

# Freethought Today

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## FFRF gets Ohio village to change seal

An Ohio village recently removed a religious seal and declaration after several objections from FFRF.

The seal of the village of Archbold contained a church at its center, nestled within images of education, farming, forestry and industry. The seal was featured in a number of places, including government buildings, street signs, village forms and documents, such as utility bills, and on the official



website. The website also contained on its history page a declaration that Archbold is a “Christian community.”

Such a seal and statement were unconstitutional, FFRF informed the village several times.

“The inclusion of a church on the official village seal and declaration that the village ‘is a Christian community’ violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment,” FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to Archbold Mayor Jim Wyse last year. “Federal courts have ruled that similar seals violate the Establishment Clause.”

FFRF suggested to the village that changing the seal would make sense in other ways, as well. Nearly 30 percent of Americans are non-Christian, including 43 percent of Millennials, practicing a minority

*See Seal on page 5*



### Have a joyous secular season!

FFRF wishes all of our members a happy and prosperous winter solstice season and new year. “Winter Walk,” an original watercolor image by artist Jan Rasmussen, is available to purchase in 10-packs of cards through FFRF’s online store, along with a dozen other choices ([shop.ffrf.org](http://shop.ffrf.org)).

### A message from FFRF

## The only wall we need is between church and state

By Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor  
FFRF Co-Presidents

If recent events have left you reeling over the radically changed political landscape and what it will mean for our cause, remember: None of us “Nones” is in it alone.

We couldn’t be directing one of the nation’s most controversial groups or working for one of the most unpopular of causes, were we not optimists.

The Religious Right never quits. Nor can we. As Margaret Mead said: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” (With more than 24,000 members, FFRF isn’t all that small, but we’re still vastly outnumbered.)

It buoys us and fortifies our resolve to be in contact every day with dedicated and enthusiastic nontheists like yourself, who tell us they’ve found a home in FFRF, who care “devoutly” about protecting our nation’s secular core.

Like you, we know that the only afterlife that should concern us is leaving our descendants a pleasant future. And

*See Wall on page 7*

## ‘IM GOD’ plate denial gives FFRF license to sue

FFRF and the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky (ACLU-KY) and filed a lawsuit on Nov. 22 on behalf of a Kentucky FFRF member denied a personalized license plate reading “IM GOD.”

Kentucky Division of Motor Vehicle (DMV) officials initially refused Ben Hart’s request early this year, claiming that the license plate message was “obscene or vulgar,” but then later saying it was because the plate was “not in good taste.” The lawsuit challenges certain portions of the regulations governing personalized license plates as unlawful, namely those that allow government officials to deny plates based on vague notions of “good taste” as well as those barring

personalized plates from communicating religious, anti-religious or political messages.

Hart had a personalized license plate with the letters “IM GOD” displayed on his Ohio-issued license plate for 12 years prior to moving to the commonwealth.

“I simply want the same opportunity to select a personal message for my license plate just as any other driver,” says Hart. “There is nothing ‘obscene or vulgar’ about my view that religious beliefs are subject to individual interpretation.”

The ACLU-KY/FFRF lawsuit argues that Hart’s proposed license plate is fully protected individual speech, which Kentucky DMV officials may not suppress using content-based, viewpoint-based, vague or overboard standards.

“Under the First Amendment, government officials do not have the authority to censor messages simply because they dislike them,” says ACLU-KY Legal Director William Sharp. “And in this instance, personalized license plates are a form of individual speech equally deserving of First Amendment protection.”

“Hart has a right to select a personalized plate message that reflects his philosophical views, just as any other driver may select an individual message for their personalized plate,” says FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott. “Just as others may select religious messages, Ben Hart, an atheist, has a right to comment on religion.”

The story went viral online, earning worldwide media coverage, with international news outlets such as the BBC, The Guardian, World Religion News, International Business Times, The Independent and Hidayatullah (Indonesia) each posting a version of the story online.



Ben Hart shows off the “IM GOD” license plate he had when he was living in Ohio. The same plate was rejected after he applied for it in Kentucky.

### Inside This Issue



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## Meet an intern

**Name:** Molly Hanson.  
**Where and when I was born:** Dodgeville, Wis., on April 13th, 1994.  
**Family:** My parents are Joe and Ann Hanson. I have two sisters Mary, 18, and Michaela, 32.  
**Education:** I'm on my final semester of school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison majoring in journalism with a certificate in gender and women's studies.  
**My religious upbringing:** I was raised Catholic more as ethnic tradition than true spiritual belief. However, I was never confirmed after I stopped attending "CCD."  
**How I came to work as an FFRF intern:** I was scrolling through fall internship listings on UW-Madison Journalism School's jobsite. I'm interested in civic law, and particularly passionate about First Amendment rights, so when I came across an internship listing for FFRF, I did some research on the foundation and found that its goals and mission really aligned with my personal beliefs. I've always felt freedom of thought to be necessary for a truly democratic



Molly Hanson

government along with a strong separation of church and state. I applied immediately and here I am!  
**What I do here:** I write action alerts, summarize legal victories, write Freethoughts of the Day, and help out wherever I am needed.  
**What I like best about it:** The working environment is awesome! I love the progressive and informed atmosphere and thoughtful conversations about current social and political issues. I really feel like I leave every day more educated on something. The people here are passionate about their work here preserving democratic values and it's really inspiring and energizing.  
**My interests are:** Politics, history, psychology, tai chi, environmental preservation, folklore, track and field, and social justice issues.  
These three words sum me up: Strong-willed, imaginative and curious.  
**Things I like:** Thai food, willow trees, feminism, gnomes, foxes, hiking, honey, coffee, learning and exploring.  
**Things I smite:** Sociopaths, mosquitos, misogyny, country music.  
**My loftiest goal:** To be the publisher of a travel/culture/exploration magazine. Or the head of an

investigative journalism organization. Or both.  
**My personal playlist:** Kanye West, Bob Dylan, Vanessa Carlton, Beyoncé, Michael Jackson, and the "Hamilton" musical soundtrack.  
**Interesting fact:** I ran track and cross country for the University of Wisconsin Badgers.  
*Editor's note: Molly has been hired as a full-time staff member as an editorial assistant. She will begin her new position in January following her December graduation from UW-Madison.*



Molly Hanson finished third in the 1500-meter run at the NCAA West Preliminaries with a time of 4:19 in May 2014.

## In memoriam

By Melisa Maxey

Jack Maxey, husband, proud father, brother, uncle, neighbor and friend, died in April 2016 with his family by his side. Jack was born in Darden, Miss., in March of 1927. He lived a life full of love and concern for people. He traveled extensively throughout the U.S. during his career working for the federal government. Jack joined the Navy at the tender age of 17, where he spent time overseas during WWII and witnessed the one and only flight of "The Spruce Goose." Jack was a member of Mensa and FFRF, and he loved reading, politics, chess, Sudoku and the funny papers. He explored progressive thinking, enjoyed nature and science,

loved a great joke and found people's lives interesting. Those who knew him loved him and sought his company just to sit and talk. Always a gentleman, Jack made you feel welcome and special. Vibrant, gracious, handsome, charismatic, humble, self-educated and fun, Jack remained caring and non-judgmental throughout his life. His personality is one that will never be matched. The world has lost a beautiful, one-of-a-kind, irreplaceable human being. Melisa, Jack's daughter, placed an itty-bitty "Free Library" in honor of her dad in the place where he was born, for all to enjoy the gift of reading. Jack's wishes were to offer his body as an anatomical donation, which the University of Nevada-Reno has received.



Melissa and her father, Jack Maxey

## FFRF welcomes 2 After-Lifers, 31 new Life Members

FFRF is pleased to announce and welcome our 31 new Life Members and two new After-Life Members.  
Warmest thanks to Dianne Centa and Carolsue Clery for becoming After-Life Members, which is a slightly tongue-in-cheek category of donation of \$5,000 for those who wish their donations to live after them.  
FFRF's 31 new Life Members are Thomas E. Ainsworth, Terry Lee Albrecht, Richard Barbieri, Annemone Barnett (a gift from her husband Jeffrey Barnett), Christine Beard, Gregory Alan Bonfiglio, Jesse Card,

Jonathan Cepale, Rita Crimmins, Anthony Dasari, Dr. John Anthony Fisher, Russell Frank, David Glenn, Ellen Jean Goodman, Dan Graly, Dr. Lauro Guaderrama, Lisa Hettler-Smith, Dr. Douglas Hobson, Andrew Hyman, Keith Loring, James Mancini, Peter D. Matthews, Robert Mendoza, Nikki Moungo, Elly Pollock, Clint Smullen, Celine Stroinski, David Tedrahn, Bob Truett, Stephen Van Eck and Michael Wiseman.  
States represented are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts,

Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.  
Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000, designated as membership or membership renewal and are deductible for income tax purposes, as are all dues and donations to FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Lifetime memberships guarantee no more renewal notices and go into a reserved "rainy day" fund. Lifetime Members receive a card, a pin and big thank you!

## They said what?

The dead body isn't the private property of relatives, but rather a son of God who is part of the people of God. We have to get over this individualistic thinking.  
**Cardinal Gerhard Mueller, author of the Vatican's guidelines for Catholics who want to be cremated, saying their remains cannot be scattered, divvied up or kept at home but instead must stored in a sacred, church-approved place**  
*Associated Press, 10-25-16*

[World War I and II were] really the Judeo-Christian West versus the atheists, right? . . . We're at the very beginning stages of a very brutal and bloody conflict . . . [that will, absent a firm stand by] the church militant, completely eradicate everything that's been bequeathed over the last 2,000, 2,500 years.  
**Breitbart News founder Steve Bannon, President-elect Donald Trump's new chief strategist and counselor, in remarks to conference at Vatican in 2014, as reported by BuzzFeed**  
*New York Times, 11/18/16*

## Correction

In the November issue we misidentified the grand prize winner of the "clean" (pre-In God We Trust) \$100 bill at the FFRF convention in Pittsburgh. Diane Stenzel of New Jersey was the winner. FFRF regrets the error.

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*The only freethought newspaper in the United States*

### A Note to Members

Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and "Private Line."

**If it says December or earlier please renew!** Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 gung-ho; \$250-sustaining) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in January/February and June/July.

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# Following the star in the east

By Barbara G. Walker

History tells us a different mythology story about three wise men and a savior than the one you normally hear around this time of the year.

Thousands of years ago in the land of Egypt, people waited anxiously every year for the natural event on which all their lives depended: the annual flooding of the Nile, which brought blessed water to irrigate their fields.



Barbara G. Walker

The water came more than 4,000 miles from melting snows in the Rwenzori, which means Mountains of the Moon. Egyptians knew little about those distant places beyond their southern horizon, where there were trackless swamps and dark jungles. But they did say all waters came from the moon, which they envisioned as the life-giving breast of Mother Isis, who gave birth to the savior. Another title of the Moon Mother was Nut, the goddess of the sky; her breasts produced the Milky Way composed of all the stars.

The savior was the god Osiris, who embodied the grain that grew in their irrigated fields. Every year he died in the reaping, and was born again as the new wheat sprouted. His flesh was the bread, his blood was the wine. People thought

they could become godlike by eating him sacramentally; then they could go after death to the Paradise of Osiris, where they could live in eternal happiness.

Osiris was also identified with his father Ra, the sun god, and so was born at the winter solstice. The father/son amalgamation of Ra/Osiris formed a holy trinity with Isis, the Holy Mother. In the Gnostic period, even Christians viewed the third person of the trinity as female, depicting her as the dove, an ancient goddess totem. Though she was later masculinized as the holy spirit, and the all-male trinity accepted by the early church, they eventually adopted the official solstitial birthday of the sun as their own version of the savior's birth. (No writings of any kind had ever mentioned any official birthday for Jesus.)

Egyptian legends told of a time when the Nile flood had failed for seven years in a row. The land dried up. There was no food; many people starved to death. (The seven-year famine also made its way into the Old Testament.) Such stories reminded everyone of the vital importance of grain storage techniques, and also of the vital necessity of the Nile flood.

Egyptian priests and priestesses anxiously studied the night sky to learn from this celestial calendar just when the rising of the waters could be expected. Over the centuries, they allegorized their observations. They noted that the star Sirius, the brightest star in the sky, rose in the east about the time that the flood was due, so they identified this star with the coming of Osiris. They called this star Sothis, and asso-



ciated it with Anubis the Great Dog, jackal god of the dead, who held the soul of Osiris and prepared him for his annual rebirth. We still call Sirius the Dog Star, and its constellation Canis Major, the Great Dog.

Egyptians also identified the "three wise men" who pointed the way to the savior's birth: The three stars in the belt of Orion — Mintaka, Anilam and Alnitak — which rise ahead of Sirius and lie in a line pointing directly toward it. They said the "three wise men" had seen the star of Osiris in the east and announced his coming. When the savior was born, the Egyptians celebrated the Festival of the Inundation, rejoicing at the savior's birth and honoring the holy mother and child with a traditional chant: "The virgin has brought forth! The savior is born!"

In summoning the spirit of the new grain from the earth, God said, "Out of the land of Egypt I have called my son" — a phrase considered prophetic

by Gospel writers who invented a flight into Egypt for their holy family, just so Jesus could be said to have come from there. (The reason given in the Gospels for their flight — King Herod's attack on newborn children — was quite impossible because Herod died in 4 BCE.)

Eventually the "three wise men" received the Persian title of Magi (sacred magicians) from the religion of the Zoroastrian Savior Mithra, to whom the priests presented symbolic birthday gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Christians pretended that the Magi traveled from their eastern land to present these tokens to the new savior.

Since Bethlehem lies far to the west of Persia, isn't it odd that the "three wise men" got there by following a star in the east?

*Florida FFRF Life Member Barbara G. Walker is the author of **Belief and Unbelief, Man Made God, Feminist Fairy Tales** and many other books.*

## Christians commandeered winter holiday

By RJ Turner

It's OK to say "Merry Christmas" if you are an atheist. Or you can think of it as saying, "Merry Krissmiss," as I thought it was spelled as a young child, if it makes you feel better.

Many of us have fond memories of happy Christmases, and to avoid recognizing the good parts of it is like throwing out your mother's apple pie because someone claimed the apples were possessed. I like apple pie and I don't care who knows.

But people have a way of forgetting history. Denying history (and science) is a cornerstone for religion, which has a tendency to massage (or forget) history to fit its supernatural beliefs. Winter solstice celebrations (which began centuries before Jesus was born) have been commandeered by Christians. And because of that, now those of us who wish to celebrate the season have to give some sort of nod to Christianity.

Long before the solstice celebrations were connected to Christianity, early Northern Europeans celebrated "Yule" by burning a large log on Dec. 21 (the shortest day of the year), feasting until it burned out, which sometimes lasted for 12 days. There were other reasons to celebrate during the solstice: Fresh

meat was available because it was difficult to provide for the livestock during colder months. Most beer and wine made earlier in the year was finally ready to consume. And it was just plain good karma to break the winter doldrums by bringing evergreen cuttings inside and inviting over a few friends.

A fellow co-worker who knew I was an atheist once asked me why I would celebrate Christmas. I told him that Jesus and God have nothing to do with Santa Claus, decorated trees, stockings and getting together with loved ones. And that the word "Christmas" to me, and many other people that I know, isn't associated with religion or God, but those other things, a happy winter celebration much like that of the early European "pagans."

Unfortunately, beloved Christmas shows like "A Charlie Brown Christmas" attempted to further hijack the celebration. In it, Linus gives a speech on "The True Meaning of Christmas," which isn't the true meaning at all, but an attempt to turn a pleasant nonreligious celebration into a reason to worship their hero. It always made me feel a little disenchanted to see one of my favorite comic characters take up bible thumping. "Christmas," in the current sense of religiosity, didn't really come to be until after the Victorian era.

In many ways, present-day Christians are like their New England Puritan ancestors. But they forget that, because of its known pagan origin, the Puritans banned Christmas. Its observance was illegal in Massachusetts between 1659 and 1681. They knew that Jesus was

Christians have a habit of claiming rights to many good things that we were already doing.

not the "reason for the season." The celebration hasn't evolved so much as Christianity evolved to make it theirs.

Christians have a habit of claiming rights to many good things that we were already doing, as if they could not have existed without their God. That includes not only our winter solstice celebrations, but also our Pledge of Allegiance, which was composed in 1892. Christians added "under God" in 1954, claiming it for themselves, thereby making those who pledge allegiance to our flag also pledge allegiance to their God.

In addition, "E Pluribus Unum" was originally our nation's motto, adopted in 1782, and was on our currency, but — surprise! — Christians also seized that and managed to change the motto to "In God We Trust" in 1956, thanks to the Cold War.

Christians even attempt to commandeer the United States itself by referring to it as "a Christian nation." The Founding Fathers were already aware of the tendency for religions to take over, also pledge allegiance, which is why

they specifically included "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States," in the Constitution. Further, the First Amendment reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

And even further, "The government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion," John Adams affirmed in a treaty ratified by Congress. It could not be spelled out more clearly. Yet, still, Christians frequently attempt to lay claim to this country, our money and our celebrations. It's only a matter of time before they lay claim to Memorial Day, the day Jesus bought his holy water skis.

"Christmas" is a word our family uses for our solstice celebrating. Spell it however you like, it still has no other meaning than a happy get-together with family and friends and a chance to show our appreciation for each other. I was lucky enough to have a French mother who introduced the word "Noel" to our celebrating. Noel means precisely the same thing to me, and I prefer "Noel," but it doesn't play as well on American streets. Every year my mother would put the four green letters "N," "O," "E" and "L" on our fireplace mantel, and sometime in the night, someone would change them around to spell: "E.L. N.O."

It means the same thing to me. Merry Christmas.

*FFRF member RJ Turner lives in Ohio, enjoys woodworking and writing, and made the "Freethought Clock" located in the Freethought Hall, the offices of FFRF.*



RJ Turner

# Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

## ET TU GALILEO?

“The Eagle has landed.”  
— first man on the moon, 1969

“Maybe Darwin was right, after all.”  
— Pope John Paul II, 1996

Here in these devout Italian digs,  
Hung with the bleeding hearts and dying Jesus,  
TV shows astronauts with little picks  
Chipping chunks of greenish lunar cheeses.

The Vatican’s abruptly overrun  
With cardinals and bishops in collision—  
The Pontiff pleads for prayer, but everyone  
Is watching heresy on television.

Oh, Galileo, your retaliation  
Is palpable as papal persecution:  
Apollo shines your sunny vindication  
On Copernicus, the Pill, and evolution.

By satellite, TV now tells the popes:  
Look what comes of knocking telescopes.

© 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](http://ffrf.org/shop).



## Happy 95th, Warren!

Longtime FFRF Member Warren Smith, shown here sitting with Tim Madigan, recently celebrated his 95th birthday in New York City. Warren was known as “the atheist in a foxhole” during his time in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1946. “Were there atheists in foxholes during World War II?” Smith asked Freethought Today in 1997. “Of course, as can be verified by my dogtags . . . A veteran of Omaha Beach in 1944, I insisted upon including ‘None’ instead of P, C, or J as my religious affiliation.”

## Meet our volunteers

# Five cats and a husband

**Name:** Judi Jacobs.  
**Where I live:** On a hilltop outside Sun Prairie, Wis., with my husband and five cats.  
**Where and when I was born:** Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on Aug 1. I spent 12 miserable years in Catholic schools, which is why I am no longer religious.  
**Family:** My husband Tom, also a freethinker, twin daughters Jennifer and Rachel, and my mother (who is still Catholic).  
**Education:** Iowa State University in Ames. Madison Area Technical Col-lege. I also did some teaching and spent a summer in Russia (when it was the USSR).  
**My day job is/was:** A medical cod-er for UW Medical Foundation. I have also been a veterinary technician and worked in retail. I raised my children myself until they were teenagers.  
**Why I volunteer for FFRF:** I like FFRF. It is a nice place to be, and I felt that this was something intellectual I could do.



**What I do as a volunteer:** I read and evaluate student essays. It has been inter-esting to learn how other people think.  
**What I like best about it:** See above statement. I also LOVE being in the FFRF library and skimming all the in-teresting books!

**Something funny that’s happened at FFRF:** I did trade a joke with Dan Barker about him and a guest going to different schools together. I enjoy the radio program so much. I think athe-ists are funnier than religious people.

**These three words sum me up:** Cre-ative, artistic, intelligent.  
**My freethought heroes are:** Thom-as Jefferson, and Anne Gaylor for her leadership in helping women to make reproductive choices.

**Things I like:** My granddaugh-ter, cats and all other animals, beads, books, fellow progressives, Barack Obama.

**Things I smite:** Cruelty to animals, children or any innocent person; an-ti-abortionists who concentrate on other people’s pregnancies and don’t care about any other “life” issues; the oil industry and Republican politicians who spread lies about our president and others. I smite a lot of other things too numerous to mention.

**How did I become a freethinker?** I never much liked going to church. I always thought it was very convenient that the things they celebrated and and tried to teach us took place a long, long time ago, and not even in this country! In high school, I realized that we had our stories, but all other cultures had their stories, and their stories are just as true and sacred to them as ours are to us. I did raise my children as Meth-odists. I do have fond memories of the churches and people I met, but finally decided religion was just not necessary.

