

# Freethought Today

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Andrew Seidel photo

## Think spring!

As winter gives way to spring, flowers help brighten the new lobby of the Freedom From Religion Foundation office in Madison, Wis.

## FFRF, Abbott go 'toe-to-toe' in new lawsuit

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is ready to go "toe-to-toe" with Texas Gov. Greg Abbott.

FFRF will soon be filing a federal lawsuit over Abbott's removal of FFRF's duly approved Bill of Rights display from the Texas State Capitol late last year.

Abbott had previously said that Texas has the "muscle and firepower to go toe-to-toe" with groups such as FFRF, who try to "bully governmental bodies."

Despite allowing a Christian nativity scene in the Capitol, Abbott forced FFRF's solstice display to be taken down only three days after it had been erected on Dec. 18.

The whimsical exhibit, designed by artist Jake Fortin, commemorates the "birth" of the Bill of Rights, depicting the Founding Fathers and the Statue of Liberty crowded adoringly around a manger scene containing the constitutional document.

FFRF and Staff Attorney Sam Grover, with the help of Texas state Rep. Donna Howard and Austin FFRF member Arturo de Lozanne, obtained a permit last summer for the December display. Also approved was an explanatory Winter Solstice sign promoting state/church separation, which pointed out that the Bill of Rights was adopted on Dec. 15, 1791.

Abbott, who chairs the Texas State Preservation Board that approves Capitol displays, sent a letter Dec. 21 to the co-defendant John Sneed, the board's



Laurn Seering photo

**FFRF's Bill of Rights "nativity" display.**

## Earn a freethought badge

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is unveiling a badge to reward freethinking youths and to challenge the Boy Scouts of America's discrimination against the nonreligious. The badge, based on the Dawkins' "A," is cosponsored by the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science.

BSA has come under fire by FFRF and many non-religious parents for four decades for recruiting through and meeting in public schools, advertising

that "Any boy may join." After boys attend the recruitment and are excited to join, parents are belatedly informed they must sign BSA's Declaration of Religious Sentiments.

BSA formally discriminates against nonreligious boys and their families, officially

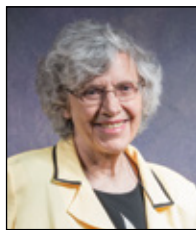


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### 2015 member survey

## FFRF's engaged membership

The typical member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation is a recently retired male who has at least one degree, who votes (usually as an independent), thought his own way out of a religious background and overwhelmingly supports reproductive and women's rights.

FFRF sent out a membership survey in late May 2015 to its 21,000 members (FFRF has since added an additional 2,500 members). More than a third (nearly 8,000) of you responded — which is statistically impressive. Offered the choice to fill out the survey online or on paper, most chose to fill out and return the paper questionnaire. Our hardworking administrative staff, which entered thousands of those surveys, just finished that project at year's end. Now we are sharing those statistically relevant results with you.

FFRF has always billed itself as a freethought umbrella, with no label required as a litmus test. However, when asked which term best describes your freethought views, almost 84% of FFRF members picked "atheist." "Agnostic" came in at 8% and another 8% prefer another term, such as reasonist, non-believer or humanist.

A vast majority of FFRF members grew up in a religious home (55%) or where at least one parent was religious (31% "mixed"). A mere 14% came from a freethought home. That nearly a third of you come from homes where one parent was nonreligious shows the value of cognitive dissonance. Not surprisingly, given the above results, 77% of you term yourself a first-generation freethinker, 17% second generation. Only 5% are third generation or more.

A plurality (48%) of members were

raised in some form of Protestantism. More surprising, 29% were brought up Roman Catholic. Although about a quarter of the U.S. population traditionally has been Catholic, there's been such a sharp drop-off that today Catholics make up only one-fifth of the U.S. population. By the way, that puts "Nones" (those 24% who indicate they are nonreligious) above Catholics! Pew Research surveys also show more than one in six Catholics today leaves the church, with nearly 13% of all Americans describing themselves as "former Catholics."

Almost 9% of you come from a Jewish background, also disproportionate to the 1.8% in the general population. About 13% of you chose "Other." (This category was skewed by the fact that many of these answers simply not

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## Meet a legal fellow

**Name:** Ryan David Jayne.  
**Where and when I was born:** Waukesha, Wis., on Oct. 23, 1984.  
**Education:** I attended public school in Waukesha through high school, studied philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee during my undergrad years, then attended law school at Lewis & Clark in Portland, Ore.  
**Family:** I'm married to my best friend Colleen, who is a high school science teacher. We are expecting our first child, a daughter, in May. My older brother Ben is an occupational therapist in Los Angeles, and my younger brother Collin is an attorney in Las Vegas. My parents, Brian and Darci, are happily retired and live in rural eastern Wisconsin. They spend most of their time gardening, watching birds and making music.  
**How I came to work at FFRF:** My student group at Lewis & Clark invited Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel to our law school to give a presentation in 2014. After that initial connection, I did a one-semester externship in the spring of 2015, and was offered a legal fellowship when the externship ended.  
**What I do here:** I write letters of complaint, participate in litigation,

and do any other lawyerly tasks that come up. I specialize in faith-based funding issues, and in 2015 I coordinated FFRF's Winter Solstice displays. When I can find time, I bang a bit on the Diane Uhl Concert Grand Steinway piano on the fourth floor.  
**What I like best about it:** I get particularly excited about stopping endorsements of religion in public schools because I think that can have tremendous long-term effects. It's crucial that our youth rise above the myths and superstitions of their parents' generation, and the first step in that endeavor is dispelling the illusion in students' minds that religiosity is ubiquitous in our society.  
**What gets old about it:** Sometimes we have to comb through hundreds of pages of public records to determine if the government is breaking the law, which can get pretty tiring.  
**I spend a lot of time thinking about:** Legal strategies to combat recalcitrant government actors.  
**I spend little if any time thinking about:** Celebrity gossip.  
**My religious upbringing was:** Non-existent. My parents are free-thinkers who just never brought up religion because there were plenty of



Laurn Seering photo

**FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne is preparing to be a father for the first time.**

real things to talk about.  
**My doubts about religion started:** As soon as I started to hear details about religion from my classmates, probably around first grade. I assumed no one really believed any of it.  
**Things I like:** Chess, music, cats and food.  
**Things I smite:** Lazy thinking and sloppy writing.  
**In my golden years:** I hope to play in chess tournaments all over the world.

## Overheard

Religiosity in a candidate is too often a substitute for actually laying out policies voters are concerned about.  
**Alec Loftus, PR consultant, op-ed, "Young voters with no religion grow in influence"**  
*The Capital Times, 12-29-15*

The week I left home, one of my heroes in the struggle for women's reproductive freedom died. Anne Gaylor, a great American visionary and free-thinker, quietly helped thousands of women get safe abortions before *Roe v. Wade* became the law of the land. What began as a living room telephone support, education, and referral service connecting women and abortion providers in New York and Mexico grew into America's first private donor fund dedicated to helping women pay for abortions. Anne's work in reproductive freedom caused her to go on to found the Freedom From Religion Foundation.  
**Ingrid Andersson, homebirth midwife and nurse, "Welcome to Sweden"**  
*The Progressive magazine, 12-4-2015*

Given the pandemic distaste for today's politics, it is consoling to remember that things change. In the late

19th century, Robert Ingersoll, aka "The Great Agnostic," was the nation's most outspoken atheist and a leading Republican, a combination unlikely today.  
**Columnist George Will**  
*NY Post, 1-3-16*

If anyone is going to be the poster child for anti-gay bigotry, [Alabama Chief Justice Roy] Moore is determined it will be him, not [Kim Davis]. And that it will be Alabama, not Kentucky, that is condemned by future generations.  
**Editorial, "Roy Moore is delusional about Roy Moore"**  
*Birmingham News, 1-8-16*

Accused of hating Muslims. No I JOIN the many decent Muslims who hate misogyny, killing gays & apostates, stoning, beheading, child marriage.  
**Richard Dawkins, responding to accusations of Islamophobia because of his continued criticism of Islam**  
*Twitter.com, 1-14-16*

I am not actively involved with organized religion. I think everyone believes in God in their own ways. To me, it means that all of us are connected, all of life is connected, and that we are

all tied together.  
**Presidential candidate Bernie Sanders**  
*Washington Post, 1-27-16*

"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."  
**Op-ed by author and freethinker Susan Jacoby**  
*The New York Times, 2-7-16*



If we're serious about freedom of religion . . . we have to understand an attack on one faith is an attack on all our faiths,. And when any religious group is targeted, we all have a responsibility to speak up. And we have to reject a politics that seeks to manipulate prejudice or bias, and targets people because of religion.  
**President Barack Obama, speaking at a Baltimore mosque**  
*MSNBC, 2-4-16*

## FFRF welcomes 2 'After-Lifers,' 10 Lifetime Members

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to welcome two new "After-Life" Members: Thomas S. Platt and Halina P. Platt.  
FFRF also thanks its 10 newest Lifetime Members: Brad DuPree, James (Jim) Fishkin (a gift from After-Life Member Paul Fishkin), David Gregory, Jason Kendrick, Lew Laird, Dr. Peter G. Roode, Dr. Willys K. Silvers, Rhea Talley, Walter van Woudenberg and James Owen Yerks.  
States represented are Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas.  
Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000 designated for membership or membership renewal, mean never another renewal notice, and largely go into "rainy day" reserves. The tongue-in-cheek category of After-Life Membership is \$5,000 per individual, and is for the kind donor who wishes a membership to "live after." All dues and donations to FFRF are deductible for income-tax purposes.  
We're grateful to James, Walter, Rhea, Willys, Peter, Lew, Jason, David, Paul, Brad, Halina and Thomas!

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# Making a Murderer: God of the bible

By PJ Slinger

Think of any fiction book you’ve read, any fictional movie you’ve seen, any tall tale you’ve heard. Now think about the worst character from any of those.

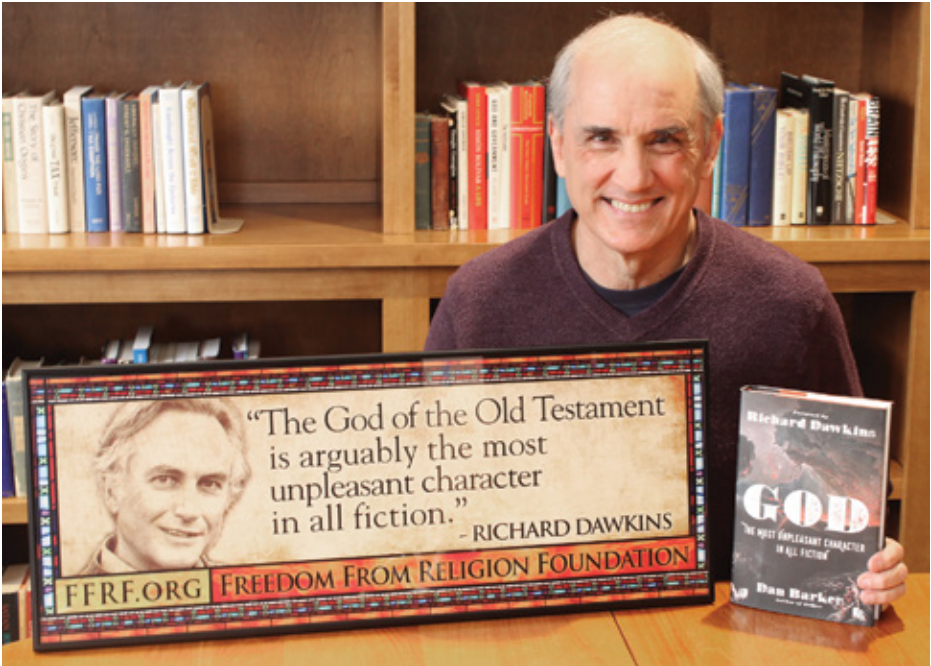
No matter who or what you think of, Dan Barker knows of one who is worse. God. Specifically, the God of the bible.

Barker, co-president of FFRF, has taken a sentence from Richard Dawkins’ book *The God Delusion* and, at Dawkins’ request, expounded on it in his new book, *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*.

The first sentence of Chapter 2 of *The God Delusion* says that the God of the Old Testament is “arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction.” Dawkins says this sentence has been the most heavily criticized line he has ever written. But Barker goes a step further and even removes the “arguably.”

Believers point to the bible as a place to find love, compassion and understanding from God. But, as Barker shows, much of the bible shows a completely different character.

“If you have never read the bible, you might like to know what is in it,” he writes in the introduction. “If you are a believer, you should be happy to see us promoting bible reading. As a former clergyman, let me offer some counsel: Don’t take the word of your pastor, rabbi, or priest. My hope is that you will do what Richard Dawkins has done and



Andrew Seidel photo

Dan Barker shows off a copy of his latest book, *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*, and one of FFRF’s bus signs.

simply read the bible for yourself.”

As Dawkins writes in the book’s foreword, “Even a cursory look at the bible should be enough to convince a reasonable person that it’s the very last document you should thrust in front of someone if you want to convince them of the love of God.”

In one of the reviews for the book, author, noted cognitive scientist, and FFRF Honorary President Steven Pinker writes, “With a twinkle that belies the canard that atheists are ‘strident’ and ‘militant,’ Dan Barker cheerfully refutes the common claim that morality comes from the God of the bible.”

In *The God Delusion*, Dawkins lists

19 of God’s character traits, which, “if they were all combined in a single fictional villain, would strain the reader’s credulity to the point of ridicule.

“Certifiable psychopaths apart, no real human individual is quite so irredeemably nasty as to combine all of the following: ‘jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.’ ”

In Part I of the book, “Dawkins Was Right,” Barker takes each of those 19 traits and finds verses in the bible to

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

show just how much of a miscreant the Christian God is. But that isn’t all.

In Part II, “Dawkins Was Too Kind,” Barker tells of other evil traits of God. “Richard’s 19 denunciations are certainly more than enough to demonstrate the downright depravity of the Lord Jealous, but he overlooked a few more,” Barker writes in the introduction. “He forgot to mention that the God of the Old Testament is also a pyromaniacal, angry, merciless, curse-hurling, vaccicidal, aborticidal, cannibalistic slavemonger.”

And for those who might try to make the case that God is real, and not a fictional character, then God would easily become No. 1 villain on the list of all nonfiction figures, beating out such monstrous people as Adolph Hitler, Attila the Hun, Pol Pot, Osama bin Laden, Vlad the Impaler and Joseph Stalin. You’re better off sticking with fiction.

You may purchase signed copies of *“God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction”* directly from FFRF for \$23 postpaid. Note: Dan is contributing his royalties for every book sold by FFRF, so your order raises funds for a good cause — FFRF! If you want your autograph personalized, please provide the name(s). You may order online at [ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop) or send your order via check to FFRF, PO Box 750, Madison, WI 53701.

# Jesus’ sacrifice . . . what sacrifice?

By Lee Salisbury

Suppose there was a penniless, homeless man begging for money. Then a wealthy person, knowing the poor man’s condition, sold everything he owned and gave it all to the beggar.

Wouldn’t we all say, “Wow! What a sacrifice!”? Doesn’t such a sacrifice bring tears to our eyes?

However, what if the rich man made an arrangement before he sold all his assets? The rich man, being of considerable influence, coerced his friend who runs the lottery to rig it so that the rich man would win. And, indeed, the rich man won the \$500 million lottery.

Now, knowing the behind-the-scenes maneuvering, what do you think of the rich man’s sacrifice? Do you really think he would have sacrificed all his wealth without the foreknowledge that guaranteed his lottery winnings? Should he be venerated and admired for his sacrifice so another could be rich? Was his act really a genuine sacrifice, or was it just a clever ploy to capture our admiration and praise while winning the greater prize of \$500 million?

Have you ever heard of any other sacrifice story that parallels this quality of sacrifice? Of course you have!

We’ve all read or heard the story of Jesus of Nazareth and his death on the cross, sacrificing himself for all the sinners of the world. Jesus walked throughout Judea doing good, healing the sick and casting out demons, and so the jealous scribes and Pharisees connived a scheme against Jesus. He



Lee Salisbury

was brought before the Roman Prefect Pontius Pilate, who held a phony trial based on trumped-up charges. Jesus was spat upon, whipped and beaten. A crown of thorns was impaled upon his head. The ungrateful Jews yelled “Crucify him, crucify him!” They brutally nailed Jesus to a cross. As he hung there, a spear was thrust into his ribs. They gave Jesus vinegar and mocked him. Finally, Jesus died.

Again, we’d be prone to say, “Wow! What a sacrifice!” But was this really a genuine sacrifice, or was there some behind-the-scenes manipulation whereby Jesus not only had foreknowledge of his crucifixion and death, but was guaranteed a resurrection and ascension to heaven? Jesus must have thought so, because he, along with numerous scriptures, foretold these events well in advance.

For example, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus “began to teach them that the

Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). Jesus foretold these events on several occasions!

This Messianic prophesy — “For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; Neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption” (Psalm 16:10) — clearly meant Jesus would not “see corruption” (i. e., not die with the same consequence as a normal human).

Revelation 13:8 speaks of Jesus as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” According to the supposedly inerrant word of God, Jesus’ death was planned by the Godhead’s Trinity Committee “before the foundation of the world.”

Such a deal! Who wouldn’t accept a few hours of pain and suffering in exchange for the promised resurrection to rule and reign for eternity at God’s right hand? Jesus’ reward makes the rich man’s \$500 million lottery winnings look like chump change.

If Jesus’ sacrifice as the Lamb of God had been a genuine sacrifice, wouldn’t he have experienced permanent death like the sacrificial lambs that foreshadowed him? Wouldn’t he have died and gone to hell for eternity, just like the sinners for whom he was the sacrifice?

Sacrifice? What sacrifice? Jesus did not meet any requirements for a genuine substitutionary sacrifice.

Even assuming the bible is the inerrant word of God and the Jesus story is historically factual, Jesus did not sacrifice his life. Instead, Jesus selfishly kept his life, side-stepping the corrup-

tion of hell and permanent death. The morning after the crucifixion, the bible says the grave was empty. What happened to “after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31)? Jesus’ time being dead was amazingly brief, maybe a couple of hours. After some appearances with his disciples, on the Day of Pentecost, he ascended to heaven. As in the earlier story, Jesus’ alleged sacrifice won him the lottery exactly as planned and was guaranteed well in advance by the omnipotent triune God, of which Jesus was a divine member.

There is no dispute that Jesus’ sacrificial crucifixion is the centerpiece of Christian theology. That story is so sacred to believers, one dares not question its validity. Unfortunately, those so desperate for an imagined life after death cannot reason sufficiently to ask the most fundamental question: Apart from a couple of painful hours on Friday, did Jesus really sacrifice anything?

Like Jesus’ failed second coming, Christianity’s theological centerpiece is simply and demonstratively false. It might more accurately be called the “sacrificial cruci-fiction.” As in every religion, Christianity’s savior-god and the promise of life after death is devoid of integrity. Its success depends solely on human fear and gullibility that we humans sadly possess in great abundance.

For 20 years, FFRF member Lee Salisbury was a fervent Christian, spending four years as a bible school teacher and 10 years as founding pastor of a non-denominational church in St. Paul, Minn. After taking a sabbatical in 1986, Lee’s slow and painful deconversion process began.



Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

WILL

More or less sound  
of mind and memory,  
I venture this testament.

1

To the poets, in the perfect pitch  
of your dangerous music,  
I bequeath the fiber of quench and gravel,  
slush and splinter, ratchet,  
forage, and fizz.  
And though you will face the welter  
of blizzard, tussle, and brawl, the scud  
of umbrage, rankle, and jeer,  
I leave you the spell  
of periwinkle, condor, daffodil, velvet,  
trickle, rapture, and pine.  
Even in the wasteland of writer’s block  
and the quicksand of murderous deadlines,  
you will find them sprouting up  
somewhere in the sunshine: impudent, racy,  
passionate, irresistible.  
Gather them in  
with pleasure.

2

To the lovers, in the blooming  
of each new moment, I hereby bequeath  
a lifetime of honor and cherish.  
I endow you with a glimpse of forsythia,  
the shimmer of silk on a chair back,  
the smell of bakeries at sunrise,  
the secrets of sparrows.  
And because there will be detours and chuckholes,  
fields of nettles, and weeks of freezing rain,  
I leave you my vested interest  
in maple trees, jonquils, coral, and amber,  
the flavor of raspberries, a taste of skin,  
and yells of joy in troubled skies—  
all of it for worse,  
for better.

In witness whereof, this day  
I set my hand—  
and hope.

© Philip Appleman.  
From the book *New and Selected Poems, 1956–1996*.



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

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

Meet a member



Douglas Schiebel relaxes at Lake Crescent Lodge in Olympic National Park, Wash.

**Name:** Douglas Schiebel.  
**Where I live:** Port Ludlow, Wash.  
**Family:** Married 54 years to Carolyn. We have two adult children and three grandkids.  
**Education:** Ph.D. from the University of Michigan.  
**Occupation:** Clinical psychologist.  
**Military:** Civilian guard, U.S. Army, Germany.  
**How I got where I am today:** I was born in a rural hamlet in the foot-hills of the Bavarian Alps and grew up during the Nazi era in Germany. I entered grade school in the provincial town of Sonthofen and went on to pass the high school “Abitur” examination in Oberstdorf, the southern terminus of the country’s railway system. Com-muting there involved the train mak-ing unscheduled stops in wooded areas to hide from strafing runs by maraud-ing Allied planes during the war.  
I went to work as a paramilitary civil-ian guard for the U.S. Army after high school graduation, prior to immigrat-ing to the United States. I have been here since.  
My religious indoctrination began with the Roman Catholic baptism cus-tomary in my native region, including a stint as an altar boy. I knew the Lat-in Mass with its repetitive “mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa” by heart. I grew tired of its drumbeat of guilt induction before too long, how-ever, and decided to skip out on the mandatory periodic “cleansing” of my soul in front of unctuous priests in the confessional booth. I was on my way to becoming a secular humanist. I de-cided that morality is best viewed as a matter of avoiding harm to others (or oneself), rather than obeisance to the dictates of a possibly sadistic deity.  
While remaining true to my human-istic convictions, I must allow that I had a brief lapse into wishful thinking in the context of the civil rights move-ment and the nuclear brinkmanship of the Cold War. I entertained the hope that belief in a loving god, whether valid or not, might persuade people to treat each other more kindly and to avoid incinerating the whole world in a conflagration of mutual assured de-struction. The shrill advent of the evan-gelical Religious Right a few years later promptly extinguished this budding fantasy in my mind.  
**Where I am headed:** To oblivion upon my death. But I will savor my remaining time on Earth with all the gusto and intellectual excitement I am capable of.  
**Person in history I admire:** Martin Luther King Jr., for establishing nonvi-olent resistance to evil as an effective tool for social change.  
**Quotation I like:** Richard Dawkins (paraphrased): We who are fated to die are the lucky ones, considering the myriad of potential human beings who were never born to see the world.  
**These are a few of my favorite things:** Balmy summer days in the Pa-cific Northwest. Visiting national park lodges. Strolling on an ocean beach. Hot (and cold) running water.  
**These are not:** Empty ritual, espe-cially of a religious type. Belligerent nationalism. Moralism.  
**My doubts about religion started:** When I heard about the medieval tor-tures of the Inquisition and the burn-ing of live human beings at the stake “to save their souls.”  
**Before I die:** I would like to see the freethought movement continue to decimate the religious mindset.  
**Ways I promote freethought:** I take my atheism out of the closet in front of family and friends.

