

# FREETHOUGHT TODAY



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Vol. 35 No. 6

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FFRF Graphic

## With Kavanaugh's nomination, our civil liberties are in trouble

Supreme Court nominee Judge Brett Kavanaugh will be a disaster for the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and tilt the court to the religious right for more than a generation.

"If Kavanaugh is confirmed, he will unquestionably eviscerate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment," warn FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor. "It seems unlikely the cherished wall of separation between state and church protecting true religious liberty could survive intact. Many of our hard-won freedoms would be gutted."

There's no sugarcoating the game-changing nature of Justice Anthony Kennedy's retirement announcement on June 27. Kennedy was a swing vote. As

the Duke Ellington song goes, "It don't mean a thing if you ain't got that swing."

Kennedy was often a disappointment, but his vote really counted when it counted. To give Kennedy his due, he has stood up for secularism in at least four major opinions, although more often voting against strict state/church separation. He even authorized some landmark civil rights cases, including the 1992 *Weisman* decision evicting commencement prayers and the clergy who gave them from public high schools, and the *Obergefell* verdict approving marriage equality in 2015. (Notably, Kennedy did not swing in our direction when FFRF's *Hein* decision was before the court in 2007.)

See Kavanaugh on page 5

## Judge: Texas governor violated FFRF's rights

FFRF has triumphed in federal court against Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who had ordered the removal of its winter solstice Bill of Rights nativity from the state Capitol in 2015.

In a final judgement, issued June 19, U.S. District Judge Sam Sparks, for the Western District of Texas — Austin Division, declared that Abbott violated FFRF's free speech rights.

FFRF, with more than 32,000 nonreligious members, including over 1,300 Texas members, had placed a duly permitted display celebrating the winter solstice and Bill of Rights Day in December 2015, in response to a Christian nativity at the Texas Capitol. The whimsical display, depicting Founding Fathers and the Statue of Liberty celebrating the "birth" of the Bill of Rights (adopted Dec. 15, 1791), had the requisite sponsorship from a Texas legislator.

Abbott, as chair of the Texas State Preservation Board, ordered FFRF's display taken down only three days after it was erected, lambasting it as indecent, mocking and contributing to public immorality.

"Defendants violated FFRF's First

Amendment rights and engaged in viewpoint discrimination as a matter of law when the FFRF exhibit was removed from the Texas Capitol building under the circumstances of this case," Sparks ruled.

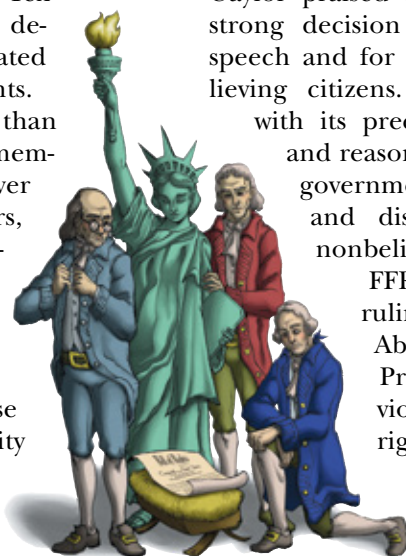
FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor praised the ruling as a very strong decision for FFRF, for free speech and for the rights of nonbelieving citizens. "The Constitution, with its precious Bill of Rights, and reason have prevailed over governmental censorship and discrimination against nonbelievers."

FFRF received an initial ruling in its favor that Abbott and the State Preservation Board had violated its free speech rights in October 2017.

But there were two roadblocks to achieving the final judgment.

First, Abbott appealed the district court's ruling that he also could be sued as an individual (as well as being named defendant in his official capacity as governor). The district court wished to hold a trial to decide FFRF's personal capacity claims against Abbott and its Establishment Clause claims. Since neither of these side issues were necessary to securing

See Abbott on page 3



## FFRF rated 'least biased'

FFRF news and reports, including FreeThought Today, have been rated as "least biased" by the Media Bias / Fact Check website.

According to the site, which rates hundreds of media outlets on a sliding scale from "extreme left" to "extreme right," FFRF was right in the middle under "least biased." The site says that that rating means "these sources have minimal bias and use very few loaded words (wording that attempts to influence an audience by using appeal to emotion or stereotypes). The reporting is factual and usually sourced. These are the most credible media sources."

Under "factual reporting," FFRF was given the rating of "high."

The Media Bias site also wrote in its "Notes" section about FFRF: "In review, their news reporting uses minimal loaded words and typically links to low-biased sources. From a political perspective, the mission is to simply keep church and state separate. Overall, we rate the Freedom From Religion Foundation as least biased and high for factual reporting."

## What's on your plate?



FFRF Member Jeff Prebeg shows off his "ATHE1ST" license plate that he was able to get from the state of Pennsylvania after FFRF stepped in to help. Turn to page 3 to read Prebeg's story of the license plate and his activism.

## FFRF, CFI: No state funding for ministry

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and the Center for Inquiry are warning the North Carolina Legislature against religious financial boondoggling.

The two secular groups were contacted by several concerned state taxpayers about a proposal to funnel a quarter of a million in tax dollars to a religious ministry, Cross Trail Outfitters. The state's currently proposed budget for 2019 seeks to give \$250,000 from the state Health and Human Services Department to the Christian ministry "for purposes of promoting wellness and physical activity for youth seven to 20 years of age."

See Funding on page 3



‘Kindness is everything’

Trucker goes from Jew to Buddhist to None

**Name:** Jonnie Benzimra.  
**Where I live:** Mentor, Ohio.  
**Where and when I was born:** Richmond, Surrey, England. Richmond has been swallowed up by Greater London and is now known as Richmond upon Thames. I was born in 1954, which makes me soon to be 64, but I am NOT going to break out into the Beatles song.  
**Family:** Two sisters in Britain and a brother in Toronto. Both my folks are deceased. My father was a staunch socialist (a bit of a dirty word here) and my mother was a very popular Maltese Jewish housewife — fiery Mediterranean blood. Here, I have an English wife who has two sons from a previous marriage. We both originally married Americans and had been divorced for about six years each. We met each other through friends who said, “Oh, I know an English girl down the road.” We have been together 15 years, married for 10 of them. I have removed the word “step” from my sons’ introduction.  
**Education:** I went to a Jewish secondary school that I had to travel all the way across London to attend. Before then I was the only Jew in a local primary school and had to stand outside class while they taught Church of England stuff. I remember being bored, but I didn’t know how nice it was to escape that indoctrination. I joined the choir because I loved to sing and ended up “praising the Lord” — in song, anyhow.  
I didn’t do very well in school. My desperate parents sent me to college hoping I would snap to and become the doctor my mother so wanted. I didn’t. My father, who was considered brilliant, reassured me that I wasn’t unintelligent, but just not so academic — a very kind heart.  
**Occupation:** At 17, I became a shopkeeper, a grocer. For a year and a half, I opened and operated a successful



Jonnie Benzimra and his wife Denise Brown.

whole food and health food shop in Wales, selling brown rice, rolled oats, buckwheat, Mung beans and honeys from around the world. A huge young community had emigrated from all points Britain to South Wales for cheaper housing and land. I was now 19 and gave it all up to go overland to India and Kathmandu, Nepal, in 1973. I sold the shop, and even with many changes of hands, it still runs today.

I have been a grocery shop owner, a traveler, a truck driver, a roadie for many different rock bands, an arc lamp spotlight engineer and operator for the entertainment industry, and a salesman in America for the winter months of all the years of the 1980s. I have also been an actor and a well-known actor’s assistant. I am a long-distance truck driver again.

As a driver, I am stunned at how much religion is hung all over passing trucks. Many trucks have huge crosses lit up in the front. There is a chapel in every

truck stop. It’s amazing how religious these truck drivers are. I am a little quiet about my Noneness, fearing a little retribution. (I will always remember being shocked during the burning of Beatles records after John Lennon said the Beatles were more popular than Jesus.) I wish we had a recognizable symbol for Nones. I would hang it up front of my truck and leave it to others to decipher. I always thought religion was a very private thing, kept to oneself and not forced down other throats.

**Religion (or lack thereof):** I was brought up in a Jewish home. My Maltese mother kept a kosher kitchen, while my atheist but traditional Jewish Brit of a father took us all out for the occasional bacon sandwich.

Although I had my bar mitzvah at 13, I didn’t believe in any of it. I did it all for the love of singing, and the grand party, with presents that came after.

When I came back from India, I was so proud that I had not found a guru like everyone else. Even my friends and family were discovering spirituality with one guru or another. ‘Twas the times. I was an atheist like my dad.

Fourteen years later, I was in India again and looking into Buddhism. I was a Jew who found Buddhism. A BuddJew, as we were known. I dove deep into that for three years with my first wife. I lived and worked at this Buddhist Center in

Dharamsala, India, where the exiled government of Tibet is based. The evangelical Christians would come and thump their bibles on the Dalai Lama’s podium proselytizing. Buddhists had to just let it happen and not intervene or use force. Very upsetting. We Buddhists were accused of being godless (which we were) and not having a real religion at all (which I was proud of). I kinda believed in reincarnation, but only to a point. It was the Mahayana Buddhist teachings of the Hell Realms that finally sent me running, pulling out my hair. Not from fear of those hellish realms, but their ridiculous invention to control the masses. We do good in this world because it’s the right way to conduct ourselves. Kindness is everything. Not the fear of going to hell or heaven or sitting next to God or getting a favorable rebirth when we die. “Do good for goodness’ sake,” my father used to quote.

I went back to India in 2007 with my present wife. On our last day, we went around the Delhi Railway Station and its lands with a street child who spoke English, who showed us how he used to live and how other kids were copping along with the organization to help those street kids. It was a wonderful chance to see and understand and help where we could. A lady joined our group at the last minute and purposely pulled out her crucifix from her blouse when talking to the kids in their home. I thought of all those missionaries trying to corrupt these Hindu/Muslim/Nones into her own beliefs. She did not represent the rest of our touristy group and I asked her to put crucifix away. She didn’t, and voices rose. I felt truly embarrassed in front of these kids and their organizers.

My motives were not conversion. Hers . . . ?

**My favorite quotation:** It is stuck on the back of my car as an often-renewed bumper sticker and has been for more than 10 years: “My karma ran over your dogma.”

The other day I heard on NPR that FFRF had won another case where religion was forced down our throats through the public arena of park areas. I am very proud of being a member of FFRF and hope that kindness given around the world is done for its own sake instead of heaven’s sake.

Take a short survey about FFRF’s videos

Did you know that the FFRF offers video programs?  
We currently produce three shows (**Freethought Matters**, **Ask an Atheist** and **Newsbite**) that run on Facebook Live, YouTube and some broadcast TV stations. Help us to better target these programs to your needs by filling out this short five-question survey.  
Go to: [surveymonkey.com/r/FFRF\\_Media](https://surveymonkey.com/r/FFRF_Media). Thank you!

ffrf

FREETHOUGHT  
TODAY

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*The only freethought newspaper in the United States*

What the hell?

FFRF Member James Mixson sent us a photo of this church marquee, writing, “It’s been hot in Missouri this year and this church in downtown St. Joseph threatens us freethinkers with even worse!”



# ‘ATHE1ST’ plate was first step in my activism

By Jeff Prebeg

Two years ago, I became an atheist activist. While I’ve been an atheist for much longer, it wasn’t until some sad and troubled times that I sought a community. Through podcasts and social media, I recreated myself and began the fight for the



Jeff Prebeg

separation of church and state. But more importantly, I wanted it to be OK for other atheists to come out and be proud. In that time, I made some lifelong friends and connections that aid me to this day.

In those days, I applied for a vanity license plate — “ATHE1ST” — and was promptly denied by the state of Pennsylvania. With the help of FFRF, specifically attorney Andrew Seidel, I was able to receive my license plate. And my car has been a billboard for atheist activism to this day!

Very recently, an exchange happened with that tweet from a fellow atheist friend from across the country. Muffy, as she’s known online, asked me how it has been driving around with that plate. Our conversation was interesting enough for me to have the honor of sharing my experiences with you.

My car is older — a 2005 Chevy Aveo



— so I went in with the knowledge that something drastic might happen to it. But I’ve learned not to let the enemies win in the face of injustice, so I proudly have several other atheist bumper stickers to go along with my license plate. I’m privileged enough that I don’t have to terribly worry about the car itself, so I’m happy to be a billboard. And so far, I haven’t had much of anything to worry about.

While living in the relatively religious (Roman Catholic) city of Pittsburgh, it’s still not the Bible Belt or a deeply rural area where such vandalism is likely to occur. I’ve seen a few

scowls, but the experience has mostly been very positive. I’ve had the occasional horn honks and middle fingers flown my way, but the cheers and thumbs-up far outnumber them. I also am a cautious and courteous driver. I never want to cut someone off and have them think, “That darn atheist!” It also has become a rallying point for my local secular organization. People know me and my fight and have been very supportive.

I once took a road trip to Indianapolis to visit friends (Hi, Dan and Natalie!) and that definitely caused me some anxiety. I can say it was harrow-

ing to drive my tiny little car with all its atheist paraphernalia on a big highway in Indiana and see giant trucks come speeding up behind me. But truth be told, nothing happened at all. No one paid me any attention the entire time out, there, and back.

Again, I’m privileged to have had nothing happen. As I’m now a part of this select club, I pay close attention to the news stories of vandalized cars and plates bent and damaged. Honestly, I wish all those could have the experience I’ve had, and while I hope this, I know it’s something I signed up for.

In these troubling times for state-church separation, I have a big target on my back as a soldier in that fight. But honestly, as I’ve come to learn about myself, I relish it. Discussions that have cropped up because of it, while sometimes hard or scary, are absolutely necessary. Another Twitter follower told me how he wept as he read my news story because his job all but prevented him from being an out atheist but he was so happy an internet friend could be.

And I’ve come to learn, that’s my role in this important fight. I have the privilege and ability to be out, so I’m going to use it to my fullest. I’m going to be as out and proud as possible, to hopefully aid those who can’t. And if I can be honest, I’m so excited for that day, because it is coming.

*Jeff Prebeg is an FFRF member from Pittsburgh.*

## FFRF welcomes its 10 newest Life Members

FFRF is proud to announce and recognize its 10 newest Lifetime Members plus one Immortal.

The 10 new Lifetime Members are Thomas V. Claringbold, Halina Greenstien, Robert Greenstien, Thomas Harburg, Bachir Jirari, Katherine O’Brien, Michael Polito, Dan Tebbs, Peter Viviano and Jeffrey Worthington.

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

States represented are California, Connecticut, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico and Washington.

One member has become an Immortal: Milton McCune. 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 also offers After-Life Memberships for a \$5,000 donation for those who want their donation to “live on” after them.

## Funding

Continued from page 1

As FFRF and CFI point out in their letter to Gov. Roy Cooper, Cross Trail Outfitters’ outdoor activities are unabashedly religious in nature.

Cross Trail Outfitters, which describes itself as an “independent, interdenominational ministry,” aims to promote Christianity by “guiding the next generation to Christ through the outdoors.” The group’s first stated goal is to “build a relationship with boys ages 7–20 and lead them to Christ or a better understanding of Him. To equip youth to passionately pursue a lifetime of service to Jesus Christ and fellowship with Him through the outdoors.”

The ministry’s website features a photo of two adults performing a bap-

tism on a child and a video showing an adult leader instructing children to remove their hats to pray. Testimonials from parents of the group corroborate that the group’s activities in the state are heavily religious.

FFRF and CFI underline that North Carolina’s proposed grant to Cross Trail to directly fund its religious mission violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, which prohibits the government from financially supporting religious activities.

The secular groups are requesting assurance that the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services will refuse to disburse any funds to Cross Trail Outfitters.

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## Abbott

Continued from page 1

FFRF’s right to place its display in the Texas Capitol in the future, it decided to dismiss the claims, clearing the path for the victorious final judgment.

The case is *Freedom From Religion Foundation v. Governor Greg Abbott*, Case No. A-16-CA-00233-SS.

FFRF was represented by attorney Richard L. Bolton with FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover as co-counsel.

“We’re pleased to finally have this lawsuit wrapped up,” says Grover. “Now we wait to see whether Gov. Abbott and the Texas attorney general’s office will follow the law and allow us to place our display again, or whether they appeal this decision and waste more state resources to fight against one of our nation’s most foundational free speech principles.”

Gov. Abbott and the executive director of the Texas State Preservation Board are expected to appeal the decision.

Photo by Arturo De Lozanne

Freethinkers gather around FFRF’s Bill of Rights nativity display in the Texas Capitol. A judge has ruled in favor of FFRF’s free speech rights after Texas Gov. Greg Abbott had the display removed in December 2015.



# HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

## PRAIRIE DOGS

“Prairie dog villages used to extend for hundreds of miles across the plains. One city contained more than 400 million of these ground squirrels. But 250 of them would eat as much as a cow, so prairie dogs were doomed.”

—Desert Museum, Tucson, Arizona

“We must welcome more babies to the banquet of life.”  
—Pope Paul VI

Zoologist are all agog  
At this imposter of a dog  
Whose fierce fertility and brains  
Civilized the western plains:  
Taking to himself a wife,  
He made a banquet out of life  
And bred a swarm of boys and girls—  
A great society of squirrels.  
  
Life was simple, life was sport,  
When one day everything ran short:  
The five-year plan for grass was clouded,  
Burrows all seemed overcrowded,  
“Too many cows,” they started to fuss,  
“and what’s more, there are too many of us.”  
  
Today, like aardvarks, yaks, and gnus,  
Prairie dogs are kept in zoos.  
Surviving rodents, may we hope  
You have a message for the pope?

From Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie



© 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. Phil’s books: [ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop).

# OVERHEARD

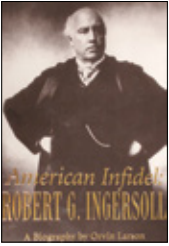
Drawing from a conservative Christian worldview, these groups critically interrogate media messages in the same way they approach the bible. **Francesca Tripodi, a researcher at Data & Society, who authored a report on how conservatives interpret news using “scriptural inference.”** *Columbia Journalism Review*, 6-25-18

I remember when I was 7, making crucial decisions about the person I was going to be. That’s also the age when I figured out that, oh, someday I’m going to die, and the age when I decided I couldn’t believe in God. I’ve never been as intelligent as I was at 7.  
**Author Anne Tyler**  
*New York Times*, 7-6-18



**Charles Blow**  
Conservatives want to reserve the right to use religion as a weapon, to control other people’s bodies and to judge some people as less worthy of full participation in the American experience because of whom they love, how they identify, where they are from or which God they worship.  
**Charles Blow, newspaper columnist, in “Trump remakes America.”**  
*New York Times*, 6-28-18

**American Infidel:**  
**Robert G. Ingersoll**



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# ‘Year of our Lord’ not part of Constitution

## FFRF attorney writes article published in Constitutional Studies

FFRF advocates for our Constitution every day. It is, as we regularly point out, a godless Constitution. But every now and then, we meet a theocrat or Christian nationalist who thinks they’ve found a savvy rejoinder: God is in the Constitution. What they intend to argue is that their god wormed his way into the date that appears on the parchment, “the Seventeenth Day of September in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty seven.”

Christian nationalists and pious politicians use that date to argue that the United States is a Christian nation and to push legislative initiatives that promote religion. For instance, last year, the Kentucky Legislature resolved to complete all of its business “in the Year of our Lord” because it wanted to “follow the lofty example set in the U.S. Constitution.”

Andrew L. Seidel, FFRF’s director of strategic response and a constitutional attorney, wrote to the Kentucky Legislature to explain its error, tired of hearing this misguided claim and decided to write up the problem in a more scholarly fashion.

The resulting article was recently published in the latest volume of *Constitutional Studies*.

The journal is published twice annually by the University of Wisconsin and is affiliated with the Center for the Study of Liberal Democracy. It is the first article of this kind that an FFRF attorney has individually published.

Seidel’s article, “Dating God: What Is ‘Year of Our Lord’ Doing in the U.S. Constitution?” examines the legal and historical significance of the lordly date by piecing together



Constitutional Studies Journal.

er how exactly it was added to the parchment during the Constitutional Convention, who added it, and what significance it may have had for the delegates and scribe. The article also traces the origins of the argument that “Year of our Lord” is consequential to a preacher writing 50 years after the Constitution was drafted.

The article is an interesting blend of history, law and detective work. Seidel examines the evolution of the various drafts of the Constitution, pointing out that that pious date appeared on none. There are other dates within the Constitution itself, but none contains religious language.

Seidel also explains that that date is not actually part of the Constitution. The legal document ends after Article VII, the attestation clause, to which the date was added. As Seidel explained it, “When you sign a contract, that signature is attesting to your consent — it is not part of the terms of the contract. The signatures and dates are not part of the Constitution itself.”

“The bottom line is that this curious little appendage has no legal significance and it’s unlikely the Founders even knew it was there,” said Seidel. “The first time any one argued that it had religious significance was a preacher writing nearly 50 years after the Constitutional Convention,” he added.

# Caption contest winner!

Congratulations to John Halas of Ohio for winning FFRF’s caption contest from the June/July issue.

The winning caption is: **I deserve to be presented with an Academy Award for this performance.** — John Halas

The top runners-up, in no particular order, are:

- Isn’t there another way to make Mom and Dad happy? — **Dan Fregin**
- Taking steps to unbelief. — **Paul Riley**
- Do I really have to go through with this? — **William Sams**

Thanks to all who participated. We will have another contest in an upcoming issue. If you see any non-copyright-protected pictures



or images (most likely that you took yourself) that you think would be good for a future caption contest, send them to [caption@ffrf.org](mailto:caption@ffrf.org).



# Kavanaugh

Continued from page 1

Although Kennedy’s record in keeping state and church separate has been spotty at best, replacing him with Kavanaugh will lead to decisions with majority opinions that are far more emphatically hostile to secularism and true religious freedom. It will go from a 5-4 court with Kennedy sometimes swinging to FFRF’s side, to an entrenched 5-4 “anti” court, leaving only Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, 85, Stephen Breyer, 80, and the more youthful Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor on the “correct” side.

Further, Kennedy was always a hopeful check against the most egregious cases of government actors using their position to promote religion. With Kavanaugh, the court will be more willing to accept cases that will allow it to drastically repeal Establishment Clause precedent from the last 70 years, confident that it will always have the five votes it needs.

Kennedy importantly sided with the preservation of *Roe v. Wade* in several major cases. It is frightening to see CNN legal analyst Jeffrey Toobin tweet his prediction: “Abortion will be illegal in 20 states in 18 months.”

Kavanaugh, a former clerk for Kennedy, would be a threat for a host of important progressive and humanist issues. The 53-year-old Catholic, who currently serves on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, has seemingly never met a regulation he wouldn’t strike down, including regulations to prevent another financial collapse as in 2008, to protect clean air, clean water, and fight climate change, to enforce safety standards for the auto industry, uphold the Affordable Care Act and protect workers.

Of most relevance to the work of FFRF is Kavanaugh’s disturbing history of working to privilege religion, harm women’s rights and tear down the wall separating state and church.

Two recent decisions illustrate his views, revealing that Kavanaugh seems “less driven by the law than by ideology,” notes FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel, who, with FFRF’s Strategic Response Team, researched his record.

Kavanaugh dissented in a 2017 case garnering national attention and concern, involving a pregnant, unaccompanied minor immigrant under detention, whom the Trump administration was preventing from exercising her right to end an unwanted pregnancy. Kavanaugh wrote that forcing the 17-year-old girl to continue her pregnancy for so many weeks she risked being unable to obtain an abortion was not an “undue burden.” Conversely, in a 2015 case, *Priests for Life v. HHS*, he wrote a dissenting opinion calling it a “substantial burden” on religion for a religious organization wanting to opt out of the contraceptive mandate to be asked simply to fill out a five-blank form — name, corporate name, date, ad-

JUDGE KAVANAUGH: Forcing a 17-year-old girl to continue an unwanted pregnancy for weeks is not an “undue burden.”



