

Freethought Today

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FFRF ends flurry of Florida violations

The Freedom From Religion Foundation recently ended a series of violations in public schools in Orange County, Fla., as well as invocations at City Commission meetings in Winter Garden.

The commission voted Sept. 5 to replace prayers with a moment of silence, following a controversy in which Mayor John Rees ejected a citizen from the meeting simply because he wouldn't stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter of complaint Aug. 29 in support of the citizen, "John Thoreau," a member of FFRF and the Central Florida Freethought Community, FFRF's local chapter.

As documented in a video recorded by Thoreau, Rees told everyone present to rise for the invocation and the pledge. As the prayer began, Rees interrupted, pointing at the seated Thoreau and saying, "We're waiting for everyone to rise." Thoreau repeatedly asserted he did not have to and remained seated. The sectarian prayer, given by a commission member, continued.

When Thoreau also refused to stand for the pledge, Rees ordered Police Chief George Brennan to "either escort him out or have him stand for the pledge." Rees continued, "This is just not fair to our troops and people overseas, sir." Brennan asked Thoreau whether he would stand or leave. He answered, "I guess I'm leaving" and was escorted out in front of the nearly 100 people in the room.

Rees claimed the refusal to stand was disrespectful, telling the Orlando Sentinel, "I did not make him stand for the prayer, but the pledge? Even school kids stand. So I told him, 'You have two choices: You can stand or go outside.'"

Seidel, in a follow-up letter, asked the commission to "get rid of prayer altogether" and asked Rees to explain at the next meeting "that citizens are within their rights to remain sitting for the pledge and that it does not reflect a lack of patriotism."

The commission held a special meeting Sept. 5 and voted 3-2 to substitute a moment of silence for an invocation. (Rees voted no.) Four chapter members and chapter leader David Williamson spoke against the prayers.

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker praised the decision, noting that it's a major coup to persuade a city to drop prayers.

Orange County Schools

Orange County Public Schools in Orlando agreed in late August to end a variety of state/church violations. This is the district that, following a federal lawsuit, is now permitting FFRF and other nonbelievers to distribute freethought literature on the same date that evangelists "passively distribute" bibles. FFRF has had to contact the district about more than 10 violations in the past 18 months.

Following a March complaint letter from Seidel, the district is abolishing athletic chaplaincies for its teams and removing bible verses from sports venues and apparel. Other violations included using religious music on game footage.

The district's August memo from the Office of Legal Services stated: "Having a team chaplain is not permitted as it is an unconstitutional endorsement of religion in the same manner as a school employee participating in prayer with students. In this area the law is very clear."

Regarding staff praying with students, the memo said: "On this issue the matter is well decided that school personnel 'cannot participate in a visible way with the players' during student-led prayer. . . . Please make sure to educate the staff at this and other schools that active participation by any School Board employee and/or non-faculty coach in student-led prayer must not occur as it is contrary to established case law."

The school also properly got rid of the bible verses on team signs and ap-

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The Venue Church rents space at Apopka High School in Orange County, Fla. What better place to perform baptisms than in an inflatable pool in front of a background with a recurring public school logo? FFRF sent a complaint letter Aug. 28 about this and other state/church violations in Apopka schools.

FFRF launches 'Out of the Closet' videos



Jarvis
FFRF Legal Intern

FFRF launched its "Out of the Closet, Freethinkers!" video campaign at the end of August. The nation's largest freethought association debuted its "friendly neighborhood atheist/freethinker" video campaign to showcase the growing numbers of unbelievers in the U.S.

"You are our movement's greatest asset. Lend your thoughts, face, name and video to our campaign to educate the masses — massed and unmassed," invites FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

University of Wisconsin-Madison law student Jarvis Idowu (above), one of FFRF's capable legal interns, notes in his segment: "The religions of today are the entertainment of tomorrow. Everyone, I hope, is an atheist about Zeus and Apollo and Poseidon. I just added Jesus and Muhammad to that list."

Go to ffrf.org/video-landing to meet many of FFRF's staff members, interns and volunteers, who have recorded short statements about their nonbelief, and for easy directions on uploading your short video via YouTube.

Inside This Issue

Living as an atheist in an Islamic state

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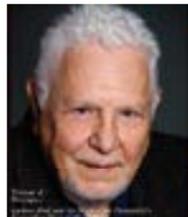
Secularists give civic invocations after Greece

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In memoriam: Physicist Victor Stenger, 1935-2014

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Meet a Deist Member

Name: Steve Pinski.

Where I live: Colorado Springs, Colo.

Where and when I was born: St. Paul, Minn., in 1959.

Family: Linda is the love of my life, best friend and wife of 35 years. Our two married children are also free-thinkers; they made the leap much quicker than I.

Education: Bourgade Catholic High School, Phoenix; bachelor's in electrical engineering, Arizona State University; master's in electrical engineering, Air Force Institute of Technology.

Occupation: I work for the federal government. I'm here to help — trust me.

Military service: Retired with 20 years in the U.S. Air Force (10 years enlisted and 10 as an officer). Various jobs included maintaining the avionics on the F-111F, intelligence, acquisition and teaching electrical engineering at the Air Force Academy.

How I got where I am today: I grew up in a very Catholic family with seven siblings. I was an altar boy and received the highest honor in my high school, the Cardinal Award for Christian Leadership. I married at 20 and we raised our children Catholic. I was a member of the Knights of Columbus, a Eucharistic minister and led services known as Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest. Linda and I taught the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, the classes required to join the church.

Basically, I went to church every week for 50 years and was as Catholic as possible. As I went deeper into the Catholic Church, the growing doubts became overwhelming. Finally,

while reciting the Profession of Faith (Nicene Creed) one Sunday, I realized that I just didn't believe the dogma and doctrine which I was professing to believe; I was not being honest with myself. So, I stopped going to church and started reading about the philosophy of religion. Linda, who had gone to church with me for 30 years, left the church as well, saying "It's about time we both acknowledge the unreasonableness of all religions."

Where I'm headed: I am determined to be mentally faithful to myself. I try not to deceive myself about all things in life. I enjoy reading about the philosophy of religion and why people believe what they believe. The human brain is fascinating.

Person in history I admire: Thomas Paine, who was a deist and wrote passionately about his beliefs and would not equivocate. Part one of *The Age of Reason* is my favorite book by Paine.

A quotation I like: "It is necessary to the happiness of man, that he be mentally faithful to himself. Infidelity does not consist in believing or disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what he does not believe." — Thomas Paine

These are a few of my favorite things: Traveling, reading and learning about other cultures, beliefs and religions. In the last five years, I have read over 100 books, including ones on atheist, agnostic and theist subjects. I am a strong supporter of FFRF and the separation of church and state.

A few of my least favorite things: People who persecute others for their own agenda: homophobes, transgenderphobes, racists, theocrats, etc.

My doubts about religion started:



Linda Pinski's shirt says "Not all those who wander are lost." Steve's smile says he's not an angry deist! They were visiting Steve's sister.

In grade school. Religion, in general didn't make sense. The more I learned, the worse my doubts became. How could all religions claim to have absolute truth? At best only one could be true; at worst they were all false.

Today, I believe all organized religions are man-made and false. It took me 50 years to break the spell and realize that all holy texts and divine revelations are myths and fables.

Ways I promote freethought: As an FFRF Lifetime Member, I try to respond to as many Action Alerts as possible. I also share my story and my lifetime of doubting organized religion. It's amazing how many people have similar doubts ("De omnibus dubitandum," all is to be doubted).

I wish you'd have asked me: "What do you believe?" I believe in God; however, I believe all organized religions

are false. I most closely identify with deism, where God is simply the great mystery behind the existence of the universe. I appreciate the mystery of God; on the other hand I do not profess to understand this mystery.

I do not believe in an anthropomorphic, Santa Claus God who makes wishes come true, cures cancer and will save me from a tornado, but only if I pray hard enough. As a deist, I realize I am a minority in FFRF's freethought membership. Conversely, I have never felt more welcome in an organization as I have amongst the atheists and agnostics here. FFRF is truly an umbrella organization welcoming all freethinkers who promote separation of church and state.

If alive, I believe Thomas Paine would also be a Lifetime Member.

FFRF welcomes 19 'Lifers' from 12 states

The Freedom From Religion Foundation gratefully announces its 19 newest Lifetime Members. They are:

Barbara Abruzzo and Connie Schofield, William Alexander, Michelle Davis Baer, Edmund Cantu, Stephen Carlsen, Sam Erickson (generous gift from Adam R. Rose to our hardworking summer intern), Glenda Halbleib, Nancy Hellner, Deborah Hilpipre, Judith Kienitz, Allen Misher, Dallas Mulvaney, Ph.D., PZ Myers, Michael Rosenthal, Robin Rusboldt, Katharine Suri (gift from Kimberly Moseley), Michael Zais and Tim Zebo.

States represented are Arizona, Cal-

ifornia, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin.

Individual Lifetime Memberships are offered at \$1,000, are deductible for income taxes to the kind donor, mean never another renewal notice and go into a reserved "rainy day" fund.

FFRF sends warm thanks to Tim, Michael, Kimberly, Robin, Michael, PZ, Dallas, Allen, Judith, Deborah, Nancy, Glenda, Adam, Stephen, Edmund, Michelle, William, Connie and Barbara!



Between you and me

Patricia Jones doesn't go for religion much, as her Jeep plate attests. Patricia is an FFRF state rep for Tennessee. "We are driving to the Los Angeles convention and hope we get lots of response while traveling," writes husband Michael.

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A Note to Members

Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and "Private Line." If it says September 2014 or earlier please renew! Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 gung-ho; \$25-student) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in Jan/Feb and June/July. Send membership or renewal to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

ffrf.org/donate

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September 2014

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

FFRF plaque complaint has Texans in tizzy

An FFRF complaint over religious plaques at two North Texas schools has many Texans in a theocratic tizzy. Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote the Midlothian Independent School District in June after receiving a complaint about the plaques.

A plaque at Mountain Peak Elementary says: "Dedicated in the Year of our Lord 1997 to the education of God's children and to their faithful teachers in the name of the Holy Christian

Church. Soli Deo Gloria [Glory to God alone]."

A similar plaque is at Longbranch Elementary. The plaques were part of the buildings' dedications 17 years ago.

In response, school district attorney John Hardy promised FFRF that the plaque would be removed from Mountain Peak Elementary. Both plaques were then covered with duct tape. But in late August, a vandal removed the coverings.

Nearly 100 people attended a rally at the administration building to protest removal of the plaques. NBC-5 Fort Worth interviewed one protester, Lisa Huski, who said her daughter carries a bible to class: "It's not about a plaque. It's about God being in our children's schools. It's about us standing up for the fact that God's in our school." On Aug. 28, Superintendent Jerome Stewart announced the plaques would remain uncovered while the district seeks legal advice. Stewart earlier had said they'd have to be replaced because of their "questionable constitutional nature."

NBC-5 reported that the Liberty Institute in Plano, infamous for defending the bible banners used by cheerleaders in Kountze, Texas, is involved. Liberty Institute's Hiram Sasser claimed "the school district created a limited public forum for plaques relating to the topic of the building dedication," which he further claimed cannot be censored "simply because of its reli-



The Dallas Observer commented on the plaque FFRF protested: " 'Soli deo gloria' is Latin for 'Suck it, atheists.' "

gious viewpoint."

"The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment stands for the principle that the state must remain separate from church, from religion," FFRF attorney Grover said. "This is a public school district, so it represents the state, and therefore it can't take a position on religion."

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor pointed to more than 65 years of firm Supreme Court decisions protecting children from religious prosely-

tizing and rituals in public schools.

"What makes this case especially egregious is the fact that these religious plaques hang on elementary schools where a captive audience of very young students are being sent a theocratic message. What a lesson in abuse of authority and our secular school system," Gaylor added.

FFRF's office has fielded a number of crank calls from Texas and reported one threat to police.

FFRF ends Florida violations

Continued from front page

parel. "While the signs themselves may be permitted," the memo said, "the reference or citation to a particular bible verse is deemed to be an unconstitutional endorsement of religion."

The school also agreed with FFRF about banning religious music in videos: "The usage of religious lyrics could be seen as an unconstitutional endorsement of religion."

Of course, these sensible actions were met with near hysteria on Fox News. Bobby Bowden, retired Florida State University football coach, noted during one interview that he didn't care about the Constitution or the First Amendment: "I want to be spiritually correct."

Extremely conservative Fox columnist Todd Starnes, not known for his accuracy or balance, reported that one chaplain would stay but be renamed as a "life coach." He also charged that FFRF is trying to "eradicate Christianity in the public marketplace of ideas."

"If this 'life coach' nonsense is accurate, Orange County can't avoid this issue with creative wordplay," responded Seidel.

FFRF still has outstanding complaints, including school-sponsored baccalaureates, holding school events in churches and forcing students to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

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

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

FFRF
P.O. Box 750
Madison WI 53701

Freedom Depends on Freethinkers

Indiana governor fights FFRF over memorial cross

Indiana Gov. Mike Pence has chimed in to publicly oppose FFRF's objection to the state's acceptance of a wooden sculpture with a cross as a memorial to vets in a state park.

Pence issued a statement in support of the sculpture being placed at Whitewater Memorial State Park in early September: "So long as I am governor, I will defend the right of Hoosiers to display this sculpture in Whitewater Memorial State Park as a lasting tribute to the service and sacrifice of all who have worn the uniform of the United States." He added, "The freedom of religion does not require freedom from religion."

FFRF first wrote to the Department of Natural Resources on Aug. 20 to urge rejection of the proposed statue, an 8-foot-tall, chainsaw-carved veterans memorial that depicts a bald eagle and includes a prominent white cross.

DNR Director Cameron Clark wrote to the Union County Development Corp., which arranged for the statue, on Sept. 2, stating that he was "pleased to accept [their] gift on behalf of the citizens of Indiana and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources." Clark ordered the sculpture to be placed next to the park's administrative office, in part to provide "proper visibility." According to a story in the Richmond Palladium-Item, the park was created in 1949 to be a memorial to veterans in surrounding counties.

FFRF noted in its letter that the memorial did not in fact honor all veterans. "[T]he Christian-only memorial

will send a message that the government only cares about the deaths of Christian soldiers, not Jewish, other non-Christian and nonreligious soldiers," Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote.

"The religious significance of the Latin cross is unambiguous and indisputable," Markert wrote, adding that "an overwhelming majority of federal courts agree that the Latin cross universally represents the Christian religion, and only the Christian religion."

She cited a string of court decisions that bolster FFRF's position, including a ruling that the cross "is not a generic symbol of death."

Markert continued, "Although the cross serves as a tombstone, a religious symbol is not necessary to mark a grave, and . . . the use of a religious symbol where one is not necessary evidences a religious purpose."

"The freedom of religion does re-

quire freedom from religion," said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, "because the freedom of religion means nothing without the freedom to dissent. And Governor Pence should be free from religion when acting in his role as a public servant."

Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor added, "FFRF has no objection to veterans memorials, but they cannot be used as a subterfuge to put Latin crosses on government land. Whitewater Memorial State Park should not host a monument that appears to say 'We only care about your service if you're a Christian.' There are many atheists in foxholes, and 24 percent of FFRF membership is made up of veterans or active military."

About 25% of all military personnel identify as atheist or agnostic or hold no religious preference.

FFRF is considering legal action.



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

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

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

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

Farewells

Twelve perfect roses in a crystal vase:
While they were fresh, they put on quite a show.
But time is cruel, so they fell from grace:
Today the last survivor had to go.

When robins come to sing to us each spring
The earthworms get a wicked double-whammy.
But when the leaves fall, birds refuse to sing,
And fly off to their condos in Miami.

You and I both hope for something lasting,
More than flowers or robins have — however,
We have to hide a smile when we're forecasting
That we are going to be around forever.

We know that every spring will have a fall,
And the last goodbye's the hardest one of all.

© Philip Appleman.

Freethought Today is honored to publish this new poem



*Philip Appleman is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include **Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible** (2012), **Darwin's Ark** (new 2009 edition) and **Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie** (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used **Norton Critical Edition, Darwin**, and the **Norton Critical Edition of Malthus' Essay on Population**.*

*His poetry and fiction have won many awards, including a fellowship in poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Center for Science Education. His work has appeared in **Harper's Magazine**, **The Nation**, **The New Republic**, **The New York Times**, **The Paris Review**, **Partisan Review**, **Poetry**, and **The Yale Review**.*

He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both "Afterlife" Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Phil's books: ffrf.org/shop.

Overheard

I think atheists are getting organized. It's a wave of visibility.

Penny Edgell, University of Minnesota sociology professor, who's teaching what she says is the state's first course on atheism this fall

St. Cloud Times, 8-11-14

I certainly respect the belief of the Hobby Lobby owners. On the other hand, they have no constitutional right to foist that belief on the hundreds and hundreds of women who work



for them who don't share that belief. I had never seen the free exercise of religion clause interpreted in such a way. **Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who dissented in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, interview with Katie Couric**

Yahoo! News, 7-30-14

[I]f we want the same acceptance that other groups have, we need to earn it — but not by convincing others there is no god. What we really need to do is get massively mobilized in service, education, and other positive social activities that will be good for us, good for our neighbors, and, it also happens, good for our image and electability.

Greg Epstein, head of Harvard University's humanist chaplaincy

thinkprogress.org, 8-26-14

Humor for [the atheist] movement may be especially advantageous because . . . it offers a relatively non-threatening challenge to religion, while simultaneously causing people some discomfort and forcing them to rethink their religious views.

Katja Guenther, University of California-Riverside sociologist and lead author of "How Humor Matters in Social Movements: Insights from the New Atheist Movement"

UCR Today, 8-17-14

Religious teaching, especially exposure to miracle stories, leads children to a more generic receptivity toward the impossible, that is, a more wide-ranging acceptance that the impossible can happen in defiance of ordinary causal relations.

News story about a study published in *Cognitive Science*, "Researchers: Children exposed to religion have difficulty distinguishing fact from fiction"

The Raw Story, 7-18-14

The IRS could be coming to a church near you, and you can thank the atheists for that. They struck a deal with the troubled agency, giving it the power to keep a closer eye on nonprofit religious groups.

Fox News commentator Elisabeth Hasselbeck, on the legal settlement in which the IRS agreed to more closely monitor church politicking after being sued by FFRF

"Fox & Friends," 7-29-14

The law's supporters, like [anti-gay activist Pastor Martin] Sempa and the leadership of the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, had been whipping up their supporters during the two days of hearings before the ruling, and LGBT activists expected a backlash if they won.

News story, "Ugandan Anti-Homosex-

uality Act Struck Down By Constitutional Court"

buzzfeed.com, 8-1-14

Things were really not good to begin with. She was so angry. After a while I think she just accepted it. We still don't talk about it. It looks like she's not going to kick me out.

Lasan Dancay-Bangura, 22, head of his university's freethought group, on coming out as an atheist to his mother while still being afraid to tell his father

BBC News, 8-3-14

[L]et's stop curtailing the rights of skeptics like myself trying to shed light on the lingering shadows of the Christian Dark Ages threatening our society under the false premise of freedom of religion.

Robert Rock, Mission City, B.C., "Letter of the Week: We should stop inflicting harmful religions on innocent children"

The Vancouver Province, 7-27-14

Why is it that we require our candidates to profess a religious faith but not that they demonstrate even minimal scientific literacy? Our representatives in Congress make critical decisions on science policy and science funding, and yet are often hostile to the entire scientific enterprise. In 2012, Rep. Paul Broun, R-Ga., while serving on the House science committee, famously said that evolution and the Big Bang are "lies from the pit of hell."

Carlos Moreno, Emory University School of Medicine associate professor, "An atheist for Congress?"

CNN Opinion, 9-1-14

There's no reason a bishop has to live like a prince or medieval monarch, even if he inherited the place from his predecessor. They should convert the mansions to museums and move into rectories.

Steven Avella, a Catholic priest and Marquette University professor of religious history, commenting on an investigation showing at least 10 of 34 active U.S. archbishops and many more who are retired live in buildings worth more than \$1 million

CNN Belief Blog, 8-3-14

That it got on Irish radio, the fact of that was amazing. But there is very little loyalty left for the organization of the church at home. The damage done is obscene. And the lack of action to make reparations, and the lack of political will to make changes.

Singer/songwriter Andrew Hozier-Byrne, on the success of his "losing your religion" song "Take Me to Church"

The Guardian, 7-31-14

The current board is operating with an outdated mindset on issues related to technology, innovation, equality, sex education and secular values. For example, why would the current board spend limited educational resources litigating cases that do absolutely nothing to further education, when that money could be much better spent on laptops for kids, leveraging technology in the classroom?

David Mech, Boca Raton, Fla., who's running for the Palm Beach County School Board on a platform of technology, innovation, equality, sex education and secular values

mechforpbcschools.com, 8-5-14

YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

produced by the
Freedom From Religion
Foundation



Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

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

**Slightly irreverent views,
news, music & interviews**

Diner drops illegal prayer discount

Mary's Gourmet Diner agreed with FFRF that all of its customers should be treated equally instead of some being rewarded for praying in the restaurant in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote an Aug. 4 letter of complaint after FFRF learned that the diner had long been offering a 15% discount for "praying in public."

Co-owner Mary Haglund emailed Cavell Aug. 6: "I am notifying you & the FFRF that as of today we are no longer offering the 15% discount for Praying in Public."

A news story in the Greensboro News & Record included a photo of a sign in the restaurant window: "We at Mary's value the support of all our fellow Americans. While you may exercise your right of religious freedom at this restaurant by praying over your meal to any entity or non-entity, we must protect your freedom from reli-

gion in a public place. We are no longer issuing the 15% praying in public discount. It is illegal and we are being threatened by lawsuit. We apologize to our community for any offense this discount has incurred."

Cavell's letter noted that according to the federal Civil Rights Act, as a place of public accommodation, "Mary's Gourmet Diner may not lawfully offer a discount only to customers who pray."

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor added, "We have found that most restaurant owners, who, after all, are in business to please all customers, are gracious and drop illegal discounts that selectively reward customer piety."

FFRF is currently involved in a discount-related lawsuit in Rhode Island and took successful action before a human rights agency in Milwaukee in another case.



FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell appeared Aug. 8 on "CBS This Morning" to discuss a lawsuit in Kountze, Texas, where cheerleaders have sued the public school district, claiming the right to display biblical banners at football games. The district barred the banners in response to an FFRF complaint letter in 2012, prompting the cheerleaders to sue. They won a temporary injunction, and a 2013 ruling said they could carry the banners but never clarified if their free speech rights were being violated. The case was recently appealed to the Texas Supreme Court. The cheerleaders' petition asks the court to recognize their speech as private, making any future ban a violation of the First Amendment.

