the

future. Ken Harrison Alameda, California

### Students appreciate FFRF scholarships

I recently received an honorable mention in your high school essay contest. Thank you for this recognition and scholarship. Growing up as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, going to college was never an option. It was the topic of disparaging sermons as often as lust, sloth or greed were. It was something foreign and something frightening.

As I grew, the Witness position on higher education liberalized, in the loosest sense of the word. Yet it was still irregular and discouraging for a young Witness. Gerrit Losch, a member of the Governing Body, has even compared going to college to shooting oneself in the head.

Having lived all of my life in such an anti-educational environment, I am still surprised at the course my life is now taking. Stepping into such a taboo place is stressful, especially when my fears of Satan's influence were replaced by the more rational fears of student loan debt. But thanks to scholarships like FFRF's, I don't have to take out student loans for my freshman year. This is a great yoke that has been lifted from my back. not by a 2,000-year-old demigod but by my fellow human beings.

I would also like to thank you for tirelessly fighting for the separation of church and state. Before I knew I was an atheist, even before I was born, your organization has been fighting every religious group that has illegally stepped across the clear line in the sand. You have fought not only for freethinkers, but for every religious person who doesn't hold the same beliefs as the specific groups that push their views into America's government and schools.

Yes, you fought for my rights even when I was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. For all this I thank you, **Aaron McLaughlin Georgia** 

#### . . .

I want to take a moment to thank you immensely for the scholarship for second place that you awarded me. I can guarantee that with this scholarship I feel motivated and empowered to continue supporting national separation of church and state and freethought and plan to promote them throughout college and life.



### Regrets, I've had a few

David Vangsness came upon this scene in Oldsmar, Fla., and adds, "The wise man proportions his beliefs to the evidence." (David Hume)

He seemed uninterested. When we got home, I sent an email to the main manager and a copy to corporate, asking them to either stop this discriminatory practice or make it available to the nonreligious.

I got a call from the manager, Autumn Collins, two days later, letting me know that they had discontinued the church bulletin discount. We had a pleasant discussion. I went by this morning to verify that the signs were removed and they were.

A little win! Brenda Germain North Carolina

## FFRF's focus where it needs to be

I must beg to differ with Allen Cosnow's letter in the August issue. I agree that FFRF should focus on nontheism, defense of the Establishment Clause and fighting discrimination against atheists. But I disagree that the other examples he ticks off are "peripheral" social issues. On the contrary, they are central to FFRF's mission.

For instance, the Boy Scouts demand a profession of theism and effectively discriminate against those who refuse to provide it or who openly identify as atheists. The Christian Right, not content for opponents to opt out of abortion and contraception themselves, seeks to ban these choices for everyone. Similarly, those who block stem cell research and euthanasia on religious grounds are depriving everyone of those options.

These are examples of precisely what FFRF should be addressing — standing up to anyone, Christian or otherwise, who interferes with our freedom from religion. Suggesting we simply stand back and expect these things to be "handled one way or another by the zeitgeist" is no more productive than praying or anticipating deliverance by a messiah.

ing would just have to wait six weeks.

Our tours, train ride and sail down the Nile River were accompanied by a degreed Egyptologist who could read the hieroglyphics. I know of no civilization (certainly not as ancient) with such a detailed record of its history. Tombs and temples are full of events detailed back as long as 4,500 years. Most of these hieroglyphics are, of course, about the plaudits and military victories of the many kings and queens and the activities of various gods.

This background is a base to state that at no time and at no place was there even the slightest hint that there ever existed any Hebrews (slaves or otherwise) that might have participated in an Exodus. Neither was there any mention of an Egyptian army being drowned in the Red Sea or the sudden deaths of all firstborns.

In the absence of any trace of peoples in an area where nature preserves even the slightest record of presence, the facts are very conclusive: There was no Exodus. There were no Jewish, Christian, Islam patriarchs (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses). The translation of hieroglyphics, with the aid of computers, came too late to stop the juggernaut of the present monotheistic religions.

The positive things I gleaned from this trip to Egypt was a firsthand experience of enlightenment for me and my grandson and meeting some of the truly friendly people of Egypt.