Help FFRF #SaveSCOTUS

ALSO JUDGE KAVANAUGH: But filling out a 5-blank form is a “substantial burden” on religion.

dress, signature.

“In Kavanaugh’s legal world, it burdens religion to fill out five blanks on a form, but it’s not a burden to force a teenager to carry an unwanted pregnancy. That is alarming,” adds Seidel.

## Kavanaugh’s record

Even while working in private practice he submitted amicus briefs on a number of cases involving the Establishment Clause, always on the wrong side.

In the landmark 2000 case, *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, the last big school prayer case decided by the high court, it ruled unconstitutional prayers delivered over the school public address system at school-scheduled, school-sponsored events, including student led.

Kavanaugh wrote an amicus brief defending the imposition of prayers upon students on behalf of U.S. Rep. Steve Largent, a former football player. Throughout the brief, Kavanaugh argued that the case was about “banning” students’ religious speech. It was really about a public school (with its own tradition of imposing prayer) handing religious students a government-owned megaphone to impose the prayers on other students at public school events. That distinction is crucial, and Kavanaugh’s inability to grasp it is disturbing.

Kavanaugh uses inflated language to disparage advocates of state-church

separation — in other words, those of us who support the First Amendment — as “absolutist[s],” “hostile to religion in any form,” advocating for an “Orwellian world,” and seeking “the full extermination of private religious speech from the public schools” and “to cleanse public schools throughout the country of private religious speech.”

In an astonishing paragraph, he portrays Christians as beleaguered and downtrodden folks “below socialists and Nazis and Klan members and panhandlers and ideological and political advocacy groups of all stripes,” rather than the privileged majority they are.

In one of the most concerning passages in the brief, Kavanaugh sends a clear signal that he does not think the Supreme Court should even apply legal tests to the Establishment Clause. In other words, it appears he would happily overrule the critical rule of law laid out in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), known as “The Lemon Test.” The Lemon Test simply

says a government action violates the Establishment Clause if it (1) doesn’t have a secular purpose; or (2) has the primary effect of advancing or inhibiting religion, or (3) fosters excessive entanglement between religion and government. Kavanaugh wrote: “In Establishment Clause cases, the search for an overarching test is not always necessary, and can sometimes be counterproductive or even harmful.”

## State-church hostility

The D.C. Circuit dismissed a case taken by atheist Michael Newdow challenging the addition of “so help me God” to the presidential oath and inaugural prayers. Notably, religious language is not present in the oath laid out in Article II of our secular Constitution, yet it is typically added by the chief justice during inaugurations.

When the court threw out the case on procedural grounds, Kavanaugh wrote separately to say that the challengers (including FFRF) should have lost on the merits “because those long-standing practices do not violate the Establish-

ment Clause.” Essentially, Kavanaugh relied on a long history of use of the words “so help me God,” supposedly, he wrote, dating back to George Washington. But Washington never uttered those words. The history of “so help me God,” is considerably shorter. The phrase has only been in regular use since World War I. In any event, that a constitutional violation is longstanding does not make it any less a violation. The argument from tradition is a poor argument which concedes that there is no better reason to continue the practice, and it is disconcerting that Kavanaugh would have relied on it to uphold violations of the First Amendment.

## Backed voucher scheme

Kavanaugh represented pro-voucher Florida Gov. Jeb Bush in a constitutional challenge to Florida’s school voucher legislation. Florida plaintiffs — including a branch of the NAACP, the Florida Education Association, and the AFL-CIO — sued Bush and the Florida Department of Education over the allocation of public funds to private schools through a voucher system. The Florida Supreme Court held the voucher system Kavanaugh defended was unconstitutional.

He went back to Florida to help Bush litigate the outcome of Florida’s electoral votes in the disputed Bush-Gore 2000 presidential election. More successful there than with the vouchers, Kavanaugh then went to work in the George W. Bush White House as associate counsel to the president. Bush nominated him to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia in 2003, and after a bitter fight that lasted three years, he finally was seated in 2006.

Would Kavanaugh hold the president accountable for wrongdoing?

While still in private practice, Kavanaugh was a key member of Kenneth Starr’s team investigating President Clinton and was a prominent voice calling for Clinton’s impeachment. But in a turn that seems hypocritical, he has lately written that presidents are under such extraordinary pressure they “should be excused from some of the burdens of ordinary citizenship while serving in office.” This statement was likely received well by Trump, facing a dogged and productive investigation by special counsel Robert Mueller.

## Another Catholic

The Constitution prohibits religious tests for public office, but one would think there was a requirement that Catholics hold a majority on the Supreme Court. Although Catholics are about 20 percent of the overall population, five of the nine current justices are Catholic, including outgoing Kennedy. The Kavanaugh nomination would retain the lopsided Catholic majority, and be a lost chance for more diversity (such as a nonreligious justice or even a Protestant!).

The National Review endorsed Kavanaugh partly because of his zealous Catholicism: “He is a lector at his parish, and he volunteers with Catholic charities, teaches and mentors in Catholic (and other) schools, and coaches his daughters’ Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) basketball teams.”

FFRF is committed to fighting any nominee who is so clearly hostile to American secularism.

“This is the legal fight of the century for America. Our nation’s future, our constitution and our civil rights hang in the balance,” says Gaylor.



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.

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# ‘Project Blitz’ pushes Christian nationalism

Its playbook reveals a theocratic vision that is in direct opposition to FFRF’s objectives

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By Paul Rosenberg

It’s just beginning to dawn on folks how much Donald Trump’s presidency relies on religious support. All the scandals surrounding Trump have brought intense attention to the 81 percent support he received from evangelical Christians in the 2016 election.

But the power of the presidency isn’t the only way Christian nationalism is advancing its agenda in America today. As Frederick Clarkson, senior research



Paul Rosenberg

analyst at Political Research Associates, reported in Religion Dispatches, a coalition of Christian right groups — including the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, Wallbuilders, the National Legal Foundation and others — have organized a major legislative initiative called “Project Blitz.” Its goal is to pass an outwardly diverse but internally cohesive package of Christian-right bills at the state level, whose cumulative impact would be immense.

The agenda underlying these bills is not merely about Christian nationalism, a term that describes an Old Testament-based worldview fusing Christian and American identities, and meant to sharpen the divide between those who belong to those groups and those who are excluded. It’s also ultimately “dominionist,” meaning that it doubles down on the historically false notion of America as a “Christian nation” to insist that a particular sectarian view of God should control every aspect of life, through all manner of human institutions. Christian nationalists are not in a position to impose their vision now, and to be fair, many involved in the movement would never go that far. But as explained by Julie Ingersoll in *Building God’s Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction*, dominionist ideas have had enormous influence on the Religious Right, even among those who overtly disavow them.

“The authors of the Project Blitz playbook are savvy purveyors of dominionism,” Clarkson told Salon. “They are in it for the long haul and try not to say things that sound too alarming. But they live an immanent theocratic vision, and they sometimes cannot help themselves, such as when they describe the resolutions as seeking to ‘define public policies of the state in favor of biblical values concerning marriage and sexuality.’”

“Among the ways they are seeking to implement ‘biblical values,’” Clarkson continued, “is by seeking religious exemptions from civil rights laws and professional licensing standards.” The two-tiered society this would create reflects the essence of Christian nationalism, as researcher Andrew Whitehead describes it.

Whitehead told Salon: “Our work shows that believing that the United States is a ‘Christian nation’ and desir-



Photo courtesy of Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation

Children and adults stand for the Pledge of Allegiance during the launch of the Texas Prayer Caucus in February 2017.

ing a close, symbiotic relationship between Christianity and civil society is significantly associated with a number of stances like opposition toward same-sex marriage, antipathy toward religious minorities and a tendency toward endorsing stricter racial boundaries in romantic and family relationships.” So, it makes sense, he continued, “that these groups who advocate for a formal recognition of the ‘Christian nation’ narrative are also seeking to formalize support for particular definitions of marriage, gender identity and family structure” — definitions that elevate some people and effectively subjugate others.

So far this year, supporters of this initiative, and their allies, have introduced 71 bills nationwide (or carried them over from last year) — and those are only the ones tracked by Americans United for Separation of Church and State. (Some of the bills counted are similar in intent, but may not directly draw on the Project Blitz playbook.)

Most of those have innocuous or feel-good names. The goal is to come across as wholesome, apple-pie Americans, while copying the strikingly successful approach of the pro-corporate American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

The guiding vision behind Project Blitz is heavily influenced by pseudo-historian David Barton, a leading propagandist for the myth that America was founded as a “Christian nation.” John Fea, author of *Believe Me*, told Salon: “David Barton has been discredited by every American historian I know, including evangelical historians who teach at the most conservative Christian colleges in the country, including Bob Jones University and Liberty University. He is a politician who uses the past for his own political agenda.”

Nonetheless, Fea continued, Barton “is one of the most important people in American politics today.” How could that possibly be true? “If Andrew Whitehead and his colleagues are correct, evangelicals supported Trump because they believe America was founded as, and continues to be, a Christian nation,” Fea said. “No one has promoted this narrative more effectively than David Barton.”

## War imagery no accident

The war imagery conjured up by the name “Project Blitz” is no accident. This

is religious war in the minds of those waging it, and they’ve got specific goals and strategies in mind. But it’s not easy for outsiders to see what’s going on here, as Clarkson explains in his story:

The bills are seemingly unrelated and range widely in content — from requiring public schools to display the national motto, “In God We Trust” (IGWT); to legalizing discrimination against LGBTQ people; to religious exemptions regarding women’s reproductive health. The model bills, the legislative strategy and the talking points reflect the theocratic vision that has animated many in the Christian Right for some time. In

the context of Project Blitz’s 116-page playbook, however, they also reveal a highly sophisticated level of coordination that echoes the ALEC, which

infamously networks pro-business state legislators, drafts legislation, and shares legislative ideas and strategies.

The bills are organized into three tiers (see sidebar), “according to the degree of opposition they anticipate — 1 being the least,” Clarkson reports. “The general plan is to begin with the less controversial measures to get legislators comfortable with the subject matter; to seek small victories first.” The full meaning and significance of the earlier measures will not become readily apparent until later measures build on them and covert synergies are revealed.

The first tier, “Legislation Regarding Our Country’s Religious Heritage,” aims at importing the Christian nationalist worldview into public schools and other aspects of the public sphere. It starts simply with a display of the motto “In God We Trust,” a Cold War replacement for “*E Pluribus Unum*” — out of many, one — which better reflects America’s pragmatic, pluralist foundations. The second tier, “Resolutions and Proclamations Recognizing the Importance of Religious History and Freedom,” aims at making government increasingly a partner in “Christianizing” America. The third tier, “Religious Liberty Protection Legislation,” has three subcategories, one dealing with “public policy resolutions,” the other two with specifically targeted but sweepingly conceived “protections” for religious practices.

“Category 3’s focus on religious liberty is especially relevant today,” in the wake of the Supreme Court’s historic *Obergefell* decision, said Daniel Bennett, author of *Defending Faith: The Politics of*

*the Christian Conservative Legal Movement*. With same-sex marriage a settled issue, right-wing Christian groups “will want to prioritize protection for religious liberty, defined in their specific way. The Christian legal movement is fighting these battles in the court, but these sorts of legislative proposals show how wide-ranging the broader movement’s strategy is.”

It’s a defensive fight now, but it’s also laying the groundwork for a possible future counteroffensive. “Although Category 3 is divided in three parts, you could also see it as having two main underlying intentions,” said Clarkson. “First to denigrate the LGBTQ community, and second to defend and advance the right to discriminate. This is one way that the agenda of theocratic dominionism is reframed as protecting the right of theocrats to discriminate against those deemed second class, at best. As the late theocratic theologian R.J. Rushdoony said, ‘Only the Right have rights.’”

## Discriminatory impact

Bills protecting the “right” to discriminate against the LGBTQ community are the most salient example of how Project Blitz aims to produce a radically altered America in the style of the *Handmaid’s Tale*. But even the most innocent-seeming proposal — introducing the motto “In God We Trust” into schools — has a divisive, discriminatory, damaging impact, sharply at odds with its presentation.

“To an ex-evangelical such as myself, Project Blitz is deeply concerning,” Christopher Stroop told Salon. Stroop is a scholar, writer and Twitter personality with a history and humanities Ph.D. from Stanford, who is currently senior research associate with the Postsecular Conflicts project. As he says, he spent many years in the evangelical world.

“When I was growing up in the 1980s,” Stroop said, “two issues that were frequently lamented in my evangelical community were the legalization of abortion and the supposed banning of prayer in school — ‘supposed’ because the right-wing evangelicals I grew up with usually failed to note that the Supreme Court had only ended officially school-sponsored prayer, and had not outlawed private prayer in schools. Extreme exaggeration of the ostensible persecution we supposedly faced as Christians was prevalent in my childhood milieu.”

The attempt to reverse that imagined persecution can have real damaging effects, as Stroop notes. In examining the goal of requiring “In God We Trust” to be displayed in public schools, he said, “I cannot help but associate this goal with evangelical resentment over legal limitations on prayer in school, and to see it as an attempt to take a step toward the Christianization of public schools. On its own, posting the motto ‘In God We Trust’ in schools would already embolden Christian nationalists present in those schools, leading Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, liberal and atheist children to feel alienated and pressured to conform.”

“The American history behind these initiatives is highly suspect,” Fea said. “Yes, Christianity has deeply influenced American culture, and one could even say that it has held a privileged cultural position, but this is because most Americans have been Christians,” he explained. “Now that America has become more diverse, particularly in the wake of the 1965 Immigration Act, some conser-





Photo courtesy of Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation  
**A man holds a worn bible during the launch of the Texas Prayer Caucus.**

vative evangelicals have gone into panic mode. They have offered up a one-sided, revisionist view of the past that is more nostalgia than actual history. This approach to history is one-sided and tends to cherry-pick the parts of the American past that are useful to the Christian right’s political and moral agenda.”

Our actual history stands in ironic relationship to this narrative impulse, Fea argued. “One can make a solid case that the Founding Fathers’ views on religious liberty anticipated this moment. They were not founding a Christian nation. They were founding a nation in which religious liberty for all faiths must be defended. The Christian Right claims to be defending their own religious liberty here, but they can’t be champions of religious liberty and at the same time promote symbols and commemorations claiming America’s Judeo-Christian heritage and privileged position.”

Stroop offers a complementary argument, arguing that “the vast majority of white evangelicals and other fundamentalist Christians in America understand ‘religious freedom’ as a species of positive freedom.” In their view, that means not just “the negative freedom from state interference in the private practice of their own religion, but the positive freedom to impose that religion in the public square as the norm.”

**Pushing a flawed vision**

Clarkson cites the call for “Religious Freedom Day” proclamations as particularly revealing, once you know how to read them. “These measures epitomize the strategy of going for soft targets first. But they also reveal how the measures are intended to advance their flawed vision of the Christian nation that never was,” he said.

“Religious Freedom Day, declared by Congress in 1991, commemorates the enactment of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom [written by Thomas Jefferson] in 1786,” Clarkson continued. The Virginia Statute “is recognized by historians as the forerunner to the approach taken by the Framers of the Constitution and later, the First Amendment.”

While the Christian Right’s model bill “celebrates the idea of religious freedom, it does not even quote from the Virginia Statute itself,” Clarkson said — and the reasons are obvious.

“The key point in the Virginia Statute states that ‘all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, en-

large, or affect their civil capacities.’ In contemporary English, we might say that people’s religious views shall be neither an advantage or a disadvantage to their status as citizens. Thus, the religious freedom that Madison and Jefferson sought to establish was equality.”

Actual study of the Virginia statute and its legacy would show, of course, that when the United States was founded, “The Constitution didn’t acknowledge Christianity or any religion,” as Clarkson told me. “The framers of the Constitution looked to the Virginia statute as the underlying principle in how to approach religion and government; this set in motion the disestablishment of the colonial-era state churches and embarked the country on the journey towards greater religious equality.”

Where is all this leading, and how successful can Project Blitz possibly be amid the political and cultural turmoil of 21st-century America? That’s a big question.

“I read this proposed legislation as a sign of desperation,” Fea said. “The Christian Right has lost the culture war and its members believe that they can somehow turn back the clock through various symbols and commemorations. They are afraid and, true to their past, have chosen to respond to social and cultural change with an appeal to a nostalgic past that may not have ever existed in the first place.”

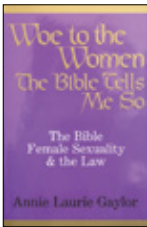
In some ways this recalls the cultural and political struggle that led to the Civil War, when Southern slaveholders waged a futile campaign to preserve a nonexistent past. That failed, but the damage to our society was devastating and in some ways is still with us. Let’s hope this new struggle over an imaginary past can end before it does similar damage.

*Paul Rosenberg is a California-based writer/activist, senior editor for Random Lengths News, and a columnist for Al Jazeera English.*

“The Christian Right has lost the culture war and its members believe that they can somehow turn back the clock through various symbols and commemorations.”

— John Fea

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# Project Blitz playbook

The Project Blitz model bills are grouped into three categories according to the degree of opposition they anticipate, with 1 being the least.

## Category 1

### Legislation Regarding Our Religious Heritage

- *National Motto Display Act*: “An act providing for display of the national motto, ‘In God We Trust,’ in public buildings and on license plates.”
- *Civic Literacy Act*: “An act providing for instruction in the content and meaning of the documents that form the foundation of our country’s constitutional republic.” Requires school boards to teach selected founding documents and to allow the posting of others in secondary schools.
- *Bible Literacy Act*: Allows for the teaching of the bible as an elective course in public schools.
- *Religion in Legal History Act*: “Endorses a uniform, sound, distinct and appropriate presentation of the story of the role of religion in the constitutional history of the United States and this state, which may be publicly displayed in courthouses and other state and local buildings throughout this state.”

## Category 2

### Resolutions and Proclamations Recognizing the Importance of Religious History and Freedom

- *Proclamation Recognizing Religious Freedom Day*: Suggests elements that might be included in an RFD proclamation.
- *Proclamation Recognizing Christian Heritage Week*: Lists items for inclusion in such a proclamation, based on proclamations in various states.
- *Proclamation Recognizing the Importance of the Bible in History*: Lists items for possible inclusion.
- *Proclamation Recognizing the Year of the Bible*: Lists items for possible inclusion.
- *Proclamation Recognizing Christmas Day*: Lists items for possible inclusion.

## Category 3

### Religious Liberty Protection Legislation Public Policy Resolutions

- *Resolution Establishing Public Policy Favoring Intimate Sexual Relations Only Between Married, Heterosexual Couples*: Resolves “that the public policy of this state supports and encourages marriage between one man and one woman and the desirability that intimate sexual relations only take place between such couples.”
- *Resolution Establishing Public Policy Favoring Reliance on and Maintenance of Birth Gender*: Resolves “that the public policy of this state supports and encourages maintenance of the birth gender of its citizens.” This a bill aimed at discouraging or limiting recognition of transgender people.
- *Resolution Establishing Public Policy Favoring Adoption by Intact Heterosexual, Marriage-based Families*: Aimed at discouraging adoption by same-sex couples.

### Protection for Professionals and Individuals

- *Protection for Professionals and Individuals Marriage Tolerance Act* (aka First Amendment Defense Act): “An act to prohibit discriminatory action against a person who believes, speaks or acts in accordance with a sincerely held religious belief that marriage is or should be recognized as the union of one man and one woman or that sexual relations are properly reserved to such marriage.”
- *Preserving Religious Freedom Act* (aka Religious Freedom Restoration Act or “state RFRA”): “This act is intended to ensure that this state applies at least the same level of religious liberty protections applied at the federal level in order to ensure that state and local governmental entities will not restrict a person’s free exercise rights more than the federal government.” The model bill is similar to bill already on the books in several states.
- *Child Protection Act*: Seeks to allow religious exemptions for adoption and foster care agencies in serving same sex couples.
- *Clergy Protection Act*: Allows clergy and religious organizations not to participate in marriage of which they disapprove.
- *Licensed Professional Civil Rights Act*: “An act prohibiting discrimination by any individual or organization against an applicant for, or a holder of, an occupational license, due to the professional’s or potential professional’s sincerely held religious beliefs.” Would provide religious exemptions for such professionals as pharmacists, medical personnel and mental health practitioners from providing care to LGBTQ people, and on such matters as abortion and contraception.

### Protection for Teachers and Students

- *Student Prayer Certification Act*: “An act providing for certain reporting and certifications by the state board of education and local school districts to comply with federal law.” States are required to certify that they are not preventing students from engaging in constitutionally protected prayer. This bill sets up a mechanism for how to implement.
- *Teacher Protection Act*: Provides for state legal assistance if teachers or schools are sued over official religious practices.
- *Preserving Religious Freedom in School Act*: Provides for legal protection for a variety of religious expressions and activities.



# IN THE NEWS

## New tax law quietly hits churches, others

Republicans have quietly imposed a new tax on churches, synagogues and other nonprofits, a little-noticed and surprising change that could cost some groups tens of thousands of dollars.

The recent tax code rewrite requires churches, hospitals, colleges and other historically tax-exempt organizations to begin paying a 21 percent tax on some types of fringe benefits they provide employees.

That could force thousands of groups that have long had little contact with the IRS to suddenly begin filing returns and paying taxes for the first time.

Many organizations are stunned to learn of the tax and say it will be a significant financial and administrative burden.

## Indiana GOP to keep old definition of marriage

The Indiana Republican Party voted to keep language defining marriage as being “between a man and a woman” in its platform, rejecting language meant to be more inclusive of same-sex couples.

Members at the GOP state party’s convention on June 9 overwhelmingly voted to keep the biblically-inspired language first adopted under then-Gov. Mike Pence in 2014.

The Supreme Court in 2015 ruled that same-sex marriage was legal in the United States.

Daniel Elliot, chair of the Morgan County Republican Party, said that the concept of marriage being between a man and woman is central to the beliefs of “Hoosier Republicans.”

“This language . . . recognizes the reality on the ground that most families are headed by married couples,” Elliot said.

## Sessions: Rule favors religious institutions

Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced an initiative on June 13 aimed at boosting the Justice Department’s role protecting religious institutions from supposedly cumbersome zoning rules.

“Under the laws of this country, government cannot discriminate against people based on their religion — not in law enforcement, not in grant-making, not in hiring and not in local zoning laws,” Sessions said in a statement announcing the Place to Worship Initiative.

The announcement said the Justice



Rich Sagall of Maryland spotted this sign while traveling in Roswell, N.M.

Department would expand awareness of a 2000 law to shield religious institutions from overly restrictive zoning regulations and would provide “additional training and resources for federal prosecutors,” with an inaugural community outreach event in New Jersey later this month.

## N.C. House OKs ‘In God We Trust’ in schools

After a debate about whether it’s promoting religion, the North Carolina state House voted overwhelmingly June 7 to require public schools to display in a prominent place the words “In God We Trust,” belatedly adopted as our nation’s motto only in 1955.

Supporters of House Bill 965, which passed 94-15, said that the legislation would promote the nation’s history and identity because it is the national motto. They denied that the bill was an attempt to promote religion in general or Christianity in particular.

But critics said the bill sends the message that the state is backing one religion over another because most people will assume it’s referring to Christianity.

“I really do believe that it is in our best interests for our nation for us not to try to promote the triune God through government,” said Rep. Verla Insko, referring to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

All the Republicans voted for the bill while it split Democrats. The bill

now goes to the Senate.