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Freedom depends upon freethinkers



# Candidates respond to secular questions

By PJ Slinger

Justin Scott is making a name for himself among freethinkers and presidential candidates alike.

Scott, an FFRF member from Manchester, Iowa, has been able to ask almost every presidential candidate about their thoughts on state/church separation issues or on secular values. Scott has used his camera phone to take videos of his questions and responses from the candidates, who were campaigning in Iowa prior to the Iowa caucus.

The only candidates who refused to answer Scott's questions were Donald Trump and Rand Paul. "At least The Donald signed an autograph for me, thanked me for coming, and told me to take care as he walked away from me," Scott said.

Scott's videos have been viewed millions of times via various news outlets and presidential campaign websites. In fact, his video of Marco Rubio has been

viewed more than 10 million times on Rubio's site. The extensive media coverage Scott has received includes the Washington Post, Time, Fox News, ABC News, Associated Press. (View Scott's Q&As yourself at [goo.gl/US0LcN](http://goo.gl/US0LcN). Listen to Freethought Radio's interview with Scott at [ffrf.org/radio](http://ffrf.org/radio).)

"It's a very exhilarating feeling to stand in front of someone that might become the next president of the United States and, for a few minutes, have them focus entirely on a question about secular values like the separation of church and state," Scott said.

He added that when he first introduces himself to the candidate, the people in the crowd have a definite reaction.

"Usually it's the gasps, blank stares, whispers that I get when I start off the question by stating, 'Hi! I'm an atheist.' It's as if I had just opened up with, 'Hi! I'm an alien from another galaxy.'"

Scott says that even though he is a self-described "political junkie," being



Justin Scott takes a photo with Donald Trump during one of Trump's visits to Iowa prior to the caucus.

able to ask candidates about secular and state/church separation issues has been more than he could have hoped.

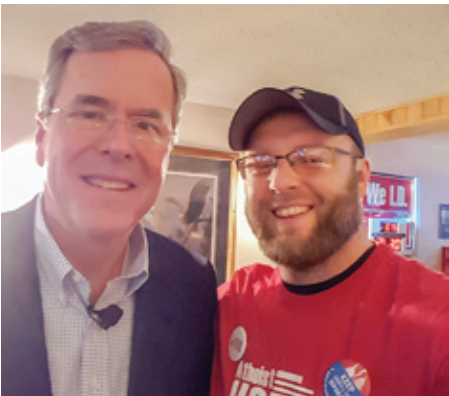
"I'm not so much surprised by the [candidates'] responses but surprised by how easy it has been to get this type of access to them as a voter," he said. "I haven't had to jump through any hur-

dles to get right up in the front row at each event and have just been able to raise my hand and ask whatever question I wanted."

Scott, who is also a member of the Iowa Coalition of Reason, is encouraging other freethinkers around the country to follow his lead.

"I really feel it's important that I do my part to help change the perception of what an atheist looks like," he said. "If an FFRF member wants to contact me with advice on how to best go about this, my email is [iowaatheist247@gmail.com](mailto:iowaatheist247@gmail.com). I welcome any and all questions and would like to connect with as many FFRF members as I can! Together we can make a difference and do our part to help normalize atheism and what it is to be a non-believer in the USA."

Below are the responses (edited for print) by the presidential candidates from questions by Scott. (FFRF is non-partisan and does not endorse or oppose any candidate for office.)

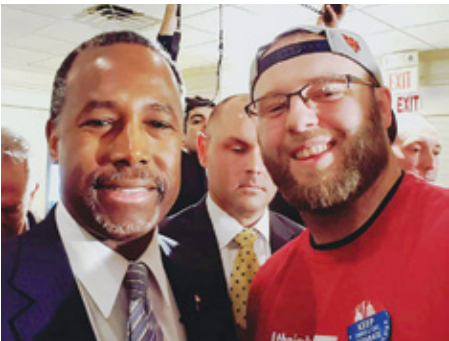


## Jeb Bush

Here's the challenge. I'm a person of faith. And I respect the fact that you're not. And you have protections under the law just as I do.

And a big tolerant nation ought to be able to say, for example, let's take the issue of gay marriage...if you walk into a bakery and you're gay, and you say "I want to buy that cake." A person whose faith suggests that is a sin, by law has to sell that cake. But if you walked into that same store and said 'I want you to participate in my marriage with my companion,' you ought to have the right, based on religious conscience, to say no. There's a difference. We need to sort this out.

You cannot discriminate housing, employment, retail, you can't discriminate. That's how our laws work and that's the way it should work. But people of faith ought to be able to act on their faith outside of their churches and outside of their homes. . . I worry more now, frankly, about the loss of religious freedom than I do about the other side of this. We should be respectful of both.



## Ben Carson

First of all, everybody, including atheists, live according to their faith. It's just what they decide to put their faith in. And everybody's [actions] are ruled by their faith. Now, in my case, you know, I have strong faith in God and I live by godly principles: loving your fellow man, caring about your neighbor, developing your God-given talents to the utmost so that you become valuable to the people around you... and that's going to dictate how I treat everybody. Fortunately, our Constitution, which is the supreme law of our land, was designed by men of faith. And it has a Judeo-Christian foundation. Therefore, there is no conflict there. So it is not a problem.



## Chris Christie

I believe that God is an important part of what this country is all about. But what I also know [is] that the great thing about America is everybody gets to believe what they want to believe. As long as they're not trying to impose it upon me, they can believe what they want to believe. And as long as they're not committing violent acts to try and forward their point of view, go ahead and believe what you want to believe. Teach within your family what you want to teach.



## Hillary Clinton

I think we've gotta stick with our founding principles, separation between church and state. And remember: It was done in the beginning mostly to protect religion from the state. So we need to stick...we need to stick with what has worked.



## Ted Cruz

We're seeing our constitutional rights under assault every day, whether it's free speech, which for atheists is particularly important. Whether it's religious liberty, which atheists have a right as well to not believe. Whether it's the Second Amendment or the privacy of the 10th Amendment. I've spent my whole life fighting to defend the Bill of Rights and Constitution, and as president, every day I will defend the Bill of Rights and Constitution for every American.



## Carly Fiorina

You're free to believe whatever you'd like in this country. So if you're an atheist, good for you. I happen to be a Christian. I happen to believe that our Christian values help me as a leader because they make me humble and empathetic and optimistic. And I think all of those qualities are vital in leadership.

No one is coercing you in any way. However, many Christians are being coerced not to practice their religion. So religious liberty is under assault in this country. When our federal government is suing the Little Sisters of the Poor in the Supreme Court, denying them their ability to practice their religion, that's a problem.



## John Kasich

In life, there's a window of opportunity. I happen to believe there is a higher power, and the reason I believe it is because, well, I kinda felt it as a kid. And then when my parents were killed in 1987 by a drunk driver, I think the Lord rescued me. But it only happened when somebody said 'You've got a window of opportunity because of your pain. I would suggest you go through it and check it out because eternity lasts a long time.' And so, for me, 1987 was — 13 and 16, that's 29 years ago — and I've been working at this every day.

And I'm not a believer because I need a rabbit's foot or a lucky buckeye. I believe it because I've actually looked at the evidence.



## Marco Rubio

This nation was founded on the principle that our rights come from our creator. If there's no creator, then where did your rights come from? And so that's why it's important for us to understand that. We're gonna protect the right of Americans to continue to believe that. We're also gonna have a country where no one is forced to violate their conscience. Which means no one's going to force you to believe in God. But no one's gonna force me to stop talking about God.

I'm more interested in eternity, and the ability to live forever with my creator. That's what I aspire to more than anything else. I believe that God, our creator, became a man, and he came down to Earth and lived among us, suffered like a man would. Emotions. Physical suffering. Emotional suffering. Pain. Illness. Sickness. Sadness. And then he died. And he died to remove sins that we couldn't remove up to that point. They could only be covered but they couldn't be removed. And, as a result, I now have the free gift of the opportunity to live forever with my creator. And I believe that passionately, and it influences every aspect of my life.



## Bernie Sanders

Religious freedom in this country is part of our Constitution, and all of us agree with that. And you have many different religions, and people have the right, in this country, to practice the religion that they believe in.

But we also have a separation between religion and state. We know how dangerous it is, historically, for governments to get deeply involved with religion. Let's not confuse and merge religion and state. That is not what our Founding Fathers wanted, and they were right.





12NewsNow.com  
The Texas Supreme Court said that cheerleaders can continue with their lawsuit over displaying banners such as this one at sporting events after the Kountze School District in Texas restricted their use.

## Court: Suit over religious banners can move ahead

The Texas Supreme Court ruled on Jan. 29 that cheerleaders may continue their suit against the Kountze Independent School District over their regular practice of displaying biblical banners at football games.

The court remanded the case back to the court of appeals. Although the evangelical Liberty Institute is touting the decision, the court did not address the underlying speech claim, merely declaring that the cheerleader case was not moot.

The case began after FFRF filed a complaint with the school district in 2012 over proselytizing banners held up by the cheerleaders as football players ran through them to open games. The banners had such messages as: "But thanks be to God which gives us Victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 15:57," and "If God is for us, who

can be against us? Romans 8:31."

After the school temporarily restricted the religious banners, the cheerleaders filed suit seeking a court order that they had a right under Texas law to promote religion on banners on the football field. Then-Gov. Rick Perry also championed the cheerleaders. The school district changed course immediately and began allowing them to be displayed.

If a current student or teacher at the school sought to challenge the banners under the Establishment Clause, they, along with FFRF, could still file a separate legal challenge, offered FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. She called the biblical banners "so patently inappropriate at a public school that should welcome and include everyone, including nonreligious and non-Christian students and fans."

## Obama invited to Reason Rally

On the day President Obama spoke at the National Prayer Breakfast, FFRF sent a letter to the president inviting him to attend and speak at the Reason Rally on June 4 at the Lincoln Memorial.

"It is laudable for the President to embrace citizens of all colors and religious viewpoints as being part of 'one American family' and to caution citizens not to be 'bystanders to bigotry,'" wrote FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker in the letter to the president, sent out on Feb. 4. "But there is one U.S. minority that has been consistently excluded from such notice: nonreligious Americans. We respectfully invite you, in your final year in office, to do something no American president has ever done: reach out to secular America. Such attention

from the Office of the President would demonstrate that freethinkers, atheists, agnostics, secular humanists and rationalists are accepted citizens."

"By showing up on June 4 . . . and addressing nonbelieving Americans, you can send a signal that the marginalization of a quarter of the U.S. population is unacceptable," the letter continues. "Please use your 'bully pulpit' to help erase harmful attitudes toward the nonreligious minority in the United States, as you have done for religious minorities. Please address the Reason Rally on June 4 or speak at our auditorium in Freethought Hall (our offices) any time. We look forward to your reply."

See page 24 for more on the 2016 Reason Rally.



## Some unknown soldiers get crosses on graves

For more than two years, FFRF has been objecting to the use of religious iconography to mark the graves of the unknown soldiers at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, also called the Punchbowl.

"Why are some Unknowns buried in the Punchbowl marked with the Latin cross while others are not?" FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel asked in the original letter to the secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Twenty-eight months later, after about a dozen correspondences between FFRF and the military, Debra S. Wada, assistant secretary of the Army, finally responded. The Department of the Army is trying to identify unknown soldiers from WWII, and a project is under way to disinter and identify those unknowns associated with the USS Oklahoma and other unknowns.

"In those cases where Unknowns are identified, the DoD will work with the DoVA, which has provided the government-furnished headstones and markers since 1973, to ensure the gravesites at NMCP or elsewhere are appropriately marked," Wada wrote.

"It's an interesting program and we applaud the military's attempt to identify these heroes," said FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, who's been working the case for a long time.

While "The Department of the Army will not initiate any action to replace the headstones of Unknowns marked with the Latin cross in the NMCP at this time," this is progress of a kind.

Wada also claimed, "It is apparent that, over time, the Latin cross has developed a secular meaning as a commemorative symbol of sacrifice in wartime."

"Wada is absolutely wrong about the secular meaning of a Christian cross," said Seidel, "and no court would agree with her, but we are happy that some action is being take to identify and more appropriately memorialize those who sacrificed all."

A billboard with a stained-glass window theme. The text on the billboard reads: "Enjoy Life Now THERE IS NO AFTERLIFE FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION".

### Life is for the living

This 10-by-30-foot billboard was purchased by Wayne Hensler, a Wisconsin After-life FFRF member, as "a legacy for my grandchildren." It was up at the end of the year in Janesville, Wis. Since 2010, Hensler has paid to have the message placed several times throughout Wisconsin. He's expressed the hope that other FFRF members might be "inspired" to place similar messages in their areas on behalf of FFRF. The colorful billboard has a stained-glass window theme, which is FFRF's signature billboard look, first debuting in Wisconsin in late 2007 with the slogans "Imagine No Religion" and "Beware of Dogma."

## Abbott backs crosses on vehicles

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott submitted a legal memo to state Attorney General Ken Paxton on Thursday erroneously insisting that Christian crosses may be legally displayed on sheriffs' vehicles. The governor is interfering in a controversy resulting from the Freedom From Religion Foundation's official complaint letter about this unconstitutional practice by the Brewster County Sheriff's Office, which recently added Latin crosses to its patrol cars.

Government officials such as Abbott, and sheriffs like those in Brewster County, took an oath of office to uphold the Constitution. But, apparently, they need a reminder that it is an entirely secular document. The Constitution does not recognize a god, much less the Christian one, and its only references to religion are exclusionary.

Abbott is governor of all Texas citizens, not just Christians. So it's dismaying that his brief assumes Brewster County has a Christian "heritage." Not so. Individuals may be religious, but counties have no religion. When public officials use their official capacity to promote their personal religion, they are violating the law. FFRF's complaint was not over an individual sheriff who had a personal cross around his neck, or a sheriff placing a cross on a personal vehicle, but over the department officially aligning itself and its officers with religion, in this case Christianity.

Such governmental speech and action sends a chilling message that the department itself enforces Christian doctrine, instead of civil law, and further signals that Christian citizens are the insiders, while non-Christians and nonbelievers are outsiders.

The absence of religious symbols from official sheriff vehicles would not, contrary to Abbott's claim, express "hostility to religion." Governmental neutrality is the appropriate viewpoint. A sheriff should not care about the religion of citizens or suspects, but about enforcing the law evenhandedly and protecting citizen rights.

Abbott attempts but fails to reconcile the government displaying exclusively Christian symbols on its property with the Constitution's Establishment Clause. Rather than addressing the considerable body of Supreme Court case law condemning religious endorsement by the government, including by the placement of crosses on governmental property, Abbott mischaracterizes the Supreme Court as having an "expansive interpretation of the Establishment Clause's limited and unambiguous test."



# Mayor cuts off invocation speaker in mid-sentence

The mayor of Oak Ridge, Tenn., cut off Aleta Ledendecker’s secular invocation in mid-sentence prior to the City Council meeting on Jan. 11.

FFRF sent a letter to Mayor Warren Gooch and the City Council, protesting the constitutional violation.

“The City Council must ensure that your invocation policy does not discriminate against atheists and freethinkers,” FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote. “Additionally, a public apology to Ms. Ledendecker for the City Council’s discriminatory treatment of her is clearly warranted.”

Oak Ridge allows up to three minutes for opening prayers or invocations, but Ledendecker, an FFRF Life Member, was cut off in mid-sentence with more than 30 seconds left. A video recording shows the invocation beginning at 0:0:24, and Ledendecker is harshly cut off by the mayor at 0:02:48, two minutes and 24 seconds into her invocation. It is followed immediately by the Pledge of Allegiance.

“To our knowledge, the City Council has never cut off a religious invocation mid-sentence prior to the expiration of this allotted time,” Jayne wrote. “We are writing to request assurances that the City Council will not discriminate against nonreligious invocations, or the citizens delivering them, in the future. We also request that the City Council permit Ms. Ledendecker the opportunity to present another invocation — and allow her three full minutes — at her earliest convenience. The best solution, however, is to discontinue invocations at future City Council meetings altogether.”

“This is not only bad policy, but very bad manners,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Such discrimination and censorship show the harm of entangling religious rituals with government.”

See the complete transcript of Ledendecker’s invocation on Page 22.



Tazewell County Sheriff’s Office photo

Tazewell County (Va.) Sheriff Brian Hieatt, second from left, stands with officers next to department vehicles adorned with “In God We Trust” stickers.

# FFRF rips Virginia sheriff over religious statements

FFRF is taking issue with Tazewell County (Va.) Sheriff Brian Hieatt, who recently decided to put “In God We Trust” bumper stickers on county vehicles, declaring, “We want the public to know that we have strong Christian men and women serving their community.”

“Our department feels very strongly about having In God We Trust on our vehicles,” Hieatt said. “We know there is nothing we can do for our community without the guidance of our Lord.”

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler sent Hieatt a letter on Jan. 27 in response to complaints from several Tazewell County citizens. “The United States Supreme Court has held that public officials may not seek to advance or promote religion,” she wrote. Ziegler said that Hieatt’s statements disturbing-

ly “imply a religious test for employment, which is unconstitutional.”

Ziegler pointed out that court acceptance of “In God We Trust” has been based on courts ludicrously claiming the phrase lacks “religious significance.” The sheriff’s admission that his use of the motto is meant to be a mark of the “strong Christian men and women” employed by the sheriff’s department undercuts any attempt to argue that the “In God We Trust” stickers are in any way “nonreligious.”

“It’s hard to imagine that any non-Christian — whether atheist, Jewish or Muslim — would feel welcome in this sheriff’s department, with Hieatt so openly favoring Christianity and misusing his authority to promote religion on the job,” said Dan Barker, FFRF co-president.

# Satanists get Phoenix to drop council prayer

The Phoenix City Council voted 5-4 on Feb. 3 to stop pre-meeting prayers and move to a moment of silence. The move comes after FFRF sent a Feb. 1 letter backing the Satanic Temple’s bid to give a prayer before the City Council’s Feb. 17 meeting.

In that letter, FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, who’s been working on behalf of Phoenix members to stop prayers in their city since August 2012, wrote, “If this council is unwilling to listen to prayers from all citizens, regardless of their belief, the solution is to not have prayers at all.” Seidel explained the law simply: “Government prayers are an all or none proposition.”

Hundreds filled the seats for the Feb. 3 meeting. Several FFRF members testified. The meeting dragged on for hours with more than 50 citizens giving public comment, some of them shouting in defense of the “one true God.” A few prayer supporters held a

prayer circle outside after the meeting, tears in their eyes.

The Phoenix City Council’s choice to get rid of prayers appears to be another example of “Lucien’s Law.” The law is named after the Satanic Temple founder Lucien Greaves but the phrase was coined by FFRF member and Florida chapter President David Williamson. Lucien’s Law states that governments will either 1) discontinue starting official sessions with prayer when the Satanic Temple asks to lead or 2) censor the Satanic Temple, thereby opening themselves to legal liability. In this case, the Phoenix City Council fortunately decided to go with option #1.

Michelle Shortt, the Satanist who was scheduled to pray, delivered her invocation to the media. FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor commented, “We’re delighted to see that reason and the Constitution has prevailed in Phoenix.”



## Where’s the ‘report abuse’ button?

FFRF sent a letter reminding the police department in Sneads, Fla., that it needs to remain neutral toward religion even on social media. FFRF received a local complaint that the official Sneads Police Department Facebook page regularly promotes Christianity. Among other religious imagery, the department posted pictures of Jesus praying, Jesus saving a drowning man with a bible quote, and Jesus looming over a sunset with commentary by the police department telling viewers to pray. “As a government entity, the Sneads Police Department cannot endorse Christianity or any other religious faith via social media,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.

# Reversing course, board to resume prayers

After receiving a complaint letter from FFRF, the Okaloosa County School Board in Florida in May 2015 ended the practice of opening with a prayer and went to a moment of silence instead. However, on Jan. 11, the board opted to resume prayer before meetings, according to the Northwest Florida Daily News.

“The resolution is put together by following court cases and research on other resolutions,” said board attorney Jeff McInnis. “It’s not a resolution that will advance a particular religion over another.”

The Daily News writes, “Before coming to a conclusion, Dr. Lamar White and Melissa Thrush, the two opposing votes, again voiced their concerns for the resolution, insisting that a moment of silence was the best course of action.”

“For me, this vote is not about my personal needs,” Thrush said. “This vote is about . . . an added burden to the superintendent and school board staff and the need to establish a budget to effectively address this resolution. This resolution potentially exposes us to future lawsuits.”



# FFRF victory

## ‘God Bless America’ banner removed

By PJ Slinger

A large banner reading “God Bless America” has been taken down from the Pittsburg Post Office in Kansas, eliciting outrage from many residents of the town who don’t understand the difference between private and government displays of religion.

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler originally wrote to the post office on June 3, 2015, about the unconstitutionality of the banner on government property. The Constitution prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages, and “United States postal regulations prohibit the display of religious materials, other than stamp art, on postal property,” she noted. In addition, the regulations ban all signs other than official notices.

But many residents and others, interviewed by several media outlets, made it clear they were upset with the post office’s decision.

After the banner came down, a local retailer began to distribute “God Bless America” yard signs and banners, and ended up handing out more than 1,000 signs and 400 banners.

“This is a subject that makes people angry,” resident Pittsburg resident Cheryl Brooks told Sarah Okeson of the Joplin Globe. “People have the right to express how they feel.”

“I’m so mad about it I can’t even

think straight,” Lane Brant told Okeson. “I just don’t get it. You have freedom of speech.”

“Of course we have no objection to religious slogans and symbols on private property,” responded Dan Barker, co-president of FFRF. “But we think Pittsburg residents would be surprised to know that Irving Berlin, who wrote the song ‘God Bless America’ for a character in a musical, was not himself religious.”

Even U.S. Rep. Lynn Jenkins, R-Kansas, weighed in on the removal of the banner, showing her ignorance of the Constitution and the post office’s own regulations. Her statement reads, in part, “I find it sad that our local post office would be forced to bend to the whims of an outside organization, such as the Freedom from Religion Foundation. Seeking the removal of this patriotic banner is a classic solution in search of a problem and I urge the United States Postal Service to rethink their decision, as this banner means more than just words to our veterans and community members.”