#### Kelvin Fisher Texas

te of those options.Editor's note: We asked Mr. Fisher for a<br/>photo to accompany his letter and he replied:These are examples of precisely what<br/>RF should be addressing — standing<br/>to anyone, Christian or otherwise,<br/>no interferes with our freedom from<br/>ligion. Suggesting we simply standEditor's note: We asked Mr. Fisher for a<br/>photo to accompany his letter and he replied:<br/>"Sorry. I have a sad story. We took many<br/>pictures on the trip, but the camera was lost<br/>about mid-trip. My wife is just starting to<br/>talk to us again."

Emma Conover-Crockett Wisconsin

#### • • •

Thank you for the generous \$300 scholarship for fifth place, as it will help me in my journey in higher education.

#### Kamila Buscavage Virginia

## Complaint stops church bulletin discount

I had a small success against church bulletin discounts. On Aug. 20, my husband and I went to our local Texas Roadhouse for dinner and were greeted at the door by signs advertising a 10% discount on Sundays for guests with church bulletins.

On our way out, we complained to the evening manager, informing him that this practice was illegal, not to mention offensive to nontheists.

#### Joan Reisman-Brill New York

# No hint of Exodus by ancient Egyptians

My grandson from Milwaukee and I recently made a trip to Egypt. We spent nine incredible days in Cairo, Giza, Luxor and Aswan.

In light of all the recent violence there, our family was unanimous in objecting to our trip. But we had already done our homework and there was never a Plan B. For Mike, summer school and a degree in civil engineer-

## Agnostic vs. atheist discussion continues

I'd like to offer the following as a friendly rebuttal to Robert Stephens' letter [Aug13] "Agnostic shouldn't be a four-letter word."

We all recognize, of course, the name of the revered American orator Robert Ingersoll, also known as "The Great Agnostic." From that sobriquet, people may assume that Ingersoll was unsure about the existence of God and preferred to suspend judgment.

Ingersoll himself, however, refuted that simplified description of an agnostic. In the biography *Robert Ingersoll* — *A Life*, Frank Smith writes:

"Although he generally allowed himself to be called an agnostic . . .



### Mel & Pal in Montana

"It is amazing, Pal, what the human mind has conjured up about religion over thousands of years. First, they conjured up a paradise, then to keep their followers in line, they came up with a hell, a scourge that has been on the backs of so many people for so long. It was a very clever ploy." [Mel Pendleton says he and Pal were enjoying Mark Twain's insights on the folly of faith.]

Ingersoll called himself an atheist. . . . In a moment of complete candor . . . he did admit publicly: "The Agnostic is an Atheist. The Atheist is an Agnostic. The Agnostic says, 'I do not know, but I do not believe there is any God.' The Atheist says the same. The orthodox Christian says he knows there is a god; but we know that he does not know. He simply believes."

Smith continues: "Ingersoll was far ahead of his contemporaries, and also ahead of some of today's atheists who don't understand these important distinctions."

#### **David Quintero** California

A letter [Aug13] stated that the spect because "You can't prove that God does not exist." The fallacy of that is that there is no such thing as a burden of DISproof to be foised on the skeptic. To prove that a thing does not exist, one would have to search the entire universe, clearly an impossible task. Expecting the skeptic to take on an impossible task is unreasonable.

only I know the sole way for everybody to live. To prove this, I have almost 2,000 years of individual torture, murder, cultural destruction and language annihilation to my credit.

Do I have an ethics problem? Thank you.

Sincerely,

The Pope (all of them) P.S.: I also own billions of dollars

worth of property on which I pay no taxes.

#### **Madison Arnold** New York

### Tenneesee thanks for stopping Gideons

Congratulations on the building ex-

of all sects and non-religious people (about 30 percent of the population) to pay for their fire protection, road maintenance, public health and human services costs and much more.

It is estimated that \$213 million of religious property in St. Louis County is not taxed, according to county Tax Division Manager Brandon Larson.

Religious institutions are nonprofit and thereby avoid federal taxation as well (which is also unconstitutional).

As St. Louis County Auditor and Treasurer Donald Dicklich noted in a commentary in response to the News Tribune's editorial, it is up to our state legislators to set property tax boundaries.

Nonprofits pay for water and electricity; they ought to pay for other services, too. That can be accomplished if fees for services in lieu of taxes were established. If legislators would do that it would bring religious institutions into compliance with the Minnesota Constitution's Article I, Section 16 ("Nor shall any man be compelled to attend, erect or support any place of worship," it reads. "Nor shall any money be drawn from the treasury for the benefit of any religious societies." Currently, both these restrictions are being violated.