## Crocodile kills pastor during mass baptism

Tragedy struck a mass baptism in an African lake when a crocodile leaped from the water and killed the pastor.

The Rev. Docho Eshete was conducting the ceremony June 3 for about 80 people at Lake Abaya in southern Ethiopia. Eshete died after being bitten on his legs, back and hands.

“He baptized the first person and he passed on to another one. All of a sudden, a crocodile jumped out of the lake and grabbed the pastor,” local resident Ketema Kairo told BBC.

After the crocodile struck, congregants and local fishermen attempted to save the Protestant clergyman, policeman Eiwnetu Kanko said, using fishing nets to prevent the crocodile from taking Eshete further into the lake.

## Majority don’t support denying service to gays

Most Americans don’t support allowing gay Americans to be denied services because of the religious convictions of a business owner.

Six in 10 Americans oppose allowing a small-business owner in their state to refuse products or services to gay people even if providing them would violate the business owner’s religious beliefs, according to survey findings published in May by the Public Religion Research Institute.

There are only two major religious groups in which the majority of adherents think that small-business owners should be able to refuse service to gay people for religious reasons: white evangelical Protestants and Mormons.

## Anti-abortion pregnancy centers win in court

Ruling for opponents of abortion on free speech grounds, the Supreme Court said June 26 that the state of California may not require religiously oriented “crisis pregnancy centers” to

supply women with information about how to end their pregnancies.

The case was a clash between state efforts to provide women with facts about their medical options and First Amendment rulings that place limits on the government’s ability to compel people to say things at odds with their beliefs.

Justice Clarence Thomas, writing for the five-justice conservative majority, accepted the free-speech argument, ruling that the First Amendment prohibits California from forcing the centers, which oppose abortion on religious grounds, to post notices about how to obtain the procedure.

## Ireland may vote down law banning blasphemy

In October, citizens in the Republic of Ireland will vote in a referendum on whether the blasphemy clause should be stripped from the Constitution.

“The publication or utterance of blasphemous, seditious, or indecent matter is an offence which shall be punishable in accordance with law,” says Article 40 of the Irish Constitution.

While Irish “blasphemers” are unlikely to be punished, the prohibition is still in the Constitution, and a corresponding law is on the books, with a top fine of almost \$30,000.

Michael Nugent, a spokesperson for the advocacy group Atheism Ireland, welcomed the referendum, saying that even in the absence of prosecutions the law was causing real damage to freedom of expression in Ireland, and to the country’s reputation abroad.

## S.C. to discriminate against non-Christians

South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster has intervened with the Department of Health and Human Services to secure a religious exemption from federal nondiscrimination laws for a Christian foster-care-placement agency in his state.

Without the exemption, the placement agency, Miracle Hill Ministries, could lose its license because it refuses to place foster children with non-Christian families.

McMaster acted in February when the Department of Social Services warned Miracle Hill that its license as a child-placing agency was at risk. It had given regulators “reason to believe” that it “intends to refuse to provide its services as a licensed Child Placing Agency to families who are not Christians from a Protestant denomination,” according to documents obtained by the ACLU.

## School buses to get ‘In God We Trust’ decals

The Lee County (Va.) School Board voted unanimously to put “In God We Trust” flag decals on their school buses.

“There’s actually a state law that requires us to have ‘In God We Trust’ placed in each of our school buildings so this seems like a natural follow up on that and I think something around here will appreciate and take pride in having on the buses,” Lee County School Board member Rob Hines said.

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# Clergy sex abuse roundup

## Court blocks release of landmark report

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court on June 25 struck a blow against clergy sexual abuse survivors by ordering a stay on a completed landmark report that is among the most expansive investigations into clergy abuse in the country, dating back decades.

The order prohibits Judge Norman A. Krumenacker III and Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro from publishing the grand jury's findings, and postpones the report's release indefinitely.

Mark Rozzi, a Pennsylvania state representative and clergy abuse victim, was upset when he heard the report wouldn't be released.

"It's like the M.O. of the church," Rozzi told the Daily Beast. "The only thing they're concerned about is protecting themselves and their own image. They're not concerned about protecting the victims. They've done what they've always done to us: put us out on the curb, and hope we go away, or we die."

According to one of the few court documents that has been made public, the case has drawn dozens of witnesses and nearly a half-million pages of internal church documents. It has focused on alleged crimes and misconduct by "individuals associated with the Roman Catholic Church, local public officials and community leaders" — and could implicate hundreds of people.

As a result, the 884-page report was the target of an intense legal battle. A group of unnamed individuals have won, at least for now, a fight to withhold its public release.

They claimed that "the reputation interest of the non-indicted named persons will be harmed by the release of the report."

According to the Daily Beast, bishops from all six dioceses have denied filing the motion or doing anything to inhibit the report's release.

The attorney general's investigation has zeroed in on six of the state's eight Catholic dioceses: Allentown, Scranton, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Greensburg and Erie.

The grand jury report is not expected to include criminal charges, according to people familiar with the content. Yet it is bound to have sweeping legal and political implications, including reviving the emotional fight in the Legislature over whether victims of long-ago abuse should have the chance to sue their abusers and the people and institutions who covered it up.

"I'm not a politician, but if I was, I'd be pretty scared," said James Faluszcak, a former priest in the Diocese of Erie who was among the victims to tell the grand jury about the abuse he experienced as a teenager.

A similar investigation in 2016 explored abuse allegations in Pennsylvania's Altoona-Johnstown diocese, and the explosive resulting report found as many as 50 priests and religious leaders guilty of child sexual abuse—and many others guilty of participating in a nearly 50-year coverup.

"This failure was colossal. It was nothing less than organized crime," Pennsylvania state Rep. Mike Vereb told The New York Times. "There was no chance, if you were a victim, that you were going to get justice."



### Minn. archdiocese OKs \$210 million payment

The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has reached a \$210 million settlement agreement with 450 victims of clergy sexual abuse as part of a bankruptcy reorganization, officials announced June 1.

At \$210,290,724, it is thought to be the second-largest payout by the Catholic church in the United States, according to the Associated Press. It comes after nearly four years of bankruptcy proceedings and negotiations. Individual awards have not been determined.

"I have been fighting in court with the church now for 13 years. ... This has been a long day coming," Jim Keenan said, battling tears, according to AP. "If anybody out there is wondering, 'Do I have the legs to stand up under my voice?' You absolutely do. Even when you're kneeling. Even when you're stumbling. You got the legs to stand up and hear your voice," he said.

Insurance carriers will pay about \$170 million of the settlement while the archdiocese and parishes will pay about \$40 million, according to Abood.

The largest clergy abuse-related settlement was in 2007 by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, which paid 508 victims \$660 million.

### 90+ seek compensation from Buffalo Diocese

More than 90 people filed claims for sexual abuse compensation with the Buffalo (N.Y.) Diocese by its June 1 deadline.

Bishop Richard Malone didn't reveal how many people applied, how many priests are being accused in the claims, or how much money the diocese is willing to pay out.

The diocese has been rocked in recent months by a continuing scandal over its cover-up of clergy sexual abuse dating back decades. A retired priest's admission in February that he had molested dozens of boys during his stints at multiple parishes in the 1960s, '70s and '80s led to revelations of other sex abuse cases and the uncovering of how those abuses were kept secret for so long.

In March, Malone launched the

Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program (IRCP), publicized the names of 42 diocesan priests who had been credibly accused of sexual abuse of minors and apologized to individual victims.

But some victims and their advocates continue to criticize Malone's handling of the crisis, saying the bishop was more concerned with protecting the diocese's reputation and assets than with getting to the bottom of the scandal, protecting children and helping victims heal.

The compensation program is being administered by two retired judges who were contracted by the diocese. The judges will determine which applicants get settlements and how much money they receive.

### Eight Rochester priests accused of sexual abuse

A Boston attorney who has spent decades representing victims of sexual abuse called on the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, N.Y., to release records it may hold concerning allegations of sexual abuse of children by clergy.

Mitchell Garabedian named eight priests from the Rochester diocese who are accused of sexually abusing minor children. A group of 15 men and two women, now grown, say they were abused by these priests when they were children.

Garabedian said the incidents took place between 1950 and 1978 when the alleged perpetrators were assigned to churches in the Rochester diocese.

He called on Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester Bishop Salvatore Matano to release any records he has about allegations of sexual abuse against priests, including so-called "secret files," so the public can know who the accused priests are and what their supervisors did to respond to allegations.

Garabedian is a Boston attorney who rose to prominence representing survivors of sexual abuse by priests there in the 1990s and 2000s. He was portrayed by actor Stanley Tucci in the Oscar-winning film "Spotlight," which chronicled the case.

To date, his firm has represented more than 1,000 victims and survi-

vors of clergy sexual abuse.

### Priest accused of sex abuse in Guam missing

Father Adrian Cristobal, who was on sabbatical in Phoenix until recently and is accused of sexually abusing two boys more than 20 years ago in Guam, has not returned to the island as ordered by the church.

Two men filed separate civil suits in federal court in Guam in April and May accusing Cristobal of sexual abuse.

Cristobal had arrived in Phoenix in December 2017 for sabbatical with a letter of good standing, the Phoenix Diocese said in a written statement to The Arizona Republic. The Phoenix Diocese said it removed his faculties, or his ability to perform church sacraments, after the first suit was filed in April.

Diocese spokesman Rob DeFrancesco said Cristobal had called them in April, saying he was at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport "presumably heading to Guam." The local diocese hasn't heard from him since, DeFrancesco said.

The Guam church has been rocked by numerous allegations against priests, which came after the territory lifted the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse in 2016. Three Arizona residents are among those claiming sexual abuse by Catholic church leaders on the Pacific island.

### Pope ousts bishop in Chile's abuse scandal

Pope Francis on June 11 accepted the resignations of the bishop at the center of Chile's clerical sex abuse scandal and two other priests, beginning a purge of the Catholic Church in a country where it had been damaged by abuse and cover-up accusations.

A Vatican statement said the pope had accepted the resignations of Bishop Juan Barros of Osorno, Bishop Gonzalo Duarte of Valparaiso and Bishop Cristian Caro of Puerto Montt.

Barros, 61, has been at the center of Chile's growing scandal ever since Francis appointed him bishop of Osorno in 2015 over the objections of the local faithful, his own sex abuse prevention advisers and some of Chile's other bishops. They questioned Barros' suitability to lead, given he had been a top lieutenant of Chile's most notorious predator priest.

In May, Francis summoned Chile's church leaders to Rome after realizing he had made "grave errors in judgment" about Barros, whom he had defended strongly during a visit to Chile in January.

Also in Chile, police raided the offices of the Catholic Church in two cities June 13, seizing documents related to a sex abuse scandal that has led to the resignation of three bishops.

Police targeted the Santiago Ecclesiastical Court and the bishop's office in Rancagua in the O'Higgins region in central Chile. Fourteen priests are accused of performing sexual acts on minors, the AP reported.



# FFRF NEWS

## FFRF condemns court ruling upholding Muslim travel ban

FFRF condemns the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision from June 26 upholding the Trump administration’s religion-based travel ban.

The Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, decided on narrow grounds, adopted a recklessly “deferential standard of review” for presidential authority. In light of concerns over “intruding on the president’s constitutional responsibilities in the area of foreign affairs,” it noted that “the proclamation does not exceed any textual limit on the president’s authority.”

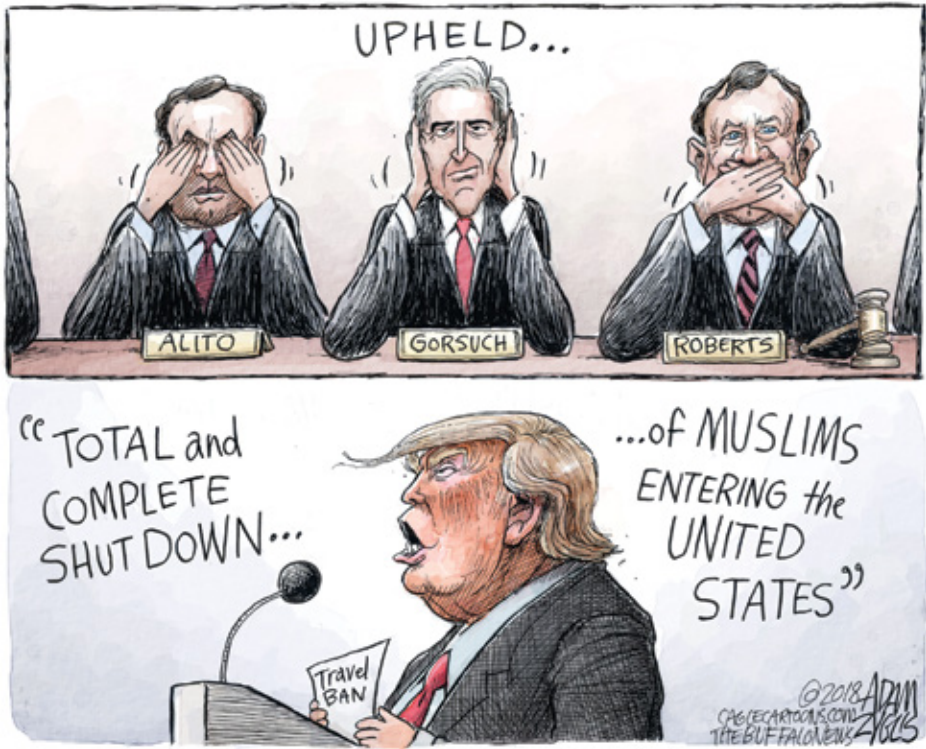
The travel ban blatantly disregards the Establishment Clause, as FFRF demonstrated in its “friend of the court” brief filed before the Supreme Court against the ban. The Trump administration’s history of excluding from entry to the United States immigrants and non-immigrants from selected majority-Muslim countries violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, FFRF had contended.

The travel ban also contravenes Article VI of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits a religious test for office or public trust.

But the Supreme Court’s decision, written by Chief Justice John Roberts, seemingly disregarded the Constitution.

After finding that the ban “is squarely within the scope of presidential authority under the [Immigration and Nationality Act],” Roberts adopted a “deferential standard of review” in light of concerns over “intruding on the president’s constitutional responsibilities in the area of foreign affairs.”

The court declined to treat the president’s statements regarding the discriminatory purpose of the ban as direct evidence of a discriminatory intent and instead only considered “the significance of those statements in reviewing a presidential directive, neutral on its face, addressing a matter within



the core of executive responsibility.” “This decision is shocking on two fronts. First, America is not supposed to have an imperial presidency. The Supreme Court failed its duty to check the president’s unconstitutional decision,” comments FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Second, its judgment will cement the notion of second-class status for those belonging to minority religions or no religion at all.”

Roberts writes: “. . . because there is persuasive evidence that the entry suspension has a legitimate grounding in national security concerns, quite apart from any religious hostility, we must accept that independent justification.”

As Justice Sonia Sotomayor writes in her rousing dissent, “the answer is unquestionably yes” as to whether the primary purpose of the ban is religious animus.

President Trump’s statements showed that the serial travel ban orders were motivated by a desire to discriminate against unpopular religious minorities. When Trump issued his most recent executive order on Sept. 27, 2017, he repeatedly linked it to previous orders, calling it a “larger, tougher, and more specific” ban.

“The true hypocrisy of this decision is evident when comparing it to the Supreme Court’s other major religious freedom decision this term,” notes FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert. “While in *Masterpiece Cakeshop* the court interpreted mild, factual statements by the Colorado Civil Rights Commission as statements of hostility toward a Christian baker, in this case a majority of the same court turned a blind eye toward repetitive, openly hostile statements by the president against Muslims.”

Sotomayor notes this inconsistency in her dissent, writing “the court recently found less pervasive official expressions of hostility and the failure to disavow them to be constitutionally significant [citing *Masterpiece*]. It should find the same here.”

A silver lining for state/church separation is that the Supreme Court has narrowed the decision’s scope.

“The case before us differs in numerous respects from the conventional Establishment Clause claim,” the court majority states. “Unlike the typical suit involving religious displays or school prayer, plaintiffs seek to invalidate a national security directive regulating the entry of aliens abroad.”

Another silver lining is Sotomayor’s dissent, joined by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. (Justices Elena Kagan and Stephen Breyer issued their own dissent.)

“The United States of America is a nation built upon the promise of religious liberty,” Sotomayor writes. “Our Founders honored that core promise by embedding the principle of religious neutrality in the First Amendment. The court’s decision today fails to safeguard that fundamental principle.”

Sotomayor adds that the judgment “leaves undisturbed a policy first advertised openly and unequivocally as a ‘total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States’ because the policy now masquerades behind a façade of national-security concerns.”

Importantly, she points out that the ruling fundamentally “erodes the foundational principles of religious tolerance that the court elsewhere has so emphatically protected, and it tells members of minority religions in our country ‘that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community,’” quoting a previous landmark Supreme Court decision.

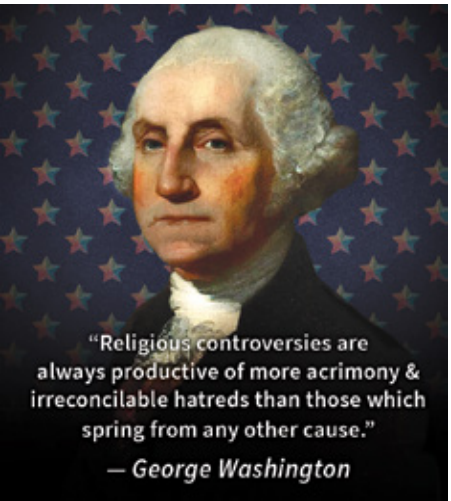
## FFRF debunks Hobby Lobby’s annual ad

Hobby Lobby engaged in its yearly Independence Day charade, but FFRF was there to expose it once again.

Every Fourth of July, the pious folks at Hobby Lobby, the corporation that gutted Obamacare’s contraceptive mandate, run a full-page ad in newspapers across the country with one message: In God they trust. The ad shamelessly tries to sell the myth that the United States is founded on the Christian god by using quotes that are almost all deliberately altered or pulled out of context to change their meaning.

Thanks to generous, activist members in Peoria, Ill., and Eugene, Ore., FFRF ran a rebuttal advertisement the week of July 4. Ken and Cheryl Hofbauer arranged to make sure the facts play in Peoria, in its monthly Community Word. Charles Jones and FFRF’s Portland, Ore., chapter underwrote much of a larger ad in the Eugene Register-Guard, which ran on July 4. The ads draw on an advertising campaign by FFRF in 2013 running full-page ads in a number of dailies to counter the Hobby Lobby ad.

“We thank these individuals and our chapter for their initiative and generosity. With member support, we hope to



FFRF used the words of the Founding Fathers to rebut a Hobby Lobby newspaper ad campaign.

run a larger campaign in 2019 to counter the Hobby Lobby July Fourth ads, whose insidious purpose is to portray the United States as a theocracy,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Also in 2013, FFRF launched an interactive website showing all of the errors in Hobby Lobby’s ad that year.

An FFRF blog ([bit.ly/2KKMjrc](http://bit.ly/2KKMjrc)) in 2016 walked readers through Hobby Lobby’s deception step by step, yet Hobby Lobby continues to misconstrue these quotes, sometimes adding new misleading quotes. This year was no different. Every single one of the 16 misleading sources FFRF previously exposed remains in Hobby Lobby’s ad, without any correction or apology.

## Voting registration initiative begins

FFRF has proudly kicked off a nationally coordinated secular voting registration drive for the 2018 elections.

It has joined forces with five other leading national secular groups to launch the first national secular voter registration initiative: Secular America Votes!

On June 30, the Inland Northwest Freethought Society, a FFRF chapter working in western Washington and eastern Idaho, conducted the first Secular America Votes registration drive in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. The vigil and march were attended by roughly 175-200 people in coordination with the nationwide “Families Belong Together” demonstrations.

“We knew that 2018 would mark a watershed moment for the secular movement and each passing day confirms our instincts,” says FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. “Never has it been more critical to use the ballot box to stop the encroachment of religious zealotry into our secular government.”

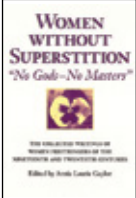
Barker adds that he’s proud of the fact that 97 percent of FFRF members are registered voters (based on a definitive 2015 survey of our members). Unfortunately, that momentum is not reflected in secular voter turnout at large. While “Nones” make up an ever-growing percentage of the U.S. population at 24 percent, more than a quarter report

To volunteer for a registration drive near you or to learn more, go to [secularamericavotes.org](http://secularamericavotes.org).

that they are not registered to vote, particularly younger freethinkers. Secular voters comprise about 15 percent of the electorate, according to 2016 studies.

Meanwhile, evangelicals, at only 17 percent of the population, still make up more than a quarter of the electorate. Secular America Votes is intended to combat the disproportionate influence of the Religious Right while drawing attention to the growing secular movement. It also provides an avenue for individuals concerned about America’s politics to do something constructive before the important November elections.

**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*

**Buy it from FFRF online  
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# Biblical basis for immigration policy repugnant

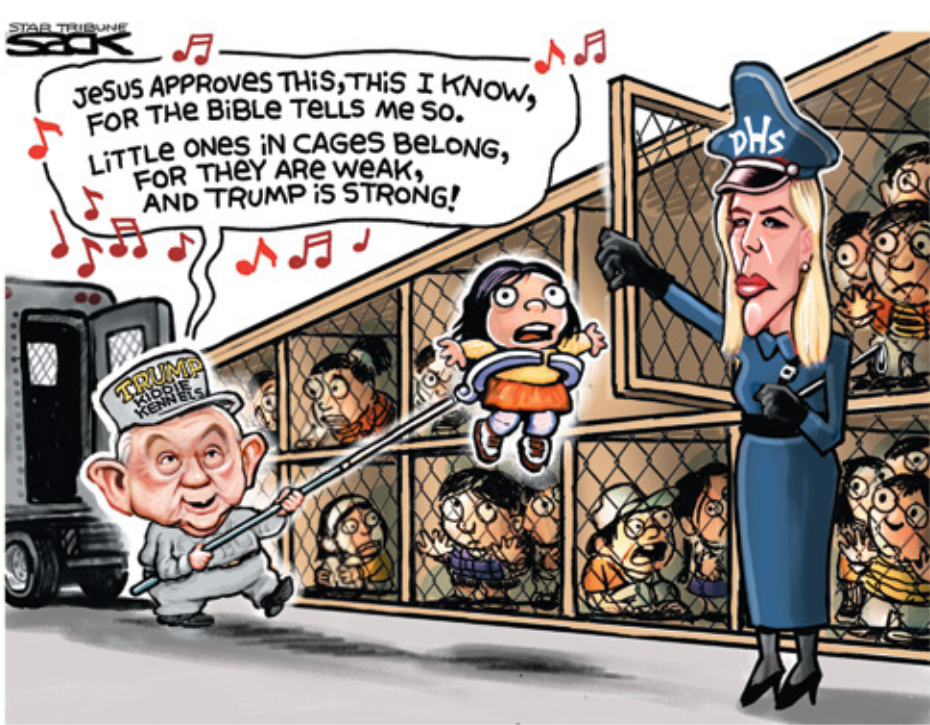
FFRF formally objected to the attorney general’s use of the bible as justification for the Trump administration’s draconian immigration procedures.

“Religion has no place in shaping public policy in our secular nation,” FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor wrote in a letter of complaint to Attorney General Jeff Sessions. “Under our godless Constitution, which separates state and church, the bible is not a legitimate justification for any action our government takes. In fact, the Supreme Court has said that if a government action lacks a secular purpose (i.e., it has a religious purpose) that action is unconstitutional.”

