

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



Wonders of the universe written in Stardust

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Best way to honor is to become an ally

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For minorities, reason can lead to equality

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Convention attention



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Comedian Julia Sweeney (right) takes a selfie with former Planned Parenthood president Cecile Richards during FFRF's national convention in San Francisco the weekend of Nov. 2-4. A record 986 people attended this year's convention, from 42 states, Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C., and from Canada and the U.K. For more photos from the convention, see the eight-page special insert. The speeches given by child author Bailey Harris and Ex-Muslims of North America co-founder Sarah Haider are also reprinted in this issue.

FFRF sues over Wisconsin's DOJ chaplaincy program

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is legally contesting a Wisconsin religion-centered counseling state program.

In a lawsuit filed Nov. 13 in a Dane County court, FFRF is challenging the constitutionality of a faith-based employee chaplaincy that Wisconsin Attorney General Brad Schimel created at the state Department of Justice.



Brad Schimel

Schimel, who was defeated in his bid for re-election on Nov. 6, announced the chaplaincy program in mid-October while campaigning. The program became effective on Oct.

4, but had been in the works for at least a year.

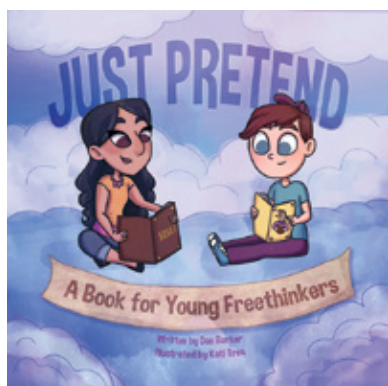
Schimel claims that the chaplaincy program is a "critical component" of the DOJ, and has urged other state agencies to contact the DOJ staff to start their own chaplaincy programs. Six all-white men from Christian faiths, many conservative, have been formally appointed DOJ chaplains. Although unpaid, the six agency chaplains are under the direction of a paid DOJ chaplaincy program coordinator and have received training and reimbursement at taxpayer expense. They're issued DOJ identification and building access cards and are not prohibited from soliciting donations or proselytizing employees.

See DOJ on page 2

New art makes *Just Pretend* more colorful, lively, engaging

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker's book for children, *Just Pretend: A Book for Young Freethinkers*, has been given a deluxe makeover.

Originally published in 1988, the book had a second edition printed in 2002 in a smaller format. Both were printed in black and white. The new 2018 edition is printed in a glossy paperback format with dozens of colorful illustrations drawn by art student Kati Treu.



"We realized that we should utilize the artistic talents of Kati to make the book more attractive," Barker said. "This edition is really driven by the art. In fact, we edited some of the copy to better fit the great artwork."

Treu illustrated each page to bring the book to life. "I just started with some rough sketches, then



Photo by Chris Line

Artist Kati Treu and author Dan Barker show off the updated version of the children's book, *Just Pretend*.

showed them to Dan, and we got them sharpened more and then I did the final illustrations," Treu said. "My favorite drawing is of 'Imagination Anonymous,' where I got to create my version of all those fictional characters."

Just Pretend is a children's book that teaches kids (and adults) how to think clearly, how to question authority when necessary, and how to separate fantasy from fact. It gets children to think about and explore myths like Santa Claus (spoiler alert!) compared with ideas like the existence of God. *Just Pretend* encourages children to apply the tests of reason to any idea, fairy tale, myth, or religion.

"Children are smart," Barker said. "They can think for themselves."

Order the book (\$12 postage-paid) at shop.ffrf.org/books-and-lit.

FFRF, AHA ask high court to let cross win stand

Two of the country's leading secular groups have asked the U.S. Supreme Court to let stand their victory declaring unconstitutional a massive cross in a Florida city park.

FFRF and the American Humanist Association filed a brief Nov. 19 opposing the city of Pensacola's efforts to overturn the recent 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision declaring the city's massive Christian cross towering over Bayview Park a violation of the First Amendment.

The filing argues that Supreme Court review is unwarranted because the law is clear and does not need to be disturbed. Numerous court decisions already make it clear that religious displays motivated by a religious purpose are unconstitutional, so there is no need for review.

"Of the 33 federal cross cases, not a single circuit has upheld a stand-alone Latin cross, let alone one motivated by a purely religious purpose," the brief states. "That uniformity is proof that this court's jurisprudence currently provides more than sufficient guidance to the lower courts to yield consistent results."

The two groups filed their initial lawsuit on behalf of local residents in the U.S. District Court of Northern Florida in 2016. The case contended that the 34-foot-tall cross overwhelming Bayview Park and

See Cross on page 4

FFRF in DFW



Photo by Dr. Zach Moore

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker (second from right) traveled to the Dallas-Forth Worth area to speak with members of the DFW FFRF chapter in October. Pictured, from left to right, are: Aaron Cott, Karen Hoenig, Courtney Stewart, Jenny Del Toro, Owen Younger, Rex Burks, Barker and Randy Hoenig.

“Thank you so much for coming to Dallas and supporting the new chapter here,” Younger writes. “You and FFRF have a committed group of supporters down here and we want to do everything we can to help protect the wall of separation and to try and make some more freethinkers while we’re at it.” FFRF welcomes its newest chapter.

Continued from page 1

DOJ

Their explicit duties include providing consultation and spiritual guidance to DOJ employees and their families, and the chaplaincies are integrated into DOJ programs, including new employee classes and orientation.

“The DOJ Chaplaincy Program does not include, and affirmatively excludes, secular mental health professionals,” FFRF’s legal complaint asserts. The complaint notes that the program sets up a religious test as a condition for employment: Chaplains must be ordained or licensed clergy in good standing of a faith group. Yet they aren’t required to be professional mental health providers, or be licensed or otherwise regulated by the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services, like other mental health professionals.

FFRF points out that DOJ employees are not in any way inhibited by their employment from freely exercising any religious preference they may have for religious counseling services. State employees, including nonreligious and non-Christian employees, are being encouraged to seek out Christian counseling, while being denied secular counseling services by bona fide mental health practitioners. FFRF alleges

there could be life-and-death consequences due to the fact that the agency chaplains aren’t required to have necessary mental health/substance abuse training.

“There’s absolutely no need or justification for the DOJ to provide religious counseling as an accommodation, such as can be argued that the military is obliged to offer,” adds FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “This is pure and simple a case of governmental promotion of religion to state employees, and it’s not only unnecessary, it also goes against both the Wisconsin and U.S. Constitutions.”

FFRF is asking the circuit court to declare the program a violation of Wisconsin State Constitution, Article 1, Section 18, and of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and to enjoin the DOJ from providing chaplaincy services.

The plaintiffs are FFRF, a Wisconsin-based national group of 32,000 members on behalf of its 1,400 Wisconsin members, and Gaylor and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, in their capacity as state taxpayers and as FFRF Lifetime Members.

Helping refugees rewarding for Executive Board member

Name: Stef Moritz
Where I live: Downtown Madison, Wis., just a few blocks from Free-thought Hall.
Where I was born: Elgin, Ill.
Family: Husband Vince Jenkins and 17-year-old cat, Ginger.
Education: I have a master’s degree in what they used to call “library science.”
Occupation: Retired public librarian. For 28 years, I worked in libraries in Illinois and Phoenix.
How I got where I am today: I have a stubborn streak, inherited from my late mother. Sometimes it’s a liability, but, on the positive side, it makes me persistent!



Stef Moritz

Where I’m headed: Well, not into the afterlife, for sure. I just want to live a good life while I’m here, respect the planet and its myriad, diverse forms of life, and when my time is finished, donate my brain to dementia research.

Person in history I admire and why: Charlotte Bronte, because she invented the admirable, strong character, Jane Eyre.

A quotation I like: “The only problem in your life is your mind’s resistance to life as it unfolds.” — Dan Millman.

These are a few of my favorite things: Orange tabbies, extra-dark chocolate, gummy bears, quiet evenings on the couch reading with my hubby, traveling to new and exotic places.

These are not: People who call mainstream media “fake news,” creationists, climate-change deniers, racists and bigots. (Do you see a pattern here?)

My doubts about religion started: Actually, later on in life. I was raised in a devout Catholic family and my education in parochial schools did not encourage me to question the tenets of the religion. In adulthood, I became aware that my personal beliefs were more and more out of sync with church teachings regarding homosexuality, birth control and the exclusively male power structure.

The final break came after the devastating attacks on 9/11, when I fully realized what a destructive force religion could be. Since then, religion has played no role in my life and I am at peace with that. I’m OK with people who get something out of religion, as long as they don’t try to force their beliefs on anyone else.

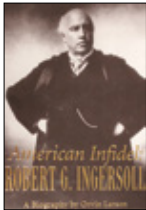
Before I die: I’d like someone, somewhere, to feel that I changed their life for the better.

Ways I promote freethought: I serve as secretary on FFRF’s Executive Board and support other organizations which champion not only freethought, but freedom of expression. As a former librarian, I abhor censorship and believe that we cannot have a free society without freedom of expression.

How I like to spend my free time: I volunteer in a number of capacities, but what is most rewarding is helping recent refugees adapt to their new lives in the United States. I enjoy one-on-one English language tutoring and am currently working with some refugee women from Iraq. I also volunteer on a regular basis for the Wisconsin chapter of The Nature Conservancy, where they have bestowed upon me the title of “Land Inquiries Specialist.”

MEET A MEMBER

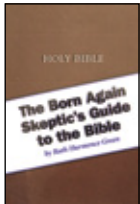
American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll



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

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

The Born Again Skeptic’s Guide to the Bible



By Ruth Hurmence Green
A Missouri grandmother debunks the bible as no one has debunked it since Thomas Paine.
Published by FFRF

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

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FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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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. FFRF has more than 32,000 members. FFRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and donations are tax deductible for income tax purposes.

FFRF’s email address is info@ffrf.org. Please include your name and physical mailing address with all email correspondence.

FFRF members wishing to receive online news releases, “action alerts” and “Freethought of the Day” should contact info@ffrf.org.

40th anniversary of Jonestown tragedy

IRS must reform church reporting policy

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

We recently passed the 40th anniversary of the horrific massacre of more than 900 people at the behest of Rev. Jim Jones in Jonestown, Guyana. We now know not to “drink the Kool-Aid.” But our society is still blind to the fact that this atrocity was made possible in large part



Photo by Chris Line
Annie Laurie Gaylor

because Jones’ ministry was given a pass by the government of the United States. The U.S. government, in fact, gives every minister and every religion a pass. Because donations to 501(c)(3) groups are deductible for income-tax purposes, tax-exempt groups are essentially subsidized by the American public. Therefore 501(c)(3) nonprofits must account to the public about what they do with tax-exempt donations — except for churches. The Internal Revenue Service waives all religions, churches, temples, synagogues and mosques from having to file the annual Form 990 information return that other 501(c)(3) entities must file every year in order to retain their tax-exempt status.

In October, FFRF (which, by the way, faithfully files the annual Form 990 accounting for its tax-exempt finances) renewed its important court challenge of this discriminatory and preferential IRS treatment of churches.

The Form 990 legal issues can seem a little academic or dry . . . until you look at Jonestown, and realize how its IRS-blessed financial secrecy spawned one of the late 20th century’s most heinous massacres in the name of religion.

Residents enslaved

Approximately 80 percent of Jonestown residents were African-Americans, seduced or terrorized into supporting Jones, who assured them that only he could protect them from a prophesied Nazi uprising. Residents were wretchedly enslaved, sleep-deprived, abused, starved and denied outside contact. At least a third of the more than 900 victims were children or minors. Also slaughtered were three journalists and a member of Congress, the admirable Rep. Leo Ryan, who had listened to constituents who had family trapped in Guyana and flown down to investigate. He and the reporters were shockingly shot down on a runway after his fact-finding visit, precipitating the killing and suicide spree by the mentally unhinged Jones.

Mainstream Christian denominations quickly distanced themselves from the events of Nov. 18, 1978, but it’s important to remember that Jones had an ordination from the Christian Church-Disciples of Christ, a mainline denomination. In plain sight, because his church lacked any formal accountability, Jones was able to amass a veritable treasury and armory, and even state-subsidized foster children, carting away money, guns and children from American shores and secreting them to a remote jungle spot. All of this hap-



Jim Jones was the American religious cult leader who was responsible for a mass suicide and mass murder in Jonestown, Guyana, on Nov. 18, 1978.

pened without a peep or a protest from governments of the time.

Cautionary tale

Jonestown also wouldn’t have happened, of course, were it not for the undue deference religion and ministers receive in our society, of which the Form 990 exception is but one symptom. Jim Jones is a cautionary tale not only about why churches should report finances to the IRS, but why it’s essential to safeguard the Johnson Amendment, which bars tax-exempt entities from engaging in politicking. Jones was praised to the hilt by public officials in San Francisco in the early 1970s, gaining their trust by offering social programs and providing campaign workers. He was photographed with many local and national politicians — appearing at events with Rosalynn Carter, Gov. Jerry Brown and San Francisco Mayor George Moscone, who appointed Jones in 1976 to the city’s Housing Authority Commission. The Peoples Temple former attorney Timothy Stoen analyzed, “There wasn’t anything magical about Jim’s power. It was raw politics. He was able to deliver what politicians want, which is power. And how do you get power? By votes. And how do you get votes? With people. Jim Jones could produce 3,000 people at a political event.”

The horror

Those of us who were alive when Jonestown occurred will never forget the horror: The aerial footage of what at first glance looked like bright carnival colors, that turned into an endless ocean of bodies splayed out in gruesome death. (Cyanide poisoning, contrary to Jones’ reassurances, is very painful. When it came to be Jones’ turn to die, the hypocrite ordered a lackey to shoot him in the head.) Jeanie Mills, in her book, *Six Years With*

God: Life Inside Rev. Jim Jones’s Peoples Temple, noted that Jones controlled his followers through fear, using floggings, beatings, psychological and sexual humiliation, and pitting followers against one another. Mills, who left the Peoples Temple in 1975 as one of the first public defectors, had helped coordinate the on-site investigation by Rep. Ryan. Tragically, she herself was later murdered in 1980, along with her husband Al and their 16-year-old daughter, Daphene. Jones’ last words, recorded on tape right before the Jonestown massacre, were orders to kill Mills and her husband.

Mills’ family, like other members, were expected to donate all their savings, houses, insurance and jewelry to the church, and contribute their full-time salaries. Jones, who had 8,000 San Francisco followers, accounted for none of this plunder or riches to anyone, much less to the government. Had the Peoples Temple been required to fill out the basic federal information return, there would have been many red flags about finances that might have caught the eye of governmental officials. Instead, governmental officials refused to investigate defectors’ numerous complaints of kidnapping, child abuse, battery.

Mills recounted how Jones attracted followers through “faith healing.” He would shove a rotting chicken liver into a victim’s mouth, camouflaging it with a towel. When the individual would retch it out, Jones would pronounce it was a cancer passing out. He employed church sleuths to spy on members and raid their garbage cans. Then he’d use the information as though it was a “revelation” or to publicly humiliate members from the pulpit. The megalomaniac would hand out questionnaires to every church member asking if he or she wanted to have sex with him. He would claim: “I have so much sperm that I

have to ejaculate at least 25 times a day.” He claimed to have the world’s biggest male organ and inaugurated bizarre public rituals around his boast. Church members were forced to “confess” they were gay. Marital sex was forbidden. He preyed sexually on women and men, and sadistically meted out public punishment with a 2-foot-plus wooden paddle, which would be used on children and adults alike as many as 150 times. Microphones would be held up to the mouths of screaming victims, who on penalty of further beatings, were then required to say to Jones, “Thank you, Father.” Sometimes Jones would giggle during the beatings. Members were encouraged to believe the world would soon end, and were told they would die without Jones’ protection.

All of this took place in the United States prior to the Peoples Temple move to Guyana.

Of course, Jonestown is and was an aberration in American churches. Most churches in our nation, thankfully, will not devolve into suicide cults. Some denominations faithfully release financial statements to their own members. A very few, largely Unitarian, voluntarily even file the Form 990, bless their secular hearts.

Financial secrecy

But there are all too many examples of the harm that occurs through church secrecy over finances. That very secrecy may attract or develop wingnuts, charlatans and criminals. Look at David Koresh and the Branch Davidians in Waco or the renegade polygamous Mormon church, many of whose communities survive on welfare and engage in child rape and marriage. It’s obvious that any church involved in a crime or scandal will benefit from the lack of reporting accountability to the IRS. One has only to observe the institutional crimes against children by the Roman Catholic Church and the U.S. bishops to see how hidden finances have protected the churches and aided its massive cover-ups. How many of these crimes occur precisely because churches are financial black holes?

The question FFRF always asks is: Why wouldn’t a church want to be transparent about its finances, to meet the same standards as other tax-exempt nonprofits? In a sense, by continuing to hold church doctrine as unquestionable, and churches and ministers as above the law and above accountability, we Americans are still voluntarily drinking the Kool-Aid.

Annie Laurie Gaylor is co-president and co-founder of FFRF.

RECRUIT A MEMBER

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FFRF
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Please send us only names of likely supporters

Freedom depends upon freethinkers

HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

“Are you saved?” he asks me,
sunrise in the corner of his eye,
a snag at the edge of his voice.
In a blur of memory, I see the others:
the preacher who used to trounce my tender sins,
kids at church camp, their brimstone choirs
shrill with teenage lust gone underground,
true believers come knocking to tell me
that flaming hell is real.
And those twisted faces on the tube:
Christian gunmen in Beirut, their hot eyes
exploding in the beds of sleeping children;
the righteous hatreds of Belfast, lighting
Irish eyes like a tenement fire;
the eyes of the Ayatollah, squinting with joy
at the blood of his blindfolded prisoners.
It smolders in the windows of the soul,
that holy blaze, never so bright
as in human sacrifice,
never so proud as in crimson crusades,
the glorious, godlike destruction.

From *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems:
A Satirical Look At The Bible*



© Philip Appleman.

Philip Appleman is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. He is editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Darwin*. He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both “After-Life” Members of FFRF.

Other books of his, available at shop.ffrf.org, include *Karma*, *Dharma*, *Pudding & Pie* and *New and Selected Poems, 1956-1996*.

Cross

Continued from page 1

maintained by the city of Pensacola represents a clear preference for the Christian faith over other beliefs and nonbelief.

The district court sided with the national secular organizations in a June 2017 decision, ordering the removal of the city’s massive Christian cross. In early fall of 2018, the 11th Circuit upheld the decision, agreeing that the government-funded, freestanding cross unconstitutionally entangles the government with the Christian faith. On Sept. 17, the city petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court to issue a writ of certiorari urging the high court to overturn the ruling. The brief reflects the determination of the two organizations to protect their constitutional triumph.

“The city failed to present a question that demands Supreme Court review,” explains AHA Senior Counsel Monica Miller. “Federal courts have uniformly recognized that a government’s free-standing Christian cross display violates the Establishment Clause. This is especially true of crosses maintained for exclusively religious ends, such as Pensacola’s cross, which serves as the centerpiece for annual Christian worship services.”

“Courts have marched in virtual lockstep in striking down Christian cross displays on government property,” adds



FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert. “There’s simply no reason the Court needs to review the sound decision by the 11th Circuit.”

FFRF contends that a city has the duty to equally serve all its residents.

“This huge city-sponsored cross impermissibly signals that Pensacola has a Christian government and that Christian citizens are favored,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We are legally and morally in the right, and our victory should stand.”

The AHA concurs with this perspective.

“All residents of Pensacola have the right to enjoy the parks that their tax dollars maintain,” says Roy Speckhardt, AHA executive director. “We are looking forward to a city park that is welcoming to all.”

Richard Kirschman ‘always a step ahead’

Life Member Richard Kirschman, a philanthropist and innovator, died on Nov. 6 at the age of 85.

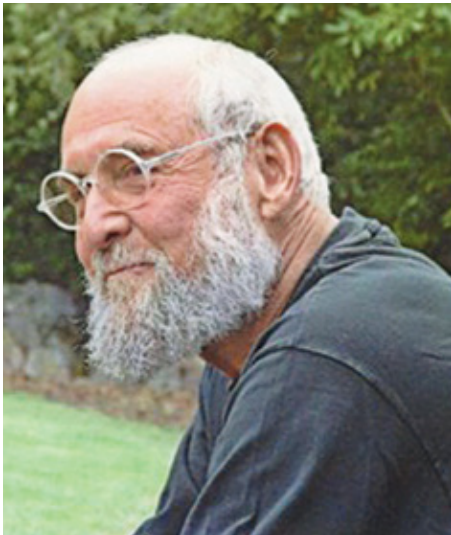
Richard was born on Long Island on Dec. 27, 1932, to Lewis Kirschman and Dorothy Freeman. He attended Bucknell University, briefly served in the Marines and later the Navy from 1955 until 1958.

Richard was the author of several books, including the *PG-13 Bible*, a printing of the text of the first five books of the Old Testament with the most offensive passages “in bold to help parents easily find the parts about slaying, lying, killing, pillaging, stoning, etc.”

Doris Ober, Richard’s wife, wrote to FFRF after his death. “He was a remarkable man who led a remarkable life. Always a step ahead, he wrote his own obituary, which I’ve copied below. He was a great admirer of your organization [and a member since 2010].”

“I made it all the way to the end. At least that’s the way it feels to me. Didn’t get cut off early as too many have. Had the exquisite pleasure of living a life of curiosity and learning that allowed me to try many things and live in many places. To feel free and safe in this great country.

“What I will miss most — a ridiculous notion for someone who has never believed in life after death, God, angels, or supernatural anythings — is being around to see what comes next. Lots of nexts. Next in new discoveries in medicine and science. Next with



Richard Kirschman

how the world’s troubles unfold. I will miss music, beauty of all kinds, wild creatures, the natural world and intelligent conversation.

“But it is people I will miss most. My beloved wife and companion in life, Doris Ober, whose

love, warmth, good humor, intelligence, talent and values have enriched my life for decades. My sister Ellen for her affection, many accomplishments, and take on life. . . . And my dear friends — whose names my forgetful mind dares not list for fear of omitting someone dear and cherished.

“I leave with these thoughts: Oppose war, be kind to each other, make music and art, travel and speak out against intolerance, ignorance, and superstition. Embrace humor, responsibility, honesty and respect for the truth.”

IN MEMORIAM

NYU law student wins Paul J. Gaylor Memorial Student Activist Award

FFRF is proud to announce that Mickey Desruisseaux has earned the Paul J. Gaylor Memorial Student Activist Award of \$1,000.

The award is annually endowed by Annie Laurie Gaylor in honor of her father, Paul. Mickey was given the award for his defense of the views of nonbelievers. His article, “Why do we portray atheists as broken believers?” was published in the November issue of Freethought Today after originally appearing in the

Washington Square News, the student newspaper of New York University.

Mickey, 25, graduated from the University of Chicago in 2015 with a degree in political science. He is now a law student at New York University and plans to graduate in 2021. He was born and raised in Chicago, and has a passion for writing, politics and the Chicago Bulls. While undecided about what type of law he will practice, he feels strongly about criminal justice reform and civil rights defense, or “maybe constitutional law as a backdoor back into the world of politics. And as I mentioned before, I have a vested interest in seeing the 45th president out of office in two years.”



Mickey Desruisseaux

FFRF welcomes 23 Life Members

FFRF is pleased and proud to announce our 23 newest Lifetime Members, our three new After-Life Members and our new Immortal.

The three new After-Lifers are Norman Wayne Lauritzen, Ruth Ann Lauritzen and Hal F. Mather. An After-Life Membership is a \$5,000 membership level for those who want their donation to “live on” after them.