Actually, there is no constitutional reason for religions to escape any taxation, so fee-for-service is really not needed.

All state citizens will see a reduction in their taxes if we call on our city, county and state officers and legislators to set the tax laws straight.

And morally, religions will want to pay for services they receive. William van Druten Minnesota

### Alabaman: Don't let up on religious bullies

Thank you for exposing the illegal Christian indoctrination that "Pastor Billy" [a public school superintendent] is promoting using public funds. My daughter is a graduate of Cold Springs High School in Cullman County, where we still live. She was tormented mercilessly at times because we are not churchgoers or "buybull" believers.

Keep after them! I have made a small donation to your Foundation. Name withheld Alabama

### All together now: 'Amen and Awomen'

In this day and age, it is important for us freethinkers to strive for equality for all, and to stop discrimination, agnostic position should get more re- pansion and thank you for the Action especially between men and women. Thus we are constantly confronted by our pastors quoting to us I Timothy 2:11-12: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. For I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." I feel that a strong approach to refute such God-given discrimination, and to equalize women with men, is to close all our prayers with, "Let us all say, Amen and Awomen." Most certainly that will raise women to the same level as men, whether God approves or not.

proportion in the general population [Aug13] and therefore reflects a higher morality by those not burdened with superstition, I ask that we not sink to the level of so many of the religious population who accept that something is true because they want it to be so.

Because the data cited in the article are based on self-identification of religious preference by individuals, we need to exercise a modicum of skepticism. Speaking for myself (but probably others), if I were to be incarcerated with lots of poorly educated criminals whose prejudices likely often manifest themselves in violence, I would keep my atheism in the closet.

I hope atheists are not expected to be unusually brave, or foolhardy. I have read of many courageous atheists but not of any who would risk their survival by being open in prisons about their nonbelief.

I should note that, despite the above and based on personal observation, I do believe that atheists are much less likely to engage in criminal activity than the general religious population - but I can't prove it. Lester Goldstein

Washington

### Devilnitions (Sectuality)

Absolution: Sects' therapy.

Cathedral: Site for sects with altar boys.

Charismatics: Compulsive sects.

Child Evangelism: Introducing youngsters to sects.

Clergy: Sects professionals.

Faith healing: Hands-on sects.

Fundamentalists: Sects by the Book. Holy Rollers: Wild sects.

Infidels: Forbidden sects.

Jehovah's Witnesses: Sects on the

doorstep.

Pat Robertson/bin Laden: Sects' offenders.

Rapture: A promise of sects. Scriptures: Sect's manuals.

Tithing: Paying for Sects.

JB Kennedy

California

### Odd Swill

If you hear a parson Touting "God's Will," It is clear that person Is spouting god-swill. **D.** Mawnik California

### Burt's bull's-eye to Marines spot on

I sent this email to the U.S. Marine Corps: I am Burt Hackett [mailing address]. I am a qualified veteran of World War II and a former Marine. I served from Jan. 1, 1947, to Jan. 1, 1950. I was 18 when I enlisted. I hold the Good Conduct Medal. I was a member of the 2nd Division, 10th Marine Regiment. I want to back up the letter [from FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel] you received about judging a Marine by his faith or no faith in some kind of a god. There is absolutely no empirical evidence that any sort of god exists. I was on the rifle team at Camp Lejeune, where we shot the M1 .30-caliber rifle with open sights at 600 yards. Those who believed in God hit the bulls-eye with the same accuracy as those who did not believe in God.

#### Lee Helms

#### Michigan

. . .

The Sunday New York Times Magazine publishes a column entitled "The Ethicist" in which people ask for advice on ethical dilemmas or whatever. I sent them the following last week.

Dear Ethicist:

I am the head of Western Civilization's longest surviving international organization of misogynistic, anti-Semitic, tyranny-supporting, homophobic child rapists. I believe that I and Alerts to FFRF members in the Crossville, Tenn., Cumberland County area concerning distribution of Gideons bibles in the classroom.

The expansion is beautiful and I hope to visit someday! **Renee Morris** 

#### (teacher, atheist, vegetarian/vegan, one dog!) Tennessee

### Ably making the case for taxing churches

This letter was printed July 27 in the Duluth News Tribune.

"Stop those who take advantage" by avoiding property tax payments, the News Tribune opined on July 18. Not mentioned, though, was the avoidance by nonprofit institutions, religious and otherwise.