"Nothing has changed," Cavell said. "These banners continue to be school-sponsored speech, and they continue to violate the Establishment Clause, so depending on the outcome of this litigation, we'd certainly be prepared to sue."

FFRF's anti-electioneering victory final

FFRF's major victory to compel the Internal Revenue Service to resume monitoring tax-exempt churches that engage in illegal electioneering was fi-

nalized July 29.

U.S. District Judge Lynn Adelman in Milwaukee issued an order approving the joint motion for dismissal between

FFRF and the IRS. FFRF agreed to voluntarily dismiss its closely watched federal lawsuit after being given evidence that the IRS has authorized procedures and "signature authority" to resume initiating church tax investigations and examinations.

Since agreeing to settle July 17, FFRF has encountered a lot of misconceptions about the suit, the settlement and the law, which went into effect in 1954. FFRF is not "targeting" churches.

No tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit, church or otherwise, may lawfully engage in partisan political action. Among those who bought the claims of various theocratic media was Oklahoma Attorney General E. Scott Pruitt, who stated in early August:

"At the intersection of those two fundamental rights [free speech and free exercise] lies the right of religious organizations to encourage their members to engage in the political process in a manner consistent with the core tenets of their religions. The Freedom From Religion Foundation is unabashed in its desire to destroy that right, and the fact that this organization has now entered into an agree-

ment with the IRS — an agreement that they call 'a victory' for their cause — is alarming."

FFRF wrote Pruitt on Aug. 7 asking him to stop the smears, noting that FFRF "works not to 'destroy' the First Amendment but to uphold the law and the Constitution."

"FFRF agreed to voluntary dismissal of our case because recent changes by the IRS have remedied our concerns," noted Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor in her letter to Pruitt. "FFRF is satisfied that the IRS does not at this time have a policy specific to churches of nonenforcement of its anti-electioneering provisions. As you are undoubtedly aware, there is an appropriate blanket ban against any and all 501(c)(3) nonprofits from engaging in political action, specifically such as endorsing political candidates."

To clarify the issues, FFRF put together an online FAQ.

FFRF will be monitoring "Pulpit Freedom Sunday," Oct. 5, as proclaimed by the theocratic Alliance Defending Freedom. ADF urges pastors to deliberately break the law by endorsing candidates from the pulpit.

FFRF monitors pre-K in West Virginia

A May 9 FFRF complaint to Berkeley County Schools about religious activity at New Beginnings Child Care Center in Inwood, W.Va., resulted in clarification by State Superintendent of Schools Charles Heinlein that pre-K providers must steer clear of religion. The center provides state-funded pre-K four days a week, then offers a fifth day which includes religious instruction.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott said that's confusing for children too young to distinguish public from religious education. Heinlein's Aug. 5 reply largely concurred with FFRF's letter but didn't agree with the objection to religious images, including a cross on the New

Beginnings sign.

Heinlein wrote that "no State funds may be used to purchase or maintain them and they may not be included or alluded to during conversation or instruction during the WV Pre-K program." He said religious images are otherwise permissible.

FFRF contends he's wrong and that all pre-K classes must be held in a secular environment. "Facilities used to teach public school students have to be secular. This is a bedrock constitutional principle that is not erased merely because classes are held in a nontraditional setting," said Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

U.S. Navy reneges on bible removal

After initially agreeing with FFRF that stocking Christian bibles in every U.S. Navy-operated hotel was wrong, the Navy backed off and returned the bibles during a review process.

FFRF sent a complaint letter March 12 to the Navy Exchange Service Command (NEXCOM). On June 19, NEXCOM issued a directive stating that the "Navy Lodge General Manager should advise the Installation Commanding Officer of our intention to work through the chaplain's office to determine what installation policy is and the method to remove religious material

currently in guest rooms." The directive said the action "is to be completed by 1 September 2014."

When the decision was made public, the ensuing outcry put the ban on hold. Navy spokesman Ryan Perry said in a written statement that NEXCOM made the decision "without consultation of senior Navy leadership," adding, "That decision and our religious accommodation policies with regard to the placement of religious materials are under review."

Perry said that during the review the bibles would be returned.

Overheard

If the Christian community — whether they be Baptist, Presbyterian or whatever — if they want their religious freedoms protected, then that means everybody's religious freedoms have to be protected. You can't let the government choose one side over the other.

Roane County Commissioner Steve Kelley, on the losing end of a 13-1 vote to place three granite "In God We Trust" signs at the Kingston, Tenn., courthouse
WBIR, 7-15-14

Nationally, as of 2009, 31 states, including New York, allowed faith-based organizations to receive public pre-kindergarten funds, according to the National Institute for Early Education Research. In Florida, for example,

parents may send their 4-year-olds to prekindergarten programs that teach religion.

News story, "De Blasio's Prekindergarten Expansion Collides With Church-State Divide"
New York Times, 8-4-14

The decisions regarding prayer in schools came about because of the failure of a local school district or state school board to remember that government-sponsored school prayer almost inherently discriminates against minorities.

Richard Davis, professor of political science at Brigham Young University, op-ed, "Reinstating state-sponsored school prayer is a bad idea"
Deseret News, 8-6-14

FFRF staffer recounts Morocco experience

Living as an atheist in an Islamic state

By Charlotte Stein

May God grant you grace. And to you may He do the same. How are you? I am well, thanks be to God. God bless you. You are well? Everything is good, God bless you. Everything fine? God bless you, God bless you. Thanks be to God! OK, well, may God guide you on your path. Oh, God bless you, peace be upon you. Peace, may God grant you grace!

This is an average greeting shared between myself and a passerby in rural Morocco. As an atheist, I don't believe that any gods have ever existed outside of their literary confines. Nope, not any of those named Jesus, Allah, Zeus, Almighty Father, Vishnu, or Woden (though perhaps I could bring to the attention of the government our "Germanic" religious heritage, thus instituting the sacrifice of several pilsners each Wednesday? A fine and honorable mid-week tradition indeed).

I would say maybe two or three of the hundreds of Moroccans I interacted with during my work as a Peace Corps volunteer knew of my lack of faith. Morocco is a nonsecular state, meaning that its citizens are required to follow Islamic Law. Over 99% of them consider themselves Muslim.

I often basked in the warmth of the large, caring family units with Muslim values, who took me in after only minutes of acquaintance. I learned how to tell who truly hoped that Allah would reward me, and those who merely said it because it would look bad if they didn't. I watched my beloved host mother find relief in prayer and extreme pride in her son's close relationship with the village imam.

I chose to suffer through two Sahara summers without food, only to share in the joy of breaking fast when the sun went down.

I love many Moroccan Muslims and enjoyed many of the ways they acted on their religion and how it affected their culture and day-to-day life. The women and girls with whom I worked left me with everlasting affection for the hijab. I get excited whenever I see a woman wearing one. I now see it as an elegant and graceful piece of self-expression worn by some of the kindest, hard-working women I know. I also appreciate the protection it provided from the often objectifying and unnerving

It was taking everything in them not to pounce and devour me. That's how those looks made me feel.

glances of Moroccan males.

I have very close relationships with Moroccan men, who respected me and cared for me because of my intelligence, the authority I commanded when necessary and the equality I demanded in all situations. I had a whole community of young men who told me they would never harass me and would protect me from harassment, because they valued me. Apparently, I had earned a special level of respect.

These 14- to 20-year-old students knew me, had worked with me, had lived with me. Take those elements away and I become the thing they have been taught not to value — the object that walks around in public only to seek attention. The object that is to be obtained and used — the younger and healthier the better.

Women face a lot of pressures in Moroccan society, one of which is the heinous act of sexual harassment. When traveling alone in Marrakesh, I would leave my hotel and walk to a restaurant a couple of blocks away, encountering between 10 and 30 men who would shout various comments about my appearance at me, as if they couldn't help themselves.

Or they would just stare, because I was a juicy piece of meat wagging my tender curves in their starving faces. It was taking everything in them not to pounce and devour me. That's how those looks made me feel. That's how women are made to feel when they walk around not attached to their male owner. Why leave the safety of your home when this is what you have to face?

I also witnessed many girls of high school age being bullied to leave school by their mothers and older sisters, who wanted more hands and some company in their homes. My students were made to feel guilty for being so selfish, for taking time to learn and study or for exercising in our running club be-



From left, outside the youth center: the French comic book character Astérix, Moroccan host mother Saadia, Peace Corps volunteer Charlotte Stein in traditional wedding garb and Saadia's son Abdelaziz in his prayer robe.

cause it made them feel good. Being healthy is a luxury that women in my community didn't feel worthy of.

So many girls quit school because they knew it was useless; they had no future beyond the home of their family or the family of their husband. Child marriage is incredibly common, and almost always the girl is substantially younger than the groom. This, I was told, is because women age faster than men. Soon she will catch up to her husband; soon her body will be useless. Finding a girl a husband early is doing them a favor, giving them stability and purpose. She finds all of her self-worth in the wealth and standing of her husband and the children they produce.

What an effective way to dominate half the population. So many women I lived with and grew to love were

stuck in this cycle of oppression, in a society that doesn't value them and often encourages them not to develop themselves beyond a wife and mother, housemaid and cook.

Tea with Hayat

My 16-year-old neighbor's name is Hayat, which means "life." She is incredibly smart and is the family's only female child. She is shy but confident. She is still in school and promised me she would finish. One afternoon we sat and drank tea, rehashing a sexual harassment discussion we had facilitated at the local youth center.

During the presentation, my host brother, one of the most loving, positive and emotional young men I knew in Morocco, had stormed out. His



Charlotte signing out in the capital city of Rabat, a Peace Corps tradition on the last day as a volunteer. Charlotte's last "official" act was to bang a native drum called a dandoom one time.



Host sister Miriam, Charlotte and Saadia celebrated the end of Ramadan fasting by feasting and staining their palms and soles of their feet with henna.



Saying goodbye to Charlotte, whom they called Sara, are (left) Rachida, Soued, Aïcha and Yassmina. King Mohammed VI's photo is on the wall.

close study of Islam had convinced him it was inappropriate to discuss such a taboo subject, especially with men and women in the same room.

So much excitement makes for good tea conversation, but Hayat's mother is an expert at changing the conversation, and soon we were discussing God's omnipresence and good will. When asked to chime in with a fitting verse, Hayat mentioned she had not memorized the Quran. This was very upsetting to her mother, but equally incensed, Hayat responded that in her experience, those who memorize the Quran follow it blindly and interpret it in a way that ignores the human experience.

She was referencing my host brother, who had deemed it unnecessary and even forbidden to discuss an issue that so deeply affected women in Moroccan society. At 16, Hayat was thinking more critically than most adults I had encountered thus far. Her words and her thoughts were my hope and kept me working hard to find more freethinking young women to help rise above the fray of everyday life in abject poverty.

I can only hope the admiration that gleamed in my eyes when she spoke conveyed how important she was, and could be.

What the future holds

With smart kids and wonderful people, what seems to be holding Morocco back? Why is Morocco's Islam still so prominent in the poorest, most rural areas? Islam is young, virile and adaptive. Morocco's educated elite are well-off, and its leaders are "liberal" enough to forge important domestic and global relationships, maintaining their role as a "progressive" force in the Middle East. Uprisings and protests are minimal, because those who suffer the most don't have the power to make change.

Being stuck in the rural south, barricaded by mountains on all sides (well, apart from the side that faces the Sahara Desert), I was often frustrated by the lack of resources, the government's apparent ignorance of the suffering of my neighbors, the forced complacency of my neighbors who had little access to quality education, and the exhausting circus that was government bureaucracy surrounding anything from traveling between cities to getting an "official" stamp with your name on it.

But it is changing, *shwiya bi shwiya*, or little by little as we say in Moroccan Arabic. I was constantly moved by individuals who shined despite the adversity they faced and will continue to inspire me for the rest of my life.

I will leave you with an impressive encounter I had while traveling during the last couple of months of my service. He was a youthful stranger who

was intrigued by my "American-ness," and probably by the fact that I was a little blonde girl speaking the local language and taking the local transportation.

While I was used to men asking me why America is a secular state — asking where we got our laws if not from a holy book — and asking me to repeat a verse that would ensure my access to *al Jannah* (heaven), this experience was truly unique and refreshing. He asked what religion we were, and I said that although Americans are mostly Christian, you are allowed to follow whatever religion you choose, and that most of the religions in the world have some sort of representation in the U.S.

He thought this was fascinating, and pondered it for a while. After some deep reflection and lots of smiles, he said, "I think, that if everyone was allowed to find the religion that was closest to their heart, that they would choose the best elements of whichever they found, and they could be the best, kindest people possible."

This wave of blissful inspiration is an excellent argument for the separation of church and state.

Charlotte Stein is transitioning back into American life in Madison, Wis., helping out as a clerical assistant at FFRF. In her free time, she practices German, French and Arabic on her adorable dog Oscar. She also loves to write, read and eat cheese curds. Soon she will be moving to either of the coasts to work for a development organization.

FFRF ousts bibles from PSU hotels

An FFRF letter of complaint resulted in removal of Gideon bibles from hotels from a third public university. FFRF received word Sept. 3 from the general counsel at Pennsylvania State University that bibles were removed

Chancellor pushes God to UW grads

Chancellor Bernie Patterson of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point told the approximately 1,425 graduates in the chancellor's "charge" near the end of their May 17 ceremonies that when confronting an ethical dilemma at some point in their lives, they'll have to lean on their foundation — "That is, your education and your faith in God. Now go and be servant-leaders. God-speed."

A graduate's family member brought the statement, which Patterson has made at commencements in years past, to FFRF's attention. In a May 22 letter, Staff Attorney Sam Grover told Patterson such remarks are inappropriate. "Graduation should be an inclusive, unifying event designed to celebrate the accomplishments and prospects of the graduates. Including religious references does exactly the opposite, isolating non-Christian and nonreligious students, cheapening their participation by sending the message that they are outsiders at their own graduation and in their own community."

Grover added, "The university should be particularly sensitive to respecting the rights and conscience of the nonreligious, given that universities serve the least religious population in the country. One in three college-aged Americans (ages 18-29) are not religious."

Patterson responded with a letter of thanks July 18. "I understand your concerns and will take them under consideration."

from the Nittany Lion Inn and the Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel in State College. Both are run by the university. FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote Penn State President Eric Barron on June 6 after receiving a complaint about bibles being encountered at the Nittany Lion Inn.

"State-run colleges have a constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion. When a government entity like PSU distributes religious material to visitors, it has unconstitutionally entangled itself with a religious message, in this case a Christian message," Cavell wrote.

"As you may know, the mission of the Gideons is to 'win the lost for Christ.' The Gideon bible and the Gideons' efforts to proselytize have frequently brought about conflict with nonreligious persons and persons from minority faiths. Individuals, not the state, must determine what religious texts are worth reading," she added.

FFRF complaints removed bibles late last year from the University of Wisconsin-Extension's Lowell Hall in Madison, and earlier this year from Iowa State University hotel guest rooms.

"No nonreligious hotel guests

should have to pay high prices to be proselytized in the privacy of their own bedrooms," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. "The bible calls for killing nonbelievers, apostates, gays, 'stubborn sons,' and women who are not virgins on their wedding nights. What is obnoxious in a private hotel, however, becomes inappropriate and unconstitutional in state-run lodgings."

Gaylor added, "So we're grateful to Penn State for making this decision to respect all its hotel guests and stay above the religious fray."

An easy way to include FFRF in your estate planning

By Andrew Seidel
FFRF staff attorney

When I travel around the country speaking about the importance state/church separation and the myth of the Christian nation, I get a lot of questions. Occasionally, because I'm an attorney, I get questions about including FFRF in estate planning.

Estimates show that from 1998 through 2052, baby boomers will pass about \$41 trillion on to the next generation (see January 2003 Journal of Gift Planning). That's trillion with a "t." Imagine what our world would look like if every one of those estates passed 10%, just 10%, to nonprofits (actual nonprofits, no churches). Or even 20%. What would our world look like?

The estate questions I get usually come up after my talk, when audience members are surrounding the speaker. Naturally, others overhear the

discussion. Twice in recent months, I've heard people lament the fact that they would like to include FFRF but don't have an estate worth very much. Perhaps you feel the same. You love FFRF, you're a member, you'd like to do something for this wonderful organization in your estate but can't figure out how.

I'd like to offer a simple yet potentially powerful solution: "in lieu of flowers." You may have seen this before. The unassuming phrase can be worth its weight in gold.

"I, Andrew Seidel, do not wish my friends and family to waste money on flowers at my funeral. I'd much prefer that money go toward something I cared about in life, something like keeping religion out of our government. In my estate planning, I ask that in lieu of flowers, friends and family send donations to the Freedom From Religion Foundation (ffrf.org/donate)."

If just 10 people contributed the \$50 they would have spent on flow-

ers, that's \$500. If 20 people contributed that much — well, you can do the math.

You don't have to be a Buffet, Gates or Zuckerberg to make an impact. You just have to plan ahead.

FFRF is pleased to provide a brochure on estate planning upon request and sends one to all members periodically. Contact Lisa Strand, director of operations, at 1-800-335-4021 or email her at lisa@ffrf.org if you would like a copy.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor adds, "Bequests to FFRF really make a difference. Bequests received during the last economic downturn not only kept us afloat but allowed us to grow and prosper. Most bequests FFRF receives are in the \$1,000 to \$5,000 range, and they really add up. Donors can also make FFRF a beneficiary or co-beneficiary of insurance or retirement policies very easily, thereby bypassing probate. We're grateful for all support at whatever level."

Nonbelievers continue to give secular invocations



Brooke Mulder
City Council, Glendale, Ariz.
Aug. 12, 2014

The purpose of the invocation read before each council meeting is to “add solemnity” to the proceedings. I can’t think of anything more solemn or significant than the act of democracy itself. As citizens of this great country, we have the right to participate equally in the proposal, development and creation of laws. We may choose to do this directly, by serving on a city council, as governor or even as president of the United States. Or we may choose to participate indirectly by electing representatives to act in our interests.

Let us all take a moment to reflect on why we are here tonight. If you are here, you may have chosen a path of serving your electorate, to the benefit of their welfare. Or you may have concerns you’ve chosen to bring in front of the council. We should be grateful that the city of Glendale has those who are willing to serve and those who trust in the system enough to participate in the process. It is people like those that enable us to truly govern ourselves.

My principles as a secular humanist teach me to rely on reason and our common humanity. A city council is an excellent illustration of how people can come together, without supernaturalism, to provide meaningful changes in each other’s lives. I would like to leave you with a final thought from Thomas Jefferson: “Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. Enable them to see that it is their interest to preserve peace and order and they will preserve them.”

Thank you.

Brooke writes: I have spent the last nine years as an Army spouse/girlfriend. My husband attended West Point for four years, followed by five years as an active duty infantry officer. I have moved from Florida, to New York, to Georgia, to Washington and finally to Arizona. My husband is now a civilian, so hopefully we can settle down here!

One of the hardest parts of being an Army spouse (in addition to the separations, the deployments and the moves) is the exclusive, nonsecular culture in the Army, especially among the officer corps. The Army is one of the only organizations where your spouse’s behavior can affect how your chain of com-

mand feels about you and consequently promotions and performance evaluations.

It is an unspoken rule as an Army officer that you should be religious, and preferably Christian. There are constantly prayers before meetings and briefings, religious marriage retreats, invitations to church and bible study. The invitations themselves did not bother me. However, the knowledge that we’d be snubbed after we politely declined did.

I remember one instance, among many, in particular. My husband’s commanding officer’s wife asked me point blank what religion I was and what church I attended. I didn’t even use the “A word” in my answer, but politely told her I did not attend church. After she found out I was not Christian, she never spoke to me again and the social invitations dried up. Now that we are in the civilian world, we are free to admit we are not believers without the fear of career retribution.



Eric Williams
City City Council, Colorado Springs, Colo.
Aug. 12, 2014

Good afternoon. Before I begin, let me offer my thanks to Ms. Dean Beukema for allowing me this opportunity. Her service to our community over the last 25 years reflects her dedication and love for our great community.

Council members, President [Keith] King, thank you for inviting me here.

Thousands of years ago, after emerging from relative obscurity, mankind began to form communities. The first ones were simple hunter gatherers, evolved to feed their own very small

camp. Soon, these small camps and tribes began to join to each other, either through violence or simple needs. Either way, they saw joining forces as being the foundation for survival.

Over the millennia, agriculture built even larger tribes. They became large villages, then towns, then cities, then city-states. And even farther, empires and great kingdoms. These people in the later ages eventually became obsessed with power and greed, driven by their beliefs that their higher powers were better than any others. Patton Oswalt, a contemporary comedian, put it simply as, “My Sky Cake is better than your Sky Baklava.” These divisions caused chaos within the overall sapient community for millennia.

Then, after centuries of great strife, the “Enlightenment” was born. The United States was built upon the principles of this Enlightenment. The deists that formed our Constitution knew the dangers of sectarian strife and therefore enshrined secular government in our most sacred document.

With this in mind, I stand before the most basic unit of human democracy, the city council. The core unit of our lives as humans living within an inherently secular system. It’s the local government that actually guides the daily lives of the citizens of this great nation.

Let us therefore, this afternoon, provide both our vocal and thoughtful support to this most fundamental institution of humanity today, and hope that reason and thoughtful reflection will guide our elected leaders to lead this great city to where it could be.

So be it.

Eric is a member of FFRF and the Atheist Community of Colorado Springs.



Michele Ritt
Dane County Board, Madison, Wis.
June 26, 2014

I find continual inspiration in my family. As a young child, my grandmother instilled in me that community service is a way of life. Me being here today is part of that. My daughter connected me directly to the country of

India.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world’s problems.”

My husband and my son brought me to a completely unexpected world.

Yoda said, “Do or do not. There is no try.”

May the force be with us all.

Michele is a Dane County supervisor and FFRF member.

South Dakota atheist gives invocation

Amanda Novotny, Brookings, S.D., an atheist and Siouxland Freethinkers president, delivered a secular invocation Aug. 5 to open the Sioux Falls City Council meeting:

Thank you, Mr. Mayor, council members, citizens of Sioux Falls and all those present for this opportunity to provide an inspirational opening to your meeting.

Often at this time, you are asked to bow your heads. Instead, I ask you to lift your head up and look around. Turn your attention to this room, a room that has heard countless discussions, frustrations and successes, a room where important decisions regarding your city are routinely made.

