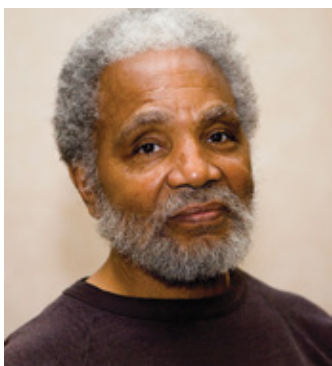


Freethought Today

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September 2015



Brent Nicastro photo

Ernie Chambers

Last call to FFRF convention

Sign up now for FFRF's 38th annual national convention in Madison, Wis., the weekend of Oct. 9-11.

Nebraska's longest serving state senator, Ernie Chambers, and religious medical malpractice reformer Rita Swan will receive awards. Filmmaker Jeremiah Camara joins Ron Reagan, Taslima Nasrin and other speakers.

Turn to the back page for more information or visit ffrf.org/outreach/convention.



Rita Swan

FFRF probe: Coaches on a mission from God

The Freedom From Religion Foundation issued a report Aug. 17, "Pray to Play," condemning more than 25 public universities for letting football coaches impose their personal religion on players by hiring Christian chaplains.

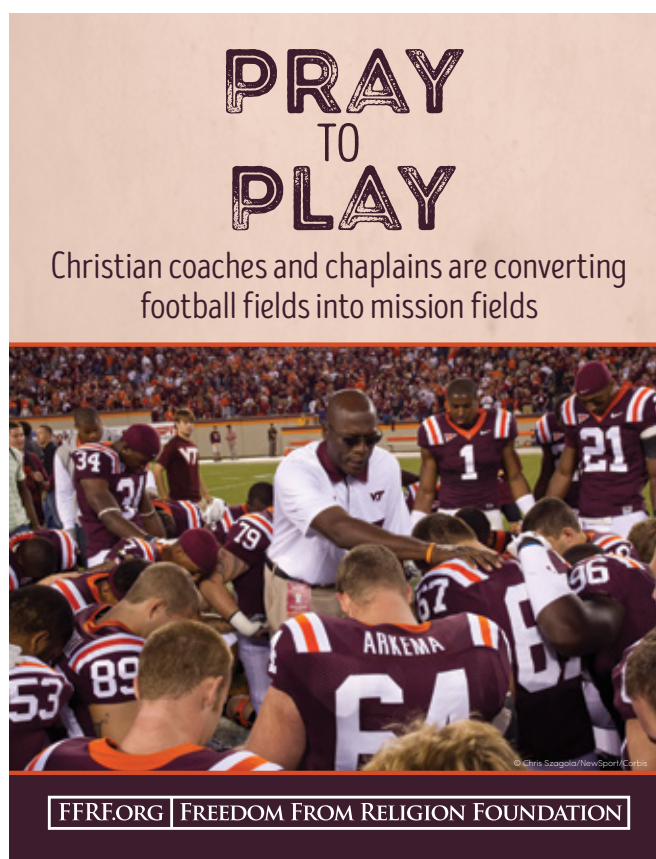
The report revealed that only 54% of college-aged Americans are Christian, and many of the teams investigated have non-Christian players, but 100% of the chaplains investigated are promoting Christianity, usually with an evangelical bent. They preach religious doctrine, including creationism at times, to athletes.

Some universities, like Missouri, paid for chaplains and their wives and children to attend bowl games. Others paid chaplains for their services, including the University of South Carolina, which has a policy prohibiting such payments. Others, such as Auburn, give chaplains an office in the stadium. Chaplains were also involved in recruiting prospective athletes, raising the possibility of violating NCCA regulations.

Chaplains regularly lead the teams

in prayer, conduct chapel services and more. These religious activities are not voluntary, as the universities claim, because, as the report notes, "student athletes are uniquely susceptible to coercion from coaches." Players have educational, financial and career reasons to obey their coach, whatever he asks.

The 25-page report is the result of



more than a year of investigation, scrutinizing hundreds of university documents and records. FFRF also interviewed an atheist football player on a ranked team.

That interviewee explained how chaplains impose religion on the team with the coach's help. The coach even had this atheist lead a team prayer. Pro football player Arian Foster, who recently came out as an atheist, has told media he was forced by Tennessee coach Phil Fulmer, now retired, to attend church with the team.

The report maps out the spread of these chaplains, which often trace back to head coaches Bobby Bowden at Florida State (now retired) or Tommy Tuberville (now at the University of Cincinnati). Bowden and Tuberville's assistant coaches, players, chaplains and in Bowden's case, his son, spread this religious epidemic.

Chaplains appointed by Jimbo Fisher, Steve Spurrier, Gus Malzahn, Gene Chizik, Terry Bowden, Brad Scott, Dabo Swinney and Mark Richt all trace back to Bowden or Tuberville. The two men are responsible for Florida State, Clemson, South Carolina, Mississippi State, Ole Miss, Texas Tech,

Continued on page 12

FFRF creates Nonbelief Relief as separate charitable entity

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is announcing the formation of a related entity, Nonbelief Relief Inc., as a new humanitarian agency for atheists, agnostics, freethinkers and their supporters "to improve this world, our only world," explains Nonbelief Relief Administrator Annie Laurie Gaylor. Gaylor is also FFRF co-president with Dan Barker.

Nonbelief Relief will operate as a separate nonprofit entity seeking 501(c)(3) status under the Internal Revenue Code. FFRF will process donations, making them deductible for income-tax purposes.

Nonbelief Relief will additionally seek to test the Internal Revenue Code's discrimination in favor of church-related charities, which, unlike secular charities, are not required to

seek tax exemption, file papers, fees or the onerous Form 990 reports to the IRS.

Nonbelief Relief will "seek to remediate conditions of human suffering and injustice on a global scale, whether the result of natural disasters, human actions or adherence to religious dogma. Such relief is not limited to but may include assistance for individuals targeted for nonbelief, secular activism or blasphemy," its bylaws note.

"The only afterlife that ought to concern us is leaving our descendants a secure and pleasant future," said Gaylor.

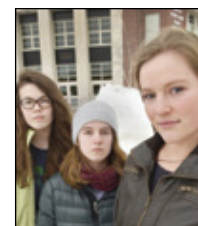
Nonbelief Relief is adopting as a slogan: "Atheists work to make this life heavenly" (giving credit to FFRF member and benefactor Stephen Uhl, a former priest).

"Nonbelief Relief is concerned with improving the human condition, not the condition of humankind's 'souls,'" noted Barker, a former minister who serves as vice president of the charity. "Charity is not true charity that comes with evangelical strings attached. The real 'sin' of religion is valuing dogma over people. We know humankind can be 'good without God.'"

Nonbelief Relief does not have the ulterior motive of "conversion" in giving aid in cases of natural disasters and other mass suffering. "Nevertheless, we think it's essential that it be known that we 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," Gaylor added.

Continued on page 12

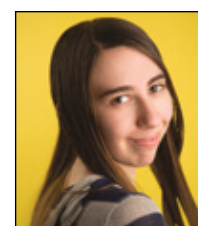
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High School Essay writers are 'good without god'
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Meet some legal interns



Jake Swenson Photo

Chris Line is a second-year student at the University of Wisconsin Law School.

Name: Christopher Allen Line.
Where and when I was born: Monroe, Wis., Dec. 20, 1989.
Family: Father, Thomas Line; mother, Debra Line; brother, Jeremy Line.
Education: B.S. in political science, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater; starting my second year at the University of Wisconsin Law School.
My religious upbringing was: Ideal. I was never baptized or forced to go to church (except by my friend’s parents after Saturday night sleepovers). My mom is agnostic and my dad is only nominally Catholic. My grandmother, who played a huge role in my life, is Catholic but I feel like she is becoming less religious in her declining years.
I went through a rebellious phase in elementary school when I experimented with church for a few weeks, but like most things that require getting up early on Sundays, I didn’t need it in my life.
How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern: I had an interest in interning with FFRF while I was an undergrad but I foolishly chose not to. I was already determined to not make the same mistake again before I had even settled on where I would be attending

law school. I had my choice of several good schools in the Midwest, but knowing that I wanted to intern with FFRF regardless of where I attended, I chose to stay in my home state of Wisconsin and enjoy the proximity to my hometown and to FFRF.
What I do here: I draft letters that involve a variety of church/state issues and I do whatever else is asked of me, which may involve anything from researching complex legal issues to moving heavy boxes.
What I like best about it: I like the positive attitude of the entire staff. We have many victories but there are also losses, backlash and laws that are not on our side, but the staff maintains a positive attitude and a dedication to upholding the separation of church and state regardless of any obstacles that stand in the way.
Something funny that’s happened: Andrew Seidel, one of the staff attorneys, was laughing loudly in his office. He played the legal staff a voice mail complaining about the good work FFRF does. The crank ended his message with an astonishing example of self deception. Taking issue with FFRF’s tactics, he said would never go

around calling organizations in other states to explain his opinion — in a phone message to an organization in another state explaining his opinion!
My legal interests are: Constitutional law, civil rights and civil liberties.
My legal heroes are: Atticus Finch, for being a fictional character willing to fight for what’s right even when everyone is against him because “the one thing that doesn’t abide by majority rule is a person’s conscience.” Clarence Darrow, for being a real person willing to fight for what’s right because

“as long as the world shall last there will be wrongs, and if no man objected and no man rebelled, those wrongs would last forever.”
These three words sum me up: Intelligent, curious and sincere.
Things I like: Ultimate frisbee, photography and acoustic guitar.
Things I smite: Bigotry, politics and willful ignorance.
I wish you’d asked me: What is the answer to life, the universe, and everything?



Lauryn Seering photo

Adam Grudman

Name: Adam Grudman.
Where and when I was born: New York, N.Y., Feb. 22, 1994.
Family: Beth, aka Ma; Mark, aka Pops; Steven, aka Lil Bro 1; Brian, aka Lil Bro 2.
My religious upbringing was: Technically, Reform Judaism, but really we studied the ways of the Force.
How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern: Ever since I can remember, I’ve been fascinated by the impact religion has on society and the impact it has on the human psyche. While doing research for internships that would simultaneously allow me to travel and meet likeminded people, I happened upon this opportunity. It was honestly pretty spontaneous. Life is more fun when you make impulsive decisions.
What I do here: Whatever they ask me. Mostly writing follow-up letters, doing research or my personal favorite: filing!
What I like best about it: The funny religious videos sent around the office and the running commentary on them.
Something funny that’s happened: The irony of an office full of atheists

constantly talking about God.
My legal interests are: I’m really interested in how public policy affects society from a sociological standpoint. I’m hoping to become fluent in constitutional and civil rights law after I graduate in 2016 from the University of Maryland. I’m studying abroad in Austria during the fall semester.
My legal heroes are: Vinny Gambini (“My Cousin Vinny”), George Carlin (yes, he *did* have a Supreme Court ruling about him [*FCC v. Pacifica Foundation*, 1978]) and for “realz,” Clarence Darrow.
These three words sum me up: You mad bro?
Things I like: “Star Wars” and anything else with space, pumping iron, skiing, tubing, hiking, drinking, arguing with people, stand-up comedy, strategy games, philosophizing with strangers, ’90s rock and Eminem.
Things I smite: Uninformed people with strong opinions, political correctness, unpaid internships (just kidding, LOL).
I wish you’d asked me: What policies I’m going to implement when I become dictator of my own country.

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September 2015

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

A Note to Members

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Lauryn Seering photo

Freedom From Religion Foundation staff and summer interns

Back, from left: Andrew Seidel, Jake Swenson, Eleanor McEntee, Jackie Douglas, Adam Grudman, Seth Wrinkle, Christopher Line, Dan Barker, Patrick Elliott, Sam Grover and Bill Dunn. Front: Neal Fitzgerald, Kat Paige, Lauryn Seering, Rebecca Markert, Lisa Treu, Calli Miller, Lisa Strand, Liana Kalpelke-Dale, Bekki Huelsman, Zena McFadden and Annie Laurie Gaylor. Not pictured: Elizabeth Cavell, Maddy Ziegler and Ryan Jayne.

Wow, and thank you, ‘Mr. Anonymous’!

Announcing Diane Uhl Legal Fund actions

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is extremely delighted to announce that earlier this year it received \$250,000 — the single largest gift to its Legal Fund from a living donor.

The modest donor prefers to be unnamed, but he asked to name the fund for Diane Uhl for whom the new legal wing in FFRF’s addition is also named. Diane and Stephen Uhl are among the most generous donors to FFRF’s building expansion, giving \$250,000 to the Building Fund. The nearly completed TV and radio studio is named the Stephen Uhl Friendly Atheist Studio.

The FFRF Executive Board voted at its summer meeting to set aside part of the fabulous gift to create a paid one-year Diane Uhl Legal Fellowship. Ryan Jayne, who just graduated from Lewis and Clark Law School and who worked full time in the legal department with an unpaid externship this spring, has been named the Diane Uhl Legal Fellow.

Additionally, the board voted to reserve \$100,000 of the Uhl Legal Fund to initiate two new federal challenges



Jake Swenson photo

of the Internal Revenue Service’s provisions that favor churches and pastors:

- The IRS code explicitly exempts churches and denominations from filing annual tax returns known as Form 990, which all other 501(c)(3) organizations must file, including FFRF, in order to retain tax exemption. The forms ensure accountability to the public and

the government. FFRF is working to re-file the case after its challenge of the inequity was thrown out on “standing” last year.

- The code also contains housing allowance privileges uniquely benefiting ministers, as was recently highlighted by John Oliver on Comedy Central’s “Last Week Tonight.” “Ministers of the

gospel,” under the 1954 law, may subtract from their taxable income money set aside from their salaries as a housing allowance, an enormous benefit.

FFRF won a resounding victory in 2013 in its federal challenge of the “parish exemption,” in a decision by U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb, Western District of Wisconsin. When the Obama administration appealed the controversial decision, the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals dismissed the case last year.

Although FFRF sets aside part of the salary of its Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker as a housing allowance, the law doesn’t permit them to claim it. The court ruled FFRF and the couple hadn’t established sufficient injury to continue the challenge. FFRF is in the process of re-configuring the lawsuit. Stay tuned!

“This so-generous gift also made possible the ‘wish list’ purchase of a number of law books and texts requested by our team of young staff attorneys,” added Gaylor. The remainder of the generous gift remains in FFRF’s general Legal Fund.

RECRUIT A MEMBER

sample copies for \$2

Send \$2 with the name and address of each person you wish to receive a sample copy of Freethought Today to:

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(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)

Freedom depends upon freethinkers

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

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Freedom Depends on Freethinkers

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

THE END OF THE WORLD

It could all go up in a flash, of course:
a comet collision, a sneaky nuke,
or a gutting from some galactic god
we’ve never even heard of. But
those are long shots, after all,
doomsday daydreams. Ten to one
there’ll be no Roman candles at all,
only
some slick guy in a three-piece suit
staring out of the big screen, eyes
gazing into yours, sincere as a stockbroker,
his voice like melting chocolate
telling you God is on our side,
but we need those big battalions;
saying conglomerates are good for you,
treasure’s tidbits trickling down;
telling you guns don’t kill people, and
the pregnant power of prayer
will fix your furry fungus.
And
the very last words you’ll hear
before the final blackout will be
“Trust me.”

© Philip Appleman.
From the book *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie*



Philip Appleman is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include *Perfidious Prov-erbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible* (2012), *Dar-win’s Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used *Norton Critical Edition, Darwin, and the Norton Critical Edition of Malthus’ Essay on Population*. His newest book is *The Labyrinth: God, Darwin and the Meaning of Life*. His poetry and fiction have won many awards, including a fellowship in poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Center for Science Education. His work has appeared in *Harper’s Magazine, The Nation, The New Republic, The New York Times, The Paris Review, Partisan Review, Poetry, and The Yale Review*.

He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both “After-Life” Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Phil’s books: ffrf.org/shop.

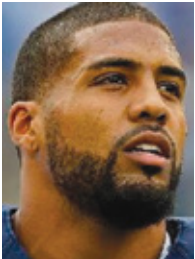
Overheard

Posts about a Christian pastor in Ver-mont being sentenced to one year in prison after refusing to marry a gay couple have circulated on the Internet. However, the article was published at a known fake-news site, and we found no evidence to support the existence of key elements of the story, including the pastor, church, or the judge refer-enced in the article. We rate this claim Pants On Fire.
PolitiFact fact check
Tampa Bay Times, 7-16-15

Although I am an atheist, I’ll be damned if my fellow countrymen can’t worship in peace.
Michael Williams, whose offer to stand watch outside the First African Meth-odist Episcopal Church in Pueblo, Colo., was accepted by the pastor
Pueblo Chieftain, 7-18-15

After prayerful reflection, I felt com-fortable that [Michael Williams] was genuine. And he’s been there at every Sunday service, standing in front of the church, observing and making sure that nothing happens.
First AME Pastor Margaret Redmond
Pueblo Chieftain, 7-18-15

If there is a God and he’s watching foot-ball, there are so many other things he could be doing. There are hungry children and diseas-es and famine and so much important stuff going on in the world, and he’s really blessed your team? It’s just weird to me.
Arian Foster, 28, Houston Texans running back, adding “I don’t believe there’s a God”
ESPN Magazine, 8-18-15



This is unprecedented. He is the first active professional athlete, let alone star, to ever stand up in support of gaining respect for secular Americans.
Todd Stiefel, chairman of Openly Sec-ular, on Arian Foster’s public profes-sions of nonbelief
ESPN Magazine, 8-18-15

The Wielands, parents of three daugh-ters, are committed to the health and well being of their children and thus seek to ensure that their daughters have comprehensive health care cov-erage. As devout Roman Catholics, they believe that they cannot pay for or participate in a health care plan that includes coverage for contraceptives or provide such coverage to their daugh-ters without violating their sincerely held religious beliefs.
8th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals rul-ing that gives standing to a legislator and his wife who are covered by the state of Missouri’s employee health plan for its employees and are chal-lenging the Affordable Care Act’s con-traception mandate
National Law Journal, 7-20-15

Authorities said Perry blamed the acci-dent on prayer. She said she had been going through some personal prob-lems and was praying as she drove, oc-casionally with her head down.
News story on the conviction of Mar-ilyn Perry, 62, Bellevue, Ohio, for ve-hicular assault, for which she was sen-tenced to three years’ probation and

\$10,000 restitution
Fox 8 Cleveland, 7-21-15
I think he got a pass because, in a lot of ways, he’s like a pedophile priest. He does an enormous amount of positive things for the world, then he has this other side to his personality that’s real-ly hurting people.
Entertainer/writer Judd Apatow, on al-legations that actor Bill Cosby drugged and raped multiple women
CNN “New Day,” 7-22-15

Dear Rev. Graham: Where is heaven? Will our telescopes ever discover it, or is it too far away? I have a hard time imagining what heaven must be like, although I think about it a lot. — L.L.
Question to evangelist Billy Graham in a syndicated column
The Town Talk, Alexandria, La., 7-23-15

Rod’s candid way of explaining his mis-takes and pointing out the dangers of putting his career in front of his faith and family will be of great benefit to fathers focused on accomplishing their professional goals.
Flier promoting a speech at a men-on-ly prayer breakfast at First Baptist Church, Arnold, Mo., by former GOP House Speaker Rod Jetton, who was convicted of sexually assaulting a wom-an after her “safe word” of “green bal-loons” apparently failed
Riverfront Times, 7-28-15

Please don’t claim this invitation is about forgiveness. We can forgive a drunk driver but shouldn’t give him school bus keys. We can forgive someone who commits violence but shouldn’t give him a gun. We can for-give someone who assaults someone but shouldn’t give him a speaking role in a church.
Email from David Clohessy, Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests director, objecting to First Baptist’s in-vitation to Jetton, which was later with-drawn
Riverfront Times, 7-28-15

After 60 years of ministry at the end of the Earth — a great challenge in an amazing place — to be told that we’re not needed anymore . . . it’s a bit sad.
Fr. Dan Doyle, leader of New Zealand’s Catholic Antarctic Ministry, which has been told by the U.S. National Science Foundation that its services are no longer needed at McMurdo Station on Ross Island due to cost-cutting and a fall in demand
BBC, 7-27-15

I do not believe that just because you’re opposed to abortion, that that makes you pro-life. In fact, I think in many cases, your morality is deeply lacking if all you want is a child born but not a child fed, not a child educated, not a child housed. And why would I think that you don’t? Because you don’t want any tax money to go there. That’s not pro-life. That’s pro-birth. We need a much broader conversation on what the morality of pro-life is.
Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun, au-thor and feminist
daillykos.com 7-30-15

36% Yes. 39% No. 25% Not sure.
Responses to a January online survey with 3,244 participants that asked “Do you believe in God?”
New York Times Magazine, 7-26-15

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

The Foundation’s 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.

FFRF combats ‘In God We Trust’ on law enforcement vehicles



“I’ve always had religious belief, and I feel like that’s kept me alive,” Houston County Sheriff Donald Valenza told the Dothan Eagle. Valenza showed off the new decal on the Alabama department’s public Facebook page, on which Jason Solowes wrote: “Too had our tax money was spent on decals they will have to remove.”

FFRF sent letters in July and August to 30 sheriffs’ and police departments around the country that have placed the controversial national motto “In God We Trust” on their vehicles. Law enforcement agencies contacted so far: Brookfield Police Department, Mo.; Elizabethton Police Department, Tenn.; Greenup County Sheriff’s Office, Ky.; Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office, Ill.; Laclede County Sheriff’s Department, Mo.; Lawrence County Sheriff’s Office, Mo.; McDonald County Sheriff’s Department, Mo.; Linn County Sheriff’s Department,

Mo.; Marion County Sheriff’s Office, Fla.; Ralls County Sheriff’s Office, Mo.; Randolph County Sheriff’s Office, Mo.; Ripley County Sheriff’s Office, Mo.; Amory Police Department, Miss.; Bay County Sheriff’s Office, Fla.; Bonifay Police Department, Fla.; Culpeper County Sheriff’s Office, Va.; Halifax County Sheriff’s Office, N.C.; Stone County Sheriff’s Department, Mo.; Walton County Sheriff’s Office, Fla.; Houston County Sheriff’s Office, Ala.; Newton County Sheriff’s Department, Mo.; Barry County Sheriff’s Department, Mo.; Camden County Sheriff’s Department, Mo.; Hempstead County Sheriff’s Office, Ark.; Cole County Sheriff’s Department, Mo.; Boaz Police Department, Ala.; Pineville City Marshal, Mo.; Cape Girardeau County Sheriff’s Department, Mo.; Cave City Sheriff’s Department, Ark.; and Lee County Sheriff’s Department, Va.

FFRF reminds the agencies that citizens trust law enforcement officers to attend to their secular duties, not spend taxpayer money placing religious messages on patrol cars to the exclusion of the 23% of Americans who are not religious.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor added, “Further, in a time when citizens nationwide are increasingly distrustful of police actions, it is frightening and politically dubious to announce to citizens that law enforcement officers rely on the judgment of a deity rather than on the judgment of the law.”



Missouri Sheriff Doug Rader (right) also has a bible verse from Romans 13:3-4 on the department’s website.



FFRF asks Tenn. governor for equal time for reason

FFRF sent a letter July 28 asking Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam to put reason on an equal footing with religious faith, if only for a day, due to a new state law that requires the governor to designate the first weekend in August of each calendar year as “Tennessee’s Weekend of Prayer Over Students.”

The letter from Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker notes that not all Tennesseans believe in the power of prayer and many object to mingling church and state in public schools. “As a result, we are requesting on behalf of FFRF’s members in Tennessee that you also issue a proclamation proclaiming a ‘Day Of Reason’ along the lines of the proposed proclamation included with this letter. Prescribing a dedicated Day of Reason is very timely in light of the 90th anniversary of the verdict on the infamous Scopes trial. We recognize, however, that you might also choose to declare a ‘Week Of Reason,’ or an alternative date near the beginning of the new school year. We look forward to working with you to finalize the details for an appropriate proclamation and dedication as requested.”

FFRF’s proposed proclamation:

WHEREAS, Tennessee students face many influences pulling them toward divisiveness, intolerance, and ignorance; and
WHEREAS, reason and free inquiry are the most effective agents against error; and
WHEREAS, Tennessee students should be intellectually challenged and enhanced by public schools that educate without dogma, coercion, or suspension of critical judgment; and
WHEREAS, Tennessee students should learn in their public schools to base opinions on reason and informed knowledge; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee students should be taught that they are responsible for their own actions and that they should judge human conduct by its intent and consequences; and
WHEREAS, Tennessee public schools should advance and impart knowledge, compassion, and rational understanding; and
WHEREAS, this summer marks the 90th anniversary of the verdict in the infamous Scopes trial, reminding us again to remain ever vigilant about the instruction of our youth:
NOW, THEREFORE, I, Bill Haslam, Governor of the State of Tennessee, do hereby proclaim and dedicate August 15, 2015, as the first annual “DAY OF REASON,” to honor and encourage Tennessee’s public schools as inviolate institutions of reason and human understanding, during the 2015-2016

school year and always. I encourage all citizens to join me in honoring the worthy and critical undertakings of our public schools.

The weekend of prayer bill passed the state Senate 33-0 and the state House approved it 95-2. G.A. Hardaway and Johnnie Turner, both Memphis Democrats, were the only two to vote against it.

Behind the bill was a theocratic group called First Priority, which boasts a mission of “Uniting the Local Body of Christ With a Plan of Action to Influence the School with the Gospel.” It trumpets “Christ-Church-Campus” and “The Hope of Christ in Every Student.”

Trey Reynolds, Wilson County director of First Priority of Greater Nashville, told the Lebanon Democrat: “We are asking local churches all across Middle Tennessee to adopt a school to serve as the point person for prayer on that school campus. This will be a multi-church, multi-denominational time of prayer at each of the more than 200-plus schools. We would like to know which schools your church would be willing to adopt and serve as the liaison in your community.”