And Janet Butler, a Pittsburg resident, told the Joplin Globe: “It’s ridiculous. If someone doesn’t like it, don’t look at it.”

But would Butler feel the same if there were a sign on a government building that said “Allah Bless America”?



Sarah Gooding photo

Postal employees removed the “God Bless America” banner on the side of the Pittsburg Post Office in Kansas recently. (This photograph is reprinted courtesy of the Pittsburg Morning Sun, which made permission contingent on our quoting its hashtag #GodBlessPittsburg.)

## ‘In God We Trust’ challenged

For a second time, FFRF member Michael Newdow is trying to get “In God We Trust” off our U.S. currency.

Newdow, an attorney and physician, filed his latest complaint in Akron, Ohio, on Jan. 4. In 2013, he, 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, who ruled the argument was unfounded.

This time, Newdow is planning to base his suit on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) rather than on the First Amendment protection from the governmental establishment of religion, as he did in the prior lawsuit. The RFRA is what Hobby Lobby used in its successful arguments to get out of covering contraception for its employees.

But will Newdow’s case stand up in court?

“I think the case is incredibly powerful from every aspect,” Newdow wrote in an email response to FFRF. “All we need is two Court of Appeals judges willing to uphold the Constitution. Under the Establishment Clause, we cannot lose.”

“Unfortunately, federal appellate judges are often willing to ignore the Constitution and come up with cockamamie excuses to avoid actually following the Establishment Clause and doing what the Constitution requires,” he continued. “And, of course, they have a lot of Supreme Court precedent behind them. So this time, we are pushing the RFRA angle. That’s a statute, not a constitutional command, and, to date, every Supreme case heard on that statute has come out in favor of the complainant(s).”

Newdow is joined by 41 plaintiffs,



Like this dollar bill shows, U.S. currency was free of the “In God We Trust” motto until the 1950s.

including 10 members of FFRF (Nancy Dollard, Marni Huebner-Tiborsky, Holly Huber, Mitch Kahle, Bernie Klein, Tracey Martin, Michael Martinez, Sarah Maxwell, Dennis Rosenblum, Sam Salerno).

“There is obviously no compelling government interest in having ‘In



Brent Nicastro photo

Michael Newdow

God We Trust’ on our money,” Newdow wrote last year on The Friendly Atheist blog. “We did fine for the 75 years before the phrase was ever used at all, and continued to do fine for the subsequent 102 years before such inscriptions were made mandatory on every coin and currency bill. Similarly, the vast majority of nations manage to function without religious verbiage on their money.”

Newdow, in 2004, also 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, so the court never tackled the topic itself.

Newdow’s current lawsuit, which is 112 pages in length, makes the claim that the presence of the motto on coins and dollars offers an unfair advantage to Christians, thus minimizing atheists.

“Imagine if Christians had to carry on their body something they disagree with religiously, like ‘Jesus is a lie’ — how long do you think that would stand?” Newdow recently told Think-Progress. “But atheists are so denigrated in this society that people accept this without a second thought.”

### Good News Club gets bad news from FFRF

Good News Club meetings will no longer take place during the school day in the Lincoln County School District in Newport, Ore., after FFRF got involved in December 2015.

The Good News Club, an evangelical Christian children’s ministry, was previously allowed to meet at several elementary schools during lunch. FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler informed the superintendent, “It is illegal for the district to allow the Good News Club to meet at schools during the school day.”

Ziegler pointed to the McCollum Supreme Court case holding that bible classes in public school were unconstitutional, in which the court said, “Here not only are the state’s tax-supported public school buildings used for the dissemination of religious doctrines. The state also affords sectarian groups an invaluable aid in that it helps to provide pupils for their religious classes though use of the state’s compulsory public school machinery. This is not separation of Church and State.”

On Dec. 15, Superintendent Steve Boynton told Ziegler the School Board had revised its rules on community use of school district facilities, and would restrict access to schools by non-school groups during school hours. FFRF’s parent complainant confirmed that Boynton presented the changes at the January School Board meeting.



## FFRF legal victories

### FFRF halts prayers by coach in Minnesota

The Albany High School football team in Minnesota will no longer be subjected to prayers led by their coaches, following a complaint lodged by FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott.

Elliott wrote to Albany Area Schools on Dec. 21, 2015. Citing a litany of cases, Elliott noted that the Supreme Court had repeatedly “struck down school-sponsored prayer because it constitutes a government advancement and endorsement of religion, which violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.”

Superintendent Greg Johnson responded promptly to notify FFRF he was looking into the matter. On Jan. 11, Johnson thanked Elliot for the letter and assured FFRF that the school district had investigated and “taken appropriate steps to ensure that any coach involvement with prayer activities will not occur.”

### Thou shalt not post the Ten Commandments



Officials in Itawamba County, Miss., removed a courthouse display of the Ten Commandments in response to a recent letter from FFRF.

“The Ten Commandments display violates the Establishment Clause of the Constitution,” FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott stated in the Jan. 27 letter. “The religious message of the Ten Commandments is obvious. By placing this display directly inside the county’s governmental offices, the county is unmistakably sending the message that it gives the display its stamp of approval.”

Elliott added that the government’s biblical display was striking a blow against religious liberty, forcing taxpayers of all faiths—and of no faith—to support a particular expression of worship.

On Feb. 1, county supervisors agreed to modify the presentation, according to news reports.

FFRF appreciates the supervisors’ decision to get rid of the Ten Commandments, but voiced concerns about the substitution.

“We’re pleased that the county’s unconstitutional Ten Commandments display will be removed from the courthouse,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “But it’s regrettable that the county supervisors sought out another religious statement to replace the Ten Commandments. Elected officials should not use their government position and government buildings as a place for promoting their religious views.”

...

FFRF has gotten the Ten Commandments and other religious displays removed from the walls of Mansfield High School in Mansfield, Ark.

In addition to the decalogue, pic-

tures with bible quotes lined classrooms and hallways. “Courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott on Jan. 13.

The Mansfield School District’s attorney wrote back the next day, saying simply, “The objects you identified have been removed.”

### Meals on Wheels tells proselytizer to stop

FFRF was able to stop an employee of Meals on Wheels from proselytizing, which then prompted a permanent policy of non-proselytization for California’s Contra Costa County division of the group.

FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to the organization’s CEO on Jan. 19 to report a Meals on Wheels employee who “aggressively promotes religion while in [a] recipient’s home, despite being repeatedly asked to stop because the recipient is not religious.”

Jayne pointed out that Meals on Wheels receives federal funding, which means it is subject to regulations prohibiting “inherently religious activities, such as . . . proselytization.” Jayne also pointed out that program recipients “are in a vulnerable position and should not be forced to endure religious proselytizing in order to receive benefits.”

Meals on Wheels CEO Elaine Clark called FFRF on Jan. 26 and said she was supportive of FFRF’s concerns and that proselytizing is very much against the group’s policy. Clark placed a disciplinary note in the employee’s file, and pledged to fire her if she continued to proselytize. In addition, after noticing that the handbook given to drivers doesn’t specifically address proselytizing, Clark said she would update it right away.

### Bible readings, posters removed from school

After FFRF stepped in, Alabama’s Blount County Schools has stopped having students read a bible verse over the PA each morning.

“A daily bible reading, even by a student, violates the Constitution,” said FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel in his Jan. 7 letter to the school district’s attorney.

In addition, religious messages were regularly posted on the school walls. In response, some freethinking students put up posters saying “God’s not real,” which were torn down and replaced with further religious posters. “Given the law, and the acrimony caused by this poster battle, the prudent course is to remove all religious and irreligious posters from the school,” wrote Seidel.

FFRF’s complainant reported on Jan. 13 that the bible readings had stopped and all religious posters were removed. In addition, after students proposed a secular club, the school took the drastic move of banning all non-curricular clubs. In response, students started a science club.

### FFRF teaches school a history lesson

Sunset Elementary School in Anadarko, Okla., has taken down a framed picture titled “The First Prayer in Congress” from the school office af-

ter receiving a letter from FFRF. The portrait showed members of the Continental Congress with heads bowed in prayer during a September 1774 session.

“This picture depicts an obscure historical event, which makes it seem likely that it was chosen for display because of its religious significance and not its historical significance,” wrote Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel. “This is especially true if one understands the actual history: that the preacher, Jacob Duché, was a traitor to the revolution who fled to England after slandering the Congress he led in prayer.”

Seidel pointed out that the prayer was opposed by the first two chief justices of the Supreme Court because, as John Adams said, “We were so divided in religious sentiments.” By Adams’ admission, the prayer was approved for its political value, Seidel wrote. In addition, Duché was opposed to American independence, vilifying the Continental Congress and calling soldiers cowards. “Is this really a man to be venerated in a public school or ought he to rank with the other traitor of that era, Benedict Arnold?” Seidel asked.

An Anadarko School District representative informed FFRF on Jan. 12 that the district decided to remove the print.

### FFRF stops distribution of bibles by Gideons



After FFRF complained, Wichita Public Schools is taking steps to ensure no further inappropriate bible distributions will happen on its grounds.

On Nov. 1, 2015, several members of the Gideons, a Christian men’s group, handed out bibles to East High School students as they got off their buses. “The district may not allow Gideons, or any other religious groups, to enter school property to distribute religious literature,” wrote Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel in a Dec. 3 letter. “In allowing Gideons to distribute bibles to students, the district is impermissibly endorsing religion by placing its ‘stamp of approval’ on the religious messages contained in the bible.”

Seidel acknowledged that the district may have had no prior knowledge of the distribution because Gideons “operate by deliberately avoiding superintendents and school boards. They advise their members to seek permission at the lowest level of authority.” In a response on Jan. 22, the district’s attorney said that this was the case, and acknowledged that “neutrality commands that the Gideons not be permitted to distribute bibles on school property.”

...

FFRF has ensured that Gideons will not be allowed to distribute bibles to West Side Elementary School students in Woodbury, Tenn.

In response to a parent’s complaint

that a teacher invited the Gideons to distribute bibles and speak to students about the book, FFRF Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to the Cannon County School District on June 8, 2015. “When a school distributes religious literature to its students, or permits evangelists to distribute religious literature to its students, it entangles itself with that religious message,” said Markert.

FFRF followed up with the district in September, but did not receive a response until Jan. 27, when the director of schools e-mailed a reply saying, “The Gideon bible distribution complaint has been addressed. I am sure there will be no further concerns with this issue.”

### Sheriff’s Office drops ‘death book’ sponsorship



An illustration from the Christian funeral book, “Lift Up Thine Eyes.”

The Lee County Sheriff’s Office in Alabama will no longer be part of the sponsors page of a Christian memorial book titled “Lift Up Thine Eyes,” thanks to FFRF.

The book, which a funeral home provides for the grieving, features colored illustrations of iconic bible stories. “We write to ensure that the Sheriff’s Office ceases its sponsorship of this Christian book, which creates the appearance that the office endorses Christianity over all minority faiths and over nonreligion,” said FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover in a letter to the Opelika, Ala., law enforcement agency.

Sheriff Jay Jones phoned FFRF on Jan. 26, informing Grover that the wording in the book had been changed to reflect that the sponsorship was made by him personally, and not by the department.

### FFRF ensures Michigan festival’s secularity

In response to an FFRF complaint, North Township, Mich., will be careful to avoid all religion in future events it sponsors with religious entities.

On Sept. 11, 2015, the Northfield Township Police Department sent an e-mail to local residents promoting a Kids’ Day event. A local church that co-sponsored the event wrote the content of the e-mail, which included religious sentiments like “Christ wishes to save all of us.”

“The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages,” wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne in the letter. “The government violates this principle of neutrality.”

The township manager responded on Jan. 27, saying that he typically tells the church that co-sponsored events must be free from religion, and would speak with the police chief to make sure it would not happen again.



FFRF 2015 Lifetime Achievement Award

Religion deadly for sick children

*This speech was delivered on Oct. 9, 2015, at FFRF's 38th annual convention at Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis., where Rita Swan was presented with FFRF's Lifetime Achievement Award. She and her husband Doug founded Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty (CHILD) in 1983.*

By Rita Swan

Thank you for inviting me to speak to FFRF again. You've done so much good. It's heartwarming to see how you've grown.

My husband and I were devout, life-long Christian Scientists until 1977, when we lost our only son Matthew to a treatable illness because we followed the church's beliefs against medical care. We left the church right after his death and have become nationally prominent advocates for protecting children from abuse and neglect related to religious beliefs and other strongly held belief systems.

Thirty-eight years and scores of national media appearances later, we remain the only people willing to speak publicly about the loss of their child because of Christian Science beliefs.

Before the Internet, it took us years to figure out that states had identically worded religious exemptions from child neglect charges, which appeared to give parents the legal right to deprive a child of medical care on religious grounds.

We learned that in 1975 the federal government had enacted a requirement that if states wanted federal money for child protection programs, they had to enact a religious exemption from child neglect statutes.

We fought this federal policy with over 50 letters to Congress and the administration. We went to Washington three times for meetings. The feds admitted to us that the Christian Science Church was the only party that asked for this remarkable policy.

In January 1983, the federal government rescinded the policy but didn't require states to repeal their laws. By 1983, every state except Nebraska had a religious exemption to neglect either in the civil or criminal code or both.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) initially tried to require states to reduce the scope of the civil exemptions so that they didn't prevent investigation or court orders, but even that was soon quashed by Christian Science lobbyists.

The Louisiana Legislature passed a resolution condemning HHS and claiming that faith healing was twice as effective as medical care in healing diseases of children. When HHS withheld money to force change in California, the state sued rather than lifting a finger to change the laws.

Congress passed a temporary moratorium that stopped HHS from requiring any changes in neglect laws and then in 1994 passed this incredible law: "There is no federal requirement that a parent or guardian provide a child any medical service or treatment against the religious beliefs of the parent or guardian."

Actually, that's a masterpiece of political doublespeak because there's no



Rita Swan holds her plaque after earning FFRF's Lifetime Achievement Award (for Valiant Work to Save Children's Lives).

federal requirement that parents do anything for children. Child abuse and neglect laws are state laws, and the federal government influences state laws only by the power of funding. But HHS has not raised any concerns about religious exemptions since the federal law was passed in 1994.

**State by state**

So we have been left with the herculean task of repealing religious exemptions state by state. When we first started, we thought we'd get all the religious exemptions repealed and



Oregon faith-healing parents Timothy and Rebecca Wyland were sentenced in 2011 to 90 days in jail and three years' probation for refusing to seek medical treatment for their daughter Alayna's hemangioma, a build-up of extra blood vessels that started to push the eyeball out of its socket.

could then work on other social justice causes. But as this frustrating and laborious work dragged on for decades, we reduced our expectations.

For the last several years, we have placed the highest priority on repealing religious defenses to negligent homicide and manslaughter. Even that looks like it will take a great many years. There are eight states that have religious defenses to negligent homicide or manslaughter.

The state of Washington, reputed to be the most secular state in the nation, has this religious defense to felony child endangerment and second-degree murder: "It is the intent of the Legislature that a person who, in good faith, is furnished Christian Science treatment by a duly accredited Christian Science practitioner in lieu of medical care is not considered deprived of medically necessary health care or abandoned."

Let me back up for a minute and explain what Christian Science treatment is. Founder Mary Baker Eddy envisioned her religion as a health care system. She called her faith healers "practitioners," their prayers "treatments" and those they pray for their "patients." Practitioners send bills for these treatments, and the church is

constantly trying to get reimbursement from third-party payers.

The church also has other workers called "nurses," who are not licensed by the state, have no medical training and do not work under supervision of state-licensed personnel. These nurses cannot take a pulse or use a thermometer. They will not do even simple non-medical procedures to relieve suffering or discomfort, such as using heat or ice on a painful area.

So with no discussion, the Washington Legislature enacted this law saying that a child sick with any disease whatsoever is not deprived of health care if a Christian Science practitioner is praying for him. Washington has declared that prayers by one religion are medically necessary health care for a child with type 1 diabetes, bacterial meningitis or cancer.

**Frustrated in Iowa**

Our most frustrating work was in our home state of Iowa, where we lived for 29 years. We lived where the Missouri River meets the Big Sioux River, where South Dakota, Nebraska and Iowa come together. We got five religious exemptions repealed in South Dakota, but Iowa was just impossible.

Although Iowa had a religious defense to manslaughter and felony child endangerment, we could not persuade the majority of legislators there was anything wrong with that.

One year, I made nine trips to Des Moines to lobby for repeal. We were greatly handicapped by living 200 miles away and being a one-car family. On Sundays, I would ride to Des Moines with a legislator, trudge up and down the hill to the Capitol in snow and bitter cold and on Thursday catch an all-night bus back to Sioux City with a several-hour layover in Omaha. My husband would meet me at 6 a.m. with a pillow and I would sleep in the car the rest of the way home.

It was hard for legislators to understand our position, and most prefer to avoid work if they can. Why did I want to make criminals of parents who had done what I did? "Your son didn't die in Iowa, did he?" one asked. One could rephrase that: "We don't have bacteria in Iowa, do we?" "Your experience is unlikely to happen in Iowa," another said.

While Iowa had several outbreaks of vaccine-preventable disease because of religious exemptions, we knew of only two deaths in faith-healing sects. Both were newborns. One died of a cerebral hemorrhage, probably preventable with a vitamin K shot, the other of Rh factor incompatibility, preventable with the RhoGAM shot. The bereaved grandparents were CHILD members whom I persuaded to go public.

Even they could not persuade enough legislators to get a bill passed. The deaths of these infants shortly after birth were not dramatic enough to motivate legislators.

It was very emotionally painful for me to carry around the story of our son's death and have legislators be indifferent, evasive and break promises.

The Christian Science Church was the only party that asked for this remarkable policy.





Ingrid Laas photo  
**Rita Swan shares a laugh and a happy greeting with Dick Hewetson of California following her speech.**

More than anything else, I regretted putting the grandparents through the ordeal of going public. It was very hard on them. It wrecked their relationships with their children and grandchildren in the faith-healing sect. One son and his wife hid their next pregnancy and birth from them, preventing them from intervening to save the baby if there had been a health emergency.

**Shining star Nebraska**

But there was always Nebraska to lift my morale. Just across the Missouri River was the one state that had never had a religious exemption from medical care of sick and injured children. Nebraska’s only religious exemption relevant to children is from immunizations.

As many of you already know, the reason Nebraska is the shining star on this issue is Sen. Ernie Chambers. He is a predictable, consistent, tenacious opponent of religious exemptions. He filibusters for hours and threatens filibusters. During the eight years when the federal government coerced states through the power of funding to enact a religious exemption to child neglect, Ernie managed to stall the Legislature and administration until the feds abandoned their policy.

Ernie has brought the administration in a conservative state along with him. The Health Department strongly supports requiring preventive and diagnostic measures for all newborns without exception. Thanks to Ernie, Nebraska is one of only four states to require metabolic testing of all newborns and the only state to have an enforcement mechanism. The other three — Montana, West Virginia and South Dakota — have laws requiring the test for all newborns but no penalty for breaking the law.

Religious objectors have sued Nebraska in state and federal courts. One family had religious beliefs against withdrawing any blood from the body. Church of Scientology parents believed in what they called “silent birth.” The baby should not be exposed to any discomfort, noise, language or other strong sensory data for at least 10 days because it will get recorded in what Scientologists call the reptilian brain. The individual will have strong fear and tension when he encounters those words or other triggers throughout the rest of his life. Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard claimed that silent birth is necessary to save the “sanity” of mother and baby.

Scientology parents were willing to have the blood drawn for metabolic testing after the baby was 10 days old. Every other state would have thought that was fine, but not Nebraska. The optimal time to do the test is before the baby is 48 hours old. That was Nebraska’s law, and the state attorney general did not hesitate to defend it in federal

court. The law was upheld.

After losing in the courts, the religious objectors went to the Legislature. Our handful of Nebraska CHILD members and I made trips to Lincoln to testify against bills creating a religious exemption for metabolic screening. Nebraska has a one-chamber Legislature in which bills can move pretty fast. Once an exemption bill had passed committees and was scheduled for a final vote on the floor, I called Ernie Chambers. Fortunately, he still had not been term-limited out of office. Within a few hours, his staff called back and said not to worry — it had been taken care of. Ernie threatened a filibuster the next day and the bill was withdrawn.

**Criminal penalties needed**

We don’t regard our work to repeal religious exemptions as intrinsically punitive. To us it’s a simple matter that parents have a duty to provide a child with the necessities of life, and the only way society can establish a duty in law is to provide a penalty for not performing a duty.

That’s true for everything from running a red light to murder. Few of us would put money in the parking meter if there weren’t a penalty. The ultimate purpose of the criminal code is deterrence. It is our hope that clear laws which apply to everybody will change behavior.

Though it would seem like madness to you, many parents in the faith-healing sects do not comprehend the risk they’re taking with their child’s life when there’s a state law allowing them to withhold medical care. They perceive exclusive reliance on religious ritual to be not only legal but safe when the state endorses their behavior.

The Christian Science Church in particular has told its members that legislators give them religious exemptions because legislators agree that Christian Science heals disease just as well as medical science does.

**Followers of Christ**

The power of the law to change religiously motivated behavior is most dramatically illustrated by our work in Oregon. In Clackamas County, there’s a group called the Followers of Christ opposed to medical care. Year after year, they buried children, but the county coroner didn’t refer the deaths to law enforcement and barely even examined the children.

Later, a medical examiner system was established. The medical examiner’s staff did forensic autopsies on children that would stand up in court. He always took their findings to the district attorney, but the DA did nothing with them, citing religious freedom and the laws that Christian Scientists had lobbied to get passed. By 1997, the church had gotten religious defenses to homicide by abuse or neglect, manslaughter, criminal mistreatment of dependents, criminal nonsupport, neglect and failure to provide necessities.

In 1998, I spoke at a national conference about Oregon laws. A new district attorney came up, saying she wanted to do something about the faith-healing deaths in Clackamas County. In a seven-month period, three Followers of Christ children had died of readily treatable illnesses: sepsis from a strangulated hernia, kidney infection and diabetes. The district attorney concluded she could not file any charges, but she did alert the press.

Media went to the Followers of Christ cemetery and found 78 children buried there. The public was outraged. One of our Oregon CHILD members asked his legislator to sponsor a repeal bill. The legislator introduced a bill in 1999 to repeal all nine religious exemptions pertaining to medical care of sick and injured children.

The Christian Science Church fought us tooth and nail for seven months. Some 75 amendments were proposed. We finally got a bill passed that repealed five of the nine.

We hoped that would be enough to change the Followers’ behavior, and for several years it seemed that it had. But in 2008, the deaths started up again.