In his now-infamous June 14 speech in Indiana, Sessions cited the bible (Romans 13) to rationalize the Justice Department’s separation of children from their refugee and immigrant parents. FFRF condemned both the child separation tactic and Sessions’ use of the bible to justify it.

To this day, the Trump administration is still struggling to reunite thousands of these refugee and immigrant children with their parents.

Though a so-called holy book should not be used to justify actions by our secular government, FFRF expressed a lack of surprise that the White House has invoked the bible to defend inhu-



mane policies. “The bible has brought out the worst in America and been used to justify our greatest shames. From slavery, to segregation, to the subjugation of women, the bible has been used as an engine of regression since America’s founding,” FFRF noted in its letter.

That is precisely why our Founders adopted our entirely secular Constitution and, when they did so, they did not pray at the Constitutional Con-

vention, FFRF reminded Sessions. The only references to religion in our godless Constitution are exclusionary. The United States was first among nations to adopt a secular Constitution — investing sovereignty in “We the People,” not a divinity.

“President Trump’s child separation policy is doing serious damage not only to parents and children, but also to America,” FFRF wrote. “Sessions’

use of religion to justify it is an egregious violation of the spirit of the First Amendment.”

FFRF points out that the bible should not shape public policy — not only because it is a behavioral grab bag full of primitive and outdated ideas and morality, but because we live in a secular nation and under a secular government. Imagine the consternation had Sessions preached instead from the Quran. It is equally inappropriate for the attorney general to preach from the Christian bible.

Ironically, Sessions himself acknowledged his secular duty in the same speech in which he preached from Romans 13. “But I am a law officer, a law officer for a nation state, a secular nation state, not a theocracy; it’s not a church,” he said. Yes, America is not a theocracy, FFRF emphasizes, and that’s why Sessions should stop treating his government office as though it were a pulpit.

The changing demographics of the United States make biblical rationalizations even more unsuitable. Today nearly one-quarter of Americans (24 percent) are religiously unaffiliated, for a total of nearly 30 percent non-Christians. Not only are a huge number of younger Americans religiously unaffiliated, but 21 percent of Americans born after 1999 identify as explicitly atheist or agnostic.

# Nonbelief Relief gives \$32K in mid-year grants

Nonbelief Relief, a leading free-thought charity, has announced its mid-year grants intended to “to improve this, our only world.”

Nonbelief Relief, a charitable organization created by the executive board of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, is a humanitarian agency taking charitable action in the name of atheists, agnostics and other freethinkers. Nonbelief Relief seeks to remediate conditions of human suffering and injustice on a global scale, whether the result of natural disasters, human actions or adherence to religious dogma. Such relief is not limited to but includes assistance for individuals targeted for nonbelief, secular activism or blasphemy.

After its mid-year meeting, the Nonbelief Relief board of directors announces the following timely gifts:

- **RAICES**, Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Le-



gal Services — Legal Representation, Education and Advocacy (LEAF) Project, \$10,000.

Founded in 1986, RAICES has grown to be the largest immigration legal services provider in Texas. RAICES has received an influx of contributions after a couple’s small Facebook fundraiser went viral, and has pledged to use the funds to help any separated immigrant families and unaccompanied children in any state. The money will go toward legal fees, bond (so that families can be released from detention and find their children again), and transportation costs. An individual case can range between \$2,500 to \$15,000 and RAICES has pledged to ensure everyone needing help is helped, free of charge. The Trump administration’s initial justification for the program, which is wreaking such havoc and misery, was biblical in nature, Nonbelief Relief notes.

- **Oxfam America**, earmarked for relief in Yemen, \$10,000.

Yemen is caught in the world’s largest humanitarian crisis and on the verge of famine after three years of war and a de facto blockade have pushed food and fuel prices out of reach, Oxfam reports, leaving people without clean water, food, hospitals, and schools.

Sixty percent of the population — 17.8 million people — doesn’t know where they’ll get their next meal, and 6.8 million face extreme hunger. More than 3 million people have fled their homes, and nearly 19 million people are in need of humanitarian

assistance. Since July 2015, Oxfam and its partners have reached 2.8 million people with assistance that includes water and sanitation services, cash assistance and food vouchers. In response to the cholera outbreak — the fastest-growing cholera epidemic in history — Oxfam is delivering water, sanitation, and hygiene to help prevent the spread of the disease. The havoc caused in Yemen is largely due to Saudi Arabia using it as a battleground in an anti-Shiite campaign, proving the divisive nature of religion.

- **Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)**, \$10,000.

In 2017, SAMS provided 3,251,639 medical services, treated 2,074,460 beneficiaries, sponsored 119 medical facilities, and supported 3,072 medical and nonmedical workers.

SAMS is a global medical relief organization that is working on the front lines of crisis relief in Syria and beyond to save lives and alleviate suffering. SAMS operates 50 primary health care facilities, including eight mobile clinics, across Syria, providing medical care for communicable and non-communicable diseases for local populations, internally displaced persons and those living in areas.

- **Alliance for Period Supplies**, \$2,500.

One in four U.S. women have struggled to purchase period products in the past year due to income, and one in five have lost school or work (or even lost jobs) because they couldn’t afford adequate supplies. Alliance for Period Supplies is a new national organization to help insure that individuals in need have access to essential period products required to participate fully in daily life. The fund is administered by the National Diaper Bank Network, and caught the eye of Nonbelief Relief board

members because of Katha Pollitt’s recommendation in a recent Nation column. “When is a necessity not a necessity?” asks Pollitt, an honorary officer of FFRF: “When it’s a product used by half the population every month for 35 to 40 years, but never even once by the other half. In case you haven’t figured it out yet, I’m talking about menstrual supplies.” Thirty-six states tax sanitary supplies, but a drive is on to overturn such taxation.

“The majority of religions consider the natural and life-affirming function of menstruation as ‘unclean’ and otherwise stigmatize women,” notes Annie Laurie Gaylor, who is FFRF co-president and administrator of Nonbelief Relief. “Even today, many women in Nepal are forced into degrading and unsafe ‘menstruation huts’ in a practice partially derived from Hinduism. In our part of the world, the notion of menstruation as a ‘curse,’ which is biblically rooted, has contributed to our society’s lack of attention to basic needs and dignity for women.”

Members of FFRF and other freethinkers are encouraged to make charitable donations via Nonbelief Relief so it can continue to publicly donate in the name of nonbelief. Churches have long been credited with charitable works because they give on behalf of their congregations. Nonbelievers are just as charitable, but have lacked the infrastructure to give as a group. Please give, if you can, to Nonbelief Relief, via FFRF, by choosing “Nonbelief Relief” in the “where do you want your donation to be used?” dropdown menu at [ffrf.org/donate](http://ffrf.org/donate), to ensure your contributions remain deductible for income-tax purposes. Your donation will go toward similar charitable gifts in the future, including endangered nonbelievers.

**FFRF’s classic ‘Freethinker’ mug**

Our classic ‘Freethinker’ mug has been re-created. White imprint on classic blue, matte finish. 13 oz. American-made mug.



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FFRF VICTORIES

More pomp, fewer religious circumstances

By Paul Epland

FFRF was able to persuade numerous public schools around the country to end their religious prayers, remarks and handouts during graduation ceremonies. Here is a round-up of FFRF’s successful outcomes.

**Brimfield, Ill.**

FFRF’s objection to an Illinois high school’s religious graduation ceremony has made certain that there won’t be any further imposition of religion in the district.

A concerned community member contacted FFRF to report that the Brimfield High School graduation ceremony on May 20 included two separate Christian prayers. A copy of the ceremony’s written program includes both an “invocation” and “benediction.” Students were reportedly told to vote on whether there would be a prayer, then administrative staff instructed the valedictorians to select who among them would deliver the prayers during the ceremony.

FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne wrote to Brimfield CUSD #309 Superintendent Robert Richardson, outlining why the imposition of religion was unconstitutional. The school district was convinced by Jayne’s arguments.

“Brimfield CUSD #309 confirms to you that there will not be scheduled or approved prayer at district-sponsored events,” Richardson recently emailed the state/church watchdog.

**Dekalb County, Ga.**

A concerned resident reported to FFRF that a Dekalb County School Board member had been using her position to promote her religious beliefs to students and staff, including religious remarks she made at the 2017 Arabia Mountain High School graduation ceremony and the 2017 Dekalb County Schools Convocation.

On April 12, FFRF Legal Fellow Christopher Line wrote Dekalb County School District’s Chief Legal Officer, Jennifer Hackenmeyer, to notify the district that no public school representative may urge religious points of view on students, including telling them that they should “magnify the Lord,” “exalt his name,” or “put God first” — all things the board member had said during school functions.

An attorney representing the district replied to FFRF’s complaint on June 26, writing that the district “does not sponsor religious speeches” and has “provided a secular script for board members during the 2018 graduation.”

**Great Bend, Kan.**

FFRF ensured that employees within a Kansas school district will not be promoting their personal religious beliefs to students. On May 23, FFRF’s Christopher Line wrote to Khris Thexton, superintendent of Great Bend public school district in Great Bend, Kan., to issue a complaint against Principal Tim Friess of the Great Bend High School. Friess made religious remarks to students and parents at the 2018 Great Bend High School graduation, beginning his remarks by “thank[ing] God for the beautiful day that he has blessed us with” before relating a religious anecdote and concluding his remarks with “may God bless each of you.”

On June 8, Mark Rondeau, a legal representative for the school district, wrote to FFRF to report that Thexton had spoken with Friess, telling him that his religious comments were not in accordance with school policies. Friess assured the superintendent these comments would not be repeated.

**Pottsville, Pa.**

FFRF has helped put an end to prayer at a Pennsylvania high school’s graduation ceremonies. A senior at Pottsville Area High School informed

FFRF that a prayer was scheduled at the high school’s graduation ceremony, and that the school sponsored a baccalaureate ceremony during the school day.

On June 6, FFRF Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler wrote to Superintendent Jeffrey Zwiebel to ensure that the prayer at Friday’s graduation was cancelled.

On June 9, the Republican-Herald, a local Pottsville newspaper, published a story detailing FFRF’s complaint against the school and the school’s subsequent decision to cancel the graduation prayer.

**Shelby, Ohio**

A concerned Ohio resident has reported that Shelby High School in Shelby, Ohio, had been advertising and promoting a baccalaureate service as part of its graduation events. An advertisement for the baccalaureate service, which typically includes prayer or worship, was published on the front cover of the Shelby High School graduation program and on the school’s website.

On May 18, FFRF’s Christopher Line wrote Tim Tarvin, superintendent of Shelby City Schools, to ensure that Shelby City Schools does not sponsor or advertise baccalaureate programs for its students.

On June 21, Melissa Martinez Bondy, a legal representative for the district, wrote to FFRF assuring it that the public school will no longer have any part in “controlling, organizing, and publicizing the baccalaureate service,” and that “the board will remove notice of the baccalaureate service from all graduation materials and announcements and will not directly or indirectly publicize the event.”

**Goldsboro, N.C.**

After FFRF intervened, Wayne County Public Schools in Goldsboro, N.C., will not conduct prayers at school functions.

On Nov. 22, 2017, FFRF Senior Council Patrick Elliott wrote to Wayne County Public School Board Chairperson Don Christopher West to register a complaint regarding prayers at Spring Creek High School graduation ceremony and school board meetings after a local complainant informed FFRF that Wayne County Schools has repeatedly engaged in practices that violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

On June 7, legal representatives for the district, Richard A. Schwartz and Laura E. Crumpler, wrote FFRF to confirm that “Wayne County Public Schools has ceased both of the practices” — prayer at high school graduation and board meetings.

**Hicksville, Ohio**

FFRF has stopped Christian commencement handouts at Hicksville High School in Hicksville, Ohio. FFRF’s Christopher Line wrote to Keith Countryman, superintendent of Hicksville Exempted Village School, on May 31 to issue a complaint about a religious packet distributed to students during the high school’s commencement practice.

A concerned student notified FFRF about the constitutional violation, reporting that every graduating student received a packet containing materials that promoted Christianity, including a copy of “Evolution vs. God,” an anti-evolution film and a religious tract titled, “Are you a Good Person?” The packet also included a letter titled, “Hicksville High School Class of 2018,” which included religious messages and a bible verse.

An attorney representing the school contacted FFRF on June 21 to communicate that FFRF’s concerns had been addressed by the school and no such illegal action will be taken or allowed by the Hicksville school district in the future.

Constitutional music to FFRF’s ears

FFRF was able to help put a stop to the intrusion of religion into three public music programs recently.

**Canal Fulton, Ohio**

A concerned resident alerted FFRF to a constitutional violation at a high school in Canal Fulton, Ohio.

A joint concert between the Northwest High School choir and the Central Presbyterian Church choir, which took place at a church and included religious music, was described by Northwest vocal teacher and organist at Central Presbyterian Church as a “culmination of spiritual, musical and theological union.”

FFRF’s Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Christopher Line wrote to Northwest Local Schools’ Superintendent Michael Schreffler on June 5 requesting assurance that the school choir will no longer participate in the religious performances at the church.

General counsel for the Northwest Local Board of Education, Mary Jo Shannon Slick, responded to FFRF on June 29 confirming that the board has reviewed FFRF’s concerns and will not be holding choir performances in a church in the future.

**Mesquite, Texas**

A parent of a student at Mesquite Independent School District in Mesquite, Texas, notified FFRF that a student choir performed on a stage in front of a large Latin cross, adjacent to a Christian flag on a pole with a cross on top. The venue was reportedly full of other religious iconography, including wall and table art quoting scripture, religious pamphlets and pews full of bibles and hymnals. The parent also noted that there were many alternative, secular venues available to the district at no cost.

On Feb. 6, FFRF Associate Council Sam Grover wrote to Superintendent David Vroonland to issue a complaint regarding the all-city choir concert at Shiloh Terrace Baptist Church in Dallas.

On June 19, district representative Karyn Cummings wrote FFRF to confirm that the “Mesquite Independent School District does not have any choir



events scheduled in religious venues for the 2018-2019 school year.”

**Arvada, Colo.**

FFRF reminded a Colorado city mayor that scheduling a Christian worship band to perform at city-sponsored events poses a serious violation of constitutional separation of state and church. On April 20, FFRF’s Christopher Line wrote Marc Williams, mayor of Arvada, Co., about the city’s regular scheduling of Christian worship band, Renewed Music Ministries.

An Arvada resident reported that the city invited the band to perform at the annual Arvada Kite Festival. The complainant reported that the band played almost exclusively Christian music and the members actively discussed their religious beliefs on stage. Renewed Music Ministries was the only band to perform at the event and was also scheduled to perform at the annual Arvada Days event in September.

On June 19, Rachel Morris, deputy city attorney for Arvada, wrote to FFRF to confirm that the city does not “plan in the future, to engage Renewed for performances at city-sponsored events.”

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.

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Arrange a bequest in your will or trust, or make the **Freedom From Religion Foundation** the beneficiary of an insurance policy, bank account or IRA.

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For related information (or to request a bequest brochure), please contact Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608) 256-8900, info@ffrf.org

Freedom depends on freethinkers



FFRF discovers hushed victory in district

FFRF was pleased to recently discover a hidden victory for state-church separation in an eastern Texas school district.

Back in 2014, FFRF was informed by a concerned community member of the Mt. Vernon Independent School District that the district was displaying several religious quotes on the walls of its schools. The quotes included both biblical passages and alleged statements attributed to a variety of prominent individuals in American history. After seeking and obtaining an open records request in 2015 for a copy of all records related to the selection and display of the quotes on the district’s walls, FFRF found that a significant portion of the quotes on display were not only unconstitutionally endorsing religion, but also fallacious.

FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover wrote to Mt. Vernon Independent School District Superintendent John Kaufman, requesting that the district remove the quotes. Courts have time and again held that public schools may not endorse religious messages — including texts taken from the bible.

The original complainant informed Grover that a new superintendent who was hired soon after FFRF sent its 2015 letter to the district quietly removed the religious quotes over the summer of 2016.

FFRF is thrilled that this assault on the right of conscience of Mt. Vernon students has been rectified.

“We don’t always know the full extent of our impact, but it is vast,” says Grover.

Bible removed from school office in N.C.

FFRF reminded Wayne County Public Schools that the Establishment Clause prohibits public schools from promoting the Christian bible or taking any action that encourages students to read the bible.

On Nov. 28, 2017, FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott wrote to Dr. Michael Dunsmore, superintendent of Wayne County Public Schools in Goldsboro, N.C., to issue a complaint regarding a bible on display on public school grounds. A parent of a student at Rosewood Elementary school notified FFRF that the school was prominently displaying a bible in the main office of the school where students and any visitors to the office could see it.

On June 7, legal representatives for the district, Richard Schwartz and Laura Crumpler, wrote to FFRF to relate that “the superintendent has inquired about the practice and assures us it has ceased” and “will not be repeated.”

City removes church ad featuring police vehicle



A concerned Tupelo, Miss., resident contacted FFRF to report that a Tupelo Police Department vehicle was featured in a recent advertisement for the Word of Life Church. The ad featured Pastor Tommy Galloway exiting a department vehicle, then quoting the bible as a “warning” to viewers that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus.” He advertised the Word of Life broadcast as a way to “find out more about this free gift.”

On Dec. 4, 2017, FFRF Associate Council Sam Grover wrote Police Chief of Tupelo Police Department Bart Aguirre to issue a complaint about department property being used in a religious advertisement.

On June 8, City Attorney Ben Logan wrote to notify FFRF that the television advertisement for Word of Life Church that used a Tupelo Police Department vehicle was “pulled from the air as of Dec. 12, 2017.”

Ohio city moves cross off city property

At FFRF’s behest, the city of Cambridge, Ohio, has moved a Christian cross off of city property. On Aug. 11, 2017, FFRF Legal Fellow Christopher Line wrote to Cambridge Mayor Thomas Orr to request that a Christian cross be moved off city property. The cross also included an image that appeared to be two hands joined in prayer. FFRF wrote to remind Orr that the display of a cross on public property is unconstitutional.

On June 19, William Ferguson, law director for Cambridge, wrote to FFRF to confirm that the cross had been removed.

Texas school stops bible distribution



FFRF has put a stop to a Texas school district’s illegal distribution of bibles. On June 6, FFRF Associate Council Sam Grover wrote to Brian Nelson, general counsel for Corpus Christi Independent School District in Corpus Christi, Texas, to register a complaint regarding several instances

of the district inappropriately advancing religion. A concerned district parent reported to FFRF that free backpacks containing supplies and a copy of the bible were being distributed at Gibson Elementary School. Additionally, FFRF was informed that some teachers had been promoting their religious beliefs in the classroom.

On June 11, Nelson responded to FFRF’s complaint, confirming that the backpacks distributed to students did contain bibles and were packed by a local church. Nelson assured FFRF that school district administration “will make certain that any future donors of backpacks and supplies are aware they must not include bibles or any other religious literature.” Additionally, the district will remind employees that religious “statements cannot be made or advanced by school personnel.”

FFRF stops evangelizing Missouri baseball coach

On May 30, FFRF Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellow Colin E. McNamara wrote to Aaron Zalis, superintendent of Rolla Public Schools in Rolla, Mo., to issue a complaint against Marty Hauck, coach of the Rolla High School baseball team. Hauck used his position as head coach to promote his religion to his players, and admitted to praying with the team before every game. While Hauck has since stepped down as coach of the baseball team, FFRF wrote to ensure

Hauck does not use his other coaching position on the school’s wrestling team to further evangelize Rolla High School student-athletes.

On June 7, Counsel to Rolla Public Schools Thomas Mickes wrote to FFRF to relate that the district’s athletic director has met with Hauck, and will conduct meetings with all district coaches to emphasize First Amendment requirements.

W. Va. football coach ends pregame prayers

FFRF notified a West Virginia school district that it is illegal for public school athletic coaches to lead their teams in prayer or participate in student prayers.

On May 31, FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott wrote to Superintendent of McDowell Country Schools Nelson Spencer to register a complaint against Mount View High School football coach Larry Thompson, who led his team in prayer at a team meal this past fall prior to the homecoming football game.

On June 6, Spencer replied, assuring FFRF that actions have been taken to correct the constitutional violation. Spencer reported that “all country principals will be scheduled for a professional development session on district adherence to the constitutional expectations of separation between state and church,” in addition to a meeting “with the coach in question and the principal at Mount View High School to discuss [FFRF’s] letter and review the district’s expectations for endorsing or promotion of religion by its staff.”

FFRF gets Florida school to address violation

FFRF has ensured that a Florida public school will not continue to distribute bibles to students.

FFRF attorney Andrew Seidel wrote on Sept. 1, 2017, to Richard Shirley, superintendent of Sumter County School District in Bushnell, Fla., regarding an incident which occurred on Oct. 19, 2016, at Bushnell Elementary School. During said incident, outside adults were invited into a fifth-grade gym class, at which time the students were lined up against the wall and presented with bibles.

A Jewish student, who declined the bible, was subjected to severe bullying by her Christian classmates as a result of the incident. Ultimately, the bullying resulted in the student leaving the school. The Sumter County School District’s inability to follow the law caused this young girl and her family serious financial and emotional distress.

On June 19, Shirley responded to FFRF’s complaint, saying the district is “working to be sure any such potential matters are corrected.”

CRANKMAIL

Here is our latest installment of mail we receive that isn’t on the high end of the intelligence spectrum, printed as received.

**Your religion:** Evolution is Your religion, you believe you came from evolution, everyone else believe they came from their God. Your god is evolution, because you put your faith and belief in evolution, just like all other religions who put their their faith and belief in their God, you are no different. Every religion thinks that theirs is right, just like you think yours is. Now every other religion knows there are two planes the natural and the spiritual. but you believe that everything came by natural selection and there is no God in that process. But let me ask you about the christian bible, there are prophecies in the bible that was prophesied thousands of years ago about things that are taking place today as we speak with accuracy they are happening right in front of our eyes. These prophecies facinates

me its like reading future news, and anyone who tries to doubt these prophecies are very dishonest and has probably evolved into a jackass and dont have a clue as to whats happening in the world today. So how come the christian bible knows so much about the future, even you athiests are mentioned in the bible thousands of years before you evolve from ape to Atheist and its not good news for you. Maybe there is a God after all, the Intelligent designer. — Peter Mollah

**No more atheism:** “Science Falsifies Atheism”. The creator & supreme ruler God is what scientists call the laws of nature & forces of physics. From launching the big bang creation and orchestrating Darwinian evolution, to sustaining & governing the cosmos, the laws of nature calibrate the reality that the forces of physics achieve to actualize all past, present & future reality itself, RIP atheism. — Roedy Green

**Re:Free Thought:** It has become not only

obvious but aggregious that the godless in the name of ‘free thought’ seek to dictate the thoughts and print of others. Where does ffrf get off telling anyone, whether gov’t or cviliaan what or when they can speak or put in print? Hypocrites to the enth degree! Pay attention as Creator of heaven and earth makes storms on the sun, shaking the foundations of the earth with earthquakes, causing volcanoes to erupt with hot rocks and fire. Sending storms, floods, wind, and hail to punish the wicked and godless. If you do not want salvation that is your business, but those who thwart others the LORD himself will thwart. ‘Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? Taking counsel together against the LORD and his anointed. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.’ — Anton Jackson

**God is inside!:** Your project trying to tear apart communities, trying to take our faith from us, doesn’t put a damper on our beliefs. God is within us. He knows our needs. No matter how much you push communities around with your authoritative ways, you will not take God away from us.

