

Freethought Today

Vol. 33 No. 7

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

September 2016

Ingersoll statue 'reborn'



Photo by Walt Meeks

In a speedy public works project taking less than eight months, FFRF ensured that freethought history continues to play in Peoria, Ill. FFRF raised all the funds to restore the world's only public statue memorializing "the Great Agnostic" Robert G. Ingersoll. The magnificent 1911 statue, which stands in Peoria's Glen Oak Park, was returned buff and restored in late July. A rededication ceremony took place Aug. 11, the anniversary of Ingersoll's birthdate. Clarence Darrow called Ingersoll "one of the bravest, grandest champions of human liberty the world has ever seen." More photographs and history are on pages 16–17.

Ten Commandments monument

Court finds parent has legal standing

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit decided on Aug. 9 that an FFRF member who is a parent of a high school student has legal standing to challenge a Ten Commandments monument in front of a Pennsylvania school.



Marie Schaub

The court ruled in favor of Marie Schaub, finding that a district court dismissal of the case against the New Kensington-Arnold School District last year was improper. The three-judge panel unanimously found that Schaub's removal of her daughter

from Valley High School due to the Ten Commandments monument, and prior contact with it, were sufficient for her to bring the case.

"The District Court appeared to read the direct, unwelcome contact standard to include a frequency requirement," Judge Patty Shwartz, writing for the panel, said of the legal test applied by the district court. "This is incorrect."

The court noted the ability of plaintiffs to bring Establishment Clause cases, even when they have not changed their behavior.

"A community member should not be forced to forgo a government service to preserve his or her ability to

See Monument on page 5

FFRF suing Pennsylvania county over cross on seal

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and several local members are suing Lehigh County in Pennsylvania to remove a Latin cross from the official county seal and flag.

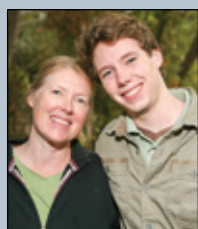
The federal lawsuit was filed on Aug. 16 in United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

FFRF is a plaintiff, as are members residing in the county who have encountered the religious symbol on governmental property and documents,

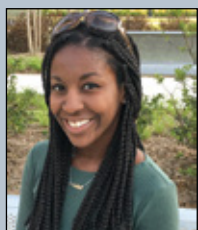
such as on letterhead, numerous official county forms and reports, the county's website, a display in the Board of Commissioners meeting room and even on flags prominently displayed at the entrance of county buildings, including the Lehigh Valley International Airport. Joining FFRF in the suit are four county residents: Stephen Melolic, David Simpson, John Berry and Candace Winkler.

See Cross on page 7

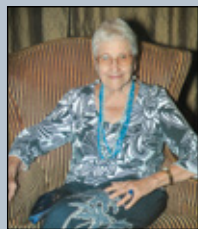
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FFRF victory

Christian flag removed

A Georgia courthouse has taken down a Christian flag after hearing from the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

An overtly Christian flag on a flagpole boasting an additional cross had been prominently on display next to the judge's bench in a Bryan County courtroom for many years. The flag is a traditional evangelical Christian design, reportedly conceptualized by Protestants in the early 20th century. The white in the flag is said to represent the biblical notions of purity, the blue is supposed to stand for baptism in water and the red is meant to symbolize the sacrifice that Jesus made for humankind.

The religious significance of the cross and the flag display is indisputable, and FFRF had urged its immedi-



This flag in the Bryan County courtroom has been taken down after FFRF complained.

ate removal.

"An overwhelming majority of federal courts agree that the Latin cross universally represents the Christian religion, and only the Christian reli-

gion," FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote to Rebecca Crowe, Bryan County clerk of courts. "And a majority of federal courts have held displays of Latin crosses on public property to be an unconstitutional endorsement of religion."

After agreeing to remove the display, Bryan County officials dilly-dallied for a while, shirking responsibility for actually getting rid of it.

Crowe said the flag was "reluctantly" removed, according to the Christian Today website. "It's not in there any longer," Crowe said. "I'm not sure who removed it or where it is, but it's not there."

Ted O'Neil, assistant editor of the Bryan County News, wrote in an op-ed that he, even as a religious person, was

See Flag on page 5

Meet a member

Name: Marjorie Halpern Holden
Where I live: Manhattan Beach, Calif.
Where and when I was born: October 1927 in New York City.
Family: Two sons: David and Robert. Three grandsons: Donald, Paul and Anthony.
Education: Cornell University B.A. 1947; Columbia University M.A. 1950; Columbia University Ph.D. 1972.
Occupation: Retired School of Education professor, California State University-Dominguez Hills.

How I got where I am today: Through a lifetime of making mistakes and making small corrections.

Where I'm headed: At almost 89, this is a loaded question. I am still hoping to write a short monograph on what I perceive as the current deficiencies of public elementary education.

Person in history I admire and why: I have a few from different fields. I admire many of the classical Greek philosophers and dramatists. There is so much we can learn from them today. They tangled with many of the same issues we are dealing with: The place, existence and nature of the gods; the right way to govern a city; moral issues about sex, gender, murder, family ties and war. It's amazing that in many ways we haven't yet solved many of these problems. At the highest levels, the men (they were a bit sexist) had very clear and high-minded ideas about how men should behave both in their personal and civic lives. So much of what I read about them resonates with me. They make me aware of so many subtleties in human relations, both personal and political. The one nice thing about an afterlife, which I know I won't have, is a chance to meet any of them.

A quotation I like: Again, the Greeks, and I think it was Socrates: "The unexamined life is not worth living." They also said, "All things in moderation." My undergraduate college, Cornell University in Ithaca N.Y., had a saying by the founder of the university, a Quaker by the name of Ezra Cornell, carved into a stone bench on the campus, which said, "ABOVE ALL NATIONS HUMANITY." That bench has helped me to resolve issues many



Marjorie Halpern Holden now and in 1947.



times in my life.
These are a few of my favorite things: Bach's music, foreign travel, reading, knitting, hanging out with my sons and grandsons, and, of course, Greek drama.

These are not: I do not respond well to people who think they have authority over others that is not legally mandated to them. I think a lot of very religious people think they have a mandate to inflict their misery, self-made quite often, on the rest of us. I think they resent the fact that we don't suffer from lack of family planning, inability to have an abortion, the legal obligation to treat LGBT people as if they were human beings, and the need to give enormous amounts of our income to people in the "religion business." And most of us don't even feel guilty about this freedom from superstition. I think knowing that life is finite makes it more precious, and it should influence the higher angels of our nature to try to help everyone get the best they can in life while they are here.

My doubts about religion started: I was fortunate. My parents were non-observant, and I think of my mother as the "village atheist." My parents were Jews, but they did not belong to any religious groups and my mother made us go to school on the Jewish holidays. This made me uncomfortable because the teachers sent a message that I interpreted as: "It's bad enough that you're not Christian, but being non-observant is even worse than being a Jew."

My husband's people were Protestants, and his mother was an observant Methodist. His dad was as much a free-

thinker as he could be without upsetting his wife. My husband read the Old and New Testaments, the Koran and all of Spinoza. Then he came around and told me that even if there were a god, he was inscrutable.

Since our parents were pretty decent, civilized people, we really didn't feel the need for instruction about ethics from a tithe collector. I don't mind people's need for a spiritual leader, but I think that faith is a ridiculous trait to ask of people to whom you have given intellectual abilities.

The three great monotheistic traditions have different rules about forbidden foods, number of wives, how to observe the Sabbath, and probably other things that are important. What kind of a God does such a loopy, inconsistent presentation when people's souls are on the line? I long ago decided that even if there is a deity, he is not anything like the being painted by any religion. None of them makes any sense. So we had best use our energy to get along with each other and solve the problems of this world as best we can. Obviously the thousands of years' lead that monotheistic religions have had has not led to the resolution of a number of serious problems.

Before I die: I hope to write a short monograph about teaching children from kindergarten on up the joys and responsibilities of American citizenship.

I think when they graduate from high school that they should be quite familiar with the U.S. Constitution. And this should occur in an atmosphere that respects their dignity and

well-being as citizens even at the earliest ages. How else can we raise men and women who will fight for what the country stands for as it is expressed in our founding documents? Most people don't even understand the basic constitutional position on separation of church and state.

I am trying to involve FFRF and Americans United to adopt the long-range goal of having educational administrators deal with First Amendment infractions much more actively.

In order to be school principals and administrators, candidates should be required to understand the First Amendment and associated case law regulating religious activities in the public schools. University students should not be awarded this credential if they are not totally aware what religious activity is permitted in the public schools. If the law is taught to the administrators and the administrators hold annual meetings to spell them out to the faculty, there should be no reason not to actually fine, fire or publicly dress down a school employee who willfully inflicts his faith during class or sports activities on vulnerable children and adolescents. I am so tired of hearing, reading and seeing pictures of praying, kneeling football players and coaches at public high schools that I just want to get some teeth into those laws. I learned that the football coach in my local district is holding something called "Chapel" in the locker room. I thought this kind of thing only happened in Texas, but it seems to be highly contagious, and has certainly hit our little city with a vengeance.

Ways I promote freethought: Mostly, I don't argue with people who I think are well-meaning, but slightly dim. In certain situations I just say, "I'm totally secular," in what I hope is a polite, non-threatening way. I try to project the idea that I am trying to be a responsible, concerned adult without religious direction. Most people don't take offense or argue. They seem to accept me on that basis, although I sometimes wonder, if they think "secular" is some kind of new-age sect. Of course, I also support FFRF and Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the Center for Inquiry.

It pays to complain

By Jimmy Holcomb

I got "God" off of my county's marriage certificate. Yip!
Before our HB2 ("Bathroom bill") fame, North Carolina was most riled-up about same-sex marriage. We saw years of loud protest, with government officials standing behind agitated preachers telling me exactly why God hates my marriage. Our state constitution still specifies that if you don't believe in God, you can't hold elective office. OK, then! But after my same-sex marriage, my certificate told me I was in "holy" matrimony under the "ordinance of God." Meanwhile, my magistrate could have legally quoted God in refusing to issue me a license. So which is it?
I talked to my county's register of deeds. He was cautious, but receptive. He mentioned "ceremonial deism," and I reminded him that there's no such thing. I offered secular replace-



ment language. After 18 months of emails, 900 Orange County newlywed couples every year will no longer be

told that God ordains anything as the county removed that religious language from the certificate.

So then I tried the same thing in Wake County, North Carolina's capital county, where the certificate bears the biblical text, "Those whom God hath joined together . . . blah blah blah." I received emailed insistence from the Wake County registrar that courts have upheld this kind of "harmless" government mention of God. I was told that mine was the only complaint she'd ever received, and that the biblical quote did not promote a specific religion. My response included this: If the high court engages in bogus reasoning like "historical use," "traditional" and "ceremonial deism" to avoid hard decisions about the Establishment Clause, it will continue to rehear cases until constitutionality is established, and that, it only requires one complaint to get a major constitutional decision. Eventually I was told that my complaint was no longer relevant because the county has decided to stop issuing these certificates. We'll see if that's true.
Jimmy is an FFRF member from Efland, N.C.

Don't inject your religious beliefs into my grief

By Julie Stahl

Two years ago, my 18-year-old son was killed about a mile from our house while driving home. A man high on drugs (meth and heroin) drove across the center line at 70 miles an hour and slammed his car head-on into my son's.

Jackson was my only child and I a single mother. Since then, I've heard countless "pearls of wisdom," usually in the form of religious platitudes from well-meaning people, some of them complete strangers, when they hear about what happened and feel compelled to say something. I say "well-meaning" because I think for the most part they are. They see I am broken, and they want to fix me. It's human nature. They don't consciously think, "Here is someone who is clearly in a vulnerable and compromised state of mind. I can exploit that to further my religious agenda." They believe they are offering comfort.

Here are some of the things I have been told:

1. God has a plan for us all (otherwise known as, "There's a reason for everything.").
2. God must have had a reason for taking your son so young (a personalized version of No. 1).
3. The Lord works in mysterious ways.
4. Your son will be waiting for you in heaven.
5. He's looking down on you and keeping you safe.
6. God called him home.
7. It was just his time.
8. He was too good for this world.
9. God must have needed another angel.
10. God never gives us more than we can handle.

To an atheist like me, these aphorisms are loaded with offense. They feel presumptuous, taking for granted a shared belief in a higher power and an afterlife. They are also condescending. After all, if I believed in a god and/or a heaven, wouldn't it have already occurred to me to take comfort from my faith in these? They insult my intelligence, all of them being childishly simplistic and illogical. No. 5, for example, would have me believe my son has become an angel who will watch over me. I guess I'm not supposed to wonder where his angel was (my mother, for instance, who adored him and died 10 years ago), when he needed one. Why would I get one, but he would not? As for him waiting for me in heaven, if I thought that were the case, do you think I'd still be here? I would have committed suicide days, perhaps even hours, after he was killed.



Julie Stahl and her son, Jackson, who was killed by a driver high on drugs at age 18.

Worst of all, however, these comments are naively menacing, implying beneath the mantle of wisdom and mystery a god who is pretty damned heartless, to put it mildly. Try as I might, I can't come up with any possible reason that a beneficent, not to mention omnipotent, being would have for allowing children to be killed, among other things.

Right now, in the time it's taking me to compose this, a little girl somewhere in the world is being gang raped. When the perpetrators are done, they'll slit her throat, hopefully quickly, but maybe not. Somewhere else a man is being beheaded; a woman is being stoned (almost certainly "in the name of God"); a child is wasting away from leukemia, while another is being sold into slavery.

You can rely on as many myths about original sin and free will as you like, but none of these illustrates anything but an arrogant, conceited and self-righteous creator. Or to put it another way, what kind of sick, twisted bastard would allow these atrocious things to happen on his watch? And who, in any of the above scenarios and countless others, is "handling" what God has "given" them?

All of these beg the question: What does it say about you, that you would choose not only to believe in the existence of a heartless, perhaps even vicious deity, but to adore it, to idolize it, to worship it?

Then there are the so-called spiritual people, who offer almost identical consolation, merely substituting the word "universe" for "god," or "presence" for "ghost" and implying notions like reincarnation.

A woman whom I consider to be my friend, who broke ranks with any form of organized religion years ago and now identifies with the moniker "spir-

itual," told me shortly after Jackson died that she felt peaceful when she thought about Jackson as he moved through the universe, sensing his presence wasn't lingering, trapped and waiting to be released into a new form. "If that helps you to feel better," she added. It didn't. Her boyfriend conveyed the message that Jackson had done here (meaning on Earth) "all that he needed to do." Hmm. So, two weeks out of high school, he was done with this world and had nothing left to contribute? Presumably "the universe" knew this and snapped him up. Never mind his plans for college, for the Peace Corps, or his enthusiasm for life.

These kinds of remarks feel just as offensive to me and for all the same reasons as their religious counterparts. Ultimately, the message is the same: Some force "up there" consciously decided my son should die. Again, what sense does this make?

To all the well-meaning people of any religious or spiritual faith, organized or not, who feel the need to dab your ridiculous convictions like salve on the wound of a broken heart belonging to someone you know shares your convictions, have at it. But if that broken heart belongs to someone you don't know or who hasn't invited your beliefs, please don't. And if that broken heart belongs to the parent of a child who has died, bite your tongue not once but twice. People die. Nobody can live forever, and the planet certainly couldn't accommodate us all

if we did. If we had to bury only our grandparents when we were young and our parents when we were middle aged, hearing some religious panacea, even in the face of our sorrow at losing someone we love, might be tolerable. But in the face of the death of our child, when we have become something that there is not even a word for in the English language because it is so unspeakable, when we are absolutely shattered beyond repair, it is intolerable.

Here are some things that you might say to someone of any or no religious convictions who is grieving:

1. I'm so sorry.
2. I wish I could change what happened.
3. I remember when (insert a happy memory here that you have of the one who died).
4. Is there something I can do for you?
5. I've been thinking about you a lot.
6. Please call me if you need anything, like groceries, or your house cleaned, or you just want to talk.

If you can't say any of these things, it's OK to say nothing. You can even say, "I realize there is nothing I can say." That is profoundly more helpful, honest and comforting than the empty, "God has a reason for everything."

Life is random. Death is random. And unless you die painlessly in your sleep at a ripe old age, it rarely makes sense. Nothing you can say to me in the wake of my child's death is going to have it make sense.

The bottom line is you can't fix me, no matter what you say or do. There are no magic words that will ease my sorrow.

surface of my heart and crowd out the anger at the man who killed him, the guilt for not being able to protect my child from harm, the remorse for not doing something I might have done that could have changed the course of events that day. If you really want to help, then offer to help, or say something that draws on your humanity, my humanity, and the fact that we are all in this thing called "life" together.

And one last thing. If you want to pray for me, go right ahead. Pray to your heart's content. But don't tell me about it and expect me to be grateful.

Julie Stahl is a writer and lives on the central coast of California.

Nothing you can say to me in the wake of my child's death is going to have it make sense. The bottom line is you can't fix me, no matter what you say or do. There are no magic words that will ease my sorrow.

Freethought Today

published by Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.
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September 2016

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

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Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

READING THE HEADLINES

Lusty priests paw kids in dusty Texas.
In floral Florida, where love goes oral,
Preachers grope the organs of their organists.
Oh, why can't pious people just be moral?

In Maine a pastor snitches widows' pennies,
In court his *mea culpa* is pathetic.
Church trustees embezzle from the many.
Oh, why do pious people have no ethics?

In Brooklyn rabbis can't disguise their *Greed*,
In Georgia, *Envy* causes priests to quarrel,
In Tehran, mullahs' *Wrath* makes many bleed.
Oh, why can't pious people just be moral?

Religious people have their explanations, and
They don't *need* morals like, say, you and me,
For Protestants elect "Predestination," and
When Catholics mouth Hail Marys, they're home free.

© 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.

They said what?

I don't like the 666.
Pope Francis, who rejected a donation of 16,666,000 pesos (about \$1.2 million) from Argentinian government to the Scholas Occurrentes educational foundation because, at least partly, the sum included the figure 666
The Guardian, 6-14-16

The secular progressive agenda is antithetical to the principles of the founding of this nation. And if we continue to allow them to take God out of our lives, God will remove himself from us. We will not be blessed, and our nation will go down the tubes.
Former presidential candidate Ben Carson, speaking at the Republican National Convention
ABC News, 7-20-16

The people of this country, the patriotic, decent, God-fearing people of this country are now right with me.
David Duke, former Ku Klux Klan leader, announcing his run for the U.S. Senate in Louisiana
Associated Press, 7-23-16

I'm a Christian, a conservative and a Republican . . . in that order.
Vice presidential candidate and Indiana Gov. Mike Pence
Indianapolis Star, 7-15-16

The bill was sold as justice for the victims of sexual abuse, when, in fact, it was a sham. The proposed legislation . . . was a vindictive bill pushed by lawyers and activists out to rape the Catholic Church.
Bill Donohue, president of the Catholic League, on the bill that would end the statute of limitations in New York on bringing charges against your childhood abuser
CatholicLeague.org, 6-20-16

People of faith may now face restrictions from fully participating in society — owning businesses, entering the medical profession or providing much-needed charitable services.
U.S. Rep. Randy Forbes (R-Va.) attacking the separation of church and state, in an op-ed
Suffolk News-Herald, 6-18-16

Meet a staffer

Name: Whitney Steffen.
Where and when I was born: Madison, Wis., in 1988.
Education: B.A. in English from UW-Madison; paralegal post-baccalaureate diploma from Madison College.
Family: One mom, one dad, one sister.
How I came to work at FFRF: I found the job posting in mid-May and talked to my good friend Bill Dunn (former Freethought Today editor) about FFRF.
What I do here: I'm the legal assistant. I make sure things run smoothly on the legal floor.
What I like best about it: People here are pretty cool. We get lots of interesting and occasionally weird complaints in our legal intake.
What gets old about it: Organizing and sending follow up letters can get really dull.
I spend a lot of time thinking about: My cats.
I spend little if any time thinking about: Quantum physics.
My religious upbringing was: I was raised Catholic. I went to a parochial school in Madison from second through eighth grade.
My doubts about religion started: At some point in eighth grade and defi-



Whitney Steffen

nately more after I graduated. A lot of not-so-fun things were happening to people in my family and I questioned why God would put us through that. I wasn't very good at being Catholic, either.
Things I like: Cats.
Things I smite: My little kitty's cancer.
In my golden years: I plan to retire early and rely on one of my kitties to provide for me. He will become a model and bring in lots of money. He'll do it because he loves me (and because he knows he's pretty).

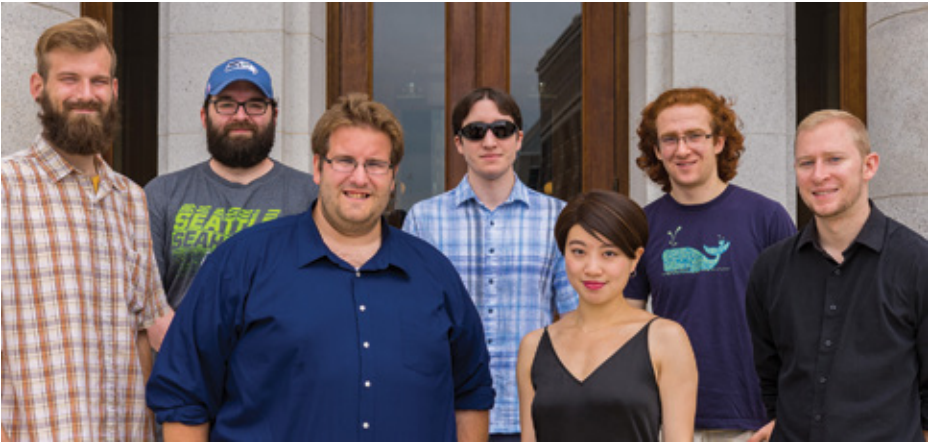


Photo by Chris Line

FFRF had to sadly say goodbye to its hard-working summer interns as they headed back to their respective schools. From left to right: Nathan Niemeyer (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Davin Skalinder (University of Michigan), Chris Line (UW-Madison), Alex Zacharczenko (Duke University), Jill Zhe Zhang (recent graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, where she was the Redleaf Scholar, underwritten by FFRF member Dr. Paul Redleaf), Mayan Essak (Lawrence University) and Lucas Swank (UW-Madison).