Now take a moment to soak in the presence of the men and women in this room, gathered here at this time and place to engage in their civic duty, to contribute and work toward creating a better community. Think of the hundreds and thousands of others who are also affected by the ideas shared here. Let all voices be heard and understood equally.

It is also often customary to read from a book during an invocation, and tonight will be no different. I’ll be sharing a quote from J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, in which Professor Albus Dumbledore said: “Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open.”

Although our differences may be many, we are bound together in similarity as members of the human species. As humans, we have the capacity to appreciate and thank each other, to utilize compassion and reason in our decision making. I ask those present to join me in showing gratitude to the men and women that serve the great city of Sioux Falls. We need only look to each other for guidance and work together to overcome any challenges we may face.

— Transcript courtesy of Hemant Mehta

Nothing fails like prayer!

The U.S. Supreme Court unwisely “blessed” sectarian prayers at local government meeting in its *Town of Greece v. Galloway* decision. If the Supreme Court won’t uphold our godless and entirely secular Constitution — adopted at a prayerless constitutional convention — it’s up to us. It’s up to you!

We’d like to see secular citizens flood government meetings with secular invocations that illustrate why gov-

ernment prayers are unnecessary, ineffective, embarrassing, exclusionary, divisive or just plain silly.

The “best” secular invocation will be invited to open FFRF’s annual convention, receiving an all-expenses-paid trip (this year at the Los Angeles Biltmore Oct. 24-26), a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

Learn more at:

ffrf.org/outreach/nothing-fails-like-prayer



Windows go in, Freethought Hall addition goes up

Below are donations for FFRF's Building Expansion Fund received from July 28 through Sept. 7, 2014. It is not cumulative except for the total.

Professor Paul Newman, Indiana, \$4,000
 Dick Baker, California, \$1,000
 Alan Remington, Iowa, \$1,000
 Michael Machula, Indiana, \$1,000
 Anonymous, Michigan, \$1,000
 John DeVault, Tennessee, \$160
 Mr. James Lewis, Arizona, \$100
 John Philip Garrity & Jean M. Thorstenson, Montana, \$100
 Garnik Patatanian, Oklahoma, \$100
 Stefanie Moritz & Vince Jenkins, Wisconsin, \$100
 Anonymous, Iowa, \$50
 Klaus & Paulette Price, Illinois, \$50
 Anonymous, New York, \$50
 In memory of Andre D. Avent. This gift is from Nancy Dollard, Tom Reke and Charles Wright. Ohio, \$50
 Brian Salzberg, Pennsylvania, \$50
 Aaron Crandall, Washington, \$50

Alice M. Kachman, Michigan, \$40
 Anonymous, Virginia, \$20
 Charles B. Palmer, North Carolina, \$10

Subtotal: \$8,930

**New Cumulative Total:
 \$1,904,239.73
 Goal: \$2 million**

Freethought Today will list subsequent donations in future issues. No donors will be identified by name without express donor permission. (Please be sure to check the box online at ffrf.org/ffrf-building-fund-contribution-page granting such permission.) Patio stones and vestibule tiles with your name are still available!

If you gave a gift designated to the building fund that does not appear to be reflected in this list or in prior issues, please contact FFRF so that we can check our records and publish your gift. Contact Bookkeeper Katie Daniel at 608/256-8900 9-5 CDT week-



The new library and cupola atop FFRF's original building.

days or email katie@ffrf.org.

Notes:

Connie Chabot, Idaho, gave \$100 in April and has since granted her permission to list her name.

John Wolfe, Pennsylvania, gave \$500

last December and has since granted his permission to list his name.

Bruce Hilpert, whose \$5,000 donation was listed in the June/July issue, prefers to be identified as being from Arizona rather than North Carolina.

Essay scholarships to seniors total \$10,250

FFRF congratulates the 16 college-bound high school seniors who placed in this year's essay competition. FFRF has offered scholarships through essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994 and graduate students since 2010.

The high school contest is named for William J. Schultz, a Wisconsin member who died at 57, was a chemical engineer and cared deeply about FFRF's work. FFRF also thanks Dean and Dorea Schramm of Florida for providing a \$100 bonus to students who are members of a secular student club or the Secular Student Alliance. The total of \$10,250 reflects bonuses.

Essayists were asked to describe "A moment when you stood up for freethought/secularism" in 500-700 words. There were six top awards and 10 honorable mentions.

First place: **Delaney Gold-Diamond**, 18, University of Chicago (\$3,000).

Second place: **Julianna Evans**, 18, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (\$2,000).

Third place: **Philip Kaltman**, 17, Georgia Institute of Technology (\$1,000).

Fourth place: **Harrison Horwitz**, 17, University of California-Berkeley (\$750).

Fifth place: **Kali Richardson**, 18, University of Arizona (\$500).

Sixth place: **Fallon Rowe**, 17, Utah State University (\$400).

Honorable mention (\$200 each):
Adam Bivens, 18, Pennsylvania State University.

Erin Camia, 18, Case Western Reserve University.

Aífe Ní Chochlain, 18, University of Pittsburgh.

Jayne M. Cosh, 18, State University of New York at New Paltz.

Sam Davidson, 18, Northwestern University.

N.C. school vouchers unconstitutional

Superior Court Judge Robert Hobgood ruled Aug. 21 in Raleigh, N.C., that a 2013 law to use public money for tuition at private and religious schools violates the state constitution.

Under the Opportunities Scholarship program, which the ruling halted, low-income families would get up to \$4,200 annually. The law made \$10 million available to a maximum of 2,400 students. As of Aug. 21, 1,879 scholarships had been accepted.

"This upholds North Carolina's long-standing commitment to public education. Public education creates productive citizens, a strong economy and a great democracy," Yevonne Brannon of Public Schools First told the Raleigh News & Observer.

"Appropriating taxpayer funds to unaccountable schools does not accomplish a public purpose," Hobgood

said in his ruling. "The General Assembly fails the children of North Carolina when they are sent with public, taxpayer money to private schools that have no legal obligation to teach them anything."

•••

The New Hampshire Supreme Court upheld a law Aug. 28 that created a business education tax credit to fund scholarships to private schools.

The unanimous decision vacated a lower court ruling that said giving scholarships to parochial school students was unconstitutional.

The bill was passed in 2012 by the Republican majority, which overrode then-Democratic Gov. John Lynch's veto. Current Gov. Maggie Hassan, also a Democrat, told The Associated Press: "The voucher tax credit is bad public policy for public education in

freethinking students to be among FFRF's most important investments in the future of freethought," said Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "There are thousands of scholarships for religious students and hardly any rewarding critical thinking and the use of reason opining about religion."

Upcoming issues will feature top placers in the college and graduate/mature student competitions.

New Hampshire and our taxpayers, diverting millions of dollars in taxpayer money with no accountability or oversight to religious and private schools."

The justices said the plaintiffs lacked standing and didn't rule on the merits of the case. They also declared unconstitutional a 2012 law letting individuals sue even if they couldn't show their rights were violated.

Businesses can donate to an independent scholarship organization in return for a credit on their taxes amounting to 85% of the donation. Republican Rep. William O'Brien said parents should be able to choose religious or secular education. "It will be up to them and not up to vested education industry interests trying to corral all students into failed government schools."

In Memoriam

Victor Stenger, 1935 – 2014

The man who coined the famous phrase “Science flies you to the moon. Religion flies you into buildings” died Aug. 25. Longtime FFRF member and prominent atheist Victor J. Stenger died at age 79 of an aneurysm near the heart at Queen’s Medical Center in Honolulu while vacationing with his wife Phylliss in Hawaii. He was also an FFRF honorary director.

He was born Jan. 29, 1935, in Bayonne, N.J., and earned a degree in electrical engineering and advanced degrees in physics. In his last major research project, before retiring in Colorado in 2000, Stenger collaborated on a project in Japan that demonstrated for the first time that the neutrino has mass. The project’s head researcher won the Nobel Prize in physics in 2002.

In addition to numerous and influential peer-reviewed articles, he wrote 12 books, including the 2007 New York Times best-seller *God: The Failed Hypothesis* and the new *God and the Multiverse*.

That book and subsequent ones placed Stenger in the ranks of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett and Christopher Hitchens, the so-called “four horsemen” of New Atheism. The Salt Lake Tribune dubbed him “the fifth horseman” in its obituary.

He was a member of the Depart-

ment of Physics at the University of Hawaii from 1963 to 2000 and after retiring was adjunct professor of philosophy at the University of Colorado.

“We were headed out for a pleasant dinner when he lost his balance on some steps outside our vacation rental and fell against me,” Phylliss wrote. “I unfortunately fell against a beam, suffered a skull fracture and concussion and was taken to the emergency room by ambulance. While there, Vic complained about not feeling well and in spite of having a team of neurologists and trauma surgeons, he died within 20 minutes.”

The Stengers were married in 1962 and have two children. He was cremated, followed by a memorial Aug. 31 in Honolulu.

“We will miss this great freethinker,” said Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. “He gave us so much to ponder and wonder about.”

“Our sincerest condolences go to Phylliss and the family,” added Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Vic gave a lot of himself to so many worthy causes and was such a preeminent scientist and skeptic. He will be missed greatly.”

To hear a clip from one of his three interviews with Freethought Radio, go to ffrf.org/news/radio and click on the Sept. 6, 2014, podcast.

IN REASON WE TRUST

“God has left no footprints in the snows of time.”

Join the nation's largest association of freethinkers (atheists, agnostics) working to keep religion out of government. For a free sample of FFRF's newspaper, *Freethought Today*, phone 1-800-335-4021

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION
FFRF.ORG/reason-must-prevail

IN REASON WE TRUST

“Science flies you to the moon. Religion flies you into buildings.”

Join the nation's largest association of freethinkers (atheists, agnostics) working to keep religion out of government. For a free sample of FFRF's newspaper, *Freethought Today*, phone 1-800-335-4021

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION
FFRF.ORG/reason-must-prevail

The ad with Victor Stenger on top was rejected by Scientific American, but the ad on the bottom is in the current issue (reduce for space).



Duluth, Minn.

Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney, spoke Aug. 3 to the Lake Superior Freethinkers, an FFRF chapter, about the *Town of Greece v. Galloway* Supreme Court case. Flanking her are (left) Bill Guse, David Broman, William van Druten and Tom Patten.



‘Thank our interns’ boat ride

The summer 2014 FFRF “thank our interns” pontoon boat ride. It’s the Betty Lou cruise on Lake Monona, Wis. It’s a relaxing sunset cruise with a Mexican fiesta theme this year. Clockwise, from left, are Sam Grover, staff attorney; Maddy Ziegler, legal intern; attorneys Liz Cavell, Rebecca Markert and Andrew Seidel; interns Neal Fitzgerald, Aaron Loudenslager, Noah Bunnell and Sam Erickson, who also has sent out many a legal follow-up query to recalcitrant public officials. (Not pictured: Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott, because he’s behind the camera!)

Elizabeth Blackwelder, 1920–2014

Elizabeth June (Gerrard) Blackwelder, 93, La Cañada Flintridge, Calif., died at home of natural causes Jan. 15, 2014. She was born June 17, 1920, in Evanston, Ill., and grew up in Atherton, Calif. She studied biology at Stanford University and during World War II was a member of the WAVES division of the Navy, assigned to the Naval Medical Research Institute, where she worked on the development of emergency life raft rations, among other projects. After the war, she returned to college at UCLA, earning a bachelor’s degree in zoology.

In 1950 she married Spencer Blackwelder, a real estate broker. She managed the insurance arm of the business.

FFRF only recently learned of her death, said Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Elizabeth and Spencer joined FFRF in 1978 and were among our earliest members. Freethought Today published articles by Spencer in its early editions. I enjoyed corresponding with them. They were always stalwart supporters of freethought and secularism.”

A Los Angeles Times obituary noted Elizabeth’s love of horses and her ride aboard Chungo across the nation in 1976 to observe America’s bicentennial. Her horseback ride as part of a wagon train took six months from California to Valley Forge, Pa.

She was preceded in death by her husband in 1996. Survivors include three sons, Steven of Dana Point, Robert of La Cañada Flintridge and Clyde of San Juan Capistrano; a daughter, Lenora of Glendale; and two grandchildren.

“I remember Liz’s warm hospitality when she invited me to stay in her home during a speaking tour in southern California,” said Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. “Our thoughts go out to her family and friends.”

Karen Abbe, 1959–2014

Karen Abbe, 54, Sacramento, Calif., died of cancer at home May 30, 2014.

She was born Sept. 3, 1959, in Sunnyvale and graduated from Encina High School in 1977 and earned an associate’s degree from American River College in 1981 in parks administration. Her career with the state of California from 1980-2012 included the Attorney General’s Office, the Board of Pharmacy and Victims of Crime program.

Karen loved to travel in her motor home and took her dog Katie and two cats across the country, from Victoria Island to Niagara Falls.

Survivors include her parents, John and Carol Abbe; a sister, Sandra Abbe; a niece, MaryAnn Estes; and a nephew, Larry Averitt. A private memorial gathering was held in July.

FFRF offers its sincerest condolences to Karen’s family.

Sherry Matulis, 1931–2014

A fall issue of Freethought Today will carry a memorial and tribute to Sherry Matulis, an early FFRF member, poet, columnist and nationally known abortion rights advocate. She testified before Congress and several state legislatures about her life-threatening “back alley” abortion in 1954 after being raped.

First place: William J. Schultz Memorial High School Senior Award

My evolution as a freethinker

Delaney received \$3,000 from FFRF for her winning essay.



By Delaney Gold-Diamond

The evolution of the human species has not culminated in a perfect society. It holds on to the vestigial structures of the past, such as religious orthodoxy. Yet humankind continues to grow, change and evolve.

Sometimes mutations randomly occur and our evolution begins to take a different course. We are moving forward and progressing into a society of freethinkers. And, just like evolution, it

is a journey that will never end.

My personal evolution as a freethinker mirrors this process. I did not have a sudden jolt of realization during young adulthood, like many freethinkers. I have grown and changed, taken some steps forward and some backward on this journey. But I can say that my atheist worldview has emerged as naturally and organically as the evolution of our species.

When I was 5, my dad and I were driving past the Catholic church in the center of my small town. It was a Sunday, and many well-dressed people were milling around in front. My dad has told me the story of what happened that day many times. Our conversation went like this:

“Daddy, what is that building?”

“That is a church.”

“What is a church?”

“A church is where people pray to God.”

“What is God?”

“Some people believe there is an all-powerful being who created the universe and all living things. They pray to this being they call God to ask for good things to happen and for bad things not to happen.”

After several seconds of awkward silence, my tiny voice piped up from the back seat, “Daddy, do you believe in God?” He said no, and with a huge sigh of relief I replied,

“Good, because that is the dumbest thing I ever heard.”

As with philosopher John Locke’s “tabula rasa,” I was a blank slate. No one had ever taught me to question the existence of a supreme being, nor

I told him that I could not go to hell because it was an imaginary place.

had I ever had any kind of religious experience. While many seem to think that it is naturally human to believe in a higher power, my experience proves that logic and reason are instinctual. Because I never had any religious indoctrination, I was born a freethinker.

Many of my peers were not so fortunate. While I was allowed to develop my own moral guidelines from reason and rationality, their families subjected them to religious indoctrination.

In first grade, I got into a fight with a boy during recess. He told me I was going to hell because I did not believe in God. I told him that I could not go to hell because it was an imaginary place. He ran off crying, and I knew I had won that debate.

In fact, debate became my passion. Once in high school, for my first foray into the world of competitive public speaking, I chose (perhaps naively) a controversial topic, advocating for a constitutional amendment to remove the words “In God We Trust” from coins and currency. I still remember the stunned looks on the judges’ faces. I may not have won many tournaments that season, but that was a matter of secondary importance. I believed in

my cause.

Ever since, I have been a devil’s advocate (pun intended) in every English, history and government class I have taken, standing up for freethought whenever necessary. I religiously cross out “In God We Trust” on every dollar bill that passes through my hands and refuse to say those two very particular, unconstitutional words in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Evolution is ongoing, never a finished process. I will continue to evolve as a freethinker, just as society will continue to evolve and become more enlightened. I believe in our nation and one day I hope to run for office as an out-of-the-closet atheist, dedicated to the separation of church and state, as our founders intended.

My achievements prove that religion and spirituality are not necessary to lead a successful, moral life. My childhood demonstrates that atheism and freethought are as natural as evolution itself.

Delaney writes: “I’m 18 and I’ve lived my entire life in Sonoma, Calif. This fall I will be moving 2,000 miles away to attend the University of Chicago to pursue a major in law, letters and society or political science. I plan on attending law school after I obtain my undergraduate degree. While at Sonoma Valley High School, I served as captain of the speech and debate and mock trial teams. I’m a “special distinction” member of the National Forensics League and a member of the Secular Student Alliance.”

Second place: High school essay contest

One nation, under the Constitution

Julianna received \$2,000 from FFRF for her winning essay.

By Julianna Evans

In schools across the country, students like me are pressured to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance each morning. While I don’t see any problem with reciting such a pledge to our country and the values which we hold important, I do have a problem with two words in it: “under God.”

In a land of freedom of expression and protection of beliefs, those two words violate the ideals and laws we value. As a nonbeliever, I think I can speak for many people — nonbelievers and members of non-Christian religions — in saying that “under God” is overtly Judeo-Christian and has no place in American public schools or government.

I have never believed in a higher power, and I have always tried to be open-minded and a critical thinker. Although my mother took me to a Lutheran church to expose me to religion, I never felt any sort of religious connection. Both of my parents are



nonreligious and have been very supportive of my nonbelief, but my school experiences have shown me that many people won’t accept those who don’t share their beliefs.

Last year my humanities teacher re-

quired students to write a speech about a controversial topic we felt strongly about. I chose the Pledge of Allegiance and focused on why we should remove “under God” from it.

I targeted the issue in an objective way and presented it in a factual and logical manner. I did not make provocative remarks against Christianity, but focused on the viewpoint that religion has no place in public institutions. The response I received from my classmates was astonishing to me. I experienced hostile looks, eye-rolling, muttering and scoffing, primarily from classmates who were heavily involved with their church’s youth group.

That my speech was so rudely received was very hurtful to me. Due to this experience, I was less willing to express my views on religion, though I am now returning to the mindset that my nonbelief is part of who I am, and no amount of religious discrimination should prevent me from expressing myself. I would gladly present my speech again and again to advocate for separation of church and state.

I have also been directly influenced by the enforcement of the Pledge of Allegiance in my school. Every morning

It has become routine for me to skip the ‘under God’ or to simply not say the pledge at all.

I am asked to stand with my classmates and recite it with my hand placed over my heart. It has become routine for me to skip the “under God” or to simply not say the pledge at all.

It is uncomfortable for me to be participating in a tradition that, through the addition of two words, goes against my beliefs. But if I were to not participate, I would be ridiculed and regarded as unpatriotic. I love my country just as much as any other American. It’s wrong to associate a pledge and the freedom and justice the flag stands for to something as unrelated as religion.

Many people may wonder why this such an important issue for me, when

Continued on next page

Continued from front page

seemingly it's a such a small issue. But we must remember that it's not just the large violations of rights which are important. If we submit to small violations, we run the risk of accepting larger and larger violations.

In issues such as these, we must adopt a "zero tolerance" policy regarding the entanglement of religion and government. With a firewall between church and state, we will then progress in our goal of freedom of and from re-

ligion, and of being a nation "with liberty and justice for all."

Julianna writes: "I am 18 and attended Fauquier High School in Warrenton, Va. and Mountain Vista Governor's School for Science and Technology in Warrenton. I will be attending Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University to pursue a degree in aerospace engineering. I was heavily involved in my school's marching band program and was Math Club secretary and a Secular Student Alliance member. I won a

Gold Medal award for innovation in computer science in March at James Madison University's Junior Science and Humanities Symposium."

Editor's note: In 1943, in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, the Supreme Court ruled that students and all others have a constitutional right not to be forced to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance. From FFRF's State-Church FAQ:

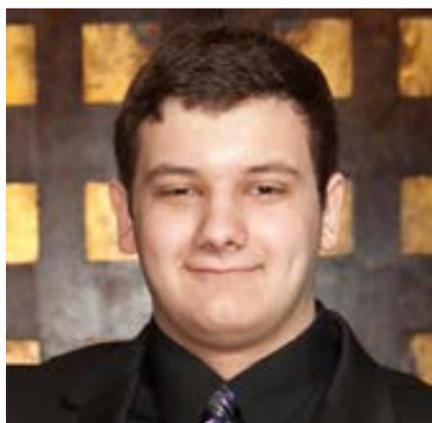
"Nor should a student be singled

out, rebuked, told they must stand, or otherwise be penalized for following their freedom of conscience. Nor should students who participate in the pledge, or who volunteer to lead the class in the pledge or to recite it over the intercom, be rewarded or favored over students who don't participate." ffrf.org/faq/state-church (scroll down to Pledge of Allegiance).

Third place: High school essay contest

Scientific defense of freethought wins

Philip received \$1,000 from FFRF for his winning essay.



By Philip Kaltman

Since I was a small child, religion was a large part of my life. I attended Sunday school and Hebrew school regularly. I went to Friday night services often, and I trusted that God had a plan and was everywhere.

I have lived in the bible belt my entire life, surrounded by both Judaism and Christianity, but natural science also played a large role in my childhood. Instead of playing baseball, I stood in the outfield watching insects in the grass. Before I could read, I could tell you which dinosaur a skull or tailbone belonged to. I watched "Land

Before Time" cartoons and paleontology documentaries. Dinosaurs were my life.

So when my Sunday school teacher explained that Noah put two of every animal on his ark so they would survive, my 7-year-old brain was confused. Where were the dinosaurs? Why weren't they on the ark? Obviously, they existed once, or we wouldn't have their bones.

I got the classic answer, "Because Noah didn't take them." Who was this Noah, and why did he decide to deprive me of dinosaurs?

Later, a documentary showed me that dinosaurs' extinction was due to a massive meteor impact, an answer that made sense. It wasn't some old man's capricious decision, it was a natural occurrence.

That was my first seed of doubt. My synagogue was no longer infallible. It was contradicted by smart scientists.

When I was stung by a bee several years later, it hurt horribly. My parents said the bee was trying to protect itself. So I asked, "Why did it need to protect itself? Didn't God control everything? Wouldn't he protect the bee and me equally?"

Then I learned about the theory of evolution, which led me to understand why animals that could hurt us existed, and to see that perhaps God didn't control the bee and wouldn't protect it and me. This was my first real crisis of

I had to awkwardly explain to my football coach that I didn't know the Lord's Prayer.

faith. Did God exist at all?