By not paying their share, religions and other nonprofits force citizens

#### **Ted Utchen** Illinois

### 'Atheists in prison' statistic questionable

As much as I'd like to believe that the proportion of atheists in U.S. federal prisons is far below that of their

Back off and back the U.S. Constitution

Best Regards, Cpl. Burt Hackett **Burt Hackett** Pennsylvania





Craig Mason is usually not one to point fingers, but deserves the attention for raising more than \$7,000 for charity.

**By Craig Mason** 

**E** ach year I fund-raise for the fight against multiple sclerosis by forming a team of wacky adventurers called Team Conehead to participate in a 150-mile bicycling event over two days. This year, in my 23rd year of bicycling, I raised just over \$7,000 (ranking me No. 38 out of 2,500), and Team Conehead raised \$33,000.

During our primary training ride, the Elephant Rock ride in Castle Rock, Colo., something interrupted my enjoyment of the day. One of the photographer's assistants couldn't resist proselytizing. I'm riding by, and to help me remember which group of bicyclists my photo would appear in online, he shouted out, "Remember the letter G — like God is great!"

As an atheist, I am completely convinced that "God is not great,"

and I really did not want to be reminded what believers care about. I was there for the bike ride and it was my day off.

The route included many churches, one of which sponsored a rest stop and photos. So I'm certainly reminded of his "God" daily, and I didn't need to be reminded by the photography provider of their gods.

"Your God is not great!" I replied to him as a rider went by me and heard what I had said. She thanked me for saying something.

(His commentary on the letter "J" gets even more prophetic — Jesus, Joseph, Jehoshaphat vou get the picture). This is not the first time he has done this.

I asked the photography vendor management to consider the following: I would like this person counseled that there are many people on this ride who represent Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, other believers and nonbelievers, a whole range of diversity that does not necessarily embrace "his" God.

My suggestion was that he be asked to keep his religion to himself where it belongs: in his own church, his own home or his own head. It has no place in a bike ride that is not specifically sponsored by a religious institution. I did not pay to be preached at, and I'm also certain that all of the other audiences I mentioned did not pay for or expect this treatment.

The message apparently hit home. The photographer's assistant ceased his proselytizing on our main ride of the year.

Craig Mason is an IT technical support professional who lives in Colorado.



you get the picture). This is not Captain Conehead, aka Craig Mason, sitting, front and center.

# High school honorable mention essays

#### Continued from page 16

offend any of the religious students with my lack of belief.

In literature classes in particular, I felt ostracized daily due to the high amount of religious content in our reading and discussions. The worst of it was telling my friends that I was atheist. That word is like a curse to some of them, and they have never looked at me in the same way again. Fights have broken out in our social circle over disagreements involving religion. Friendships have been strained or even severed.

Perhaps even worse than losing friends is losing family. My family is very traditional and both of my parents are religious, but they are open-minded about my atheism. My grandfather isn't.

I eventually learned to fight back against discrimination at school and home. Using logic, I am able to reduce the constant bombardment of questions from my grandfather, and our relationship is slowly getting better. As for school, for a year I was the president of the Parkview branch of the Secular Student Alliance. We are the only high school in Georgia to have one, and I could not be more thankful for it. It serves as a nonjudgmental environment for venting, for discussion or debate and for open-minded thinking. We promote equality throughout the school between all religious and nonreligious beliefs, encouraging tolerance and acceptance rather than alienation. I plan to carry those values with me throughout my life as a freethinker.

# Seeking true tolerance



By Zofia Warpeha

A am going to hell. At least, according to what I have been told. While growing up in a small town in rural Minnesota, my inevitable journey to that fiery place after death was a frequent topic of discussion.

#### THERAN \$WAG."

But I longed for a place where I didn't have to face that isolation, a place that I could speak openly about my beliefs, a place where people were tolerant.

I may not believe in God, but I believe that our society has the potential to reach the point of true religious tolerance. I believe that we are capable of creating a world where no children have to be told that they're going to heaven or hell unless they truly believe it themselves. I believe that someday, it will not matter what someone believes in our seemingly secular society.

It may take awhile, but I have faith.

