

# Freethought Today

Vol. 33 No. 4

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

May 2016

## Atheist invocation denied

# FFRF to sue Congress

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is poised to sue the chaplain of the U.S. House of Representatives over the refusal to allow Dan Barker, an atheist, to deliver the opening invocation before the House.



Barker

FFRF is representing Barker, a lifetime member and co-president of FFRF.

No nontheist has ever been allowed to give the House invocation, despite the fact that the nonreligious make up almost 24 percent of the population.

From the years 2000 to 2015, 96.7 percent of the invocations have been Christian, 2.7 percent Jewish, 0.4 percent Muslim and 0.2 percent Hindu. More than a third were delivered by guest chaplains.

The lawsuit is being readied for a May filing, more than 18 months after the Rev. Patrick Conroy, a Roman Catholic priest who has been House chaplain since 2011, was first asked to permit Barker to give an invocation.



Conroy

House Speaker Paul Ryan is also named because he's the presiding officer whose duties include overseeing other House officers, including the chaplain.

FFRF Staff Attorneys Sam Grover and Andrew Seidel first met with the chaplain's office in 2014, asking about a nonreligious citizen delivering the opening invocation. The aides, Assistant to the Chaplain Elisa Aglieco and Chaplain's Liaison to Staff Karen Bronson, will also be named as defendants.

No written requirements exist, but the chaplain's office replied that someone could give the invocation (1) if they are sponsored by a member of the House, (2) they are ordained, and (3) they do not directly address House members but instead address a "higher power."

U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, who represents Barker in Congress, requested in February 2015 that the chaplain's

*See Congress suit on page 4*



Photo by Chris Line

## Standing up for democracy

From left, Madison-area grad student Sarah Lewis, FFRF Staff Attorneys Andrew Seidel and Patrick Elliott and FFRF Legal Assistant Calli Miller stand below FFRF's billboard with their likenesses on it. See page 8 for the story.

## City sued over censorship

After being denied a request to put up a display in a city park, FFRF has sued the city of Shelton, Conn., and its mayor and parks director.

FFRF, along with member and local resident Jerome H. Bloom, filed suit March 22 in U.S. District Court, Connecticut.

The American Legion has been allowed to erect a display, featuring heralding angels, every December for at least four years in Shelton's Constitution Park. The Legion claims its organization was founded to acknowledge "God as the source of all our rights and freedoms."

FFRF's suit challenges the city for allowing the park to have a religious display, but not a nonreligious one.

"The angel display in the park constitutes not only a religious display, but one with a sectarian message, since the display is put up every December to coincide with the traditional celebration of the birth of Jesus, as heralded by angels," FFRF charges in the suit.

Megan Spicer of the Connecticut Law Tribune pointed out that Charles Haynes, a senior scholar at the First

*See Censorship on page 19*



Photo by Maureen Houston of the News-Democrat

## The daffodil man

Joseph Cunningham, 90, an FFRF executive board member, plants daffodils from his yard along Illinois Hwy. 4. See Page 14 for the full feature story reprinted from the Belleville, Ill., News-Democrat.

## FFRF renews IRS challenge

FFRF has renewed its court challenge against a housing allowance in the tax code that uniquely privileges clergy.

FFRF filed the federal lawsuit in the Western District of Wisconsin on April 6, naming as defendants Jacob Lew, U.S. secretary of the treasury, and John Koskinen, IRS commissioner.

The clergy allowance is not a tax deduction but an exemption—allowing housing allowances paid as part of clergy salary to be subtracted from taxable income. Rep. Peter Mack, the sponsor of the 1954 law that put this allowance into place, argued that ministers should be rewarded for "carrying on such a courageous fight against this [a godless and anti-religious world movement]."

The plaintiffs are FFRF itself, as well as FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, whose housing al-

lowance allocation by FFRF was denied by the IRS.

"There is \$700 million in annual benefit at stake, and the tax and religious worlds will be watching as the case once again begins its foray through the legal system," Tony Nitti writes in Forbes.

In 2013, U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb ruled in FFRF's favor.

"Some might view a rule against preferential treatment as exhibiting hostility toward religion, but equality should never be mistaken for hostility," Crabb wrote. "It is important to remember that the establishment clause protects the religious and nonreligious alike."

Crabb's finding sent "shockwaves through the religious community," according to the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, which bitterly

*See IRS on page 16*

### Inside This Issue



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## Meet a staffer

**Name:** Alyssa Schaefer

**Where and when I was born:** I was born in a suburb of Chicago a week before Christmas. However, I spent most of my adolescence in Wausau, Wis.

**Education:** I earned a B.S. in international affairs with a concentration in security policy from the George Washington University. I also spent a semester abroad in Brussels, Belgium.

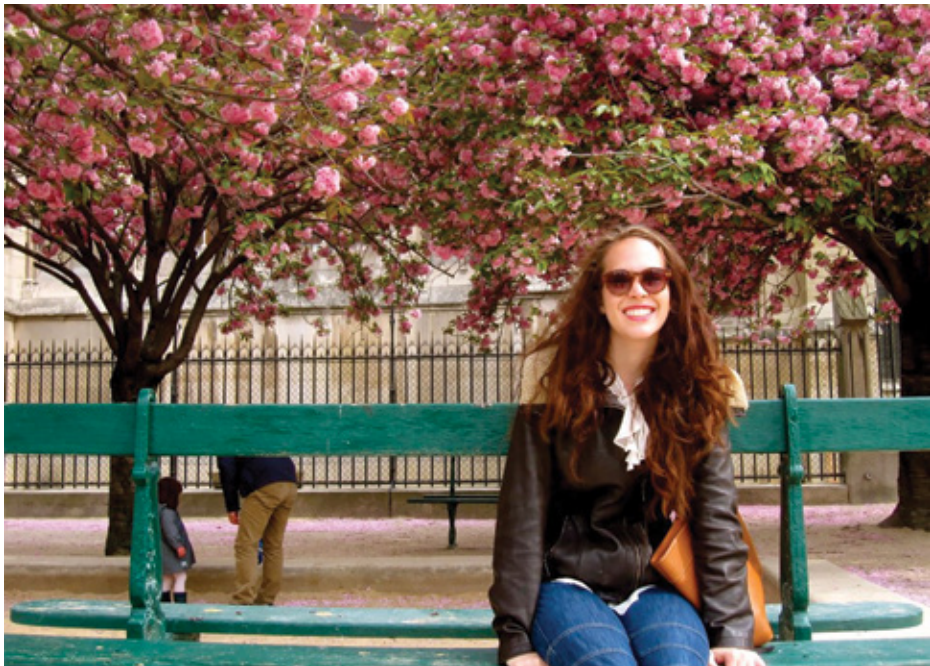
**How I came to work at FFRF:** I had moved back to Wisconsin after going to school/working on the East Coast and was on the hunt for a job in the nonprofit world. I discovered the job posting, did some research on FFRF, realized that I agreed with the foundation’s mission, and applied. The rest, as they say, is history.

**What I do here:** I’m FFRF’s program assistant. My job tends to vary from day to day, depending on the needs of the foundation. One constant is overseeing FFRF’s shop.

**What I like best about it:** The people here are quite amazing.

**What gets old about it:** I really dislike the cranks that call looking for a fight.

**I spend a lot of time thinking about:** The intersections of philosophy with



Lisa Kentgen photo

**Alyssa Schaefer, shown here on a bench just outside of Notre Dame in Paris, is FFRF’s program assistant.**

other academic fields and popular culture, both past and present. Right now I am on an Existentialism kick. Just this past week I watched the season finale of the TV show “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia” and it was a modern-day

homage to Sartre’s “No Exit.”

**I spend little, if any, time thinking about:** The NFL. I honestly don’t know which teams were in this year’s Super Bowl.

**My religious upbringing was:** Catho-

lic. There were two Catholic churches in my hometown. One church focused on Jesus and being a good person, while the other was more focused on fire and brimstone. I went to the former, and although I had issues with Catholicism, the community at the church was a real positive one.

**My doubts about religion started:** At the age of 8 or 9. In Sunday school I had difficulty putting behind me the discrepancies between the stories of Jesus, with his messages of kindness and compassion, and God, who seemed to be quite a terrifying and cruel guy. I became particularly distraught over the story of the ark when I was that age, unable to wrap my head around the idea that God destroyed all but two of each of all land animals just because he was angry with the humans.

**Things I like:** Cheese, the great outdoors, sloths, book sales, and my crazy cat Lola.

**Things I smite:** Cockroaches, bar crawls, and “God’s Not Dead 2.”

**In my golden years:** When I retire, I hope to become a docent at either an art museum or a natural history museum.

## Overheard

On the face it clearly says “Liberty, Parent of Science & Industry.” If Republicans had their way, it would have said, “Liberty, Offspring of God.”

**Jerry Coyne, writing on his blog, “Why Evolution is True,” about the first American penny that clearly had no religious leanings**  
3-28-16

In Allah’s world, the woman is denied, refused, killed, veiled, locked up or possessed.

**Kamel Daoud, Algerian author, who blamed the “sexual misery of the Arab-Muslim world” for the attacks on women on New Year’s Eve in Cologne, Germany**  
*The New York Times*, 4-14-16

If we are recognizing the bible as a sacred text, then we are violating the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the state of Tennessee by designating it as the official state book.

**Bill Haslam, governor of Tennessee, vetoing a bill that would have made the bible Tennessee’s state book**  
*Press release*, 4-14-16

A candidate’s religion should never overshadow their qualifications for of-

fice, yet our nation has come to a point where that phenomenon can readily occur.

**Lizzy Schick, in her article “An atheist in the White House: Secularism and the American presidency”**  
*Harvard Political Review*, 4-17-16

Creators should have nothing to do with Islamic fashion. Designers are there to make women more beautiful, to give them their freedom, not to collaborate with this dictatorship which imposes this abominable thing by which we hide women.

**Pierre Berge, co-founder of Yves Saint Laurent, on the growing number of fashion designers who are making clothing for Islamic women, including the burkini, a full-bodied swimsuit with a hood**  
*The New York Times*, 4-14-16

If the sum total of your communication to your kids, or your congregation, about sex is just don’t do it, you’re not doing a good job.

**Boz Tchividjian, founder of the Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE), in the article, “Abused? You can’t work at these churches,” by Zack Kopplin**  
*The Daily Beast*, 4-15-16

## It pays to complain

FFRF Member Gean Taylor of Powder Springs, Ga., was able to stop a state/church violation with a simple phone call. Here’s what she wrote to FFRF:

I wanted to brief you on the on-the-spot correction I was able to make on March 1, 2016, when I went inside the gas company to pay my bill in Austell, Ga. When I approached the clerk’s window, I noticed there were religious pamphlets on one side of her window and small cards with bible verses and the contact information for her church on the other side of the window. I asked, “Is this you?” She responded that it was. I then asked if she’d ever heard of the separation of church and state. She stated that I didn’t have to take one.

I informed her that this was a state/church violation and that when I come

inside a government office to pay my gas bill, I didn’t expect to see any religious handouts whatsoever and that I would be filing a complaint. After contacting the human resources office at the number listed on the gas bill, I left a message identifying myself with a short narrative of what happened. I mentioned that if those handouts are allowed, then atheists and Satanists can feel free to bring in their handouts too.

About 90 minutes later, I got a call from a human resources person, who apologized sincerely and thanked me for bringing this to her attention. She stated that the problem has been corrected and would not happen again. I went back the next day and went to the same clerk, and everything was as it should be. Another small battle won for the proponents of state and church separation.

## FFRF welcomes new members, ‘Immortals’

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is excited to welcome its newest “After-Life Member” (Suzanne Shynne), two new “Immortals (Laurel Hines and Jamey and Jackie Smith), and 30 new Lifetime Members.

FFRF would also like to thank generous Life Member Dr. Harold L. Safenstein, M.D., for purchasing gift Life Memberships for five people: Tory Anderson, Vici Duarte, Georgiann Roman, Roy Towne and Alex Zygmunt.

The other new Life Members are: Beatrice Barretto, Charles Bennett, Lucia Cheng, Stephen Gay, Ken Gould, Robert Griglak, Dr. Kenneth Haslam, Joshua I. James, Dr. William Thomas Kelley, Kenneth Kerin, Allen King, Judith Lansky, Kate McDonald, Dr. Larry Page, Michael Podell, Richard Robert Reed, Joel Rosenfeld, Jeff Sella, Roger Stewart, Briana Tabry, Mark Tabry, David Updegraff, Mary Wenniger, Dr. Aaron Wielenberg and Tony Woodring.

States represented are: Arkansas,

Arizona, California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington and Wisconsin.

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

“Immortals” are those very kind members who have contacted FFRF to report that they have made provisions for FFRF in their estate planning.

The category was suggested by Bari Babow and Mike Kirkland, generous FFRF Life Members, with hopes it would raise awareness of the importance of legacy planning for FFRF’s future.

### Freethought Today

published by Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.  
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May 2016 | *The only freethought newspaper in the United States*



# Living in a fundamentalist enclave

By Brian Bolton

Williamson County, Texas, may be the most politically and religiously conservative governmental entity in the United States. Only Republicans are elected to public office and they often tout their alleged Christian credentials.

For example, the incumbent district attorney compared herself to Jesus, explaining that “Christ’s example shows us that doing what’s right often comes at a price” (she spent a weekend in jail for disobeying a judge’s order), while vilifying her opponent in full-page advertisements as an ally of dangerous criminals.

With a population of 50,000 and more than 70 Christian churches, Georgetown (where I live) is the county seat. A historic courthouse dominates the downtown square. Sprawling Williamson County, with a population approaching one half million, is governed by a judge and four commissioners. They are paid about \$100,000 a year.

Three very different newspapers are available in Georgetown. The Williamson County Sun is a moderately conservative, semi-weekly newspaper that reports local news. The Georgetown Advocate is published biweekly and promotes an incendiary blend of Tea Party politics and fundamentalist zealotry that features virulent anti-Obama tirades. The Good News Journal is a bimonthly “Judeo-Christian newspaper that delivers a message of hope, inspiration, and patriotism.”

The following examples illustrate how fundamentalist extremism can thoroughly infuse, infect and distort community values.

## Constitutional corruption

A Williamson County constable resigned from his position in mid-term three years ago. The county commissioners decided that they would handle the replacement process. After inviting applications, they interviewed the top five candidates.

The county judge and three of four commissioners interrogated the nominees, asking a series of questions about religious affiliation and participation and views on abortion and same-sex marriage. Three of the rejected candidates filed a federal lawsuit against the judge and commissioners. Two subsequently settled for monetary damages, and one continued to court. Almost every high school student knows that the U.S. Constitution prohibits religious tests for public office. Not only did the county judge and the commissioners demonstrate contempt for a basic constitutional principle, they actually rationalized their behavior by stating that voters in the next election would ask the same questions!

The total cost to the taxpayers was well over half a million dollars for this official governmental bigotry. One remarkable irony is that the recalcitrant commissioners were represented in court by Rudy Giuliani’s law firm, since he is an advocate of women’s reproductive rights and supports marriage equality!

This scenario would be unbelievable anywhere except in Williamson County, Texas.



Brian Bolton

## Christian nationalism

Speaking at the ground-breaking for a fundamentalist megachurch in Georgetown, the local state senator said, “Our nation was built on the cornerstones of Christ, the church, the family and the community.” The Georgetown mayor proclaimed “Georgetown Vacation Liberty School Week” at a council meeting. The Vacation Liberty School merges traditional summer bible school with Christian nation propaganda: “Our goal is to teach students to understand that no matter what they might have heard, America is a Judeo-Christian based culture.”

The editor of the Advocate suggested in a signed editorial that the public schools are not teaching that the U.S. is a Christian nation in order to be “progressive” or politically correct. His opinion supports the distrustful attitude toward public schools expressed in the goal statement of the Vacation Liberty School.

After the Good News Journal published an article titled, “Prayer That Birthed a Nation,” which claimed that delegates to the Constitutional Convention began each session with “prayer for God’s guidance and wisdom,” I wrote to the managing editor and publisher explaining that Benjamin Franklin’s motion to begin each session with prayer was not adopted.

No correction or apology to readers was ever issued. Interestingly, the publisher had previously written in a brief editorial statement that, “Truth is hidden in scandals, bad media and lies.” Remember, this is a self-described Judeo-Christian newspaper!

## Abortion opposition

I wrote to a reporter asking that the Sun give more attention to the American majority viewpoint than to a small minority of anti-abortion extremists. That informal note was published as a letter to the editor, and then a per-

sonal attack on me was published in response.

The author of the letter said that I write articles about atheism and spew an anti-God secular agenda. He wondered why people like me choose to live in Georgetown, where God, family and country still have deep roots.

My reply, which summarized what the bible actually says (and doesn’t say) about abortion, was finally published six weeks later after I pressed an argument based on journalistic ethical responsibility.

Within a month of publication of my letter, the editorial assistant who initiated the episode lost his position and one month later the managing editor left the Sun. A cause and effect inference would not be unreasonable because the cautious publisher carefully avoids the abortion controversy.

I also wrote a letter to the editor of the Advocate responding to the false assertion that the bible prohibits abortion. The confused author based her claim entirely on the pronouncement that “God knew us when we were still in our mother’s womb.” Like several other passages that refer to the womb, this verse does not condemn or prohibit abortion.

My letter, which explained that there is no biblical basis for the assault on women’s reproductive rights, was not published. The Advocate does not tolerate any opinions that contradict fundamentalist Christian dogma.

The Georgetown Life Chain conducts an annual street-side demonstration where 100 activists hold signs such as “Abortion kills children” (which is not true) and pray for the end of abortion. Some people driving by honk their support. From this evidence, the local organizer concluded, “Georgetown is pro-life.”

An anti-abortion operation called the Heidi Group, with the demonstrably false motto “God Loves the Unborn,” alleged that comprehensive sexuality education programs in the schools encourage teen sexual activity, illustrating the confused ideas that permeate the anti-abortion movement.

Finally, six anti-abortion protesters demonstrated outside the local Bank of America branch, with a display saying that the “Bank of Abortion donates to Planned Parenthood.” Actually, the bank matches employees’ contributions to all approved charitable organizations.

## Blasphemy punishment

Christian football legend Tim Tebow visited a Georgetown evangelical megachurch for Easter Sunday service. He gave his popular testimony in a 20-minute interview conducted by the

pastor.

Reflecting the size of this resurrection celebration, 15,000 attendees were transported to the church by 110 chartered school buses. The big trouble began the following Wednesday when the Sun published a front-page story with numerous photographs under the banner headline, “Tim Tebow Has Risen, Indeed.”

The reaction to the headline was immediate and vociferous. Letter writers called it offensive to Christians and disrespectful to their lord and savior Jesus Christ. In a groveling apology, the editor declared that he was “deeply sorry” and assured readers that he was a devout, lifelong Christian. He concluded by calling Jesus “the most important figure in history.”

The fundamentalist blitzkrieg not only brought the editor to his knees, he became increasingly defensive and belligerent in responding to reader criticism. Few people in the community were surprised when the editor announced his resignation and moved to Colorado at the end of the year. Ironically, he had received an award from the Texas Press Association for excellence in headline writing a few months earlier!



## Conclusion

Despite the radical political and religious views and the occasional unconstitutional activities, Georgetown is generally a good community in which to live. The government operates efficiently and there are few major problems. The residents are friendly and helpful and controversies are always resolved peaceably.

The real problem for nonbelievers in predominantly Christian communities is the relentless effort of the radical fundamentalist minority who want to impose their extreme ideas on everyone else. Mainstream Christians and members of smaller sects are reluctant to engage in combat with the self-righteous zealots out of fear of being labeled un-Christian or worse.

Nonreligious Americans have legitimate reasons to be concerned about fanatical fundamentalist activism. Texas is one of the seven states that still have prohibitions against unbelievers holding public office or serving on juries. Moreover, the neo-fundamentalist agenda would not permit atheists or agnostics to teach school, adopt children or even to vote.

Finally, while the River Rock Bible Church held two Christmas Eve services in the historic courthouse and Bethlehem Village was a prominent feature of the Christmas extravaganza on the square, there was one positive note: The Georgetown Utilities System wished all residents “Happy Holidays.”

*FFRF Life member Brian Bolton, who lives in Georgetown, Texas, is a retired psychologist, humanist minister and sponsor of FFRF’s graduate essay contest. The executive wing of FFRF’s office bears his name.*



The Georgetown Life Chain conducts an annual street-side rally where activists hold signs such as “Abortion kills children” and pray for the end of abortion.



Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

PARABLE OF THE ONE-TRACK MIND

*The Book of Jeremiah:*  
“Thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness . . . thou hadst a whore’s forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed.”

*The Book of Ezekiel:*  
“They committed whoredoms in Egypt; they committed whoredoms in their youth: there . . . they bruised the teats of their virginity.”

*The Book of Hosea:*  
“Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom.”

*The Book of Isaiah:*  
“The Lord will visit Tyre, and she . . . shall commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world.”

*The Book of Amos:*  
“Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city . . . and thou shalt die in a polluted land.”


*The Book of Joel:*  
“They have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.”

*The Book of Revelation*  
“I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:  
With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication . . .  
And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornications:  
And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

*Exegesis #1:*  
“Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

*Exegesis #2:*  
“He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets.”

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




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

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

Shop at FFRF online

Looking to proudly display your atheism or nonbelief? Want to give the gift of freethought?  
Check out FFRF’s newly improved online store at [shop.ffrf.org](#). This isn’t just shameless self-promotion, it’s a good way to help FFRF fight the battle of church and state, which is also the title of a Dan Barker tune on “Friendly Neighborhood Atheist.” The rights you save may be your own.  
FFRF offers a variety of items, including music, new and used freethought books, apparel, greeting cards, DVDs/video, tote bags, pins, bumper stickers and much more.  
New clothing items for sale are the “In Chef We Trust” apron, “Unabashed Atheist” tee and “Out of the Closet Atheist” and Dawkins-inspired “A” caps.