# Helping in the fight

**Name:** Karen Lee Weidig  
**Where I live:** Madison, Wis.  
**Where and when I was born:** Long ago in the nouveau riche and lily-white suburbs of Milwaukee. Brook-field, to be specific.  
**Family:** I live with an awful hound named Happy.  
**Education:** Degrees in cultur-al anthropology, Spanish litera-ture, art history and graphic design (pre-computer!).  
**My day job was/is:** Janitor.  
**Why I volunteer for FFRF:** Some-body has to fight this fight for me and I am grateful. Plus, I can’t send money commensurate with my gratitude.  
**What I do as a volunteer:** Smile, read, collate.  
**What I like best about it:** Such in-teresting literature. Such fascinating people!  
**Something funny that’s happened at FFRF:** Dan Barker told a joke at lunch about the aging lovers . . .  
**These three words sum me up:** No sense’a’ humor.  
**My freethought heroes are:** All of the “little” people brave enough to



stand up against the conventions of religious society.  
**Things I smite:** Religious people and institutions trying to run my life. And yours.

Religious study

Believers understand the world less

A report from the University of Helsinki suggests that religious people are more likely to have a poorer understanding of the world and are more likely to believe inanimate objects have human qualities.

Ben Kentish of The Independent (U.K.) writes that researchers found that “religious beliefs were linked with a weaker ability to understand physical and biological phenomenon such as volcanoes, flowers, rocks and wind without giving them human qualities.”

Believers were more likely to think that inanimate objects such as metal, oil, clothes and paper can think and feel, and agree with statements such as “Stones sense the cold.”

“The more the participants believed



Photo by Kenn W. Kiser/Morguefile.com

**Does this angel statue feel the cold?**

in religious or other paranormal phenomena, the lower their intuitive physics

skills, mechanical and mental rotation abilities, school grades in mathematics and physics, and knowledge about physical and biological phenomena were . . . and the more they regarded inanimate targets as mental phenomena,” wrote Marjaana Lindeman and Annika Svedholm-Häkkinen, who completed the study. (The study defined “mental” as having human characteristics such as thoughts and spirit.)

The researchers said their findings suggest people’s lack of understanding about the physical world means they apply their own human characteristics to the whole universe, “resulting in belief in demons, gods, and other supernatural phenomena.”

The scientists compared religious


believers to people with autism, saying both struggle to distinguish between the mental and the physical, although autistic people are at the opposite end of the spectrum because they often see the world as entirely physical and struggle to understand the mental state of others.

Lindeman and Svedholm-Häkkinen asked 258 Finnish people to report how much they agreed that “there exists an all-powerful, all-knowing, loving God” and whether they believed in paranormal phenomena such as telepathy and visions of the future. They then matched their answers with a range of other factors, including exam results, survey answers and performances on different tests.

In the news

**Pope: Female priest ban likely forever**

Pope Francis said he believes the Roman Catholic Church’s ban on women becoming priests is forever and will never be changed, in some of his most definitive remarks on the issue.



A Swedish female reporter noted that the head of the Lutheran Church who welcomed him in Sweden was a woman, and then asked if he thought the Catholic Church could allow women to be ordained

as ministers in coming decades.

“St. Pope John Paul II had the last clear word on this and it stands, this stands,” Francis said.

Francis was referring to a 1994 document by John Paul that closed the door on a female priesthood. The Vatican says this teaching is an infallible part of Catholic tradition.

The reporter then pressed the pope, asking: “But forever, forever? Never, never?”

Francis responded: “If we read carefully the declaration by St. John Paul II, it is going in that direction.”

**One in five raised in religiously mixed homes**

A new poll shows that one in five U.S. adults grew up in a family with more than one religion.

The poll, conducted by the Pew Research Center, also found that of those raised this way, most had one Protestant or Catholic parent and one religiously unaffiliated parent.

More Millennials — 27 percent — are raised in religiously mixed homes than any other generation to date. And about the same number of young people — 24 percent — say they were raised by at least one parent who did not have a religious affiliation.

More people say their mother, rather than their father, was mostly responsible for their religious upbringing; and those raised in mixed-faith homes are more likely to identify with their mother’s faith.

**\$132M offered over sex abuse claims**

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has offered to pay \$132 million to settle hundreds of child sex abuse claims against its clergy under a revised bankruptcy reorganization plan filed in court.

The archdiocese, one of 15 U.S. Catholic districts and religious orders driven to seek Chapter 11 protection by the church’s sex abuse scandal, said its plan would mark the second-largest such bankruptcy settlement of pedophile priest claims in America.

The sum is more than double the \$65 million previously offered by the archdiocese and rejected by plaintiffs.

But lawyers representing the bulk of nearly 450 claims at stake in St. Paul-Minneapolis denounced the latest proposal as still far too small and accused church officials of trying to conceal their ability to pay much more.

**Coach suspended for ending prayer**

Wichita Falls (Texas) Wildcats coach Tony Curtale has been suspended indefinitely from the junior hockey team for allegedly ending an on-ice team prayer.



According to Times Record News, Curtale came off the ice after an overtime victory and then noticed a group of his players kneeling in prayer on the ice. He then had a brief conversation with a player, who wasn’t dressed for the game, and told that player to get the others off the ice.

Curtale, a Catholic, said it wasn’t to deny players their religious freedom, but rather to have everyone on the team feel comfortable, regardless of their religious preferences. Curtale said it was the first time he noticed his players praying on the ice after the game.

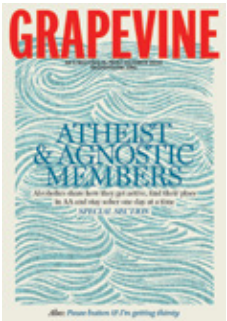
“I don’t want to single anybody out, especially young guys. I’m trying to protect them as much as possible,” Curtale told the Times Record News.

**AA’s journal gives nod to freethinkers**

AA’s Grapevine, the journal of Alcoholics Anonymous, devoted its October issue to atheists and agnostics, a first for the publication.

AA’s 12-step program for alcoholics has long been met with concern by atheists because of the heavy involvement of God as part of the recovery process. Five of the 12 steps include reference to God or a higher power, although those have been tempered over the years to be more inclusive of what the word “God” or “higher power” means.

From the October Grapevine’s Editor’s Letter: “This month, our special section features stories by atheist and agnostic AA members, some who have many years of sobriety. One member quotes our co-founder Bill W., in a 1946 Grapevine: ‘An alcoholic is a member if he says so . . . we can’t force our beliefs or practices upon him.’ In editing these stories, we honored the request of some authors to not capitalize the word God, which is our usual style. Bill W. intended Grapevine to be a mirror of the Fellowship. We hope these stories will shed some light on the joys and challenges of our atheist and agnostic members.”



**First Satan Club meeting protested**

The first official meeting of the After School Satan Club at an elementary school in Portland, Ore., drew national members of the Satanic Temple and Catholic protesters.

“The club is here to contrast the presence of the evangelical Good News Clubs, which are here specifically to proselytize to children,” said Lucien Greaves, the Satanic Temple’s national co-founder, who was on hand for the first official meeting of the club, an open house for parents, students and staff.

The Satanic Temple is a national organization based in Salem, Mass. Its mission is to “encourage benevolence and empathy among all people, reject

tyrannical authority, advocate practical common sense and justice, and be directed by the human conscience to undertake noble pursuits guided by the individual will.”

**Creationists case ended by Supreme Court**

The Supreme Court decisively ended a creationist group’s suit over the teaching of evolution by declining to review the case.

On Nov. 14, the Supreme Court opted to not review *COPE et al. v. Kansas State Board of Education et al.* At issue was Kansas’s adoption of the Next Generation Science Standards, which, according to the plaintiffs, “establish and endorse a nontheistic religious worldview” in violation of the Constitution.

“This is a case that was frivolous from the get-go,” said National Center for Science Education’s Executive Director Ann Reid, noting that the federal courts have consistently recognized “that evolution is not a religion and that teaching evolution does not violate the Establishment Clause.”

**Oklahoma votes down church/state proposal**

Oklahoma’s relationship between church and state was left unchanged after voters rejected the State Question 790 proposal on Nov. 8.

The proposal, created in response to the removal of the Ten Commandments monument from the grounds of the Oklahoma Capitol, would have repealed Article 2, Section 5 of the Oklahoma Constitution if it had passed. Article 2, Section 5 prevents religious monuments from being placed on public grounds and precludes religious organizations from taking part in public programs to the same degree as nonreligious organizations.

Opponents of SQ 790 say it would have resulted in too close a relationship between religion and government, creating and strengthening sectarian lines along faith among Oklahomans. In addition to faith-based societal strain, there were fears that educational funding, already in short supply, would be distributed to religious teaching organizations as well, leaving less for public schools.

# Religion trumps all in election

By PJ Slinger

The religiously unaffiliated voted in record numbers in the 2012 election, but did not reach the epic heights predicted.

The religiously unaffiliated, known as “Nones,” made up 15 percent of the voting population on Nov. 8, which translates to about 19.5 million votes. In 2012, the Nones made up 12 percent of voters for about 15.5 million votes cast. However, predictions for the 2016 election had the Nones casting up to 26 million votes.

So while the Nones are definitely increasing in number, the group as a whole is still not voting like it.

“The numbers are in for the religiously unaffiliated, who now account for a quarter of U.S. adults, but still do not tend to vote as a bloc,” writes Lauren Markoe of Religion News Service.

## FFRF members engaged

That a higher majority of Nones are Millennials — an age that historically, doesn’t turn out to vote — may account for the seeming indifference of the secular voter.

“At FFRF, we are proud that 96 percent of our members are registered voters and politically engaged,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, basing those numbers on a definitive membership survey in 2015. The average age of FFRF members is 67.

Those Nones who did go to the polls voted overwhelmingly for Hillary Clinton. She got 68 percent of the religiously unaffiliated vote, compared to just 28 percent for Donald Trump. Among white born-again Christian evangelicals, Trump garnered 81 percent of the vote.

“Despite Trump’s not being a particularly religious person, his platform was seen as anti-secular in many atheist and humanist circles,” writes Kimberly Winston of the Religion News Service. “He said he would appoint religiously conservative Supreme Court justices, ban Muslim immigrants, favor Christianity and repeal the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits certain tax-exempt organizations from endorsing political candidates — issues antithetical to organized atheism and humanism.”

## Evangelicals for Trump

Evangelical voters went overwhelmingly for Trump.

“While earlier in the campaign some pundits and others questioned whether the thrice-married Trump would earn the bulk of white evangelical support, fully 8-in-10 self-identified white, born-again/evangelical Christians say they voted for Trump, while just 16 percent voted for Clinton,” wrote Gregory A. Smith and Jessica Martinez of Pew Research Center.

“White evangelicals in this election aren’t values voters,” Robert P. Jones, CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute, told Markoe of Religion News Service. “They’re nostalgia voters. Trump’s line —



**FFRF Member Sam Salerno shows off his shirt after he voted on Nov. 8 in Lakewood, Ohio. Salerno is secretary of the Northern Ohio Freethought Society (NOFS), which is an Ohio chapter of FFRF.**

‘Let’s make America great again’ — and his last-minute saying — ‘Look folks, I’m your last chance’ — was really powerful for white evangelicals who see their numbers in the general population slipping.”

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker agreed, noting the evangelicals clearly ceded their claim as “values voters” in this election.

“In past elections, the Religious Right used to proclaim that ‘character counts.’ The so-called ‘values voters’ supported candidates whom they thought exhibited higher ‘Christian’ moral values,” Barker said. “In this past election, however, ‘character counts’ seems to have morphed into ‘political expedience counts.’ ‘Forget character,’ they are now saying. ‘Let’s get anybody into office who will help us force our punitive agenda on the rest of the country.’”

Deborah Jian Lee, author of *Rescuing Jesus: How People of Color, Women and Queer Christians are Reclaiming Evangelicalism*, told the Huffington Post that Trump’s win underscores a deep racial divide within evangelicalism.

“I’ve been hearing from evangelicals leaders and lay people who are people of color, women and LGBTQ who fiercely opposed Trump and are now stunned to see just how many of their white fellow believers supported a candidate that proudly demeans their humanity,” she wrote. “Trump preached xenophobia, racism, sexism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and more, and the white evangelical base said ‘Amen.’”

## Religious divide

The Pew Research Center showed how the religious divide shaped the election. According to Pew, weekly churchgoers backed Trump over Clinton, 56 percent to 40 percent. Those who said they attend religious services more sporadically were closely divided. And those who said they don’t attend religious services at all backed Clinton over Trump by a 31-point margin. The Jewish vote looked much as it did in the past, with overwhelming support for the

Democrat: Clinton garnered 71 percent compared with Trump’s 24 percent.

Catholics overall voted for Trump over Clinton 52 percent to 45 percent.

Mathew N. Schmalz, an associate professor of religious studies at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., said in Fortune magazine that Catholics didn’t vote for Trump because of his morals (or lack thereof).

“As far as Catholic conservatives are concerned, I know many who believe that Trump’s appeals to racism and misogyny are not only antithetical to Catholic commitments, but to the values of the Republican Party,” Schmalz writes.

Atheist author Sam Harris said that evangelicals may have unwittingly elected the country’s first atheist president.

“The irony: 81 percent of evangelicals just elected our first atheist president,” Harris wrote on his Twitter page the day after the election.

But Hemant Mehta, who writes the Friendly Atheist blog, disagreed with Harris’ claim that Trump is an atheist.

“I take issue with the claim that Trump is an atheist,” Mehta wrote. “Not because I’m one myself and I’d hate for Trump to be lumped in with ‘my tribe,’ but because I think atheism requires more thought than Trump gives it. Trump isn’t someone who thinks ‘God doesn’t exist.’ He doesn’t think about God, period. You think he spends time pondering deep philosophical questions? Of course not. Don’t confuse apathy with atheism.”

## Challenge for Nones

The Nones and other secularists now have their work cut out for them in the coming years.

Paul Fidalgo, director of communications for the Center for Inquiry, told Religion News Service’s Winston that a Trump presidency will be a step back for secular values.

“It is time for the secular community to gear up big-time because we should expect, once again, the basic tenets of secularism are going to be challenged very, very hard,” Fidalgo said. “That is the reality.”

Winston spoke with Sarah Levin, senior legislative representative for the Secular Coalition for America, a lobby that represents 19 atheist, humanist and freethought groups in Washington, D.C., including FFRF.

“Our eyes are now on the midterm elections,” Levin told Winston. “We are going to double-down. We really have to.”

Levin said the Nones need to band together better as a voting force as their numbers continue to increase.

“It is important to recognize the Religious Right’s agenda doesn’t represent the majority of Americans or even the majority of the faith community,” Levin told Winston. “They won the battle, but they didn’t win the war. The shifting demographics are still in our favor. That’s going to be a challenge for them and it is going to be incumbent for us to increase our turnout.”

# Freethinkers make their mark on elections

As the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans increases every year, so do the number of elected officials who are also “Nones.” Of course, it’s still an uphill battle, as atheists are still near the top of who-would-you-never-vote-for lists.

Freethought Today, with the help of the Freethought Equality Fund’s candidate endorsement list, has put together a listing of many of the atheist/agnostic/freethinking candidates (or others who are friendly to state/church separation) who were up for election on Nov. 8.

## Elected or re-elected

**Pinny Beebe-Center** — Maine State House (District 93).

**Ernie Chambers** — Nebraska State Senate (District 11).

**Beth Doglio** — Washington State House (District 22b).

**Julie Fahey** — Oregon State House (District 14).

**Martha Hennessey** — New Hampshire State Senate (District 5).

**Diego Hernandez** — Oregon State House (District 47).

**Chris Kennedy** — Colorado State House (District 23).

**Pam Marsh** — Oregon State House (District 5).

**Juan Mendez** — Arizona State Senate (District 26).

**Strom Peterson** — Washington State House (District 21, Position 1).

**Jamie Raskin** — U.S. House of Representatives (Maryland – District 8).

**Athena Salman** — Arizona State House (District 26).

**Melissa Sargent** — Wisconsin State Assembly (District 48).

**Tim Smith** — New Hampshire State House (Hillsborough District 17).

**Mark Spreitzer** — Wisconsin State Assembly (District 45).

**Lisa Subeck** — Wisconsin State Assembly (District 78).

**Ryan Tipping-Spitz** — Maine State House (District 123).

**Sam Young** — Vermont State House (Orleans-Caledonia-1 District).

## Not elected

**Patrick Edwards** — Pennsylvania General Assembly (District 62).

**Talia Fuentes** — U.S. Congress (District 5).

**Jennifer Goulet** — Washington State House (District 9, Position 1).

**Gayle Jordan** — Tennessee State Senate (District 14).

**Misty Plowright** — U.S. House of Representatives (Colorado – District 5).

**Cara Prior** — Arizona State House (District 16).

**Scott Prior** — Arizona State Senate (District 16).

**Misty K. Snow** — U.S. Senate (Utah).

**Barbara Stocker** — Missouri State House (District 115).

**Perrin Swanlund** — California State Assembly (District 34).

**Beth Tuura** — Florida State House (District 47).

**Beth Weisser** — Arizona State House (District 5).

**Mikel Weisser** — U.S. Congress (District 4).

## Overheard

One of the difficulties in raising public concern over the very severe threats of global warming is that 40 percent of the US population does not see why it is a problem, since Christ is returning in a few decades. About the same percentage believe that the world was created a few thousand years ago. If science conflicts with the bible, so much the worse for science. It would be hard to find an analogue in other societies.



Noam Chomsky

**Noam Chomsky, a cognitive scientist, historian, social critic and political activist, in an interview after the election**  
*Truthout.org, 11-14-16*

People should vote their conscience. People should weigh in what is for their own good and the common good but not be influenced by religious organizations or by churches.

**Father Dermot Rodgers, a pastor at St. Peter of Rome in San Diego**  
*NBC 7, 11-6-16*

The Christians may have the force of Heaven behind them, but the Satanists have the U.S. Supreme Court.  
**Reporter Rick Anderson, in an article about how the founder of the Satanic Temple of Seattle is trying to start an after-school Satan Club, but has been rejected by the L.A. Unified School District, for now**  
*Los Angeles Times, 10-20-16*

The City Council can, in a purely secular environment, make people who don't believe stand before a sign that mocks their disbelief and disbelievers. But that doesn't make it right, reasonable or humane.

**Editorial on the Chesapeake City Council's decision to erect an "In God We Trust" plaque on the wall behind the council dais**  
*Virginian-Pilot, 11-7-16*

In the United States, we know what happens when we start dividing ourselves along lines of race or religion or ethnicity. It's dangerous. Not just for the minority groups that are subjected to that kind of discrimination or, in some cases in the past violence, but because we don't then realize our potential as a country when we're preventing blacks or Latinos or Asians or gays or women from fully participating in the project of building American life.

**President Obama, speaking in Athens, Greece**  
*New York Times, 11-15-16*

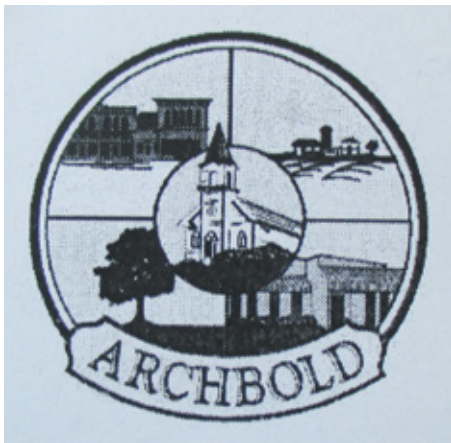
When I look at how religion plays itself out, religions are so much about controlling women and their sexuality and freedom, I'm the most personally upset by that part of it. It reinforces a power structure to keep people down, basically. I really think that the whole "submitting" and "surrendering" yourself — even though poetically I can really get into those ideas — in practical ways, I think it keeps people passive.

**Actor and comedian Julia Sweeney**  
*West Michigan Revue, 10-28-16*

## Match made in Door County, not heaven



**FFRF members Heather Mendenhall and Paul McQuillen were married on Aug. 21 in the picturesque gazebo at Cave Point in Door County, Wis. FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, a former minister, officiated at the freethought ceremony. Posing after the event are Dan, Heather, Paul and Annie Laurie Gaylor. Attendees included family and friends from California, Colorado, Texas, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Florida, Pennsylvania, New York and Ireland.**



This seal has been replaced.

## Seal

Continued from page 1

religion or no religion at all. To have a religious seal and declaration alienates and ostracizes this huge portion of the population.

After three follow-up letters to the village, FFRF finally persuaded it to change the seal and remove the church. (The Christian declaration was removed from the website immediately after FFRF's first letter.)

The village website now features a "Live Archbold!" motto superimposed on a state of Ohio shape. The new motto calls Archbold "A Community of Character!"

FFRF is gratified that Archbold made the right choice.

"We're happy that we were finally able to persuade the village," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "The church symbol and the declaration of Christian heritage were blatant endorsements of a particular religion."

## Wall

Continued from page 1

ensuring that — making sure political setbacks don't undo every good thing to happen to freedom of conscience, scientific progress, personal and civil liberties in our lifetimes — is going to require all our best efforts.

On your behalf, FFRF will be fighting like hell to ensure that a fluke Christian Right victory is not allowed to trump reason and our First Amendment. We'll be working overtime to safeguard your right, the right of every American, to be free from the imposition of religion and religious doctrines by our government. And to do this we need your help.

We're bracing for unrelenting congressional legislative battles to turn the clock back on secular policies we thought were secure. We're about to be swamped with new and vicious assaults against the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The vice president-elect, expected to run the new administration, has repeatedly boasted, "I'm a Christian, a conservative and a Republican in that order." As Indiana's governor, he attacked women's rights and signed a bill into law last year to permit business owners to discriminate against gays and others due to their religious beliefs.

