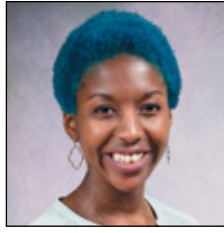


FREETHOUGHT TODAY



Sign up for
FFRF's 40th
convention
PAGE 3



Becoming an
unapologetic
black atheist
PAGE 12



Seeking
the unseen
PAGE 14

THE POWER OF ATTORNEYS

FFRF wins three lawsuits in February!

Cross taken down at park

Santa Clara finally settles with FFRF over lawsuit

A 14-foot granite cross in a public park in Santa Clara, Calif., was removed following a federal court challenge by FFRF.

FFRF and a local member sued the city in April 2016, after FFRF had attempted for four years to persuade the city to remove the cross without litigation.

The cross was donated by the Santa Clara Lion's Club in 1953 for the decidedly nonsecular purpose of marking the site of the second Spanish Catholic mission, which had been established in 1777.

As part of the ongoing settlement, the city has donated the cross to the Catholic Santa Clara University. FFRF did not receive prior notification about the removal, learning via South Bay NBC that it was no longer in the park as of Jan. 13.

"We're happy that the city divested itself of this religious symbol, and that the Constitution is now being complied with," says FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert.

"Some people feel like we've caved in or succumbed to the arguments of a relatively small number of people, but as I said, they [FFRF]

See Cross on page 7



Photos by Jim Wissick

An empty pedestal remains where a 14-foot Christian cross used to be in this public park in Santa Clara, Calif.

Monument to be moved from school

FFRF, plaintiff get victory after years-long lawsuit

FFRF is delighted to announce the successful settlement of a longstanding federal lawsuit challenging a 6-foot-tall Ten Commandments monument in front of a Pennsylvania public high school.

FFRF, along with a student and parent (Marie Schaub), filed suit in September 2012. Schaub, an atheist, withdrew her daughter from Valley High School in the New Kensington-Arnold School District because of the monument that her daughter had to pass by every day to get into the school. Her daughter then attended public high school elsewhere in the district.

U.S. District Judge Terrence McVerry dismissed the New Kensington challenge in July 2015, ruling that because Schaub and her child were no longer



Schaub

See Monument on page 7

Marching for women's rights



FFRF Program Assistant Alyssa Schaefer shows off her sign from the Women's March on Washington on Jan. 21. FFRF had a contingent march in the rally in Madison, Wis. To see more photos from that memorable day and to read Alyssa's take on the massive protest, go to page 23.

City settles with FFRF

FFRF is pleased to announce that its lawsuit against Shelton, Conn., has been successfully settled after the city halted its discriminatory policy.

FFRF, with local member Jerome Bloom, filed a federal lawsuit in U.S. District Court, Connecticut, in March 2016, after the city refused to allow them to place a nonreligious winter solstice display in Constitution Park. Yet, the city had allowed the American Legion to place a religious display featuring "heralding angels" there every December for at least four years. FFRF sued over impermissible viewpoint discrimination.

The city had even deemed FFRF's proposed display "offensive to many." FFRF's display reads: "At this Season of the Winter Solstice, may reason prevail. There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell. There is only our natural world. Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds."

The joint settlement agreement indicates the city agrees not to allow private unattended displays in Consti-



This display of "heralding angels" will no longer be allowed in Constitution Park in Shelton, Conn.

tion Park. The city agreed that anywhere it "allows private parties to erect unattended displays . . . it will allow plaintiffs to erect a display in that park, without regard to the content or viewpoint . . . so long as plaintiffs' display complies with any neutral, written city policies regarding such displays."

It also formally stipulates that Huntington Green, an open space in the city, is a "public forum for private unattended displays."

See Victory on page 7

Roerden's activism isn't by the book

Name: Chris Roerden

Where and when I was born: The Bronx, N.Y., in 1935; grew up in Manhattan's Inwood neighborhood.

Family: Two sons: Ken, who majored in mass communications at UW-Madison and works in film in L.A.; and Doug, who lives on a farm outside Boston with his family (my three grandsons) and is a web architect.

Occupation: Book editor for 55 years, now specializing in mysteries and thrillers by published authors (such as award-winning author/investigative TV reporter Hank Phillippi Ryan) and still teaching writers' workshops. My website is writersinfo.info.

Education: New York City's High School of Music & Art (now named LaGuardia), an art major; graduated in 1952 at 16 and went to work in publishing.

Eleven years later, I was married with two toddlers, living in Maine, and having researched 300 years of history for the publication of my first book in 1965, *Collections from Cape Elizabeth, Maine*. I enrolled at the University of Maine-Portland and took the maximum class load nights and summers to graduate in four years with a B.A. in English summa cum laude in 1969.

I was hired by the University of Maine-Portland (now University of Southern Maine) as an instructor of English. I earned an M.A. in English in 1971.

How I got where I am today: Feminism and activism!

I discovered sex discrimination in 1960 when my husband's first transfer took me out of New York City to upstate Albany. A small publishing firm of CPAs and lawyers hired me as its first editor but would not meet my previous salary. I agreed to a trial period, soon earned my raise, but also found my name listed in the various publications not under "Editorial" but "Office Staff," together with the other two women employees. I was told, "We can't have the bookkeeper and typist getting jealous." When I left a year later to have my first child, I was replaced by a head-of-household male who started at twice my salary. Six months later the publisher asked me to edit from home, and I invoiced what my work deserved.

One week before I graduated college in May 1969, a failed birth-control option led to an illegal abortion performed by my family doctor at midnight, with my husband of 12 years



Chris Roerden

MEET A MEMBER

disposing of the evidence at the town dump while our boys, 6 and 8, slept a few blocks away alone at home. I was deeply affected — but only by the many contradictions involved. My situation defied all the stereotypes of a college student having an abortion. Everyone cheering for my top honors one week later couldn't know the truth. My mother had gotten numerous abortions until advised that having me would be safer, thereby introducing me to three siblings, then ages 12, 16 and 17. In order for my mother to continue working for my father in his store, he kept my 16-year-old sister from graduating high school to instead care for me, causing all the neighbors to believe she was the mother of an illegitimate baby.

My activism — not knowing that's what it was — began by challenging my grad school's requirement for summer residency on its Orono campus, a hardship on mothers of young children. My alternative to the dean's argument that residency provided "intellectual intercourse among graduate faculty and students," was to create the first association of grad students on Portland's commuter campus and host faculty-student socials with major speakers. In 1971, still teaching and raising a family, I earned the first M.A. in English awarded by the University of Maine system for studies and thesis conducted entirely on a commuter campus.

Feminism led to my joining the National Organization for Women in Syracuse in 1971, finding the greatest support I'd ever known. Becoming an

almost full-time NOW volunteer for the next 12 years, I helped create the Syracuse school system's nonsexist curriculum; was elected to regional and national committees, asked to organize for the Equal Rights Amendment throughout the Midwest, elected Wisconsin NOW president, participated in many statewide coalitions (FFRF, ACLU, League of Women Voters, Governor's Conference for the White House Conference on Aging, and others), and won a majority of votes to the national board; and often speaking, writing, and lobbying in Madison and Washington for reproductive rights.

Throughout my life I've had the great honor of interacting with Anne Gaylor, Madelyn Murray O'Hair, Gaylor Nelson, Gordon Parks, Bella Abzug, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem and many other inspiring role models. In the late 1980s, I joined the international organization Sisters in Crime, which today takes most of my energy.

Person in history I admire and why: Elizabeth Gould Davis, a librarian and author of *The First Sex*, because of her extraordinary research on institutional sex discrimination throughout the centuries and her persistence under fire for her theories of needed social changes. Her book altered my world perspective.

These are a few of my favorite things: Reading, listening to classical music,

time with my partner and our rescue dog, observing politics, mentoring new writers, and intelligent conversation.

My doubts about religion started: I never thought about religion even as I absorbed a few Jewish cultural traditions from my secular, immigrant grandparents. My defining moment occurred in an adult evening class on philosophy when the instructor threw open the window, leaned out, and called up to the night sky: "Hey, God, you up there?" After aiming several more questions skyward, he closed the window and announced, "I guess no one's there." No doubt he elaborated on the point he made, but I no longer listened; I was so surprised that an authority figure would publicly demonstrate such bold disbelief, and I savored the great satisfaction of finally witnessing such absolute closure.

Before I die: I hope to complete one more book (currently mired in rough draft), thereby adding to my 10th and 11th titles (*Don't Murder Your Mystery* and its all-genre clone, *Don't Sabotage Your Submission*) by offering writers some final words of advice.

Ways I promote freethought: Approaching 82, I continue participating in my local atheist society and donating conservatively to progressives — those political candidates and organizations that keep up the fight for my humanist, pro-choice beliefs.



Photo by Paul Gaylor

Roerden testifies against the "Fetus Personhood" bill in Madison, Wis., on April 6, 1981.

FFRF FREETHOUGHT TODAY

Published by Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

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The Monona Terrace and Convention Center, as seen in this photo from Lake Monona in Madison, Wis., will be the site of FFRF's 40th annual national convention.

Sign up now for FFRF's 40th convention

Great speakers, cruise highlight weekend events

FFRF's 40th national convention will feature several high-profile personalities, including Steven Pinker, Maryam Namazie and Michelle Goldberg, with more to be announced later.

The convention will be the weekend of Sept. 15-17 at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis.

See the back page for the registration form. Early sign-ups get discounted rates!

Speakers

Steven Pinker, FFRF's honorary president, is a cognitive scientist, psychologist, linguist, and popular science author. He is Johnstone Family Professor in the Department of Psychology at Harvard University, and is known for his advocacy of evolutionary psychology and the computational theory of mind.



Pinker

He is one of the world's foremost writers on language, mind and human nature. Pinker has also taught at Stanford and MIT. He has also received eight honorary doctorates, several teaching awards at MIT and Harvard, and numerous prizes for his books *The Language Instinct*, *How the Mind Works*, *The Blank Slate* and *The Better Angels of Our Nature*. He has been named Humanist of the Year, received FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award and is among Prospect magazine's "The World's Top 100 Public Intellectuals," Foreign Policy's "100 Global Thinkers," and Time magazine's "The 100 Most Influential People in the World Today."

Roy Zimmerman is an American satirical singer-songwriter and guitarist with a repertoire of irreverent songs. He wrote a series of satirical musical reviews in the 1980s that were produced by the San Jose Repertory Theatre. The musicals parodied the excesses of the evolving yuppie culture in Silicon Valley.



Zimmerman

Zimmerman founded The Foremen, a Southern California satirical folk quartet. It performed at the national conventions of both major American political parties in 1996. Continuing as a solo act, Zimmerman explained the philosophy behind writing and performing humorous songs on increasingly political subjects: "There's nothing funny about world peace. Social justice never killed at the Comedy Store. If we ever attain a worldwide consciousness of peace and justice, I'll be happily out of a job. But as long as there's poverty, war, bigotry,

See back page for full registration form

ignorance, greed, lust and paranoia, I've got a career."

Maryam Namazie is an Iranian-born secularist and human rights activist, commentator and broadcaster. She is spokesperson for Iran Solidarity, One Law for All and the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain.



Namazie

London-based Namazie was born in Tehran, but left with her family in 1980 after the 1979 revolution in Iran. Namazie first worked with Ethiopian refugees in Sudan. In the United States in 1991, she became the co-founder of the Committee for Humanitarian Assistance to Iranian Refugees (CHAIR).

She specializes in challenging cultural relativism and political Islam. These activities were recognized by the National Secular Society with the 2005 Secularist of the Year award. She is the spokesperson for Fitnah – Movement for Women's Liberation, One Law for All and the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain. She is humanist laureate at the International Academy of Humanism; National Secular Society Honorary Associate; Honorary Associate of Rationalist International, among others.

She will be receiving the Henry H. Zumbach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism award of \$10,000.

Michelle Goldberg is an author and columnist for Slate. She holds a Master of Science degree in journalism from the University of California Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism.



Goldberg

Goldberg's first book, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism*, was a finalist for the 2007 New York Public Library's Helen Bernstein Book Award for Excellence in Journalism. In 2009, she published *The Means of Reproduction: Sex, Power, and the Future of the World*, which is based on her reporting about the state of women's reproductive rights across several continents.

In 2008, *The Means of Reproduction* won the J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award.

Her work has also appeared in The New Yorker, The New York Times Book Review, Glamour, Rolling Stone, The Nation New York, The Guardian (UK) and New Republic. Goldberg has taught at NYU's Graduate School of Journalism and lectured throughout the United States and in Europe.

Join FFRF on boat cruise

FFRF convention attendees are invited to take a boat cruise on Madison's Lake Monona Friday, Sept. 15, prior to the start of the convention. The Monona Terrace Community & Convention Center, home to FFRF's convention, overlooks the scenic lake.



For \$50 per person, you'll be treated to a two-hour tour with a buffet, featuring clam chowder, chips and Cajun dip, vegetarian variety platter, seafood salad, chicken salad, pasta salad, fruit salad, sliced deli meats/cheeses and assorted desserts. There is a cash bar for beverages.

The tour begins at 10:45 a.m. and ends at 1 p.m.

We'll have bus service to take you

from Freethought Hall or the Hilton to the boat launch and back to the hotel, or you can walk the route. Maps will be available. Unfortunately, the yachts are not wheelchair accessible, as the walkways are tight and there are narrow stairs to the banquet area. There are two boats and a total limit of 86 passengers. If you are coming as part of a group, FFRF will make sure your group is aboard the same boat.

Hotel info

Reserve rooms now! FFRF is offering convention blocks at three hotels this year to accommodate even more registrants!

Hilton Madison Monona Terrace, 9 E. Wilson Street, is the official convention hotel and closest to Monona Terrace. Rooms are \$183 (single/double/triple/quad). Call 608-255-5100 to make a reservation for the "Freedom From Religion Foundation" group rate.

Best Western Plus Inn on the Park, 22 S. Carroll Street, is right on the Capitol Square, newly remodeled, and just 0.3 miles from Monona Terrace — about a six-minute walk. Rooms are \$189 (one bed for 1-2 people), \$209 for 2 beds (1-4 people), or \$249 for suites. Call toll-free 800-279-8811 or local 608-285-8000 to reserve rooms in the "Freedom From Religion Foundation 2017 Block."

Sheraton Madison Hotel, 706 John Nolen Drive, is two-miles away from Monona Terrace on a lakeside walking/biking path, with shuttle service available. Call 608-251-2300 or 866-716-8134 (toll-free) to reserve a room at \$149 (single/double/triple/quad).

General schedule

Tour Freethought Hall, FFRF's newly expanded offices in downtown Madison, from 9:30 a.m. to noon on Friday. The Betty Lou Cruise on Lake Monona, from 10:45 a.m. to 1 p.m., has capacity for 86. Convention registration opens at 2 p.m. at Monona Terrace, with workshops and snacks from 3-5 p.m. Friday dinner is on your own — or join us at the first-ever FFRF Tailgate Party, serving up Wisconsin tailgate favorites from 5-6:45 p.m. The formal program begins Friday at 7 p.m., ending with complimentary dessert and beverages. The convention resumes Saturday with the optional Non-Prayer

Breakfast at 8 a.m. The morning program starts at 9:30 a.m. After a two-hour lunch on your own, with picnic lunch option, the program resumes at 2 p.m. An optional dinner banquet begins at 6 p.m., to be followed by the evening speaker and entertainment. Sunday morning features the annual meetings of members and state representatives, ending by noon.

Menu

Friday 'tailgate' dinner

Bucky's Tailgate Buffet features Wisconsin Waldorf salad, home-style potato salad, fresh vegetable and relish tray, beer-boiled Johnsonville bratwurst with Wisconsin sauerkraut and chopped fresh onion, grilled boneless chicken breast, fresh-sliced tomato and crisp lettuce, Wisconsin calico baked beans, condiments and buns, coffee, tea or milk. Cash bar.

Saturday 'Non-Prayer' breakfast

Wisconsin cheese and chive scrambled eggs, apple-smoked bacon, rosemary wedge potatoes, ketchup compote, petite muffins, orange juice, coffee, tea and milk (veggie option available).

Saturday 'Grab and Go' box lunch

Includes your choice of roasted chicken or grilled vegetables on Kaiser roll with tomato, lettuce with condiments on the side, chips and a can of soda.

Saturday banquet dinner

Chicken Wellington: Delicate puff pastry filled with a boneless chicken breast, apple smoked bacon, shallots and mushrooms, served with mushroom-brown rice pilaf, fresh seasonal vegetable blend.

Portobello Wellington: Delicate puff pastry filled with fresh portobello mushrooms, herbs, shallots and risotto and served with grilled tomato.

Both entrees served with dinner rolls and butter, house salad with Champagne-mustard vinaigrette, beverage (coffee, tea, or milk) and chocolate raspberry torte.

HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

GERTRUDE

Gertrude Appleman, 1901-1976

*God is all-knowing, all-present, and almighty.
— A Catechism of Christian Doctrine*

I wish that all the people
who peddle God
could watch my mother die:
could see the skin and
gristle weighing only
seventy-nine, every stubborn
pound of flesh a small
death.

I wish the people who peddle God
could see her young,
lovely in gardens and
beautiful in kitchens, and could watch
the hand of God slowly
twisting her knees and fingers
till they gnarled and knotted, settling in
for thirty years of pain.

I wish the people who peddle God
could see the lightning
of His cancer stabbing
her, that small frame
tensing at every shock,
her sweet contralto scratchy with
the Lord's infection: *Philip,
I want to die.*

I wish I had them gathered round,
those preachers, popes, rabbis,
imams, priests — every
pious shill on God's payroll — and I
would pull the sheets from my mother's brittle body,
and they would fall on their knees at her bedside
to be forgiven all their
faith.



From *New and Selected Poems, 1956-1996*
© Philip Appleman.

Philip Appleman is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include *New and Selected Poems: (1956-1996)*, *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 newest book is *The Labyrinth: God, Darwin and the Meaning of Life*. He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both "After-Life"

Members of FFRF. Phil's books: ffrf.org/shop.

FFRF welcomes new Lifers, After-Lifers

FFRF is pleased to announce and welcome our 34 new Lifetime Members and three After-Life Members.

Mary Ann Jarrett, Dr. Willys Silvers and David S. Watkins are now After-Life Members, a tongue-in-cheek donation category which is \$5,000 for those who wish their donation to live on after them.

FFRF also would like to thank its 34 new Lifetime Members: Raul Acevedo, Alan Appel, Michael Barrows, Dennis Bland, Steven J. Bouska, John Breitbart, Leslie Converse, Thomas Edward Cullen, Kateri Dupuis, Richard C. Geis, M.D., Eduard Gorina, Grant Hatton, Cheryl Hofbauer, Ken A. Hofbauer, Dr. Grant Hunter, Dr. Madhu S. Joshi, Dr. Lowell Liebermann, Ronald E. Lindeman, John C. Lofton, Jared Martin, Beatrice Maslowski, Derek Mathias, Karl Midgette, David Parrs, Mark Patrick, Cindy Post, Todd M. Redden, Dr. Kendra Stauffer, Steve Taylor, James M. Tillingham, Bryan Turk, R. James Wardman, Kevin Welty, and Nancy Wender.

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.

The states represented by our newest Life and After-Life members are Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

Coming Next Month in Freethought Today



Read Daniel C. Dennett's
convention speech.

OVERHEARD

So I've been shopping around for a new religion to see me through the



Keillor

next four years. Too many of my fellow Christians voted for selfishness and for degradation of the beautiful world God created. I guess they figured that by the time the planet was a smoky wasteland, they'd be nice and comfy in heaven, so wotthehell. Anyhow, I'm looking around for other options.

Garrison Keillor

Washington Post, 1-17-17

When someone in their official capacity stands up there and gives an invocation, that's an official endorsement. To my mind, they've taken a step backward.

FFRF member David Suhor of the Satanic Temple West Florida after the Pensacola City Council decided to only allow individual council members or their chosen representatives to conduct the opening invocation

Pensacola News Journal, 1-19-17



Dickinson

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church
I keep it, staying at Home
With a Bobolink for a Chorister
And an Orchard,
for a Dome.

Emily Dickinson, in a poem she wrote, now on display at New York's Morgan Library & Museum's new show, "I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson."

New York Post, 1-21-17

Trump and his handlers have found a fox for every chicken coop in Washington. A Twitter finger must not become a trigger finger. . . . Remember, the Constitution doesn't begin with, 'I, the president.' It begins with, 'We, the people.'

Gloria Steinem, in her speech to the Women's March on Washington

USA Today, 1/21/17

No hate, no bigotry, no Muslim registry!
Alicia Keys, in her speech to the Women's March on Washington

USA Today, 1/21/17



Warren

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, speech to the Women's March on Boston

Vox, 1/20/17

You have heard from multiple secular activists in the community, and I'm now adding myself into the mix. Gentlemen, you are digging yourselves a hole and burying yourself with one of our nation's founding documents.

Kathryn Howard, president of the University of West Florida's Secular Student Alliance, speaking about how she supported the Constitution and called for the end of invoca-

tions at meetings because the board showed no signs of being inclusive of non-Christian speakers

Escambia County (Fla.) Board of County Commissioners meeting, 1-19-17

Everything they're doing they're claiming they're doing it through God's word. They stand there with their bible. They cross-examine people using scripture, and it's all perverted.

Frank Spryszak, an assistant county prosecutor in Ohio, during closing arguments in a trial where Timothy Ciboro and his son Esten were found guilty of kidnapping, endangering children and multiple counts of rape against two girls

The Blade, 1-30-17



Moore

We have to get busy, folks. We have our work cut out for us. Make this part of your new daily routine. Call Congress every single day. Each of you has one rep in the House and two senators. They have a phone number: 202-225-3121.

Michael Moore, in his speech to the Women's March on Washington

C-SPAN, 1/21/17

Mr. Trump is known for failing to honor his debts, but in this case, he's fully repaying his Christian conservative supporters. For all his flagrant sinfulness, he's assembling a near-theocratic administration, his cabinet full of avowed enemies of church-state separation.

Michelle Goldberg, "The Religious Right's Trojan Horse"

New York Times, 1/29/17

Science is constantly proved all the time. You see, if we take something like



Gervais

any fiction, any holy book . . . and destroyed it, in a thousand years' time, that wouldn't come back just as it was. Whereas if we took every science book, and every fact, and destroyed them all, in a thousand years they'd all be back, because all the same tests would [produce] the same result.

Ricky Gervais, in an interview on the "Late Show with Stephen Colbert"

CBS, 2-1-17

If you're a really smart person and you want to immigrate to a great country that will welcome you, come to Canada! And if you're Muslim, you're very, very welcome here, as are people of every faith — and atheists, too.

