

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



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Judge: Cross in park must come down

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and the American Humanist Association (AHA) combined for a major legal victory with a judge's ruling June 19 against a massive cross in a Florida public park. Unfortunately, the city is needlessly appealing the ruling.

The 34-foot white Latin cross, owned by the city of Pensacola, dominates the public Bayview Park. The cross is also the site of numerous Easter services, frequently co-hosted by Christian churches. A plaque specifically referencing Easter sits at the base of a platform near the cross.

FFRF and the AHA's Appignani Legal Center filed the suit against the city after residents of Pensacola, who objected to the cross on public property, contacted them. When the city refused to respond to warning letters and remove the cross from government property, the groups teamed up to take legal action in May 2016.

On June 19, Senior U.S. District Judge Roger Vinson ruled that "the Bayview Cross can no longer stand as a permanent fixture on city-owned property." He added, "The law is the law."

Vinson ordered the cross removed within 30 days. The ruling came down less than a week after oral arguments were heard on June 14.

The city has unfortunately decided to appeal the case to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The Pensacola law firm Beggs & Lane currently represents the city in the case, on which city officials have spent more than \$80,000 of tax money. The city's decision to appeal seems to have been bolstered by the offer of the Becket Fund

See *Pensacola* on page 6



A judge ruled that this cross in Bayview Park in Pensacola must be removed. The city is appealing the decision.

The unveiling of an icon



Photo by Associated Press

Actor John de Lancie, left, and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker had a little trouble removing the drape off of the new Clarence Darrow statue on July 14 on the grounds of the Rhea County Courthouse, home to the famous Scopes "monkey trial" in Dayton, Tenn., in 1925. Turn to pages 14-17 for more photos and coverage of the history-making event.

Well, this is an Unpleasant website

FFRF's new site shows horrible things said or done by God in bible

FFRF is excited to announce a new online resource for those who would like to see or showcase how unpleasant, to put it mildly, the god of the Old Testament is.

In the first sentence of Chapter 2 of *The God Delusion*, biologist Richard Dawkins calls the biblical God "the most unpleasant character in all fiction."

To document his claim, Dawkins asked former minister and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker to provide a list of biblical passages backing up that claim. The result is Barker's 2016 book, *God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*.

A year later, the Unpleasant Companion website was born, built in part by FFRF Digital Product Manager Tim Nott, who came up with the name of the site. The site is a browsable, searchable, sharable database of the biblical verses from Dan's book.

The full sentence from Dawkins' book is: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction; jealous and



Richard Dawkins



Dan Barker

proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, blood-thirsty, ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."

That sentence has prompted more criticism than anything else Dawkins has ever written, which is saying a lot.

In Part I of Barker's book, "Dawkins Was Right," there is a chapter for each of Dawkins' 19 unpleasant God descriptors.

In Part 2, "Dawkins Was Too Kind," Barker adds another eight characteristics: pyromaniacal, angry, merciless, curse-hurling, vaccicidal, aborticidal, cannibalistic and slavemonger. And to the Unpleasant Companion, he adds homicidal.

So whether you use the website as

Go to:
unpleasantgod.ffrf.org

a complement to the book, or just use it to see what incredibly vile things "God" has done or endorsed in the Old Testament, it is a handy site.

"It makes for an enhanced experience for readers of Dan's book because, while you can read the content in the book, here you can search for it, find it, share it with other people and get that information out to a larger audience," Nott says. "And if you didn't read the book, the quotes are still great. The homepage lays out why the book was written, why the Dawkins quote is there, and all that content is still supportive of the concept that God is the most unpleasant character in all fiction."

Barker says the name of the site — Unpleasant Companion — has a double meaning.

"It's obviously a companion to the book, but also God is an unpleasant companion himself," he states. "The takeaway is: Don't worship the god of the bible."

We hope you'll enjoy — and share — the site.

Motorcycles, freethought keep him revved up

Name: Lee Parks

Where I live: Apple Valley, Calif.

Where and when I was born: Rockford, Ill., in 1969.

Family: Life partner Christie; father Howard; mother Carrie; sisters Becky and Sara; brother Lou.

Education: B.S. in speech communications from University of Utah; Curriculum for Living from Landmark Education.



Lee Parks

Occupation: Motorcycle trainer and curriculum developer (Total Control Training, Inc.), motorcycle gear manufacturer (Lee Parks Design), book and magazine author (*Total Control*).

Military service: I was not in the military, but I am the son of a sailor and provide beginner through advanced motorcycle training to all branches of the military.

How I got where I am today: I'm fortunate to have had many professional and personal mentors who provided many opportunities to learn and encouraged me to be the best at what I do. MTXE: Mental Toughness, Extra Effort.

Where I'm headed: Changing the



Lee gets low to the ground as he takes a sharp turn on his high-performance motorcycle.

MEET A MEMBER

culture of motorcycle safety, globally.

Person in history I admire and why: Ayn Rand, because she lived a principled life on the ideals of personal responsibility and productive work, and considered mysticism as man's greatest enemy.

A quotation I like: "A ship in harbor is safe, but that's not what ships are built for." — John A. Shedd.

These are a few of my favorite things: Motorcycle and car racing,

downhill mountain biking, skiing, singing, reading and writing philosophy, teaching, dark chocolate, dry cappuccinos.

These are not: Religion pushers, hypocrites, science deniers, bureaucrats making laws restricting fun because they don't know how to have any.

My doubts about religion started: I was raised Jewish but when I was 7 (age of reason) and I realized that the stories in temple didn't seem to make any sense, I instantly became an atheist.

Before I die: I want to write my magnum opus on philosophy, combining freethought, libertarianism and nonreligious Eastern philosophy.

Ways I promote freethought: Magazine and book writing, street epistemology, sharing freethought writings, local freethought group participation, proud Lifetime Member of FFRF.

I wish you'd have asked me: About my latest entrepreneurial venture creating a jewelry line around an atheist symbol I designed. It combines a symbolic compass and electron path into an "A," representing the two primary branches of physics: Newtonian and particle. I figured a symbol of science is much more appropriate for wearing in public than a symbol of torture and death as Christians like to wear. It also allows atheists to "out" themselves without having to overtly say anything. I'm in the tooling stage right now and should have the first production pieces on sale by September.



Lee is creating a jewelry line around this atheist symbol he designed.

Caption contest winner!

Congratulations to Neal Edwards for winning FFRF's Caption Contest from the June/July issue.

His winning caption, out of nearly 100 entries, was: "Please allow two to three thousand business years for delivery."

Neal has been sent an "Unabashed Atheist" T-shirt.

The runners-up (in no particular order) are:

- I was asked if I'd found Jesus yet. I said, "Gee, I didn't know he was missing, but you might check that truck." — John Simmons

- How "thoughts and prayers" are delivered. — Vincent Boileau

- He is not here, for he has driven. — Lunker Barlow

- We just saw the latest PEW statistics on religion in the United States.



You're going to need a smaller truck. — Richard Goldfine

Thanks to all who participated. We will have another contest in an upcoming issue. If you have any non-copyright protected images that you think would be good for a caption contest, please send them to caption@ffrf.org.



"I think it's already apparent that a good part of this nation understands — if only instinctively — that anything which seems to suggest that God favors a political party or the establishment of a state church, is wrong and dangerous. Way down deep, the American people are afraid of an entangling relationship between formal religions — or whole bodies of religious belief — and government. Apart from constitutional law and religious doctrine, there is a sense that tells us it's wrong to presume to speak for God or to claim God's sanction of our particular legislation and His rejection of all other positions.

Most of us are offended when we see religion being trivialized by its appearance in political throw-away pamphlets. The American people need no course in philosophy or political science or church history to know that God should not be made into a celestial party chairman."

— Mario Cuomo (1932-2015), former governor of New York

From his speech, "Religious Belief and Public Morality: A Catholic Governor's Perspective," given at the University of Notre Dame on Sept. 9, 1984.



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P.O. Box 750
info@ffrf.org
P 608.256.8900

Madison WI 53701
FFRF.org
F 608.204.0422

EDITOR P.J. Slinger fttoday@ffrf.org
EDITOR EMERITUS Bill Dunn
EXECUTIVE PUBLISHER Annie Laurie Gaylor
GRAPHIC DESIGNER Roger Daleiden
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR Amit Pal
CONTRIBUTORS

Philip Appleman, Dan Barker,
Molly Hanson, Andrew Kersten,
Chris Line, Jake Swenson, Lisa Treu

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

‘Ask an Atheist’ day



FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel calls out to passersby at the Dane County Farmers Market in downtown Madison, Wis., on July 1. FFRF sent out a crew to interact with market attendees to see if they had any questions to “Ask an Atheist,” FFRF’s new video program. Rotating hosts include Dan Barker, Annie Laurie Gaylor, and Seidel. Topics on the show so far include, “What’s wrong with the Ten Commandments,” “What does the bible really say about abortion,” “How can you be moral if you don’t believe in God,” “Creationism” and “Independence from religion.” Watch Wednesdays at noon (Central time) via Facebook and later on FFRF’s YouTube channel.

Photography by Chris Line



FFRF videographer Bruce Johnson interviews Richard Parry outside the Wisconsin State Capitol.



A small boy holds up FFRF’s “Fan of Reason.”



FFRF legal intern Dante Harootunian talks with a couple who stopped by FFRF’s table.



Seidel gets into a discussion with with Emily Feinstein.



Seidel poses for a photo with an unidentified fan of FFRF.



FFRF’s table outside the State Capitol featured one of its “I’m Atheist and I Vote” banners.

HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

THE ANT

The ant, Darwin reminded us,
defies all simple-mindedness:
Take nothing (says the ant) on faith,
and never trust a simple truth.
The PR men of bestiaries
eulogized for centuries
this busy little paragon,
nature's proletarian —
but look here, Darwin said: some ants
make slaves of smaller ants, and end
exploiting in their peonages
the sweating brows of their tiny drudges.

Thus the ant speaks out of both
sides of its mealy little mouth:
its example is extolled
to the workers of the world,
but its habits also preach
the virtues of the idle rich.

© Philip Appleman.

From *New and Selected Poems, 1956–1996*



Philip Appleman is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. He is editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Darwin*. 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 thanks 44 new Lifers, 1 Immortal

FFRF is proud and excited to announce its 44 new Lifetime Members and one new Immortal.

Charles Keeling is the latest Immortal, a designation for those members who have contacted FFRF to report they have made provisions for FFRF in their estate planning.

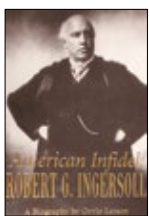
Our 44 newest Life Members include two who wished to remain anonymous, and Jonathan Ainsworth, Brett

Cantrell Baird, Joanie Barker Nichols, Pat Brodbent, David Burch, Gene Callen, Donald A. Cesario, Billy Clark, Jane Dodd, Marcia Dodge, Beverly M. Flowers, Richard E. Gadbois, Harold R. Gladstone, Marcia Haddox, Pamela M. Halverson (in honor of late husband Jess Levin), Marsha Kay Hebbeler, John G. Hildebrand, David Ives, Craig Johnson, Herman T. Lankford, Maureen Levesque, Dennis Nienkerk, Donald O'Connor, Mark Oelerking, Kevin O'Neill, Dr. Paul Redleaf, Rhoda Redleaf, John Roland, Richard S. Ross, Ph.D., Dr. Miguel A. Sanchez, Frederick Schaffalitzky, DM Schuman, Freethought Today Editor PJ Slinger, Frank Stiverf, Evelyn Thiel, Jack Thiel, Linda Turnipseed, Hal Webre, Ethel Welsh, Larry Wilson, Randal H. Woods and Warren Wylie.

Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000, designated as membership or membership renewal, and are deductible for income-tax purposes.

State represented by our newest Life Members are Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, New Jersey, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll



Prof. Larsen writes with affection and respect of this illustrious 19th century freethinker.

By Orvin Larsen

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc. has 29,000 members, 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.

Iowa city changes prayer process

The Eastern Iowa Atheists successfully lobbied the mayor and City Council of Waverly, Iowa, to change its unconstitutional prayer practice before City Council meetings.

"Mayor Charles Infelt announced at a council meeting on June 5 that he and the council had developed a policy for

IT PAYS TO COMPLAIN

prayers/invocations that would open the practice up to more voices and worldviews instead of just his," writes Justin Scott, Eastern Iowa Atheists' founder and director.

It started on April 3, when Scott approached the mayor and council at their regular council meeting to request a more inclusive invocation process. The mayor responded that "there is no representation beyond the theistic approach" and that atheists at City Council meetings are expected to "just say (their) own quiet little reflection."

That interaction began a series of discussions at council meetings through April and May, where the mayor clarified his position on atheist (and other) invocations, stating that he would be open to them taking place in a future meeting, but offering no further details about whether that would happen.

Two months later at the council

meeting, a college student from Iran shared a traditional Muslim invocation, marking just the fifth time since 2014 that Infelt hasn't delivered the prayer or invocation to start a meeting.

"Waverly's diversity and long treasured value of inclusivity shall be reflected in this organizing process. I hope we enjoyed and feel anchored by today's invocation," Infelt said.

"The Eastern Iowa Atheists applaud the mayor and council for not only drafting this policy for prayers and invocations — providing some much needed clarity to the process — but also for recognizing the importance of having a prayer/invocation process that is open to every voice and worldview," Scott said. "In a perfect world, prayers and other religious ceremonies would have no part in our secular government, but since the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled them to be legal, we want to ensure the most inclusive and constitutionally sound process is offered by cities that choose to include this practice so that atheists have an opportunity to take part in the process and have their voices heard."

OVERHEARD

Religious people do not always adopt the political cues given them in church. That's just not how it works.

Gregory Smith, a researcher at Pew Research Center, on President Trump's "religious liberty" executive order.

The New York Times, 6-14-17

Even though some members of the House did not agree with my invocation,



Athena Salman

I feel strengthened and supported by the public response. Atheists, humanists and other secularists are not going away. You cannot silence us. As a state representative, not only am I beholden to the Arizona state Constitution, I am beholden to the U.S. Constitution and that is about upholding the values of a secular government. Both constitutions are on our side.

Arizona state Rep. Athena Salman, in an interview describing her feeling after being chastised by other representatives for not invoking a higher power in her invocation to the Arizona House.

Religion News Service, 6-19-17

The document they conceived [U.S. Constitution] bears many marks of the Age of Reason — especially the separation of church and state in the First Amendment of Madison's Bill of Rights. This is the one entirely innovative element in the Constitution. Everything else — separated powers, federalism, the single executive, bicameralism, an independent judiciary — had been known in theory or practice (or both). Only this was truly new. Ours was the first nation started without the assistance of an official deity or cult.

Garry Wills, author, journalist and historian.

The New York Times Magazine, 7-2-17

It is completely irrational to try to keep Baby Charlie, who has no future, alive. This child will simply exist with no chance for any kind of human relationship. To withdraw all forms of life-sustaining treatment is simply a humane act, as well as saving large amounts of scarce medical expenses in the millions that can be used to aid those who can be helped. Keep this child alive to what end? It would be a life artificially kept alive, a miracle of modern technology but a failure as a human reality. To remove life-sustaining treatment from this child is not murder; it is simply an act of kindness and humane sympathy.

Peter R. Riga, a former priest, in a letter to the editor, on the fate of 11-month-old British baby Charlie Gard, who was born with an extremely rare genetic disease. He is blind and deaf, and he cannot breathe or move on his own.

The New York Times, 7-7-17

While the Constitution describes the form and function of the government



Photo by David Shankbone
Stephen Colbert

(what it does and how we participate in it), the Bill of Rights is mostly a list of things that the government can't do to us. And though Madison proposed 19 amendments, I like that the states approved only 10. It has a biblical roundness, with a twist: "Higher power, thou shalt not tread on me."

Stephen Colbert, late-night TV host.
New York Times Magazine, 7-2-17

FFRF's interns help keep up the fight

FFRF has seven legal interns working at its Madison, Wis., office this summer. Here are their profiles.

Name: Ben Becker

Where I was born: Milwaukee, Wis.



Ben Becker

Education: I started at Purdue University, and then transferred to Marquette University, where I earned my B.A. degree in criminology and legal studies, along with a minor in sociology. I am

also a 2018 Juris Doctor candidate at the University of Wisconsin Law School.

My religious upbringing was: Reform Judaism.

What I do here: The majority of my work revolves around composing legal letters that are sent to the alleged violator or their legal counsel in order to rectify the situation and bring it within the realm of Establishment Clause constitutionality. Background research, open records requests, and other forms of investigation are also integral to my work.

What I like best about it: My ability to effect real change. Having such opportunities in an area so important to our society and constitutional jurisprudence is remarkably fulfilling.

My legal interests are: Constitutional/election law, higher education law, sports and entertainment law.

My legal heroes are: James McGill and Saul Goodman (fictional characters from the AMC TV show "Better Call Saul").

These three words sum me up: Intropective, reliable, passionate.

Things I like: Well, this is certainly a broad prompt. I like a myriad of things, the highlights being: Watches/horology; dogs — the bigger the better, as I grew up with Bernese Mountain dogs and a Leonberger; music — I've played piano, alto saxophone, guitar and bass. In addition, I try to attend as many shows as I can and know way more about the late-'80s/early-'90s Seattle music scene than is probably healthy. I play in an Ultimate Frisbee league, have golfed for the majority of my life, and sometimes dabble in soccer. Teams I support include the Green Bay Packers, Milwaukee Bucks, UW Badgers, Sporting Kansas City, and Everton; good food and drink; science fiction and science fact, especially as it relates to space exploration.

Things I smite: The inability to be punctual, micromanaging, and at the risk of my supervising attorney looking over my shoulder, Establishment Clause violations, obviously. Hi, Liz!

My loftiest goal: Becoming chancellor/president of a major research university.

Name: Russell Busch.

Where and when I was born: Chicago in 1990.

Family: Most of my family is in central Illinois.

Education: Undergrad at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; law school at University of Michigan Law.

My religious upbringing was: "Cul-



Russell Busch



Photos by Chris Line

FFRF's summer legal interns pose outside the Wisconsin State Capitol.

turally Catholic."

What I do here: I address member complaints with letters, and work on litigation.

What I like best about it: The intersection of speech and religion in First Amendment issues.

My legal interests are: Freedom of thought, litigation in general.

My legal heroes are: Justice John Marshall Harlan, Justice William J. Brennan (particularly for his opinion in *Texas v. Johnson*).

Things I like: La Croix, necromancers and warlocks.

Things I smite: Authoritarian mentalities, intellectual laziness, the texture and flavor of coconut.

My loftiest goal: To argue a case before the Supreme Court (and win!).

Name: Ryan Christensen.

Where and when I was born: Queensbury, N.Y., in 1995.



Ryan Christensen

Family: My mom Margaret, my dad Andrew and my sister Nicole.

Education: Senior at UMass-Amherst, majoring in legal studies and political science.

My religious upbringing was: Roman Catholic.

What I do here: Most of my time is spent writing drafts of letters for FFRF's lawyers for all kinds of church/state separation violations. I also do research (on things like tuition tax credits and social media history), occasionally help with the filming of "Ask an Atheist," and transcribe prayers in videos sent to us by complainants.

What I like best about it: Learning more about Establishment Clause case law every day, and having lawyers help me improve my writing.

My legal interests are: The Bill of Rights, stare decisis and how courts decide whether to overturn previous decisions, power struggles between the three branches, federalism and the powers of states and localities, Civil War Amendments.

My legal heroes are: James Madison, Abraham Lincoln.

These three words sum me up: Skeptical, idiosyncratic, contrarian.

Things I like: Reading, playing chess, watching Netflix, soccer, tennis, snowboarding.

Things I smite: People who walk slowly.

My loftiest goal: Running for office.

Name: Dante C.H. Harootunian.

Where and when I was born: Syracuse, N.Y., in 1994.

Family: I grew up with my parents and

my younger brother.

Education: I graduated from UC-Santa Cruz in 2016. I double majored in politics and history and minored in legal studies. I am currently attending the University of Minnesota Law School.

My religious upbringing was: Dante C.H. Harootunian. I was raised in a nonreligious household.

What I do here: Mostly, I have been drafting letters of complaint to public schools violating the rights of their students. I have also drafted a few Freedom of Information Act requests, and am currently working on some legal research.

What I like best about it: I like being able to help students and their families who are brave enough to take legal action to defend their rights in towns and school districts where they are likely to be shunned and bullied for doing so.

My legal interests: Immigration, international and constitutional law.

My legal heroes are: Justices Harry Blackmun, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor.

These three words sum me up: Persistent, friendly, planner.

Things I like: Dogs, politics, dogs, podcasts and dogs.

Things I smite: Anti-intellectualism.

My loftiest goal: To spend my career helping refugees gain asylum in the United States.

Name: Mark Noel.

Where and when I was born: Milwaukee, Wis., in 1986.



Mark Noel

Family: I and my brother were raised by a hard-working single mother.

Education: Joliet Junior College, University of Washington (B.A. in sociology), University of Washington (J.D.).

My religious upbringing was: Christian (nondenominational).

What I do here: Draft legal and policy letters to various governmental entities, research prisoner inquiries, background legal research for potential litigation.

What I like best about it: Helping ensure the protection of constitutional rights.

My legal interests are: Land use, tax, and entrepreneurial law.

My legal heroes are: John Adams, Justice Anthony Kennedy.

These three words sum me up: Ecler-

MEET THE INTERNS

tic, curious, skeptical.

Things I like: Travel, playing basketball, cooking, craft beer.

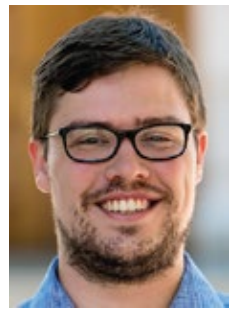
Things I smite: Myopia, willful ignorance, grape-flavored things.

My loftiest goal: Get elected to public office in the state of Washington.

