

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



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has enhanced
human flourishing**

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and set a
good example**

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FFRF sues Carson's Department of HUD

FFRF is suing Secretary Ben Carson's Department of Housing and Urban Development for dodging records requests relating to a White House bible study.

FFRF has teamed up with Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), a government watchdog, to bring the federal suit.

It was filed Jan. 18 in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. The lawsuit alleges that HUD has a pattern and practice of denying fee

waivers on Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests "where disclosure of the requested documents is likely to cast the agency or HUD Secretary

Ben Carson in a negative light."

According to reports, the Trump administration holds weekly bible study sessions at the White House. FFRF is seeking the records to determine whether or not the bible study uses government resources, whether staffers may feel coerced into organizing or even participating in the religious event, and to ascertain government access granted to Capitol Ministries, a group that seeks to evangelize elected officials.

The pious affair is apparently co-sponsored by Vice President Mike Pence. The list of bible study attendees includes officials whose appointments FFRF objected to because of their inability to keep their personal religion separate from their public office: Edu-

cation Secretary Betsy DeVos, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, CIA Director Mike Pompeo, Energy Secretary Rick Perry, and, of course, Secretary Ben Carson, the neurosurgeon whom President Trump tapped to run Housing and Urban Development.

Every department that FFRF has requested records from has dragged its feet, but Carson and HUD have thrown up additional arbitrary and illegal barriers. When FFRF asked for the records

in August, it requested, as is typical with 501(c)(3) groups, a fee waiver. HUD denied that fee waiver the day of the request because the records were allegedly

not in the public interest. FFRF filed a lengthy appeal and HUD again refused the waiver because the records FFRF was seeking supposedly did not relate to HUD operations or activities.

"If this bible study is legal and above-board, as the Trump administration and Fox News have argued, what are they trying to hide by torpedoing the FOIA process?" asks FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

FFRF's Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel began looking into the bible study and the possible waste of government resources in early August. Seidel appeared on Fox & Friends to explain the concerns with the bible study.

"We're still waiting on records
See HUD on page 4

**“What are they trying to
hide by torpedoing the FOIA
process?”**

— Annie Laurie Gaylor



Ben Carson posts Facebook statement against FFRF

Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson has recently posted a very revealing statement against FFRF.

Carson's Facebook message deals with the federal lawsuit that FFRF and Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) have filed over violations of the Freedom of Information Act involving Carson and the De-

partment of Housing and Urban Development.

Our groups are suing over illegal denial of public information and fee waivers in two unrelated investigations.

On his Facebook page, Carson mockingly notes: "They are fearful that a hot beverage or a bagel may

See Carson on page 4

Atlanta commuters get a dose of secularism



FFRF has placed two billboards with messages saying "In Science We Trust" in the greater Atlanta metro area. The messages went up on Cobb Parkway billboards in January and February. One billboard is 14 feet tall and 48 feet wide and the other is 10 feet by 36 feet. The messages will rotate to new spots in the Atlanta region in March.

FFRF Member Jack Egger kindly paid for the signs, which depict an astronaut suspended in outer space to illustrate its slogan. "If all of us had faith in science and humanism, we would improve life on Earth so fast," says Egger. "By giving up supernaturalism, we all can have a more fulfilling life, with a brighter, more peaceful and predictable future."

Freethought Today website launches

FFRF is excited to announce it has launched a new website for those who want to read Freethought Today on their mobile devices or computers.

FreethoughtToday.com includes all of the great articles, columns, legal news and other content you see in the print edition.

As an FFRF member, you are given access to all the content for free; just log in and browse away!

The new site has been built with responsive design to work on all of your handheld digital devices, as well as desktop computers and laptops. Give it a look!

But FFRF has more than

just a new website to keep you informed about the latest in state-church separation and news about freethinking.

Read blogs from several of FFRF's staffers on a variety of topics at the Patheos website. Go to *patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow*.

FFRF continues its weekly "Freethought Radio" show and its new weekly TV show, "Freethought Matters."

Plus, there is the weekly Facebook Live program called "FFRF's Ask an Atheist!" and shorter quick hits of news in our News Bites programming. You can access them all on FFRF's YouTube channel.

Atheist ‘library lady’ speaks volumes

MEET A MEMBER

Name: Dianne M. Centa.
Where I live: Kent, Ohio, since 1973.
Where and when I was born: I was born in Wadsworth, Ohio, in 1946, and raised in Norton, Ohio.

Family: Mom and dad are deceased, as is my oldest brother. I have two younger brothers, two daughters (both Life Members of FFRF, as is my son-in-law), four grandchildren and a great-grandson. I’ve been a widow for some years, so there is no husband in the picture.