Canada's Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland, daughter of a Ukrainian immigrant, in a column by Nicholas Kristof

New York Times, 2/5/16

Let's not mince words. President Trump's recent actions are an attempt to move the United States away from being the religiously free country that the founders created — and toward becoming an aggressively Christian country hostile to other religions.

Opening paragraph from David Leonhardt's op-ed titled, "Trump Flirts With Theocracy"

New York Times, 1-30-17

Wisconsin shows bad consequences of school vouchers

By Patrick Elliott

Billionaire voucher advocate Betsy DeVos is all set as our new education secretary to put into place an alarming national school voucher scheme. We here in Wisconsin know how disastrous this will be for the country.

President Trump has promised to implement a \$20 billion federal school voucher plan that will take money from our public school system and funnel it to unaccountable private, mainly religious schools. These vouchers will ultimately cost taxpayers and students alike.

Taxpayers cut the checks to voucher schools, and yet they have no say in how they are run. Our public schools are managed under democratically elected school boards that assert public oversight. Where public money goes, public accountability should follow.

The lack of oversight of voucher schools encourages widespread fraud and mismanagement. The voucher program in Milwaukee, which is the longest running in the country, stands as a prime example. More than \$139 million was given to Milwaukee voucher schools over a 10-year period that were eventually removed from the program for failing to meet requirements related to finances, accreditation, student safety and auditing.

Besides mismanagement, we can be assured that any private voucher schemes will largely benefit church-affiliated schools. In the states that have enacted such proposals, parochial schools have gained a windfall. In recent years, Wisconsin has expanded its voucher program statewide. A full 163 out of 163 schools that registered to participate next year are religious schools. All of the schools are Christian, except two Jewish schools and one Muslim school.

Our government should not be funding religiously segregated schools with public money. Religious instruction has traditionally been left to the private sector as a personal and private decision. With vouchers, religious instruction becomes publicly subsidized.

And what is taught in taxpayer-funded private schools is often very disconcerting, as can be seen in Wisconsin.



Photo by Brent Nicastro

Patrick Elliott

Voucher schools in the state have used science materials that rail against what they call “the man-made idea of evolution.” A number of schools reportedly lacked any textbooks at all. Some pop-up voucher schools do not have a safe outdoor space for children to play or even offer nutritious lunches. A teacher at one school reported that students were served ramen noodles with hot sauce and a cup of water for lunch before the school was removed from the National School Lunch Program. These types of schools are the last thing we should encourage nationally.

This public subsidy also brings with it troubling policy implications. Voucher schools may try to discriminate on the basis of religion and sexual orientation. Disability rights advocates have noted the lack of legal protections for students with disabilities who attend private schools. This is in contrast to our public schools, which are mandated to accept all comers and to provide a free and appropriate education for all students. These common schools represent the pluralistic society that we live in.

Trump’s proposed \$20 billion in voucher money would remove much-needed resources from our public school system and instead fund discriminatory unaccountable private religious schools. Taxpayers will pay financially, but students will pay the highest price when our public education system is eroded. We in Wisconsin have already suffered the consequences.

Patrick Elliott is an FFRF staff attorney.

THEY SAID WHAT?

My mother gave me this bible, this very bible, many years ago. In fact, it’s her writing, right here. She wrote the name, and my address, and it’s just very special to me. . . . I want to thank the evangelicals. I will never let you down. **Donald Trump, discussing the bible he would put his hand on during the inauguration ceremony**
NPR, 1-30-16

There should be no fear. We are protected and we will always be protected. We will be protected by the great men and women of our military and law enforcement. And most importantly, we will be protected by God.

Donald Trump in his inauguration speech
CBS News, 1-20-17

I’m going to try very hard to get done during my term, and I’ll get it done, is



Trump

the Johnson Amendment. For evangelicals, for Christians, for everybody of faith. Where, we’re going to try and end and terminate the Johnson Amendment which is a disaster for religion, in my opinion. . . . It’s a priority, absolutely.

Donald Trump, in interview with CBN’s David Brody
Christian Broadcasting Network, 1-27-17

The people in this room come from many, many backgrounds. You represent so many religions and so many views. But we are all united by our faith, in our creator and our firm knowledge that we are all equal in His eyes. We are not just flesh and bone and blood, we are human beings with souls. Our republic was formed on the basis that freedom is not a gift from government, but that freedom is a gift from God.

Donald Trump during National Prayer Breakfast
NBC, 2-2-17

And this senator from Rhode Island during the midst of the testimony was just—it is just a religious belief for him and for others.

Scott Pruitt, President Trump’s pick to lead the Environmental Protection Agency, talking about Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse’s belief in climate change
ThinkProgress.org, 2-13-17

Do you know if you were a Christian in Syria it was impossible, at least very tough to get into the United States? If you were a Muslim you could come in, but if you were a Christian, it was almost impossible and the reason that was so unfair, everybody was persecuted in all fairness, but they were chopping off the heads of everybody but more so the Christians. And I thought it was very, very unfair. So we are going to help them.



Brown

Donald Trump, in interview with CBN’s David Brody
Christian Broadcasting Network, 1-27-17

Your body is your body and be responsible with it. But after you’re irresponsible, then don’t claim, “Well, I can just go and do this with another body,” when you’re the host and you invited that in.

Oklahoma state Rep. Justin Humphrey, after proposing a bill that would require a woman seeking an abortion first to obtain written permission from her sexual partner
The Intercept, 2-13-17

Right now, they don’t make it important to be personally responsible because



Tinderholt

they know that they have a backup of “Oh, I can just go get an abortion.” Now, we both know that consenting adults don’t always think smartly sometimes. But consenting adults need to also consider the repercussions of the sexual relationship that they’re gonna have, which is a child.

State Rep. Tony Tinderholt, of Arlington, Texas, after proposing a bill that would make abortion a felony in Texas and to direct state officials to ignore federal law established by Roe v. Wade
Texas Observer, 1-13-17

Evangelicals, Christians will love my pick.

Donald Trump, several days before he announced the nomination of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court
CNN, 2-1-17



Weiss’s wise words

“There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed. Let it once enter our common schools, they would be destroyed . . . Those who made our Constitution saw this, and used the most apt and comprehensive language in it to prevent such a catastrophe.”

— Justice H.S. Orton of the Supreme Court of Wisconsin, concurring opinion in *Weiss v. the District Board*, decided on March 18, 1890, ruling bible readings and devotionals in public schools unconstitutional.

'Bibles in School' lawsuit brings media attention

FFRF has been the focus of a lot of media coverage over its Jan. 18 lawsuit to end "Bibles in the School" classes in a West Virginia district. Most of the coverage has been based on the terms of the suit itself, although it's evident partisan and/or religious sites have pushed their agendas on the topic.

The federal lawsuit challenges bible indoctrination classes that have been taught in Mercer County Schools for more than 75 years. The bible instruction begins in first grade and classes are held in 15 elementary schools, one intermediate school and three middle schools. The classes meet weekly and last 30 minutes in elementary schools and 45 minutes in middle schools. Lessons have included images of Jesus being tortured, nailed to the cross and ascending into heaven.

FFRF's lawsuit has received major news coverage, including from the Associated Press, which appeared on ABC, NBC and CBS news sites and the Washington Post, among many others. National Public Radio's "Here and Now" show featured FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor on Jan. 26. CBS Today also did a segment on the case.

An article by Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, known for its support of state/church separation, was on point. "Education about religion as part of history or literature classes, or as a comparative religions course, can be an appropriate curricular offering in public schools, provided they are careful not to promote religion. Religious instruction in a public school, however — particularly for young children — runs the risk of jeopardizing the religious liberty of students and parents alike."

The Register-Herald in Beckley, W.Va., interviewed Rev. Garry Moore, pastor of Scott Street Baptist Church in Bluefield, W.Va., who lamely attempted to justify the "Bibles in the School" program by saying they should be used for literature and history purposes, not religious motives.

"Just to even have it as literature, we've got to have something (in schools),"

Moore told the newspaper. "But it should be kept in a literature-based vernacular rather than taught (as it would be in church). . . . It's such a complex book. It has a wide variety of authors. Students are not going to get religion, just the facts about the bible. It's a history book."

Comments from the discussion board on the Bluefield Daily Telegraph article included those who used the lack of bibles in the classroom as a reason for what they see as the moral decay of society.

"We took God out of the school, that's when the bullying began! If God and the bible were allowed, perhaps there would not be such foolishness as bullies, killings, back talk, disrespect and dishonor."

But others were there to call them on it.

"Not even close. The bible provides plenty of verses demanding intolerance! Have you not read it?"

On the bright side, the comment board also had voices of reason, such as:

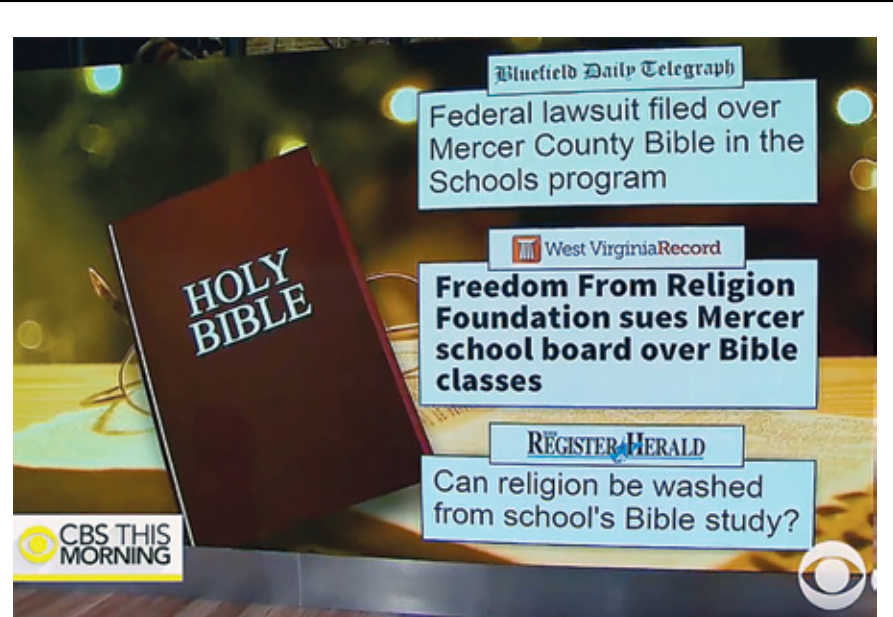
"If public schools offered 'comparative religions' classes, no one would have a problem with that. The problem here is that public schools in Mercer County are giving the bible and Christianity preferential treatment, despite the fact that student

bodies are comprised of students of all faiths (or lack thereof)."

And this: "Unfortunately no one heretofore had the courage to take a stand against this for many, many years. In a place like Mercer County, to do so would be dangerous. As a student of Bluefield High School from 1974 to 1977, I know of what I speak."

And finally: "If you are a Christian parent, is it not enough to be able to indoctrinate your kids at home and at church? Do you really need the assistance of public schools?"

Joining FFRF as primary plaintiffs in the federal case filed in the Southern District of West Virginia are Jane Doe, an atheist and member of FFRF, and her child, Jamie Doe. The defendants are Mercer County Board of Education, Mercer County Schools, and Superintendent Deborah S. Akers.



This is a screen grab from the "CBS This Morning" news report.

Case gets national TV coverage

"CBS This Morning" ran a television segment on Feb. 8 on FFRF's Mercer County "Bible in the Schools" lawsuit.

CBS News correspondent Tony Dokoupil talked with a mother and her daughter, who want the school to continue teaching the bible, and another mother who took her child out of the school system because of the bible classes.

"It is very important that what we teach at home can be moved on to the school and instilled there and moved to the church and it's still there so that it moves in a circle," Cheryl Thomas said.

Dokoupil then pressed Thomas further.

"Is it a religious course?" Dokoupil asked.

"It's the bible," she said.

"Is that a yes?" Dokoupil asked.

"I would say it is the bible," she said. "It doesn't teach one religion. It's not a Baptist bible, it's not a Presbyterian bible; it's the bible, and it is God."

Then the reporter asked Thomas' daughter, Teagan, a few

questions.

"Do all the kids in your class go to bible class too?" Dokoupil asked.

"Only one goes out and plays on the computer, because she can't hear what the bible says," Teagan said.

"How come?" Dokoupil asked.

"Because her dad just doesn't want her to hear all the bible stuff," the girl responded.

"What do you think about that?" Dokoupil asked.

"I think that that's bad. She needs to go to bible class," Teagan said.

Dokoupil then spoke with Elizabeth Deal, who moved her daughter out of the school system after she was bullied for opting out of the bible classes.

"If you want them to have a religious education, that burden's on you. That burden should not be on the school system," Deal said. "They taunted her about it. They told her that she was going to hell, that I was going to hell, that her father was going to hell."

CBS News said it would continue to follow the story as it unfolds.

"If you want them to have a religious education, that burden's on you. That burden should not be on the school system."

— Elizabeth Deal

March for Science set for April 22

On Earth Day 2017, scientists and those who support science will march in Washington and around the country in a show of solidarity against the rising tide of anti-science thinking and anti-intellectualism in Congress and the presidential administration.

The Secular Coalition for America, which includes FFRF as a member, is one of the organizers of the event on Saturday, April 22. Dozens of marches will be held around the country in concert with the Washington march.

"It is time for people who support scientific research and evidence-based policies to take a public stand and be counted," the wording on the official March for Science website proclaims. "Recent policy changes have caused heightened worry among scientists, and the incredible and immediate outpouring of support has made clear that these concerns are also shared by hundreds of thousands of people around the world."

President wTrump, a climate-change skeptic, has indicated he may want to pull the United States out of the international Paris climate agreement. Since



taking office, Trump has ordered an end to the release of information from the Environmental Protection Agency and has clashed with the National Park Service.

"The mischaracterization of science as a partisan issue, which has given policymakers permission to reject overwhelming evidence, is a critical and urgent matter," it says on the March for Science website.

Kevin Dahl of the National Parks Conservation Association said he plans to attend events in Tucson.

One of the values of science is that it is not based on "which way the political wind is blowing," Dahl said. "Good science serves us all."

FFRF hails new bill to fight discrimination

FFRF strongly supports a new bill to end immigration discrimination against people of any religious belief — including those with no religious belief.

Rep. Don Beyer, D-Va., introduced in Congress the Freedom of Religion Act of 2017.

The bill, which has more than 100 co-sponsors, has clear language providing nontheists protection from the type of religion-based policies that the Trump administration has put into place.

"Notwithstanding any other provision of the immigration laws, an alien may not be denied entry, re-entry, or admission to the United States, or any other immigration benefit, because of the alien's religion or lack of religious beliefs," a provision reads.

FFRF applauds a bill that not only upholds the Establishment Clause but contains such a clear reference to nonbelievers' rights.

The plight of nonbelievers in other countries is of deep concern to FFRF since the organization has been involved through its charitable arm Nonbelief Relief Inc. to assist and relocate imperiled atheist Bangladeshi activists and bloggers.

No more pizza topped with extra Christianity

The Pizza Ranch restaurant in Kentwood, Mich., was offering a discriminatory Sunday special, giving \$2 off an adult buffet for customers who brought in that weekend's church bulletin. That kind of discount is a violation of the federal Civil Rights Act and the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act.

On Feb. 2, FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to the owner, Jay Bell, explaining that Pizza Ranch's promotion favored religious customers and denied customers who do not attend church "full and equal" enjoyment of Pizza Ranch.

Bell responded to FFRF on Feb. 4, expressing the restaurant's thanks for being educated on the matter by FFRF. He also wrote that he had shared the information about Pizza Ranch's civil rights violation with the corporate office and that changes were being made across the chain.

Lunch bribery ends

A religious ministry will no longer be allowed to evangelize at an Oklahoma middle and high school by baiting students with pizza after FFRF got involved.

FFRF was informed that every Wednesday, representatives from an area church were permitted to enter Crooked Oak Public District property to host a religious lunch event. The ministry's promotional pizza lunches were hosted either in the school's cafe-



teria or the auditorium.

In exchange for the pizza, students were proselytized by adults from the church during the school day. At these lunches, church volunteers would ask students for their phone numbers and social media contact information. FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover informed Superintendent Bradley Richards that allowing church representatives access during school hours to recruit students for religious activities is a violation of the Establishment Clause.

"The district cannot grant non-school persons unique access to students or to treat schools as a recruiting ground for their religious mission," wrote Grover on Nov. 22, 2016. "It demonstrates an unlawful preference not only for religion over non-religion, but also Christianity over all other faiths."

Richards responded on Jan. 27 that he agreed that the lunchtime meetings violated law and that the school district had put an end to the unconstitutional events.



Photo courtesy of Valley News Dispatch

This Ten Commandments monument will no longer sit in front of Valley Junior-Senior High School in the New Kensington-Arnold School District in Pennsylvania.

Monument

Continued from page 1

exposed to the decalog monolith, they did not suffer injury or have standing to sue over the violation.

In August 2016, the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld Schaub's legal right to challenge the bible monument. The three-judge panel unanimously found that Schaub's removal of her daughter from the school due to the presence of the monument, and prior contact with it, established their clear injury to sue.

That ruling set in motion negotiations with the school district, which has now agreed to remove the Ten Commandments monument within 30 days. The district also will pay attorneys' fees of \$163,500, of which more than \$40,000 will go to FFRF for its role as co-counsel.

"It's been a drawn-out fight but my family and I are grateful to everyone who has helped us finally right a wrong that was committed so long ago," says Schaub, who received FFRF's Atheist in a Foxhole Courage Award at its annual convention last fall in Pittsburgh. "I hope this settlement serves as a lesson and a reminder

that the separation of state and church is especially important when it comes to our kids in public schools. The removal of this religious monument will provide a more welcoming environment that will promote equality and neutrality."

FFRF is gratified that reason and our secular Constitution have prevailed.

"The First Commandment alone is reason enough why public schools may not endorse the Commandments," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Students in our public schools are free to have any god they like, as many gods as they like — or none at all! In America, we live under the First Amendment, not the First Commandment."

In August 2015, McVerry had ruled in favor of FFRF's challenge of a similar marker in front of the a junior high school in Connellsville, Pa. That bible monument was removed in October 2015.

Representing FFRF was local attorney Marcus B. Schneider, with FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott serving as co-counsel.

Victory

Continued from page 1

Late last year, the city disallowed displays in Constitution Park, including the American Legion's angel display. It also permitted FFRF to place its winter solstice display in Huntington Park, where the city also permitted a Christian nativity display. Unfortunately, FFRF's sign was mutilated and destroyed.

The city also agreed to pay FFRF its filing fees and other legal costs of \$936.50.

"We are pleased the city of Shelton will no longer discriminate against atheists and other nonbelievers in its public forums, and that it has closed the forum at Constitution Park," says FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

Barker indicated that FFRF and Bloom will continue to erect a winter solstice display in Huntington Green as long as religious displays are put up, and added: "We question that it's truly a public forum if dissenting points of view are vandalized. We'll be back in December, but will be asking for additional protection of our display."

FFRF thanks Jerome Bloom for making possible the legal victory.

FFRF was represented by attorney Laurence J. Cohen, of Springfield, Mass., with FFRF Attorneys Elizabeth Cavell and Ryan Jayne, who is FFRF's Eric Stone Legal Fellow, serving as co-counsel.



Photo by Jim Wissick

A pedestal is all that's left after FFRF sued the city of Santa Clara, Calif., to remove at 14-foot cross from the public park site.

Cross

Continued from page 1

side," councilmember Teresa O'Neill told Ian Cull of NBC Bay Area.

Markert and other FFRF staff had written or phoned the city on more than a dozen occasions since first contacting the city over the Establishment Clause violation in April 2012. The city had indicated in 2012 that it looked forward "to resolving this matter in an expeditious and responsible manner."

"It's a very rational way to begin the New Year — sending a strong message of support for the wall of separation between religion and government," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Reason and the Constitution have prevailed."

As usual, not everyone was pleased with the cross coming down.


"I find it offensive that the city leaders don't have the will to maintain a rich symbol of their city's history, but take path of least resistance — and less legal

expense — of caving to this lawsuit," one commenter on the NBC website wrote. "The city should have settled by offering counseling to the individual who allegedly found the cross so offensive."

FFRF v. City of Santa Clara was litigated on behalf of FFRF by David J.P. Kaloyanides, with FFRF attorneys Markert and Madeline Ziegler serving as co-counsel. The case, No. 5:16-cv-02072, remains before Judge Lucy H. Koh until the final settlement papers are signed.

What Is a Freethinker?

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



Truth survives

The bible is an alternative fact. Religion was the first fake news. To "unlike" them is a valiant act. Real truth survives peer reviews.

Dan Barker
1-26-17

FFRF VICTORIES

By Molly Hanson

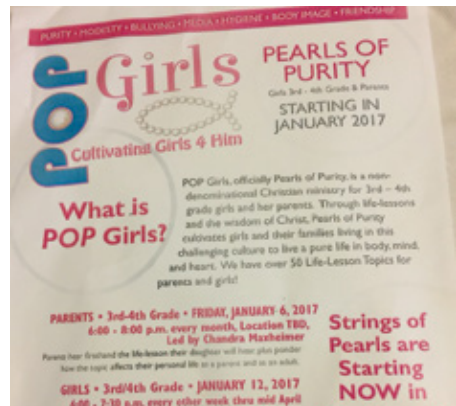
Illinois staff won't join in school gospel choir

An Illinois school district has confirmed to FFRF that its staff members will not remain involved in a school gospel choir.

FFRF initially contacted the Oak Park and River Forest High in December after a local community member informed the organization that there was a gospel choir at the school being led by the school's outreach coordinator.

"It is wholly inappropriate for a public school to teach its students songs of Christian worship," FFRF's Elaine and Eric Stone Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to Interim Superintendent Joylynn Pruitt-Adams on Jan. 23. In a letter received on Jan. 25, the district informed FFRF that it would adhere to the law.

No more religious flyers in school district



An Indiana school district has pledged to FFRF that it will not permit the distribution of fundamentalist flyers to its students.

A resident contacted FFRF to inform it that staff at Yankeetown Elementary School in Newburgh, Ind., were distributing ultrareligious flyers to third- and fourth-grade female students. The handouts were a description of POP Girls ("Pearls Of Purity"), a Christian ministry promoting the "wisdom of Christ."

FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to Warrick County Schools Superintendent Brad Schneider on Jan. 20, cautioning the school district about disseminating such material.

"This flyer should not have been approved and we will put steps in place to prevent objectionable flyers to slip through the cracks in the future," Schneider responded on Jan. 24. "You have my word that flyers of this nature will not be distributed home in the future."

FFRF gets apology for coach's public piety

An Illinois school district has apologized to FFRF for a coach's participation in prayer gatherings at school events.

