

# Freethought Today

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## Hello, Pittsburgh!



Photo by Andrew Seidel

**Theoretical physicist and author Lawrence Krauss excites the crowd during his presentation on the opening evening of FFRF's 39th annual convention in Pittsburgh at the Wyndham Grand Hotel on Oct. 7. More than 525 people registered for the convention from 33 states, Canada and Hong Kong. For more convention coverage, see the special eight-page pullout section in this issue, which includes the full speech by Carter Warden, a longtime Christian minister who came out publicly as an atheist at the convention.**

## FFRF contest winners

# Four honored for secular invocations

The Freedom From Religion Foundation announced the four winners of its 2016 "Nothing Fails Like Prayer" contest. The competition is set up to honor nontheistic activists who give secular invocations in front of local governmental bodies.

The winners are:

— **Aleta Ledendecker** of Tennessee had her initial invocation on Jan. 11 before the City Council in Oak Ridge, Tenn., cut short in mid-sentence by the mayor, even though she had 30 seconds left of her designated time. After Ledendecker and FFRF protested, she was allowed to return to give the full opening remarks. Ledendecker was a "presidents' choice" awardee. Ledendecker, an FFRF Lifetime Member, is founder of the newest FFRF chapter, FFRF East Tennessee.

— **Justin Scott** of Iowa gave his invocation on May 2 before the City Council in Waterloo, Iowa. He also persuaded the city to proclaim a "Day of Reason" on May 5 to balance the National Day of Prayer. Scott was one of two who won a popular vote by FFRF members and its Facebook followers. Scott won international attention with his one-man campaign as an atheist to publicly question, prior to the Iowa Caucus, every presidential candidate on secular issues.

— **David Suhor** of Florida is a co-founder of the Satanic Temple



Photo by Ingrid Laas

**David Suhor, a member of the Satanic Temple West Florida, reprises his tongue-in-cheek secular invocation to FFRF convention guests on Oct. 8.**

West Florida, who sang his invocation before the Pensacola City Council on July 14. He is a musician and teacher who sang text originally written by Lucien Greaves, co-founder of The Satanic Temple. He won the popular vote. Suhor is also a litigant in FFRF's and the American Humanist Association's lawsuit against a 25-foot-tall cross in Pensacola's public Bayview Park.

— **David Williamson** of Florida has given multiple secular invocations  
*See Invocations on page 22*

## FFRF helps get humanism into prison system

Humanism is now an officially recognized religion throughout the Virginia prison system after FFRF stepped in and helped out a prisoner there.

Christopher Landeck, a freethinking inmate at Coffeewood Correctional Center in Virginia, contacted FFRF because his prison had meeting options for Christians, Jews, Hindus, Muslims and a variety of other minority religious groups, but no opportunity for nonreligious inmates to meet and converse about their beliefs.

"Where inmates are demoralized, dehumanized, subjugated and silenced on a daily basis, humanist ideals should help restore the humanity and fill the vacuity that life behind bars carves out of the individual," Landeck wrote.

Landeck applied to start a humanist study group with equal access to prison chapel resources, but was denied because the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) did not recog-



**Dan Barker and FFRF will donate these books to the Coffeewood Correctional Center in Virginia.**

nize humanism on its list of "Religions Approved to Operate in DOC Facilities." Because of that, Landeck was being effectively denied the opportunity to meet with like-minded prisoners to discuss his beliefs.

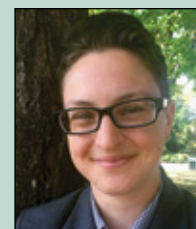
FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover sent a letter to the VADOC in February

2016 to argue for equal access to prison chapel resources for nonreligious inmates. After a back and forth between FFRF and the prison, humanism became an officially recognized religion throughout the Virginia prison system as of June 22. Subsequently, Landeck's group was also approved at Coffeewood Correctional.

"Thanks to FFRF, we have the ability to offer an alternative lifescape for inmates not affiliated with traditional religions and nonbelievers that only attend religious services in order to feel part of something larger than themselves," Landeck wrote to FFRF. "Freethinking inmates are now excited to be able to organize into groups of like-minded individuals to talk about substantive issues of the day, philosophy, art and culture, and most importantly, a productive secular life after prison."

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FFRF analysis

# Record 26 million ‘Nones’ could vote

More than 26 million voters with no religion could turn out on Election Day Nov. 8, dwarfing previous records and providing the power to sway the direction of the country for the first time in history, according to an analysis from the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

The ranks of atheists, agnostics and those with no religious affiliation — the “Nones” — have increased by 19 million since Barack Obama was first elected president in 2008, according to Pew Research, making them the fastest growing “religious” group in America. In 2004, the Nones comprised just 16 percent of all American adults, but have now grown to represent a quarter of all adults and a third of Millennials.

Despite their size, the Nones have been underrepresented at the ballot box. According to the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), religiously unaffiliated voters comprised just 12 percent of all voters in the 2012 presidential election.



Photo illustration by Dreamstime

However, their participation is set to spike in 2016, according to FFRF’s new analysis of data on religious affiliation and voting participation, drawn from numerous sources.

Popular vote projections by FiveThirtyEight.com in mid-October showed Democrat Hillary Clinton with a lead (49%) over Republican Donald Trump (43%), with the remainder of voters supporting third-party candidates.

Using the 2012 popular vote (128.6 million) as a base, we can project that more than 63 million votes would go to Clinton and approximately 55 mil-

lion would go to Trump using those percentages.

How would that break down by religious affiliation? Approximately 30 percent of Clinton’s supporters are religiously unaffiliated and 13 percent of Trump supporters meet that definition, according to PRRI.

That means Clinton could receive almost 19 million votes and Trump could receive more than 7 million votes from the Nones. That’s more than 26 million projected votes for the major party candidates, a more than 70% increase from the 15 million Nones who turned out during the 2012 election.

“This election could be a flashpoint where secular voters finally eclipse other major religious groups in terms of turnout and influence,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “It’s time that candidates acknowledge our presence and commit to keeping religion out of government.”

Earlier this year, FFRF launched its “I’m Secular and I Vote” campaign to mobilize voters across the country through national TV, billboard and bus campaign ads, featuring young Millennial voters. FFRF is also enlisting students on college campuses and launching a digital marketing campaign to reach voters online. Ninety-six percent of FFRF’s membership is registered to vote, according to a member survey.

“The next president will have the power to determine the direction of the Supreme Court for a generation,” says Gaylor. “We expect secular voters to come out in force and make their voices heard.”

## Donate now to FFRF through CFC, AmazonSmile

There are a few ways you can donate to FFRF, including directly through our website, through the CFC or AmazonSmile.

If you are a federal employee, you may now make donations to FFRF through the CFC (Combined Federal Campaign) until Dec. 15. If you wish to help FFRF through this campaign, the CFC code to designate your contribution to FFRF is 32519.

It is recommended that all CFC donors check the box to include their name and mailing address (in addition to e-mail) with the donation. Donors will receive an acknowledgment from FFRF when we receive pledge notification (throughout the year).

From the CFC website: “The CFC is the official workplace giving campaign of the federal government. The mission of the CFC is to promote and support philanthropy through a program that is employee focused, cost-efficient and effective in providing federal employees the opportunity to improve the quality of life for all. The CFC is the world’s largest and most successful an-

nual workplace charity campaign.”

Another way to donate automatically is through AmazonSmile. It’s a simple way for you to support FFRF (or other charitable organizations) every time you shop, at no cost to you. When you shop at smile.amazon.com, you’ll find the exact same prices, selection and shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to your favorite charitable organization. Visit our AmazonSmile donation designation page and select the Freedom

From Religion Foundation to donate 0.5% of eligible purchases to FFRF.

The AmazonSmile Foundation is a 501(c)(3) private foundation created by Amazon to administer the AmazonSmile program. All donation amounts generated by the program are remitted to the AmazonSmile Foundation. In turn, the AmazonSmile Foundation donates those amounts to the charitable organizations selected by their customers. Amazon pays all expenses of the AmazonSmile Foundation; they are not deducted from the donation amounts.

### Humanism

Continued from front page

Inmates who adopt a worldview of inclusiveness will find themselves in a much healthier paradigm and better prepared for re-entry into society.”

With a humanist study group now operating at the prison, the participants are eager for educational materials about atheism and freethought. So FFRF Co-President Dan Barker and FFRF agreed to donate 11 books to the prison chapel library so that all inmates have access to nonreligious views.

“It is our sincerest wish that these books will help enlighten many inmates on what it means to be ‘good without God’ and inspire them to lead a purpose-filled life,” Barker wrote to Chaplain Burke at the facility. The donated books were written by Barker (*Life Drive Purpose*, *The Good Atheist*, *Godless*, *God: The Most Unpleasant Character in Fiction*), FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor (*Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So*, *Women without Superstition: ‘No Gods — No Masters’*) and FFRF founder Anne Nicol Gaylor (*Lead Us Not Into Penn Station*), among others.

If you would like to donate books or other materials in “new” condition to the humanism group at the prison, please send them, along with a list of their titles and retail values, to:

Chaplain Burke  
Coffewood Correctional Center  
P.O. Box 500  
Mitchells, VA 22729-0500

### FFRF welcomes 26 new ‘Lifers’, 1 After-Lifer

FFRF would like to welcome and announce our 26 new Life Members and one After-Life Member.

We offer our warmest thanks to Marjorie H. Holden for becoming an After-Lifer. After-Life memberships of \$5,000 are a slightly tongue-in-cheek category of donation for those who wish their donations to live after them.

Our 26 new Life Members are Ken Blair, Al Blazo, Kevin R. Breen (gift from Lifer Michael Jacobson), John Drain, Margaret Falk (gift from Lifer Adam R. Rose), Stan and Susan Hills, Dr. Deborah Kirby, Lawrence Krauss, Norman and Ruth Ann Lauritzen, A. Kendall LeBlanc, Chris Luchini, David and Mira Peck, JoEllen W. Polzien, Preston Smith, Hal Steinkopf, Jill Thomson, Hani Varoqua, Gary Whittenberger, Kathleen Widland, Carol Wood, George and Pam Zerba, and Mike Zulauf.

States represented are California, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas and Virginia.

Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000, designated as membership or membership renewal and are deductible for income tax purposes, as are all dues and donations to FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Lifetime memberships guarantee no more renewal notices and go into a reserved “rainy day” fund. Lifetime Members receive a card, a pin and a big thank you!

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*The only freethought newspaper in the United States*

**A Note to Members**  
Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and “Private Line.”  
**If it says November or earlier please renew!** Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 gung-ho; \$250-sustaining) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in January/February and June/July.  
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Cliff Richards Student Activist Award

Being an activist in Bangladesh can be deadly

Muhammad Shohiduzzaman received \$2,000 in late September from FFRF as a Cliff Richards Student Activist.

By Muhammad Shohiduzzaman

My name is Muhammad Shohiduzzaman and my pen name is Paplu Bangali. I am a blogger, a student activist and a theatre activist in Bangladesh. I am an atheist, even though I come from a conventional Muslim family.

I was born in a small village in the Sylhet District in Bangladesh. It's a multicultural area where Christian, Hindu and Buddhist religious minorities live among the Muslim majority. People in my village are very religious and conservative.

I attended a government primary school and then at the age of 14 I was sent to my uncle's house in Upazlia to get a better education. After finishing my secondary education there, I enrolled in business studies at Madan Mohan College in Sylhet. That was when I first got involved with social, cultural and political movements, including theatre activism.

For the last decade, I have been working on various social issues, including human rights of religious minorities, violence against women, religious fanaticism, and secular and science based-education.

I have been writing in the areas of freethinking, criticizing Islamic fundamentalism and repression of religious minorities. Recently, I have been active in raising voices against the killings of bloggers. I organized and led protests and rallies demanding justice for all these murdered bloggers and freethinkers in Bangladesh. Many national print and electronic media interviewed me about this movement because we have been demanding the arrests of the killers.

As a civil society activist, I founded and/or worked with a number of organizations and political networks:

**Bangladesh Student Union (BSU):** I have been a member of BSU since 2010 and the ex-president of the Sylhet district committee. BSU was established in 1952 and is an independent, democratic, leftist political network that primarily works for the rights of students in Bangladesh. Its membership exceeds 20,000 students. The mission of BSU is to establish a non-discriminatory science-based secular and uniform education system.

**Bangladesh Udichi Shilpigosthi:** I have been a member since 2008. It is the largest anti-sectarian, progressive and voluntary organization in Bangladesh, which plays a significant role in all secular and cultural movements in Bangladesh. Since its inception, the organization is engaged in raising awareness among the public through cultural activities — songs, dances, recitations, dramas, films, fine arts and literary works.

**Youth for National Interest:** I am the founder of Jatyo Sharthe Amra Tarunno (Youth for National Interest), which was established in 2013. I worked as the coordinator until I left Bangladesh in March 2016. We organized civil society campaigns against all forms of sexual abuse and violence



Muhammed Shohiduzzaman speaks at a protest condemning the rape of a girl from an ethnic minority group in Sylhet, Bangladesh, in 2012.



Muhammad Shohiduzzaman speaks at an event commemorating ‘Martyrs Intellectual Day’ on Dec. 14, 2015, in Sylhet.

faced by children and women.

**Blogger & Online Activist Forum:** I am also a founding member and organizer of this group in Sylhet since 2012. This forum promotes freethinking and the rights of online bloggers and other freethinkers. We organized various civil society campaigns against arrests and killings of bloggers.

**Transparency International-Bangladesh:** The Youth Engagement and Support (YES) group is a movement initiated by Transparency International-Bangladesh (TIB) to engage and empower the youth of Bangladesh to address issues related to corruption. I worked as a volunteer in this group from 2006 to 2012, helping raise awareness against corruption, organizing and participating at protests against sexual violence faced by women and children, and in other issues related to women's empowerment. I performed in different street dramas as a theater actor. I was also a script-writer for these dramas.

As a result of my activism, I was physically attacked three times by Islamic fundamentalists:

- On Dec. 23, 2013, a religious extremist group threatened to kill me. I reported this to the Sylhet police, but they did not respond. Furthermore, a local religious extremist group organized a procession against bloggers and freethinkers in Sylhet, and shouted slogans against me and other bloggers. The group also threatened to kill us. I found out that I am at the top of its list because of my anti-religious fundamentalism activities and my demand for justice against the murdered bloggers.

- On Jan. 11, 2014, I was attacked by a group of fundamentalists with the intent to kill me. Fortunately, I man-

aged to save my life; however my head was injured and my right hand was fractured. I stayed in the university medical facility for two days. I was attacked because I organized the protest with Youth for National Interest days earlier. The protest condemned Bangladesh's widespread attacks against religious minorities, and we demanded justice for victims of human rights violations.

- On May 12, 2015, I organized a protest in Sylhet against the murder of blogger Ananta Bijoy Dash after he was killed by fundamentalists. During the protest, members of the ruling party's student league attempted to attack me because I was the main organizer. I was taken to a safe place by other protesters. However, I then found out that some of my activist friends were physically attacked by them.

- On Feb. 4, 2016, I was attacked while I was traveling by rickshaw to my home in Sylhet. Six unidentified persons dragged me out of the rickshaw and called me “nasthik,” which means atheist. Then they physically assaulted me. Fortunately, bystanders intervened and saved me from the attackers. I reported the attack to the local police, but they did not take any steps for my safety. They just told me to leave Bangladesh because it was not safe for me to stay.

The current Bangladesh government keeps silent over the killings of bloggers and freethinkers because the government is keen to maintain its ties to the fundamentalist groups in order to hold onto its political power. Therefore, there has been no action taken against the fundamentalist groups, so the religious extremist groups, as well as ruling party's supporters, targeted me.

I made a general complaint to the police station two times regarding the attacks on me. However, the police failed to take any action. After the incident on Jan. 11, 2014, with the assistance of my political friends, I sought temporary relocation to a rural village in Bangladesh. After that, I returned to the city, and changed my place of residence. Following the incident on May 12, 2015, I took similar precautions and changed my residence again. After the incident on Feb. 4., 2016, I moved to Dhaka with the help of my fellow bloggers.

In Dhaka, I contacted Forum Asia and it, in collaboration with INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre in Sri Lanka, assisted me in temporarily relocating to Sri Lanka. I stayed there for five months under a tourist visa. Then in August of this year, I was relocated to the Philippines with the help of PAHRA (Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates).

Several of my colleagues, including Nazimuddin Samad, who denounced the last attack I faced, were killed while I was in Sri Lanka. Such attacks clearly indicate that returning to Bangladesh is impossible and life-threatening. Therefore, I am in need of a long-term relocation. Currently I am looking for an opportunity to enroll in a post-graduate course.

So while I vow to continue my activism and education, I must do it outside of Bangladesh.



Shohiduzzaman performs in a street drama on anti-corruption in 2010 in a rural area of Sylhet.



Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

NOT FOR LOVE

“Contemplate a tangled bank . . .”  
— Darwin, *The Origin of Species*

It is yes a green shimmer of beauty,  
Of butterfly flashes of lemon,  
The perfume of virginal roses,  
And larks lifting lyrics to heaven . . .

And yes the larks love butterflies (for breakfast)  
Raccoons love meadowlarks (at midnight dinners)  
Roses hug their neighbors (till they wither)  
Nature breeds good nature (in her winners).

So Brahmins love the beggars on the Ganges,  
Bankers love their strip mines in Montana,  
Pastors love their sheep, all ripe for fleecing,  
And realtors love the trees in Indiana.

Moral:  
Love suffers long and is kind of  
Pathetically prone to be docile.  
Darwin’s advice to the prone is:  
Beware of becoming a fossil.

© 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 Proverbs 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](http://ffrf.org/shop).

Thanks to donors, FFRF legal fellows begin second year



Photo by Chris Line  
Madeline Ziegler and Ryan Jayne are in their second years of their legal fellowships with FFRF.

Madeline Ziegler and Ryan Jayne have started their second years as legal fellows for FFRF.

From September 2015 to August 2016, Jayne was the Diane Uhl Legal Fellow and Ziegler was the Cornelius Vander Broek Legal Fellow. The Diane Uhl Legal Fellowship was set up in Diane’s honor by an FFRF donor interested in furthering FFRF’s legal work. Ziegler’s fellowship was named for a member leaving a bequest large enough to cover the year-long legal fellowship.

“We are so grateful to this member, a friend of benefactor Diane Uhl, who prefers not to be named, for making possible the start of a legal fellowship for FFRF,” says Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. “This will permit FFRF to reward deserving legal interns to work for one to two years for FFRF as attorneys, and to broaden the net to attract other recent law school grads seeking short-term fellowships to work for the separation of state and church.”

For the next year, Jayne will be known as the Eric & Elaine Stone Legal Fellow, just endowed by FFRF’s generous members Eric and Elaine Stone (\$50,000). Ziegler’s second year is being paid for by a generous bequest from Patrick O’Reiley. The rest of that bequest has gone into a legal fellowship endowment, whose interest will be used to help pay at least part of legal fellowships over the years.

Individuals who contribute \$50,000 to FFRF may have the legal fellowship named for them.



Photo by Ingrid Laas  
FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor (right) presented generous members Eric and Elaine Stone with a “Freethinkers Extraordinaire” award for funding the \$50,000 Eric & Elaine Stone Legal Fellowship for the upcoming year.

Meet a staffer

**Name:** Roger Daleiden  
**Where and when I was born:** Milwaukee on the vernal equinox (March 20).  
**Education:** University of Wisconsin-Madison (MFA in fine art painting and printmaking), UW-Stout (BS in studio art).  
**Family:** Mary Jane, and cat Neeko.  
**How I came to work at FFRF:** I was looking to change jobs after five years as a graphic designer at a catalog company when I heard of a graphic design position open at FFRF. I was eager to get back into an editorial environment that is focused on education and cultural advancement.  
**What I do here:** I’m here to help create our newspaper, brochures and other printed materials to assist in communicating our message to promote nontheism and help defend the



Photo by Chris Line  
**Roger Daleiden**  
separation between church and state.  
**What I like best about it:** It is important to me that the job that I do helps to

improve the lives of others, by promoting knowledge and reason over myth and fantasy.

**What gets old about it:** Parking in downtown Madison is very hard to find on our little isthmus between lakes Mendota and Monona.

**I spend a lot of time thinking about:** Planning my next outdoor adventure. It’s early fall now, so I’m still obsessed with bicycling and hiking.

**I spend little if any time thinking about:** The massive amount of time I wasted in mandatory church services.

**My religious upbringing was:** Roman Catholic. I was sent to Catholic schools from the second grade until the end of my sophomore year of high school. I decided that enough was enough, and so I transferred to a public high school. I have never looked back.

**My doubts about religion started:** I have always been interested in science and science fiction. As I learned more about scientific fact, modern religion seemed more similar to primitive mythologies that were trying — and failing — to explain the natural world and the universe.

**Things I like:** I am fairly absorbed with outdoor activities like hiking, bicycling, paddling, and downhill skiing.

**Things I smite:** Our current political climate, where politicians wave the bible and claim to be religious, when in reality they are just pandering for votes to maintain their money and power.

**In my golden years:** Some day I hope to get back to producing fine art (art for art’s sake), whether it’s traditional media or digital, as I still may have something to say.



In the news

Jordanian murdered for ‘insulting Islam’


A prominent Jordan writer was shot and killed on Sept. 25 outside a courtroom where he awaited trial for charges that he had “insulted Islam.”

Nahed Hattar, a 56-year-old columnist for a Lebanese newspaper, was charged for a cartoon he posted on Facebook depicting a bearded man in bed with two women ordering Allah to serve him wine and cashews. Although Hattar later took down the cartoon and apologized for posting it, Jordanian authorities arrested him for blasphemy against Islam, according to the New York Times.

Security sources told the Jordan Times that the shooter was a known extremist named Riad Abdullah who has been captured.

Before being gunned down, Hattar said the cartoon had been meant to highlight the hypocritical view of jihadists and their views on the afterlife rather than to insult Islam. Hattar was known for inspiring political controversy with his columns that reflected a liberal, secular viewpoint on government.

**Roy Moore suspended over gay marriage stance**



The chief justice of Alabama’s Supreme Court, charged with defying federal court rulings that permit same-sex marriage, was suspended Sept. 30 for a second time after being found guilty of violating judicial ethics, the Alabama Court of the Judiciary ruled.

Chief Justice Roy Moore had gone to trial on charges that he violated Alabama’s canons of judicial ethics with a Jan. 6 order that said probate judges were bound by state law banning gay marriage.

The Alabama Court of the Judiciary suspended Moore, effective immediately, without pay for the remainder of his term, saying in a ruling that it had found “clear and convincing evidence” of ethical violations.

Moore’s attorney said in a statement that he planned to appeal the decision to the Alabama Supreme Court.

**Compensation offered to abuse victims**

Victims of clergy sex abuse willing to forego lawsuits against New York’s Roman Catholic archdiocese can seek compensation through a new church fund, but any records of such abuse and what the church did about problem priests will remain private.


The program will be led by Kenneth Feinberg, who managed the federal compensation fund for Sept. 11 victims, with oversight by former New York Police Department Commissioner Ray Kelly, among others.

The archdiocese announced the program at a time when victim advocates are pressing New York legislators to expand or temporarily abolish time limits on lawsuits over child sex abuse.

The inner workings of the fund will

be private, although victims can decide whether to reveal their involvement.

**Guam leader OKs lifting abuse limits**



Guam Gov. Eddie Calvo signed a bill that would lift the statute of limitations on child sex abuse charges for civil cases, a move that Catholic leaders say could bankrupt the church in the largely Catholic U.S. territory.

The bill, which does not apply to criminal prosecutions, was approved by the Legislature after abuse allegations surfaced against Archbishop Anthony Apuron.

Church leaders say lifting the statute of limitations would subject the church to unlimited financial liability, forcing the closure of parish churches and schools on the island where more than three-quarters of Guam’s 162,000 residents are Roman Catholics.

Calvo said he was “saddened that even a single injustice had to happen in order to make this law necessary. There are no winners. Justice is the only victory.”

**Saudis try to end guardianship system**

A petition signed by more than 14,000 Saudi women calling for an end to the country’s male guardianship system is being handed to the government, the BBC reports.

Women must have the consent of a male guardian to travel abroad, and often need permission to work or study.

In the deeply conservative Islamic kingdom, a woman must have permission from her father, brother or other male relative to obtain a passport, marry or leave the country.

Renting a flat, undergoing hospital treatment or filing a legal claim often also requires a male guardian’s permission, and there is very little recourse for women whose guardians abuse them or severely limit their freedom.

**U.S. pastor deported over anti-gay views**

Botswana President Ian Khama said on Sept. 20 he had ordered the arrest and deportation of U.S. pastor Steven Anderson, who was banned from neighboring South Africa over his anti-gay views.

Anderson, of the Faithful Word Baptist Church in Arizona, notoriously welcomed the gunning down in June of 50 people at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Fla., by saying “there’s 50 less pedophiles in this world.”

Khama told Reuters he had ordered Anderson’s immediate arrest and deportation after the pastor said in an interview with a radio station that gays and lesbians should be killed.

**Muslims pass atheists as most unpopular**


About 40 percent of Americans say atheists “do not at all agree” with their vision of America, according to a new study from the University of Minnesota.

The study also shows another discouraging fact — Americans’ disapproval of Muslims has jumped to 45.5 percent from just over 26 percent 10 years ago.

And “Nones” — those who say they have no religious affiliation, but may also have spiritual or religious beliefs — are also unpopular. Nones make up one-third of the U.S. population. Almost 40 percent of those surveyed say the rise of the “Nones” is “not a good thing.”

The new study also attempts to find out why atheists are so reviled. The findings show that religious Americans associate atheists with “criminality,” materialism and “a lack of accountability.”

**NCAA moves events from N.C. over HB2**



The NCAA has pulled seven championship events from North Carolina, including opening-weekend men’s basketball tournament games, for the coming year due to a state law that some say can lead to discrimination against LGBT people.

