

Freethought Today

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FFRF wins suit over school board prayer

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has won a significant federal court judgment against a California school board for its blatantly religious meetings.

U.S. District Judge Jesus Bernal ruled on Feb. 18 against the Chino Valley Unified School District for overtly and consciously inserting religion into official proceedings.

“Finally, a Jesus I can believe in,” wrote a commenter on an article in the San Bernardino County’s Inland Daily Bulletin, playing off the name of the judge.

FFRF, along with 22 local residents, filed a lawsuit on Nov. 13, 2014, challenging the School Board’s prayers, bible readings and proselytization at official gatherings. The district, which serves about 32,000 students, was ordered to pay court costs and plaintiff fees, which are currently about \$200,000. On March 7

the School Board voted 3-2 to appeal the ruling, which means the suit could take another two years and cost between \$350,000 and \$500,000.

At one meeting, then-Board President James Na “urged everyone who does not know Jesus Christ to go and find Him,” after which another board member closed with a reading of Psalm 143.

The judge wasn’t having it.

“The court finds . . . permitting religious prayer in board meetings, and the policy and custom of reciting prayers, Bible readings, and proselytizing at

board meetings, constitute unconstitutional government endorsements of religion in violation of plaintiffs’ First Amendment rights,” Bernal wrote. “Defendant board members are enjoined from conducting, permitting or

See Chino Valley victory on page 15

‘Finally, a Jesus I can believe in.’

— online commenter,
playing off the name of U.S.
District Judge Jesus Bernal



Plaintiffs Michael Anderson, Larry Maldonado and attorney David J.P. Kaloyanides, along with FFRF and 20 other plaintiffs, won a lawsuit against the Chino Valley School District stopping prayers during board meetings.



Kevin Price photo

FFRF and two plaintiffs have sued over Latin cross decals on public vehicles in Brewster County (Texas).

Texas county sheriff sued over cross decals

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and two of its members are suing a Texas sheriff over his decision to affix Latin cross decals on county patrol vehicles.

Brewster County Sheriff Ronny Dodson announced in December that he “wanted God’s protection over his deputies” in deciding to place the prominent crosses on at least five county law enforcement vehicles.

Local plaintiffs Kevin Price and Jesse Castillo, both atheists and FFRF members, have come in regular contact with the Christian displays numerous times while out driving in the county. They “do not believe in any supernatural

beings” and object to “an exclusively Christian religious symbol” being displayed on their county’s patrol vehicles, the suit notes.

Both men contend “the Latin crosses convey the divisive message that non-Christians . . . are not equally valued members of the community and that Christians are favored.”

When the Brewster County Sheriff’s Office Facebook page posted two comments supportive of the Latin crosses, Price criticized the action. His comments were deleted by the sheriff’s office and he was blocked from making further comments.

Castillo believes “that the

See Brewster County on page 19

Death threat received

More families join nativity suit

Two more parents have joined a lawsuit challenging an annual nativity performance at Concord High School in Elkhart, Ind.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, the American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Indiana filed the original suit on Oct. 7, 2015, along with “Jack Doe,” a student and member of the performing arts department, and FFRF member “John Doe,” his father.

The new parent plaintiffs are also seeking anonymity to protect their families from the vitriol and open hostility this state/church violation has created. This hostility includes a death threat that was sent to FFRF in December.

The anonymously penned death threat targeted FFRF Staff Attorney and co-counsel Sam Grover and a family that some have speculated is the



Two more parents have joined FFRF’s lawsuit against an annual live nativity performance at Concord High School in Elkhart, Ind.

Doe family.

“I will make it my life’s mission to one day (in the next weeks, months or even years) when you think this is all done and forgotten about, to find you and the [redacted family name],” reads the email. “I will cut you into pieces and feed you to the fishes in the Elkhart River (Please note that I will enjoy this).”

The missive ends on this

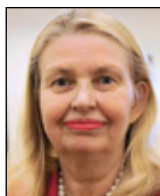
note: “Do yourself a favor, and believe me, when I say: NO ONE WILL STOP ME!”

For several decades, Concord High has performed a “Christmas Spectacular” each winter. Every performance for the public, of which there were four in 2014, “ends with an approximately 20-minute telling of the story of the birth of Jesus, including a live nativity scene and a scriptural reading from the bible. During this segment, students at the high school portray the Virgin Mary, Joseph, the three wise men, shepherds and angels,” notes the original complaint. Attendance and performance at the Christmas Spectacular is mandatory for students enrolled in the performing arts department.

Attorneys for FFRF and the ACLU argue that the nativity performance and the reading

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This section has been removed from the digital version of Freethought Today.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

FFRF welcomes 1 new After-Lifer, 16 Life Members

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is very pleased to welcome its newest “After-Life Member,” Bruce Hoffmann, and 16 new Lifetime Members. They are:

Mike Abbott, Milton Erven Anglin, Bob Antoine, Marguerite Cassidy, Rhonda Dapceovich (a gift from Lifetime Member James Grant), Josh David (a gift from Lifetime Member Adam R. Rose), David Druecker, Nan Haberman, Ian Lanphier, Randy Lifshotz, Gregory Lydin, Anne Mills, Astrid Newenhouse, Derek Studanski, plus two members who prefer not to be named publicly.

States represented are: Arkansas, California, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Minnesota, New York, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin.

Correction: We listed Bruce Hoffmann as a new Lifetime Member, instead of an After-Life Member, in the previous issue.

Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000 designated as a membership or membership renewal. Individual After-Life Memberships, a tongue-in-cheek category for those who wish their memberships to live after them, are \$5,000. Both categories are deductible for income-tax purposes for the kind donor, as are all dues and donations to FFRF, a 501(c)3 nonprofit.

Warmest thanks to Bruce, Derek, Astrid, Anne, Gregory, Randy, Ian, Nan, David, Adam, James, Marguerite, Bob, Milton, Mike and our two “anonymous” new Lifers!

What Is a Freethinker?

freethinker *n.*

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

Overheard

It should be simple. Government representatives must remain neutral on religious issues.

Editorial by Robin Layton, editor of Chino Valley (Ariz.) Review, in response to the Town Council becoming fragmented over pre-meeting invocations

Chino Valley Review, 2-10-16

Taking “In God We Trust” from our currency is a progressive move that will benefit a wholly different religious America — one where religious rights are truly protected.

Kelsey Dickerson, staff writer

The Valdosta State University Spectator 2-11-16

We should recognize that the oppression of atheists does not only violate the human rights of people . . . but represents a degradation of the fundamental principle that people should be free to hold their own beliefs without fearing for their life or liberty. History has shown time and time again that when one minority group is oppressed with impunity, others soon face the same fate.

Bishop Declan Lang, the chair of the

UK-based Catholic Bishops’ Conference Department for International Affairs, in an article for the Universe

The Catholic Herald, 3-8-16

This bill only protects those citizens who have a “sincerely held belief.” So apparently, if you are not a practicing member of a religious group, you have no standing with the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. This bill creates a special class of American. This special class may practice freedom of religion, but those who wish to have freedom from religion have no special protections.

Tisha Gay-Reed, deputy director of WV Free, after the West Virginia House of Delegates voted to enact a state-level Religious Freedom Restoration Act

The Hill, 2-19-16

If it gets someone to know a part of the First Amendment that they didn’t know before, I think it’s ultimately a good thing.

Derek Allen, lawyer for Michael Schumacher, who won the right to wear a strainer on his head in a driver’s license photo after claiming he was a member of the Church of the Flying

Spaghetti Monster

WKOW-TV 2-15-16

No matter how many kids they assaulted, very few predator priests are ever prosecuted.

Mary Dispenza, Northwest director of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), after public records show only 5 convictions out of the 77 priests from the Seattle Catholic Archdiocese who were recently identified as abusers of children

Seattle Times, 1-24-16

The heinous crimes these children endured are absolutely unconscionable. These predators desecrated a sacred trust and preyed upon their victims in the very places where they should have felt most safe.

Pennsylvania state Attorney General Kathleen Kane, on how more than 50 Catholic priests over four decades sexually abused hundreds of children while bishops covered up their actions. (See page 10 for full story.)

Religion News Service, 2-2-16



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

Editor: PJ Slinger, *fttoday@ffrf.org*

Editor Emeritus: Bill Dunn

Executive Editor: Annie Laurie Gaylor

Graphic Designer: Jake Swenson

Contributors:

Philip Appleman, Dan Barker, Ernie Chambers, Steven Hewett, Susan Jacoby, Lawrence Krauss, Ingrid Laas, Chris Line, Amit Pal, Lauryn Seering, Andrew Seidel, Maddy Ziegler

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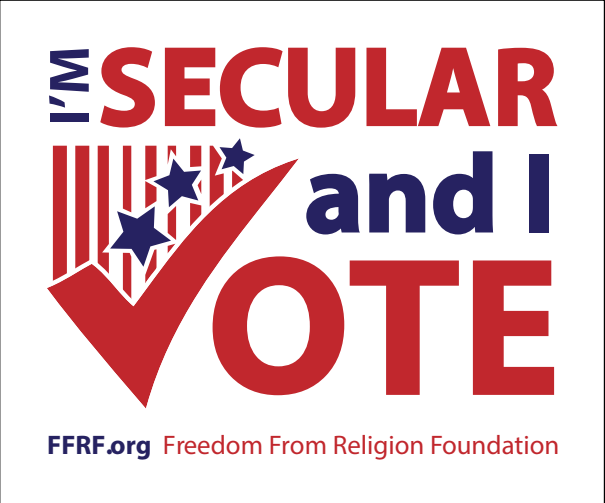
FFRF launches ‘I’m Secular and I Vote’ campaign

FFRF hopes to engage the millions of non-religious voters with its new “I’m Secular and I Vote” campaign ahead of the 2016 presidential election.

“Since President Obama was first elected, the number of religiously unaffiliated adults in America has grown by nearly 20 million,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Still, most candidates and media outlets focus their time on traditional religious groups, so we’re taking action to be more vocal and coordinated as a demographic that should not be ignored.”

A fresh ad campaign featuring John F. Kennedy aired in 21 major television markets during The Late Show with Stephen Colbert for two weeks in March. The commercial depicts the famous lines delivered by presidential candidate John F. Kennedy to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in 1960: “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly on the general populace.”

FFRF also plans to reach out to voters through its chapters, paid digital media ads, efforts to mobilize students on college campuses, and coordination with the nation’s other major freethought associations as part of the June 4 Reason Rally in Washington, D.C.



A major Pew Research survey recently found 23 percent of the U.S. population is now religiously unaffiliated, with 19 million new adults since 2007 classifying their religious affiliation as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular, a trend Pew says is being driven primarily by young adults. A third of Millennials now identify as non-religious.

“Much of the movement away from religion in America is being driven by Millennials, many of

We need secular voters to be vocal about their beliefs, or lack thereof, while rejecting efforts to push religious dogma on the nation.

— FFRF Co-President Dan Barker

whom will be voting for the first time this year,” said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. “We need secular voters to be vocal about their beliefs, or lack thereof, while rejecting efforts to push religious dogma on the nation.”

FFRF will be working with its 23,500 members, 20 chapters across America and through secular student alliances to encourage supporters to register to vote, attend and speak out on secularism at political events and submit op-eds to local and campus newspapers. FFRF also launched a student essay contest with thousands of dollars in prizes, and will distribute “I’m Secular and I Vote” buttons, T-shirts, bumper stickers and educational material across the country.

Sick and tired of ‘God Bless America’

Susan Jacoby, an honorary director of FFRF, is the author of *Strange Gods: A Secular History of Conversion*. This op-ed appeared in *The New York Times* on Feb. 5, 2016, and is reprinted with permission.

By Susan Jacoby

The population of nonreligious Americans — including atheists, agnostics and those who call themselves “nothing in particular” — stands at an all-time high this election year. Americans who say religion is not important in their lives and who do not belong to a religious group, according to the Pew Research Center, have risen in numbers from an estimated 21 million in 2008 to more than 36 million now.

Despite the extraordinary swiftness and magnitude of this shift, our political campaigns are still conducted as if all potential voters were among the faithful. The presumption is that candidates have everything to gain and nothing to lose by continuing their obsequious attitude toward orthodox religion and ignoring the growing population of those who make up a more secular America.

Ted Cruz won in Iowa by expanding Republican voter turnout among the evangelical base. Donald J. Trump placed second after promising “to protect Christians” from enemies foreign and domestic. The third-place finisher Marco Rubio’s line “I don’t think you can go to church too often” might well have been the campaign mantra. Mr. Rubio was first christened a Roman Catholic, baptized again at the age of 8 into the Mormon Church, and now attends a Southern Baptist megachurch with his wife on Saturdays and Catholic Mass on Sundays.

Democrats are only a trifle more secular in their appeals. Hillary Clinton repeatedly refers to her Methodist upbringing, and even Bernie Sanders — a cultural Jew not known to belong to a synagogue — squirms when asked whether he believes in God. When Jim-



Susan Jacoby

my Kimmel posed the question, Mr. Sanders replied in a fog of words at odds with his usual blunt style: “I am who I am. And what I believe in and what my spirituality is about, is that we’re all in this together.” He once referred to a “belief in God” that requires him to follow the Golden Rule — a quote his supporters seem to trot out whenever someone suggests he’s an atheist or agnostic.

Candidates ignore secularists

The question is not why nonreligious Americans vote for these candidates — there is no one on the ballot who full-throatedly endorses nonreligious humanism — but why candidates themselves ignore the growing group of secular voters.

Yes, America is still a predominantly Christian nation, but evangelical Christians (including multiple Protestant denominations), at 25.4 percent, are the only group larger than those who don’t belong to any church. At 22.8 percent, according to Pew, the unchurched make up a larger group than Catholics, any single Protestant denomination and small minorities of Jews, Muslims and Hindus.

Critics have suggested that there is no such entity as secular America, because the nonreligious do not all

share the same values. One might just as easily say the same thing about the religious. President Jimmy Carter, for example, left the Southern Baptist Convention because he disagreed with its views about women — but Mr. Carter remains his own kind of devout and liberal Baptist in the tradition of his 18th-century religious forebears.

Secularists politically weak

Secularists remain politically weak in part because of the reluctance of many, especially the young, to become “joiners.” Rejection of labels may be one reason so many of the religiously unaffiliated prefer to check “nothing in particular” rather than the atheist or agnostic box.

But it takes joiners to create a lobby. The American Center for Law and Justice, an organization focused on the rights of Christians, gathered more than a million signatures on a petition protesting the imprisonment of Saeed Abedini, an Iranian-American pastor and convert from Islam who was one of four Americans freed in last month’s prisoner swap.

For small secular organizations, a million signatures for any cause would constitute a supernatural happening. I spent a few years working for the Center for Inquiry, a humanist think tank that merged last month, in a rare union of secular forces, with the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. Michael De Dora, the center’s public policy director, argues that secularists must work with liberal and mainstream religious groups on issues of mutual concern.

Yet there is some controversy over coalition building between those who consider themselves “hard” and “soft” atheists. I suppose I must be a “soft” atheist for believing that there is a huge political upside to ad hoc coalitions with liberal religious groups.

Freedom of conscience for all — which exists only in secular democracies — should be at the top of the list of shared concerns. Candidates who

rightly denounce the persecution of Christians by radical Islamists should be ashamed of themselves for not expressing equal indignation at the persecution of freethinkers and atheists, as well as dissenting Muslims and small religious sects, not only by terrorists but also by theocracies like Saudi Arabia. With liberal religious allies, it would be easier for secularists to hold candidates to account when they talk as if freedom of conscience is a human right only for the religious.

Reclaim the language

Even more critical is the necessity of reclaiming the language of religious freedom from the far right. As defined by many pandering politicians, “religious freedom” is in danger of becoming code for accepting public money while imposing faith-based values on others.

Anyone who dismisses the importance of taking back this language should consider the gravity of the mistake made by supporters of legal abortion when they

allowed the anti-abortion movement to claim the term “pro-life” after *Roe v. Wade*.

Secularists must hold candidates to account when they insult secular values, whether that means challenging them in town hall meetings or withholding donations. Why, for example, would any secular Republican (yes, there are some) think of supporting the many Republican politicians who have denied the scientific validity of evolution? Politicians will continue to ignore secular Americans until they are convinced that there is a price to be paid for doing so.

“God bless America” has become the standard ending of every major political speech. Just once in my life, I would like the chance to vote for a presidential candidate who ends his or her appeals with Thomas Paine’s observation that “the most formidable weapon against errors of every kind is Reason.”

Susan Jacoby will be speaking at FFRF’s annual convention in Pittsburgh in October. See the back page for more convention details and to register.

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

THAT TIME OF YEAR

So April’s here, with all these soggy showers,
Making us almost long for March again,
As every twiglet makes a play for flowers
And every hack for miles picks up a pen,
Girls all playing hankypank, not soccer,
The smell of oozing sap all over town,
Teenage boys completely off their rocker,
And rutting rabbits diddling farmer Brown.

We’re in for it now, nothing to be done:
Loving’s what we wanted, what we got.
At least we’re going to have a little fun—
With any luck, we’re going to have a lot.
Thirty days hath April: seize the day!
Don’t trust to luck for darling buds in May.

© 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), *Darwin’s Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used *Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, and the *Norton Critical Edition of Malthus’ Essay on Population*. His 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.



Snow is invisible, too?
Not-so-deep thoughts from the First Reformed Church of Portage, Mich.

Meet a member

Name: Marni Huebner-Tiborsky.
Where I live: Richmond Heights, an east suburb of Cleveland, Ohio.
Where and when I was born: Bedford, Ohio, on March 21, 1973.
Family: Mark Tiborsky, 54, atheist spouse and staunch FFRF supporter.
Education: 1990 graduate of Mentor High School, Mentor, Ohio; 1992 graduate of Lakeland Community College with A.A. English major; and 1994 graduate of Lake Erie College with B.A. major in French/Italian.

Occupation: Coordinator, World-wide Expense Reporting. I work in the finance department for a private equity firm and check almost all expense reports worldwide (U.S., Europe and Asia), making sure tax, internal and external coding and audit rules are followed. I also manage the Travel and Expense Reporting system and handle almost all back office administrative and helpdesk functions, training, etc.

How I got where I am today: Whew, this is a tough one. I think it’s a matter of just gaining day-to-day experience, trying new things and just growing up, maturing and learning how to be better and do better, even in the face of adversity and sometimes just bad luck. I’m always learning, especially from my friends and peers. It’s not always easy but I keep plugging away day to day!

Where I’m headed: Where I hope I’m headed is eventually running my own business teaching people about green smoothies and making raw vegan fruit desserts in an environmentally friendly store/food truck. I also would like to be a vegan menu planning consultant. On a far different note, I hope to eventually organize/host a freethought convention in Cleveland.

Person in history I admire and why: There are so many! I admire any free-thinkers throughout history who have resisted the status quo no matter how frightening it was or how dangerous. Their willingness to put themselves on the front lines to create change is to be applauded. It is critical, especially with current events, that more free-thinkers have the courage to come out to friends and family and publicly. The only way to change minds and end discrimination and ignorance is to get out in the open and educate!

A quotation I like: “The only constant is change” — Isaac Asimov.

These are a few of my favorite things: A secular, free society, green smoothies, coffee, my cats, being married to another atheist, the greatest friends in the world (you know who you are!), our social meetup group and our wonderful FFRF chapter.

These are not: My cats (yes, they are a blessing and a curse!), bad drivers, willful ignorance, entitlement mentality and tax-exempt churches.



Marni Huebner-Tiborsky.

My doubts about religion started: I have been an atheist as long as I can remember. Religion just never made sense to me. I was reared Methodist, but just didn’t give it much thought, ever. The whole thing just seemed inane. I went to church and was active, but that was because of community, not religiosity.

Before I die: Wow, there’s so many things! I want to visit every national park in an RV, and I want to own a completely modular, mobile tiny house (although I’d have to build another house for the kitties). I want to visit Farm Sanctuary in New York, Big Cat Rescue in Florida, and I want to get my husband to Europe. I would also like to be in New York City once for the Macy’s parade and once for New Year’s Eve. I’d also like to run a statewide Secular Community Center and own a very successful business.

Ways I promote freethought: In 2007, I founded and now co-organize with my husband a social group on meetup.com called The Cleveland Freethinkers, which has over 1,100 members and has had over 600 in-person meetups. In 2012, I founded the local FFRF chapter, Northern Ohio Freethought Society (NOFS), to be a local separation of state and church watchdog/activist group. Our chapter has already participated in several great community outreach campaigns and events. We are looking to become more involved with Foundation Beyond Belief and Secular Student Alliance. My husband and I are involved with the local chapter of Center for Inquiry and my husband is on the board. We have been peripherally involved with United Coalition of Reason and my husband coordinated the formation of the local Northeast Ohio Coalition of Reason. We are also involved with the local Sunday Assembly (husband’s in the band!) and, of course, are heavily involved with FFRF. All of these groups we also promote through Facebook and Twitter and have a separate website for the NOFS chapter.



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

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

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

Put an atheist on the Supreme Court

This op-ed appeared in *The New Yorker* on Feb. 19, 2016, and is reprinted with permission.

By Lawrence Krauss

Who should replace Antonin Scalia? On Feb. 15, The New York Times reported that the justice himself had weighed in on the question: Last June, in his dissenting opinion in the same-sex marriage case *Obergefell v. Hodges*, Scalia wrote that the court was “strikingly unrepresentative” of America as a whole and ought to be diversified. He pointed out that four of the justices are natives of New York City, that none are from the Southwest (or are “genuine” Westerners), and that all of them attended law school at Harvard or Yale. Moreover, Scalia wrote, there is “not a single evangelical Christian (a group that comprises about one quarter of Americans), or even a Protestant of any denomination” on the court. (All nine justices are, to varying degrees, Catholic or Jewish.)

Scalia’s remarks imply that an evangelical Christian should be appointed to the court. That’s a strange idea:



Lawrence Krauss

Surely, the separation of church and state enshrined in the Constitution strongly suggests that court decisions shouldn’t be based on religious preference, or even on religious arguments. The Ten Commandments are reserved for houses of worship; the laws of the land are, or should be, secular. Still, I’m inclined, in my own way, to agree with Scalia’s idea about diversity. My suggestion is that the next Supreme Court justice be a declared atheist.

Atheists are a significantly under-represented minority in government. According to recent findings from the Pew Research Center, about 23% of American adults declare that they

have no religious affiliation — which is two percentage points more than the number who declare themselves Catholic. At least 3% of Americans say that they are atheists — which means that there are more atheists than Jews in the United States. An additional 4% declare themselves agnostic; as George Smith noted in his classic book *Atheism: The Case Against God*, agnostics are, for practical purposes, atheists, since they cannot declare that they believe in a divine creator. Even so, not a single candidate for major political office or Supreme Court justice has “come out” declaring his or her non-belief.