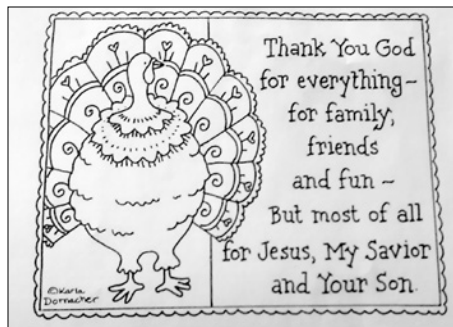
On Dec. 26, 2016, after a basketball game between Vandalia Community High School and Pana High School, Coach Brian Buscher took part in a prayer circle with students of both teams.

In a letter sent on Jan. 11 to Vandalia Community Unit School District #203 Superintendent Rich Well, FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne reminded him that it is illegal for public school

coaches to lead, organize or participate in prayers with their students.

"Please accept our apology," Well emailed back a few days after receiving FFRF's letter. "Our Varsity Boys Basketball Coach Brian Buscher has been notified that no coaches are allowed to participate."

FFRF reminds Maine school to stay secular



Teachers at an elementary school in Guilford, Maine, have been reminded of their constitutional duty to not promote religion in their public roles as educators.

FFRF received notice that a third-grade teacher at Piscataquis Community Elementary School had handed out a coloring page depicting a pious turkey with wording that read, "Thank You God for everything — for family, friends and fun — but most of all for Jesus, My Savior and Your Son."

FFRF sent a letter to Superintendent Ann Kirkpatrick on Dec. 21, 2016, who responded a month later that the matter had been investigated, and that the teachers understood their obligation to refrain from any religious promotion in the classroom.

Florida judge says to dismiss prayer case

A Florida judge says a prayer lawsuit against a high school athletic league should be tossed out. FFRF filed an amicus brief in the case.

U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge Amanda Arnold Sansone issued a Feb. 3 recommendation to dismiss a case brought by Cambridge Christian School against the Florida High School Athletic Association. The First Liberty Institute, a theocratic group, filed the suit in September, arguing that the association was mandated to allow Cambridge Christian to deliver a Christian prayer over the PA system at state championship events. Sansone found that Cambridge Christian's request for a preliminary injunction should be denied and its suit should be dismissed.

FFRF gets Ohio council to change invocation

FFRF was able to get the Upper Arlington City Council in Ohio to amend its rules to comply with the Constitution.

FFRF received a complaint that the council was having government officials lead invocations at the beginning of its meetings when a local minister was not present. FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to City Council President Donald Leach on Dec. 6, 2016, informing him that not only is prayer at government meetings unnecessary and divisive, but it is illegal for officials to lead prayers at government meetings.

FFRF received a response from City Attorney Jamie Hummer on Jan. 6, who wrote that the council amended their rules to state that neither council members or employees are permitted to conduct the prayer.

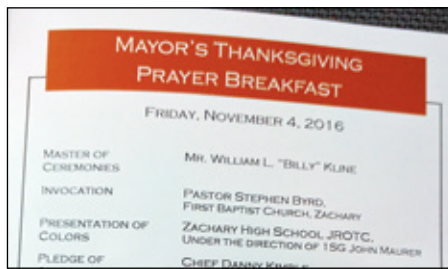
Symbols removed from Nevada school

Religious artwork hanging on the office wall of Bob Miller Middle School in Henderson, Nev., has been taken down after FFRF took action on a complaint.

The organization received a report that a cross and a reference to Jesus were being displayed on the BMMS Dean of Students' office wall. FFRF's Patrick O'Reiley Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to School District General Counsel Carlos McDade on Dec. 22, 2016, asking that the Christian iconography be taken down.

McDade responded in a letter to FFRF on Jan. 11 writing that the employee had removed the displays of religious symbolism.

Louisiana city changes prayer breakfast



The city of Zachary, La., has changed its rules to ensure that its annual "Mayor's Prayer Breakfast" will no longer violate the First Amendment by receiving city endorsement.

The city's website promoted the annual breakfast as a "Christian event," which was held in a church. FFRF's Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to Mayor David Amrhein on Dec. 16, 2016, informing him that the event violated the Constitution.

Amrhein responded on Jan. 17 with a list of changes that the city would make in future prayer breakfasts to avoid city endorsement. Amrhein informed FFRF that the event would take place at a non-city facility, not use city resources or funds, not require mandatory attendance by city employees and not be mentioned on the city's website.

Alabama school's Christian promotion ends

An Auburn, Ala., elementary school assured FFRF that it will not be promoting Christianity or a religious group.

Dean Road Elementary School distributed flyers and used social media postings to promote "All Pro Dad" events, which the school was hosting throughout the school year. All Pro Dad is a group that promotes "family values," along with Christian prayer and worship.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover first wrote to Auburn City Schools Superintendent Karen DeLano on July 16, 2015, about the unlawful flyers. After several interactions, an attorney representing the school district replied to FFRF on Jan. 12 that there would not be any promotion or endorsement by the school of a religious organization.

Angel statue removed from Indiana park



FFRF was informed that a statue of an angel with its hands clasped in prayer had been put up in a public park in Kokomo, Ind. The display conferred government endorsement of Christianity over all other faiths or no faith.

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to the Kokomo Parks and Recreation Department's superintendent on June 3, 2015, asking that the statue be removed from the park or to a more private location.

After several follow-ups, FFRF was informed on Feb. 6 of this year that the statue had been removed by the city park department's new superintendent.

Kentucky school educated on First Amendment

Educators at Grant County Schools in Kentucky have been reminded of their responsibility to uphold the First Amendment's requirement that they not proselytize religion.

FFRF was alerted to a published nativity display in the high school's newsletter, accompanied by the phrase "Merry Christmas." FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to Superintendent Donald Ruberg on Jan. 17, asking that the school refrain from including religious iconography in their newsletters and that staff be reminded of their constitutional duty to remain neutral toward religion.

On Jan. 19, the attorney for Grant County Schools communicated that the superintendent would meet with the school district's principals and let them know that the newsletter nativity was inappropriate and why.

Religious promotion ended at Texas school

A parent with a child in Victoria School District in Texas contacted FFRF to report instances of religious promotion at Ella Schorlemmer Elementary School. A Christian prayer was part of the school's Veterans Day celebration and a teacher at the elementary school incorporated religious worksheets into a lesson plan.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Superintendent Robert Jaklich on Dec. 22, 2016, asking that the school district refrain from including religious rituals during public school assemblies and that teachers not incorporate religious instruction or devotional teachings into their lesson plans.

Jaklich responded on Jan. 24 that steps had been taken to ensure that the violations would not recur.

Louisiana coaches warned about proselytizing

In Louisiana, the Caldwell Parish High School football team's coaches have been warned not to promote religion to the team in the future.

FFRF was informed that a coach had been taking the team to church. The coach had also been exposing the athletes to religious movies and music. The coach had described his efforts to indoctrinate student-athletes into Christianity as "faith-based team building."

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Superintendent John Gullatt on Sept. 16, 2016, about the violations.

The school district's attorney responded in writing to FFRF on Feb. 1, that the coaches had been reminded of the district's policies against religious promotion.

Religious program ends at Illinois school

FFRF took action to end a partnership between the Decatur Public Schools District in Illinois and two local churches after learning of a constitutional violation.

The school district had partnered with Glad Tidings Church and Tabernacle Baptist Church for six half-day retreats at the churches. FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to the district's administrators on Dec. 21, 2016, reminding them that public schools may not advance or promote religion.

The school district's attorney contacted FFRF early this February to inform the organization that the partnership program with the churches had been suspended and cancelled for the next year.

FFRF gets Texas coaches to stop prayers

FFRF learned that coaches in Texas' Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City Independent School District were illegally participating in prayers with its student-athletes.

Coaches from Byron P. Steele II High School, Samuel Clemens High School and Ray D. Corbett Junior High School had engaged in prayers.

Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Superintendent Greg Gibson on Jan. 25 to inform the school district that it is illegal for public school coaches to organize or participate in prayer with their teams.

Gibson responded on Feb. 9 that he worked with the athletic director and health educator to schedule training for all coaches on complying with the Constitution.

Latin cross removed from Texas classroom

FFRF reminded the Lewisville Independent School District in Texas that employees must not endorse their personal spiritual beliefs to students through religious displays.

A community member informed FFRF that a cross was visibly hanging in a classroom of Arbor Creek Middle School promoting the teacher's Christian views to students. On Feb. 8, FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to the school district's superintendent, Kevin Rogers, asking that the cross be removed.

Lewisville ISD's legal director

called to inform FFRF on Feb. 13 that the cross had been removed from the classroom.

Ohio nativity display banished by FFRF

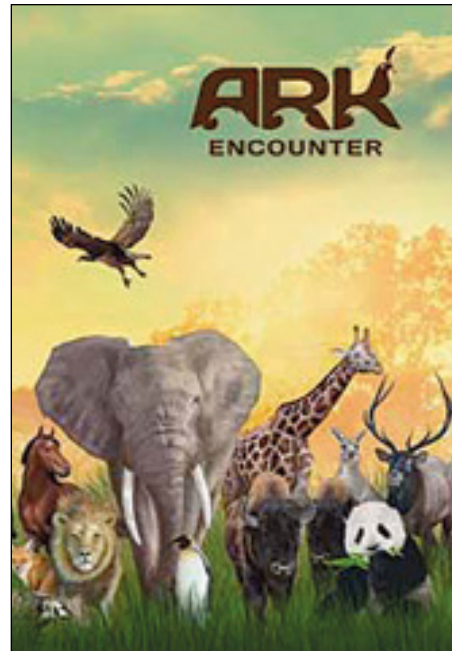


A nativity display was removed from an Ohio public high school's property after FFRF took action.

It was brought to FFRF's attention that a December nativity scene had been put up for the second year in a row at Buckeye Local High School in Rayland. FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert informed district officials on Dec. 20, 2016, that the display was unconstitutional because it signaled that the school district preferred Christianity over all other faiths or no religion.

Interim Superintendent Scott Cestlin informed FFRF on Dec. 28 that the nativity scene had been taken down after receiving Markert's letter.

Virginia city cancels visit to 'Ark Park'



FFRF has dissuaded a Virginia city's park and rec department from hosting a trip to the infamous "Ark Park" and creationist museum.

A resident informed FFRF that the Christiansburg Parks and Recreation Department was arranging a visit in early April to the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum in Kentucky. The excursion was advertised on the city's website.

FFRF urged the city to refrain from organizing an outing to such overtly religious sites, and the city responded within a couple of days.

"Please be advised that the trip has been cancelled and will be removed from the town of Christiansburg's website," the city's legal counsel wrote.

The Ark Encounter is a Christian ministry run by the creationist Ken Ham, who also built the Creation Museum. Ham has been open about the proselytizing nature of his projects right since the beginning.

"We are eagerly approaching what I believe will be a historic moment in Christendom," he stated in a 2016 letter outlining his motive. "It's the opening of the one of the greatest Christian outreaches of our era."



A display featuring a cross next to a kneeling soldier has caused a stir in the city of Belle Plaine, Minn., after FFRF got the city to remove the cross.

Town backtracks on removal of veterans cross memorial

FFRF is troubled about a Minnesota city backtracking on its removal of a cross from a public veterans park.

In Veterans Memorial Park in the city of Belle Plaine, there was a display — very recently added and without official approval — of a soldier kneeling before a Latin cross next to the city's own Veterans Memorial Stone. In response to a letter from FFRF's Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert, the cross had been taken down a few weeks ago. Now it seems that the city may be on track to permitting the cross to be put back up. The Belle Plaine City Council seemingly caved in to immense local religious pressure.

"A controversial veterans memorial in Belle Plaine, Minn., will be restored to its original form, after a narrow vote by the city council," a local TV station reports. "On [Feb. 6], the city council voted 3-2 to establish a 'limited public forum' in the Veterans Park, which supporters believe would allow the cross to stay."

FFRF charges that the purpose behind the newly proposed limited public forum is religiously motivated — to keep a Christian cross on government property — and thus calls into question the constitutionality of the policy.

If the proposal goes forward, FFRF will also consider proposing a memorial of its own: to atheists in foxholes. FFRF displays two such monuments — one at its offices in Madison, Wis., the other on campgrounds in Alabama. The full text reads: "In honor of atheists in foxholes and the countless freethinkers who have served this country with honor and distinction. With hope that in the future humankind may learn to avoid all war."

FFRF had objected to the cross on city land due to a number of reasons — all of which remain valid.

The cross showed an endorsement of religion over nonreligion. Additionally, FFRF asserted, the memorial sent a message that the government cares only about the death of Christian soldiers and was disdainful of the sacrifices made by non-Christian and nonreligious soldiers, since it excluded the one-third of the population that identifies as such. Putting the cross back up will again be an official violation of the First Amendment.

FFRF has dealt with Belle Plaine previously, and won. A few months ago FFRF caused the city to move a nativity scene off of city property that had stood for years in front of the fire department.

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Freedom depends upon freethinkers

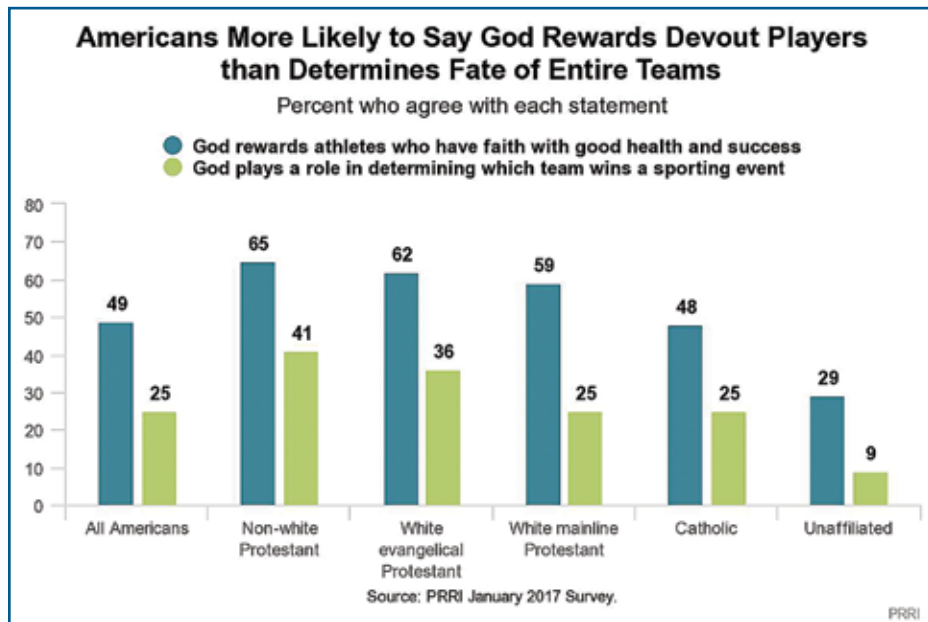
— Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

Foundation members wishing to receive online news releases, "action alerts" and "Freethought of the Day" should contact info@ffrf.org. Please include your name, email and physical mailing address.

IN THE NEWS



Many believe God directly involved in sports, politics

One-fourth of Americans believe God plays a role in determining the outcome of sporting events.

White evangelical Protestants and nonwhite Protestants are more likely to see the hand of God in the outcome of sporting events than any other religious group, according to a Public Religion Research Institute report by Daniel Cox and Robert P. Jones. About 40 percent of nonwhite Protestants and 36 percent of white evangelical Protestants believe God plays a role in determining which team wins. Fewer white mainline Protestants (25 percent), Catholics (25 percent) and religiously unaffiliated Americans (9 percent) believe God plays a role in determining outcomes on the field.

Nonwhite Protestants (65 percent), white evangelical Protestants (62 percent), and white mainline Protestants (59 percent) are more likely than Catholics (48 percent) and religiously unaffiliated Americans (29 percent) to believe God rewards faithful athletes with success and good health.

2016 election

Twenty-eight percent of Americans believe God played a major role in determining the outcome of the 2016 election. Thirteen percent say God

played a minor role and a majority (55 percent) say God did not play any role at all in the presidential election.

Close to half of Republicans believe God intervened to help Donald Trump win the presidency, compared to 26 percent of independents and only 18 percent of Democrats. Nearly seven in 10 Democrats believe God had no hand in determining the outcome of the election.

Close to half of Republicans believe God intervened to help Donald Trump win the presidency

White evangelicals stand out from other religious groups in their belief that God intervened in the 2016 election. A majority (57 percent) of white evangelical Protestants say God played a major role in determining the outcome of the 2016 election, a view shared by fewer than half of nonwhite Protestants and fewer than one-quarter of white mainline Protestants (22 percent), Catholics (21 percent), and the religiously unaffiliated (7 percent).

Praying for teams

Close to two-thirds (63 percent) of Americans consider themselves to be a fan of a particular sports team. Among sports fans, 20 percent report that they believe their team has been cursed at some point, while 28 percent say they have prayed for God to help their team.

Mississippi still the most religious state

Mississippi remains the most religious state in the U.S., with 59 percent of its residents in 2016 classified as “very religious,” followed by Alabama (56 percent very religious) and Utah (54 percent). Vermont is the least religious state; 21 percent of its residents are classified as very religious. Two other New England states, Maine and Massachusetts, are the second- and third-least religious.

These state-by-state results are based on 174,969 interviews conducted as part of Gallup Daily tracking in 2016.

Gallup classifies Americans as “very religious,” “moderately religious” or “nonreligious,” based on their responses to questions about the importance of religion and church attendance.

Gallup began tracking religious indicators daily in 2008. The percentage of all Americans who are very religious has declined slightly over that period of time, from 41 percent in 2008 to 38 percent in 2016, while those who are nonreligious has edged up from 30 percent to 32 percent. The relative rank ordering of the states, however, has changed little over the past nine years.

Mississippi is the most religious state in the nation for the ninth straight year.

Most of the top 10 highly religious states over the past nine years have been in the South, except for Utah, where the devout Mormon population helps put it in the top 10 consistently. In 2016, the only other non-Southern state in the top 10 was South Dakota.

Atheism rises in the Netherlands

For the first time in history there are an equal number of religious and non-religious people in the Netherlands, according to a report by Statistics Netherlands. Last year 50 percent of the 18-years-and-older population were atheists, and 50 percent followed some form of religion.

The largest group of believers are Roman Catholics, at 24 percent of the population. Protestants follow at 15 percent. Around 5 percent of the Dutch population are Muslim and 6 percent adhere to other faiths like Buddhism, Judaism and Hinduism.

7% of Australian priests accused of abuse

Seven percent of priests in Australia’s Catholic Church were accused of sexually abusing children over the past several decades, a lawyer said as officials investigating institutional abuse across Australia revealed for the first time the extent of the crisis.

The statistics were released during the opening address of a hearing of Australia’s Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The royal commission — which is Australia’s highest form of inquiry — has been investigating since 2013 how the Catholic Church and other institutions responded to the sexual abuse of children over decades.

The commission has previously heard harrowing testimony from scores of people who suffered abuse at the hands of clergy. But the full scale of the problem was never clear until the commission released the statistics it has gathered.

Commissioners surveyed Catholic Church authorities and found that between 1980 and 2015, 4,444 people reported they had been abused at more than 1,000 Catholic institutions across Australia, said Gail Furness, the lead lawyer assisting the commission. The average age of the victims was 10.5 for girls and 11.5 for boys.

Court: Flower shop owner discriminated

The Christian owner of a Richland, Wash., floral shop violated state laws when she refused to make custom arrangements for a longtime customer’s same-sex wedding, the Washington Supreme Court ruled on Feb. 16.

The decision affirmed the 2015 ruling by Judge Alex Ekstrom in Benton County Superior Court.

Barronelle Stutzman, owner of Arlene’s Flowers, vowed to take her fight to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The state Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision that Stutzman violated the state’s anti-discrimination law and the Consumer Protection Act by declining to provide services based on sexual orientation.

Ekstrom had sided with state Attorney General Bob Ferguson and the plaintiffs, Robert Ingersoll and Curt Freed, both of whom filed lawsuits against Stutzman and her corporation in 2013 shortly after the refusal. The judge also awarded \$1,001 in penalties and costs to the state.

Catholic hospitals fined over contraception law

Twenty-two hospitals in Wisconsin, including SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital in Madison, have been fined by the state for not following a law requiring them to offer emergency contraception to rape victims.

The 2008 state law requires emergency rooms to give information about so-called “morning-after pills” to victims of sexual assault, dispense the drugs at their request and train staff about the drugs.

St. Mary’s was fined \$7,500 in April 2015 for not obeying the three main parts of the law. From June to December 2014, the hospital failed to inform three sexual assault patients about emergency contraception or make it available to them.

Christian-only prayer ruled illegal by court

A Michigan county’s tradition of Christian-only prayers at public meetings violates the U.S. Constitution by promoting one faith over others, a federal appeals court ruled Feb. 15.

In a 2-1 decision, the court ruled in favor of a resident who was offended after he began attending Jackson County Board of Commissioners meetings in 2013. The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said prayer invocations at public meetings can be legal. But in Jackson County, the court noted that only commissioners offered a prayer, not audience members.

“There is no distinction between the government and the prayer-giver: They are one and the same. The prayers, in Bormuth’s words, are literally ‘government speech,’” said judges Karen Nelson Moore and Jane Branstetter Stranch.

32% say you need to be Christian to be American

About one-third of all Americans think that you have to be a Christian to truly be an American — despite the history of religious pluralism that dates back to the nation’s very earliest days.

The Pew Research Center asked residents of numerous nations what it takes to truly belong in their countries. Americans were far more likely than residents of other countries included in the survey to say that religion was key to sharing in the national identity.

Thirty-two percent of Americans said one should be Christian to really be American, compared to just 13 percent of Australians, 15 percent of Can-

nadians and 15 percent of Europeans who felt the same way about belonging to their homelands.

The same number of Americans — 32 percent — said that being born in the United States is key to being an American. More Americans — 45 percent — said that sharing “national customs and traditions” was important, and many more — 70 percent — said being an American meant speaking English.

Religion was the only question on which Americans were an outlier. On birth, language and customs, America was in line with other industrialized nations.



FFRF apprehensive about Gorsuch as court nominee

FFRF is concerned about the nomination of Neil Gorsuch to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Gorsuch, 49, a former Catholic who converted to Episcopalianism, would be the lone Protestant on the Supreme Court, along with five Catholic and three Jewish justices. Gorsuch's educational qualifications are excellent, but his record is disturbing.

Gorsuch, currently on the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, joined the now infamous *Hobby Lobby* decision that for-profit companies have religious rights — a ruling that the Supreme Court upheld, allowing corporations to trample women employees' contraceptive rights in the process.

According to Eric Citron at the Peabody-winning SCOTUSblog, Gorsuch "is skeptical of efforts to purge religious expression from public spaces (like Scalia)." This skepticism — antagonism — is evident in two of Gorsuch's dissents. In each instance, the 10th Circuit decided not to rehear a case that a three-judge panel had decided.