The NCAA says the decision came “because of the cumulative actions taken by the state concerning civil rights protections.”

The Religious Right-backed law — known as HB2 — requires transgender people to use restrooms at schools and government buildings corresponding to the sex on their birth certificates. It also excludes gender identity and sexual orientation from local and statewide anti-discrimination protections.

**Group wants to make abortion capital murder**

The political committee Abolish Abortion Florida has launched a ballot initiative to amend the state’s constitution to punish abortion as capital murder. Under the proposed amendment, anyone who performs or procures an abortion would be charged with first degree, pre-meditated murder.

“Abortion” would include any abortifacient drug or device that can kill an embryo by preventing implantation, as well as the intentional destruction of unwanted IVF embryos. The amendment would define life as beginning at fertilization rather than “conception,” and declares that “abortion deprives an innocent human being of the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

According to AAFL, the idea is not only to collect enough signatures to get the measure onto the 2018 ballot, but also to encourage legislators to begin putting forward legislation to abolish abortion instead of merely regulating it.

**Istishon blog blocked for Bangladesh users**

People from Bangladesh have found Istishon website, a popular secular blogging platform, inaccessible.

Founder and editor of the blog Nur Nobi Dulal said that many users from different parts of the country had not been able to access the website. He urged the government to withdraw the “ban” immediately, saying such move would strengthen the writers.

Dulal, who left the country recently in the face of threats by Islamist extremists, in a Facebook post condemned the restriction imposed by the government, and mentioned that freedom of expression and right to information are the basic rights of the people. Instead, he demanded closure of the websites and Facebook pages spreading religious extremism.


**Nevada court suspends school choice program**

The Nevada Supreme Court has ruled that the state’s voucher-style Education Savings Accounts — seen as the broadest school choice program in the country — have an unconstitutional funding mechanism and the program should remain blocked.

Justices issued a 4-2 ruling striking down the program — which has been on hold since the winter and never disbursed funds to families as it intended — but upholding some of its key underpinnings.

“Taxpayer money isn’t to be used to support the private education of a handful of kids,” said Rory Reid, son of Sen. Harry Reid and president of the Rogers Foundation, which supported legal challenges against the program. “We’re proud to stand up for that proposition.”

**IRS changes status of Billy Graham’s ministry**



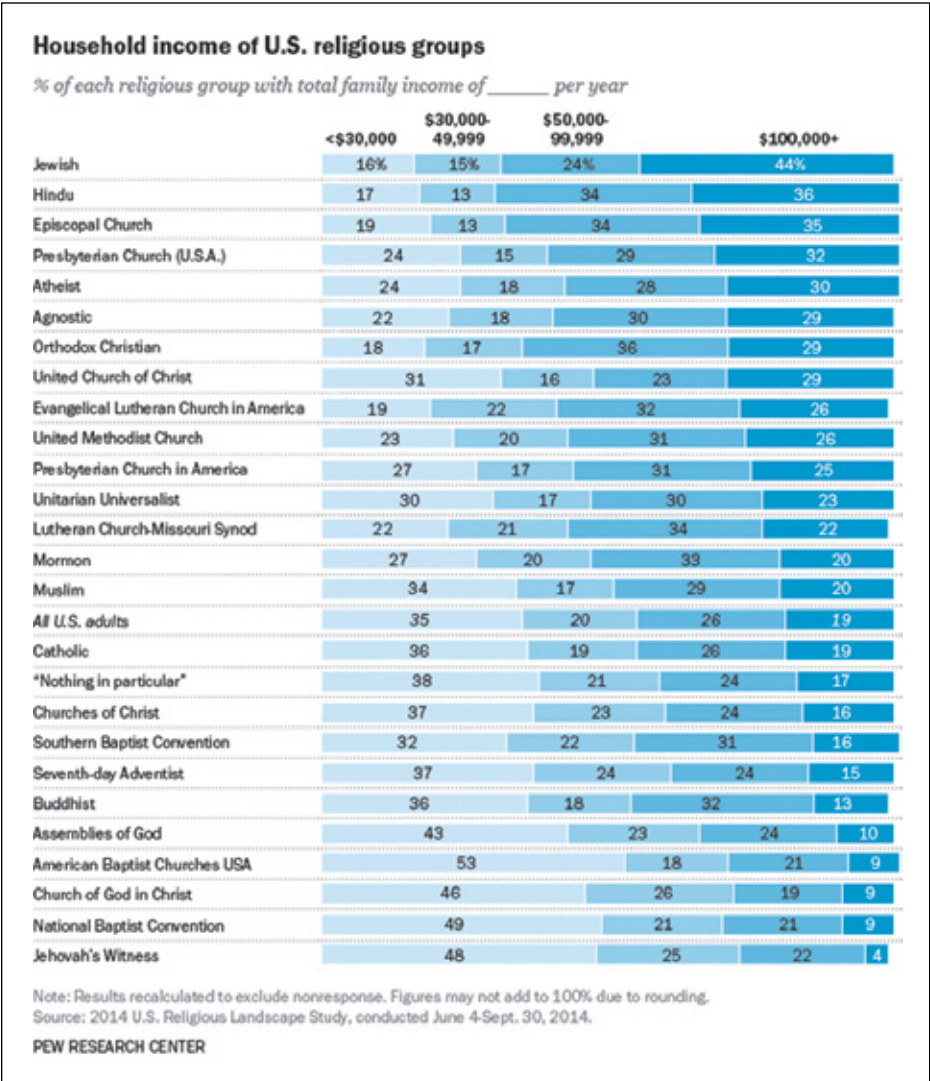
The Internal Revenue Service has reclassified one of the most famous Christian organizations, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

The IRS changed its tax status from a nonprofit to an “association of churches,” at the request of the Graham organization, The NonProfit Times reported Sept. 26. The change was made last November.

The change means the 66-year-old Christian organization no longer has to file what the IRS calls Form 990, a public statement of its financial information, including salaries for top officials.

The reason for the change, said Mark DeMoss, a Graham spokesperson, is primarily to avoid the intense work required to file a 990, which he described as “onerous.”





# Link between religion and wealth based on education

Atheists and agnostics are among the wealthiest groups in the United States, based on religious affiliation. According to the 2014 Religious Landscape Study by the Pew Research Center, 30% of atheists and 29% of agnostics have an annual household income of \$100,000 or more. That is only behind Jews, Hindus, Episcopalans and members of the Presbyterian Church (USA). The lowest earning group was Jehovah Witnesses, with just 4% of its members making more than \$100,000 as a household.

David Masci of Pew points out that “there is a strong and proven correlation between education and income, but it’s harder to know whether there also is a link between religion and wealth. What we can say is that members of some religious groups — not to mention atheists and agnostics — on average have a higher household income than others and those in the richest religious groups also tend, on average, to be better educated than

most Americans.” Nearly half of Hindu adults and almost one-third of Jewish adults hold postgraduate degrees. Other factors besides education — including age, race and ethnicity — also are correlated with both religion and income.

Self-identified atheists and agnostics are among the top earners, “which may call into question any link between high levels of religious belief and wealth,” writes David Masci of Pew. “Members of all these groups also are more likely to be highly educated than the general population.”

Among those denominations with the lowest household income are two historically black churches, the National Baptist Convention (9% live in households with incomes of at least \$100,000) and the Church of God in Christ (9%), according to Pew’s data. In those two groups (plus Jehovah’s Witnesses), almost half of all members have household incomes of less than \$30,000 per year.

## FFRF voices concern

# County plans for homeless center to be run by Catholic group

FFRF is concerned about a Catholic organization possibly being given charge of a public center for the homeless in Wisconsin’s capital.

Dane County is planning to contract with Catholic Charities Madison, a religious group, to provide a publicly paid and affiliated resource center for the homeless. The Catholic Charities Inc. Diocese of Madison has an explicitly religious mission, stating in its tax return that it “serves as a visible presence of the Catholic Church of the Diocese of Madison by providing services that effectively address the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of individuals and families.”

While it is laudable that Catholic Charities works to address community

needs, it has a distinctly Roman Catholic affiliation. The organization was recently described by the Wisconsin State Journal as being the “outreach arm of the church.”

Despite assurances from Catholic Charities that it “serve[s] and employ[s] persons regardless of sexual orientation, religious, ethnic, racial or social background,” FFRF questions how the organization can do so and remain true to church doctrine. It also

# Why are the ‘Nones’ growing so quickly?

Most people know that the group of religiously unaffiliated, known as “Nones,” has been growing significantly in the past decade.

But the question is why.

Surveys in the 1970s and ’80s found that fewer than 10% of U.S. adults said they had no religious affiliation. Now, 23% describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or “nothing in particular.”

The obvious assumption is that fewer people in the country are religious. But some argue that, instead, the increase in the “Nones,” is simply because more people are “coming out of the closet,” so to speak. It may be more socially acceptable now to claim that one is an atheist or agnostic or nonbeliever than it was in previous generations.

The Pew Research Center looked into the data to see if the numbers showed a “why.”

According to Gregory A. Smith and Alan Cooperman of Pew, “Americans who are not religiously active and who don’t hold strong religious beliefs are more likely now than similar people were in the past to say they have no religion.”

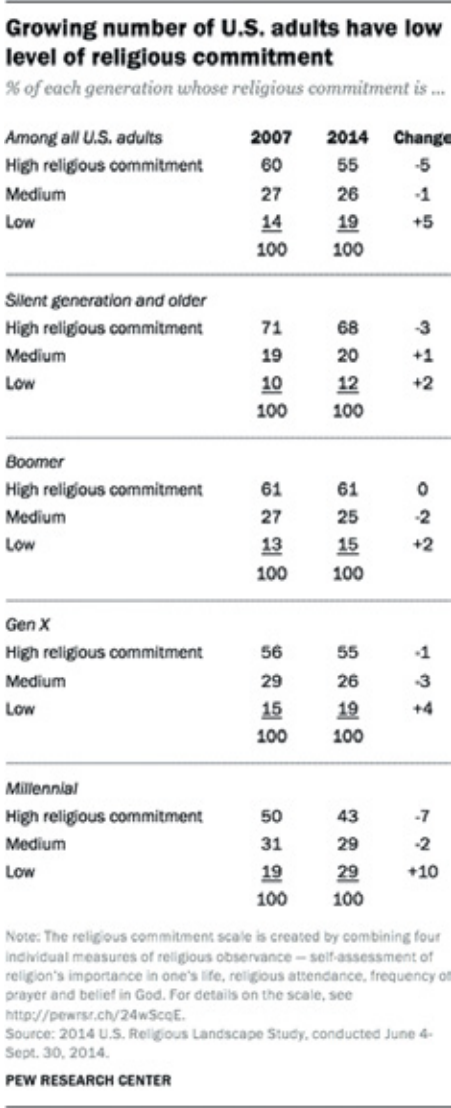
But they make the point that there is more to it than that. The share of Americans with low levels of religious commitment also has been growing. Another factor is generational change.

“If you think of America as a house of many different faiths, then instead of imagining the “Nones” as a roomful of middle-aged people who used to call themselves Presbyterians, Catholics or something else but don’t claim those labels anymore, imagine the unaffiliated as a few rooms rapidly filling with nonreligious people of various backgrounds, including young adults who have never had any religious affiliation in their adult lives,” Smith and Cooperman write.

According to the 2014 Religious Landscape Study by Pew, there is a distinct generational pattern. Young people who are not particularly religious seem to be much more comfortable identifying as “Nones” than are older people who display a similar level of religious observance.

Almost 80% of Millennials with low levels of religious commitment describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or “nothing in particular.”

Also, the share of the population



that exhibits low levels of religiosity is growing. In 2007, for instance, 14% of U.S. adults had a low level of religious commitment (based on self-reported rates of attendance at worship services, daily prayer, certainty of belief in God and self-described importance of religion in people’s lives). By 2014, the share of U.S. adults with low religiosity had grown to 19%.

“Millennials, who make up a growing share of the population as they reach adulthood and older Americans die off, are far less religiously observant than the older cohorts,” Smith and Cooperman write. “Whether Millennials will become more religious as they age remains to be seen, but there is nothing in our data to suggest that Millennials or members of Generation X have become any more religious in recent years. If anything, they have so far become less religious as they have aged.”



# FFRF seeks summary judgment over church grants

FFRF has asked a judge to declare a New Jersey county’s millions of dollars in grants for church repair a violation of the state constitution.

FFRF and member David Steketee recently submitted their final brief in support of their motion for summary judgment in a lawsuit filed on Dec. 1, 2015. The suit seeks to protect the rights of New Jersey citizens to not be compelled to support religions with which they disagree.

Steketee, a taxpayer in Morris County, and FFRF are contesting grants to churches by the county’s Historic Preservation Trust Fund. Since 2012, the board has awarded more than \$4.6 million to such entities, which is more than 40 percent of the money disbursed by the fund.

FFRF’s case relies on the religious aid prohibition in New Jersey’s Constitution, which states that “No person shall . . . be obliged to pay tithes, taxes, or



other rates for building or repairing any church or churches, place or places of worship, or for the maintenance of any minister or ministry, contrary to what he believes to be right or has deliberately and voluntarily engaged to perform.”

FFRF’s brief points out that the New Jersey Constitution prohibits the government from spending taxes to “repair any churches,” and cites cases where the New Jersey Supreme Court

and Appellate Court have enforced this provision, even under circumstances that are less clear. Morris County told the court that it didn’t spend tax dollars to “repair” churches, but only to “stabilize, rehabilitate, restore, and preserve” them. “Constitutional obligations cannot be escaped with synonyms,” FFRF answered. In addition, the county itself used the word “repair” to describe the challenged grants.

Morris County also argues that denying churches access to taxpayer funds would violate the churches’ rights, but FFRF explained that this misses the mark. “The county may not prohibit the churches’ free exercise of religion, but this does not mean Morris County must pay the churches’ repair bills,” FFRF asserts. The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld state constitutional provisions very similar to New Jersey’s, despite similar arguments against them.

FFRF has asked that the court grant

FFRF’s summary judgment motion, declare that the grants violate the New Jersey Constitution, prohibit Morris County from issuing similar grants in the future, and require the churches to repay the grants they improperly received. The court will hear oral arguments for the case on Oct. 13. Since Morris County has spent tax dollars on the exact thing the state constitution prohibits, FFRF is confident that it will prevail. With this victory, FFRF will ensure that Morris County taxpayers will no longer be forced to finance religious buildings.

The lawsuit is being handled by attorney Paul S. Grosswald. FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew L. Seidel and Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne are co-counsel. *FFRF v. Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders*, Case No. C-12089-15 is in the Chancery division of Somerset County in New Jersey state court. The judge assigned to the case is Margaret Goodzeit.

## FFRF state / church complaints

### California school board must stop invocations



FFRF is continuing its objection to the Orange County (California) Board of Education’s tradition of beginning each meeting with an invocation. It allows interested people to request to deliver the invocation and has set up guidelines.

It is beyond the scope of a public school board to schedule or conduct prayer as part of its meetings, FFRF asserts. FFRF recently won a victory (*FFRF et al v. Chino Valley School District Board of Education*) in California over this very violation, with a federal court declaring the practice unconstitutional.

“It is coercive, embarrassing and intimidating for nonreligious citizens to be making a show of their nonbelief (by not rising or praying) or else to display deference toward a religious sentiment in which they do not believe, but their school board members clearly do,” FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to the Orange County Board of Education.

### Religion-infused events at school must stop

FFRF is objecting to events suffused with religion that are due to be held at several Indiana public schools. Two groups are organizing these events.

Several Indiana public schools are hosting assemblies for “Break the Grey,” a group that addresses troubled-youth topics. The speaker at these events, Bill Ballenger, promotes Christian rock concerts organized by him, often on the same evening as the assemblies.

The other organization that is putting together events at many Indiana public schools is called RemedyLIVE, a Christian ministry that encourages students to “share their secret struggles

with caring adults.” Its website informs schools that students will be “given cards that invite them to chat with RemedyLIVE’s 24/7 crisis chat center,” but notably omits the fact that the ministry refers to its online staff as “soul medics” who have to be “committed believers to the teachings of Jesus Christ.”

“It is well settled that public schools may not advance or promote religion,” FFRF Elaine and Eric Stone Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne has written to several Indiana schools, citing a number of cases.

### FFRF objects to public school baptisms

FFRF is raising objections to the recent baptism of several football players at a Georgia public high school.

A number of football players were reportedly baptized on Sept. 14 after school on the property of Heritage High School in Ringgold, Ga. A video posted on social media shows the students undergoing the religious ceremony and the head football coach, E.K. Slaughter, leading the event. Indications are that the event was organized as a memorial to a deceased recent Heritage High School graduate.

In the video, a large group of students and several adults are standing around a large utility tub on school property. Coach Slaughter opens the event with a speech and then yields the floor to another adult, who gives what is basically a baptism sermon. A third adult then says, “Coach has given me the honor to baptize you guys,” and then goes on to baptize the students one by one, “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

“Public schools may not advance or promote religion,” FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell writes to Catoosa County Public Schools Legal Counsel Renzo Wiggins. “It is also illegal for coaches to organize or participate in religious activities with students, including baptisms.”

### Department needs to change oath, code

FFRF is asking for a Wisconsin police department’s overtly religious oath and code of ethics to be changed.

The West Allis Police Department’s Code of Ethics has included the fol-

lowing line since at least 2013: “I will constantly strive to achieve these objectives and ideals, dedicating myself before God to my chosen profession . . . LAW ENFORCEMENT.”

This code of ethics is also printed in the department’s annual report. The code’s language mirrors the State of Wisconsin’s Administrative Code, which prescribes a law enforcement code of ethics that “shall be administered as an oath to all trainees during the preparatory course,” except that the Wisconsin Administrative Code does not include the words “before God.”

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

### Chief should stop proselytizing rants



FFRF is calling out a Connecticut police chief’s rant against nonbelievers.

On Sept. 24, Bridgeport Police Chief Armando Perez addressed a crowd of about 50 people at a “police solidarity march.”

“We need God in our lives,” the media reported him saying. “The problems that we’re having is because people have abandoned church, people have abandoned God, and that cannot happen . . . Let’s bring God back in our lives, back in our church — bring our kids — in our city, in our schools — absolutely.” And he then reportedly “advocated a lot more praying.”

FFRF informs Perez that his diatribe is problematic on several levels.

“It is a fundamental principle of Establishment Clause jurisprudence that the government cannot in any way promote, advance, or otherwise endorse religion,” FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel writes to Perez.

### County clerk needs to get rid of poster

FFRF is asking a Kentucky county clerk to get rid of a Ten Commandments poster prominently displayed in his office.

A large, framed version of the Ten Commandments is conspicuously on view at the Bath County clerk’s office. It can be seen behind the service counter and is directly underneath a framed picture of “In God We Trust.”

The Ten Commandments poster breaches the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, FFRF points out.

“In *McCreary County v. ACLU*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a modern display of the Ten Commandments in two Kentucky courthouses violated the U.S. Constitution,” FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott writes to Bath County Clerk Roger Coyle.

### Student: Non-Catholics discriminated against

A Catholic Church-operated housing facility in Wisconsin’s capital is being charged with discrimination against non-Catholics.

A student has filed a complaint with the Equal Opportunities Commission in Madison, Wis., over discriminatory rental practices at a downtown complex forcing renters who are not practicing Catholics to pay \$1,200 more a year. The Lumen House building, a former Catholic school, is owned by St. Raphael’s, a Roman Catholic congregation. It opened in 2014.

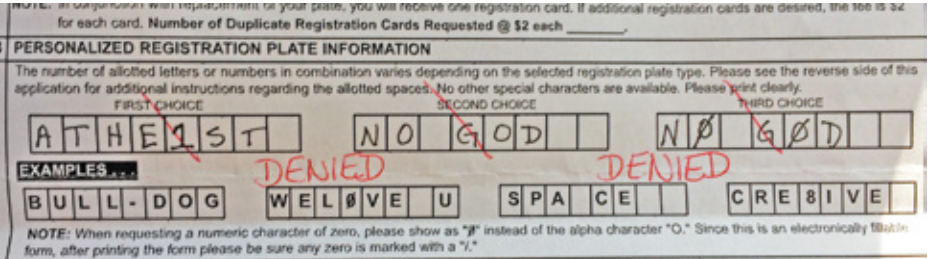
In her statement filed on Oct. 12 alleging unlawful discrimination, student Nicole Niebler noted that both St. Raphael’s and Forward Management Inc. “discriminate against residents, and housing applicants, on the basis of religion and nonreligion.” Niebler is president of the campus group AHA (Atheists, Humanists & Agnostics).

Renters who participate in qualifying Roman Catholic religious programming and are approved by Father Eric Nielsen of St. Paul University Catholic Center pay \$100 less a month in rent.

FFRF has helped investigate the problem and file the complaint on the student’s behalf.



FFRF state/church victories





## FFRF state/church victories

### Indiana county does the correct thing



An Indiana county has taken a wisely secular action in response to FFRF's complaint.

After opening its courthouse lawn to an FFRF display and a variety of religious panoramas last winter, Franklin County has passed a new ordinance prohibiting all private exhibits on its courthouse lawn. Commissioners cited "interference with the courthouse operations" and the "unexpected undue burden" on county resources as the reasons for closing the forum.

FFRF suspects that the actual motive of the Franklin County commissioners may have been a bit more complicated.

"I assume that the real reason they're closing the forum is because the lawn became such a circus once it became widely known that anyone could place a display there," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Last winter, they tolerated about a dozen Christian exhibits. FFRF's Winter Solstice banner, which was slashed to ribbons and replaced, was actually one of the most season-appropriate displays on the lawn."

"We're pleased to learn that after six years of letter writing and two lawsuits, Franklin County has finally done what we first requested in 2010," notes FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover. "Limiting use of the courthouse lawn to government displays should ensure that the lawn remains an open and welcoming space for all community members to enjoy—regardless of their religious or nonreligious beliefs."

### Assembly prayer nixed in school district

FFRF has made sure that public school employees in an Indiana school district will not continue to impose prayer during school gatherings.

Back in April, a school guard at the Rise Up Academy (the alternative high school in South Bend, Ind.) delivered a prayer at a school-wide assembly. The prayer included the following: "We thank you for being the alpha and omega, the beginning and end. I want you all to say, 'Thank God! Thank God! Amen!'" The reference to alpha and omega is taken from the New Testament's description of Jesus in several verses and shows the prayer to be specifically Christian.

"The Supreme Court has continually struck down formal school-led prayer in public schools," FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to South Bend Community Schools Superintendent Carole Schmidt.

The South Bend school district took FFRF's complaint seriously and launched an investigation.

"The South Bend Community School Corporation has a number of policies in place prohibiting religion in the classroom and in the curriculum," the district's counsel said in a recent phone message. "The issue in

question was a spontaneous response by an employee, not part of our curriculum. It was not planned, and we were as surprised by it as anyone else. The issue has been addressed with that employee."

### FFRF shuts off Christian music station

An Arkansas elementary school bus driver has been told to stop playing religious tunes while transporting students.

A worried parent of a student in the Siloam Springs School District informed FFRF that the bus driver was playing music from a local Christian station for students taking the bus to and from school. FFRF objected to the promotion of religious beliefs through music or radio programming.

"Students on the bus are a captive audience and cannot avoid listening to broadcasts that the driver selects," wrote Staff Attorney Patrick Elliot in a letter to Superintendent Ken Ramey. "Given the content of the programming and its proselytizing nature, young and impressionable students can not be forced to listen to such programs."

Ramey responded on Oct. 3 to inform FFRF that strict action had been taken to ensure the bus driver would not play a Christian radio station while transporting students in the future.

### California coach-led prayer event stopped

Thanks to FFRF, a California public high school football coach will no longer be hosting "prayer breakfasts" for players.

FFRF received a complaint from a parent of a San Pasqual High School football player that the coach was hosting a "Friday Morning Prayer Breakfast" each week for the athletes at his home. Attendance at these breakfasts was incentivized with free food and speeches from former NFL players.

In a letter sent on Sept. 21, FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler informed Superintendent Steve Boyle that public school athletic coaches who lead their teams in prayer send a message of school endorsement of certain religious practices.

"It is no defense that students voluntarily participate in the prayer breakfast. The potential for subtle coercion is extremely high in the context of high school sports," wrote Ziegler. "Players feel immense pressure to conform to what coaches expect of them so as not to affect their playing time or otherwise lose favor with the coaches."

Boyle responded on Oct. 3 that, after an investigation on the coach, the school district has directed that no coach or staff member should host religious events.

### Religious display removed from daycare

A city-run day care in Edinburgh, Ind., has taken down a display that read "PRAY BELIEVE FAITH."

FFRF received a complaint on Sept. 13 from a parent who was concerned about the display in the main room of an afterschool day care program facilitated by the town's Parks and Recreation Department. The religious message was spelled out with tall wooden block letters and sat on top of kitchen

cabinets in the day care.

In a letter sent Sept. 16 to Town Manager Wade Watson, FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote that the display was unconstitutionally promoting religious beliefs and practices on behalf of the town and asked that it be taken down. A letter response on Oct. 3 from the town's attorney informed FFRF that the signage had been removed.

### Religious promotion ends for school event

The Midway Independent School District in Texas has taken steps to ensure that it will stop promotion of a specific religious worldview in its "Shattered Dreams" event to combat drinking and driving.

FFRF received a complaint from a student over the event during which a local pastor addressed the students asking them to bow their heads in prayer. Student "obituaries" were read by the pastor and scripture was cited.

Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to the Midway Independent School District Superintendent Christine Badillo asking that future Shattered Dreams events be free of prayer, religious remarks, and references to scripture.

Badillo responded on Sept. 28 assuring FFRF that future productions of the event would not include references to scripture or contain religious overtones.