Zofia Warpeha, 18, Princeton, Minn., is attending The New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music and Eugene Lang College in New York City to pursue degrees in jazz violin performance and liberal arts. "I'm very involved in various musical ensembles and enjoy working at my local farmers' market, selling honey and maple syrup produced on my family's farm."



it caused my young eyes to finally open to the problems with religion. The older I got, the more comfortable I became with the idea that people practic-

Lindsey Foster, 17, was born in Tucker, Ga., and is attending Georgia State University to major in music education. She was a section leader in marching band and symphonic band and a member of Modern Music Masters, the music honor society. The phrase "religious tolerance" was always tossed around in my community. To most people in my school, to be tolerant was to accept that people had the right to be wrong. For some, it also meant that people had the right to know that they were wrong. It became easier with time, but it wasn't always a simple task to tolerate the tolerance.

In high school, there weren't as many teenagers who wanted to save my soul. Most matured and became more tolerant, and I became more accepting. I accepted prayers said before extracurricular competitions, contemporary Christian music in our public school choir and the fact that I would never fit into the group that I tried to hang out with, the people who had attended youth group together for years and that showed up to school with identical shirts emblazoned with "LU-

## Mom: No Christmas gift for you

#### By Sarah Sprenger

When I was an infant and unable to speak, my parents (34 and 45 years my senior) took the liberty of baptizing me into the Lutheran Church without asking me if that was what I wanted. I went along with it until I was about 7, when the pastor's madcap wife threatened me with a machete for disrupting the sermon.

Though that's not a story my parents (or many others) tend to believe, ing religion needed it to explain things they didn't understand, like little kids need the tooth fairy and the stork.

The problem was that I had to keep my beliefs hidden away. I was a closet atheist until I was a sophomore in high school. For years I had been faking reasons why I did not want to or could not go to church. One day my mother finally called me out.

It was then I learned how much my parents disliked my views. Because I did not believe in a logical fallacy, because I believe in science over stories, and because I am able to come up with my own solutions and conclusions, I was a disappointment.

The year I came out of the closet, my mother told me she was not going to get me anything for Christmas. Christmas is a Christian holiday, so why would an atheist want to celebrate it?

Continued on next page

## Meet a Member

Name: Christina Schanda.

Where I live: Forsyth, Mo., about 15 minutes from Branson.

Where and when I was born: San Clemente, Calif., in 1967. My parents moved back to "the boot heel" of Missouri shortly after I was born and insisted I go with them.

**Family**: My daughter Jordan and her husband Joey live about an hour away in Springfield. My son Jett is a high school sophomore. My sister and her family live three miles away and my parents live next door. We're very close, literally and figuratively.

**Education**: Forsyth School, K-12. Graduated from Florida State University School of Theatre in 1989.

**Occupation**: I do bookkeeping for my dad's dental practice from my home office and work as dental assistant for him part time. I also enjoy painting and writing, but those "jobs" don't pay the bills. I do the first two things so I can do the other two things.

How I got where I am today: It was pretty rough raising my kids in a little town [pop. 2,300] where it's just accepted that that kids would come home from school with religious material and that some teachers are going to ask your kids if they attend church. After years of incidents involving the school and more trips complaining to the administration than I can count, I finally started referring to myself as a atheist and demanding that laws be followed.

After my daughter graduated, I started working with my friend, an editor and magician of the printed word on some of my experiences. I uploaded my collection of short stories *Christina-anity* about a year ago and had a few hard copies printed this year.

Even though the stories are fiction (lots of creative license has been taken with facts and names), they contain enough truth to get the point across. And of course, in a little town, you can change the names, but everyone knows whom you're talking about. Self-publishing has given me a lot of gratification since I'm the obvious minority.

Since coming out and publishing my short stories, several things have changed. First, I have been shocked at how many people have come to me privately and told me how much they admire my courage to be an out atheist in a small town. They have told me stories of how they would lose their jobs/families if they even alluded to not being religious, but they feel satisfaction at seeing me call out the bullying of the religious majority here. That makes me feel bad for them, but I have really come to appreciate my situation since it allows me to be exactly who I am.

Second, I have connected with a lot of freethinkers in the process. That includes Springfield Freethinkers and Branson Freethinkers, my Facebook and Twitter groups/friends and, of course, freethought books and publications like Freethought Today. Without them, I'm not sure I would have felt like I had enough peer support to be the "town atheist."

My family has always been supportive, even though I know they have experienced some negative fallout from my little book project. Otherwise, it would have been hard for me to put my real name on it.

Finally, since I am out so openly now, I have had several people come to me and tell me they thought they were the only nonbeliever in the area. I like being able to help those people connect with other like minds.

