

Freethought Today

Complimentary Copy
Join FFRF Now!

Vol. 32 No. 1

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

January-February 2015



Newly expanded Freethought Hall

Thanks to the generosity of members, FFRF staff moved into expanded offices in downtown Madison, Wisconsin, in January. See pages 12–13 for more building photos. (Photo by John Hart. Reprinted with permission of the Wisconsin State Journal.)

Bola Olaniyan was the first official visitor to FFRF's "reborn" Freethought Hall addition. Bola, a University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate student, signed the first line of the guest book in early January. At left is Charlotte Stein, receptionist and assistant, who says Bola is her best friend. (Katie Daniel photo)

FFRF eyes suit over Georgia school prayer abuses

"One of Georgia's most charming cities" is how Swainsboro (pop. 7,600), which is between Atlanta, Augusta and Macon, bills itself. But its school district, Emanuel County Schools, appears to have a most uncharming habit: inflicting daily prayer upon its captive audience of children.

"Jamie Doe," a kindergartner at Swainsboro Primary School (motto: "Where Cubs Become Tigers!") was singled out by the teacher after Jamie's parents, "Jane and John Doe," complained about daily classroom prayer. The Does pulled Jamie out of school by the end of the year.

Jamie's first-grade sibling, "Jesse Doe," was also subjected all semester long to pressure to pray. Jesse's teacher said outright that Jesse's mother was a bad person for not believing in God.

The parents are FFRF members who contacted FFRF for legal support shortly after the 2014-15 school year started. Letters from FFRF and complaints by the parents have not ended the violations. A lawsuit, as this goes to press, is being prepared for federal court.

The Establishment Clause violations were daily. Before lunch, Jamie's teacher, Cel Thompson, asked students to bow their heads, fold their hands and pray, while leading the class in a "call and response" prayer: "God our Father, we give thanks, for our many blessings. Amen."

In Jesse's first-grade class, teacher Kaytrene Bright led students in this

daily prayer: "God is great. Let us thank you for our food. Thank you for our daily prayer. Thank you. Amen."

The parents contacted Principal Valorie Watkins in August 2014 to object to the prayers. Rather than stopping them, the teachers told the Doe children to leave their classrooms and sit in the hallway while the rest of the class prayed. Jesse reported that the teacher "used her mean voice" when instructing Jesse to wait in the hall. The teacher also unnecessarily singled Jesse out by telling the class that Jesse can't recite the Pledge of Allegiance since it contains the words "under God," although the parents had not discussed the pledge with the teacher.

When the Does renewed their objections a few days later, the principal said other parents who didn't want their children to participate in prayer had been "OK" with the "solution" of leaving the room. The Does explained that was unacceptable, but daily prayers continued.

Jamie's teacher next announced to the entire class that Jamie wasn't allowed to pray to God, which resulted in Jamie being teased.

FFRF objected strongly in an Aug. 20 complaint letter, pointing to more than 65 years of Supreme Court precedent against religious devotions and proselytizing in public schools. Despite a promising reply from the district's attorney, the school continued to organize Christian prayers. Eventually, the

parents withdrew Jamie. Home schooling Jamie has substantially burdened Jane Doe, who has three younger children to supervise at home.

Pressure on Jesse escalated in December. Jesse's science teacher encouraged Jesse to "make a good decision" regarding prayer in the classroom. Jesse's physical education teacher likewise encouraged Jesse to begin praying. The teacher even held Jesse back from recess to talk about Bright's views of God, explaining that God loves Jesse and made the world. The teacher indicated to Jesse that Jesse's mother was a bad person for not believing in God. Around this time Jesse gave in and started participating in classroom prayers.

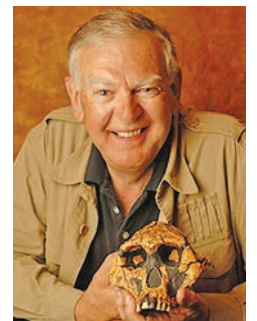
"It should not be necessary for FFRF to sue over such an obvious violation of specific Supreme Court decisions barring devotions from our public schools," noted Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. "No child in our secular school system or their parents should be subjected to prayer or stigmatized when their parents speak up to defend the Establishment Clause. But unfortunately, it appears a lawsuit will be the only way to protect the freedom of conscience of these young children."

"If anyone needs a picture drawn on how destructive religion is in our public schools, this situation is a perfect example," added Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president. "The fact that such abusive practices are continuing in our

public schools 53 years after the first Supreme Court decision against school prayer shows how important FFRF's legal work is."

Inside This Issue

Donald C. Johanson's dissent from religion



Page 8



See more FFRF billboards in action.

Page 24

In Memoriam

Freethought Hall wing to be named for Lonsdale



Harry Lonsdale as a candidate for U.S. Senate. (Photo: Benjamin Brink/The Oregonian)

Harold K. Lonsdale 1932–2014

Harry Lonsdale, 82, a prominent Oregon scientist, politician and philanthropist, died of heart failure Nov. 11, 2014, at John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital in Indio, Calif. He was an FFRF Lifetime Member who had given \$100,000 to FFRF's building fund.

A wing of the new Freethought Hall addition is being named the "No Hell Below Us" Harry Lonsdale Wing.

"We were so very sorry to learn of Harry's death and had been in correspondence to obtain his portrait for the wall and feature him in our 'Meet a Member' section in Freethought Today," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. "We were so impressed with Harry's achievements, reported in numerous articles about his life appearing in many West Coast dailies."

Lonsdale was born in Westfield, N.J., the son of a Sicilian immigrant mother and a Welsh father, earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Rutgers University and a Ph.D. from Penn State University. He served in the U.S. Air Force and was married three times and had two children with his first wife, Connie Kerr Lonsdale.

His company Bend Research, co-founded with Richard Baker, specialized in membranes and was bought

out by a pharmaceutical firm in 1985. "He was a risk taker and entrepreneur. He left a secure career in Silicon Valley and came up to Bend and started a four-man research company, at risk, in 1975," said colleague Rod Ray, a former Bend Research CEO.

Lonsdale ran unsuccessfully three times as a Democrat for the U.S. Senate "[H]is candidacies had a big impact on Oregon politics in the 1990s," reported Jeff Mapes of The Orego-



Harry Lonsdale

nian. "And they turned Lonsdale into a determined champion of limiting the flow of big money into political campaigns."

"If you want democracy, work for campaign finance reform," Lonsdale said in a 2003 column in *The Oregonian*.

State Rep. Lew Frederick, D-Portland, credited Lonsdale for playing a major role in creating Oregon's "robust high-tech industry" while chairing Gov. Vic Atiyeh's Science Committee

in the early 1980s. "They put together a plan that relied on the ingenuity of Oregon and an education system that supported that kind of innovation," Frederick wrote. "In fact, they were at least a decade ahead of their goals for the Silicon Forest."

Survivors include his daughter, Karen, and his son, Harold Jr.

FFRF is so grateful that this distinguished entrepreneur, activist and philanthropist rated FFRF and freethought high on his scale of causes.

Saying goodbye to Bob



Robert Nordlander 1932–2014

The Appleton Post-Crescent, a Wisconsin daily newspaper, called Robert Nordlander, who died at 82 on Dec. 11, 2014, "likely the most prolific letter writer in Post-Crescent history." In fact, wrote Larry Gallup in a reminiscence about Nordlander, the paper inaugurated a "one letter per month" policy in Bob's honor.

"With us, Nordlander's most frequent topic was his atheism, which put him at odds with many of his readers," Gallup added.

"We first got acquainted with Bob Nordlander as a result of his freethinking letters to the editor to *The Capital Times* in Madison in the 1970s," recalls Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. "Bob was one of our earliest members, joining FFRF before we went national in 1978, and was a regular at our earlier conventions held mainly in Wisconsin."

He was a board member (state rep-

resentative) of FFRF for many years, and coordinator of FFRF's Atheist-Freethought Library for the Blind, devoting many hours of volunteer work reading books and issues of *Freethought Today*.

When the Internet came along, Bob took to it with a nonreligious passion, sending regular emails on religious and freethought topics to a large list of subscribers. "I will miss those daily nuggets in my inbox," says FFRF co-president Dan Barker.

He was born June 17, 1932, in Neenah, Wis., the only son of Swedish immigrants. He lived in the area all his life. His obituary said his only biological family are cousins living in Sweden. He earned a B.A. in history with minors in political science, Spanish and French at the University of Minnesota and taught English, Spanish, history and French at various schools. He also ran as a Democrat for the state Assembly and on the Socialist-Labor Party ticket for the U.S. Senate and lieutenant governor.

In a "Getting Acquainted" piece published in *Freethought Today* in March 1984, Bob, a Korean War veteran, noted he served "four inglorious years in the United States Air Force," where he wrote a history of the USAF flight Test School still in print. Bob was a great debunker of myths, including the myth that there are "no atheists in foxholes."

He wrote that his first memory of religion was going to church and seeing "a very angry man in the pulpit who really scared the hell out of me."

A memorial to celebrate his life was held Jan. 17 at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Appleton.

"He'll be missed by us at FFRF, and his strong network of friends and organizations," said Gaylor.

Notify Us of Your Address Change Promptly!

Email: info@ffrf.org

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

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 February 2015 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

Freethought Today

published by Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

info@ffrf.org • FFRF.org

P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701
(608) 256-8900 • FAX (608) 204-0422

Editor: Bill Dunn, ftoday@ffrf.org

Production Editor: Dan Barker

Executive Editor: Annie Laurie Gaylor

Contributors:

Philip Appleman, Robin Buckallew, George Gold, James Haught, Buzzy Jackson, Donald Johanson, Andrew Seidel, Matthew Stark

January-February 2015

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

FFRF, ACLU sue over Indiana courthouse crèche

A large Christian nativity scene on the Franklin County Courthouse lawn in Brookville, Ind., was removed the day after Christmas instead of staying up through at least mid-January, as has typically been the case for the past 50 years. The early removal came pursuant to a federal lawsuit filed by the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana in late December.

The county had also added a disclaimer to the crèche for what appears to be the first time.

The ACLU of Indiana, which is representing FFRF and its courageous local plaintiffs, Steve Kristoff and Renana Gross, sued the county Dec. 16, four years after FFRF first complained on behalf of local residents about the annual violation. The life-sized nativity scene was once even erected at the foot of a flagpole, attempting to tie religion to patriotism. FFRF kept complaining, with the county moving the religious scene even closer to the courthouse entrance in 2011.

Plaintiffs are represented by ACLU Senior Staff Attorney Gavin Rose. FFRF

Staff Attorneys Rebecca Markert and Sam Grover are co-counsel.

The Thomas More Society of Chicago, a Catholic group, is representing Franklin County, which agreed to remove the nativity promptly in an agreement overseen by U.S. District Court Judge Tanya Walton Pratt.

In response to the suit, the county adopted on Jan. 12 its first codified policy for erecting courthouse displays. The policy specifies that “a permit for use of the courthouse grounds will be made on a nondiscriminatory basis and will not be based on the religious or political content” of a display.

Peter Breen, Thomas More Society special counsel, said, “With the enactment of this ordinance, the allegations of the lawsuit brought by the ACLU and Freedom from Religion Foundation are moot.”

To that, FFRF had this to say: “Hold on just a minute, for Pete’s sake.”

Getting the county to adopt an official policy on displays is a victory, but it’s not the only victory that FFRF hopes to achieve through its litigation. FFRF’s claim that the county’s continued, sea-

sonal display of the nativity violated the rights of non-Christians remains a live issue in the case.

Litigation will continue on that issue in order to establish that the county violated the rights of its citizens and to better restrict what sort of involvement the county can have in endorsing displays in the future.

Moving forward will also allow FFRF to uncover just how much preferential treatment the county has given to the display and to depose Commissioner Tom Wilson, who ranted to a reporter last year: “If we don’t start standing up for our rights, we’re going to lose them. The atheists and the liberals are taking over our country. They are the ones demonstrating and doing everything, and we’re the ones sitting back and doing nothing.”

Wilson added, “Pretty soon, one morning we’re going to wake up and our freedoms are going to be gone. We’ll have a socialist government or a dictator telling us what to do.”

Ever since FFRF’s first complaint in 2010, locals have rallied by the nativity to support keeping Christian worship



scenes at the seat of county government.

“We are not a Christian nation, Indiana is not a Christian state, and Franklin County is not a Christian county,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Government needs to stay neutral and should not be turning Christians into insiders and the rest of us into outsiders.”

The discovery phase of the suit is under way and should be completed by early April.

The case, No. 1:14-cv-02047-TWP-DML, is in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Indiana, Indianapolis Division.

At FFRF’s 2015 convention:

Hewett to receive ‘Atheist in Foxhole’ honor

Steven Hewett, an FFRF Lifetime Member, will receive the 2015 “Atheist in Foxhole” Award at FFRF’s national annual convention in Madison, Wis., the weekend of Oct. 9-11 at Monona Terrace Convention Center.

In January, the city council in King, N.C., settled *Steven Hewett vs. City of King* in Hewett’s favor, agreeing to stop flying a Christian flag and to remove a cross from a kneeling soldier statue at a veterans memorial.

Hewett is a former police officer and Afghanistan war veteran with a Combat Action Badge and Bronze Star. He returned home from the service to find a Christian flag flying at the King Veterans Memorial.

The city in December agreed to repeal a policy under which a flag flown on one of several poles was selected for each week of the year by lottery. The policy, inaugurated after Hewett’s first complaint, let people choose a preapproved flag representing their religion of choice or to fly no flag at all.

After the suit was filed on Hewett’s behalf by Americans United by Separation of Church and State, a sculpture of a kneeling soldier with a cross was added.

Hewett, under a gag order earlier, is now free to talk about the controversy, which made him the focus of intense attack. North Carolina Lifetime Member Scott Burdick produced the documentary “In God We Trust?” about the state/church battle. (It can be viewed for free online.)

Locals rallied on behalf of the Christian symbols, waving a multitude of Christian flags and cheering speakers who “encouraged” non-Christians to move elsewhere. Hewett found himself battling the “Christian nation” myth as much as the state/church violations. He’s had to take security precautions.



Steven Hewett at the memorial in King, N.C., where the city agreed to remove the Christian flag at left and the kneeling soldier sculpture.

Early-bird registration

The convention formally opens Friday, Oct. 9, with an after-dinner program, but pre-convention tours of the “reborn” Freethought Hall/addition in downtown Madison will take place Friday, followed by afternoon legal workshops and appetizers at Monona Terrace Convention Center, 1 John Nolen Drive. The program continues all day Saturday, followed by the Sunday membership and state representatives’ meetings, adjourning by noon.

Hotel accommodations adjoin the convention center at the Hilton Madison Monona Terrace, 9 E. Wilson St. Convention room rate is \$169 (king and double/double), plus tax; \$189 king corner room and king/doubles

lake view; \$199 deluxe doubles; \$219 king deluxe. Phone 1-866-403-8838 or 414-935-5941 (local number is 608-255-5100) and please be sure to mention “Freedom From Religion Foundation.”

The cut-off is Sept. 7 while rooms last. The Hilton has also created a secure and private reservation website personalized for FFRF. Find link at: ffrf.org/outreach/convention/.

Additional rooms are being held at the Sheraton Madison Hotel, 706 John

Nolen Drive (several miles away, close to the Madison Beltline.) at \$139 (king and double/double), especially convenient for those who are driving. Phone 1-888-267-7077. Future issues will update the schedule and speakers and include the registration form.

Plan ahead not to be disappointed!

Listen to an interview with Steven Hewett on Freethought Radio (scroll to Jan. 24, 2015 show at ffrf.org/news/radio/).

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
(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

Fleas

"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." — Isaiah 45:7

I think that I shall never see
a poem as ugly as a flea,
a flea whose hungry mouth is pressed
against a buttock or a breast,
a flea that spreads disease all day
and lifts its little claws to prey:
poems are made by you and me,
but only God can make a flea.

I think that no one ever made
a poem as powerful as AIDS,
or plagues that may in summer kill
half the bishops in Brazil
and share the good Lord's Final Answer
with clots and cholera and cancer—
for God concocted pox to mock us,
staph and syph and streptococcus:
poems are made by bards or hacks,
but only God makes cardiacs.

I think that I shall never smell
a poem as pungent as a hell,
where grinning devils turn the screws
on saintly Sikhs and upright Jews,
giving them the holy scorcher,
timeless, transcendental torture:
poems can make you want to yell,
but only God can give you hell.

© 1991 by Philip Appleman. Based on "Trees" by Joyce Kilmer
From the book *Let There Be Light*
Available as a song on FFRF's 'Beware of Dogma' CD



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 "After-Life" Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Phil's books: ffrf.org/shop.

YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

TUNE IN TO
FREETHOUGHT RA-
DIO

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



Overheard

For the past week, Charlie, an atheist newspaper, has achieved more miracles than all the saints and prophets combined. The one we are most proud of is that you have in your hands the newspaper that we always made.

Charlie Hebdo's editors, announcing a run of 3 million copies a week after 12 people died in a terrorist attack at its Parisian magazine office

The Associated Press, 1-14-15

They shouted "We have avenged the Prophet Muhammad." Some useful idiot will claim it had nothing to do with religion.

Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, on the deadly attack at Charlie Hebdo in Paris

Twitter, 1-7-15



Apologists for religion blame fundamentalism for these despicable acts. Really? Well the one thing fundamental to fundamentalism is belief in a god. **Former Catholic seminarian Alex Mooney, column headlined "Religion belongs to Dark Ages: Atheist says terror attacks reinforce his belief all faiths are nonsense"**

Scottish Daily Record, 1-10-15

I may not agree with you, but I will defend to your death my divine right to kill you.

Perversion of a Voltaire quote attributed to a terrorist with a smoking gun in a cartoon drawn by Steve Benson about the Charlie Hebdo massacre

Arizona Republic, 1-8-15

We must also recognize and loudly proclaim that the quest for any and all "Islamic State(s)" has no place in modern times. Theocracy, particularly Islamism, is a proven failure.

Excerpt from a full-page ad by the Gatestone Institute, a conservative think tank, signed by 22 Muslims

The New York Times, 1-11-15

The signs were designed to restrict women from using public spaces simply because they were women . . . and constitute a severe injury to the rights of women to equality and respect.

Ruling by the magistrate court in Beit Shemesh, Israel, ordering removal of ultra-Orthodox signs warning women to dress modestly and not loiter in certain areas and awarding each plaintiff

\$3,750

Jerusalem Post, 1-15-15

[T]his Christmas season we're asking YOU to nominate the Number 1 "Scrooge" that deserves "recognition" for seeking to stamp out religious expression across America. So please choose the Number 1 "Scrooge" with your vote below!

Liberty Institute's 2014 Scrooge Awards announcement, which includes FFRF as a nominee for contesting Texas cheerleaders' football banners with bible verses

libertyinstitute.org, 12-22-14

I still believe that Islam often stands in opposition to human rights and women's rights. I believe that the Quran relays that Muhammad demanded death for nonbelievers. Many Muslims may disagree with my view, or interpret Islam in a more moderate way, but I cannot accept this religion myself. That is what my conscience tells me.

Waleed Al Husseini, who was beaten by guards while serving 10 months in a Palestinian prison for blasphemy and now lives in France

The Daily Beast, 12-8-14

Crazy things you can't easily put out of your mind, like "I'm going to chop your head off and put it on a stick and carry it around the town square."

Jackie Carter, pastor at First Metropolitan Community Church, Wichita, Kan., on threats she's received for performing same-sex marriages

KSN-TV, 12-14-14

I believe that the local church is the answer to the world and not the laws and politics and all those things.

Sean Edwards, Birmingham, Ala., who will keep his job as a police lieutenant after founding Empowerment Word Church, where he will serve as pastor

WBRC-TV, 12-8-14

Those of us with a secular worldview are coming together online, talking, in some countries meeting in secret. The nonreligious are raising their heads above the parapet.

Bob Church, International Humanist and Ethical Union communications director, on the Netherlands-based group's 2014 "Freedom of Thought Report" which shows seculars increasingly viewed as threats to the established order

Religion News Service, 12-17-14

“Nothing Fails Like Prayer” submission

Council secular ‘prayer’ invokes love, laughter

George Gold

“Over the past two years,” says George Gold, “we have been petitioning the mayor of Chico, Calif., to be included in the invocation rotation. On Aug. 26, we received the official invocation schedule for 2015, and we have been invited to deliver an invocation on three occasions throughout the year. Our invocations will be secular.”

**Chico City Council
Chico, Calif., Jan. 6, 2015**

Good evening Mr. Mayor, members of the city council:

I’m George Gold, coordinator of the Butte County Coalition of Reason, and I’m president of the Atheists of Butte County.

Rather than bowing our heads and closing our eyes in deference, we want to encourage you to open your eyes wide to face the reality that confronts us. We should do so without losing sight of our ideals and what we might achieve.

When this body comes together to govern, you do so with the consent of the citizens of Chico, a diverse community with many different views and opinions. This eclectic community, according to the Pew Research Center, includes 20% of the population living secular lives. In the city of Chico, that means for the first time ever, I’m here representing over 17,000 secular Chico citizens with this invocation.

Humanists, nonbelievers, agnostics and atheists by their very nature believe that we have the power to solve all problems within ourselves, amongst ourselves, through science and reason,



George Gold

and that by applying this science and reason with the strength found in sympathy and compassion, we can overcome any hurdle we encounter.

It is incumbent upon this council to make the best decisions for the entire community. In this regard, I ask that you use wisdom, common sense and empathy in your deliberations.

In your work here, take into account the implications your decisions will have now and in the future. Be reminded of the joyous laughter of children playing in the comfort of the shade of our trees. You are planting seeds for the benefit of future generations.

When there are problems, when there is debate, let us be accountable for our own actions. Let’s not point to the shortcomings of others. Let us behave morally and judiciously. Let’s

treat each other with respect.

When we need to find wisdom, let’s look to the documents of government, the Constitution of the United States, the Bill of Rights, and yes, the First Amendment, which in one sentence provides for the separation between church and state. We might even consult our city charter for direction.