FFRF’s 23 newest Lifetime Members are Elizabeth Bouve, Carlton Cum’arah Khem Bronner, William Cabell, Raymond Dodge, Mynga Futrell, Richard Heldmann, Jamie A. Henson, Robert Hunter, Tim W. Jenkins, Jennifer Johnston, Steve Kahn, Barbara Kwiatek, Robert J. Morgan, Harvey Motulsky, Jerome Rampelt,

Karen Roy, Allen Sharples, Karen Sielbeck, Jon Taggett, David Tucker, Chuck Weller, Rose L. White and Joshua Wiens.

States represented are Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Virginia and Washington. Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000, designated as membership or membership renewal, and are deductible for income-tax purposes.

The new Immortal is Joe Annino. The Immortals category is a donation designation for those members who have contacted FFRF to report they have made provisions for FFRF in their estate planning.

FFRF Life Member donates kidney to stranger

By Steve Pinski

I donated my kidney to a complete stranger.

For me, this was a very simple decision — it was the right thing to do. I have two brothers-in-law with Huntington’s disease. They, in turn, had two children each with Huntington’s disease. Huntington’s is a terrible genetic disease that eventually takes everything from you. If I could donate a kidney, liver or arm to help them, I would, without hesitation. Unfortunately, there is nothing I can do except visit them in a total care facility, which my wife and I do as often as possible. There is no cure.

Obviously, I don’t think this decision was influenced by God, since I don’t believe in a personal Santa Claus god. My religion didn’t help me donate a kidney, because I believe all religions on Earth are man-made and false. Furthermore, while I believe “nothing fails like a prayer,” I also believe “nothing succeeds like true compassionate action.” You can be good without a personal god.

I merely figured if I couldn’t help my family members who have a genetic disease, I might as well help whomever I could. People are dying every day waiting for a kidney and I have two good ones. With my decision made, I just had to find out if I was eligible to donate and then do it.

Data speak volumes

I’m an engineer, and I really like data. Checking out the National Kidney Foundation website, I found the following statistics:

- There are currently 121,678 people waiting for lifesaving organ transplants in the United States. Of these, 100,791 await kidney transplants.
- The median wait time for an individual’s first kidney transplant is 3.6 years and can vary depending on health, compatibility and availability of organs.
- In 2014, 17,107 kidney transplants took place in the United States. Of these, 11,570 came from deceased donors and 5,537 came from living donors.

Also, on average:

- More than 3,000 new patients are added to the kidney waiting list each month.
- 13 people die each day while waiting for a life-saving kidney transplant.
- In 2014, 4,761 patients died while waiting for a kidney transplant. Another, 3,668 people became too sick to receive a kidney transplant.

While there are several different ways to go through the process of donating an organ, here’s the process I went through. First, I went to the National Kidney Registry (NKR) website and clicked the button, “I am considering donating my kidney.” The NKR process then went into high gear.



Steve Pinski rests in his hospital bed after surgery on July 31.

I had to complete the NKR screening via the website and then, once clearing that step, I had to fill out my full medical history on the website. From there, I had to select the NKR medical center where I wanted the surgery performed. (I chose the University of Colorado Health Center in Denver.)

Three days later, I was contacted by the UC Health living donor coordinator. I then underwent complete workups and labs. Getting cleared for donation took about eight weeks.

At that point, NKR organizes the chain of people to get kidneys. (In my case, it was three).

Finally, there was the pre-op followed by the surgery on July 31. I now have to go to post-op appointments to review my health at six months, one year and two years.

Psychological interview

If you are a non-directed donor (donating to someone you do not know), you must see a psychologist. They want to understand why you want to donate an organ to a complete stranger. One of the very interesting anecdotal things I was told during my psychologist interview had to do with religion. I explained I used to be very religious, but I had left

all religion about 10 years ago. My psychologist looked at me and said, “That’s interesting.” I asked why he thought that was interesting. He then told me that, in his experience, most of the people who donate to complete strangers are nonreligious. I guess humanism really is making the world a better place.

Other than my wife and kids, I had not told anyone until I was cleared to donate. I figured I didn’t need to tell anyone unless it was really going to happen. In addition, I have five sisters, and my mother — who are all nurses. I was about to break the cardinal rule the nurses in my family taught me: Never go into a hospital and have surgery unless it’s absolutely necessary. So, I couldn’t tell any of my family nurses until it was over. I told my brother and he was very happy for me.

But I also couldn’t tell several of my sisters and mother, prior to the surgery, because of religion. The very religious among them would have started prayer chains all over the country. I prefer to be in the hands of science and not give them the satisfaction of thinking their prayers

made the surgery turn out great. And the surgery did, indeed, turn out great!

My kidney was removed at 7:30 a.m., on July 31, packed in ice, and shipped to Madison, Wis., on the same day it was removed. Someone received it later in the afternoon that very day.

When donating, it is possible to know who received the kidney, although it’s not always a sure thing. Both parties — the donor and the recipient — have to want to communicate. The first communication is strictly done through the health center coordinators.

I wrote to my kidney recipient and I received a reply. We plan to have further communications, and hopefully we can meet some day.

What I learned about my recipient is that he had been on dialysis for 5 ½ years and now he says he’s doing “great.”

What I also know is my recipient’s wife was willing to donate her kidney to her husband, but she was not a match. My recipient’s wife promised to donate her kidney to a second stranger when her husband received a kidney. And then the chain continued one more time to a third kidney recipient. So, three separate people received kidneys because I started the chain with a donation to a stranger.

I didn’t care what race, religion or sex my kidney recipient was. I am just pleased that person has the chance to live a happy healthy life in honor of my family members with Huntington’s disease.

Quick recovery

I was walking the morning after surgery. I was walking two miles within a week. I was walking four miles within two weeks. I could walk/run four miles within four weeks. A few precautions I now take include not using meds such as aspirin, Ibuprofen, etc., keeping my salt intake low and checking my blood pressure occasionally. Other than that, I feel great and I’m back doing everything I was doing prior to the surgery.

And, yes, I would donate my kidney again in a heartbeat. (If you thought I meant donating my second kidney, that would be a “no.”) I never felt pressured to donate. As a matter of fact, I was assigned a “donor advocate,” who told me over and over that I could back out at any time. I also never felt nervous, even as I was wheeled into the operating room. My surgeon was incredible and the entire operation/post-op team was amazing. Even the hospital food was fantastic.

While donating a kidney may not be an option for everyone, it is worth considering if you are in good health.

FFRF Life Member Steve Pinski of Colorado owns a small cinematography drone business and is an FAA-certified drone pilot.



Steve Pinski, left, and his son Kevin, finish a construction drone job on Oct. 25.

Freethought Matters

A new weekly half-hour TV talk show produced by FFRF.

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A small image showing three people sitting on a stage during the Freethought Matters TV Talk Show.

Freethought Matters TV Talk Show airs in:			
Chicago	WPWR-CW	(Ch. 50)	9:00 a.m.
Los Angeles	KCOP-MY	(Ch. 13)	8:30 a.m.
Madison, Wis.	WISC-TV	(Ch. 3)	11:00 p.m.
New York City	WPIX-IND	(Ch. 11)	8:30 a.m.
Phoenix*	KASW-CW	(Ch. 61)	8:30 a.m.
Portland, Ore.	KRCW-CW	(Ch. 32)	9:00 a.m.
Sacramento	KQCA-MY	(Ch. 58)	8:30 a.m.
Seattle	KONG-IND	(Ch. 16)	8:00 a.m.
Washington, D.C.	WDCW-CW	(Ch. 15)	8:30 a.m.

*(In Phoenix: Ch. 61 or 6 or 1006 for HD)

Go to: ffrf.org/news/freethought-matters for more information

ELECTION ROUNDUP

Secular voters becoming more powerful

By Andrew L. Seidel

Given the intensity of the news cycle during election week, you might have missed the biggest story of the election: the surge of the “Nones.”

Voters hit two important milestones in the 2018 midterm. First, Protestants were not the majority of the electorate, according to Religion News Service. Second, as white evangelical Christians (who carried Trump into office on a wave of Christian nationalism) are barely maintaining their share in the electorate, nonreligious people are gaining. “Nones” — those who self-identify as nonreligious on surveys like those conducted by the Pew Research Center — sharply increased their share of the U.S. electorate, from 11 percent in 2006 to 17 percent in 2018. That’s a massive 55 percent increase.

A second, similar metric shows the same growth: The number of people in the United States who enter the voting booth but not church is also surging, from 18 percent in 2014 to 27 percent in 2018. That’s another big jump of 50 percent. Nones are also younger and the fastest-growing religious identification. That means as evangelicals age out, Nones replace them in age groups that are more likely to vote.

In other words, the electorate’s trend



Andrew L. Seidel

away from religion is going to continue and probably accelerate. The shift in the electorate likely means a coming shift in those being elected and in what makes a candidate electable.

The signs are already visible. This year, three U.S. representatives formed the first ever Congressional Freethought Caucus, which is dedicated to four goals, including promoting “public policy formed on the basis of reason, science, and moral values;” and “protect[ing] the secular character of our government by adhering to the strict constitutional principle of the separation of church and state.”

The caucus quickly grew to 10 members, all of whom won their re-election. Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., was the principal founder of the Congressional Freethought Caucus. Before announcing the caucus and against the advice of friends and family, he courageously

came out as nonreligious. Conventional wisdom and several past studies on voting for hypothetical atheist candidates held that doing so would hurt his re-election chances, even in California. But Election Day proved otherwise, with Huffman winning by nearly 50 points. His lack of religion didn’t dent his share of the vote. (Laws on the books in eight states bar atheists from holding public office, though such laws are unenforceable.)

Voters elected more freethinkers — an umbrella term for everyone who rejects religion, be they atheist, agnostic, skeptic, humanist, or simply nonreligious — this year than in any other election. The Freethought Equality Fund, a PAC dedicated to increasing the number of office holders who are religiously unaffiliated, announced that 47 openly nontheists or humanists won elections at the federal and state levels, nearly triple the number currently in office. There are seven new members of the House of Representatives who are religiously unaffiliated: Katie Hill (Calif.), Sean Casten (Ill.), Sharice Davids (Kan.), Tom Malinowski (N.J.), Antonio Delgado (N.Y.), Chrissy Houlahan (Pa.), and Jennifer Wexton (Va). Kyrsten Sinema, Arizona’s new senator, also “ascribes to no religion,” as The New York Times reported.

As this trend continues, religious pandering will be less of a political necessity and it may even become a liability, and we will see its decline. This coming shift will have important policy ramifications, though there will a lag time before we see them. The attempt to redefine religious freedom will be stopped, in the legislatures if not the courts. The political power of the Catholic Church will be checked to an extent, though its money will always buy it influence. In general, the halting and even rollback of Christian privilege might begin.

There are many principled reasons to stand against religious pandering, but politicians do it because it is fruitful. But the more secular “We the People” (and especially we the voters) become, the less politicians will cater to religious sensibilities. Eventually, we’ll hit a tipping point where the pandering is not simply worthless, but actually harmful.

It’s time for politicians to take note: Secular people are a powerful and growing voting bloc. Pander to the evangelicals and you ignore, malign, or offend secular values voters. Politicians who do so may soon find that they are not rewarded with higher office, but relegated to obscurity.

Attorney Andrew L. Seidel is the director of strategic response for FFRF.

Religious groups voted along usual lines

‘Nones’ made up 17% of 2018 electorate, the highest percentage ever

An analysis of the 2018 midterm elections by the Pew Research Center shows that there was strong continuity in the voting patterns of many key religious groups.

White evangelical or born-again Christians backed Republican candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives at about the same rate they did in 2014, while religiously unaffiliated voters (known as “Nones”) and Jewish voters again backed Democratic candidates by significant margins.

About 70 percent of the Nones voted for the Democratic candidate

in their congressional district, which is nearly the same as the share of religious Nones who voted for Democratic candidates in 2014 and 2010.

Pew Research analysis of the religious composition of the 2018 midterm electorate shows that 17 percent of voters were Nones, the highest ever. Nones were 12 percent of the electorate in both 2014 and 2010.

Three-quarters of white voters who describe themselves as evangelical or born-again Christians voted for Republican House candidates in 2018, according to National Election Pool (NEP) exit poll data. That’s close to the share who did so in midterm elections in 2014 (78 percent) and 2010 (77 percent).

The 2018 midterm exit polls

showed a small shift in Catholic voting patterns. Catholic voters were pretty evenly split: 50 percent favored the Democratic candidate for Congress, while 49 percent favored the GOP’s nominee. In the past two midterm elections, Catholics leaned toward Republican candidates by margins of roughly 10 percentage points.

Among Protestants, 56 percent voted for Republican congressional candidates and 42 percent backed Democrats. Among those who identify with faiths other than Christianity and Judaism (including Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and many others), 73 percent voted for Democratic congressional candidates while 25 percent supported Republicans.

Voters who say they attend reli-

gious services at least once a week backed Republican candidates over Democrats in their congressional districts by an 18-point margin. Those who attend services less often tilted in favor of the Democratic Party, including two-thirds (68 percent) of those who say they never attend worship services.

Meanwhile, 47 percent of voters in 2018 were Protestants, down from 53 percent in 2014 and 55 percent in 2010.

There was little change in the share of voters who identify as Catholic, Jewish or with other faiths. And the 26 percent segment of voters who were white and identify as born-again or evangelical Christians is similar to other recent midterm elections.

In 2018 midterms, most white evangelical Christians continued to support Republican candidates; most religious ‘Nones’ continued to back Democrats.

% who voted for _____ candidate for Congress in their district

	2006		2010		2014		2018	
	Dem.	Rep.	Dem.	Rep.	Dem.	Rep.	Dem.	Rep.
Among those who are ...	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Protestant / other Christian	44	54	38	59	37	61	42	56
Catholic	55	44	44	54	45	54	50	49
Jewish	87	12	n/a	n/a	66	33	79	17
Other faiths	71	25	74	24	67	31	73	25
Religiously unaffiliated	74	22	68	30	69	29	70	28
White, born-again / evangelical Christian	28	70	19	77	20	78	22	75

Note: Data on Jewish voters in 2010 are not included due to insufficient sample size.
Source: National Election Pool national exit polls. 2018 data from NBCNews.com

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How secular candidates fared in the midterms

Election winners		
District	Name	Nonreligious Label
U.S. Senate		
Arizona	Kyrsten Sinema	Religiously unaffiliated
U.S. House		
D-CA (District 2)	Rep. Jared Huffman (i)	Humanist
D-CA (District 25)	Katie Hill	Religiously unaffiliated
D-IL (District 6)	Sean Casten	Religiously unaffiliated
D-KS (District 3)	Sharice Davids	Religiously unaffiliated
D-MD (District 8)	Rep. Jamie Raskin (i)	Jewish and “humanist”
D-NJ (District 7)	Tom Malinowski	Religiously unaffiliated
D-NY (District 19)	Antonio Delgado	Religiously unaffiliated
D-PA (District 6)	Chrissy Houlahan	Religiously unaffiliated
D-VA (District 10)	Jennifer Wexton	Religiously unaffiliated
D-WI (District 2)	Mark Pocan	Religiously unaffiliated
State Legislatures		
AZ House District 18	Jennifer Jermaine	Religiously unaffiliated
AZ House District 26	Rep. Athena Salman (i)	Atheist
AZ Senate District 26	Sen. Juan Mendez (i)	Atheist
CA House District 20	Rep. Bill Quirk (i)	“Scientist”
CO House District 23	Rep. Chris Kennedy (i)	Agnostic
CO House District 27	Brianna Titone	Spiritual but not religious
CT House District 88	Rep. Joshua Elliott (i)	“Agnostic atheist”
CT House District 96	Rep. Roland J. Lemar (i)	“Agnostic and humanist”
FL House District 49	Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith (i)	Agnostic
FL House District 69	Jennifer Webb	Spiritual but not religious
ME House District 93	Rep. Pinny Beebe-Center (i)	Unitarian Universalist
MD House District 20	Rep. David Moon (i)	Nonreligious
MA House Bristol 2	Rep. Jim Hawkins	Religiously unaffiliated
MA House Essex 18	Tram Nguyen	Spiritual but not religious
MA Senate Second District	Sen. William Brownsberger (i)	Nontheist
NE District 8 (Unicameral)	Megan Hunt	Atheist
NV House District 15	Howard Watts	Agnostic
NV House District 16	Rep. Heidi Swank (i)	Atheist
NH House Cheshire 5	Rep. John Bordenet (i)	Unitarian Universalist
NH House Grafton 8	Rep. Suzanne Smith (i)	Religiously unaffiliated
NH House Grafton 8	Joyce Weston	Atheist
NH House Hillsborough 17	Rep. Tim Smith (i)	Atheist
NH House Hillsborough 21	Wendy Thomas	Spiritual but not religious
NH House Hillsborough 28	Rep. Jan Schmidt (i)	Nontheist
NH House Hillsborough 38	Chris Balch	Spiritual but not religious
NH House Hillsborough 42	Jacqueline Chretien	Humanist
NH House Strafford 16	Rep. Sherry Frost (i)	Atheist
NH House Strafford 25	Rep. Amanda Gourgue (i)	Religiously unaffiliated
NH Senate District 5	Sen. Martha Hennessey (i)	Agnostic
NY House District 74	Rep. Harvey Epstein (i)	Agnostic
OR House District 5	Rep. Pam Marsh (i)	Religiously unaffiliated
OR House District 11	Marty Wilde	Unitarian Universalist
OR House District 14	Rep. Julie Fahey (i)	Religiously unaffiliated
OR House District 28	Rep. Jeff Barker (i)	A “religious skeptic”
OR House District 33	Rep. Mitch Greenlick (i)	Atheist
OR House District 47	Rep. Diego Hernandez (i)	Openly agnostic
PA House District 182	Rep. Brian Sims (i)	Openly non-religious
TX House District 135	Jon Rosenthal	Agnostic
VT House Orleans-Caledonia District	Rep. Sam Young (i)	Agnostic
VT House Wash. District	Rep. Warren Kitzmiller (i)	Humanist
VT Senate Windsor District	Sen. Dick McCormack (i)	“Governs with reason”
WA House District 21a	Rep. Strom Peterson (i)	Agnostic
WA House District 22b	Rep. Beth Doglio (i)	Agnostic
WA Senate District 47	Mona Das	Religiously unaffiliated
WI House District 48	Rep. Melissa Sargent (i)	Agnostic
WI House District 57	Rep. Amanda Stuck (i)	Unitarian Universalist
WY House District 45	Rep. Charles Pelkey (i)	Agnostic
Election non-winners		
U.S. House		
D-CA (District 42)	Julia Peacock	Humanist
Green-IA (District 3)	Paul Knupp, Jr.	Humanist
D-KY (District 1)	Paul Walker	Humanist
D-LA (District 3)	Rob Anderson	Spiritual but not religious
D-NE (District 1)	Jessica McClure	Religiously unaffiliated
State Legislatures		
AK House District 29	Shawn Butler	Spiritual but not religious
AL House District 41	Emily Anne Marcum	Atheist
AR State Senate District 5	Jim Wallace	Agnostic
CA House District 5	Carla Neal	Spiritual but not religious
CA House District 9	Harry He	“Not religious”
CA House District 67	Michelle Singleton	Religiously unaffiliated
CA Senate District 28	Joy Silver	“culturally Jewish”
CO House District 16	Andrew Smith	Agnostic
FL House District 24	Adam Morley	Agnostic
FL House District 53		
FL House District 77		
FL House District 79		
GA House District 5		
GA House District 7		
GA House District 47		
GA House District 49		
ID House District 13B		
ID Senate District 34		
IN House District 84		
IN House District 91		
IN Senate District 6		
IA Senate District 11		
KS House District 19		
KS House District 59		
KS House District 67		
KY House District 66		
ME Senate District 15		
MD House District 29C		
MD House District 31B		
MD House District 37B		
MA House Bristol 3		
MI House District 56		
MI House District 79		
MI House District 82		
MN House District 13B		
MN House District 18A		
MN House District 21A		
MN House District 29A		
MO House District 13		
MO House District 101		
MO House District 111		
MO House District 114		
MO House District 133		
MO House District 134		
MO House District 161		
MT House District 9		
MT House District 97		
NV House District 26		
NV House District 32		
NV House District 36		
NH House Belknap 3		
NH House Belknap 5		
NH House Belknap 6		
NH House Carroll 6		
NH House Hillsborough 6		
NH House Hillsborough 21		
NH House Merrimack 2		
NH House Rockingham 4		
NH House Strafford 24		
NY House District 64		
NY House District 105		
NY House District 135		
NC House District 77		
NC House District 117		
NC Senate District 48		
ND House District 1		
ND House District 5		
ND House District 45		
ND Senate District 31		
OH House District 16		
OH House District 89		
OK House District 76		
OK Senate District 22		
OR Senate District 30		
PA House District 92		
PA House District 97		
SD House District 3		
SD House District 5		
SD House District 34		
SD Senate District 3		
TN House District 19		
TX House District 11		
TX House District 23		
TX House District 130		
VT House Orange-Washington-Addison Dist.		
WA House District 7b		
WA House District 9a		
WA House District 35a		
WI House District 15		
WI House District 22		
WI House District 27		
WI House District 53		
WI House District 84		
Phil Moore		
Alanis Elizabeth Garcia		
Mark Lipton		
Brian Neil Rosser		
Rick Day		
Andrea Nugent		
Krishan Bralley		
Chris Ho		
Robert Nielsen		
Curtis Nash		
Kevin Leineweber		
Ryan Farrar		
Sara Ramsey		
Stephen Wyatt		
John Hall		
Alex Van Dyke		
Roberto Henriquez		
Kellie Julia		
Julia Nichols		
Harry Freeman		
Dan O'Hare		
Emily Farrer		
Ernie Whiteside		
Joey Andrews		
Christopher Giles		
Heidi Everett		
Justin Vold		
Lori Ann Clark		
Renee Cardarelle		
Mitch Weber		
Genevieve Steidtmann		
Phoebe Ottomeyer		
Dennis McDonald		
Cindy Slimp		
Derrick Nowlin		
Elizabeth Lundstrum		
Robert Peterson		
Patrick Maloney		
June Joseph		
Paula Povilaitis		
Lesia Romanov		
Carlos Cardona		
Michelle Carter		
Justin Bordon		
David Owen		
Eric Emmerling		
Brenda Grady		
Scott Burns		
Ben Geiger		
Rep. Brandon Phinney (i)		
Adam Baumel		
Laurette Giardino		
Andrew Gilchrist		
Bonnie Dawn Clark		
Gayle Kemp		
Norman Bossert		
Crysta Parkinson		
Zachary Raknerud		
Tim Hoyer		
Rachele Hall		
Cassimir Svigelj		
Joe Helle		
Forrest Mayer		
William Andrews		
Solea Kabakov		
Shanna Danielson		
Dana Hamp Gulick		
Justin Roemmick		
Brett Ries		
George Nelson		
Cory Allen Heidelberg		
Edward Nelson		
Alec Johnson		
Amanda Jamrok		
Frederick Infortunio		
Larry Satcowitz		
Mike Bell		
Jennifer Goulet		
James Thomas		
Lillian Cheesman		
Aaron Matteson		
Nanette Bulebosh		
Joe Lavrenz		
Erica Flynn		
Atheist		
Agnostic		
Spiritual but not religious		
Agnostic		
“Does not hold supernatural beliefs”		
Unitarian Universalist		
Unitarian Universalist		
Agnostic		
“Realist”		
Spiritual but not religious		
Humanist		
Humanist		
Not religious		
Atheist		
Humanist		
Atheist		
Agnostic atheist		
Religiously unaffiliated		
Humanist		
Secular		
“Inventor of religions”		
Agnostic		
Atheist, secular humanist		
Religiously unaffiliated		
Agnostic atheist		
Agnostic		
Spiritual but not religious		
Atheist		
Religiously unaffiliated		
Spiritual but not religious		
Atheist		
Religiously unaffiliated		
“None”		
Religiously unaffiliated		
Agnostic		
Religiously unaffiliated		
Naturalist		
Atheist		
“Believes in science”		
Spiritual but not religious		
Spiritual but not religious		
Humanist		
Atheist		
Atheist		
Unitarian Universalist		
Spiritual but not religious		
Religiously unaffiliated		
Religiously unaffiliated		
Atheist		
Atheist		
Secular		
Humanist		
Agnostic		
Spiritual but not religious		
Religiously unaffiliated		
Humanist		
Agnostic atheist		
Agnostic humanist		
Agnostic		
Atheist		
Atheist		
Religiously unaffiliated		
Atheist		
Agnostic		
Atheist		
Agnostic		
Atheist		
Agnostic		
Agnostic		
Atheist		
“Not a believer”		
Deist		
Not religious		
Spiritual but not religious		
Atheist		
Agnostic		
Secular Humanist		
Atheist		
Secular Humanist		
Religiously unaffiliated		
Religiously unaffiliated		
Religiously unaffiliated		
Religiously unaffiliated		

(i) = incumbent

Special thanks to the Center for Freethought Equality and “The Friendly Atheist” Hemant Mehta

FFRF NEWS

FFRF warns: Acting AG a Christian nationalist

By Andrew L. Seidel

A man who has a “biblical view of justice” is now running the Department of Justice.

Acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker (appointed by President Trump on Nov. 8 minus the required Senate approval process) is a Christian nationalist. He has asserted that all judges must be “people of faith” with “a biblical view of justice.”



Whitaker

At a 2014 forum for candidates vying to be the next Republican nominee for U.S. senator in Iowa, Whitaker staked out an extreme Christian nationalist position — even more extreme than any other speaker at the right-wing summit. He criticized other speakers who said that our Constitution and law “come from God” as not going “far enough.”

Whitaker would demand of his judges — and presumably this would hold for people who work under him at the DOJ, especially given that his predecessor shared this view — be “people of faith” and “have a biblical view of justice.”

“As long as they have that worldview, then they’ll be a good judge,” he has said, despite our Constitution’s prohibition of a religious test for public office. “And if they have a secular world-view, where this is all we have here on Earth, then I’m going to be very concerned about how they judge.”

It’s not just Whitaker’s Christian nationalism that is problematic.

He ran a group formed and dedicated to preventing Judge Merrick Garland from taking a seat on the Supreme Court.

And when asked what some of the worst Supreme Court cases were, Whitaker didn’t begin with, say, *Dred Scott*, which essentially held that Afri-

can-Americans were not human. No, Whitaker “would start with the idea of *Marbury v. Madison*. . . . All New Deal cases that were expansive of the federal government. . . . Then all the way up to the Affordable Care Act and the individual mandate.”

Marbury is the seminal case that established the federal judiciary authority to review and declare laws unconstitutional; it ensured that the judiciary is the third, separate and co-equal branch of our government. It is a critical check and balance. Needless to say, it’s not considered to be controversial or suspect — indeed, it is foundational to U.S. law.

On abortion, Whitaker’s Christian extremism again rears its head with a “life begins at conception” mentality. He also opposes same-sex marriage on religious grounds: “It’s traditionally been up to the churches and to God to define that.” There’s also talk that Whitaker, as a federal prosecutor, went after LGBTQ politicians because of “anti-gay bias,” which of course has deep biblical roots.

What would a biblical view of justice look like? Capital punishment for such non-crimes as worshipping gods other than the Judeo-Christian god, blasphemy, sabbath-breaking, disobeying a parent, a woman who isn’t a virgin on her wedding night, or witchcraft. Biblical law forces victims of rape to marry their rapists and it punishes innocent

children for the crimes of their parents, “to the third and fourth generation.”

Whitaker has joked that he prefers New Testament justice to “Levitical” justice, but has apparently forgotten that Jesus supposedly said, in the Beatitudes no less, that he came to fulfill the law of the prophets, not to abolish it.

Whitaker’s biblical ignorance is matched by his blatant disregard for America’s founding principles and the Constitution, which was the first to prohibit religious tests for public office. His statements show a disregard for the rule of law. That alone makes him unfit to run the DOJ.

“And if they have a secular worldview, where this is all we have here on Earth, then I’m going to be very concerned about how they judge.”
— Matthew Whitaker

‘Freethought’ window image part of traveling exhibit



An image of a stained-glass window in FFRF’s library will be on display with 14 other images in a traveling art show.

With just the word “Freethought,” the simple colored glass panel was deemed to be one of the best by the Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee for the exhibit, “Gratitude: Faith/Diversity.”

The photo was taken by Katrina Treu, FFRF’s part-time office assistant.

The 15 photos selected will be printed as banners that will be hung at Milwaukee City Hall, the Jewish Community Center and Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design.

The guidelines for the project were listed, partly, as: “Submissions should consider not only what we are grateful for, but for what gratitude means both philosophically and theologically in our lives. The representation of diverse beliefs and unique contributions of all people and all faiths are welcome and encouraged.”

FFRF celebrates repeal of Irish blasphemy law

FFRF applauds Irish people for voting to repeal the nation’s constitutional ban on blasphemy.

The theocratic provision, which dates back to 1937 and was reinforced with a 2009 statute, had never been actively enforced. But it was a national embarrassment for Ireland and was lampooned by figures such as English comedian Stephen Fry, who was initially slapped with blasphemy charges that were later dropped. Following the Oct. 27 vote, the Irish may now blaspheme to their hearts’ content.

Atheist Ireland, which worked diligently to educate about the referendum, was thrilled, saying that when the repeal takes effect, “our laws can then protect people from harm, not

protect ideas from criticism, and our media outlets will no longer have to self-censor themselves.”

For several years, Congress has failed to pass proposed bipartisan resolutions calling for the global repeal of blasphemy laws. “Freedom of expression and religion are fundamental human rights that are the bedrock of any open society,” Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del, stated upon introduction of this year’s resolution.

FFRF is encouraging supporters to contact their elected representatives and ask them to protect the rights of freethinkers worldwide. Promoting secularism and the right to speak critically of religion is a universal win for freedom of speech and religious liberty.

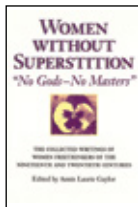
NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER CONTEST

Our goal is to see secular citizens flood government meetings with secular invocations that demonstrate why government prayers are unnecessary, ineffective, embarrassing, exclusionary, divisive or just plain silly.

The person who gives the best secular invocation will be invited to open FFRF’s annual convention in 2019, receiving an all-expenses-paid trip to Madison, Wis. Oct. 18-20, 2019, along with a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

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

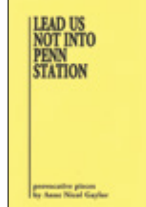
Women Without Superstition: “No Gods — No Masters”



Collected writings of 50 women freethinkers of the 19th & 20th centuries (51 photographs).
Edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor
Published by FFRF

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Lead Us Not Into Penn Station: Provocative Pieces



By Anne Gaylor
A must-have for any freethinker, this gracefully readable book contains Gaylor’s classic writings.
Published by FFRF

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FFRF contacts IRS over church’s electioneering

FFRF has raised the alarm over a Florida church’s blatant electioneering.

FFRF learned that on Election Day, Grace of God Church, which serves as a Pasco County polling location in New Port Richey, Fla., posted a political sign on its property. The placard was planted on church property 100 feet away from where ballots were cast and read, “Don’t vote for Democrats on Tuesday and sing ‘Oh, How I Love Jesus’ on Sunday,” followed by an exclamation point drawn out of a cross.

Pasco County Supervisor of Elections Brian Corley asked Pastor Al Carlisle to remove the sign. Carlisle admitted he had put it there, but he refused to remove it. The Church of God posted the sign on its Facebook page. In response to suggestions that it had violated Section 501(c)(3) of the tax code, the church indicated it was willing to “risk losing our 501(c)(3) and honor our sacred rights to free speech.”

Carlisle was upfront about his political motivations. He “criticized Democrats in favor of open borders, saying they oppose Christian values in the bi-



ble, which he said explains that God established borders for the Garden of Eden,” reports the Tampa Bay Times. “If people are offended by his sign, Carlisle said, they have a problem, not him. And their problem is with God.”

IRS regulations specify that 501(c)(3) organizations, which include churches and other religious organizations, are prohibited from “[participating in or intervening in] any political campaign on behalf

of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office,” FFRF reminds the Internal Revenue Service.

FFRF has asked the IRS to commence an immediate investigation of the Grace of God Church and take appropriate action to remedy any violations of 501(c)(3) regulations.

“By permitting signs opposing political candidates to be erected on its property, particularly on Election Day while serving as a polling location, the church appears to have inappropriately used its religious organization to participate in a political campaign,” FFRF Associate Counsel Elizabeth Cavell wrote to the tax authorities. “It violated IRS regulations, apparently with full knowledge and disregard of its obligations under the tax code, by expressing opposition to a group of candidates for political office. Given these partisan activities, Grace of God Church violated the 501(c)(3) tax-exempt rules, which prohibit electioneering.”

The state/church watchdog is also commending Pasco County election officials for announcing that they will look for an alternative polling place to the church the next time around.

FFRF urges Supreme Court not to review its unanimous N.J. win

FFRF is urging the U.S. Supreme Court to let stand its recent victory on behalf of New Jersey taxpayers.

The state/church watchdog filed a brief Nov. 26 with the U.S. Supreme Court, encouraging it to reject a request that it review a unanimous FFRF win at the New Jersey Supreme Court. This April, the state’s top court held, 7-0, that New Jersey taxpayers cannot be forced to pay to repair active houses of worship, several of which explicitly sought taxpayer funds in order to further their worship services.

At the heart of the lawsuit, argued in New Jersey state court, is the New Jersey Constitution’s guarantee: “nor shall any person be obliged to pay tithes, taxes, or other rates for building or repairing any church or churches, place or places of worship, or for the maintenance of any minister or ministry, contrary to what he believes to be right.”

Despite this clear language, Morris County churches are arguing that they are nevertheless entitled to these taxpayer funds, asking the Supreme Court to expand its contentious decision from last year, *Trinity Lutheran v. Comer*. FFRF’s brief points out that the New Jersey Supreme Court analyzed *Trinity Lutheran* at length and unanimously agreed that Morris County’s program

was significantly different, rejecting each of the county’s arguments.

FFRF also emphasizes that “the New Jersey Supreme Court decision is supported by history tracing back to the earliest days of this country,” and that it “does not conflict with decisions of this court or other courts.” So, there is no reason for the Supreme Court to review it. The New Jersey Supreme Court’s decision, FFRF’s brief points out, is “consistent with a tradition that is as old as the United States itself,” with the New Jersey constitutional provision at issue dating back to 1776. FFRF underscored that this taxpayer protection is a principle that the Founders, including Thomas Jefferson, saw as an essential guarantee to prevent the government from forcing citizens to support religions in which they disbelieve.

The plaintiffs in the case are David Steketee, an FFRF member, and FFRF itself. In New Jersey state court, Steketee and FFRF were represented by outside counsel Paul Grosswald and FFRF attorneys Andrew Seidel and Ryan Jayne, who will continue as co-counsel. FFRF is represented in front of the Supreme Court by the widely renowned Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of the University of California at Berkeley School of Law and one of the most-cited legal scholars of all time.

FFRF challenges NYC grant to Muslim group

FFRF is calling attention to a constitutional violation by the New York City Council.

A concerned New York taxpayer contacted FFRF to report that the city has awarded a grant to the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) as part of the Muslim Empowerment Initiative. The group reportedly intends to use these taxpayer funds to pay for several religious events.

The Islamic Council received an allocation of funds from the City Council for fiscal year 2019 totaling \$20,000. As part of the Muslim Empowerment Initiative, these funds were reportedly meant to be used to “educate Muslim New Yorkers on their fundamental rights, conduct case management and provide referrals for various legal, social and health care services.”

The Islamic Circle of North America is, at its core, a proselytizing organization. Its website states that “Dawah has always been the top priority of ICNA.” Dawah is a two-pronged concept consisting of external and internal Dawah. Internal Dawah involves teaching Muslims about aspects of Islam, while “external Dawah” is to invite non-Muslims to Islam and teach them about Islamic beliefs and practices.

What Is a Freethinker?

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

FFRF gets holiday displays in Illinois



FFRF has put up an exhibit honoring the Bill of Rights at an Illinois courthouse to counter a Chrstian creche. The display was installed by FFRF Member Will Meyer at the Grundy County Courthouse on Nov. 23 and will be available for public viewing until the end of December.

The mainstay of the tableau is FFRF’s playful Bill of Rights “nativity.” The irreverent cutout by artist Jacob Fortin depicts Founding Fathers Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington gazing adoringly at a “baby” Bill of Rights in a manger while the Statue of Liberty looks on. A sign beside the tongue-in-cheek nativity states: “Happy Winter Solstice. At this Season of the Winter Solstice, we honor reason and the Bill of Rights (adopted Dec. 15, 1791).” At the bottom, it reads: “Keep State & Church Separate.”



FFRF’s Winter Solstice display has proudly been on view at the Illinois Capitol for 10 years running, to balance a Christian nativity display. The exhibit was installed by FFRF Member Kathryn Koldehoff in Springfield and will be up until the end of December.

The green and red sign contains a secular message, composed by the late Anne Nicol Gaylor, FFRF’s principal founder:

“At this season of the Winter Solstice, may reason prevail.

“There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell.

“There is only our natural world.

“Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds.”

FFRF VICTORIES

By Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey

School board opts for invocation revocation

A school district in California has ceased scheduling invocations before board meetings after receiving a letter of complaint from FFRF.

FFRF Associate Counsel Liz Cavell initially sent a letter to the Ceres Unified School District Board of Trustees last October after a community member reported that the Board of Trustees opens its regular meetings with prayer. The district’s attorney sent a response letter, declaring that the board disagreed with the conclusion of a federal district court in California that the legislative prayer analysis in *Marsh v. Chambers* and *Town of Greece v. Galloway* is inapplicable to prayer practices in public school board meetings.

FFRF sent a second letter to the district after FFRF’s Chino Valley victory against school board prayer came down from the 9th U.S. Circuit Court.

“Since the time of your letter, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has joined the 3rd and 6th Circuits in holding that a school board’s prayer practice violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment,” Cavell wrote.

FFRF received a response from the district stating that the board has decided to suspend placing an invocation on its agenda for meetings.

Loudspeaker prayers ended in West Virginia

In August, FFRF contacted a West Virginia school district regarding a report that the high school in Logan County was broadcasting a Christian prayer over the loudspeaker prior to a football game.

“The prayers at district football games are inappropriate and unconstitutional,” FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote in his letter. “Not only is the district endorsing these prayers by allotting time for them at the start of games, but it is also providing the prayer-giver with the public address system needed to impose these prayers on all students and community members at the games.”

FFRF received notice that loudspeaker prayers have ceased at the football games. Later, subsequent violations were reported in the district and FFRF is pursuing these issues.

Wisconsin VA distances itself from religion

After getting a letter from FFRF, the Milwaukee VA Medical Center will take measures to ensure that no future



Member Michael Rowe sent us this photo of a marquee from the Voice of Calvary Church in Altoona, Fla.

events appear to be entangled with religious sponsorship.

A Milwaukee resident contacted FFRF to report that the Medical Center co-sponsored and advertised a “Bike Blessing” event in June. Posters advertising the event indicated that it was co-sponsored by the VA Chaplain Service and included the VA seal at the bottom, along with text that said, “U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs / Veterans Health Administration / Milwaukee VA Medical Center.”

“Setting aside the VA chaplaincy itself, any Medical Center promotion or organization of a religious event poses serious constitutional concerns,” FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover wrote in his Sept. 5 letter to the medical center. “Advertising this event and including the VA seal on those advertisements sends the message that the VA endorses the blessing ceremony’s religious message.”

FFRF received a response from the VA stating that, in the future, “there will be no marketing that would imply VA sponsorship of the event, and [it] will additionally ensure that marketing materials clearly state that any religious aspects of the event are not sponsored by the VA.”

Texas district addresses numerous violations

A Texas school district has addressed multiple state/church violations after hearing from FFRF.

A community member contacted FFRF to report that employees of Whitney Middle School in Plano have promoted multiple religious events to students this year. Teachers reportedly used the school’s public address system to remind students about “Bring Your

Bible to School Day.” Other events promoted by the school include a Christian revival event called “Fields of Faith” and the Christian-oriented prayer rally “See You at the Pole.” School employees also apparently have participated in these events alongside students. All of these events appeared to have been promoted, in part, at the request of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), which is a private club operating at the school.

“We write to ensure that the district does not allow its employees to organize, promote or participate in future religious events while acting on behalf of the district,” wrote FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover in his Oct. 30 letter to the legal firm representing the district. “Additionally, the district must take steps to disassociate itself from the FCA and ensure that its employees are not promoting their personal religious beliefs to students.”

The district’s attorneys replied, assuring FFRF that all of the complaints had been addressed by the schools. The superintendent passed on the message that both “Bring Your Bible to School Day” and “See You at the Pole” events are not to be officially promoted or endorsed by the school. Additionally, the FCA webpage was taken off the school website.

VA Medical Center in Florida removes cross

Thanks to FFRF, a cross was removed from the lobby of a Florida VA

Medical Center.

A volunteer at the medical center reported that a large cross display was put up in October at the Malcolm Randall VA Medical Center in Gainesville. The display also featured a religious prayer.

FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert sent a letter to the center, alerting it to the unconstitutionality of such a display and also pointing out that the display is exclusionary of non-religious service members.

“Veterans are frequently compelled to come to the center to receive medical care and other services,” Markert wrote. “The over 23 percent of military personnel who either express no religious preference or are atheists should not be made to feel offended, excluded, and like ‘outsiders, not full members of the political community’ because the center, a government facility, contains prominently placed religious statements.”

FFRF received a call from the center that the display has been removed from the lobby.

Cereal killer: City ends ties to prayer breakfast

The city of Noblesville, Ind., has separated itself from a prayer breakfast after FFRF pointed out the unconstitutionality of a city-sponsored religious event.

A concerned Noblesville citizen contacted FFRF to report that Mayor John Ditslear had, in his official capacity, sponsored, promoted and participated in a prayer breakfast. The self-described “prayer and worship service” included the community’s “men and women of faith glorifying God and asking his blessing on our community, schools, families, public services and churches.”

Judge Steven R. Nation was the keynote speaker and shared “how faith has guided his life.”

The mayor’s official Twitter account was reportedly used, in addition to the city’s website, to promote this religious event.

FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne sent a letter to the mayor asking that the city cease promotion and coordination of this prayer breakfast.

FFRF received a response email from the Mayor’s Office stating that the city has “taken steps that will take the city out of the prayer breakfast. The 2019 prayer breakfast will be hosted by a local nonprofit who will manage the entire event. City funds have not been used for this event.”



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Aracely Santoy-Poole

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Texas coach counseled after FFRF intervenes

After intervention from FFRF, a tennis coach at a Texas high school has been instructed to cease pressuring students to participate in religious activities.

A local parent contacted FFRF after a tennis coach at Friendswood High School reportedly encouraged students to attend a prayer breakfast in September. As FFRF understands, the coach told his players that while he couldn't "force them to attend," he would be "checking to see who attended" and that he wanted the whole team there "in solidarity."

At least one student reportedly felt pressured to attend the prayer breakfast because the student feared punishment if he/she were to forego the event. FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover sent a letter to the district's legal representative to assure that coaches are not pressuring students to attend or participate in religious events.

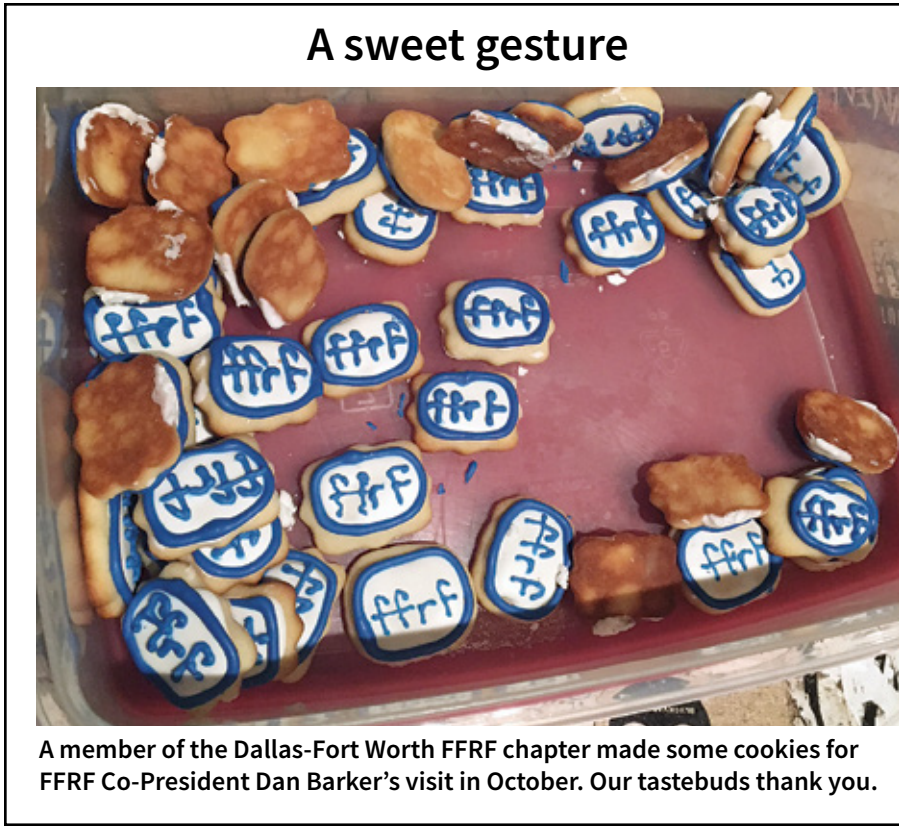
"Athletic coaches are entrusted with a tremendous amount of power and influence over their players," Grover wrote in his Oct. 29 letter. "Using this influence to encourage players to attend religious events is unacceptable and unconstitutional in the public school context. It appears that [the coach] coerced the students in his care to participate in the prayer breakfast."

The legal firm representing the school sent a response to FFRF, stating that the coach has been "counseled on this matter and now full recognizes that he cannot encourage student attendance to religious events." Additionally, before the upcoming spring prayer breakfast, coaches will again be reminded they may not in any way encourage or endorse participation in the breakfast.

Averse to the verse: School removes quote

A bible verse was removed from a Veterans Day tribute wall in a Missouri public school after the school received an FFRF complaint.

When a local resident contacted FFRF concerned that Seymour R-II School District was displaying a bible verse as part of a Veterans Day display, FFRF Robert Ingersoll Legal Fellow



Colin McNamara sent a letter asking that the bible verse be removed from the display.

"This religious display is especially inappropriate given that about 38 percent of Americans born after 1987 are not religious," McNamara writes. "The display alienates those nonreligious students, families, teachers and members of the public whose religious beliefs are inconsistent with the message being promoted by the school."