According to a story in the Kingsport Times-News, a Christian group called Expecting God’s Help is teaming with First Priority in Hawkins County. “The countywide event will be held Sunday, Aug. 2, from 2-4 p.m. on the campus of every public school in Hawkins County, including the independent Rogersville City School.”

Haley Wherry, director of First Priority Blue Ridge, said, “Without prayer, these students will not be able to stand against the insurmountable odds they will face from childhood until they leave this world.”

Four Hawkins County schools have a First Priority group in the school: Rogersville Middle School, Cherokee High School, Surgoinsville Middle School and Volunteer High School. Wherry is available “to assist local churches to empower their students as missionaries in the other middle and high schools of Hawkins County.”

The “Prayer Walk Guide” includes a dozen items, including “10. Plead – the Blood of Jesus over the Schools, Homes and Students; 11. Bind – the powers of darkness in the Name of Jesus; 12. Loosen – the Power of God in our schools, our communities, our nation.”

“It is a shocking misuse of governmental authority to pass a law, at a behest of a group intent on missionizing public school students, to designate a weekend to ‘pray over students.’ Public schools exist to educate, not proselytize,” said Gaylor.

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HOSTED BY DAN BARKER AND ANNIE LAURIE GAYLOR

Slightly irreverent views, news, music and interviews

Legal staff busy shoring up state/church wall

FFRF reminds Tenn. principal of law

The principal of Little Milligan Elementary School in Butler, Tenn., has been reprimanded by the Carter County School District for frequently leading students in prayer and reportedly asking them each Monday if they had been to church. FFRF was contacted by a concerned parent.

The principal, J.R. Campbell, also reportedly recruited several students to accompany him during the school day to a Baptist church to set up chairs for a church service. While he drove to and from the church, the students walked, crossing Highway 321 twice without supervision.

“The district must take action to ensure that its educators, principals and teachers alike, are not recruiting students to participate in church-related activities, or to encourage student involvement in religious activities of any kind,” Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert said in a June 9 letter.

John Banks, district general counsel, replied July 10 to say that Ward had investigated the allegations and met with Campbell. Banks provided a copy of Ward’s letter, which was signed by Campbell and placed in his personnel file.

While praising Campbell’s “long, meritorious and exemplary service,” Ward said his investigation “leads me to believe there is some substance to the factual statements” in FFRF’s letter and that he will continue to monitor the situation. “Having discussed this at much length with you, I understand that you will take all necessary steps to prevent a violation of Board policy or First Amendment Rights of students, faculty, or staff in the future.”

No more bibles at school ‘career day’

Daniel Pratt Elementary School, Montgomery, Ala., will no longer allow Gideon bible distributions, which occurred during a “career day” at the school.

In response to FFRF’s June 12 letter protesting the distribution, James Seale, attorney for Autauga County Schools, informed FFRF that the principal, who no longer works in the district, approved the distribution without the district’s knowledge. “The new principal is aware that the distribution of bibles during the instructional day is not permissible,” Seale wrote.

Letters stop abuse of school prayer

Dalton Local School District’s future graduation ceremonies and school board meetings will not include prayer. “The Supreme Court has settled this matter — high school graduations must be secular to protect the freedom of conscience of all students,” wrote Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert in a letter sent June 16. A letter to the school board followed on June 26: “It is beyond the scope of a public school board to schedule or conduct prayer as part of its meetings.”

Superintendent Scott Beatty responded July 6 that the district would not have an invocation or benediction as part of its 2016 ceremony, and an attorney for the school board wrote July



“United States postal regulations prohibit the posting of signs and posters on USPS property, other than official postal notices,” Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell noted in a March 13 letter to the postmaster of Cogan Station, Pa. “The display of religious symbols, other than stamp art, on postal property is specifically prohibited.” After two follow-up letters, Officer in Charge Karen Rockwell replied July 28 that the display had been removed.

16 to let Markert know school board prayers would also be discontinued.

Summit Leadership Academy-High Desert’s graduation ceremony will not include prayer or other religious sentiments in the future. The Hesperia, Calif., school’s 2015 graduation had included both a prayer and religious remarks from the commencement speaker.

After Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the district, the school’s attorney replied July 9 that the invocation and remarks by the graduation speaker both “contained sectarian language,” and said the school would ensure that this would not be the case going forward.

Woodstown-Piles Grove Regional School District in New Jersey is taking steps to end its sponsorship of an annual baccalaureate ceremony after it received a June 23 letter from Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler. Woodstown High School co-sponsored a baccalaureate with Sharptown United Methodist Church which was held in the school cafeteria and advertised in the senior class calendar, which “strongly encouraged [students] to attend this worthwhile activity.”

Students also received mailed invitations to the ceremony, lacking a dis-

claimer, from the church.

Ziegler pointed out, “The school’s role in sponsoring and promoting the baccalaureate would cause any reasonable graduating senior or parent to conclude that the district endorses the religious messages espoused at these services.”

Superintendent Thomas Coleman replied that district employees would not organize, plan or coordinate future baccalaureates, services would not be included in the official senior calendar, and district administrators would “receive professional development regarding the constitutional parameters that apply to baccalaureate services.”

Green Local Schools, Green, Ohio, has instructed administrative staff that prayers will not be permitted at future school-sponsored events. An honors banquet, spring banquet and the senior awards night at Green High School had all included prayer.

“It is unlawful for any school-sponsored event to include prayer,” Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote in the first of two letters to the district. “The U.S. Supreme Court has found prayers at other traditional after-school events, such as football games and graduations, unconstitutional.”

Mary Jo Shannon Slick, attorney for the district, replied July 9 that Superintendent Jeffrey Miller has instructed staff that prayers, even if student initiated, won’t be permitted at events. Shannon Slick said the class president gave a prayer on her own initiative at the awards event.

Mifflinburg Area School District Superintendent Daniel Lichtel has instructed administrators for the district in Union County, Pa., to no longer schedule prayers at school functions and directed staff to refrain from leading prayers.

Lichtel’s directions to staff came after Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler wrote the district June 12 about a report that a teacher gave a scheduled Christian prayer at a school-sponsored banquet: “An objective observer attending this event would almost certainly perceive such a prayer given by a teacher in full view of his superintendent as tacit district endorsement of religion in general, and Christianity in particular.”

FFRF stops forced recital of pledge

A Valhalla High School teacher in La Mesa, Calif., is no longer permitted to force students to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Previously, according to FFRF’s information, when students remained seated, math teacher Douglas Babington would shout at them to “get up or get out” and threaten them with failing grades if they refused.

FFRF sent a letter April 21 informing the Grossmont Union High School District that this conduct was unconstitutional. Superintendent Ralf Swenson said in a July 10 reply that “we have dealt with the issue internally and consider the matter resolved.”

FFRF douses fire chief’s prayer plans

Milton, Fla., Fire Chief John Reble planned and coordinated the Santa Rosa County Day of Prayer event, listing his city email address as the primary contact for the May 7 event. He has agreed to cease all planning of the event using city resources and his public title after receiving a letter from Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.

The city’s attorney responded July 16 that Reble would refrain from sponsoring the event in his official capacity in the future.

Roadside cross goes away after letter

The Missouri Department of Transportation has taken down a cross that was posted at an intersection in Poplar Bluff, Mo. Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote the department on July 10: “It is blatantly unconstitutional for either the city or the state to display a patently religious symbol like a Christian cross at a public intersection.” The cross placement is unconstitutional even if it is privately funded, owned and maintained.

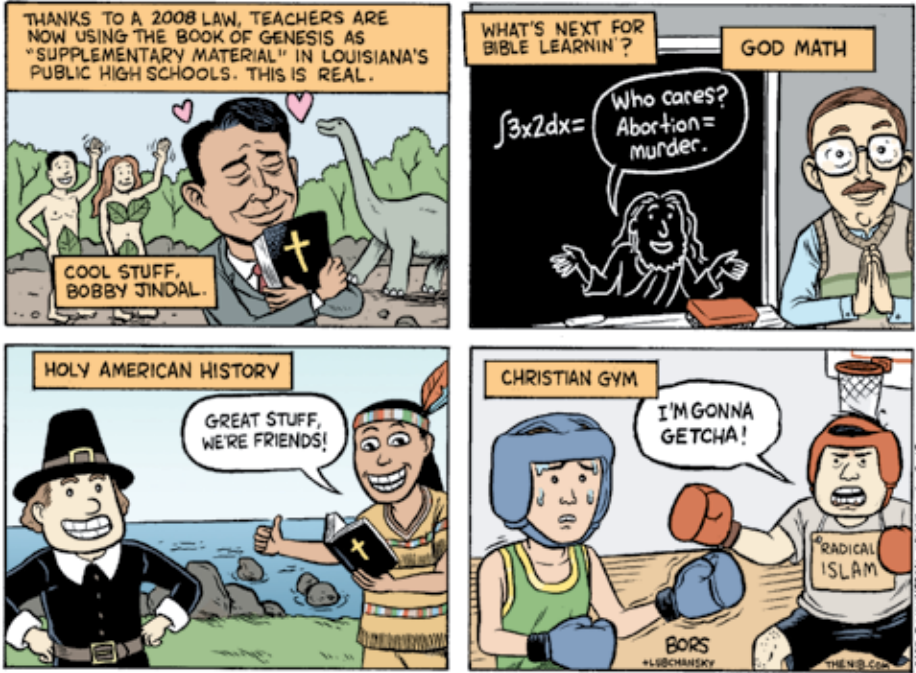
The Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission replied July 16 that the cross had been privately and illegally placed and had been removed immediately.

Calif. swim meets will go secular

The Visalia Seahawks, a swim team organized by the city of Visalia, Calif., will no longer be subjected to prayers over the loudspeaker at meets. The team had solicited parents to volunteer to give the prayer.

“Any reasonable Visalia resident would interpret the prayers at the swim meet as government endorsement of religion,” Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote in a July 17 letter.

Nicolas Cardella, attorney for the city, responded July 24: “We conducted a review of the facts and law and determined the practice should be discontinued. City staff have since reminded league representatives that the Seahawks swim team is part of the City’s recreation program, that opening a municipal recreation event with prayer is improper, and that the practice must be discontinued.”



Georgia violations will be addressed

After a teacher delivered a prayer at Lowndes High School’s Freshman Academy Awards Night and a Lake Park Elementary School event was held in a church, Lowndes County Schools is taking steps to ensure no further violations of the separation of church and state will occur.

Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler sent two letters to the Valdosta, Ga., school district after the issues were reported. Counsel for the school district, Warren Turner, promptly resolved the matters and assured FFRF that school administrators now understand the law.

(Editor’s note: Now if they will only abide by it!)

Prayer silenced at Florida meetings

Quarterly employee luncheons for the city of Belleview, Fla., will now have a moment of silence instead of a prayer. “While individuals are certainly free to pray privately or to worship on their own time in their own way,” wrote Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler in a complaint letter, “calling upon city employees to pray is coercive, embarrassing and beyond the scope of secular government.” A city employee had alerted FFRF to the violation.

“In spite of the longstanding tradition in this country of ‘offering thanks’ prior to eating on such occasions, the City has chosen to observe a moment of silence,” City Clerk Sandi McKamey replied on July 23.

According to a story in the Ocala Star-Banner, the Belleview City Commission “reluctantly” voted 4-1 on Aug. 4 to also replace prayer before meetings with a moment of silence. The story said FFRF’s letter about prayer at employee meetings “prompted commissioners to examine their prayers before meetings.”

Meeting prayers used to be led by clergy but due to a decline in participation, commissioners themselves were leading them.

Teacher’s Catholic enthusiasm curbed

Rogers City (Mich.) Area Schools Superintendent Kathleen Xenakis-Makowski has resolved a state/church violation brought to her attention in a complaint letter from Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert. A Rogers City High School English teacher reportedly had inappropriately discussed his Catholicism with his students regularly and had repeatedly asked them if they were Christian.

Xenakis-Makowski informed Markert on July 21 that she met with the teacher and his principal to instruct them “not to use this form of instruction any longer.”

Coaches warned about midfield prayer

Hernando County (Fla.) School District’s football games will remain secular. A local complainant sent FFRF a photo of the Hernando High School and Sunlake High School teams gathered with coaches at midfield to pray at their May 22 game.

“If, while acting in their official capacities, school district employees join hands in a prayer circle or otherwise manifest approval and solidarity with the student religious exercises, they cross the line between respect for religion and the endorsement of religion,”

wrote Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, quoting a federal court case.

Attorney Dennis Alfonso replied that the matter would be addressed in training provided to staff. FFRF awaits a reply from Pasco County Schools regarding the same practice at Sunlake High.

Georgia school ends bible distribution

A representative of Gideons International who thanked the West Haralson Elementary School faculty for inviting him to distribute bibles to fifth graders for 16 straight years will no longer be permitted to proselytize children in Tallapoosa, Ga.

“There is no excuse or justification for this practice,” wrote Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler on May 8. “It is unnecessary, offensive and illegal.”

In a July 29 response, incoming Superintendent Jerry Bell said he would advise administrators that distribution of bibles by Gideons or school employees was not permitted.

Letter sours school on religious tea

Eighth-grade girls at Alice Robertson Jr. High School in Tulsa, Okla., have traditionally attended a religious “spring tea” event but won’t in the future due to Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel’s complaint letter. Students were taken annually to First United Methodist Church during school hours for the “abstinence-only” event hosted by Muskogee’s Pregnancy Resource Center, a “crisis” pregnancy facility.

Previous years’ events included prayer, religious music and adults recounting personal religious stories. Transportation was provided by “Okie Trolley,” a company that declares a commitment to “Christian faith” on its website.

“Due to the pervasively religious nature of the spring field trip, we see no reasonable alternative to canceling the event,” wrote Seidel.

The school made some changes but still held the event, which prompted a follow-up letter. Bryan Drummond, attorney for the district, replied to the second letter July 30. “Based on this entire situation, the District’s central administration has decided that in order to avoid any issues in the future, the District will discontinue its involvement with the ‘Spring Tea’ in any way in the future.”

Minn. baccalaureate gets the boot

Kingsland High School in Spring Valley, Minn., will no longer host a baccalaureate service after getting a complaint letter from Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott. “Given the blatant school endorsement of this event, we ask that you take measures to cease any school involvement in baccalaureate services going forward.”

A staff member, when asked whether the school had collected rent, said, “The baccalaureate is considered a school event. Being a school event, there was no charge for the space.”

Superintendent John McDonald replied July 29, stating that the district has a facility use policy and that he would ensure that it is being followed. He said he would also advise event organizers to “revise their program so that a reasonable observer would not conclude that the service is school-sponsored.”

School board ends meeting prayer

The North Lebanon (Pa.) School Board has stopped praying at its meetings. Prayers were recited even though students were typically present at meetings and a student representative attended each meeting.

“Federal courts, including the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, which has jurisdiction over Pennsylvania, have struck down school board practices that include this religious ritual,” wrote Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler on May 1.

A July 30 reply from school counsel Howard Klein said the board had stopped praying before meetings.

Parks head gets constitutional lesson

Employees of the Houston Parks and Recreation Department in Texas will not invite pastors to give religious motivational speeches at future mandatory meetings. Division Manager Jeff Jefferson invited his pastor, William Lindsey, to a June 26 employee meeting. Lindsey’s speech contained religious content, including Lindsey promoting his church.

Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler wrote the department a letter of complaint: “Religious messages at government-sponsored events are unnecessary, inappropriate and divisive.”

Parks and Recreation Director Joe Turner replied July 15 that Lindsey was not invited to speak on religious matters, and said FFRF’s letter had been reviewed with Jefferson, who is now aware of basic separation of church and state principles in the workplace.



A print of Warner Sallman’s famous portrait was prominently displayed in a hall at Royster Middle School.

‘Head of Christ’ not in Kansas anymore

A portrait of Jesus hanging in Royster Middle School in Chanute, Kan., was removed Aug. 20 in response to Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel’s letter to Chanute Public Schools. The reproduction of Warner Sallman’s “Head of Christ” had been displayed in the school at least as far back as 1966.

Superintendent Richard Proffitt, in his first year in Chanute, told the Wichita Eagle that the image came down on advice of district legal counsel. “We were notified [by FFRF] and we responded to stay in compliance,” Proffitt said.

A similar copy of the painting in a middle school was involved in an FFRF and ACLU of Ohio lawsuit against Jackson City School District in Jackson, Ohio, in 2013. The school settled the suit, agreeing to permanently remove the portrait of Jesus and pay \$95,000, including attorney’s fees. Seidel’s letter

to the Chanute district stressed the settlement.

“It is illegal for Royster Middle School or any other Chanute public school to post religious images in its hallways, or anywhere else that appears to be school-sponsored. If this picture of Jesus is displayed, as we are told, the District must remove it at once.”

Proffitt said the portrait is being stored in a secure location “where it’s not visible.”

Ryan Jayne, FFRF legal clerk, noted it’s the second time the Foundation has worked with Proffitt to resolve a complaint. The earlier case involved Gideon bible distribution in Saline in 2014.

“It’s nice to have people who appreciate the law and get things done [and] who follow the law, even if it’s likely to be unpopular in the community,” Jayne told the Eagle.

New York City quiets amplified gospel

The Gospel Light Baptist Church will no longer be able to illegally gather and preach over a loudspeaker in a New York public park. The church had previously set up weekly in Major Mark Park in Queens, preaching for hours at a time at people walking by.

FFRF learned that the church did not have a permit to gather in the park, and that even if they did, no amplification was allowed at all in the small community park. Attorney Madeline Ziegler sent a letter July 23 to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, requesting that the city enforce permit restrictions.

In a July 27 phone call, Mark Edwards, park manager for New York City District 12, said he would send parks enforcement directly to the church to advise them that they could not hold events without a permit and could not set up their public address system. FFRF’s complainant confirmed on July 31 that the church had stopped harassing passersby.

Marquee madness



All others apply paste

Kathi Wise saw this sign of sagging faith in Palatine, Ill.



Try Sonblock (SPF 666)

Bill Kable, Georgia Life Member, spotted this in Tyger, Ga.

FFRF awards Maine student activists \$1,000 each

Trio stood up for right to sit down during pledge

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has awarded \$1,000 student activist awards to three Maine high school graduates who are starting college. The awards were made possible thanks to designated grants from FFRF members Richard Ross, M.D., who gave \$1,000 “in memory of Tony Ross,” attorney Allen P. Wilkinson, who specifically asked that his gift go to a high school activist, and a member who prefers to remain anonymous. He is 83 and designates his recurring award for a “Strong Backbone Student Activist.”

By Gaby Ferrell,
Lily SanGiovanni and
Morrigan Turner

For our first three years of high school, we had often discussed how the Pledge of Allegiance made us uncomfortable. We had joked and made vague plans for how, when we were seniors, we would change how the pledge was addressed in our school. At South Portland High School, the senior class president reads the pledge over the intercom each morning, preceded by the invitation, “Will you all please rise and join me for the Pledge of Allegiance?”

Lily was class president all four years, and when the end of junior year approached, with the looming responsibility of leading the pledge, our plans needed to become more concrete. We thoroughly researched the history of the pledge. We studied federal, state and local laws and policies surrounding its recitation in schools. We read about cases in other schools when students fought against the pledge in one way or another.

Armed with the information that Maine state law says schools must allow students the “opportunity” to recite the pledge once during each school day, the three of us marched into the office on Lily’s first day as acting senior president with a plan. Lily stated clearly over the intercom, “You may now stand and recite the pledge if you wish to,” followed by 15 seconds (we had previously timed it) of silence.

She then said, “The poem of the day is the Pledge to the Earth.” (An announcements tradition is having a poem, joke or song of the day.) Lily then recited “I pledge allegiance to the Earth, and all the life which it supports, one planet, in our care, irreplaceable, with sustenance and respect for all.”

The reactions from students and staff to our “unauthorized student action” — as it was deemed by our principal in an email memo he sent to staff about the incident — were our first introduction to the strong and varying opinions virtually everybody has about the pledge.

During our subsequent meeting with our principal, we explained that this wasn’t a one-time stunt and that we wanted to make a real change in the high school. We told him that we and other students had been pressured and made to feel uncomfortable by staff members during the pledge and in order to help those students, the procedure needed to change.

There are many reasons someone may not want to stand for or recite the pledge such as religious restrictions, moral conflicts or political ideals. When the words of the pledge are bro-



From left are Morrigan Turner, Gaby Ferrell and Lily SanGiovanni.



Morrigan Turner (left), Lily SanGiovanni and Gaby Ferrell at an ACLU event recognizing their activism.

ken down, it’s a solemn promise of unconditional loyalty and support to the United States and its government. It’s unethical and decidedly contrary to the values of free speech and beliefs to force anyone, let alone teenagers and children, to make that promise.

Our principal understood where we were coming from and supported us, but he couldn’t make a decision to change the procedure himself. We were given a place on the agenda for the next meeting of the faculty leadership team.

In the few weeks we had to prepare for our presentation, rumors began circulating through the school and community about us and our intentions. Not only students, but faculty

members were gossiping about us. We were told by one teacher that another had said to him, “Those girls just don’t understand, I’d like to show them pictures of my dead friends from the war, maybe then they’d get it.”

We also had teachers and students who were our allies. Our civil rights team adviser helped us craft our presentation and prepare for the meeting. Our proposal was to change the pledge procedure to the way Lily had done it on her first morning. Though we had a well-researched and argued presentation, the committee shot it down unanimously. We were upset and slightly discouraged.

We get an ultimatum

School work picked up and we let the issue fall by the wayside for a few months. Lily led the school in the pledge each morning just like it had always been done. Until one morning, without asking permission, she again added “if you’d like to” at the end of her invitation to stand and join her in the pledge. And she continued to do so, and for a few weeks most people didn’t say anything, save for a couple of our classmates who noticed and complimented Lily on the addition.

Then somehow, a parent caught

wind of the subtle change and took to Facebook to air his not-so-subtle objections to it, and still not-so-subtly blame low-income immigrants for it. His post blew up with comments from other parents and community members who were equally displeased with the apparently frightful notion of alerting students to their freedom of choice.

Our principal got calls and emails, some of which were not phrased so politely or eloquently, and Lily was told she could no longer add the disclaimer. No discussion, no ifs, ands or buts. Either she dropped the line or someone else could lead the pledge.

Now we were mad. We didn’t understand why random community members could stop us from telling students about their freedom of speech and choice, and why those people had a bigger say in how our school was run than students who actually attend our school. Plus, the people who were upset about the “four little words” wanted students to be forced to stand and recite the pledge, which is against the law in Maine.

This is when we called the Portland Press Herald, and our interview with Kelley Bouchard ran on the front page. The response was massive. The story was picked up by every local paper, news stations showed up at school to interview us and the story went national on Yahoo and the Washington Post. We were interviewed by radio show hosts as far away as Chicago.

Each time the story ran brought responses, sometimes in the thousands. Many of the comments on the online articles were ugly. Sexist, racist, ageist and anti-immigrant sentiments abounded. Foul language, logical fallacies, threats and suggestions that we relocate our ungrateful selves to Afghanistan were aplenty.

There was also support and accolades from strangers both local and national. Some of the comments were so ridiculous that they made us laugh, but even with the incorrect grammar and over-the-top language, a personal attack is still a personal attack and some were pretty hurtful.

One specifically upsetting outcome was a Twitter page (@saythepledge) that was created by an unknown student in our school devoted to tearing us down and aggressively promoting the pledge.

Digging in our heels

The massive amount of attention and backlash only motivated us to make the change we believed was needed. We asked to present to the leadership team again. Our principal told us that we probably wouldn’t get anywhere with the “if you’d like to” idea because the tensions were still high from our secondary “unauthorized student action.”

So we wrote a procedure that stated the invitation would be “I now invite you to rise and join me for the Pledge of Allegiance” which also stated clearly that no teacher may compel a student to participate in any way, but that everyone is expected to remain quiet while the pledge is read, and that the right to choose without coercion will be explained at the start of each school year to incoming first-year students.

Continued on next page

FFRF welcomes 19 ‘Lifers,’ 1 ‘After-Lifer’

The Freedom From Religion Foundation appreciatively announces one new “After-Life Member,” Susan David, and 19 new Lifetime Members. They are:

David William Cheney, Frank K. Dean (a gift from Jill and Jeff Dean), Sally Drew, James Dulak, John Estrada, Doug Hilpibre, James McLaurin, Virginia Meserole, Wallace R. Nichols Jr., Kent Nielsen, Robert Nugent, Ryan Pettit, Douglas Schiebel, Bob Seidensticker, Allen Swanson, Jon Tollefson, Kenneth Trapp, Edward Traynor and Leslie Wald.

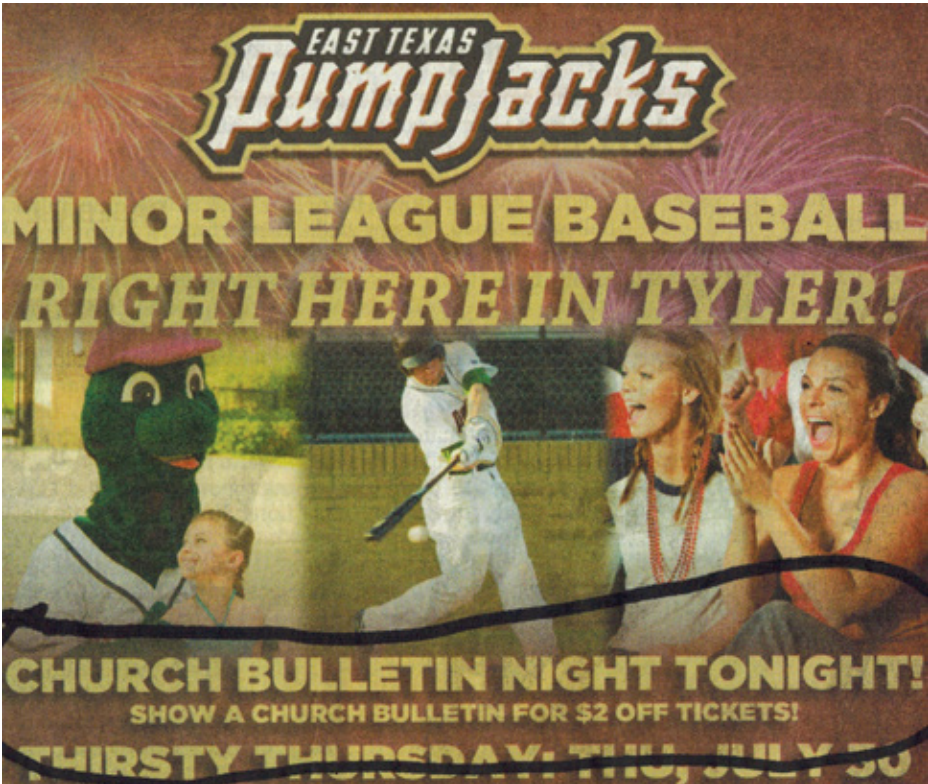
States represented are Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin.