Matt Albright photo

**At least there’s no trespassing**  
FFRF Member Matt Albright noticed this sign and took this photo with his son Stephen in it. “This marquee outside of Cooperstown, N.Y., often has some oddballs. This one my son and I just didn’t get.”

Congress suit

*Continued from front page*  
office invite Barker, a former minister who retains a valid ordination. Pocan provided Barker’s requested information, biography and ordinance certificate. Conroy then asked for something other applicants haven’t been required to provide — a draft of the proposed remarks, expressing doubt Barker could craft an appropriate invocation.  
When no permission was forthcoming, Barker provided his remarks in June 2015. Barker proposed saying there is no power higher than “We, the people of these United States,” and invoking “the ‘spirit’ of the founding patriot Thomas Paine, a non-Christian deist who argued for Common Sense over dogma.”  
Four months passed without a word. When recontacted, the chaplain’s office, insultingly, claimed it did not think Pocan’s request was “genuine.”  
FFRF is planning to sue both under the Fifth Amendment’s due process clause, and, in a novel twist, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993. RFRA is the statute under which the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Hobby Lobby’s decision to meddle in its female employees’ contraceptive decisions. RFRA states that the federal government, which includes the house chaplain, “shall not substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability,” unless the government demonstrates that the burden “is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest” and “is the least restrictive means of furthering” that interest.  
FFRF plans to argue that the chaplain’s office is putting substantial pressure on Barker to modify his behavior and to violate his beliefs. FFRF is also planning to invoke Article VI, Section III of the U.S. Constitution, which states that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification of any office or public trust.”  
FFRF will be asking the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia to declare that barring atheists and other nonreligious individuals from the position of guest chaplain violates the Constitution and RFRA, that requiring guest chaplains to invoke a supernatural power violates Article VI, and to enjoin the defendants from barring otherwise qualified atheist and nonreligious individuals from delivering the opening invocation before the U.S. House.



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

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

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



# Why we don't mix church and state

*This article originally ran in the Arizona Republic on Feb. 8, 2016, and is reprinted with permission.*

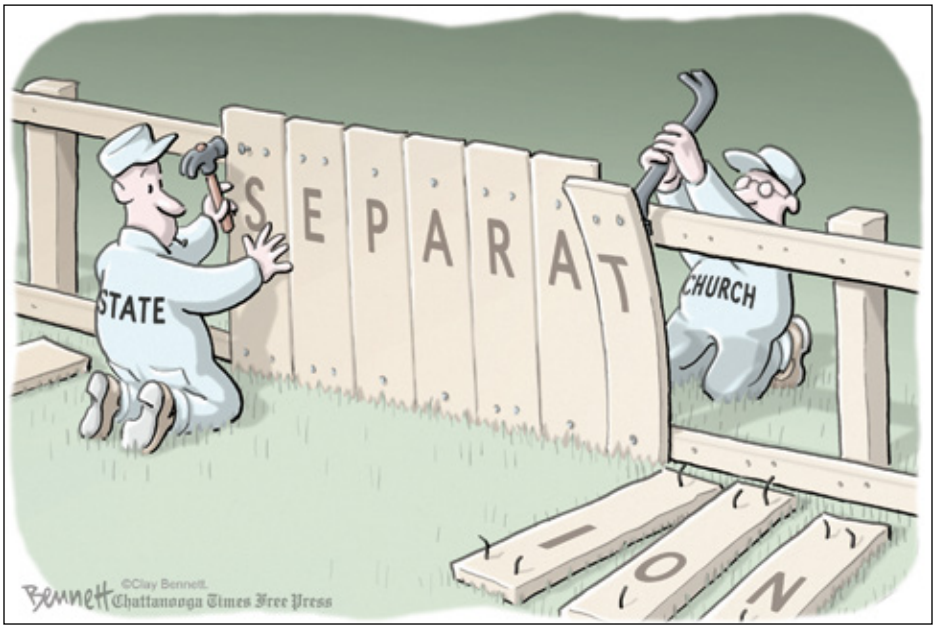
By Dianne Post

The chaos at the Phoenix City Council meeting on Feb. 3 is precisely why religion and government should be kept completely separate. To try and enforce one viewpoint is not only contrary to the Constitution, law and founders, it's contrary to common sense.

The First Amendment is clear and cannot be overturned by majority vote. As Thomas Jefferson said, "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment or religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof' thus building a wall of separation between church and state."

The First Amendment is not the only place in the Constitution that prohibits religion. In Article VI, paragraph 3, it states that elected representatives are bound by an oath to the Constitution, not the bible, and that "... no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."

When John Kennedy ran for office in 1960 as the first Catholic, he had to be very clear that, "I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute — where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to



act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote — where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference — and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs."

Yet today, from presidential candidates down to city council members, public officials are racing to establish their religious bona fides, religious schools are siphoning off public tax dollars, preachers tell their parishioners how to vote and Catholic bishops dictate medical treatment to doctors.

This does not make religion or society stronger.

In fact, James Madison said, "It was the universal opinion of the century preceding the last, that civil government could not stand without the prop of a religious establishment, and that the (Christian) religion itself, would

perish if not supported by a legal provision for its clergy. The experience of Virginia conspicuously corroborates the disproof of both opinions. The civil government though bereft of everything like an associated hierarchy possesses the requisite stability and performs its functions with complete success; whilst the number, the industry,

and the morality of the priesthood and the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of the church from the state."

Other presidents, too, such as Rutherford B. Hayes, have

pointed out that both the public and the private spheres are stronger when they are kept separate: "We all agree that neither the government nor political parties ought to interfere with religious sects. It is equally true that religious sects ought not to interfere with the government or with political parties," Hayes wrote. "We believe that

I think the government ought to stay out of the prayer business.

— President Jimmy Carter

## Meet a member

**Name:** Dianne Post  
**Where I live:** Phoenix.  
**Where and when I was born:** I was born in Muscoda, Wis., halfway between Madison and Dubuque, in January 1947.  
**Family:** Two sisters, one in Milwaukee and one in California; two brothers, both in Muscoda.  
**Education:** I received my bachelor's degree in correctional administration in 1969 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where I worked with Anne Nicol Gaylor on women's abortion rights. Then I was off to California for my first professional job as a parole officer and then to graduate school in San Jose in psychology. Then I moved back to Wisconsin to work in a series of jobs around the state with alcoholics and the mentally challenged. Psychology was not for me, so I applied to only one law school and got in — UW-Madison. After graduating in December 1979, I left for the sunny and hot clime of Arizona and have been here ever since.  
**Occupation:** International human rights lawyer. My last gig was in Moldova in November 2015 training judges on women's rights and LGBT rights.  
**How I got where I am today:** Hard work, stubbornness, brains and guts.  
**Where I'm headed:** Well, I wanted to be the first woman president, but that



Dianne Post

doesn't seem too likely. I'll settle for making maximum use of the talents I have to bring about a better world before I leave it.

**Person in history I admire and why:** Charlotte Gilman Perkins was the ultimate in women rebels of her time. She left her marriage, gave up her child, saved herself from insanity and wrote profound books to lead the way for those who came after her.

**A quotation I like:** "There was a time when religion ruled the world. It is

known as the Dark Ages." — Ruth Hurmence Green.

**These are a few of my favorite things:** The cosmos, hummingbirds, books.

**These are not:** Mosquitos, temperatures more than 110 degrees.

**My doubts about religion started:** When I was sent to Sunday school. I was the kid who asked all those impossible-to-answer questions: "But teacher, we learned in school that you can't turn water into wine." I was told that these were just mysteries that people were not meant to understand and to stop asking questions. That didn't sit well. In high school, a very enlightened Presbyterian minister moved to town and I babysat his kids and started going to his church. He encouraged questions and didn't hesitate to say he didn't understand, either. Not surprisingly, he left the church himself after three particularly horrible events. By the time I was 16, I was done with religion.

**Before I die:** I'd love to see a socialist woman president.

**Ways I promote freethought:** Agitating against prayer in governmental spaces. I gave the first (as far as I know) secular invocation in Phoenix in February 2015. That practice is now ended and we turn our sights toward the state Capitol!

the cause of good government and the cause of religion suffer by all such interference."

Jimmy Carter needs not burnish his religious credentials, and he, too, said, "I think the government ought to stay out of the prayer business . . ."

Too many have today forgotten the lessons of our history. As Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "The lessons of religious toleration — a toleration which recognizes complete liberty of human thought, liberty of conscience — is one which, by precept and example, must be inculcated in the hearts and minds of all Americans if the institutions of our democracy are to be maintained and perpetuated."

An Iraq War veteran, who spoke at the Phoenix City Council hearing, described how in that country members of one sect kill others just because they believe in something different. Council Member Thelda Williams said she received death threats, and another public official told me she received hate mail for suggesting an imam give an invocation.

This hatred and fear as demonstrated at the City Council meeting are precisely why religion and government must remain separate. Religions are protected from government meddling and interference with their ideas of faith and conscience, and those of us who are nonreligious or of minority religions are also protected from government or religions interfering with our ideas and our conscience.

We should listen to the wisdom of our founders and the words of our Constitution and eliminate all public invocations.

*Dianne Post is an international human rights attorney who represented battered women and children in Phoenix for 18 years before embarking on international work in the field of gender violence. See "Meet a Member" profile on this page for more.*

## Women in Secularism conference slated for September

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor will speak at this year's Women in Secularism conference in Arlington, Va.

The conference, which runs Sept. 23–25, 2016, is presented by the Center for Inquiry. The fourth Women in Secularism conference will bring together a diverse lineup of 18 speakers to address what it means to be a "woman in secularism" — not just in theory, but in practice. Speakers will address not only the progress that has been made, but also the many challenges that still lie ahead. The Saturday night banquet features comedian and former Saturday Night Live star Julia Sweeney.

For more information, go to [womeninsecularism.org](http://womeninsecularism.org).

### What Is a Freethinker?

**freethinker** *n.*

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





## Bible quote removed from district homepage

A Texas school district has removed a bible quote from its website following an FFRF complaint.

The Troup Independent School District’s official website on its homepage prominently featured a bible quote from 1 Samuel 17:48: “As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran out to meet him.”

“It is well settled that public schools may not advance or promote religion,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote Stuart Bird, superintendent of the Troup Independent School District, in January. “No public school may urge religious viewpoints on students by granting special status to a religious text like the bible.”

The story of David and Goliath as told in the bible is not just a tale of an underdog triumphing over great odds, but is also a story about the power of the Judeo-Christian god, FFRF explained. Before David strikes down Goliath, he states, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.” (1 Samuel 17:45). Indeed, David explicitly states, “All those gathered here will

know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.” (1 Samuel 17:47). This is a story meant to convert readers to Judeo-Christianity.

Quoting a bible story about the power of the Judeo-Christian god on the district’s website shows its preference for Judeo-Christianity over all minority religions and over nonreligion, FFRF contended. By doing this, the district unconstitutionally lent its power and prestige to Christianity, thereby excluding the nearly 30 percent of adult Americans who are non-Christian and the more than 43 percent of Millennials who practice a minority religion or no religion at all. FFRF asked that the quote be removed from the homepage.

FFRF has learned that the Troup Independent School District modified its website. While the website still references the story of David and Goliath, this is a prominent story in popular culture and contemporary literature. Thus, it’s not unconstitutional for the district to reference the story. It was the bible citation that constituted a religious endorsement and that has been removed.

## South Carolina football chaplain removed

The University of South Carolina football program has let go of its chaplain after the FFRF complained about him last year.

“South Carolina’s football team has parted ways with longtime team chaplain Adrian Despres,” reports The State newspaper, adding that “his position came under some criticism when the Freedom From Religion Foundation sent a letter of complaint in August, requesting the elimination of the chaplaincy in the USC football program.”

Indeed, FFRF’s report on unconstitutional Christian chaplains in college football programs highlighted the University of South Carolina as one of the major offenders. FFRF’s Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor wrote to USC President Harris Pastides asking him to abolish the chaplaincy.

FFRF had charged that Despres preached creationism and proselytized public university students while being

paid \$4,500 by the University of South Carolina during the 2014 football season. He was supposedly a “character coach” hired to counsel players and speak to recruits, but in reality he was paid to preach and recruit new football players.

In truth, he functioned as the team chaplain, asserted FFRF, with then-head coach Steve Spurrier calling him “preacher” or “reverend.” Despres preached a series of sermons called “Christian Man Laws” to players, teaching them to “stop being sissies for Christ.”

South Carolina’s chaplaincy dates back to 1994. Adrian Despres apparently took over in 1999.

After ending Despres’ 16-year run as chaplain, coach Will Muschamp responded to criticism by saying that FFRF has “zero to do with any decisions I make.”

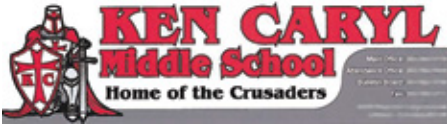
## FFRF destroys a crusader

FFRF has effectively killed off a crusading public school mascot.

Ken Caryl Middle School in Littleton, Colo., has a “crusader” as its mascot. The figure is a cloaked knight holding a shield and sword. Latin crosses on the tunic and shield mark him out to be a member of Knights Templar, one of the most feared fighting units in the Crusades.

FFRF reminded the school district that a school mascot should not be derived from the Crusades, since they were incredibly divisive and violent. The Crusaders were zealous warriors who slaughtered Jews, Muslims and other Christians in the name of religion. The whole effort was a disaster that to this day mars the West’s relationship with the Middle East.

FFRF pointed out to the school district that a lot of universities and orga-



nizations, including Christian outfits, with crusader-type mascots have gotten rid of them in recent years. It urged the school to do so, too.

The school district indicated that it would be heeding FFRF’s advice.

“The district is in the process of forming a diverse group of parents, students, staff and community members to consider your feedback and develop and/or review submissions for a new mascot/logo for Ken Caryl Middle School,” Dan McMinimee, superintendent of Jeffco Public Schools, replied in a March 15 email. “We anticipate the process to be finished by the start of the next school year.”

## FFRF legal victories

### FFRF ensures students’ rights in Alabama

FFRF has ensured that members of the Interfaith Club at Bob Jones High School will be permitted to hold meetings on any topic of their choosing, after Madison City Schools Assistant Superintendent Robby Parker prohibited discussion of Satanism, the planned topic at one of the club’s meetings.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover contacted the district’s attorney on Feb. 17, noting that it’s unlawful for a school to deny students the right to meet based on the “religious, political philosophical or other content of the speech at such meetings.”

The district’s attorney responded March 2, saying that administrators and other employees “will take all necessary steps to ensure that schools in the city of Madison comply with the statute.”

### Bible verse removed from email signature

An inspector from North Carolina’s License & Theft Bureau will no longer use a biblical verse as her email signature after FFRF contacted the department.

Her email signature included, “For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. Romans 13:4.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott called the department’s attention to the signature in a letter dated Sept. 18, 2015. The department’s human resources director responded March 8, informing FFRF that the employee removed the quote from her email signature.

### District drops religious assemblies

Shelby County School District in Alabama is taking steps to ensure no further inappropriate religious assemblies occur in its schools.

Presenters from Word of Life Redemption were permitted to hold assemblies at Montevallo High School and Montevallo Middle School on Feb. 12. The group lists its mission as “to influence students in schools and youth groups throughout the nation and to ‘make a difference’ in today’s youth culture through music, drama, and worship that glorifies God and brings people to the cross.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover

wrote the district on March 2, and on March 8, Superintendent Randy Fuller responded, noting that the district considered the incident a serious matter and was already addressing it with administrators.

### Public transit ceases ad sponsorship

The Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority in Ohio has agreed to FFRF’s request that it cease weekly sponsorship of a religious advertisement in a local paper.

The ad, printed each Saturday in the Record-Courier with text promoting Christianity and a “Scripture Reading” selected by the American Bible Society, listed PARTA as a sponsor. “It is unconstitutional for PARTA to pay for a religious advertisement, or to endorse religion,” FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote in a letter to the organization.

On March 15, PARTA notified FFRF that it had directed the newspaper to ensure that PARTA ads no longer appeared in religion-themed sections.

### Automated phone system misuse rectified

The Jacksonville City Schools in Al-

abama has assured FFRF that the district’s automated phone system will not again be used to inform parents of religious events.

Last summer, community members reportedly received calls and text messages from the school system to inform them of and invite them to prayer walks being held at the district.

“Future use of this phone system will be appropriate and within the guidelines of the law,” Superintendent Mark Peterson wrote in response.

### Library stays open on Easter Sunday

FFRF persuaded the central library in Madison, Wis., to serve patrons on Easter Sunday.

FFRF had contacted Madison library staff last year to emphasize that Easter Sunday was neither a federal nor a Wisconsin holiday, and that the library was open otherwise on Sundays.

“It is unconstitutional and inappropriate for city libraries to close on this Christian holy day,” FFRF Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to Library Director Greg Mickells last May.

The library was open on Easter, where it did heavy business, and will remain open in future years.



## FFRF legal victories

### Gideons must follow same rules as others

Gideons will now be forced to abide by the same literature distribution rules as all other groups in Georgia's Whitfield County Schools following an FFRF complaint.

A district parent said representatives of the men's ministry handed out bibles to Westside Elementary School students on Nov. 10, 2015.

FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote a letter to the district on March 28, informing the district of the unconstitutionality of the Gideons handing out bibles.

In an April 1 email, Superintendent Judy Gilreath informed FFRF that principals are told each year that they cannot allow Gideons on campus to distribute bibles, but may place a table in their schools where, without discrimination, people and organizations can place literature, unattended, for students to pick up.

### FFRF tackles football coach's religiosity

The coach of the Cannon County High School football team in Woodbury, Tenn., will no longer be permitted to conduct religious activities with his students.

The coach previously had taken his team to attend area churches for "team building," and also brought in a speaker to give the team a devotional with "faith-based life lessons" the day before every game.

FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a letter of complaint to the Cannon County School District on Nov. 24, 2015. The district "cannot allow a nonschool adult access to the children in its charge, and it certainly cannot grant that access to a religious speaker seeking to organize prayer for the students," Markert wrote.

On Feb. 25, Director of Schools Barbara N. Parker responded saying the issues have been resolved.

### Staff won't lead, promote religious club

Tri County Area School District in Sand Lake, Mich., is making changes to a religious club that was previously run unconstitutionally.

Tri County High School's First Priority club, a Christian club, was often attended by a music teacher and a local pastor, in violation of the Equal Access Act. The music teacher also promoted the club in her classroom, even reportedly distributing fliers to students at lunch and telling them to take a flier because they "need Jesus."

An attorney for the school district wrote back on April 11, telling FFRF that it would ensure staff members would only participate as monitors in student-led religious clubs, and outside persons would not attend the clubs.

### Principal schooled on religious activities

A Wisconsin elementary school principal has been instructed to stop imposing his religious beliefs on staff, students and parents.

The principal of Elm Lawn Elementary School in Middleton, Wis., reportedly prayed in front of teachers, students and parents while addressing disciplinary issues, and gave a devotion-



Photo by Sainya Bashir / The Capital Times

### Loaves and fishes for lunch?

High school students in Middleton, Wis., protest the "Jesus Lunch" held in a park across the street from the high school. Some FFRF staff members were also there, offering desserts to those who stopped by their table. The park is used as an official part of the school during school hours, and the school district has said the Jesus Lunches should be moved to an off-campus location during school hours. Proponents of the lunches say the park is open to the public, so it does not violate any rules. Jesus Lunch began in 2014 by a group of parents of Middleton High School students and involves parents passing out free food to students and having discussions about Christianity.

al book to at least one parent during a student consultation.

FFRF lodged a complaint with the Middleton-Cross Plains School District on Jan. 11.

"It is inappropriate and unconstitutional for district administrators to distribute religious literature or to handle disciplinary issues by praying in front of students," Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne told the superintendent.

On April 14, the superintendent told FFRF that "the principal in question was informed of [the district's] expectations."

### Arkansas groups won't get grants

FFRF recently complained to the Northwest Arkansas Economic Development District about the nearly \$600,000 in grants it gave in 2013-14 to Ecclesia College in Springdale, Ark., an overtly religious institution.

Of the seven majors the college offers, five are theologically based; of its 14 emphases, nine are Christian. Students are promised they will be taught everything from a "biblical perspective" in a "biblical-based classroom."

FFRF sought assurance that the district would not allocate money in the future to Ecclesia College or other religious outfits. Joe Willis, executive director of the agency, promised in his reply to "make certain" that all future grants "will not be used to advance a religious purpose or cause."

### Teacher stops peddling creationism

FFRF has stopped a Garrettsville, Ohio, public school teacher from promoting creationism in his classroom.

In January, Garfield High School biology teacher Gregory Walker taught a lesson on creationism/intelligent design as a precursor to a unit on evolution. Walker had four crosses on display during the lesson.

"As a matter of fact, there has never been evidence of macroevolution," he said in a statement. "You can look at any fossil you want. There is no correlation, no go-between, from any organism to another. Ask any scientist."

"Teaching creationism or any of its offshoots, such as intelligent design, in a public school, is unlawful, because creationism is not based on fact," FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote in a letter last month to Ted Lysiak, superintendent of the James A. Garfield School District.

"It's agreed that Walker will no longer teach intelligent design and the science involved in it," Lysiak writes.

### Graduation in church halted

A Nevada public school is no longer holding its graduation ceremonies inside a church, following an FFRF complaint.

For at least the past three years, Coral Academy of Science's eighth-grade promotion and senior graduation ceremonies had been performed in The Church at South Las Vegas, and it was scheduled to be the host again this year.

Coral Academy "will endeavor not to hold graduation ceremonies at that facility in the future, and has recently changed the site of its 2016 ceremonies from there to a secular venue on the UNLV campus," said Mark Gardberg, legal counsel for the school.

### Graduation practice in church ends

FFRF made a Pennsylvania public school discontinue graduation practice inside a church.

Columbia High School last year required its students to receive their graduation caps and gowns and ceremony information within a church.

School districts that have used churches for school functions have had the practice struck down by courts.