FFRF welcomes 16 new Life Members

FFRF is excited to announce and welcome 16 new Lifetime Members.
Warmest thanks to our new Lifetime Members: Stephen Baker, Joseph Blubaugh, Stefan Boedeker, Bill Dunn (Freethought Today editor emeritus), H.D. Gillespie, Jack H. Henley, Jaime Hunter, Benjamin Kimsey, Richard Kwiatek, Douglas Marshall, Gary Mead, Ms. K. Mynn, J.R. Passmore, Nicholas Soroka, Bill Walker and Martin Zanni (a gift from his wife Christie Olsen).
States represented are: Arizona,

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

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.

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Freedom Depends on Freethinkers



Democracy for all!

FFRF greeted residents and visitors of Philadelphia with a series of billboards and kiosks around the city during the Democratic National Convention held July 25-28. FFRF’s “I’m an atheist and I vote” campaign in Philly came on the heels of FFRF’s ad campaign during the Republican National Convention earlier in July, where a billboard in Cleveland included Ronald Reagan’s quote, stating: “We establish no religion in this country . . . Church and state are, and must remain, separate.”

Flag

Continued from front page

for the removal of the flag.

“I was asked by a few people what I felt about the issue,” he wrote. “I’m in favor of removing the flag and anything connected to religion from any and all levels of government. Due to schisms, theological disagreements and stubbornness, there are actually more than 4,000 distinct Christian denominations alone. Whose version do you want government to embrace? Christians and everyone of faith should support the removal of such flags, along with all traces and/or mentions of religion in any and all government action.”

But not everyone who chimed in on the subject understood that it was a constitutional issue, not one of aesthetics. The Gospel Herald wrote a somewhat snarky editorial claiming that no one should be offended by an image of the cross.

“It is rather absurd to say that the image of the cross is offensive simply because one does not adhere to the Christian faith, but this seems to be the case when an atheist activist group filed a complaint against a Georgia county courthouse, causing a Christian flag to be removed,” the editorial said.

And the Christian News incorrectly thought archaic state law should trump the godless U.S. Constitution, adopted in 1787.

“The Georgia state Constitution, first formally written in 1777 — just one year after the founding of America — acknowledged Christianity and required its leaders to be Christians. ‘[W]e the people of Georgia, relying upon the protection and guidance of almighty God, do ordain and establish this Constitution,’ it reads.



Photo courtesy of Valley News Dispatch

This Ten Commandments monument sits in front of Valley Junior-Senior High School in the New Kensington-Arnold School District in Pennsylvania.

Monument

Continued from front page

challenge an allegedly unconstitutional religious display or activity,” Schwartz said. “Thus, a community member like Schaub may establish standing by showing direct, unwelcome contact with the allegedly offending object or event, regardless of whether such contact is infrequent or she does not alter her behavior to avoid it.”

The court also highlighted the unique parental rights involved, writing that Schaub “has an interest in guiding her child’s religious upbringing and has standing to challenge actions that seek to ‘establish a religious preference affecting’ her child.”

FFRF and a parent previously won a similar case against the nearby Con-

nellsville Area School District.

“If anybody has suffered injury by the presence of a Ten Commandments monolith at this community high school, it is Marie Schaub and her daughter, whose lives and education have been disrupted just for speaking up for the First Amendment,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We’re delighted that reason — and the Constitution — have prevailed, and look forward to winning this case at the district level as we won the Connellsville case.”

FFRF will be honoring Schaub at its upcoming 39th annual national convention at the Wyndham Grand Downtown in Pittsburgh on the weekend of Oct. 7-9. Schaub, the target of community wrath, will be receiving FFRF’s “Atheist in Foxhole Courage Award.”

Freethought books

The following are newer books by FFRF members on the topics of religion or freethinking. FFRF does not do book reviews.

The Good Slave

By Franklin Sellers

\$2.99 (eBook)

What if a Christian ISIS rose to power in the United States?

The Good Slave tells the story of an America ruled by radical religious fundamentalists strictly enforcing their own brutal interpretation of biblical law.

In a dystopian America of tomorrow, little Phoebus learns what makes a good slave good, and the devastating consequences of disobedience. Has teenage Stephen Messinjure really committed a blasphemous crime? Or is his father, fallen televangelist Josef Messinjure, being punished for daring to defy the Church-State? The Christian States of America has put his master’s son on trial.



No Proof At All: A Cure for Christianity

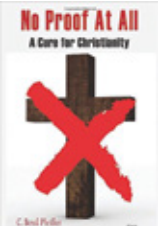
By C. Boyd Pfeiffer

\$19.99 (paperback)

September 2015

Algora Publishing

Facts. Truth. Logic. Science. These are the basics of the world in which we live day-to-day in society, government, medicine, agriculture, and manufacturing. But while we have 21st-century technology, we have 1st-century superstitions, basically those superstitions found in religion. With a particular focus on Christianity and its predecessor Judaism, Pfeiffer reflects on the facts of the bible and Christian religions and his own thinking over a lifetime, from a Baptist upbringing to debating and discussing religious subjects with everyone who is interested. Biblical immoralities, prophecy and blind faith come in for a sharp skewering as he roasts them in the hot gaze of reality.



Letter to My Christian Family and Friends

By Darrel Newkirk

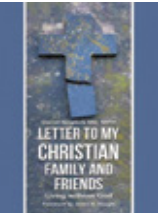
\$14.99 (paperback)

April 2016

Lulu Publishing

Why did Darrel Newkirk leave the religion of his parents, family and friends after devotedly serving God and His church for over 55 years?

Newkirk was a devoted Christian. He believed God called him to be a medical missionary, and he and his wife served as foreign missionaries. They served five years in Zaire, Africa. After returning to the United States, he continued to serve actively in their Southern Baptist church. He and his wife helped to start a new mission Southern Baptist church in which he was active for over 20 years. But then he left not only that church, but Christianity itself.



FFRF opposes Texas charter chain’s transgressions

FFRF is calling attention to a publicly funded Texas charter school chain’s multiple violations of the U.S. Constitution.

FFRF has requested that the Texas Education Agency investigate Advantage Academy in Duncanville and take action to prevent its four schools from endorsing Christianity to its students. If Advantage Academy is unwilling to operate as a public school in a manner consistent with the Constitution, FFRF asks that all of its current charters be revoked.

“The Texas Education Agency has an obligation to make certain that publicly funded schools and government subsidized teachers ‘do not inculcate religion,’ to quote the U.S. Supreme Court,” FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Texas Education Agency Commissioner Mike Morath.



Allen Beck is a Christian evangelist and the founder of Advantage Academy. He is also an outspoken zealot who has placed his religious responsibility to proselytize and evangelize ahead of his responsibilities to the state of Texas, the Constitution and his students. Beck founded Advantage Academy in 1998 in order to bring Christianity and the bible “back” into public schools.

Here are some of the unconstitutional ways Beck has been trying to get religion back in schools:

- He admits that his academy is teaching the bible to students, encouraging students to pray, and spreading misinformation about the foundations of American history.
- Beck continually flaunts how he has deceived the state and the Texas Education Agency for years by claiming that Advantage Academy is not promoting Christianity.
- He says that everyone, no matter their position within the public school system, needs to be incor-

porating religion into their work and evangelizing.

- When Advantage Academy advertises its schools, it uses language and imagery to suggest that its students will receive a religious education.
- Advantage Academy regularly promotes religious, and specifically Christian, events to students. For example, the school endorses the National Day of Prayer and displays it on the school calendar, endorses a religious baccalaureate service that takes place on the school’s campus, and observes the exclusively Christian holiday Good Friday as a school holiday.

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits the state, and by extension any state-funded public or charter schools, from endorsing religion. All of these above actions violate the Constitution.

FFRF state/church complaints

FFRF supports denial of grant to church



FFRF has co-filed a brief before the U.S. Supreme Court supporting the denial of a Missouri grant to a church.

The Trinity Lutheran Church in Columbia, Mo., is appealing the refusal of a state grant for the upgrading of a playground at a preschool it runs. FFRF joins the brief filed by the American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Missouri.

The brief reminds everyone that the use of taxpayer dollars to aid churches was one of the greatest concerns of the framers of the U.S. Constitution and, in large part, animated the passage of the Establishment Clause. Madison was adamant that even “three pence” in aid was too much of a threat to religious liberty.

Tying houses of worship financially to the state also undermines religious freedom by inviting the government to scrutinize and oversee their operations. Despite any short-term gain for the government-funded religious institution, in the long run, religious liberty is corroded, and, in the case of direct aid to a church, church autonomy is impeded, the brief asserts.

District should cut ties with churches

FFRF is urging the San Diego school district to end a summer partnership with local churches.

The San Diego Unified School District has reportedly formed a partnership with area churches that involves these churches opening up their doors to children to be tutored by volunteer

teachers for the summer. The sessions will also include “character education,” according to media accounts. Superintendent Cindy Marten met with church leaders to promote the partnership at St. Stephen’s Church of God in Christ, which lists one of its visions as to “WIN SOULS FOR CHRIST.”

FFRF contends the district should terminate the partnership, since it can’t allow its summer school programs to be used as recruiting grounds for churches.

The summer partnership impermissibly advances religion, communicates a message of school endorsement of religion and is marked by the excessive entanglement between the school district and church, FFRF asserts. It asks that the School District cease all involvement with and promotion of church programs and dissolve any formal summer partnerships with the churches.

FFRF protests Ohio judge’s sentencing

On May 25, Judge William Mallory of the Ohio Court of Appeals, First Appellate District, sentenced Jake Strotman, who is religious, to attend Morning Star Baptist Church for 12 consecutive Sunday services. Strotman was accused of assaulting a Baptist preacher during a chaotic brawl after a hockey game. Mallory reportedly said, “The thing about religion, I think it is kind of personal and for me I don’t try to impose my religious views on other people, except for sometimes in this room.” After Strotman suggested being sent to a church of Mallory’s choice as his punishment, the judge decided that it would be appropriate to sentence Strotman to attend his victim’s Baptist church for 12 Sundays.

FFRF contacted Mallory independently to point out that his actions in this case are a clear violation of the First Amendment.

Mallory’s actions in this case also violate Article 1, Section 7 of Ohio’s Constitution: “No person shall be compelled to attend, erect, or support any place of worship, or maintain any form of worship, against his consent.”

While Strotman suggested and accepted his church-going sentence, his decision wasn’t completely free of coercion. In the beginning of the proceeding, Mallory threatened Strotman with up to 90 days in jail, and encour-

aged his fear by having him look at the bailiff and his handcuffs. Many people would opt to go to church when faced with the fear of jail time, FFRF asserts.

Judge turns away nonreligious couple



In a complaint receiving wide news coverage, FFRF has warned a Kentucky judge about his refusal to marry a non-religious couple.

Mandy Heath and her fiancé, Jon, were planning on getting married in Trigg County on July 22 at the courthouse of County Judge Executive Hollis Alexander.

Heath requested that the courthouse marriage be secular. After she made those plans with the clerk, Alexander called Heath to inform her that he would not perform the ceremony. When asked why, Alexander apparently responded: “I include God in my ceremonies, and I won’t do one without him.”

FFRF emphasizes to Alexander that under the U.S. Constitution, he, as a government official, has an obligation to remain neutral on religious matters.

By refusing to provide secular ceremonies, Trigg County sends a message of religious endorsement. However, according to the Constitution, it is illegal to condition a government benefit on a religious test.

FFRF applauds victory on pension plan

FFRF applauds a recent court victory that health care workers have obtained over their religious employers regarding unfair pension plans. FFRF filed a friend of the court brief in the case just decided by a federal appeals court.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on July 26 ruled that the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) does not exempt retirement plans created by supposedly religious

entities that are not churches.

The plaintiffs alleged that they had been harmed by the management of a retirement plan run by their former employer, Dignity Health. FFRF submitted an amicus brief in support of the plaintiffs arguing that any religious exemption from ERISA violates the constitutional separation of state and church.

While not addressing the substantive argument that FFRF put forward, the court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs on statutory grounds. The ruling joins similar decisions handed down by the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in December and the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in March. FFRF had filed amicus briefs in these cases, too. Last month, FFRF also filed an amicus brief before the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in a similar case.

Two choir students at SDSU punished

FFRF is protesting the penalization of two San Diego State University students for refusing to participate in a choir performance at a church service.

A choir course that Patrick Walders teaches at San Diego State University is mandatory for certain degrees. In May, Walders asked his students to perform during a service at College Avenue Baptist Church. Two students demurred. The professor told them he would fail them if they didn’t participate. The students stayed away, and Walders did flunk them, offering them no alternatives. The choir members who showed up reportedly had to sit through the sermon after their performance.

“As a state-run institution, San Diego State University is bound by the Constitution’s Establishment Clause, which ‘mandates government neutrality between religion and religion and between religion and nonreligion,’” as the U.S. Supreme Court has noted, FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler writes to San Diego State University President Elliot Hirshman.

The selection of a Baptist church as the site for a San Diego State choir performance demonstrates the school’s preference for religion over nonreligion and for Christianity over other faiths, FFRF asserts. San Diego State is a secular university and should not be mandating religious choir performances. It is obligated to provide its students an advanced education free from religious endorsement.

FFRF objects to sermonizing prof

FFRF is raising objections to a Wisconsin community college professor who tells students that life is about creating a personal relationship with God.

Madison College Professor Hiep S. Van Dong, an instructor in the School of Business and Applied Arts, has encouraged students in his Leadership, Ethics and Development course to add religion to their lives, both verbally in class and via email.

Van Dong explained to a student in an email that he has “discovered it isn’t about do’s and don’ts, it is about a personal relationship with a living God. It is not about earning my way to heaven or God’s grace; however, it is about seeking a personable Creator and sustainer of my life.”

Van Dong also uses “Sometimes You Win, Sometimes You Learn,” a

‘Such blatant religiosity has no place in a public institution.’ —Annie Laurie Gaylor

religion-promoting tome by John C. Maxwell, an evangelical pastor, as a textbook. Van Dong has reportedly solicited the entire class to contact him personally about the “truth” in the book, stating that he “could not say it in class, given it is a public university.”

Van Dong’s promotion of religion constitutes an official endorsement and advancement of religion in violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

“Federal courts have upheld public universities’ restrictions on a profes-

sor’s religious expression in the classroom and other like settings,” FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne writes to Madison College School of Business and Applied Arts Dean Bryan Woodhouse. “These restrictions do not abridge the professor’s free speech rights.”

Madison College’s interest in avoiding the appearance of official endorsement of Van Dong’s religious beliefs overrides his free speech rights in this matter, FFRF contends.

“Such blatant religiosity has no place in a public institution,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Madison College needs to put a check on Van Dong’s religious activities in class.”

FFRF is asking Madison College to take immediate action to ensure that Van Dong is not misusing his position.



FFRF state/church complaints

N.H. House should discontinue prayer



FFRF is urging the New Hampshire House of Representatives to end its tradition of starting sessions with a prayer.

On Feb. 4, Peter Chamberland, pastor of Granite State Baptist Church in Concord, prayed, “Lord, through every situation, that You would protect our children through the great drug crisis that goes across our state, both those that are born and the unborn, that You would watch over them.”

However, when the prayer was published in the House Journal, the portion of the prayer dealing with abortion was redacted. House Clerk Paul Smith stated that prayers were not supposed to be political and that prayers printed in the House Journal were edited for such content. But New Hampshire law requires clerks of the House of Representatives to “keep a true and fair record of all proceedings.”

Even nonsectarian prayer excludes the 23 percent of Americans who identify as nonreligious, FFRF emphasizes. The exclusion is compounded when a majority of prayers are sectarian (to Jesus) or a majority of the officiants are of one religion (Christianity). Such prayer creates acrimony, turns believers into political insiders and minorities into political outsiders in their own community, and confers unconstitu-

tional governmental preference not just for Christianity over other faiths, but also for religion over nonreligion.

FFRF asks that Chamberland’s prayer be published in the House Journal in its entirety. Additionally, the organization urges the House leadership to take this opportunity to discontinue the practice of scheduling prayers to open sessions.

FFRF objects to religious school logo

FFRF is protesting a blatantly religious school district logo in North Carolina.

The logo of Madison County Schools (headquartered in Marshall) contains a triangle with the word “God” at the top and a surrounding square that includes “spiritually” as one of four traits.

Former Superintendent Ronald Wilcox designed the logo more than a decade ago and told the Asheville Citizen-Times in 2014, “It just sums up the culture here and what we believe.” The logo is widely used throughout the district and is prominently featured on the official website. FFRF had earlier written to the school district two years ago about the logo but did not receive a reply.

It is no defense that religion is just one element on the logo, FFRF asserts, citing past court rulings on the issue. It warns Madison County Schools that continuing use of the logo poses a serious liability problem for the school system, since earlier this year FFRF won a judgment against the Chino Valley Unified School Board in California in a challenge to its unconstitutional religious practices that resulted in an award of more than \$200,000 in costs and attorney fees.

Christian university scholarships decried



FFRF is challenging an Ohio town’s scholarship program for a Christian university.

Grove City is offering its residents scholarships to attend Ohio Christian University’s local campus, at the Grove City Church of the Nazarene, as part of the Grove City Higher Education Investment Program.

The campus is located inside a megachurch and many of the institution’s degrees and courses are heavily infused with Christianity. But even seemingly secular options have a lot of religion in them. Students who pursue a B.S. in nursing are taught to deliver “holistic Christian care,” while students who pursue an associate’s degree in business or human services must take a core of “Bible/Christian worldview classes.”

City-funded scholarships from Grove City for attending Ohio Christian University thus violate both the U.S. and the Ohio Constitutions.

“The Ohio Constitution prohibits compelling taxpayers to fund religious education,” FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne writes to Grove City Council President Roby Schotke. “And the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment strictly prohibits the government from advancing religion.”

The U.S. Supreme Court has struck down grants to parochial schools when there is a possibility that the funds will be used to advance religion, FFRF informs Grove City. The Supreme Court has also upheld statutes that prohibit public aid to students pursuing degrees in theology. Private universities that offer no truly secular degrees are not entitled to participate in government funds, FFRF asserts.

FFRF wants cross removed from park

FFRF is asking a Texas town to remove a huge cross from a public park.

A large Latin cross is displayed at the entrance to Swenson Park in Spur, Texas. It overlooks the town and can be seen by passersby.

The government’s permanent display of a cross on public land is unconstitutional, FFRF informs the mayor. It unabashedly creates the perception of government endorsement of Christianity and conveys the message to non-Christians, including the 23 percent of Americans who are not religious, that “they are not favored members of the political community,” to quote the U.S. Supreme Court. The cross has an exclusionary effect, making non-Christian and nonbelieving residents of Spur political outsiders.

FFRF is requesting the city of Spur to immediately take steps for the removal of the cross or its relocation to a private site.

This year alone, FFRF has twice gone to court over similar violations. In April, it sued the city of Santa Clara in California to remove a large cross from a public park. And in May, it filed a suit against Pensacola, Fla., to challenge a 25-foot-tall cross in a public park.

Cross

Continued from front page

The board adopted the imagery that appears on the seal in 1944. Allentown, the third largest city in Pennsylvania, is located in Lehigh County, which has a population of about 350,000. FFRF first wrote a complaint letter in November 2014 and again in January 2015, creating a minor firestorm. Following several meetings about the controversy, the Board of Commissioners sent a reply on March 25, 2015, noting: “The cross, one of more than a dozen ele-

ments, was included to honor the original settlers of Lehigh County who were Christian.”

Members of the public clearly view the Latin cross as having religious significance. Among representative responses to FFRF’s complaint from members of the public was this message from a local citizen: “It’s do or die time. Stand up and live our national motto, ‘In God We Trust.’ And Jesus’ words ‘fear not,’ should give you strength to win one for the cross. The people of the state’s prayers are with you. Go with God in your effort to pre-

vail over this clear and present evil.”

By adopting and displaying a seal and flag with a Latin cross, the county is violating the First and 14th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. The purpose is religious, not secular, and “has the primary effect of both advancing religion and expressing defendant’s preference for Christianity above all other religions and nonreligion,” the plaintiff contends.

FFRF and its plaintiffs are seeking a declaration that the religious symbols on the county seal and flag are unconstitutional, a permanent injunction

against displaying them, nominal damages, costs and attorney’s fees.

“Lehigh County is not a Christian county, it should be equally welcoming to all its citizens regardless of their religion or their reject of religion,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “A redesign to comply with the Constitution is imperative.”

The litigation is being handled by Marcus B. Schneider of Pittsburgh, with assistance from FFRF Staff Attorneys Patrick Elliott and Elizabeth Cavell.

Police chief gets lessons in Constitution

FFRF unfortunately had to help teach a Florida police chief the U.S. Constitution.