After-Life Memberships of \$5,000

are a slightly tongue-in-cheek category for those who wish their donations to live after them. The category was suggested by a Lifetime Member who urged that FFRF offer an even more gung-ho category.

Lifetime Memberships of \$1,000 are donations designated explicitly for new membership or membership renewal. All dues and donations for FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, are deductible for income-tax purposes. Lifetime and After-Life Memberships go into rainy-day reserves and guarantee never another renewal notice.

FFRF sincerely thanks Susan, Leslie, Edward, Kenneth, Jon, Allen, Bob, Douglas, Ryan, Robert, Kent, Wallace, Virginia, James, Doug, John, James, Sally, Jeff and Jill, and David.



It paid to complain

Texas FFRF member Rick Wilbanks went to work after seeing this ad July 26 (a Sunday) in the Tyler Morning Telegraph by writing the Pump Jacks, who play in the Texas Collegiate League, about the illegality of offering preferential treatment in places of public accommodation. He included FFRF’s FAQ about church bulletin discounts and added, “Please stop this divisive and unconstitutional civil rights discriminatory practice. There is room enough in East Texas for ALL views about religion!” The team’s general manager and co-owner, Mike Lieberman, emailed back the same day: “Thank you for bringing this to our attention. We were unaware of the legal issue at hand. We will cease the promotion moving forward and provide a discount for any fan who requests it this evening.”

Atheist sitcom creators win big in ‘No God But Funny’ contest

To challenge the negative stereotypes of atheists as heartless, hopeless or just plain evil in popular entertainment, talented freethinkers were asked to create a sitcom featuring a lovable atheist lead character for the “No God But Funny” contest, sponsored by the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the Center for Inquiry. Judges with expertise in comedy and television have chosen the winning entries.



Contestants were asked to “contribute to the downfall of civilization” by submitting either a 22-minute teleplay script for a prize of \$15,000 or a fully produced 3- to 15-minute “webisode” for a prize of \$25,000.

Winners in the teleplay category are Rachel Lewis and Daniel Beecher of Salt Lake City for their script “Thank God I’m Atheist,” in which two young atheists in love, Holly and Matt, are about to be married but have to contend with Holly’s devoutly Mormon parents, who have very different plans for them. When Holly worries about coming out to her parents, Matt tells her, “It’s not going to kill them. I’m thinking three days in a hospital, tops.”

The winner in the webisode category is John Dardis of Los Angeles for “Earth Angel,” a self-discovery story of a witty young woman named Angel who, on her 18th birthday, must find a way to come out as an atheist to her quirky and very religious family — on Christmas Day no less!

“Even in 2015, atheists are still too of-

ten pigeonholed as the ‘other’ — people that Americans don’t want to vote for and don’t want their kids to marry, due in large part to the way we’re portrayed in TV and movies,” said contest creator Pamela Koslyn. “But we’re convinced that finding creative ways to present atheists as charming, funny and warm will help to break old stereotypes and usher in greater social acceptance and legal rights for the nonreligious. That’s what we want to begin to make happen with this contest, and the results have been fantastic.”

Entries were judged comedians Paul Provenza and Steve Hill, writer and producer Barbara Romen, magician Max Maven and actor/ writer Rich Fulcher.

“Earth Angel” was screened Aug. 26 before an audience at the Center for Inquiry-Los Angeles, where Dardis received his prize.

Check out the complete script for “Thank God I’m Atheist”: bit.ly/1hYYagh

Watch “Earth Angel” on YouTube: bit.ly/1KIk520

‘Learning to Drive’ Katha Pollitt essay now a movie

Learning to Drive and Other Life Stories, a very funny collection of essays by Katha Pollitt, an FFRF honorary officer who writes the sublime “Subject to Debate” column for The Nation, is now a feature film, nationally released on Aug. 21.



Katha Pollitt

The book (available from ffrf.org/shop) includes personal vignettes, including one on Katha’s decision to finally learn to drive as an adult in Manhattan. The movie is loosely based on her 2002 essay in The New Yorker, and stars Patricia Clarkson as Wendy/ Katha and Ben Kingsley as Darwan, the Sikh driving instructor. In real life,

the instructor was Filipino, not Indian, Katha notes.

The poet and feminist has received several honors from FFRF, including its Emperor Has No Clothes Award. Katha’s interview about the movie and her newest book, *Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights*, can be heard on Freethought Radio broadcast and podcast at ffrf.org/news/radio (scroll to Aug. 15, 2015).



Activist trio

Continued from previous page

We came to our second presentation armed with a petition signed by almost 200 current students and alumni supporting the change, as well as anonymous anecdotes from students who had been pressured by teachers to participate in the pledge and how uncomfortable they felt.

We explained that by using the word “invite,” it was clear that one can either accept or decline the offer to join in the pledge, complying with the law by allowing the opportunity but not pressuring anybody to do anything they don’t want to do. The team voted in favor of our new proposal.

We are confident that the procedure will be followed in the years to come and hopeful that this change and the communitywide discussion that preceded it will make for a more open and comfortable environment for students and faculty at South Portland High School.

Lily SanGiovanni: I am 18 and have grown up in South Portland. I am the daughter of Robert and Kimberly SanGiovanni. Throughout high school I have participated in my school’s award-winning jazz ensemble, marching band and wind ensemble. I played on the varsity lacrosse team as a goalie. I was a member of student government, Civil Rights Team, my school’s service group Interact, Spanish Club, Am-

nesty International and served as student president for the class of 2015 all four years. I will be heading to Wesleyan University this fall to play lacrosse and plan on majoring in neuroscience. I have always been a passionate, curious person who questions the questionable. Though successfully changing the pledge policy was a reward in itself, I am psyched and extremely honored to receive this award.

Morrigan Turner: I am 18 and grew up in South Portland with my parents, Colleen Jones-Turner and Peter Turner. I am going to Vassar College and plan on majoring in environmental studies to save the planet. At South Portland High School I took part in the Student Senate, Civil Rights Team, Poetry Club, Math Team, Musical, Drama Club

and Seeds of Peace. I was also president of the Amnesty International chapter, a student representative to the School Board and vice president of the class of 2015. Changing the pledge procedure taught me so much, and I appreciate the recognition of the work we all did.

Gaby Ferrell: I’m 18 and I’m the daughter of Courtney and Tim Ferrell. Throughout high school I was a member of the Student Senate, Civil Rights Team, Blunt Youth Radio and did tech for the Drama Club and musical. I was also a student representative on the School Board and the building committee for our recently renovated high school. I’ll be starting at Barnard College of Columbia University to study sociology and economics.

FFRF alerts Fla. schools to ‘dirty dozen’ violations

In response to a never-ending stream of flagrant state-church violations coming out of the Florida public schools, FFRF sent a memorandum Aug. 13 to all 67 Florida superintendents. The memo covers 12 of the most common complaints reported to FFRF. The eight-page memo was signed by FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker and David Williamson, founder of the Central Florida Freethought Community, an FFRF chapter. It was principally researched by FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel and Law Clerk Neal Fitzgerald. Detailed explanations with citations to case law are included.

FFRF’s attorneys have written to Florida school districts about more than 65 violations in the past two school years. FFRF also sued one Florida district

over bible distributions, a case that was satisfactorily resolved when the school district ended all outside distributions. The memo is intended to “help educate district staff on how to protect students’ rights of conscience by enforcing the Florida Constitution and Establishment Clause of the First Amendment,” Gaylor said.

The “dirty dozen” are:

- School events, including graduations and athletic events, may not include prayer.
- School staff, including teachers and coaches, may not organize, endorse, promote or participate in prayers with students. Nor may staff or nonschool personnel participate in religious activities of student clubs such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.
- School events, including graduations, should not be held in churches.
- Schools may not organize, endorse, promote or participate in baccalaureate services.
- School clubs and athletic teams may not have a “chaplain” or religious counselor.
- Schools may not teach religious doctrine, including creationism or intelligent design.
- Schools must charge a fair rent to all organizations that lease school property; churches leasing school property must actually pay that rent and can only use school property during non-instructional time rental hours.
- Schools may not allow the distribution of bibles or religious literature on school property.
- Schools may not force students to stand for or recite the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Schools may not disallow atheist or nonbeliever clubs if other noncurricular clubs are allowed, regardless of whether a staff adviser volunteers.
- Schools may not allow religious displays on school property, including in classrooms and teachers’ displays.
- “Voluntariness” cannot excuse a constitutional violation.

“The rights of our children, especially those of religious minorities, are being neglected far too often,” Williamson said. “We hope this proactive effort is seen by district and school administrators for exactly what it is: an opportunity for them to better understand and correct violations that may be occurring at their schools with or without their knowledge.”

Suit settled; FFRF helps oust Cowboy Church

A Colorado teacher in the Fremont RE-2 School District has favorably settled his case against the district, which has long drawn FFRF’s ire for unconstitutional insertion of religion into school activities.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel had sent the district four letters since February 2013 about numerous state/church violations. Many stemmed from the district’s close relationship with the Cowboy Church at Crossroads, which rented space in the district’s high school on Sundays. Pastor Randy Pfaff was a regular presence in the school and was known to students as “Pastor Randy.”

Pfaff held a weekly pizza lunch at Florence High School, requiring students to pray in order to participate, and ran the school’s Fellowship of

Christian Huskies club, in violation of the Equal Access Act’s requirements that school clubs be “student-initiated” and not run or regularly attended by “nonschool persons.” The district also permitted Pfaff and other Cowboy Church attendees to initiate a daily prayer at the school flagpole, which Principal Brian Schipper and other staff members also attended.

Plaintiff Robert Basevitz filed suit in April over many of the same issues FFRF had raised. Basevitz also said students had singled him out for being Jewish. His complaint called the Fellowship of Christian Huskies a “front designed to allow Pastor Pfaff and the church to use the school as a platform for his ‘mission work’ of preaching to students and staff,” and pointed out that the group was sponsored by the school as well. The school district let Pfaff hold a bible distribution masquerading as a “scholarship night” for seniors and put on a Christian concert during the school day.

Upon learning the suit had been filed, Seidel contacted Paul Maxon, Basevitz’s attorney, and offered FFRF’s assistance, including the information, facts and plaintiffs FFRF had accumulated with the aim of filing its own lawsuit. The parties settled the case July 28. Under the agreement, school district employees cannot engage in religious activities with their students, sponsor prayer, sponsor religious activities, endorse religious groups or distribute religious literature. In addition, student-led religious groups must be genuinely student-led, and outside adults cannot direct or regularly attend student group activities.

Seidel, who consulted on the settlement, welcomed the news that Cowboy Church will no longer use district facilities for its worship services, and in the future, the district will prohibit use of its facilities “by an group that impairs the district’s ability to carry out its educational mission, including groups that create a reasonable risk of liability for violation of constitutional mandates.”

“Andrew Seidel and the Freedom from Religion Foundation were instrumental in helping us successfully prosecute this case and secure removal of a church from a public school,” said Maxon. “Because of the complex nature of Establishment Clause law, being able to access the expertise of FFRF’s lawyers was invaluable in our efforts to properly frame the issues in this case.”



Julian Bond

Saluting Julian Bond, civil libertarian, atheist

Civil rights leader Horace Julian Bond, 75, died Aug. 15 of vascular disease in Fort Walton, Beach, Fla. The iconic civil libertarian, journalist and author who co-founded the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Southern Poverty Law Center, chaired the NAACP and served in the Georgia Legislature, was also a nonbeliever.

Doug Blackmon of “American Forum” on PBS interviewed Bond this year, asking him, “Are you a believer?” Bond replied, “No,” then asked with a smile, “Will that tarnish my reputation?”

He went on to criticize mainstream churches for being “absent without leave today” on civil rights issues and religious homophobia. “Why don’t we hear church voices?”

Florida school district paid \$86,000 to contest FFRF lawsuit

Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., spent \$86,164.68 paying its attorney to defend a lawsuit filed by FFRF, only to eventually do what FFRF requested it do months before filing suit.

That money could have bought 861,645 No. 2 pencils, 47,869 elementary school student meals or nearly 400 Chromebooks for students. In 2013, FFRF sent a letter asking the district to close a “forum” that was created at the behest of a Christian missionary group that wanted to continue to distribute bibles to students.

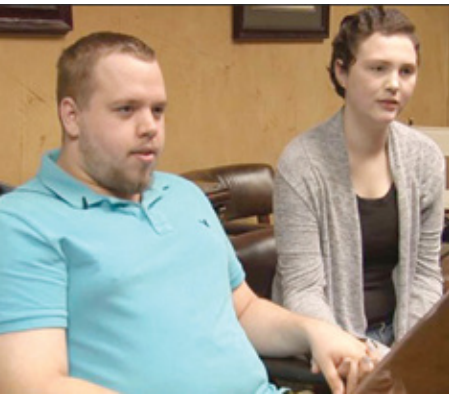
When the district kept the forum open, FFRF asked to distribute its own materials to students. The school district then censored many of the materials FFRF sought to distribute, and FFRF sued over the censorship. To end that lawsuit, in February 2015, the school district closed the forum for religious distributions, which is what FFRF suggested in its first letter.

“Had the district listened to FFRF as a concerned ally rather than treated us as an adversary, it could have saved a lot of time and money,” said FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel. “We urge oth-

er public schools to stick to the business of educating students, not providing outside groups with a platform to preach to other people’s children.”

Allowing religious literature distributions turns public schools into religious battlegrounds, fraught with solicitation and propaganda. FFRF’s position is that the best course is to disallow all third-party literature distribution, and FFRF finds it unfortunate that Orange County Public Schools had to pay its lawyers tens of thousands of dollars to come to the same conclusion.

FFRF objects to proselytizing judge



Josten Bundy and Elizabeth Jaynes had a shotgun wedding, so to speak.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation sent a complaint Aug. 13 to the Texas State Commission on Judicial Conduct about Smith County Judge Randall Rogers, who forced Josten Bundy and Elizabeth Jaynes to marry as a condition of Bundy’s probation on misdemeanor assault charges after a fight with Jaynes’ ex-boyfriend. Jaynes was not involved in the incident and did not face any charges. The couple has since married per the judge’s orders.

The Tyler judge also required Bundy to write Proverbs 26:27, “If a man digs

a pit, he will fall into it,” 25 times a day.

Staff Attorney Sam Grover submitted FFRF’s complaint to the judicial ethics commission on Aug. 13. “Judges cannot require people to get married or force them to write bible verses. Judge Rogers’ conduct was illegal and he should face serious consequences for it. His actions demonstrate a religious bias with significant implications for any nonreligious or non-Christian litigants appearing before him.”

FFRF has nearly 1,000 members in Texas. FFRF’s complaint garnered international coverage.

Best time ever to be a freethinker is now!



Jim Haught

FFRF member Jim Haught gave this talk July 25 in Charleston, W.Va., at an event jointly sponsored by the Charleston Secular Humanist Community Center and the Morgantown Atheists.

By James A. Haught

In the entire history of civilization, the best time for us religious skeptics is now. America’s culture rapidly is swinging our way. The Secular Age is snowballing, right before our eyes. Post-Christian America is arriving at a gallop.

Once, we would have been burned at the stake as heretics, or thrown into prison for blasphemy. But now, finally, Western society is reaching a point at which old social stigmas against doubters are disappearing. We may become the new majority.

We live in a time of victory for honest, intelligent, rational, educated, scientific thinking. We are watching the relentless decline of supernatural religion, with its magical gods, devils, heavens, hells, angels, demons, miracles, revelations, virgin births, visions,

resurrections, divine prophecies, holy visitations, incarnations, reincarnations, second comings and such bible stuff.

Year after year, the culture around us is evolving. Secularism is taking over America, just as it previously did in Europe, Canada, Australia, Japan and other advanced democracies. The supernatural mentality still prevails in the Muslim world — and in less-developed tropical zones — but the modern West is leaving it behind.

I’m in my 80s, so I’ve had a long time to see the transformation. Few remember what the bible belt was like in the 1950s. Back then, it was a crime for stores to open on the Sabbath. It was a crime to buy a cocktail or a lottery ticket. It was a crime to look at something like a Playboy magazine or to read a sexy book. (I remember when our mayor sent police to raid bookstores that sold *Peyton Place*.) It was a crime for an unmarried couple to share a bedroom. It was a felony to be gay, and homosexuals were sent to the old stone prison at Moundsville. It was a felony for a desperate girl to end a pregnancy. Jews weren’t allowed into Christian country clubs. Prayer was mandatory in school classrooms. Church-supported laws dominated.

That world has simply disappeared, decade after decade. The culture evolved. Sunday “blue laws” were undone. Teacher-led school prayers were banned. Gay sex became legal. Liquor clubs were approved. Abortion became legal. State governments became lottery operators. Censorship ended. Other church taboos gradually disappeared.

Within my lifetime, morality flip-flopped. Religion lost its grip on American society, yet it happened so gradually that hardly anyone noticed.

Creeping secularism slowly won the day, defeating religion step by step.

Along with the transformation of laws, religion suffered drastic decline of church membership. After World War II, faith collapsed in Europe and other Western democracies. America seemed an exception, but the secular tidal wave finally arrived. Since the 1990s, surveys find a snowballing increase in young Americans who say their religion is “none.” A Pew Religious Landscape report in May found that “nones” have climbed to nearly one-fourth of America’s adult population, while the number of aging church members keeps shrinking. Significantly, 35% of those under age 34 eschew religion. The secular trend seems unstoppable.

Most people don’t quite grasp it, but the rapid American acceptance of gay equality, and the stunning Supreme Court ruling that made same-sex marriage legal nationwide, shook religion like an earthquake. David Brooks of The New York Times wrote:

“American culture is shifting away from orthodox Christian positions on homosexuality, premarital sex, contraception, out-of-wedlock childbearing, divorce and a range of other social issues. More and more Christians feel estranged from mainstream culture. They fear that they soon will be treated as social pariahs, the moral equivalent of segregationists because of their adherence to scriptural teaching on gay marriage. They fear that their colleges

Significantly, 35% of those under age 34 eschew religion.

will be decertified, their religious institutions will lose their tax-exempt status. . . . The Supreme Court’s gay marriage decision landed like some sort of culminating body blow onto this beleaguered climate.”

Rod Dreher of The American Conservative wrote that the high court ruling “did not come from nowhere. It is the logical result of the Sexual Revolution, which valorized erotic liberty.” He added, “We have to accept that we really are living in a culturally post-Christian nation.”

Of course, millions of Americans still belong to churches and will continue to do so. But evolving public attitudes may relegate believers to low status, shunned by intelligent, educated, scientific-minded people. For example, Atlantic Monthly reported: “In 2012, roughly a quarter of American religious congregations reported instances of members ‘speaking in tongues,’ a 5-percentage-point bump from what was reported in 1998.”

Churchgoers of this sort are laughable to mainstream society. The culture doesn’t take them seriously. Low-brow “holy roller” Christianity won’t wield much influence over this nation.

After decades of struggle — centuries, actually — freethinkers are witnessing a collapse of supernatural religion in America. We doubters no longer need hide our skepticism; we can declare it proudly. It is the hallmark of intelligence and education. We are the new dominant force, prevailing at last.

As I said at the start, the best time to be a skeptic is now.

James Haught is editor of West Virginia’s largest newspaper, the Charleston Gazette-Mail. His latest book is Religion Is Dying.

It all started with ‘What about the dinosaurs?’

By David Lubeck

My religious education started and ended at age 10. When the teacher began by talking about the origin of everything as detailed in Genesis, I politely raised my hand and asked “What about the dinosaurs?” The unavailability of a satisfactory answer led to more questions, and while my parents insisted I remain in the class for a while, it became a small war of faith versus reason. I never won the war, but eventually I was allowed to withdraw unscathed from the battlefield.

I have engaged in multiple skirmishes in this war in the succeeding 70 years, and I regret to report I have yet to win one. My bitterest defeat is my daughter, an otherwise bright and wonderful person, who is not only a practicing Jew but runs a Jewish non-profit organization. I once stood in her living room wringing my hands while she lit the Friday night candles in her kitchen, asking myself “Where did I go wrong?” It was funny and sad at the same time.

In the course of the many times I have engaged in these fruitless battles I have learned a few things. They include:

1. Humor, especially sarcasm, is counterproductive.
2. The words you use matter. We unbelievers generally describe ourselves

as atheists. That is defining ourselves as what we are against. It is better to use a word like “rationalist.” Then at least you are for something.

3. Questions work better than statements. All but the rarest believer have moments of doubt. Sometimes you can see them waver when you mesh with one.

4. *Reductio ad absurdum* does not work. It often seems to me a devastating argument, but it is always brushed off as nonsense.

5. Be polite and respectful. Laughing at the nonsense of believers may be natural, but it just raises hackles and increases defensiveness.

6. Be firm. “Yes, but . . .” loses points. The believer has no foundation but hearsay and false hope. Any concessions will strengthen that fragile underpinning.

7. The battle is worth fighting. The fantasy that this is a purposeful universe is more comforting than the truth. But since so often religion by its very nature goes to extremes that provide anything but comfort and provides excuses for all the cruelty that our nature can conceive, it must be fought and perhaps one day contained. The advanced, educated, industrial countries are slowly and steadily growing less religious. The United States is a laggard in this regard, but it is happening. There is some small hope that reason will prevail.

Having said all of the above, and

without lessening the enthusiasm to bring reason to the world, there are times when we have to shut up. I was working for a hospital some years ago which was being acquired by a Catholic health care organization. I, an apostate Jew with a big mouth, was somewhat apprehensive about how I would fare in the new regime. One of my co-workers, a woman in her 50s, said something that led me to say something snarky about our new masters. It led to a brief discussion which ended when she said, with overflowing sincerity, “I don’t know how I could go on without my faith.”

I stopped. Nothing I said, witty or wise, could replace for this woman at that stage in her life, the underpinnings of her universe. However false it might be, this is what kept her going.

Don’t think that I gave up the fight. The day the merger was official, I put a large sign over my desk which declared, “The Delusion of One Is Neurosis; The Delusion of Many Is Religion.” (I have forgotten whom I was quoting.) The sign stayed there, unchallenged, until I retired 12 years later.

I really only had one run-in with the “Inquisition” in those 12 years. A nice young lady who produced the in-house newsletter picked up and reproduced an article talking about those who were delayed getting to work in the twin towers on Sept. 11, 2001. It went on at some length about the greatness and goodness of the God who spared them.

I pointed out in an email to her that by that logic, the same omnipotent and omniscient God who had spared these individuals, by failing to act, had condemned the 3,000 to death.

I promptly received a summons to see the vice president of Mission, a rather formidable nun. We had a very spirited 20-minute discussion which ended in an armed truce. There was no further problem until I retired eight years later.

I suppose my point is that we must fight the good fight when we can, because we are very, very slowly winning, but there are times to back off.

Mr. Lubeck adds: I’m almost 80 and amazed to have made it this far, having broken many of the rules for long life. I was an English major in college, planning to be a teacher and write the great American novel. I discovered I was not patient enough to be a teacher and didn’t have the novel in me. I made my living mostly by selling things, then fell into the job that was made for me, hospital risk manager. I got to play lawyer without the bother of law school, bar exams, etc. I retired at 75 because I just couldn’t haul my tail into those 7 a.m. meetings any more. I’ve lived in New Jersey for the last 48 years but still talk, think and act like a New Yorker. I play bridge and chess and read like a fiend, mostly junk mysteries these days, but some history and politics to keep it real. By all means, let’s keep it real!

FFRF awards \$17,950 to high school seniors

Announcing 2015 William J. Schulz High School Essay Contest winners

The Freedom From Religion Foundation sincerely congratulates the 23 college-bound high school seniors who won this year’s joint essay competition. FFRF, an educational state/church watchdog that has more than 22,700 members nationwide, has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994 and graduate students since 2010.

Seniors were asked to pick from two topics, “Why I’m good without God” or “Atheist/Nonbeliever of color,” and submit 500 to 700 words. FFRF doubled the number of awardee slots this year, awarding first through sixth place for both topics, plus discretionary honorable mentions. There were 13 top awards and 10 honorable mentions. (For unknown reasons, there were many more entries from female students.)

Winners of both competitions are listed below and include the award amount and college or university they’ll be attending in the fall:

First place: Jennifer Gray, 18, Brandeis University (\$3,000)
First place: Teneisha Neal, 18, Troy University (\$3,000)
Second place: Tess Monet Brown, 18, California Institute of the Arts (\$2,000)
Second place: Ananya Garg, 18, University of Washington-Seattle (\$2,000)
Third place: Alison Farmer, 18, Michigan State University (\$1,000)
Third place: Joelene Kuaana, 18, University of La Verne (\$1,000)
Fourth place: Aliyah Davis, 18, Georgia State University (\$750)
Fourth place: Lily Zhang, 17, University of Maryland-College Park (\$750)
Fifth place: Sasha Rogelberg, 18, Bryn Mawr College (\$500)
Fifth place: Alaina Hoover, 18, Dru-ry University (\$500)
Fifth place: Karina Solano Suarez, 18, DePaul University (\$500)
Sixth place: Jonathan Ortiz, 17, University of Florida (\$400)
Sixth place: Bria Bertrand, 18, Ken-

nesaw State University (\$400)
Honorable mentions (\$200 each):
Erica Broderhausen, 18, Boston University
Kierra Robertson, 18, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Kahley McBeth, 18, Pennsylvania State University
Julian Rauter, 18, Harvard University
Anna Bores, 17, Binghamton University
Grace Powers, 17, Green Mountain College
Telexius Wilson, 18, Palm Beach State
Hannah Dolan, 18, University of Oregon
Taressa Straighter, 18, Purdue University
Jazmyn Glause, 18, University of Wisconsin-Madison
“We truly consider our scholarships for freethinking students to be among FFRF’s most important investments in the future of freethought,” said

Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “There are thousands of scholarships for religious student, and hardly any rewarding critical thinking and the use of reason in forming an opinion about religion.”