As you know, President Obama was blocked from nominating a Supreme Court justice to replace the vacancy left by arch-conservative Antonin Scalia's death this year. After a decade suffering under a 5-4 "anti" voting bloc on the Supreme Court, we'd fervently looked forward to seeing that vacan-



Photo by Lauryn Seering

**FFRF's marquee shortly after the Nov. 8 election.**

cy filled by a progressive, so we could make some progress. Instead, Donald Trump has issued an official list of 21 judicial arch-conservatives drawn up with help from the Federalist Society. It's a cruel blow to know it'll be "déjà vu all over again" on the Supreme Court. But we can live with that. The real game-changer will be when the Religious Right packs the court if liberal justices retire. Then watch out.

Last spring when we launched a challenge grant to raise funds to send FFRF's expert attorneys to Capitol Hill, we didn't realized how critical such lobbying efforts would become. The president-elect campaigned on the promise to repeal the Johnson Amendment only as it applies to tax-exempt churches. That law is a safeguard barring entities from politicking and electioneering with tax-exempt dollars, something FFRF has successfully sued the IRS over to enforce. The Religious Right appears to have found a champion (or at least

a pushover) in the White House for its aggressions on the wall of separation between religion and government, including for the imposition of religion under the guise of "religious liberty" or "conscience clauses."

Since FFRF's founding in the late 1970s, we've weathered many ups and downs, including painful setbacks in the battle of church and state. But we've also won many brave victories in which reason has prevailed, and witnessed positive changes inconceivable even a decade ago. Most heartening, we're still witnessing the phenomenal growth in the United States of the Nones: the quarter of adults and the third of Millennials who identify as having no religion. Our secular movement cannot be denied.

It's on your behalf, and representing your views and rights, that we work to promote freethought and to get religion out of government. So help us give the Religious Wrong "hell" in 2017!



Photo by Scranton Times-Tribune  
**Dunmore High School Coach Jack Henzes prays with his players before a game.**

# Coach ceases pregame prayer

A public school football coach in Pennsylvania has been asked to stop praying with his team after FFRF contacted his school district.

Dunmore High School Coach Jack Henzes was regularly guiding his team in pregame prayers.

“It is illegal for public school athletic coaches to lead their teams in prayer,” FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote to Dunmore School District Superintendent Richard McDonald back in June. “The Supreme Court has continually struck down school-sponsored prayer in public schools.”

Cavell had added that the legal guidelines are actually even more restrictive.

“Public school coaches must refrain not only from leading prayer themselves, but also from participating in students’ prayers,” she pointed out. “It is unconstitutional for public school employees to participate in the religious activities of their students.”

Coach Henzes’ conduct represents the school and team when he acts in his

official role as the head coach. Therefore, he can’t lead his team in prayer, FFRF reminded the school district.

The Dunmore School District heeded FFRF’s advice, albeit after a bit of a delay.

“The school district has addressed this issue,” Superintendent John Marichak, who replaced McDonald in July, said in his recent reply. “We directed Coach Henzes to be sure that he should not partake in any such behavior. We also covered this with all of our personnel to be consistent and exhaustive in the upholding of the law.”

FFRF appreciates that its counsel was taken seriously.

“Regardless of the length of the time he was engaging in the activity, Coach Henzes was clearly overstepping legal and constitutional boundaries with his public prayerfulness,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We’re glad that the Dunmore School District gave him a talking to about his conduct.”

# FFRF ensures religion-free public school graduation

After a multiyear effort, FFRF has made sure that an Ohio public high school’s graduation ceremony will not be infused with religion.

FFRF initially contacted Dalton Local Schools in the summer of 2015 with its objections to a benediction at the Dalton Local High School graduation that year. The district assured FFRF that this would not happen in 2016. Instead, it invited Mark Hirst, a former member of the school board and a local pastor, to give the “message” at the 2016 graduation ceremony. His address contained overly religious content, peppered with remarks such as “Our soul calls us to this great truth, that we are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God’s great universe” and “I want you, class of 2016, to be everything that God created you to be.”

FFRF emphasized to the school district that it should have expected this, since Hirst had given similarly prayerful speeches at past ceremonies. The district has a duty to remain neutral toward religion, the organization said, and to guarantee that all school functions, especially graduations, are secular.



“As you were informed last year, the Supreme Court has continually struck down prayers at school-sponsored events, including public school graduations,” FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to Dalton Local Schools Superintendent Scott Beatty this July. “School officials may not invite a student, teacher, faculty member or clergy to give any type of prayer, invocation or benediction at a public high school graduation.”

After an exchange of letters over the past few months, FFRF has finally received a solid assurance from Dalton Local Schools.

“The superintendent will be requiring that any outside speaker at a district-sponsored event, such as graduation, provide a copy of the speaker’s remarks to the superintendent for review to ensure that there are no comments that can be construed as proselytizing,” the school district’s legal counsel recently replied. “Any outside speaker will be advised of the district’s adherence to its obligations under the Establishment Clause with regard to not promoting any religion or religious beliefs.”

# Georgia school district scraps bible class

A Georgia school district scrapped plans for a proposed bible class partnership with a local Christian group after FFRF complained.

In September, FFRF sent a letter to Oconee County Schools that detailed multiple violations in its school system of the constitutional separation of state and church. A particularly disturbing instance concerned a student being tormented for not joining in the Lord’s Prayer led by the North Oconee High School head basketball coach, David Gascho. Other students taunted him on a school bus with taunts of “Kill the Jew” and “Massacre the Jews,” according to the student’s family.

Among the violations the school district engaged in was its proposed partnership with the Oconee County Christian Learning Center for religious release time classes and possibly a bible class for credit. The bible class was meant to cover “divisive topics like abortion, evolution

and gay marriage,” the local newspaper reported. On all these issues, the Learning Center has a theocratic stance, with an absolutist approach against abortion, a dismissal of evolution in preference of creationism, and a condemnation of homosexuality as “sin.”

FFRF warned the school district that the partnership was unconstitutional and illegal.

“The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits public school sponsorship or involvement in devotional school instruction,” FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to Oconee County Schools Superintendent Jason Branch. “Just as Oconee County Schools cannot teach the bible as truth or creationism as science, it cannot give credit to students who receive those lessons outside schools.”

FFRF has received official word that the school district has abandoned plans for the biblical partnership.

# Police oath, code changed

A Wisconsin police department’s overtly religious oath and code of ethics has been changed after FFRF protested.

The West Allis Police Department’s Code of Ethics had included the following line since at least 2013, a line that was part of the oath that the police officers take: “I will constantly strive to achieve these objectives and ideals, dedicating myself before God to my chosen profession . . . LAW ENFORCEMENT.”

“Article VI of the U.S. Constitution prohibits the government from requiring any kind of religious test for an ‘office or public trust,’ which includes the position of police officer,” FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to West Allis Police Chief Pat-

rick Mitchell on Oct. 4. “The U.S. Supreme Court has held that to require a religious oath is a violation of both the First and Fourteenth Amendments of the Constitution.”

Besides requiring officers to take a religious oath, the inclusion of the modified Code of Ethics in the department’s annual report also gave the appearance that all officers believe in one particular god. This was not only divisive and inaccurate — fully 23 percent of American adults are nonreligious — but also unconstitutional.

“The West Allis Department Code of Ethics has now been modified and is taken verbatim from the Wisconsin Administrative Code,” Mitchell recently responded in a letter.



# Sheriff fixes issue

A California sheriff department has assured FFRF that it has taken remedial action after an officer participated in a prayer meeting.

Back in May, an undersheriff in the Orange County Sheriff’s Department spoke at the Mission Viejo All City Prayer Meeting, held in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer. The undersheriff addressed the event in full uniform and made statements such as “we know the power of prayer” and “remember to pray, remember to support us.”

Coordinators, speakers and volunteers at task force events must share the view that the bible is inerrant and that “there is only one savior and one gospel.” Official participation in an event organized in concurrence with the National Day of Prayer is deeply problematic.

“The Establishment Clause in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages,” FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote in June to Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Sandra Hutchens.”

# FFRF state/church victories

## FFRF silences school’s religious hymns



Thanks to FFRF, the Waikoloa Elementary and Middle School in Hawaii has ended its practice of having students stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance and sing religious songs.

FFRF received a complaint in September that students at the school were being forced to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance, and stand to sing “The Star Spangled Banner,” “America the Beautiful,” and “God Bless America,” on scheduled days of the week. FFRF was also informed that students who refused to stand had been disciplined by the school’s teachers.

“Students have a constitutional right not to be forced to participate in patriotic exercises,” wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler to Superintendent Art Souza. “Students may not be singled out, rebuked, told they must stand or otherwise penalized for following their freedom of conscience.”

Ziegler also informed Souza that “America the Beautiful” and “God Bless America” were inappropriate songs for the public school to schedule students to sing because of the religious lines in the songs that wrongly equated patriotism with piety.

On Oct. 18, FFRF received a reply from Souza who wrote that students would no longer be participating in singing the problematic songs. FFRF was also assured that teachers at the school had been told that students were not to be forced to stand or participate in the pledge or the national anthem.

## District rids classes of religious films

Thanks to FFRF, the Vernon Independent School District in Texas has enacted policies to end the promotion of religious ideologies to students through film.

FFRF received a complaint that teachers in the school district had been promoting their personal religious beliefs to students during class through religious films. FFRF was informed that a teacher at Vernon Middle School had shown a class of sixth-graders the Christian drama film “God’s Not Dead.” Furthermore, FFRF was told that a former teacher at Vernon High School had shown numerous religious films to his Teen Leadership class.

Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Vernon ISD Superintendent Gary Harrell on Oct. 20 to ask that the district ensure that its employees do not use the classroom to evangelize.

“Teachers have access to a captive student audience due to their position as public educators,” wrote Grover. “The district has a duty to prohibit religious proselytizing by teachers in the classroom.”

In a response dated Oct. 26, the district told FFRF that the teachers who had shown religious films in class were no longer employed by the school district. The letter also informed FFRF that Vernon ISD had enacted policies

to ensure that any film containing religious messages that was to be shown to students in the future would be approved by a campus principal.

## Ohio district’s team chaplain, prayer ended

An Ohio school district won’t be promoting religion through its coaching staff after FFRF got involved.

A concerned parent notified FFRF that either a coach or a team chaplain had led some of the Warren Local Middle School and High School athletic teams in prayer prior to games. In a letter to the school district, FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert informed Superintendent Kyle Newton that it is unconstitutional for public school employees, such as coaches, to participate in the religious activities of their students.

Markert also informed Newton that having a spiritual leader for the football team is unconstitutional.

Newton responded in a letter on Oct. 24 informing FFRF that he would instruct the district’s coaches that they are not allowed to participate in team prayer or to permit a chaplain or other nonstudents to lead the district’s athletic teams in prayer.

## Baptism of player by coach leads to change



A football coach at a public high school in Newton, Miss., will no longer be promoting his religious beliefs to student athletes after FFRF objected to the coach’s baptism of one of his players.

Coach Ryan Smith reportedly organized and performed a baptism on one of his players in front of the Newton High School football team. Before the ritual, the coach had given religious remarks to the team promoting Christianity. This included telling his players how God was calling to him, what scripture teaches about being a man, and the importance of accepting Christ as a savior.

Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Newton Municipal School District Superintendent Virginia Young on Oct. 13 to ensure the school district investigated the situation. Grover reminded Young that public schools are not to advance or promote religion, nor are they to organize, sponsor, or lead religious activities at public high school events.

“Coach Smith’s actions are especially problematic in the context of athletics, given the pressure players feel to conform to their coaches’ expectations so as not to disappoint coaches or hurt their standing on the team,” wrote Grover.

The Newton School District attorney informed FFRF that Young had met with Coach Smith and that the district did not expect that its staff would promote their personal religious beliefs to students in the future.

## FFRF gets religious signs taken down

After FFRF’s objection, two religious signs are no longer visible during school days at a public elementary school in Woodbridge, Va.

A community church in the town that rents the school building for its Sunday services was regularly leaving up signs promoting church services in front of Penn Elementary School. The signs were being displayed throughout the school week and were placed near the driveways to the school.

FFRF contacted Prince William County Public Schools Superintendent Steven Walts asking that action be taken to ensure the church signs would not be placed in front of Penn Elementary School.

FFRF was informed by the school system on Nov. 7 that the signs had been removed from school grounds.

## Jehovah’s Witness display removed

After FFRF got involved, a Jehovah’s Witness display with religious pamphlets has been removed from the side of a commuter bike path in Madison, Wis.

A concerned resident contacted FFRF to report a “sandwich board” display that was standing in Glenwood Park at the side of the bike path. The display held religious literature advertising the Jehovah’s Witnesses Christian sect.

In a letter to the Parks Superintendent on Nov. 10, FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne informed the city of the display.

“This religious display stood as an advertisement to bikers and other users of the commuter path,” wrote Jayne. “FFRF and our members are concerned that displays at this location will be a hindrance on others’ use of the park and bike path.”

FFRF received a response on Nov. 16 from the Department of Public Works Engineering Division City Engineer Robert Phillips, who wrote that the sign had been removed and was not permitted by the city.

## Bible verse display removed from school



Jumoke Academy, a public school in Connecticut, will be upholding its obligation to keep school and religion separate after a constitutional violation was reported by a school employee to FFRF.

The employee noticed that an academic assistant at the school was displaying a bible verse on her profile outside of one of the school’s classrooms.

Managing Attorney Rebecca Markert informed the school board that the display was an unconstitutional display of religion, and especially inappropriate given that nearly 30 percent of Americans and 44 percent of Millennials are non-Christian, either practicing a minority religion or no religion.

“The display alienates those non-religious students, families, teachers, and members of the public whose religious beliefs are inconsistent with the messages being promoted by the school,” wrote Markert on June 24.

FFRF received a response on Nov. 7 from the charter school’s executive director, Troy Monroe. Monroe wrote that the employee who had been displaying the bible verse had been met with and the religious display had been removed. Furthermore, Monroe informed FFRF that the school-based leadership team was informed of the expectations to ensure Jumoke Academy stays in compliance with the regulations involving the separation of church and state.

— *Compiled by Molly Hanson.*

## ’Tis the season!



Photo by Tom Cara

FFRF’s Metropolitan Chicago Chapter set up its annual holiday display on Nov. 22 in Chicago’s Daley Center Plaza. “We had eight volunteers and everything went up very smoothly,” Tom Cara of FFRFMCC said. “Included were two volunteers from the Kenosha/Racine Atheists and Freethinkers group (KRAFT).” From left to right: Steve Foulkes, Mike Weeda, Rob Moore, Sandra Mesrine, Bob Hunter, Shane Stapley, Rick Schuch. Rob and Sandra are from KRAFT.



## Albuquerque features well-timed billboard

FFRF and its Albuquerque chapter have put up a billboard with a well-timed message in New Mexico’s largest city.

A billboard has been installed at 152 Montano Road NW with a patriotic slogan superimposed on the image of a waving U.S. flag: “Keep Religion OUT of Government.” The display, paid for by FFRF, went up on Nov. 14 and will be there for a month.

“This is a timely reminder to our new government that our nation was founded on the uniquely American principle that religion should stay out of the public sphere,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “The framers of our godless Constitution were wise to realize that wars, strife, terrorism and persecution go hand in hand when religion is allied with government. The

incoming administration would do well to remember that.”

The activists with FFRF’s local chapter are thrilled to spread the word about the organization — especially at a time like this.

“As our country faces a challenging transition, we want to remind its citizens that it is imperative to honor the intentions of our Founders,” says Freedom From Religion-Albuquerque Vice President Kristen Gandy. “We also want to let secular individuals within our local area know that they are not alone in their values. Nontheists have a place in New Mexico to come to participate in activism, to let their godless voices be heard, and be supported in their constitutional rights with our local organization.”

## Wisconsin city gets tutored on basics of U.S. Constitution

Earlier this year, the Mayor’s Youth Commission in Kenosha, Wis., voted 5-2 to give \$500 to St. Mark the Evangelist Catholic Church for an Easter retreat for two of the church’s youth groups, God 1st and J-Walkers. FFRF alerted the city that the grant was unconstitutional and asked it to refrain from awarding such grants in the future.

“The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits the government from financially supporting religious activities,” FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to Kenosha City Administrator Frank Pacetti in May. “The city of Kenosha may not fund a church’s religious activities, including Easter youth retreats.”

Pacetti replied to FFRF after almost a six-month delay, contending that since the funds were private donations raised from sales of memorial bricks at a local park, and not from tax proceeds, it wasn’t engaging in a constitutional violation.

FFRF set the record straight in a quick follow-up communication, informing Kenosha that the source of the funding didn’t make a difference.

“The Establishment Clause prohibits the city from funding religion, regardless of how the city acquired the funds,” Jayne wrote. “No matter how the government categorizes a

grant, the city must abide by the First Amendment when it awards funds.”


FFRF clarified that the Mayor’s Youth Commission, which voted to grant the money, is a city entity. Moreover, the city did not warn the memorial brick donors that their funds would go toward advancing religion.

FFRF’s persistence has paid off. In a recent letter, Pacetti confirmed that Kenosha’s mini-grant program had been terminated.

“The city of Kenosha has been and will continue to be vigilant in its efforts to protect the constitutional rights of all of its citizens,” Pacetti wrote back. “In furtherance of this goal and in the hopes of finally putting this disputed issue to rest, I wish to advise you that the mini-grant program is being discontinued.”

FFRF is heartened that it was able to enlighten the city of Kenosha.

“It was not necessary to throw out the baby (the youth grants) with the bathwater (unconstitutional funding policies), but we’re glad our reasoning got through to Kenosha officials,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.



**FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION**  
P.O. Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • FFRF.org

**What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?**  
Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists.  
The Foundation’s email address is [info@ffrf.org](mailto: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](mailto:info@ffrf.org).

## FFRF’s case against Congress enters new stage

The Freedom From Religion Foundation’s case against the U.S. Congress has reached a new stage.

Earlier this year, FFRF sued Speaker of the House Paul Ryan and House Chaplain Rev. Patrick Conroy over the refusal to allow Dan Barker, an atheist, to deliver the opening invocation before the U.S. House. The government asked the court to dismiss that case. On Nov. 14, Barker responded to the government’s specious arguments.



Dan Barker

The House of Representatives begins each day in session with a prayer. Forty percent of those prayers, more than 900 in the last 15 years, have been given by guest chaplains. No nontheist has ever been allowed to openly give the House invocation, despite the fact that the nonreligious make up almost 24 percent of the population. From the years 2000 to 2015, 96.7 percent of the invocations have been Christian, 2.7 percent Jewish and less than half a percent Muslim or Hindu.

The government raised several disturbing arguments for why it should be allowed to discriminate against Barker and other atheists. One of the House chaplain’s major claims was that Barker does not have legal standing to bring the lawsuit because he was not “injured” by the discrimination. Of course, discrimination is itself an injury that courts can redress.

“But as Barker pointed out, every oppressor claims that their prejudice ‘is done ‘for the good’ of the oppressed” and said that the court must reject this degrading argument.

Another of the chaplain’s central claims was that the courts, as a co-equal branch of government, cannot review the House’s actions for constitutional violations. In its response, FFRF pointed out that the judiciary has always reviewed legislative action for constitutional compliance. Being a government officer is not a license to discriminate and the courts have jurisdiction to ensure equal treatment for all.

The government also attempted to argue that Barker was challenging the prayers themselves, rather than seeking an opportunity to deliver a secular invocation. But citizens have been delivering such invocations at government meetings around the country ever since the U.S. Supreme Court approved this practice. More than 75 have been given recently, including in state legislatures.

When the Supreme Court allowed legislative prayers in the 2014 case *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, it did so partly because the town involved “at no point excluded or denied an opportunity to a would-be prayer giver” and “maintained that a minister or layperson of any persuasion, including an atheist, could give the invocation.” It was this promise of nondiscrimination that led Barker to seek the guest chaplaincy in the first place. The D.C. district court must now decide whether that language was true and valid or a meaningless sop thrown to the Nones.

Barker is a Lifetime Member of FFRF and is represented by FFRF attorneys Andrew L. Seidel and Sam Grover, who authored the response, and Rich Bolton of Boardman Clark. Barker sued as an individual, not as co-president of FFRF.

## FFRF abortion ad runs in Little Rock paper

FFRF ran a full-page advertisement in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette asking the question, “What does the bible really say about abortion?”

The answer, as the ad puts it, is: “There is no biblical justification for the assault on women’s reproductive rights.”

The ad featured a compelling portrait of birth control crusader Margaret Sanger, and her quote: “No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body.” It documents that the bible does not condemn abortion and, in fact, “shows an utter disregard for human life.” It reminds the reader: “We live under a secular Constitution that wisely separates religion from government, and protects women’s reproductive rights.”



The ad was funded and largely written by Brian Bolton, a retired professor and Life Member of FFRF, in memory of FFRF’s principal founder Anne Nicol Gaylor (1926-2015), who was propelled into freethought activism by her experiences working to legalize abortion in the late 1960s and early ’70s. Gaylor observed that the battle

for women’s rights “would never end” until the root cause of women’s oppression — “religion and its control of our government” — is challenged.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor notes that the right to abortion remains a major political controversy.

The ad refers the reader for more information to Bolton’s article “God Is Not Pro-Life” and FFRF’s noncontract “What Does the Bible Say About Abortion?” It ran earlier this year in the Austin American-Statesman, the Tulsa World and in Wichita, Kan.

