

Freethought Today

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FFRF unveils 'Atheists in Foxholes' monument

A 4,743-pound granite monument dedicated to "Atheists in Foxholes and the countless freethinkers who have served this country with honor and distinction" was installed Oct. 6 at FFRF's new offices in Madison, Wis.

It was dedicated on Oct. 9 during the grand opening of the renovated Freethought Hall. About a fourth of FFRF's membership are veterans or current members of the military.

The monument, made of the same South Dakota granite that Mount Rushmore is carved from, is more than 7 feet high, reflects the long windows that are part of the original 1855 building and provides a focus for the Rose Zerwick Memorial Garden and Courtyard adjoining the new entrance. A teak bench opposite the display provides a spot for reflection.

This is FFRF's second Atheists in Foxholes monument. The prototype,

which was carved by World War II veteran Bill Teague, is nestled in the piney woods next to FFRF's southern Freethought Hall near Munford, Ala., which is overseen by its chapter, the Alabama Freethought Society.

FFRF worked with Pechmann Memorials, which also carved the patio pavers — bearing donor names and slogans — surrounding the monument in the cozy courtyard space.

"FFRF deals with so many state/church entanglements regarding all branches of the military, where substantial incursions by aggressive evangelicals have been made. This monument not only honors nonreligious veterans, but serves as a reminder to our nation that — contrary to that tired, old, untrue cliché — there are indeed many 'atheists in foxholes,'" said Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-founder and co-president.



Ingrid Laas photo

Veterans assemble in front of the new Atheists in Foxholes monument Oct. 9, the day FFRF's 38th annual national convention opened in Madison, Wis. (See a close-up photograph of the monument on page 3 and more about the convention in the special eight-page convention insert.)

FFRF lawsuit ends Georgia school prayer

FFRF dismissed its lawsuit against Emanuel County School District in Swainsboro, Ga., after the district agreed to stop teacher-led prayer and proselytization in its public schools.

A concerned family had contacted FFRF about prayer in kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. FFRF sent a letter in August 2014 to the district but teachers continued to subject students to prayer, and the family's students were bullied and ostracized. FFRF filed

suit in February, alleging that teasing classmates and pressure to pray from teachers led one child to drop out of kindergarten, while teachers told the first-grader to start praying and not to listen to the child's mother, whom one teacher described as a "bad person."

But after the suit was filed, the district relented. Emanuel staff have received educational training on their obligations not to promote religious beliefs in their classrooms and the fam-

ily has been financially compensated.

"We're pleased that the Emanuel County Schools has taken action to correct the egregious constitutional violations that were taking place in its classrooms," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "No devotions and religious practices should take place in public schools, and no small child should ever be pressured to take part in such illegal practices."

FFRF was represented by litigation

attorney Wally Nichols of W.R. Nichols and Associates. FFRF Staff Attorneys Sam Grover and Andrew Seidel also worked to build the case.

Grover noted, "Educators in Georgia, where we receive many complaints about religion in schools, and throughout the country, need to know that their duty is to educate students, not fill their heads with religious propaganda."

FFRF, ACLU sue over school's nativity scene

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, the American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Indiana filed a federal lawsuit Oct. 7, challenging an annual live nativity performance at Concord High School in Elkhart, Ind.

The complaint notes that for several decades Concord High School has organized a "Christmas Spectacular." Every performance, of which there were five last year, "ends with an approximately 20-minute telling of the story of the birth of Jesus, including a live nativity scene and a biblical scriptural reading. During this segment, students at the high school portray the Virgin Mary, Joseph, the Three Wise Men, shepherds and angels."

FFRF has brought suit on behalf of its 23,000 members, including more than 360 in Indiana, and a local family, whose high school student "Jack Doe" is a member of the performing arts department. Attendance and performance at the event is mandatory for

students enrolled in the performing arts department.

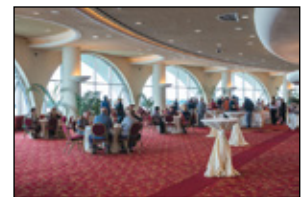
The suit alleges that the nativity performance and the reading of the biblical story of the birth of Jesus are "well-recognized symbols of the Christian faith. Their presence at the Christmas Spectacular is coercive, represents an endorsement of religion by the high school and the school corporation, has no secular purpose, and has the principal purpose and effect of advancing religion."

"FFRF is suing to ensure that non-religious and non-Christian students are able to fully participate in their school's winter concert," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "The nativity represents the pinnacle of Christian belief and its most holy day. This spectacle would be appropriate at a private Catholic school, but is a blatant and egregious promotion of religion in a public school setting."



FFRF will display a Bill of Rights "nativity" metal cut-out plus a winter solstice banner this year in Franklin County, Ind., to counter a courthouse nativity scene that has stood alone on public property for 50 years. FFRF's efforts started in 2010, and after two lawsuits and with the help of the ACLU of Indiana, the county has agreed to open a public forum and allow secular displays. (If you're looking to add a secular display to a December public forum, FFRF has more of these 4-foot metal cut-outs displays available.)

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38th annual national convention
Special Insert!



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Meet our valuable volunteers



Lauren Seering photo

You wouldn't call Linda Josheff (left) and Sue Schuetz soul sisters (and certainly not soulless sisters), but they are siblings. The Charles Darwin that Sue refers to is at right.

Linda Josheff

Name: Linda Josheff.

Where I live: Town of Cross Plains, Wis.

Where and when I was born: July 1946, Madison, Wis.

Family: Husband, Phil; children and spouses, Julie and Rob, Tess and Jere-

my; grandchildren, Cameron, 19, Bailey, 17, Addison, 5; dogs, Bob, Annie and Maizie.

Why I volunteer for FFRF: I believe in the work that is being done here.

What I do as a volunteer: This summer I read essay submissions from students.

What I like best about it: Reading

what these young people have to say. It pleases me to see the large number of responses and the thought that went into each entry.

Education: Madison Area Technical College, practical nursing program, 1966; MATC, associate degree in human service, 1985.

My day job is/was: Retired LPN with 35 years of nursing experience.

These three words sum me up: Funny, sentimental, impatient.

My freethought heroes are: Anne Gaylor, Christopher Hitchens, Margaret Sanger.

Things I like: Dogs, fresh air, reading, laughter.

Things I smite: Hypocrisy, the denial of availability of birth control for all women.

Sue Schuetz

Name: Sue Schuetz.

Where I live: Cross Plains, Wis.

Where I was born: Madison, Wis.

Family: Sons Steven and Gary, four grandsons, two daughters-in-law, two sisters, a brother and lots of great friends!

Education: Coursework at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison

Area Technical College and Edgewood College.

My day job is/was: I worked 18 years for the Dane County Sheriff's Office. Now I enjoy being a very busy and engaged retiree.

Why I volunteer for FFRF: Because I believe in this important work and the amazing, inspiring people here.

What I do as a volunteer: Whatever needs to be done! For example, reading high school and college essays and helping with mailings.

What I like best about it: Being around like-minded people.

Something funny that's happened here: Realizing, every time I walk into the library, Charles Darwin is not a live person.

These three words sum me up: Energetic, creative, curious.

My freethought heroes are: Anne Nicol Gaylor, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Dan Barker, Andrew Seidel.

Things I like: Walking, reading, Wisconsin Public TV and Radio, being with my grandsons and friends and family, staying at my cabin and doing my artwork.

Things I smite: Barking dogs, wind chimes, pesticides.

Meet a Wisconsin member

Name: Dawn Thom.

Where I live: Green Bay, Wis.

Where and when I was born: I was born in the town of Upham in Wisconsin over 80 years ago.

Family: Six lovely children, all college educated with good careers, nine beautiful grandchildren and two wonderful great-grandsons who make me laugh.

Education: I went to a one-room school during my elementary years except for one year in a two-room school. I graduated from high school and went to business college for two years.

Occupation: At retirement, after 21 years, I was an internal auditor for a bank.

How I got where I am today: I was a stay-at-home mom until the children were self-sufficient and then went back into the workforce. My employer used to say I should just turn my salary over to my college-age children as that is where the money went, even though they also worked.

Eighteen years ago, my then husband, who was Lutheran and head of the family in his eyes and the church's, wanted to teach me a lesson, so I was served divorce papers. His minister quoted the bible that women were not to speak and only ask their husband if they wanted to know anything. The hate in my ex's eyes as he said I belonged in jail and he would try to put me there, set the stage to extract myself

from the area. I moved to my present city to be safe.

Where I'm headed: I have written three books, two on local history, now located in the Green Bay library historical section, and one on domestic abuse, which has been approved by Golden House, the Green Bay abuse center. I volunteered for hospice work for a couple of years, learned to fly little planes and kept up on politics.

At this age, it's a one-way trip, but I will end it, kicking and screaming all the way. I'm researching penal institutions, especially how communities and people treat felons who lack of housing and jobs when released, then show amazement when they reoffend. They have created the self-fulfilling prophecy of recidivism.

It has always puzzled me that most people judging someone for making bad choices are the most religious. So many do not have the empathy to reach down and give a hand to the needy. It is like they would soil their hands and not make it to heaven. Yet, Jesus is supposed to have said, "As ye do to the least of these, you do unto me."

Ideas for two new books are rolling around in my head, but I haven't been able to master the software needed. One would be on farm life in the 1930s to 1960s, the other about a young man incarcerated for 18 years after he made a bad decision at age 19 and the trials he has to overcome after release.



Dawn Thom

Something always interferes, especially now with the hysterically funny politics.

My mother lived to be 91 and her brother to age 93, driving a car until he was 92. My father's sister was well over 100 when she passed. All three stayed mentally alert. My brother is turning 88, drives his own car, and he and his wife take care of their house with very few problems. Full steam ahead!

Person in history I admire: The strong women who have stood up for equal rights and had the strength to not back down. Many are "unknown" but have lent their courage to the rest.

A quotation I like: "Let me live in my house by the side of the road and be a friend to man." (Sam Walter Foss, 1858-1911) "Your candle does not glow brighter if you blow someone else's candle out."

These are a few of my favorite things: Flowers, pets, people, traveling, cruises, jokes, music and playing the piano.

These are not: Rigid thinking, negative people, control freaks, especially the ones who use religion as a reason.

My doubts about religion started: Until I was 10, we went to a Congregational church with a lovely woman minister named Mrs. Lavis. Then we moved to my maternal grandparents' farm where the closest church was Lutheran, which my grandfather wouldn't attend, so we went to the United Brethren Evangelical Church. The first time I went to the church service, the ritual seemed normal until the minister started thundering how you could only be saved if you gave yourself to Jesus. Otherwise, you would go to hell. He looked and acted crazy. My eyes opened wide, I shrunk into my seat and clung to my grandmother. This was not religion as I had known it up to then.

The more I was forced to go, the more I resisted. But my parents insisted it wouldn't hurt me, so catechism was a must. I hid the book and did not study and knew only one answer when it came time to pass the test, which embarrassed my family no end.

Before I die: My bucket list starts getting shorter, and then other things pop up, so it is never-ending. Those two books are rattling around in my head just waiting to be put down in the computer. Traveling to see different cultures would be a lot of fun. I've outlived traveling companions. It would be fun to go to D.C. again and see the changes made in the last decades.

Ways I promote freethought: By my actions and discussing my beliefs in a rational manner (most of the time, not always calmly) with those who question or make uneducated remarks about beliefs that conflict with theirs.

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

A Note to Members

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FFRF debuts atheist marquee

While most of the Christian churches in the U.S. (which number about 320,000) proselytize on marquees, secular groups haven't promoted freethought in a similar manner. But now, FFRF has debuted its prominent digital marquee as part of the Oct. 9 grand opening of its newly expanded Freethought Hall in downtown Madison, Wis.

"What the freethought movement has needed is a marquee of its own," said Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. FFRF will keep its marquee "upbeat and positive" while still forthright, unlike many church marquees that include lakes of eternal fire and brimstone, putdowns of nonbelievers or quips against equal rights for gays, atheists and women.

"We're putting freethought on the map," added Co-President Dan Barker, "and we want Freethought Hall to be a landmark."



Andrew Seidel photo

Out of the corner closet

Freethought Hall has shed its former anonymity on a corner two blocks from the Wisconsin Capitol by adding reason to the public discourse. It's kitty-corner from a Catholic "Way of the Cross" display (next to an 8-story state office building) that includes 14 stone crosses depicting how Jesus died 2,000 years ago for sins you haven't even committed yet.

Nonbelief Relief awards \$20K to Doctors Without Borders

Nonbelief Relief, a new humanitarian agency for atheists, agnostics and freethinkers, has awarded its first grant: \$20,000 to Doctors Without Borders.

The Nonbelief Relief board voted to give the grant after the Oct. 3 aerial bombing by the U.S. military of a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, killing 22 people: 12 staff members and 10 patients, including three children. Another 37 people, including 19 staff members, were injured.

"The attack constitutes a grave violation of International Humanitarian Law," Doctors Without Borders noted, calling it "attack on the Geneva Conventions" and a "war crime." It's seeking an unprecedented independent investigation by the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission.

Nonbelief Relief is a venue for nonbelievers to give assistance as nonbelievers.

"We think it's important that it be known that secularists are just as charitable, if not more charitable than the religious, but have simply lacked the infrastructure to give as a united group under the banner of freethought," says Nonbelief Relief President Annie Laurie Gaylor, who also serves as FFRF co-president.

Others on Nonbelief Relief's board are Lisa Strand, FFRF's director of operations; Stephen Hirtle, FFRF's chair and professor at the University of Pittsburgh; and Madison, Wis.-area businessman and FFRF board member Jim Zerwick, who first proposed the donation.

FFRF is the sole member of the charity. Individuals and FFRF members may add their donations to Doctors Without Borders by designating an online donation for Nonbelief Relief at:

ffrf.org/donate/



Ingrid Laas photo

Joseph Cunningham, 89, an FFRF executive board member from Illinois, served in the South Pacific in World War II. He taught for 37 years, mostly high school English, typing and shorthand. "I was a child of the Dust Bowl," he told a reporter earlier this year. "Ever seen 'Grapes of Wrath'? I was that kid."

Patheos hosting Freethought Now!

A blog by FFRF staff members titled Freethought Now! is being hosted by Patheos, a website dedicated to providing a credible dialogue on religion and nonreligion. Freethought Now! will be part of the Atheist Channel on Patheos, which hosts about 40 blogs, including Hemant Mehta's popular The Friendly Atheist. Patheos hosts more than 500 other religious blogs and is accessed by millions of readers every month.

Access the FFRF blog at patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow/.

Some recent blogs are Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel's "Hobby Lobby, owners under investigation for looting artifacts," Staff Attorney Sam Grover's "Arizona's anti-abortion law leads schools

astray," and Co-President Dan Barker's "Let's ask for bible-free rooms."

FFRF expects the new collaboration will increase its visibility and membership. Most Patheos traffic comes from social media. Some blogs get millions of hits a month. In addition to exposing FFRF's writing, activism and vision to a new audience, it will generate a modest income for our nonprophet nonprofit.

For now, our former blog site, ffrf.org/news/blog/, will host our archives and carry a link to the Patheos site. If you are signed up to receive notices of FFRF blogs by email, you will continue to receive a "teaser" of the blog that will take you to the Patheos site.

FFRF adds 22 Life Members, 2 'After-Lifers'

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to announce two new After-Life Members, Kenneth Fahrenholtz and John Mosley, and 22 new Lifetime Members. They are:

Linda Allewalt, Arnold Asrelysky, Stephen Balukoff, Richard E. Bayer, Jeanette Beschta, William H. Brady, David DeGroot, Rosalyn Sue Dunn, Dennis How, Allison Jurkowski, Richard Lee, Bob Mendenhall, Larry Moens, Stephen Murphy, Dory Owen, Steven Peck, Randall T. Pelkey Jr. (aka Chicago Randy), Brian Rezin, Drew A. Rosielle, Luke J. Rosielle (a gift from Drew A. Rosielle), Matthew Sypherd and Dmitry Turovsky.

States represented are Arkansas, Arizona, California, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin.

Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000 designated for membership or renewal. After-Life Memberships (intended for support that "lives after") are \$5,000. All dues and donations are deductible for income-tax purposes. Both types of membership ensure never another renewal notice and go into rainy-day reserves.

Warmest thanks to John, Kenneth, Dmitry, Matthew, Drew, Luke, Brian, Randall, Steven, Dory, Stephen, Larry, Bob, Richard, Allison, Dennis, Rosalyn Sue, David, William, Jeanette, Richard, Stephen, Arnold and Linda!

Announcing three new 'Immortals'

Honorio E. and Theodora F. Andres and Don Fedock join the ranks of FFRF "Immortals" by notifying FFRF of their generous intentions to remember the Foundation in their estate planning.

In September, FFRF sent a brochure about bequests to all members. To request a brochure, please contact Lisa Strand, director of operations, at 1-800-335-4021 or info@ffrf.org.

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

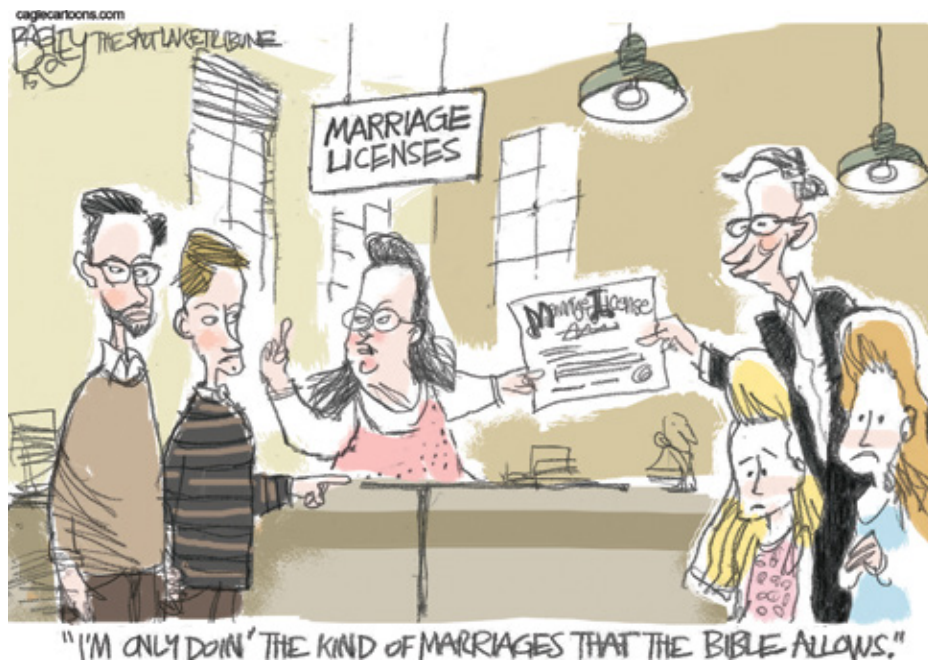
DAYS ONE THROUGH SIX, ETC.

You keep on asking me that—
 “Which day was the hardest?”
 Blockheads! They were *all* hard—
 And of course, since I’m omnipotent,
 They were all easy.
 It was Chaos, to begin with. Can you imagine
 Primeval Chaos? Of course you can’t.
 How long had it been swirling around out there?
 Forever.
 How long had I been there?
 Longer than that.
 It was a mess, that’s what it was. Chaos is
 Rocky. Fuzzy. Slippery. Prickly.
 As scraggly and obstreperous as the endless behind
 of an infinite jackass. Shove on it anywhere,
 it gives, then slips in behind you,
 like smog, like lava, like slag.
 I’m telling you, chaos is—*chaotic*.
 You see what I was up against. Who
 could make a world out of that muck?
 I could, that’s who—land
 from water, light from dark, and so on.
 It might seem like a piece of cake
 now that it’s done, but
 back then, without a blueprint,
 without a set of instructions, without a committee,
 could *you* have created a *firmamen*?
 Of course there were bugs in the process,
 grit in the gears, blips, bloopers—
 bringing forth grass and trees on Day Three
 and not making sunlight until Day Four, that,
 I must say, wasn’t my best move.
 And making the animals and vegetables before
 there was any rain whatsoever—well,
 anyone can have a bad day.
 Even Adam, as it turned out, wasn’t such a great
 idea—those shifty eyes, the alibis,
 blaming things on his wife—I mean,
 it set a bad example. How could he
 expect that little toddler, Cain,
 to learn correct family values
 with a role model like him?
 And then there was the nasty squabble
 over the beasts and birds.
 OK, I admit I told Adam
 to name them, but—Platypus?
 Aardvark? Hippopotamus?
 Let me make one thing perfectly clear—
 he didn’t get that gibberish from *Me*.
 No, I don’t need a planet to fall on Me,
 I know something about subtext.
 He did it to irritate Me, just plain
 spite—and did I need the aggravation?
 Well, as you know, things went from bad
 to worse, from begat to begat,
 father to son, the evil fruit
 of all that early bile. So next
 there was narcissism, then bigotry,
 then jealousy, rage, *vengeance!*
 And finally I realized, the spawn of Adam
 had become exactly like—Me.

No Deity with any self-respect
 would tolerate that kind
 of competition, so what could I do?
 I *killed them all*, that’s what!
 Just as the Good Book says,
 I drowned man, woman, and child, like
 so many cats. Oh, I saved a few
 for restocking, Noah and his crew,
 the best of the lot, I thought. But
 now you’re back to your old tricks again,
 just about due for another good ducking,
 or maybe a giant barbecue.
 And I’m warning you, if I have to do it again,
 there won’t be any survivors, not even
 a cockroach! Then,
 for the first time since it was Primeval
 Chaos, the world will be perfect—
 nobody in it but Me.

© Philip Appleman.

From the book *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems*



Overheard

Indeed, the absurdity of [Kentucky clerk Kim] Davis’ position is apparent: After she issues a gay or lesbian couple a marriage license, she can still worship, she can still read her Bible, she can still believe that her selective spin on God’s teachings is true and other peoples’ is false, she can still hate the air that gays and lesbians breathe. In short, issuing a marriage license in accordance with the law does not affect her constitutional right to freely exercise her religion in the least. Not one iota. At least, as a nation of laws, let’s have the intellectual honesty to label Davis and people like her for what they actually are: not heroes, not martyrs, not defenders of the Constitution. They are the personification of ill will. They are the face of hate.

James Nelson, Montana Supreme Court justice from 1993 to 2012, op-ed
Helena Independent Record, 9-25-15

One especially pities American liberals who took [Pope Francis] to their hearts, disregarding his canonization of a priest who, 250 years ago in California, took part in the genocide of native Americans, and how before an emotional meeting with victims of sexual abuse by priests, he first congratulated the U.S. bishops on their “courage” in the ongoing saga, which of course includes decades of cover-ups that these liberals can somehow ignore. But then it began to emerge that during his visit he had privately met Kim Davis, the Kentucky county clerk who went to jail rather than register same-sex marriages, and had embraced her and thanked her for her “courage.”

Anshel Pfeffer, news correspondent, calling the pope’s failure to address the need for birth control “rank hypocrisy”
Haaretz, 10-2-15

The pope’s calling those protesting sexual abuse and church officials’ complicity “dumb” is shockingly revealing of the lack of seriousness with which he takes this issue—and devastating to those survivors who still held out hope that he would be different from his predecessors.

Katherine Gallagher, Center for Constitutional Rights senior attorney, op-ed, “Pope’s Attitude Is Little Different Than His Predecessors”
The New York Times, 10-14-15

By her own report, Mother Teresa once told a woman to imagine that her suffering was kisses from Jesus: “Suffering, pain, sorrow, humiliation, feelings of loneliness, are nothing but the kiss

of Jesus, a sign that you have come so close that he can kiss you.” “Tell Jesus to stop,” the woman responded.