### California school removes church banner



Thanks to FFRF, a church banner on an elementary school fence in Long Beach, Calif., has been removed during school days.

A concerned community member informed FFRF that the MacArthur Elementary School was displaying a church banner on its fences for a church that meets at the school on Sundays. The banner was being left up during the school day when children were present.

"When a school displays a banner on its property advertising a worship service, it has unconstitutionally entangled itself with a religious message, here a Christian message. This alienates those non-Christian students, teachers, and members of the public whose religious beliefs are inconsistent with the religious messages being promoted by the school," Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to Long Beach Unified School District Superintendent Chris Steinhäuser.

Steinhäuser responded on Sept. 22 writing that the school had removed the sign and that the school's principle informed the church that posting its signage is only allowed during the church's use of the school facilities on Sundays.

### No more coach-led prayers for Texas teams

FFRF ensured that two Texas football teams will not have future coach-led prayers.

FFRF was informed that at a football game played on Sept. 16 between New Boston High School and Pewitt High School, coaches had gathered players from both teams and led them in a group prayer. Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to the school districts on Sept. 23 regarding the constitutional violation, asking representatives of the schools to not organize, lead or participate in prayer with students.

FFRF received responses from the school districts on Oct. 3 and Oct. 6 and they agreed to ensure prayer is not promoted in the future.

### Jersey school district adjusts school policy



A New Jersey public school district in the Montgomery Township has revised its policy to remove what appeared to be the promotion of prayer in schools after FFRF stepped in.

Proposed revisions to the Montgomery Township School District's policy on religion in public schools would have allowed for prayer during classroom time and at graduations and other school events.

In a letter sent on Oct. 14, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel informed the Montgomery Board of Education that the policy was written to unconstitutionally endorse religious practices.

The board responded on Oct. 17 to inform FFRF that the policy wording was adjusted to acknowledge the student's constitutional rights. The school board adopted a majority of FFRF's suggested policy on religious expression in public schools.

### FFRF stops school's promotion of religion

Thanks to FFRF, Arizona's Dysart Unified School District will not plan, promote or participate in "See You at the Pole," a Christian prayer event put on by a religious club. The school district will uphold their constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion.

An email sent from a Valley Vista High School employee asked all school district teachers and staff to join in for "See You at the Pole" on Sept. 28. The email explained that the event was "a day committed to global unity in Christ and prayer for your generation."

In a letter to DUSD Superintendent Gail Pletnick, FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler informed the school district that a public school employee must not lead, direct or encourage students to engage in prayer.

Ziegler informed Pletnick that it is also unconstitutional for public school employees to participate in the religious activities of their students.

FFRF received a response on Sept. 28 from the executive director for human resources at Dysart Unified School District, Patti Buck, who wrote that the school staff had been informed that staff members must not participate in the school religious event.



FFRF AWARDS \$9,050

# Grad student essay contest winners named

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the 2016 Brian Bolton Graduate/Older Student Essay Contest winners.

The list of awardees has seven top places and four honorable mentions. Students were asked to write 600 to 800 words on the topic of “Why God and politics/government are a dangerous mix.” FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994 and graduate students since 2010.

The winners of the competition are listed below and include the award amount, age and college or university they are attending. Students who are a member of a secular student group received \$100 bonuses.

**FIRST PLACE**  
Stephanie Wise, 26, Oregon State University (\$3,000)

## FIRST PLACE Identity politics and religious tests for candidates

FFRF awarded Stephanie \$3,000.

BY STEPHANIE WISE

It is tempting to point an accusatory finger solely at religious groups for their encroachment on the constitutional protection of the Establishment Clause. No doubt we see examples of religious interference in government that threaten First and Fourteenth Amendment rights, among them same-sex marriage bans, the Mississippi religious-objection law and the Texas abortion law. But the wall of separation endures attacks from citizens, media and politicians on both the left and right, not uniformly from the religious, nor always intentional, indicating a larger cultural problem at root.

The culprit may be the national culture of identity politics, which unintentionally encourages cultural conflict, thereby arousing threats to the integrity of the separation of church and state.

Identity politics rightly empowers communities with shared traits (such as ethnicity, class, sexuality or religion), which are able collectively to correct gaps in their legal protection. Yet, occasionally, we reap unpleasant side effects, such as the ubiquitous experience of animosity toward out-group individuals (which includes racism) or compulsory conformity.

This cultural rigidity sparks public culture wars, leading to expectations among the electorate that politicians will take sides. Espousing a political theory or specific policies is not enough; politicians must link themselves with an identity acceptable to their electorate or suffer rejection. Thus we find candidates’ religions on full display as if a qualification for office, in oblivious contradiction to the



**SECOND PLACE**  
Charlotte Ljustina, 23, Columbia University (\$2,000)

**THIRD PLACE**  
Ashley Peralta, 22, University of Colorado (\$1,000)

**FOURTH PLACE**  
Landon Poe, 22, University of Cambridge Wolfson College (\$750)



**Stephanie Wise**

constitutional prohibition of religious tests for federal office-holders.

We see the most obvious evidence of religious intrusion in the very public realm of presidential elections. In the March Democratic debate, an audience member directed a question to Hillary Clinton: “To whom and for what do you pray?” Clinton eventually rattled off a series of civic-religious platitudes the audience would accept. Her prayer life, of course, bears no relevance to her qualifications for the presidential office.

But demanding knowledge of a candidate’s precise religious experience is clearly a demand for cultural benchmarks to categorize the candidate. Moreover, Clinton’s implicit recognition of the topic’s validity is most disturbing. When candidates allow such categorizing questions without protest, they give tacit approval to continued religious interference in public life and diminish the likelihood that they can effectively represent the interest of unreligious citizens.

Some candidates do protest, however obliquely. But even in these cases, their protest is often rebuffed. Earlier in the March debate, the same citizen posed a different question to Sen. Bernie Sanders: “Do you believe that God is relevant?” Sanders delivered a universalist response, stepping outside his religious identity to recognize universal human problems, which his religion also recognizes. But this response prompted the moderator, Anderson Cooper, to repeat a concern among Jewish leaders that Sanders purposely stifled public expression of his Judaism. The media thus corralled Sanders back into the frame of identity, forcing

See First Place Essay on the next page

**FIFTH PLACE**  
Garrett Pekarek, 27, Missouri Southern State University (\$500)

**SIXTH PLACE (TIE)**  
Regina Riem, 25, Herkimer County Community College (\$400)

Arielle Neal, 28, Tennessee State University (\$400)

**HONORABLE MENTIONS (\$200 EACH)**  
Kurt A. Escobar, 29, University

## SECOND PLACE Where God does not belong

FFRF awarded Charlotte \$2,000.

BY CHARLOTTE LJUSTINA

What do the political stage and a schoolyard have in common? Other than bullying and people stealing your lunch money, both of these have a long-standing friction with one subject in particular: religion.

And, if ever there was a time when, as Roger Williams wrote, “the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world” shouldn’t merge, it is during election season — a time where emphasis is intended upon issues and policy platforms rather than beliefs and theories. Thomas Jefferson coined the phrase “separation of church and state” as a protective measure of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

However, when we widen the aperture of historical religious-political relations, we see that many forefathers never sought to expel the church from society. In fact, religion was fully integrated in the life of the nation. But today, American citizens recognize religion as a private matter to be kept out of the political sphere. Media coverage has reflected this by condemning the combination of religion and politics. Cultural development and generational change, pop culture and echoes of historical disaster make it clear that politics and religion should remain unmarried.

Perhaps the best place to begin in the analysis of this non-marriage is at the core of either partner. Religion is the belief in a God or gods; politics is the work of the people who represent the government. By definition, the two worlds are polarized. The former, which founds itself in faith and belief, is like oil, while the latter, founded in logic and reason, is vinegar.

Why then did George Washington and Alexander Hamilton promote religion as a pillar of civil society without which there would be anarchy?

of New Mexico

Ryan Collins, 23, University of North Texas

Phillip Gauronskas, 27, Eastern Virginia Medical School

Jason Schloss, 25, Long Island University-Post

The graduate student college contest is endowed by Brian Bolton, a Lifetime Member who is a retired psychologist, humanist minister and professor emeritus at the University of Arkansas. FFRF also thanks Dean and Dorea Schramm of Florida for providing the \$100 bonus to students who are members of a secular student club or the Secular Student Alliance. The total of \$9,050 reflects bonuses.

FFRF congratulates the 11 graduate/older college students who won this year’s essay competition and wishes them all the best in their future endeavors.



**Charlotte Ljustina**

According to them, religion and politics should not only mix, but they should practically be symbiotic.

Well, both the cultural and generational landscapes have developed, particularly with regard to religion. As our forefathers weaved society into a thick tapestry, they issued general fasting times for humility and prayer. This is unsurprising, though, for religious liberty was heavily founded in Anglican principles. In short, our forefathers worshiped the same God. The general fasting was later questioned, since “religion and conscience” are entities with which “the government has nothing to do,” wrote the General Aurora Advertiser in 1798. The Advertiser also acknowledged a “connection between state and church affairs as dangerous to religious and political freedom.”

Today there are more than 4,200 religions. And, with an increasingly liberal population and radical shifts in previously standardized concepts, such as gender and sexuality, religion has developed several different meanings.

This generational change has also led to pop culture and media development. Notably, this medium reaches masses in quick, visual and (often) entertaining ways, which make audiences more susceptible to reception. For example, in the network TV drama, “Scandal,” the prominent political figure Sally Langston battles with her

See Second Place Essay on the next page



THIRD PLACE

# When religion spreads hate

FFRF awarded Ashley \$1,000.

BY ASHLEY PERALTA

When I was 12, I stopped saying the same Pledge of Allegiance that the rest of my class was chanting. If we truly were “one nation under God,” why was it that so many people were spreading hate about Muslims? Why was it that people sang Christmas songs, but I never heard about Chanukah? I did not understand why so many supposedly loving gods allowed their followers to be hateful. So I stopped believing that one fully existed when I was 12.

When I was 14, I realized that friends stopped talking to me when I told them I did not go to church, nor did I want to. President Obama became president and people questioned what kind of Christian he could be, and I learned in my government class that every president of the United States had been Christian, as that belief would stay true to the American way.

When religion and politics blend, we have instances such as Kim Davis using her religious freedom to deny the rights



Ashley Peralta

of others. Planned Parenthood can stop being funded in Texas, resulting in low-income women with little to no resources being forced to travel across the state to receive services.

When this happens, people use their beliefs to interpret laws and validate their actions without consideration for other groups. Because I grew up around mostly Christians, I was socialized into thinking that lying and not believing in Jesus would send me to hell. The media would simply validate the opinions of those constantly around me, with faint protest from the few who were brave enough to oppose the majority.

When I came to college, I saw how hateful educated members of society were to their fellow human beings. My belief that my college experience would

be different from high school changed quickly when Christian religious fanatics would spit and shout at Muslim girls walking by, or yell at same-sex couples exchanging sweet words to one another.

Things deteriorated more rapidly once Donald Trump and Sen. Ted Cruz became serious contenders for the Republican nomination for president. Evangelical extremists and xenophobic bigots were suddenly being publicized and followed to the point that gun lobbyists were advocating for their weapons to be at the conventions, and Mexicans were told that there would be a mass deportation. An extremist Christian targeted Planned Parenthood, and not a month later we had another shooting in San Bernardino by ISIS supporters.

All of these attacks were in the name of a higher power, or the individual’s interpretation of what their God sees as “just.” Saying I was voting for a Democrat was met with scorn; meanwhile, hate perpetuated as politicians encouraged others to fall back on faith in times of crisis.

Facebook filled with “Prayers for Paris” or “Prayers for Orlando” as religion took a dark twist — as it has for centuries — and people used God as justification for inflicting violence. While all of this is happening in our world, as our fellow humans are being bombed, burned, shot or tortured in the name of Allah, Jesus or whichever higher being, the prayers

for the afflicted did nothing to stop the continued violence. The media coverage of our politicians’ ignorant remarks about race, women’s rights and sexual orientation did not stop the fanatics from inflicting more harm; it merely encouraged the hate to grow faster.

God mixed into politics puts people like me at risk just being out in the world because I do not belong to any majority group.

America will not be “great again” when those in power feel they can speak for the underrepresented groups as they have been for centuries. Christians cannot speak on my behalf, men cannot speak on my behalf, whites cannot speak on my behalf, and if religion continues to bleed into our political justice system, more lives will be at risk for simply being different.

The United States is supposed to encourage diversity, but in today’s society, diversity is unsafe and we as a people will grow more disconnected and become more intolerant unless church and state officially disconnect.

*Ashley Peralta, 22, attends the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Colorado in Denver. She is working toward a master’s degree in early childhood special education. She is involved in social justice issues and works with underrepresented minorities, including those with intellectual, physical and developmental disabilities.*

## First place essay

*Continued from the previous page*

him to publicly display his religion.

These informal religious tests have no de jure power, but this religious culture yields a high percentage of citizens — 25% — who identify as less inclined to vote for candidates who profess a certain faith. The de facto religious test for political candidates harms the religious and nonreligious alike by encouraging, even compelling, habitual integration of religious identity in political contests.

This habit can inspire religious attacks on constitutional protections, but we ought to fear more its effects on foreign policy. In the January Republican debate, Ohio Gov. John Kasich advocated a Sunni-centric Middle Eastern foreign policy, couched in explicitly anti-Shia language. He first

warned of a “Shia crescent” falling over the Middle East before opining that allies of the United States should “knock off the funding and teaching of radical clerics,” referring to an executed Saudi Shiite.

This bizarre act of pledging support to a particular Muslim sect foolishly invests the country in the identity politics of remote regions. The convoluted interplay of theocracies, religious sects and terrorist organizations in the Middle East is difficult enough to juggle without the added challenge of politicians doling out religious favoritism. In particular, this statement threatens already-tenuous relations with Iran and other non-Sunni nations. And it stems once again from the habit of identity politics, which tells politicians that it is not only permissible, but desirable, that they should cast about their opinions on religion.

More Americans engage in politics during an election year, providing candidates the unique

opportunity — and difficult responsibility — of setting the agenda for many citizens at once. Candidates adhering to the Constitution cannot allow identity politics to erode our national culture any further. Each candidate who chooses sides in some foreign religious conflict, or chooses to answer questions about their personal religion, detracts from the national vision of preventing established religion. Religion sways dangerously over politics already, and shifting political culture from under its shadow is the best — perhaps the only — solution.

*Stephanie Wise, 26, grew up in Naselle, Wash., and graduated from Baylor University with a degree in political science. She now attends Oregon State University (where she also works as graduate coordinator for the Department of Mathematics), while applying to graduate programs in political science. She enjoys running, hiking and reading political philosophy.*

## Second place essay

*Continued from the previous page*

Christianity — especially during her presidential campaign. Leveraging her Christianity, she solicits support on the basis of her religion. A crisis ensues when she commits a murder. The drama highlights the struggle of Langston’s sin throughout the show as a Christian woman at odds with her faith and, therefore, at odds with herself. Through this show, the internal process of spirituality is exposed to show chaos and, often, exactly what Hamilton was trying to avoid: anarchy.

For those less persuaded by television and more by history, there are abundant events dictating danger between politics and religion. One may think of the “ethnoreligious purification” of the Turkish Empire in the early 20th century or Soviet efforts to exterminate avowed religious groups listed in the U.N.Convention during the same epoch.

And while genocide occurred transcontinentally, perhaps the first to be remembered is the Holocaust — a politically charged eradication of an entire people based on several aspects, including religion. This extreme case demonstrates the scenario in which a politician’s religion

is not only to be celebrated, but any other religion is to be eliminated.

When religion creeps into politics, it may become less about God or an entity and more about the character of an observer. This creates a scale of humanity: Those worthy as deemed by religious devotion and those not. The polarization of people on any ground is dangerous. This was prevalent in the fight for gay marriage. It is still apparent in the fight for abortion and women’s rights.

The sociopolitical issues that already divide due to morality or environment are pulled further apart because of religion. If there is any hope of acceptance, peace and unity within our democracy, then a divisive piece such as religion must be removed from the game entirely.

*Charlotte Ljustina, 22, was born and raised in Florida. She attended Mount Holyoke College, where she graduated with degrees in mathematics and English. She then attended Boston College Law School in 2015, but left after one semester. She is now in the master’s program in negotiation and conflict resolution at Columbia University. Her interests include gymnastics, acroyoga, photography, theater and cuisine.*





FOURTH PLACE

Religion and politics — a toxic cocktail

FFRF awarded Landon \$750.

BY LANDON POE

If there’s ever a sure-fire way to get support for a political directive, it is to frame it in religious language.

When President Reagan’s critics attacked his Cold War policies as hawkish and provocative, he cast his message as peace through strength and his dramatically increased military budget as a moral battle against an “evil empire.” When President George W. Bush framed his past drinking problems under a theme of redemption and strength, he gained fervent support from the Religious Right.

Religious pandering, church politicking and political religious litmus tests are all examples of the dangerous cocktail of religion and government. Religion masks the bitter aftertaste of policing social norms and creates societal division. At some point, this manipulation of promoting particular religious beliefs begins to violate our freedom from religion. While the 14th Amendment actually brings freedom from religion to the states, the same amorphous and highly debated Establishment Clause oftentimes ensures just the opposite.

Arguably, the Framers of the Constitution did not interpret the Establishment Clause as an absolute separation of church and state. They originally wanted to prevent Congress



Landon Poe

from establishing an official state religion while foreseeing some grey areas. However, following the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, the Jeffersonian “wall of separation” has become rather porous. *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* (2014) was the first time that the court recognized the religious beliefs of a corporation as legitimate grounds for exemption from the law.

In a blasphemous attempt at justifying sexism through religion, Hobby Lobby argued that providing contraception to its employees would lead to “the maximization of sexual activity” and cause men to only want women for “satisfaction of their own desires.” In the aftermath of this case, 15 states have already filed briefs arguing that businesses would be able to deny coverage for transfusions, stem cell treatments and psychiatric care. This case enabled organizations to use religion to justify their own absurdity.

Even as the Constitution expressly tries to prevent the establishment of a national religion, there is an unequivocal bias toward Christianity. It is no wonder that the presidential race has become so intensely laced with religious demagoguery. Donald Trump assuages his Christian followers by saying he would keep a database of

all Muslims in the country, presumably to police their activities. Hillary Clinton waxes lyrical about prayer and campaigns in churches that endorse her in services. The intrusion of religion into politics is dangerous because religion camouflages the real intent of elected officials and diverts attention away from issues that need it.

Despite religious people holding such power over political rhetoric, they feel that they have lost the moral war at home, and have taken it abroad. The Bush administration spent more than \$1.4 billion on HIV prevention, and to please domestic conservatives, a third of that money went toward programs teaching faithfulness and abstinence before marriage. Stanford researcher Nathan Lo found that after nearly \$1.7 billion was spent to launch a public health campaign focused on abstinence in Uganda, rates of HIV infection soared and violent homophobia ensued. These false, ideologically-driven programs put sexually illiterate young people’s lives and health in literal danger.

We see the same bifurcation of ideology and pragmatism right here at home when religion prevents a woman from getting an abortion or when it torments the mental health of an LGBT teenager. In his presidential campaign, Sen. Ted Cruz exhorted that, “Companies and small businesses should absolutely not only have the right to turn away gay customers, they should exercise that right. Universal condemnation may

convince these people to choose to stop being gay.” Religiously justified absurdity and hate is not unique to Cruz nor does it take a logical leap to understand that religion is at odds with reality. The mix of government and religion is dangerous because it puts the lives of innocent people on the line, regardless of truth.

On the bright side, it appears that religion in government will wane as we move to the future. This is because the burgeoning millennial generation is weary of the tirade of orthodoxy that excludes secular voters. Denying facts about abortion, homosexuality and climate change under the mask of religion is becoming less credible as young people search for pragmatism in political rhetoric. It is a damning castigation of the growing distance of the parties from their electorate when four out of 10 young Americans no longer identify with political parties. Pragmatism requires compromise, and there is little room for ideologues in this conversation.

In 2016, religion remains a robust undertone beneath political rhetoric in the upcoming election. In the decades to come, I believe “we the people” will change that.

*Landon Poe, 22, is a grad student at University of Cambridge Wolfson College, where he is studying planning, growth and regeneration. As an undergrad, he attended The Citadel in South Carolina, getting degrees in political science and business administration. He aspires to a career in public policy.*

FIFTH PLACE

The divided state of America

FFRF has awarded Garrett \$500.

BY GARRETT PEKAREK

America has always embodied a message of freedom. Of tremendous importance in our country’s past and present are our freedoms of — and from — religion. Throughout the years, America has espoused a message of unity, and yet the politics of today are filled with divisive tactics and fear-mongering.

One can scarcely turn on the news without seeing a policymaker urging us all to worry more about this group or that. The idea of “us vs. them” is not a new one, and yet it is an all-too-common view in this election season. In some cases, the “us” refers to America as a whole, and the “them” refers to our faraway enemies. In all too many instances, however, the “us” is the Christian majority that dominates our political process, and the “them” can be any one of several other groups. On some occasions, Muslims are the target of vitriol. On others, perhaps it is Planned Parenthood doctors. Many times, it is those of us without faith who find ourselves suffering



Garrett Pekarek

the scorn of our elected officials.

Earlier in the year, Sen. Ted Cruz, a seemingly strong candidate to be the Republican nominee for president, said something that was worrisome: Cruz suggested that anyone who did not begin the day with a prayer was unfit to run the country. While this comment found a great deal of support from many on the right, it painted a stark picture for nonbelievers.

Atheists, agnostics and others of no faith are undoubtedly a minority in the United States. In many parts of the country, an elected official would be committing political suicide by admitting that he or she did not believe in a higher power. However, Cruz’s statement and its largely positive reception illustrate how strongly many Americans oppose those of us with no faith. A great many Americans would completely discount a presidential candidate, other qualities notwithstanding,

simply for his or her lack of beliefs.

Cruz did not manage to secure the Republican nomination. Instead, Donald Trump will be representing the party in the upcoming general election. Trump says some terrible and reprehensible things, but one cannot ignore the fire that he is lighting in the Republican camp. Even young voters, tired of dishonest career politicians, are coming out in droves to support the mogul.

The alarming issue is the fervor that Trump and other ultraconservative politicians are stirring up in the name of God. Many Christian political figures make wild accusations regarding those of other faiths and those with no faith. Every December, we hear the laments of the “war on Christmas,” and it is not uncommon to hear a member of Congress make mention of the liberal agenda or radical atheists. While much of this is likely no more than political rhetoric, it only serves to deepen the divide between devout followers of these extremely conservative politicians and, frankly, almost anyone else.

Politicians make a living crafting speeches and platforms for the sole purpose of winning over the populace. Our elected officials have an opinion on presumably any topic that one could imagine. However, when it comes to God, our governmental officials should have nothing to say. The First Amendment of the Constitution prohibits the government from establishing a religion or preventing the free exercise of religion.

The constant barrage of religious messages from those in the political

sphere seems to suggest that America is a country of and for Christians; in fact, many politicians go so far as to say that America is a Christian nation. I have no issue whatsoever with a senator going to church every Sunday and beginning every day with a prayer, but all aspects of religious beliefs should cease when it comes time to voting on legislation or addressing the public. The “us vs. them” mentality is a dangerous one, as it implies that some of us are on a different team from the others.

Many people would fight and die in the name of their God, and when politicians allude to some imagined enemy in those of other faiths or those without, it creates an unsafe atmosphere of hatred and distrust. Couple that with the frenzy that Trump and the media are creating among some members of the population and real violence could ensue.

Bringing God into politics creates division. We, as citizens of the United States, need to remain united. There is no “us vs. them,” there is only “us.” We are one people, and we deserve laws that serve us all, not only those of us with a particular religious affiliation. As a secular voter, I deserve to feel just as safe and just as included in the political process as anyone of the Christian faith, as do those of any other faith.

*Garrett Pekarek, 27, is from Joplin, Mo., and attends Missouri Southern State University. He is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in sociology. He is a member of the Secular Student Alliance and intends to get a doctorate in either anthropology or sociology.*



SIXTH PLACE TIE

# Mixing ice cream and manure

FFRF awarded Regina \$400.

BY REGINA RIEM

In order for a true democracy to thrive, it is imperative for the people living in that society to be able to freely and confidently debate and express their opinions. Laws criminalizing someone for their beliefs are not only unjust, but also detrimental to the cornerstone of democracy. As history proves time and time again, no good comes out of mixing religion and politics, a combination which often leads to tension and conflicts when vastly different doctrines clash.

The most obvious example of conflicting theological ideologies is the seemingly ongoing war pitting Christians against Islam. Benjamin Kwashi, a Nigerian Anglican archbishop from Jos, said of his country’s 2015 general election, “When religions like Christianity and Islam have a huge following of hungry, not very educated people on both sides, then politicians will explore the areas of religion to get them on their sides. That’s a very dangerous and bad thing to do. It’s not fair, and it’s not right.”

Since 2001, Nigeria has been a hotbed for deadly disputes between the predominantly Christian “indigenes” and Muslim “settlers.”



Regina Riem

In 2011, 800 people perished during skirmishes throughout northern Nigeria after Muhammadu Buhari lost the general election.

Because the average Nigerian is devoutly religious, with towns like Jos serving as a microcosm of the evident divide affecting the nation, he becomes an easy target for deceptive tactics by politicians who are looking to secure the perks of holding office. While religion in itself might not incite conflict between different factions, politicians hungry and desperate to get into office will use the divide to their advantage.

As Archbishop Kwashi states in an interview with the BBC, “Religion by its very nature and content appeals not so much to reason. It’s a heart matter and carries with it huge emotions.” The use of religious affiliation as a campaign

tactic is both manipulative and irrelevant to an individual’s leadership qualifications and potential. A candidate could be a devout Muslim and a great leader or a morally righteous Christian but a terrible leader, and vice versa.