From a judicial perspective, an atheist justice would be an asset. In controversial cases about same-sex marriage, say, or access to abortion or birth control, he or she would be less likely to get mired in religion-based moral quandaries. Scalia himself often got sidetracked in this way: He framed his objections to laws protecting LGBT

rights in a moral, rather than a legal-rights, framework. In his dissent in 2003 in *Lawrence v. Texas* — a case that challenged a Texas law criminalizing gay sex — Scalia wrote that those who wanted to limit the rights of gay people to be teachers or scoutmasters were merely “protecting themselves and

their families from a lifestyle they believe to be immoral and destructive.” To him, religion-based moral objections seemed to deserve more weight than either factual considerations (homosexuality is not destructive) or rights-based concerns (gay people’s rights must

be protected). Indeed, Scalia’s meditation on the court’s lack of religious diversity was part of a larger argument that the court’s decision on same-sex marriage did not reflect prevailing religious and moral values. An atheist justice, by contrast, would have different intellectual habits. I suspect that he or she would be more likely to focus on reason and empirical evidence.

See Krauss on page 15

Lawrence Krauss will be speaking at FFRF’s annual convention in Pittsburgh in October. See the back page for more convention details and to register.

Scalia’s poor state/church legacy (in quotes)

By PJ Slinger

On Feb. 13, when conservative Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died, it shook up the makeup of the court and created what is turning into a contentious fight to find his successor.

Over the years, FFRF took issue with many of Scalia’s decisions and proclamations, whether they were with the majority opinion or not. FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker, along with FFRF co-founder Anne Nicol Gaylor, even protested Scalia’s appearance during a stop at the University of Wisconsin Law School in 2001.

The following quotes from Scalia during his tenure on the bench reveal his feelings about state/church separation issues and other religion-based topics.

On religious displays on government property

“I find it a sufficient embarrassment that our Establishment Clause jurisprudence regarding holiday displays has come to require scrutiny more commonly associated with interior decorators than with the judiciary. But interior decorating is a rock hard science compared to psychology practiced by amateurs.” — *Dissent in Lee v. Weisman* (1992)

On religious faith in public life

“Have the courage to have your wisdom regarded as stupidity. Be fools for Christ. And have the courage to suffer the contempt of the sophisticated world.” — *speech to Knights of Columbus Baton Rouge Council 969, (Jan. 29, 2005)*

On the Establishment Clause

“The Founding Fathers would be astonished to find that the Establishment Clause — which they designed to ensure that no one powerful sect or combination of sects could use political or governmental power to punish dissenters — has been employed to prohibit the characteristically and admirably American accommodation of the religious practices (or more precisely,



cultural peculiarities) of a tiny minority sect. I, however, am not surprised. Once this court has abandoned text and history as guides, nothing prevents it from calling religious toleration the establishment of religion.” — *Board of Ed. of Kiryas Joel v. Grumet* (1994)

On the morality of the death penalty

It seems to me that the more Christian a country is, the less likely it is to regard the death penalty as immoral. Abolition has taken its firmest hold in post-Christian Europe, and has least support in the church-going United States. I attribute that to the fact that, for the believing Christian, death is no big deal. Intentionally killing an innocent person is a big deal: It is a grave sin, which causes one to lose his soul. But losing this life in exchange for the next? The Christian attitude is reflected in the words Robert Bolt’s play has Thomas More saying to the headsman: ‘Friend, be not afraid of your office. You send me to God.’ For the nonbeliever, on the other hand, to deprive a man of his life is to end his existence.” — *God’s Justice and Ours, 123 First Things* (May 2002)

On belief in the devil

“You’re looking at me as though I’m weird. My God! Are you so out of

touch with most of America, most of which believes in the devil? I mean, Jesus Christ believed in the devil! It’s in the gospels! You travel in circles that are so, so removed from mainstream America that you are appalled that anybody would believe in the devil! Most of mankind has believed in the devil, for all of history. Many more intelligent people than you or me have believed in the devil.” — *Jennifer Senior, “In Conversation: Antonin Scalia,” New York* (Oct. 6, 2013)

On religious (and nonreligious) neutrality

“To tell you the truth, there is no place for that [religious neutrality] in our constitutional tradition. To be sure, you can’t favor one denomination over another, but you can’t favor religion over nonreligion? . . . I think one of the reasons God has been good to us is that we have done him honor. Unlike the other countries of the world that do no even invoke his name, we do him honor.” — *speaking to students at a Louisiana Catholic high school (Jan. 2, 2016)*

On the Pledge of Allegiance

“We do him [God] honor in our Pledge of Allegiance, in all our public ceremonies. There’s nothing wrong

with that. It is in the best of American traditions, and don’t let anybody tell you otherwise. I think we have to fight that tendency of the secularists to impose it on all of us through the Constitution.” — *speaking to students at Colorado Christian University (Oct. 1, 2014)*

On prayer at graduation ceremonies

“To deprive our society of that important unifying mechanism in order to spare the nonbeliever what seems to me the minimal inconvenience of standing or even sitting in respectful nonparticipation is as senseless in policy as it is unsupported in law.” — *Lee v. Weisman* (1992)

On the Lemon test, which requires laws to have a secular purpose

“Like some ghoul in a late-night horror movie that repeatedly sits up in its grave and shuffles abroad, after being repeatedly killed and buried, Lemon stalks our Establishment Clause jurisprudence once again, frightening the little children and school attorneys of Center Moriches Union Free School District. Its most recent burial, only last term, was, to be sure, not fully six feet under: Our decision in *Lee v. Weisman* conspicuously avoided using the supposed test but also declined the invitation to repudiate it. Over the years, however, no fewer than five of the currently sitting justices have, in their own opinions, personally driven pencils through the creature’s heart (the author of today’s opinion repeatedly), and a sixth has joined an opinion doing so. The secret of the Lemon test’s survival, I think, is that it is so easy to kill. It is there to scare us (and our audience) when we wish it to do so, but we can command it to return to the tomb at will. Such a docile and useful monster is worth keeping around, at least in a somnolent state; one never knows when one might need him.” — *Lamb’s Chapel v. Center Moriches Union Free School District* (1993)

Read Annie Laurie Gaylor’s blog, “Why Scalia was a ‘fugitive from justice’” at [Pa-theos.com](#).

Prayers halted

FFRF wins several cases over public prayers

In the past month or so, FFRF was able to get many public school officials and coaches and other public entities to end their use of illegal prayer.

Seniors spared from prayers

Seniors at the Easton Area Lifestyle Campus in Easton, Pa., will no longer be subjected to prayers by center staff. Previously, staff recited prayers, asked people to join in an “amen” chorus accompanied by piano, and sung Christian hymns.

“Federal regulations prohibit senior centers receiving federal funding to engage in religious activities at government-sponsored functions such as senior lunches,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel on Jan. 12 in a letter to the center.

On Jan. 29, FFRF received a response from the Northampton County Department of Human Services, noting that it had distributed a policy memo to the county’s senior centers. The memo said that “all senior centers operated by the county of Northampton, or funded even partially by funds from the [Area Agency on Aging] are, effective immediately, precluded from offering prayers.”

School officials to be neutral

The Morgan County Schools in Alabama have reminded a coach and a band director to keep state and church separate after FFRF stepped in with a written complaint.

A Danville High School student informed FFRF that, after the end of football games, the team’s coaches gathered the players together at the center of the field and led both teams in a Christian prayer. In addition, the drum major, on the instruction of the band director, led prayers at the half-time of each game and at practices.

“It is, of course, unconstitutional for public school athletic coaches or band directors to lead students in prayer, participate in student-led prayer, or instruct students to lead prayers,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover in a letter to the district.

An attorney for the school district informed Grover by email on Feb. 8 that the coaches and band director had “been told of their obligations to



Jason Tench / Shutterstock.com

In the past few months, FFRF has been able to get many schools and other public entities to stop prayers during ceremonies or by those in positions of authority.

remain neutral, including that they should not organize or direct students in prayer.”

Graduation prayers ended

The La Mesa-Spring Valley School District will no longer include prayers at graduation ceremonies.

FFRF objected to the practice in a Jan. 14 letter. “The Supreme Court has continually struck down prayers at school-sponsored events, including public school graduations,” Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the district.

On Feb. 10, the district said that “steps have been taken to ensure that prayers or prayer-like speeches are not held at school-sponsored activities in the future.”

Invocations to be nonsectarian

The Plano Independent School District Board of Trustees has dropped Christian invocations from its meetings in favor of “nonsectarian inspirational messages” after hearing from FFRF.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover first wrote on Dec. 7, 2015, informing the board, “It is beyond the scope of a public school board to schedule or conduct prayer as part of its meetings.”

When an attorney for the school district replied that the district did not intend to change its practices, Grover sent a rebuttal letter on Jan. 22. He pointed out that several courts have

held that prayers at school board meetings differ from the legislative prayers that the U.S. Supreme Court has approved of, and that even in the legislative context, legislators themselves are not permitted to lead the prayers as the trustees were doing here.

In a Feb. 26 response, the Plano Board of Trustees attorney maintained his disagreement, but wrote, “Notwithstanding our disagreement, going forward the Plano ISD School Board intends on opening its meetings with nonsectarian inspirational messages delivered by board members.”

Coach won’t organize prayers

A Michigan public school softball coach will no longer lead team members in prayer.

In May 2015, FFRF sent a letter to North Branch Area Schools Superintendent Thomas English alerting him that high school softball coach Willie Deshetsky was leading his team members in prayer. FFRF sent English photos of Deshetsky’s team prayerfully holding hands with him.

“It is illegal for public school athletic coaches to lead their team in prayer,” FFRF Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote.

FFRF finally received a response in February informing the organization that the coach had been asked to desist.

“Coach Willie Deshetsky was officially informed he cannot organize,

advocate or lead the softball team in prayer,” North Branch Athletic Director James Fish said in his reply.

Coach-led prayers to stop in Illinois

FFRF has been able to get three Illinois public schools districts to stop coaches from leading prayers at school competitions.

The organization had written to Altamont Community Unit School District #10, Pana Community Unit School District #8 and Dieterich School District asking them to cease the practice.

While not acknowledging any wrongdoing, the three school districts responded by stating that they’ll make certain this won’t happen in the future. The Dieterich School District also sent FFRF a copy of a memo that Superintendent Cary Jackson circulated among all district employees emphasizing the district’s need to adhere to the U.S. Constitution.

“We, as a school district, absolutely have a respect for religion, but by federal law, cannot endorse it,” the memo reads. “Therefore, when our students choose to participate or initiate a student-led prayer, our employees may not participate in any way.”

Kentucky coach to stop prayers

FFRF recently got a Kentucky school district to stop a public high school football coach from leading his team in prayer.

Last September, FFRF had sent a letter to the Bowling Green City Schools asking that Coach Kevin Wallace cease from having his team worship before games. The complaint included a photo of Wallace with his students in a prayer circle, as well as his quote in the local paper acknowledging that he was engaged in the practice.

In a follow-up letter last month, FFRF Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert expressed concern that the school district had failed to take any action.

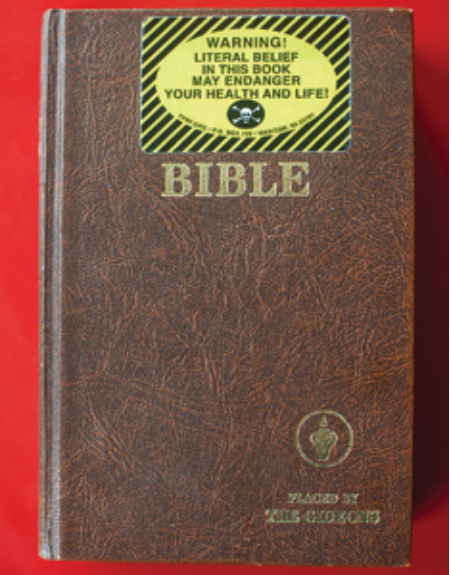
Finally, FFRF received a response in March from Bowling Green Independent Schools Superintendent Gary Fields acknowledging the receipt of the two letters. “I have addressed the concerns contained in your letters and consider the matter to be resolved,” Fields replied.

Good news! Bible distribution ends in 3 districts

FFRF was able to get three school districts around the country to end the illegal practice of allowing bibles to be distributed to students.

At the Cleveland County School District in Rison, Ark., the district superintendent confirmed to FFRF that the Gideons would no longer distribute bibles to students in classrooms at Rison Elementary School, and that the Gideon representatives would no longer be allowed to speak with students about their mission.

“Courts have uniformly held that the distribution of bibles to students at school is prohibited because it violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott. “When a school distributes religious literature to its



students, or permits evangelists to do so, it entangles itself with a religious message.”

After receiving a complaint from FFRF, the River View Local School District in Warsaw, Ohio, also will no longer permit the Gideons to distribute bibles.

Students were reportedly separated into groups who wanted and did not want to receive bibles. The children who elected not to take one were instructed to wait in a separate line until the Gideons were finished distributing bibles to other students.

“Public schools have a constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion and to protect the rights of conscience of young and impressionable students,” wrote Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert in a letter originally sent June 5, 2015.

The district finally informed FFRF

on Feb. 8 that it would not permit the distribution of bibles on school property.

And at West Orange-Stark Elementary School in Orange, Texas, FFRF got involved when it had heard from parents that bibles were being handed out to students.

“There is no excuse or justification for this practice. It is unnecessary, offensive and illegal,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote in a Jan. 6 letter to West Orange-Cove School District Superintendent Rickie Harris.

In a response dated Feb. 1, lawyers for the school district said that they had counseled the school about the rules governing such issues. “We anticipate no further issues in the future,” the legal firm stated.

FFRF legal victories

Superintendent pulls back on Twitter



The superintendent of Dalton Local Schools in Ohio will no longer post religious messages on his official school Twitter feed, after FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote the school district’s attorney a letter on Jan. 25, 2016. The tweets called for prayer, encouraged belief in God, and promoted Christian church events. “Anyone viewing this school-sponsored Twitter feed would understand that the superintendent is endorsing his personal religion over all others,” said Jayne.

Attorney Susan C. Hastings responded on Feb. 2 informing FFRF that the superintendent would establish a separate Twitter account for personal communications.

No religion for Adopt-a-Cops

The Johnson City Police Department in Tennessee is taking steps to ensure it is abiding by the Constitution regarding its “Adopt-a-Cop” program.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter on Dec. 8 objecting to the program, in which community members “adopt” a police officer, and includes praying for the officer every day.

In a Feb. 2 response, an attorney for the department acknowledged that the department could have done more “to dispel the public’s perception that the department itself was operating and ‘pushing’ this program,” and assured FFRF that the department recognized its obligation to separate church and state.

Library open during Dalai Lama event

The public library system in Madison, Wis. decided in February not to close its central downtown branch for a March private event for the Dalai Lama. FFRF, whose office is located across the street from the library, was one of the community voices objecting to the planned event.

“We write to express concerns that granting this proposal would raise the appearance of government-religion entanglement, and also would be a disservice to the local community,” said FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne in a letter to the library’s board of directors.

The board unanimously voted the proposal down on Feb. 4.

FFRF again gets rid of ‘Jesus is My Hero’ shirts

FFRF has again ensured that staff at Akron Public Schools in Ohio will not be permitted to wear “Jesus Is My Hero” T-shirts in school. FFRF first dealt with the shirts in 2013, which promoted the Buchtel Community Learning Center’s athletic program.

The district notified all staff in October of 2013 that wearing the donated shirts was a violation of policy. “Unfortunately,” said Staff Attorney Rebec-

ca Markert in a letter to the district’s attorney, “I’m writing again because our complainant informs us that these T-shirts have made appearances once again, worn by coaches at football practices.”

On Feb. 9, the district’s attorney told Markert that the district’s athletic director and the school principal were notified, and told staff “that, while acting in their official capacity as school officials, they are prohibited from engaging in actions that could be seen as an endorsement of religion, in violation of board policy.”

FFRF wins two battles in California district

In California, Lake Elsinore Unified School District’s “Student of the Month” luncheons with the local Chamber of Commerce will no longer be religious events, and a praying coach has been taken to task.

The monthly lunches that honored students for their academic achievements took place on school property and were attended by school staff and government officials. They also typically included a Christian prayer, and, one year, Lee Strobel’s *The Case for Christ* was given to the honorees.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the school district on July 23, 2015, asking the district to “discontinue prayer and the distribution of religious literature at future school-sponsored activities.”

The district replied on Aug. 20, claiming that the Student of the Month events were not sponsored by the district. Seidel rebutted the letter on Sept. 15, pointing out that district employees were “volunteer administrators” and the district was thanked in the programs as a sponsor.

On Feb. 12, the district informed FFRF that changes had been made to the Student of the Month ceremonies. The district is no longer a sponsor, it vowed not to mandate or encourage student participation in prayers, and the chamber agreed to implement a “secular inspirational message” in lieu of prayer.

The district also noted that it had directed the Elsinore High School football coach to refrain from requiring prayer and participating in student prayers.

‘In God We Trust’ picture taken down

Kettle Falls Middle School in Washington has taken down a picture reading “In God We Trust” over the back-drop of an American flag, after FFRF complained.

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to the Kettle Falls School District on Nov. 23, 2015. “This posting falsely equates patriotism with piety,” she contended. “Young, impressionable students are apt to believe that the school endorses the religious message of the poster.”

On Feb. 18, the district superintendent informed FFRF that the picture had been removed.

Grad info session moved from church

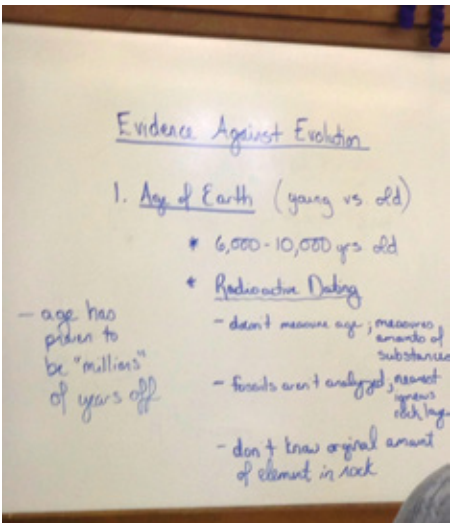
The Columbia Borough School District in Columbia, Pa., will not hold events in church any longer.

Last year, Columbia High School

required graduating students to attend a graduation practice in a Christian church to receive caps and gowns, as well as information about the ceremony. FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler objected to the constitutional violation in a July 22, 2015, letter.

After FFRF followed up with the district twice, an acting superintendent for the district informed FFRF that the previous superintendent had recently resigned, and he had only just seen FFRF’s letters. He apologized for the district’s lack of response, confirmed that the situation had happened as FFRF described, and stated that he immediately directed the high school principal to cease the practice of distributing important graduation information in a church.

Kansas district drops creationism



The Sylvan-Unified School District 299 in Sylvan Grove, Kan., will no longer permit the teaching of creationism.

A student contacted FFRF to relate that a science teacher at Sylvan-Lucas Junior/Senior High School had long been teaching creationism and presenting her biology students with “evidence” against evolution. The teacher’s lesson plans listed “Arguments [sic] against Evolution notes” for two class periods, and she showed a video called “Unlocking the Mystery of Life,” which claims that the universe “can only be explained by intelligent design.”

“Teaching creationism or any of its offshoots, such as intelligent design, in a public school is unlawful, because creationism is not based in fact. Courts have routinely found that such teachings are religious, despite many new and imaginative labels given to the alternatives,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel in a Feb. 9 letter to the district superintendent.

On Feb. 22, FFRF received a response from the district. Superintendent Jude Stecklein said the district investigated the situation and informed the teacher that she can no longer teach creationism.

‘Appeal to Heaven’ flag removed

Shelby County, Ohio, is no longer displaying an Appeal to Heaven flag in a county building after hearing from FFRF.

Members of the Appeal to Heaven movement “honor the Lord by networking elected officials who are believers in Jesus Christ, who regularly attend and display a commitment to an evangelical, Gospel-centered church and who will commit to live and govern based on biblical . . . principles.”

“This mission is clearly sectarian,

and displaying the flag is a tacit endorsement of evangelical Christianity,” wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne in a letter to the county.

On Feb. 25, the Shelby County Commissioners notified FFRF that the flag had been removed.

Religious mural on wall painted over

The Holy Land Experience, located in Orlando, painted a mural on a retaining wall that turns the corner from Interstate 4 in the direction of the religious amusement park. This interchange and retaining wall are government property that the Florida Department of Transportation maintains, and Holy Land sought no permits or permission to put up the mural.

The mural featured religious imagery, showing two angels unrolling a scroll that signifies humankind. The message conveyed was that God created us all — an inescapably religious notion, says FFRF.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to Florida public officials last November when FFRF was alerted to the mural by its local chapter, the Central Florida Freethought Community.

FFRF has learned that the Holy Land Experience has finally painted over the mural in a neutral tan color.

Ohio bible study groups adhere to law

Faith Memorial Church in Lancaster, Ohio, participated in bible study groups in a number of local public schools. The church listed such groups in eight public schools in its vicinity, including four high schools. Most of the clubs met during the schools’ lunch breaks and were run by adults, according to the church’s webpage (since taken down).

The courts have clearly decided over the years that public schools cannot advance, prefer or promote religion.

FFRF recently received a response from legal counsel for the four districts where the public schools are located. In its reply, the firm told FFRF that in the future any bible study clubs would conform to the law. “Principals are making sure that students leading bible study clubs are conducting those groups within the parameters of the Equal Access Act,” the March 2 letter stated.

Florida charter school gets default notice

FFRF had warned the Duval County School Board in Florida in January that the Seacoast Charter Academy seemed like a thinly disguised religious establishment.

The institution, which was run as part of a private Christian school for almost 20 years, became a kindergarten to fifth-grade charter entity in 2011 for financial reasons.

Also, Seacoast hosted a Veterans Day program inside the academy’s auditorium, which features a large Latin cross at center stage and lots of religious iconography. It is also used for Seacoast’s chapel services, so it serves the same role as a church.

“We’re pleased the school district investigated and issued the default,” said FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel. “Both the district and FFRF will continue to monitor these schools.”

Church Christmas tree bill misguided

An unnecessary bill to carve out a special right for churches has been approved by the Wisconsin Legislature. It prohibits any local government “from enacting or enforcing an ordinance, related to fire safety that prohibits the seasonal placement of a Christmas tree in the rotunda of the state Capitol building or in a church.” It also creates a “presumption” for fire safety inspections that such a tree “is not a fire hazard.”

It’s a bad idea to create precedent that privileges churches or otherwise decrees that content-neutral laws do not apply to religious people or organizations.

That’s what got us the disastrous *Hobby Lobby* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, giving corporate employers who invoke personal religious beliefs veto power over what forms of



Andrew Seidel photo

A recently passed bill in Wisconsin will make live Christmas trees in churches or the Capitol rotunda, shown here, exempt from fire safety inspections.

contraception their women employees may choose. That’s what brought us in Indiana the state-level version of the “Religious Freedom Restoration Act” to allow discrimination against gays.