Most people don't know that there are groups in the area and online opportunities and groups that they can join anonymously. I think it's really important to feel like part of the freethought community without having to jeopardize one's job and personal relationships.

A quotation I like: "I now consider myself a 'dry' Baptist." (Said my father, Ed Schanda, son of a Baptist minister.)

These are a few of my favorite things: Anything Tim Minchin. Lists. "The Daily Show." Slimming pants. Bill Maher. Free beer.

**These are not:** Toe shoes. Sarah Palin. Kirk Cameron. Tardiness. Litterbugs.

My doubts about religion started: When I argued with my parents about the ability of the Easter Bunny to slip under a door. At that point, they

knew they had a skeptic on their hands. I think I was about 7.
I wish you'd have asked me: What's been your favorite freethought event thus

far? I had the time of my life at the Reason Rally in Washington, D.C. I went with



Christina Schanda's *Christina-anity*, available as an eBook at *amazon.com*, is a collection of pithy essays about growing up atheist in the bible belt. She was profiled in an interesting feature ('Heathen' takes on hell — with humor) in February 2012 in the Springfield News-Leader, which declined FFRF's request to reprint the article.

## From Christina-anity

#### Christina-anity's saints

Heath Ledger, Shakespeare, Charles Darwin, Jim Morrison, Albert Einstein, Kurt Cobain, Freddie Mercury, Divine [the late actor Harris Milstead, associated with filmmaker John Waters], Christopher Hitchens.

#### Christina's 12 disciples

Jimmy Fallon, Cartman ["South Park" character], Tim Minchin, Andy Samberg, Kathy Griffin, Jon Stewart, Bill Maher, Betty White, Stephen Colbert, Ricky Gervais, Tina Fey, Seth MacFarlane.

#### Her religious holiday

Dionys-mus. Each Jan. 28, Christina-ists will in the ritual of drink, song and

my daughter and met up with some like minds from the Branson and Springfield groups. It was a blast. The weather didn't cooperate the day of the event, but it was still a great experience. I hope to go again someday. I think it made a huge statement in this country about the rise of reason. dance celebrating the fruits of the nonvirgin mother's labor in 1967 and also the losing of Christina's virginity in 1985. This is a truly nondenominational holiday. Nonconverts welcomed.

# High school honorable mention essays

#### Continued from previous page

Of course there are other problems with being a freethinker. One of them is that my freedom of speech is strictly opposed. I have the right to say what I want, but many people will try to repress that right — not just my parents or people of their age group, but also some members of my own generation. In an essay about Christopher Hitchens for a logic class, I agreed with his statement that religion is asserted without evidence. When I got my essay back after swapping for peer revision, everything claiming religion was false was crossed out or changed and included with my peer's comments were the words, "What makes you think this is an OK thing to write?"

Many religious people claim that

atheists and freethinkers are endangering their practices, taking away their freedom of religion. But in all actuality, it's the opposite. Many freethinkers do not want to get involved in religion at all, only wanting to go about their business and exploring how the world really is.

Just because I do not believe in a god doesn't mean that I don't deserve

the rights granted in the First Amendment, which forbids laws establishing an official religion.

Sarah Sprenger, 18, Lake Orion, Mich., graduated magna cum laude and is attending Michigan State University to major in plant biology and statistics. She participated in Peer Corps (seniors and juniors mentoring freshman).

Madison, Wisconsin

September 2013

## FFRF opposes change in Wis. constitution



**Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott** 

Wisconsin's Religious Right lobby has introduced a dangerous bill, Assembly Joint Resolution 43 and Senate Joint Resolution 38, to amend the state Constitution and tamper with the ringing language of Article 1, Section 18.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott testified (below) Aug. 20 against the amendment before the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor:

Joint Resolution 38 poses substantial problems for the state of Wisconsin.

This change has no regard for how well our religious protections have functioned. The substance of Article 1, Section 18 has been unchanged for 165 years, since Wisconsin's 1848 Constitution. It explicitly protects from interference with rights of conscience. To amend Section 18 permanently, particularly when the amendment is unquestionably vague, is an insult to the founding document of our state.

Supporters of this constitutional amendment claim that it only is restating current judicial opinions. This is not true. The wording in the amendment is expansive. It turns a shield into a sword. A protection is now something that can be wielded against others. The amendment includes any purported burden on conscience, not just substantial burdens. A person may allege any trivial burden and could violate the law as long as religion was used as a justification. It also covers indirect burdens, which reaches a wide gamut of lawful state actions. Each person would be a law unto themselves.

