

# FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**Vandals can't keep up with activist member**

PAGE 6



**Evolution and Atheism: best friends forever**

PAGE 14



**How to increase our political clout?**

PAGE 17

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## Solstice sing-along



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Guitarist and singer Ken Lonnquist performs for FFRF members and staff during the Winter Solstice celebration at FFRF's office in downtown Madison, Wis., on Dec. 21, 2016. FFRF Co-President Dan Barker also performed and accompanied Lonnquist on the piano on several songs, and everyone joined in to sing "Auld Lang Syne." For more photos from the annual event, see the back page.

## FFRF sues to abolish W. Va. bible classes

The Freedom From Religion Foundation filed its first lawsuit of the year in mid-January, to end egregiously unconstitutional "Bible in the Schools" classes in Mercer County Schools, W. Va.

Joining FFRF as primary plaintiffs are Jane Doe, an atheist and member of FFRF, and her child, Jamie Doe. FFRF and Jane Doe contend Jamie next year faces "an untenable choice" — whether to participate in unconstitutional bible indoctrination or face likely ostracism by conspicuously opting out.

The bible instruction, taught by itinerant teachers who possess "a degree in bible," begins in first grade. Classes are held in 15 elementary schools, one intermediate school and three middle schools. The classes meet weekly and last 30 minutes in elementary schools and 45 minutes in middle schools.

Defendants are Mercer County Board of Education, Mercer County Schools and Superintendent Deborah S. Akers.

Bible indoctrination classes have been taught in Mercer County Schools for more than 75 years. Between 1939 and 1985, the bible classes were designed, financed, administered and staffed by a small group of Mercer County citizens. Following complaints by

See *Lawsuit on page 13*

## Your dues help stop their don'ts!

### FFRF continues to fight for everyone's constitutional rights

Your membership in the Freedom From Religion Foundation gives us the opportunity to fight for you and all Americans when it comes to keeping state and church separate, as the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution guarantees.

Since our last issue of Freethought Today, FFRF has been on

the winning side of dozens of complaints against public entities that mingle religion with their business.

On page 5 of this issue is a recap of FFRF's 2016 legal battles, which includes more than 260 victories coming out of 1,073 complaints. We also highlight the four lawsuits FFRF won in 2016 and list the eight lawsuits that are currently filed.

On pages 10 and 11 of this issue we detail the 26 legal victories we've won since our last issue of the paper was published. Those victories came in 18

different states, showing that our reach is truly nationwide and that violations can occur anywhere.

FFRF's legal department includes Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert, Staff Attorneys Patrick Elliott, Andrew Seidel, Sam Grover, Elizabeth Cavell, Legal Fellows Madeline Ziegler and Ryan Jayne, Legal Intake Clerk Seth Wrinkle and Legal Assistant Whitney Steffen.

If you see a violation of the separation of state and church, contact FFRF at [ffrf.org/legal/report](http://ffrf.org/legal/report).

## Freethought Today has a new look

FFRF has updated and redesigned much of Freethought Today, as you can see by this month's issue.

This is the first true redesign since the newspaper debuted in September 1983, but it's entirely a visual change. All of the content you have come to expect from Freethought Today will still be included. "We feel the redesign gives the paper a modern, crisp look that emphasizes readability," says Editor PJ Slinger.

The newspaper redesign project was handled by FFRF's graphic

design team of Jake Swenson and Roger Daleiden.

Some of the specific changes:

- The most noticeable change is to our masthead at the top of the page. It now includes three small photos as part of the "teasers" for what's inside the issue, which means the teaser box at the bottom of the page is no longer necessary.

- The headline fonts have gone from a serif font to a sans serif, which give the headlines a more dynamic look.

- There will be a color consis-

tency that the paper previously lacked. We will be using a standard blue for section headers, bylines and column names.

- Black Collar Crime, while still in the same font size, has been changed to a light face, which gives it more readability.

- One thing that we did not change was the text font. We decided to keep the Baskerville font (created by a freethinker!), which studies have shown is one of the easiest newsprint styles to read.

We hope you enjoy the changes!

### Don't trump the First Amendment!



Photo by Chris Line

During FFRF's Winter Solstice celebration, Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor showed the guests a copy of the full-page ad FFRF placed on Bill of Rights Day in the Dec. 15 issue of The New York Times. The ad tells readers: "Don't let the Religious Right trump the First Amendment. The framers of our secular Constitution knew the only wall we need is between church and state." A black-and-white version of the ad can be seen in this issue's wrap.



# Darwin Soder: On the origin of a name

**Name:** Darwin Soder  
**Where I live:** On Florida’s West coast in Sarasota since 1980.

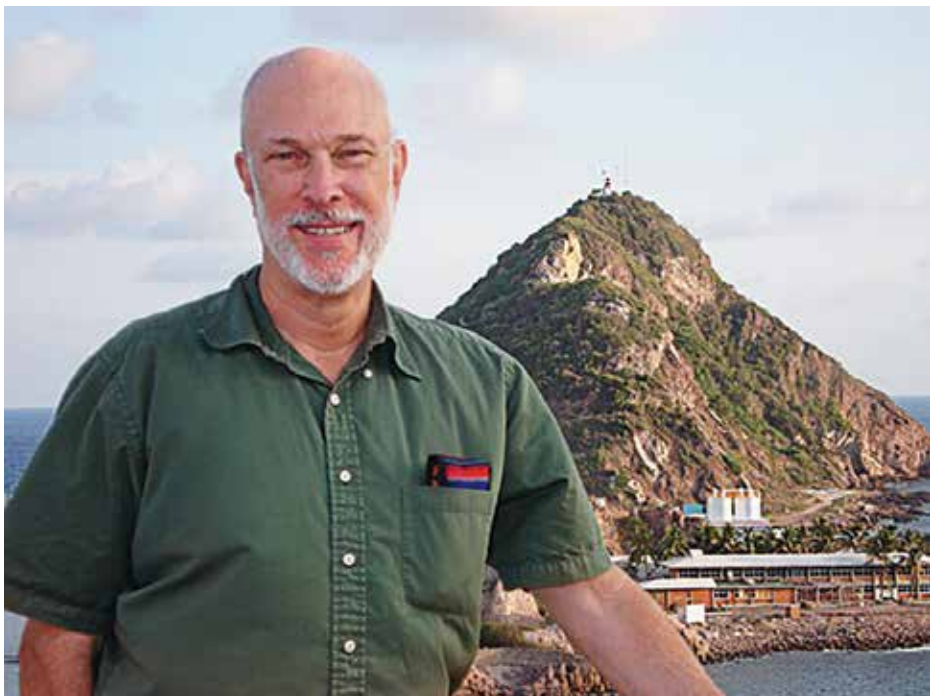
**Where and when I was born:** Wichita, Kan., in 1943.

**Family:** I am the oldest of four brothers. Two of them became devout Christians while my youngest brother followed me in nonbelief. We all grew up in a traditional Midwestern household where we attended church every Sunday.

**Education:** My parents preceded me by attending college and were able to enter the surging middle class at the beginning of WWII. As a result, I was afforded the opportunity to attend Kansas State University, where I earned an undergraduate degree in economics. I then completed a master’s degree in economics and secured a job teaching in a small Kansas college.

**Occupation:** After getting a second master’s degree in labor statistics and industrial relations at Michigan State, I breezed into a job as an economist with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in Washington, D.C. Two years later, I relocated to the U.S. Maritime Administration. Living in a houseboat on the Potomac River, I began my life-long love of boating and sailing. In 1979, I departed Washington and sailed to Florida, where a few years later I started a firm managing other people’s money in the great stock market boom of 1983-1999. After a lucrative career, I retired in 2003.

**How I came to be called Darwin:** I am the grandchild of a horticulturalist, Albert Soder, who lived in rural Iowa at a time where there was no electricity, no running water, no radio and no entertainment. He didn’t attend college, but educated himself by intensive reading from the greatest books written in the late 1800s. One of those books was Charles Darwin’s *The Descent of Man*. Albert was so inspired by this groundbreaking publication that he and his wife Nellie agreed to name their second child “Darwin.” That revered name was passed on to me. Albert also purchased Robert G. Ingersoll’s *Prose-Poems and Selections* (1884), Thomas Paine’s *Age of Reason* (1794) and John E. Remsburg’s *The Bible* (1903). I still have Albert’s books and owe much of my own conversion to nontheism to my grandfather, who was an active member of the International Congress for Progressive Thought. He attended its 27th National Convention in St Louis in 1904. He was a skeptic ahead of his



Darwin Soder stands in front of El Faro Lighthouse Hill in the harbor of Mazatlan, Mexico, on the Pacific coast.

## MEET A MEMBER

time in rural Iowa.  
**Where I’m headed:** At age 74 and never married, life has been really good and just too easy. I have no children, so my living expenses have been minimal.

Person in history that I admire and why: I have always admired Carl Sagan and particularly relish his book, *The Demon-Haunted World*. Sadly, he died in 1996 at age 62, but he authored 30 books, and though a closet humanist who cautiously avoided questioning the deeply held faiths of the general population, he fostered a love of scientific thinking over myths and superstition.

**A quotation I like:** “I no more believe in the biblical God than I believe in Zeus, Isis, Thor and the thousands of other dead gods that lie buried in the mass grave we call mythology. I doubt them all equally and for the same reason: a lack of evidence.” (Author unknown)

**These are a few of my favorite things:** Sharing a weekly 12-mile ride with my partner Susan on our lowslung recumbent trikes that combine joyful exercise and no worry of falling. In addition, we sail her 18-foot Hobe

Mirage trimaran on the warm green waters of Sarasota Bay all year long. At an earlier age, Sunday motorcycling with other riders was a great way to avoid road congestion and church attendance. Finally, I’m learning a new outdoor activity — sporting clays and trap shooting.

**These are not:** Continuous blather by radio and television newscasters about the president-elect and his entourage. Along with many like-minded individuals, I “cut the cord” following the election. I don’t like seeing the voluntary display “In God We Trust” on many Florida license plates. This phrase is also displayed on our state seal in government offices statewide. Should we sue to remove it?

**My doubts about religion started:** I was raised in a family of religious moderates who belonged to a unique Congregational church ministry, which proclaimed that members could accept Jesus as the son of God and the savior of humankind, or as a natural-born human being who taught us how to worship God and to respect each other. By my late teen years, I was inclined to be skeptical of the Christian bible and of supernatural entities, but still liked the deist inclination of our Founding Fathers. I became much more skeptical

in my sophomore year at Kansas State, when I enrolled in a philosophy class. While the professor was careful not to reveal his own beliefs, he selected a textbook which included a full chapter on the existence of God. I was shocked to read that there were valid reasons to challenge the very existence of a God. I am fortunate to be a close acquaintance of Barbara G. Walker, who has authored several persuasive articles in Freethought Today. Her many carefully researched histories of biblical mythology have persuaded me to reject Christian dogma regarding the “life” of Jesus.

**Before I die:** I am a life member of Final Exit Network, a national organization devoted to helping people die a good death. FEN evaluates members’ requests for education and even assistance in facilitating their own death. If they are of sound mind, but unwilling to endure severe pain, or to waste family financial assets by a prolonged stay in a nursing home, an exit guide will come to support their Final Exit. I hope that I will die suddenly, but if that good fortune is denied, I am prepared to employ fast and mostly painless alternatives.

**Ways I promote freethought:** For at least a decade, my car’s license tag has read “SKPTIC.” My motor home also displayed the name “APOSTATE” on its front bumper. I loved that word because most people had to ask me what it meant. I have always mounted a Darwin fish symbol on my vehicles, along with a smaller evolve fish holding a wrench. In 2000, I became an early member of the first nontheist group in Sarasota — the Humanists of Sarasota Bay (HUSBAY). When I told the club’s founder that I had just retired from a career in financial services, he asked me to be its treasurer, a post I held for 10 years. We now have almost 130 active members. In 2008, I gathered several of my fellow humanists together to adopt one of our county’s largest parks. The county erected a permanent sign with our association’s name near the park entrance. Finally, in 2010, I created a public Facebook page called Sarasota Humanists. I serve as the administrator and we have nearly 100 followers, many of whom are HUSBAY members, too. The site is packed with humorous nontheist cartoons, photos and member comments. I am proud to be a Life Member and After-Life Member of FFRF in support of its outstanding achievements.



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# Words of wisdom for 2017

## FFRF honorary board members speak out

With the start of a new year and a new presidential administration, FFRF asked its honorary board members to briefly answer this question:

“Given all the changes politically in the United States (and around the world), how can we freethinkers best deal with these challenges in 2017?”

Here are the answers (edited) from those who responded.

### Rebecca Newberger Goldstein

Some people are energized by anger and confrontation, others drained. I belong to the second category, which makes me a delightful companion but a wimpy activist. In the present circumstances, I’ve vowed to battle my even-temperedness and keep my outrage stoked and focused on resistance. I’m afraid that, with time, this will prove hard even for those more inclined to ferocity than I.



Newberger Goldstein

The tactics of the new presidential administration were laid clear in the campaign and have continued, fast and furious, since Election Day. They consist in so overwhelming us with outrages — sometimes as many as six impossible things before breakfast, as the White Queen said to Alice — that we can’t fully give any single one of them their due before our attention is swept away by yet another. The result is that the individual items in the onslaught become blurred in memory, and we end up feeling much less than we would if only one or two of them had occurred. Soon, the whole limbic system just shuts down in exhaustion. It’s a phenomenon that psychologists ought to study, as they have “compassion fatigue.” It could be called “outrage fatigue,” and I expect the next few years will give us ample opportunities for observing it.

*Newberger Goldstein is author of 36 Arguments For the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction and a research associate in Harvard’s psychology department.*

### Robin Morgan

Never forget that the reason for this worldwide anti-progressive backlash — in this country whitelash and malelash — is in fact because we have made such progress. The ferocity of the response to everything we stand for tells us just how terrified the patriarchal systems are of losing their power. Which they will, they will. As Susan B. Anthony told us, “Failure is impossible.”



Morgan

My New Year’s resolution I plan to take to heart is from the great quote from former Congresswoman Pat Schroeder: “You can’t wring your hands and roll up your sleeves at the same time.”

*Morgan is a feminist pioneer, global activist, author of the groundbreaking Sisterhood is Powerful and more than 20 books. Check out her blog at robinmorgan.net/blog.*

### Daniel C. Dennett

The greatest danger, I think, is letting the truth slide into oblivion. I hope we can carefully, scrupulously record and annotate the current state of the nation at the close of Obama’s presidency, the promises and assertions made by Trump (together with the evidence of lying and promise breaking, the evidence for illegal arrangements and activities and the time and effort devoted to pushback on preposterous proposals and schemes).

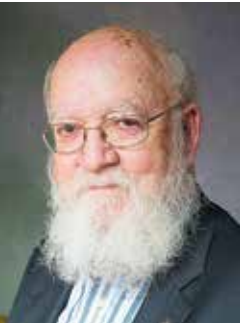


Photo by Ingrid Laas  
Dennett

The nation shouldn’t have to be constantly correcting, rebutting, chastising, deploring or demanding apologies from a naughty-little-boy president. If he would just behave like a grown-up, we could all get a lot more done.

When the nation gets tired enough of this, we want to have more than enough undeniable grounds for impeachment so that it will sail through Congress with bipartisan support.

*Dennett is a professor of philosophy at Tufts, and author of the bestselling book about religion, Breaking the Spell.*

### Sean B. Carroll

The surprising 180-degree turn has many of us working in science and education wondering how best to respond to the shift in climate (pun intended).

I find myself looking back to other eras when cultures slammed into reverse, and how people responded. I wrote a book a few years ago about Albert Camus and Jacques Monod, who were more clear-eyed than many in anticipating the misery that was about to befall France upon occupation in 1940, a country that was very much divided before and during their long ordeal.



Carroll

Like them, I think we have to summon hope and courage, resist paralysis, and get on with our work — convinced that in time, the tide will turn back in favor of reason.

*Carroll is scientist, author and educator at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and University of Wisconsin.*

### Robert Sapolsky

I assume that like everyone reading this, I’ve been horrified by all that has happened politically since long before Election Day — horrified, angry, scared, amazed at how little I apparently understand what this country is about, wondering if this is how Berlin felt in 1931, etc.



Sapolsky

Critical thinking, counter-arguments, even facts will not make a dent with the new administration. Nor will empathy, compassion and decency.

All that’s keeping me from despair is the fact that the young over-

whelmingly rejected Trump (and the young overwhelmingly rejected Brexit and its underlying xenophobia in the UK). If they organize to fight back, we may be OK.

*Sapolsky is a neurologist, Stanford professor and author who has a new book coming out in May called Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst.*

### Steven Pinker FFRF honorary president

First, we mustn’t overinterpret Trump’s electoral victory as suggesting that history is on the side of Trumpism, but should remember that far more people voted for Clinton than for Trump, that President Obama’s approval rating is at an all-time high, and that Trump’s support was concentrated among older voters, who will die someday and be replaced by more liberal cohorts.



Photo by Brent Nicastro  
Pinker

Also, we should remember that a functioning democracy does not consist of electing a ruler, but depends on an enormous distributed infrastructure: legislators who have to respond to constituents and lobbyists, judges with reputations to uphold, bureaucrats who are responsible for the missions of their departments, and the tens of millions of people who have to carry out their jobs in order that the government and society function. These are pressure points at which citizens can continue to exert an influence, even when the election is a distant memory.

*Pinker is a professor of psychology at Harvard and is author of The Blank Slate. He has been elected to the National Academy of Sciences.*

### Jerry Coyne

With respect to the U.S., the unexpected election of Donald Trump as president has made freethinkers think freely about how we might respond to the challenges that are sure to come. There is of course a need for the usual letter-writing and donations to worthy organizations (including FFRF!), but I’ve also pondered whether I might have to reassume my ’60s mentality and get involved in public demonstrations, including acts of civil disobedience. The Supreme Court is a worry, but I see nothing we can do about that. However, if Trump tries to cut back our civil liberties, or build his odious wall between Mexico and the U.S., then it may be time to take to the streets.



Photo by Ingrid Laas  
Coyne

*Coyne is professor of ecology and evolution at the University of Chicago, and is author of the book, Why Evolution is True.*

### Edward Sorel

Concerning the Trump years ahead, I suspect they will bear some resemblance to the Vietnam years of protest in the 1960s. There will be one or two religious leaders who protest against the unconstitutional tactics of Trump, but the heads of most

of the Christian sects will stay silent, or strongly support his actions as long as public money continues to be diverted into their schools and they continue to enjoy their special tax privileges. I remember Cardinal Terence Cooke telling American troops in Vietnam, “You are friends of Christ because you are here.” I think we’ll hear a variation on that theme when Trump gets us into another holy war.



Sorel

Good luck to us all in the New Year. *Sorel is a satiric cartoonist who is a regular contributor to The Atlantic and The New Yorker, and whose caricatures have been exhibited at the National Portrait Gallery. His newest book is the critically acclaimed Mary Astor’s Purple Diary.*

### Susan Jacoby

I think that the advances made by secular Americans in recent years are under grave threat from the administration of President Donald J. Trump — an irony-laden situation, since Trump never displayed any particular interest in religion until he began running for the nation’s highest office. Trump may not be any more interested in religion now, but Vice President Mike Pence and many members of the cabinet are about as far right as it gets in American religious discourse and public policy. From these government leaders — especially if, as I suspect, Trump is basically indifferent and has delegated all religious matters to Pastor-manqué Pence — we can expect nothing but attacks on women’s reproductive rights, attempts to funnel tax money to religious charter schools, science-denying initiatives on everything from climate change to evolution, and every other imaginable attempt to erode the barrier between church and state. We must fight these initiatives at the local, state and national level with every dollar and every iota of reason we possess.



Photo by Ingrid Laas  
Jacoby

My contribution to this fight this year is going to be a rewrite of my 2008 book, *The Age of American Unreason*, to take into account the explosion of irrationality that elected Trump. Eight years ago, I could not possibly have imagined the depths of unreason that would claim our country in the 2016 election. I consider it my duty to try to make some historical sense of this phenomenon. I believe that all freethinkers have a duty — to our country and our world — to use our talents and experience to fight a movement that disdains knowledge, ridicules those who think before they speak, and regards 140 characters as a suitable form of communication between an elected leader and the public. These are the times that try men’s and women’s souls.

*Jacoby is author of several books, most recently Strange Gods: A Secular History of Conversion. She earned many grants and awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Guggenheim, Rockefeller and Ford Foundations.*



# HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

## LAST-MINUTE MESSAGE FOR A TIME CAPSULE


I have to tell you this, whoever you are:  
that on one summer morning here, the ocean  
pounded in on tumbledown breakers,  
a south wind, bustling along the shore,  
whipped the froth into little rainbows,  
and a reckless gull swept down the beach  
as if to fly were everything it needed.  
I thought of your hovering saucers,  
looking for clues, and I wanted to write this down,  
so it wouldn't be lost forever —  
that once upon a time we had  
meadows here, and astonishing things,  
swans and frogs and luna moths  
and blue skies that could stagger your heart.  
We could have had them still,  
and welcomed you to earth, but  
we also had the righteous ones  
who worshipped the True Faith, and Holy War.  
When you go home to your shining galaxy,  
say that what you learned  
from this dead and barren place is  
to beware the righteous ones.



© Philip Appleman.  
Philip Appleman is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include *New and Selected Poems: (1956-1996)*, *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible* (2012), *Darwin's Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His newest book is *The Labyrinth: God, Darwin and the Meaning of Life*. He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both "After-Life" Members of FFRF. Phil's books: [ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop).

## OVERHEARD

White evangelicals decided the presidency. They still have colossal power. Strangely, they chose a president who contradicts evangelical morality. Trying to fathom America's religious-political tides is bewildering.  
**James Haught, editor emeritus of The Charleston Gazette-Mail**  
*Tribune News Service, 11-30-16*

I believe it should not be a separation. It should be a wall. It should be a gulf.  
  
**Ernie Chambers, discussing the separation of church and state regarding holiday displays in the Nebraska State Capitol**  
*Lincoln Journal-Star, 12-19-16*

We will have Christmas trees, we give presents, we enjoy all the wonder the children can see in this even without religion involved. We enjoy Santa and the flying reindeer. We don't discourage that fun sort of storytelling, we just don't believe in the religious aspect.  
**FFRF Life Member Jim Hudlow, president and treasurer of the Inland**

**Northwest Freethought Society, a local chapter of FFRF**  
*CDA Press, 12-20-16*  
"The Complete Essays" by Michel de Montaigne. This book should, in my humble opinion, replace Gideon in hotel bedside tables the world over.  
**Actress Tilda Swinton, in answer to a question about her 10 top books**  
*The New York Times, 12/25/16*

The idea that we are our brother's keeper and our sister's keeper. That we should treat others as we would want to be treated. And that we care for the sick, feed the hungry, and welcome the stranger, no matter where they come from, or how they practice their faith. Those are values that helped guide not only my family's Christian faith, but that of Jewish-Americans, and Muslim-Americans, nonbelievers and Americans of all backgrounds.  
**A holiday message from the Obamas to Americans, recognizing nonbelievers**  
*WhiteHouse.gov, 12/25/16*

Overall, the religious lineup looks a lot like 2012. In terms of voting, the GOP is basically the party of white Christians, and the Dems are the party of religious minorities and the nonreligious.  
**John Green, director of Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron**  
*Akron Beacon Journal, 12-28-16*

# Clerical assistant enjoys making the world a better place

**Name:** Renee Oberhart.  
**Where and when I was born:** April 14, 1990, in Waterford, Wis.  
**Education:** Bachelor's degree in elementary education.  
**Family:** Mom, Dad, brother (30) and sister (31).  
**How I came to work at FFRF:** I saw an ad online. After looking into FFRF, I started thinking it would be a really good place to work and it would allow me to help people.  
**What I do here:** I'm the part-time clerical assistant, so I make and send out prospect packets and new member packets, do laundry, shred papers, help with packaging merchandise, help with sending out thank yous, etc.



Photo by Chris Line

Renee Oberhart

**What I like best about it:** My co-workers are super supportive and fun people. Our office environment is laid back, yet we all work really hard. I love that I feel like I'm contributing in a positive way to society.

### MEET A STAFFER

**What gets old about it:** Paper cuts!  
**I spend a lot of time thinking about:** Self improvement, health, and how to make the world a better place.  
**I spend little, if any, time thinking about:** This is an interesting question because now I have to think about what I don't usually think about! I suppose that I don't think about sports very often.  
**My religious upbringing was:** Catholic, which included Catholic school from preschool through eighth grade and church once or twice a week.

**My doubts about religion started:** When I got out of my small town and started college, I was exposed to a lot of new ideas. One of my first problems with Catholicism was that they don't agree with gay people getting married. I thought people should be able to be happy and love who they wanted. In addition, I felt like everything we said and did in church was from memori-

zation and I didn't think through the actions and words when I did/said them. Because of this, I didn't get anything out of church and I started to feel like religion was all about rules and what we shouldn't do. Throughout college and afterwards, I began having more doubts like, "How do you know that your religion is the right one, and does everyone else go to hell because they guessed wrong?" It got hard to believe in a religion when so many parts of it are illogical.  
**Things I like:** Playing piano, building things out of wood, my cat.  
**Things I smite:** Cottage cheese, ignorance and lack of critical thinking.  
**In my golden years:** I will be a cat lady.  
**If I could have any superpower, what would it be?:** I would want to be able to experience how other people think and feel, emotionally and physically. Ideally, everyone would have these same capabilities, but we could turn them off when needed. More people would experience empathy, and hopefully not many would choose to permanently turn off this superpower.

## FFRF welcomes 81 new 'Lifers,' '7 After-Lifers,' '6 Immortals'

FFRF is excited to announce and welcome our 81 new Life Members, seven new After-Life Members and six Immortals since the last issue.  
Warmest thanks to our newest Immortals: Jeff and Donna Dutkofski, Marjorie Holden, Barbara Leuthner, Paul Loveless and Sherri Wilhoite. "Immortals" is a designation for those kind members who have contacted FFRF to report that they have made provisions for FFRF in their estate planning.  
Thanks to our seven newest After-Life Members: William Arnold, John Doody, Loren Howerter, Jeffrey LaVicka, Scott Romanowski, Dr. George E. Snow and Stephen Strickler. After-Life Memberships are \$5,000 for those who wish their donation to live on after them.  
FFRF's 81 new Life Members are Moses Altsech, Linda S. Becker, Kathleen Anne Beer, Robin Bernstein, Dr. John Bills Jr., Michael Bourque, Bob Butler, Rebecca L. Byers, Lawrence Clark, Dr. Jeffrey Michael Collins, William D. Cramer, Paula Crook, Herbert A. Davis Jr., Christine Doyle, Mason Ferratt, Carol Fischer, Holly Gant, Ronald Gerstl, Joel Gewirtz, Don Glessing, David Goldan, Michael Gompertz, Russell Gregory, Judy Grunberg, Stephen Wayne Hackney, Alyssa Jarrett, Dorothy

Jayne, June Jeffries, Opal Frazier Johnson (gift from Lifer dad Ben A. Johnson), Cary Jones, Chuck Kahn, Thomas Kivlahan, Beverly Kobrin, Catherine Kozminski, Joseph Anthony Levesque, Clifton Levin, Patricia Lewis, Steven R. Linke, Michael Marquez, Elizabeth Morig, Norm Moyer, James Roland Myers, Jay Nagdimon, Raymond Netherwood, John W. Nicholson, Tony W. Nodine, Dr. David Nolley, Lori Olson, Harvey Ostensen, Michael L. Parker, Dr. Ulises J. Pesce, Andrew Rakowski, Dr. Krishna Rayapudi, Austin Rial, Lisa Rial, Alan Ritter, Paul T. Rodts-Palenik, Daniel Rosenbloom, Douglas Royer, Lawrence Rubin, Jonnie S. Rupp, Judy L. Saint, Michael Schubmehl, David J. Schuller, Dr. E. C. Sheeley, Jack Callaway Shelp, Lloyd Sinclair, Dr. James V. Sisk, James R. Smart, Tim Smyth, Don Stahl, Philip M. Walsh, John F. Weber, Arden D. Wellington, Nicholas Alan White, Dr. Dale F. Wiley, Laurie Williams, Terrell K. Williams, Dr. Albert Ye, Michael Yessik and one person who wished to remain anonymous.  
Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000, designated as membership or membership renewal and are deductible for income-tax purposes, as are all dues and donations to FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.