We decided to try to get the remaining four exemptions repealed. The legislator again agreed to sponsor the bill. Because it had been such an exhausting fight in 1999, we decided to move to Salem to help him. When the church found that we were living in Salem, they gave up and said they would not oppose our bill because the deaths in Oregon had reached “a criti-

cal mass.” Seventy-eight dead children were not a critical mass, but 82 were. Our bill sailed through almost unanimously, and there has not been a Followers of Christ child die of medical neglect since 2009, not even in one of their unattended home deliveries. Oregon is one of six states with no religious exemption for care of children.

**Many Idaho deaths**

The most urgent need for legislative reform now is Idaho, which has four or more Followers of Christ congregations. State law allows parents to withhold lifesaving medical care from children, so criminal charges are never filed. One coroner doesn’t even do autopsies on Followers’ children because Idaho law requires autopsies only when a crime is suspected. Some families have reportedly moved from Oregon to Idaho since Oregon eliminated its exemptions.

In the Peaceful Valley Cemetery owned by the Followers of Christ, 35% of the graves are of minor children

or stillbirths. Statewide, only 3% of Idaho deaths are of minor children or stillbirths.

Though the deaths go back as far as 1924, 149 of the 206 graves of minors occurred after Idaho enacted religious defenses to criminal injury and manslaughter.

This death sentence for so many was passed by the Legislature with no discussion.

We are working hard for repeal in Idaho but to date haven’t gotten even a committee hearing.

**Tax write-offs**

Turning to another subject, we want to thank the Freedom from Religion Foundation for co-signing our petition to the Internal Revenue Service asking that they stop recognizing bills for rituals and prayer as a deductible medical expense. Since 1943, the IRS has allowed bills that Christian Science practitioners submit for their prayers to be deducted from income taxes as a medical expense.

The amount of money at issue is not as significant as the fact that the policy has been used to bolster lobbying for religious exemptions from child neglect laws. Two states even have laws explicitly allowing those whose prayers are deductible medical expenses to deprive their children of medical care. We hope to hear something from the IRS about this early next year.

Finally, we would be grateful if you would write or call your U.S. House and Senate members to state your opposition to bills that give religious objectors an exemption from purchasing health insurance. The House bill, H.R.2061, recently passed the House by voice vote. A companion bill, S.352, sponsored by Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., is in the Senate Finance Committee.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates these bills will cost the government \$1.24 billion over 10 years. The more people exempt from insurance pools, the more premiums will go up for the rest of us. We believe that at least some of those children in Idaho would have gotten medical care if their parents had been required to buy health insurance for them.

Go to [childrenshealthcare.org](http://childrenshealthcare.org) and to [idahochildren.org](http://idahochildren.org) for more information.



Ingrid Laas photo  
**At FFRF’s national convention, Rita Swan shares her somber tales of children being denied life-saving medical care because of religious exemptions.**



FFRF 2015 annual convention speech

# Corporate interests fueled rise of Christian nationalism

*This speech, edited for print, was delivered Oct. 10, 2015, at FFRF's 38th annual convention at Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis.*

By Kevin M. Kruse

The concept of “one nation under God” is one most Americans take for granted. But the story of how the phrase was coined and how it came to occupy such a central role in the national imagination has never really been explored in full.

Its rough origins are clear, with the words rooted in the almost sacred text of the Gettysburg Address. When he delivered that famous speech, President Abraham Lincoln inserted a spontaneous but still solemn prayer that “this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom.” After Lincoln, however, that phrase largely disappeared from political discourse for decades.

In the traditional telling, it suddenly reappeared in the 1950s, plucked out of obscurity and inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance in a sudden burst of religious revival. According to the standard story, as America fell under the thrall of the anti-communist panic of the McCarthy era, the nation’s leaders sought to emphasize America’s religious traits as a means of distinguishing it from the “godless communists” of the Soviet Union. In this telling, the religious nationalism of the era was little more than a bit of Cold War propaganda that could be cast aside as international relations evolved.

My current work, however, argues that the postwar religious revival in general — and mobilization of the phrase “under God” in particular — were rooted not in the foreign policy of the 1950s but rather in the domestic politics of the 1930s and 1940s. During that earlier era, corporate titans enlisted conservative religious leaders to create this new era of religious nationalism. Together, they advanced an ideology of “freedom under God” that was meant as a contrast, and a challenge, to the state power that its architects feared most. The government they feared was not the Soviet regime in Moscow but the New Deal administration in Washington.

## Big business backers

From the earliest days of the New Deal, corporate America mounted a major campaign to restore the image of big business and to roll back what they called the “creeping socialism” of the welfare state. Corporate leaders resolved to change that situation through a massive campaign of what they called “public relations” but what critics characterized as “propaganda.” They did this by transforming older institutions they ran for the new task and by creating wholly new organizations for the purpose.

In 1934, for instance, a new generation of conservative industrialists took over the leadership of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)



Ingrid Laas photo

**Kevin Kruse tells the crowd at FFRF’s national convention how corporations helped make America a Christian-dominated country.**

with promises of “serving the purposes of business salvation.” The powerful industrial association now dedicated itself to spreading the gospel of free enterprise. As late as 1934, NAM devoted a paltry \$36,000 to its public relations efforts.

Three years later, it spent nearly \$800,000 — a sum that represented more than half of its total funds that year. NAM used that money to sell free enterprise through a wide array of films, radio programs, paid advertisements, direct mail, a speakers’ bureau and a press service that provided pre-made editorials and news stories for 7,500 newspapers.

But in the end, NAM’s self-promotion efforts were seen as precisely that. As a chronicler of NAM noted, its arguments were so clearly self-serving that “it was easy for critics to dismiss the entire effort as mere propaganda.”

While traditional business lobbies like NAM were unable to sell free enterprise effectively, neither were the new advocacy organizations that were created specifically for that purpose.

The most prominent of these new groups, the American Liberty League, was created in 1934 to “teach the necessity of respect for the rights of persons and property” and “the duty of government to protect individual initiative

and enterprise.” It benefited from the financial backing of major corporate figures, particularly from the upper ranks of companies like DuPont and General Motors. But the prominent role of such men in the group essentially crippled its effectiveness, as the Liberty League, much like NAM, was easily dismissed as an organization of tycoons looking out for their own interests.

## Enlisting the clergy

Realizing that they could never effectively make the case for free enterprise on their own, these businessmen made the shrewd decision to outsource the job. But they chose a rather unlikely group to serve as their new champions: the clergy.

While it was an unorthodox decision, the reason was simple. As the oil tycoon J. Howard Pew noted in a private letter to a fellow CEO, corporate leaders needed to enlist clergymen in their cause “because recent polls indicated that of all the groups in America, the ministers had more to do with mold-

ing public opinion” than any other segment of society. They were much more popular than business leaders, to be sure, and as men of God, they could advance corporate criticism of the New Deal without the suspicion that they were motivated by self-interest.

But it was one thing to want to enlist the clergy and another to actually do it. As early as 1940, NAM had worked to educate ministers about “the spiritual concept that underlies our American way of life.” But its efforts once again came off as little more than self-serving propaganda.

In 1945, a consultant explained why the effort to recruit clergymen as defenders of free enterprise had failed. He had interviewed dozens of priests, ministers and rabbis, but ultimately found them, almost to a man, repulsed by the organization’s efforts at outreach.

## ‘Apostle to millionaires’

Accordingly, the industrialists decided that they needed a go-between, a single sympathetic minister whom they could use to reach his fellow clergymen, win them over to the cause of free enterprise and convince them to join him in its defense. They found him in Rev. James W. Fifiel Jr.

Fifiel had been ministering to the needs of the rich and powerful since 1935, when he became pastor of the posh First Congregational Church in Los Angeles. Located on a palm-shaded drive in the heart of the residential section, the church had an imposing physical structure, including a massive cathedral of concrete with a 176-foot-tall Gothic tower, wedding chapel, gymnasium, three auditoriums and 56 classrooms.

The church included so many of the city’s leading businessmen that one observer said “its roster reads like the Wall Street Journal.” Fifiel warmly embraced his new flock, becoming, in the words of one admiring profile, the “Apostle to Millionaires.” To be sure, he was the perfect match for the millionaires in his pews. In the apt words of one observer, Fifiel was “one of the most theologically liberal and at the same time politically conservative ministers” of his era.

Theologically liberal, he had no patience for fundamentalists. Reading the bible, he reasoned, should be “like eating fish — we take the bones out to enjoy the meat. All parts are not of

equal value.” Accordingly, he dismissed Christ’s teachings on wealth and poverty to embrace more recent theories about the compatibility of Christianity and capitalism.

“The blessings of capitalism come from God,” he argued. “A system that

provides so much for the common good and happiness must flourish under the favor of the Almighty.”

While Fifiel took a loose approach to the bible, he was a strict construc-

The government they feared was not the Soviet regime in Moscow but the New Deal administration in Washington.



tionist with the Constitution. He believed that the New Deal expansion of the federal government was wholly unconstitutional. As it fought the “restricting trends” of “pagan statism,” the church would find natural allies in corporate America because “business, like the church, is naturally interested in the preservation of basic freedom in this nation. Goodness and Christian ideals run proportionately high among businessmen,” Fifield said. To lead this crusade of churches and corporations in defense of freedom, Fifield created an organization he called Spiritual Mobilization. Its credo: “Man, being created free as a child of God, has certain inalienable rights and responsibilities; the state must not be permitted to usurp them; it is the duty of the church to help protect them.”

Spiritual Mobilization was founded in 1935, but its influence remained fairly small until it attracted the notice of the nation’s leading businessmen. By the mid-1940s, its board resembled, in the words of an observer, “a who’s who of the conservative establishment.”

Not surprisingly, top corporations donated generously, as did many executives from their personal accounts. They also pressured friends, competitors and employees to do the same. Spiritual Mobilization had a budget in 1947 of \$270,000. Adjusted for inflation, that would be about \$3 million today.

A decade earlier, organizations that these industrialists formed and financed to challenge the New Deal had been easily dismissed. But now the tables were being turned. Spiritual Mobilization argued, quite explicitly, that the New Deal had broken most, if not all, of the Ten Commandments. It asserted that the Roosevelt administration had made a “false idol” of the federal government, leading Americans to worship it rather than the Almighty.

Above all, Spiritual Mobilization insisted that the welfare state was not a means to implement Christ’s teachings about caring for the poor and the needy, but rather was a perversion of his teachings. In a forceful rejection of the public service themes of the “social Gospel,” it argued that the central tenet of Christianity remained the salvation of the individual. And for any political and economic system to fit with Christ’s teachings, it would have to be rooted in a similarly individualistic ethos. Nothing better exemplified such values, they insisted, than the capitalist system of free enterprise.

Gospel of capitalism

Thus, throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, Fifield and like-minded religious leaders advanced a new blend of faith and free enterprise that one observer aptly anointed “Christian libertarianism.” A critic noted that Fifield and his allies “do as much proselytizing for Adam Smith and the National Association of Manufacturers as they do for Christianity,” but these figures would have welcomed the gibe as a fair description of their work, even a compliment. They believed, rather sincerely, that spreading the gospel of one required spreading the gospel of the other.

Fifield soon reduced Christian libertarianism to a short, catchy phrase: “freedom under God.” Scholars would later assume that the phrase was coined to contrast the democratic and religious foundations of the United States and the godless communism of the Soviet Union. But the private correspondence between Spiritual Mobilization’s religious leaders and its corpo-



Kevin Kruse signs a copy of his book, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*, for Michigan FFRF State Representative and Lifetime Member Joe Harris.

rate financiers shows quite clearly that the main threat to the American way of life, as they saw it, came from Washington, not Moscow.

In 1949 they launched a radio program called “The Freedom Story.” The free, 15-minute program was fairly simple — a dramatic presentation followed by a brief commentary by Fifield. Importantly, the broadcasts were marketed to stations as a way to fulfill their public service requirements in a way that would attract listeners. This decision allowed the organization to secure free airtime, but it also dictated changes in its content.

In the original scripts, Fifield made blunt attacks on the policies of the Truman administration, but his legal counsel warned that getting involved in partisan politics would disqualify the program as a public service feature. Instead of directly attacking the Democrats, the lawyer said, they should use “a horrible example from current experience in the socialist and communist countries of Europe and Asia” and then later “make it plain enough to your radio audience that we are heading for the same kind of situation here.”

Within a year, Fifield’s weekly programs about the danger of “creeping socialism” were being aired on over 500 stations. At the same time, Spiritual Mobilization launched a new monthly magazine titled Faith and Freedom. The magazine printed and promoted the work of an expanding network of libertarian and conservative authors.



Kevin Kruse

‘Freedom under God’

Spiritual Mobilization’s leaders struck upon their greatest idea yet in the spring of 1951. To mark that summer’s 175th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, they proposed a massive series of events for the Fourth of July week, using the theme of “Freedom under God.” According to Fifield’s longtime ally William C. Mullendore, president of the Southern California Edison Co., the idea originated from the belief that the “root cause of the disintegration of freedom here, and of big government, is the disintegration of the nation’s spiritual foundations, as found in the Declaration of Independence. We want to revive that basic American credo, which is the spiritual basis of our Constitution.”

Spiritual Mobilization announced in June the formation of the Committee to Proclaim Liberty to coordinate the events. The committee’s name, they explained to a crowd of reporters, came from the 10th verse of the 25th chapter of the Book of Leviticus, in which God instructed Moses that the Israelites should celebrate the anniversary of their arrival in the Promised Land and “proclaim liberty throughout all the land and to the inhabitants thereof.” This piece of scripture, organizers noted, was inscribed on the crown of the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.

The committee’s main thrust was to advance conservatism. The committee members whose presence was most emphasized were prominent opponents of Democratic administrations: former President Herbert Hoover, who had been driven from the White House by Roosevelt two decades earlier, and Gen. Douglas MacArthur, who had been removed from his military command by Truman only two months before.

They were joined by military leaders Gen. Mark Clark and Lt. Gen. A.C. Wedemeyer, the heads of veterans groups such as the American Legion and conservative media stars like newspaper columnist George Sokolsky, radio broadcaster Fulton Lewis Jr. and Human Events founder Felix Morley. Also joining were conservative voices in law like Clarence Manion and Dean

Roscoe Pound of Harvard and conservatives from the entertainment world like Bing Crosby, Cecil B. DeMille, Walt Disney and Ronald Reagan.

The dominant presence on the committee, however, came from the corporate world. J. Howard Pew, whose family had donated a tenth of the committee’s \$100,000 operating budget, served as a founding member. He was joined by Conrad Hilton of Hilton Hotels, B. E. Hutchinson of Chrysler, James L. Kraft of Kraft Foods, Hughston McBain of Marshall Field Department Stores, Eddie Rickenbacker of Eastern Airlines and Charles E. Wilson of General Motors.

Business interest in the endeavor was so strong that the committee had to expand its ranks to make room for the others clamoring for a spot, including notables like Harvey Firestone, E. F. Hutton, Fred Maytag, Henry Luce and J.C. Penney.

Reframing the preamble

As the Fourth of July drew near, the committee focused its attention on encouraging Americans to mark the holiday with public readings of the preamble to the Declaration of Independence.

The decision to focus solely on the preamble was in some ways a natural one, as its passages were certainly the most famous and the most lyrical in the document. But doing so also allowed organizers to reframe the Declaration as a purely libertarian manifesto, dedicated to the removal of an oppressive government. Those who read the entire document would have discovered, to the consternation of the committee, that the founders followed the high-flown prose of the preamble with a

long list of grievances about the absence of government and the rule of law.

In the end, the Declaration was not a rejection of government power in general, but rather a condemnation of the ways in which the British crown had deprived the

colonists of the government they so desperately needed. In order to reframe the Declaration as something rather different, the committee had to edit out much of the document they claimed to champion.

Indeed, the committee offered its own interpretation, which was spelled out clearly by its corporate sponsors in full-page newspaper ads. The San Diego Gas & Electric Co., for instance, encouraged customers to reread the preamble, which it presented with its editorial commentary running alongside:

• “. . . all men are created equal . . .” That means you are as important in the eyes of God as any man brought into this world. You are made in his image and likeness. There is no “superior” man anywhere.

• “. . . they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. . .” Here is your birthright — the freedom to live, work, worship, and vote as you choose. These are rights no government on earth may take from you.

• “. . . that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men. . .” Here is the reason for and the purpose of government. Government is but a servant — not a master — not a giver of anything.



2015 Richard and Beverly Hermesen Student Activist honoree

# The fight to create a secular club

*Thomas Sheedy's speech, edited for space, was delivered on Oct. 10, 2015, at FFRF's 38th annual convention in Madison, Wis. He was introduced by FFRF Legal Fellow Maddy Ziegler:*

I'm here to introduce student activist Thomas Sheedy. He is 17 years old and a senior at the Ward Melville High School in East Setauket, New York. He's the very recent founder of the school's Secular Student Alliance, the vice president of the Gay Straight Alliance and the event organizer for the Long Island Atheists.

Thomas reached out to FFRF this summer asking for help to start his Secular Student Alliance after being given the run-around by his school for over a year. I wrote to the school district telling them that denying the club's formation was against the law. I worked with its attorney to ensure the club was finally approved. All the while, Thomas was very diligent about phoning me for updates and making sure that I was on top of things. It was that diligence that led to his ultimately winning the almost two-year battle to found the Ward Melville High School Secular Student Alliance.

So it is my pleasure, on behalf of generous FFRF members Richard and Beverly Hermesen, to announce Thomas Sheedy as the winner of a student activist award of \$5,000.

By Thomas Sheedy

While I am excited to be around famous heroes such as Dan Barker and Taslima Nasrin, I wish we could live in a country where the fight for secularity on the domestic front was nonexistent. Because in my vision of America, there would be fair treatment of all, regardless of belief, and we would quote the sensible statement by President Kennedy where he said, "I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute."

When I decided to abandon my Roman Catholic faith in the spring of 2013, I began to research and observe the array of viewpoints in the secular movement and just what we are fighting against.

What I saw was appalling. I witnessed a rejection of reason in our political system because politicians want to win votes instead of revealing facts. I saw a promotion of ignorance cultivated by a history of childhood indoctrination and deliberate brain-washing where kids look to fairy tales for answers. Most of all I witnessed the scorning of sons and daughters and the separation of loved ones, because those sons and daughters did not believe in God.

This appalling shock happened to a 15-year-old kid in a suburban town on Long Island. As a young atheist, I had a thirst to be with like minds, to communicate with those who respected my viewpoints and to work with those who wanted to educate others on the plea-

Christians will not find a speck of dust on our nation's soil where they are persecuted as a group. They face no opposition to their rights.



Ingrid Laas photo

Thomas Sheedy tells the national convention audience of his struggles to begin a chapter of the Secular Student Alliance at his high school in East Setauket, N.Y.

sure of sanity.

So what did I do that was so special? I decided to start a Secular Student Alliance at Ward Melville High School in East Setauket, New York.

During the summer preceding my first day of high school, I educated myself on the emergence of nonbelief. On my first day of high school, I was eager to make friends with those who had a similar disclosure on religion. By my sophomore year, I wanted to start

an after-school club for atheists and agnostics. At that time, I did not know of anyone who might be interested in joining. I held on to my hopes because I knew that the facts outweighed my lack of patience — a third of millennials consider themselves to be nonreligious.

Then I came across a struggle that caught my eye: A junior named John Raney wanted to start a Christian club called Students United in Faith. Like any students who want to start a new club, Raney sent in an application to the vice principal. After his application was ignored for two months, his mother contacted the school district and found that his club was denied because it was apparently religious in nature.

Once he heard the bad news, he contacted a group called the Liberty Institute, which is basically the Christian version of FFRF. The Liberty Insti-

tute sent a letter to the district administration demanding that the club be allowed. Raney also got in touch with the media and received extensive news coverage. The administration did not understand that under the Equal Access Act, Raney could have his club.

John Raney and the Liberty Institute knew of the school's lack of knowledge on that issue, and took the Christian persecution battle to my school's doorstep. Christians will not find a speck of dust on our nation's soil where they are persecuted as a group. They face no opposition to their rights in the South. On the coasts, they are only met with officials who did not know that there were laws made in the latter half of the 20th century, thus creating loopholes against Jefferson's wall of separation.

As a result of Raney's threats, he got his club. However, in the aftermath of his victory, I saw his club doing more harm than good. When I went to one of his meetings, I was met with evangelical rhetoric and a feeling of discomfort.

## A club for secularists

In 2014, a teacher named Ira Sterne, who was the adviser to our school's model Congress, explained that if the Christians can have their club, students who conduct their lives in a secular manner can have their club. I told Mr. Sterne about my idea from September and we got to work. We envisioned a forum where students could talk about religion in an open setting without any backlash or bigotry.

In June, I took this idea to the vice principal's secretary and, the day after

we filled out the application sheet, we lost it. The school then decided not to hand out new applications. Why? They said it was because the school year is ending. These excuses from faculty and school officials did not end there, unfortunately.

At the start of my junior year, I faced a rude awakening. Before the first period bell even rang on the first day of school, Mr. Sterne came up to me and said that he was transferred to another building in the district. That meant I had to find another faculty member to be the adviser for the club, so I made one of the same mistakes I did in June — I gave in. I succumbed to the forces working behind my back and behind the backs of my supporters.

About a week later, Raney told me that Students United in Faith was denied for a second time, but it's not what you think. The school administration, as well as a few members of the School Board, agreed with Raney's views. However, to not seem controversial in front of a few suspected skeptics, the district told Raney that he did not have the required 20 student signatures for the club to be official. But he knew that the Equal Access Act of 1984 did not respect local club minimums, so he contacted the Liberty Institute, and they began to plot again.

On Oct. 3, 2014, I overheard Raney telling a student that he had to leave the meeting early for an interview with Fox News. I politely jumped into the conversation and asked if his statement was true. He flat out denied it. Three days later I received links to an article saying, "School bans Christian club again" by Todd Starnes. Raney got the attention that he wanted and, even though the laws are in his favor, he wanted to push his agenda. He got his club approved again by means of force. There was barely any proper education to the local populace on the situation. The schools, which were mainly on Raney's side, were blinded again and fooled once more, first by their lack of knowledge and then by their unwillingness to take action.

A day after Fox published the article, Raney came up to me and said, "Yeah, I lied, I did have an interview with Fox News."

Ladies and gentlemen, why would John Raney, the conservative Christian, lie to Thomas Sheedy, the liberal firebrand atheist? Well, because he is afraid that I will stop his agenda. He would get his club, but he would not get as much media recognition and would not be able to move his agenda further to the right. By November 2014, Raney's agenda has influenced much of the religious freedom debate across the religious and political communities on Long Island.

## Adviser search continues

After September 2014, I made it my top priority to find a suitable teacher to be our adviser for my club. From October to March, I asked many teachers from various departments, and they all turned me down. At this point, I wanted to see if the school would be willing to help me out. I submitted a club application and I got called down to the vice principal's office in March, where I was told that the district sent out an email to all teachers and faculty in the



district asking for volunteers. No one volunteered.