FFRF warmly thanks Brian Bolton, a professor emeritus who taught in Arkansas, for his generous support and commitment. Bolton also sponsors FFRF’s annual graduate student essay contest.

# Nonbelief Relief gives \$20K to Doctors Without Borders

Nonbelief Relief, a humanitarian agency for atheists, agnostics, freethinkers and their supporters to improve this world — our only world — recently announced that it has given \$20,000 to Doctors Without Borders.

Nonbelief Relief was incorporated in 2015, with the Freedom From Religion Foundation as its sole member and a board created to carry out the donations. Nonbelief Relief seeks 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 includes assistance for individuals targeted for nonbelief, secular activism or blasphemy.

One of NonBelief Relief's first gifts after its creation in 2015 was to Doctors Without Borders, following the bombing by U.S. forces of its hospital in Af-



ghanistan, killing 22, wounding 37 and destroying the facility. Now, Nonbelief Relief is supporting its invaluable work in Nigeria and Haiti.

"We are giving these funds to this secular organization because of its work in Nigeria, where the Boko Haram insurgency is creating famine and illness, and in Haiti, following Hurricane Matthew," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "In wishing to help Haitians, we felt Doctors Without Borders would

make the best use of these funds."

Many hundreds died, medical structures were destroyed, 175,000 were displaced and 1.4 million people are in need of aid.

Gaylor noted that the Nigerian situation, due to the Islamist Boko Haram, is critical.

Other major donations this year include:

- More than \$60,000 total distributed to about a dozen Bangladeshis,

who are on a hit list because of their public atheism.

- World Food Program, USA, \$20,000 earmarked for Syria, and \$10,000 earmarked for Sudan.

- \$10,000 for National Center for Victims of Crimes, going directly to survivors or victims' families of the Orlando shooting.

- \$10,000 for the Livingston Parish Public Schools, in Baton Rouge, following the flooding that destroyed school buses and classrooms in Louisiana in early fall.

Nonbelief Relief will additionally seek to challenge 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 and public.

## FFRF files amicus brief over broadcast pregame prayers

FFRF has filed an amicus brief against a Florida Christian school that wants to broadcast pregame prayers at state championship football games.

Cambridge Christian School in Tampa, Fla., filed a federal lawsuit last month targeting the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA), a state entity, asking that it provide access to a public-address system so that the school's prayers could be heard loud and clear before games. The case stemmed from a Dec. 4, 2015, game where the school's request to use

**We hope the court will see that this is not a matter of censorship.**

—Jocelyn Williamson

the public-address system for prayers was declined by the association, which manages game announcements. The association recently asked a Florida district court judge to toss out the lawsuit.

FFRF and its local chapter, Central Florida Freethought Community, have filed a friend-of-the-court brief asserting that Cambridge Christian has no case to make.

"Cambridge Christian wants to force a state agency to promote its Christian message through a mechanism limited to conveying government speech," FFRF states in the brief. "The Florida High School Athletic Association has rightly declined to do so because it would violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment."

Students who participate in the association's athletic championship competitions or attend the competitions cannot be the subjects of publicly

broadcast prayer by the association, FFRF contends. This remains true even when private Christian schools participate. Under the Establishment Clause, the government may not endorse religion, and there is no exception to be made even if most members of the audience would be receptive to the religious message. The Florida High School Athletic Association cannot be the mouthpiece of religious organizations or be used to gather event attendees to engage in a communal expression of Christian religious worship.

FFRF also argues that a ruling in favor of Cambridge Christian would harm the public.

"In this case, an injunction would be adverse to the public interest because it would violate the rights of participants, spectators and those who view the game broadcast," it says.

The Central Florida Freethought Community agrees. "We hope the court will see that this is not a matter of censorship, but the appropriate use of a public facility for a secular sporting event," says Director Jocelyn Williamson.

### FFRF ends school's religious promotion

After an investigation prompted by FFRF's objections, a Mississippi school district will no longer allow religious events to be promoted by administrators over the school public address system.

FFRF was informed by a concerned community member that administrators at Biloxi Junior High and Biloxi High had been broadcasting religious events. At Biloxi High School, there was a broadcast announcement reminding students to participate in a "See You at the Pole" event, which is an



annual Christian-oriented prayer rally. Biloxi Junior High Principal Scott Powell reminded students over the loudspeakers on Oct. 4 and Oct. 5 not to forget to bring their bibles to school on Oct. 6 for "Bring Your Bible to School Day." This was a privately organized, non-school religious event. There was no disclaimer made that the school was not endorsing the event.

On Oct. 26, FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover sent a letter to Biloxi Public Schools Superintendent Arthur McMillan about the constitutional violations.

"Public school representatives may not organize or endorse a prayer event like See You at the Pole or an event designed to promote a religious text like Bring Your Bible to School Day," wrote Grover.

Grover informed McMillan that FFRF was requesting that the district investigate the violations and take action to ensure that its employees understand and respect their constitutional obligations.

On Nov. 18, FFRF received a response from Biloxi Schools Board Attorney Edward Donovan.

"Those responsible for the delivery for announcements at the junior high and high school have been directly counseled by the Superintendent to reinforce their awareness of the need to absolutely avoid announcements which promote any particular religious belief, prayer gatherings or any other activity which could be construed as the promotion of any sect or religion," wrote Donovan.

## Partisan politicking draws complaints

Tax-exempt churches should never engage in partisan electioneering.

Prior to the Nov. 8 election, FFRF acted on 15 electioneering complaints, sending letters to the IRS reporting illegal campaign intervention on the part of churches in different parts of the country. Some of the most egregious cases were within the final weeks before the election, including a flyer distributed at a California church that told parishioners: "It is a mortal sin to vote Democrat." In another instance, a pastor of a Roman Catholic Church in Rhode Island said: "I cannot vote for Mrs. Clinton, since my immortal soul would be in peril by cooperating in the destruction of innocent human life."

Like all nonprofits organized under 501(c)(3) of the tax code (including

FFRF), churches must abide by strict guidelines that prohibit partisan election activity. The code states in relevant part that 501(c)(3) organizations cannot "participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office." While leaders of churches or religious organizations may express their opinions on political matters as individuals, they are precluded from making "partisan comments in official organization publications or at official functions of the organization."

In order to cross the line and unlawfully endorse a candidate, pastors don't need to say any magic words like "Vote for Candidate A" or "Don't cast

your ballot for Candidate B." They can even cross that line by expressing that sentiment without telling a parishioner directly. Churches should not even tacitly express favor or disfavor of a particular candidate.

Over the years, FFRF has reported hundreds of churches that have violated these prohibitions. In 2012, FFRF sued the IRS to compel it to enforce its own regulations barring churches as well as other nonprofit (c)(3)s from engaging in partisan political activity. FFRF is proud that the lawsuit nudged the IRS to agree to continue to investigate errant churches and ensure that the tax code is being enforced evenhandedly.

Tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organizations may either maintain neutrality and stay

tax-exempt or endorse candidates and pay taxes. The choice is theirs. As the law stands, religious leaders are free to endorse whomever they choose, so long as they do so on their own time in their capacity as citizens, not from the pulpit and not as church officials using church resources. This rule is known as the Johnson Amendment, after Lyndon B. Johnson, the Texas senator and later president who helped pass the law in 1954. (President-elect Donald Trump has vowed to repeal the rule, but it is currently the law.)

James Madison wrote, "to employ religion as an engine of civil policy" was "an unhallowed perversion of the means of salvation."

Churches would do well to listen to this Founding Father.

FFRF Atheist in Foxhole Courage Award

Thou shalt not defy the First Amendment

Marie Schaub is a plaintiff in FFRF's case over a Ten Commandments monument in Pennsylvania's New Kensington-Arnold School District. In August, FFRF won an appeal in the case, overturning the initial judge's ruling that she (and her daughter) did not have legal standing. She is the only publicly named plaintiff in the case and has been vilified because of it. Marie gave the following speech on Oct. 8 during FFRF's 39th annual national convention in Pittsburgh. She was introduced by FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott:

While small in stature, Marie Schaub will be the force behind lifting two tons of granite. Her case against a school district over its Ten Commandments monument is not completed, but is nearing its conclusion. In the process of challenging the school system, Marie has endured community backlash, yet she has not wavered in her dedication to enforcing the Constitution. I am pleased to present Marie with FFRF's Atheist in Foxhole Courage Award, which is given to those who have demonstrated exceptional courage.

By Marie Schaub

I can remember the first time I saw the nearly 6-foot-tall statue of the Ten Commandments in front of Valley High School. I was confused and sickened, but I didn't think there was much I could do about it.

When I heard that a group that shared the same ideas about religion in our government was looking for other people who opposed the 2,000-pound monument, I was instantly relieved and excited to be a part of such an important cause. I thought for sure FFRF's phones were already ringing off the hook with willing participants who also wanted the decalogue relocated.

Well, I soon found out that not only was my atheist family seemingly alone in our town, but we were very unwanted. One of the first signs indicating that we were not welcome came from the school administrators themselves. The New Kensington-Arnold School District's superintendent took to Facebook like Donald Trump takes to Twitter.

Superintendent John Pallone posted a long status about the monument, saying how the district would defend its religious rock against the evil, out-of-town atheists from Wisconsin — completely ignoring the fact that at least four members of my family who live in the district were included in the complaint. The superintendent prior to John Pallone was George Batterson, and he also expressed his religious duty to defend the Ten Commandments, as revealed in private emails to his sister. So it's apparent that there is a long history of bigotry at Valley High School in New Kensington.

**No more privacy**

Everyone involved in the lawsuit was subjected to what I would call a necessary invasion of privacy. Every email, text, social media post, private message, etc., that had anything to do with this case was permissible in court, unless it was a correspondence with an attorney. Always be mindful about what you do online. You never know



Photo by Ingrid Laas

**Marie Schaub, the lone named plaintiff in FFRF's lawsuit over a Ten Commandments monument on public school property, speaks to the convention crowd on Oct. 8.**

when it will become part of the public record.

At the beginning of this process, I had to hand over all of my electronic accounts, along with my user names and passwords, to our attorneys and their assistants. Thanks to FFRF, I've been able to work with Marc Schneider and his team at Steele Schneider in Pittsburgh. They've been more than professional while dealing with thousands of pages of materials the district and I have provided for them to sift through. It was certainly an uncomfortable experience to have my personal messages and emails examined, but I realized it was a temporary inconvenience and a small sacrifice, considering what was at stake.

Others in my neighborhood found social media and letters to the editor as an outlet to vent. Almost daily, there was a new article or post complaining about my complaint. I recall one post that said my "whole family should be taken out into the street and shot." Many people wrote that we should leave the country if we don't like it. Some of the crank mail I've received has been both threatening and laughable at the same time. It's because of these threats that I requested my daughter not be named in this lawsuit, and the judge agreed to allow my child to proceed as Doe 1.

As someone who's always been outspoken and a bit feisty, I felt it was in my best interest to be named in this complaint because I knew I'd have a tough time keeping my mouth shut. I'm not shy about expressing my non-belief and I share my opinions about it with whoever is willing to listen. I don't try to convert people by openly advertising that I'm an atheist; my objective is to let other people like me know that they're not alone.

**Relationships affected**

Not only has this case caused problems with the school and the community, it's also affected some of my

personal relationships. In the beginning, tensions ran high. Everyone had an opinion. Even though a lot of my friends said that they agree the monument is in an inappropriate location, they expressed their distaste for my objection. I've lost a couple of so-called friends over it, but in my opinion, if this subject has caused them to avoid me, they obviously weren't that good of friends in the first place.

You see, there's just no nice way of telling someone that they're full of shit. But I try, and you should, too. I really put a lot of effort into criticizing the belief — not the believer — in spite of some of the colorful names I've been called. I struggle with it daily, but I think it's important to focus on the discrepancies and negative effects all religions have on our society, not just the Christian faith. Christians

seem to feel they are the most oppressed majority in America.

In response to our combined complaint, a few church leaders formed a little group called "Thou Shall Not Move." They fashioned cardboard cutouts of the Ten Commandments, which are displayed in people's yards all over town, including my neighbor's directly across the street from me. It's my understanding that they were going to use the raised money to help fund the legal defense of a similar monument at another public school approximately 45 minutes away in Connellsville. But that's already been ruled unconstitutional and relocated, so the group is now seeking to donate several monuments to private organizations, which is fine by me.

Appeal to moderates

Just as I believe we need to appeal to moderate Muslims to address radicalism, I think we should approach moderate Christians who value the separation of state and church. Many Christians who insist on injecting their religion into our secular lives seem to be driven by fear and ignorance. If only they could see that the tiny holes they put in the wall of separation are the cracks that could pave the way to the Sharia law that they are so afraid of. Maybe then they might be more inclined to respect our right to freedom from religion.

Despite being ostracized by my community and chastised by my acquaintances, I'm here to tell you that speaking out is well worth it, and I would do it all over again. While I may have lost a few friends along the way, it pales in comparison to the awesome support my family has received as a result. Before I found FFRF, I felt isolated and alone, but being part of the largest group of freethinkers in North America is comforting, inviting and gives me hope for the future.

We're all well aware of what's been done to nonbelievers in the past. Even today, in many countries, expressing opposition to religion can be deadly. Luckily, in the United States, most religious fanatics have barks that are

Continued on the next page



Photo by Ingrid Laas

**Marie Schaub is presented with FFRF's Atheist in Foxhole Courage Award by Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott at the convention.**

*It pays  
to complain*



By Dianne Centa

Donald H. Bachtel served admirably in Vietnam. I met him a few years later (in 1971) and we got married in 1972. When he died in a motorcycle accident in 1976, neither of us was yet 30.

His family and I were glad to have the city of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, bury him in the military part of the cemetery and install a headstone. Donald was raised without “the god delusion,” and I had long since discarded my Catholic faith.

When I visited the grave later, I noticed that the city had used a headstone with a Christian cross on it. That bothered me, but in my state of mind, I let it pass. All these years later, though, as “they” shout more and more loudly that this is a “Christian nation” and “there are no atheists in foxholes,” I finally decided to rectify the situation. I contacted the cemetery and the Department of Veterans Affairs and asked for a stone with an atheist symbol on it. As you can see, this nice marker was installed in the midst of rows of stones with crosses on them. Members of his family have thanked me; I’m just sorry it took me so long to have that horribly wrong symbol replaced.

**Marie Schaub**  
*Continued from previous page*

bigger than their bites. From what I’ve seen, the irrational evangelicals resort to vandalism of godless billboards and displays or push empty threats. So please don’t let that scare you away from properly reporting any violations that marginalize minorities. And please don’t stoop to their level.

And that brings me to another point. I’m not sure if you’ve noticed, but apparently if you’ve come out of the closet as a nonbeliever who thinks religion is harmful, you are called a “militant atheist.” But those who told me I should leave the country and die are considered “true Christians.” Don’t get me wrong, I have plenty of friends who are believers, but I’ve never gotten death threats from a Muslim, Jew or Hindu, and I’ve yet to witness any of those groups violate the separation of state and church. If I did, I’d speak out against those, too.

We live in the Information Age and I think these are very exciting times. We’re no longer isolated and, thanks to the internet, nonbelievers and freethinkers can have a major positive im-

**FFRF’s Vets Day ad runs in USA Today**

FFRF took out a Veterans Day ad with USA Today that honors those who have served, especially freethinkers. About a quarter of FFRF’s members are veterans or in the military.

The ad was in a special edition of USA Today distributed on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, with an initial print run of 800,000. It was sent out for free to the Pentagon, the U.S. Congress, the Army, Navy and Air Force headquarters, 250 military bases nationwide, key VA officials and a number of veterans organizations. Additionally, 1 million military personnel received a digital copy.

The ad appeals to the almost one-fourth of veterans who are nonbelievers. “You’ve been fighting for our secular Constitution and our freedom — let us fight for you,” the ad says. It features a photo of World War II veteran and FFRF Board Member Joe Cunningham in front of the “Atheists in Foxholes” monument at FFRF’s office building, Freethought Hall, in downtown Madison, Wis. The monument, which was dedicated last year during a grand opening celebration for the renovated Freethought Hall, is in honor of “ATHEISTS IN FOXHOLES and the countless freethinkers who have served this country with honor and distinction. Presented with hope that in the future humankind may learn to avoid all war.”

“Contrary to that tired, untrue cliché, there are indeed many ‘atheists in foxholes,’ and we’re reaching out to them,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.



Top: FFRF Members and veterans Henry Huemmer, Tim Morton, Brian Erskine and Ben Barwick pose next to the Atheists in Foxholes monument during a Veterans Day reception on Nov. 11. Middle and bottom: The wreaths and flowers were paid for by “an unabashed Arizona atheist” member. Lisa Treu planned and organized the celebration (including cookies and cupcakes!).



**Marie Schaub**

FFRF and Patrick Elliott were with my family and me throughout this entire process. Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker were more than helpful during this time, especially when I told them we were interested in staying the course and appealing the district court’s decision. We immediately filed an appeal, along with several unexpected friends of the court. I’d like

to personally thank Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, the Anti-Defamation League, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Jewish Social Policy Action Network, the Sikh Coalition, the Union for Reform Judaism, and, of course, the Freedom From Religion Foundation!

After four years of lengthy litigation, I didn’t expect to make much progress, but this past summer the Court of Appeals, which included a panel of three judges, unanimously sided with us on the issue of standing. One of the judges noted how the unwanted contact didn’t have to be as frequent as the previous judge had ruled and remanded the case back to district court to be heard on the case’s merits.

Apparently, the sitting judge who originally heard our request is about to retire, but in a surprising and recent change in events, reports say that the School District is considering alternative locations for their Judeo-Christian monument. Ultimately, we all want to be accepted and feel welcome. The only way to do that is through understanding and equality.

Be brave, stand up for your rights, even if standing up means taking a seat.

FFRF's inaugural Forward Award

Even after deadly attack, the fight continues

Rafida Bonya Ahmed's speech was delivered on Oct. 8 at FFRF's 39th annual convention in Pittsburgh. She was introduced by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor:

I consider Wisconsin's motto, "Forward," a perfect motto for the free-thought movement.

The original "Ms. Forward" statue was sculpted by Jean Miner in the early 1890s. FFRF has commissioned a statuette replica of Forward to bestow as a new and important award, for those freethinkers who are significantly moving society forward.

Rafida Bonya Ahmed is an American citizen who was born in Bangladesh, and married Avijit Roy, meeting him through the award-winning Bengali blog, Muktomona, which means Freethought.

Bonya and Avijit were set upon by machete-wielding Islamist militants on Feb. 26, 2015, which left Avijit dead and Bonya critically wounded. Bonya, thankfully, has made amazing progress recovering from major wounds and has not backed down. In fact, she has become an even stronger proponent of secularism and freethought. Today, she is moderating Muktomona, and working very closely and generously with international and local communities to help save other Bengali bloggers and activists, including working with Non-belief Relief, FFRF's new humanitarian charity.

I have been privileged to spend a little time with Bonya and can think of no one braver and more deserving of our first "Forward" award. We also dedicate this award to the memory and works of Avijit Roy that have moved society forward.

By Rafida Bonya Ahmed

Thanks to the Freedom from Religion Foundation for the Forward Award. Thanks for being a partner at this critical time, helping the freethinkers in Bangladesh from half the world away.

I am Rafida Bonya Ahmed. I normally write with my middle name Bonya Ahmed. I am a Bangladeshi-American blogger, author and also one of the moderators of the Bengali blog Muktomona, which is the first freethinking blog in the Bengali language. My late husband Avijit Roy founded this first online platform in 2001 as a Yahoo forum for atheists, freethinkers, humanists and the secular Bengali-speaking community.

I was born in Bangladesh, but I came to do my undergrad here in the early 1990s and have been living here since. My day job used to be in the corporate world, and I was a senior director of marketing at one of the credit bureaus. My husband was also born in Bangladesh, earned his Ph.D. in biomedical engineering in Singapore and then moved here in 2006.

Last year in February we were visiting Bangladesh, our home country, for a book-signing event. When we were leaving the well-lit, crowded book fair to get back to our car, Avijit and I were attacked by Islamic militants. Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent claimed responsibility for this attack. We were stabbed repeatedly with machetes on the side of the road. Avijit died in the



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Rafida Bonya Ahmed, an atheist activist who was seriously injured in a machete attack in Bangladesh, speaks at the FFRF convention in Pittsburgh.

hospital, and I was gravely injured as a result of four stabs around my head, and my thumb was sliced off. I have injuries on both hands and my body. I've had multiple surgeries to repair the damaged nerves and arteries. I continue to suffer from constant headaches and back issues and I have been put on PTSD watch.

After the attack, it did not make sense to continue my job in the corporate world, so I decided to take leave from work. When the University of Texas at Austin, with a very strong South Asian Institute, offered me a visiting scholarship to do research work on the rise of Islamism in Bangladesh, I gladly took it up. I thought this would finally give me the opportunity to work not for a paycheck, but for something I always craved to do.

Let me take a minute to show how my husband and I factor into this situation in Bangladesh.

Avijit and I are, or were, atheists, bloggers, writers and, above all, secular humanists who tried to answer the larger questions in life. We wrote in Bengali because we wanted to popularize the basics — as well as the cutting-edge concepts — of science, rationalism, philosophy and art in this language. I wrote a book on evolution named *Along the Path of Evolution* a few years ago.

As I said, Avi founded the first online platform Muktomona. We wrote about science, rationalism, atheism, freethinking, literature. He wrote and edited 10 books. He wrote books about the origin of life, the science

behind homosexuality, and about love from the perspective of evolutionary psychology.