Valerie Tarico, columnist, “Why Right-Wing Christian Leaders Are Often Indifferent to Needless Suffering”
AlterNet, 9-23-15

Similarly, atheists enjoy broad acceptance from those who don’t identify with any religion, 91% of whom say they would support an atheist for president. However, this drops to 47% among Protestants, and is not much higher among Catholics (58%). As a result, the overall percentage who would vote for an atheist stands at 58%.

Gallup Poll, “Support for Nontraditional Candidates Varies by Religion”
gallup.com, 6-24-15

We’re taking a stand today to fight for pregnant women who are denied potentially lifesaving care because doctors are forced to follow religious directives rather than best medical practices. Catholic bishops are not licensed medical professionals and have no place dictating how doctors practice medicine, especially when it violates federal law.

Brooke Tucker, ACLU of Michigan staff attorney, announcing a lawsuit against Trinity Health Corp., which operates 80 Catholic health care facilities, for denying treatment to at least five women who suffered miscarriages and were denied care
aclu.org, 10-1-15

This was an awesome way to celebrate another “Ooh, the world is going to end” thing.

Kyrie Howard-Nusbaum, Iowa State University software engineering major, on the Atheist and Agnostic Society’s party and canned food collection in the Memorial Union on the night of the “blood moon” eclipse
Iowa State Daily, 9-28-15

Ayisha (not her real name) from Lancashire was just 14 when she began to question Islam after reading the Koran. She started rebelling over wearing the hijab, but eventually decided she wasn’t a Muslim and the situation at home rapidly got worse. “My dad threatened to kill me by getting a knife and holding it against my neck and saying: ‘We might as well do it if you’re going to bring this much shame to the family.’”

News story, “The ex-Muslim Britons who are persecuted for being atheists”
BBC Magazine, 9-28-15



AP Photo/Sue Ogrocki

FFRF protests Kentucky water tower cross

FFRF has objected to a cross atop the Wilmore, Ky., water tower. "It is unlawful for Wilmore to display a patently religious symbol such as a Christian cross on public property," said Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert in a Sept. 29 letter to Mayor Harold Rainwater.

Markert informed Rainwater that FFRF successfully sued the town of Whiteville, Tenn., over its water tower cross. Ultimately, the town agreed to settle the suit, paying FFRF's costs and legal fees.

The Wilmore water tower is on the property of Asbury University, a Christian liberal arts college, but is owned by the city of Wilmore. When ownership was transferred from the university to the city 45 years ago, the school stipulated that the cross should remain.

Rainwater has vowed to keep the cross. "I'm certainly going to fight to keep it with everything I've got. I think it's symbolic of our town," Rainwater told the Jessamine Journal. "We won't take it down unless we're forced to take it down."

"The United States is not a Christian nation, Kentucky is not a Christian state, Wilmore is not a Christian town, and its water tower serves all residents regardless of religion," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Crosses belong on church steeples, not public water towers."

FFRF urges any Wilmore residents offended by their government's endorsement of Christianity to reach out to FFRF.

In the dead of night

Workers removed a 2-ton Ten Commandments monument Oct. 5 from the grounds of the State Capitol in Oklahoma City. The ACLU of Oklahoma challenged it in court, and the state Supreme Court voted 7-2 in June that it was unconstitutional. Oklahoma County Judge Thomas Prince then ordered its removal by Oct. 12. The removal started at 10:30 p.m. for security reasons. Later in October, the ACLU filed suit to remove a recently installed stone decalogue at the Johnston County Courthouse in Tishomingo. The same week, a Ten Commandments monument was moved from Connellsville (Pa.) Area Junior High School, following FFRF's federal court victory.

Legal complaint stops Texas school violations

A Texas school district will no longer let the high school principal preach to students or be involved with a religious after-school club after getting a Sept. 28 complaint from FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.

A lawyer for the Prosper Independent School District responded that Principal Greg Wright will no longer speak "in his capacity as District employee at future on-campus, student-led See You at the Pole events." Attorney Charles Crawford also said the First Priority Club will be "student-formed and led."

An earlier Facebook post by parents promoting the club said Wright is "beginning an organization for students called First Priority on October 7 that

will meet twice per month in the auditorium. They will sing, pray and praise.

"It's like FCA, but some tend to believe FCA is centered more around athletes so Mr. Wright wants all students to feel welcomed at his First Priority meetings. He said this morning [that] Christian faith is an active faith. He's encouraging students to be proactive and make their daily walk with Christ a priority."

FFRF first received a report from a family in the district detailing how Wright preached to students at the school's Sept. 25 See You at the Pole prayer gathering and that Assistant Principal Rachell Grant displayed a Latin cross and a plaque in her office. The plaque said: "God didn't promise

days without pain, laughter without sorry, nor sun without rain. But he did promise strength for the day."

In the FFRF letter, Seidel also asked the district to be wary of potential bullying: "We request that PISD clearly communicate to students and staff that any retaliatory action taken against district families they might believe responsible for raising state-church issues with the school will not be tolerated."

Crawford said the district will "continue to enforce its anti-bullying policies" and bar display of religious items.

FFRF will bestow a student activist award on the complainant, whose essay will be published in a future Freethought Today.

FFRF steps in after members of Congress back coach-led prayers

FFRF has responded to a letter from 47 members of Congress who claim it's constitutional for a public school's assistant football coach to lead team prayer, despite the school district ordering the coach to stop.

The congressional letter, which was sent to Bremerton (Wash.) School Superintendent Aaron Leavell and Bremerton High School Principal John Polm, states they are concerned "over reports that the Bremerton School District views Coach Joseph Kennedy's tradition of quietly praying at the fifty yard line after the conclusion of school football games as unlawful."

On Oct. 28, the school district put Kennedy on paid leave after he defied

the district's order earlier in the month to not pray at midfield following the team's game.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel responded to the congressional letter by sending a letter to U.S. Rep. Randy Forbes and U.S. Sen. James Lankford, co-chairs of the Congressional Prayer Caucus, pointing out the legal errors in their letter defending Kennedy and coach-led prayer. All of the letter's 47 signatories are Republican.

"The Prayer Caucus's letter is misleading and fundamentally misunderstands the law," Seidel writes. "Several other federal courts have examined this precise issue and all have come down on the side of students' right

to an education free from proselytizing and not on the side of a predatory adult seeking to use a position of power to impose their religion on other people's children."

Randy Dorn, state superintendent of public instruction, released a statement on Oct. 23 backing the school district's decision. "School staff exercising their right to silently pray in private on their own is fine. But leading a prayer isn't. School officials are role models; leading a prayer might put a student in an awkward position, even if the prayer is voluntary. For students who don't share the official's faith, prayers [sic] the official's public expression of faith can seem exclusionary or even distress-

ing. What's more, that official could open the district up to a lawsuit."

Kennedy is now being represented by Liberty Institute, a Christian Right group based in Texas. In a letter to the school district, Liberty Institute claims that the postgame prayers are "private religious expression" and has announced plans to sue the district if Kennedy is not allowed to continue the prayers.

On Oct. 29, Kennedy went to the Bremerton football game as a spectator, and prayed in front of the bleachers after the game. According to Heather Graf of King 5 News, Kennedy will be "moving forward with legal action against the school district."

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Freedom Depends on Freethinkers

FFRF legal victories

Bible class discontinued at Alabama school

Blount County School District in Oneonta, Ala., did not offer a bible study elective class for the 2015-16 school year after FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel lodged a complaint about the unconstitutional class.

The class was taught by a teacher and a local Baptist pastor. Class topics included “How we got the bible; Doctrine issues and how they apply to the bible; How to find Christ in the Old Testament — How the Old Testament relates to the New Testament.” The translation used in the class was described as providing “the most recent evangelical Christian bible scholarship.”

Seidel quoted the 1948 Supreme Court case *McCullum v. Board of Education*, in which the court wrote, “Here not only are the state’s tax-supported public school buildings used for the dissemination of religious doctrines. The State also affords sectarian groups an invaluable aid in that it helps to provide pupils for their religious classes through use of the state’s compulsory public school machinery. This is not separation of Church and State.”

The district’s attorney, Donald B. Sweeney, Jr., informed Seidel on Sept. 2 that the class was discontinued for the following school year.

Classroom prayers nixed in North Carolina

A teacher in the school district of Perquimans County in Hertford, N.C., will no longer be permitted to lead her first-graders in prayer after FFRF contacted the district and informed it of the constitutional violation.

Susan Jordan, first-grade teacher at Perquimans Central School, previously led her class in prayer every day before lunch. “Public school teachers may not lead, direct, or ask students to engage in prayer,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott on Sept. 2. “The School District of Perquimans County has an obligation under the law to make certain that ‘subsidized teachers do not inculcate religion,’” wrote Elliott, quoting a Supreme Court case.

The school district’s attorney, Richard A. Schwartz, promptly informed FFRF on Sept. 4 that the superintendent had investigated FFRF’s allegations and met with the teacher. “School officials are confident there will not be any further problems,” Schwartz said.

No prayers at school employee meetings

FFRF has ensured that prayers will not be given during future mandatory faculty meetings in the Montgomery Independent School District in Texas. The school district had brought a Christian pastor to give a prayer at an Aug. 18 employee meeting, and the dean of academics also offered a prayer.

“Federal courts have held that mandatory meetings for government employees cannot promote religion,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote. “This type of religious endorsement unfairly isolates non-Christian and nonreligious employees and could also be perceived as workplace harassment.”

A response from the superintendent on Sept. 8 said that the district

“has addressed these incidents with the appropriate personnel and have taken steps to be proactive in training our administrative staff on the complexities inherent in protecting the constitutional principle of separation between church and state.”

Teacher kicked out of religious club

A teacher at Colonial High School in Orange County (Fla.) Public Schools will no longer have a leadership role in CONFRA: Hispanic Christian Action, a religious club, following involvement into the issue by FFRF.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote the district on Aug. 27 about the teacher’s conduct. She posted on Facebook in Spanish: “I’m super happy and grateful to God because it pleases Him to use me as His instrument, placed in my heart to open a CONFRA at the school where I work . . . For the first meeting I invited 14 young leaders to start and they all came.”

“As you know, the district cannot allow its faculty to form religious student groups, or to participate in religious exercises with students,” Seidel wrote.

In a Sept. 8 response, OCPS attorney John C. Palmerini told FFRF that the teacher had been informed that she cannot participate in the club’s activities.

Texas school’s social media secularized

Staff at the Lake Dallas Independent School District will no longer promote religion on official school district social media pages after FFRF contacted the district regarding the issue.

A student reported to FFRF that the school district’s Twitter feed had re-tweeted a prayer. “Public schools have a constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover reminded the district. “The district must make certain that it does not unlawfully endorse religion, either in the classroom or through social media.”

“From this point forward, I will ensure that staff is better educated in the subject through more thorough professional development sessions and public school law sessions,” wrote Superintendent Gayle Stinson in a Sept. 14 response. “Our goal is to provide an inclusive environment for all students.”

Last Supper has last day at Kansas school



Jesus fried for your sins?

After FFRF protested, Haysville Public Schools in Kansas removed a print of Leonardo Da Vinci’s “The Last Supper” from the cafeteria of Nelson Elementary School.



After getting a letter from Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, this banner in Lake Worth, Fla., and similar ones at four other schools in the Palm Beach County School District were removed. School attorney Blair Littlejohn replied Sept. 24 that a memo was sent to every principal “reminding them that directional banners and signs of lessees should only be displayed during the times that a school facility is being leased.”

“As you are certainly aware, the display of religious messages in the school setting violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment,” Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the school district. “When a district promotes religion over nonreligion, it impermissibly turns non-believing students, parents, and staff into outsiders.”

Donna L. Whiteman, attorney for the school district, informed Seidel on Sept. 14 that the print had been removed.

Graduation prayer taken off the schedule

At the Iberia High School (Mo.) graduation in 2015, a reverend gave a heavily Christian invocation and benediction. Thanks to the FFRF, this constitutional violation will not recur.

“The Supreme Court has settled this matter—high school graduations must be secular to protect the freedom of conscience of all students,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott. “It makes no difference how many students want prayer or wouldn’t be offended by prayer at their graduation ceremony. As the Supreme Court has said, ‘fundamental rights may not be submitted to vote; they depend on the outcome of no elections.’”

The Iberia R-V School District published a statement on Sept. 10 acknowledging that, despite the opinions of the board members and administrators, it was obligated as a public entity to “follow the directives of the Supreme Court.” The district also noted its duty to be a good steward of its funds, and not use taxpayer funds on unnecessary lawsuits.

No more prayer at ‘Super Fun Day’

Future “Super Fun Day” events, Special Olympics-style events held at Neal High School in Brewton, Ala., will be free from prayer after FFRF contacted the school district. At the 2015 event, students, staff, volunteers and participants were asked to bow their heads while a prayer was given in Jesus’s name.

“It is unlawful for any school-sponsored event to include prayer,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover in a letter to Escambia County Schools Superintendent John J. Knott. “The district has a duty to remain neutral toward religion. By including prayers at an event sponsored for its own students, the district abridges that duty and alienates the one in three young Americans who are not religious.”

On Sept. 15, Superintendent Knott informed FFRF that he had directed

that future district-sponsored events were not to include scheduled prayer.

School employees don’t have to hear prayers in meetings

Prayer will no longer be included in employee meetings in the Dickinson Independent School District in Texas after FFRF sent a complaint letter to the school district.

A district employee informed FFRF that a mandatory teacher in-service training included Dickinson High School principal Billye Smith asking all employees to stand while she prayed.

“Federal courts have held that mandatory meetings for government employees cannot promote religion and specifically that school districts cannot include prayer during teacher in-service trainings,” wrote Staff Attorney Sam Grover on Sept. 3.

An attorney for the school district informed Grover on Sept. 16 that the district has advised all campus administrators that leading prayer at staff meetings is unconstitutional.

Illinois school district ends school board prayer

Because of a letter sent by FFRF, Teutopolis Community Unit #50 Board of Education will no longer open with a prayer.

In a letter sent Aug. 28, Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote, “It is beyond the scope of a public school board to schedule or conduct prayer as part of its meetings. Federal courts have struck down school board practices that include this religious ritual.”

Superintendent Bill Fritcher, who often led the prayers, responded on Sept. 15, the entire body of his letter reading: “Teutopolis Unit #50 will discontinue starting school board meetings with a prayer.”

Religious posters removed from classroom

A religious poster has been taken down from a sixth-grade teacher’s classroom in Texas after FFRF contacted the school district.

A teacher at River Valley Intermediate School in Woodway, Texas, had a large poster in his classroom reading “In God We Trust,” which also included a bible verse and a proselytizing advertisement: “If you would like to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, call Need Him Ministry at 1-888-NEED-HIM.”

“The District violates the Constitution when it allows its schools to display religious symbols or messages,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover in a letter to the Midway Independent School District. “A poster promoting Christianity violates this basic constitutional prohibition by creating the appearance that the District prefers religion over nonreligion and Christianity over all other faiths.”

“The poster in question has been removed from the classroom so that the biblical verse and proselytizing advertisement noted in your correspondence can be removed,” wrote Superintendent George E. Kazanas in a Sept. 21 reply.

School officials done with National Day of Prayer

FFRF has ensured that Georgetown Independent School District in Texas will not send administrators to participate in the Georgetown National Day of Prayer in their official capacities.

After explaining that the National Day of Prayer is a sectarian Christian event founded by Billy Graham, FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote, “Government officials can worship, pray and participate in religious events in their personal capacities. But they are not permitted to provide credibility or prestige to their religion by lending a government office and government title to religious events.”

On Sept. 23, Superintendent Fred Brent assured Grover “that the District is committed to following the requirements of the First Amendment when it comes to the separation of Church and State,” and said that the administrator did not know he would be expected to speak at the prayer event. “I can assure you that if the District is invited to attend this or similar events in the future, and we do send someone to attend, it will not be in a leadership or participatory role as a district official,” Brent said.

Florida school adds freethought quotes

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a complaint letter last April to the University of Florida at Gainesville about a biblical quote inscribed at the newly erected Heavener School of Business. The quote chosen by donor James W. Heavener from Micah 6:8 says, “He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?”

Now the public university has announced it will add three quotes from secular sources to be part of an “ethical portal” highlighting the importance of ethics in business. One quote chosen, from freethinking deist Thomas Paine, was suggested by Seidel: “My country is the world, and my religion is to do good.” (“The Rights of Man” 1791)

The two other quotes were contributed by a faculty member who teaches ethics:

- “To restrain our selfish[ness], and to indulge our benevolent affections, constitutes the perfection of human nature.” (Adam Smith, “The Theory of Moral Sentiments” 1759)

- “Wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else.” (Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics”)

The portal includes a plaque that states, in part, “Scholars and students of ethics derive universal ethical principles from a wide range of sources, sec-



ular and religious, whether or not any particular scholar or student ascribes to religious beliefs.”

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor commented, “In an ideal world, there would be no religion or irreligion inscribed on public university property, but we think this compromise is acceptable, given that the biblical engraving was a fait accompli. We extend our appreciation to the university for its thoughtful response. Many people do not realize that Adam Smith was a freethinker in his own right, saying in ‘The Wealth of Nations’ that ‘Science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition.’”

Texas students freed from praying more

The Frisco (Texas) Independent School District removed a display reading “Pray more, worry less” from the Roach Middle School front office after getting Staff Attorney Sam Grover’s letter Sept. 11.

The district informed FFRF on Sept. 25 that the display was removed from public view.

School steered toward religious neutrality

The Avon (Ind.) Community School Corp. has taken corrective action regarding an inappropriate religious assembly that students were required to attend.

A Sept. 9 assembly titled “Stay In Your Lane” was mandatory for Avon High School sophomores. Two speakers from the group “Steered Straight” told their stories of recovering from drug addiction, stories that were laced with religion.

One speaker told students, “Someone wanted me on this Earth” while pointing to the ceiling and discussed angels watching over him. The other said, “I pray to God that you get this message.” The wife of one of the speakers also reportedly told students that “God has a purpose for you.”

Staff Attorney Sam Grover’s Sept. 17 letter noted: “Steered Straight’s Facebook page has several spiritual posts that should have alerted the district to the potential religious nature of [the] presentation. Regardless of the motives of the presenters or those who invited them, allowing an organization access to your student body to promote a religious message gives the appearance that the district endorses that message.”

In a Sept. 24 reply, Superintendent Margaret Hoernemann said the district would discuss separation of state and church with administrators “as a timely reminder of our commitment to remaining neutral toward religion.”

FFRF ends longtime grotto violations

Several Oregon public schools will no longer be performing during a holiday chorale concert at a Catholic shrine. Local families alerted FFRF in 2013 about numerous public school districts that scheduled students to perform during the Festival of Lights event in Portland at the 62-acre Sanctuary of Our Sorrowful Mother, aka “The Grotto.”

In his December 2013 complaint letters to 24 school districts, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel said the issue is twofold: “They’re taking students to a church, and courts have said schools can’t do that. The second reason is that The Grotto is making money off the backs of public school children.” The facility, run by the Servite Friars, charges for parking, money which goes to fund religious activities.

“The stage is also flanked by two religious statues, one on either side,” noted Seidel. “Murals depict different moments in the life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the Via Matris or seven sorrows of Mary, and the massive center mural is named ‘the Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mother in heaven.’ Visitors sit in pews marked with crosses and the building is crowned by a golden dome and cross.”

Jollee Patterson, Portland Public Schools general counsel, sent an email to administrators in September: “Even if PPS singing groups perform songs from a variety of religious traditions, the strongly religious setting during the Festival of Lights could create a perception that the school is endorsing and supporting a particular religious tradition.”

Of the 24 districts contacted by FFRF, it appears that five (Aberdeen, Bend-LaPine, Longview, Washougal and West Linn-Wilsonville) did not participate in the 2014 concert. FFRF sent follow-up letters Oct. 23 to districts that have not complied.

FFRF curbs coach’s religious comments

FFRF reminded the Kenmore High School football coach in Akron, Ohio, about school policies on the promotion of religion after his comments at an event at which the team received a gift of new uniforms.

A complainant alerted FFRF to Coach Kemp Boyd’s religious comments such as talking about “honoring God with your abilities.”

“These comments raise concerns about Coach Boyd crossing the constitutional line while he’s acting in his official capacity as a public school representative,” wrote Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert in an Aug. 21 letter.

General Counsel Rhonda Porter

replied Sept. 29, noting that she met with Boyd and reviewed school policies. “Coach Boyd assured me that he fully understands the importance of keeping his personal religious beliefs separate from his duties as a coach,” Porter said.

Godly decals removed from sheriff’s cars

The Houston County (Ala.) Sheriff’s Office has removed Matthew 5:9 “Blessed are the Peacemakers” decals from patrol cars. Staff Attorney Sam Grover informed Sheriff Donald Valenza in late July that the display “undermines the credibility of the sheriff’s office in the eyes of the nonreligious and minority religious citizens.”

According to an Oct. 8 Dothan Eagle news story, County Administrator Bill Dempsey advised Valenza to remove the stickers. “Of course neither the commission or anyone here supports that request, however we contacted our liability insurance carrier and their attorneys said if we take this to court they said we’re going to lose,” Dempsey said. “The county would be looking at hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal expenses.”

“We’re disappointed the county is only doing the right thing to avoid a losing lawsuit, but are very pleased to secure this victory on behalf of our Houston County members and supporters,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State had also lodged complaints.

San Diego libraries to stay open on Easter

San Diego public libraries, typically open on Sundays, will no longer close on Easter. “Easter is neither a federal holiday nor a California state holiday,” wrote Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert in a June complaint letter. “As a matter of policy, the library should remain open on Easter to continue to provide San Diego residents with library services, as it does on [other] Sundays.”

Library Director Misty Jones notified FFRF on Sept. 29 that all San Diego libraries would remain open on Easter Sundays.



New Day Christian Fellowship in Riverside, Calif., and CrossLife Church in Orlando, Fla., will no longer be allowed to leave ads up permanently at schools in which they rent space. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote complaint letters in June and August to the Alvord Unified School District in California and Orange County Public Schools in Florida. “If the church wishes to advertise its services, it may only use school property during the time it has rented the property — on Sundays.” FFRF’s California complainant reported Sept. 4 that the sign had been taken down from Arizona Middle School. On Sept. 8, OCPS attorney John Palmerini informed FFRF that the church banners had been removed from Corner Lake Middle School.

Secular invocations, unlike prayer, never fail Constitution



Deana and Mark Weaver have “three wonderful, freethinking children” — Samuel, 20, Georgia, 18, and Jackson, 16.

Deana Weaver

Pennsylvania Senate

Harrisburg

April 15, 2015

Thank you for welcoming something different into your day. It is an honor for a constituent to be given a voice before this governing body.

In recent months, religious beliefs have been at the forefront of a heated national debate.

We are fortunate to be citizens of the country founded and formed to recognize the importance of the individual, where *no one* shall be made to hide, or justify, his or her personal beliefs, and where no government shall impose a singular religion on its citizenry.

Where there are misunderstandings, we may engage in conscientious and respectful dialogues to assuage fears. I am humbled to represent a portion of your diverse constituency. This raises the question, can atheists pray?

A prayer can be meditative — seeking the inner strength to face difficulty and challenge.

A prayer can be solicitous — seeking to bring a benefit or relief of tribulation to oneself, a loved one or to strangers.

A prayer can be a direct appeal to a higher power. So, let us pray

That we may use our power to lead with compassion and understanding.

That we remain tolerant of others, regardless of differences in religious beliefs, gender, race and sexual or political orientation.

That we treat one another as we wish to be treated.

Let us pray for open minds, and for the strength to overcome preconceived judgments. Let us learn daily and consider wisely.

Let us be mindful of our one *diverse* human family with *common* values and needs.