Gorsuch dissented in a case that removed roadside crosses as Establishment Clause violations, when the 10th Circuit decided not to rehear the case. He wrote that it was a "biased presumption" to assume that roadside crosses erected by the government and bearing government insignia are unconstitutional endorsements of religion. Gorsuch thinks the quintessential symbol of Christianity, the cross, stamped with state symbols, is



Gorsuch with Trump

not a religious endorsement.

He also dissented when the 10th Circuit decided not to rehear a case that removed a Ten Commandments monument from a county courthouse in Oklahoma. In that decision, Gorsuch wrote, "public displays focusing on the ideals and history of a locality do not run afoul of the Establishment Clause just because they include the Ten Commandments."

Gorsuch's record reveals that he cannot be trusted to abide by even well-established legal principles within state/church separation law. Federal courts, including the Supreme Court, have recognized that the Latin cross is an exclusively Christian symbol. Yet Gorsuch would have held that Latin crosses and the Ten Commandments — which begin, I AM the LORD thy God, you shall have no other gods before me" — do not endorse Christianity.

"In short, Gorsuch is no friend to the separation of state and church," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. FFRF has about a dozen ongoing Establishment Clause lawsuits, several of which may be Supreme Court-bound.

Church politicking would undermine our republic

The new political setup in Washington, D.C., is hell-bent on converting religious institutions into campaign halls.

The Johnson Amendment bars churches or other 501(c)(3) tax-exempt groups from endorsing or opposing political candidates. It is essential for keeping the foundations of our secular republic intact, but the Trump administration and Congress are going after it with all their might.

FFRF is heavily invested in the current law — and in keeping it intact. For decades, FFRF has been working to ensure enforcement. Since 2006, FFRF has asked the IRS for investigations into 70 situations in which we believe the tax code was violated. Our complaints to the IRS are filed without regard to political affiliation or allegiance.

At the National Prayer Breakfast on Feb. 2, President Trump vowed: "I will get rid of and totally destroy the Johnson Amendment."

Coupled with this was another ominous development. A portion of a leaked presidential executive order draft that *The Nation* magazine obtained also seeks to halt all enforcement of the Johnson Amendment.

Why does all this matter so much?

Named for Lyndon B. Johnson, who sponsored the bill as senator, the Johnson Amendment prohibits tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) groups, including churches, from engaging in partisan, political activities. Thus, it safeguards U.S. democracy by ensuring that tax-exempt money (which is essentially subsidized by taxpayers) is not used for political purposes.

Without the Johnson Amendment, official church doctrine could include which candidate congregants must vote for. The most pernicious

aspect of church politicking is the power which religious leaders hold over the mind of the individual.

The pressure churches would be able to exert — spiritual blackmail would not be an inappropriate term here — would forever alter our political system. Elections would cease to be about ideas and become pandering to churches for souls/votes.

Any church is free to make a choice whether to remain tax-exempt or to decide to forfeit this privilege in order to engage in politics. This prevents the IRS from enforcing that rule. Unlike other 501(c)(3)s, churches do not have to file tax returns with the IRS. Other tax-exempt (c)(3)s must track every dime that comes in and goes out. You can usually find their Form 990 tax returns online, including FFRF's. But churches are financial black holes.

So, with the repeal of the ban on church politicking, you have a quick recipe for churches to absorb millions, possibly billions, for political campaigns, which they can spend on anything they want. This is not about free speech, it's about tax-subsidized political power.

The Johnson Amendment isn't a threat to our democracy. But allowing tax-exempt churches to engage in political campaigning would be. It would open the door to further unregulated money in our politics with zero accountability. Because of their lack of accountability, were tax-exempt churches allowed to engage in electioneering, they could essentially turn into money-laundering operations for political candidates. The result would make the *Citizens United* fallout look like child's play. Our secular republic would be at stake.



FFRF Attorneys Andrew Seidel (left) and Sam Grover discuss the Johnson Amendment in this screengrab from a video produced by FFRF. Go to bit.ly/2lcYwFh to view the discussion online.

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

They who live on love and laughter
Don't mess around with the hereafter.

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shop.ffrf.org

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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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NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER

Contest

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 Madison, Wis., on the weekend of Sept. 15-17), a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

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

Out of the Closet Atheist award

Becoming an ‘Unapologetic Black Atheist’

Nadia Duncan's speech was delivered on Oct. 8, 2016, at FFRF's 39th annual convention in Pittsburgh. She was introduced by FFRF Director of Operations Lisa Strand:

Our student awardee this year is Nadia Duncan. Nadia won first place in FFRF's Michael Hakeem Memorial College Student Essay Contest for freethinkers of color. I'm pleased to announce that the Executive Board of FFRF has now created a new award — endowed by a bequest by David Hudak — to begin in 2017, making permanent an essay contest geared to students of color.

Nadia's memorable essay, “Why I am an unapologetic black atheist,” was printed in the September issue of *Freethought Today*.

Nadia is from Vienna, Va., and is a sophomore at SUNY Purchase College. Her interests include singing, acting, dance, creative writing and reading.

Given the title of your essay, Nadia, FFRF has a plaque for you recognizing you as an “Out of the Closet Atheist.”

By Nadia Duncan

I would like to first and foremost formally thank you all for this honor. Thank you to the current co-presidents of FFRF, Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, for your tireless efforts in the courtroom, in your community and across the country to defend freethought and the constitutional edict of the separation of church and state. Because of your work, we are able to live in a more just and freethinking America. And thank you to my mother, Thembi Duncan, who is here with me today. Without her constantly prodding me to write and submit my essay to the competition, I wouldn't be standing here.

I used to call myself a “soft agnostic.” It was a term that I coined to try and be as inoffensive as possible in my hometown of Vienna 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; therefore, I have claimed a new title: Unapologetic Black Atheist.

I am so grateful that FFRF recognizes the specific challenges that come with being a freethinking person of color. Some think that we cannot live a life free of religion due to our ethnic heritage, but this is narrow-minded and uninformed. It is a myth, in the words of Annie Laurie. The belief that people of color have to take shelter in the arms of organized religion because of the plight of racial oppression is one that stems from fear and a desire to assimilate.

In my research for this speech, I stumbled upon a quote from a book called *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage*. It reads: “The rapid development of African Christianity and its offshoots in the diaspora is rooted in colonial history and resistance to oppression, exploitation and



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Nadia Duncan tells the FFRF convention audience how she became a self-described “Unapologetic Black Atheist.”

slavery.” This notion gave me pause. How could the very religion that was forced upon a people, whose native traditions were stripped away from them, be used as resistance to that very same oppressor?

Promise of salvation

As it turns out, the writers' answer was that the enslaved Africans “embraced” whichever of the various denominations of Christianity that their slaveholders belonged to. They found solace in the promise of heavenly salvation after the horrors of their earthly existence were over. Although I only have the experience of a black American woman in the 21st century, that explanation doesn't sit right with me at all.

I believe that when the enslaved were faced with some of the most horrible treatment that has ever befallen a group of people in human history, they were forced to cling to any idea that allowed them to retain hope and a sense of community. They did the best that they could with unimaginable hardship and strife. The survivors of enslavement passed their newly adopted beliefs down to their progeny, hoping to pass with these

beliefs the strength that would allow them, in turn, to face any of the tribulations of their own lives.

Ironically, through to the Reconstruction era, primarily white Christian spaces were still hostile toward black people, forcing black worshippers to establish their own churches, particularly below the Mason-Dixon Line, because worshipping the right way still didn't mean acceptance into white spaces. Black people were resilient enough to continue on, and the original civil rights movement was housed within the walls of the churches because those were the only socially acceptable places for the black community to congregate.

At that time, it was necessary for survival as a black American to be a member of the Christian community. I don't condemn the adoption of religion through necessity. However, as the tides have rapidly changed through the turn of the millennium, I believe that the time of necessity

has passed. I understand the roots of Christianity within the culture of descendants of the African diaspora, but I choose to reject it.

I wonder what would've happened if the enslaved had been presented with a humanist doctrine after the terrors of middle passage into the New World? Would it have made a difference in how they organized and ultimately fought to end chattel slavery?

With the creation of social media and the growing political climate regarding the U.S. government and its relationship with Christianity, I think that not only is it no longer necessary, but it is no longer possible for black people to utilize the church as a center for political activism. Some leaders of the black religious community are becoming exactly what their predecessors moved to the churches to escape: discriminatory and spiteful to those whom they do not understand.

Education and respect

I grew up with a second degree of separation from religious belief and Christianity. I was born in Greenbelt, Md., my mother's only child, and the fourth of my father's, who had been previously married to my siblings' devout mother before their separation. I spent most of my adolescence in northern Virginia, a unique place that prides itself on being too suburban and affluent to be considered the rural South, but too historically conservative to call itself the North.

During my youth, Christianity was always on the periphery of my experience. My mother and father both, in their own ways, seemed apathetic to the idea, but tiptoed around it and went through the motions when other, more devout family members were present.

What my parents gave me instead of religion was a moral compass anchored in self-confidence. They taught me to respect other people and myself. They taught me that becoming educated would be the most important endeavor of my entire life, and they taught me to stand up for myself

“What my parents gave me instead of religion was a moral compass anchored in self-confidence. They taught me to respect other people and myself.”

— Nadia Duncan



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Nadia Duncan speaks to the audience in the ballroom at the Wyndham Grand Hotel in downtown Pittsburgh.

in the face of adversity and discrimination. My parents provided the foundation for me to flourish and to have the strength to enter the adult world with poise and confidence — and they were able to do it without any added religious pressures.

I was only ever in church services a few times, and always at the suggestion of a second-degree relative. I was given the choice to attend services when I was around 9 years old, and I, obviously, opted out. What could be more boring to a child than sitting still and listening to someone monotonously drone on about things that don't make any sense?

There were a few biblical passages in aging, cracked frames strewn about the house that I grew up in, remnants of my late stepmother, and I would glance at them from time to time. They always put me on edge, but I could never determine exactly why. As I've gotten older, I've realized what made it so off-putting to me when I saw these seemingly inoffensive messages of love, divinity and acceptance — they didn't align with what I was seeing in real life.

The Christianity that I saw was in the vindictive stares from the devout relatives of my half-siblings during my youth and the careful way they spoke to me, as if "bastard child" was stamped on my forehead. It is in the news, Fox News. It is in the evangelical protesters who came to my college campus in Westchester, N.Y., holding

spiteful, grammatically incorrect signs on our Great Lawn and insisting that our liberal, LGBTQ-friendly student body had earned a collective one-way ticket to hell.

Even some members of my own family are guilty of this holier-than-thou attitude that leaves my blood boiling. They act as if their devotion to Christianity somehow makes them incapable of fault. Not only that, but they act as if the faults of others have some sort of direct connection to their spirituality, or lack thereof. It's as if the steps to becoming a good black person can sometimes appear to be hopelessly intertwined with devout Baptist, Methodist, Protestant or Catholic beliefs.

Religion a tool of control

How can people who have experienced marginalization themselves be able to project it onto others so easily? The answer is painfully simple. Across cultures, religion is a tool of control. In the December 1992 issue of FreeThought Today, the late Dr. Michael Hakeem, for whom my honor is named, wrote: "Christianity provided a system of thought, a climate of opinion, that made possible the dehumanization of whole categories of people."

Religious oppression has caused the deaths of millions of people throughout all of human history, all in the name of a faceless, chameleon God

whose will aligns with the will of those men who wish to control others.

I understand that people need comfort when the worst comes into their life. We all want to feel accepted in communities of like-minded people. Religious centers can be places of healing and support for some. But I believe that secular spaces of gathering, just like this one, can be just as supportive and just as rewarding.

Human beings are naturally curious, and we seek solace from the fear of an inevitable death. But to dwell on the possibility of the end of our individual existence is to ignore the plights that exist in the world around us.

We all want to ascribe 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, nor do I altogether vilify organized religious practice. But I do believe that morality comes from within, and not from a devotion to a

series of antiquated religious practices, regardless of their origin.

I believe that true purpose can be established here, during our time on Earth. We each hold the means to our own destinies. 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.

“I believe that morality comes from within, and not from a devotion to a series of antiquated religious practices.”

— Nadia Duncan



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Nadia Duncan and her mother Thembi Duncan.

CRANKMAIL

FFRF presents to you, unedited, several of the letters we have received in the past month questioning our motives, intelligence and general right to be alive.

FFrF: Id like to thank you ass hats for the removal of the veterans kneeling cross, i will be adding one to my yard n making them for others as well since you deem them an insult to your religious beliefs... go fuck yourselves morons — Rick Svihl

general question: Question; I am a Christian. I am not afraid of Zeus because I know he does not exist. Why are you so afraid of God? — Kevin Quillen

Lame: What you are doing is not correct or moral. If something is to have a cross to accurately represent the memorial it should have one. I got a great idea to stop your movement. Its easy. Belle plain or other cities simply sell the 4x6 foot area to a private entity. Then they can put whatever they like including a fuck freedom from religion sign since this is America and we have that freedom. — Justin Sullivan

Removing crosses: This organization is repulsive and should be absolutely shut down. Such ignorance that your organization doesn't understand terrorism or how it keeps happening!! Only cowards with too much time and no courage to fight the real fight make decisions like this and I will do everything that I can to make people aware of this disgraceful organization! 1st amendment right? — Rebecca Sundberg

Heretic: How arrogant for anyone to think that they know better than Jehovah God. Be forewarned, God will not be mocked. Many Atheists have no problem believing in ghosts and spirits since so many people have seen ghosts, but they choose not to believe in God, whom is spirit. You will surely find out when you die just how real God is when you meet Him face to face, and when you are judged for you unbelief. Don't bother responding as I don't care to be harassed and the email address I gave you is not real. — William Bryant

christian beliefs: This country was founded on Christian beliefs. Everyone is entitled to believe, or not believe, as they wish. However, the majority rules. I believe any business or government site should have the right to display the nativity. There is the separation of government and religion, but, again, the United States of America is a Christian country. No one is forcing

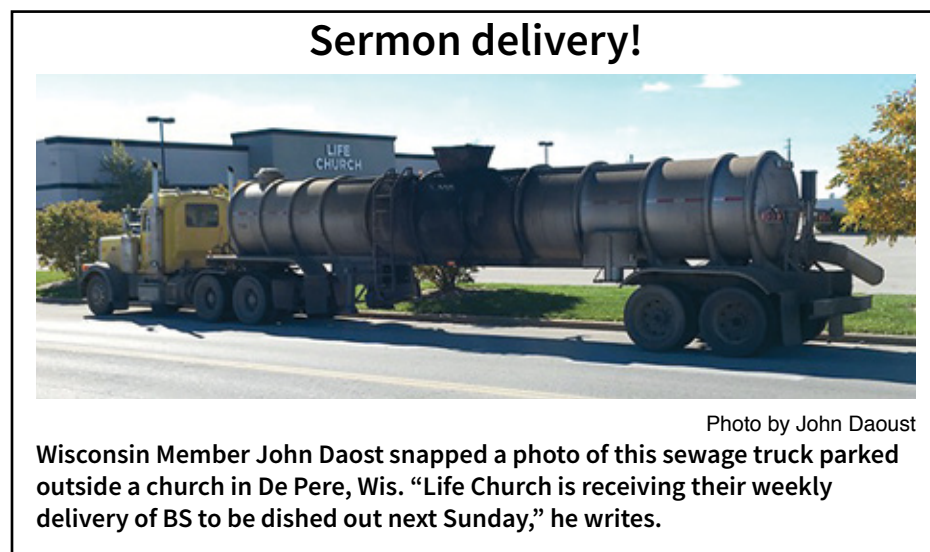


Photo by John Daoust

Wisconsin Member John Daost snapped a photo of this sewage truck parked outside a church in De Pere, Wis. "Life Church is receiving their weekly delivery of BS to be dished out next Sunday," he writes.

you to look at the nativity. God is good all the time! — Linda Zazworsky

Belle Plaine, MN: FFRF is prepositionally challenged. It's freedom "of" religion, not freedom "from." To satisfy the trivial whining of ONE person, you insisted on the removal of the cross from the Belle Plain cemetery - which MANY loved. What symbols does your organization appreciate in a cemetery? Many of us will be developing an objection to them. — Janice Erickson

Horrible people: You are horrible people for making towns and cities remove crosses. I hope you all burn in hell!! This is a nation founded on Christianity if you don't like it get the fuck out! We don't want you anyway! I hope God make the rest of your lives miserable! — Michael Rossman

Worst people: You are the worst kind of people that I've heard of after reading some of the crap that you guys of done I pray you will get eyeball cancer — Joe Nizzard

Sue me!: Hey guys guess what I did??? I prayed in school!!!! Whoops my bad!!! Sue me please!!! You know why I believe in GOD, simple reason, if you look at the beauty of Earth and just the scope of the universe. How can you not tell me there isn't a God! You're telling me in a blink of a second that everthing became form just like that? Oh it just happen chance too! You can't explain why it happen or what not. I'm sorry but it takes more faith to believe in something

to happen out of nothing than to believe that God simply spoke and something came from nothing! — Jay Hammond

Christians: In a letter i saw hall had 26000 members across the United States. 71% of Americans believe or relate to Christianity. So you have nothing but bull crap. Your foundation should be shut down you are nothing but rsdicals — Michael Mann

Satan comes to kill: Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Islam comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Obama comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Freedom from Religious foundation comes to steal, kill, and destroy. You might want to look over Islamic Laws becomes Islam is now demanding Sharia Law in America and by July America will not have any more freedoms. August 21, plan between then and September 23 to have a nuclear attack in every major city in the USA. Hoorah to 324 Americans dead is your slogan from here on out. All white, black, Jews and Christians must die in the USA by September 23rd. My Curch complaint is to shut down every Islamic Mosque in America because America died from within because Islam is taking over from within. — John Ashcraft

Your organization: I pledged to see you BASTARDS destroyed and removed from this planet. May you BASTARDS burn in Hell! — Thomas Greene

End of the libe: Send another fucking letter to another school or town threatening them if

they don't bow down and kiss your ass, and you will feel my fucking wrath. GET THE FUCK OUT OF THIS COUNTRY NOW — Steven Jung

Your a bunch of scummy creeps!!! Trump will clean u up>: kkdj kkkkkkkk ill hhhg — Jean McSchmidt

My opinion of ffrf: Why don't you people get a real life and a real job. You're just a bunch of pseudo-intellectual malcontents who have nothing going on in your lives other than foisting you agenda on the rest of us Americans. I am so sorry you shit heads are offended by nativity scenes. Go and throw your little whiney ass temper tantrums you pansy-assed fucktards! Maybe it's about time someone took all of you out of sight!!!! — Robert Bishop

Coach prayer: Your foundation makes me sick. To put a man against the wall because he knelt to pray with his players is absolutely UN-American. You're a bunch of busy bodies poking your nose into business that is not your own. — Chris Allen

Complaint: every time something happens at the school someone goes running to you complaining about what I kids doing in school I kind of wish this would stop is freedom of religion not Freedom against religion but I think I'm just going to pull my kid out of school and homeschool him and teach him the right way and give him a better education I do not appreciate you all — Scott Lamar

God loves you: America would be better off if people like you would just guru your heard — Amy Nelson

Ideology: This so called 'foundation' is nothing but a radical activist group trying to stop Christians and their freedoms! Soon u will be no longer a organization, because Christianity will prevail! If anyone doesn't like the constitutional rights here, leave! Here is my freedom of speech, which u will not take from me.....all of u can go straight to HELL! We r not going to continue to take this! — Denise Magliochette

Ignorant worthless Anti Americans: You are a poor excuse for human beings. Trolling and praying on people that are minding their own business. It is worthless scum like you that is killing the moral fabric of this country. There is a special place in hell for people like you. — Jim Ton

prayer: I am going to pray for all of you while I am working here at my government job. — Ralph Nagle

Emperor Has No Clothes award

Seeking the unseen: Gravitational waves

Here is an edited version of the speech given by Lawrence Krauss at FFRF's 39th convention in Pittsburgh on Oct. 8, 2016. He was introduced by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker:

The Freedom From Religion Foundation's "Emperor Has No Clothes" award is given to public figures who make known their dissent from religion. Lawrence Krauss is an internationally known theoretical physicist whose studies include the early universe, the nature of dark matter, general relativity and neutrino astrophysics.

He grew up in Toronto and received his undergrad in both mathematics and physics at Carleton. He has a Ph.D. in physics from MIT. He joined the Harvard Society of Fellows on the Yale faculty as an assistant and associate professor. In 1993, he was named professor of physics, professor of astronomy and chair of the Department of Physics at Case Western Reserve University. In 2008, Krauss became the foundation professor in the School of Earth and Space Exploration, and is the inaugural director of the Origins Project at Arizona State University. Lawrence is author of more than 300 scientific publications and more than a dozen books, including *A Universe from Nothing: Why There is Something Rather than Nothing*, and *The Physics of Star Trek*. His upcoming book will be called *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.

He also wrote an article last year in the *New Yorker* on how the U.S. needs an atheist Supreme Court justice.

By Lawrence Krauss

Thank you very much. This is truly an amazing organization and award. I feel very privileged to be here and to be speaking to you.

What I want to do today is talk a little bit about how science treats problems that seem like they're not solvable or seem like they might be almost metaphysical or religious. We get embroiled in the petty problems of the world around us, and one of the great things about the field that I work in is that it points out that those problems are really irrelevant.

This is a recent Hubble Space Telescope deep field picture (see photo). Every spot in that picture, every dot that you can see, is a galaxy, not a star. There are over 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe, and those small, faint, blue galaxies are about 8 billion or 9 billion light years away. That means that the light from those objects took that long to get to us.

That means that the light came from before the Earth and sun formed because the Earth and sun are about 4.5 billion years old. Since the lifetime of a main sequence star, like our sun, is about 10 billion years, and a lot of those galaxies are 9 billion years old, or the picture is 9 billion years old, so now it's 9 billion years later. That means many of the stars in this image are no longer around. They burned out. And any civilizations around those stars have burned out. Any civilizations that had awful presidential candidates have burned out. They're gone. No one's going to ever know about them and their history.

And similarly, if the light from our sun is eventually captured by another



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Lawrence Krauss holds his Emperor Has No Clothes award after receiving it from FFRF Co-President Dan Barker on Oct. 7, 2016, at FFRF's convention in Pittsburgh.

er civilization that might go around a new star and one of those systems, it may see us. But they'll see us 10 billion years from now, and by then our sun will be gone and our civilization will be gone and no one will care. It's over. And that's just the way it is.

Uniform universe

When you look at this image, you may ask which direction in the universe is it? And the answer is, it doesn't really matter, because every direction in the universe looks identical. There is the same number of galaxies out there as out here. Anywhere you look, there is the same number.