Name: Cory Paul

Where I was born: Knoxville, Tenn. I grew up with my parents and two younger brothers.

Education: I graduated with departmental honors in anthropology from Grinnell College in 2012, and will be starting my second year at Columbia Law School.



Cory Paul

My religious upbringing was:

Southern Baptist, but my family was good about letting me explore other religions and ideas. I gradually fell out of the church around the start of high school.

What I do here: I write letters of complaint to towns and school boards concerning constitutional violations reported by members of FFRF or community members who find us while searching for assistance. I also perform legal research on FFRF's active and potential cases, including research on standing issues, state tax codes, etc.

My legal interests are: Pretty boring, but I enjoy studying and debating minutiae. Administrative Procedure Act and tax cases are where I've specialized so far.

My legal heroes are: Justice John Paul Stevens demonstrated how a justice's judgment can evolve over time, and his ability to recognize and repair his own flaws on freedom of speech cases is a great example of facing personal bias.

These three words sum me up: Calm, reserved, bookish.

Things I like: Pub food, chess and hiking.

Things I smite: There's nothing I particularly dislike except sad salads. If I spend \$10 to get served wilted lettuce and a couple tomatoes, that's terrible.

My loftiest goal: To be retired, 90 years old, and drinking orange juice on my porch with a partner of over 50 years.

Name: Evan Stang.

Where and when I was born: Madison, Wis., in 1995.

Family: Parents Paul and Carol Stang.

Education: Legal studies, economics major.

My religious upbringing was: Presbyterian.

What I do here: Write letters.

What I like best about it: When

[FFRF Legal Assistant] Whitney Steffen gives me stickers.

My legal interests are: Constitutional, contractual.

My legal hero is: Barack Obama.

These three words sum me up: Rides a motorcycle.

Things I like: My motorcycle.

Things I smite: Traffic.

My loftiest goal: Climb Mount Everest.



Evan Stang

Religious conservatives denounce cross decision

By PJ Slinger

Not surprisingly, the Pensacola cross decision won by FFRF and AHA sparked an outcry from prominent religious conservatives.

Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee disparaged the judge's decision to have a 30-foot cross removed from Bayview Park because it violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

"I hope Pensacola will appeal after Bayview Park cross ruled unconstitutional & ordered removed in 30 days," Rubio tweeted.

That wasn't nearly as bad as Huckabee's diatribe on Fox News, though. Huckabee showed clear ignorance of constitutional law and the definition of freedom.

"It's absurd! Four people. Four people in Pensacola said they had a problem with this. Thousands of people have enjoyed the fact that it is there," Huckabee said. "We are a nation that has freedom of religion, not freedom from religion. It's not that they are offended, they just can't stand that some people believe in God."

And, of course, there was Catholic League President Bill Donohoe, who can always be counted on to say something outrageous. He didn't disappoint.

"It is obvious that militant atheists hate the sight of the cross. Nor can it be doubted that some vomit upon seeing it," Donohoe wrote in an op-ed titled, "Atheist Christian haters win in court."

Donohoe ended his tirade by writing that if the Supreme Court doesn't "reconsider its Establishment Clause jurisprudence . . . we will continue to see more phony cases brought by atheist Christian-hating activists feigning 'shock' at seeing crosses in parks."

Todd Starnes, the Fox News pundit who makes no claim to being fair and balanced, called FFRF "notorious" and FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor "perpetually offended."

"People of faith are facing unrelenting attacks from a ruthless bunch of godless atheists — hell-bent on eradi-



Photo by David Suhor

The Bayview Park cross in Pensacola, Fla., was ordered by a judge to come down within 30 days, but the city has decided to appeal that ruling, so the cross will remain until the legal process is complete.

cating Christianity from the public," he said on his show. "Should Christian citizens be relegated to some sort of second-class citizenship? Should they be directed to keep their beliefs hidden inside the church house? . . . Just how far do the atheists intend to go in this cultural jihad on our Judeo-Christian values?"

At the state level, the Pensacola News Journal reported that Florida state Rep. Matt Gaetz issued a statement saying he was frustrated to hear the cross was ruled unconstitutional.

"I am deeply saddened by this decision and will always stand in support of the Bayview Cross," Gaetz said. "The Bayview Cross, although a symbol of Christianity, has grown beyond that as a monument of our community's history."

During the 2016 election, Gaetz challenged his Democratic opponent Amanda Kondrat'yev to a debate over

“People of faith are facing unrelenting attacks from a ruthless bunch of godless atheists — hell-bent on eradicating Christianity from the public.

— Todd Starnes.

the cross. Kondrat'yev was one of the four plaintiffs who filed the lawsuit to remove the cross.

And then there was Christian evangelist Franklin Graham spouting off on the subject. He went on Facebook to denounce the judge's decision.

"We have organizations like the American Humanist Association and the Freedom From Religion Foundation to thank for ridiculous changes like this," he wrote.

Yes you do. And you're welcome.

Pensacola

Continued from page 1

for Religious Liberty to represent it for free. Taxpayers are still on the hook for legal fees when FFRF and AHA win. The Becket Fund is a theocracy-rationalizing organization that FFRF has sparred with in the past and knows only too well. FFRF and the AHA are committed to seeing this case through to its rightful end.

The decision by Vinson, a senior federal judge for the Northern District of Florida — Pensacola Division appointed by President Reagan, can, however, most charitably be characterized as begrudging. It was marred by ill-informed excursions into the history of the First Amendment.

"The historical record indicates that the Founding Fathers did not intend for the Establishment Clause to ban crosses and religious symbols from public property," Vinson erroneously stated, and went on to castigate the U.S. Supreme Court for its recent rulings on the separation of state and church.

The case was decided on clear, settled legal grounds. "This is not a 'borderline case,'" Vinson stated. "The Bayview Cross clearly has a primarily — if not exclusively — religious purpose."

Hence, it's a waste of both sides' time and money for Pensacola to appeal.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor notes that public parks are for the public — of all religious beliefs and no religious beliefs, and it's so obvious why sectarian symbols do not belong there.

"We are pleased that the court struck down this cross as violative of the First Amendment," says Monica Miller, senior counsel at the Appignani Humanist Legal Center. "The cross was totally unavoidable to park patrons, and to have citizens foot the bill for such a religious symbol is both unfair and unconstitutional."

Plaintiffs are Amanda Kondrat'yev; Andrei Kondrat'yev; David Suhor and Andre Ryland. The case was brought by both AHA's Miller and legal director David Niose and FFRF Staff Attorneys Rebecca Markert and Madeline Ziegler. Case 3:16-cv-00195-RV-CJK.

A long time coming



Rev. John Ingersoll finally has a headstone, 158 years after his death. FFRF was a major contributor, working with the Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee and Birthplace Museum, to help put up the headstone for the father of Robert G. Ingersoll, the famed 19th century attorney, orator and "great agnostic." FFRF Member Gerrie Paino, shown in the photo, organized the arrangements and installation of the headstone, which is in the Springdale Cemetery in Peoria, Ill.

Congress trying to thwart the Johnson Amendment

Nearly 4,500 nonprofits, including FFRF, signed a joint letter to Congress in opposing repeal of the Johnson Amendment, a move that would be disastrous for the nonprofit sector and for campaign finance.

A repeal is so widely unpopular that fully 79 percent of Americans oppose pastors endorsing candidates from the pulpit.

Despite public opinion, Congress is attempting to undermine a more than 60-year-old prohibition on church electioneering. House Republicans have tried to hamstring the amendment through a provision buried 116 sections deep in the latest House Financial Services appropriations bill.

The provision reads: "None of the funds made available by this Act may be used by the Internal Revenue Service to make a determination that a church, an integrated auxiliary of a church, an integrated auxiliary of a church, or a convention or association of churches is not exempt from taxation for participating in, or intervening

in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office unless" and is followed by a series of restrictions meant to ensure that no church is ever penalized for violating the law. Specifically, the Commissioner of Internal Revenue must personally consent to enforcement, must notify Congress of the IRS' intent to enforce the law, and must then wait 90 days before making a determination against the church.

Note that these additional protections against enforcement are only contemplated for churches and associations of churches, but not for other nonprofits, which are equally bound by the Johnson Amendment. The result is unequal treatment under the law — a preferential boon to churches in violation of the Constitution's separation between religion and government.

FFRF filed a legal challenge in May against President Trump's "religious liberty" executive order.

N.J. Supreme Court to hear FFRF case

A legal battle that FFRF is fighting in New Jersey over unconstitutional funding is now headed to the state's highest judicial arena.

The New Jersey Supreme Court has accepted a direct appeal of a trial-level decision that allowed Morris County to disburse millions in taxpayer funds for church repair, despite a state Constitution provision barring such use.

FFRF and member David Steketee filed suit in late 2015 against the county, challenging public grants of tax dollars to repair or maintain churches. FFRF, with Steketee, a taxpayer in Morris County, contested more than \$5.5 million in funding to churches since 2012 by the Historic Preservation Trust Fund.

FFRF specifically challenged \$1.04 million in allotments to the Presbyterian Church in Morristown to allow "continued use by our congregation

for worship services," and disbursements to St. Peter's Episcopal Church to ensure "continued safe public access to the church for worship."

FFRF contends the grants clearly violate Article I, Paragraph 3 of the New Jersey Constitution that guarantees: "Nor shall any person be obliged to pay tithes, taxes, or other rates for building or repairing any church or churches, place or places of worship, or for the maintenance of any minister or ministry, contrary to what he believes to be right."

The trial court created an exception to Article I, Paragraph 3, brushing aside binding precedent because this particular case involved educational grants rather than historic preservation grants. The court provided what FFRF deemed "scattershot justifications," such as claiming the state has a "long history [since 1990] of making historic

preservation grants to active houses of worship." But an illegal practice does not become legal just because it has gone unchallenged for a few decades.

The Supreme Court accepted the case and adopted an issue statement by Morris County that badly misconstrues the facts: "Does the county's voter-approved program providing grants to nonprofit organizations that own buildings on the state or federal historic register, including churches and other religious institutions, violate Article I, Paragraph 3 of the New Jersey Constitution?"

FFRF takes issue with this description because it suggests that religious institutions were offered grants on equal terms as nonreligious institutions. In fact, Morris County's program is open to all religious nonprofits, but only to secular nonprofits that meet certain strict guidelines.

FFRF is hopeful that the New Jersey Supreme Court will confirm that Morris County cannot compel taxpayers to support or repair churches, upholding the plain language of the state Constitution.

"We're confident that the Supreme Court will rule in our favor," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "After all, handing out millions in public money to churches is clearly a constitutional violation."

In late 2016, the New Jersey Supreme Court agreed to hear another case that involved government grants to religious entities, *American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey v. Hendricks*. In that case, an appellate court correctly ruled that the grants were unconstitutional.

FFRF's lawsuit is being handled by attorney Paul S. Grosswald. FFRF Staff Attorneys Andrew L. Seidel and Ryan Jayne are co-counsel.

Religious signs raise concerns in Wisconsin

FFRF is warning a city in Wisconsin about constitutional concerns raised by religious signs on public property.

A concerned local resident contacted FFRF to report that there are two identical Christian signs on city land in Oconomowoc. They say, "The Churches of Oconomowoc Welcome You," and there are prominent Latin crosses on top. The displays are easily visible to drivers and anyone visiting a popular public park.

"The First Amendment 'mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion,'" to quote the U.S. Supreme Court, FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne writes to Oconomowoc Mayor David Nold. "Displaying



This sign appears on city property in Oconomowoc, Wis.

signs that promote Oconomowoc's Christian churches, along with Latin crosses, fails to respect either constitutional mandate of neutrality. It endorses religion over nonreligion and Christianity over all other faiths."

The religious significance of the Latin cross is unambiguous and indisputable, FFRF adds. As a consequence, these signs convey a message to non-Christians in Oconomowoc that they are not

"favored members of the political community," to cite the U.S. Supreme Court again. We're talking about a significant proportion that is alienated due to such symbolism. Nearly 30 percent of Americans are non-Christians, either practicing a minority religion or no religion at all, including more than 40 percent of Millennials.

FFRF is urging the city to remove the signs from its property to avoid further concerns.

Legal department of FFRF expands

FFRF is making some changes to its legal department staff recently in order to help fight for the continued separation of state and church.

Colin McNamara will be joining FFRF on Sept. 1 as the first Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellow. He's a recent graduate of University of Richmond Law School and has extensive experience with the ACLU of Virginia.

Also starting Sept. 1, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel will transition into the role of director of strategic response. He will be spearheading the legislative arm of FFRF to develop our new lobbying efforts on the federal and state levels.

Elaine and Eric Stone Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne has taken on a full-time role as staff attorney and legislative counsel. He'll continue working on the legal issue areas as an attorney, but will also assist Seidel in tracking legislation.

Madeline Ziegler will remain FFRF's legal intake attorney and also retains a part-time staff attorney caseload. Other legal staff members' titles have changed, as well. Rebecca Markert is now legal director, Patrick Elliott is senior counsel, and Elizabeth Cavell and Sam Grover are associate counsel.

FFRF asks that appeals court upholds decision

FFRF is asking the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to uphold a lower court ruling against prayer at meetings of a California school board.

A district court in February 2016 granted summary judgment in favor of FFRF and its 22 plaintiffs, declaring school board prayer in Chino Valley District, Calif., an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion. The decision by U.S. District Judge Jesus G. Bernal, Central District of California, also ruled the school board policy and custom of reciting prayers, bible readings and proselytizing violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

FFRF filed its lawsuit in November 2014. After FFRF won at the district court level, the school board voted to appeal the decision in a controversial 3-2 vote at a contentious meeting. On March 31, 2016, the court ordered the district to pay more than \$200,000 in attorney's fees and costs.

FFRF notes the board's policies and practices have no secular purpose.

"We're confident that the 9th Circuit will firmly agree with us," says FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. "Public school boards exist to oversee secular education, and must protect rights of students and their parents by keeping religious devotions and divisiveness out of official school board functions."

Scouting out discrimination



Photo by Chris Line

Several FFRF staffers protested House Speaker Paul Ryan's appearance at a Madison, Wis., hotel on July 7. Ryan was there to receive a "Distinguished Citizen" award from the Boy Scout Region of Southern Wisconsin. FFRF protested the Boy Scouts' exclusion of nonreligious boys. Shown in this photo are, from left, Communications Coordinator Lauryn Seering, an unidentified woman, Legal Assistant Whitney Steffen, former Freethought Today Editor Bill Dunn, Legal Intern Ryan Christiansen, and Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott.

FFRF keeps Georgia schools on its mind

By Molly Hanson

FFRF has earned legal victories in several Georgia school districts in the past month or so after learning about constitutional violations there.

Dalton schools to disengage with rituals



FFRF took action to correct a disturbing Establishment Clause violation at a school district in Dalton, Ga.

A concerned staff member informed FFRF that, for the last two years, graduating seniors of Coahulla Creek High School have been bused to a Baptist church after participating in an annual “senior walk” for a church-sponsored lunch — a scheduled part of the walk. During the lunch, seniors were handed an evangelical Christian book targeting school students called “The Life Book” that is propagated by Gideons International. The book included a summary of the Old Testament, the entire Gospel of John, interactive student comments and questions and scriptural answers to issues teens might face.

Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote

to Whitfield County School District Superintendent Judy Gilreath on June 23, warning against the serious constitutional violations. Cavell communicated FFRF’s demand that the district refrain from entangling the secular duties of the school with religion in the future. Gilreath responded on June 27 informing FFRF that she had spoken with the high school principal to ensure the violation does not happen again.

Coven elementary school to be Gideon-proof

FFRF has ensured that illegal religious propaganda distributions to students at a Georgia school district in Coven, Ga., are put to rest.

A troubled parent contacted FFRF about a Gideon bible distribution in a fifth-grade classroom at Rocky Plains Elementary School. Impressionable students were told that the bibles were available at the front of the classroom for anyone who would like to take one.

FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote to Newton County Schools Superintendent Samantha Fuhrey on June 6, requesting that the district investigate the situation and take steps to combat future occurrences.

A general counsel for the district informed FFRF in a reply on June 15 that a conference had been held with the principal involved in the violation and affirmed that it would not happen again. The issue will be addressed with all administration and teachers when the schools reopen from summer break.

Gainesville schools gets secular revamp



Thanks to FFRF, a school district in Gainesville, Ga., will keep religion out of its classrooms, hallways and ceremonies.

A concerned parent informed FFRF that the assistant principal of Chattahoochee Elementary School — part of the Forsyth County Schools district — had opened the graduation ceremony at Chattahoochee Elementary School with a Christian prayer this past May. A different parent in the district also contacted FFRF about a King James Bible that was exhibited in a trophy case in North Forsyth Middle School. Additionally, the parent informed FFRF that a poster in a classroom at the middle school with the phrase “God is in control” was being displayed in view of students.

FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell sent a letter on June 16 to an attorney representing the district warning about the unconstitutional promotions of religion in the

public school district. Cavell communicated FFRF’s request that the district discontinue prayer at future school-sponsored events, and remove both the King James Bible and religious poster from display. On June 23, a response from the district informed FFRF that the requests had been adhered to and that steps had been taken by the district superintendent to ensure no future First Amendment violations recur.

Lexington school gets constitutional lesson

A high school in Lexington, Ga., will be made aware of its constitutional duties pertaining to religion and will not be proselytizing its athletes in the future.

A concerned parent informed FFRF that Oglethorpe County High School held a sports award banquet that began with a prayer led by Athletic Director Tony Derricotte — who is also a preacher. The prayer caused several attendees to become discomfited.

FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell sent a letter on June 5 warning the school district superintendent of the unlawfulness of school-sponsored prayer. On June 16, an attorney representing the district informed FFRF in a letter that the Oglethorpe County School District superintendent would be taking steps to ensure school employees stay within the bounds of the First Amendment.

FFRF VICTORIES

By Molly Hanson

FFRF blows whistle on Kansas coach’s prayers



A high school wrestling coach in Wichita, Kan., has been reminded to stay in line with the First Amendment after he unconstitutionally led a prayer during a team banquet.

A concerned parent informed FFRF that, this past spring, the Wichita Northwest High School wrestling coach led a prayer for all attendees at the end-of-the-year school-sponsored banquet. FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the school district on April 20 to inform school officials that such conduct endorses and promotes personal religious beliefs on behalf of a public school district — which is unconstitutional.

FFRF received notice on May 22 that the school district conducted an investigation into the violation. Several actions were taken to ensure that no promotion of religious belief reoccurs in the future. A newsletter will be sent out before the school year starts this upcoming fall reminding school principals of the constitutional prohibition against employee participation of prayer at school functions. The issue will also be discussed with the district’s high school athletic directors.

Senior center reminded to keep meals secular

A North Carolina county senior center will adhere to federal regulations against religious worship after FFRF took action on a constitutional violation over pre-lunch prayers.

A concerned resident of Leon Mann Jr. Enrichment Center — based in Morehead City, N.C. — informed FFRF that a daily lunch prayer was occurring at the publicly funded facility. The prayer was being led by a former preacher, who was attending the center himself. Employees would quiet the crowd and encourage participation in the prayer while members of the center who did not wish to join in were being ostracized for their rejection of the religious ritual.

FFRF sent a letter on May 30 requesting that the center cease its prayers as regulations prohibit senior centers receiving federal funding from engaging in religious activities at government-sponsored functions, such as senior lunches. An attorney representing the center responded on June 6, informing FFRF that no coercion or endorsement of religion would take place at the Enrichment Center and that the prayer did not represent the center.

FFRF terminates prayer at Arizona school

FFRF successfully stopped prayers scheduled into yet another high school’s graduation ceremony, this time in Elkins, Ariz.

Last spring, FFRF was informed that the Elkins High School 2016

graduation ceremony opened and closed with a Christian prayer. FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott a letter on June 26, 2016, to the school district, warning against the inclusion of prayer at future school-sponsored events.

Although FFRF did not receive a response from the district, the organization was informed on June 5 that there had been no prayers included in this past spring’s 2017 graduation ceremony.

Delaware school cuts prayer from graduation



A Delaware school district agreed to comply with its constitutional obligation to remain neutral regarding religion in its June 5 graduation ceremony, after receiving a letter from FFRF requesting that it cancel scheduled prayers.

It was brought to FFRF’s attention that the Woodbridge High School graduation ceremony had scheduled both an invocation and a benediction, and had done so in years past. FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote to Woodbridge School

District Superintendent Heath Chasanov on June 1, informing him that the Supreme Court has ruled against prayers at public school events — which includes graduations.

Chasanov responded on June 5 with a copy of the commencement ceremony showing that the prayer had been removed.

South Carolina wrestling prayers silenced

A high school in Honea Path, S.C., has been reminded of its obligation to stay secular after it received a warning from FFRF over an unlawful prayer delivered to the school’s wrestling team this past spring.

FFRF was informed that a local pastor was called to lead a prayer at a Belton-Honea Path High School awards event for the school’s wrestling team. The pastor called upon Jesus Christ several times throughout the prayer, explicitly undermining the public school’s duty to remain secular on matters regarding religion.

FFRF sent a letter on June 2 requesting that the school address and correct the violation. The school district superintendent, Richard Rosenberger, responded on June 7, informing FFRF that the Belton-Honea Path High School principal and athletic director were made aware of the constitutional breach. Rosenberger also informed FFRF that school district faculty would be given a legal briefing on religion in schools.

Florida school to keep Christ out of events

A Florida high school won't be inserting religion into future school-sponsored events after receiving a legal warning from FFRF over a Christian prayer.

It was brought to FFRF's attention that the assistant principal and athletic director at Middleton High School in Tampa, Fla., had called upon a staff member to deliver a Christian prayer at an athletic banquet on school property. The individual had asked his students and their parents to bow their heads as he delivered a prayer, thanking God for the food.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter to Hillsborough County Public Schools Chief of Staff Alberto Vazquez on May 30, warning against the unconstitutional school endorsement of religion. Vazquez responded on June 19 to inform FFRF that an investigation had been launched over the violation. The athletic director has been retrained on the district's policy to remain religiously neutral and inclusive.