Let us work toward clean air and water, safe neighborhoods, strong schools and a viable economy with sustained employment opportunities.

Let us provide for well-trained and equipped firefighters, emergency responders, police and military. Let us never forget their sacrifices.

As we forge ahead, toward the common good of community, may we all benefit from the enduring power of diversity.

Thank you.

Deana Weaver, a member of the Dillsburg, Pa., Area Freethinkers, was raised in a Methodist household “but by age 14 recognized hypocrisy and social attitudes of which I no longer wanted to be a part. I volunteered as a hospital candy striper on Sun-

day mornings to avoid my parents’ church attendance requirement.”

Her parents signed a waiver allowing her to enlist at age 16 in the U.S. Army. She left for active service after high school graduation in 1977, serving for four years and for 10 years in the Army Reserves.

Deana said she has pleaded with lawmakers “to refrain from applying their personal religious beliefs to legislation — very frustrating conversations.”



Linda Stephens

Linda Stephens

Town Board, Greece, N.Y.

Oct. 20, 2015

Good evening. I would like to thank Supervisor Reilich and the Town Board members for allowing me to deliver the invocation this evening. I am a member of Sunday Assembly Rochester, which is a secular congregation popularly known as an “atheist church.” Sunday Assembly welcomes nontheists of all stripes, including atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers and other like-minded people.

On a personal note, I am sometimes disappointed with the quality of the invocations given before the Town Board meetings, including the atheist ones. For that reason, I sought help with this one tonight. I hope you find it acceptable.

The town of Greece is a big town. Nearly 100,000 people live here, many different kinds of people. Sometimes this can present problems, but more often than not, it’s a source of our strength. Greece residents do not all think the same way or believe the same things. Yet, it is important to remember that we are all linked by our common humanity and our shared origin. When we work together to move our town forward in a spirit of mutual respect and common decency, we showcase what is best about our community, our state and our nation.

The residents of Greece have diverse beliefs. We are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, humanists, atheists, agnostics, Wiccans, pagans, Sikhs, and that’s not all. We are straight, gay and transgender. We are young and old and everything in between. We are of different races and nationalities. Some of us are liberal, some of us are conservative, and some of us are a bit of both.

It is not surprising then that we do not agree about everything. And we often feel fiercely protective of what we do believe. There is great passion in

our beliefs, and rightly so.

But there is one thing on which we can all agree. We share the goal of making our community the best place it can be. We unite here this evening around that noble aim and common purpose. Thank you.

*FFRF Life Member Linda Stephens, a retired public school librarian, was the atheist plaintiff in the **Town of Greece v. Galloway** Supreme Court decision, and with co-plaintiff Susan Galloway received FFRF’s 2014 Freethinker of the Year award. Her invocation is modeled on one developed by Americans United for Separation of Church and State for its Operation Inclusion project. Sunday Assembly Rochester is a godless congregation that meets monthly.*



Zachary Moore outside City Hall in Keller, Texas.

Zachary Moore

City Council, Keller, Texas

Aug. 18, 2015

Mayor Matthews and council members, on behalf of the Keller Humanists and the Keller Interfaith Alliance, I’d like to thank you for this opportunity to help memorialize this meeting tonight.

As the council gathers here to make decisions on behalf of the people of Keller, I ask you to lift your heads, to open your eyes and open your hearts.

Let us remember the words of the prophet Isaiah, who imagined a kingdom of peace where “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.”

Let us remember the children of Keller tonight, who will be returning to their studies next week. What we do here as citizens prepares the way for our children, and the children of our neighbors, to lead us into the future. Let us build for them a city of peace and prosperity, of hope and opportunity. Let us instill in them the values of equality and liberty, help them celebrate inclusively the diversity of our community.

Let us show them, through our decisions here tonight and moving forward, that we seek to bring about a peaceable kingdom, where adversaries become companions, and where fear is replaced by love, right here in Keller.

Thank you for your service to the people of Keller.

FFRF member Zachary Moore, who has a Ph.D. in molecular biology from the University of Cincinnati, has given three secular invocations to the Keller City Council, with a fourth canceled (see sidebar). Zachary, former executive director of the Fellowship of Freethought Dallas and coordinator for the Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Rea-

son, is currently executive director of Keller Humanists, treasurer of Camp Quest Texas and a Foundation Beyond Belief board member.

Prayer always followed secular invocation

Zachary Moore had given three secular invocations, the first in December 2014, before the Keller, Texas, City Council. A fourth was to be delivered Oct. 6, but the council canceled it, with Mayor Mark Matthews offering a prayer instead. It started with “Gracious heavenly father.”

Moore’s invocations were always followed by a prayer delivered by Pastor John Salvesen of the Bear Creek Bible Church, a practice which Moore accepted at first but came to see as discriminatory. He contacted FFRF, and Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote a complaint letter to the city:

“If the council insists on continuing to host prayers at public meetings, it cannot discriminate against any person wishing to give a prayer. The non-religious and members of minority religions must be permitted to deliver invocations on an equal basis. This not only means permitting them to be in the invocation rotation, it also means not making a special show of diluting their message with a subsequent Christian prayer.”

The city canceled Moore’s invocation after receiving the letter.

Salvesen told CBS Dallas-Fort Worth that atheists have no one to pray to. “You can pray in the name of Jesus, in the name of Allah or anything else, any other deity. The Supreme Court guarantees that. That was their decision. But Mr. Moore does not provide a prayer.”

Salvesen said if a Muslim or Jewish leader delivered the invocation, it wouldn’t be necessary to follow it with a prayer.

FFRF is awaiting an official response from the city, which reportedly is considering a new invocations policy.

Nothing Fails Like Prayer contest

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 government 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 (next year in Pittsburgh on the weekend of Oct. 7–9, 2016), a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

Learn more at:

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

Meet an Idaho member



Elizabeth Rose says Roscoe (and all cats) are freethinkers in that they have very little time for dogma.

Name: Elizabeth Rose.

Where I live: In the panhandle of very red-state Idaho, where the first question people ask after your name is, “What church do you belong to?” But it’s beautiful here, with four distinct seasons and breathtaking views of craggy mountains and evergreens against a bounty of deep-blue lakes everywhere you look.

Where and when I was born: I’m a third-generation Los Angeleno who escaped the big city about 25 years ago. I’m happy to be celebrating my induction into Medicare this month!

I live with: Jerry, my wonderful husband of 32 years, and eight spoiled rotten cats. (Yes, we are one cat away from a reality show!)

Occupation: Retired after 41 years of teaching high school literature: William Shakespeare, Mark Twain, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Arthur Miller, Ray Bradbury and, of course, large doses of Edgar Allan Poe.

I loved the classroom but hated the never-ending paper-grading and the ever-present red ink stains on my hands. Some 60,000 students later, I hope I have at least taught a few of them to think critically and set them on the right path.

These are a few of my favorite things: Learning, cooking and crafting; reading Freethought Today cover to cover; reading nonfiction by (in alphabetical order) Dan Barker, Greta Christina, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Bart Ehrman, Barbara Ehrenreich, Guy P. Harrison, Christopher Hitchens, Susan Jacoby, Michael Shermer and Stephen Uhl; relishing fiction by a novelist I recently discovered, James Morrow; myth-busters, skeptics, muckrakers and clear reasoners of all stripes who expose corruption and deception with verifiable evidence!

I also like canning jars of my “famous” huckleberry ice cream topping and barbecue sauce, and hot buttered rum and pumpkin spice latte mixes (better than Starbucks and sugar-free) to give friends and neighbors. And organizing, organizing, organizing.

Things I smite: Climate denialists, anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theorists, grumpy naysayers and “haters,” and anyone who harms the vulnerable,

whether human or animal. People who, when real-life crises are averted, thank their god(s) instead of the doctors, nurses, police officers and firefighters who actually did something useful. Also people who, when things go right for them, credit their god(s) instead of coincidence, happenstance and the basic goodness and decency of other human beings.

To Kim Davis (and other small-minded, “pretentiously pious” hypocrites like her who scream “Christian persecution” while endeavoring to impose their own sanctimonious demands on everyone else), I offer a Jon Stewart quote: “You’ve confused a ‘war on your religion’ with ‘not always getting everything you want.’ . . . It’s hard for me to believe Christians are a persecuted people in America. God willing, maybe one of you Christians will one day even rise up and get to be president of this country, or maybe 44 in a row?”

My doubts about religion started: When my Catholic elementary school made the major mistake of teaching me to read so I could evaluate what they were telling me about religion, and my university professors taught me about other cultures and how to think critically; when I recognized that there are over 10,000 gods and goddesses that people have worshipped, believed in, prayed to, killed for and died for; when I accepted that the universe and the cosmos are so much more beautiful when seen through the expansive telescope lens of science rather than through the restrictive microscope of religion; and when I realized that there’s not enough love and kindness in this world to give any of it away to imaginary beings.

Two quotations I like: “I can tell you a generation ago, they said there is no way people would ever allow gay marriage. Slavery — essentially — gone in a generation. We got rid of it. Change is always one generation away . . . so if we can plant the seeds of doubt in our children, religion will go away in a generation, or at least largely go away. And that’s what I think we have an obligation to do.” (Lawrence M. Krauss)

“I do not pretend to understand the moral universe, the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways. I cannot

calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. But from what I see, I am sure it bends toward justice.” (Theodore Parker, American transcendentalist whose premise inspired the title of Michael Shermer’s new book, *The Moral Arc: How Science and Reason Lead Humanity Toward Truth, Justice, and Freedom*.)

Before I die: There’s no skydiving or hot-air ballooning or writing the great American novel on my bucket list. I do hope to get to Wisconsin one of these years to attend the FFRF convention in person (and to sample all those great cheeses). And definitely more cruises. There’s *nothing* better than being on a long, luxurious cruise with my handsome hubby, with nothing to do all day and all day to do it.

It’s very important that the people I love *know* that I love them by showing that in as many “little ways” as I can. I would like to see Lawrence Krauss’s

quotation above become a reality, and I’d like to see the world embrace the best qualities of humanism and secularism and democratic socialism to provide a better life for the greatest number of people. I really feel that “Happiness isn’t having what you want; it’s wanting what you have.” I just want to continue doing what I do and appreciating what I have in this life, here and now, while I have it.

Other ways I promote freethought: I’m vice president of the Inland Northwest Freethought Society, an FFRF chapter, which has served eastern Washington and northern Idaho since 1992. I plan fun social activities and programs for INFS members at meetings, organize and staff secular booths at the Spokane County and Kootenai County fairs each summer and help with breakfasts at a local homeless shelter. (You can take the teacher out of the classroom, but you can’t take the classroom out of the teacher!)

Faux Poe, via Idaho

By Elizabeth Rose

In 1845, just four years before his untimely death, Edgar Allan Poe wrote what is arguably the best-known poem in history — one almost all of you had to learn in your school days.

In this poem, loaded with literary devices and consistent use of internal and external rhymes, critics and readers alike have been led to believe that the distraught narrator feels great fear and trepidation when he encounters the “ghastly, grim and ancient raven,” an “ebony bird of yore.”

Not so!

I’ve come into possession of some heretofore unknown verses of the poem, found at the bottom of an old trunk, of course, purported to have belonged to the late poet, that you may find quite surprising and elucidating.

And so, with your indulgence (and with sincere apologies to the inimitable Mr. Poe) I give you:

The Raven, Revisited

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door—
“ ‘Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door—
Only this and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
“Sir,” said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you” —
Here I opened wide the door:
(Something I was SORRY for!)

Scripture-spouting fundamentalist, wild-eyed 7th Day Adventist, Earnest theist, God jihadist with his “good news” to outpour: “Rapture’s coming! World is ending!” Cloaked in faith, he is unbending. William Miller will be sending me to hell for evermore.

“Repent now or to Saint Peter you’ll have much to answer for!”

Quoth my Raven, “Close that door!”

Watchtower-toting and officious, next a pale Jehovah’s Witness.

Superstitious, she solicits — for my soul she will implore.

Just behind her came a laggard — Look, it’s preacher man Ted Haggard, Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, followed by at least a score:

Billy Graham, Benny Hinn, weeping Tammy Faye and Jim!

Quoth my Raven, “Shut that door!”

Next, two brush-cut civil corpsman handed me a Book of Mormon, Smiling brightly as they parked their bicycles beside my door.

“Jesus walked here in the States! Planet Kolub will be great!

Temple garments . . . Golden Plates . . . can be yours for evermore!

We can baptize you for Zion and your faith we will restore!”

Quoth my Raven, “Latch that door!”

Then they said to give up coffee, chardonnay, and mocha toffee.

“I’m no crazy Kamikazi. Please DON’T save me, I implore!

Leave no pamphlets as a token. Leave my peaceful calm unbroken.

Get thee back into your Temple and the night’s Plutonian shore.

Read the doormat on the floor: “ ‘GO AWAY,’ you theist bore.”

Quoth my Raven, “Bar that door!”

See, MY Raven’s atheistic. He’s no bird-brain. He’s realistic.

Far more sane and humanistic than those bible-thumpers I deplore.

He’s evolved beyond religion. He would take no more derision.

With his beak and sharp cognition, he declared a state of war.

With a corvine’s sure precision, firmly did he SLAM — THAT — DOOR!

Quoth my Raven, “NEVER MORE!”

What Is a Freethinker?

freethinker *n.*

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

What I told my 9-year-old when she finally asked

Atheist answers daughter's question about God

This appeared originally on June 9 on [Buzzfeed.com](http://buzzfeed.com) and is reprinted with the author's permission.

By Kate Cohen

“How do we know there's no God?” My 9-year-old daughter, the youngest of my three children, was doing her math homework in the kitchen and must have overheard her father and me talking. I hesitated. Even though I'd been raising my kids as atheists for most of a decade, I was caught off guard.

My firstborn, Noah, never questioned me on the issue of a supreme being; he was more concerned about his Jewishness. So what if God was pretend — he could still have a bar mitzvah, right?

His younger brother also accepted God's fictional nature, but he gave me hell about heaven. Brooding on mortality at age 6, he pushed hard for the possibility of an afterlife. “We don't actually know what happens after you die, right?” he said. “I mean, you can't talk to someone who's dead, after all. There could be a heaven.”

Still, no matter what solution Jesse temporarily embraced — um, reincarnation? — it never included God.

The boys are 14 and 12 now. They glance at me slyly during the “under God” part of the Pledge of Allegiance. At their grandparents' seders, they read aloud passages about the biblical burning bush like overrenunciating actors rather than believers. Done and done.

Lena is 9. She is not worried about death and she's not interested in being Jewish. She just wants to know how the world works. She asks everything: How long do chickens live and what is insurance and how do you remember the way to all the places you drive and how do girls masturbate?

I answered all of these. The God one should be relatively easy: It's a question atheists get asked all the time, usually by people who think we should use the gentler term “agnostic,” people who are comfortable with doubt, but suspicious of certainty.

To them I would say that all evi-



Kate Cohen in Melbourne, Australia.

dence points to the fact that God is a popular and useful fiction, and that no evidence points to the fact that he actually exists.

And where's the evidence that he doesn't exist? That's what Lena's asking for. And that's what leaves many people in the “agnostic” camp and (understandably) makes many parents — even those willing to be counted as atheists themselves — wary of issuing definitive statements to their children.

‘A compelling fiction’

The few books that offer advice to atheist parents counsel us not to be definitive. They tell us to let children decide for themselves what they do or do not believe. This seems perfectly reasonable. As open-minded, educated people, we should let our children decide for themselves, right?

I looked at my daughter, the fourth-grader, pencil poised over mixed-number problems, head cocked, waiting. Should she get to decide for herself? No one told me God didn't exist. I grew up Reform Jewish and bookish. Technically, I guess, the prayers we said in Hebrew to bless the wine on Friday nights were addressed to an actual being. But when we talked about God, we spoke of him as a fascinating literary character rather than as a real force in our lives.

So I have no memory of believing in God, even at my bat mitzvah. At my

Jewish wedding, we studiously avoided invoking his name. But it wasn't until I had children that I realized I had to spell it out: God was a compelling fiction created in response to human need.

That was enough for my boys, and I had assumed it was enough for Lena. But I had been wrong: She needed more. It was my solemn responsibility as a parent to give her the information she asked for, to help her understand the world.

It was my solemn responsibility to give her the information she asked for, to help her understand the world.

For that reason, it would never have occurred to me to let Lena decide for herself whether vampires exist (although there's no evidence to the contrary), or fairies or leprechauns, or all the denizens of Mount Olympus — even though some people at some

point believed the Greek gods were real.

Fairies and Ares are magical, invisible beings whose existence cannot be disproven. Just like God. Logically, they are the same. But culturally? Emotionally? Not even close. There may be a whopping 3 percent of us atheists now, but it's still a believers' world. [Ed.: 4-5 percent more identify as agnostics and about 25 percent overall as nonreligious, recent surveys show.]

We live in a culture in which at least 74 percent of us believe in a personal God, more than 40 percent of us believe God created the Earth 10,000 years ago, the calendar is counted from the birth of a deity (and the months are named for other, passé deities), our money states “In God we trust,” witnesses swear on bibles, and major political speeches end with “God bless America.”

In this context, it's hard even for me to remember it's all made up.

When I feel that way, Greek gods can be a helpful corrective, a reminder that just because a belief system is ubiquitous doesn't make it true. At some point, people were building temples to the Greek gods and atheism was a capital offense. And even then some brave mother managed to murmur to her kids, “Athena's a cool idea, but believe me, she's just pretend.”

Take a breath, I told myself, step outside the believing world for a second, and tell your kid the truth.

How do we know, Lena? We know the way we know there are no fairies: The only proof is man-made and all the thinking behind it is wishful. We know because we are open to evidence and we have been given none. We know because —

But she had gone back to figuring out how fractions work.

Done. For now, at least.

Kate Cohen, whose “No God But Butter” blog is at katecohen.net, has a degree in comparative literature from Dartmouth College and works as a freelance writer. She's working on a book about raising children as atheists. “I've got three of them, one husband and 40 chickens; we all live on a farm in Albany, N.Y.”

Overheard

The number of Americans identifying as Catholic has fallen by 3 million since 2007, according to a [May 2015] Pew Research Center poll. The free fall in the number of Catholics, among other Christian groups, has been matched by a corresponding rise in the share of the population calling themselves atheists or agnostics — a trend especially acute among millennials. A full 13% of American millennials now identify as atheist or agnostic, according to Pew. But while Catholicism remains a celebrated part of American culture, atheists and agnostics continue to be stigmatized personally and sidelined politically.

Charlie Bulman, University of Maryland senior government and history major, op-ed

The Diamondback, 9-27-15



Rep. Mark Rozzi, D-Berks County, who was molested by a priest at age 13, criticizing the pope for praising bishops' handling of clergy sex abuse
WFMT-TV, 9-28-15

One of the things that got me into Buddhism in the first place is that it does not have a belief in [an anthropomorphic] god. When I became interested in New Atheism in general, I started to

be more and more skeptical about any supernatural claim, and, consequently, the supernatural aspects of Buddhism. Before I knew it, I became an atheist.

Aditya Nandiwardhana, Indonesian “leftist-vegan atheist your mother warns you about and a proud Social Justice Warrior”
Rappler.com, 9-24-15

A Westerville woman reported she was hit by a woman during bible study on Price Road, according to a report received at 10:24 p.m. Oct. 6. The woman declined a medic.

News item on an incident reported to police in Gahanna, Ohio
Rocky Fork Enterprise, 10-14-15

A national day of prayer is inimical to the project of economic recovery in Zambia because it will keep Zambians on their knees while the country needs a national program that will keep it on its feet. The cup of prayer is empty and

a country that drinks from it in order to satiate the thirst for development and progress will continue to famish and stagnate. What Zambia needs to address its economic challenges is inventive and innovative ideas, imaginative and adventurous thinking, and the logic of discovery, experimentation and exploration. What Zambia needs is a national day of practical and productive thinking, not prayers.

Secular humanist Leo Igwe, on Zambia's state-mandated day of prayer
The Maravi Post, 10-16-18

A Spartanburg County deputy responded to the home of Danielle Emily Hughes, 23, after she called dispatch and asked for a priest to remove demons from her 5-year-old son, according to an incident report.

News story on a South Carolina woman who was charged with two counts of neglect
WHNS, 9-28-15

God is so *not* ‘pro-life’

By Brian Bolton

A prominent fundamentalist Christian minister and television celebrity regularly proclaims that the unborn child has a God-given right to life, that life is a gift from God, and that abortion is the sinful destruction of God’s sacred creation. These and similar assertions are thoroughly refuted by “God’s word,” the holy bible.

Defenders of women’s reproductive rights should know what the bible actually says about abortion and, by extension, related issues, including contraception, the morning-after pill, in vitro fertilization and fetal tissue research.

Scriptural truths

Ten biblical episodes and prophecies provide an unequivocal expression of God’s attitude toward human life, especially the ontological status of “unborn children” and their pregnant mothers-to-be. Brief summaries:

- A pregnant woman who is injured and aborts the fetus warrants financial compensation only (to her husband), suggesting that the fetus is property, not a person (Exodus 21:22-25).
- The gruesome priestly purity test to which a wife accused of adultery must submit will cause her to abort the fetus if she is guilty, indicating that the fetus does not possess a right to life (Numbers 5:11-31).
- God enumerated his punishments for disobedience, including “cursed shall be the fruit of your womb” and “you will eat the fruit of your womb,” directly contradicting sanctity-of-life claims (Deuteronomy 28:18,53).
- Elisha’s prophecy for soon-to-be King Hazael said he would attack the Israelites, burn their cities, crush the heads of their babies and rip open their pregnant women (2 Kings 8:12).
- King Menahem of Israel destroyed Tiphshah (also called Tappuah) and the surrounding towns, killing all residents and ripping open pregnant women with the sword (2 Kings 15:16).
- Isaiah prophesied doom for Babylon, including the murder of unborn children: “They will have no pity on the fruit of the womb” (Isaiah 13:18).
- For worshipping idols, God declared that not one of his people would live, not a man, woman or child (not even babies in arms), again confuting assertions about the sanctity of life (Jeremiah 44:7-8).
- God will punish the Israelites by destroying their unborn children, who will die at birth, or perish in the womb, or never even be conceived (Hosea 9:10-16).
- For rebelling against God, Samaria’s people will be killed, their babies will be dashed to death against the ground, and their pregnant women will be ripped open with a sword (Hosea 13:16).
- Jesus did not express any special concern for unborn children during the anticipated end times: “Woe to pregnant women and those who are nursing” (Matthew 24:19).

Biblical atrocities

The 10 incidents and declarations surveyed above document God’s complete rejection of the anti-abortion crusaders’ claims about the sanctity of life and a divine right to life. There is clearly no biblical justification for the radical theology they espouse. This section



Brian Bolton

summarizes God’s monumental history of murderous behavior as recorded in holy writ.

We know that God killed millions of unborn children and their pregnant mothers-to-be in the Noachian deluge, the conquest of Canaan, the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah and in 20 major slaughters described in the bible. The critical feature of these horrific events is that all people were exterminated. Whenever entire communities were massacred, we can be sure that pregnant mothers-to-be and their unborn children were among the victims. Moreover, there are no stated exemptions for this specific segment of the population.

It can be concluded from this ghastly program of human annihilation that the God of the bible is the greatest mass murderer in history and that he does not care about unborn children or living children or living adults. If God really opposes abortion, why didn’t he just say so? Why didn’t he authorize one of his trusted spokesmen—Moses, Jesus or Paul—to issue a definitive statement on the subject?

It is also noteworthy that while the bible requires the death penalty for 60 specified criminal violations, abortion is not among them. When all relevant documentation is examined, it is obvious that God does not love the unborn and he certainly does not disapprove of abortion.