# FFRF earns over 260 victories in '16

By Rebecca Markert

In 2016, the Freedom From Religion Foundation earned more than 260 solid victories to keep religion out of government after sending out 1,073 formal letters of complaint.

The total number of victories will certainly grow, as many complaints lodged in 2016 will still roll in this year. FFRF wrote letters to errant public officials in 49 states (all but Wyoming) and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

The number of total formal letters sent out do not include the many follow-up letters sent or the time FFRF's legal staff spent responding to questions from FFRF members and members of the general public. More than 4,500 queries about potential violations were lodged with FFRF last year, most through our online form: Report a State/Church Violation.

Mass mailings were not included in the above total, either. FFRF staff attorneys often send mass educational letters to government officials, most of which involve letters to superintendents educating them on the law with regard to religion in public schools.

Of the 1,508 letters sent as mass mailings last year, most (1,390) were to superintendents in Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Indiana, and Ohio warning against public school field trips to the Ark Park, and to registers of deeds (99) regarding religious marriage certificates.

The top 10 states (where FFRF sent the most letters of complaint) were:

- 1. Texas
  - 2. Florida
  - 3. California
  - 4. Ohio
  - 5. Wisconsin
  - 6. Indiana
  - 7. Illinois tied with Tennessee
  - 9. Alabama tied with Georgia
- The top 10 legal issue areas were:
- 1. Religion in the public schools
  - 2. Miscellaneous issues
  - 3. Religious displays

- 4. Government funding to religious organizations
- 5. Prayer or religious statements by government officials
- 6. Elections (churches electioneering or churches serving as polling places)
- 7. Holiday displays
- 8. Cross displays
- 9. Prayer at legislative meetings, such as city councils and county boards
- 10. In God We Trust displays (most being decals added to law enforcement vehicles)

To assist in processing these complaints, FFRF hired a full-time legal intake coordinator (Seth Wrinkle) and a full-time legal assistant (Whitney Steffen) to replace FFRF's first legal assistant, Calli Miller (who left FFRF to attend Harvard Law School).

FFRF staff attorneys were also busy assisting our network of attorneys in litigation cases around the country. In the first half of the year, FFRF filed a whopping eight lawsuits and two of those quickly settled in FFRF's favor. For all of 2016, 11 new lawsuits were filed. (See sidebar for lawsuits.)

Staff attorneys also filed seven amicus briefs with courts around the country, including in two cases regarding religious exemptions in the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA). FFRF filed an amicus curiae brief in Dane County Circuit Court to support the city of Madison levying taxes on property that the St. Raphael's congregation owns and the court ruled in favor of taxation. Another amicus brief was filed against a Florida Christian school that wants to broadcast pregame prayers at state championship football games. FFRF supported the American Humanist Association in two of its cases, filing amicus briefs in cases involving a cross display in Bladensburg, Md., and school board prayer at Birdville Independent School District in Texas. Finally, FFRF submitted a brief in defense of free speech in an ongoing case regarding Minnesota's assisted suicide law.

Rebecca Markert is the FFRF's managing staff attorney.



FFRF and a local member sued to remove a 14-foot Latin cross from a Santa Clara, Calif., city park, in 2016. It came down in mid-January this year.

## FFRF wins four lawsuits

Last year was a remarkably successful litigation year for FFRF. It won:

- *FFRF v. Antelope Valley Union High.* FFRF, Antelope Valley Freethinkers and David Dionne sued the school district in April 2016 for refusing to advertise our freethought scholarships, while promoting religious scholarships. The case was victoriously settled within two months!
- *FFRF v. Chino Valley School District.* On Feb. 18, 2016, a federal court ruled strongly in favor of FFRF and our 22 eager plaintiffs against opening the board of education with prayer and bible readings. The board foolishly voted 3-2 to appeal to the 9th Circuit, but the district's been ordered to pay \$200,000 in legal costs.
- *FFRF v. Concord Community Schools.* We have a partial victory. FFRF's lawsuit with "John Doe" families ended an egregious half-century tradition of public schools hosting a live nativity performed by students as part of a Christmas concert in Elkhart schools, Ind., as teachers read from the New Testament. In September 2016, the federal judge ruled against the live nativity. Stay tuned, as the judge said a non-live nativity at a school function is just fine.
- *FFRF v. Brewster Co.,* filed in federal court in March 2016, made Texas Gov. Greg Abbott eat crow. Before our suit was filed, the governor insisted it

was lawful for the sheriff to put crosses on the back of its patrol vehicles (for shame!). Bravo to Kevin Price and Jesse Castillo, both FFRF members and atheists, our brave plaintiffs. The crosses came down almost immediately and the case was closed by June.

- *FFRF v. New Kensington-Arnold School District.* FFRF won an appeals court ruling in August 2016, indicating ultimate victory in sight in its school Ten Commandments case. The 3rd U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in our favor that plaintiff Marie Schaub, who received FFRF's "Atheist in a Foxhole Courage Award" last year, has standing as a mother of a student to sue over the 6-foot-tall Ten Commandments monument in front of a Pennsylvania high school. The case was remanded to the same judge who two years ago found in our favor against a similar monument at a junior high in Connellsville, Pa. We hope for speedy final victory.

## FFRF files eight lawsuits

The total includes the two new cases, above, settled successfully in 2016, and:

- *FFRF v. City of Santa Clara.* FFRF with a local member sued to remove a 14-foot Latin cross from a California city park. FFRF just won this case. We'll have full coverage in our March issue.
- *FFRF v. City of Shelton.* FFRF and Member Jerome H. Bloom sued in March after city officials in the Connecticut town refused our right to erect a display in December, while permitting the American Legion to put up a religious display.
- *Dan Barker v. House of Representatives.* Although Dan's U.S. representative kindly invited him to open a session with an invocation, the Catholic priest as chaplain barred him as an atheist. Boo!
- *Kondrat'yev v. City of Pensacola.* FFRF and the American Humanists are suing over a 25-foot cross in Bayview Park, Pensacola.
- *FFRF v. County of Lehigh.* FFRF and local members filed suit in August to remove a Latin cross from the official county seal and flag.
- *FFRF v. Gov. Abbott.* You're a mean one, Mr. Governor. We sued Abbott in February for removing our duly permitted Bill of Rights "nativity" display from the Texas State Capitol.
- *Gaylor v. Lew.* It's back to federal court for Dan and Annie Laurie, who've been denied their "housing allowance" refund, which clergy are eligible for under discriminatory IRS regs.
- *Hart v. Thomas.* FFRF and ACLU-KY are representing FFRF member Ben Hart, after Kentucky Department of Motor Vehicle officials denied him a license plate saying "IM GOD."

## Winter wonder



Photo illustration by Chris Line and Roger Daleiden

Winter has given FFRF's Freethought Hall a distinguished and distinctive look in downtown Madison, Wis.





Preston Smith stands in front of the two displays he was authorized to put up in December.

# Vandals can’t keep up with activist member

By Preston Smith

As a Lifetime Member of FFRF — and a militant atheist at heart — I decided to test the limits of a local public park zoned as a free-speech area. For 27 years, a life-sized nativity scene and menorah went unopposed. Then, Satan spawned in downtown Boca Raton, Fla.

Last summer, I submitted an application to the city outlining plans for a 6-foot-tall inverted pentagram, painted blood red, with a holy symbol of Baphomet as the centerpiece, and several sacred slogans above. It helps when your mom is a freethinker and your dad is a custom welder, a liberal Christian, and a supporter of the cause. Not wanting to appear as just another town lunatic suffering from religious delusions (too late?), I proposed that FFRF include one of its Winter Solstice banners. It was crucial to balance the sculpture of fictional Satan with a reputable organization fighting for the separation of church and state.

One does not simply place a monument to Lucifer in a taxpayer-funded park and return to normalcy. Here’s what unfolded in December and early January:

**Dec. 6, 2016:** FFRF banner No. 1 and pentagram were erected.

**Dec 7:** Both were spray-painted.

**Dec 12:** Pentagram was restored and FFRF banner No. 2 was installed.

**Dec 16:** FFRF banner was stolen and pentagram was overturned. A Fox News camera crew ambushed me at my place of employment, a middle school.

**Dec 17:** FFRF banner No. 3 was installed and the pentagram was chained to tree.

**Dec 19:** The head of the PTA of my middle school petitioned that I be fired as a teacher.

**Dec 20:** Pentagram was dragged by a truck with a chain and the base was destroyed.

**Dec 21:** Protests were held outside my school, but atheists gathered in my defense.

**Dec 24:** FFRF banner got shredded with a knife.

**Dec 28:** Pentagram base was re-welded and resurrected with a new First Amendment banner.

**Jan. 2, 2017:** Banner and pentagram were both knocked down.

**Jan 6:** We removed the display from the park. A police investigation is ongoing into possible hate crimes.

Many people wondered why there wasn’t a camera monitoring the site. Well, the city refused to place a video camera to oversee the park so as not to impede on anyone’s First Amendment rights. Oh, the irony! Placing a personal video camera proved to be a logistical nightmare. Plus, there’s the reluctance of adding a personal camera out of the sheer principle of the matter.

I know there are concerns that these displays seemed to suggest that FFRF condones devil worship, since the two displays sat adjacent to each other, but that was not my goal. What this social experiment successfully did was expose the religious hypocrisy it intended to. Moreover, I’ve painstakingly educated the media as to what the metaphor of Satan represents (short answer: everything organized religion opposes). Sure, the research shows that most people are far more inclined to listen to and consider your viewpoint if you’re nonconfrontational. But caustic activism grabs people’s short attention spans. My goal as an activist is to continually marginalize religion, akin to the Four Horsemen of New Atheism. And if you disagree, that’s fine; there’s a full spectrum of approaches. Indeed, we need all the help we can get.

*Preston Smith is a public school teacher who enjoys lazy beach days and Rocky Mountain summer getaways. He also donates to environmental causes and supports death with dignity.*

## A visual timeline of bigotry

December was a busy month for FFRF Lifetime Member Preston Smith, who worked with the city of Boca Raton, Fla., for several months to gain approval for “equal time” displays in a public park. But some people didn’t care for his additions to the park and repeatedly vandalized or stole several of FFRF’s signs and his personal satanic inverted pentagram.



Barely a day after they were put up in Boca Raton’s Sanborn Square Park to counter a life-sized nativity scene, FFRF’s Winter Solstice banner and Smith’s pentagram display were spray-painted and defaced.



Smith replaced the vandalized FFRF banner a new FFRF message, only to have it stolen a week later.



FFRF provided Smith with a third different banner after the previous was stolen. This one was then “slashed to pieces,” Smith said.



Smith used the back side of the original (spray-painted) banner and created a new sign for FFRF reciting the First Amendment.



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

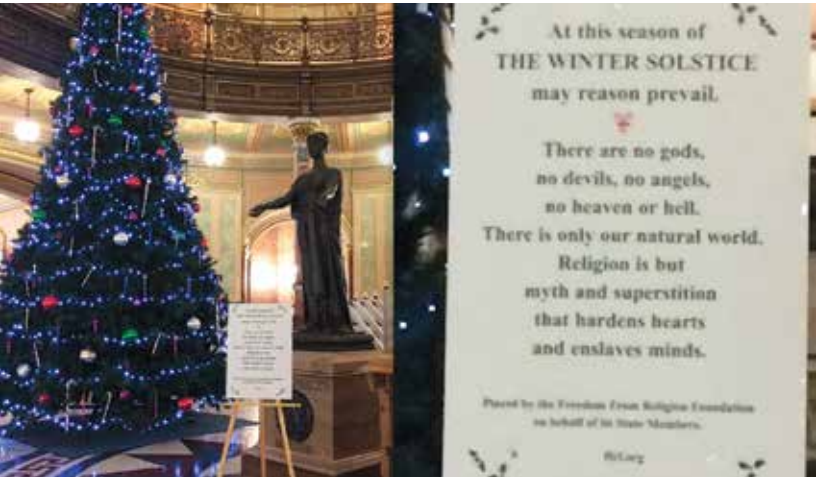
The Foundation’s email address is [info@ffrf.org](mailto:info@ffrf.org). Please include your name and physical mailing address with all email correspondence.

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



## Making a difference from coast to coast

FFRF members and affiliates were able to put up displays in 2016 all around the country, from California and Washington to Virginia and Florida and many points in between. There were 16 sites that hosted FFRF Winter Solstice or Bill of Rights “nativity” displays during the most recent holiday season. Below is a sampling of some of the places (and people) where FFRF signs and banners were displayed. Go to [ffrf.org/news](http://ffrf.org/news) (December) to view other activism.



FFRF’s Winter Solstice exhibit was displayed in the Illinois Capitol building in Springfield for the eighth year in a row. It was installed by FFRF Member Kathryn Koldehoff.



W.P. Meyer and Ryan Bell set up the whimsical Bill of Rights “nativity” on the grounds of the Grundy County courthouse in Morris, Ill., for the second straight year.



FFRF State Representative Dr. Paul Novak of Iowa stands next to FFRF’s Bill of Rights “nativity” at the State Capitol in Des Moines.



Freethinkers of Hastings-on-Hudson displayed FFRF’s “Reason’s Greetings” banner in VFW Park in the New York village.



FFRF and its Metropolitan Chicago chapter displayed their annual secular Solstice exhibit in Daley Plaza in the heart of the city.



For the 21st year, FFRF’s Winter Solstice “no gods” sign was displayed in the Wisconsin Capitol in Madison, Wis. Joining the display in the rotunda for a second year is FFRF’s whimsical Bill of Rights “nativity,” which depicts Founding Fathers Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington gazing in adoration at a “baby” Bill of Rights.

## We need your help in restoring vandalized banners

In what unfortunately has become a holiday tradition, several FFRF Winter Solstice banners and signs have been stolen or vandalized.

Beginning in late 2015, FFRF created a Resurrection Pledge Fund so that banners and displays can be “resurrected” in a timely manner and the vandals/thieves will actually be helping FFRF’s cause. Donors may pledge any amount, but pay only if any of FFRF’s displays are stolen or destroyed.

Sure enough, in early December 2016, one of FFRF’s signs was covered in spray paint in Boca Raton, Fla., within 24 hours of it being put up. (See Preston Smith’s story on page 7.) Shortly thereafter, a Winter Solstice “Let Reason Prevail” banner Manassas, Va., was stolen. And in Shelton, Conn., a banner was slashed by a vandal a few days before Christ-



FFRF’s banner was vandalized in a Connecticut park.

mas. The Foundation is offering a \$2,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the vandal or vandals responsible.

In the current pledge drive, 133 FFRF members have pledged nearly \$5,000 in support. In the inaugural year of the Resurrection Pledge

**Please join FFRF’s Resurrection Pledge Fund campaign at:**

[ffrf.org/donate/resurrection-pledge](http://ffrf.org/donate/resurrection-pledge)

Fund drive, 95 freethinkers answered the call, pledging a total of \$889 for each FFRF display that was stolen or vandalized.

If you want to join in the effort to protect FFRF’s freethought displays, then join FFRF’s Resurrection Pledge Fund campaign. With your help, we can ensure that thieves and vandals cannot censor FFRF’s freethought message without triggering a donation that will fund even more FFRF displays.



# FFRF takes a stand against theocrats

The highly religious leanings of many members of the incoming presidential administration and Congress have forced FFRF to get out in front of the issues and nominations to try to quell some of the potentially catastrophic appointments and decisions. (See page 9 for more details about Donald Trump’s appointees.) FFRF has taken a proactive approach by sending letters to the specific committees in charge of vetting the nominees.

### Quizzing Sessions

In a Jan. 9 letter to the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, FFRF urged them to ask attorney general nominee Jeff Sessions some pointed and specific questions. The U.S. senator from Alabama has called the separation between religion and government a “recent thing that is unhistorical and unconstitutional.”

He has also reportedly stated, “If you have secularization in the world and don’t believe in a higher being, maybe you don’t believe there is any truth.”

FFRF asked the Judiciary Committee to put before Sessions the following five questions:

1. As attorney general, would you uphold our nation’s proud secular tradition of separating religion from government?
2. Is it your belief that religious free exercise is limited to the freedom to believe and worship as one chooses? Or do you propose that free exercise also includes the freedom to act as one’s religion demands, even if such actions might curtail the civil rights of others, or run contrary to the law?
3. Is it your contention that not believing in a god makes someone an undesirable citizen or categorically unfit to serve in public office or other



positions of public trust?

4. As attorney general, will you defend the constitutional rights of Americans, including public officials, to choose to affirm, rather than swearing religious oaths?

5. As attorney general would you defend the law of the land even when it conflicts with your personal religious beliefs? Or do you believe that it is the role of the attorney general to reinterpret our country’s laws from his or her own personal religious perspective?

### Not vouching for DeVos

On Jan. 12, FFRF sent a letter to the members of the Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee, requesting them to ask Betsy DeVos the following seven questions during her confirmation hearing to become secretary of education.

1. Would you uphold the right of states to abide by their constitutions and limit funding to religious schools?

2. Why shouldn’t private schools continue to be privately funded? Why should all taxpayers shoulder the burden of a dual education system?

3. Religion and freedom flourish under our constitutional separation of state and church. Given this history, how can you then propose taxing citizens to support religious education?

4. You are a lobbyist for publicly paid vouchers. If you were confirmed as secretary of education, would it not be tantamount to the proverbial fox guarding the chicken coop?

5. What measures would you take to ensure that schools that receive public money are accountable to taxpayers?

6. Do you believe that elementary and secondary schools that receive public money should be allowed to discriminate on the basis of disability, religion, or sexual orientation?

7. Will you advocate for teaching genuine science in all public-supported schools and oppose the teach-

ing of unscientific and untestable religious opinions in the science curriculum?

### Picking Carson’s brain

FFRF told the Senate that it needed to closely scrutinize Dr. Ben Carson, the Housing and Urban Development secretary nominee, on how his zealotry might affect his leadership.

FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker wrote a letter on Jan. 12 to the members of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs about Carson’s religious bias possibly interfering with his supervision of HUD.

In the letter, Gaylor and Barker said that Carson should be asked: “Will you commit to HUD serving all Americans equally and without discrimination, regardless of their religion or lack thereof?”

Carson also claims there is “no conflict” between “God’s law” and the laws of the United States. FFRF advised the committee to therefore inquire: “If there is a conflict between the law and your religion, for instance, if your office were required to extend housing to a gay couple, would you be able to uphold the law?”

### No Moore!

On Dec. 22, FFRF also sent out a statement telling Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley to not appoint Roy Moore to fill the state’s open U.S. Senate seat being vacated by Sessions after he was nominated by Trump to be attorney general. Moore is the suspended chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court.

“It is outrageous that Moore is even in the running for representing the state of Alabama in this country’s foremost legislative body,” FFRF’s statement read. “An incorrigible evangelical Christian theocrat, he has a terrible record.”

## Trump’s court appointees could linger for generations

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

The Washington Post had a chilling report on Christmas Day revealing that Donald Trump will inherit more than 100 judicial vacancies when he becomes president.

Even if Trump’s presidency is short-lived, the effects of decisions by Trump’s lifetime appointees could linger on for generations. These judges will decide on access to abortion and contraception, on immigration and voter rights, anti-discrimination policies, gun control — not to mention the ever-controversial principle of separation between state and church.

Since 2015 when they seized control of the Senate, Republican senators have obstructed Obama nominations. No floor votes were scheduled on 25 of Obama’s recent court nominees, even though they’d been approved out of committee with bipartisan support.

Then came the shameful decision by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Sen. Charles Grassley, chair of the Judiciary Committee, to ignore

Obama’s nomination to replace the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, the ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, has denounced the blocking of that solid and centrist nomination — Merrick Garland, chief justice of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia — as “the most outrageous act of obstruction and irresponsibility” witnessed in his 42 years in the Senate.

Despite the GOP stonewalling, Obama did manage 329 judicial appointments, naming more female, minority and gay or lesbian judges than any other president. Democrats currently make up 51 percent of circuit court judges. Unfortunately, according to the Brookings Institution, that is expected to drop to 43 percent by 2020 under Trump, while Republican appointees, currently about 34 percent of district judgeships, are projected to rise to about 50 percent. The Brookings Institution notes one silver lining: Many to-be-departing judges are Republican appointments, meaning Trump replacements may not significantly shift the balance of power. Also hopeful is the fact that the Senate tradition is to consider nominees only if supported by both senators from the nominee’s home state — and more than half the



states are represented by at least one Democratic senator.

Meanwhile, here are some of the chilling possibilities deemed to be on the short list as Scalia’s replacement, according to NPR’s court-watcher Nina Totenberg:

- William Pryor, former attorney general of Alabama, who was appointed to the 11th Circuit by President George W. Bush while Congress was in recess. As NPR’s Nina Totenberg notes, “Judge Pryor is an outspoken critic of the Supreme Court’s decisions on abortion, homosexuality and the so-called Miranda warning.”
- Diane Sykes of Wisconsin, an arch-conservative appointed by Bush to the 7th Circuit. Totenberg notes, “She authored an opinion expanding the rights of employers to limit their workers access to contraceptives on religious grounds . . . [and] mandating state subsidies for anti-gay religious groups on college campuses, a position subsequently reversed by the Supreme Court.”
- Judge Raymond Gruender of Missouri, who, Totenberg relates, “wrote a decision upholding state-mandated

suicide warnings before abortions.”

The dismayed list of the remaining 21 Heritage Foundation and Federalist Society-stamped nominees goes on and on. But whomever Trump appoints to replace Scalia at least will not change the partisan balance on the Supreme Court, which was already a 5-4 swing to the Republican side.

Let’s toast the health of our elderly liberal justices on the highest bench!

And a toast to the opposition, such as South Carolina’s Democratic Party head Jaime Harrison, who won’t forget how the GOP treated Obama’s nomination and has urged: “It’s time to roll up our sleeves and fight back.”

It’s long past time, actually. Annie Laurie Gaylor is co-president of FFRF.

### What Is a Freethinker?

**freethinker** *n.*

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



Annie Laurie Gaylor



# Trump's picks a threat to church/state issues

Evangelicals who pushed Donald Trump over the top in the election are surely pleased with several of his appointments to the cabinet and other high-ranking positions in his administration.

Trump promised to be “the greatest representative of the Christians,” and he seems to be heading in that direction. Before even being elected, he chose Mike Pence as a running mate, a man who denies evolution and has voted to restrict LGBT rights based on “religious freedom.” Trump has also appointed several other religious fundamentalists who pose a threat to church/state separation.

Here's a look at a number of them.

## Betsy DeVos



A staunchly Christian woman who wants to “advance God’s Kingdom” has become the head of the U.S. Department of Education.

Betsy DeVos has been critical of public schools for decades and is a major proponent of the voucher system, which takes money from the public schools and moves it to private — usually religious — education institutions.

She and her husband, Dick (whose father co-founded Amway) are billionaire philanthropists, and have made it clear that their faith motivates their decisions on education reform.

“This is a significant threat to the separation of state and church,” FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott says. “We know from state voucher programs that the overwhelming beneficiary of these programs are not students, but are instead the churches and parochial schools that take in public money.”

According to Politico, the DeVoses assert school choice leads to “greater Kingdom gain.” They “lament that public schools have ‘displaced’ the church as the center of communities, and they cite school choice as a way to reverse that troubling trend.”

Betsy DeVos has used biblical terms to criticize public schools, “referring to her crusade to fund religious schools as a ‘Shephelah,’ a Hebrew term referring to an area where battles were fought in the Old Testament,” Politico writes.

“Our desire is to be in that Shephelah, and to confront the culture in which we all live today in ways that will continue to help advance God’s Kingdom, but not to stay in our own faith territory,” Betsy DeVos said during a 2001 meeting of “The Gathering,” an annual conference of some of the country’s wealthiest Christians.

“The decision to appoint DeVos to this post signifies a serious attack on public education,” FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor says. “As the top education official in the United States, she can be expected to do everything in her power to take taxpayer money from public schools and send it to private religious schools.”

Kary Moss, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan, explained to the Washing-

ton Post the anxiety many have about DeVos as education secretary: “We strongly urge Congress to scrutinize the record of Betsy DeVos, who has been a staunch proponent of school vouchers, a misguided idea that diverts taxpayer dollars into private and parochial schools and perverts the bedrock American value of separation of church and state.”

According to Politico, the DeVoses adhere to the Calvinist view of Christianity. Richard Israel, a professor of the Old Testament at Vanguard University in California, said Calvinists see it as the work of Christians to influence culture.

“Their view of the Christian mission isn’t to be in the fortress and hold out against the pagans, but to engage culture from a Christian worldview and transform it,” Israel told Politico.

## Ben Carson



Retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson will be heading the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Rep. Elijah Cummings, the Democratic ranking member of the House Oversight Committee, called Carson “woefully unqualified.”

While that may be true, it’s his stance on state/church issues that should have all Americans even more worried. Carson has denounced the notion of separation of church and state.

“We Americans must be proud of who we are. We cannot give away our values and principles for the sake of political correctness,” he said while still a candidate for the presidency. “There are those who go around proclaiming separation of church and state. You can’t put anything up that has anything to do with God. ... I’ll have a seizure if I see a cross, and all of this kind of crap. The fact of the matter is — do they realize that our founding document, the Declaration of Independence, says we have certain unalienable rights given to us by our creator, aka God.”

Carson gave a telling response to Justin Scott, an FFRF member from Iowa who asked state/church questions of the presidential candidates during the lead-up to the Iowa caucuses.

“Fortunately, our Constitution, the supreme law of the land, was designed by men of faith, and it has a Judeo-Christian foundation. Therefore, there is no conflict there. So it is not a problem,” Carson told Scott.

## Scott Pruitt



Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt, no friend to the environment, is now the head of the Environmental Protection Agency.

FFRF has tussled several times with Pruitt, an active promoter of oil, fossil fuels and fracking who has openly opposed the EPA and calls climate change a “hoax.”

Pruitt has also gone out of his way to target FFRF.

“This is yet another cabinet nomination that would involve the fox guarding the chicken coop,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Pruitt’s not only a theocrat on civil liberties issues, but his blinkered faith-based views make him an entirely inappropriate candidate to run the science-based EPA.”

After FFRF sent letters to 26 Oklahoma school districts in 2015 about illegal bible distribution in public schools by the Gideons, Pruitt jumped into the fray, sending a letter to superintendents statewide that smeared FFRF. Pruitt wrote: “As the attorney general of Oklahoma, I will not stand idly by while out-of-state organizations bully you or any other official in this state into restricting the religious freedom the Founders of this country held dear.”