As a young secular voter, I realize Americans are not immune to the deceptive tactics of a desperate career politician looking to either maintain or move up in the political hierarchy. Some candidates will say anything and everything to appeal to voters. Most recently, Sen. Ted Cruz came under fire after he told reporters, “I am a Christian first, and an American second.” While I interpret his comment as merely an attempt to court the Religious Right that makes up the core of Republican voters, it is still a questionable comment for an individual representing our body of government to make during an important election. Basically, he is saying his faith comes before his duty to work for and protect the common good of America.

While the United States is not a theocratic body of government and does not sponsor any one religion, many Americans identify themselves as Christians, including a lot of our politicians and our city officials. The Constitution protects everyone’s right to freely and openly practice any religion.

There is nothing wrong with Cruz openly practicing his faith. The danger of mixing religion and politics presents itself when politicians and city officials use their belief as grounds for pushing certain legislation and, in the process, infringing on the rights of Americans, such as the case of same-sex marriage. Even after the U.S. Supreme Court voted in favor

of same-sex marriage in a landmark ruling, a county clerk in Kentucky still decided to deny marriage licenses to several homosexual couples, because it went against her religious beliefs.

The voting trend in the United States does not differ much from the trend in Nigeria. American voters are just as likely to write off a candidate for a character flaw, appearance or a negative association with an ideology or religion. It should not have to boil down to something as trivial as religious affiliations or a lack of thereof, because the duty of a politician ought to be protecting the good of the people regardless of their creed. However, that is not the case.

We are putting individuals into office because the label “Christian” gives a candidate an almost Christ-like image and appeal, when that might be far from the truth. Voters could be writing off a suitable candidate, with all of the qualifications to do the job, because the candidate has a name such as Muhammadu Buhari or Barack Obama or identifies as Muslim.

As minister and social justice advocate Tony Campolo best summed it up, “Mixing religion and politics is like mixing ice cream and manure. It doesn’t do much to the manure but it sure does ruin the ice cream.”

*Regina Riem, 25, is a student at Herkimer County Community College in New York, where she is working toward an associate’s degree in human services. From there, she plans to transfer into a bachelor’s program. She also works as a resident associate in an assisted-living community for individuals with Alzheimer’s and dementia. She enjoys reading.*

SIXTH PLACE TIE

# Constitution offers equal protection for all

FFRF awarded Arielle \$400.

BY ARIELLE NEAL

I am part of the growing population referred to as the “Nones,” a diverse group of people who are religiously unaffiliated and generally skeptical of the role religious institutions play in politics today.

The Pew Research Center reports that in 2016 “Nones” make up 23% of American adults and are the fastest growing “faith” group in the country. Despite this confirmation that we exist in growing numbers, the heavy religious pandering that colors the 2016 presidential campaign gives the impression that the candidates care little about appealing to our secular sensibilities.

As a group, the “Nones” are potentially the future crusaders for separation of church and state, the invisible threat inciting the Religious Right’s increasingly vicious protection of its position of power. The use of religious pandering to secure evangelical voter turnout comes with the cost of alienating “Nones” like myself.

The separation of church and state is the



Arielle Neal

foundation of a functioning democracy and the very essence of the American ideals of freedom and liberty. The divisive tone that religious pandering has taken this election year has gone beyond subtle gestures that indicate a preference for religion over nonreligion. The current presidential election is dominated by voices that normalize religion, Christianity in particular, as an American value that needs protection.

I find this vilifying of secular views and religious minorities on the national political stage disconcerting and morally questionable. The 2016 national debate is rife with proclamations of persecution and bigotry in the name of Christian religious liberty.

Donald Trump’s claim that “as president, [he] will not allow Christianity to be consistently attacked and weakened” is in conflict with the constitutional requirement of neutrality: that the government is prohibited from giving preferential treatment to one religion over another, as well as preferential treatment of religion over nonreligion.

The government’s blocking of the

Religious Right’s manipulation of power for a narrow religious agenda is faithful to the original intention of the Establishment Clause. The protection of the Establishment Clause and the fight to keep religion out of government is not an attack on religious liberty, but rather a necessity to ensure that no American’s political rights are determined by the beliefs of today’s religious majority.

Let’s consider some of the actions the Religious Right would prioritize if given free religious reign over the government: criminalization of contraception; prevention of the marital union of LGBTQ couples; extradition of Muslim-Americans on the basis of their faith; refusal of non-Christian immigrants and refugees; and systematic indoctrination of publicly educated school children with religious teachings that seriously compromise the critical development of rational thinking and scientific understanding. It’s not that secular Americans are against religious expression; it’s that mixing religion and government is a recipe for the very theocracy our founders sought to escape.

The clear and present threat religious pandering poses to democracy is that it alienates and disengages the political participation required to keep a democracy functioning healthily. Unfortunately, the hysterical cries of evangelicals make better media headlines than education surrounding the founders’ intent. Herein lies the danger of promoting religious beliefs on the national political stage: The religious circus of the 2016 presidential campaign threatens to alienate and deter from voting the very voters whose participation works to

protect the Establishment Clause.

The 2016 election season makes clear that the Religious Right feels the continued separation of church and state is an attack on its religious liberty by nonbelievers. Quite the opposite. Upholding the Establishment Clause is what guarantees religious liberty, regardless of the religion of the party in power. Justice Robert Jackson wrote in *Zorach v. Clauson*: “The day that this country ceases to be free for irreligion it will cease to be free for religion — except for the sect that can win political power.”

With the number of religiously unaffiliated growing, the protection of this constitutionality may be of increasing importance to religiously affiliated Americans in the near future. Allowing political conversations to be dominated by religious belief overlooks the function of the Establishment Clause for the protection of religion just as much as for the protection of government. The protection of the Establishment Clause by secularists is an act of compassion toward the religiously affiliated, as it is an attempt to ensure the equal protection of citizens under the law.

*Arielle Neal, 28, is a Nashville native and is working toward a master’s degree in business administration at Tennessee State University. She graduated from Mount Holyoke College with a bachelor’s degree in psychology and obtained a master’s degree in social work from Middle Tennessee State University in 2015. She plans to work for an accountable care organization, addressing the fragmentation of health care systems.*



# Grad essay honorable mentions

The following student essays earned honorable mention status. Each author was awarded \$200 by FFRF.

## Religious pandering, politicking a travesty

BY RYAN COLLINS

We, as Americans, have the freedom to believe in whatever higher power(s) we want to believe in. But we also have the freedom to not believe. We have the power to dissent, to question and to reject organized religion.

Three things should concern freethinking citizens and voters of the United States:

1. American politicians are continually pandering to religious groups.
2. Church politicking has eliminated the boundaries between church and state.
3. Politicians are enforcing religious litmus tests that threaten the freedoms that our country was founded upon, silencing the voice of secular citizens and secular politicians.

Unfortunately, religiosity in



Ryan Collins

American politics has tarnished the sanctity of representative democracy in the United States.

Speaking to more than 30,000 people at a rally in Alabama, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump pumped up his crowd of loyal fans and voters by appealing to religious voters, namely evangelicals. Speaking about his book, *The Art of the Deal*, Trump declared, “That’s my second favorite book of all time. You know what my favorite is? The bible! Nothing beats the bible, not even *The Art of the Deal*.”

Republicans pandering to the white, evangelical demographic is nothing new in American politics, but it is exceptionally disconcerting (and frightening) that there are voters who are swayed by Trump’s personal beliefs, considering this was a man who cannot share a single, correct bible verse. Trump is the prime example how

pandering is used to attract religious voters by simply invoking the bible or throwing “God” in political speeches.

It’s one thing for a politician to want to push for policies and platforms that are based on their “deeply held” beliefs, but it is another thing for a politician to take advantage of religious voters to continue the Christian privilege that persists in American politics.

The separation of church and state is an issue that is mostly dismissed by politicians because the two are strange bedfellows. The problem can sometimes be ignored, but whenever elections occur, churches are breeding grounds for overt and subversive religious politicking.

“What houses of worship cannot do, under federal law, is to endorse or oppose candidates for public office,” said the Rev. Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. “They may not use their resources to intervene in a partisan race. Houses of worship cannot become cogs in anyone’s political machine.”

Defying Lynn’s statement, religious institutions have ignored the separation of church and state when it comes to politicians. For example, Sen. Ted Cruz’s presidential campaign “announced the endorsement of Pastor Jack Hibbs, the founder and senior pastor of Calvary Chapel Chino

Hills in southern California, a church of approximately 9,000 attendees,” writes Bob Eschliman of Charisma News.

Instead of churches preaching the gospel and the teachings of Christ, they are further blurring and degrading the boundaries between church and state by using the pastor’s pulpit for political means.

The biggest threat to secular and nonreligious liberties is the travesty of religious litmus tests. Pandering and church politicking is definitely an issue that citizens should notice, however, the most salient issue that secular citizens should be fighting is the fact that in some states, atheists and nonreligious citizens cannot run for office. In the North Carolina Constitution, it states that one of the disqualifications for office is “any person who shall deny the being of Almighty God.”

Religious litmus tests are, without a doubt, a complete travesty of the democratic principles this country was founded upon. Hopefully, one day, reason shall prevail.

*Ryan Collins, 23, was born and raised in Fort Worth, Texas. He was raised as a Southern Baptist, but considers himself a secular humanist. He earned a degree in history and RTVF (Radio, TV and Video Film) from the University of North Texas in 2015. He is now a grad student at UNT in the media arts program.*

## Presidency a test of faith or fitness?

BY JASON SCHLOSS

Perhaps the most important contribution by the Founding Fathers is the concept of separation of church and state. The American colonies rebelled against a monarchy that claimed “divine right of kings” and regarded the royal head of state as leader of the official church. Thus it was truly revolutionary to take government out of the church, and to remove the church from government. It seems abundantly clear that James Madison and the other founders did not want religion to be a deciding factor in choosing elected leaders. Thus it is particularly disturbing when religious belief becomes an issue in the presidential race.

In January of this year, at a town hall event in Iowa, a woman told Hillary Clinton that she had called into a Catholic radio show seeking guidance about the election, and the host had told her that she should choose a candidate based on faith rather than party. She then asked Clinton, “How would you say your beliefs align with the Ten Commandments and is that something that’s important to you?” Clinton’s answer, which concluded with the hope that those who follow Christianity would use it to be tolerant rather than to condemn, contained the following words: “My study of the bible, my many conversations with people of faith, has led me to believe the most important commandment



Jason Schloss

is to love the Lord with all your might and to love your neighbor as yourself, and that is what I think we are commanded by Christ to do.”

This sounds like the sort of thing one might hear during a Sunday morning sermon rather than a political campaign. A better response might have been: “My faith is a personal thing, and while I do find some of the Commandments useful as part of a broader moral framework, I think that the qualifications for the office of president do not require a personal statement of religious belief.” But that demands a degree of courage that politicians do not typically possess — an ability to stand up for the constitutional principles that the office they are seeking is charged with upholding, rather than the pressure to say what is politically expedient at that moment.

In June, while addressing a group of Christian leaders in New York, Donald Trump said of Clinton, “We don’t know anything about Hillary in terms of religion. There’s like nothing out there. It’s going to be an extension of Obama, but it’s going to be worse, because with Obama you had your guard up. With Hillary you don’t, and it’s going to be worse.”

This was like meat for the wolves, and some conservative politicians unfortunately devoured it. Ken Blackwell of the Family Research Council responded that Clinton “would be a third term in her attack on religious liberty in general. I have no reason to attack her faith, I just question her ability to defend my right, my family’s right, my church’s right to practice our faith in the public square.”

Practice his faith in the public square? Yes, the Constitution gives him that right. But religious practices by public officials in publicly held venues represent government endorsement of one religion over others, as well as over nonbelief, a clear violation of the Establishment Clause. The free expression of faith in one’s home or place of worship is fully protected in the First Amendment, but not for public officials imposing their faith on others who may not share those beliefs.

For someone like me, voting in only his second presidential election, the idea that faith in God is seen by many as a qualification for office concerns me. It does so because it is a clear violation of the “no religious test” clause. It also makes me feel disenfranchised as a young, secular voter who does not believe in a deity, but who does believe that separation of church and state must be staunchly defended against those who would seek to impose their own beliefs on others through government policy.

*Jason Schloss, 25, was raised in East Northport, N.Y., and currently attends LIU Post, where he is a second-year graduate student, working toward a master’s degree in digital game development and design. He enjoys drawing and playing video games, both as entertainment and inspiration for his art.*

### It Pays To Complain

## Principal removes signs from public property

*FFRF Member Reid Schoonover of Clintonville, Wis., sent us his success story:*

Just thought I’d like you to know how I handled a recent (small) issue here in Clintonville.

I noticed that our local Catholic Church school was advertising its upcoming school year with signs. Some were posted on their church lawn and some on city property across the street from the church.

Rather than speak (complain) to someone at City Hall, I decided to first speak with the school principal about the signs on city property, suggesting that our city’s residents may assume that the city was endorsing religion and particularly the Catholic religion over others. I spoke quietly and with concern in my voice that I believe was interpreted as genuine concern for all, and that she, the principal, would want to do the right thing.

The principal was very understanding about the possible misunderstanding by city residents and, in the next few minutes as I was driving away, she went out and removed the misplaced signs.

It was a moment’s sincere interaction that brought a satisfactory solution without any hard feelings. And my wife and I will continue to support art for art’s sake by donating to the school’s art auction again.



# Religion in government often disastrous

BY PHILLIP GAURONSKAS

In the Constitution, the First Amendment states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” This statement was most likely written with at least a general understanding that running a government based on religion is a dangerous concept. Throughout history, there have been (and still are) certain regions of the world where religion has played a significant role in the government, often with disastrous results.

During the Middle Ages, Western Europe was under the influence of the Catholic Church. The idea of having a kingdom ruled by a representative of the Christian “lord and savior” appealed to many members of society. The bible taught these individuals that to do well by God helps to secure one’s seat in heaven — and what better way to do good by God than to listen to



Phillip Gauronskas

the leader of the Catholic Church? The consequences in this line of thinking were made evident in some of the world’s greatest atrocities. Because people blindly accepted the pope’s decrees as the law of the land, many innocent people were forced to suffer for their own beliefs. Other people had to enlist their services to the Catholic Church and shed their blood and others’ blood in order to demonstrate the “love” and “compassion” of their lord and savior.

The Crusades, spanning the course of 500 years, accomplished this. Innocent blood was shed in order to take back the “Holy Land” from Christian or Muslim rule, depending on who was in control of it at the time. Innocent civilians were murdered, and even children were forced to fight on the

front lines for their God. All of this was done in the name of the Church.

Jewish people had to endure the harrowing experience of the Spanish Inquisition. Unfortunate souls would be gathered up from the streets and sent in to “confess” their “sins” to the “one true Christian God.” Innocent people were abused, neglected and sometimes killed because they believed in something different than the European Christians did.

Pagans, atheists, gypsies and agnostics were subjected to similar mistreatment, regardless of their personal integrity or law-abiding nature. Simply because these individuals chose to believe in something that was contrary to what the Church believed in, they were martyred and massacred.

Fast-forward to the 21st century, and we still find certain regions of the world that are governed by theocracy. In countries such as Afghanistan, women are treated with little regard. According to Sharia law, in order for a woman to prove that she was raped (or that she’s innocent of committing adultery) by a man, she must have four male eyewitnesses. Additionally, individuals that convert from Islam to another religion may be punished under penalty of death for committing infidelity against Allah. Not only that, but Sharia law also makes it permissible, and even sometimes encouraged, to slaughter innocent non-Muslims in the name of Allah, the

practice known as jihad. As can be clearly seen in all of these examples, this violates many of the values that we consider to be fundamental human rights in Western civilization.

Many atrocities committed by theocracy can be averted simply by taking a more secular, neutral approach to government. If we look at human beings as people instead of targets of religious conquest, it becomes easier to treat everyone more fairly. There are laws that are deeply rooted in religion that are contradictory to human dignity and the respect of our fellow humans. That is why it makes sense to keep church and state separate.

I am personally thankful to live in a society where I can say these sorts of things (or write an essay about it) without the fear of being personally attacked for being a “blasphemer” or a “heretic.” I know that there are people in the world that do not have the same freedoms that I do, and I can only hope that one day they, too, shall be able to live their lives as freely as me and other people in this country.

*Phillip Gauronskas, 27, attends Eastern Virginia Medical School and is working toward a master’s degree in biomedical sciences research. He is married with a 2-year-old son. His interests include writing, tinkering with computers, reading, research and the study of both religion and science.*

# Drawing for ‘clean’ (godless) cash

## And the winners are . . .



Photo by Ingrid Laas

At FFRF’s annual convention in Pittsburgh, a drawing was held for “clean” (pre-“In God We Trust”) currency. The event was emceed by Buzz Kemper (kneeling). Thanks also to Todd Peissig and Eric Lawrence for handling ticket sales.

The winners (listed by currency) are: Teresa Palomar, Md., \$1 Series 1935G, donated by Paul Swanson, Minn.; Ed Jones, Mich., \$1 Series 1935E, donated by Charles and Sheri Bender, Ind.; Laurie Webre, Fla., \$1 Series 1935E, donated by Marie R. Donnel, Calif.; Kelly Wagner, Md., \$1 Series 1935A, donated by Donald R. McEntee, Md.; Cynthia Nelms-Byrne, Iowa, \$2 Series 1928G, donated by Ron Frederickson, Wis.; Jeff Fallgren, Wash., \$2 Series 1928D, donated by Larry Tanner, Conn.; Dianne Centa, Ohio, \$5 Series 1950E, donated by Charlie French; Chris Luchini, N.M., \$10 Series 1934C, donated by Warren Smith, N.Y.; Oliver Jia, \$20 Series 1950D, donated by Lynne Hills, Conn.; Eugene Provost, N.J., \$50 Series 1950B, donated by Craig Thomson, Pa.; and grand prize winner Dianne Centa, Ohio, \$100 Series 1934, donated by a Tennessee member.



Photo by Andrew Seidel

Thomas Sheedy looks at the winning ticket after pulling it out of the wheel held by FFRF Program Assistant Alyssa Schaefer.

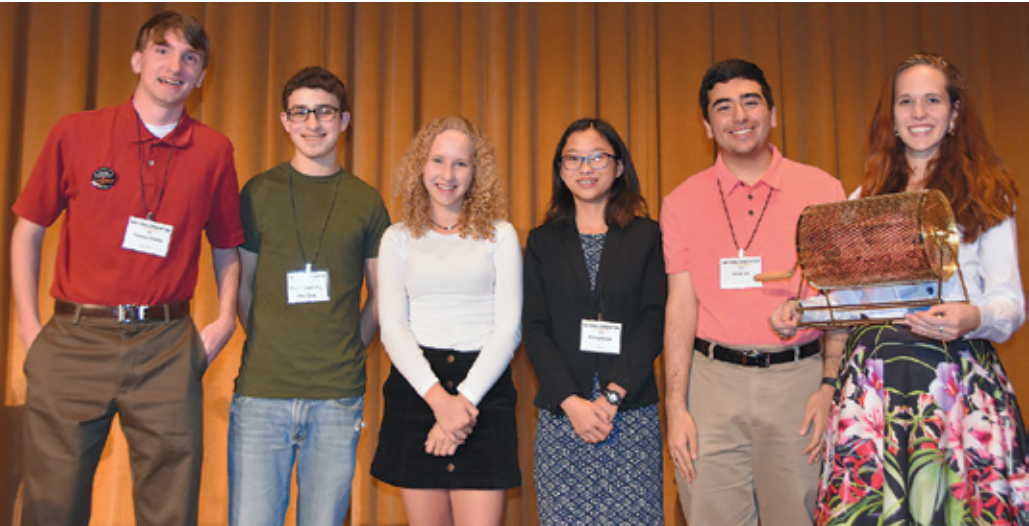


Photo by Andrew Seidel

Helping select and announce the winners of the pre-“In God We Trust” cash were students Thomas Sheedy, N.Y., Brandon Zukofsky, N.Y., Lily Gaylor, Wis., Sidney Novak, Iowa, and Oliver Jia, Pa. Alyssa Schaefer held the chances wheel.



## Letterbox

### New ‘After-Lifer’ proud of FFRF’s work

Enclosed is my check for \$5,000, which I wish to donate in exchange for becoming an “After Life” Member.

I find that over the years I have become increasingly convinced that support for FFRF is the way to go. I am quite pleased with my decision, and look forward to enjoying my membership for the years remaining. I particularly commend your outreach to young people. It should result in a strong growing membership in the years to come. Also, in reading their essays, I am highly impressed by the caliber of young people we are attracting.

Also, thank you for “writing me up” in Freethought Today (as a “Meet a Member” profile). I felt very flattered to have been asked!

**Marjorie H. Holden**  
California

### Religious truth doesn’t sit well with aides

It’s hard to imagine that in a land of “liberty and justice for all,” there are scores of bills pending which would allow discrimination based on religion. This is particularly upsetting to me because, as a 77-year-old transgendered man who relies on home care, I’ve already caused two nursing aides to quit their jobs over my religion-oriented revelations.

Had I been as diplomatic as Dan Barker, I might’ve kept these aides, but I can only take so much proselytizing before I feel compelled to speak my mind.

My simple assertion that “I’ve been good without a god for a half-century” always puts them in a mild state of shock. And while they’re sitting there with facial paralysis, I dump too much information on them at one time. It’s when there’s too much to digest that they react with hostility.

On their last visit with me before quitting their jobs, each of the aides left with a departing shot. On her way out, one said, “Belief in God is not an opinion!” The other said, “Well, I’ve been good with God!”

To the first one, my response was: “If you can’t prove that something exists, then it’s just your opinion that it does.” To the other aide, I responded, “When you gave up Santa Claus as a kid, did that make you evil?”

One thing is for sure. Those nurses will never forget me (though they’d like to), nor will they ever forget some of the things that poured out of my mouth that day. They might’ve had Kim Davis on their side, but I had experience on mine.

**Herb McClelland**  
Ohio

### A freethinker with the balls to show it

As a Lifetime Member of FFRF, I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to Annie Laurie Gaylor, Dan Barker and the entire FFRF organization. Keep up the great work! I thoroughly enjoy the weekly podcast and the (nearly) monthly edition of Freethought Today. I’m looking forward to the next time the convention is held on the West Coast.

Enclosed is a picture of a golf ball I had personalized, one of several



dozen. Most golf balls are lost, and then many, if not most, are eventually found. I thought it was a good way to spread the world of atheism and freethought. I will also give out balls when the opportunity presents itself.

**Bruce Perry**  
California

### FFRF’s vigilance unfortunately necessary

Freethought Today details how often the Religious Right (and their affiliates) attempt to force religiosity on us poor “soulless” creatures. The magazine Church & State is going through the same battle. They don’t give up, do they? Had it not been for FFRF’s vigilance, we would easily end up being the Christian version of ISIS or Taliban.

If it reduces their zeal, maybe we should start taxing all their properties; it could generate millions of dollars in new tax revenue if they are treated like commercial properties.

The Religious Right may come back with a story that they are encouraging morality and assuring the devotees that this is the only path to eternal bliss. How they have come to this conclusion is anybody’s guess!

**G.M. Chandu**  
New York

### ‘Black Collar’ should be publicly posted

I wish there was an inexpensive flier or couple pages of “Black Collar Crime Blotter” that could be posted on bulletin boards or left in areas where it could be read or taken home. People need to learn how criminals and perverts hide behind supposedly virtuous organizations.

Religion is an organized system of belief — belief upheld and pursued with zeal. Religion enslaves.

**John Carley**  
Montana

### Moving to the South has been eye-opener

Thank you for the work and good deeds you do (constantly! — over and over). I just turned 66 and have been a nonbeliever since I was about 15. Having grown up in New England in an area where religion isn’t taken too seriously, I am shocked at the zealots in the South. We bought a home in Morganton, N.C., where everyone, so far, is some kind of Baptist, and there seems to be a church about every half mile. So I’ll either have to become a hermit or keep my mouth shut. (They all seem to have guns, too). Hopefully, I’ll be

able to meet some other like-minded people. I plan on buying some of your nontracts and leaving them wherever I see some Jesus propaganda.

I proudly have my “I’m Secular and I Vote” bumper sticker on my car.

**Lynne Hills**  
North Carolina

*Editor’s note: Lynne sent us some “clean” (pre-In God We Trust) currency that we raffled off at our convention.*

### Cardinal says one thing we can agree with

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the archbishop of New York, said on the need for faith in the face of mortality: “For a skeptic, or one without faith, such an admission of an inevitable personal winter can cause some discouragement, trepidation and anxiety. For a believer, it prompts trust, gratitude and a constant search for the one thing that will never fail, fade or pass: The Lord.”

Well, we can all agree that “the Lord” is indeed a “thing.” A “nothing.”

**Dennis Middlebrooks**  
New York

### Prayers have no place in Congress

I wonder where praying to a mythological deity figures in to a congressional meeting? And to which deity do you pray? Jesus? Zeus? Wotan? The Tooth Fairy? Is it to make Congress holy, or to make members more honest and ethical? No, they are as dishonest (and honest) as the rest of us. What ever happened to the separation of church and state?

This is irrational in the least, and unconstitutional at best. It’s a historical artifact of habit and has no place in a rational world.

**Frank E. Grant**  
West Virginia

### Crank Mail should be printed in a book

Please print a book of all the Crank Mail. I can’t get enough of it! I’ll buy the first copy.

**Gary McDougall**  
Nevada

### Are politicians hiding their atheism?

No one will ever know, of course, yet I can’t help but wonder if Hillary Clinton and many other politicians are atheists. They know their careers would crumble into dust if they had the courage to reveal their true beliefs.