In June, FFRF sent a letter to Oviedo Chief of Police Jeffrey Chudnow regarding an Oviedo Police Department Awards Ceremony and Career Track Recognition held in March at the Reformed Theological Seminary, a church and religious school. The program included a religious invocation.

“It is a fundamental principle of Establishment Clause jurisprudence that the government cannot promote, advance or otherwise endorse religion,” FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to Chudnow. “Allowing prayer at an awards ceremony sends the message that the police department not only prefers religion over nonreligion, but also Christianity over other faiths.”

FFRF has asked him to discontinue the practice of opening Oviedo Police Department ceremonies with invocations and holding official events at facilities that are religious in nature.

Chudnow replied last month, asserting that the Oviedo Police Department had no “intention of establishing any religion.” Anyway, he said, as a man practicing the Jewish faith, he wasn’t “offended” by the invocation and didn’t receive any complaints.

FFRF quickly responded. In a follow-up letter, FFRF contended the fact that the OPD did not “have any inten-



Jeffrey Chudnow

tion of establishing of any religion” is irrelevant. The inclusion of an invocation at an official ceremony gives the impression that the department — and, hence the government — endorses religion.

Seidel also addressed the chief’s second point: “Those offended by the invocation, marginalized by the display of state-sanctioned religion at a secular awards ceremony, would not seek redress from the OPD and risk making themselves targets for ridicule or persecution. Also, we complained.”

Chudnow seems to have missed the point. In a second response dated July 18, he claimed that the interpretation of the First Amendment by the courts



was fluid and unsettled. Besides, he stated, he had seen a copy of the Ten Commandments hanging in the chambers of the U.S. Supreme Court during a 2009 visit.

FFRF has attempted to lay his misconceptions to rest in another letter.

It agreed with Chudnow that the First Amendment protects the right of private citizens to freely exercise religion, but informed him this protection does not extend to a government agency or to a person acting in his or her official capacity.

And, FFRF said, his contention about First Amendment law is dubious.

“Your statement that the religion clauses of the First Amendment are

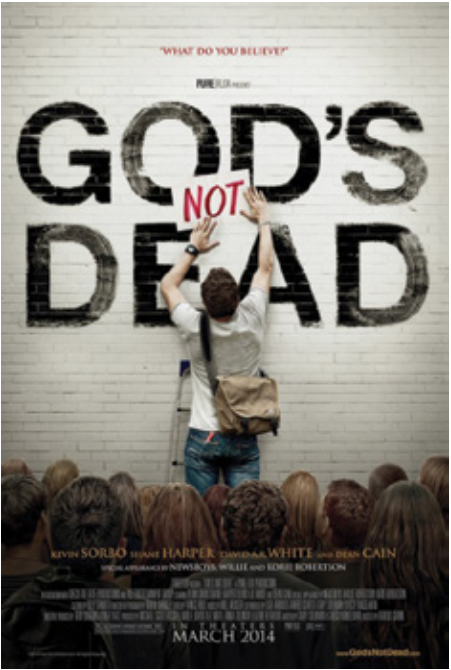
‘fluid and dynamic’ is problematic,” Seidel writes to Chudnow. “Regardless of the composition of the Supreme Court, the justices have referred time and again to the words of Thomas Jefferson in interpreting the Establishment Clause and will likely continue to do so well into the future. Jefferson’s ‘wall of separation between church and state’ has been repeatedly noted as the central organizing principle presented by the Establishment Clause.”

As for the Ten Commandments display that Chudnow thought he saw hanging on the wall inside the U.S. Supreme Court building, that wasn’t really the Ten Commandments. The single tablet (not two, as in the Ten Commandments stories) bearing Roman numerals that appears in the East Courtroom frieze is actually a representation of the Bill of Rights. Tablets bearing only the Roman numerals I-X appear on the support frame of the courtroom’s bronze gates, on the lower interior panel of the courtroom doors, and held by a figure in the woodwork of the library, again, signifying the Bill of Rights, not the Ten Commandments.

“We are delighted that we have contributed to the edification of a police chief,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We hope that this education will get him to acknowledge that he has been constitutionally wrong.”

FFRF state/church victories

District to stop showing religious films



FFRF has convinced a Texas school district to take a harder stance against showing Christian propaganda and anti-evolution movies to students.

In Central Heights High School in Nacogdoches, Texas, two teachers showed their students questionable films. In a ninth-grade health class, an instructor screened “God’s Not Dead,” a movie blatantly Christian and proselytizing in nature. And in a ninth-grade science class, another teacher, remarking to his students that he didn’t believe in evolution, played “Expelled: Intelligence Not Allowed,” an intelligent design propaganda work that the New York Times described as “a conspiracy-theory rant masquerading as investigative inquiry.”

FFRF contacted the Central Heights Independent School District in May to alert school officials that the teachers were out of line. FFRF received a letter

stating that district staff members will be trained on First Amendment issues to educate them better on the separation of state and church.

Lord’s Prayer removed from ceremony

A long-standing tradition of reciting or singing the Lord’s Prayer at Ohio’s East Liverpool High School’s graduation ceremony has been corrected.

A complainant informed FFRF that the prayer has been recited at graduation for the past 70 years. In 2015, the school choir sang the prayer as part of the event’s program.

“It is wholly inappropriate to put on performances of songs of worship in a public school setting,” said FFRF Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert in a letter to the district. “The song has a devotional, biblical message, and thus would be appropriate in a church setting, but not in a public school. There are a multitude of secular songs that would be far more appropriate.”

The Board of Education president shared his view with a news reporter in May. “When I was first on this board I expressed a concern about us singing. The comment made was that ‘we know we are breaking the law, we will do it until we get caught.’ Well, ladies and gentlemen, we got caught.”

On May 16, the superintendent told FFRF that the prayer would not be included in this year’s ceremony. Although the valedictorian then led the prayer of his own accord, the prayer was not school-sanctioned or on the ceremony program.

Apology given for denial of service

A regional freethinkers group has received an apology for discriminato-

ry denial of services during a recent protest at a religious theme park after FFRF sent a letter of complaint.

On June 30, Five Star Septic and Portable Toilet Rentals agreed to send portable toilets to a July 7 demonstration against the Ark Encounter park put on by the Tri-State Freethinkers. But when the company’s office called Tri-State Freethinkers to get directions to the site, it asked whether the portable toilets were for the protest. Upon learning that they were, the office denied service, indicating that this was partially because it did not want its name associated with the atheists’ protest.

It is unlawful for legitimate businesses to discriminate on the basis of religion, FFRF contended in a formal letter of complaint.

With such short notice, Tri-State Freethinkers had to hastily organize a shuttle caravan to a nearby gas station for the nearly 200 attendees needing to use toilets.

Arwood Waste & Demolition, with which Five Star Septic has been a subcontractor, said sorry to Tri-State Freethinkers and made a pledge that the inappropriate behavior will not recur.

Email signature now in compliance

FFRF has persuaded an Ohio county commissioner to remove religion from her official email signature.

Crawford County Commissioner Jenny Vermillion used two inappropriate signature lines in her county email address. The first of these was a reference to an Old Testament verse, Jeremiah 1:5, along with the politically charged commentary “Choose LIFE!!” (The actual verse reads: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrat-

ed you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”) The second was a President Eisenhower quote that promotes religion and disparages atheists.

FFRF requested that Vermillion delete all these references from her email signature.

And she indeed did. In a terse but to-the-point letter a few days ago, Vermillion replied: “Dear Sir or Madame, It has been removed.”

FFRF gets religion off of fishing team



The Cherokee County School District in Centre, Ala., has addressed several church/state violations occurring on the fishing team, after receiving a complaint from FFRF.

A concerned parent informed FFRF that the team’s coach had shirts printed depicting an ichthys (Jesus fish) with a Christian cross inside. The school raised funds by selling the shirts, and students had to wear the shirts at competitions. The coach also encouraged students to pray and attend religious events.

The superintendent of the district called FFRF on June 26. He stated that the fishing coach “understands” her constitutional obligations and that the fishing team was approving new, religiously neutral competition shirts and that the problematic shirts would no longer be sold to the public.

FFRF state/church victories

Teacher won't show Christian film again



A physical education teacher in the Tattnall School District in Georgia will not show “Woodlawn” or other Christian films to his class again after hearing from FFRF.

The film was shown at Reedsville Middle School over two class periods. The movie, produced by a Christian film production company, follows a struggling football team that unites over faith to make a run at the playoffs. It features quotes such as “This is what happens when God shows up,” and “I’m asking you to choose Jesus. Can you do that? Will you do that? Right now.”

In a letter of complaint, FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote, “When the district allows teachers to show Christian propaganda to middle school students, the district becomes complicit in an egregious constitutional violation and breach of trust.”

The superintendent responded on July 5, saying that she had met with the relevant teachers and administrators and that the district would review its procedure for approving classroom-appropriate media.

Band won't return to Ark Encounter

Williamstown High School will not be returning to the newly opened Ark Encounter in Kentucky.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel complained to the district on July 7 after the school’s marching band performed at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Ark Encounter on July 5.

“There are . . . serious constitutional issues with public schools helping a private religious ministry to launch a park meant to convert people and collect a fair bit of money in the process,” wrote Seidel. “It is unacceptable to expose a captive audience of impressionable students to the overtly religious atmosphere of Ham’s Christian theme parks.”

The attorney for Williamstown School District spoke with FFRF on July 18, stating that there are no current plans for the band or any school group to visit the park in the future and that he would notify FFRF if any came up.

Proselytizing ends in school district

After an FFRF complaint, the Payson (Ariz.) Unified School District has directed teachers not to promote

their personal religious beliefs to their students.

FFRF was notified of the situation by the parents of a local kindergarten student. The student had shared that his music teacher was telling the story of baby Jesus being born and that his homeroom teacher showed a movie about “baby God saving people” and that “he died doing it.”

Multiple other issues were also addressed. The school promoted its winter concert with a flier that repeatedly referenced Christmas as “Christ”mas. Additionally, at the end of the concert, all of the teachers sang the hymn “Silent Night” on stage together.

On March 17, the district responded to FFRF that the principal had spoken to the music teacher and that they would amend future district-wide staff training to prevent teachers from promoting religious beliefs to their students.

FFRF sees end to school prayer club

Yucca Valley Elementary School in the Morongo Unified School District in California does not plan to continue its after-school prayer club.

FFRF received a complaint from a local parent that a fourth-grade teacher was leading a Good News Club in her classroom directly after school, having her daughters encourage other students to pray, and using a whiteboard in the staff lounge to advertise her search for finding a new club leader. Additionally, FFRF received reports of teachers participating in the National Day of Prayer at the “old flagpole” on campus. Good News Club is a Christian program for 5-12 year olds with various bible-related activities.

FFRF received a reply from the district’s attorneys on July 14. They informed FFRF that the teacher in question was no longer an employee of the district and that administrators across the district had been informed of “the limitations imposed on district employees by the Constitution.”

Coach prayers to end in Minneapolis



Athletic directors across the entire Minneapolis Public School District have been reminded not to lead, initiate, require or facilitate prayer with students at any school athletic events.

FFRF lodged its complaint with the district in response to reports that the North Community High School football coach regularly gathered the team for prayer and participated in the prayer.

After more than five months, FFRF finally received a reply. The district sent a memo to all building athletic directors reminding them of their constitutional obligations promised to address the issue at a district-wide pre-season coaches meeting.

Jehovah's Witnesses won't be at post office

The United States Postal Service has responded to an FFRF complaint by promising to prevent Jehovah’s Witness literature distribution at the Bay City Post Office in Texas.

A local complainant requested that FFRF take action to end the proselytizing practice. The Witnesses set up chairs, an umbrella and a stand with pamphlets next to the post office entrance.

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler objected to the situation as a violation of both postal regulations and the United States Constitution. She pointed out that regulations prohibit “tables, chairs, freestanding signs or posters, structures, or furniture of any type... on postal walkways, . . . driveways, parking lots, or other exterior spaces.”

FFRF was notified on July 12 that postmaster of the Bay City Post Office has reviewed regulations and that the regulations “will be adhered to in the future.”

City removes itself as ChristFest sponsor

The city of Muncie, Ind., is not listed as a sponsor of ChristFest 2016 after FFRF complained about sponsorship of the 2015 event.

ChristFest is an all-day event meant “to give praise, worship, and honor to the Lord Jesus Christ.” It features “praise & worship teams, drama teams, and Christian comedians.”

The event, which occurred on Aug. 15, 2015, at the Canan Commons, had the city of Muncie seal and the city’s name listed as gold level event sponsors. Gold level sponsors must give a donation of at least \$1,500.

“Even if the city of Muncie did not donate funds to ChristFest, it is improper to allow the city seal to appear on the ChristFest website,” FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the city.

The city replied that it had not given any money to the event and were already attempting to have the seal removed. The city’s name and seal are no longer on the 2016 event website.

Church land transfers stopped for now

FFRF has persuaded a Tennessee county to stop giving away land to churches.

The Shelby County Board of Commissioners had repeatedly transferred land to churches for nominal sums under a Tennessee provision that permitted this for nonprofits. For example, the county conveyed eight parcels of land to Memphis’ Kingdom Fellowship Baptist Church in 2012 and a further four parcels to the same church in 2015.

FFRF informed the county that it was violating both the U.S. and Tennessee Constitutions by its actions, no less than if it directly transferred taxpayer money to churches.

FFRF advised Shelby County that county property should never be transferred to religious institutions for less than fair market value, since this sort of action forces taxpayers of all faiths and of no religion to subsidize a particular expression of worship.

Shelby County heeded FFRF’s advice. In a recent response, Kennedy

acknowledged that FFRF’s letter had made it reassess its actions and that as a result, Shelby County was suspending the land transfers for the time being.

Post office removes religious literature



The post office in Morristown, Tenn., removed its Sign of the Times magazine rack after FFRF complained to the postmaster.

The rack was placed just outside the building on the post office’s property. According to its website, the magazine “encourages readers to lead joyful Christian lives as they await the soon return of Jesus.”

Seven weeks later, the postmaster replied that “an investigation was made” and that “proper steps were taken to remove the rack and signage from postal property.

FFRF has complained to other Tennessee post offices about Sign of the Times magazine racks, most recently in Harrison.

Nativity scene won't be redisplayed

The Porum Police Department in Oklahoma has agreed not to redisplay a nativity scene in front of the department’s building.

The scene, erected on public property, was displayed in November 2015 and faced Main Street.

“Displaying an inherently Christian message unmistakably sends the message that Porum Police Department endorses the religious beliefs embodied in the display,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel in a letter to the police chief.

After nearly six months, FFRF received a reply denying that the holiday display was solely a nativity scene but agreed not to display it in the future.

Publicly run hotel rids itself of bibles

Following an FFRF complaint, the Thunderbird Executive Inn in Arizona has removed the Gideon bibles that resided in all of its rooms.

The hotel is part of the Thunderbird School of Global Management, recently made a unit of Arizona State University. A concerned citizen contacted FFRF.

“Permitting members of outside religious groups the privilege of placing their religious literature in public university guest rooms also constitutes state endorsement and advancement of religion,” explained FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler. “Individuals, not the state, must determine what religious texts are worth reading.”

The hotel’s director informed FFRF on July 19 that religious materials would be removed from guest rooms.

In the news

Florida mosque removed as polling site

A polling station is being moved from a Boca Raton mosque to a public library after more than 50 people complained about voting in a mosque.

Bassem Alhalabi, president of the mosque, said citizen complaints shouldn't warrant a change. The list of polling sites in Palm Beach County includes dozens of churches and synagogues. FFRF has done media interviews pointing out that this discrimination is good reason to discontinue voting in churches.

"This is not democratic," Alhalabi said. "If Muslims are good to vote in a church and a synagogue, then Christian and Jews are also good to vote in an Islamic center."

Westminster hires first paid secular adviser



The University of Westminster has appointed the first-ever paid secular adviser for non-religious staff and students.

Trained and accredited by the British Humanist Association (BHA), Isabel Millar will be the first to address the fact that non-religious people are "unlikely to accept emotional and spiritual support from a religious adviser."

The BHA also says the new hire is reflective of the "rapidly changing demographics" of the UK, where about two-thirds of students report having no religion, despite experiencing "all the same stresses and strains as their religious counterparts."

Universities have been known to employ chaplains and multifaith advisers to provide emotional and spiritual support to students and employees with a religious background.

Priest gets only 'Hail Mary' punishment

A 95-year-old Catholic priest admitted to sexually abusing many boys decades ago on Guam. He said he confessed his sins to other priests at the time, but none told him to stop.

The Rev. Louis Brouillard said that the other priests told him to "do better," along with saying Hail Mary prayers.

Brouillard served in Guam from the 1940s through the 1970s, and when asked how many boys he might have abused, Brouillard said, "I have no idea. Maybe 20. At that time, when I was that age, I got the impression that kids liked it, so I went ahead. But now of course, I know it's wrong and I'm paying for it."

Arkansas panel OKs 'conscience clause'

A legislative panel gave approval July 13 to a "conscience clause," which allows counselors and therapists in Arkansas to refer out patients because

of personal beliefs, a new rule that is opposed by the American Counselors Association and others.

Proposed by the state Board of Examiners in Counseling, the Administrative Rules and Regulations Subcommittee of the Arkansas Legislative Council gave the new rule a favorable review.

The rule prohibits a counselor or therapist from being sanctioned for transferring a current or potential client to another provider because of sincerely held "ethical, moral or religious principles." However, the transfer can occur only after careful consideration and consultation, and the counselor or therapist cannot abandon a patient.

FFRF members get nonreligion on statement

As part of the President's Statement, the University of Central Florida has added "nonreligion" to the university's policy on affirmative action to explicitly prohibit discrimination or harassment on these grounds.

UCF President John Hitt added the word in his June 16 "President's Statement Regarding Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action." UCF is the largest public university in the country, with more than 60,000 students.

It was the work of FFRF members Brenda and Mark Frei who were able to get the change made.

"During the course of the past year, a situation occurred at the University of Central Florida where our family member experienced what we assessed to be discrimination based on being nonreligious," they wrote in a letter to FFRF. "We were fortunate to be able to visit Tee Rogers, who works for UCF in this area and is a secular ally, to discuss the matter. As advised, we also discussed the matter with the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Programs."

Campaign by Muslims pulls no punches



A Muslim-run public relations firm in Chicago has produced an advertising campaign that includes a billboard that reads, "Hey ISIS, you suck!!!"

The billboard was up on northbound I-294 just west of Chicago. The declaration is signed with a social media hashtag, "From: #ActualMuslims" and it cites a verse from the Quran that says, "Life is sacred."

Leena Suleiman of Sound Vision said about 60 donors had pitched in. She told a local TV affiliate that the campaign stemmed from the frustration Muslim-Americans feel when a terrorist attack happens.

"It's about shouting out, 'ISIS does not represent me, I'm Muslim, I say the word 'sucks,' I'm like everyone else in my country,'" Suleiman said. "We want to scream it from a billboard."

Rastafarian cook fired for his dreads

A Rastafarian prep cook lost his job working at a Walt Disney World resort hotel because he refused to cut his dreadlocks, according to a religious discrimination lawsuit filed July 12.

Courtney Joseph wears dreadlocks as an expression of his faith and kept his hair tucked under a hat while working at the Shades of Green resort, the complaint states.

In February 2013, following a Disney kitchen inspection, Joseph's supervisor told him the dreadlocks would have to go because of the resort's appearance policy, according to the federal lawsuit.

Joseph refused to comply on religious grounds and was fired, the complaint states. His termination violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which protects employees against religious discrimination, the EEOC claims.

Kansas City sued over convention



American Atheists has sued Kansas City, Mo., claiming that plans to use \$65,000 in tourism tax dollars to assist in an upcoming Baptist convention violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

The lawsuit, filed July 22 in U.S. District Court against officials including Kansas City Mayor Sly James, asks a federal judge to block the city from spending taxpayer dollars to support the event.

It contends that using tax dollars to help Modest Miles Ministries Inc. prepare for the National Baptist Convention USA would advance a religious purpose in violation of the First Amendment.

A memo that detailed sexual misconduct and harassment allegations against former Archbishop John Nienstedt also said a Vatican ambassador in 2014 had told bishops to stop their investigation, according to the Minneapolis Star Tribune.

When those bishops responded with a letter saying that "would rightly be seen as a cover-up," the memo published on the Star Tribune website said then-Ambassador Archbishop Carlo Viganò told them to "destroy" the letter.

Vatican spokesman the Rev. Federico Lombardi said, "We need more information before we can make any comment" regarding the release of documents alleging the former ambassador to the U.S. stopped an investigation of the former Minnesota archbishop.

The spokesman's remarks came on July 21, the day after a collection of documents regarding clergy sex abuse in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis was made public.

Fatwa renewed against Pokemon



Saudi Arabia's top clerical body has renewed a 15-year-old edict that the Pokemon game franchise is unIslamic, although the fatwa made no specific mention of the new "Pokemon Go" mobile game.

Nintendo's app, in which players walk around real-life neighborhoods to hunt and catch virtual cartoon characters on their smartphone screens, has become a hit around the world.

The General Secretariat of the Council of Senior Religious Scholars said it had revived a 2001 decree against a Pokemon card game in response to queries from believers.

The council argued that the mutations of the creatures in the game, which are given specific powers, amounted to blasphemy by promoting the theory of natural evolution.

Politics preached from the pulpit

According to a recent survey, most American churchgoers are hearing pastors and priests speaking about politics from the pulpits of their churches during this presidential election season.