Oklahoma school will stick to teaching facts

FFRF has stopped an Oklahoma high school teacher from inserting anti-science, religious thought into his anatomy and physiology classes.

It was brought to FFRF's attention that an Owasso High School teacher, Bob Linder, was teaching creationism in his science classes. Linder fallaciously claimed that the biblically based idea of human origin was equivalent to the scientific theory of evolution, which he had made attempts to cast doubt upon. Teaching creationism, or any of its derivatives such as intelligent design, to a captive student audience is unlawful — as federal courts have consistently upheld. FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to Owasso Public Schools Superintendent Clark Ogilvie on Jan. 31, informing the district of the violation.

"Teaching that there is a scientific controversy about the validity of evolution is akin to teaching astrology with astronomy or alchemy beside chemistry," wrote Seidel. "Representing unconstitutional discarded misconceptions as scientific facts does a great disservice to the scientific literacy of Owasso High School students."

An attorney representing the school district informed FFRF in a letter sent June 20 that Linder had voluntarily re-

tired, and that appropriate actions had been taken by the district to prevent similar violations of staff infusing religious doctrine into curriculum.

Senior center to serve religious-free meals

FFRF has ensured that a senior center in Grants, N.M., will be serving prayer-free meals from here on out.

A concerned member of the Cibola Senior Center informed FFRF that the federally funded institution was instructing its members to pray before receiving meals. Although the center was not directly coercing members to comply with the practice, staff members were singling out individuals who did not pray. This created a divisive atmosphere that ostracized those who chose not to pray.

"Not only does permitting public prayer at these meals cause concern that the government is endorsing religion, it also violates our citizens' rights to be free from religious proselytizing," wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel in a letter to the center's director, Dorie Sandoval, on May 19. Sandoval responded on June 8, informing FFRF that the center had a policy against employees encouraging prayer that would be strictly adhered to.

Indiana school district says no more prayers

An Indiana school district has promised FFRF that graduation prayers will not occur again in its schools.

A concerned Elkhart Community Schools parent contacted FFRF to report that the 2016-17 graduation ceremony at the Roosevelt STEAM Academy began with a prayer. The speaker asked the audience to stand and bow heads, and then led a sectarian Christian prayer, concluding with "In Jesus' name, Amen."

"The Supreme Court has continually struck down prayers at school-sponsored events, including public school graduations," FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to Elkhart Community Schools Legal Counsel Douglas Thorne last month.

This prayer is especially egregious when involving a captive group of impressionable elementary-age school children, FFRF added. Parents, not public schools, are responsible for the religious or nonreligious upbringing of their children. And courts have continually reaffirmed that the rights of minorities are protected by the Constitution. It makes no difference how many students want prayer or wouldn't be offended by prayer at their graduation ceremony.

The school district has assured FFRF that it will adhere to the First Amendment.

"Our obligation to maintain a status of religious neutrality is communicated to our staff at all levels on a regular basis and I am, by copy of this letter, re-

mind our building principal on the importance of maintaining this status at all school functions," Thorne responded. "We will continue in our efforts to meet those obligations."

Ohio school will have a Christ-free school year



A school district in Smithville, Ohio, won't be scheduling Christianity into its school calendar or holiday decorating activities anymore.

Green Local Schools District featured an overtly Christian theme on its lunch calendar this past December, listing "Baby in a blanket on a bed of straw" with a "star" on the lunch menu. This was an obvious reference to the birth story of Jesus Christ. The calendar also displayed a picture of a baby in a manger on Dec. 26, paired with the wording "The Best Christmas Gift." FFRF was also made aware that Green Middle School had several classroom doors decorated with nativity scenes and references to the birth of Jesus Christ.

In a letter sent on March 16, FFRF Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert informed Superintendent Judy Robinson that a nativity scene is a sectarian Christian symbol, which is unlawful for a public school to display. Markert warned against the constitutional violation of promoting a religious doctrine in a public school. On June 20, FFRF was informed by a school official that the situation had been investigated and corrected.

N.C. sheriff's office complies with FFRF

FFRF recently sent a letter to the Ashe County Sheriff's Office, based in Jefferson, objecting to a "Time of Prayer" event it was scheduled to host on June 24. Highlighting the event was a prayer led by Anne Graham Lotz, the daughter of the celebrity evangelist Billy Graham and sister of Franklin Graham.

FFRF expressed concern that Ashe County officers, and perhaps Sheriff Terry Buchanan, would make an appearance at the event in their offi-

cial uniforms and might speak using government titles to promote the religious event. This, FFRF reminded the sheriff's office, would have exacerbated the appearance that the sheriff's office endorses Christianity. The Ashe County Sheriff's Office promptly addressed this concern.

"No uniformed officer or deputy will be speaking or participating in the event," wrote an attorney representing the Ashe County Sheriff's Office. "Mr. Buchanan may give a brief introduction of Ms. Lotz, but it would be without introduction of himself and without use of a title or uniform. The only presence of any uniformed officer would be consistent with their normal routine of patrol and other law enforcement duties."

Arizona high school to end assembly prayers

After it was brought to FFRF's attention that an award assembly at an Arizona high school had begun and ended with a Christian prayer, action was taken to ensure the public school remains secular.

During an award assembly this past spring at Harrison High School in Harrison, Ariz., a benediction was scheduled and delivered to students during school hours. FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote to the Harrison School District on May 24, informing the superintendent that such school-sponsored religious activities violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Elliott requested that the school refrain from including inappropriate and unconstitutional prayers at future school events.

FFRF received a response May 30 from the interim superintendent, who wrote that all principals had been notified of the violation and assuring the organization that the violation will not occur anywhere in the school district again.

Missouri school changes graduation policy

Thanks to FFRF, a school district in Willard, Mo., has adopted a policy to ensure that religion does not seep into future high school commencement addresses.

During Willard High School's graduation ceremony this past spring, religious remarks and a prayer were given by Willard Public Schools Superintendent Kent Medlin in his address to students. FFRF was informed that Medlin had quoted the bible several times, evangelized the audience by discussing his "savior" and asked the students and their families to pray along with him.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote to the school board on May 18 noting that Medlin is infamous for abusing his position of authority to promote his personal religious beliefs in the past. Elliott asked for steps to be taken by the district to comply with constitutional requirements that it remain neutral regarding religion.

An attorney representing the district wrote on May 25 to inform FFRF that the remarks had been against the board's policy. The district has altered its policy on graduation ceremonies to have the Board of Education review future commencement speeches. Furthermore, the school board's policy on religious neutrality will be reviewed with all staff members during the orientation for the upcoming school year.

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Study: Atheists have higher intelligence than the religious

Researchers say faith is an instinct, which can be overcome

A recent study has concluded that religious people are less intelligent, on average, than atheists.

The researchers, from the Ulster Institute for Social Research and Rotterdam University, say that faith is considered an instinct, and smarter people are better at overcoming

those instincts.

The authors, Edward Dutton and Dimitri van der Linden, published their study in Springer's journal of Evolutionary Psychological Science in May.

The researchers say that a negative correlation appears valid if religion is considered an instinct and intelligence is the ability to rise above one's instincts. Dutton and van der Linden claim religion should be considered an "evolved domain" (instinct).

"If religion is an evolved domain, then it is an instinct, and intelligence

— in rationally solving problems — can be understood as involving overcoming instinct and being intellectually curious and thus open to non-instinctive possibilities," Dutton said in a statement.

According to the study, the more intelligent a child is — including during the early years — the more likely he or she is to turn away from religion. And for older people, those with above-average intelligence are less likely to believe in a god.

Dutton and van der Linden also

looked into the link between instinct and stress. They argue that being intelligent helps people during stressful times to consider their options and act rationally.

"If religion is indeed an evolved domain — an instinct — then it will become heightened at times of stress, when people are inclined to act instinctively, and there is clear evidence for this," Dutton said in a statement. "It also means that intelligence allows us to be able to pause and reason through the situation and the possible consequences of our actions."

Commandments monument up less than a day gets destroyed

An Arkansas man was arrested after he livestreamed himself driving his car into a Ten Commandments monument less than a day after it was placed on the Arkansas Capitol grounds.

Michael Reed, 32, who identifies as Christian, has been charged with defacing objects of public interest, criminal trespass and criminal mischief.

An 18-second video of the incident on Reed's Facebook page begins with music playing in a car before the driver shouts "Oh my goodness" and then "Freedom" before smashing into the monument. Reed said he was doing it because it was a violation of the separation of church and state.

When Reed left the scene, he walked to the Capitol building and began making threats to officials.

Agents with the Secret Service say Reed walked into the building and started making strange threats against the president and the federal government.

Reed allegedly told agents with the Secret Service that Satan made him crash his car into the statue. He also told agents that the devil told him to urinate on the monument.

Arkansas state Sen. Jason Rapert unveiled the statue the day before, ending his two-year fight to have the tablet erected on the Capitol grounds. Rapert sponsored a bill to have the monument built, arguing, in part, that the commandments would help citizens to understand "the Ten Commandments as the moral foundation of the law."

This wasn't the first time Reed has pulled such a stunt. In October 2014, Reed rammed his car into the Ten Commandments monument at the Arkansas Capitol. It was destroyed in the crash. It was later ordered removed by a court in a case brought by the ACLU, which also plans to sue over the Arkansas display.

FFRF released a statement decrying the act of vandalism while also condemning the placement of the monument on public grounds. "FFRF does not condone violating the Constitution by erecting a Ten Commandments monument on the Arkansas Capitol grounds. Nor do we condone breaking the law to remove such a display. There is no need to resort to criminal behavior to uphold the Constitution. . . . Whatever his motivation: We are a nation governed by the rule of law. That not only means vandalism will not be tolerated, but it also means that we take our disputes to court."



Photo by Jimmy Chin. Reprinted with permission.

Rock climber and atheist Alex Honnold smiles after completing a 3,000-foot rope-free climb of El Capitan in Yosemite National Park on June 3. The historic event was documented for an upcoming National Geographic feature film and magazine story.

Sheer fortitude

Atheist Alex Honnold climbed El Capitan without ropes or aid

It takes a lot of faith to do what Alex Honnold did.

Faith in himself, that is.

On June 30, Honnold became the first person to climb the sheer "Freerider" face of El Capitan in Yosemite National Park without any ropes, safety harnesses or assistance.

National Geographic claims that Honnold's accomplishment "may be the greatest feat of pure rock climbing in the history of the sport." The Washington Post said it was the "moon landing" of solo climbing.

Honnold, besides being incredible climber, is also an "out" atheist.

"I'm an atheist rock climber," he told Chris Johnson, author of the book *A Better Life: 100 Atheists Speak Out on Joy & Meaning in a World Without God*.

"I was taken to church for may-

be five or six years as a kid and at no point did I ever think there was ever anything going on with church," Honnold tells Johnson during filming for "A Better Life in Yosemite with Alex Honnold." "I always saw it as a bunch of old people eating stale wafers, and that's totally weird to me."

It took Honnold just 3 hours and 56 minutes to "free solo" the nearly 3,000-foot granite wall. Free soloing is when a climber is alone and uses no ropes or any other equipment that aids or protects him or her, leaving no margin for error.

"What Alex did defied everything that we are trained, and brought up and genetically engineered to think," climber Peter Mortimer told National Geographic.

Scaling El Capitan's sheer wall was literally a death-defying feat for

Honnold. The Washington Post says that the mountain "features rock faces smoothed out by ancient glaciers that left the cliff with the texture of a kitchen counter." Any misstep or slip would send him plummeting to the rocky park floor with little to no chance of survival.

"With free-soloing, obviously I know what I'm in danger, but feeling fearful while I'm up there is not helping me in any way," Honnold told National Geographic. "It's only hindering my performance, so I just set it aside and leave it be."

Being an atheist has perhaps pushed Honnold to try things he might not otherwise attempt.

"By not believing in an afterlife, it just sort of forces you to make the most of this life, to get the most out of the time you have," Honnold tells Johnson during filming. "It probably has affected the way I live my life, by accepting the fact that I'm just another animal on the Earth and I will die in my time, and I only have a limited amount of time and I have to use it."

“By not believing in an afterlife, it just sort of forces you to make the most of this life.”
— Alex Honnold

FFRF blasts *Trinity Lutheran* decision

Supreme Court rules church school can get federal funds

FFRF released the following statement on June 26.

The U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision that could inflict incalculable damage upon the constitutional wall of separation between state and church. Seven justices turned their backs on the hallowed principle that citizens should not be forced to financially support churches and church schools.

In a 7-2 vote, the court, in a decision by Chief Justice John Roberts, ruled in favor of Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Mo., in its court battle against the state of Missouri. The church, which runs a religiously segregated day care, sued because it was excluded from a program that provides grants to non-profits to resurface playgrounds with recycled tires. Missouri's Constitution, along with more than 30 other state constitutions, bars direct or indirect taxpayer funding "in aid of any church, sect, or denomination of religion."

The decision strikes a blow, possibly fatal, against treasured provisions in a majority of state constitutions whose prohibitions against taxpayer support of religion are more explicit than the First Amendment's Establishment Clause.

It has been a bright line rule since America's founding that the government will not fund religion or the free exercise of religion. On June 26, the Supreme Court destroyed that rule, claiming that a government funding program that is not open to churches "violates the Free Exercise Clause." This turns the steadfast rule on its head,



Photo by Shutterstock

The Supreme Court, for the first time, ruled in favor of providing public funding for a religious organization.

since government funds that flow to churches ultimately facilitate religious worship. Never in our history has the government been able to fund religious worship — until now.

On its face, the outcome seems benign: A church school can write a grant to replace asphalt or other pavement at a playground with retreaded rubber tires to make it safer. But in fact, the church school receiving this public improvement is free to proselytize the tots under its protection, and to discriminate in admission in favor of only Lutheran or Christian children, or any other criteria it cares as a private entity to adopt.

It's no surprise that President Trump's new appointee, Neil Gorsuch, joined Roberts and Justices Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas, Anthony Kennedy, Stephen Breyer and Elena Kagan in siding with the majority. (What is more surprising is the extent to which Gorsuch agreed with Thomas in a concurring opinion.)

"The exclusion of Trinity Lutheran from a public benefit for which it is otherwise qualified, solely because it is a church, is odious to our Constitution all the same, and cannot stand," the decision reads.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote the well-argued dissent, joined by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

"To hear the court tell it, this is a simple case about recycling tires to resurface a playground," she stated. "The stakes are higher. The case is about nothing less than the relationship between religious institutions and the civil government — that is, between church and state. The court today profoundly changes that relationship by holding, for the first time, that the Constitution requires the government to provide public funds directly to a church. Its decision slights both our precedents and our history, and its reasoning weakens this country's longstanding commitment to a separation of church and

state beneficial to both."

FFRF was part of an amicus brief against Trinity Lutheran, which pointed out that direct grants to churches clearly violate the Establishment Clause, making the state prohibitions constitutional.

This case shames the high court in another way: It should never have been decided. The state of Missouri, a week before the April oral arguments, changed its policy and permitted churches to compete for the grants, mooted the case. The court would kick most cases to the curb where the parties agree, but here, the majority simply passed over this in a footnote. Clearly, a majority on the ultra-conservative court was keen on using this opportunity to eviscerate many state provisions predicated on Thomas Jefferson's original Virginia Statute for Religious Liberty. The heart of the Jefferson statute guarantees that no citizen may be forced to pay taxes that are used to erect, attend or support any place of worship.

Some 39 state constitutions have language, often referred to as the Blaine Amendment, that contain strong guarantees against public support of religion. Article 1, Section 7 reads: "That no money shall ever be taken from the public treasury, directly or indirectly, in aid of any church, sect or denomination of religion, or in aid of any priest, preacher, minister or teacher thereof, as such; and that no preference shall be given to nor any discrimination made against any church, sect or creed of religion, or any form of religious faith or worship."

This decision guts Jefferson's wise counsel against forcing taxpayers to spend even "threepence" in support of religion. We will all suffer the consequences.

What other media wrote

Here are some other media outlets' analyses on the *Trinity Lutheran* decision.

The Washington Post

The Supreme Court's ruling on a high-profile case involving a church's day care playground surfaces will likely be used in church-state battles in the future, experts believe.

A small footnote in the ruling became a hot topic of debate among observers after the decision was handed down.

Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. wrote the majority opinion, but Justice Neil M. Gorsuch and Justice Clarence Thomas did not join a footnote where four justices state, "This case involves express discrimination based on religious identity with respect to playground resurfacing. We do not address religious uses of funding or other forms of discrimination."

Because only four justices joined that footnote, it is technically not considered the opinion of the court.

Experts believe that the footnote in the case will be used in future church-state litigation.

Does the decision limit the application of the ruling by focusing on "playground resurfacing" in this footnote?

Or does the decision open the door to religious groups receiving government funds for a wide variety of purposes?

Vox.com

Supporters of the state pointed out that — despite the relatively benign goals of Trinity Lutheran's playground-building — it opened the floodgates for taxpayer subsidizing of any "secular" part of a religious organization's expenses that might be deemed to be for the common good.

Secularist blogger Hemant Mehta at the religion blog network Patheos gave the example of building a gym at the late Jerry Falwell's Liberty University that was officially open to the public, but served to make the institution more attractive to potential students.

Plus, any precedent allowing state funds to flow to religious institutions could be used to legitimize discrimination on religious grounds. In LGBTQ-advocacy group Lambda Legal's amicus brief, for example, the organization argued that "There should be no possibility that a child and her same-sex parents are fenced out of Trinity, left to gaze at a publicly funded playground they may not enter, as its use is reserved solely for children from preferred religious tradition as a place to play and pray. The fence belongs instead precisely where Article I, § 7 erects it: separating church from state."

As the Supreme Court's attention turns toward more religious-exemption cases it's evident that the uneasy relationship between church and state in America won't become any simpler anytime soon.



Photo by Shutterstock

The Supreme Court on June 26 ruled against state-church separation.

The Atlantic

This is the first time the court has said the government is required to provide public funding directly to a religious organization.

That decision could have implications for a host of other policy fights — especially the voucher debate over public funding for private religious schools.

In the dissenting opinion, it reads, in part: "The court profoundly changes that relationship by holding, for the first time, that the Constitution requires the government to provide public funds directly to a church. Its decision slights both our precedents and our history."

While her colleagues may see this about nothing more than tire scraps on a church playground, Justice Sonia Sotomayor argued that the decision undermines years of court precedent

and legal history in the United States. Missouri wasn't being "anti-religious" in denying money to Trinity Lutheran, Sotomayor argued. It was choosing to remain secular.

"If this separation [of church and state] means anything, it means that the government cannot ... tax its citizens and turn that money over to houses of worship," Sotomayor wrote.

"The court today blinds itself to the outcome this history requires and leads us instead to a place where separation of church and state is a constitutional slogan, not a constitutional commitment."

As Sotomayor predicts, *Trinity Lutheran* is likely the beginning of a new wave of legal challenges about government funds and the free-exercise clause. A little case about tire scraps and playgrounds just set the stage for a new way of thinking about the separation of church and state.

Nonreligious seem to be gaining worldwide

It seems that more and more surveys and polls are showing that the nonreligious are becoming a major “religious” group, in many cases even larger than any given religious denomination.

The following are several recent examples of how this promising trend is shaking out in the United States and around the world.

College freshmen less religious than ever

Data from a nationwide religion survey shows first-year college students who list their affiliation as “None” has skyrocketed.

The number of college students with no religious affiliation has tripled in the last 30 years, from 10 percent in 1986 to 31 percent in 2016, according to data from the CIRP Freshman Survey. Over the same period, the number who attended religious services dropped from 85 percent to 69 percent.

These trends provide a snapshot of the current generation of young adults; they also provide a preview of rapid secularization in the United States over the next 30 years.

Since 1966, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) has surveyed incoming college students about their backgrounds, beliefs, and attitudes, including questions about their religious preference and attendance at religious services. In 2016, they surveyed more than 137,000 first-time students at 184 colleges and universities in the United States.

Most of this growth comes at the expense of Catholicism, which dropped from 32 percent to 23 percent, and mainstream Protestant denominations including Baptists (from 17 percent to 7 percent), and Methodists (from 9 percent to 3 percent). At the same time, the number of students choosing “Other Christian” increased from 5 percent to 13 percent.

The fraction of “Nones” is higher at universities (36 percent) than at four-year colleges (26 percent), mostly because more colleges than universities are religiously affiliated. Not surprisingly, religious colleges are more religious, with only 17 percent Nones; and historically black colleges even more so, with 11 percent Nones.

Starting in 2015, the CIRP survey includes “Agnostic” and “Atheist” in the



Illustration by Shutterstock

list of religious preferences, along with “None.” In 2016, the breakdown of students with no religious affiliation is 8.5 percent agnostic, 6.4 percent atheist, and 16 percent None, with all three categories up slightly since 2015.

Men are more likely than women to identify as agnostic (10 percent vs. 8 percent) or atheist (8 percent vs. 5 percent).

Canadians: Religion does more harm than good

Just over half of Canadian respondents say they believe religion does more harm than good in the world, according to a new survey.

The Ipsos poll, conducted for Global News, showed that 51 percent of respondents agreed with the above statement.

“There’s a lot that’s happening in the world right now in the name of religion,” Sean Simpson, vice president of Ipsos Affairs, said. “Of course, ISIL is the primary example that’s using religion to justify what they’re doing.”

Simpson explained that the number is rising; when Ipsos asked the same question in 2011, 44 percent of respondents agreed.

“But I think we hear about these incidents more often, not just because they may be happening more often but because of the information age.

“We’ve got 24-hour news cycles and social media and Twitter where we hear about every incident so it’s not surprising to me that a growing number of Canadians believe it does more harm than good.”

What he did find surprising was that

Quebec, once considered to be Canada’s most religious province, is now the most secular.