Theological questions

Anti-abortion zealots assert that human life begins at conception, and therefore the fertilized egg possesses all constitutional rights of a living person. It follows that destruction of a conceived embryo (blastocyst) is murder.

This is the basis for the personhood argument which has been defeated in five statewide initiatives since 2010.

The bible declares that God breathed life into man’s body (Genesis 2:7). At least a dozen more verses indicate that breath is synonymous with life. This scriptural truth completely contradicts the personhood dogma.

More importantly, if the fertilized ovum is a person, as anti-abortion extremists claim, then God’s record as the greatest murderer of unborn children is expanded further. That is because most fertilized eggs either fail to implant in the uterine wall and pass out of the body or do implant, begin to develop and then are spontaneously aborted. Fewer than one-third of fertilized ova survive to become living humans.

Why does God murder untold millions of these “persons” every year in the U.S. alone? Why did God, who allegedly loves the unborn and hates abortion, kill so many unborn children, adolescents and adults throughout biblical history? Why do fundamentalists pursue a political agenda that is thoroughly refuted by God’s word?

Anti-abortion antilogies

Among those who deny women’s reproductive rights, numerous contradictory positions are observed. For example, some prominent politicians who want to overturn *Roe v. Wade* would allow exceptions for rape, incest, severe fetal abnormality and/or life of the mother. These exceptions necessarily require destroying the fetus, which is the very action they condemn. In other words, the murder of unborn children is acceptable when anti-abortion politicians approve.

Another blatant inconsistency involves physicians who want to defund Planned Parenthood because it provides aborted fetuses for medical research. Yet, some of these physicians have themselves conducted research using aborted fetuses. Furthermore, medical investigations using fetal tissue have produced lifesaving vaccines and therapeutic interventions that have benefited everyone.

The most disgusting contradiction exists between the radical activists’ preferred label “pro-life” and their horrific record of godly violence. In the 40 years since *Roe v. Wade*, was decided, eight abortion providers have been murdered and 17 have been maimed or seriously injured. More than 6,000 acts of violence have been perpetrated, including fire bombings, arsons, kidnappings, assaults and death threats. These agents of violence are accurately labeled “Christian terrorists.”

The activists who want to make abortion illegal invariably call themselves “Christian conservatives,” stating that they want to reduce government intrusion and eliminate burdensome regulations that limit personal liberty. They say they want to get government off our backs and out of our lives. Except, of course, when they want to use the coercive power of government to inflict their theological beliefs on everybody else, especially in matters of reproduction and sexuality.

After 40 years with at least 1 million elective abortions annually, opponents still refuse to endorse programs that are proven to reduce abortions, such as family planning that stresses contraception and comprehensive sexuality education.

Instead they promote abstinence-only, ignorance curricula. If they would focus their efforts on preventing unwanted pregnancies, they would stop many more abortions than their politically coercive and sometimes violent tactics have stopped. Ironically, the crusaders help to cause the abortions they denounce.

A ‘holocaust’

Dogmatists condemn what they call the “holocaust” of 56 million abortions since *Roe v. Wade* became the law of the land. At the same time, they spend tens of billions of dollars annually building and operating their grandiose megachurches, Christian academies and other programs to promote fundamentalist doctrines. If they really want to prevent the murder of unborn children, why don’t they just use some of their vast wealth to pay women not to have abortions?

Lastly, the most egregious contradiction occurs whenever the religionists invoke a biblical justification for their sanctimonious stance, because the Judeo-Christian God simply does not care about the lives of pregnant women and their unborn children. Abortion opponents cite a dozen verses that refer to the developing fetus but not one that condemns abortion.

The bible is an unending compilation of atrocities illustrating God’s penchant for feticide, infanticide and the wholesale slaughter of adults.

Conclusion

Prominent women’s rights groups like Planned Parenthood, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, NARAL Pro-choice America, Emily’s List and the National Organization for Women should confront the zealots about the complete lack of biblical support for their position. For the past decade, surveys have indicated that about two-thirds of Americans think abortion should remain legal. A 2015 poll put the figure at 80%.

Among institutions, Planned Parenthood has the highest approval (45%) and Congress has the lowest (8%). Why don’t reproductive rights advocates attack the anti-abortion terrorists with the same ferocity that the zealots exhibit in their ongoing campaign of harassment, violence and dishonesty? The truth is that the bible does not endorse the fundamentalist Christian assault on women’s reproductive health.

In fact, God is clearly pro-abortion.

FFRF Life Member Brian Bolton is a retired psychologist, humanist minister, university professor emeritus and sponsor of FFRF’s graduate essay contest. He lives in Georgetown, Texas. The executive wing of FFRF’s new addition bears his name.



In memory of Darrell Keith Hutchins

By Doris E. Hutchins

FFRF member Darrell Keith Hutchins, 73, Conway, Ark., lost his 16-year battle with prostate cancer on Oct. 7, 2014. I am writing this on the one-year anniversary of his death.

Darrell was born Sept. 29, 1941, at the home of his paternal grandparents in Lowery, Okla., and graduated from Oaks Indian Mission High School in Oaks and received an M.S. and Ph.D. from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah and the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, respectively.

He loved the woods at his Lowery home place and in retirement took up handcrafting archery bows from timber he cut himself. He was ever on the lookout for suitable bow trees in outings in the woods. He made more than 200 bows from a variety of wood types. Darrell also enjoyed canoeing and made many float trips with friends.

Darrell loved scientific research and spent as much time as he could in the laboratory. He was the author of numerous scientific papers and the holder of three patents for scientific equipment. His love of science was exceeded only by his love for his family and friends.

We met in 1968 at a church service. Darrell's acceptance of the theory of evolution was not condoned in the church in which we were married and this began our transition to becoming freethinkers. Preachers would warn, "If one brick from your wall of faith is pulled out, the whole wall will fall." We discovered the truth in this admonition, and as the bricks began to fall, found a wonderful sense of freedom and contentment.

No longer were we involved in hair splitting over the meaning of a bible verse or personality conflicts that led to church splinter groups! As a matter of life philosophy, Darrell believed that



Darrell and Doris Hutchins met in church in the 1960s.

rational discourse and investigation should be applied to all questions and that an idea should be accepted only if based on evidence. He would say, "Most people would rather die than think and in fact, most do!"

Darrell was a dedicated Democrat and a member of the Faulkner County Democratic Central Committee. For 11 years we hosted a monthly discussion group meeting at our home for progressive-minded persons interested in politics and current events. He also distributed an e-mail newsletter consisting of progressive articles from the Internet. He was incredulous at how easily people followed demagogic politicians without questioning their blather, concluding, "Ignorance is our country's most costly commodity." He was a prolific writer of letters to the editor and for a time was a biweekly columnist for the editorial page of the Log Cabin Democrat in Conway.

Darrell was a longtime member of the Arkansas Country Dance Society. He loved to call and write square

dances and produced a volume of his dances titled "Square Dances With an Old-Time Flavor." It was fitting that his memorial service included friends sharing favorite memories of him and enjoying old-time fiddling and special square dance performances.

Darrell struggled with clinical depression most of his life. In spite of that, he strove mightily to provide for his family. He said, "If I had to choose between depression and cancer, I'd choose cancer. I know of no disease worse than depression."

In the end, his love of science still called him and he arranged for his remains to be donated to the Genesis Program in Memphis, Tenn., for medical research.

I and our two children and grandchild live on to continue to reflect Darrell's love, wisdom and integrity.

Member to senator: FFRF speaks for me

What follows is an instructive email back and forth on Sept. 30 between FFRF member Doris Hutchins and Arkansas state Sen. Jason Rapert, R-Conway. "You will notice that he gives permission to pass along his negative feelings about FFRF," writes Doris.

The state in April approved erection of a Ten Commandments monument at the Capitol in Little Rock. Rapert was chief sponsor of the bill. In response, and after the secretary of state denied a permit for a Hindu display at the Capitol, FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker sought permission in August to erect a stone monument saying "May Reason Prevail" and other wording similar to its winter solstice message in several state capitols. No response has been received.

In September, the Satanic Temple applied to place a Capitol statue of Baphomet, a goat-headed deity often used to represent Satan, to memorialize "various historical witch hunts and homage to the persecuted freethinkers and 'heretics' who helped inform American secular jurisprudence."

Subject: Separation of church and state

Dear Senator Rapert: I am one Arkansan who appreciates the efforts of Freedom from Religion Foundation to restore a clear line between church and state.

Sincerely, Doris Hutchins

Doris: Thanks for your input. The Freedom From Religion Foundation is nothing more than an anti-Christian atheist gang. They intimidate and threaten people without proper cause. I would never support the United States establishing a state religion, and for over 150 years it was understood the government must not interfere with religion. Now, atheists and liberals are trying to use government to squelch our culture and traditions. I disagree.

Have a good day, Sen. Jason Rapert

Senator Rapert: I recently read that you urged the Freedom from Religion Foundation to go back to where they are from and leave us Arkansans alone. As a member of FFRF, I'm not sure where I would "go" since I am a born-and-bred Southerner.

Doris

Doris: They are from Wisconsin. People who urge others to persecute Christians aren't welcome in our state as far as I am concerned. I pray for their complete and utter defeat and that all their plans would be confused wherever they go. You are welcome to tell them I said so. I pledge to oppose their tactics everywhere in America.

Sen. Jason Rapert

FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell notes, "We've had many reports of Sen. Jason Rapert and are very familiar with his religious pandering. Kudos to you, Doris, for taking your legislator to task."

In memoriam

James H. Hiner, 1921–2015

James H. Hiner, 93, Belmont, Wis., died April 2, 2015, during ambulance transport to the hospital in Dodgeville.

He was born June 18, 1921, in Brownwood, Texas. He attended Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa, before enlisting in the U.S. Marine Corps in May 1941. He played in Marine bands and served as a stretcher bearer during campaigns on Tarawa, Saipan and Tinian and was awarded the Bronze Star in 1944.

Jim earned bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Minnesota, and taught English literature and related subjects for 17 years at Vermillion Community College in Ely, Minn., then taught for three years at Milton College in Milton, Wis. In the summers he worked as a canoe outfitter with Border Lakes in Winton, Minn.

Jim was a published poet, accomplished musician, humorist, inventive art photographer, avid gardener and gourmet cook. Survivors include his wife of 31 years, FFRF member Marian Maciej-Hiner, three children, a sister, six grandchildren, two step-grandchildren, five great-grandchildren and three step-great-grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his parents and a son Steven in 1989.

A celebration of Jim's life was held April 18 at Folklore Village. FFRF offers sincerest condolences to Marian and the family.

Meet a military member

Name: Stephen Murphy.

Where I live: Maryland.

Where I was born: California.

Family: Bride of 21 years; four sons from elementary to college age.

Education: B.A. in cartography from Millersville University, Millersville, Pa.; M.S. in space studies from American Military University; M.S.E. in curriculum and instruction/space and science from the University of Colorado.

Occupation: Space Operations (general knowledge of the architecture of systems that use space; ability to educate the general military public on space-dependent systems; assistance to troubleshooting space-enabled problems; and an interface between the highly technical and the general tactical levels of the military).

Military service: U.S. Army, 21-plus years.

How I got where I am today: I grew up as a Navy brat and joined Army ROTC when I started college. The military paid for my two master's degrees, which kept me in the military longer.

Where I'm headed: Being selected for promotion will keep me in the Army for about 25 years total.

These are a few of my favorite things: Science fiction. Gadgets. Tin-

kering. Redheads. Podcasts and audio books. Running. Cleverness.

These are not: Greedo shooting first ["Star Wars" reference]! Things that don't work like they are designed to work. Losing things. Inefficiency. Voluntary and willful ignorance. Grinder pumps [wastewater conveyance devices].

My doubts about religion started: When I was about 20 years old while standing during a song at a Catholic Mass. My mind was wandering (as it always did in church services my whole life) and the thought "Why is one religion right and another isn't?" popped into my head. It took another 10-plus years to come to the label atheist.

A year in Baghdad reading medieval history (aka crimes of the Holy Roman Church) and a lot of Wikipedia took me further on that road. A pool-side discussion with a friend of my brother introduced me to Richard Dawkins and his 7 Point Scale. I realized I was a 6.

Before I die: I would love to design and build the ultimate customized house. I would do as much work as I could on it (to save costs and to ensure the tweaks are to my and the bride's liking). I would also like to write a book



Stephen Murphy's "Evolving Darwin" in the background was a gift from a former co-worker.

of sorts but I never seem to be able to settle on an idea that I think would generate enough interest.

Ways I promote freethought: Casual discussion. Bringing situations that overstep the boundaries between church and state (especially in the Department of Defense setting) to light.

In the news

Hajj death count surpasses 2,200

According to press tallies in late October, at least 2,223 foreigners from more than 30 nations died in a Sept. 24 stampede during the annual Islamic pilgrimage known as the hajj near Mina, Saudi Arabia. Saudi officials blamed the tragedy on two converging groups of pilgrims on their way to Mecca to "stone the devil." About 2 million people participated.

The Associated Press count came from state media reports and official comments. Iran said it lost 465 pilgrims, followed by Mali (282), Nigeria (199), Egypt (182), Bangladesh (137), Indonesia (129), India (116) and Pakistan (102). Several other African nations' death tolls were in double digits.

The previous deadliest incident during the hajj was a 1990 stampede that killed 1,426 people.

Seculars triumph in Michigan cases

After getting a complaint from the Michigan Association of Civil Rights Activists (MACRA) on behalf of a student at Byron Center High School, Superintendent Dan Takens told the principal and staff that the district can no longer be involved with a baccalaureate program for graduating seniors beyond renting a school facility.

"We have to make sure the lines stay defined," said Takens. "Students or groups are welcome to still hold the service, but they are on their own."

Takens said the district would no longer promote the event, print programs and waive rental fees for baccalaureate, reported mlive.com on Sept. 30.

Mitch Kahle, MACRA co-founder (and FFRF Life Member), had filed a Freedom of Information Act request to confirm district involvement. About 80 of the 250 graduates attended the May religious ceremony.

In late August, Ottawa County Circuit Judge Jon Hulsing dismissed a lawsuit that sought to force the city of Grand Haven to resume displaying a 48-foot Christian cross on city property. The decision came about a year after Kahle, on behalf of an ad hoc group called Remove the Cross, asked the city for equal access for displays supporting LGBT pride, marriage equality, reproductive choice and equal rights for nonbelievers.

After the city council voted 3-2 in January to remove the cross, a group of seven residents sued the city. Hulsing ruled that city displays are "governmental speech . . . and that the City has the right to determine what messages it sends through the use of its own governmental property."

Bigoted bakers refuse to pay fine

Aaron and Melissa Klein, proprietors of Sweet Cakes by Melissa in Gresham, Ore., are refusing to abide by a July order from the state Bureau of Labor and Industries to pay \$135,000 to Rachel and Laurel Bowman-Cryer for refusing to make a wedding cake in 2013 for their same-sex marriage. The Kleins are claiming financial hardship despite crowdfunding efforts that have raised about \$515,000 on their behalf, reported [The Oregonian](http://TheOregonian.com).

Sweet Cakes' website includes the

biblical verse John 3:16 and says, "We here at Sweet Cakes strongly believe that when a man and woman come together to be joined as one, it is truly one of the most special days of their lives, we feel truly [sic] honored when we are chosen to do the cake for your special day."

State officials have asked the court to place a lien on the Kleins' property and other assets. They closed their Gresham bakery and now operate the business out of their home while raising five children. They appeared in September at the Values Voters Summit in Washington, D.C., alongside Kim Davis, the Kentucky clerk jailed for refusing to issue same-sex marriage licenses.

Calif. curbs 'crisis pregnancy' centers

A bill signed Oct. 9 by California Gov. Jerry Brown requires "crisis pregnancy" clinics opposed to abortion to tell patients that abortion services are available elsewhere.

In response to the law, religiously affiliated clinics filed suit in federal court in Sacramento against state Attorney General Kamala Harris. The suit asks for an injunction stopping the law from taking effect Jan. 1.

The complaint was filed on behalf of A Woman's Friend Pregnancy Resource Clinic in Marysville and Crisis Pregnancy Center of Northern California by the Pacific Justice Institute, a Sacramento Religious Right law firm.

Ilyse Hogue, NARAL Pro-Choice America president, told the Sacramento Bee, "Anti-choice crisis pregnancy centers are ground zero in the fight for reproductive freedom, and Govern-

nor Brown and the California Legislature can be proud of leading the first successful statewide effort to ensure that no woman is tricked into walking through doors of a [clinic] to be manipulated and shamed again."

Clients must be told of public programs that offer abortions and be given the phone number of the appropriate county social services office so they can determine eligibility. Facilities are subject to a \$500 civil penalty for a first offense and \$1,000 for each subsequent offense.

Beware, kids, it's non-Christian prayer!

The Board of Education in Shelby, N.C., voted 7-2 on Oct. 12 to consider replacing a moment of silence with prayer to start meetings after getting a request from the Cleveland County Christian Law Enforcement Association. As board Chairman Phillip Glover called for the usual moment of silence, an audience member began to recite the Lord's Prayer and many in the overflow crowd joined in, reported the [Shelby Star](http://ShelbyStar.com).

Seven board members voted to direct Superintendent Stephen Fisher and legal counsel to look into the legality of prayer for discussion by the board in November and a possible vote in December. The board first voted 5-4 against a motion to start meetings with prayer.

Board member Jerry Hoyle said he doesn't want to give non-Christians a platform to speak or pray in front of students at meetings. According to Hoyle, "we need to all spend more time praying," adding he wants to find a way for the board to do that legally.

Sheriff's Sgt. Rodney Fitch told the board, "A society that has allowed prayer to be removed from public places cannot produce good leaders."

Mother Teresa's nuns drop adoption

The Missionaries of Charity, a Catholic order of nuns founded by Mother Teresa, will close 18 adoption centers in India rather than comply with new government regulations that let single and divorced persons adopt children.

Sister Amala, nun in charge at the Missionaries' North Delhi center, said the guidelines offend her conscience. "What if the single parent we give our baby [to] turns out to be gay or lesbian? What security or moral upbringing will these children get? Our rules only allow married couples to adopt."

"The bishops endorse the decision of the Missionaries of Charity," said Fr. Joseph Chinnayan, deputy secretary-general of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, adding that church officials will discuss ways to mitigate the regulations.

No-haul alcohol fine with judge

Two Muslim men who are former employees of Star Transport, a trucking firm based in Morton, Ill., were awarded \$240,000 by a federal jury in Peoria after a two-day trial in October. U.S. District Judge James Shadid earlier found in March that the men, Mahad Abass Mohamed and Abdikarim Hassan Bulshale, were wrongly fired in 2009 for refusing to deliver alcohol because they are Muslims.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission filed suit in 2013 on their behalf. "Star Transport failed to provide any discrimination training to its human resources personnel, which led to catastrophic results for these employees," said EEOC attorney June Calhoun in a statement.

The EEOC tried to no avail to work out the issue with Star Transport a year before filing the suit, court records said. The company eventually admitted liability because it hadn't provided "reasonable accommodation."

According to the [Journal Star](http://JournalStar.com), whether the men collect any money is uncertain since Star Transport went out of business earlier this year.

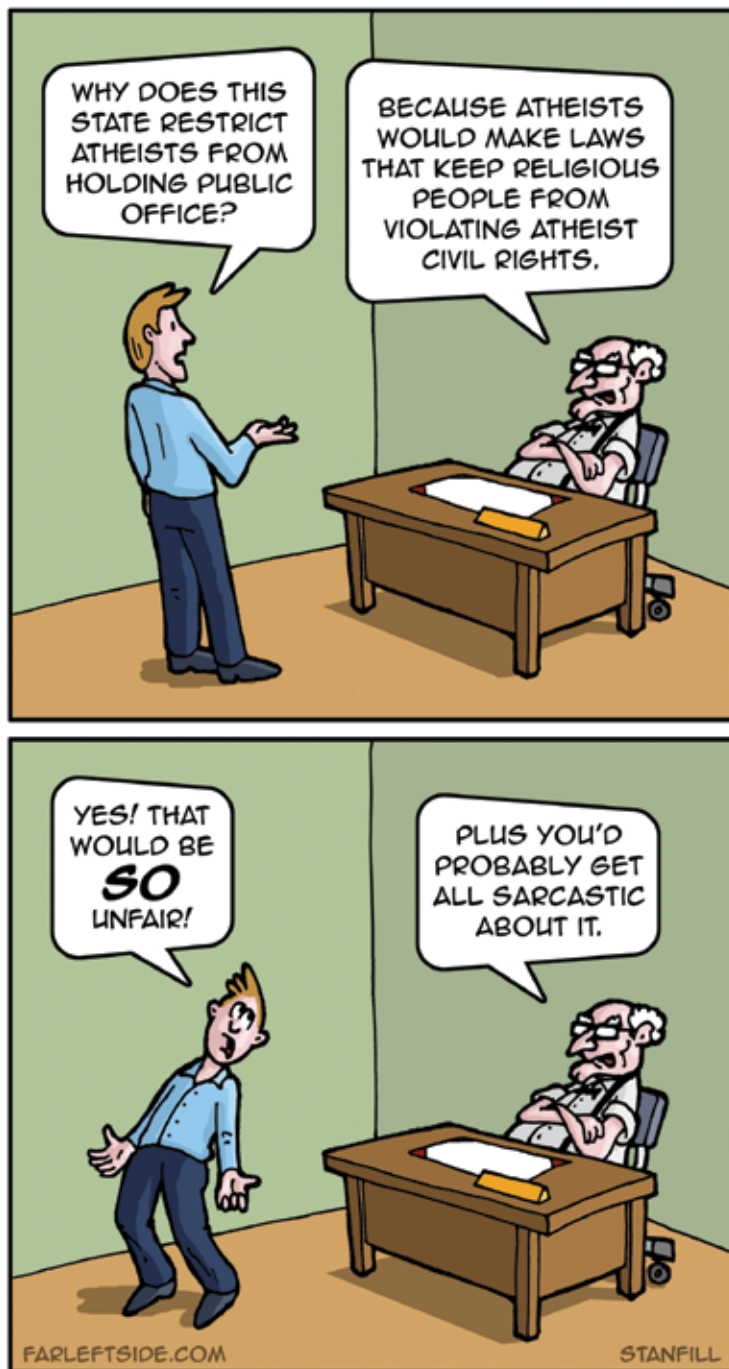
Church helps cover board legal bill

Mike Hearp, pastor of Swansville Pentecostal Holiness Church, Dry Fork, Va., presented a \$2,000 check to the Pittsylvania County Board of Supervisors at its Oct. 20 meeting in Chatham. "The idea was brought up to show our support for the board of supervisors and also appreciation and support for their standing on the issue of prayer," Hearp told the [Roanoke Times](http://RoanokeTimes.com).

The board lost a nearly four-year legal battle last summer over its practice of leading Christian prayers to start meetings and was ordered to pay \$77,300 in legal fees to plaintiff Barbara Hudson and the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia.

Praying in Jesus' name is "such a vital issue," Hearp said. "There will be another day, another judge and a different verdict because God will have the final say in all affairs."

Board Chairwoman Brenda Bowman said she "swelled with pride knowing that a church would come out and offer support to us like that. I'm just real glad that he stepped forward to offer to do that and challenge other churches, and I hope other churches will follow suit."



Meet a graphic(s) staffer

Name: Jake Swenson.

Where and when I was born: Rockford, Ill., November 1981.

Education: B.F.A. in graphic design from the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point. I'm in my first semester in the master's program at UW–Madison's Department of Urban and Regional Planning.

Family: Parents Brad and Sandee Swenson, older sisters Jenni Corbett and Jessi Knuth.