The more I learned, the more I doubted, until in 10th grade, I declared in front of my entire synagogue that I did not believe in God. There were gasps, stares and weird looks, but I persevered. After the service, astoundingly, many people congratulated me on my speech and my willingness to share my lack of belief.

I learned that defending my freethought was not something to be nervous about, but instead could be accepted as a good thing. So I tried it more, this time at school.

Despite how secular we want our public schools to be, religion in many places permeates almost every aspect of them. I had to awkwardly explain to my football coach that I didn't know the Lord's Prayer. I repeatedly turned down the friend who invited me to his Fellowship of Christian Athletes prayer sessions.

To overcome this, I helped found my school's first freethinker's club,

after jumping through myriad hoops and finding ways around constantly being told we couldn't. We provided a safe haven for others who challenged the faith that is so deeply ingrained in our culture.

Recently, I attended a planning meeting for my Cobb County School District, where a woman demanded that creationist alternatives to evolution be taught in science classrooms. (Cobb County in Georgia became notorious about 10 years ago for putting labels on science textbooks that said "Evolution is a theory, not a fact.")

I was quick to jump in and oppose her. I explained that I had interned in an evolutionary biology lab at Emory University and had seen evolution happen in front of my eyes.

The meeting's leaders gave every attendee a sticker to put next to the viewpoint that they supported. I felt extremely proud as I counted line after line of stickers next to my suggestion that only evolution should be taught in schools, versus the single sticker next to my opponent's.

Philip Kaltman, 17, Marietta, Ga., will attend the Georgia Institute of Technology and major in biology. He interned in an Emory University microbiology lab, researching evolutionary and genetic biology. He was an officer of the Science Honor Society and an officer of the Freethinker's club at his magnet STEM high school.

Fourth place: High school essay competition

Traveling the road to reason

Harrison received a \$750 scholarship from FFRF.

By Harrison Horwitz

This is the story of how I became a devoted atheist, an impassioned heretic and an optimistic realist.

My first encounter with religion came in early childhood. I was born to a single mother of Jewish heritage who was very proud of her faith and traditions. She was murdered when I was 5.

As a young boy, I was told that God worked for the greater good of humankind. In my innocence and naiveté, I could not conceive why God would take everything I had from me and leave me with absolutely nothing. It was then that I first had the notion that there is no higher power driving humanity toward good. Rather, we are



truly left to our own devices.

I looked into the heart of religion and witnessed its dark, repressive side.

Shortly after my mother's death, I was adopted by my great uncle and moved to a rural, impoverished and devoutly religious town in central California. Caliente was a town of Republicans, guns and the good Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: the holy trinity.

What Caliente residents lacked in education, they made up for in their unchallenged faith in God and Jesus. Their clergy encouraged them to loathe homosexuals, look down on blacks and immigrants and treat women like personal property.

While my adoptive parents did not force religion on me, they certainly believed in a divine being. All great things that occurred were because "He made it so." As I became more aware of the small-minded mentality of Caliente, I pieced together parts of the puzzle. I witnessed sleazy politicians using fear-based religious platforms to win elec-

I have questioned organized religion since middle school.

tions, while ignorant and misguided people followed them as though they were The Second Coming.

When I moved back to Los Angeles, I saw the movie "Jesus Camp" in my sociology class. Most of the students were shocked to see religion being shoved down the throats of the young and impressionable, but I had already been through my own version of "Jesus Camp."

My high school years put everything I encountered in my early life into perspective. In pursuit of a better educa-

tion with a focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) fields, I pegged religion for what it is: a tool for oppression that has controlled people for thousands of years.

Leaders who have the right mix of charisma, power and ego use religion to manipulate most of the population. That may sound harsh, but the suppression of hard truths has allowed the outdated institution of religion to run rampant.

I have questioned organized religion since middle school. Then, my resistance only went so far as to inquire, "How do you know there is a God?" or "How could that which goes against proven science be right?"

Even when spoken from a sixth-grader's mouth, these are dangerous questions for religion. Since then, my knowledge and understanding of religion's grasp on society has grown exponentially. Now, I actively debate

the topic in and out of the classroom. Fact-based science and creationism are incongruent. Religion has no place in the educational system.

My intention is not to sound contentious or judgmental. My beef is not with the children of "Jesus Camp" who were born into religion. My issue is with the institution of religion, the camp and its leaders, that prey on ignorant and vulnerable people.

Education should be based on ra-

tional thought and supported by facts, not on fables and bedtime stories. I dream of a world in which people want to discover answers, not one in which people pretend to already have them.

Harrison was born Nov. 19, 1996, in Los Angeles. After seven years he moved to Caliente for four years and then back to L.A. He's attending the University of California-Berkeley to major in biology and minor in political science.

Fifth place: High school essay contest

A letter to my younger self

Kali received a \$500 scholarship from FFRF.



By Kali Richardson

"I took the [road] less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." — Robert Frost

Do you remember the first time you took the less-traveled road? You started asking questions that didn't have answers, around age 8 for Catholic kids. "How do we know God is real?"

Wednesday night youth groups suddenly turned dark, because an in-

quisitive, skeptical child is not welcome around adults who have devoted their lives to delusion. Do you remember when your mom had to write you a note just so you could check out Harry Potter from the elementary library? Even as a 6-year-old, you thought that was ridiculous.

Perhaps it was just the Catholics who didn't have answers; somewhere inside of you a hope grew that maybe you were wrong, and maybe there was an omnipotent Father out there to save you from the monsters under your bed.

So off you went at age 11 to a multitude of Baptist summer camps that were thrilled to have saved a child from what they saw as a competing religion. Your mother was not pleased. But hey, this is Arkansas. This is Baptist country. (You thought, if it were about saving your soul, wouldn't she be OK with belonging to any religion?)

A year later you were in sixth grade, going through that emo phase that all of your generation participated in at one point or another, and everything changed. You came out in more than one way, and didn't know which was worse in that small town — to be gay, or to be an atheist?

At that point the road wasn't just less traveled by; it had thorns and chiggers and every once in a while, snakes. You didn't believe in the small town or its religion and it didn't believe in you. "It's just a phase," they said.

But it wasn't just a phase, and in

'Do you hate religion? Are you an atheist?'

sophomore year you stopped standing up for the pledge. The verbal feedback was amazing. "Do you hate the people who died for our country?" When the words "under God" were discovered to be the cause, it got worse. "Do you hate religion? Are you an atheist?"

Some of your classmates in sophomore biology decided to shout the pledge as if to prove the subtle point that you cannot escape. Your teacher started your unit on evolution with the words, "I know most of us don't believe we came from monkeys, but the school requires me to teach this, so . . ."

Do you remember weighing the pros and cons of challenging that ignorant statement in your head? Social scorn for a few days, or making what is right known? You were tired of being hated, but corrected the teacher regardless.

Do you remember when someone challenged the Friday night pre-football "prayer over the loudspeaker" tradition? There had already been a Supreme Court ruling, but you didn't know that. Your school, knowing full well how illegal their activities were, stopped the prayers. The entire school

thought it was ridiculous and unfair, but you were secretly happy to not have to pretend to pray.

You pointed out a few times that it was, technically, state-funded religion, but no one else viewed it as that. Everyone seemed to say, "It's a tradition. It's our life. Who are you to try to change that?"

You have taken the road less traveled, and it has made all the difference. It gave you the fuel to move to another state your senior year. Being isolated all those years for being an atheist makes leaving pretty easy, doesn't it? It piqued your interest in stem cells, which led to your pursuit of a science major.

And while you will always cringe when someone invites you to a youth group, you'll be more than thankful that it's happening in a different sphere of society than your school. Don't give up, and always be a skeptic. It's gotten you to where you are.

Kali writes: "I am 18. My hometown is Batesville, Ark., but I moved after my life was turned upside down during junior year. My parents divorced, I developed a major blood clot while attending the Naval Academy Summer Seminar 2013 and my mother remarried. I now live with her in Tucson, Ariz. I will be attending the University of Arizona in the fall and plan to major in biology with an emphasis in biomedical sciences."

Sixth place: High school essay contest

Forever secular

Fallon received \$400 from FFRF for her essay.

By Fallon Rowe

I grew up without religion. In Idaho schools, this made me fairly unique, and I struggled throughout my education, walking on eggshells around my many Mormon friends.

In elementary school, a friend asked me if I believed in "God." After a few moments of thought, I replied negatively, explaining the lack of importance of such a word in my life. That friend was quickly transformed into an enemy, presumably because her parents had indoctrinated her to be unfriendly with those who lack religion. I didn't let it bother me, but I'll never forget that encounter.



As I transitioned into high school and attained a higher level of thinking, I began to analyze my own beliefs. I see

how religion can corrupt and brainwash people, especially children who are so impressionable. I see smart, caring students turn ugly and rude when they find out I'm "that atheist girl."

I have to be extra confident of my nonbelief in order to hold my own against the zealots I face in my school and community every day. Sometimes I wonder if my peers would discriminate against me less if I were a racist rather than an atheist. It scares me that they think I'm evil or heartless simply because I disagree with religion. I am lucky to have found a few accepting and freethinking friends in high school, but we are among the minority.

At Girl Scout camp when I was younger, I was the only one who absolutely refused to pray before every meal. Although the organization is not religiously affiliated, the counselors

Sometimes I wonder if my peers would discriminate against me less if I were a racist rather than an atheist.

tried to force us to pray. In school, I continue to leave out "under God" while reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. I fight for the separation of church and state at every opportunity.

In my advanced placement government class, a peer claimed there would be no peace until Jesus walked

Continued on page 22

FFRF complaint letters add to tally of legal victories

Jesus saves (you from craving meth)

Campbell County Comprehensive High School in Jacksboro, Tenn., will vet future assemblies to ensure no inappropriate religious programming after receiving an FFRF letter of complaint about a March assembly in the gym. According to a student, the school hosted a substance abuse assembly during school hours that included opening and closing student-led prayers and featured religious leaders.

Speakers included Sheriff Robbie Goins, Caleb Arnold of the Hill College Ministry, representatives of the Stanfield Church of God and the Christian alternative rock band the Birdsongs. The band describes itself online as “passionate about spreading the gospel and pointing people to Christ.”

The complainant reported that “references to God and Christianity” and “quotes from the bible” were prevalent and that a speaker told students that “Jesus Christ delivered [them] from methamphetamine.”

The complainant reported that “some people I know didn’t want to go, given their beliefs, and were forced to attend the assembly.”

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a March 28 letter to the director of schools: “Though teaching students about the perils of drug abuse is a commendable goal, allowing church representatives and an evangelical Christian band access to your student body gives the appearance that CCPS endorses those speakers’ religious messages.”

On July 9, after receiving two FFRF follow-ups, the district responded: “It was the assumption of the principal at the school that this would be a program in which the primary emphasis would be on curbing potential drug use. As a result of your letter we have spoken with the principal and have asked that he do a better job scrutinizing the content of future assemblies.”

School backs off baccalaureate

Freeman High School in Freeman S.D., will no longer organize or sponsor an annual baccalaureate ceremony for graduating seniors. FFRF received a complaint that on May 14 a religious ceremony took place at which attendance was mandatory for all seniors and members of the band and chorus. Students were reportedly told that they would receive an “F” for not attending. Teachers, staff and the principal all have attended the event at the school.

FFRF was informed that between songs, a pastor preached and quoted bible verses. The pastor also led the crowd in prayer. The school promoted the event on the school calendar and website and announced it repeatedly over the intercom.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a complaint letter May 30 to Superintendent Don Hotchkiss. Shortly thereafter, the school responded that it would stop the practice. The complaint resulted in a flurry of Freeman Courier news articles in the town of about 1,300.

Hotchkiss said it was never his intention to eliminate the baccalaureate. “I do think we have to make some changes to how we do baccalaureate; I think we’re fortunate to have been able to do

this for as long as we have.”

That comment sounded to FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor like the superintendent knew that the practice violated the law. “If so, that’s really sad,” Gaylor said. “It’s like he thought, ‘I know it’s illegal but maybe nobody is watching.’ That’s why we need state/church watchdogs like FFRF.”

Elliott sent a follow-up letter July 23 explaining that the district had to completely disassociate itself from the event. Hotchkiss then announced that the Ministerial Association would host future baccalaureates “with no help, input, collaboration or participation from employees at the Freeman Public Schools.”

Sending FFRF a copy of the board motion to discontinue school affiliation, Hotchkiss snidely added, “I trust this information will not only be useful for you but will also allow you to have a more complete and restful nightly sleep cycle.”

The Courier editorialized in FFRF’s favor July 24, asking readers to “Imagine if you, as a Christian, moved into a community that was primarily Muslim and the public school chose to hold a religious service as part of the graduation. Likely you’d have reservations about being there and offering prayers and following the religious tenets and traditions of Islam.”

Teacher-led religious club disbanded

Hawkins Middle School in Hawkins, Texas, will no longer permit a teacher to organize and promote a “Feed and Seed” club. A concerned parent contacted FFRF, reporting that a teacher ran the club during lunch period. The teacher read from the bible and invited religious leaders to speak to students. Parents weren’t informed that their children were participating. The teacher also read religious materials on Good Friday during instructional time.

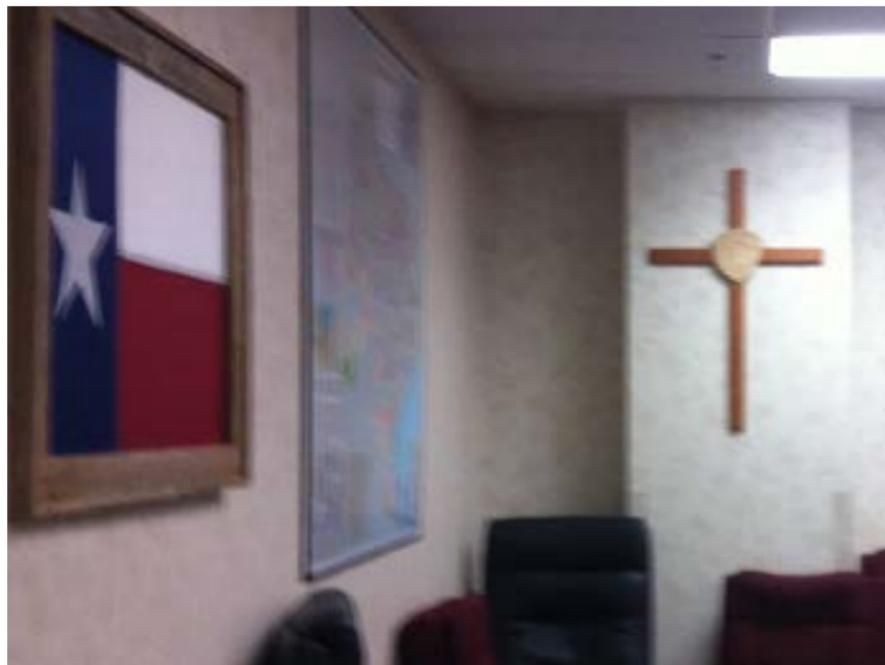
Staff Attorney Sam Grover sent a letter to the district June 4. On Aug. 5, the superintendent replied that regulations and practices regarding extracurricular and co-curricular clubs were reviewed as well as classroom instructional material guidelines: “We are working to make certain that the Hawkins ISD complies with all applicable laws, including the First Amendment’s prohibition concerning the endorsement of religion.”

The school noted that if the club returns as a strictly student-led group, the teacher involved in the abuses will not be approved as faculty supervisor.

Gideon bibles out in Kansas school

An elementary school in Gypsum, Kansas, will no longer allow the Gideons to proselytize and hand out bibles to students. FFRF was informed that on May 16, a fifth-grade teacher at USD 306 allowed representatives from Gideons International to speak and distribute bibles in his classroom.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter to the district July 8: “Parents carefully instruct children not to accept gifts from strangers. The Gideons’ practice is a usurpation of parental authority. It is the duty of public school administrators to protect not only the



The Texas Department of Public Safety in Austin removed this cross from a Highway Patrol conference room after a concerned employee alerted FFRF to the violation. Staff Attorney Sam Grover sent a complaint letter July 8. On Aug. 11, after initially attempting to justify the cross as nonreligious, the department agreed to remove it.

personal conscience of students but to ensure they are safe from predatory adults while at school.”

On July 31, the district responded, “[The] superintendent . . . did not have any knowledge that this activity was going on. If he would have known it was occurring, he would have stopped it. This confirms that USD 306 will not permit this to happen anymore.”

FFRF successfully complained about another teacher in the district who actively led, participated and organized a See You at the Pole prayer gathering. Fliers announcing the gatherings included the teacher’s name.

The letter said that a new policy prohibiting teachers sponsoring overtly religious events will be enforced by the district.

Young students recruited for Team Jesus

Michael T. Simmons Elementary School in Tumwater, Wash., will no longer allow religious materials to be handed out.

Children were pulled out of class to attend a mandatory assembly led by former NFL player Shawn Harper, who at the conclusion handed out cards to students with his picture on the front and an image of Jesus on the back. The card said:

“I grew up in a religious home, but I did not know God. I suffered a potential career ending injury which put me out of the NFL for one year. It was during that year, when I thought I had lost everything, that I discovered the difference between religion and a relationship with Jesus. He found me, and I have been playing on His Team ever since. I was able to come back and finish my career in the NFL!”

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter June 5 explaining why the school district needed to remedy the violation.

The district responded promptly: “The card about which you have stated concern, which looked like a traditional sports card, was made available to students by the speaker as the students were leaving the assembly hall. Not all students received a card, but many

did. The card was not approved in advance by the principal. The principal has shared with me that in the future she will make sure to pre-approve any materials that are to be handed out to students in such a context.”

The district defended the assembly itself as addressing bullying and not containing religious content, although Harper’s website says he’s a “Christian Motivational Speaker” at the top of the home page.

The incident was scheduled for discussion at an August meeting of administrators, the response said.

Mandatory meetings in churches stopped

Dawson County School District in Gainesville, Ga., will no longer hold mandatory meetings for teachers in churches.

A complainant reported to FFRF that the district held a mandatory staff meeting on Aug. 4 at the First Baptist Church of Dawsonville. The meeting was opened by a minister who gave a sermon inviting people to join his church and “come to Jesus.” He then urged the teachers to stand while he prayed to “bless” the teachers, school year, students, etc. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent complaint letter Aug. 15, noting that letting staff skip the church meeting wouldn’t cure the constitutional violation. Employees should not be forced to “out” themselves as nonreligious or non-Christian to their employers, he said.

The district responded Sept. 3: “While a church leader was invited to give a brief welcome to the facility, the length and nature of the comments was unexpected and certainly not invited. Under all the circumstances there is no expectation of such a gathering at the church anytime in the future.”

Senior center halts staff-led prayer

Employees at a senior center in Eagle Nest, N.M., will not lead prayers before federally funded meals. FFRF was informed that staff recited sectarian prayers before meals at the center

and that participants were asked to join hands.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent an Aug. 21 complaint letter. The center responded Sept. 3, saying that “to the extent that the prayers are conducted by Village employees or have an appearance of being Village sponsored, the Village will take action necessary to ensure that this does not continue to occur.”

School reins in creationist teacher

Eureka Union School District in Granite Bay, Calif., will no longer permit a teacher to “teach the controversy” about evolution during science class.

According to a complainant, a teacher at Ridgeview Elementary School routinely taught creationism and intelligent design during science instruction. The teacher claimed that it’s legally required to “present both sides of the issue.”

The strategy apparently consisted of giving the students a bag of popcorn and a sheet of paper with a complicated design, telling them to repeatedly let popcorn fall on the paper. If the popcorn did not form the complicated design, then, the teacher told them, it shows that evolution must be unreasonable.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter of complaint March 4, summarizing court rulings: “Evolution is not a ‘theory’ in the layperson’s sense of the word. Evolution is a ‘scientific theory.’ This difference is crucial. A misunderstanding of these terms often leads to a misunderstanding of evolution, the vast weight of evidence supporting evolution, and of its overwhelming acceptance in the scientific community.”

The district responded March 13, thanking and assuring FFRF that the complaint was immediately addressed and appropriate action taken.

Bibles verses removed at post office

A post office in Richmond, Calif., removed bible verses posted at employee time clocks. A concerned employee contacted FFRF that a sign quoting 1 Peter 4:15 (“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a ‘busybody’ in other people’s matters”) was posted on internal bulletin boards.

Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell sent a letter to the branch, pointing out that the display directly violates regulations. The Postal Service said Aug. 19 that the verses were removed: “Employees at the facility will be reinstructed through a Stand-Up Talk regarding the policies related to posting items near time clocks and on internal bulletin boards.”

Mormon video barred from assemblies

Kuna School District in Kuna, Idaho, addressed the constitutional concerns brought on by a religious video at an assembly. A complainant informed FFRF that Kuna Middle School held an anti-bullying assembly in May. A video, “Bullying — Stop It,” produced by the media channel of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was shown to students. On stopping bullying, the video claims, “This mighty change of heart is exactly what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is designed to bring about.”

It also claims that, “allowing us to see others the way our Heavenly Father sees us, because God loves us so much, we too must love and forgive; remember in the end it is the merciful who obtain mercy.”

The video was paused at the end to display the Mormon Church’s logo.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter June 4: “[Y]our community possesses many secular experts in this field, including counselors, psychologists, and sociologists, who have experience, training, certification and/or degrees and would be delighted, usually at no cost to the district, to discuss bullying before your student bodies, and whose presence would not raise constitutional red flags.”

On July 7, Superintendent Wendy Johnson replied: “The student who presented the assembly and video did disclose to building administration that there was religious content at the end of the anti-bullying video. The building administration requested that the video be stopped before the religious content was shown. Unfortunately the video was not stopped in the appropriate time.”

Johnson added that building administrators will be directed to use only district-approved materials.

In Ohio, Jesus has left the building

Religious images will no longer adorn the locker room of North Canton Memorial Stadium Complex in Canton, Ohio. A concerned student contacted FFRF to report that a portrait of Jesus was displayed near the door leading to the stadium.

On July 3, Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a warning letter to the Stark County Educational Services Council, requesting an immediate investigation of the illegal religious display at Hoover High School.

Markert stated: “As you may be aware, a similar situation occurred at Jackson Middle School in Jackson, Ohio. A lawsuit brought by FFRF together with the ACLU of Ohio on behalf of a Jackson Middle School student resulted in a settlement for the permanent removal of the portrait of Jesus and a hefty fine, including attorney’s fees against Jackson City School District.”

A council representative responded Aug. 21 that the portrait had been removed.

Miami Beach removes Jewish eruv

A public park in Miami Beach, Fla., will no longer permit religious eruv to be erected over public property after a complaint was filed by FFRF.