The winning essays for the “good without God” contest appear in this issue. The winning batch for the topic of challenges facing “nonbelievers of color” will run in the October issue. Next to be announced: FFRF’s selection of winners of its college essay competition and its graduate student essay competition.

The high school contest is named for William J. Schulz, a Wisconsin member who died at 57, was a chemical engineer and cared deeply about FFRF’s work, leaving a bequest that funds the awards. FFRF also thanks Dean and Dorea Schramm of Florida for providing a \$50 bonus to students who are members of a secular student club or the Secular Student Alliance. The total of \$17,950 reflects bonuses.

Pray to Play

Continued from front page

Cincinnati, Auburn and Georgia’s chaplains. Chaplains typically have ties to the coaches: Bowden’s second chaplain was a minister at his church; Georgia’s chaplain is head coach Mark Richt’s brother-in-law.

This type of activity is illegal at a public university, but coaches think they can get away with it because, as Ole Miss head coach Hugh Freeze put it, “I do everything through the FCA [Fellowship of Christian Athletes] platform.” But even the FCA seems to recognize the problem. Their own legal analysis says that, “In a public university setting, there must be adequate separation so that an employee’s views are not perceived as connected to a university course” or the university itself.

Yet coaches like Freeze and Tuberville regularly fundraise for their chaplain and the FCA, using their influence and position to direct funds to religious organizations rather than the school or athletic program. The FCA’s influence is especially apparent in the business proposal FFRF obtained between the FCA and the University of Washington, which inadvertently admits there is no need for a football chaplain because “schools have mentorship programs and life-skill programs. Schools also



FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel (left) appeared on MSNBC’s “Sports Matters” Aug. 25 to discuss FFRF’s “Pray to Play” report. Host Rob Simmelkjaer also interviewed Simon Brown (right) of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Seidel was the report’s principal author, with assistance from Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott and Neal Fitzgerald and Chris Line, legal interns.

tend to have psychologists on hand that students can access on a need to need basis. Campuses have religious centers where students can attend regardless of faith or denomination. There are multiple outside organizations that exist.”

FFRF sent copies of the report, which includes a model policy to adopt, to presidents at the public schools with the most flagrant chaplaincies, including Auburn University, Univer-

sity of Georgia, University of South Carolina, Mississippi State, University of Alabama, University of Tennessee, Louisiana State University, University of Missouri, University of Washington, Georgia Tech, University of Illinois, Florida State, University of Mississippi, University of Wisconsin and Clemson University.

The model policy suggests hiring a counselor with genuine training if student athletes are truly in need.

FFRF is sending players on several teams, including Georgia, South Carolina, Auburn, Alabama, Tennessee, Missouri, North Carolina, Georgia Tech, North Carolina State, Wisconsin and Illinois, an explanation of their rights as students at secular universities.

Finally, the report exposes the misconception at the heart of this problem: Some coaches think that students need to be Christians in order to be good people. This myth persists despite the arrest of Oklahoma’s chaplain for stealing prescription pills and the conviction of Tuberville’s latest chaplain hire at the University of Cincinnati for sexually assaulting a 73-year-old grocery store clerk.

Auburn and Alabama have refused to provide records for the report, violating their state open records laws. Auburn did so after requesting a \$500 deposit from FFRF in December. FFRF is considering litigation.

See FFRF’s press release with the report and supporting documents at: bit.ly/1Lpujhu or scroll to Aug. 17 press release at ffrf.org/news.

FFRF Staff Attorneys Andrew Seidel and Patrick Elliot produced the exposé with help from Legal Interns Chris Line and Neal Fitzgerald.

Nonbelief Relief

Continued from front page

Lisa Strand, FFRF’s director of operations, will serve as treasurer/secretary, and Jim Zerwick, a board member of FFRF, will also serve on the Nonbelief Relief board.

FFRF has seeded the charity via a \$200,000 special donation. Individual donors may designate contributions to Nonbelief Relief via FFRF. (If do-

nating online, choose the Nonbelief Relief designation in the dropdown.) Only donations to FFRF specifically earmarked will go to Nonbelief Relief.

Nonbelief Relief will contribute and raise funds during serious natural disasters, permitting nontheistic donors to give as part of a secular charity.

But Nonbelief Relief will also fill a void by offering help to nonbelievers who find themselves imperiled or threatened because of their nonreligious views, writings or activism. There

are many charities for believers, but nothing adequately meeting the needs of nonbelievers increasingly targeted for their atheism, apostasy or “blasphemy,” Gaylor noted.

Earlier this year, FFRF’s initial Nonbelief Relief project awarded \$20,000 to imperiled atheist Taslima Nasrin, a physician, writer and poet. The Center for Inquiry also helped her escape India after death threats escalated. Nasrin has been the subject of a fatwa for more than 20 years for angering imams

in her native Bangladesh. She more recently appeared on a death list that also contained the names of four secular writers and bloggers in Bangladesh who were brutally hacked to death by Islamists since February.

“Our giving will not be inspired by a bible or so-called holy book, or by the desire that we will get a heavenly reward. Our giving is inspired by wishing to ‘Make the world better,’ in the last words of 19th century American feminist Lucy Stone,” Gaylor said.

First place: William J. Schulz High School Essay Award

Why I have no need for religion



Jennifer Gray

FFRF awarded Jennifer \$3,000.

By Jennifer Gray

I did not grow up with religion. Many of the stories seem strange, implausible and rather silly. I have come to think the only real way to become invested in the doctrine of the bible is to have grown up with it — have the stories dictated to children as laws of the world. However, even if I had had an upbringing steeped in dogma, I still

think I would have eventually abandoned it. I questioned too much.

I thought a lot at age 6 about the world and what happened after death. Perhaps I was a bit of a morbid child, entertaining myself with thoughts of existence, but I came to consider many philosophical flaws I still see as inherent in the system “preached” by religion. I did not understand the idea of a system warning of the dangers of greed and ambition, yet bribing followers with rewards. It seemed everything came down to death and the magic ticket into heaven. I thought it was so aggressively selfish: Be nice to others so you can be rewarded later. It is all about what you get in the end, not the good you do.

The most consistent argument against the idea of religion promoting virtue and harmony is that it has been the direct cause of wars and human suffering. The haphazard zealous mess that was the Crusades is certainly a shining example, as is the great cruelty toward the Jewish people in World War II. My grandfather had been a devout man before the news of the horrors of concentration camps. The atrocity caused him to declare there was no God. Why would God allow such a thing to happen? Why would a kind, benevolent God create people destined to hurt other people? My parents shielded me from his ponderings; they were not the thoughts a child ought to have.

When my father presented me with the information concerning this scholarship, he told me not to tell my mother. He said she would cry. I would be a different person from the moment I voiced my atheism. The confession, as it were, supposedly changes a person in the eyes of others — twists them into something immoral and lost. A lack of faith is something to be mourned.

I have always thought it hypocritical that the same people vowing in rows of other people like themselves to be kind and saintly turn so violent against someone who does not see things the way they do. It is dangerous to call yourself an atheist; they are not to be trusted, only those who automatically shun them on principle are worthy human beings. I have always thought it strange that acceptance is not considered a virtue.

While the brutality of war is reason enough to doubt the benefits of religion, my main concern has always been how it discourages freethought. Religion promotes a closed-minded-

ness and complete aversion to progress that causes abrupt halts to future schools of thought. It advocates clinging to the words written in an archaic book above all else.

It is so strange how we as a society have almost universally come to the conclusion that many old philosophers and scientists were plainly wrong, yet we still hold on to this one document as indisputable fact.

I do not need to be watched over to do the right thing. Morality is about the choices we make, and I personally do not need a man in the clouds looking over my shoulder to choose what is right. I can be a good person without memorizing verses or rattling off names of saints long since dead. I can be a moral person without offering up prayers to some abstract idea of fate as a father figure. I can do what is right because I believe in humanity and kindness.

Goodness is not equivalent to religion. I do not need bribes or faith to understand the almost childish simplicity of a just life.

Jennifer Gray, 18, lives in Carlton, Ore. and attended Forest Grove High School. “I plan to attend Brandeis University in the fall and am currently interested in studying history and the humanities in general, as I have been interested in art and English for a long time.”

Why would a kind, benevolent God create people destined to hurt other people?

Second place: High school essay contest

Can’t we all just get along?

FFRF awarded Tess \$2,000.

By Tess Monet Brown

God is an overblown Santa Claus. He has a naughty and a nice list, and he sees you when you’re sleeping. But God wants you to repent. God wants your praise and your money and your devotion. He wants your time and your fear and your unwavering loyalty. And without your faith you will be damned for all eternity!

All Santa wants is milk and cookies. I believed in Santa until I was 12. I believed in God — well, never.

In the biblical tale of Job, God discovers a man who is kind and moral and full of faith. God decides to make a deal with the devil to see if they can turn Job into a sinner by torturing him. For me, that’s a rather large red flag. Excuse me — hang on a minute — who does this Almighty God think he is?

Yet millions of people have devoted their lives to worshipping this cruel, oversized bully who is so full of Himself that we are expected to capitalize His pronouns. Is this common sense? I can hardly believe that people in such overwhelming numbers believe in and worship an invisible, arrogant fear-monger. God is love? No, God is “fear my irrational wrath!” If you ask me, we atheists are just people who have proven we have at least half a brain.



Tess Monet Brown

“Love thy neighbor” is the second commandment in the novel called the Holy Bible, and yet, oddly enough, it’s mostly atheists who are consistently following it. Most of us don’t have a default of discrimination. We aren’t programmed with prejudice, while most religions are riddled with it. Most atheists will accept you if you are gay, straight, white, black, purple, Martian or otherwise. And then there is God, who is not only greedy but bipolar. He commands you to love thy neighbor and then condemns the gays to death in the next chapter. Sounds a tad unstable.

It’s irrational to generalize that atheists are more moral than other people, just as it’s impossible to say that religion makes you moral. You make yourself moral. Moral atheists, however, are moral in that we don’t need a God to

tell us to love others. And there are far more moral atheists that I have seen than moral religious fanatics. Atheists don’t need God to keep them from murdering. Meanwhile, the character of God, in another fabulous display of split personality syndrome, was at the root of the Crusades, responsible for the death of millions in his name.

For me, life has been a near constant struggle against the negative connotations surrounding atheism. Living in a fairly religious community, I’ve grown used not only to the “holier than thou” attitudes of my peers, but I’ve come to expect them. The best response I have to “Why don’t you believe in God?” is “Because I don’t need one.” It’s the truth. There’s nothing superior in religion. No one needs a god to be moral. In fact, more atrocities have been committed in the name of God and morality than for any other reason.

To be moral, you only need a conscience. I am good without God because I know right from wrong. And I know science. I know common sense. I know that clouds are made of condensed water and that it’s physically impossible for some higher being to make a throne out of one. He’d fall right through.

However, as atheists, we are going about it wrong. We spend most of our time trying to do what I have just done. Trying to convince religious people that the idea of God is irrational. This is a lost cause. Instead, we should con-

Millions of people have devoted their lives to worshipping this cruel, oversized bully who is so full of Himself that we are expected to capitalize His pronouns.

tinue to show our acceptance, our contentment and our kindness to others. We should let the world know, religious and otherwise, that we aim to have no prejudice. That, in keeping the idea God out of our lives, we are encouraging independence and freethought.

I know that all I want is for this poor, conflicted human race to coexist.

Tess Monet Brown, 17, was a senior at Robert McQueen High School in Reno, Nev. She will be attending the California Institute of the Arts for the Voice Arts. “From a very young age I have loved music more than anything in the world. I also love to act, dance, write fiction, cook and learn languages. I am a proud atheist and have been all my life.”

Third place: High school essay contest

‘Evasive’ religion offers few answers

FFRF awarded Alison \$1,000.

By Alison Farmer

My best friend is from a religious background that is the opposite of mine. She was raised conservative Christian, home-schooled, never once presented with an opinion other than those sanctioned by her church. I, to the contrary, had the good fortune to be raised in a freethinking family.

When we were first getting to know one another, we talked earnestly about a number of things, including religion. This was in middle school, a time when I first started seriously thinking for myself. I was speaking of the irrelevance of religion when she remarked that religion was necessary for morality. This was an idea I had never before considered, but immediately saw as ridiculous. Wasn't I proof by my very existence that this was untrue?

I was raised without a shred of faith infecting my love of science and reason, but remained as good a person as any. This was explained (unsatisfactorily) away by suggesting that because I was raised in a religious society, the good morals from my Christian neighbors somehow influenced my morality. Curiously enough, this is roughly similar to the theory I have since adopted.

I am a moral human being for two reasons: empathy and society. From these we gain the most fundamental and universal of social contracts: the golden rule. While the idea to treat others as you would wish to be treated



Alison Farmer

seems almost elementary, it provides the basis for an ethical society. This social contract is maintained by both an intrinsic moral compass and the external pressures of society.

Any human being capable of compassion and empathy is motivated to morality. If I can understand how my actions affect another person, and understand how I would be affected in that individual's place, I will be guided by my nagging moral compass away from improper actions. Of course, as we have all experienced, moral compasses fail, or can be ignored.

While empathy creates a moral compass, society enforces it. If my moral compass should fail and I act wrongly—stealing, for example—the rest of so-

ciety, quite content living without fear of thieves, will punish me for my failure to observe the accepted standards.

In this way, morality is established in only the most secular of fashions. While religion may act as a vessel for morality, it is not the source. In fact, religion is often detrimental to morality. Religion is certainly capable of acting as a force for good, but far too often is exploited by its adherents.

It is when religion is used to justify the degradation and exclusion of fellow human beings that it becomes counterproductive. It is a universal truth that human beings are afraid of the unknown. Why bother trying to overcome your fear of others when you can condemn and denounce them? Using very specific interpretations of a book from a supposedly infallible deity to declare your own superiority is by far the easier route.

While it may be true that humans are afraid of the unknown, the cure is luckily simple: become known. Counteracting negative stereotypes about atheists and nonbelievers simply requires that we are open to our communities. Overall, I have been pleasantly surprised by my fellow human beings.

Living in extremely religious west-

ern Michigan, I expected far worse reactions from people regarding my atheism than I ever received. Most people don't know anything about atheists other than stories from their religious community, hardly an accurate source. The best and easiest way for us to counter negative stereotypes is just by being accessible.

I am an atheist because I want answers; not the evasive sidestepping of religion but the thoughtful analysis of science. I want to understand the world around me, to understand the connections between everything and everything else. I have never experienced anything in my life to suggest the presence of a deity.

I am not, and have never been, afraid of death. I do not need religion to comfort me. I am not the sort of person to take things on faith. I am an atheist simply because I see no logical alternative.

I am happy just to be in existence, a wonderfully complex arrangement of molecules enjoying a beautiful, fulfilling, moral life on this Earth — without religion.

Alison Farmer, 18, is from Grand Rapids, Mich., and is headed to Michigan State University. She graduated from Forest Hills Central High School and plans on majoring in environmental geoscience. She has been involved with the FHC orchestra, Science Olympiad and National Honor Society. "I'm interested in all things Firefly, steampunk, Jane Austen, feminism or DIY-related."

While religion may act as a vessel for morality, it is not the source.

Fourth place: High school essay contest

Making my community better without God

FFRF awarded Aliyah \$750.

By Aliyah Davis

For 13 years, I have recited the Girl Scout promise at every troop meeting, camp visit, and special event I have ever attended. There is a line that reads: "On my honor, I will try to serve God. . ." In the handbook, the asterisk notes that "God" can be replaced by what the girl is comfortable saying, since Girl Scouts is a multicultural organization.

As a young child, I would say God out of memorization, without any connection to religion and beliefs I had yet to establish. Over time, I thought about the meaning behind the words. Who is God and why must I serve him?

When I was 10, I told my mother and her friend that the bible was nothing more than another book on a shelf. They both thought I was "simply confused." Soon after the incident, my mom insisted that I take a bible study class at church. The instructor made me read lines from the book, none of which I understood. Apparently, I would "be a better person" after reading God's words. I asked, "Who is God and why should he be the judge of

whether or not I'm a good person? Is he even real?"

The church staff was flabbergasted, as if no other person had questioned the existence of anything they ever believed. I never received a valid answer. As I left the church, an older woman grabbed me and said, "Once you accept God for who he is, you will be forgiven." This was the most ridiculous thing I had encountered in my life. Why should I be deemed a bad person for not having faith in a religion, specifically Christianity? At that time, I declared myself an atheist.

The best thing Girl Scouts taught me was to treat others how I would want to be treated. I have consistently gone out of my way to make others feel appreciated, welcome and loved, no matter who they are, with hopes that they would return the favor to me. But not because God is watching or that is what Jesus would do. I was nice so people would respect me for the acts of kindness I displayed.

At school I was a teacher's pet and class favorite. I was often praised for how well I interacted with other students. The interactions I had with my peers fueled a love for serving my community, not God. This was the most direct method to make the world, in



Aliyah Davis

which I live, a better place and to make me a better person.

One of my best volunteer experiences was at a Salvation Army homeless shelter. I was apprehensive about going because I knew it was a faith-based organization. I was a part of a group who helped serve dinner to shelter residents. I learned that the majority were

ex-criminals who were on their way to get "better."

Despite going through the Salvation Army program, some become repeat offenders and go through the program multiple times. I learned that religion does not stop people from making the same bad decisions twice. Doing the right thing is a personal choice.

As an atheist living in Georgia in the bible belt of America, I have found it hard to be openly accepted in society. I know the difference between right and wrong and my atheism has nothing to do with it. Personally, I find joy in volunteering. It's my way of giving back to my community and serving others.

I'm not angry with the world; I love what it has to offer. I think showing a willingness to help anyone in need counters what theists choose to believe about nonbelievers. The stereotypes will always exist, but being an active member of your community helps ease what others think atheists represent.

Aliyah Davis, 17, graduated from Shaw High School in Columbus, Ga. She will be attending Georgia State University in Atlanta. "I intend on majoring in environmental studies or marketing. I have strong interests in preserving the environment for later generations."

Fifth place (tie): High school essay contest

This is my life, not God’s

FFRF awarded Alaina \$500.

By Alaina Hoover

When I was a young girl looking at a wide variety of religions to choose from, I could definitely see the temptations: a group of welcoming believers, some guidance and a feeling of connection to a supposed “holy being.” But I decided that I first wanted to step back and assess all religions before picking the “destiny that guides me.”

I found that failing to follow others, waiting to decide my life’s religious viewpoint at a more mature age and attempting to think for myself was frowned upon. When I was asked what church I attended by classmates, their eyes bugged out of their heads when I said I did not attend one.

When learning about world history, I didn’t know all of the “holiness” of Jerusalem that was assumed was common knowledge. Friends would offer to let me attend church with them. It seemed as if they thought I was missing out on something. Eventually, this led me to try a day of church with my grandmother.

Sitting there with the sounds of the preacher lulling in the background, I looked around and listened for anything “divine.” But all I could hear were babies crying, people standing and sitting in some sort of Morse code and teenagers on their phones, obvi-

ously bored with the service. How was this “enlightening” at all? How does this show me the right path?

Troubled by these questions, I brought them to my mother, another nonbeliever. She had attended church as a child yet was happy in having no religion at all after taking college mythology classes. She pointed out that worshipers today believe that their religion is better than mythological past religions, which they laugh at, calling them “stories.”

The morals that are ‘taught by God’ were written by men.

Yet to the Greeks who created them, those stories were as meaningful as the bible, Quran or Torah are today. My mother made me realize that religions often scoff at each other, yet they are all one and the same when looked at through a nonbeliever’s eyes. I’ll admit this made me angry. How can others tell me that I have no morals by following my own? The morals that are “taught by God” were written by men. Who is to say that one person’s morals from 3,500 years ago are better than mine today? I just could not see any sense in it.

Another fault I find in the argument of religious followers is the idea of prayer. Faced with high cholesterol? Pray for it to get lower. Upset by uproars in Ferguson? Pray for peace. Family members going through tough times? Pray for God to provide them a job. Religious followers are so eager to pray for everyone and have God fix it for them, yet many are not willing to put in the work themselves.

If you have an unhealthy lifestyle, then fix your diet and exercise. If you are upset with society, then work to help fix it. If your family member cannot afford rent, then send a little bit of money their way. Instead of taking time to kneel on a floor, believers should take the time to get out and do something about it.

So how do we open their eyes? Well, we don’t. In trying to tell people that their religion is wrong, we would be hypocritical in the sense that we are trying to force our viewpoints on someone else (as they have done to us). But we can show them that there are more important values than what “God tells us.”

We can create our own morality and act on it. We can make a difference in our community. We won’t do nice things because “we’re Christians.” We’ll do nice things because we want to. Maybe when seeing that, as nonbelievers, we have the freedom to be happier and live as we want to, they will open their eyes and join us.

Hopefully, in the end, they will re-



Alaina Hoover

alize life is about finding and defining your own path, not one that someone (or something) decides for you.

Alaina Hoover, 17, graduated from Triad High School, Troy, Ill., and will be attending Drury University in Springfield, Mo. “I plan on going into premedicine with a major in biopsychology. I am going to minor in Spanish and take classes in philosophy as well.”

Fifth place (tie): High school essay contest

Morality is inherent in human beings



Sasha Rogelberg

FFRF awarded Sasha \$500.

By Sasha Rogelberg

Years ago, my Jewish grandmother said that she would rather vote for a Christian presidential candidate than an atheist, as a religious individual would have higher moral standards than a nonbeliever. This statement, despite being delivered by a dear loved one, just did not feel right to me.

As I processed and reflected on this to make sense of my discomfort, I soon realized that this moment marked a turning point in how I view the rela-

tionship between religion and morals. Ultimately, I believe morals are not at all dependent on faith.

My lack of faith in a god stemmed from the realization that my desire to treat people with compassion was not motivated by fear of judgment by a deity. One should not be a loving human because someone tells them to be that way; one should love because one wants to live in a world that is loving. An individual should be motivated to be kind because they want to bring others happiness and support.

When I perform an act of altruism, I do not consider a higher power; instead, I consider the feelings of another human. Religion provides extrinsic motivation for others to be kind, the promise of happiness in an afterlife, but being free from religion implies a more genuine motive: a motive rooted in just the need to be an excellent citizen of the human race.

As an agnostic, I’ve questioned the origins of morals. While many believe that morality derived from the Ten Commandments or other religious documents, I believe that morality is inherent in human beings.

Philosopher John Locke insisted that humans are born with the potential to be good. Psychologist Michael Tomasello observed toddlers interacting and found that they were likely to pick up dropped items or assist their

While many believe that morality derived from the Ten Commandments or other religious documents, I believe that morality is inherent in human beings.

peers without prompting. Tomasello attributes this kindness not to culture but to something natural. He even goes so far as to say that this kindness cannot be socialized and does not exist among any other species in the same way it does in humans.

This research suggests that positive, kind behaviors cannot be attributed to social constructs such as religion. It supports the finding that without religion, humans still have a strong moral foundation based on love and altruism. As secular individuals it is our job to reaffirm this foundation.

Rather than spreading the intended messages of love and peace, contemporary organized religion seems more concerned about making judgments and spreading dogma antithetical to messages of love and acceptance. For

example, some Christians seem to judge homosexuality as morally wrong and an “abomination” and send their children to gay conversion therapy rather than accept them as one of God’s creations.

Radical Muslims have used their doctrines to justify genocide of differing denominations of the same religion. These examples demonstrate hypocrisy in religion and speak to how religion can turn humans against each other, thus rendering the core tenets of their religion not only useless but harmful.

In order to combat oppression and stigmatization from religious institutions, nonbelievers must continue to be upstanding citizens and make their identities clear. Secular individuals must continue to show tolerance, kindness, compassion, love and acceptance to demonstrate that morals are a manifestation of being human, and that people can, indeed, be good without God.

Sasha Rogelberg, 18, graduated from Providence High School in Charlotte, N.C. She will attend Bryn Mawr College to major in psychology and minor in philosophy. In high school she was active in speech and debate and the school newspaper and was an officer in her Gay-Straight Alliance. She plans to continue her social activism as well as her hobbies in art and writing.

Sixth place: High school essay contest

Being good without God is being human

FFRF awarded Jonathan \$400.

By Jonathan Ortiz

A world without religion would be a wholly better one: Homosexuals and nonbelievers would not be considered the spawn of Satan; discrimination and bigotry could not be justified by 2,000-year-old texts; violence and terrorism in the name of God would not exist; liberal and free democracy would be omnipresent; scientific discoveries would not be halted because of some fairy tale; and we would do everything in our power to enjoy the only life we have and leave the world a better place than when we were born into it.

I am an agnostic atheist because there is no evidence of a God, only evidence of regression, suffering and blood at the hands of those willing to do anything to prove their god is the one and only.

I am good without God because I follow no petty absolute moralities and do not believe in eternal damnation. I am good and do good for the betterment of humankind, nothing else. I have been called “unpatriotic,” “un-American” and even a “traitor” by some of my peers for sitting politely during the Pledge of Allegiance or for suggesting “In God We Trust” be removed from our currency. I am told I disrespect our servicemen and have no moral compass.



Jonathan Ortiz

I am told all these things, and yet it is their religious texts they so revere that demonize gay servicemen and women, call for the stoning of adulterers and apostates and death for those who work on the Sabbath. If any secular text contained such vitriol, its author would be harshly criticized and looked down upon, quite rightly.