How I came to work at FFRF: I discovered FFRF from an article I was reading on the Fox News website during my freshman year of college, and I have followed the group ever since. After college I was working back in Rockford. My girlfriend lived in Madison, so I decided to move up last fall. Shortly after, I noticed FFRF was looking for a graphic designer.

What I do here: I do the layout for the newspaper, logos, brochures, web graphics, photography and more.

What I like best about it: There are many wonderful things about working for FFRF. Aside from the obvious — getting to work for a nonprofit that fights to keep state and church separate — I love working in downtown Madison. It is vibrant and pedestrian

friendly. I walk around during lunch every day, and my bike commute to and from the Schenk–Atwood neighborhood is extremely easy, thanks to great bike routes and paths.

What gets old about it: The chaos that ensues right before the paper deadline.

I spend a lot of time thinking about: Where to go for coffee, how cities function, and politics.

I spend little if any time thinking about: Video games, TV, social media.

My religious upbringing was: Not religious, although I was baptized Catholic. We did not belong to a parish, so they paid a fee to do it at my grandparent's church in Milwaukee.

My mom was raised Catholic and my dad Lutheran. My mom and sisters went to church for a short time when I was very young. At some point, the church sent my mom a letter telling her she needed to contribute more money, and that was the end of it. Her exact words when I asked her about it via text message: "Screw them, never went back — never regretted it!" She is also an FFRF member.

My doubts about religion started: Even though I was lucky enough to grow up in a family that never talked



about religion, it is bound to infiltrate your life eventually. So many people I knew spoke of their religious beliefs as fact that I eventually started to believe some of it, not that I spent any time thinking about it.

I remember a day after school in junior high when my sister was watching some bad daytime talk show. The theme of the day was about god and the devil. She stated that she did not believe in either, and I remember being a little surprised by this option. Before long I adopted this view as well.

Sometime in high school I began to think more about the subject and came to the conclusion that it was not something that I could believe in.

Things I like: Cycling, music, coffee, traveling, photography, walking, running, historic architecture, craft beer, bike and pedestrian accommodations, public transit, public education.

Things I smite: Surface parking lots, automobiles, suburban sprawl, school vouchers and the way Wisconsin is currently being governed.

In my golden years: I want to be physically active. I want to continue to learn new things, and I still want to be living in an urban environment.

Favorite TV show: "Mystery Science Theater 3000." I know I said I don't think much about TV, but this one has been off the air for 16 years.

Fear of frying? Not for these atheists

Justin Scott, Iowa FFRF member and founder of the Delaware County Coalition of Reason in Manchester, was sightseeing recently with his wife and their three children when they decided to check out the former "World's Largest Frying Pan" (redubbed "Iowa's largest" after the claim was contested) in Brandon. How large is it? Big enough to fry 528 eggs, if it were functional.

Looking around for someone to take a family photo with his camera, Justin saw a woman wearing a shirt with a quote by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a 2010 FFRF Emperor Award honoree. The front of her shirt said "Minnesota Atheists."

"Holy cow! You're an atheist?! So am I!" Justin said "Hertz" Hertz smiled and replied in the affirmative as they "high-fived" in the town of about 325 inhabitants. She and her mother Nancy were on their way to the inaugural Gateway to Reason event in St. Louis. Nancy Hertz and her husband Matthew are FFRF Lifetime Members. Surely, it was *no* god's plan that this encounter would take place!

As they talked, Justin noticed a bystander sighing and shaking his head, so he asked, "Is there a problem?" The man said, "Yes, I'm a Christian."

"What does that have to do with us being atheists?" Justin asked.



Heathens "Hertz" Hertz and Justin Scott got acquainted in Brandon, Iowa.

"Everything. Look around at this beautiful world. How could it not be made by God?"

According to Justin, Hertz got the last word in with, "The unknown is what is so beautiful!" The man then headed to the restroom (hopefully, not to retch).

If you're keeping score, says Justin, mark it Atheists 1, Other Guy 0. "It felt very good to be able to proudly and respectfully stand up for ourselves and for reason."

'Come prepared to sin!'

These announcements appeared in church bulletins or were announced at services:

- The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.
- Scouts are saving aluminum cans, bottles and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.
- The sermon this morning: "Jesus Walks on the Water." The sermon tonight: "Searching for Jesus."
- Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.
- Don't let worry kill you off — let the Church help.
- Miss Charlene Mason sang "I will not pass this way again," giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.
- For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.
- Next Thursday there will be try-outs for the choir. They need all the help they can get.
- Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on Oct. 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.
- A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.
- At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What Is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.
- Eight new choir robes are current-

ly needed due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones.

- Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person you want remembered.
- The church will host an evening of fine dining, super entertainment and gracious hostility.
- Potluck supper Sunday at 5 p.m. — prayer and medication to follow.
- The ladies of the Church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.
- This evening at 7 p.m. there will be hymn singing in the park across from the Church. Bring a blanket and come prepared to sin!
- The pastor would appreciate it if the ladies of the Congregation would lend him their electric girdles for the pancake breakfast next Sunday.
- Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 p.m. Please use the back door.
- The eighth-graders will be presenting Shakespeare's "Hamlet" in the Church basement Friday at 7 p.m. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.
- Weight Watchers will meet at 7 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.
- The Associate Minister unveiled the church's new campaign slogan last Sunday: "I Upped My Pledge — Up Yours!"

Fall for freethought



Lauryn Seering photo

Honorable mention: High school essay 'Good Without God' contest

Blind faith: The real problem with religion

FFRF awarded Julian \$200.

By Julian Rauter

I have always believed that there is a reason to make ethical choices beyond the fact that someone is watching. I was raised in a household where morality was a given. My parents taught me about sharing and respecting other's viewpoints without invoking the threat of God's watchful eyes. I understood from a young age that I needed to be good for my own benefit and the benefit of others, not because there was a higher power constantly passing judgment on my actions.

It is no shock, then, that I grew up to be an atheist.

For a long time, I was hateful toward religion and faith in general. However, maturity and contemplation have helped me understand that the problem is not faith itself, but blind faith.

There is no hatred in the heart of a religious follower who understands the historical context of their sacred text but still finds its teachings helpful. There is hatred in the heart of a religious follower who interprets their text as the literal word of God Almighty passed down through his anointed servants on Earth. These are the Zionists detonating car bombs, the Muslims sending money and guns to ISIS, the Christians campaigning to ban evolution from public schools.

Every religion has its easily led and



Julian Rauter

blindly devoted followers. Even Buddhism has encouraged the oppression of minority groups in Southeast Asia. Religious people are entirely capable of hatred and undue aggression, and much of this is motivated by blind faith.

The question is, where does blind faith come from? I believe it is due to a false correlation between religion and morality. I know many religious people who understand the value of being good as an end unto itself and may have been helped to that understanding by their religion. I've also met an equal number of religious people who

assume that following the rules of their particular doctrine simply makes them a good person. They eat the wafer, wear the yarmulke, abstain from pork and assume "that's good enough." While these rituals all have their value to the culture of each faith, they are not intrinsically valuable. They do not prevent the worshiper from doing wrong.

Those who follow religious tradition by rote gain nothing; their thinking has been done for them. Herein lies the intrinsic problem with organized religion: When left unchecked, it creates one-track minds. Generations of unquestioning belief breed monocultures wherein children are raised to believe that the answer to the question "Why am I here?" is located in one book. This belief is faulty only due to its scope.

Humans have written many thousands of books trying to answer that question. What are the odds that anyone got it exactly right? Is it not far more likely that the answer is spread across many books, all of which must be taken with a healthy dose of context? People who have only studied one text are bound to be closed-minded and insular. This is true whether the text is the Quran or Great Expectations. But it's especially regrettable when the text holds its followers as part of an elite few exclusively blessed with the secrets of the world. This leads to an undeserved feeling of superiority and, eventually, to decidedly immoral behavior.

We are all part of the same species

with the same physical and emotional needs. No one among us has the right to claim that we are truly "better." Therefore, the perception that followers of any religion are morally cleaner than nonbelievers is just that: a perception.

As Americans, we have the privilege of not being required to pray at one specific altar, or any altar at all. This allows us to seek paths to morality and enlightenment that are less faith-based. In the end, it is not about the paths that people take but the direction in which they are going.

I am proud to say that I am heading toward freethought and morality, and I don't need God's help to get there.

Julian Robert Rauter, 17, attended Margaretville Central School in Margaretville, N.Y. He is attending Harvard University with the tentative plan to major in anthropology with either a double major or minor in linguistics. "I also plan to take many classes in the humanities, especially literature, creative writing and ethnic studies. I hope to pursue linguistic anthropology at the graduate level and specialize in language documentation and culture loss. I hope to pursue fieldwork with indigenous communities in North America and other areas with high rates of linguicide (language death) such as Australia and the Pacific. My highest ambition is to dedicate my life to protecting the world's linguistic and cultural diversity from the Western monoculture that threatens its survival."

Honorable mention: High school essay 'Good Without God' contest

Innocence lost, acceptance found



Kierra Robertson

FFRF awarded Kierra \$200.

By Kierra Robertson

It all started that fateful day in elementary school when my former best friend asked me, "Do you believe in God?" I innocently answered "no," not realizing the repercussions. I saw it as the same caliber of question that went with "What's your favorite color?" That

innocent idea was quite wrong.

Immediately I was surrounded by accusations and harsh reactions. Apparently I couldn't have any morals, even though I felt myself perfectly normal. I was horrified. Why should I be rejected like this? Why should I be told that I am evil?

When I got home, my mother told me what I had already learned by this point, that I shouldn't ever tell anyone that I was an atheist. I didn't think it was fair, seeing as all the other children could talk all they wanted about their religions without fear of repercussion. But I was different. I was instructed to hide my absence of belief and keep my head low.

After a while, it became apparent that word had gotten around because soon everyone was asking if I was a believer. Using my mother's rule as a rock to stand on, I pulled myself from the current by saying, "My mom says I'm not allowed to talk about religion at school."

After more goading to get me to tell them, they eventually gave up, perhaps thinking of me as a "goody-goody," but at least not as some evil demon spawn.

People in high school were more accepting. In fact, one of the most popular kids at my school loudly proclaimed allegiance to atheism. It was a relief to tell my friends who I was and how I

viewed the world and not be scorned or ridiculed. The only issue that presented itself was in my freshman year when I was left by someone I cared for due to my "immorality" as an atheist.

Then there's my grandma. I have been instructed to never tell her because she'd completely freak out. She's a devout Christian who would completely feel that "her beloved granddaughter is succumbing to the devil" and would do her best to rid me of my ideas. I know it's somewhat minor, but it feels wrong that I can't even tell my own family members who I am without being accepted.

I was instructed to hide my absence of belief and keep my head low.

I know for a fact, through my own experiences, that atheists can be just as moral or more moral than Christians. I have always been one of the more seemingly moral people at school, helping small creatures while other people, often religious, kill them with apparent relish. A person doesn't re-

quire a religion to be a decent human being. We are all in this together, and many atheists, although shunned, continue working for the common good because they know this.

I am an atheist because I don't see any evidence that there is a deity. Too many terrible things have happened, and there is simply too much horror in the world. Morally, I simply care for everything on my own without needing some sort of divine intervention to keep me in check. Respecting and loving the planet and other people is simply something I do because it feels right to me.

Even though it might seem like an uphill battle, I'm doing my best to show the world how atheists can be moral. While it might seem ridiculous that we have to prove ourselves, every stigmatized group has had to. Why would we be any different? I just believe in doing my best to be good.

Kierra Robertson, 18, graduated from Northwood High School in Pittsboro, N.C., and is attending to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "My goal is to obtain an advanced degree in statistics and minor in environmental science. Since childhood, I have been very interested in mathematics, human rights and the environment."

Honorable mention: High school essay contest, freethinkers of color

Education can lift veil of religious ignorance

FFRF awarded Hannah \$200.

By Hannah Dolan

I have sinned. I have no chance of salvation. I am going to hell. Or so I'm told. In the community where I live, there are a few Jewish people, Buddhism is not an uncommon practice, and one of my friends is Muslim. But most people identify as Christian.

I was in elementary school, young and unaware that differences in faith could turn people against me. I was at a fellow student's house and everyone was sitting down to eat dinner. As the food reaches the table, everyone takes their neighbor's hand. I sit, confused, not understanding what everyone is doing. All eyes turn to me as I become the obstacle in completing the holy chain. The eyes are not understanding, the eyes are not comforting. The eyes are watching, judging, daring me. I quickly complete the circle, taking the hands on either side of me, and someone begins a prayer, no one bothering to tell me what we were doing.



Hannah Dolan

It is the unknowing, the inability to understand, that discourages diversity. Followers of faith do not understand how I do not believe there is a god, while I am not certain why they follow the beliefs that they do. If I do not follow a religious code, do I have any morals? How do I understand someone if I think they believe in something

that does not exist? I am evil and they are crazy.

My sister, with her godless beliefs, is considered a "bad influence" by her friend's family. The only reason why they are allowed to talk is so her friend can try to "convert my sister to see reason."

How do we fix this problem? How do we share the views of atheism without forcing it onto others? I think education is the answer. From elementary school through high school, whether it be a history class or an English assignment, the different religions are covered. But no one ever talks about the people who do not follow a particular faith. In class discussions on faith or religious figures in literature, one comment, one question or clarification and everyone stares as if no religion is not an option.

I am a girl of science. I do not believe a supreme being created all that lives. I believe that highly dense subatomic particles expanded into the known universe. When the days get hard, when everything feels like it is going wrong, I do not feel like someone has done this to me for the sake of a

To change how beliefs are looked at, atheism needs to be openly discussed.

test. I take no comfort in thinking that I am being watched and judged every hour of every day. But people look at me and two things happen. First, people make assumptions about the way I look, with my genes making them put me into the category of "others." And the second is that people who know me, but don't know the person underneath, judge me on my lack of faith.

To change how beliefs are looked at, atheism needs to be openly discussed.

Hannah Dolan, 18, is from Valencia, Calif. She graduated from William S. Hart High School and is attending the University of Oregon to study computer science with cyber security interest.

Honorable mention: High school essay contest, freethinkers of color

Enlightenment from the horrors of the bible

FFRF awarded Telexius \$200.

By Telexius Wilson

It started when I was in elementary school and my mom and I went to a new church. Kids sat in the back while the adults sat in the front. All the kids were allowed to sleep through the sermons, so I happily joined because this church started early in the morning and I was tired and bored. After the sermons I always felt like my mom and I didn't belong there because most of the people were related to the pastor. My mom always taught me to pray for everything. When I did, I noticed that most of the things I prayed for never came true unless it was simple stuff. One day I stopped praying and realized the world didn't change one bit.

When I entered high school I got interested in science and the world around us. I realized that none of the tons of evidence backed up the claims the bible made. I started researching deeper and deeper. I found all the things wrong with the bible on my journey. I could never support something that says any form of slavery is OK. As an African-American I could never accept this. My ancestors didn't die for me to support a religion that condones their mistreatment. I found out people even used the bible to defend against abolishing slavery. The bible is against women, too! When I learned about this, I knew I was no longer a Christian. I told my mom that I was now an atheist and you could tell she wanted to slap the black off me. She said, "You ain't no atheist." That was the end of our conversation. I'm planning on coming out to my entire family after I finish college. I know that means they

might ostracize me, but I can't continue to live a lie forever, and my friends support me.

When you're down on your luck and have no one to turn to, the church seems like it has the answers to all your problems. It doesn't matter if you're poor and uneducated because the church needs people like that to keep it going. You have arms outreached to help you through everything when you're at your lowest. You are not alone anymore. That is how they get you. If someone tells you that if you put a little money into our church, you'll get something back in return, like a promotion, new car, new house or something, wouldn't you want to do it? I remember when the pastor said my mom was getting a new car. Guess what? She didn't. It's easier for people to accept a lie than the truth. It's so much easier to turn off your brain and believe someone has something amazing planned for you. The church also has another big advantage: They start their members young. Kids who are too young to understand what's going on are woken up early and dragged to church or children's bible study. Their teachers avoid all the terrible things that go on in the bible and only spoon feed them the good stuff.

How would I would make the freethinker movement more attractive to

One day I stopped praying and realized the world didn't change one bit.



Telexius Wilson

minorities? First, tell kids to question everything and do their own research. Look up all the bad things their holy book says. Education and knowledge are the key to becoming a freethinker. Have a debate with them and point out all the holes and flaws and maybe they might see that you are right.

Start a group in the community and fundraise to help out struggling families. Religion has dehumanized atheism, so doing something great for the community will help get rid of some of that stigma. Don't start a war with the neighboring churches, be kind to all. Give the questioning a sense of acceptance and belonging like a church does. Use the methods that make churches so successful to your advantage. Their methods are successful for a reason. That's how I would make the freethinker movement look more attractive to minorities.

Telexius Wilson, 18, grew up in West Palm Beach, Fla., and attended Lake Worth High School. She is attending Palm Beach State for two years, then Florida Atlantic University after that. She wants to major in criminal justice so she can become a police officer.

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Staying strong in a world of believers

FFRF awarded Taressa \$200.

By Taressa Straughter

“What? You’re an atheist? Why?” Those are the questions that I always hear when I tell people that I am an atheist. I honestly don’t think that it’s a big deal, I just don’t believe in God. Ever since I was a little girl in church, I always questioned the existence of God. It just didn’t make sense to me. Why worship someone that I can’t see? My life as an atheist has not been easy, but it’s even harder when you’re a black teenage atheist. Yes, I know that’s very rare, but I assure you that we do exist. Growing up in a predominantly black community, it is considered an abomination if you say that you’re an atheist. Where I grew up, you always went to church on Sunday and worshipped the Lord. You were told to fear God and you would enter heaven when you died. Being a black female atheist comes with a lot of challenges, but I always stayed true to what I believed in: science.

I grew up with my Pentecostal mother and grandmother. My six siblings and I went to church on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and twice on Sundays. They were true holy rollers, and if

we even asked to stay home, we were punished. I would be bored out of my mind in church. The preacher would talk for hours about the same thing, and I always thought he was a moron. For years, I just stayed in church and tolerated it. I knew that I was a nonbeliever; science just made more sense to me. When I was in the eighth grade, I told my mom that I was an atheist. “All nonbelievers will burn in hell,” she said in anger. I was shocked and cried that entire day. I felt as though it was me against the world. However, the fun really began when I entered high school. I went to a historically black high school, and that meant at every event there was a prayer. That meant at every award ceremony, the students would thank

Being a black female atheist comes with a lot of challenges, but I always stayed true to what I believed in: science.

God for the “blessings” they received. I was really uncomfortable when people would pray over their food at my school’s alumni banquet, or when random old women would scream “praise God” out of the blue. But the absolute worst part was the questions that people would ask me, and then they would question my atheist beliefs. “Why don’t you believe in God?” “Where do you think you would go when you die?” I think it would be more logical to interrogate them about their God. They are worshipping a being that they can’t see, feel or hear. I always tell them that I am a believer of science and that it has more evidence than that dreadful book of a bible.

Even though I’ve been the recipient of many angry expressions, I am proud of who I am. I am proud to be black, to be a woman, and to be an atheist. I think that everyone is entitled to believe what they want to believe, or even to not believe at all. I want freethinkers in my community to be proud of who they are and not have to live in the shadows. You can’t really change what someone already believes in, but you change their perspectives of how they see people from other religions. All of that can happen with education and information. Freethought can be more attractive to nonwhite communities by informing them about freethought



Taressa Straughter

and debunking stereotypes about freethinkers. Ignorance can overpower by knowledge, and that can bring diversity to the freethought movement. I hope that people will be more understanding and accepting of my atheist views.

Taressa Straughter, 18, is from Miami, Fla. She attended Booker T. Washington Senior High School in Miami and is attending Purdue University. She plans to be on the pre-med track and to attend medical school at Johns Hopkins University and her dream career is to become a neurosurgeon.

Honorable mention: High school essay contest, freethinkers of color

Diversity discouraged in religious communities



Jazmyn Glause

FFRF awarded Jazmyn \$200.

By Jazmyn Glause

As a minority and nonbeliever in a small town in rural Wisconsin, I feel like others are constantly trying to force their beliefs upon me even when they don’t realize it. In my community I have firmly come out as a nonbeliever for many reasons. Think of the positive effect that encouraging non-whites to become freethinkers or nonbelievers would have on our society.

I had not thought much about my religious standpoint until I moved to Rice Lake, Wis., in December 2012. After moving to such a religious community I realized that it seemed as if most religiously inclined people didn’t have a grasp on their own opinions or morals. Everything they believed was pulled right out of the bible, regardless of their understanding of the topic. The teenagers in town cling to the words spoken during Mass, not

to mention that the depictions of the words and “beliefs” within the bible are usually blown out of proportion. It leads believers to be very unaccepting of diversity and revolutionary beliefs. I quickly decided that this was not what I wanted for myself. I am naturally a very accepting and loving person, yet I still question everything. I would never be one to believe something I read or heard without looking further into it. I came to the conclusion that I would rather not be involved in religion at all because I like to have my own morals, beliefs and opinions in life.

As a whole, I see much discouragement of diversity within the religious community, especially as a minority and a member of the LGBT community. Every day I am told, whether directly or indirectly, that my way of life should be corrected or I should be involved in the church to stay out of the “trouble” that “people like me” usually get into. It’s apparent that anyone who doesn’t fit the mold that religion has created for our society will not be accepted by believers, or believers will try to “correct” diverse people without their consent.

As for nonwhite communities, I feel that it would be a good idea to encourage freethought and/or nonbelief. In politics, the people who support nonwhite communities in the greatest ways are the liberals, who most of the time aren’t as heavily religious as conservatives. If we can encourage freethought within these communities, we can continue to elect officials who are working toward the betterment of a wider spectrum of people, not just those who

It’s apparent that anyone who doesn’t fit the mold that religion has created for our society will not be accepted by believers.

have fit the perfect cookie cutter mold of past generations. If we show nonwhite communities that they will be more widely accepted by those whose beliefs aren’t fueled by religion, they will be more likely to look into freethought and/or nonbelief themselves. In doing this we will be able to work toward a society with a great variety of

beliefs, morals, opinions and values. In return, more people will be accepted and treated as equals no matter their race, gender, sexual orientation, economic status or anything else that seems to divide our nation.

I am confident in my decision to be out as a nonbeliever in my community and my country. I believe my decision will have a positive impact on my community and open a door for freethought within it. I will continue to break down barriers as a minority and as a freethinker in my small town in rural Wisconsin, and I will take these beliefs with me wherever I go.

Jazmyn Glause, 18, attended Rice Lake High School in Rice Lake, Wis., but was originally born in Grand Island, Neb. She is a sponsored skateboarder and works as a bike mechanic at a bicycle shop in Rice Lake. She is attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison, majoring in art with an emphasis in graphic design.



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 email address is info@ffrf.org. Please include your name and physical mailing address with all email correspondence.

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

Letterbox

Enlightening, enjoyable sums up convention

We would like to thank all of you at FFRF for the very enlightening and enjoyable time we experienced at your convention. We are very proud to be Life Members of an organization that works so diligently to protect our First Amendment in keeping religion out of government and for everything else you do to promote atheists' (and everyone's) constitutional rights.

We had a wonderful time and look forward to attending next year's convention in Pittsburgh.

Rosalyn Sue Dunn
Robert Mendenhall
Ohio, Florida (snowbirds)

Firefighters, not prayer, saved my home

For months I have been looking forward to coming to the convention in Madison, which would have been my second. Though I've been a nonbeliever for most of my adult life, I'm just peeking out of the closet, and it was so great to spend time with a group of like-minded people at FFRF's Los Angeles convention.

Unfortunately, not being a seasoned traveler, I waited too long to make plane reservations and as of Sept. 11 was having trouble finding a satisfactory flight. Then the next day, the Valley Fire hit us. I was among thousands of evacuees and needless to say, a flight to Madison was one of the last things on my mind.