An eruv is “an urban area enclosed by a wire boundary that symbolically extends the private domain of Jewish households into public areas, permitting activities within it that are normally forbidden in public on the Sabbath.” An eruv, constructed of 15-foot plastic poles connected by string, was installed by two members of the Orthodox Jewish community in Pine Tree Park without a permit.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a complaint letter to the city of Miami Beach: “Allowing Orthodox Jews to permanently demarcate large areas of public property as a private Jewish household that is ‘property’ of the Orthodox Jewish community forces those of other faiths and no faith to live with-



FFRF legal staff teaches CLE

FFRF staff attorneys (left) Sam Grover, Elizabeth Cavell, Rebecca Markert, Patrick Elliott and Andrew Siedel taught a Continuing Legal Education class Aug. 12 on state/church issues. It was sponsored by the Dane County (Wis.) Legal Association for Women and was attended by about 35 attorneys and two judges. Topics included nativity scenes and Ten Commandments displays on public property, prayer at government meetings and school prayer.

in an Orthodox Jewish religious enclosure, including members of other Jewish denominations who are offended by the Orthodox Jewish elevation of legalistic constructs over what they believe to be the true spiritual values of Judaism.”

On July 10, FFRF received a response from the city insisting that an “eruv does not violate the Establishment Clause, and can be legally permitted. It has the secular purpose of allowing Orthodox Jews to participate in matters of daily living outside of their homes on Saturday, their Sabbath.”

Seidel replied July 14: “There is nothing secular about helping a religious sect comply with religious law. What do you think the reaction would be if Miami Beach endorsed and even helped devout Muslims rope off an area in which to adhere to Sharia law?”

FFRF’s complainant confirmed on July 24 that most of the eruv had been removed from the park. She called it “a great victory.”

Chorus won’t sing in S.C. churches

Broome High School students in Glendale, S.C., will no longer perform in churches. A concerned citizen informed FFRF that on May 11 the school chorus sang at the First Baptist Church of Cowpens during a Sunday morning worship service.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter May 19 to Spartanburg School District 3, explaining why holding school-sponsored activities in churches, especially during services, is a bad idea constitutionally, even if students are allowed to opt out of participating.

On Aug. 11, an attorney representing the district responded that students should not be asked to participate in any activity that takes place during a religious service, where that activity is sponsored by the school.

The counsel added that she had met with all district administrators to give a presentation including “instruction regarding the Establishment Clause and how it applies to public school students and religion.”

Graduations won’t have official prayer

Alexander High School in Alexander N.Y., will no longer conduct prayer at graduation. Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a letter June 24, 2013, about an invocation listed on a

recent graduation’s program.

After several follow-up letters, the district sent an email Jan. 31: “We do not believe it was illegal. It was student initiated and student led.”

Markert responded April 8, citing the Supreme Court’s *Santa Fe v. Doe* ruling on precisely such violations.

On May 28, the district responded: “The graduation planning committee for the class of 2014 has decided not to include an invocation in their graduation program.”

In August, Markert received more confirmation that the School Board “made the decision not to include an invocation in the ceremony.”

Teacher-led prayer stopped at banquets

After a complaint by FFRF, Sandy Run K-8 School staff in Swansea S.C., will no longer lead prayer at academic banquets. FFRF learned that a school staff member led students and staff in a Christian prayer at a June 2 banquet.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter to Calhoun County Public Schools on July 22. On Aug. 12, Superintendent Steve Wilson responded: “I have reminded staff on numerous occasions of the law and to not engage in any activity that could be considered out of bounds as it pertains to Freedom of Religion. After receiving your letter, I immediately placed the subject on the very next District Principals’ Meeting agenda . . . and directed any and all to refrain from such practices.”

Overheard

You are a public forum to take care of the town’s business. Take care of town business and let this stuff bury itself out.

Tom Berry, town attorney for Amherst, Va., on a tabled motion to start opening council meetings with prayer instead of a moment of silence
Lynchburg News & Advance, 8-25-14

When people start using science to argue for their specific beliefs and delusions, to try to claim that they’re supported by science, then scientists at least have to speak up and say, you’re welcome to your delusions, but don’t say that they’re supported by science.

Thomas Freeman, op-ed arguing against allowing the teaching of creationism and intelligent design in public schools
news24.com, 9-2-14

Complaints? We've had a few, but not too few to mention

FFRF legal staff was extremely busy sending out letters of complaint in August, as well as spending time being interviewed by media about situations where FFRF has intervened, often at the request of local complainants. Some may have been remedied already.

Contact: Folsom Cordova Unified School District, Rancho Cordova, Calif., Aug. 1.

Violation: Follow-up letter from June asking the district to address a third instance of a sign advertising a church on school grounds. The church rents space in a high school, but the sign was displayed well before the actual rental time.

Contact: North Carolina Office of Charter Schools, Aug. 1.

Violation: Wilson Preparatory Academy, a public charter school in Wilson, N.C., hosted an informational meeting for parents and students in the sanctuary of Raleigh Road Baptist Church. A pastor started the meeting with the Lord's Prayer at the request of the school founder, who also repeatedly asked parents if he "could have a witness" throughout the meeting.

Contact: Academy District 20, Colorado Springs, Colo., Aug. 4.

Violation: The head football coach at Pine Creek High School instituted mandatory prayers for team members and either led them or told another coach to do so. He also reportedly told students that "football is God's game."

Contact: DeSoto County Schools, Hernando, Miss., Aug. 4.

Violation: "Jesus Loves Me" and "In God We Trust" signs were displayed in the counseling office at Lake Cormorant Middle School.

Contact: City Council, Chico, Calif., Aug. 4.

Violation: The council refused to let an atheist give an invocation and emailed FFRF the criteria. FFRF responded later that day, pointing out that criteria were applied inconsistently and detailing why the requirements burdened free speech.

Contact: Bay District Schools, Panama City, Fla., Aug. 5-6.

Violation: The district invited pastors to counsel students after several fatal shootings in the area. More than 30 pastors wanted to participate. The school district attorney responded, claiming pastors were just one of many community representatives who would be present on the first day of school to support students. FFRF wrote back to say that while it was fine to invite members of secular community groups, pastors should be disinvented.

Contact: Boerne ISD, Boerne, Texas, Aug. 6.

Violation: The Boerne High School football coaches and players' parents participated in a weekly bible study in which they wrote religious notes to an assigned team member. They then decorated the locker room with scripture, blessed the lockers and delivered the notes to players' lockers.

Contact: DeKalb County, Ga., Board of Registrations and Elections, Aug. 6.

Violation: A church sanctuary with many pictures of Jesus was used as a polling place.

Contact: Alexander Central School District, Alexander, N.Y., Aug. 6.

Violation: The district stopped holding prayers at graduation, but implied the decision came from the student body, not the district, raising concerns

The Colorado coach also reportedly told students that 'football is God's game.'

that the district might allow a different student body to decide to hold prayer in the future. The superintendent responded Aug. 14, claiming that was not the case, that it had been the district's decision.

Contact: Tom Schedler, Louisiana secretary of state, Aug. 7.

Violation: A University of Louisiana-Lafayette police officer was denied a request to renew his oath of office with the line "so help me God" crossed out. His superiors delayed the signing of the form while they consulted Schedler's office, which informed them they would not accept the modified form.

Contact: Frisco ISD, Frisco, Texas, Aug. 7.

Violation: Rebuttal to a school board which justified continuing prayers under *Greece v. Galloway*.

Contact: Anderson County Schools, Clinton, Tenn., Aug. 8.

Violation: The music teacher at Lake City Elementary School regularly taught her students religious songs, including "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho."

Contact: Okaloosa County, Fla., Sheriff's Office, Aug. 8.

Violation: The office had several chaplains, whom the sheriff described as a "spiritual lifeline," providing marriage and other counseling for employees.

Contact: St. Charles Parish Board of Education, Metairie, La., Aug. 8.

Violation: Rebuttal to a school board which justified continuing its prayer practice under *Greece v. Galloway*.

Contact: Jackson-Madison County Schools, Jackson, Tenn., Aug. 8.

Violation: The district held a mandatory in-service at West Jackson Baptist Church. The school's attorney had assured FFRF that he would investigate covering/removing religious materials and that there would be no members from the church present and no religious content. FFRF's complainant reported that the church's pastor was present and was invited to deliver an invocation, with crosses displayed throughout the sanctuary.

Contact: U.S. Postal Service office, Katy, Texas, Aug. 8.

Violation: Every month, two stacks of a religious newspaper called "The Good News Just Keeps Coming" were left on a bench in violation of regulations.

Contact: U.S. Postal Service office, Redondo Beach, Calif., Aug. 8.

Violation: Copies of a Christian business directory were available in a magazine rack attached to the wall in violation of regulations.

Contact: Pelham City Schools, Pelham, Ala., Aug. 11.

Violation: School board meetings started with prayer led by a board member. A mandatory meeting for all employees was held at First Baptist Church, where the pastor started the



The public high school in Danielsville, Ga., unveiled a new religious monument at the stadium.

meeting with prayer and invited everyone to a revival service.

Contact: Indian River County Schools, Vero Beach, Fla., Aug. 11.

Violation: The school board invited pastors to give invocations or have board members offer prayers, which were often sectarian.

Contact: 16 Texas public charter schools and school districts, Aug. 12-13, Aug. 18.

Violation: Schools participated in the Texas Christian Athletic League, a private, explicitly Christian league, which says, "We dedicate ourselves to encourage Christian values." The league uses religious images and prayer at events.

Contact: Farmington Area Public Schools, Farmington, Minn., Aug. 13.

Violation: Elementary schools go annually to Feed My Starving Children, an overtly Christian charity. The students box food and are then asked to pray over the food they have packaged.

Contact: Wilson County Schools, Wilson, N.C., Aug. 14.

Violation: Jones Elementary School planned to host a "Backpack Prayer Service" at which "Education and faith leaders will gather to pray for the 2014 Back-to-School Fair." Students will receive backpacks as part of the Wilson Education Partnership, which "links schools with the faith community."

Contact: Beaverton, Ore., School District, Aug. 15.

Violation: Hazeldale Elementary School partnered with Cooper Mountain Presbyterian Fellowship to run the "Summerhawks Drop In Program," a summer program at the school. A flier advertised "Positive character traits according to Jesus," and T-shirts included logos for the school and the fellowship.

Contact: Jackson County Commission, Scottsboro, Ala., Aug. 15.

Violation: The commission was considering a proposal to display the Ten Commandments, along with the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, in a "historic" documents display.

Contact: Presiding judge, Breathitt County Courthouse, Jackson, Ky., Aug. 15.

Violation: A large, framed picture of Jesus was displayed in the main entranceway of the courthouse with a caption reading, "In your place what would Jesus do?"

Contact: Internal Revenue Service, Aug. 15.

Violation: Whitworth Memorial

Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn., placed political campaign signs on its grounds.

Contact: U.S. Army Installation Management Command, Washington, D.C., Aug. 15.

Violation: The army has a de facto policy allowing bibles in military-run hotels.

Contact: Bartlett City Schools, Bartlett, Tenn., Aug. 15.

Violation: The newly formed district held an employee meeting in the sanctuary of Bartlett Baptist Church underneath a large cross. The next day, a community-wide "Kickoff and Pep Rally" was held at Bartlett United Methodist Church. Both events featured student performances.

Contact: AKA Entertainment & Media, Greensboro, N.C., Aug. 15.

Violation: AKA operates food and music festivals. After an FFRF victory on a church bulletin discount at one RibFest, one in a different location was still offering the discount.

Contact: Splashdown Water Park, Spokane Valley, Wash., Aug. 18.

Violation: Admission to the park was \$10, including tax, on Sundays with a church bulletin, reduced from the \$16.99 plus tax regular admission.

Contact: Waller ISD, Waller, Texas, Aug. 19.

Violation: The district held a mandatory employee convocation, which began with a prayer given by a school board member, who is also a Christian pastor, and closed with a prayer given by a junior high principal.

Contact: Gwinnett County Schools, Suwanee, Ga., Aug. 19.

Violation: The district held a religious assembly at Parkview High School featuring Pastor Kevin Queen of 12 Stone Church. Queen described his "job" as "to tell the same basic and best story in many different ways, represent the Kingdom, and invite people to life with Jesus."

Contact: Kaufman ISD, Kaufman, Texas, Aug. 20.

Violation: For the second year in a row, the district included prayer at its annual employee convocation, this year given by Pastor Chacko of Grace Christian Church.

Contact: Tipton Community School Corp., Tipton, Ind., Aug. 20.

Violation: Tipton High School displayed the Ten Commandments in a hallway with school photos.

Contact: Mayor of York, Pa., Aug. 20.

Violation: For five years, the mayor



The office at Kenneth Cooper Middle School in Oklahoma City displayed a poster titled "Faith in America."

has hosted a city-organized conference, "FaithNet," for local faith-based organizations. The events were attended almost exclusively by Christian pastors. The 2013 keynote speech was essentially a Christian sermon.

Contact: Vidor ISD, Vidor, Texas, Aug. 21.

Violation: Christian prayers are broadcast over the loudspeaker at Vidor High School football games. In addition, a teacher has publicly boasted about proselytizing to students during the school day, writing online, "I personally love my job as a public school teacher b/c I am able to talk with many kids about Jesus."

Contact: Baldwin County, Ala., Aug. 21.

Violation: A monument displayed in front of the Baldwin County Courthouse in Bay Minette is "Dedicated to the glory of God and in honor of the veterans of all wars."

Contact: Emmanuel County Schools, Swainsboro, Ga., Aug. 21.

Violation: Teachers at Swainsboro Primary School regularly lead students in prayer. Two teachers ask their students to bow their heads, fold their hands and pray before lunch. The complainant family alerted the principal to this issue, after which the complainants' children were made to sit in the hallway while the rest of the class prayed. One child felt the teacher "used her mean voice" when asking the child to wait in the hall.

Contact: Internal Revenue Service, Aug. 21.

Violation: Idlewild Baptist Church in Lutz, Fla., distributed a sample ballot for local elections which had "suggested candidates" marked.

Contact: Conemaugh Valley Board of Education, Johnstown, Pa.; South Butler County School Board, Saxenburg, Pa.; Northern Bedford County School Board, Loysburg, Pa.; Aug. 22. **Violation:** The school boards start each meeting with prayer.

Contact: Toledo Public Schools, Toledo, Ohio, Aug. 22.

Violation: The district invited all employees to a "Back to School Bash" at Cedar Creek Church, where it had held at least one earlier event. The district's chief academic officer said that since nobody was mandated to go, "people who would be uncomfortable at a Christian church can stay away."

Contact: Millville Police Department, Millville, N.J., Aug. 22.

Violation: The department has a chaplain program consisting only of Christian ministers. The program is meant to "have a large focus on juveniles," but also consoles families after tragedies and counsels officers in need. The chaplains have been given some enforcement authority, recently picking up juveniles violating curfew.

Contact: Putnam County Schools, Oklahoma City, Aug. 25.

Violation: The Kenneth Cooper

Middle School office displayed a religious poster with an image titled "Faith in America" by Donald Zolan, which features two children with their hands clasped in prayer against an American flag background.

Contact: Tarrant County, Fort Worth, Texas, Aug. 25.

Violation: The tax assessor's office changed its official office envelopes, adding "In God We Trust" on the back, and intends to add the phrase to next year's tax statements.

Contact: Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y., Aug. 25.

Violation: The village annually hosts a holiday display in VFW Park in December, which contains a nativity scene erected by a Catholic church, a menorah erected by a Chabad group and a Christmas tree erected and lit by the village.

Contact: Springfield Public Schools, Springfield, Mo., Aug. 26.

Violation: Third graders at Wanda Gray Elementary School were given "take home" folders promoting a church. The front cover includes the school mascot, the name of the school, the office phone number and the school website. The back says the folder is "compliments of Seminole Baptist Temple," lists the church contact information, and advertises evangelical Christian activities for students.

Contact: Stone Bridge High School, Ashburn, Va., Aug. 26.

Violation: The varsity girls tennis coach prayed with her students.

Contact: Seminole County Public Schools, Fla., Aug. 26

Violation: Seminole High School in Sanford reportedly allowed a pastor to serve as football team chaplain. The district responded to deny the claim.

Contact: Northern Tioga School Board, Elkland, Pa.; Blackhawk School Board, Beaver Falls, Pa.; Valley Grove School Board, Franklin, Pa.; Northern Potter School Board, Ulysses, Pa., Aug. 27.

Violation: The boards start monthly meetings with prayer.

Contact: Military Entrance Processing Station, Johnston, Iowa, Aug. 28.

Violation: A rack containing bibles and other Christian material was set up in the main lobby.

Contact: Madison County School District, Danielsville, Ga., Aug. 28.

Violation: Madison County High School unveiled a new monument in its stadium Aug. 22. The monument has two bible verses: Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," and Romans 8:31, "If God be for us who can be against us?"

Contact: Valley View ISD, Valley View, Texas, Aug. 29.

Violation: A teacher at Valley View Middle School distributed a tract to his students after teaching them about the Declaration of Independence. The tract was "Donated by Cooke County Republican Women" and encouraged readers to visit the website for the National Center for Constitutional Studies, a group which promotes religion under the guise of teaching American history. The website includes a list of reasons to oppose same-sex marriage and articles drawing connections between the Constitution and the bible.

Contact: Forney ISD, Forney, Texas, Aug. 29.

Violation: A student was punished for refusing to stand during the Pledge of Allegiance. The teacher stopped class and told the student that while he did not have to recite the pledge or salute the flag, he did have to stand. When the student did not stand, the

teacher sent him to the principal's office, where he received in-school suspension.

Contact: Wisconsin Office of the Commissioner of Insurance, Madison, Aug. 29.

Violation: The office provided an "inadequate and unlawful response" to FFRF's open records request regarding the office's enforcement of contraception coverage requirements. The agency provided no responsive records, did not specifically state the public policy reasons for the refusal and did not either detail the records being withheld or state that there were no records.

— compiled by Maddy Ziegler

The district's chief academic officer said that since nobody was mandated to go, 'people who would be uncomfortable at a Christian church can stay away.'

State/Church Bulletin

'Bait and switch' by Greece board

The Town Board in Greece, N.Y., voted unanimously in August to approve a new prayer policy that supposedly is in line with the Supreme Court's May ruling involving the town. However, the new policy says speakers will represent "assemblies with an established presence in the town of Greece that regularly meet for the primary purpose of sharing a religious perspective." The town clerk will maintain a list.

"This is an affront, not just to non-believers, but to all citizens of Greece," said Dan Courtney, an area resident and FFRF member who gave an atheist invocation after the ruling. "Despite telling the Supreme Court that anybody could give an invocation, they've now come up with a policy that says an atheist can't give one."

Town Attorney Brian Marianetti told WHAM News that the policy is meant to keep invocations local and take Greece out of the national spotlight. "With this policy in place, we are hopeful that we can return to the business of the town."

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor said the board has no business praying or hosting prayer. "If they really wanted to get down to business, prayers would go away and the time spent arranging and delivering them could be devoted to actual city business."

Gregory Lipper, senior litigation counsel for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which represented plaintiffs Linda Stephens (an FFRF member) and Susan Galloway in their suit against the town, called the policy "an enormous bait and switch."

Israel funds push to teach bible

Israel's Ministry of Education announced a new program meant to make secular Israelis more familiar with the bible. Called "Our Story — a Daily Bible Chapter," the program focuses on 25- to 40-year-olds and will get 47.5 million shekels (\$13.5 million) of public money over five years, Haaretz reported Aug. 13.

The program is meant to "strengthen the position of the Bible as a fashioner of Jewish-Zionist identity and as a national cultural foundation that unites the Jewish people in all its diversity."

An unnamed source told the paper the project "reflects the priorities of the ministry heads, under which projects in the fields of civics and Jewish-

Arab coexistence don't merit the same investment." The Education Ministry is headed by Orthodox Rabbi Shai Piron of the Yesh Atid Party.

Bible Believers lose Michigan case

Authorities in Dearborn, Mich., didn't violate the free speech rights of a group called Bible Believers when they threatened to ticket them at an Arab-American street festival in 2012, the 6th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in a 2-1 decision. The evangelists were hit with water bottles and rocks while carrying a pig's head and telling Muslims they were "sick" and would "burn in hell."

"Although robustly guarded by the First Amendment, religious conduct remains subject to regulation for the protection of society," the majority ruled. The sheriff's office was "regulating the safety of the festival attendees," not "religious conduct," Judges Bernice Donald and Samuel Mays Jr. wrote.

Atheist airman denied reenlistment

An atheist airman at Creech Air Force Base near Indian Springs, Nev., was denied reenlistment for refusing to sign the oath portion of a contract with the words "so help me God," according to a Sept. 4 Air Force Times story.

The American Humanist Association has complained to the base and USAF inspector generals. AHA said that after the unidentified airman crossed out the phrase "so help me God," he was told he could either comply or leave the Air Force.

A new regulation put in place last year requires that an enlistment oath be sworn to God, where before the instruction said "Airmen may omit the words 'so help me God,' if desired for personal reasons."

"Reciting 'so help me God' in the reenlistment and commissioning oaths is a statutory requirement under Title 10 USC 502," said Air Force spokeswoman Rose Richeson, adding that the requirement can't be changed unless Congress changes the statute mandating it.

"The airman's term of service expires in November 2014," Richeson said in an email. "He has until this time to complete the Department of Defense Form 4 in compliance with the Title 10 USC 502."

FFRF also wrote the Air Force on behalf of many members.

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Charles K. Adcock, 31, Frisco, TX: 9 counts of sodomy and 22 counts of rape. The alleged acts took place in 2010-12 in Muscle Shoals, AL, where Adcock was youth pastor and interim worship pastor at Woodward Ave. Baptist Church.

Assaults against the female victim allegedly started when she was 14 and took place at the church and at Adcock's home. *Source: WHNT, 8-21-14*

Romannilo "Nilo" Apura, 67, Point Pleasant, NJ: 2nd-degree endangering the welfare of a child, 3rd-degree aggravated criminal sexual contact and 4th-degree attempt to commit criminal sexual contact. Apura, pastor at St. Martha Catholic Parish, allegedly molested a 16-year-old boy earlier this year at a Trenton residence and later tried to remove the same boy's pants. Authorities did not say how he knew the boy. *Source: Trenton Times, 8-21-14*

Jorge Vasquez, 47, Phoenix: 6 counts of child molestation, 2 counts each of sexual assault and sexual conduct with a minor and 4 counts each of sexual abuse and kidnapping. Vasquez is accused of sexual contact with 4 female victims (ages 12 to 33) against their will during his 7-year tenure as pastor at La Roca, or the Rock Church.