Now that the tree-exemption bill

has passed, what’s next in Wisconsin? A law to exempt church-run day cares or schools from basic safety standards? That’s a real possibility. There are a handful of states, mostly Southern, which endanger children’s lives by excluding church ministries from licensing requirements. Already, Wisconsin is among the states that shamefully exempt religious parents from prosecution for failure to seek medical care for sick or dying children.

There’s no secular purpose for excluding churches from safety requirements the rest of us have to obey. If the law is a good law, it should apply to all; if it’s a bad law, then everyone should be free of it, not just churches.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover testified against the bill on March 2.



Imagine that!

Longtime FFRF member Darrell Barker, brother of FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, recently showed off his tattoo, happily thumbing his nose (and biceps) at Leviticus 19:28: “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh on account of the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the Lord.”

‘Holy water’ sprinkled on school grounds

When a new fitness trail was inaugurated at Cooper Elementary School in Bella Vista, Ark., the ceremony included prayers and the sprinkling of “holy water” while students and staff members looked on.

Staff members, including the school’s principal and vice principal, were in attendance, as were the school district’s assistant superintendent and a board member. A representative from Mercy Health, a co-sponsor of the trail, led the crowd in prayer. He asked everyone, including the students, to raise their hands to ask for God’s blessing for the new trail. The adults, including the school officials, participated. Then, the nun sprinkled holy water over the site.

“It is unlawful for any school-sponsored event to include religious activities,” says Patrick Elliot in his Feb. 23 letter, prompted by a concerned local parent, to lawyers for Bentonville Public Schools. “Even when outside the typical school environment, the Supreme Court has found prayers taking place at school-sponsored events



A nun casts “holy water” onto the site of a new fitness trail at Cooper Elementary School in Bella Vista, Ark., during the inauguration ceremony, which also included prayers.

unconstitutional.”

By including prayers at school-sponsored events, Bentonville Public Schools abandons its duty to remain neutral toward religion and alienates the approximately 30 percent of the U.S. population that is not Christian,

Elliot adds.

FFRF has asked Bentonville Public Schools to make certain that such religiosity is not repeated at future school events and that school officials inform it in writing of steps taken to ensure this.

Illinois school district’s satanic ban is spurious

After hearing from a local resident, FFRF is asking for an Illinois school district to lift its ban on satanic material.

The Rich Township High School District for several years has imposed a prohibition on satanic symbols, literature and activities in the district’s handbook. Its reasoning is that Satanism is not protected by the First Amendment and that even if it were, the belief system’s harmful concepts would severely disrupt the school environment.

But the First Amendment applies to Satanism, too. In a 1981 ruling (*Thomas v. Review Board*), the U.S. Supreme Court said that “religious beliefs need not be acceptable, logical, consistent, or comprehensible to others in order to merit First Amendment protection.” This certainly pertains to Satanism.

And the tenets of Satanism do not justify discriminatory treatment. It can be argued that almost all religions promote hatred and bloodshed. By many measures, Satanism is less susceptible to this criticism than Judaism, Christianity or Islam.



An Illinois school district has a ban on satanic material, reasoning that the belief system’s concepts would disrupt the school environment.

The Old Testament, holy to both Judaism and Christianity, is replete with violence.

“Of course, adherents of these religions often try to explain these verses away, perhaps arguing that they are metaphorical or only apply in unique circumstances,” says FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne. “If this ad hoc reasoning is sufficient to forgive these passages, the same leniency must be granted to the texts of Satanism and other minority religions. Compared to the texts of more popular religions, the tenets of Satanism are reasonable and benign.”

FFRF asks Michigan town to revoke religion privilege

The Hamtramck City Council in Michigan has exempted calls to prayer and church bells from the local noise control ordinance, meaning city residents are often roused from their sleep at ridiculous hours.

FFRF has requested that the city repeal the noise ordinance exemption that favors religion.

“This exemption violates the Constitution,” FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote in the Feb. 23 letter, prompted by a concerned Hamtramck resident. “The noise ordinance is a reasonable restriction meant to foster a peaceful, quiet community with a well-rested population. It is a neutral and generally applicable statute. Religious announcements, calls to prayer, or church bells should not be exempt.”

For seven months each year, the noise exemption does not allow for sunrise prayer announcements because it comes into force only after 6 a.m. (while the sun rises before 6). Since it is not needed much of the year, the exemption is simply an unconstitutional codification of religious privilege,



The Hamtramck (Mich.) City Council has exempted calls to prayer from a local noise ordinance.

Seidel says.

Mosques and churches can communicate directly with their congregation in hundreds of ways that do not disturb the peace, tranquility and sleep of every other citizen.

The exemption also does not limit the volume of messages. By not providing a specific maximum decibel level for mosques and churches, as it does for other exemptions such as construction equipment, the city is unconstitutionally favoring religion.

FFRF members part of Newdow’s Minnesota suit

Last month it was reported in Free-thought Today that Michael Newdow had filed a lawsuit in Ohio to get “In God We Trust” off U.S. currency.

Newdow, a California attorney and physician, also filed a complaint on Dec. 15, 2015, in the District of Minnesota, with seven FFRF members as part of the group of 29 plaintiffs.

In 2013, Newdow, along with FFRF, sued the U.S. Treasury over the printing of “In God We Trust” on currency. That lawsuit was dismissed by New York Judge Harold Baer and upheld on appeal.

As with the Ohio suit filed in January, Newdow has based his new complaints on the Religious Freedom Res-

toration Act (RFRA) rather than on the First Amendment protection from the governmental establishment of religion, as he did in 2013.

FFRF members Gary Berger, Marie Castle, Charles Christopher, Betty and Thomas Grogan, Roger Kaye and Eric Wells have joined 22 others in the suit.

Newdow’s current complaint, which is 115 pages in length, makes the claim that the presence of the motto on coins and paper money offers an unfair advantage to Christians.

In 2004, Newdow sued to have “under God” removed from the Pledge of Allegiance. That case made it to the Supreme Court, although it ruled that he did not have standing to sue.

Missouri school district urged to end access by evangelicals

Youth ministers in the Branson, Mo., area have been allowed admittance to several public schools, and FFRF is trying to get it to stop.

KLIFE, which describes itself as a “Christian ministry to area youth,” is one evangelical group that visited students. Its website proclaims that the “heartbeat of KLIFE lies in the ability to build relationships with kids and bring the content of God’s word to bear on those relationships.”

A video circulated on social media that appears to show the local KLIFE

chapter director, Pastor Robert Bruce, at Hollister Middle School leading all the students in prayer.

Reportedly, adults led similar prayers several times previously during the preceding week.

“It is well settled as a matter of established law that public schools may not advance, prefer or promote religion,” says FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott. “It is unconstitutional for a public school to allow an evangelical Christian organization to impose prayer on all students.”

Orlando city ceremony includes religious oath

FFRF has learned that at an Orlando, Fla., oath of office ceremony on Jan. 11, there was a Christian invocation and benediction.

The invocation began, “Our heavenly father, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” and ended with “In Christ’s name, Shalom and Amen.” The benediction quoted from the bible and ended, “To him be the glory and Church in Christ, Jesus through all generations forever and ever, Shalom and Amen.” The ceremony was for the mayor of Orlando and three city commissioners, and was open to the public.

“The city’s inclusion of prayer in the oath of office ceremony gives the impression that the city supports and endorses religion over nonreligion,” writes FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel in a letter to Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer.

“This sends the message to members of the audience who are non-adherents ‘that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, full members of the political community,’ to quote the U.S. Supreme Court.”



Patrick Elliott photo

Church votes against secularism

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott, who votes in the basement of St. Paul Lutheran Church, wrote to Madison, Wis., officials about using the church facility as a polling location. This marquee against secular Americans was displayed the same week that voters were at the polls.



Prior to being removed because of an FFRF complaint, a sign welcoming people to Sylvania, Ala., had a blatant religious message.

Irate Alabama ex-official wants to undo FFRF’s good work

An upset former councilor in Alabama is vowing to get his town to again blatantly engage in Christian messaging.

FFRF last summer asked the town of Sylvania to remove welcome signs that read, “One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism,” a biblical quotation from the book of Ephesians.

Local officials got rid of the unconstitutional slogan.

“The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover said in his Aug. 6 letter to then-Sylvania Mayor Emily Wooten.

Wooten responded to inform FFRF

that the signs were being taken down.

But recently former councilman Tony Goolesby proclaimed, “I intend for that bible verse to go back up on our sign or some statement of God.”

The town originally promised to remove the religious signs in 2012, after FFRF had complained back then. But if the signs came down in 2012, they were soon put back up, and remained that way until FFRF complained again in August 2015.

“Adherence to the Constitution is not an optional exercise,” FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor says. “Sylvania cannot again be in violation of our founding principles just because of a few disgruntled residents.”

Judge named in FFRF suit against Texas governor

The judge has been named in FFRF’s lawsuit against Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and his removal of FFRF’s Bill of Rights display in the Texas State Capitol.

The judge assigned to handle the case is U.S. District Court Judge Sam Sparks.

The case moves forward as Abbott’s and the state attorney general’s offices have basically shrugged it off by claiming it will be a slam-dunk win.

“The First Amendment does not require Texas to allow displays at its Capitol building that mock and satirize an entire religion,” said Abbott spokesman John Wittman.

The lawsuit was filed in February after Abbott removed the initially approved Bill of Rights nativity display from the Capitol, despite allowing a Christian nativity scene.

But, according to the office of state Attorney General Ken Paxton, courts throughout Texas have rejected other attempts to marginalize people of



Lauryn Seering photo

FFRF’s Bill of Rights nativity display.

faith. “We look forward to working with yet another court to prove this group wrong,” Paxton spokeswoman Cynthia Meyer said.

“And we look forward to remedying a serious case of censorship of freethought views and rights,” countered Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

School told to get rid of pastor

FFRF is urging a Florida public high school to remove a pastor acting as school chaplain.

The Vero Beach High School football coach, Lenny Jankowski, employs a team chaplain, Pastor Joe Moore, to preach to his players. The team’s football players and cheerleaders participate in game day prayer breakfasts at a local church, which often include ministers preaching to the football players and cheerleaders with football coaches in attendance. In addition, Moore seems to have access to the school’s other teams, especially the baseball players.

Jankowski, also the athletic director for the school, suggests that Moore has access to the other sports teams.

He states that Moore is considered full time, and the football team’s staff photos support this.

Moore is given access to the team at baseball games and is allowed to be in the dugout with the team. He leads the team in prayer before baseball games. The players have reportedly even refused to take the baseball field without praying because they have become so accustomed to Moore delivering prayers.

FFRF is asking the Indian County River School District to immediately initiate an investigation, discontinue the “team chaplaincy” at Vero Beach High, and refrain from employing a “team chaplain” for any of the district’s sports programs.

Catholic cover-up in Pennsylvania

Hundreds abused by more than 50 priests

The Catholic Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, Pa., was blistered in a statewide grand jury report that stated two bishops covered up “the sexual abuse of hundreds of children by more than 50 priests and other religious leaders over a 40-year period.”

The Associated Press reported that former bishops James Hogan and Joseph Adamec covered up the widespread abuses, according to the report released March 1, which also alleged the church was instrumental in selecting police chiefs in Altoona and Johnstown in the 1980s.

The 147-page report was based partly on evidence from a secret diocesan archive opened through a search warrant last summer. No criminal charges are being filed because some alleged abusers have died, the statute of limitations has expired or victims are too traumatized to testify, said Attorney General Kathleen Kane. “Their souls were killed as children,” Kane said. “They weren’t out playing baseball; they were trying to avoid priests.”

Adamec cited possible self-incrimination in refusing to testify before the grand jury. Hogan is dead. Mark Barchak, the current bishop who has suspended several priests named as abusers in the report, was faulted over concerns “the purge of predators is taking too long.”

The report referred to a “payout chart” used by the diocese: Victims fondled over their clothes were to be paid \$10,000 to \$25,000; fondled under their clothes or subjected to masturbation, \$15,000 to \$40,000; subjected to forced oral sex, \$25,000 to \$75,000; subjected to forced sodomy or intercourse, \$50,000 to \$175,000.

See the entire grand jury report at bit.ly/1QTruse (includes very graphic content).



Cardinal: Church ‘mucked things up’

Vatican treasurer Cardinal George Pell, the third most powerful official in the Catholic Church, admitted that the church had “mucked things up” over the sexual abuse scandal.

Pell, from Australia, is the highest-ranking church official to testify on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

Giving evidence in front of abuse victims at the same time the movie “Spotlight” was winning the Academy Award for Best Picture, Pell said the organization reflected society as a whole and there was a “tendency to evil in the Catholic Church, too.”

“Spotlight” is the story of the Boston Globe team of investigative reporters who uncovered the massive scale of child sexual abuse and ensuing cover-up that happened under the watch of Cardinal Bernard Law in Boston.

Pell was expected to clarify whether he knew that a number of priests were

abusing children in the diocese near Melbourne, where he served as a senior priest and vicar from 1973–1983.

Pell is not facing criminal charges, but his position as the Vatican’s economic secretary could be in jeopardy if evidence shows that he either ignored or protected abusers.

“I’m not here to defend the indefensible,” Pell said. “The Church has made enormous mistakes and is working to remedy those, but the Church in many places, certainly in Australia, has mucked things up, has let people down.”

Vatican: Bishops not obliged to report abuse

The Catholic Church has told its new bishops that it is not necessarily their duty to report accusations of clerical child abuse and that only victims or their families should make the decision to report abuse to police.

A document, recently released by the Vatican, tells bishops how they should deal with abuse allegations, saying they must be aware of local laws, but that their only duty was to address those allegations internally.

“According to the state of civil laws of each country where reporting is obligatory, it is not necessarily the duty of the bishop to report suspects to authorities, the police or state prosecutors in the moment when they are made aware of crimes or sinful deeds,” the document states.

SNAP, a U.S.-based advocacy group for abuse victims, said the news outlined in John Allen’s *Crux* article proved that the church had not substantially changed.

“It’s infuriating, and dangerous, that so many believe the myth that bishops are changing how they deal with abuse and that so little attention is paid when evidence to the contrary — like this disclosure by Allen — emerges,” the group said in a statement.

Judge: Law violates priest’s religious freedom

A Louisiana judge on Feb. 26 struck down a state requirement that clergy members report suspected child abuse, even if they learn about it during a private confessional.

State District Judge Mike Caldwell ruled that the requirement violates the constitutionally protected religious freedom rights of a Roman Catholic priest accused of neglecting his duty to report a teenager’s abuse allegations to authorities.

The Baton Rouge Advocate reports that Caldwell ruled in favor of the Rev. Jeff Bayhi in a lawsuit that Rebecca Mayeaux filed against the priest and the Roman Catholic Diocese.

In the news

Nonbelievers win suit over Mormons

A jury awarded \$2.2 million to six residents of two polygamous southwestern towns at the Utah-Arizona border, after the towns were found violating the civil rights of non-believers for more than two decades.

The towns of Colorado City, Ariz., and Hildale, Utah, were accused of denying services to residents who were not part of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (FLDS), a radical offshoot of Mormonism. Services denied to nonbelieving residents included police protection, building permits and water connections, according to the jury. Among the residents who sought damages are former members who had left the church.

Six residents of the towns brought the case forward and will be awarded \$2.2 million in damages, although the two towns will only pay \$1.6 million as part of their settlement deal, as negotiations were made by lawyers prior to the settlement. A Phoenix jury of seven men and five women deliberated the case for four days at the end of a seven-week federal trial. The civil rights lawsuit was filed by the Department of Justice in 2012.

Jessica Clarke, an attorney for the Department of Justice, told jurors

in her opening statements that the town’s non-believing residents were denied “some of the most basic rights . . . freedom to live in a city governed by the laws of the land, not by the laws of religion.”

Man wins right to wear spaghetti strainer

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation has instructed all DMV offices to recognize colanders as religious headwear.

Attorney Derek Allen said his client Michael Schumacher is a Pastafarian and was denied his religious right as a member of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, which was first established in 2005.

The religion denies it is satirical or intended to be humorous, but says it is based in science.

Pastafarians in other states, including Utah, Texas, and Massachusetts, also have been allowed to wear colanders in their ID photos.

Bill would put prayer back in schools

An Alabama legislator wants public school teachers to read a prayer every day in the classroom.

Alabama state Rep. Steve Hurst put

forth a bill in February that would force teachers to lead their students in the same prayers that chaplains recite prior to sessions of Congress.

According to House Bill 318, “At the commencement of the first class of each day in all grades in all public schools, the teacher in charge of the room in which such class is held shall, for a period of time not exceeding 15 minutes, instruct the class in the formal procedures followed by the United States Congress. The study shall include, but not be limited to, a reading verbatim of one of the opening prayers given by the House or Senate Chaplain or a guest member of the clergy at the beginning of a meeting of the House of Representatives or the Senate.”

‘Religious freedom’ bill creates special class of rights

A religious freedom bill promoted by Republicans in West Virginia would allow people of faith to discriminate against others, as well as break any other law that violates their beliefs.

Senate Bill 11 says “exercise of religion” means the sincere practice of observance of religion or religious conscience. It includes, but is not limited to, the ability to act or refuse to act in a manner substantially motivated by

one’s sincerely held religious beliefs, whether or not the exercise is compulsory or central to a larger system of religious belief.

In effect, as Tim Peacock writes in the *Peacock Panache*, “SB 11 would literally create a new class of rights superior to all other protections afforded at the local, state or federal level. It would create a special class of rights wherein when one civil right comes into conflict with another, religious belief would prevail.”

Rights groups sue over ‘Muslim-free’ gun range

Two activist groups filed a federal lawsuit on Feb. 17 against a rural Oklahoma gun range, arguing that it violated civil rights laws by posting a sign that said the business was “Muslim-free” and barring a Muslim from shooting there.

The lawsuit by the Council on American-Islamic Relations Oklahoma Chapter and the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma seeks to have the Save Yourself Survival and Tactical Gear store in Oktaha end what the plaintiffs said is blatant discrimination.

The gun store and range posted a store window sign that reads: “This privately owned business is a Muslim Free establishment.”

FFRF 2015 Atheist In Foxhole award

Defender of the Constitution

Steven Hewett's speech, edited for space, was delivered on Oct. 10, 2015, at FFRF's 38th annual convention in Madison, Wis. He was introduced by Steve Trunk, a previous winner of FFRF's Atheist in Foxhole award:

Steven Hewett grew up all over the country because his dad was in the Air Force, as was mine. He's a former Christian who saw the light and became an atheist. Steve retired in 2005 from the Department of Defense. He served in the U.S. Army from 1975 to 1978 and then he continued his military service with the North Carolina National Guard from 1995 to 2005, ultimately reaching the rank of staff sergeant. He was activated and deployed to Afghanistan. While deployed there, Staff Sergeant Hewett earned a Bronze Star, a Combat Action Badge and several other medals. When he came back home, he found a Christian flag flying at the Veterans Memorial in King, N.C. After a long court battle, the city agreed to stop flying the flag and remove a cross from a kneeling soldier statue. He's married to Jackie Holland, who is a retired Stokes County schoolteacher. Steven is currently an activist for FFRF and working on a book about his lawsuit.

By Steven Hewett

I'm honored to be standing up here. I want to let you know that this endeavor that I started was for veterans and about veterans, because we honor service and sacrifice. We honor the veterans who come back from war. We honor veterans who come back from war who have been killed in action with the American flag. And that's the only flag that you'll ever see on the uniform of a soldier.

It all started in 2010, when I noticed a Christian flag and a kneeling soldier statue at our memorial in King, N.C., as



Atheist in Foxhole Award winner Steven Hewett, left, stands with Steve Trunk, who was a previous winner of the FFRF award, during the 2015 FFRF national convention in Madison, Wis.

well as religious services on Memorial and Veterans days. And those were endorsed by the city. So I decided to call the city manager to complain. During our conversation he told me, "You will answer to God and Jesus Christ for this, upon your death, for complaining about it." He then abruptly hung up. I abruptly called him back. I recorded that conversation from that point on, which was used in the lawsuit.

The ADF, or American Defense Fund, had been secretly discussing how to get the Christian flag back up. And so for about three months, this group decided to protest at the memorial. The city gave them permission to protest 24/7. They camped out there;

they held it hostage. So they held vigil for three months, keeping the Christian flag on the memorial. There were also other local protests. There was this tractor-trailer rig that was just down the street from where I lived. You can see they spent quite a bit of money on it, with a sign that said, "Freedom of religion — freedom of speech. This is America." This was put up by the Stokes County militia. They also put up thousands of yard signs all over town. Any time the City Council was talking about the memorial, they were surrounding the city with prayer chains and Christian flags.

Calvary Baptist Church rallied 5,000 of its Christian soldiers to march in October of 2010. This is still during the three-month period the flag was down. So this was a march that ended at the memorial. Five thousand people were there waving Christian flags.

But it didn't end there. Two days later I was assaulted by a neighbor who is a Christian fanatic, who had Christian flags flying at his house. He was a self-proclaimed preacher. I had to get a restraining order against him. And then I had to take other measures. Some of the other examples of the hate speech and threats were on the Internet. One gentleman in town says, "Why is this man still alive?" Another wrote, "No one speak to him, avoid doing business with him. Refuse any contact, overlook him by the staff at restaurants, make his life as miserable as possible, even up to the edge of breaking the law."

Unbeknown to these people, I retired from the Department of Defense. I have a monthly income that you can't mess with unless you shut the government down. My house is paid for. I am completely debt free. You cannot run me out of town financially. But they did go after my wife. They tried to get

her fired from her job. A student saying the Pledge of Allegiance over the loudspeaker said, "I pledge allegiance to the Christian flag. Oh, excuse me, I'm sorry, I mean the American flag." And so she had many friends at school that she lost within a matter of days.

I took security measures. I have a "No Trespassing" sign, I put security cameras on my house. I also put security cameras in my vehicle where I had 360-degree coverage. I was followed quite often anytime I was driving in town, but it was fun watching people follow me. I used to be a police officer, so I know if you make three left turns and the car is still behind you, guess what? You're being followed. They even followed me into the parking lot, parked next to my vehicle. So I have all that on video. It's rather entertaining.

[Hewett then showed a news clip of reporter Craig Thomas from WXII Channel 12: "This controversy has gone on for about six months, and this is what we now know: This Christian flag will go up to that flagpole as soon as the calendar turns to January. One hundred ten ping pong balls, each representing one flag-flying application, put into a hopper. Of the 59 applicants in the drawing, all were there for the Christian flag or Christian cross flag, except for five — those of Steven Hewett for his family that served, and for his wife's father. Selected for the 46th week of the year, on November 12, Hewett will fly the Buddhist flag to honor his own service."]

Anyway, they got the flag back up. The American Defense Fund made a sham public forum policy that one flagpole was to be designated for public speech, but it was limited speech. It was limited to only a symbol that was recognized by Arlington National Cemetery. And it could be on a flag. But you can also have colors on the flag, so they could have the Christian flag in their ultimate glory of the white, blue and red. And I did have five Buddhist flags because I had some Buddhist beliefs. Plus, it pissed them the hell off.