In the survey released Aug. 8 by the Pew Research Center, almost two-thirds of the respondents (64 percent) say their clergy have spoken about at least one political or social issue.

And even though churches can be stripped of tax-exempt status for endorsing or opposing a candidate, 14 percent of respondents said their pastors have spoken about a specific presidential candidate. Both Donald Trump and the Republican Party platform have said they want to repeal that law barring political speech from the pulpit.

Frequent topics included religious liberty and homosexuality, with about 40 percent of recent churchgoers saying they'd heard about either one of those two topics. That was followed by abortion (29 percent) and immigration (27 percent) and, less frequently, environmental issues (22 percent).

Comedian starts Church of JC Capitalist

British comedian John Cleese announced that he is starting the Church of JC Capitalist.

In a video posted July 28 on YouTube, Cleese — no stranger to religious-themed comedy as part of films such as "Monty Python's The Meaning of Life" — appears dressed in a red robe and miter, sitting in front of a cartoon building that features both stained glass windows and the yin-yang symbol.

Cleese's video follows a similar send-up of televangelists' tax-exempt status in the U.S. by John Oliver, host of "Last Week Tonight." Oliver gained legal recognition in 2015 for Our Lady of Perpetual Exemption, reportedly raising thousands of dollars in donations he later sent to Doctors Without Borders.

FFRF awards \$10,000

Four earn Catherine Fahringer scholarships

FFRF is pleased to announce that it has awarded \$10,000 in scholarship awards in memory of Catherine Fahringer to four students chosen by the Black Skeptics of Los Angeles, an African-American atheist community-based group.

The scholarship is part of the First in the Family Humanist Scholarship program, which focuses on undocumented, foster care, homeless and LGBTQ youth who will be the first in their families to go to college.

“We are excited and proud to offer these four students \$2,500 each in the name of Catherine Fahringer,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Fahringer was a San Antonio feminist and freethinking activist who ran a long-lived FFRF chapter and served on the executive board for many years. She was especially interested in nurturing the next generation of freethinkers. She died in 2008.

Here are excerpts from each of the winners.

By Kola Heyward-Rotimi

Faith is something that has stayed on people’s minds for millennia. Something about belief — belief in a higher power, belief in a superior leadership position, or belief in the environment itself — ensnares our minds.

I not only identify as a secular person but as an African-American, which brings into play two different cultural aspects that contrast with mainstream society’s view of who is secular. Secular people are rarely seen in media as people of color, let alone a young black man raised by an African-American mother and a Nigerian-American father in a nonreligious household. One of the biggest lessons I learned while being raised in this secular household is to question everything. Everything was up for debate, even the idea of not believing in religion.

I was never convinced to personally believe in a religious system. Even so, exploring the significance of religious systems sparked my interest in the reasons why people decide to believe in a higher power, and the various ways people express their belief. These questions have kept me interested in learning about religion for years, and I incorporate these questions heavily in my fictional writing. Most of my fiction takes place in a unified fictional universe. A central conflict stems from debates about the differences between “good” and “bad” faith, how religion can be used to advance personal agendas and the influence of religion on the making of civilizations.

In my next few years at Amherst College, I plan on continuing to ask questions concerning religion and religion’s role in peoples’ lives. Creative writing will be a great outlet for this process, and I hope to publish the trilogy of Afro-Asian inspired fantasy novels that I am developing while I am in undergrad. I also want to give underprivileged students the opportunity to



Kola Heyward-Rotimi

prove their scientific assumptions like I do and come to their own conclusions. I will attempt to achieve this through creating a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving STEM education of communities lacking in educational resources worldwide.

Kola graduated from North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics and will be attending Amherst College in the fall.

By Makeda Scott

When you grow up in the Caribbean, there are certain traditions and teachings that no one is allowed to escape. From the way you dress to the food you eat to the number of times you attend church services, there is an explicit list of things you must do. Wrong!

Contrary to popular belief about atheists, freethinkers and other secular identifying persons like myself, I am not without faith. My faith, however, does not lie within an intangible, imaginative being who punishes, kills and loves at his/her discretion. It lies within the tangible and remarkably enigmatic and beautiful creation that are human beings. I believe in humankind.

I didn’t identify as atheist or a freethinker until recently. In addition, I was also slow to self-identify because on top of being a “radical thinker” and an “anarchist,” as my family has so courteously classified me, I am a black gay female. My life has been centered around criticisms just for thinking the way I do and being who I am. Now that I am older and more mature, I’ve come to the realization that these groups, these minorities, these cultures that I belong to, are empowering. A lot of the achievements and strides I have made are owed to the strength and support I have garnered from others like me.

I take pride in saying I’m a nonbeliever. I take pride in saying I’m black. I take pride in saying I’m a lesbian. I take pride in saying I’m a woman. I don’t conform to societal norms, and that’s OK.

As it stands right now, there is an enormous issue within the young colored LGBTQ community in Iowa. LGBTQ youth, colored youth and youth in general tend to struggle independently with self-acceptance, but from experience and observation, the magnitude to which self-love and acceptance becomes obscured is heightened when adequate resources and opportunities for support and connection are limited.

Iowa is a majority white state, with very low percentages of minorities. It also has a largely religious population. This causes many LGBTQ minorities to feel misplaced, misrepresented and underrepresented. What I want to do is to create an outreach in my community where young colored LGBTQ persons can participate in events that will grant them a sense of involvement. I want to use the principles behind humanism as my platform. Humanism proselytizes human equality and value, and that is something these youths need to be reminded of. It teaches us there is beauty



Makeda Scott

in idiosyncrasy. I believe that I can and should be a beacon for change in this world, and that it begins at home.

Makeda will be attending the University of Iowa.

By Jorge Banuelos

I remember the day that I told my family that I had doubts about religion. Doubts, not vehement opposition. Not affirmative rejection, not an outright refusal to participate in religious activities, but doubts. Reasonable doubts.

I told my family that I did not find it reasonable to have to accept without question any fact of life. Even before I finished telling them how I felt, I could feel the dynamic shift from one of love and warmth to outright rejection. After I saw what my mere expression of doubt could do, I was not the same.

I grew up in a family of Jehovah’s Witnesses, going three generations back to my great-grandmother. It didn’t sit easy with me that I had to automatically accept an Earthly hierarchy connected to a mystic, ethereal creator. I didn’t like the communal peer pressure to follow a preset life pattern, nor did I appreciate the full devotion to some texts, but lenience toward other beliefs. As I grew, I told myself that I owed it to my well-being and my conscience to not maintain this façade for the emotional comfort of those halfway vested in me. So I didn’t.

The thing that affected me the most in my experience was the power of doubt and the importance of human experience. Religions are meant to be pre-ordered courses of life and explanations for real phenomena that better the believer. But when this goal actually materializes, the believer falls by the wayside, leaving an institution that only focuses on surviving. The institution does not care for the long-lasting well-being of the believer. Religion operates like a pharmaceutical company; it creates dependent customers rather than healthy, happy people. And the rejection I faced validates this claim.

For a while, I beat myself up over the emotional distance in the family. But I then realized that it was not my fault. I don’t reject the religious mindset altogether, since the human race needs dialogue over experience. But in that same breath we need experience-based dialogue, not ideological ramblings. Civil rights have only progressed so far because we used the rationale “God created us with rights and made us equals” instead of “People are suffering and we must respect their struggles.” We reached a legislative equality, which is only equality in theory, and thus felt that the fight was over. Experience says otherwise, and that should be valued more.

Humanism helped me to value myself and my experiences, and that is the only reason I need. It gave me confidence and it helped assuage my anxiety. It can do the same for others when they learn their true power is based on the sole fact that they exist. Humanism builds confidence, it fosters indepen-



Jorge Banuelos

dence and it tells the disenfranchised exactly what they need to hear: that they matter.

Jorge graduated from Wichita High School and now attends Carleton College.

By Sabria Harper

Discrimination is the one thing all religions have in common. Whether it’s Christians against homosexuality or other religions discriminating against each other, all try to exclude people based off of something they cannot help. This is part of the reason I don’t have a religion.

Having a religion is having faith in something that can’t be proven or explained scientifically. While others choose to believe in “God,” I choose to believe in myself and the tangible reasons for the things that happen in our lives. The greatest technological innovations, and basic everyday occurrences were not created by faith, but by things physically and scientifically seen and proven. Believing in anything more is not only irresponsible and unrealistic, but also dangerous. Religions create more problems than they could ever solve.

I live in a community where Caucasian Catholics are the norm. Living in one of the very few black households in the neighborhood, I have noticed many of my neighbors are either ignorant or inattentive to the issues of the black community. That is something I would like to change.

Many black issues, such as increasing incarceration rates, unequal pay and representation in companies and blatant racism, are being ignored due to the lack of awareness and support in my community. If we simply educated our communities, we would not only increase support in numbers, but also increase the support of races that objectify African-Americans. If those who commit the racist acts see their peers supporting black causes, point of views could change, racism and violence could end, and the world would be a better place.

I know it isn’t that simple, but it is a place to start. By fixing discrimination and racism, we can fix the issues of today, and those to come.

The equality of all, no matter what race, sexual orientation or gender, is an ideology that should become part of our way of life. Humanism is a practice that could fully address social issues, and make the world stronger as a whole. It could eliminate all faults within our society economically, socially and politically. Black CEOs would be common, and women would get the same wages as men. There wouldn’t be a need for the Black Lives Matter movement because everyone would know that all lives matter.

Humanism is the key to fixing us and making our society the best it can possibly be.

Sabria graduated from Milikan High School in Long Beach, Calif., and now attends UC-Berkeley.



Sabria Harper

FFRF awards \$8,750

College Essay Contest for Students of Color winners

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the 10 winners of the 2016 Michael Hakeem Memorial College Essay Contest for Students of Color.

Essayists were asked to write a personal persuasive essay about why they are a nonbeliever and their experiences as young nonbelievers of color.

Winners are listed below and include the award amount and the college or university they are attending. FFRF has paid out a total of \$8,750 in award money for this contest.

FIRST PLACE

Nadia Duncan, SUNY Purchase College (\$3,000)

SECOND PLACE

Anuj Krishnamurthy, Brown University (\$2,000)

FIRST PLACE

I am an Unapologetic Black Atheist

FFRF awarded Nadia \$3,000.

BY NADIA DUNCAN

I used to call myself a “soft agnostic.” It was a term I coined to try to be as inoffensive as possible in my hometown of Vienna, Va., while still remaining honest about my unenthusiastic attitude toward organized religious practice. People hear the word “atheist” and they recoil, as if it describes some sort of violent, dangerous iconoclast. But “agnostic” sounds tame. People hear “agnostic” and think, “Oh, there’s still some hope for her.” There isn’t.

I’ve grown tired of being inoffensive. I can no longer pretend to subscribe to the rampant ignorance I see in my community. Therefore, I have claimed a new title: Unapologetic Black Atheist.

The church is a huge part of culture in the South, especially among black people. My grandparents’ generation was raised in devout Christianity, and, through them, the teachings were passed down to me. As dubious as I was about their validity, I couldn’t escape them. How ironic, considering Christianity came to many African tribes on the continent through the work of white Christian missionaries throughout the 19th century, people who considered African peoples to be no more than savages. Enslaved people of African descent in America were stripped of their native religions and forced to adopt the Christianity of their white oppressors, or risk punishment that could be as grave as death.

The same black Americans who understand and detest what white supremacy has done to their lives are worshipping in a practice that was forced upon their ancestors centuries earlier. In turn, they force it upon their children. People in my community give their money and their time to the church, and in return receive an indoctrination that compels them to hate other marginalized groups, such as the LGBT community. How can people who have experienced marginalization themselves be able



THIRD PLACE

Bahram Sherwani, San Francisco State University (\$1,000)

FOURTH PLACE

Jonathan Azpeitia, Pomona College (\$750)

FIFTH PLACE (TIE)

Kamerin Winston, Spelman College (\$500)



Nadia Duncan

to project it onto others so easily? The answer is painfully simple. Across cultures, religion is a tool of control. The three major Abrahamic religions have all been used on many different occasions as tools to rally the masses and convince people to follow the will of God. Yet somehow, the word of God always seems to come from groups of men who have derived status and authority and intend to keep it. From the Crusades to the Westboro Baptist Church, to the conflicts over Palestine and the Holy Land that have lasted centuries, to Islamic extremism and violence across the Middle East, religious indoctrination has caused the death of millions of people throughout human history, all in the name of a faceless, chameleon God whose will aligns with the will of those who wish to control others.

I understand. People need comfort when the worst comes into their life. We want to feel accepted in communities of like-minded people. Religious centers can be places of healing and support for some. I get it. Human beings are naturally curious, and we seek solace from the fear of an inevitable death. We want to ascribe a meaning to our lives, to find a purpose; we want to be able to name the source from which we came. I don’t condemn spirituality or the belief in greater forces outside of ourselves. But I do believe that morality comes from within, and not from a devotion to a series of religious practices, regardless of their origin. I believe that I can be a good person, a person of value, a black person, without claiming a religious affiliation. I am, and always will be, an Unapologetic Black Atheist.

Nadia, 18, from Vienna, Va., is a student of theatre and classical voice at SUNY Purchase College and will be a sophomore in the fall. Her interests include singing, acting, dance, creative writing and historical and not-so-historical reading.

FIFTH PLACE (TIE)

Tyneshia Griffin, Virginia Tech University (\$500)

SIXTH PLACE

Benjamin Duru, California University–Long Beach (\$400)

HONORABLE MENTIONS (\$200 EACH)

Ana Almeida-Rojo, Oglethorpe University

SECOND PLACE

We must save ourselves

FFRF awarded Anuj \$2,000.

BY ANUJ KRISHNAMURTHY

In recent years, “international development” has become a popular discipline in scholarly and diplomatic circles. Achieving sustainable growth in the developing world is, of course, one of the 21st century’s toughest challenges. The World Bank estimates that more than 2 billion people in the developing world live on less than \$3 a day; a third of the world’s poorest live on the South Asian subcontinent, where my immigrant parents hail from.

Yet, while the obvious impediments to development — corruption, conflict, disease — have been examined exhaustively by academics, a particularly pernicious phenomenon has been overwhelmingly neglected: God, religion and all the associated accoutrements.

I am a freethinker of color because religiosity has proven an intractable hindrance to economic growth in developing countries. So long as religion remains humanity’s preeminent mechanism of social control, I’ve come to believe that people of color all over the developing world will continue to suffer from material misery and spiritual starvation.

The summer before I entered college, I spent a month visiting family in central India. It had been five years since I’d last been there, and, as soon as I stepped out from the air-conditioned sanctuary of New Delhi’s airport, I could immediately discern the new developments: more gleaming skyscrapers, more smartphones, more Western fast-food franchises. Yet, in seeming defiance of India’s nascent capitalist tradition came something wholly unexpected: more houses of worship. I noticed it instantly — more orange flags perched atop Hindu mandirs and more ornate minarets guarding Muslim mosques.

I was perplexed: What role did ancient religions, often propagating backwards sentiments, have in a burgeoning economy? It is self-evidently absurd to expect the proliferation of temples to automatically rectify, or even alleviate,

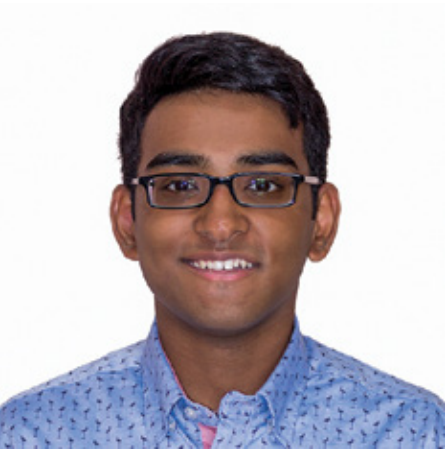
Taylor Johnson, SUNY at Purchase

Alexandra Lewis, East Carolina University

FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979.

“It’s a myth that most African-Americans, Latinos or Hispanic-Americans are uniformly religious,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “FFRF wants to showcase diversity and reward minorities in the freethought movement who are especially courageous in ‘coming out of the closet.’”

The college contest is named for the late Michael Hakeem, a sociology professor who was an FFRF officer and active atheist known by generations of University of Wisconsin-Madison students for fine-tuning their reasoning abilities.



Anuj Krishnamurthy

‘So long as religion remains humanity’s preeminent mechanism of social control the developing world will continue to suffer.’

India’s domestic troubles. In fact, the extravagance by which Indians celebrate their holy texts, statues of deities, and conceptions of heaven contrasts sharply with the realities on the ground. India’s gods seem to merely watch as poverty, illiteracy and hunger continue to abound, unchecked and uncontested. Religion is far from empowering; it callously compels people to accept their present circumstances, however undesirable, and submissively hope for something better in the afterlife.

What most Indians — and most religious residents of the developing world, I imagine — fail to recognize is that God cannot miraculously imbue their lives with prosperity and happiness and relieve their sorrows. God cannot cure disease; only doctors can. God cannot teach children; only educators and parents can. God cannot improve democracy; only effective leaders can.

Indeed, the agents of any society’s collective progress are not divine figures — they are people, people who reject the passivity of prayer and dare to make their dreams reality. Putting our faith in God to solve our problems, then, is tantamount to sheepishly shirking our civic duty. Individuals in any society have a robust obligation to participate in their communities, both commercially and politically.

To the adversaries of atheism and

Continued on the next page

THIRD PLACE

Raised to value science

FFRF awarded Bahram \$1,000.

BY BAHRAM SHERWANI

I remember the day I began questioning. People across the nation were in shock as the Twin Towers in New York were destroyed. I was then an 8-year-old who went by “Zack,” because somehow, even as a child, I knew that a name of Persian origin wouldn’t be as welcome in the majority-Caucasian suburb where I resided. Regardless of this moniker, my heritage had eventually become known, and the effects of the anti-Muslim sentiment in this country haunted the rest of my younger years.

It wasn’t long after those attacks that I felt the need to educate myself on the religion I was born into. I never understood why I was going to mosque a few times a year, why I couldn’t eat pork, or why I was shown hate, even at a young age, for a belief that I never asked to believe in.

In this diverse nation, I was exposed to many other monotheist religions from my peers in school, Little League and Boy Scouts. Even in all of these traditionally American activities, I felt like I was considered an outsider by those around me, and

a constant theme of exclusion rose from my rejections to their attempts of conversion to whatever faith they blindly followed. While discovering many outrageous descriptions of holy stories, choral worship songs and divine beliefs across multiple faiths, I realized that religion was never a choice for most people. Some found strength and comfort in submitting to their faith in a God, while others had only known and followed what their families have wanted them to. Some converts also chose to benefit from social inclusion aspects, and the support system a faith community usually provides. I seem to have been born with an understanding of logic, rather than a belief in blind faith.

I left Islam in my late teens after I had comfortably researched enough to understand the reasons people believe and the lack of evidence behind popular organized religions. Fortunately for me, my mother was a school teacher and my father was an air force captain in Afghanistan before escaping to the United States as refugees. Because of their higher levels of education, my parents kept an open mind on beliefs, and encouraged me in learning about anything I chose, especially in science-related fields. This is uncommon among immigrant Muslim families.



Bahram Sherwani

As a student raised to value science, where the indisputable evidence shows evolution, the lack of a geocentric universe, and the existence of predated stories of origin, I had no reason to believe in an all-powerful god that created these aspects of life. I had no reason to believe my life was dedicated to serving this deity, and that I’d be punished after death if I did not. As selfish as it seems, I made the choice to live for myself, to gather experiences, and to maybe one day change the world. Organized religion has changed the world in more negative ways than positive. I refuse to let an ancient text that contradicts itself and exerts power over people dictate how I live my life.

For all of my brothers currently in the Muslim faith, wondering if you should have to be apologetic for the crimes

against humanity committed in the name of your religion: It is never too late to open your mind to a new way of thinking that is based on law, logically consistent theories and solid evidence. I

challenge you to reject the certainty in your beliefs. As we continue in our destined path of discovery, I hope more people of color accept the proven ideas of science, and successfully escape beliefs that are responsible for many of the atrocities of this world.

As an agnostic, I personally don’t deny the possibility of a god. But I can honestly say that there is much more evidence to disprove the existence of a being that provides society with hate, sickness and war. Science, law and love provide a good moral foundation. This is why I am a freethinker.

Bahram, 23, is studying political science at San Francisco State University in California. He is the youngest child of two refugee immigrants from Afghanistan who left everything in their war-broken country as a last attempt to secure a better future for their children. He grew up in the suburban vineyard town of Livermore, Calif. He hopes to finish school as a transfer student at San Diego State University, earning a degree in political science with a minor in economics. He enjoys playing with his dog Jake, writing music or watching informational videos.

FOURTH PLACE

Finally making my own choices

FFRF awarded Jonathan \$750.

BY JONATHAN AZPEITIA

You did well on a test? God must be with you. You’re in good health? God is looking out for you. About to go to bed? Be thankful for another day of life God has given to you.

The bible simply doesn’t line up with scientific evidence. It states that the Earth is only 6,000 years old, but carbon dating, a tool used in chemistry, helps us decipher the age of radioactive materials to be hundreds of thousands of years old. With viruses evolving in front of our very own eyes, we witness the theory of evolution, adapting to survive against the medicine we use to treat them. The updated flu shot will result in the creation of antibodies, ready to fight off the flu if it ever arises in the host. As science keeps growing, the copious amounts of hard data to disprove religion are ever growing. Believers of God argue that anything good or bad that happens in the world is part of his master plan.