It’s not the first time Pruitt maligned FFRF. In 2014, while discussing the Internal Revenue Service’s policy on pulpit politicking, he claimed FFRF “is unabashed in its desire to destroy” free speech and the First Amendment’s free exercise clause. He has also refused open records requests from FFRF over his involvement in promoting the distribution of bibles and so-called “religious freedom” in public schools.

Pruitt’s hostility toward FFRF is part of a pattern. For instance, he long fought to retain a Ten Commandments monument that the state Supreme Court ordered removed in 2015 from the Oklahoma Capitol.

## Rick Perry



Rick Perry, to be named secretary of the Department of Energy, is another fanatically religious nominee who has scuffled with FFRF.

On behalf of hundreds of members in Texas, FFRF and five of our Houston members sued Perry as Texas governor in July 2011 over Perry’s initiation, organization, promotion and participation of a prayer event. Perry not only issued a proclamation that Aug. 6, 2011, was a “Day of Prayer and Fasting for our Nation’s Challenges,” but actually initiated the very call for the event. He videotaped an invitation posted at the official gubernatorial website asking citizens to turn to Jesus and ask for God’s forgiveness.

But the judge dismissed our lawsuit, ruling that the plaintiffs lacked standing. Perry did not, however, repeat the Texas prayer event.

Perry intruded into our complaint over cheerleaders at public high school games in the Texan city of Kountze. These cheerleaders had painted paper banners with New Testament bible verses for football players to run through at the start of games. Perry grandstanded in vocally siding with the cheerleaders.

And he even issued a gubernatorial prayer proclamation for rain! It was to no avail; the state endured unprecedented wildfires after his decree.

It’s unfortunate that a climate change denier who opposes science

education and the need for an Energy Department has been nominated to run that very department.

If he is confirmed, we can expect Perry to use his cabinet position to wreak havoc on the environment — and to unabashedly promote religion.

## Jeff Sessions

Jeff Sessions, a U.S. senator from Alabama who has called church/state separation an “extra-constitutional doctrine,” is nominated to be the next U.S. attorney general.



“As a result of his alarming views, Sessions played a key role in keeping a 29-foot cross

on display on government property in Southern California and sponsored a resolution in the Senate encouraging the display of the Ten Commandments at government facilities, including courthouses,” writes American United for the Separation of Church and State.

During the confirmation hearings, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island asked Sessions: “And a secular person has just as good a claim to understanding the truth as a person who is religious, correct?” Sessions then stunned the Senate chamber crowd into temporary silence with his response: “Well, I’m not sure.”

## Nikki Haley



Nikki Haley, the South Carolina governor who will serve as the United States’ representative to the United Nations, has been rightfully criticized for organizing a massive prayer rally.

The ACLU of South Carolina filed an open records request seeking an accounting of whether or not taxpayer funds were used to promote religion during that rally.

## Michael T. Flynn



Michael T. Flynn, tabbed as national security adviser, is a fundamentalist Christian who is openly hostile toward the rights of Muslims, even claiming that Sharia law is spreading in the United States.

On Feb 26, 2016, Flynn tweeted: “Fear of Muslims is RATIONAL.”

On Nov. 17, 2016, Matthew Rosenberg and Maggie Haberman of The New York Times wrote this about Flynn’s thoughts on Islam: “Islamist militancy poses an existential threat on a global scale, and the Muslim faith itself is the source of the problem, [Flynn] said, describing it as a political ideology, not a religion.”



# FFRF messes with Texas — and wins

By Molly Hanson

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, through the hard work of Staff Attorney Sam Grover, earned five victories against various Texas municipalities and departments in the past several weeks.

## Cross removed

In mid-December, FFRF was able to persuade the city of Longview, Texas, to remove a cross from a Texas fire station’s lawn in front of the station’s sign. After FFRF heard from an area resident, Grover wrote to Longview Fire Chief J.P. Steelman about the violation. City officials then told the fire department to remove the cross.

“A cross that caused a stir when it was erected a year ago as part of a Longview fire station’s Christmas display went up again this year — until city officials asked firefighters to remove it,” the Longview News-Journal reports.

“It’s our practice to follow what case law has shown throughout the United States,” city spokesperson Shawn Hara told the paper. “So that is to not display on our city-owned property displays that are specifically sectarian — things like the cross.”

## Dress code changed

After FFRF’s involvement, Madisonville High School in Texas has made changes to its spiritually discriminatory and unconstitutional apparel policy.

FFRF received a complaint from a student at the high school, who had been told by the school’s vice principal, Kathleen Golden, to remove an inverted cross necklace and pentagram ring



Submitted photo

**This cross that sat on the lawn outside the fire station in Longview, Texas, has been removed.**

and was threatened with expulsion if he did not. Golden allegedly told the student that he should “practice his bloody religion somewhere else.”

The school dress code had banned attire that could be interpreted as promoting or insinuating demonism, such as satanic symbols. Grover wrote to the Madisonville CISD informing the district that it could not draw a distinction between student religious expression and which religion they choose to express.

On Dec. 1, Madisonville High School Principal Heath Brown called to inform FFRF that the district would remove discriminatory language in its dress code.

## Christian flag taken down

A Christian flag displayed in an office window at Stephen F. Austin State University has been removed after FFRF raised concerns.

The flag displayed the image of the Latin cross, the global symbol for Christianity, and was visibly hanging in the office window of the university’s processing coordinator for admissions, Dorinda Byly. FFRF’s Grover

contacted the university president about the constitutional violation in the university’s expression of favoritism for Christianity above other religions or no religion.

FFRF received notice on Dec. 16 from General Counsel Damon Derrick that the flag had been removed from the window.

## Religious promotion ends

The Gunter Independent School District in Texas has been educated on its obligation to uphold the Establishment Clause of the US. Constitution after violations made by staff members.

FFRF took action after receiving a report that a social studies teacher at Gunter High School, Kerry Clement, had shown his ninth-grade class the trailer for the 1991 movie “Not Without My Daughter” when teaching about Islam. Clement supplemented the trailer with statements that all Muslims have multiple wives and that they are “hateful” and “wife beaters.” In contrast, Clement spent two days discussing Christianity with the class

and teaching the tenets of Christianity as factual information by presenting a video about the miracles performed by Jesus in the bible.

Grover wrote to the school district asking it to ensure that its employees not promote religious beliefs in the classroom.

On Nov. 29, FFRF received a response from a firm representing Gunter ISD stating that Clement would ensure that all religions are represented in a historically and culturally accurate manner in the future.

## Christian ad removed

A sign advertising a Christian after-school program, Kids Beach Club, has been removed from the wall of Wester Elementary School in Texas after FFRF took action.

The sign, which read “Making Jesus cool at school!” had been permanently posted on the cafeteria wall of the public elementary school.

Grover expressed the FFRF’s objection to the district’s appearance of a government endorsement of a religious message to Lubbock Independent School District Berhel Robertson.

“When a school permanently displays a sign on its property advertising a Christian club, it has unconstitutionally entangled itself with a religious message,” wrote Grover.

An attorney representing Lubbock ISD informed FFRF on Dec. 22 that the advertisement had been removed from the school and communicated that the district had agreed that it never should have been put up.

*Amit Pal and Madeline Ziegler contributed to this article.*

# These schools haven’t got a prayer anymore

By Molly Hanson

The Freedom From Religion Foundation was able to get several school districts around the country to eliminate prayers as part of school-sanctioned activities.

## No more school prayer

Action was taken by FFRF after it was informed that Hartford (Kan.) High School’s mandatory drunk-driving awareness assembly had opened with a prayer, led by the school’s Athletic Christian Team sponsor Mike Watkins.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to Superintendent Michael Argabright to inform him of the violation.

A response dated Nov. 30 informed FFRF that the principal of the building where the assembly had been held had addressed the issue with Watkins and that the prayer would not happen again.

## Coach-led prayers ended

A football coach in Michigan’s Millington Community School district will no longer be participating in or leading prayer with student-athletes after FFRF blew the whistle on the unlawful violations.

It was brought to FFRF’s attention that after a November football game hosted by Millington High School against Detroit Central High School, both teams joined each other on the field to pray together. This prayer involved Millington

head coach Roger Bearss.

FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert informed Millington Community Schools Superintendent Bruce Martin that it is illegal for public school athletic coaches to lead their teams in prayer or to permit someone else to.

Martin informed FFRF that the situation had been discussed with Bearss, who had been made aware of the church and state violation regarding coach participating in prayer with student-athletes.

## Pre-game prayer ceases

Coaches in an Arkansas public school district will no longer be promoting personal religious beliefs after FFRF presented video evidence of a Harmony Grove School District football coach and a team chaplain leading his team in prayer before a game.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Superintendent Daniel Henley, informing him of the dual constitutional violations of district staff praying with students and athletic team chaplains in a public school setting.

In reply, Henley claimed that the prayer had been organized by a student-athlete and that the coaches did not organize or participate in the prayer. Grover then presented two pieces of video evidence clearly displaying a pastor leading the players and coaches in a team prayer.

On Dec. 12, Henley stated in an



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**FFRF has been able to get many schools and other public entities to stop prayers during ceremonies or by public school coaches before and after games.**

email that, after reviewing the video evidence, he had met with the district’s athletic director and head football coach and had been assured that coach-led prayer would cease.

## Graduation prayer nixed

FFRF’s persistent efforts persuaded an Indiana school district to remove prayer from the local high school’s graduation ceremony.

Jennings County High School in North Vernon, Ind., had prayers as part of its graduation ceremonies in both 2015 and 2016. FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to Jennings County Schools Superintendent Terry Sargent about the violation.

Initially, Jennings County Schools replied in a legalistic manner, but after FFRF sent a number of follow-up letters, it did the right thing.

“Please be advised that Jennings County School Corporation will no longer incorporate prayer as an official aspect of

any program,” the school district’s legal counsel writes in a recent letter.

## Prayer breakfast ended

The city of Lakewood, Calif., will no longer be sponsoring a prayer breakfast held annually by the city’s mayor.

A concerned city resident informed FFRF about an email that had been sent out inviting residents to congregate with Lakewood Mayor Jeff Piazza and the Lakewood City Council, along with a gathering of religious leaders and groups, in a “celebration of faith, unity and community spirit.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote to the city saying the event was a constitutional violation.

On Nov. 22, FFRF learned from the city manager that the city would no longer be sponsoring the prayer breakfast and that the breakfast would no longer be carried out in the name of the city.

*Amit Pal and Madeline Ziegler contributed to this article.*



# FFRF VICTORIES

By Molly Hanson

## High school team, ministry split up


A Missouri high school basketball team will not continue to partner with a religious ministry in its summer camp program, thanks to FFRF's involvement.

FFRF was informed of a constitutional violation occurring in the Eldon School District after the high school basketball team announced that it would be partnering with Sports Crusaders to host summer athletic camps for fourth-through eighth-grade students.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Superintendent Matt Davis asking that the district end its school's partnership with the religious ministry.

On Nov. 23, an email from Davis was sent to FFRF informing the legal staff that he had visited with the basketball coach to ensure this legal violation would not happen again.

### FFRF takes action over school religious event



Adults in the Sarasota County School District in Florida organized and participated in "See You at the Pole" events put on by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes at county schools in November. FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel contacted Superintendent Lori White about the violation.

White wrote back on Dec. 6 informing FFRF that she had instructed district administrators to remind the school principals not to allow staff promotion of religion in the schools through student clubs.

### FFRF shuts down religious recruiting

FFRF has put an end to church advertising through an Oklahoma public school district after Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel contacted Superintendent Brad Overton.

A local district family informed FFRF that Cordell Public Schools had partnered with several local churches to provide school supplies to children. The churches were taking advantage of the school's charitable goal by using the partnership to recruit church members.

Overton wrote back, informing FFRF that changes had been made to the supplies distribution system to eliminate any religious endorsement.

### Religious club to end meetings in schools

A concerned community member in the Camden County School District in Georgia informed FFRF that district employees had involved themselves in a religious student club at the high school and middle school. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes was meeting before school on Tuesdays with district employees and outside adults leading, regularly attending and participating in the meetings, in violation of the

Equal Access Act.

FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to Camden County Schools Superintendent William Hardin to remind him that public schools may not advance, prefer or promote religion.

Hardin wrote back on Dec. 6, informing FFRF that he had discussed the constitutional violations with the principals of both schools.

### Religious sign removed from recycling center

A Centerville, Ga., resident contacted FFRF to report a city-owned recycling center displaying a sign reading, "Pray for our nation." The sign was in full view for anyone using the center.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Centerville City Clerk Krista Bedingfield, and City Attorney Rebecca Tydings wrote back to inform him that the sign had been removed from the recycling center.

### Club won't receive preferential treatment

After receiving a complaint that the Fellowship of Christian Athletes in Montana's Rockwood School District was receiving special treatment in its advertising, FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler contacted Superintendent Eric Knost.

The club was given preferential treatment by being displayed on a permanent board at Eureka High School, a privilege that other clubs were not allowed.

Knost replied on Dec. 1 informing FFRF that Rockford school administrators would be reminded that religious-related student groups are not to be given preference over other noncurricular student groups.

### Mississippi school ends bible study sessions

It was brought to FFRF's attention that the Gulfport (Miss.) School District staff was regularly propagating their personal religious belief to students in the public school. Several counselors had been handing out Christian-based informative packets to students, and every week staff members held a bible study with students.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Superintendent Glen East to complain about the multiple violations. FFRF's complainant reported that the district had complied with FFRF's request by removing posters advertising religion, ceasing to pass out Christian materials during school hours and ending bible study sessions.

### Gun show no longer favors churchgoers

FFRF was informed that the annual Gun & Knife Show in Cumberland County, Tenn., which is co-sponsored by the county, included an advertisement for free admission this past summer for anyone presenting a church bulletin. This kind of discount violates the federal Civil Rights Act.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Mayor Kenneth Carey, Jr., who was also the chair of the County Commission.

Carey responded in December, telling FFRF that he spoke with the facility manager to ensure this discriminatory promotion would not be used at future events.

### No more promotion of religious messages



During the 2015 holiday season, the Roopville Elementary School in Georgia posted a religious message on its marquee, reading, "For God so loved the world, He sent his only Son. Merry Christmas."

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to Superintendent Phillip Hartley to ask that he ensure that the school is aware of the constitutional prohibition of displays of religious messages in public schools.

Hartley replied on Dec. 9, informing FFRF that he had discussed the requirements with the principal and assistant superintendent.

### School participation in nativity event halted

FFRF complained last year about schools in Wake County, N.C., participating in the Apex Nativity Celebration, an annual Christmas festivity that a local Latter Day Saints church puts together. FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliot wrote to the legal counsel for the Wake County Public School System with his concerns.

After learning that the schools were still planning to participate, FFRF contacted the district's legal counsel again and requested further records. That did the trick. The schools pulled out.

"After continued review of the invitation under applicable legal standards, we regret to inform you that Wake County public school students will no longer be participating in this year's celebration," Cathy Moore, Wake County Public Schools deputy superintendent, wrote to event organizers in an email shared with FFRF.

### Nativity scene removed from public park

On behalf of a local resident, FFRF recently wrote to the North Carolina town of Butner objecting to a nativity scene in a public park that had been placed there for years around Christmas. It was a large exhibit prominently displayed across from the Butner Town Hall that featured figurines and lights illuminating it at night.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote to Butner Mayor Vicky Cates about the violation, and the town responded.

The town has sent FFRF an official acknowledgement of the removal of the nativity scene.

### School district does constitutional training

An Alabama school district will have its staff undergo training to reacquaint them with constitutional principles.

FFRF contacted the Blount County School District in November 2016, after a parent at Hayden Primary School informed it that a second-grade teacher there asks the "class leader" of the day to lead a prayer when the class

lines up for lunch.

FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to Blount County Schools Superintendent Rodney Green.

The school district proved to be very responsive to FFRF's concerns.

"We have every reason to believe that our teachers in the Blount County System understand what the law requires," the school district's legal counsel replied. "However, Superintendent Green advises he and his staff will conduct professional development with Blount County teachers in January 2017 on board policy and the Establishment Clause."

### No more religious radio to be aired at school

A community member contacted FFRF to report that a radio in the front office of Osceola (Wis.) Intermediate School regularly played a Christian station loudly enough for everyone passing by to hear. The station was St. Paul-based 98.5 KTIS, which describes itself as a "ministry" that "communicat[es] God's message in the Twin Cities" in order "to lead people to Christ and nurture believers in their faith through Christ-centered media."

FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to Osceola School District Superintendent Mark Luebker with FFRF's concerns, and the district complied.

"Effective Jan. 1, 2017, the Osceola Intermediate School office will refrain from playing 98.5 KTIS or other religious programming while students or parents are present," Luebker responded.

### Nativity scene not displayed at manor



In December 2015, a nativity scene was on display at a publicly owned manor in Wadena, Minn. The manor is owned and managed by the Wadena Housing and Redevelopment Authority and funded in part by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott contacted the housing authority to inform it of the constitutional violation.

FFRF's local complainant reported this past December that the nativity scene was not put back on display during the holiday season.

### FFRF stops school's religious announcement

FFRF contacted Wayne City Community Unit School District #100 in October to object to a posting on Wayne City High School's Facebook account about a "Bring Your Bible to School" day. The announcement gave a location (school library), time and day to meet and "pray over the day."

FFRF Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote to Superintendent Jeff Mitchell and pointed out that such an announcement violated the constitutional separation of church and state.

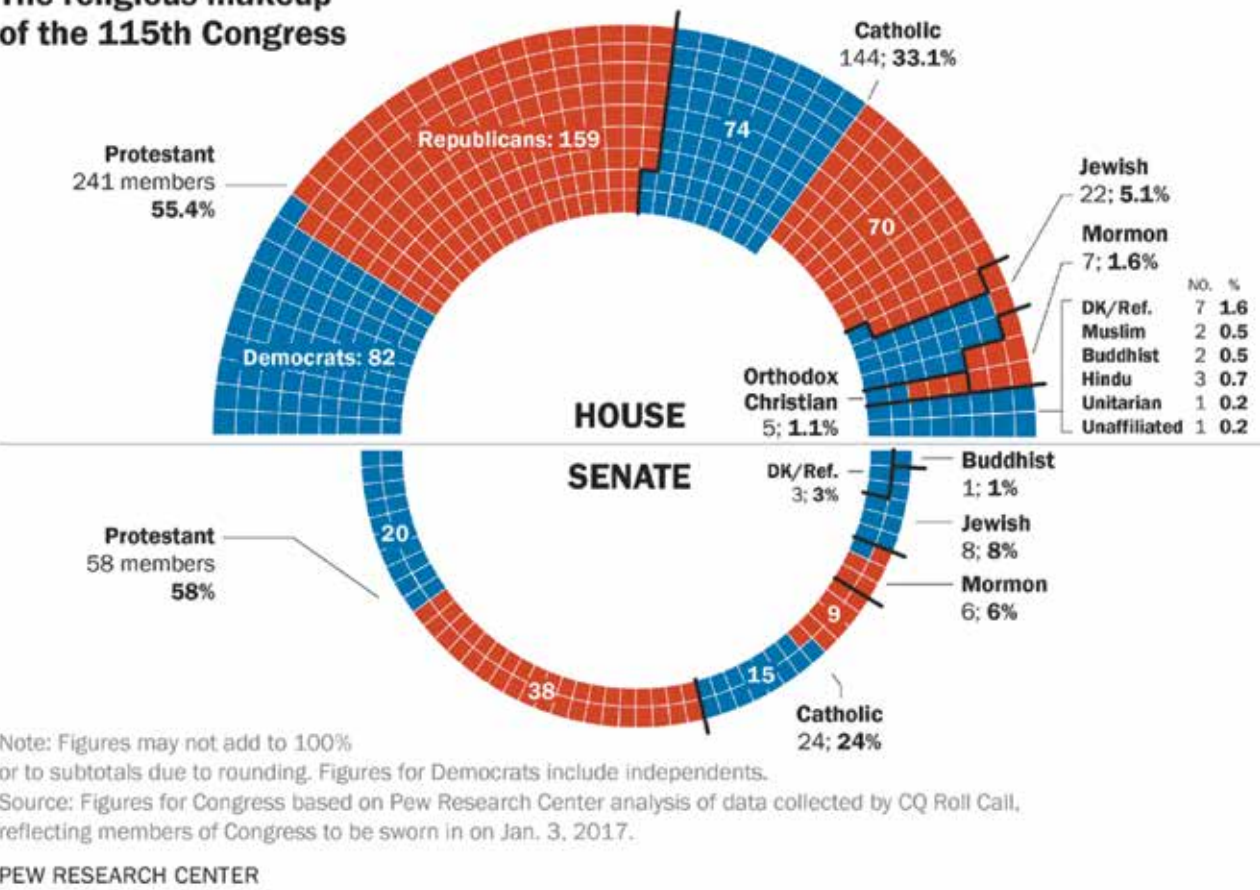
The Wayne City school district has promised to prevent any future misuse of its social media.

*Amit Pal and Madeline Ziegler contributed to this report.*



# IN THE NEWS

## The religious makeup of the 115th Congress



## FFRF requested Trump hold secular inauguration

In its first public letter of the year, FFRF asked President-Elect Donald Trump to “faithfully execute” the secular Constitution by keeping faith and prayer out of the inaugural ceremony.

Religion should not be part of “a ceremony about pleading fealty to a secular Constitution,” FFRF wrote in the letter. The framers of the U.S. Constitution thought the presidential oath so important they included the exact wording: “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of the President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

Notably, there’s no reference to “So help me God” or placement of a presidential hand on a bible.

FFRF notes that Trump seems to be turning the secular inauguration into “a religious circus” — given that Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Rabbi Marvin Hier, Bishop Wayne T. Jackson, Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, Rev. Franklin Graham and Pastor Paula White was each scheduled to pray and give readings.

## Evangelicals trust religion more than science

Many people place greater trust in university and industry scientists than in religious organizations to tell the truth about the risks and benefits of technologies, reports the journal Public Understanding of Science. But among evangelicals, the pattern is reversed, with religious organizations trusted significantly more than scientific sources.

The study also found that evangelical and non-evangelical participants differed in which factors were associated with trust in university scientists. For non-evangelicals, greater scientific knowledge was associated with higher levels of trust. But for evangelicals, neither of these was associated with greater trust. In fact, evangelicals with greater scientific knowledge reported lower levels of trust in university scientists.

## Court: ‘In God We Trust’ no burden to atheists

An Ohio federal district court in December rejected several challenges to the United States’ use of the motto “In God We Trust” on currency. The court rejected FFRF Member Michael Newdow’s (and other plaintiffs’) First Amendment free exercise claims, as well as his compelled speech and equal protection arguments.

The court said in part: Plaintiffs cannot demonstrate that the use of the motto on currency substantially burdens their religious exercise. Credit cards and checks allow plaintiffs to conduct the bulk of their purchases with currency not inscribed with the motto. And for cash-only transactions, such as a garage sale or a coin-operated laundromat, the use of the motto on currency does not substantially burden plaintiffs’ free exercise.

## Judge halts transgender, abortion protections

A federal judge in Texas on Dec. 31 issued a nationwide injunction halting enforcement of Obama administration protections for transgender and abortion-related health care services just one day before they were due to go into effect.

The lawsuit — brought by Texas, a handful of other states, and some religiously affiliated nonprofit medical groups — challenges a regulation implementing the sex nondiscrimination requirement found in the Affordable Care Act.

The Health and Human Services regulation “forbids discriminating on the basis of ‘gender identity’ and ‘termination of pregnancy’” under Obamacare, as U.S. District Court Judge Reed O’Connor wrote in his opinion halting enforcement of those provisions in the rule.

The states allege that the regulation violates the Administrative Procedure Act.

# ‘Nones’ far underrepresented

## Congress still mostly Christian, white, male

The percentage of “Nones” in the United States is nearly a quarter of the population, yet just one of the 535 members of the new Congress is religiously unaffiliated.

A report from the Pew Research Center also shows that the 115th Congress remains much more male and white than the rest of the U.S. population.

Only Arizona Democratic Rep. Kyrsten Sinema admits to being “unaffiliated,” which Pew defines as people who are atheist, agnostic or who describe their religion as “nothing in particular.” That means only 0.2 percent of Congress is unaffiliated, compared

with 23 percent of U.S. adults. That unaffiliated group, also called the Nones, is the fastest-growing “religious” group in America, according to a previous Pew study.

More than 90 percent of members of Congress are Christian, compared with 71 percent of U.S. adults.

Part of the reason for this huge gap is that Nones tend to be younger, while a congressional members’ average age was 57 in the 114th Congress. Since the Nones are among the youngest of all “religious” groups, the expectation is that as they age, more of them will be elected to Congress and will start to make up the dramatic difference that currently exists.

Also, because Nones are young-

er, they tend to vote at lower rates than older Americans, so they may be underrepresented partly for that reason, as well.

And finally, not being religiously affiliated also means there is not a concerted voting bloc that is politically motivated.

“They may be unaffiliated; they may be atheist; they may be agnostic, but they’re not part of some club,” Margie Omero, a Democratic strategist at Purple Strategies, told National Public Radio in 2015. “You could certainly argue that evangelicals are not monolithic in terms of their policy beliefs, but there’s no denying that there’s more of an organization around organized religion than there is around disorganized atheism.”

# U.S. Christians less educated than ‘Nones’

The nonreligious, known as the Nones, and members of religious minorities in the United States are much more likely to have attended college or a vocational school than members of the Christian majority, according to a new study.

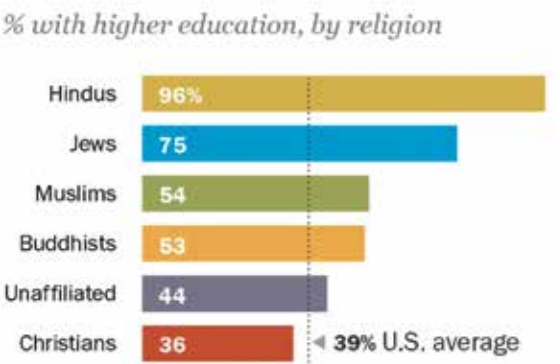
The Pew Research Center review was based on data from 2010, using census and survey data from 151 countries that found wide gaps in education among followers of the world’s major religions. It also found an education gap between men and women within religious groups.

Only 36 percent of the 267 million Christians in the United States had a post-secondary education, which made them the least-educated religious group in the country.

The study found a positive connection between higher education levels and the number of people who described themselves as having no religion. In the United States, the religious tended to be less educated than the nonreligious.

Jews in the United States were more than twice as likely as Christians to have a postsecondary degree, and Hindus were almost three times as likely, the report showed. Most Jews live in two wealthy countries with generally high education levels: the United States and Israel.

## In United States, religious minorities more likely to have college degrees than Christian majority



From a worldwide perspective, Christians in the United States were among the best-educated among all Christians. Twenty percent of Christians worldwide had a post-secondary degree.

Globally, the gender gap was widest among Hindus, with women receiving 2.7 years less education on average than men, and Muslims, whose women received 1.5 years less education. Buddhist women received 1.1 years less education than men, Christian women received 0.4 years less, and unaffiliated women received 0.8 years less. There was no educational gender gap among Jews, the researchers said.