And doesn’t it reflect the lowest

hypocrisy that Donald Trump (the thrice-married man who has bragged about bedding married women, and has never declared himself a man of faith until now) was invited to speak at the Evangelical Values Voters Summit in Washington, D.C.? Without even a smirk, that charlatan promised his pious audience that as president he will protect “our Christian heritage . . . like you’ve never seen before!” The Donald also said that as president, he’ll compel people to say “Merry Christmas” — but so far nothing about what he’ll do to adulterers.

**David Quintero**  
California

### News article shows disdain for atheists

The news item “Charity shuns atheist’s \$28,000 donation” in the October issue is more proof that religionists cannot allow unbelievers to be seen as good, compassionate, true American patriots.

Also, the article “Help FFRF help others” was outstanding.

As always, well done, Americans.

**Pete Viviano**  
New Mexico

### Essay winner excited, proud to be recognized

Thank you so much for the \$500 scholarship! It was really exciting to see my essay printed in your newspaper, and the money covered the cost of my textbooks for the fall semester. Receiving this scholarship meant a lot to me. Thank you!

**Bethany Wasilik**  
Virginia

### College essay writers show great maturity

Wow, I was amazed by the insight and maturity expressed by each student essay writer and college scholarship winner in Freethought Today! FFRF is doing an excellent job of reducing the isolation and stigma suffered in the past by young freethinkers. I also love learning about the humanitarian work of Nonbelief Relief. What an exciting time to be a freethinker! Looking forward to future issues.

**Anne Dorfman**  
California

### FFRF’s Weekly Report a great feature

I am loving, loving, loving the new Weekly Report feature by Amit Pal delivered online.

Pithy, it is nonetheless full of info to chomp down on and make me proud of the work FFRF is doing. I swear I don’t know how you do it all! I am inspired to increase my donation.

**Rea Bennett**  
Arizona

### Thanks to FFRF for sanity and reason

Thanks so much for all the great work that everyone at FFRF does in the name of sanity and reason. I tremble to think what this country would look like without your diligence.

**Al Blazo**  
Ohio



Letterbox

Catholic hospitals get in way of medical care

Here in northeastern Oklahoma, the metastatic devouring of independent hospitals by Catholic systems goes on. Chaos ensued a few years ago and continues, as no contraceptive methods, surgical or otherwise, may be provided on the premises of Jane Phillips Medical Center, engulfed by St. John's of Tulsa.

So, while top-guy Pope Francis says individual conscience may govern personal choices, canon law runs institutions, where medieval policy still prevails, causing hardships to clients, regardless of belief. This international plight needs comment. As a family-planning nurse, it's my daily bread.

Carole Kowaleski  
Oklahoma



A one-fingered salute from the Big Guy

We've all seen pictures of people who have come to Jesus by proudly displaying his silhouette in their burnt toast, bellybutton lint or frost pattern on a window pane.

My epiphany came as I was reading by candlelight my latest edition of Freethought Today. When I finished, I leaned over to blow out the candles and noticed a wax overflow on the table top. I interpreted it as a sign from the Big Guy that there is no way I'm going to make it to heaven.

Warren Dunn  
California

More great info in Freethought Today

I just finished reading the October issue and am, as usual, so impressed with the work you do. Thanks!

I thought you'd be amused that I recently saw, and promptly bought, a bumper sticker that reads: "Children have imaginary friends, adults have God." It's on my car right now!

I was highly impressed with two articles in the latest issue:

1. The analysis of Christianity by Paul Davis was fascinating, well-written and amusingly blunt. I'd love to show this to my church friends, but, as I usually observe, they wouldn't read it. The truth is too hurtful to them.
2. I was fascinated by Dan Barker's article about his visit to the prison. I wasn't aware any prison would allow a person like Dan to talk to inmates. Good job, Dan! I'm impressed you had such a crowd to hear you. At the church jail visits I participated in, the pro-religion brainwashing was disgusting.

Again, a million thanks for the great representation FFRF does for us in the community. I enjoyed my recent visit to Madison and FFRF headquarters. With all the hard work coming out of that building, I had envisioned it to be the size of the Pentagon!

Jack M. Red  
North Carolina

Voting manipulation hinders true democracy

I read with interest "The problem of voting in churches" by Rebecca S. Markert. Great article! I agree 100% with all points made.

As another standing example of skewing the scales (again, in favor of Republican/conservative), for the 36 years I have voted in Texas, the Republican choice has always been the top choice on the ballot, with the Democrat always the second choice. For a long time, I wondered why. It certainly isn't alphabetical ("D" comes before "R.") Suspecting there might be a stealthy advantage motive, I looked into it. What I found is that research had shown the candidate listed first enjoys a 1% to 2% point bonus over the other candidate. The theory as to why is that people who are on politically on the fence, have mild dementia, etc., are more likely to vote for the first candidate they see on the ballot. In some states, such as California, as a principle of fairness, election officials rotate the party that gets first slot on the ballot to equalize the "first slot advantage." But not in Texas, and I'm sure not in other "red" states!

With Donald Trump the Republican presidential nominee, I have no doubt that many Republicans will be working overtime this election cycle to ensure that voting will occur in as many churches as possible to maximally exploit the unethical contextual priming effect, as well as maintaining the "first slot advantage" and any other scrap of a point they can get. It's unfortunate that when it comes to election time, manipulation is in, while fairness and ethics is out.

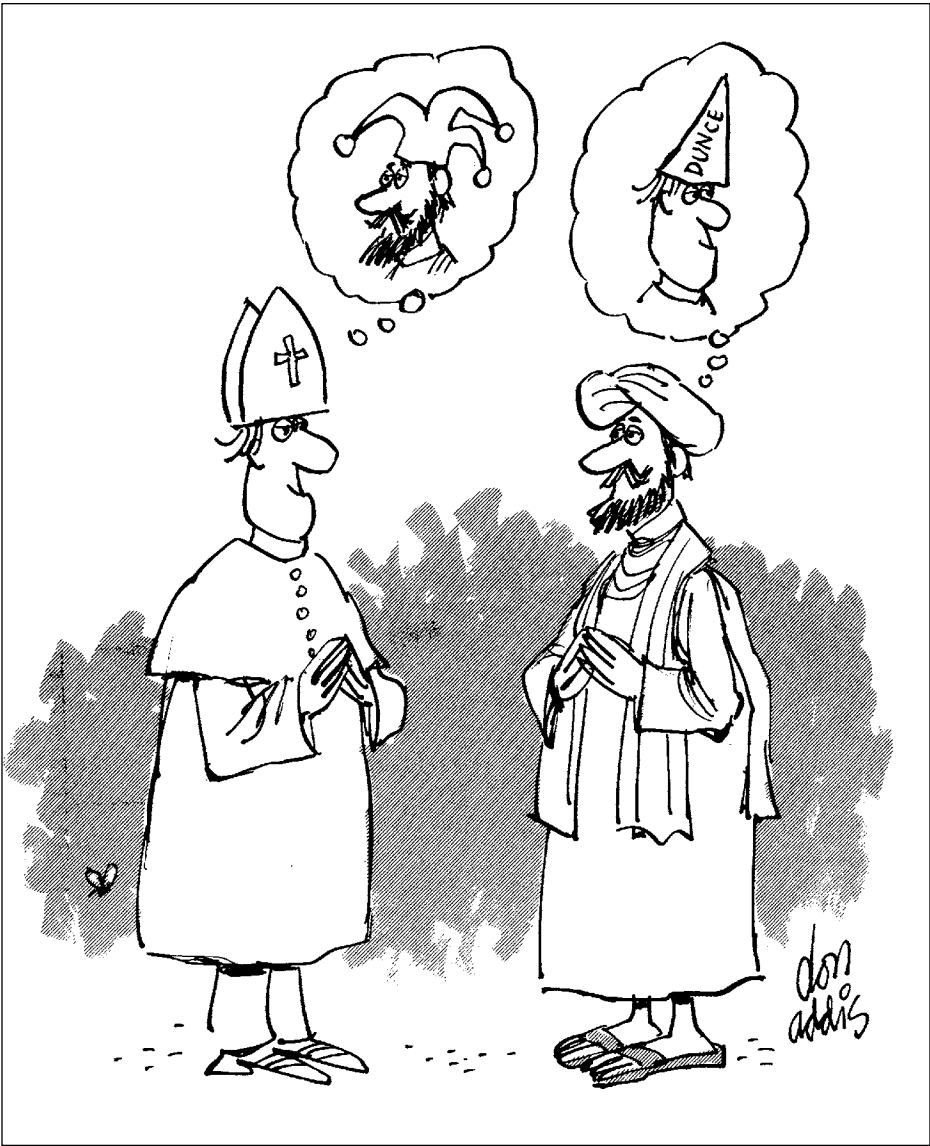
Jaime Hunter  
Texas

Focus on defending religious freedoms

Whenever I read of an action or lawsuit taken by FFRF or a news story about LGBT rights or medical benefits, the opposition always complains about the attack on their religious beliefs and freedoms. Whether it be nativity scenes in public buildings, same-sex marriage licenses, or Obamacare mandates on birth control, people feel their religious freedoms are being threatened.

FFRF is continuously accused of trying to restrict religious freedoms. I believe and am confident that is not part of its mandate. On the contrary, I believe FFRF would fight to defend religious freedoms as it does fight to defend nonbeliever freedoms. Therefore, I would like to see less on disproving the existence of Jesus or debates pitting religious zealots against nonbelievers. Let everyone believe what they want, respect it and defend their right to do so freely. Let's put the emphasis back in freedom from religion.

Greg Kuethe  
Wisconsin



Sharing the crank mail

Here we go with another edition of Crank Mail, where we can see the unedited thoughts of those who are outraged by FFRF's upholding of the Constitution.

**Your crazy stand:** I pray to God that each and every member of your group meet God one day as you transit to hell. — Rebecca Berryman

**Rot in hell lowlife scumbags!!!:** I will be PRAYING that ALL members of this Devil group will rot in hell for eternity. That's what non-believers get to look forward to. Take down all the Christianity paraphanelia you want, Jesus lives in our hearts, souls and minds. You are wasting your time and lives, idiots. Jesus is EVERYWHERE!!!!!! Hahahahahahaha!!!! Heathens. — Jason Davis

**Your assault against Christians:** Gotta forgive you uninformed, doomed, idiots. How about a class-action suit against your organization and it's individual members. Time to bankrupt you financially, as you are already morally bankrupt. You don't tell me I can't pray to my God. I also believe in self protection and keep my 12 ga Mossberg ready with double ought buckshot ready for unwanted visitors. Best you idiots stay far away. I pity you all for being so utterly stupid. The Book is Real, as is God. Enjoy Hell! — George Ramsey

**Your day:** You people are all FUCKING IDIOTS whose day is coming. You will all be sitting in confinement in a place you definitely will not like. When the time comes you will be rounded up and all your phony law degrees will not help you one bit. — Carson Wurste

**You fucking piéces of dog shit:** Count your blessings you didn't pull your bullshit at the school my kid goes to because i would have shot you worthless scumbags jn the head — Joseph Nazar

**Ten comandments:** I believe you are out of your minds and dead wrong. The ten commandments are a essential law. There is nothing wrong with having them in public. If a individual doesn't like it then they dont have to read it. There is nothing wrong with the moralistic nature of these laws. It is disrespectful to our nation and forefathers and people that fought for our nation. To be the way you are. Everyone that ever died for this country is rolling in their graves. You make me sick. If someone displays one once of respect or dignity they are wrong. Freedom or religion is exactly this. We are allowed to put up the ten commandments or other religious writings wherever we want. — George Taylor

**Your efforts:** I'd just like to say regarding your effort to "free us from religion". Just operate your own space, leave mine and my children's alone. If you don't want to participate then don't, but I'll NEVER do it your way. One more thing - Fuck your organization! — Larry Wolff

**Your mission:** In spite of all your efforts,

you can never destroy Jesus. He is alive, and every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. This means you, by the way. One day, very soon, you will stand before Him and you will be required to give an account for your life. If you do not repent, He will have no choice but to send you to the lake of fire. You should be ashamed of yourselves. You are blind, hate-filled hypocrites. You hate God, and you hate all who honor Him. They shall be exalted, and you shall be abased — Henry Taksis

**Livingston county:** Your organization offends me! I'm not even a trump supporter but watching him win and destroy organizations like yours is gonna be awesome. You people are scum. Pure evil. You get your kicks off stopping people from caring for each other. Nice wholesome things from the Bible threaten you. Like having the possibility of there being a Heaven would be a bad thing. Lol! What a bunch of whacko's! Let's have nothing to believe in and nothing to look forward to. — Cory Rosenbergh

**Question:** I've sent a few messages with no response! Who is running this organization? Why do you hate God? What has he most likely NOT done for you? You know as well as I do separation of church and state doesn't mean what you are pushing on people! Do you really believe that we came from a big boom? I would guess you don't and your taking hundreds of people to he'll with you! Jesus is the only way to heaven! Pleas respond — Michael Wallace

**Prayer before football games:** Well you got the prayer taken out of a little town named Dover. Way to go you've destroyed another small town tradition you bunch a commie bastards. — James Lumen

Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

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

FFRF • P.O. Box 750  
Madison, WI 53701

Freedom Depends on Freethinkers



# Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

## Arrested / Charged

**Gregory A. Varney, 61, Topeka, KS:** Aggravated assault. Varney, pastor at Light of the World Christian Center, is accused of using a vehicle in an assault at his residence against his daughter. According to a church member, he struck another vehicle when leaving.

Several days later, he was arrested at a taco shop and charged with disorderly conduct/brawl or fight, obstruction of official duty and battery on a law enforcement officer.

A church statement after his initial arrest said Varney's behavior may have been caused by toxins released due to kidney failure. Varney and his wife Debbie founded the church in 1985 at a Ramada Inn. Since 1993 it has been housed in a \$5 million building that seats 1,600. *Source: KSNT, 9-29-16*

**Michael Walsh, 80, Pembroke, MA:** Rape of a child and 2 counts of indecent assault and battery on a child. He's accused of crimes against a boy who was in 4th grade when Walsh was altar boy coordinator at St. Brendan's Catholic Church in Dorchester and earlier was a layman at St. Francis de Sales Parish in Charlestown. Walsh was later ordained but was removed from ministry in 2002.

"I never thought I would come forward," the alleged victim, now 38, told a reporter. "I thought it would be just something I lived with as I have for 27 years, but I have 10 nieces and nephews, and looking at them, seeing them, I would never want something that happened to me happen to them."

Charges could be filed because Walsh spent years living in Florida and Michigan, tolling the statute of limitations. *Source: WCVB, 9-28-16*

**Thomas L. Ciganek, 67, Watertown, WI:** Strangulation and suffocation, use of a dangerous weapon and aggravated battery. Ciganek is accused of using a phone cord to strangle a 94-year-old woman he was visiting to conduct bible study. According to a witness, Ciganek allegedly read 2 chapters from the Book of Revelations before pulling the cord from his pocket and wrapping it around the woman's neck.

The witness alleged she got Ciganek to let loose before she pushed the woman's Life Alert to summon help. *Source: Daily Citizen, 9-27-16*

**Christian Raburn, 29, Winter Garden, FL:** Keeping a gambling house, serving alcohol to a person younger than 21 and contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Raburn, pastor at the now-defunct Church of Victory and a Trinity Broadcasting Network preacher, allegedly served alcohol to brothers aged 20 and 17 from his garage outfitted with "obvious gaming tables."

Photos the brothers took showed people holding cash and liquor bottles "arrayed in a manner most commonly seen in commercial bars and lounges," an Orlando Police report said. *Source: Orlando Sentinel, 9-23-16*

**Michael Jenkins Sr., Helena-West Helena, AR:** Rape and sexual grooming of a minor. Jenkins, pastor at Church of the Living God, is accused by a 15-year-old girl while he was in a trailer parked outside his home. According to court documents, there was an ongoing inappropriate relationship between Jenkins and the girl, who attended the church. *Source: WREG, 9-23-16*

**Mitchell G. Bolkcom, 23, Grand Forks, ND:** 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct. Bolkcom is charged with having consensual sex in 2015 with a 16-year-old girl while he was an employee and volunteer at St. Michael Catholic Church in Prior Lake, MN. They had met at a church retreat and started meeting to talk about her depression, the girl told police.

She alleged they started having sex after Bolkcom told her he only had 7 years to live because of a heart condition. At the time of his arrest, he worked for the Fellowship of Catholic University Students at the University of North Dakota. *Source: KSTP, 9-23-16*

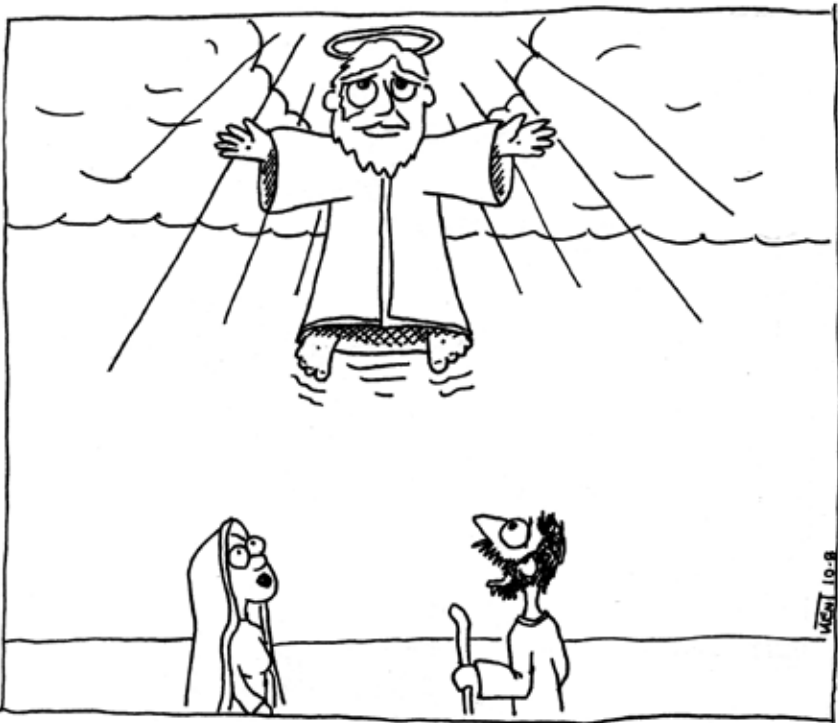
**Wesley R. Weaver, 48, W. Melbourne, FL:** 2nd-degree sexual battery. Weaver, associate pastor at First Christian Church and a hospice chaplain, is charged with having consensual sex with a 17-year-old boy he met on the phone app Grindr. The boy went to police after Weaver allegedly told him he wanted to have sex with younger people. *Source: WFTV, 9-21-16*

**Octavio Munoz, 40, Chicago:** Possession of child pornography. Munoz, pastor of St. Pancratius Catholic Church, was removed from ministry last year and was at a Maryland treatment facility when the arrest warrant was issued.

An archdiocesan employee and rector reported seeing indecent live webcam images on a computer in Munoz's apartment in July 2015, when Munoz was leaving his post at Casa Jesus, a program to recruit Latin American seminarians. *Source: WLS, 9-21-16*

## Menso

by Brian Kent



“I wish He had put on some underwear before he did that.”

**Robert D. Wyatt, 50, Thornton, CO:** Sexual assault on a child, sexual assault on a child as a pattern of conduct and sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust. Wyatt, assistant pastor at Agape Bible Church, is accused of assaults on a girl whose family belonged to the church.

"The girl reported that the conduct had been going on for nearly two years, beginning when she was 12," said a statement from the Adams County District Attorney's Office.

According to an affidavit, head pastor Darrell Ferguson and the girl's adoptive parents didn't go to police, even though sexual intercourse is alleged, because of concern with what would happen to Wyatt. The document said the father "felt biblical counseling they would receive through the church was sufficient." *Source: KDVR/Denver Post, 9-19-16*

**Brandon W. White, 20, Pleasant Grove, AL:** Enticing a child for immoral purposes, 2nd-degree sodomy, possession of obscene matter and electronic solicitation of a minor. White allegedly sent images of his genitals to at least 7 minor boys in his youth group at First Baptist Church, said prosecutor Bill Veitch. He said White, now in college, stayed active with the group after high school. "He's like a big brother/mentor to these boys."

Police Lt. Danny Reid said it's alleged there was physical sexual contact with at least 1 boy. *Source: al.com, 9-16-16*

**Danny L. Wells, 60, Smyrna, GA:** Rape and aggravated child molestation. Wells founded 7 Bridges to Recovery ministry and runs The Garden shelter, where he's accused of molesting a 10-year-old girl who was staying at the shelter with her mother earlier this year.

An investigation, which began in Alabama, led police to Wells after a 10-year-old girl told police that Wells had sexually abused her.

"The Garden's been open for 10 years, so there is a concern there may be additional victims, adult and juvenile," said Lt. Nathan McCreary, Cobb County Police Department. *Source: WBRC, 9-16-16*

**Adair Krack, 67, Hoquiam, WA:** 2 counts of child molestation. Krack, pastor of First Baptist Church, is accused of victimizing a 12-year old girl this summer at his home. She and 2 younger sisters, who live in Oregon, were staying there during vacation bible school.

During the investigation, another sister, now 20, alleged Krack molested her 15 years ago.

"He's just the friendliest guy, it's hard to believe," said Deanna Courts, who lives near the church. *Source: KIRO, 9-15-16*

**Arturo Reid, 65, Brooklyn, NY:** Bigamy. Reid, a deacon at First Baptist Church of Crown Heights, was charged after Annette Reid, 70, his wife since 2004, discovered he had married another woman in Allentown, PA, where he also owns a home.

Investigators found a marriage license application receipt and determined Reid married a woman identified as "I.R.-T." on March 15, 2015. *Source: NY Post, 9-15-16*

**Sherman Smith, 56, Algiers, LA:** Indecent behavior with a juvenile, sexual battery and molestation of a juvenile or person with a disability. Smith, former pastor at 2nd Highway Baptist

Church, has now been accused by 5 girls of sexual crimes dating back 22 years.

He was first arrested in November 2015 on aggravated rape and sexual battery charges. *Source: Times-Picayune, 9-15-16*

**David D. Hoppenjan, 52, Pace, FL:** Obscene communication and traveling to meet/using computer to lure child. Hoppenjan, senior pastor at First United Methodist Church, was among 22 men arrested in a sting called Operation Undertow. He allegedly contacted an undercover officer posing online as a 14-year-old boy in September to meet for sex. *Source: WEAR, 8-14-16*

**Jose V. Morales, 49, Phoenix:** Sexual abuse, child molestation and sexual conduct with a minor. Morales, pastor of Iglesia Impac-to de Fe, is accused of assaults on at least 5 victims, some of whom were church members. One alleged victim told police he molested her for 5 years, starting when she was 7.

According to court records, Morales came to Arizona in 1986 at age 19 and later married a girl in Mexico when she was 10 and impregnated her when she was 13. *Source: KNXV, 9-14-16*

**Maurice Underhill, 53, Dover, NJ:** Bribery, falsifying or tampering with records, commercial bribery and obstructing administration of law or other governmental function. Underhill's duties as community service coordinator at Church of the Redeemer in Morristown included supervising people sentenced to complete community service through the Episcopal parish, where he was also a sexton.

He allegedly received an unspecified amount in payment in July and falsely reported that the probationer had completed the required hours of service. *Source: Daily Record, 9-13-16*

**Richard Keenan, 65, Hubbard, OH:** 8 counts of rape and 12 counts of attempted rape and gross sexual imposition. Keenan trumpeted his religion in 2010 when he was elected mayor of Hubbard. "I'm a Christian," he told a reporter. "Dedicating my life to Jesus has changed my life. Don't preach it, but live it."

He has pleaded not guilty but during a court appearance, prosecutors alleged he has admitted assaults on a girl over a 3-year period, starting when she was 4, to his wife and several other persons. A court filing states that during therapy sessions, Keenan accused the girl of initiating the acts and called her a "willing participant." *Source: Youngstown Vindicator, 9-13-16*

**John S. Mraz, 66, Emmaus, PA:** Possession of child pornography, criminal use of a communication facility and misdemeanor selling obscene materials. Msgr. Mraz, pastor at St. Ann Catholic Parish and a former educator, was arrested after a parishioner who was upgrading Mraz's computer allegedly found the files in the computer's recycling bin.

An affidavit said a forensic search of another computer showed Mraz searched online for "nude boys wrestling," "teen boys spanked," "small boy nudes," "handcuffed nude boys," "boy bondage" and similar terms. *Source: WCAU, 9-13-16*

**Toby N. Willis, 46, Ashland City, TN:** Rape of a child. Willis, the patriarch of the conservative Christian family featured on TLC's reality

show "The Willis Family," is accused of raping an underage girl in Nashville in 2004. He was arrested in Kentucky after reportedly having fled there.

Willis and his wife Brenda have 8 daughters and 4 sons, whose names all start with J. They adhere to the Quiverfull dominionist sect that encourages married couples to produce as many offspring as possible in order to raise an army of Christian believers. Psalm 127 says "Happy is the man who has his quiver full of [children]." *Source: NY Daily News, 9-10-16*

**Kenneth DuBose, 45, Bridgeport, CT:** Possession of narcotics. DuBose, pastor of St. James Missionary Baptist Church, was allegedly observed buying 27 grams of crack cocaine from a man targeted in a police sting operation. DuBose told officers he was counseling the man, later posting on Facebook that "The devil is a liar. God will and can turn every set up into a victory." *Source: The Hour, 9-9-16*

**Alvin N. McNeil, 54, Prichard, AL:** 1st-degree sodomy, 1st-degree rape and sexual abuse of a child. McNeil, pastor of Open Door True Worship Apostolic Church, was indicted by a grand jury for allegedly impregnating a 16-year-old girl and fondling her 11-year-old sister. *Source: WALA, 9-8-16*

**Brian P. Werth, 32, Montgomery Village, MD:** 4th-degree sexual offense, sexual abuse of a minor and 2nd-degree assault. Werth, director of youth ministry at St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church in Rockville, is accused of having a relationship with a 16-year old girl that started in 2014 with explicit text messages and progressed to having sex in May at a ministry "lock-in" overnight event.