Let us open our hearts to the inherent dignity and worth of each person in our community. I hope we can appreciate and realize our differences of race and religion, and or lack of religion.

In the end we are all human beings. When we bleed, we bleed one of the four basic blood groups. Regardless of race, regardless of where we live, regardless of our political affiliations, whether we are rich or poor, and yes, whether we are religious or decidedly not religious, for in every single one of us, the color of our blood is the same.

In the face of adversity, we need not look above for answers, but instead we

should recognize the proven potential within ourselves and in each other to overcome the many challenges that we will face in this coming year.

Our commonalities unite us, and I hope we and you can recognize our humanity as we get ready for the challenges of this new year.

We, the secular community, want to participate in our communities with a life full of inspiration, imagination and beauty. Each of us wants to live an honorable and ethical life. We hope each of you feels the same.

Some people say, I’m just a child of the ’60s, just look at my long hair [lifts hat], oh, gone; my big black beard, oh, gone, but I suppose that it might be true. Nevertheless, my mantra has always been make love not war. Today, I guess if nothing else, I still believe — in that.

Thank you and Happy New Year.

FFRF member George Gold, born and raised in Sydney, Australia, is a computer systems engineer.

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 Monona Terrace Convention Center, Madison, Wisconsin, October 9–11, 2015), a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

Learn more at:

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

Atheist: I’ll see your 10 and raise you one commandment

The Inspirational Atheist: Wise Words on the Wonder and Meaning of Life is Boulder, Colo., author Buzzy Jackson’s new book. Jackson, an atheist with a Ph.D. in history, also works as a researcher at the Center of the American West at CU-Boulder.

She includes a thoughtful insert in the book (which she originally wanted to title *Chicken Soup for the Soulless*) called “The 11 Commandments for Atheists.” They are:

“Do not destroy what you cannot create.” — *Hungarian-American physicist and inventor Leo Szilard*

“Do unto others 25 percent better than you expect them to do unto you. The 25 percent is for error.” — *American biochemist Linus Pauling*

“Be hard on your beliefs. Take them out onto the verandah and beat them with a cricket bat.” — *Australian comedian Tim Minchin*

“Try to leave the world a better place than when we entered it.” — *Michio Kaku, City College of New York theoretical physics professor*

“A man’s duty is to find out where the truth is, or if he cannot, at least to take the best possible human doctrine and the hardest to disprove, and to ride on this like a raft over the waters

of life.” — *Plato*

“You can resolve to live your life with integrity. Let your credo be this: Let the lie come into the world, let it even triumph. But not through me.” — *Russian novelist and historian Alexandr Solzhenitsyn*

“You cannot save people, you can only love them.” — *author Anaïs Nin*

“To make others less happy is a crime. To make ourselves unhappy is where all crime starts. We must try to contribute joy to the world.” — *film critic Roger Ebert*

“The best thing you can possibly do

I did not die. I did not go to Heaven. **Alex Malarkey, 16, author with his father of *The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven*, open letter to Christian bookstores, which resulted in Tyndale House pulling the best-seller from shelves**

The Washington Post, 1-15-15

Last time we had it, we ended up with a drunk trying to get the doors off the church. So we’ve made the decision not to have Mass when people are pouring out of the pubs sloshed. **David Hogan, pastor at St. Berna-**

with your life is to tackle the [expletive deleted] sh*t out of love.” — *Cheryl Strayed, American author of the best-seller *Wild**

“Try to be nice to people, avoid eating fat, read a good book every now and then, get some walking in, and try and live together in peace and harmony with people of all creeds and nations.” — *Monty Python’s “The Meaning of Life”*

“There are far too many commandments and you really only need one: Do not hurt anybody.” — *Carl Reiner, actor, director, movie producer*

dette’s Catholic Church in Nunthorpe, UK, estimating that fewer than 25% of parishes now offer Christmas midnight Mass

Ecumenical News, 12-22-14

In an annual index of the reputations of 40 of Australia’s largest charities, the Salvation Army fell from 10th last year to 27th this year.

News story attributing the decline to allegations that boys were dragged from their beds and raped in Salvation Army facilities in New South Wales and Queensland and that children at a Sydney home were “rented out” to strang-



Buzzy Jackson

ers who molested them in the 1960s and 1970s

abc.net.au, 12-21-14

As wars go, this one is pretty wimpy. There are no bullets or bombs, or even loud voices. The atheists’ weapons are good deeds that demonstrate that they have Christmas spirit, without the religious component. This season, they participated in a walk against hunger, made presents for the poor and packed food for the hungry.

News story headlined “Minnesota atheists observe Christmas their way”

St. Paul Pioneer Press, 12-22-14

FFRF legal team compiles variety of successes

Proselytizing in Georgia, Minn., ended

Elementary school faculty in the Whitfield County School District, Dalton, Ga., have been instructed not to proselytize students. FFRF received a report from a parent whose Antioch Elementary kindergartner was told that Christmas was "Jesus' birthday" and that "Jesus is the reason for the season."

A project in the child's class involved making a nativity scene from construction paper while the teacher read the story of the nativity. When the parent complained to the school, the solution offered was to remove the student "whenever anything religious was brought up" and to ask the parent what she would do with the child "when they do activities for Easter."

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a complaint letter to Superintendent Judy Gilreath on Dec. 23. Gilreath responded Jan. 5, saying that she met with the Antioch principal and "made her aware of the complaint and the legal restrictions concerning teaching of religion in a public school." She instructed the principal to speak with the teacher who did the nativity project to "make sure she understands she is not to celebrate religious holidays with her students."

•••

Minnesota School District 197 (West St. Paul, Mendota Heights and Eagan) took swift action after being alerted by Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott to a constitutionally problematic situation. Representatives from two evangelical Christian organizations, Young Life and Wyldlife, were seeking to further increase their access to middle school students.



A job description for a Young Life staff associate claimed they had been "blessed with open arms from a new administration" and were looking for a staffer to "build a foundation and significant ministry" in the schools.

"It is inappropriate for public schools to offer Young Life representatives unique access to a student audience before the school day on school property," wrote Elliott. "While it is laudable that volunteers are willing to assist the school with monitoring students in the morning, any volunteers must not be identified as being affiliated with a religious organization and may not mention or promote their religious group activities."

The superintendent responded promptly, saying she met with the groups' leader and told him they could not have a presence in the schools. "I was clear that under no circumstances may there be any recruitment of students to Young Life or Wyldlife, nor any discussion of religion or activities sponsored by Young Life or Wyldlife with our students."

Coach warned about soliciting prayer

Olentangy High School, Lewis Center, Ohio, stopped letting staff solicit prayers at school-sponsored events after getting a Nov. 20 FFRF complaint

letter from Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert. The girls cross-country team's coach had reportedly invited a student to deliver a prayer at an end-of-season banquet.

"Prayer occurring as part of a regularly scheduled annual event sponsored or even co-sponsored by the school certainly leads 'an objective observer, acquainted with the [prayer] perceive it as a state endorsement,'" wrote Markert, quoting a Supreme Court case.

Superintendent Wade Lucas responded Nov. 25 that the coach's prayer solicitation was unconstitutional. He said he would "take steps to monitor and ensure that appropriate distance is maintained by our coaches."

City says brochure cross was careless

After getting an FFRF complaint letter, the city of Rice, Minn., will not include religious symbols on newsletters.

The city's Spring 2014 newsletter included a cross image next to the notice that city offices would be closed Memorial Day. "Including a Christian cross with the announcement of the Memorial Day closing excludes any non-Christian or non-believing veterans. It perpetuates the myth that there are no 'atheists in foxholes' and that the only veterans worth memorializing are Christians," wrote Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert.



An attorney for the city wrote back on Dec. 2, saying that the city would be careful about using religious symbols in the future.

FFRF letters clip angels' wings

Gulf Coast Charter Academy South in Naples, Fla., removed a religious song from its repertoire after Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a complaint letter Nov. 24.

Kindergartners reportedly learned a song about a child getting lost in the woods and being saved by an angel after kneeling and praying. The chorus was something to the effect of "I believe in angels sent down from heaven."

"The music described above has a devotional message and thus would be appropriate in a church setting but not in a public school," Seidel wrote.

An attorney for the school responded Dec. 1: "Thank you for your concern. This matter is being addressed and the song will be removed from all classes. We are also reviewing the balance of the curriculum to ensure further compliance."

•••

The Arizona Department of Economic Security has discontinued use of a religious training video. A mandatory meeting for certain employees included a video featuring a comedian who talked about dying and meeting God. Agency employees were described as "angels with big white wings." The video included a prayer.

Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote the department Nov. 17 about the illegality of the video: "As a government entity, DES has a constitutional obligation to

remain neutral toward religion."

Training and Development Administrator Adele Cook responded Dec. 3 to say that the units using the video would immediately discontinue doing so, and "all agency training units will be directed not to use the video in the future."

Choir cancels gig at Catholic shrine

Aberdeen High School in Washington state pulled out of the Festival of Lights at The Grotto in Portland, Ore. The Grotto is a Catholic shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The public school choir was scheduled to perform in the church. The venue charges an entrance fee, which it pockets.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter Nov. 24 to Superintendent Thomas Opstad about the inappropriateness of such participation.



Opstad responded Dec. 2 that he had looked into the matter and decided the choir would not be attending the festival.

Athletic league says no to prayer

The Marin County [Calif.] Athletic League, which includes public and private schools, will no longer allow a Catholic school to impose prayers on public school attendees. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote a letter Feb. 25, 2014, to the Tamalpais Union High School District, which participates in the league. Justin-Siena Catholic High School, another league participant, regularly had a priest offer a prayer before home games.

League Commissioner Susie Woodall responded Dec. 3 to say that the Catholic school was now prohibited from engaging in organized prayer at events.

Calif. board votes to skip prayers

The Paso Robles [Calif.] School Board decided not to start including prayer at meetings. After learning the board was considering it, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote Board President Katy Griffin, noting that the school context is different from the context of other government prayers, such as at city council meetings.

"Students and parents have the right, and often have reason, to go before or participate in school board meetings and deliberations. Fully 70 years of firm Supreme Court precedent bars religious indoctrination and rituals from public schools for the express purpose of protection of the rights of conscience of impressionable schoolchildren," wrote Seidel.

FFRF's complainant emailed Dec. 10 to report that the board voted Dec. 9 not to pray before meetings.

Complaint stops prayer at assembly

A teacher at Green Forest [Ark.] High School led a prayer at a Veterans Day ceremony. Staff Attorney Sam

Grover sent the school district a letter Nov. 25: "While it is laudable for Green Forest High to organize an assembly to honor veterans, it is unconstitutional to allow any religious message or prayer to be part of a school-sponsored event."

A school district attorney responded Dec. 10, saying the school had assured him none of its staff would lead a prayer at a student assembly in the future.



FFRF not answer to coach's prayers

Anniston [Ala.] High School's football coach will no longer organize and lead team prayers. After reading a local news report that Coach Eddie Bullock asked for a student "prayer leader," Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote Superintendent Darren Douthitt on Oct. 31.

"We have informed our coaching staff that they cannot initiate a prayer by the embers of our athletic teams. It is also our plan to remind all faculty and staff of all our schools that they cannot initiate nor [sic] participate in student prayer," an attorney for the school district responded Nov. 17.

Oklahoma school art will be secular

Teachers in Chandler [Okla.] Public Schools will not create religious projects with their students in the future. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter to the district in 2013 after learning of an auction at which two items were religious art projects created by students: a poster with a bible quote, "Blessed are the pure in heart," and a poster that read, "Wash your hands & say your prayers cause Jesus and germs are everywhere."

After several follow-up letters, Seidel received an email Nov. 20 from the new superintendent, who said he did not anticipate the recurrence of the constitutional violation.

No more graduations in church

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote the Los Gatos [Calif.] Union School District last June about R.J. Fisher Middle School's graduation ceremony at Calvary Church.

Superintendent Diana Abbati responded Nov. 20, writing that the district would be moving 2015 graduation ceremonies to "a venue not affiliated with a religious entity."

'Finding Jesus' in school no more

The new administration of Worth County Schools in Sylvester, Ga., say there'll be no repeat of a religious assembly condoned by previous administrators. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote Superintendent Barbara Thomas on Jan. 30, 2013, after receiving a complaint that an assembly included the principal prompting a student to lead a prayer followed by a speech by a pastor who talked to students about "finding Jesus Christ."

After unproductive correspondence with Thomas, who stated that “it was the consensus of the Board [of Education] that no one’s rights would be infringed” by religious assemblies, a new superintendent, Kay Smith Mathews, eventually responded Nov. 20. She stated she could not confirm that the assembly had occurred, but said she was “most concerned about this incident” and had discussed it with the district’s principals and gave them guidelines about religion in public schools.

trict lawyer responded Dec. 18, saying he “[did] not disagree” with FFRF’s account of what happened at the lunch. “It is now acknowledged that prayer offered by staff members of a public school entity may not be appreciated by all students and parents, and it is not anticipated that this will occur in the future.”

Pole prayer limited in Alabama

Staff and church groups will not be permitted to lead religious events at Athens Elementary School in Athens, Ala. In 2013, a church group was permitted to lead a “See You At The Pole” gathering, a Christian prayer event, at the school. The school’s athletic coach reportedly led students in prayer.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent Superintendent Trey Holladay a letter Oct. 9, 2013, noting that public school employees “must refrain from actively participating in religious activities while acting within their governmental role to avoid any perception of government endorsement of religion.”

An attorney for the district responded in December, informing FFRF that no similar violations had occurred since FFRF’s letter.

Maryland DNR ends Boy Scout ties

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources has ended a partnership with the Boy Scouts of America, which discriminates against atheists and agnostics, as well as LGBT adults.

The DNR previously had an annual charter agreement with the Baltimore Boy Scouts in which the DNR agreed to conduct a scouting program in accordance with the Boy Scouts’ policies. “The DNR cannot continue to sponsor this discriminatory program,” wrote Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott in a letter Sept. 24.

FFRF stands up for Nevada students

The Washoe County School District in Nevada distributed a memorandum reminding principals that students must not be compelled to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

After a student was ordered to stand for the pledge and to leave class after refusing, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter Oct. 22, 2013, reminding the district that numerous courts have consistently ruled “that students have a constitutional right not to be forced to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance or to be compelled to stand for its recitation.”

The school district’s attorney responded Nov. 24 that he had sent a district-wide memo about students’ right to decline participation without harassment.

No more staff-led prayer at school

Staff at the Haskins Learning Center in the Pratt [Kan.] Unified School District will no longer lead students in prayer. FFRF received a report that before a school-wide Thanksgiving lunch, the principal asked everyone to bow their heads while a teacher delivered a prayer.

After Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a complaint letter, a school dis-



Dog, not dogma

It took about two months for a deputy to notice what was either a misprint or a great practical joke on a \$500 rug in the Pinellas County Sheriff’s Office in Largo, Fla. Department spokeswoman Cecilia Barreda told The Associated Press that the “In Dog We Trust” was a manufacturer’s error which another rug in the office from the same company didn’t contain. The rug later sold for \$9,650 in an online auction in which 83 people bid. Proceeds went to Canine Estates, a Palm Harbor animal shelter.

The DNR responded Dec. 22 that the charter agreement had expired and would not be renewed.

Gideons banned from Michigan school

Zeeland [Mich.] Public Schools will not allow Gideons to distribute bibles on school grounds in the future. After an Oct. 17 distribution, a parent informed FFRF that a teacher reportedly told students she would like each one to take a bible home.

“There is no excuse or justification for this practice. It is unnecessary, offensive and illegal,” wrote Staff Attorney Sam Grover.

Assistant Superintendent Jon Voss responded Dec. 22, saying that the district would make it clear to all building administrators that “third parties without a connection to the school — like Gideons — are not allowed on school property to distribute information to our students.”

Voss also said the district would contact the Gideons directly to let them know about the ban.

Fire department deletes bible verse

The Reidville [S.C.] Fire Department removed a bible verse from its website after receiving an Oct. 17 letter from Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.

FFRF had also objected to the department’s employment of a chaplain. The department removed a photo of the chaplain from the website’s “Members” section, while claiming the chaplain had “not been associated with our department for quite some time, thanks for your concern.”

Michigan district cuts religious music

Breitung Township Schools, Kingsford, Mich., is diversifying its music selections. A parent reported to FFRF that the district’s 2013 Christmas concert included many religious songs such as “Silent Night,” “Joyful, Joyful” and the “Hallelujah Chorus.”

Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor in a letter Dec. 19, 2013, wrote that “No religious song gives any educational benefit to public students for which

an inclusive secular alternative cannot be found.”

Superintendent Craig Allen finally responded in November, saying that the district would “ensure that there are a variety of songs from various origins to promote inclusion rather than alienation of non-Christian children.” The district also decided to refer to the concert as a holiday program instead of a Christmas program.

Ohio schools end bible handouts

Mad River Local School District and Miamisburg City Schools in Ohio are no longer hosting bible distributions. Both districts had hosted a group called “Shoes 4 the Shoeless” that held events to fit children with new shoes, then directed them to a table where they were given bibles.

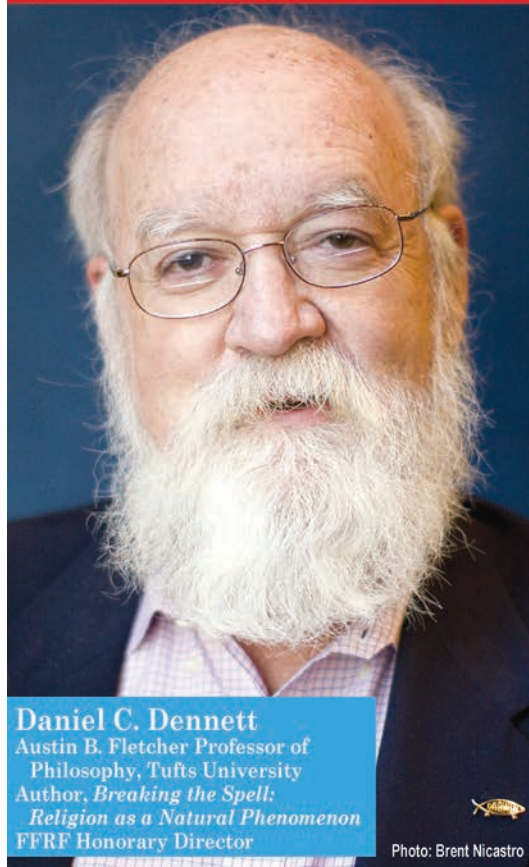
The group described itself as “a faith-based nonprofit” that “include[s] a Christian New Testament in every box of shoes [they] deliver.”

Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to both districts, noting that bible distribution as part of the public school day is unconstitutional.

After FFRF followed up, both districts’ superintendents responded Jan. 15. “We no longer hold these events in any of our buildings,” said Mad River Superintendent Chad Wyen. During a subsequent visit from the group to Miamisburg City Schools, “no Bibles or New Testaments were distributed with the shoes and socks,” said Superintendent David Vail.

—Compiled by Maddy Zieler

IN REASON WE TRUST



“If the topic comes up, acknowledge you’re an atheist. No big deal. Now let’s talk about something interesting.”

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**

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

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

FFRF.ORG/reason-must-prevail

Daniel C. Dennett
Austin B. Fletcher Professor of Philosophy, Tufts University
Author, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*
FFRF Honorary Director

Photo: Brent Nicastro

This ad appeared in the February 2015 Scientific American magazine.

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

FFRF national convention speech, Los Angeles, Oct. 24, 2014

Crowd loves Lucy scientific sleuth Johanson

This speech was given on October 24, 2014, at FFRF's 37th annual convention at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles.

DAN BARKER:

For a long time, FFRF has been offering the "Emperor Has No Clothes" award to prominent people who tell it like it is about religion. It comes from the Hans Christian Andersen story about the naked emperor who pretended he was wearing clothes, and the young boy who was unafraid to say, "He's got nothing on!"

Today we're very honored to present this award to an internationally known paleoanthropologist. He's worked in Ethiopia, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. For the past 40 years, he's conducted field and laboratory research. You might know Donald C. Johanson as the discoverer of the fossil Lucy.

Lucy, the first discovered member of *Australopithecus afarensis*, thought to be a distant ancestor of modern humans, was dated to 3.2 million years ago. Five years ago, I had what was very close to, or maybe parallels a religious experience, when I was in Times Square at the Discovery Center where Lucy is on display. I was the only one in the room, looking at what I thought was my great-great-great-grandma. I got goose bumps.

Donald is now the founding director of the Institute of Human Origins, an evolution think tank at Arizona State University. We've been inviting him for many years to our convention to speak, but it always coincided with some expedition he was going on. We have limited copies of his beautiful book called *Lucy's Legacy: The Quest for Human Origins*.

He's an ardent freethinker and non-believer. We're excited to be featuring Donald in an upcoming FFRF educational ad in Scientific American.

[Presenting award]: Thank you for telling it like it is, and saying that the emperor has no clothes.

By Donald C. Johanson

Thank you so much! Wow, we're really here. What a wonderful introduction. I was sitting over there thinking, "Who's he talking about?" You know, often I go to a sold-out crowd and they all think that Don Johnson [the actor] is coming to speak. They don't read very well.

I was thinking that I haven't read the fine print on what it means to agree with and accept this [award], so I thought I would bring it up at the beginning and ask that if I have a born again experience, do I magically see clothes on this sculpture?

This has been a very important part of my life, the study of who we are and where we come from. It has immense implications, philosophical and otherwise, everything from medicine to how we look at and treat one another.

I truly believe in under-

standing the deep roots of humanity, and the very simple fact that we now know it is based on an "out of Africa" experience, is vital to knowing who we are.

For so many years, beginning in 1856 with the discovery of the Neanderthal skull in Germany, all these white European males got together and figured out that Europe was the finishing school for humanity. Well, that's all, as we say, ancient history.

A guiding principle for me throughout my career has not necessarily been discovery-driven, to find a specimen, although I did, on the 24th of November, 40 years ago. Somebody asked me, "What's the big difference between you and Lucy?" I said, "Well, when I look at Lucy, she doesn't look a day older."