Is part of his plan really to allow the genocide of groups across the world? To let nations rot and let their children starve to death? Tell me that I am judgmental of God’s ways, but I am just being a realistic human being. We need action from people to improve the world instead of waiting around for his hand to take action.

I had been raised in a Catholic household. My family is of Mexican descent, thus Catholicism was very ingrained in my culture and lifestyle. One day during my sophomore year of high school, when my best friend told me he was an atheist, I asked him to leave my home. I was in utter disbelief. How could anyone live their life without God?

But then I began to wonder why he chose to live such a life. Who was God? Did I believe in him because I chose myself, or was I just raised to have this mentality by my family? I thought about my relationship with this “God” I so strongly believed in and decided to end it. I realized that the only reason for my beliefs in Catholicism was due to my parents forcing me to go to church. None of the religious experiences were necessarily due to my own will. Baptism? My parents chose for me. First Communion? My parents chose for me.

It was time I began choosing for myself.



Jonathan Azpeitia

It has been four years since I told my parents I’m an atheist. At first, they shunned me the same way I had shunned my friend. My mother wept because her boy had abandoned her Catholic ways. My parents took me to church more often, hoping I would rescind my words. But I didn’t. We had many arguments over religion, as they were still trying to force Catholicism upon me. After many months, my family finally accepted my new beliefs. It was very hard at first. I was defying generations of believers in my family,

going against the norm of my heritage. I was scared.

Then I realized that I wasn’t alone. It turned out that many of my friends were also atheists. They had never forced any of their opinions upon me and were very respectful of what

used to be my Catholic ways.

Denying religion and becoming an atheist was a life-changing experience. I felt liberated as I no longer feared what this deity thought of me. Millennials have less traditional mindsets, and it is OK for us to think differently. You don’t have to conform to your culture’s ideals because you are your own person. Choose your beliefs because you truly believe in them, not because you’re being told to do so by someone else. The assumption is made that the nonbelieving community is rude and will shove atheism down your throat, but that is simply not true. The community is welcoming because we all are freethinkers and we chose to break the mold. If you choose to do so, too: Welcome.

Jonathan, 19, was born in Kirkland, Wash., and attends Pomona College, majoring in molecular biology. His interests include playing music, representing minority groups on campus and scientific research.

Second Place Essay

Continued from the previous page

proponents of religion, I say this: Demanding progress from God isn’t enough; we must realize the cornerstones of development — healthcare, education, good governance — for ourselves.

Religious fervor in India has also stymied development because it incubates excruciating sociopolitical disharmony. Each election year, embattled political parties pander to

religious groups for votes, promising to bolster the standing of certain faiths at the expense of others. Political classes essentially hijack religion, rerouting devotees to serve their own ethically dubious interests. The result is irreconcilable interfaith dissensions, frequently manifested in violent Hindu-Muslim riots and acts of terrorism. Yet, just as there is no divine reward for civic complacency, there is no salvation in self-superior, religious politicking.

As a freethinker of color, I care deeply

about my roots. Much of my family still lives in India, and I am genuinely invested in the vitality of India’s government and economy. But I fear that religious obsession may upend the tremendous progress India has made.

The secular movement, thus, would do well to consider the identities and backgrounds of young people of color in its critique of religion. After all, the whole world does better when the developing world, long encumbered by unproductive religiosity and

colonial exploitation, secures its own economic voice. Secular thinkers can help advance this noble project by incorporating communities of color and issues of development in their work.

Anuj, 18, lives in Monmouth Junction, N.J., and attends Brown University, where he intends to major in international relations and economics. His interests include volunteering at the Rhode Island Urban Debate League, playing pickup basketball, and playing the tabla, an Indian classical percussion instrument.

FIFTH PLACE (TIE)

The removal of my mental shackles

FFRF awarded Tyneshia \$500.

BY TYNESHIA GRIFFIN

Similar to any African-American, I am the product of an inhumane, perplexing history. But I diverge in my thinking from many African-Americans because I am aware of our neo-slavery. That is, the mental incarceration that shackles us.

For instance, as a conflicted teen, I found that infantilizing, yet spiritually mobilizing sermons began to leave me feeling hollow. I desired an existence where I could receive enlightenment from reflecting on my faults and peculiarities, rather than shame. As I know now, and as I was learning then, religion teaches African-Americans to suffer under illogical fallacies, such as racism and sexism. We are taught that “better days are a’coming,” to wait patiently on a miracle instead of acting to legislate equality and empower each other as brother and sister.

But, as I know now, and as I was learning then, it is a choice to let such concepts undermine one’s bliss and blind one from truth. Human beings, innately conscious, are vulnerable to many forms of pain and deserve human rights.

Recognizing humanity as an evolutionary manifestation is difficult. My beliefs result from empathizing with the struggles and ideals of individuals who illustrate true freedom. They



Tyneshia Griffin

inspire me with images of a fully enlightened self and humanity. Such an inspiring feeling comes over me when I walk through the exhibitions of the contemporary artist Kehinde Wiley. To me, his larger-than-life oil paintings place women of color in the positions of nobility where they have always stood in life, but never in pure, realistic illustrations.

As a freethinker, seeing these portrayals, portrait after portrait, renews my belief in the oneness of humanity and my inherent mental and physical strength.

But Wiley’s muses also communicate that the validity of his message, no matter how emotionally poignant, contradicts the objectification of woman that is intrinsic to religion, and resultantly, worldly cultures. And in such moments, my reasoning gains value because it permits me to understand the context of my life as an African-American woman, and recognize how ideologies can blind me from the powerful, true messages that are always within grasp.

When it comes to expressing this newfound exoneration, I find myself not fully connecting with the perspectives of those I love, while also searching for an open, safe space where my realizations stand united, and not demonized within my ethnic community. In reflecting on my ethnicity, it can feel more than impious to neglect my people’s beliefs. Religion is literally and figuratively their saving grace, and it brings our communities together in a way one could never understand unless they are the descendants of the enslaved. In order for African-Americans, such as myself, to become a part of secular organization, the sincere and honest compassion and sense of respect and reciprocity that we feel for one another would have to exist in that organization.

Letting my mind go where it wants brings me an intellectual freedom that I would never relinquish. I have

the option to discover different ideologies, look at them objectively, and decide how I want them to influence my life. And in living in this space of freedom, I only desire the same exoneration for others who allow doctrine to limit their happiness.

The religious may paint secularism as immoral, but if that were true, how come I am consistently filled with love? Why do I constantly aim to empower others who struggle with cyclical sufferings, ranging from sexual discrimination to self-hate? If secularism frees me to see, and respect all religious institutions for their power to invoke action from within the minds of billions of humans, how could I be infantilizing religion?

Even without considering such backlash, nonbelieving is undeniably an obstacle, especially if I have to watch those I love open their hands to receive a blessing that they can grant for themselves. However, for me, in this moment of my life, freethought is a necessity. It provides me with the mental objectivity to respect the ideas of others, validate my human condition, and be open to receiving compassion from anyone, no matter their religion.

Tyneshia, 19, lives in Prince George, Va., and attends Virginia Tech University. She plans to major in geography, with additional studies in writing, Spanish and sociology.

FIFTH PLACE (TIE)

Breaking away from Christianity

FFRF awarded Kamerin \$500.

BY KAMERIN WINSTON

Christianity has been ingrained in my blood as a black woman in the United States since the day I was born. My enslaved ancestors worked while singing Negro spirituals; spirituals about freedom and how God was going to free his chosen people. Christianity was the crutch that helped guide us through our turmoil, even though often it seemed to hurt us more.

I was born and raised in Detroit, a large city with more than 80 percent of its population being black. “A church and a liquor store on every corner,” is a common description used by people in Detroit. Everyone I knew went to church. My family, friends, neighbors and co-workers all belonged to a church. Even if you didn’t attend church regularly, you had a church home you attended on Christmas, Mother’s Day and/or Easter.

Well, for me, my mother became a devoted Christian at a young age, so we attended church every week. In my early years, I spent significant time there. Wednesdays for bible study, Fridays for evangelistic service and Sundays for 8:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. and 7 p.m. worship services.

As a child, I consistently questioned things said in church. Jesus did what? Why would he do that? It never seemed realistic to me. Especially in a Pentecostal church, everything seemed so theatrical. I often found myself paying more attention to the actions of people



Kamerin Winston

when they “caught the Holy Ghost” than listening to the Sunday sermon. I continued to go to church because my mother wanted me to, and I thought maybe one day I would feel the way those people in church were feeling.

As I grew older and began to learn the history of the world, I really took a historical look into various religions, specifically the one I grew up practicing. I found the story of Christ quite outlandish. In church, I’d heard a million times the story of Jesus dying on the cross for my sins, but to read it in a textbook made me more skeptical than ever. After learning about the history of African people and how they lived thousands of years without Christianity, I realized that Christianity may not provide the answers to life and death.

Christianity in the black community has been our rock. Christianity was there when our ancestors fought for their freedom from slavery. Christianity was there when our brothers and fathers were lynched during the Jim Crow era. Christianity was there when we were hosed down and chased by dogs in Birmingham.

We have always looked to Christ and God for guidance during our struggles

Continued on the next page

SIXTH PLACE

Drifting away from religion

FFRF awarded Benjamin \$400.

BY BENJAMIN DURU

I was brainwashed as a child. Anger, bitterness and sadness were but a few of the emotions that arose when I realized this. Growing up as a gay, poor, Nigerian-American atheist in Lynwood has given me understanding of multiple perspectives. My parents are very religious people. I became an atheist when I realized that it was time to start thinking for myself and not for others.

I attended a local Catholic church until the age of 15. In eighth grade I began to read the bible from the beginning, but I never finished it. My eyes were opened after coming across Leviticus 20:13: “If a man lies with a man as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.” This didn’t make sense to me because God is supposed to be the embodiment of love and kindness. My parents forced me into Catholic schooling. Every year after eighth grade I drifted further away from religion.

I came out to my parents as gay and an atheist in 2013. My mother would call me several times and tell me that I was going hell and that I needed to find God and accept Jesus. For a few months, phone calls turned into yelling matches. My parents constantly refer to atheists as “heathens.”

When someone embraces being an atheist, people take immediate offense because they feel as if you are demeaning them and saying that they are wrong. Atheists don’t have a certain location where they meet or a



Benjamin Duru

‘I reject religion because it is based on a continuous, unproven, supernatural line of thought that inhibits the ability to think freely in many areas.’

certain set of rules, values or restrictions based on a book. They don’t share a personal connection with a higher being they believe to have created them.

Science is constantly changing and adjusting with new information. We can make observations and base our experiments on those observations. We form conclusions based on our results, but if new information becomes available, we change the way we think. Religion always stays the same. Religious people constantly create faulty secondary elaborations for their beliefs in order to preserve their faith.

Atheism can never be used as a justification to kill people in the same way that belief in God can. In the U.S., Christianity is the dominant religion. Whenever a tragedy happens, such as the shootings in Orlando,

Continued on the next page

College essay honorable mentions

Made with stardust, not a rib

FFRF awarded Ana \$200. This is an excerpt.

BY ANA ALMEIDA-ROJO



Ana Almeida-Rojo

When I go to other people’s houses, I typically see Our Lady of Guadalupe pictures and rosaries in their living rooms, kitchens, dining rooms, cars, etc. To them, these objects are necessary to represent a respectable Mexican-Catholic household. To me, they are merely masks of religious hypocrisy. I am a young nonbeliever of color. My anti-religious

sentiments have developed through my science education and experience with religious folks. Religious teachings only focus on the result, such as going to heaven or going through a suitable reincarnation. That is not a satisfying approach to life because it has selfish undertones. By utilizing science, people can learn more about the universe and obtain different views on life through various disciplines, including biology, chemistry and physics. Science allows room for discussion and disagreement. Religion, on the other hand, adheres you to religious texts. Being a nonbeliever is difficult, but being a nonbeliever and a person of color is even more difficult because many or most people of color will bash and disown those who do not believe in God. It is extremely hard to express any negative opinions on religion or else you bring shame to the whole family. Young freethinkers of color face special scrutiny in exposing their views on religion, because people of color emphasize religion in all aspects of life. I believe private events could help young freethinkers of color feel welcome and comfortable in their ideas. Religion dehumanizes people and their hard work. It angers me that nonbelievers are judged to no end just because they do not hold religious views. Nonbelievers could discover a cure, could put their hearts in volunteering, could feed the homeless, but still be disregarded as positive contributors to society. The secular movement has become more popular, but there is still more progress to go.

Ana, 21, was born in Mexico, but has lived in Roswell, Ga., for most of her life. She attends Oglethorpe University. She enjoys trying new foods/restaurants, playing arcade games and listening to music.

Alone among my own people

FFRF awarded Taylor \$200. This is an excerpt.

BY TAYLOR JOHNSON



Taylor Johnson

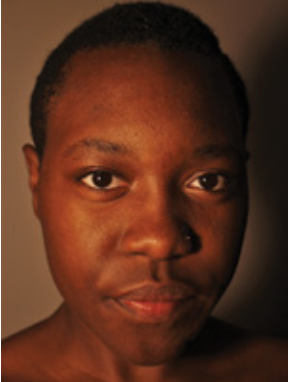
I believe personally that there isn’t a god or higher being. If there did happen to be one, I wouldn’t allow my life choices to be defined by one. I believe that one being cannot hold significant power over everyone else, which makes it harder to view God as real instead of as a story to comfort those in need. My decision to be an atheist-agnostic is

strongly frowned upon in society, especially in the African-American community. Because I am black, it is assumed that I belong to some denomination of Christianity and that I place a large amount of faith in God. I had to hide this part of myself from family and friends, acting as though I still believed. When I told my mother of my atheism, she rejected it and still forced me to attend church with her every week. I got into arguments and fights with peers at school and camp when they found out about my lack of belief. They said that I was just trying to be like “the rich white kids” and that I needed to embrace my black ancestry. I tried explaining my views and how I am accepting of theirs, but they chose not to listen. I found myself alone among my own people, rejected for my opinions. I longed for a place where I could find others like me or speak to like minds. The secular movement should work more to reach out to different populations of people and make their presence known, encouraging nonbelieving youths to be more open about how they feel so they’ll find others who will accept them. To those who try to counter my beliefs and say that I am wrong, I always remind them that at a point in history, their beliefs too were frowned upon and looked at with disgust. All groups of people face some form of oppression before being recognized. Treating atheism the same negative way Christianity or Judaism or Buddhism was once treated isn’t OK. All we can do is believe what we individually believe and live our lives as the best citizens we can be. Taylor, 19, attends SUNY Purchase College in Harrison, N.Y. She was born in Far Rockaway, N.Y., and moved to Jamaica, N.Y., in 2012. She is part of her school’s cheerleading team, and a shadow cast production of “The Rocky Horror Picture Show.” She enjoys hiking, camping and child care.

Are you there God? It’s me, skeptic

FFRF awarded Alexandra \$200. This is an excerpt.

BY ALEXANDRA LEWIS



Alexandra Lewis

Being skeptical about the existence of God was not something that came to me as a child. As I grew older, the more skeptical I became of the existence and validity of God and Jesus Christ. This eventually led me to identify as agnostic. In addition to asking myself these questions, my experiences with churches (specifically black churches) have left me with mixed emotions toward religion altogether.

Part of my reasoning for reconsidering my faith is rooted in my experiences with black churches. While my objective is not to reprimand black churches, I can wholeheartedly say that some of the beliefs that are preached upon are extremely unwelcoming to certain individuals. For example, it is a common belief among most (but not all) black churches that members of the LGBTQ community are sinners. As someone who identifies not only as a person of color but also as queer, it is difficult for me to feel like I am welcomed with open arms and that I truly belong. Hearing pastors preach about how being queer is a sin is something that I’ve experienced both first- and second-hand. While no one knew that I was queer, it was still terrifying for me to think that people could start furiously quoting bible scriptures at me in the event that someone found out. The trivialization of mental illness in black churches is another reason behind my skepticism toward my previous faith. I was diagnosed with clinical depression in my early teens and no matter how much praying I did before and after, I still struggled with it. My case isn’t the only one like this; many black men, women, teens and children battle with poor mental health, and are pointed in the direction of God and God only. Listening to the church and only relying on God to “save” me from my depression was something I could not do. I later realized that seeking psychiatric help alongside counseling and a good support system of family and close friends is what would help me deal with something that I struggle with every day. Alexandra, 19, was born in Buffalo, N.Y., and raised in Charlotte, N.C.. She attends East Carolina University. Her interests include photography, reading and writing.

Fifth Place Essay

Continued from the previous page

in this country. Yet I can’t help but wonder why God would allow this to happen to us. The bible says God would never give us more than we could bear. Could we bear watching our children and spouses being taken away from us during slavery? Could we bear watching our children being murdered? Can we continue to bear watching our children being hunted down and killed like animals by police? We pray to God for a long life, yet praise him even at funerals. Christianity gives us hope, but it may be false hope. Freethinking, particularly in the black community, has a very negative connotation. Because of our history in this country and our reliance on religion, especially Christianity, to separate yourself from religion seems like a slap in the face to others. There are so many people who grew up

in the church, but, because they don’t agree with Christianity, have chosen to remove themselves and their family from the church. It’s not that bad to no longer practice the religion, but the second you no longer identify with it you are seen as the enemy. Black freethinkers often put up with attending church just to keep up an image. There needs to be a safe haven for black freethinkers, a place where they can get together and know they are not alone. Kamerin, 18, lives in Atlanta and attends Spelman College, where she is a history major and political science minor. At Spelman, she served as the community leadership council president for her first-year hall and also was a member of Spelman protégé under the Morehouse Business Association. She is interested in politics and business, and has worked closely with her politician father.

Sixth Place Essay

Continued from the previous page

Fla., people say of survivors, “God answered their prayer and protected them.” They completely disregard those that died and how God let that happen. Or, they say, “It’s God’s will.” I reject religion because it is based on a continuous, unproven, supernatural line of thought that inhibits the ability to think freely in many areas. There is a deep feeling of alienation when you realize that you can’t socialize in large groups with people within your own race or ethnicity. The battle was finding a place where I felt comfortable. At school I didn’t join the atheist club because there weren’t many people of color. I feel like black atheists are judged more harshly than their white counterparts. People tend to lump black people together. Every single black person is the same while white people are different. There was another layer

of stress for me because my parents are from Nigeria. They brought along many of those conservative ideologies. I think that the secular movement can be a more inclusive place to people of color by recognizing that certain groups may have a harder time openly admitting that they are an atheist. There are cultural and historical barriers that need to be talked about. Secular people need to expand their social group. Atheists are from all walks of life. It’s important that we create a separation between church and state. We should be able to live in a society that embraces nonbelievers and believers. Benjamin, 22, lives in Lynwood, Calif., and attends California University- Long Beach. He is majoring in sociology and is interested in studying crime, human rights and the way human beings interact with one another. In his free time, he likes to read, write, sing, exercise and cook.

Ingersoll statue restored by FFRF

By Leslie Renken

This article first appeared in the Peoria Journal Star in Illinois on July 23 and is reprinted with permission.

For most of his life and for years after his death, Robert G. Ingersoll was both lauded and ridiculed in Peoria.

Today, he's all but forgotten.

"He's the most famous Peorian you've never heard of," said Cheryl Hofbauer, a member of the Peoria Secular Humanist Society. She and her husband, Ken, worked with a national organization, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, to restore the bronze statue of Ingersoll that has stood at the back entrance of Glen Oak Park since 1911.

Removed May 10 for repairs, the restored Ingersoll statue was rededicated on Aug. 11, the 183rd anniversary of Ingersoll's birth.

Peoria's infidel

Ingersoll's advocacy of rational thinking and humanism over the tenets of organized religion earned him the nickname "Peoria's Infidel." A lawyer, philosopher, Civil War veteran and one-time attorney general of Illinois, Ingersoll's most successful endeavor was public speaking. He was a brilliant thinker whose oratory skills and personable nature served him well both as a trial attorney and a paid speaker — he typically earned \$3,500 per speech. Many of his speeches tackled thorny topics of the day, including slavery and women's rights. He frequently poked fun at orthodox religion. His speeches and writings on these topics catapulted him to international fame.

"He was the top-drawing speaker in America. When he spoke, the lecture halls were standing-room only. Before fire codes, people would climb up into the rafters to see him speak," said Canton resident Connie Cook Smith, co-president and a founder of the now defunct Peoria-based Friends of Robert Ingersoll society.

Ingersoll lived in Peoria from 1857 to 1877, pivotal years in his career and life. He and his brother built a successful law practice, and Ingersoll evolved from an indifferent Christian (his father was a congregational minister) to an outspoken agnostic. His wife, Eva Parker of Groveland, was likely instrumental in his deconversion. She came from a family known for their unorthodox religious views, according to *American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll*, by Orvin Larson [available at ffrf.org/shop]. Ingersoll left Peoria when business and cultural interests called the family to New York.

For a long time after his death in 1899, Ingersoll remained a topic of spirited debate in Peoria. In 1983, the Friends of Robert Ingersoll society celebrated the 150th anniversary of Ingersoll's birth with a week of activities in Peoria. At one point during the festivities the head of American Atheists, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, got up and slammed Ingersoll for a number of things, including not doing more to assist atheist organizations of his time. But perhaps most insulting, according to Ingersoll fans present that day, was her comparison of Ingersoll to Ronald Reagan — both were radical right-wingers, she said. As a result, the Friends of Robert Ingersoll banned O'Hair from future celebrations.