"A school's use of a church for school functions is problematic because it sends a message of approval of the church to impressionable students," FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote in a letter last July to Carol Powell, then-superintendent of the Columbia Borough School District.

On receiving no reply, Ziegler followed up with two more letters in November and last month. Finally, FFRF

got a response a few weeks ago from Acting Superintendent Ken Klawitter, who took over in December. Klawitter told the organization that he first became aware of the issue through its February letter and acted swiftly.

"I immediately directed the high school principal to cease the practice," he wrote. "In the future, caps and gowns, as well as important graduation information, will be distributed in a secular setting."

### No more preaching at mandatory events

A Texas public school district will stop preachers sermonizing during compulsory employee events, following a complaint by FFRF.

The Hurst-Euless-Bedford Independent School District held a mandatory district-wide convocation at First Baptist Church of Euless on Aug. 14. During the event, Scott Sheppard, executive director of 6 Stones Ministries, led the assembled employees in a prayer. Sheppard reportedly admitted that he wasn't supposed to pray in his speech, but said that because "y'all are in my house," he was going to pray anyway.

The district's attorney, Deron Robinson, replied last month to assure FFRF that "the district administration has taken appropriate measures" to make certain future speakers are reminded of the district's policy and practice to not promote a specific religion."

### FFRF takes on principal's proselytizing

After hearing from FFRF, the Conroe Independent School District in Conroe, Texas, has instructed the principal of Vogel Intermediate School to stop proselytizing to her employees.

An employee reported that the principal regularly sent emails with religious content, and even placed notes in each employee's personal mailbox with the message, "Jesus died for you."

On March 29, the district responded, denying all allegations, but stating that the principal had been provided with a guide to religion in the public schools to use during teacher in-service training at the beginning of the next school year, and would reinforce with the staff their obligation to remain neutral toward religion.

### FFRF has teacher cease sermonizing

FFRF has made an Ohio public school teacher stop sermonizing to her students.

Green Middle School teacher Kelli Hunka was assigning religious projects to her students every month. In January, for instance, she had students "write and illustrate a prayer for the new year," while recently she asked students to "illustrate Isaiah 11:6."

"These assignments are not part of a study of comparative religion or the history of religion, but rather provide lessons in Christianity," FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote in early March.

Hunka "has been instructed not to use any materials containing the religious references mentioned in your letter," Mary Jo Shannon Slick, legal counsel for the schools, recently replied, adding that Hunka had assured Green Local Schools Supervisor Jeff Miller she would abide by the directive.



# Plaintiffs are FFRF, Antelope Valley Freethinkers

## School district sued over scholarships

FFRF, along with the Antelope Valley Freethinkers, is suing a California school district for censoring information about the groups' scholarship opportunities.

The lawsuit was filed April 12 in California federal court. FFRF, the Antelope Valley Freethinkers, and AVF President David Dionne are plaintiffs. The defendants are the Antelope Valley Union High School District and members of the district board of trustees.

The Antelope Valley Union High School District distributes lists of scholarship opportunities to district students. But for the past two years the district has refused to publish scholarship opportunities offered by FFRF and the Antelope Valley Freethinkers. The Freethinkers' scholarship asked college-bound seniors to write essays on the topic, "Being a young freethinker in Antelope Valley," with a total award money of \$1,750. FFRF's rejected essay competition for college-bound high school seniors (with more than \$7,500 in cash prizes) offered students a chance to write on the topic of "Young, bold and nonbelieving: Challenges of being a nonbeliever of color" or "Why I'm good without God: Challenges of being a young nonbeliever."

The district said it was rejecting the scholarships because the essay announcements would upset parents, claiming that they that they appeared



Photo by Ann-Laurel Nickel

**David Dionne, president of Antelope Valley Freethinkers, is a named plaintiff in the lawsuit along with FFRF and AVF.**

to "promote anti-religious expression" and had "aggressive" and "argumentative undertones toward religion." Offers by the local group to modify the wording were rejected.

In 2014, FFRF sent the district two letters objecting to the district's censorship. In her response at the end of the year, the district's general counsel, Bridget L. Cook, stated that "since the district is a limited public forum, we reserve the right to determine what

information we allow to be disseminated in our schools." Repeated FFRF follow-ups were to no avail.

The Antelope Valley Union High School District is being inconsistent in its policy. The district's scholarship lists included scholarships that solicit religious expression or contain religious elements. In one example, the Quartz Hill High School Scholarship Bulletin for December-January 2015-2016 lists the "Playing with Purpose Award,"

which requires the applicant to write "at least one paragraph . . . describing how and when you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and what your present relationship with Him means to you."

The school district's censorship of Antelope Valley Freethinkers and FFRF is government suppression of free speech in violation of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, FFRF asserts. The district censored FFRF and the Antelope Valley Freethinkers' speech because their message is nonreligious, critical of religion and controversial.

This unequal treatment amounts to viewpoint discrimination because a public school that publishes scholarship opportunities for students offered by religious groups many not refuse to publish scholarships offered by two nontheistic organizations, FFRF contends. FFRF seeks a permanent injunction enjoining the defendants from engaging in continued viewpoint discrimination in publishing scholarship opportunities.

The case is being litigated by California attorney David J.P. Kaloyanides, with FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel and FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler serving as co-counsel. The case, No. 2:16-cv-02487, was filed in the U.S. District Court, Central District of California, Western Division.

## School district: Pamphlets — not bible — inappropriate

Delta County School District employees in Delta, Colo., placed FFRF literature, along with material from the Western Colorado Atheists and Freethinkers and The Satanic Temple, in schools for students to take. In early April, FFRF sought the distribution to protest a previous bible distribution in the school.

However, the School District complained about two FFRF pamphlets: "An X-Rated Book: Sex and Obscenity in the Bible" and "What Does the Bible Say About Abortion?" Both of them were limited to just the local high schools.

The School District objected to the cartoon cover of "An X-Rated Book," which shows a bible groping a young woman.

then the district must ban the bible too," he says. "If you actually examine the pamphlet, you will see that it is comprised almost entirely of bible quotes. There is absolutely no way for the district to exclude the pamphlet and allow the bible to be distributed."

This gets to the larger point of why FFRF insisted that it be allowed to dispense its literature. In spite of repeated FFRF requests, the Delta County School District refused to stop the Gideons from passively distributing bibles in the local public schools. Since the School District has told FFRF that it will keep on giving the Gideons access, FFRF made sure other perspectives got heard, too.

"The school has no ability to censor any materials based on their viewpoint once it opens a forum," says Seidel. "That is why open forums in public schools are such a bad idea. If you want to open a forum, you do not get to determine what is acceptable and not."



**FFRF Legal Assistant Calli Miller is featured on one of FFRF's billboards stating, "I'm atheist and I vote."**

## 'I'm atheist and I vote' billboards welcomed candidates to Madison

Billboards featuring local atheist voters greeted presidential candidates and their staff as they traveled to campaign in Madison in advance of the April 5 Wisconsin primaries.

FFRF displayed its 'I'm an Atheist and I Vote' billboards in 12 locations across Madison featuring local Millennials.

"Madison is a very secular city, and we want the candidates to acknowledge our presence and priorities," said Calli Miller, FFRF's legal assistant, who is featured on one of the billboards. "Candidates should acknowledge secular voters as the fastest-growing minority group in America, while committing to keep religion out of government."

Since President Obama was first elected, the number of religiously unaffiliated adults in America has grown

by 19 million, fueled largely by growth of young, secular Millennials.

The billboards are part of FFRF's campaign to reach voters across the nation through FFRF chapters, a national TV ad buy focusing on the separation of church and state, efforts to mobilize students on college campuses, and coordination with the nation's other major freethought associations as part of the June 4 Reason Rally in Washington, D.C.

"Secular voters are highly educated and independent-minded," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "They care deeply about women's rights, environmental protection, marriage equality and social justice, and candidates should be reaching out to us directly."

"It is inappropriate in a school setting; we would not allow any of the high school students to wear or otherwise display such a cartoon," says School District Attorney Andrew Clay. "Why would we allow them to carry it in the building? It may also qualify as hate literature, demeaning women."

But district officials are misconstruing the cover.

"The School District misses the point entirely," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "The cover image is a feminist cartoon whose message is that the bible itself demeans women."

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel also dismisses the School District's argument.

"The idea that the pamphlet qualifies as hate literature is absurd, and if you're banning it on those grounds,



As a compromise, FFRF put stickers over the cover of "An X-Rated Book," stating "censored by order of Delta County Schools." The organization is of the view that the attempt at censorship will likely backfire, since students are more likely to take "forbidden fruit."

The School District also limited the distribution of "What Does the Bible Say About Abortion?" to local high schools, since it deems the cover, a famous depiction of Adam and Eve by Albrecht Dürer, to be a "pornographic picture."



# State/church violations in schools

FFRF receives numerous complaints every month about violations of the First Amendment happening in public schools around the country. Here are several of the state/church issues FFRF is working on.

## Iowa

FFRF is questioning the appropriateness of creating prayer spaces for Muslims and Christians at the University of Iowa in Iowa City.

The public university has recently established two prayer rooms for its Muslim students. This is in addition to a longstanding university chapel that features a Latin cross. The presence of such religious venues on a public campus raises a number of issues.

FFRF is asking for the University of Iowa to close down the Muslim prayer areas and to remove Christian symbols from the chapel.

## Kansas

FFRF recently learned that late last year, Impact World Tour organized two meetings at the Spring Hill Middle School in Spring Hill, Kan., that were heavily evangelical in nature. Tickets were handed out to the students, but the actual theme of the programs was concealed.

An Impact World Tour gathering at the school attended by a student (daughter of the complainant) was so religious that she remarked afterward: “It was a cult.” The presenters asked the audience to come to the front and “surrender their lives to Jesus.”

Records obtained by FFRF show that each school principal in the district requested that these assemblies be held.

FFRF is asking for assurances in writing from the Spring Hill School District that such unconstitutional violations will not recur.

## Kentucky

Okolona Elementary School in Louisville has a Fellowship of Christian Athletes student club sponsored by teacher Ashley Pearson. Also, the school art

# FFRF: Jersey borough needs secular motto



FFRF wants a New Jersey borough to get rid of its unmistakably religious seal and motto.

The official seal of the borough of Clayton depicts a church and a Latin cross, with the accompanying motto reading: “A Great Place to Live and Play, Work and Pray.”

The inclusion of a cross and church on the official seal and the declaration that the borough is a great place to pray violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, FFRF asserts.

The borough’s logo signals an endorsement of Christianity and prayer.

“Federal courts have ruled that similar seals violate the Establishment Clause,” wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler in a letter last September to Clayton Mayor Tom Bianco.

The borough responded to FFRF that the seal and the motto were nothing more than a reflection of its history, citing no law to back up its assertions. Ziegler contends in a follow-up letter that such an argument is untenable.

“The federal courts have consistently held that religious symbolism on official city seals is unconstitutional, even in the face of claims that the religious portions are in some way historical,” Ziegler writes.



teacher, Mary Smith, showed a video last November in class of “Amazing Grace” that featured the Christian hymn in multiple languages and several images of Latin crosses. Additionally, a door at Pleasure Ridge Park High School in the same town has multiple crosses, a portrait of Jesus and the words “Jesus is the way, the truth and the life” on the outside. Finally, a teacher at Fern Creek High School, also in Louisville, told students at a health class that an important aspect of health is “spiritual health,” defined as “the practice of a religion or guided by faith which gives you purpose.”

FFRF is asking the district to investigate and to ensure that the reported violations do not recur.

## Missouri

Several Missouri public school employees are unconstitutionally promoting evangelical youth ministries, charges FFRF.

It was reported to FFRF that South Valley Middle School and Liberty High School teachers in Liberty, Mo., are spreading the word about Young Life and Wyldlife on school property and during school time in their professional capacities. (Young Life has as its explicit mission “introducing adolescents to Jesus Christ and helping them grow in their faith,” with Wyldlife sharing in this purpose.) The teachers wear T-shirts during the school day with the names of these ministries emblazoned on them.



Greg McNeil photo

# Foot-washing ceremony a no-no for state officials

FFRF is objecting to top Indiana state officials taking part in a Christian foot-washing ceremony in their official capacities.

Employees from Gov. Mike Pence’s office, as well as Lt. Gov. Sue Ellspermann and her staff, sponsored and participated in a “foot-washing” ritual during office hours at the Shepherd Community Center in Indianapolis. Pence made an appearance at the center, too, shortly after the ceremony was completed. The rite was deeply religious.

Sonna Dumas, director of the school associated with Shepherd, “a faith-based ministry,” commented to the Indianapolis Star that “the teachers told students about the biblical origins of the tradition in

FFRF asks Liberty Public Schools to investigate the situation and to make certain that its employees are not unlawfully and inappropriately promoting religious organizations during school hours.

## Ohio

Norwalk City School Board of Education meetings have regularly opened with a prayer, in spite of repeated FFRF objections. The School Board has deliberated over the issue and will consider a written policy formalizing opening meetings with a prayer.

A federal district court in California recently ruled in FFRF’s favor in a lawsuit filed against the Chino Valley School Board for a similar violation, awarding the organization attorneys fees and costs totaling more than \$200,000. In the case, the court scrutinized a written policy that was virtually the same as the Norwalk School Board’s proposed draft.

FFRF urges the Norwalk School Board to reject its policy proposal and drop the practice of scheduling prayer before its meetings.

## South Carolina

FFRF is contending that the hiring of a South Carolina public school football coach may have been because of his religion, which is in violation of school nondiscrimination policies.

Text messages exchanged between Seneca High School Principal Cliff Roberts and recently hired coach Hal Capps indicate that their shared religiosity was a significant factor in Capps’ appointment.

While offering Capps the job, Roberts texted, “I am going to trust you and trust the Good Lord through this, and be obedient to what I feel he is leading us to do.” Capps responded, “Amen.”

Capps was known for leading post-game prayer circles at a North Carolina high school, which ended after FFRF complained in 2014.

FFRF is asking the School District, in Seneca, S.C., to conduct an immediate investigation into whether its hiring and nondiscrimination policies have been violated.

# FFRF, friends to restore Ingersoll statue

Thanks to 248 donors from 42 states plus Puerto Rico, including 26 who sent \$1,000 and whose name will be credited on the new base along with the Freedom From Religion Foundation, FFRF has raised more than \$30,000 to restore the 1911 statue of Robert Green Ingersoll in Glen Oak Park in Peoria, Ill.

Ingersoll, a Civil War colonel and famed 19th-century “infidel” orator and author, built his early career as an attorney in Peoria, where he met his wife, Eva. He served as Illinois’ attorney general from 1867 to 1869.

Peoria Secular Humanist Society Board member Ken Hofbauer was instrumental in setting the project in motion by contacting the Peoria Parks Department. The statue, sculpted by Fritz Treibel, and the base will be restored this summer.

**Photo: Peoria Secular Humanist Society Board members Ken Hofbauer, Cheryl Hofbauer, Kathy Martin McNeil, Greg McNeil, Marshall Nehring, Treasurer Sarah Buck Nehring, Vice President Walt Meeks and President Nick DeTrempp pose by the soon-to-be-restored Robert Ingersoll statue.**

preparation for the event.”

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that government offices may not appear to endorse religion, FFRF reminds the governor. The governor’s office may not spend taxpayer money on religious ceremonies, including paying employees to participate. The office’s endorsement of religion — and of Christianity in particular — turns non-Christian and nonreligious Indianans into outsiders in their own community.

As it is inappropriate and unconstitutional for government officials to sponsor and participate in religious rites, FFRF is seeking assurances from the governor that his office will not engage in this again.





**Freethought Fest 5**  
Above: History and religious studies Professor Charles Cohen, FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel and political science Professor Howard Schweber discuss religion in politics during Freethought Fest 5, hosted by UW-Madison's Atheists, Humanists and Agnostics and co-sponsored by FFRF. The event was held April 8-9 at Gordon Dining Hall and Events Center on the UW campus. Left: FFRF Executive Board Member Todd Peissig volunteers at FFRF's table during Friday's session. Lower left: Famous skeptic and paranormal debunker James Randi gave the keynote speech on science and the paranormal.

## Congressman asked to end propaganda

FFRF is asking U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller of Florida to stop using taxpayer money for religious indoctrination.

Miller's office issues an official weekly "Miller Newsletter" that often explicitly promotes his Christian faith.

"Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of Christ and for giving thanks to God Almighty for sending his Son to save us," reads a newsletter from last December, for example. "In Luke 2:10-11, the shepherds learned of the birth of Jesus, when the Angel said to them 'Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day

in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.'"

In addition, Miller's newsletter often makes erroneous claims about the separation of state and church, stating, for instance: "It was not the intent of the Founders' to keep God out of the government, but to keep the government out of the church."

FFRF is calling on Miller to refrain from disseminating his religious perspective in a newsletter paid for with public money.

Government officials may not use their government office or resources to further their religion, FFRF asserts.

## Judge sanctioned over sentencing

A bible-foisting judge was sanctioned by Texas State Commission on Judicial Conduct for making a man write bible verses 25 times a day as part of his sentencing.

Last July, Judge Randall Rogers from Smith County, Texas, decided that the best punishment for Josten Bundy, who punched an ex-boyfriend of his girlfriend, was to marry his girlfriend, get counseling and write bible verses.

If Bundy declined to the probation rules, he would be sentenced to 15 days in jail.

Bundy was told to write Proverbs 26:27 ("If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it") 25 times a day.

Bundy did comply with the marriage injunction and ended up marrying his girlfriend.

FFRF filed a complaint with the commission and Americans United for Separation of Church and State sent a letter to the judge.

"After a thorough review and investigation of the issues you raised in your complaint, the commission voted to issue the judge a private sanction," Seana Willing, executive director of the commission, said in the letter. However, FFRF was not allowed to see the details of the sanction.

FFRF thanks the commission.

"In our secular constitutional system, courts should not be forcing people to act according to biblical precepts," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.



Judge Rogers



Jake Swenson Photo

**FFRF presents 'Life of Brian'**  
FFRF's Lisa Treu dresses up as a character from Monty Python's "The Life of Brian," which was shown to members in the Charlie Brooks Auditorium at FFRF's Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis., on March 23. About 50 members came to see the irreverent and hilarious film that skewers religious thinking and dogma.



## FFRF sues over cross in California public park

FFRF, with local member Andrew DeFaria, is suing the city of Santa Clara, Calif., to remove a gigantic cross from a local public park.

The lawsuit was filed April 20 in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, San Jose Division.

The 14-foot granite Latin cross at Memorial Cross Park that FFRF and DeFaria are suing about officially commemorates a 1777 Spanish Catholic mission. The prominent Christian edifice was donated by the Santa Clara Lions Club in 1953, with the city maintaining the cross and the park ever since. FFRF contends that the city's decision to accept the cross and its subsequent display and maintenance "amounts to the advancement of religion," specifically Christianity.

FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert first complained in April 2012 to the city's then-mayor, Jamie L. Matthews. The city indicated two months later that it looked forward "to resolving this matter in an expeditious and responsible manner."

In the past three years, on at least 12 occasions, Markert and other FFRF employees have followed up on the status of the cross's removal. But the city's only action to date has been to remove a sign reading "Memorial Cross Park."

DeFaria, who lives in Santa Clara, has encountered the cross at the park. "As a nonbeliever in any religion, he finds the cross on public land objectionable," the lawsuit says. DeFaria now avoids the park, and even the street on which the park is located, so he won't have to encounter his city's endorsement of the Christian religion.

FFRF and DeFaria are asking the court to declare the city cross in violation of Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, as well as the No Preference Clause of Article I, § 4 of the California Constitution.

"It should not be necessary to sue over such an obvious and blatant establishment of religion," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "We waited four years for the city to act in good faith and divest itself of this unconstitutional endorsement of religion, and were left with no recourse but to go to court."

It should not be necessary to sue over such an obvious and blatant establishment of religion.

— Annie Laurie Gaylor

*FFRF v. City of Santa Clara* is being litigated on behalf of FFRF by David J.P. Kaloyanides, with FFRF attorneys Rebecca Markert and Madeline Ziegler serving as co-counsel. The defendants are the city of Santa Clara, Santa Clara City Council, Mayor Lisa Gillmor, Vice Mayor Teresa O'Neill and other members of the council.

## Town council will stop invocations

Thanks to efforts by local activists and national freethought groups, including FFRF, the Chino Valley Town Council in Arizona voted unanimously April 12 to drop prayers from governmental meetings.

In December, a local resident expressed dismay about the councilor-delivered invocations always ending "in Jesus' name." In response to the complaint, Councilmember Lon Turner on Jan. 8 publicly declared he would continue to pray in Jesus' name, claiming that the citizen's request was an attempt to "tread on" his religion and "freedom of expression."

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote letters on Jan. 14 and Feb. 10 objecting to the practice.

Although originally promising there would be no invocation while controversy was discussed, Mayor Chris Marley at the following meeting personally conducted the invocation, reading a "disclaimer" that the prayer was his "personal belief." Local Rabbi Adele Plotkin, who had attended the meeting on the understanding that there would be no Christian prayer, audibly protested and was removed from the council chambers.

The council decided not to change its practice, with Marley declaring the lack of action was "drawing a line in the sand in defense of freedom of religion and free expression."

Ziegler sent another letter after these antics: "It is alarming that the members of the Chino Valley Town Council do not understand that you are acting as the government at Town Council meetings, and not as private individuals."



# Prayer, belief in God at all-time low in U.S.

According to a new analysis of a decades-long survey, twice as many Americans said they did not believe in God in 2014 compared with the early 1980s, and five times as many said they never prayed.

The study, led by San Diego State University psychology professor Jean M. Twenge, found the percentage of Americans who believe in God or prayed reached an all-time low two years ago. Americans were also less likely to describe themselves as religious, attend services or believe the bible is divinely inspired.

The results stemmed from analysis of the General Social Survey, a poll of 58,893 Americans from 1972 to 2014.

While Americans are generally more secular, there was one discrepancy within the broader results: Researchers saw a slight uptick in belief in the afterlife.