When it was announced in the spring of my junior year that new applications for the next school year were being distributed, I quickly filled one out and found an adviser who had some spare time and submitted the application. Fifty-one students said that they were interested. We had a teacher who was willing to be our adviser and we labeled our goals. We wanted to create a safe haven for nonreligious students. We wanted to get kids involved with the secular movement. We wanted an open forum for enlightening discussion. We wanted to protect the separation of church and state. We wanted to become an engaging partner in the Three Village community through charitable work and public service.

Club rejected

When I submitted that application I had no doubt that the school would not give me any problems since we met their guidelines. On July 12, 2015, I was notified that the Ward Melville Secular Student Alliance was not included on the new list of clubs for the school year.

Remember how I said that the school’s administration was more in line with Raney’s ideas? There were kids at Ward Melville who were struggling with coming out as atheists to their parents. There were students and teachers who were sick of the religious right’s agenda to turn Long Island into a battleground, and there were students who wanted an excuse to be anywhere but home so they could be with those who cared about their well being.



Ingrid Laas photo

Thomas Sheedy

What I saw as a beginner in the movement was now coming back to me and I did not want to let these people down, but I could not do it alone. I contacted the Freedom From Religion Foundation and I explained my situation. Soon enough, FFRF sent

a letter to the Three Village Central School District demanding that training on the Equal Access Act is encouraged and that this mess — these games that were started by Raney and the school board — had gone on long enough. The law firm representing the district stated that the issue would be discussed at the legal emergency meeting on Aug. 11.

A few days after the meeting, FFRF received a reply stating that while the club was never denied, the superintendent was in favor of recommending approval of the club. On Sept. 8 I was notified that the Ward Melville Student Secular Alliance had finally been approved. The following day, I threw out my original speech and I thanked the superintendent for making the right decision for approving the club, not only because the law required her to do so, but because it was the right thing to do.

As of two days ago, we have had three official meetings and we intend to make our group not just a club, but an institution as well. After working hard for over a year and a half, after seeing local Long Islanders taken advantage of, was it all worth it?

I think so. I managed to get through the hardships and problems in the struggle, but this fight is not over yet.

We have to protect secularism in every state. What’s happened in Rhode Island and Long Island is just the beginning. Every state in the country is under threat from the losing majority, even in places that are quiet and Catholic. Thank you.

*Listen to an interview of Thomas Sheedy on FFRF’s Freethought Radio, [ffrf.org/news/radio](http://ffrf.org/news/radio) (Jan. 2, 2016, podcast).*

Kevin Kruse speech

Continued from page 13

The ad urged readers to make their own Declaration of Independence in 1951: “Declare that government is responsible TO you — rather than FOR you. Declare that freedom is more important to you than ‘security’ or ‘survival.’ Declare that the rights God gave you may not be taken away by any government on any pretense.”

Clergy join attacks

The committee involved the clergy in a variety of ways, most importantly with a national sermon contest. The roughly 17,000 pastors who belonged to Spiritual Mobilization were encouraged to compete for cash and other rewards by writing an original sermon on the theme of “Freedom under God” and then preaching it to their own congregations on “Independence Sunday,” July 1, 1951. Thousands did.

“The effort to establish socialism in our country has probably progressed further than most of us fully realize,” asserted a Lutheran minister in Kansas. “It would be well to remember that every act or law passed by the government which promises to ‘give’ us something is a step in the direction of socialism.”

First place went to Kenneth Sollitt, pastor of First Baptist Church in Mendota, Ill. Appropriately, his sermon was titled “Freedom Under God: We Can Go on Making a God of Government, or We Can Return Again to the Government of God.”

The individual sermons were then linked and amplified by a program broadcast that same evening on the CBS national radio network. The national advertising agency of J. Walter Thompson handled promotion for the program, which lived up to organizers’ expectations. A longtime friend of Fifield’s, Cecil B. DeMille, met with him to plan the production and stock it with an impressive array of Hollywood stars. Jimmy Stewart served as on-air master of ceremonies,

while Bing Crosby and Gloria Swanson each offered short messages of their own. The preamble to the Declaration of Independence was read by Lionel Barrymore.

The keynote came from Gen. Matthew Ridgway, who interrupted his duties leading American forces in Korea to offer a live address from Tokyo. In keeping with the “Freedom under God” theme, Ridgway insisted that the founders had been motivated in large part by their religious faith: “Theirs was a deep and abiding faith in God, a faith which is still the great reservoir of strength of the American people in this day of great responsibility for their future and the future of the world.”

Let Freedom ring!

Three days later, the festivities concluded with local celebrations on the Fourth of July. The committee coordinated the ringing of church bells across the nation, timed to start precisely at noon and last for 10 full minutes. As the bells chimed, residents were encouraged “to open their doors, sound horns and blow whistles and ring bells, as individual salutes to Freedom.” After 10 minutes of ringing, groups gathered in churches and homes to read the preamble together.

That night, 50,000 people attended a rally at the Los Angeles Coliseum. It featured eight circus acts, a jet plane demonstration and a fireworks display

that a local American Legion chapter promised would be the largest in the nation. Fifield gave the invocation, and actor Gregory Peck delivered a dramatic reading of the preamble.

In the end, the Committee to Proclaim Liberty believed, rightfully, that its work had made a lasting impression on the nation. “The very words ‘Freedom under God’ have added to the vocabulary of freedom a new term,” the organizers concluded. Citing an outpouring of support for the festivities, the committee resolved to make it an annual tradition and, more importantly, work

The committee involved the clergy in a variety of ways, most importantly with a national sermon contest.



Ingrid Laas photo

Kevin Kruse speaks during FFRF’s national convention in Madison, Wis., in October 2015.

to keep the spirit of its central message alive in American life.

The entire nation, they hoped, would soon think of itself as “under God.” And indeed, the nation soon did.

President Dwight Eisenhower did even more to cement the phrase in the national consciousness. Shortly after taking office in 1953, he presided over the very first Presidential Prayer Breakfast, an event whose official theme was “Government under God.”

The next year, Congress followed his lead by formally adding the phrase “under God” to the previously secular Pledge of Allegiance. Two years later, Congress made a similar phrase — “In God We Trust” — the country’s first official motto.

As a political culture of public religion moved to center stage during the Eisenhower era, the new religious nationalism eroded the underlying arguments of the New Deal, precisely as its architects had originally intended. It successfully recast capitalism in a favorable light, while encouraging Americans to question the validity and the value of the welfare state.

More fundamentally, this movement of “under God consciousness” succeeded in convincing a wide range of Americans that the country was, at heart, an officially Christian nation. The prayers of corporate America had been answered, but in ways that went beyond their wildest imaginations.

*Kevin M. Kruse is a professor of history at Princeton University whose newest book is **One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America**. He’s also the author of **White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism** (2005) and three collections on modern U.S. history. He earned his M.A. and Ph.D. in history at Cornell University.*



More than \$30,000 in scholarships

# FFRF offers four student essay contests

Thousands of scholarship programs reward students for blind faith and orthodoxy, but hardly any reward students for using reason. Therefore, the Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce its 2016 high school, college and graduate/mature student essay scholarship competitions, which offer more than \$30,000 in total cash prizes.

FFRF offered its first student competition in 1979, added a separate contest for college-bound high school seniors in 1994, and then in 2010 launched a contest for graduate/“older” students (ages 25-30). This year, FFRF will be sponsoring two parallel contests for college students — one to engage free-thinking students of color, the other with a general topic open to all.

Awards are: \$3,000 first place, \$2,000 second place, \$1,000 third place, \$750 fourth place, \$500 fifth place and \$400 for sixth place. Several \$200 “honorable mentions” may be awarded at judges’ discretion.

A bonus of \$100 from FFRF members Dean and Dorea Schramm will be given to any winner who is also a student member of FFRF, a secular student club (or who joins Secular Student Alliance online, which is free).

Please publicize FFRF’s important outreach to the next generation at your local high schools, colleges and universities, and to the students in your life. See handy ads in the back wrap or visit: [ffrf.org/outreach/student-essay-contests/](http://ffrf.org/outreach/student-essay-contests/).

## William J. Schulz High School Senior Essay Competition

Choose one of the two topics below:  
**“The challenges of growing up a freethinker”**

Write a personal (first-person) essay about challenges or problems you have faced as a young freethinker. Did you grow up in a home with devout parents? Were you forced to attend a private religious school or church? Were you ever bullied or put down for your freethinking? Did you have to hide your true thoughts from others for fear of repercussions? Explain how you overcame the prejudices of others, and why you are free from religion, including at least a sentence or two about why you reject religion.

**“Why Boy Scouts of America should welcome atheists and nonbelievers”**

Write a persuasive open letter to Boy Scouts of America from a personal (first person) point of view about why the Boy Scouts should revoke its bigoted policy officially barring non-



religious boys and their families from membership. The organization recently lifted its homophobic membership ban, but continues to “maintain that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing his obligation to God.” Explain why believing in a god is not synonymous with being moral, and why you as a nonbeliever consider yourself a good person and citizen. You may wish to cite the examples of nonbelievers who have contributed to society. Include at least a short paragraph explaining why you are a nonbeliever. (If you were a member of the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, you may wish recount your experiences.)

**Word length:** 350-500 words.  
**Eligibility:** North American high school senior who graduates in spring 2016, going on to college in fall 2016.

**Deadline:** Postmarked no later than June 1, 2016. Winners announced by August.

**Submission rules:** Essays must be both mailed and emailed. Email your essay to [highschoolessay@ffrf.org](mailto:highschoolessay@ffrf.org) with subject heading “Essay [Your Full Name].” Follow other requirements listed below: “Rules applying to all submissions.”

*This competition is endowed by a bequest from William J. Schultz, a member of FFRF who died at 57 and cared deeply about FFRF’s purposes. He was a farm boy who became a chemical engineer and built paper-producing mills around the world.*

## Michael Hakeem Memorial College Essay Competition

Choose one of the two topics below:  
**“Why I am a freethinker”**

Write a personal (first-person) persuasive essay about why you are a non-

believer (freethinker, atheist, agnostic, skeptic) and your experiences as a young nonbeliever. Please write about what was the most compelling or instrumental catalyst for you in becoming an atheist, or what confirmed your nonbelief, such as a philosophical argument, book or experience. Include some intellectual reasons for your rejection of religion, and the best arguments you would enlist to win over or respond to those who frown on atheism.

**“Why I am a freethinker of color”**

Write a personal (first-person) persuasive essay about why you are a nonbeliever (freethinker, atheist, agnostic, skeptic), and your experiences as a young nonbeliever of color. Please include some intellectual reasons for your rejection of religion, and the best arguments you would enlist to win over or respond to those who frown on atheism. You may wish to include advice on how the secular movement can become a more welcoming and inclusive place for young freethinkers of color.

**Word length:** 550 to 700 words  
**Eligibility:** Ongoing undergraduate college student through age 24, including, but not limited to, college seniors graduating in spring/summer 2016, attending a North American college or university. Note: If you have graduated from high school but have not yet started college, you must enter the high school senior contest.

**Deadline:** Postmarked no later than June 15, 2016. Winners announced by September.

**Submission rules:** Essays must be both mailed and emailed. Email your essay to [collegeessay@ffrf.org](mailto:collegeessay@ffrf.org) with subject heading “Essay [Your Full Name].” Follow other requirements listed below: “Rules applying to all submissions.”

*The late Michael Hakeem, a sociology professor, was an FFRF officer and active*

*atheist known by generations of University of Wisconsin-Madison students for fine-tuning their reasoning abilities.*

## Brian Bolton Graduate/“Older” Student Essay Competition

**“Why God and Politics/Government Are a Dangerous Mix — Especially in an Election Year.”**

Write a persuasive essay about the dangers of religion and politics/government mixing in this election year. Analyze current examples of religious pandering, church politicking or political religious litmus tests that concern you and threaten the Establishment Clause. You may wish to use examples of the harm created by religion in politics and government from a legal, topical or historic perspective, or discuss how it makes you feel excluded as a young secular voter.

**Word length:** 600 to 800 words.  
**Eligibility:** Currently enrolled graduate student including up to age 30, or undergrads ages 25-30, attending a North American college or university, including, but not limited to, someone graduating or earning degree in spring/summer 2016.

**Deadline:** Postmarked no later than July 15, 2016. Winners announced by October.

**Submission rules:** Essays must be both mailed and emailed. Email your essay to [gradessay@ffrf.org](mailto:gradessay@ffrf.org) with subject heading “Essay [Your Full Name].” Follow other requirements listed below: “Rules applying to all submissions.”

*The competition is endowed by Brian Bolton, an FFRF Lifetime Member who is a retired psychologist, humanist minister and university professor emeritus at the University of Arkansas.*

## Rules applying to all competitions

Submit essay both by mail and email by postmark deadline. No faxes. Essay must be typed, double-spaced, standard margins and stapled. Include word count. Place name and essay title on each page. Choose own title. Attach a one-paragraph biography on separate page at end of essay including name, age and birth date, hometown, university or college, year in school, major or intended major, degree being earned and interests. (High school students should include high school’s name, city, state and date of graduation as well as intended college.) Do not include a résumé.

For a chance at an additional \$100 bonus, indicate the name of the secular school or college club

you belong to (including a student membership in FFRF) or Secular Student Alliance (free at [www.secularstudents.org/studentmember](http://www.secularstudents.org/studentmember) and mention it in your bio). Provide both summer and fall 2016 addresses (campus and home), phone numbers and email addresses for notification. Winners may be asked to send verification of student enrollment.

Students will be disqualified if they do not follow instructions. FFRF monitors for plagiarism. You may not re-enter the same contest for your student group if FFRF has previously awarded you for an essay.

By entering, students agree to permit winning essays to be printed in full or in part in Freethought Today, FFRF’s newspaper, and posted online at

FFRF’s website. Winners agree to promptly provide a photograph suitable for reproduction with their essay and will not receive their prize until they do so. Winners will receive a school-year membership to FFRF, which includes a school-year subscription to Freethought Today. All eligible entrants will be offered a school-year membership or a freethought book or product.

Email essay as indicated above; also mail by required deadline to:

FFRF  
\_\_\_\_\_ (fill in) Essay Contest  
PO Box 750  
Madison WI 53701



In the news

Archbishop seeks euthanasia opt-out

The new head of Belgium’s Roman Catholic Church demanded that faith-run hospitals and nursing homes have the right to refuse euthanasia to patients, the Washington Post reports.

A 2002 law decriminalized euthanasia for terminally ill adults and it has the support of a large majority of public opinion and politicians. But Jozef De Kesel, archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels, said “I think that we have the right, on an institutional level, to decide not to do it. I am thinking, for example, of our hospitals.”

De Kesel’s reputation as a moderate made him a popular choice when the pope appointed him to succeed his arch-conservative predecessor in December.

“We were happy when he arrived, he seemed like an open man and I had great hopes for him,” Jacqueline Herremans, head of the Association for the Right to Die with Dignity, told the Washington Post. “I didn’t expect comments like this.”

Pentagon blog promotes Christianity

A U.S. Army officer has been criticized for promoting Christianity as a way of getting healthy, Military.com reports.

Col. Thomas Hundley writes a fitness blog on Health.mil called Motivational Monday Message. Health.mil is the official website of the Defense Health Agency.

According to the military.com article, “Increased prayer was the first of five recommendations Hundley suggested for improvement in 2016 in a blog entry that also referenced a Bible story about Jesus feeding thousands of people with two fish and five loaves of bread.”

A complaint was filed by Mikey Weinstein, president of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, after hearing from service members critical of Hundley’s inclusion of religion in an official website.

School district pushes ‘purity,’ ‘worship’

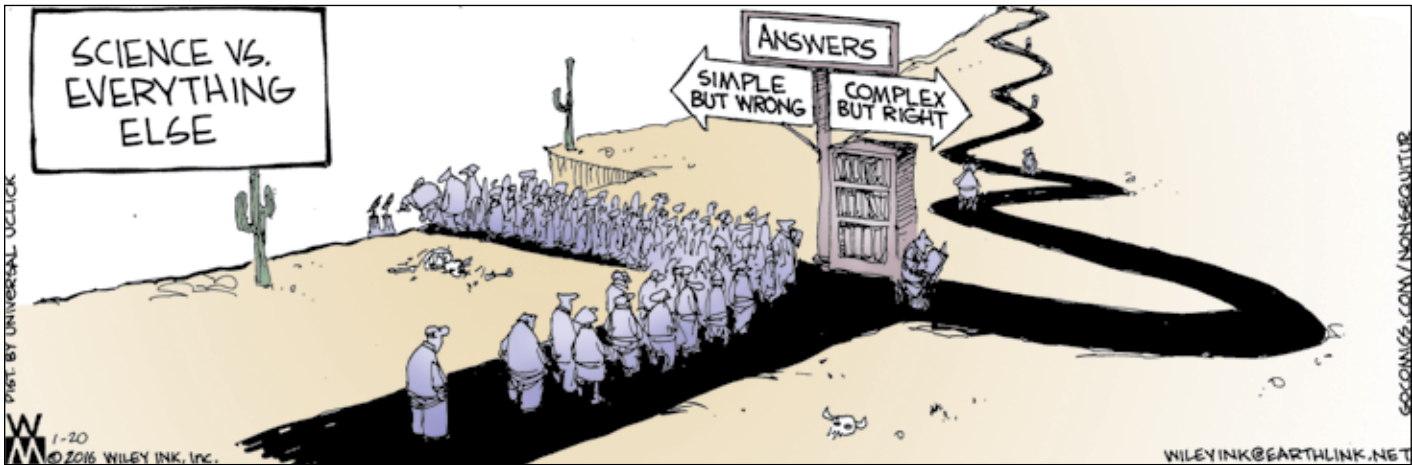
A parent of a student in the Mesa Valley School District 51 in Colorado has complained that the district used its email to advertise a Christian event which uses bible lessons to encourage girls as young as 11 to stay “pure” while looking for a husband, according to a report in Raw Story.

The event is called “Wake Up Sleeping Beauty: Worship At His Feet.” The flier shows a bible verse from Luke 7:38, and the program, which is put on by Wake Up Ministries, promises that girls will want to change their Facebook status to “The One Who Worships At His Feet.” A video also encourages fathers to “protect her purity.”

“The idea of a woman or girl crying at a man’s feet, then using her hair to wash his feet, then kissing his feet, seems pretty demeaning to me,” one parent told Raw Story.

Unfortunately, the district dismissed a complaint from the parent.

“We do not find that the flyer promotes a religious organization or demeans a person or group on the basis of gender,” District 51 Communications Specialist Jeannie Smith told the parent in an email.



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Planned Parenthood gets vindicated

A grand jury in Harris County, Texas, indicted two members of a group that made falsified and highly-edited videos purportedly showing Planned Parenthood employees selling fetal tissue.

Devon Anderson, a Republican who was asked by the lieutenant governor, a strident opponent of Planned Parenthood, to open the criminal investigation, said that the grand jurors had cleared Planned Parenthood of any misconduct, according to The New York Times.

David Daleiden, the director of the Center for Medical Progress, which released the videos, and Sandra Merritt were indicted on felony charges of tampering with governmental records.

According to The New York Times, “Neither the videos nor the many investigations that followed have found any evidence that Planned Parenthood employees offered to sell fetal tissue for a profit. Texas is the 12th state in which investigations stemming from the videos have found no wrongdoing by Planned Parenthood.”

Ark park eligible for tax incentives

A federal judge ruled that Kentucky officials violated Noah’s Ark Theme Park’s owners’ First Amendment protections by blocking it from the sales tax tourism incentive that could be worth up to \$18 million.

U.S. District Judge Gregory Van Tatenhove ruled the state’s Tourism Cabinet cannot exclude the park from the tax incentive based on its “religious purpose and message.”

According to the judge’s decision, “Tourists will pay money in order to gain entrance into the theme park, people will buy food and drinks there, and while many may come hoping to learn something about the bible, the park will likely attract people of all different viewpoints.”



Sign up on Sunday mornings

This marquee is from “a rural church northern California,” wrote FFRF member Larry Roszkowiak, who didn’t want to name the church because “I see religion as a disease and I try not to ridicule the sufferers.”

So despite promoting Christianity, the judge decided that the park is a tourist attraction and therefore eligible for state funds and the fact that it is religious in nature has no bearing on the case.

As for an appeal from the state, that is unlikely. When the lawsuit began, Kentucky’s governor was Democrat Steve Beshear. Now it’s Republican Matt Bevin.

Clergy abuse protesters call it quits

After 14 years, a group of demonstrators has given up protesting the Catholic Church’s response to the clergy sexual abuse crisis, according to a report in the Boston Globe.

“I’ve decided that, after 14 years, the church is not going to change,” Kenneth Scott told the Globe.

The protesters began their demonstrations in January 2002 at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston after The Boston Globe Spotlight Team published its story detailing the church’s attempt to cover up the abuse of children by priests. At first, 40 or 50 protesters gathered outside the cathedral, demanding the resignation of Cardinal Bernard F. Law. However, after 14 years, the group called it quits after being “convinced the church will never take the steps necessary to protect children from abuse,” the Globe reports.

Pakistan child marriage ban bill fails

Pakistani lawmakers withdrew a bill meant to stop the practice of child marriage after the Council of Islamic Ideology declared the legislation un-Islamic, the Washington Post reports.

The bill, which proposed raising the marriage age for females from 16 to 18, also called for tougher penalties for those who arrange marriages involving children. Child marriages, particularly involving female brides, are common

in parts of Pakistan. It’s estimated that 20 percent of girls in the country are married before they turn 18.

**Israeli ethicist’s home vandalized**

Yaakov Malkin, 89, a prominent Israeli ethicist and atheist philosopher, had his Jerusalem home vandalized Jan. 20 in a hate crime apparently carried out by unknown Jewish extremists, reported the Times of Israel.

Graffiti with a Star of David and references to biblical passages were painted on the fence around the home. An envelope with a threatening note and a knife containing another biblical reference were also found at the scene, police said.

Malkin directs Tmura, the International Institute for Humanistic Secular Judaism. He’s also chief editor of Free Judaism, a journal for cultural Judaism, which he founded in 1995.

Court to take on First Amendment

The Supreme Court will hear another legal battle over the separation of church and state, and will decide if Missouri improperly excluded a church playground from a state program that provided safer play surfaces, the Washington Post reports.

Trinity Lutheran Church in Columbia applied to be part of a state grant program that replaces pea rock with recycled tires for playgrounds. Although the church’s application ranked high in the grant program, it was turned down.

A letter from the Missouri DNR said including the church would violate a section of the state constitution that says “no money shall ever be taken from the public treasury, directly or indirectly, in aid of any church, sect or denomination of religion.”

A judge agreed with the state, and the entire U.S. Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit split on the question.