But that's a real problem, a metaphysical problem, which led to much of the research in physics that I am now involved in. We think we have a solution to it, but to understand that, we have to think about the origins of the universe. We want to look back to the beginning of time.

It turns out we can't look back to the beginning of time using light. If we do, we can only go back as far as the cos-

mic microwave background radiation, when the universe was about 300,000 years old. It represents a wall in the universe, essentially. If I try and look outside this room, I can't look outside the wall because it's opaque. Well, if we look back in the early universe, the universe was hotter and hotter and hotter, and at a certain point it was so hot that neutral matter couldn't exist. And electrons are stripped away from protons and formed plasma. And that material is opaque.

So if we try and look back to the beginning of time, we can't, because between us and the beginning of time, the universe was opaque. We can only look back to the moment the universe became transparent. Just like I can look back at all the way to that wall over there because the air is transparent.

This is a baby picture of the universe (see photo next page). A neonatal picture of the universe, when it was about 300,000 years old. And color here represents temperature. So there are hot spots and cold spots. And this is before galaxies, before stars formed,

and it looks like the universe has a lot of lumps, and it does. The average temperature of this radiation coming at us today is about 3 degrees above absolute zero. It was 3,000 degrees when it left that surface, but the universe has expanded by a factor of 1,000 in that time, and it's cooled and it's now 3 degrees. And it turns out the difference between the hot spots and the cold spots here is 1/100,000 of a degree. So, this is actually incredibly smooth.

And that exacerbates the problem I told you about earlier. The galaxies may look the same everywhere, but why is the temperature of the universe the same absolutely everywhere? And where did the lumps come from?

These lumps are important because they're going to collapse to form all the stars and galaxies and everything you see in the visible universe. Well, it turns out, we think we understand that. The same thing solves both problems of why the universe is the same temperature everywhere and why there are lumps. And it's really kind of amazing: quantum mechanics. We think quantum mechanical processes in the early universe produced all the lumps I'm seeing in this room. All the lumps we see in the universe. In fact, the universe is an example of macroscopic quantum mechanics.

Looking back

If we want to try and understand where all this comes from, we've got to look back through that plasma. If I want to look through that wall, I might want to use X-rays, because then I could see through the wall. I've got to find something that will, in this case, not interact strongly with all that material so it can come from the Big Bang all the way through that plasma and get all the way to our eyes today. Well, we have to think of something that interacts much more weakly than light because light can't make it through. So what's the weakest thing in the universe? Gravity.

Some of you may not feel that gravity is weak, but that's because the entire Earth is attracting every atom in your body. But the gravitational force between each of your atoms and every atom in the Earth is so small you'd never be able to measure it. So, gravity is much weaker than electromagnetism. Now, about 200 years ago, James Clerk Maxwell showed us that if I shake an electric charge, I produce an electromagnetic wave.

Einstein in 1916 demonstrated that gravity was really an effect of the curvature of space. That space itself responds to the presence of matter and energy by curving, by expanding, by contracting. And, therefore, each of you is curving space around you, but not by any amount you can see, because gravity is so weak. But every time I do this [waves his arms around], and I do this a lot, I'm creating a disturbance that produces a ripple in space that travels out at the speed of light. Not an electromagnetic wave, but a gravitational wave. Every time I'm doing this [waves arms], I'm producing a gravitational wave.

Scientists decided that we should try and detect these. So we built the largest gravitational wave detector in the world. There are two of them actually. One is in Hanford, Wash., and there's

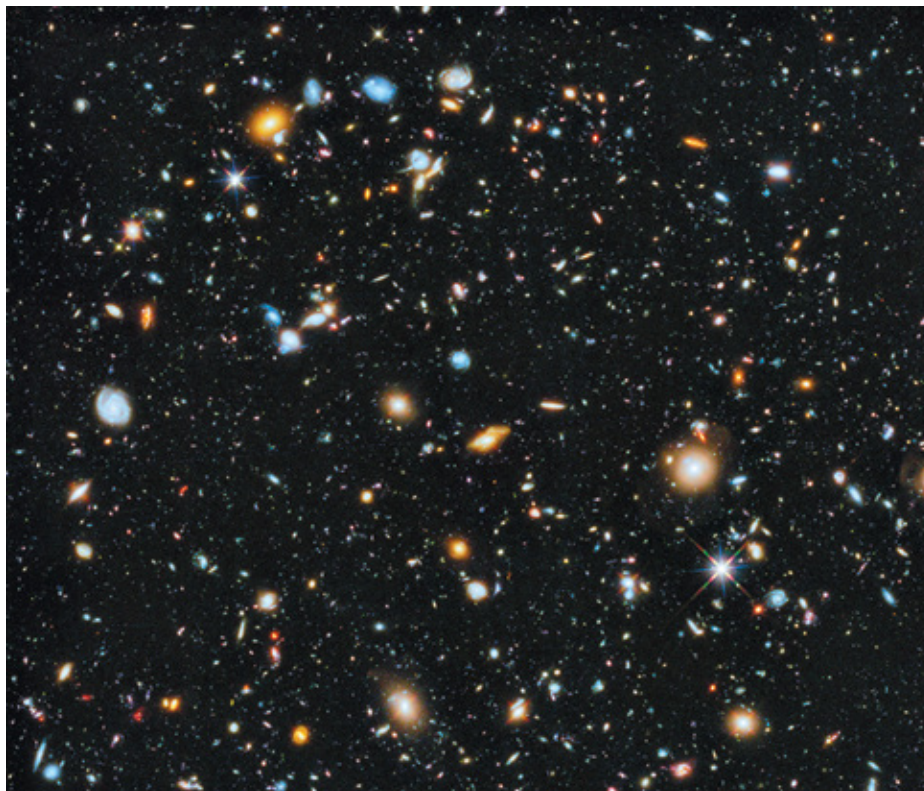


Photo courtesy of NASA

This photo of the Hubble Deep Field shows a tiny portion of the sky, and almost all the points of light seen in the photo are not of stars, but rather whole galaxies.

an identical set-up in Livingston, La. Each detector has two perpendicular arms, each four kilometers long, and they're identical.

Long-awaited signal

Now, this detector was built in the 1990s and 2000s, but it didn't have quite the sensitivity we thought you'd need. It could only detect a change in length equal to one-hundredth the size of a proton. So it got upgraded. In 2015 it achieved the sensitivity of one-thousandth the size of a proton. They were going to turn it on and do an engineering run, which is what you do with big, new machines. Ray Weiss, who was the director of this, said, "Don't take any data, because we're just doing an engineering run." But, of course, they didn't listen to him and they turned it on. One hour later, they got a signal that we've been waiting for since Einstein.

And, in fact, it was a signal that came from an event that happened 1.3 billion years ago. Here is a gold-plated event of a gravitational wave. This discovery could not have been made before last year because we didn't have the technology — the quantum technology, the optical technology — to build devices that were sensitive enough to this. That's the first part.

But the second part is, when you see something like this, it only means something if you can compare it to something you can predict. Because if you can't predict it in science, it's no good. Science is not a story like religion. It makes predictions. In order to be able to make that prediction, it meant we had to be able to calculate what would happen when two massive black holes collided, and that is incredibly complex because the gravity is very strong. We never witnessed gravity that strong before.

So everything came together. The earliest we could have detected these gravitational waves was Sept. 14, 2015. And that's exactly when we saw it.

What they discovered, by doing this amazing technology that no science fiction writer would ever suggest you could do, is an event that is equally interesting.

[Showing simulation on screen] These are two black holes 1.3 billion light years away. What's amazing is these black holes are orbiting each other 200 times a second. Not once a year, like the Earth orbits the sun, but 200 times a second. And in a final hurrah, they will collide. What you get is a massive gravitational wave emission.

In two-tenths of a second, that system emitted three times the mass of our sun in gravitational waves, which means that it emitted more energy in gravitational waves than all the rest of the stars in the visible universe are emitting right now. That's amazing. You couldn't make this stuff up.

New astronomy field

The real universe is just so much more interesting than the universe of myth and superstition. And we've discovered that this actually happens. This means we're living in a time that is very similar to the time when Galileo first took his telescope and looked up at the moons of Jupiter. He created a whole new field of astronomy. And this will be a new field of astronomy.

Gravitational wave astronomy will open up a new window on the universe and, if history is any guide, every time we open a new window on the universe, we're surprised.

But what about gravitational waves from the beginning of the universe?

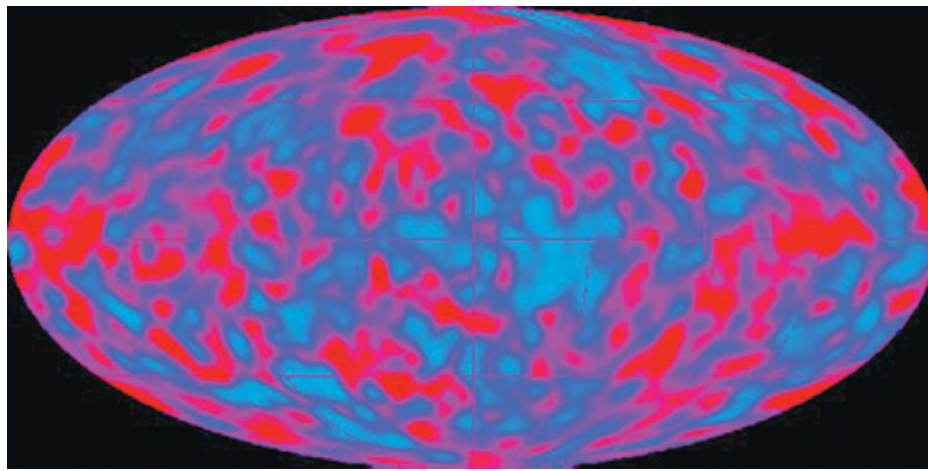


Photo courtesy of NASA

This image is of the cosmic microwave background radiation, taken by the NASA Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE) satellite. It is a snapshot of the universe about 300,000 years after the Big Bang, when the universe contained only radiation (photons) and matter had not yet formed.

How can we look for them? There is a device that's been built to look for those called the BICEP detector at the South Pole. This detector looks for the cosmic microwave background radiation, which only comes from the universe that's 200,000 years old. But it's looking for an imprint in there that comes from the beginning of time.

This detector was designed to look for a signal from the Big Bang. It's actually designed to look for a signal from a moment after the Big Bang. But it is a phenomenon that we think happened when the universe was a millionth of a billionth of a billionth of a billionth of a second old.

We think at that very early moment, our universe expanded incredibly rapidly, increasing in volume by a factor of 10 to the 90th in a millionth of a billionth of a billionth of a billionth of a second. It went from the size of a single atom to the size of a basketball. And that was because it was an incredible amount of energy stored in empty space.

Now, one of the reasons we think that happened, besides the fact that our particle physics ideas suggest it might, is it also solves that problem of why the universe looks the same in all directions.

Universal inflation

So we needed to look for something else that would be unambiguous evidence that inflation happened. When you puff up a universe by a factor of 10 to the 90th, that's going to generate gravitational waves. And the unambiguous prediction is that enduring inflation gravitational waves of all frequencies are generated and we can look for them.

The cosmic microwave background is caused because you've got free electrons that are about to be captured by hydrogen and before that, just before their capture, they scatter light to your eyes. Now, if the universe is uniform all around them, the same temperature all around them, they scatter light in the same intensity in all directions. But if a gravitational wave comes by, its size is the size of the visible universe at that time. It causes the universe to get a little smaller in one direction and a little bigger in the other direction. And that means the electron will see radiation that's a little more intense in one direction and less intense in the other direction. And when it scatters that radiation, it'll be polarized. That means it'll be more intense in one direction than another.

Four years ago, the BICEP detector was looking for that polarization, the kind of signal we would expect to see if inflation happened. (A signal that I'm happy to say I had predicted about 20 years earlier.) But it produces a kind of snake-like polarization pattern. In

February of 2013, they produced this image. And it shook the world because if this were true, this would be perhaps the most important image in the history of science because it would be the first detection of gravitational waves. This would be a signal from the very beginning of time.

These would be gravitational waves generated when the universe was a millionth of a billionth of a billionth of a billionth of a second old and they'd allow us to test our ideas about the origin of the universe. You notice I said, "If it's true," because we just don't know. It turns out this is called a multiple expansion, but there is the data and there is the prediction from inflation you see. It looks great.

Extraordinary evidence

The reason I wanted to present this to you today is because it's the difference between science and religion. There were two groups of people looking for the same thing. It was the Holy Grail, if you'll forgive me, of cosmology. And these guys wanted those guys to be wrong and those guys wanted these guys to be wrong. So what did they do? Did they cut each other's

heads off? No. They said, "Let's do a joint analysis."

They didn't care who was right, they just wanted to know what was right. They knew that one of them was wrong, or maybe they were both wrong. But all they wanted to find out was what the answer was. And to me, therefore, even though many people say, "Oh, it's unfortunate that maybe this experiment was wrong," it's one of the great examples of the history of science because it shows how science works. They got together and they came up with a joint analysis.

And so, if you actually look at their joint paper, everyone says it implies that gravitational waves haven't been seen. There's an 8 percent chance that they're not there. And for physicists, that means there's no evidence that they're there.

If you're going to make an extraordinary claim, as Carl Sagan said, you've got to have extraordinary evidence. And 92 percent just doesn't cut it. You need 99.9995 percent confidence before we can say we made a discovery. That's what we needed before we claimed we discovered the Higgs boson.

The thing about science that's really important is that we try to prove ourselves wrong as much as we try to prove ourselves right. And only after we've convinced ourselves, after trying to prove ourselves wrong, do we claim we're right.

But I want to close by asking what would we learn if that was really there? Because we don't know. We're doing new experiments to see if it's really there. New experiments with greater sensitivity. If it's real, we have seen a signal from the beginning of time.

No supernatural events

I wrote a book called *A Universe from Nothing* a bunch of years ago, which tried to take back these

See Krauss on page 16



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Krauss walked around the convention hall floor while giving his speech, using photos and images to help illustrate his points.

‘My journey started with questions’

FFRF member shares nonbelief thoughts with pastor in series of newspaper columns

FFRF Life Member Linda Allewalt was asked by a local pastor in Kentucky to write a series of columns for the newspaper on the perspectives of nonbelievers.

“He was concerned about the increasing religious polarization going on in our community and he wanted to demonstrate how opposite opinions could not only be tolerated, but celebrated,” Allewalt wrote to FFRF.

So the pastor — Dave Charlton of First Christian Church — and Allewalt were able to get the editor of the Shelbyville, Ky., Sentinel-News to agree to run a series of five weekly columns by each. The columns ran side by side.

Neither Allewalt or Charlton knew what the other was writing, but for the final column they could respond to what the other wrote in previous columns.

The first installment was an overview of each writer’s journey to their respective religious worldviews.

“My journey started with questions — basic curiosity,” Allewalt wrote. “I believed in and mentally accepted the basic tenets of Protestantism in essence because people I loved and trusted told me it was all a true description of how the universe works. If I had been born in Pakistan, I’d be practicing Islam; India, Hinduism.

“In short, I found the gods (there are at least two) depicted through those mythologies to be petty, violent, exclusive and immoral. And I have to include the god of Jesus in that description.



Linda Allewalt gestures at a sign in a cabin she and her husband rented near Gardiner, Mont. “Turns out the owners of the ‘resort’ were quite religious and made sure that you knew it, both with the interior and exterior décor,” Linda wrote. “When we walked up to the door, I pointed out this sign to my husband and we both laughed.”

“I concluded I didn’t need Christianity in order to be a good and moral person.

“What I am describing is a huge change of mind. It is a movement from what I called ‘boxed-in’ thinking to freethinking.”

The following are excerpts from Allewalt’s columns on the given topics.

Separation of church and state

“The ‘God’ of Jefferson, Franklin, Madison, Adams and many of the men in the room hashing out the Constitution was not in any sense the Christian ‘god.’ So claims that this country was founded as a ‘Christian nation’ are so far off as to be comical. Except it’s not funny.

“Now we have legislators enacting resolutions to recognize the ‘Year of the Bible.’ We have Congress inviting the pope to address them. If you know anything about the Founders, you would know

that this single act would have them jumping out of their seats in protest.

“Despite all of these inroads into government, members of the dominant religion, Christianity, complain bitterly in courts and media that their ‘religious freedom’ is being violated.

“For an atheist, the message from our government and society is even louder and clearer than the church bells ringing out Protestant hymns on a daily basis. ‘You don’t belong.’”

Perception of the other side

“‘A good Christian man . . . a woman of strong Christian values . . .’ How many times do we see this description used for politicians in general remarks about someone? What does that mean? Are religious people overall more moral than nonreligious people? Is there a difference in their morality? The short answer is ‘no.’

“Either people have a sense of compassion or they don’t. That sense is not dependent on having a god or being godless. Meaning and purpose in life come out of a sense of awe about

our place in the universe and again out of our desires to increase love and happiness in our fellow human beings lives, and not from some unevicenced fantasy about an eternal extension of our consciousness.

A look at science and religion

“We need scientifically literate people in our future generations or we as a country will fall further behind other countries than we already have.

“Forty percent of the people in this country claim the creation story is the accurate explanation for human origins.

“We still have a significant part of our population who feel that their religion is so threatened by science that they must find a way to silence it or diminish its influence. Or, label it ‘atheism!’”

A discussion of belief and nonbelief

“All ideas and claims in this world should be subject to scrutiny, criticism, demands for evidence and even sometimes satire and ridicule. Attempts to hold religious ideas (or atheistic ideas) ‘untouchable’ are wrong in a free and democratic society.

“Rational thinking is not so much a condition, but a tool to probe ideas to determine if there is evidence to support those ideas and claims about the nature of the world/universe. I would say that atheists use this tool for more than religionists.

“Religions tend to build fictions and present them as reality.

“If the emotion of love is a product of chemistry, physics, physiology and biology of a healthy brain, then I say, ‘Wow! Aren’t brains marvelous? The universe is awesome all by itself. It has no need for the supernatural to enhance it.’”

“I concluded I didn’t need Christianity in order to be a good and moral person.

— Linda Allewalt

Krauss

Continued from page 15

questions from religion, such as “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Well, you don’t need supernatural shenanigans to get something from nothing. But at the time, I wrote about the possibility that most of us think is true right now among physicists — that there is probably more than one universe, or probably many, many universes, out there. Something we call a multiverse.

What happens is there’s a local place where that exponential expansion

stops. And when that happens, all the energy and empty space gets converted into particles and radiation in a big bang. So our universe originated when inflation ended at that point. But in other places in this multiverse, inflation is still going on and there may be today a universe just forming and it goes on in most of these models forever. It’s eternal. And the really strange thing is, it turns out that the way inflation ends in each universe can produce different laws of physics in each universe.

That may explain the properties of our universe because it may be, as it turns out, in some universes there may be a lot of galaxies and in some universes there may not be many because the conditions aren’t right. And it could just be that the properties of our universe are what they are because if you didn’t have galaxies, you wouldn’t have stars, if you didn’t have stars, you wouldn’t have planets, if you didn’t have planets, you wouldn’t have astronomers.

So the universe is the way it is because there are astronomers here to measure it. Which sounds religious, but it’s not. It’s just cosmic natural selection. You would not expect to find yourself in a universe in which you couldn’t live. But the neat thing is this speculation may now be testable. Not directly, because we’ll never know those other universes exist, but



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Krauss signs a copy of his book, *A Universe From Nothing*, for FFRF Volunteer Liz Vaughn. Krauss became a Life Member at the convention.

if we could measure gravitational waves from inflation and demonstrate that inflation happened, and measure the properties of inflation, we’d be able to know if inflation is eternal. And if that’s the case, we would know that there are other universes out there.

In this case you could have a theory, a grand unified theory, that would explain everything we can see about the universe in which we live. And so I’m amazed that we are potentially on the threshold of knowing whether we are alone in a cosmic sense. Whether there are other universes, or whether

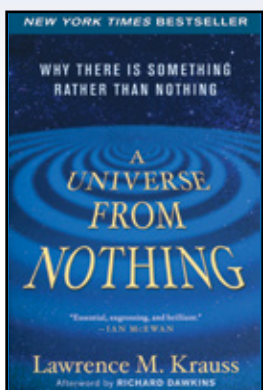
our universe is unique. And, of course, if there are a multitude of universes then that makes, of course, God even more redundant.

So, let me close by going back to this picture from the beginning of my talk. When I look at a picture like this, I think about the civilizations that may have died there on these planets that may have been around these stars. I think about why the universe is the way it is, and it caused us to do the work we’ve done over the last 40 years. This is spiritual. This is all. But this beats the spirituality of religion because it’s real.

A UNIVERSE FROM NOTHING

Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing

By Lawrence M. Krauss



Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

Evangelicals inconsistent on animal care

Their official statement doesn't mesh with bible

By Brian Bolton



Brian Bolton

We share our lives with 150 million dogs and cats, and 10 million birds, fish, reptiles, and small mammals. More than 1 billion farm animals are raised and slaughtered for food in the United States each year. We coexist with untold billions of wild animals. However, we still tolerate the horrific killing of hundreds of millions of sentient creatures for sport, the fashion industry, traditional medicine, and by motor vehicles.

Possibly after considering similar information and sobering facts about animals in America, Barrett Duke of the Southern Baptist Convention, working with several other religious leaders, has drafted an “Evangelical Statement on Responsible Animal Care.” Christine Gutleben of the Humane Society praised the statement, saying that it is the result of wise and thoughtful reflection and has the potential to create enormous good. I think that her effusive endorsement is unjustified.

To establish a foundation for principles of compassionate care and responsible rule over animals, the statement's authors outlined three requirements. First, they declared that their thinking must come from scripture, with the goal of identifying key bible passages. Second, they specified that the emergent guidelines must be based not only in scripture, but also in God's unchanging character. Third, they asserted that humans are expected to show the same respect for animals that God does.

Although the authors refer to themselves as evangelicals, they are, in fact, fundamentalists, i.e., they believe the bible to be literally true. The belief that bible stories actually happened—that biblical events really occurred—is the hallmark of fundamentalism. The necessary implication of this theological commitment is that all of scripture is relevant to discussion of any issue, not just carefully selected verses and passages.

Contradictions

After establishing the theological foundation for their principles of animal care, the authors proceed to completely contradict their premise of absolute scriptural truth. They do this by deploying the fundamentalist exegetical strategies of textual selectivity (cherry-picking) and textual omission (disregarding or rejecting). In other words, they identify and cite verses and passages that are supportive of their preconceived perspective, while ignoring unpalatable material that tells a very different story.

The authors assert that “God uniquely created humans in his own image and likeness, in contrast to animals, who are created after their own kind.” Because of this unique creation, they say, “Humans have greater worth than every animal and were appointed by God to rule over animals.” They declare further that, “Scripture is clear on humanity's greater value, uniqueness, and rule, and sole status

as God's image bearers.”