You don’t want to pray? Then don’t. No one is forcing you to pray. Cause you my friend in our community are very much a minority. God knows who is faithful and who will be richly rewarded in Heaven. That’s all I need. Good luck to the people of this foundation. We pray for our enemies and those who persecute us. Why? Because God is love! Therefore we must love others. We will not be shaken. It’s too late, God is inside! — Kimberly Meyers

**Crazy:** Hi y’all crazy for thinkin the way you do lmao you think the world just popped outta nowhere k bye — Blake Pottsfeld Jr.



FFRF awards \$13,000

2018 Essay Contest for High School Students

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the numerous winners of the 2018 William Schulz High School Essay Contest.

FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994 and graduate students since 2010.

High school seniors were asked to write a personal persuasive essay based on this prompt: “Why I believe ‘They who live on love and laughter, don’t mess around with the hereafter.’” The slightly irreverent lyricist Yip (“Over the Rainbow”) Harburg wrote the above line.

After carefully reviewing more than 250 essays, FFRF awarded 10 top prizes and 14 honorable mentions.

Winners are listed below and include the award amount and the college or university they will be attending. FFRF has paid out a total of \$13,000 in award money for this contest this year.

- First place
- Anh Quoc Nguyen, University of Texas (\$3,000)
- Second place
- Sarah Almstrom, University of Massachusetts (\$2,000)
- Third place
- Andreanna Papatheodorou, Bryn Mawr College (\$1,000)
- Fourth place (tie)
- Mackenzie Brown, Arizona State University (\$750)
- Aisha Galdo, University of Florida (\$750)
- Fifth place (tie)

FIRST PLACE

A present for the future

FFRF awarded Anh \$3,000.

By Anh Quoc Nguyen

Heaven towers above and hell lies below, so where do we stand? Are we just the middle ground, an insignificant moment in time, that precedes the everlasting peace of heaven or the eternal punishment of hell? I stared up at the blinking stars, hoping that the god I read about would share his answer with me.

Silence.

The stars continued to blink.

If I were to describe the universe in one word, it would be apathetic. Growing up within the deep jungle of Vietnam, I never heard the church bell echo through our village. Not because we lacked a church; we just could not afford a church bell. Poverty ravaged my village, yet people swarmed to the church doors every Sunday morning.

SECOND PLACE

A better place

FFRF awarded Sarah \$2,000.

By Sarah Almstrom

My grandmother, a deeply religious woman, always comforted me when I felt stressed.

Angels, she would explain, watch me constantly, and God has plans for me that I do not understand. Perhaps others find solace in these beliefs, but I did not. I felt uneasy at the thought of this omniscient,



- Matthew Bergosh, (\$600)
- Sam Mathisson, University of Michigan (\$600)
- Sixth place (tie)
- Trevor Jansen, University of Maryland, Baltimore County (\$500)
- Alden Lecroy, Clemson University (\$500)
- Seventh place
- Ariana Menjivar, Montgomery College (\$400)
- Honorable mentions (\$200 each)
- Fatima Bartel, Ramapo College
- Nick Bellizzi, University of Illinois
- Meghan Cashell, University of Missouri
- Haidee Clauer, Pomona College
- Amber Cocchiola, Kent State University
- Amber Fehrs, Brown University
- Kenneth Gonzalez Santibanez, Princeton University
- Mitchell Griffin, University of Iowa
- Damon W. Jordan, Ohio State University

- Maddy Malik, Vanderbilt University
- Benjamin Manzo, Ashland University
- Haven Morris, Armed Forces in Germany
- Jonathan Obeda, University of California-Riverside
- John West, University of Minnesota
- The high school contest is named for the late William J. Schulz, a Wisconsin member who died at 57. He was a mechanical engineer and cared deeply about FFRF’s work, leaving a bequest that funds the award.
- FFRF also thanks Dean and Dorea Schramm of Florida for providing a \$100 bonus to students who are members of a secular student club or the Secular Student Alliance. The total of \$13,000 reflects those bonuses.
- The students of color essay winners will be announced in the September issue, the college student essay winners will be announced in the October issue and the grad student essays will be announced in the November issue.

It takes a village to grade essays

The number of entries in FFRF’s 2018 William J. Schulz Memorial High School Essay Contest was the largest ever, with more than 250 students submitting essays.

To judge them all in a timely manner and put together our list of winners and honorable mentions required a lot of human capital.

FFRF would like to thank Lisa Treu, FFRF’s director of first impressions, for the huge task of organizing the volunteer readers and collating the results so that we could better make our final decisions. FFRF also thanks our volunteer readers who came in on their own time and graded each of the essays. They are Don Ardell, Linda Aten, Jeff Brinckman, Linda Josheff, Dan Kettner, Sue Schuetz and Karen Lee Weidig. FFRF staffers and interns who contributed to the judging were Luke Changget, Bill Dunn, Molly Hanson, Amit Pal, Lauryn Seering and Kati Treu. Final decisions of award winners were made by FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker and Freethought Today Editor PJ Slinger.



Anh Quoc Nguyen

know. No matter what happens, its effects will come circling back to us. Choosing to only see the afterlife equates to saying that we have already given up on this world. However, I choose to see the current reality, and it desperately reaches out for help. Every day, people across the globe suffer just like the people in my village. Holding onto the hope of an afterlife belittles the

struggles of those around me while failing to pull them out of their hardships. The government covers its negligence with the promise of a heaven to ease the worry of the poor. But only through the true rejection of religion can people cast away their limitations and begin to take control of their lives.

The world is unfair, so we must learn to make it fair, not hide away its flaws with religion’s impractical promises.

One world, one life, one chance. This is all we have. We came into this world by chance, but that does not mean we do not have a responsibility to uphold. We need to help this world — our world. Humanity’s future depends on how we choose to act in the now. Heaven and hell might not exist after our death, but our children’s future will continue on along with the stars.

Anh, 18, graduated from Jersey Village High School in Houston. He was born on a cashew farm in Vietnam and moved to the United States when he was 8. He plans to major at the University of Texas in mechanical engineering with an emphasis on fluid dynamics and thermodynamics.



Sarah Almstrom

See Almstrom on page 15



SECOND PLACE - Alstrom

Continued from page 14

over another does not make that belief correct. Troubling inconsistencies exist in every ideology. If God creates grief, as many argue, only so we understand joy, then what interest should I have in a place with no misery, only happiness? The idea is contradictory at best, insulting at worst. Any attempt to understand the endless paradoxes of mythology is inane; the intentions of a fictional god are still

fictional intentions and have no real bearing on a debate of the afterlife. Consoling the hungry with promises of food in heaven, sending prayers to families instead of aid, and more imaginary charity prevents us from moving forward, from taking actual steps to solve real, human problems. Perhaps the best example of this was the Indian caste system, where reincarnation depended on an individual accepting his or her fate.

The poor starved and suffered in silence, wasting their real lives to gain a fictitious one. They, and many others, fail to realize that the afterlife is not the betterment of life, it is the ending. We exist in the only “better place” now, and creating a just, kind and benevolent world is our own responsibility. Conformity to religious laws and beliefs doesn’t guarantee an improved life later — it simply worsens the only

one we have. Sarah, 18, attended Wachusett Regional High School in Holden, Mass., and will be attending the University of Massachusetts, where she hopes to obtain a degree in international relations and politics. She is a member of the National Honors Society, as well as the Spanish and Music Honors societies. For two years she was the captain of the mock trial team and the editor of her school newspaper.

THIRD PLACE

Freedom from the orthodox

FFRF awarded Andreanna \$1,000.  
By Andreanna Papatheodorou

The incense stung my eyes. It was pitch black. A man with a long beard droned on in a language I don’t speak. I fought to stay awake. Next to me, my brother poked me and tried to start some kind of game. My father hushed us. I really hated Easter at Greek Church. I don’t know if it was in this tenebrous drudgery that I discovered I was an atheist, or when my mother’s meditations to the full moon failed to rouse an interest in me. All I know is that at 10 years old, I decided I would tell the kids at school what I’d learned about myself. Some furrowed their brows at me. A boy I had a crush on, the son of a local pastor, gave me links to Christian rock songs on YouTube. He told me he would pray for me. My mom, a veteran of some unhappy

years at Catholic school, explained that I should understand that for people who really believe, hearing that someone doesn’t believe is like seeing them in front of an oncoming truck. It was their job to get them off the road, or at least to warn them. I asked my crush if he thought I was going to hell. He said yes. I cried the whole way home. But it didn’t change my convictions. I understand the historical and evolutionary benefits of organized religion. We needed explanations, and so we invented thunder gods and virgin births. All well and good. But we have science now, and tools of discovery. No, everything isn’t perfect, but we’re in a new phase now, and as declining church attendance proves, the era of faith is moving slowly behind us. I don’t mess around with the hereafter. I am brightly, keenly, sometimes painfully aware that, like water pouring from a jar, life ebbs away, slowly for some,

faster for others. We don’t know how much we have in our jar. It’s up to us to enjoy it fully, to live deliberately, and to savor it all. It’s fleeting, and it’s all we have. I am devoted to social justice. I’ve helped organize parades and I’ve spoken at rallies. I’ve handed out lunches and helped undocumented men organize flu shot clinics. Not because I’m afraid I’ll get licked by flames for eternity if I don’t, but because I want to be a force for good. Our world is flawed, imperfect, but exquisitely filled with hope and possibility. Each of us craft it anew each day, but only if we accept the responsibility that we are all there is. There is no magic chant, no bearded guy in the sky, no afterlife where we’ll be rewarded or punished. This is it, here, now, with its dragonflies and its injustices, its sunflowers and its travel bans. This is all we have. Today is the day to start making it better. I intend to be a



Andreanna Papatheodorou

joyous, pushy, hopeful part of that, for as long as I’ve got. Andreanna, 18, attended Leonia High School in Leonia, N.J. She is trilingual, having a mother born in Spain and a father from Cyprus. She has played soccer for the past 14 years and otherwise volunteers and advocates for the rights of others, with a majority of that work focused on bettering the lives of undocumented immigrants. She will be attending Bryn Mawr College.

FOURTH PLACE (tie)

Time not lost

FFRF awarded Mackenzie \$750.  
By Mackenzie Brown

As cliched as it sounds, you really do “only live once.” Everyone is handed one chance to live, to make choices, and to experience what they want. The reason that life itself is meaningful is because only one life exists. The idea of an afterlife makes the meaning of life less, well, meaningful. Religion offers this picture-perfect experience after death, but it is more of a false comfort than a reality. Heaven is a way to cope with death, but all it actually does is lessen the value of life while alive. When people are asked about what they regret, their answers usually involve the things they did not do, rather than the things they did. When people

get to the end of their lives, it seems they would want to feel fulfilled, not left wondering what could have been. Religion, for many people, is a way of avoiding the regrets, because, after all, they can just experience everything in heaven. The harsh truth, though, is that there is no heaven, and there will be no more time left to experience anything. The way to making life mean something is to know that what we are doing now is what matters. You only get so many shots, so you have to make them count, because in the “afterlife” there are no hoops to shoot through. My mother used to go to church. But then I was diagnosed with a life-long illness. And when I was in the hospital for this illness at the age of 3, my mother found her way into the children’s termi-



Mackenzie Brown

nal illness wing. She tells me that was the moment she stopped believing in religion. That story has always stuck with me since so many people walk down those halls and still go to church and believe in God. I reject religion for the same reason she did.

If I believed in God or a higher power, it might have been easier to deal with my illness, to think that it was all part of a bigger plan. But that would not be real. My illness has made me realize that life is painfully short. There is no time to waste, you can live life freely, or you can miss out. I cannot claim to know the meaning of life. I do not know what happens after death. I do know that I do not want to die without having lived to the best of my ability. This world matters because, while it’s not all sunshine and rainbows, it’s still all we have got. So, here’s another cliché: Live like today is your last day (with no afterlife). Mackenzie, 17, attended Highland High School in Gilbert, Ariz., during which time she put in hundreds of hours of volunteer work. She will be attending Arizona State University and is already part of ASU’s Next Generation Service Corps. She plans to major in kinesiology and to become an occupational therapist who works with people with disabilities.

FOURTH PLACE (tie)

Building our own paradise

FFRF awarded Aisha \$750.  
Aisha Galdo

The idea that there is a blissful eternity waiting for us after death is an enticing one. It tells us that if we wait long enough and go through the motions long enough, we will be rewarded for an empty existence. This encouragement of passivity can be en-

countered through many religious texts, such as in the New Testament, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). It tells us that we should never stand up for ourselves or others, and just let the figures of authority, whether they be religious or not, run our lives. It is this very verse that slave owners read to their slaves to keep them complacent; promise them an idyllic life after this one, as long as they keep their

heads down and their hands working. As a woman of color, this promotion of passivity in the face of oppression offends me to my core. Even though I am young, I know that I will face significant challenges in my career and personal life due to my gender and heritage. I will never be able to stay idle if I wish to succeed; there is nothing for me to inherit from



Aisha Galdo

See Galdo on page 16



FOURTH PLACE (tie) - Galdo

Continued from page 15

the earth if I am meek. Throughout history, my people have never inherited anything from this earth that was not sown by our ancestors’ spilled blood and sweat. This world is the only one I have, and even if there was a paradise after this existence, it was never meant for people like me. It was never meant for people like us. Heaven has never been for anyone except those who had it so much better than everyone else that others could only fantasize about a paradise half as good as theirs.

The price of heaven has always been about keeping others down. The powerful tell the weak not to fight back or else they’ll lose the promise of heaven. The weak tell their brothers and sisters not to fight back or else they’ll lose what little they have. I cannot fathom why they would believe this. The same people who filled us with these promises are the ones who pillaged our villages, stole our belongings and ripped apart our families. The only way we will ever be able to

reach paradise is if we build one right here, in this world. Only through fighting back against this inequality and empowering our brothers and sisters can we hope to one day live in the place that was promised to us. This world is the only one we can have now, the only world worth fighting for. We cannot wait for a paradise to make itself shown to us, we must make it ourselves. The meek shall inherit this earth, the only earth that has ever

made itself known to us. *Aisha, 18, attended Miami Beach Senior High School in Miami Beach, Fla. She was adopted from an indigenous Chinese tribe, which led her to do activist work for indigenous rights. She is an active member of Amnesty International and a founding member of the chapter at her high school. She will be attending the University of Florida, where she wishes to major in mechanical engineering. Aisha hopes to attend law school in the future.*

FIFTH PLACE (tie)

The beautiful game

FFRF awarded Matthew \$600.

By Matthew Bergosh

Growing up, I never gave religion a second thought. Even though I attended a religious preschool (for economic reasons), religion was never more than a fairy tale to me. It was Santa giving every single kid on Earth a present on Christmas, the Easter Bunny going around and hiding treats for us, and Jesus breaking bread and fish into enough pieces to feed everyone. Noah’s Ark was a nice coloring book scene, and the Nativity was a fun story to enact, but that’s all it was. A story for those that couldn’t accept death. I struggled accepting death, too. It’s kept me awake and brought me to tears on many a night when I was young. But then I had an epiphany, and it may seem small, but it pro-

foundly changed my life: You don’t know you’re sleeping, so why would death be any worse? And then the realizations kept coming: Don’t be nice for a potential reward after death, be nice because it feels nice. Don’t spend a second of your time thinking of death, because that’s a second you wasted from life. Help people in this life, don’t tell yourself they’ll be rewarded in the next. I also noticed that people rely on religion for strength and they looked down on my lack of faith as if it were a handicap. But I finally understood that I was the stronger one because I “manage” to be a good person without the threat of eternal torture. That’s what atheism means to me: strength, wisdom and freedom. I denounce religion and accept the cold, uncaring universe. I choose to focus on this life with wisdom and enjoy the freedom that this choice grants. To



Matthew Bergosh

elaborate, I reject religion for several reasons. First, I simply do not believe. That seed was not planted in me when

I was young. By refusing it, I clear my mind for logic and critical thinking, which I would much prefer over comfort and faith. Second, there is far too much suffering in this world for there to be a good God, and if God is not good, why believe? Third, too much of this anguish is in the name of religion for me to find it attractive. I live my life as if it was a soccer game: I’m on the clock from beginning to end (with a break in the middle for my midlife crisis), fully enjoying every moment because I never know when the game ends for me. *Matthew, 18, attended Vilsech High School at APO, AE in Germany. After moving numerous times because of his father’s military career, he and his family settled in Germany. Because his mother is German, Matthew is a dual citizen legally, linguistically and culturally. He will be attending the University of Southern California in the fall.*

FIFTH PLACE (tie)

A strange day in kindergarten

FFRF awarded Sam \$600.

By Sam Mathisson

I can only remember getting in trouble once in kindergarten. That spring, my grandma had died. I was too young to process it properly, but I knew I would never see her again. When I returned to kindergarten, the girl sitting next to me asked where I had been. “My grandma died,” I told her matter-of-factly. Elizabeth was horrified. She shrieked, “You can’t say died! You have to say ‘passed on,’ because people’s souls go to heaven, and we get to see them again.” “That’s not true,” I remember saying forcefully. Elizabeth started crying. This attracted the attention of my teacher, who asked what was wrong. After Elizabeth tearfully explained what happened, the teacher pulled me aside. “Honey, I’m very sorry about your grandma. But you can’t go around saying people died, and that there isn’t a heaven. It upsets the other kids. Now go apologize to Elizabeth, and then you can play with blocks.” I refused to apologize, and the teacher just put us on opposite sides of the room. It would have been easier if I had apologized to Liz. The teacher would have smiled and Liz would’ve stopped glaring at me. But I didn’t go along

with it then and I still don’t. As a kindergartener, I only knew what my own family thought — and so did Liz. Since then, I’ve had time to develop my own views. I’ve spent years studying history and learning the impact that religion has had on our world. Religion is depicted as a comforting blanket, meant to console us when our grandmothers die. Reflecting on that day in kindergarten, I saw the truth: Religion divides people. It breeds conflict. And it causes rifts in even the smallest of communities. It would have been easier if I had apologized. It would have been easier to say “passed on.” It would have been easier to have a belief that God will provide, to believe that everything is meant to happen. But I don’t believe. I don’t have faith. Religion has been a destructive force for too long, and I won’t be a part of it. Religion prevents people from addressing the world’s problems today by shifting the focus to an eternal tomorrow. This perpetual focus on the afterlife detracts from the immediacy of today. It makes our life and the work we do on Earth seem inconsequential. This results in a type of global apathy. Missionaries focus on saving souls rather than saving lives. It doesn’t matter if their flock dies from preventable causes; their blessed souls will still go to heaven. And if all you must do to reach the

pearly gates is repent on your deathbed, why live a virtuous life? People believe God can forgive their transgressions, but God’s forgiveness is a false forgiveness. We, not religion, must provide comfort to those around us. We have a responsibility to each other — to our families, our communities and the human race. And even to our classmates, however misguided they may be. *Sam Mathisson, 18, attended Rye High School in Rye, N.Y., with his twin brother (David). He enjoys writing and often contributed to the school newspaper and literary magazine. He was captain of his school’s cross country team and has participated in cross country and track (mainly pole vaulting) for four years. He’s worked at a bike shop, a summer camp,*



Sam Mathisson

*and as an English and history tutor. Sam will be going to the University of Michigan with the goal of majoring in history.*

Yip Harburg,  
from his book:

## Rhymes for the Irreverent

Life is liveable

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

*Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation*

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



SIXTH PLACE (tie)

# Enjoy life, go to hell

FFRF awarded Trevor \$500.

By Trevor Jansen

The afterlife is truly the perfect carrot on the proverbial stick for any religion. It promises pleasure and happiness beyond anything attainable on Earth, guarantees that those who believe in it will do whatever it takes to get there, and, best of all, it cannot be refuted or shown to be less than what was promised since it only comes after death. The afterlife is how every business wishes it could reward its employees — an empty promise they have no obligation to keep in exchange for a lifetime of loyalty.

The intrinsic problem with the promise of an afterlife is the fine print. There’s plenty of extra conditions in re-

ligious texts that ensure only the “right” people get to be happy when they die. No gays, heathens, bastards, blasphemers, freethinkers or mixed-fabric wearers are getting into the Christian heaven. Obviously, they get to suffer eternal torment in the pits of hell, but only because God loves them.

Noticing these stipulations was a big wake-up call to me, and should be to others as well. Why does God punish homosexuality when he created it? Why did God give us free will, but sends us to hell when we decide to question him? What happens to people who worship different religions and don’t even know Abrahamic religions exist? Ask these questions of any religious practitioner and you will no doubt hear a litany of their characteristic mental gymnastics and cop-out answers.

The real reason you should be opposed to the presented idea of an afterlife is the damage such an idea causes. By trivializing death to the point where being dead is actually (supposedly) better than living, you create a mindset where believers have no reason to care for their health or happiness on Earth. With the promise of heaven in front and the threat of hell behind them, people will make themselves miserable by denying sexual urges, accepting primitive conditions, abstaining from pleasurable activities, and even killing and dying for a meaningless cause. Cults like Heaven’s Gate and The People’s Temple get all the bad press for convincing their members to die to reach heaven, when Christianity and Islam do the same thing on a much larger scale.

Promising an afterlife encourages people to ignore the life they already have in pursuit of some goal that is always just out of reach. Being pious and reaching heaven is antithetical to living your real life to its fullest and experiencing everything it has to offer. Frankly, if



Trevor Jansen

all the religious people are in heaven, I’d much rather go to hell.

*Trevor, 18, attended La Plata High School in La Plata, Md. Trevor also enjoys travel, as he has been all over the United States, as well as France, England and Spain. He will be attending the University of Maryland - Baltimore County, where he plans to study biology and hopes to become a pathologist.*

SIXTH PLACE (tie)

# Life, death and Jehovah’s Witnesses

FFRF awarded Alden \$500.

By Alden Lecroy

Only two things are certain in this life: death and Jehovah’s Witnesses showing up at your door. They come with their promises of fellowship, eternal paradise — and an endless supply of magazines. And while all of these things may seem desirable to some, something just does not add up. I have found that if something seems too good to be true, it usually is. The idea of an afterlife is no exception.

Sigmund Freud believed that religions were created as a form of wish fulfillment. The idea of an afterlife is especially indicative of this idea. We all want to think that we have a nice, warm paradise waiting for us after we die. This idea, however, only serves to steal present joy. After all, how can we enjoy this life if we’re too obsessed with where we’re going after it? Life is much too rich to spend memorizing bible passages and praying to an absent deity. To me, life



Alden Lecroy

is meant to be spent fulfilling personal goals and doing the things that produce happiness. There are too many idyllic, cascading waterfalls and decadent chocolate desserts to worry about divine judgement and eternal Armageddon. But why don’t I mess around with the hereafter? Personally, I find satisfaction

in playing piano. I find that it is the only thing that can tie my hectic life together.

I do not reject religion because I dislike going to church on Sunday. Nor do I reject it so I can sin without consequence. I reject religion for one simple reason: There is no proof. I believe that evidence is the way in which truth is discovered. It strikes me that so many people can so adamantly believe in a higher power without the slightest morsel of verifiable data. If such a large percentage of people accept outrageous religious teachings, such as talking snakes and tremendous floods, what are we teaching the younger generations? Are we effectively suspending the faculties of critical thinking? Are we making the world a more gullible place?

But it’s more than that. Many people’s lives are negatively affected by religion. One of the more deplorable religious practices of late is seed faith. In many mega-churches these days, religious leaders ask followers for donations, or “seeds.” The religious leader then “sows” the seed; he or she asks god to bring for-

tune on the donor. Proponents of this practice promise “hundred-fold returns” on donations. Donors often expect miracles to happen to themselves or loved ones. Religious snake oil salesmen may then spend seed money on lavish private jets and opulent mansions. All the while, devoted followers choose to seed money instead of paying for chemotherapy, rent or medicine.