“It was interesting that fewer people participated in religion or prayed but more believed in an afterlife,” Twenge said. “It might be part of a growing entitlement mentality — thinking you



Jake Swenson photo

The percentage of Americans who pray has reached an all-time low.

can get something for nothing.”

## Majority in Norway don’t believe in God

A survey from the Norwegian Monitor shows that nonbelievers in God now are higher in number than those

who do believe.

Nearly 40% of respondents said they did not believe in God, more than the 37% who answered “yes” to the same question. Another 23 percent said they did not know.

The survey, which was mailed to 4,000 Norwegians, denotes the first

time that nonbelievers outnumber the religious. Two years ago, the number of believers and nonbelievers was equal. When the question was first asked in 1985, 50 percent said they believed in God while 20 percent did not.

The survey also showed that women are more likely to believe in God than men and that faith in God is stronger among the old than the young.

## No religion for more than half in Scotland

A survey published by Scottish Social Attitudes shows that more than half of the 5.4 million people living in Scotland have no religion.

The 52 percent of unaffiliated Scots represents a 12 percent jump from 16 years ago.

The proportion of people who say they belong to the Church of Scotland — the Presbyterian Church that for so long dominated almost every aspect of life in that country — has fallen dramatically, to just 20 percent, down from 39 percent of the population in 1999.

In the news

## Prayer returning to Phoenix council

In a case that keeps changing, Phoenix City Council members voted 7-2 on March 2 to restore a spoken prayer at council meetings. However, under the new rule, the invocation would have to be given only by chaplains for the police and fire departments.

The issue came up initially when a group of Satanists were scheduled to give the opening prayer at a council meeting in February. But the council did not want to allow the Satanists to lead an opening invocation, so it voted to replace the invocation with a “moment of silent prayer and reflection.”

But that decision then drew protests from some council members, residents and religious leaders who claimed it was still a victory for the Satanists.

Then two residents filed a petition asking for the council to reinstate the invocation, and Councilman Jim Waring said the council should approve the petition with an amendment requiring that only the city’s police or fire chaplains give the prayer.

Now council members must vote on a specific ordinance to make the rule change.

## A huge triumph for Tennessee’s children

The Tennessee Legislature repealed a decades-old religious defense for felony crimes against children by parents whose children died or were seriously harmed when prayer took the place of medical assistance.

“The House gave final legislative approval [April 14] to a bill repealing a controversial 1994 law that was at the center of a long court fight over the 2002 death of a Loudon County child whose mother refused medical care in favor of ‘spiritual treatment’ and prayer,” the Memphis Commercial Appeal reports. The bill now waits approval from Gov. Bill Haslam, who will almost certainly sign it.

A major player in getting the bill passed was an FFRF ally, Children’s Healthcare Is Legal Duty (CHILD). “CHILD believes all parents, regardless

of their religious belief, should have a legal duty to obtain medical care for their child when necessary to prevent serious harm,” Rita Swan, the organization’s president, told the Commercial Appeal.

## Bible won’t be Tennessee’s state book

Tennessee lawmakers were unable to override Gov. Bill Haslam’s veto of a bill that would have made the bible Tennessee’s official book.

Forty-three House members voted in favor of the bill, but supporters needed 50 to meet the threshold of the 99-member chamber. Both the House and Senate would need a majority vote for the bill to become law. Haslam vetoed the bill on April 14.

When the bill was first introduced last year, state Attorney General Herbert Slatery expressed opposition and wrote an analysis on the constitutionality of the bill, noting that “Common sense compels the conclusion that designation of the bible as the official state book in practice and effect conveys a message of endorsement,” which he says violates the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution.

## No surcharge on Utah license plates

Utah Gov. Gary R. Herbert signed a law making license plates with the phrase “In God We Trust” a standard option, not subject to the \$5 surcharge like other specialty plates.



“John Adams said our Constitution was made for only a religious and moral people,” Herbert wrote on his blog. “Our nation’s motto bears extra importance at a time when free worship of God and religious rights are being challenged.”

The “In God We Trust” license plate is the state’s most popular commemorative plate and, beginning Jan. 1, 2017, it will become one of three standard Utah plates, along with The Greatest Snow on Earth and Delicate Arch.

## Indiana trooper fired after proselytizing

A 14-year veteran of the Indiana State Police was fired in April for neglect of duty and insubordination, following an internal investigation. That firing came shortly after Indiana State Police trooper Brian Hamilton asked a woman he had pulled over where she attended church and whether she had been “saved,” according to a lawsuit filed by the woman.

The woman, who felt uncomfortable with the questions and wanted the officer to stop asking her questions about her faith, said that she did attend a church and that she was saved, hoping that would end the line of questioning.

But Hamilton then invited the woman to his church and gave her directions, the lawsuit alleges.

## National Day Of Reason proposed

Rep. Mike Honda (D-Calif.) and Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.) introduced a resolution to create a secular alternative to the National Day of Prayer.

The one-time occasion, known as the National Day of Reason, would be observed on Thursday, May 5, the same day as this year’s National Day of Prayer. According to the resolution’s authors, the National Day of Reason would provide an opportunity for the religious and non-religious to come together and recognize “the importance of reason in the betterment of humanity.”

## ‘In God We Trust’ in schools?

The Pennsylvania House Education Committee approved legislation that would encourage the state’s public schools to display “In God We Trust.”

Under House Bill 1728, the phrase would be allowed to be prominently displayed in each building. The display could be in the form of a mounted plaque or artwork from a student contest.

Republican state Rep. Cris Dush reintroduced the proposal after a similar measure failed to pass the Legislature in 2013. The bill now goes to the full House.

## Evolution disclaimer to stay in textbooks

Some science textbooks used in Alabama public schools will continue to include a disclaimer regarding the theory of evolution.

In March, the state Board of Education unanimously voted to continue including the one-page disclaimer in biology textbooks. The disclaimer has been in place since the 1990s.

Part of the disclaimer reads: “[Students] should learn to make distinctions between the multiple meanings of evolution, to distinguish between observations and assumptions used to draw conclusions, and to wrestle with the unanswered questions and unresolved problems still faced by evolutionary theory.”

## Secular activist murdered in Bangladesh

A Bangladeshi law student who posted against Islamism on his Facebook page was murdered on April 6.

Nazimuddin Samad, a 26-year-old atheist who had taken part in protests against Islamist leaders, was attacked near his university in Dhaka by unknown assailants carrying machetes.

“They hacked his head with a machete. As he fell down, one of them shot him in the head with a pistol from close range.

He died on the spot,” deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Syed Nurul Islam told AFP.

It was the sixth such killing in 15 months and sparked protests in Dhaka, where more than 1,000 students blocked a busy road to demand the attackers be brought to justice.



FFRF’s 2015 Freethinker of the Year Award

‘No small violations of the Constitution’

*Douglas Marshall was the plaintiff in FFRF’s federal court victory that forced the city of Warren, Mich., to allow him to put up a “Reason Station” in the City Hall atrium to counter a longtime prayer booth. He also was previously a plaintiff in the FFRF’s 2011 case against the city of Warren over censorship of FFRF’s Winter Solstice sign. Douglas graduated from Tri State College in Indiana and served in the U.S. Army for two years. He retired in 2005 as a marketing analyst in the trucking and logistics industry.*

*Douglas’ speech, edited for space, was delivered on Oct. 10, 2015, at the FFRF national convention in Madison, Wis.*

By Douglas Marshall

As shown in the recent Pew Study, America is becoming more diverse in its religious beliefs and there is an increase in those who do not believe in any deity or religion. This causes many of the religious to try to insert their beliefs in the public arena. They do this because they can see that membership is dwindling and feel that they need to make America a theocracy in order to maintain their dominance. Public officials assist this by giving public space to the favored religious group to grant the authority of the governmental unit to that religion. Public school teachers add creationism to their science classes, read bible passages in class, pass out religious literature, promote clubs like the Good News Club or add religious songs to seasonal presentations.

We must be on the watch for violations of the First Amendment’s separation of church and state at all times and challenge them whenever they appear.

A secular nation

Our country was not established as a Christian nation, but as a secular nation. Many of our Founding Fathers were revolutionaries with deist beliefs. They saw the problems that official religions bring and wanted to make sure that those problems would not be tolerated in this new country.

The First Amendment to the Constitution states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” and the 14th Amendment, “No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States.” The First Amendment forbids laws (rules or privileges) respecting religion and the 14th Amendment conveys that along to state and local governmental units.

As citizens, it is our responsibility to support our government and its underlying Constitution if we want to live under that document. It has been noted by someone “that if we lose our freedoms it will not be in a big slash of a sword but by many small cuts which we ignore at the time.” The Christians and offending parties will complain that we are nitpicking and if these violations offend us, we should just close our eyes, look the other way and remain quiet. I reply that there are no small violations of the Constitution and that every one must be addressed.

I was confronted with a situation in Warren, Mich., where I live. The city was giving space in the city hall atrium



Ingrid Laas photo

FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert presents Douglas Marshall with the 2015 “Freethinker of the Year” award.

to a religious group to promote its religion. When I complained about this establishment violation, I was told that the area was a free speech area open to all, and it would be a violation of the church’s right to speech to deny them access. At that time, in the spring of 2009, I contacted FFRF Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert, who wrote a complaint to the city and received a similar response. It was that initial involvement that caused me to join FFRF.

I then asked about the availability to have similar access, I found that I needed an insurance liability policy in the amount of \$1 million and an additional \$10,000 in medical insurance to which I would need to add the city and Downtown Development Authority on as additional insureds. As an individual, I have no need for general liability insurance, so the cost of such insurance would be prohibitive. Also, the city had an unreasonable charge for the whole atrium, which they wanted to apply to displays by individual residents, but waived for churches and nonprofits. Confronted with these obstacles, I was unable to challenge the violating party with my own speech. Two years ago at the Freedom From Religion Foundation convention, I met with Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott and asked if FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, was willing to add me, the city and the city’s Downtown Development Authority to its insurance policy for a Reason Station. Once I knew that I had the insurance requirement covered, I was able to make my application for a display.

Ready in advance

From the start, I knew that the city was only using the public space story as justification for allowing the violation of the Establishment Clause, and I suspected that my application would be denied out of hand. Believing that this would be the case, I contacted the local ACLU in advance to determine what its response would be if I was denied use of the facility by the city. The ACLU would not make any commitment prior to something happening, but stated it wanted to know if my application for equal access was denied. I also contacted the local representative of Americans United for Separation of Church and State for its assessment

and was advised that it, too, wanted to be notified if my application was denied. Now that I had contacted these three organizations and was sure of my legal standing, I was ready to present my application for the space.

Because Patrick Elliott of FFRF had obtained copies of the church’s application for me, I was able to duplicate the application of the Prayer Station for my Reason Station. When the time was appropriate, I sent in my application for a Reason Station by certified mail. As I had expected, a week later I received a letter from the mayor stating that my application was being denied. As a bonus, the mayor stated the application was being denied because I was an atheist and a member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

The mayor knew this because we had been to court before over the solstice display a year earlier. This was perfect; the city was denying my right of speech 1) because of my religious views and 2) because of my membership in the Freedom From Religion Foundation. The denial was clearly a violation of my religious rights, my right to speak and right of association as stated in the First Amendment, and denial of equal protection under the law as stated in the 14th Amendment.

When I received the letter of denial, I was ready and emailed all the documents to FFRF, Americans United and the ACLU. I knew that the Freedom From Religion Foundation was behind me, but it did not have a local attorney to handle the case. Americans United was the first to respond with a letter to the mayor and city within four hours from the receipt of my complaint. About a week later I received a call from the ACLU to interview me to make sure that I was honorable and that I was involved based on principle, as opposed to looking for personal gain. Within about three weeks from my

email, I had all three organizations offering to represent me and I was able to coordinate the three organizations to work together with an additional local attorney on my case. I signed an agreement for these organizations to represent me. I believe that this was the first time that all three organizations have worked together on a single case.

Remaining polite

One of the things that I have done in working on this situation was to always remain polite when dealing with government officials and anyone involved. I always kept my temper in check, never raised my voice, and always said “Thank you” or “No thank you” in all my dealings. This did not stop the city from claiming in its response to the lawsuit that the real reason I was denied the use of the space was that I was an obnoxious, threatening person and only wanted to create a disturbance. One of the penalties with challenging an Establishment Clause violation is that the religious establishment and governmental unit spread all manner of things as a reason to discredit me. These unwarranted accusations were later discredited in the deposition portion of disclosure, leaving only the original reasons as stated in the mayor’s letter.

The mayor, during interviews with reporters both immediately after his rejection letter and also after I filed in federal court, compared atheists, FFRF, and by extension, me, to Nazis and the KKK. In the last few years there have been many comparisons to Hitler or Nazis by various individuals in our country. My feeling has always been if a person compares an opponent to Hitler or Nazis, he is just publicly stating that he has no knowledge of either and has nothing else to justify whatever he is proposing or defending. The comparison did hit the news, and, after the initial news reports, the mayor backtracked.

When I sent in my application for the Reason Station I was sure that the mayor would reject my application. At the time it was the best thing that he

Continued on page 14



Ingrid Laas photo

Douglas Marshall



FFRF 2015 convention speech

# A contradiction in black freethought

*This speech and Q&A session occurred on Oct. 9, 2015, at FFRF's 38th annual convention at Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis.*

*FFRF Co-President Dan Barker introduced Jeremiah Camara, who produced the film, "Contradiction," a documentary on black freethought, humanism and unbelief:*

How many of you saw the movie this afternoon, "Contradiction"? Wasn't that a wonderful movie?

Jeremiah Camara is a writer and an award-winning poet. He's the author of the books *Holy Lockdown: Does the Church Limit Black Progress?* and *The New Doubting Thomas: The Bible, Black Folks, and Blind Belief*. He's the creator of the very popular YouTube series "Slave Sermons."

He's based in Atlanta, where he lives with his wife of 26 years. Jeremiah has won several poetry awards and he's performed poetry at the prestigious Apollo Theater. He's the author of a collection of poetry called "Smoke and Haze," dealing with social injustice. He's notably the producer of this film "Contradiction," which explores how faith in a supernatural creator is affecting society, particularly among African-Americans.

So, come on up Jeremiah.

By Jeremiah Camara

Wow, we wouldn't even be here if Jesus would have just stayed a carpenter, you know what I mean? The bible never made sense to me — especially the part, where it said that God made the world in about a week. I know that was a lie.

My wife, when we met, said she was an atheist, but I didn't believe her because the first time she saw my body she just said, "Oh, my God." The first time I saw her, I was like, "Lord, have mercy."

I was born and raised in Cincinnati. I didn't really come from a religious family, to be honest. We went to church, but I really didn't have that opposition at home that a lot of blacks have. My parents were behind me 100% in everything that I did. My mom, she's 87 years old now and she's like, "go get 'em." I'm just so glad that I have a mom like that who's in my corner.

I did manage to go to church quite often — I was seeking this spirit. I wanted to fall out and pass out and speak in tongues and all that kind of stuff. But every time I tried to speak in tongues, it just didn't work. I just kept saying, "Yabba dabba doo." It never worked for me.

I get kind of fiery sometimes when I speak, so they call me the reverse preacher. I actually preach the opposite of what you think with my emotions, but I learned that in the black church. There is a lot of entertainment there.

You all have seen me with this glove on. It's Dan's fault, actually. I have a pinched nerve in my hand and it's all because of Dan, because I'm an aspiring pianist.

I said, "Dan, can you spare some time where I get in there and play some on the piano?"

He said, "Listen man. I got three things, the three most important things for becoming a pianist. He said,



Ingrid Laas photo

**Jeremiah Camara answers questions from the convention audience about his film "Contradiction: A Question of Faith," a documentary on black freethought, humanism and unbelief.**

"The first thing is practice."

I said "OK."

He said, "The second thing is practice."

I said OK.

He said "But the third thing is practice."

And I kept practicing and practicing, and I wound up getting a pinched nerve in my palm. So hopefully you don't mind, I'll just give you a fist bump. We can get on with the Q and A.

**Audience member:** We saw your movie this afternoon. It was wonderful. In this context today, there's a lot of like-minded people who certainly were enjoying the film and took it the way I'm certain you intended. What is the response of either some of the people that are in the film, whose words are being used? They don't come off looking all that well. Or when you showed it to communities or in places where you

don't have a like-minded group of people, what kind of reactions do you get from this type of film?

**Jeremiah:** I think that the most surprising thing so far was the lack of backlash. And I think the reason is because in order to defend yourself, you have to know a little bit about your religion and they don't know anything about it. One person, she came up to me, we had like 400 people at our premiere, and she said, "You just made all Christians look stupid." I didn't debate them in the movie, I just let everyone talk. And one guy in New York said, "Don't make me look like a fool." You did that. I didn't really make you do anything.

No one has really challenged it. We've reached out to the church community and they won't have us, of course. And a couple of the prominent preachers in Atlanta, they've seen the film. But they won't touch it because

they know that if this gets in the hands of their parishioners, they'll say "Wow! This stuff does make sense." And so they just keep it away from there. It's been received positively for the most part. But as a writer, a filmmaker, an artist and aspiring pianist, I'm not always the best at the business behind it because I'm busy making it. I can use all the help that I can get and I say that everywhere. But it's true because, if you notice, it just takes one person to see the film.

One lady asked, "Have you been on NPR?" I would love to get it on NPR so that everyone can know that there is a segment of African-Americans that doesn't believe this stuff.

As I travel around the country, you would be shocked at how many black people don't believe this stuff. But they're in the closet with it and it's just, "Hey, I'm going to lose everything if I come out with this. My wife, my mom, my family — they're going to ostracize me." So it's just a deep fear. But once you present this stuff, people look at this and say, "You know this makes a lot of sense," but they'll have this cognitive dissonance.

**Audience member:** Could you talk more about the money and how these wolves exploit the black community all the way back from the Civil War to the present?

**Jeremiah:** I'm going to bring up something a little more current and one of the things that broke my heart and almost got me out of this business. I've been doing this for 25 years. I was into this before a lot of this stuff was going on. But what happened recently, this year, almost made me give it up.

I call it the Harriet Tubman business that I'm in. Harriet Tubman said "I could have freed more if they only knew they were slaves." But what just happened this year with Creflo Dollar (we call him Klepto Dollar). He asked for \$65 million. He wound up getting \$70 million for a plane. And the street that he's on in Atlanta is a street called Old National Highway and this street is crime-ridden. And you get a plane so that you can go out and preach mythology around the world. But there is no way to measure who you've reached or what the effect of them being reached is going to have on society. There's no way to measure it.

And I thought about all the elderly people who could've got their mortgages paid. I thought of the science and math academies that you could have built with that money. I thought about the young men — African-American men — who have felonies, who are now disenfranchised for life. Let me tell you, I did a lot of things when I was coming up as a teenager. I just didn't get caught. I'm no better than a lot of the young black men who have felonies and will never get an opportunity. And so you hold this against them for a life. Look at all of the training that \$70 million could help make, produce, create. Just so much besides a jet plane. I was so disappointed; I almost said, "To heck with it" and went into the medical marijuana business.

Dan called me and said, "I want you to come out." I wasn't going to pass up that opportunity. Your feedback from the movie has really inspired me even more. So I think I'm going to stay with this Harriet Tubman business a little

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Ingrid Laas photo

**Jeremiah Camara speaks following a screening of his film, "Contradiction," during FFRF's national convention on Oct. 9, 2015.**



# Marshall

Continued from page 12

could have done for me. I was in no position to buy the necessary items such as easels, tables, chairs, signs and table displays. I did not have a group of people organized to staff the Reason Station at that time. Had the mayor approved my initial request, I would have been unable to buy all the necessary equipment and did not have a group of volunteers to staff the table. Without any of this, I would have been hard-pressed to set it up myself and staff it for the long run. The mayor’s rejection and lawsuit gave me the publicity to obtain volunteers and, upon victory, the money to buy the equipment.

## City gives in

In settlement talks demanded by the court, the city capitulated on my demands and the only thing that I had to give up was that the main sign would only say “Reason Station,” but that there would be no restrictions on what was on the table for display or distribution. Even with the city paying all legal fees and damages, I was amazed that the mayor was claiming victory. Sometimes solutions happen speedily, others take time. I first complained about the Prayer Station in April 2009 and was not able to win a victory in court until this year.

The downside to asking for equal access is that once it is won, I must provide and staff the display. FFRF has supplied non-tracts, issues of Freethought Today and other materials for the Reason Station. My U.S. representative and a senator had supplied copies of the Constitution and state representatives had supplied Michigan’s Constitution. I have used some of the damages to provide signage, table displays and other equipment required. Hopefully, if my table displays are designed properly, sooner or later the city will determine that the city hall atrium is not an appropriate place for discussion as to whether or not a deity exists. The true meaning of the Reason Station is that 1) It takes away the governmental endorsement which the Prayer Station had previously had; 2) It puts atheists



Ingrid Laas photo

**Douglas Marshall speaks to the convention crowd about his struggle, and eventual victory, in getting a “Reason Station” in the Warren, Mich., City Hall.**

in public view so that citizens can see that we are ordinary people, and; 3) It lets other atheists, who are in the closet or feel alone, know that they are not alone.

## Reason Station opens

After a minor correction required in the insurance certificate, the city approved my application for the Reason Station. On the first day we had about eight visitors to the display, all of which thanked us. On the second day two other atheists stopped by specifically to thank us for our efforts in getting the Reason Station in City Hall. Some of these people have gone on to become volunteers. Another woman, who described herself as a regular Christian who attended weekly church services, stopped by to thank us for all our efforts in setting up the Reason Station. There is rarely a day in which someone does not stop by to thank us for being there. A few weeks after opening, a lady from California in the Detroit area on family business specifically drove to Warren to visit the Reason Station and thank us all for being there. So many have stopped and the response has been so positive, that I feel rewarded for all the time and work it has taken to start the Reason Station.