His larger passions were science and reason. They acted as a gateway for his curiosity about our world. Still, art acted as a force of change and inspiration in his life. But two of his books — *Philosophy of Disbelief* and *Virus of Faith* — created far greater attention than his previous works. On one hand, they made him exceedingly popular among young adults and progressive readers. On the other hand, these books fueled hostility and anger toward Avijit from the Islamist fundamentalists.

I guess that would be it, a summary of his "crimes" in the eyes of the Islamic terrorist groups, "crimes" that led to him being hacked to death.

**No government outrage**

Bangladesh is a small country surrounded by India on three sides and the Bay of Bengal in the south. The attack on us is not the end of the story, but rather the start. Avijit was perhaps the most prominent victim, but he was neither the first nor the last such victim. After the attack on us, Islamist terrorists killed another two humanist bloggers and writers in Bangladesh in the same manner within couple of months. They vowed to kill one a month.

In August 2015, as our government stayed completely quiet, the militants walked into the apartment of another atheist blogger and stabbed him to death in front of his partner. In October last year, they targeted two of Avi-

jit's publishers in their office. They managed to slaughter one in his office, while the other publisher barely escaped along with two other writers. Many of these secular bloggers, writers and publishers had to flee the country to save their lives.

You would think the Bangladeshi government would be outraged by now. Instead, it remained largely silent as the killing spree continued. And while this supposedly secular and democratic government did eventually speak out, the criticism was undercut as it shamelessly blamed the victims for their own deaths for crossing "boundaries" and warned against writing anything that could hurt so-called "religious feelings."

We are now seeing the inevitable results of encouraging a culture of impunity in Bangladesh. The systemic pattern of assassinations and attacks have extended from atheist bloggers to minority Shiite, Hindu or Christian groups, foreign nationals, progressive, secular university professors, intellectuals, activists.

The machete-wielding terrorists marched into the apartment of the editor of the first Bengali gay magazine in April this year and stabbed him — along with his friend — in front of his mother and safely got away. Their crime? They were homosexuals. The terrorists assassinated six people in that month alone.

**Claiming responsibility**

Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent and ISIS have been claiming responsibility for these slayings. ISIS, meanwhile, has featured Bangladesh in its magazine Dabiq multiple times. Recently, ISIS's publication again vowed to kill the atheists and minorities in Bangladesh.

The government's response has been unbelievable. While it is condemning these killings, it is also arresting bloggers, writers and publishers, closing down publications under the guise of the "semi-blasphemy" law — a very old British colonial law which has been enforced in recent times with an increased amount of severity. Believe it or not, this new amended



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Rafida Bonya Ahmed lost her thumb on her right hand during the attack by extremists that killed her husband.

act has made the criticism of religion or hurting so-called religious feelings on the internet punishable with up to 14 years of jail. The government has been systematically harassing and arresting bloggers, writers and journalists under this law.

Let me give an example. The Bangladeshi government banned a secular progressive blog site called Istition recently under this law. Its moderator, Nur Nobi Dulal, has been in hiding for almost a year. The Islamic militants as well as the Bangladeshi government are looking for him. He is living an inhumane fugitive life with two teenage kids and his wife.

Thanks to Freedom from Religion Foundation for helping these people at the critical moments of their lives. The truth is that the liberal progressive secular community and minorities of all sorts in Bangladesh now don't just have to fear Islamic militants, we must also fear our own government, which shows no regard for its secular beginnings and chooses instead to appease the religious fundamentalists to secure its vote banks.

You can say we are caught between a rock and a hard place.

The government was finally forced to respond once the ISIS-supported militants took over a restaurant in the affluent diplomatic area of the capital city on July 1 of this year and slaughtered 20 people with machetes. Most of them were foreigners, working in Bangladesh.

Afterward, the Bangladeshi government claimed to arrest quite a few of these militants from a couple of Islamic terrorist groups. But, we are also hearing that many of them are getting killed in so-called crossfire by the police before bringing them to justice in the judicial system. There has been an uproar about these crossfires in Bangladesh.

### Raising awareness

I have been continuing to work to raise awareness in the international community, such as the European Union, United Nations, and the U.S. Congress. I've also helped out the threatened and displaced bloggers and writers in different ways. We have built a few temporary shelters and migrated a few bloggers to the safer places.

To be honest, Europe has been pretty open to take some of these bloggers. Awareness about the rest of the world is greater there, too. I am still waiting to get some positive response from our government here. The Freedom from Religion Foundation, PEN America and Center for Inquiry have been great partners in this journey.

I know most of the mainstream national and international media covered the attacks on us and others as an attack on freedom of expression and freedom of speech. But I really think it is more than that. As my good friend Professor Nigel Hughes from UC-Riverside wrote in Huffington Post right after the attacks on us last year:

"They did not die only for the cause of free expression. They also died because they believed that the natural explanation of where we come from is the correct explanation; that it is factually right, that it speaks the truth. They died because they understood, what science has to tell us about the past, has direct consequences for choosing how we face the future, and that science has repeatedly proven to be the surest way to do this successfully."

"Yet, on the very day that Roy,



Photo by Ingrid Laas

**Rafida Bonya Ahmed, right, stands with FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor after receiving FFRF's inaugural Forward Award.**

a U.S. citizen, was bludgeoned to death, another American [Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.)] stood on the floor of the U.S. Senate with a snowball in his hand and claimed that what his gut told him was a better basis for preparing for the future than the scientific contributions of thousands of individuals, accomplished over thousands of years.

### A matter of consequence

"This is why the deaths of these science advocates in Bangladesh is a matter of consequence the world over. The global significance of their deaths must not be obscured behind a veil of free speech concern. They died because they understood that the risks of ignoring what science tells us are too serious to indulge political ambition clothed in a supernatural mantle, wherever it occurs."

Beyond the direct implications such as Sept. 11 or the killings in San Bernardino, we are seeing a concerning rise of assaults on our rational way of life here at home in America. We see presidential candidates rejecting the well-established theory of evolution, denying the impacts of climate change or attempting to deny women's right to choose. The list can go on. These are all done in the name of politics and religion.

### We've come a long way

I think secular humanism is more important now than ever in the history of our species. In last few hundred years we have come a long way. We are demanding equality for all people, regardless of racial or ethnic background, sex, gender, religious views or political leanings.

The increase in global wealth is outpaced only by the widening income inequality. With this much global wealth, strangely enough, we still have a large population in the world living under extreme poverty.

Climate change is beginning to transform life on Earth. Around the globe, seasons are shifting, temperatures are climbing and sea levels are rising. We need a deeper understanding of science and reason to deal with the challenges of the 21st century.

Now our world is connected and intertwined way more than ever before. We are all a part of a complicated web, where all actions contain global

consequences.

I pause sometimes to consider what really happened in Bangladesh in such a short period of time, and what is happening in many parts of the world? We are seeing a shift toward religious fundamentalism and conservatism in many parts of the world, including here at home. Maybe Bangladesh, a Muslim country with a secular beginning, can act as a test case for us.

Believe it or not, I was openly an atheist since the age of 13. Not here, not in Europe, but in Bangladesh. My liberal Muslim parents did not discourage my lack of religion. We hosted open debates during dinner about religion, human rights, politics and history.

As a teenager, I was openly an atheist, with my left political stand. It was a little uncommon at that time, but not a punishable act like it has been now. I attended medical school in Bangladesh right after my high school in the late '80s. It was only a matter of time before I dropped out of med school and worked in a garment factory for a year — first as a helper, and then as a machine operator. My parents got really worried and they forced me to leave the country. They were worried about my safety. That is when I came to do my undergrad here in 1991.

### Plight of women workers

Some of you may be familiar with the tragic fatalities that occur in gar-

ment factories in Bangladesh. We hear about the fatalities from the building collapses and fires every now and then. The country has an export-oriented ready-made garment industry, which employs more than 4 million workers. About 90 percent of garment workers are women.

The plight of garment workers is something I have thought about for decades. I worked with these people side by side, an opportunity that kids from my socioeconomic class do not get. In part, they have shaped my worldview forever.

During my time as a garment worker, I discovered firsthand that the whole industry is governed by inhumane working conditions, long hours, extremely low wages, lack of building safety, child labor, repression, corrupt government policies, you name it. It continues the same way, even now.

By sacrificing the livelihoods of these female workers, brands like Old Navy, Walmart, H&M and Gap can provide us with clothes at competitive rates here.

Even now the minimum wage for these workers is less than \$70 a month. The workers protested a while back to get it up to \$100 a month, but they had to settle for \$70 at the end of the negotiation with the garments factory owners.

Does it remind you about the workers and the sweatshops here in the 19th century?

Annie Laurie reminded me of this quote from a 19th-century feminist freethinker, Helen Gardener, when she heard about my experience in the garment factory. Helen said, "I do not know of any divine commands. I do know of most important human ones. I do not know the needs of a god or of another world. . . . I do know that women make shirts for 70 cents a dozen in this one. I do know that the needs of humanity and this world are infinite, unending, constant and immediate. They will take all our time, our strength, our love and our thoughts; and our work here will be only then begun."

Many people ask me what gets me going after everything that has happened to me. This is what gets me going in this careless, indifferent, valueless universe in which we live: Because the universe is indifferent, we create our own purpose during our tenure in this little planet. We try to create a better world every day with every bit we can.

Whenever I start to sink into the deep sense of my personal loss, I realize that, for all intents and purposes, I stand before you in a privileged po-

*See Forward Award on page 16*



Photo by Ingrid Laas

**Rafida Bonya Ahmed, right, speaks with convention attendees following her speech on Oct. 8.**

Forward Award

Continued from page 15

sition here today. I have been given a platform to speak, I have a comfortable life, a network of good friends and family who will support me through this ordeal.

But what about those who have no voice, no agency, no platform? When thousands of men and women get trafficked through the wild ocean, when millions of people get displaced in wars, when ISIS butchers, beheads, and forces girls into sexual slavery, when Boko Haram abducts young women and sells them off in medieval style, thousands of garment workers fight for their basic rights as human beings, millions of children die in poverty-stricken nations — I see that they do not have a voice.

These are not isolated events. We need to understand the global phenomenon, the political, economic and social connections. I firmly believe that we need to have a sense of collective responsibility and consciousness.

World is interconnected

Today’s world is connected in ways we cannot

conceive. The Islamists are asking for a world of Islamic Ummah, something that goes beyond the shores of any national boundary. Today’s powerful nations coin their political and economic strategies keeping the global economy in mind. The big corporations innovate thinking about the global markets.

We — the humanists — cannot be confined only to the issues related to our islands. It is easy to place the entire fault on religion. Within almost all religious texts exists justification for heinous intolerance, discrimination, hatred, terrorism and violence. But I think religion is only one piece of this big puzzle.

Religion is more than a belief system, more than a cognitive, social and anthropological phenomenon. It’s a tool which humanity sharpened into a political weapon throughout history. We should be able to navigate this complex dynamics with proper knowledge and reason.

But we also see a concerning trend among modern liberals and humanists who are scared to crit-

icize Islam or any religion and its extremist views because of political correctness.

I think we have come to a point in history where it has become our responsibility to condemn imperialistic, political and economic discriminations and exploitation globally and locally.

We should also have the courage to call out the ingrained religious fundamentalism (including Islam) and defend secular beliefs, science and reason. We should stand up against both, not one or the other.

As humanists, as people free from any religious dogma, we need to go beyond the notions of national concerns or only political or religious concerns and understand the complicated web of global

connections. This can facilitate a better understanding of today’s world, transmit and mingle ideas, form a global bond of resistance to build a better world.

Socrates said, “I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world.” We all also need to strive to become the citizens of the world.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Rafida Bonya Ahmed

No doubting Thomas



FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel stands in front of Thomas Jefferson’s second home at Poplar Forest, near Lynchburg, Va. Poplar Forest invited Seidel to take part in a conversation in the Jefferson dining room about religious liberty. Seidel wrote: “I gathered in that dining room with Doug Laycock, John Ragosta — both attorneys and law professors — and about 40 guests to talk about ‘Religious Freedom: Now and in Jefferson’s Time.’ Doug and John have stellar resumes and it was an honor to have a civil conversation with them about such an interesting topic. But the true honor stayed with me throughout our talk — the privilege I had to talk about religious freedom in the house of the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom, which toppled the established church in that state.”

NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER

Contest

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, a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

LEARN MORE AT:

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

Overheard

Historically most people consider this country a Christian nation, or a country where Christianity has been central. We may be entering a period where that is no longer true.

Daniel Cox, research director at Public Religion Research Institute  
Religion News Service, 9-15-16

This election has truly shown the underbelly of the toxic relationship that can develop between politics and religion.

Teryn O’Brien, a Christian who stopped calling herself “evangelical” because of its highly conservative background  
Washington Post, 11-9-16

Islam is an idea. Muslims are people. Human beings have rights and are entitled to respect; ideas, books and beliefs don’t and aren’t. No belief is sacred, but our right to believe what we want is.

Ali A. Rizvi, author of The Atheist Muslim: A Journey from Religion to Reason  
New York Post, 11-26-16

I think you’re right, that there are certain occupations — probably, most prominently, politics — where there would be a bias against somebody who’s agnostic or atheist in running for office. . . . We should foster a culture in which people’s private religious beliefs, including atheists and agnostics, are respected.

President Obama, in an interview with Bill Maher  
Salon.com, 11-5-16

I look at evangelicals and I wonder, those values [we try to teach our kids] don’t mean anything to them? All those values to me are more important than anybody’s skill in business or anything else because it tells who we are, how we want to live and what kind of people we are.

San Antonio Spurs coach Gregg Popovich, after the election  
CBS Sports, 11-12-16



And baby makes four

FFRF Staff Attorney Liz Cavell holds her newborn baby boy Simon Augustus Seidel shortly after his birth on Nov. 26. Husband, father and FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel reports that Simon was 9 pounds, 9 ounces and that “mother and baby are happy and healthy.” Simon joins his 18-month-old brother Oliver in the Seidel family.

## FFRF convention speech

# The founding of The Clergy Project

Linda LaScola's speech was delivered on Oct. 7 at FFRF's 39th annual convention in Pittsburgh.

Linda is one of the founders of The Clergy Project and is a clinical social worker with years of experience as a qualitative researcher and psychotherapist. She is co-author, along with Daniel C. Dennett, of *Caught in the Pulpit: Leaving Belief Behind*.

She describes how The Clergy Project came about, and her speech was, in essence, a long introduction for former minister Carter Warden, who was known only by the pseudonym "Adam Mann" for years. Warden publicly "came out of the closet" as an atheist following LaScola's speech at the convention.

To read the transcript of the speech by Warden, see the November issue of *Freethought Today*. Or to watch it online, go to [ffrf.org/warden](http://ffrf.org/warden).

By Linda LaScola

First, I want to extend my personal welcome as a western Pennsylvania native: Hello, younz guys! Any of younz from New Castle? I am. I never said "younz" as a kid. My mother told me it was wrong — and she was born and raised in Pittsburgh, on the north side. I told my girlfriends that if they ever left western Pennsylvania, they couldn't say "younz." It just wouldn't fly outside the tri-state area.

So now I'm back saying "younz" from a podium in a stunning, downtown Pittsburgh that didn't exist when I was growing up. And I am here to talk about something I had no clue about back then — atheist clergy.

Thanks, Dan and Annie Laurie, for giving me this opportunity.

I'm also here to briefly discuss the nonbelieving clergy study I conducted with Dan Dennett and with help from Dan Barker. And then how it relates to a pastor who is not so "Caught in the Pulpit."

When I made my personal academic study of religion in 2005-2006, I learned that clergy learn about the mythological basis for the bible in seminary. As a qualitative researcher and former clinical social worker, I couldn't figure out how they could then go out and teach and preach something they knew wasn't true. How could they deal with the cognitive dissonance? I learned that philosopher Daniel Dennett had the same question. So, to make a long story very short, we teamed up with Tufts University to conduct a small pilot study, and then a larger study of 35, including current and former pastors, seminary students and professors.

It was a qualitative study, meaning it was open-ended, with no set list of questions asked the same way, and done in hour-long interviews. It resulted first in a paper on the pilot study called "Preachers Who Are Not Believers" in 2010 and later in the book, *Caught in the Pulpit: Leaving Belief Behind*.

Dan Barker provided three of our



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Linda LaScola



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Linda LaScola speaks about her work with The Clergy Project during FFRF's national convention on Oct. 7 in Pittsburgh.

first five participants. Nonbelieving clergy were calling him out of desperation for someone to talk to. They knew he had once been a pastor because of his 2008 book, *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists*. One pastor called Dan on the phone with a fake name — "Adam Mann" — then agreed to have an initial anonymous phone conversation with me about participating in the study. He was so concerned about protecting his identity that he called from a roadside phone booth to my fax line because it didn't have caller ID. After that phone call, he agreed to participate in the study, and trusted me enough to give me his real name.

The pilot study caused quite a stir and soon Dan Dennett and I had lots of clergy contacting us directly to be in the next part of the study.

This is when Dan Barker and Richard Dawkins saw an opportunity, with these newly discovered atheist clergy, to start the private online meeting place for apostate clergy that they had been thinking about since they first met in Iceland at the 2006 International Humanist and Ethical Union Convention.

Soon, what came to be known as The Clergy Project was being planned. I was thrilled by the idea. Emails started flying between me, Dan Barker, Dan Dennett, Richard Dawkins, Todd Stiefle and others in the secular movement. To my surprise, "Adam Mann" was also on the list. Dan Barker had added him

without mentioning it to anyone. I was not happy about this. I thought it was a bad idea.

In October of 2010, I carefully crafted and sent this email: "Hello, Dan B., Dan D. and Richard. Our study participants so appreciated the opportunity to speak openly with me about their situations, I'm sure they'd appreciate even more talking to people in similar situations, and to counselors who could offer the straightforward assistance that I as a researcher could not."

"I'm leaving Adam off the response list for now. I certainly do think he could be helpful (as well as helped) in this effort, but knowing the pain he's suffering, I wanted to spare him what might start out as an intellectual exercise that doesn't provide the immediate support he needs. Perhaps we can bring him back in when we have some concrete ideas to run by him."



Photo by Ingrid Laas

The founding members of The Clergy Project are, from left, Dan Barker, Daniel C. Dennett, Carter Warden and Linda LaScola.

I couldn't figure out how they could then go out and teach and preach something they knew wasn't true. How could they deal with the cognitive dissonance?

Then I wrote this email to Adam: "Adam, don't feel you have to spend a lot of time on this. My feeling is that you should be a recipient of this service, rather than focusing your energies on helping to plan it."

This was the immediate response from Adam: "No way am I just going to sit back on this one. This is an opportunity to use my talents and passion for a 'real' good cause. Maybe I can be a recipient and contributor at the same time. I'm just a pup, but you're in league with the big dogs now!"

After that, Adam became an active member of The Clergy Project team, and he and I worked very closely and very hard, exchanging emails fast and furiously to get the secret, private Clergy Project website up and running by March 2011, already with 52 members! And then we got the public site up a few months later. Our relationship had changed from reserved, objective interviewer and anxious, isolated pastor to that of colleagues working on a common cause.

Adam was a founder of The Clergy Project, along with me, Dan Dennett, Dan Barker, Richard Dawkins and another pastor called "Chris." Adam received secular counseling and was the first beneficiary of the outplacement program, finding a good public sector job, which he holds today.

He also composed and secretly recorded some secular hymns with Dan Barker and he met Richard Dawkins via a secret Skype call made from his car in a shopping center parking lot. He hasn't met Dan Dennett yet, but he's about to.

After all this time, Adam decided that he wanted not only to be out of religion, but to be open about it, hopefully helping others who are in the same spot he was in seven years ago.

## Letterbox

### Seminarians knowingly lie to parishioners

Thank you for publishing the excellent critical analysis “Christian foundation crumbles under scrutiny,” by Paul Davis. So few people have any idea of the flimsy or non-existent factual base of Christian doctrine/dogma.

What makes me even more angry and disgusted than the fictional base of theology is the more modern practice of moderate and liberal seminaries’ knowledge of the fraud and yet still teaching it as truth to the lay public. For example, as long ago ago as 1955, I had a birthday party for my seminary student husband and invited 11 other seminarians and their wives. After dinner, the men, who had finished their final class in Church Management that very day, began to worry out loud about how (not whether) they were going to lie to their parishioners!

In the 1970s and later in the 1980s, I, too, after years of learning how corrupt the church institutions often are, took out loans so that I could fight against such lack of social justice by obtaining my own degrees. My liberal seminary and university, too, seldom denied the falsity of the theology, yet taught us how to play down this fraud when we would be teaching or preaching.

While doing my own research on my doctoral dissertation, I learned about the falsehoods Davis analyzed, plus some additional facts about which the church has lied.

**Patricia Highby**  
**Oklahoma**

*Editor’s note: To find out more about what the church has lied about, read Patricia’s book **The War on Women** (2013).*

### We will need to redouble our efforts

As a response to the election of a demagogue, I (through my Infidel Foundation) have just donated \$1,000 to FFRF. While Trump is building his wall against Mexico, he will also tear down the wall between church and state. We need to redouble our efforts.