The district superintendent quickly responded to FFRF with assurances that the bible quote was promptly removed.

Texas school grows a spine, ends book deal

A Texas elementary school has severed a partnership with a religious group after hearing from FFRF.

A concerned district community member reported that several teachers at Bridge City Elementary School had partnered with a religious group and allowed them to minister directly to students through donated books. In one class, students received a book, sent to them by their "prayer partner," that contained personalized, proselytizing notes. Additionally, Bridge City Elementary publicly thanked these

"prayer partners" on its official Facebook page.

"Providing students with age-appropriate reading materials is of great benefit to many families, but Bridge City Elementary cannot pursue that goal through a partnership that advances the mission of a religious organization," wrote FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover. "The district may only accept donations that are free from the condition that the school promote a religious message."

The district's legal representation responded to FFRF's letter of complaint, stating that the administration was unaware the books contained personal religious messages.

"Appropriate disciplinary action was taken as well as discussion of district policy and practice of non-affiliation with religious organizations," the firm wrote to FFRF. "The district expects that this will resolve the issue but will ensure compliance by staff."

Religious promotion ends at Georgia school

Religious promotion in a Georgia school will cease, thanks to a letter from FFRF.

A local resident alerted FFRF to the fact that Providence Elementary School in Gainesville, Ga., was pro-

moting on the school's official Facebook page a church service and a "prayer walk" hosted by the church.

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote to the district to ensure it remove such social media posts and refrains from promoting any future religious events.

"It is illegal and inappropriate for Carroll County Schools, and Providence Elementary School in particular, to create an event on Facebook for a worship service and an accompanying prayer event," Line wrote in his letter to the district's legal representation. "To do so shows that the district is 'appear[ing] to take a position on questions of religious belief.'"

The district's attorney responded with assurances that the posts have been removed from the school's official Facebook page and the administration has reviewed with their staff the obligation to avoid any appearance of public school endorsement of or participation in religious events.

Colorado school backs out of ministry event

FFRF commends a Colorado school district for cancelling its attendance at a sermonizing session that an evangelical group is a key part of.

The Todd Becker Foundation, a Christian ministry, was scheduled to appear at a Burlington Middle School assembly on Nov. 28. FFRF sent letters to the Burlington School District and several area school districts that were scheduled to attend the event, warning them that it will involve members of the Todd Becker Foundation reading from the bible and praying with students, which is in violation of the Establishment Clause. The school systems that were slated to be present at the event included Cheyenne County School District, Hi-Plains School District, Kit Carson School District and the Arriba-Flagler School District.

However, the Cheyenne County School District, after hearing from FFRF, did not send its students to this religious assembly.

The Todd Becker Foundation travels throughout the Midwest and the Rocky Mountain states putting on assemblies in public schools with the explicit purpose of converting students to its brand of evangelical Christianity. Oftentimes, it infiltrates public schools under the guise of offering a secular presentation, despite its purpose being laid out in no uncertain terms on its website.

Ohio district stops loudspeaker prayers

FFRF has brought an end to school-sponsored prayer over the loudspeaker prior to sporting events in an Ohio school district.

After a local resident reported that Green High School in Franklin Furnace was broadcasting a prayer over the public address speaker before its football games, FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line sent a letter alerting Green Local School District to the unconstitutionality of such a practice.

An attorney representing the district sent a response informing FFRF that the district will no longer schedule school-sponsored prayers to occur at events sponsored by the district and that district-owned equipment will no longer be used to project prayers to the public at events sponsored by Green Local School District.

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Who's the problem?



Richard Packham saw this church marquee in Roseburg, Ore. "My immediate thought was, 'Yes! God is a greater problem than any problem I have.' It also listed a time for 'Sun worship' and I thought, 'Gee, a sun-worshipping church?'"

IN THE NEWS

Texas keeps Moses in U.S. history curriculum

The Texas State Board of Education voted Nov. 14 to keep Moses in high school U.S. history standards.

Ken Mercer and other conservative members of the board argued for keeping Moses in as an influence on the country's Founding Fathers. They cited Gov. Greg Abbott, who had weighed in on the matter on Twitter in September, saying, "Eliminating Moses as one of our law-givers is contrary to factual history and to #SCOTUS precedent."

"Gov. Abbott . . . [is not one of] our Founding Fathers," Board member Erika Beltran replied, arguing no proof exists that Founding Fathers were influenced by Moses.

Report: Saudi Arabia worst in world for atheists

In its seventh Freedom of Thought report, the International Humanist and Ethical Union listed Saudi Arabia as the worst place in the world for atheists. Others near the bottom of the list include Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Maldives.

Saudi Arabia passed a law in 2014 that describes atheist thought as a kind of terrorism. The country also has been prosecuting liberal campaigners and activists.

At the top of the list for best places for atheists are, in order, Belgium, the Netherlands, Taiwan, Sao Tome and Principe, Nauru, Japan and France.

Greece to separate church and state

Greek Prime Minister Alex Tsipras announced plans in early November to disestablish the Church of Greece. Tsipras, whose Syriza party was elected on a secular manifesto in 2015, has secured the backing for the move from Archbishop Ieronymos II, head of the Greek Orthodox Church.

The prime minister intends to amend the Constitution of Greece to remove references to the church and define the Greek state as 'religiously neutral.' In exchange for the church's support for secularization, the government has agreed to award an annual fixed subsidy to the church. Priests will cease to be counted as government employees.

Getting out the secular vote!



Prior to the midterm election, Rae Howard (pictured) and Janet Thew of the Greater Sacramento Chapter of FFRF set up a voter registration table over several days at a community college and coffee house in the Sacramento area. They registered 21 voters and shared FFRF items, including stickers, buttons, brochures and issues of Freethought Today.

'Pro-life' bill could allow for death penalty

Ohio Republicans are considering a bill that would redefine and ban abortion, and potentially punish people with severe criminal penalties if they perform or undergo an abortion.

The bill, HB 565, was introduced in March and is currently awaiting consideration in the health committee. From fertilization to birth, the "unborn human" would be included under the definition of person in the criminal code.

Also in Ohio, the House, in November, passed one of the most restrictive abortion bills in the country. It would penalize doctors for performing an abortion when a fetal heartbeat can be detected, as early as six weeks into the pregnancy, often before women are even aware they are pregnant.

There are no exceptions for rape, incest or danger to the life of the pregnant person.

AG opens probe into abusive priests in D.C.

D.C. Attorney General Karl A. Racine said Oct. 23 that his office has begun an investigation of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy in the Archdiocese of Washington, the latest in a string of state-level law enforcement officials now looking into the Catholic Church's handling of abuse complaints.

Pope Francis accepted Cardinal Donald Wuerl's resignation as Washington's archbishop amid an uproar over a Pennsylvania grand jury report that depicted systemic abuse in the Catholic Church across the state, including in Pittsburgh, where Wuerl had been a bishop.

Racine has limited power to prosecute crimes in the district, where felony cases are handled by the U.S. attorney's office.

However, he is opening a civil investigation under his authority to enforce D.C. law governing nonprofit organizations.

Alaska archdiocese launches commission

The Archdiocese of Anchorage is launching an independent commission on sexual abuse to review all personnel files of those who have served in the region since 1966 and plans to release names of any Catholic church workers in their purview with credible sexual misconduct claims against them.

The move mirrors that of other U.S. dioceses that have launched similar efforts in an attempt to respond to the ongoing sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church.

Nevada Hilton replaces bibles with Constitution

In place of the bible so often found in bedside drawers throughout the nation's hotels, the ownership of the Hilton Garden Inn in Nevada has opted for a copy of the U.S. Constitution.

Management at the hotel confirmed that there are copies of the U.S. Constitution in every room but declined to provide more details on the change.

Some hotel chains looking to attract younger Millennial guests — dubbed the least religious generation in American history — have eschewed bibles.

Supreme Court to take Bladensburg cross case

The Supreme Court agreed Nov. 2 to decide whether a 40-foot cross in the median of a busy suburban Maryland highway is a secular memorial to those who died during World War I or an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion.

The so-called Peace Cross, made of granite and cement, was built in 1925 as a tribute to local men who died during World War I. It was paid for by local families, businesses and the American Legion. But the giant cross sits on a piece of land that has been owned since 1961 by a state commission that pays for its maintenance and upkeep.

The challenge to the cross began with the American Humanist Association.

Atheist minister allowed to keep her job

Atheist Toronto United Church minister Gretta Vosper will be allowed to keep her job.

Toronto Conference, the Rev. Gretta Vosper, and West Hill United Church said in a joint statement Nov. 7 that the parties had "settled all outstanding issues between them."

The General Council of the United Church of Canada had started proceedings in a formal hearing to decide whether to place the ordained minister on the Discontinued Service List (Disciplinary).

A Toronto Conference interview committee said in a September 2016 report that it had found Vosper unsuitable for ministry, because she was no longer in "essential agreement" with the church's statement of doctrine and was "unwilling and unable" to reaffirm the vows she made when she was ordained in 1993.

Appeals court sides with state over busing

Federal judges backed Wisconsin state schools Superintendent Tony Evers' decision to not require a public school district to provide busing to students attending a private religious school.

Parents of students at St. Augustine School and a conservative legal firm sued Evers and the Friess Lake School District in 2016 after the district and Evers said the students did not qualify to ride district buses to school for free.

Under state law, public school districts are required to bus private school students, but only to one school per religious denomination in an attendance area.

Because students were already being bused to another Catholic school, the St. Augustine students were denied free transportation by Evers' Department of Public Instruction and the district.

The parents appealed a lower court's ruling siding with Evers and the district. On a 2-1 vote, a panel of the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld that ruling Nov. 8.

Vatican: U.S. bishops must delay taking action

The Vatican has told the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to delay voting on measures to hold bishops accountable for failing to protect children from sexual abuse, the president of the conference said in a surprise announcement Nov. 12.

For weeks, the U.S. Catholic bishops have trumpeted a series of reforms they had hoped to make after what one cardinal called the church's "summer of hell." Those reforms must be approved by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The Vatican's late intervention, ordered by its Congregation for Bishops, essentially puts the American bishops' reforms on hold.

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Richard and Beverly Hermesen Student Activist

Wonders of universe written in *Stardust*

This is an edited version of the speech Bailey Harris gave at FFRF's 41st annual convention in San Francisco on Nov. 2. She was introduced by FFRF Program Manager Monica Schwartz.

Bailey Harris is a 12-year-old author on a mission to inspire a love of science and a sense of wonder about the universe with her Stardust series of books for young readers, which she has co-written with her father, Douglas. The first book in the series, *My Name Is Stardust*, was released in 2017 and has sold thousands of copies worldwide.

Bailey and Douglas developed a story to teach children this concept, along with other areas of science such as evolution and astronomy. The second book in the series, *Stardust Explores the Solar System*, is hot off the press.

Because of her extraordinary initiative and accomplishment, FFRF is delighted to give Bailey Harris its Beverly and Richard Hermesen Student Activist Award of \$5,000. Come on up, Bailey!

By Bailey Harris

Hello, everyone. It is such an honor to be here with you today. Thank you very much to the Freedom From Religion Foundation for having me here to speak. And a special thank you to Beverly and Richard Hermesen for this amazing student activist award.

First, a little bit about me. I am the third child in my family and I have two older brothers and a little sister (and my dog, Lady). I love to play soccer and I am the striker for the club team Impact United. I am in seventh grade and I love my school and friends there. My parents are secular and they teach our family humanist values.

And while Utah is highly religious, there is a great secular community in Salt Lake City, where we live now. We even have a female, openly gay, liberal mayor! But we didn't always live in Salt Lake.

I was born and raised in Utah, which is known for quite a few things, including the worldwide headquarters of the Mormon church — I mean, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, as it likes to be called now.

On my first day of third grade at Eastlake Elementary School in South Jordan, Utah — yes, the city was named after a river in the bible — I was so excited!

What I didn't know then was that the children were all scheming about how to turn me into a Mormon. Over 90 percent of the children at this



Bailey Harris



Photo by Chris Line

Bailey and her father Douglas Harris promote their new books, *My Name is Stardust* and *Stardust Explores the Universe*.

school were Mormon. Unfortunately, that year in school ended up being very hard for me and that excited little 8-year-old girl went through some very difficult times. I don't tell you this part of the story because I want you to feel sorry for me at all. I tell it because it will help you understand why I wrote *My Name is Stardust*.

One thing that began to happen that year is that my classmates wanted me to read a book that was very special to them. Everyone wanted me to read the *Book of Mormon*. They told me that this book made them happy and that it would make me happy if I read it.

Because of this, my parents presented a family lesson about world religions and, as part of this, taught us about Mormonism and the *Book of Mormon*.

I learned that the book was made — supposedly translated — by a man who put his face in a hat and saw the words magically appear on a rock. I learned that the book came from golden plates that were delivered by an angel and that nobody except for the Mormon prophet ever saw them.

I tried to be nice about it, but I simply let them know that I wasn't interested in their book. But then these classmates started asking me if I believed in Jesus. I told them that I didn't. And this is where things REALLY started to change for me. Not believing in the *Book of Mormon* was one thing, but not believing in Jesus was simply crazy!

One girl in particular started following me around at recess and lunch and always wanted to talk to me about religion. She told me that I would go to a place called hell. I ran away and hid from her. This classmate went to the yard duty official and told her that I was refusing to play with her, so I was taken to the assistant principal. I was crying. The assistant principal told me that I couldn't refuse to play with someone.

I told her that the girl wouldn't stop talking about religion and telling me that I was going to be sent to hell. The assistant principal told me that I was being a bully by refusing to play with her. This went on for a few weeks and I cried almost every day.

The assistant principal punished

me and told me that I had to go to the library at lunch to read anti-bullying books. She made me watch videos about bullying and I had to sit in the corner to eat my lunch by myself.

After my mom learned about this, she went in to the school to talk with the assistant principal. My mom told her that I shouldn't be required to play with a girl who is harassing me about religion. The assistant principal said to my mom, "You moved here from California. What do you expect?"

She told my mom that if I was going to be out at recess and lunch with the other children, I couldn't refuse to play with this girl or anyone else. My mom called my dad and he immediately left work and went to the school. He tried to talk to the assistant principal and she stood up in the office and told him to get out.

My mom and dad then spoke with the principal the next morning. He apologized and said that I could refuse to play with people and that I was welcome to go in to his office at recess or lunch if I ever needed to. He also said that he would be discussing this with the assistant principal, and we assume that this is why she lost her job a few weeks later.

My parents ended up pulling me out of this school and put me in a charter school.

But even at the new school, the *Book of Mormon* and Jesus were frequent topics and the fact that I didn't go to church was a topic almost every day. I also continued to be told that I was going to be sent to hell.

This is when my parents decided to move out of the holy land of South Jordan up to Salt Lake City, where we could be somewhere with more diversity. This has been very good for our family!

Now on to the happy part of the story!

My family loves science, so when "Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey" came out, we watched it every Sunday evening.

In one episode, host Neil deGrasse Tyson said, "The planets, the stars, the galaxies, we ourselves and all of life — are the same star stuff." I was so excited! I couldn't believe that everything on Earth was made of stardust, including our bodies. I ran upstairs to the family computer and started typing a book.

My dad came up after the episode was over and asked what I was doing. I told him that I was writing a book about how we are made of stardust because I wanted all children to know how amazing this is.

My original title was *The Book of Truth*. I knew that the kids at my school thought that the *Book of Mormon* made them happy. The things that I was writing about in this book made me happy, so I made my book title sound a lot like their book title.

My dad and I worked on the book together for the next two years and it was a lot of fun. We found a very talented illustrator and realized that it would cost a lot of money to have the illustrations done the way that we wanted them. So, we launched a Kickstarter to raise some money, and the campaign did much better than we expected! We were also approached by a couple of publishers and ended up signing a publishing deal for a book series based on Stardust. This was a dream come true for me!

We then started writing a second book called *Stardust Explores the Solar System*, which was just released. We are currently working on a third book called *Stardust Explores Earth's Wonders*, which will be released in May.

We are excited to be able to continue to use the books to support our mission to inspire a love of science while teaching the scientific method to children and families as they navigate our world to find truth.



Photo by Chris Line

Bailey Harris was watching Neil deGrasse Tyson's "Cosmos" series when she came upon an idea for a book, *My Name is Stardust*, which has now sold thousands of copies.

Freethought Heroine

Best way to honor is to become an ally

Here is an edited version of the speech Sarah Haider gave on Nov. 2 at FFRF's 41st annual convention in San Francisco. She was introduced by FFRF Legal Assistant Kristina Daleiden.

It's my pleasure to introduce FFRF's 2018 "Freethought Heroine."

Sarah Haider is an American writer, speaker and activist. Born in Pakistan and raised in Texas, Sarah spent her early youth as a practicing Muslim. She left her faith in her late teens, and later co-founded Ex-Muslims of North America (EXMNA), which advocates for the acceptance of religious dissent and works to create local support communities for those who have left Islam.

In addition to atheism, Sarah is passionate about civil liberties and women's rights. She directs EXMNA's "Life Beyond Faith" mini-documentaries, a series of video portraits of ex-Muslim atheists and humanists. Sarah is also heading EXMNA's Normalizing Dissent tour, and travels the United States and Canada to cover a range of issues related to apostasy in Islam. She is currently a columnist for Free Inquiry magazine.

Please welcome Sarah Haider.

By Sarah Haider

Thank you to everyone at Freedom From Religion Foundation for recognizing me with this award. I am deeply grateful and humbled. I also want to take this time to thank FFRF for the numerous occasions in which they have assisted us at Ex-Muslims of North America. On multiple occasions, FFRF has helped us fight discrimination against ex-Muslims and we are grateful for their counsel and aid. In addition, earlier this year, FFRF also gave us a grant to fight a false allegation against an ex-Muslim teenager who was in danger from honor violence.

I thank Annie Laurie Gaylor, Dan Barker and everyone else at FFRF for their steadfast support and for this great honor. And I've been thinking about that! The concept of honor. What it means to have this sort of recognition. Honor is interesting in that it reflects as much on the values of those who give it as it does on the accomplishments of the honorees themselves. As it so happens, the very same achievements which bring me honor here today are those which



Sarah Haider, co-founder of Ex-Muslims of North America, spoke about the need for freethinkers to ally themselves with the courageous people who are fighting for a freer world.

have brought deep, unrelenting dishonor in the community in which I was raised.

There are other speakers here with my background, so this idea won't be too unfamiliar to this audience. I was born in Pakistan and raised Muslim, and come from a culture which highly values honor, particularly the honor of men. This honor can be tarnished by the actions of your kin, particularly female kin.

In this context, leaving the faith — choosing to walk away from God's path to deny his word — is a disgraceful life choice. Walking away from faith is considered indistinguishable from walking away from morality itself, and to forsake God is to forsake goodness. It is inconceivable to many faithful that the choice one makes to leave religion might be one based in reason, an embrace of a different source of ethics rather than an abandonment of all that is right.

Due to this misconception of the nature of disbelief, those who walk away from faith are routinely deprived of basic human dignities, even the right to life. While all nonbelievers are considered morally compromised, it is

apostates, those who have supposedly seen the light of God and chosen to refuse it, who are cast as the most corrupt, as near to villainy as an ideological choice can be.

Leaving the faith

So, it is no surprise that the decision to leave the faith, particularly in Muslim communities, is often met with extreme hostility, even violence.

Numerous public opinion polls demonstrate the hatred for ex-Muslims throughout the Muslim world. Sixty-three percent in Egypt, 58 percent in Jordan and 64 percent in Pakistan believe ex-Muslims should be killed for their disbelief. But one does not need to solely rely on this data to gauge the alarming levels of intolerance for apostasy. Across the Muslim world, vigilante mobs threaten those who leave the faith, and too often family members may be those one must fear the most.

In the West, the actions of family members — whether that be shunning, abuse or violence — loom on the minds of those who leave.

However, even if you are lucky enough to have a family which chooses not to hurt or disown you, it is taken for granted that you should have enough decency and tact to stay silent about your lack of faith, to keep your immorality to yourself. You can choose to do otherwise, but it will come at a high cost — extreme shame and dishonor, which will cast a shadow over any relative. This is why honor violence

exists. A family with a dishonorable member is pressured to take action to stop the bad behavior of their kin, lest the bad actions of a relative cast shame on them. Honor violence is, on some level, self-preservation.

So, it is in some sense disorienting to find myself honored for the same actions for which I could find nothing but great dishonor in my former faith community. It proves, if nothing else, the malleability of our societies. It is a testament to our capacity to evolve, to progress, to be the masters of our cultures and communities, not merely to be mastered by them. We are cultural beings, but that doesn't mean we are only passively shaped by the contexts we are born into, but that they, too, are shaped by us.

But it doesn't always feel that way. Faith-based communities, in particular, often have coercive elements in them, elements which are most strongly enforced on women. In conversations about choice and freedom, the social costs of deviance can be difficult to factor in. Unlike physical coercion or laws which restrict practices, social forces are not often as visible or easily quantifiable.

Oppression of women

As feminists have long noted, religious convictions of right and wrong and social pressure to conform have played an acutely devastating role in the lives of women. As ex-Muslims, our mothers often have a large role in our oppression, particularly for ex-Muslim women. This was true for me, as well. My mother didn't just disagree with my religious choice, she would incur a great social cost for my behavior. And in this way, social pressures throttle freethought in a truly insidious manner.

It is difficult to study or to generalize because of the multifaceted nature of social pressure and coercion, which plays out differently in different places.

It's insidious because we are not accurate reporters of what is happening to us. We cannot often understand the forces playing out within ourselves, and we lie to ourselves to feel better about our own inability or unwillingness to act. Sometimes we lie to feel powerful in a powerless situation, other times to preserve the self-deception that we are good actors.

When I was a young Muslim woman, I parroted ideas which are contradictory and even ridiculous. I thought my modesty was entirely a free choice, and I was prepared to defend it. For the sake of this comforting rationalization, I ignored all obvious ways in which my choice was influenced by my upbringing. I couldn't be immodest even if I wanted to, so I allowed myself



Sarah Haider talks with Phil Ferguson of Illinois following the Saturday evening dinner.

Yip Harburg,
from his book:

Rhymes for the Irreverent

Illustrated by Seymore Cwast

Shall I Write A Letter
To My Congressman?

Each Congressman has got two ends,
A sitting and a thinking end,
And since his whole success depends
Upon his seat — why bother, friend?

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation

Buy it from FFRF online - shop.ffrf.org

the mercy of rationalizing a choice I hadn't made as a choice I would have made anyway.

My family was led by a reluctant patriarch, for which I am grateful. Tolerant by nature, my father was unwilling to enact force upon those weaker than him. This allowed me the space I needed to explore ideas bigger than those I was raised with.

Although I had to abide by standard Muslim dress and behavioral codes, I was not restricted intellectually by my family. But I was formed by the society I grew up in. I took for granted the truth of the claims made in the Quran, because those were the beliefs of the people I trusted most in the world – my parents.

If there is one message I wish to emphasize here today, it's that literal, physical restrictions to thinking and acting freely are but one of many.

Self-assuring deception

Now, there is such a thing as born skeptics, for whom doubt is the natural state. There are also those who can manage to think without the interruptions of ego. But the vast majority of us do not fit this bill. We might like to believe that our reasoning faculties function independently, that our emotions and actions are a response to deliberate, careful reason. But that in itself is a self-assuring deception. Too often, our reason does not act as the driver, but instead plays assistant to other emotions and ego-preserving desires.