Yet on the day that I flew my flag, the Stokes County militia was there protesting us, flying their little Christian flag to make sure it was at the memorial. Also, on another day in the first year, a supporter flew no flag.

They were threatened with having their arms broken, and somebody put little crosses in the box where we have the name of who the flag was flying for. The police were called and

they said there was nothing they could do. So our good ol' city police department didn't do anything.

So, for almost four years the Christian flag dominated the memorial. For the first two years it was 47 weeks with a flag and then five weeks of no flag. The second year was 47 weeks with the Christian flag, four weeks with no flag or my Buddhist flag. Then the other two years, while the lawsuit was in progress, another 47 weeks and five weeks. Those five weeks were all mine. And you could hear them groan every time my name was called for a week that I was going to fly the flag. Finally, in November 2012, Americans United for



Steven Hewett gives his Atheist in Foxhole acceptance speech on Oct. 10, 2015.

We now honor all veterans at the memorial.

Continued on page 13

Emperor Has No Clothes Award

Ernie Chambers: ‘I am what I am’

Nebraska state Sen. Ernie Chambers delivered a speech during FFRF’s 38th annual convention on Oct. 10, 2015, at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis. He was introduced by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor:

I dare you to find anyone who embodies the spirit of the child in the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale who tells it like it is better than Ernie Chambers.

Senator Ernie Chambers is the longest-serving state senator in Nebraska, where he’s known as a “defender of the downtrodden,” and a man of the people. As Rita Swan mentioned in her speech, Senator Ernie Chambers impressively ensured that Nebraska was the only state never to adopt a religious exemption for child neglect.

Ernie previously won a First Amendment Hero award from FFRF in recognition of his career as a firebrand, and in particular his challenge as a public official of paid legislative prayer. *Marsh v. Chambers* went before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1983 and it got it wrong, but Ernie had a moral triumph by persuading his unicameral branch to drop the payment for legislative chaplains anyway.

Then you may remember that a few years ago Ernie sued God. This was a brilliant piece of writing and logic. Claims for relief included:

“That the defendant has made and continues to make terroristic threats of grave harm to innumerable persons. . .

“Defendant directly and proximately has caused fearsome floods, egregious earthquakes, horrendous hurricanes, terrifying tornadoes, pestilential plaques, ferocious famines, devastating droughts, genocidal wars, birth defects, and the like . . .

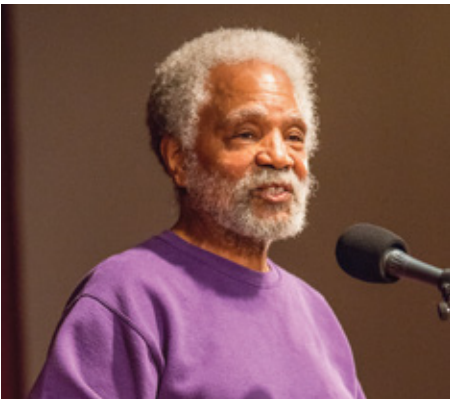
“Causing calamitous catastrophes resulting in widespread death, destruction and terrorization of millions upon millions of the Earth’s inhabitants including innocent babies, infants, children, the aged and infirm without mercy or distinction.”

Ernie, the plaintiff, noted in the legal complaint that despite reasonable efforts to effectuate personal service upon defendant (“come out, come out wherever you are”) plaintiff has been unable to do so.

Ernie Chambers graduated from Creighton University Law School, and was first elected in 1970.

He was term limited out in 2008. The law was changed just to get him out, but he waited it out and won re-election in 2012.

This spring, notably, he persuaded the state to drop the death penalty after never giving up, seeking its abolition since 1970. Yes, there’s pushback



Ernie Chambers speaks during his convention speech about not accepting labels.



Nebraska state Sen. Ernie Chambers smiles with FFRF Clerical Assistant Kat Scott-Johnson at the national convention on Oct. 10 in Madison, Wis.

in Nebraska, but we were so thrilled with Ernie Chambers’ victory over Old Testament “eye for eye, life for life” barbarity that we asked him to please come and accept our Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

We’re honored that he’s agreed to be here today.

This honoree teaches all of us the importance of being Ernie.

Ernie, come meet your emperor!

Here are snippets of Sen. Ernie Chambers’ speech:

By Ernie Chambers

I’m from a small town in Nebraska called Omaha and I have small-town ways. But I do not have a small brain or a small mind. Small minds think little thoughts, and you do not have to be limited in terms of your mental activities by the size of the backwardness of the place where you spend your life laboring.

I was reared in a deeply religious fundamentalist household. The church was called the Church of God and Christ and the people claimed to believe every word in the bible the way it was written, but that was not what they believed at all. They had indicated that the only people who were right were in that church. And they did not mean the entire denomination. They meant just the people in that little building.

I do not care what people think or say about me because it makes no difference. I don’t do things to please people. I treat people the way I want to be treated. I don’t need a prayer book. I don’t need a preacher. I don’t need a psychologist, psychiatrist or anybody to tell me what constitutes being ethical or righteous.

I pay a lot of attention to words and language. Words have a life of their own, words have meaning, words have power. I believe in precision in the use of words, even though the ones reading them don’t read as carefully as I will write them. I’m just saying that as we go through life we have to establish priorities and we determine which things mean the most to us. And to many people, words don’t mean anything.

When people criticize me, it has as much impact on me as the sweat of a gnat would have on the Rock of Gibraltar. People are fickle. If they’re in a good mood, they say nice things. If they are in a bad mood, they say mean things. Why should I get angry if people are the way people are? If they say something today and say the opposite tomorrow, am I surprised? No. Why should I be surprised and upset when something behaves the way I know it’s going to behave?

You know why I will not accept the term atheist? I’ve never referred to myself as an atheist and when other people hang that label on me, I tell them there are only two labels I accept: my name, which my mother gave me, and black. Black is a term that carries with it connotations: the lynchings, the bombings, the burnings, the castrations, the raping of our women and our little girls.

But as black people we are so accustomed to being defined and labeled by other people that I don’t accept their labels. I don’t need to. And you ought to think about it. There is so much arrogance among white people and white people are not even aware of it a lot of times.

If people who call you an atheist because you don’t believe in a Christian God or the Jewish God, are they atheist because they don’t believe in the gods of the Romans, the Greeks, the Egyptian, the Etruscans, the Vikings? So if you don’t believe in their gods, you’re atheist many times over.

You’re going to define yourself with a negative definition. Not of what you are, but of which you are not.

And I am supposed to accept what somebody says I am? If you allow yourself to be defined and labeled, then you have lost already. You don’t have to accept what I say. What I say is based on what I’ve come to believe and what helps me make it through a very cruel hostile world. But unlike a lot of people who accept those labels and flaunt them and are proud of them, labels don’t play any part in my life.

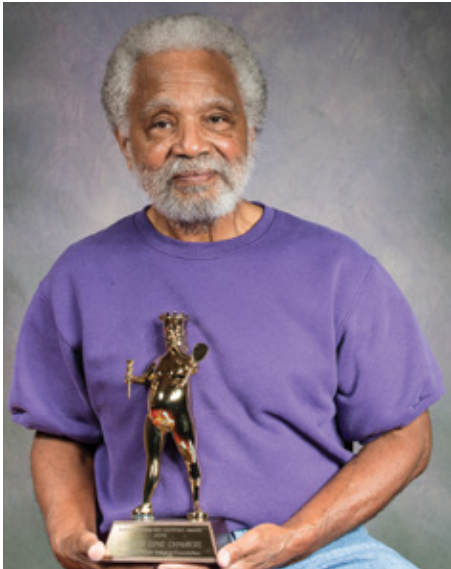
I’ve read the bible. I call it the bible. And, as I told the people with whom I was eating, that’s the way I pronounce the word. And one of the senators who was there, he was pretending to be re-

ligious. He said he was offended by the way I mispronounce the word. I asked why. He said because that’s not the way you pronounce it.

I asked him how you pronounce it and he said “bible” and I said “bibble.” You say to-may-to, I say to-mah-to. Makes no difference. I said, however, when you read that book, you don’t pay attention to what it says. You want to go back to Genesis and say God said whoever sheds blood by man shall his blood be shed? I asked if God meant what he said? Yes. Well, how do you know what God says? It’s in the bible. And you say whatever is in the bible is what God said, huh?

Oh, and by the way on that word, I’m going to spell a word very carefully and slowly and I want you to pronounce it for me. B-I-B-L-E. He says “bible.” Right. Now pronounce this for me. B-I-B-L-I-C-A-L. He says “biblical.” There you go. You and I have come together. That’s what your bible says. Come let us reason together.

I’m not mad at you because you mispronounce it “bible” and you are going to be mad at me because I pronounce it “bibble.” It’s what it is to each of us and however way we pronounce it does not change it at all. But if you believe that it does, then it shows that the world for you is what’s in your head, not what’s out there. So you see things as you are not as they are. And because of that you misunderstand a lot.



Ernie Chambers holds the 2015 Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

I will not label nor let anybody label me, and yet people do it anyway. So if they want to say I’m an atheist and they are cultured, then I quote Shakespeare: “As You Like It.” If they’re rough and tumble, work hard for a living and buy fast food, then I tell them I’ll give you what Burger King would say: “Have it your way.” Your saying it doesn’t make it so, but if it makes you happy, then as you think in your heart, let it be unto you. But it means nothing to me.

So my conclusion is based on the words of the greatest philosopher America ever produced. The greatest thinker ever produced by America. The most rational of rationalists ever produced by America: Popeye the Sailor Man. And here is what Popeye gave me: “I am what I am, that’s all that I am.” So call me an atheist. Call me an agnostic. Call me a nonbeliever. Describe and try to define me in terms of what I am not. But I define myself in terms of what I am. And what I am is what I am and that’s all that I am.

POETRY

BY *Ernie Chambers*

Morticians National Anthem

March 10, 2014

Foreword

I was given a Commission
By a Mortician
To write a National Anthem
For those who do “plant them.”

(Sung to the tune of “My Favorite Things.”)

Corpses, condolences, flowers, a coffin,
Black-curtained hearse that they carry you off in;
Tombstones and epitaphs with verbal slings,
These are a few of our favorite things.

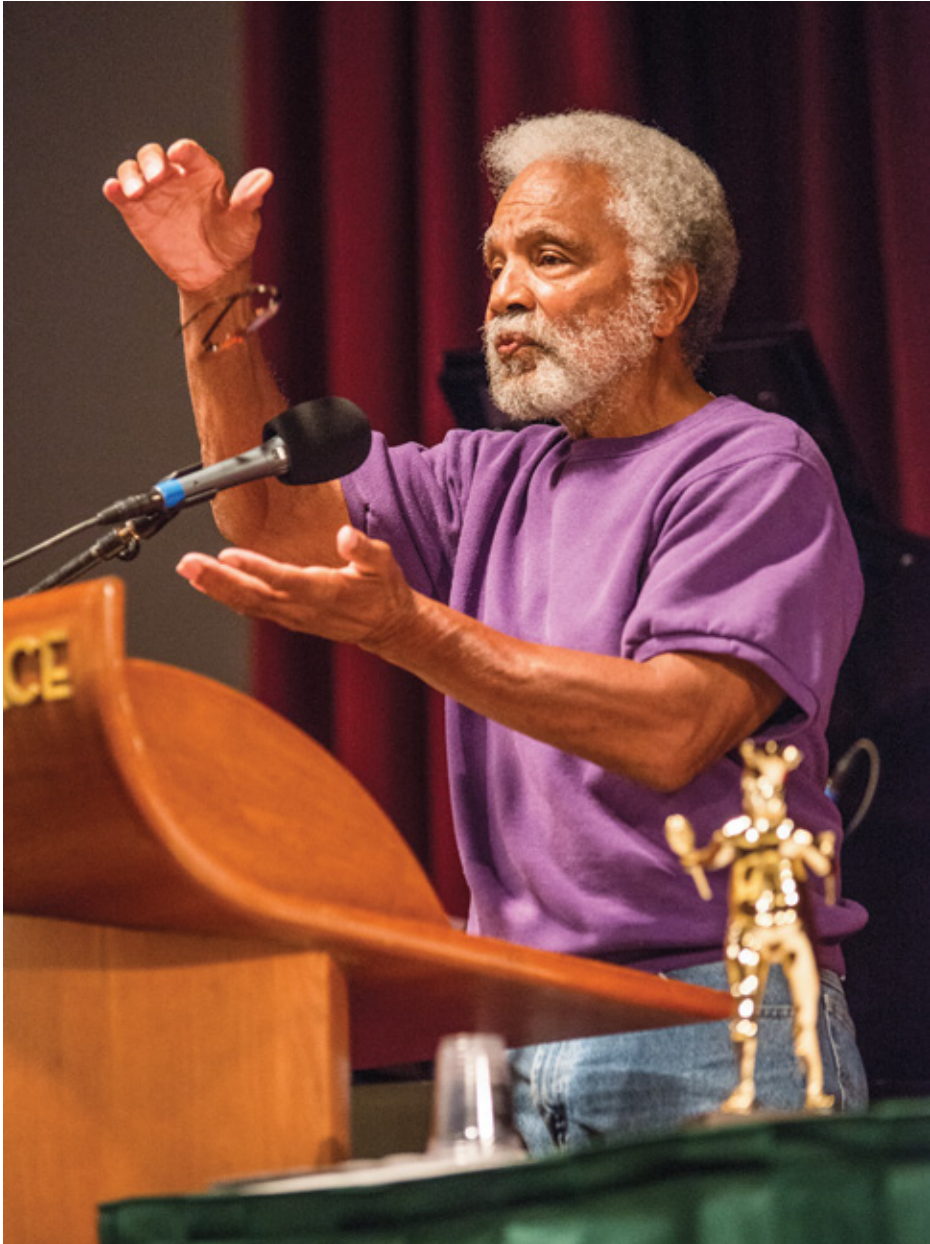
Churches and eulogies, pallbearers, mourners,
Weeping and wailing in all the church corners;
Choirs droning dirges that make grown men cry —
These are the things that take place when folks die.

Fine embalming keeps the corpse fresh,
Add some makeup, too;
Then a good service lends just the right touch,
And all of this waits . . . for you!

Graves freshly dug, with stone vaults placed inside them;
Caskets are placed in those vaults that do hide them.
Florists, morticians, gravediggers and such —
These are your servants who thank you so much!

Row-upon-row rest the graveyard’s residers.
Some day, all out here will be insiders.
Here is a truth which each person does know:
We all shall help make that populace grow.

When the last dirt tops the casket,
And the grave is filled,
We shall not gather again in this way,
Until someone else . . . is chilled!



Ingrid Laas photo
Ernie Chambers drops his glasses into his hand during his acceptance speech for earning FFRF’s 2015 Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

Old Sailor’s Lament

March 25, 2015

Years and years, so many years
I sailed upon the vasty Sea
When I reached the other side,
‘Tweren’t nobody there exceptin’ me

Moral

May 10, 2014

All who are “religious” should,
From Wisdom’s Fountain drink:
Waste not Prayer
When Brains are there
Employ those Brains and THINK

Hewett

Continued from page 11

Separation of Church and State filed a lawsuit on my behalf.

The elements of the lawsuit were this: The Christian flag was flying on a public memorial on public property. The Christian soldier cross that was placed there by the city was paid for by the city. And also the city sponsored Christian services at all the Memorial and Veterans day events. Not only that, but Calvary Baptist Church always had their religious material at the police department. And the police department had a Facebook page that had several religious verses on it.

So FFRF got involved in that because of the religious verses. FFRF advised the city that it was a violation of the Establishment Clause. The city said, “Stick it up your ass.” The city attorney’s advice was that the religious quotes would stay. A few months later, the city had a media policy. And it prohibited the chief from doing this. So



Ingrid Laas photo
Steven Hewett

that came down.
But the lawsuit over the flag proceeded. For over two years there were multiple depositions, fact-findings, motions, countermotions, several mandatory negotiation meetings, all in an

attempt to avoid a trial. Then in November 2014, two years after the lawsuit had begun, Federal Senior District Judge James Beaty called for all parties to assemble and to try to negotiate a settlement.
During the settlement time he asked each party questions. First he asked Greg Lipper of Americans United, “Why should we take the flag down? Why should we do this?” And then the judge looked over to the other side table and started asking them. And then I went, “Oh, hell yes.” He was asking why a Christian flag should be up there. Why, why, why? And the city was just stumbling for an answer.
And so at that time I knew we had won. The judge, to avoid a trial, sent us off to a room where we then started hammering out a negotiation. The city capitulated to all our terms. The City Council agreed to remove the kneeling soldier in front of the Christian cross. It agreed to not fly the Christian flag at the Veterans Memorial. And in a previous ruling, the judge had told them

they could no longer promote or endorse Christian services.
The city of King spent \$50,000 of taxpayer money on this lawsuit. The insurance company paid Americans United half a million dollars in attorney fees and gave me a dollar.
So we now honor all veterans at the memorial. It has been restored. We have a silhouette with a soldier kneeling before the helmet and rifle. This is inclusive of all veterans. This is a standard battlefield memorial. And the flagpole on the far left has been left empty. I guess that’s so they can imagine the Christian flag being there, since I had to imagine that it wasn’t there. But there’s also a plaque at the memorial.
And that plaque is something that really got me, because it is to all American veterans. At the bottom it says, “To American Veterans for every symbol of heroism, sacrifice and loyalty and freedom.”
And yes there are atheists in foxholes, because I am one.

The 10 worst Old Testament verses

By Dan Barker

While writing *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*, I found myself wading through the murky waters of the Old Testament, something I was hoping never to have to do again.

Here is my list of the 10 worst Old Testament passages, in reverse order. My main criterion is that this list show us something about the character of God. All believers admit that the bible contains some stomach-churning tales, but these examples reveal the *LORD himself* commanding, committing or condoning the brutality. Richard Dawkins was not exaggerating when he called God a capriciously malevolent bully.

10. God destroys a good family ‘for no reason.’

God made a bet with Satan that Job, a good and blameless man, would remain faithful even if he killed his children and ruined his life. Here we see God indicting himself for the crime, openly confessing that he destroyed a family “for no reason.”

“The Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the Earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil. He still persists in his integrity, although you incited me against him, to destroy him for no reason.’” (*Job 2:3 New Revised Standard Bible*)

9. God destroys the fetuses of those who do not worship him.

This is not the only feticidal passage in the bible, but it is the worst:

“You shall acknowledge no God but me. . . . You are destroyed, Israel. . . . The people of Samaria must bear their guilt, because they have rebelled against their God. They will fall by the sword; their little ones will be dashed to the ground, their pregnant women ripped open.” (*Hosea 13:4, 9, 16 New International Version*)

8. God approves the massacre of a peaceful people so one of his tribes could have a place to live.

Most believers think God destroyed the Canaanites because they were depraved and immoral, although the bible does not make that claim. They were killed — and labeled “evil” and “wicked” — simply because they did not worship him. Here is a group of



This 1866 wood engraving illustration by Gustave Dore is one of many of his works portraying violence in the bible in the name of God.

people who did nothing wrong. They were “at peace and secure,” but they had to be eliminated.

“And in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking a place of their own where they might settle, because they had not yet come into an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. . . . Then they said to [the priest], ‘Please inquire of God to learn whether our journey will be successful.’ The priest answered them, ‘Go in peace. Your journey has the Lord’s approval.’ . . . Then they took what Micah had made, and his priest, and went on to Laish, against a people at peace and secure. They attacked them with the sword and burned down their city. . . . The Danites rebuilt the city and settled there.” (*Judges 18:1–28 NIV*)

The Canaanites were not the evildoers. The Israelites were the invaders!

7. Babies are slaughtered and wives raped.

The murderous Old Testament deity deemed human life to be worthless, placing his own megalomaniacal glory above human values. Here is one of the worst examples:

“See, the day of the Lord is coming — a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger. . . . I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty. . . . Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be looted and their wives violated.” (*Isaiah 13:9–16 NIV*)

6. A mixed-race couple is murdered by a godly priest to keep God’s people pure.

The righteous priest Phinehas murdered a loving couple for the crime of miscegenation. Then he was praised by God and rewarded for the hate crime with a perpetual priesthood for keeping the nation racially pure.

“Just then one of the Israelites came and brought a Midianite woman into his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the Israelites. When Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he got up and left the congregation. Taking a spear in his hand, he went after the Israelite man into the tent, and pierced the two of them, the Israelite and the woman, through the belly. So the plague was stopped among the people of Israel. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the Israelites by manifesting such zeal among them on my behalf that in my jealousy I did not consume the Israelites. Therefore say, “I hereby grant him my covenant of peace. It shall be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of

perpetual priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the Israelites.’” (*Numbers 25:6–13 NRSV*)

5. A daughter is burned as an acceptable sacrifice to God.

General Jephthah made a vow with God in order to defeat the enemy. When Jephthah won the war, God received his hundred pounds of flesh.

“And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: ‘If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord’s, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.’ . . . When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels! . . . After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed.” (*Judges 11:30–39 NIV*)

After burning his daughter, Jephthah was rewarded with a prestigious judgeship and was later buried with honor.

4. The cannibalistic God makes people eat human flesh.

There are nine passages in the Old Testament where God makes cannibalistic threats. Here is the worst one:

“And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat.” (*Leviticus 26:27–29 King James Version*)

3. God threatens rape, then takes credit for it.

This passage was new to me, and it blew me away. I guess I had only read it before in the King James Version, where the sexual molestation is not obvious. Here it is in the NRSV, where the Israelites were asking why they were being attacked by the Babylonians:

“Hear and give ear; do not be haughty, for the Lord has spoken. . . . And if you say in your heart, ‘Why have these things come upon me?’ it is for the greatness of your iniquity that your skirts are lifted up, and you are violated . . . because you have forgotten me and trusted in lies. I myself will lift up your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen.” (*Jeremiah 13:15–26 NRSV*)

“Skirts lifted up” is sexual assault. “Violate” is rape. The King James Version has the quaint “heels made bare,”

GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction
By Dan Barker
Sterling Publishing, New York
Hardcover with dust jacket
February 2016

which obscures the sexual assault. Notice that the “iniquity” for which they were being raped was not immorality or depravity; it was simply because “you have forgotten me.”

2. God threatens sexual molestation.

The Lord will harass attractive uppity women by exposing their private parts.

“Moreover the Lord saith, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts.” (*Isaiah 3:16–17 KJV*)

The New International Version covers up this embarrassing passage with “make their scalps bald” in place of “discover their secret parts [Hebrew: poth = vagina].” Other translations are more honest: The Orthodox Jewish Bible has “lay bare their nakedness,” Amplified Bible “stripped naked,” Complete Jewish Bible “expose their private parts,” Common English Version “uncover their private parts,” and Living Bible “expose their nakedness for all to see.” Even if “daughters of Zion” is a metaphor for Israel, it is a metaphor of sexual assault.

1. God wants you to be happy to dash babies against the rocks.

I have always thought this was the worst verse in the bible, and my opinion remains unchanged.