The idea of an afterlife is one that religions constantly exploit in order to control the followers of religious ideologies. If people realized that our religious leaders promised an impossible product, this world would be a much more enlightened place.

*Alden, 18, graduated from Seneca High School in Seneca, S.C. He enjoys playing piano, practicing martial arts, cooking and learning French. He has won three grand championships at international martial arts tournaments. Alden will be attending Clemson University in the fall, with plans to get a degree in mechanical engineering and eventually become a petroleum engineer.*

SEVENTH PLACE

# You might go to hell, Ariana

FFRF awarded Ariana \$400.

By Ariana Menjivar

When I was 4, my mom introduced me to a man I couldn’t see. She said his name was God and that he would always be present in times of need.

When I was 13, I told my mom that I didn’t believe in God anymore. She told me it was OK because I didn’t understand. I told her that she didn’t understand and that she would never understand.

When I was 17, my co-worker’s mother said to me, “You might go to hell, Ariana; it’s sinful to reject the Lord.” I asked her why. She told me that it just was. I then said to her, “Well then, I guess I’m going to hell.” It was a joke, but she got mad.

To be blatantly honest, I never understood religion. To a certain extent I also feared it; especially as a young child. The mix of fear and the frustration I had,

along with the inability to understand the answers given to me in response to the questions I conceived about religion, bred anger in me and tore my young mind apart.

Christians, Catholics, Muslims, etc., all have their own beliefs about the “afterlife.” As a former Catholic, I was introduced to three options: Heaven, hell and purgatory. They were all equally terrifying to me. Hell and purgatory were terrifying for obvious reasons. Heaven just sounded too obnoxiously perfect. I didn’t want to live an eternal life in a place that didn’t challenge me.

My former religion implanted the idea that I was born solemnly of sin and that following my birth, the entirety of my life would consist of sins. It also taught me that as long as I confessed my sins, worshipped God, and was a good human being; I could still go to heaven. I would often contemplate whether the only reason people want to be good in life is to avert

the possibility of burning in hell. Religion seemed too much like a scare tactic.

I became an atheist because I got tired of trying to abide to principles I didn’t agree with and pretending to believe in something I didn’t. I don’t live fearful of any possibility of what is beyond life because I no longer believe in any possibility. I’m a morally adept being and this is certainly not due to religion. I choose not to live in fear of an uncertain or nonexistent life. I live for the now.

There is humility in admitting that you aren’t certain about life after death. We have a scientific understanding of why we’re here. It’s in our best interests to create our own meaning to life. I have one life, I want to do what feels right to me, and what will benefit me while I am alive and well on Earth. Honestly, if you really think about it, in a sense we are all atheists about any God we don’t follow.

*Ariana, 18, graduated from Watkins Mill High School in Gaithersburg, Md. She has*



Ariana Menjivar

*been performing martial arts for 10 years and have been teaching it for four years. She enjoys watching horror and sci-fi movies. Ariana will be attending Montgomery College in Rockville, Md., and hopes to become a criminal investigator.*



# FFRF student essay honorable mentions

FFRF selected 14 essays from the high school essay contest it deemed worthy of honorable mention status. Each of the following students received \$200 from FFRF.

To read each of the honorable mention essays in full, go to [freethought-today.com](http://freethought-today.com).

Here are edited excerpts from each one (in no particular order).

By Haven Morris



The question of an afterlife, especially one with such stark dichotomy between reward and punishment, takes the place of a conversation about intrinsic morality. Ultimately, to give a choice between heaven, a gilded carrot hanging on a sanctimonious string which guides someone to morality, or hell, a fiery stick clapped threateningly and eternally on an open palm, is not to give a choice at all. It is the authoritarian parent saying, “My way or the highway.” It is a mobster offering a bribe or a set of cement galoshes.

Haven, 17, attended Stuttgart High School in Stuggart, Germany. She is a published poet and has lived on four continents. She plans to major in psychology and minor in film at UC-Boulder.

By Benjamin Manzo



I don’t quite understand why a guy (some would call him Satan) who disagreed with God would be allowed to rule hell, would be willing to torture those who disobey God, and would still want to mount a holy war against heaven. Seems to me he would rather create a sort of “sinner’s heaven” for those who disobeyed God rather than punish them. Wouldn’t he want to reward those souls who thought the way he did?

Benjamin, 18, graduated from Elyria High School in Elyria, Ohio. He will be attending Ashland University and is enrolled in the journalism and digital media production program. His goal is to work as an editor on film and television shows.

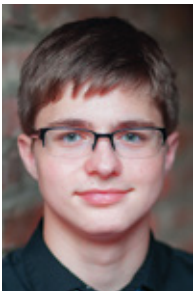
By Haidee Clauer



Rather than pretend that the entropy, adversity, and issues around me will resolve themselves in an afterlife, I am driven to use all of my abilities to make this world a better place. Without a constant need to maintain a perfect appearance in the spotlight, I work to shine light on those overlooked or unrewarded by society and use my voice to advocate for others.

Haidee, 18, attended Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy in Overland Park, Kan. She was her school’s newspaper editor, student council president, and four-time actor in the annual play. She will be going to Pomona College, where she plans to study molecular biology and journalism.

By Damon W. Jordan



Humans have already existed for thousands of generations, and it is highly unlikely that we will cease any time soon. Therefore, I already have an afterlife to look forward to: the lives of my sons and daughters. Our job while living on this planet is to ensure our children can live on it, too, and our children’s children after that. The reason we research science and technology is to improve the future, not just the present.

Damon, 17, graduated from Thomas Worthington High School in Worthington, Ohio. He was a member of his school’s marching band and gave free private lessons to local elementary school students. Damon will be attending Ohio State University and hopes to become an English teacher.

By Amber Fehrs



Religious dogma, especially belief in the idea of an afterlife, encourages complacency. I do not want to be complacent in my life. I want to have agency, I want to work to solve my own problems, and I want to leave the world a better place than it was when I came into it. I reject religion and its promise of an afterlife because, where religion breeds complacency, atheism inspires action.

Amber, 18, graduated as valedictorian from Norfolk Senior High School in Norfolk, Neb. She will be attending Brown University and plans to double major in physics and applied mathematics.

By Amber Cocchiola



I cannot imagine living my life for death, yet those who wear religious blinders obsess over it. To them, this life is simply a stepping stone to another life. . . . One of the things that makes the world, and life, interesting is that it is made up of moments — both good and bad. . . . If people took off their blinders, they could see everything they’ve experienced that led up to the moment they are in.

Amber, 18, attended Bio-Med Science Academy in Rootstown, Ohio. She presented at Battelle Headquarters for the Governor’s Opioid Challenge and attended the Women in BioScience Conference in 2015. She will be attending Kent State University.

By Jonathan Obeda

As Emily Dickinson so eloquently put it, “Forever is composed of nows.” We as a society have lost sight of this ideology, you cannot expect to look toward the future without existing in the moment. Life isn’t a contest, life isn’t a race, and there is no prize at the end of the journey.

Jonathan, 18, attended the Los Angeles Center for Enriched Studies. He finished high school ranked sixth in California for parliamentary debate. He is seeking a degree in philosophy at the University of California-Riverside.

By Maddy Malik

By clinging to the existence of an afterlife, we often fail to seize every chance to help others in our waking lives. What purpose would it serve to help others to the fullest extent when a simple prayer grants you access to rapture in the hereafter?

The ability to “live on love and laughter” without the ulterior motive of reaching an afterlife is incredibly important to bettering this life while we all still have the chance.

Maddy, 18, graduated from Ravenwood High School in Brentwood, Tenn. She was a member of the Science National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, Rho Kappa, National Honor Society and Spanish Honor Society. She will be attending Vanderbilt University with the goal of eventually becoming a physician.

By John West



Only when life is viewed as a fleeting oasis in the dark sea of perpetual unconsciousness does its true value become overwhelmingly clear. It is unfortunate that this is so often ignored.

When people forget the immense value of their own life, how can they be expected to value the lives of others? Whether you anticipate an afterlife or not, you must acknowledge that your current life is a certainty and any existence beyond that can only be speculation.

John, 18, attended Cambridge High School in Milton, Ga. John will be attending the University of Minnesota with plans to major in microbiology.

By Kenneth Gonzalez Santbanecz



Religion is humanity’s version of blinders, for devotee’s narrow pursuit of heaven prevents them from seeing Earth’s potential as paradise. When meaning and significance are pushed to life after death, happiness and worldly-improvement are neglected in life before death. Atheists are the most motivated to make positive changes in this world because we believe that this is the only world we’ll ever get to experience.

Kenneth, 17, graduated from Mesquite High School in Mesquite, Texas. He will be attending Princeton as an undergrad and then plans to go to law school with the hope of someday becoming a federal district judge.

By Fatima Bartel



Death is a very important part of life, yet the discussion of it is extremely stigmatized. No one knows what happens after we die, and so it is often left up for interpretation by the living. Many religions promote the “afterlife” as one of the interpretations.

Instead of dreaming about a post-death scenario of paradise, people should instead focus on making their own lives a paradise.

Fatima, 18, graduated from High Tech

High School in North Bergen, N.J. She will be attending Ramapo College in Mahwah, N.J., where she plans to major in business administration and management.

By Meghan Cashell



Despite the complete lack of evidence of a higher power, people still let their entire lives revolve around what they must do to be proper members of their religion and make it to heaven. People sacrifice many forms of happiness in order to meet the requirements laid out by their respective faiths. Living your whole life a certain way just to “make it to heaven” is like spending all your savings on a house that doesn’t exist. Life is not a waiting period before the “big event,” it IS the big event.

Meghan, 18, attended Park Hill South High School in Riverside, Mo. She will be going to the University of Missouri, where she plans to major in biology. She hopes to go to vet school after earning her bachelor’s degree.

By Nick Bellizzi



Death is an uncomfortable topic, and to reject religion leaves people with a cold, nihilistic view of their cosmic role. However, just as nihilism can be too easily conflated with cynicism, it can also provide us with comfort in knowing that we can choose to spend our lives however we’d like. In essence, concepts of the afterlife may be comforting to some, but too often is it used as a tactic to increase a following. Go to church? Great. Don’t attend? Have fun in an eternity of swimming in infernal fire pits.

Nick, 18, graduated from Harry D. Jacobs High School in Algonquin, Ill. He’ll be attending the University of Illinois with the plan to major in computer science. He hopes to become a theoretical computer scientist or software engineer.

By Mitchell Griffin



Have you been suffering from religiosity? If you have experienced any of the following symptoms — delusions of cosmic importance, wishful thinking, speaking to deities, irrational dehumanization of women, or fixation on the afterlife — you may be suffering from this disease. I was so worried about the next life that I was forgetting the value of the life I had right in front of me. But then I found Reality. It’s a new prescription drug made by Secular Pharmaceuticals that let me live my best life. I was no longer consumed by worries about life after death or what God thought of me and I was finally able to be my true self. All it took was a single dose of Reality and I was cured. The pills may be hard to swallow, but the results are worth it.

Mitchell, 18, attended Treynor High School in Treynor, Iowa. He will be going to the University of Iowa in the honors program. He plans to study political science and journalism and hopes to someday become an investigative journalist.



# LETTERBOX

## Thanks for scholarship, support and kindness

I would like to thank the anonymous couple from the Northwest who provided the money to make possible the scholarship I received. Thanks to everyone at FFRF for believing in me to award the \$2,000 scholarship along with the 2018 Thomas Jefferson Student Activist Award. [See the June/July issue for his essay.]

I cannot express the amount of appreciation and gratefulness I have toward FFRF. The organization provides thousands of people a chance to safely resolve and/or pursue challenges of state-church separation, allowing ordinary citizens the opportunity to be powerful influencers in their local, state and federal governments.

Everyone deserves the right to be free from intrusions that poison our governments and communities with bias and hate. The power of the people rather than the forces of religion should inspire the government.

I hope you know that FFRF has made a profound impact on my life and will continue to do so. Thanks for all your help, support and kindness.

Daniel Roe (pseudonym)  
Tennessee

## After-Life membership can be made here and now

With apologies to Lewis Carroll, now is the time the Walrus said to speak of many things, of ships and shoes and After-Life.

I'm not seeking an afterlife, but I am seeking FFRF's After-Life membership. As PZ Myers (not related) recently said, "I'll look forward when religion is treated as a hobby."

Troy Myers  
Washington

## Louisiana state senator is dangerous theocrat

In the May issue, there was an "In the News" segment about "In God We Trust" motto being placed in all Louisiana schools. It quoted Louisiana state Sen. Regina Barrow trying to justify this by saying, "We have an obligation to ensure students have that introduction because we cannot always assume that it's necessarily happening in the home." How incredibly arrogant! She's assuming that the state has some kind of right or duty to overrule parents who choose a superstition-free upbringing for their children. That is the attitude of a dangerous theocrat.

Lee Helms  
Michigan

## Sen. Rubio is violating state-church separation

I notice on Twitter that Florida Sen. Marco Rubio often tweets bible quotes and praises his Christian God. Isn't this a violation of the Constitution since it suggests that an American senator favors one religion over others and is engaged in proselytizing that religion?

I also notice more and more often the network news programs do stories in which they suggest the power of prayer is more popular and effective than it is.

Allan Provost  
Florida

## Nonreligious conversion



Andrew L. Seidel

FFRF's Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel, while on vacation in Ireland, saw this former church that was converted into a post office. "Progress!" he noted.

## Cemetery: All dressed up and no place to go

I just came across the "German Liberal Cemetery" located in Medina, Minn. It is listed on the website of the city of Medina under "Community" and is apparently one of two remaining free-thinker cemeteries in the state. From the brochure: "The Free Thinkers Society was a movement that began in Germany during the 1840s as a protest against the unquestioning acceptance of authority of the church regarding religious truths." Current cost of a plot is only \$2,000.

Sybille Redmond  
Minnesota

## Hubble book, Shelley movie both worth a look

I just finished a biography by Gale E. Christianson of the renowned 20th-century astronomer Edwin Hubble, whose discoveries revolutionized our understanding of the universe (and for whom the Hubble Telescope is named). Although raised a Christian, by the time he attained fame at Mt. Wilson by discovering many other galaxies beyond the Milky Way and determining that these galaxies were receding from the Earth at velocities in direct proportion to their distance, Hubble, along with his wife, had become agnostic. When queried about his religious view, Hubble said, "We do not know why we are born into the world, but we can try to find out what sort of world it is — at least in its physical aspects." On the topic of religion on another occasion, he discreetly noted, "The whole thing is so much bigger than I am, and I can't understand it, so I just trust myself to it; and forget about it."

Edwin Powell Hubble is perhaps the greatest figure in astronomy since Galileo, and a great freethinker, as well.

On another topic, I also saw the new film "Mary Shelley" and thought it was very well done. It centered on Mary Shelley's relationship with the married poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, who, upon meeting her, boasts that he was expelled from Oxford due to his manuscript "On The Necessity of Atheism." Mary is a kindred freethinking spirit and they soon become a scandalous item. Lord Byron and Dr. Polidori (who thought corpses could be reanimated)

also appear in the film, and both are shown to be contemptuous of religion as well. Elle Fanning was terrific as Mary Shelley, and the rest of the cast was fine. Can you guess what book Mary Shelley tries to get published at the end, with difficulty because of her gender?

I highly recommend this film for my fellow heretics.

Dennis Middlebrooks  
New York

## Why is cake's use even a relevant factor?

I know it is a little late now, but I still have to ask: How can it be OK for a baker, artist or not, to refuse to bake a cake for a person who is gay, assuming one of the gay men offered to pay for it? Did the baker even know who would pay for it, since no one else involved in the purchase matters? Why is it relevant what the cake was for? Suppose they just liked his work and wanted to put it on a shelf somewhere? It was bought for a party; why is it any of the baker's business that it was a wedding party, or a wedding party for gay men? Neither the cake nor the baker actually participated in the wedding service and vows. They would have been married with or without his cake. How is it possibly conceivable that any god would care what was done with a cake? Is it a sin for gay people to eat cake? The cake would have been served after they were married, so is this baker not going to serve anyone who is gay and married? How about gay, but not married? How about bisexual? How would he know? Would he require proof of not being gay for future customers? What if they agreed not to tell anyone who it was that baked the cake, so he wouldn't be "shamed" by anyone?

Ron Herman  
New Mexico

## Can FFRF seek repeal of 'In God We Trust'?

Has FFRF ever sought repeal of our current national motto: "In God We Trust" back to the original "E Pluribus Unum"? Who is "we" in the current motto? It certainly isn't me or FFRF, I'm sure. It really rankles me when I see the motto on our currency. Is this not a clear violation of the very first line

of the Bill of Rights? The motto was changed when Republicans held all the levers of power in the mid-1950s, and Eisenhower signed it into law. I was 4 years old when the motto was changed, so I don't know whether anyone objected at the time.

Of course, with the current makeup of Congress and the presidency, the motto will stay as it is . . . a violation of the Constitution.

Jim Martin  
Florida

*Editor's note: FFRF in 1994 sued to have "In God We Trust" removed from currency and as the national motto. The lawsuit was dismissed by a 10th Circuit federal judge that same year. Michael Newdow has more recently tried to challenge it in court.*

## Here's how to really teach students the bible

This is in regard to James Haught's column in the June/July issue: "The problem with teaching the bible in public schools."

Why should teaching the bible in public schools be a problem?

If I taught a course on the bible, the first thing I'd remind my students is that God himself broke two of his own Ten Commandments; namely, numbers seven and 10.

He caused Mary to become an adulteress, without her consent. Furthermore, he not only coveted Joseph's wife, but got her pregnant.

Throughout my bible course, I'd assign my students the task of finding passages in the "Good Book" in which biblical heroes would surely be tried for crimes against humanity and child abuse if they were living in today's world.

I would also ask them to fill their task books with the bible's inconsistencies and contradictions.

And for extra credit, I'd ask them to find pornography in the bible. Not romantic love, but pornography. Yes, it's all right there in the "Good Book."

David Quintero  
California

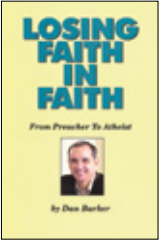
## Kudos to Devin facing up to school bullying

I just got my latest Freethought Today, and after reading the Strong Backbone Student Activist Award essay by Devin Estes, I'm so touched by him.

I can hardly believe that teachers bullied this brave young man! I feel very proud of him, and his parents, for standing his ground; it is very difficult to do when being bullied by adults as well as other kids. Shame on those folks! With such strength of character, and with the support of his parents, I'm sure he'll go far. May you be well and happy, Devin!

April Hall  
Pennsylvania

## 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



# BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

## Arrested / Charged

**William E. Smith Jr.**, 48, Palmer, TN: Attempted rape of a child. Smith, pastor at Church of God International, was found in a vehicle with his pants down on top of a girl by deputies looking for a stolen pickup in a wooded area, the complaint said. Deputies said Smith told them several times the girl was 18 but she later told them she was 12. *Source: WTVC, 6-1-18*

**Alfonzo Carter**, 45, Chicago: Criminal sexual assault. Carter, assistant pastor at Greater First Baptist Missionary Baptist Church and father of 8, is charged with seducing a 16-year-old girl from the church in April during counseling for problems she was having at school. Prosecutor Jacqueline Marquardt said Carter asked the girl if she was sexually active. “When [she] told [Carter] that she was not, [he] asked if he could teach her how to have sex. The teen said ‘yes,’” Marquardt alleged. After she became suspicious, the girl’s grandmother allegedly found Carter hiding in a bedroom closet in the house where the girl was staying with her grandmother, Marquardt said. *Source: Sun-Times, 5-30-18*

**Randall K. Carter II**, 42, Overland Park, KS: Rape of a child, aggravated criminal sodomy and aggravated indecent liberties with a child. Carter, a youth pastor at an unidentified church and 5th-grade teacher at Lee A. Tolbert Community Academy in Kansas City, is charged with assaults on 2 girls under age 14 between July 2013 and August 2016 when he was teaching at Pathway Academy and University Academy. Tolbert Academy, a public charter school, is named after a Pentecostal pastor. Classes are held in the 24-classroom wing of Victorious Life Church. A woman who knows Carter from church told a reporter she thinks the allegations are false. *Source: fox4kc, 5-25-18*

**Joshua W. Wright**, 67, **Donald Jackson**, 40, and **William J. Wright**, 46, face 11 counts related to sexual assault of 4 teen girls enrolled in a program run by the Oxon Hill Assembly of Jesus Christ in Fort Washington, MD, where the Wrights were pastors and Jackson was a congregant from 2001-08. The program, which ended in 2011, was called Children Having Overcoming Power and provided living accommodations and classes for at-risk youth. *Source: WUSA, 5-23-18*

**Phillip P. Ratliff**, 77, Norman, OK: 2 counts of performing lewd acts on a child. Ratliff, pastor at Alameda Baptist Church, was arrested after a forensic interview of Ratliff’s juvenile granddaughter and an allegation he had child pornography on a computer. *Source: Norman Transcript, 5-24-18*

**Sheldon R. Johnson**, 55, Goldthwaite, TX: Violating a criminal trespass warning. Johnson, pastor of First United Methodist Church, had been barred from any Goldthwaite public school after a vehement April 20 argument with a middle school administrator when police were called. But on April 26, he returned twice and the school, which Johnson’s child attends, was locked down as a precaution. The United Methodist Rio Texas Conference said in a statement that Johnson will retire July 1. *Source: KWTX, 5-22-18*

**Larry A. Holley** and **Patricia E. Gray**, Flint, MI: Conspiracy to commit wire and mail fraud, 2 counts of wire fraud and 4 counts each of mail fraud and money laundering. It’s alleged that Holley, pastor of Abundant Life Ministries International Inc., and Gray, his Treasure Enterprise business partner, bilked about \$6.7 million from over 80 investors, many of them church members around the region. Ads were aired on Christian radio stations soliciting laid-off auto workers to invest their severance packages. *Source: mlive.com, 5-22-18*

**Matthew S. Everly**, 25, Bloomington, IL: 11 criminal counts, including aggravated battery of a child, aggravated domestic battery and reckless conduct. Everly, associate pastor of worship arts at Eastview Christian Church in Normal, is accused of injuring his 2-month-old daughter in March when she sustained 2 broken legs and a broken arm. The girl was temporarily removed from the home but was returned to live with her mother, who’s not criminally charged. *Source: WJBC, 5-21-18*

**Kenneth Lewis**, 56, Arvada, CO: Predatory criminal sexual assault of a child. Lewis, a Catholic priest defrocked in 2007 after serving in Tulsa, OK, is accused of assaulting a 13-year-old boy at a hotel in Evanston, IL. His parents filed a complaint with Tulsa police in 2004. Two more alleged victims have come forward and charges are pending. The diocese sent Lewis to treatment in 1994 but he was allowed the return to active ministry in 1995. *Source: Sun-Times, 5-21-18*

**William A. Nolan**, 64, Madison, WI: 6 counts of sexual assault of a child under 16. Nolan, a retired priest-in-residence since 2014

at Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Parish, is accused of abuse of a former altar boy that allegedly started while he was pastor at St. Joseph’s Parish in Ft. Atkinson. Nolan retired from full-time ministry in 2007. A man, now 25, told police in April he had a “continuous sexual relationship” with Nolan from 2006-10. Police Chief Adrian Bump said there may be more victims. “This is a delayed report of almost 13 years. Based off our interaction and working closely with the victim, it was identified that a concern that there may be other kids out there that were assaulted and that resulted in motivating the complainant to come forward.” *Source: WMTV, 5-16-18*