Compared to the rest of Canada, those from Quebec are significantly more likely than residents of other provinces to feel religion does more harm than good (62 percent).

Plurality of Australians identify as nonreligious

After decades of rapid growth, the number of Australians marking “no religion” on their census forms has for the first time surpassed Catholicism as the most common answer to a prompt in the country’s 2016 census, according to data. If all Christian denominations are considered together, they would make up just over half of respondents.

The number of respondents who identified as nonreligious — 30.1 percent — almost doubled from 15.5 percent in 2001. Less than 1 percent identified that way in 1966, the year Australia lifted its “White Australia Policy,” which opened up immigration to non-Europeans and kicked off broader demographic changes. Australia’s population has also more than doubled since then.

The trend away from religiosity in Australia is likely to continue, as the bulk of growth in the category, perhaps unsurprisingly, is in the 18-34 age bracket. Those older than 65 were the most likely to identify as religious — and Christian in particular, as non-Christian religious groups tend to find representation in younger immigrant populations.

Survey: Majority of British is nonreligious

The 34th annual British Social Attitudes Survey has shown that nonreligious people represent a clear majority of British people in 2017, accounting for 53 percent of the population. This is a new high for the nonreligious population, which was previously estimated at 51 percent in 2014.

The result is consistent with other recent polls which ask the questions “Do you consider yourself to have a religion?” and “If so, which one?,” which will typically find that nonreligious British represent roughly half the population.

The strength of the British Social Attitudes Survey’s result, in particular, is that it has asked the same question every year for several decades, creating a real-time picture of how attitudes to religion in Britain have changed with demographic shifts.

Most noticeable is the distinction between the views of younger age cohorts and older age cohorts; a majority of older Britons have strong religious identities that are not widely shared by their children and grandchildren.

Most in Czech Republic don’t believe in God

The vast majority of adults in Central and Eastern Europe identify with a religious group and believe in God, according to a recent Pew Research Center survey of 18 countries in the region. But those in the Czech Republic are an exception. A majority of the population there is religiously unaffiliated and does not believe in God.

More than seven in 10 Czechs (72 percent) do not identify with a religious group, including 46 percent who describe their religion as “nothing in particular” and an additional 25 percent who say “atheist” describes their religious identity.

When it comes to religious belief — as opposed to religious identity — 66 percent of Czechs say they do not believe in God, compared with just 29 percent who do. (While a lack of affiliation and a lack of belief may seem to go hand in hand, that is not always the case. In the U.S., for example, a majority of religiously unaffiliated adults — 61 percent — say they believe in God.)

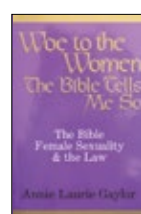
A cupola lovebirds



Photo by Brad Swenson

Hanna Bruer and FFRF Graphic Designer Jake Swenson were married in the Kenneth Proulx “Above Us Only Sky” Cupola at Freethought Hall on June 17. The wedding was officiated by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So

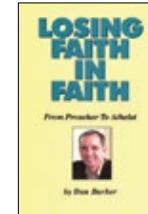


A concise, easy-to-read book that will challenge your concept of the bible as “a good book.” Illustrated. 264 pages.

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

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Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist



How Dan “threw out the bathwater and discovered there is no baby there.”

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IN THE NEWS

Pope's advisor charged with sexual assaults



Cardinal George Pell, a senior adviser to Pope Francis and the third-ranking official in the Holy See, is taking leave from the Vatican to fight historical sexual assault charges in his home country of Australia.

The case is the latest black mark against the Catholic Church, which has been reeling from sexual abuse scandals across several countries that date back decades. It could also have ramifications for Pope Francis, who counts Pell among his closest aides.

Australian police have not released a detailed list of charges against Pell and didn't disclose any information about alleged victims, saying only that there were multiple charges and "multiple complainants."

Pell said he had been the victim of "relentless character assassination," as he held a news conference in Rome to rebut the allegations.

"I'm innocent of these charges, they are false," Pell said. "The whole idea of sexual abuse is abhorrent to me."

Pell arrived in Australia on July 10 to appear in the Melbourne Magistrate's court for a filing hearing.

Police said he was not receiving any special treatment, despite his elevated status as the Vatican's treasurer.

Two stoned to death for 'violating Islamic law'

An unmarried couple have been stoned to death in public in Mali in the first such incident since jihadi groups were driven out of the region.

Jihadis seized key northern cities in Mali in March 2012, and though they were driven out by a French-led military intervention in 2013, Islamist groups continue to make their presence felt with frequent attacks on domestic and foreign forces.

"The Islamists dug two holes where they put the man and the woman who lived maritally without being married," said a local official. "They were stoned to death."

Members of the public were invited to take part.

A local official said the ringleaders had accused the unmarried couple of violating "Islamic law," which requires punishment by stoning.

Man sentenced to death for Facebook comments

A Pakistani court sentenced a man to death for comments he made about the prophet Mohammed on Facebook.

In what appears to be a first for social media, the judge found Taimoor Raza, 30, guilty of committing blasphemy online.

The verdict is the latest step in a nationwide crackdown on internet dissent in Pakistan, where unproven allegations of blasphemy have previously sparked violent mob lynchings.

Raza was arrested last year after engaging in an online debate about Islam on Facebook with a man who turned out to be a counterterrorism agent.

Religious exemption for retirement plans expands

The exemption in federal pension law for church retirement plans should apply even to plans not initially established by a church, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled.

The reversal stems from class actions against Advocate Health Care Network by current and former employees. Advocate operates 12 hospitals and 250 other health care facilities in Illinois. Though it is not a church, it has contractual relationships with the Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Among other things, the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) establishes minimum funding, vesting requirements and fiduciary responsibilities for plan administrators, but church plans are exempt from such requirements.

Plaintiffs argued that, even if Advocate could dodge liability under ERISA's church-plan exemption, the exemption is a violation of the First Amendment's prohibition on a state establishment of religion.

Faith-healers charged with murder of baby

The faith-healing parents of a baby who died this year just hours after she was born have been charged with murder in connection with her death.

Sarah Mitchell gave birth to twin girls March 5 at her parents' Oregon City home. She and her husband, Travis Mitchell, are part of the Followers of Christ church — a group that doesn't believe in medical care and instead relies on prayer and anointment with oil for healing.

One of the infants, Gennifer, died just hours after birth due to breathing problems.

State Medical Examiner Dr. Karen Gunson told KATU News she isn't sure if Gennifer would have survived if she had been taken immediately to the hospital, but said it would have given her a chance.

Juror dismissed for hearing holy spirit

A Florida federal court jury found former Congresswoman Corrine Brown guilty on 18 counts of fraud and corruption after the judge removed a juror who insisted the Holy Spirit had told him Brown was not guilty on all charges. A motion for a new trial has been filed. The motion in *United States v. Brown* argues: "There is a substantial possibility the holy spirit was actually the juror's own mind telling him that one or more witnesses had not testified truthfully."

Church of England 'colluded' with sex abuse

The head of the Church of England has said the institution "colluded" with and helped to hide the long-term sexual abuse of young men by one of its former bishops.

Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, made the statement as the church published a review of how it handled the case of former bishop Peter Ball, who was convicted and imprisoned in 2015 after pleading guilty to offenses including two counts of indecent assault.

Welby said the report was "harrowing reading" and that the church didn't help those who were brave enough to come forward.

The report said Ball's conduct "caused serious and enduring damage to the lives of many men," and that "the church at its most senior levels and over many years supported him unwisely."

Chicken-slaying ritual can continue, court rules



Photo by Shutterstock

An ultra-Orthodox ritual involving the twirling and slaughtering of tens of thousands of chickens can continue on public streets, an appeals court ruled.

The 3-2 ruling by the Appellate Division First Department in Manhattan upholds a lower court decision that declined to block the pre-Yom Kippur slaughter, *Kaporos*, that involves swinging the chickens three times overhead while saying a prayer that asks God to transfer sins to the bird. The chicken's throat is then slit in accordance with kosher laws.

"Although they may be upsetting to nonadherents of such practice, the United States Supreme Court has recognized animal sacrifice as a religious sacrament," the ruling read.

Montreal Catholic Church will fingerprint priests

The Catholic Church of Montreal will expand its pilot project that bars priests and church volunteers from being alone with children and requires them to provide digital fingerprints to work with vulnerable populations.

Around 10 churches have been taking part in the pilot project, which was launched last fall. All churches will now have to follow these rules by 2020.

The rules apply to those occupying roles deemed as "high risk" in the diocese's 194 churches and ministries — working with minors, the sick and the elderly — and also include mandatory police background checks.

Everyone, from salaried employ-

ees to volunteers, will be subject to a 10-step screening process. There will have to be at least two adults with a group of minors, and those adults will have to provide references and adhere to an ethics code.

Michigan governor vetoes anti-abortion plates

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder vetoed legislation requiring the state to create and sell an anti-abortion fundraising license plate.

In a news release, Snyder said the plate sends a "political message" with the potential to "bitterly divide" millions of residents. He said it's inappropriate for a state-issued plate.

The legislation "is not about a license plate; it's about the state of Michigan making a political statement," Snyder said. "And that statement arouses strong emotional reaction that divides the residents of this state."

The bill's sponsor, Sen. Patrick Colbeck, R-Canton, said Snyder's action is "disgraceful." He said the governor had voiced objections about the cost of the new plate but Colbeck had assured him money had been raised to cover it and that there would be no additional expense to the state.

Colbeck said he thought there were enough votes in the Senate to override Snyder's veto, but not in the state House.

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Michigan put out a statement acknowledging Snyder's action on its Facebook page. "Women's health care should not be political and Gov. Snyder agrees," the group said. "Join us in thanking him for this."

San Antonio mayor says atheism causes poverty



Former San Antonio Mayor Ivy Taylor, a Baptist, claims poverty is caused by "broken people" who don't believe in God. While speaking at a mayoral forum in May, Taylor was asked about the "deepest systemic cause of generational poverty."

She replied, "To me, it's broken people. People not being in a relationship with their creator and, therefore, not being in good relationship with their families and their communities, and not being productive members of society. I think that's the ultimate answer."

Many of her critics claim Taylor is an intolerant conservative Christian with an anti-LGBT agenda. When Ivy made an appearance at a vigil for victims of the Orlando shooting victims, she was booed off the stage by gay rights activists because of her anti-gay politics.

Darrow takes rightful place at courthouse

By PJ Slinger

Clarence Darrow was a larger-than-life attorney. Now, finally, the legendary lawyer has a larger-than-life statue honoring him for his part in the famous Scopes Trial in 1925 in Dayton, Tenn.

Thanks to FFRF, a 7-foot-tall statue of the litigator by sculptor Zenos Frudakis was installed on the Rhea County Courthouse grounds, opposite a similar statue of William Jennings Bryan, the prosecuting attorney in the famous “monkey trial.”

The installation of the venerable statue received significant press coverage, including a large spread in *The New York Times*.

“We’re dedicating this magnificent statue to history,” FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor said. “The monument is a tribute to a civil libertarian and freethinker who fought for science and rationality — to have them prevail for all time to come.”

In July of 1925, the courthouse was the site of the trial of Dayton High School teacher John T. Scopes, who was charged with violating state law by teaching evolution. Scopes, who was defended by Darrow, was convicted and fined \$100. However, the decision was ultimately reversed in 1927 by the Tennessee Supreme Court because of a technicality — the judge set the fine, not the jury.

The statue of Bryan, given to the county by the Bryan College in 2005, inspired Frudakis, FFRF and others to seek to remedy the “missing link.” Frudakis is a renowned American sculptor who has created an extensive, award-winning collection of more than 100 bronze sculptures in public and private collections. FFRF contributed the costs for the



All photos this page courtesy of the Chattanooga Times Free Press

FFRF’s Clarence Darrow statue stands permanently on the courthouse grounds.

\$150,000 project.

“Memorializing Darrow alongside the existing Bryan statue will now at least balance the views inherent in the trial, and accurately reflect history, a well as symbolically recreate the court drama which captured the attention of our nation,” Frudakis told the Chattanooga Times Free Press.

The dedication ceremony included actor John de Lancie, who played “Q” in “Star Trek: The Next Generation,” and has portrayed Darrow in a play. Also speaking was Andrew Kersten, author of the 2011 biography, *Clarence Darrow: American Iconoclast* (see page 15). Margaret Downey with the Freethought Society was the emcee.

“We’re thrilled to be working with an internationally known sculptor in making this gift, not just to Rhea County and its historic courthouse, but to posterity,” Gaylor said. “This magnificent statue of Darrow will enhance Rhea County’s history, and be a draw for generations to come.”



Annie Laurie Gaylor

sculptor in making a gift to Rhea County, to history and to posterity.

This is a permanent tribute that will not only enhance tourism but will balance history. While we bequeath it to Rhea County, it is actually a gift to the nation — to Americans from across the country who every year make a pilgrimage to witness this historic spot, to reflect, study and debate.

What Clarence Darrow stood for at the Scopes Trial is as timely and imperative today as in 1925. Clarence Darrow knew that we live on in memory, words and deeds. In the world of civil liberty advocacy, science and freethought, Clarence Darrow is truly an immortal.

Clarence Darrow believed, “You can only protect your liberties” in this world by protecting the other man’s freedom. *You can only be free if I am free*,” Darrow noted. Darrow realized that science education, the use of reason in our social policy and freedom of conscience are essential to human progress and survival.

FFRF held a Darrow Celebration on July 13 at the Chattanooga Hotel in Chattanooga, Tenn., with speakers Frudakis, Kersten and William Dusenberry. Fred Edwards of the American Humanist Association, which helped locate a sculptor for the project, also spoke. FFRF State Representative Margaret Downey recounted the inside story behind town opposition.

During the unveiling ceremony, de Lancie spoke eloquently about the meaning of the Darrow statue on the courthouse grounds.

“It’s fitting that Bryan and now Darrow are back in the town that made them famous,” he told the crowd. “In the world of the religious versus the secular, this is ground zero, the epicenter. I think it’s been a little boring for Mr. Bryan to have been standing there all alone among only those who share his views. That’s going to change now.”

But not everyone is enamored with having a replica of Darrow on the courthouse lawn.

The *New York Times* writer Richard Fausset reports that at a County Commission meeting in Dayton recently, resident “Ruth Ann Wilson suggested that the statue might unleash a local plague or a curse.”

“I rise in opposition to this atheist statue, all right?” she said at the meeting. “This is very serious, folks.”

Local Religious Right activist June Griffin said the statue “doesn’t belong there” and considers the courthouse grounds “sacred territory.” Griffin, 77, was “once lampooned by ‘The Daily Show’ for her creationist beliefs,” *The New York Times* reported. “She was instrumental in arranging a July 1 anti-Darrow rally at the courthouse that included state Sen. Mae Beavers, a Republican candidate for governor, and Larry Tomczak, a public policy adviser to the conservative Liberty Counsel. “He described the gathering as a protest against the ‘ongoing attempt by secularists in America to blur or remove symbols reminding us of our Judeo-Christian heritage.’”

Griffin even predicted that “the statue would not last long in the heart of the Bible Belt,” Fausset writes.

“There are a bunch of people back on the mountain, you don’t know what they’re going to do,” Griffin told Fausset. “But I’m just going to leave them to their devices.”

FFRF, Downey and Rosalie Frudakis took pains to ensure law enforcement came out in full force, after Griffin posted a photograph of herself with a shotgun, quoting bible verses about executing “heathens.”

Despite the threats, the event went off without a hitch, other than the one where the covering of the statue got hooked on Darrow’s tuft of hair during the unveiling.

Clarence Darrow: An ‘immortal’

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor gave these remarks July 13 prior to the unveiling of the statue.

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

We are delighted to be here in Dayton, Tenn. It’s been a lifelong ambition to visit Dayton, to enjoy the Scopes Trial Play and Festival.

We’re here to celebrate the unveiling of the “missing link” at the Rhea County Courthouse — a magnificent artistic achievement, Zenos Frudakis’ creation of a statue commemorating a great civil libertarian, Clarence Darrow, and in particular, his defense of John Scopes and evolution in “the trial of the century.”

We join together with the citizens of Dayton and Rhea County in celebration of the history made here in 1925. We thank the Rhea County Historical and Genealogical Society for all its efforts in support of this landmark.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation thanks our members around the country for the financial support making possible our role in underwriting this artistic and historic project. We’ve been delighted to work with a brilliant

Monumental ideas

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker gave these remarks at the unveiling of the Darrow statue on July 14.

By Dan Barker

The Scopes Trial was so hot that they went outside. Today, if Bryan and Darrow were here, they’d probably say “Thank goodness for the evolution of air conditioning.”

Clarence Darrow said: “History repeats itself. That’s one of the things wrong with history.”

He also said, “I’ve never killed a man” — Darrow was a pacifist — “but I have read a lot of obituaries with pleasure.”

And, “A criminal is someone without the capital to incorporate.”

And Clarence Darrow said, “An idea is a greater monument than a cathedral.”

So we have some monuments today for these two great men, and it is the ideas that they stood for that keep American great.

America is a great country, not because we are all united. The original motto of our was “E Pluribus Unum,” which means, “Out of many come one.”

“E pluribus unum” does not mean “United we stand.” “E pluribus unum” means “Divided, we stand.” We don’t have to agree. We don’t have to have the same political views or religious views. We don’t have to agree on anything. We are free to think like we want.



Dan Barker

We are a proudly rebellious country. We fought a Revolutionary War that kicked out the sovereign, the top-down authority telling us, “Here’s what you must think.” None of us wants to be told what to think. It’s the great American experiment that allows all of us, no matter what our position is, to believe, to not believe, to be political or not.

There are many countries in the world, and there were many times in history where that was not allowed. There were and are places where only one of these representatives would be free to speak his mind. The other would have been shut down. Here in America, isn’t it wonderful both can be heard?

Today, of all days, my grandson Ethan is graduating from Marine Corps boot camp. He loves his country. And he loves his fellow Marines. He’s not a believer, but many of his Marine friends are believers, and they say America is wonderful because of the freedoms that we have.

So, Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan, bravo!

Darrow and Bryan are back together again

Historian and author Andrew Kersten gave this speech at the unveiling of the Clarence Darrow statue on July 14 in Dayton, Tenn.

By Andrew Kersten

It has been 92 years since Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan have stood together. A lot has happened since. But a lot remains the same.

There are four things that one should know about Darrow, Bryan and this case.

First, you should know that Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan were not mortal enemies. If anything, were we to see them in action today, we would call them frenemies. They had known each other for decades, had their moments of close cooperation, friendship and comradeship. And they had their disagreements, too.



Andrew Kersten

But we should never lose sight of the fact that the lives of these two great Americans were interconnected and interwoven. Falling into “who wore the white hat and who wore the black hat” is a serious misread of history and an abuse to the memory of them both.

They were both born in the Midwest — Darrow in Ohio and Bryan in Illinois. Both of them spent a good portion of their lives in Illinois. Both were lawyers. Both were intensely political and involved in party politics. Both were life-long Democrats. Together they were instrumental in remaking the Democratic Party.

Knew each other well

In short, they knew each other well, had the same circle of colleagues, worked together for years, and had known each other’s criticisms for decades. That they would square off here in Dayton was not a surprise to each other or anyone who knew them. Nor should it surprise anyone that they were friends. And when Bryan died shortly after the trial, Darrow was shocked and saddened, saying of his fallen friend that he was “a man of very extraordinary powers. . . . I sincerely regret his death, and extend my sympathy to his grief-stricken family.”

Second, there were several issues that defined their lives, not just one. Not just the debate between evolution and creationism.

Here’s where they agreed — at least for some moments in time.

They both thought that American politics should serve working people first. In the 1890s, Darrow and Bryan worked together to transform the Democratic Party, and in so doing, American politics. The 1890s was a period — Mark Twain called it the Gilded Age



Clarence Darrow, left, and William Jennings Bryan have a discussion during the Scopes Trial in 1925 in Dayton, Tenn.

— when corporations and the propertied had power and sway over the American system of laws, politics and economics. It did not work for the average person; it did not work for families. A few daring young politicians and their allies stood up against the system which they considered unjust, if not immoral. Darrow worked behind the scenes to achieve change while Bryan was out in front.

Darrow and Bryan at various moments were in and out of touch with American politics for most of their lives. Yet, neither of them ever abandoned their basic agreement that our system of governance should work for everyone, not simply those who have more than others.

Let’s listen to their words for a moment. Bryan put his political views this way in 1896: “We shall fight them to the uttermost, having behind us the producing masses of the nation and the world. Having behind us the commercial interests and the laboring interests and all the toiling masses, we shall answer their demands for a gold standard by saying to them, you shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.”

Darrow wrote this to a friend in 1894 at the height of the Chicago railroad strike: “Do you know that they are making history very fast in America, and all the history is against freedom? Can anything be done to stop them before liberty is dead?”

They both were dedicated to freedom and liberty.

Didn’t always agree

Here then is the third thing: Like any pair of old friends, they did not agree on everything. In fact, these two disagreed about some big issues and in a very public way. They each believed that they were right and the other was wrong. And, they each believed that the other was meddling in what should happen and what

should be the future. And, they squared off right here in this marvelous place.

The road to Dayton was a long one. Darrow and Bryan had been sparring for a couple years in the newspapers. As we all know, Bryan criticized evolution based on his religious views. To him, the scientific principles and thoughts constituted a systematic attack on Christianity. Darrow did not share that view for two reasons, one public and one private. Darrow believed that science was the key to the future of the United States and of humanity. Evolution and investigations into it were a part of that. He did not mind at all where the research took us as long as it did not harm anyone in the process and led to a brighter, more peaceful world. He also saw it as his role in society to push back on what he saw was a “war on science.” Darrow’s public debate in the newspapers hit the road in 1925, stopping here in Dayton, Tennessee.