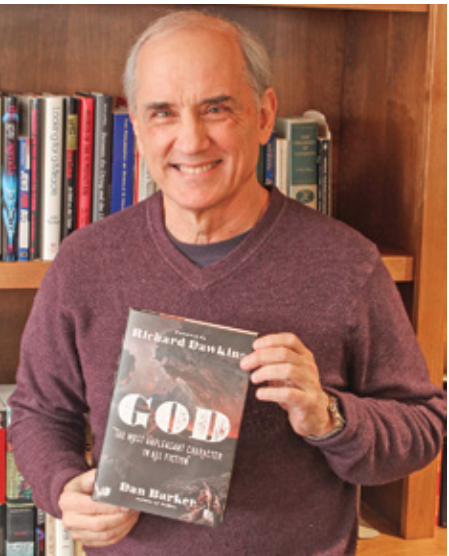
“O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!” (*Psalms 137:8–9 NRSV*)

God was not merely saying that regrettable collateral damage might occur during wartime. He said believers should be happy — some translations say “blessed” — to kill innocent babies of those who are keeping you from worshipping your own god.

...

Anyone who claims to admire and worship the biblical God has either abandoned all sense of moral judgment or has never actually read the Old Testament. Since most believers are good people, I prefer to assume the latter. I think the world would be a much better place if people would actually read the book. A.A. Milne, author of *Winnie the Pooh*, said: “The Old Testament is responsible for more atheism, agnosticism, disbelief — call it what you will — than any book ever written; it has emptied more churches than all the counterattractions of cinema, motor bicycle and golf course.”

Before we can cure an illness we have to diagnose it. Please, let’s read the Old Testament, and then excise the cancer from our lives.



Andrew Seidel photo

FFRF Co- President Dan Barker shows off a copy of his new book, which can be purchased online for \$20 at ffrf.org/shop/books.

Celebrate secularism at Reason Rally 2016

With a great lineup of speakers from all walks of life, Reason Rally 2016 promises to be a fantastic event, bringing together tens of thousands of free-thinkers to help raise awareness of the power of secular voters.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is one of the major sponsors of the event, happening June 4 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Advocacy days, parties and other events will be held from June 2-5.

- The six tenets of the Reason Rally are:
- Public policy should be based on facts, not faith.
 - Medical research should be based on scientific rigor, not corporate or ideological influence.
 - Being patriotic has nothing to do with believing in a god.
 - Religious litmus tests for candidates are wrong.
 - Rational thought is important in personal and public life.
 - Democracy works best when everyone’s voice is heard.

Besides FFRF, other sponsors include American



Atheists, American Humanist Association, Center for Inquiry, Richard Dawkins Foundation, Secular Coalition of America, and Stiefel Freethought Foundation. FFRF and other sponsors will be visible with booths and have a brief opportunity to speak. For more information, go to ReasonRally.org. Freethought Today will carry updates.

This year’s speakers

Hip-hop artist **Baba Brinkman**
Movie and TV writer **Kelly Carlin**
Comedian **Margaret Cho**
God Delusion author **Richard Dawkins**
Actor, singer and comic **John de Lancie**
SciBabe, the pseudoscience fighter **Yvette d’Entremont**
Actor and humanitarian **Johnny Depp**
Actress and activist **Amber Heard**
Theoretical physicist **Lawrence Krauss**
StarTalk co-host **Leighann Lord**
Activist **Maryam Namazie**
The Science Guy **Bill Nye**
NASA Cassini Project imaging team leader **Carolyn Porco**
Biologist **Cara Santa Maria**
Musician **Killah Priest**
Director and comic **Paul Provenza**,
Magician **James Randi**
Journalist **Dr. Andrés Roemer**
National Center for Science Education chair **Eugenie Scott**
SNL alumna **Julia Sweeney**
Musician **Mark White**

Krauss

Continued from page 5

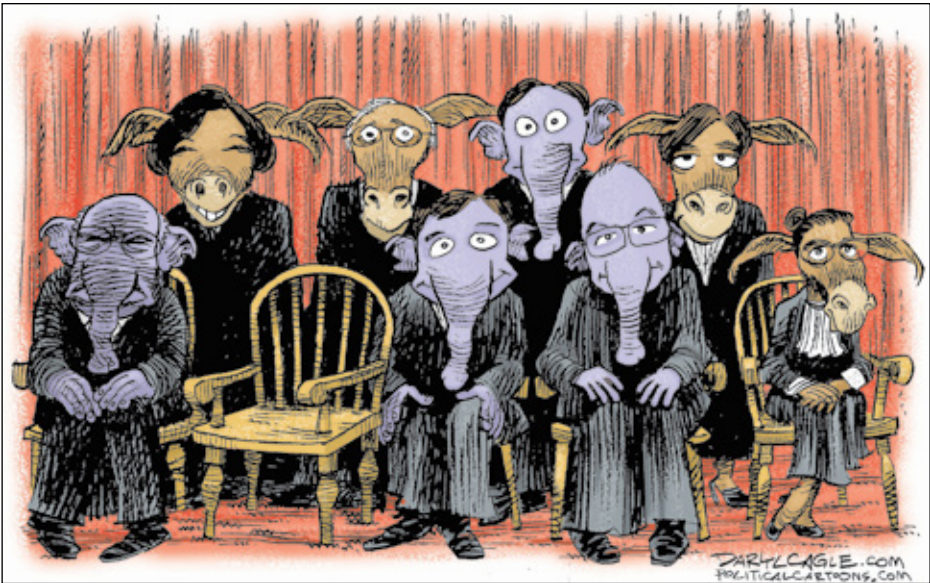
In addition, the appointment of an atheist justice would send a meaningful message: it would affirm that legal arguments are secular, and that they are based on a secular document, the Constitution, which was written during the founding of a secular democracy. Such an appointment would also help counter the perceived connection between atheism and lawlessness and immorality. That unfortunate and inaccurate link is made all too often in the United States. A Pew survey conducted in January showed that, once again, Americans would be less likely to vote for an atheist candidate than for a candidate who has no experience, is gay, was involved in financial improprieties, has had extramarital affairs, or is Muslim. Atheists are widely, absurdly and openly mistrusted.

That distrust has ancient roots: because religion long ago claimed morality as its domain, atheism has long been connected to immorality. To many people, religiosity confers an aura of goodness. In the U.K., when people who had listed their religious affiliation as Christian on the national census were asked by the Richard Daw-

kins Foundation why they had done so, most said it was not because they actually accepted the detailed doctrines of their faith, but because it made them feel like they were good people. This is a two-way street on which both directions point the wrong way. By the same token, when good people openly declare that they cannot accept religious doctrines or question the underlying concept of God, they are often classified as “bad.”

The prejudice against atheists has real-world consequences. In December 2014, the Times reported that seven states — Arkansas, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas — still have laws on their books that make atheists ineligible to run for public office. And anti-atheist prejudice is shaping our presidential race, too. Consider the case of Donald Trump in South Carolina. After Trump insulted Ted Cruz using a sexist slur, one voter responded by saying, “The way he speaks — that doesn’t sound like somebody who really believes in God that much. You want your children to look up at the president of the United States.”

Implicit in that statement is the idea that a politician’s belief in God is, in itself, a reason for children to look up



to him or her. Meanwhile, other aspects of a candidate’s character seem not to matter. If the opinions of Cruz’s colleagues in the Senate and elsewhere are any indication, he seems to be rather unlikable; his competitors in the Republican primaries have suggested that he is less than truthful, as well. Still, Cruz captures a significant fraction of the evangelical vote because his character seems to matter less than his open and pronounced invocation of God in discussing his policies.

Our strange attitudes about athe-

ism warp our politics and our laws. It’s time to remove the stigma. One way to do that is by appointing an atheist to the Supreme Court. Happily, such an appointment would be a tribute to the spirit, if not the letter, of one of Scalia’s last opinions. More than that, it would be a tribute to the secular principles upon which this country was founded.

Lawrence Krauss is an esteemed theoretical physicist and author who will be receiving the Emperor Has No Clothes Award at the 2016 FFRF national convention. See more on the back page.

Chino Valley victory

Continued from front page

otherwise endorsing school-sponsored prayer in board meetings.”

Reporters covering the lawsuit clearly had fun with their articles. David Allen of the Inland Daily Bulletin wrote: “After years of prayers and religious references at its meetings, the Chino Valley Unified School Board has been halted by a higher power: a federal judge.”

And Mel Ewald of the Chino Champion wrote: “God and Jesus Christ were conspicuously absent from Thursday’s meeting of the Chino Valley School Board.”

FFRF obviously welcomes the ruling. “Our plaintiffs told us the board proceedings were more like a church service than a school board meeting,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “So my reaction to the ruling is, ‘Hallelujah!’”

The board tried to claim a legislative prayer exception, invoking the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2014 *Greece v. Galloway* decision. But Bernal called the argument “meritless,” saying, “The legislative exception does not apply to prayer at school board meetings.”



Plaintiffs (from left to right) Michael Anderson and Larry Maldonado stand with attorney David J.P. Kaloyanides in front of the Townsend Junior High School in the Chino Valley School District. FFRF and 22 plaintiffs, including Anderson and Maldonado, won a lawsuit against the district over prayers during board meetings.

“The risk that a student will feel coerced by the board’s policy and practice of religious prayer is even higher here than at football games or graduations,” Bernal stated. “The School Board possesses an inherently authoritarian position with respect to the students. The board metes out discipline and awards at these meetings, and sets school policies that directly and immediately affect the students’ lives.”

He added, “Regardless of the stated purpose of the [prayer] resolution, it is clear that the board uses it to bring sectarian prayer and proselytization into public schools through the backdoor.”

RMuse, a writer for the PoliticusUSA web site, backed FFRF: “For now, though, there is one public school district in California that is safe from theocrats, thanks to the Freedom From Religion Foundation and concerned

FFRF thanks plaintiffs

FFRF warmly thanks the 22 local plaintiffs — mainly parents with school-age children — who joined FFRF’s lawsuit. Most plaintiffs’ identities are under a protective order, but Larry Maldonado and Michael Anderson (and FFRF, of course) are publicly named.

“We couldn’t do this without our local plaintiffs and are grateful to them for making our victory possible,” said Dan Barker, FFRF co-president.

Local counsel David J.P. Kaloyanides and FFRF Staff Attorneys Rebecca Markert and Andrew Seidel litigated the case.

The federal case was brought in U.S. District Court Central Division of California and the case number is 14-2336. The decision can be read online at ffrf.org/chino.

parents who prevailed with absolutely no assistance whatsoever from even one ‘Constitution-loving’ politician.”

Strong Backbone Award

Even after cheating death, I'm OK without God

By Dustin Hickok

When I was 16, they read me my last rites.

My mom's Catholic, so the priest said some magic words to save my soul. I think he sprinkled water or oil, but I was unconscious. I don't remember. That's what I was told.

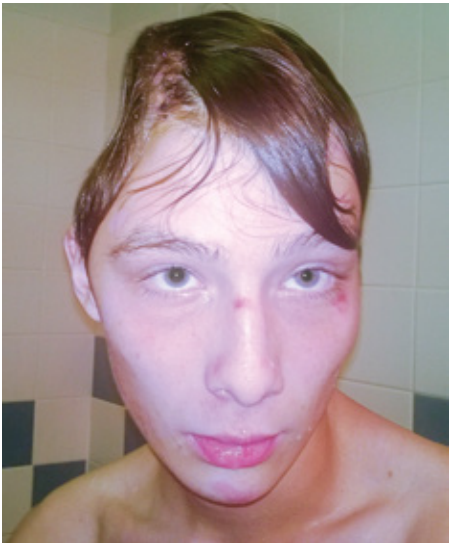
Anyway, on Oct. 26, 2013, while skateboarding, I foolishly hitched onto a friend's car going 45 mph. I was not wearing a helmet. I fell. I was 16.

I fractured all the bones on one side of my face, damaged my sciatic nerve, brain fluid leaked from my ear and I severely damaged the front portions of my brain. Emergency surgery removed half my skull. I was in a coma and on life support.

Doubtful doctors said "if" I woke up, I may never again be able to communicate, that I was most likely blind in one eye, and that walking, feeding myself or living independently was forever gone. But they noted that I had all my teeth. That was good. Months later, one of my many therapists told me I would never graduate, much less graduate with my 2015 class. After all, I'd missed an entire year of school. My brain was messed up. It wouldn't happen. I had to give it up.

They were wrong.

I've worked countless hours, sweated and cried and bled and literally crawled to get where I am today. I



Dustin Hickok, left, had to have part of his skull removed after an accident that nearly killed him. However, through sheer determination, he was able to graduate with his class even after missing a year of school.



learned to eat again, speak again, walk again, spell, count, breathe, shower, dress, use the bathroom, cope, sing, not have seizures, and on and on. I learned to live. I'm not blind. They put my skull back together. And this year, I took a double load of high school classes. I have a 3.6 GPA. As I write this [in May of 2015] I am six days away from graduating with my original 2015 class! I got my driver's license. I have a girlfriend. I went to prom. I have been accepted to college. I have a wicked scar, but it's kind of cool.

People call me a miracle. They tell me I should thank God.

I don't ask, "Would that be the same God who let me fall?"

See, they wouldn't understand. They would dislike me and judge me, and even though they'd just called me an inspiration because I lived when so many others might have died, in their eyes I'd have instantly turned into something evil. Sad. If I didn't accept their faith, everything I'd done was dust.

They ask, "How can you walk again if not for God?" Well, if God made me walk, then my NOT walking was also because of God. If everything is part of His Great Plan, does that mean God made me fall?

And though I think of myself as a good person, why would God save me, the infidel? True, I'm moral without

the threat of hell. I don't eat babies, sacrifice small animals, or copulate with kidnapped toddlers like so many people think I do if I dare tell them I don't believe, but still, I don't buy into it. Does it mean that my heathen soul is headed for fiery hell? Should I tell people this? God saved a nonbeliever?

But you know what? I don't. I stay silent. For the most part, I'm a closet atheist, because I know most people mean well, and if they say I've been blessed, I smile and say "thank you." If they intrude into my government, that's different, but a remark on my recovery? I let it go.

I have a tattoo: "If you believe in yourself, anything is possible." Most see the word "believe" and that makes them happy. I see the word "yourself." I know who's responsible. I'm OK without God. But I do wish others would be OK with me when I say that I'm OK without him. It's hard to be brave enough to speak up. But you know what? I've faced death and won. Their disapproval doesn't even leave a scar.

...

Dustin, 18, grew up in Littleton, Colo., and went to the Denver School of the Arts, graduating in May 2015. He now attends the University of Northern Colorado. He plans to major in physiology and minor in music, with plans to work in the field of music therapy. Dustin enjoys playing the guitar and singing, and also is interested in health and the outdoors. The Strong Backbone Award of \$1,000 from FFRF is endowed by an octogenarian member.

Cliff Richards Student Activist Award

Glad to be called a heathen pig

By Douglas J. Ciampi Jr.

The last time I voluntarily attended a church service was at the age of 5, and by seventh grade I was openly identifying as an atheist. Given that I grew up in a Catholic area of rural Massachusetts, my beliefs were rarely brought up in public. When high school came around and discussions grew, more people began to learn of my beliefs, but fewer students seemed to be bothered by the fact that I was "good without God." But this isn't a story of the upcoming generation, which will be more accepting and freethinking than any hitherto; it's a story of how I came to realize and love my true identity: the heathen pig.

I was a tinkerer and a builder when I was young, spending countless hours disassembling everything from the kitchen sink to my baby monitor to figure out how it all worked. While I did not have a complete understanding of how everything functioned, I did know that when I carefully smashed my baby monitor and began dissecting it, there was no "man behind the curtain" relaying what he heard to my parents. There were components that played some part in making this contraption work. I was becoming a critical thinker, and doubting everything from Santa to God. Come biology class, I had a decent understanding of the "how" part of humans, and realized there was no reason for God(s) to exist. This marked the start of my secular jour-



Douglas J. Ciampi Jr.

ney. It would take until my junior year of high school for me to examine the topic more heavily and more critically. I came to the conclusion that when society wasn't strong enough to create and enforce its own laws, religion was created in order to scare individuals into being "good" people.

But this goal of creating "good" people failed quite miserably. Putting aside the dozens of genocides and millions of deaths that religion has spawned, religion has stamped out many cookie-cutter Christians (although there are some from every faith), that view those of a different faith as lesser people, or even lesser than people. I learned this the hard way when I dared to challenge four churches and the near-incestual relationship they had with my school district. Part of my public high school's official graduation ceremony was a "religious event" held in one of

four churches each year, where the priest would serve as master of ceremonies. Not a single person in the 50 years that this ceremony took place ever objected to it, until my senior year rolled around.

I asked nicely for the school not to hold it that year, and was told I didn't have the right to ask. I wrote the school asking them not to hold the ceremony, and met with the principal so he could hand my complaint back to me and walk out of the room. Americans United for Separation of Church and State wrote the school informing them of the legality of such a service, which led to a meeting with the principal where he called my mother and tried to have her convince me to drop the complaint. But I didn't drop it: I fought. I went before councils and committees at every level and, after nearly six months, succeeded in having the event removed.

But in the eyes of the religious community, I became a public enemy. I was the one who "killed the Baccalaureate." The story ran front page of all the local newspapers, and was the "Principal's News" for March. All parents were emailed about it, and I began to receive attention, a lot of it. All throughout the process I received negative and scathing remarks from dozens of adults, including a two-minute spiel about me by the chairman of the school committee. I was inundated by these comments, but one stood out high above all the rest. Someone took the time out of their life to write a newspaper and proclaim to the world that I was nothing but a "heathen pig."

...

Douglas J. Ciampi Jr., 18, resides in Westminister, Mass., and graduated from Oakmont Regional High School in Ashburnham, Mass. in June 2015. He is attending American University in Washington, D.C., where he is pursuing a degree in history. His interests include politics, numismatics and hiking. He is a 2014 alumni of Boys State, a 2015 Comcast Leader and Achiever, an AP Scholar, and a 2015 Stanley Koplik Certificate of Mastery with Distinction recipient. His awards also include a citation from the Massachusetts House of Representatives, a Good Citizenship Citation from the American Legion, and the 2015 Americans United National Youth Award. He is currently a member of the Secular Student Alliance, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the National Honor Society, and the American Numismatic Association. FFRF's Cliff Richards Student Activist Award is 1,000.

Honorable mentions: Michael Hakeem Memorial College Essay Contest

Challenging stigmas against nonbelievers

Atheism and virtuousness

FFRF awarded Samuel \$200. (This essay has been edited for space.)

By Samuel Chan Sai Hay

Without religion, how can one be good, or even want to be good? As an international student from Hong Kong studying in the U.S., I find the previous statement offensive to nonbelievers. The theory that there is an incompatibility between morality and atheism is far too common and prevalent in the United States. In light of this, I would like to introduce Hong Kong as an answer to how atheism and morality can coexist and illustrate how an atheistic society can be as ethical as any other type of society.

According to government documents, about 50% of the city’s population, which is approximately 3.5 million people, do not consider themselves religious. In fact, as studies in recent years indicate, 77% of China’s population describe themselves as nonreligious people, while 47% consider themselves atheists.

Hong Kong is often applauded as one of the most civilized, orderly and peaceful cities, having only a total of 11.95 crimes per 1,000 citizens, which is almost four times less than the number in the heavily religious United States. And atheism does not necessarily spell violence or savagery. In 2014, Hong Kong only had 27 homicides, while New York City, which is also a



Samuel Chan Sai Hay

city of 8 million people, had 333 homicides. The incarceration rate of Hong Kong also hit a record low in 2014, with only 123 people per 100,000 in prison, which is 125th in the world. Although nonreligious factors must not be overlooked, one can see that the degree of religiosity does not necessarily have direct links to a population’s savagery. That being said, one’s civility is actually subject to a collection of many other factors, such as education, rather than only religion.

Hong Kong, despite, or perhaps because of, its nonreligiousness, also displays outstanding numbers in term of city safety, human development and sustainability. The list goes on, but it just proves that it is possible and realistic for a largely atheistic society to be as moral, civilized and advanced as any other societies, no matter what their religiosities are.

Hong Kong native Samuel Chan Sai Hay is a history major student at De Anza College, Calif., where he enjoys studying all branches of humanities. He is also a co-author of 64:24, a Tiananmen Square protest commemorative book.

Self-motivated morality matters

FFRF awarded Julianna \$200. (This essay has been edited for space.)

By Julianna Bauman

The difference between atheistic morals and those of a religious person is that they are organic and rational, rather than provided and blindly accepted. Nonbelievers feel accountability for their actions. They recognize consequences, not as an internal shame inspired by an invisible higher being or a denial of entry into a heavenly afterlife, but as real effects on themselves or others.

It is difficult to deny the strong morality that so many nonbelievers possess, made more impressive by their self-maintained desire to act upon it. A UC-Berkeley study showed that atheists are actually the more compassionate group as a whole — they are more motivated by others’ suffering than religious people, who are often motivated by a sense of obligation or concern for their own reputation. Some may believe that this is an insignificant finding. But in the long term, motive truly matters. Actions fueled by obligation are difficult to perpetuate, while a person with self-created and rationalized moral convictions is likely to act upon them for a lifetime.

It was not until I read *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand in my senior year of high school that I fully understood this notion. I had been a Christian for 17 years



Julianna Bauman

and there were times where I loved having religion. At the same time, I would often feel tremendous guilt at my own actions and felt obliged to serve the church and the community. Of course, I had moral inclinations of my own, but they were often locked to and influenced by religion. As I grew older I slowly began to drift away from religion, but Rand’s story of competent characters and shameless belief in self completed my departure from Christianity. Her literature espouses the possibility of serving others without sacrificing oneself. I came to realize that I can determine my own morals, I can use them to make change, and through them I can strive for personal fulfillment. This is the conviction of the nonbeliever, and it has stronger roots than any religious doctrine could ever grow.

Julianna Bauman was born in San Ramon, Calif, and is a junior at the University of Washington in Seattle. She intends to major in neurobiology and will graduate in June of 2018, after which she plans to enroll in an MD/PhD program in order to become a medical scientist.

An incentive for a moral life

FFRF awarded Mariesa \$200. (This essay has been edited for space.)

By Mariesa Dae Robinson

I remember in perfect clarity my journey through confusion, dogma, doubt, and finally nonbelief.

I was constantly in trouble in Catholic school and eventually was asked to leave. I fared better in public school, where I learned that science showed religious claims were impossible. When I brought these things up at religious meetings, I was told the secular world would try to lure me away from a life dedicated to God. But I had questions.

I claimed to be a deist, then an agnostic, but after a couple years of amazing teachers, I had a realization: Historically, people used religion to do heinous and terrible things. Belief in God did not make people good, and if God was not good, then he was not God. I finally admitted to myself that I was an atheist, and that I would have to figure out morality myself.