**Thomas W. Allen**, 49, Abingdon, MD: 4 counts of assault. Allen, rector of St. Mary’s Episcopal Church, is accused of hitting his wife in the face during an argument in May while driving home from dinner out. According to the police report, Allen allegedly had been drinking during much of the day and also assaulted 3 of their 5 children, including kicking his 18-year-old stepdaughter in the chest as she tried to help a sibling. *Source: Baltimore Sun, 5-15-18*

**Daniel Ramos**, 29, Burbank, IL: Grooming, indecent solicitation of a child and 6 counts of child pornography. Ramos, youth pastor at Victory Worship Center, is accused of sending 4 female church members between the ages of 12 and 17 lewd photos and videos of him masturbating. Some of them sent him photos of themselves, clothed and unclothed. *Source: Sun-Times, 5-15-18*

**Jacob “Yanky” Daskal**, 59, Brooklyn, NY: 3rd-degree rape, forcible touching, sex abuse, criminal sex act and acting in a manner injurious to a child under 17. Daskal, founder and president of the Shomrim Brooklyn South Safety Patrol, is charged with assaults on a 16-year-old girl in his home between August and November 2017. Shomrim, a private Orthodox Jewish neighborhood patrol, received \$425,708 in city contracts between 2010-15. Daskal has also been a major local political contributor. *Source: NY Post, 5-10-18*

**Inés Pérez** and **Rosa Tróchez Joaqui**, Catholic nuns who worked respectively as director and assistant at Hogar Renacer Santa Clara in Popáyan, Colombia, are charged with aggravated torture of about 65 displaced children under their care from 2014-17. After neighbors reported screams coming from the facility, investigators allegedly found children who’d had their hands burned and their shaved heads pushed into toilets as punishment. *Source: Newsweek, 5-9-18*

**Jackie D. Woodburn**, 63, Burtchville, MI: Producing or attempting to produce child pornography, receipt or possession of child pornography and coercion. Woodburn, associate pastor until recently at Colonial Woods Missionary Church, is charged with posing as a teen online “to sexually exploit minor teenage and preteen girls,” the complaint said. Among the more than 50 alleged victims is a 13-year-old Texas girl who chatted with “jd windwalker” in 2016. That IP address was traced to

Woodburn’s home, police said. A seized computer allegedly had least 70,000 Skype chat messages between “windwalker” and others. The church website said he was among 60 people worldwide selected for a counseling enrichment program at Focus on the Family in 1991. *Source: Detroit News, 5-9-18*

**Joseph Cramer**, 66, Gardner, KS: Theft of property greater than \$25,000 and 2 counts of unlawful use of a computer to defraud or falsely obtain money, property or services. Cramer has resigned as pastor of Divine Mercy Catholic Parish. More than \$40,000 is involved. A bail condition bars him from casinos. *Source: KMBC, 5-9-18*

**Meally M. Freeman**, 55, Brooklyn Center, MN: 2 counts of criminal sexual conduct. Freeman, pastor at Grace Mountaineer Tabernacle Church, is charged with assaulting a 28-year-old woman who had gone to him for “spiritual guidance” last September. The complaint alleges the woman lost consciousness during 2 sessions after Freeman gave her small cups of anointing oil to drink and that when she awoke after the 2nd session, she found her private areas exposed and covered with oil. In a recording made later, he allegedly admitted touching her genitals and breasts and said, “We insert things into people” during “deliverance.” *Source: KMSP, 5-8-18*

**David Poulson**, 64, Oil City, PA: Indecent assault, endangering the welfare of children and corruption of minors. Poulson, pastor at several Catholic parishes in the Diocese of Erie, is accused of molesting 2 boys for several years. It’s suspected there are more victims. One boy was 8 and was an altar boy when the alleged assaults started. Prosecutors said Poulson would make him admit the “sins” during confession. The other boy was 15. Nine other males told investigators similar abuse stories. *Source: Philly Voice, 5-8-18*

**William H. Randall**, 73, Fleming Island, FL: Custodial sexual battery against a victim under 18. Randall, retired pastor at St. Simon Baptist Church, is charged with molesting a girl at the church between 2007-15. The girl told police he

and needed a stress reliever.” An online video purportedly showing the pastor having sex led to the charges. *Source: WFTV, 5-2-18*

**Carlton L. Marks**, 60, Henagar, AL: Theft of property. Marks, clerk/treasurer at Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church until resigning last September, is suspected of stealing over \$200,000. *Source: WAFF, 5-1-18*

**Jerry R. Newton**, 54, Slidell, LA: Theft of government funds. It’s alleged that Newton, pastor of Bogalusa Baptist Church, didn’t disclose to the Social Security Administration that he was employed as a pastor and owned 2 businesses when he applied for and received \$95,316 in disability benefits. *Source: Times-Picayune, 4-27-18*

**Philip Smith**, 52, Lancaster, PA: Involuntary deviate sexual intercourse and aggravated indecent assault of a person under 16 and 15 related offenses. Smith, a radio host for Christian station WJTL, is accused of assaults on a girl from 2013-17, starting when she was 15. *Source: Lancaster Online, 4-27-18*

**Jermaine Grant**, 43, Burlington Township, NJ, and **Lincoln Warrington**, 48, Teaneck, NJ: Tax evasion and conspiracy to defraud the U.S. government. Grant, leader of the Israelite Church of God in Jesus Christ, and church treasurer Warrington allegedly failed to report a combined \$5.3 million in income from the church from 2007-15, with a tax loss to the government of \$1.9 million. *Source: Courier Post, 4-27-18*

**Cesar M. Rios Martinez**, 35, Laurel, DE: 25 counts of dealing in child pornography. Martinez is pastor at Iglesia El Espiritu Santo in Salisbury, MD. *Source: AP, 4-27-18*

## Pleaded / Convicted

**Jerry Gross**, 72, and **Jason L. Gross**, 51, Spindale, NC: Pleaded guilty to wire fraud. Father and son, who are business partners and pastors at Word of Faith Fellowship, are accused of getting dozens of church members to falsely file for unemployment benefits in order to funnel money to the church from 2009-13. The Grosses also filed false claims. A criminal investigation is ongoing into the church’s alleged involvement in physical and emotional abuse of members. *Source: AP, 5-25-18*

**Philip Wilson**, 67, archbishop of Adelaide, Australia, was found guilty of failing to report a serious crime committed by another person. He’s the highest-ranking Catholic cleric in the world to be convicted of such an offense and faces a maximum of 2 years in prison. Wilson denied under oath that 2 altar boys told him they were molested in 1971 and 1976 by **James Fletcher**, a New South Wales priest later convicted of multiple assault counts and who died in prison in 2006. Magistrate Robert Stone said he could not accept Wilson’s claim that he didn’t remember the conversations, including an allegation made to him in the confessional booth by the boy, who was 11. *Source: NPR, 5-22-18*


**Fernando Sayasaya**, 53, a Catholic priest extradited from the Philippines in December, pleaded guilty to 2 counts of felony 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: AP, 5-18-18*

**Christopher Collins**, 32, Buena Vista, VA: Pleaded guilty to possession of child pornography and attempting to send obscene material to a minor under 16. It was alleged that in November 2016 when an undercover officer posing online as a 13-year-old girl contacted Collins (username NavyGuy4Yng), he sent images of his erect penis and a video of a male masturbating and claimed to be a youth pastor. Collins is studying to be a youth pastor, a government press release said, but didn’t name the institution. *Source: WLNI, 5-18-18*

**Daniel S. Johnson**, 40, Coos Bay, OR: Guilty by jury of travel with intent to engage in illicit conduct, aggravated sexual abuse and 6 counts of engaging in illicit sexual conduct in a foreign place. He was accused of molesting 6 boys aged 8 to 17 while running a Cambodian orphanage from 2005-13. Johnson’s work with Hope Transitions ministry was funded for several years by Calvary Baptist Church in Gladewater, TX. *Source: Register-Guard, 5-16-18*

**Kenneth Butler**, 38, Toledo, OH: Pleaded guilty to obstruction of a sex-trafficking investigation and 2 counts of sex trafficking of children. “This defendant has admitted to crimes that include preying on a foster child who was previously the victim of sexual abuse, and he committed these crimes in a house of worship,” U.S. Attorney Justin Herdman said. Butler, pastor at Kingdom Encounter Family Worship Center from 2007-12, is accused of having sex with 2 minor girls. Two other pastors, **Cordell Jenkins**, 47, and **Anthony Haynes**,

## Words from the wise



Aura Lee Ferguson of Nebraska, who has been posting themes of “spiritual enrichment for passersby” for 17 years on the Unitarian Church Wayside Pulpit in Lincoln, Neb., recently saw FFRF’s phrase, “Freedom depends on freethinkers” and added that to the marquee. She says it will be up for a few weeks to “give folks on A Street something to ponder.”



39, also face charges involving the same girls. *Source: Toledo Blade, 5-14-18*

**Alan Devine**, 74, Stockport, UK: Guilty by jury of 6 counts of indecent assault on 2 girls between 1972-76 when Devine was chaplain at a Catholic school. Prosecutors said he became enamored with a 15-year-old, which led to her getting pregnant and giving the child up for adoption.

The victim, now 58, didn't go to police until 4 decades later. Her sister, now 54, alleged Devine also molested her during the same period. He admitted fathering the child but claimed the affair didn't start until the girl was 18. He later started a relationship with the girls' mother after her divorce. *Source: Daily Mail, 4-30-18*

**Berl Fink**, 57, a Hasidic rabbi from Brooklyn, NY, pleaded no contest, paid a \$100 fine and received 5 points on his driver's license for eluding a Vermont state trooper on I-91 for more than 4 miles shortly after midnight Aug. 8. Trooper Justin Thompson alleged Fink was going 83 in a 65-mph zone and swerved at times.

Fink said he didn't realize at first that he was being pulled over, but that once he did, he looked for a safe place to stop. Thompson ordered Fink out of the car at gunpoint and handcuffed him and his wife and 2 sons before releasing them. A review of video footage concluded Thompson acted properly. *Source: Valley News, 4-26-18*

**John P. Aitchison**, 67, Canberra, Australia: Guilty by jury of 5 counts of rape and 8 counts of indecency involving against a 13-year-old girl in the 1980s. The woman testified Aitchison first assaulted her after violin practice at the Anglican church where he was pastor.

She testified he told her during the assault to look into the corner and pray she would see her pet dog that had died and kept muttering "please God forgive me." Two men also testified Aitchison molested them as youths. *Source: abc.net/au, 4-26-18*

**Sentenced**

**Klint Bitter**, 35, Omaha, NE: 10 to 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to attempted sexual assault. Because most sentences are cut in half under state law, Bitter will serve 5 to 10 years. He was a youth pastor at Christ Community Church in February 2017 when he contacted a male teen to set up a sexual encounter with a 15-year-old girl and then met her in Bellevue for sex, prosecutors said.

The male teen, **DeArch Stubblefield**, 19, pleaded guilty to attempted human trafficking and was sentenced to 20 to 40 years. *Source: World-Herald, 5-23-18*

**Justo J. Iarraz**, an Argentinian Catholic priest, was sentenced to 25 years in prison for sexual abuse of 7 boys between the ages of 10 and 14 at the minor seminary in Paraná from 1985-93 where he was prefect of discipline and spiritual guide. Prosecutor Juan Ramirez Montul said it's clear there are other victims who haven't filed complaints. *Source: AP, 5-21-18*

**Gary Uhlenkott**, 67, Spokane, WA: 6 months in jail after pleading guilty to viewing minors engaged in sexual explicit conduct. Uhlenkott, a Catholic priest and Gonzaga University music professor, was arrested after federal agents seized videos from his office and apartment in 2013.

Among the movies purchased with his credit card were "Boy Fights XXVIII: Bucharest Holiday," "Boys of Europa" and "God or Goat." *Source: AP, 5-16-18*

**Wisdom Kusorgbor**, 25, Korle-Gonno, Ghana: 24 months' hard labor for putting his fingers in a 3-year-old's vagina and "brushing" it with his penis in December 2016. Kusorgbor, pastor of Soldiers of the Cross Ministries, lived in the same housing compound as the girl and her mother. *Source: Graphic Online, 5-13-18*

**Mark C. Adams**, 56, Mt. Carmel, TN: 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to using means of interstate commerce to persuade a minor to engage in sexual activity. Adams, a deacon and Sunday school teacher at Oak Grove Baptist Church, posed in March 2017 as a 17-year-old boy on the Kik app to have explicit chats with an 11-year-old girl in Michigan.

"He made specific instructions for her to position her body in front of her camera so that she may take photographs of her genitals," the plea agreement stated. *Source: WJHL, 5-8-18*

**Jacob A. Bertrand**, 35, San Diego: 10 years' probation and a \$1,000 fine after pleading guilty to criminal sexual conduct. Bertrand, a Catholic priest, had sex with a young adult woman in her Minnesota home after saying a private Mass there in 2010. Afterward, he told her they had "fulfilled the second holiest sacrifice next to Jesus and Mary on Calvary."

Minnesota clergy can be charged with 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct for having sex with persons they're not married to while being asked for or giving spiritual advice, even if the sex is consensual. *Source: WCCO, 5-7-18*

**Robert D'Aversa**, 70, and **Anthony Criscitelli**, 63, Altoona, PA: 5 years' probation, \$1,000 fine and costs after pleading no contest to endangering the welfare of children. They are Franciscan friars accused of covering up sexual abuse by fellow friar Stephen Baker in the 1990s.

Baker killed himself in 2013, days after announcement of a multimillion-dollar settlement.



He was first accused of sexual abuse in 1988 but his superiors never reported allegations to police. *Source: Tribune-Review, 5-4-18*

**Andrew Rushford**, 64, Yantic, CT: 5 years in prison suspended, 5 years' probation and \$43,000 restitution after pleading guilty to larceny for stealing from Grace Episcopal Church, where he had been treasurer since 2013. *Source: Norwich Bulletin, 5-3-18*

**William J. Walters**, 33, Roanoke, VA: 6 years in prison suspended and restitution of \$180,000 after pleading no contest to 3 embezzlement counts. He was charged with stealing from the church, where he was pastor from 2007-15. *Source: Roanoke Times, 5-1-18*

**James D. Worley**, 45, Gresham, OR: 12½ years in prison and \$12,000 compensation to a family member he was convicted of molesting in the early 2000s when she was between the ages of 5 and 7. He was senior pastor of Powell Valley Church from 2012 until his arrest in 2014.

Worley's initial indictment included accusations from another family member but charges were dropped days before his trial started. The jury deadlocked on 8 other counts. His victim, now a teen, read a statement in court. She said the smell of Worley's brand of cologne "makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand up." *Source: Bend Bulletin, 4-30-18*

**Komar Uddin**, 68, Leicester, UK: 15 years in prison after convictions for sexually assaulting a 19-year-old in her home during a 2015 exorcism. Uddin worked as an imam at several mosques after entering the country from Bangladesh on a visa in 2006. A married father of 11, he stayed illegally before fleeing to Germany after his arrest. *Source: Leicester Mercury, 4-27-18*

**Branden E. Shumate**, 39, Koloa, Hawaii: 45 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of 3 counts of lewd acts on a child younger than 14. Shumate was an assistant at Shekinah Fellowship in 1997 in Lake Forest, CA, where his father was pastor, when he met the 6-year-old victim whose family attended the church.

The other victim was 10 in 2010-11 when she told her mother that Shumate molested her while she was drying off after a shower while her family was living with the Shumates. *Source: OC Weekly, 4-27-18*

**Jose L. Pizarro**, 42, Mansfield, TX: 50 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of indecency and sexual abuse of a child younger than 14. Pizarro, pastor of Iglesia de Dios Nuevo Amanecer, was accused of abusing an 8-year-old girl at church in 2016 and a 10-year-old girl in 2013. *Source: Dallas News, 4-27-18*

**Asaram Bapu**, who has founded hundreds of Hindu ashrams in India, was sentenced to life in prison for raping a girl in 2013 when she was 16. He's in his 70s. He and his son are also accused in 2 other cases involving alleged repeated assaults of 2 sisters 10 years ago in Gujarat state. *Source: NPR, 4-25-18*

**Gregorio Martinez**, 50, N. Bergen, NJ: 5 years in prison for bail jumping. Martinez, a Pentecostal deacon and pastor, fled to Nicaragua in 2015 after being convicted of molesting a 13-year-old boy and sentenced to 4 years, time he just started serving after being extradited. He's scheduled to face trial for another assault on an 18-year-old male. *Source: Jersey Journal, 4-23-18*

**Civil Lawsuits Filed**

**Sabine Griego**, Las Vegas, NM, a former Catholic priest, is being sued by 6 men and 1 woman, now in their 50s, who allege he raped or molested them between 1968-84. He's the sole defendant. Past lawsuits have targeted the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, which in every case has settled out of court to keep the 32 plaintiffs quiet.

"The goal in these 7 survivors in focusing on Griego specifically is to draw attention to the fact

that he has escaped any kind of prosecution, even though he has been known as a credible abuser for more than 20 years," said attorney Levi Monagle. *Source: KOB-TV, 5-15-18*

**St. Paul's School**, Concord, NH, is being sued by 3 former students whose suit calls the school affiliated with the Episcopalian Church a "haven for sexual predators" that has failed to protect children for decades.

Two male plaintiffs attended the school from 1966-70 and 1973-76. One alleges he was inappropriately touched by **3 faculty members**, including **Gerry Studds**, who later was elected to Congress. The other alleges administrator **Coolidge Chapin** brought him and other students to a New York City brothel in the winter of 1973-74, where Chapin stripped to his underwear and ordered students to have sex with prostitutes.

Plaintiff "Jane Doe" alleges the school had a "hypersexualized environment" where older students scored points for having sex with younger ones and that officials failed to report her sexual assault during the 2012-13 school year. *Source: NH Public Radio, 5-4-18*

**Chris Cunningham** and the **Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles** are being sued by at least 7 male plaintiffs who allege Cunningham molested them while he was pastor at several parishes from the mid-1990s to early 2000s when he was in his 20s. The suit claims officials knew about Cunningham's behavior and gave him different assignments until 2004 when he left the priesthood. He's now a licensed psychologist in Rhode Island. *Source: Daily Breeze, 4-27-18*

**Legal Developments**

**Osher Eisemann**, 61, Lakewood, NJ: Theft by unlawful taking, misapplication of government property, misconduct by a corporate official and money laundering. Eisemann, an Orthodox rabbi who founded the School for Children with Hidden Intelligence, is accused of using a private fundraising nonprofit for the school to launder \$630,000 in public tuition funds.

He's also accused of transferring another \$200,000 of school funds into a personal account and then back to school accounts to create the false impression that he was using personal funds to repay debts he owed the school. The school receives \$1.8 million a month from public school districts that send students with special education needs there. *Source: nj.com, 5-25-18*

**Samuel Mullet Sr.**, 72, leader of a break-away Amish sect in Bergholz, OH, lost his appeal for a new trial. U.S. District Judge Dan Polster ruled that alleged errors raised by Mullet during his trial for hair- and beard-cutting attacks in 2011 weren't prejudicial.

Prosecutors alleged the motive was religious since hair and beards have spiritual significance for the Amish. Of the 16 men convicted in the case, only Mullet remains imprisoned. He was sentenced to 11 years. *Source: USA Today, 5-3-18*

**George Pell**, 76, Vatican finance minister, will stand trial on multiple charges of historical sexual abuse. Cardinal Pell is the most senior Catholic official to face criminal charges for assault. Allegations stem from his time as a priest in Ballarat in the 1970s until the 1990s, when he was archbishop of Melbourne. Details of the allegations and number of charges were not made public. *Source: The Guardian, 4-30-18*

**Allegations**

**Fabian J. Maryanski**, 77, is the subject of a renewed investigation by the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo, NY, into an accusation he had a sexual relationship for several years with a girl in the mid-1980s. The priest started his sexual advances when she was a 15-year-old parishioner, according to a 1995 letter sent by her law-

yer to the diocese.

His accuser, now 49, alleged he got her drunk and had intercourse with her on her 18th birthday when he was 45 and that they didn't stop having sex until she was 22. She said she's still a practicing Catholic, adding, "the fact that the shepherds who were supposed to protect their flock decided to protect the wolves instead is beyond my ability to accept at this point." *Source: Buffalo News, 5-6-18*

**Peter Charland**, a New York Catholic priest who died in 2004 at age 58, molested them in the 1970s, allege 8 men who have filed claims with the Diocese of Rockville Centre's victim compensation program. All were members of the PJ Folksingers at a Long Island parish.

Steven Werner, 60, said Charland molested him over 100 times during "practice sessions" in the rectory. Group member Barbara Ryan Hausman said she first heard abuse stories in 1994 at a reunion. "As I look back, I could see how he orchestrated the whole thing." Charland left the priesthood in 1978. *Source: Newsday, 4-27-18*

**Removed / Resigned**

**Mark Froehlich**, 75, Belmont, OH, was removed from public ministry by the Catholic Diocese of Steubenville during an investigation of historical sexual abuse of a minor. Msgr. Froehlich, who is retired, denied the allegation: "I've been doing this for 50 years," he said of his time as a teacher and priest. "With this crazy #MeToo crap that's going on, a defendant like me will have a tough time." *Source: News-Register, 5-30-18*

**Paige Patterson**, 75, was removed by trustees as president of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, TX, because of sexist remarks he made about women and charges he downplayed the seriousness of rape and domestic abuse.

A published report alleged Patterson encouraged a woman not to report a rape in 2003 when he was president of the church's seminary in Wake Forest, NC, and that he told another woman to stay with and pray for her husband after he blackened both her eyes.

Another report detailed a 2014 sermon in which he "related a conversation he had with a woman while her son and a friend were standing alongside. As they talked, a teenage girl whom Patterson described as 'very attractive' walked by, and one of the boys said, 'Man, is she built.'"

The woman scolded the boy but Patterson defended him: "I said, 'Ma'am, leave him alone, he's just being biblical. That is exactly what the bible says.'" *Source: al.com, 5-24-18*

**Luigi Esposito**, 77, was suspended by the Catholic Archdiocese of Baltimore during a probe of alleged sexual abuse while he was associate pastor at Our Lady of Pompei Church in the 1970s and the complainant was 14. He was also a teacher, coach and athletic director of Our Lady of Pompei High School from 1964-1987. *Source: WBAL, 5-21-18*

**Shayne Duvall**, Louisville, KY, pastor at St. Raphael Catholic Church, "will be away for a couple of weeks to be on retreat" for his involvement in an inappropriate relationship with an adult. Jeff Shooner, vicar for priests for the Louisville Archdiocese, told a reporter that "Father Shayne has apologized and hopes to continue as pastor." *Source: Courier Journal, 5-11-18*

**Charles Hanel**, Pewaukee, WI, was put on leave as pastor at Queen of Apostles Catholic Parish during investigation of an allegation he had inappropriate contact with a minor. Hanel, who was ordained in 1983, had recently returned from sabbatical when the allegation surfaced in late April. The date(s) of the alleged incident(s) was not specified. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 5-11-18*

**Steven Fink**, rabbi at Temple Oheb Shalom in Pikesville, MD, was suspended with pay because of "an allegation of an improper incident of a sexual nature that may have occurred many years ago" involving a teen, a temple statement said. *Source: WBFF, 5-3-18*

**Larry Bach**, Durham, NC, resigned as rabbi at Judea Reform Congregation after the Central Conference of American Rabbis determined he committed an ethics violation that was sexual in nature in March. Bach was reprimanded for a similar violation in 2014 when he served a synagogue in El Paso, TX. *Source: WTVD, 5-1-18*

**Gerry LeBouef**, Clawson, MI, pastor at Guardian Angels Catholic Church and president of Bishop Foley High School, was placed on leave. Madison Heights police said in a press release that the department took a "suspicious circumstances" report from a student in April. *Source: Detroit Free Press, 4-27-18*

**Les Hughey**, 64, Scottsdale, AZ, resigned as pastor of Highlands Community Church. Six women have alleged he assaulted them while working as a youth pastor at Scottsdale Bible Church from 1985-96 and earlier at First Baptist Church in Modesto, CA. *Source: Arizona Republic, 4-27-18*

**Samuel Venne**, pastor of St. Stephen Catholic Church, Grand Island, NY, and **Art Smith**, pastor of Blessed Mother of Calcutta Parish in Depew, NY, were put on administrative leave by the Diocese of Buffalo due to allegations of sexual abuse of minors. *Source: WKBW, 4-23-18*

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



# FFRF’s interns help fight for the cause

Here are the profiles of FFRF’s 2018 summer interns.