As I was saying, it wasn't necessarily that I was hoping to make this colossal discovery of a creature that has become pretty much an icon in terms of paleontology or paleoanthropology, but it was to understand our place in nature. The book that launched my intrigue about where we've come from was a book entitled *Man's Place in Nature* by Thomas Henry Huxley, who was a tea-drinking buddy of Charles Darwin.

They often sat and noodled on the question of human evolution. I can see them in Darwin's garden in Kent while they discussed how they were going to bring this shocker to the Victorian world of Great Britain, that we actually descended from the apes. Darwin, as you well know, was very reluctant to do that because he didn't want to upset the household, as his wife Emma was very religious.

And he only said that light would be thrown on the origin of man, until 1871 in his *Descent of Man*, when he articulated a number of scenarios for that. I read *Man's Place in Nature* and realized the importance of this subject, for which paleoanthropology wasn't really a moniker until the late '50s or so. I realized that we have a remarkable record preserved in Earth's geological strata that connects us with the past, with each other, and I think very importantly, connects us with the natural world.

We know, every single one of us in this room, who the creator was — Mother Nature. I will have much more to say about that as we get into this discussion.



Donald C. Johanson autographing books for appreciative convention-goers at the Biltmore Hotel. (photo by Ingrid Laas)



Donald C. Johanson with FFRF's "Emperor Has No Clothes" award. (photo by Ingrid Laas)

Dinosaurs 'left behind'

Someone said, "What was the most surprising thing about discovering Lucy?" I said, "Well, nobody even knew she was missing."

I've also been asked to comment on why I'm an atheist. I've always been an atheist. I didn't have to be converted to atheism. I went to church when I was about 12 years old. I remember it distinctly in Hartford, Conn. Some friends, who were Scandinavians, too, convinced me. They said, "You should

Why did Noah leave the dinosaurs behind?

come to the Swedish Lutheran Church here on Sunday to see what they are talking about."

So I got up unusually early, disturbing my mother, who said, "Ver are you going?" I said, "I'm going to church." She said, "Vat are you doing that fer?" Anyway, I went to church and came home, and then she said, "Deed they ask you fer money?" I said, "Yeah, they did."

And she said, this little uneducated housekeeper from Sweden who immigrated when she was 16, deciding when the New World was where everything was happening, "The first thing they'll do is control you, then they will instill fear in you, and then they will take your money."

So at about 11 or 12, I went to see my mentor, who was a German anthropologist (big surprise) whom I'd met one day, and he gave me a short course in comparative religions, how every society has, does and will have some sort of creation myth. Of course lots of them were much more intriguing than a virgin

birth or Noah's ark — how'd you like the job of cleaning the poop up on that? — or original sin.

The thing that alarmed me most about Noah's ark was that if this creator and Noah were such wonderful people, why did they leave the dinosaurs behind?

I began to realize that believing in a creator being — someone I couldn't see, someone who's keeping track of me, someone I'd be afraid of — was really not my cup of tea. I was much more of a free-thinker, as we say, and as I went through high school, I had a very adequate education at a public high school, which we should all bring back.

I lived in Berkeley for years, and my favorite bumper sticker said, "If you think education's expensive, try ignorance." During my education, I began to really understand that if I were to believe in this mythical creator — you know we only had one choice, right, since the downsizing? If you lived in Greece, we'd have a whole bunch of gods we could have prayed to, but now, with cutbacks and so on, we're down to one — that I would have to unfortunately totally reject my objectivity and logic and leap into total fantasy. I just couldn't see the benefit of that.

A grand theory

As we all know, if someone in the church doesn't know, they say, "Therefore, God," and I say "I don't know, let's find out." Science is such a rewarding, creative and charming way of looking at the universe. So why do people so resist evolution, the grand unifying theory of biology?

Think about this. Bring it up at the next astrophysics talk you go to when they explain the origins of the cosmos and string theory and particles that go faster than the speed of light so that they're younger when they extinguish than when they were born. You go home and think that it was all very logical and someone goes, "What was the talk about?" You say, "Well, I just, I don't know exactly." They're trying to figure out the grand unifying theory of the universe, right? It's a pretty big question.

Yet a retiring Englishman who went off on a five-year boat cruise once figured out the grand unifying theory of biology. The robustness of the "theory" of evolution is that: The same tenets that Darwin suggested and proffered in the middle 1800s are still the core ideas of biology. If Darwin were sitting in the back of the room and I mentioned DNA, he wouldn't have a clue. He didn't know things were inherited. He observed and interpreted and understood how important that elusive thing natural selection is, and how powerfully explanatory it is.

I suspect most people just don't think. I don't want to be too anti-clerical or anti-church; I respect people's beliefs and I don't try to destroy them. I understand that if you were born in X culture, you believe in X god, and if you were in Z culture, you believe in Z god, and so on. Before I knew about FFRF, I used to say that we have freedom of religion, but not freedom from

religion in America.

Darwin, if he were alive today, would probably be very happy with this poster ["In Reason We Trust"]. I want you to support science and reason. So take God's name off our money we all worship and replace it with "In Science We Trust." I don't think we'll do that, but we do need to get God's name off our money. There's no question.

The anti-science aspect of religion is what bothers me most intensely. It's personified in this cartoon: "Welcome to church, you won't be needing that [your brain] in here." Just take this brilliant organ out that has evolved over 6 million years of natural selection, that happens to put us at the pinnacle of intelligent life on the planet, in the solar system, and maybe even in the universe, to be so bold.

In whose image?

I think we have been given the wrong name by the Swede, Linnaeus, who called us *Homo sapiens*, meaning "wise man." You read the same newspaper stories I do — people shooting people on high school campuses, etc., etc., going after people with axes in New York. We are wise men? We are still a work in progress, a long way from where we should call ourselves human.

A more appropriate name would be *Homo egocentricus*. Whom do you think about most of the time? Come on admit it, even as an atheist, it's yourself. We think about ourselves. We think about our parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, maybe five generations of time. But the Earth is billions of years old; life is 3.5 billion years old on this planet. We believe that we're the pinnacle of evolution, that everything was designed to make white European males.

There's something very impersonal to most people about natural selection. It isn't touchy-feely like a god that creates us in his image. Who'd he look like? You? You? You? We created him in our image, obviously, not in his image.

You often see, and sometimes even television documentaries go at this from the wrong perspective, that Darwin is dead. No argument with that. He is dead, I agree. Evolution is just a theory. Right, you know what? Isaac Newton is dead, too. But gravity ain't going away, even if his ideas were called the "theory" of gravity.

I regularly lecture at colleges, universities and museums. It's always interesting to say, "Raise your hand if you believe in evolution." And you know, there's a certain percentage that do. I say, "It may all surprise you that I don't believe in evolution" — there's this big sigh of relief — "any more than I believe in gravity." It doesn't take belief; this is a fact. If you let something go, it's going to fall to the ground. You don't have to believe in gravity, it is a fact.

In biology, going back to Darwin, I think it was Dobzhansky, the great geneticist, who said that "In biology, nothing makes sense except in the light of evolution." Evolution is a fact, it's not good, it's not bad, it has no moral compass. Just like gravity, it doesn't care if your grandmother's favorite Dresden china falls to the floor in the middle of an earthquake (which we could have any minute here).

Evolution doesn't care if tens of thousands of people die of Ebola. Ebola doesn't kill you because you're a bad

person or some kind of deviant. It kills you very simply because you don't have a resistance to Ebola. Those who live through Ebola who had no medical care probably have a resistance to Ebola. I've never heard anybody say, like with sickle cell anemia and malaria, let's go find out why those people didn't die from Ebola.

From my perspective, I think that a scientific strategy, especially a biological one, with a full understanding of natural selection, gene recombination, mutation, etc., and a more aggressive approach to Ebola, would have gone much further than we have come thus far. But the West, which has the ability to do that, was fiddling away while Ebola was burning its path through western Africa, decimating people and setting its sights on places like Europe and North America.

Human beings care. That's one of the marvelous exciting things about us. That's also why I love dogs. They care, too, but we care because of our family values, because of our moral compass, because we are human beings and because we are alive. We so often forget what that means.

Richard Dawkins, my distinguished friend, says essentially, "We are the lucky ones because we're going to die." Why are we going to die? Because we were born. If there were two genes' difference, you would not be you. You would be someone else.

We need to cherish that, and we have to understand that this is an exciting opportunity to be alive and not sit around and worry about some omnipotent being keeping score to decide whether we're going to end up in eternal ecstasy or unending damnation. As I say, how could he have time to keep score on each one of us? He's so damn busy helping people sink 6-foot putts in Arizona and get extra points in football games. He doesn't have time to keep track of us.

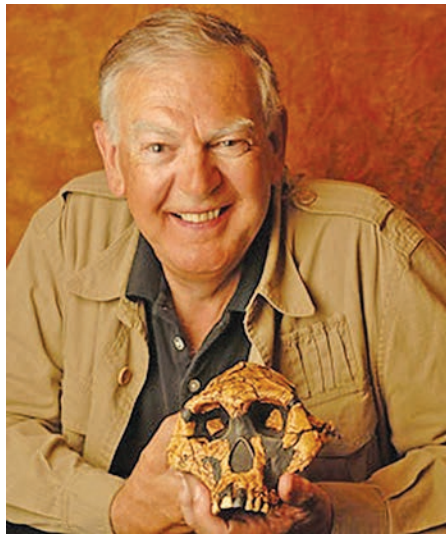
We now have over 400 specimens of Lucy's species, *Australopithecus afarensis*.

The problem is that people's prayers don't get answered. Why? Well, here it was in *The New Yorker* [cartoon]: "God finds all the prayers of mankind in his spam folder." We now have an explanation.

One of the things about natural



Donald C. Johanson, with his Emperor Award, signing a copy of his book *Lucy's Legacy*. (Photo by Ingrid Laas)



selection, which we all grow up learning, is the survival of the fittest. I was taught by my mentor at age 13 that it's really the elimination of the unfit. If you think about it, that's a better way to look at it.

The problem with natural selection is you can't weigh it, you can't see it, you can't buy it from Edmond's Scientific, it doesn't come in the color

'We know who the creator was — Mother Nature.'

blue or in G flat major. It is that fact — one cannot see it, we can only see the results of it — that makes people so reluctant. They have to see a guiding hand or a guiding force that they can imagine or pray to.

Bad rap for atheists

Atheists, and I guess there are a few in this room, get a pretty bad rap, very often. Religious people accuse us of lacking morals, having no family values. Well, unless I'm reading the wrong newspapers, I don't recall any atheists out there beheading people, stoning women or burning people at the stake.

We're accused of not being spiritual. Look at that earthrise over the moon. Does that move you, does that touch you? Does that excite you? Walking home where I live most of the time now, in San Francisco, feeling the heavy fog caress my face at night, watching nesting birds and chicks born in a window box, these are moments of great inspiration and great spirituality. Our world is filled with endless moments of inspiration, real inspiration, available to each and every human being created by evolution. We need not rely on creation myths for inspiration.

Atheists are accused of not playing fair since we don't teach creationism in science class. Well, if you're going to teach creationism, why don't we teach astrology with astronomy? In medical school we'd have to teach witchcraft along with medicine, and alchemy with chemistry. Where's it going to end?

OK, you American Airlines pilots, today we're going to discuss the flat Earth. You get on a plane in L.A., you're hoping to see the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and the pilot believes in a flat Earth? You'll never get there.

Our main duty in getting to one of the core issues of what

I'm talking about tonight is to reawaken a "reverence" for the natural world and our place in it. [We have a duty] to respect the creativity of the true creator, Mother Nature, to protect her, to take seriously our responsibilities as the most creative, but also the most destructive species that's ever lived on Earth.

The future is in our hands, and it is time that we stop turning our back on the natural world and start listening to her and working with her.

The Creation Museum [in Petersburg, Ky.] is one of our favorite places. Where else can you witness the science of cavemen cavorting with their favorite pet dinosaur, Skippy, 5,000 years ago?

Is this a time warp and we're back in the Dark Ages or something? This is lying, cheating, deceiving, warping and perverting people's knowledge. To make what? Money. How much money does the Creation Museum make at the same time it destroys young people's opportunities to look at the world through an open mind. That's what upsets me probably more than anything else about the museum.

Of course I thought I'd show you the great breakthroughs in science, from Marie Curie to the great accelerators and how much has been accomplished in religion. Well, part of my mission in life has been to educate people about the fossil evidence for human evolution.

A born-again, Francis Collins, asked me to give the single most important talk that I've given in years, on Darwin's 200th birthday, at the National Institutes of Health. He's deeply religious and is the head of the National Institutes of Health. What was most interesting about that morning when I was given 20 minutes to talk about 6 billion years of evolution — I spoke very quickly — was the tea time. Collins, whom I knew and had debated, and I had a huge interchange where he said, "Well, there are just some things that science can't explain." I said, "Yes, then it's not science."

Yet he in his liberated world invited me to give one of the keynote speeches. But the most important part of that exposure was the tea, when a couple of real scientists with white coats and nametags and all that came over. They said, "We just wanted to tell you how much we enjoyed your talk. We had no idea there was this much evidence for human origins. Because all we do is peer through these electron microscopes at microscopic things; we don't look at the big picture. Thank you for coming here and helping us understand who we are, where we come from and why we should be so grateful to be human."

That was unbelievable satisfaction.

Finding Lucy

This is the first shot [slide projection] of Hadar, Ethiopia, that I saw in 1972. It was a spiritual moment for me, looking out on these vast badlands, heavily dissected, eroding, layer after layer, rich in fossils. I was still at graduate school at the University of Chicago and this to me was — we shouldn't use that word "epiphany" — but it certainly was for me.

Tonight I was asked to say a few words about it, and it will only be a few words. You see me in the background, much thinner than I am today. My graduate student, in the foreground, is doing all the work. I was walking back to my Land Rover, glanced over

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

my right shoulder and saw a piece of arm bone from an elbow, that little fragment of bone which allows you to flex and extend your arm, was the first piece of Lucy that I recognized.

I knew that because of all the studies in graduate school, anatomy, osteology, the study of bones and all that. And we were rewarded with this 3.2 million-year-old skeleton that picked up the popular moniker of Lucy, after “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,” which came from the Beatles tape that was playing that evening.

This woman on the expedition said, “If you think it’s a female, Don, we should call her Lucy.” I said, “Excuse me, I’m a Ph.D. We don’t give cute little names to our fossils.”

Well, you know what happens when the genie is out of the lamp. The next morning: “Are we going back to the Lucy site? Do you think we’ll find more of Lucy’s skeleton? How old do you think Lucy is?” She became an individual and now she is iconic. Some people think she’s the dinosaur in Chicago, Sue [a *T. rex* discovered in 1990 in South Dakota].

Lucy is really the poster child for paleoanthropology and human origins. When you read about new fossil finds, they’re either younger than Lucy, older than Lucy, more complete than Lucy, not as primitive as Lucy, or whatever. So this was a remarkable discovery for me. It launched an incredible 20-year series of expeditions. We now have over 400 specimens of Lucy’s species, *Australopithecus afarensis*.

It also stimulated scientists, mostly young scientists, as it always is — the silverbacks like myself are more reluctant to change — to develop new methodologies and ways of understanding, examining and studying these specimens. She did play a very important role beginning in 1974.

And if you go to the Creation Museum, there she is. She’s a four-legged, quadrupedal knuckle-walker. This is because of Dr. Ham. I don’t know what he got his doctorate in, may have been one of those things you get at Sears [Dr. of literature, Liberty University].

There ain’t no way that Lucy was walking on her knuckles and forelegs.

A child goes in, sees this and is impressed by it. The child doesn’t know one way or another.

My grandchild, Brendan, went to the California Academy of Sciences — he’s 3 years old — with his father. His father says, “Let’s take a picture next to Lucy, the thing your grandfather found.” He refused to get his picture taken until I came and stood next to it. He knows that Lucy walked upright, doesn’t bother him. It doesn’t bother him that she’s very old. He thought it was so neat that she came from apes.

It’s terribly important that we don’t shut these minds down so early. The longer you have a mind that is shut down the more time there is to develop and reinforce bigotry.

Make real sacrifices

‘The anti-science aspect of religion is what bothers me most intensely.’

Here [in a cartoon] he’s saying, “Look, it’s not personal, it’s religious.” There have been so many sacrifices in religion — burning at the stake, beheading people, stoning people to death or ripping their hearts out and eating a live pumping heart (if you’re an Aztec) — what’s that left us with? A bunch of dead bodies.

It didn’t do much to stop the volcanic eruption, the drought never ended, it didn’t dispel the locust invasion, did it? No, it did nothing. Yet you’re going to be surprised that tonight I’m going to propose that all of us begin to make some real sacrifices.

What might those sacrifices be? Clean up the oceans. Quit throwing



Donald C. Johanson with his new Emperor award, between FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor. (Photo by Ingrid Laas.)

everything just because it disappears into oceans. Stop overfishing species that you hope will forever be present and available to you. When was the last time you saw orange roughly on a menu? Twenty years ago, and now it’s gone.

Make some real sacrifices, sacrifices to Mother Nature, who will, unlike the false gods to whom we have made sacrifices, reward you. I guarantee that. Clean up the oceans, and you will live a healthier life. You will reduce the carcinogenic toxins that pollute our fish and poison us. Clean up our air, reduce carbon emissions and make a sacrifice. Buy a car that doesn’t go as fast, that doesn’t look as jazzy. Find alternate sources of power and build more efficient cars.

We will be rewarded with what? Healthy clean air with reduced pulmonary disease, and we’ll all breathe a sigh of relief. I could go on and on about this, but I think you all get the gist. We live in a beautiful world.

Here [photograph] I was at Bryce Canyon not long ago. It is stunning to be out with nature. We’re the fortunate ones, as I said. Each and every human being is, because we were born. It’s our primary duty on this planet to be the guardians of its future for our chil-

dren, grandchildren and many generations beyond that.

We need to stop being *Homo egocentricus* and start to become a more deeply contemplative species that makes decisions intelligently, not out of fear or self-interest and not because of how much money we’re going to make. Make decisions that will help us regain the balance between ourselves and our creator, Mother Nature.

It’s time, really, that as we look back on 4 million years of evolution, 3 million with Lucy. She is a link, not the missing link but one that reminds us of our link to the natural world.

Lucy didn’t know where she was going; we don’t know where we’re going. She didn’t know that her descendants would end up as *Homo sapiens*, but it’s an interesting perspective to know that

My grandson thought it was ‘so neat’ that Lucy came from apes.

we are united by our past, that we have this commonality of beginning, that we undoubtedly will have a common future, and I think a common destiny globally.

The most important thing from here on forth is to stop acting as if there’s some place else for us to move to. We are destined to be on, as my late friend Carl Sagan said, “this pale blue dot.” Let’s take those responsibilities seriously.

Thank you very much.

FFRF’s expansion in the news



The Jan. 29 Isthmus cover.

FFRF’s four-story building and general expansion has been the topic of two local profiles in its hometown of Madison, Wis.

FFRF’s growth made the Jan. 3 front page of the Wisconsin State Journal in a story by Doug Erickson, “Busy time for Madison nonprofit,” which featured sneak preview photos of the building’s interior. Doug quoted Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor saying of FFRF’s prominent downtown location, two blocks from the Capitol: “We like to be in the thick of things.” She added: We see more growth, more productivity.”

The story mentioned principal founder Anne Nicol Gaylor, 88, and her fiscal conservatism, which made possible the reserves that, combined

with membership generosity, made the capital campaign possible.

The article pictured Dan Barker, FFRF co-president, touring the “Above Us Only Sky” Kenneth Proulx Cupola, the Charlie Brooks Auditorium with its Steinway concert grand, contributed by Diane Uhl, and balconies. Read the story at <http://bit.ly/1At2iup>.

Isthmus, Madison’s news weekly, ran a Jan. 29 cover story, “Freedom From Religion Foundation: The nation’s largest group of freethinkers strives to improve the image of atheists,” by Steven Potter. The in-depth story touches on FFRF’s lawsuits, activist and freethought point of view.

Read the Isthmus story at <http://bit.ly/1zNT2mt>.

FFRF welcomes 34 Lifetime Members!

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to welcome its newest Lifetime Members. Two requested that their names be kept anonymous.

They are: Dr. Jaen Andrews, Adam Bernstein, Janet and Steve Borchers, Michael Cantwell, Lindy Dangelmayr (gift from Susie York), David Driscoll, Ephraim Fithian, Philip Frankel, Francine Goldstein, Mike Greiner, Rob Haworth, Kay Heggstad, M.D., Keith Kelly, Thomas Kluzak, Ron Lee, Robert MacArthur, Daniel and Helene Mathisson, Clifford Melick, Ph.D., Jim Meznik (gift from Julie Stindt), John Miller, Dr. Boyd Myers, Richard Read, R. Neil Rotter, Beverly Schnabel, Kyra

Stafford, Prentice Steffen, Robert Tripler, John F Tripp, Jeffrey Vowles and Ian Whatley.

Twenty states are represented: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, North Carolina, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

Lifetime Memberships are offered to individuals who join or renew FFRF at a \$1,000 level of support, are deductible for the very generous donors, go into rainy-day reserves and ensure never another renewal notice.

Thank you all!



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.

Legal staff busy shoring up state-church wall

FFRF legal staff sent a wide variety of complaint letters in December, including the following. (See sidebar for Christmas and crèche complaints.)

Contact: Cherry Creek School District, Colo.

Violation: Teachers at Pine Ridge Elementary School hung two religious displays for Veterans Day: a "God Bless You" bulletin board and the poem/hymn "Lord, Guard and Guide."

Contact: Palm Beach County Commission, Fla.

Violation: Commissioners take turns saying prayers at meetings, typically asking citizens present to rise for the invocation.

Contact: Texas A&M University, College Station

Violation: The college broadcasts prayers over the intercom at every Corps of Cadets meal.

Contact: Wicomico County Public Schools, Md.

Violation: Northwestern Elementary School described Mardela Springs Wesleyan Church as its "official Faith-Based Partner." Students reportedly know the church's pastor as the "school pastor," and the church started an evening kids' program at the school through which "many children have been introduced to the Gospel and have given their hearts to Jesus."