However, the backlash from my family proved to me that it did not make that much sense to everyone. I began having to defend myself almost incessantly. The scientific arguments were easy: Science simply and completely disputed the biblical account of creation because the Earth was too old, and evolution too well documented. Philosophical arguments came relatively easy, too. If there was only one God, why were there thousands of re-



Mariesa Dae Robinson

ligions? Finally, the concept that everyone should follow arbitrary rules about food and sex and prayer schedules during their time on Earth — in order to earn time in an afterlife that no two religions fully agreed on — seemed like a gamble that would not only waste one’s time on Earth, but also make it all too easy to become hateful, judgmental and so focused on salvation that there would be no time to fix the current woes of our world.

Thus it became clear that atheism is the most moral belief system one can have. If this life is all anyone gets, it becomes morally imperative to live it well, and take full responsibility for the state of the world here. That is why nonbelievers should be respected rather than stigmatized.

Mariesa Dae Robinson was born in Amherst, Ohio, and is a junior at Mercyhurst University. She is a sociology major with minors in gender studies, psychology and public health. She is interested in human rights, specifically issues related to the atrocities committed against women, including ending rape and female genital mutilation.

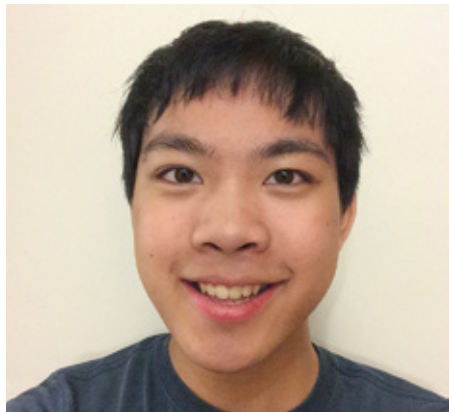
Atheists worthy of respect

FFRF awarded Martin \$200. (This essay has been edited for space.)

By Martin Cheung

Centuries ago, people believed toxic gases called miasma arose from the ground and caused diseases. Now we know cholera is spread in water and malaria is transmitted by infected mosquitoes. The progress of scientific knowledge has consistently discredited superstitious beliefs, and I believe science firmly rejects the existence of the supernatural, including God. If the majority of scientific evidence supported the existence of God, I would readily accept his existence. Then I would immediately question the morality of his actions, because omnipotence does not equal “worthy of worship.”

The term “god of the gaps” describes the argumentative fallacy to attribute a gap in scientific knowledge as evidence for the existence of God’s existence. However, I think this phrase is also an apt description of the gap of understanding between the religious and irreligious. Religious people often think that atheists are immoral or have no meaning in life. Since America remains majority Christian, the utter inconceivability of atheism to the religious continues to marginalize atheists as a fringe minority, despite growing numbers. For America to learn to respect atheists, it must learn that they are their friends, neighbors, students, teachers, co-workers, children, heroes,



Martin Cheung

favorite actors, writers and politicians. Historical stigma associated with atheism has marginalized the significant contributions of atheists to humanity. Atheists provide a valuable perspective to society based on science and reason that asks for critical examination of traditions and the promotion of rationality over unfounded convictions.

Nonbelievers deserve respect for their beliefs because of human rights. To ask why an atheist is entitled to dignity is to ask why a human is entitled to dignity. Atheism is both freeing and burdening, in the sense that no one tells you what is right and wrong. You determine your own moral compass based on your personal beliefs, free from dogma and doctrine. Most of all, atheists are worthy of respect because we are truth seekers who value reason, integrity and the spirit of humanity.

Martin Cheung lives in Marietta, Ga., and attends the University of Pennsylvania. He intends on majoring in biology, and is primarily interested in genetics and molecular biology.

Letterbox

Happy to donate to the cause

Your handwritten thank-you note for a recent donation makes me feel like a true member of FFRF and part of its mission. I especially look forward to the monthly newspaper with news of FFRF's victories, the essays, and my personal favorite, Crank Mail. These wonderful people who call themselves God-fearing Christians are complete illiterate idiots who use the most vile and profane language.

As a token of my appreciation and respect, please find the enclosed check that I would like to donate to Nonbelief Relief. I am a strong supporter of reaching out and helping those less fortunate than us, or who are victims of oppressive political regimes or natural disasters. I think it's great to see that we nonbelievers care as much as, if not more than, those who believe they are doing the "Lord's work."

Allen P. Wilkinson
California

Religious bullies need to be stopped

Remember how your parents told you to stand up to bullies? Are we doing it?

Schools across the country are engaging in anti-bullying policies. It's time to add religious bullying to their lists. There may be backlash on this. Most people wouldn't see the harm in indoctrinating impressionable kids against their parents' wishes. But these things should be brought into the spotlight of public discourse. Surely we have examples in our secular publications of the intrusion of gospel drug-pushers in our public schools.

Religious bullies and their narrow-minded backers are out to intimidate, browbeat and bulldoze their way through legislation. They do so because, like all bullies, they don't have rationally agreeable foundations for their claims of truth.

Haven't enough children, let alone societies, been damaged already?

Carl Scheiman
Maine

Doctors Without Borders thanks FFRF

I am writing to thank FFRF for its generosity in 2015, and to share with you a photo essay about our work over the past year. I hope that these photos convey how much your support of Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) means to the millions of people helped by these programs.

Please view the photos: <https://msf.exposure.co/a-year-in-pictures>.

The past two years have been some of the most challenging ever for MSF. From the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and earthquakes in Nepal to the impact of brutal wars in Syria and Yemen, the refugee crisis in Europe, and the attack on the MSF hospital in Afghanistan, MSF teams have witnessed tragic losses while carrying out crucial and life-saving work.

Thank you for standing with us this past year. With so much work still ahead, we are grateful for your support, confidence and trust.

Jason Cone
Executive Director
Doctors Without Borders



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People upset because of own biases

Hello, just catching up on my December 2015 Freethought Today newspaper, and the article "FFRF's request to remove religious displays from Mississippi park upsets residents." The title as it stands makes it sound like FFRF is at fault for causing upset. At the risk of "preaching to the choir," I feel compelled to point out that FFRF's request is NOT the root cause of residents' distress. Rather, disturbed residents are upset because of their own bias, selfishness, arrogance and their rejection and/or ignorance of the law of the land (separation of church and state). If they truly believed in religious freedom for all citizens, with government not playing favorites when it comes to belief, then they wouldn't be upset.

Jaime Hunter
Texas

Keeping up the good fight

I wanted to let you know that I received the award in the mail yesterday! Thank you very much. It is certainly an encouragement to keep up the good fight for church/state separation.

Doug Ciampi
Virginia

Note: Doug was awarded FFRF's Cliff Richards Student Activist Award of \$1,000. See page 16 for his story.

Scientific publications, stick to science!

I would like to bring to your attention an example of the insidiousness of what is posing as science. I subscribe to various health newsletters, including from the Mayo Clinic, as well as Scientific American. In their latest issues, both of these publications have seized on a study called "Religion, Therapy a Good Mix for Treating Depression." I have responded to both of them in writing with the following comments:

"I recently received your email regarding 'Religion, Therapy a Good Mix for Treating Depression.' I was astonished, and extremely disappointed, to see that what I had expected to be information based on fact and science has become a clichéd, faith-based propaganda machine. This article was totally inappropriate. It is not the place of an esteemed medical publication to promote myths regarding religion and one's personal beliefs. As an avowed atheist, and proud of it, it is offensive to me to receive disinformation and evangelism, in place of helpful facts based on education, scholarship and scientific wisdom. Let's stick to science, and leave myths to the climate change deniers."

This once again demonstrates the

necessity of vigilance in holding the "scientific community" accountable for their continual assault on secular views, and the misuse of funded studies.

Jeremiah Begnal
Florida

A new pledge that makes sense

For functions where the Pledge of Allegiance recitation is required, I have written and recite my own pledge: "I pledge allegiance to the people of the United States of America, and to the Republic which has stood the test of time, one nation, conceived in genius, of differing cultures, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." This makes much more sense to me, to pledge help and support to my neighbors, than it does to pledge to an increasingly empty symbol alone.

Gary Meader
Washington

Scalia observance crossed line

What's with a Catholic priest leading a prayer at Justice Antonin Scalia's casket in the Supreme Court building, complete with some participants making the sign of the cross? I think this was in violation of the Establishment Clause in the Constitution. There should be no public prayer in a government building, especially one giving a Christian message. Churches, mosques and synagogues are the proper places for prayer, not government buildings built at taxpayer expense. I was offended by this.

Ronald Wielgus
Arizona

Lands' End caves after church bullying

I was disappointed to see Lands' End pull an interview with Gloria Steinem — a woman who has been involved in the public eye since before the CEO of Lands' End was born — due to a handful of rude, threatening alleged "customers."

Did no one think about those of us who respect Steinem? Should I threaten to quit shopping at Lands' End, too? Will you now ask your customers to vote for the most popular, like in junior high school? Talk about the mean boys of the Catholic Church bullying a corporation.

And I have to question the idea of churches taking the political stand to threaten a business — so much for separation of church and state. Clearly churches need to be taxed.

Candace Drimmer
Massachusetts

Opening the bible literally pays off

I spent a night in a Georgia hotel, and as usual I checked the nightstand for the ubiquitous Gideon's pulp fiction. I'll either toss it in the trash or give it a one-way ticket to the Dumpster.

These books always seemed as if no one ever opened them. But this time something possessed me to rifle through it. Lo and behold, about a third of the way through was a crisp \$10 bill tucked inside along the spine. I was surprised, but even more so when I continued to riffle and came upon another.

I burst out laughing. How the money got there or why is open to speculation. One can only imagine the rationale behind it. But I told my wife I took it as a sign and that I was compelled to send it to the legal fund of FFRF.

The moral, I guess, is that sometimes it does pay to open the bible.

Arlen Zin
Florida

(Editor's note: Thank you, Arlen! It's a new testament to your devotion to FFRF!)

Animal slaughter worst of all

The terrible torture and slaughter that religious beliefs and indoctrinations have caused on other sentient beings is the most harm ever inflicted on other beings in the history of the planet.

Every year there is the "feast of sacrifice" in the Islamic world named Eid al Adha. Over 200 million baby lambs, goats and camels are slaughtered on this weekend in remembrance of Abraham, who was prepared to murder his young son at God's command.

There is a feast of merriment and slaughter in the Jewish world named Passover, where yearly millions of cows, chickens, turkeys, geese, fish and veal are murdered and devoured in the name of Judaism.

There exists a holy day in the Christian religion named Easter where the tradition is to slaughter and devour a baby lamb. A bloody orgy for the depraved appetite.

In Tibetan Buddhism, where the leader is the Dalai Lama, he professes his appetite for slaughtered animal flesh, although only devouring it every other day in the name of "compassion."

In Hinduism the followers believe their cows are sacred, yet some will take baby male dairy cows and tie them to a temple fence to dehydrate in the boiling sun and then market their hides for leather. All the harm religion has ever been responsible for against humans pales in comparison to these atrocities against animals.

Harvey Bear
Washington

Letterbox

Happy to spread the word of reality

FFRF's healthy and rational intelligence about the realities of this world and our joined-together lives have directly contributed to the release of some good folks from harsh attitudes about religion.

I have been invited by Turner Classic Movies to do a couple live TV introductions and several recorded ones for future use, which will give me a chance to make a presentation to a group of older veterans and families on "Better Life Served Attitudes." That will give me a chance to share my healthy sense of reality and introduce FFRF to many.

Donnie Roan-Dunagan
Major, U.S. Marine Corps, retired
Texas

The 'Good Book' is anything but

Being raised Catholic, I was never encouraged to read the bible — better they should interpret it for me. Once I left the church, I had no desire to read it, so I advanced into my 70s without ever opening it.

Then a couple years ago my best friend was seduced by Jehovah's Witnesses. He made several attempts to convert me, and finally handed me a bible and asked me to read it. I agreed only because his friendship was important to me.

I did not get very far before concluding that it is the most disgusting book I have ever read. Yet, doggedly, I continued. I had made it through Job 9:35 when my friend decided to end our friendship. (Witnesses are not supposed to associate socially with nonbelievers — defined, of course, as anyone not a Witness.) It was devastating to lose this friendship of 20 years, but on the bright side, I was able to stop reading that vile book. How anyone can take it seriously amazes me.

Phyllis Murphey
California

Pledge is just blind patriotism

I was pleased to see the letters in Freethought Today on the subject of the Pledge of Allegiance. I thought I was the only one who dislikes it. As enthusiastically glad as I am to be a citizen of the U.S., I never take part in reciting it. Even if "under God" were removed, I would still refuse to join in that call to blind patriotism. Blind patriotism is

not as bad as blind religion, but it deserves (dis)honorable mention. As one of the letters says, "Pledges of loyalty are characteristic of countries that are not free." Although it doesn't have an "amen" at the end, I can almost hear the clicking of the heels of boots.

Allen Cosnow
Illinois

None of the above is acceptable answer

In my condo complex I belong to a discussion group called "Great Decisions," in which we discuss foreign policy topics. The subject of sectarian violence in the Middle East came up and we talked about how fortunate we are to have the First Amendment.

One lady opined that it means freedom of religion, not freedom from religion. I didn't want to tell her that, like with a multiple-choice quiz, you can pick A, B, C or D, which is none of the above.

John F. Oman
Florida

Clear danger to our way of life

More than 30 years ago, I was driving home early one Sunday morning, and on the radio I came across what seemed to be a Christian preacher speaking. He was saying how "they" — the Christians — would try their best to convert "us" non-believers, through prayer, intercession and the like. And then he said something startling.

"If they won't listen to us," he told the crowd, "we'll take them by their hands and feet, kicking and screaming, and drag them into the tent."

That was when I understood that these people represented a clear and present danger — a danger not just to me, but to many Americans and, indeed, to our entire way of life.

I personally don't care what anyone thinks or believes. My beliefs or non-beliefs are my business. But I do believe, with all my mind, in keeping religion out of governance and law.

Although I saw Ron Reagan's commercials for FFRF on TV, it didn't really register with me until I came across FFRF online. I sent away for a copy of Freethought Today and devoured every word. Finally, I thought, sane people, smart people, patriotic people who are fighting against this particular insanity! I am now a member!

Steve Heimoff
California

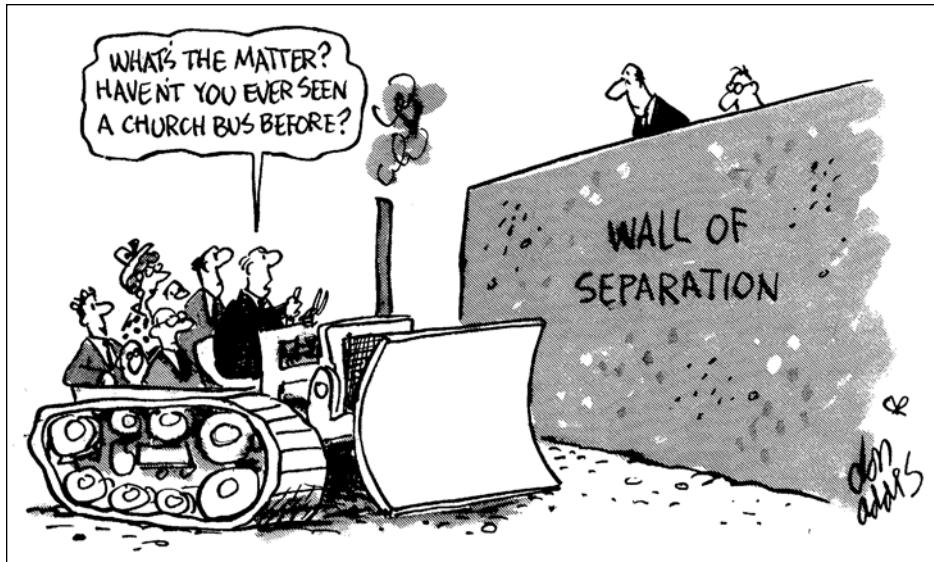
note that this modified nativity scene is no more legal or appropriate than the original show. Both versions exist solely to promote Christianity during a school-sponsored performance in violation of the Constitution.

"We had hoped the school district would simply do the right thing and adopt a neutral stance toward religion as it is required to do under the Constitution," says Staff Attorney Sam Grover.

"We are grateful to the new plaintiffs who have joined and strengthened our case, despite the backlash in the community," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "This controversy shows how divisive it is to bring religion into our public schools."

Listen to Grover discuss the case on Freethought Radio during the Feb. 13 episode at ffrf.org/news/radio.

Sharing the crank mail



Yes, we get a lot of mail at FFRF. Not all of it is from the most erudite or lucid people in the world. The following comments, printed as received, prove that.

you try to take freedom so you are terrorists who should face death for treason: You subhuman trash tried to get some little girls to not use Jesus signs? You disgusting trash bags need to get the hell out of this country if you are gonna do that because you aren't being told you cant in fiction. You are the disgrace to this country like hussein , and hillary rottin killton. So go back to hell where I came from — *Caleb Nunya, Illinois*

Hypocrites: Atheists spend more of their lives trying to disprove Christ, so rry to bust your bubble but he was real as tax records have proven. — *Christopher Davis, Kentucky*

The Truth: God is not a religion, He is a person. He told Moses; "I Am Who Am." Genius isn't it! He is!! You can not deny that He Is! — *Noel Francis*

freedom from religion?: You want freedom from Religion, move to a different country Hypocrites, If you dont want religion in your lives, what are you doing in a Christian base country?? You are a disgrace to the human race!! — *Amy A, South Carolina*

Your a bunch of scummy creeps!!!: yep — *Jean Mcscmidt, Indiana*

GOD: You people have NO idea what real. It doesn't matter what you think. GOD is real and his word is real. Jesus is coming soon and will reign as king of kings. His commandments are real. You should really read and study the bible, you would find that it shows how things are and will be.

We need prayer in schools and the commandments should be on ever street corner.... GOD is the final judge and he is coming soon. — *Greg Ingersoll, Missouri*

The Cross In The Wall: If there is no God Then whats the fuss about..let people put up there crosses, pray in school, church, at meetings. if you really don't think there is a god what could it hurt. if you had a imaginary friend when you were a kid you didn't get spanked . it just made you feel secure . your group is a very small group compared to the rest of the world that believes in some sort of higher power . I thank my God that i am not to smart to believe. — *Barry Callahan*

Harassment: I am sick and tired of YOUR harassment. It is time you people stuff it where the sun don't shine just because you have a bunch of high school graduates with a new born

mentality. Just because you DON'T have a life, it doesn't give you the right to FORCE your views on others. Lying, cheating , stealing is in your MOTTO. You make Donald Trump and Adolph Hitler look like a saint. — *John Whiteside, South Carolina*

Nutz: I wouldn't pist on any of you people if you were on fire. Your a bunch of ignorant cry babies who blame God for their problems. It literally made me ill that one of your brain dead people complained about the Kansas post office. Its worthless bloodsuckers like you destroying this country. Safe everyone the trouble and go hump in front of a truck. — *Jake Surridge*

Freedom: you shouldn't even want to touch money because it has In GOD we trust and maybe you should pack up and move on your own Island then you can have complete control and not be bothered with the difference in people and the right to choose and do your research this country was built on the word of GOD NOTICE the minute we took Prayer out of school then the school start getting attacked with shootings and now that we're taking Ten Commandments out of the courtrooms our country and justice system is in ruins the LORD GOD warned nations about turning there backs on him they will bring destruction to there own nation GOD is a LOVING GOD but he is also a just GOD he is the reason we move and live and have our very existence so imagine being a parent and your children don't acknowledge you or respect you in any kind of way but your the one who feed and clothe and shelter them amongst other things what a slap in the face that would be well that how we do our HEAVENLY FATHER when we treat him with disrespect because we don't acknowledge him or thank him for all that he does for us can you guarantee that you will wake up tomorrow can you make the sunrise in the moon set you have no control over that but it is God that has control not you but God and when you don't acknowledge him for all of his goodness and glory that is a disrespect but God is a loving God and he loves everyone but he does not force himself on anyone he's there with open arms if you choose to want him and he is merciful and kind and forgiving — *Arlene Adele*

DERP! you are the whole problem: Well if you think we came about from Darwin that just dosnt happen that way.Look up how his offspring turned out retarded bad for real thats how much the man new of genetics zip 0 none.So where did we come from.You dont like God your problem I dont want to here about it go to CA and wine with all the lib tars out there. — *Dave Taber, South Dakota*

Concord

Continued from front page

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

U.S. District Judge Jon DeGuilio issued a temporary injunction on Dec. 2 barring the school from holding the nativity pageant with student actors.

The updated complaint also challenges the nativity enactment as it was modified during the 2015 Christmas Spectacular, in which the school used mannequins in place of live student performers. FFRF and the ACLU

Brewster County

Continued from front page

crosses heighten the stigma associated with being an atheist and that he might receive more favorable treatment from the Sheriff's Office by hiding his atheism or by displaying pro-Christian messages," states FFRF's legal complaint.

FFRF seeks appropriate declaratory and injunctive relief, as well as nominal damages and attorney's fees.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor asserts that no government official has the right to promote his or her personal beliefs on government property.

"Whether it is a cross, a star and crescent, or a pentagram, law enforcement must remain neutral on matters of religion in order to foster public

confidence in their impartiality," Gaylor said.

Brewster County, located in the western part of Texas, has a population of less than 10,000.

The federal lawsuit against Dodson was filed in U.S. District Court, Western District of Texas, Alpine Division, on March 2. To view the full lawsuit online, go to ffrf.org/brewster.

The case is brought on behalf of the plaintiffs by Randall L. Kallinen of Houston, with FFRF Staff Attorneys Sam Grover and Patrick Elliott as co-counsel. Kallinen represented the late Kay Staley in her victorious litigation to remove a bible monument from the steps of the Harris County Courthouse.

See page 22 for Kay Staley's obituary.

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Mark W. Howington, 52, Maumee, OH: Assault, obstructing official business and carrying a concealed weapon. Howington, connections pastor at The Dwelling Place and a Christian radio host and music director at Proclaim FM, is charged with assaulting Debra Piechowski, 58, in a Target store women’s bathroom.

Piechowski alleged to police that as she entered the bathroom, Howington, a stranger to her, “slapped her butt cheek really hard” and left without saying a word. The police report said officers found him in the parking lot with a sharpened screwdriver in his pocket and a small container of Vaseline in his right sock.

Howington has resigned from the church and radio station. *Source: Toledo Blade/WTVG, 2-16-16*

Vicitacio Rivas-Valle, 68, Union City, NJ: 2 counts each of 3rd-degree endangering the welfare of a child and 4th-degree criminal sexual contact. Rivas-Valle is charged with criminal sexual contact with 2 teen girls who attended the church where he is pastor, the name of which was not disclosed.

Prosecutor Camelia Valdes said the crimes are alleged to have occurred in Clifton over a 2-year period. *Source: nj.com, 2-12-16*

Alfredo Pedraza, 50, Rockford, IL: 2 counts of aggravated criminal sexual abuse of a minor under age 13. Authorities launched an investigation after receiving 2 reports of alleged abuse in 2014.