Darrow an iconoclast

The other reason that Darrow wanted to take a stand in Dayton is that he valued public education. As a boy, his own experiences with public schools had not been very positive. He wanted schools to be places of engagement with ideas that challenged the views inherited from kith and kin. He wanted schools to be places where debate and discussion molded minds. He was an iconoclast and wanted others to have the opportunity to jettison or to accept received wisdom through study and not through rote memorization. According to Darrow, learning your ABCs or multiplication tables or your Latin conjugations was the opposite of what an education should provide. Education was the road to freedom and liberty.

Let’s listen again to Darrow: “Unless there is left enough of the spirit of freedom in the state of Tennessee, and in the United States, there is not a single line of any constitution that can withstand bigotry and intolerance when it seeks to destroy the rights of the individual.”

Finally, the fourth thing we should think about at this reunion of the Old Lion (Darrow) and the Great Commoner (Bryan) is that the American experience is defined by a jockeying of ideas. In fact, the nation itself is an idea, perhaps only that. As we all continually strive to fashion that “more perfect union,” we should recall that our nation under the Constitution was forged from great debates.

Today we see a monument to Darrow and Bryan, to their contest of ideas here in Dayton, and to the great American tradition of debate to engage and to advance civil society.

Andrew Kersten, author of *Clarence Darrow: American Iconoclast*, is the dean of the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Idaho-Moscow and a political historian who has specialized in modern U.S. history (1880s through the 20th century).

The evolution of Darrow



The original sculpture.



Sculptor Zenos Frudakis stands with the statue after it was bronzed.



The statue after it has been sandblasted.



The final look, ready for installation.



Photo courtesy of Chattanooga Times Free Press

The Clarence Darrow statue now stands outside the Rhea County Courthouse in Dayton, Tenn., on the opposite side of the front lawn from the statue of William Jennings Bryan.



Photo by Dan Barker

A “Read your bible” sign hanging on the outside wall of the courthouse has been up for about five years, according to Tom Davis, president of the Rhea County Historical Society. This sign was in the actual trial in 1925 and Darrow persuaded the judge to move the sign out of the vision of the jurors.



Photo by Dan Barker

At the request of dedication emcee Margaret Downey and FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, the sign was flipped over during the dedication ceremony, only to be put back up immediately after the event was over.



Photo courtesy of Chattanooga Times Free Press

Emcee of the event Margaret Downey speaks with Nigel Chadwick after the dedication ceremony on July 14.



Photo courtesy of Chattanooga Times Free Press

On July 1, prior to the dedication ceremony, a small group of protesters (shown praying) who were against the Darrow statue gathered, but they were offset by an equal number of pro-Darrow backers.



Photo by Carl Ledendecker

FFRF hosted a pre-dedication dinner party on July 13 at the Chattanooga Hotel in Chattanooga, Tenn., which was attended by 67 individuals from 18 states. Speakers at the dinner party represented the “evolution” of the Clarence Darrow statue, with the addition of historian Andrew Kersten and celebrity John de Lancie, an actor (“Q” in the “Star Trek: The Next Generation” series) and an atheist, who traveled the nation for three years in a play in which he portrayed Darrow. Speakers (seated): FFRF member and secular celebrant William Dusenberry, who first noticed that William Jennings Bryan had a statue at the Rhea County Courthouse, but Darrow was missing; Andrew Kersten, a dean at the University of Idaho-Moscow whose 2011 biography is called *Clarence Darrow: American Iconoclast*; Fred Edwards, representing the American Humanist Association, which helped find a sculptor for the statue; and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. Standing: John de Lancie; FFRF State Representative Margaret Downey, who put FFRF in touch with the sculptor and helped with the dedication; Rosalie Frudakis of Frudakis Studio; the sculptor Zenos Frudakis; and FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. FFRF underwrote the \$150,000 project thanks to member support.



Photo by Dan Barker

Doris Jackson of Columbus Ohio, Jenn Taylor with Unchurched: Black Folks of Knoxville, Tenn., and Aleeta Ledendecker of Louisville, Tenn., show off their FFRF "Fan of Reason" fans outside the courthouse.



Photo courtesy of Chattanooga Times Free Press

The statue of Darrow is now permanently installed on the Rhea County Courthouse lawn.



Photo by Dan Barker

Zenos Frudakis, sculptor of the Darrow statue, gives his remarks to the crowd prior to the unveiling on July 14.



Photo courtesy of Chattanooga Times Free Press

While waiting for the unveiling ceremony, nearly 200 visitors gathered on the courthouse grounds in 90-degree weather.



Photo by Dan Barker

Actor John de Lancie speaks to the audience at the dedication ceremony. His remarks will be printed in the September Issue.

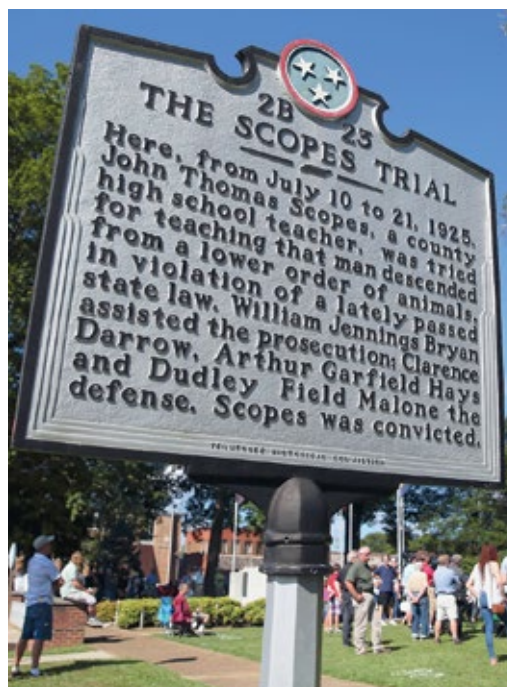


Photo courtesy of Chattanooga Times Free Press

This sign denotes the historical importance of the Scopes Trial that occurred inside the Rhea County Courthouse in Dayton, Tenn.



Photo by Dan Barker

John de Lancie, left, and FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker stand next to the newly dedicated statue of Darrow.

FFRF AWARDS \$10,050

2017 Essay Contest for Students of Color winners

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the 14 winners of the 2017 David Hudak Memorial High School Essay Contest for Students of Color.

High school seniors of color were asked to write a personal persuasive essay about what they would like to tell a believer in their life about why they chose free-thought (atheism, agnosticism).

Winners are listed below. The award amount and the college or university they will be attending are also listed.

FIRST PLACE

Lydia Mason, New York University (\$3,000)

SECOND PLACE

Uma Kokilepersaud, University of Maryland (\$2,000)

**THIRD PLACE**

Lauren Greenlee, University of San Francisco (\$1,000)

FOURTH PLACE

Lizeth Ortega-Luna, Pomona College (\$750)

FIFTH PLACE

Celestina Garcia, Indiana University (\$500)

SIXTH PLACE (TIE)

Sarah Espada, Cedar Crest College (\$400)
Evann Bailey, University of Tennessee-Chattanooga (\$400)

HONORABLE MENTIONS (\$200 each)

Avin Arefzadeh, University of Illinois
Dominic Ryan Vince Cruz, Washington College

Adwoa Debrah, New York University
Shejan Heaven, University of Georgia

Miaun McCloud, Grand Valley State University

Erin O'Malley, University of Rochester

Dylan Palmer, New York University

FFRF has offered essay competitions since 1979. This contest is named for the late David Hudak, an FFRF member who left a bequest to generously fund a student essay contest. FFRF thanks Dean and Dorea Schramm for providing a \$100 bonus to students who are members of a secular club. The total of \$10,050 reflects bonuses.

FIRST PLACE**Breaking the chains**

FFRF awarded Lydia \$3,000

By Lydia Mason

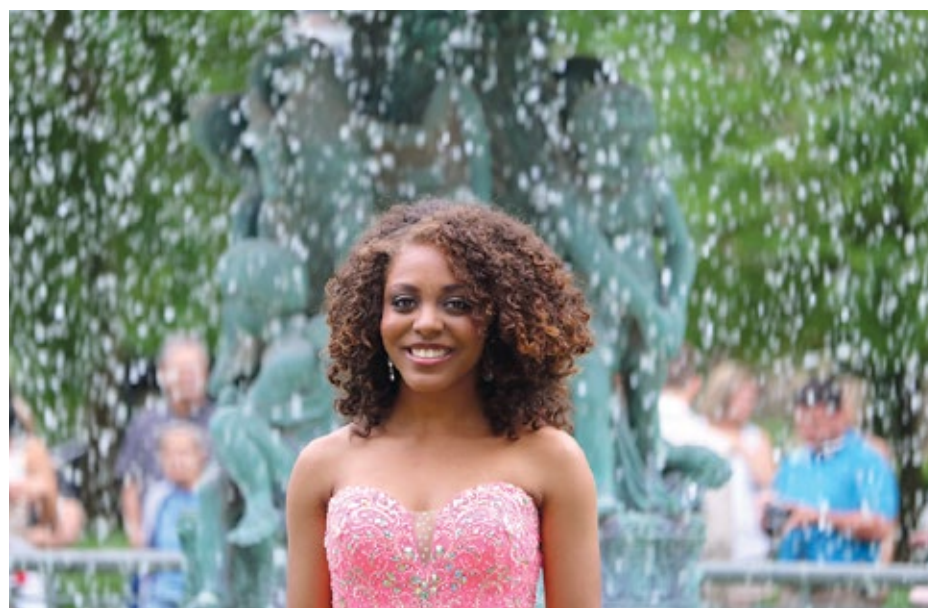
Am I going to hell? For much of my life, this question plagued me. Growing up in a hyper-religious household, I had always been told that only the true believers — the true Christians — would go to heaven. Everyone else would be damned to hell. My parents painted the world in black and white: the saved and the damned. To them, there was no question about the truth of their beliefs. God was the truth, and the truth would set you free.

Although I initially accepted Christianity without question as a child, as I got older, I realized my beliefs were not as clear-cut as I had thought. I recognized that my religious views were based on circular reasoning and logical fallacies rather than introspection and critical thinking. My religion had become a belief with atrophied logic and conviction supporting it. It was based not on understanding and faith, but on fear and ignorance. I was afraid of what I did not understand, still desperately swaddling myself in a comfort blanket

of unsupported certainty. Therefore, instead of facing my fear and accepting that there are some things that I do not know the answers to, I doubled down on the things I was most unsure of, making fact out of my greatest uncertainties.

After careful deliberation, I eventually came to embrace ignorance as a mandatory aspect of the human experience. I challenged the core of my identity, the foundation of my family's beliefs and my own — my religion. I was no longer the devout Baptist with invulnerable faith; I was the agnostic pariah with more questions than answers.

However, this intellectual liberation does not come without a price. Being a young, agnostic, LGBTQ+ African-American can leave you quickly feeling isolated within your own community. Because religion is such a large aspect of the black experience and black culture (likely due to the indoctrination of Christianity in black people as a tool for white supremacy during slavery), choosing not to partake in it can sometimes feel like you are losing a piece of your culture, your identity. When you tell your family about your choice to embrace irreligion, it is seen as



Lydia Mason

more than just a lifestyle choice, but more significantly as a betrayal of your history and your people.

While I will never bash those who are religious, I refuse to let the stigma against irreligion change my beliefs. By accepting the fact that I do not know if there is a god or an afterlife, I've become more enlightened. There is nothing more intellectually confining than forcing yourself to be sure of the unknown.

Being agnostic has allowed me to openly

embrace the beauty and possibilities all the religions of the world have to offer, while also accepting that I don't have all of the answers to life's questions.

Lydia, 18, was the valedictorian at DuPont Manual High School in Louisville, Ky., with a 4.0 GPA. She works four jobs to help support her single-parent household and save for college. She has founded three social justice organizations and raised more than \$70,000 for nonprofits. She hopes to become a lawyer and eventually a judge.

SECOND PLACE**What if it's just us? Why are we not enough?**

FFRF awarded Uma \$2,000.

By Uma Kokilepersaud

It was my freshman year of high school when I first considered suicide.

This is the part where I am supposed to say, I "found" God. That I prayed my depression away.

But I did not find God.

I found a cat.

Mr. Tims is 4 years old. He is overweight — and bites. A thunderstorm in a fur coat. He is my best friend — and the reason I am alive today.

His companionship brought me back from the brink. In caring for a living creature, I was forced to get out of my own head. I could not feed myself, but I must feed him. I may not want to exercise, but he needed to play. I could not sleep, but what could I do while he sat on my lap for three hours?

My wreckage gave me the freedom to become strong. I found medication that



Uma Kokilepersaud

worked, I talked to a therapist, I read as much as I could. Every day became easier than the last. Teachers stopped me in the hallway to tell me how much better I was doing.

During my junior year I took AP biology. And I was good at it, too. The study of matter that loved and wept and dreamed.

And then one of my classmates denied evolution.

I knew there were people like that in the world, who rejected scientific research,

who confused religious dogma with fact. I knew that, but I was still angry.

It was only later that day when I was playing with Mr. Tims that I realized why I was so angry.

Before that day I did not think much of religion — my family was Hindu and I supposed I was Hindu, too. Now I am vehemently atheistic.

I wanted to die. Mr. Tims slept with me through the night. My mother watched me during panic attacks. My grandfather sat with me watching television. Long dead writers filled my heart with courage. The trees behind my house whispered to me as I fell asleep. The moon sat in the sky and calmed me with its iridescent glow, never asking anything of me.

God was silent.

There are homes torn apart by hate, children who know nothing but abuse, loneliness so deep it could cut straight into the Earth's crust, rape, war, bigotry, suffering. Yes. It is much easier to overlook the

world's pain when it can all be attributed to some cryptic being's "plan."

But there is also much that is fine in this world. And it, too, can be attributed to the "plan." Every connection between strangers can be ascribed to faith or destiny. Every love song or embrace can be divine intervention. But what if it's not? What if it's just us?

Every twine of DNA created by angels?

Or the remnants of stars.

Why are we not enough? This world and our imperfect creatures, and our nitrogen and phosphorus and carbon?

When will we take responsibility for all that is lovely and broken in this world?

Uma, 17, from Baltimore, will be attending the University of Maryland and seeking a chemical engineering degree. She is excited to join secular and freethought organizations on campus. After college, she hopes to become a research physician specializing in neurological illness.

THIRD PLACE

Alone in the universe and that's all right

FFRF awarded Lauren \$1,000.

By Lauren Greenlee

For someone I don't know, especially someone who believes in a higher power, to understand my religious beliefs (or lack thereof), they would need to know my background.

I was born into the LDS church and my family has strong ties to the religion. That connection made leaving the church difficult. Eventually, I was able to wean my mother off the idea that I would be at her side at church each week.

But the "how" of that is not as important as the "why," and the "why" was a plethora of frankly abhorrent beliefs and practices that had been conveniently avoided in my Sunday school lessons. Beliefs that no one would have told me about if I had asked. Information that I wasn't supposed to go looking for, because the LDS church specifically instructs its members not to get their information from any non-LDS sources and to "doubt your doubts before



Lauren Greenlee

you doubt your faith."

I didn't know until my teen years that the church had banned African-Americans from being full members until 1978. Or that it took until 2013 for the Mormon

church to renounce statements made both within their holy text and by fellow authorities in the 1960s that black and Native American people who became members of the church had been cursed with their darker skin tone and would gradually become lighter once they became members. Some may say that the men making these statements were merely products of their time, but I refuse to believe that any benevolent and fair god would choose a man like Brigham Young as its mouthpiece.

Once I removed myself from Mormonism, I began to search for other religious avenues to take in life. I avoided other institutionalized religions like the plague. But the idea of a god, any god, someone looking out for us, was always in the back of my mind.

I tried paganism. I had no sacrifices or altars, but I offered fervent prayers to goddesses who I found sufficiently different from Mormon Jesus. Despite my attempts, I never received an answer from Brigid or the Morrighan. I became more insecure, wondering what to do with my desire to believe — until I realized that I didn't have to. For all my wishing that someone would

answer my prayers, the fact remained that I had no evidence of a higher power. And so, over time, I walked away from religion altogether.

I figure if a god (capital "G" or otherwise) wants me, it'll come calling. Until then, agnosticism is fine with me. I don't presume to know whether there is or isn't a higher power, but if there is, it doesn't seem interested enough in me to make itself known. After years of fighting for recognition from something bigger than me, I'm finally content to exist on my own, secure in my individuality. I won't be feeding those old insecurities again anytime soon.

Lauren, 18, is from San Luis Obispo, Calif., and will be attending the University of San Francisco. She plays clarinet, alto saxophone, violin and piano (and some guitar and ukulele). She is an active volunteer, serving the homeless, doing beach cleanups, helping with upkeep on plots in memorial gardens and shelving books at the library. Lauren enjoys ceramics and reading in her spare time.

FOURTH PLACE

In whom do I trust?

FFRF awarded Lizeth \$750.

By Lizeth Ortega-Luna

It's 8 a.m. and I get up
and recite a pledge only to erupt
when you stand up
and say, "In God We Trust"
when we all sit in silence and know that in all must
you choose Him to find refuge in justifying
the injustice
the malpractice
that attacks us
but

when I say
that God will not help us today
in fighting the war against terror and corruption
you say it's an abruption
of me losing faith
but

how can I have something I never had?
you say, "it could be worse, it's not that bad"
when I know there are children dying,
farmers' fields are drying,
families being torn apart are crying,
friends mourning the death of the migrant — none of it is expected
but

you neglect it
and say, "God had a reason"
yet you expect me to believe in the meaning
when I know even you don't trust yourself
but

maybe it all works like a carousel —
going around
and around
and around
until your head hurts —
and you are left to pray and believe that "it could all be worse"
but

when I look at the news on TV
and see those plea
for justice while they march because they deserve to live
in a world with rights, it's as if we are in Berlin —
having a wall separate humanity
from our sanity
but



Lizeth Ortega-Luna

you still tell me to pray because God will listen
and when I tell you that you have that
I don't have privilege to wait for something to happen
because of the color of my skin, I have to be the captain
of my life seeking into the ocean
for a solution,
you get upset!
but

I should be the one with no rest
when I am told that my sister may never recover from her condition
remember that my dad could have gone missing
if that man with the fair skin would have pulled the trigger
when I have gone days without dinner
have been homeless
and hopeless
all a mess
with nothing but despair,
I shout at you, at him, at everyone, "it's not fair!"
but

I then ask, "Why me? What have I done?" and you tell me, "Your answer will come"
and yet, you expect me to believe when I have been let down
when I know there are others that live as if they have a crown
only to feed
their greed
off of us who work with our sweat, blood, and tears
but

if there's something I have learned these past eighteen years is that in Myself I trust.

Lizeth, 18, is from Las Vegas, where she volunteers her time by teaching children English, Spanish and math. Lizeth, an AP scholar, served as the 2016 American Legion Auxiliary Nevada Girls State as a deputy mayor, senator and Girls Nation runner-up. She enjoys dogs, gardening and calligraphy. She aspires to be a leader through understanding societies and cultures and ultimately would like to be a United States ambassador to the United Nations.

FIFTH PLACE

I believe in humanity, equality, doing good

FFRF awarded Celestina \$500.

By Celestina Garcia

Dear believer, I know the fact that I am a nonbeliever may upset you. It has perhaps already altered your view of me, but I ask that you hold your judgment for just one moment.

I have a reason for my nonbeliever status. I know you have already heard the facts, seen the evidence of Earth's true age and formation. You've heard of quantum particles. You've had high school biology and you've heard your teachers remind you that evolution is just a "theory" (even though scientific theory is as good as fact). So I come to you today with a different argument for your acceptance of my chosen path. It may seem new to you, but its message will be all too familiar.

I possess little to no spirituality, but I do possess a great faith in humanity. I believe in equality, I believe in the value of every human life and in our capacity to do good. I

“Without faith, I feel free to forge my own path, to discover my own sense of self, to develop my own sense of right and wrong.

— Celestina Garcia

have always felt that the human duty is to do good for others, so I strive to do good for my fellow human. I do this not because of the threat of hell, or the reward of heaven, but because I feel the need to make the world a better place for those I share it with. Without faith, I feel free to forge my own path, to discover my own sense of self, to develop my own sense of right and wrong.

I don't believe, because I doubt the morality of those who need a doctrine to explain to them that they should do good. I doubt a world where we help our fellow human because an ancient book tells us to. I doubt to make myself free. In my eyes, all of humanity does right because

deep down, they care about their fellow human, they care about the Earth and its future. Deep down, all of humanity shares this commitment to the future, whether or not they believe. I do not wish to persuade you, because you are free to follow the path you choose, but I implore you to consider what I have said to you today.

I don't believe, because, to me, leading the life of a "good person" seems obvious.

I don't believe, because I have reviewed the facts and made my own informed decision.

I don't believe, because I believe in something else. I believe in humanity.

Celestina, 18, of Bloomington, Ind., plans to enter the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University. After college, she hopes to be able to provide services to nonprofits, specifically to Van-Go, a community arts program dedicated to providing free art lessons to those without access to professional art supplies. Eventually, she would like to start her own nonprofit marketing firm dedicated to providing affordable marketing services to other nonprofits.

SIXTH PLACE (TIE)

A moral and ethical rejection of religion

FFRF awarded Evann \$400.

By Evann Bailey

My father and grandmother are extremely conservative Christians who do not understand why I have chosen to become agnostic. Generally speaking, most African-Americans are Christian and, if they are not, they tend to be spiritual. It has been very difficult for me to go against what has been ingrained in me since birth. I was a Christian until 2012, when I started to question Christianity, its teachings and religion as a whole.

My path to becoming an agnostic began when I tried to understand the bible for myself and not rely on a preacher. Many passages and ideas in the bible contradict themselves, and when I started asking questions, no one gave me logical and definitive answers.