The way to be moral is to adopt a relative morality in which issues are discussed and debated with others, and reason, evidence and philosophy are considered. One must be moral simply to be moral, nothing else. No promise or threat of what comes in an afterlife

should motivate one not to murder or steal. This is ultimately why theists cannot claim they are moral, for they have an ulterior motive. To be truly moral is to do so willingly.

I believe the single best thing that can be done to counter these negative stereotypes is to better inform the public about what atheism is. Many believe that being an atheist constitutes eating babies or holding secret meetings to plan how best to destroy religion, when in reality it means only that one does not believe in a deity. We need to teach the importance of the scientific method and how crucial it is to make

decisions based on facts and reason rather than superstition. We need to teach that it is very possible, and quite frankly only possible, to be moral without God. If it were not possible, many of our modern day democracies would be stuck in the 7th century.

To be truly moral is to do so willingly.

Many of us atheists do not talk about the hypocrisies of religion every day as Richard Dawkins does or the late Christopher Hitchens did: We are on the whole a friendly bunch and believe in freedom of religion. It is when we are demonized for thinking critically that we stand up and call theists out. One day we will not have to come out as atheist to everyone we meet for it would be as though we are telling them something as innocuous as our favorite color. On that day we will have achieved a great victory: Making others see how natural it is to be good without God.

Jonathan Ortiz, 17, was born in Germany and attended Vilseck High School on an American military base known as the Rose Barracks near Vilseck, Germany. “I will attend the University of Florida in the fall and intend to study law. I am extremely interested in politics and hope to run for public office one day.”

Honorable mention: High school essay contest

Morality by threat or morality by love

FFRF awarded Anna \$200.

By Anna Bores

Being an atheist came naturally to me. I was never interested in the religious activities that my mom forced me into. Phrases like “If God isn’t real, we’re really wasting a lot of time” and “What makes our religion different from the other ones?” often found their way out my mouth and into my mother’s aggravated ears.

I just never felt this “force” or “love” from above that everyone seemed to experience; I usually just felt bored. Around the age of 12, I said to my cousin, “Hey Andrew, I don’t think I believe in God anymore.” He said, “That’s called being an atheist.”

It was not a big deal to me, but I soon realized that it was an enormous deal to other people. People gave me weird looks when I said I was an atheist. One friend told me that I was going to hell. A teacher said the word “atheists” with such extraordinary disdain, as if we were the spawn of Satan (I guess in her mind we were). It amazed and scared me that for the first time in my life people thought I was a bad person.

Around this time I started searching for atheism on YouTube. I needed



Anna Bores

validation. I needed to feel like I was not the only atheist on planet Earth (aside from babies). This is when I discovered the infamy that is Fox News. I read comments such as “If everyone followed the teachings of Jesus Christ, we’d have peace on Earth.” “Science doesn’t advance the human condition in any moralistic way.” “You (atheists) want to be rude and narcissistic and mean.”

On the one hand, the commentary is laughable because the claims are so outlandish, but on the other hand it is

sad. To this day, I have not talked about my atheist views anywhere on social media because I am afraid it may affect my future job prospects.

The ironic thing (not to toot my own horn) is I am a really moral person. I help people because knowing that I made their day better is rewarding. I do not need the promise of heaven or the threat of hell to force myself to be moral. I help others because making them happy makes me happy, and that is all I need.

Turning morality into a system of rewards and punishments seems self-centered. Some religious people are moral only to secure a positive eternity for themselves. It defeats the whole purpose of helping others, which is to make the world a happier and kinder place. There are endless examples of religion being twisted into something grotesquely immoral: gay conversion

I help others because making them happy makes me happy, and that is all I need.

therapy, the Crusades, slavery, my own great-grandmother dying from an illegal abortion. What do all of these examples have in common? Religion.

Stereotypes about atheists seem to be deeply woven into the fabric of American culture. Despite that, I think there is hope that we can be seen in a more positive light. Even though others have questioned my morality, I have also been described as “a fantastic friend” and “so kind,” even by religious people. The way I do this is simply by being a fantastic friend and being kind.

Stereotypes survive only as long as people’s ignorance thrives. If atheists aid others, do community service, help a neighbor, religious people will realize that we are not the spawn of Satan but are caring, loving people who just believe in one less god than they do.

Anna Bores, 17, was born in New York City, where she attended Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music and Art and Performing Arts. “I was a vocal major at LaGuardia and I am extremely passionate about music. I like songwriting, music theory and performance. I will attend Binghamton University in the fall. My other interests are political science, social justice, writing, (and I skateboard recreationally).”

More honorable mentions to be published in future issues.

The story of James Terry and his mother, Vashti McCollum



Vashti Lozier

*This is a presentation given to a Unitarian Universalist Sunday school class by Vashti Lozier, daughter of FFRF Life Member Jim McCollum (James Terry in the story) and granddaughter of Supreme Court victor Vashti Cromwell McCollum, to commemorate her namesake’s birthday (Nov. 6, 1912). The landmark **McCollum v. Board of Education** case in 1948 was the first time the Supreme Court issued a ruling against religious instruction in public schools.*

By Vashti Lozier

Once upon a time, not so long ago, there was a little boy, just a little older than you. His name was James Terry and, like you, he was a Unitarian. When he started fourth grade, his

school added a new class. In addition to the usual math and reading, science and social studies, there was a class about God. James Terry brought home the permission slip to his mother so that he could take the class with his friends. Actually, there was not just one class but two classes. You see, different people have different ideas about God. So one class was formed for students whose families had one set of ideas about God (they are called Catholics) and another class for students whose families had a different set of ideas about God (they are called Protestants). Although most of the children’s families chose one class or the other, some children’s families had other ideas about God. James Terry’s family was one such family. As Unitarians, his family had their own ideas about God. His mother, Vashti, did not sign the permission slip. When James Terry returned to school, his teacher asked him to turn in his permission slip. She told him everyone else had turned in their slip and he was keeping the class from having a perfect record. Like many children, James Terry didn’t like being different from everyone else and he did not like disappointing his teacher. Without a signed permission slip, James Terry could not take the new class. While his friends had their class about God, James Terry had to sit in the hallway. This is where kids sat who were being punished for bad behavior. This made James Terry feel sad and

lonely. He felt different. Soon the children in the class felt, too, that he was different. They began to tease him. Some children even hit him and stole his books. All of a sudden, he didn’t have any friends in his class. No one seemed to like him anymore. Now he felt even more alone. James Terry’s mother didn’t like seeing her son unhappy. She knew that lots of people had lots of different ideas about God, and that it wasn’t fair that there were classes that taught the kids just one idea about God. She thought children should learn about God from their parents, at church or from their own ideas and experiences, not at school. She also didn’t think it was fair that James Terry was being teased and bullied because of his beliefs. Everyone is entitled to have the freedom to have his or her own beliefs and not be bullied and scared! Vashti decided to do something about it. When people disagree, they can talk to a judge, who decides who is right. Vashti decided to talk with a judge (actually nine judges who made up the Supreme Court of the United States). Some people felt that it was OK for the children to learn about God at school and others agreed with Vashti and James Terry. The judges listened carefully to both sides and decided that Vashti and James Terry were right and, after that, there were no more classes about God at school. After hearing the judges’ decision, James Terry said, “I knew Mom was

right. Everybody thought Mom and I were wrong, but now they can’t think that unless they think the judges are wrong, too.” Even today, at your own school, it is thanks to James Terry and his mother that children of all families and of all religions are free to go to school together without feeling different and without feeling scared or bullied. Where we live, in the United States, people are free to believe whatever they choose about God or to not believe in God at all. This is not true in many other places in the world, and it is a right that, even here, we sometimes have to fight for.



Vashti and James Terry McCollum in court, 1945.

Vashti’s ‘Supremely’ good cookies

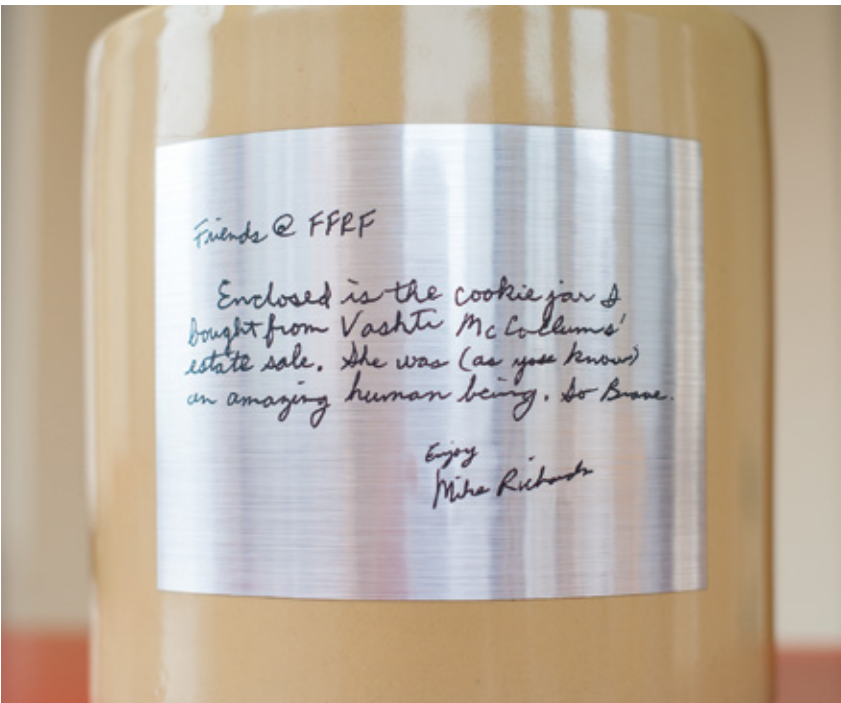
Jim McCollum writes: “Attached is the best version of Mom’s cookie recipe that I have found. You have to realize that she was a seat-of-the-pants cook and what started out as an oatmeal cookie recipe evolved over time and included various new ingredients along the way. Most generally, she added healthy things that suited her fancy, to the point that her cookies became a meal in and of themselves.”

Vashti McCollum’s Famous Cookies

- 2 cups canola oil or melted oleo (Vashti used 1 c. each)
- 3 cups sugar, white or brown or mixture
- 4 large eggs unbeaten
- 2 tsp. pure vanilla extract or other flavoring to taste
- 1/3 c. sugar cane syrup (or honey, jelly, jam, corn syrup)
- Beat all together until smooth (2 tbsp. liquid lecithin optional)
- Sift and add:
 - 3 c. flour (Vashti used part stoneground whole wheat and part white)
 - 1 tsp. salt
 - 3 tsp. baking soda
 - 1/2 c. dried skim milk.
- Stir mixture until smooth
- Add 2 c. chocolate or butterscotch bits or nuts, raisins, mincement, chopped candied fruit, or any mixture to make 2 cups.
- Optional: 1/2 to 1 c. wheat germ and/or pure bran. Vashti added both.
- Work in dry, uncooked quick-cooking oats until mixture is quite dry, at least 9-10 cups (less if wheat germ and bran were added).
- Chill covered dough covered at least 2 hours or overnight.
- Drop on ungreased cookie sheet in portions about size of large egg. Sometimes you have to flatten them out a bit with fork or hand. Bake in 350 degree oven (or less) until just underdone. (Vashti took them out when they still seemed like they were not done, but they were, and they stay more moist that way.)
- Store in refrigerator.



Illinois Member Mike Richards bequeathed this cookie jar, which he bought from Vashti McCollum’s estate sale, to FFRF. The jar, which now has an official sign identifying its origins, sits in a place of honor in the new Joel Landon and Wanda Beers Freethought Library in FFRF’s Freethought Hall addition in Madison, Wis.



Secular invocations

Warren Geltch
Orange County
Commission, Orlando, Fla.
July 16, 2015



Warren Geltch

Thank you. Good morning, mayor and commissioners.

As you know, one of the great things about Orange County is its vast diversity. Every individual in our community is important and deserves to be treated equally, no matter their race, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion or nonreligion. Morally, no one can justify inequality, discrimination or intolerance.

The record shows that through great leadership, and often difficult struggles, our sense of morality has changed and progressed over the course of our nation’s history. But positive changes usually don’t come easily, or quickly. Slavery wasn’t abolished until 90 years after our country’s inception. Women couldn’t vote until 1920 — 144 years after our nation’s inception. Since then, we’ve expanded civil

rights, women’s rights and gay rights. However, significant hurdles remain. There is still inequality, discrimination and intolerance.

So how do we continue positive trends pertaining to morality? Well, to have a good moral compass, we must possess two core values. The first core value is empathy. We must be able to place ourselves in the other person’s shoes to understand them and see their point of view. We must really get to know them. When we don’t know them, it’s easy to demonize them. When we do get to know them, we may find that we all primarily want the same things out of life.

The second core value is conscience. We must feel good when we do the right thing and feel bad when we do the wrong thing. We must be accountable and responsible for our own actions. That includes treating others how we ourselves, want to be treated, and making this one life the best we can, not just for ourselves, but for everyone, because every life is precious.

Without empathy and without good conscience, we will not progress.

Mayor and commissioners, you are about to approve a new budget today. Undoubtedly, you will consider many issues during the next fiscal year. The public trust requires that every issue be considered on its own merit, be analyzed thoroughly and decided through rational problem solving, guided by ethics and integrity.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Central Florida Freethought Community, I want to thank you for allowing us to present this secular invocation this morning. Thank you.

Warren Geltch retired as an assistant Orange County administrator in Orlando in 2010 after 35 years of public service. He started his government career as a purchasing agent for the University of South Florida, where he earlier earned a B.A. in marketing. He also holds an M.B.A. from the University of Tampa.

Jake Smith
DeLand, Fla.,
City Commission
July 20, 2015



Jake Smith

Hello and good evening, mayor and city commissioners. My name is Jake Lee Smith and I am a student at Stetson University. I would first like to thank you for the opportunity to allow me to open this commission meeting, offering a different perspective to the community and its legislators.

As a council whose mission statement advocates the importance of representing a city with “diverse citizens” that “demonstrate a strong sense of community,” I and others in attendance appreciate your open-mindedness here tonight.

The city’s mission statement also goes on to say that we will “remain dedicated to preserving and enhancing those assets which make DeLand distinctive,” and that “We, as citizens of DeLand, will continue to strive to maintain DeLand’s heritage as the ‘Athens of Florida.’ ” It is my personal belief that the primary assets which make DeLand distinctive lie within the hearts of each and every one of us here in this great little town. This distinct community maintains great historic roots, and a rich heritage.

I myself benefit from this city’s rich heritage, as I currently attend Stetson University here, one of the oldest institutions of higher education in the country. We always must, of course, seek to preserve our history, and never forget to look back at where we came from.

However, it is equally important to look to the future, learn from the past, and keep our eyes open to progress. A great example of progress in DeLand sits before us all, Ms. Jessica Davis, the first African-American woman to be a city commissioner in this council’s 133-year history.

This shows that within all communities is the potential for improvement, and one of the greatest improvements a community can make, is that which comes from within. It’s not all about infrastructure, budgets, building codes and taxes. No, at the core of any great town, are its great people. And as the mission statement claims, we seek to always remain a city that values the diversity of its citizens — regardless of what we look like, whom we love or what life philosophies we pledge ourselves to.

In closing, I would like to leave you all with a few important words from one of the most revered speeches in cinematic history:

“We all want to help one another. Human beings are like that. We want to live by each other’s happiness — not by each other’s misery. We don’t want to hate and despise one another. In this world there is room for everyone. And the good Earth is rich and can provide for everyone. The way of life can be free and beautiful. . . . More than machinery we need humanity. More than cleverness we need kindness and gentleness.” (Charlie Chaplin, “The Great Dictator,” 1940)

Thank you very much.

Jake Smith is a junior English major and psychology minor at Stetson University in DeLand. He’s president of the Stetson Association of Secular Students, which he started as a freshman, as well as vice president of communications for Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity and a founding officer of the university’s first-ever interfaith organization, Stetson Engage.

Overheard

I think a moment of silence would . . . give everybody just the equal respect. I mean, everybody prays differently or doesn’t pray at all.

Brandi Fickling, urging the Okaloosa County School Board to stop praying before meetings after FFRF sent a complaint letter causing the board to scrutinize its practice
Northwest Florida Daily News, 7-28-15

Mr. Houser believed that women should not work outside their homes, and “had a lot of hostility toward abortion clinics,” Mr. Floyd said. He was the sort of person who believed “that all the trouble started when they took bibles out of school and stopped prayer.”

Calvin Floyd, former Georgia talk show host, on frequent guest John Houser, 59, who fatally shot two women and wounded nine others before killing himself at a movie theater in Lafayette, La.
The New York Times, 7-25-15

I don’t know about the atheist vote; they may not like me. I’m not so sure.

Republican presidential candidate

Donald Trump, when asked in Iowa “Do you want the atheist vote, too?”
patheos.com, 8-4-15

The right way to answer the question would be “Yes, I want the atheist vote too.” Everyone, whether Christian, atheist or other wants opportunity, a good education and safe neighborhoods. Everyone, whether Christian, atheist or other wants competent people in government who are going to represent their best interests and capably solve the problems that all Americans face.

James Kirk Wall, “An Atheist in Illinois”
Chicago Now, 8-4-15

Holding an event for students, whether during or after school hours, that promotes one religion is ethically wrong. The fact that students have to “opt out” ostracizes a group of kids who really want nothing more than to fit in. Forcing students to “opt out” makes the minority choose between being bullied into not attending something all of their peers are attending or being bul-

lied into attending the event and being bullied at that event. And, yes, bullied is the right word.

Natalie Leppard, a Ph.D. researcher for ProCon.org, a nonprofit which promotes critical thinking on controversial issues by presenting differing viewpoints
dailymkos.com, 8-6-15

Mrs. Lerner writes, “the fool in his heart says there is no God.” I suggest that the fool is the one who thinks that prayer is the most important part of a City Council meeting. The City Council is a busy organization. Why overburden them with the organizational challenge of arranging speakers for each meeting?

Cameron Barry, Simi Valley, Calif., letter to the editor
Simi Valley Acorn, 8-7-15

I’d be surprised if he turned out to be crooked or a dope dealer. I’d be disappointed, that’s for sure.

Louis Goodman, Oakland, Calif., a Jewish lawyer and fan of Joel Osteen, whom he was going to see preach the prosperity gospel at a baseball stadium
San Francisco Chronicle, 8-6-15

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

Learn more at:
ffrf.org/outreach/nothing-fails-like-prayer

Breaking satire! Impositional religiosity added to DSM

*People largely disturb themselves by believing in absolutistic shoulds, oughts and musts. . . . The devoutly religious person tends to be inflexibly closed, intolerant and unchanging. Religiosity, therefore, is in many respects equivalent to irrational thinking and emotional disturbance. — Albert Ellis, **Psychotherapy and Atheistic Values** (1980)*

By Donald B. Ardell

Despite vigorous protests from several Republican presidential candidates, the Vatican, Fox News, Westboro Baptist Church and preachers across the land, a new entry was added recently to the authoritative “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders” (DSM). Scientists have termed the new disorder, the manual’s 298th official entry, Impositional Religiosity (IR).

IR is “the unwelcome application of faith-based beliefs, dogmas, creeds and the like on the rights and preferences of others, particularly those without beliefs in, uses for, or intentions to adhere to, what they perceive as preposterous burdens or obligations based on irrational beliefs.”

The DSM, now in its fifth edition, dates to the 1840 census, when efforts were made to collect information about mental health in the U.S. By the census of 1980, seven categories of conditions were established: mania, melancholia, monomania, paresis, dementia, dipsomania and epilepsy. Given that the inclusion of IR brings the list of insanities to almost 300 in 2015, it seems clear the trajectory of mental health in this country over the course of the past 175 years is not encouraging.

IR accounts for the culture war in America, wherein otherwise relatively

good and generous people embrace policies that restrict the rights of others. Religious groups seek to deny women full reproductive choices, to discriminate against and/or oppose equal rights for LGBT communities, and to impose supernatural symbols (e.g., crosses, Ten Commandments tablets, baby Jesus statues) and rituals (prayer in public schools, “god language” on currency and the patriotic pledge).

It seems unlikely that such unwelcome forms of imposition, which reflect bullying, indifference to the preferences of others, intolerance, discrimination and/or mean-spirited bigotry, would manifest absent creeds and dogmas that reinforce such undemocratic tendencies.

Recent examples were on display before and after the June 26 Supreme Court ruling that established marriage equality as a legal right across the U.S. While hailed by President Barack Obama as a victory for America (“When all Americans are treated as equal, we are all more free.”), many sufferers of Impositional Religiosity appear to be in the throes of mental breakdowns:

- Associate Justice Antonin Scalia railed against an “elitist” court majority, calling the decision a judicial putsch and threat to democracy.
- A month earlier, Anne Graham Lotz, daughter of Billy “Elmer Gantry” Graham, predicted that Jesus would be here any day to escort his followers to heaven. She added that, without authentic Christians around to keep order, you-know-what will hit fans everywhere. (See her “Mayday! Call to Prayer.”) Specifically, banks will close, the stock market will plunge, planes will fall from the sky, cars will crash, families will be torn apart and more.
- Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee

urged Christians to engage in a massive biblical disobedience campaign against the false god of judicial supremacy.

- Former Florida U.S. Rep. Allen West envisioned that the ruling could lead to civil war.
- Bill Muehlenberg, who runs a Web-based ministry called Culture-Watch, said it’s officially the End Times because of this “homo-fascist” decision and that the Supreme Court has declared that reality and biology no longer exist.
- Bryan Fischer weighed in from the rabid Religious Right with the discovery that Satan is dancing in the streets of America and, because of the decision, 6/26 will be our nation’s moral 9/11, a date that will live in infamy when the twin towers of truth and righteousness were blown up by moral jihadists.

Late-night comedian Conan O’Brien got in the spirit of the moment by noting, tongue in cheek, that, for the first time in 24 years, Jupiter and Venus appeared almost on top of each other in the night sky!

Identifying isn’t curing

Unfortunately, including IR in the DSM doesn’t mean that a cure has been found. At present, there is no drug known to alleviate, let alone immunize against, the condition. Nor are there counseling or treatment programs in place for egomaniacal and clueless office-holders and their supporters who are afflicted but somehow still believe they’re capable of serving as president.

Fortunately, while there is no cure, there are practitioners of alternative and complementary medicine, including homeopaths, psychic surgeons and chiropractors, who insist that their potions, crystals, treatments, astrological charts or other methods can eliminate this dreadful disorder painlessly and



Bill Hettler photo

Don Ardell

quickly. Unfortunately, a conspiracy by the government, the pharmaceutical industry and/or the American Medical Society is suppressing these superior, proven cures in order to protect their monopolies, so they say.

Let us pray, light a candle, do a rain dance, sacrifice an animal (but no virgins, please) or do something known to please the one true god or gods in order to bring relief for those afflicted with Impositional Religiosity and the rest of us imposed upon by them, as soon as heavenly possible.

Be well and look on the bright side of life.

*Florida FFRF member Don Ardell, who turned 77 on July 18, is a promoter of REAL wellness (lifestyles guided by Reason, Exuberance, Athleticism and Liberty). He has for the past two years been both the national and the world champion in his division in triathlon and aquathlon, as well as national champion for the past three years in duathlon. His latest book is entitled **Wellness Orgasms: The Fun Way to Live Well and Die Healthy**.*

Ewing Park residents face religious bigotry

The following story includes a Pennsylvania case FFRF was involved with. It was originally published June 25 in the Ellwood City Ledger and is reprinted with permission.

By Eric Poole

When Danielle Morabito opened her mailbox Thursday, she didn’t expect to become the victim of a hate crime. So she was surprised about it.

Morabito, who lives in Ellwood City’s Ewing Park neighborhood with her fiancé, Joel Stinson, said someone claiming to be one of her neighbors put a letter in her mailbox asking her to remove “idols” and “pagan and gay pride flags” from her yard.

Here’s the anonymous letter, including grammar and punctuation errors, in its entirety (but minus salutations and a “thank you” sign-off):

“Although it is appreciated that you have made your yard look nice, this is a Christian neighborhood and it would be appreciated if you wouldn’t push and or display your pagan beliefs in

plain sight. Please remove all the idols, pagan and gay pride flags from view.”

Wow. According to the Internet, you’re never supposed to go full Godwin, but my dad spent two years in Europe during the 1940s fighting a war against people like the person who wrote this note.

If that reference was too esoteric, I’m calling the letter writer a fascist.

Morabito and Stinson are Christians — they also have a cross in their front yard — but they respect such Eastern traditions as the use of meditation. They have a Zen garden in the back yard, not visible from the street, and several Buddha statues, some of which can be seen from outside the property.

Contrary to the letter writer’s assertion, the flags have nothing to do with “gay pride” — even though Morabito and Stinson are in favor of gay rights. They are Tibetan prayer flags, similar to the banners that mountain climbers of all faiths place on Himalayan peaks out of respect for the Sherpas who provide invaluable assistance during expeditions in the world’s highest mountain range.

Not that the nature of the symbols matters.

Because in the absence of harm to anyone else, property owners have the right to adorn their residences as they desire. And, no, that doesn’t mean you get to do whatever you want with your property. There are, and should be, laws against stuff like running a porn shop next to a school or construction that increases runoff into your neighbor’s basement.

But the letter writer’s apparent butt-hurt at catching a glimpse of Buddha’s belly or some billowing prayer flags constitutes neither harm to the neighborhood nor — contrary to the claim in the letter, an attempt by Morabito and Stinson to “push and or display” any beliefs.

I mean, it’s not like they were trying to erect a religious display on the Ellwood City Municipal Building front lawn. Now that would be pushing and displaying a belief.

Y’see, while representatives of the Freedom From Religion Foundation were threatening to sue Ellwood City three years ago to have a nativity display removed from in front of the municipal building, they repeatedly said religious displays belong on private property, such as churchyards.