The first day of operation was April 28, 2015. On that day, we were using a card table of my mother’s — which was over 60 years old — and a variety of folding chairs. There was not much room for all the material that we had to display. Later, one of the volunteers set up a staffing format on Volunteer Spot so that all the scheduling is done via the Internet. I have created a business card with the staffing website which I give out to prospective volunteers. They can handle the commitment themselves or they can email or phone me and I will handle it for them. I would eventually buy a portable six-foot display table, new lighter chairs, and a portable two-wheel dolly to help in moving the display items. When I ordered the easel for the sign, I also ordered smaller easels to be used as table displays.

## Table display quotes

On the first day of operation, the table display was a quote by Benjamin Franklin. Starting on the National Day of Prayer, we had a table display with Matthew 6:5, which we used the rest of May. Other than the staff at the Reason Station, few seemed to get what Matthew was referencing. In June, we added a Thomas Jefferson quote to the

table displays, and also started having two table displays with the second one being Epicurus. In July we replaced Epicurus with a statement by Marcus Aurelius. Recently we have added a Susan B. Anthony statement. Eventually I hope to have different table displays for each month of the year. I am planning to have the “Let Reason Prevail” solstice verbiage in the atrium this solstice holiday season.

At no time have I ever wished to promote my views on the existence or nonexistence of a deity. Although I am not ashamed of my opinion that there are no deities (based on the lack of evidence), I do not broadcast my views except when asked or confronted.

I have no issue with what anyone wants to believe, or their right to meet in churches or their homes to discuss and practice their beliefs. If people want to put up signs on their lawns or purchase billboard space to expound their beliefs, it causes me no harm. As Thomas Jefferson said, “It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are 20 gods or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.” I do have a problem with people who want to use government facilities to promote their religious beliefs and add the implication that the government endorses those beliefs and practices. The only reason I asked for a space for the Reason Station is to take away that governmental endorsement of a religion.

I need to thank the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Americans United, the ACLU and all the attorneys for making the Reason Station possible. Most of all, I want to thank the volunteers who staff the Reason Station for all their time and effort. Without those volunteers, all the work in getting the Reason Station would be for nothing, as they are the Reason Station.

Finally, if we want to live in a country where we have freedom of conscience and the right to express those opinions, we must remain alert to any violation of those rights. We need to be First Amendment warriors challenging violations of the Bill of Rights whenever they occur. Remember, there are no small violations of the Bill of Rights, and if we want those rights, we cannot close our eyes to the violations.

# Camara

Continued from page 13

bit longer.

**Audience member:** The black churches are involved in a lot of social activism. They work with jobs, with justice. They were front and center in Missouri’s expansion of Medicaid, trying to get that through. And in the Ferguson commission, they’re working with officials on that. How do we keep that activism without the religion?

**Jeremiah:** Dan, John, chapter one, verse one. Right? You know that by heart and I can answer that question. “In the beginning.”

**Dan:** “Was the word.”

**Jeremiah:** I’m going to translate. “In the beginning was the word.” In the beginning — that’s going to be a tough job and this is why in the beginning, as far as African-Americans in this country, was the church.

“And the word was with God.” And the church was with blacks and blacks were with the church. “And the word was God.” And the church was the black community. You see where I’m going. There was no separation.

And everything that we’ve ever gotten, all the steps that we’ve made, was because of the church. So this is how it is perceived in the black community. So when you take that away, you pretty much take everything away. Now, you’ll take the social aspect away from it, but my experience in being out of the church is so liberating. It feels so good to know as opposed to just believing. In fact, our ancestors would have been eat-

en alive if we believed there wasn’t something lurking behind those bushes as opposed to knowing that a predator was behind those bushes. Belief can get you in trouble. And I’m just free now. I would take that over the social aspect any day. Take a lot of people that you go to church with, they just put on airs.

I remember one time I was with my church community and they’re so judgmental. Christians are some of the meanest people out here. I was sitting there and they looked over, we were at a restaurant, and there was this guy drinking a beer. You know the slogan of Miller; the can says Miller High Life. And he looked at him and he said, “Look at that. If he only knew what the high life was.” I just saw the whole charade and all that kind of stuff.

**Audience member:** My husband and I were just overwhelmed with your film. We’re really very impressed and were wondering how long it took to do this. What is the oldest picture you had and what is the newest picture?

**Jeremiah:** Wow. It took 18 months to do. The oldest picture that I had was probably that Praise House. When the missionaries were from Europe and they were in Africa, that went way back to the 1800s. The newest one, I can’t recall what the newest one was.

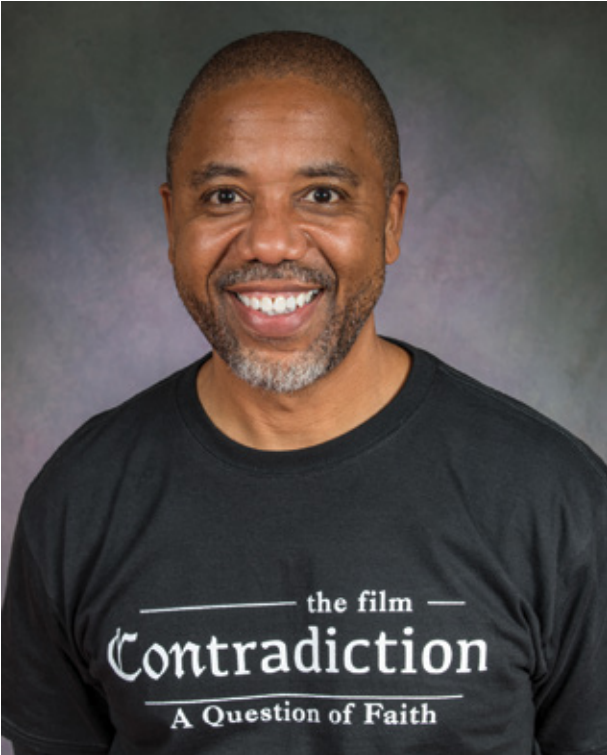
**Audience member:** What are you working on now? What are we going to see next from you?

**Jeremiah:** I don’t know. I may do some comedy. I’ve been praying about it but I know God is not going to answer my prayers. Here’s his son, on the cross, crying out for help and he said, “To hell with him,” so I know he’s not going to help me out. He has all these mansions in heaven but let his son be

born in a filthy manger. What kind of father is that?

So, I don’t know, but we’ll see. I’m in between projects right now but I’ve got to do something because I have a creative itch. Thanks for coming out, and I am looking forward to coming again.

Go to [jeremiahcamara.com](http://jeremiahcamara.com) to see more of Jeremiah’s work.



Ingrid Laas photo

**Jeremiah Camara**



# Mother Teresa doesn’t deserve sainthood

*This column first appeared on Hemant Mehta’s blog, The Friendly Atheist, and is reprinted with permission.*

By Hemant Mehta

Pope Francis recently announced that Mother Teresa would become a saint on Sept. 4. The honor will come nearly two decades after her death.

While many are undoubtedly celebrating the announcement, it’s important to look at what went into the sainthood process, since it makes no sense at all and few people will dare to tell the truth about it. After all, Mother Teresa is one of those people who’s supposed to be immune from criticism.

So what does it take to be a saint?

Simply put, there needs to be proof that you played a role in two separate miracles. And if you think those two concepts contradict each other . . . you’d be right.

The first “miracle” took place in 2003 and was approved by Pope John Paul II. He said that an Indian woman, Monica Besra, had been cured of an abdominal tumor, all thanks to the supernatural intervention of Mother Teresa, who had been dead for several years at that point.

The story went like this: Besra had a tumor. Someone put a locket with Mother Teresa’s photo on her stomach. And then the tumor went away. That’s it.

Clearly, Mother Teresa did it!

That story tends to ignore how Besra suffered for years even after Mother Teresa died and how doctors continued to work on Besra even after the locket was placed on her. But, you know, I’m sure that had nothing to do with it.

There was another, more dangerous, side effect to the “miracle” claim: “The doctors say that if the story of the miracle gets what they describe as undue publicity, illiterate and poor villagers may stop taking medical treatment for their maladies and seek miracle cures,” writes Subir Bhaumik of the BBC.

So that was the first “miracle.” Something that had no definitive proof, gave us plenty of reasons to be skeptical,



Hemant Mehta

and could have a disastrous effect on sick people.

What about the second “miracle”? That one involved a Brazilian man with a viral brain infection who was in a coma.

“His wife had been praying for months to Mother Teresa, and on Dec. 9, 2008, as he was about to be taken to emergency surgery, she and her husband’s priest and relatives intensified their prayers,” writes Sewell Chan in The New York Times. “The next morning, the man fully awoke, with normal cognition, according to the Rev. Brian Kolodiejchuk, a Canadian priest who was the postulator, or chief proponent, of Mother Teresa’s canonization. The man did not need surgery, and resumed his work as a mechanical engineer. Moreover, although doctors had previously told him that he was sterile because of his weakened immune system and antibiotics, he and his wife had two healthy children, Father Kolodiejchuk said.”

Let’s grant the idea that even medical professionals don’t know what happened (even though the only medical professionals who said that were convened by the Vatican).

It’s obviously a tremendous leap to then say “Mother Teresa did it.”

Ignorance doesn’t imply the truth of religion. This is just the Mother Teresa version of the god-of-the-gaps fallacy.

By the way, it’s still not clear who the man is. The Vatican hasn’t released his name, age, medical history, etc. Sketchy, no?

And yet it was enough for Pope Francis to call it a “miracle” — the

second one — enough to bestow sainthood upon Mother Teresa.

In addition to all that, we have the criticisms levied by Christopher Hitchens in *The Missionary Position*, like the fact that Mother Teresa opposed abortion and contraception. She may have helped poor people, but her own beliefs made their lives worse in aggregate by causing them to have larger families, compounding their poverty and hunger.

In fact, she believed that being poor wasn’t such a bad thing (all the more reason to keep poverty-stricken people in their place): “I think it is very beautiful for the poor to accept their lot, to share it with the passion of Christ. I think the world

is being much helped by the suffering of the poor people,” Mother Teresa is quoted as saying.

Journalist Terry Firma also pointed this out: “If Mother Teresa can be sanctified for ‘miracles’ she performed posthumously, it also ought to be fair to connect her to what was done in her name after her death. That includes this: The Missionaries of Charity, the organization she founded, announced two months ago that it will no longer be involved in adopting out orphans. Why? Because India opened up adop-

tion to prospective parents who are single, divorced or separated.”

So, again, her beliefs are making life worse for many people who really need help.

This is what it takes to become a saint these days: Two bogus miracles that amount to nothing more than, “We’re not entirely sure what happened.” And a whole bunch of bad ideas, rooted in the Catholic faith, that have hurt

countless women and children and families since her death. Don’t forget: There’s reason to believe she wasn’t even really religious during the final decades of her life.

The whole thing is downright ridiculous — and I think people would freely admit that

if we were talking about, say, Scientology. But Catholicism is less “weird” because we’re so used to it.

There’s no evidence whatsoever that Mother Teresa has any direct impact on this world anymore, much less that she’s performing miracles in her spare time.

If church officials wanted to honor the work she did during her lifetime, so be it. Instead, they’re making up things she’s been working on since her death and awarding her for their theories.



Manfredo Ferrari photo [CC BY-SA 4.0], via Wikimedia Commons

Mother Teresa

# Did God know of future suffering and do nothing?

By David Quintero

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you came to birth I consecrated you.” —Jeremiah 1:5*

Many people opposed to abortion and stem cell research quote this biblical passage from Jeremiah to defend their positions. Their goal is to convince people that God is referring to you and me — indeed, to everyone! They reason that because God knew everyone even before they were formed in the womb, it is wrong to prevent the further development of an embryo of someone whom God already knew as a fully developed human being, and who made that person sacred.

But the biblical passage continues: “I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

After this verse, it seems obvious that it isn’t you and me and everyone else whom God “knew” before he formed us in the womb. It was the prophet Jeremiah. It was he whom God knew and consecrated before he came to birth.



David Quintero

Even if the biblical explanation of those who favor unlimited births were true for everyone, not just Jeremiah, it would cast a shadow on God’s benevolence and omnipotence. Take into account, for instance, all the sadistic mass murderers who have tormented humanity. Did God know Attila the Hun, Nero, Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin before he formed them in the womb? Did he know Charles Manson? Did he know every serial murderer be-

fore they were born? If so, it seems perverse that he allowed such evildoers to come into the world.

The “pro-lifers” will remind me that my argument is faulty because God gave everyone the free will to choose good or evil. I will, in turn, remind them that since God knows everything, he knew beforehand that the evil ones would choose to be evil with their free will.

Consider also that millions of individuals are born blind, deaf, armless, legless, deformed, paralyzed or in other ways deprived of normal faculties. Sure, many of these people have heroically overcome their disabilities — Helen Keller is probably the foremost example of such an extraordinary triumph.

Nevertheless, would we choose to have children so severely deprived only so they could surmount their handicaps? Would we ourselves choose to be severely deprived so that we could have the opportunity to overcome our misfortune?

I don’t think we need to ponder

that very long. I do believe, however, that God is sadistic if he “knew” those embryos in the womb and was aware of their future suffering and did nothing about it.

Those who believe in God’s perfect goodness will condemn my sacrilege for writing this, and remind me that we worthless humans can never come close to understanding his mysterious ways.

Why then, if I can never come close to understanding God’s mysterious ways, should I waste time and energy to even try? It’s far better that I try to understand what is within the reach of my intelligence.

Therefore, I choose reason, not faith, to guide my thinking and my actions. If, as a result of this choice, God condemns me to eternal damnation, he will have to bear the blame. After all, before he formed me in the womb, he knew me.

*FFRF member David Quintero earned an undergraduate degree at Cal State and has had more than 300 of his opinions printed in various publications.*





June 4, 2016, in D.C.

# Great speaker lineup set for Reason Rally

The secular movement will be out in force at the Reason Rally, showcasing a growing voting bloc that wants science and facts to be the basis of public discourse.

More than 30 scientists, entertainers, artists and others will be speaking at the rally on June 4 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Among those scheduled to speak include scientist-educator **Bill Nye**, actors **Johnny Depp** and **Amber Heard**, illusionist **Penn Jillette**, comedian **Julia Sweeney**, noted skeptic **James Randi**, physicist **Lawrence Krauss** and FFRF Co-Presidents **Annie Laurie Gaylor** and **Dan Barker**.

FFRF is one of the major sponsors of the event and Gaylor and Barker are members of the board of directors for the Reason Rally Coalition.

The largest gathering of nonreligious people in history will reinforce the increasing power and number of those who do not want religion to determine public policy. Both Gallup and Pew have found that the number of unaffiliated adults is growing so fast, especially among younger Americans, that they have eclipsed mainstream Protestants. The Reason Rally is appealing to people of all ages, genders and races

to come together around the common need for sound public policy.

“Everyone who has ever buckled a seatbelt or ducked at gunfire is part atheist and a little afraid that God might not protect them,” Jillette said. “We need to let America know that some of us aren’t even pretending to believe anymore.”

While the main day of the Reason Rally is June 4, there are actually four days of events, from Thursday, June 2, through Sunday, June 5.

“Reason and freethought are important to me,” said Heard. “Coupled with and enabling the pursuit of knowledge, they are essential to my humanity.”

Sophia Kameron, a 15-year-old songwriter and artist, will debut her single “Connected” at the rally. The song showcases her commitment to raising awareness of equality for all, regardless of race or religion. “It’s never been more important for people my age to voice their concerns about the world around them.”

For more information and to see a full list of the speakers, go to *reason-rally.org*. Freethought Today will have photos of the event in the June/July issue.

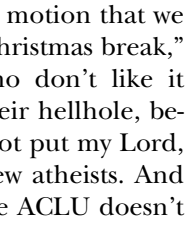
## They said what?

It is not God’s plan that I be president in 2016 or maybe ever.  
**Sen. Marco Rubio on announcing his suspension from the presidential campaign.**  
*ABC News, 3-15-16*



away from anyone else in the United States, but would recognize that Christians — like Jews in the Soviet Union — are being singled out for persecution and elimination.  
**Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton, on a plan to create a visa program to prioritize Christian refugees over all others**  
*KARN News Radio, 3-2-16*

I would like to make a motion that we rename this period “Christmas break,” and those atheists who don’t like it can crawl back into their hellhole, because I, for one, will not put my Lord, my God, aside for a few atheists. And if they don’t like it, the ACLU doesn’t like it, the heck with them.  
**Millard (Neb.) School Board member Paul Meyer**  
*Omaha.com, 3-22-16*



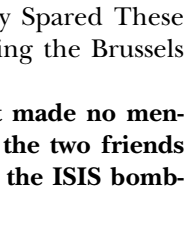
We need to empower law enforcement to patrol and secure Muslim neighborhoods before they become radicalized.  
**Presidential candidate Ted Cruz, following the deadly attack on Brussels**  
*Ted Cruz’s Facebook page, 2-23-16*

It’s not about Christianity at all. It’s about tracing the history of our national motto and how it became what it is regardless of whatever faith you are. Our nation relied upon God, so it applied to all faiths.  
**Republican state Rep. Rick Saccone, who wants “In God We Trust” to be posted in Pennsylvania public schools**  
*PennLive.com, 4-11-16*



We’ve lost prayer, we’ve lost bible reading, we’ve lost just about everything. It’s so that we can’t even preach the very foundations of the word of God... And if [the government] stormed in these doors right now and arrested me, I would not be surprised.  
**Televangelist Jim Bakker, claiming religious freedoms are being eliminated for Christians in the U.S.**  
*Right Wing Watch, 4-4-16*

How God Miraculously Spared These Christian Friends During the Brussels Attacks  
**Headline of story that made no mention of God, and that the two friends merely prayed AFTER the ISIS bombing in Brussels**  
*Charisma News, 3-23-16*



If you have a presupposition that excludes the possibility of a God, that excludes the possibility of supernatural acts, and that everything has to be explained just with natural processes, then you’ve basically limited what you can let the objective observation of science tell you.  
**Astronaut Jeff Williams, on how he believes there is no conflict between science and belief in God**  
*Charisma News, 3-23-16*



Christian communities have existed almost literally since the time of Jesus himself, have been targeted for persecution and extermination, so I think that the United States has a moral imperative to try to save these Christians and the other small minority groups. So I would create a special kind of visa program that wouldn’t take any access

## IRS

Continued from front page fought the ruling.

“We call this our David vs. Goliath challenge,” said Gaylor, because virtually all major denominations and many minor congregations — including Unitarians, Muslim and Jewish groups — weighed in with amicus briefs against FFRF’s challenge to religious privilege.

In November 2014, the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals threw out that victory — not on the merits, but on the question of standing — arguing that Barker and Gaylor hadn’t yet sought a refund of their housing allowance from the IRS.

Accordingly, Barker and Gaylor sought refunds last year, as did FFRF’s president emerita, Anne Gaylor, whose retirement payout included a housing allowance. The IRS refunded the housing allowance to the married couple for the year 2013, but denied the refund request for 2012. Similarly, the IRS held up the refund request for the senior Gaylor, who subsequently died in June. Ian Gaylor, her son, is additionally named as a plaintiff in the lawsuit on behalf of the Anne Nicol Gaylor



estate.

The benefit of the tax exemption to the clergy is huge. The congressional Joint Committee on Taxation has reported that the exemption amounts to \$700 million a year in lost revenue. Religious News Service calculated the allowance reduces the take-home pay of some pastors by up to 10 percent. Christianity Today found that 84 percent of senior pastors receive a housing allowance of \$20,000 to \$38,000 in added (but not reported) compensation to

their base salary.

“The manner in which our housing allowance has been used borders on clergy malpractice,” William Thornton, a Georgia pastor and blogger, told Forbes magazine in 2013. “A growing subset of ministers who are very highly paid and who live in multimillion dollar mansions are able to exclude hundreds of thousands of dollars from income taxation.”

Clergy are permitted to use the housing allowance not just for rent or

We call this our David vs. Goliath challenge.  
— Annie Laurie Gaylor

mortgage, but also for home improvements, including maintenance, home improvements and repairs, dishwashers, cable TV and phone fees, paint, towels, bedding, home décor, even personal computers and bank fees. They may be exempt from taxable income up to the fair market rental value of their home, particularly helping well-heeled pastors. The subsidy extends to churches, which can pay clergy less, as tax-free salaries go further.

FFRF is asking the court to rule unconstitutional IRS 26 U.S.C. §107 as administered by the IRS and the Treasury Department because it provides preferential and discriminatory tax benefits to ministers of the gospel. FFRF’s complaint alleges that the section “directly benefits ministers and churches, most significantly by lowering a minister’s tax burden, while discriminating against the individual plaintiffs, who as the leaders of a nonreligious organization opposed to governmental endorsements of religion are denied the same benefit.”

The case was filed on behalf of FFRF by litigator Richard L. Bolton. *Gaylor et al v. U.S. Treasury* has case number 3:16-cv-00215.



The Daffodil Man

FFRF member plants thousands along the highway

BY MAUREEN HOUSTON

*This article originally ran in the Belleville (Ill.) News-Democrat on April 12, 2015, and has been updated and is reprinted with permission. Joseph Cunningham is an FFRF executive board member.*

The daffodils waving to you along Illinois 4 in Mascoutah are the work of Joseph Cunningham. The 90-year-old retired teacher has been planting the yellow flowers there for more than 20 years. “They put (Mid-America) airport in and had to move the highway a quarter mile,” said Cunningham, sitting on a hassock in his living room. “I had extra daffodils. They were getting pretty thick around here. I just went out there one night and planted. I wondered, ‘Do you need a permit?’ No one stopped me. I just kept going.” He estimates he has planted thousands. They, in turn, have multiplied. “I would say there are millions.”

Cunningham was honored for his efforts on Earth Day last year, along Illinois 4, south of Interstate 64, where many of his daffodils grow. Susan Reed, membership chairman for Federated Garden Clubs of Missouri and Illinois, set things in motion to honor Cunningham’s work.