The girl is deeply conflicted, investigators allege. "She hates him and cares for him at the same time," they wrote. *Source: WUSA, 9-8-16*

**Aharon Goldberg [cq], 55, Bnei Brak, Israel, Shimen Liebowitz, 25, Kiryas Joel, NY, and Binyamin Gottlieb, 33, Monsey, NY:** Conspiracy to commit kidnapping and conspiracy to commit murder for hire (Gottlieb was only charged with the former). Goldberg, a rabbi with ties to the Kiryas Joel Satmar Hasidic community, and Liebowitz are accused of paying a man they recruited \$55,000 to torture a husband until he signed a "get," a religious document in which a husband consents to a divorce.

The plan evolved into killing him instead to end the marriage. The recruit went to the FBI and started recording conversations. Gottlieb was arrested as he prepared to board a flight to Ukraine 2 days after Goldberg and Liebowitz were charged. *Source: Reuters, 9-7-16*

**Ted Merchant, 67, Chicago:** 1st-degree murder. Merchant, who held worship services called Straight Gate Ministry in the nursing home where he lived, is accused of shooting retired Baptist minister and fellow resident Allen Smith, 80, and then fleeing from the back patio in his motorized wheelchair. He was found 3 blocks away.

Police didn't say what prompted the shooting, which was caught by a surveillance camera. The men often discussed religion, said resident Dorothy Hull. "They'd talk about bible passages and ideas about God. They always had little arguments going on about things like that." *Source: Chicago Tribune, 9-7-16*

**John S. Mattingly, 70, Charlotte Hall, MD:** 20 counts of bank fraud. Mattingly, pastor of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Leonardtown, allegedly deposited more than 500 checks written by parishioners and himself on a parish account into his own retirement account. The total is estimated at \$76,000 from 2007-10, when he resigned after serving the parish since 1994. *Source: WRC, 9-5-16*

**Nicholas King, 73, Rockledge, FL:** Larceny under false pretenses of more than \$50,000 from a person 65 years of age and older and scheme to defraud under false pretenses of more than \$50,000. King is pastor at St. Mary's Catholic Church. A story on the Diocese of Orlando's website noting King's 50th anniversary as a priest says he "believes strongly in bringing the Gospel and necessary resources to people in need." *Source: Florida Today, 9-3-16*

**Timothy Peltz, 51, Wheaton, IL:** 4 counts of predatory criminal sexual assault. Peltz, a deacon at Living Hope Bible Church in Roselle, is accused of molesting a girl over a 10-year period. Assistant State's Attorney Jennifer Lindt told the judge that Peltz admitted it started 13 years ago.

"The defendant said this is all the victim's fault because she was too affectionate at 3½," Lindt said.

Lindt alleged the assaults stopped when the girl was 13 "because she was able to physically resist" but started again within the past several months.

Peltz's 2014 book *Inspirational Poems for the Soul* sells online for \$11.99. He advertises on social media as a Christian music performer. *Source: Daily Herald, 9-1-16*



**Gene W. Edwards, 71, Kannapolis, NC:** Misdemeanor assault/physical with sexual motives. Edwards, pastor of Genesis Baptist Church, is accused by 3 women ranging in age from 51 to 75 of inappropriate behavior at the church or in their homes. Allegations include forceful hugging, pressing the sides of breasts with his hands and attempting kisses on the mouth.

The Genesis church sign includes Edwards' name along with "The Church That Loves People." One woman alleged he started moaning while hugging her. *Source: Salisbury Post, 8-30-16*

**John Reid, 69, Durham, England:** 2 counts of fraud. Reid is accused of stealing an undisclosed amount of money from 2 Catholic parishes where he was pastor. *Source: Premier, 8-30-16*

**Juanita Gomez, 49, Oklahoma City:** 1st-degree murder. Gomez is accused of killing her daughter, Geneva Gomez, 33, in their apartment because she believed she was possessed by the devil. According to court documents, "Juanita stated she punched her daughter repeatedly and forced a crucifix and religious medallion down her throat until blood came out of her daughter's mouth. Juanita saw her daughter die and then placed the body in the shape of a cross."

Francisco Merlos, Geneva's fiancé told police they were going to the courthouse to get married later that day. *Source: The Oklahoman, 8-29-16*

**Ratikanta Dash, 35, Anduti, India:** Sexual offense against a child. Dash, a priest at Kalia Gosain Temple, is accused of raping a 5-year-old girl in his living quarters in the temple after luring her there with chocolates. He later fled but was found in a neighboring village, said Nimai Sethi, assistant police commissioner. *Source: Times of India, 8-29-16*

**Paul Monahan, 83, Council Bluffs, IA:** 5 counts of misdemeanor invasion of privacy. Since he retired in 2004 as a parish priest, Monahan has served as senior chaplain at St. Albert Catholic Schools. Charges stem from an alleged incident involving boys going to the bathroom at an April 4 high school track.

The relevant statute relates to recording or photographing of an unknowing victim in a state of partial of full nudity. *Source: Daily Nonpareil, 8-23-16*

**Kevin M. Grimes, 51, Spencer, IA:** 5 counts of sexual exploitation by a counselor, therapist or school employee. Grimes resigned in May as senior pastor at DaySpring Assembly of God Church after a criminal probe started. He also founded the Spencer Dream Center, a ministry group that provides social services and community outreach.

Court documents allege Grimes had sexual contact with 3 "significantly impaired" clients between 2012-16 while administering mental health services.

Family members of a former client asked a reporter why faith-based treatment programs aren't subject to regulation in Iowa. *Source: Sioux City Journal, 8-19-16*

**Robin Barrett, 57, Conception Bay, Newfoundland:** Distributing or selling child pornography, accessing child pornography and possessing child pornography. Barrett was removed as an Anglican priest in 2009 and convicted in 2010 after being found in possession of 31,460 images and 3,451 videos of children as young as 6 months being penetrated. *Source: St. John's Telegram, 8-19-16*

Pleaded / Convicted

**James J. Brennan, 53, Philadelphia:** Pleaded no contest to simple assault. Brennan, an inactive Catholic priest, and the prosecution agreed to a plea deal calling for 2 years' probation as his trial for attempted rape and child endangerment was about to start. A mistrial was declared in 2012 after jurors deliberated for 13 days and couldn't reach verdicts.

Brennan's codefendant and supervisor, Msgr. William J. Lynn, 65, was convicted of child endangerment but the state Supreme Court ordered a new trial in July after Lynn had spent nearly 3 years in prison. *Source: The Inquirer, 10-19-16*

**Hifz Rahman, 58, Netherton, England:** Guilty by jury of 5 counts of sexual assaults on 2 girls while serving as imam at Queens Cross Mosque in Cradley Heath in 1986-87.

One of the girls, age 6 at the time, came forward to police in 2012. She alleged Rahman molested her almost daily during Quran lessons. She was so afraid that she would wet her pants, according to a book titled *Brutal* that she wrote under the pen name Nabila Sharma in 2012.

Rahman didn't attend the end of his trial due to alleged illness and didn't hear the jury's verdicts. A West Midlands police spokesman said he fled the day after being convicted: "[I]t is believed he boarded a flight to Bangladesh." *Source: Birmingham Mail, 10-7-16*

**Robyn Q. Gwyn, 68, Windsor, Nova Scotia:** Guilty in a bench trial of child sexual assault between 1988-93 when he was a Catholic priest in Kingston, Ontario. The alleged victim, now

42, testified Gwyn was very interested in the confessional in hearing details of his "impure thoughts."

Once, after the priest performed oral sex on him, the man alleged, he asked if they were going to hell but was reassured "It was OK, as long as I did it with him." Another time, he testified, Gwyn compared his penis to the holy eucharist.

Prosecutors presented evidence that psychological assessments at 2 treatment institutions identified Gwyn as a pedophile. *Source: Post Media, 10-3-16*

**Kenneth Fairley, 62, Hattiesburg, MS:** Guilty by jury of 3 counts of theft and fraud involving U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grant funds. Fairley, pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, ran a nonprofit home rehabilitation program.

The conspiracy charge also involves Artie Fletcher, 55, Picayune, who contracted with Fairley to do rehab work but allegedly subcontracted it "to local individuals and companies who attempted to perform the work for a lesser amount." He has pleaded guilty to misprision [cq] of felony. *Source: Hattiesburg American, 9-12-16*

**Robert Claffey, 73, Ballarat, Australia:** Pleased guilty to 19 counts of buggery, indecent assault and sexual penetration of a child while he was a Catholic priest. Incidents occurred between the 1970 and 1990s.

In 1998 he admitted molesting 2 brothers after their sister died in a car accident and received probation. *Source: Herald Sun, 8-30-16*

**John Sheahan, 85, Ballarat, Australia:** Guilty by magistrate of 2 counts of indecent assault of a 9-year-old girl at a church school in the 1960s when he was a Catholic priest. Sheahan denied guilt but earlier admitted to having 3 other victims. *Source: Herald Sun, 8-23-16*

Sentenced

**Christopher Hutchinson, 37, Parker, CO:** 90 days in jail and 20 years' probation after being found guilty of sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust. Hutchinson was the 13-year-old victim's youth pastor at South Fellowship Church in Littleton.

The girl's father, a church elder, asked for prison time, but District Judge Natalie Chase said that was inappropriate because Hutchinson only touched the child through her clothes when they met 3 times in parks.

Leora [cq] Joseph, chief deputy district attorney, told Chase that prison was appropriate because Hutchinson lied about not getting sexual gratification and let his attorney besmirch the girl's reputation during a harsh cross-examination. It was clear that Hutchinson was grooming her with late-night texts and by escalating his touching each time he saw her, Joseph said. "There is no bigger betrayal of trust than a man who purports to walk with the Lord." *Source: Denver Post, 9-30-16*

**Joshua C. Scheil, 29, Twin Lakes, WI:** 2 years in prison, 3 years of extended supervision and 15 years' probation on convictions for child enticement and causing a child 13 or younger to view sexual activity.

Scheil, pastor of Hope Lutheran Church, in April sent an undercover agent posing as a 13-year-old girl several sexually explicit messages and a photo of his genitals. He also said he wanted to have sex when he came to Oshkosh for the South Wisconsin District of the Missouri Synod's spring pastors conference.

Deputy District Attorney Scott Ceman said he believes "this was not his first time doing this," noting evidence that Scheil had been arranging an encounter with and an 18-year-old from Wausau. *Source: Oshkosh Northwestern, 9-29-16*

**Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi, 41, Agoune, Mali:** 9 years in prison after pleading guilty before the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, to destroying cultural heritage (attacking protected sites as a war crime).

Prosecutors said Mahdi, an Islamic scholar, led a group of religious police called the "Hisbah" in destroying 9 mausoleums and a mosque in Timbuktu with pick-axes and crowbars in 2012. The attacks were recorded on video. *Source: Deutsche Welle, 9-27-16*

**Damion Rutues, 37, Des Moines, IA:** 10 years in prison for 3rd-degree sexual abuse and

harboring a runaway. Rutues, associate pastor at Learning of the Lord Revival Center, allegedly let a 15-year-old girl and her friend sleep inside the church. His mother is lead pastor.

"He was familiar with the family," said police Sgt. Paul Parizek. "He was lying to her parents that she, in fact, was there, and while she was there he was having sexual intercourse with her."

Court documents say the other girl walked in and found Rutues on top of her friend. He served prison time after a 2004 arrest for sexually abusing a 12- and an 8-year-old he met at the church. *Source: KCCI, 9-26-16*

**Noor Walile, 38, Leicester, UK:** 6 years in prison after pleading guilty to raping an underage boy in 2010 in a bathroom at Rugby Mosque, where he was imam.

Prosecutor Jane Sarginson told the court, "Initially, Walile denied the allegations, but then said he had done something 'very bad' and that he could not remember what had happened, but that the devil had come over him." *Source: Rugby Observer, 9-23-16*

**David Hayman, 38, Oradell, NJ:** 6 years in prison after pleading guilty to sexual assault and endangering the welfare of a child by sexual conduct. Hayman, youth pastor at Cornerstone Christian Church and a married father of 3, was tried on charges involving 2 girls, both 16, from his youth group.

Three other alleged victims told the court what happened after becoming his "daughters," as he called them. One girl said he guided her hand to his lap on a flight home from Ireland while saying, "Remind me not to sit next to you when I've been away from my wife this long." *Source: northjersey.com, 9-23-16*

**Gary L. Hawkins, 66, Lynden, WA:** 1 year of house arrest after pleading guilty to 3rd-degree child molestation. Hawkins, a member of 2 churches who has gone on mission trips to Mexico and Guatemala, admitted sexually touching a 15-year-old boy he was tutoring.

Weeks after the 2014 incident, Hawkins tried to commit suicide by drug overdose. It was then he told his wife he had touched the boy. He was charged in the early 1980s with molesting a 7-year-old boy when he was a child care worker at Hillcrest Chapel in Bellingham. The boy alleged he took naked baths with Hawkins in a mobile home. He pleaded guilty to 2 counts of indecent liberties. *Source: Bellingham Herald, 9-15-16*

**Brian Mitchell, 31, N. Olmsted, OH:** 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to 4 counts of sexual battery. Mitchell, youth pastor at Columbia Road Baptist Church and father of 3 children under age 8, admitted to a relationship with a 16-year-old girl from the church. "Fun" text messages later turned sexual.

The girl's mother testified that church officials told her their family couldn't return to church until her daughter apologized to Mitchell's wife. The family has since left the church. *Source: Plain Dealer, 9-8-16*

**Otis Holland, 59, Las Vegas, NV:** 15 life terms in prison with no parole for at least 60 years for 15 sexual assault convictions involving 3 underage girls from United Faith Church, a congregation he founded.

Holland met with the girls under the guise of "counseling" them about sexual issues and then performed sex acts on them, prosecutor Robert Langford said. He faces 22 similar counts with 5 more alleged victims. *Source: Review-Journal, 9-8-16*

**Anjem Choudary, 49, and Mohammed Rahman, 33, London:** 5 years, 6 months in prison after being found guilty of terrorism charges. Choudhary, Britain's best-known Islamist preacher, and his acolyte Rahman were convicted of encouraging support for Islamic State. Choudary became notorious for praising the 9/11 attackers and calling for conversion of Buckingham Palace into a mosque. *Source: Reuters, 9-6-16*

**Hafiz Abbasi, 32, Manchester, England:** 12 months' supervised probation, 200 hours' community service and a \$1,325 fine after being found guilty of sexual assault. Abbasi, an imam at Minhaj-ul-Qur'an Central Mosque, was accused of indecent fondling of a woman twice in October 2015. *Source: Evening News, 9-4-16*

**Paul Cunningham, 54, Los Alamos, NM:** 1 year in county jail and 2 years' probation after

pleading guilty to distributing and possessing visual media depicting sexual exploitation of children. Cunningham, pastor of First Baptist Church, was arrested after Colorado police traced his computer's IP address to Los Alamos. Electronic devices at his home had more than 400 images and videos of children and adults having sex. *Source: Albuquerque Journal, 9-2-16*

**Jason M. Hankins, 35, Hoover, AL:** 50 years in prison after pleading guilty to sexual exploitation of a child and possessing child pornography. Hankins, a staffer at Shades Crest Baptist Church's Family Life Center, met his victim by seeking out a single mother on a Christian dating site.

He "possessed more than 100 videos and more than 1,000 images of child pornography, including a video of a man raping a toddler," the sentencing memorandum said. *Source: AP, 9-1-16*

**John-Mark Wilson, 45, Brookland, AR:** 3 years' supervised probation and mandatory counseling after pleading guilty to distributing, possessing or viewing matter depicting sexually explicit conduct involving a child. Wilson, pastor of Brookland Church of Christ, is subject to a maximum of 10 years in prison if he violates probation. *Source: Democrat-Gazette, 9-1-16*

**Brian Burchfield, 43, Oklahoma City:** 6 months in jail after pleading guilty to sending lewd text messages to 4 minor boys while he was youth pastor at Immanuel Baptist Church in Shawnee.

District Attorney Richard Smothermon called the sentence fair. "There had been no physical touching. Certainly he was in the grooming process and leading towards that but it had not yet gotten to that point." *Source: KWTW, 8-24-16*

**Mohammed Syeedy, 21, Rochdale, England:** Minimum of 24 years in prison for acting as an accomplice in the February murder of Jalal Uddin, 72, an imam who Syeedy believed was practicing Islam that ran contrary to the Salafist strain espoused by the Islamic State.

Syeedy, a native Bangladeshi, drove the getaway car for **Mohammed Abdul Kadir**, who is still at-large and thought to be in Syria. Uddin was been to death with a hammer. *Source: Reuters, 9-18-16*

**David O'Hearn, 55, Nelson Bay, Australia:** 5 years, 4 months in prison after being convicted of 44 child sex offenses against 6 male victims while serving as a Catholic priest in the 1980s and 1990s. O'Hearn was sentenced in 2012 on similar charges and will first be eligible for parole in 2022.

Many of the assaults stemmed from O'Hearn's wrestling bouts with boys. After making a 10-year-old perform oral sex on him, O'Hearn allegedly said "our little secret has become a big secret." *Source: abc.net.au, 8-23-16*

**Brett Mittelsteadt, 33, Sherwood Park, Alberta:** 2 years in jail after pleading guilty to sexual interference and communicating with a person under 16 to facilitate commission of a sexual offense. He was the 14-year-old girl's teacher at Holy Spirit Catholic School and a family friend when he started grooming her sexually in 2013.

It progressed from texts like "I love you" and "You are beautiful" to FaceTime chats during which he encouraged her to take off her clothes while he masturbated. Mittelsteadt, who is married with 2 children, once drank alcohol with her in his parents' house before taking her to bed.

"I will never remember what it's like to be innocent," the girl said through tears as she read her victim impact statement to the court. *Source: cbc.ca, 8-22-16*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

**Michael "Mitch" Walters** and the **Catholic Archdiocese of Newark, NJ**, are accused in 2 new suits by plaintiffs alleging child sexual abuse in the 1980s. Danielle Polemeni and David Ohlmuller attended St. Cassian's Parish and the church's school in Upper Montclair when Walters was a priest and deacon there. Six plaintiffs in 3 separate suits now have alleged abuse by Walters.

Polemeni alleges Walters groped her buttocks and put his face in her breasts in her home when she was 13 or 14 and that on an 8th-grade class trip, he carried her around a pool while fondling her breasts and buttocks for several minutes. "I also thought that that was just how men behaved. That sometimes they were creepy and gross, and you just had to wait for them to go away."

Ohlmuller, an altar boy, alleges Walters fondled him "many, many times" in the confessional in 1982 when he was 12. *Source: nj.com, 10-12-16*

The **Catholic Diocese of Belleville, IL**, is being sued by Laura Merleau-McGrady, 51, who alleges she was manipulated into a consensual sexual relationship by **Osang Idagbo**, a Catholic priest and native Nigerian serving Sts. Peter and Paul Parish in Waterloo. She alleges the diocese was negligent in supervising Idagbo and seeks damages in excess of \$50,000.

According to the suit, they met in 2008 and struck up a friendship based on their shared

*Continued on next page*





fluency in French, which later turned into long conversations focusing on troubles between Merleau-McGrady and her boyfriend (and later, husband), her health and converting to Catholicism. She alleges he also had improper relationships with other women. *Source: News-Democrat, 10-11-16*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles**, priests **Enrique Huerta** and **Ramon Palomera** and **St. Francis Xavier Parish** are being sued by “Jane Doe,” who alleges Palomera molested her, exposed himself to her while she was cooking and bombarded her with sexually explicit photos and late-night phone calls while she was his housekeeper at the parish in 2014-15. He’d been removed from another parish in 2010 for having a long relationship with an adult female, after which he completed church-ordered therapy for “sexual deviancy.”

The suit alleges Huerta, senior priest at St. Francis, allowed Palomera, 50, to serve as associate pastor while knowing he was “entirely unfit to serve as a clergy member.” *Source: Daily Mail, 10-6-16*

**Loyola University**, the **Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans** and the **Jesuits of the USA Central and Southern Province** are being sued by “Jane Doe,” who alleges **Benjamin L. Wren**, a priest nicknamed Zen Ben Wren, preyed on her starting in 1978 when she was 5 and living part time with her grandmother, who worked at Loyola.

By the time she turned 9 or 10, the suit says, the abuse included “forcible sexual intercourse.” She alleges she was assaulted 8 to 10 times a year between 1978-85. Wren left the priesthood in 1996 and died of lung cancer in 2007. *Source: The Advocate, 9-2-16*

**Jeffrey D. Eddie, 43**, and **Highland Park Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals, AL**, are being sued by sexual abuse victim “John Doe.” Eddie, children’s pastor at the church, pleaded guilty in 2014 to multiple abuse counts and was sentenced to 30 years.

Doe alleges he was molested from 2009-12, starting when he was 12. Two more suits against Eddie have been filed. *Source: WHNT, 8-31-16*

**Holy Trinity Church, Pomfret, CT**, the **Catholic Diocese of Norwich** and retired **Bishop Daniel Reilly** are being sued by Jonathan and Melissa Roy, husband and wife. Roy, 37, alleges he was molested hundreds of times as an altar boy by **Paul Hebert**, a priest who died in 2010.

The diocese earlier settled 2 other suits alleging pedophilia by Hebert, who allegedly blindfolded Roy while performing sexual acts on him and videotaped them. *Source: The Day, 8-29-16*

## Civil Lawsuits Settled

**Bergen Catholic High School, Oradell, NJ**, and the **Christian Brothers Institute** agreed to pay \$1.9 million to 21 men who allege they were molested by **11 Catholic brothers** who taught at the school from 1963-78. No liability is admitted in the settlement agreement, which says the payment “does not relate or correlate” to the merits of the allegations.

One former student opted out of the deal because he refuses to take down a website detailing abuse at the school. Kobutsu Malone said the school wants to silence him to make the scandal go away. “Considering the charges we are making, to find the school in ass-covering mode rather than healing mode is really disgusting,” said Malone, 66, now a Buddhist monk in Maine. *Source: lohud.com, 8-22-16*

## Finances

The **Catholic Diocese of Stockton, CA**, has filed a Chapter 11 bankruptcy plan that would allocate \$15 million to 27 alleged victims of sexual abuse who have come forward since 2014. The diocese has paid out more than \$14 million already over the past 20 years to settle abuse claims, most against defrocked priest **Oliver O’Grady**, 71, the subject of the 2006 film documentary “Deliver Us from Evil.” He admitted to molesting at least 25 children of both sexes and to sleeping with 2 mothers to gain access to their children.

O’Grady served 7 years in prison and was deported to Ireland in 2000. He was sentenced in 2012 to 3 years for possession of child pornography after accidentally leaving his computer on an Aer Lingus flight. Images of children as young as 2 were found on the computer. *Source: Turlock Journal, 9-24-16*

## Legal Developments

**Yoshiyahu Pinto, 43, Ashdod, Israel**, rabbi of the Shuva Yisrael communities in Ashdod and New York, will not receive parole, Lod District Court Judge Avraham Tal ruled, reversing the parole board’s decision. Pinto has served 7 months of a 1-year sentence for trying to bribe Ephraim Bracha, head of a national fraud squad, with \$200,000 to get information about a criminal probe into Pinto’s charitable foundation. Bracha later committed suicide.

Tal said confidential material showed Pinto



might renew his criminal ties if he were released early. *Source: Haaretz, 9-29-16*

**Barry Freundel, Washington**, a rabbi who pleaded guilty in 2014 to making videos of nude women in a synagogue’s ritual bath, received an appropriate sentence of 6½ years, ruled a 3-judge panel of the D.C. Court of Appeals. The court denied Freundel’s appeal that his sentences on each of 52 voyeurism convictions should have run concurrently and not consecutively. *Source: AP, 9-15-16*

**Shmuel Eliyahu, Tzfat, Israel**, should be removed as chief Sephardi rabbi of the city, according to an appeal to Israel’s Supreme Court by the Reform Movement and 2 related groups, which allege Eliyahu, 59, is “inciting violence against the Arab community.”

The petitioners also claim “he is abusing his position and ignoring the law that prohibits political statements from those whose salaries are paid by the state.” *Source: Arutz Sheva, 9-15-16*

**Kin Park Thaing, 30, Indianapolis**: Felony battery and neglect. Thaing, a Burmese national charged with beating her 7-year-old son in February with a coat hanger for misbehaving with his 3-year-old sister, cited Indiana’s 2015 religious freedom law as a defense and quoted biblical scripture: “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol.”

The boy’s teacher noticed red welts and notified police and child welfare officials. A doctor found 36 bruises across the boy’s back, thigh and left arm and a bruise on his cheek in the shape of a hook on a coat hanger. *Source: Indianapolis Star, 8-31-16*

**Barry Starr, 66, Sharon, MA**, former rabbi at Temple Israel, accused of embezzling \$360,000 from the synagogue to pay off a blackmailer, had a larceny charge dismissed and could have his remaining embezzlement by fiduciary charge dismissed if he obeys the law for a year. Starr, who is now divorced and drives a cab in a suburb of Cleveland, OH, is accused of paying **Nicholas Zemeitus** the money between 2012-14 not to reveal he is gay.

Superior Court Judge Robert Cosgrove agreed to let Starr admit there were enough facts to convict him and continued the case without a finding for a year, which could lead to the embezzlement charge being dismissed. Starr has repaid all but \$67,000 to the temple. *Source: Boston Globe, 8-30-16*

**Gregorio Martinez, 48, Jersey City, NJ**, an evangelical preacher with ties to the Assemblies of God who fled the U.S. in 2015 after being convicted of molesting a 13-year-old boy, was arrested in Honduras. He still faces charges of sexual assaults against 3 other teens. *Source: nj.com, 8-21-16*

**Larry Holley, Grand Blanc, MI**, pastor of Abundant Life Ministries and owner of Treasure Enterprise, has been ordered to stop selling unregistered securities and to not make misleading statements in the offer and sale of securities.