# FFRF stands with Planned Parenthood

## FFRF STATEMENT

Congress must cease its relentless assault on Planned Parenthood. For the umpteenth time, the GOP-controlled Congress has threatened to cut off reimbursement funds for the organization, this time as part of a larger plan to repeal Obamacare. House Speaker Paul Ryan recently announced Republicans will move to strip all federal funding for Planned Parenthood. This could cost the organization hundreds of millions of dollars in lost revenue, and it's a highly unscrupulous ploy. This must be emphasized: Planned Parenthood does not receive any direct funding from the federal government. It does get reimbursed for family plan-

ning services, which do not include abortion (except in narrow instances). But that hasn't stopped the attacks on Planned Parenthood from members of the Religious Right and their elected representatives — attacks based on deception and misinformation. In reality, theocrats are seeking to not just deny low-income women access to abortion on religious grounds, but also access to contraception. "Planned Parenthood has been a political target for years," NPR reports. "But recently, the partisan polarization has gone beyond abortion rights and into any federal funds going to the organization." The primary organized opposition to reproductive rights in this coun-



try always has been religion, as FFRF co-founder Annie Laurie Gaylor has repeatedly emphasized. Virtually every vocal opponent of contraception and abortion argues against these rights on the basis of God and the bible. In fact, the Freedom From Religion Foundation came into existence in good part because of the organized religious opposition to abortion rights. It is what opened the eyes of FFRF principal founder Anne Nicol Gaylor to the dangers of dogma being

enshrined in our laws. The causes of freethought, women's rights and family planning are all inextricably linked. "No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body," freethinker and contraceptive rights crusader Margaret Sanger stated. "No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother." Planned Parenthood President Cecile Richards has vowed to offer full resistance to the anti-Planned Parenthood onslaught. "Not without one hell of a fight, they aren't," she recently tweeted a response to the defunding efforts. FFRF stands in full solidarity with Planned Parenthood.

## FFRF applauds law protecting nontheists

President Obama and the U.S. Congress have finally paid heed to freethinkers. In May, FFRF asked our members to write to their senators to extend protections of freedom of belief to non-believers. Well, Congress and Obama seem to have listened. On Dec. 16, the president signed the Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Act. This law does what groups such as FFRF have been asking for years. It alters the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act to acknowledge that non-believers deserve the same protections as religious citizens: "The freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is understood to protect theistic and nontheistic beliefs and the right not to profess or practice any religion." The new language also recognizes that although minority religions are targeted by majority religions in many countries, nonbelievers are targeted almost universally: "Though not confined to a particular region or regime, religious persecution and the specific targeting of nontheists, humanists, and atheists because of their beliefs is often particularly widespread, systematic, and heinous under totalitarian governments and in countries with militant, politicized religious majorities." Other modifications include redefining "violations of religious freedom" to



Whitehouse.gov

President Obama signs the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act into law on Dec. 16, 2016.

**The freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is understood to protect theistic and nontheistic beliefs and the right not to profess or practice any religion.**

incorporate protections for those "not professing a particular religion, or any religion." Violations of freedom of conscience now include a list of acts committed because of "an individual's conscience, nontheistic views, or religious belief or practice," including "forcibly compelling nonbelievers or nontheists to recant their beliefs or to convert." FFRF welcomes these long over-

due changes. Not only are nonbelievers persecuted in many countries, but atheism is actually a capital crime in nations such as Saudi Arabia. "Official recognition that freedom of belief applies also to nonbelievers was way past due," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "We're delighted that freethinkers finally received this gift in the closing days of the Obama administration." The amendments to the act are particularly important for FFRF's continued campaign to protect atheist bloggers in Bangladesh — a campaign that has helped several bloggers escape. FFRF will be emboldened in its work on the behalf of these activists with the knowledge that the U.S. government acknowledges the legitimacy of their views.

## Bill of Rights censorship case continues

FFRF's lawsuit against gubernatorial censorship of its Bill of Rights display in the Texas Capitol will proceed, following a ruling by a federal judge in Austin on Dec. 20. FFRF placed the display to counter a Christian nativity scene, which was not ordered removed. FFRF's free speech claim and our Establishment Clause claim will move forward, and the state's motion for summary judgment against FFRF was denied. FFRF's motion for summary for judgment was also denied, with the judge saying issues of fact remain unresolved. The issue before the judge is whether the governor engaged in viewpoint discrimination when he had the display removed. Although FFRF had a permit and legislative sponsorship for a display to counter a Christian nativity, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott ordered it removed. It appears there will either be a bench trial, or else an appeal of the judge's ruling. The judgment ruled against FFRF's claims based on equal protection, unbridled discretion and due process — not the central aspects of the case. The case, *FFRF v. Abbott*, Case No. A-16-CA-00233-SS, is in the courtroom of U.S. District Judge Sam Sparks, for the Western District of Texas, Austin Division.

## Lawsuit

Continued from front page

parents of eight students in 1985, the Mercer County schools took over the instruction in 1986, claiming to follow nine guidelines from the Office of the Attorney General. Financing is provided by the "Bluefield Bible Study Fund, Inc.," which operates a fund to pay bible teachers to instruct about 4,000 students. Bible teachers must follow lesson plans almost without deviation. There are 70 to 90 visuals used in each lesson. Lessons have included images of Jesus being tortured, nailed to the cross, and ascending into heaven. The curriculum is the equivalent of sectarian Sunday school instruction. Goals include developing a "positive attitude" toward biblical literature, "understanding the importance of the Ten Commandments," and "harmonizing the four gospel accounts of the last days of Jesus." FFRF's legal complaint lists examples of the proselytizing curriculum. Lesson 2 promotes creationism by claiming humans and dinosaurs co-existed. Students are asked to "picture Adam being able to crawl up on the back of a dinosaur! He and Eve could have their

own personal water slide! Wouldn't that be so wild!" Lesson 6 exhorts students to follow the Ten Commandments and to "have no other god than the Lord God!" Lesson 25 indoctrinates young students in the core narrative of Christianity — the alleged crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor notes: "The U.S. Supreme Court ruled such religious instruction unconstitutional more than 65 years ago, in the landmark *McCullum v. Board of Education*. It's unacceptable that such clearly unconstitutional indoctrination is still being conducted in any public schools." FFRF won a court victory before the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ending similar bible instruction in Rhea County (Dayton), Tenn., schools in 2004. Mercer County, whose county seat is Princeton, has a population of about 63,000. *FFRF v. Mercer County Board of Education* was filed in mid-January in the U.S. District Court in the Southern District of West Virginia, with Marc Schneider serving as primary litigating attorney and FFRF Staff

Attorney Patrick Elliott as co-counsel. FFRF thanks FFRF extern Chris Line for his research and preparation of the complaint.



This visual aid is used, along with more than 60 other images, to help teach elementary school students in Mercer County Schools the Ten Commandments.



FFRF convention speech

# Evolution and atheism: Best friends forever

Here is an edited version of the speech given by Jerry Coyne at FFRF's 39th annual convention in Pittsburgh on Oct. 8. FFRF Co-President Dan Barker introduced him:

Jerry is a past recipient of FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award and has been an honorary board member and has also worked with our attorneys over the years. He is professor emeritus in the department of ecology and evolution at the University of Chicago and a member of both the Committee on Genetics and the Committee on Evolutionary Biology. He's written 119 scientific papers, 150 popular articles, book reviews, columns, and a very popular book about the evidence for evolution: *Why Evolution is True*. And I think, when it comes to this book, nobody does it better. In fact, even Richard Dawkins said that he didn't need to write his next book because Jerry Coyne had already done it. His newest book is called *Faith Versus Fact: Why Science and Religion are Incompatible*. Let's welcome Jerry Coyne.

By Jerry Coyne

Here's my thesis for the evening: The fact of evolution is not only inherently atheistic, it is inherently anti-theistic. It goes against the notion that there is a god.

Accepting evolution and science tends to promote the acceptance of atheism. Now, it doesn't always, of course. There are many religious people who accept evolution. I would say they're guilty of cognitive dissonance, or at least of some kind of watery deism.

The path from going to an evolutionary biologist to an atheist is pretty straightforward. You write a book on evolution with the indubitable facts showing that it has to be true, as true as the existence of gravity or neutrons, and then you realize that half of America is not going to buy it no matter what you say. Their minds cannot be changed; their eyes are blinkered.

And so you start studying what it is about religion that makes people resistant to evolution. You discover that religion is in some ways like science, but it's a pseudoscience. It makes scientific claims, or at least empirical claims, about the real world, but then adjudicates those claims in a completely different way from science.

So you start realizing that religion is perverting what you're trying to do with science by making statements about the world, but then supporting them with various cockamamie methods. And so you become an atheist and



Photo By Andrew Seidel

Jerry Coyne speaks to the audience at FFRF's annual convention in Pittsburgh on Oct. 8, 2016. Coyne is professor emeritus in the Department of Ecology and Evolution at the University of Chicago.

you might then become an anti-theist because you see that religion is promoting ways of thinking about the world that are not sound.

### Natural pathway

This is a natural pathway; it's the same pathway Richard Dawkins went along — except that he pissed off religious people more than I did.

Look at the subtitle of Dawkins' *The Blind Watchmaker: A World Without Design*. A design-less world is one thing that religious people cannot bring themselves to accept. I'm not going to go over the evidence for evolution. You should either know it by now or, if you don't, buy my book. Let me just say it comes from many various areas of biology: embryology, the fossil record, morphology, genetics, biogeography. All these different areas come together to show that evolution, in fact, is true. As true as anything is in science.

Case closed, right? Well, no. Not in America, at least. The Gallup Poll has been surveying American attitudes toward evolution for 32 years and the

results have held pretty steady. When it asks Americans, "How did humans get here?," 40 percent say, "We've always been here like we are now and so have all the other species and the Earth is about 10,000 years old." For over 30 years this has held steady.

Then we have the theistic evolutionists. Those are the people who accept evolution, but think that God was the motor that did it. And those respondents have pretty much hovered around 30 percent. There's a sort of heartening downswing in that in the latest years, which is mirrored by a heartening upswing in

the number of naturalistic evolutionists, now up to 20 percent. Those who claim, yeah, we got here by naturalistic processes. This happens to be the truth, by the way.

It's not like people don't have access to the evidence and information of evolution. It's that people are blinkered to that truth by religion, and that's something that I think almost all of us know in our hearts.

### Evolution deniers

Most people who say they accept evolution are nevertheless supernaturalists to some degree. Why? Because of religion. You scratch a creationist, you'll find a religionist. Intelligent design advocates have been described as creationists in a cheap tuxedo. They say intelligent design, but what they really mean is Jesus.

A poll taken by Gallup asked evolution deniers why they deny it. The first three reasons are all religious and don't have anything to do with evidence. "I believe in Jesus Christ," "I believe in the Almighty God," and "Due to my religion or faith." It's only when you get to the fourth most common answer — you can give only one answer in this poll — they say, "Well, there's not enough evidence for it."

The poll shows 83 percent of the people who reject evolution say the rejection has to do with their faith. It has nothing to do at all with evidence. There is a strong negative relationship, a highly statistically negative relationship, between religion and belief in evolution.

The countries that have the most belief in God have the lowest acceptance of Darwinism. Countries that have the least acceptance of God, the least belief in God, are those that accept evolution more. Countries in, say, sub-Saharan Africa or the Middle East, are not only highly religious, but they're also deeply opposed to evolution.

What's the reason for this relationship? This is mainly a correlation, not a causation, but I think there is some causality here. First of all, you can say, well, the higher your belief in God, the less likely you are to accept evolution. There's something about being religious that makes you less likely to accept Darwin, and I think that is indeed the case.

But the other alternative explanation is that the more you grow to accept evolution, the less you are likely to be religious. That's also plausible, but I think it's almost incontrovertibly true that the first explanation is the more correct one, simply because you know how it works in this country: People get their Jesus before they get their Darwin. By the time they get to biology class, they're already immune. They're immunized to evolutionary biology.

### Religion hampers U.S.

Where's the United States in terms of religion and evolution? It's really bad. We're second from bottom. The only industrialized country that has less acceptance of evolution than we do is Turkey. So the reason why the U.S. is so resistant to evolution — as opposed to say France, Denmark and Sweden — is because we're one of the most religious "First World" countries.

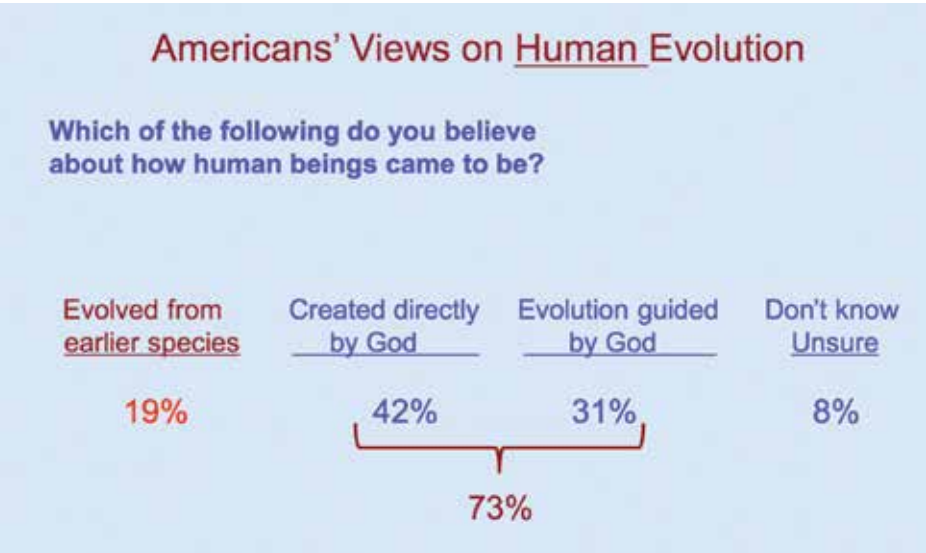
We can do the same kind of correlation with states as we did with countries. At the top we have Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts. At the bottom: evolution denialists Arkansas, Tennessee and Utah. Sensing any pattern there?

I don't have the data on the religiosity of every state in the U.S., but what I did find were the 10 most religious states and the 10 least religious states. Those states that are the most religious are the ones that are the most evolution-denying states and vice versa, and there's no overlap between them. The more religious you are, the less likely are to accept evolution.

There's another factor that explains why different countries vary in their degrees of religiosity and why different states in the U.S. vary in their degrees of religiosity. And that has to do with well-being.

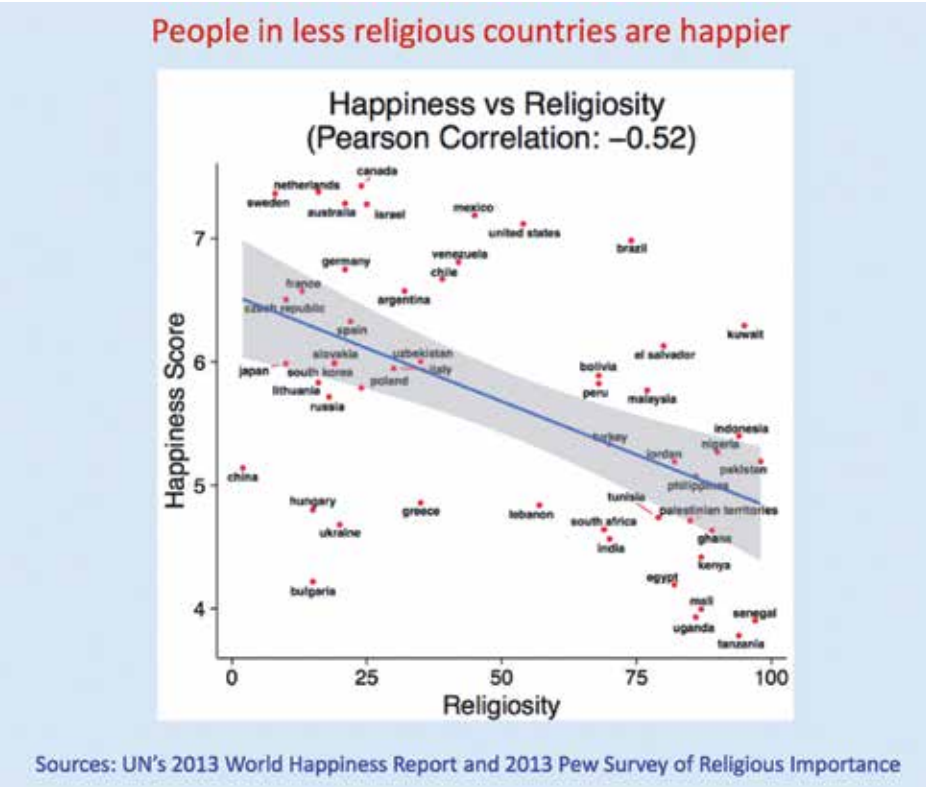
You see the same kind of relationship we saw for evolution and religion, but in this case those countries with the highest belief in God tend to be the countries that are the least well-off. Those countries that have the lowest belief in God tend to be the countries that have the most well-being. I don't think this is an accident.

Where is the U.S. here? You can say the reason why we reject evolution is because we're so religious. But why are



A Gallup poll in 2014 shows the breakdown of Americans' views on the evolution of humans. (Chart by Jerry Coyne.)





Coyne showed this slide to the audience while discussing the relationship between happiness and religiosity — the happier a country claims to be, the less religious it is and vice versa. (Chart by Jerry Coyne.)

we so religious? Because we’re not really that well-off. We have high degrees of income inequality. We have no government health care (or not, at least, until recently), high incarceration rates and high child mortality compared to other countries.

So what’s going on here? Well, again, you have a correlation and not causation. You can say two things. First, you can say that those countries that absolutely believe in God more tend to create societies that are bad. That is, it’s the religiosity that somehow makes the societies dysfunctional. That’s possible, but it just doesn’t jibe with any notion of religion that I have.

Happiness matters

The other explanation is that the more well-off you are as a country, the less need your inhabitants have to embrace God. They don’t feel that they have to have a need to appeal to some celestial being that can give them an additional life that will make things right for them after their own miserable life on Earth is ended.

Every few years, the United Nations compiles a happiness index. It asks the inhabitants, “How are you doing? Are you happy?” They don’t have any objective rating on how happy they are. They just ask people if they are happy or not.

There were 156 countries surveyed, but I could get data on only 52 of them. You can see there is, again, a strong negative relationship. The happier you are as a country, the less religious you are. The more miserable you are, the more religious you are. The happiest countries in the world are Norway, Denmark and Switzerland. The unhappiest countries in the world are Togo, Benin and the Central African Republic — countries which are deeply dysfunctional and highly, highly religious.

So this supports my explanation of why religious countries tend to be countries that are less well-off. That’s also the explanation of Karl Marx and his famous quote: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of the soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition it to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions.”

What Marx meant by that, and this is

often taken as an anti-religious quote, is that religiosity arises when people have no other place to turn to in their lives. It is the opium of the people. And to rectify the situation, where you have an illusory kind of solution to a very real physical problem, is the next paragraph: “To call on people to give up their illusions about these conditions is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions.”

In other words, if you want to get rid of religion in this world, then you have to get rid of the conditions that breed it.

Perpetual antagonism

So I hope I’ve painted a picture of the antagonism, the perpetual antagonism between religion and evolution. What I want to say now is why that antagonism occurs. Why is evolution so anathema to believers? Well, there are lots of reasons.

It’s scary. It’s scary in a lot of ways if you’re religious. In fact, I could not finish the list of the ways that the fact and implications of evolution scare religious people.

Here’s just a few of them.

- We’re products of evolution, not of any protective god. We can be explained largely by natural selection and you don’t need a god to do that.

That, of course, is the thing that religious people really cannot stand that all. Their strongest argument for God, which is the appearance of design in nature, has now been kicked out from under them by Charles Darwin and his descendants.

- There is no evidence for a soul. All of this comes out of science and evolution. Some of these are direct facts, some of them are implications, but both of them are scary to religious people. We’re animals — African apes. If you want to really tick off evangelical Christians, tell them they are just apes. If you tell them they’re a fish, it doesn’t give them the same reaction, although that’s just as true.

- Morality is not God-given. This is a big thing for Americans in particular. Morality is not something that’s given to us by God, but is either evolved from our ancestors or is a cultural veneer that has developed sociologically over time. And there is no externally imposed meaning or purpose and lives.

So here we see that direct conflict between religion and science and between evolution and religion. I just want to tell you briefly three reasons why science and religion are incompatible.

Competing entities

Science and religion are competing entities. They both compete to make statements about the universe. You don’t hear people saying that religion and business are compatible. Or that religion and baseball are compatible. You don’t hear that. What you hear is science and religion are compatible. Why science and why religion? Because they both compete to tell us the truth about the universe.

So, in many ways, they’re in the same business, although there’s a lot more to religion than just empirically non-verifiable statements. They differ in their methodologies. You know how science works: We appeal to nature, we appeal to testability, we appeal to hypotheses, we appeal to falsifiability, we depend on consensus. We have all the apparatus of professional science like blind testing, like statistics and peer review.

Religion makes claims about the universe that does not have this apparatus. It has dogma, authority and scripture, and that’s the way it tests its claims. So right off the bat when they’re making claims about the universe, science and religion differ in how they adjudicate them. Methodologically, it can’t be expressed more strongly than this: In science, faith is a vice; in religion, faith is a virtue.

In science, we have ways of knowing that we’re wrong. If you have a scientific frame of mind, then if you believe something, you can think of ways that you’re capable of being shown wrong.

In religion, there’s no way that the beliefs can be shown to be wrong. You may say to them, “Everybody is suffering and dying. Look at that little girl over there who’s got leukemia. How could your god do that?” They’ll always find a way to explain it. It’s a system of bias where you always find out exactly what you want to believe to begin with.

Science and religious investigations tell us different things about the world.

Here, for example, is what Christianity told us about the world before science came in and blew them all out of the water: the creation story, the exodus, Adam and Eve, a great flood, prayer works, young Earth. These are all wrong. We know this now. And why are they wrong? Because science has shown them to be wrong.

Asymmetric relationship

We thus have an asymmetric relationship between science and religion. Science can show that religious beliefs are wrong. Religion cannot show that scientific beliefs are wrong. Religious people know this in their heart and

that’s why they hate science so much — at least many of them.

So science advances and people feel threatened by the implications of science, and the more science advances, the more threatened the believers get.

Evolution, of course, threatens them for ways I’ve mentioned before. Cosmology, the idea that there’s a big bang and that there could be an infinite series of big bangs that go back

See Evolution on page 16

“ Science has the capability of telling religious people their beliefs are wrong. Religion doesn’t have that effect on science. — Jerry Coyne



Photo By Andrew Seidel

Coyne signs copies of his book Faith vs. Fact for FFRF members in attendance at the Pittsburgh convention. Standing in the foreground are Life Members Jane Malless and Steve Kern, both of Indiana.



forever and ever so you don't need a first cause. That's scary to religious people.

We don't have the kind of libertarian free will that is absolutely essential to many religious people. You have to be able to choose to accept Jesus. You have to be able to choose freely to accept God. If we don't have that, then the underpinnings of religion are seriously eroded. And this is what neurobiology is starting to tell us. We can now predict what choices you are going to make in certain circumstances 10 seconds before you're cognizant of having made that choice yourself.

And finally, archaeology, history and biblical scholarship are starting to tell us that the bible is largely a human-made construction. It's a work of fiction. Many of the things in it don't turn out to be true, like the exodus or the census of Caesar Augustus.

I don't know how religious people come to deal with that, particularly fundamentalist ones. So we have this constant tension.

Now, don't believe the people who tell you science and religion are friendly, because they're not. Science advances and each time it does, religious people have to figure out how to incorporate that change into their worldview.

Accommodationism

So what does a religious person do when they're faced with these ideas? They don't want to give up their religion, that's for sure. They practice what we call accommodationism. They try to find ways in which science and religion are friendly to one another.

Here's one solution: These two areas are non-overlapping. One of them deals with what's true in the universe, the other one with what's right and wrong in the universe, and they can be friendly because they're separate from one another. So I guess distance breeds amity, or something like that.

But this isn't the way religion works in most countries. Religious people really do have an epistemological underpinning to their beliefs. A Harris poll, taken a couple of years ago, shows what supernatural ideas Americans believe in. It's always between 55 percent and 85 percent: the existence of God, the existence of heaven and hell, Jesus Christ's resurrection, the virgin birth, the existence of angels. A full 68 percent of Americans believe in angels. That's three times more than believe in evolution or accept evolution.

These are real empirical statements about the nature of the universe. This is a religion that is absolutely grounded on certain propositions about



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Jerry Coyne

what's true. You cannot call yourself a Christian unless you believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Religion as some nebulous collection of moral dicta and songs that you hear in church is completely at odds with the way religions really are in America, including Christianity, and even more so with Islam.

Try telling a Muslim that there is no truth in the idea that the angel Gabriel dictated the Koran to Mohammad, and many of them will slit your throat. I mean, not all of them will. But they take these things very seriously as empirical truths. Try telling a Mormon that Joseph Smith was a con man and made up those golden plates. If they really believed that, they couldn't be Mormons.

A "factless" religion, whatever its attraction to the liberal scientist, could never be Christianity or, for that matter, Judaism or Islam. So think of religion as a form of science, because at bottom all religious beliefs must be based on certain claims about the universe and the world that, at least in principle, are empirically testable. If you can test them, then you can show whether they're wrong. They always are wrong.

Testing religious claims

Some say religion and science are separate because you cannot put God into a test tube. You cannot do scientific tests on claims about religion, and therefore they're different magisteria. Well, of course you can do scientific tests on claims about religion. Creationism is one such test and it's been shown to be wrong.

Here's another one. A study was meant to test whether intercessory prayer was effective. They took patients who had undergone cardiac surgery and they had people pray for them. And some people knew they were being prayed for, some people didn't know they were being prayed for, and people didn't know who they were praying for. So it was a pure double-blind study.

And then they could monitor the effects of this prayer. What do you think the outcome was? It's zippo. Actually, not zippo — the people who were prayed for the most were marginally worse off than everybody else. But believe me, if it had gone the other way, if prayer had worked, then you would hear this study trumpeted from the highest mountaintops by every Christian in this country. But when it doesn't work they'll say things like, "Ah. You can't test God. It's a meaningless study."

You don't need a god to construct an ethical system or to have a philosophically consistent system of virtues and morality.

I'll finish up with a question: Can

religion and science have this friendly dialogue that everybody is always saying we need to have?

No, that is not possible. You cannot have a dialogue like that. You cannot have a constructive dialogue between religion and science. You can have a destructive monologue between religion and science. The monologue is because the only discipline that can meaningfully speak to the other one is science talking to religion. Science has the capability of telling religious people their beliefs are wrong. Religion doesn't have that effect on science. It can't. There is nothing, and there is no scripture, there is no religious belief that has ever had any influence in promoting the advance of science whatsoever.

So it's a monologue. Science talking to religion. Religion having to swallow it.

So let me finish with this question: What is our task in light of all this antagonism between science and religion? The relationship between atheism, humanism and evolution. What do we do? How is the best way to promulgate evolution, or to promulgate nonbelief, or promulgate humanism?

Evolution and atheism

There are several ways to do it. One way is to just teach evolution and shut the hell up about being an atheist. You hear this all the time by people who say, "Richard Dawkins, you know, he really had me believing in evolution, but then he wrote *The God Delusion*." And, I mean, I just can't stand that anymore. This is what I call the "Dawkins Canard."