Or on the lawns of residents. Evidently, the Wisconsin atheists practiced more religious tolerance than did the letter writer.

I was surprised by the letter, but I shouldn’t have been considering that this world is full of fundamentalists of all shades and the defining characteristic of a fundamentalist might be an overwhelming desire to obsess and condemn what other people are up to.

Or, if you prefer, overlooking the planks in their own eyes to fixate on the specks in their neighbors’.

All discussions of personal freedom and property rights aside, the letter writer made a request to remove the offending items. So, on behalf of Morabito and Stinson, here’s the answer.

“My first reaction was, ‘I have to go shopping and get more Buddhas,’” Morabito said when asked what she thought about the letter.

So, I guess that would be a “No.”

*Eric Poole is a staff writer and columnist for the Ellwood City (Pa.) Ledger and author of the military history **Company of Heroes** (Osprey Publishing, 2015).*

In the news

4th atheist blogger hacked to death

Niloy Chakrabati, in his late 20s, on Aug. 7 became the fourth atheist blogger to be hacked to death in Bangladesh by extremist Muslims. Chakrabati, who blogged as Niloy Neel, was murdered in his Dhaka apartment by several men who were in the building on the pretext of renting an apartment, UPI reported.

His death follows those of Avijit Roy in February, Washiqur Rahman in March and Anata Bijoy Das in May. All four were on a list of 84 bloggers identified by Muslim groups in 2013 as blasphemers.

The Christian Science Monitor reported authorities arrested three men Aug. 17 for their alleged involvement in two of the murders: Touhidur Rahman, an information technology expert and British citizen who left the U.K. in 2011 or 2012; Aminul Mulik, a broker at a passport office; and Sadek Ali, who worked at a printing shop.

...

A five-member panel of federal judges in Putrajaya, Malaysia, denied Shafaqat Ali Ghulam Nabi's appeal of his death sentence for beheading a man for blasphemy against Islam in 2011, the New Straits Times reported Aug. 26.

Shafaqat, 33, a Pakistani gardener, was sentenced for murdering Harjit Singh, 51, with a machete at Singh's home where he was tending a grove of frangipani trees. A witness told the trial court Shafaqat told him he killed Singh for insulting the Kaabah in Mecca, the most sacred site in Islam.

Commissioner leaves for Muslim prayer

Proof of the divisive power of religion surfaced Aug. 3 at the Lincoln County Commission meeting in Lintont, N.C. Duston Barto of Foot-hills Interfaith Assembly was scheduled to give the board's first Muslim invocation, which prompted Commission Chairman Carrol Mitchem to walk out

of the meeting.

"I ain't gonna have no new religion or pray to Allah or nothing like that," Mitchem told WBTV earlier, adding that anyone opposed to Christian prayer can "wait until we're done praying." The county has 102 churches.

The Lincoln Times-News reported that after criticizing Mitchem for leaving during the prayer, Commissioner Alex Patton motioned at the end of the meeting to scrap the board's two-month-old "all-inclusive" invocation policy for a moment of silence. The motion passed with only Mitchem dissenting.

Mitchem told a reporter Patton is a "lunatic." Hickory Humanist Alliance member William Keener was set to give the Aug. 17 invocation, which will no longer occur.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent the board a letter June 12 challenging the new invocation policy as exclusionary for minority religions and nonreligious residents. The interfaith assembly had formed in response to the policy and had more than 40 members, including atheists, Unitarians, humanists, Muslims, Christians, Wiccans and Ba'hais.

Kentucky clerks resist gay marriage

Linda Summers, a deputy clerk in the Superior Court Clerk's Office in Harrison County, Ind., filed a federal lawsuit after she was fired for refusing to issue same-sex marriage licenses. Summers, a member of Capital Christian Church in Corydon, believes homosexuality is a sin and alleges her First Amendment free exercise rights were violated, Religion Clause reported July 24.

County Clerk Sally Whitis had sent an e-mail to all employees telling them that even if it conflicted with their religious beliefs, they were required to process licenses for same-sex couples. Summers responded with a hand-delivered letter asking that she not be required to do so and was fired for insubordination.



Hall monitor

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker appeared Aug. 26 on "Today" on NBC in a segment (on.today.com/1LAAnzN) featuring FFRF's victory persuading a Kansas school district to remove a devotional painting of Jesus from a middle school corridor in Chanute. (For details, see legal victories on page 7.) FFRF and the ACLU of Ohio won a federal lawsuit settlement in 2013, successfully removing a copy of the same portrait from a public school in Jackson, Ohio.

In Rowan County, Ky., County Clerk Kim Davis defied a federal court order and a direct order from Gov. Steve Beshear to issue same-sex marriage licenses. The American Civil Liberties Union sued her in July on behalf of a gay couple. Davis then sued Beshear, asking the court for protection under the state's 2013 religious freedom law.

Also named in the suit is Wayne Onkst of the state Department for Libraries and Archives, the agency responsible for updating marriage license forms and making them gender neutral.

Snake-handling kills another pastor

John D. Brock, 60, died from a rattlesnake bite in his left arm July 26 after refusing medical treatment. Brock was handling the snake during a church service at Mossy Simpson Pentecostal Church in Jenson, Ky.

He died four hours later at his brother's house, WKYT reported. Services for Brock, a coal miner for 36 years, were held at Stoney Fork Holiness Church.

It's estimated that as many as 300 churches nationwide still use snakes. Brock is the second person to die from a snake bite recently at a Bell County church service. Jamie Coots, 42, who appeared on the TV reality show "Snake Salvation," died in February 2014 after he was bitten at Full Gospel Tabernacle in Jesus' Name in Mid-dlesboro, where he was pastor.

Court rules against bakery owner

A three-judge panel of the Colorado Court of Appeals ruled Aug. 13 against Jack Phillips, owner of Masterpiece Cakeshop in Lakewood, who refused to make a cake for David Mullins and Charlie Craig for their 2012 wedding reception. "I'm a follower of Jesus Christ, so you can say it's a religious belief, but I believe that the bible teaches that that's not an OK thing," Phillips had announced.

FFRF signed on to an amicus brief submitted by Americans United for Separation of Church and State in support of the couple, who were represented by the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado. "Religious freedom does not and should not mean that religionists are above the law, or that basic civil liberties can be denied to gays or others on the basis of religious objections," said Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

School panel eyes Orthodox influence

The New York State Education Department appointed a three-person panel to study the East Ramapo school system, The New York Times reported Aug. 13. "Last fall, a former federal prosecutor appointed by the state to investigate the district found that the school board, which is dominated by Orthodox Jews, had diverted money from public schools to children who attend local yeshivas, leaving the district in dire financial trouble," the paper reported.

About 8,000 minority students, mostly black or Latino, attend East Ramapo public schools, while about 24,000 students who live in the district attend yeshivas. The board has made severe cuts to public schools since 2009 and increased spending on private school students.

Airport prayer room geared to Islam

The "Reflection Room" at Orlando International Airport is scheduled to be open by Sept. 1. WKMG-TV reported the Florida airport will spend \$250,000 on the space where Muslims can pray. The airport decided to build the room after Emirates Airlines announced it will make nonstop flights from Orlando to Dubai.

Many Muslims now pray in public, even in airport bathrooms, said Carolyn Fennell, director of public affairs. Now, she said, "reflective time" will be available without kneeling on bathroom floors or in corners. The airport already has a chapel in Terminal A. The room will include a place for pre-prayer washing, shoe racks and signs that point north, south, east or west so that the Muslims can face Mecca during prayer.

Evangelist Franklin Graham complained on Facebook: "How loud do you think the objections would be today if they spent \$250,000 in taxpayer money to build a new prayer room exclusively for evangelical Christians? Or for Jews or Mormons or any other group? Why do Muslims get preference?"

Fennell denied that any tax dollars were used. She said about 30% of the airport's funding comes from airlines, with the rest generated through user fees at businesses. "We do use passenger facility charges that are built into ticket fees, as virtually all airports do."



Andrew Seidel photo

Thank you, Scott!

Legal Assistant Calli Miller stands by a portrait of Richard Dawkins, just gifted to FFRF by talented artist Scott Burdick, who has also produced and directed freethought video projects and films, including "In God We Trust," "Sophia Investigates the Good News Club" and "The March of Reason: A Film about Atheists, Science, the Reason Rally and Reality." (All are available on YouTube.) The portrait hangs in the Charlie Brooks Auditorium in FFRF's new addition. The grand opening will be held Friday, Oct. 9, in conjunction with the 38th annual convention.

Meet a faithless feminist



Karen Garst

Name: Karen L. Garst.

Where I live: Sherwood, Ore.

Where and when I was born: Bismarck, N.D., in 1950.

Family: Husband, Ron; son, Sam; stepdaughters, Valerie and Amy; son-in-law, Ben; grandchildren, Arabelle and Elliott.

Education: B.A. in French, Concordia College, Moorhead, Minn.; M.A. in French literature, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction, UW-Madison.

Occupation: Retired executive di-

rector of the Oregon State Bar.

How I got where I am today: I moved to Portland from Wisconsin to take a position in 1980 as field representative for the Oregon Federation of Teachers. I then served as executive director of the Oregon Community College Association before taking my last post at the State Bar.

Where I'm headed: I'm embarking on a new career as an author and I'm seeking a publisher for a book of essays by women about their journeys away from religion. I've started a new blog

about women and religion and I'm accepting speaking engagements.

Person in history I admire: Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In the 19th century, she fought for the abolition of slavery and was an atheist at a time when few women were and even fewer spoke out about it.

A quotation I like: "It is thought strange and particularly shocking by some persons for a woman to question the absolute correctness of the Bible. She is supposed to be able to go through this world with her eyes shut, and her mouth open wide enough to swallow Jonah and the Garden of Eden without making a wry face. It is usually recounted as one of her most beautiful traits of character that she has faith sufficient to float the Ark without inspecting the animals." — *Men, Women, and Gods and Other Lectures*, 1885, by Helen H. Gardener, introduction By Robert G. Ingersoll (available for free at gutenberg.org/files/30207/30207-h/30207-h.htm.)

These are a few of my favorite things: Friends and family, living on five acres surrounded by nature, a pension and Social Security, living in a country where women can strive to be anything they want.

These are not: People who resist learning something that might change their mind. In other words, they are closed to new information — "young Earth" creationists — seriously? I learned about evolution in 1963 and it was no big deal. How is it a big deal now?

My doubts about religion started: I was never a very gung-ho congregant. Being raised in a religion in Bismarck was what everybody did. It constituted my social life. I loved the music and rituals. I rarely attended church as a single person.

I really started to have doubts when I read the works of members of the Jesus Seminar [a group of about 150 critical scholars and laymen founded in 1985 by Robert Funk]. My final "hold on" was the resurrection. Then I read Bishop John Shelby Spong's *Resurrection: Myth or Reality* and let the last piece go.

Before I die: I would like to provide an opportunity for women to realize what religion has done to subordinate them.

Ways I promote freethought: I belong to several secular groups, including FFRF, and made a presentation to the Humanists of Greater Portland on "From Goddess to God: The Elimination of the Female Divine." I'm active on social media and promoting my book.

I wish you'd have asked me: What prompted me to write the book? I have been an atheist for two decades. I had never joined any secular groups. When SCOTUS issued its decision in Hobby Lobby in 2014, I felt I had to do something. Working in women's groups in the 1970s, I thought we had secured access to birth control and abortion. We are now fighting the battle all over again. I want to make a difference.

The blog: faithlessfeminist.com; on Twitter: [@karen_garst](https://twitter.com/karen_garst); on Facebook: facebook.com/faithlessfeminist.



Meet a chapter president

Name: Angela Combs.

Where I live: I'm currently residing in beautiful, enchanting New Mexico, just a short walk from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

Where I was born: Baltimore, Md.

Family: For various reasons, my free-thinking ways being not the least of them, my family size has significantly waned over time. The family members that remain active participants in my life include my niece, Liz Barbour, an intelligent young woman with whom I am proud to share some of my better genes, and Sam Robinson, a caring and supportive family member, one that genetics failed to provide.

Education: Math/science associate's degree, 2010. I'm currently working on a B.S. in psychology and evolutionary anthropology and intend to pursue graduate studies in 2016.

Occupation: Research assistant in an experimental psychology lab at the University of New Mexico.

How I got where I am today: From a life entrenched in fundamental Christianity, abuse and isolation, my lengthy quest to understand god's loving neglect, as well as to find god's defense for his blessing on those who afflict the innocent brought me to the momentarily terrifying and ultimately freeing realization that god is not. Time invested in working with victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and members of the homeless population revealed to me how prevalent the abuses of religion are.

The harm that religion does is fre-

quently deep and severe. Religion too often takes otherwise healthy, strong individuals and transforms them into either perilously vulnerable or dangerously arrogant people. That long-coming recognition is how I got to where I am today. I cannot stand idle while others continue to be oppressed and manipulated by the unjust and discriminatory justices of religion. I am not here only to take back my own life, but to help others do the same.

Person in history I admire: My greatest admiration goes to Robert Oppenheimer. He was able to lead a team of the greatest minds of his time to achieve one of humankind's most remarkable accomplishments. Even more impressive than his intellectual abilities, however, was his conviction. He lost so much in the course of doing the right thing, and even in the face of aspersion, he spoke up for what was right. He spoke out for the protection of those who didn't even understand that they were in danger. That, to me, is the epitome of beauty.

A quotation I like: "If religious instruction were not allowed until the child had attained the age of reason, we would be living in a quite different world." (Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*)

These are a few of my favorite things: Neanderthals, tiger sharks and intellectual honesty.

My doubts about religion started: When I was 21 years old, I questioned a few specific "facts" and became quite unsettled by my own conclusions. This



Angela Combs

resulted in my living as a closet atheist for three years before backsliding. From that time, I remained a zealous Christian until I began to feel some alleviation of the intense abuses that I had suffered throughout my 20s and into my 30s. Having moved beyond a time of literally struggling to survive each day, I was able to breathe, to consider, to reflect on why god was failing.

Before I die: I want to see a lot more of this amazing world.

Ways I promote freethought: I promote freethought in my service as

president of the Albuquerque chapter of FFRF. We have a great group of freethinkers and we're quite interested in engaging our community.

I cannot claim to fully understand everyone else, but I do try to understand myself. An occasional deep and honest look at myself reminds me of where I came from, who I have been, and what I have believed. I can see in myself that many common approaches to confronting religion would have had no beneficial effect on me in times past. However, demonstrating freethought is powerful.

Even when I was a zealous, fundamentalist Christian, I admired solid thinking. Not arguments, accusations or insults, but crisp, clear, clean thinking. My go-to means of promoting freethought is by being a freethinker, by sharing not only my thoughts, but also sharing my thought processes as well as any doubts I may have.

Acknowledging that one doesn't have all of the answers, and even that the answers one has may be somewhat lacking, can be confounding and amazing. I have respected others who have done so, and so I suspect that others can be inspired to give it a try as well. I am ever grateful to the freethinkers who demonstrated the simple art of freethought for me. While others sought to take from me, they gave to me the single most powerful tool one can possess.

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Kelly Shannon, Warwick, RI: Possession of child pornography on a cell phone and 7 other counts, including making false statements to police and forcing the alleged victim and other witnesses to make false statements. The bio on her Christian music website says Shannon, who's married with 2 children, is a graduate of Zion Bible College and "licensed minister (evangelist) with the Assemblies of God." The alleged victim is a young female relative.

The state Attorney General's Office brought the charges. Court documents allege Shannon made the girl pose and then shared the images on the Internet. The same girl told Warwick police last year she was raped by a teen boy, but more recently she alleged Shannon forced her to lie, telling police Shannon took the photos to teach her how to perform sex acts detailed in the rape allegation.

Her bio says she was rescued from abusive surroundings as a youth by a pastor who sent her to bible college. Her signature gospel song is "Rescue Me." *Source: NBC 10, 8-14-15*

Vitaly Korchevsky, 50, Glen Mills, PA: Securities fraud. Korchevsky, who leads the Slavic Evangelical Baptist Church in Brookhaven and has chaired the Association of Slavic Baptist Churches USA since 2000, is accused of working for years with Ukrainian hackers on a \$100 million insider trading scheme. A parallel civil suit filed by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission names 21 more defendants.

According to his professional biography, Korchevsky became a born-again evangelical in 1981. He later moved to the U.S. and earned an M.B.A. from Regent University, the Virginia college founded by televangelist Pat Robertson. *Source: philly.com, 8-12-15*

Jason Phillips, 41, Glasford, IL: 4 counts of being present at a child care facility. Phillips, a former youth pastor at Covenant Community Fellowship Church in Canton, was sentenced in 2011 to 4 years in prison for criminal sexual assault of a minor girl. He was released earlier this year but is accused of violating the terms of the sex offender registry.

Assistant State's Attorney Phillip Money told the court that a police officer was dispatched Aug. 6 to His Little Children Child Care Center because Phillips had been seen picking up and dropping off 2 children there. Staff told police he'd been there several other times. *Source: Canton Daily Ledger, 8-8-15*

Samuel O. Addo, 45, Cabo Corso, Ghana: Conspiracy and defrauding by false pretenses. Addo, an elder at Great Fire Pentecostal Church, is accused of having 2 accomplices from the church, whose names were given only as **Pastor Andy** and **Pastor Frimpong**. Addo pleaded not guilty but the others are at large.

They're charged with defrauding a buyer out of 45,000 Ghana cedi (\$11,524) for an old schnapps bottle. [The story wasn't clear whether it was unopened and had schnapps in it.] *Source: Ghana Web, 8-7-15*

Pablo P. Mata, 46, Montebello, CA: Mata, a Santería priest, is being sought on allegations of sexual assaults occurring during "healing rituals" at his business. It's alleged he had a 16-year-old girl disrobe on 3 occasions for the ritual in 2013. Police suspect there may be other victims. *Source: L.A. Times, 8-6-15*

Jerry W. Cox, 72, Franklinton, LA: Structuring financial transactions to avoid federal reporting requirements. Cox, pastor of Faith Tabernacle, is charged with moving more than \$100,000 around in banks in 2011 to avoid reporting it as income. He lives in a multimillion-dollar home a few miles from the church, which owns the tax-exempt property.

Cox has close ties to former St. Tammany Parish District Attorney Walter Reed, who was indicted in April on similar charges and has given thousands of dollars to Faith Tabernacle. *Source: WWL, 8-6-15*

William C. Lewis, 26, Brunswick, GA: 2 counts of child molestation. Lewis, a youth pastor at First Jordan Grove Baptist Church, was arrested the day before he was scheduled to lead a bible study. He is also a primary grades teacher at Altama Elementary.

An arrest warrant said the incident allegedly occurred July 6 with a 10-year-old boy at "It Takes a Village" summer camp. *Source: First Coast News, 8-5-15*

Larry Bates, Memphis, TN: Multiple counts of fraud for allegedly bilking about 300 victims out of \$18 million. Bates and his sons, **Charles** and **Robert Bates**, are accused in a federal indictment of targeting individuals seeking advice from a supposed trusted Christian adviser and/or an alleged reputable Christian financial company.

From 2002-13, the trio allegedly told potential customers they needed to buy gold and silver to protect themselves from "Mystery Babylon," a forthcoming economic, political and religious downturn. *Source: Memphis Flyer, 8-5-15*

Melvin Ollison Sr., 60, Bayboro, NC: 2 counts of 1st-degree rape, 4 counts of 1st-degree sex offense with a child and 3 counts each of 2nd-degree sexual offense and indecent liberties with a child. Sheriff Chris Davis identified him as a former associate pastor but didn't release the church's name. Investigators said Ollison told church members in April he was taking a leave of absence.

The 4 alleged victims are Ollison family members all under age 13, the youngest age 5. The first alleged incident was in 1979 and the last in April. *Source: WNCT, 8-5-15*

Jimmy Chang, 32, East Longmeadow, MA: 12 counts of 2nd-degree sexual assault. Chang, who works at private tutoring center, was a leader of a Christian youth group in Agawam at the time of the alleged assaults in 2012 on a girl in the group.

Authorities allege Chang persuaded the girl to sneak out of her house and give up her virginity when she was 17. Her sister told police she found detailed descriptions of the sexual relationship in her sister's online diary, including a statement that she loved Chang but felt "used and pathetic." *Source: Hartford Courant, 8-4-15*

Yishai Schlissel, an ultra-Orthodox extremist who lives in an Israeli West Bank settlement, was arrested for stabbing 6 participants in the back during Jerusalem's gay pride parade. Shira Banki, 16, died of wounds sustained in the attack.

Schlissel was convicted of a similar attack at a pride parade in Jerusalem in 2005 and had been released from prison 3 weeks before after serving 10 years of a 12-year sentence. According to prosecutors, Yishai Schlissel told police in 2005 he had come "to kill in the name of God." *Source: AP, 7-31-15*

Karen J. King, 64, Madison, WI: 9 counts of theft, identity theft, forgery and making false representations. King, a part-time secretary at Burke Lutheran Church, is accused of using 4 church credit cards and a checking account to pay for personal items, including trips to Las Vegas and Florida and her cellphone bills. An estimated \$34,443 was taken. King was fired in June 2014,

The complaint alleges she took collection money after erasing the amounts written down and used the same tactic to alter her time slips to reflect overtime. She was paid \$11.56 an hour for 15 to 20 hours a week. *Source: State Journal, 7-31-15*

Brian K. Burchfield, 42, Shawnee, OK: 1 count each of soliciting and engaging in sexual communications with a minor and violation of the Oklahoma Computer Crimes Act. Burchfield, young adult pastor at Quail Springs Baptist Church, was fired after being accused of "sexting" 4 boys ages 14 to 17. He met them while working at Immanuel Baptist Church.

Police records say text conversations included grooming habits of private areas, genital size and requesting photos from the teens. A police report says Burchfield "invited the juveniles to attend a 'Man Journey Retreat' with him" and stay at his in-laws' lake house in Eufaula in July 2014, the month he was fired. *Source: News-Star, 7-30-15*

Oscar Vasquez-Guzman, 38, Indianapolis: Attempted sexual misconduct with a minor, 2 counts of child molesting and 7 counts of sexual misconduct with a minor. Vasquez-Guzman, a pastoral associate with St. Anthony Catholic Church, is accused of sexual contact with 2 boys between the ages of 11 and 15 from Sept. 2013 through July 20, 2015.

Court documents said the older boy alleged he was first touched inappropriately when he was 14 and again about a year later when he went to Vasquez-Guzman's house before a church activity. The boy told investigators Vasquez-Guzman performed oral sex on him and warned him if he told his mother the police would get involved and his family would be deported. *Source: Indianapolis Star, 7-29-15*

Peter Knebel, 72, Waukesha, WI: 1st-degree sexual assault of a child/sexual contact with a person under the age of 13. Knebel, a pastor at Fox River Christian Church and Waukesha School District bus driver, is charged with molesting a girl in his office while she sat on his lap playing a computer game.

Sheriff's officials were contacted by the church's executive director after the girl made the allegations. *Source: WITI, 7-27-15*

Ezra Sheinberg, 48, Safed, Israel: 12 counts of rape, indecent assault, sexual harassment, fraud and obstructing an investigation. Sheinberg, a rabbi and founder of Orot HaAri Yeshiva, is accused of assaulting 13 women. The married father of 8 was arrested in July at

'I am scarred and damaged. I am broken.' — Victim statement at youth pastor Nicholas Lawrence's sentencing

Ben Gurion Airport as he waited for his flight to Brazil. *Source: Jerusalem Post, 7-24-15*

José Luis Montes Toyos, Madrid, Spain: Money laundering. Montes Toyos, a monsignor and pastor of the Catholic parish of San Ginés, and his brother and a family lawyer are accused by Swiss and Spanish prosecutors of laundering funds linked to the expropriation by the city of Madrid of a farm, thousands of acres of land and valuable paintings. Bank accounts are tied to companies domiciled in Panama and Belize. The period in question is 2004-11. *Source: El Mundo, 7-24-15*

Jules Anderson, 56, Franklin, LA: Computer-aided solicitation of a minor for sexual purposes, sexual battery and molestation of a juvenile. Anderson, former pastor and current overseer of Israelite Divine Spiritual Church #2 in Four Corners, was arrested after a complaint about alleged inappropriate activity with a 16-year-old boy in Anderson's vehicle in a sugarcane field. *Source: KATC, 7-23-15*

Thomas Cooperider, 23, Valparaiso, IN: 2 counts of rape and counts of sexual battery. The complaint alleges Cooperider assaulted 3 women during bible study he led in 2014-15 at Liberty Bible Church in Chesterton. The women were "so mentally disabled or deficient" that consent could not be given, it's alleged.

Cooperider told police he'd been accepted at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, where he planned on studying law. *Source: nwi.com, 7-22-15*

Joe Habegger, 55, Tarpon Springs, FL: Lewd and lascivious molestation of a child under the age of 12. Habegger, a physical education teacher at Westlake Christian School in Palm Harbor in 2013-14, is accused of molesting a student who won an auction to spend a day with a teacher outside of school.

Deputies said the boy and Habegger began spending time together and that the alleged criminal activity occurred after the school year ended. After Habegger's contract at Westlake Christian was not renewed, he was hired at Solid Rock Christian School, where he was fired when the principal found out about the allegations. *Source: Fox Tampa Bay, 7-21-15*

Yanhao "Eric" Ren, 24, Fullerton, CA: Kidnapping, sodomy with a child under 14 and oral copulation with a child under 14. Ren, a youth leader for Evangelical Formosan Church in Rowland Heights, is accused of starting a sexual relationship in May 2015 with a 13-year-old girl who was in his church group. It's possible there are other alleged victims, authorities said.

State Patrol officers found the girl and Ren in a vehicle parked off Hwy. 330 at midnight in an unincorporated area of San Bernardino County, a statement said. *Source: OC Weekly, 7-15-15*

Ogyen Trinley Dorjee, 30, Dharamshala, India: Money laundering. Dorjee is revered by followers as the 17th incarnation of the head of the Karma Kagyu branch of Tibetan Buddhism. He fled Tibet for India at age 14 and is seen as a possible successor to the Dalai Lama, who just turned 80.