Contact: Akron Public Schools, Ohio

Violation: A teacher at Buchtel Community Learning Center started and runs a religious club at the school.

Contact: San Juan USD, Calif.

Violation: A Spanish teacher showed a religious movie whose plot revolved around many aspects of Catholicism.

Contact: Oxford City Schools, Ala.; Cartersville City Schools, Ga.; Craven County Schools, N.C.

Violation: The districts hosted bible distributions.

Contact: Seminole County Schools, Fla.

Violation: Students at Lawton Childes Middle School were presented with four cards to choose from to send cards to soldiers. One included a bible verse and another depicted a nativity scene.

Contact: Laurens County Schools, Ga.

Violation: Schools in the district regularly organize prayers before athletic events.

Contact: Brownwood Police Department, Texas

Violation: The department employs a police chaplain.



An FFRF complaint letter went out about this nativity scene at the Fayette County Courthouse, La Grange, Texas.

Contact: Vallejo City USD, Calif.

Violation: Superintendent Ramona Bishop appeared in her official capacity in a promotional video for a Christian dominionist group.

Contact: Clairton City School District, Pa.

Violation: Football coaches at Clairton High School engage in post-game prayers.

Contact: La Porte ISD, Texas

Violation: La Porte Junior High was scheduled to hold a choir concert in a church.

Contact: Mobile County Public School District, Ala.

Violation: A Semmes Elementary School teacher's Thanksgiving study guide included overly religious descriptions of the holiday.

Contact: Marshall County Schools, Ky.

Violation: Benton Elementary School gave parents an ad for a religious program with school forms.

Contact: Frontier Central School District, N.Y.

Violation: Big Tree Elementary School's principal regularly discusses religion at school-sponsored events. Past statements reportedly included, "We need more prayers in our school," and, "I run Big Tree as a Christian school."

Contact: Pennsauken Public Schools, N.J.

Violation: Pennsauken High School featured religious content, including prayers, hymns and a religious speaker at its senior awards ceremony.

Contact: Sheridan County School District #2, Wyo.

Violation: K-Life, a Christian youth

group, circulates in school lunchrooms to proselytize and advertise K-Life.

Contact: Joshua ISD, Texas

Violation: A cross hung on the wall of the ninth-grade campus building.

Contact: Newton County Commissioners, Ga.

Violation: The commission approved a religious display that included the Ten Commandments.

Contact: City of Barberton, Ohio

Violation: The city's offices close on Good Friday.

Contact: Bartow County Schools, Ga.

Violation: Euharlee Elementary School showed students a Christian film.

Contact: Cleburne County Public Schools, Ala.

Violation: An eighth-grade teacher assigned her students two religious books.

Contact: Okaloosa County School District, Fla.

Violation: Ruckel Middle School held a choir concert in a church sanctuary. The pastor addressed the audience and introduced the program.

Contact: Pratt USD 382, Kan.

Violation: Staff at the Haskins Learning Center distributed gifts to students with tags quoting the John 3:16 bible verse. (See photo at left)

Contact: Moore County Schools, N.C.



FFRF sent a complaint letter to Spiro Public Schools, Ala. At Spiro Elementary's kindergarten holiday concert, students sang two religious songs and two children held up heart-shaped posters reading "Baby" and "Jesus."

Violation: Pincrest High School held a soccer team awards banquet that began with a prayer for all students and attendees.

Contact: Wakulla County Commission, Fla.

Violation: The commission was considering a proposal to add "In God We Trust" to its chambers.

FFRF 2014 legal letters top 1,000

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert noted that FFRF staff attorneys sent 1,053 official complaint letters in 2014. The letters resulted in 219 legal victories to date, with more to follow.

Texas topped the list of states that got the most letters, followed by Florida, California, Ohio, Georgia, Alabama, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Oklahoma rounding out the top 10.

Top 10 issue areas were schools, miscellaneous, nativity/holiday displays, legislative prayer, chaplains, religion in the workplace (tie with prayer breakfasts), church bulletin discounts, Good Friday closings and religion in the military.

FFRF salvos in 'War on Christmas'

December and January complaint letters went to:

Contact: Wis. Dept. of Revenue, Madison

Violation: The department put up a display featuring a cross, stars of Bethlehem, and religious messages, many emphasizing the word "JESUS" in large, bold font.

Contact: Douglasville, Ga.; Saltillo, Miss.; Rolling Hills, Calif.; Bandera County, Texas; Fayette County, Texas; Poplar Grove, Ill.; Trenton, Mich.; Grundy County, Ill.; North Ogden, Utah; Rainbow City, Ala.; Roane County, W.Va.; Elkhorn, Wis.; Brodhead, Wis., Walworth County, Wis., Glencoe City, Ala.; Higginsville, Mo.; and New Orleans.

Violation: These cities hosted nativity scenes on public property or endorsed live nativity displays. (See photo above)

Contact: Grapevine-Colleyville ISD, Texas

Violation: Cross Timbers Middle School partnered with Grace Christmas Cottage, an overtly Christian organization, to run a holiday gift program.

Contact: Montgomery, La.

Violation: The town hosted a Christmas celebration which was advertised on the town's Facebook page under a large banner of a nativity scene that said "The Town of Montgomery is PROUD to keep CHRIST in our Christmas celebrations."

Contact: Copperas Cove ISD, Texas

Violation: Two Halstead Elementary teachers taught students the story of Jesus' birth and explained that Christmas celebrates his birthday.

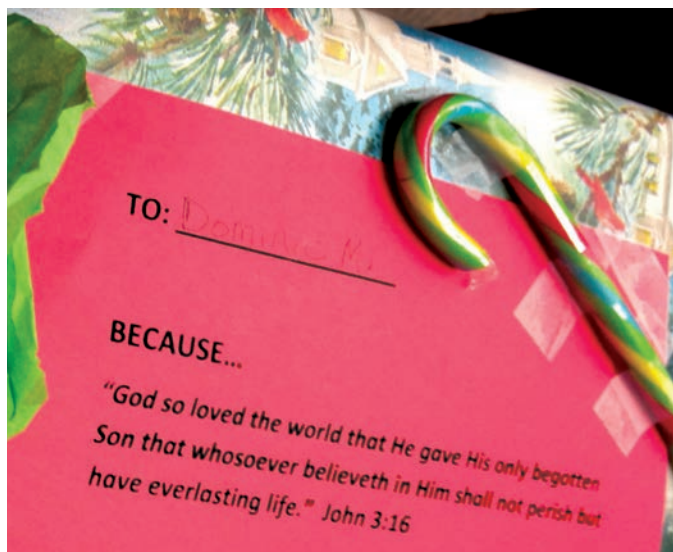
Contact: Mooresville Graded School District, N.C.

Violation: A teacher at Park View Elementary School taught students the Christian nativity story and made them draw part of the nativity. Another teacher polled students about whether they were Christians.

Pratt fail

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel has been after the Haskins Learning Center, a publicly funded school in Pratt, Kan., to keep church separate from school. A day after receiving assurances that staff would be told it wasn't kosher for the principal to introduce a teacher to lead a prayer at Thanksgiving time

(see item above), a local complainant reported another violation had occurred. Attached to each student gift from the school was a bible verse (John 3:16). Seidel wrote another complaint Dec. 23 to an attorney for the state school board association in Topeka.



FFRF moves into expanded Freethought Hall, Madison, Wis.



The growing staff of the Freedom From Religion Foundation gather in front of the brand-new entrance to Freethought Hall, FFRF's expanded office in downtown Madison, Wis. Staff moved into the five-story addition adjoining the original two-story building in January. The addition, which quadruples space, includes the fourth-floor Charlie Brooks Auditorium and the "No Hell Below Us" Harry Lonsdale lower level wing.

Pictured are Attorneys Andrew Seidel and Sam Grover, Co-Presidents Annie

Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker, Bookkeeper Katie Daniel, Law School Extern Jarvis Idowu, Attorney Liz Cavell, Communication Coordinator Lauryn Seering, Freethought Today Editor Bill Dunn, Law School Extern Ryan Jayne, Legal Fellow Katherine Paige, Legal Assistant Calli Miller, Editorial Assistant Dayna Long, Director of Operations Lisa Strand, Legal Publicist Maddy Ziegler, Office/Membership Manager Jackie Douglas, Receptionist/Assistant Charlotte Stein and Attorney Patrick Elliott.



Administrative staff overlook Charlotte Stein and the Anne Nicol Gaylor Lobby, which has a 14-foot ceiling. From left are Katie Daniel, Lauryn Seering, Dayna Long, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Lisa Strand and Jackie Douglas.

*Photography
by
Andrew
Seidel*



Another view of the Anne Nicol Gaylor Lobby and security-locked front entrance. Walls await a portrait of FFRF's founder, plus recognition plaques and tiles.



Bookkeeper Katie Daniel, busy with year-end work in her new office.



Calli Miller joined the staff in January as the legal department's first legal assistant, deferring her own foray into law school for a year to help out.



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker by the spiral staircase in the “Above Us Only Sky” Kenneth Proulx Cupola, which can be accessed from the auditorium. Its staircase leads to the Joel B. Landon & Wanda Y. Beers Freethought Library (see photo below).



Before and after: A “before” photo of Staff Attorneys Patrick Elliott, Sam Grover, Rebecca Markert, Liz Cavell and Andrew Seidel on the open-air concrete structure last year. After, joining the attorneys at the conference table in the same spot in the Diane Uhl Legal Wing (standing from left): Legal Fellow Katherine Paige, Legal Publicist Maddy Ziegler, Legal Assistant Calli Miller and Extern Ryan Jayne. Ryan is working for credit in his final semester through Lewis and Clark Law School.



Don’t be fooled by this angle. The new library, with beautiful woodwork, built-in shelving and lighting, will be very spacious after the boxes of books are unpacked and shelved. It’s 900 square feet atop the original 1855 two-story Freethought Hall, which is currently undergoing renovation in phase II of the project.



Left: Charlotte Stein, Lauryn Seering and Chelsea Culver assemble one of the 28 shelving units in the basement. (Photo by Dan Barker)



Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, already at home in her very own office (previously shared) in the Brian Bolton Executive Wing. Not pictured: the lower level, named for the late benefactor Harry Lonsdale; the third-floor Harold Erickson Public Relations Wing; the Steven Uhl “Friendly Atheist” Studio and the Rose Zerwick Memorial Garden and Courtyard, to be planted in the spring.



Legal Extern Jarvis Idowu’s work station is such an improvement from his previous improvised one. Jarvis is a third-year law student working for credit from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School.



Legal Extern Ryan Jayne performing Beethoven on the gorgeous Diane Uhl Steinway concert grand in the Charlie Brooks Auditorium on the top floor (pretty curtains to be installed). (Photo by Dan Barker)



An artistic shot of Dan Barker at the open Steinway.

Meet a Nebraska member

Name: Robin Buckallew.

Where I live: Hastings, Neb.

Where and when I was born: Alameda, Calif., 1960.

Family: My husband, Fritz, a retired librarian who shares my love of good books, art movies and theater; my son, Chris, 32, who now lives in Alameda and works with computers; my Irish setter, Murph, who never demands to be the center of attention and has managed to prevent the postman from breaking into the house and killing us.

Education: I have bachelor's degrees in political science and biology, an M.S. in biology, a Ph.D. in environmental science and a master of fine arts in playwriting.

Occupation: I teach environmental science and other science courses to college students.

Military service: None, but I did volunteer with Service to Military Families at the Oklahoma City Red Cross for three years.

How I got where I am today: It was a combination of genetics and environment, and my family can take substantial blame (or credit) for both! I was raised in a fundamentalist Christian family but created havoc by starting to ask questions when I was 10. I stopped praying, but continued asking questions. Instead of going to heaven, I decided to go to college.

Where I'm headed: I hope I'm headed for Broadway (as a playwright, not an actor), but I'd be content with the small stage. Then, when it's all over, I plan to be fertilizer. That seems to me the most fitting end for someone who has spent years studying plants.

Person in history I admire: Robert Ingersoll — not only a great thinker but a great orator and an all-round good guy. Charles Darwin, who was willing to set aside what he thought was true and accept what the evidence showed. I wish we could all do that. Lorraine Hansberry, who managed to get to Broadway in spite of being female, black and a nonbeliever.

A quotation I like: "I did not see why the schoolmaster should be taxed to support the priest, and not the priest the schoolmaster." — Henry David Thoreau.

I also like Carl Sagan's answer to a young man worried how he would

have meaning in his life if there were no God: "Do something meaningful."

These are a few of my favorite things: My husband, sunsets, cats, reading, photography, theater. Any activity that managed to combine all of these into one would be my idea of "heaven."

These are not: People who go on about my "god-given gift." People who say there is a reason for everything. People who can't figure out whether to use to, too or two. Porch missionaries who insist on asking me how I explain everything around us and argue when I answer evolution and organic chemistry. Athletes who point to the sky every time they score.

My doubts about religion started: When I was 10 and my grandmother gave me my first "grown-up" bible. I actually read it, and the stories didn't quite match what was in my bible stories for children book. Then, when I went to high school, I began to doubt even more when I learned mythology. So many gods, most of whom no one believes in anymore, caused me to wonder about "my" god. I wrote a letter to the ancient Greeks to explain what we believed, and realized it sounded as weird as what they believed.

Still, I didn't use the word "atheist" to describe myself until I was 45. I called myself a deist for a while, then used agnostic. Once I started calling myself

'Instead of going to heaven, I decided to go to college.'

atheist, people always said, "Surely you mean agnostic," which only made me more likely to use atheist, because I will no longer let other people define for me what I believe.

Before I die: I would like to complete my women of the bible play series and manage to put on a festival of them. I would like to take a tour of Europe. I would like to discover and name a previously unknown species of plant.

Ways I promote freethought: I am the faculty adviser for the secular student club at our college, and I have brought in speakers. I have a local atheist meet-up that currently has about 32 members. I wear my freethought T-shirts around locally and on trips to Lincoln and have had conversations with people about freethought as a result. I write freethought novels. I am currently working on starting a freethought play festival, and as soon as I find a venue, I have some theater professionals who are willing to help me.

I wish you'd have asked me: What freethought books have I written? I have written several books that are freethought fiction. Four are currently in print. The first I wrote was called *The Diary of Mrs. Noah*. It is a new take on what is obviously a myth. The second is called *Transformation*. It takes place in a world where the church has taken over, banned the birth control pill and women working, and just in general made a nuisance of themselves. *Yesterday & Tomorrow* is about a woman who meets a man claiming to be the devil, which leads to a rethinking about who



"Rather hokey but fun," says Robin Buckallew (between Eve and Adam) of the late S.P. Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden in Lucas, Kan.

is really good and who is evil.

The last one, *Alpha & Omega*, is about the adventures of a police detective who encounters a very old man claiming to be Paul of Tarsus. Paul leads him on a battle against the

Catholic Church. This is actually a trilogy, but the last two aren't out yet. I am also working on a book of freethought short stories called *The Wandering Atheist* that is still in the editing process.

Separación de iglesia y estado



Secular Humanists of Puerto Rico applied in early December to have its solstice message displayed in courthouses on the island along with the nativity scenes that have been placed in many regional and appellate court buildings for years.

FFRF Life Member Victor Rivera-Jimenez, M.D. (behind banner, blue shirt and tie), writes: "As Christmas Day approached, and having received no definite response from the administrative judge, our group took to the streets Dec. 23 and called a press conference at the courthouse in San Juan. We were not allowed to go into the lobby (although other protesters in the past have been allowed to). We were told to remain at street level, where we displayed our secular message, a short version of the Freedom from Religion Foundation's solstice message."

The judge, in a letter dated Dec. 31 and postmarked Jan. 7, denied the secular display, claiming the

crèche is cultural and historical and doesn't endorse Christianity. "We are outraged that a judge would first stall a response to a good-faith request by secular citizens for equal time," Rivera said. "We want to seek a legal remedy and action to fight this blatantly unfair and discriminatory practice by a government office that is supposed to treat all its citizens fairly, regardless of whether they are believers or unbelievers."

Overheard

It may be true that the pressure on a Conservative politician particularly of keeping quiet about not being religious is very similar to the pressure that there has been about keeping quiet about being gay.

Tory Member of Parliament James Arbuthnot, coming out as an atheist during a House of Commons debate on allowing prayers at council meetings *The Independent*, 1-16-15



Robin with her former roommate's dove, which she nursed back to health.

States' godly preambles are relics of another time

By James A. Haught

Did you know that nearly all 50 states have religious preambles affixed to their state constitutions, in brazen violation of the First Amendment's decree that government cannot dictate supernatural faith?

Some of these holy declarations date back to the 1700s. They're little-noticed, because hardly anyone reads state constitutions. Yet they exist as official government proclamations.

Four states (New Hampshire, Oregon, Tennessee and Virginia) don't use preambles but include "worship maxims" within their constitutions.

Court challenges to them could fail, because judges often pretend that governmental religious declarations aren't actually religious. For example, after members of Congress pandering to religious believers branded "In God We Trust" on money and inserted "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, federal courts shrugged off these church-state breaches, saying they're merely "ceremonial deism" with no "significant religious content."

In May, the Supreme Court said it was OK for the town of Greece, N.Y., to open council meetings with prayers exalting "the saving sacrifice of Christ on the cross." Five conservative justices ruled that such invocations are merely "ceremonial." (Perhaps, privately, they understand that public prayers are meaningless lip service that nobody believes.)

Any intelligent person can see that official government decrees of supernatural belief are gross constitutional violations. Court rulings to the contrary are absurd, almost comical.

If anyone wants to tackle the holy preambles and worship clauses in the 50 states, I wish them god(less)speed. Here's an alphabetical list of the relevant clauses:

Alabama 1901: We the people of the State of Alabama, invoking the favor and guidance of Almighty God, do ordain and establish the following Constitution.

Alaska 1956: We, the people of Alaska, grateful to God and to those who founded our nation and pioneered this great land.

Arizona 1911: We, the people of the State of Arizona, grateful to Almighty God for our liberties, do ordain this Constitution.

Arkansas 1874: We, the people of the State of Arkansas, grateful to Almighty God for the privilege of choosing our own form of government.

California 1879: We, the People of the State of California, grateful to Almighty God for our freedom.

Colorado 1876: We, the people of Colorado, with profound reverence for the Supreme Ruler of the Universe.

Connecticut 1818: The People of Connecticut, acknowledging with gratitude the good Providence of God in permitting them to enjoy.

Delaware 1897: Through Divine Goodness all men have, by nature, the rights of worshipping and serving their



Jim Haught on the day he turned 80 in 2012.

Creator according to the dictates of their consciences.

Florida 1845: We, the people of the State of Florida, grateful to Almighty God for our constitutional liberty.

Georgia 1777: We, the people of Georgia, relying upon the protection and guidance of Almighty God, do ordain.

Hawaii 1959: We, the people of Hawaii, grateful for Divine Guidance, establish this Constitution.

Idaho 1889: We, the people of the State of Idaho, grateful to Almighty God for our freedom, to secure its blessings.

Illinois 1870: We, the people of the State of Illinois, grateful to Almighty God for the civil, political and religious liberty which He hath so long permitted us to enjoy and looking to Him for a blessing on our endeavors.

Indiana 1851: We, the People of the State of Indiana, grateful to Almighty God for the free exercise of the right to choose our form of government.

Iowa 1857: We, the People of the State of Iowa, grateful to the Supreme Being for the blessings hitherto enjoyed, and feeling our dependence on Him for a continuation of these blessings.

Kansas 1859: We, the people of Kansas, grateful to Almighty God for our civil and religious privileges.

Kentucky 1891: We, the people of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, grateful to Almighty God for the civil, political and religious liberties.

Louisiana 1921: We, the people of the State of Louisiana, grateful to Almighty God for the civil, political and religious liberties we enjoy.

Maine 1820: We, the People of Maine, acknowledging with grateful hearts the goodness of the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe, and imploring His aid and direction.

Maryland 1776: We, the people of the state of Maryland, grateful to Almighty God or our civil and religious liberty.

Massachusetts 1780: We, the people of Massachusetts, acknowledging with grateful hearts the goodness of the Great Legislator of the Universe, in the course of His Providence, an opportunity and devoutly imploring His direction.

Michigan 1908: We, the people of

the State of Michigan, grateful to Almighty God for the blessings of freedom.

Minnesota 1857: We, the people of the State of Minnesota, grateful to God for our civil and religious liberty, and desiring to perpetuate its blessings.

Mississippi 1890: We, the people of Mississippi in convention assembled, grateful to Almighty God, and invoking His blessing on our work.

Missouri 1845: We, the people of Missouri, with profound reverence for the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, and grateful for His goodness.

Montana 1889: We, the people of Montana, grateful to Almighty God for the blessings of liberty.

Nebraska 1875: We, the people, grateful to Almighty God for our freedom.

Nevada 1864: We, the people of the State of Nevada, grateful to Almighty God for our freedom.

New Hampshire 1792 (Part I. Art. I. Sec. V): Every individual has a natural and unalienable right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.

New Jersey 1844: We, the people of the State of New Jersey, grateful to Almighty God for civil and religious liberty which He hath so long permitted us to enjoy, and looking to Him for a blessing on our endeavors.

New Mexico 1911: We, the People of New Mexico, grateful to Almighty God for the blessings of liberty.

New York 1846: We, the people of the State of New York, grateful to Almighty God for our freedom, in order to secure its blessings.

North Carolina 1868: We, the people of the State of North Carolina, grateful to Almighty God, the Sovereign Ruler of Nations, for our civil, political, and religious liberties, and acknowledging our dependence upon Him for the continuance of those.

North Dakota 1889: We, the people of North Dakota, grateful to Almighty God for the blessings of civil and religious liberty, do ordain.

Ohio 1852: We, the people of the State of Ohio, grateful to Almighty God for our freedom, to secure its blessings and promote our common welfare, do establish this Constitution.

Oklahoma 1907: Invoking the guidance of Almighty God, in order to se-

cure and perpetuate the blessings of liberty.

Oregon 1857 (Bill of Rights, Art. I. Sec. 2): All men shall be secure in the Natural right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their consciences.