If you look at the evidence that Richard's atheism has impeded his efficacy in promulgating evolution, there is none that I can find. If you go to his website, you'll find a place called Convert's Corner. There are hundreds and hundreds of letters from people. People who have read *The God Delusion* and by reading *The God Delusion* have not only become atheist, but have accepted evolution.

So what you find when you look at data is a synergy between atheism and religion. The Dawkins Canard is not correct, in my opinion. I've never heard anybody tell me, interacting with creationists over a long time, saying, "You know, I really, really, really want to accept evolution. I really do because I know that all the data are buttressing it. But as long as Richard Dawkins keeps propagating atheism, I'm not going to do it." That's the contention that these people make.

Second of all, you can criticize a religion and teach evolution, but just don't do it at the same time. That's one strategy. This is the one I usually use — not because it's duplicitous, but because you don't want to confuse people with what your message is. Or, you can bring up religion and science and evolution at same time. You need a special audience to do that, like the collection of molecules I have in front of me.

And finally, this is the lesson I really want to give you — that the all-important thing here in propagating evolution and atheism is the rise of humanism itself. If you want to get people to accept evolution, you have to get rid of the blinkers that prevent them from doing that — which is religion.

So if I was going to ask what's the

best way really to get people to accept evolution? My answer would involve income and health care. Get rid of income inequality and give everybody health care. That's going to take a long time, but when you do that, you're going to build a lot of societies like the ones in Northern Europe, which are largely atheistic. They've given up the need for God because they don't have a need for God. And every one of those societies is an evolution-accepting society.

We have evolution that perforce leads to accepting atheism because of the implications and the facts about evolution. And then if you become an atheist, because you think religion is wrong, then you want to become a humanist because you realize that humanism is not only the sole way to create societies that are fair, just and have the most well-being, but also leads to more rejection of God.

And then you can go the other way around. If you're a humanist, then you just simply build good societies and you don't worry much about atheism or evolution. But, it turns out, that once you improve society, people don't need to believe in God anymore. They become atheistic, and as soon as they become atheists, their opposition to evolution just drops. Drops like a stone.

So I'll finish by saying we're winning. This country, and most of the West, is becoming more and more secular over time. The "Nones" (people who don't belong to an organized faith) are increasing in the United States, as well as in Europe. In Britain, Christians are now outnumbered by people who said they have no religion at all.

The last thing I want to add is a quote (in honor of his biographer Susan Jacoby) from the great agnostic Robert Ingersoll, who said the most perspicacious thing I've ever heard about the relationship between science and religion: "There is no harmony between religion and science. When science was a child, religion sought to strangle it in its cradle. Now that science has attained its youth, and superstition is in its dotage, the trembling, palsied wreck says to the athlete, 'Let us be friends.' It reminds me of the bargain the cock wished to make with the horse. Let us agree not to step on each other's feet."

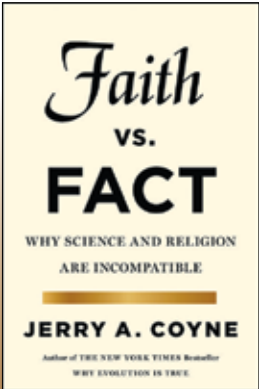
To watch Jerry Coyne's entire speech, go to [ffrf.org/coyne](http://ffrf.org/coyne)



A 2013 Harris poll shows the percentage of Americans who believe in various myths. (Chart by Jerry Coyne.)

Faith vs. Fact: Why Science and Religion are Incompatible

— By Jerry A. Coyne —



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



FFRF convention speech

# Here’s how to increase our political clout

*Susan Jacoby’s speech, edited for space, was delivered on Oct. 8, 2016, at FFRF’s 39th annual convention in Pittsburgh. She was introduced by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor:*

Susan is an honorary director of FFRF and previously received our Freethought Heroine award. She began her writing career as a reporter for The Washington Post and today remains one of the few journalists who writes about secular issues as an open champion of freethought. This is still a rare commodity in the media, and we can count on her to speak up in her media columns on state/church and freethought issues.

Susan is author of 11 books, including *Strange Gods: A Secular History of Conversion*, which came out in March. *Strange Gods* is a really unique book as “a secular history of conversion.”

Her other books include *The Age of American Unreason*, a New York Times best-seller and *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism*.

Welcome back, Susan Jacoby.

By Susan Jacoby

Earlier this year, I wrote an op-ed piece for The New York Times that appeared under the headline, “Sick and Tired of ‘God Bless America.’” [It was also republished in the April issue of Freethought Today.] It was their headline, not mine, but I liked it in a way I don’t usually like the headlines editors put over my articles. In this piece, I was discussing the political implications of a poll by the Pew Research Center. I’m sure that most of you are familiar with the poll, which indicated that the number of Americans who do not belong to any religious group and, even more important, who say religion is not important in their lives, has risen from 21 million in 2008 to more than 36 million.

That is a lot of people — and an extraordinary increase within a very short period of time. But the shift toward a more secular American population has not been reflected in our politics. No candidate thinks that he or she has anything to lose by offending us. I’m here not to talk not about the politicians, but about what we, as secularists, can do to become more influential in the public square. Inveighing against the perfidy of the Religious Right won’t do it: We have to become more aggressive and more effective at bringing the message to the American public that secular values are American values, and not letting either the Religious Right get away with what they have gotten away with for the past 30 years — the claim that being religious is implicit in the phrase “American values,” and that the only dispute is over what kind of religion is defining the values.

At this stage of the development of the secular movement, articulating those values, and articulating them more forcefully, is our job. The question is how to do it in a way that commands the attention, particularly among the young, of that growing portion of Americans who say religion is not important in their lives. The problem is that a lot of these young people



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Susan Jacoby speaks to the attendees at FFRF’s 39th annual convention in Pittsburgh on Oct. 8.

are brainwashed enough by the public culture of religion that they are afraid to openly call themselves either atheists or agnostics, and instead insist that they’re “spiritual, but not religious.” We may be sick and tired of “God Bless America,” but we’re not going to have

a president any time soon who replaces it with something else.

The question is what we ourselves can do to bridge the gap between the stigma still attached to ungodliness and

the reality that the ungodly are now a much larger minority group than many religious denominations.

## Good without God

First, I want to talk about two tactics that don’t work, in my opinion. I feel slightly nauseated every time I see the slogan “good without God.” To me, there’s something unseemly and self-abasing about basically saying to the world, “I am not what other people say I am.”

I was once asked by the conservative talk show host Michael Medved, who happens to be an Orthodox Jew, “What’s to stop you from committing murder if you don’t believe in God?” I’ve been asked that question many times since, but that was a first, and all I managed was to say, “Well, committing murder has never actually occurred to me.”

I should have asked Medved, “What’s to stop you from committing murder if your God orders it? He’s done that in the past; in fact, he did it at the founding of your religion.”

And, of course, the answer is that

Abraham would have gone ahead and murdered Isaac if God, that prankster, hadn’t recanted at the last minute and said, “I didn’t really mean it; I only wanted to see if you’d obey me and do it. I was just joking.” The story of Abraham is reason enough for my reservations about “good without God” campaigns. My beliefs have never told me that I have to kill my child to please some unnamed power who controls the universe.

## Choose our battles

Second, I think we ought to choose our symbolic battles very carefully. I don’t mean to suggest that symbols aren’t important, but that when we do go after symbols, they should be symbols that clearly violate the Constitution.

Getting Ten Commandments monuments out of courthouses is important because those monuments support and perpetuate the myth that our laws are based on the prohibitions in the bible. In fact, many of the commandments are not crimes, but, in religious terms, sins. We don’t try people for adultery any more. We don’t try anyone for coveting his neighbor’s wife. Or ox or ass. We don’t try anyone for not honoring her father and her mother, unless she’s committing elder abuse, in which case we try her for assault. So the Ten Commandments monuments have no place in courthouses. One of the reasons I truly respect the Freedom from Religion Foundation is that its lawsuits generally focus on public use of symbols that directly contradict not only the letter but the spirit of the Constitution.

But engaging in symbolic battles that have little or nothing to do with the Constitution creates tremendous

backlash and accomplishes nothing.

We had a classic example in New York a few years ago, when the American Atheists attempted to bar the placement at the 9/11 Memorial Museum of a cross created by two steel beams that crashed and crossed each other in a resemblance to a crucifix.

This cross was to be displayed among many different kinds of artifacts. It was part of the history of the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks, and its presence amid the rubble was meaningful to many Christian rescue workers. And it wasn’t as if the cross were being given pride of place; it was simply going to be one of thousands of exhibits of objects from those times. The lawsuit predictably got nowhere in federal court, and it shouldn’t have.

You and I may think that finding meaning in two beams that became welded together at the site of a massacre is ridiculous, but the fact is this accidental cross did have meaning for many people who were pulling human remains out of that ground. What the whole episode of the lawsuit did was reinforce the image of atheists as an intolerant minority.

There would have been a constitutional issue if this cross, created out of the horror of that day, had been placed atop the museum. At the time, many atheists who supported the plaintiffs made statements saying that the non-religious were offended by the display of this “cross” in the museum. All I can say is that these atheists must be pretty thin-skinned and prone to take offense.

Now, if there’d been a statue of Prometheus found at Ground Zero, and it had deliberately been left out of the museum because someone considered it too secular, that would be a symbolic case I’d support — just as I strongly support all of the many lawsuits FFRF has brought against the use of crosses and commandments monuments on public land, in front of public schools, and on seals of state.

One reason I think it’s important to pick symbolic battles carefully is that if we’re all over the map on this, it dilutes the power of our voice when secular values and secular people have every reason not only to be ethically offended, but to turn to our Constitution for a legal defense.

I wrote another New York Times op-ed after the Newtown school shootings, when President Obama went to an interfaith memorial and talked about Jesus watching over the grieving. The fact is that a number of the victims were Jews and Hindus, and we don’t know — but can assume if the Newtown population mirrors the diverse views found in national polling data — that others were raised in secular homes. This would have been a perfect place for the president of the United States to acknowledge that violence violates decent secular as well as decent religious values, and that grief, mourning and consolation are not limited to people who believe in a supernatural being who guides the world. But the president didn’t do that; he talked only about religious consolation. When this happens, as it does so frequently, secular organizations need to call out public officials on it.

I think that there are several other

See *Political Clout* on page 18



steps we can and must take — some of them are already under way — to gain the political clout that we don’t yet have.

Focus on the young

First, we really need to concentrate on the young. I can tell you from my talks on campuses through the country that the secular movement has the same problem with people under 30 that traditional political parties have. The young are, in fact, much less religious than previous generations; they’re largely responsible for the growth in the number of Americans who say religion isn’t important in their daily lives.

But I can’t even count the number of college students who have told me they don’t want to be “labeled” as atheists. “It stands for a kind of nerdiness,” one University of Minnesota student said. “The people who take part in campus freethought activities are seen as, well, a little obsessed.”

I think just showing up — as our normal, everyday selves — on college campuses is immensely important. No, we don’t have horns and tails. Yes, we do have jobs and kids and spouses and lovers and all of the concerns in our lives that the religious majority has. I don’t participate in debates about the existence of God, because I, of course, agree with the 19th-century freethought hero Robert Ingersoll (and every scientist) about the impossibility of proving a negative. It’s enough to say, “Based on all of the evidence before me, I see no reason to conclude that God exists.” But, like all scientific theorems, this conclusion has to remain open to new evidence.

There are, however — and I’ve found this particularly true at historically religious colleges — all kinds of productive discussions you can have with young people who are just really beginning to think about and question the beliefs on which they were raised. By historically religious colleges, I’m sure you know I don’t mean brainwashing factories like, say, Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University.

I particularly remember one conversation with a first-year student at Augustana. He had come to Augustana planning to become a Lutheran minister, but he had already decided he wanted to change his major and work toward becoming a high school history teacher. He had been raised in a very conservative Lutheran home with fundamentalist beliefs, but Augustana had exposed him to a much more liberal religious mindset. He said, “In my mind, I know you’re right when you talk about the essential equality of beliefs, and nonbelief, in a democracy. But I know that I’m in possession of the truth, and how can I not want the same thing for others?”

You know, I felt sorry for this young man, because I sensed that this question was really a result of his own questioning of his faith — because Augustana, like all good religious colleges, teaches more about comparative religion and the history of secularism than secular institutions do. That’s what I was doing there — being an adjunct to the history of secularism curriculum.

I reminded this young man of the famous line in the gospel in which Pontius Pilate asks, “What is truth?” at Jesus’ trial. And I talked about how nothing in secular democracy denies him the

right to proselytize anywhere outside of public institutions, but it does deny him the right to teach a public school history class in which he tells his students that the bible is literally true.

Fighting for schools

The second vastly important area of secular action, which involves those who are too young to represent themselves, is concerned with everything about schools. The work FFRF is doing in battling the use of school assemblies to allow outside religious figures to promote their own afterschool religious activities — in the guise of anti-bullying or anti-drug messages — is exemplary.

In some states, like Pence’s Indiana, that means going to court. In others, like Wisconsin, just writing letters to school administrators gets results. The infiltration of these conservative Christian-themed programs into schools is particularly troubling, because the people being targeted are teenagers already at risk — because of drug problems, academic difficulties, issues surrounding sexuality — sometimes all three. To open kids like this to people who are essentially telling them that their problems can be solved by religious conversion is not only unconstitutional, but medically dangerous.

But, of course, the biggest education problem — concentrated in the South and various parts of the Midwest, but also surfacing in school districts in every state in the union — involves the teaching of evolution. And this can be a tough one, because it means that secular parents have to make public trouble, which often does create trouble for their children. And it has to be accomplished at the local level, because all national organizations can really do is provide some financial and legal support.

Fighting the troglodytes who, at the very least, want to sneak intelligent design into the curriculum as a “theory” on an equal par with evolution, often requires banding together with liberal



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Susan Jacoby said in her speech at the convention that secular Americans need to become a bigger part of the discussion when issues of religion come into the public sphere.

religious parents who strongly support the teaching of evolution.

That’s what happened in Dover, Pa., when parents — both religious and nonreligious — successfully fought against a policy that mandated the teaching of intelligent design. This battle ended in 2005 with a blistering federal district court ruling against the teaching of intelligent design in public schools — one which the higher courts declined to review. I don’t think it’s possible to overestimate the importance of fighting these battles and of cultivating allies who aren’t necessarily atheists, but who do believe in secular science and secular history.

I mention history because while we hear a lot about evolution, the right-wing attack on the teaching of the secular side of both American and world history is unrelenting. Texas is the most extreme example, with regular reviews of textbooks having resulted in such gems as replacing Thomas Jefferson with Thomas Aquinas on a list of historical figures in revolutionary thought. I do think that secular parents have to make pests of themselves to get any change in such matters, and being a pest can be effective, even if you’re not in the majority or anywhere near it.

Can you imagine what right-wing Christian parents would do if a teach-

er said something as mild as, “Some scholars don’t think Jesus was a historical figure?” Well, secular parents have to make a fuss when a teacher says that all of the founders were devoutly religious and that the United States was established as a Christian nation.

Frankly, there are places where we’re so outnumbered that we will be ignored even if we to speak up. But there are lots of other places — communities like Dover — throughout the country, where a great deal can be accomplished just by having discussions with likeminded parents and conversations with school administrators. One thing to remember is that school administrators don’t like trouble from anyone — so if we can’t get anything avowedly secular into the curriculum, we can often get avowedly anti-secular interpretations out.

Agreement on issues

Three, I’d like to see more emphasis on certain major political issues on which all secular organizations can agree.

I’ll give you an example. One of the most glaring omissions throughout this election cycle, on the part of candidates from both parties, has been any reference to the persecution of freethinkers in both Muslim theocracies and countries torn by Muslim and



Photo by Andrew Seidel

Susan Jacoby is greeted by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor prior to giving her speech at the convention.



Hindu religious nationalist terrorism. Secretary of State John Kerry has mentioned persecution of Christians, but not of secular freethinkers.

The Center for Inquiry, of which I'm also an honorary board member, has been particularly good on human rights issues, as FFRF has. But I would like to have seen a full-page ad during this campaign in a forum that politicians pay attention to — that would probably be the New York Times or The Washington Post — signed by every major secular and humanist organization and calling on all candidates to denounce not only the persecution of Christians, but the persecution of freethinkers who dare to blog about such issues as women's rights — from Saudi Arabia to the deserts controlled by terrorists to Bangladesh.

The letter should have been addressed to President Obama, Secretary Kerry, Hillary Clinton and Trump. Since these persecutions are carried out not only against freethinkers and Christians, but against dissenting Muslims, too, an ad like this would be a good way to connect freedom of religion with freedom from religion. I don't know about you, but I'd happily make a donation for a special fund to finance an ad like this.

Approach politicians

Four, we need, as secular organizations, to make constant approaches and reproaches to politicians who have a secular outlook but are reluctant to say so, when we are excluded from public events.

This is tricky, because it runs the risk, if secular voices are included at public events, of fueling the accusation that secularism is just another religion. Annie Laurie Gaylor is not the pope. Neither is Richard Dawkins. What I really want to see at public events like Newtown is a politician who presents a secular perspective on a public trauma. And I don't think this is impossible, but it will require constant lobbying.

Look, no one would have thought — even 10 years ago — that acknowledgement of LGBT rights would become so taken for granted that the phrase is in danger of losing its force. There is no reason, with the growing secular population, that this can't happen for us — especially since so much of that population is young. But it does require a relentless political lobbying effort that we don't yet have — a con-



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Susan Jacoby

stant set of reminders to our elected representatives that there are more of us than they think. I don't think, for instance, that Kerry made a deliberate decision to leave secularists out his litany of persecution. I think he just overlooked us.

Make it personal

Finally, we have to come out as who we are and we have to do it with passion as well as reason — and make it personal.

One question I have been asked frequently is how it is possible to get through difficult times in life — and especially the knowledge of death — without belief in a loving supernatural being.

It was Susan B. Anthony, who played down her nonbelief so that she wouldn't alienate religious suffragists, who said, "If it be true that we die like a flower, leaving behind only a fragrance . . . what a delusion the race has ever been in — what a dream is the life of man."

She could not have been more wrong. What if we do die like a flower, leaving a faint and decidedly transient scent behind? It's so much better than leaving a stench behind. Whether our actions are remembered on a large stage, for how long, and by whom, is not the foundation of or the rationale for living what might be called the good life. The moral rightness or wrongness of our actions can no more be evaluated by how they will be judged in the future by human beings than by how they will be judged by a god in a supernatural afterlife. It is our acceptance that this

life is all there is, not our expectations of immortality and perfect understanding in eternity, that gives our lives their moral meaning.

Those of you who have heard me speak before know that I rarely talk about my personal life. I keep that for my books. However, I'm going to make an exception because it is so pertinent to the question of how it's important to get personal when we try to convey our values to others. Eight years ago, my longtime partner died of cancer. He had Alzheimer's disease, but, fortunately, the cancer killed him before he entered the final stages in which all cognition and consciousness are destroyed.

More than one friend said to me, "I don't know how you can get through this without believing in God." Well, I don't know how I would have gotten through it if I did believe in a God who would slowly and methodically destroy a brilliant mind. During the last months of my partner's life, I often wrote him letters because he found it easier to absorb things when they were written down rather than spoken. Here is an excerpt from a letter I wrote him after we had gone to a movie — as it turned out, the last movie he would ever see.

"Only a few weeks ago, when we saw that movie 'Starting Out in the Evening,' I was deeply moved by a line in which he was describing his love for his former wife. 'She lived in my heart,' he said, 'and I never found that again.' Well, you are the only person who has ever really lived in my heart. And that will be true, long after you are gone, until my last moment of consciousness on this Earth.

"We don't believe in life after death, you and I, and we know we're not going to meet some day again, in a place with puffy clouds and harps. We have no children together, so the memory of the love we have won't go on in that way, either. But I deeply believe that love is never wasted, and whatever good comes from it, we have passed on in some way to others — in everything from books to, perhaps, a greater tenderness than either of us might have shown without the other. Now we have only the moments of time we have, and we must use them as best we can."

I'm glad I saved a copy of this letter, because it brings back all of the conversations we had during those last months, while the light of his mind was dimming but not yet extinguished.

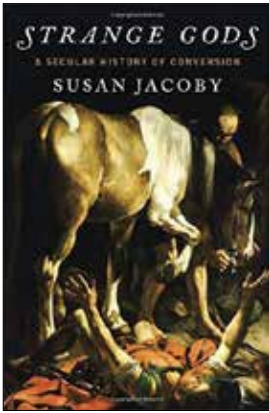
I know that the memory of what I was able to do to help him rests only with me — well, a small part of it now with you — but it doesn't matter. It seems to me that the very essence of the atheist's and humanist's concept of morality — a concept limited to what we do here on Earth — is that love is never wasted even though it is not eternal.

Our acts, good and evil, become a part of the world that will continue after us, as long as the world continues. There is grandeur in this view of life, as Darwin said at the end of his great work. But there is also a proportional humility in this perspective.

The knowledge that this is our one and only life, a span between unconsciousness that precedes and follows our short existence, lies at the heart of the atheist and humanist conscience. Conveying both the grandeur and humility of this view of life is the duty of all of us who are not merely sick and tired of "God Bless America" but who are convinced that rationality is the partner, not the enemy, of private love and public patriotism.

Strange Gods: A Secular History of Conversion

— By Susan Jacoby —



Buy it from FFRF online  
shop.ffrf.org



Photo by Annie Laurie Gaylor

McCollum bumps into Darwin

Jim McCollum, an illustrious figure in Establishment Clause history, toured FFRF's newly enlarged and renovated office building, Freethought Hall, in Madison, Wis., on Dec. 28. He's pictured with the life-like silicon model of Charles Darwin by artist Csam Wheatley that graces FFRF's Joel B. Landon and Wanda Y. Beers Freethought Library.

Jim was the little boy in the middle of the legal battle by his brave mother Vashti McCollum to end religious instruction in the public schools in Champaign, Ill.

As the son of nonreligious parents, Jim was ostracized for not attending sectarian religious instruction classes during the school day. Ultimately, he had to leave the town to escape further vilification, as Vashti describes in her amazing memoir, *One Woman's Fight*, available from [ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop). Vashti lost at two court levels, then

thrillingly won a historic 8-1 ruling, the first in Supreme Court history, declaring religious instruction in public schools unconstitutional in 1948. The *McCollum* ruling is the bedrock of Establishment Clause law pertaining to public schools.

Jim, an FFRF Lifetime Member, went on to become an attorney. While technically retired, he very fittingly currently teaches constitutional law at Southern Arkansas University in Magnolia, Ark. Jim, 82,

often introduces himself to his constitutional law students by showing the excellent documentary about his case by filmmaker Jay Rosenstein, "The Lord Is Not on Trial Here Today." FFRF is pleased to give tours of Freethought Hall to FFRF members visiting the area. Just give us a little notice when you know your plans and we will make some time! Contact Director of First Impressions Lisa Treu at 608/256-8900, [ltreu@ffrf.org](mailto:ltreu@ffrf.org).

RECRUIT A NEW MEMBER

Sample copies for just \$2

Send \$2 with the name and address of each person you wish to receive a sample copy of **Freethought Today** to:  
FFRF • P.O. Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701

Freedom depends upon freethinkers

— Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.



# LETTERBOX

## Memory of Anne Gaylor helps to ease the pain

All of this political turmoil has made me think of Anne Nicol Gaylor [FFRF's principal founder]. She would be appalled by the threats to everything she fought so hard to accomplish, but she would also be leading the charge to defend our rights today. I will always be in awe of her grace and stamina in the face of such big odds. Thinking of her now actually eases the pain just a little bit, and makes me more hopeful.

**Elsa Kramer**  
Indiana

## Important to donate to FFRF now

I'm a long-time Life Member and occasional donor. FFRF is now a beneficiary on my IRA (although I'm not planning to die anytime soon).

Trump and Pence convinced me to donate to the cause of reason, so I created a "donor-advised fund" with some appreciated securities. Fidelity Charitable should be sending you a check from the "Bob Pickering Giving Fund" soon. Use it wisely. Thanks for all you do.

**Robert Pickering**  
Nevada

## Freethinker kittens great for conversation

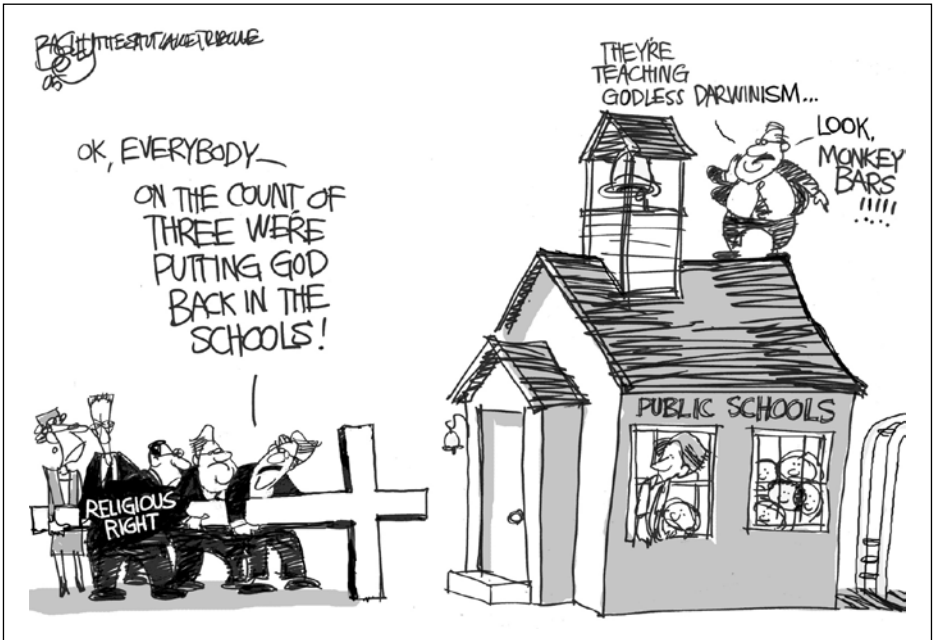


We thought you'd enjoy seeing our new freethinker kittens named Darwin and FFRUF! Hope you got our recent donation. We are huge fans of all you do! Yes, and you can imagine the names are great for conversation! My friends all wonder, "What is FFRUF?" and then I get to explain! It's great!

**Susie and Gary York**  
New Hampshire

## 'Season's Greetings' a reason for arrest?

During the presidential campaign, Donald Trump pledged to evangelicals that he would end the "War On Christmas" and ensure that everyone would be saying "Merry Christmas." If he is true to his word, then could this be the last time people can send out cards, or stores post signs saying "Happy Holidays" or "Seasons Greetings"? Or will citizens have the right to greet acquaintances with those forbidden words, without fear of some form of harassment or arrest from the government? Of course, Trump's pledge flies in the face of the First Amendment, but as he demonstrated many times at his campaign rallies, he has little regard for freedom of speech. With a regressive, theocratic Congress and a right-wing-dominated Supreme Court to support him, along with the Religious Right and the Catholic Church, anything is possible. I think a proper response to Trump's arrogance would be for millions of freethinkers to



send various secular or atheistic holiday cards to Trump at the White House next December. I plan to send him a "Merry ChristMyth!" card.