The minor girls told police Vasquez allegedly told them he was teaching them about sex during counseling sessions to prepare them for their future husbands or boyfriends. *Source: Arizona Republic, 8-16-14*

Bill Winger, 62, Douglasville, GA: 4 counts of simple battery, a misdemeanor. He's accused of sexual contact in 2012-13 with a female staff member while he was pastor at King's Way Baptist Church, which runs one of the state's oldest private Christian schools.

Three counts involve alleged unwanted "grabbing and hugging," while another says Winger made "physical contact of an insulting and provoking nature" when he pressed against her with a part of his body that was aroused.

Solicitor General Matthew Krull said there are other accusers. Winger resigned in October after 15 years at the church amid allegations he molested children in Michigan 20 years ago, for which he was never charged. *Source: Journal-Constitution, 8-15-14*

Winston Blackmore, 60, Bountiful, BC: Polygamy. Blackmore, leader of a fundamentalist Mormon splinter group of about 500, allegedly "practiced a form of polygamy, or practiced a kind of conjugal union" with 24 women, authorities said. Another man charged, **James Oler**, allegedly had a conjugal union with 4 women.

Blackmore was ordered by a court in 2013 to pay \$150,000 for understating his income by \$1.8 million over 6 years. The judge dismissed his claim that he headed a "religious communal congregation" that was tax exempt. *Source: National Post, 8-14-14*

Willard L. Jones, 63, Tulsa, OK: Filing a false tax return and 3 counts of wire fraud and one count of filing a false tax return. Charges allege that Jones, as executive director of Greater Cornerstone Church's community center, diverted over \$933,000 of donations and grants to personal use. *Source: News on 6, 8-14-14*

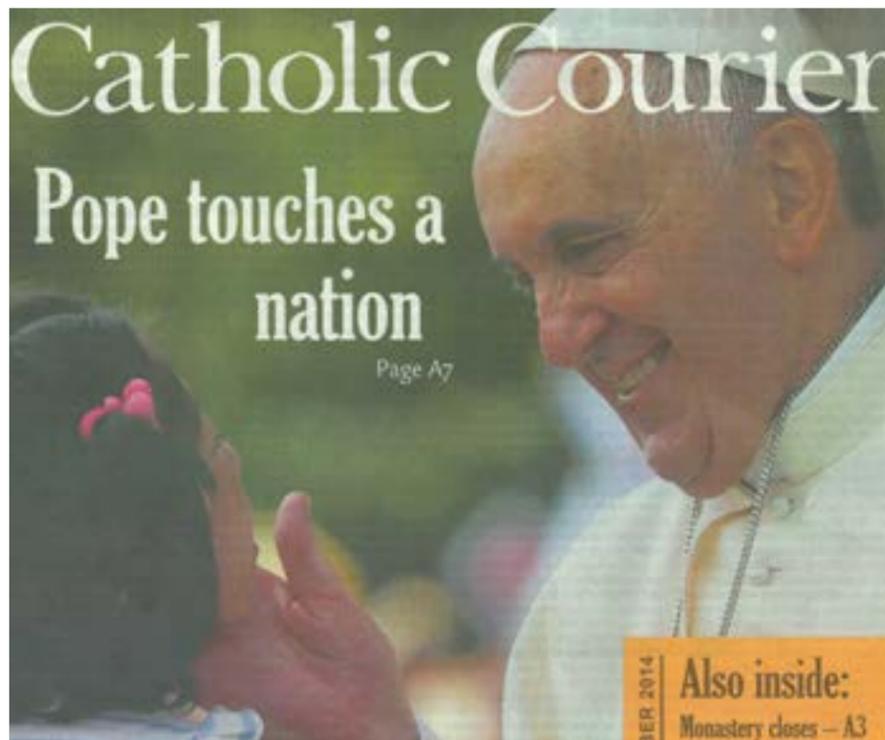
Ventje C. Singkoh, 69, Daly City, CA: 3 counts of felony child molestation for allegedly abusing a female victim younger than 13 between Jan. 2013-Feb. 2014. Singkoh is pastor at Indonesian Pentecostal Foursquare Church and also holds services at Golden Gate Christian Church, First Presbyterian Church and at his home. *Source: sfgate.com, 8-12-14*

Gavriel Bodenheimer, 71, Monsey, NY: 1st-degree sexual abuse and 3 counts of 1st-degree criminal sexual act. Bodenheimer, an Orthodox rabbi and principal of Yeshiva Bais Mikroh, is accused of molesting a 7-year-old boy in 2009-10 in his school office. Bodenheimer, who has 14 children and 100 grandchildren, is active in the push to change the state education aid formula to bring more money to the East Ramapo school district, whose board is controlled by Orthodox and Hasidic Jews, and to private schools. *Source: Lohud, 8-12-14*

Jeff Beltz, Hydesville, CA: Inflicting corporal injury on a spouse. Beltz, associate pastor at Hydesville Community Church, was arrested in the church parking lot after allegedly striking his wife about 2 p.m. in the face with an open hand, breaking her glasses.

The church's website says Beltz leads the "men's ministry," including the Christian Outdoorsmen of Humboldt County, a father/son hunting and fishing group. *Source: Lost Coast Outpost, 8-11-14*

Leonard "Sonny" Layman, 69, Bridgewater, VA: 3 counts of aggravated sexual battery and 4 counts of indecent liberties with a child. Layman is children's pastor at Spring Creek



"Wasn't this how the church got in trouble in the first place?" asks New Yorker Dan Courtney, who sent this Diocese of Rochester front page.

Church of the Nazarene. The church's website says he was called to the children's ministry in 1990. A family member is the alleged victim, the church pastor said. *Source: WHSV, 8-11-14*

Jack G. Knight, 73, Stokesdale, NC: 6 counts of 3rd-degree sexual exploitation of a minor. Charges stem from digital child pornography images the Rockingham County Sheriff's Office found, said Cpl. Kevin Suthard. Knight is a retired Methodist minister.

Knight was charged earlier in July with felony secret peeping for allegedly recording a woman who rented a basement apartment in his home. *Source: News & Record, 8-8-14*

Jerald L. Hill, 56, Roach, MO: Attempted unlawful sex with an animal and attempted animal abuse. Hill is CEO and president of Windermere Baptist Conference Center in Lake of the Ozarks.

Authorities were alerted about a Craigslist ad seeking 2 types of animals to have sex with. A detective exchanged emails with Hill under the guise of offering a dog for sex. He declined to say what other type of animal Hill allegedly was seeking. *Source: Columbia Daily Tribune, 8-7-14*

Orlando A. Caldera, 64, Charlotte, NC: 2 counts of indecent liberties against a child. Caldera, associate minister at Memorial United Methodist Church, is charged with sexually touching 2 girls, ages 6 and 10.

He was later charged with 26 more sexual assault counts related to 5 more alleged victims. *Source: Charlotte Observer, 8-6-14*

Telas R. Staten, 39, Kinston, NC: Statutory sexual offense, indecent liberties with a child and crimes against nature. Staten, pastor at St. Matthew's Church of Christ and an employee at Lenoir County Boys and Girls Club, is accused of molesting a teen boy. *Source: WRAL, 8-5-14*

Ron Fails, 55, Lima, OH: Soliciting. Fails, pastor of Grace Church World Wide Ministries, allegedly tried to hire an undercover officer online who was posing as a 19-year-old female escort.

Police Sgt. Dave Gillispie said after officers identified themselves at a motel, Fails "proclaimed he was there to counsel" the teen. Gillispie added that counselors don't bring condoms to appointments like Fails did.

He pleaded no contest to soliciting 3 years ago. *Source: Lima News, 8-4-14*

Brett A. Rains, 48, New Castle, IN: Domestic battery. Rains, pastor of New Salem Baptist Church, allegedly struck his wife in the face repeatedly while both of them had been drinking and then "aggressively backed into" her car twice with his van.

Rains reportedly told another deputy that he'd consumed vodka and his prescription medication, described as "Valium and a steroid." *Source: indystar.com, 7-30-14*

Dan Haby Jr., 51, Alvarado, TX: Indecency with a child/fondling. Haby, children's pastor at the Cowboy Way Church, "told the victim that he wasn't married and he didn't have a way to relieve stress," an affidavit said. "He explained that by lying with and holding the victim, this allowed him to release stress, which helped him be a stronger pastor thereby bringing God to more people."

The alleged victim told police he was sexually assaulted in 2000-01, starting when he was 15. *Source: Star-Telegram, 7-28-14*

Brian K. Smith, 33, Belle Vernon, PA: Ag-

gravated indecent assault of a person less than 16, corruption of minors and possession of child pornography. The alleged victim told police that youth pastor Smith recruited her for a Journey by Grace church group called the Joshua Project when she was 15.

"The first sexual encounter did, our investigation revealed, occur at the church itself," said Rostraver Police Chief Greg Resetar.

"It appears as if Mr. Smith is a very manipulative person," he said. "It appears that he may tend to prey on children that may be experiencing some problems in their life." *Source: WTAE, 7-28-14*

Matthew Durham, 19, Edmond, OK: Engaging in illegal sexual conduct in foreign places, aggravated sexual abuse with children and other child predation charges. Durham was a volunteer at the Upendo Children's Home near Nairobi from April to June. Its mission is "to provide opportunities for Christians to be in ministry to children of Kenya."

Durham allegedly had sex with as many as 10 males and females aged 4 to 9 and forced others to watch. One alleged victim is HIV positive.

The U.S. Attorney's Office said Durham can be prosecuted in Oklahoma. *Source: KTLA, 7-23-14*

Pleaded / Convicted

Israel Berrios-Berrios, 58, Naranjito, Puerto Rico: Pleaded guilty to transporting a minor with the intent to engage in criminal sexual conduct. Berrios-Berrios was relieved of his duties in May by the Catholic Diocese of Caguas amid accusations he molested an altar boy from about age 8 until he turned 17.

Berrios-Berrios took the boy on a 4-day Bahamas cruise in 2008 when he was 15. He's the first priest to face federal sex charges in Puerto Rico. The U.S. Attorney's Office said the maximum sentence is 12 years. *Source: AP/La Prensa, 8-20-14*

James A. McAbee, Beaumont, TX: Pleaded no contest to marijuana possession in a plea deal in which a charge of unlawful carrying of a weapon was dropped. McAbee, known as the "Pistol Packing Preacher," is pastor at the Lighthouse Worship Center.

The plea calls for a sentence of 2 years' deferred probation, \$2,000 fine, drug education classes, community service and surrender of his concealed carry permits from Texas, Arizona and Florida.

He was arrested during a traffic stop after undercover officers saw him with a known prostitute, according to the District Attorney's Office. *Source: Beaumont Enterprise, 8-20-14*

Cynthia Head, 51, Brookfield, MO: Pleaded guilty to wire fraud for embezzling \$192,000 from the Brookfield Church of the Nazarene, where she was treasurer. As part of the scheme, Head made unauthorized purchases with church checks at Walmart stores of items such as computers, cameras and vacuum cleaners, then returned the items for cash.

The embezzlement started in 2007 and lasted until Oct. 2013. *Source: Linn County Leader, 8-19-14*

John I. Oselsky, 50, Carmichael, CA: Pleaded no contest to misdemeanor soliciting for prostitution. Oselsky, a native of Moldova

Irish single mothers who refused to participate were anesthetized during delivery and later told their babies had died.

and senior pastor at Grace Family Church, was among 2 dozen people arrested in a sheriff's sting. He initially claimed he didn't understand what the 2 women were saying to him in a parking lot.

A plea agreement said he will pay \$380 and take a 12-hour education class. If he doesn't complete the class, he'll be ordered to serve 10 days in jail and 3 years' probation. *Source: Sacramento Bee, 8-14-14*

James M. Taylor, 30, Niskayuna, NY: Pleaded guilty to endangering the welfare of a child. Taylor admitted to having a 7-month relationship with a 15-year-old girl while serving as associate pastor at St. Kateri Tekakwitha Catholic Parish. A plea agreement calls for no jail time.

Taylor met the girl while serving as a deacon and youth minister at Corpus Christi Church in Clifton Park. *Source: Times Union, 8-13-14*

Jonathan Smith, 59, Ocean Springs, MS: Pleaded guilty to 2nd-degree sexual assault. Smith, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Salem, NJ, at the time of the incident, was convicted of molesting a minor male relative under age 13 in 2013 at Smith's home.

Terms of a plea bargain call for a 4-year prison sentence and \$2,000 fine. Smith led the Presbyterian congregation for about 9 years and resigned suddenly a month before his arrest. Church officials said he cited "personal and medical issues."

He'll have to serve 85% (3 years and 4 months) of his sentence before becoming eligible for parole. *Source: Star-Ledger, 7-30-14*

Sentenced

Jorge Castro, 55, Norwalk, CT: 6 years in prison after pleading no contest to sexual penetration by foreign object. Castro, pastor at Las Buenas Nuevas Church, assaulted a female congregant who had come to him for spiritual counseling in 2010.

Castro is suspected of molesting as many as 20 women from 2004-12, most of whom were Spanish-speaking undocumented immigrants. Only 4 were willing to talk to detectives because of fear of deportation. *Source: Press-Telegram, 8-15-14*

Joshua L. McDonald, 37, Bridge City, TX: 15 years in prison on each of 6 counts, to be served concurrently, for sexual assault of a child. McDonald, First Baptist Church youth pastor, mouthed to his wife Mandi, "It's OK," as deputies led him away.

McDonald pleaded guilty to having sex with 2 girls under age 17. Mandi McDonald described a victim who visited their home as "touchy-feely" and said she had boundary issues. *Source: 12 News, 8-14-14*

Bruce Burnside, 60, Madison, WI: 10 years in prison and 5 years' extended supervision after pleading guilty to 2nd-degree reckless homicide and 1st-offense OWI in the 2013 death of Maureen Mengelt, 52, who was jogging when struck by Burnside's car at 2:45 p.m. on his way to a church event. He was forced out as a Lutheran bishop after being charged.

Prosecutor Emily Thompson said that 2 hours before the accident, Burnside texted someone that he was sitting in his backyard with "my laptop and a Bloody Mary." That suggests he was lying when he told police he hadn't been drinking since the night before or early morning hours, Thompson said.

His blood-alcohol content was estimated at nearly twice the legal limit at the time of the accident.

"[A]ll falls away when you look at the simple truth of the blood-alcohol content," said Judge Nicholas McNamara. "The science here tells me that Mr. Burnside was incapable of safely controlling his vehicle, whether he thought he was or not, whether he's telling the truth or not, whether he fled or not. He was drunk, and he was substantially drunk." *Source: WKOW/State Journal, 7-31-14*

Alexander G. Garcia, 57, Middleton, ID: 5 to 15 years in prison. Garcia blamed Satan for causing him to molest a 12-year-old girl in a storage room at the Nampa Seventh-day Adventist Church where he was a deacon in July

Fr. Walsh once tied the boy up with ropes from his vestments and raped him, turning up the music when the boy's cries got too loud.

2013.

Judge Bradley Ford retained jurisdiction, which means Garcia will be evaluated in the prison system for 1 year, after which Ford can decide to release him on probation or have him finish his prison term.

Garcia also was also ordered to pay a \$5,000 civil penalty and more than \$3,000 in fines. He was charged initially with lewd conduct with a minor but pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of sexual abuse of a minor under age 16. *Source: Idaho Statesman, 7-29-14*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Jennifer Herrick, 61, a former New South Wales teacher, is suing **Thomas Knowles**, the former superior of the **Blessed Sacrament Fathers**, for sexually assaulting her for 14 years. Herrick, who has a congenital orthopedic disability, alleges repeated assaults, including forcing her to have sex in a park grandstand in sight of other people.

The Catholic Church's decision to reinstate Knowles to public ministry in Melbourne last year after it had agreed to a \$100,000 settlement with Herrick left her feeling "revictimized," the suit said.

Herrick, who said she was a virgin in her early 20s when the alleged assaults started, is also suing the current and 2 former heads of the religious order. *Source: The Australian, 8-7-14*

Arthel Coleman, former deacon at the Born Again Christian Center, East Palo Alto, CA, is suing Pastor **Andre Harris** and members of his extended family for allegedly trying to sell for personal profit both the church and a house Coleman donated. The church is still listed for sale for \$999,950.

Harris family members occupy 4 of the church board's 5 seats. The other is vacant. Coleman alleges congregants never approved any such transactions. *Source: Mercury News, 7-31-14*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Diocese of Venice, FL**, settled a suit for 6 figures that alleged **Jean R. Joseph**, 49, a now-suspended Catholic priest, molested a teen boy in Ft. Myers in 1993. The victim, now 37 and living in Port Charlotte, was "outed" by Joseph and his lawyer at a public rally in 2009 after the suit was filed. The priest and victim are Haitian.

The plaintiff said he spoke out not for money but to stop Joseph, whom his dying mother considered a son, from participating in her funeral.

At a canonical trial, a nun who lived in a house Joseph owned in Haiti testified "she believes she and her sisters were there to provide cover for the defendant's homosexual behavior," trial documents said. *Source: News-Press, 8-23-14*

Jon Jaker, 54, Orange, CA, won an undisclosed settlement in his suit against the **Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis**. Jaker alleged he was molested repeatedly starting when he was 11 by **Thomas Stitts**, pastor at St. Leo Catholic Parish in St. Paul. Stitts died at age 50 of cancer.

Jaker's mother said she tried to report the abuse in 1971 to the archdiocese but was told no one there handled such reports.

Jaker alleged that on one visit to the rectory, Stitts made him undress, fondled him and rubbed his genitals on him.

Jaker said, "I lock my doors still, in my own home, in my bedroom."

At least 14 other victims have named Stitts in lawsuits. Among them are 4 Edina brothers who say he molested them as a priest at Our Lady of Grace in Edina. *Source: Pioneer Press, 8-21-14*

A **Kansas City** jury awarded \$350,000 to a former employee and her husband who alleged the **Christian Fellowship Baptist Church** misrepresented that its 2007 investigation into the woman's abuse allegations was a serious inquiry aimed at learning the truth. **Stan Archie** resigned as pastor and as president of the Missouri Board of Education in January 2013 after 2 women accused him of sexual misconduct. Three other women later made similar allegations.

Church elders received a copy in 2007 of a letter in which the former staffer complained to Archie that "all you wanted to do was . . . make

me your sex toy."

Elders then questioned Archie and the staffer and concluded her charges weren't true. A statement in a church publication instructed church members to shun her and her supporters.

"It tore from them their family of faith," plaintiffs' attorney Rebecca Randles said in her closing arguments. "These men were shameless." *Source: Kansas City Star, 8-7-14*

Yaakov Weingarten, a rabbi in Brooklyn, NY, agreed to pay \$522,000 restitution to settle a suit filed by state Attorney General Eric Schneiderman for collecting money for 8 fake charities. He and his wife Riva will pay \$360,000 of the \$522,000 to 2 Israeli charities that actually do the work Weingarten claimed the fake charities were doing.

The Weingartens used donations to pay a mortgage and improvements at 2 houses and to pay cable TV and electricity bills.

He pleaded guilty May 19 to 3rd-degree criminal tax fraud and was sentenced to 5 years' probation. *Source: Daily Forward, 7-23-14*

Legal Developments

Matthew A. Kidd, 58, Muncie, IN: Kidd, pastor of Freedom Point Apostolic Church, is now set to stand trial on Jan. 15, 5 days short of 6 years after he was charged with child molesting and sexual misconduct with a minor for alleged assaults of 2 teen brothers in 2002-05. A 2012 trial ended in a hung jury on those charges but Kidd was found not guilty of vicarious sexual gratification, stemming from allegations made by a member of the same family.

His second trial has been postponed 8 times, mostly at the request of defense attorneys. *Source: Star Press, 8-23-14*

A Jan. 20 trial date was set in Hartland, NY, for **Roy Harriger**, 70, on 9 counts of child molestation, including 1st-degree incest. At least 15 people in 3 states have signed affidavits that Harriger, pastor of Community Fellowship Church, molested them, but most are past the statute of limitations.

Current charges involved 3 alleged victims, including Harriger's own son. "I wish people would understand they need to come forward, because like me, it's 40 years later. And you know all these kids and everything that they're now coming forward with, even ones that have testified before have come out with even more," George Harriger said. *Source: WVIB, 8-19-14*

The trial in **Cleveland** of **James McGonegal**, a Catholic priest charged with soliciting a park ranger for sex, was postponed so a judge can consider the appropriateness of the charge. The soliciting was deemed a felony because McGonegal tested positive for HIV.

The priest's lawyer argued it shouldn't be a felony because medical advancements since the law was passed in 1996 make infecting a partner with HIV much less likely. *Source: Plain Dealer, 8-18-14*

A mistrial was declared in Corinth, MS, when a jury couldn't agree whether **Timothy Nail**, pastor at Farmington Baptist Church, was guilty of sexual battery. Nail allegedly molested the victim between Aug. 2012 and April 2013 when she was 6 and 7.

The girl testified Nail inappropriately touched her at her grandparents' house. A new trial will be scheduled, possibly in late October. *Source: WREG, 8-11-14*

Appeals by former **Irish priest Tony Walsh**, 60, sentenced to separate prison terms of 16 years and 15 months in 2010 and 2012 for serial child abuse, were denied by the Court of Criminal Appeal. The court described the crimes as "depraved" rape and sexual abuse of boys in the 1970s and 1980s by Walsh, known as the "Singing Priest" for his role in a clerical vocal group before he was defrocked.

Evidence showed he met his first victim when the boy was 7. Walsh later invited him to his home to listen to his record collection. The boy visited him twice a week for 5 years.

According to testimony, he once tied the boy up with ropes from his vestments and raped him, turning up the music when the boy's cries got too loud. *Source: RTE News, 7-31-14*

Federal bankruptcy Judge Susan Kelley has ordered mediation to resolve issues in the 3-year-long case involving clergy abuse victims, creditors and the **Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee**, which filed for bankruptcy in 2011. More than 500 alleged victims have since filed claims.

A 2012 mediation attempt failed. A plan proposed earlier this year would give 128 victims about \$4 million from an insurance settlement. Other claimants would get nothing.

The archdiocese would use the other half of the \$8 million insurance settlement and \$2 million borrowed from a cemetery trust fund to cover attorneys' fees and other bankruptcy costs. Victims hoping to tap into the \$55 million cemetery trust fund are outraged by the plan.