Young Icelanders not believers

A new poll shows that 0.0% of Icelanders under the age of 25 believe that God created the world, according to an article in Iceland Magazine. The poll also showed that less than half of Icelanders claim they are religious and more than 40% of young Icelanders identify as atheist. Of Icelanders younger than 25, 93.9% believe the world was created in the big bang, 6.1% either had no opinion or thought it had come into existence through some other means and 0.0% believed it had been created by God.



Letterbox

Jesus’ lineage can get confusing

Continuing George Saunders’ “dizzying” thought (Dec. 2015), how about this? Jesus is known as son of God, and Mary as mother of God. Would it not make Mary as grandmother of Jesus? **G.M. Chandu**  
New York

Congrats to FFRF on high charity rating

Congratulations on FFRF’s four-star rating from Charity Navigator, the highest rating it assigns. In contrast, “Bull” Donohue’s Catholic League receives the lowest rating of one star. **Dennis Middlebrooks**  
New York

List names of notable atheists

In “Meet a Florida Member: Michael Kaye” (Dec. 2015), he states, “Before I die, I would like atheists to be at the top of the list of the most-liked and admired group of people in the United States.”

From my perspective, there are a significant number of nontheists at the top of the list. Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, Albert Einstein, Mark Twain, Ayn Rand, Katharine Hepburn and Thomas Edison immediately come to mind.

Unfortunately, news writers who write about a famous individual will usually not mention that the person is a nonbeliever; consequently, the public is not aware of that fact.

I think FFRF should devote a full page to listing the names of notable/famous atheists, starting with those who are dead and up to the present.

**John Dunn**  
California  
*Editor’s note: Please see Freethought of the Day on FFRF’s website for a listing of prominent nonbelievers. [ffrf.org/news/day](http://ffrf.org/news/day)*

Publish all top essays without ranking

We were very pleased to see your excellent ad in The New York Times, and we immediately sent our membership fees and a donation. Freethought Today is informative and interesting, and we particularly enjoyed reading the fine college essays in the December issue. I have one suggestion, as an educator of many years: Instead of ranking the essays 1, 2, 3, etc., why not simply publish your top 10 as winning essays and divide the prize money equally? All the essays were excellent! Diversity adds to the richness of thought, and I think that the more we can accept the value of different opinions without trying to rank them, the better.

**Francesca Benson**  
New Jersey

Thanks to FFRF’s Patrick Elliott

Patrick Elliott, I want to say thank you in person some day so you can see in my face the gratitude I feel for you. I called you about five years ago and you called me back within hours. You, at no charge, helped me stop a church service happening in our local middle school. I’m not sure if you remember how eloquently and fervently you took up the cause, but you got it stopped quickly and tactfully.



Recently, I called about a teacher who was bashing Muslims and the LGBT community in her class. I called you, and you called back and left a message that included your cell phone number. If that’s not above and beyond, I don’t know what is.

I’m so grateful to you, Patrick, for what you did for us personally and for what you do for this country on a daily basis. I was thinking about you and my lack of ever being able to repay you. “Thank you” sounds so cheap and lacking. It’s all I have though, so thank you. Children of all faiths and lack of faiths deserve to have a religion-free public school education. Without FFRF, and those who work with you, it would be impossible.

**Debra Morales**  
Oklahoma

Relieved to know I wasn’t alone

I remember the first time I came across FFRF. I was at the Mayo Clinic Medical Review Course reading a newspaper and I read about FFRF being involved in a suit or complaint. I took down the address and ever since have enjoyed Freethought Today. I was so relieved to know I wasn’t alone.

I was raised in the fundamentalist evangelical mythologies, but in time science and reason prevailed. I was in general practice for 44 years in South Dakota. It’s possible this infidel may have done some good!

**Dr. Leonard Linde**  
South Dakota

Student essays offer ammunition

Just got my Freethought Today paper and, as always, enjoying reading it cover to cover.

I read with particular interest the student essays and the fascinating subject they were given. These young people hit the nail on the head about religion and terrorism. I mention this often to my church friends who decry my viewpoint, but obviously they have their heads in the sand, as usual. I was particularly pleased to see bible verses quoted that prove the evil and two-faced nature of religion. Now I have ammunition!

I enjoyed Ron Reagan’s speech too. Very well done but I’m sorry I missed it “live.”

I always enjoy reading about the victories FFRF makes in the church/

state/Constitution issues. Well done. I’m proud to be part of this ongoing effort to right many wrongs.

**Jack M. Red**  
North Carolina

*Editor’s note: You can view Ron’s speech via video at [ffrf.org/outreach/awards/special-awards](http://ffrf.org/outreach/awards/special-awards)*

Reagan’s convention speech superb

Ron Reagan’s presentation published in your latest newspaper [Jan./Feb. 2016] expressed my sentiments far better than I could. Indeed, it was superb! I especially enjoyed his citing his presbyterian upbringing (or, at least the attempt at such) as “Christianity light” because I was educated at the Fieldstone Ethical Culture School and consider Ethical Culture to be “Freedom From Religion Foundation light.”

Being neither a Ronald or Nancy Reagan fan, I am delighted, as a geneticist, at who they produced as a consequence of the reshuffling of the available gene pool!

**Willy Silvers**  
Professor Emeritus, Genetics  
Perelman School of Medicine  
Pennsylvania

FFRF’s actions are worthwhile

I am a former Presbyterian minister who left the church in 1968. I am a member of the Clergy Project. Now, at 80 years of age, I want to use some of my resources to support worthwhile programs and yours is one of them.

I fully support your efforts to keep religion out of the secular society and off public property. We also need to do more to stop the government from giving grants to faith-based organizations that merely use the money to supplement their religious programs.

**Frederick G. Wyngarden**  
Iowa

Religion will tear country apart

Our Constitution is being raped unmercifully.

I said 30 years ago that slavery put our country in a hateful civil war and the next civil war on our soil will be over religion.

Those of us that are “out of the closet” are in for a terrifying ride. Perhaps burning at the stake will become fashionable again.

I’m glad I’m 74 years old and won’t have to deal with it. Hopefully, I have seven grandkids and a first great-grandchild coming in June. What an awful world to live in. I don’t want to be here to see the inevitable slaughter.

**Patsy Baird**  
Nevada

We should just disregard the pledge

In his good article about the Pledge of Allegiance [Jan./Feb 2016], C. Boyd Pfeiffer stops short of considering the value of it.

Once the pledge caught on, it was plain enough that someone had to recite it. Following the vile method of religions, the primary target was children. They were required to recite it on any convenient occasion, well before they could spell or understand the word “indivisible,” or the fact that there was no such thing as “liberty and justice for all.”

The pledge was a poor idea, and we should not wonder that there has been much wrangling over it. Many people have felt they should not be asked to say a pledge of loyalty to the country they were born in. Pledges of loyalty are characteristic of countries that are not free.

I always wondered why the pledge starts with, “I pledge allegiance to the flag . . .” Then I learned the whole affair began with a for-profit scheme to sell flags to public schools. It worked very well.

I do not agree this unnecessary pledge has served us well at all. Instead of disputing its language, we should mark it “Return to Sender.”

**Robert McCurdy**  
Pennsylvania

It’s silly to pledge to inanimate object

To pledge allegiance to a flag is like pledging love and fidelity to your wedding ring instead of your spouse.

**Heidi Johnson**  
Maryland

Electronic rosary: Forward to the past



Electronic rosary

Welcome to the 21st century! The Roman Catholic headquarters (the Vatican) must be desperate to keep and/or attract customers (congregants).

Science to the rescue!

**Peter J. Viviano**  
New Mexico



Letterbox

Ingersoll statue worth saving



Robert Ingersoll statue

Robert G. Ingersoll’s writings eloquently expose the fallacies of religious beliefs and are especially amazing for the time that he wrote them. We need to preserve for future generations the Peoria, Ill., monument to him and his work.

Alan Woodmansee  
Rhode Island

(FFRF is teaming with the city of Peoria, Ill., to help repair the statue of the 19th century’s best-known and illustrious free-thought advocate. To donate, designate the “Ingersoll Peoria statue repair” dropdown link at [ffrf.org/get-involved/donate](http://ffrf.org/get-involved/donate).)

Heaven sounds pretty hellish

I became a serious atheist when I realized that if I did go to heaven, I would spend eternity with popes, priests, ministers and pedophiles and other such Christians and Muslims.

That thought gives me the heebie jeebies!

Joe Flax  
California

Evidence for religion lacking

There’s a principle in science called the “Sagan rule,” named after the famous astronomer Carl Sagan, who said “Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.”

The problem with applying this sensible doctrine to religion is that if you ask religionists for evidence of their claims, almost always they will point you to the bible or some other “holy” text, simply refusing to admit the document is full of contradictions and absurdities.

I get the irony of the “Jesus is watching you” billboard in New Mexico, a few yards from a sign advertising “adult videos” [Jan/Feb 2016].

A more subtle irony can be observed by noting the Jesus sign was paid for by the Roman Catholic Churches of San Juan County. If Jesus was watching an endless supply of Catholic priests sexually abusing children, why didn’t he do anything about it?

David M. Shea  
Maryland

It pays to complain



SSA members, from left, Micah Terrebonne, Tiffany Barnhardt, Sarah Barrios, and Tyler Bivens helped end prayers at Nicholls State University commencement programs.

FFRF member Dr. David Schultz reports that the Secular Student Alliance at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, La., recently got the university to eliminate prayer from commencement ceremonies.

Schultz is on the board of directors of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association and faculty advisor and sponsor of the SSA at Nicholls State.

Here is the story in his words:

“The SSA recently had a surprising win. Nicholls State University, like all other state universities in Louisiana, has had prayers at its commencement exercises — an invocation and a benediction. The prayers were regular given by a Catholic priest or a Protestant (usually Baptist) minister.

“Last fall, the president of the SSA (Sarah Barrios) sent a letter to the president of Nicholls State asking him to consider broadening the diversity of sectarian prayers given or to eliminate prayer entirely out of respect for those of other faiths and those of no faith.

“We were surprised and very pleased

to see that at the commencement exercises last fall there was only a moment of silence. No prayer. On returning to campus in January, Sarah had a letter from the president’s chief of staff thanking her for her suggestion and stating that they planned to remove prayer from the commencement exercises.

“The response of the university was a surprise to everyone. We’re in a very religious area. A large number of our students come from sectarian high schools. We have a St. Thomas Aquinas Center and Baptist Campus Ministry on the university’s property.

“I’ve griped to sympathetic faculty members about the religiosity that has been a part of the campus culture since its beginnings and the common response has been something like ‘You have to realize where we are.’

“We’re excited that the SSA, only in its third semester at Nicholls State University, has already attracted attention and made an impact on the academic culture at the university.”

Sharing the crank mail

Another sample of the not-so-friendly mail we get each month, with comments printed as received.

**Wilmore and the Cross:** Are you afraid that the cross will bring the Lord down to confront you personally? Are you afraid it has some magic powders? Everyone has the right to believe what they want in this life. If you don’t like the cross on the water tower then don’t look at it. If you don’t like the women that wear scarves on their head then don’t look at them. Having Jesus is kinda like having insurance, there will be a time in your life you will be glad you have it. — Jane Stopher, Kentucky

**Bill of Rights:** Why is your organization causing the courts to make a unconstitutional rule. Don’t understand this. Example, why can’t kids volunteer have a Christmas play at school with a nativity scene at the end of the annual Concord High School Holiday Spectacula? — Kyle Schori, Indiana

**Clemson Football:** why don’t you step out of college sports and mind your business. Leave the actions of Dabo Swinney to the university and the Clemson Family. When either of the two feel he is out of line, it will be handled properly. In other words we DON’T need your help. When we do, we will ask for it. — Andrew Williams

**HELL BOUND:** I am a God fearing concerned citizen and I would just like to know why you would not want people to know about our Lord and Savior. As must crime and terrible things going on in this world today Jesus is our only hope. — Shannon Harrington, Alabama

**Sick lives:** How worthless and sick your lives must be. I will pray for you. — Joe Reynolds

**Stupid banning of the bible:** YOU ARE SICK MINDED FOOLS, JESUS IS COMING BACK SOON AND YOU ARE GOING TO BE LEFT BEHIND, YOU ARE ALL OF YOUR STAFF, WHY IN THE WORLD OR NOT IN THE WORLD PROBABLY HELL WOULD WE NEED A STUPID ORGANIZATION CALLED FREEDOM FROM RELIGION, NO RELIGION NEVER SAVED ANYONE ONLY JESUS CHRIST BUT, WHEN YOU BAN RELIGION AND THE BIBLE YOU ARE TAKING AWAY ALL OF OUR RELIGIOUS RIGHTS TO DO WHAT AMERICA NEEDS RIGHT NOW WHICH IS JESUS I RE-



BUKE YOUR PRACTICES IN JESUS NAME AND YOU ARE GOING DOWN JESUS IS IN CONTROL OF AMERICA AMEN — Carol Smith, Wyoming

?: I juss want to put my pearsonal belief in on your thoughts....for your group to be free I pearsonally think when you try to force a coach or any organization not to have their own religion your not free from religion at all in my opinion being an athiest has become ots own religion that is pushing its own religion and beliefs on those who have faith and know that there is a God who has to come to save everyone — Jennifer Mitchell

**This goes to your president and all your powerful attorneys:** I emailed all president’s of every single University and college nationwide, and I emailed every school district nationwide, every city government, to ignore all your threats of lawsuits and ignore the lawsuit due to the fact of the 1st amendment rights, and you’re trying to force your whacked up agenda on the American people. You just want media attention and

money! BTW I emailed every single station nationwide including the major ones like MSNBC, FOXNEWS, and CNN to not give you air time. They all agree with me on this. Your agenda sucks and you won’t win this time! We will keep God in America and you can’t do a thing about it. Welcome to the NEW AMERICA!!! You lost! — Casey Forsyth

**Freedom of Religion:** You say GOD and any reference to Him offends you. Well, your stand against Him and His teachings greatly offends me. I have the choice of believing in the Lord my God and savior and in prayers.especially in the military. — William Crawford, California

**You will not win:** I have no problem if you want to be an athiest and want to educate people on their rights. But I know your true purpose. You want to destroy anything related to Jesus or God and you can’t stand the idea that religious people exist. I promise you, you will never get rid of God and those of us who are Christians. Don’t forget that we have the right to believe, and it amazes me to this day how people like

you could never believe in anything bigger than yourselves. You will not remove Jesus from our lives. You will never succeed in this ridiculous mission to turn this country’s founding principles from morality and religion to secular atheism where everyone is selfish and nihilistic. — Mark Bobbi

**I will pray for you:** The rapid increase in violence in our society is, in no small part, due to your efforts to deny our Lord. One day you will see. — Stephen Melsom

**Question:** What gives you the belief that you have the right to force your ideas on individuals or athletes? You are part of the problem with the USA and world today. I feel sorry for you — Steve Sanders, South Carolina

**Clemson:** Y’all are nothing but a bunch of worthless pieces of shit. Y’all want freedom from religion until it comes to what y’all want to put on people. You’re fucking ignorant. Clemson and Dabo don’t push religion on anyone. All you want is money. You stupid son of a bitches. You’re money hungry is all it is. I will be filing a lawsuit against you. See you in court. — Justin Raines

**Dabo Sweeney:** People have the right to tune out things they do not want to listen to. If the Clemson Team is 98% Christian, and I understand it is, then the 2% has no right in a Democracy to stop hearing what Dabo says. Back off and leave the Clemson family alone. You are based in Madison, Wisconsin and not the Deep South. Religion is a powerful entity in this part of the world. Pushing your agenda down the throats of the vast majority is just plain wrong. You are no better than Joe McCarthy was in his witch hunt. — Mike and Dianne Evans, Alabama

**no bibles in hotels:** Only fools and idiots would prevent Bibles in rooms in hotels. It is because of the Bible that you can run a hotel. Jesus Christ lives in the Bible. You have freedom because of Him. WAKE UP before it is too late. — Colleen Ulrich, Australia

**College and religion:** Leave Clemson alone. What is the matter with you? These are not government institutions as you think. We as,parents pay huge sums to send our kids there, so if we want prayer at football games , etc we get it. As long as your devil worshipping kids are not forced to pray, then shut the hell up. — Dr. Andrew Johnson



# Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

## Arrested / Charged

**Shabir Ahmed, Khanqah, Pakistan:** Inciting violence. Ahmed, imam at a mosque south-west of Lahore, allegedly accused 15-year-old Anwar Ali of blasphemy, after which the boy went home and cut off his hand, then returned to the mosque and presented it on a plate to Ahmed.

Ahmed had asked for people who didn't love Muhammad to raise their hands. Ali misheard and raised his hand to show his love for the prophet. The imam reportedly pointed at Ali and called him a "blasphemer who was liable to be killed." Worshipers joined in to condemn him.

The boy's father defended the imam. "We are lucky that we have this son who loves Prophet Muhammad that much. We will be rewarded by God for this in the eternal world." *Source: NY Times, 1-19-16*

**LaSonia Tucker, 41, Jonesboro, AR:** Aggravated assault. The police report states that Tucker was conducting the family's Sunday bible study at home with her 3 children when her 18-year-old daughter became uncooperative and "mumbled" while reading the verses.

"This action made [Tucker] angry so she grabbed an extension cord and began whipping [her daughter] with the cord across the left arm," the report said. Then she allegedly took a 4-inch steak knife, "moved forward and the knife accidentally struck the top of [her daughter's] right hand." Extensive bleeding resulted. *Source: Democrat-Gazette, 1-18-16*

**Jeffrey Allred, 42, Sallisaw, OK:** Embezzlement. Allred, pastor of The Journey since 2005, allegedly used a church credit for his personal use. About \$50,000 is involved. The church board has filed a civil suit alleging "deceit, false representation, nondisclosure and concealment, breach of fiduciary duty, conversion and all other related claims." *Source: KFSM, 1-13-16*

**Christopher D. Beam, 33, Shubuta, MS:** 5 counts each of lustful touching of a child and enticing a child under 18 years of age with an electronic device for sexual purposes. Beam, pastor of Evergreen Baptist Church, was also a substitute teacher and school bus driver. *Source: WDAM, 1-13-16*

**James Lilly, 24, Bluefield, W.VA:** Incest, 2nd-degree sexual assault and 31 counts of sexual abuse. Lilly, who worked in youth ministry at Episcopal churches, is accused of molesting a juvenile female starting in 2009 when she was 9 or 10. *Source: Daily Telegraph*

**Donnie Ray Schultz, 45, Del City, OK:** 19 counts of 2nd-degree rape, 31 counts of forcible oral sodomy, manufacturing child pornography, possession of obscene material involving the participation of a minor under the age of 18 and engaging in a pattern of criminal offenses in 2 or more counties. It's alleged Schultz met a 14-year-old girl through the bible class he taught at Calvary Christian Church and started a sexual relationship. She's now 16.

Schultz allegedly had sex with the girl at "homes where the defendant would do home repair," at the church, in a storage unit and at their respective homes. He was convicted of rape in 1995 and was on the sex offender registry until 2013.

Calvary Christian spokesman Jason Sharp said Schultz was a member for about 19 years and that church officials knew about his conviction but discounted its relevance because the state had removed him from the sex offender list. *Source: newsok.com, 1-11-16*

**Samuel Borntreger, 39, Summer Shade, KY:** 1st-degree murder. Borntreger, who had recently become a minister, called authorities to say he'd poisoned his wife, Anna Yoder Borntreger, 26, in 2006 when they lived with their 4 children in an Amish community in Harrison County, MO.

Borntreger was a well-known cabinet maker, said Harrison County Sheriff Josh Eckerson. "We were aware [Anna] passed and supposedly she had a liver disease of some sort. We didn't have any idea what was going on until . . . he confessed."

The probable cause statement said he told deputies he put antifreeze in his wife's drinks and twice inserted battery acid into her rectum. Eckerson got a search warrant to exhume the body. "He became a minister and decided it was time to air his dirty laundry, I guess," Eckerson said.

Borntreger had remarried and fathered 4 more children. *Source: AP/Daily News, 1-11-16*

**Jacob Malone, 33, Exton, PA:** Rape and institutional sexual assault, endangering the welfare of a child, corruption of a minor and furnishing liquor to a child. Malone was pastor of leadership development and volunteerism



at Calvary Fellowship in Downingtown before resigning in November after admitting impregnating a teen who was living with him and his wife Libby.

Malone met the girl when she was about 12 and belonged to a church in Mesa, AZ, where he was a pastor. He contacted the girl when she was 17 in June 2014 and invited her to live with him in Minnesota, police said. He reportedly flew to Ecuador "to reflect on the situation" and was taken into custody by customs agents after returning to the U.S. *Source: The Inquirer, 1-11-16*

**Ronald Stribble, 66, Lindale, TX:** Soliciting prostitution. Stribble resigned as senior adult minister at First Baptist Church after posting bond, said Tom Buck, senior pastor. The arrest report said Stribble arranged online to meet a female at a Tyler hotel, where he was confronted by plainclothes officers.

"Our focus, as a church, from this point forward will be to love, pray for and help Ronnie and his family as they walk through this time, and seek God to bring healing both to them and our church," Buck said in a statement. *Source: Morning Telegraph, 1-8-16*

**David L. Von Bergen, 59, Alton, IL:** 3 counts of unauthorized video recording and obstruction of justice. Von Bergen, an elder at Zion Lutheran Church, is charged with hiding several cameras inside the church, including in a changing area in the sacristy. **Kale Hanson, 36, Bethalto, Zion's assistant pastor,** is charged with obstruction of justice.

The cameras were found during Christmas Eve services. Police allege Hanson agreed to destroy their memory cards and let Von Bergen leave with the cameras. At least 1 minor was recorded in the changing area, said Tom Gibbons, Madison County state's attorney. *Source: News-Democrat, 1-7-16*

**Gerald Searle, 51, Liberty Center, OH:** Receipt of material involving the sexual exploitation of a child. Searle, who resigned last April for "personal reasons" as pastor at Shiloh Christian Union Church in Delta, is accused of possessing child pornography between 2013-15. He was also a substitute bus driver for the public school district. *Source: NBC Toledo, 1-6-16*

**Anthony McClain, 54, Suffolk, VA:** 15 counts of aggravated sexual battery, 5 counts of indecent liberties with a child and 6 counts of incest. McClain operated a ministry called Something God Made Ministries Community Center Inc. Charges stem from alleged incidents in 2015.

In August he allegedly told a detective "it was consensual and she initiated it."

"I believe my husband is innocent, and I'm standing by him 100%," Deborah McClain told a reporter over the phone from N. Carolina, where the family has relocated to. *Source: WAVY, 1-6-16*

**Robert Lubrano, 63, Farmingdale, NY:** Criminal possession of a controlled substance. Lubrano, an unassigned Catholic priest, is arrested in a motel parking lot for possessing of 800 mg of crack cocaine and drug paraphernalia. A spokesman for the Diocese of Rockville Centre said he's been on leave for 5 years.