**Stephen Van Eck**  
**Pennsylvania**

### FFRF convention was No.1 on my bucket list

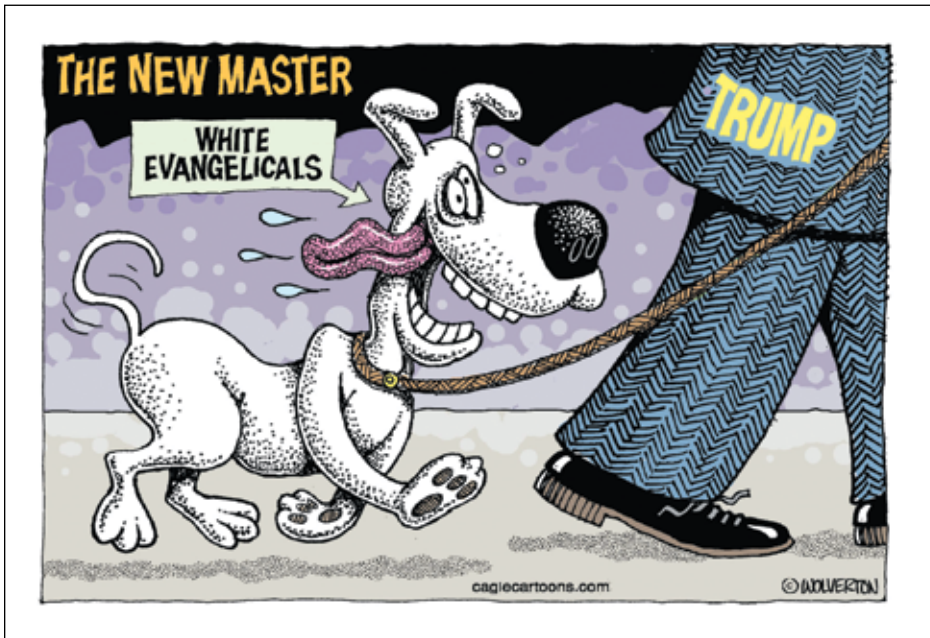
No words left to thank you enough for this experience! At 76, attending an FFRF convention was No. 1 on my bucket list. I will start saving health and “wealth” so as to attend Madison in 2017 and am invigorated to come out of the proverbial closet and wear my Secular Woman necklace, fight church/state issues wherever I can.

**Peg Lehto**  
**Pennsylvania**

### Feeling sad, helpless, hopeless after election

I thank you deeply for all you do. FFRF is one of the few organizations that offers me hope.

During this election, I heard from a variety of Catholics about how their priests stated that their congregation must vote right-to-life. I am so sickened by these right-to-birthers (since after birth they care



little for the children they demand to be born) that I continue to wonder how the government can offer them tax-exempt status. These institutions of dogma and ancient worldviews are at the root of so much that is divisive in this country that it pains me to see they receive government endorsement through tax exemption.

Many of us feel helpless, hopeless and cynical after receiving such a blow from this election. Any recommendations for those of us left reeling in pain and disgust after this abominable experience?

I will continue to support FFRF and other such groups, but it doesn’t seem to be enough. It simply seems that public education can not compete with childhood indoctrination and brainwashing by religious parents and many of us feel like simply withdrawing. I feel so small, helpless, and sad.

**Marc Clayton**  
**North Carolina**

### Elderly atheist couple appreciative of FFRF

I think we are the oldest atheist couple at 99 and 101. If I had known of FFRF before we lived so long, we would be Lifetime Members, but living this long took the substantial sum we had saved for retirement, making us hesitant to risk any further investments. Learning of FFRF was our most heart-warming experience. Don’t give up. Our days are limited before they fertilize our lawn and organic garden with our ashes.

**Alton and Marjorie Eliason**  
**Connecticut**

### Did church and state just get married?

I received my Freethought Today the day after America made hate and violence the law of the land. You have worked so diligently and patiently to curb the marriage between church and state, but I am afraid we failed. Because now it is open season on every minority, no bag limits and no permits required. And the more evil and hateful the laws, the more God’s will has to be invoked to justify them. I am old enough to actually remember when we passed the Fair Housing Act and the Fair Voting Act. These miracles occurred only because people protested and marched and got beat up and jailed. And when enough people had put their lives on the line, the

government was shamed into acting. Now, it turns out those sacrifices didn’t buy even one lifetime of respite from hate and bigotry. Religious conviction laws easily allow legal discrimination against anyone for any reason. And when we pass the White Voting Act and the White Housing Act, and the Bathroom Protection Act, and on and on, you can be sure religious leaders will be at the forefront of everyone.

Please don’t think I am blaming you! It is a Herculean task, and I am constantly amazed at how much work you do. If my membership in FFRF is a contributing factor to my being murdered in the ethnic cleansing to come, it will give me great pride. Does that sound like ridiculous hyperbole? Remember, the people who write the letters where you get your Crankmail column just won the election. Yeah, those people.

**Linda Palter**  
**Michigan**

### The sign of the cross as effective as prayer

The Cleveland Indians beat the Chicago Cubs 6-0 in the opening game of the 2016 World Series. The Cubs were trailing 3-0 in the eighth inning when relief pitcher Hector Rondon was brought in to face the Indians’ Roberto Perez with two runners on and two outs. Before his first pitch, Rondon went through a ritual of making the sign of the cross with his fingers in the dirt on the back of the pitcher’s mound, then crossing himself and finally patting his forearm where he has a very large tattoo of a cross. Five pitches later, Rondon gave up a three-run home run to Perez and the Indians won the game 6-0. Nothing fails like prayer!

**Dan Bell**  
**California**

### Feeling ‘born again’ after finding FFRF

Let me start by saying that am neither an atheist or a nonbeliever. However, I feel very strongly that religion be kept far apart from government, public schools or any taxpayer-supported institution.

Since my introduction to FFRF, I have been enlightened. Before I discovered the organization over a year ago, I had already given up on organized religion. Having been raised in the Assemblies of God faith, I was subjected to the darkest side of Christi-

anity. The weekly threatening, vitriolic tirades from the Book of Revelation depressed and frightened me. Gratefully, my religious mother finally saw the darkness behind our faith and we quit the weekly torture sessions. My dad was thrilled and was quickly front and center to say, “I told you so!”

From then onward I kept whatever beliefs I had to myself, constantly wary that these dark religious forces were mingling with our government and infecting our schools. Then one day in 2015 I saw Ron Reagan’s FFRF commercial on TV and my life was changed. There was an entire culture I knew nothing about that thought as I did. I was elated, and shortly thereafter joined the membership and have never looked back.

Thank you FFRF! I have truly been “born again.”

**Warren Pender**  
**Florida**

### Freethought Today, FFRF a beacon for us

I applaud your every effort when people all over the world are suffering at the hands of the idiocy of religion.

Freethought Today is a beacon for us; please keep it up!

**Jay Mumford**  
**California**

### Pursuit of the truth hindered by faith

I want to thank you for publishing Julie Stahl’s article in your September issue. I am her loving father and proud of her ability to express herself.

I don’t think I really knew what pain was like until I lost my grandson, Jackson. Julie’s suffering has been, obviously, much greater. That pain cannot be alleviated by the mythology of promising happiness in an “afterlife.” We are an imperfect species, saddened with the knowledge that we are bound to die. As a result, many humans have avoided the search for truth in exchange for a faith in organized religion, which has lead to division, distrust, violence and hatred.

As an atheist, I applaud your organization’s search for truth.

**Don Stahl**  
**Maryland**

### Support for those whose lives are at risk

Congratulations on another splendid convention. The speakers were excellent and every aspect of the weekend was well-organized.

Rafida Bonya Ahmed’s account of the machete attack by Islamic militants that resulted in her injury and the death of her husband reminded me of the plight of the Jews during the Holocaust. The government of Bangladesh has done little to nothing to protect its citizens from these attacks. I think it is important for secularists worldwide to unite in their support of these bloggers who have risked their lives to warn of the dangers of Islamic fundamentalism. For this reason, I am enclosing \$1,000 to Nonbelief Relief c/o FFRF in support of those whose lives are at risk.

**Ron Taggart**  
**Ohio**

## Letterbox

### Glad to contribute to FFRF’s worthy cause

Thank you for all you do. And a special thanks for intervening in the wacky decision by the DMV in Pennsylvania denying a nonbeliever’s request for a vanity plate reading “ATHEIST.”

Someone has to make the fight and I’m glad to contribute what little I can to the cause.

**Marc Beauchamp**  
**California**

### ‘So help me God’ should not be used

It’s 2016, and I cannot believe that the citizens of the state of Wisconsin and the citizens of the United States of America are still subjected to swear before God before serving in public office, and as an affirmation to telling the truth. I personally find it offensive that I have to swear to a God before I can serve the greater good of the public.

I have been a chief election official for the state of Wisconsin for about 15 years, and the state oath of office I have to retake every couple of elections ends in “so help me God.” I have written to the county and the Government Accountability Board, but the reply was that the current oath ending in “so help me God” is supported by the state Legislature.

I served on the local school board and the oath of office I had to take ended in “so help me God.” As clerk for the school board, I had to swear in new members with the same oath of office, that ends in “so help me God.”

Recently I was sworn in as a federal grand jury member and again had to take an oath of office that ends in “so help me God.”

Has FFRF ever tried to change these oaths? Is the argument akin to the current arguments in favor of “In God We Trust” on the currency and “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance?

**H. Adam Steinberg**  
**Wisconsin**

*Editor’s note: Our attorneys are working on this.*

### Catholics face rules for cremated remains

Not content with a lifetime of inducing guilt, endless rituals, countless obligations, restrictions galore and the fear of endless torture for a single mortal screwup, now Catholics must abide by new rules regarding the cremated remains of their dead.

Want to scatter, divide or keep the ashes of a loved one at home in an urn? No way. This might somehow stymie a “resurrection” of sorts. The faithful must rot in a “consecrated” hole in the ground, so as not to inflict a “brutal destruction” on the dead body. Besides, someone might think anything else flirts with “pantheism, naturalism or nihilism” or, worse yet, “individualistic thinking.” That’s just another way of saying “thinking for yourself.” And that the Church will not abide, or else there will soon enough be no church and people can do as they like with the ashes of their loved ones — and, more importantly, their own lives before they reach this state.

**Donald B. Ardell**  
**Florida**

### How can I help freethought movement?

Sometimes I wonder if my commitment to the freethought movement is insufficient. I was raised in a mainstream Protestant tradition. I was never exposed to violent extremism or personal abuse. My parents were religious but not fanatic. My journey away from faith was a very gradual process. My first explicit step was when I joined the Army and insisted on having “none” in the religion space on my ID “dog tags.” Even years later, I went to church with my mother once a year on Dec. 24. I found it inoffensive and rather nostalgic: I could still sing the harmonies I had been taught as a child. It was only after I joined FFRF that I thought of myself as an “atheist.”

Should I do more? I reiterate the half-hearted offer that if someone else wants to start a Maryland chapter, I could assist in a limited way.

As an aside, the “In Chef We Trust” apron FFRF sells puts me in mind of a kitchen towel I got for my cousin. It read: “Someone lost the corkscrew and we had to live for days on only food and water.”

**David Shea**  
**Maryland**

### As new Lifer, excited to read speeches

I am now an FFRF Life Member! Hard to believe.

Perhaps I’ll celebrate being a Lifer here in Milwaukee as the winter solstice rushes our way. At least I will toast this accomplishment with all my freethinking friends in southeast Wisconsin.

I’m looking forward to reading all of the speeches from the October convention in upcoming newspapers.

**David Glenn**  
**Wisconsin**

### Love reading FFRF’s Special Weekly Report

Thanks for the Special Weekly Report by FFRF Communications Director Amit Pal. All of you deserve a lot of praise for doing some fine work all year around in fighting the fantasy beliefs that at least half the population still has in regards to a God and Jesus! Please continue the good fight to keep religion separate from the political arena.

**Paul Loveless**  
**Florida**

### Great to see ad on abortion in newspaper

Thanks for sponsoring the full-page ad — “What the Bible Really Says About Abortion” — in the Arkansas Democrat Gazette. We are proud to be members of FFRF.

**Linda And Bill Farrell**  
**Arkansas**

### We are once again a demon-haunted country

This donation is to light 500 candles in our sadly once-again demon-haunted country. Keep on fighting, folks!

**John Richardson**  
**Washington, D.C.**



Photo by Abbie McMillen

### Love the sin

FFRF Member Abbie McMillen of Maine saw this sign at Emmaus Lutheran Church on Route 9 in Falmouth, Maine. “This has to be the weirdest church sign I have ever seen,” she wrote. “What are they thinking . . . that you can sin all you want if you are a believer? What a bargain!”

## Sharing the crank mail

*Here is our most recent installment of correspondence we get from those who don’t understand what we do or why we do it and aren’t afraid to show their lack of grammar, syntax or spelling.*

**You are all atheists:** You people have no respect for the U.S. Constitution, nor do you know how to interpret it. You people care about no one but yourselves. You all belong in hell. You people are not Christians, you people are atheists. Your interpretation of the U.S. Constitution is totally inaccurate. There is nothing in the U.S. Constitution about “separation of Church and State”. There is a clause known as the “establishment clause”, which no laws shall prevent the free exercise ones right to live their lives, including where or when they choose to pray, that includes the 50 yard of a football field. What your foundation is trying to do, is to wipe Christianity from this country. What you are doing is wrong. I am disgusted at what your foundation represents. You do not have the right based a single complaint to tell a school or individual to stop doing what they are doing, even if the vast majority of the school does not have an issue what is going on in their schools. Knock it off. — *Theresa McDevitt*

**God Loves You Anyway:** Our creator, the one we all adore, loves you. Whether you choose to accept his gracious love is up to you, but I wish to implore you to accept his love. Those that do not know his love lead such cold and heartless lives, they murder innocent babies through abortion, they marry people who should not go together through gay marriage, and they feel like this benefits people somehow. How does murdering a baby make you feel? — *James Barnett*

**Newton MS baptism:** I read an article regarding your complaint against Newton High because the high school coach baptized a student after school hours per the student’s request. Whew! Thank God you are there to protest such kind actions! With your assistance, more people can continue to slide down the slippery slope to Hell. Thanks for all you do (sarcasm). — *Nancy Duran*

**Dunmore:** Give it up people and let these kids pray with there coach the 1st Amendment applies to them too and the right to pray. Nothing about what they are doing is illegal, just not right in your eyes. Grow up!!!! — *Robert Cunningham*

**Lies:** There is no seperation of church and state in us constitution it was in a letter of opinion by pres jefferson to danbury baptiat church inregard to keeping government out of religious affairs,not the other way. — *Steve Britton*

**Stopping a tradition:** Shame on you guys for getting involved in something that is none of you business. This is the problem with our country. People get involved with other people’s business about there tradition and it’s wrong. If teams want to pray before a game that is there right. I’m a Catholic and I don’t get involved with what your group does so why

would you get involved with what other people want to do. — *Tim Lavelle*

**U.S. Constitution:** Have you people ever heard of the US Constitution? Freedom of religion? It’s one of the foundations this country was founded and built on. Hope your ready for a Trump administration next year. This country has had enough of groups like yours interfering with our right to worship freely in this nation, and under Trump you will no longer be allowed to interfere and continue to attack that god given unalienable right. — *Brian Maters*

**Report on my local TV station:** I live in Pennsylvania your located in Wisconsin and you wrote a letter a local High School, Dunmore School District, in Lackawanna County, PA. YOU are way off base. YOU have some nerve and no right to send a letter to a school where they for over 40 years have their team mates gather before a game to “pray for a good game and the safety of the players”. They are good clean living students with a faith in GOD. Because people like you don’t believe in GOD or pray is a very sad state of affairs. I see by your web site you don’t have very many followers----that is because you are WRONG in your beliefs. Your motto (such as it is) “critical work to promote nontheism and defend the constitutional separation between religion & government”. OK the kids gather in prayer but they are a high school----not government. The problem with this world today is the lack of prayer and the belief of a Greater Power-----it’s GOD. It would be interesting to ask your followers how they think the world got here, how did they become a person, created inside their mother -----it’s the miracle of life and the hand of God. This is where the problem starts, people of your uneducated caliber start trouble-----bear in mind the American people will not allow you to win your “cause”-----we Christians out number you jokers millions to one. — *Dorothy Sawyer*

**Ashamed:** Y’all should be ashamed of yourselves your God created you and will make you burn in Hell for pushing your beliefs on others if our school wants to pray guess what we will do so and there will never be anyone to stop that. — *Leanna Gorrecht*

**Dunmore high school:** what gives you the right to even ever tell someone what to do. law or not this is this school thing and if the parent and student are fine with this what gives you a right to set in a say other. are you being affected by this. is this hurting you. no its not. this is none of your business to set in. you can take you law and shove it because you should NEVER SET IN, in what someone believes. what someone feels. last I check we live in AMERICA maybe you should brush up on some information before you ever come after a child believes. — *Matt Evans*

**Trump train:** Hey lefty fags, how you doing now that you have been smashed by the TRUMP TRAIN? Your rain of corruption and lies is over. Get over it you cry baby snowflakes!!! HaHaHaHa!!! Choo Coo!!! — *Jerry Babbitt*

# Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

## Arrested / Charged

**Gary L. Curtis, 59, Central City, LA:** 5 counts of sexual battery. Curtis, pastor of Second Zion Baptist Church, is accused of fondling 4 minor females as far back as 2007. New Orleans police began investigating after a woman reported an alleged incident involving a 12-year-old.

Detective Bianca Delrish then met with another person described in the report as a “concerned elder,” who told her Curtis touched other girls on their clothed buttocks at the church. *Source: The Advocate, 11-10-16*

**Samuel Pierre, 35, Orlando, FL:** Kidnapping and sexual battery on a child under 12. Pierre, youth pastor at Tabernacle of Prayer and Miracles International, allegedly picked up a girl and told her mother he was taking her to church along with other group members. Instead, it’s alleged he took her to his home and gave her something to drink that caused her to lose consciousness. Several months later, the mother confronted the girl because “she had been acting different” ever since she went with Samuel Pierre, an affidavit said.

Pierre was arrested in 2009 for lewd or lascivious battery in 2009 involving a girl from the church, whom he also ended up with alone after supposedly telling her she’d be part of a group. Charges were dropped in 2012. *Source: Orlando Sentinel, 11-9-16*

**Three unidentified men,** all in their 60s, Horsham, England: Suspicion of historical sex abuse. They were staffers at Christ’s Hospital boarding school, affiliated with the Church of England and founded in 1552 by King Edward VI. Assaults are alleged on 9 students in the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Source: The Telegraph, 11-6-16*

**Sherman R. Smith, 56, Algiers, LA:** 9 counts of sexual assault, including incest, alleged against 7 minors while he was pastor at Second Highway Baptist Church and Bibleway Missionary Baptist Church between 1989-2001. It’s alleged he took advantage of his position of trust to rape or otherwise molest girls who often were friends of his own children. *Source: Times-Picayune, 11-3-16*

**Ronald W. Mitchell, 56, Magnolia, TX:** Sexual assault of a child. Mitchell, pastor of Body of Christ Ministry, is accused of assaulting an underage female church member. Apostle Mitchell, as he is known, now operates the church out of his home due to financial reversals. Police said a “large cache of weapons and ammunition” was found in the home. *Source: KTRK, 11-3-16*

**William L. Helker, 47, Pine City, MN:** 6 counts of possessing child pornography. Helker, associate pastor at All Saints Lutheran Church, allegedly possessed thousands of images of children as young as about age 5, including children of congregation members on whom he used PhotoShop to turn innocent images into porn.

Men appear in some videos, including a nude man wearing a clown mask and tennis shoes. It’s alleged Helker shared porn with a man in Finland and sought images of preteen and teen girls. *Source: River Towns, 10-31-16*

**Lee Kaplan, 51, Feasterville, PA:** 15 sexual assault charges, including rape and statutory rape, involving 6 sisters, now aged from 8 to 18, who believed they were his wives. Kaplan allegedly told them he learned in dreams that the arrangement was what God wanted and that he was God’s prophet.

The girls’ parents, **Daniel and Savilla Stoltzfus**, Quarryville, PA, former members of an Amish community, are charged with child endangerment for allegedly “gifting” their oldest daughter to Kaplan when she was 14 as payment for his financial help. She and Kaplan have had 2 children together.

According to Sarah Stoltzfus, Savilla’s sister, Daniel Stoltzfus once told a midwife that “God gave us desires so we can act on them” and that he objected to her working in a grocery store because a woman working outside the home “was of no use to God.” *Source: pennlive.com, 10-31-16*

**Raul D. Moreno, 52, Merced, CA:** 3 counts of attempted murder. Moreno, pastor of Victory Outreach International, is charged with shooting his daughter Savannah, 19, her boyfriend, 21, and another female family member, 17.

Savannah Moreno alleges years of sexual abuse preceded the shootings and that Raul Moreno is actually her biological brother who adopted her at a young age.

The church was founded in Los Angeles in 1967 with the mission of “evangelizing and discipling the hurting people of the world.” Its web-



site says it has more than 700 churches in 30 countries. *Source: Sun-Star, 10-30-16*

**Hugh McDowell, 62, Niota, TN:** Rape of a child and 2 counts each of sexual battery by an authority figure and continuous sexual abuse of a child. McDowell, assistant pastor at Spoken Word Ministry Church, is accused of assaults on 2 girls aged 17 and 12, with the last alleged incident on June 21.

Verizon phone logs showed nearly 1,100 calls and 6,000 text messages between McDowell and an alleged victim January 2015 and June 2016, the complaint said. *Source: WATE, 10-29-16*

**Jon Paquette, 56, Birchwood, WI:** Burglary. Paquette, pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church, is accused of breaking into homes of church members while they were gone and taking prescription medications. *Source: Leader-Telegram, 10-28-16*

**Leo Donaldson, aka Leo Inglima, 30, Bloomfield, MI:** Child endangerment, 1st-degree aggravated sexual assault, 2nd-degree sexual assault by contact and 3rd-degree aggravated criminal sexual contact. The alleged assaults involve 2 boys under age 18. Donaldson teaches and coaches at Bloomfield High and is parish cantor and youth minister at St. Francis of Assisi American National Catholic.