“If a garden club person sees somebody’s beautification efforts, it’s our job to make sure they get recognized,” said Reed, who met Cunningham at the St. Louis Home and Garden show in February. “He’s an amazing man. It’s a way to show our support and appreciation. He’ll get a national award of distinguished service. Federated Garden Clubs of Illinois and Missouri will give him one. (So will Garden Clubs of Illinois.) I got hold of Mascoutah mayor Jerry Daugherty and asked ‘Is there a highway beautification certificate?’ He said, ‘If there isn’t, we will get him one.’”

ONCE A GARDENER

“My dad was a gardener,” Cunningham said. “I started planting flowers from the time I was 4 or 5 years old. Vegetables, as well. I’ve always been an outdoor person.” His father was a truck driver. The family lived in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Michigan before settling near Carmi, Ill.

“I was a child of the Dust Bowl. Ever seen ‘Grapes of Wrath’? I was that kid.” Cunningham, who often wears a navy blue veterans’ cap, served in the U.S. Navy before becoming a teacher. “I was in World War II all over the South Pacific,” he said. “We carried troops and supplies.” He taught English and typing at Mascoutah High School. “I taught 37 years all together — two years in a country grade school where these daffodils were that I took up, two years in Red Bud, the rest of the time at Mascoutah.” He met his wife at Mascoutah High. “I am a hillbilly from West Virginia. My wife (Norma) was a Phi Beta Kappa who graduated from Washington



Daffodil man Joseph Cunningham usually wears a big straw hat when he’s planting. Photo by Maureen Houston of the News-Democrat



Joseph Cunningham plants daffodils along the embankments of Illinois 4, something he’s done for more than 20 years. Photo by Maureen Houston of the News-Democrat

University. She taught German and Latin and English. She’s been in a nursing home for two years.” Cunningham retired at 59 to travel with his wife. They went far — Russia, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Italy, England, China, Scotland, Wales and Japan — and near. She accompanied him on the two-hour drives to Carmi to dig daffodils. “At one time, 10 miles outside Carmi, there were 20 houses and a little grocery store,” he said. “People went away and left their daffodils. They won’t be back. I started digging and digging and digging.”

PLANTING ROUTINE

Cunningham plants his highway daffodils a couple hours every evening for eight to 10 days. “You’re supposed to plant in fall,” he says. “If I were to go back to Carmi in the fall, I couldn’t find them. I have to dig while they’re blooming, which is against all gardening rules. But they live and do fine. “So far this year, I’ve planted twice,” he adds. “Rain helps. I just dig the spade in, push sideways, push the daffodil in and stomp it with my foot.” Sometimes, someone is curious about what he’s doing. “One time, a state policeman stopped with lights flashing, I was way up on a bank. I told him, ‘Don’t come up. There’s snakes.’ I came down and told him I was planting daffodils. He said, ‘What’s a daffodil?’ He was just a kid, about 22 years old, a very, very nice fellow. We talked a little and he drove on. Once in a while, someone will go by and honk. I can tell stories about this all day long.”

Obviously, he enjoys the work. “I like to go out by myself. If I get tired, I sit on the bank and watch the cars go by,” he says. “I look off in the distance and think and think and think.” Last year’s planting schedule was interrupted for good reason. Cunningham’s two daughters, Kathryn Jean Grogman, an attorney from near Los Angeles, and Linda Cunningham, a doctor in Salem, Ore., and their husbands, came for a nine-day visit to celebrate Cunningham’s 89th birthday on April 8. He also has five grandchildren. “He was one of the original organic gardeners,” said Linda Cunningham. “He grew a lot of vegetables and fruit. He had a big garden and we did a lot of canning when we were kids. I was always at his side. This originally was poor soil. He amended it, made it rich soil.” When in town, they’re likely to visit Missouri Botanical Garden and go for a hike in Missouri’s Hawn State Park. They still talk about the time a few years ago when they came to a place too deep to cross. “Dad used his walking stick to pole vault across,” said Linda Cunningham.

JOSEPH’S YARD

It’s not hard to pick out Cunningham’s house on a

quiet Mascoutah street. Daffodils — lots of varieties — border the yard. They’re on either side of a front hedge. A pail of dug-up plants sits next to the gray ranch’s front door. “Some of them have been here 60 years,” he said, walking around the yard. “I think I took up the old-fashioned ones and moved them to the highway. Here, they are at their full bloom. Out there, they are slower. You stand along the highway and the wind blows. I have trouble keeping my hat on.” Does he have a favorite variety? “Probably the pink ones,” he says. “I like them all. It would be nice if someone could develop an ever-blooming daffodil.”

He pointed to a delicate white daisy-looking flower out front. “You know what this flower is?,” he asks. “Bloodwort. I got it out in the woods one day. After the blossom, the leaves get gigantic. They skip around from place to place. I didn’t plant all these. They just jump around.” Across the driveway, a little pond babbled a soothing tune. “I spent a whole day cleaning it out yesterday,” he said. “All the water in there came from a sump pump. I didn’t spend a penny.”

During the tour, he may mention the neighbor who cuts his grass, ask another neighbor about taking her son to the circus, or show off his latest planter. Petunias and geraniums tumble from the stump of an old apple tree he had to cut down. He saved its logs for his daughters’ visit. “They love to sit out here at night and watch the fire.”



Cunningham checks out a bloom in his Mascoutah yard. Photo by Maureen Houston of the News-Democrat

TAKE A DRIVE

On a breezy, wet afternoon, Cunningham steered his Honda sedan the mile or so to Illinois 4. Rainwater had collected in the culvert between the road and a hillside where he plants, making it tough to get across. “I wear boots,” he said. “I use my shovel as a cane.” He pointed out clumps of green. “It’s sort of a haphazard way I plant them,” he said. “They will be out in another week. Where did we plant yesterday when we put daffodils in the shape of my initials? (A while back), my intention was to put in my wife’s initials. I hit a rock. Couldn’t go straight. I gave up that idea.” But gardener Susan Reed did just that with Cunningham’s initials when she came over from Golden Eagle to see his work. “She’s a bigwig in the Missouri Garden Club,” Cunningham said. “She’s a go-getter, very enthusiastic. I started talking and told her about my daffodils. She latched onto me. She wanted me to judge some flower arrangements (at the Home and Garden Show).” But Cunningham is happy just to tend to his daffodils. “I do look forward to them each year, I really do,” he says. “They’re a sign of spring.”



Letterbox

Freethought stamp of approval

I received a thank-you card from FFRF and noticed it had a Mark Twain stamp on it. I used to collect stamps, so this got me thinking: Why not find and use stamps commemorating freethinkers? I did a little searching and came up with the enclosed stamps, used in combination to make up 49 cents or 71 cents: Paine, Einstein, Jefferson and Dewey. An added bonus is that each envelope has three freethinkers on it instead of one (Twain).

During my research, it was hard to find many stamps honoring freethinkers. I couldn't find any for Isaac Asimov, Kurt Vonnegut, Arthur C. Clarke, Gene Roddenberry, Martin Gardner or Robert Ingersoll. I did, however, find at least three of Ronald Reagan, one for Richard Nixon and hundreds of Christmas stamps.

Mike Steiner  
Arizona

*Editor's note: Thank you so much. FFRF appreciates receiving unused stamps as in-kind donations, particularly with freethought meaning.*

Best way to claim 'I'm in charge!'

Have you ever noticed how the existence of all these gods, the Judeo-Christian one in particular, is based solely on the word of a series of different guys who walked off into the bushes or out in the desert or up into the mountains, and then came back and told everybody, basically, "The Lord thy God has spoken to me. He has given me his list of new rules. Oh, by the way, he also said from now on, I'm in charge!"

Cory Deering  
California

Terrorists inspired by religion

There should be no doubt that those Islam-inspired terrorists who commit suicide and take as many other people as possible with them have been fooled to believe that sultry virgins are waiting as reward on the "other side."

That is clearly stated in the Quran, and must be quite a temptation for young guys raised in a backwards society with very strict rules against just about everything considered normal in more modern, progressive nations. For us non-Islamic Westerners, such belief is obviously pure nonsense.

Perhaps, over time, it might help to promote the truth, that not only aren't there any virgins waiting, but that there is simply no heaven or afterlife to look forward to.

That's certainly a truth that without any religious opposition can be promoted in more secular cultures. But would that be possible here in the U.S., where religion is still so widely spread and prominent, and where religious belief so heavily rests upon the myth that there is an afterlife, with either a heaven or a hell waiting after judgment.

FFRF does great work for freethinkers

I recently received my copy of Free-thought Today and I am increasingly impressed with the many court "wins"



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achieved by FFRF.

I also enjoy the student essays. These youngsters' intelligent viewpoints are so impressive. Of particular note are those written by Dustin Hickok and Douglas Ciampi. Those two young men overcame tremendous odds and prejudice and I admire their fortitude and strength during the crises each suffered.

Thanks, too, to FFRF for speaking up for all of us on the secular side of the fence. I'm always amazed at the number of politicians who are unaware of the law segregating church and state and their fights against FFRF, despite their ignorance.

I sure like the secular billboards you erected in Wisconsin during the presidential candidate visits. Good show! I'm impressed with the growing number of "nones," which I attribute to the good work of FFRF, getting our cause out there.

Jack M. Red  
North Carolina

Needed: Champions of First Amendment

After reading, "Suit over religious banners can move ahead" in Free-thought Today, about cheerleaders' success in court allowing them to promote religion at their school event, I then read that FFRF's response to the ruling was a commitment to challenge the decision if a current student or teacher at the same school came forward to challenge the religious banners used by cheerleaders.

But I see a need for more. The article shows a need for more litigants. Sadly, separation of church and state requires litigants; in other words, a champion. If no one else comes forward, then we need to be that champion.

Robert Williams  
California

Norway's atheists vs. U.S.'s believers?

From the March 20 New York Post: Belief in God among Norwegians is at an all-time low, with only 39% professing belief, down from 50% in 1985.

In the same issue, an article on American diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad quotes President Ronald Reagan in response to an invitation to embrace Islam by an Afghan mujahideen he was meeting in the White House: "Well, please tell Mr. Khalis that we have our own religion. Furthermore, today the struggle is between believers and non-believers. As believers, we are on the same side."

So, I guess the USA should now invade Norway?

Dennis Middlebrooks  
New York

Milk it for all its worth

Imagine a new nation/state carved out from somewhere in the Middle East (where all the "Stans" currently exist.)

This place would be called Curdistan [not to be confused with the region of Kurdistan]. Its official food would be some kind of high-mountain goat cheese, similar to a hard grana like parmesan.

And the state motto would be: "What a friend we have in cheeses."

Boyd Wilcox  
Oregon

The value of the pledge to the flag

In his recent letter [March 2016], Robert McCurdy says "the pledge was a poor idea." But, if we really consider the historical significance of the original Pledge of Allegiance, it definitely has some value. It should not be seen as a symbol of blind patriotism or a promise not to criticize our leaders, but as a reminder of our unique re-

public founded under our Constitution, which deserves our loyalty and support.

Today our Constitution and national unity are still threatened from many directions, especially Christian theocrats. Liberty and justice for all are still important goals.

Of course there is no argument within FFRF that "under God" should not be included. We have minority rights and common law not because we are God's chosen people, but because Americans — religious and nonreligious fought and died to get and preserve those.

So, our rewrite of the pledge should be only a minor revision of the current one: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under the Constitution, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

We are just beginning to fight for our rights as nonbelievers, and we can do so only as patriots under that flag.

Ron Herman  
New Mexico

Another 10 terrible bible verses

I thoroughly enjoyed Dan Barker's list of the 10 worst Old Testament verses [April 2016]. Here's my runner-up list of other foul bible teachings (with my take on the gist of the verses).

**Exodus 21:20-21** — God allows you to beat your slaves to the point of death, with absolute impunity.

**Numbers 5:11-31** — The magic test to find out if a wife has committed adultery. One of the most primitive and bizarre passages in God's word.

**Numbers 11** — Languishing in the desert, Moses' people get tired of eating only the magic skyfood, manna. God gets fed up with their complaints and starts an epidemic in their camp, killing the Israelites who had craved meat.

**Numbers 16** — When 250 of the people challenge the leadership of Moses and Aaron, God opens a trapdoor to hell, and the 250 rebels and their families get swallowed up. (The Good News bible even has a cartoon image of this memorable event.)

**Judges 19, 20** — Pointless and gory account of a man whose mistress is offered up to a gang of perverts. After they kill her, he publicizes the crime by hacking her into 12 slabs and mailing them to the 12 tribes of Israel.

**I Samuel 6** — God kills 70 people

for peeking into the Covenant Box. In the King James Version, he actually kills 50,070.

**I Samuel 18:24-7** — David and his men kill 200 Philistines so they can cut off their foreskins as a tribute to Saul, so that David can marry Saul's daughter.

**II Kings 2:23-4** — God kills 42 boys because they called prophet Elisha an old baldy. A perfect passage to cite when believers talk about God's love for his children or when they start a sentence with "God must have a sense of humor because . . ."

**I Chronicles 21** — God kills 70,000 people because Satan made David take a census. In fairness to Satan, II Samuel 24 claims that God told David to make the census. Should God be drinking decaf?

**Ezekiel 4:9-17** — Read this and you'll wonder if you or prophet Ezekiel have just dropped acid. God tells Ezekiel that as a penance, he must live on bread baked on coals made from burnt dung. In verses 14 and 15, God deigns to enter into a dispute on human dung vs. cow dung.

To paraphrase the biblical apologist Josh McDowell, I submit my list and Dan's list as "evidence that demands a verdict."

Dave Pitts  
Ohio



Letterbox

Proud of those who sit for pledge

I've read many accounts of school-age young adults standing behind their convictions by refusing to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

I recently did the same for the first time at a local event. I have gained a new respect for those young adults — the courage it takes to do that in front of your peers at that age is immeasurable. I say this because of the palpable animosity my act generated and how those who did stand made me feel.

I am a fairly unflappable adult in my early 40s and I regularly say and do things that most people wouldn't dream of saying or doing. That said, I felt very uncomfortable from the first word of the pledge as the animosity and hostility in the air could have been cut with a knife; stares, frowns and whispers ensued.

Kudos to those who choose to stand, or in this case, sit, for what they do or do not believe in. Anyone who is afforded a similar opportunity should avail themselves of it — you'll gain a new appreciation for the courage of the next generation of atheist activists.

**Leslie Dreist**  
Michigan

Writer's 'evidence' confirms scriptures

When I travel, I always buy a local newspaper, and the first things I read are the letters to the editor. They give a sense of what the place is like politically and socially.

In a recent Enterprise-Record from Chico, Calif., a letter writer gave the following "evidence" that scriptures are reality, not myth.

1. "We know that DNA contains vast amounts of information and there is no known naturalistic mechanism for the origination of information. But we do know that information originates in the mind of an intelligent being. Earthly creation information originated in the mind of God as the Judeo-Christian scriptures states."

2. Soft biological tissue has been found inside dinosaur bones claimed to be about 60 million years old. We know from observation, experimentation and atomic binding energies that biologic soft tissue cannot remain intact for more than a few tens of thousands of years. Therefore, the vast alleged ages of biologic life could not exist.

These are just a couple of dozens of examples of facts confirming or explained by scripture."

Gee, I'm convinced! I hadn't heard these "facts" before, so I pass them along to other Freethought Today readers for their entertainment value.

**Robert C. Van Fleet**  
California

Don't base court choice on religious orientation

I have long been a supporter of Lawrence Krauss, just as I have been of FFRF and Freethought Today.

However, I seriously disagree with Krauss' demand [April 2016] to "Put an atheist on the Supreme Court."

To even consider an individual's religious orientation is a violation of the First Amendment. Only demonstrated respect for the Constitution and the just laws of this nation should be at issue when determining the nomination or approval of anyone as judge.

History convinced the courageous leaders of the Evolution and the wise framers of our Constitution of the evils of combining religion and government.

We must not duplicate the error by demanding a nonreligious person as a Supreme Court justice simply to balance the errors and evils of Reagans, the Bushes and the U.S. Senates of their time. We must not violate our Constitution by even considering a nominee's religious views, except as they might be applied to violate the rights of others.

Freedom of religion absolutely includes freedom from religion.

**Gilbert Cantlin**  
Ohio



Sharing the crank mail

FFRF has a lot of admirers and fans. The following comments, printed as received, come from people who are the opposite of that.

**why do you practice hate:** I have never met an atheist I could trust. Normally they are angry. Its not about Thinking. Its not about science. That's used as a smoke screen. Using Former Presidents son to push for your rights shows just what a liar your organization represents. Separation of church and state in your interpretation is not what forefathers meant. THAT IS A LIE. READ YOUR HISTORY. — *Jay Powe*

**Free Thinkers:** Your page is really really hateful to anyone who does not agree with your views. You are even going as far as to try and STOP people from believing. Why can't you pratice what your preaching and really be a "free thinker" and understand that what you believe is what you believe and does not mean your are correct in any way and should not try to forcefully remove others rights to have a Bible or pray. The only reason you would want these rights removed is due to the fact you know there is a God and you cannot understand that and believe yourself, you want to take as many people down the non-believin path as possible with you and deny their right. — *Kelley Corbell*

**Unreal:** You guys are idiots. Your Ron Reagan commercial is pathetic. If in fact, he is really related to President Reagan, he is absolutely not worthy of his birth right. Sick,sick,sick... you deserve to burn in Hell. — *Charles Skipper, South Carolina*

**I saw your ad:** You are intellectually and perceptually dishonest. Anyone who does not believe that there is a Creator, is stupid. For something to exist, it has to be created! Nothing can exist without being created. Your father must have jerked off on a hot pile of shit and you were born from that. — *David Pelly*

**Freedom:** You are just another religion, desperate to indulge in group narcissism —*Paul Ward, California*

**Clayton:** You people are psychos.... Why do you people feel the need to bother everything and everyone you disagree with? Is the Clayton NJ seal really bothering anything or anyone? Your cause is so insignificant! People like you inflame this country. Did anyone in Clayton realllllly complain .... Um no! Get a fucking life losers! — *Greg W., New Jersey*

**belief system:** you people are miserable and want everyone else to be so too. that is why you want to ruin things for people who have faith. you want everyone to be as mixed up and nasty as you are. — *Brad Schubert, Minnesota*

**Christ wins:** We home school! We raise our children on CHRIST!!!!His BLOOD covers us!!! No cell phones, No television no computers!!! Survival in the mountains, fitness, daily praise to our CREATOR!!!!!! Strange that you deny the truth for a lie!! The quicker you worldly people get things going the quicker CHRIST returns and destroys your father the devil!!! You can't fool those who really have the HOLY SPIRIT to teach us and expose every lie!!! You may want to read the new testament !! You who deny GOD and CHRIST will be in eternal suffering, pain and complete darkness!!!! — *Robert Heinrich, Alabama*

**FFRF commercial:** In your commercial airing on tv, you ask people to donate money to you guys, and that our Founding Fathers intended to build this country with a separation from church and state. Basically youre soliciting money from people based on a lie. Ridiculous. Where did you formulate this idea that our founding fathers did not wish to integrate religion into our country's fibers? In a dream? Fuck you. — *Johnny Stucko*

**You know nothing:** I will be using considerable monies to fight you people in courts until you are broke and out of business. I will argue your requirement to PAY for litigation in every state for every instance of litigation you seek. — *Moe Fine*

**Article:** Your integrity is lower than a snake's belly in a wagon wheel rut. I feel sorry for you as you will rue the day you meet the Lord face to face. Then you will see the light, but it will be too late. The wisdom of God is foolishness to this world. I see that you buy into the foolishness. Rejoice while you can as you are being lead around by the devil like a pig with a ring in his nose. — *John Hirsch, Texas*

**Your the scum of the earth:** Your organization is a waste of oxygen on this over populated earth and you will reap what you sow — *Stu Padaso, Michigan*

**Mororons:** We'll be laughing when you all go straight to hell for your hateful activities. Eat shit and die. — *David Grume*



Is God short of cash?

FFRF member Ruth Redd found this sign at the Brockington Road Church of the Nazarene in Sherwood, Ariz. "The irony of this is that tithing is robbery, in my opinion," Ruth wrote.

Censorship

*Continued from front page*

Amendment Center, sides with FFRF.

"These are clearly losing cases for the local governments," he told Spicer. "The reason they're [FFRF] bringing these forward is because it's the only way to challenge the government's favoring religion over nonreligion. They're trying to get the government to be more consistent under the First Amendment and not take sides."

When Bloom and FFRF sought permission last November to counter such religiosity by placing a sign asserting, among other things, that there are "no angels," they were turned down because the city deemed it "offensive to many."

FFRF made three more attempts to resolve the dispute, but no satisfactory

resolution occurred.

The city's Mayor Mark A. Lauretti and Parks Director Ronald Herrick are co-defendants in the lawsuit.

FFRF and Bloom are seeking a judgment that the city's censorship has violated their free speech rights under the First and 14th Amendments, as well as their equal protection rights, and a judgment enjoining the city from excluding their display in the future, as well as nominal damages and reasonable legal costs.

The case was filed in the courtroom of Judge Janet Bond Arterton (appointed by President Clinton) on behalf of the plaintiffs by Laurence J. Cohen of Springfield, Mass., with FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell and FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne serving as co-counsel. FFRF v. City of Shelton has case number 3:16-cv-00477.



# Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

## Arrested / Charged

**Douglas J. Allison, 55, Port Angeles, WA:** 4 counts of child rape and 8 counts of molestation. Allison, principal and teacher at Mountain View Christian School, is accused of assaults on girls ages 10 and 11. The school is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *Source: KOMO, 4-1-16*

**Jude D. Hughes, 50, Elk Park, NC:** Taking indecent liberties with a student. Hughes, pastor at Jonas Ridge Baptist Church and custodian at Avery County High School, allegedly sent 2 nude photos of himself to law enforcement, thinking they were going to a female student. The girl and her parents gave permission for the sheriff's office to take over her social media accounts after Hughes tried to "friend" her on Facebook, it's alleged.

When he showed up to meet her, deputies were waiting. *Source: WSOC, 3-31-16*

**Lloyd Schallenberger, 23, Richland, MS:** Sexual battery on a minor. Schallenberger, who ran the sound booth at First Baptist Church and taught Sunday school, is charged with molesting a 9-year-old boy several times last year in Polk County, FL.