**Dennis Middlebrooks**  
New York

## We all understand the horrors of religion

Our Founding Fathers did not care for religion. Thomas Jefferson wrote, "The priests of the different religious sects dread the advance of science as the witches do the approach of daylight, and scowl on the fatal harbinger announcing the subdivision of the duperies on which they live." Ben Franklin said, "Lighthouses are far more useful than churches."

Sadly, too many horrible wars and other horrors were caused by religion: the Crusades, the Inquisition, burning women at the stake, etc.

Religion is like a giant butcher knife slicing through the Earth! All religions are horrible and most of us know that. I will stick to the Constitution!

**Jaylene Howard**  
Colorado

## Nonbelievers hold key to humankind's future

I am very grateful that your organization exists and it gives me hope that our species will eventually shed the burden of religion and move forward into a future based on reason and logic. The world is facing several serious problems. Honesty must supplant hypocrisy and childish religious beliefs must be abandoned if we are to survive as a species. Everything is at stake and humanity no longer has the luxury to behave as it has in the past. We hold the key to the future of humankind.

**Jeff Griese**  
Wisconsin

## FFRF deserves this, not Salvation Army

My extremely Christian mother died recently. She requested donations to the Salvation Army for a memorial tribute. As an atheist and former next-door neighbor to the organization, there is no way I can contribute to such a hateful group.

Enclosed is \$500 as a memorial to my mother, G. JoAn Fugate. Please use it to continue your battle.

**Marci Shaver**  
Wyoming

## FFRF publishes a true abomination!

FFRF, have you no decency?

I was shocked and dismayed to see in the November issue a recipe for "Wisconsin Spaghetti (no garlic)." What are you thinking, people of Wisconsin? No garlic in spaghetti sauce? That's like a garden without flowers. Why, without garlic you might as well be covering your spaghetti with ketchup.

What's next, eliminate the basil? Apparently you even think oregano is unnecessary.

Now, I want you to understand that I don't have a problem with what consenting adults do in private behind closed doors in their kitchen, but to display this culinary heresy in public, in the pages of a periodical that even children can have access to, is an abomination.

For shame, Wisconsin, for shame!

**Laura Thaw**  
British Columbia, Canada

## Christians have seized moral low ground

Now that Christians have overwhelmingly backed Trump, they have finally seized the moral low ground and revealed their hypocrisy. Sadly, not only they, but we, will suffer the consequences of their choice. Now, anyone who cares about morality can see what "Christian values" really means: political maneuvering giving power over women, LGBT, Muslims and nonbelievers, nonwhites, etc., where the end justifies the means, where claims for moral superiority are fronts and masks for bigotry and prejudice.

H.L. Mencken wrote, "Religion is fundamentally opposed to everything I hold in veneration — courage, clear thinking, honesty, fairness, and above all, love of the truth." Mencken described not only what Christianity is opposed to, but the character of the man those Christians voted for.

**Carl Scheiman**  
Maine

## Jacoby's viewpoint was too limited on 'cross'

I attend conventions to acquire information from, and about, the presenters. The amount of both kinds of information that I acquired at FFRF's excellent, extremely well-organized convention in Pittsburgh made my attendance at it very worthwhile.

I have read two of Susan Jacoby's very informative books, and I had heard her speak previously. I was startled to hear her say in her address at the convention (reprinted on pages 17-19) that the suit brought by American Atheists (AA) regarding the World Trade Center (WTC) cross in the National Sept. 11 Museum was dismissed at it should have been, because the cross "had meaning" to those who found it among the ruins of the center and its display in the museum did not violate the separation of church and state.

Jacoby noted that finding two steel beams fused together in the shape of a Christian cross in the wreckage was in no way remarkable, because the buildings were constructed with such beams and there must have been many crossed beams in the wreckage. The workers who found the "cross" believed, however, that it signified the presence of the Christian god, and it became a shrine at which religious believers prayed and left messages reflecting their faith and at which religious services were held. The cross, blessed by a priest and modified to make it more clearly Christian, was eventually moved to a nearby Catholic church. During the construction of the museum, the 17-foot-tall cross was lowered into its prominent place, where it was again blessed and the space on which it was placed consecrated by a priest. Its presence implies, at least, that Christians were the main victims of the destruction of the WTC towers, but that their god remains present, and it clearly represents elevation of Christianity above nonbelief in religion.

AA insisted that atheists receive equal treatment with religious believers, so it demanded that the fact that nonbelievers were also killed in the WTC attack be recognized in the museum, either by adding something symbolizing nonbelief or by removing the cross representing only Christians. It offered to pay for an atheist memorial, in a design approved by the museum, or to have an existing exhibit dedicated to nonreligious victims. The museum refused to take any of these actions, so AA sued to force it to do so.

In sustaining dismissal of AA's suit, a federal appeals court ruled that the WTC cross is merely religious art, which in a museum does not violate separation of church and state. That prevented AA from pursuing the matter further, because if such a ruling became more broadly applicable, other requests for removal of crosses erected in public spaces, including those made by FFRF, might also be denied on the grounds that the crosses are merely art.

AA's decision is a rational one that may benefit FFRF's important and laudable undertakings to preserve separation of church and state. On the other hand, Jacoby is justifying the presence of the cross in the National Sept. 11 Memorial and Museum on the basis of its "having meaning" to those who found it could well have a deleterious effect, because the crosses that FFRF seeks to have removed clearly have great "meaning" to those who have erected them. I conclude that Jacoby's position represents a disappointingly limited view of separation of church and state.

**Kenneth G. Crosby**  
Texas



## FFRF should target state, federal level

As a “Lifer,” I am obviously a supporter of our mutual goals. However, as I have written before, I suggest that you step on the head, rather than the tail, of superstition. Surely you have the means to go to the state or federal level rather than battle the innumerable school officials and the like.

On a related issue, I must confess to — EGAD! — reading the bible, of all things. I have found it fascinating, if ludicrous. It has obviously been translated so many times it makes no sense. My favorite section so far is the Song of Solomon. That is hot stuff by any standards. “Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, browsing amongst the lilies.” Or this corker: “Behold, you are handsome, my beloved. Yes, pleasant. Also, our bed is green.” “Your hair is like a flock of goats.” “Your neck like the tower of David!”

I wish I had thought up some of those lines as a teenager.

**R.G. Huber**  
**New Jersey**

*Editor’s note: FFRF has published two books about the bible: **The Born Again Skeptics Guide to the Bible** by Ruth Hurmence Green and **Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So** by Annie Laurie Gaylor. Visit our store online at [shop.ffrf.org](http://shop.ffrf.org).*

## Here’s a good way to upgrade to After-Lifer

I am a Life Member. However, with the new administration coming in and the threats it poses to church-state separation, I thought of a neat way to upgrade folks like me to becoming an After-Lifer. I will plan to donate \$1,250 additional each year so that at the end of the administration’s four-year term, I’ll have given another \$5,000.

We need you now more than ever!  
**Name Withheld Upon Request**

*Editor’s note: Thank you for such a generous offer! Several members have become Lifetime Members (\$1,000) or Afterlife Members (\$5,000) on the “installment plan.” Please be sure to inform FFRF with each donation that it is an installment toward a Lifetime or Afterlife Membership, so that our bookkeeping properly records it. It cannot be designated retroactively.*

## Think long term to help change beliefs

You need this \$1,000 donation more than ever! The next few years may be grim, but hopefully long-term changes in people’s beliefs toward religion and reality will work in our favor. Think long term when frustrations build.

Keep fighting the good fight.

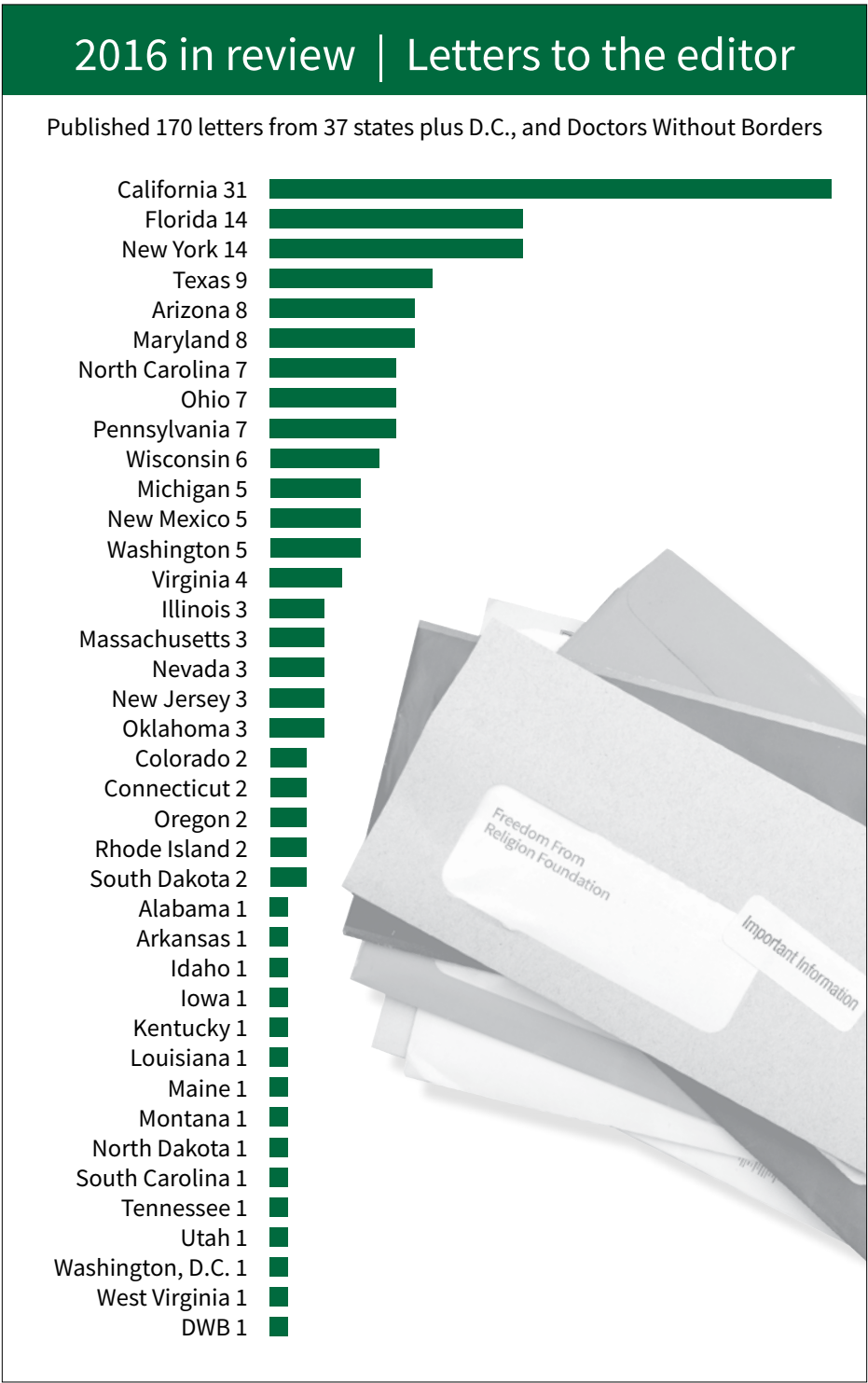
**John Mosley**  
**After-Life Member**  
**Utah**

## Consolidate forces to stop the insanity

Once the baton of the presidency is passed, it is time to prepare for battle.

At this point, it is clear that the game has changed and that we must be ready for a protracted campaign to block the insanity that is sure to be attempted by the Trump administration. We will need to litigate, demonstrate, then litigate some more. And have more litigation in the wings ready to go.

I recommend that FFRF, along with other like-minded organizations, assess



and approach the issues as a consolidated bloc, with division of labor as appropriate to achieve the ends needed, from demonstrations to litigation.

To that end, leadership engagements will be necessary, and so will cash. I am thus happily providing this donation to you with the promise of more as needed.

Never back down, never surrender, never give up an inch.

**Chris Kramer**  
**LTC, USA, Retired**  
**Missouri**

## Challenges to increase following election

I want to give thanks to you and the fine work that you do. With the outcome of the recent election, your challenges will be all the greater. I accept it as my challenge, too, and am enclosing \$500 to support your legal efforts. I wish all of you the very best.

**Thomas L. Johnson**  
**California**

## Hope for humanity to be free from religion

I’m with you. I’m a staunch atheist, freethinker and have rejected Christianity and the great hoax it has pulled on the human race. I think Christianity is the biggest scam ever perpetrated!

I would love to see all of humanity set free from the enslavement of religion.

In the future, humanity will advance to the stars and other planets, free from the bondage of the gods that have enslaved us.

**Stacy Young**  
**Tennessee**

## Next time, try saying ‘Merry ChristMyth’

In the December 2016 issue, our member R.J. Turner tells us that it’s OK to say “Merry Christmas” even if you are an atheist, or he says you can think of it by saying “Merry Krissmiss.” But if I am exchanging greetings with some fundamentalist friends at Christmas time, I will smile and say, “Have a Merry ChristMyth!” Isn’t that the point we’d like to make? Give it a try!

**Ted Utchen**  
**Illinois**

## State/church wall may need more enforcement

Decades ago, a friend of mine introduced me to FFRF. I have enjoyed every issue of Freethought Today and enthusiastically read it from cover to cover.

In 2009, I became a Life Member because I value its mission of maintaining the separation of church and state.

The results of the latest presidential election are of particular concern for me, and not only because of the lack of character of the president-elect. Just as importantly, if the vice-president-elect — self-described as first and foremost a Christian — were to be elevated to the office of the presidency, that wall between state and church would require even more reinforcement.

Therefore, I am enclosing \$5,000 for an After-Life membership in order to aid your (our) legal efforts. I’m assured this donation will be well utilized because FFRF maintains a 4-star rating with Charity Navigator.

**George Snow**  
**California**

## Shoring up legal fund as important as ever

Enclosed is a donation for your legal fund, a donation quite a bit larger than my usual one. Seeing the results of the November election, I am skeptical that such donations might not be legal much longer.

I am of the belief that if two or three Scalias are added to the Supreme Court, FFRF attorneys (and their descendants) will be busy for the next 40 years.

**Name withheld by request**  
**California**

## Freethought Equality Fund thanks FFRF

Just reading my December issue and came across your coverage of the Freethought Equality Fund’s endorsed candidates for 2016. Thanks for recognizing us and our candidates.

I’m very proud of our efforts this year. We quintupled the number of open nontheists in state and federal elected office going from three to 15. However, we need 1,500 to 1,600 to reach equality with our numbers in the general population.

We have a lot of work to do. Thanks again.

**Ron Millar**  
**Freethought Equality Fund**  
**Virginia**

## Help donate so couple can be Life Members

I was just reading the letter in the December 2016 issue from Alton and Marjorie Eliason, who noted that at ages 99 and 101 they wish they could spare the funds to become Lifetime Members of FFRF. Since I am already a Lifetime Member but continue to give, I am making a donation toward a Lifetime Membership for this couple. I hope others will do the same, so they can enjoy this special status before they, as they so charmingly put it, fertilize their lawn and garden.

Happy New Year!  
**Joan Reisman-Brill**  
**New York**

## Despite FFRF successes, it’s not obvious to all

Thank you for all that you do. It is awesome. We loved the 2016 “Review.”

We often forget how much progress is being made. Here in the South and Bible Belt, it’s not obvious. We’re always pulling for you and I tell people about FFRF, but they don’t often respond well. That’s because of where we live.

**Judy Holder and Barry Parsons**  
**Florida**

## Hope NY Times ad gets FFRF more members

I am enclosing a check for \$5,000 for FFRF’s Legal Defense Fund. The full-page New York Times ad was brilliant! I hope that it will generate many new FFRF members who share a commitment to separation of church and state.

**Fairfid Caudle**  
**FFRF Life Member**  
**State Representative**  
**New York**



# BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

## Arrested / Charged

**Balvantgiri Babu, 70, Sambalpur, India:** Suspicion of murder. Babu, a Hindu priest at Khodiyar Temple, is accused by the son of Jasu Ratnakar, 55, of killing her and burning her body near the temple compound. A motive was not released. *Source: Times of India, 12-31-16*

**Rupert Clarke, 60, Maidstone, Jamaica:** Suspicion of rape and carnal abuse. Clarke, pastor of Nazareth Moravian Church, was allegedly found by police in a “compromising position” about 9 p.m. in his vehicle with a girl who had just turned 15. *Source: Jamaica Gleaner, 12-29-16*

**Nicholas Kelley, 34, Lawrenceville, GA:** Child molestation, statutory rape and aggravated sexual battery. Kelley, middle school pastor at New Bridges Church, is accused of having a year-long sexual relationship with a 14-year-old girl from the church. The girl’s parents discovered the relationship Dec. 26 after she secretly left her house to be with Kelley, had a panic attack and was hospitalized, police said.

Jeff Lyle, a New Bridges lead pastor, said Kelley is married with 3 children and was fired after admitting to “various levels of physical interaction” with the girl. *Source: Journal-Constitution, 12-28-16*

**Oscar Rodriguez-Gutierrez, 51, Stockton, CA:** Suspicion of lewd or lascivious acts with a child younger than 14. He’s suspected of assaulting a 12-year-old girl. Police wouldn’t say if she belongs to the unidentified church off Waterloo Road where he is pastor. *Source: Stockton Record, 12-28-16*

**Nelson Simoes, 56, Gondola, Mozambique:** Child rape. Simoes, pastor of an African Apostolic Church congregation, is charged with marrying a 12-year-old girl in 2015 and making her his 6th wife. He reportedly has 23 children.

Simoes alleges he married her with her parents’ consent and paid them \$55 after they originally asked for \$240. “We condemn this practice and he will be held criminally responsible,” said police spokesperson Elsidia Filipe. *Source: allafri-ca.com, 12-23-16*

**Yitzchok I. Sofer, Brooklyn, NY:** Benefit fraud. Sofer, a lobbyist for the Central United Talmudical Academy, is accused of filing false claims to receive food stamps between 2013-16 and wrongly collecting over \$30,000.

Sofer oversees government relations for a group of yeshivas that cater to the Orthodox Satmar community called Aaronis, after Grand Rabbi Aron Teitelbaum. *Source: The Forward, 12-22-16*

**Adrian R. Van Klooster, 74, Maddington, Australia:** Possessing child exploitation material. Van Klooster, a former Catholic priest, allegedly had child porn on a CD.

He was sentenced to prison in 2003 after pleading guilty to indecent acts with 2 boys and 3 girls aged from 6 to 12 and served 5 years. Testimony alleged he slid around naked with children on a floor coated with olive oil and shampoo and possessed child porn in a file titled “Parish Business.” *Source: abc.net.au, 12-22-16*

**Kara K. Amundson-LaVenture, 42, and Michael J. LaVenture, 45, Roberts, WI:** 5 counts of felony theft. Amundson-LaVenture, treasurer at New Centerville United Methodist Church, also is charged with unauthorized identity use. It’s alleged the couple was responsible for \$167,551 in unauthorized checks and \$21,898 in missing cash from the church from 2006-15. Church officials learned of the allegations in May 2015 but kept it secret until its insurer, Church Mutual, said it wouldn’t cover a claim unless a police report was filed. Amundson-LaVenture allegedly opened a credit card account in the church’s name and used the card at hotels, gas stations and clothing stores, including Victoria’s Secret. *Source: Leader-Telegram, 12-20-16*

**Dong Wook Kim, 51, and Joo Seong Kim, 19, Minneapolis:** Malicious punishment of a child and 2 counts of assault. The elder Kim, pastor of Good News Church, and his son are accused of beating a 12-year-old boy with a 2-by-4, a wooden closet rod and an electrical cord as religious discipline.

Pastor Kim allegedly told police he struck the boy over 20 times on Dec. 14 because he was upset that the boy said he “wanted to test God.” The boy told authorities his 4-year-old sister was also abused, the complaint said, and she was taken into protective custody. *Source: Star Tribune, 12-20-16*

**An unidentified imam, 45, Coventry, England:** Child abuse. The man, imam at Noorul Islam Jamia Mosque, was arrested after West Midlands police received a video allegedly showing him striking a child. *Source: Coventry Telegraph,*

12-19-16

**Carlos Zuniga, 51, Weslaco, TX:** Driving while intoxicated. Zuniga, pastor of St. Pius X Catholic Church, allegedly failed a field sobriety test after police responded to a 1-vehicle accident about 11 p.m. and found him in the front seat of his 2015 Land Rover. *Source: The Monitor, 12-19-16*

**David Harrison, 58, Jerusalem:** Multiple counts of rape, sodomy, sexual assault, assault and intimidation. The complainant, now 21, alleges assaults by the rabbi, a substitute teacher at Beit Shulamit, an all-girl high school, started when she was 14 and continued for several months.

She accuses him of forcing her once to take a “morning after” pill after raping her. He was fired in 2010 and denies the allegations, saying he doesn’t even know her.

Harrison has spent his career as an educator and has also performed ceremonies for people without a personal connection to a rabbi. *Source: Jerusalem Post, 12-18-16*

**James V. McNeal, 39, Ardmore, AL:** 2 counts of sexual abuse of a child less than 12 years old. McNeal, children’s minister at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Hazel Green, “has been terminated and isn’t allowed on the property,” said Lon Ostrzycki,



lead pastor.

One alleged victim, age not released, is involved, investigators said. *Source: WHNT, 12-16-16*

**Shalom Lamm, 57, Bloomingburg, NY, Kenneth Nakdimen, 64, Monsey, NY, and Volvy “Zev” Smilowitz, 28, Monroe, NY:** Conspiracy to commit an offense against the United States, in particular to corrupt the electoral process by submitting false voter registrations, buying voter registrations and offering bribes for voter registrations and votes. **Harold Baird, 60, former Mamakating town supervisor,** pleaded guilty to conspiracy to submit false voter registrations.

It’s alleged Lamm orchestrated voter fraud in Bloomingburg in a 2014 village election to advance his 396-unit Hasidic townhouse development named Chestnut Ridge. After losing a 2013 town supervisor reelection bid, Baird registered to vote in the village and ran for a trustee seat despite not living there, court papers said.

It’s also alleged people from outside the village were bribed with money, subsidies and other items of value to entice them to vote. The conspirators allegedly backdated lease agreements for uninhabited properties they owned, picked up mail from uninhabited homes and planted items like toothbrushes and toothpaste to make unoccupied apartments appear lived in.

Bloomingburg, pop. 400, was supposedly targeted for a Satmar (a Hasidic sect) community expected to house thousands because it was the smallest village in the state and occupancy would give Hasidic residents control of local government.

Lamm has repeatedly slammed his opposition as anti-Semitic. Mamakating Town Supervisor Bill Herrmann, who defeated Baird in 2013, pooh-poohed the claim. “Obviously we’re not anti-Semites. Somebody’s guilty of fraud.” *Source: Times Herald-Record, 12-15-16*

**Howard “Howdy” White, 75, Bedford, PA:** 5 counts of assault and battery. White is accused of sexual assaults on a 16-year-old boy in 1973 on overnight trips to Boston while he was an Episcopal priest at St. George’s School in Middletown, RI.

An investigator’s report about abuse at St.

George’s found multiple allegations against White at other posts in New Hampshire, West Virginia and North Carolina. He retired in 2006 but was serving as a weekend substitute before being removed from the priesthood in October by the Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania. *Source: AP, 12-13-16*

**Terry W. Dobbs, 53, Yorktown, IN:** Sexual misconduct with a minor, vicarious sexual gratification, child exploitation and child solicitation. Dobbs, pastor at Old Fashion United Baptist Church, is charged with having sex with a 15-year-old girl from the congregation.

It’s alleged they kissed and fondled during counseling sessions last summer at the church and later had sex there 3 times in addition to exchanging nude photos of each other. *Source: Star Press, 12-9-16*

**Terrence S. Smalls, 26, Cockeysville, MD:** Sexual abuse of a minor. Smalls, a volunteer at the Church of the Nativity, is accused of molesting a 4-year-old girl in the bathroom of the Catholic parish’s day care during Mass on Nov. 27.

Police said he’d also been a Girl Scout volunteer and elementary classroom assistant and advertised baby-sitting services for children under age 6 on Sitter.com. *Source: Baltimore Sun, 12-9-16*

Corradi and Corbacho and the others all worked at the Antonio Próvolo Institute, a school for hearing-impaired youths, and are accused of molesting at least 8 students.

It’s also alleged that Italian survivor groups told the Vatican in 2008 and 2014 about Corradi and others accused of molesting children at a similar school in Verona. “It is appalling and heart-breaking that Corradi was not stopped by Pope Francis or by other church authorities. Corradi’s presence at the school in Mendoza was no secret,” said Anne Barrett Doyle, co-director of BishopAccountability.org. *Source: Fox News Latino, 12-2-16*

**Michael S. Holcomb, 41, and Rayanne Carson, 33, St. Leonard, MD:** Embezzlement/misappropriation and theft and theft scheme between \$10,000 and \$100,000. Holcomb, pastor of Crossroad Christian Church, and bookkeeper Carson were both fired last summer after allegedly stealing about \$80,000 from church accounts. *Source: SoMd News, 11-30-16*

**Mohammad A. Wahid, 54, Queens, NY, and Mohammed I. Kabir, 42, Bronx, NY:** Conspiracy to commit forced labor, conspiracy to harbor undocumented persons for financial gain and violating the Fair Labor Standards Act. The men allegedly forced employees to work for them at substandard pay at a halal chicken slaughterhouse in Perth Amboy, NJ, owned by Wahid.

Officials allege employees worked up to 100 hours a week for \$290 in cash and had \$40 deducted for living in a bug-infested building with no heat or hot water. Halal practices govern preparation of meat slaughtered by Muslims prior to sale. *Source: mycentraljersey.com, 11-29-16*

**An unidentified Catholic priest in Chiautla, Mexico,** has been charged with vote pressuring, a misdemeanor punishable by a fine. Prosecutors said it’s the first time a priest has been charged with such an offense. The priest allegedly blessed 2 mayoral candidates at a Mass held to kick off their campaigns. *Source: AP, 11-29-16*

**Babu Lal, 70, Baran, India:** Forgery. Lal, a priest at a Hindu temple, is accused of receiving supplies with a ration card which he claimed was issued to him in 2015. The card bore the “popular names” of temple deities, which raised suspicions, said a supply officer. *Source: Times of India, 11-28-16*

**Barry McGrory, 82, Ottawa, Ontario:** 2 counts each of gross indecency and indecent assault for offenses allegedly committed against a 15-year-old boy in the late 1960s when McGrory was a Catholic seminarian. The complainant came forward in September after a news story about McGrory’s misdeeds as pastor of Holy Cross Parish in the 1970s and ’80s.

He was convicted in 1991 of sexually assaulting a 17-year-old boy and received a suspended sentence and probation. The Archdiocese of Ottawa later settled with 2 of his victims at Holy Cross. Another is now suing for \$1.5 million.

McGrory has claimed he was healed of his sex addiction to adolescent males and females after “surrendering” himself to God after his 1991 arrest. *Source: Ottawa Citizen, 11-27-16*

**Thomas J. Chantry, 46, Waukesha, WI:** 5 counts of molestation of a child and 3 counts of aggravated assault. Chantry is accused of assaults on several minors in the 1990s and 2000-01 while he was pastor of Miller Valley Baptist Church in Prescott, AZ. Chantry was listed until recently as pastor of Christ Reformed Baptist Church in Hales Corners, WI.