These statements express unequivocally the fundamentalist doctrine of special creation of humankind, which is thoroughly contradicted by the overwhelming evidence for evolution. The false claim of human separateness from and superiority over all other animals is the basis for the dogmatic assertion of human exceptionalism and the pernicious doctrine of dominionism.

Credit where due

It is important to give the statement's authors credit where it is warranted. They assert that God commands humans to give animals the respect they deserve, because all animals have inherent God-given value. They declare that cruelty toward animals is sinful and an affront to God. Furthermore, they say that humans are obligated to work for the protection and preservation of all of God's animals.

This highly commendable and appropriate condemnation of animal cruelty and endorsement of humane treatment of animals is weakened considerably by the authors' final phrase: “while prioritizing human needs.” Another qualifying condition obliquely cautions that “any attempt to idolize or divinize animals should be rejected.” What exactly do these statements mean?

Another series of three declarations that focus on God's character further clarifies the fundamentalist view of the relationships between humans and animals: (a) “All animals ultimately belong to God and exist to bring him praise and reveal his character,” (b) “Humans' responsible rule over and compassionate care for animals is rooted in the unchanging character of God,” and (c) “After the flood, God caused all animals to fear humankind and gave them to humans for food.”

In other words, animals are God's possessions and therefore he can do whatever he chooses to do with them. This includes using animals as innocent sacrificial victims. Is this the same respect for animals that humans are expected to show?

Now we come to the greatest failure of the “Statement on Animal Care.” Even though Barrett Duke said that everything in the statement is based in scripture, it is the omission of many of God's edicts and actions concerning animals that stand out. The strong condemnation of animal cruelty is mitigated substantially by God's horrific penchant for

animal sacrifice and his many other immoral uses of animals.

Animal sacrifice

Animal sacrifice is a major requirement in God's theology of worship. Twenty chapters of the Hebrew Testament books are dedicated to specifying in precise detail how animals are to be sacrificed. In addition to lengthy discourses on ritual methods, three dozen gory descriptions of sacrificial episodes are reported.

The sacrificial animals are killed and their blood is sprinkled or smeared on the altar. Then the carcasses are burned. While the typical ritual sacrifice involves a few dozen animals, there are some that are especially repugnant for their huge numbers alone. Four horrific episodes entail the slaughter of tens of thousands of oxen, sheep, and goats as worshipful tributes to a bloodthirsty God.

Illustrating how important animal sacrifice is to God, he stopped a plague he started as punishment for his chosen people that had already killed 70,000 men, only after a proper sacrifice was completed. He also threatened to kill Aaron if he entered the Holy Place without proper preparation involving an elaborate animal sacrifice.

Considering God's proclivity for animal sacrifice, an observer would expect the fundamentalists to leap to the defense of Santerian priests who routinely make offerings of domestic animals in their services and Hmong shamans who sometimes kill dogs as part of their healing rituals. Most Americans regard these inhumane practices with disgust and horror. Yet, a federal court struck down a Hialeah, Fla., ordinance banning animal sacrifice, ruling that it was aimed at religion. Likewise, the bible clearly approves of animal sacrifice.

The writers of the statement may have anticipated the introduction of the gruesome subject of animal sacrifice by unfriendly critics, because they invoked a standard fundamentalist exegetical technique for no apparent reason. They state that any ethical norms derived from the Old Testament must be applied today “in light of the New Testament.” In other words, Hebrew Testament principles may not be applicable today if an excuse can be located in the Christian Covenant.

This exegetical ploy will not work for three reasons. First, God instigated the blood sacrifice of his only begotten son, who is often referred to as the “Lamb of God.” Second, Jesus' parents conducted a sacrifice upon his birth as required by God's law. Third, Jesus himself endorsed animal and human sacrifice.

Innocent animals were routinely killed in the hundreds of massacres and slaughters that dominate Hebrew bible history. Some especially detestable instances of animal cruelty were portrayed in Joshua's intentional crippling of horses, Solomon's abuse of 300 foxes, Balaam's beating of his donkey, and the stoning and burning of Achan's livestock, with him and his family, because he stole some “devoted things” from God.

Americans have a profound appreciation and admiration for our best friend, the dog. Especially praiseworthy are the canine traits of steadfast loyalty and constant companionship. How ironic that none of the bible's 40 references to dogs are positive. Dogs are typically viewed with disgust and are often described as scavengers. For example, Jezebel's corpse was eaten by dogs, with the exception of her skull, feet, and hands. Dog is also a derogatory label for homosexuals. Jesus referred to those he disrespected as dogs, as well as calling them swine and vipers.

Meat industry

The statement's authors present a vigorous defense of the God-given human right to kill animals for food. This carnivorous plea occurs on seven different pages of the 10-page document. Particularly noteworthy are the assertions that eating meat is affirmed in the New Testament, that the bible does not mandate a vegetarian or vegan diet, and that God provided animals as food for humans beginning with Noah and continuing with Jesus and Paul, since it is alleged both ate meat. The writers are diligent lobbyists for the meat industry and they clearly reject any modern doctrine of “animal rights.”

The Humane Society Legislative Fund periodically evaluates all 535 U.S. senators and representatives on their support for animal welfare issues, such as animal cruelty, horse slaughter, endangered species, cosmetics testing and wildlife trafficking. Conservative politicians typically receive low scores on a scale of zero to 100. Prominent conservatives with scores of zero are: Ted Cruz, Louie Gohmert, Trey Gowdy, Charles Grassley, Steve King, Rand Paul, Marco Rubio, and Jeff Sessions. For these lawmakers, their zero scores are seemingly a badge of honor, reflecting complete disdain for the welfare of animals.

The “Evangelical Statement on Responsible Animal Care” asserts that God commands humans to show respect and compassion for animals, including the praiseworthy condemnation of animal cruelty and the exhortation to work for the protection and preservation of all of God's animals.

Unfortunately, God's extensive and abhorrent abuse of animals for his own selfish purposes is entirely inconsistent with the statement's call for respect and compassion for animals. Specifically, God's horrific obsession with animal sacrifice thoroughly contradicts the statement's condemnation of wanton cruelty to animals. This is most certainly why the authors disregarded this gruesome content.

It is exceedingly difficult for readers to have any confidence in the statement's conclusions because they do not accurately reflect God's character and behavior as recorded in the bible. Much of the content of scripture is unacceptable to most Christians and virtually all Americans. Of course, the vast majority don't know how terrible it really is — for the simple reason that few people read the bible.

Life Member Brian Bolton is a retired psychologist, humanist minister and sponsor of FFRF's graduate essay contest. The executive wing of Freethought Hall bears his name.

LETTERBOX

Thin-skinned Christians inspire FFRF donation

Watching Fox News, I saw the report on Boca Raton, Fla., about the vandalized FFRF displays. The mayor was outraged about the “hate speech” that might incite Christians to do bad things to others. They are certainly thin-skinned and easily offended. How paranoid can they be?

I’m inspired to send a donation to FFRF to keep up the good work and to educate the people. The gentleman [Preston Smith] in Florida should be given a commendation.

William Alexander
Texas

Newspaper redesign a significant improvement

Whenever a periodical changes its design, I always hate it. There are usually strange font and color choices, cases of poor contrast, text either unreadably small or silly big, and numerous other issues that make it harder to read than the previous design. However, you folks really nailed it with the new design of Freethought Today. This is the first periodical redesign I’ve seen that I think is a significant improvement over the previous. My compliments to those who chose the new layout and fonts, as well as those who elected to leave the basic text font alone. Kudos and thanks to all on a fine job!

Karl Wiegers
Oregon

Good job on new look of Freethought Today

Just received the new Freethought Today and want to say I like the new banner and layout. Good job to all involved! Keep up the good work and may we all survive the present administration.

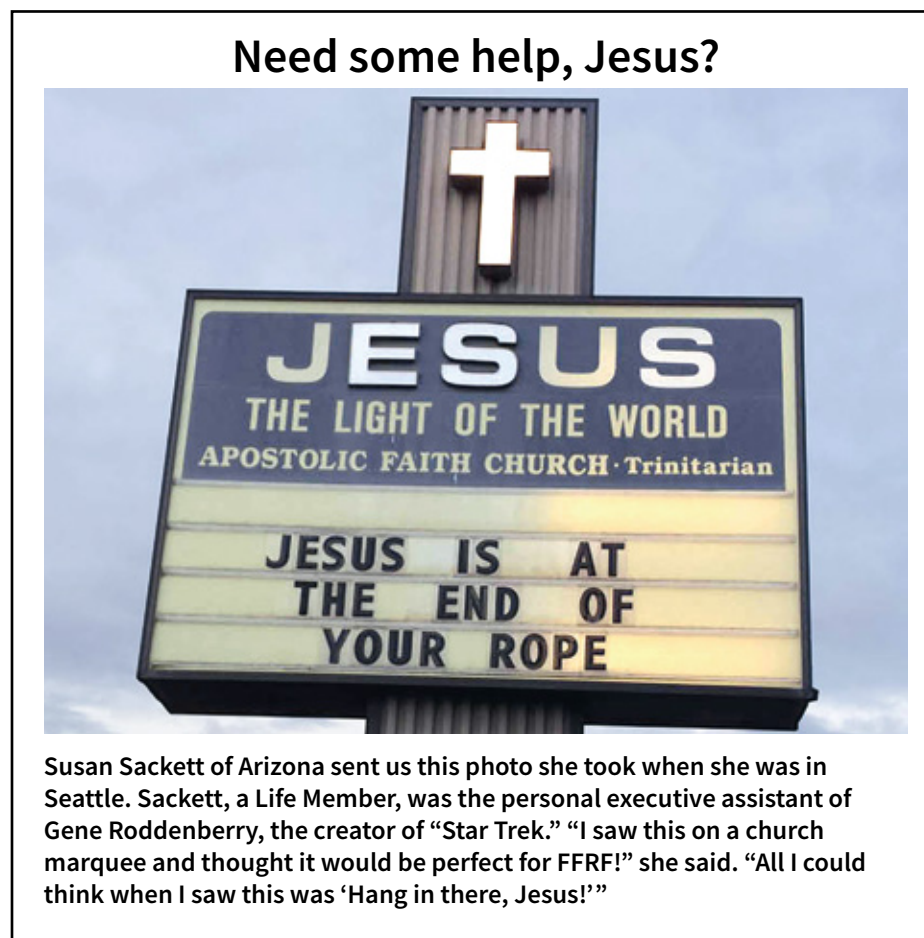
RESIST!
Scott Baker
California

FFRF validates concerns over church/state wall

I write as someone who had to listen to bible verses and say the Lord’s Prayer (although I didn’t say it) for 10 years in Massachusetts public schools in the 1950s. These recitations were always coupled with the Pledge of Allegiance, so as a pupil I always assumed that religion and citizenship were intertwined. This created confusion for me, especially since I came from a secular home. I figured there must be something wrong with me, and looking back, I think it was a cruel thing to do to a child.

Although prayer has been outlawed in schools, the new administration threatens to undo some of the laws maintaining separation of church and state. Organizations such as FFRF fight to keep that wall, and for that I am very grateful. I feel that someone is not only listening to my concerns, but validating them.

Alison Holt
California



Susan Sackett of Arizona sent us this photo she took when she was in Seattle. Sackett, a Life Member, was the personal executive assistant of Gene Roddenberry, the creator of “Star Trek.” “I saw this on a church marquee and thought it would be perfect for FFRF!” she said. “All I could think when I saw this was ‘Hang in there, Jesus!’”

Harm to our rights may take decades to undo

I was both touched and comforted by a letter in the December 2016 issue by Marc Clayton from North Carolina. While I don’t have to deal with the absurdity in North Carolina, I remain depressed and demoralized by the dreadful harbingers of things to come during the reign of Trump. Looking at the list of the twisted corpses that he has chosen for his cabinet, I can only fear that, no matter how much we fight, the damage he can do will take decades to undo.

While I started my adult life as a Roman Catholic priest, I didn’t last long, and now I am what David Silverman calls “a firebrand atheist.” I really don’t get it — just about all the violence and discrimination in this world has religion as its root cause. I am so glad that I can know that FFRF is fighting daily to preserve the rights of thinking people.

Frederick Lucies
Florida

Bible not the basis for respect and reason

The Nov. 6 edition of several U.S. papers contained a full-page ad, “Declaration of Dependence Upon God and His Holy Bible.” The undersigned proclaimed adherence to the bible, saying that marriage was “instituted by God between one man and one woman,” and equating same-sex marriage with bestiality.

When I seen palaver such as this, I wonder if the signatories are dishonest or ignorant.

First, what bible are we talking about? The 73-book Catholic bible? The 66-book Protestant bible? Or perhaps the 81 books of the Ethiopian Orthodox bible? Are they even aware there are multiple versions, and if so, how do they judge them?

Second, in reading the King James Version, I saw no clear reference to abortion. As to one-man, one-woman, there are repeated references to polygamy and mass murder and incest. Genocide and slavery are green-lighted, but shellfish is “an abomination”?

The “good book” is replete with

homophobia, bigotry, hatred, racism, homicide and misogyny, no matter what version they choose. No cherry-picking a few verses about love. Humans in the 21st century must set aside this Bronze Age and Iron Age catalog of inhumanity and realize that the bible is in no way the basis for our respect, humanity and reason.

Jay Mumford
California

FFRF should reach out to religious believers

I believe there are a large number of people who affiliate with some religion, but who believe that religion has its place and that it should not find its way into government or our public schools and state-funded colleges. Responsible believers would see the necessity in keeping religious influence out of government and tax-funded education. I suggest we try to tap into this audience now that we have a questionable administration taking over our government. More now than ever, we need to step up our vigilance against theocratic influence.

Warren Pender
Florida

Grateful for FFRF’s work, perseverance

Please accept this \$1,000 as an unrestricted gift. Please also express my gratitude to all the members of the FFRF leadership, management and staff for their dedication and perseverance.

Now, more than ever, our country needs what FFRF provides. As a Life Member, I continue to be extremely grateful for all the courageous, right-thinking work done by FFRF.

Scribner A. Messenger
Maryland

U.S. shouldn’t emulate Islamic countries

Now that Republicans have the majority in Congress, they intend to repeal the Johnson Amendment, which

prevents pastors and priests from supporting political candidates from the pulpit. It would be an infringement of tax-exempt law. In the Islamic countries, the imams give support to their favorite candidates whole-heartedly, including encouraging jihadist tendencies. Do we really need to emulate this process? If Vice President Mike Pence gets his way, they will preach anti-abortion in all instances.

G.M. Chandu
New York

Resist fanaticism from this administration

America is the most religious democracy on Earth. Greater percentages of our citizens believe in God, the devil, the afterlife, miracles, the supernatural and angels than any other democracy. Our government is dominated by believers and our citizens forced to respect its priority over all other rights and freedoms. Public disrespect of religion is almost illegal in the United States. Believers enjoy all kinds of legal and financial advantages over nonbelievers.

The very basis of religion is its profound anti-intellectualism and authoritarianism. The institution spurns rationality, science and objective evidence in favor of faith and loyalty to church and God.

The similarities between the anti-intellectualism of Donald Trump and that of religion are obvious. In both cases, objective evidence and realities are overruled by the desires and dogma of leaders.

The reason why Trump has not been condemned by the American public is that, as a clever con-man, he has exploited the religious fervor of the people and is using it for his own benefit. He is manipulating the still large majority of religious Americans into believing that he is a modern-day protector of the faith who will fight all advances of secular rights.

The religious people of America are fighting for the survival of faith in an age of science and technology. I do not know if there is anything that can be done to stop the catastrophe that this portends. However, I still have the hope that the American people have some surviving sense of reality and ethics and can be persuaded to resist his call to fanaticism. This means that all the freethinkers among us must commit themselves to getting this message out as widely to as many people as we can.

Eric Stone
California

‘Atheist cap’ story was thoughtful, entertaining

I absolutely loved Carl Scheiman’s “Adventures with my atheist cap” (January/February issue). It was such a beautiful, thoughtful, entertaining story, full of heart, soul and brain. I’m thinking maybe Freethought Today might introduce a new regular feature where people report responses they get to atheist caps, t-shirts, pins, etc. I suspect the more people wear these “badges of courage” and share the responses, the more positive they will become.

Joan Reisman-Brill
New York

Does Alzheimer's affect person's religiosity?

I recently saw a picture of the brain of a person with advanced Alzheimer's disease. When you have Alzheimer's, your brain gradually shrinks away. You lose self-awareness and you basically become a nonperson.

I began to wonder if a non-person can get into heaven or paradise. If you were a Christian or Muslim before you developed Alzheimer's, are you still a Christian or Muslim after? If you weren't a Christian or Muslim before the onset of Alzheimer's, can you become one afterwards? Can a nonperson be prayed into heaven? Can a nonperson go to hell? These are the questions that go through my mind as I watch my husband lose his.

After listening to my son's recording of his father so earnestly singing praises to God, it seems incongruent that if he lives long enough, he will not even know who "God" is.

Name and state withheld upon request

Crankmail shows Christians' dark side

I am always amazed by the vitriol expressed by Christians in the Sharing the Crank Mail column (one of my favorites!).

If the Christians who write are so certain of their salvation and our damnation, why the hatred? In their worldview, we are certain to receive our just deserts in the not-so-distant future. Why then don't they just sit back and smile sadly but knowingly at what lies ahead for nonbelievers?

The anger they express makes me believe that perhaps they "doth protest too much."

**Bill Ciesla
New York**

New design looks great; switch up radio hosts

"Thank goddess!" was what I yelled when I saw the new design of my FreeThought Today issue! Of course, the yelp was tongue-in-cheek. I am so happy to see FFRF embracing an updated design in the publication. It looks great and it was needed. [Graphic designers] Jake and Roger, good on you!

It would also be nice to have FreeThought Radio mix up the host roster and include some guest hosts, maybe staff attorneys or younger staff members to get a different viewpoint. Thank you for all the important work you do, especially now.

**Kat Reed
Minnesota**

Gaylor, Barker books helped my deconversion

I have just finished reading Dan Barker's *Godless* and *Losing Faith in Faith* and Annie Laurie Gaylor's *Woe to the Women*. Both of you have really helped me solidify my new points of view on the bible and its teachings.

I am a recently deconverted person. I read a lot of books by Richard Dawkins, Lawrence Krauss, Christopher Hitchens, Carl Sagan, all of whom speak from a scientific background.

Woe to the Women is deeply moving, disturbing and convincing. For years, I was critical of the violent god of the

Old Testament and had major doubts about the biblical accounts of creation, flood, miracles, etc.

When my wife died, I became very skeptical of prayer. I came to the conclusion that God is a human construct and we are just praying to ourselves. Why did it take me to 71 to realize?

Since my deconversion, I now have inner peace. Thanks again for your clear writing.

**Al Schritt
Florida**

'Live and let live' a worthy adage for all

When I decided to become a Life Member of FFRF, I didn't take the time to express why I felt so compelled. Your organization is very dear to my heart.

I honor, in my thinking and my actions, every person's right to believe in any religious or spiritual path, but each person must keep such belief to themselves and those like-minded individuals. Imagine if everyone believed in that adage "live and let live." No one would have any desire to change a single person. In fact, everyone would show great respect for each person's belief. There would be no attempts at conversion. Religious terrorism would cease. Tens of millions of lives would be saved; hundreds of millions of people would no longer suffer unspeakable torture; billions of dollars of property would no longer be destroyed.

FFRF, I truly applaud all your efforts to save me from religious intrusion.

**Russell Gregory
Pennsylvania**

This devilish donation should scare Pence

Please accept the enclosed \$666 donation in the name of Mike Pence. I request that this donation remain anonymous since I don't trust "them" to not chase me down and give me hell.

**Name withheld by request
California**

What does Jesus look like now?

When the religious freaks come knocking on my door, peddling their hocus pocus, I always ask them if they have a recent picture of Jesus. I don't mean the one that hangs in all the churches of some 20-something. I want to see what a 2017-year-old man looks like.

**Lawrence Davidson
Oregon**

Contribution to party was this holiday poem

I wrote this for a party where we were expected to contribute "something." There were a few laughs!

A kiss under the mistletoe used to be a hit

Now I don't like the sharing of spit

I once hung my stocking on the mantelpiece shelf

Now it doesn't get filled unless I do it myself

Bright lights on a Christmas tree provide a bright glow

Now I prefer a tree sprinkled with snow

I used to know words to a Yuletide carol

Now all I remember is "Roll Out the Barrel"

Christmas dinner with relatives was always expected

Now if I get invited, it is gratefully rejected

Now all I can say if you give me a hug is "Happy New Year" and a great big "Bah Humbug"

**Pat Cornwell
Wisconsin**

Religion a powerful tool for control

Thank you for asking A.C. Grayling to explain his statement in *Against All Gods*, "What we are witnessing is not the resurgence of religion, but its death throes"



(FreeThought Radio broadcast of Jan. 11).

This claim is not just naively optimistic, it is seriously flawed. Religion evolved and exists today for a solid reason — it's a powerful and effective tool for controlling, pacifying and exploiting large numbers of people. The Romans eventually harnessed Christianity as their tool to support their slave-based empire.

The usefulness of this tool is not going to simply evaporate on its own, so there will continue to be a strong force keeping religion alive, regardless of education and awareness. With a lot of effort we can weaken its influence, but we will never be able to kill it. It is an endless struggle, and constant vigilance will be necessary to hold on to any gains we make.

**Chris Allen
Texas
After-life Member**

New administration will keep FFRF very busy

Please find the enclosed for a Lifetime Membership.

I have been particularly impressed by your work in response to 45's administration and actions. Keep up the excellent work (and your spirits!) in what will be a trying four years.

**Alan Appel
Virginia**

Voice your opinion on state/church separation

I have been receiving numerous surveys asking how I feel about Trump and his administration, etc. I am sure others are receiving these as well. There is always a box asking for other concerns. Take advantage of this request to address your concerns about separation of state and church and Christian intrusion in public schools. Address why Christianity is granted a privileged status while the rights of non-believers and other religious affiliations are disregarded. I am trying to do this on all the surveys I receive. Progressives must stop leaving this off the list of major concerns about the Trump administration.

**Deborah Hilpipre
Minnesota**

Crankmail writers seem to forget words of Jesus

Much of the Crankmail would be funny or simply ludicrous if it weren't so scary. Their vitriolic content belie the biblical words of Jesus when he promoted forgiveness and to love thy neighbor as thy self.

I never thought it possible for mature adults to harbor such feelings of ill will and vitriol as the followers of the "man of peace." On the other hand, these are the same people who brought Donald Trump to power.

**Warren Dunn
California**

Eternity begins with my After-Life Membership

At 88, I think it's about time to start planning for eternity; hence my donation to become an After-Life Member.