He allegedly told police the boy slept in his bed but nothing happened, then admitted after taking a polygraph test that there was accidental touching. *Source: The Ledger, 3-20-16*

**Robert D. Smith, 44, Denver, PA:** Failure to report. Smith, pastor at Grace Point Church of the Nazarene, is charged with not alerting police about alleged child abuse in November by **Cynthia A. Ebersole, 62**, a day-care employee at Grace Point Learning Academy. She's charge with endangering the welfare of a child.

A parent alleged she saw Ebersole slap a fussy 14-month-old in the face 3 times and hold her hand over the crying child's mouth. Smith suspended her for 2 days and moved her to a classroom with infants. *Source: fox43.com, 3-29-16*

**Rodney Mathews, 24, Versailles, IN:** 2 counts each of child seduction and possession of child pornography. Court documents allege the abuse started in 2014 when the girl was 15 and attended Versailles Church of Christ, where Mathews was a youth minister. Documents allege they had oral sex and that Mathews sent the girl pictures of his penis and received photos of her breasts. *Source: WCPO, 3-29-16*

**Larry R. Dawson, 66, Antioch, TN:** Assault with a deadly weapon and armed assault on a police officer. Dawson, pastor at St. Luke's Community Church, is charged with pointing a gun at police while going through security at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center in Washington. Police fired at him. He was hospitalized in critical but stable condition. *Source: The Tennessean, 3-28-16*

**Scott D. Stockton, 44, Tonawanda, NY:** Possession of a sexual performance of a child and 2 counts of promoting a sexual performance of a child younger than 17 years old. Stockton is known for pastoral work and youth mentoring through schools and churches, according to police, who would not name the churches where he has worked.

His website says he's a Christian speaker, coach and counselor. His business is named "You. Only Better." *Source: Buffalo News, 3-28-16*

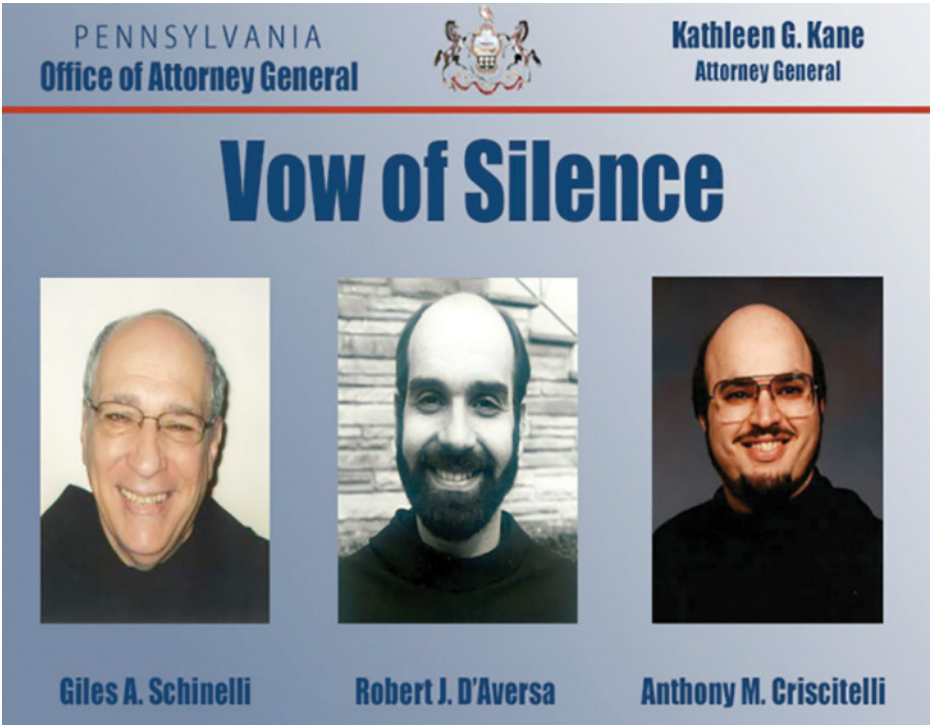
**Keith Frye, 54, Lilbourn, MO:** 1st-degree statutory rape. Frye, residing pastor at Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church, was arrested after an investigation which stemmed from a hotline phone call. The alleged victim, now 5, was examined and interviewed. The child told authorities the incidents happened more than once. *Source: KFVS, 3-21-16*

**Lucas Savage, 37, Clinton, ME:** Unlawful sexual contact. Savage is co-director of Youth Haven Ministries, which is affiliated with Canaan Calvary Church, and coaches youth soccer. He's charged with molesting a girl at his home.

"When I found out she was under 5, it's plainly disgusting. Going through my head, I don't want anyone watching my son, ever, only my mom. I'm scared now. The little girl knew him," said Denise Carrow. *Source: WCSH, 3-19-16*

**Obinna Aneke, 44, Lagos, Nigeria:** Rape. Aneke, senior deacon at Jesus Saves Pentecostal Church, is charged with several assaults on a 7-year-old girl whose mother put him in charge of her children while she was at work.

According to a report, Aneke asked for forgiveness but said he only tried to have sex with the girl once. "I didn't even remove her pants. On that day, I shifted her pants sideways and wanted to penetrate, but when I saw it was not possible, I left her and ejaculated outside her private parts." He said "evil forces" were working on him. *Source: pulse.ng, 3-17-16*



Franciscan friars charged with endangering the welfare of children and criminal conspiracy.

**David M. Thorne, 35, Picayune, MS:** 3 counts of sexual battery of a minor. Thorne, youth pastor at Goodyear Baptist Church, is accused of assaulting a 15-year-old girl from the church in January and February. After her parents notified authorities, he was suspended by the church, where he'd worked since 2007. *Source: Picayune Item, 3-16-16*

**Michael Higginbottom, 72, Newcastle, UK:** 4 counts of indecent assault and 2 counts of buggery. At the time of the alleged offenses in the 1970s against 2 boys under age 16, Higginbottom worked as a priest at St. Joseph's College in Upholland, a seminary which closed in the 1990s.

The Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle has suspended him from duties at his current parish, a spokesman said. *Source: Wigan Today, 3-15-16*

**Giles Schinelli, 73, Robert J. D'Aversa, 69, and Anthony M. Criscitelli, 61:** Endangering the welfare of children and criminal conspiracy. The men were successive leaders of the Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate Conception in western Pennsylvania and are accused of moving Brother **Stephen Baker** and at least **8 other friars** to different assignments after they were accused of molesting minors.

"No reports were ever made to law enforcement," state Attorney General Kathleen Kane said. "As the grand jury found, the ultimate priority was to avoid public scrutiny at all costs." *Source: AP, 3-14-16*

**Sabra Johnson, 42, and Carol Jo Sosa, 34, Houston:** Fraudulent use of an ID. Johnson, pastor at City of Faith Church and operator of Classic City Cars, and Sosa are accused by Dustin Vail of opening a credit card account in Vail's name and charging almost \$25,000. Vail worked at Johnson's auto restoration business. *Source: KPRC, 3-11-16*

**David Ibe, 29, Igboeze Onicha, Nigeria:** Rape. Ibe, pastor of Christ Command Commission, is charged with raping a 23-year-old woman after luring her into a building under construction. He allegedly told police he was upset that she refused to marry him. *Source: dailypost.ng, 3-8-16*

**Gordon W. Dominey, 63, Coquitlam, British Columbia:** 17 charges of sexual assault and indecency. Dominey was an Anglican priest who worked at the Edmonton Youth Development Centre, an incarceration facility, when the alleged assaults occurred in 1985-89. The charges were added to 10 similar ones lodged earlier after 4 more alleged victims came forward. Staff Sgt. Devin Laforce said accusers were between the ages of 14 and 17. *Source: CBC, 3-7-16*

**Honore Kombo, 50, Weston, CT:** 1st-degree larceny. Kombo, removed as pastor in July at St. Augustine Catholic Parish in Seymour, allegedly took \$27,000 in church funds, starting in 2013. WFSB reported that Kombo told police the money was used to provide loans in his native country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Source: New Haven Register, 3-4-16*

**Tsion Saadon, Marseilles, France:** Giving a false deposition. Saadon, a rabbi who teaches history at Yavne Jewish day school, is accused of falsely claiming he was stabbed in November by a man wearing a shirt with an ISIS symbol.

The injuries Saadon showed police didn't match the story he told, an unidentified police source said. *Source: The Forward, 2-25-16*

**Eleven members of Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:** Food stamp fraud and money laundering. Ar-

rests were made in Utah, Arizona and S. Dakota and included Lyle and Seth Jeffs, brothers of imprisoned sect leader Warren Jeffs.

The practice has been called "bleeding the beast," taking money from a government they hate, said Amos Guiora, a University of Utah law professor who has studied the church.

Seth Jeff and about 75 others have set up a compound about 30 miles from Mt. Rushmore, where neighbors are wary. "As locals, we know what is going on in there and we don't want to see it expand," said Linda Van Dyke Kilcoin. "We value our 12-year-old girls in South Dakota." *Source: AP, 2-24-16*

**Dennis Wright, 67, Oak Hill, OH:** Illegal use of a minor in nudity-oriented material or performance, 7 counts of rape, 2 counts each of sexual battery and unlawful sexual conduct with a minor and 3 counts of gross sexual imposition. Wright, pastor at Old Emory Church, is accused of assaults against 2 juveniles and an adult, including 2 parishioners, between 2009-15. The adult was "substantially impaired."

"Everybody in the neighborhood knew what was going on," said Elliott Perry, who lives next to the church. "It didn't look proper him setting up on top those little girls as they was driving. I've got daughters, [and] when they ride in my vehicle they sit on the passenger side, not right up against him." *Source: The Raw Story/Gallipolis Daily Tribune, 2-23-16*

**John B. Spalding, 74, Rhode Island:** Endangering the welfare of a child and possession of child pornography. Spalding, a member of the Catholic Brothers of the Sacred Heart, is charged with accessing porn on his computer at St. Joseph's High School, Metuchen, NJ, where he taught history and social studies until 2015 before relocating. *Source: nj.com, 2-18-16*

**Irfan Salihu, Prizen, Kosovo:** Inciting ethnic hatred. Salihu served as an imam in Prizen before being suspended in 2015 by the Islamic Community of Kosovo. The indictment alleges he incited hatred in a 2013 sermon defending the medieval Ottoman Turks' conquest of the Balkans.

He's also made numerous misogynist comments, saying unwed women who have sex should be cast away like "used tires."

Feminist Lura Limani called the indictment absurd. "It is ridiculous that a man whose entire history of public speeches seems to rely heavily on inciting hate, specifically against women who do not live by Sharia law, is only prosecuted once he makes a silly claim." *Source: Balkan Insight, 2-16-16*

## Pleaded / Convicted

**Robert Jaynes Jr., 45, Indianapolis:** Pleaded guilty to 2 drug charges tied to producing and selling for \$2.6 million almost 100 tons of synthetic marijuana know as "spice" or "K2." Jaynes, pastor of Irvington Bible Baptist Church, and **12 others**, including several more church members, were among 13 people who were federally indicted. *Source: Indianapolis Star, 3-28-16*

**Howard Curtis, 73, London:** Guilty of multiple counts of sexual assault against women and children after a 4-week trial. Curtis, pastor of Coulsdon Christian Fellowship, testified "deliverance counseling" had to be done on bare buttocks to cast out evil spirits.

He was also accused of digitally penetrating a woman but denied there was a sexual motive. The alleged acts occurred from 1991 to 2013.

Prosecutor Toby Fitzgerald alleged after

Curtis' wife refused to submit to "Christian domestic discipline," he turned his attention to women of his congregation. *Source: The Telegraph, 3-24-16*

**Robert Gamel, 66, Los Banos, CA:** Pleaded guilty to possession of child pornography. He was arrested while serving as pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Parish in 2014. Court documents allege he gave a young male parishioner \$100 or more to buy tight clothes and wear them to church.

Others at the parish expressed concern about Gamel's behavior, according to a police report which said Gamel allegedly told Fr. Guadalupe Rios he'd seen nude photos of the boy online. *Source: Bakersfield Now, 3-11-16*

**Jeffrey B. Mobley, 23, Stuart, FL:** Pleaded guilty to production and distribution of child pornography. Mobley, youth pastor at The Grace Place in Ocala, was charged with enticing 2 minors in his youth program to engage in sexual activity and exchange sexually explicit images. *Source: WPTV, 3-10-16*

**Raymond P. Buhrow, 65, S. Middleton Tshp., PA:** Pleaded no contest to sexual assault and to indecent assault of a person less than 13 and corruption of minors. Buhrow, pastor of the Calvary Temple Holiness Church, admitted fondling 2 girls, now 16 and 14, from 2009-14 on church property.

The older girl alleged Buhrow "would often catch her while she was alone," grab her from behind and fondle her breasts and genitals over her clothing, court records said. *Source: penn-live.com, 3-10-16*

**Peter Simone, 75, Huber Heights, OH:** Pleaded guilty to aggravated theft and agreed to the prosecutor's recommended 5-year sentence, repayment of \$1.92 million and waiving appeal rights. Simone was charged with stealing that amount from St. Peter's Catholic Church, where he was pastor.

Prosecutor Mat Heck Jr. said, "[I]t appears the money has been spent by the defendant and there are now liens and mortgages on the real estate" on more than 30 rental properties Simone owned. *Source: Dayton Daily News, 3-10-16*

**Paul Gotta, 58, East Windsor, CT:** Pleaded guilty to distributing explosive material to a person under 21. Gotta, suspended in 2013 from the Catholic priesthood for allegedly assaulting a minor, admitted he helped a boy, 17, buy thousands of rounds of handgun ammunition and gave him 2 pounds of explosive powder. *Source: AP, 3-8-16*

**Duncan Aker Jr., 64, Greensburg, IN:** Pleaded guilty to 5 counts of sexual abuse. Incidents were alleged with a boy under age 12 between 2007-10 while Aker was pastor at Vanceburg Christian Church. *Source: WSAZ, 3-7-16*

**Roger C. Kissel, 67, Sidney, NE:** Guilty by jury of sexual abuse and lascivious acts. The 4-day trial included testimony of a girl who was 5 when she told her mother in 2013 about sexual contact when Kissel was Cowboy Church pastor.

Kissel testified about his moral and religious convictions and lifelong contributions to society. *Source: KWBE, 3-4-16*

## The incident came to light when Apsey accidentally sent a text to his wife that was meant for the victim.

**James Rapp, 75, imprisoned in Oklahoma,** pleaded no contest in Michigan to charges he molested students while working as a teacher and wrestling coach at Lumen Christi High School. He's been defrocked as a Catholic priest. *Source: AP, 3-2-16*

**Kurt Ludwigsen, 44, Manhattan, NY:** Pleaded guilty to 7 counts of forcible touching women softball players at Nyack College, a Christian school, where he coached. He had faced almost 200 counts.

Court records show he also offered to "assist players to attain employment in the adult entertainment industry" and invited porn star Allie Haze to practice. Petaluma Police Lt. Dany Fish said Ludwigsen faced "similar allegations" in 2013 in California, which were outside the 1-year statute of limitations. *Source: Press Democrat, 3-1-16*

## Sentenced

**Stephen A. Pohl, 57, Louisville, KY:** 33 months in prison after pleading guilty to accessing child pornography. Pohl, former pastor of St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church, was given credit for 3 months he's been in custody.



“I am deeply sorry for the sadness, pain, anger and mistrust I’ve caused by my great mistake,” he said at sentencing. *Source: Courier-Journal, 3-29-16*

**Thomas Cooperider, 23, Valparaiso, IN:** 6 years in prison suspended, with the time to be completed on probation, after pleading guilty to 3 counts of sexual battery. Cooperider, a bible study leader at Liberty Bible Church, was charged with sexual touching of 3 developmentally disabled women in secluded rooms at the church in 2014-15.

He reportedly told police he has been accepted to Liberty University, where he plans on studying law. *Source: nwitimes.com, 3-29-16*

**Chad A. Apsey, 37, Lake Odessa, MI:** 2 years, 11 months to 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct. Apsey, youth minister at Believers Christian Church, was accused of conduct at the church in 2015 with a girl younger than 16. The incident came to light when he accidentally sent a text to his wife that was meant for the victim. *Source: Lansing State Journal, 3-28-16*

**Emiliano Patino, 40, Ft. Worth, TX:** 5 years in prison with no parole and 10 years’ probation after pleading guilty to 2 counts of sexual assault of a child under 17. Patino, founder of Freedom in Worship Church, admitted molesting 2 teen sisters when he was 23. He’s a former roommate of pastor Geronimo Aguilar, convicted of sexual assaults in 2015 on the same victims.

Evidence was also presented that Patino duped church members into believing he had cancer to get them to help him financially. *Source: Star-Telegram, 3-16-16*

**Aminur Rahman, 30, Haddington, Scotland:** 29 months in prison for convictions on 20 counts of fraud. A jury found the imam bilked worshipers at Jami Mosque in 2012-13 in Portsmouth, UK, out of \$38,000.

Judge Ian Pearson told Rahman, “You abused your high office for personal gain and when you were challenged by those you had exploited, you arrogantly tried to fob them off with a series of lies.” *Source: Portsmouth News, 3-16-16*

**Donald Lafferty, 71, Bloomfield, MO:** 50 years in prison after a jury convicted him of attempted murder, arson, armed criminal action and financial exploitation of the elderly. He was charged with hiring **Brandy Lee and Christopher Hicks**, a married couple who attended Beech Grove Church, which Lafferty pastored, to kill his wife in 2013. Lafferty was also having a sexual relationship with Ms. Hicks. He was also convicted of defrauding his mother of \$87,000 by forging power of attorney documents. *Source: Daily American Republic, 3-14-16*

**Christopher D. Ross, 44, Lebanon, TN:** 6 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of statutory rape by an authority figure. He was initially charged with 10 counts while he was a youth pastor at Fairview Church.

Courtney Greene, now 20, was 14 when Ross began making advances. Sexual contact started when she was 15 and Ross was 39, according to testimony. Greene said Ross threatened to kill himself if she told anyone. *Source: The Tennessean, 3-14-16*

**Matthew L. Durham, 21, Edmond, OK:** 40 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of 4 counts of engaging in illicit sexual conduct in foreign places. He was charged with molesting male and female orphans on several missionary trips in 2014 to the Upendo Children’s Home in Nairobi, Kenya. The home was founded by members of the First Presbyterian Church of Edmond.

“The walls of Upendo are stained with sexual abuse,” said orphanage director Eunice Menja, who recorded a video of Durham confessing that was shown in court. Durham claimed he was coerced and is appealing the conviction. *Source: KWTW, 3-7-16*

**Abdefatah H. Ziraoui, Oran, Algeria:** 6 months in jail and a 50,000-dinar fine (\$450) for making death threats. Ziraoui, a Sunni Salafist imam, called for the death of journalist Kamel Daoud, whom he accused of apostasy in December 2014.

Daoud won the 2015 French Prix Goncourt for his first novel *The Meursault Investigation*, a retelling of Albert Camus’ classic *The Stranger*. *Source: Lebanon Daily Star, 3-7-16*

**Tommy Lynn Bailey, 58, Altus, OK:** 5 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of assault with the intent to commit a felony of lewd molestation. Bailey, pastor of Elm and Hudson Church of Christ, admitted to acts between 2009-12 when the victim was in his custody as a foster child. She told police the abuse started when she was 14. Bailey was fined \$15,000 ordered to pay \$15,000 restitution to his victim. *Source: Lawton Constitution, 3-2-16*

**Joseph Maurizio, 70, Central City, PA:** 200 months in prison, \$50,000 fine and \$10,000 restitution to 2 victims. The Catholic priest was convicted of engaging in illicit sex in foreign places, possession of child pornography and money laundering. He was charged with traveling to Honduras in 2004-09 to molest boys at an orphanage funded by his charity, Humanitarian Interfaith Ministries. *Source: Post-Gazette, 3-2-16*

**Darrell Best, 46, Upper Marlboro, MD:** 18 years in prison after pleading guilty to sexual as-



saults on 2 teen girls. Assaults occurred at God – A Second Chance Ministry, where he was pastor, and at the D.C. police headquarters, where he worked as an officer. *Source: WJLA, 2-26-16*

**Yoel Malik, 33, Brooklyn, NY:** 60 days in jail and 6 years’ probation after pleading guilty to felony luring a child and misdemeanor sexual conduct for molesting 4 teen boys, all students at a now-closed yeshiva. Malik, a Satmar Hasidic rabbi, blamed victims for seducing him after forcing them to perform oral sex on him.

A plea deal dismissed the felony charge. “What D.A. [Kenneth] Thompson has done is inexplicable,” said Ben Hirsch, spokesman for Survivors for Justice. “Through unexplained plea deals such as this, he has effectively quashed any willingness on the part of victims to come forward.” *Source: NY Daily News, 2-26-16*

**James Dokos Jr., 63, Chicago:** 40 hours’ community service after pleading guilty to felony theft of more than \$100,000 as pastor of Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Milwaukee. He was later transferred to Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Glenview, IL.

Terms of deferred prosecution will reduce the charge to a misdemeanor if Dokos stays out of legal trouble for a year. He’s already made restitution.

“He has destroyed two churches. I’d like to see him go to jail,” said Jim Gottreich, former Sts. Peter and Paul council president. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 2-22-16*

### Civil Lawsuits Filed

**David Janney, Orlando, FL,** who resigned in February as Orlando Baptist Church pastor after allegations of an affair with a church member, is being sued by several parties and has filed for bankruptcy with estimated debts of \$16 million. Arlene Miranda has filed 2 suits charging the church and its officers tried to cover up her affair with the married pastor.