A separate suit over the trust fund is pending before the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in Chicago, which heard arguments in June. *Source: AP, 7-30-14*

The 8th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals upheld the 50-year prison sentence of former **Kansas**

City Catholic priest and convicted child pornographer **Shawn Ratigan**, 46. The court ruled that U.S. District Judge Gary Fenner didn't commit procedural error or abuse his discretion in imposing the sentence requested by prosecutors. *Source: Kansas City Star, 7-25-14*

Allegations

Robert E. Gamel, 64, was placed on administrative leave by the Diocese of Fresno, CA, during an investigation of "Internet related sex crimes" allegedly involving at least 1 teen. Gamel has been a priest at St. Joseph's Catholic Parish since 2009.

Police detectives served a search warrant at the St. Joseph's rectory, seizing computer equipment, hard drives and other potential evidence. *Source: Fresno Bee, 8-19-14*

Diocese of **Pittsburgh** Bishop David Zubik notified 6 Pittsburgh-area Catholic parishes that **John Carroll**, 86, a retired priest living near Boston, has been accused of molesting a child while he was pastor at St. Michael Parish in Elizabeth, PA, in 1962-63.

It took 11 years for the diocese to alert the parishes after it was notified in 2003 by the Boston Archdiocese that Carroll had been accused. Only now is the archdiocese taking steps to remove Carroll from the priesthood.

At the time that the diocese was informed, said spokesman Ronald Lengwin, the church considered child sexual abuse a "moral defect" but not necessarily a crime. *Source: Tribune-Review, 8-18-14*

The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse heard a wrenching account of how **Melbourne** Catholic priest **Victor Rubeo** molested 2 generations of males from a single family.

Paul Hersbach and his father Tony testified and then were interviewed by public TV. Tony Hersbach and his twin brother Will were molested by Rubeo in the 1960s. The priest then abused Tony's sons, Paul and Adam, in the 1980s.

Paul and Tony Hersbach said they have lost their Catholic faith as a result. In 1996, the police contacted Tony and Will to tell them Rubeo had confessed to abusing them. Neither twin had told the other. Rubeo received probation and served no time.

Paul alleged in 2004 that Rubeo had molested him but the family didn't go to the police until 2010. Rubeo was charged with 30 counts and died at age 78 in 2011 before trial. *Source: abc.net, 8-18-14*

The Catholic Church in **Chile** confirmed that **Fr. Gerardo Joannon** "actively participated" in the forced adoptions of at least 2 babies taken from their unwed single mothers more than 30 years ago and given to married couples in traditional Catholic families. Joannon was also allegedly engaged in an "inappropriate relationship" with a mother.

The church sent Joannon to Madrid in October "to initiate a process of psychological and spiritual accompaniment."

The underground adoption network operated in the 1970s and 1980s and was made up of wealthy families, gynecologists, social workers, lawyers and priests, according to The Guardian.

Pregnant women who refused to participate were anesthetized during delivery and later told their babies had died.

Joannon reportedly participated in funeral Masses for the supposedly dead children, church officials confirmed. Empty caskets were used. *Source: NY Daily News, 8-14-14*

A secret Catholic Church report found that **Australian priest Peter Searson** of Doveton was found guilty of child sex abuse in 1997 by a church panel but no criminal charges were ever brought.

The revelation that the church knew about Searson's long history of child abuse, including in the confessional, was found in a report by the Independent Commissioner into Sexual Abuse Peter O'Callaghan, who was appointed by then-Archbishop of Melbourne George Pell, now a cardinal. The archdiocese never released those findings.

Searson died in 2009, when 15 priests and a bishop gathered to pay their respects.

He was the last of 4 priests accused of molesting children at Doveton Parish from 1972-97. The others were Thomas O'Keeffe, Wilfred Baker and Victor Rubeo. *Source: Daily Mail, 8-11-14*

Minnesota Catholic priest Kenneth LaVan began sexually abusing girls with his first parish assignment in the 1960s but wasn't removed from active ministry until 2013, court and internal church records say.

"The secret personnel file of Kenneth LaVan shows a pernicious 'blind spot' among Catholic officials at the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis: the stunning and heartless minimization of the sexual abuse of girls and women," plaintiffs' attorney Jeffrey Anderson said in a statement.

LaVan, 81, retired in 1998 and lives in Oakdale.

Psychologist Gary Schoener, hired by the archdiocese to examine LaVan and investigate 2 early complaints by girls, said in a report that

it "seems extraordinarily unlikely" that the girls' claims were fabricated. Putting LaVan back in a pastoral role, he said, would be "very risky."

But the archdiocese kept assigning him to different parishes, interspersed with stays at treatment programs in New Mexico and Maryland. *Source: Pioneer Press, 8-11-14*

Attorneys for a **Minnesota** man suing the **Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis** and the **Diocese of Winona** have released names of New Ulm priests accused of sexual misconduct.

In a civil suit deposition, Francis Garvey, a Catholic priest and former top official of the Diocese of New Ulm, MN, identified diocesan priests accused of sexual misconduct. The diocese had refused to release the list until the suit was filed:

David A. Roney, Francis Markey, Vincent Fitzgerald, William J. Marks, Michael G. Skoblik, John L. Gleason, Douglas L. Schleisman and John M. Murphy. *Source: KSTP, 8-4-14*

Removed / Resigned

Ernest Formichelli, who taught at Cardinal Mooney High School, Youngstown, OH, from 1976-2013 and St. Christine School from 1971-76, is no longer employed by the Diocese of Youngstown and no longer is a deacon.

The Ohio Board of Education in September 2013 accepted a resolution "to accept the voluntary surrender and to enter an order to revoke permanently the 5-year professional high school teaching license and permanent nontax teaching certificate" of Formichelli.

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests said the information was a "random discovery" it made on the board's website. Judy Jones, SNAP's Midwest associate director, said a SNAP member had been molested by a deacon and another person also had accused that deacon of abuse. Jones said both accusations were against Formichelli.

Jones said it's the diocese's responsibility to release or post the names of abusers on its website.

The Mahoning County Prosecutor's Office didn't release any information, but Jones said reports were taken. *Source: The Vindicator, 8-17-14*

Richard Salas is still listed as administrator for St. Joseph's Catholic Parish, Gander, **Newfoundland**, but is no longer ministering as pastor to the congregation.

Diocese of Grand Falls Bishop Robert Daniels confirmed that Salas is under investigation by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. He gave no details. *Source: Western Star, 8-5-14*

John Fitzgerald, 66, pastor of Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church in Conway, PA, has been put on administrative leave and is living in temporary housing while church and law enforcement officials review an allegation of unspecified sexual abuse dating to the late 1990s.

Bishop David Zubik said Fitzgerald can't administer sacraments or dress or otherwise identify himself as a priest while on leave. *Source: The Trentonian, 8-3-14*

Pope Francis has ordered the **Paraguayan Diocese of Ciudad del Este** to remove **Carlos Urrutigoity**, a priest accused of sex abuse in Pennsylvania, as deputy bishop and to sanction **Bishop Rogelio Ricardo Livieres Plano**.

Urrutigoity was sued in 2002 for sexual abuse of minors in the Diocese of Scranton. He and another priest, **Eric Ensey**, were suspended by then-Bishop James Timlin amid allegations they molested students at St. Gregory's Academy. The diocese reportedly settled the case for \$400,000 in 2006.

Urrutigoity, a native of Argentina, was transferred to Canada before settling in Paraguay.

During his visit to Paraguay to investigate, Cardinal Santos Abril y Castello told Bishop Plano to stop ordaining priests. *Source: Religion News Service, 7-30-14*

John H. Wadeson was stripped of his priestly duties in the Archdiocese of Agana, Guam, in the wake of allegations of past sexual abuse in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. His whereabouts are unknown.

A 2004 report lists Wadeson as being credibly accused of molesting 2 people between 1973-77 while working with the Divine Word Missionaries order. Wadeson worked in Los Angeles between 1972-85 and taught at Verbum Dei High School, an all-boys school. *Source: AP, 7-25-14*

Other

William "Bill" Scott, 68, Lumberton, NC, shot and killed his 64-year-old wife Charlotte at their home before turning the gun on himself, according to the Robeson County Sheriff's Office.

Scott was interim pastor at Charity Baptist Church in Hope Mills and served as treasurer at East Lumberton Baptist Church. *Source: WTVD, 8-23-14*

Former Catholic priest **Rodney L. Rodis**, 58, died in a **Virginia** prison of undisclosed causes.

Continued on page 22

Letterbox

Members strengthen wall of separation

It's because of all the incredible work you do and your bravery that I make this important investment of Lifetime Membership. Through FFRF, my husband Doug and I have read so many good books and articles. We have met many impressive and intelligent people at the conventions.

Thank you for all of the successes and willingness to stand up for humanity, reality, the ability to question, fairness and the law. On top of this, I won't have to remember to pay the annual fee. Woo-hoo!

I want to add a shout-out to the awe-inspiring young people and individuals who use their intellect to stand up to the bullies who shove religion into every public arena. They have all done this at great risk of being ostracized and threatened by so-called friends,

family members and others in their communities. It's so good to know that they are out there questioning senseless tradition and speaking out against it. We're inspired by all of you!

Deborah Hilpipe
Minnesota

•••

With the beheading of journalist James Foley, I feel compelled to finally make my membership a lifetime commitment. Just more proof that religion and government (religious governing) do not mix.

Thank you for all the effort to keep our democracy secular. Please find enclosed my \$1,000 Lifetime donation.

Robin Rusboldt
Wisconsin

•••

Finally! Someone has mentioned the elephant in the room, or rather in the U.S. Supreme Court chambers — the male Roman Catholic majority.



Gary McDougal in Michigan writes: “[Crank mailer] Chuck Thompson gets a big laugh saying we can't use U.S. currency because it says IN GO WE TRUST [sic]. Don't worry. I've got us covered. I had a stamp made and I stamp all my and my wife's currency with it. One day Mr. Thompson may receive one of my bills in his change.”

In appreciation of your New York Times ad, I have donated \$1,000 to the building fund.

Keep up the good work.
Walt Bilofsky
California

Grandparents rejected '5 little popelings'

I find it sadly ironic that a century after three of my grandparents from Roman Catholic Poland shook off the mental shackles of that church when they arrived in the U.S., I am being dragged back under church rule by the five little popelings on the Supreme Court.

Kathleen Yagelo
Michigan

Student essayists give thanks for help

Thank you very much for the student essay scholarship! It will go a long way toward college. I will continue to speak for the separation of church and state throughout (and beyond) college.

Ryan Muskopf
New York

•••

Thank you so much for selecting my essay as a scholarship winner. It is such an honor to be selected by a prestigious organization. I look forward to receiving Freethought Today and becoming an active member.

Philip Kaltman
Georgia

Benefactor praises award recipient

We have a Hallmark store in the area that advertises on the local channel that has a wide collection of Christian books and gifts. I'm thinking of going in there and asking if they have any Jewish or atheist books or cards. Of course, it's only fitting that they're located next to a Hobby Lobby.

It's a shame that we can't launch a recall against Chief Justice Roberts and his gang of four, but unfortunately we can't do that (it probably wouldn't succeed anyway, what with the state of today's society).

Thank you for choosing Max Nielson as the first recipient of the Allen P. Wilkinson Student Activism award. I look forward to making this a permanent award to a deserving student.

Allen P. Wilkinson
California

'God ain't dead — he's in your head'

As a confirmed agnostic (who knows, who cares?), I think American fundamentalists are basically poor analytical thinkers who value their club membership (church and like-minded friends) over critically thinking things

To whomever opens this bible

Jamie Tobitt writes from California: My wife and I have been proud members for a few years now. I have been putting a “Hotel Room Bible Rebuttal” in every Gideon bible I find during my travels (over 100 nights a year), so I've placed several hundred of these in hotel rooms all over the country.

I have been wordsmithing it for a while — trying to keep it to one page that I fold into quarters, and place behind the front cover of the hotel room bible. I did not want to destroy or deface the bible because it would simply be replaced. I want to share the most current version with anyone who is interested in using, copying and improving it. [To see FFRF's “beware” offerings, go to ffrf.org/shop/stickers and click on Stickers & Bible Warning Labels at right.]

Perhaps you opened this bible for answers. Well, there is some good advice in here, but have you really read this book?

I'll get right to it. I am an atheist. Don't worry; I don't necessarily want to convert you (although I think the world would be better without religion). But there are a few points I want to share.

•••

My life is not empty or meaningless. This is the only life I will ever have. So I'm going to enjoy it as much as I can. That gives it much meaning. I can only try to make the people I care about as happy as I can before my time is done. Of course, I'd like to think there is an afterlife. . . who wouldn't? But wishing that something is true is not the same as it actually being true.

I believe in love, family, freedom, country, and working hard to help the world become a better place for everyone. None of this is in conflict with my atheism.

I am a strongly moral person. I consider my actions, weigh the consequences, and decide whether it will do more harm than good to me and others. We don't need a bible for our morals. If you followed the morals in the bible, you would be considered immoral by today's standards.

Atheism is not a religion; atheism is the rejection of religion, specifically. . . the rejection of belief in gods. This is not the same as saying “there is no God” because that requires proof of god's non-existence. The burden of proof is with the person making the claim, not the person who hears the claim. For example; if you claim there is a green unicorn living in your car, I am going to need some substantial evidence before I might believe you. In the case of god, I have not seen enough evidence to make me believe that the statement “god exists” is true.

Atheists are generally not the im-

moral, un-American evil-doers that many think we are. Granted, there are amoral people who also happen to be atheists. But the same could be said for Christians, Muslims, or any other group.

For that reason, it doesn't make sense to link atheism with communism and anti-American ideals. This largely came from the anti-communist propaganda in the 1950's. That is also when god showed up in the Pledge of Allegiance and on our money.

America is NOT a Christian nation. This is a misunderstanding that I don't have space to get into. Everyone in America has the constitutional right to practice the religion of their choice (or not) as long as it doesn't affect others personally. A separation between church and state is the ONLY way to ensure religious freedom for everyone. Our founding fathers knew this. They intentionally created a secular government despite that many (not all) of them were Christian.

I could potentially be convinced that god exists (or ghosts, or the Easter bunny) if real evidence were presented. Still, even if I became convinced that god existed, it doesn't mean he would be worthy of worship. There would be a lot of questions (i.e., Support of slavery, suppression of women, death sentences for the mildest offense).

I believe in evolution as the best explanation of life on this planet. No, science does not know exactly how life started. But that doesn't mean the next likely answer is that an invisible man in the sky did it. Evolutionary science is strong science using real, verifiable, reproducible evidence. Science tries to find answers based on evidence. Religion gives you answers and then constructs the ‘evidence’ to support it.

There are so many ‘true’ religions in the world. How can this be? A de-

vout Muslim and a devout Christian see each other with equal confusion as to how the other one could possibly believe they are the true one. Now think about the thousands of variations even within Christianity and you can begin to understand my point.

But I'm not just focusing on the Christian god. What about gods we don't hear much about anymore? Zeus, Thor, Odin, Apollo, etc. They were as real to their believers as Yahweh, Jesus, or Allah is to current believers. How would you tell a believer of Zeus that his god is not real, and still protect yourself from the same arguments?

The bible is filled with known forgeries and amendments that biblical scholars agree have been added to older texts over the years. But no original text exists so we can't verify who or what was first written.

So it comes down to faith. Faith believes something is true in the absence of evidence to support that it is. I try to minimize the things I believe on faith and maximize the things I believe on evidence. Doing that has led me to realize there is no evidence to support the claim that god exists.

•••

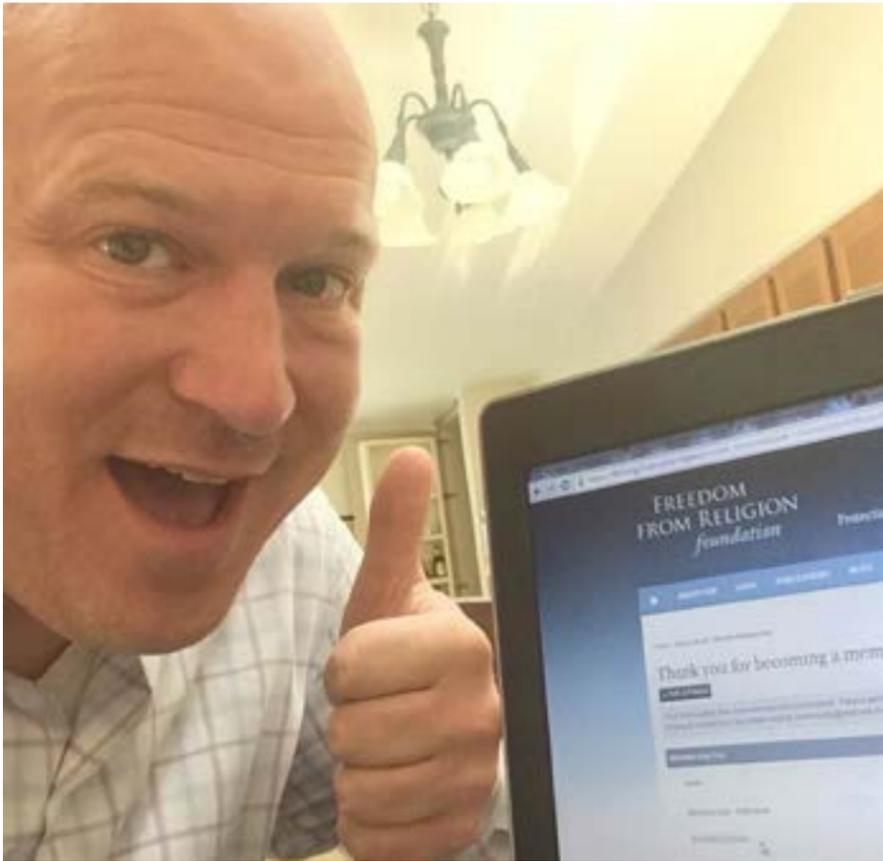
There are three questions you can ask yourself.

- 1.) WHAT do you believe?
- 2.) WHY do you believe it?
- 3.) WHY should other people believe it too?

•••

If you can come up with solid, reasoned, logical answers. . . congratulations! However, I'm willing to bet that your answers would not hold up to any examination for real evidence.

If you are interested, there are a number of web sites and groups out there that help explain what being a positive-atheist is. Good luck.



'My Book of Mormon'

David Michael, who hosts a podcast called "My Book of Mormon" (mybookofmormonpodcast.com/) shows off his new FFRF membership. "For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by religion and religious beliefs. Perhaps it's because I've never had faith in any religious worldview myself, but I've always struggled to understand why people believe what they believe."

through (creationism vs. natural selection, etc.).

One of the most apt homilies I've seen appeared as graffiti on a local bike path underpass: "God ain't dead, he's in your head."

Bob Varden
Washington

Crime blotter deserves broader audience

I've been a proud member for several years and really look forward to Freethought Today. It's a great combination of different things from legal victories to the crank mail. I appreciate seeing your stories about the New York Times ads and the billboards that share our message.

My favorite part has got to be the black collar crime blotter. More than any other section this really brings home that the problems in the church are *not* in the past and that it's not just one church!

I'd love to see the crime blotter reprinted in a major newspaper or two. It shows the level of deceit that occurs under the guise of spiritual guidance. I think it has the potential to make people think twice before sending their money to support charlatans, con men and pedophiles. If you ever consider publishing the blotter to a larger audience, I'd be willing to contribute.

In the meantime, please keep up the good work!

David Leftwich
Colorado

Don't confuse your sins with our laws

"Don't make your sins my laws." Think of the things we could not do if this happened:

No Sunday golf (keep holy the Sabbath), no beer and football (no alcohol at meals), no bacon and eggs or barbecue (no pork), no ability to raise children outside of poverty (no control of family size with contraceptives), not being able to cremate loved ones and instead having to hold a funeral you

can't afford.

And so on, depending on the religion du jour.

Patricia Wilson
New York

Tolerance for gospel lessens with age

This is a little reminder of just how gullible people really are [a Baptist church marquee saying "God answers knee mail"]. I live in what I would classify as a small "village" in the bible belt of Texas, mostly Baptist of some sort.

The sign says it all. So let it be noted that nothing fails like prayer. The longer I live, the less tolerant I am of people preaching the "gospel" and expecting me to fall in line and follow.

I love the crank mail. I can see the ignorance in every word.

Becoming a freethinker has changed my life considerably, and I have come to like the way the change has made me feel, about living and life in general. In retrospect, I think my father was an atheist, although I never heard him make the statement that he was. I never saw him bow his head to any man, nor can I ever remember him saying grace over a meal. And, it certainly did not hamper my upbringing. He has been gone now about 50 years, I wish he had been around to see the family I raised.

Best of luck with your work.

Jack H. Henley
Texas

Heinlein saw through religious notions

I remember Dan Barker commenting that theology is a subject of study with no subject to study. He said it much more eloquently, of course.

In reading *Job: A Comedy of Justice* (1984) by Robert A. Heinlein, I found that notion expressed so beautifully that I thought I'd share it.

The protagonist says, "Theology is never any help: it is searching in a dark cellar at midnight for a black cat that isn't there."

I would, by the way, recommend the book. Heinlein does some lovely skewering of religious notions.

Dianne Centa
Ohio

Thanks for diligence on church politicking

I am very glad someone finally got the IRS to start cracking down on churches trying to influence elections. I have been mad about the fact that Christians have been preaching politics from the pulpit in open defiance of the law. Thank you for getting the IRS to move on this issue.

I plan on joining FFRF next payday. Any group that stops the Christian fundies from taking over the world, I have to support completely.

Jeffrey Quillinan
California

Thinking more clearly about evolution

What is now repeated like a mantra is "I believe in evolution." But the problem is not how we evolutionary biologists understand the comment, it is the ambiguity of the terms "believe" and "evolution."

From my point of view, "belief" is so ambiguous as to be almost meaningless. To creationists it absolutely means that whatever one believes in has no need of evidence, merely faith. But for the biologist and any other good scientist, the term means that to "believe" in something means there is considerable evidence in the natural world to whatever phenomenon it may be, that it is considered to be correct. But what a difference in the interpretation of "believe!" Even the dictionaries all seem to be confused, considering "believe" and "accept" one and the same, just synonyms. Just look at your dictionary or Google it.

I propose that we separate the two terms to be: (1) "to believe" is to understand that whatever it may be, that it is absolutely correct on faith alone without any observations in the natural world needed and (2) "to accept" is to understand that whatever it may be it is considered correct only tentatively and can be questioned at any time.

The second term "evolution" is also ambiguous. First, evolution merely means change. But the term has been used as something absolute in a Darwinian sense. So with such vagueness, no wonder it is a huge target that can be the subject to endless and senseless criticism from creationists. I propose that we substitute the terms "evolutionary biology" for the overused term "evolution."