He’s been removed from his church position, said Fr. Kerry Walters in a statement: “All lay and ordained persons in the AANC who minister to children are required, as Mr. Donaldson was, to have background checks. They’re also required to abide by Church policy which stipulates that at least two adults must be present in parish activities involving children.” *Source: nj.com, 10-27-16*

**Sharon Holder, 44, Kingsport, TN:** Theft over \$10,000 but less than \$60,000. She’s accused of stealing money between 2011-14 from the youth group at Victory Apostolic Church in collaboration with her husband, **Boyd W. Holder Jr.**, 45, pastor of the church. He was indicted for theft and money laundering in May 2015 after between \$70,000 and \$100,000 was discovered missing from the church’s bank account, with a trial set for March. *Source: Times-News, 10-26-16*

**Kevin Gugliotta, 54, Mahwah, NJ:** 20 counts each of possession and dissemination of child pornography. He was removed as pastor at Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Union after his arrest for allegedly possessing illicit images in July on a computer at his Pennsylvania vacation home.

A nationally ranked poker player, Gugliotta is also charged with being a fugitive from justice because he failed to turn himself in after being notified of the porn charges. *Source: nj.com, 10-26-16*

**James Thekemuriyil, 41, Bangalore, India:** Wrongful confinement, unnatural offense and criminal intimidation. Thekemuriyil, a Catholic priest, was rector of Deva Matha Seminary in Iritty in May 2015, when he is accused of

molesting a 21-year-old seminary student, who alleged he was coerced into withdrawing a complaint he made to church officials. He was later removed as rector. *Source: Business Standard, 10-26-16*

**Edward B. Smart, 67, and Marion D. Smart, 52, Albany, NY:** Grand larceny, welfare fraud and offering a false instrument for filing. Edward Smart, pastor of First Israel African Methodist Episcopal Church, and his wife are accused of receiving about \$12,000 in social services benefits by understating their income.

**Six employees** of the Smarts’ nonprofit Israel Community Service Program face similar charges. It’s also alleged the employees were misclassified as independent contractors to avoid paying taxes and government fees.

Smart’s salary as pastor is about \$100,000 a year, including a housing allowance. *Source: Times Union, 10-25-16*

**Terry W. Millender, 52, Brenda Millender, 56, and Grenetta Wells, 55, Alexandria, VA:** Conspiracy to commit wire fraud and money laundering. Terry Millender is senior pastor of Victorious Life Church, which met at West Potomac High School. His wife and Wells are also affiliated with the church.

They also operated a company called Micro-Enterprise Management Group that recruited investors by emphasizing its Christian mission, allegedly to provide small loans to people in developing countries. An estimated \$1.2 million was involved, federal prosecutors said. *Source: WTTG, 10-24-16*

**Jonathan Tucker, 39, New Albany, MS:** Touching of a child for lustful purposes, enticement of a child and sexual battery. Tucker, pastor of New Birth Community Church, is accused of molesting a 13-year-old.

“It looks like it has been going on for a good while,” said New Albany Police Chief Chris Robertson. *Source: Daily Journal, 10-21-16*

**Randi L. Zurenko, 33, Millerstown, PA:** 13 counts of institutional sexual assault, 153 counts of sexual abuse of children, 33 counts of unlawful contact with minors, 20 counts of dissemination of obscene material to a minor and 13 counts of corruption of minors. Zurenko is accused of molesting 2 of her social studies students at Bishop McDevitt High School, a Catholic school in Harrisburg.

One alleged victim had “an encounter” in a park with Zurenko before the student graduated in 2013. The complaint alleges she massaged the student’s back, undid her bra and gave her alcohol. It’s alleged she started molesting the other student in 2015 and continued until October, including taking photos of them having sex. *Source: pennlive.com, 10-21-16*

**Ronald Léger, 78, Winnipeg, Manitoba:** 8 counts of sexual assault. Four accusers allege Léger molested them as children as young as 10 during the 1980s and in 2002-04 when he was pastor at Holy Family Catholic Parish and operated a center called Teen Stop Jeunesse.

“He always had cigarettes for the kids, so if you needed a cigarette you’d go up and see Ron,” said an alleged victim. “Go into Ron’s office and have a smoke and sit on his lap.”

He pleaded guilty in July 2015 to molesting 3 males and was sentenced to 2 years in prison. He was granted day parole in September after it was determined he was only a moderate risk to reoffend. The day parole was later revoked. *Source: CBC, 10-21-16*

**Salvatore Anello, 59, Palermo, Sicily:** Sexual molestation. Anello, a Capuchin order Catholic priest and hospital chaplain, is charged with inappropriately touching 4 adult women and a 12-year-old girl during rituals to free them from demonic possession.

“A healing prayer” involved “repeatedly touching their genitals,” a newspaper report alleged. The Diocese of Palermo said in a statement that Anello is not authorized to act as an exorcist. *Source: Palermo Today, 10-21-16*

**Oleh Zhownirovych, 54, Clinton, NJ:** Felony aggravated battery and misdemeanor battery. Zhownirovych, former pastor at Ukrainian Orthodox Holy Church, is accused of walking up to a woman in a Walmart checkout lane in Overland Park, KS, and grabbing her 4-month-old daughter around the neck to pull her out of her carrier. Quisha Hill said her daughter wasn’t injured.

The vice president of the church association mentioned a drinking problem and said the group voted to remove Zhownirovych as pastor 10 months ago. It wasn’t immediately known why he was in Kansas, but when jailed he listed his address as that of the church’s cathedral. *Source: Kansas City Star, 10-20-16*

**Ronald “Romeo” Cooper, 52, Miami:** Multiple counts of human trafficking, false imprisonment, prostitution and sexual activity with a minor. Cooper, a youth pastor at Good News Little River Baptist Church, is charged with forcing 4 teens into prostitution by threatening to kill them if they didn’t agree to have sex with male clients.

All allege Cooper drugged them with crystal meth, erectile dysfunction, anti-anxiety pills and alcohol before assaulting them. *Source: Christian Post, 10-20-16*

**Joao da Silva, 54, Montes Claros, Brazil:** Child rape. Da Silva, described in news reports as an “evangelist Christian priest,” allegedly assaulted a 5-year-old girl during English classes at the church. Her parents became suspicious after she expressed fear about attending class and found 6 of her drawings that appear to show a rape.

“One of them that caught our attention shows the face of a naked man with an erect penis” looming over a child, said Karine Maia of the Delegation for Stopping Crimes Against Women. *Source: Daily Mail, 10-19-16*

**Andrew L. Jackson, 30, White Hall, AR:** 10 counts of rape. Jackson, youth pastor at an unidentified church, is accused of assaults on a 16-year-old girl in 2014. The charges stem from an investigation of claims by the girl’s sister when she was 13 that Jackson raped her. He faces 3 rape counts, still pending, from December 2014 on those allegations.

The older girl denied in 2014 that she had been molested but in September was reinterviewed and alleged she had intercourse with the married Jackson “at least 10 times,” according to the affidavit, and that he told her if she said anything he would burn her family’s house with her and her family inside. *Source: Democrat-Gazette, 10-18-16*

**Rashidun Nabi Bhuiyan, 26, Comilla, Bangladesh:** Murder. Nabi, a member of the banned Islamist group Ansarullah Bangla, is charged in the April death in Dhaka of secular writer Nazimuddin Samad, 28. When the judge asked him in court about the murder, Nabi said, “I admit that we killed him. Please forgive us. We regret it and apologize to the nation. Please pardon me. We were misguided.”

Since 2013, members of Ansarullah Bangla have killed 11 secularists, including the Bangladeshi-American Avijit Roy. *Source: Dhaka Tribune, 10-18-16*

**Daniel J. MacKay, 42, Eugene, OR:** Purchasing sex with a minor, sexual misconduct, patronizing a prostitute, endangering the welfare of a minor, unlawful possession of cocaine and using a minor in a controlled substance offense. MacKay, pastor at St. John the Wonderworker Serbian Orthodox Church, was arrested during a sting conducted after an underage girl alleged to police he was involved with her.

MacKay has a child and is married, according to the church’s website, which says he was formerly an adjunct instructor of English literature and composition at Northwest Christian University. His recent work published by St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press is titled *How to Make Love: Living an Orthodox Understanding of Love Instead of Dying for Romantic Love*. *Source: Register-Guard, 10-14-16*

**Bobby R. Slagle, 69, New Castle, IN:** Felony intimidation and misdemeanor resisting law enforcement. Slagle, pastor at Calvary Baptist Church, allegedly told a brother and sister riding bikes outside the church “that if they did not get off his property, he was going to shoot them.” The police report said he raised his shirt so they could see the .38-caliber revolver in his waistband. The gun contained 4 live rounds.

He told police he was frustrated about recent vandalism and “it was his right to tell the kids what he did.” *Source: Muncie Star Press, 10-12-16*

**Tupou Tuoipulotu, 61, Corcoran, CA:** Misdemeanor battery. Tuoipulotu, pastor at United Methodist Church, was charged with striking a female parishioner on the temple after a Sunday service. Jeanne Thomas, also 61, told police she had stepped in to defend another parishioner whom the pastor was yelling at. “She wouldn’t quit saying how she’s the boss and this church is full of evil,” Thomas said. “I didn’t see the punch coming.”

Ernest Bonilla said he changed the locks on the church and Tuoipulotu was fired. *Source: KGPE, 10-10-16*

**Wesley R. Blackburn, 35, New Paris, PA:** Corruption of minors and 84 counts each of felony statutory sexual assault and misdemeanor indecent assault. Blackburn, youth pastor and Sunday school teacher at Faith Brethren Bible Church, is accused of impregnating a 15-year-old who joined his youth group in 2014.

An affidavit alleges Blackburn admitted to a state trooper that he was the child’s father and asked his wife for a divorce after revealing his relationship with the girl. His wife then told the senior pastor, who fired Blackburn and contacted police. *Source: Tribune-Democrat, 10-9-16*

**Jacob A. Bertrand, 32, Spring Valley, CA:** 2 counts of 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct. In 2010, according to the complaint, Bertrand, now pastor of Santa Sophia Catholic Parish, visited a woman in Minnesota he had met in 2009 in Rome while they were studying spirituality and he was a deacon before being ordained.

Bertrand and the woman, now 30, had sex after a private Mass in the basement of her Mendota Heights home, it’s alleged, and that after Mass he told her they had “fulfilled the second holiest sacrifice next to Jesus and Mary on Calvary.”

The woman alleged to police that Bertrand had “mystically proposed” to her and told her that while he was praying, the Lord had imprinted a vision in his mind of her “naked and straddling him.” *Source: Star Tribune, 10-7-16*

**Cherie White, 44, and Keith White, 51, Kingston, PA:** 9 counts and 5 counts, respectively, of theft and conspiracy. Cherie White and her husband Keith are accused of stealing \$174,000 since 2010 from Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, where she was church secretary and he was board president.

Other board members became suspicious after receiving past due notices for electric bills. Asked if he could forgive the Whites if they’re found guilty, Pastor Paul Metzloff said, “That’s a very interesting question. Christ preaches forgiveness for everything, and that’s something we grapple with.” *Source: WNEP, 10-6-16*

**Gary Spear, 45, Mitchell, IN:** Felony child seduction. Spear, youth minister at Mitchell Church of Christ, is accused of incidents between 2011-13 by the alleged victim, starting when she was 16 and had gone to Spear for counseling because her parents were divorcing.

It’s alleged that Spear told her he considered her his daughter and thus it was OK to kiss him and let him fondle her, which she said happened several times a week in the church, at his home and in his truck. *Source: WBIW, 10-4-16*

**Francis Ngalande, 44, Mpherere, Malawi:** Defilement. Ngalande, pastor of Mpherere Catholic Parish, is accused of sexually defiling a 16-year-old girl he’d arranged to meet to discuss the new school he’d found for her. A medical report confirmed the allegation, a police statement said. *Source: Nyasa Times, 10-3-16*

**Kumar, 52, Shivamogga, India:** Rape. Kumar, a Hindu priest at Durga Chowdeshwari Temple, allegedly raped a 15-year-old girl whose parents sought his help for the girl’s poor academic performance. It’s alleged that several days later he assaulted her when she came to receive a Vedic talisman from him. *Source: The Hindu, 10-2-16*

**Gurjeet Singh, Adampur, India:** Act intended to outrage religious sentiment. Singh, a Sikh priest, was charged after torn pages of a Sikh hymnal were found by a village canal. Police said Singh admitted his culpability, adding they haven’t determined a motive. *Source: Hindustan Times, 10-2-16*

Pleaded / Convicted

**Patrick O’Brien, 76, Dublin, Ireland:** Pleaded guilty to 48 counts of indecent assault and sexual assault. O’Brien, a Catholic parishioner and volunteer at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, was charged with molesting 14 boys from 1977 to 2010, including assaulting a boy in a cathedral storage room while the congregation prayed.

His first victim was 9 when he was raped in a

field after his parents had given O’Brien permission to take him on a road trip. The final assault on the boy was in his own bedroom on the pretense of tucking him into bed, minutes after he had shared a meal with the family. *Source: Irish Times, 11-10-16*

**Willie J. Tiller Jr., 53, Oklahoma City:** Guilty by jury of 10 counts of forgery while he was pastor First Baptist Church in Ardmore in 2013-14. He’s accused of forging \$12,000 worth of checks from the church-affiliated First Touch Learning Center by using a board member’s name and made payable to himself. He’s now pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church. *Source: KXII, 11-9-16*

**Stephanie Meakin, 51, Crewe, England:** Guilty by jury of failing to notify a change in circumstances, which led to her fraudulently receiving about \$46,000 in disability benefits from 2001-13. Meakin, pastor of Church of Abundant Life International, claimed she had severe mobility problems but witnesses testified about her walking her lively Rotweiler puppy, dancing at a Christmas party, her luxury safari and jogging to a cash machine, the judge noted. *Source: Liverpool Echo, 11-7-16*

**Sean P. Aday, 39, Lake Forest, CA:** Pleaded guilty to 2 felony and 2 misdemeanor counts of sexual battery, each tied to a different victim. Aday, a youth pastor at Grace Community Church, was originally charged with 10 felony counts, including forcible rape, sodomy by force and sexual penetration by a foreign object and force.

“I knew when I met you there was something off about you. You can’t even look me in the eye now,” a victim’s mother said in court. Terms of a plea bargain call for a sentence of 2 years in prison.

He was accused of assaults on 4 young women on church property or during church trips to Costa Rica, Moldova and South Africa. Sara Fuentes, 27, testified she was first molested on a trip when she was 19 and that it continued for 2 years until she left the church. *Source: OC Register, 11-4-16*

**Major L. Hillman, 23, Lynchburg, VA:** Guilty by jury of electronic solicitation and indecent liberties with a child. Hillman, youth pastor at Thomas Terrace Baptist Church, was charged with crimes against a 14-year-old girl he was counseling in 2015 for self-esteem issues stemming from an earlier sexual assault.

He admitted using Snapchat to exchange sexually explicit texts, photos and videos but claimed it was an attempt at therapy for the girl. The relationship was cut short when the victim’s father read her diary. *Source: News & Advance, 11-2-16*

**Khin Par Thaing, 30, Indianapolis:** Pleaded guilty to felony battery but a plea agreement

pher Leonard, 18. Irwin, pastor of Word of Life Christian Church, and **8 church members**, including the brothers’ parents, have admitted they beat them during punishment sessions for wanting to leave the church, described by some as a cult.

The boys were whipped with an electrical cord on their stomachs, genitals, backs and thighs for as many as 14 hours “in hopes that each would confess their prior sins and ask for forgiveness,” an affidavit said. *Source: Observer Dispatch, 10-21-16*

Sentenced

**Timothy A. Williams, 51, Woodstock, IL:** 30 days in jail, 2 years’ probation and sex offender registration after pleading guilty to possession of child pornography involving children younger than 13. Williams, a married father of 2 daughters, was pastor of Heritage Baptist Church in Greenwood. *Source: Northwest Herald, 10-28-16*

**Richard Thomas, 78, Allouez, WI:** 4 months in jail and 3 years’ probation after pleading no contest to 2 counts of exposing genitals/pubic area/intimate parts to a child. Thomas, a Catholic priest, admitted flashing a teen boy passing by his apartment window in March and told the court he “struggled with urges.” He has 2 previous indecent exposure convictions.

The manager of the independent living facility for retired priests told police that on April 8 he found Walsh wearing a bathrobe and standing in front of a window in the unoccupied room the boy reported seeing him in. Thomas told the manager he was looking for a place to shower. *Source: WBAY, 10-28-16*

**Kevin G. Sloniker, 31, Coeur d’Alene, ID:** Life in prison with no parole eligibility for 35 years after pleading guilty to 7 counts of lewd conduct with a child under the age of 16. Sloniker, who worked as a long-haul trucker, met and befriended boys as a youth camp counselor for Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Post Falls. The church is part of the conservative Society of Saint Pius X.

He was found guilty of molesting 7 boys between the ages of 8 and 14 and admitted using “hand to genital” contact. At sentencing he called himself a “man of the bible” who was seeking a sense of companionship because he grew up in an isolated area and was homeschooled. *Source: KREM, 10-28-16*

**Larry M. Murrell, 63, Klamath Falls, OR:** 30 days in jail with credit for time served and 3 years’ probation after pleading guilty to 2 misdemeanor counts of sexual abuse. A felony count of sexual abuse was dismissed as part of a plea deal. Murrell was arrested for forcing “deviate sexual intercourse” on a female congregation

**Jedediah Stout, 32, Joplin, MO:** 63 months in prison and \$702,000 restitution after being convicted of damage to religious property, violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act and 2 counts of arson. Stout, who identified himself as a politically conservative Christian, was arrested for setting a 2012 fire that destroyed the Islamic Society of Joplin mosque and twice starting fires at a Planned Parenthood facility.

Stout opposes abortion due to his religious beliefs and wants Planned Parenthood clinics converted to orphanages. Abortions aren’t performed at the Joplin clinic. *Source: Joplin Globe, 10-18-16*

**Vincent G. Ryan, 78, New South Wales, Australia:** 15-month suspended sentence after pleading guilty to molesting a 13-year-old altar boy in the 1980s. The acts included forced oral sex, masturbation and attempted penetration. He’s already served a 14-year sentence for other sex offenses.

Acting Judge Norman Delaney said it was a “very difficult decision” to impose a suspended sentence, referring to a report from a psychologist who has been treating Ryan for 6 years which states: “[The offender] is fully rehabilitated” and “has shown sorrow and remorse.”

Delaney said Ryan doesn’t remember the victim because the abuse was so similar to that he committed against dozens of others. He was released in 2010 after serving 14 years for assaults against 35 boys as young as 6 between 1973-91. *Source: abc.net.au, 10-14-16*

**Victor Barnard, 55, Finlayson, MN:** 30 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of criminal sexual conduct, with 57 others dropped in a plea bargain. Barnard, founder of River Road Fellowship, was charged in 2014 with molesting 2 girls when they were 12 and 13.

They were part of a “Maidens Group” of about 10 girls and young women Barnard lived with and called “brides of Christ.” He fled to Brazil after being charged.

His attorney, Dave Risk, said Barnard admitted in court that he had intercourse with each girl when they were 15 and that the sexual acts happened multiple times over a period of years. *Source: Pioneer Press, 10-11-16*

**Robert P. Claffey, 73, Ballarat, Australia:** 18 years, 4 months in prison, with no parole eligibility until 2030. Claffey was convicted of sex assaults on 10 boys and 2 girls, ranging in age from 6 to 16, while he served as a Catholic priest. His initial victim was a 7-year-old girl preparing for her first communion in 1969. He later used the excuse of providing pastoral care to a boy, whose brother had died 2 days earlier, before molesting the boy at home.

Former Ballarat bishop Ronald Mulkearns told a court last year he knew Claffey “had been misbehaving . . . in a sexual way” but didn’t remember any details. *Source: The Age, 10-4-16*

**Robert G. Couture, 54, Tecumseh, Ontario:** 10 months in jail and \$75,000 restitution to St. Anne Catholic Parish, where he was pastor from 2002-10. The exact amount of parish money missing is unknown but according to testimony could be as much as \$234,000. *Source: Windsor Star, 10-3-16*

**Joseph Raleigh, 35, Miller, SD:** 46 months in prison and 3 years’ probation after pleading guilty in a plea bargain to attempted trafficking with respect to involuntary servitude and forced labor. Raleigh, pastor at First Baptist Church and a married father of 4, answered a Craigslist ad set up by law enforcement in 2015: “I’m available all weekend. I’m attractive, clean, good build, 30 years old. Looking for some hot fun.”

An agent responded: “we here in pierre and she good to go. She 15 and experienced. Prices very dependin on what u want.”

Raleigh replied: “Want an hour of all I can get. Do you have a pic?” He agreed to pay \$300 for “30 to 40 minutes.” *Source: Capital-Journal, 10-2-16*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

**Marc L. Disick, 58, Bronx, NY,** rabbi at Temple Beth Am in Bayonne, NJ, is being sued for nearly \$70,000 by clinical psychologist Leslie Freedman, who alleges he’s been seeing Disick 3 times a week since 2011 and has been paid only \$800. Despite the arrears, Freedman continued to provide therapy until June 2015, according to the suit.