In recent years Ingersoll seems to have been forgotten for all but a few scholarly Peorians. Cook Smith has a theory why.

"Librarians of the day were very religious, and they tended to throw out his books," she said.

The recent removal of Ingersoll's statue did create some interest, however. Former longtime Peoria County Board member Roger Monroe wrote an editorial for The Community Word on May 31.

"There's no truth to the rumor that the park district is now planning to construct a statue of Karl Marx," Monroe said. "One wonders if those who believe would be permitted to have a statue of Christ at the entrance to the park on Prospect Road."

An easy fundraiser

In spite of Peoria's ambivalence for Ingersoll, there are a great many people elsewhere who still hold him in high esteem.

"Ingersoll is a beloved figure in freethought history," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.



Photo courtesy of Tom Flynn

Robert Ingersoll's widow joined other family members and 6,000 in attendance on Oct. 23, 1911, to dedicate the world's only full-length statue of Ingersoll, in Peoria, Ill., by sculptor Fritz Triebel. Mrs. Ingersoll is the one seated.

"He's just an icon in our movement."

His popularity made it incredibly easy to raise \$35,000 for the restoration of Ingersoll's statue. Once FFRF put the word out, donations came in from across the nation, as well as Canada and Puerto Rico.

"There were 26 people who donated \$1,000 or more, and altogether close to 300 people donated," said Ken Hofbauer, who had alerted FFRF about the deterioration of the statue after meeting Jeff Ingersoll, a descendant of Robert Ingersoll, at a conference last summer.

"He saw my name tag and said 'You're from Peoria. Did you know there's a statue of Robert Ingersoll in a park there?'" said Hofbauer. "He'd seen it a couple years ago, and it looked awful. He asked me if I could hook up with someone from the park district to do something about it."

Hofbauer contacted the Peoria Park District and they got an estimate for the restoration — \$60,000. Hofbauer was told it could be considered in the next year's budget, but there was some doubt about approval.

"I was told that there's never enough money to go around," said Hofbauer. That's when he started brainstorming other ways to raise the funds.

In October, Hofbauer and his wife attended the FFRF national convention, where they met Gaylor, who was familiar with the Ingersoll statue in Peoria.

"I have seen it. We held a convention in Peoria in the 1980s because of Peoria's Ingersoll ties," she said. When Hofbauer asked about the possibility of FFRF participating in a fundraising effort for the statue's restoration, Gaylor asked him to email pictures of the deterioration.



Sculptor Zenos Frudakis looks up at the statue of Robert Ingersoll that he helped refurbish.

"I was horrified when I saw the photographs," she said. "I said, 'Yes, we can take this on as a fundraising project.' And soon after I sent out the notice, our members reacted with great alacrity."

In addition to money, FFRF got some advice.

"I had two members who contacted us and said 'that bid seems way too high,'" Gaylor said. "One of them, a very successful Philadelphia sculptor named Zenos Frudakis, got a bid from the foundry he's worked with for years to do the whole restoration, including coming to get it and bringing it back, for less than \$30,000." FFRF sent the park district a check, and not long afterward the statue was hauled away.

Good for another 105 years

On July 15, the 14-foot tall bronze statue created by sculptor Fritz Triebel stood on concrete blocks in the Laran Bronze foundry in Chester, Pa. The restoration was nearly complete. The badly damaged base and many cracks and pinholes had been repaired, and the patina was restored.

"It looks pretty good," said Frudakis, who is supervising the restoration free of charge. "The way it's been preserved, it should last for another 105 years."

A busy sculptor of international acclaim, Frudakis was partnering with the FFRF on another project when he heard about the Ingersoll statue. A longtime fan of Ingersoll, Frudakis quickly volunteered his services.

"I have such great respect for Ingersoll," he said. "I am a humanist myself. I have spent my whole life trying to know what is real and what isn't real, and that's what he was about."

Ingersoll's message is as important today as when he was alive, said Frudakis, while speaking of recent political events.

"When you have someone get up and make a speech and say 'first I am a Christian,' and that everything comes after that . . . he doesn't believe in evolution. They are out of touch with reality. There have been hundreds of years of science — it's amazing to me. You can't just make it up because you want something consistent with your world view. And people are still fighting about these things in the schools. That scares me. That's why I donated my services. I think people should accept reality."

Bronze is one of the most permanent of all the artistic mediums, allowing the artist to make a statement for a long time. With a little help from Frudakis, for the next 100 years Ingersoll will stand on a pedestal in Glen Oak Park as though he was still speaking to an audience. Frudakis hopes future generations will learn about this famous Peorian and study his rational philosophies.

"He is the embodiment of rational thinking, not just for his time, but for our time and the future," he said.

Leslie Renken is an arts reporter for the Journal Star.

Ingersoll statue rededication

Glen Oak Park, Peoria, Ill. — Aug. 11, 2016



Ingersoll’s Creed

Justice is the only worship.
Love is the only priest.
Ignorance is the only slavery.
Happiness is the only good.
The time to be happy is now.
The place to be happy is here.
The way to be happy is to make others so.



FFRF served birthday cake in memory of the guest of honor at a pre-dedication dinner party in Peoria attended by about 75 people from 12 states. It was the 183rd anniversary of Ingersoll’s birth. There were nine brief after-dinner speakers paying tribute to Ingersoll, with music provided by Dan Barker and Elliott Ingersoll. Robert Ingersoll, the most famous freethinker of the 19th century, was a spell-binding orator. His aphorisms include: “With soap, baptism is a good thing.” “The hands that help are better far than lips that pray.” “All religions are inconsistent with mental freedom.” “I do not believe in putting out the sun to keep weeds from growing.”



Ingersoll descendants carry on tradition

Ingersoll descendants Elliott and Jeff Ingersoll. Elliott Ingersoll, Ohio, a great-great-great grand nephew, professor of psychology and professional musician, recited some Ingersoll lines and sang a song in Ingersoll’s honor at the dedication. Jeff Ingersoll, a seventh cousin four times removed from Robert Ingersoll, is a caretaker of the Robert G. Ingersoll birthplace in Dresden, N.Y., and chairs the Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee. About 200 people attended the ceremony, hosted by the Peoria Park District.

Major donors attend dedication

Several major attended the rededication on Aug. 11, including Joe Harris of Michigan, Ken and Cheryl Hofbauer of Peoria, Ill., Margaret Downey of Pennsylvania and Sharon Parker and Jeff Ingersoll of New York. In attendance but missing from this photo was Doug Brassil of Ohio.



Thank you, donors!

FFRF thanks all of the 243 donors to the Ingersoll project, who represented 42 states, plus Puerto Rico and Canada. Ingersoll, a Civil War officer and attorney, lived in Peoria for 20 years. The names of the 23 donors (or donor couples) giving at least \$1,000, are memorialized on the new plaque.

Photography by Greg McNeil



Ingersoll, the orator and author, was a Civil War officer, lawyer, celebrated family man, personal friend of three U.S. presidents, Illinois attorney general and the 19th century’s most famous freethought advocate. (From left) Ken Hofbauer, with the Peoria Secular Humanist Society; FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker (kneeling); sculptor Zenos Frudakis (behind Dan); Margaret Downey and Jeff Ingersoll, both with the Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee; Don Ardelle, an FFRF member and fan; Tom Flynn, editor of Free Inquiry, and Elliott Ingersoll, descendant.

Letterbox

Freedom from religion is one of our rights

We keep hearing Christians referring to the Constitution, saying it does not guarantee freedom from religion. As many Crank Mail writers claim, “The First Amendment guarantees the freedom of religion, not from religion.”

The notion that there is freedom of religion, but not freedom from religion, is absurd. That thought is due to semi-literacy and incomplete information. Literate people are aware of the many uses of the words “free” and “freedom,” and are likely to have better information. Thus, they might know the Ninth Amendment, which has a single sentence, “The enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.”

One of those rights is to be free from religion.

Robert McCurdy
Pennsylvania

Freethought Today restores my faith

Boy, nothing restores my faith in people more than your publication.

Happily, I am meeting more and more atheists, or those who are finally willing to admit it.

Enclosed is another donation to your worthy, worthy, worthy, worthy cause.

Allan Provost
Florida

‘An Act of God’ play irreverent, hilarious

God appears as follows under “Who’s Who in the Cast” in the Playbill for the highly irreverent and hilarious Broadway play, “An Act Of God,” starring Sean Hayes:

“God (Creator) is the Lord Almighty, the King of the Universe, the Alpha and Omega and just the shit in general. He is perhaps best known for his work on ‘The Universe,’ the sum total of all that is and all that shall be, which 6,000 years later is still considered one of the greatest works ever created. His works as a writer includes the Old Testament and the New Testament, which have together sold 7 billion copies worldwide and spawned such spin-offs as the entirety of Western history and Veggie Tales. ‘An Act of God’ is his first work written directly for the stage, although His 1827 comic work, ‘The Book of Mormon,’ was recently adapted into a successful Broadway musical. He is one of three founding members of legendary supergroup The Trinity, who are worshiped around the world.”

I highly recommend this delightfully blasphemous one-act play by David Javerbaum, the former head writer and executive producer of “The Daily Show.”

Dennis Middlebrooks
New York

Make employees liable for corporate violations

It seems to me that a focus on the First Amendment needs to be made from the perspectives of public and corporate law, property ownership rights and obligations.

While Florida’s state statutes intelligently do not permit homeowners’



Photo by Myron Smith

Packin’ ’em in

“Clearly, that old adage ‘Praise the Lord and pass the ammo’ has profound meaning in the Grace Church of South Park,” writes FFRF Member Myron Smith of this church sign in Jefferson, Colo. “Does the bible support open or concealed carry, and what would Jesus prefer?”

associations to include religion and politics on common properties in any manner, the state’s government employees nevertheless practice the contrary.

Rather than litigating against a government entity in vague totality, it seems to be more prudent to litigate against the involved government employee(s) with the personal responsibility, authority and liability in violation of such federal, state and local laws.

This way the accused cannot hide behind the vast, bureaucratic governmental organizational skirt.

Sadly, one of the most egregious errors made by the Supreme Court against the best interests of “We the People” is the absurd nonsense that a corporation is equivalent to a human. If so, given a corporate violation of law, who is liable and sent to jail? The millions of shareholders?

Harold Chanin
Florida

FFRF: Keep after the little actions

Every day when I open my email and read all the happenings with FFRF, I find myself with a smile and wanting to jump up and shout, “Yes! Go for it!”

I appreciate the fact that FFRF keeps pounding away at all the little actions that appear here and there in states across the nation. Small actions such as the hanging of a religious picture or a prayer lunch group on public property that serves free food to students along with a Christian message. All these little actions could be ignored and would soon be enough to challenge the law of separation of state and church.

There are all those follow-up letters that the staff writes to remind folks of the legality of these “little actions.” I’m a great believer in the fact that little things add up to important big stuff. So keep after those little things. Sometimes we get to the big problems because we ignored the little ones.

Diane Uhl
Arizona

House chaplaincy should be abolished

Having read about your lawsuit against Congress, I am in complete agreement. I also believe the House chaplaincy should be abolished. If members want to pray prior to the opening of Congress, they can do so

in their heads, silently. This is free to taxpayers and then there is no discrimination.

In the most recent Church and State magazine (by Americans United for the Separation of Church and State), there is an article that mentioned how the Rev. Franklin Graham used tax-exempt funds to further the causes of right-wing and Republican candidates during the 2012 campaign. This is clearly illegal. I would hope that FFRF and Americans United would join forces to convince the government to rescind the tax-exempt status of all churches across the country. They should be paying the same taxes as everyone else. They should receive no special treatment.

Barbara Bugatto
California

Gaylor’s book helped me leave the church

I just finished reading Annie Laurie Gaylor’s book, *Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So* (published by FFRF).

When I was 67, a very active woman in the local Catholic church informed me that food stamps enabled the poor to not be responsible. As a food stamp counselor for the state of Tennessee, I was floored by this accusation. My experiences had been that most food stamp recipients fed their children with the help of food stamps.

My eyes were opened to the hatred of the church toward women and children. I realized something was wrong, and that was religion!

This was very difficult for this old man to stomach.

Within five weeks I had quit the church and later the Masonic Lodge, which requires belief in a supreme being. As a relatively new member of FFRF, I appreciate this book and the newspaper. Keep up the good work.

Joe Gillis
Tennessee

Fundamentalists put us in our own hell

After many years, laboring within the confines of a religious institution as a minister, weary of arguments about the correct interpretation of the bible, it is a joy today to be freed from such foolishness. As a longtime critic of theological fundamentalism, its ideology and its power within churches, I have in recent years become more

aware of how theological fundamentalism has taken other religions captive. So while Christian fundamentalists, since the founding of America, have used the biblical threat of eternal damnation to capture the allegiance of millions of Americans, now the fundamentalists of Islam have seized on the Quran’s allure of eternal paradise to persuade their disciples to kill all infidels. So while the pure, the chosen, the truthers entertain their dreams of heaven, it is creating nightmares for the rest of us on Earth. We are all now in a kind of hell.

William W. Kenney
Massachusetts

Don’t waste your body; donate it to science

My wife Jean and I, along with many other compassionate people, had our driver’s licenses marked with “Organ Donor.” In case we were killed or injured beyond recovery, the first responders would know to notify the nearest hospital where they could harvest any organs that were suitable.

As we got older, we realized that our organs were probably not in good enough condition to be useful. This got us thinking about what else we could do with our bodies at death that would benefit somebody or organization.

The two major choices at death are cremation or burial. Cremation takes a huge amount of energy to consume your body, and your loved ones are left with a handful of ash.

Burial means you are put in a box with a lid, then into a concrete box in the ground to decay slowly over time.

Neither of these two choices interested us. After doing some research, we found we could donate our bodies to research and education. This made a lot of sense. It was like organ donation on a larger scale.

We contacted the University of Florida College of Medicine in Gainesville and it immediately sent the forms for us to dedicate our bodies at death to the college. We then each received a card for us to carry with us, stating that we wanted this treatment of our bodies at death.

Jean died March 30. Oxley-Heard picked up her body, did minimal embalming, and delivered her to the college. After they have finished using her body, they will cremate it and scatter the ashes on the Gulf of Mexico.

Hal Mather
Florida

Religious can’t claim moral high ground

I’m so sick of the religious trying to hijack the moral high ground when it comes to helping needy kids (and primarily for the purpose of covertly proselytizing them). Although I am a fervent and vocal atheist (and an FFRF Life Member), I belong to a Unitarian Universalist church for the fellowship and social justice work it does. Everyone there is keenly aware that much of the church membership is agnostic or atheist, and it bothers no one. God’s existence is irrelevant — we work hard to make the world better. We do good deeds every day in our community without publicizing it or hiding it behind events designed to draw people into the “God squad.”

Joy Goldbaum
New Mexico

Letterbox

Contact lawmakers to oppose RFRA

I'm telling all politicians that they will not get one penny from me or my vote unless they forcefully oppose RFRA. These bills make us secular citizens second class. All atheists in the U.S. should be screaming at the top of their lungs to their respective congresspersons. So should FFRF.

Eric Stone
California

Editor's note: FFRF has long championed overturning the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. FFRF recently emailed an action alert to every member asking you to support the "Do No Harm Act," introduced in May by U.S. Reps Bobbie Scott, Va., and Joe Kennedy, Mass., seeking to reform the RFRA, a super-statute that is used to allow religionists to violate the Civil Rights Act, Affordable Care Act, etc.

Revelations authored by mentally ill person

About 47 years ago, I was diagnosed as manic depressive, more currently called bipolar disorder. I was fortunate to have outstanding psychiatric care and medication, and, along with my over-riding urge to improve, have been in full remission for many years. But this is not why I write.

While I was seriously mentally ill during my childhood, because of my religious background, I was immersed in reading the bible, especially immersion into the book of Revelations.

Looking back, I recognize a kinship of obsessions and severe mental illness with the authorship of Revelations. I see now that back then my mental illness-addled brain crazily wrote long missives in the exact manner as the author of Revelations.

I don't profess to be a bible scholar and I refuse to pick up a copy of the bible, as it repels me deeply. However, in my rather unique expert opinion, John the Apostle was a sociopath.

Shirley M. Johnson
Louisiana

New Life Member is a Mason and atheist

Hope all is well at FFRF. Enclosed please find my check for \$1,000 to become a Life Member. At 81 years of age, I am a very lucky person and I do not think God had one thing to do with it.

Having been a 32nd degree Mason, I think I am qualified to say I do not believe in a god of any sort. However, once a Mason, always a Mason.

Jack Henley
Texas

Student essays are highlight of paper

I always read the student essays in Freethought Today. In the August issue, for some reason, these really jumped out at me as the most interesting and enlightening things in the paper. I have great admiration for the brave young people, all of whom face greater risk and rejection than I do. And my apologies to the young men and women whose essays appeared in previous issues that I failed to express the appreciation they deserved.

David M. Shea
Maryland



Photo by Chris Line

The FFRF staff and summer interns, from left to right. Back row: Sam Grover, Seth Wrinkle, Mayan Essak, Ryan Jayne, Tim Nott, Whitney Steffen, Jackie Douglas, PJ Slinger. Middle row: Elizabeth Cavell, Eleanor McEntee, Patrick Elliott, Amitabh Pal, Lisa Strand, Jake Swenson, Lisa Treu, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Rebecca Markert, Maddie Ziegler. Front row: Alex Zacharczenko, Dan Barker, Lauryn Seering, Alyssa Schaefer, Andrew Seidel. Not pictured: Chris Line.

Sharing the crank mail

Love us or hate us, FFRF gets plenty of mail, and this month's hate mail is all via email. Here is this month's Crank Mail, printed as received.

FFRF: You people are the spawn of the earth. Just because you have a difference of opinion, you have no right to be assholes. Just as you have a right to be ignorant, they have a right to believe. My father was hit with a mortar round in Vietnam. He has a cross on his grave. I catch one of you taking it off, you will visit satan you piece of shit. — Daniel Cook

Your organization: I pray you children of Satan burn in HELL! I would do anything possible to Destroy you creatures! — Thomas Greene

Sussex county: Keep your opinions out of our state and especially out of our county. We are a conservative, religious county. The Constitution was based on biblical values. We really do not care what you think of what we do with him our own County. — Andrew Riggins

Hell: Y'all some hell bound ass holes — Mark Wallace

Religion: Prayer is by choice not forced upon people. And if you got a problem with it then fuck you. — Chris Ritchie

FFRF: As a member of our local school board, I take great offense to FFRF attempting

to force their beliefs upon local school boards. As noted, you have 200 members from the state of Kentucky which is a very minuscule number of Kentucky residents. As a matter of fact, that is fewer people than voted for me in the last school board election. I was elected to ensure that the children of our county receive the best education possible according to our local morals, ethics, values and beliefs!!!! I will not sway in those local morals, ethics, values and beliefs because a group such as yours from another state or any other entity that attempts to dictate to the citizens of America how to educate their kids. — Bill Clift

Sign: Just read an article in my local paper regarding your hideous group trying to have a sign removed from a small town in Texas. This sign has been there for many years, and YOU need to go away, and leave things alone. Go find a REAL cause to fight. It's groups like you that leave me thinking, there must be something lacking in your lives. You're pathetic!!! — Suzie Shaw

Ark Encounter: You people really need to pay attention to this. We should not limit our children's exposure to any educational experience whether or not YOU feel it is religious in nature. The Ark Encounter is an historic and record-breaking structure (largest timber frame

structure in the world). Stop fear mongering and embrace knowledge. — Mariah Custer

Donation: I read what you stand for and this organization is a disgrace. For one thing the State is to stay out of religion and so far the state has interfered in religion but again you organization is to stupid to understand. But again from mentally ill people who don't know their ass from their heads.

GODS NOT DEAD HE IS SURELY ALIVE,
GODS NOT DEAD HE IS SURELY ALIVE,
GODS NOT DEAD HE IS SURELY ALIVE,
GODS NOT DEAD HE IS SURELY ALIVE,
— Twiggy Jespersen

Why?: The whole reason out county is in the sharpe it is right now is because groups such as you want God removed from everything. Do you not understand the reason the first colonist that came here were looking for a place to worship that was not corrupt? And all 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence were members of a church who all studied the scriptures just to make sure what they were doing was not violating God's will?

Your group is part of the nations problem and if you cannot be part of solution you need to leave.

Hell is truth seen to late. — Terry Melton

FFRF on the road



The annual Secular Student Alliance conference was held July 8-10 in Columbus, Ohio. FFRF Co-President Dan Baker can be seen not quite halfway up on the far right. The SSA convention's primary goal, according to its website, is to train student leaders and activists from across the United States in grassroots organizing and leadership skills.

Shop with ease at FFRF online

Looking to proudly display your atheism? Want to give the gift of freethought? Check out FFRF's online store at ffrf.org/shop. This isn't just shameless self-promotion, it's a good way to help FFRF fight the battle of church and state, which is also the title of a Dan Barker tune on "Friendly Neighborhood Atheist." The rights you save may be your own.

FFRF offers a variety of items, including music, new and used freethought books, apparel, greeting cards, DVDs/video, tote bags, pins, bumper stickers and much more.

Newer clothing items for sale are the "In Chef We Trust" apron, "Unabashed Atheist" tee and "Out of the Closet Atheist" and Dawkins-inspired "A" caps.



Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Francis Taiwo, 40, Ajibawo, Nigeria, pastor of Key of Joy Celestial Church, was arrested after police received a tip that his 9-year-old son had been locked in a room in the church since May and wasn't being fed regularly. They reportedly found him chained by the neck to a heavy log. The boy's stepmother, from whom Taiwo said his son had stolen food, was also arrested. Taiwo, a native of Benin, allegedly told police his son was possessed by a demon and "needs deliverance" so he wouldn't steal. *Source: Christian Daily, 7-27-16*

Michael Nicolai, Dillingham, AK: Assault and attempted sexual assault. Nicolai, pastor at St. Seraphim of Sarov, a Russian Orthodox parish, is accused of hitting his wife and tearing her undergarments and other clothing during a domestic disturbance that allegedly started in an argument about him viewing pornography.

"This incident was alcohol related," said Police Chief Dan Pasquariello. "Alcohol clouds people's judgment. Everybody's human. Everybody makes mistakes." *Source: KDLG, 7-23-16*

Victor Jagerstatter, 39, Mountain Home, ID: Rape. Jagerstatter, pastor at Our Lady of Good Counsel, was placed on leave by the Catholic Diocese of Boise. He's accused of assaulting an Air Force airman who was renting a room from him.

Court documents say the man went to bed fully clothed about 3 a.m. after becoming intoxicated at a party and woke up partially exposed in the morning with Jagerstatter kneeling beside him. He described to police circumstances that suggest oral contact took place.

Nearly 100 parishioners packed the courtroom to support the priest. They recited the Lord's Prayer and sang "Amazing Grace" in the hallway outside court. *Source: Idaho Statesman, 7-23-16*

Jose Luis Pizarro, 40, Mansfield, TX: Aggravated sexual assault of a child. Pizarro, pastor of Iglesia de Dios Nuevo Amanecer (New Dawn), is charged with sexual touching of an 8-year-old girl in May at the church, which her family attends. *Source: Star-Telegram, 7-23-16*

David R. Utt, 39, Canton, IL: Burglary to a place of worship, criminal damage to property over \$300 and possession of burglary tools. Utt, pastor of New Hope Community Church, was arrested about 1 a.m. after police saw a vehicle in the back parking lot of First Church of the Nazarene. The complaint alleges Utt was found trying to break into a safe in the office.

Utt and his late father were both Nazarene pastors. According to police Sgt. Josh Wages, Utt described it as an act of desperation to keep New Hope alive because he was behind on rent payments for the church, which has a Facebook post for a GoFundMe page seeking \$20,000 for a down payment to buy the former movie theater where New Hope meets. Only \$140 has been pledged. *Source: Journal Star, 7-20-16*

Christopher L. Trent, 37, Bellingham, WA: 4 counts of 2nd-degree child rape. Trent, pastor of Bellingham Baptist Church and a married father of 7, allegedly had sex with a girl more than 100 times over 2 years starting when she was 12 and told her he wanted to marry her when she turned 18.

Police found the family packing a U-Haul and transport van when they went to question him. *Source: Bellingham Herald/KIRO, 7-20-16*

Edgar Gonzalez, 24, San Antonio: Sexual assault of a child. Gonzalez, youth pastor at an unidentified church, is accused of having sex at least twice with a 16-year-old girl from his church in the back seat of his Nissan sedan in July.

The arrest warrant states the girl told a nurse Gonzalez promised to "marry her and take care of her." *Source: Express-News, 7-18-16*

Amer Saka, 51, London, Ontario: Fraud exceeding \$5,000. Saka, a Chaldean Catholic priest, is charged with stealing \$500,000 meant for Iraqi refugees in a sponsorship program overseen by the Diocese of Hamilton.

Bishop Emanuel Shaleta told police that Saka told him he had lost all the money gambling. *Source: Hamilton Spectator, 7-14-16*

Jay L. Preston, 57, Paola, KS: Aggravated indecent liberties with a child. Preston, founding pastor of Grace Revolution Church of the Nazarene and president of My Father's House homeless shelter is charged with "lewd fondling or touching" of a child younger than 14 in July.

"I have seen children who were molested and raped in their homes, places that ought to be safe and pure. I have seen countless fatherless daughters walking wounded through life and trying to find love in the arms of some guy who only sees them as an object for his gratification," Preston wrote on the My Father's



House website in 2010. "I have seen too much." *Source: Kansas City Star, 7-13-16*

K. Rama Rao, 26, Hyderabad, India: Rape and wrongful confinement. Rao, a priest at Sai Baba Temple, is accused by a 45-year-old woman of raping her at the temple after she told him her daughter had been arrested for smuggling cocaine.

The woman alleges he told her to return the next day with turmeric and 5 lemons for the puja (Hindu prayer ritual) he would perform to solve her problems. Instead he took her into his temple room and raped her, she told police. *Source: Times of India, 7-13-16*

Andrew Stutzman, 38, Silverton, OR: 10 counts of 2nd-degree sex abuse. Stutzman, a leader of ACTS Ministry (Advocating Christ Through Servanthood), is accused of assaults on a girl starting when she was 16 in 2012 and continuing into 2016.

Detective Josh Boatner said there may be more victims. Stutzman and his wife co-own a coffee shop which is a frequent meet-up spot for bible studies, book clubs and teens involved with Young Life, a national Christian youth outreach group. *Source: Statesman Journal, 7-13-16*

Youth pastor Raymond Vincent's alleged victim, a 10-year-old girl, was later found to be pregnant.

Walter Williams, 59, New Haven, CT: 4th-degree sexual assault, 5 counts of 2nd-degree sexual assault and 3 counts of risk of injury to a minor. Williams, pastor of Walk of Faith Church of Christ, is accused of 6 sexual encounters in 2015-16 with a girl who was a church choir member. The girl's mother called police after seeing messages on her daughter's phone. *Source: WTIC, 7-12-16*

Mahmoud Velitov, Moscow: Public justification of terrorism. Velitov, imam at Yardyam Mosque, is accused of delivering a 2013 speech in which he allegedly praised activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation), which is banned in Russia as a terrorist group. *Source: Moscow Times, 7-12-16*

Dominic Yamoah, 40, Clarinda, IA: Solicitation of prostitution. Yamoah, pastor of St.

Clare Catholic Church, allegedly tried to hire an undercover officer to engage in sex in Hamburg. *Source: KCCI, 7-9-16*

Mauricio Aguilera-Garcia, 55, Salem, OR: 10 counts each of 2nd-degree rape and 2nd-degree sodomy and 5 counts of unlawful sexual penetration. Aguilera-Garcia, pastor at Our Father's House Church, is accused of raping a girl from the church, starting when she was 13, between 2010-12.

He was convicted of 1st-degree sex abuse in 1985 but wasn't listed as a sex offender because Oregon didn't institute its registry until 1989. *Source: Statesman Journal, 7-7-16*

Damond "DJ" Roker, 39, Memphis, TN: Aggravated assault, aggravated rape, incest and tampering with/fabricating evidence. Roker, pastor of Redemptive Life Church, is charged with beating a family member before raping her twice 4 hours apart after cleaning up the initial scene.

In a 2006 affidavit, details of his domestic assault arrest were detailed in which he was accused of assaulting his ex-girlfriend in her home. He was "very intoxicated and drinking a half pint of coconut rum," the report said. *Source: Commercial Appeal, 7-4-16*

Clinton Lewis, 48, Hermitage, TN: 4 counts of theft. Lewis, pastor of Mt. Hopewell Baptist Church, is charged with fraudulently obtaining \$60,000 in state grant money for an addiction recovery program he operated along with **Andre Trice**, 38, who was also charged.

The investigation alleged that clients on a list submitted to the state received no service from 2011-15. *Source: The Tennessean, 7-2-16*

Raymond Vincent, 46, Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Sexual battery on a child and lewd and lascivious conduct. Charges stem from late 2015 when Vincent was youth pastor at an unidentified church in Pompano Beach. His alleged victim, a 10-year-old girl, was later found to be pregnant. The pregnancy was terminated in February 2016. Vincent then fled to Haiti, where he was arrested. *Source: Sun Sentinel, 7-1-16*

Lionel McFadden, 27, Hamden, CT: 2nd-degree sexual assault and risk of injury to a minor. McFadden, a volunteer who taught Sunday school and organized activities, services and outreach events at an unidentified church, is accused of molesting a minor in April. *Source: WTNH, 7-1-16*

Kounzong Saebphang, 26, Riverside, CA: Possession and distribution of child pornography. Saebphang, a native Laotian, is a monk who lives at the Wat Lao Buddhist Monastery and is in the U.S. on a religious worker visa. *Source: Press-Enterprise, 6-3-16*

Pleaded / Convicted

Franklin Porterfield, Bronx, NY: Guilty in a bench trial of attempted forcible touching and 3rd-degree sexual abuse. Porterfield, pastor of Faith Love Community Church, was accused of inappropriately touching a woman from his congregation in 2014. *Source: News 12, 7-13-16*

Kenneth Dewitt, 67, Patterson, AR: Pleaded guilty to 3 counts of 3rd-degree sexual assault, with a plea agreement calling for concurrent 10-year prison sentences with 5 years suspended on each count. Dewitt resigned as chaplain in 2014 at the McPherson women's prison after admitting an inappropriate relationship with a subordinate (another chaplain).

An investigation then led to charges related to 3 inmates with whom he'd had sex, including a woman who'd attended Dewitt's religious program in 2008 and stayed on as a clerk. The program, called Principles and Applications for Life, was associated with conservative evangelical pastor **Bill Gothard**, who has been accused of sexual harassment or molestation by at least 34 women. *Source: Arkansas Times, 7-5-16*

Sentenced

Jermaine Evans, 32, Milwaukee: 15 years in prison and 10 years' probation after pleading guilty to 2nd-degree sexual assault of a child. Evans, dean of students and girls basketball coach at HOPE Christian High School, was accused of having sex with a girl "approximately six times when she was 16," "approximately 10 times when she was 15," "approximately 10 times when she was 14," "seven to eight times when she was 13" and "one time when she was 11 or 12," according to the complaint. There was allegedly no sexual intercourse until she turned 14.

HOPE Christian is a network of 6 schools that participate in the Milwaukee and Racine voucher programs. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 7-21-16*

Timothy Kane, 60, Detroit: 3 to 20 years in prison for stealing \$131,400 from a Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit charitable fund when he was associate pastor of St. Moses the Black Parish. Kane, who is Caucasian, was originally sentenced in 2014 to 12 months in jail to be served over 5 years but the prosecutor successfully appealed that sentence.

Judge Margaret Van Houten cited jail-recorded phone calls with a co-conspirator during which "a different Mr. Kane came to light" and showed he was a ringleader and not just a participant in the scam.

Kane told the judge he only confessed due to confusion stemming from low blood sugar from delays in being fed while in custody. "I can honestly say that I didn't know what was going on, or what I said." He added, "I have been punished already. God has me in the palm of his hand. The blood of Jesus has made us all equals." *Source: Detroit News, 7-19-16*

Charles G. Prayer Jr., 38, Greenville, NC: 5 years, 4 months to 11 years, 3 months in prison after pleading guilty to 2nd-degree rape. Prayer, founding pastor of Elijah's Mantle Apostolic Church, had numerous inappropriate social media conversations with his 15-year-old victim that culminated in physical contact on March 1, 2015, prosecutors said. *Source: Daily Reflector, 7-11-16*

Joel A. Wright, 23, Columbus, OH: 15 years, 8 months in prison after pleading guilty to attempted enticement of a minor, admitting he posted a Craigslist ad seeking a girl under age 3 to "adopt/own" and have sex with. Wright was studying to be a Catholic priest at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus.

After a man in Tijuana, Mexico, responded to the ad and alerted authorities, Wright told him he'd bought an outfit for the child to wear and infant pain relief medication. The man agreed to let immigration agents take over his email account. In a December email, Wright wrote that he hoped his victim would resist. "If she is angry at me she will be even more fun because she will probably try to get away and it is so much more fun when it is a bit of a struggle — what do you think?"

Wright met an undercover agent in San Diego, thinking he was a Mexico-based tour guide. Inside a duffel bag he had baby clothes, sleep aids, bottles, toys, candy and lubricant. *Source: Daily Mail, 7-2-16*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Archbishop Demetrio Trakatellis, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and the former pastor of Holy Resurrection Church in Brookville, NY, are being sued by the parents of a 4-year-old Long Island boy they allege was molested by the priest's teen son in May 2015 as the boy's 6-year-old sister watched.

The suit, which seeks \$10 million in damages for each child, alleges that the perpetrator sodomized and ejaculated on the boy in a secluded spot on the church grounds after Sunday services as his parents chatted with the priest. Names are being withheld to protect the minors involved.

It's alleged the boy returned wearing no underwear and told his parents and the priest what happened. After the priest found his son hiding in a closet, the suit claims, he said, "This will not happen again. You're finished. You're going to be arrested this time."

It's unclear from court papers if the teen was criminally charged. *Source: NY Daily News, 7-22-16*

Stephen T. Dougherty, 59, Beeville, TX, the **Catholic Diocese of Corpus Christi** and the **Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity** are defendants in a suit filed by "Jane Doe 108," who alleges Dougherty molested her multiple times starting when she was 7 and that church entities were negligent. She's now 18 and is suing for \$1 million.

Dougherty has also been indicted by a grand jury for 1st-degree aggravated sexual assault of a child for an alleged 2011 assault, after which the diocese stripped him of his priestly duties. His criminal trial is set for September. His cousin, Frances "Sissy" Farenthold, a former Democratic state legislator and gubernatorial candidate, accompanied him to court recently. *Source: Caller-Times, 7-21-16*

Henry L. McGee, 69, Round Rock, TX, his wife and First Baptist Church in East Austin are being sued by the mother of a girl who alleges McGee molested her starting when she was 13 in 2014. McGee, who was fired as pastor last fall, is also charged criminally with continuous sexual abuse of a child. He faces similar charges in another county for alleged assaults about 7 years ago. *Source: American-Statesman, 7-18-16*

Ronald Léger, 78, Winnipeg, and the **Archdiocese of St. Boniface** are being sued for \$2.1 million by a man, now 22, who alleges Léger, a Catholic priest, started molesting him when he was 12. Léger was sentenced to prison in February for sexual offenses against the plaintiff and 2 other boys between 1984 and 2005.

The trial court heard testimony Léger rubbed a 15-year-old's clothed genitals on repeated occasions and asked "How his big boy was doing." Another time he fondled the boy and told him he should "make babies." *Source: Winnipeg Sun, 7-7-16*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis** publicly admitted wrongdoing and apologized for mishandling sexual abuse allegations against defrocked priest **Curtis Wehmeyer** as prosecutors announced the archdiocese won't be criminally charged. To settle a lawsuit, **Archbishop Bernard Hebda** agreed to take part in at least 3 restorative justice sessions with victims.

The state had charged the archdiocese with 6 counts of gross misdemeanor child endangerment in 2015 involving Wehmeyer, imprisoned for molesting a boy in Wisconsin and 2 in Minnesota.

Plaintiffs' attorney Jeffrey Anderson accused the Vatican of interfering in an investigation into alleged sexual misconduct by Hebda's predecessor, **Archbishop John Nienstedt**. He cited a newly released 2014 memo from an archdiocese official who raised concerns that Nienstedt's "social relationship" with Wehmeyer had clouded his judgment.

Daniel Griffith also alleged in the memo that **Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò**, the apostolic nuncio in Washington, ordered 2 Minnesota auxiliary bishops to prematurely wrap up the investigation and to destroy a letter in which they disagreed with Viganò. *Source: CBS, 7-20-16*

The **Catholic Diocese of Savannah, GA**, will pay \$4.5 million to settle a suit alleging defrocked priest **Wayland Y. Brown**, 73, now living in Baltimore, molested a 13-year-old St. James Catholic School student in the late 1980s. Brown allegedly took the boy to S. Carolina and forced him to perform sex acts.

The plaintiff's claims against Brown, who served 5 years in prison, are unresolved by the settlement. Documents show concerns about Brown as far back as 1969. *Source: WTOG, 7-5-16*

Legal Developments

Roy D. Harriger, 73, a Church of Nazarene pastor sentenced in 2015 to 15 years in prison for sexual assaults on 2 of his grandchildren in New York, was arraigned in Mercer, PA, on rape and sexual assault charges allegedly committed in 1991-97.

A woman alleges she was forced to perform sex acts on him from the time she was 8 until she was 12 and told police Harriger forced her to have sex with a 5-year-old boy and a male in his late teens or early 20s. *Source: Sharon Herald, 7-22-16*

Lucas Savage, 37, Clinton, ME: Unlawful sexual contact. Savage, co-director of Youth

Haven Ministry, was first arrested in March after an 11-year-old girl told her mother he "had put his hand down [her] pants" when she spent the night at his, had touched her inappropriately "about 30 times" and that they had exchanged "secret kisses."

After Savage rejected a plea deal, a grand jury indictment was required for the case to proceed, which has now occurred. Youth Haven is affiliated with Canaan Calvary Church. *Source: Bangor Daily News, 7-22-16*

Eliezer Berland, 79, a Hasidic rabbi who fled Israel in 2012 due to sexual abuse allegations by women, has been extradited to Israel from S. Africa after hiding previously in Morocco, the Netherlands and Zimbabwe. About 300 supporters greeted him at Ben Gurion Airport, where he was arrested.

Berland later collapsed at a hearing when confronted by a woman accusing him of molesting her and was hospitalized. At a hearing before extradition occurred, Judge Fayeeza Kathree-Setiloane denied bail, saying "he cannot be trusted" because he had jumped \$55,000 bail in the Netherlands. *Source: Haaretz, 7-19-16*

Catholic priest Jeff Bayhi, Baton Rouge, LA, had his defamation suit against WBRZ-TV dismissed by a state judge. Bayhi alleged WBRZ defamed him in a news graphic that stated "woman claims priest abused her at age 14" and "priest died while authorities were investigating."

The graphic didn't name Bayhi and accompanied a 2015 report about the woman, Rebecca Mayeux; a deceased parishoner, **George Charlet Jr.**; and Bayhi, her pastor.

Judge Wilson Fields agreed with the station's argument that the verbal report was "completely accurate" and that the graphic was corrected at the end of the newscast.

Mayeux alleges she was 14 in 2008 when she told Bayhi in confession that Charlet was sexually assaulting her. She and her parents are suing Bayhi, the Diocese of Baton Rouge, and Charlet, who died in 2009 at age 65.

One of Fields' colleagues declared unconstitutional in February a state law that requires clergy to report allegations of wrongdoing even if learned in the privacy of the confessional. *Source: The Advocate, 7-18-16*

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez and other Catholic officials lobbied hard against the Justice for Victims Act, which passed the California Senate 33-0 and now goes to the Assembly. The bill would end the statute of limitations for sexual assault crimes and allow criminal prosecution of perpetrators to be "commenced at any time." Currently it's 10 years or before the victim's 40th birthday if they were under 18.

Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed a 2013 bill that would have increased the statute of limitations for civil prosecution. *Source: Inland Valley Daily Bulletin, 7-14-16*

Eric Dejaeger, 69, former Canadian Catholic priest, has been denied funding by the Nunavut Legal Services board to appeal 24 convictions for sex crimes against children. He was sentenced to 19 years in prison in February 2015 for crimes between 1978-82. Grounds for an appeal weren't specified.

After Dejaeger was arrested on charges in 1995 after serving an earlier sentence, he fled to Belgium, where he lived for 16 years. *Source: CBC, 7-14-16*

George A. Smith, 78, a Catholic priest sentenced in 2013 to 10 years in prison for sexual assaults on 13 altar boys in Newfoundland between 1969 and 1989, was granted full parole by the Parole Board of Canada.

An assessment concluded Smith's risk level for sexual recidivism is low, his need for sexual treatment is moderate and his responsivity to sexual offender treatment is high. *Source: Western Star, 7-13-16*

George Benbow, 64, Plainfield, NJ, sentenced to 11 years in 2012 for molesting girls aged 8 and 9, had his appeal denied by a state

My first erection was at the hands of Koharchik.'

— *Sean Daugherty, a 10-year-old altar boy in 1980*

appellate court. He was found guilty of incidents at a summer camp run by Christian Fellowship Gospel Church, where he was founding pastor.

Benbow argued his sentence was excessive and that the trial judge committed appealable errors. *Source: mycentraljersey.com, 7-7-16*

Westside Family Church, Lenexa, KS, petitioned a federal court to reveal the names of 2 teen sisters and their parents who are suing the Baptist church, alleging negligent supervision of vacation bible school volunteer **Kessler Lichtnegger**. He was sentenced to 17 years for sexual assaults in 2014 on the girls, who attended Westside. He was 17 at the time. He was convicted earlier of a 2011 sexual assault against a 15-year-old girl with developmental disabilities.

"While the Defendant admits the sensitivity of the allegations, Plaintiffs tactically decided to 'draw first blood' on the issue publicly," the church's petition said. "However, they should not be able to hide behind pseudonyms after systematically and intentionally initiating a campaign specifically designed to damage Defendant's reputation."

David Clohessy, director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, said it's the first time in his 28 years of advocacy work he has witnessed a religious organization trying to "out" a minor, calling it "stunningly callous." *Source: Baptist News, 6-30-16*

Thomas H. Leland, 49, St. Paul, KS, charged with bank fraud in 2015 for taking \$151,000 worth of unauthorized reimbursements, salary advances and other payments as pastor of 2 Catholic parishes, negotiated a diversion agreement. It delays prosecution for 18 months and results in dismissal of the charge if he adheres to the agreement. He must turn over at least 5% of his monthly gross income to satisfy the debt, refrain from gambling and undergo counseling. *Source: KCWH, 6-30-16*

Allegations

Savio Hon Tai Fai, apostolic administrator of the **Archdiocese of Agana, Guam**, has refused to meet with former altar boys who accuse **Archbishop Anthony Apuron** of molesting them in the late 1970s, said attorney David Lujan. The accusers include 3 men and the mother of another former altar boy who died 11 years ago in the throes of depression at age 38.