**Name:** Luke Changet  
**Where and when I was born:** Lancaster, Ohio, in 1991.  
**Family:** Parents Brad and Helen, brother Jake, sister Grace and dog Ender.  
**Education:** Ohio State University for undergrad, Case Western Reserve University for law school.  
**My religious upbringing was:** Catholic.

**How I heard about and/or chose to become an FFRF intern:** I was looking for nonprofit jobs in November 2016 in the wake of the election, and FFRF had a posting for an attorney near me. That sparked my interest, which led me to law school. So, naturally, when I was looking for summer jobs, I checked if FFRF had anything, and this internship exists, so here I am.

**What I do here:** Legal research and letter writing. My favorite so far has been helping draft a letter to Ted Cruz and Rand Paul denouncing their anti-science views.

**My professional interests are:** To do good. Whether that is for a nonprofit like FFRF or ACLU, or working as a public defender, or anything else, I want to use my law degree to help change the world for the better.

**These three words sum me up:** Nerdy, accepting, maker-of-bad-jokes.

**Things I like:** Video games, working out, tabletop games, my dog, other people’s dogs, pictures of dogs, thinking about dogs.

**Things I smite:** Patriarchy, capitalism, fascism, nerds (in-game only).

**My loftiest goal:** Abolish capitalism.

**This is a fun fact about myself:** I am a competitive quidditch player. No, it’s not live-action role-playing. Yes, I’ve broken bones.

**Name:** Paul Epland.  
**Where and when I was born:** Plymouth, Minn., in 1997.  
**Family:** Parents Kris and Mark Epland, brother Ethan (18).  
**Education:** Sarah Lawrence College.  
**Religious upbringing:** Methodist.  
**How I heard about and/or chose to become an FFRF intern:** I heard about FFRF through the Paul Redleaf internship program at my college.

**What I do here:** Editorial intern, write “Freethoughts of the Day” and other things.

**My professional interests are:** Teaching, writing.

**These three words sum me up:** No outstanding warrants.

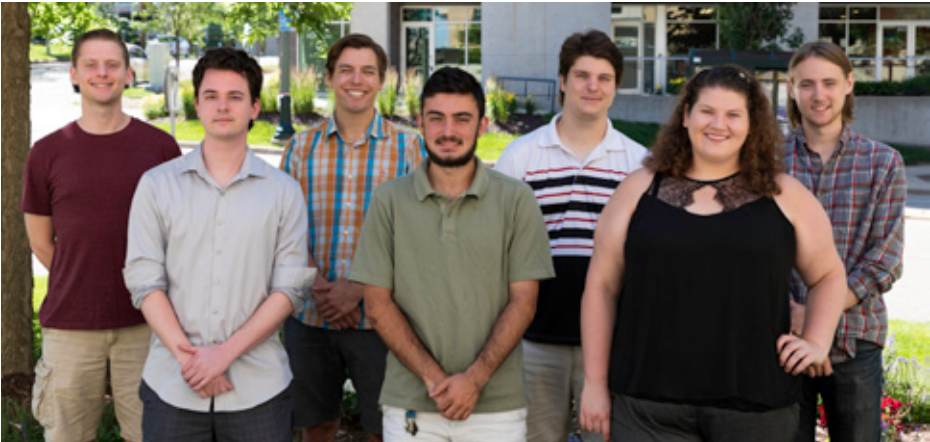
**Things I like:** Cycling, reading, films, spending time with friends/family and my dogs.

**Things I smite:** Flying.

**My loftiest goal:** Publishing a book.

**This is a fun fact about myself:** I run a radio show with my friends at school!

**Name:** Mario Fregoso  
**Where and when I was born:** Milwaukee in 1997.  
**Family:** I was raised with my Mom Ally, my sister Olivia, who we call Lulu, and my Dad, who is also named Mario. (It gets



Photos by Chris Line

FFRF has seven interns working at its Madison, Wis., office this summer. (confusing.)

**Education:** Heading into my junior year at UW-Madison.

**My religious upbringing was:** I was raised more or less atheist by my father, since he was raised extremely Christian and broke away.

**How I heard about and/or chose to become an FFRF intern:** I heard about FFRF

through my friend who did the same internship the year before.

**What I do here:** I do a lot of research. This summer, I have been focusing on school assemblies and churches promoting political figures.

**My professional interests are:** I hope one day to go to law school and become an attorney. Not quite sure what kind of law I am most interested in yet, but I know I want to represent real people and not huge businesses.

**These three words sum me up:** Chill, creative, daring.

**Things I like:** Murals, hip hop music, Chinese food, debates, Milwaukee, Mario Kart.

**Things I smite:** Dry markers/unsharpened pencils, early mornings, sore throats, mosquitoes, coffee.

**My loftiest goal:** First man on Mars!

**This is a fun fact about myself:** I paint murals and do art in my free time and was recently featured at Summerfest for a live painting of a tiny home.

**Name:** Jackson Marchant.  
**Where and when I was born:** I was born in Moscow, Idaho, but raised in Spokane, Wash. I’m 25.

**Family:** Parents Kim and Jack, and a 3-year-old Chesapeake Bay retriever named Fernie.

**Education:** International relations magna cum laude from Eastern Washington University. Rising 2L at the University of Washington School of Law for my J.D.

**My religious upbringing was:** None. My parents raised me with a secular and freethinking mindset. Thanks, Dad. I’ve always loved learning about human culture, so when I was a kid and teenager I learned a lot about different myths and religions out of curiosity. However, as a student of history, it’s impossible to overstate the horrific influence religion has had over almost every war and genocide since homo sapiens migrated out of Africa some 200,000 years ago.

**How I heard about and/or chose to become an FFRF intern:** I’ve known about FFRF for a long time and have admired its fight to protect the Constitution from

those who would tear down the wall separating state and church. I learned of the internship through my law school, and it was too good an opportunity to pass up.

**What I do here:** I work with staff attorneys to write complaint letters for Establishment Clause violations regarding government-sponsored religion. I also track down proof of violations on social media and from journalistic sources.

**My professional interests are:** Politics and law.

**These three words sum me up:** Pre-tension isn’t cool.

**Things I like:** Travel, cooking, and learning about history. Rewatching “The West Wing.”

**Things I smite:** Fanatics in any form.

**My loftiest goal:** To run for and win elected office.

**This is a fun fact about myself:** While vacationing in Banff, Alberta, some years ago, I met the guy who plays Jesus at the Holy Land Experience; he’s the same guy Bill Maher interviewed in the movie “Religulous.”

**Name:** Bryant Plank.  
**Where and when I was born:** Eau Claire, Wis., in 1991.

**Family:** I have five sisters and one brother who range in age from 18 to 35.

**Education:** B.S. in political science. Rising 2L at Marquette Law School.

**My religious upbringing was:** Pretty nonexistent.

**How I heard about and/or chose to become an FFRF intern:** Followed FFRF on Facebook and later interviewed through law school. I’m studying constitutional law so this was the perfect internship opportunity.

**What I do here:** Legal research and writing.

**My professional interests are:** Constitutional law and politics.

**These three words sum me up:** Ambitious, diplomatic, efficient.

**Things I like:** Traveling, cats, activism, good people, football, basketball, family, friends.

**Things I smite:** People who suck, religion, winter, traffic.

**My loftiest goal:** Become a U.S. senator.

**This is a fun fact about myself:** I traveled alone to Uganda in 2014.

**Name:** Corinne Elayne Staten.  
**Where and when I was born:** Wyandotte, Mich., in October 1994.

**Family:** Parents Jennifer and Scott, and brother Vince. My dog’s name is Odin and we have a koi pond.

**Education:** I have a bachelor’s degree in business administrations with a minor in human resource management and

philosophy, as well as an associate’s in legal studies. Currently about to start my third year of law school at Valparaiso.

**My religious upbringing was:** I was sort of brought up Baptist in southern Kentucky, but my parents let me research and test different religions once I was old enough. After some trial and error, I realized that I didn’t believe in a god and that I was an atheist.

**How I heard about and/or chose to become an FFRF intern:**

I heard about FFRF when I was an undergrad freshman and it was a dream to be a legal intern while in law school. I have always been passionate about secular rights and the separation of church and state, so this was the perfect internship for me. I met Dan Barker my sophomore year when I was vice president of my school’s Secular Student Alliance.

**What I do here:** I draft letters for staff attorneys and try not to drink too much coffee.

**My professional interests are:** Being in-house counsel for a corporation. I want to work somewhere where I am passionate about what the company’s mission is. I clerked for a judge last fall and it opened my eyes to possibly being a judge one day. I like doing things that challenge me to think outside the box.

**These three words sum me up:** Sociable, honest and driven.

**Things I like:** Reading, cooking, exploring new places, learning new areas of law, losing track of time, and getting to know new people.

**Things I smite:** The haters.

**My loftiest goal:** In-house counsel for GM or Ford (being from the Detroit area that is lofty) but really just passing the bar.

**This is a fun fact about myself:** I grew up in McCreary County, Ky., during the *McCreary v. ACLU* case, so it was interesting watching the county go crazy over their “religious rights being taken away.”

**Name:** Joe Steigmeyer.  
**Where and when I was born:** Fort Wayne, Ind., in 1991.  
**Family:** One older brother, one younger sister.

**Education:** University of Iowa College of Law ’19 (J.D.), Carleton College ’14 (B.A.).

**My religious upbringing was:** Catholic.

**How I heard about and/or chose to become an FFRF intern:** *Hein v. FFRF*.

**What I do here:** Help write briefs and letters.

**My professional interests are:** Varied and inconclusive, but my legal interests include constitutional law, criminal law, and copyrights/trademarks.

**These three words sum me up:** I’d need four.

**Things I like:** Soccer, golf, Faulkner, jazz, MST3K, Wes Anderson movies.

**Things I smite:** Hypocrisy; I’m also sad that “The Simpsons” jumped the shark 15 years ago.

**My loftiest goal:** To one day pay off my law school debt.

**This is a fun fact about myself:** I was a competitive gymnast for 12 years.



IN MEMORIAM

World loses ‘devout atheist,’ Nobel Laureate Paul Boyer

Among the many distinguished members of the FFRF was Nobel Laureate Paul D. Boyer, who died June 2, at age 99 in Los Angeles.

We were privileged at FFRF to have met Professor Boyer, who spoke at the 2002 national convention in San Diego and was a guest on FFRF’s Freethought Radio. Boyer was an enthusiastic Life Member, who told us “how pleased” he was to have found a group like FFRF.

In his short autobiography on the Nobel website, Boyer referred to himself as a “devout atheist,” and added: “I wonder if in the United States we will ever reach the day when the man-made concept of a God will not appear on our money, and for political survival must be invoked by those who seek to represent us in our democracy.”

Boyer pointed out in his talk to FFRF that, as might be expected, “belief in God and in a hereafter dropped considerably as the level of scientific achievement increased.” He pointed to a recent survey showing that only 10 percent of members of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, representing “a pinnacle of achievement for American scientists,” believe in a god.

“My views have changed from a belief that my prayers were heard to clear

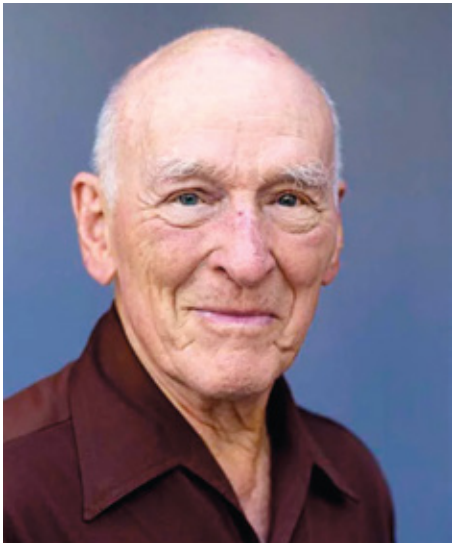


Photo by Brent Nicastro

Paul D. Boyer

atheism . . . Over and over, expanding scientific knowledge has shown religious claims to be false,” he said in his speech, “A Path to Atheism.” “None of the beliefs in gods has any merit.”

Boyer was born in July 31, 1918, in Provo, Utah, the middle child in a family of six in a loving home. His mother’s death from Addison’s disease when he was 15 awakened his interest in studying biochemistry. Although he became a “deacon” in the Mormon church at

age 12 and graduated from Brigham Young University, where he met his wife Lyda, Boyer’s pursuit of science during graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison altered his perspective. He earned his doctorate in 1943.

Moving to Stanford to do postdoctoral research in a war project, he and his wife ceased going to Mormon meetings. By the time he was 25, he had “slipped over from agnostic to atheist,” Boyer told Freethought Radio. Lyda, too, became an atheist.

In 1955, he went to Sweden on a Guggenheim Fellowship. Boyer became a faculty member of the University of Minnesota, where, in 1956, he was appointed to the Hill Foundation Professorship. Some years later, he and his family, including two daughters and a son, moved to Los Angeles, where Boyer continued research into biochemistry at UCLA. In 1965, he became director of the newly created Molecular Biology Institute, where he taught chemistry and did research for over half a century, studying enzymes, the proteins involved in biochemical processes in the animal and plant cells.

Boyer shared the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1997 with John E. Walker

and Jens C. Skou “for their elucidation of the enzymatic mechanism underlying the synthesis of adenosine triphosphate (ATP).”

As The New York Times obituary put it, he shared the prize “for his contributions to understanding the way all organisms get energy from their environments and process it to sustain life and fuel their activities.” He discovered the underlying mechanism for ATP (adenosine triphosphate) formation. “The concepts of Boyer’s binding change mechanism helped to clarify the basic chemistry of life on Earth, what makes life ‘go,’” according to the University of Minnesota at the time Boyer was awarded the Nobel. “Imagine trying to repair a TV if you didn’t know how it worked. This tells you how the machinery of the cell works,” Boyer explained to The Times on the day his Nobel was announced.

He and Lyda traveled widely in retirement. He became an advocate of death with dignity following the illness and death of his son, Douglas, in 2001.

Paul D. Boyer was a gentle giant in the world of science, who pursued knowledge for the benefit of all.

THEY SAID WHAT?

Only one title is given to a woman in all of scripture . . . the title given to a woman is ‘helper.’

**Mark Harris, a Republican running for Congress from North Carolina’s 9th Congressional District, in a 2013 sermon he gave when he was pastor of First Baptist Charlotte.**

*The Friendly Atheist, 7-6-18*

Our country was founded on religious liberty, but America is at a time of crisis as some try to silence the faithful and remove God from the public square. Texas has faced a great deal of adversity, but we’ve relied on our faith to overcome those challenges, which has brought us closer to God.

**Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, in a news release regarding the Southern Baptist Conference in Dallas posted on the official governor’s website.**

*Gov. Texas Gov, 6-12-18*



Jeff Sessions

**Attorney General Jeff Sessions, explaining the administration’s detention of nearly 1,500 immigrant children.**

*MSN.com, 6-14-18*

It is very biblical to enforce the law, that is actually repeated a number of times throughout the bible.

**White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders, when asked by CNN’s Jim Acosta about Sessions’ comments (above).**

*Yahoo News, 6-14-18*

The past two months have been tough for our convention. I believe God has allowed all of this to happen to drive us to our knees.

**Southern Baptist Convention President Steve Gaines, following a series of sexual misconduct cases — including rape allegations against former Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary President Paige Patterson — that has prompted the convention’s socially conservative, all-male leadership to seek forgiveness.**

*Washington Post, 6-9-18*



Pope Francis

**Pope Francis, reiterating that the Catholic Church is not supportive of same-sex parenting.**

*NewNowNext.com, 6-18-18*

I’ll make you a promise: This president, this vice president and our administration will always stand with you.

**Vice President Mike Pence, speaking at the Southern Baptist Convention’s annual meeting.**

*Washington Post, 6-13-18*

We are being told that Western civilization is the problem in the world. Our Judeo-Christian ethic is what is civilization. And that is what is under attack here and abroad. It also goes by a different name. Christendom. It’s under attack. And even speaking about it can bring you under attack.

**Kansas state Sen. Steve Fitzgerald, during a meeting of the Leavenworth County Republican Party.**

*CNN, 7-7-18*

Computer programmer Thomas Jacobs dies

Tom Jacobs, an agnostic and husband of FFRF volunteer Judi Jacobs, died June 7 at age 68 in Sun Prairie, Wis.

He was born April 3, 1950, in Clinton, Iowa, to Dick and Merle Jacobs. He graduated from Clinton High School in 1968 and attended Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. He served a year-and-a-half as an ambulance driver at Fort Lewis in Tacoma, Wash.

He returned to Iowa State and graduated in 1974 in computer science. On Aug. 18, 1973, he married Judi Kopecky. They had twin daughters in 1978.

They moved to Des Moines, where he worked for the state until they moved to Madison, Wis., in 1976, where he was employed by the state of Wisconsin as a programmer.

Tom then worked for the company which is now known as Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation and retired in 2015.

His wife Judi wrote: “He didn’t know if there was an afterlife and wasn’t interested in finding out. He was interested in democracy and social justice.”

He is survived by Judi, two daughters, two grandchildren, and eight siblings and their spouses.

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FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



# As convention nears, rooms are going fast!

With many high-profile personalities (including **Cecile Richards**, **Salman Rushdie**, **Adam Savage** and **Julia Sweeney**) set to speak, FFRF's convention in San Francisco from Nov. 2-4 is certain to be a great time.

But a word of caution: If you have yet to reserve your room at the Hyatt Regency, get on that right away. The original block of rooms FFRF reserved for our members filled quickly. An additional block of rooms has been made available, but those, too, are going fast. Don't be left out! FFRF's 41st annual convention will be held Nov. 2-4 at the Hyatt Regency, 5 Embarcadero Center.

The list of speakers for this year's gathering is as long as it is impressive! Richards is the past president of Planned Parenthood, Rushdie is an acclaimed author, Savage was co-host of the popular TV show "Mythbusters," and Sweeney is a comedian extraordinaire. Other speakers include **U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman**, who is one of the founders of the newly created Freethought Caucus, actor **John de Lancie**, activist **Ensaf Haidar**, comedian **Leighann Lord**, author **Debra Deanne Olson**, Ex-Muslims of North America co-founder **Sarah Haider**, and child author **Bailey Harris**.

But it's more than just the speakers! On Friday, Nov. 2, FFRF will also be showing a late-night movie and Saturday morning features the "Non-Prayer Breakfast," complete with the "moment of bedlam."

It's a weekend you won't want to miss! Convention registration is only \$60 per member, \$65 per companion, \$110 non-member, and free for students and kids. Sign up for the discounted package that includes the two meals on Saturday and save \$20. Rooms can be reserved for Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights at \$235 plus tax. Phone directly to make your reservations: 1-888-421-1442 and use the code "Freedom From Religion Foundation." Or go online at [ffrf.org/convention2018](http://ffrf.org/convention2018) for full convention information or reserve rooms directly at [bit.ly/FFRF2018](http://bit.ly/FFRF2018).

## Tentative convention schedule

<b>FRIDAY (Nov. 2)</b>	Registration re-opens
<b>11 AM</b>	<b>9:30 AM</b>
Registration opens and continues through convention.	Welcome by Lisa Strand, FFRF director of operations
<b>1-3 PM</b>	"Nothing Fails Like Prayer" award winner
Speakers TBA	<b>10 AM</b>
<b>3 - 3:30</b>	Speakers TBA
Coffee, light refreshments	<b>Noon-2 PM</b>
<b>3:30-5</b>	Lunch, sightseeing on your own
Salman Rushdie (Emperor Has No Clothes Award)	<b>2-5 PM</b>
Book signing follows	Speakers TBA
<b>5 - 7 PM</b>	<b>6 PM</b>
Dinner on your own	Banquet Dinner (tickets needed)
<b>7 PM</b>	<b>8 PM</b>
Evening Welcome by Dan Barker & Annie Laurie Gaylor	Clean Money Drawing
Year in Review Presentation	<b>8:30 PM</b>
Music	Leighann Lord ("Real Women Do It Standing Up")
<b>7:30 PM</b>	<b>9 PM</b>
John de Lancie (First "Clarence Award" presentation)	Adam Savage (Emperor Has No Clothes Award)
<b>8:15 PM</b>	<b>SUNDAY (Nov. 4)</b>
Julia Sweeney ("Older & Wider" stand up comedy)	<b>8:30 AM</b>
<b>9:30 PM</b>	Pastries, coffee available
Dessert reception	<b>9 AM</b>
<b>10:15 PM</b>	Annual membership meeting (open to all current FFRF members)
Late-night film TBA	<b>11:15 AM</b>
<b>SATURDAY (Nov. 3)</b>	Annual state representatives meeting
<b>8:00 AM</b>	
Non-Prayer Breakfast (tickets needed)	

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Or register online: [ffrf.org/convention2018](http://ffrf.org/convention2018)

DISCOUNTED REGISTRATION & MEALS PACKAGE

Get a \$20 discount when you bundle two meals and registration. Includes Saturday breakfast and dinner.

	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___ \$190	\$ ___
Spouse or Companion <small>(Non-member accompanying member)</small>	___ \$195	\$ ___
Non-member	___ \$240	\$ ___
Child / Student with ID (Meals Only)	___ \$130	\$ ___

Please indicate number of meals

Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast

\_\_\_# Regular    \_\_\_# Vegetarian    \_\_\_# Vegan    \_\_\_# Gluten Free

Saturday Banquet Dinner

\_\_\_# Regular    \_\_\_# Vegetarian    \_\_\_# Vegan    \_\_\_# Gluten Free

REGISTRATION - NO PACKAGE

Member	___ \$60	\$ ___
Spouse or Companion <small>(Non-member accompanying member)</small>	___ \$65	\$ ___
Non-member <small>Or join for \$40 and save \$10</small>	___ \$110	\$ ___
Child / Student with ID	___ Free	\$ ___

SELECT MEALS À LA CARTE

Please indicate number of meals

Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast

\_\_\_# Regular    \_\_\_# Vegetarian    \_\_\_# Vegan    \_\_\_# Gluten Free

Saturday Banquet Dinner

\_\_\_# Regular    \_\_\_# Vegetarian    \_\_\_# Vegan    \_\_\_# Gluten Free

► Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I am enclosing a donation to sponsor student convention travel costs. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(Make checks payable to FFRF) Return with payment to:  
**FFRF, Attn: Convention | P.O. Box 750 | Madison, WI 53701**

Names of all registrants (attach extra sheet as necessary)

Address

City State / ZIP

Phone\* Email\*

Credit Card Number Expiration Date / Security Code

Signature **\*Contact information for in-house use only.**

☐ Please tell us about any concerns over accessibility or accommodations in order to fully participate in this convention:

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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 2018, receiving an all-expenses-paid trip to San Francisco Nov. 2-4, along with a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

MORE INFO AT:

[ffrf.org/outreach/nothing-fails-like-prayer](http://ffrf.org/outreach/nothing-fails-like-prayer)