Pedraza has not been active in any ministries since October 2014, said a release from the Catholic Diocese of Rockford. He came to the diocese from Colombia in 2013 and worked with the DeKalb Deanery and assisted as a priest at Sacred Heart Parish and Our Lady of Good Counsel in Aurora. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 2-11-16*

Jonathan Chang, 60, and Grace Chang, 57, Cupertino, CA: 9 counts of wire fraud and money laundering. The federal indictment alleges Jonathan Chang, an elder responsible for financial affairs at Home of Christ Church 4 in Saratoga, with his wife’s assistance, set up a supposedly charitable foundation called Home of Christ Associates that bilked the church and a foreign donor out of \$7.4 million from 2004-16.

The church is one of six Bay Area branches of the nondenominational Home of Christ Church. *Source: Gilroy Patch, 2-10-16*

Diego Rota, 45, Solza, Italy: Paying for sex with a minor. Rota, a Catholic parish priest, was among 11 men arrested for hiring minor males to have sex after a mother found a text message on her son’s phone. Giulio Dellavite, secretary general of the Diocese of Bergamo, said Rota has been suspended from the ministry. *Source: Vanguard, 2-10-16*

Mohammed Rana, 46, Queens, NY: Endangering the welfare of a child and sexual abuse. Rana, an instructor for a religious after-school program run by Masjid Abu Huraira Mosque and attended by the alleged 9-year-old victim, is accused of reaching under her clothing and grabbing her chest at least twice in November and January.

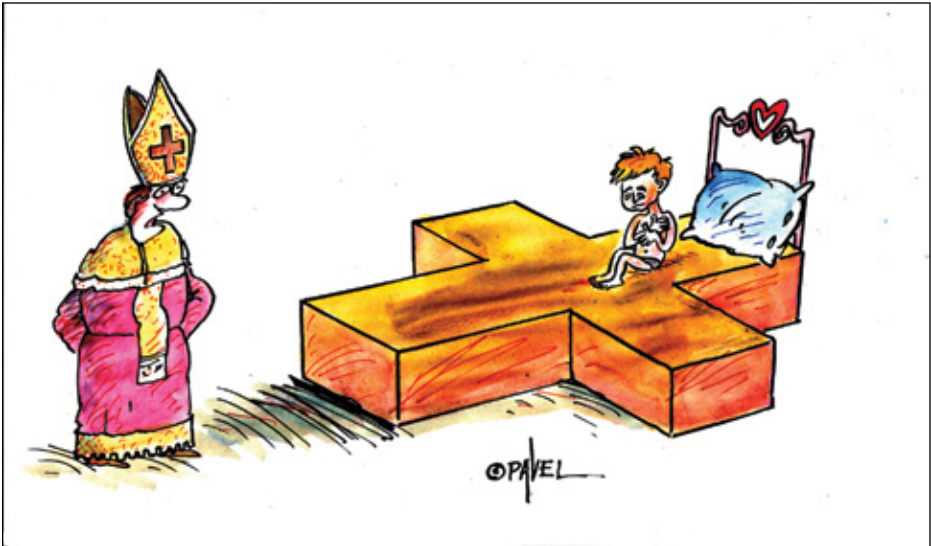
Investigators learned of the allegation after a sexual abuse prevention workshop using puppets was conducted at the girl’s public school and she spoke up. *Source: WPIX, 2-10-16*

Patrizio Benvenuti, 64, Canary Islands: Fraud and money laundering. Benvenuti, who worked for a Vatican legal tribunal as a military chaplain before retiring, is under house arrest after being charged in an alleged scheme that bilked elderly people out of \$34 million. An alleged accomplice, Christian Ventisette, 54, is still being sought.

“The funds disappeared, but they are not in my pockets or in those of the [charitable] foundation. They are in the pockets of the person who duped everyone,” Benvenuti said. *Source: The Guardian, 2-10-16*

John Feit, 83, Scottsdale, AZ: Murder. Feit, who left the Catholic priesthood in the 1970s, was indicted by a grand jury for the 1960 death of Irene Garza, 25, a former Miss South Texas who taught 2nd grade in McAllen. She was last seen on Easter Saturday. Her body was found several days later in an irrigation ditch about a mile away from Sacred Heart Catholic Church, where Feit had heard her confession. An autopsy showed she’d been raped and beaten to death.

Feit was prosecuted for assault with intent to rape in connection with another incident earlier that year. After a mistrial, he pleaded no contest to aggravated assault. Two priests came forward after the Garza case was reopened in 2002, claiming Feit made incriminating remarks to them, but he wasn’t charged. *Source: Fox*



News, 2-10-16

Ryan M. Dailey, 28, Las Cruces, NM: Battery on a household member. According to the arrest report, Dailey was praying with his mother at their home when he started yelling at her, angrily asking “who her soul belonged to.” When she tried to leave, Dailey allegedly held the front door shut with his foot and began hitting her on the back and head with a bible.

The report alleged Dailey then grabbed her as she was trying to leave through the back door and struck her again with the bible after she had fallen down. *Source: Sun-News, 2-9-16*

Harishchandra Rao, aka Appu Bhatta, 56, Kateel, India: Rape and criminal intimidation. Rao, assistant priest at Shri Durgaparameshwari Temple, is accused of impregnating a teen who did household chores for him. She alleged to police he coerced her into having intercourse at least 6 times since September. *Source: Times of India, 2-7-16*

Gordon W. Dominey, 63, Coquitlam, British Columbia: 5 counts each of sexual assault and gross indecency. Dominey was an Anglican priest who worked at the Edmonton Youth Development Centre, an incarceration facility, when the alleged assaults occurred in 1985-89. Staff Sgt. Devin Laforce said the accusers were between the ages of 14 and 17 at the time. *Source: CBC, 2-6-16*

Christopher Barnett and Carolyn Ivy, Florence, AL: Fraudulent use of a credit card. Barnett was pastor and Ivy was secretary at Lee Heights Baptist Church in 2009-14 when the alleged fraud involving about \$125,000 occurred. *Source: WHNT, 2-5-16*

Marie J. Hall, 24, Richfield, MN: 3rd-degree murder, criminal vehicular homicide and criminal vehicular operation. Hall’s SUV traveling at an estimated speed of about 80 mph rear-ended a Bloomington Public Works truck and killed a city employee removing snow Jan. 28. Answering why she was driving so fast, Hall said it was a way to “end [it] all” and that she had read in the bible that “you must die by the flesh to get into heaven,” according to the criminal complaint, and that “she was distraught over events in her life.”

Hall allegedly told police she got in her Ford Explorer with 2 bottles of vodka and downed the equivalent of 4 to 5 shots. *Source: WCCO, 2-4-16*

Dennis Theurer, 66, Fairview Heights, IL: 2 counts of predatory sexual assault. Theurer is a church elder and longtime youth choir leader at Edgemont Bible Church. The alleged incidents started in 2011 and ended in February.

“We are all brokenhearted about this. This is a sucker punch. It came out of nowhere,” said Edgemont pastor Doug White. *Source: KMOV, 2-4-16*

Prem Singh Parmar, 35, Kalbadevi, India: Rape, outraging a woman’s modesty and criminal intimidation. Parmar, a priest at Hindu temples in the Mumbai area, is accused of drugging, raping and blackmailing a 38-year-old married woman.

“The victim, in her statement, has said that in 2013, Parmar called her to his residence saying he has saved some special prasad [religious offering of food] for her, which he offered her. After consuming it, the victim fell unconscious,” a police statement said. “When she regained consciousness, Parmar showed her some compromising pictures of her that he had taken while she was unconscious. He then threatened to send these pictures to her in-laws and forced himself on her.”

The exploitation allegedly continued until January, when the woman told her husband. *Source: The Hindu, 2-4-16*

Joseph L. Niemeyer Jr., 54, Walton, KY: Sexual abuse, rape and sodomy. Niemeyer and his wife were youth ministry leaders at New Banklick Baptist Church. Pastor Tim Cochran

said it isn’t clear if the alleged victim, a girl under age 12, had a connection to the church.

“It’s like a kick in the gut. He was my friend. I’m shocked really. Never in a million years would I have guessed anything like this,” Cochran said. *Source: WXIX, 2-3-16*

Felix “Cuba” Delgado, 40, Bridgeport, CT: Police searching Delgado’s apartment during a drug investigation arrested him on a warrant from Massachusetts for alleged disinterment of human remains from a mausoleum. Delgado is the second Connecticut Santeria priest accused of stealing human remains in Massachusetts. Santeria is an Afro-Cuban religion that uses some elements of Catholicism. *Source: WNBC, 2-2-16*

Willie Tiller Jr., 53, Oklahoma City, OK: 10 counts of forgery, Tiller, pastor at Tabernacle Baptist Church, is accused of forging a church member’s signature when he was pastor at First Baptist Church in Ardmore for nearly 10 years.

District Attorney Craig Ladd alleged that for more than 2 years, Tiller wrote checks to himself from the church’s day care account totaling about \$12,000. *Source: KXII, 2-2-16*

‘The cheapest baby girl under 3 would be good,’ seminary student Joel Wright allegedly wrote on Craigslist.

Brent Hawkes, 65, Toronto: Indecent assault and gross indecency. Hawkes, senior pastor at Metropolitan Community Church, a Protestant denomination with congregations in 37 countries, is charged with alleged sex assaults in Nova Scotia in 1974-75 when he was a teacher, allegations he denies. *Source: CBC, 2-2-16*

Joel A. Wright, 23, Columbus, OH: Traveling with the intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct with a minor and aggravated sexual abuse of a child. Wright, a Catholic seminary student at Pontifical College Josephinum and former Franciscan University student, was arrested in San Diego on his way to Mexico.

He had unknowingly been exchanging emails with undercover federal agents, who got a tip Wright was seeking female children in Tijuana for sex on Craigslist. According to the criminal complaint, Wright said he planned to pay parents to “adopt/own” their child. “The cheapest baby girl under 3 would be good,” he allegedly wrote. *Source: NY Times, 2-1-16*

Arthur E. Lehr, 62, Taylors, SC: Engaging a minor for sexual performance and 2 counts of criminal sexual misconduct with a minor. Two of the 3 alleged incidents date to 1989, and authorities said more accusers may come forward. Lehr is a former pastor who held bible study at his home. *Source: WSOA, 1-29-16*

Frank J. Selas III, aka Frank Szeles, 76, Bonita, CA: 2 two counts of obscene behavior with a juvenile. Charges stem from the late 1970s when Selas hosted the “Mr. Wonder” TV show in Louisiana and was barred from contacting children from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Authorities fielded parental complaints in 1979 about Selas’ behavior on a Cub Scout camping trip and he was “removed from all positions related to children” after failing to comply with the church’s child protection policies, said church spokesman Eric Hawkins, adding that Selas now belongs to a Mormon congregation in the San Diego area.

The man arrested by the U.S. Marshals Service goes by Frank Szeles and advertised swim lessons and other activities for children. *Source: Daily Mail, 1-29-16*

Richard H. Jackson, 61, Eugene, OR: 23 counts of sexual abuse, including sodomy and unlawful penetration, related to alleged assaults on his adopted daughter, now 22. She alleges the assaults occurred when she was between the ages of 3 and 12. Jackson held a volunteer leadership position at Willamette Christian Center and owned an insurance agency. Neighbors said he recently spray-painted over his slogan “the most beloved insurance agent in town.”

His attorney George Derr said a bail hearing that Jackson has admitted to sexually abusing his daughter but disputes some of claims about frequency and type of abuse. *Source: Register-Guard, 1-28-16*

Timothy Stallings, 56, Elizabeth City, NC: Larceny by employee. Stallings is accused of taking \$980 in offerings in October and November at Calvary Baptist Church, where he was pastor. *Source: WITN, 1-27-16*

Avraham Shemesh, Ashdod, Israel: Sexual harassment. Shemesh, a haredi rabbi and elementary teacher, is charged with fondling and kissing the genitals of 3 boys aged 13 and 14. The indictment alleges he told the boys that for them to be judged fit to lead prayers, he had to see if they had at least 2 pubic hairs (as required by religious law). *Source: Haaretz, 1-26-16*

Kentrell Jackson, 18, Baton Rouge, LA: Sexual battery and 3 counts of indecent behavior with a juvenile. Jackson ministered to youth at Jesus Name Apostolic Church, where his grandmother is pastor. He allegedly told detectives he has molested 18 boys and girls between ages 6 and 13, starting when he was 8. More charges are expected. *Source: The Advocate, 1-25-16*

Marquis Kidd, 32, Upland, CA: Oral copulation of a child under age 18 and 4 counts of molesting a child under age 18. Kidd, an elder and youth minister at Mt. Sinai Church of God in Pomona, is accused of molesting a boy under age 18. *Source: San Bernardino Sun, 1-25-16*

Ryan L. Roberson, 38, Rainbow City, AL: Producing pornography with a person under the age of 17. Roberson, youth pastor at The Church at Mercy Hill, allegedly made and shared a video of a girl he was “close with,” according to police. *Source: WIAT, 1-22-16*

Jason N. Ellis, 40, Portsmouth, VA: 9 counts of sexual assault. Ellis, an elder at Deliverance Worship Center, is accused of showing a teen boy pornography starting in 2014, asking him for sex and forcing himself on the boy off church property. *Source: WVEC, 1-6-16*

Pleaded / Convicted

John J. Farrell, 62, Armidale, NSW, Australia: Guilty by trial of 10 counts of sexual abuse for molesting 3 altar boys between 1980-84. Farrell was defrocked from the Catholic priesthood in 2005. He has already pleaded guilty to 40 other child sex abuse charges, some involving girls as young as 5, and is awaiting sentencing for those convictions. *Source: Morning Herald, 2-17-16*

Samuel McCullough, 84, Rochester, NY: Guilty of 3rd-degree attempted rape and endangering the welfare of a child. McCullough, former pastor at Sharing and Caring Christian Ministry, was convicted of crimes occurring between August 2014 and July 2015 involving a child under age 17.

“We commend [the victim’s] courage in assisting in the prosecution of this child predator. We are hopeful that she may begin to heal now that Mr. McCullough has been brought to justice,” said prosecutor Meredith Vacca. *Source: Democrat & Chronicle, 2-11-16*

Delso Erazo, 70, The Woodlands, TX: 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of indecency with a child. Erazo, pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Monte de Sinai, admitted molesting his niece for about 9 years, starting when she was 6. He pleaded guilty just before jury selection was set to start. *Source: The Courier, 2-10-16*

Mark A. Broussard, 60, Lake Charles, LA: Guilty of 2 counts of aggravated rape, molestation of a juvenile, aggravated oral sexual battery and aggravated rape. The jury vote was 11-1 (2 states, Oregon and Louisiana, require a 10-2 majority in criminal cases except for capital crimes).

Broussard molested 2 altar boys while he was a priest at Our Lady Queen of Heaven and St. Henry Catholic Church in the 1980s and 1990s. Allegations included abuse inside the confessional. *Source: KPLC, 2-5-16*

Dan W. Haby Jr., 52, Alvarado, TX: Pleading guilty to indecency with a child. Haby, pastor of Cowboy Church, signed a plea agreement during his trial for molesting a teen church member 16 years ago. The agreement calls for dismissal of the conviction if Haby abides by the



terms of his probation for 7 years and registers as a sex offender.

The victim testified Haby told him it was his calling from God to help Haby relieve stress so he could be a better pastor.

Another man, Jacob Thibodeaux, accused Haby in 2014 of inappropriate contact. That led to a guilty plea, \$700 fine and sex offender treatment. *Source: Star-Telegram, 2-1-16*

Gerald Searle, 51, Liberty Center, OH: Pleaded guilty to receipt of material involving the sexual exploitation of a child. Searle, who resigned for “personal reasons” as pastor at Shiloh Christian Union Church in Delta, is accused of possessing child pornography between 2013-15.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Tracey Tangeman told the court Searle favored images of boys aged 12 to 14 and that he placed 5 orders for file downloads using a church billing address. *Source: Toledo Blade, 1-22-16*

Otis Holland, 59, Las Vegas, NV: Convicted by jury of 15 counts of sexual assault and lewdness with a child. Holland, pastor of United Faith Church, was accused of crimes against 3 girls younger than 16. A day before the verdict, 22 more charges were filed alleging assaults on 5 more alleged victims.

Prosecutors said Holland told girls and adult women that sex was a path to spirituality. Parents would send girls to him for counseling for things like skipping school and smoking cigarettes. Testimony showed his limousine had a back seat that reclined into a bed. A 14-year-old testified Holland used a sex toy on her there to resolve her “sexual hangups.” *Source: Review-Journal/ABC, 1-21-16*

Sentenced

Mark Haynes, 56, Westtown, PA: 20 years in prison and a \$15,000 fine after pleading guilty to child pornography charges involving 2 teens. Haynes, most recently pastor at Sts. Simon and Jude Catholic Parish, had sexual contact ranging from online conversations to molestation with at least 30 children between 1985 and 2014, prosecutors alleged.

One of the victims, a 12-year-old girl, responded to Haynes’ request to send him explicit photos. He posed online as a 15-year-old named Katie Caponetti. *Source: philly.com, 2-17-16*

Carlos Smith, 55, Saucier, MS: 22 years in prison without possibility of parole after a jury found him guilty of sexual assault. The victim testified she was 11 when Smith, pastor of Unity Baptist Church, started molesting her in 2011 at church and at a family member’s home, which continued until she was 14. The girl told Judge Roger Clark she has forgiven Smith, who is related to her.

He was convicted of indecent exposure involving a minor in 2006. *Source: Sun Herald, 2-15-16*

David F. Pople, 68, Safety Bay, Australia: 3 years in prison after pleading guilty to 6 counts of sex abuse and breaching bail conditions. Pople, a Jehovah’s Witness elder, admitted molesting 2 teen boys between 1989-96.

One of the teens reported the sexual assaults to elders in 1997 but didn’t file a police report until 2014. Pople was forced out the church for being “insufficiently repentant” in 1997 but was readmitted the next year.

Judge Troy Sweeney told Pople that she believed he was genuinely remorseful, adding that “A message must be sent that child abuse is abhorrent and will not be tolerated by any civilized society. They were vulnerable because they were young and because you were a church elder and their boss.” *Source: The West Australian, 2-13-16*

Ronald Léger, 77, Winnipeg, Manitoba: 2 years in prison after pleading guilty to 3 counts of sexual assault and sexual interference with a person under age 16. The charges stemmed from incidents dating from 1984. Léger, who was defrocked as a Catholic priest last year, also founded Teen Stop Jeunesse, which states on its website: “We offer various programs in a safe atmosphere for youth to come and hang out and participate in many of our programs.” *Source: CBC, 2-10-16*

Paul Clarke, 71, Manchester, England: 8 months in prison suspended, sex offender registry and computer restrictions after plead-

ing guilty to possessing more than 3,000 pornographic images of children. Clarke was pastor at St. Anthony Catholic Parish, where computers were seized. “All the charges involved images taken from the Internet,” a police spokesman said. *Source: BBC, 2-6-16*

Oscar Sanchez, 35, Lowell, MA: 15 to 18 years in prison after being found guilty by a jury of 4 counts each of aggravated child rape and rape of a child by force, 2 counts of rape and 1 count each of indecent assault and battery on a person under 14 and indecent assault and battery on a person over 14. His wife, **Luisa Osario-Sanchez, 43,** was found guilty of assault and battery and reckless endangerment of a child and was sentenced to 1 year. They co-pastored the Church of God the Holy Branch.

The victim, now 19, lived with the couple and testified the abuse started when she was 6. Sanchez would come to her bed at night under the guise of praying with her. She alleged that fondling eventually escalated to rape over a period of 10 years and that Osario-Sanchez let it continue and would physically assault her out of jealousy. *Source: Lowell Sun, 1-30-16*

Winston Cramer, 51, Tucville, Guyana: Guilty of causing the 2014 death of a bicyclist by dangerous driving. Cramer, pastor of Georgetown Nazarene Church, ironically lives at 162 Go Slow Ave. He was ordered to pay a \$100,000 fine or serve 18 months in jail.

Pauline Simon, common-law wife of the victim, agreed to a \$500,000 settlement for her loss and injuries to her 12-year-old daughter in the same accident. *Source: Stabroek News, 1-29-16*

Vasan Josea Oatis, McComb, MS: 5 years in prison suspended with sex offender registry after pleading guilty to criminal sexual activity with certain individuals and offenders incarcerated on correctional supervision. Oatis, pastor of Walker’s Chapel Free Will Baptist Church and a former police officer, had consensual sex with inmate Rhianna Nichols while she was incarcerated at Marion-Walthall Correctional Facility in 2013-14.

Oatis started a sexual relationship with Nichols when she was on a work detail at Columbia City Hall, said District Attorney Hal Kitrell. *Source: Hattiesburg American, 1-29-16*

Jacob D. Kepple, 36, Charlottesville, VA: 5 years in prison with all but 30 days suspended after pleading guilty to taking indecent liberties with a child. Kepple was a youth minister at First Baptist Church in 2009-11 when he became acquainted with the victim, a high school sophomore who attended the church.

First Baptist pastor Don Hicks said he first heard allegations in 2014 and contacted police. Kepple resigned soon after. Speaking after sentencing, Hicks said he was glad that Kepple confessed to “save the young lady all of this pain” [of testifying before a jury]. *Source: Daily Progress, 1-28-16*

Fr. Haynes posed online as a 15-year-old named Katie Caponetti.

Craig Burden, 29, W. Lafayette, IN: 7 years in prison with 3 years suspended after pleading guilty to attempted child exploitation and possession of child pornography. Burden, Calvary Baptist music minister, was arrested after his wife found child porn on his computer in July along with video of a juvenile girl in her underwear in a bathroom. None of the video was recorded at the church. *Source: Journal & Courier, 1-27-16*

Michael R. Jones, 45, Norfolk, VA: 2 years in prison after pleading guilty to secretly recording another clergyman’s wife and daughter in a bedroom and bathroom of their home. Jones, pastor of Norfolk Apostolic Church, received a suspended 3-year sentence for burglary for entering the home in 2014 to install 3 cameras, which contained nude images of the mother and her 19-year-old daughter. *Source: Virginian-Pilot, 1-26-16*

Jeffrey B. Fehr, 29, Manitoba Province: 6 months in jail and 2 years’ probation after pleading guilty to possession of child pornography.

The victim, in her early teens when Fehr asked her for nude photos in 2012 when he was a church youth group volunteer, said in her impact statement that Fehr “was a friend, a mentor and a role model. However, he took advantage of my vulnerability.”

Evidence showed she had sent him 11 photos of herself, some in her underwear and others nude. *Source: Leader-Post, 1-20-16*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Catholic priest **Denis Heames**, the **Diocese of Saginaw** and **St. Mary’s University Parish** in Mt. Pleasant, MI, are defendants in a suit filed by Megan Winans, a Central Michigan University student who had a sexual relationship with Heames. The suit alleges battery, defamation, breach of fiduciary duty, fraud, intentional infliction of emotional distress and negligent supervision and retention.