Pennsylvania 1776: We, the people of Pennsylvania, grateful to Almighty God for the blessings of civil and religious liberty, and humbly invoking His guidance.

Rhode Island 1842: We the People of the State of Rhode Island, grateful to Almighty God for the civil and religious liberty which He hath so long permitted us to enjoy, and looking to Him for a blessing.

South Carolina 1778: We, the people of the State of South Carolina, grateful to God for our liberties, do ordain and establish this Constitution.

South Dakota 1889: We, the people of South Dakota, grateful to Almighty God for our civil and religious liberties, establish this.

Tennessee 1796 (Art. XI): That all men have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their conscience.

Texas 1845: We the People of the Republic of Texas, acknowledging, with gratitude, the grace and beneficence of God.

Utah 1896: Grateful to Almighty God for life and liberty, we establish this Constitution.

Vermont 1777: Whereas all government ought to enable the individuals who compose it to enjoy their natural rights, and other blessings which the Author of Existence has bestowed on man.

Virginia 1776 (Bill of Rights): Religion, or the Duty which we owe our Creator, can be directed only by Reason, and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian Forbearance, Love and Charity towards each other.

Washington 1889: We the People of the State of Washington, grateful to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe for our liberties, do ordain this Constitution.

West Virginia 1872: Since through Divine Providence we enjoy the blessings of civil, political and religious liberty, we, the people of West Virginia, reaffirm our faith in and constant reliance upon God.

Wisconsin 1848: We, the people of Wisconsin, grateful to Almighty God for our freedom, domestic tranquility.

Wyoming 1890: We, the people of the State of Wyoming, grateful to God for our civil, political, and religious liberties.

*James A. Haught, longtime editor of the Charleston Gazette in West Virginia, is the author of the 2010 book, **Fading Faith: The Rise of the Secular Age.***

What Is a Freethinker?

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



Meet a civil libertarian member

Name: Matthew Stark.

When and where I was born: New York City, Jan. 27, 1930. I lived in New York until I went to school at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio.

Where I live: My wife, Terri, and I have two homes, one in Minneapolis and the other in Fort Myers, Fla. We're snowbirds.

Education: Two degrees at Ohio University: English and B.S. in education, 1951. I earned a master's in educational psychology in 1959 from the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis and a Ph.D. in educational administration and counseling, Western Reserve University, 1963.

Occupation: In my first post-graduate job, I recruited, trained and supervised advisers to students in dorms, as well as to the fraternities and sororities at the University of Minnesota. I immediately changed the "house mother" title, with their agreement, to "house directors." Labeling them "house mothers" was insulting. I developed programs where they could take any course they wanted for free.

I stayed at the U of M as adviser to

Students' Extracurricular Activity, reporting to the dean of students and president. We developed programs to involve students in extra curriculum, including for extra credit. Then I set up the Office of the Coordinator of Human Relations Programs. Martin Luther King Jr. and I developed a program where students at University of Minnesota were trained by me and others to go down South to Montgomery, Selma, etc., live there and work with black and white people positively concerned about race relations. I met Dr. King through the ACLU and was his legal liaison.

When I retired from the university, I became the first paid director of the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union (1973-87), after having served as volunteer president. I did what executive directors do: I dealt with the media, schools and colleges, etc. I was either the plaintiff or recruited plaintiffs for litigation and recruited lawyers to do volunteer work for the MCLU.

Person in history I admire: Donald G. Patterson, head of the psychology department at the University of Min-

nesota, and one of the main founders of the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union, and Earl Larson, now a federal district judge, also involved in the original founding of the MCLU.

These are a few of my favorite things: I love to fish, walk in the woods and around the lakes in the Twin Cities. I've done a lot of fishing in Canada and Minnesota. I love to sit with my friends in a tented area outside, enjoying the lake and sunset, talking and drinking cold beer.

These are things I smite: Teachers at public schools who impose their religious views on their students. The most serious problem we're facing in this world is overpopulation — the Earth cannot sustain the millions upon millions of people living on it.

A quotation I like: Coined myself: Civil liberties are essential if we're going to have a democracy.

My doubts about religion started: When I was a kid. My family was primarily Unitarian. I was astonished by what I read and saw about religion and how people I liked were treated because of their diverse religious views, or their sexuality. It always bothered me.

There's a book written by Dick Hewetson [a longtime FFRF state representative] about the MCLU and my role in it: *History of the Gay Movement in Minnesota and the Role of the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union*.

Ways I promote freethought: I have and will continue to support public education and my belief that all students ought to go to public schools. I support organizations with which I have funda-



Matt Stark

mental agreement, such as FFRF, and I think what you guys are doing is absolutely wonderful.

I helped take cases to keep religion out of government as director of the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union. I'm proud of being grand marshal in the Twin Cities Gay Pride Festival in 2008 and to have received a variety of local, educational, humanist and atheist awards.

I was always extremely interested in separation of church and state. When I was in public school, they had the kids praying, so I blew the whistle as a student. Later in my life, when I came across FFRF, of course, I was absolutely delighted. I worked with Anne Nicol Gaylor and even sent FFRF a check to help put up a portrait of her in the new lobby!

'Reformed' Catholic tells off pope



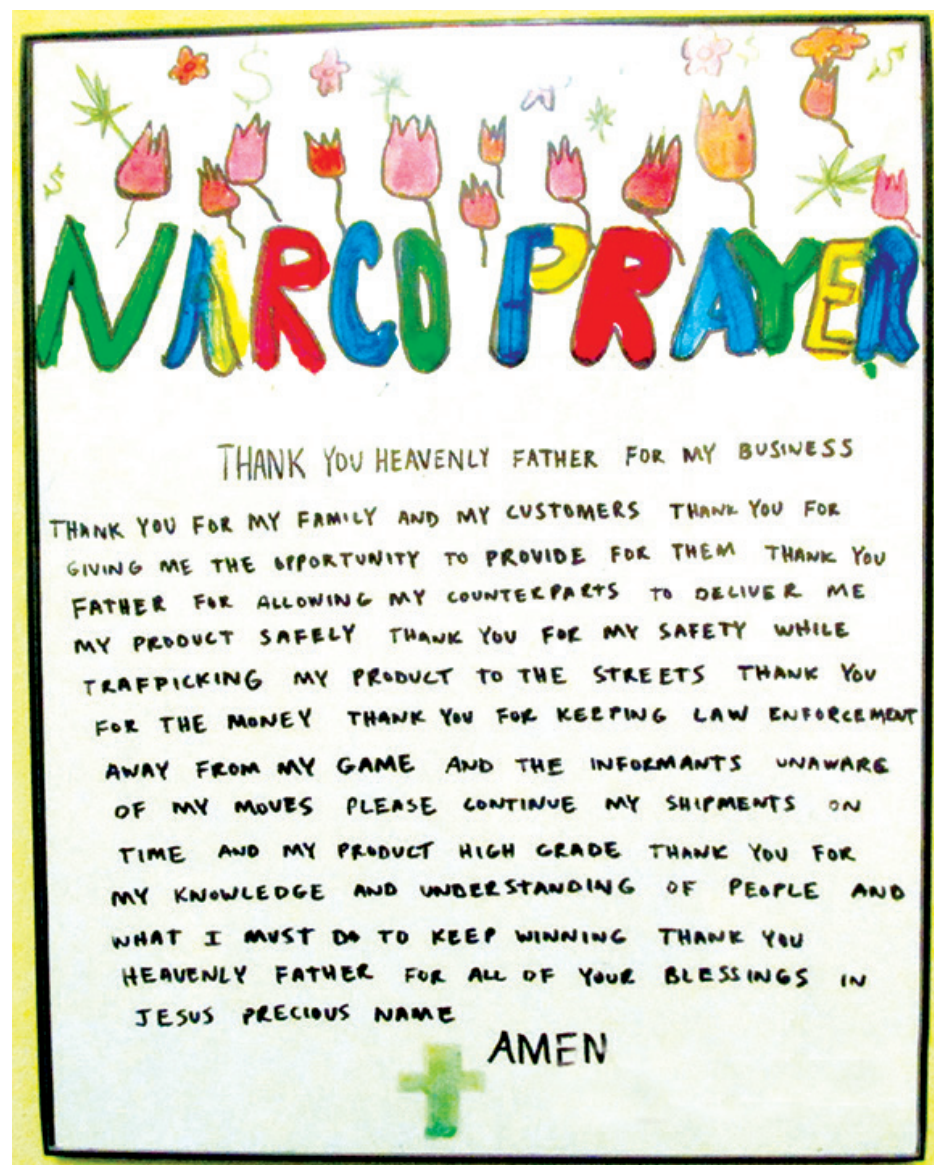
Ken Proulx and Annie Laurie Gaylor (photo by Dan Barker)

Wisconsin FFRF member Ken Proulx, who is 90, notes, "The pope was saying it's wrong to kill in the name of God. Why, the Catholic Church got where it is by killing people, with a history as black as the ace of spades. In Spain alone, 25,000 people were killed during the Inquisition."

Ken counts among "the best years of my life" his public school education

in a one-room schoolhouse in the Midwest, where the teacher paid him 50¢ a week in 1935 to be "janitor" and keep the woodstove fed and cleaned.

"The worst years of my life" were spent in parochial school in the third and fourth grades. Ken called it "an injustice" and still remembers the sharp sting of the nun's pointer on pupils' hands.



Hosanna in the highest

The Daily Herald reported that police in Wausau, Wis., executing a search warrant Nov. 17, encountered this prayer above a bed in a residence where they arrested two people, a 34-year-old man and an 18-year-old woman. Police, who said they confiscated drug paraphernalia and about 50 grams of marijuana, posted this photo on Facebook and this comment: "Lt. Matt Barnes, who supervises our [Community Service Officers] unit, quoted the lyrics from a Garth Brooks song 'Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers.'"

'No God But Funny' contest open

Calling all writers, producers and funny freethinkers! The "No God But Funny" contest is looking for laughs. "Contribute to the downfall of civilization by writing a sitcom and/or producing a webisode that features a likeable atheist," for a chance to win \$15,000 (for a sitcom) or \$25,000 (for a produced webisode).

The contest, which is sponsored by the Center for Inquiry and the Freedom From Religion Foundation, seeks to promote a positive view of atheism. In this new golden age of television, it's high time a lovable atheist character took center stage.

There are two ways to win:

Writer's contest: Submit a written teleplay for a half-hour TV sitcom pilot, plus outlines for 11 more episodes.

Producer's contest: Submit a completed webisode for the internet, plus outlines for 11 more episodes.

The contest deadline is May 1, 2015. Entry fee is \$40. For more information, go to nogodbutfunny.com/.

If you'd like to enter, click here to view contest rules and guidelines. Or follow along by liking the Facebook page "No God But Funny Contest."

FFRF would like to thank Life Member Pamela Koslyn for her generous donation of \$6,000 that makes this contest (her creative brainchild!) possible.

Pamela notes that on Feb. 3 there were 207 Facebook "likes," 200-plus Twitter followers and, best of all, over 50 entrant registrations.

Recent FFRF Action Alerts

FFRF urged members to get involved with state/church issues in their areas by contacting local officials to put forth the secular viewpoint:

- The Clark County Board of County Councilors in Vancouver, Wash., is considering a proposal to post “In God We Trust” in the county’s main public hearing room. “A lot of times we drift away from it,” said Councilor Tom Mielke, who suggested the display.

- Mayor Lupe Ramos Watson of Indio, Calif., decided to end the Indio City Council’s practice of opening meetings with a prayer. “We need to respect all beliefs and absence of beliefs,” she said, reported in *The Desert Sun*. Councilman Mike Wilson has strenuously opposed the change. FFRF urged members to thank the mayor for a courageous stand.

- Two Mississippi state representatives, Tom Miles and Michael Evans, are proposing to make the bible the state book. Miles said that since Mississippi has a state bird, a state flower and even a state toy, it should have a state book, reported *The Clarion-Ledger*.

- New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo stopped by a Sunday service at Mt. Ver-

non’s Grace Baptist Church on Jan. 18 to announce the creation of the Office of Faith-Based Community Development Services. The office’s first effort will be a \$50 million grant program.

- Ohio recently unveiled plans for Community Connectors, a program that provides funds for local networks of volunteers and organizations to mentor students in disadvantaged schools. Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Richard A. Ross, whose department is charged with administering the program, added an unnecessary requirement: any organization that wants to participate must partner with “a faith-based organization.”

Feeling the pressure from FFRF and others, the state “clarified” its requirement to include “organizations whose mission is based on the belief that every child’s life has a purpose.”

“The change doesn’t clarify anything, it just makes the program’s requirements more confusing,” noted FFRF Legal Fellow Katherine Paige. “The principle that our lives have a purpose is distinctly religious, and ‘values’ is usually code for Christian Right values.”

“This is just as absurd as it would be to require all faith-based organizations to partner with atheistic groups that

believe there is no cosmic ‘purpose of life,’” added Co-President Dan Barker. FFRF continues to monitor the situation.”

Boards say no to meeting prayer

Concord [Calif.] City Council meetings will stay prayerless after the council’s two-person Policy Development Committee on Jan. 12 declined to forward a council member’s proposal to start meetings with prayers. The council had stopped praying about 40 years ago.

Councilwoman Laura Hoffmeister and Mayor Tim Grayson agreed prayer is divisive, reported the *Contra Costa Times*. Hoffmeister recalled that when the council allowed prayer in the 1970s, the proceedings often devolved into a “three-ring circus.”

Hoffmeister added, “I think it’s a slippery slope. There are just too many issues about who might or might not be allowed or might be offended.”

Concord resident Roylen Stack told the council she opposed prayer. “Are we going to allow Druids to come in and speak? There are a whole bunch of things that people believe in.”

•••

The Easton [Pa.] Area School Board voted 5-4 on Jan. 13 against starting meetings with prayer, reported the *Express-Times*. Solicitor John Freund said 3rd Circuit appeals decisions are clear: Prayer will open the district up to legal challenges.

“My issue comes back to the legal issue,” said board member Robert Fehnel. “The last thing we need is more controversy.”

The district was ordered to pay

\$385,000 in fees and damages last year to students who won a legal challenge that let them wear “I Heart Boobies” breast cancer awareness bracelets.

GAO notes drop in IRS charity exams

A Dec. 17 U.S. Government Accountability Office press release said that Internal Revenue Service budget cutbacks have led to a steady decline in the number of charitable organizations audited. In 2011 the examination rate was 0.81% compared to 0.71% in 2013. Examination rates in 2013 for individual taxpayers and corporations were 1% and 1.4%, respectively. (1.4 percent).

The Exempt Organizations division of the IRS is responsible for making sure religious institutions comply with the law. FFRF sued the IRS for failure to enforce the law against church politicking. Last August, U.S. District Judge Lynn Adelman granted a joint motion for dismissal but said FFRF could renew the lawsuit if the IRS reverts to its previous inaction.

Greece elects atheist prime minister

Alexis Tsipras took his oath of office today in Athens. He said he promised to uphold the Constitution and look out for the welfare of Greeks. Tsipras is an atheist, so he refused a religious oath — the custom in this Greek Orthodox country. He’s the first prime minister to do so.

News story, “Greece’s Left-Wing Prime Minister Takes Charge”
National Public Radio, 1-26-15

It pays to complain

An Ohio complainant writes to recount how it paid to complain about a religious display encountered Dec. 4 at the Louis Stokes Veterans Hospital in Cleveland:

“I am a veteran from 1968. While walking toward the gift shop called the Patriot Mart, I was saddened by a display outside the mart. Tables were set up selling the usual veterans T-shirts and hats, but there was also a table set up selling Christian hats and license plate holders. The hats carried such messages as “God’s Army,” “Jesus Is My

Boss” and 10 other pronouncements that Christianity and veterans were one and the same. No other religion was represented. To me it was a blatant act against the Constitution. I kept wondering how the Veterans Administration could be so unaware that this was against the law.”

After emailing FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover on how to proceed, the complainant called a VA patient representative. Assurances were given that the vendor was operating against policy. A follow-up email:

“I returned on 1/29 . . . and was happy to see all religious articles were gone. Vendor was selling only military connected clothes and trinkets. The patient rep. had done her job and I was glad I was able to keep religious endorsement off public space. My next mission will be to oppose the nativity scene being displayed on my local town’s public square.

FFRF thanks its kind building fund donors.

This listing reports donations for FFRF’s Building Expansion Fund received from Dec. 11, 2014, to Feb. 2, 2015. It’s not cumulative except for the total.

- William Fagan, Texas, \$5,000
- Karen Owens, Georgia, \$5,000
- Mr. Paul D Singleton, Kentucky, \$5,000
- Anonymous, California, \$2,500
- Bernard Barwick, Wisconsin, \$1,000
- Colorado Springs Chapter of FFRF, Colorado, \$1,000
- Robert Hanner, Texas, \$1,000
- Mary Naff, California, \$1,000
- Anonymous, Wisconsin, \$1,000
- Anonymous, Illinois, \$1,000
- Anonymous, Arizona, \$1,000
- Anonymous, Wisconsin, \$500
- Anonymous, Indiana, \$500
- Gary Knapp, New Jersey, \$200
- Anonymous, New Jersey, \$100
- Anonymous, Kentucky, \$100
- Anonymous, Oregon, \$100
- Anonymous, Wisconsin, \$100
- Robert Surufka, Illinois, \$100
- Anthony Uva, New Jersey, \$100
- Joyce Arthur, British Columbia, \$50
- David Coulson, California, \$50
- Roy and Karen Firestone, Oregon, \$50
- Kenneth Gillespie, New York, \$50
- Paul and Peg Heffron, Minnesota, \$50
- Anonymous, Massachusetts, \$50
- Anonymous, California, \$40

- Eric Michel, Georgia, \$40
- Wendy and Alexander Corby, California, \$25
- Alice M Kachman, Michigan, \$20
- Anonymous, Virginia, \$20
- Subtotal: \$26,745**
- New Cumulative Total: \$2,029,894.12**

(For those keeping track at home: Due to unfulfilled donations, the new cumulative total is less than the most recently published cumulative total plus the current listed donations.)

UPDATE: Joyce Arthur, British Columbia, recently granted permission to publish her \$50 donation from August 2013.

See pages 12–13 for photos of the addition. FFRF is embarking on Phase II of the project (renovating the original 1855 building to which its new addition is attached).

Donations received before Dec. 11 were listed in prior issues. Freethought today will list subsequent donations in future issues. Donors are not identified by name (hence all the “Anonymous” listings) without express permission.

If you made a donation that does not appear to be reflected in this list or in prior issues, please contact us so we can check our records and publish your gift. Contact Katie Daniel, donor relations manager, (608)256-8900 9-5 CDT weekdays or email katie@ffrf.org. Thank you!



Reason’s greetings

Standing up for reason in December at the Bulloch County Courthouse, Statesboro, Ga., near a nativity scene “Presented by Local Churches Celebrating the Savior’s Birthday” were (front, left) Patsy Thompson Bucky, Dayna Goldstein, Don Armel, (back) Lee Davis, Daniel Hunter and Paul Zeigler.

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Michael W. Hill, 52, Chanute, KS: Sexual battery of a child under 18 but over 12. Hill, pastor of Chanute Seventh-day Adventist Church, was arrested on a Florida warrant charging him with molesting a minor in Jacksonville more than 20 years ago. The statute of limitations doesn't apply due to the age of the alleged victim.

The arrest report said Hill apparently contacted the alleged victim to arrange a meeting in Daytona Beach. Authorities monitored and recorded the meeting, which Hill's wife also attended, and arrested Hill afterward. *Source: WJXT, 1-16-15*

Christopher D. Ross, 43, Mt. Juliet, TN: 10 counts of statutory rape by an authority figure. Ross, youth pastor at a Lebanon church the authorities wouldn't name, is accused by a minor of inappropriate advances in 2010 that allegedly progressed into sexual contact in 2012.

The Wilson County Sheriff's Office is investigating whether there are more potential victims. *Source: The Tennessean, 1-15-15*

James F. Rapp, 74, an ex-Catholic priest in Jackson, MI, now imprisoned in Oklahoma: 3 counts of 1st-degree criminal sexual conduct and 10 counts of 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct for alleged crimes in 1980-86 while he was a teacher, maintenance supervisor and wrestling coach at Lumen Christi High School.

Two men reported the alleged sexual abuse to the county sheriff in 2013. *Source: mlive.com, 1-13-15*

Heather E. Cook, 58, Baltimore: Vehicular manslaughter, driving under the influence and using a text messaging device while driving. Cook, bishop suffragan and the 2nd-highest-ranking official of the Episcopal Church of Maryland, is charged in the death of cyclist Thomas Palermo, 41, and then fleeing the scene before returning about 30 minutes later.

Cook struck "Palermo from the rear," said prosecutor Marilyn Mosby, "which caused Palermo to strike the hood and windshield" of her Subaru. A statement said Cook's blood alcohol level was 0.22, well above the legal limit of 0.08.

In 2010, a police officer found Cook driving on a flat tire in the middle of the night with vomit on her blouse. She pleaded guilty in 2012 to DUI and received "probation before judgment" and a \$300 fine with charges of possession of marijuana and drug paraphernalia dropped. *Source: Washington Post, 1-11-15*

Paul Melnichuk, 80, Toronto: 5 counts of sexual assault. Melnichuk, founder and senior pastor of a megachurch called the Prayer Palace, is accused by a mother in her 40s and her daughter in her 20s of molestation on church property in 2014. Both are parishioners.

A 2007 newspaper series focused on the considerable wealth Melnichuk and his twin sons, both associate pastors, have built while heading a congregation that's mostly poor and black. According to the investigation, the church took in \$3 million in donations in 2005 while spending only \$9,443 on charity.

Police believe more assault victims could come forward. *Source: Toronto Star, 1-9-15*

Thomas W. Wilson, 63, Smithville, NY: 1st-degree sexual abuse and endangering the welfare of a child. Wilson, senior pastor at Smithville Baptist Church, is accused of molesting a 9-year-old girl in 2008 behind the Lake Ontario Playhouse in Sackets Harbor.