Soon after, I began to examine the relationship between Christianity and African-Americans from a historical standpoint. Before being kidnapped and brought to the Americas, my ancestors did not worship Jesus and God. They worshipped their own African deities and spirits. Christianity has been forced upon my people and many other minority ethnic groups. We have been brainwashed into believing a human who lived



Evann Bailey

thousands of years ago is the son of an invisible man in the sky. It did not make sense for me to continue to follow and believe in a fairytale my ancestors were forced to believe. I wanted to break this chain of illusion.

My decision to denounce Christianity has also resulted in my decision to denounce religion as a whole. There are many similarities among the religions of the world. For example, Mithraism and Christianity are remarkably similar. Both Mithras and Jesus were born on Dec. 25, died on a cross, had 12 disciples, and practiced celibacy. The list goes on and on. Many religions also share a general consensus on the idea of heaven, hell, and good vs. evil,

as shown in Greek and Roman mythology. Historically, new religions take similar elements from religions of their surrounding location to create their own.

I believe religion is used to comfort people. Because of this, many people have taken it upon themselves to twist doctrines for personal gain. These select few have corrupted something that could have resulted in positivity. Historically, the Christian church takes millions from its followers every day. Catholic priests have a history of abusing people. Islamic radicals kill many people in the name of their god. Overall, religion has been a toxic part in human history and has caused unnecessary hardship for many.

I have not rejected the possibility of there being a God or multiple gods. Who is to say that there is no way for a higher force to be controlling everything on Earth? As the cliché goes, the world works in mysterious ways. We may never truly understand why or how things happen the way they do, but I know for certain that I cannot morally and ethically take part in religion.

Evann, 18, of Murfreesboro, Tenn., was born in Louisiana and has moved several times because her father was a college football coach. She has always wanted to be a doctor and hopes to become an Ob-Gyn and work in lower-income communities. In high school, she created a capstone project that focused on the strained relationship between the mentally disadvantaged and the police.

SIXTH PLACE (TIE)

This is what I'd like Christians to know

FFRF awarded Sarah \$400.

By Sarah Espada

I'd like to tell believers, specifically Christians, to realize that Christianity isn't all there is and to expand their worldview. I personally know how hard it can be to let go of beliefs that have been ingrained in your brain. However, I found it to be rewarding.

I faced much guilt and confusion when I deconverted. I'm a nonreligious person of color, while many of my friends and most of my family are religious. I know the path I'm on is right for me. In society, people of color, specifically blacks and Latinos, are seen as very religious. I know firsthand that this can be true.

Being multiracial myself (my dad is Puerto Rican and my mom is black and white), I was raised an evangelical Pentecostal Christian. I was raised listening to gospel music, dressing up for church on Sunday mornings and going to bible study and church camp.

Christianity can be a suffocating religion. I want believers of color to know that they are under no obligation to adhere to it. As a nonreligious person of color, I want more

“Making the choice to walk away from organized religion was terrifying and lonely and exciting and liberating.

— Sarah Espada



Sarah Espada

people of color to question their religion, do research and investigate the history of their religion.

Making the choice to walk away from organized religion was terrifying and lonely and exciting and liberating. I'd like believers to know what it feels like to no longer be scared of the "devil's temptations" and "eternal hellfire" and to be able to release the guilt over their imaginary "sins."

Christians live in a bubble. Whatever doesn't line up with

their beliefs is outside of that bubble. Unfortunately, this is why Christians can be narrow-minded. When Christians live in their own small limited world, with only Christian friends and only watching, reading, and listening to things that go along with their beliefs, they begin to judge and become unloving toward others.

It's scary leaving the bubble, but there so much more outside of it. The world is so much bigger than the Christian worldview. It really feels wonderful to discover that world as a nonreligious person without fear or guilt and I'd like to encourage all people who are being suppressed by religion to discover it, too.

Sarah, 17, from Windsor, Conn., plans to attend Cedar Crest College and major in social work. She was a member of her high school's Key Club and has written for the high school newspaper.

FFRF Students of Color honorable mentions

FFRF selected seven essays from the students of color high school contest it deemed worthy of honorable mention status. Each of the following students received \$200 from FFRF. Here are edited excerpts from each of them.

Questioning can lead to the truth

By Dominic Ryan Vince Cruz

I remember my upbringing as a Filipino Roman Catholic, in which a key feature of this religion is the negative approach to questions. You are betraying your faith and your devotion to God as the center of your morality when you question.

But what is actually wrong with questioning? Of verifying? If there is a God, why is it something you have to believe in? Why is it not just simple fact?

If you go through the rest of your life without ever questioning what you're told, especially about religion, then how would you ever know if there was any inaccuracy with what you believe?

Remember that truth and belief are essentially separate. You have to be able to question, because if you don't, you can't establish what the truth is.

Dominic, 18, is from Frederick, Md., and will be attending Washington College and plans to double major in international relations and economics. For his career, Dominic would like to work in public policy, analytics and/or international law.

Think beyond what you are taught

By Adwoa Debrah

I never enjoyed attending church. I found it to be boring and repetitive. The service was anything but inspiring and left me drained. Through my disdain for the institution, I began to question why I believed in God, and I came to the conclusion that I actually didn't believe. I never did.

But faith was engrained in my culture, seemingly passed down from generation to generation. We were taught that every waking moment of our lives' was due to God's grace. From us waking up, to using the bathroom, it is by God's grace. Although the strong sense of faith is meant to be a uplifting in the black community, it is crippling. My imagination felt limited.

I know that I'm lucky; many still allow themselves to be fooled or depend on the undependable. To those people, I want to tell them to think beyond what we have been taught. Think beyond.

Adwoa 18, is from Montgomery Village, Md., and plans to double major in international studies and business at New York University. She would like to become a corporate lawyer for an international corporation and/or work in the United Nations.

Rising above the views of family, community

By Miaun McCloud

The highest form of blasphemy a person in the black community could commit is daring to have their own thoughts and beliefs. Religion is a staple within the African-American household and is pushed heavily throughout



Miaun McCloud

generations.

My mother used to be my greatest supporter. Little did I know how much of a falsifier she truly was. Unlike my siblings, I never showed enthusiasm when attending church. And when I would express my opposition, I was ignored. When I finally gained the courage to talk to my mother about being a freethinker, she all but disowned me. Gone was the caring woman who loved and nurtured me; instead, she was replaced by a monomastic religious freak.

While being black and being a freethinker may not mix, I will rise above the myopic views of the people within my family and community. Just like oil, I will surge above the dense water that is religion, for I will not let stigmas hold me back.

Miaun 17, is from Detroit, and will be attending Grand Valley State University. She volunteers at nursing homes, animal shelters and homeless shelters and also participates in #LunchBag, which provides meals for those in need.

Belief in different thoughts and ideas



By Erin O'Malley

I attended Catholic school as one of only a handful of students of color until I switched to a larger, more diverse public school when I was 12. I'd never met anyone who outwardly identified as an atheist.

I realized that I had only followed my religion because I was expected to, and as I continued to come to terms with my personal beliefs, I perceived that I, an Asian-American bisexual woman, didn't fit in with the older, white and mostly affluent church-goers.

Today, I do not believe in a religion anymore, but I do believe in the humanity of those willing to take a step back from what they've always been told, and embrace different thoughts and ideas.

Erin, 18, from York, Pa., is the co-founder of Sooth Swarm Journal, an international literary magazine, and her writing has been nationally recognized.

She also co-founded a Gay-Straight Alliance. Her activism has earned her the George Eastman Leadership Award and the Hampton Roads Pride Foundation Award.

History of faith rooted in fear



By Dylan Palmer

Although I'm not religious, I know a whole lot about the history of faith.

Christian Europeans invaded in search of resources to claim and people to brainwash. All in the name of God. Christianity caught on in my ancestors' motherland because of fear. After watching their people slaughtered, their women raped and their homes burned, they knew that a God that merciless was not one to question. That fear became a tool wielded by the Europeans to keep the victims of their imperialism docile.

When I ask my Christian African-American peers today why they are believers, I often hear the same response. "My faith helps me get through tough times," or "My faith keeps me sane," they say. But isn't that exactly what the church wants you to think?

Since its inception, Christianity has been a tool of control.

I understand the fierce oppressive circumstances that have made these beliefs so prevalent. But I do challenge believers of color to know their history and stop searching the sky for a heaven or a God when there's so much to see right in front of them.

Dylan 18, is from Portland, Ore., where he was the Black Student Union president at his high school. He also plays soccer, and was editor for the national award-winning school magazine and the leader of the Student Equity Team. Dylan will be attending New York University before going to law school.

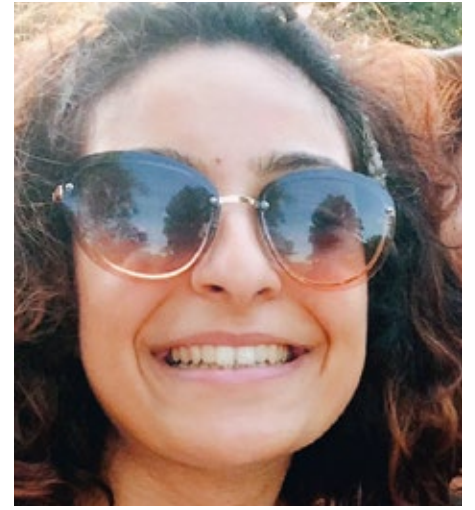
Open letter to my fellow believer

By Aven Turner

My name is Aven, and I am not a believer.

Being of color and from a Middle-Eastern background already places me in the non-trustworthy drawer. But atheism on top of that? That just places a big lock on my door. Little do you know the subtle prejudice engenders me to feel less, when I merely want to pursue my truth peacefully.

When I look at religion, I do not see a comforting truth, but carefully crafted propaganda. I see a rulebook. I see a childish illusion, a clinging to an ideal because it seems comforting, despite the itching feeling of this ideal being absurd. For me, such an itch cannot be ignored, it turns into aching. Lying to myself is not the easy way out; it



Aven Turner

destroys me intellectually.

I actually remember the exact day I became an atheist. I remember that I felt so inspired and free, and just the thought of it made me restless

Letting go of the idea that there is this all-controlling God felt incredible. I felt in control of my life, and so fascinated with the idea that the whole world just functions. It just exists. Finally, I no longer felt as if I was lying to myself.

When I go to bed at night, wake up in the morning, or take a walk in the afternoon, I find comfort and peace knowing I have pursued this trail of truth.

Aven, 17, is from Plainfield, Ill., and will be attending the University of Illinois. She volunteers at a children's museum and has earned a seal of bi-literacy for German and has numerous accolades for speaking French.

Finding my own path through life



By Shejan Heaven

Being born and raised in Bangladesh almost guaranteed which path I would follow. The country, of which nearly 90 percent of the people are Muslim, showed me how I "should" live my life.

It was not until I moved to Atlanta when everything changed. I found an interest in science and mathematics. I began to stray from the teachings of Allah.

I told my parents how I felt. I explained everything, but they were absolutely appalled. They were already imagining their eldest son burning in hellfire. The sheikh at my mosque told them to send me to Arabic school, and that is where I struggled for the next few months.

I came home a broken 16-year-old, filled with sadness and hate toward my parents for sending me to such a horrible place. Eventually, I forgave them.

Shejan, 18, is from Doraville, Ga., will be attending the University of Georgia and plans to major in biology. He plays soccer, basketball, ultimate Frisbee and cricket, and has played the violin for seven years and the piano for three.

LETTERBOX

Secular company stands out among religious ones

The fence around our property needed replacing, so we called a number of fence companies to come out and give us estimates.

I noticed that many of them had a small cross or Christian fish somewhere on their trucks. When did the Christians corner the fence business? For the last company that came out, the young man walked around the yard with me taking notes.

Once done, he handed me the bid, shook my hand, said “Stay secular” and walked away. I guess he must have noticed my slightly irreverent bumper sticker on my car. He turned on the sidewalk, spread his arms and, with a smile, said, “We have no choice.”

You can guess which company got the bid.

Curtis Bass
North Carolina

Freethinking authors helped me find my way

Dan Barker’s *Losing Faith in Faith* was the second book I purchased to see my way toward coming out atheist. George Smith’s *Atheism: The Case Against God* was my first.

I became an ardent fan of the FFRF when Anne Nicol Gaylor was still alive (women everywhere owe her a huge debt of gratitude) and have been a member for more than 25 years now.

Thanks to the many authors I have read, I am “way out” and am proud of it.

I wish to express my thanks for all your organization has done in the name of common sense, reason and logic in a nation too religiously virused to see anything past Religious Reconstruction.

George West
New Mexico

Join us in taking stand against ‘Jesus lunches’

For the past few years in Middleton, Wis., a group of Jesus apologists have provided free lunches and, according to them, a “short message about Christianity,” and “nutrition for the soul.” The preaching occurs every Tuesday at 11:30 a.m. in the public park adjoining the Middleton High School.

The city declared the lunches to be an exercise of free speech and the school board abandoned its leased use of the park during school hours. Since then, the level of local protest has dwindled considerably, and the Jesus lunch organizers think they have prevailed.

However, this does present non-believers in the area with an opportunity to offer evidence-based secular messages to these high school students.

If you understand why this is an issue and live nearby, please come out and take a stand with us against religious bigotry and for the separation of state and church.

Name withheld on request
Wisconsin



The bible is good for something after all

At a suite we rented in Myrtle Beach, S.C., an inside door slammed shut whenever we opened the front door, which was frequently.

We couldn’t find a doorstop, but after an intense search for a makeshift one, we spotted the Gideon’s bible in our bedstand drawer. Voila! It served its purpose well!

Joyce McChesney, South Carolina

Fellow members — donate your tax return to FFRF

I spoke with FFRF requesting information regarding naming FFRF in my estate plan.

I have subsequently found out that the joint trust with my wife set up years ago demands her signature in addition to mine to effect a beneficiary change. As she is “born again,” you see my problem.

Consequently, I have decided to initiate substantial support before I die.

Enclosed is my check for \$7,647, which is the exact amount of my federal income tax refund. Perhaps I can start a trend among our members. It is now more important than ever to maintain the wall of separation.

I note that the amount is equal to 1.53 Afterlife Memberships. I hereby pledge to upgrade to a full 2.0 Afterlife Memberships in 2018.

Name withheld on request
Ohio

Life Member hopes to enable other advocates

Please accept my payment for a Lifetime Membership. I would like to make it in honor of my incredible husband, Jess Levin, who introduced me to your organization early in our marriage and died suddenly in 2015.

Jess was a lifelong freethinker who did not judge people whose beliefs differed from his, but rather encouraged them to practice tolerance and to develop critical-thinking skills that would enable them to rule their own spirituality with kindness and compassion, rather than be ruled by the

agendas of others and the too-often injurious dogma proffered as truth by a number of established religions.

It is my hope that my membership will enable the other “Jesses” in the world to continue to advocate for justice, tolerance and reason, and guide us both as individuals and as a society to shine with our own light rather than that of hatred fed to us by others.

Pamela M. Halverson
North Carolina

‘FANHA’ could be our unifying acronym

I blog a lot about freethought issues, in particular the importance of church and state separation. After tussling with fellow nontheists about personal labels (e.g. “freethinker,” “atheist,” “bright,” “nonreligious”) I realized that what we don’t have is a unifying acronym, on par with the powerful and household LGBTQ. I came up with “FANHA,” which stands for “Freethinker, Atheist, Naturalist, Humanist, Agnostic.” I believe that FANHA could unify us and would go far in maintaining our rights in the face of incessant bigotry.

Jaime Hunter
Texas

FFRF’s student activists deserve to be honored

Thank you for publishing — and rewarding — your student activists. It’s challenging enough for adults even in the most progressive situations to stand up for their views against religious tyranny. It is in-

initely more difficult for young people who aren’t yet independent to stand against schools, peers, parents and bullies who want to silence and punish them. Kudos to these brave, clear-headed and articulate students. May they keep up the good work and inspire others to do likewise.

Joan Reisman-Brill
New York

The gods are angry, but what do they want?

Editor’s note: This letter was first published in the Duluth News-Tribune.

I’m assured by some that our many and various ills — bad health, bad weather, bad politics, bad breath — are the sure and certain result of our poor adherence to the gods. But which god, goddess or set of gods must we appease?

It isn’t generally recognized that all gods of the past are still on duty. We have shunned them, and that is why they’re angry.

One of my favorite gods is Poseidon, who’s in charge of the seas, fish and mermaids.

And with Poseidon (Neptune, if you like) you get the swell trident and nice weather when he’s in a good mood. Lots of gods only want a burnt offering from time to time. You know, a lamb, goat, ox, or virgin — stuff like that. The South American gods loved a heart freshly torn from a child. What an honor for them and their families!

But for the all-time good deal, go with John Frum, god of the Southwest Islanders during World War II. According to Wikipedia, John delivered big time to the island natives and didn’t want anything at all for it. Although he enjoyed a spirited dance and maybe a missionary boil.

So here is my complaint. We need all the help we can get from the gods, but please, folks, tell us which gods you are representing and what they want.

William Van Druten
Minnesota

Clearly, poverty is not a symptom of godlessness

The reason for so much poverty is that there are too many people on Earth. We are outconsuming our resources. What is to blame? One is religious opposition to birth control and the other is plain old heartless evolutionary pressure to breed, breed breed.

I have done surgery in South Sudan (where I nearly got killed because religious people were shooting at each other and we health-care workers were caught in the middle). Half of the population in South Sudan is facing death, and most of them are highly religious.

Maybe San Antonio Mayor Ivy Taylor, who said that poverty is a symptom of godlessness, could explain how her god blesses her but not an equally devout person in South Sudan? And how does she explain why many an atheist in this country has a full tummy at night?

Dr. Peter G. Roode
Florida

FFRF should push against Good Friday holiday

I wholeheartedly agree with Joe Leslie's comment in the June/July issue that governments should not be recognizing Good Friday. For example, in my locality, both the city and county governments have an official Good Friday holiday. Surely, such a declaration only serves the purpose of promoting religion and, in this case, Christianity. Governments could avoid this patent contravention of the Establishment Clause by giving employees a "personal" holiday that they could choose to take on the Friday before Easter or any other day of the year. A letter from FFRF might be all it takes — as is often the case. I join Joe in thanking FFRF for its good work.

Steve Beckham
Tennessee

Editor's note: All it takes is your tip. FFRF acts upon information from complainants and will be writing your county officials.

'In God We Trust' motto should be struck down

With the U.S. government founded on the principles of secularism and non-endorsement of religion, how is it that we have lawmakers officially sanctioning the motto: "In God We Trust"?

This religious motto is on our currency, bumper stickers and decals emblazoned on local police vehicles. Is this not a violation of the First Amendment that forbids the establishment of and promotion of religion by government?

"In God We Trust" is a congressionally sanctioned motto made into law by the 84th Congress in 1956. It was adopted as the nation's motto as an alternative or replacement to the motto of "E pluribus unum," which was adopted when the Great Seal of the United States was adopted in 1782.

The "In God We Trust" phrase is a violation of Jefferson's definition and the Founders' call for church-state separation. We must demand the religious motto be struck down by the courts.

Lance G. Jobson
Georgia

ELIZABETH WILSON is now a Lifetime Member!

To all the staff at FFRF, thank you for your dedication and due diligence in this important work, keeping state and church separate.

I stand in solidarity and am proud to be a member of this exemplary organization. Enclosed is my Lifetime Membership fee and an additional donation in Mike Pence's name. Feel free to use my name in capital letters or shouted from the rooftops!

Elizabeth Wilson
Washington

FFRF should add feature on how to debate theists

Please add a regular feature called "How to debate a theist and win" in Freethought Today, where reasonable, scholarly retorts to religious arguments are given.

No name-calling, but smart answers that win people over in the middle.

Andrew O. Lutes
Kentucky



Donation is for the fight against Trump's order

In light of President Trump's executive order, please find this donation to help support the legal efforts to fight pro-religious legislation. Our son, [Legal Fellow] Ryan Jayne, keeps us updated on all the wonderful work you do and he is proud to work for such a worthy cause.

Brian C. Jayne
Wisconsin

Old letter shows early start to freethinking

Rummaging through boxes of old photos, letters and newspaper clippings, I came across a copy of a 1943 letter my mother wrote to her parents (my grandparents) about me when I was just 4.

"I tried to explain to Rickey some things about God. I told him God is everywhere and takes care of him all the time. He thought about that for a few minutes and then said, 'If God takes care of me, why do you get babysitters when you go out?' Well, that did make God seem ineffectual, so I replied, 'That person is here to answer the phone.' Rickey said, 'If God is so great, why can't he answer the phone?'"

Frederick Gilbert
California

I'm putting my money to good use at FFRF

I have been sliding down the slippery slope of life for so long that I can now see the gaping abyss of oblivion. Like many people my age, I suspect my entrance into the abyss will be through the doors of a nursing home. Before some greedy, inhumane doctors take what little money I have to provide me with shoddy, inhumane care, I decided to give some of the money to someone who will put it to good use.

I have been an FFRF member for 20 years, and from my home in rural Southern Baptist Virginia, I have quietly cheered your efforts. I don't speak too loudly lest some pious Southern gentleman take his shotgun from his deer antler rack and ventilate my skull.

The one thing I have done is leave copies of Freethought Today in waiting rooms all around the area. I don't know if any good has come of it.

It is heartening to see how the

membership of FFRF has grown, and I hope it will continue. Opposition is growing and we have comparatively little money and few people to push back. For as long as I'm around, I'll keep cheering. And if I hit the lottery, you'll be the first to know.

Much gratitude for what you have done thus far and many good wishes for success in the future.

Ron Bryant
Virginia

Impressed with FFRF's diligence and chutzpah

Thank you for confronting religious lies and abuse. Each year I am more and more impressed with your courage, diligence, activism and overall chutzpah.

Keep up the good work.
Brian Fitzpatrick
Colorado

Life Membership gives hope in these times

Make me a Life Member! You and your members give me a little hope in these depressing times.

Rose Marie Foltz
Ohio

'Wall of separation' came before Jefferson

At the risk of sounding pedantic, I'd like to say that long before Thomas Jefferson was even born, it was Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island Colony, who penned the "wall of separation" metaphor.