Heames, ordained in 2008 and now living in Canada, was placed on leave in 2014 for “boundary violations.” Winans alleges he started a sexual relationship with her after she went to him for “spiritual direction and counseling” and that he then hired her as a paid parish media intern so he could “work closely with her without raising suspicion among parishioners and employees.”

According to a university investigation, they were intimate for the first time and several other times at the home of Heames’ spiritual director **Trudy McCaffrey**, who is also a defendant. *Source: Central Michigan Life, 2-8-16*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Archdiocese of Hartford, CT**, has agreed to pay former altar boy William Dotson \$500,000 to settle a 2010 suit alleging Catholic priest Stephen Bzdyra molested him over a 3-year period in the 1980s in New Haven and Naugatuck.

Dotson also alleged Bzdyra paid him hush money and threatened to report his mother for violating welfare guidelines, saying he would be taken away from his family if he spoke up. *Source: Hartford Courant, 2-10-16*

The **Catholic Church in Hawaii** has agreed to settle suits involving 63 plaintiffs who allege child sex abuse by clergy and teachers. It’s estimated settlements will total about \$20 million. At least 11 suits are still pending.

First Insurance of Hawaii, which provided liability coverage to the Catholic Church and Damien Memorial School for decades, has refused to fund any settlements in the 40 suits that went to mediation last fall and this year, according to a lawsuit filed by the church and school. *Source: Hawaii News Now, 1-29-16*

Legal Developments

The **Catholic Church in India** has lifted the suspension of **Joseph P. Jeyapaul**, 61, a priest convicted last year of sexually assaulting a 14-year-old Minnesota girl in 2004. Bishop Arulappan Amalraj of the Diocese of Ootacamund had referred the case to the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the suspension was lifted on the Vatican’s advice, diocesan spokesman Sebastian Selvanathan said.

Jeyapaul fled but was arrested in India by Interpol in 2012 and extradited to the U.S., where he pleaded guilty. Charges involving alleged rape of another teen girl were dropped in a plea bargain.

Attorney Jeff Anderson, who represented the women in their successful civil case, said both are “quite upset, disturbed and feel deeply betrayed that they would have the audacity to consider even putting him back in ministry.” *Source: AP, 2-15-16*

Joseph Maurizio, 70, Central City, PA: U.S. District Judge Kim Gibson ruled Maurizio, convicted of molesting orphans in Honduras, should not get a new trial and set sentencing for March 2. “Given the substantial evidence that exists in this case . . . the court finds it unlikely that a jury at a second trial would acquit defendant,” Gibson wrote.

Attorney Steven Passarello had argued that a statement by an alleged victim that Maurizio did not molest him was improperly withheld by the prosecution. Passarello said he will appeal to the 3rd Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals. *Source:*

AP, 2-7-16

Eliezer Berland, 78, Israeli leader of an offshoot Hasidic sect who fled from Israel to South Africa after being charged with child molestation, is under fire after a death threat was issued against South Africa’s chief rabbi Warren Goldstein. Goldstein had decreed that Berland and his entourage should get no help from the Jewish community.

After police raided a hotel where Berland had been staying, a post on his website announced Goldstein had the halachic status of a “rodef.” Under Talmudic law, a person so designated may be killed with impunity as a self-defense measure. *Source: Jerusalem Post, 2-2-16*

Velio Estrada, Edmond, OK, pastor of El Tabernaculo de Fe, had his \$475,000 private home foreclosed on and owes \$24,000 in back taxes, public records show. The Oklahoma District Council of the Assemblies of God and Estrada are embroiled in a dispute. He has several properties listed under his name as church trustee and is accused by the council of using church money for his private home. *Source: KOCO, 1-27-16*

Allegations

Howard W. White Jr., Bedford, PA, a retired Anglican priest, is under investigation after a woman alleged he molested her as a minor while he was rector at Grace Church in the Mountains in Waynesville, NC, where he served from 1984 to 2006.

White is also among a half dozen former employees at St. George’s School in Middletown, RI, involved in a probe of abuse at the prep school. He was fired as assistant chaplain there in 1974 but went on to work at 2 other schools. *Source: Providence Journal, 2-6-16*

Removed / Resigned

Wayne Buchanan, Tremont, ME, resigned as pastor of St. Brendan’s Anglican Parish. Bishop Julian Dobbs said police have been looking into a situation that preceded Buchanan’s departure but declined further comment. Buchanan also teaches biblical languages at Grace Evangelical College and Seminary in Bangor. *Source: Bangor Daily News, 2-12-16*

Malachy Onuoha, pastor of St. Patrick’s Catholic Church in Gattton, was suspended from the ministry by the Archdiocese of Brisbane, Australia, during an investigation of unspecified misconduct in his home country Nigeria “some years ago.” *Source: Gattton Star, 2-12-16*

Antonio J. Velez, a Tertiary Capuchins priest, has been removed from duties in the Catholic Diocese of Alexandria, LA. Bishop Ronald Herzog made the decision because of allegations of misconduct with a female minor in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, which has notified police. *Source: Town Talk, 2-11-16*

David Janney, 61, Orlando, FL, resigned as senior pastor at Orlando Baptist Church in the wake of a lawsuit alleging he and church leaders tried to buy the silence of a woman he was having an affair with. Plaintiff Arlene Miranda, 46, a single mother, alleges she was offered weekly payments to keep quiet and sign a non-disclosure agreement, which she did.

The church “disputes the vast majority” of Miranda’s claims and said the agreement she signed was an attempt to “provide aid, support and counseling” to her. It said the church would pay her \$375 a week until May 27 and \$200 a week until July 29. *Source: Orlando Sentinel, 2-10-16*

Charles Bodziak, 74, St. Michael, PA, was put on leave as pastor of St. Michael’s Catholic Parish. According to the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, officials are reexamining an accusation of sexual misconduct involving minors that dates back more than 30 years. *Source: WTAJ, 1-25-16*

Paul Symonds will live as a retired Jesuit priest barred from public ministry, announced the Catholic Diocese of Down and Connor, Ireland. Allegations of misconduct date back to the 1970s, when he worked in England. He was arrested in 2009 during a child abuse probe but wasn’t charged. The church started its own investigation in 2011. *Source: Belfast Telegraph, 1-23-16*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

In memoriam

2008 Freethinker of Year Kay Staley dies

Kay Staley, who was awarded FFRF’s 2008 Freethinker of the Year Award, died Jan. 17 in Houston at age 72.

Staley, an FFRF member, was born Oct. 8, 1943, in Tulsa, Okla., and graduated from the University of Houston Law Center after earning her undergraduate degree from Baylor University in 1964. She then became a real estate broker.

She became the plaintiff in the case to have the bible removed from a monument at the Harris County Courthouse in Texas. The court found that the display violated the First Amendment. For this Kay was awarded the FFRF Freethinker of the Year honor.

“The county really tried to contend, number one, that it was not a religious display,” Staley said during her speech at the 2008 FFRF convention. “Their whole case was based on that it was a monument, not a religious display. I don’t know where they figured they were going to go with that. I won’t bore you with the legal arguments, but the judge decided that a reasonable observer would think that the county was endorsing this display, and so he thought that made it unconstitutional. And when the county argued that they were not appearing at the rally in their official capacities, the judge said they were in their official capacity attending a rally during business hours. So we got a wonderful opinion in the district court.”

Kay was the lead plaintiff in FFRF’s federal lawsuit in 2011 against Texas



Kay Staley is shown giving her 2008 acceptance speech for FFRF’s Freethinker of the Year Award at the national convention in Chicago.

Gov. Rick Perry for infamously proposing and promoting a “Day of Prayer and Fasting for our Nation’s Challenges” at Reliant Stadium in Houston, inviting citizens to “turn to Jesus and ask for God’s forgiveness.”

Kay was also a member of Humanists of Houston, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, ACLU, Houston Church of Freethought and Final Exit Network.

“Kay Staley’s presence, charm and personality inspired others not only to be activists, but to have fun while raising a ruckus,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “In her memory, let’s all redouble our efforts to make a fuss and speak up when we encounter religious coercion, especially by our government.”



Standing in the Patrick O’Reiley Editorial Wing at FFRF’s offices in Madison, Wisc. are Freethought Today Editor PJ Slinger, FFRF’s new Communications Director Amit Pal and FFRF Graphic Designer Jake Swenson.

Editorial wing named in Patrick O’Reiley’s honor

Patrick O’Reiley was a major benefactor for FFRF and following his death, FFRF named the new editorial wing in its Madison offices after him.

O’Reiley was born Jan. 31, 1924, in New Haven, Ind. and died Aug. 12, 2013, at his home in San Diego after an extended bout with prostate cancer at the age of 89.

He was a mortar gunner in the 42nd Infantry Division during World War II and was awarded the Bronze Star for bravery during a battle in France in January 1945. He married Anna Popa on Jan. 1, 1947, and they lived together until her death in 2009. After mov-

ing to San Diego in the 1950s, Patrick worked in different positions within city and county governments before getting a position as the San Diego Zoo’s personnel director in 1962. He retired in 2008, and his 46-year tenure made him the longest-serving in the zoo’s history.

He was generous with his money and time, and made gifts to the San Diego Humane Society, the San Diego Foundation and the Nature Conservancy, and, of course, FFRF. He is survived by one son, Tim, who lives in Las Vegas.

Secular invocations

Rep. Juan Mendez Arizona Statehouse March 3, 2016

The traditional opening prayer given prior to the start of the session of the Arizona House was given by atheist Democrat Juan Mendez, but since it did not reference a higher power, Republicans in the House were upset and had a Baptist minister give another prayer that gave thanks to God.

After Mendez’ invocation, House Majority Leader Steve Montenegro said the decision not to pray to God didn’t meet the rules he issued for the opening prayer.

Earlier this year, Mendez signed up to give an invocation, but Montenegro blocked him, citing an unofficial rule that all invocations had to be made to a higher power.

“Prayer, as commonly understood and in the long-honored tradition of the Arizona House of Representatives, is a solemn request for guidance and help from God,” Montenegro wrote. He said anything else, including a moment of silence, does not count.

Seráh Blain was at the meeting and told Hemant Mehta what happened, which he published on his Friendly Atheist blog: “Immediately after Mendez gave it, House Majority leader Montenegro rose for a point of order saying that the rule calling for the House to open with a prayer was not fulfilled. Speaker of the House [Andy] Tobin said the point was well taken and called on a minister waiting in the wings to give a prayer to our heavenly father. Representative [Rusty] Bowers took a point of personal privilege to accuse Mendez of impugning people who pray.”

Here is the invocation Mendez gave:

“We are here today, as everyday, to represent our



State Rep. Juan Mendez, who received FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award in 2013 for giving a previous secular invocation.

pluralistic society — of which I am grateful to again be included in.

To represent that beauty of our multi-cultural state that reflects our diversity of color, of heritage, of religion and lack thereof.

Spanning across communities both urban and rural; we are the same. Yearning to better our lives. Looking to better the lives of others.

Let us embrace those that want to help our society grow. Let us accept each other for our differences. Let us work to help those we represent flourish.

We need not tomorrow’s promise of reward, to do good deeds today. For some may seek the assistance of a higher power with hands in the air, there are those of us that are prepared to assist directly, with our hands to the earth.

Take these words to heart as we move this great state of Arizona forward: It is our responsibility to honor the Constitution and the secular equality it brings.

And so shall it be.”



Be sure to disinfect, too
FFRF member Matt Gaines of Missouri found this sign while driving past the Knoxville Community Church in Knoxville, Mo.

NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER

Contest

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

It’s up to you!

We’d like to see secular citizens flood government meetings with secular invocations that illustrate why government prayers are unnecessary, ineffective, embarrassing, exclusionary, divisive or just plain silly.

The “best” secular invocation will be invited to open FFRF’s annual convention, receiving an all-expenses-paid trip (next year in Pittsburgh on the weekend of Oct. 7–9, 2016), a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

LEARN MORE AT:
ffrf.org/outreach/nothing-fails-like-prayer

FFRF on the road



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker (fifth from left) participated in a debate with the George Washington University Secular Society. Shown in the photo are, from left, Irissa Cisternino, Robert Pattillo, GW Secular Society professor Derek Malone, GW associate professor of philosophy and religion James Midkiff, Dan Barker, Taylor Lacaillade and Maria O’Sullivan.



Students with the Humanists on Campus group pose with Dan Barker at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Barker spoke Feb. 8 at the Florida Free Speech Forum on “The Battle of Church and State.” Later that day Barker talked about his book, *Life Driven Purpose*, at the Bob Graham Center at the University of Florida.



Dan Barker joined a large freethinking contingent in this picture on Feb. 23 in the Oklahoma state Capitol in Oklahoma City after speaking during the “Atheist Day” celebration, which was sponsored by various atheist groups and communities in Oklahoma.



In Tallahassee, Fla., on Feb. 20, Dan Barker discussed his new book, *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*, at the Southeast Secular Student Regional Conference at Florida State University.

Arm yourself with knowledge

Enclosed in this issue is a complimentary copy of FFRF’s newest brochure, “Top 10 Public School State/Church Violations and How to Stop Them: A Guide to Keeping Schools Secular.” The brochure includes court precedents and the best succinct arguments against religious encroachments in public schools.

Feel free to pass it on to your friendly neighborhood public school superintendent or other school officials, or share with local secular groups. This brochure, printed on 80-pound paper (heavier than what is enclosed) is available for purchase in quantity. These are ideal to send public schools in your area and to distribute at tables and events. FFRF has included open space on the brochure’s final panel for a chapter or local group to stamp or place its own contact information.

FFRF is making these available to you at cost (including postage). Order from FFRF.org/shop in quantities of 12 (\$3), 25 (\$4), 50 (\$7) and 100 (\$10). You may also order via mail by specifying item and sending a check or money order payable to: FFRF, PO Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

TOP 10

Public School

STATE | CHURCH

Violations

And How to Stop Them

A Guide to Keeping Schools Secular

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION foundation

They said what?

Girl Scouts is exhibiting a troubling pattern of behavior and it is clear to me that as they move in the ways of the world it is becoming increasingly incompatible with our Catholic values.

St. Louis Archbishop Robert J. Carlson, in a letter to “priests, scout leaders and the faithful,” about how the Girl Scouts program supports transgender rights, homosexuality, contraception, abortion rights, “role models in conflict with Catholic values, such as Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan,” and organizations “such as Amnesty International, Coalition for Adolescent Girls, OxFam and more.”

The New York Times, 2-19-16



speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington D.C. 3-5-16, NBC News

If I were president, I would work very hard on eliminating the ban on Christianity in our public schools.

Former presidential candidate Ben Carson, speaking with Pat Robertson at Regent University, on how he would end a ban that doesn’t exist

Right Wing Watch, 2-28-16

This idea of a separation of church and state is a myth. You can’t separate ’em.

Mike Gonzalez, campaign chairman for Ted Cruz

MSNBC, 2-16-16

Just like you have antidepressants that serve to cheer up a person and make them feel better about themselves and their life, CruzCare will make it legal, and even mandatory later on, to prescribe similar medication to atheists, so that they forget about the “I don’t believe in God” or “I am not religious” crap, and come back to their faith and church as normal people do. And all of that will be done completely free of charge.

Rafael Cruz, son of presidential candidate Ted Cruz

Newslo.com, 2-7-16



Just an effort to honor our veterans and the American Legions and the great country that we live in. We thought it was important to put the sign back up.

Kansas state Rep. Lynn Jenkins (R), on her decision to put the “God Bless America” banner on her office building after FFRF had it removed from the Pittsburg, Kan., post office

FourStatesHomepage.com, 2-17-16

We are one liberal justice away from the Supreme Court ruling that government can take religious liberty away and force every one of us to violate our faith on penalty of prison or fine.

Presidential candidate Ted Cruz,

Writing fellowship seeks applicants

The Mesa Refuge, a writer’s retreat in Point Reyes Station, Calif., is seeking applicants for a new two-week fellowship for writers working in the areas of freethought, humanism and separation of church and state.

Book authors, filmmakers and journalists in print, radio and television are invited to apply at www.mesarefuge.org.

The fellowship was founded by FFRF member Richard Kirschman, an inventor, activist and philanthropist, who said, “In a land where freedom to

speak one’s mind is valued in both law and culture, criticism of religion or its consequences is still widely suppressed and often culturally punished. This fellowship is intended to both recognize and support the work of individuals dedicated to the separation of church and state, atheism and agnosticism.”

The Mesa Refuge has provided time and space for more than 700 progressive writers during the last 18 years. Three writers share a beautiful residence overlooking a tidal wetland.

Weekend of Oct. 7–9 in Pittsburgh

Join us for FFRF’s 39th national convention

The Freedom From Religion Foundation’s 39th annual convention will be held Oct. 7-9 in Pittsburgh, one of the top-rated cities in the country.

The national convention will be held at the Wyndham Grand hotel in downtown Pittsburgh. See the bottom of this page for more information and registration form. More speakers will be announced as they confirm.

Speakers

(These speakers also will be signing copies of their books during the convention.)

Susan Jacoby is the author of 11 books, most recently, *Strange Gods: A Secular History of Conversion*, which will come out in March. Her articles have appeared frequently in the op-ed pages of The New York Times, including one in February, “Sick and Tired of ‘God Bless America,’” (which can be read on Page 3 of this issue).



Jerry A. Coyne, professor emeritus in the Department of Ecology and Evolution at the University of Chicago, has written 119 scientific papers and 150 popular articles, book reviews, and col-



umns, and his new book *Faith vs. Fact: Why Science and Religion Are Incompatible*. Coyne plans to speak on the topic of “Evolution and Atheism: Best Friends Forever.” He previously was honored with FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

Lawrence Krauss is an internationally known theoretical physicist and author and is director of the Origins Project at Arizona State University. He is the author of nine books, including best-sellers *The Physics of Star Trek* and *A Universe from Nothing*. He recently wrote an op-ed for The New Yorker, “Put an atheist on the Supreme Court,” (which can be read on Page 5).



Lauri Lebo is an author, radio station owner and former reporter from Harrisburg, Pa., where she was the principal local reporter covering the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* trial in 2004-05 while working for the York Daily Record. After more than 20 years as a journalist, she left reporting to write *The Devil in Dover*, a book about the Kitzmiller trial over so-called “Intelligent Design.” She will be named FFRF’s Freethought Heroine.



Photo courtesy of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

Fallingwater, located in rural Pennsylvania, was built in the late 1930s over a 30-foot waterfall.

Join FFRF on Fallingwater tour

On Friday, Oct. 7, prior to the start of the convention, FFRF will be hosting a group tour of the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Fallingwater, the elegant and awe-inspiring home ingeniously built over Bear Run waterfall.

The \$40 ticket includes admission to Fallingwater and round-trip coach bus transportation. There is also an optional, although highly recommended, box lunch available for \$12. (The cafeteria is expected to be too busy to accommodate FFRF on this tight schedule.) The 43-mile route to the captivating Fallingwater is through scenic Pennsylvania countryside during the most

beautiful time of the year.

Extra rooms have been set aside at the Wyndham Grand for FFRF members for Thursday night for those interested in the tour. The buses leave every half hour beginning at 7:50 a.m.

Note: The tour can be a challenging walk for some. There is a ¼-mile walk to and from the home on uneven gravel paths, a one-hour walking tour, and more than 100 steps. If the walk to or from the house would be difficult for you, please let us know so that we can make arrangements. There is no wheelchair access. Also, no children under the age of 6 are allowed.

REGISTRATION

ONLINE: ffrf.org/outreach/convention/2016-registration

MAIL: Return with payment to: FFRF, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701

CONVENTION

	NUMBER REGISTERING	COST
FFRF member(s)	_____ x \$60	\$ _____
Non-member spouse or companion accompanying a member	_____ x \$65	\$ _____
Non-member(s) <small>Save \$5 by becoming an FFRF Member. (\$40 Individual Membership)</small>	_____ x \$105	\$ _____
Child/Student(s) – Free with copy of student ID	_____ x FREE	\$ _____

FOOD

Indicate number of orders per entrée.

Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast Buffet	_____ x \$30*	\$ _____
____ Grand Breakfast	____ Vegan Tofu Scramble	
____ Grand Breakfast Gluten Free	____ Vegan Tofu Scramble Gluten Free	
Saturday Night Dinner	_____ x \$45*	\$ _____
____ Herb Grilled Chicken	____ Tuscan Grilled Vegetable Stack (vegetarian/vegan)	
____ Herb Grilled Chicken Gluten Free	____ Tuscan Grilled Vegetable Stack (vegetarian/vegan) Gluten Free	

*Includes 20% Gratuity & Sales Tax

FALLINGWATER FRIDAY BUS TOUR

Bus tour and entrance fee	_____ x \$40	\$ _____
Box lunch (turkey sandwich on whole wheat)	_____ x \$12	\$ _____
Box lunch (Greek wrap with hummus, veggies)	_____ x \$12	\$ _____
Box lunch (gluten-free chef salad)	_____ x \$12	\$ _____
		Total \$ _____

Name

Please include names of all registrants

Address

City / State / ZIP

Phone / Email

Contact information for in house use only.

Hotel info

Reserve hotel rooms now. Individuals may call the hotel or go online to register. FFRF has reserved a block of rooms at the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Downtown at 600 Commonwealth Place. Room rates for FFRF guests are \$159 single or double occupancy. Phone 412-391-4600 (direct) or 888-317-0197 (toll-free). Refer to the group name “Freedom From Religion Foundation” to receive the guest rate. The cut-off date to reserve rooms is Sept. 12, but reserve now to avoid disappointment as the reserved rooms normally fill up.

General schedule

After the tour of Fallingwater, there will be a reception from 3-5 p.m. with complimentary appetizers and afternoon workshops. Friday dinner is on your own.

The formal program begins at 7 p.m. Friday, ending with complimentary dessert and hot beverages. The convention resumes Saturday morning with an optional Non-Prayer Breakfast at 8 a.m. The morning program starts at 9:30 a.m. After a two-hour lunch on your own, the program resumes at 2 p.m. An optional dinner banquet will be followed by evening speaker/entertainment.

Annual meetings of the membership and the state representatives are Sunday morning, ending before noon.

Menu

Saturday’s Non-Prayer Breakfast

Scrambled eggs, applewood smoked bacon, chef’s home fried cottage potatoes, muffins and danishes, freshly squeezed orange juice, freshly brewed Starbucks coffee, decaffeinated coffee and a selection of specialty teas.

Vegan/vegetarian entree option: Scrambled vegetable and tofu with roasted tomato and cottage potatoes. \$30

Saturday’s banquet dinner

Field greens with grape tomato, Kalamata olives, English cucumber and balsamic dressing, dinner rolls and butter, herb grilled chicken with basil cream sauce, chef’s selection of starch and chef’s selection of seasonal vegetable.

Vegan/vegetarian entree option: Tuscan grilled vegetable stack with white and black bean ragout with tomato coulis.

Dessert is New York cheesecake with fresh strawberries. \$45