Apuron, placed on leave in June by Pope Francis pending a church investigation, has not been seen in Guam since Hon was appointed as temporary administrator. He hasn't been criminally charged.

"Where are you hiding Apuron?" Lujan asked in his letter to the archdiocese. *Source: WXIA, 7-24-16*

Michael "Mitch" Walters, a New Jersey Catholic priest accused by 6 persons at 2 parishes of sexual molestation while they were minors in the 1990s, is under criminal investigation by the Hudson County Prosecutor's Office, according to Road to Recovery, a victim advocacy group. The prosecutor's office declined to comment.

Walters was removed from the ministry in October after allegations were made last year when he was working as a weekend pastor at Our Lady of Sorrows in South Orange and overseeing spiritual enrichment programs and fundraising for evangelical work for the Archdiocese of Newark. *Source: nj.com, 7-20-16*

The appointment of **Col. Eyal Karim** as chief rabbi of the Israeli Defense Forces has drawn fire after remarks he made as a civilian surfaced. In 2002 a reader on a religious website asked if a Deuteronomy verse meant modern soldiers can sexually assault women in wartime.

Karim allegedly responded: "Although fraternizing with a non-Jewess is a very bad thing, it is allowable in war out of consideration for the difficulties of the fighters. And because the success of the collective is what mostly concerns us in war, the Torah allows the individual to satisfy his lust in the permitted conditions for the sake of the general success." *Source: Haaretz, 7-13-16*

The story of **George Koharchik**, a Catholic priest ordained in 1974, starts on page 66 of the grand jury report on child sexual abuse in the **Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, PA**. Shaun Daugherty was 10 in 1980 when he served Mass for Koharchik, who was his basketball coach and religion teacher at St. Clement School.

"My first erection was at the hands of Koharchik," said Daugherty, 46, chef/owner of Crescent Grill, Long Island City, NY. "My first memory of an ejaculation was with Father Koharchick." He played racquetball, bicycled and played soccer with the priest — "Any activity that required a shower afterward. He bathed me. He cleaned my entire body."

Koharchik sexually molested him for 3½ years, alleged Daugherty, who is criticizing the Pennsylvania Senate's action on a bill to reform child sex crime laws. The bill passed the House by 180-15 in April. The Senate passed it also but only after stripping a provision to extend the statute of limitations and make it retroactive.

"None of [the priests named in the grand jury report] are registered sex offenders. None of them," Daugherty said. "They can move next to anybody. They can move next to any school. Plus the Senate just gave them a green light said: 'Here you go. Here you go. You are free.'"

Koharchik was defrocked in January after being placed on leave in 2012. He lives near the Johnstown Public Middle School. *Source: pennlive.com, 7-8-16*

Peter Murphy, an Iowa Catholic priest who died in 1980 after serving 8 Iowa parishes from the 1950s to 1970s, has been accused of raping a 12-year-old altar boy at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Sioux City in 1960. Tim Lennon, 69, San Francisco, came forward publicly earlier this year to allege abuse by Murphy.

Lennon said he first wrote to the Sioux City Diocese in 1996 and received a "dismissive" reply that Murphy was dead. He again contacted the chancellor in 2010 and finally got a personal meeting this year with Bishop R. Walter Nickless.

Lennon said he put newspaper notices in areas where Murphy served and got 4 responses alleging abusive activity. The diocese claims Lennon's is the sole allegation it's received. In 2004 the diocese stated it had received 33 allegations of sexual abuse of a minor against 10 priests over the past 53 years and had paid out \$4.1 million in settlements. *Source: Sioux City Journal, 7-2-16*

Removed / Resigned

Jerald "JD" McCarty, Waupun, WI, senior pastor at United Methodist Church, was placed on leave after allegedly admitting to misuse of church funds. McCarty has been a pastor at the church since 2007. According to 2014 records, the church has 238 members. *Source: Daily Citizen, 7-18-16*

Perry Noble, 45, Anderson, SC, has been removed as senior pastor at NewSpring Church, which has about 30,000 members on several campuses. A statement from church officials said "Perry has made some unfortunate decisions" and "is no longer qualified" to continue as pastor.

In his own statement, Noble said the job had "created a strain" on his marriage and that alcohol dependency made him "run to it instead of Jesus." *Source: WYFF, 7-10-16*

Pope Francis accepted the resignation of **Aldo di Cillo Pagotto**, 66, as archbishop emeritus of the **Archdiocese of Paraiba, Brazil**. Pagotto has been accused of shielding sexually abusive clergy expelled from other dioceses and of being involved in a sexual relationship with an 18-year-old man.

Pagotto's defenders claim he came under fire because of his conservative views. *Source: Church Militant, 7-6-16*

Other

Robert Vonnahmen, 85, Highland, IL, a Catholic priest defrocked in 2007 for preying sexually on at least 8 boys at a church camp he helped start in 1959, died in May at a nursing home. His death was announced by the St. Louis chapter of the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP), but there has been no mention of it by the church. *Source: Southern Illinoisan, 7-25-16*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org



In memoriam

Cleo Kocol: Feminist atheist activist



FFRF Lifetime Member Cleo Kocol died on July 5.

It is with great sadness that FFRF reports the death on July 5 of longtime atheist and feminist activist Cleo Fellers Kocol, 90, a Lifetime Member of FFRF.

Cleo was born in Cleveland on Jan. 12, 1927, and was always glad to share a birthday with Jack London, as her beliefs often echoed his. She grew up in a nonreligious household and followed proudly in her mother's intrepid feminist footsteps. After high school,

she worked for the Department of the Navy during World War II and then as a medical secretary, doctor's assistant and assistant hospital administrator.

When Cleo was 43, she married Hank Kocol, a health physicist. Her feminism and atheism came to the fore when she and Hank lived in New Jersey in the 1970s and joined FFRF and the American Humanist Association. She served on AHA's national board and chaired its feminist caucus for many years and was AHA's Humanist Heroine in 1988. Cleo has a patio stone with her and Hank's name engraved on it in the courtyard of Freethought Hall.

The Kocols moved to Washington state in 1979 and became part of a weekly Sunday picket at the Mormon Temple in Bellevue to protest the church's opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment. She and 20 others were arrested in 1980 for chaining themselves to the temple gates to stop Mormon President Spencer Kimball from entering, the first of her two civil disobedience arrests. The other two actions took place in Washington, D.C., in front of the White House and

at the Federal Building in Seattle.

Moving to California, Cleo and Hank became charter members of Atheists and Other Freethinkers, started a highway cleanup project and were active in Humanists of Greater Sacramento Area. In Roseville, Calif., she and her husband started and co-chaired for 13 years the Humanists of Sun City, Roseville.

Cleo was an award-winning poet, an avid scrabble player and active in her community. She traveled extensively and enjoyed reading, good movies and "small dinner parties with good talk."



Cleo and Hank Kocol's paver brick makes up part of the Rose Zerwick Memorial Garden Courtyard outside Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis.

In the early 1980s, Cleo wrote and performed three different hour-long women's history shows, spotlighting Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Margaret Sanger and other feminists.

She was commissioned by the Navy to write and perform a short play about "Amazing" Grace Hopper, a computer pioneer and one of the first women Navy commodores, who later rose to the rank of rear admiral. Cleo's memoir *The Last Aloha* was published in 2015. It details her humanism and feminism and life with Hank, from their meeting in 1970, to their "carrying forth the freethinker's word," to his death in 2013.

"I write because the answers to the questions posed seem like pure common sense and because the Religious Right has gotten a stranglehold on our country, although they hide their presence behind euphemisms," Cleo wrote. "They pretend not to be anti anything, but they certainly are anti-woman, anti-nontheists, and anti-common sense. They, by the voting public's apathy, have taken over Congress, and we in the secular movement will come to regret it if we sit on our hands."

Bill Teague carved first 'Atheist in Foxhole' monument

Bill Teague, who designed and carved FFRF's first "Atheists in Foxholes" monument, died at the age of 90 on July 9 at Bill Nichols Veterans hospital in Alexander City, Ala. He donated his body to Anatomical Research at the University of Alabama-Birmingham.

Bill carved the monument that resides in the piney woods next to FFRF's southern Freethought Hall near Munford, Ala., which is overseen by its chapter, the Alabama Freethought Society. A second "Atheists in Foxholes" monument was later carved and now sits outside Freethought Hall, the FFRF office in Madison, Wis.

The tribute to nonreligious servicemen and women was suggested by FFRF's principal founder Anne Nicol Gaylor, and also expresses the hope that "humankind may learn to avoid all war." As a veteran, Bill took special interest in making the monument a reality.

Bill was born in Montgomery, Ala., on Sept. 5, 1925, to Arthur Clyde and Mary Evelyn Bible Teague. He was a veteran of World War II, joining the service in February 1943. He served on four ships that participated in support of five invasions in the Pacific, beginning at the Solomon Islands and end-



Bill Teague stands under a grillwork arch for Fearn Park, named in honor of the late Blanche Fearn. Bill's handiwork beautifies many spots at Lake Hypatia.

ing at Okinawa. After his discharge, he continued a life at sea, sailing on more than 30 merchant ships into almost every port in the world.

Bill received his chief engineer li-

cense, which qualified him to sail ships of any horsepower or tonnage. After retiring, he operated his infamous "Hobby Shop." He built anything from the tiniest objects to the massive concrete

monument in Panther Park that replicates the state of Alabama. Bill and his wife Betty were contributors to the Abe Brown scholarship fund, mostly by donations from recipients of repair work performed by Bill. They also funded individual scholarships. Bill performed assistance to the city of Eclectic, Ala., with minor to major repairs. Most notable are the star shaped signs welcoming visitors to the city and the monuments and improvements to Panther Park. They were lifetime members of the Elmore County Humane Society and members of the Capri Community Film Society of Montgomery.

The Teague family came to Eclectic in 1947 and started Teague's soft drink business. Several years after the business was closed, Bill donated the building and hobby shop to the city with the intent for it to be used as the city library. Bill is survived by his wife, a brother, a sister, a sister-in-law, two stepdaughters and a brother-in-law.

"Bill was secular 'salt of the Earth,' a stalwart of the Alabama FFRF chapter and remarkably talented, hardworking and kind," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "He will be greatly missed."



Bill fashioned an impressive star-shaped marker at Lake Hypatia, which included a pansy bed in tribute to women freethinkers and small marble pedestals bearing quotes by Thomas Paine and Robert G. Ingersoll.



In memoriam

Wayne Hensler’s legacy writ large

Wayne A. Hensler enjoyed life while he could because he knew there was no afterlife.

Wayne, 87, died on June 15 at Rainbow Hospice Inpatient Center of Johnson Creek, Wis.

But he left behind what he hoped would be a legacy for his grandchildren and great-grandchildren: freethought billboards. For several years Wayne sponsored FFRF billboards around south-central Wisconsin that said, “Enjoy Life Now: There Is No Afterlife.”

Since 2010, he paid to have the billboard message he coined placed once a year somewhere in rural Wisconsin and expressed hope that other FFRF members might be “inspired” to place similar messages in their areas on behalf of FFRF.

Wayne was born on Aug. 4, 1928, in the town of Portland, Wis., the son of Emil and Vera (Dochadis) Hensler. He graduated from the Farm Short Course at the University of Wisconsin. After finishing his education, he purchased and operated his own farm in the town of Lake Mills, Wis., and later bought a hog farm in Waterloo, Wis. On Aug. 22, 1953, he married Bernadine Balmer in Waterloo and the couple raised two daughters. He joined FFRF in 1985 and became a Lifetime Member in 2006.



Wayne Hensler points to one of his billboards that he sponsored with the help of FFRF. Wayne died at the age of 87 on June 15.

Wayne prided himself on being a freethinker, traveler, hog farmer and always living life his way. Regarding the billboards he sponsored, Wayne hoped they would bring a bit of cheer to those who saw them.

“It’s something that will make people think a little bit, and maybe help them make a little more joy in life,” he said. “With all these signs, especially

the religious ones — God this and Jesus that — this is kind of counteracting that kind of thing.”

Hensler grew up in a religious family. His grandfather, a German immigrant, “got so wound up reading the bible all the time, he actually got to believing he could heal people.” His Lutheran mother always wanted him to sit with her in the front pew, but he

wouldn’t. Hensler sometimes asked religious friends if they believe in ghosts. “They say, ‘Oh no!’ Then I ask them why they pray to the father, the son and the holy ghost, and they just look at me,” he said.

Wayne thought the key to success in life was good old-fashioned common sense. With a smile, he said he would tease people by asking, “Why should I go to church? I don’t want to go to heaven. I don’t want to be with you people. Can’t you get that in your head?”

“We will certainly miss this octogenarian activist,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “There was always a chuckle in his voice when we conspired over the phone on our plans for the next billboard. Wayne definitely made my life more enjoyable and his message is a wonderful legacy.”

Wayne is survived by his daughters Judi (Norman) Eggert of Waterloo and Peggy (Fred) Schwartz of Helenville, Wis.; nine grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren, two brothers and three sisters.

Wayne’s “unholy” trinity is made up of life, death and “hoping someone remembers you. That’s all that life is about. That’s my philosophy anyway.”

Secular invocations

They said what?

The Satanic Temple
West Florida
Pensacola, Fla.,
City Council
July 14, 2016



David Suhor

The text of the invocation was originally written by Lucien Greaves, co-founder of The Satanic Temple. The invocation was delivered by David Suhor, a musician, activist, teacher and co-founder of The Satanic Temple West Florida.

Suho sang it to an altered version of Albert Malotte’s famous and beautiful melody for the “Lord’s Prayer” (1935).

This was his fifth invocation before local elected boards. David is also a plaintiff in FFRF’s lawsuit against the city of Pensacola for the exclusive display of the “Bayview Cross,” a huge Latin cross in a local public park.

Let us stand now,
unbowed and unfettered
by arcane doctrines
borne of fearful minds in darkened times.

Let us embrace the Luciferian impulse
to eat of the Tree of Knowledge

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

and dissipate our blissful
and comforting delusions of old.
Let us demand
that individuals be judged for their
concrete actions,
not their fealty to arbitrary social
norms
and illusory categorizations.
Let us reason our solutions
with agnosticism in all things,
Holding fast only to that which is de-

monstrably true,
Let us stand firm against any and all
arbitrary authority
that threatens the personal sovereignty of One or All.
That which will not bend must
break,
and that which can be destroyed by
truth
should never be spared its demise.
It is Done. Hail Satan.

[Bernie Sanders] had skated on having a Jewish heritage. I read he is an atheist. This could make several points difference with my peeps. My Southern Baptist peeps would draw a big difference between a Jew and an atheist.

Brad Marshall, chief financial officer of the Democratic National Committee, in emails released by WikiLeaks, allegedly in an effort to get people to vote for Hillary Clinton over Sanders
The Guardian, 7-27-16

Our laws prevent you from speaking your minds from your own pulpits. An amendment, pushed by Lyndon Johnson many years ago, threatens religious institutions with a loss of their tax-exempt status if they openly advocate their political views. I am going to work very hard to repeal that language.

Presidential nominee Donald Trump during his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention
CBS, 7-21-16

They fight against Christianity because Christianity touches the souls of people and the devil regards Christianity as a threat; of course it is a threat because we’re going to overturn him and his kingdom.

Pat Robertson, claiming that FFRF and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State are controlled by Satan and only go after Christianity
RightWingWatch.org, 7-11-16

The reason we are building the ark is not as an entertainment center. I mean it’s not like a Disney or Universal, just for anyone to go and have fun. It’s a religious purpose.

Ken Ham, prior to the opening of his Ark Encounter on July 7 in Williamstown, Ky.
New York Times, 6-26-16

Join FFRF at the 2016 National Convention

Time is winding down to FFRF’s 39th annual convention!

With a roster full of great speakers, this year’s convention is sure to please. Such freethinking dignitaries as **Lawrence Krauss**, **Susan Jacoby**, **Daniel Dennett** and **Jerry Coyne** highlight the Oct. 7–9 convention in the great city of Pittsburgh.

Recently added to the speakers’ list is **Nadia Duncan**, who took first place in FFRF’s college essay contest for persons of color. Read her essay on Page 12 of this issue. She was awarded \$3,000 by FFRF.

Friday night will begin with opening remarks and music by FFRF Co-Presidents **Annie Laurie Gaylor** and **Dan Barker**. Then FFRF will honor a deserving candidate for the inaugural **Henry H. Zumach** Freedom From Fundamentalism Award before commencing with the evening’s speakers.

On Saturday, you’ll have the opportunity to get books signed by Jacoby, Coyne and Barker prior to the banquet dinner. After dinner, there will be a drawing for “clean” money, followed by a brief concert at the piano by Barker, and the evening will conclude with Dennett’s keynote speech.

Register today! FFRF’s block of rooms will not be held past Sept. 12. See “Hotel info” below for more information on lodging.

We can’t wait to see you in Pittsburgh!

More information can be found at ffrf.org/outreach/convention.

Convention Schedule

Schedule is subject to changes

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7

Early registration for Fallingwater tour goes to be announced.

2:00 PM

Registration opens & continues

3:00 – 5:00

Reception with appetizers

3:00 – 4:00 & 4:00 – 5:00

Legal Accomplishments Workshop
FFRF Staff Attorneys

3:00 – 4:00 & 4:00 – 5:00

Legal Workshop
“Is Christianity Un-American?”
FFRF Staff Attorney
Andrew Seidel

Dinner on your own

7:00

Opening & Music
FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker &
Annie Laurie Gaylor

Henry H. Zumach Freedom
From Fundamentalism Award

David Williamson
Secular Invocation & short remarks

“Nothing Fails Like Prayer” Awardee

7:30

Linda LaScola
“Not So Caught in the Pulpit”

8:00

“Adam Mann”
Clergyman comes out as atheist

8:30

Lawrence Krauss
Emperor Has No Clothes Award

Book signings for LaScola &
Krauss to follow

Complimentary desserts

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8

8:00 AM

Nonprayer Breakfast
(For ticket holders)

9:30

Welcome & Highlights of FFRF Year Report
FFRF Directors Lisa Strand, Dan Barker &
Annie Laurie Gaylor

Professor Stephen Hirtle
Pittsburgh Welcome

10:00

Marie Schaub
Atheist in Foxhole Courage Award

10:30

Lauri Lebo
Freethought Heroine Award

11:00

Rafida Bonya Ahmed
“Forward” Award

Booksigning for Lebo to follow

Noon – 2:00 PM

Lunch & Sightseeing Break

2:00

Dan Barker
“GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character
in All Fiction”

2:30

Student honoree Nadia Duncan and
student activist TBA

3:00

Susan Jacoby
“Sick and Tired of
‘God Bless America’”

4:00

Jerry Coyne
“Why accepting evolution and
accepting atheism go hand in hand”

Book signings for Coyne, Jacoby & Barker
to follow

6:30

Banquet Dinner
(For ticket-holders)

Drawing for “Clean” Money

“The Singing Atheist”
Dan Barker at the piano

Daniel Dennett
“Has the Dam broken?
Omens and worries.”

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9

Room opens at 8:30
pastries, coffee & tea

9:00 AM

Annual Business Meeting
(Open to current FFRF members)

Annual State Representatives Meeting

Adjourn by Noon

Hotel info

Reserve hotel rooms **now**. Convention coincides with Steelers game, so rooms are nearly gone. If no rooms are available, search for other downtown Pittsburgh hotels or check hotels.com. Individuals may call the hotel or go online to register. FFRF has reserved a block of rooms at the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Downtown at 600 Commonwealth Place. Room rates for FFRF guests are \$159 single or double occupancy. Phone 412-391-4600 (direct) or 888-317-0197 (toll-free). Refer to the group name “Freedom From Religion Foundation” to receive the guest rate. The cut-off date to reserve rooms is Sept. 12, but reserve now to avoid disappointment.

General schedule

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

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

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

Fallingwater tour

On Friday, Oct. 7, prior to the start of the convention, FFRF is hosting a tour of the impressive **Frank Lloyd Wright**-designed Fallingwater site. The \$40 ticket includes admission and coach bus transportation. There is also an optional, although highly recommended, box lunch available for \$12. (The cafeteria is expected to be too busy.) The 43-mile route to the captivating Fallingwater is through scenic Pennsylvania countryside. Buses depart from Wyndham Grand every 30 minutes beginning 7:50 a.m., with returns beginning 2:10 p.m. Expect to be gone for about 7 hours.

Extra rooms have been set aside at the Wyndham Grand for FFRF members for Thursday night for those interested in going on the tour. FFRF will assign your time.

Note: The tour can be physically challenging for some. There is a ¼-mile walk to and from the home on uneven gravel paths, a one-hour walking tour, and more than 100 steps (although not all at once). There is no wheelchair access and children under the age of 6 are not allowed.

2016 CONVENTION REGISTRATION

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

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

CONVENTION OCTOBER 7–8

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

FOOD

Indicate number of orders per entrée.

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

*Includes 20% Gratuity & Sales Tax

FALLINGWATER FRIDAY BUS TOUR FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7

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

Name _____ Please include names of all registrants

Address _____ City / State / ZIP _____

Phone / Email _____

Contact information for in house use only.