**Dr. Willys Silvers
Pennsylvania**

BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

David L. Von Bergen, 59, Alton, IL: 21 counts of producing and possessing child pornography and unauthorized video recording. Due to new evidence, the charges were added to 4 similar ones lodged in January 2016 when Von Bergen was an elder at Zion Lutheran Church in Bethalto. He's alleged to have recorded boys and girls as young as 4 and 2 adult women on cameras placed in church bathrooms.

While he was trying to retrieve the cameras on Christmas Eve 2015, he was confronted by then-pastor **Kale Hanson, 36**, who agreed to destroy the camera memory cards, it's alleged. A felony count of conspiracy against Hanson is pending.

Von Bergen's son was sentenced to 80 years in January on child porn charges, said prosecutor Tom Gibbon. "So it certainly seems, from the facts we have known to us, that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree." *Source: WSDK, 2-3-17*

Bishop William Marshall, Bridgeport, CT: 3rd-degree larceny. Marshall, pastor of City of Life Worship and Deliverance Center and a city fire commission member, is accused of stealing about \$8,200 worth of electricity from United Illuminating Co.

A company meter check at Marshall Artz Barber Shop and Tattoo, owned by the pastor, showed power had been illegally reconnected after being disconnected in August 2013 for nonpayment of a \$4,000 bill. *Source: CT Post, 2-1-17*

Robert Bonner, 48, Essex, MD: Sex abuse of a minor, 2nd-degree assault and 2 counts of 4th-degree sex offense. Bonner, a teacher and coach at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic School, is accused of "inappropriate verbal and text message conversations" with a high school girl and "inappropriate and unwanted physical contact with the student on school property" on Jan. 19-20. *Source: WBAL, 2-1-17*

Micah D. Wright, 39, Wilmington, NC: Assault by strangulation and misdemeanor assault on a female. Wright, pastor of Revolution Church, allegedly scraped and scratched the woman while choking her with his hands and twisting her arm.

He has a 2006 conviction for felonious restraint and misdemeanor assault on a female and received probation. *Source: WWAY, 1-26-17*

Denis "Chrysostom" Alexander, 80, Sydney: Sexual assault. Alexander, a Catholic Benedictine monk removed in 2013 from the ministry, is accused of abusing boys at the Ft. Augustus Abbey boarding school in Scotland, where he's being extradited to.

The school closed in 1993. Alexander was transferred to Australia in 1979 after abuse allegations by a different student. *Source: BBC, 1-23-17*

Prince Nuah, 29, Ganta, Liberia: Rape. Nuah, senior pastor at Redeemed Christian Church of God, is accused of raping a 13-year-old girl who came to his house for help with her homework. Nuah denies the charge and allegedly told a reporter the girl had gone into his bedroom, undressed and asked him to sleep with her. *Source: New Dawn Liberia, 1-23-17*

Francisco Guevara, 65, Colleyville, TX: Indecency with a child and 2 counts of continuous sexual abuse of a child. Charges stem from alleged incidents 7 years ago when the victims were between ages 4 and 7 and Guevara was a volunteer at St. John the Apostle Catholic Church, where he worked in the nursery.

The Diocese of Fort Worth notified police after allegations were made last July and Guevara was banned from church activities. *Source: Star-Telegram, 1-19-17*

Jacques Faucher, 80, Ville de Gatineau, Quebec: Breach of bail conditions. Faucher, a Catholic priest awaiting sentencing for historical sex crimes involving boys between the ages of 9 and 13, is charged with visiting a restricted section of a community pool 96 times. A bail term was to avoid public parks or pools where children under 16 were expected to be present. *Source: Ottawa Citizen, 1-19-17*

Mark Brooke, Ward, AR: Solicitation of prostitution. Brooke, pastor of Cornerstone Assembly Church and a city of Ward probation officer, is charged with making arrangements for sex on his city-provided phone with an undercover officer. *Source: Democrat-Gazette, 1-18-17*

Rafael Diaz, 69, Queens, NY: Sexual abuse and acting in a manner injurious to a child. Diaz, the now-terminated music director at Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Parish, is charged with molesting a girl 4 or 5 times during private lessons at her home in 2014.

The girl, now 15, told police Diaz would touch her chest and breast while having her sing different pitches and once asked her if she had started menstruating. *Source: NY Post, 1-16-17*

Dara de Cogan, 57, Kilburn, England: 12 counts of sexual activity with a girl aged between 13 and 17. De Cogan, a leading Irish classical musician, is accused of assaulting a student between 2007-09 while teaching at Ampleforth College, a boarding school operated by Catholic Benedictine monks. *Source: Yorkshire Post, 1-16-17*

Climax Dewa, 65, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe: Vio-



lating a protective order. Dewa, pastor of St. Anne's Anglican Parish, allegedly threatened his wife with an axe and called her a gold digger at their home Jan. 5 after being ordered last year to desist from verbally and physically abusing her for supposedly denying him his conjugal rights.

Doris Dewa, 38, lacked respect for him and habitually treated him in a condescending manner, the pastor claimed at arraignment. *Source: The Chronicle, 1-16-17*

Omer Desjardins, 85, Winnipeg: Sexual assault, sexual exploitation and gross indecency. He's accused of sexual assaults in 1988-89 at Credo Home, operated by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate Catholic order, by "Joe" (last name withheld), now 43.

Desjardins was convicted in 2015 for the 1978 sexual assault of a 10-year-old girl. "Joe" went to police after hearing about the conviction. Desjardins has been removed from public ministry but not from the priesthood, said Tim Coonen of the Ottawa Oblate Provincial Office. *Source: CBC, 1-13-17*

Ibrahim Omerdic, 62, Melbourne, Australia: Conduct causing a minor to enter into forced marriage. Omerdic, imam at Noble Park Mosque, is charged with marrying a 34-year-old man to a girl under age 16 last September. The groom faces a similar charge and 1 count of sexual penetration of a child under 16. *Source: The Age, 1-13-17*

Ethan Chandler, 42, Belleville, NJ: 2nd-degree luring a child and sexual assault and 4th-degree criminal sexual contact. Chandler, a former music and youth minister at Hope Evangelical Free Church in Wilton, CT, is accused of contacting several individuals he believed to be teen boys for sex.

Authorities said Chandler "allegedly sent nude photos of himself to at least three juveniles and may have been having sexual relations with another 14-year-old male." He pleaded guilty in 2014 to disorderly conduct after he was discovered in a mall bathroom kissing a young man who appeared to be a minor.

Chandler now operates a company that videos high school sporting events, which puts him into contact with youth, police said. *Source: The Hour, 1-9-17*

Floyd Sullivan, 74, Kansas City: Assault. Sullivan, pastor of Mt. Olive Baptist Church, is charged with attacking a 75-year-old congregant during a discussion in November about the safety of a handicapped-access ramp. He allegedly struck the man on the face, kicked him after he fell and "placed his foot on the victim's throat," court documents said.

Witnesses said Sullivan yelled "This is what happens when you mess with me; you don't mess with me!" *Source: KSHB, 1-9-17*

Roland Gulson, 56, Chaguanas, Trinidad: Sexual grooming, sexual penetration and 3 counts of sexual touching. Gulson, pastor at Angel Michael Healing Tabernacle, is accused of assaults on a 15-year-old girl between July 15-18 at the church. *Source: Trinidad Express, 1-9-17*

Quinton Williams, 38, Cordova, TN: Aggravated statutory rape. Williams, an associate minister at Morning Grove Baptist Church, is charged with having

sex with a 17-year-old girl 10-15 times last year at the church and at his home. She and her family attended the church. *Source: Commercial Appeal, 1-6-17*

Jody Dewayne Brown, 42, Gallatin, TN: Attempted aggravated sexual exploitation of a minor and unlawful photography in violation of privacy. Brown, worship leader at Freedom Church, is accused of surreptitious recording at his home last October, where he invited several teens over to swim, including the complainant.

"Once done swimming, she went to the shower, and in the restroom noticed a camera placed in the exterior window from the outside and she learned Mr. Brown had placed the device in the window," said sheriff's Detective Eddie Cripps. After spotting the cell-phone camera, she told detectives she ran from the home to her car.

A spokesperson said Brown no longer works at the church. *Source: WTVF, 1-6-17*

John T. Lindsey, 47, Charlotte, NC: Possession of a firearm by a felon and 18 counts of robbery and

conspiracy to commit robbery with a dangerous weapon. Lindsey, pastor of True Love Church of Refuge, is accused of robbing 9 stores last year and firing a shot inside Family Dollar. He has 2 drug-related convictions from the 1990s. *Source: Charlotte Observer, 1-5-17*

Michelle Medrick, 58, N. Royalton, OH: Bank fraud. Medrick is accused of embezzling \$1.9 million in 2008-16 from a Catholic Charities agency in Parma that provides foster care and adoption services and residences for children with behavioral problems.

Medrick converted proceeds of client-agency and donor checks to cash, which she used for her own benefit, according to authorities. She is also accused of altering copies of the checks, which were then placed into Catholic Charities records. Insurance will cover the thefts. *Source: cleveland.com, 12-28-16*

Pleaded / Convicted

Wesley Brown, 54, Flagler Beach, FL: Guilty by jury of 19 of 31 counts of embezzlement and securities charges. Brown, volunteer pastor and bible study leader at Calvary Chapel, was accused of defrauding church members and others out of \$395,000 in a Ponzi scheme between December 2010 and June 2012. *Source: News-Journal, 1-26-17*

Randy Johnson, 52, Dallas Center, IA: Lascivious acts with a child, child endangerment, 2 counts each of indecent exposure and assault with intent to commit sex abuse, 3 counts of indecent contact with a child and 4 counts of 3rd-degree sex abuse. He and his wife co-pastor the Church of the Brethren and live next to the church.

"They are the nicest people ever," said neighbor Sabrina Vanclue. "Yeah, this is a complete shock." *Source: KCCI, 1-25-17*

Yona Metzger, 63, former chief Ashkenazi rabbi of Israel, pleaded guilty to bribery, with a plea bargain calling for him to serve 42 months in prison. He admitted accepting 5 million shekels (\$1.3 million) in bribes, down from 10 million in the 2015 indictment.

Metzger was originally accused of accepting bribes from wealthy foreigners seeking to convert to Judaism, accepting kickbacks from nonprofits, theft from a yeshiva, money laundering and tax violations. *Source: Haaretz, 1-24-17*

Paul Hanniford, 55, Kingston, Jamaica: Guilty by jury of having sexual intercourse with a minor. Hanniford, pastor of Pentecostal City Mission Church, was charged with raping a 13-year-old girl at his home after choir practice in March 2015.

Prosecutors said he gave the girl's 5-year-old brother a bowl of cornflakes to occupy him while Hanniford took her into the bedroom but the boy heard her crying and came in to witness the assault. Afterward, Hanniford returned the children to their mother at the church. *Source: Jamaica Gleaner, 1-23-17*

Timothy Peltz, 52, Wheaton, IL: Pleaded guilty to 4 counts of predatory sexual assault of a child, with 19 other counts dropped. Peltz, a deacon at Living Hope Bible Church, was accused of molesting a girl over a 10-year period, starting in 1994.

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

Peltz's 2014 book *Inspirational Poems for the Soul* sold online for \$12. He advertised on social media as a Christian music performer. *Source: Daily Herald, 1-20-17*

Edmund Harman, 27, Franklin Township, NJ: Pleaded guilty to criminal sexual contact. Harman, a science teacher and track coach at Notre Dame High School, admitted fondling a student's breasts, kissing her and asking her for nude photos in February 2016. The Diocese of Trenton operates the school.

A plea agreement calls for probation and teaching license forfeiture. *Source: nj.com, 1-19-17*

Micah Neal, 42, Springdale, AR: Pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit honest services fraud. Neal, an evangelical Christian and Republican state representative whose term ended Jan. 9, was accused of pocketing \$38,000 in kickbacks from \$600,000 in state grants from January 2013 to January 2015 that went to 2 nonprofits. One was to Ecclesia College, a "transdenominational" Christian school in Springdale.

Ecclesia President Oren Paris III denied any impropriety. The school is referred to in the plea agreement only as Entity B, a nonprofit operating a college in Springdale.

In a tweet just before his court appearance, Neal wrote, "Praise God even when you don't understand what He's doing." *Source: Raw Story, 1-5-17*

Sentenced

Michael Dunn, 67, York, England: 9 months in jail after pleading guilty to 3 counts of sexual assault in a court in Ireland. Dunn, a Catholic priest when the assaults occurred 40 years ago, was accused of molesting a 12-year-old altar boy he had taken with him on vacation.

Dunn was jailed for 18 months in England in March 2005 after he was convicted of sexually assaulting another boy, age 13, in 1975-76 while he was pastor of Christ the King Parish. *Source: Irish Times, 2-3-17*

Mark Hale, 50, Manvel, ND: \$500 fine and \$3,000 restitution after pleading guilty to unlawful transport of wildlife and unlawful taking of wildlife in a national park. Hale, pastor of Thrive Community Church, a Nazarene congregation in Grand Forks, illegally killed a bull elk last September in Theodore Roosevelt National Park.

He also faces misdemeanor charges in state court for allegedly failing to properly tag another elk he shot earlier outside the park and leaving the carcass inside the park. *Source: Capital Journal, 1-27-17*

Timothy Ciboro, 53, and Esten Ciboro, 28, Toledo, OH: 5 life sentences plus 41 years and 3 life sentences plus 38 years, respectively, after a jury found the father and son guilty of multiple counts of rape and kidnapping. Their victims were the elder Ciboro's 14-year-old stepdaughter, 9-year-old biological daughter and 11-year-old biological son.

At a pretrial hearing, the Ciboros sought permission to use the bible in their defense. It's "the only law book that truly matters," the son told the judge.

"Everything they're doing, they're claiming they're doing it through God's word," prosecutor Frank Spryszak said at closing. "They stand there with their bible. They cross-examine people using scripture and it's all perverted." The men read the bible and prayed while Spryszak spoke.

In his closing, Timothy Ciboro asked God for forgiveness and said his "job in this trial was to glorify him and not to put forth any dirty laundry or past sin that [his stepdaughter] had committed." *Source: Toledo Blade, 1-27-17*

Major L. Hillman, 23, Lynchburg, VA: 6 years in prison for computer solicitation and indecent liberties with a minor convictions. Hillman, a volunteer youth pastor at Thomas Terrace Baptist Church, was charged for interactions with an 8th-grade girl he was counseling in 2015.

The girl's mother testified that "I've seen the end result of what a pedophile does, and the end result is scary." *Source: News & Advance, 1-25-17*

Isaac Kizhakkeparambil, 59, Lucerne, Switzerland: \$1,200 fine for a customs violation at an airport in Kochi, India, where he failed to declare 3 gold ingots disguised as chocolate bars in his luggage. Kizhakkeparambil, a Catholic priest, was vacationing and attempted to avoid the 10% duty on 10.7 ounces of gold, officials said. *Source: The Hindu, 1-23-17*

Martin Cassidy, 67, Belfast, N. Ireland: 3 years' probation after pleading guilty to indecently assaulting a male and gross indecency with a child. Cassidy molested a 14-year-old boy in 1988 during a novena at Clonard Monastery, where he was volunteering at the request of his brother, a Redemptorist priest.

Despite Cassidy's record of 13 previous sexual offenses, Judge Patricia Smyth said probation was appropriate because his last offense was in 1990 and he's now taking chemical castration medication at his own request. *Source: Belfast Telegraph, 1-17-17*

Cindy Kaye Henderson Reese, 41, Morris, AL: 40 years in prison. A jury found her guilty in December in the 2015 murder of her husband. Prosecutors alleged Reese, music minister at Sardis Baptist Church, and senior pastor **Jeffrey Brown** were having an affair and planned the murder.

Brown testified that Reese brought him the gun she used to kill her husband and asked him to dispose of it. He was sentenced earlier to 20 years after pleading guilty to manslaughter. *Source: al.com, 1-11-17*

Brandon E. McDade, 31, Mission Viejo, CA: 6 years in prison after pleading guilty to committing lewd acts upon a child under the age of 14, misdemeanor child annoyance and 2 felony counts of committing lewd acts upon a child between the ages of 14 and 15. At the time he was a youth pastor at Grace Hills Church in Aliso Viejo. The assaults on 2 boys took place at the church and at a movie theater. *Source: KTLA, 1-9-17*

Peter Knebel, 73, Oshkosh, WI: 4 months in jail followed by 4 months' work release and 10 years' probation after pleading guilty to 2nd-degree sexual assault of a child. Knebel was congregational care pastor at Fox River Christian Church in Waukesha in 2015 when he was charged with molesting a 10-year-old girl in his office that July.

According to a criminal complaint, Knebel told the child to come in his office so she could use his computer. He had her sit on his lap while she used the computer and then put his arm around her before moving his hand over her body, including her breast, for about 30 seconds. She then ran out of the office, feeling "uncomfortable and scared." *Source: WISN, 1-3-17*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Perry P. Sandifer, Wood River, IL, is being sued by a Georgia man, 46, who alleges Sandifer molested him repeatedly in 1982-84 when Sandifer was a youth minister at Mulberry United Methodist Church in Macon.

When confronted by a church official, Sandifer "immediately admitted his wrongdoing," according to a 2016 letter to the plaintiff signed by the official, the suit alleges.

Sandifer has surrendered his credentials and is no longer affiliated with the United Methodist Church, said Rick Lanford, South Georgia Conference district superintendent. *Source: Macon Telegraph, 1-20-17*

The **Chicago Presbytery Church, Presbytery of Chicago** and **San Marcos Church** are being sued by 2 men who allege sexual abuse in the 1980s by San Marcos pastor **Douglas Mason**, who died in 2006. The presbytery settled in 2007 with 4 plaintiffs who accused Mason of abuse, and 7 men who were high school students in the 1980s and '90s filed similar suits in 2015. *Source: Sun-Times, 1-19-17*

Mayer Herskovic, 24, Brooklyn, NY, was barred by a judge from receiving \$131,000 that his ultra-Orthodox Jewish community raised for his legal defense. He's scheduled to be sentenced in March for his 2nd-degree gang assault conviction for a 2013 attack that left Taj Patterson, who is black, partially blind.

The judge invoked the Son of Sam Law, which prevents criminals from profiting from their crimes, to block the funds, at least temporarily.

Andrew Stoll, Patterson's lawyer, slammed the neighborhood watch group called Shomrin for vigilante activities and for posting Herskovic's \$50,000 cash bail. *Source: NY Post, 1-8-17*

Ahmet Mahmut Ünlü, a Muslim "televangelist," is being sued by the Turkish Chess Federation for proclaiming chess as "worse than gambling and eating pork" in a January videotaped sermon. "People who play chess are more prone to lying than others. People who play chess may not say the 'shahada' [declaration of Islamic belief] while they are dying," Ünlü said.

"Legal proceedings have been launched into the baseless comments and evaluations that affect thousands of our players and families, at a time when we most need the unity, peace and the philosophy of chess," the federation said in a statement. *Source: Hürriyet Daily News, 1-3-17*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago** settled a suit for \$2.7 million filed in 2014 by brothers, now ages 28 and 26, who alleged sexual abuse in 2005

by defrocked priest **Daniel McCormack**. Deceased Cardinal Francis George was dropped as a defendant after his 2015 death.

The brothers stayed silent until a family member saw news that McCormack was arrested and asked them about it, said their attorney, Mark Brown. The older brother will receive \$1.55 million and the younger will get \$1.15 million. *Chicago Law Bulletin, 1-13-17*

Legal Developments

The **Catholic Diocese of Belleville, IL,** moved to dismiss a woman's suit alleging a priest engaged in a sexual relationship with her, arguing that it's a religious issue that should be addressed by the church and not the court. Laura Merleau-McGrady, 51, now living in China, alleges she met **Osang Idagbo**, 42, at a 2013 event at St. Peter and Paul Parish in Waterloo, where she disclosed private information to him while he failed to identify himself as a priest.

After she learned he was a priest, Merleau-McGrady alleges Idagbo used the information to manipulate her into having an affair. The diocese disputes the claim: "To the contrary, her Complaint makes clear that Plaintiff, a competent adult woman, voluntarily elected to enter into and continue an alleged sexual relationship with Rev. Idagbo for almost two years." *Source: Madison County Record, 1-17-17*

Timothy D. Johnson, 39, and **Sarah N. Johnson, 38,** Plymouth, MN, fled to New Zealand after being charged with gross misdemeanor child neglect for the March 2015 death of their adopted son, Seth, 7. A year in jail is the maximum sentence. Arrest warrants were issued after the Johnsons failed to show up in court Jan. 31.

The parents had "issues with going to doctors" and chose not to seek medical attention for prolonged physical difficulties, the charging document said. Seth endured extensive trauma from an inflamed pancreas and other possible infections.

After a year-long review of evidence, Hennepin County Attorney Mike Freeman said Seth's death couldn't be definitely linked to the Johnsons' actions or inactions so they were charged with the most serious crime the law allows. It was initially investigated as a homicide, partially because of large areas of bruises on the boy's body.

When the couple, who have 6 more children, got home from a wedding, they found Seth unresponsive on the floor and "prayed for his health" but agreed to wait till morning to decide whether to seek medical care. In the morning he was semi-conscious and covered in vomit so they started CPR and called 911.

The couple met at Bethany Global University, a bible college in Bloomington. Tim Johnson studied for the ministry but ended up working as a mechanical engineer.

Kevin Robertson, ministry leader at Hillside Community Church in Auckland, NZ, said the Johnsons have been attending his church and others in the area. He was surprised to hear the circumstances leading to the family's "relocation." *Source: Star Tribune, 2-1-17*

Roger Copleton, 54, Lauder, Scotland, was removed from the Scottish Social Services Council's registry of home care and housing support services managers. Copleton, a former Episcopal priest at Holy Trinity Parish, was convicted in 2015 of embezzling from Share Scotland. The council also found he falsified work records and hadn't "demonstrated

any insight, regret or remorse" for his actions, for which he was ordered to repay \$6,300 and perform 250 hours of community service.

"He preached from the pulpit, so we thought we could trust him," said Joe White, managing director of the charity which helps disabled adults live independently. *Source: STV News, 1-10-17*

Allegations

Northern Ireland's Historical Abuse Inquiry upheld an allegation from a former resident at **Nazareth House in Londonderry** that she was sexually abused at age 4 or 5 by a Catholic nun at the children's home, which closed in 1998 after opening in 1892. Another witness testified she was molested from ages 8 to 12 at the home by a priest, including in the confessional, who sometimes gave her a mint afterward.