In his most prominent work, *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution* (1644), Williams gave his reasons for the separation of church and state, which Thomas Jefferson later adopted.

Thus, it is he who should hold that place of honor among us nonbelievers. Despite being a 17th-century Puritan, he labored throughout his life to keep religion away from government, and vice versa. But that wasn't all. Even back then, he insisted that one doesn't have to be a Christian to be a good person.

I have no doubt that if Williams were living today, it would sour his stomach, as it sours mine, every time someone says that ours is a Christian nation.

David Quintero
California

FFRF should pursue class action against Congress

I realize we Nones are basically engaged in many costly battles — winning some, losing some.

From my perspective, the pivotal problem is "private v. public properties" and "private v. public citizens." The vast majority of these types of cases involve citizens utilizing public properties in violation of the U.S. Constitution.

The common example is bringing a cult's faith/tenets on public properties, from congressional and states' violations to local governance and public schools.

While those who argue violations of the Constitution for teaching/practicing their religion is more than acceptable, most would also argue such other violations are unacceptable; including utilizing public property to teach/practice pedophilia, slavery, homicide, sexual assaults, bank-robbery, mugging, terrorism, assassinations, kidnapping and torture.

So it seems FFRF and many others must bring class action litigation against Congress and the administration for their constitutional violations in law.

Another long-standing violation of the Constitution is including "God" on money and in icons, oaths and courts of law.

Harold Chanin
Florida

Thanks for helping bring down Pensacola cross

Thank you so much. I have been a member of FFRF for a few years now and plan to be for life. I want to thank you for helping bring to light this illegal cross that has existed in my home city of Pensacola for 75 years. Thank you, thank you.

Michael McCurdy
Florida

Trump, Pence pushing religion on the people

Before his campaign for the presidency, the only splashes Donald Trump ever made regarding religion were his three weddings. His three marriages in churches were only showboating of gowns, cakes and guest lists.

After his election, Trump played religion to please his presumed base. He declared dictatorially that it now was all right for church ministers to promote political candidates from pulpits.

We are far too tardy in evicting him! One problem is that religious eccentric Mike Pence would replace him. That was Trump's insurance in choosing Pence as his running mate. Pence was forced to rescind his Religious Freedom Restoration Act in Indiana, and his Trump experience should have been a wake-up call for anyone who thinks they can use government to promote religion in this country.

Look at all the nonstop work FFRF must do and the cost involved in trying to stop government agencies from attempting to promote religious ideas or to stop churches and their leaders from what they themselves call "sin," as in the sex offenses of clergy and the theft from church tills by their holy leaders.

Gilbert Cantlin
Ohio

BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Andre L. Leaphart, 40, Newport News, VA: Sexual battery with intent to transmit infection. Leaphart, associate pastor at Fellowship United Church of Christ, is accused of knowingly infecting a Hampton man in 2016. The alleged victim learned about Leaphart's infection after finding his HIV medication. *Source: WAVY, 6-27-17*

Zalmen Sorotzkin, 39, and his wife Tzipporah, 35; Mordechai Sorotzkin, 35, and his wife Rachel, 32; Shimon Nussbaum, 42, and his wife Yocheved, 40; and Mordechai Breskin, 37, and his wife Jochved, 35, all of Lakewood, NJ: Theft by deception. Zalmen Sorotzkin, rabbi at Congregation Lutzk synagogue, and the others are accused of collecting \$1.3 million in unearned Medicaid, SSI and other government benefits.

In all, 7 Lakewood couples to date are accused of fraudulently obtaining nearly \$2 million in benefits. *Source: nj.com, 6-26-17*

Lloyd Haughton, 41, Sanford, FL: Sexual battery by a custodian/victim under 18 years of age. Haughton, rabbi at Synagogue Beth Israel, a Messianic congregation, is accused of assaulting and impregnating a 15-year-old who lived with him.

Messianic Jews, who believe Jesus is the messiah, are not recognized by mainstream Judaism although they incorporate Jewish holidays and rituals into their observances. *Source: Orlando Sentinel, 6-25-17*

Todd Coontz, 50, Ft. Lauderdale, FL: 3 counts of failure to pay tax and 4 counts of aiding and assisting in filing false tax returns. Coontz, pastor of Dominion Family Worship Center, "prosperity gospel" televangelist and founder of RockWealth International Ministries, allegedly avoided more than \$325,000 in federal taxes from 2000-14.

He's also accused of perpetrating a check-cashing scheme by filing false returns from 2010-13 and of hiding income by claiming travel as a business expense while receiving reimbursement that he kept as personal income. *Source: NPR, 6-23-17*

Calvin E. Clopton, 35, Columbus, GA: Feticide, possession of a firearm during the commission of a crime, attempted rape, making terroristic threats, 3rd-degree cruelty to children, obstruction of a 911 call and 2 counts each of kidnapping, false imprisonment and aggravated assault. Clapton, a chaplain at St. Francis Hospital and youth pastor at Macedonia Baptist Church in Macon, is accused of handcuffing and striking London Hayes, 23, with a pipe in February, causing a miscarriage. He had moved in with her after she was a patient in the hospital emergency room, even though he was married.

"He punched my 2-year-old son in the face," Hayes alleged. "My son was trying to get him off me." *Source: al.com, 6-16-17*

Franklin L. Fountain, 55, Bridgeport, CT: Larceny and forgery. Fountain, pastor of Fountain of Youth Cathedral, a Pentecostal church, allegedly forged deed documents and sold property to himself for \$1. City records list him as the owner of the property valued at \$1.5 million. *Source: ctpost.com, 6-14-17*

Domenic V. Bisesti, 31, Largo, FL: Lewd and lascivious molestation. Bisesti, director of children's ministry at Anona United Methodist Church, is accused of touching a 14-year-old girl's buttocks at the church in June and trying to kiss her. He allegedly sent her a Snapchat message that said "I wish we could have either kept going or never gotten that close." *Source: Tampa Bay Times, 6-14-17*

Ruben Garcia, 59, Buda, TX: Indecency with a child by sexual contact and 2 counts of sexual assault of a child. Garcia, associate pastor at Betania Baptist Church, is accused of 3 assaults on a girl under age 17 in 2013-14.

He allegedly would get parents to approve letting their children enrolled in summer camps stay overnight at his home so they could get an early-morning start for the trip, a church member said. *Source: KXAN, 6-13-17*

Erick E. Granados-Zeledon, 39, Edgewater, MD: 7 counts of child molestation, including sexual assault of a minor and sodomy. Granados-Zeledon, a volunteer chaperone and bible study instructor at Iglesia Hispanica Emmanuel, an Assemblies of God church in Annapolis, is accused of assaults on an 11-year-old boy. *Source: WBAL, 6-9-17*

Victor E. Tax-Gomez, 47, East Palo Alto, CA: 6 counts of sexual assault, including penetration with a foreign object of a juvenile and an adult and committing a lewd act with a child under 14 and under 15. Tax-Gomez, pastor at El Senor Justicia Nuestra Iglesia, is accused of assaults on several church members over a period of years. *Source: Palo Alto Patch, 6-1-17*

A. Livingston Foxworth, 68, Hull, MA: Paying for sexual conduct. Foxworth, senior pastor at Grace Church of All Nations, and 9 other men were arrested during an undercover sting in which detectives posed as a female on Backpage.com. He allegedly offered to pay \$150 for sex and went to a Boston address. *Source: Boston Herald, 6-1-17*

Freddy Washington, 53, Manhattan, NY: Committing a lewd act on a child under 14 and 2 counts of criminal sexual conduct with a minor under 11. Washington, a Spiritan Catholic priest, is accused of molesting 2 altar boy trainees in the early 1980s when he was a volunteer at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Charleston, SC.

One boy alleged to police that Washington had him draw an outline of his penis because it was part of the training and then fondled the 10-year-old's genitals. He allegedly told the other boy it was mandatory to have his penis measured and then performed oral sex on him. *Source: abcnews4.com, 6-1-17*

Matt Tague, 43, San Marcos, CA: 16 counts of lewd or lascivious acts with a child under 14. Tague, family pastor at North Coast Calvary Chapel, has been married for 20 years and has 6 children, the church website said. The alleged victim doesn't attend the church. *Source: Union-Tribune, 5-31-17*

Ruven Meulenbergh, 32, Lake Forest, CA: 3 counts of lewd acts on a child and 2 counts of lewd acts on a child under age 14. Meulenbergh, a volunteer youth mentor at Rick Warren's Saddleback Church, is accused of alleged incidents with 2 boys during the past year, starting when they were 13.

The church website says the mentor position is "designed specifically to help 7th and 8th graders connect with Jesus, each other and a caring adult." *Source: KCBS, 5-28-17*

Hafiz A. Hannan, New Haven, CT: Hannan, a native Pakistani and imam at Masjid Al-Islam Mosque since 2013, was taken into custody by federal agents and faces deportation.

Menso by Brian Kent



"If it makes you feel any better, Heaven doesn't even exist. God's just something I made up to get people doing the kind of stuff that gets them sent here."

He was arrested in 2006 during an immigration fraud probe of applications for religious worker visas. At the time, leaders of the Islamic community in Massachusetts said the problem was an administrative error. *Source: AP, 5-23-17*

Allan Mithen, 78, Clifton Hill, Australia: Rape and 6 counts each of indecent assault and indecent dealing with a girl under age 13. Mithen is charged with alleged incidents when he was Catholic rector at the Wandering Mission in 1965-69.

The 4 alleged victims were between ages 8 and 15. **Two former teachers**, ages 82 and 83, are also accused of molesting Aboriginal girls at the mission. *Source: The Age, 5-22-17*

Derren Evans, 27, Lilburn, GA: Sexual assault. Evans, a Providence Christian Academy substitute teacher and coach, is accused of alleged incidents between March 10-22 on school grounds involving a female student athletic trainer.

A police report said Evans started making frequent sexual jokes: "The example she gave was that she was playing basketball and carried two of the balls at one time, holding them in front of her chest. Evans pulled her aside later and said, 'Those looked like boobs' while laughing."

On March 10 during lunch in his office, the report said, Evans "walked up behind her and began to rub her shoulders before kissing her neck. He then put his hands down her shirt and grabbed her breasts over her bra."

On subsequent days, he allegedly grabbed her buttocks while she rode a stationary bike in gym class, grabbed her breast as she walked by in the hall and asked her to send him nude photos. *Source: Daily Post, 5-19-17*

Terry Herzberg, 66, Tannersville, NJ: Invasion of privacy and attempted invasion of privacy. Herzberg, pastor of Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Hackettstown, is accused of taking "upskirt" images of a church secretary in 2013-16.

The alleged victim sued the church and Herzberg in November, charging he also made sexually charged comments and "created an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment." *Source: nj.com, 5-18-17*

Menachem A. Chinn, 40, East Windsor, NJ: 2 counts each of sexual assault and endangering the welfare of a child. Chinn, a rabbi and former teacher at Shalom Torah Academy, is accused of assaults on a 12-year-old boy in 2012 and on another underage male in 2010-11. He also directed the Twin Rivers chapter of the National Council of Synagogue Youth. *Source: Asbury Park Press, 5-16-17*

Jonathan W. Wehrle, 66, Williamston, MI: Embezzlement of \$100,000 or more. Wehrle, pastor of St. Martha Catholic Parish in Okemos, was arrested on the 39th anniversary of his ordination. He lives with his sister and 90-year-old mother and has 3 adopted adult sons. He had planned to retire June 28. *Source: State Journal, 5-16-17*

Christ M. Stoltzfus, 69, Elizabethtown, PA: 2 counts of failure to report. It's alleged that Stoltzfus, an Amish bishop, failed to report 2 cases of child sexual abuse and reportedly told police he'd been told the abuse "wasn't really that bad."

The case involves **Daniel R. Fisher, 44**, who has been charged with indecent assault for inappropriately touching a 5-year-old girl and a 10-year-old girl. *Source: pennlive.com, 5-13-17*

Ibrahim Omerdic, 61, Melbourne, Australia: Conduct causing a minor to enter into a forced marriage, involving a 34-year-old groom and a 14-year-old bride. Omerdic was an imam of the Bosnian Islamic Society and Noble Park Mosque when he oversaw the ceremony last September.

The groom pleaded guilty to marrying the girl after prosecutors dropped child sex abuse charges against him. Federal police investigated 69 incidents of forced or underage marriage in 2015-16. *Source: Herald Sun, 5-12-17*

Bruce McAllister, 68, Brooksville, FL: 5 counts of sexual assault by a custodian and 27 counts of misdemeanor battery. McAllister is

accused of assaults on 3 European boys under his guardianship while they attended Hernando Christian Academy as foreign exchange students. His wife is school principal.

"He portrayed himself to the students as a physical therapist and an expert in sports medicine," said police Capt. Rick Hankins. The investigation is ongoing. "I can tell you that we have interviewed a foreign exchange student that he hosted in 2006 that has reported inappropriate contact. You have 10 years of juveniles that he's hosted."

McAllister surrendered his massage therapist license in 2007 after the state accused him of falsely advertising himself as a physical therapist and using chiropractic techniques he wasn't licensed to use. *Source: Tampa Bay Times, 5-11-17*

Tony Overheu, 67, Perth, Australia: Common assault, trespass and damage. Overheu, a self-described devout Christian and senior member of the Church of Christ and Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship, shoved a lemon meringue pie in the face of Qantas CEO Alan Joyce during a speech at a hotel.

Overheu said he wanted to push back against "corporate bullying aimed at social engineering" to change the marriage law. He denied religion was a motive for the attack and said he's angry about the "green left and corporates" subverting democracy by pushing for same-sex marriage without holding a plebiscite. *Source: Daily Mail, 5-11-17*

Steven Smolek, 59, La Crosse, WI: Child enticement, sexual intercourse with a child and 2 counts of exposing genitals. Smolek, who resigned in November as assistant superintendent of schools for the Catholic Diocese of La Crosse, is accused of assaulting a 16-year-old boy in January 2015.

Smolek allegedly engaged in sexually explicit conversations on the Skout social networking app with an undercover agent who identified himself as a 12-year-old boy.

The teen told police Smolek sent him nude photos after connecting on Skout. He agreed to pizza and a movie at Smolek's apartment, where they exchanged oral sex, the complaint said. *Source: La Crosse Tribune, 5-3-17*

Barry T. Durrell, 55, Houston: Aggravated sexual assault and continuous sexual abuse of a child. Durrell, an ordained deacon at West Houston Seventh-day Adventist Church, is accused of molesting a 2-year-old boy in a church closet in May 2016. The boy's mother allegedly found them there.

A 7-year-old boy alleged in February to family members he was being molested by Durrell at the church and elsewhere. Durrell was convicted of a similar offense in California in 1988 but wasn't on the registered sex offender list. *Source: KHOU, 5-3-17*

Pleaded / Convicted

Larry M. Thorne, 55, Ft. Walton Beach, FL: Guilty by jury of sexual battery on a minor, lewd and lascivious behavior with a child and witness tampering. Thorne, pastor of Abundant Life Church, is accused of assaults on a 14-year-old girl in 2014. *Source: NWF Daily News, 6-28-17*

An **unidentified Zen Buddhist priest**, 62, Augsburg, Germany, pleaded guilty to molesting 7 boys as young as 4 over a 10-year period. Before heading the Buddhist community, he was a police officer.

He's accused of abusing a woman's 2 sons after she sought him out for grief counseling after her husband died and of molesting a child refugee and a young drug addict. He allegedly had 2,800 files of child pornography. *Source: Deutsche Welle, 6-16-19*

Jeffery Bondi, 47, Virginia Beach, VA: Guilty by court trial of object sexual penetration. Bondi, youth pastor at Galilee Episcopal Church, was accused of assaulting church member Margaret Anne Viola in 2001 when she was 18 and babysitting for the Bondis.

Viola testified he put his hands up her shirt before unbuttoning and unzipping her pants. "It's disturbing that the adults in this case didn't go to police [until 2016]," said Judge H. Thomas Padrick. "Nobody did anything. I fault Galilee Church to a certain extent. I think it is just shocking that the church just abandoned her. Shame on them." *Source: WAVY, 6-15-17*

John S. Mraz, 67, Emmaus, PA: Pleaded guilty to possessing child pornography, criminal use of a communication device and possessing obscene or sexual materials. Msgr. Mraz, pastor of St. Ann Catholic Church, was arrested after a parishioner upgrading his computer found images of nude males in the computer's recycling bin.

According to court records, digital devices possessed by Mraz showed internet searches for "Small Boy Nudes" and "handcuffed nude boys." *Source: Morning Call, 6-8-17*

Kenneth Nakdimen, 64, Monsey, NY, and Shalom Lamm, 57, Bloomingburg, NY: Pleaded guilty to conspiracy to corrupt the electoral process by committing voter fraud in the 2014 Bloomingburg village election. **Volvy Smilowitz** has also been charged in connection with planning a large housing development intended to attract members of the Orthodox Jewish sect Satmar Hasidim.

Prosecutors say they filed falsified voter registrations and offered bribes for registrations and votes to swing the election to candidates favorably disposed to the project. Nakdimen admitted conspirators backdated false lease agreements for uninhabited properties they owned and planted items like toothbrushes and toothpaste to make unoccupied apartments appear lived in. *Source: Times Herald-Record, 6-7-17*

Robbie Wilkerson, 49, and Tasha Wilkerson, 44, Oak Park, IL: Pleaded guilty to wire fraud and money laundering (Robbie) and theft of government funds (Tasha). Robbie Wilkerson, founding pastor of New Birth Christian Center, and his wife admitted obtaining money illegally from a federal food program in 2010.

Another New Birth pastor, **Anthony Hall, 54, Downers Grove**, pleaded guilty to taking part in the scheme. The Wilkersons would have to repay at least \$400,000 under a plea agreement the court is reviewing. *Source: State Journal-Register, 5-20-17*

Francisco Moran, 59, Old Lyme, CT: Guilty by jury of 3 counts each of sexual assault and risk of injury to a minor and 2 counts of coercion. Moran, pastor at The Good Samaritan Church was convicted of assaults on an immigrant woman and her 15-year-old daughter who were parishioners. *Source: The Day, 5-25-17*

Jarvis Gray, 29, Millington, TN: Guilty by jury of rape of a child and aggravated sexual battery. "Prophet" Gray, a YouTube evangelist who

"I think it is just shocking that the church just abandoned her. Shame on them."
— Judge H. Thomas Padrick

wrote the Fresh Anointing blog, was convicted of raping a 5-year-old girl in his care in 2012 or 2013 while babysitting for her and her siblings.

The Gray home doubled as a church. He's also charged with having sexual contact with a young boy in a pending case. *Source: WMC-TV, 5-18-17*

Joseph Hemmerle, 74, Louisville, KY: Entered Alford pleas to 2 counts of wanton endangerment and 5 counts of 3rd-degree sexual abuse the day before his trial was to start. As a Catholic priest, Hemmerle allegedly molested a boy in 1977-78 at Camp Tall Trees.

Any sentence will run consecutively to the 7 years he's serving in a separate case in which he testified he applied calamine lotion to campers' genitals due to poison ivy. *Source: WDRB, 5-17-17*

Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, 76, Jerusalem: Convicted of breach of trust, issuing false certificates and fraudulent acceptance of a benefit under aggravated circumstances. As chief rabbi, he oversaw issuance of more than 1,000 false certificates of ordination in 1999-2003 to security personnel, entitling them to higher salaries.

Bakshi-Doron and subordinates received millions of shekels for their part in the scam. The state paid out about \$84 million in unwarranted salary bonuses. *Source: Jerusalem Post, 5-16-17*

Adair Krack, 67, Elma, WA: Guilty in a bench trial of 2nd-degree child molestation. Krack, pastor at First Baptist Church, was accused of sexual contact with a 12-year old girl at a 2016 summer bible camp. The victim said Krack, who was a family friend, first touched her inner thigh, according to court records, and then began touching her outside her clothing and inside her underwear or swimsuit. *Source: Daily World, 5-15-17*

Sentenced

Kenneth L. Baker, 44, Ashland, OR: 10½ years in prison after pleading guilty to 1st-degree sexual abuse and 2nd-degree sexual penetration of a juvenile from 2006-11, starting when she was 13 and he was pastor at First Baptist Church. *Source: Mail Tribune, 6-28-17*

Christina Albini, 43, Windsor, Ontario: 1 year in prison and 3 years' probation after pleading guilty to sexual interference/touching the body of a person under 16 years old for a sexual purpose. Albini, a teacher at Christ the King Catholic Elementary School, befriended the male student when he was 13 and soon started having sex with him, the court was told.

She would pick up him up in her purple Dodge Challenger and take him back to her home for sex. She promised to "be quick and have him back before his mother gets home," said prosecutor Eric Costaris. *Source: CBC, 6-28-17*

Christopher Stivers, 32, Struthers, OH: 7 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of sexual battery involving a 14-year-old student at Gospel Baptist School, where Stivers was principal. He was also a youth pastor at the church.

"How would you feel if someone did this to your little girl?" the victim's mother asked at sentencing. "I do not believe Mr. Stivers is truly sorry. I base that belief on the fact that he calls what has happened a consensual encounter," her father said. *Source: WKBN, 6-23-17*

Corey M. Brown, 47, Savannah, GA: 28 months in prison and \$178,140 restitution after pleading guilty to mail fraud for intercepting offerings meant for Second African Baptist Church from 2008-14 when he was pastor there.