Investigators believe similar incidents occurred "several times at several other locations" in the same period and said more charges could be forthcoming. *Source: Daily Times, 1-6-15*

Jose Palimattom, 48, W. Palm Beach, FL: Distributing obscene material to a minor. Palimattom, a priest of the Franciscan Province of St. Thomas the Apostle in India who started serving in December at Holy Name of Jesus Parish, is accused of showing a 14-year-old male parishioner about 40 images of nude pre-teen boys on his phone.

The police report said he wanted the boy's help to delete the images. In a taped statement, Palimattom allegedly admitted viewing child porn privately as a "curiosity" and said he knew the victim was 14 but considered him an adult. *Source: WPBF, 1-5-15*

Richard Yeamans, 52, Spotsylvania, VA: Taking indecent liberties with a minor and 2 counts of aggravated sexual battery of a minor. Yeamans, who was involved with a Baptist congregation called Fairview at River Club, is accused of molesting 2 boys, aged 11 and 12. The church denied on its website the media reports that said he was a youth pastor, claiming he was only a volunteer. *Source: WUSA, 1-5-15*

James D. Worley, 42, Gresham, OR: Attempted sodomy, 2 counts of rape, 20 counts of sexual abuse, 11 counts of sodomy and 3

counts of using a child in a display of sexually explicit conduct. Worley, senior pastor at Powell Valley Church, is accused of molesting a boy and a girl under the ages of 14 and 12 in 2002-04.

On the day he was booked into jail, Worley tweeted, "Stormy weather has arrived. About to find out two-things: who our real friends are and how our God glorifies himself. #Psalms35 #GlorifytoGod."

He was also an officer with the Tillamook Police Department before his badge was revoked in 2007 for a variety of alleged violations, according to police review board minutes, including telling a dispatcher that he could "service her" in a way no man ever had. He's married with 4 children. *Source: KOMO, 1-6-15*

Danny R. Wooten, 51, Pomona, CA: Multiple counts of embezzlement, conflict of interest and misappropriation of public funds. Wooten, pastor at New Covenant Church, is accused with 2 others of embezzling \$6.4 million from the city of Pasadena Public Works Dept., where he also worked.

The Southern California Evangelistic Jurisdiction has also begun an audit to determine if any funds are missing, an official said. Wooten has been stripped of all pastoral authority. *Source: Star-News, 1-5-14*

Alessandro De Rossi, 46, Rome: Aggravated sexual abuse. De Rossi, now a Catholic parish priest in Rome, is accused of multiple sexual offenses against teen minors while he was a priest in Salta, Argentina.

One alleged victim, who said he met De Rossi at age 14 at a party the priest organized, told police De Rossi also molested other children. *Source: Buenos Aires Herald, 1-3-15*

Ignacio Villafan, 49, Tulare, CA: 2 counts of grand theft. Villafan is charged with embezzling at least \$150,000 from 2005-09 from St. Rita's Catholic Church, where he was pastor until being removed in 2012. *Source: Visalia Times-Delta, 12-31-14*

Andrew L. Jackson, 28, Hot Springs, AR: 3 counts of rape. Jackson, youth pastor at Victory Tabernacle United Pentecostal Church, is charged with having intercourse 3 times with a 13-year-old girl at his home in 2014.

The arrest report states police viewed "inappropriate text messages" on the girl's cellphone from Jackson, who denies the accusations. *Source: Arkansas Online, 12-24-14*

Dylan Ritterman, 27, Hillsboro, OR: 12 sex abuse counts involving minors. "Brother" Ritterman was a youth leader who was also involved with the Spanish ministry at Bethel United Pentecostal Church. Assaults on a teen boy allegedly took place in the church basement in 2009-10. Another boy has also made accusations. *Source: KPTV, 12-23-14*

Derek Hutter, 37, Sachse, TX: Attempted production of child pornography and receipt of child pornography. Hutter, youth minister at S. Garland Baptist Church, was previously charged with continuous sexual abuse of a child, possession of child pornography and online solicitation of a minor.

The teen girl's parents told police Hutter asked her for sexually explicit photos, which she sent him on her phone. The girl told police they had sex about 2 dozen times in 2014, starting when she was 13. *Source: Morning News, 12-22-14*

Venije Singkoh, 70, Daly City, CA: Child molestation. Singkoh, pastor at Indonesian Pentecostal Foursquare Church, is accused of "tongue kissing" a 9-year-old girl on multiple occasions in 2014 after placing her on his lap.

Prosecutor Steve Wagstaffe said the girl told her parents, who then confronted the pastor at a meeting with other church members. *Source: Bay City News, 12-18-14*

Terry Reed, 54, Terrytown, LA: Indecent behavior with a juvenile and sexual battery. Reed, director of Vessels of Christ Ministry (operated from his home), is accused of sleeping naked with a 15-year-old boy he'd taken in. The teen alleged to police he was forced to shower with Reed and wash him.

Reed pleaded guilty in 1997 to indecent behavior with a juvenile boy who was living with him and received a 5-year suspended sentence and probation, court records show. *Source: Times-Picayune, 12-16-14*

Tommy Lynn Bailey, 56, Altus, OK: Child sexual abuse. Bailey, pastor at Elm and Hudson Church of Christ, is charged with sexual abuse of a female foster child, starting when she was



Bring a 'safe' word

Sheila Miguel, Florida, shares this marquee outside a Miami Catholic church.

14 in 2007 and continuing till 2014.

He also worked at Open Arms Behavioral Health in Lawton (motto: "Putting the pieces back together"). *Source: Altus Times, 12-16-14*

Gaylard Williams, 59, Seymour, IN: Battery. Williams, pastor at Praise Cathedral Church of God, is accused of making unwanted sexual advances to a 27-year-old man parked at Cypress Lake.

The man alleged to police that when he rolled down the vehicle window, Williams grabbed at his crotch and asked for oral sex. Williams was tracked through his license plate number. *Source: WLKY, 12-16-14*

Jeromie Clark, 34, and Jennifer Clark, 38, Calgary, Alberta: Criminal negligence causing death and failure to provide the necessities of life. The couple are charged in the November 2013 death of their son John, who died at 14 months of a staph infection complicated by malnutrition. The Clarks are Seventh-day Adventists. Authorities allege they tried to hide the baby's failing health. Two older siblings were removed from the home.

Sgt. Doug Andrus said John received no professional medical attention until being taken to a hospital the day before he died. *Source: CTV News, 12-13-14*

Solomon Bandiho, 49, Mesa, AZ: Suspicion of child prostitution. Bandiho, a Tanzania native who's parochial administrator at Holy Cross Catholic Church, and 4 others were arrested in a sting called "Buyer Beware."

Detectives posed as 16-year-old girls on a website known for trading in prostitution. When the men came to a motel, they were arrested. *Source: Arizona Republic, 12-13-14*

Bernard O. McGarty, 89, La Crosse, WI: Disorderly conduct. McGarty, a Monsignor who has served Catholic parishes in the Diocese of La Crosse for more than 5 decades, was cited by Wausau police after a salon massage therapist alleged he exposed himself to her.

The police report said the woman was massaging his leg when he lifted the towel from his groin and told her to rub oil on his genitals. She told police that after she said no and left the room, McGarty yelled an obscenity at her. He told police he was in Wausau for a funeral. *Source: WKBT, 12-12-14*

Jose S. Landaverde, 47, Chicago: Misdemeanor battery. Landaverde, a native of El Salvador and pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Anglican Mission, was arrested about 3 a.m. at his home, where a 34-year-old woman told police he had attacked her, knocked her down and kicked her after a night of drinking. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 12-11-14*

Five members of Word of Faith Fellowship, Spindale, NC, were indicted on kidnapping and assault charges stemming from allegations by a gay church member. Charged were **Justin B. Covington, Brooke M. Covington, Robert L. Walker Jr., Adam C. Bartley and Sarah Covington Anderson.**

Matthew Fenner, 21, a church member since

age 16, alleged he was targeted because he's gay. He told police that in January 2013 he was threatened with confinement for 2 days, slapped, strangled and verbally assaulted to free him of "homosexual demons."

The church was once the subject of an "Inside Edition" report on its "blasting" techniques, in which a person is encircled and subjected to high-pitched shrilling sounds, screams and prayers, sometimes for hours.

Fenner told media it took several tries to get officials to take his allegations seriously and let him file a formal complaint. *Source: QNotes, 12-10-14*

Jude D. Ramdial, 33, New York City: Sexual assault of a child. Ramdial, former youth minister at Victory Temple Church of God in Channelview, TX, is accused of assaulting a 15-year-old girl in his youth group in 2005 who baby-sat for him and 2 other group members.

Ramdial moved to New York in 2008 to help establish several Hope-NYC churches, police said. Court documents said his ministerial credentials were revoked in June after a church trial board found him guilty of lewd acts and adultery. *Source: KPRC, 12-10-14*

Stephen Amesse, 56, Ottawa: 2 counts each of sexual assault and sexual interference under the age of 16. Amesse, pastor at St. Patrick's Catholic Parish, is charged with molesting a 14-year-old boy in 2008. Police said the investigation was launched in February after the alleged incident was reported. *Source: Ottawa Citizen, 12-4-14*

Daniel Curran, 64, Newcastle, N. Ireland: 4 counts of gross indecency and indecent assault. Curran, a former Catholic priest, is accused of molesting a boy between 1990-95.

He already has 3 convictions for assaulting at least 13 boys over a 17-year period. *Source: Belfast Telegraph, 11-14-14*

Pleaded / Convicted

Martin "Mordechai" Wolmark, 56, Monsey, NY: Pleaded guilty to conspiracy to travel in interstate commerce to commit extortion. Wolmark, an Orthodox rabbi, was part of a group of 8 who used cattle prods and other devices to convince men to give their wives a "get," a document a woman must obtain from her husband to get a divorce under Jewish law. So far, 6 have pleaded guilty. Wolmark faces 5 years in prison. *Source: Journal News, 1-15-15*

John W. McKenzie, 51, Bahama Village, FL: McKenzie, former pastor of St. James Missionary Church, was scheduled to plead guilty to 2nd-degree felony larceny for alleged theft of about \$45,000 from the church. He was arrested in 2013 after a board of trustees member expressed concern McKenzie was "emptying the church bank account by taking pay advances far in excess of what he is entitled," an arrest affidavit said. *Source: Keys News, 1-13-15*

Joshua Swain, 34, Carbondale, IL: Pleaded guilty to theft, aggravated identity theft and loan fraud for incidents between 2011-13 while he was senior pastor at The View Church.

Swain admitted using a parishioner's identity to obtain at least \$10,000 and submitting false documents from the church board to get a bank loan. *Source: WSIL, 1-9-15*

Sentenced

Pawel K. (full name withheld), 44, Wroclaw, Poland: 7 years in prison. The Catholic priest, who denied wrongdoing, was arrested in 2012 in a hotel with a teen boy.

Judge Maciej Skorniak said guilt was not in doubt due to the testimony of so many other alleged victims and images on the priest's computer. Skorniak called him a "seductive, provocative and dangerous type."

Pawel K. was already given a 1-year suspended sentence in 2010 for possessing child pornography. *Source: AP, 1-14-15*

Janet Combs, 77, Cincinnati: 5 years' probation after pleading no contest to receiving stolen property. Combs, former pastor of Ark by the River Church, had 10 other counts dropped in exchange for her plea in the \$2.1 million securities fraud case she was involved in with others, including elected officials.

The church earlier agreed to pay \$250,000 restitution to 12 investors/victims. *Source: WCPO, 1-14-15*

Willard L. Jones, 63, Tulsa, OK: 37 months

in prison, 3 years' probation, restitution of \$933,507 and forfeiture of his house, a Rolex watch and fur coat. Jones, pastor of Greater Cornerstone Baptist Church, was convicted of stealing from the church's nonprofit community center for 6 years. He pleaded guilty to subscribing to a false tax return and 3 counts of wire fraud. *Source: Tulsa World, 1-12-15*

Aaron Brodeski, 45, Batavia, IL: 2 years' court supervision, \$500 fine and 30 hours of community service after pleading guilty to disorderly conduct for exposing himself in a gas station and in a car in the store's parking lot. Brodeski, pastor of Holy Cross Catholic Church, was initially charged with public indecency.

"Msgr. Brodeski will remain unassigned from all priestly duties at this time and will work with diocesan officials to determine the next course for him," said a statement from the Diocese of Rockford. *Source: WREX, 1-12-15*

Romulo Jimenez, 69, Houston: 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to aggravated sexual assault. Jimenez, Centro Cristiano Vida Nueva pastor, was accused of touching an 8-year-old girl inside her underpants in his office and in a church bathroom in 2013.

A witness who saw the girl with her pants and underwear down said Jimenez told her he was helping her go to the bathroom. *Source: Houston Chronicle, 1-6-15*

Larry M. Clark, 62, Buena Vista, VA: 5 years in prison on each of 3 counts of indecent assault and 10 years on each of 2 counts of carnal knowledge plus fines of \$107,500. A jury convicted the former pastor of Pentecostal Outreach Church of molesting a teen boy for about 30 months, starting when "I'm proclaiming my innocence to the day I die," Clark said at sentencing. He didn't testify at his trial.

Prosecutor Christopher Billias said another alleged victim was too traumatized to pursue charges. *Source: Roanoke Times, 1-5-15*

Yitzhak Shuchat, Brooklyn, NY: 1 day in jail and 25 days' community service. Shuchat, an Orthodox Jew and member of a Hasid community patrol, fled to Israel in 2007 after clubbing a 20-year-old black man with a night stick.

A "hate crime" charge was reduced to simple assault because there was no claim Shuchat used racial slurs. He was jailed for 3 months in Israel while fighting extradition. *Source: NY Post, 12-20-14*

Tadhg O'Dalaigh, 71, Dublin, Ireland: 5 years in prison with 2 years suspended. This is the retired Catholic priest's 2nd conviction for molesting schoolboys in the 1970s and 1980s. He's admitted to masturbating 10 boys, while claiming the last assault was in 1984. *Source: RTE News, 12-18-14*

Marcia Peterson, New Orleans: 15 months in prison and \$91,000 restitution. Peterson, executive director of CDC 58:12, a faith-based community development group, pleaded guilty to stealing money from the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Housing and Urban Development and to falsifying unemployment benefit claims.

Peterson admitted embezzling grant money "for gambling and other personal purposes," court documents said. *Source: Baton Rouge Advocate, 12-18-14*

Timothy Kane, 58, Detroit: 12 months in jail served over 5 years during the months of June and December plus weekends and \$131,400 in restitution. A jury found Kane, pastor at St. Moses the Black Catholic Parish, guilty of stealing from the charitable Angel Fund. *Source: Free Press, 12-15-14*

John Balyo, 36, Caledonia, MI: 40 years in prison for sexual exploitation of a child and possession of child pornography. Balyo hosted a Christian radio show, was a camp counselor and volunteered with the sheriff's department and a church's overseas mission. He was arrested at a Christian music concert.

Balyo met clandestinely in motels with boys as young as 12. "I'm having a lot of trouble trying to reconcile two people in the orange jumpsuit before me," Judge Robert Holmes Bell told Balyo. "There's the Christian man with a reputation as a value-driven individual. But there is something else going on that is troubling . . . filthy, obscene."

He was sentenced earlier to 25-50 years for sexually assaulting the same boy last May, 2 weeks after his wedding. Balyo's pregnant wife has been granted an expedited divorce.

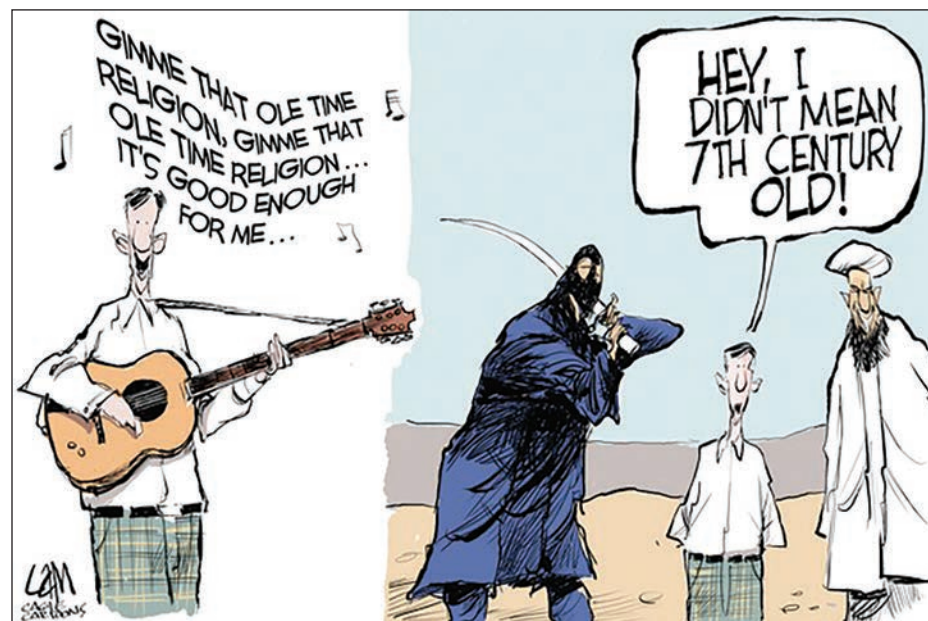
Court records said he collected children's obituaries and articles about kidnapping and child sex abuse. *Source: WZZM, 12-5-14*

John Fiala, 56, a former Nebraska Catholic priest already serving 60 years in a Texas prison on a 2012 murder-for-hire conviction, was sentenced to another 30 years for aggravated sexual assault of a 16-year-old.

Fiala tried to have his accuser killed. In 2010, the Omaha Archdiocese paid an undisclosed amount to settle a sexual assault. *Source: omaha.com, 12-4-14*

John Irwin, 73, Dungiven, N. Ireland: Conditional discharge after pleading guilty to theft and theft by an employee. He must obey all laws for 2 years. Irwin, a retired Catholic priest, took the money in 2009-12 from St. Patrick's Church Parochial House.

Irwin has repaid the money and made com-



pensation to the Derry Diocesan Society, his attorney told the court. *Source: Derry Journal, 12-4-14*

Sipho M. Manana, 47, Mhluzi, S. Africa: Life imprisonment for raping a 12-year-old boy in 2011. Manana, pastor at Jericho Apostolic Church, chose and groomed his victim (the child of a single parent) carefully, said Magistrate Deon Minnie. "[T]here is no indication of a trace of remorse for what he has done."

Police are investigating similar allegations by the boy's younger brother. *Source: Middelburg Observer, 12-1-14*

Trevion L. Ethridge, 23, Newton, TX: 23 years and 3 months in prison after pleading guilty to producing child pornography in 2012-13 while he was youth pastor at an unidentified church. Ethridge changed his plea to guilty during his trial and admitted sending a minor pornographic images and videos of himself and enticing the minor to send pornographic images and videos in return. *Source: KWTX, 12-1-14*

Isaiah D. Jordan, 23, Milwaukee: 37 years in prison and 11 years' probation for attempted kidnapping and multiple convictions of sexual assault against 5 women and girls in 2012-13. Jordan, youth minister at Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church, cruised streets and bus stops to offer rides to females, then attacked them.

Jordan testified that the victims were all prostitutes. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 11-24-14*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Suzanne Greer, 20, the daughter of former pastor **Terry Lee Greer**, has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against her father and officials of the **United Methodist Church of North Alabama** for the 2013 shooting death of her mother by her father in Gardendale. The complaint was initially sealed from the public.

Terry Greer, 55, is being held at a secure medical facility after a judge found him not guilty of murder by reason of mental disease or defect.

Suzanna Greer, her father, and the estate of Lisa Greer are also suing **Brookwood Medical Center** and a **psychiatric group** for malpractice in treating the pastor before the shooting. On the day he fatally shot his wife and wounded Suzanna, Greer allegedly said, "What if we all just drive up to heaven today?" *Source: al.com, 1-12-15*

Former Catholic priest **James Thoennes** and the **Diocese of St. Cloud, MN**, are being sued by a man who alleges he was molested as an elementary student in the early 1970s in Foley. The suit accuses the diocese of creating a "public nuisance" by not informing the public about Thoennes and about 2 dozen other priests who allegedly molested children.

Thoennes, of St. Cloud, was deposed in September for a separate suit and admitted molesting at least 5 boys in the diocese. *Source: St. Cloud Times, 1-7-15*

Three women are suing **Barry Freundel**, his **synagogue in Washington, DC**, the **adjacent mikvah** (ritual bath) and **Towson University law school** in connection with clandestine nude videos allegedly made by Freundel of them in the mikvah. He was arrested in October on 6 counts of voyeurism.

"Defendants turned a blind eye to obvious signs of Freundel's increasingly bizarre behavior, ignoring the bright red flags that Freundel was acting inappropriately with women subjected to his authority," the suit claims.

Plaintiff Emma Shulevitz alleges the rabbi told her in 2012 not to put a water bottle in front of a clock radio, where a camera was later found. *Source: The Forward, 12-5-14*

Velicia Alston, 39, and "John Roe" are suing a **Jehovah's Witnesses congregation** for \$10.5 million in Hillsboro, **OR**, alleging decades of sexual abuse were covered up, including the plaintiffs'. Irwin Zalkin's law firm has 14 active cases against Witnesses congregations in several states.

Alston alleges that **Daniel Castellanos**, a minister and piano teacher, molested her when

she was 11 or 12. Roe alleges he was about 9 when Castellanos assaulted him.

Alston alleges church elders told her and her mother to tell no one, including police. *Source: The Oregonian, 12-1-14*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

A jury in Ft. Wayne, **IN**, awarded Emily Herx \$1.95 million for being fired by the **Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend** for undergoing in-vitro fertilization while she was a language arts teacher at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic School. A federal judge later reduced the award to \$543,803.

Herx alleged in her discrimination suit that she was treated differently from male employees who disagreed with Catholic doctrine when her 2011-12 contract wasn't renewed and she was called "a grave and immoral sinner" by John Kuzmich, parish priest at St. Vincent de Paul.