"I have been smoking crack cocaine ever since my sister was murdered," a complaint alleged he told police. His sister was decapitated in her apartment by her mentally ill son in October 2014. The son died after jumping in front of a train. His brother died of a heroin overdose in 1997. *Source: NY Daily News, 1-6-16*

**Richard Watson, 51, Salem, MA:** Heroin trafficking. Watson, a Wiccan priest, is accused of having than 2 ounces of heroin in his apartment when it was searched in August. He allegedly let Javier Peña-Abreu, 22, Dorchester, store the drug there to be picked up by buyers.

Peña-Abreu's lawyer told the court his client was only at Watson's apartment to have a tarot card reading. *Source: Gloucester Times, 1-5-16*

**Daniel lampaglia, 72, Manhattan, NY:** 9 counts of petit larceny. lampaglia, pastor of Evangelical Rock Church, is charged with stealing church money between Oct. 28 and Nov. 21, 2015. Based on videos recorded by members suspicious that the pastor was stealing from offerings, he's accused of taking only \$238, but an affidavit in a civil case alleges he misappropriated over \$8,000.

"They don't pay me enough," lampaglia told a police officer after his arrest, a prosecutor alleged in court.

Church sources told a reporter lampaglia is paid \$600 a week plus free lodging and utilities in a 3-bedroom apartment in the Rock Church townhouse on E. 62nd St. "He has no shame," said church member Sue Cruz, 54. "A decent person would step down." *Source: WLNy, 1-1-16*

**Callan D. Rice, 26, Anson, TX:** 2nd-degree indecency with a child. Anson was fired as Bethel Assembly youth pastor after being charged with having a relationship with a girl under age 17 who was in his youth group. He was arrested in his vehicle while parked with the girl behind a building in Abilene. Rice's wife is worship pastor at Bethel. *Source: KTXS, 12-30-15*

**Almir Daci, aka Ebu Belkisa,** an imam from eastern Albania, is charged with advocating terrorism and recruiting persons to conduct terrorist acts. Daci, believed to be in Syria, will be tried in absentia.

A YouTube video released last June showed Daci and a Kosovo militant threatening people who don't support ISIS, prosecutors said. *Source: Balkan Insight, 12-3-15*

## ‘He has no shame. A decent person would step down.’

— Sue Cruz, on Daniel lampaglia, her pastor charged with larceny

**Earnest Blount, 55, Hattiesburg, MS:** Sexual battery. Blount, pastor of Sweet Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church for 22 years, is alleged to have engaged in oral sex in his office with a 15-year-old boy. The church has accepted his resignation. *Source: WDAM, 12-30-15*

**Avraham Yosef, Holon, Israel:** 2 counts of breach of trust. Yosef, Holon's chief rabbi, is accused of using his position to force businesses to work with the kashrut (kosher) supervision agencies owned by his family. *Source: Haaretz, 12-27-15*

**Benjamin Oteka, Gulu, Uganda:** Embezzlement. Oteka, pastor of Faith Cathedral Center, is charged with stealing \$104,000 from Favor of God Ministries, where he was director in 2013.

Janan Loum, chairperson of the National Fellowship of Born-again Churches, defended Oteka, claiming the recent breakup of his marriage to Carol Ward, the American founder of the ministry, is why Ward accused Oteka of stealing money. *Source: Daily Monitor, 12-28-15*

**Adam Egan, 35, Bethlehem, NY:** Unlawful surveillance and tampering with evidence. Egan, pastor of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, allegedly recorded a woman getting dressed in a Salvation Army room in Colonie. Police said he fled the building and tried to delete the video after the woman saw a camera on top of a curtain and phoned them for help. *Source: Times*

*Union, 12-24-15*

**Jeffrey Peterson, 28, Akron, OH:** 3rd-degree sexual battery. Peterson, information technology coordinator at Our Lady of the Elms School, is accused of an incident last July involving a student at the all-girls Catholic school, where he has been fired. *Source: cleveland.com, 12-22-15*

**Andrew M. Leone, 49, Palm Bay, FL:** 30 counts of possession of material depicting child sexual conduct, promotion of material depicting child sexual conduct and using a computer to seduce, solicit or lure a child. Leone was part of the security team at Calvary Chapel and a ministry assistant for the Youth Outreach Unleashed program.

A family member called the church about images of a teen girl and boy on compact discs she allegedly found in Leone's backpack. The church notified police. *Source: Florida Today, 12-1-15*

## Pleaded / Convicted

**Mostafa Elazabawy, 61, Manhattan, NY:** Elazabawy, imam at Masjid Manhattan, pleaded guilty to petit larceny and agreed to pay \$13,000 restitution and a \$5,000 fine. The charge stemmed from his work as a paid tax preparer for Queen of Sheba Ethiopian restaurant.

Elazabawy made headlines when he said the National Sept. 11 Memorial & Museum's "The Rise of Al Qaeda" video narrated by Brian Williams offended Muslims.

"I'm not a bad person," he said in court. "One day I'm going to meet the Lord and he's gonna clear everything up." *Source: NY Daily News, 1-6-16*

**Paul Clarke, 71, Manchester, England:** Pleaded guilty to 5 counts of possessing an indecent image of a child. Clarke, pastor at St. Anthony's Catholic Church, was arrested when a 2014 search of the residential presbytery allegedly turned up 3,100 images of children. *Source: BBC, 1-5-16*

**Stephen Pohl, 57, Louisville, KY:** Pleaded guilty to accessing child pornography. Pohl, former pastor at St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church, admitted accessing images of underage boys at the church rectory and office between January and August 2015. A plea agreement calls for him to serve 33 months in federal prison and register as a sex offender.

"I'm presently working with a psychologist," Pohl told U.S. District Judge David Hale. "It has assisted me in understanding what is happening here."

The case started when a 10-year-old boy told his mother that "Father Steve" had him pose at an after-school club with his hands on his knees and legs spread apart. Detectives found about 150 more photos Pohl took of St. Margaret Mary School students. Their underwear was visible in some. Parents have started a petition asking the school and U.S. Attorney's Office to release the photos. *Source: Courier-Journal, 1-4-16*

**Ronald L. Wilcox, 60, Fruitland, MD:** Pleaded guilty to aggravated sexual assault. He admitted molesting a teen girl in 1996-98 at the church office and at her home while he was a deacon in training and youth ministry assistant at Macedonia Freewill Baptist Church in Piscataway, NJ. *Source: nj.com, 12-22-15*

## Sentenced

**Demarcus Smith, 32, Memphis, TN:** 85 months in prison after pleading guilty to receipt of child pornography. Smith, pastor at Oak Hill Missionary Baptist Church, was convicted of having a teen boy send him sexually explicit photos of himself through a Facebook app. *Source: Commercial Appeal, 1-15-16*

**David Wax, 53, and Judith Wax, 51, Lakewood, NJ:** 7 years in prison and 2 years' probation, respectively, for their part in the so-called "Prodfather" plot to force Jewish men to give their wives religious divorces called "gets."

The husband and wife testified against **Mendel Epstein, 70,** the rabbi sentenced earlier to 10 years. Victims described being thrown into vans, beaten and shocked with electric cattle prods until they relented.

The Waxes admitted replacing a blood-soaked carpet in their home to hide the crime. The family of the victim's wife allegedly paid David Wax about \$100,000. *Source: Asbury Park Press, 1-13-16*

**Tony Walsh, 61, Dublin, Ireland:** 2 years in prison with 1 year suspended for the sexual assault of a girl between the ages of 7 and 10 in 1973-76. Walsh, a Catholic seminarian at the time, is already in prison for a 2010 conviction for molesting 3 boys. He was known as the "Singing Priest" as part of a traveling group of performing clerics before he was defrocked.

The court heard that the girl was assaulted in a parish hall run by the Sisters of Charity, where Walsh helped with maintenance work.



*Source: Irish Independent, 1-13-16*  
**Ryan A. Winner, 34, Olney, TX:** 60 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of sexual exploitation of children. A still image of the pre-buscent male victim engaged in sexual conduct with a man appears to have been taken at the unidentified church where Winner worked as a youth minister.

The investigation started after U.S. Homeland Security received a tip from Australian authorities about online child pornography being traded. *Source: Olney Enterprise, 1-7-16*

**Aryeh L. “Larry” Dudovitz, 48, Chicago:** 8 years in prison for the aggravated sexual assault of a 15-year-old boy in 2006. Dudovitz, a Chabad-Lubavitch rabbi and father of 9, is “a sexual predator of the worst kind,” prosecutor Tracy Senica told the court.

After drinking traditional vodka shots with the boy and his family at their home to celebrate Sukkot, Dudovitz told the victim he was leaving, but the boy later woke up to Dudovitz performing a sex act on him. *Source: Sun-Times, 1-6-16*

**Brent Bartel, 42, Richland Hills, TX:** Guilty by jury of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon and injury to a child. Bartel’s wife Lindy testified she awoke in 2012 to screams and found him holding their 6-year-old son down as he carved a pentagram on the boy’s back with a box cutter.

“I asked him ‘Why?’ He said, ‘According to the bible, women are sinful and only the blood of innocent will do.’”

Lindy Bartel testified that the day before, her husband watched Mel Gibson’s movie “*The Passion of the Christ*” repeatedly. “I asked him, ‘How many times have you watched that?’ He said 10 times.” *Source: Star-Telegram, 1-5-16*

**James Carragher, 75, Prenton, England:** 9 years in prison. Carragher, former head of St. William’s, a Catholic home for boys operated by the De La Salle Order, was found guilty in December of 24 counts of indecent and sexual assault related to his years at the home with multiple victims. He has already served 21 years after first being sentenced in 1993.

Co-defendant **Anthony McCallen**, 69, the school’s chaplain, was sentenced to 15 years for a series of historical sex offenses.

David Greenwood, who represents 109 alleged victims of assault at St. William’s, said a civil case filed in 2004 has still not reached a conclusion. *Source: bt.com, 1-4-16*

**Ian Pheasey, 54, Warwick, England:** 5 years in prison after pleading guilty to sexual assaults on 3 girls in the 1990s. Pheasey and the girls, ages 6, 7 and 14, were Jehovah’s Witnesses. Testimony alleged Pheasey, who volunteered as a Kingdom Hall librarian, choked the girls to get sexual satisfaction and that the church covered it up for 25 years. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe sex assaults need to be observed by at least 2 people to be credible.

An issue of Watchtower magazine urged readers to be “shrewd” about sex abuse and stated, “Even if a report is true, it does not necessarily mean that it should be spread. There may be times when it would be neither right nor loving to distribute true accounts to others.” *Source: Daily Star, 1-3-16*

**Faisal bin Nayem and Rezwanul Azad Rana, Dhaka, Bangladesh,** were sentenced to death for the 2013 machete murder of Ahmed Haider, a secular activist who was publicly critical of Islam. Both were university students and members of the banned Ansar Bangla militant group.

**Jaasim Uddin Rahmani**, the spiritual head of Ansar Bangla, was sentenced to 5 years for abetting murder, while **5 others** received jail terms of varying lengths for their involvement. *Source: Wall Street Journal, 12-31-15*

**Jean B. Uwinkindi, 64, Kigali, Rwanda:** Life in prison. Uwinkindi, former pastor of a Pentecostal church in the capital, was convicted by Rwanda’s highest court of genocide and crimes against humanity tied to the 1994 deaths of 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and Hutus. He was arrested in 2010 in Uganda. *Source: Reuters, 12-31-15*

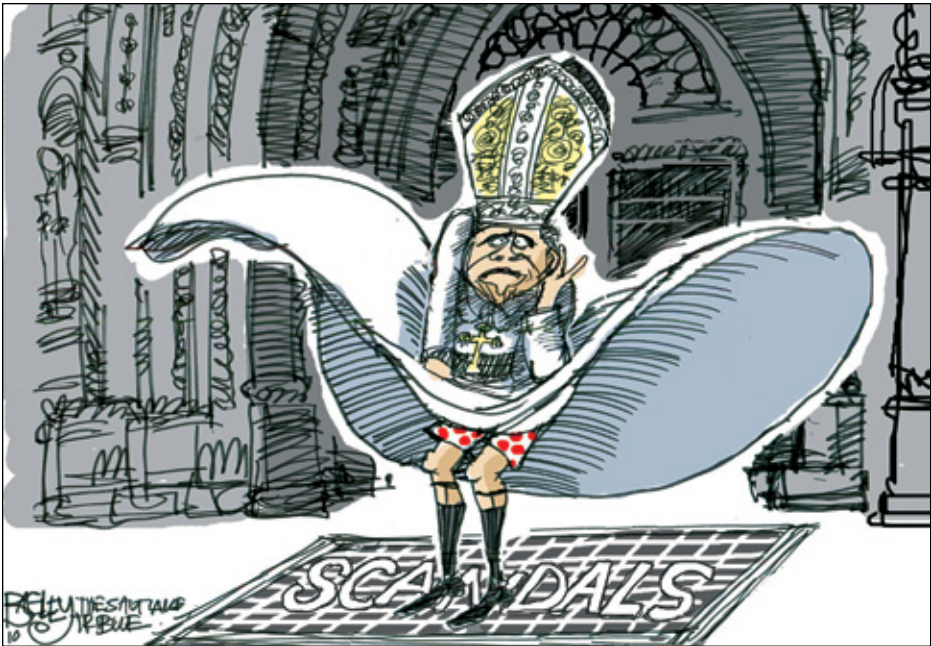
Civil Lawsuits Filed

**Trinity Fellowship Church, Amarillo, TX,** is being sued for \$50 million over allegations that **Randy S. Castillo**, 28, a children’s ministry volunteer, molested a girl while he worked at the church from 2012-14. He was charged in March 2015 with 2 counts each of aggravated assault of a child and sexual assault of a child.

According to the church, Castillo worked with 4-year-olds at the church and also at a summer camp for 1st- through 4th-graders in 2014. *Source: KSNV, 1-14-16*

“Jane Doe 115” is suing the **Catholic Diocese of St. Cloud, MN, the Order of St. Benedict and Church of St. Joseph**, alleging she was molested by **Othmar Hohmann**, a monk who was pastor of St. Joseph in the early 1960s. The woman alleges multiple assaults starting when she was 11 by Hohmann, who retired to the abbey in 1975 and died in 1980. He was moved between parishes 12 times before 1961-66, the period covered in the suit. *Source: St. Cloud Times, 1-13-16*

More plaintiffs, bringing the number to 10



women, have joined an **Illinois** suit alleging leaders of the bible-based **Institute in Basic Life Principles** covered up decades of inappropriate sexual conduct. The women were participants, interns or employees at the conservative ministry. The suit seeks to stop IBLP’s alleged plans to liquidate its assets and relocate from Oak Brook to Texas.

Defendants are the institute, its board and founder/pastor **Bill Gothard**, 81, accused of molesting a 15-year-old girl in 2012 but never charged.

Followers include Michelle and Jim Bob Duggar of the now-canceled reality TV show “19 Kids and Counting.” The institute also operated the facility where the Duggars’ eldest son, Josh, went as a teen after admitting he sexually abused his younger sisters. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 1-7-16*

Six men have sued the **Catholic Diocese of Portland, ME**, alleging it covering up abuse by its priest **James Valley** from 1958 to 1977 when they were ages 8 to 15. Valley died in 1997.

“I have no evidence indicating that Bishop [Daniel] Feeney warned the public to protect their children against Father Valley,” said Mitchell Garabedian, the men’s attorney. “Father Valley was shuttled from parish to parish to parish, as were so many other abusers.” *Source: AP, 1-5-16*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Kansas City and John Wisner**, associate pastor of St. Agnes Parish in Roeland Park, MO, in the mid-1980s, are being sued by a man who alleges the priest molested him when he was between 15 and 17 years old.

Wisner was removed from active ministry in 2012 after other child sexual abuse allegations surfaced, said an archdiocese statement. *Source: KCTV, 12-18-15*

**Zion Lutheran Church, Hopkins, MN**, is being sued by “Jane Doe 115,” alleging she was molested in 1974-77 by now-deceased youth minister **John Huchthausen** starting when she was 11.

‘[Masteller] is not entitled to a volume discount for his crimes.’

— *Pennsylvania Superior Court denial of Jonathan Masteller’s claim his sentence was excessive.*

Doe is represented by Hamilton James, a newly formed national attorney team, which includes FFRF member Marci Hamilton. Hamilton, professor at Cardoza School of Law in New York and an authority on sex abuse litigation, said women in general are reluctant to report abuse by clergy, coaches, teachers, family members and family friends. *Source: Star Tribune, 12-15-15*

Legal Developments

**Jonathan D. Masteller, 25, Kinzers, PA,** sentenced last year to 25 to 80 years for molesting a 12-year-old boy, had his excessive sentence appeal denied by the state Superior Court. Masteller, youth programs director at Gap Community Church, was charged after a pastor doing maintenance on a church computer found photos of Masteller and a boy engaged in sex acts.

Masteller, the opinion stated, “is not entitled to a volume discount for his crimes.” *Source: Lancaster Online, 1-14-16*

**Eliezer Berland**, 78, an Israeli rabbi wanted on charges of child molestation, may now have some sort of diplomatic status that would protect him from prosecution, according to the South African Jewish Report. Recent photos

showed him celebrating his birthday in Johannesburg. He first fled to the Netherlands after several females, including a 15-year-old girl, alleged he had molested them.

Berland’s son described his father’s new status as a “victory over the Israeli legal authorities.” *Source: Jerusalem Post, 1-10-16*

Israel’s Supreme Court upheld a 1-year prison sentence for **Yoshiyahu Pinto**, a rabbi who pleaded guilty to bribing a police official probing personal use of charitable donations. Pinto asked the court to void the prison sentence due to poor health and his cooperation with prosecutors.

In April 2014, prosecutors charged former U.S. Rep. Michael Grimm, R-NY, with illegally receiving several hundred thousand dollars in contributions from Pinto followers. *Source: JTA, 1-7-16*

Allegations

**Michael “Mitch” Walters, 60, S. Orange, NJ**, parochial vicar at Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church, left the ministry by mutual agreement with the Archdiocese of Newark. He’s accused of molesting a minor boy and minor girl in the early 1980s while pastor of St. Cassian Church in Montclair.

Accuser David Ohlmuller, Lake Bluff, IL, alleges Walters fondled him in a confessional at least 10 times, starting when he was 12. He’s represented by Boston attorney Mitchell Garabedian, as is a woman who alleges Walters molested her in her home and on a trip to Pennsylvania when she was 13 and 14. *Source: nj.com, 1-16-16*

Grace Episcopal Church, **Traverse City, MI**, sent a letter to parishioners revealing that 3 church members “were sexually harassed by the Rev. **Bry Dennison** during his tenure as interim priest in 2008-09.” Church spokesperson John Strickler said that to his knowledge, harassment included violating personal space, unwelcome embraces, “brush-bys and things of that nature.”

After an investigation, Dennison was removed from ministry until July 2015. He’s been restored as a “priest in good standing” but is still barred from pastoral duties. Strickler said the church has offered to help pay for victim counseling. *Source: WPNB/WGTU, 1-11-16*

Alleged pedophile priest **Ronald Pickering** got \$188,000 from the **Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne** after he fled Australia. Pickering “retired” in 1993 from his Melbourne parish to England in the wake of at least 19 allegations of child sexual abuse. He died there in 2009.

Records show annual payments to Pickering were delivered by intermediaries even as the archdiocese was compensating his victims. The archdiocese paid each of 16 victims an average of \$37,000. *Source: The Age, 1-10-16*

At least 231 boys in the **Regensburger Domspatzen choir in Germany** were historical abuse victims, according to Ulrich Weber, a lawyer commissioned by the Catholic diocese to investigate allegations. The choir, attached to a boarding school, was run by Pope Benedict’s older brother, **Georg Ratzinger**, from 1964 to 1994, when most of abuse is alleged. Claims included rape, sexual assault, beatings and food deprivation, said Weber.

Composer and former pupil Franz Wittenbrink alleged in 2010 there was a “system of sadistic punishments connected to sexual pleasure.” *Source: The Guardian, 1-8-16*

Police in **India** raided 2 shelters run by the **Emmanuel Seva Group**, a nongovernmental organization in Greater Noida and Meerut, after allegations children were abused for failing to memorize bible passages. “We are investigating whether the organization had permission to run a shelter home. Three persons, including the caretaker of a shelter home, have been detained and are being questioned,” said Ashwani Kumar, Bisrakh police spokesman.

A 9-year-old boy, who was among 30 children from poor families removed from the shelters, said he and his younger brother and

sister were allowed to see their parents only 15 minutes a month and were “paraded” before potential donors. “They gave us good clothes whenever visitors came. They made us stand in line and recite bible passages. Fltering meant a beating with sticks and belts later.” *Source: Hindustan Times, 1-8-16*

**Manuel Gallo Espinoza**, 52, a **New Jersey** Catholic priest who fled from Plainfield to his native Ecuador in 2003 after being accused of rape by an altar boy, is the subject of an arrest warrant. Gallo Espinoza admitted to a reporter in August that he engaged in a sex with Max Rojas Ramirez, now 28, who has gone public with his allegation. Joan Robinson Gross, Union County presiding municipal court judge, found probable cause to issue the warrant.

Asked by the reporter if he realized that having sex with a 15-year-old when he was 40 could be a crime, Gallo Espinoza responded by email, “I just came fr [sic] my country and really in Ecuador a person at 15 years old is not consider [sic] so innocent.”

Ramirez alleges the priest held him down and raped him in a bedroom at the rectory on Easter weekend in 2003. *Source: nj.com, 1-7-15*

**Marc Gafni**, 55, (born Mordechai Winiarz), a former rabbi accused of sexual misconduct with girls and women in the U.S. and Israel but never charged despite admitting to some of it, has started an “evolutionary spirituality” movement in California called the Center for Integral Wisdom. It’s attracted a number of wealthy celebrities and the attention of Jewish leaders concerned about Gafni’s past.

The New York Times recently reported that Gafni’s growing prominence is cause for alarm in the Jewish community, given the accusations of “sexually exploiting a high school freshman and who then moved to Israel to start a mystical community, only to lose it after having affairs with multiple followers.”

Gafni told the Times that “old claims against him were all exaggerated, the result of professional resentment, and that he had been the victim of pseudo-feminist witch hunts.

“Mr. Gafni, who has been divorced three times, said that any mistakes might have occurred because he was in denial about his poly-amorous nature,” the Times reported. *Source: Haaretz, 12-27-15*

Removed / Resigned

**Howard White, Bedford, PA**, was put on leave as substitute pastor at St. James Episcopal Church after a lawyer representing sexual abuse plaintiffs alleged White molested them at **St. George’s School** in Middletown, RI, in the 1970s and 1980s.

The school in December said an investigation found that 26 students accused 6 employees of sexual abuse and apologized for not reporting allegations to police.

According to a 1974 letter from then-headmaster Anthony Zane to White, the school gave him money after his departure and paid his moving expenses.