The inquiry found there was "significant violence" inflicted on children by a number of nuns, including a girl being "struck a severe blow with a brick," with younger girls assaulted by older residents. *Source: Derry Journal, 1-24-17*

O. Jermaine Simmons, 37, Tallahassee, FL, pastor of Jacob's Chapel, fled naked from a parishioner's home after being caught there by her husband, who had brought their sick 6-year-old son home from school, said a police report. Claynisha Stephens, 34, had called 911 on Jan. 17 to report her husband, Benjamin Stephens III, was angry and was brandishing a handgun after finding her having sex in their oldest daughter's bedroom.

The school had tried unsuccessfully to reach Claynisha, who told police that she and Simmons "have been establishing a relationship" since October 2016. Simmons, who is married and has a son, apologized the next Sunday to his congregation. "What I want from God, I have already

received — that's his forgiveness. What I am asking of our members is your prayers and your forgiveness." He then received a standing ovation. *Source: Tallahassee Democrat, 1-23-17*

The Archbishop of Canterbury of the **Church of England**, Justin Welby, apologized "unreservedly" for the

fact that claims of physical abuse in the 1970s by a former colleague, Christian charity head **John Smyth**, were not reported to police until 2013. The alleged assaults came to light in the early 1980s after a 21-year-old student at Cambridge University reportedly tried to kill himself after allegedly being told by Smyth, who now lives in S. Africa, to submit to another beating.

A 1982 report by the charity, the Irwerne Trust, called the practice "horrific" but the claims weren't reported to police. The report said 10 boys received an estimated 22,000 blows, some of which left scars, with a garden stake over a 3-year period at Smyth's home. *Source: BBC, 2-2-17*

The **Anglican Church of Canada** made a formal apology for the crimes of pedophile pastor **Ralph Rowe**, 76, accused of sexually abusing more than 500 victims, including members of the Wapekeka First Nation community, dozens of whom have committed suicide.

Rowe flew a small plane into remote areas in the 1970s and '80s and targeted boys aged 8 to 14. Many indigenous parents let their children go camping with him. He was also a Boy Scout leader. He was convicted of 39 counts in 1994 but served only 5 years. *Source: Toronto Star, 1-20-17*

Theo B. Maseko, Gauteng, S. Africa, pastor of Breath of Christ Ministries, allegedly had congregants drink engine-cleaning fluid "to demonstrate the power of God." Facebook photos appeared to

show people being fed the liquid with the caption: "The fullness of Christ is in this bottle. Healing and strange deliverance."

Maseko later told a reporter, "When we pray over anything its poison dies, so it can't harm people. Nothing happened, no one has been to hospital." *Source: The Star, 1-17-17*

John Fraiser, La Grange, KY, pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church from 2011 until termination last August, is being investigated for an alleged sex assault on a 15-year-old boy during an Alabama church event in June 2015. He has not been charged but a grand jury is expected to hear the allegations in the near future.

According to a crime log, authorities at the University of Alabama-Huntsville were contacted in October by Kentucky police about the boy's allegations, which include sodomy. Court records show Fraiser's wife has filed for divorce and a protective order. They have a daughter. *Source: WAVE, 1-13-17*

Andrea Contin, 48, Padua, Italy: Suspicion of abetting prostitution and domestic violence. Contin, Catholic pastor of the Church of San Lazzaro, is under investigation after 3 female parishioners complained about his activities, including allegedly taking multiple lovers and prostituting as many as 30 women on online swapping sites. One was allegedly encouraged to have intercourse with a horse and beaten twice.

Authorities reportedly raided the rectory and seized sex toys and homemade videos of orgies. A church volunteer, age 49, told a reporter, "There were a lot of women hovering around him. I didn't understand that at first, only later."

Claudio Cipolla, bishop of Padua, said Contin was placed on leave and will face discipline after the investigation ends. His alleged actions are "unacceptable for a priest, for a Christian and even for a man," Cipolla said. *Source: NY Post, 1-3-17*

Removed / Resigned

Luke Melackrinis, 46, Hempstead, NY, spiritual leader of the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of St. Paul, was placed on leave after a woman from outside the parish complained about "inappropriate email exchanges," said a letter to parishioners from Bishop Andonios Paropoulos.

Melackrinis "consented to immediately begin seeing a professional for evaluation so we can determine the proper course of action," the bishop wrote. Melackrinis "fell in a moment of weakness," the letter said. *Source: NY Post, 1-15-17*

Robert Duesdieker, Owensville, MO, was put on administrative leave as pastor of Immaculate Conception Catholic Parish while alleged inappropriate conduct with minors 25 years ago is investigated by police and the Diocese of Jefferson City. *Source: KQFX, 1-4-17*

Other

After the December suicide-murder of **Daniel Randall, 56, Hebron, ME,** and his daughter Claire Randall, 27, Maine State Police decided "to at least review the investigative record" of the 1993 death of Greta Randall, his first wife, whose death was attributed to a fall at a state park when she was 6 months pregnant. Their son died the next day.

"It was the conclusion at the time that this was an accidental death," said spokesman Stephen McCausland. "There's nothing in the documentation that would change that."

Daniel Randall, who left his post in 2015 as First Congregational Church pastor and chaplain at Roger Williams University, Bristol, RI, killed his daughter and then himself with a shotgun just days after he was served with divorce papers by his estranged wife Anita. He'd just finished a 90-day substance abuse program and bought the gun on the way home.

Messages spray-painted in Anita Randall's home included "ANITA ITS ALL YOUR FAULT" and "VOW BREAKER." Greta Randall was Claire's biological mother. Daniel married Anita the year after her death. *Source: Providence Journal, 1-12-17*

Thomas Williams, 54, who left the Catholic priesthood after impregnating a woman whose mother later became President George W. Bush's ambassador to the Holy See is now the Rome correspondent for Breitbart News. Williams was recruited in 2014 by Stephen Bannon, former Breitbart CEO and now chief White House strategist and senior counselor for Donald Trump's presidency.

Williams first met Bannon in 2003 through a mutual friend who was producing Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ," for which Williams was the theological consultant. He then belonged to the conservative Legion of Christ order, whose founder, now-deceased **Marcial Maciel**, was eventually revealed to be a serial child molester who had fathered several children. Williams, as a spokesman for the Legion's Zenit news agency, had defended Maciel, but now admits he was wrong to do so.

Williams had fallen in love with Vatican art historian Elizabeth Lev after Mary Ann Glendon, her mother, introduced them. She gave birth in 2003 to a Down syndrome child he acknowledged was his son in 2012. He left the priesthood and married Lev in 2013.

Glendon, an attorney and virulent abortion opponent, served as Bush's Vatican ambassador from 2007-09. *Source: NY Times, 1-10-17*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

Black is white, up is down



Photo by Lester Pulst

FFRF member Lester Pulst in Asherville, N.C., sent us this photo of the Riceville Valley Community Church marquee.

IN MEMORIAM

Warren Allen Smith was atheist in foxhole

FFRF member Warren Allen Smith, a teacher, editor, businessman and author, died on Jan. 8, 2017, of happiness.

That's how Warren's self-penned obituary began. If true, not a bad way to go.

He was born Oct. 29, 1921, in Minburn, Iowa, and graduated from Iowa State Teachers College with a B.A. in English in 1948, and received his M.A. in American Literature from Columbia University in 1949. During his time in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1946, Smith was known as "the atheist in a foxhole," according to his website. "Were there atheists in foxholes during World War II? Of course, as can be verified by my dogtags . . . A veteran of Omaha Beach in 1944, I insisted upon including 'None' instead of P, C, or J as my religious affiliation."

He worked as a high school English teacher from 1949 to 1986. In 1961, Smith co-founded Variety Recording Studio. He lived with his partner of 40 years, Fernando Vargas, an atheist, until Vargas' death from AIDS in 1989.

Smith's fame was largely due to his journalism, which often focused on humanist issues. He was book review editor for *The Humanist* from 1953 to 1958 and wrote the column "Hu-

“Were there atheists in foxholes during World War II? Of course, as can be verified by my dogtags.

— Warren Allen Smith



manist Potpourri" for *Free Inquiry* from 1997 to 1998, as well as writing columns for *Gay and Lesbian Humanist*, *The Freethinker*, *The American Rationalist and Skeptical Inquirer*. He wrote the books *Who's Who in Hell*, a 1,264-page biographical listing of over 10,000 philosophic non-believers (2000), and *Celebrities in Hell* (2002), which are extensive compilations of famous freethinkers. Smith's other books include *Gossip from Across the Pond* (2005) and *In the Heart of Showbiz* (2011).

Smith was the personal agent to Gilbert Price, a three-time Tony Award nominee, from 1963 until Price's death in 1989.

In college, Smith rejected his Methodist upbringing and became an outspoken humanist and freethinker. In an article for *The New York Observer* on Aug. 14, 2000, Smith wrote: "If you're the member of an organized church group, you really have to have a guilt complex. You have to feel guilty about not loving God enough or not contributing enough money or not contributing enough to society." He describes himself as a "humanistic naturalist." In 1948, he formed the first college humanist club in the United States.

Smith's other accomplishments include being vice president of *The Bertrand Russell Society* from 1977 to 1980, serving as treasurer of the *Secular Humanist Society of New York* from 1988 to 1993 and co-founding *Agnostics, Atheists and Secular Humanists Who Are Infected/Affected with AIDS/HIV Illness* in 1992 (although Smith himself was not HIV positive). He created *Philosophedia*, an online reference of philosophers and atheists that has received more than 6



Smith

million page views. Smith was an activist member of ACT UP (and participated in the Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village in 1969); *Freethinkers NY* (a co-founder); *Mensa* (1964 until his death); the *New York Society of Ethical Culture*; the *Rationalist Press Association* (United Kingdom); and the *Unitarian Society*.

Extraordinary life and obit

It's not often that people write their own obituaries, but that's what Life Member Kay Ann Heggstad of Madison, Wis., did prior to her death on Jan. 13.

She began: "Kay Ann Heggstad, age 72, bought the farm, is no more, has ceased to be, left this world, is bereft of life, gave up the ghost, kicked the bucket, murió, c'est fini. She died on Friday, Jan. 13, 2017, after a wimpy non-battle with multiple myeloma, a nasty bone marrow cancer, after almost two years to the date of diagnosis. No one should say she fought a courageous battle, because she did not! Unlike most folks, she complained all the way. What a whiner!" (To read her full obit, go to *bit.ly/2jUut40*.)

While Kay's self-written obituary was humorous and self-deprecating, her children wanted people to know more about their amazing mother, so they wrote a second obituary that filled in some of the blanks they thought she left out.

"She was raised Roman Catholic and got a very good education in the Catholic school system," the second obit read. "She used that education to help people by correcting their grammatical errors, even if no one asked her to. She later, as an adult, found that she could not tolerate a religion that treated women as second-class citizens and left the faith."

Kay was born on Sept. 18, 1944, to John and Augusta (Pulvermacher) Heggstad in Madison, where she spent most of her life with the exception of one year as an intern in St. Paul and two years on the Navaho reservation in Gallup, N.M. She attended medical school at UW-Madison.

"The two best things about med school were finding her husband, Paul Wertsch, in the pathology lab and mar-



Heggstad

rying him a year later, and being taught how to do a proper physical examination by William S. Middleton, who was her escort at med school graduation," her self-written obit read. "She even wore a dress for that occasion."

After a few years at a clinic, she, her husband and two others opened their own clinic in 1977, where she worked until 2000 when she became a medical director at a hospice care facility.

"She had found her true calling in life, only to be 'let go' after five years," her self-obit read. "After she left, they replaced her with a puppy. Paul says it was because the dog had a nicer personality."

Kay and Paul Wertsch were married for 48 years and have two children, Johanna Wertsch (Larry Kaltenberg) in Madison and Gregory Wertsch (Mark Ferrandino) in Denver; and two granddaughters, Paulina Kay Wertsch, and Lila Augusta Ferrandino.

Included in her obituary was a short list of places to donate memorials in lieu of flowers. That list included FFRF.

Kay was a friend and comrade in arms to the late Anne Gaylor, FFRF's principal founder, as well as her personal physician for many years.

"We're so grateful to Kay for her long years of cheerful support, and send condolences to her family," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Nat Hentoff was prolific writer, civil libertarian

Atheist Nat Hentoff, who was known for his civil libertarian views as much as his prolific writing, died at the age of 91 on Jan. 7 at his home in Manhattan while "surrounded by family members and listening to Billie Holiday," according to his son.

Hentoff was born in Boston on June 10, 1925, to Simon and Lena Katzenberg Hentoff, who were Jewish immigrants from Russia.

Hentoff wrote for *The Village Voice* for 50 years and also contributed to *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, *Down Beat* magazine and dozens of other publications. He wrote more than 35 books — novels, volumes for young



Hentoff

adults and nonfiction works on civil liberties, education and other subjects.

Hentoff received the National Press Foundation's award for lifetime achievement in contributions to journalism, and in 2004 was named one of six Jazz Masters by the National Endowment for the Arts, the first nonmusician to win the honor.

FFRF founder's sister-in-law dies

FFRF Member Alice Nicol, age 89, died on Dec. 19, 2016, in Baudette, Minn.

She is survived by her husband Tom Nicol, a longtime member of FFRF and last living sibling of Anne Nicol Gaylor, FFRF's principal founder.

Alice Irene Brunson was born March 3, 1927, to Charels and Florence (Woodard) Brunson, in Merrillan, Wis. She graduated from Tomah High School, Tomah, Wis., in the 1940s. She and Tom Nicol were married for "71-plus wonderful years," says Tom. They loved to travel together and in their travels Alice worked a variety of jobs, including at a roadhouse in Chistochina, Alaska. She worked for area resorts when they moved to Baudette, a town known for setting record low temperatures. At the end of her life, Alice enjoyed puzzles.



Nicol

She and Tom have a son, Gary, and daughter-in-law Beth, two grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

D.C. Women’s March a unifying voice of reason

By Alyssa Schaefer

Like many others, I was initially skeptical about the effectiveness of a Women’s March on Washington.

That’s why, when my mom asked me in late December to join her and a small central Wisconsin delegation of women in a cross-country journey to the nation’s capital for the Jan. 21 event, I hesitantly agreed. Any worries of a tepid turnout, however, were immediately dispelled when our car pulled up to a D.C. metro station that Saturday morning. There was already a winding line of pink hats and hand-made signs around the station.

From my first moments on the train, I felt the communal excitement that made the day as exceptional as it was. Once the reality of the enormity of this protest hit me and the other participants, it created an energy that lasted throughout the day. I distinctly remember the cheering that flooded the train when we went past RFK Stadium and saw a sea of buses arriving one after another from all corners of the country for the event.

Everyone had signs — a wild array of signs. Half the fun of going to the

protest was seeing the crazy signs that others had brought, while posing for pictures with your own.

As my group made our way down Independence Avenue toward the stage at the Mall, it was astonishing to see the variety of causes that people came to the event to support. I was marching to protest the invasion of the Religious Right into our highest offices of government, particularly how it would affect my right — and that of millions of other women — to general and reproductive health care. Others marched for the rights of minorities, the economy, environment, education, civil rights — and/or to show the new president and his administration that they were going to hold him accountable during the next four years.

There was an overlying feeling of

support and community — that everyone’s reasons for marching were equally important, and that by working together our voices would be heard to a greater degree.

The Women’s March proved that there is strength in numbers. Every single street I looked down while marching was filled with pink hats. There were children — even dogs — in pink hats. The crowd was so large that by the time we had finished the march around the Mall, those closest to the stage hadn’t even begun to move. I had never seen — and may never see — so many people together at one time.

Although women were definitely the majority, it was heartening to see how many men showed up, supporting the women in their lives while voicing their own concerns about the new administration.

Law enforcement and military personnel also contributed to the lively energy of the protest. Besides taking the time to make sure this was a safe and peaceful event, many genuinely looked excited, even a bit giddy, that we were there. One army officer in a tank

blocking the road to the White House was taking photos and selfies of the protesters as we marched by. Another police officer thanked us for peacefully exercising our First Amendment right after we had thanked him for his work in making the march a success.

The primary takeaway I had from my experience at the march was that my concerns about the next four years, especially pertaining to fundamental freedoms, are shared by millions of women and men throughout the country and the world. It made me grateful I am a part of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, where I can contribute daily to an organization that effectively works at keeping state and church separate.

It is my hope that the multitudes of people that participated in and cheered on the Women’s March convert this momentum into active civic participation in their local, state and national governments — and into supporting organizations such as FFRF in the fight to keep our democracy and country the best it can be.

Alyssa Schaefer is FFRF’s program assistant.

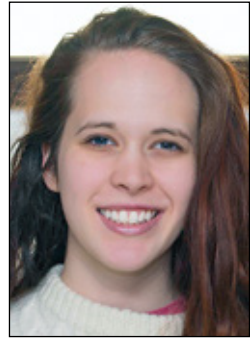


Photo by Chris Line
Alyssa Schaefer



Photo by Chris Line

The Miss Forward statue outside the State Capitol in Wisconsin wears a pink “pussy hat” during the Jan. 21 march.



Photo by Brent Nicastro

Looking from the steps of the Wisconsin Capitol building, more than 100,000 people walked up State Street in Madison, Wis., on Jan. 21 during the Women’s March.



Photo by Chris Line

A child rides on her father’s shoulders during the march.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF’s group of protesters, including FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, Kristina Daleiden (center) and Ryeven Zoromsky (right) hold FFRF’s sign as they walk down State Street in Madison.



Photo by Chris Line

Women wear colorful wings as they march up State Street.



Marching in the Sacramento rally was FFRF Sacramento Chapter, including, from left, Mike Kirkland, Kathy Johnson and Janet Thew. Seated at right is Chapter President Judy Saint.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover holds up a sign as Colleen Coleman-Jayne, wife of FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne, holds their daughter Leona.



Photo by Chris Line

Part of FFRF’s marching contingent prepare to head to the rally in Madison, Wis. — which had the largest per capita turnout. From left: Ron Malzer, Rev. Krista Taves, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF Board Member Steve Salemsen and Joan Wallace.

IT PAYS TO COMPLAIN

FFRF Board chair gets church sign covered

Stephen Hirtle, chair of FFRF's Executive Board, was able to get a director of elections to remedy a state/church violation in a parking lot for a church that is also a voting site.

Hirtle wrote in April 2016 to the Election Board about signs at the church parking lot that said "Parking for church business only" on Election Day.

The director of elections responded to Hirtle. "Voting is considered a church function as we are authorized to be on their premises. . . . Covering the signs may lead to further concerns from church members."

But when Hirtle went to cast his

ballot on Nov. 8, "to my surprise, the signs were covered with garbage bags when I went to vote!" he wrote. After voting, Hirtle said he tracked down the election judge in charge for the precinct and thanked him for covering the signs.

He also added that there were no religious signs in the voting area, no church members doing a bake sale, and said it was "the most neutral space I have seen within a church the Pittsburgh area. Cornerstone Ministries, also in my suburb, is at the other end of the spectrum where people are forced to vote in a very religious space."



This sign could have caused confusion for voters who needed to park and vote at the church.



A plastic bag covers the sign on Election Day.

Christian bench removed from VA center

An FFRF member got a bench bearing two crosses at the entrance to a VA center in Michigan removed by calling up the patient advocate office and complaining.

The member, who wishes to remain anonymous, is a medically retired soldier.

The bench, which was located in the Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center Annex in Saginaw, Mich., had the silhouette of a praying soldier flanked by two crosses.

"Christianity is being singled out to be honored," the member wrote. "As an atheist soldier, I find it offensive when the Constitution I swore to support and defend is violated by my own government."

The member contacted the VA patient's advocate office, and a representative for that office "originally said that the bench was inclusive, since the chap-



An FFRF member was able to get this bench with Christian crosses removed from a VA center in Michigan.

lain wouldn't have authorized anything that violated the separation of church and state," the member writes. "She said that he was the authority on anything church/state related and that he was basically infallible, instead of realizing that having the chaplain as the one who determined if the church violated the state was a conflict of interest."

A few days later, the representative called him back.

"She said the chaplain had decided to have it removed and replaced with a plain bench," he said.

Mayor's 'Jesus' sign removed

A "Thank you, Jesus" sign was placed outside the Bayboro Town Hall, N.C., in December last year, much to FFRF Member Candace Young's dismay.

"I went to the town meeting on Dec. 6 and asked them to take it down," she said in an email to FFRF. "They immediately treated me as having no standing. One commissioner asked me if I believed in God, and another one asked how I could buy things because money says 'In God We Trust.'"

She then asked to speak at the Dec. 20 meeting, but was told there was no meeting that day because it was the town's annual Christmas party.

"So on that date, I delivered a letter to the board members and mayor stating that I would be having 10 religious signs made and would add them to the mayor's sign if they did not remove the 'Thank you, Jesus' sign," Young said.

Since the mayor did not remove his sign, Young added several of her signs to the lawn outside the Town

Hall, at which point a call was made from the Town Hall to the Sheriff's Department to complain about Young's signs.

"The deputy said I would have to remove them, and I said I would when the mayor took his sign down," Young said. "After some discussion and phone calls to the mayor, the deputy said the mayor would have the sign removed."



FFRF member Candace Young placed several of her signs near the mayor's "Thank you, Jesus" sign outside the Bayboro Town Hall, N.C.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

4 NATIONAL CONVENTION

MADISON | SEPTEMBER 15-17, 2017

2017 Convention Registration Form & Info

[View convention details on page 3.](#)

	Number Registering	Cost
Friday Tailgate Party Buffet (Dinner) 5:00 p.m. to 6:45 p.m.	___ \$32	\$ ___
___ Regular		___ Vegetarian
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16		
Non-Prayer Breakfast	___ \$20	\$ ___
___ Country Breakfast		___ Veggie Breakfast
"Grab and Go" Box Lunch	___ \$20	\$ ___
___ Chicken Sandwich		___ Veggie Sandwich
Saturday Dinner	___ \$40	\$ ___
___ Chicken Wellington		___ Portobello Wellington (veggie)
		Total \$ ___

If you have allergies or other dietary restrictions not accommodated by the above meal selections, please note those here:

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

Names of all registrants _____

Names of all registrants _____

Address _____ City / State / ZIP _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Credit Card Number _____ Expiration Date / Security Code _____

Signature _____

Contact information for in-house use only.

Registration Fees

► **Early Bird Deadline: Register for only \$40! Prices rise \$20 June 1.** ◀

	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___ \$40	\$ ___
Spouse or Companion <i>(non-member accompanying member)</i>	___ \$45	\$ ___
Child/Student with ID	___ Free	\$ ___
Non-member <i>Or join for \$40 and save money!</i>	___ \$95	\$ ___

Meals / Events

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

Freethought Hall Open House 9:30 a.m. to Noon. Please RSVP, tickets required.	___ Free	
Betty Lou Cruise on Lake Monona 10:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. <i>*includes lunch buffet and bus to dock from Hilton and FFRF office and back. Children 12 months old or younger – Free.</i>	___ \$50*	\$ ___
___ Regular		___ Vegetarian