My house was fortunately spared and I was able to return on the 19th. This was an extremely scary and upsetting experience, but I was interested to realize that I didn't think for even a split second of offering a prayer either of succor or thanks. All my thanks instead go to the wonderful members of CalFire, who, by working their backsides off, stopped the fire half a mile from my home.

Now it's really too late to make a reservation. But more importantly, since the random chance of three large fires in two months in the same area strains credulity almost as much as a long-bearded man sitting on a cloud monitoring every detail of each of our lives, I'm reluctant to be away from my home and my animals until the end of fire season.

So, with much disappointment, I will have to miss the convention. I hope it's great, and if my luck holds, I'll be at the next one.

Phyllis Murphey
California

Crank mail: 'complete lack of decency'

As I read your endless crank mail, I'm again disappointed in a portion of society and their complete lack of decency. They claim that Christianity mandates belief in and actions based on the message of their lord and savior, Jesus Christ. Why is it, then, that they are incapable of conceiving the possibility that their vulgarity, lack of restraint, judgment of fellow humans and subsequent condemnation violate Christian doctrine and have consequences very similar to those they wish on FFRF members?

I wish you all the best in your efforts to uphold the values of our founders and the Constitution. I understand

that "freedom of religion" includes both options, to believe in a deity or not to believe. It would appear that this escapes a fair number of Christians, as does the ability to voice an opinion without being vulgar and hateful. I am quite certain that this behavior is made much easier by the faceless delivery via email or comments on Facebook.

Sarah Bales
Tennessee

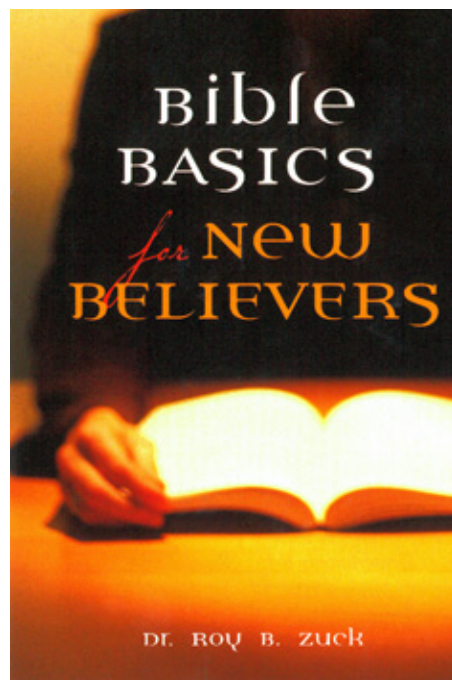
Minority essayist's view was refreshing

After reading Teneisha Neal's essay in the October issue, I can see why she received first place. She thinks and writes far beyond her years and brings a refreshing view on the tradition of Christianity in the black community. She makes many valid points and explains clearly the challenges of resisting the pressure of conformity.

My congratulations to Teneisha and to the perspicacity of the FFRF judges.

Raymond Hellkamp
New York

Bible belt snags Dells vacationer



Part of the Wisconsin Dells tourist packet.

I took a short holiday in September in Wisconsin Dells, booking a suite at the All Star Value Inn, a small motel on the outskirts of town. When I arrived, I was given a packet of information that included myriad Dells coupons. One of the coupon packet covers contained a sleeve on the front within which was placed — you guessed it — a bible quote sheet! Additionally, my suite contained not one but four Gideon bibles, prominently displayed on top of the furniture beside each bed, including the sofa bed (no hiding them in a drawer).

Being a private business, the motel can provide bible quotes if the owners so choose. And I can choose a different motel. I sent a letter of objection to the resident manager. Since joining FFRF, I have become bolder in my opposition of Christian messaging in hotels. Thank you for your advocacy!

Maybe FFRF could condense some of the submissions from folks who have crafted clever text to include in hotel bibles? I would be happy to keep copies to insert them in bibles wherever I travel.

David Glenn
Wisconsin

Editor's note: FFRF offers two bible warning labels plus a variety of "nontracts," succinct summaries such as "What's wrong with the Ten Commandments?" "X-rated bible," etc., at ffrf.org/shop.

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My wife and I recently traveled from Athens, Ohio, to La Crosse, Wis., and made reservations at the La Quinta Inn in Bloomington, Ill., as the midway point. When I made the reservation, I requested that the Gideon bible be removed from the room. Of course, when we checked into the room, the bible was there in its full glory. I returned it to the front desk and pointed out that I had requested that it be removed. I was told that "it had to be there."

For the return trip, we made a reservation at a nearby Best Western and made the same request. Upon arrival, we checked the room and there was, in fact, *no* bible, Gideon or otherwise. Kudos to Best Western (at least that one).

Cameron Foster
Ohio

Believers confused by religious freedom

If I could convince you to print bumper stickers stating "Expecting that you treat your fellow humans with Respect is NOT Denial of your Religious Freedom," I would guarantee you the sale of two stickers. I could have bumper stickers custom-made at Café Express, but their stickers are so small and so generic. I imagine there would be a good demand for it, especially during the coming election year.

I was displeased to see in the Oct. 2 issue of Science an article headlined "Talking science and God with the Pope's new astronomer," an interview with Jesuit Brother Guy Consolmagno, director of the Vatican observatory.

In claiming that science and Christianity are two sides of the same coin, Consolmagno states, "The Romans, on the other hand, believed in nature gods that intervene according to whim — but if you believe in that you can't be a scientist."

Donald Hamilton, Life Member
Indiana

New monument inspires foxhole atheist

I served 23 years in the U.S. Army before retiring in 1998. It wasn't until after I left that I could fully appreciate how much of an internal war I, and numerous other atheists like me, waged within our units and ourselves to quietly push back against forced prayer, sermon formations and general acquiescence that everyone was to give honor to the Christian god and only the Christian god.

While I saluted my superiors, obeyed all lawful orders, I bowed before no man and knelt before no god and stood up with words and example to support those under me in later years who refused to show signs of acquiescence, just as an early leader of mine did for me. It had to be done respectfully and with a great deal of subtlety, but it could be and was often done.

Lawsuits and protests were (and probably still are) not the order of the day within the military if one loves serving their country, seeks it out as a career, believes in all that the Constitution means and knows they are often all that stands between true evil and a chance for change for so many around the world.

FFRF's Atheists in Foxholes mon-

ument means far more to us than to most who visit or comment here might ever fully realize. My sincere thanks to FFRF and hopefully we'll see more like this in a more public venue in the very near future.

Cage Abshire
South Carolina

Members bask in glow of 'After-Life'

I have been a Life Member for several years and, at age 81, hope to be for many more. But your full-page ad in the Sept. 24 New York Times has changed my mind. I now wish to be an "After-Life" Member. Enclosed please find my check for \$5,000.

The ad was so well-timed. The wording, from the "Global Warning" to the JFK quote, was very clever. The cartoon was deliriously shrewd. The statistics on world population were quite pertinent.

You deserve a round of applause.

Kenneth Fahrenholtz
New Jersey

•••

I never thought I'd have an afterlife until I read that this was possible in the September issue, and for only a few thousand dollars. That's a bargain for immortality and my check is enclosed. You're also in my estate for considerably more, but I won't have the pleasure of writing that check!

Your offer of an afterlife is as valid as any that the preachers are making. Keep fighting the good fight.

John Mosley
Utah

Religion running (ruining) our country

I had not intended to give another donation to FFRF until December for holiday gift giving, but I have been so disturbed by our government allowing a pope to come and preach to our politicians that I felt compelled to send monetary assistance sooner to your much-needed commitment of working to keep religion out of running (ruining) our country.

Jackie D. Schneider
Oregon

Transplanted Georgians note FFRF's work

My wife Kris Byron and I are Life Members who recently moved back to Georgia after 12 years in upstate New York. In our first month here, we've already seen FFRF in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution three times: onfield baptisms at a high school, football chaplains at public universities and "In God We Trust" on police cars. (By the way, you're always referred to as the "Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation.")

Being back in the bible belt, it really hits home how much important work FFRF is doing trying to keep church and state separate and how busy government officials are keeping you. Thank you for all the hard work, and we're letting you know there are two more of us in Georgia now!

Ross Rubenstein
Georgia

Atheist cap sparks interest, comments

It's good to see that FFRF is reinstating the "Out of the Closet Atheist" cap. I felt awkward about wearing mine at first but did in spite of my reticence, knowing that there is so much misin-



Mary Jo Stirling, California, writes: “I have attached the headline from the Sept. 25 Los Angeles Daily News (page A1) and my revision.” Nice work, Mary Jo!

formation about atheists.

I wore it for years, until it got so ragged that even my wife was glad when I got a “U.S. Atheist” cap to replace it. Over the years, I’ve had either no comments or really positive ones such as, “Good for you!” Most, to my surprise, are from women, including a volunteer at the library desk who called her friend over, saying, “Look at this!”

I don’t speak unless spoken to, merely wearing the cap. I wear it even when I sometimes pick up my wife from her Sunday service. On one of those days, I encountered a young man from Teen Challenge. He stopped and told me that atheists “hate God,” so I needed to straighten out that lie.

Maybe we spread ourselves too thin in our battles against ignorance and indifference. Maybe we need to concentrate our energies on attacking one big lie at a time. How about a freethinking campaign to eliminate the Noah’s ark story from our culture? Too many children are being taught that evil tale.

The idea of eradicating it was jump-started for me when reading Marshall Brain’s destruction of the myth as detailed in his book *How “God” Works: A Skeptic Questions Belief*.

**Carl Scheiman, Lifetime Member
Maine**

P.S. Why Aren’t there any Christian Science hospitals?

Schooling Bill O’Reilly on mass murder

I was pleasantly surprised in reading the October issue to see in “They Said What?” an item on Bill O’Reilly blaming atheists and agnostics for mass murders. I had seen this broadcast and responded by sending an e-mail to Mr. O’Reilly. Needless to say, I have never received any acknowledgement.

I included the names and religious affiliations of recent accused mass murderers Mohammad Youssuf Abdulazeez, Dylann Storm Roof, Adam Lanza, James Holmes, Vester Lee Flanagan and several others.

I also informed him that “History also shows that more people have been killed in the name of religion than for any other reason. Just think for recent starters: Ireland, Iraq, Iran, Israel, India and Pakistan. We would all be better off with no religion of any kind! So, Bill O’Reilly, I expect a public admission of your error.”

**Timothy Keister
Pennsylvania**

FFRF’s ad countered papal visit hype

I saw FFRF’s full-page ad Sept. 24 in the Washington Post, a welcome counterpoint to the general adulation of the media coverage of the pope’s visit to the U.S.

No doubt many of us could set forth the obvious atrocities inflicted on humanity by religion: the Crusades, the shameless murders of Joan of Arc, Jacques DeMolay, Giordano Bruno, the Inquisition and so forth. Let us consider some subtler crimes.

In the fourth century A.D., the great library of Alexandria was the greatest collection of scholarship in the world, until 391 A.D., when the church decided (on no further evidence than their own narrow and ignorant prejudice) that the library was “heresy” and burned it. Some historians have suggested that this crime set back the advance of western civilization by a thousand years.

In 1233 A.D., Pope Gregory IX published a papal document that specifically identified cats with Satan. Literally for centuries thereafter, millions of cats were slaughtered to satisfy doctrinal purity — and probably thousands of cat owners, mostly women, accused/convicted (there was very little distinction) of “witchcraft.”

The population of domestic cats was greatly reduced, especially in the cities. The church did not seem to care about the corresponding increase in rats and mice, their infestation of food storage or the diseases such as the plague they transmitted. There is no telling how many people died as a direct or indirect result of this cruel and ignorant document.

Within the limits of the system, it appears that Pope Francis is a kindly and well-meaning man. We should not be misled into believing this represents any real change in the rigid, authoritarian, sexist doctrines of the church.

I don’t know the views of the current pope about cats. I don’t think popes usually have pets. (Pope Pius XII kept birds in a cage. When he died, his housekeeper was told to leave the Vatican immediately, that day. As an afterthought, she was told she could take the birds.)

On another topic, your winter solstice cards are creative. I think of Christmas, despite the name, as being at least as much a secular holiday as a religious one. I know nonreligious people who observe it with seasonal decorations, a party, exchange of gifts, etc. If someone greets me with “Merry Christmas!” I will probably reply in kind. I don’t see this as a religious assertion, merely a seasonal courtesy.

**David M. Shea
Maryland**

Editor’s note: FFRF’s hope in issuing winter solstice cards is indeed to reclaim the natural holiday that has been usurped by the Christian church and which has been celebrated for millennia in the northern hemisphere with festivals of light, gift exchanges, feasts and evergreens.

Time for agnostics to get real?

I am an agnostic and moral realist in sympathy, support and respect of FFRF. I do think FFRF suffers from the same “us and them” exclusiveness and group think that Steven Pinker identifies. The solution is to be more inclusive.

The meaning and force of religion is the group’s psychological drive to discover and create the reality of morality. Religion will never disappear. Su-

perstition may disappear, but religion never.

I have in the past called myself “agnostic” because it maintains the idea of an open mind. Now I think “moral realist” is the better term.

The “god” or “no god” question is an unprovable. It also implies I read minds and know the meanings in the minds of others. It is polemic, a fodder for extremes.

The word “agnostic” is habitually associated with the “god” question. It leads to the same zero. Talking reality is far more productive and inclusive.

**David W. Morse
New York**

Put sources before quotes in paper

I joined FFRF in January 2008 and am very appreciative and encouraged by the work you are doing. I think we are finally beginning to see the tide turning in our favor, even though there are more state/church violations than ever.

I had an idea pertaining to Freethought Today and wondered if you thought it made any sense.

In the “Overheard” and “They said what?” sections, I like to read the text in bold before I read the actual quote. That way I can put the comment into context.

I know it’s a personal decision, but for me, I like having the source information first. Would it make sense to have the author or source of the quote in bold lettering first, followed by where it appeared and then the statement?

**Matt Wolf
Iowa**

Kudos to Empire State Building owner

Three cheers for Anthony Malkin, principal owner of the Empire State Building, for lighting that iconic edifice in red in September for the New York Philharmonic’s gala concert rather than white in honor of the Roman pontiff’s visit.

Malkin had previously refused to honor the centenary of Mother Teresa, choosing instead to light the building white in honor of the suffragettes. The Catholic League’s Bill Donohue is most displeased, to put it mildly.

**Dennis Middlebrooks
New York**

God on money insults all nonbelievers

In 1957, as part of the “cold war” against godless communism, the phrase “In God We Trust” was added to all our money. The method by which this change was supposed to aid in the battle is not very clear. But those of us who see no god in which any trust can be placed have been annoyed by this ever since. Eschewing the use of money is hardly feasible.

In a fit of puerile petulance, I recently began correcting all the bills which pass through my hands. I simply cross out the “God.” As I say, I started this purely as pique at being forced to pass on, and thus presumptively endorse, an opinion with which I vigorously disagreed.

As an aside here, I have checked, and while there is a statute which prohibits defacing currency, it applies only to actions which make the currency “unfit for use.” Since a small blob of ink has no effect on the utility of a bill as a medium of exchange, that statute

obviously does not apply. Indeed, my actions are clearly protected speech under the First Amendment.

Since we are part of a minority whose numbers are consistently underestimated, it occurs to me that we could bring more awareness of our prevalence if others would join me in this small gesture of truth-telling. If large numbers of bills began turning up all over the country with the foolishness obliterated, perhaps we would receive more respect. It would certainly be encouraging to occasionally come across bills corrected by others to remind us that we are not alone in pursuit of truth, justice and reason.

Anyone care to join me?

I have thought about doing the equivalent correction for coins, but no feasible method comes to mind. Use of a hammer and chisel is hardly practical, and ink or paint would wear/chip off too quickly to be worthwhile.

**David Lubeck
New Jersey**

‘Trash talkin’ Presbyterian’ as president?

President Trump (I’m trying to get used to the idea, just in case) has proclaimed his preference for Presbyterianism. He says it’s the greatest and he loves the beautiful little Presbyterian church he attends.

Pentecostals were tossing vipers into Mormon temples in anticipatory celebration of Mitt Romney representing their fruitful multiplication in government. Today, Protestants of every creed and cult are grinning from ear to ear over the prospect of a trash talkin’ Presbyterian representing all of them in the White House.

Ask any of them what gets you into heaven: faith in our Lord and Savior who forgives sinners, they all agree, with the exception of Presbyterians.

Presbyterians believe it’s all about predestination: God has decided ahead of time who is blessed and who is damned. Not a damn thing anyone can do about it. Mencken said, “Such a belief makes all religion, faith and morality absurd.” Ingersoll wrote, “If there is any dogma that ought to be protected by law, predestination is that doctrine.”

A mere public reference to an Almighty Kingship over the Land of the Lost now satisfies the Pauline requirement that all Christians think as one. A secular enforced liberalism has bridled the collective superstitious consciousness. Gone are the good old days when Christians slow-roasted one another at the stake over dogmatic disagreements.

We call it civilization.

**Mike Middlesworth
California**



Kneediness?

Presbyterians baited passersby in Shreveport, captured by Terra Slack, Louisiana.

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Dennis Chapman, 62, Taylorsville, NC: Assault on a child less than 12 years old. Chapman, pastor at Harmony Baptist Church and a bus driver for the public school system, is accused of pinching a child's buttocks 4 times on the "exceptional children" bus Chapman was driving. A woman told police she saw the incident. *Source: WYFF, 10-15-15*

Donald Bellizzi, 44, Rabat, Malta: Sexual assault of minors and possession of child pornography. Bellizzi, a Catholic priest and chaplain who lives at a convent, is charged with molesting 3 underage boys between 2010-13. The boys were part of a group of 5 youths considering the priesthood. *Source: Times of Malta, 10-14-15*

Yonah Metzger, 62, Jerusalem: Bribery, fraud, breach of public trust, fraudulent receipt of a benefit under aggravated circumstances, theft, money laundering, tax violations and conspiracy to commit a felony. Metzger, former Ashkenazi chief rabbi, is alleged to have received about \$2.6 million in bribes from foreigners who wished to convert to Judaism or to clarify if they were Jewish under standards acceptable to the Chief Rabbinate.

He's also accused of receiving percentages of donations to charitable groups in exchange for support of their activities and not reporting the income.

He resigned from major duties in June 2013 after allegations were made. *Source: Jerusalem Post, 10-13-15*

Bruce T. Leonard, 65, and Deborah R. Leonard, 59, Clayville, NY: 1st-degree manslaughter for the death of their 19-year-old son Lucas, who died after a physical assault at Word of Life Church in New Hartford, where Lucas' 17-year-old brother Christopher was also assaulted and which the family attended. **Four more church members** were charged with 2nd-degree assault.

New Hartford Police Chief Michael Insera said both sons were subjected to hours of physical punishment "in hopes that each would confess to prior sins and ask for forgiveness." A witness at a probable cause hearing told the judge the counseling session lasted 14 hours.

"The victim expressed a desire to leave the church and this is what may have initiated the session. We still have not concluded why the session turned so violent," Insera said, adding that Lucas was beaten so badly that emergency room doctors thought he'd been shot in the groin.

"We always joked around and said they were a cult, which now we're believing that they probably were," said Tara Litz, who lives by the church. *Source: CBS/Post-Standard, 10-13-15*

Meghan B. Alt, 25, San Clemente, CA: Possession and control of child pornography, 3 counts of lewd acts upon a child under 14 and a sentencing enhancement allegation for substantial sexual conduct with a child. Alt, a youth volunteer at Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints congregations in Irvine and San Clemente, allegedly took explicit photos of a 4-year-old female relative earlier this year and distributed them in exchange for money and gifts.

Alt, the 2014 Mrs. Orange County, is accused of sending some photos to a California-based U.S. Marine. *Source: LA Times, 10-9-15*

Paul Clarke, 71, Urmston, England: Possessing an indecent image of a child, possessing prohibited images and making a total of 3,100 indecent images of children. Clarke, who resigned suddenly in February as pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Parish, allegedly possessed images taken from the Internet. *Source: The Independent, 10-8-15*

An unidentified haredi rabbi, Ofakim, Israel: Sexual offenses, including sodomy, and manipulation through use of his leadership position. While 2 women allege the rabbi committed indecent acts an unspecified number of years ago, authorities suspect others may come forward. *Source: Arutz Sheva, 10-8-15*

Ralph A. Sawyer, 30, Hazelwood, MO: Stealing more than \$500. Sawyer, pastor at Lindsay Lane Missionary Baptist Church, allegedly used a church debit card to make unauthorized withdrawals of \$21,727 in June and July. He resigned in August.

An affidavit alleges he told police he started an affair with a 20-year-old woman in March: "Defendant admitted he continued to pay the woman so that she would keep quiet once she discovered that he was a married pastor," the document said.

A church statement said, "We believe this situation is between Ralph Sawyer, God, and the Judicial Process." *Source: Post-Dispatch, 10-6-15*



Timothy A. Williams, 50, Woodstock, IL: 6 counts of possession of child pornography. Williams' name was removed as pastor from the website of Heritage Baptist Church a day after authorities conducted a search of his home.

His arrest followed an 8-month investigation that started with an online tip from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. *Source: Northwest Herald, 10-6-15*

Maurice J. Pugh, 45, Decherd, TN: 2 counts each of statutory rape by an authority figure and aggravated statutory rape. Pugh, pastor of a Fayetteville church he founded named Love Will Set You Free, is accused of molesting a teen girl who attended the church in early 2014.

When charges were made public, several women, including the alleged victim's mother, reportedly came forward to say they'd been sexually involved with Pugh. The congregation also voted to change the church's name. *Source: WSMV, 10-6-15*

Jeffrey B. Mobley, 24, Ocala, FL: Using a facility or means of interstate commerce to persuade, induce or entice an individual under the age of 18 to engage in sexual activity. Mobley, a youth pastor at The Grace Place, allegedly had intercourse with 2 minors from the church at the Clarion Inn in Stuart, the criminal complaint said. *Source: WPBF, 10-6-15*

Stanley H. Pace, 43, Conehatta, MS: Simple battery and indecent behavior with a juvenile. Pace, pastor of the now-closed Oaklawn Avenue Church and former pastor at Acadiana Presbyterian Church, was arrested after a 16-year-old girl alleged to police she was "involved in inappropriate situations" with Pace starting when she was about 6. *Source: Daily World, 10-5-15*

Harry Babinger II, 52, Carrick, PA: Deviate sexual intercourse with a child, unlawful contact with a minor, sexual assault and incest of a minor.

Babinger, an organist at Christ Lutheran Church in Duquesne and Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mt. Oliver, was arrested after the alleged victim told a babysitter what had happened to her.

An unidentified pastor at Trinity Lutheran told a reporter that Babinger didn't work with children and simply played the organ. He is on leave from both churches. *Source: WPXI, 10-5-15*

Kevin Carter, 54, Little Ferry, NJ: Endangering the welfare of a child and aggravated assault. Carter, pastor of St. Margaret of Cortona Catholic Church, is accused of threatening to shoot an 8-year-old boy with a Civil War-style musket in September.

A parishioner told officials at the Archdiocese of Newark that Carter made the boy stand against a rectory wall, aimed the unloaded but fully functional musket at him and said he would shoot him. The alleged incident happened on the Sunday the NY Giants played the Dallas Cowboys, prosecutor John Molinelli said. Carter is a Giants fan. The boy is a Cowboys fan and was wearing a Cowboys shirt.