A financial firm has filed a separate claim seeking to deny Janney’s attempts to void his debt of least \$3.6 million. *Source: Orlando Sentinel, 3-25-16*

Cecilia Lifschitz, Brooklyn, NY, is suing Borough Park rabbi **Haim Yosef Sharabi and 2 alleged collaborators** for “inducing” her to spend \$214,000 for 3 handwritten Torahs and the promise of an appropriate husband, while getting only “bupkis,” as a newspaper put it. She seeks damages for alleged breach of contract. *Source: NY Daily News, 3-22-16*

“Jane Doe 247,” 34, is suing **St. John the Baptist Church in Northlake, IL, the Melkite Catholic Church and its Newton Diocese**, alleging she was molested by **Fr. Albert Wehby** in 1995-98. Doe and her sister lived for a time with him. After she made allegations to police, Wehby was transferred to California and served 11 years before retiring. *Source: WBBM, 3-14-16*

“John Doe” is suing the **Catholic Diocese of Austin, TX**, alleging he was molested over about 5 years, starting when he was 11 in 1973, by **Milton Eggerling and James O’Connor**, priests stationed at St. Louis King of France Catholic Church in Austin, and **2 Houston seminarians**. Eggerling died in 2008 at age 87. *Source: KXAN, 3-12-16*

“John Doe,” who attended a Catholic boarding school in the 1970s, is suing the **Salesians of Don Bosco in New Rochelle, NY**, alleging he was molested for 2 years by **John Casula** at Mary Help of Christians School in Tampa, FL. Casula died in 1994 and the school is closed.

“Brother Casula [the auto shop teacher] would show Plaintiff all the interesting engines and projects his students were working on,” the complaint says. Eventually, the abuse began in the back of the shop where there were no windows, it’s alleged. *Source: Tampa Bay Times, 3-8-16*

Ex-pastor **Mark Driscoll**, executive elder

**John S. Turner and other officials** of Mars Hill Church in Seattle and several corporate entities are being sued in Washington state under the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act.

The complaint alleges the defendants defrauded churchgoers Brian and Connie Jacobsen, Ryan and Arica Kildea and thousands of others by soliciting donations for one purpose and using them for unauthorized ones. Members have tithed as much as \$30 million yearly. Driscoll now lives in Phoenix. *Source: The Daily Beast, 2-29-16*

### Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Boston** settled lawsuits for \$778,500 with 7 plaintiffs who alleged they were molested by priests. One alleged abuser, **Richard T. Coughlin**, founder of the All-American Boys Chorus in Costa Mesa, CA, came from Boston to the Diocese of Orange in 1965. He was suspended in 1993 after at least 6 people accused him of sexual abuse. Lawsuits involving Coughlin have resulted in over \$3 million in settlements.

Another plaintiff was a 90-year-old man who filed a claim in 2014, alleging he was molested by **James MacGuinness** from 1938-40. *Source: Orange County Register/Boston Patch, 3-30-16*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle** agreed to pay \$9.1 million to 8 women to settle their suit alleging molestation by **Michael Cody** from 1968-75 at two parishes. Cody died in 2015.

Cody’s decades-old, secret file surfaced publicly last year during a suit by a woman to whom the diocese paid \$1.2 million. *Source: Seattle Times, 3-23-16*

Two towns controlled by the **Fundamental Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** were found liable at trial for \$1.6 million for discrimination against non-LDS residents. Hildale, UT, and Colorado City, AZ, were founded in the early 20th century by Mormon splinter groups.

A Phoenix jury found after a 7-week trial that law enforcement harassed nonbelievers and that utilities were denied to new residents from outside the church. *Source: Deseret News, 3-7-16*

### Finances

**Amer Saka, London, Ontario,** is under investigation for allegedly gambling away \$500,000 meant to resettle Iraqi refugees in Canada. Saka is pastor at St. Joseph Chaldean Catholic Church.

“We believe that Fr. Saka has a serious gambling problem and that these funds may have been used for that purpose,” said Bishop Emanuel Shaleta, who suspended Saka and took him to the Southdown Institute, a facility for clergy with addiction problems. *Source: Toronto Star, 3-28-16*

The **Michigan Jewish Institute** has been barred from student-aid programs by the U.S. Department of Education after a probe of allegations the school obtained about 2,000 fraudulent Pell grants from 2006-12 for Israeli students with no intention of getting a degree from MJJ, located at Shul Chabad-Lubavitch in W. Bloomfield.

The department also charged MJJ kept inadequate records and gave inaccurate information to the Accrediting Council of Independent Colleges and Schools. *Source: Detroit News, 3-23-16*

### Allegations

**Ronald Atwood, 72, Columbus, OH,** a Catholic priest on leave since 2013, should be defrocked, according to the Diocese of Colum-

bus, which is petitioning the Vatican to remove him for alleged sexual abuse of minors.

One alleged victim said Atwood repeatedly molested him from 1975-80 at Bishop Ready High School and on out-of-state trips. Atwood is reportedly stricken with cancer. *Source: Columbus Dispatch, 3-30-16*

The names of **16 Catholic priests** “credibly accused” of child molestation were released by the **Diocese of New Ulm, MN**. Most are accused of multiple offenses, said plaintiffs’ attorney Jeff Anderson. His office has 13 pending cases involving **Rudolph Henrich**, 14 involving **Michael Skoblik** and 12 naming **J. Vincent Fitzgerald**. Three of the 16 are still alive: **Robert Clark, Dennis Becker and Douglas Schleisman**.

Over 100 Minnesota priests have now been similarly identified. *Source: Star Tribune, 3-29-16*

Sexual abuse complaints against **Richard Lauinger**, 85, are credible, said a statement from the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit. He was ordained in 1956 and left the priesthood in 1975. Spokesman Ned McGrath said the archdiocese started getting complaints against Lauinger in January. *Source: Oakland Press, 3-29-16*

**Ohoheli Torah** yeshiva in Brooklyn, NY, was the scene of a protest during a school fundraiser by victims of sexual abuse and advocates of accountability. “Call the cops, not your rabbi,” protesters chanted, carrying signs saying “sexual abuse of little boys and girls is soul murder.”

The school lined up buses to prevent attendees from seeing protesters, who said they’ll keep coming back until all the staff accused of abuse have been replaced. *Source: WPIX, 3-20-16*

**Roy Drake**, a now-deceased Jesuit priest who taught at the **Maine Maritime Academy** in the 1970s, molested him, alleges Neal Gumpel, who protests regularly outside Jesuit headquarters in New York. His lawyer is Mitchell Garabedian, who became familiar with Drake because the Jesuits had already settled with another alleged victim.

Gumpel said Drake gave him, his brother and a friend alcohol the night of the visit. Later, Gumpel said Drake attacked and molested him.

Gumpel said he’s even been denied an apology. “So in the end, I want to do enough damage to them that it’ll help me get the rest of my life back on track.” *Source: WCSH, 3-7-16*

**Ben Colucci**, a retired Capuchin Franciscan priest, is accused by a Colorado woman of sexual abuse when she was a student at Denver’s **Marycrest High School** during the 1980s.

“Based on the information received, the Review Board has advised that the complaint should be treated as credible,” said a Capuchin statement.

The school closed in 1988 and Colucci was removed from ministry in 1993. The woman has also reported the allegations to police. *Source: Denver Post, 3-2-16*

## ‘Call the cops, not your rabbi,’ protesters chanted in Brooklyn.

### Removed / Resigned

**Bradley Baldwin, Brooklyn Park, MN,** is on leave as pastor of the Catholic Church of St. Gerard during a probe of allegations of a cover-up of sexual abuse by a Franciscan brother in Pennsylvania.

The leave will be in effect “pending further clarification of his level of supervision concerning” Brother **Stephen Baker**, wrote interim Archbishop Bernard Hebda on St. Gerard’s website. Baker killed himself in 2013 after reports surfaced he molested scores of boys in the 1980s. *Source: Star Tribune, 3-22-16*

**Australian Catholic priest John Fleming** was ordered to cease all ministry during a probe of sexual misconduct claims that he was involved with an underage girl in the 1970s while he was an Anglican priest. Fleming’s defamation suit against the Adelaide Advertiser for airing those claims in 2008-09 and that he had a relationship with a gay man he was counseling were dismissed in February by the Supreme Court.

The court ruled the allegations were substantially true. *Source: AAP, 2-25-16*

**Timothy Dolan**, pastor at the Catholic Church of St. William in **Fridley, MN**, took a voluntary leave of absence during an investigation by the Edina Police Department.

An affidavit said the probe started after reports were received on 4 separate occasions from Dolan’s Edina apartment complex neighbors about sounds of a child crying or “in distress.” No child was ever found during searches but Dolan allegedly told police he had pornography on his computer, which was confiscated along with his phone, CDs and DVDs. *Source: Pioneer Press, 2-22-16*

Email: [blackcollar@ffrf.org](mailto:blackcollar@ffrf.org)



## In memoriam



### Kathleen Phillips 1943-2016

FFRF member Kathleen “Kitty” Lane Phillips, 72, died on Feb. 22, 2016, in the arms of her husband, best friend and soulmate of 47 years. Kathleen was born May 17, 1943. She was residing in Virginia Beach, Va., but spent many happy years raising her family in Homewood, Ill. She went back to college and graduated from Christopher Newport University for a career teaching fourth-graders in the Hampton City School District. Always an adventurous spirit, she traveled to 49 states and 37 countries. Besides her husband, Frederick G. Phillips, she is survived by her two children, Michael Shawn Phillips and wife Kate, and Kathleen Phillips Paul,

Kathleen Paul and husband Kevin (all atheists), and two grandsons, Noah and Tyler Paul. Her passions included racing sports cars, traveling the world on a sailboat, art history, music, fine wine and celebrating holiday traditions with her family. She was raised as Methodist but gave that up when she was in her 50s and became a member of FFRF in her 60s. She enjoyed reading Freethought Today and had attended an FFRF convention in Raleigh, N.C.

### James “Jim” G. Goble 1947-2015

FFRF member James “Jim” Goble, a longtime Denver resident, passed away in his home of more than 40 years on Dec. 3, 2015, after a terminal illness. He was 68. He was born July 26, 1947, in Woodward, Okla. His family settled in the Denver area in the 1950s, where Jim attended public schools. Jim was a true entrepreneur, being self-employed his entire career. He owned and operated Alert Answering Service in Denver for 30 years. Then he went into the drive-in theatre business and operated the Cinderella Drive-In Theatre in Englewood for 11 years, in addition to owning and operating the Starlite Drive-In Theatre in Wichita, Kan., for the last 17 years. Jim was a collector of vintage and retro memorabilia, and his house, yard and garage were filled with colorful objects and lights. Jim was much loved and will be missed by

his friends, family and neighbors. He is survived by his brother Randall Goble of Denver, his partner Bart Cox of Denver, and his close friend of 45 years, Roger Acierno of Denver.



### Arch Wakefield 1926-2016

FFRF member Arch Wakefield of Tega Cay, S.C., died Feb 24, 2016, at the age of 90. Arch was born Jan. 24, 1926, in Charlotte and grew up there and in Columbia, S.C., and Gastonia, S.C. He was the only child of Arch Wakefield Sr. and Alicia Seawright Wakefield. He graduated from the University of South Carolina with a degree in chemical engineering, and then from the University of Florida with a Master’s degree in engineering. He also attended the University of Maine while in the U.S. Army in World War II, and re-

ceived a certificate in civil engineering. After his discharge from the Army in 1946, and his subsequent graduation from college, Arch worked for two years for the business founded by his father, the Wakefield Optical Company of Charlotte. He then worked three years for Carbide and Carbon Chemical Company and 30 years for The Celanese Fibers Company. Arch is survived by his wife, Margery, and sons, John, Richard, Michael and Matthew, 11 grandchildren and one great-grandchild. His second son, William, preceded him in death. His first wife, Margie, and his second wife, Marianne, both preceded him in death.

### Herbert B. Livingston 1917-2016

FFRF Lifetime Member Herbert B. Livingston of Santa Ana, Calif., died March 8, 2016, at the age of 99. He married Rosetta Livingston on Sept. 14, 1941, and they remained married for 66 years until her death in 2008. Herb was a member of FFRF since January of 1979. “Herb was a very early member, and one of FFRF’s first Lifetime Members, who attended several early FFRF functions, and was particularly well-known to the freethought community in Southern California, where he was active with Atheists United. His wife, Rosetta, preceded him in death and had also been a longtime supporter of FFRF. They are both missed,” said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

## Secular invocations

### Earl Coggins Jacksonville, Fla. City Council March 22, 2016

Good afternoon. Thank you members of the Jacksonville City Council for this opportunity to give the invocation prior to today’s City Council meeting. As I start, we’ve had a bad week, and I just want to remind everyone to please keep in your hearts and minds our good friends and allies in Europe — and in particular, in Belgium. In 1903, a poem called “The New Colossus,” written by Emma Lazarus, was inscribed on a bronze plaque and mounted inside the lower level of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty. In part, it said: “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” Many people, past and present, have accepted the invitation on that bronze plaque. They come from a multitude of cultures. Some of their descendants might be in this room today. We are gathered today, both religious and nonreligious, young and old, liberal and conservative, with the shared belief that we must treat our fellow human beings with respect and dignity, and equally important, treat each other as colleagues in the day-to-day business of living together and amongst each other. Each of us in this room is a member of a minority in some way, whether it be a minority view related to politics, society, race, religion, or any other aspect in which we may be regarded as different. It’s a very lonely feeling when you are regarded as different. At the same time, each of us is also a part of a majority. Each of us, in some way, is a part of something big. It’s when we are wearing our majority hats that we need to be most mindful of how we treat each other.



Earl Coggins We must pledge our best efforts to help one another, and to defend the rights of all citizens of this city. This afternoon I invoke humanity’s potential to use intellect, empathy and cooperation as a way in which to make this city a great and peaceful place to coexist. Today I also invoke the freedoms guaranteed in our Constitution, especially the First Amendment, as a compass to govern by: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech; or of the press; or the right of the people to peaceably assemble; and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” And lastly, I invoke the essence of teamwork and collaboration to help us put aside inclinations to fear each other, and instead, find common aspirations and goals where we can work together for the betterment of our city. As a Humanist and an atheist, it is a great feeling of inclusion to be up here. It is my hope that we

can find representatives of all worldviews for future invocations. Thank you very much. ... Coggins would like to give credit to the following people: Emma Lazarus, author of the poem “The New Colossus,” part of which was used in this invocation. James Madison, author of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, all of which was used in this invocation. Herb Silverman, part of the first paragraph of his 2006 invocation was used in this invocation. Americans United for Separation of Church and State sample invocation for their Operation Inclusion project. Their invocation was not used, but was inspirational in creating my invocation. Ken Hurley, for suggestions on what to include in my invocation. Earl Coggins in the founder of First Coast Freethought Society in Jacksonville.

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 (this year in Pittsburgh on the weekend of Oct. 7-9), a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

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



FFRF on the road



Dan Barker spoke to the Humanist Society of Greater Phoenix on March 13 at the Humanist Center in Mesa, Ariz. Pictured with Dan are HSGP Vice President Chris Wojno and long-time humanist activist Susan Sackett. Sackett was a friend of Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry and was a writer and producer involved in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* TV series and other *Star Trek*-inspired books.



More than 165 people attended Dan Barker’s talk about his book on March 13 at the Duvall Auditorium in Tucson, Ariz., at a meeting of Freethought Arizona. Pictured are Stephen Uhl, Dan Barker, Elaine Bosman, Jerry Arches, and Diane Uhl. Dan also participated in the Tucson Festival of Books the previous day, where the local humanist and freethought groups had a booth on the University of Arizona campus. Stephen and Diane Uhl were major benefactors to FFRF’s building expansion and are named in the Diane Uhl Legal Wing and the Stephen Uhl Friendly Atheist Studio.



Jill Dean, a longtime FFRF member and former volunteer, listens to Dan Barker speak in Tucson on March 14.



FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel spoke on defending church/state separation to the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara, Calif., on March 19. Pictured, from left to right, are Pat Ward, Judy Fontana, Roger Schlueter, Seidel, Suzanne Spillman and Diane Krohn.



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker spoke about his book *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction* on March 20 at SASHA-CON, a regional conference put on by the Skeptics, Atheists, Secular Humanists & Agnostics (SASHA) at the University of Missouri, Columbia.



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker discussed his new book at LogiCon at the University of Arkansas on April 2. The Secular Professionals Alliance at Walmart sponsored Dan’s appearance and members sat with him for this photo. From top to bottom, left to right: Ken Staten, Michelle Alexander, Greg Voss, Matt Miller, Dan Barker, Mike Brown, Gary Berger and Jerry DeWitt, a former minister who also spoke. Other members of the SPAW who are not in the photo but attended LogiCon include Shon Clements, Bhash Ramireddy, Bobby Fletcher and Sheila Czech.



FFRF’s 39th annual convention, Oct. 7-9

Check out all that Pittsburgh has to offer

By Kim and Stephen Hirtle

FFRF is bringing this year’s convention to Pittsburgh, Pa., on the weekend of Oct. 7–9, a city that has been garnering national and international attention for its quality of life and unique features.

Recent accolades for Pittsburgh:

- Listed as one of the best places in the world to visit (Travel + Leisure).
- Rated as the No. 1 food city in 2015 (Zagat).
- Offers America’s most stunning views (USA Today).
- Listed as the “coolest American city you haven’t been to” (Huffington Post).

Pittsburgh, with a population slightly more than 300,000, is also known for having more bridges than any city in the world, including Venice. The three main rivers — Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio — join downtown at Point State Park. Two inclines (funicular railways) dating back to the late 1800s take tourists and commuters up the side of Mount Washington, just as they did when steel was the main industry.

Downtown Pittsburgh, where the FFRF convention will be held, is known for its striking and varied architecture, notable restaurants and cultural amenities. The Andy Warhol Museum (named for a Pittsburgh native) and the Carnegie Science Center are just



Bill Helwig photo

FFRF is holding it’s annual convention in beautiful downtown Pittsburgh from Oct. 7-9.

across the river on the North Shore. The Carnegie Natural History and Carnegie Art Museums are housed together, a short taxi or bus ride away, in the Oakland neighborhood, which is also home to Phipps Conservatory and two world class institutions: the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie-Mellon University.

Across the street from the Cathedral of Learning is the Carnegie Natural History Museum, known for one the largest collections of dinosaur fossils in the world, including the Diplodocus Carnegii, named in honor of Pittsburgh native and freethinker Andrew Carnegie.

For those seeking outdoor activities, there are bike rental locations downtown, with bike trails throughout the

city and along the rivers. Kayak Pittsburgh operates on weekends in October, just a short walk from the hotel, and for a modest fee, you can get out on the Allegheny River for an hour or two of exercise with excellent views of the skyline and stadiums.

FFRF visitors are encouraged to check out Market Square, a large European-style plaza surrounded by 14 restaurants near the hotel.

Those coming to the conference a day early will have the opportunity to visit Fallingwater. Considered to be the most iconic of all of Frank Lloyd Wright’s designs, the house was built on top of natural waterfall.

Stephen Hirtle is chair of the FFRF Executive Board and professor of Information Science at the University of Pittsburgh.

Dennett joins

cast of speakers

FFRF is proud to announce that **Daniel Dennett**, one of the so-called “Four Horsemen of New Atheism,” will be giving among the acclaimed speakers at FFRF’s annual convention. Dennett, co-director of the Center for Cognitive Studies at Tufts University, is the author of many books, including *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*.

Also recently added to the speaker’s list is **Marie Schaub**. She is the only named plaintiff in an ongoing case near Pittsburgh. She joined FFRF in 2012 to ask the New Kensington-Arnold School District to remove a 6-foot-tall granite monument depicting a copy of the Ten Commandments that is prominently displayed in front of the public high school her child was scheduled to attend.

And, as previously reported, also speaking at the convention will be theoretical physicist **Lawrence Krauss**, freethinking author **Susan Jacoby**, author and professor emeritus of evolution and ecology **Jerry Coyne** and author and former reporter **Lauri Lebo**, who covered the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* trial in 2004-05.

More details can be found at: [ffrf.org/outreach/convention](http://ffrf.org/outreach/convention)

2016 CONVENTION REGISTRATION

ONLINE: [ffrf.org/outreach/convention/2016-registration](http://ffrf.org/outreach/convention/2016-registration)

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

CONVENTION OCT. 7–8

FFRF members	_____ x \$60	\$_____
Non-member spouse or companion accompanying a member	_____ x \$65	\$_____
Non-members	_____ x \$105	\$_____
New-members	_____ x \$100	\$_____
Save \$5 by becoming an FFRF member. (\$40 individual membership, \$60 registration)		
Child/Student(s) – Free with copy of student ID	_____ x FREE	\$_____

FOOD

Indicate number of orders per entrée.

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

\*Includes 20% Gratuity & Sales Tax

FALLINGWATER FRIDAY BUS TOUR FRIDAY, OCT. 7

Bus tour and entrance fee	_____ x \$40	\$_____
Box Lunch Indicate number of orders per box lunch	_____ x \$12	\$_____
____ Turkey sandwich on whole wheat	____ Greek wrap with hummus, veggies	
____ Gluten-free chef salad		
		Total \$_____

Name

Please include names of all registrants

Address

City / State / ZIP

Phone / Email

Contact information for in house use only.

Hotel info

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

General schedule

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

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

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

Fallingwater tour

On Friday, Oct. 7, prior to the start of the convention, FFRF is hosting a tour of the impressive **Frank Lloyd Wright**-designed Fallingwater site. The \$40 ticket includes admission and coach bus transportation. There is also an optional, although highly recommended, box lunch available for \$12. (The cafeteria is expected to be too busy.) The 43-mile route to the captivating Fallingwater is through scenic Pennsylvania countryside. Buses depart from Wyndham Grand every 30 minutes beginning 7:50 a.m., with returns beginning 2:10 p.m. Expect to be gone for about 7 hours.

Extra rooms have been set aside at the Wyndham Grand for FFRF members for Thursday night for those interested in going on the tour. FFRF will assign your time.

Note: The tour can physically challenging for some. There is a ¼-mile walk to and from the home on uneven gravel paths, a one-hour walking tour, and more than 100 steps (although not all at once). There is no wheelchair access and children under the age of 6 are not allowed.