"Brown's parishioners thought they were offering their hard-earned savings so their church could do good works," said acting U.S. Attorney James Durham. "Little did they know Brown's idea of good work was to line his own pockets." *Source: WXIA, 6-19-17*

David Hoppenjan, 53, Pace, FL: 21 months in prison and 3 years' probation after pleading guilty to traveling to meet a minor for sexual contact. Hoopenjan, pastor at First United Methodist Church, and 21 other men were arrested in a September 2016 sting called Operation Undertow. The police report said he contacted an undercover officer posing as a 14-year-old boy. *Source: News Journal, 6-14-17*

Stephen Jesmer, 38, Manchester, NH: 5 to 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to witness tampering, 2 counts of aggravated felonious sexual assault and 4 counts of misdemeanor sexual assault for forcing himself on a 13-year-old girl from his congregation in the church office. Jesmer was pastor of Dialogue Church until summer 2016 when church leaders heard about allegations and contacted authorities. His wife was present at sentencing. *Source: Union Leader, 6-2-17*

Christopher L. Trent, 37, Bellingham, WA: 5 years in prison after pleading guilty to 4 counts of 3rd-degree child rape. Trent, youth pastor at Bellingham Baptist Church, abused her over 100 times when she was under 16 and made her his "sex slave," the victim testified. Trent, who is married with 7 children, promised to marry her in a gazebo on the beach when she turned 18.

Judge Raquel Montoya-Lewis called his behavior "insidious and terrifying" and told him he couldn't "hide behind the concept of sin, as you have represented to the court."

Police arrested him as he was loading a U-Haul to move out of Bellingham. *Source: Bellingham Herald, 6-1-17*

Benoni J. Enciso, 49, Boyne City, MI: 24 to 48 months in prison after pleading guilty to possession of child sexually abusive material and 2 counts each of surveilling an unclothed person and eavesdropping using a device. Enciso, director of family life at Stutsmanville Chapel, admitted recording an 18-year-old and her 15-year-old sister taking showers in his home. The family was visiting from out of town. He was their former pastor.

He still faces 20 similar charges in another county. *Source: News-Review, 5-20-17*

Kenneth A. Keith, 51, Burnside, KY: Life without parole after pleading guilty to murder, robbery and burglary. Keith, former pastor of Main Street Baptist Church, was charged with the 2013 shooting deaths of Michael Hockensmith, 35, his wife, Angela, 38, and gold broker Daniel Smith, 60, at a pawn shop owned by the Hockensmiths.

Michael Hockensmith had worked for Keith at the pawn shop before assuming ownership. The victims were shot in the presence of the Hockensmiths' 9-year-old son, who called 911. *Source: Herald-Leader, 5-26-17*

Kevin Boyd Sr., 47, New Orleans: 8 years in prison suspended and 5 years' probation after entering an Alford plea to obscenity and 2nd-degree battery. Boyd was presiding bishop of the Church at New Orleans. A jury had deadlocked in 2015.

A victim and former congregant objected to the sentence: "I didn't come this far to give him a slap on the wrist," said a Mississippi man who testified at Boyd's trial. He accused Boyd of raping him for at least 5 years, starting in 1999 when he was 12. Another victim later came forward. *Source: Times-Picayune, 5-25-17*

Anselme Malonda-Nkuanga, Wendell, NC: 30 days suspended, \$289 fine and court costs after a judge found him guilty of misde-

meanor assault and battery. Malonda-Nkuanga, pastor of St. Eugene Catholic Parish, was accused of groping the breasts of an 87-year-old former parishioner Oct. 1 at her home in Culpeper, VA. "What you did to me was nasty," the victim told the Missionhurst priest. "Shame on you." *Source: Star-Exponent, 5-24-17*

Howard "Howdy" White, 75, Bedford, PA: 18 months incarceration after pleading guilty to sexually assaulting a student in 1973 when he was associate chaplain at St. George's School in Middletown, RI. Audrey Scanlan, Episcopal bishop for central Pennsylvania, formally removed White from the priesthood in October. *Source: Altoona Mirror, 5-16-17*

Kevin Grimes, 52, Spencer, IA: 5 years in prison for 3 counts of sexual exploitation by a counselor. Grimes, pastor at DaySpring Assembly of God and CEO of the Spencer Dream Center, engaged in sexual conduct with clients while providing mental health services. *Source: Des Moines Register, 5-16-17*

Timothy J. Peltz, 52, Wheaton, IL: 34 years in prison after pleading guilty to 4 counts of predatory criminal sexual assault of a child under 13. Peltz, a deacon at Living Hope Bible Church, started molesting the victim when she was 3 years old, prosecutors said.

The girl, now a teen, said Peltz had "fooled everyone" in the congregation. Prosecutor Jennifer Lindt said Peltz's acts constituted a "breathtaking level of evil." By law he must serve at least 85% of his sentence, about 29 years. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 5-12-17*

Christopher Remaley, 30, Long Valley, NJ: 7 years in prison for seducing a 15-year-old girl in 2014 while he was youth leader at an unidentified church in Easton, PA. "He called me his daughter," the victim said of Remaley, who is married and has 2 daughters.

"He used the power of religion to seduce this child," said prosecutor Meg Rodriguez. "In a kitchen, in a shed, in a barn — he took her virginity and he knew that. He made choices, not mistakes." *Source: Daily Record, 5-5-17*

Juan Gregorio Rocha Romero, 23, El Cortezal, Nicaragua: 36 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of murder and illegal detention. Rocha, pastor of an evangelical Christian group, and 4 followers had performed an exorcism on a 25-year mother of 2 after she attacked people with a machete, prosecutors said.

Witnesses said Vilma Trujillo García was tied up for 6 days in February without food or water, then thrown naked on a burning pile of wood. She died 5 days later.

"God told her he was going to remove that evil spirit from her and asked us to start a fire, as that's where the spirit was going to be expelled," Rocha told a reporter. *Source: AFP, 5-2-17*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

The **Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, NY**, and **Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio** are being sued for negligence by a woman who alleges she was taken advantage of sexually in her mid-20s for several months in 2014 by **Andre Bain**, 44, pastor of St. Vincent Ferrer Church in East Flatbush.

Instead of providing spiritual guidance when she sought counseling, Bain pushed her into sexual acts and the diocese was slow to re-

abuse is alleged there and the statute of limitations allows the filing.

The abuse began in 1978 or 1979, when Strzepak was 4 years old, he told a reporter, but New York's statute of limitations has expired on those claims. *Source: Syracuse.com, 6-3-17*

Joseph C. Nguyen, Santa Ana, CA, parochial vicar at St. Anne Catholic Church and owner of the Vietnamese Broadcasting Service (VBS), is being sued by Tram Ho, a former beauty queen and host of a jewelry auction TV show, for sexual harassment. The Diocese of Orange, a co-defendant, placed Nguyen on administrative leave.

VBS features QVC-style programming and religious services. Ho says she was fired from VBS in 2016 for repeatedly refusing Nguyen's advances.

"Father Joseph likened his sexual desires to that of the needs of the Catholic Church to generate income — both being the realities of survival," the suit alleges. *Source: Variety, 5-27-17*

First Baptist Church, Hammond, IN, is being sued in connection with a fraud scheme by deacon **William Kimmel**, sentenced in 2014 to 22 years in prison. Cricket Boyd alleges she lost her entire \$175,000 investment and seeks class-action certification for over 100 people who lost \$5 million.

The suit claims the church should have known of Kimmel's "exploitative propensities" and was negligent in retaining him as a financial adviser. *Source: nwitimes, 5-23-17*

Seton Hall Prep School, West Orange, NJ, the **Archdiocese of Newark** and **Sacred Heart Parish**, Newark, are being sued by "John Doe," alleging he was molested by now-deceased priests **Robert Gibney** and **William Giblin** in the 1960s.

Attorney Mitchell Garabedian said he also intends to seek damages from the priests' estates "if possible." *Source: nj.com, 5-17-16*

Michael Hoepfner, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Crookston, MN, is accused in a suit of covering up sex abuse by now-retired priest **Roger Grundhaus** in 1971 after the plaintiff, Ronald Vasek, told him about it in 2010.

Vasek alleges Hoepfner persuaded him in 2015 to sign a paper recanting the allegation if he wanted to be ordained a deacon and keep Vasek's son in good graces as a diocesan priest. He went public after his application was denied. It's the first time a U.S. bishop has been accused of such coercion, said attorney Jeff Anderson. *Source: Austin Daily Herald, 5-12-17*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Diocese of Bridgeport, CT**, has settled with 5 alleged sexual abuse victims of 4 now-deceased Catholic priests. "Probably the earliest one would be age 11, and [ages] range from 11 through high school," said plaintiffs' attorney Jason Tremont.

The priests are **Robert Morrissey**, **Martin Federici**, **Walter Coleman** and **James Gildea**. The list of "credibly accused diocesan priests" has 29 names on it. *Source: Ridgefield Press, 6-7-17*

The granddaughter of deceased televangelists **Jan and Paul Crouch Sr.** was awarded \$2 million after a California jury found Jan Crouch's nonresponse as a mandated reporter of Carra Crouch's 2006 sexual assault caused "outrageous harm." The elder Crouches founded the Trinity Broadcasting Network, whose nonprofit arm was held liable for \$900,000 of the award.

Carra Crouch was 13 when she alleged she was raped in an Atlanta hotel room by a 30-year-old Trinity employee. When she told her grandmother, Jan Crouch blamed her for what happened and never reported the incident to police, Carra Crouch alleged. The employee was never criminally charged. *Source: LA Times, 6-4-17*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of New York** has paid more than \$1.5 million through a victim compensation program to 7 men molested as boys in order to settle sexual abuse claims filed against 6 former priests: **Francis Stinner**, **John O'Keefe**, **Gennaro "Jerry" Gentile**, **Peter Kihm**, **Ralph LaBelle** and **Richard Gorman**. The 7 will get payments between \$150,000 and \$350,000. Claims had to be filed by July 31. *Source: Iohud.com, 5-30-17*

Daniel Greer and the **Yeshiva Center of New Haven, CT**, must pay Eliyahu Mirlis \$15 million, a jury decided. Greer, a prominent rabbi and founder of the Orthodox Jewish school, was accused of molesting Mirlis, now 29, from 2001-05 at the school. Greer has filed an appeal. *Source: New Haven Register, 5-18-17*

Legal Developments

Rowland Foster, 72, Lebanon, PA, will stand trial for failure to report suspected child abuse in the 2016 pneumonia death of his 2-year-old granddaughter Ella. Foster leads Faith Tabernacle, which substitutes prayer for modern medicine.

District Judge Ann Young reversed another judge's April decision to dismiss the original charge for insufficient evidence. Young said an important part of her decision was testimony at the previous preliminary hearing by Dr. Neil Hoffman, a forensic pathologist, testimony she called "clear, convincing and compelling" that Ella's condition was easily treatable. Her parents await trial for involuntary manslaughter. *Source: AP, 6-28-17*

Removed / Resigned

Gustavo Gómez Santos, 51, Granger, WA, was removed as pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish by the Yakima Catholic Diocese after a 21-year-old alleged to authorities he was fondled about 5 years ago by Santos when he was pastor at St. Juan Diego Parish in Cowiche. *Source: KIMA, 6-12-17*

John Chmil, Kingston, PA, resigned as pastor of St. Ignatius Loyola Catholic Church after allegedly admitting he misused parish funds, the Diocese of Scranton said in a statement. Law enforcement has been contacted. About \$130,000 is involved. *Source: Citizens' Voice, 6-4-17*

Gregory Parlante, Chadds Ford, PA, resigned as pastor of St. Cornelius Catholic Church "so that I can totally devote my time to becoming well" from a "near-death illness," he wrote in the parish bulletin. He's been a priest for 35 years.

State police were alerted in late May by parish staff to a suspicious package addressed to Msgr. Parlante. "It was believed to contain illegal drugs," said Ken Gavin, Archdiocese of Philadelphia spokesman, adding that "the parish and the archdiocese are cooperating fully with law enforcement in the course of their active investigation." *Source: Philly.com, 6-1-17*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org



FFRF member Alison Holt saw this in a phone booth in Laguna Woods, Calif., and wrote, "Apparently God is out of order!"

spond to her complaint, the suit claims. The plaintiff was a volunteer eucharistic minister and administrative aide at the church. She alleges Bain told her they weren't sinning because they weren't having vaginal intercourse. *Source: NY Daily News, 6-26-17*

The **Archdiocese of Agana, Guam**, now has been named in 78 lawsuits alleging sexual abuse by **14 Catholic priests**. The latest by plaintiff "J.A.," now 40 and living in Oregon, alleges **Ray Techaira**, now deceased, raped or assaulted him more than 100 times from 1984-87, starting when he was 7.

The suit alleges Techaira told him that submitting was what "a good Catholic" did and that he shouldn't worry about being penetrated because he would use "a lot of coconut oil." *Source: KUAM, 6-22-17*

The **Syracuse, NY, Catholic Diocese** and retired priest **Felix Colosimo**, 78, are being sued for \$25 million by Matthew Strzepak, 41, Santa Barbara, CA, who alleges he was repeatedly molested as a child from 1987-90. The suit was filed in federal court in Connecticut because some

ON THE ROAD



FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert and FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne get photographed with a bronze statue of Brutus Buckeye, the mascot of Ohio State University. The two were in Columbus, Ohio, for SSA Con from July 7-9 and gave a presentation titled, “How you can fight for the First Amendment in your public school.” Markert and Jayne were part of a workshop with three sessions.



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker spoke to the Portland, Ore., Chapter of FFRF on April 23. The Portland Chapter board, shown in this photo, includes (from top of stairs) Michelle Santorsola, Valorie Peters, John Drain, Wes Mahan, and on the ground, Board President Cheryl Kolbe with Barker.



FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne, left, and FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott, right, stand with U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., in Pocan’s office in Washington, D.C. Jayne and Elliott were in the nation’s capital lobbying to uphold state-church separation.



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker (right) debated Sonny Hernandez (left) of Reforming America Ministries on June 3 in Houston on the topic of “Does God Exist?” Pastor Evan McClanahan (center) of First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Houston organized the debate. More than half the audience in that church were atheists, including many FFRF members, Barker noted. The debate video is online; go to Youtube and search for “barker hernandez debate.”

THEY SAID WHAT?

When you look at the tenets of religion, of the bible, of the Quran, of other religions, there is a distinction between homosexuality and just being a human being.

Missouri state Rep. Rick Brattin, during a debate over a bill amendment to protect LGBT people from discrimination.

Kansas City Star, 5-8-17

I have an eternal perspective and I want to share that with you and with the people listening at home, that at the end of the day, when we try to reach an agreement with divided government, we win some, we lose some. Nobody is really happy, but you know what? Happiness and circumstances — not what it’s about. There is actual joy to be found in Jesus Christ. Jesus loves you all. If you would like to get



Abigail Whelan

to know him, [if] you’re listening at home, [or] here in this room, please email me, call me. Would love to talk to you about Jesus. He is the hope of this state and of this country.

Minnesota state Rep. Abigail Whelan, when asked the question, “Do you think benefiting people who are hiding money in Liberia is worth raising taxes on your own constituents?”

ThinkProgress, 5-24-17

Can man change the entire universe? No. Why do I believe that? Well, as a Christian, I believe that there is a creator in God who is much bigger than us. And I’m confident that, if there’s a real problem, he can take care of it.

Michigan state Rep. Tim Walberg, during a town hall meeting in Coldwater, Mich., saying that while he believes climate change is real, it’s not something for humans to solve.

Time, 5-31-17

I’m just asking you to genuinely pray for the people on that block.

Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin, on his plan to confront Louisville’s growing vio-

lence by having roaming prayer groups.

Louisville Courier-Journal, 6-1-17

Hunt them, identify them, and kill them. Kill them all. For the sake of all that is good and righteous. Kill them all.

U.S. Rep. Clay Higgins of Louisiana, calling for war against radical Islamists.

Washington Post, 6-5-17

The Earth is 6,000 years old. That’s a fact.



Jesse Kramer

How old was Noah when he built the ark? Six hundred. He wasn’t like, cashing Social Security checks. He wasn’t hanging out. He was working. So, I think we have an obligation

Wisconsin state Rep. Jesse Kremer at a hearing for his proposed Campus Free Speech Act for the University of Wisconsin.

The Capital Times, 6-7-17

to work. The role we have in work may change over time, but the concept of retirement is not biblical.

Greg Gianforte, on why retirement isn’t a “godly” teaching.

Gianforte, a Republican candidate in the race for a Montana House seat, was cited for assaulting a reporter on May 24, the day before the election.

Huffington Post, 6-9-15

Look, I have to be honest, my faith calls me to a different place on the issue.

Karen Handel, who told a voter that her faith makes her oppose adoption rights for a woman’s lesbian daughter and other members of the LGBT community. Handel defeated Jon Ossoff in a special election for the seat vacated by Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price.

Georgia Voice, 6-16-17



Greg Gianforte

Sweeney joins FFRF convention lineup

FFRF is excited to announce that actress and comedian Julia Sweeney will be speaking at its annual national convention.

Sweeney, who will be the Saturday evening keynote speaker, rounds out the complete weekend lineup of performers and speakers at the Monona Terrace in downtown, Madison, Wis., from Sept. 15-17. She is perhaps best-known as a member of the "Saturday Night Live" cast from 1990-94. She also wrote and performed three monologues, including "Letting Go of God," which details her deconversion experience from Catholicism.

Sweeney is an honorary board member of FFRF, and is also on the advisory boards of both the Secular Coalition for America and the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science.

With so many great speakers set for this year's convention, the Friday schedule will begin at 3 p.m., earlier than the start of previous FFRF conventions. FFRF Honorary Board President Steven Pinker and Katha Pollitt will both speak prior to the "Forward" Tailgate Dinner, after 13-year old Kelly Helton gives a 5-minute student activist pep talk.

After the break, FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker will give the welcoming remarks, to be followed by Maryam Namazie, who will receive the Henry K. Zumach Freedom From Fundamentalism Award.

Comedian Paula Poundstone will conclude Friday's events with her performance. Attendees will be able to meet with Poundstone after she concludes her talk.

Saturday's schedule is just as exciting, and just as packed. You'll get to hear from FFRF's legal staff members regarding many of the major cases they worked on during the year. That will



Photo by Tim Hughes

Julia Sweeney

be followed by four freethinkers of the year presentations, activist Kimberly Veal, composer Brent Michael Davids, science communicator Cara Santa Maria, author and columnist Michelle Goldberg and singer-songwriter Roy Zimmerman. Sweeney will conclude the night with her remarks.

Plus there will be the annual drawing for "clean" (pre-"In God We Trust") currency after the Saturday dinner.

Sweeney and Zimmerman will also have DVD / CD signings at the end of the evening.

And don't forget about taking a free tour of Freethought Hall Friday morning before the convention officially begins. Complimentary light pastries and drinks will be offered.

Boat cruise sold out

Due to high demand for the Betty Lou boat cruise, all the spots have been filled. FFRF has chartered a third boat to help with the overflow, but that boat is also now filled to capacity.

CONVENTION SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

Schedule is subject to change

Pre-convention Events

9:30 AM- Noon Open House, Freethought Hall, Downtown Madison

Early registration opens

10:45 AM Boat tours
Downtown locations

2:00 PM Registration re-opens
Monona Terrace, 1 John Nolen Dr.
Sales tables open
Main Ballroom

Afternoon Formal Opening

Monona Terrace Convention Center
Main Ballroom

3:00 PM Short Welcome
Kelly Helton, Student Activist

3:15 PM Steven Pinker
FFRF Honorary President

4:00 PM Forward Award, Katha Pollitt
Booksigning for Steve Pinker & Katha Pollitt follows

5:00- 6:45 PM "Forward" Tailgate Dinner (Optional)
Rooftop Gardens, Monona Terrace

Evening Program

Main Ballroom

7:00 PM Evening Welcome
Dan Barker, Annie Laurie Gaylor
Music
Year in Review

7:30 PM Henry K. Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award
Maryam Namazie

8:30 PM Paula Poundstone

9:30 PM Poundstone Meet and Greet
Complimentary cupcakes and hot beverages
Grand Terrace

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16

8:00 AM Nonprayer Breakfast (Optional)
Exhibition Hall AB
Nothing Fails Like Prayer Awardee

9:00 AM Ballroom, sales tables re-open

9:30 AM Welcome, Lisa Strand
Music, Dan Barker

9:40 AM Zenos Frudakis
"Clarence Darrow Goes to Dayton"

10:00 AM Battle of Church & State: Legal Accomplishments, FFRF Legal Staff

11:00 AM Freethinkers of the Year
Jesse Castillo, Kevin Price, Jerry Bloom, Marie Schaub

Noon - 2 Lunch Break
Grab & Go Lunch (Optional)

2:00 PM Kimberly Veal

2:30 PM Brent Michael Davids
"Do you know an American Indian atheist?"

3:00 PM Freethought Heroine Award
Cara Santa Maria

4:00 PM Michelle Goldberg
Booksigning follows

6:30 PM Saturday Night Dinner (Optional)

8:00 PM "Clean Money Drawing"

8:30 PM Roy Zimmerman

9:00 PM Julia Sweeney
Book, DVD and CD Signings for Julia Sweeney & Roy Zimmerman

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

Annual Membership Meeting

8:30 AM Complimentary pastries, hot beverages

9:00 AM Annual Membership Meeting
For current FFRF members
State Representatives Meeting
Adjourn by Noon



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

4 NATIONAL CONVENTION

MADISON | SEPTEMBER 15-17, 2017

	Number Registering	Cost
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)		
(Include Subtotal from previous column) ► Total \$ _____		

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

(Make checks payable to FFRF) 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.

2017 Convention Registration Form & Info

Registration Fees

	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___ \$60	\$ ___
Spouse or Companion <i>(non-member accompanying member)</i>	___ \$65	\$ ___
Child / Student with ID	___ Free	\$ ___
Non-member <i>Or join for \$40 and save money!</i>	___ \$115	\$ ___

Meals / Events

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

Freethought Hall Open House 9:30 a.m. to Noon. Please RSVP, tickets required.	___ Free	
Friday Tailgate Party Buffet (Dinner) 5:00 p.m. to 6:45 p.m.	___ \$32	\$ ___
___ Regular ___ Vegetarian		
Subtotal \$ _____		