While no criminal charges have been filed,

state regulators received allegations that Holley, who is unlicensed, promised a senior citizen a certain return on an investment without mentioning the risk. *Source: mlive.com, 8-18-16*

Lawyers for the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** argued in U.S. District Court in Utah that a suit accusing the church of failing to protect Navajo children from sexual abuse in a church-run foster program belongs in federal instead of tribal court because the alleged incidents occurred off tribal land.

Four plaintiffs allege abuse in the 1960s and early 1980s in the Indian Student Placement Program, which placed thousands of children in Mormon foster homes in Utah, Idaho and New Mexico and ended about 2000. *Source: AP, 8-16-16*

## Allegations

**Iowa Catholic priest Peter Murphy**, who died in 1980, is accused by 6 persons of sexual abuse. The Sioux City Diocese has settled with victim Tim Lennon, now 69, for \$100,000 plus therapy costs, according to Lennon, who said he first complained to the diocese in 1996 about his abuse in 1960 and received a “dismissive” reply that Murphy was dead.

Kristie Arlt, diocesan spokesperson, said 5 others came forward recently. Lennon had put paid notices in newspapers in areas where Murphy served.

The diocese stated in 2004 that it had received 33 allegations against 10 priests over the past 53 years and had paid out \$4.1 million to settle. *Source: Sioux City Journal, 9-14-16*

**John T. Long, 60, Port Orange, FL**, is no longer pastor at Tubman-King Community Church after 20 years there but church officials aren’t commenting why that is. Daytona Beach police are investigating an allegation made last May about a 2013 incident at the church after bible study.

In an interview with the alleged victim’s father, a church employee, the father told a reporter his daughter was 18 at the time. He declined to discuss details of the allegation but a police report refers to a sexual offense.

Derek Harris, Black Clergy Alliance president, said Long is no longer a member. *Source: News-Journal, 9-14-16*

## Removed / Resigned

**John O’Keefe, Pearl River, NY**, was permanently removed from the ministry by the Catholic Archdiocese of New York for alleged sexual abuse of a minor. Msgr. O’Keefe last served as pastor of St. Margaret of Antioch Parish in 2011. He’s accused by a former student at Cardinal Hayes High School in the Bronx, where O’Keefe was a teacher and guidance counselor in 1981-83. *Source: lohud.com, 9-20-16*

**David R. Rizzo, 44, Altoona, PA**, was granted a leave of absence as pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Parish. Bishop Mark Barchak said the diocese received a complaint alleging

behavior “inconsistent with church ministry” but didn’t involve minors. *Source: Tribune-Democrat, 9-17-16*

**Nicholas Chervyatiuk, 55, Chicago**, was removed as pastor of Holy Patronage Church, a Ukrainian Orthodox congregation, after allegations he took more than \$500,000 from a 93-year-old parishioner diagnosed with dementia. He denies the allegation and hasn’t been charged with a crime.

Chervyatiuk said at a June court hearing he considered the money was payment for care he provided to Nelly Bridgeman as her health declined. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 9-12-16*

**Kansas Catholic priest Chris Rossman**, 44, was suspended as pastor of parishes in Baldwin City and Lapeer due to a report received by the Archdiocese of Kansas City that he had visited “inappropriate” internet sites depicting minors. *Source: Capital-Journal, 9-12-16*

**Michael Carroll, 72, Green Bay, WI**, was found guilty in a Catholic Church trial of molesting 4 minors, resulting in an order by the Vatican for him to live a life of prayer and penance and to no longer present himself as a priest. Allegations dated to the late 1970s and early 1980s.

He was initially suspended in 2002 when he was pastor at parishes in Wittenberg, Tigerton and Marion. *Source: WLUK, 9-9-16*

**New York Catholic priest Anthony Giuliano** was suspended as pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Pawling and St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Dover Plains due to an allegation he molested a 15-year-old boy in the 1980s in a Bronx church rectory.

The complainant, now 43, alleges Guiliano told him he was going to “take him to the back and give him a frontal,” thinking it was a wrestling maneuver until his pants were pulled down.

A bill to create a 1-year window for historical abuse victims to seek redress failed to pass this year. The Catholic League called it “a vindictive bill pushed by lawyers and activists out to rape the Catholic Church.” *Source: NY Daily News, 9-6-16*

## Other

**George A. Seufferling**, a Catholic Archdiocese of Kansas City priest suspended from ministry in 2011 after being accused of sexual abuse by several adult women, was removed from the list of honorees at the St. Louis seminary he graduated from in 1956 after 2 alleged victims complained. The archdiocese has petitioned the Vatican to defrock him “due to conduct inconsistent with priestly celibacy.”

“I was horrified that they were going to celebrate 60 years of priesthood, which was actually 60 years of violating the vows he took,” said Laurel Menne-Dibb, a Wisconsin resident who alleges abuse by Seufferling in 1976 at age 24 after she went to him for confession.

Seufferling’s name appears along with “retired” on the archdiocese’s official list of priests with no mention of the allegations. *Source: Kansas City Star, 10-5-16*

**Catholic Church leaders in Guam** expressed worry about potential bankruptcy after Gov. Eddie Calvo signed a bill to lift the statute of limitations on sexual abuse claims in civil, but not criminal, cases. The bill passed after allegations surfaced against **Archbishop Anthony Apuron**, 70, who has not been criminally charged but has been accused of molesting at least 5 altar boys in the 1960s and 1970s.

About 75% of Guam’s 162,000 residents are Catholic. *Source: CBS, 9-23-16*

**Pastor Letsego** (no first name available) of Christ Embassy International in **Limpopo, S. Africa**, was found hanged in his home a day after mistakenly sending online chat photos of his genitals to church members that were meant for his mistress. News reports said the caption “Wife is away, it’s all yours tonight” accompanied the photos.

An anonymous congregant alleged the affair involved a female deacon at the church, part of a denomination founded in Nigeria in 1990. *Source: Christian Post, 9-22-16*

**Anthony Cipolla, 73, Warren, OH**, a Catholic priest defrocked in 2002 for child molestation, died of a heart attack just before his car crashed into a tree. He was charged in 1978 with molesting a 9-year-old boy during First Communion instruction but the boy’s mother later decide not to pursue prosecution.

A 33-year-old man sued in 1988, alleging Cipolla started molesting him when he was 12 and continued until he was 17. *Source: AP, 9-21-16*

**Steven L. Anderson, Tempe, AZ**, pastor of Faithful Word Baptist Church, was deported from Botswana for his radio speech calling for the death penalty for gays. He is now barred from entering Botswana, S. Africa and the UK.

“I do hate homosexuals,” he told a radio interviewer, adding that adulterers should be stoned to death.

Botswana President Ian Khama said he directed police to go to the station and initiate deportation. “We don’t want hate speech in this country. Let him do it in his own country.” *Source: Reuters, 9-20-16*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org



## A message for everyone



Photo by Lauryn Seering

This important message recently appeared on the electronic marquee on the side of FFRF offices in downtown Madison, Wis. FFRF’s marquee message changes several times a day, often quoting freethinkers or celebrating important dates in freethought history.

## It pays to complain

### Staff no longer part of See You at the Pole

FFRF Member Tamara Corbett noticed that public school teachers were promoting their participation in a recent See You At The Pole prayer event held at her local middle school in Noblesville, Ind. The event was supposedly organized by a student-run club, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. However, school employees and staff cannot pray with students or actively promote or participate in student-run religious clubs. They are only

allowed to supervise the club in a non-participatory capacity. Several teachers posted comments on Facebook about joining the event with the students. So Corbett contacted the school principal to point out that school employees join the students at the event. “I received a call from the principal, and he told me that in talking with some of the teachers that I mentioned to him, he does believe a line was crossed,” Corbett wrote to FFRF. “Teachers, as well as the supervisor of the FCA club, did actively participate in this event. The principal and superintendent will be working with the staff about the role they should play in the FCA club.”

## Overheard

Proclamations, like this one from the city of Victoria, are an invaluable way to send a message that Canadians are willing to stand behind the right to freedom of speech and the council should be commended for their courage. However, the fact that councillors had to debate this proclamation goes to show just how controversial free speech can be. **British Columbia Humanist Association Executive Director Ian Bushfield, responding to a 3-2 vote approving “International Blasphemy Rights Day.”** *BC Humanist Association, 9-23-16*

It’s a truly non-denominational ale for all non-beerliivers. **Kelly Shaefer, who performs in the death metal band Atheist, now has his own beer called Atheist Ale** *Sarasota Herald-Tribune, 10-4-16*

But I do not believe in this nation — a First Amendment nation where we

do not raise any religion over the other and we allow people to worship as they please — that the doctrines of any one religion should be mandated for everyone. **Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine, during the vice presidential debate with Indiana Gov. Mike Pence** *ABC News, 10-4-16*

Once again they’re saying yes, our guys committed horrible crimes, but we’re going to make up the rules for how these crimes are handled. They are the ones who concealed and enabled the predators. We feel it’s designed to mollify politicians. **Barbara Dorris, outreach director for SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests), who remained skeptical after the archdiocese of New York said it created an arbitration system for child victims of sexually abusive priests** *Religion News Service, 10-7-16*

## In memoriam

### Paul D. Fleischauer, 1968-2016



FFRF Lifetime Member Paul D. Fleischauser of Madison, Wis., died on Sept. 15, 2016, from esophageal cancer. He was born on Sept. 9, 1968, in St. Paul, Minn., to Dennis Fleischauser and Lynette (Heuer) Raisler. He married his longtime partner, Michael James Cole, on Jan. 4, 2014, in Minneapolis. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Paul entered the police academy. He went on to join the Madison Police Department where he proudly served for 21 years. After just five years on the force, Paul received an award from the Madison City Council for saving the life of a man he pulled from a burning house. This would become the first of three life-saving awards that he would receive during his career. Paul also received 34 letters of commendation. He served as an instructor, sharing his knowledge and experience as a drug recognition expert. Paul was an avid Green Bay Packers fan, supporter of the Human Rights Campaign, incredible gardener, co-host of Saddle Up Saturday at Woof’s bar in Madison, world traveler and still always there to help his friends and family.

### Irene Stephenson, 1923-2016



FFRF Lifetime Member Irene Hamlen Stephenson died in September. She was born on Oct. 7, 1923, in Chicago to Charles Martin and Carolyn Hilda (Hilgers) Hamlin. She married Edgar B. Stephenson on Aug. 16, 1941, and they divorced in 1946. In 1973, Stephenson founded a method of personality analysis called “biorhythm,” which assesses individual characteristics and compatibility between partners based on certain physical, mental and emotional “cycles.” She wrote a column on biorhythm compatibilities for the National Singles Register from 1979-81. She was the editor of The Truth newsletter

from 1979 to 1985, and had been the editor of the Mini Examiner newsletter. She has been the founder, owner and president of several matchmaking services that use her biorhythm analysis method. She wrote numerous articles for magazines on issues of compatibility. She is quoted in *Who’s Who in America* (1998): “To be happy, you have to be what is natural for you, not what someone else wants you to be. In a letter to FFRF in 2007, she wrote, “I want you to know I read EVERY WORD of Freethought Today. When my copy arrives, I feel as if I have received a love letter.”

### Joseph Chern, 1922-2016



Longtime FFRF member Joseph Chern, 94, died at his home on Sept. 16. He was born April 22, 1922, in St. Paul, Minn., to Russian immigrants. Joe enlisted in the Air Force during World War II. After the war, he attended the University of Minnesota, majoring in forestry and wood technology. His early career was as a forester in California and Minnesota, where he had particularly fond memories of working on the Iron Range. He moved to Madison, Wis., in 1952 to do research at the USDA Forest Products Laboratory. Joe and Joyce were married in 1955 and moved into the house they built on the shores of Lake Monona in Wisconsin. After retirement, he and Joyce joined the Peace Corps and spent two years in Talca, Chile. He then joined the Executive Service Corps and was sent to Egypt, Honduras, Belize and Bosnia to help set up wood dry kilns. He had an exemplary work ethic, and in his spare time built three homes and wrote two books. Joe had been a member of FFRF since 1979. His lifelong desire to donate his body to the University of Wisconsin-Madison Medical School was granted.

He is survived by his wife of 61 years, Joyce Western Chern, son Andy Chern (Tiffani) and daughters Laura Chern (John Voorhees) and Cindy Casalina (Jeff) and many grandchildren. “We’ll sure miss Joe — who was an FFRF member since 1979,” said Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-presidents. “Joe first started dropping by when we had rented offices off the Capitol Square in the early 1980s. He’d stop by with a warm chuckle and some astute strategy for us to try. Joe was a very caring and endearing person who made life more enjoyable and enlightened for those around him. We admired his deep commitment to justice around the globe.”

## COMING NEXT MONTH IN FREETHOUGHT TODAY



Marie Schaub’s ‘Atheist in a Foxhole Courage Award’ speech from FFRF’s convention



Rafida Bonya Ahmed’s ‘Forward’ award speech on the dangers of being an atheist in Bangladesh



## Secular invocations

### Jocelyn Williamson Orlando City Council Sept. 26, 2016

FFRF Member Jocelyn Williamson has given seven secular invocations in the past two years, including this most recent prior to the start of the Orlando City Council meeting. She is a longtime business educator, with a special interest in community building. She created the Science League for Kids, co-founded the Central Florida Freethought Community and serves on the board of the Florida Humanist Association.

*“The reaction from people has been overwhelming positive,” she says of her invocations. “Personal remarks from officials and the audience have been welcoming and thankful overall. Making the invocations a “meetup,” where we meet before or after for a drink or meal, has also worked well to bring new members to our organization.”*



Jocelyn Williamson

Let us remember that these events are truly only a small fragment of what is happening in our world. Just consider that which you will contemplate today — where we see an outpouring of love for our community — The Pride Parade, the mile walk for a cure for Down Syndrome and the art exhibition for breast cancer. And the proclamation to recognize that Native Plants are an important part of providing a better environment, not just for our native animals, but for us as well.

We are working together to the benefit of the society — which we want to see for ourselves and our children.

Today — we leave our busy schedules outside for just a little while. During this meeting, let us remember to be concerned for the well-being of all among us, to use reason to guide our debate, to be committed to the diversity with which we thrive, and to respect all those of differing views. For without disagreement, we may not learn from one another.

The City Beautiful presents many challenges to its leaders, but none which is too great for us to meet together. Everyone brings unique abilities with them to help solve the problems at hand. And all the knowledge we need is right here, in this room.

No matter what work lies ahead, let’s remember the words of the great Arnold Palmer. He was our king even before Orlando had a castle. He said: “The most rewarding things you can do in life are often the ones that look like they cannot be done.”



Photo by Andrew Seidel

David Williamson, Justin Scott, David Suhor and Aleta Ledendecker are the four winner’s of FFRF’s “Nothing Fails Like Prayer” contest. Each winner received a plaque, \$500 and an expenses-paid trip to the FFRF convention in Pittsburgh. Williamson and Ledendecker were the Presidents’ Choice winners, while Scott and Suhor were the top two vote-getters in an online poll.

### Invocations

*Continued from page 1*

since 2014 and also organized others to give them. He is a plaintiff in the federal lawsuit filed over censorship of a secular invocation in Brevard County, Fla., brought by FFRF, Americans United and the ACLU. Williamson was a “presidents’ choice” awardee. Williamson is founder of FFRF’s chapter, Central Florida Freethought Community.

All four honorees received expense-paid trips to repeat their secular invocations at FFRF’s 39th annual national convention in Pittsburgh. Each also received a formal plaque and a \$500 honorarium.

“We’re proud of all the contestants for their success in balancing governmental prayer,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. Gaylor praised activists for their persistence and dili-

gence, and willingness to speak publicly.

The new contest for 2017 opened on Sept. 1 and ends Aug. 1, 2017. The winner or winners will be attending FFRF’s 40th annual national convention in Madison, Wis., Sept. 15-17, 2017.

The contest began in response to an unfortunate ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2014 “blessing” sectarian prayers by city and county governments. The silver lining in that ruling was the court’s qualification that the practice is permissible — providing all comers, including atheists and religious minorities, are permitted to participate.

“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,” adds Dan Barker, FFRF co-president.

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

## No God? No problem!



FFRF Life Member Al Wagner sent this photo to FFRF. This church sign is just south of Ridgeville, S.C. “Down there there’s a church just about every mile, it seemed,” Wagner wrote. “Every time I look at this picture it gives me a little chuckle.”


## Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

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

FFRF • P.O. Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701

*Freedom Depends on Freethinkers*

## Yip Harburg, from his book *Rhymes for the Irreverent*



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

Buy it from FFRF online  
[shop.ffrf.org](http://shop.ffrf.org)








Photo by Mark Tiborsky

Sam Salerno, Sharon Woznicki and Jesse Dill handle table duties for the Northern Ohio Freethought Society during the 2016 Ingenuity Fest in Cleveland. Mark Tiborsky of the Northern Ohio Freethought Society writes: “We were there all weekend, passing out FFRF and NOFS literature along with other secular materials. The event was well-attended and a lot of people stopped by to chat and collect some materials. I thought we put on a very nice display, framed by a ‘Tree of Life’ poster and a poster featuring a list of commonly used logical fallacies. Ray Valenti’s Powerpoint presentation featuring quotes by famous freethinkers was a nice touch. The majority of the responses were positive, although we did have a handful of somewhat antagonistic visitors!”



Photo by Norman Stockwell

FFRF made an appearance as a co-sponsor of Fighting Bob Fest, an annual fall event inspired by Robert “Fighting Bob” La Follette, one-time Wisconsin senator, governor and founder of the Progressive Party — and a freethinker who admired Robert G. Ingersoll. The Sept. 17 event took place at Breese Stevens Field in Madison, Wis. FFRF’s “atheists vote” banner was also on formal display. Pictured at FFRF’s table are (from left) Bookkeeper Eleanor McEntree, Legal Intake Clerk Seth Wrinkle and Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. Also assisting at the table were Freethought Today Editor Emeritus Bill Dunn, Co-President Dan Barker, Legal Fellow Maddy Ziegler and Director of Communications Amit Pal. With thanks to FFRF Director of First Impressions Lisa Treu for organizing the table beforehand.



During the NC Pride Parade and Festival in Durham, N.C., the Triangle Freethought Society of North Carolina was there with a booth and great representation. In this photo, Chirag Bhangale, the Good Works coordinator and a board member of the Triangle Freethought Society, holds up a fun sign opposing North Carolina’s HB2 bill.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Staff Attorneys Elizabeth Cavell and Patrick Elliott presented a seminar on “The Establishment Clause and Public Schools” at the Legal Association for Women’s luncheon on Sept. 14. Those in attendance, mostly Dane County (Wis.) attorneys, received continuing legal education credit.



Photo by Tom Waddell

FFRF Maine had a booth at the Common Ground Country Fair in Unity, Maine, Sept. 24-25. Gigi Orah and Tim Bolton, secretary for FFRF Maine, helped staff the table, where many supportive people stopped by, according to FFRF Maine President Tom Waddell. He said they sold several books, buttons, pins and collected some donations. Even better, he said, 13 people were interested in becoming FFRF and FFRF Maine members. “We gave away well over 200 Freethought Today newspapers and passed out a lot of FFRF / FFRF Maine membership applications,” Waddell said.



Susan L. Kocher of the Triangle Freethought Society, dressed as an invisible pink unicorn, uses a sign to poke fun at a protester at the NC Pride Parade and Festival. “Because much of the anti-gay hysteria in the U.S. and abroad is fueled by religion, and because TFS supports our LGBTQ members, we consider participation in this event to be well in line with our mission,” Kocher said. “This is our fourth year of setting up a TFS booth and participating in the parade. Our big Flying Spaghetti Monster is always a hit with the crowd, likewise our ‘Hug an Atheist’ signs. We get lots of hugs! It’s a very positive day, aside from the fundie-Christian haters, who deserve a little light-hearted poking.”



# U.S. has long history of not electing atheists

*This article originally appeared in Religion & Politics, the online journal of the Danforth Center at Washington University and is reprinted with permission.*

By Leigh Eric Schmidt

When Donald Trump spoke to a group of evangelical leaders in New York early this past summer, he insinuated that Hillary Clinton’s Christian faith was an unknown quantity, that there was really no indication in her long public life of her being religious at all. The record, of course, could hardly be clearer on Clinton’s religious affiliation; she is a lifetime Methodist who has spoken repeatedly about the formative influence of her Protestant faith.

This much we have certainly learned by now: Facts rarely get in the way of Trump’s fearmongering. If it pays to suggest that Barack Obama is a secret Muslim, then surely there is something to be gained from darkly implying that Clinton might just be a closeted unbeliever. After all, the two groups that polling has consistently shown to evoke the most distrust among Americans are Muslims and atheists.

## Kennedy first Catholic

In casting doubt on Clinton’s religious credentials before an evangelical audience, Trump was simply trying to fire up those Christian soldiers who already see her as an enemy to their social and political causes. But, the insinuation itself raises the larger question of whether there remains, in effect, a religious test for the nation’s highest office, notwithstanding the constitutional provision to the contrary. Could an atheist or avowed secularist be elected to the presidency — indeed, to any office of public trust — in a country still so reflexively God-affirming?

When Richard Nixon allowed in the presidential election of 1960 that the Roman Catholic faith of his rival, John F. Kennedy, should not be an issue, he did so in such a way that offered little consolation to the nonbeliever: “There is only one way that I can visualize religion being a legitimate issue in an American political campaign,” Nixon claimed. “That would be if one of the candidates for the presidency had no religious belief.”

While Kennedy went on to become the nation’s first, and only, Catholic president, the Cold War blockade against candidates without religious belief was kept very much in place. Even now with the threat of godless communism having largely dissipated,



Leigh Eric Schmidt

the atheist badge remains an automatic disqualifier for more than 40% of the American electorate. A mere whiff of irreligion can be a serious political encumbrance, an unforgivable breach for those who still take the nation’s biblical, city-on-a-hill status with exceptional seriousness.

## Jefferson’s election

Raising the atheist specter against presidential candidates has been a tried-and-true part of the attack apparatus in American politics from the beginning. The sometime Anglican, mostly deist Thomas Jefferson was relentlessly assailed as a howling atheist who would destroy the biblical and Christian foundations of the republic. For many American Christians, the election of Jefferson in 1800 was apocalyptic; the political and moral order was being entrusted to an infidel indifferent to whether his compatriots worshipped one god, 20 gods or no god at all. To Federalist clergy, if Americans elected a freethinker like Jefferson, they might as well throw their bibles into bonfires and teach their children to chant mockeries of God.

A century-plus later in 1908, rumors followed the Republican presidential nominee, William Howard Taft, that he had “no particular religious belief.” The Taft campaign countered the whispers of atheism by trumpeting Taft’s substantial Unitarian connections, admittedly small solace to evangelicals. His Cincinnati pastor stepped forward to emphasize that Taft’s mother and father had been longtime members of the church and that their son had joined in enthusiastically as a youth, including on one occasion playing the part of a “very plump” pixie in a church play. “Taft Once Unitarian Fairy” was the headline of The New York Times story explaining how Taft met the religious bona fides for the office he was seeking.

Needless to say, that report did not solve Taft’s religion problem. Evangelical opponents dogged him throughout the election season, claiming that no Christian could vote for such a hetero-

dox candidate, especially in comparison to their champion, Presbyterian William Jennings Bryan.

Down ballot the politics of irreligion have been much the same. American unbelievers occasionally reported electoral successes, but they were usually small victories claimed under a cloud of suspicion. An atheist alderman in Lyons, Iowa — one Samuel Penn — served for years as a member of the City Council in the 1850s despite his ungodly opinions being widely known in town. His “unflinching integrity” won out over ministerial criticisms and pious misgivings.

Far better known than local atheist triumphs were infamous secularist debacles. One such was the fate of the convicted blasphemer Abner Kneeland, who, after years of legal trouble in Massachusetts in the 1830s, set out for Salubria, Iowa, in search of freer climes. There he kept up his infidel activities, organizing celebrations of Tom Paine’s birthday and criticizing Christian “bigotry” and “superstition.” He also stayed involved in party politics. Entering the fray on behalf of the Democrats over the Whigs, he quickly became a lightning rod, with the local Democratic candidates getting tarred as “Kneelandites.” To underline the point, some hotheaded acolytes of the “Christian party in politics” burned the “Old Infidel” in effigy, a potent symbol (as they saw it) of the election’s religious and political stakes. Kneeland’s favored candidates went down in flames with his likeness.

## Ingersoll nomination

Still more infamous was the brouhaha that erupted in 1877 over the news that President Rutherford B. Hayes was about to appoint the infidel orator and Republican politico Robert G. Ingersoll as ambassador to Germany. “Only think of committing this whole Christian Republic to the deep, deep disgrace,” one New York correspondent reported aghast, “of being represented in the German Empire by a clever, loud, contemptuous scoffer at the Christian religion and the bible!” The nomination was quickly set aside.

The snubbing of Ingersoll lit up freethinking liberals. Here was an eminently qualified statesman, a Civil War veteran and lawyer, excluded from holding an office of public trust

entirely on religious grounds. The dire message that secularists took from Ingersoll’s squashed diplomatic career and from any number of episodes like it was one of persisting disenfranchisement through Christian statecraft.

As Kneeland’s old infidel newspaper, the Boston Investigator, editorialized in 1885, “Our politics this day are governed almost as much by religion as if we had a nationally established church and creed, for no man who is not religious can be elected to any office.” That despairing conclusion overstated the absoluteness of the barrier, but not by much.

## Religion still resounds

Even as the number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation has grown over the last 20 years — now about 25% of the population — the demand that politicians make their theism manifest continues to resound.