One alleged victim, now 32, told police Chantry would spank him, “grope him, rub him and make him sit on his lap” during tutoring sessions when he was 9 or 10. He allegedly told the boy not to tell anyone “about his special lessons because he would not be able to teach everyone.” *Source: Daily Courier, 11-26-16*

**David R. Diehl, 39, Kentwood, MI:** Child sexually abusive activity and using a computer to commit a crime. Diehl, who works at a funeral home and co-pastors Church on Fire with his wife in Grand Rapids, was arrested in a sting in which an officer posing as a concerned Craigslist user warned about a fictional “Daddy Dave” trying to “trick out” his daughters.

“Diehl admitted there was a strong possibility he would have met with Daddy Dave for the purpose of having sex with the 11-year-old girl if there was zero chance of Diehl being arrested by police or having to go to jail,” Detective Matthew McLanin said in an affidavit, adding that Diehl expressed “interest and curiosity” in children ages 12 and 13.

The church website says Diehl served in the U.S. Army for 18 years and now “operates with a gift of prophecy and has a heart for young adults and men’s ministry.” *Source: mlive.com, 11-23-16*

**Christopher Stivers, 31, Struthers, OH:** Sexual battery. Stivers, assistant pastor of Gospel Baptist Church, is accused of assaulting a 14-year-old girl from the congregation on Nov. 21. The church also operates a K-12 school, where Stivers is principal. *Source: WKBN, 11-23-16*



**Xaiquiri A. Matthews, 28, Bishopville, SC:** Indecent exposure. Matthews, a pastor at First Baptist Church, is accused of several incidents in October and November when he was allegedly seen exposing his genitals through his open car door near the Coker College campus. *Source: WLTX, 11-22-16*

**Harold A. Stewart, Prince Edward Island:** Fraud and participating in a criminal organization. Stewart, pastor of Kensington-New London Presbyterian Church, and 5 others are accused of defrauding a vulnerable person out of \$325,000. A member of the group also allegedly attempted to defraud a charitable organization out of \$525,000.

The charges come after ones lodged in May that alleged Stewart and others who had befriended an 89-year-old widow took out a mortgage against her property and ran up credit card bills of \$160,000. *Source: Toronto Sun, 11-18-16*

**Michael Adeniran, 48, Abeokuta, Nigeria:** Sexual abuse of a minor. Adeniran, pastor of El-Bethel Church, is accused of impregnating a 15-year-old girl after taking her virginity on her birthday in June. The girl's mother is a church member. *Source: ynaija.com, 11-21-16*

**David Mathis, 54, Cleveland:** Rape. Mathis, pastor of Courts of Praise Church in Collinwood, is accused of twice raping a 12-year-old girl at a motel in November after she had skipped school and was helping Mathis at the cafe he operates. The girl's mother had reported her missing. *Source: cleveland.com, 11-16-16*

**Ronald W. Mitchell, 56, Magnolia, TX:** Sexual assault of a child. Mitchell, pastor of Body of Christ Ministry, is accused of assaulting an underage female church member. Apostle Mitchell, as he is known, now operates the church out of his home due to financial reversals. Police said a "large cache of weapons and ammunition" were found in the home. *Source: KTRK, 11-15-16*

**Pleaded / Convicted**

**Wade Malloy, 62, Stanley, NC:** Pleaded guilty to wire fraud. Malloy, founding pastor of South-Lake Presbyterian Church in Huntersville, admitted to embezzling between \$500,000 and \$1 million from the church and SouthLake Christian Academy. He now works as a salesman at Victory Chevrolet in Charlotte.

His co-conspirator, **Wayne C. Parker Jr., 59, Mooresville,** was sentenced in November to 5 years for fraud estimated to total \$9 million from 2000-14 while he was school headmaster and chief financial officer.

Prosecutors alleged Parker stole an average of \$650,000 a year, including money parents donated in memory of their dead child. *Source: Charlotte Observer, 12-20-16*

**Paul A. Monahan, 83, Council Bluffs, IA:** Guilty of 5 aggravated misdemeanor counts of invasion of privacy. Monahan, a retired Catholic priest and high school principal, didn't testify at his 3-day bench trial. Five males testified that while at a track meet in April, Monahan entered the restroom 9 times and stood at the urinal next to them despite others being open and stared down at their genitals.

His doctor testified that Monahan has bladder issues and needs to urinate often. His attorney stated Monahan looks down a lot because of a "crick" in his neck.

In his decision, Associate Judge Gary Anderson said Monahan "intentionally violated these boys' reasonable expectations of privacy for the purpose of satisfying his sexual desires while the boys were in a state of partial nudity." *Source: Daily Nonpareil, 12-16-16*

**Corey McGill Brown, 47, Brunswick, GA:** Pleaded guilty to mail fraud for embezzling more than \$200,000 from Second African Baptist Church, where he was senior pastor. The government dropped 63 other counts as part of a plea bargain, which recommends a maximum 28-month sentence and restitution. Brown also coordinated the Savannah-Chatham Police Department's chaplain program from 2010-14. *Source: jacksonville.com, 12-2-16*

**Timothy D. Miller, 40, Managua, Nicaragua:** Pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit international parental kidnapping. Miller, a Mennonite missionary, admitted buying plane tickets to Nicaragua for **Lisa Miller** (no relation) and her 7-year-old daughter in 2009 so she could avoid sharing custody with her former same-sex partner in Vermont.

Joined by a civil union in Vermont, Janet Jenkins and Lisa Miller separated in 2003, with custody given to Miller and visitation rights to Jenkins.

When Miller moved to Virginia, she joined a conservative Christian church and tried to stop visits by Jenkins. A court intervened and, before Miller fled with her daughter, was considering transferring custody to Jenkins. *Source: Buffalo News, 12-1-16*

**Christopher J. Remaly, 30, Washington Township, PA:** Pleaded guilty to sexual assault. Remaly was youth pastor at an Easton-area church which authorities will not identify when he was arrested in 2014 for sexual encounters with a girl from his youth group who was 15. He was a married father of 2 at the time. *Source: Daily Re-*



*cord, 12-1-16*

**Joseph Hemmerle, 74, Louisville, KY:** Guilty by jury of immoral or indecent practices with a child. Hemmerle, a retired Catholic priest and high school teacher, was charged with molesting Michael Norris, now 53, in 1973 when he ordered Norris to strip naked at a camp in Texas so he could treat him for poison ivy.

Testimony, including his own, showed he touched the victim with his hands and mouth and applied calamine lotion to the boy's genitals.

"I feel vindicated," Norris said. "That jury had the same evidence that the Catholic Church had in 2001."

No charges were brought until another accuser from the camp came forward in 2014. That trial is set for April. *Source: Courier-Journal, 11-29-16*

**Raymond S. Cheek, 84, Western Australia:** Guilty of committing an act of gross indecency and 2 counts each of indecent assault and indecent dealings with a child. Cheek, an Anglican priest and parish Scout leader before being defrocked in 2014, was accused of multiple assaults on boys between 1955-85.

One man testified that on his first day as an altar boy in 1976, Cheek stripped him naked except for his shoes and socks and touched his genitals with his hands and the tassels of his cincture.

The man alleged it happened every Sunday for several years but Cheek referred to the bible and said it was tradition for a priest to dress an altar

boy that way. "He seemed to be very convincing as to reasons why he did it." *Source: ABC Online, 11-27-16*

**Lonny Remmers, 58, Corona, CA:** Pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud by soliciting \$2 million from an Ohio investor and using \$660,000 of it for personal expenses. Two co-defendants also made pleas.

Remmers, founder of Heart of Worship Community Church, also agreed to pay unspecified restitution. He and his wife declared bankruptcy in 2010. He was convicted in 2014 of inflicting corporal injury on a child and assault with a deadly non-firearm weapon for using pliers during a bible study to pinch the nipple of a 13-year-old boy who had reportedly assaulted his own sister. *Source: Press-Enterprise, 11-22-16*

**Eliezer Berland, 79, a Hasidic rabbi** who fled Israel in 2013 and was extradited from S. Africa, pleaded guilty to assault and 2 counts of indecent acts. Under a tentative plea deal, he would receive an 18-month sentence, including time served in jail since July, for molesting an adult woman and an underage girl.

Berland, founder of Shuvu Bonim yeshiva in Jerusalem, is also accused of instructing disciples to harm anyone who tried to expose his crimes. *Source: Arutz Sheva, 11-19-16*

**Thomas B. Fleming, 67, Worcester, MA:** Pleaded guilty to money laundering. Fleming, a retired Catholic priest, was accused of helping orchestrate an online dating scam in which women were asked to send money, which ended up in banking accounts he controlled and was forwarded to Nigeria.

Under a plea agreement, he would serve no time beyond the 3 weeks he was jailed after his arrest and would pay \$90,000 restitution. However, he claims to be indigent. He retired in 2014 during the time the transactions took place. *Source: Telegram & Gazette, 11-17-16*

**Sentenced**

**Barry Dangerfield, 83, Brisbane, Australia:** 3 years in prison suspended after pleading guilty to 11 counts of indecent acts. Dangerfield was pastor of Toogoolawah Uniting Church in the 1960s when the offenses involving a 12-year-old boy occurred, including mutual masturbation and oral sex, sometimes during driving lessons. *Source: Queensland Times, 12-22-16*

**Mohammed al-Khaled Samha, 58, Vollsmose, Denmark:** 14 days in jail suspended for violating the racism law in his 2004 mosque sermon calling Jews "children of apes and pigs." Samha, a Syrian-born imam, in an earlier sermon in Germany called for the death of Zionist Jews. "Count them and kill them to the very last one. Don't spare a single one of them." *Source: AP, 12-20-16*

**Tiffanie Irwin, 30, New Hartford, NY:** 12 years in prison on convictions for manslaughter and assault. Irwin, pastor of Word of Life Christian Church, was accused of calling a 2015 church counseling session that led to the death of Lucas Leonard, 19, and severe injury of Christopher Leonard, 17.

**Joseph Irwin,** her brother, was sentenced to 8 years for gang assault and assault. Co-defendant **Bruce Leonard,** father of the victims, admitted to whipping his sons with an electrical cord and was sentenced to 15 years. *Source: Rome Sentinel, 12-19-16*

**Jeffrey D. Brown, 37, Morris, AL:** 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to manslaughter in the 2015 death of Michael Reese, who was found shot in the back of the head in his home. His wife, **Cindy Kaye Henderson Reese,** 41, was convicted of his murder and awaits sentencing.

Prosecutors alleged Brown, former senior pastor at Sardis Baptist Church, and music minister Cindy Reese, were having an affair and that Brown orchestrated the murder. They were living together when arrested and he testified against her as part of a plea bargain. *Source: WVTM, 12-12-16*

**Zachary Hertlein, 25, Fairchance, PA:** Corruption of minors, indecent assault without consent and indecent assault of a person less than 16.

Hertlein was fired in July as a youth pastor at First Baptist Church but wasn't charged until now.

It's alleged that while on a trip to a Christian festival in June with his wife and several minors, Hertlein and a 15-year-old girl "went missing" for an extended time at night and returned together. *Source: WPXI, 12-12-16*

**Sean P. Aday, 39, Lake Forest, CA:** 2 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 felony counts of sexual battery by restraint and 2 misdemeanor counts of sexual battery between 2008-15. Aday, youth pastor at Grace Community Church, had 4 female victims he assaulted on church property or on church trips overseas, prosecutors said. *Source: LA Times, 12-9-16*

**Luis U. Carrasco-Reid, 54, Corpus Christi, TX:** 70 months in prison after pleading guilty to conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute a controlled substance. Carrasco-Reid, an ordained deacon since 2014 at Corpus Christi Catholic Community, allegedly received over \$300,000 and was among 21 persons charged with trafficking tons of marijuana across the U.S. starting in 2006.

U.S. District Court Judge Frank Montalvo acknowledged leniency pleas on Carrasco-Reid's behalf but said he couldn't ignore sentencing guidelines just because he was in the ministry. *Source: El Paso Times, 12-8-16*

**Edwin Figarez, 42, Puthenvelikkara, India:** 2 life sentences for several rapes of a 14-year-old girl. Figarez, pastor of Lourdes Matha Catholic Church, fled to the United Arab Emirates after the allegations.

"It is pertinent to note that he has gone to extent of attributing bad character to the victim — a small girl," Judge K.T. Nisar Ahammed said at sentencing. *Source: NDTV, 12-8-16*

**Paul Endrei, 56, Avon, OH:** 3 years' probation after pleading guilty to child endangerment. Sexual battery and gross sexual imposition charges were dropped due to "evidentiary issues" as part of a plea bargain. Endrei, senior pastor of Church on the Rise, agreed never to work again as a clergy member.

Prosecutors alleged he started molesting his juvenile victim in 2005 and went on to have sexual contact with her in 2009-10 and 2013. In her victim impact statement, the girl said Endrei groomed her and "taught me sex was good" and that she was treated as an outcast by her family and the church after coming forward. *Source: Chronicle-Telegram, 11-18-16*

**David St. John, 59, Bristol, TN:** 30 years in prison with no parole after pleading guilty to 3 counts of rape of a child and 6 counts of aggravated sexual battery. St. John, pastor of the now-dissolved Bible Truth Baptist Church, was charged with assaults in April on two 8-year-olds whose families attended the church. *Source: Times News, 11-18-16*

**Donald E. Mansell, 37, Salem, OR:** 30 days in jail and sex offender registration after pleading guilty to 2 counts each of misdemeanor harassment and 3rd-degree sexual abuse. Mansell, director of financial operations, athletic director and boy's basketball coach at Livingstone Adventist Academy, was accused of inappropriately touching 2 students between 2010-13.

Ron Sayer, an attorney representing the female victims, called the sentence a tragic miscarriage of justice. "I don't think it's a good thing for our society when a teacher can do that kind of thing and get a light sentence."

One victim filed a civil suit in May seeking \$5.25 million from the Seventh Day Adventist Church. *Source: Statesman Journal, 11-16-16*

**Leslie Sheahan, 85, Ballarat, Australia:** 4 months in jail for an indecent assault conviction involving a girl while he was assistant pastor of St. Columba's Catholic Church in the 1960s. The victim testified she awoke to find Sheahan in her bedroom and was forced to masturbate him when she was 9 or 10.

He was sentenced in July to 6 months after pleading guilty to 2 similar assaults on girls but the sentence was suspended. In 2015 he served 3 months for assaulting a girl with a carrot in the 1970s. *Source: The Courier, 11-16-16*

**Jonas J. Moses Jr., 63, Brimley, MI:** 45 to 70 years in prison after being found guilty by jury of 7 counts of criminal sexual conduct involving teens as young as 13 from Anishinabe Baptist Church in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, where Moses was pastor. His first trial in June ended in a hung jury. *Source: Evening News, 11-16-16*

**Civil Lawsuits Filed**

The **Catholic Diocese of Kamloops, BC,** and retired priest **Lindo Molon** are defendants in a suit filed by Rosemary Anderson, who alleges she was sexually exploited for 8 months in 1976-77 while teaching at Our Lady of Perpetual Help by Molon, her supervisor at the elementary school.

Anderson alleges Molon was transferred after she complained and that then-Bishop **Adam Exner** "demanded that she leave the diocese under threat of slander and harassment by the education committee that governed the plaintiff's employer." *Source: Kamloops This Week, 12-29-16*

The **Anglican Diocese of Brandon, Manitoba,** is being sued by a Winnipeg man, 53, who alleges



he was molested in the late 1960s or early 1970s by a **now-deceased priest** in the town of The Pas. The claim states the priest performed or attempted explicit sex acts with the plaintiff when he was under age 10 in the rectory and church basement. *Source: CBC, 12-26-16*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Santa Fe** is being sued by 7 men who allege they were molested as children in the early 1960s by **Hubert C. Lomme**, pastor of Our Lady of Sorrows Parish in Las Vegas, NM. Lomme died in 1986 at age 79. *Source: The New Mexican, 12-20-16*

**Manfred Malagon**, Elgin, IL, the **United Pentecostal Church International** and the **International Christian Fellowship** are being sued for \$450,000 by a woman who alleges she was sexually assaulted by Malagon, her pastor. **Sarai Malagon**, his wife, is a co-defendant.

The pastor is accused of sending the woman text messages with photos of animal genitalia and of making repeated and unwanted sexual advances and calling her a prostitute and a witch during sermons before excommunicating her. Sarai Malagon allegedly told church members the plaintiff was “seducing all the men in the church,” including her husband. *Source: Sun-Times, 12-16-16*

The **Jewish Theological Seminary** and its **National Ramah Commission**, New York City, are being sued by “John Doe,” who alleges he was molested at a Wingdale, NY, camp as a 13-year-old in 1972. The commission is the coordinating body of the camping arm of Conservative Judaism and oversees a network of Ramah camps in North America and Israel.

The plaintiff, a Westchester businessman, discovered earlier this year that his alleged abuser, camp counselor **Harvey Erlich**, was later accused of molesting 4 other boys and pleaded guilty in 2015 to 3 counts of gross indecency in Canada, where there’s no statute of limitations.

“This is what enrages me more than anything else,” said Doe, a father of 3. “The fact is this went on for years and nobody stopped it.” He accuses Erlich, 18 at the time, of forcing him to perform oral sex. *Source: The Forward, 12-14-16*

**Terrance Herzberg**, 67, Hackettstown, NJ, former pastor of **Gethsemane Lutheran Church**, is being sued for sexual harassment and allegedly taking upskirt photos of his administrative assistant. The church, which accelerated his planned retirement in the wake of allegations, is also a defendant. The Warren County Prosecutor’s Office didn’t immediately comment.

While standing in her office June 27, the woman alleged she “felt Herzberg’s presence close behind her,” so she turned and saw him straightening up and holding a camera.

After she gave a statement, police had her call Herzberg to ask several questions they provided. In the recorded conversation, he allegedly admitted taking photos of her and other women wearing skirts. *Source: Daily Record, 11-25-16*

**Guam’s Catholic Archdiocese** and **several priests** have now been sued by 15 plaintiffs for sexual abuse. Anthony Vegafria, now 56, alleges **Fr. Louis Brouillard** molested him from 1971-74, including during Boy Scouts weekend activities, and that he was forced to watch Brouillard assault his friend, now deceased.

Bruce Diaz, 47, alleges Brouillard molested him from 1976-80 as an altar boy and Scout: “The sexual abuse included oral copulation. This happened about four times a week on parish grounds.” His suit names about 50 defendants who allegedly abetted, concealed or covered up the abuse.

Brouillard, 95, now living in Minnesota, released a signed statement Oct. 3 admitting to abusing at least 20 boys. *Source: Pacific Daily News, 11-22-16*

## Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle** settled a suit with “A.W.” for \$950,000 on her negligence claim related to her alleged rape as a 10-year-old in 1983 at St. John the Evangelist School by custodian **Charles Siddons**, who died in 1997. He was convicted of a lesser sexual assault charge after pleading guilty and admitting to digitally penetrating the plaintiff.

“A.W. filed this lawsuit against the Archdiocese because it knew that Chuck, nicknamed ‘Chester the Molester’ by students, was fondling students’ breasts, slapping their butts, looking up their skirts, and dry-humping them in his office,” the complaint said. “Yet despite the overwhelming notice evidence, the Archdiocese never took any meaningful steps to protect A.W. and the other children from him.”

Allegations about Siddons’ behavior date from the early 1970s. A.W.’s mother, parish secretary at the time, testified she complained at least 20 times to no avail. The archdiocese filed several motions for dismissal, all of which were denied. *Source: National Catholic Review, 12-16-16*

**Paragon Contractors**, which has ties to the **Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**, was ordered to pay \$200,000 in back wages to children as young as 6 who were forced to pick pecans in 2012 in cold weather,



sometimes with little food and few breaks.

“Behind a veil of secrecy in Southern Utah’s desert country, the defendants profited from the labor of a religious community’s children,” U.S. District Judge Tena Campbell wrote. Defense attorneys claimed children were glad to get a break from school to gather nuts for the needy.

Attorney Karen Bobela said Paragon has deep connections to sect leader **Warren Jeffs**, serving a life sentence in Texas for sexually assaulting girls he considered brides. *Source: AP, 12-8-16*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Baltimore** has settled out of court with about a dozen plaintiffs alleging sexual abuse as far back as the 1950s by **A. Joseph Maskell**, a now-deceased priest and teacher at Archbishop Keough High School. Spokesman Sean Caine confirmed that “settlements with victims of Joseph Maskell have been ongoing since at least 2011.” Most amounts were not available, Caine said.

Most but not all of the victims are women. Donna Von Den Bosch, 60, Reading, PA, who received \$35,000 in September, alleged she was raped multiple times over the course of 3 years by Maskell in the 1970s. She said she told a nun at her school she didn’t want to see Maskell because he was “evil,” but the nun brushed her off. “I didn’t have the vocabulary at 14 to describe what was going on.”

Maskell wasn’t removed from the ministry until 1994. *Source: Baltimore Sun, 11-15-16*

## Finances

The **Catholic Swiss Bishops Conference** has created a reparations fund of \$495,000 for victims of clergy sex abuse who no longer can seek legal redress due to the statute of limitations. Since 2010, 223 persons (49 who were under age 12 when molested) have informed church authorities of alleged abuse. Most took place between 1950-90.

“The sin has several levels: the abusive act, the complicit silence and the lack of assistance to the victims,” said Msgr. Charles Morerod. Individual dioceses will also contribute separately to the fund. *Source: AFP, 12-5-16*

## Legal Developments

**Gregorio Martinez, 49, Jersey City, NJ**, had his sentencing for a 2015 sexual assault of a 13-year-old boy delayed until March 24. A prosecutor told the judge that Martinez, a Pentecostal preacher who speaks in tongues, apparently tried to obliterate his fingerprints because when he was arrested in August in Honduras, his fingers and thumbs were bloodied and bandaged. He met his victim through the church.

Martinez fled after being convicted. Superior Court Judge John Young Jr. ordered him held without bail. “It’s obvious Mr. Martinez, but for the extraordinary effort of law enforcement to secure his return, had no intention of coming back. If given the opportunity, he would again leave.”

He also faces charges for alleged assaults on 3 other teens who came forward after his conviction. *Source: ABC, 12-23-16*

**Brian L. Williams, 54, Delaware, OH**, has finished an 8-year prison term for sexual battery while he was pastor at Grace Brethren Church in 2008 but his 15-year-old victim won’t collect the \$3.6 million the jury awarded her. The Ohio Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling that a 2005 statutory cap on noneconomic damages limits “pain and suffering” compensation to \$250,000.

Overall, the girl received \$311,400 and her father was awarded \$75,000.



The girl’s lawyers argued that the limit is unconstitutional when applied to child sex-abuse victims because it deprives them of adequate compensation for a lifetime of mental trauma. Williams had been accused of sexual misconduct twice before with teen girls.

Justices Paul Pfeifer and William O’Neill dissented and said damage amounts should come from juries, not legislators. Pfeifer wrote that caps were “designed to protect doctors and corporate interests.”

O’Neill added, “This child was raped in a church office by a minister and a duly empaneled jury established an appropriate level of compensation for loss of her childhood innocence. We have the right to interfere with that process. Shame on the General Assembly. The children are watching. And I for one do not like what they are seeing.”

Minority House Democrats’ bill to exempt sexual abuse victims from the cap last session was defeated. *Source: Columbus Dispatch, 12-14-16*

**Fred Neulander, 75, Cherry Hill, NJ**, founder of M’kor Shalom synagogue, was denied an appeal hearing by the state Supreme Judicial Court on his 2002 conviction for the contract murder of his wife in 1994. He’s serving a sentence of 30 years to life. The 2 killers served 23-year terms and are free.

The prosecution alleged Neulander’s motive was to continue an extramarital affair with another woman. He based his appeal on the contention that witnesses lied about his connection to the crime, an argument lower courts all rejected. *Source: nj.com, 12-7-16*

**Richard Shahan, 55, Homewood, AL**, had his murder trial, first set for April 2016, rescheduled to start May 15. Shahan was children and families pastor and facilities director at First Baptist Church when he was accused of the 2013 stabbing death of his wife Karen in their home.

He was arrested Jan. 1, 2014, while boarding a plane to Germany. It’s alleged he was involved in several relationships with men in Europe and Nashville, TN. *Source: al.com, 11-15-16*

## Allegations

**Hosea Stubblefield, 32, Houston**, the recently divorced pastor of Salem Missionary Baptist Church, is refusing requests to resign after video surfaced of him having sex with several women while he was married. “B. Coll” posted several clips online in which she was a participant.

“We’ve actually seen the video and verified it is Stubblefield with members of the congregation, but the video is too explicit to show,” said a statement from Fox 26. In an interview with the station, Stubblefield admitted he made as many as 10 sex tapes over a 10-year period.

Craig Davis, head deacon and church trustee, said his daughter dated Stubblefield. “Disgusting, I trusted and believed. I had been working with him for over a year before he became our pastor.” *Source: Christian Post, 12-29-16*

**Shimon Garelick, Nahariya, Israel**, had his rabbinic license revoked by a disciplinary committee in response to allegations of sexual abuse against girls, boys, men and women while serving as a neighborhood rabbi, kashrut (kosher) supervisor and hospital chaplain.

Accusations date back many years, while some are more recent. Garelick, a father of 11, was detained in 2007 but was released without being charged. Police have closed all cases against him. *Source: Times of Israel, 12-17-16*

**Jehovah’s Witnesses in Australia** abused more than 1,000 children, said a report by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to

Child Sexual Abuse that covers the last 6 decades. None of the alleged perpetrators were reported to police.

The church’s responses to abuse allegations often mirror those of the Catholic Church and some Orthodox Jewish communities, although Jehovah’s Witnesses have no paid clergy. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York has instructed elders to hide allegations from law enforcement and church members, the report said. *Source: Washington Post, 11-28-16*

**Lethebo Rabalago, Polokwane, South Africa**, pastor of Mt. Zion General Assembly, allegedly sprayed pesticide on parishioners to heal them of various afflictions, including cancer, ulcers and HIV/AIDS. Photos of the service were posted on “Prophet” Rabalago’s Facebook page.

Tiger Brands, which manufactures Doom, called the practice “alarming” in a statement. “[We] want to make very clear that it is unsafe to spray Doom or any aerosol onto people’s faces.” *Source: BBC, 11-21-16*

**Christopher Carwile, Memphis, TN**, was placed on paid leave as a city library employee after it was made public that he was fired 18 years ago as youth pastor at Immanuel Baptist Church for alleged sexual assaults on 3 teen boys. The church never reported the allegations to police and Carwile went on to work at another church.

Michael Hansen alleges he was 16 and Carwile was 20 when Carwile invited him to stay overnight at his parents’ home after bible study. “He said sleep in my bed because the oils from your skin will get on the couch and on the carpet.”

Hansen said he and his brother and the other teen told Immanuel pastor Scott Payne. “The church’s attitude was we fired him and that’s good enough.”

The accusers and a victim support group are calling for the Mid-South Baptist Association to “denounce, discipline and publicly remove Rev. Scott Payne” from any posts. *Source: Commercial Appeal, 11-18-16*

## Removed / Resigned

**Paul F. Angelicchio, Rome, NY**, pastor of St. John the Baptist and Transfiguration Parish, has been placed on administrative leave “due to an allegation of abuse of a minor. The alleged incident would have taken place 27 years ago,” said a statement from the Catholic Diocese of Syracuse.