Disick, who is also a professional divorce and business mediator, declined to comment to a reporter. *Source: NY Post, 11-13-16*

**Barry Kallenberg, 64, Alpine, NJ, and Sunny Isles Beach, FL,** is being sued in Bergen County Superior Court by the New Jersey Department of Banking and Insurance for fraud. Kallenberg, a rabbi currently without a congregation but who officiates at life cycle events and makes hospital pastoral visits, is accused of falsely reporting his luggage was stolen 23 times at Miami International Airport in 2010-12 so he could collect about \$35,000 in insurance money. Surveillance video showed him picking up his luggage and later returning to report it never arrived, an affidavit said.

He was convicted in Florida in 2014 on 23



approved by the judge reduced it to a misdemeanor and called for 1 year of probation for beating her 7-year-old son with a plastic coat hanger in February.

Thaing claimed she stopped her son from behavior that would have seriously harmed his 3-year-old sister. She hit both with the hanger before telling them to kneel and pray for God’s mercy, court documents said. “I was worried for my son’s salvation with God after he dies. I decided to punish my son to prevent him from hurting my daughter and to help him learn how to behave as God would want him to.”

A doctor noted 36 bruises on the boy, including one on his cheek in the shape of a hook.

Attorney Greg Bowes argued that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act gave Thaing the right to discipline her children in accordance with her beliefs. Gov. Mike Pence (now vice president-elect) signed Indiana’s RFRA into law in 2015.

Prosecutor Terry Curry has said he expects more defendants to cite religious defenses, which means the legal system will have to devote time and resources to arguing the merits of the claim. *Source: Indianapolis Star, 10-29-16*

**Tiffanie Irwin, 30, Chadwicks, NY:** Pleaded guilty to 3rd-degree manslaughter and 2nd-degree assault in the 2015 death of Lucas Leonard, 19, and the beating of his brother Christo-

member on Feb. 6, 2015, when he was pastor at the House of Prayer for All Nations.

In a letter to the court, Murrell argued he was coerced into performing sexual acts by the victim and said the encounter was “not totally my idea.” *Source: Herald & News, 10-25-16*

**Misty Rae Hopkins, 49, Burnet, TX:** 5 life sentences and 4 terms of 20 years, served consecutively, after a jury found her guilty of 5 counts of aggravated sexual assault of a child and 4 counts of indecency with a child. Charges stemmed from abuse between 1999-2005 by Hopkins and her late husband of their daughter. Four of their children testified they were abused by both parents.

**John P. Hopkins,** pastor of Northside Baptist Church died at age 40 on Christmas Day 2012. His obituary said, in part, “He was a godly man who lived his life for the Lord and left his legacy for his family.”

The abuse remained unreported until 2014 when all the children had turned 17 and left home. *Source: American-Statesman, 10-21-16*

**Maulana Nurunnabi, 32, Jaldhaka, Bangladesh:** 3 months in jail after pleading guilty to harassment of a 10th-grade girl. Nurunnabi, imam of Baktiar Para Utachhari mosque, was accused of repeatedly accosting the girl with marriage proposals on her way to and from school. *Source: Dhaka Tribune, 10-21-16*

fraud counts and received probation. *Source: nj.com, 11-12-16*

**James L'Keith Jones, Albuquerque, NM**, bishop of the Church of God in Christ, is being sued along with the church for \$12.2 million for alleged sexual assaults against Kimberly Pollard, 37, Lubbock, TX.

Pollard alleges Jones groomed her into what became a 20-year sexual relationship and extramarital affair and also tried to groom her 6-year-old daughter, telling her she looked “sexy” in her nightgown and saying he’d wait until she was 18 to date her.

COGIC is one of the largest African-American Christian denominations and has 12,000 congregations in every U.S. state and 70 countries. *Source: Daily Mail, 11-4-16*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Guam, Archbishop Anthony Apuron and Fr. Louis Brouillard** are being sued by 4 men for alleged sexual abuse. Three of the men, now in their 50s, were altar boys in the 1970s under Apuron. The other man, now in his 70s, was an altar boy in the 1950s, when he says Brouillard molested him.

Brouillard, 95, admitted to The Associated Press in August that he may have molested 20 boys during his time in Guam, which recently lifted the statute of limitations for civil suits in child molestation cases.

In a statement related to the lawsuits, he claimed his predatory behavior was known by other priests and by Apollinaris Baumgartner, who served as Guam archbishop from 1945-70. Brouillard wrote that Baumgartner approached him to talk about the “situation” and told him “try to do better and say prayers as a penance.” *Source: Pacific Daily News, 11-1-16*

The **Catholic Legion of Christ**, based in Connecticut, is being sued by a man who alleges he was molested as a teen in the early 1990s by **Luis Garza**, 58, a priest believed to be living in the Philippines and who was second-in-command to the late Legion founder **Marciel Maciel**. The plaintiff also alleges molestation by Maciel and another priest at a Legion boarding school. *Source: New Haven Register, 10-29-16*

**Terry Knighten, New Braunfels, TX, and Renew Ministries** are being sued by 2 parishioners, ages 27 and 32, who allege Knighten molested them. He founded the church, formerly called Celebrate Life Church, in 2006 and resigned after the suits were filed. The church website is offline but Knighten’s Facebook page says he and his wife Michelle started it after getting a mandate from God to “Feed the Spiritually Hungry.”

The older woman alleges the misconduct started in 2005 and ended with a sexual encounter on Christmas Eve 2015 at the church. The 27-year-old alleges she was assaulted in October 2015 after seeking marriage counseling. *Source: Herald-Zeitung, 10-27-16*

### Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis** settled a suit for undisclosed terms filed in 2013 by Pat and Dan Harkins, Florissant, MO, who alleged their son was molested between 1999-2002 by former priest **Bryan Kuchar**. Alex Harkins committed suicide with a handgun in 2009. The abuse allegedly occurred at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary.

Kuchar was never criminally charged for assaults on Harkins but was suspended by the archdiocese in 2002 and defrocked by the Vatican in 2006. The Harkinses sued after the Archdiocesan Review Board denied their claim.

Kuchar was convicted in 2003 of molesting a 14-year-old boy 8 years earlier and was sentenced to 3 years in the St. Louis County Jail.

“I still believe in God,” Pat Harkins said. “I don’t believe in the Catholic Church. How could I?” *Source: Post-Dispatch, 11-10-16*

**Delbarton School**, an all-male Catholic prep school in Morristown, NJ, and **Fr. Luke Travers**, the school’s former headmaster, were ordered to pay \$150,250 in damages to Marc MacNaughton, who alleged he was fired in 2005 for reporting 2 students’ allegations that Travers touched them inappropriately.

Travers was later accused in several lawsuits of sexually abusing 4 students in the 1980s and 1990s, but the jury was barred from hearing the sexual misconduct allegations.

MacNaughton also alleged the defendants sabotaged his efforts to obtain teaching and coaching jobs in order to keep a potential sex scandal quiet. *Source: nj.com, 10-26-16*

**Yeshiva Torah Temimah**, Brooklyn, NY, settled a suit filed by 2 former students for \$2.1 million. The plaintiffs alleged they were 6 when molested by teacher and rabbi **Joel Kolko** in 2003 and that the yeshiva and its leader, **Lipa Margulies**, knew for decades that Kolko was molesting students.

Kolko, now 70, was controversially allowed to plead guilty in 2012 to 2 misdemeanor counts of child endangerment, with no jail time or sex offender registry ordered.

Attorney Marci Hamilton said such settlements are rare in New York because victims must sue perpetrators before age 23 and institutions by age 21. “Even as teenagers, it’s impossible to process what’s happened to them



by someone they trusted. Asking them to come forward is much more than most of them can handle.” *Source: NY Post, 10-23-16*

The **Catholic Church in Argentina** was ordered to pay \$50,000 to former seminary student Ruben Descalzoa, who alleged he was molested in 1992 by **Archbishop Edgardo Storni**, who died in 2012 at age 75 without being criminally charged. *Source: AFP, 10-15-16*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Hartford, CT**, settled a suit by an unidentified plaintiff who alleged he was repeatedly molested in 2000-01 when he was 13 by **Edward J. Tissera**, aka Edward Warnakulasooriya, associate pastor at St. John the Evangelist Church in Watertown.

Terms weren’t disclosed but court papers show the plaintiff offered in March to settle for \$950,000. *Source: CT Post, 10-13-16*

The **Catholic Diocese of Ootacamund, India**, settled a suit filed by Megan Peterson, a Minnesota woman who sued for sexual abuse by priest **Joseph Jeyapaul**, 61. Financial terms weren’t disclosed, but the settlement includes a provision that Peterson will be informed annually of where Jeyapaul is living until he is defrocked.

Jeyapaul was extradited to the U.S. in 2014, convicted of criminal sexual conduct and was deported without serving prison time. Peterson sued after learning the Vatican had approved his reinstatement into ministry in India. Peterson was 14 when she was molested in 2004 while Jeyapaul was serving at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Greenbush, MN. *Source: Star Tribune, 10-3-16*

### Finances

The **Catholic Archdiocese of New York** announced its Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program, which allows victims of clergy sex abuse to collect damages within 60 days of filing a credible claim if they sign a confidentiality agreement and agree not to sue the archdiocese over related claims in the future. The first phase involves 170 cases, said Cardinal Timothy Dolan. Administrators include Kenneth Feinberg, who oversaw compensation for victims of the 9/11 attacks.

Critics contend the archdiocese is trying to sweep abuse claims under the rug while circumventing the Child Victims Act, which would abolish the statute of limitations for sex abuse lawsuits. State Sen. Brad Hoylman called the program “a canny legal strategy devised to reduce the archdiocese’s liability for decades of crimes and cover-ups.”

The archdiocese has spent \$2 million lobbying against the bill, which will be reintroduced next year.

“Cardinal Dolan sees the writing on the wall,” said abuse victim Gary Greenberg. “He knows the Child Victims Act will pass next year.” *Source: Church Militant, 10-6-16*

### Legal Developments

The **state of Queensland, Australia**, has removed the civil statutory time limit for victims of sexual abuse. Previously, child victims had only 3 years from the time they turned 18 to start civil action. The law lets courts set aside past secret settlements by churches and other institutions that used the age limit to negotiate lower payouts.

The bill also changed the law to allow class action suits. *Source: The Guardian, 11-8-16*

**Lyle Huddlestun, 44, Bonham, TX**, former youth minister at Boyd Baptist Church, must stand retrial for 2 counts of sexual assault on a teen boy alleged between 2007-09, a state appeals court ruled.

The boy reported the allegations in 2013, claiming the incidents happened when he was 13 or 14 during bible studies and sleepovers. Two previous trials ended in hung juries.

Huddlestun claimed the last mistrial was improperly granted and sought dismissal of the case. His trial is now set for February. *Source: KXII, 11-4-16*

**Louisiana Catholic priest Jeff Bayhi** was not required to report alleged sexual abuse of a 14-year-old girl, the state Supreme Court ruled: “Any communication made to a priest privately in the sacrament of confession for the purpose of confession, repentance, and absolution is a confidential communication . . . and the priest is exempt from mandatory reporter status.”

In her suit against Bayhi and the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Rebecca Mayeux, now 22, alleged she told him in 2008 that she was being molested by parishioner **George Charlet Jr.**, who died in 2009 at age 65. *Source: The Advocate, 10-29-16*

**Steven Wolpert**, 63, a Catholic priest at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Brooklyn, NY, in the 1980s and imprisoned in 2008 for molesting an 8-year-old boy, is being considered for parole. At sentencing, the judge noted Wolpert testified he let children sleep naked with him “because they were curious and he didn’t want to stifle the child’s sexuality.”

“Kids will be safest if Wolpert serves his entire sentence of 18 years behind bars,” said David Clohessy, of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. *Source: NY Daily News, 10-24-16*

**Philip Wilson**, 66, Catholic archbishop of Adelaide, Australia, must face trial on charges he covered up for a pedophile priest in 1971, ruled New South Wales Supreme Court Justice Monika Schmidt, upholding a lower appeals court decision. *Source: Fox News, 10-14-16*

**John T. Lee, 51, Millsboro, DE**, had his sentencing in federal court, first set for March, postponed again. Lee, a former Catholic priest and Navy chaplain, pleaded guilty in November 2015 to production and distribution of child pornography. Court documents say he took a nude

photo of a 17-year-old boy during a sexual encounter in Lee’s car and posted it online.

Lee was court-martialed in 2007 and served time for using his position as a priest to prey on lower-ranking servicemen and failing to tell a sex partner he was HIV-positive. *Source: News Journal, 10-3-16*

### Allegations

**Anthony Kiplagat**, a Kenyan Catholic priest assigned since 2012 to several Kansas parishes, engaged in unprofessional conduct with an adult woman and “violated clerical continence,” according to a statement issued in The Leaven, official newspaper of the Archdiocese of Kansas City.

Spokeswoman Anita McSorley said the allegation was forwarded to Overland Park police last January. The investigation is ongoing.

Court records show a protective order was granted to a woman in February who alleged Kiplagat sexually assaulted her and “told me he had infected me and if I go to the church and break my silence he would kill me and harm my family.” She said she had tapes of their arguments, which include alleged comments in which “he calls me a footstool” and “says God told him he was to be with me.”

Kiplagat first came to Kansas in 2007 as a student at the University of St. Mary in Leavenworth. *Source: Kansas City Star, 11-8-16*

The **Catholic Sisters of Mercy** and the **Archdiocese of New York** each say the other entity is responsible for any sexual abuse that may have happened to “Don,” who alleges he was molested 70 years ago by an employee at St. Michael’s Home for Children, an orphanage on Staten Island which closed in 1978.

Don, who asked that his last name not be used, told a reporter he was molested for 2 years by a lay employee at the orphanage. His attorney, Jordan Merson, said church officials told him “it was not responsible” because the Sisters of Mercy operated the orphanage then, while the religious order claims the archdiocese did.

Merson can’t subpoena documents to determine who actually ran the home due to the statute of limitations.

The archdiocese’s “policies and procedures” outlined in its new Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program for victims also bars payment to those abused by laypersons and not clergy, Merson said. *Source: Staten Island Advance, 11-8-16*

**Saeed Tousi**, 46, a member of Iran’s Supreme Council of the Quran, is accused of sexual assaults on 10 boys, all Quran students. The alleged victims took the unusual step of telling their stories to foreign media. One boy alleged he was assaulted in a public bath house at age 12.

The initial complaint was lodged in 2010. Another alleged victim said he has “lost all hope” that justice will be done.

A video interview with the accuser has gotten about half a million views. “People are being abused under the banner of religion . . . and no one is going to be held accountable,” wrote commenter Meysam.

“If the victims had been girls, [the authorities] would have accused them of being dressed inappropriately and provocatively. And they would argue that the assault was understandable,” wrote Somayeh. *Source: BBC Persian, 11-2-16*

### Removed / Resigned

**Scott Crenshaw, Hudson Oaks, TX**, was removed as senior pastor at New River Fellowship Church because he had “inappropriate images” on his work computer, according to the church, which has 3 campuses and over 2,000 members.

In a statement, Crenshaw admitted viewing the images, adding, “I have always preached that New River was not a museum for perfect people, but a hospital for those who are hurting, jacked up and messed up.”

The church board’s statement said Crenshaw “chose not to properly address” the issue and is “not qualified to lead” the church. *Source: Star-Telegram, 11-11-16*

Catholic priest **William Moloney, Peterborough, Ontario**, was placed on administrative leave as pastor at Immaculate Conception Parish due to an allegation he molested a boy at Camp Northern Lights, which serves children between the ages 9 and 13. Spokesperson Deirdre Thomas said the diocese learned of the allegations 5 years ago but the alleged victim did not want to come forward then.

Moloney resigned in June as chaplain for the Peterborough School Board. *Source: Peterborough This Week, 11-8-16*

**Richard Fritz, 69, Bronson, MI**, resigned as pastor of St. Mary’s Assumption Catholic Church and St. Barbara Parish after results of an internal audit were turned over to Michigan State Police. The agency is investigating alleged mismanagement of parish funds and inappropriate checks between 2010 and June 2016.

An attorney for the Diocese of Kalamazoo told investigators that records show over \$213,000 was allegedly taken. *Source: WOOD, 11-3-16*

Email: blackcollar@ffr.org

FFRF on the road



Dan Barker debated Thomas Ross of the Mukwonago Baptist Bible Institute on the topic of “Prophecy and Archaeology Validate the Bible as the Word of God” at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater on Nov. 10. The event was organized by the UWW Philosophy Club, the Secular Student Alliance and Set Free Ministries. Pictured, from left, are Paul Rains of Set Free Ministries, Thomas Ross, Barker, Matthew Schultz of the UWW Philosophy Club and Josie Thorman, president of the UWW Secular Student Alliance.



FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor (center) was a panelist Oct. 20 in a discussion in Madison, Wis., on “How religion is shaping the election.” The event was sponsored by the Capital Times and featured three Christians, a Muslim, a Jew, an atheist (Gaylor) and a journalism professor. Cap Times reporter Jessie Opoien, right, moderated the discussion



FFRF’s Chicago Chapter participated in “Hug an Atheist Day” on Nov. 5, which was organized by Ron McCullough (white shirt, holding white sign) and the Chicago Black NonBelievers. Tom Cara of the FFRF Chicago Chapter (holding yellow sign) writes: “Atheists gathered in both Millennium Park and along Michigan Avenue in Chicago to offer free hugs to passersby. The ‘hugfest’ was very well received by city residents, tourists and even Chicago Park District employees, with many opening their arms and hearts to give some hugs to atheists and showing their appreciation for what we were doing. Several ‘sidewalk huggers’ even opened up about being atheists themselves!”



Speaking at the Openly Secular Day conference hosted by University of Wisconsin’s Atheists, Humanists and Agnostics (AHA) on Nov. 15 were “The Friendly Atheist” Hemant Mehta, FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert and actress/activist Julia Sweeney.



FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, second from right, gave a presentation on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to the FFRF Metropolitan Chicago Chapter Board on Nov. 3. Standing with Seidel are FFRFMCC Board Members Tom Cara, Joel Frazin and Brian McCaskill.



FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel points out the silliness of a protester from the Westboro Baptist Church on Oct. 20 in Madison, Wis.

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“For what we are about to receive,  
Oh Lord, ’tis Thee we thank,”  
Said the Cannibal as he cut a slice  
Of the missionary’s shank.

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# What the election means for state/church separation

By Hemant Mehta

As we begin to look forward from the election, here are some issues church/state separation advocates are going to have to deal with in the years to come.

**Will Donald Trump repeal the Johnson Amendment?**

As it stands, churches (and other nonprofits) do not have to pay taxes.



Hemant Mehta

GOP's 2016 platform.

If he successfully repeals it, evangelical churches around the country will essentially become arms of that political party. Church and state will be intertwined in a way we've never seen before.

**Will Trump use taxpayer money to fund private religious schools?**

One of Trump's few specific poli-

But that also means they can't endorse candidates from the pulpit. Trump has pledged to repeal the law that says that — the Johnson Amendment — and that idea made its way into the

cy proposals included spending \$20 billion to allow students to attend the schools of their choice, presumably including private religious schools. Besides hurting public schools all over the country, these taxpayer-funded vouchers would go to some schools that put indoctrination over education.

Americans United for Separation for Church and State suggested that the religious liberty aspect of this plan was a looming disaster: "One of the most dearly held principles of religious liberty is that government should not compel any citizen to furnish funds in support of a religion with which he or she disagrees, or even a religion with which he or she does agree. Voucher programs, however, violate that central tenet: They use taxpayer money to fund primarily religious education. Indeed, approximately 80 percent of the students participating in the D.C. voucher program attend religious

schools. Parents certainly may choose such an education for their children, but no taxpayer should be required to pay for another's religious education."

**Will Trump discriminate on the basis of religion?**

Trump has already proposed a ban on Muslim immigrants — or even visitors — though he hasn't explained how he'd know they're followers of Islam. Not all Muslims look the same, and not all people from certain countries are Muslim.

More broadly, though, this idea that people should be treated differently by the government on the basis of their faith goes against everything our nation is supposed to stand for.

If Trump and his party promote discrimination against religious minorities, who will stand up for them?

**How much influence will Vice President-elect Mike Pence have on this administration?**

Pence believes people can be "cured" of their homosexuality. He thinks it's okay for Christian business owners to discriminate against LGBT customers. He supported a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. He signed a bill to jail gay couples who simply applied for a marriage license — and any clerks who gave them one.

Pence was arguably the most anti-LGBT governor in the nation. At the very least, he gave North Carolina's Pat McCrory a run for his money. With unchecked powers in the White House, what will he be able to do?

**What will Trump do with the Supreme Court?**

With one vacancy and three more moderate-to-liberal justices with an average age of 80, Trump with his Senate majority could push through just about any of his far-right evangelical Christian-approved nominees.

What will that mean for transgender rights? Abortion access? The death penalty? The Affordable Care Act? All those other issues in which religious conservatives go against basic human decency?

At the very least, church/state separation advocates better hope 83-year-old Ruth Bader Ginsburg has a few more years left in her.

*Hemant Mehta, a member of FFRF, writes The Friendly Atheist blog on Patheos.com.*

## Mark your calendar! 40th Anniversary of FFRF's Convention



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Madison, Wisconsin

Sept. 15-17, 2017

## COMING NEXT MONTH IN FREETHOUGHT TODAY



Susan Jacoby's speech from FFRF's convention

### REMINDER

The January / February issue is combined and will be delivered in late January.

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