Some took the populist success of Sen. Bernie Sanders, a secular Jew with thin religious ties, as an indicator that the nation’s obligatory godliness is finally tapering off. Perhaps, but a staffer at the Democratic National Committee was nonetheless

American unbelievers occasionally reported electoral successes, but they were usually small victories claimed under a cloud of suspicion.

caught, in a hacked email, wondering if Sanders might be an atheist and whether that could be used against him in the primaries.

After he left office in 2013, Barney Frank, the first openly gay member of Congress, admitted that during his career he had never been fully candid about his nonbelief and advised atheists against using that harsh identifier in public life. Why should a politician, he asked, “pick a fight that doesn’t have to be waged?”

On this front, the secularist minority still has a long way to go. Public expressions of faith, however perfunctory, retain a strong pull in America’s electoral politics. Insinuating that one’s opponent does not pass this de facto religious test has been a recurring smear in the nation’s history, one no less nefarious for its familiarity.

*Leigh Eric Schmidt is the Edward C. Mallinckrodt Distinguished University Professor in the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis. He is the author of Village Atheists: How America’s Unbelievers Made Their Way in a Godly Nation, published this October by Princeton University Press.*

## They said what?

There needs to be alternative Halloween celebrations in churches, where they have all the games, and all the fun, and all the nice, pretty girls, and all the handsome boys, and they’re praising the Lord instead of worshiping Satan. Halloween has become a night when the devil rejoices. **Pat Robertson, answering a woman’s question about her son attending a**



**haunted house that includes a “demon DJ” who “encourages people to dance”** *The 700 Club, 9-26-16*

Those Bibles sit quietly in the dark unless someone opens the drawer. They go quietly back into the dark if that someone is not interested. . . . Going after those bibles as though they represent a major threat is like smothering a lamb with legal briefs. It’s overkill, folks. And it is a strategic mistake. **Linda Valdez, a columnist writing for the Arizona Republic, after FFRF was**

**able to get a hotel affiliated with Arizona State University to remove bibles from the rooms**

*Arizona Republic, 9-26-16*

Raise your hand, Christian conservatives, everybody. Raise your hand if you’re not a Christian conservative. I want to see this, right. Oh, there’s a couple people,



that’s all right. I think we’ll keep them. Should we keep them in the room? Yes? I think so.

**Donald Trump, joking — supposedly — to supporters at a campaign rally in Iowa**

*Washington Post, 9-28-16*

I want to prove to everybody that God does exist.

**9-year-old William Maillis, who has already graduated high school and wants to be an astrophysicist**

*People.com, 9-29-16*





FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

# NATIONAL CONVENTION 2016

PITTSBURGH

39TH ANNUAL | OCTOBER 7-9 | WYNDHAM GRAND HOTEL



Lawrence Krauss gives his keynote speech to the crowd of about 525 on the opening night of the convention, Oct. 7. His talk was titled, "Turning Metaphysics into Physics."



Emily Dunbar of Pennsylvania listens to Jerry Coyne's speech, "Evolution and Atheism: Best Friends Forever" on Saturday, Oct. 8.



FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel gives a presentation Friday, Oct. 7, titled "Is Christianity Un-American?"



Cosima, the daughter of Mikel and Ed Hensley, reads quietly.



Justin Scott of Iowa (above) takes a selfie with the audience while on stage after receiving FFRF's "Nothing Fails Like Prayer" award.

Atheist-themed baseball caps (right) were some of the merchandise available for purchase at the convention. To buy any FFRF products, go to [shop.ffrf.org](http://shop.ffrf.org).



Marie Schaub waits to be introduced to give her acceptance speech for earning FFRF's Atheist in a Foxhole Courage Award.



Founding members of The Clergy Project (from left: Dan Barker, Daniel C. Dennett, Carter Warden and Linda LaScola) listen to a question from an audience member following Warden's speech, where he publicly came out as an atheist after decades as a Christian minister. (See next two pages for his speech.)



Sheila and Steve Aldred enjoy a light moment during the convention.



## ‘Conflict of careers’

# My journey from ministry to freethinking

*Carter Warden’s speech, edited for space, was delivered Oct. 7 at FFRF’s 39th annual convention in Pittsburgh at the Wyndham Grand Hotel. He was introduced by Dan Barker:*

It was the day after Easter in April 2009. I was in the office and I got a call from a Church of Christ minister from east Tennessee who told me, kind of whispering, that he had lost his faith, but was still stuck in the ministry. I knew that feeling. I told him about this Dan Dennett/Linda LaScola study (of preachers who are not believers), and he jumped at the chance to participate, as long as his privacy was guaranteed. He said he wanted to be known by the name “Adam Mann.” That’s what I know him as. In fact, I just checked my email . . . I have more than 1,600 emails from “Adam Mann.”

Then, when The Clergy Project launched in March 2011, Adam was an active participant, and he established the online forum and did all this admin work. You might have seen he was featured on “ABC Nightly News” in 2010, interviewed — behind a screen — by Dan Harris.

But tonight, after being a closeted atheist in the pulpit for many years in the Bible Belt, Adam Mann is going to come out here publicly as an atheist.

Let him know what true heathen fellowship is all about.

I’m gonna let him tell you his real name tonight. So Adam Mann, come on up so I can start calling you by your real name.

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By Carter Warden

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Wow, eight years ago I did not know what a freethought convention was, let alone ever dream that I would one day be speaking at one.

My story, while unique to my personal situation and experiences, is unfortunately not unique across this country and even around the world, because others have also found themselves trapped in the disheartening position of being a member of the clergy who no longer believes in a god or the supernatural. It is my hope that my story will bring hope to those in that perplexing situation.

Who am I? For the last eight years to many I have been known as Adam Mann, but my real name is Carter Warden. I have lived in east Tennessee since I was 4. My early religious upbringing was United Methodist, and then as teenager and young adult transitioned to the Christian Church / Church of Christ, the instrumental version as opposed to those that use no instruments in worship, because we all know how segmented the faithful can be. So I was born smack dab in the middle of American Protestantism.

Why did I choose ministry? I was an automotive technician by trade with a two-year associate degree. I have always been mechanically minded, seeing things as very black and white. Something either worked or it did not, and there was always a logical reason and corresponding repair. But after a few years of work and deepening involvement in my local church, I sought a more meaningful purpose for my life. Religion provided that for me at that time. I had married my high school sweetheart. We just celebrated our



Photo by Ingrid Laas

**Former minister Carter Warden sings a song for the convention crowd on Oct. 7 after coming out publicly as an atheist. He is one of the founding members of The Clergy Project, a group that supports religious professionals who no longer hold supernatural beliefs.**

33rd anniversary, and we now have two grown children. Early on, my wife and I decided our lives and marriage would be dedicated to ministry. I returned to school to receive an undergraduate degree in bible with a minor in sociology from a local Christian liberal arts college. I was ordained in ministry in 1988 and began preaching in a local church.

### 25 years a minister

The Christian Church does not require its pastors to be seminary graduates. However, a few years later I enrolled in seminary as I wanted more education and eventually received my master’s degree in religion. So for well over 25 years, I was involved in active ministry as a youth pastor, preaching pastor, small groups pastor, administrative pastor, and a worship pastor, all in the Christian Church. And then most recently, until two weeks ago, I was a part-time musician and worship leader for a United Methodist Church.

So what changed? My spiritual de-

mise, as some would say, but what I call my intellectual enlightenment, began in July of 2008, after nearly 20 years in full-time ministry. I was leading a small group bible study where we read a Christian book entitled *UnChristian*. The book looked at the way the world views Christianity, focused specifically on “Mosaics” and “Busters,” those 19- to 29-year olds that the church always loses when they go off to college.

The research presented the top six criticisms that non-Christians have about Christians. They are hypocritical, anti-homosexual, sheltered, conversion-motivated, too political and judgmental. Pretty accurate, wouldn’t you say? I began to look at the big picture and I tried to step back to see what we Christians looked like from a nonbeliever’s perspective. As I seriously thought about it, I realized that if I had been approached by a nonbeliever on the subject of evolution, for example, I could not carry on an intelligent conversation. This was because most fundamental evangelical believers have shunned all secular and scientific teaching about evolution, because it is taught by the church to be “evil” and directly contradicts the literal interpretation of scripture. So I realized the indictment of non-Christians was correct: I was sheltered and ignorant in many subjects. This book challenged me to do research so that I might know my secular audience better, so that I could win them to Christ.

### Getting educated

I began reading anything and everything on the topics of evolution, biology, cosmology, cognitive science, philosophy and world religions. Eventually I found myself secretly reading books and watching debates by each of the four horsemen of the new athe-

ism: Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett, Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris. I read books by Bart Ehrman, Dan Barker, Michael Shermer, Guy Harrison, Greg Epstein, John Loftus, Stephen Hawking, Stephen Prothero,

Eugenie Scott, Victor Stinger, Jerry Coyne, Andrew Newberg and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, as well as the writings of Bertrand Russell, Friedrich Nietzsche, Robert Ingersoll, Charles Darwin, Benjamin

Franklin and Thomas Paine, to name a few.

I knew that if Christianity were true it would withstand the distorted truth promoted by worldly wisdom. God could and would honor my sincere inquiry into the “big questions” of life and faith. Surely searching for understanding and truth would draw me even closer to him. I had always said that a faith unchallenged is really not faith at all. I loved then to quote Francis Schaeffer, who stated that for faith to have conviction of the whole person, it must be based upon the mind as well as the heart. So I found myself plunging into areas of study I had never seriously contemplated.

Between July 2008 and April 2009, I read more than 60 books, listened to hundreds of hours of lectures and debates, watched 25 documentaries and movies. I went through eight college-level courses from the Teaching Company on philosophy, evolution, New Testament, world religions, biology and human behavior.

I also audited a graduate-level class on the historical life of Christ to see what the most recent scholarship had to offer in an attempt to recover my waning faith. The class only solidified my skepticism by showing how little we can really know about the life of Christ as recorded in the New Testament documents and outside sources,

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To watch Carter Warden’s entire speech, go to [ffrf.org/warden](http://ffrf.org/warden).

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Photo by Ingrid Laas

**Warden, who used the pseudonym “Adam Mann” for eight years before coming out as an atheist, told the crowd how he began to lose his faith after extensive reading and discussions.**



as well as the plethora of variations, inconsistencies and contradictions in the text. Realizing that I was not the first person to wrestle with doubt, I shared my struggle with a select small group of people that I knew I could trust.

No satisfactory answers

Over a period of almost one year, I met with four different bible college and seminary professors, three pastors and even a professional Christian counselor, who told me I was experiencing a “conflict of careers.” While I respected each of these people, none of them had satisfactory answers. In fact, the majority of those I spoke with suggested I leave fundamentalism and minister in a more liberal denomination. They told me I was interpreting the text too literally. While this solution might work for some, I saw it as avoiding the ultimate question at hand: Is there really an all-knowing, all-powerful, loving, intervening God as revealed in scripture? My conclusion, after 10 months of intense study and still to this day is, no there is not.

So instead of deepening my faith, my intense study left me no choice but to abandon my once precious faith. I did not lose my faith, as though it was something that regrettably slipped away, rather I chose to discard it because it no longer made sense. Some of the major reasons I no longer believe are: the contradictions in the biblical texts, the discrepant and despicable character of God in scripture, the questions of theodicy or unexplained suffering in the world, the fallacy of answered prayer, the denial of modern science, and, in general, the harmful teachings of religion.

I agree with Dan Dennett, who, in the book *Caught in the Pulpit*, states that “the church has its hands full if it seeks to protect its laypeople and even religious leaders from influences of the real world.” Modern technology makes information readily available for anyone seeking answers. Therefore, the church of today faces the same dilemma that God himself fictitiously faced, rather unsuccessfully, in the garden when he tried to keep humankind from the tree of knowledge. Shouldn’t that be a red flag to all people, a warning sign when open honest inquiry is discouraged and squelched? Faith and knowledge do not go hand in hand; to me they are more like oil and water. You can temporarily mix them with constant vigorous physical and mental work, but left alone to their natural state, they repel each other.

Taking the first step

So what is a nonbelieving clergy member do? I think it was the day after Easter Sunday in 2009 that I called the Freedom From Religion Foundation and asked to speak with Dan Barker. I was sitting in my church parking lot and had blocked my cell number, in case this unknown atheist tried to turn me in to church authorities or the secular news agencies. I had read his book, *Godless*, and just had to speak with someone who had experienced what I was going through. I told Dan that my entire life had been given to God. My wife and children and extended family were all strong Christians. Our lives revolved around the church. We were consumed by Christianity.

It was incredible to find someone who understood, someone who had once been passionate about God, ministry and the church, but changed his mind. Allow me to read part of my email to Dan the next day. Note the

fear of being identified, which almost all nonbelieving clergy have.

“Dan, I appreciate you taking my call yesterday. I am writing under a fictitious name and have created this email account just for such correspondence. I am interested in you putting me in touch with the person doing interviews for the Daniel Dennett project. . . . Again, I want to emphasize the need for confidentiality with you and your organization as well as any contact I have with the Dennett project. I know you understand the need for this. I give you permission to give my email to the Dennett contact person. Sorry I cannot remember her name. Adam”

Thus the beginning of “Adam Mann” and the first of more than 2,500 emails with Linda LaScola, whose name I will never again forget. So in 2009 I became one of the active clergy members in the original Tufts University study. After that, Linda and Dan Dennett orchestrated secret interviews that I was eager to do with ABC’s Dan Harris (2010) and with the Canadian Broadcasting Company in 2011 and 2012.

I am not alone

Since Linda has shared my involvement as a secret founder, website technical administrator and eventually a forum moderator of The Clergy Project, I will only share what I learned about myself and the now nearly 770 Clergy Project members. I learned that I am not alone. I learned that reason and science are the best tools for people to discover truth, freedom, happiness and purpose for this life. I learned that goodness and morality do not come from a god. Goodness, morality, happiness, compassion, love, selfless sacrifice, and the desire to make this world a better place can be found within each of us as we accept our role as the most privileged species on Earth.

I saw this firsthand in March of 2013 when a former Catholic priest who was a member of The Clergy Project shared on the private forum that he had just been diagnosed with inoperable liver cancer. Roger’s amazing positive attitude and willingness to share his pain and resolve with complete strangers was a very powerful testimony that there truly are atheists in foxholes, and that death without the hope of something beyond is not only fathomable, but to be viewed as a welcome experience in this journey of life. Roger and I exchanged emails and spoke on the phone as he awaited his imminent death. I actually interviewed Roger for



Photo by Andrew Seidel

Warden said he was worried about whether he should tell people of his atheism. His daughter told him, “Dad, it won’t matter when you are dead, so tell people now.”

more than an hour by Skype before his death. He gave me permission to edit and eventually share the video that we titled “The Acid Test of Final Farewells.” Linda and I hope to share that story and video soon on her blog.

Interviewing Roger, he told me how inspiring the work of Dawkins and Dennett had been to him. Wanting to do something special for Roger, I wrote Dennett and shared Roger’s story and phone number. One day later Roger wrote me saying, “Adam, if you did anything to facilitate the call, I thank you from the depths of my heart. It was a very heartwarming surprise and damn near midnight his time. I had often watched him as one of the four horsemen: one of the purer essences of the goodness of this universe.” Roger died peacefully at his home less than two weeks after my interview and Dennett’s call. Peace, compassion, purpose – all exhibited in the lives of those who are not believers. Truly a real testimony of goodness without godliness.

No more pretending

So why go public now? While doing one interview for The Clergy Project, I was asked what fears I had. I answered then that “my greatest fear is doing nothing at all and pretending to be someone I am not for the rest of my life.” All of us nonbelieving clergy have our own reasons for remaining

closeted. Many, like me, refrain from telling others because we do not want to hurt or embarrass family members and friends. Combine this with the financial stress of trying to change one’s career midstream and you can see why many learn to tough it out and put up with the cognitive dissonance and the gut-wrenching feeling of inauthenticity. Yet I longed for the day when I could be completely

honest and transparent about the journey from faith to reason, especially with those I loved the most.

In 2013, I realized I had to give up some of my responsibilities with The Clergy Project so I could truly focus on changing careers. Thankfully, I found a good job at a local uni-

versity and quietly oozed out of full-time ministry. But because of the financial needs of my family, I worked part-time as a music minister. Maybe I should have been happy with the way things were, because who knew the difference? God didn’t seem to care and what the people don’t know won’t hurt them, right? I really tried for almost two years to see if I could live under the radar. I logged off of The Clergy Project forum and gave up my role as moderator and website administrator. I stopped reading about and corresponding with anyone from any freethought organizations. I even stopped emailing Linda, Dan Barker and Dan Dennett for an extended period of time. Maybe I could learn to live with the tension? And I did for a little while, but I still ultimately had to live with myself.

Tell people now

During that time, I attended several funerals and actually sang at many of them for family and church friends. I would think, “I do not want to be remembered as a spiritual person. I am not a man of faith. I am a man of reason and science. I want to enjoy this one short life I have. I want people to know I rejected faith and lived a meaningful, happy life without it.” I told that to my daughter one day and she replied, “Dad, it won’t matter when you are dead, so tell people now.”

My true voice has been suppressed and silenced and, as a result, I have been living a life of secrecy, duplicity and hypocrisy. But that stops today.

I finally found the boldness to openly proclaim to the world that I am no longer a member of the clergy or a person of faith. I live with reason as my guide and I am an atheist.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker greets and embraces Warden after introducing him to the convention-goers.





Rafida Bonya Ahmed is presented with the inaugural Forward Award by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.



FFRF plaintiff Marie Schaub is presented with FFRF's Atheist in Foxhole Courage Award by Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott.



Lauri Lebo was given the Freethought Heroine Award for her news coverage of the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* trial in 2004-05. FFRF Board Chair Stephen Hirtle presented the award.



Photo by Andrew Seidel

Lawrence Krauss points to the Emperor Has No Clothes Award he was presented with prior to giving his keynote speech on Friday, Oct. 7.



David Williamson is presented with his "Nothing Fails Like Prayer" plaque by FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.



Justin Scott receives his "Nothing Fails Like Prayer" plaque award from FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell.



Aleta Ledendecker is honored with FFRF's "Nothing Fails Like Prayer Award," presented by FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert.



David Suhor is presented with a "Nothing Fails Like Prayer" plaque by Freethought Today Editor PJ Slinger.



Nadia Duncan was given the Michael Hakeem Memorial Award for her first-place essay in FFRF's contest for freethinkers of color. FFRF Director of Operations Lisa Strand presented the award.



Hank Zumach, Wis., presented FFRF with his Freedom from Fundamentalist Religion Award, including a \$10,000 check! FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker then surprised Hank with a "Freethinker Extraordinaire" award. Thank you, Hank.



## FFRF's 2016 State Representatives



FFRF's State Representatives gathered at the Pittsburgh convention to participate in their annual meeting. FRONT (from left): Dan Barker, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Wis.; Douglas Marshall, Mich.; Paul Novak and Dianne Cooper, Iowa; Ken Hofbauer, Ill.; Margaret Downey, Pa.; Patricia Jones, Tenn.; Stef Moritz, Wis. MIDDLE (from left): Cheryl Kolbe, Ore.; Marc-Andre LaChance, Canada; Fairfid Caudle, N.Y.; Todd Peissig, Wis.; Sue Kocher, N.C.; Joseph Harris, Mich.; Sheridan Chapin, N.Y.; Michael Jacobson, Nev.; Nick Sheridan, Md. BACK (from left): Mike Cermak, Pa.; Stephen Hirtle, Pa.; Robin Buckallew, Neb.; Steve Lowe, D.C.; Steve Salemson, Wis.; Kevin Gough, Conn.



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# Convention Speakers

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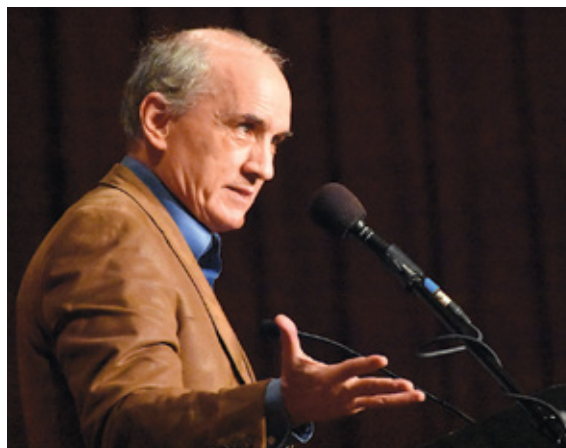
Rafida Bonya Ahmed, humanist activist and author, spoke about the dangers of being an atheist in Bangladesh. Her husband was hacked to death by Islamic militants and she was severely injured, including losing her thumb.



Marie Schaub is a plaintiff in FFRF's lawsuit over a Ten Commandments monument in front of her local high school. She spoke of her invasion of privacy and the nasty threats made to her after it was known she was trying to get the monument removed.



Stephen Hirtle, chair of FFRF's Executive Board and Pittsburgh resident, gave the welcoming remarks to the convention attendees. He is a professor in the School of Information Science at the University of Pittsburgh.



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker talked to the audience about his new book, *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*.



Lauri Lebo is an author and former reporter who covered the *Kitzmiller v. Dover* trial in 2004-05. She spoke about her death (and revival) on the operating table during an emergency surgery and how, as an atheist, she didn't mistake the pleasant feelings she had as she was dying for any supernatural occurrence.



Carter Warden came out publicly at the convention as an atheist after spending decades as a Christian minister.



Daniel C. Dennett, co-director of the Center for Cognitive Studies at Tufts University and honorary FFRF director, was the keynote speaker on the final night of the convention. His speech was titled "Has the Dam Broken? Omens and Worries."



Nadia Duncan, a student at SUNY Purchase College, took first place in FFRF's college essay contest for persons of color.



Lawrence Krauss, theoretical physicist, author and director of the Origins Project at Arizona State University, was honored with FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award. (Photo by Andrew Seidel)



Linda LaScola is one of the co-founders of The Clergy Project and is a clinical social worker. She and Daniel C. Dennett are co-authors of *Caught in the Pulpit: Leaving Belief Behind*.



Jerry Coyne, professor emeritus at the Department of Ecology and Evolution at the University of Chicago, talked about "Evolution and Atheism: Best Friends Forever."



Susan Jacoby, an honorary FFRF director, is author of 11 books, including *Strange Gods: A Secular History of Conversion*.

Photos by Ingrid Laas & Andrew Seidel





Jocelyn Williamson, Fla., helped at the merchandise tables.

# FFRF Staff & Volunteers



FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker emceed the annual conference.



Buzz Kemper, Wis., handled all the audio during the convention. Videography was handled by Scott Taylor, Wash.



Volunteers Liz Vaughn, Mary and David Balint and Jeff Prebeg, all of Pennsylvania, helped out at the tables.



Executive Board Member Steven Hirtle, Pa., talks with convention attendees during a break.



FFRF Program Assistant Alyssa Schaefer and FFRF Director of Operations Lisa Strand.



FFRF Staff Attorneys Rebecca Markert, Patrick Elliott and Elizabeth Cavell.



FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel chats with a member between speakers.



Freethought Today Editor PJ Slinger shows off an "I'm Secular and I Vote" shirt.

## Meet FFRF's Executive Board



Front row (from left): Lisa Strand, director of operations (non-board member); Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-presidents; Jim Zerwick, director.  
Middle row: Stef Moritz, secretary; Todd Peissig, director; Joe Cunningham, director; Cheryl Kolbe, director.  
Back row: Mike Cermak, director; Steve Salemsen, treasurer; Stephen Hirtle, chair.



FFRF Staff Attorneys Rebecca Markert and Elizabeth Cavell help sell shirts. Not pictured on this page: FFRF Membership Manager Jackie Douglas and volunteers Kristine Danowski, Andy Gaylor and Ian Gaylor.



Jeff Livingston, Wis., volunteered at a merchandise table.



Eric Lawrence, Ill., and Todd Peissig, Wis., worked the "clean money" raffle table all weekend.





Nicholas Couch asks a question on Friday, Oct. 7, following Carter Warden’s speech.



Keynote speaker Lawrence Krauss wore red Chuck Taylor shoes that stood out during the convention.



Flowers from the garden of Tom McClement, Ohio, and brochures greeted convention attendees as they signed in.



Ed and Mikel Hensley, president of FFRF Kentucky, brought their daughter Cosima to the convention.



Stanford Quayle and Joyce Brehm listen to Lauri Lebo’s speech on Oct. 8.



The crowd responds almost unanimously when asked by speaker Jerry Coyne how many atheists are in the audience.



Audience members watch the screen during Lawrence Krauss’ speech on Friday, Oct. 7.



From left, Helen Novak, Dora Novak, Paul Novak, Sidney Novak and Dianne Cooper are all smiles after dinner.



Author Susan Jacoby chats with Robert Stenzel, N.J., during her book-signing event after her speech at the convention.



Donna Silver, Wis., asks a question of The Clergy Project panel.



FFRF members make noise during the morning breakfast’s “Moment of Bedlam.”



# Fallingwater Tour



Three busloads of FFRF members took a tour of Fallingwater in southwest Pennsylvania on Oct. 7 before the start of the convention in Pittsburgh. Fallingwater, a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home, was built between 1936 and 1939 over a 30-foot waterfall. Wright designed the house for his clients, the Kaufmann family, and it instantly became famous and is now a National Historic Landmark.



FFRF members walk along the paths outside the building between the main home and the guesthouse.



FFRF members Nancy and Jeff Fallgren visit the scenic overlook path outside of Fallingwater.



Left: A stream runs down the hill and under Fallingwater until it reaches the falls on the opposite side of the house. Above: FFRF members stand on a patio while they listen to the tour guide describing Fallingwater's unique design and features. Fallingwater was featured on the cover of Time magazine in 1938 and is the most-visited of all of Wright's buildings. Wright, a skeptic said, "I believe in God, only I spell it Nature."