“Under the circumstances, I think the school is being generous, and if you find yourself hard-pressed in the future I suggest that you consider selling your Porsche,” said the letter, released by attorney Carmen Durso. White has not been charged with a crime. *Source: Morning Call, 1-7-16*

**Steven Harris, East Falls, PA**, pastor of St. Bridget Catholic Church, was placed on administrative leave for the second time in 5 years. A statement by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia said it “was made aware of possible concerns regarding his suitability for ministry at this time” while stating the removal “does not involve accusations of any criminal activity.”

He was put on leave in 2011 in the wake of a grand jury report on clergy abuse, then reinstated in 2012. Harris, ordained in 1980, was assigned to St. Bridget’s in June 2015. *Source: Montgomery News, 1-7-15*

**Paul Rowan, 47, Warrington, England**, a Catholic priest who was director of theology and religious studies at St. Mary’s University in Twickenham, was fired due to allegations of an affair 2 years ago with undergraduate Charmaine Garton, a mother of 2. Rowan is appealing the decision. *Source: Daily Mail, 1-3-16*

**Vsevolod Chaplin**, 47, a Russian Orthodox archpriest, was fired as the Moscow Patriarchate chairman of the Synodal Department for the Cooperation of Church and Society. Chaplin had urged women to dress more modestly so they wouldn’t provoke rape and offended Muslims by calling Russia’s military campaign in Syria a “holy war.” *Source: NPR, 12-26-15*

Other

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle** made public a list of 77 clergy or religious order members accused of sexual abusing minors.

Those on the list served or lived in western Washington between 1923 and 2008, the archdiocese said in a statement, and were the subject of “allegations that are either admitted, established or determined to be credible.”

At least 40 persons were listed as deceased and 14 with “unknown” status. Most of the rest were laicized. *Source: KUOW, 1-15-16*



## In memoriam



### Manfred ‘Dick’ Koehler 1933–2015

FFRF member Manfred G. “Dick” Koehler, 82, died at home in Slinger, Wis., on Dec. 23, 2015. Born in Grossk-

mehln, Germany to Max and Ida Koehler, Manfred spent most of his life in Wisconsin, including the last 27 years in Slinger.

He grew up in Milwaukee and attended the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and also served in the U.S. Army.

He retired from Sigma-Aldrich at 55, which meant he could spend more retirement time with an active role in his grandchildren’s upbringing. He babysat them while the parents worked, helped with school work and attended their sports games. He also attended many concerts and programs.

Manfred’s wife Helga died in 2013.

According to his obituary, “His post-retirement interest in clocks led

him to a basement full of tick-tocking, musical and moving Black Forest clocks and the moniker ‘Mr. Cuckoo.’

“Everyone will miss his strong presence, his love of sports (golf and basketball especially), his thoughtful comments and his keen sense of humor.”

Memorial donations may be made to FFRF, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701 (<http://ffrf.org/donate>).

### David I. Berkman 1934–2015

FFRF member David Berkman, 81, died on Dec. 31, 2015. He was a college professor, teaching mass communications at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, among other universities. He wrote a column called

“Media Musings” for a Milwaukee alternative paper called the Shepherd’s Express. He also hosted Wisconsin Public Radio’s “Media Talk” show for 13 years.

Dave was a liberal, a civil rights activist, and a free speech absolutist, and served on the state boards of the ACLU in Connecticut and Wisconsin.

A member of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters, he advocated protecting Public Broadcasting’s independence from political threats. He loved reading, politics and argument.

He is survived by his wife, Margarita Dusek; children, Linda Turner of New York City, Elena Sullivan of San Diego, Calif., and Neil Berkman of Berkeley, Calif., and grandchildren.

## Secular invocations

### Aleta Ledendecker Oak Ridge (Tenn.) City Council Jan. 11, 2016



Aleta Ledendecker

*Here is the full transcript of Aleta’s invocation. The mayor of Oak Ridge cut her off in mid-sentence when she still had more than 30 seconds to go. (See page 7 for the full story.)*

Good evening, council of Oak Ridge.

As I solemnize these proceedings, I want to acknowledge the service of the council members and share appreciation for their willingness to be a part of the governmental process. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who take on the burden of public office. Thank you for your service to the citizens of Oak Ridge.

Now, let us not bow our heads, but hold them high with eyes open so that we may keep them focused on the issues facing Oak Ridge in order that they may be considered with reason and compassion.

When this body comes together to govern, they do so with the consent of the citizens of Oak Ridge. Oak Ridge is a very diverse community with many different views and opinions. I urge the members of the City Council to face the future and their civic duties with full recognition of their responsibilities to all the citizens of Oak Ridge. I urge you to maintain our trust that you will recognize and serve equally the growing diversity of your constituents with favoritism toward none. Realize that this growing diversity encompasses not only many religions, but a growing contingent of those who have no religious affiliation, the “nones.”

This community is made stronger by the diversity within it. Over 200 years

ago our Constitution established a principle of inclusion as a shining example for the rest of the world, which has contributed to the astonishing success of our nation. When we forget or ignore it, we turn our backs on the wisdom of the founding fathers and tarnish their legacy, weakening our society in the process.

It is incumbent upon this council to make the best decisions for the community — the entire community. In this regard, I ask that you use reason, wisdom and empathy in your deliberations today, taking into account the implications your decisions will have now and into the future.

As this new year begins, remember that in honor of separation of church and state, no deities need to, nor should be invoked at the openings of your meetings. Doing so gives the appearance if not actual governmental preference to one group of citizens over others. The council is a civil body not a religious one, so should recognize that secular authority in government is not only sufficient, but preferable. James Madison, founding father and 4th President said it well:

“And I have no doubt that every new example will succeed, as every past one has done, in showing that religion & government will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together.”

Mayor and council members I appreciate the opportunity to offer an inspiring start to your meeting.

Now let this honored council proceed with its business, remembering also to honor all of its constituents, while upholding the principle of separation of church and state. Thank you.

*Aleta is an FFRF Life member and secretary of the Rationalists of East Tennessee.*

### Peter D. A. Wood Leon County (Fla.) Commission April 28, 2015

Words matter. As we gather here today, like many Tuesdays, we stand ready and eager to unite and conduct business as usual. Most meetings use this time to begin procedure with prayer. To some, prayer is a staple of public works. To others, it is a deviation from what our government is constructed to do. Whatever side you may fall on, what we say and how we say it can have

implications that extend beyond our immediate surroundings.

Thoughts matter. We all have our convictions, some of which are identical, others which conflict and contradict. That secularism, atheism and even non-Christian belief systems are overwhelmingly underrepresented in Leon County should worry all of us. That today this history changes is cause for optimism.

Actions matter. Rather than bow, fall prostrate, or look inward to connect ourselves to the heavens, let us focus on the one tangible reality we all know and share: each other. Whether we agree with one another or not, it is through cooperation and sacrifice that this county churns, burns and thrives. Ask yourselves: Why are you here, and how do you care to express this motive? Through what you say? How you think? What you do? Today I open our County Commission meeting suggesting we reassess what unity is so that our community can truly grow strong together. E pluribus unum. For it is out of many that a unified voice comes into being.

*Peter D.A. Wood is a PhD candidate at Florida State University. Raised in Davenport,*

*Iowa, Peter volunteers for Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Big Bend, is treasurer of the Secular Student Alliance at FSU, and serves as a board member for the Center for Inquiry’s Tallahassee community. His essay, “Religions are responsible for their unclear teachings” earned him a fifth-place award in FFRF’s 2015 Brian Bolton graduate college essay contest.*



Peter D. A. Wood

## 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](http://ffrf.org/outreach/nothing-fails-like-prayer)



## They said what?

The majority of cases of domestic violence happen because the woman’s partner does not accept them, or rejects them for not accepting their demands. Or often the macho reaction comes about because she asked for a separation.

**Braulio Rodriguez, archbishop of Toledo, Spain**

*Metro UK, 12-27-15*

The purpose of our life is to cooperate with God’s plan. Our goal is eternity, the ability to live alongside our Creator and for all time, to accept the free gift of salvation offered to us by Jesus Christ.

**Presidential candidate Marco Rubio in a televised campaign ad**

*The New York Times, 1-6-16*

I want to remind you that some of the most important elections are the local elections. We need God-fearing city councilmen and county commissioners. We need Christians to run for school boards.

**Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, speaking at a prayer rally**

*Tallahassee Democrat, 1-12-16*

I don’t know how the council can make decisions without prayer. I don’t know how you can do your job without prayer. **Rev. Bruce Shafer, pastor of Grace Life Church in Monroeville, Pa., just before the City Council unanimously voted to start its meetings with a moment of silence, ending 50 years of beginning the meetings with the Lord’s Prayer.**

*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 1-15-16*

I mean, it’s beyond ridiculous that you take the most abnormal situation and then you make everyone else conform to it. That doesn’t make any sense whatsoever.

That’s one of the very reasons that I have been an outspoken opponent of things like gay marriage. . . . Everybody is equal, everybody has equal rights, but nobody gets extra rights. And when we start trying to impose the extra rights based on a few people who perhaps are abnormal, where does that lead?

**Presidential candidate Ben Carson**

*Right Wing Watch, 1-11-15*

Christians have been lied to and have believed the lies, have been drinking the Kool-Aid for too long with things like so-called separation of church and state, which of course is neither in the Constitution nor in the Declaration.

**Minister Rafael Cruz, father of Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas**

*Breitbart News Daily, 1-21-16*

To pass laws that do not uphold God’s moral law degrades us as a nation, it degrades our liberties and it degrades the greatness of a nation and that’s what God understood from Old Testament times: The greatness of a nation is built up by His law.

**Former U.S. Rep. Michelle Bachmann**

*David Barton’s show “Foundations of Freedom,” 1-25-16*

I am convinced God is not done with America. We are going to, together, with God’s blessings and grace, pull America back from the abyss.

**Presidential candidate Ted Cruz**

*Christian Broadcast network, 1-25-16*



## Texas lawsuit

*Continued from front page*

executive director, advising him to remove the FFRF display. Abbott lambasted FFRF’s exhibit as indecent and mocking, implied it would promote public immorality, had no educational purpose and compared it to “Piss Christ,” a controversial 1987 photograph by Andres Serrano showing a plastic crucifix submerged in a jar of urine.

State Rep. Charlie Geren, a Preservation Board member, advised Sneed about FFRF’s display, saying “that, if I were him, I’d take it down.”

FFRF’s federal lawsuit, to be filed in February in the Western District of Texas, Austin division, charges that Abbott and the other defendants violated the free speech, equal protection and due process rights of FFRF and its member, de Lozanne.

The defendants’ action shows “unambiguous viewpoint discrimination” and was also motivated by “animus” toward FFRF and its nontheistic message, FFRF contends. Such action violates the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause by favoring the “stand-alone Christian nativity scene” and disfavoring FFRF’s “nontheistic content.”

FFRF’s legal complaint details a “history of hostility directed against FFRF” by Abbott when he was attorney general. In December 2011, Abbott, on Fox News, actually warned FFRF to stay out of Texas altogether, stating: “Our message to the atheists is: Don’t mess with Texas or our nativity scenes or the Ten Commandments.”

“I want the Freedom From Religion Foundation to know that our office has

a history of defending religious displays in this state,” Abbott added. He warned that FFRF should be aware that Texas “has the muscle and firepower to go toe-to-toe with these organizations that come from out of state trying to bully governmental bodies into tearing down things like nativity scenes.”

In October 2012, Abbott again attacked FFRF during a press conference: “We will not allow atheist groups from outside of the state of Texas to come into the state, to use menacing and misleading intimidation tactics to try to bully schools to bow down at the altar of secular beliefs.” During the same conference, Abbott said: “We are not going to either tolerate or accept

these atheist groups trying to prevent that freedom of expression here in the state of Texas.”

As governor, Abbott has recently attacked FFRF for asking the Brewster County’s Sheriff’s Office to remove crosses from patrol vehicles, and has complained that the city of Orange, Tex-

as, removed a nativity scene from city hall at FFRF’s behest.

“Gov. Abbott has consistently advocated for displays of religion in the public sphere, while actively opposing any expression of nonreligious principles,” FFRF notes.

FFRF will be seeking a judgment that each defendant violated the Establishment Clause and clauses protecting free speech, equal protection and due process rights of the plaintiffs. FFRF will be asking for damages and reasonable costs and attorneys’ fees.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of FFRF by Richard L. Bolton, with FFRF Staff Attorneys Sam Grover and Patrick Elliott as co-counsel.

## Freethought badge

*Continued from front page*

excluding atheists, agnostics and non-believers. Currently, BSA maintains “that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing his obligation to God.”

FFRF maintains that no one can grow into the best kind of citizen who discriminates against the nonreligious, and that it’s what you do — not what you believe — that makes you a good person.

Social disapproval prompted BSA to largely drop a similar ban on membership against gay Scouts. But BSA persists in stigmatizing those who use reason and critical thought to evaluate religious claims.

FFRF, at the urging of its member Richard Kirschman, has produced a badge similar to BSA’s merit badges, which are typically sewn on uniforms or sashes.

Scouts who wish to earn this badge are asked to help disprove BSA’s misguided claim that nonbelievers cannot be good citizens. The requirements, paralleling typical merit badge requirements, ask Scouts to learn about secularism and the rich history of dissent from religion.

Because this unauthorized “badge” is intended to protest BSA policy, it’s expected that Scouts won’t be able to work with a typical merit badge counselor to demonstrate completion of requirements. So FFRF will ask a parent, guardian, sibling over the age of 18,



teacher or other adult in their lives to attest that Scouts have fulfilled them. At Dawkins’ suggestion, the Scout is also required to send FFRF a short essay that addresses BSA’s claim that non-believers can’t be good citizens. Unlike BSA badge providers, FFRF will not charge Scouts money for the badge.

FFRF intends the badge to reward Boy Scouts who have persevered in an organization that basically has instituted a “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy about atheist and agnostic participants, but

has regularly expelled open nonbelievers. While BSA officials dictate the discriminatory policy, Scouting troops vary widely in their enforcement of the ban, so it’s believed many Scouts are nonreligious.

“But if any young boy — or girl — fulfills the requirements, we’d be delighted to reward them with this badge,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Many nonreligious students who might otherwise wish to join BSA never join, knowing of its big-

oted policy. This is their chance to be rewarded for critical thinking and to earn a keepsake at the same time. We hope someday very soon that BSA itself will change its policy and adopt its own official merit badge rewarding critical thinking.”

FFRF’s requirements give Scouts or other young freethinkers the chance to select various activities, such as interviewing a military veteran about being “an atheist in a foxhole” or non-religious acquaintances about their nonbelief.

Scouts are asked to engage in secular or freethought activism, such as attending a secular convention, starting or participating in a secular student club, writing a letter to the editor on a secular topic, “sitting down” for the religious Pledge of Allegiance, or speaking up if they hear atheism being derided or erroneous claims such as that “America is a Christian nation.” Students are invited to watch a movie with a freethought theme, such as Monty Python’s “Life of Brian,” or to learn to perform John Lennon’s “Imagine.” They are asked to research the lives of historic freethinkers and the history of how religion has seeped into U.S. symbols.

The full requirements for the contests can be found at FFRF’s website: [ffrf.org/freethought-badge](http://ffrf.org/freethought-badge).

Please help publicize this opportunity to young freethinkers in your life and community.

FFRF thanks Richard Kirschman for subsidizing the cost of the badges.



# Reason Rally 2016: A bloc party that counts

After a successful (but chilly and damp!) Reason Rally in 2012, the event will be heading back to Washington D.C., this year.

The latest polls show that the percentage of people who don't care about a candidate's religion is increasing and that "Nones" outnumber the U.S.'s largest religious denomination (Catholics) by several percentage votes. Nones are also a growing segment of the under-45 population — who are key voters! That growth is a great accomplishment for those who support separation of church and state, critical thinking and just plain good sense.

We'll all have the opportunity to celebrate that victory — and build our power as a voting bloc — by attending the nonpartisan Reason Rally 2016 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on June 4. You'll hear great speakers and entertainers, and get the chance to lobby members of Congress.

"In this historic place, we proclaim our dream of a future where people are free to express rational and reasonable views without the fear of reprisal, retaliation or retribution!" proclaims the ReasonRally.org web site.

Speakers will include Richard Dawkins, Johnny Depp, Kelly Carlin, Paul Provenza, James Randi, Julia Sweeny, Cara Santa Maria, Lawrence Krauss and Eugenie Scott, and a host of activists, musicians and performers.

Major sponsors include the Freedom From Religion Foundation, 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 on Saturday and have a brief opportunity at the mic.

The Reason Rally itself is a day-long event, but there will be a variety of other events over several days from Thursday, June 2 through Sunday, June 4. The coalition of groups putting on the Reason Rally has reserved room blocs at centrally located hotels.

Thursday and Friday will include Lobby Days, in conjunction with the Secular Coalition of America.



Some pre-rally evening entertainment events are being planned, as well as a Sunday post-rally event.

It's a Voting Bloc Party for those who believe that public policy should be made based on scientific evidence, not religious beliefs. Join us, and bring your friends!

For more information, go to *ReasonRally.org*. Freethought Today will carry updates.

## FFRF's engaged membership

*Continued from front page*  
ed specific Protestant denominations, such as Baptist).

FFRF members are an educated bunch, with 96% having at least some college (14% some college, but no degree; 7% associate degree), 33% with a bachelor's degree, and nearly 40% with at least one advanced degree (24% one master's, 4% multiple master's, 4% law degree, 10% Ph.D. and nearly 4% medical degree).

Asked to choose between six primary catalysts for leaving religion, 33% of you chose "Religion doesn't make sense," 16% science, 14% religious hypocrisy/bigotry, 6% reading skeptical authors and 4% reading the bible itself. Nearly 16% added additional comments, such as, "All of the above." (See sidebar for a sampling of these comments.)

The average age of a member of FFRF is 62.7. The vast majority (over 90%) are at least 40 or older. Almost 12% are between the ages of 40–49, 19% 50–59, 28% 60–69, 23% 70–79. Only 12% of you have children under the age of 18 living in your household. The survey showed 57% of FFRF members are retired. The older age bracket has been consistent with FFRF surveys for almost 40 years. After nonbelievers get through college, establish careers and families, they then tend to join FFRF.

"We concentrate on providing services to younger freethinkers, particularly students, who don't yet have the disposable income to join FFRF," said Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. FFRF runs three essay competitions, offers student and youth activist awards, and works closely with students and their parents to correct state/church violations in public schools.

Although 73% of you are male, you're actively feminist: An overwhelming 73% strongly support women's rights. We asked you, "In addition to FFRF and other secular causes, which other types of causes do you support (check all that apply)?" This question was aimed at discovering which other causes members actively support, such as via membership, donations or volunteer activities. Receiving the most "votes" was reproductive rights,



Lauryn Seering photo

**The marquee on the side of FFRF's Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis., changes daily to share of wisdom from and for freethinkers.**

checked by 79% of FFRF members, closely followed by death with dignity and environmental issues (75% each), the aforementioned women's rights, marriage equality (72%), racial equality (64%), LGBTQ rights 63% and 64%??, peace/antiwar 50%.

"It's fascinating to me that the most popular cause is reproductive rights, since that was the impetus for founding FFRF in the first place. It was fighting religious dogma in our civil law over the question of contraception and abortion that happened to open my mother's and my eyes to the harm of religious sway over legislation. Apparently that epiphany is a common one," commented Gaylor.

A full 96% identify as white or Caucasian. "We've started funding an annual needs-based scholarship for freethinking students of color, and we include a prompt aimed at students of color in one of our essay competitions, but we will take this result as a cue to work harder at expanding outreach," noted Barker.

Sixty percent of you are married, 12.5% divorced, 8% cohabiting, 6% widowed, and almost 12% single, never married. About 10% identify as LGBTQ. Almost 11% of FFRF members are vegetarian or vegan (compared to about 3% of the general population).

Proving there are atheists and agnostics in foxholes, 26% of FFRF members have served in the military (typically 24% in the military are nonbelievers). About 19% of FFRF members are employed in or retired from the teaching profession, and 57% are retired over-

all. Nearly 33% of FFRF members volunteer on a regular basis.

Thirteen percent of you have attended an FFRF convention in the past decade. We asked which area would most attract you the most: The West Coast (22%) and the Midwest (21.6%) received the most votes.

Thank you to the whopping 73% who have recommended FFRF to a friend or colleague! We were pleased that 71% found it easy to join, donate or purchase books or merchandise online.

Over 43% of you have been members for 2–5 years and 20% for 6–10 years. Almost 23% who responded had been a member for a year or less.

More than 4,900 of you chose to tell us in your own words why you joined FFRF, and we really enjoyed reading those comments, with answers such as: "You do important work," "Strength in numbers," "I strongly believe in the separation of church and state and want to support an organization that fights for the cause." More than 1,700 made suggestions for projects for FFRF to undertake, from very general to very specific. FFRF and its legal department are studying these responses closely, and appreciate the suggestions.

"I'm proud to report that 96% of our members are registered voters," said Gaylor. "All the more reason for public candidates to wake up to the changing demographics and court the secular vote." FFRF members are mostly an independent crowd, with 21% calling themselves Independent, 36% "Progressive/Liberal," 28.7% Democratic, 3.5% Libertarian, 2.5% Green, 3.7% "other" and 1% Republican. Comments included the candid: "I vote for the least repulsive moron."

## Why did you leave religion?

Here's a small sampling of the more than 1,000 comments from members who responded to the survey question, "If you left religion, what was the primary catalyst?"

Father's death due to reliance on Christian Science healing.

Abused by religion.

A person I looked up to shared his atheism, introduced me to Bertrand Russell's *Why I'm Not a Christian* and I was already thinking religion does not make sense.

I decided those impure thoughts and acts were not mortal sins, but normal.

*The Age of Reason* by Thomas Paine.

I became an earth science teacher and the facts do not coincide with faith.

My own introspection, reasoning and rationalism.

When I was 11 years old I determined that it did nothing to make people nicer.

I believe organized religion is at the root of human suffering, bigotry and destruction.

I was 8 years old, getting ready to do my holy (holey) confirmation when something in me clicked, clear as a bell, and it said, "This is B.S." I left and never looked back.

No god could be that cruel, especially to children.

Always had my doubts, but when my son came out as atheist and didn't get struck by lightning, I figured he was on to something.

Anne Gaylor in 1985.

Tooth Fairy = Santa = Easter Bunny = Jesus.

I realized we were no different than the cavemen worshipping lightning because they didn't understand it.

Falling in love with an atheist and really thinking about religion for the first time.

Reading Dan Barker's *Losing Faith in Faith*.

Civil rights in Atlanta in 1960; my Methodist church wanted to keep blacks from entering the sanctuary – it made no sense that a religion would do that.

Primarily the understanding that Christianity is but one of many historical religions that use mythology to understand the world.

Belief in god fails all tests of science, logic and reason.