Priests and Bishop Kevin Rhoades testified at trial about wanting Hertz to express remorse about flouting the contract's morals clause, but she never did. Rhoades also testified that paying out money to Herx would negatively affect diocesan operations. *Source: Journal Gazette, 12-24-14*

U.S. District Judge Morrison England ruled that **Chabad of California** intentionally misused \$272,495 in Department of Homeland Security grants it received in 2009 and must pay \$844,985 in penalties, a portion of which will go to whistleblowers.

The group's director, Rabbi **Boruch Shlomo Cunin**, applied for the funds as part of a program to boost surveillance systems at religious institutions. England ruled Chabad didn't follow accounting guidelines and used the money for "regular operating expenses, including employee payroll, building repairs, mortgages and utility expenses." *Source: Jewish Journal, 12-16-15*

Four Jewish girls seminaries in Jerusalem agreed to refund tuition to 13 American families who are part of a class action suit connected to claims that Rabbi **Elimelech Meisels**, the head of all 4 schools, is a serial sex abuser.

The plaintiffs didn't allege Meisels molested their daughters, although he's been accused by other girls.

Meisels is described in the suit as an American with a residence in Jerusalem. He founded the first such school in 2004. *Source: Haaretz, 12-1-14*

The **Catholic Diocese of Helena, MT**, has filed a bankruptcy plan that proposes a \$16.4 million settlement for 362 people who alleged in a 2011 suit they were molested by clergy. Each would get a minimum of \$2,500.

Bishop George Leo Thomas apologized to victims at a press conference. "I know the pain is real, the pain is in the present tense, and in the name of the church, I want to say I'm sorry and we're sorry as a church."

The diocese is the 11th in the U.S. to seek

bankruptcy protection due to claims of sexual abuse. *Source: AP, 11-18-14*

Legal Developments

A circuit judge denied "shock probation" for **Louis F. Piskula, 75, Owensboro, KY**, 5 months into his 5-year prison sentence for molesting a boy under age 12 in the 1970s while he was pastor at Blessed Mother Catholic Church. Piskula retired in 2002.

The term refers to a theory that some criminals are so shocked by their experience that they won't commit another crime. *Source: AP, 1-13-15*

Marie Mielke, 29, Chisago County, **MN**, came forward publicly to talk about her sexual abuse suit against **Michael Keating**, a Catholic priest and University of St. Thomas faculty member. "Hiding something that isn't your fault gets exhausting," said Mielke, who alleges Keating, now 58, molested her from 1997 to 2000, starting when she was 12.

"It almost killed me. I felt so ashamed I wanted to die," Mielke said. The county attorney declined to file charges in 2006. Keating denies guilt.

Documents show a 2007 clergy review board advised that Keating be monitored and restricted in ministry, but that didn't occur, said plaintiff's attorney Jeff Anderson. *Source: Pioneer Press, 1-13-15*

An unidentified Catholic priest, 58, **London:** The priest was bound over for trial on charges he indecently assaulting a named female in 1978-79 at a religious institution in South Dublin, Ireland. *Source: Irish Times, 1-12-15*

An **Indiana** circuit judge issued an arrest warrant for **Robert M. Wilson, 52, New Castle**, for failure to show up for a pretrial hearing on a charge of criminal trespass. Wilson had repeatedly conducted worship services in a rural cemetery's chapel despite being told to stop by the board of directors.

He told a reporter that God instructed him at least 17 times to conduct services there. He reportedly was using a pulpit borrowed from the Flying J Truck Stop. *Source: Star Press, 1-11-15*

Frank P. Hreno, 51, Florham Park, NJ, a Catholic priest charged with threatening to kill another priest during a fight over who got to use a leased vehicle at a Vocationist Fathers retreat, was admitted to a pretrial intervention program with no admission of guilt.

Emeka Okwuosa, 37, the other priest, accused Hreno of stabbing him in the arm with a metal staff topped with a crucifix, which Hreno denied. Okwuosa filed a complaint with police but Hreno wasn't charged with assault. *Source: Daily Record, 1-5-15*

Chicago-based insurer CNA has asked a **Minnesota** federal court to limit its responsibility to cover some clergy sex abuse claims against the **Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis**. The archdiocese sued about 20 insurers to clarify what their coverage liability is.

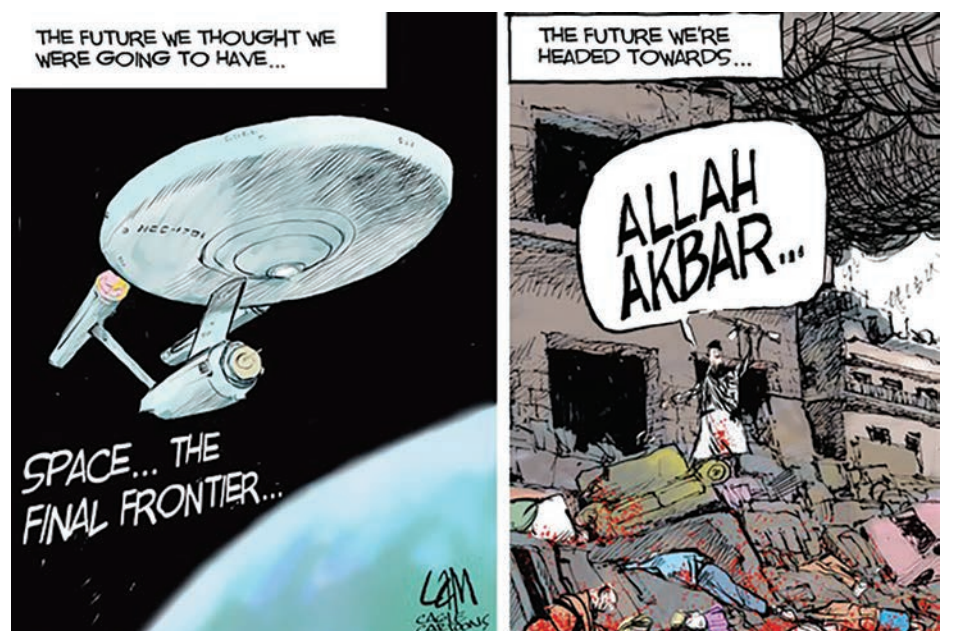
CNA contends it shouldn't have to cover claims related to events that were "not unexpected or unforeseen" and alleges it has no record of some policies the archdiocese says exist. *Source: KARE, 12-30-14*

Minnesota Public Radio reported on pedophile priest **Thomas Ericksen, 67**, now living in the Twin Cities, who left the priesthood in 1988, the year after Ericksen and the Diocese of Superior, **WI**, settled for \$3 million a lawsuit by filed by Paul Eck and his nephew James for alleged 1983 assaults. Criminal charges were never filed.

Paul Eck discovered Ericksen working for Special Olympics in Kansas City in 2010, where he was then suspended, moving to Indonesia. He was founded volunteering in 2014 at a Brooklyn Center food pantry and subsequently fired.

Ericksen told MPR what he learned in therapy: "I was thinking of it as I was being a father to these kids. Of course, you know, the father doesn't have sex with kids, but I didn't have

Continued on page 22



Letterbox

Place for religion isn't government

Thanks for all the great work you FFRF realists do. It's sad we have to have a group as such, to bring sanity to the world, but I am afraid if we don't exist there will be more 9/11's and worse (even from the Christian religion). They must stay in their place, and that is not in the government. I am enclosing a check for \$500 toward a Lifetime Membership. I will be sending another check for the same amount next month.

At the age of 77, I'll keep reading as long as the eyes hold out and I am breathing.

Bob MacArthur
Massachusetts

Appreciate 'fine job of educating'

I would like to change my membership in FFRF to Lifetime. You will find enclosed a check for \$1,000.

The best way to describe my feelings is that I am proud to be a member. I feel that pride every time I read about how FFRF takes action against the unending efforts by those who want to impose their religious beliefs on others through government action and/or at publicly funded venues. It is amazing to me how insensitive and uninformed many religious people are as shown by their behavior. FFRF does such a fine job of educating all of us on issues of separation of church and state and other matters concerning religious belief and lack thereof.

You have changed the way I think about religion, taught me how to have an intelligent discussion about the separation of church and state with others and made me feel good, even anxious, to come out of the closet as an atheist. Thank you!

Rob Haworth
Maryland

•••

Congratulations to FFRF on being identified by [Jerry Falwell's] Liberty Counsel as one of the staunchest supporters of the separation of church and state!

Ken Crosby, After-Life Member
Texas

•••

As an active member of FFRF, I have five words to submit to the Letterbox: Socrates died for our sins.

Best wishes.
George Singer
Rhode Island

Thanks for Charlie Hebdo donation

I am so proud of you for your donation to Charlie Hebdo, I am sending you a check for \$100 in support of your efforts.

Your courage should set the example for every publisher who writes about the tragedy.

Charlie Sitzes, Lifetime Member
Indiana

Here's to health, happiness in 2015

As the old year ends, I look back on some quotes and sayings, some unattributed, that I found throughout the past year that will follow me into the new, providing guidance and some

smiles. Hopefully, you will find one that starts 2015 off well for you.

"We must become the change we want to see in the world." (Mahatma Gandhi)

"Show me a person who has never made a mistake and I will show you someone who has never achieved much." (Joan Collins)

"If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything."

"If you lend someone \$20 and you never see that person again, it was probably worth it!"

"A society grows great when old people plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in."

"Only the guy who isn't rowing has time to rock the boat." (Jean-Paul Sartre)

"The best theology is probably no theology; just love one another." (Charles Schulz)

"Nothing is impossible. Some things just are less likely than others."

"I can explain it to you. I can't comprehend it for you."

"Do not speak unless you can improve the silence."

"Reason makes me an atheist; community makes me a humanist."

"Religion is indulged rather than discussed."

"Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again more intelligently." (Henry Ford)

"The deepest sin against the human mind is to believe things without evidence." (Thomas Edison)

Diane Uhl
Arizona

Fire station Jesus sign was offensive

I live about a half mile from Utica, N.Y., where FFRF contested the "Happy Birthday Jesus We Love You" sign outside a firehouse. I do not belong to a formal synagogue, church or mosque. I am offended by the firehouse sign.

I very much appreciate and support your actions with the mayor regarding the sign.

Name withheld
New York

What would Jesus drive? Dollar rental!

While renting a car recently at the airport in Jacksonville, Fla., I noticed a sign in the booth of the Dollar rental office that read "God Bless You!" I spoke to the manager and told him that I did not think that mixing religion with business was a good idea, and that the sign may be offensive to others of different faiths and beliefs. I said that I did not need to be "blessed."

After picking up my rental, as I was driving out, I noticed that the sign was taken down. Keep up the great work.

Phil Kellerman
New York

Remembering Rushdie in Hebdo wake

The day that they put a fatwa on Salman Rushdie was the day 27 years ago that I ordered *The Satanic Verses*. I hope you saw the wonderful quote from Salman after the terrorism in Paris:

"Religion, a medieval form of unreason, when combined with modern weaponry becomes a real threat to our freedoms. This religious totali-



Good day at Black Rock

George and Julie Iddon (aka Braveheart and Artemisia), Washington state, have a freethought moment on their motorized couch in front of the center camp at Burning Man 2014 in the Black Rock Desert in northern Nevada. The week-long annual event is "an experiment in community, art, radical self-expression, and radical self-reliance." George adds, "We'll see you in October 2015 at the convention in Madison."

tarianism has caused a deadly mutation in the heart of Islam and we see the tragic consequences in Paris today. I stand with Charlie Hebdo, as we all must, to defend the art of satire, which has always been a force for liberty and against tyranny, dishonesty and stupidity. 'Respect for religion' has become a code phrase meaning 'fear of religion.' Religions, like all other ideas, deserve criticism, satire, and, yes, our fearless disrespect."

I miss Christopher Hitchens terribly, but he couldn't have stated it any better than his friend Salman (but I'm probably wrong; Hitchens would have no doubt been better).

Free press is a must in our society!!

Greg Stuart
Indiana

Hotel bible inserts a wonderful idea

I was so impressed with the "To whomever opens this bible" insert that Jamie Tobitt has placed in several hundred hotel Gideon bibles over the years that I printed copies to do the same in my travels. I recently stayed at six hotels in California, Nevada and Utah and, to my surprise, I found a bible in only one.

We're making progress! Keep up the good work.

Don Stockard
California

Mich. college students appreciate FFRF

I'm honored to share some wonderful news about a First Year Experience (FYE) course that I teach at Central Michigan University in Mt. Pleasant. Last semester, I had the pleasure of working with 40 students entering their first year of college. My class, FYE 101, is considered an introductory course for first-time students (freshman and transfer). I work with students who have shown in high school, and desire to continue to show in college, an interest in diversity, multiculturalism and inclusion.

During the semester, I've asked the students to complete a major community service project. This assignment allows groups of students to coordinate all aspects of creating a project, from

creation to involvement to execution and presentation. Steps included, but were not limited to: 1) research/knowledge/service; 2) awareness; and 3) fundraising. They were also asked to write a five-page paper about their experience.

I'm excited to say that your organization was chosen as a recipient of one of the eight group's fundraising efforts! On behalf of Amanda Corder, Lauren Ouellette, Sydnee Alexander, Jasmine Smith and Husayn Jaber (Multicultural Advancement Scholars), please accept this check for \$43.52 to use toward the continued success of your organization. In addition, I have included and mailed under separate cover a banner the students signed.

We appreciate your work and the services you provide to make someone's life just a little bit better.

Traci L. Guinn, Ed.D.
Michigan

'Death with dignity' an important fight

Barbara Mancini's story [Dec14] about her struggle, and sad failure, to achieve a "death with dignity" for her father brought me back to my own story. My mother, who was dying of ovarian cancer, wanted desperately to die, and I found a way to help her do that.

After writing about this in my book *Last Wish*, I heard from many people with a dying loved one who had the same reasonable wish: a swift, painless death. Anyone who has been through this understands the good sense in allowing physicians to help. It's the safest way to make sure the passage from life to death goes smoothly.

I, too, am a member of Compassion and Choices, an organization that assists people who are in this situation and fights for legalization. Many religious people are in favor of such change. Some of them are Catholic. A major foe of physician-assisted death, however, is the well-funded Catholic Church.

The word "mercy" comes up often in Catholic teachings. Unfortunately, it is not applied in cases of dying patients, who simply, and reasonably, want a decent way out.

Betty Rollin
New York



David Williamson, founder of the Central Florida Freethought Community, an FFRF chapter, loves his custom Mighty Wallet. “The FFRF and CFFC logos stand symbolically between ‘the state’ on the left and ‘the church’ on the right. My previous two Mighty Wallets regularly garnered compliments and comments. Now I have a reason to talk about something a little more substantial than ‘nice wallet!’”

Pope off the mark on insulting religion

Thanks, Annie Laurie [for her blog “We can and we must make fun of faith”], right on the money! The pope opposes negative comments about religions because he doesn’t want bricks thrown at his glass house. So while it sounds as if he is defending the idea of respect, he is really trying to protect Catholics from being a target.

When people hide behind religion to excuse extreme behavior, it is well past the time to be polite in our denouncement of this façade. Popes are considered infallible to orthodox Catholics, but we say that no one is entitled to respect simply because they hold a title (let alone be considered infallible).

Respect is earned by deeds. When religious leaders earn our respect, we will give it. Religions themselves — that’s another matter.

Jerry Gilbert
Colorado

Terror threat requires rethinking tactics

Though I am a Life Member committed to a secular society, I have come to the conclusion that it is immediately imperative for the secular community to reach across the aisle and build strong bridges with theists from the currently predominant religion in America in order to protect against the immeasurably greater threat to civil liberties that will manifest from the inevitable rise of radical Islam within American borders.

I am deeply thankful to FFRF for its indefatigable pursuit of secular liberty, but I don’t want to look back with regret 30 years from now at all the time we squandered writing to local governments about [what to me are relatively inconsequential things like nativity scenes].

As my heroes Annie Laurie and Dan well know, fighting militant theism with reason is not like fighting fire with fire. It is not even like fighting fire with water. It is like fighting fire — with a flashlight. We have no time to fight this fire with flashlights.

All theism, if unchecked, leads to theocracy. But not all theocracies pose the same danger. We needn’t look too far to find other nations which have already surrendered to the “religion that must not be insulted.”

I regret this conclusion, but I am convinced that joining forces with our Christian countrymen is the only way to secure long-term freedom for secularists.

Frank Mercer
Washington

Jesus Christ real Super Bowl superstar?

After Seattle’s comeback win over

Green Bay, fans of faith and football admired the Seahawks as the players knelt in prayer to personally thank God for their miraculous victory. Other fans may have been tempted by a less visceral moment to question why such an omnipotent God was lounging around the clouds in a No. 12 jersey watching football while ignoring deadly natural disasters, worldwide diseases and a host of daily atrocities of men against men, women and children.

Regardless of your persuasion, we know that our hardworking Seahawks may, or may not, win the next Super Bowl. And even in 2015, some may believe that the outcome of the “big game,” followed by hurricanes, pandemics and wars will be positively altered by prayer if you just have faith. Let’s see what happens.

Patrick Sebald
Washington

Editor’s note: Pat’s letter was published in the Everett Herald in January. What happened in the Super Bowl? God snubs Seahawks!

Scientific theories always open to revision

I’d like to comment on [student essayist] Benjamin Carter’s comment about scientific theories being constantly disproven. While it’s true that many ideas have been accepted and later proven false, it’s usually the details that are revised and not the vigorously tested general ideas.

Copernicus was wrong about circular orbits of planets, Newton about the immutability of space and Einstein about the cosmological constant. Biologists argue over the modes of evolution and physicists the existence of dark matter. But centuries after Newton came up with his laws of mechanics, they are still used every day by engineers. We still believe that planets orbit around the sun and that the cosmological constant has a logical explanation. Biologists still have no question about the phenomenon of evolution.

Rather than a house of cards that will be knocked down one day, vigorously tested scientific theories are more like blueprints of partially mapped houses that may be revised upon further knowledge, but the existence of which are in no doubt.

Tsee Lee
New York

Population problem tied to religious belief

There are two basic problems on this planet: the human population explosion and religion. The two feed on each other like parasites, forever hungry. As the population grows, people become poorer and more desperate. Poverty reduces their opportunities to become more educated, and they become less willing or able to question authority. That delights religious lead-

ers who prey on uneducated people.

This never-ending cycle decreases the opportunity for education and produces people who believe the lies of religious leaders, the very same imams and bishops who brainwash those that follow them into believing that to have many children is the will of some “god.”

And on it goes relentlessly toward a self-prophesied Armageddon.

Charles W. Brown
California

Exhibiting no shame about ‘coming out’

I’m a longtime member who eagerly reads each issue of Freethought Today. It’s very interesting and annoying that so many increasingly arrogant religious bigots persist in ignoring the legal realities underlying separation of state and church as they initiate battles they cannot win.

In the science of evolution, there are two terms that describe the significance of changes that occur within species over time. “Rudimentary” anatomical or physiological features are ones that are becoming more apparent and significant for success of the species over time. “Vestigial” features are those that are becoming less prominent as they become less important for the survival of the species.

Human culture also evolves, and beliefs and “facts” that were once universally accepted are discarded, most often as scientific research and discovery fill in gaps in our knowledge. For example, we now know that the Earth is not flat and that natural phenomena like earthquakes and lightning are not caused by temper tantrums of imaginary beings.

In human cultural evolution, superstitions and religious mythology fit the “vestigial” category. Over time they will

disappear from human experience altogether, if our species survives long enough. I find it very encouraging that the membership of FFRF and other freethinking groups is growing and, in polls, more and more people are publicly professing no religious belief.

I began to lose what little belief I had in religious mythology when I went to college and began an extensive study of biology and evolution. As my knowledge increased, my awareness of the silliness, and the destructiveness, of the biblical Genesis story also increased.

Largely because of what I’ve learned through FFRF and the stories told by others who have put aside their vestigial belief in ridiculous mythology, when the subject of belief comes up in conversation I no longer just say that I’m not religious. I state that I am an atheist.

I think it’s important that we “come out” to show others that we have no shame in our choosing knowledge over ignorance and blind obedience to stuff we just know can’t be true.

Robert C. Van Fleet
California

Stealth fundamentalists stalking Texas

On the day before Texas Gov.-elect Greg Abbott’s inauguration, a news story showed Gov. Rick Perry “passing down” a bible said to have been handed from Texas governor to governor since 1925. Perry was heard telling Abbott that the governor’s primary duty is to be a servant of the people and quoted from the Book of Matthew.

It’s no secret that Abbott, and the lieutenant governor-elect, Dan Patrick, are both creationists eager to pass legislation mandating the teaching of intelligent design alongside evolution in public schools. Both are advocates of school vouchers for private and parochial schools, taking students out of the public school system. Both oppose abortion rights, marriage equity and birth control.

Both are what I like to call “stealth fundamentalists,” public officials or those seeking office who disguise their real agendas by avoiding discussion of religious issues during campaigns, but who, once elected, unveil a radical fundamentalist Christian agenda.

Only time will tell how Texans will suffer for it in the days, months and years to come.

Jack Mathys
Texas

Michigan Atheists celebrate decades of activism



Photos by Tracey Martin



FFRF Co-president Dan Barker spoke at the 28th annual statewide convention of Michigan Atheists (MA) in Ann Arbor in December. He is pictured at left with Doug Marshall, the courageous plaintiff in FFRF’s lawsuit challenging religious discrimination in Warren, Mich.

Dan also performed a few freethought songs. MA President Anne-Marie stands behind Dan as organizers and attendees join the festivities. MA, founded in 1975, is one of the oldest continuously operating atheist groups in the country.

Meet a member

Name: James Downard.

Where I live: Spokane, Wash.

Where and when I was born: Spokane, Sept. 22, 1952.

Family: Two sisters and a brother still living, plenty of nieces and nephews far and wide.

Education: B.A. in history, Eastern Washington University.

Occupation: Former inventory/supply worker, now retired (on extremely inadequate Social Security).

How I got where I am today: Muddling along one day at a time as best I can, trying to enjoy myself but not making a nuisance.

Where I'm headed: In my TIP (Troubles in Paradise) anti-creationism project, I hope to help limit anti-evolutionist popularity. The initial PDFs and links are online at www.tortucan.com, a very much no-frills page so far.