"I don't know whether it ended up to be an actual argument or whether or not the priest was just showing his preference for his team, but our position is there is really no basis to ever point any weapon at an 8-year-old child," Molinelli said. *Source: fox5ny.com, 10-2-15*

Gerald D. Campbell, Odessa, TX: Engaging in illicit sexual conduct in foreign places. Campbell, general manager of Victory Christian Children's Home in Malawi from 1997 until resigning in 2009, is charged with molesting 11 orphans in 2001-03. The home is operated by Charles Trombley Ministries. Campbell re-

mained active at Grace Fellowship Church and for a time was business manager there after resigning from Victory Christian.

An affidavit alleged Campbell touched boys or forced them to touch him, including ejaculating on a boy's stomach and unsuccessfully attempting anal sex. Of the 11 alleged victims, 8 were minors, the complaint said. *Source: Odessa American, 10-2-15*

Adam W. (surname withheld under privacy laws), 45, **Zarczyce Duze, Poland:** 3 counts of statutory rape and unlawful imprisonment. The Catholic priest is accused of having sex with a 14-year-old girl from the congregation in 2014-15.

A spokesman for the Diocese of Kielce said the priest has resigned. *Source: Radio Poland, 10-2-15*

Sholom Dovber Levitansky, 38, Sherman Oaks, CA: Lewd act upon a child and 5 counts each of oral copulation of a person under 18 years of age and sexual penetration by a foreign object. He met his alleged victims, who were 15 and 16 at the time, while working as a rabbi at the Living Torah Center/Chabad in Santa Monica.

In February, Jewish Community Watch added him to its "Wall of Shame," saying "Multiple victims came forward and revealed to JCW that they had been abused by Levitansky."

In March, Sima Yarmush, now 27, spoke publicly about more than 2 years of sexual abuse, allegedly perpetrated by Levitansky and ending when she was 18. After she told her parents and a social worker, 4 rabbis were assigned to hear her case but she didn't contact police. "I was 18, unmarried and terrified of the public finding out I was sexually abused. The idea of fighting a legal battle with a man who repulsed me was terrifying."

She said the rabbis told her they would "take care of everything" but instead Levitansky was quietly sent to therapy and went on to practice in a different Jewish community. *Source: Canyon News, 10-1-15*

Timothy Douglas, 49, Brookshire, TX: Possession of child pornography and 3 counts of possession with intent/promotion of child pornography. Douglas was pastor at Creekside Community Church in Katy until 8 months ago. Court documents allege police seized numerous images and videos from Douglas showing boys and girls as young as 5 engaged in sex acts. *Source: KRTR, 10-1-15*

Ariel Stevenson, 25, Franklin, TN: Statutory rape and sexual exploitation of a minor. According to police, she met the 17-year-old alleged victim at Franklin Christian Church, where her husband is a student minister.

Church leaders and police received the allegations in May and met with parents to discuss the situation. *Source: WTVF, 9-29-15*

Robbie Wilkerson, 47, Tasha Wilkerson, 42, Oak Park, IL; Richard Shumate, 50, Evelyn Shumate, 47, Romeoville, IL; Anthony Hall, 53, Downers Grove, IL: Wire fraud and theft of government funds. Robbie Wilkerson, founding pastor of New Birth Christian Center in Chicago, and the others are accused of defrauding a federal summer food service program of more than \$400,000.

Robbie Wilkerson is also charged with money laundering. Hall, a New Birth Christian Center pastor, got about \$50,000 for his and his spouse's use, prosecutors said. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 9-30-15*

Benjamin Scherger, 32, Elmore, OH: Public indecency. Scherger, pastor at Heritage Baptist Church, was arrested after police received reports of a person exposing himself while driv-

ing near Woodmore High School after school hours. Scherger was removed as pastor after being charged. *Source: WTOL, 9-25-15*

An unidentified rabbi at a Jerusalem yeshiva was arraigned on sexual abuse charges after a student, now 19, filed a complaint saying he was molested for 5 years. He alleged that other students were also molested.

The Tel Aviv Magistrate's Court extended the detention of a different rabbi accused of molesting 2 boys, 14 and 16, when he taught at a religious school in central Israel. The rabbi claims the school reported him to authorities because it was trying to pressure him into dropping unrelated legal proceedings against the school. *Source: Times of Israel, 9-24-15*

Peter Keeley-Pannett, 71, Brighton, UK: Attempting to cause a boy over 13 to engage in sexual activity, 3 counts of making 150 indecent images of children and 2 counts each of causing a boy aged 13 to 15 to watch images of sexual activity and causing or inciting a boy of 14 to engage in sexual activity. When arrested, Keeley-Pannett was an unpaid deacon in the Anglican Diocese of Chichester in West Sussex.

Police said charges relate stem from alleged use of a webcam and not physical contact. *Source: Belfast Telegraph, 9-24-15*

Aramis G. Betts, 25, Pensacola, FL: Sexual assault, obscene communication, traveling to meet a minor and unlawful use of a 2-way communication device.

Betts, pastor at St. John Divine Missionary Baptist Church, was arrested after a 17-year-old boy's father told police he found sexual texts on his son's phone.

The alleged victim said Betts paid him \$100 to expose his genitals and \$500 to let Betts felate him. *Source: News Journal, 9-21-15*

Joseph Faraone, 68, White Plains, NY: 1st-degree sexual abuse and 2nd-degree criminal sexual act. Faraone, a former Catholic priest, is accused of engaging in oral or anal sexual conduct with someone younger than 15 years old or with someone incapable of consent due to a mental disability or incapacity. He's also charged with assaulting a 50-year-old female patient at a nonprofit human service organization where he worked.

In 1985, while he was pastor at St. Patrick's Parish in Yorktown, Faraone won \$1.17 million in the New York Lotto. *Source: Journal News, 9-20-15*

Joshua D. Stanbery, 39, Tontitown, AR: Obtaining a controlled substance by fraud. Stanbery, young adult minister and music worship leader at Cross Pointe Community Church, allegedly stole 7 hydrocodone pills, 32 oxycodone pills and four Percocet pills from a parishioner's home. About 40 church families may have been similarly targeted, the parishioner said.

The police report said Stanbery admitted to the senior pastor that he had stolen the pain pills. *Source: KFSM, 9-18-15*

Howard Curtis, 72, London: Assault by penetration, 5 counts of cruelty to children under 16 years of age, 2 counts of indecent assault and 4 counts of sexual assault. Curtis, senior minister of Coulsdon Christian Fellowship, allegedly ran a "cult" where adult women were persuaded to strip naked so he could spank them over his knee. Curtis and his "inner circle" used "unorthodox" teachings to instill discipline in women and children, court documents said.

"He would conduct something known as 'deliverance ministry,' said to be casting out evil spirits from a person, and he would tell people that discipline needed to be administered to people, in particular to women," said prosecutor Jane Osborne. *Source: The Telegraph, 9-18-15*

Milton Toehay, 82, Anadarko, OK: 10 counts of lewd acts with a child under 16. Toehay, pastor at Washita Full Grace Church, is accused of molesting a 7-year-old girl who told police it had been happening every Sunday in a church office since she was 5, the arrest report said.

Court documents said the girl's grandmother noticed she wasn't in a church classroom recently and was told she was in Toehay's office, where she found her granddaughter standing by Toehay with her shorts and underwear pulled down. She immediately took her to the emergency room. *Source: KWTW, 9-17-15*

Khang Nguyen Le, 35, Lafayette, LA: Wire fraud. Le, resident monk at the Vietnamese Buddhist Association of Southwest Louisiana, is charged with stealing about \$150,000 from the temple.

"Le admitted to having a gambling problem and admitted that he was utilizing Temple funds to gamble," said a statement by a federal agent in court papers. *Source: NY Post, 9-15-15*

Pleaded / Convicted

Evan W. Jackson, 33, Gatesville, TX: Pleaded guilty to 1 count of sexual assault of a child after a similar count and another of in-

decency with a child were dropped. Jackson, pastor at Coryell Community Church, is alleged to have first molested the victim in 2003 when she was 14.

"She said Jackson abused her on a weekly and sometimes biweekly basis for about two years," the investigator said in an affidavit.

In a recent monitored phone call with the woman, "Jackson told her he has asked for forgiveness from God and told her he made mistakes when he was younger and that he was sorry for what he did and asked her to forgive him," the affidavit said.

Jackson has 2 children. His wife is the church's children's minister. *Source: KWTX, 10-14-15*

Eric Dejaeger, 68, a defrocked Canadian Catholic priest serving 19 years in prison for sexual abuse of native Inuit children, pleaded guilty to 4 counts of indecent assault and gross indecency involving more victims in Nunavut.

His victims include 12 boys and 10 girls, most between age 8 and 12. Dejaeger also abused a dog in front of 2 children. *Source: Canadian Press, 9-30-15*

Rives M. Grogan, 50, Mansfield, TX: Pleaded guilty to picketing or parading in violation of federal law. Grogan, pastor/president of New Beginnings Christian Discipleship, yelled "the Bible teaches if you support gay marriage, you could burn in hell for eternity" in the U.S. Supreme Court in April.

He was charged under a law prohibiting making a "harangue or oration" and impeding the administration of justice. All 9 justices were present. Justice Antonin Scalia called the outburst "rather refreshing actually," to a burst of laughter.

Grogan was arrested in Cincinnati in 2012 for running on to the field during a National League baseball playoff game with a sign that said "Abortion is Sin" on one side and "Romney/Ryan for president" on the other. *Source: Courthouse News Service, 9-28-15*

Herman Jackson and Jannette Faria, Cicero, IL: Guilty by jury of 13 and 8 counts of fraud, respectively. Jackson and Faria, his wife, were accused of scamming hundreds of thousands of dollars in subsidies for day-care centers connected to Jackson's church, the Ark of Safety Apostolic Faith Temple. Inspectors said the centers were roach-infested, lacked hot water and smelled of urine. Electrical cords were found submerged in water.

Prosecutors said Jackson flooded an agency with "dozens and dozens" of documents filled with "clear, black and white lies" in order to get the subsidies: "Once the spigot was on, the defendants did whatever they could to put it on full blast." *Source: Sun-Times, 9-24-15*

Joseph D. Maurizio Jr., 70, Central City, PA: Guilty by jury of engaging in illicit sexual conduct in foreign places, possession of child pornography and international money laundering. Maurizio, the now-suspended Catholic pastor of Our Lady Queen of Angels, was convicted of molesting 3 orphan boys in Honduras between 2004-09.

He used money from a charity he created to fund trips to the ProNino orphanage, where he paid boys with money and candy for sex.

John Kelleghan, Homeland Security investigator, said in a statement, "What Maurizio did to the children in Honduras while swindling unsuspecting Americans for money to support his pedophilia is atrocious." *Source: Tribune-Review, 9-24-15*

Caleb Sexton, 28, Buffalo, NY: Pleaded guilty to 3rd-degree criminal sexual act. Sexton, a volunteer soccer coach at West Seneca Christian School, admitting having oral sex with a 12-year-old girl he met at Hedstrom Memorial Baptist Church in Cheektowaga, where his father is pastor. *Source: WKBW, 9-19-15*

Sentenced

Ephraim Frederick Karp, 51, Beachwood, OH: 22 years in prison and 5 years' probation after pleading guilty to sexual abuse of a minor and 3rd-degree sex offense in Baltimore County, MD. Rabbi Karp, former Menorah Park Center for Senior Living director, had 3 female victims, 2 under age 18, said prosecutor Lisa Dever.

Dever said the plea included charges from Ohio based on alleged incidents at Karp's home. All 3 victims lived in Baltimore County. A trial set for Oct. 28 was canceled. *Source: Cleveland Jewish News, 10-16-15*

Geronimo Aguilar, 45, Richmond, VA: 40 years in prison for aggravated sexual assault of and indecency with a child. The girl was 13 when Aguilar started assaulting her in 1996 when he was music minister at New Beginnings International Church in Ft. Worth, TX, and it continued for 2 years. He still faces charges involving the girl's younger sister, who alleges she was 11 when first molested.

One of the sisters testified she knew Aguilar in Anaheim, CA, where they had lived in communal homes owned by Set Free Church before moving to Texas. Aguilar moved to Richmond in 2003 to start his own church. *Source: Star-Telegram, 10-13-15*

Peter Ball, 83, Langport, England: 32



months in prison for misconduct in public office and 15 months for indecent assaults, sentences to run concurrently. Ball, the former Anglican bishop of Gloucester and Lewes in England, admitted molesting 18 boys in the 1970s-1990s. He resigned as bishop in 1993 due to allegations but was allowed to work in churches until 2010.

The archbishop of Canterbury has commissioned a formal review of how the church responded to those allegations. David Greenwood, attorney for 4 victims, said the church "should no longer be allowed to police itself." *Source: BBC, 10-4-15*

Christopher Howarth, 68, Uckfield, England: 10 years in prison on convictions for sexual assault, sexual activity with a child, taking indecent photographs of a child and causing a child to engage in sexual activity. Howarth, an Anglican lay priest at Holy Cross Church and deputy principal, was charged with offenses between 2005-10. *Source: Sussex Express, 10-2-15*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Antonio Marfori, 63, Elk River, MN, a Catholic sacramental minister at the Church of St. Andrew, is being sued for molesting a boy in the late 1970s when he was assigned to St. Mary's Cathedral and taught high school religion. Plaintiff's attorney Jeffrey Anderson alleges Marfori coerced a then 15-year-old student into oral sex, telling him this "is what they do in the seminary."

Another alleged victim who attended Cathedral High but isn't part of the suit but may still file, told Anderson that Marfori molested him on a trip to Breckenridge, MN, telling him it was the "Filipino way." Marfori is a Philippines native.

The suit also accuses the school and the Diocese of St. Cloud of negligence for failing to prevent the alleged abuse. *Source: citypages.com/St. Cloud Times, 10-12-15*

Softball coach **Kurt Ludwigsen, 44, Ridge-wood, NJ,** engaged in "outrageous conduct" at Nyack College, plaintiff "K. Doe" alleges in a suit with claims that include the coach "routinely licking his players' ears, kissing their lips and faces, slapping their buttocks, grabbing their breasts, directing them to sit on his lap, lying on top of them," offering to "assist players to attain employment in the adult entertainment industry," and inviting porn star "Allie Haze to practice and directing students to life counseling sessions with her."

The suit says the school in Nyack, NY, which calls itself "New York's Christian College," never should have hired Ludwigsen, alleging he "was certainly not a 'typical Christian coach'" and that publicly available information showed he'd been the subject of a "criminal investigation for sexual assault and sexual harassment" while coaching in California.

"If you are interested in receiving a Christian education in an environment that will prepare you to do all that God has called you to do with excellence, Nyack College is the place for you!" says Kristine, class of 2010, on the school's website.

Doe alleges Ludwigsen "frequently slapped her on the buttocks," once telling her "that s-t is like a water bed! You better keep going to the gym and doing squats" and then began to lick her ear.

He was fired that night and charged criminally in May with almost 200 counts of forcible touching and sexual abuse. His wife Ann asked media to respect the family's privacy after he was charged. *Source: NY Daily News, 10-2-15*

Billy Bob Burge, Greenville, TX, is being sued for alleged molestation of a teen who attended First Baptist Church in Rockwall in the 1990s when the boy was 13 and Burge was a youth pastor.

Burge resigned as connect minister at Grace Community Church after the suit was filed.

Greenville Christian School also removed him as an athletic department volunteer and substitute teacher and banned him from the campus.

John Jeremy Sweet-Gomez, the alleged victim, killed himself last January at age 37. His parents, Carla Sweet and Ed Gomez of Dallas, allege the sexual assaults took place on church property and on church-sponsored trips. First Baptist Church is a named defendant. *Source: Herald-Banner, 9-24-15*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Catholic Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph** settled 2 claims totaling \$200,000 involving convicted priest **Shawn Ratigan**, imprisoned for 50 years for taking obscene photos of girls as young as 2. The out-of-court settlements were confirmed by diocesan spokesman Jack Smith, who said they included an offer of counseling for the 2 girls and their mother.

The diocese has now settled nearly \$4 million in claims stemming from Ratigan's pedophilia. Then-Bishop Robert Finn was also found guilty of failing to report suspicions of child abuse after photos were found. He was given probation. *Source: Kansas City Star, 10-12-15*

The **Catholic Marianist Order** agreed to pay \$300,000 to "John Doe 116" to settle his sex abuse suit involving Marianist Brother **Louis Meinhardt** at Chaminade High School, MO, where Meinhardt taught typing in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He died in 1990.

The plaintiff, in a statement, said, "For Chaminade and the Marianists to allow Brother Meinhardt to continually and openly sexually abuse young boys for over 26 years is both appalling and unacceptable. The first time any clergy or employee had even suspected sexual abuse or any student had reported sexual abuse, the information should have been lawfully and immediately directed first to the police. Had the law been followed, I am convinced Meinhardt may not have even been there to abuse me, because he had likely already been sexually abusing kids at Chaminade for 13 years." *Source: KMOX, 10-11-15*

Instead of calling 911, David Hickman's family prayed and anointed him with olive oil.

Adass Israel School, Melbourne, Australia, and its former headmistress **Malka Leifer** were ordered to pay \$1.2 million for sexual abuse of students. Leifer fled to Israel in 2008 and is fighting extradition after being arrested there last year.

Victoria Supreme Court Justice Jack Rush called Leifer "evil" and "wanton" and said the school acted "in complete disregard of Leifer's victims" in arranging her departure.

Three sisters allegedly were molested at the ultra-Orthodox school by Leifer, a mother of 8. She faces 74 criminal counts.

School officials could be criminally charged: "[Victoria] Police will be looking at this as a broader part of the investigation to determine whether an offense has been committed." *Source: Australian Jewish News/Herald Sun, 9-16-15*

The **Catholic Diocese of Paterson, NJ,** has settled another case involving sexual abuse allegations against Msgr. **Ronald J. Tully**, a Catholic high school administrator. The diocese has paid at 9 victims about \$2.1 million.

In the latest case, the first involving a female, Tully is accused of fondling the victim 20 times in 1977 when she was a 16-year-old student at Pope Pius High School in Passaic.

Attorney Ken Mullaney said the diocese filed paperwork in Rome at least 3 years ago to defrock Tully, who is still getting a pension. Mullaney said he's been "scratching my head" over why it has taken so long. *Source: northjersey.com, 9-14-15*

Legal Developments

Timothy Probert, 57, Bluefield, W.VA, filed motions for dismissal of 50 counts of child sexual abuse alleged while he was a volunteer at Westminster Presbyterian Church. Probert contends the church pastor violated the priest-penitent privilege when he brought his concerns about boys being molested to police.

An outside judge was called to hear the case after all 3 Mercer County circuit judges recused themselves. *Source: Daily Telegraph, 10-18-15*

Lawsuits against the **Catholic Archdiocese of Santa Fe, NM,** identify former priests **Armando Martinez** and **Sabine Griego** as alleged sexual abusers. The suits were filed by unidentified men who allege being raped as boys. Martinez was removed from the ministry in 1993 and retired in 1994. He was killed by a hitchhiker at age 62.

The **Servants of the Paraclete** religious order, which operated a treatment facility for abusive priests, is a co-defendant. The suit alleges Martinez was sent there in 1988.

Griego, who's still living, is alleged to have molested a victim in the 1980s at Queen of Heaven Parish in Albuquerque. A 1993 suit alleged then-Archbishop Robert Sanchez transferred him to Albuquerque in 1979 despite allegations he'd molested boys in Las Vegas, NM. *Source: Albuquerque Journal, 10-13-15*

Dale and Shannon Hickman, Oregon City, OR, had their manslaughter convictions upheld by the state Supreme Court. They were sentenced to 75 months in prison in 2011 in the death of their newborn son David. The Hickmans belong to the Followers of Christ, a church which rejects conventional medicine in favor of faith-healing.

David, born 2 months prematurely, weighed 3 pounds, 7 ounces and died of pneumonia 9 hours after birth. Instead of calling 911, the family prayed and anointed him with olive oil.

The court rejected the appeal argument that the state constitution's religious freedom provisions required proof that the Hickmans acted with the "knowledge" that their religious practices would result in their child's death. *Source: The Oregonian, 10-8-15*

Ronald Joling, 71, and Dorothea Joling, 72, Coquille, OR, were arrested in Arizona almost 6 months after they failed to appear for sentencing in Oregon for tax evasion and filing false tax returns. Ronald Joling, pastor of Hope Covenant Reformed Church, testified he stopped paying income taxes in the early 1990s because he concluded tax laws didn't apply to him. His wife's lawyer told the jury that she was an "obedient wife" whose God "speaks to her through her husband."

About \$1.2 million in taxes are owed. They also face charges of filing false, retaliatory liens against a number of federal officials. *Source: Register-Guard, 10-7-15*

Lyle Huddlestun Jr., 43, Ozona, TX, will be retried in February for sexually assaulting a 13-year-old boy more than a decade ago when Huddlestun was a youth pastor at Boyd Baptist Church in Bonham.

The judge declared a mistrial in September after jurors heard inadmissible testimony about a lie detector test. *Source: KTEN, 10-1-15*

Former Catholic priest **Ronald Paquin, 72,** who pleaded guilty in 2002 to sexually assaulting a 12-year-old altar boy at a church in **Haverhill, MA,** between 1989-92, will be released from prison over prosecutors' objections.

"Our contention is that Mr. Paquin poses a danger to the community," District Attorney Jonathan Blodgett said. "Unfortunately, we have no further legal options available to hold Mr. Paquin."

Boston Archbishop Sean O'Malley also expressed dismay: "We are disappointed in today's ruling, particularly with concern for Ronald Paquin's victims and all others who have experienced the reprehensible crime of the sexual abuse of minors." *Source: WCVB, 10-1-15*

Mack C. Andrews, 55, Thomasville, AL, arrested in 2013 on multiple counts of rape, sexual abuse, attempted rape, sodomy and sexual torture, goes on trial Nov. 16. "My ex-pastor is my rapist," alleged victim "Jane" told a reporter. She said she lost her virginity to Andrews, pastor of United Pentecostal Church, on her father's grave when she was 9.

"He told me if I didn't say anything, he would come back and put flowers on the grave. If I did, he said demons would come and get me from my bed."

Andrews has been in jail for about 2 years on multiple sex charges involving at least 4 underage girls stemming from the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Jane alleged Andrews started grooming her for intercourse when she was 7 by violating her with drumsticks, pens, letter openers, the talons

China, Texas

From left are Vic Wang, Dan Barker and Amber Barnhill at an Oct. 22 event hosted by the Southeast Texas Humanist Alliance, the Lamar University Secular Student Alliance and Humanists of Houston. SETHA notes: "Over the past few years, there has been an increased interest from national organizations, such as the Freedom From Religion Foundation, regarding the separation of church and state in our local school districts. Church and state concerns have been raised in Kountze, Beaumont, China, Sour Lake and other local communities. Unfortunately, these concerns have resulted in a great amount of confusion, hostility and tension." The panel discussion was held at City Hall before a packed house, including Mayor John Walker. (The city is named for its original location near a large grove of chinaberry trees.)



FFRF on the road



Tom Cara photo

Skokie, Ill.

Co-President Dan Barker spoke Oct. 25 to the Ethical Humanist Society of Chicago about his new book *Life Driven Purpose* and FFRF activities. A standing-room-only crowd enjoyed the presentation. About 40 people attended a luncheon reception hosted by FFRF's Metro Chicago Chapter at Maggiano's Little Italy restaurant, where Dan entertained musically.



Ingenious folks!

FFRF's chapter, the Northern Ohio Freethought Society, tabled Oct. 24 at Cleveland's annual Ingenuity Fest with materials provided by the Foundation. From left are Ray Valenti, Linas Muliolis, Marni Huebner-Tiborsky, Sam Salerno, Dave Huntsman and Mark Tiborsky.



Declare and share your nonbelief in FFRF's online "Out of the Closet" campaign!

ffrf.org/out

They said what?