To reword the original phrase "I believe in evolution," say "I tentatively accept some of the theories of evolutionary biology." That eliminates the absurd idea that evolution is some sort of god. Remember that some theories in evolutionary biology have been lacking in evidence (such as "essentialism," "mutationism" or "inheritance of acquired characteristics"). Other theories have been supported by evidence (such as "natural selection," "gradualism," or "punctuated equilibrium").

Finally, I just want to say that there is no one grand theory of evolutionary biology. So how can one say they believe in *the* theory of evolution?

Charles W. Brown
California

Love is all you need before meals

I expect to be part of a family gathering at Thanksgiving and, as the oldest member, will be asked to say a few words before dinner. My sons are freethinkers but they have a habit of marrying women of some sort of belief (mostly Catholic). I have composed a short piece that I hope will please everyone this year:

"Whatever or various ideas of life forces, we are brought together by the most powerful force of all — love that will sustain us and, if we share it generously, will overcome whatever differences we may have over the details. I am very proud and thankful to be a part of this family.

Lea Augustine
Illinois

Navy veteran appreciates FFRF's efforts

I'd like to extend my heartfelt appreciation and thanks for all that you do to preserve secular standards in our government and the military. Every victory is a step in the right direction, and reading about things like this help to vindicate a 21-year Navy career defending the rights for which we fight.

I look forward to reading about future victories for our secular rights.

Douglas Wright
California

Two by two, they darken my door

When two Jehovah's Witnesses (always two) arrived at my door a couple Saturdays ago, here is what I wish I would have said to them.

"One of the many things I like and appreciate about atheists is that they do not go door-to-door on a Saturday (or any other day) and disturb people by handing out unwanted brochures and talking about God. Atheists are secure enough in their beliefs (or nonbeliefs) that they don't feel the need to try to round up as many people as they can to try to bolster their beliefs through strength in numbers."

I also want to comment on the term "nones." It suggests a negative connotation and sounds suspiciously like "nuns," something I don't want to associate myself with. We are *not* "nones." We have beliefs; they are just way different from those of the religious!

I wish I had a replacement name, but surely, one of the many smart and wise atheists out there can come up with a great one.

Sue Schuetz
Wisconsin

Editor's note: The Pew Research Center lumps atheists and agnostics into its "nones" category along with people who say they believe "nothing in particular" and unaffiliated believers. Not a very precise or useful categorization, certainly.

Non-prophet status accorded to FFRF

After years of membership in FFRF, I at last have learned why we are a tax-free organization and do not have to pay any taxes. It is because we are a non-prophet organization, yes!

Ted Utchen
Illinois

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Continued from page 19

Rodis, a Philippines native who lived a double life as a husband and father of 3 daughters, was convicted in 2008 and sentenced to 18 years for embezzling at least \$600,000 from 2 parishes.

In 2007, parishioner Phil Scoggin recalled Rodis' pitch for donations to help tsunami victims in Indonesia. Scoggin wrote a check for \$500 on the spot.

"He deserves an Academy Award for acting because at the same time he was stealing money from us, he was telling us to 'be good,' and that hurt," Scoggin said. "The fact that he took money from people who really needed it is unconscionable." *Source: Times-Dispatch, 8-19-14*

The 1st District Appeals Court in Illinois gave custody to the father of 2 girls because their mother had them take part in church rituals in which members engaged with the pastor in

naked prayer sessions.

Court documents said the unidentified woman exposed her minor children to "Light Therapy" by pastor Phil Livingston of Light of the World Ministries in Wauconda. During the "private" sessions, Livingston inserted his fingers into members' private areas while he told them to touch his. He and his wife Colleen call themselves "The Naked Apostles."

A former church member testified she saw the mother and her daughters in Livingston's home, where the sessions took place, and said he asked the mother to prepare her daughter for the ritual.

Livingston claimed in 2011 that the sessions helped cure a range of issues, including drug addiction and yeast infections, and that nudity is used in a "desexualized" manner. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 7-28-14*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

Sixth place: High school essay contest

Forever secular

Continued from page 13

the Earth again. No one protests these outbursts besides me, and I always get many negative glares for speaking up for secularism. In AP literature, I steadfastly voice my opinions on nonreligion and the importance of the wall of separation. I stand alone in these classrooms as the lone representative of freethought.

Recently in my community, a student's religious grandparent challenged a book in my school, and it resulted in the removal of the book from the curriculum at every school in the district. Along with over 300 of my peers, I signed a petition to keep the book in the curriculum, but our efforts were in vain.

Despite this, hundreds of copies were distributed for free in my community because of a fundraiser, and it awakened people to the evils of censorship. One of the main reasons the book was challenged was because it was called "anti-Christian." This upset me since my school is public, and religion should have no influence on my education. It intrigues me that some Christians are blatantly against the book, and some have no problem with it and have even rallied behind the anti-censorship efforts.

This helps me see that Christians can't be grouped together entirely as being completely closed-minded or unresponsive to change, just like atheists shouldn't collectively be viewed as radical or dangerous.

I care deeply about separation of church and state, especially in schools, because I don't want other students to have to face similar challenges. I do not need religion or a deity to be a good person. I do not need a holy book to outline my morals, or a priest to tell me women are inferior and ignorance is acceptable. I do not need childish tales from long ago to guide me through life and give me hope.

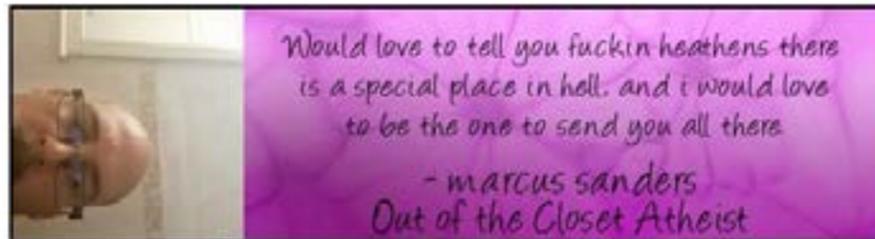
I need people — good, caring, intelligent people — who act from the heart of humanity and the brain of science. I need logic and freethought to help me escape from the chains of silent atheism and solve the problems we face as human beings.

Fallon Rowe, 17, Meridian, Idaho, will be attending Utah State University to major in environmental geoscience and minor in journalism. Her interests include rock climbing, traveling, mountaineering and writing. She's a member of FFRF and the Secular Student Alliance.



Saluting FFRF plaintiff Marie Schaub

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor was one of about 25 speakers at the third annual Pennsylvania State Atheist/Humanist 2014 Conference in Pittsburgh on Aug. 29-31. At right is Marie Schaub, who is the named plaintiff in FFRF's ongoing federal lawsuit challenging a Ten Commandments Eagles Club monument in front of the high school in New Kensington, Pa. Marie, the mother of a student, came forward publicly and has put up with a lot of guff.



This was posted on FFRF's website.

Sharing the Crank Mail

With the emergence of the Islamic State (aka ISIS), crank mailers have a new suggested location for us to move to, along with Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, Cuba and France. A small sample of the many hundreds of emails FFRF received recently, printed as received.

To FFRF Ideas: I've met allot of pricks in my day but this group is a fucking cactus. May god bless you. — *Steven Haley*

first amendment: I hope all your members' nipples fall off and grow back on their foreheads and they all start lactating at the same time. That's also part of that first amendment thing. Freedom of speech and of religion doesn't seem to be on your fascist radar. I'm sure you guys and Hitler would have gotten along fine. I mean you guys look at people that believe in God the same way he did the Jewish population. — *Russ Walker, Colorado Springs*

Your Children: All of your children need a bullet right between their eyes. — *Elmo Sippy, Ellijay, Ga.* [Editor's note: This was reported to police.]

The Scumbag Mooslims in Minnesota: You prevent chaplains in FLA from saying a prayer before games, but you don't say a word when the goat fuckers want to build a Mosque, aka recruiting ground, in Minnesota? You just want to eviscerate Christians, you GOD less cocksuckers. FUCK OFF AND DIE. — *Connecticut*

We have enough babies in America: I think you are right up there with ISIS. Virtually the same thing only based in America. We dont gripe about you driving your foreign cars do we as Christians? No, because we dont care. We'll look the other way when you drive by in your Toyota. YOU ARE A BUNCH OF SELF ABSORBED WORTHLESS SELFISH CHILDREN THAT PROBABLY GOT BEAT UP ALL THE TIME IN SCHOOL. SO PUT YOUR CRAYONS AWAY AND YOUR COLORED PAPER AND PENCILS AND LOOK AT THE REAL THREAT TO OUR COUNTRY. — *Jameson Mayer, Cedar Rapids, Iowa*

Crosses: How do I go about removing your foundation from the United States? I am a war veteran and your foundation offends me. — *James Kimble*
P.S. Hey did you know there is a cross on my computer keyboard.

religion: are,t there better things to worry about like bulling in schools drugs weapons getting a education that,s what really should matter. — *teresa low, connersville, indiana*

Religion: You guys are a bunch of dumbass fucktards. How can you be offended by something you don't believe in? Assholes! — *Mr. Jesus, Heaven, Illinois*

Plaques at schools: As a non-practicing Jew myself I just want to say that you are a bunch of idiots. You have so little faith in your faithlessness that you feel intimidated by crosses and plaques on public lands. This country was built on a Judeo-Christian ideal. I just wish that our idiot judges would wake up and throw your lawsuits, and you, out on your butts. — *Stephen Lubin, New York*

Freedom of religion: For an orginazation that doesn't want religion sure does act like it is carrying on a crusade of religious porportion. I should sue you on behalf of tax payers for the continued law suites that fail. I am also contacting congress and senate to enact a law that if a law suite is brought forward and is considered frivolous that who ever brought the law suite should be charged any and all cost associated with the law suite and a fine of \$250. — *Troy Cummings, Virginia*

Suggestion: Madison, Wi., one of the known marxist cities in the USA! It is a sad thing to witness the USA sinking into an ABYSS of touchy-feely diversity, ultaliberalism, political correctness, socialism, and Saul Alinsky Marxism. — *Doc H*

Attacking Christianity: You Bastards, I hope God has mercy on your souls. — *Robert Guccione*

Your thought process: Your belief in nothing is still a belief. I find your organization pushing your agenda is upsetting to me and I do not like it. I will now be a minority voice trying to desolve your organization. — *Leo Bauer*

Seminole High football team: I am a supporter of the constitution. And I agree that there should be no establishment by government. But to build bridges, you have to have humidity, and be able to say, "I was wrong". — *Courtney Campbell*

Thoughts on freedom from all religion: What about the muslim that prays out in public, or in state parks. What about the Jews who wear a yamaka? Is it that you only attack Christianity because you think that Christians are meek? If that's what you think then clearly you need to brush up on your history. — *Joe Craig, Branson, Mo.*

Quit Your Sniveling: I would bet that the overwhelming majority of your members are new to being atheists. I'm sure they were unaware of what it even meant until they heard about it, while standing in line waiting to vote for Obama. They couldn't wait to get home and try it for themselves. So, they sent you \$5.00 and left for work the next day wearing a T-shirt proclaiming themselves an atheist. The problem with these people, is that in 12 months when all their fake facebook friends start saying Christianity is the new trend, they will rush out of their homes to beat the door down at their local church to donate \$5.00 and get their "I'm a Christian" T-shirt. At which point your "foundation" will crumble and you'll have to go find a real job. — *James Briskey, San Antonio*

satan's immisary's: I see you morons are conspiring against church's with the gestapo gov't agency? will hell be hot enough for you kretns? I pity your soul's on judgment day! — *aaarocket37*

Your So Called Victories: What you call significant legal victories are nothing but effective blackmail techniques. Your fear mongering and threats in my mind seem very similar to those of Nazi Germany. All employees of my company pray before each and every day - that will not end. If an employee doesn't like it - they know where the door is. — *Michael Moran*

ass holes: The pendulum will swing back the other way ass holes and i hope it will take you'r heads off when it dose. Try to tell me what i can and can not do and see how long you breath! — *Carl Thurston, Texas*

IRS Lawsuit: You want the IRS one or the most corrupt gov't. agencies to spy on churches. I am 68 years old and the older I get the more I fear for My Grand Children. Shame on you. The American is getting Pissed WATCH OUT. — *Thomas Kimble, West Palm Beach., Fla.*

It is freedom OF religion: Our assigned technicians have breached your email accounts. Our investigators have identified your family members. Our firm is a GSA contractor of the US Federal Government (GSA 6HNDN4) and have published the identities of your recorded conditions and the identities of your immediate family members, including all relevant personal data including addresses, social security numbers, and related family members above the age of 13. Good luck with that! — *Jonathan Hawfield, Houston*

What Is a Freethinker?



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

Meet an Intern



Noah Bunnell's internship was made possible thanks to FFRF member Dr. Paul Redleaf.

Name: Noah Bunnell.

Where and when I was born: New London, N.H., March 16, 1994.

Family: Parents, Deborah Schachter (51) and Thomas Bunnell (58); sister Eliza (18).

Education: Rising junior at Carleton College in Northfield, Minn.

My religious upbringing was: Jewish. I went to a Reform synagogue, attended Hebrew school, had a bar mitzvah, etc., although my Jewish mother and Christian father were always careful to let me come to my own conclusions.

How I came to work as an FFRF intern: The roots of my skepticism reach back to the *d'var Torah* (lesson of the Torah) which I wrote and then delivered at my bar mitzvah at age 13. Surprisingly well-received given its heretical slant, my talk centered on questioning why a benevolent god would smite Aaron's sons, concluding that even religious doctrine is only meant to offer guiding principles rather than "The Word," and even then, it often has some pretty bad advice.

Thereafter, I clung to Judaism for its cultural comforts, but not for its answers to the metaphysical questions of the universe and the transcendent. For those, I looked to science and increasingly, to literature and poetry. Since I'd developed into an atheist, FFRF seemed like the place to be.

What I do here: I compile bios of famous freethinkers for the Freethought of the Day portion of our website and

write summaries of FFRF's legal victories. I help out wherever needed.

What I like best about it: It's great to work for an organization helping to effect important change and to write about those changes actually taking effect.

Something funny that's happened at work: All too often, people call to spew odious and empirically dubious claptrap (did God send religious people to make life a living hell for nonbelievers?). I love that my desk is situated so that I can hear the creative responses the people answering the phones come up with in response to these crank calls: Lisa's "Well, I hope you pray for me!" Katie's recent go-to — shouting, "USA USA USA!" Or one that's been suggested, but hasn't been implemented yet: "Thank you for calling the Christian-Atheist Dating Hotline! What type of atheist are you interested in today?" Cracks me up.

My academic interests are: English literature, religion, politics and German.

My heroes are: Kurt Vonnegut and George Carlin.

These three words sum me up: Introspective, curious, outdoorsy.

Things I like: Postmodern fiction, running, social justice, Woody Allen movies, corny puns.

Things I smite: Men's rights activists, passive aggression, the Religious Right, bigotry.

My loftiest goal: Peace.



Chuck Hoonstra's professional background makes him very helpful as a reader of student essays.

Meet an Office Volunteer

Name: Charles D. Hoonstra.

Where I live: Madison, Wis.

Where I was born: Mount Pleasant, Mich.

Family: My wife and two daughters — one with two children, a girl age 13 and a boy age 11.

Why I volunteer for FFRF: Like Madison and Jefferson, I believe strongly in the separation of church and state. For me, as a nonbeliever, FFRF is a home for like-minded people who insist on intellectually honest thinking.

What I do as a volunteer: So far, I have graded student essays.

What I like best about it: I am very impressed with the quality of the young people. They are resolute in their independent reasoning. They don't let myths or false assumptions get in the way. Plus, many of them are outstanding writers with compelling personal stories to tell.

Something funny that's happened at work: Being retired, I have no current work story to tell. But I must confess the other day I stupidly emailed my water bill payment to Madison, Ala., instead of to Madison, Wis.

Education: Madison West High School, 1959; B.A. and M.A. in philosophy, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1963, 1965; J.D., UW-Madison Law School, 1967.

My day job is/was/will eventually be: I am a retired Wisconsin assistant attorney general. I worked in a variety of areas in my 36 years, including positions in state government and at the University of Wisconsin. I taught business law courses at UW-Platteville and UW-Madison. For many years I served the Law School in an ad hoc capacity, teaching the practicum courses. I still help out with the moot court programs.

Education: Undergraduate, graduate and law degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

These three words sum me up: According to my grandchildren, I am awesome, funny and fair. But of course, they are the least objective people in the world on that question.

My freethought heroes are: David Hume, John Stuart Mill and Bertrand Russell.

Things I like: Sports, history and being a grandfather.

Things I smite: Confirmation bias (starting with a desired conclusion, rejecting conflicting facts and cherry-picking supportive facts).

Why did I closet my atheism so long? Because I did not want to tarnish my father's community legacy. He was an effective and popular local pastor.

The reward of demonizing atheists is attracting intolerant religious voters. Such fearmongering also reinforces negative associations with "the progressives" (i.e., Democrats). Democrats are equated to atheists who are "trying to take God out of our country." Can you name anyone who's trying that? I can't. **Pam Price, Reno, Nev., letter to the editor** *Reno Gazette-Journal, 9-2-14*

I'm sorry, I don't necessarily want to trip over anyone who's praying. I want you to pray. I want you to pray whenever you are. But I don't want to know you're doing it. I don't want to know

because it's your private business. **Entertainer Whoopi Goldberg, on seeing people pray at shopping malls and asking her why she's not praying over her food** *"The View," 8-6-14*

Let's lose the lazy, media-fueled assumption that being black equals being hyper-religious. I'm a very morally grounded African-American man who doesn't believe in God. Why is that so hard to grasp?

Darrin Johnson, Black Skeptics Los Angeles member *theroot.com, 8-18-14*

Recruit a Member Sample Copies for \$2

Send \$2 with the name and address of each person you wish to receive a sample copy of Freethought Today to: FFRF, P.O. Box 750, Madison WI 53701 **Freedom depends upon freethinkers** (Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)

FFRF's 37th national conference, Los Angeles, weekend of Oct. 24-26

Last call to FFRF national convention

Convention schedule

Tentative, subject to change

Arrive Thursday if you want to do some morning sightseeing.

Friday, October 24

2 PM Registration opens, etc.
 3-5 Afternoon workshops by FFRF Staff Attorneys **Rebecca Markert**, **Patrick Elliott** & **Andrew Seidel**
 FFRF legal updates/ combatting Christian nation claims
 Complimentary appetizers
 Dinner on your own
 7 PM Welcome
Dan Barker & Annie Laurie Gaylor, Co-Presidents
 7:30 Freethought Heroine Award
 Attorney **Marci Hamilton**
 8:15 "Nothing Fails Like Prayer" Secular Invocation
 Introduced by Andrew Seidel
 Winner to be announced
 8:20 Freethinkers of the Year
 Presentation: **Susan Galloway** & **Linda Stephens**
 9:00 Emperor Has No Clothes Award
 Presentation
 Anthropologist **Donald C. Johanson**
 Booksigning & Complimentary Dessert Reception follows

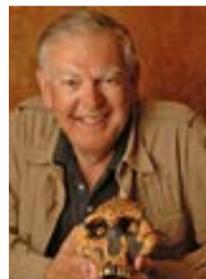
9:25 "Nothing Fails Like Prayer"
 Song by Dan Barker
 9:30 Welcome
Lisa Strand, FFRF Director of Operations, Dan Barker & Annie Laurie Gaylor
 9:45 An Atheist Actor in Hollywood
Scott Clifton
 10:15 Coffee/tea break
 10:30 A Better Life: Atheists Speak
 Out on Joy & Meaning in a World Without Religion
 Photographer/author **Chris Johnson**
 11:00 **Jessica Alquist**
 11:30 **Barbara Manzini**
Noon to 2 Lunch/sightseeing on your own
 2 PM How a Good Methodist Became a Better Atheist
 Anthony Pinn
 2:45 Champion of the First Amendment Presentation
Erwin Chemerinsky
 3:15 Emperor Has No Clothes Award
 Presentation
 Physicist **Sean Carroll**
 4:30 Booksigning for all three afternoon authors
 6:30 Banquet Dinner (for ticket-holders)
 8:00 Drawing for "clean," pre-In God We Trust currency (\$1 to \$100)
 The Singing Atheist - piano concert by **Dan Barker**
 Speaker to be announced

Saturday, October 25

8 AM Non-Prayer Breakfast (for ticket-holders)
 9:00 Registration, ballroom reopens

Sign up today or online:

ffrf.org/outreach/convention



Johanson



Carroll



Pinn



Chemerinsky



Stevens



Galloway



Manzini



Barker



Johanson



Hamilton



Clifton



Gaylor



Seidel



Elliott



Markert



Strand

Return with payment to be received no later than Fri., Oct. 17 to: FFRF, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701

**Freedom From Religion Foundation's
 37th Annual National Convention
 October 24-26, 2014**

Los Angeles, California

Make checks payable to "FFRF"

Number registering

___ FFRF member registration(s) @ \$65 per person	\$ _____
___ Non-member spouse or companion accompanying member @ \$70.....	\$ _____
___ Non-member registration(s) @ \$110.....	\$ _____
(Save \$5 by becoming an FFRF Member)	
___ Student registration(s) @ \$10	\$ _____
___ Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast @ \$30* per person	\$ _____
___ Classic ___ Vegetarian ___ Vegan ___ Check if gluten-free	
___ Saturday Night Dinner @ \$55* per person	\$ _____
___ Chicken ___ Halibut ___ Vegetarian ___ Vegan ___ Check if gluten-free	
* Meal prices include 23% gratuity & 9% sales tax	
	Total: \$ _____

Name(s) Please include names of all registrants for nametags

Address

City/State/ZIP Please include phone/email (in case we have a question about your registration)



West coast confab — Convention last minute details

A powerhouse of distinguished state/church advocates, attorneys, scientists and freethinkers awaits you at FFRF's national conference, as well as freethought camaraderie, music and irreverency.

Early registration and meal orders end Fri., Oct. 17 (register online at: ffrf.org/outreach/convention). You may register at the door (minus meals) beginning 2 p.m., Fri., Oct. 24, at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel, 506 S. Grand Ave., Los Angeles, Calif.

See costs on registration form and online.

The convention room rate of \$169 single or double is available through Sept. 23, 2014. Phone the Biltmore directly at 1-800-245-1410 to reserve your room or to check on rates available after the cut-off. Click on the link for online hotel reservations at ffrf.org/outreach/convention.

FFRF's website carries full details, a convention FAQ and more!
See you in L.A!