About \$1 million in 26 different foreign currencies was seized in 2011 during a raid on his monastery but charges were dismissed in 2012. Now, the high court in the state of Himachal Pradesh has reinstated the charges. *Source: AFP, 7-9-15*

Gabriel Bodenheimer, 72, Monsey, NY: Pledaded guilty to endangering the welfare of a child. Bodenheimer, rabbi and longtime principal of Yeshiva Bais Mikroh, admitted to molesting a 7-year-old boy in 2009-10.

Prosecutor Richard Kennison Moran said he offered the defendant the chance to plead to a lesser charge because "the family wants to spare their son the ordeal of testifying. I respect his family's wishes." A grand jury had indicted him on 4 counts of criminal sexual act and 1st-degree sex abuse.

The boy's grandfather called the rabbi "a predator and a bum. He took away a child's innocence that can never be given back." *Source: Journal News, 7-28-15*

Sentenced

Nicholas Lawrence, 27, Pekin, IL: 40 years in prison (mandatory 85% before parole-eligible) after pleading guilty to 2 counts of predatory criminal sexual assault. Lawrence met the victim while teaching bible classes at 2 churches in Peoria Heights.

The girl he "groomed" sexually starting when she was 8 in 2010 still thought of him as her "spiritual mentor" when he was arrested in 2014, court records said. Their relationship had continued during his classes in 2013-14 at First Church of God in Pekin.

"I am scarred and damaged. I am broken," the girl wrote in a letter read to the court by the prosecutor. Lawrence "should be considered a monster."

"What I did was appalling and inexcusable," Lawrence told the judge. "Contrary to popular belief, I can and will reform completely" with therapy in prison.

Investigators found 14,000 images on Lawrence's computer of "child pornography and erotica" featuring children from toddlers to about age 10. *Source: Daily Times, 8-12-15*

Richard McCormick, 74, imprisoned for 8-10 years in Gardner, MA, on a 2014 child rape conviction, had another 8-10 years added to his sentence, to be served concurrently, after pleading guilty to indecent assault and battery on a child under age 14. McCormick, a retired Salesian Catholic priest, was charged after another victim recognized his photo in the paper.

Prosecutors said both male victims were molested by McCormick at summer camp between 1981-83. *Source: Boston Herald, 8-11-15*

Norman T. Faux, 55, Lake Ariel, PA: 27 months to 15 years in prison and payment of \$5,000 in counseling fees for his victim. Faux, a United Methodist pastor, had pleaded guilty to having sexual intercourse with a male juvenile. The assaults started when the boy was 9 and lasted until he was 19, according to court documents.

When the boy was 11, he began watching pornographic videos as a distraction while Faux performed oral sex on him. The boy said it happened so many times he lost count.

Lead prosecutor Pat Robinson called Faux, who is HIV-positive, "disgusting and despicable. He is an extremely manipulative individual. He blames everybody but himself for his outrageous activity." *Source: Wayne Independent, 7-31-15*

James Callozzo, 73, Youngstown, OH: Pledaded no contest to 3rd-degree sexual imposition and was sentenced to 60 days in jail, all of it suspended, 1 year probation and a \$220 fine. Callozzo, pastor at Nativity of Christ Orthodox Church, was ordered to have no contact with the 18-year-old male victim.

The charge stemmed from a May incident at a Perkins Restaurant when Callozzo followed the victim into the bathroom and grabbed the boy's genitals. *Source: The Vindicator, 7-29-15*

Simon Reynolds, 50, Barnsley, UK: 32 months in prison for theft. Reynolds, Anglican vicar at All Saints Church, was found guilty by jury of stealing \$37,000 from 2007-13. The money came from fees for weddings and funerals and gravestones. Reynolds fled to Germany while the jury was deliberating but later returned to England and turned himself in. *Source: Yahoo News, 7-27-15*

Walter Roberson and Robert Young, pastors at VineLife Church, Boulder, CO, pleaded no contest to failure to report child abuse and were sentenced to serve 10 days in jail or on work crew. Church elders **Edward Bennell** and **Warren Williams** pleaded no contest to the same charge. Bennell received 2 days in jail or on work crew. Williams was ordered to perform 40 hours of community service. All received 1 year of unsupervised probation. The men were all charged for failure to report suspected abuse in 2013 by youth pastor **Jason Roberson**, who is Walter Roberson's son.

"A message has to be sent that this cannot happen," said Judge David Archuleta.

Jason Roberson, 36, was sentenced to 2 years in prison and 10 years' intensive probation for a 7-year relationship he started with a female congregant when she was 15. *Source: Daily Camera, 7-23-15*

Yaakov Deutsch, 63, Afula, Israel: 9 years in prison and a \$76,000 fine for molesting 4 teens, 2 boys and 2 girls. Deutsch, a prominent rabbi in the Nazareth area, told a 15-year-old it was "God's will" for him to penetrate her vaginally and anally in 2008.

The indictment alleged she came to his home for a blessing to improve a health condition and that he ordered her to "touch his body and sexual organ, reasoning that energies will pass from his body to hers in such a way and cure her."

Later he started to take liberties with her

13-year-old cousin, the indictment said. *Source: Arutz Sheva, 7-22-15*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

“John J.M. Doe” and “John K. Doe” filed the latest suits alleging sexual abuse in the early 2000s by convicted pedophile priest **Daniel McCormack**. The Catholic **Archdiocese of Chicago** is also a defendant.

McCormack was defrocked in 2007 after pleading guilty to molesting 5 children. He has completed a 5-year-sentence but is still confined at a state-run mental health facility in Rushville because of his predatory past. *Source: NBC Chicago, 8-14-15*

Manuel Gallo-Espinoza, now 51, fled to his native Ecuador after being accused of raping a 15-year-old boy right before Easter 2003 in the rectory of St. Mary’s Catholic Parish, Plainfield, **NJ**, when he was a visiting priest from 2000-03. Max Rojas Ramirez, the alleged victim, is now suing the priest, the parish and parish officials and the Archdiocese of Newark.

No criminal charges were ever filed, but the Union County Prosecutor’s Office is “actively involved” in the search for his whereabouts. A newspaper discovered Gallo-Espinoza obtained visas to enter the U.S. in 2005 and 2008 and was teaching high school in Maryland. He quit abruptly last February, apparently due to a personnel matter. *Source: Newark Patch, 7-29-15*

Two men, “Doe 51” and “Doe 56,” allege sexual abuse as minors by **multiple Catholic priests and brothers** at Crosier Seminary in Onamia, **MN**, in 1979-81. Named defendants include priests **Gerald Funcheon** and **Roger Vaughn** and brothers **Gabriel Guerrero, Roman Fleischhacker** and **Wendell Mohs**. *Source: Anderson & Associates, 7-28-15*

Andrew McCormick, 59, a Catholic priest whose recent trials ended with hung juries, won’t be retried, but now a 27-year-old former altar boy is suing McCormick and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Plaintiff’s lawyer Brian Kent said his client wants to ensure “this doesn’t happen to any other children.”

At his first trial last year, it was revealed McCormick was reprimanded for letting boys in his private rooms and was investigated in 2004 by a grand jury for questionable conduct with minors. *Source: The Inquirer, 7-23-14*

An unidentified French priest, 82, is the reason another French man, 64, is suing the Vatican for \$54,000. A civil suit alleges the priest, now living in Switzerland, started molesting the unidentified plaintiff when he was 12 at boarding school.

The plaintiff alleges his sexual assault decades later of a 15-year-old girl stemmed from his childhood abuse. *Source: Christian Post, 7-22-15*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The Catholic **Archdiocese of Milwaukee** agreed to settle a suit with 330 clergy sex abuse victims for \$21 million. Payments to victims will vary and be determined by an independent arbitrator. Archbishop Jerome Listecki said the proposed settlement sets the stage to close a bankruptcy proceeding filed in 2011.

The archdiocese objected to all 575 claims filed in bankruptcy court and tried to have hundreds thrown out of court. Peter Isley, Midwest director of SNAP (Survivors Network for Those Abused by Priests), said in a statement: “In a perverse and cynical parody of the famous biblical story of King Solomon, it has been announced that the Archdiocese of Milwaukee has reached a monetary ‘settlement’ with the Creditors Committee of the nearly 5-year-old church sex abuse bankruptcy. It is exponentially the lowest bankruptcy compensation for victims in the United States.”

Subtracting attorneys’ fees reduces the payment to victims by one-third. The average per victim nationwide in clergy sex abuse settlements is about \$300,000 compared to \$45,000 for the Milwaukee settlement. *Source: Source: WITI, 8-4-15*

Legal Developments

John Regan, 51, Roselle, IL, has met the terms of his 4-year probation sentence for embezzling \$300,000 from St. Walter Catholic Church, where he was pastor, but the court approved the state’s petition to ensure he keeps making restitution. After he was arrested in 2008, it was disclosed he spent the money on riverboat gambling binges.

Regan will no longer be required to work at a \$9.75-per-hour factory job, which was a condition of his sentence. Judge John Kinsella said he wanted him to understand that parishioners who contributed the money he gambled away had worked hard to earn it.

Court records show he’s repaid about \$16,000. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 8-14-15*

Lonny Remmers, 57, Corona, CA, founder of Heart of Worship Community Church, was paroled after serving 9 months and 13 days of a 2-year sentence for inflicting corporal injury

Testimony: Yaakov Deutsch told the 15-year-old it was ‘God’s will’ for him to penetrate her vaginally and anally.

on a child and assault with a deadly non-fire-arm weapon. In March 2012, the boy’s mother brought her 13-year-old son to Remmers for punishment for allegedly sexually assaulting his 7-year-old sister.

At Remmers’ direction, 2 church members made the boy dig a mock grave, threw dirt on him, stripped and struck him, sprayed him with Mace and rubbed salt on his wounds. He was then brought to Remmers, who during bible study with a dozen others present, twisted the boy’s nipple with pliers. *Source: Press-Enterprise, 8-12-15*

Larry Jones, 66, McAlester, OK, was fired as Missionary Baptist Church pastor after being charged last year with possessing obscene or indecent writings for his sexual fantasy involving 3 girls as young as 6 from the church. His wife, who later filed for divorce, called police after discovering the story. Jones pleaded not guilty. There’s no indication he acted on the fantasy. After briefs were submitted, District Judge James Bland **dismissed the charges**, citing *Stanley v. Georgia* (1969). In that case, suspected gambling bookie Robert Stanley was arrested after a search found movies deemed obscene. SCOTUS unanimously overturned his conviction as violating the 1st and 14th Amendments, while establishing a private right to possession of pornography. *Source: News-Capital, 8-4-15*

D.C. Superior Court Judge Geoffrey Alprin upheld the 78-month prison term of **Barry Freundel, 63**, an Orthodox rabbi convicted of videotaping women preparing for ritual baths at a Georgetown synagogue.

Alprin, who presided over Freundel’s case, denied a motion that said Freundel should have been sentenced for a single act of videotaping and not for each of the 52 victims he admitted recording.

“Fifty-two individual people had their privacy invaded by someone they trusted,” Alprin said, denying the plea for leniency. Prosecutors alleged the rabbi recorded another 100 or so women for which he wasn’t charged due to the statute of limitations.

Alprin agreed to recommend that the U.S. Bureau of Prisons accept Freundel into a federal prison at Otisville, NY, or Miami. *Source: Washington Post, 7-3-15*

Charges were dropped against Shlomo Erps, 27, Monsey, NY, arrested in June for 1st-degree sexual abuse for alleged sexual touching of a 4-year-old boy who rode on a school bus driven by Erps for Talmud Torah Khal Adas Yereim in Ramapo. Prosecutors said proving the case in light of the boy’s age and other circumstances would be hard.

The school has now installed cameras in all buses, said administrator Tzvi Sternberg. *Source: lohud.com, 7-31-15*

Ronald H. Paquin, 72, a Boston Archdiocese Catholic priest who pleaded guilty in 2002 to repeatedly raping an altar boy between 1989-92, could remain in custody even though he’s served his full sentence of 12-15 years.

Essex D.A. Jonathan Blodgett filed a petition

to have Paquin declared a “sexually dangerous person,” which allows for indefinite civil commitment if experts see evidence of a “mental abnormality or personality disorder” that make commission of new offenses likely.

The archdiocese received 13 complaints alleging abuse by Paquin between 1990-96, but he was still allowed to serve as a priest by the archdiocese’s leader at the time, Cardinal Bernard Law. *Source: Boston Globe, 7-30-15*

Stanislaus Hogan, 70, an Australian Jesuit priest sentenced in March to 30 months in prison for having more than 1,500 sexually explicit images and videos of young boys in his private quarters at St. Ignatius’ College in Adelaide in 2013, was resentenced and released after the Court of Appeal found the sentencing judge erred.

“A wholly suspended sentence is appropriate given that much of the material was classified at the lowest level of seriousness, [Hogan’s] early guilty pleas and cooperation with police, and the personal circumstances of [Hogan], including his low risk of reoffending,” the court said. *Source: abc.net.au, 7-30-15*

Colin Davids, pastor of Grace Apostolic Ministries, Cape Town, S. Africa, has had assets worth \$10.8 million frozen during a probe of an investment company he owns that investigators believe may be a pyramid scheme. Davids’ company Platinum Forex promised investors returns of up to 84%.

“Court papers allege that Colin Davids used . . . investors’ funds to pay for two immovable properties in Platteklouf and Hermanus, motor vehicles for his wife, Charlyn, [and] household expenses from retail stores,” said National Prosecuting Authority spokesman Eric Ntabazalila.

Davids posted a statement on Facebook that his business is legitimate: “Some say where there is smoke there is fire but beware of malicious people who starts a fire to try and burn your house down.” *Source: Times Live, 7-23-15*

Allegations

Max Horley, an elder for a Jehovah’s Witness congregation in Narrogin, Australia in the late 1980s, testified before an official inquiry in Sydney that Witnesses regularly destroyed notes about child sexual abuse to stop them from falling into the wrong hands and to “protect” their wives. The royal commission has heard about more than 1,000 allegations of child abuse since 1950 that were never reported to police.

“BCB,” 47, testified that **Bill Neill**, a now-deceased elder, groomed her from the age of 15, watching her in the shower and molesting her.

“We do not want our wives knowing our stuff, what sort of things we were dealing with,” Horley said, claiming he didn’t know at the time that sexual abuse was a criminal matter.

Attorney Angus Stewart told the commission in an opening statement that there are 68,000 Witnesses in Australia and that it had traditionally dealt internally with allegations. Stewart said the church was preoccupied with “sin and sinning.” *Source: The Guardian, 7-30-15*

The U.S. Dept. of Justice is trying to revoke the citizenship granted in 1998 to **Mohamed Sheikh Abdirahman Kariye**, an imam in Oregon, for allegedly hiding ties with radical Islamic groups when he applied for citizenship. The government contends Kariye “dealt directly” with al-Qaida founders Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam. He’s also accused of being a founder of a now-defunct organization that provided aid to terrorist groups. Kariye was one of 18 people who sued in 2010 for being wrongly placed on a no-fly list. *Source: AP, 7-21-15*

Removed / Resigned

Stephen A. Pohl, pastor of St. Margaret Mary Catholic Parish, Louisville, **KY**, was placed on administrative leave due to allegations of child pornography possession or distribution, said a statement from the Archdiocese of Louisville, which mentioned “inappropriate photos of children.” Pohl was ordained in 1985. *Source: WDRB, 8-15-15*

Charles Antekeier, 79, a retired priest in the Catholic Diocese of Grand Rapids, **MI**, was ordered to no longer present himself as a priest or wear a clerical collar by Bishop David Walkowiak, who expressed his “deepest apologies” to children and families who “have been abused by members of the clergy in the Diocese of Grand Rapids.”

Staff said they were approached in November by a person who alleged abuse occurred in 1984-85 when Antekeier was pastor at St. James Parish in Grand Rapids. *Source: mlive.com, 8-14-15*

Ganpat Jha, a Hindu priest at Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Varanasi, **India**, was suspended after allegedly being caught on video pocketing money from devotees that was meant for the temple’s cash box. Police have been notified. *Source: The Hindu, 8-9-15*

Octavio Munoz Capetillo, Chicago, had been removed as pastor of St. Pancratius Catholic Church by the Archdiocese of Chicago. Police spokesman Anthony Guglielmi confirmed Munoz is the subject of a criminal investigation because of materials allegedly found on a computer in his possession.

Munoz, a native of Mexico ordained in 2004, had been director of Casa Jesus, an archdiocese training program for Latin American men aspiring to become priests. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 8-4-15*

Gerardo Joannon, a Chilean Catholic priest in his late 70s who has admitted to participating in at least 2 illegal adoptions but hasn’t been charged due to the statute of limitations, was relocated to a house for priests in Merlo, Argentina, as “an act of religious obedience,” prayer and penance.

The number of stolen children with the complicity of clergy and medical personnel during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet between 1973 and 1990 could be in the thousands. They’re known as the “Children of Silence.” *Source: CNN, 7-28-15*

Honore Kombo, pastor of St. Augustine’s Catholic Church, Seymour, **CT**, was moved by archdiocese officials to a nonparish assignment because of financial discrepancies in the 2014 financial report, a notice to parishioners said. A forensic audit is being conducted. *Source: Valley Gazette, 7-18-15*

Other

How gruesome photos claiming to show the body of a murdered pedophile priest **John Geoghan** ended up for sale on the website “Serial Killers Ink” is under investigation by the Massachusetts Dept. of Correction. SKI is known as a “murderabilia” site.

The defrocked Catholic priest was convicted of molesting over 100 children. He was sentenced to life and was strangled and beaten to death in his cell in Shirley, MA, at age 68 in 2003 by another inmate, Joseph Druce. In response to a question on Facebook about the photos, allegedly signed by Druce, SKI responded: “They have been sold.” *Source: WHDH, 8-8-15*

Charles Goodman, 53, Gary, IN: Felony reckless homicide and driving with a suspended license. Goodman, driver of a St. Jude Deliverance Center bus in a fatal crash near Indianapolis, never had a valid driver’s license in Indiana. The 15-person bus, headed to a church youth convention in Ohio, did not have required federal registration for an out-of-state trip, police said.

A boy, 6, died in the crash, which “appears to be a result of driver error,” State Police said but did not elaborate. Goodman has numerous citations and misdemeanor arrests in Illinois and Indiana, including illegally transporting alcohol in a vehicle, driving without valid registration and driving with an uninsured motor vehicle, along with a felony burglary conviction. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 7-29-15*

David L. Moriak, the Chicago bishop of the Orthodox Church in America forced to step down in 2013 for alleged sexual misconduct, has been serving as a parish priest in Hermitage, PA, without permission from the national church. The misconduct was described as “unwelcome written and spoken comments to a woman that she regarded as an inappropriate crossing of personal boundaries.”

John Jillions, chancellor of the Orthodox Church in America, said the national church is reviewing the conditions of Moriak’s retirement. “Another bishop did ask Bishop Matthias [Moriak’s church title] if he would be interested in the pastoral position in Hermitage. However, the matter has not been fully discussed or approved by the Holy Synod of Bishops, nor has Bishop Matthias been released to assume any church positions.” *Source: Chicago Tribune, 7-18-15*
Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org



Objection overruled!

“It’s been such an eye opener and disappointment to live in a state where this sort of public proclamation runs rampant,” writes Barb Masinton from North Carolina. “The Free Will Baptists north of Arapahoe are showing their intolerance, ignorance and gross disregard for basic human rights. Keeping the frustration alive!”

Letterbox

Yes, size *does* matter to our readers

Please do not change the format of the Freethought Today. The current dimensions fit perfectly inside the confines and security of my mail box as well as the perfect “flip-back” capability when I turn the pages back on themselves. Also, please retain the current font size, as these aging eyes struggle with the micro font sizes that other publications seem to be converting to in order to make room for revenue enhancing space. My only suggestion would be to adopt a slightly bolder sans-serif font similar to the one used in this missive.

Warren Dunn
California

P.S. The August article on Sean Carroll was outstanding!

• • •

Re the June/July letter about the “awkward” size of the newspaper: I don’t have a problem with holding and reading the publication but, as I pass it on to a friend, I often need to copy a long article to keep and this is very difficult with my small printer.

I too know nothing about such things but would really like a smaller tabloid so I don’t have to manipulate several pages of print and stick them together. All the best.

Sheila Somner
Arizona

• • •

Thanks for such a wonderful August issue. I had heard a video recording of Sean Carroll’s acceptance speech. It was good to read it again.

Pete Roode
Florida

God-fearing believers on wrong track

When a Christian proudly says, “I am god-fearing,” this should be your response: “Why would you fear your loving god? It is your belief in your religion, its leaders and its followers that you fear.”

Irene Stephenson, Life Member
California

Anne Gaylor’s work will be carried on

The best thing that anyone can hope for is to live a life that leave’s the world a better place for those left behind. Anne Nicol Gaylor was an extraordinary woman who exemplified such a life.

The Women’s Medical Fund and the Freedom From Religion Foundation are a legacy that will help to keep her memory alive for a long time. As Lifetime FFRF Members and Women’s Medical Fund supporters, we are thankful that her work carries on.

Francine and Lenny Goldstein
New York

Anne and Norma made the world better

Allow me to offer sincere condolences to the families and friends of Anne Nicol Gaylor and Norma Briggs. If any of us could accomplish as much as these ladies did, we might look on our time on Earth as well spent. I am reminded of the 19th century American feminist Lucy Stone, whose last words to her daughter were, “Make the world better.”

On a somewhat related topic, Nicholas Winton, a British stockbroker who rescued more than 600 Jewish children from Prague before the Nazi takeover in 1939, died at the age of 106. Sir Nicholas (knighted by Queen Elizabeth II) was of Jewish ancestry, but his parents had him baptized in the Anglican Church.

He himself said frankly that he was “not religious.” During the rescues, two rabbis came to Winton and protested that his willingness to foster the children to any family in England willing to take them in, often Christians, was unacceptable. He replied, “If you would rather have a dead child in Prague than a live child in a Christian home, that’s your problem.”

Congratulations to the Foundation and other secular groups for sponsoring the rescue of Taslima Nasrin from illiterate religious barbarians. The Clergy Project article was very interesting, though I am doubtful about the assertion by “Keith” stating “very few ministers” still believe in what they preach. In the Army, I took an oath to defend the Constitution, which includes defending the right of all Americans to practice the religion of their choice (however odd these often seem to me), so long as they respect my right not to.

It is distressing that the black collar crime blotter fills more than two pages of fine print.

David M. Shea, Life Member
Maryland

TV attacks on Gaylor, FFRF were awful

I watched Annie Laurie Gaylor’s crucifixion on Fox News (“Hannity”) the other night. I am 88 years old and think I have been around some — ex-Navy, airline transport pilot, owner/operator of several successful small businesses — and I have never seen or heard anyone treated so rudely and inconsiderately as Annie Laurie was by these clowns.

To salve my wounds, I am enclosing a check for \$1,500 for FFRF to use wherever you see fit.

Mal Prinzing, Life Member
Minnesota

• • •

FFRF made the news on our small-town radio station. The news reporter saw Ron Reagan’s FFRF ad on CNN and described it as “shocking enough for some networks to censor the ad” (apparently the “not afraid of burning in hell” comment got to him).

Yes, it’s quite shocking that an atheist would dare to express his constitutional right to free speech (because only Christians are supposed to do that). He described FFRF as “working to force Christianity out of government altogether” (because it belongs there in the first place). His report cited “same-sex marriage and the avalanche of religious persecution that has followed” (no examples given), “the recent movement against Christianity” (no examples given), “the onslaught of religious persecution against Christians” (no examples given), and “the upper hand gay people seem to have nowadays” (because equal treatment is “the upper hand”).

Later on he referred to FFRF as “Freedom From Religion in Government.” It’s clear that he made no serious effort to research FFRF and its activities, forming his opinions

and generalizations mostly from the “shocking” commercial. But never fear, his pastor assures us that “those who oppose Christianity will, as always, lose in the end.”

Needless to say, I won’t be listening to any more of his “news” reports that are so slanted they are almost vertical. Clearly this reporter has no concept of church and state separation or of any beliefs that differ from his own. When I turn on the news, what I expect to hear is news. If I want a sermon, I’ll go to church.

I thought about firing off an e-mail to the station’s general manager, but then I figured what’s the point in trying to reason with people who aren’t interested in the facts to begin with.

David Madsen
Indiana

Crank letters funny but also disturbing



A family in Harvest, Ala., after an F5 tornado demolished their home in April 2011.

I received Freethought Today and enjoyed reading it. I especially thought the crank letters were funny, although it’s also kind of disturbing to see how hateful and ignorant some of these loving, tolerant Christians can be toward someone who does not share their beliefs.

What actually made me realize I was an atheist was around 1990 when I read an interview that Bill Moyers conducted with Isaac Asimov in Moyer’s book *World Of Ideas*. Asimov discussed topics such as the conflict between science and religion, overpopulation, the environment and computers. He stated that he believed that after he died there would be nothing, although he added that his written works would live on after his death.

Since Asimov wrote over 400 books on science and science fiction, he was an authority on science. I realized his opinions carried a lot more weight with me than a preacher with an eighth-grade education. If you get a chance to read the book, I think you will like the interview.

I was watching Atlanta TV news a few years ago and there was a story about a tornado that struck a small Alabama town. A mother was holding a small boy who asked his mother why God caused a tornado to wreck their house. She replied, “God did not cause the tornado. God saved you from the tornado.”

I plan to share your information with several of my friends.

Loren Jacobs
Georgia

• • •

I just finished reading the August crank mail. It’s clear that the majority of those who wrote to you are both illiterate and ignorant. I appreciate post-

ing their comments without revisions. By their own words, they show themselves to be true bozos. Keep up the good work you are doing; you make me proud to be among those who think for themselves.