I fear that we, the people in this room in particular, are vulnerable to this kind of self-reassurance.

It is too easy to imagine that because we have left faith-based dogma behind, because we can now look back objectively at religious faith and analyze and dissect its effects on social function, that we are no longer susceptible to similar kinds of behavior.

Salman Rushdie mentioned in his talk Friday about his fears of a secular form of religion, of a regression to the instincts of heresies, blasphemies and inquiries. Those are fears I share, as well.

And, in fact, it is dangerous to presume that we are more likely to spot dogma when we experience it now because we have seen it before, particularly when it involves social pressure. We may have recognized and conquered one form of dogma, one form of irrationality, however, this says little about our resistance to other forms of unreason.

Remember, that although we consider religion to be averse to at least some forms of rationality, the religious layman considers his faith to be quite



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Nearly a thousand convention attendees listened to Sarah Haider's heartfelt and powerful speech on Nov. 3.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Sarah Haider

reasonable. And just as we can understand "rational" religious apologism to be post-hoc reasoning, we should assume we, too, are capable of employing this reasoning more often than we'd like to acknowledge.

We are, for better or worse, influenced by our social nature and this distorts our judgment and choices we make. We are often more influenced by a desire to be seen as good, than to actually do good.

I bring it to this point because as an ex-Muslim, I routinely find myself frustrated with the ways in which we in the broader United States engage with Islam and Muslim practices.

To give one example, I see thoughtless celebrations of the hijab — depictions of smiling or triumphant women in headscarves are more commonplace today than they were 10 or even five years ago. The intent of such depictions is, of course, to stand up for the rights of minorities. However, in the ham-fisted attempts at appearing "tolerant" and "diverse," we gloss over oppression and very real sexism in conservative Muslim communities.

I remember the 2016 Olympics, when there was wall-to-wall coverage on the first hijabi Muslim woman who won bronze for team fencing. Gushing headlines and shows highlighting Ibtihaj Muhammad. The story was of a "triumphant Muslim woman, victorious in an Islamophobic society." What was glossed over?

Fencing was the only choice left to her. While she played a variety of sports growing up, fencing was chosen by her parents, as it was the sport in which her body and hair would remain covered. Many Muslim women are not al-

lowed to participate in sports at all due to concerns of modesty. This, alone, should have caused outrage. Further, she wasn't the only Muslim athlete at the Olympics that year — Dalilah Mohammed ran hurdles for the U.S. team and placed higher, earning individual gold. But Dalilah did not wear the hijab, which means she was ignored for the more politically useful story.

Every freethinker from a Muslim background will tell you this: They feel, to some extent, abandoned by people like you. How they feel that you have chosen your immediate political urgencies over their great struggle.

This past month, the European Court of Human Rights upheld an Austrian decision to fine a woman.

Her crime was to speak about Mohammed's life and describe his marriage with a 9-year-old child as pedophilia. Regardless of the validity of the claim, the fact that a European court is adjudicating issues of religious sensibility — in essence, reintroducing blasphemy laws — is something that should concern us deeply.

A month before that, a conservative British politician defended a woman's right to wear the face-covering niqab. In doing so, he also mocked the concept itself. He was deemed a hate-monger for what was ostensibly defending a woman's right to choose, to choose things he himself despised.

Moving away from nuance

Rather than moving toward greater nuance in the way we address the challenges of this faith, we are moving further away from it. And while I'm speaking specifically about Islam, this is only one avenue in which there is a deeply troubling polarization of discourse into black and white choices.

And I'd wager many of you know what I'm talking about here, who have felt, as I have, a strong pressure to be more simplified, dare I say, more tribal, in our thinking, particularly in this political atmosphere, as the social discourse instead increasingly resembles a battlefield.

And what happens in a time of war? No matter who we are, how peaceful by nature, we all feel an urge to rally around the flag, which most of us cannot resist. We collapse ourselves into one-dimensional figures, because in

a moment of crisis, when the stakes seem highest, we are asked to fall in line or risk dooming our side. Now is not the time to ask questions, now is not the time for introspection, nor for criticism of our own side — because this is war.

But I urge you to resist this urge to conform.

By this time, at this incredible conference, you have already met people who exemplify courage. And many of you will come to them, now and after the conference, to thank them for their work. These comments are appreciated more than I can put into words.

But there is something you can do that is more meaningful than any note of thanks.

If you see someone that inspires you, honor them not with thanks or applause, but with allyship. Tell them they will not be alone — because you will stand with

them. That you will place your own skin in the game as they have, that you will bear the costs of failure. And, in your life, where and when you find an overwhelming urge to correct a wrong, to highlight a misconception, to stand up even to your own team, that you will do so. That you will not choose to be bullied or scared into silence.

And it will feel difficult and unnatural — because it is difficult and unnatural. But it is no less worth doing because of it.

“We are often more influenced by a desire to be seen as good, than to actually do good.”
— Sarah Haider



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Sarah Haider, raised Muslim, said that “the decision to leave the faith, particularly in Muslim communities, is often met with extreme hostility, even violence.”

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Freedom depends on freethinkers

Godless Citizens mentions FFRF extensively

By PJ Slinger

In their new book, *Godless Citizens in a Godly Republic*, Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore discuss the laws and legal cases of nonreligion and atheism in the United States. They heavily reference FFRF’s role in the chapter, “The Atheist Awakening,” including calling FFRF a “pesky atheist activist organization.”

Kramnick and Moore, longtime professors of government and history, respectively, at Cornell University, also wrote the classic book *The Godless Constitution: A Moral Defense of the Secular State* in 1996.

“I had been working some on the concept of religious freedom, that there were ways in which it was becoming a claim of privilege,” Moore has said previously. He added that “those with no religious belief are the fastest-growing segment of the population. Atheism is the strongest form of that, and historically, it was despised in early American history.”

The book gives a shout-out to FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor and her late mother, Anne Nicol Gaylor. They write: “Strikingly, even though Madalyn Murray O’Hair founded the American Atheists in 1963 and led it for many years, most leaders of atheist and secular organizations today are men. (An important exception is the mother-daughter team Anne and Annie Laurie Gaylor. The former in 1978 founded the Freedom From Religion Foundation, based in Madison, Wisconsin; the latter still leads it.)”

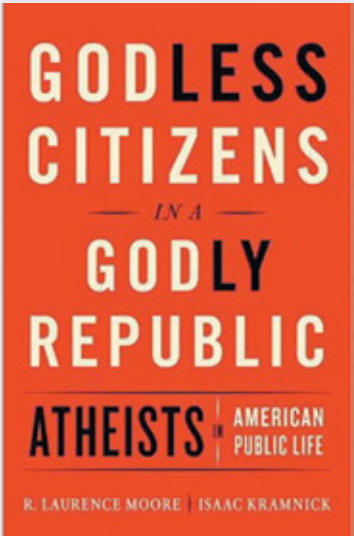
Brief history of FFRF

The book offers a brief description of the founding and history of FFRF:

“The Freedom From Religion Foundation is among the largest organizations of atheists and agnostics in America. It was founded in 1978 in Madison, Wisconsin, by Anne Nicol Gaylor, who, after graduating from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, owned and managed several small businesses, ran a suburban weekly newspaper, and was an abortion-rights activist. As head of the FFRF from 1978 to 2005, she grew its membership from the three people around her kitchen table to an activist group [now] with 33,000 members in 50 states and Canada. Gaylor, who died in 2015 at the age of eighty-eight, has been succeeded by co-presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor, her daughter, and her son-in-law, Dan Barker, an ex-evangelical Christian minister. The FFRF has published two popular books by Annie Laurie Gaylor, which echo Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s atheist writing. *Woe to the Women — The Bible Tells Me So* is about sexism in religion, and, since publication in 1981, has been reprinted five times. The other,



Isaac Kramnick (left) and R. Laurence Moore recently wrote the book, *Godless Citizens in a Godly Republic*.



To purchase a copy of the book, go to:

shop.ffrf.org/books-and-lit

Women Without Superstition: No Gods — No Masters (1997), is a 600-page anthology of writings of 19th- and 20th-century women freethinkers.”

But Kramnick and Moore save much of their discussion of FFRF for its legal fights:

“It has won some important victories. Following a 1995 suit brought by it against its home state of Wisconsin for designating Good Friday a legal holiday, the federal District Court ruled in 1996 that the holiday was indeed a violation of the First Amendment because ‘the promotion of Christianity is the primary purpose of the law.’ In another case rich with historic symbolism, the FFRF brought suit against the Rhea County School District in Tennessee for allowing religious instruction in the county’s public schools.

“The *Scopes* trial put Rhea County on the world’s map in 1925. The is-

sue in 2001 was the county allowing students from Bryan College, named after the trial’s religious hero, William Jennings Bryan, to teach the bible to public elementary school students for thirty minutes a week during the school day in three county schools. Bryan College refers to itself as a Christian school and its motto is ‘Christ Above All’: its mission statement reads, ‘Educating students to become servants of Christ to make a difference in today’s world.’ In June 2004 the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a lower District Court judgment that the school board’s practice of allowing the teachings of the Christian bible as religious truth was a violation of the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause. Not content with just its court victory, the FFRF has spent \$150,000 to place a statue, erected in 2017, of Clarence Darrow, the famous agnostic lawyer who defended *Scopes*, in front of the Rhea County Courthouse to stand near the statue of Bryan put there in 2005 by Bryan College.

“The FFRF wins 75 percent of its cases, but sometimes loses on procedural grounds. The foundation in 2004 brought suit against President Bush’s executive order establishing a faith-based initiative to fund religious charities, since faith-based organizations are ‘singled out as being particularly worthy of federal funding because of their religious orientation, and the belief in God is extolled as distinguishing the claimed effectiveness of faith-based social services.’ When *Hein v. FFRF* reached the Supreme Court in 2007, the court ruled 5-4 against FFRF, holding that taxpayers had no standing to challenge executive actions taken by the White House, only legislative governmental action.”

‘In-your-face’ ads

Godless Nation also gives FFRF much credit for its “in-your-face” advertising, in newspapers, on billboards, and, perhaps most notably, on television.

“Newspaper ads have been a particularly favored promotional tool for the FFRF. . . . FFRF, as we note at length below, has become the pre-eminent gadfly of American civil religion in the last decade with its numerous lawsuits and in-your-face atheist billboard campaigns. Nothing better illustrates its role in the Atheist Awakening than its full-page ad in *The New York Times* on Sept. 24, 2015, on the occasion of Pope Francis’ address to a joint session of Congress. Under a huge picture

of two tablets listing the ten “sins” of the Catholic Church, including ‘Banning Contraception,’ ‘Criminalizing Abortion,’ and ‘Denying Catholic Women’s Rights to Religious Equality,’ the ad text read: Regardless of what Pope Francis’ message is, Congress shouldn’t be ‘blessing’ him or handing him a government-endorsed pulpit. The framers of our godless Constitution wisely envisioned what John F. Kennedy described as ‘an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish — where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the pope . . . where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials.

‘A memorable highlight’

“The FFRF’s 2015 ad, with its tear-out reply form to join the foundation at the bottom of the page, was a memorable highlight of a day rich in the symbolism and contradictions of the American secular government’s embrace of God. Pope Francis spoke in the House of Representatives below the inscription of ‘In God We Trust’ and before, among others, nine Supreme Court justices, six of them Catholic and three Jewish. None was from America’s Protestant majority.

“Not quite two years later, on May 25, 2017, the FFRF took out another full-page ad in *The New York Times* after President Trump delivered the commencement address at Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University. The foundation replied to Trump’s proud declaration there that ‘America is a nation of true believers.’ Above a huge caricatured head of the president that took up nearly half the page was the retort: ‘Mr. President — We are NOT a Nation of Believers.’ Below the president’s picture, the text insisted, ‘We are one nation under a Godless Constitution. We the people are free to believe or disbelieve,’ followed by the assertion that ‘a quarter of the U.S. population today in nonreligious — true nonbelievers. . . . Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation.’”

“By far the most controversial atheist use of television occurred in 2014, when the FFRF produced a 30-second commercial with President Reagan’s son, Ron Reagan, proudly proclaiming his atheist convictions. It was refused by CBS, NBC, ABC, Fox, and Discovery, and shown only on CNN and Comedy Central. Three years later, in 2017, [MS]NBC finally agreed to run it along with CNN again. In it the president’s son says to the TV audience, ‘Hi, I’m Ron Reagan, an unabashed atheist, and I’m alarmed by the intrusion of religion into our secular government. That’s why I’m asking you to support the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the nation’s largest and most effective association of atheists and agnostics, working to keep church and state separate, just like our Founding Fathers intended. Please support the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Ron Reagan, lifelong atheist, not afraid of burning in hell.’

“Michael Reagan, the adopted son of the late president and a conservative commentator, is now boycotting NBC and CNN for airing this commercial and took to Twitter to note that ‘our father is crying in heaven.’”

PJ Slinger is editor of Freethought Today.

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FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

Climate change is state/church matter

By Andrew L. Seidel

Another mundane “miracle”: a cross left standing in the wake of a hurricane that killed 33 people. God didn’t save the people or even the church from Hurricane Michael. Instead, he saved a torture-device-turned-religious symbol.

This religious myopia is remarkably consistent. After Hurricane Harvey, Christians claimed that their god saved a cross and let over 100 people die. And it might not have been a cross, just a telephone pole.



Andrew L. Seidel

To see these as miracles, one must be blind to just about everything else. It’s not focus or positivity, it’s ignoring facts and reality and death. It’s willful blindness.

That same willful blindness is actually contributing to the hurricanes. It leads people to claim that there is a scientific debate and dispute about anthropogenic climate change.

As fires rage out West and hurricanes devastate the Southeast and Gulf Coast (which tend to be the more religious areas of the United States), I continually wonder when we’ll break through this deliberate ignorance, this head-in-the-sand hope for a better future. It was only two months ago that the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published the report warning humanity that we’ve got about a decade to ensure that our children have a habitable planet. This is not an environmental issue, or rather, it’s not just an environmental issue. This is also a security issue, a food issue, an immigration issue — and so much more.

The willful ignorance is one reason I



Shutterstock image

continue to believe that climate change is also a state-church issue.

Denying anthropogenic climate change is based on the rejection of facts and reality in favor of blind faith, wishful thinking, or willful denial. Many of the climate denialists in politics, such as Vice President Mike Pence, Sen. James Inhofe, and has-beens such as Scott Pruitt, Michele Bachmann and Rick Santorum, deny climate change for explicitly religious reasons.

There is a correlation between religiosity and climate denial. While other factors, such as political party affiliation, race and ethnicity, are strong predictors of views about climate change, the Pew Research Center found “it is the religiously unaffiliated, not those who identify with a religious tradition, who are particularly likely to say the Earth is warming due to human activity. . . . White evangelical Protestants stand out as least likely to have this view.”

President Trump denies climate change as creationists deny evolution, citing no science or facts, but arguing that he’s got a “natural instinct” for science while citing what he believes to

be disagreement among scientists over the anthropogenic nature of climate change. That disagreement tends to center on a small proportion of scientists, usually pegged at around 3 percent, who tend not to be climate scientists and who may disagree with some aspect of anthropogenic climate change.

I encountered this 3 percent argument for the first time in the office of a conservative Christian U.S. senator who shall remain unnamed, but who’s a big fan of “thoughts and prayers” over concrete action. I was so stunned by the deliberate ignorance that, instead of choosing a persuasive analogy (it’s like refusing to get treatment for cancer when 97 doctors say you have cancer and three say you don’t), I pointed out that more people deny the Holocaust than scientists deny human-caused climate change.

The staff did not appreciate being lumped in with Holocaust deniers. I did not appreciate them denying reality and risking the only planet we have.

Inhofe once cited Genesis to bolster his denial of reality: “God’s still up there. The arrogance of people to think

that we, human beings, would be able to change what he is doing in the climate is to me outrageous.” He also stupidly tried to disprove climate change by bringing a snowball to the floor of the Senate. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, who’s been a good friend to the secular community, utterly destroyed Inhofe’s idiocy.

It’s not just that more zealous believers deny climate change; their religious blinders also prevent them from viewing reality. Those following literalist strains of religion are particularly primed to reject clear facts, such as evolution, the fact that virgins don’t give birth, and that human beings don’t resurrect themselves. Many believers are perfectly willing to reject claims without evidence — or even in spite of the evidence.

Religion’s view of the afterlife also hinders our collective ability to tackle climate change. The only afterlife we ought to care about is leaving our descendants and our planet a secure and pleasant future, as FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor has pointed out. Systems that deny facts and reality must not be used to dictate public policy.

We get one shot at life and we get it on this one planet. Carl Sagan famously wrote in *Pale Blue Dot*, “The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.”

By ignoring our role in climate change we are not just ignoring reality, we are kneeling before and bowing our heads to the same willful ignorance that has driven religion from one generation to the next. And I, for one, refuse to bend my knee to any ignorance — be it rooted in religion or elsewhere.

Andrew L. Seidel is the director of strategic response for FFRF.

Is American religion exceptional? Maybe, maybe not

By Yonat Shimron

This article first appeared on the Religion News Service site on Nov. 20. It is reprinted with permission.

America is more religious than Europe, almost everyone agrees. Two-thirds of U.S. Christians pray daily, compared with a median of just 18 percent of Christians across 15 countries in Europe, to cite just one recent survey.



Yonat Shimron

But there is disagreement brewing among sociologists over whether the intense religious devotion that has long characterized a segment of the United States is impervious to anti-religious trends in Europe, where all the markers of faith have dramatically slipped over the past few decades.

In dueling articles posted to the journal Sociological Science, two groups of scholars have sized up decades’ worth of survey data generated by the massive General Social Survey stretching back to 1973 — and arrived at different conclusions.

At the heart of the throwdown dividing sociology of religion circles is the question: Is American religion

exceptional? Exceptionalism is the deep-seated conviction that the U.S. marches to a different drummer. While some argue this distinctiveness is proof it has been blessed by God, most scholars who use the term mean that the United States is simply different.

In an article published in Sociological Science on Nov. 15, David Voas and Mark Chaves, of University College London and Duke University, respectively, maintain that U.S. religious devotion may be higher than in other Western countries but it too is slowly declining and essentially no different from other developed nations in its growing secularization.

On the other side are two graduate students, one at Harvard and the other at Indiana University, who argue the most devout Americans have remained so and the decline is coming from those with moderate religious habits.

“There’s a short uptick during Ronald Reagan’s presidency, but other than that, it’s been steady from the 1970s to today,” said Landon Schnabel, a Ph.D. candidate at Indiana.

Voas and Chaves counter that even the intensely religious segment of the American population is shrinking. Just as Europe has become more secular, so too has America, just at a slower rate.

“The fact of the matter is, even on

the intense religious category the U.S. is declining, if very slowly,” said Chaves, a professor of sociology and religious studies at Duke University.

Both teams examined five indicators of intense religion: strong religious affiliation, more than weekly attendance at religious services, biblical literalism, affiliation with an evangelical religious group and praying multiple times per day.

Voas and Chaves argue that between 1973 and today there’s been a significant drop in religious Americans’ responses in three key indicators: affiliation, the number of religious services people attend each week and their belief that the Bible is the literal word of God.

For example, only 6.6 percent of Americans attended church more than once a week between 2012 and 2016, a drop from 8 percent in 1973.

Asked if “the bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word,” 31 percent said “yes” between 2010 and 2016, a drop from 35 percent between 1984 and 1990.

The reason for the overall drop? It’s generational, argue Voas and Chaves.

“Each successive birth cohort is less intensely religious than the one before,” they wrote, “and there is little sign of people becoming more intensely religious with age or over time.”

Yonat Shimron is a Religion News Service national reporter and senior editor.



Photo courtesy of Creative Commons

People worship at Marble Collegiate Church in New York.

LETTERBOX

America’s founding was secular, not sectarian

Factual, historical and lawful articles on America’s secular founding, secular Constitution and secular government provoke irrational over-reactions from regressive religionists falsely claiming them to be “anti-religion.” Nothing could be further from the truth.

Secular refers to matters that are not religious, not “anti-religion.” Sectarian refers to matters that are religious. For example, one of 2,000 vastly different versions of American Christianity or 10,000 distinct world religions.

America’s lawful founding documents and their recorded history clearly establish our nation was created as a secular republic and not a sectarian republic.

The Constitution’s First Amendment that guarantees belief freedom for every American is neither pro-religion nor anti-religion, but religion-neutral. Its historic trinity of religious liberty clauses provides freedom from religion, freedom of religion and freedom for religious speech.

We were the first nation in history to provide individual belief freedom in our founding and governing Constitution. We also provided a genesis for the historic Universal Declaration of Human Rights that declares “. . . everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion,” adopted by the United Nations in 1948.

American freedom of any religion or no religion freely flourishes. It is a precious liberty for which every patriotic American can be proud. And that is not anti-religion.

John Compere
Texas

Let’s literally put God on the ballot in 2020

Here is an idea to ensure that the Religious Right will go down in defeat in the 2020 presidential election: Put “God” on the ballot as the Republican presidential candidate. Every Republican ballot will be cast for that, and since there is no such thing, the election will be won by the most capable candidate.

Robert Laub
Missouri

Library reopens, as does the eye of reason

The public library in my neighborhood (Belmont Hills) recently reopened after some renovation, which included a new outdoor brick patio on the side of the building. Earlier this year, they gave residents the option to purchase and customize an engraved brick.

Jacqueline and I wanted to choose a thought-provoking “atheistic” quote and decided on one from Ben Franklin. Fast forward to a couple weeks ago at



Legal titans



Photo by Chris Line

Jim McCollum, who was the school boy at the center of the famous 70-year-old Supreme Court case, *McCollum v. Board of Education*, recently visited Freethought Hall to tape an episode of FFRF’s “Free-thought Matters” TV show. Jim met with FFRF’s legal staff and is pictured (center, tartan tie) with them and FFRF’s co-presidents. Next to Jim (right) is his daughter Vashti, name-sake of Jim’s mother, who brought and won the landmark court deci-

sion out of Champaign, Ill., keeping religious indoctrination out of our public schools. The *McCollum* case was the precedent on which is based all subsequent Supreme Court decisions against prayer and devotions in public schools. It was the first case to incorporate, under the 14th Amendment, the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, meaning the clause protection separating religion and government applies to state as well as federal citizens.

the grand opening, and we were happy to find our brick installed right in front of the book drop-off. Not as eye-catching/impactful as one of your great billboards but, we think it’s kinda cool.

Thank you for all the hard work that you do!

Kevin Castellano
Pennsylvania

Hawaii bishop misusing his power over Catholics

The front page of the Hawaii Catholic Herald has Bishop Clarence Silva’s decree against the Our Care, Our Choice Act (i.e., death with dignity act) which will go into effect on Jan. 1, 2019. He writes, it’s “contravening the law of God. . . . I must put the goal of eternal life with God as my top priority for the people of this state.”

This is sickening that a man can misuse his power over Catholics and thinks he controls “the people of the state.” He’s denying separation of state and church. Poor delusional man. This not a theocracy but a republic with a Bill of Rights and a Constitution!

I’m sooo glad I’m not a Catholic anymore!!!

Carolyn Golojuch
Hawaii

Religion is all around, even in Pennsylvania

I thought Pennsylvania was way above the Bible Belt. But no. There are so many roadway signs proclaiming “Truth” and Jesus’ love. I found this new one particularly upsetting: Jesus with a hole in his hand beckoning us on. Another one I found to be funny was about the denial of evolution. It has a red bar line striking out the symbol for evolution, the one that shows four bodies, from monkey to man. Even in Ohio, there are the Ten Commandments lining I-71 north of Cincinnati. They have taken to using lawyers’ terms now — Beyond reasonable doubt. “Jesus is alive beyond reasonable doubt.” But I doubt, I still doubt. That’s one thing I am sure of is doubt.