We ask the governor to veto this bill. **Part of a statement from the California Catholic Conference opposing the right-to-die bill that was later signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown**
Los Angeles Times, 10-5-15

I've already accepted Jesus into my heart and now I want to know more, but the bible is not an easy read. They need to have a blonde version of the bible.

Tamra Judge, "Real Housewives of Orange County" star, who was recently baptized at Mission Viejo Christian Church

The Christian Post, 10-6-15

[Conscientious objection] is a human right and if a government official is a human person, he has that right. It is a human right.

Pope Francis, defending Kentucky clerk Kim Davis' refusal to obey the law and issue same-sex marriage licenses
NBC News, 9-28-15

How Should America Deal With the Sinners in Its Prisons?

Headline on a story about the pope's visit to the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility in Philadelphia

The Atlantic, 9-28-15

I will be the greatest jobs president God ever created.

GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump, speaking at the Values Voter Summit in Washington, D.C.

USA Today, 9-25-15

When I am elected as president, I will have no obligations to any party. We will get America back to one nation under God. We, as politicians, need to be responsible only to Almighty God. Not Allah, not some other god, but the God that this nation was founded on.

Wiley Drake, First Baptist Church and Messianic Fellowship pastor, Buena Park, Calif., announcement of candidacy

Christian NewsWire, 9-24-15

There are several prophecies foretelling that the moon will be turned to blood in the endtime.

Irvin Baxter, pastor of Endtime Ministries in Plano, Texas, on the lunar eclipse and "supermoon" convergence

The Guardian, 9-26-15

Unbelieving women either compete for the attention of men through outlandish messages that communicate some variation of "easy lay," or in the grip of resentment they give up the endeavor entirely, which is how we get lumberjack dykes. The former is an avid reader of Cosmopolitan and thinks she knows 15K ways to please a man in bed. The latter is just plain surly about the fact that there even are any men.

Douglas Wilson, pastor at Christ Church, Moscow, Idaho, blog titled "On Why Christian Women Are Prettier"

Friendly Atheist, 9-26-15

At a recent fellowship breakfast, the conversation pulsed to why our Christian nation maintains such a pitiful state of decadent immorality, personal viciousness and increasing criminal escapades. Our overwhelming answers? Because we expunged God's word from public view, we disallowed Christian holiday reminders for public consumption and, of course, we re-

moved school prayer, which, years ago, started the bitter anti-Christian and anti-prayer avalanche against the spoken name of Jesus Christ.

Gene Poore, letter to the editor, "This nation needs prayer saturation"
Jacksonville Daily News, 9-26-15

COLMES: So you could never vote for a Muslim for public office? GRAHAM: I don't see how I could, no. COLMES: Could you see yourself voting for a Jewish person? GRAHAM: Of course. COLMES: Or an atheist? GRAHAM: Probably not, I wouldn't want to vote for an atheist.

Billy Graham's pastor son Franklin Graham, radio interview

"The Alan Colmes Show," 9-29-15

Change us, oh God, and help us be like Kim Davis, obeying the Constitution and defying federal criminals. In Jesus' name.

Christian dominionist Doug Stringer, praying at "The Response" rally headlined by North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory in Charlotte

rightwingwatch.org, 10-1-15

Sex belongs to Christians. Because sex belongs to God. "God created it to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." If it is used by those who do not believe and know the truth, it is prostituted.

John Piper, chancellor, Bethlehem [Baptist] College and Seminary, Minneapolis

desiringgod.org, 9-28-15

I don't know why an atheist is so upset about us putting up "In God We Trust," Sheriff Moats said. I'm not saying that they trust God. I'm saying that we, as the guys in this department who put this on our cars, we trust in God. And why is that a bad thing? Even if you don't believe, you know God's all about good.

Polk County, Ga., Sheriff Johnny Moats, on FFRF's numerous complaints about aligning state and church on squad cars

The New York Times, 10-3-15

The Bible did not set limits on the age between two partners.

Timothy Butler, 55, Layton, Utah, on trial for sodomy and sexual abuse of a 5-year-old girl, alleged statement to police in which he also said the girl was not "getting love at home, so he gave it to her"

Ogden Standard-Examiner, 10-8-15

It was blatant. The board better hope there isn't a God because they turned their back on God.

Gary Colatch, Connellsville, Pa., on the school board's vote to move a Ten Commandments monument off school grounds after FFRF successfully sued

Pittsburgh-Tribune Review, 10-8-15

Our country is in trouble. And to be honest, I don't see any political solution. The only hope for this country is in Almighty God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Pastor Franklin Graham, announcing his Decision America Tour during which he'll visit all 50 state capitols "to proclaim the Gospel, rally prayer for our country and encourage Christians to vote for candidates with biblical values"

The Daily Signal, 10-11-15

Drawing for 'clean' (godless) currency



At FFRF's annual convention in October, Buzz Kemper and Dan Barker announced FFRF's annual chances to win "clean," pre-"In God We Trust" currency. Calli Miller handled the tickets and students drew winning tickets. Thanks to students Sidney Novak (IA), Nicole Niebler (WI), Amanda Scott (AL), Thomas Sheedy (NY) and Brianna Colombe (MN). Thanks also to Todd Peissig (WI) and Eric Lawrence (IL) for staffing the chances table! At right: Buzz, Calli and Thomas. (Ingrid Laas photos)

And the winners are . . .

Photography by Ingrid Laas



(Listed by currency): Ann Kremers (MN), \$1 Series 1935E, donated by Carleton Laird (IL); Lee Hazlett (WI), \$1 Series 1935E; Ruth Walker (IA), \$1 Series 1935E; Susan Duehl, (WI), \$1 Series 1935F (not pictured), donated by Carleton Laird; James Miller (CA), \$1 Series 1935F; Al Collins (IL), \$1 Series 1935A, donated by Woody Kaplan (MA) on behalf of the Secular Coalition of America; Michael Pepler (CA), \$2 Series 1953B, donated by Charles and Sheri Bender (IN); James Miller, \$2 Series 1953A, donated by Gary and Bonnie Stormo (SD); Sidney Novak (IA), \$5 Series 1934D, donated by Bruce Lowerre (FL); Joel Frazin (IL), \$5 Series 1950A, donated by Gary and Bonnie Stormo; Debbie Golden-Davis (AZ), \$10 Series 1950D, donated by Floren Serafin (MO); Larry Hothem (MD), \$20 Series 1934B, donated by Dillard Henderson (MI); Lee Hazlett, \$50 Series 1950E, donated by Michael Jacobson (NV); Grand prize winner (who prefers not to be identified), \$100 Series 1950E.

Special Winter Solstice / New Year's Gift Membership Offer!

Gift Memberships 2 for the price of 1— only \$40!

Memberships regularly start at \$40. Offer applies only to current FFRF members giving **new U.S. gift memberships to freethinkers—not renewals** for yourself or others. No exceptions please. Offer expires Jan. 10, 2016. Recipients will receive a Winter Solstice card notifying them of your gift. Gift is deductible for income-tax purposes to donor.

I would like to give 2 gift memberships at only \$40

Return to
FFRF, PO Box 750
Madison, WI 53701
Make payable to FFRF



Recipient #1

Name

Address

City/State/ZIP

Recipient #2

Name

Address

City/State/ZIP

Offer expires Jan. 10, 2016

Gift memberships given by:

Donor name (you must be current FFRF member—does not apply to renewals)

Donor street address

Donor city/state/ZIP

Donor daytime phone / Email address (in case of questions)

FFRF 2015 Convention Special Insert



Ingrid Laas photo

From California, to the New York island . . .

This band never prayed for you and me! Nearly 600 convention attendees came to Madison from 39 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, Australia, Uganda and Ontario Province, Canada. The contingent included many of FFRF's State Representatives, gathering here for their annual meeting during the convention.

STANDING (left): Paul Novak, Iowa; Darrell Barker, Wash.; Bonnie and Gary Stormo, S.D.; Stephen Hirtle, Pa.; Robin Buckallew, Neb.; Sheri Bender, Ind.; Steve Aldrick, Tenn.; Steve Trunk, Calif.; Fairfid Caudle, N.Y.; Cheryl Kolbe, Ore.; Steve Salemon, Wis.; Michael Jacobson, Nev.; Dick Hewetson, Calif.; Todd Peissig, Wis.; Michael Cermak, Pa.; Joe Harris, Mich.; Douglas Marshall, Mich.;

Charles Bender, Ind.

FRONT (left): Chris Calvey, Wis.; Dianne Cooper, Iowa; Patricia Jones, Tenn.; Sheridan Chapin, N.Y.; Margaret Downey, Pa.; Annie Laurie Gaylor, Wis.; Dan Barker, Wis.; Jim Bredeson, Wis.; Kevin Gough, Conn. In attendance but missing from the photo: Paul Newman.

Executive Board members pictured above: Stephen Hirtle (chair), Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor (co-presidents), Steve Salemon (treasurer), Jim Bredeson (secretary) and directors Mike Cermak and Todd Peissig. Not pictured are directors Joe Cunningham and Patricia Cleveland.

Freedom from discrimination in Madison

Anita Weier was honored as Freethought Heroine for introducing a historic ordinance to make "nonreligion" a protected class in Madison, Wis. The ordinance passed with no dissent on March 31. Weier, former assistant city editor for The Capital Times, is an FFRF member who served as an alderperson for two terms (2011-15).

By Anita Weier

I decided to add "nonreligion" as a protected class in Madison's Equal Opportunities Ordinance because the ordinance already protected religious people from discrimination, so it seemed only fair and equitable to protect the nonreligious.

A protected class is a group of people whom city officials believe needs protection from discrimination in housing, employment or public accommodations. Madison's ordinance now lists 27 protected classes, including sex, race, color, national origin, citizenship status, age, handicap, marital status, arrest record or conviction record, sexual orientation and others.

I believe that discrimination against atheists and other nonreligious people is widespread, affecting employment, public school practices and selective price discounts. In Paris, 12 workers for an atheistic publication – Charlie Hebdo – were murdered. In Madison, the Freedom from Religion Foundation now does not publicize its address because of threats.

Discrimination continues

A major study, "Atheists as 'Other,'" published by the University of Minnesota in 2006, revealed that "atheists are less likely to be accepted, publicly and privately, than any others" from a long list of marginalized groups. The study looked at attitudes toward groups such



Ingrid Laas photo

Anita Weier receives the Freethought Heroine award from FFRF staff attorney Patrick Elliot at the 38th annual National Convention in Madison, Wis.

as immigrants, racial minorities, gays and Jews from the 1960s to the present, and found that every group had made great strides in social acceptance except for atheists. More Americans would disapprove of their children marrying atheists than any other class.

Locally, some businesses have offered discounts to those who show a church bulletin. The Freedom From Religion Foundation also has encountered refusals by companies to make T-shirts, print brochures or post billboards. Last year a television network refused to air an FFRF TV ad made by Ron Reagan.

Therefore, I believe that atheists, agnostics and humanists need to be protected when applying for jobs and housing and using public accommodations.

As you know, the Religious Right has assumed substantial control over our state and federal governments, a situation that leaves the nonreligious in a

perilous situation. For instance, South Carolina's state law requires "that the president of the University shall not be an atheist or infidel." Texas prohibits religious tests for public office, provided the person "acknowledges the existence of a Supreme Being." Atheists running for public office do not tend to "out" themselves.

Atheist parents have been denied custody of their children because of atheism in several states, including Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and Texas. Imagine the furor if this had been done to parents because they were Jewish or Mormon.

Writing the ordinance

My first step in amending the ordinance was working with a city attorney to make an official proposal. I made a mistake in using the word "atheist," which raises more ire among some than terms such as "agnostic." Also, I

realized that nonreligion could protect more people. So I amended my proposal.

I also faced a time crunch, since I would be leaving the council in April 2015, having decided not to run again. Frankly, because of dislike of atheists, I would not have introduced this measure if I were running for re-election.

I waited until January to present the measure because I did not believe that the Christmas season would be a politically favorable time.

My amendment was first submitted to the City Council, which referred it to the Equal Opportunities Commission for a recommendation. The EOC in turn referred the proposal to its Employment Subcommittee. That committee approved the amendment with no opposition, though two members abstained, saying that their employers might not like their name connected to such a proposal.

I encountered more opposition at the Equal Opportunities Commission, where the vote was 5 in favor, 3 against and one abstention. Opponents tend to be religious people.

Then I started explaining my amendment to my fellow City Council members. I was very encouraged by immediate support from many, including a relatively conservative alder (for liberal Madison). Ultimately, 14 of 20 council members signed on to co-sponsor the measure, which I believe took some political courage. After testimony by five atheists and the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the council approved the amendment unanimously on a voice vote. Though no one voted no or abstained, a few were silent.

I was surprised to find that my amendment was a first, that no other localities had approved such a protection. I am extremely proud of our City Council for setting this important precedent.

Freethought Hall Grand Opening

October 9, 2015
Madison, Wisconsin

Photography
by Ingrid Laas



More than 400 FFRF and community members attended the morning open house, which preceded FFRF's 38th annual convention.



Matt Stark, retired director of the ACLU of Minnesota, shown by the portrait of Anne Nicol Gaylor in Freethought Hall's eponymous lobby. Matt's generous gift made the portrait possible. (Andrew Seidel photo)



Celebratory champagne flows.



Making mimosa toasts were Ohio members Ron Taggart, Marni Huebner-Tiborsky and Doris Jackson. Marni is president of the Ohio Freethought Society, a Cleveland-area FFRF chapter.



Not one but two Lisas greet guests! Lisa Strand (left) is director of operations, and Lisa Treu is director of "first impressions."



Dan Barker, FFRF co-president, playing the new Steinway Model A concert piano in the Charlie Brooks Auditorium. The gorgeous piano was donated by Diane Uhl, whose picture sits on top.



Jan Froelich (center, bright blue), FFRF's nonprofit CPA, is applauded. Jan was first to suggest that FFRF purchase the building next door for its much-needed expansion.



Legal extern Chris Line photographs guests by "Mr. Darwin," a life-like mannequin who inhabits the Joel B. Landon and Wanda K. Beers Freethought Library. View the photos at flickr.com/photos/FFRF_darwin/.



Librarians and FFRF members Cheryl Becker and Stef Moritz greet visitors.



Breakfast pastries went fast.



Family Values

The family of Rose Zerwick, for whom the Rose Zerwick Memorial Garden and Courtyard is named, gathered Oct. 9 in the courtyard. From left are Daryl Scherkenbach (spouse of Life Member Susan A. Zerwick), Tyler Van Fleet (daughter of Ellen Zerwick Van Fleet), Susan A. Zerwick, Jim Zerwick, Susan B. Zerwick (spouse of Jim), Ellen Zerwick Van Fleet and FFRF member David Zerwick. Jim, Ellen, Susan A. and Dave are Rose's children. Rose was a longtime Madison member who died at age 95 and whose bequest was designated for FFRF's building fund. Jim Zerwick serves on FFRF's Executive Board and on the board of Nonbelief Relief Inc.



Steven Hewett, 2015 recipient of the Atheists in Foxholes award, stands by the newly placed monument in the Rose Zerwick Memorial Garden and Courtyard. (Andrew Seidel photo)



FFRF's legal staff gathers beside generous benefactors Stephen and Diane Uhl in the Diane Uhl Legal Wing: Legal Assistant Calli Miller and Attorneys Andrew Seidel, Rebecca Markert and Elizabeth Cavell. Not pictured are Attorneys Patrick Elliott and Sam Grover.

Diane and Stephen Uhl with Dan Barker in front of the Diane Uhl Steinway concert grand!



Darrell Barker, Washington, and Peter Dashavici, all the way from Australia. (Andrew Seidel photo)



FFRF's new digital marquee rotates messages of reason with event notices. (Andrew Seidel photo)

FFRF Awards



Anita Weier being presented with her Freethought Heroine Award by FFRF Attorney Patrick Elliott, for sponsoring an ordinance making nontheists a protected class in Madison, Wis.



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker presenting Ron Reagan with the T-shirt inspired by his TV commercial for FFRF, in which he identifies himself as “an unabashed atheist, not afraid of burning in hell.” (Andrew Seidel photo)



Ron Reagan holds his “unabashed atheist” plaque. (Andrew Seidel photo)



Nebraska state Sen. Ernie Chambers being presented with his Emperor Has No Clothes Award by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.



Legal Fellow Maddy Ziegler presenting New York high school student Thomas Sheedy with a \$5,000 Richard and Beverly Hermsen Student Activist Scholarship.



Annie Laurie presenting Taslima Nasrin with her Emperor Has No Clothes Award. The statuette is reserved for public figures who make known their dissent from religion.



Annie Laurie presenting previous Atheist in Foxhole recipient Steve Trunk, California, with FFRF’s newly created statuette.



Steve Trunk, 2011 Atheist in Foxhole awardee, bestows the 2015 honor upon Steven Hewett, North Carolina.



Rita Swan receiving her “Lifetime Achievement” award from Annie Laurie on behalf of FFRF.



Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel hands Brooke Mulder her “Nothing Fails Like Prayer” plaque. Brooke won the 2015 “Nothing Fails Like Prayer” contest for delivering her secular invocation to the city of Glendale, Ariz.



FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert awarding successful FFRF plaintiff Douglas Marshall, Michigan, the “Freethinker of the Year” plaque.

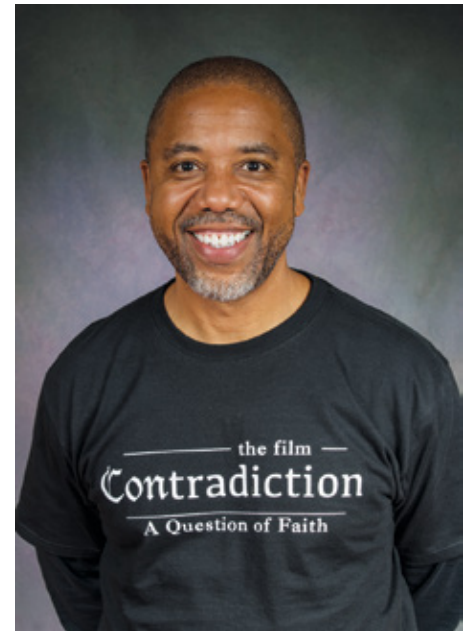
Speakers



Ron Reagan, unabashed atheist.



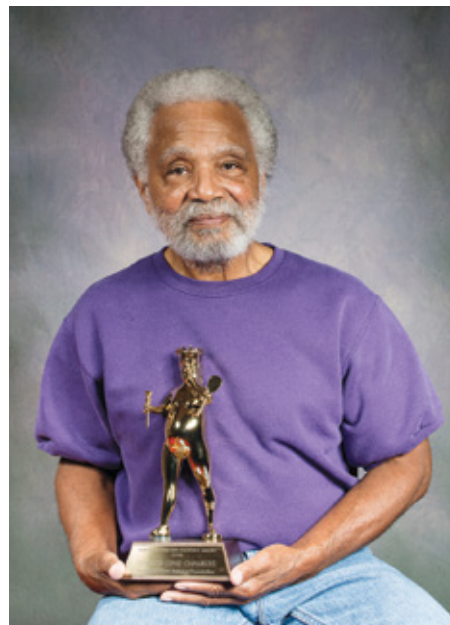
Dan Barker, talking about his new book *Life Driven Purpose*.



Filmmaker and author Jeremiah Camara.



Madison Mayor Paul Soglin, of Madison, the first mayor to “grace” FFRF’s annual Non-Prayer Breakfast. (Andrew Seidel photo)



Nebraska state Sen. Ernie Chambers.



Rita Swan, co-founder of Children’s Healthcare Is a Legal Duty.



FFRF Attorney Rebecca Markert reporting on legal activism during the past year.



FFRF Director of Operations Lisa Strand introducing the legal panel.



FFRF Chair Stephen Hirtle (left) introduced author Ken Kruse.



FFRF legal staff gave a legal activism workshop and report on legal achievements. From left are Attorney Sam Grover, Cornelius Vanderbroek Legal Fellow Maddy Ziegler, Attorneys Rebecca Markert, Patrick Elliott, Andrew Seidel, Elizabeth Cavell and Diane Uhl Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne.



Liz Cavell with her advice on winning legal cases.

Staff & Volunteers



Meet FFRF's official meeters and greeters: Todd Peissig, board member; Lisa Strand, director of operations; Takara Scott-Johnston, clerical assistant; Lauryn Seering, publicist; Lisa Treu, director of "first impressions" and Jackie Douglas, membership manager.



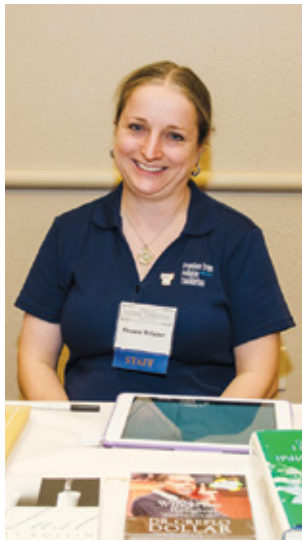
Staffers Jackie Douglas and Eleanor McEntee with volunteer Jessica Kopish.



Bekki Huelsman, legal intern, and Calli Miller, legal assistant.



Eric Lawrence and Todd Peissig manned the raffle table to win "clean" money (pre-"In God We Trust").



FFRF Bookkeeper Eleanor McEntee.



Bill Dunn, Freethought Today editor; Maddy Ziegler, legal fellow; and Calli Miller, legal assistant.



Buzz Kemper (center) worked with Monona Terrace staff to run the audio.



Volunteers Linda Josheff, Wisconsin, and Beth Taylor, Washington.



FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor.



Ryan Jayne, Diane Uhl Legal Fellow.

Convention Participants



The crowd stands for Taslima Nasrin, who gave a poignant and memorable speech about living under a fatwa and being banned from Bangladesh more than 20 years.



Brianna Colombe, Minnesota, asks a question from the floor.



College student and secular activist Amanda Scott and high school activist Thomas Sheedy. Amanda thanks Adam R. Rose for his travel scholarship, making her attendance possible. (Andrew Seidel photo)



Dick Hewetson, California, greets Rita Swan.



Robin and Walter Greene.



FFRF staffer Takara Scott-Johnston gets a hug from Sen. Ernie Chambers.



Michael Mpagi spoke briefly about his escape from Uganda as a gay and atheist activist. (Andrew Seidel photo)



The convention took place October 9-10 at the elegant Monona Terrace in Madison, Wisconsin, a spacious lakeside facility based on a design by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Fairfid Caudle, New York, Sheridan Chapin, New York, and Sanford Quayle, Wisconsin, found seats in the front row.



Front row: Mitch Kahle and Holly Huber, Hawaiian secular activists turned Michigan firebrands. Next row: Kathy Johnson and Judy Saint. Judy directs FFRF's Sacramento chapter.



Sue Dunn, Oregon, asks a question.



Richard Mulder and awardee Brooke Mulder, Arizona.

Convention Moments



Convention photographer Ingrid Laas kept very busy. (Andrew Seidel photo)



About 600 audience members fill the room.



An attractive food display in the architecturally pleasing Monona Terrace Convention Center designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.



FFRF Attorney Elizabeth Cavell staffs a sale tables. (Andrew Seidel photo)



Dan Barker proves it's a myth that freethinkers aren't musical. (Andrew Seidel photo)



Taslima Nasrin autographs a book for a 13-year-old admirer. (Andrew Seidel photo)

Staffer Lisa Treu greets convention-goers. (Andrew Seidel photo)



Cheryl Kolbe, who directs FFRF's Portland chapter, and Stephen Hirtle, FFRF's board chair, Pennsylvania. (Andrew Seidel photo)



Staff Attorney Sam Grover, Georgia attorney Wally Nichols and Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel were all part of successful FFRF litigation to stop daily prayer (and bullying over prayer) at an elementary school in Emanuel County, Ga.