The consequences in changing Section 18 will be far reaching. The wording is so broad that any state enforcement, state statutes, and local ordinances would be impacted. Protections from discrimination in places of public accommodation, housing, and employment could be gutted. The expanse of the provision would reach schools, correctional institutions, and law enforcement, including prosecution for possession of illegal drugs. All areas of public policy would be impacted, including a person's right to obtain medications. A pharmacist could claim he has no duty to refer to an alternative provider if the pharmacist objects to filling a doctor's prescription. A student not wanting to take a biology exam would be exempted because of her creationist beliefs.



### FFRF celebrates Women's Equality Day

FFRF's female staffers participated in the 93rd anniversary of women's suffrage in the United States. The 19th Amendment, first proposed by agnostic and feminist foremother Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was drafted by Stanton but not adopted until 1920, 18 years after her death. Pictured in front of "Forward" (a reproduction of Jean Miner's 1891 Columbian Exposition statue embodying Wisconsin's state motto) at the Capitol are (from left) Staff Attorney Liz Cavell, Publicist Lauryn Seering, Membership Director Jackie Douglas, Journalism Intern Sarah Eucalano, Summer Office Assistant Julie Solberg, Director of Operations Lisa Strand, Office Assistant Dayna Long (also newly elected president of Wisconsin NOW), Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. Not pictured: Bookkeeper Katie Daniel. (By the way, Annie Laurie and her mother, Anne Gaylor, FFRF president emerita, led the protest to "Save Ms. Forward" in the early 1990s when a backward governor suggested putting the statue in the Capitol basement.)

## Where is the 'choice?'

Catholic schools win big in Wisconsin voucher scheme

Under Wisconsin's regrettable expansion of school vouchers, Christian schools were the only winners, and more than 80% are Catholic. Every one of the 25 schools announced in August is a Christian school: 18 Catholic, four Lutheran and three nondenominational Christian schools.

The Legislature and Gov. Scott

67% were already attending private schools.

"Where is the 'choice' in that?" asked Gavlor.

sion of the state program."

State Rep. Sondy Pope, a voucher critic, said, "The voucher program is no longer providing the escape option from a failing public school; it has become a new state entitlement program that will cost taxpayers and directly compete with our constitutionally reguired public school system."

This amendment is a solution to a problem that does not exist. It changes our original 1848 establishment clause and free exercise protections. The amendment must be rejected.

Walker radically expanded vouchers statewide in the 2013-15 budget. It's expected that an average of \$192.5 million in taxpayer funds will be spent each year on vouchers during the 2013-15 budget cycle.

In August, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction randomly chose 500 students to fill the openings.

Contrary to pro-voucher propaganda claiming the expansion would give lower-income public school students a "choice," only a quarter of participating students will come from public students. More than two-thirds (76%) of applicants did not attend public school last year, and 67% were already attending private schools.

"It's appalling that taxpayer funding is going to provide Christian education to students already attending these religiously segregated and unaccountable parochial schools," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. Under the new statewide scheme, the 25 schools receiving the most applicants will receive a tuition voucher worth \$6,442 per enrolled student.

One chosen school in Madison, Lighthouse Christian, apparently will be teaching creationism, compliments of state taxpayers.

Noted Wisconsin State Journal columnist Chris Rickert:

"[T]here is one bright line past which no public dollars should cross; it's the line between schools that teach evolution and schools that shun evolution for 'intelligent design,' creationism or some such similar religiously based nonsense that warps kids' minds and leaves them ill-prepared for responsible citizenship."

Rickert added, "Thoughtful people should be disturbed that Madison's Lighthouse Christian School is among those eligible to take voucher students under the Legislature's recent expan-

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott said, "Under the state's system, only select religious schools were able to garner a high number of student applicants. The U.S. and Wisconsin Constitutions do not allow for preferential treatment to religion, which includes the prohibition against majority-rule funding schemes like this."

The number of vouchers will increase to 1,000 next year. Vouchers in Wisconsin were initially limited to Milwaukee but were expanded to Racine in 2011. Milwaukee's voucher program started with 341 students in 1990 and now has nearly 25,000 students, with over 21,000 of them attending religious schools.

"This voucher program is being used as an inroad into completely funding religious education with taxpayer money. Vouchers must be stopped, not expanded," said Gaylor.