The other day, I was having such a nice time shopping, but that all ended when a cashier said, “Have a blessed day.” I replied, “No thanks. I don’t want to be blessed. I don’t want people to feel absolved for not taking on responsibility for wishing me well in the name of their god or religion. ‘Have a great day’ is just fine. Thanks for your custom.”

Let’s be more aware that people’s religion is their own personal business and not to be forced down other people’s throats.

Jonny Benzimra
Ohio

State-church separation fight is a noble cause

I so appreciate all the good work you do to beat back all the ridiculous religious crap going on in our country today.

Your work and your publications all seem relevant and well presented. More than anything, I appreciate the donation of time to this worthy cause. Thank you all!

Bill Cabell
Virginia

Evolution of religion should be on T-shirts

“Polytheism
Monotheism
Atheism
It’s evolution!”

How about printing this on a bumper sticker or T-shirt?

Bob Nilson
New Hampshire

We enjoyed watching ‘Freethought Matters’

My wife and I just watched your new program, “Freethought Matters,” on WPLX-Channel 11 in New York. Annie Laurie and Dan did a great job and guest Larry Decker (executive director of the Secular Coalition for America) did a great job — I think he has a wonderful future. Keep up the good work.

Gary Grub
New Jersey

FFRF offers logical, moral support

Thanks to the Ron Reagan ad on MSNBC, I immediately joined FFRF. I read Freethought Today from cover to cover. I find it enlightening and entertaining. I am encouraged by the Black Collar Crime reports and the vindication that it must surely bring to the victims in some small measure. I can recall verbal abuse from the nuns and the attempted indoctrination by the priests. That brainwashing is so damaging to young minds; the guilt still affects me today to some degree.

Richard Heldmann
Connecticut

FFRF’s ‘Freethought Matters’ mug



A meaningful message and the logo of FFRF’s new TV show. Ivory imprint on tapered burgundy, 8 fl. oz. American-made mug.

\$20 postpaid — Item#MU02

Call 608/256-8900 or order online ffrf.org/shop

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Convention accolades

‘It was positively phenomenal’

I don’t often write notes of praise after attending a big event, but this time I just have to. This weekend’s conference wasn’t just good, wasn’t just great, it was positively phenomenal. Not just one or two, but a whole lineup of great speakers, all of whom were terrific. Not just that, but the whole event was so smooth and well organized. I know a thing or two about what goes on behind the scenes to put on a big event like this (I’ve helped to do so, several times), and I know it’s not easy, but FFRF made it happen flawlessly. My wife and I had previously decided just to attend FFRF conferences when they come to the West Coast, but after this weekend, she’s pushing to go to all of them from now on, just because this one really was that good. Please make sure to thank everybody who had anything to do with putting this together, because everybody did a fantastic job!!!

Brian Madsen
California

‘Wonderful’

Thanks so much for all your efforts to host the San Francisco convention. The speakers and entertainment were wonderful.

Dan Bell
California

‘All inspiring’

My wife Francy and I enjoyed the convention in San Francisco. The speakers were all inspiring, especially John de Lancie, Salman Rushdie and Cecile Richards.

I mentioned to a friend about the “clean money” drawing and he offered to donate a bill for next year’s event. This bill is more than 100 years old and includes a quirky note to counterfeiters on the back side. It is a

true piece of numismatic history. We look forward to attending future conventions.

Patrick McGinnis
California

‘Brings tears to my eyes’

I just attended the convention on Saturday afternoon, and the ex-Muslim speakers from around the world blew me away. And then to have Annie Laurie Gaylor and Cecile Richards in conversation. Thank you so much. It actually brings tears to my eyes, thinking about it.

Joy Hahn
California

‘Community for freethinkers’

I would like to join Debra Deanne Olson in thanking you for producing such a wonderful conference. I agree with Debra that we need to forward the secular revolution.

I think the most important thing FFRF does is provide a community for freethinkers. You give us a home base for like-minded people.

Dr. Craig Wilkinson
Utah

‘Very satisfying’

I just want to thank all of you for a very satisfying experience. My first FFRF convention lived up to all my expectations. Thank you to Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, as well as the many others who made this possible. And special thanks for the terrific speakers. My son David accompanied me, and he also enjoyed the experience. I think before I become immortal, I’ll be able to completely convert him.

Marjorie Holden
California

CRANKMAIL

We present to you, unedited and unfiltered, the latest correspondence from those who don’t appear to become FFRF members any time soon.

Cowards!: Just heard on the radio that you are “taking on” an elementary school for posting in the lunchroom “Give us this day our daily bread.” IF THIS IS INDEED TRUE, how cowardly and pathetic you all truly are! Taking on a grade school full of innocent children who seek our wonderful Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ...what cowards and despicable creatures you all truly are. — *Philip Merhalski*

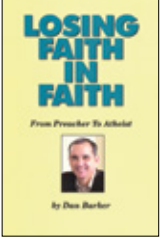
Atheists: Heard that there are atheists in your group, right? People who deny God’s existence wonder how they were made like some ameba or paramecium or just a body making itself and giving itself life. Big bang? There’s going to be one soon! Shocking! Why is every planet in its perfect order in rotations? Why is every planet in the exact place

for life to exist? Why is every planet round and not square or oval? Huh! Some of your atheists like Vivien Castillo denies her very existence and is a total retard with an IQ which must be below 40. What can one expect when they worship a pagan god like Muhammed the murderer of thousands. Why worship him when you don’t believe in God. Every atheist believes in God. They just don’t desire to do the will of God which is peace, love, mercy, forgiveness, the govt. of the eternal one. — *Billy Thompson*

Stop dividing us!: Please take your religious hate somewhere else. You are trying to divide this country and the residents of Honesdale, Pa want to be left alone. It is sickening what you people do to small towns across the United States. Are you funded by George Soros and Hillary Clinton? Why don’t you come to my house and try and take my cross down. You are nothing but liberal trash. — *Michael Seaman*

Christianity: Christianity IS freedom from religion!! Christianity is not a religion, it is a reality!! — *Paul Lauricella*

Losing Faith in Faith:
From Preacher to Atheist



By Dan Barker

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

Published by FFRF

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

Woe to the Women:
The Bible Tells Me So



By Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

Published by FFRF

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

Keeping us safe from cat-astrophe!



I am a proud FFRF member and love reading Freethought Today every month. And once I’m finished, my cat, Pinky, loves sprawling out and taking a nap on the paper! We both sleep peacefully knowing everyone at FFRF is working hard to keep religion out of our democracy.

Katelyn and Pinky Shearer
Virginia

‘The best ever’

I wanted to praise this year’s convention. They’ve all been wonderful, but I think this year’s was the best ever. You continue to outdo yourselves, and I was especially impressed with the lineup of speakers this time and the impact of their presentations — especially Salman Rushdie and the enormous value of your legal team. They are at the very center of what FFRF does, and they are superb! The hotel was comfortable, beautiful and centrally located for the enjoyment of San Francisco. I came two days early to do just that.

Sherry Chapin
New York

‘Inspired me’

The wonderful convention in San Francisco has inspired me to become a Life Member.

David Tucker
California

Correction

In the October issue, Kathleen Yagelo’s name was misspelled in the Letterbox section. FFRF offers its apologies to Kathleen.

Read the constitution: Other than read the constitution you can’t! The constitution says “freedom of religion”, not freedom from religion! You may not think so, but you are as much involved in religion as the Staunchest Catholic, Baptist of Muslim. With little common sence you should realize that Atheism is as much a religion as any of these. — *Richard Vought*

Stop bullying!: No one likes a bully. I do not do well with bullies. Bullies never remain on their feet when they are around me. I will not be bullied by you. Stop it! — *Don Vanderhoof*

Repeat now!: you out to be ashamed of yourselves- trying to take God, the Almighty one who formed you in your mother’s womb, out of everything. some day you will be reprimanded and will rot in hell. — *Dave Ribort*

You’re dumb: Obviously you have never actually read the U.S. Constitution or you would know that the “separation of church and state” was set up to protect the CHURCH from undue influence by the STATE!!! Not the other way around as you depict it. Maybe you are referring to another Constitution rather than the U.S. Constitution.... because ours quite clearly states the purpose of “separation of Church and State”....not to mention that our Constitution was drafted using Christian Biblical principles as their guideline. Please crawl back into whatever hole you crawled out of. — *Jeff Bookout*

Explain: All freedoms should be outlawed and banned should people who practice them should they go to jail as I believe in the literal interpretation of no religion ie if people practice religion in home they go to prison explain — *Kelly Lee*

You are Satanists: Regarding your attack on the character of Sheriff Billy Rowles of Newton County Texas, I am of the opinion that you are a bunch of Godless bastards that want to go around

sticking their noses in other peoples’ business for the greater glory of Satan. I have known Billy for many, many years, and you cannot find a better man anywhere. I am nowhere as good as he is, so I tell you from my heart, go fuck yourselves and leave us the fuck alone, you atheistic assholes. God Bless You. — *James Terrell Jr.*

Stay away!: Your organization is a joke. STAY THE F*** OUT OF OUR BUSINESS IN CHEROKEE. — *Tim Jones*

It’s CHRISTmas: We don’t appreciate you targeting our small town in Dover, Ohio over our CHRISTmas displays! We have our freedom of speech and display. If you don’t like CHRISTmas, fine, don’t display anything! Keep your noses in Wisconsin and OUT of Ohio! — *Jed Lombard*

Read this: I come from Europe. I watched Atheists like you people destroy Christianity only to later submit to the actual societal oppression and proselytizing that Islam forces onto public life. — *Rambo Baggins*

You bigots!: You haven’t won shit....smh Common anti-religion bigots — *Natasha Tomlinson*

Losers: No body watched this retarded pathetic out cry about religion, any more. — *Tshaaj Thomas*

Fools: I love watching Atheists squirm when confronted with the truth reality science. That is why I love the Ark encounter... #atheists have a hard time explaining the reality in regards to geology. They can’t explain adequately coal formations and why there are corals and shells fossil layers below and above these Carboniferous layers... they deny the flood of Noah’s Day In spite of the massive amounts geological evidence that supports a global flood. I have to laugh when I hear the name called the ‘thinking Atheists’ which is obviously an oxymoron. The fool says in his heart there is no God! — *Kurt Sensabaugh*

BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Jody Sambrick, 58, W. Lampeter Township, PA: 4 counts of dissemination or possession of child pornography and 2 counts of criminal use of a communication facility. Multiple devices were seized in a search at his home. Sambrick is pastor at Hopeland United Methodist Church in Lititz. *Source: Penn Live, 10-24-18*

Paxton D. Singer, 24, Sugar Grove, IL: Sexual exploitation of a child and disorderly conduct. Singer, youth director pastor at Harvest Bible Chapel, “knowingly enticed a person under 17 years of age to remove their clothing for the purpose of sexual arousal or gratification of the defendant or the child” between October 2016 and August 2017, a press release said, adding that there was no known physical contact. *Source: Daily Herald, 10-23-18*

Hernan Toro, 90, San Jose, CA: 6 counts of child molestation. Toro is one of 15 priests named recently by the Diocese of San Jose as being credibly accused of abusing children. He was convicted in 1983 and registered as a sex offender but went on to serve several parishes before retiring in 1990.

“Bishop McGrath is saddened and infuriated that additional innocent children are the recent victims of horrific acts by Hernan Toro,” the diocese said in a statement. Spokeswoman Liz Sullivan said such cases were handled differently in the past. “We now know, based on the current psychological best practices, that returning these men to ministry was a misguided attempt at rehabilitation.” *Source: Mercury News, 10-20-18*

Gary J. Ray, 56, Arlington, WA: 3 counts of aggravated theft by a person in a position of trust. Ray is accused of stealing about \$40,000 in donations for families devastated by a 2014 mudslide that killed 43 people while he was pastor at Oso Community Chapel. At least \$6,000 was also reported missing from Restoration Church Camano, where he worked after leaving Oso. *Source: Daily Herald, 10-17-18*

Abednigo Mongo, 28, Hazyview, S. Africa: Assault and 2 counts of rape. Mongo, pastor of the Prophetic Ministry of the Nations, is accused of assaults in August on a 15-year-old girl who was a church member. He allegedly told her on social media to come to the church so they could pray together. *Source: IOL News, 10-17-18*

Rigoberto Gamez, 52, Chicago: Misdemeanor battery and 2 counts of criminal sexual abuse involving force. Gamez, pastor at Our Lady of Tepeyac Parish and liaison for Hispanic charismatic renewal for the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, is charged with assaults on women ages 17, 18 and 27 starting in 2016. *Source: WLS, 10-12-18*

Betty Lou Wheaton, 79, Belpre, OH: Grand theft. Wheaton, treasurer at Bethel Lighthouse Baptist Church for the past 41 years, is accused of stealing \$515,000 from the church. Prosecutor Amy Graham said she doesn’t know how long Wheaton could have been stealing from the church. “[Bank] records only go back seven years. I think she sent a lot to her family and they didn’t know.” *Source: Marietta Times, 10-11-18*

Curtis W. Abbott, 47, Nixa, IL: Unauthorized practice of medicine or surgery and 2 counts of child endangerment. Abbott, who has a ministry called Restore Bible Culture, is accused of illegally circumcising 2 teens in May. Documents filed by Abbott in his recent divorce said his wife decided to end the marriage after his “decision to officially go back into the ministry after having multiple prophetic communications.” *Source: News-Leader, 10-10-18*

Mitchell R. Fields, Montgomery, AL: Rape. Fields, pastor of True Grace Fellowship Community Church, was indicted by a grand jury. The alleged victim, to whom Fields is related, was a teen at the time of the alleged assault. *Source: The Advertiser, 10-4-18*

William Townsend, 28, East Point, GA: Theft by taking and fraud. Townsend, a youth pastor at unidentified churches, is charged with stealing about \$20,000 as a leasing consultant for an apartment complex. Four underage girls have also come forward with allegations of inappropriate touching, sexual text messages and cash in exchange for sexual favors, a court employee said, but charges haven’t been filed in those cases. *Source: WXIA, 10-4-18*

Jonathan L. Jenkins, 57, Riverside, CA: Aggravated sexual assault of a child. Jenkins, a youth pastor at Starlight Baptist Church, allegedly assaulted a 13-year-old congregant in a church bathroom in March.

He was arrested while going into a liquor store in Santa Ana. Jenkins has a “long criminal history,” said police Cpl. Anthony Bertagna, including convictions for robbery, burglary, criminal threats and narcotics violations. *Source: KTLA, 10-3-18*

John Praveen, aka John Praveen Kumar Itukulapat, 38, Rapid City, SD: 2 counts of sexual contact with a child under 16. Praveen, a native of India serving as a Catholic priest at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, is accused of sexual contact with a 13-year-old on Sept. 3 and



Sept. 28. *Source: Rapid City Journal, 10-3-18*

Andrzej Skrzypiec, 63, Salt Lake City: Patronizing a prostitute. Skrzypiec, pastor at St. Ambrose Catholic Parish and chaplain at J.E. Cosgriff Memorial Catholic School, allegedly offered an undercover officer \$30 for oral sex in August and arranged to meet her at a nearby hotel. He denied he was looking for sex and told police he was there to get food from a taco stand. *Source: Salt Lake Tribune, 10-1-18*

Scott Patschke, 53, Wausau, WI: Child enticement. Patschke, pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church, allegedly shared a photo of his genitals with members of a citizens group posing as a 15-year-old boy and arranged to meet at a Walmart in Rib Mountain, where he suggested they could “go into the bathroom and see what happened.” Group members met Patschke and recorded the interaction, then shared it with police, who discouraged the group’s actions but charged Patschke. *Source: WSAW, 9-28-18*

Allen Price, 58, Quarryville, PA: Over 100 counts of child abuse, assault and sex offense. Charges stem from Price’s time as a volunteer at Grace Bible Chapel in Rising Sun, MD, from 1987 to 2001. He’s accused of molesting 5 girls ages 11 to 16 who attended youth group meetings. *Source: WBOC, 9-28-18*

John E. Harris, 41, Prattville, AL: Sexual assault, enticing a child for immoral purposes and facilitating the travel of a child for an unlawful sex act. Harris was a student pastor at Glynwood Baptist Church before resigning in September 2017. The alleged victim is a teen boy. *Source: The Advertiser, 9-27-18*

Ryan Mutchler, 30, Beaverton, OR: Online sexual corruption of a child and luring a minor. Mutchler, youth pastor at Mountain Park Church in Lake Oswego, allegedly met a 14-year-old girl at

Student pastor John Harris

church camp in June and started exchanging text messages, which were seen by her parents. An undercover officer later used her phone to text with Mutchler, who allegedly expressed a desire to have sex with her. *Source: Oregonian, 9-24-18*

Pleaded / Convicted

Timothy L. Reddin, 67, Fayetteville, AR: Pleaded guilty to attempted online enticement of a minor. Reddin, part-time pastor at Turner Street Baptist Church, was charged with messaging an undercover agent in July to have oral sex with someone he thought was a 14-year-old boy. He sent the agent a photo of his penis and said he could “coach” him to perform oral sex.

Reddin also taught classes at Ecclesia College, a Christian school, and was chaplain for the Singing Men of Arkansas choir. He was sentenced to 27 months in prison in 2000 after pleading guilty to possessing child pornography. *Source: KFSM, 10-18-18*

David L. Poulson, 65, Oil City, PA: Pleaded guilty to indecent assault, corruption of minors and endangering the welfare of children. Poulson was charged with multiple assaults on boys as young as 8 while serving as a priest in the Catholic Diocese of Erie. *Source: Daily Record, 10-17-18*

Meally Morris Freeman, 56, Brooklyn Center, MN: Guilty by jury of 2 counts of criminal sexual conduct. Freeman, a Liberian immigrant and pastor of Grace Mountaineer Tabernacle, was found guilty of drugging a female congregant, 28,

and violating her under the guise of performing a religious “deliverance.” *Source: KMSP, 10-3-18*

Otho Schilling, 59, Mount Hermon, LA: Pleaded guilty to theft of government funds. Schilling, while he was pastor at New Beginning Baptist Church in 2005-2016, received over \$200,000 in Social Security benefits he wasn’t entitled to. He’d arranged to have the church pay his personal expenses in lieu of getting a direct salary, concealing his earnings and employment, prosecutors said. *Source: Times-Picayune, 10-3-18*

Hafiz A. Pirzada, 76, Northolt, UK: Guilty by trial of 8 counts of sexual assault with a female under 13 and 2 counts of causing a child to engage in sexual activity. Pirzada, an imam, was accused of molesting sisters between the ages of 9 and 11 in 2007-09 while teaching them about Islam and the Quran. *Source: Newham Recorder, 10-2-18*

Sentenced

Wayland Y. Brown, 76, Baltimore: 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to 9 counts of criminal sexual conduct with a minor in Georgia between 1978-88. Brown, a now-defrocked priest, was accused of assaulting 2 students at St. James Catholic School in Savannah between ages 11 and 13. He was convicted in 2003 and served 5 years in Maryland after pleading guilty to performing sex acts on a teen boy and his younger brother between 1974-77. *Source: Island Packet, 10-24-18*

Anthony Mauro, 45, Beachwood, NJ: 180 days in jail and lifetime probation after pleading guilty to 2 counts of possessing child pornography. When arrested in August 2017, he was a volunteer Youth Team leader for St. Barnabas Catholic Church in Bayville. *Source: nj.com, 10-19-18*

Raphael J. Robinson, 41, N. Aurora, IL: 14 years in prison after pleading guilty to aggravated criminal sexual assault of a minor while in a position of trust and authority and failure to report an address change. Robinson, pastor of Kingdom Church, was required to register as a sex offender for the rest of his life after a 2004 conviction for molesting a 16-year-old girl. He’ll have to serve at least 7 years. *Source: Daily Herald, 10-9-18*

Juan M. Riojas Martínez, Piedras Negras, Mexico: 15 years in prison without parole and unspecified compensation to victims after a 3-judge court convicted him of sexual assault of a minor when Riojas was director of a Catholic seminary and the boy was in his care. Another boy later came forward to allege abuse when he was 15. *Source: Mexico News Daily, 10-5-18*

Felix D. Broussard, 52, Breaux Bridge, LA: 5 years’ hard labor after pleading guilty to possession of pornography involving juveniles. Broussard, pastor at St. Bernard Catholic Church and chancellor of the parish school, was charged in July 2016 with 500 child porn counts. A repair technician discovered the images on Broussard’s personal computer. *Source: KLFY, 10-4-18*

James R. Martin, 68, Hot Springs Village, AR: 5 years in prison and \$137,658 in restitution after pleading guilty to theft of property over \$25,000 while he was secretary at Leonard Street Baptist Church. Pastor Jimmy Holland said the church reached out to Martin several times before his arrest in July 2017 but got no response. *Source: Sentinel-Record, 10-4-18*

Fernando Sayasaya, 53, a Catholic priest extradited from the Philippines, was sentenced to 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of gross sexual imposition involving 2 boys under 15 when he served parishes from 1995-98 in Fargo, ND.

The boys alleged he touched or tried to touch their penises when they visited his apartment. One told police Sayasaya showed pornographic movies and served him alcohol. *Source: Fargo Forum, 10-1-18*

James F. Talbot, 80, a defrocked Jesuit priest living in a Missouri treatment facility, was sentenced to 10 years in prison with all but 3 suspended after pleading guilty to gross sexual assault and unlawful sexual contact for molesting a boy between the ages of 8 and 9 in 1997-98 in Freeport, ME. He served 6 years in Massachusetts after pleading guilty in 2005 to sexually assaulting 2 of his students at Boston College High School in the 1970s.

The Maine victim, now 30, told the court Talbot stole his childhood. “What was supposed to be a man from God . . . turned out to be a disgusting animal.” Talbot had married his parents. “I hope you rot in hell and I hope you die in jail,” the boy’s father said at sentencing. “How can the Catholic Church allow this stuff to go on?” *Source: WGME, 9-24-18*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

The **Vatican Holy See** is being sued in San Francisco for alleged failure to stop sexual abuse of children. Kathy Stonebraker alleged she was molested by **Stephen Kiesle**, pastor at St. Joseph Parish in Pinole, CA, in the early 1970s when she was about 11. Once he took her into the confessional and pushed himself against her with his pants down, the suit alleged.

Plaintiff Jim Keenan, St. Paul, MN, alleged he was abused as a child by an **unidentified priest** and that he was later offered a settlement by the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. *Source: KTVU, 10-24-18*

Zia Ul-Haq Sheikh, former imam of the Islamic Center of Irving, TX, is accused by plaintiff “Jane Doe” of grooming her for sex starting when she was 13 in 2010 while seeing him for mental health counseling. She alleges he “offered himself as a potential husband” even though he was more than twice her age and already married.