John Brady
California

Used to, but don’t accept ‘idiocracy’

Thank you for pushing back against this “In God We Trust” nonsense. I live in the Walton County, Fla., area, where the sheriff in his rebuttal letter essentially said the rights of the minority are nonexistent: “The disdain of a small minority should never, absent legitimate grievance, take precedence over the majority.”

I’m dumbfounded that a publicly elected official would make such a comment but, then again, I was raised in the South, and I’m used to religious idiocracy. That being said, the sheriff’s rebuttal was the headline article on the cover page of the Aug. 6 newspaper.

Please continue to fight this. My donation is inbound to ensure you are able to try.

Kyle Hunter
Florida

Genius Ingersoll deserves our attention

I’ve been a member for about 10 years, thanks originally to Dan Barker’s book *Losing Faith in Faith*. My question to Dan is about that book and its updated version *Godless*. In the former, Dan devotes several pages to and introduced me to Robert Ingersoll, whom I’d never heard of before. I then went out and found some things by Ingersoll and had my heart and eyes and mind opened in ways I’d never known. I eventually went bought a complete set of his *Works* from Powell’s, the legendary bookstore in Portland, Ore. I read Ingersoll almost daily now; the man was a genius.

I have read tons of Dawkins and Hitchens and Harris and many other modern-day atheists but none come close to Ingersoll’s brilliance. He was such a good and decent man, a humanist in the deepest and broadest sense of the word.

But what I wanted to know is why the whole Ingersoll chapter from *Losing Faith in Faith* was left out of *Godless*.

I continue to appreciate and support FFRF’s work. Many, many thanks!

Kirk Knighton
Washington

*Dan replies: When Ulysses Press approached me about **Godless**, they wanted an update of **Losing Faith in Faith** but wanted it to be a different book. So I pulled out chapters and added new chapters. You are right — I miss the Ingersoll chapter! But this way, the two books — one by the non-profit FFRF and the other by the commercial Ulysses Press — can be sold separately, with only about one-third overlap.*

Here are some songs I wrote [audio files emailed to Kirk] based on Ingersoll’s words: “Love,” “Declaration of the Free,” “The Trinity” and “The Time To Be Happy is Now.”

How to get the Gideons behind thee!

I travel frequently for business purposes and, unfortunately, have little to no control over which hotel chains I stay in due to my company’s travel policy. For the past few years, I have been using FFRF’s “skull and crossbones”

and “Gideon Exposed” bible stickers. However, I recently ran out and instead of ordering more stickers, decided that from now on I will simply remove the bibles by bringing them down to the concierge or front desk. I smile sweetly, hand the bible over and say “I find this offensive and don’t want it in my guestroom. Thank you!”

My theory on this tactic is that most will never get replaced, as the majority of staff never inquire which room I’m in. (I have faced outright hostility by some staff when I try to return the bibles, though none refuse to take them.) I also like to think that the staff might even mention the nice lady who removed her bible to the management.

I just wanted to offer this action to other members as an alternative to stickering.

Marie Fisher
California

Annie Laurie Gaylor replies: It might interest you to know that hotels are dunned for these bibles. The Gideons strong-arm hotels into putting them in the rooms and then strongly “hint” they need a donation for them. It’s my understanding they usually get one.

I have even seen bibles on maids’ carts and strongly suspect your bibles find their way back into your vacated rooms, but whatever is done to express client displeasure is helpful, and the personal touch is especially helpful. FFRF got a lot of national and even international publicity in the late 1980s when we first proposed that hotels offer bible-free rooms as they were then offering smoke-free rooms. We always ask for bibles to be removed from our convention block.

Hate mail like this we can take

For several reasons I hate Free-thought Today! So many of your contributors express my opinions, preferences, beliefs, etc., but do it much better than I can do it myself. I hate it because I am reminded of the myriad of never-ending whack-a-mole projects you encounter in trying to separate religion and government, especially in schools.

I hate it because I learn over and over again about the continuous supply of intolerant people, people who can’t understand what FFRF is trying to do and militantly claim that you’re trespassing on their religious liberty. Yeah. Lots of things to hate, but keep up the great work!

Gary Welch
Nebraska

Religious music gets another thumbs-up

Re “There’s more to religious music than religion” [August Letterbox], my hope is that we secular humanists never succumb to our own brand of narrow-mindedness. Thus, I’m in complete agreement with Ken Harrison that it is a mistake for atheists to distance themselves from the beautiful sounds of religious music, whether it be Christian, Jewish or any other. That would be akin to refusing to enter a majestic cathedral, or to even glance at a religious painting or sculpture by a Renaissance master.

Religious art is humanity’s heritage, and if we isolate ourselves from it only because we are atheists, we are rejecting magnificent treasures.

Let’s also consider the written word. Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Sonnet XLIII (“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways”) conveys the sublime state of romantic love in a beautifully



Lauryn Seering photo

Creative baker and Texas member Amber Barnhill surprised Co-President Dan Barker with delicious homemade “FFRF” sugar cookies and other treats this summer that were shared with appreciative staffers.

woven tapestry of words. Should we dismiss that gem because the poet mentions God in it? I hope not.

David Quintero
California

Cannabis church didn’t warrant such scrutiny

Indiana is known for its “Hoosier Hospitality,” which now means if you are exactly like us, then make yourself at home. Otherwise, just keep right on moving.

I received notification from state Sen. Patricia Miller and Rep. Cindy Kirchhofer of a July 28 meeting to “address the recent events occurring in our community.” The meeting was actually strategy planning for exorcising the First Church of Cannabis from the community.

The church had its inaugural service July 1, the date Indiana’s Religious Freedom Restoration Act became law. The service was heavily “attended” by Indianapolis police and heavily picketed by the Church of ACTS (Church of Anointed Christians Tormenting Satan). These goofballs have the audacity to complain that the First Church of Cannabis is not a valid religion? Another protesting church, The Sanctuary, is located at what was until recently a barber shop.

This is so typical of the craziness we see in America these days. Any group of two or more can open up a Christian church in a strip mall, house or shed any day of the week. The police don’t appear at their doors to investigate; state legislators don’t call meetings to exorcise them.

Donald R. Hamilton, Life Member
Indiana

Abortion rights under religious assault

I was 73 on June 17, so I’m definitely slower, older and smarter. I’ve been watching the debate on defunding Planned Parenthood. Doctors harvest human organs all the time, so why not those fetuses?

My daddy gave my mother a coat hanger abortion in their bed in 1954 in Cincinnati and flushed the fetus down the commode. I was there and saw it happen. This is what will happen if the “defunders” influenced by Operation Rescue, the religious extremist Randall Terry, the bible thumpers and those who bomb abortion clinics are successful.

You should print this message for the sake of women’s health.

Donald D. Woods
Tennessee

Nongrace for Turkey Day on my menu

I had an idea for Thanksgiving grace and meals in general. I have Christians in my family. I even say “amen” sometimes. But I decided that at this year’s Thanksgiving, after grace, I’m going to ask if I can say a few words, too. I’m then going to thank all the humans who came before and sacrificed for us so we could be here at this table, eating this meal — our ancestors, the soldiers who fought in wars, the women birthing and raising us, the cavemen that got their butts kicked by woolly mammoths, etc. I may have more thoughts by Thanksgiving, but I definitely think it’s going to bring a lot more meaning to my meal than thinking about nonexistent gods.

I call it a nongrace, but I really don’t want it to be divisive. I did it once and someone got very offended. I tried to explain that I wasn’t calling out their beliefs, just putting mine and my love for them into words.

Paul Glaser
California

Charlie Hebdo always cries ‘woof’

My neighbor across the alley owns a beautiful Great Pyrenees dog. If the dog were to place his front paws on my shoulders (I’m 6 feet tall), his head would be twice taller than mine! Almost three years ago, when he was a 4-foot-tall puppy, I was in the neighbor’s yard when he was introduced to his home. He was slightly timid, of course, but I scratched his ears, talked to him and stroked his soft white coat.

Time has passed and I don’t see the neighbor much, and while the dog protects his house, he and I are super friends, proving once again that dogs never forget. After the disaster in Paris, I began to call him Charlie Hebdo. After, it’s obvious — French dog! Our conversations are thus: “Hi, Charlie Hebdo!” “Woof woof woof!” Or sometimes I raise my fist: “Freethought, free speech, Charlie H!” “Woof woof woof!”

Clifford J. DeVoy
Washington

Time to eradicate this mental disease

Let us finally, if somewhat reluctantly, admit that religions and other nonsensical belief systems are nothing more or less than mental diseases. Then let us, to begin with, seek to eradicate the “worst” current religious disease: Islam. And after we cure the planet, or at least a lot of the planet, of Islam (think “polio”), we can focus on all the others. Eventually, our “least troubling” religions (think “all the cases of a little untreated and symptomless high blood pressure”) will be seen as the deadly diseases that they really are, and will one day be added to the various cured diseases of the past.

Perhaps a new true profession will somehow emerge, dedicated to helping individuals, groups, countries and our planet in treating and beating these mental diseases which are embodied in our various religions and other nonsensical belief systems. After all, most of humanity and humanity’s leaders are going to need an incredible amount of effective and indefinite assistance in order for all of us to ultimately prevail against this insidious cancer.

E.T. Dwyer
Arizona

Overheard

Lo, true believer, the hour of donating to Pastor, Megareverend, and CEO John Oliver’s Our Lady of Perpetual Exemption Church is at hand! Can you feel the spirit stirring within you? Specifically, the spirit of tax-exempt income?

Entertainer John Oliver, who set up the church to make a point how televangelists are enriching themselves (but will turn over his donations to Doctors Without Borders)
HBO “Last Week Tonight,” 8-16-15

In a 1958 poll of Americans, only 18% of respondents said they would vote for a generally well-qualified presidential candidate nominated by their political party if that person happened to be an atheist. In 2015, that number has jumped to 58%.

Tania Lombrozo, psychology professor at the University of California-Berkeley, “Would Voters Entrust The White House To An Atheist?”
National Public Radio, 8-10-15

Atheist Clubs Don’t Belong at Catholic Colleges, Experts Say

Headline on a story criticizing secular student groups at Loyola University, Georgetown University, DePaul University and Dominican University
Catholic Education Daily, 8-13-15

Faith is selective gullibility; a virus, every drop of which contaminates reason and honesty with the comfortable poison of self deception.

W. Cassity-Guillion, the atheist in “Mormon, atheist debate definition of faith”
Deseret News, 8-11-15

A judge who is willing to perform marriages of only opposite-sex couples because of his or her personal, moral, or religious beliefs, may be viewed as possessing a bias or prejudice against a specific class or group of people based on sexual orientation. Exhibiting bias or prejudice in the performance of judicial duties is antithetical to a core tenet of judicial office and erodes the public’s confidence in the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary.

Board of Professional Conduct of the Ohio Supreme Court, advisory opinion saying judges can’t opt out of performing same-sex marriages
sc.ohio.gov, 8-7-15

This apology is an admission. After they put everybody through hell, their attorneys asked the most degrading deposition questions, and they knew they were wrong — now, I’m not a liar. All of us, we’re not liars.

Michael Sandridge, clergy sex abuse victim, on the Catholic Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph’s apology and invitation to Healing Our Parishes through Empathy services
Kansas City Star, 8-11-15

This is an opportunity for us to reach out in the name of Jesus Christ in a setting that is completely unique, even odd by some people’s standards. But who’s to say that church can’t happen right here?

Pastor Phillip Guin, Rocky Mount United Methodist Church, Jemison, Ala., on the shooting range the church opened to attract members
CBS Houston, 8-14-15

They said what?

Christian erotica is basically my way of taking what the secular world has perverted, and made us feel ashamed of.



Profile of pastor’s daughter DiShan Washington, also a pastor’s ex-wife and author of *The Preacher’s Wifey*
National Public Radio, 7-19-15

Once I looked up, I had no idea what they wanted me to look at and I saw her mouth moving. I then asked my friend, “Is it her mouth?” She replied “yes” and then I got the shivers throughout my whole body. I couldn’t believe my eyes. I kept blinking in case I was seeing things.

Kirsten Keirouz, a parishioner at St. Charbel’s Maronite Catholic Church in Sydney, where she and others claimed to have seen the Virgin Mary’s lips moving in a painting and praying along with them
Daily Mail Australia, 7-23-15

When a teacher tells a little boy he can’t pray over his meal: Send the hornets, Lord, clear that [battle]field! When the Pentagon tells them to take down a cross on a Christian chapel: Send those hornets, clear the field! When the Supreme Court says they know bet-

ter than God: Send the hornets, Lord, clear the field! And when the president says that America is no longer just a Christian nation: Don’t send the hornets, Lord. Send the mosquitoes and the gnats and the bumblebees and the lightning bugs and the cicadas. Send every critter you got, Lord! Clear the field!

Fox News pundit Todd Starnes, speaking at the Faith and Freedom Coalition’s “Road to Majority” conference in Washington, D.C.
Fox News, 6-20-15

It is so naive that he would trust the Iranians. By doing so, he will take the Israelis and march them to the door of the oven. This is the most idiotic thing, this Iran deal.



Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, criticizing President Barack Obama with a Holocaust analogy
Breitbart News, 7-25-15

We’ll see, if I get to be president.
Former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, responding to a reporter’s question in Iowa if he would defy the courts and order the FBI or federal military to stop abortions
Topeka Capital-Journal, 7-31-15

They were growing up to be monsters, they were disrespectful, rude in school. I’m not saying they’re dead because of that. I’m not even saying I killed them. God says in the bible do not disrespect your mother and father or your days will be short, but I’m not saying that’s what happened.

David Conley, 48, Houston, charged with the shooting deaths of Valerie Jackson, her husband and her children, 13-year-old Nathaniel (also Conley’s son), 11-year-old Honesty, 10-year-old Dwayne, 9-year-old Caleb, 7-year-old Trinity, and 6-year-old Jonah
The Associated Press, 8-12-15



Darrell Barker photo

Happy 90th to Norm Barker

Norman Barker pictured with son Dan, co-president of FFRF, on Norm’s 90th birthday Aug. 13 at his home near Olympia, Wash., which he shares with FFRF members and son Darrell, daughter-in-law, Suzan, and many dogs and cats. Norm, who became a freethinker gradually after his minister son “just lost faith in faith,” is a member of the Delaware Tribe of America (Lenni Lenape). Norm is a retired police officer who served in Anaheim, Calif., and he’s proud he never once had to shoot his gun. He played trombone professionally in bands his entire life, including with Hoagy Carmichael. Bands he played in were featured in about a dozen films, most notably “Easter Parade.” Judy Garland flirts with Norm as she sings “I Wish I Were in Michigan.”

Sharing the crank mail

This edition of the crank mail, printed as received, is rated G for Godawful or Ghastly, take your pick.

Must Bear Witness: The Lord will hold all of you accountable. I am one of his servants issuing a dire warning to take heed before you are swept away by the maelstrom of DESTRUCTION he has prepared for this world. The Lord has given his signs on the lands. I will give u a little hindsight. The city of Tyler Tx will when this cataclysm hits will become the city of Tyre. It will become a coastal city in the very near future. I myself will be behind the scenes then laughing as all you did was attack his church. You can find these terrains yourself by checking the surrounding of Smith county tx on Google map and check the terrains from above. But don’t look for me when this comes into being. You are on your own then. — *tmssquire*

Comment: Your organization, Richard Dawkins, and the cowardly people who take part in it would have fit in real well with the Third Reich. — *Paul Sherard*

Disgrace to our country!! Ron Reagan and this website is a total disgrace to our country. The world is going to hell in a hand basket and it’s because of people like you. CNN has lowered its standards to low life television. — *Mark*

Freedom of religion and speech: Why is it when Islam or LGBT communities speak their mind and promote religion on public grounds we hear nothing but as soon as a Christian does all heck breaks loose? Y’all are just as pathetic as the ACLU. — *Thomas Woolverton, Prague, Okla.*

JESUS SAVES: Mr. Reagan, I don’t hope for anyone to burn in hell as you proclaim “I am not afraid to burn in hell”. I will pray for you because sir, you are really misunderstanding what it is going to be like to burn in hell. Eternity spent on fire in the pit. No parties, no fun, no bars, no water to drink to fill the quench of thirst, ever. Y’all really need to rethink your plan to go to hell and God’s plan to prosper you throughout eternity. — *Cheryle Giannoni*

Freedom of speech at 1sec4 of const: God, Jesus army will one day throw all of you

in the pit God army is here already you don’t believe me I’m 2 and 0 against the devil himself ask him how the 2 holes I put in his head is I put in Mexico. — *Peter Gupta, Gods country, World*

religion: You need to stay out of our beliefs combining church and state has always worked. We need prayer in school, on the field on the race track and EVERYWHERE. Keep your nose out of our business, and may GOD have mercy on you. — *Diana Lane*

Your Foundation: You are attempting to destroy the United States and Western Civilization. Karl Marx would be so so proud. I hope you all fail miserably, but I am sure you are funded by George Soros, Communist that he is. Just admit you want to remake the country in a secular humanist definition, with no right or wrong, no morality at all. Enjoy yourselves. — *Dean Meredith*

Separation of Church and state: There is no separation of Church and State. I won’t give my address or phone as you may come after me. God Bless America. Jesus Christ is Lord! In God we trust! — *Thomas Eckhoff*

Jefferson co.: I live near Jefferson County Illinois. I understand that you feel it is your business to put your views on us. It’s not, mind your own business and we will mind ours. Please stay in cryconsin. — *Jim Lamar*

minding your own business: Why dont you fucking idiot busybodies mind your own business in your own county and leave our Sheriffs dept in Florida the fuck alone. We like the way our Sheriff runs his Dept and he sure as fuck dont need shithheads like you tryin to tell him how to run it. STAY the FUCK out of our business. Mother Fucking lunatics. — *Rob Longmire*

Nativity Scene In Belen, New Mexico: No one asked for your two cents about your views. Belen means Bethlehem in Spanish. It’s organizations like yours that’s causing downfall of society. Mind your own business in Wisconsin and stay out of New Mexico’s business. Now get lost. — *JJ Smith*

Eye of ra: Fuck up bitch — *Ra Ra, Marshall, Texas*

A note to you: I really think that you all need to go back down in your “Fox holes” and find Jesus! Your obviously going to hell in a hand basket and don’t even care that your polluting the minds of your children! Our fore fathers founded this nation UNDER GOD and nothing you can do can take God from our hearts! You may successfully take him from the schools and from the public but God says what is done in secret he will reward openly! — *Robin Michelle*

Important!!!! Yes, please go fuck yourselves and stay out of my town and my town’s concerns! That is all. Thanks! — *Brett Dowler, Parkersburg, WV*

Belen NM: The religious traditions of our community were being actively practiced by Belen community members 400 years ago. About that time, the ancestors of you Yankee rednecks were trying to convince yourself the world might not be flat and that by sailing west side you might actually discover a new world. When we need your advice about how our traditions will be celebrated, we will call. Do the world a favor and start holding your breath... Ready, Set, Inhale! — *Stephen Hensley*

your bullshit: Im tired of people like u who have not fought for this country to stick ur nose in what people in this contry believe. Dont tell people n govt to take stickers that say “ In God We.Trust” off of their cars n trucks. If u dont like it, move ur sorry ass to the USSR. — *Ron Smith*

Leave people alone! If I was the mayor of Belen, NM, I would tell you to kiss my ass. Don’t tell me how to run my town! When are you going to sue tow-truck driving companies? The towing piece in back is shaped like a cross. — *Daniel Easter (be offended)! Phoenix, AZ*

Grady Judd: I have seen where you have attacked sheriff Judd. I have no problem with that but ask how is him speaking at a church any different from the county having preachers in a sheriff uniform in cars as great counselors and have preachers on duty to speak at events and things? — *Ben Smith, Florida*

Bumper stickers on Bay Co. Sheriffs cars: I will argue the separation clause with you, and further more state that if you are any member of your organization are using United States Treasury Notes, you must cease and diciest in any and all uses as it says “In God We Trust” on all currency. Thank you for you devout effort in the

attempt to remove God and destroy a nation. But if it really offends you, move to the Middle East. — *Timothy Carr, Panama City Beach, Fla.*

The Ten Commandments: You bastards can go to Hell. You god Satan is waiting for you in his flaming dominion and I hope you enjoy the heat. Neither You, the Courts or Obama the Muslim Beast can force me to do otherwise. I promise and swear to fight you evil Bastards every way and anytime I can to see your ultimate destruction. GO TO HELL YOU EVIL BASTARDS! — *Thomas Greene*

Religion in public school: Everybody’s talking about muslims and giving me a headache so I want it demolished like you fag do to Christianity. — *Craig Caswell, Rock Rapids, Iowa*

Religion: You ignort people need to get a life and leave us alone. We don’t want your God-less beliefs here. Quit shoving your nose where it is not wanted. You are what is wrong with this country. — *Missouri*

Kill yourselves! I’m not hiding behind a cloak of anonymity like the unnamed individuals in the law suit against the Ohio school that had the picture of Jesus hanging. Seriously? You scumbags sued a frickin’ school? Are you really proud of yourselves for trying to take money away from children’s educations? I read a quote from you pieces of shit, “As a result of these unconstitutional actions, Plaintiffs and other like-minded citizens and residents have suffered, and will continue to suffer permanent, severe and irreparable harm and injury.” Are you fucking kidding me?! What suffering, harm and injury could a Jesus picture possibly bring about? The only suffering I see is the persecution of millions of Christians at the hands of worthless assholes such as yourselves. You motherfuckers are the biggest pieces of shit in the world right now. (Worse than ISIS!) You all should be drug out in the street and shot! — *Scott White-kettle, Etters, Pa.*

A bunch of fucking idiots: Screw you and your bullshit, that sign in Lindale is their fucking business, if they want their sign then mind your own business, your bullshit can suck my sick, hope you like that, I have the right to my own opinion, fuck you — *Michael Watson, Texas*

FFRF on the road



FFRF staff attorneys Maddy Ziegler and Sam Grover presented a workshop titled “Secular Student Rights on Campus” at the 2015 Secular Student Alliance annual conference at Ohio State University in Columbus on July 11-12. There were about 230 registered attendees.



Dan Barker spoke to an audience of about 400 in St. Louis on FFRF’s activism and his latest book *Life Driven Purpose*.



Staff Attorney Sam Grover spoke on current state/church issues June 7 in Cudahy, Wis., at an event sponsored by Southeast Wisconsin FreeThinkers. From left are SWiFT members Eric Hildeman and LaVada Luening, board members John Phillips and Kurt Bocksbaum, Grover and SWiFT member Marshall Schmitz.



Josiah Mannion photo

G2R2

Clergy Project member Neil Carter, a former church elder who blogs as “God-less in Dixie” from Mississippi, and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker at the Gateway to Reason II conference at Washington University in St. Louis, where Dan spoke Aug. 1. Josiah Mannion was also taking photos to promote the 2016 Reason Rally in Washington, D.C., for which the date hasn’t been set.

They said what?

I had a strong, Christian lawyer tell me yesterday that, under this decision that he has read, what it brings about is: It only requires one human being in this relationship — that you could marry your lawn mower with this decision. I think he’s right.
U.S. Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, commenting on the Supreme Court’s same-sex marriage decision
Dickinson County News, 7-1-15

Now is it because I’m already married to a woman? Would I have to divorce her first? With the stuff Steve King is saying, it seems like everything is fair game now.
Pat Rynard, who took his lawn mower to the courthouse in Des Moines and was told by Polk County Recorder Julie Haggerty (a Democrat who had a hard time keeping a straight face) that they weren’t eligible for a marriage license
Iowa Starting Line, 8-5-15

Donald Trump does not fear man nor will he allow deception and lies to go unnoticed. I am going to use him to expose darkness and perversion in America like never before, but you must understand that he is like a bull in a

china closet. Many will want to throw him away because he will disturb their sense of peace and tranquility, but you must listen through the bantering to discover the truth that I will speak through him.
Pastor Jeremiah Johnson, Heart of the Father Ministry in Lakeland, Fla., relaying a message he says he received from God
Charisma Magazine, 7-28-15

I’m certainly am an imperfect man, and it’s only through the blood of Jesus Christ that I’ve been redeemed for my sins.
Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, telling the audience at the first GOP presidential debate that his faith informs his leadership approach
Wisconsin State Journal, 8-6-15

Why don’t you go back to the church of Satan that you run?
Waller County Sheriff Glenn Smith,



speaking to United Methodist pastor Hannah Adair Bonner, who’s been keeping vigil for 27 days outside the Texas jail where Sandra Bland was found dead under suspicious circumstances
Houston Chronicle, 8-12-15

There’s one thing Mr. Colbert is very interested in: talking about Donald J. Trump. “Every night before I go to bed, I light a candle and pray that he stays in the race and I also pray that no one puts that candle anywhere near his hair.”
Story on Stephen Colbert replacing David Letterman starting Sept. 8 as host of “The Late Show”
The New York Times, 8-11-15



Prior to 1962, everybody prayed before school started. In 1962, the Supreme Court banned prayer. In 1963, they banned the bible from school. Prior to that, the bible was the principal textbook in all schools.
Rafael Cruz, a nondenominational pastor and father of Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, whose claim was rated “Mostly False” by PolitiFact.com
Tampa Bay Times, 8-10-15

Josephine King is no longer considered a member of the First African Baptist Church of Bainbridge, Georgia.
Letter to parishioners from Senior Pastor Derrick Mike, who said the 92-year-old woman will no longer be able to worship at the church she’s belonged to for 50 years because she hasn’t been tithing WALB-TV, 8-11-15

What about the majority? I’m so tired of protecting the minority! What about the rest of the country, the 77%?
Ainsley Earhardt, “Outnumbered” co-host, defending “In God We Trust” decals on Missouri sheriff’s patrol cars while presuming all Christians like them
Fox News, 7-27-15



The most important thing or school supply you could get your child is prayer back in school, that’s what’s needed.
Janet Aust, Palestine, Texas, who was recruiting schools and churches countywide to “pray at the pole” at 7:30 a.m. on the first day of school
Palestine Herald-Press, 8-12-15