The TIP project is a methods-based ("follow the sources") approach that bypasses the usual and often distracting "religion vs. science" fistfight in order to pull the rug out from under the anti-evolutionists. Sound documenting of sources is something they can't do at all, let alone well enough to win, so it seems a good idea for us to play those cards right off the bat.

Person in history I admire: Stephen Jay Gould, as prickly a "paying attention to details" guy as ever there was, and whose ideas (from spandrels to NOMA) have sparked my and others' thinking. For example, my pocket definition of religion ("a neotenus spandrel sustained as a Scorched Earth defense") owes a lot to Gould's concepts and terminology.

A quotation I like: William James, sent a questionnaire in 1904 about religious beliefs of prominent persons and their dependence on "the authority of the bible," replied succinctly: "No. No. No. It is so human a book that I don't see how belief in its divine authorship can survive the reading of it."

These are a few of my favorite things: Music (classical and otherwise), movies (and their music), studying science and history in many forms, designing an amusement park (my grand and obviously unbuilt "Nat Park" plan that had as brief blip of "fame" in our local KSPS public TV's 1990s documentary "Memories of Natatorium Park.") They



James Downard

still air it around the Fourth of July.

These are not: People who seriously think things like anti-evolutionism are good science and the people who (knowingly or not) elect them to boards of education or state legislatures or Congress. I devised the "Tortucan" concept to account for how people can so easily do those sorts of things (search on youtube.com for "tortucan" videos).

My doubts about religion started: I was raised in a family of very much ex-Mormons, where there was no religious upbringing or discussion of religious matters whatsoever. My mother (very politically conservative but also very nonreligious) went ballistic when she found out that our first-grade class was marched once a week to religious instruction at a Spokane church. She thought public school was where you were supposed to get educated, not indoctrinated, and pulled me out immediately. I spent the time reading on my own at school while the class dithered away the hour at the church. But she did send us all to Sunday school, just so we'd be exposed to it and could make up our own minds (none of us became converts from the experience).

We were living in California by the time I was dispatched to Methodist Sunday school in the early 1960s, which didn't last long. I was summarily asked to leave (much like Carl Sagan's fictional Ellie Arroway in *Contact*) for asking too many questions about the biblical flood (my dinosaur collecting and encyclopedia reading having had

its baneful influence on me already).

The big mistake they made at Sunday school, though, was giving me a nice Revised Standard Version of the bible, complete with a plethora of bottom-of-the-page cross references. That's how I first spotted that the Davidic genealogy of Joseph listed in Matthew didn't match the one given in Luke. I notice that not all bibles make the mistake of putting cross references right there for people like me to follow up more easily!

Before I die: I would like to enjoy at least a bit of whatever posthumous fame I may have earned.

Ways I promote freethought: Over the years, I've become active in the Spokane Secular Society and the Inland Northwest Freethought Society, the latter now an FFRF chapter. I've helped organize and staff the annual Darwin

Day display at the downtown RiverPark Mall. I'm also the atheist blogger on the award-winning Spokane Faith & Values website (www.spokanefaith.com) where my "Ask an Atheist" button gets plenty of traffic.

The big thing on my plate is the online anti-creationism project, which has expanded to cover over 35,000 sources (including over 13,000 technical science works aimed at "flattening" over 6,000 anti-evolution sources). Nothing on this scale has existed before. Those who want to help the TIP baby grow and thrive can find a link at www.tortucan.com/ because I can't quite do it alone (it takes a secular village sort of thing).

I'm also on Facebook and Twitter, where I've been usefully applying TIP methods to short-circuit anti-evolutionists.

Black Collar Crimes

Continued from page 19

sex. I didn't consider it sex." Ericksen claimed there was no "rape" due to lack of penetration.

"The case is still open," said Sawyer County Sheriff Mark Kelsey. Charges could still be brought due to Wisconsin's legal doctrine called "tolling," which stops the clock on the statute of limitations for people who leave the state.

The doctrine was upheld in a 2010 Wisconsin Supreme Court case involving former convicted Jesuit priest **Donald McGuire**. *Source: Sawyer County Record, 12-30-14*

James Schook, 66, a former Louisville, KY, Catholic priest in prison, had his request for "shock probation" denied. He has terminal melanoma. He was sentenced to 15 years last April on 3 counts of sodomy and 1 count of indecent and immoral behavior with an individual.

Richard Whitfield, now 56, told the jury Schook first molested him in 1971 when he was 13 and said the sexual relationship lasted for years. He was too ashamed to tell anyone, he testified. *Source: WLKY, 12-19-14*

Juan McFarland, former pastor of Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church in Montgomery, AL, was permanently barred by a circuit judge from church property and must remove himself from all church bank accounts. McFarland told the congregation in September he had AIDS, had sex with parishioners on church property, misused church money, used drugs and carried a loaded gun in church.

After he refused to give up his post, trustees filed an injunction. Church members voted twice to remove him, 80-1 in October and 92-13 in November. *Source: The Advertiser, 12-3-14*

Allegations

An unidentified 89-year-old man told the Historical Institutional Abuse inquiry how he was sexually abused by teen boys and beaten by nuns at Nazareth House and Lodge in Belfast, N. Ireland, where he arrived when he was 3 after his parents abandoned him. His mother wanted him to get a good education and better life than she could provide after his father left the family, the man testified from a wheelchair.

He never told her about the sex abuse "out of respect for her," he said.

A total of 102 witnesses testified before the inquiry, which was set up in 2013 to investigate child abuse in 13 N. Ireland residential institutions from 1922-95. *Source: BBC, 1-6-15*

The **Catholic Diocese of Gallup, NM**, released an updated list going back decades of 30 clergy and 1 layperson it says were credibly accused of sexually abusing minors. The list includes names, places and dates of service but doesn't mention any criminal charges, sanctions or information on the number of accusers.

Arizona plaintiffs' lawyer Robert Pastor said "credibly accused" is an arbitrary term. "In that context, the Catholic Church acts as judge and jury. Historically, the Catholic Church and its managers have used the phrase 'credibly accused' to justify hiding pedophile priests." *Source: Arizona Republic, 12-17-14*

The **Catholic Church of Scotland** announced 15 allegations of sexual, physical, verbal or emotional abuse were made in 2013, 7 of which allegedly involved clergy members. Six allegations were historical (from the 1980s or before) and 10 of the 15 were for sexual abuse.

As of November 2014, there were no prosecutions associated with the 2013 allegations. *Source: BBC, 12-16-14*

California victim advocates are calling for the ouster of former Catholic priest and psychiatrist **Thomas Havel** from his practice at El Camino Hospital. They cited accusations that Havel, now 77, molested 2 teen girls years ago.

Havel was accused in 1988 of assaulting a 13-year-old girl he had counseled before coming to El Camino. The civil suit was dismissed. The alleged victim was 34 when she came forward.

Havel was accused in 2002 of molesting a girl between 1968-73 while he was pastor at a Pasadena parish. Archdiocese of Los Angeles files state that the Marianist Order settled that case and Havel petitioned to leave the priesthood in the late 1990s.

"We are taking this matter seriously and assessing the situation carefully," the hospital said in a statement.

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests was alerted by a concerned citizen to Havel's presence at the hospital, where he has worked since 1980 and is an electro-convulsive therapy specialist.

"When the news of Jerry Sandusky broke, we heard from victims of coaches and victims of teachers," said SNAP's Barbara Dorris. "You feel safer to come forward when someone's blazed the trail." *Source: Contra Costa Times, 12-7-14*

Removed / Resigned

John E. Harris, 59, a Catholic priest who voluntarily separated himself from public ministry in 2003 after having served in 5 Maine parishes over 19 years, was defrocked by the Vatican. Diocese of Portland officials said an accusation of sexual abuse of a minor by Harris in the early 1980s has been substantiated. *Source: Press Herald, 1-17-15*

The Catholic Archdiocese of Boston announced that **3 administrators at Immaculate Conception School** in Revere, MA, resigned after allegations of indecent exposure in a bathroom by an employee.

A statement said 3 potentially illegal incidents took place in a student-only bathroom in the 6 weeks prior to the announcement. Pastor **George Szal**, Principal **Alyson Kelly** and an **unidentified teacher** resigned "due to their failure to report these possible incidents in a timely manner."

The unidentified employee was put on leave pending the outcome of a police investigation. *Source: WCVB, 1-13-15*

S. Bartholomeow, pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church, Jalahalli, India, was suspended by the Vatican. Bangalore Archbishop Bernard Moras confirmed the suspension but offered no details, saying "It's best you ask him."

Bartholomeow was accused of rape in 2013 but the case was dismissed after the complainant refused to cooperate. Activists are pressing to reopen the case. *Source: Times of India, 1-12-15*

Dan Duane, 76, Mallow, Ireland, lost his appeal of a decision by the Apostolic Signatura in Rome that he be defrocked. Pope Francis has endorsed the ruling of the canonical court, and the Diocese of Cloyne has apologized to victims of Duane's alleged sexual abuse for the time the removal took (8 years). *Source: Irish Independent, 1-7-15*

Robert Harrison, 77, one of the first black Catholic priests in Milwaukee, has been barred from public ministry and removed from teaching and coaching at Cardinal Hayes High School, Bronx, NY. A press release from the school said Harrison "has admitted committing several acts of sexual abuse of minors in the 1970s and 1980s."

At the time, Harrison was serving in Milwaukee as a Capuchin Franciscan priest. *Source: PIX11, 1-5-15*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

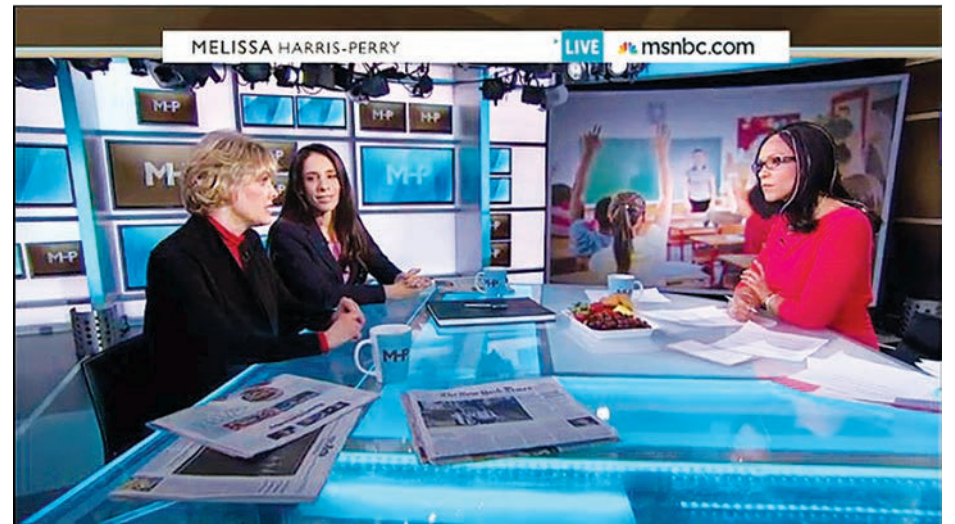
What War on Christmas?

Minnesota Atheists raised \$1,190 for a Twin Cities food bank on Thanksgiving Day on the 5K Walk to End Hunger and was named volunteer organization of the month by the Foundation Beyond Belief. In December, 24 atheists donated over \$1,000 worth of toys and games to the Children's Hospital of Minnesota, said

Eric Jayne, MA president and FFRF member (center, arms spread in this photo at the Mall of America). "In 2014, we had over 70 volunteers donate over 1,600 hours of service for our monthly food bank packing event and had about 150 volunteers serve meals on 14 occasions to over 300 people without permanent housing at the Family Place Shelter," Jayne said.



Churches in schools debated on MSNBC



A Religious Right scheme to “plant a church in every school” was one of the topics covered in a Jan. 31 segment of MSNBC-TV’s “Melissa Harris-Perry Show,” featuring FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor and Katherine Harris, author of *The Good News Club: The Christian Right’s Stealth Assault on America’s Children*.

FFRF’s complaint over such an entanglement at Apopka High School in

Orlando, Fla., was reported by Harris in her Jan. 14 article in *The Nation* headlined “The movement to put a church in every school in growing.”

The Venue Church, which operates inside three public schools in Orange County, Fla., has as its goal “To plant a congregation in every Central Florida school zone in the next 10 years.” FFRF, which has an ongoing federal lawsuit over bible distribution in Or-

ange County Public Schools, has repeatedly complained to the district about a number of problems.

The church vows it will never own its own building. Its motto is “Partnering with schools and communities to serve students and families to gain the privilege of sharing the love of Jesus for eternal impact.”

FFRF complained, among other things, about Todd Lamphere, Venue’s

co-founder and pastor, being designated as the school football team’s “chaplain” (as well as chaplain of its bowling team!). The district subsequently renamed him “life coach” and continues to justify Lamphere’s active school presence, which includes organizing “mission trips” for students.

Harris and Gaylor debated the topic with a Methodist evangelist.

College essay contest honorable mention

Unleashing the atheist within

By Jennifer Wilson

My parents raised me with a profound respect for science but not with religion. My physicist taught me that there are certain laws of nature that the universe abides by, and even though we cannot understand everything, these laws exist and allow us to survive.

My respect for science has never led me to belittle religion or those who believe. It simply allows me to justify a world in which the answer to “What is the meaning of life?” is just as easily nothing, as it is God, nirvana or the number 42.

I had a Catholic friend in junior high who tried to pique my curiosity. She talked about religion a lot. I only mentioned my nonbelief when I was asked what church I went to. When we were 14, out of the blue, she told me that I could come to Mass with her anytime and said, “I pray for you a lot because I’m worried that you’re going to go to hell.”

The sentiment came from her heart, a place full of compassion for others, but I was taken aback. In my head I told her she should save her prayers for people who actually want them, but aloud I just said, “Thank you, that’s very thoughtful.”

Whether it was by telling me about Jesus Christ in the middle of an abortion debate or trying to debunk decades of scientific inquiry while discussing creationism, my classmates found ways to poke the atheist within me.

The vast majority of students at my small Lutheran college in Minnesota are Christians. I was hesitant to attend because of that, but I felt at home on the campus, the academics were rigorous and the financial aid they offered was stellar.

Three problems faced me: biblical studies, theological studies and ethical studies requirements. One day in my first-semester class called “Bible in Film,” the professor did the unthinkable: He asked those of us who

believed in God to raise our hands. I was the only one who didn’t. He then asked me to justify my nonbelief.

Two weeks into college, in a room full of strangers (and my roommate), I froze up, unable to justify myself or even ask the simplest of questions as a rebuttal: “Why do you believe in God, professor?” For the rest of the semester, my peers met my opinions with glares of disdain and immediate counterattacks.

That first semester was rough, but I’ve become more confident in expressing my opinions. I’ve used my nonbelief to instigate discussion rather than argument.

I’ve always been an atheist, and I al-



ways will be, no matter how many of my peers poke at the atheist within me, trying to stamp it out.

Jennifer Wilson, 21, was born in Geneva, Switzerland, and lived in France the first eight years of her life but considers Lawrence, Kan., her hometown. She’s a senior majoring in English and mathematics at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minn. She was awarded \$200 for this essay.

Sharing the Crank Mail

Parental warning: contains obscene, schatological and sexually graphic language. Proofreader warning: typos and bad spelling uncorrected.

New, oh-so-appropriate hot spot suggested for godless heathens: Bikini Atoll, test site for 23 U.S. nuclear devices detonated between 1946–58.

you people are assholes: You people are absolute losers, the bottom of the barrel of humanity. Tolerance only goes in one direction for mofos like you, and you the only reason you get away with it is because in the end you will answer to God. — *Dick Heads, leaveChristAlone@shmuks.com*

MSNBC: SAw your twerp on MSNBC with MHP. Relogious organizations do far more good for the poor & down-trodden than you ever will, if you do anything! Catch your breath next time, asswipe, before speaking. You are all worthless pieces of shit. You will be targeted in our revolution! — *dee mee, Tarrytown, Colo.*

God is Great mother fuckers!: Get a life and leave Ohio alone you bunch of racist pigs! — *Mike Hunt, fuckYou@yahoo.com*

Poop: Poop in my mouth tastes so good like a real atheist would say on a mothafucken dickweed mothafucka bitch ass niggas eatin salad on a Tuesday rubbing their dicks on the floor until they are red all over and split that shit in 2? — *Dick Long*

Freedom: You and your leader the current US President have destroyed the true meaning of America where we are free to choose our own beliefs and ignore the ones we choose not to participate in. Stop destroying what America is

all about. It’s bad enough that we have the anti Christ as the US president, we certainly don’t need you to dictate our lives as well. — *LP Gunn*

Life: It’s in my best interest to inform you that you are in violation. You will need to cease your activities! Eternity is a long time! Advise has been given!!! Have a nice day!! — *ne.bubba@yahoo.com*

Idiots: If you don’t like freedom of religion the move your ignorant selves to Iraq. — *Ryan Howe*

get out of alabama: you have NO RIGHT TO INFRINGE ON OUR RIGHTS TO WORSHIP GOD AND STAND FOR HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS... IF YOU DON’T LIKE...MOVE TO BAGHDAD! — *phullips*

Opinion: You are very alarming group of misled individuals. With your last breath.....Who’s name will you be calling out? — *jdhattonelectric@yahoo.com*

religion: If a city wants to have a CHRISTMAS parade mind your own fuckin business! Christ is the reason for CHRISTMAS! Get over it. White Christians are supposed to be tolerant of everything but we can’t do anything because it might offend some camel hump. Groups like yours will be the reason for the 2nd civil war!! MERRY CHRISTMAS assclowns. — *Sam Nelson, Wisconsin*

Growing up: Take a good look at the world now and what it was when you were young. did your parents do drugs?. Where there as many murders.. rapes.. crimes?.. were there wholesom programs on tv?.. Did people lock there doors?.. If you want to fight to keep something out.. you should be working on what is on the TV.. the

Games of violence the kids play today... you represent a world without GOD.. YOUR SO BACKWARDS — *Jay McMahon*

Your group: All you liberal sacks of shit need to be shuffled to Bikini Atoll & left to rot!!! — *Pendragon of Britain*

hey: You people need to get a real job instead of taking god out of everything. I took your bible quiz which sickened me cause if u got a question wrong u give the right answer along with some smart ass remarks. No wonder the world is all to hell. Have a blessed day. — *matt barnette, Virginia*

WHERE JESUS DIED: RELIGION AS JESUS BRUIED AT THE CITY OF GOLGOTHA, AND CURCIFIED IN THE CITY OF GOLGOTHA. BUT, JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST DIED TOGETHER ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS AND THEY WERE KILLED ONLY TWICE. — *DONNA RINKER, ANDOVER, MAINE*

Questions: What we do with practicing religion is our business whether it’s partaking in a prayer before a football game or I stilling it in government WHO THE FUCK DIED AND MADE YOUR BITCH ASS BOSS TO TELL US WHERE OUR RELIGION HAS BUSINESS BEING?! No one so go jam a couple fingers up your narrow ass sit the fuck down shut the fuck up and stop making a mockery of traditions no one gives a fuck and the only reason they act like they do is because of persistent nagging by your foundation trying to get you to shut the hell up! We’re football players we pray before every game and our coaches are apart of that family tradition you CANT stop this we will pray and pray and pray. — *James KCCO*

Freethought billboards blanket Chicago area

FFRF and its Metropolitan Chicago chapter put up 14 freethought billboards in Chicagoland in December and January, with six more scheduled to be placed in March. Eleven went up in December and three in January. (All are shown here, along with Evan Kane's on this issue's front page. Billboards featuring "Friendly Atheist" Hemant Mehta and Tom Cara, chapter director, were featured in December's Freethought Today.)

Bob Elmore, photographer and chapter board member, commented: "As Tom Cara might attest, there isn't much I wouldn't do for the cause of FFRF, and providing some decent photos of the billboards was a true pleasure. We're all really proud of Tom's commitment to furthering the message here in the Chicago area and look forward to recruiting more new members who might respond to our efforts and aren't afraid to show their true colors."

One billboard was somehow deemed "offensive" by a landowner whom Clear Channel was leasing space from and had to be moved to a different location. It featured Alan Wagner and his message, "I put my faith in science."

"It's hard to believe someone would be that offended by a slogan that says that," commented Cara.

FFRF, which has more than 800 Illinois members, debuted the "Out of the Closet" billboard campaign in 2010 in Madison, Wis. Chicago is the 12th city for the campaign.

"Atheist? Freethinker? Humanist? Good WITHOUT god? Join us!"

FFRF Chicago Board Members, ffrfmcc.org... **Freethinkers**

FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Finding purpose & meaning together... religion free!"

Liz, Chris, Sylvie, Ian & Charlie Calato, *Huntley* Freethinking family... **Atheists**


FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"I believe in reason and logic!"

Mary Schulatz, *Chicago* Retired Teacher... **Atheist**


FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"No gods, no masters."

Chicago Black Skeptics... **Freethinkers**

FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"We are here to challenge you to think for yourself!"

Kimberly Veal, *Chicago* Social Justice Activist... **Freethinker & Humanist**


FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Life is good for this life-long atheist."

Kathi Wise, *Palatine* Grandmother... **Atheist**


FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"I put my faith in science."

Alan Wagner, *Sterling* Musician... **Atheist**


FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"My atheism does not dampen my wonder."

Kenner Estes, *Chicago* IT Executive/Father... **Atheist**

FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Moral, loving and generous — without religion."

Your Atheist Neighbors


FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"Equality for all shouldn't be constrained by any religion."

Joel Frazin, *Chicago* Trader... **Atheist**


FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



"I'm following truth beyond belief."

Drew Bekius, *Chicago* Former Pastor... **Freethinker**

FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



Mark your calendar!

38th Annual National FFRF Convention

Weekend of October 9-11, 2015
 Monona Terrace Community & Convention Center
 1 John Nolen Drive
 Madison, Wisconsin

Tour expanded Freethought Hall Friday morning. Tour Frank Lloyd Wright convention center Friday afternoon, enjoy appetizers, workshops.

Formal program begins 7 p.m. Friday continuing all day Saturday.