After “sexting on a daily basis” and engaging in other sexual behavior online, Sheikh had intercourse with her at a Motel 6 in Grapevine in December 2016 after she turned 18, the suit claims. *Source: Star-Telegram, 10-19-18*

The **Catholic Conference of Illinois** and all 6 state dioceses are being sued by 3 men and a woman alleging sexual abuse by priests decades ago. The suit filed by attorney Jeff Anderson seeks to compel dioceses to provide names of all priests accused of child molestation. *Source: AP, 10-18-19*

Catholic dioceses in Rockville Centre, NY, and St. Petersburg, FL, and their respective current bishops **John Barres** and **Gregory Parkes** are defendants in a suit alleging deceased priest **Robert Huneke** molested Mark Cattell, then age 9, in Tampa in 1981 after Huneke was transferred there from New York. The abuse occurred even though John Salvesson repeatedly warned church officials in writing that Huneke had abused him for years starting in 1969 while he was pastor at St. Dominic Catholic Church in Oyster Bay, according to the suit and Salvesson. *Source: Newsday, 10-17-18*

Trinity Life Baptist Church in Garland, TX, failed to report sexual abuse by youth pastor **Dalton Lanphier**, a suit filed by Julia Davis, mother of an alleged 2014 victim, asserts. Lanphier is serving 30 years for multiple felony convictions involving at least 5 boys. *Source: Morning News, 10-16-18*

The **Vatican Holy See** is being sued by Manny Vega, 52, Oxnard, CA, who seeks the release of the names of all sexual offenders within the church worldwide. The suit alleges **Fidencio Silva-Flores**, pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, abused Vega between 1979-84.

Silva-Flores was charged with 25 counts of molestation in 2003 but the case was dismissed because of the amount of time that had passed. Although Vega reached a settlement with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 2007, that doesn’t release the Vatican from responsibility, the lawsuit says. *Source: AP, 10-3-18*

The **California Catholic Conference**, all 12 **California dioceses** and the **Archdiocese of Chicago** are being sued by Thomas Emens, Camarillo, CA, who alleges he was molested for 2 years starting in 1978 when he was 10 years old by Msgr. **Thomas J. Mohan**. The priest, now deceased, came to Anaheim in the early 1970s from the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Attorney Jeff Anderson said the suit’s goal is “to abate the continuing nuisance” of abuse by ordering each diocese to name all accused priests, detail their history of alleged assault and identify their last known addresses. *Source: AP, 10-2-18*

James Grear, **Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish** and the **Catholic Diocese of Lafayette, IN**, are defendants in a suit filed by “John Doe 1,” who alleged Grear molested him in 1982 at a youth rally. Grear was ordained in 1970 and left the ministry in 2007.

Doe alleges he told then-Bishop **Raymond Gallagher** during confession at a different parish that he was molested and that Gallagher “instructed John Doe to forget about the abuse, to ask God to forgive him, and not to disclose the abuse to anyone else.” Gallagher resigned as bishop in 1982 and died in 1991. *Source: Journal & Courier, 9-25-18*

The **Diocese of Greensburg, PA**, is being sued by “John Doe,” who alleges sexual abuse in the 1970s by Catholic priest **Joseph Tamilowski**, who died in 1994. Doe alleges the diocese knew about abuse accusations against Tamilowski at least a decade before he met Doe when he was 13 or 14 and was an altar boy at St. Hyacinth Parish in Monessen. *Source: WPXI, 10-16-18*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The Court of Appeals ordered the Catholic **Archdiocese of Santiago, Chile**, to pay 3 victims of predator priest **Fernando Karadima** 450 million pesos (\$663,000). James Hamilton, Juan Carlos Cruz and José Andrés Murillo accused Archbishop Emeritus **Francisco Errázuriz** and Archbishop **Ricardo Ezzati** of covering up Karadima’s abuses.

Pope Francis defrocked Karadima, 88, in September for serially molesting minors while he was pastor at a Santiago parish. *Source: Santiago Times, 10-21-18*

Legal Developments

A witness in the case of Indian Catholic Bishop **Franco Mulakkal**, 54, accused of raping a nun 13 times between 2014-16, died several weeks after testifying at pretrial hearings. The death of Kuriakose Kattuthara, 62, also a Catholic priest, is being investigated. Mulakkal is free on bail. *Source: CNN, 10-22-18*

Arthur J. Perrault, 80, had his bail motion denied by a federal judge. Perrault, a Catholic priest who fled New Mexico in 1992 and was arrested in Morocco in 2017, is charged with aggravated sexual abuse and abusive sexual contact for alleged assaults decades ago at Kirtland Air Force Base and Santa Fe National Cemetery while he served a Catholic parish. *Source: AP, 10-17-18*

Kenneth Kauchek, a Michigan Catholic priest ordained in 1976, had his libel and defamation claims filed in 2017 dismissed against 2 newspapers and the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. Kauchek claimed SNAP, the Detroit Free Press and the Macomb Daily wrongly reported he had molested a 16-year-old girl in 1976.

The newspapers based their stories in part on a 2016 Archdiocese of Detroit press release that said the sexual misconduct allegation made in 2009 had been “deemed substantive.” The court ruled that a libel plaintiff has to establish a statement is false and that a defendant has no burden to prove it’s true. *Source: Cincinnati Enquirer, 10-16-18*

The Catholic **Diocese of Winona-Rochester, MN**, may not be off the hook after all after the state Court of Appeals overturned a district court judge’s ruling there wasn’t enough evidence that the diocese knew priest **Richard Hatch** was dangerous. The plaintiff’s suit alleges he was about 14 when Hatch, now deceased, molested him at St. Mary’s Parish School in Winona in 1962.

A 1961 letter from Bishop **Edward Fitzgerald** chastised Hatch for taking 2 teens with him on a Florida vacation. The appeals court affirmed the judge’s decision to dismiss claims against the parish due to lack of evidence it had access to the bishop’s letter or knew about Hatch’s alleged misconduct. *Source: Winona Post, 10-8-18*

Florida Catholic clergy who may have sexually abused victims are the subject of an investigation launched by state Attorney General Pam Bondi, who said more than 15 persons have contacted her office after announcement of the probe. A confidential tip site — myfloridalegal.com/priestabuse — has been established.

“As far as how widespread this is, frankly we have no idea right now,” Bondi said. “We love the Catholic Church, we love youth organizations and we love schools. But abuse is abuse.” *Source: WUWF, 10-8-18*

The **Archdiocese of Detroit** and **Michigan Catholic dioceses** in Gaylord, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Lansing, Marquette and Saginaw were served search warrants from state Attorney General Bill Schuette as part of a probe into clergy sex abuse. The AG’s website said the investigation will be “independent, thorough, transparent and prompt” and will “find out who knew what, and when.” *Source: CNN, 10-4-18*

The **Society of Christ Fathers** in Poland was ordered by an appeals court to pay 1 million zlotys (\$270,000) to a woman who alleged she was abducted and sexually abused when she was 13 by a Catholic priest identified only as **Roman B.**, 42. He was arrested in 2008 and convicted of pedophilia. *Source: AP, 10-2-18*

Allegations

Basil J. Hutsko, pastor at St. Michael Byzantine Catholic Church in Merrillville, IN, was not beaten at the church as he claimed, said a statement from the Eparchy of Parma, OH. The eparchy “has recently verified with a member of Father Basil Hutsko’s immediate family that the incident Father Basil Hutsko reported on Aug. 20, 2018, did not occur,” the statement said. Police had called in the FBI to investigate it as a hate crime.

Hutsko has also been placed on leave in response to a credible accusation of sexual misconduct involving a minor that allegedly occurred 35 years ago, the statement said.

Source: WGN, 10-24-18

The Catholic **Diocese of San Jose, CA**, released a list of **15 priests** “credibly accused” of sexually abusing children from 1961-2006. Five are still alive. The list includes their current whereabouts. The diocese said more names could be added as certain criteria are met.

Joey Piscitelli of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests provided the names of **6 more priests** whose names do not appear on the diocese’s list. He suspects there are others yet to be named who may still be working in ministry. “It sounds way short,” Piscitelli said.

Several days later, Minnesota plaintiffs’ attorney Jeff Anderson released a list identifying **212 priests** in the Dioceses of San Jose, Oakland and San Francisco as being accused of sexual misconduct involving minors. Anderson called the diocese’s San Jose list “deficient.” *Source: Marin Independent Journal, 10-23-18*

William MacCurtain, 84, Bournemouth, UK, a Jesuit priest accused of molesting a 13-year-old boy at a homeless shelter in 1989 in South Africa, should be extradited, William Segodisho said at a Johannesburg press conference. Segodisho detailed sex acts MacCurtain allegedly had him perform in exchange for clothing, meals and schooling.

A statement by the British Province of the Society of Jesus said Segodisho had received a sincere apology and an ex-gratia payment (made out of a moral rather than legal obligation). *Source: BBC, 10-10-18*

The Catholic **Diocese of San Bernardino, CA**, released a list of **34 priests** accused of sexually abusing children since 1978, when the diocese was formed. Six were ultimately convicted. Fourteen of the 34 are dead, 14 are listed as having been permanently banned by the diocese and 5 as having been “removed from the priesthood.” *Source: San Bernardino Sun, 10-8-18*

Sogyal Rinpoche, 71, a Buddhist teacher whose *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* has sold more than 3 million copies, is accused by ex-devotees of sexual, physical and emotional abuse and of using donations to fund a lavish lifestyle. His organization includes 130 centers in 30 nations.

Former followers said Rinpoche surrounded himself with young women he called “dakinis” (angels), whose duties included wiping his backside. A woman in her 40s alleged “Sogyal and the girls thought everything that went into him and came

for alleged ethical violations.

Fink’s attorney, Andrew Graham, said Fink wants Oheb Shalom to honor its contracted financial obligations and to recognize how its public comments have damaged his reputation. *Source: Baltimore Sun, 10-21-18*

John Schouten resigned as pastor of VGF Church (formerly Vineyard Grace Fellowship) in Heath, OH, because of a “sexual sin” committed over 30 years ago before he was a minister, said a statement by church elders. It called Schouten’s actions “wrong, evil and illegal.” *Source: Newark Advocate, 10-18-18*

Bill Coates, 63, resigned as pastor of First Baptist Church in Gainesville, GA, due to sexual misconduct with a female former church staff member, said an email to the congregation. It allegedly occurred in 2005 or 2006, said executive pastor Kent Murphey, claiming it was neither a criminal nor a civil offense. *Source: Gainesville Times, 10-15-18*

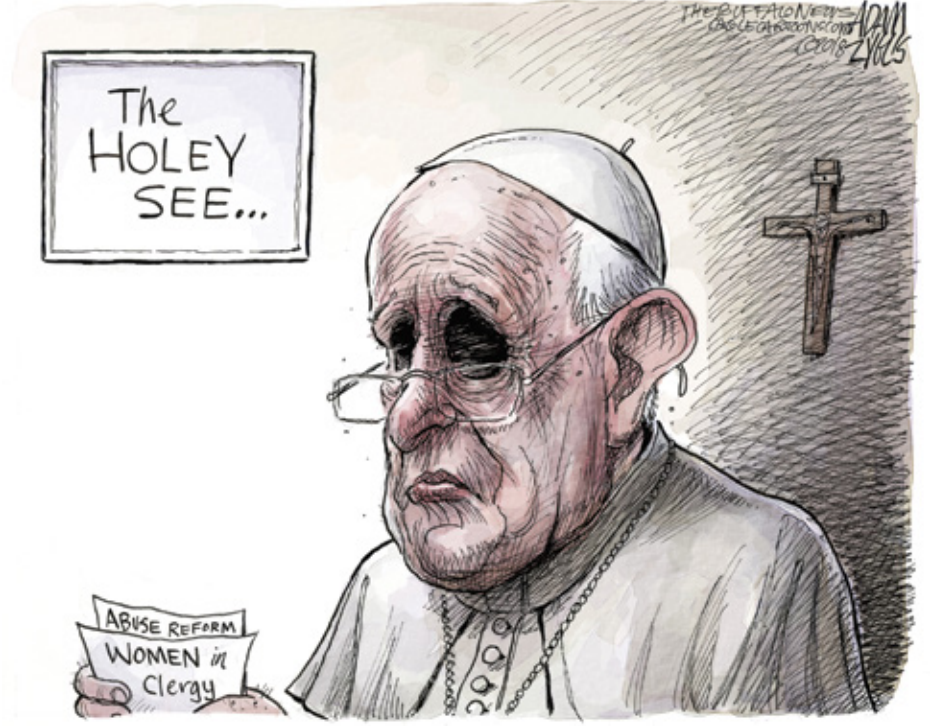
Nelson Beaver, Lexington, OH, was placed on leave as pastor of 2 Diocese of Toledo Catholic parishes due to an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor over 25 years ago when he served Sacred Heart Parish in Montpelier, announced Bishop Daniel Thomas. Beaver was ordained into the Lutheran ministry in 1969 but 3 years later became a Catholic. *Source: WKYC, 10-15-18*

Joseph Reschick, 67, Greenfield, PA, was placed on leave as pastor at St. Rosalia’s Catholic Church due to an allegation of abuse of a minor from nearly 3 decades ago. *Source: KDKA, 10-15-18*

Jason Wasserman, 53, resigned as president of Temple Beth Hillel in S. Windsor, CT, after it was revealed he pleaded guilty and received probation in 2008 for his attempt to commit enticing a minor by computer and attempt to commit risk of injury to a minor. **Jeffrey Glickman**, 58, rabbi at Beth Hillel for 24 years, was aware of Wasserman’s sex offender registration but chose to keep it from the congregation. He has resigned from the town council and as a fire department chaplain.

Wasserman, now 53, had been caught in a sting after he went to Glastonbury to engage in sexual activity with a person he thought was a 13-year-old girl but was a detective. *Source: The Forward, 10-14-18*

Archbishop Emeritus **Francisco José Cox Huneeus** and Bishop Emeritus **Marco Antonio Órdenes Fernández**, retired Chilean clerics,



out of him was holy. So the girls wiped his ass.”

In a report commissioned by the organization, a student told of his “abject humiliation” when Rinpoche grabbed his testicles in front of a group. Rinpoche stepped down in 2017 as spiritual leader after students went public with allegations. *Source: The Sun, 9-22-18*

Removed / Resigned

James W. Clark, Uniontown, PA, put on leave by the Catholic Diocese of Greensburg in June, will not be returning to active ministry. The diocese announced that an allegation about an incident before Clark was ordained in 1984 “has been found to be both credible and substantiated.” At the time he was working as a janitor at St. James Parish in Apollo. *Source: Post-Gazette, 10-21-18*

The termination of **Steven M. Fink** as rabbi by trustees at Temple Oheb Shalom in Baltimore was upheld by a 515 to 91 vote of congregants. Fink, temple rabbi since 1999, denied unspecified allegations of misconduct and ethical violations that arose in May, the same month the Central Conference of American Rabbis suspended him

himself as a priest” due to “credible and substantiated” allegations of sexual misconduct, said a notice from the Archdiocese of New York. The statement added that the Holy See will decide on an appropriate penalty. “However, it is certain that Msgr. Boyle will never serve as a priest again.” *Source: silive.com, 10-9-18*

Patrick Doyle, Indianapolis, was suspended as pastor at Nativity Catholic Parish, said a statement from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis: “The single allegation from decades ago involved a vulnerable female adult, age 18, who was an adolescent when at least the emotional aspects of the relationship began.” *Source: WTHR, 10-8-18*

Robert Gerl, a Michigan Catholic priest, had his priestly permissions removed due to a “credible allegation of sexual assault of an adult male” which occurred decades ago, said a statement from the Diocese of Lansing. *Source: State Journal, 10-8-18*

John J. Lynch, Woodbourne, NY, was placed on leave as pastor at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church after a complaint was filed with the New York Archdiocese for “improper conduct with a minor” about 30 years ago. *Source: Sullivan County Democrat, 10-4-18*

Mark Cyza, Nebraska City, NE, chief administrative officer of Lourdes Central Catholic School and pastor of St. Benedict Parish, was placed on leave due to inappropriate conduct with a woman, said a statement by Bishop James Conley. “Father Cyza has repented of his failings,” the statement said. **Four priests** have been removed by the diocese since August. *Source: Journal Star, 10-3-18*

Louis S. Dolinic, 77, Depew, NY, was the **15th priest** placed on administrative leave by the Buffalo Catholic Diocese since March. He retired in 2010 from Our Lady of Czestochowa Parish. No details were given about the alleged abuse. *Source: Buffalo News, 10-3-18*

Thomas Kreiser, Bronxville, NY, was removed as pastor at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church due to an allegation of inappropriate behavior with a minor. Kreiser pleaded guilty in 2011 to stealing about \$25,000 from St. Gregory Barbarigo Church and was sentenced to 5 years’ probation. *Source: NBC New York, 10-2-18*

William Breslawski, pastor at St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Rocky Point, NY, has “agreed to step away from the ministry” while the Diocese of Rockville Centre investigates allegations of sexual abuse involving a teen in 1980 and 2 adults in 1984. The Nassau and Suffolk County district attorney’s offices have been notified about the complaints, first lodged in 2002 and recently renewed. *Source: WLNY, 10-1-18*

Gerald Baker, a Kentucky Catholic priest on temporary suspension since 2016, was permanently suspended by the Diocese of Owensboro. Three juveniles have accused him of abuse. A State Police spokesman said investigators have determined criminal charges won’t be filed. *Source: Courier Journal, 10-1-18*

Francis Aning Amoah, a Catholic priest serving since July at Sacred Heart Parish in Chariton, IA, will return to his home diocese in Ghana. The Diocese of Des Moines suspended Amoah in August due to a “serious violation of boundary issues” involving allegedly unwanted advances toward an adult woman. *Source: KCCI, 9-27-18*

Andy Dwyer, pastor of St. Vincent de Paul and St. Theresa’s parishes in Windsor, Ontario, has been removed from his duties while the Catholic Diocese of London investigates allegations of inappropriate conduct from “many years ago,” a statement said. *Source: Catholic Register, 9-27-18*

Gerald Moran, Danville, CA, was put on leave as pastor of St. Isidore Parish by Diocese of Oakland Bishop Michael Barber after he learned Moran let a priest who was removed from ministry over a child abuse accusation celebrate Mass and sacraments at St. Isidore.

“Father **Patrick Foley** was removed from priestly ministry due to inappropriate behavior with children,” Barber said in a letter to parishioners. Although Foley was removed by the Diocese of San Diego in 2015, he continues to represent himself as a priest and maintains a website that describes himself as an “itinerant papist preacher” based in Sacramento. *Source: Mercury News, 9-25-18*

Other

Pierre-Yves Fumery, 38, Gien, France, hanged himself in the Catholic church where he served after being questioned but not charged by police about allegations of sexual assault of a child under 15. In a similar incident in September involving a Rouen Catholic priest, **Jean-Baptiste Sebe**, also 38, hanged himself in his church. A woman had alleged he assaulted her adult daughter but at the time of his death no formal complaint had been made. *Source: BBC, 10-22-18*

Louis Brouillard, 97, a retired Catholic priest accused in more than 130 lawsuits of molesting children on Guam, died in Minnesota. Brouillard, a Minnesota native, was ordained on Guam in 1948 and served as a pastor, teacher and Boy Scout leader until 1981. The most recent suit was filed Oct. 4. *Source: Pacific Daily News, 10-11-18*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

IT PAYS TO COMPLAIN

Member helps get bibles removed from convention hotel

Like many other FFRF members who attended the convention in San Francisco, Life Member Steven Lowe contacted the front desk at the Hyatt Regency to request there be no bible in his room. (FFRF always requests that the rooms where members will be staying are bible-free, but that request was not fulfilled completely.)

“I always ask for a ‘religion-free’ room when I make a reservation,” Lowe said. “It usually doesn’t work (because most hotels don’t pre-assign rooms before you check in). But, it puts it in the system. When I find the bibles, I always return them to the front desk and ask to speak to a manager and convey, civilly, a complaint. I send a similar letter to most hotels where I stay and find a bible.”

After getting a “welcome to the hotel” email from the Hyatt’s reservations manager, Lowe sprang into secular action. Below is the (edited for clarity) email chain that helped get the bibles removed from the rooms.

Welcome to the hotel! I just wanted to touch base and see if there was anything I could do to ensure everything is to your satisfaction during your stay.

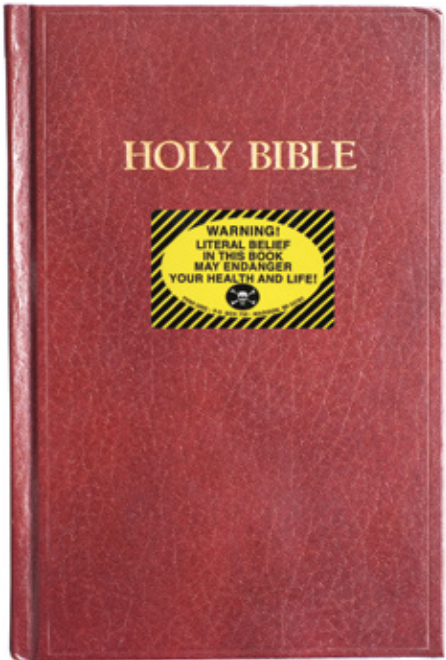
Brad
Reservations Manager

Dear Brad,

Thank you for asking. The hotel is wonderful with great architecture and service, so far. My only problem, the same problem I have at many hotels, is your policy of placing religious materials (a Protestant Christian bible) presumptively in your guest rooms. Why

do you do this? Do you favor or prefer Christians (that’s the way it looks, since you provide only one religion’s text or materials)? Why do you presume all of your guests are Christian? (We aren’t). Why don’t you think this would not be off-putting or even offensive to non-Christians? (It is.) Why do you risk offending ANY client in this way? Are you suggesting that we should all become Christian? Probably not, but it could be implied. I would prefer a religion-free room from any hospitality vendor, including Hyatt. I am asking you to stop doing this. If you must, please consider keeping these books (and others of other religions) at your front desk and make them available upon request by a guest. As a world-class hospitality vendor, you should not be presuming the religion or the religious needs of your guests, or favoring one over others. I am going to return this unwanted book, with its unwelcome implied message, to the Front Desk with a complaint. Please feel free to share my feedback with your general manager, who can, perhaps, decide to change your presumptive pro-Christian (and anti-non-Christian) policy.

Steven Lowe



more enjoyable and more welcoming.

Brad

Thank you for your reply. I encourage and hope that you will modify your policy. It matters not that the bibles are free to you. You are still making the decision to place and replace them in your guest rooms. This action speaks of your decision and position. Make your rooms welcoming to all. Have the courage to be secular and to end this traditional yet biased practice. My only request is that you keep me informed as to your decision to keep or change your policy regarding the placement of religious books in your guest rooms. Thank you.

Steven Lowe

Hi Steve,

I just wanted to let you know that we are removing all the bibles from the rooms in the hotel. We certainly didn’t mean to offend anyone by having them in there, but in the interest of a more universal viewpoint and out of respect for you and your group, we will be taking them out of the rooms for the foreseeable future. Let me know if you have any questions or concerns and I will be happy to assist with anything during your stay.

Brad

Well, I am impressed with the speed with which you were able to make this policy change. And I couldn’t be happier with your decision. I hope the “foreseeable future” is forever. Thank you and congratulations. All are welcome.

Secularly yours,
Steven Lowe

THEY SAID WHAT?

The anti-religiosity in this country that is somehow in vogue and funny — to make fun of faith, to constantly be making fun of people who express religion, the late-night comedians, the unfunny people on TV shows. It’s always anti-religious. . . . This is no time to be driving god out of the public square, no time to be making fun of people.”

Kellyanne Conway, White House counselor, trying to blame the anti-religious for the clearly anti-Semitic killing done at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh on Oct. 27.
CNN, 10-29-18

We just ask you now to take control, to take total control of these elections. That you call up the people that you would have to move forward, to vote, to stop and block any of Satan’s work, any of his demons’ work, and anything that would be a lie, and block that.