Onondaga County D.A. William Fitzpatrick said no physical contact by the priest is alleged and he won’t be charged.

Danielle Cummings, diocesan communications director, said the church “must conduct a canonical process beyond any criminal investigation to ensure that no church law has been violated. While in this process, we are not providing more detail of the allegation.” *Source: Observer Dispatch, 12-12-16*

**Australian Catholic priest Thomas Knowles** has been defrocked and the church has agreed to a confidential settlement with Jennifer Herrick for Knowles’ 14-year sexual relationship with her decades ago. She sued him and 3 other members of the Order of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament after the church investigated in 2011 and cleared Knowles.

Herrick was a shy, 19-year-old with hip dysplasia when she met Knowles, who repeatedly exploited her vulnerability as a disabled and sexually naive parishioner, the suit alleged. “I don’t believe for a minute that the hierarchy of religious orders or the diocese had any grasp of what abuse of positional power really does to parishioners. Their conduct has been to delay, procrastinate, make things as difficult as possible.” *Source: abc.net.au, 12-7-16*

**Shimshon Yurkowicz**, rabbi of Chabad Malvern in Melbourne, resigned from the Orthodox Rabbinic bodies in Australia. He was earlier forced out as a trustee at the Yeshivah Centre, coming under fire for failing to stop child sexual abuse. *Source: J-Wire, 12-6-16*

**James M. Day, Brussels**, was banned for life from the ministry by the Church of England for “conduct unbecoming and inappropriate”. He was ordained in 2004. A tribunal for the Diocese of Europe considered evidence against Day, who is also a psychology professor at the Université Catholique de Louvain, that included 4 memory sticks with pornographic images and explicit emails about his gay liaisons.

Birte Day, his estranged wife, alleged in testimony that he choked her with a scarf and spit in her face and that she discovered about 50 videos of men and women in orgy scenes and at least 100 sketches of naked women being tortured and burned. *Source: The Telegraph, 10-27-16*

**An unidentified northern Israel rabbi** had his certification revoked by the ethics committee of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate after sexual harassment complaints were filed against him. No criminal charges have been filed and a police investigation is closed.

The committee report said the acts involved “behavior unsuited to a rabbi” and contravened Jewish law even though they didn’t constitute a criminal act. *Source: Arutz Sheva, 10-26-16*

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



# Adventures with my atheist cap

By Carl Scheiman

It all began a couple years ago, with the purchase of an “Out of the Closet Atheist” cap from FFRF. I wore it occasionally, but only when my wife (who is a Christian) was not with me. I got into the habit of wearing it to Sunday morning meetups with another atheist friend. My friend didn’t feel comfortable with my “advertising.” Neither did I. Then one summer day, wearing my cap, I went to a yard sale. The man behind the table looked up and said, “Good for you!” We had a few words together, and I went on my way, still wearing the cap.

Eventually, I became comfortable with being openly atheist, so I popped it on my head whenever I was out alone. No harm done, and all the while nonconfrontational and upbeat. (At a church sale, a woman once asked me, “Do you wear that to every church sale?” I responded, “I wear it everywhere.”) My policy became, “Don’t speak unless you’re spoken to.” This has proven very workable.

One Sunday, instead of driving my wife to church and picking her up afterwards, the situation was reversed. She came to the cafe looking for me, and caught me wearing “the cap.” OK, deep breath. She already knew I was an atheist; that she accepted years ago. No words were said about it, but if I remember correctly, I thought, “Ah, well, it’s too late now,” and we walked off together, me with the cap on. We continued going out like that. Since then, I’ve kept it in the car, so wherever we go I put it on automatically when exiting.

Throughout the years, there was only one negative reaction. We were visiting relatives in another state a few years ago. While I was standing in a pharmacy check-out line, a young man pointed at me and told his son I was



Carl Scheiman shows off his “U.S. Atheist” cap, which replaced his “Out of the Closet Atheist” cap.

evil. I didn’t say a word, but wondered what this boy thought of avoiding an ordinary, bland and smiling guy like me. I hope his father’s “lesson” backfired.

After some years, the cap was a well-worn veteran, and FFRF didn’t sell it anymore. (They do now.) A local shop offered t-shirt/jacket embroidery services, including caps. It took some thought to decide on “U.S. Atheist.” If anyone asked, I could always say it’s because I’m a veteran. I detest the attitude that only Christian soldiers are patriots. How many making that claim actually served their country?

Recently, when we were leaving the local McDonald’s, a woman walked over to say, “I like your hat.” That reaction has been going on for years now. I always say

“thank you.” Some months before this, same place, the girl student behind the counter, ditto. A middle-aged man at the supermarket made a beeline over to say he also is an atheist, right in front of his young son, and shook my hand.

Another time, the man behind the deli counter, same market, said, “By the way, I like your cap.” And then there were the two senior ladies, volunteering behind the counter at the library. When I walked in, one called out, “Come and look at this!” It’s nice to help make someone’s day. At the cafe, people come up to tell me they’re glad to see those words; judging by their demeanor, they’re intellectuals who are passing through, who I don’t expect to see again. I’d told my friend

about these encounters before, and then he finally saw for himself. This morning we stood in line at the cafe, and an ear-to-ear smiling woman with her husband told me, “I like that.”

The majority of times, though, the comments come not from intellectuals, but, to my surprise, blue collar and service workers, Lincoln’s “common man,” and women, of all ages. This may seem odd, because atheists normally appeal to reason rather than to emotions, to the intellect rather than the nitty-gritty of practical, everyday life, and to cold and not warm science, to make their points. But, thinking back on the rational and questioning influences in my own life, which led me to atheism, I notice that most of them originated with my fellow blue collar, practical thinking co-workers.

I’ve come to think “the cap” speaks for them. So, even though it becomes a pain sometimes, I think about their feelings. I think also of those others: the many who suffer and die defending what I so (flagrantly) aver. They are paying with their loss of safety, paying with their imprisonment and even their lives — and why? For merely pointing out the emperor has no clothes. They are, tragically, ignored by our worldwide media. In a way, I speak for them, too.

Encountering so many people who understand have been special experiences. My ultimate hope is to someday live in a world where a cap like mine is not commented on at all, but universally accepted. I want a world desired by every freedom-loving human being, where someone is neither praised nor damned for wearing a cap that says “atheist,” a world where freedom of speech is the first freedom honored in every country. Until then, the cap stays.

*Carl Scheiman is an FFRF Lifetime Member from Maine.*

# Will my marriage be constitutional?

This article originally ran in the Raleigh News & Observer.

By Jimmy Holcomb

I recently married a man. For us, the strange words haven’t settled in fully: “husband,” “spousal benefits,” “married filing jointly.”

The Supreme Court’s 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision giving me the “equal protection” of marriage solved the problem largely by side-stepping the largest, most vocal part of it: the religious objectors. For these passionately displeased residents, the court has destroyed forever the idea of marriage and the free exercise of religion. This momentous court action cured the current malady, but as we’ve seen with *Roe v. Wade*, if we don’t finish the course of the antibiotic, a super-virulent bacterium returns — mutant.

And here it is: House Bill 2802, the federal First Amendment Defense Act, insisting that your right to discriminate outweighs my right not to be discriminated against, as long as you mention religion. Civil rights with an asterisk. Void where prohibited. This act applies specifically to views on marriage, but, if passed, we can assume it will be applied eventually to all “culture war” issues. Inject the First Amendment’s free-exercise clause with performance-enhancers and watch it de-



Jimmy Holcomb

vour the anti-establishment clause and everything else in its path. Jim Crow could really have had legs if segregationists had discovered this super-religious liberty earlier.

Will my marriage last? Probably. Will my right to marriage outlast religious liberty? A red election, a retiring justice — courts will decide — and things could get ugly. I never wanted an unconstitutional marriage, lumped in with Bowers and Dred Scott — notorious court decisions, later overturned, that get frowny faces on social media. Desperate for proof that James Madison himself would be shouting “Love Wins!” I had an espresso and read the

full *Obergefell* opinion.

High court cases don’t hinge on decisive moments: a rhyming couplet, a glove, shrunk from dry-rot, forced triumphantly onto a hand. It’s more like Debate Club. Justice Anthony Kennedy argues that my marriage is valid because this vital social institution “responds to the universal fear that a lonely person might call out only to find no one there.” The dissenting justices condemned the majority’s reasoning as loopy, insisting that the definition of marriage is universal and unchanging: a man and a woman uniting solely for the purpose of child-rearing.

So, we never have proof of constitutionality, only opinions of it, and opinions change. The person who keeps me from calling out in loneliness agrees, we needed more than the right to life-partnership and commitment ceremonies. We’d watched Mary, at Downton Abbey, debunk repeatedly the idea of one universal and unchanging definition of marriage. We wanted the right to lock eyes across a crowded room, have three Martinis and drive to Vegas to get hitched. We wanted the right to marry for health insurance, or to expand our goat herd, or, indeed, for love, just like millions of couples before: Teenagers. Eighty-year-old sweethearts. King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. Well, maybe not them.

Long before outgoing North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory joined hands with preachers in support of House Bill 2, our state’s legislative leaders stood with preachers condemning my marriage. Now, on grounds of religion, my Orange County officials can legally refuse to perform same-sex marriages. Our Hillsborough magistrate didn’t refuse, but the marriage certificate we were given tells us our “Holy Matrimony” is “According to the Ordinance of God.” Troubled by the contradiction, I’ve worked with our Register of Deeds to have the language for all future certificates changed to something less religious, more constitutional. My own First Amendment Defense Act.

Marriage, bathrooms, abortion, vaccinations: Cries of religious freedom are increasing. The Bill of Rights, created to protect the minority from the majority, contains two religion clauses, both essential. Whatever happens in November, it’s imperative that the high court take an opportunity soon to remind legislators, judges and citizens of Thomas Jefferson’s extraordinary, critical insight: America guarantees the right to preach, protest and debate our deeply held beliefs, because we’re only required to act, not think, in accordance with the law.

*FFRF Member Jimmy Holcomb of Efland, N.C., is a member of the Triangle Free-thought Society, an FFRF chapter.*



# IN MEMORIAM



Polly with her grandchildren, Juliana and Owen Jesse Rothstein.

## Polly Rothstein was abortion, health-care rights activist

Life Member Polly Rothstein, an abortion rights activist, died in her home Nov. 13 at age 80.

Rothstein, who co-founded the White Plains-based Westchester Coalition for Legal Abortion in 1972 — shortly after the state Legislature voted to overturn a law that made abortion legal in 1970, and a year before the U.S. Supreme Court made abortion legal nationwide — was known for her persistence, passion and pursuit of women’s health care rights.

Rothstein was born to Sylvia and Harold Wittenberg on Oct. 13, 1936, in Bridgeport, Conn., and grew up in Fairfield. She earned an undergraduate degree at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs and a master’s degree from Columbia University in New York City.

Before helping to form the coalition, Rothstein volunteered for Planned Parenthood and became a lobbyist in the early 1970s. In Albany, she realized it was difficult to change people’s minds on a religious topic, like abortion, and instead decided to focus her efforts on getting pro-abortion rights lawmakers elected, including U.S. Rep. Nita Lowey, former Westchester County Executive Andy Spano, and recent presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, who became a U.S. senator in 2000.

The WCLA has for more than 40 years developed an extensive database of New York registered voters who are regularly called and surveyed about their opinions on abortion.

“What Polly saw, and the women with whom she founded this organization saw, is that Westchester is the bellwether for this state,” said Catherine Lederer-Plaskett, president and chairwoman of WCLA-Choice Matters. “Her unbelievable legacy is that she recognized the power of the vote in this issue and she created a fundamental grass-roots strategy.”

Around 2000, Rothstein suffered a spinal cord injury that left her without feeling from her sternum down. She often used a self-designed walker to get around.

“She went through this with such aplomb,” her son, Chester Rothstein, recalled. “She kept a good frame of mind, she’s happy, she gets very frustrated and unhappy with her situation, but she was never mean, never upset with other people, and there’s no way the rest of us would have handled her adversities.”

In 2001, Rothstein stepped down from her position leading the coalition she helped build because of health issues, but continued to beat the drum for abortion rights — an issue she maintained would never go away — and devoted time to her two grandchildren and hobbies.

In addition to her son, she is survived by two sisters, Martha Baldwin and Judy Bravard; a daughter, Amy Rothstein; and two grandchildren, Juliana and Owen Jesse Rothstein.

## Noted botanist Hugh Iltis helped get DDT banned

Life Member Hugh Iltis, 91, died Dec. 16, 2016, in Madison, Wis.

Hugh was a renowned University of Wisconsin–Madison plant geographer, educator, conservationist and mentor to botany students.

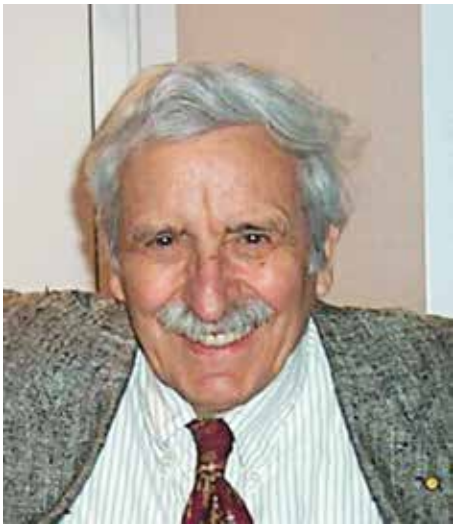
He was a co-founder of the Wisconsin branch of the Nature Conservancy in 1960 and inspired other projects in Wisconsin, Hawaii and Mexico.

Hugh was born in Brno, Czechoslovakia, in 1925. His father, Hugo, a botanist and educator, wrote the definitive biography of Gregor Mendel, the founder of genetics.

Hugh graduated from the University of Tennessee and then earned a Ph.D. in botany from the Missouri Botanical Garden. In 1955, he joined the Botany Department at UW–Madison as director of the herbarium.

He then got involved in ecological consciousness and, in 1968, helped make Wisconsin the first state in the nation to ban the pesticide DDT.

Stanley Temple, UW–Madison Beers-Bascom Professor Emeritus in Conservation, told David Tenenbaum, science writer for UW: “His



Hugh Iltis

annual guest lecture in my biodiversity class was always packed with gibes at religious leaders for opposing population control, politicians for shortsighted, environmentally damaging worldviews, industry for being greedy, and anyone else for being ignorant. He finished each lecture by admonishing students ‘to be a good ancestor’ and leave a better world for future generations. Hugh’s life was certainly guided by that maxim.”

## Joseph Padula made ‘world better’

FFRF donor Joe Padula died May 16th at his home in San Francisco. He was born on Oct. 5, 1938, in Albany, N.Y., and at an early age he moved to New York City. San Francisco became his home in 1967 during the “Summer of Love.” He greatly enjoyed the beauty and lifestyle of San Francisco and the rest of California, with time spent in visits to Muir Woods, Yosemite, Big Sur, and Lake Tahoe. He spent a year away from San Francisco traveling in Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

Joe’s career interests were in financial investments and real estate. His personal interests were reading,

music (especially Mozart), art, philanthropic endeavors and his cats. For many years, Joe was a volunteer usher at the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House and assisted for five years in the feral cat colony program at Sutro Forest. Joe kept informed on important world issues, desired peace and harmony for all creatures, and hoped for an end to injustice, poverty, war and destruction of our environment.

Joe remembered FFRF in a bequest “giving to groups that make the world better.”

### Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

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

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## NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER

# Contest

We’d like to see secular citizens flood government meetings with secular invocations that illustrate why government prayers are unnecessary, ineffective, embarrassing, exclusionary, divisive or just plain silly.

The “best” secular invocation will be invited to open FFRF’s annual convention, receiving an all-expenses-paid trip (this year in Madison, Wis., on the weekend of Sept. 15-17), a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

**LEARN MORE AT:**

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Yip Harburg  
**Rhymes for the Irreverent**

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

**Lead Kindly Light**  
Where Bishop Patrick crossed the street  
An “X” now marks the spot.  
The light of God was with him,  
But the traffic light was not.

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



# CRANKMAIL

This issue we present a special post-holiday version of Crankmail. Yup, in December our “fans” were overloading our inbox with their love for us. (Warning: This edition is laced with profanity.) Here is just a fraction of the mail we received, submitted to you unedited.

**Out of business:** you people ARE going out of business in 2017. I belong to a group of over 8000 with a lot of financial muscle...enough to put you people on unemployment...stopping you dead in your tracks...taking out billboards across the country and ads forcing you people to back down.... Your business will CEASE and DESIST...or...it will CEASE to exist. Your move, Morons. — Jordan Macuso

**your unbelief:** don't you DARE claim to defend The Constitution, because it was written by christians for christians. My reason for writing this? Your billboard which suggests its reasonable to believe that somehow there is no God, when its your beliefs that violate Newtonian physics, So stop it with all of this anti Christian nonsense. — Nick Holmes

**Religion:** i was curious to know if its easy for all of you guys to be such worthless pieces of shit or do you have to rpactice at it?not to worry though your day is coming soon.have a great day and dont forget to go and fuck yourself. — Harry Kennelly

**Wakulla:** You're a bunch of jerks and should be exorcised from society. The constitution does not say freedom from religion; it specifically states freedom of religion, regardless what the Supreme Court says, they should be free to practice prayer in public school. You're total jerks! — An-nis Hernden

**Removal of nativity scene:** Have you ever consulted with Clergy on your Attacks.. I am A Christian, I believe in the the word.. But no where in the good book did i read that the Nativity Scene was offensive.. it is the HOLIDAY season for \crying out loud.. You (your group) are right up there with the “Westboro Baptist Church” You are actually taking away from kids (and some Adults) about the Holiday and the Christmas Miracle.. A lot kids will ask Parents, Sunday School Teachers,, and in some schools (and Heaven Forbid.). School teachers... when they see this Scene.. IS that SO WRONG... I don't think so — Sean Updike

**Letter to town of Blackston:** This area is a rural area made up of small towns and villages - the greater number of us, even though we are divided by both politics and religion, try hard to get along with each other - Now your 'organization' wants to pressure these people into hiding their beliefs and symbols - isn't that what hitler did to the jews — Stuart Cardwell

**Learn something:** Your efforts to eradicate religion/Jesus from Christmas is laughable...Christmas should be, and is, EXCLUSIVE! Christ-mas—get it? If you want your own holiday, that's fine--petition for a Freedom From Religion Day and gather around all those who would honor that occasion. Of course, you can't give presents, for that would demonstrate love , which is a Christian basic. Can't sing songs of joy and thanksgiving for you have no one to thank other than flawed humans like yourself who also don't know who to thank. Can't be charitable to others for that would smack of Christian caring and help. — Suzanne Renaud

**Shut the fuck up:** Leave us alone and stick to killing babies you America hating liberal fucks. — Steve Jung

**Douchebags:** The reason why I'm sending this e-mail is because I HATE Atheists because they've done nothing but make religious people like me miserable. So far this Christmas season, I've heard the word Christmas very

few times, and it's all thanks to you people. Every single commercial I've seen about this time of year has said the word “Holiday” instead of Christmas. So Congratulations FFRF Sons of Bitches, you're officially ruining the Christmas Season for me. I also blame Atheists all together. You people wanna know why Atheists are the least trusted group of people in America? Because you're all so negative! All you people do is say truly horrible things about religion and religious people. Atheists are angry all the time. Have any of you watched the TV show called The Legend of Korra? In the 1st season, a man named Ammon who's a non-bender forms a large anti-bending group called the Equalists, who want to rid the world of bending. Sounds familiar to what's happening here, huh? I strongly suggest all members of the FFRF watch the 1st season of the Legend of Korra. — Jeremy Moore

**Agenda:** How about leaving Christians alone and let them worship GOD as it was in the beginning of time ! Christianity came before atheism. — Kevin Jepsen

**You being assholes:** I just sick and tired anyone against somebody elses praying in public you stick your fucking nose where it dont fucking belong. I fought for the right to pray and just the same as you cocksuckers to not want to pray you dont like dont watch.i would love to meet anyone involved with you and show how the fuck i really feel. I dont like your breathing the same air as i am.i want you to stop breathing.so are you going to stop breathing. Fucking assholes. Why dont you go out and fight for what you believe in.you would shit your pants the minute you heard your first shot.and im sure if you were hit bleeding im sure you would be praying to god. If i was therw i would take a shit on you asshole cocksucking dickheads — Joseph Timimski

**constatutonalaty:** the constatution of the united states garenties freedom of religions thats what allows you athiests two assembl your attacking crosses and thouse different than you shows your not educated inconstatutonalaty and laws of usa most godless comunests attact others fredoms so shut the hell up and go back too the turd world you came from — William I. Johnson

**Nativity scene:** I will, either independently, or with a familiar constitutional rights legal aid group, begin the process of compelling your group to compensate the affected youth choirs. Simple advice — if you don't like the program, don't tune in! — Jim Darges

**FFRF:** You literally suck the joy from the holiday season because of your selfishness and lack of tolerance. You're the weird kid at the party, standing in the corner crying because you don't believe in anything, and that's what your intellectual parents taught you. So you try to spoil it for everyone else (ESPECIALLY THE CHILDREN) because everyone else is having fun and enjoying Christmas except for you, and there's nothing really fun, expressive, or joyful about believing in nothing. Jeez, I feel bad for you. Leave the rest of us alone, please. — Ben Davis

**Menominee nativity:** Your organization is exactly what Jesus was, a rable rouser seeking attention. How ironic is that? Find a better hobby and quit wasting taxpayers time. — Jeff Paul

**Freedom for religion:** I don` t believe in Santa clause either but I` m not wasting my money to put billboards everywhere. You poor deluded souls. Is it any wonder that Madalyn Murray O` hair was kidnapped, robbed and tortured for days before her murder. Take a Que. She cried out to God in her last hours. What a pity, no peace in your little insignificant lives. Intelligence has to create intelligence, we didn` t just “pop up” out of nothing. Have fun in hell, licking flames out of Hitler`s asshole.FREAKS — Giovanni Carello



Not all of our Crank Mail is emailed to FFRF. Some of it comes the old-fashioned way — through the U.S. Postal Service.

# THEY SAID WHAT?

If you're a person of prayer, we could use your prayers. **Gatlinburg Fire Chief Greg Miller, as crews battled a wildfire from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park that went into neighboring communities** KFOR Channel 4, 11-29-16

You can say again, “Merry Christmas,” because Donald Trump is now the president. You can say it again, it's OK to say, it's not a pejorative word anymore.

**Corey Lewandowski, former Trump campaign manager, speaking to Sean Hannity** Fox News, 12-6-16

One must in no way overlook the negative consequences that can derive from the ordination of persons with deep-seated homosexual tendencies. **From a document by the Vatican's Congregation for the clergy reiterating that gay men cannot become priests** Religion News Service, 12-8-16



Cory Lewandowski

No school official in Texas can silence a biblical reference to Christmas. This is an attack on religious liberty.

**Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, saying that Killeen, Texas, school officials were wrong to remove a nurse's aide's “Charlie Brown Christmas” decorations from the nursing office door following FFRF complaint** Austin American-Statesman, 12-16-16

Ben Carson is a decent man with deep religious roots. As the new Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, he will be positioned to advance the cause of religious liberty. He can be expected to ensure that faith-based programs that are tied to the department's block grants are not burdened with contrived church-and-state regulations. **Catholic League President Bill Donohoe** CatholicLeague.org, 12-7-16



Bill Donohoe

Over two millennia ago, a new hope was born into the world, a Savior who would offer the promise of salvation to all mankind. Just as the three wise men did on that night, this Christmas heralds a time to celebrate the good news of a new King.

**Republican National Committee chairman (and incoming White House Chief of Staff) Reince Priebus in a Christmas message, prompting controversy that Republicans compared Donald Trump to Jesus.** Buzzfeed, 12/26/16



Reince Priebus

The world desperately needs more exorcists. **Headline in New York Post article, which quotes Valter Cascioli, a psychologist and scientific consultant for the exorcists' association, who said, “The lack of exorcists is a real emergency.”** New York Post, 12/28/16

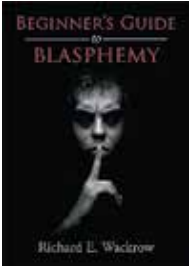
## FREETHOUGHT BOOKS

The following are books written by FFRF members on the topics of religion or free-thinking. FFRF does not do book reviews.

### Beginner's Guide to Blasphemy

By Richard E. Wackrow \$12.95 (paperback); \$7.55 (Kindle) September 2016, Lulu Publishing

In America, one is expected to smile deferentially while listening to the nonsense parroted by the religious: that the Ten Commandments are the basis of morality, that all religious people mean well, and that you can't be good without God. One is not supposed to question the content, logic and instructions of the holy books. And so as not to offend the publicly pious, the nonreligious are expected to join in prayer to someone else's imaginary friend. Well, no one has the right not to be offended — especially when his or her alleged moral code is itself offensive. This book debunks religious malarkey one fantasy at a time.



### Wintermas: Toward a Secular Celebration of the Season

By Michael Harold \$0.99 (Kindle) November 2016

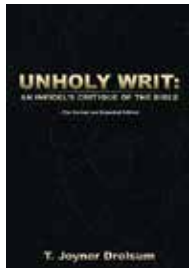
This short e-book briefly sets out the case for a principled, named winter holiday celebration for non-Christians, including nonbelievers, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers and those from other cultures. It's essentially a secular Christmas but with important differences, such as a focus on the rebirth of the sun at the Winter Solstice, rather than on the birth of the son of God. After briefly summarizing the history of Winter Solstice celebrations and Christmas, it sets out guidelines for how non-Christians can derive meaning from and enjoy the winter holiday season as Wintermas, a secular celebration.



### Unholy Writ: An Infidel's Critique of the Bible

By T. Joyner Drolsum \$36.95 (Paperback) \$7.99 (Kindle) November 2011 AuthorHouse Publishing

The bible has often been put forth as a supposedly infallible guidebook charting the correct path to an authentic existence. According to its proponents, Scripture is an absolutely dependable life manual because it is the word of God. However, close inspection of the bible calls into question its divine authorship; and, thus, its reliability as an accurate roadmap for the soul. In fact, under close examination it proves to be nothing more than a mundane and cobbled together collection of archaic superstitions. The many errors that it contains, including those about the natural world, undermine the pivotal claim that the bible is divinely inspired.





## Winter Solstice celebration 2017!



Longtime FFRF Members Phyllis Rose and Roger Chapman share a laugh in Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis., on Dec. 21 during a celebration of the Winter Solstice.



FFRF members listen to Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor during her opening remarks.



FFRF’s Director of First Impressions Lisa Treu and Director of Operations Lisa Strand share smiles with the camera.



Guitarist and singer Ken Lonquist plays a song for the crowd as FFRF Co-President Dan Barker accompanies him on the piano. Dan sang his original “Solstice Tribute” and “Merry Fricken Christmas.”



Members and staff mingle and chat following the music presentation.



Holiday treats and goodies line the table along the side wall of the Charlie Brooks Auditorium on the fourth floor of Freethought Hall.

Photos by Chris Line and Ingrid Laas

## Save The Date! 40th Anniversary of FFRF’s Convention



Monona Terrace Community & Convention Center

Madison, Wisconsin

Sept. 15-17, 2017

## Coming Next Month in Freethought Today



FFRF convention  
speech by  
Lawrence Krauss