Illinois state Rep. Mike Bost, during a “prayer call” on Oct. 19 for the group Intercessors for America.
Friendly Atheist, 10-20-18



Mike Bost

not God’s way.

John H. Pruitt, who ended up not winning the election to be on the Chino Valley Unified School Board, which was successfully sued by FFRF over religious discussion during meetings, costing the district more than \$200,000 in legal fees.
Inland Valley Daily Bulletin, 10-29-18

I will retweet the devil if the devil tweets, “I Love Jesus.” It’s the message, not the messenger.

Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, defending himself after coming under attack for previously endorsing Faith Goldy in her race for Toronto mayor, even though she recited the 14-word manifesto used by neo-Nazis, and retweeting a prominent Nazi’s anti-immigration message.
The New York Times, 10-31-18

They’re going to show up for me because nobody’s done more for Christians or evangelicals or, frankly, religion than I have.

President Trump, in an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network, about how he expected Christians to vote in the midterm elections.
Huffington Post, 11-1-18

If [judges] have a secular world view, then I’m going to be very concerned about how they judge.

Matt Whitaker, who replaced Jeff Sessions as acting attorney general, at an April 25, 2014, Family Leader debate.
Friendly Atheist, 11-8-18

I mean, this is my job, this is what I’m supposed to do, and I’m missing out there. I’ve got just to trust in what I’m doing and trust that my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ makes no mistakes. For whatever reason, that was the day I was supposed to have.

Cody Parkey, kicker for the Chicago Bears, after the ball hit the uprights an incredible four times during the game on Oct. 11 against the Detroit Lions.
Chicago Sun Times, 11-11-18

What is crooked cannot be made straight, and you cannot count what is not there. Ecclesiastes 1:15.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., tweeting a bible verse amid his criticism of the Florida recounts.
The Hill, 11-14-18

God’s punishment for liberal California.

Dave Johnson, Republican Party chairman in Columbiana County, Ohio, in a tweet blaming liberals for California’s ravaging fires.
The New York Post, 11-20-18

Caption contest winner!

Congratulations to Jeanne Lombardo of Arizona for winning FFRF’s caption contest from the November issue, voted on by staff members. For her winning entry, she gets an FFRF T-shirt!

The winning caption was: **Jesus doesn’t save, but you can!**

Top runners-up include:

We’ll make your car rapture-ready. — Paul Riley of New York.

Savior Auto, where finding a reliable used car is a real miracle! — Jay Hufton of Virginia.

At Savior Auto, we’ll nail down the problem and resurrect your car in three days! — Kyle Dreifus of California.

Thanks to all who participated. If you see any non-copyright-protected pictures or images that you think would be good for a caption contest, please email them to caption@ffrf.org.



Former churches with better missions



Life Member Cheryl McCutcheon told us about Taft's Ale House in Cincinnati, housed in the historic and renovated St. Paul's German Evangelical Protestant Church (top), which was

built in 1850 and held its final service in 1984. From the Taft's website: "Constructed in 1850 amidst the burgeoning Over-the-Rhine brewing industry, St. Paul's Evangelical Church was once



Photos courtesy of CincinnatiRefined.com

the oldest Protestant parish in the Queen City. Young Billy Taft may have even sauntered past, his cheeks still stained with gooseberry pie.

Unbeknown to him, this structure would carry on his own legacy. Young Billy would go on to become Supreme Court Chief Justice, Yale Bonesman, and 27th U.S. President, William Howard Taft. He was a collegiate heavyweight-wrestling champion, could bury a two-seam fastball through the backside of a catcher's mitt, and made the most brazen ham tremble with a single glance. Our city was without its fabled folk hero for too long, but at last the mythos of Big Billy has been restored. The legend of Cincinnati's prodigal son lives on inside the hallowed halls of Taft's Ale House."



FFRF Member Nancy McClements, a retired librarian, stands outside a former church (Saint-Jean-Baptiste, above) that now houses a library (Bibliothèque Claire-Martin) in Quebec.

Nancy sends us this biographical information of Claire Martin (1914-2014): Claire Montreuil was born in Quebec City. After studying with the Ursulines of Quebec and the sisters of the congregation of Notre-Dame de Beauport, she worked as a secretary and, in the 1940s, as a radio announcer. It was at this time that she adopted the name of her mother, Martin. After marrying Roland Faucher in 1945, she moved to Ottawa, where she did translation before publishing a first collection of short stories in 1957. Claire achieved notoriety with the publication of her memoirs, published in 1965 and 1966. She continued her career as a writer by publishing two other collections of short stories and novels, including *The Fire Purifier*, released when she was 94.



Member Larry Lubetsky of Maryland sent us this photo of a repurposed church in Baltimore's Hampden neighborhood. The former Mount Vernon United Methodist Church (right) now houses Chesapeake Systems, a technology company. The 200-year-old building was struck by lightning in 2008 and the congregation was unable to rebuild after the resulting fire. The church remained vacant for 16 months until the CEO of Chesapeake Systems stepped in to buy the building and update it for his company's needs.



Life Member Richard Gagnon sent us this photo of the South Berwick Public Library, which used to be St. Michael's Catholic Church in Maine (right). Gagnon writes: "I was baptized and confirmed in this church — till I broke free. It makes a better library than it ever did a church."

In 2010, the town of South Berwick purchased the church, rectory and properties. Extensive exterior work and a new addition were completed in 2011. The Friends of the South Berwick Public Library raised over \$1 million in a campaign that was key to helping finish the interior renovation and furnish the library with furniture and equipment. Occupation of the entire space began in 2012.



Life Member David M. Shea of Maryland informed us of a repurposed church in Ellicott City, Md. (left), that now houses the Howard County Historical Society Museum. The former First Presbyterian Church was built in 1837, but collapsed during renovations in 1894. Rebuilt that year, the church had a Gothic-style structure with a 100-foot bell tower, steeply pitched roof and stained and leaded glass windows. The church was donated to the Howard County Historical Society in 1960 by Mrs. James (Alda Hopkins) Clark.

If you see or know of any former churches that now serve a secular purpose, please send us a photo and a brief description of the property. Send it to editor@FFRF.org.

For minorities, reason can lead to equality

By James C. Wiseman

I would first like to thank the Freedom From Religion Foundation for its service to this country. We the people need FFRF and I will always support your efforts.

The reason I am writing today concerns an issue that FFRF is already well aware of — that of the black American atheist. As a member of that demographic, I would like to speak freely, without fear of being misunderstood. All life matters. Sound reasoning and DNA analysis dictate that there is no difference between black, white, red or yellow people. There’s no difference between gay and straight, theist or atheist. Yet, we are all aware of the divisive nature of our culture, our language and our ideologies.

After careful study, I have become disenchanted with the Abrahamic mythologies. I find that my views are in the minority among other minorities. Even blacks who consider themselves freethinkers are very hesitant to

cross the line that borders agnostic territory. When we briefly look at the history of American slavery, it is easy to see how the Jewish mythologies be-

came so entrenched into black society. The question becomes: How can the minority communities, a very significant voting bloc, be shown that evangelical representatives are not voting in their best interest?

There is a great deal of psychological damage on both sides of the racial divide. Blacks believe heavily in tradition, even when those traditions are cumbersome, outdated or harmful. Whites in America largely avoid the issue of race for fear of being labeled racist or



James C. Wiseman

being misconstrued about an issue that they don’t fully understand. There is also a great deal of pressure, from both sides, pushing for the American idea of the “typical black person.” Anyone stepping out of the mold is often ostracized, accused of “acting white,” as if a specific value system or type of education is the exclusive right of the white male. These are some of the biases that help to keep the black community in the evangelical singularity.

I’m not suggesting an easy or immediate solution to this complicated issue. Inviting black speakers to your events and promoting essays from black students are all a very good start. Yet even highlighting such unicorns will not be enough to get minority attention en masse. There has to be a campaign with a theme strong

enough to gather the support of the minority communities. That theme must be “equality.”

Religion is the most divisive thing humanity has ever invented. While Christians pay lip service to brotherly love, there are very clear racial lines drawn in the theological sand. FFRF offers the only possible cure: reason.

The *Book of Mormon* clearly says that every prophet was white. At their plantations, slave owners would often invite pastors to give the “[N-word] sermon,” a collection of bible stories that speaks on the right of a slave owner to beat his slave, and that submission to the master is righteous. There are still churches in the South that refuse to marry interracial couples. The Ku Klux Klan is a Christian organization, which says it burns the cross to allow the light of Jesus to cleanse the sins of the wicked. I even witnessed evangelical pastor James Kennedy once speak against tolerance. On the Family Channel, of all places, he gave a speech saying that being tolerant to other lifestyles and cultures is the greatest sin that we can teach our children.

I realize that we must pick our battles carefully. Nothing I am suggesting here will be quick or easy. But when I spoke to other black men about the 2016 election, almost all of them told me they would not vote for Hillary Clinton because “the bible says a woman should not be in charge of men.” I found this same attitude in the Hispanic community. Clearly, this is a problem that greatly undermines the efforts of FFRF.

On a personal, and closing note, I truly believe that reason is the great equalizer. The cure to racism. The key to education. No one wants to be ignorant. Yet when every part of our culture encourages ignorance, it is difficult to step into the light. It is my hope that FFRF will become the lighthouse that guides us all out of ignorance.

James C. Wiseman, from Ohio, is an artist and devoted father and currently lives in Georgia.

“Religion is the most divisive thing man has ever invented.”
—James C. Wiseman

Happy Winter Solstice from FFRF!



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF and all of its staff members wish you and your family and friends a joyful Winter Solstice season and a Happy New Year!

Save The Date! Oct. 18-20, 2019 42nd Annual FFRF Convention



Mark your calendar now for the 2019 FFRF National Convention in Madison, Wis. It will be held Oct. 18-20 at the Monona Terrace and Convention Center. See you there!

Next issue will arrive in late January.



The next issue of Freethought Today will be the combined January/February issue. It will arrive in late January.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

NATIONAL CONVENTION

SAN FRANCISCO | NOVEMBER 2-4, 2018



Photo by Chris Line

This majestic view of the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge is from near the Ferry Building, a block east of the Hyatt Regency in San Francisco, site of FFRF’s 41st annual convention.



Photo by Chris Line

Awardee and speaker Sarah Haider, co-founder of Ex-Muslims of North America, talks with a convention guest during the Saturday evening dinner.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Richard Ray Halasz and Jana Halasz of Texas enjoy the opening of the convention.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

(From left) Honorees Ensaf Haidar, Trisha Ahmed and Maryam Namazie watch Rasel Ahmed’s speech. His magazine, Roopbaan, was awarded the first annual FFRF Avijit Roy Courage Award.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Elle Harris smiles as her sister Bailey signs copies of her book *My Name is Stardust*. Bailey received the \$5,000 Richard and Beverly Hermsen Student Activist Award.



Photo by Chris Line

Attorney David Kaloyanides, who spoke at the convention during the Saturday morning program, gestures during a discussion with FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert.



Photo by Chris Line

(From left) Candace Ede, Julie Ede and Colin Ede came all the way from Alaska to attend the convention in San Francisco.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Activists working toward freethought and freedom for Muslims and ex-Muslims gathered for a photo during the convention.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott (blue shirt) tries to handle the horde of customers flocking to the merchandise tables prior to Salman Rushdie’s speech.



Photo by Chris Line

Poet Victor Harris enjoys a laugh with his mother, Gwendolyn Olson, and Julia Sweeney.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

A group of convention attendees enjoy the camaraderie during the Non-Prayer Breakfast.



Photo by Chris Line

David Williamson of the Central Florida Freethought Community asks a question of Salman Rushdie during the Friday afternoon session.



Freedom From Religion Foundation AWARDS

Photos by Ingrid Laas



FFRF this year introduced the new **Avijit Roy Courage Award**, which includes a crystal plaque and \$5,000. The award honors the life and work of the Bangladeshi-American atheist and author assassinated in Dhaka, Bangladesh,

in 2015 by Islamist terrorists. The inaugural award was given to the LGBTQ+ magazine Roopbaan, and was accepted by co-founder Rasel Ahmed. Avijit Roy’s surviving spouse Bonya Ahmed, presented him with the honor.



Acclaimed author Salman Rushdie, right, shows off his Emperor Has No Clothes Award while posing with FFRF Co-President Dan Barker (center) and FFRF Communications Director Amit Pal. The award celebrates “plain speaking” on the shortcomings of religion by public figures.



Ensaf Haidar (right) earned the 2018 Henry H. Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award. Last year’s recipient Maryam Namazie presented her with the award, which includes a \$10,000 prize.



FFRF, recognizing the special contributions of women to freethought and the battle to keep state and church separate, bestowed the 2018 Freethought Heroine Award to Sarah Haider (left), co-founder of the Ex-Muslims of North America. She was presented the award by FFRF Legal Assistant Kristina Daleiden.



Cecile Richards, former president of Planned Parenthood, speaks with a convention attendee after receiving FFRF’s Forward Award, which goes to a freethinker who significantly moves society forward.



John de Lancie was given FFRF’s new Clarence Darrow Award, which is a bronze statuette that is a miniature version of the 7-foot-tall statue of Darrow created for FFRF by sculptor Zenos Frudakis, now standing on the lawn of the Rhea County Courthouse in Dayton, Tenn., where the Scopes trial took place. The award is an all-purpose award to recognize civil libertarians, those who promote science and/or freethought, as Darrow advocated. Presenting the award to de Lancie was atheist activist Margaret Downey and Frudakis (not pictured).



FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott (right) presented David Steketee with FFRF’s Freethinker of the Year award, given to recognize successful defenders of the constitutional principle of separation between church and state.



U.S. Rep. Jared Huffmann (center) stands with FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel (left) and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker after receiving the Emperor Has No Clothes Award, given out annually since 1999 to public figures who make known their dissent from religion.



Debra Deanne Olson (left) and Craig Wilkinson were each given the Courage To Tell the Truth Award, honoring the late California Gov. Culbert Levy Olson, Debra’s grandfather. They co-authored a book about the atheist governor, who is pictured with hand in pocket, not on a bible. FFRF Board Member Stef Moritz presented the awards.



Jocelyn Williamson earned FFRF’s Nothing Fails Like Prayer Award, which is given for the best secular “invocation” at a government meeting. Williamson gave four secular invocations in 2018. Presenting the award was Freethought Today Editor PJ Slinger.



Freedom From Religion Foundation ‘LOSING OUR RELIGION’



Convention attendees watch “Losing Our Religion” film in rapt attention.



Leslea Mair and Leif Kaldor discussed their movie prior to the initial screening at the beginning of the convention. They were given access to the then-600 (now 900+) members of The Clergy Project, which is a safe haven for clergy from all faiths who no longer believe.



Former pastor Brendan (on screen, left) found that coming out as an atheist not only caused him to lose his job, but also friends, family and a sense of community.

A poster for the movie “Losing Our Religion,” a feature-length documentary about ex-clergy members and clergy who are still undercover about their atheism.



Brendan’s wife (above), who is still a believer, remained by his side even though they were ostracized from their friends and family for his apostasy.

Photos by Ingrid Laas

FFRF’s 2018 State Representatives

Photo by Ingrid Laas



FFRF State Representatives gathered at the Hyatt Regency in San Francisco during the convention for their annual meeting.

Front row (from left):
Sheridan Chapin, N.Y.;
Steven Lowe, Wash. D.C.;
Margaret Downey, Pa.;
Claudette StPierre, Colo.;
Annie Laurie Gaylor, Wis.;
Dan Barker, Wis.; Jocelyn
Williamson, Fla.; Stef Moritz,
Wis.; Bonnie Stormo, S.D.;
and Gary Stormo, S.D.

Back row: Rob Moore,
Wis.; Stephen Hirtle, Pa.;
Randy Pelton, Ohio; Steve
Trunk, Calif.; Cheryl Kolbe,
Ore.; Paul Novak, Iowa;
Robin Buckallew, Neb.;
David Williamson, Fla.;
Steve Salemsen, Wis.;
Aleta Ledendecker, Tenn.;
Mike Cermak Jr., Pa.; Todd
Peissig, Wis.; and Tom
Schottmiller, Pa.

Freedom From
Religion Foundation
**CONVENTION
COMEDY**
Photos by Ingrid Laas



Comedian Leighann Lord entertained the crowd to conclude the convention on Saturday evening.



Julia Sweeney performed her new stand-up act, “Julia Sweeney: Older and Wider” to close out the Friday portion of the convention at the Hyatt Regency in San Francisco. Nearly a thousand convention attendees enjoyed Sweeney’s very funny 90-minute comedy routine.



Photo by Chris Line

Besides being a CFI certified secular celebrant, Lord has written two books, including Leighann Lord’s *Dict Jokes: Alternate Definitions for Words You’ve Probably Never Heard But Will Definitely Never Forget*.



Sweeney has created and performed several award-winning one-woman shows, including “Letting Go of God” and “God Said, Ha!”



Members of the audience laugh in delight at Lord’s comedy routine.



Sweeney talked about her mixed feelings about her role as the androgynous “Pat” character she created for “Saturday Night Live.” Catch her next year on Hulu’s “Shrill!” with Aidy Bryant.



Lord is a veteran stand-up comedian, having been seen on Lifetime, VH-1, Comedy Central, HBO and “The View.”



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF’s Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel speaks with convention attendees at one of the sales tables following the afternoon session on Friday, Nov. 2.

Freedom From Religion Foundation CONVENTION STAFF



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Members of FFRF’s legal team include Senior Associate Patrick Elliott, Legal Director Rebecca Markert and Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Working the registration table at the start of the convention were (from left) Legal Assistant Kristina Daleiden, Director of Operations Lisa Strand, volunteer Cynthia Struye and Bookkeeper Eleanor McEntee.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line helped out with his photography skills at the convention.



Photo by Chris Line

Freethought Today editor PJ Slinger introduces the 2018 Nothing Fails Like Prayer Award winner.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

FFRF’s Director of Communications Amit Pal looks over Salman Rushdie’s shoulder as he signs books for convention attendees. In the background at right is FFRF’s Multimedia Producer Bruce Johnson.



Photo by Chris Line

Program Manager Monica Schwartz works the sales table, selling books, including Salman Rushdie’s *Joseph Anton*.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF’s Office and Membership Manager Jackie Douglas helps a couple get signed in to the convention.



Photo by Chris Line

“Honorary Staff Member” Buzz Kemper takes a break from his role as audio technician to introduce FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker.

Freedom From Religion Foundation CLEAN MONEY DRAWING

Photos by Ingrid Laas



Lifetime Members and volunteers Todd Peissig (left) and Eric Lawrence handled the ticket sales for the “clean money” drawing. Thank you, Todd and Eric!



Randy Turner (left) and Marty Bishop Arellano, both of Washington, look over the pre-“In God We Trust” money. Arellano collected the money for Emma Chase, who was the winner of the \$10 bill.



Buzz Kemper (with microphone), Monica Schwartz (center) and Dan Barker show their excitement when they realize that Dolores Salomon (background, reaching forward) has won the \$100 bill of “clean money” after already winning a \$2 bill.

Denomination / year Donor			Winner
\$1	1935 Series E	Gary and Marcy Garb (Pa.)	Mark Harrison (Calif.)
\$1	1935 Series E	Michelle Bock & Ruth Lilly (Tex.)	Randy Turner (Wash.)
\$1	1935 Series F	Diane Uhl (Ariz.)	Bob Kressek (Calif.)
\$1	1935 Series G	John C. Shepherd (Ga.)	Dick Kerr (Calif.)
\$1	1935 Series G	Nancy Harris (Wis.)	Gail Jones (Calif.)
\$2	1953	Raymond Greenbank (Ohio)	Dolores Salomon (Calif.)
\$2	1953 Series C	Charles & Sheri Bender (Ind.)	Becky Carter (Ore.)
\$5	1950 Series E	Lynne Hills (Conn.)	Helga Crisp (Ky.)
\$10	1950 Series B	Craig Thomson (Pa.)	Emma Chase (Wash.)
\$20	1934	D.A. Rickards (Ohio)	Claudette StPierre (Colo.)
\$50	1929	Ron Locatelli (Calif.)	Coyote Herron (Wis.)
\$100	1934	Shirley R. Moll (Minn.)	Dolores Salomon (Calif.)



Each year during the convention, FFRF holds a “clean money” drawing of bills that were printed prior to 1957, when the words “In God We Trust” were added. Here, this year’s winners show off their newfound riches.



Mark Harrison of California shows off his newly won “clean” \$1 bill.

FFRF’s Executive Board

Photo by Ingrid Laas



Front row: Stef Moritz, secretary; Dan Barker, co-president; Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president; Sue Kocher, director; Todd Peissig, director.
Back row: Cheryl Kolbe, director; Stephen Hirtle, chair; Steve Salemsen, treasurer; Mike Cermak Jr., director; Jim Zerwick, director.



Photo by Chris Line

Following the Non-Prayer Breakfast, the Southern California-based Voices of Reason a cappella group opened the Saturday convention program with a 15-minute concert.

Freedom From Religion Foundation VOICES OF REASON



Photos by Ingrid Laas

Katie Sharp, music director for Voices of Reason, leads the group in song. “We’re all just good people trying to be better and trying to make the world a better place,” she told Religion News Service.



One of the songs the group performed for the convention crowd was “Every Sperm is Sacred,” a funny spoof of anti-abortion Christians from the movie “Monty Python’s Meaning of Life.”



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker (right) joined in on keyboards, singing “Nothing Fails Like Prayer,” during the set by Voices of Reason.



Bay-area poet Victor Harris delighted the audience with some of his inspirational secular works.



Larry Decker, executive director of the Secular Coalition of America, gave a rousing talk during the Saturday morning program.

FFRF Chapter Presidents

Photo by Ingrid Laas



Front row: Claudette StPierre, Denver chapter; Aleta Ledendecker, FFRF East Tennessee; Jocelyn Williamson, Central Florida Freethought Community.

Back row: Rob Moore, FFRF-Southeastern Wisconsin/ Kenosha-Racine Atheists & Freethinkers; Cheryl Kolbe, FFRF Portland (Ore.) Area; Randy Pelton, Northern Ohio Freethought Society; David Williamson, Central Florida Freethought Community.

Freedom From Religion Foundation

CONVENTION MOMENTS



Photo by Chris Line

My Name is Stardust author Bailey Harris poses with renowned author Salman Rushdie during his book-signing event.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Famed sculptor Zenos Frudakis (left), who created both the Clarence Darrow and Forward awards statuettes, stands with Margaret Downey and her husband Tom Schottmiller, both FFRF state representatives.



Photo by Chris Line

TV screens are set up around the room in the lower ballroom during the Friday afternoon session.



Photo by Chris Line

A convention guest brought her skeptic support dog to Friday's sessions.



Photo by Chris Line

Hundreds of miniature cupcakes were offered to convention guests following Julia Sweeney's comedy show to end the Friday evening session.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Director of Operations Lisa Strand (left) helps handle getting people signed in at the registration table at the start of the convention in San Francisco.



Photo by Chris Line

The crowd applauds after Victor Harris performed some of his poetry during the Saturday morning program.



Photo by Chris Line

Dick Hewetson of California speaks to FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor prior to receiving an award from her for his extended service to FFRF since the 1970s.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Angela Robbins (left) and Marie Schaub, both of Pennsylvania, pose for a photo during the Non-Prayer Breakfast.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Mohammed Al Khadra, founder of Ex-Muslims of Jordan, gives his speech, "What We Think, How We Think," during the Saturday afternoon program.