Education: I attended the public schools in Norton, then went to college for two years at what is now called Ohio Dominican College. I eventually finished my bachelor’s degree at Kent State University in 1972. I’ve taken occasional classes since then, but, like all of us, I’ve learned a lot from life, too.

Occupation: I work at Kent State as a senior library associate. I like to say that I play with books for a living. I like it enough that I’ve been there for more than 40 years.

Military service: None. But I will mention that I was married to a GI and lived overseas with him for a year when he was stationed in Germany. Later, I was married to a decorated Marine Corps Vietnam veteran. (One of those “mythical” atheists in a fox-hole.) One learns a lot from those experiences!

How I got where I am today: I’d like to say that it was through hard work and perseverance and all those grand things, but I’m not sure that’s true. I’m an old civil servant who has gone through my share of life’s ups and downs — haven’t we all?

Looking at my college experience, I started out thinking that I’d major in biology. Well, through events, choices and probably natural inclination, I wandered off into being what I’ll call a generalist. I had to scramble during my last quarter to put together enough hours in one field (English) to actually receive my degree. Hence, the library career and lifelong love of learning. Another thing that has helped shape me is that I’ve taken advantage of many travel opportunities. It started with two trips sponsored by The Mother Earth News magazine. We went to China before it was open to regular tourism and then to Nepal to trek in the mountains. I’ve since traveled with the Kent State Geography Department to Cuba, India



Life Member Dianne Centa, a longtime library associate in Kent, Ohio, enjoys wearing irreverent clothing, such as FFRF’s “Unabashed Atheist” T-shirt.

and Thailand. I often refer to myself as an opportunistic traveler because most of my ventures have been with groups that are interested in learning something, not just seeing the touristy sights. I’ve seen Iceland, Antarctica and the Galapagos. (OK, now I’m just bragging.) And I attend conferences across the nation (and beyond) sponsored by FFRF and other groups.

Where I’m headed: A presidential answer: We’ll see.

Person in history I admire and why: So many worthy choices, but I’m going to go with Stephen Jay Gould. The columns he wrote over the years and collected into books expressed evolutionary ideas with a unique flair. He could begin with baseball or Hershey bars and lead us to further understanding of big ideas. (I say this despite his “non-overlapping magisteria” idea.)

A quotation I like: Again, too many choices! But I like this spoken by a character in Edward Abbey’s *Fool’s Progress*: “‘God,’ he would say, always putting the name in quotes, is a noise

people make when they’re too tired to think anymore.”

But, as a traveler who also likes to be silly: “Confucius say, ‘Man who run through airport going to Bangkok.’” Even Freethought Today needs a bit of humor.

These are a few of my favorite things: Reading; puttering around in my little-bitty garden; Sudoku puzzles; pop TV shows like “NCIS New Orleans,” “Law and Order,” “Kal Penn’s The Big Picture,” “Tyson’s Star Talk”; craft beers; good wine; good food (especially “ethnic” foods).

These are not: Some small: Misuses of the language, e.g., putting a modifier with “unique,” or muddying a sentence by using “they” as a singular pronoun.

And dogs. Do you really have to bring them everywhere with you? Can’t they stay home while you buy a tomato at the market? (That’s not going to win me many friends!)

Some big: The enthusiastic embrace of ignorance by some religious believers and politicians.

The misunderstanding and characterization of liberals as, as . . . well, I can’t really get what “they” are saying.

My doubts about religion started: Pretty early on, including, ironically, during instruction allowing us to be confirmed in the Catholic Church.

Even though my parents* were not enthusiastically religious, I did go through a spasm of religiosity when I was in high school (even toying with the idea of becoming a nun!) and chose to attend a Catholic college. Catholic college might have been the beginning of the end. We had to take a theology class (which included proofs for the existence of God) and a course in logic. These two things do not go together! It was, however, not until a few years later that I reached that moment of clarity: Standing and reciting the Apostle’s Creed and realizing that I didn’t believe a word of it.

*A footnote about my parents, Mom particularly. I think I could sense her doubts early on even though she didn’t openly admit to being a nonbeliever until much later in life. She was in her 80s when she said, “It’s all bullshit, isn’t it?” (I could have used that as my favorite quote.)

Before I die: I hope to be around for the next total eclipse of the sun. The last one I tried to view was eclipsed by a thunderstorm.

Ways I promote freethought: I give money to several organizations which promote separation of state and church. I also had our FFRF signs put on the local buses in Portage County, Ohio.

There is the occasional letter to the editor; I sign mine, unlike commentators in the anonymous “Sound off” column. I reported a couple of violations, including writing directly to a local mayor, who seemed to respond favorably.

Another thing which is rather fun and informative (for me and others) is that I wear my irreverent T-shirts very often and very openly. I wear them to work; I wear them to the farmers’ market and other downtown events. This sparks conversations and, frequently, positive comments. I recently had a woman ask for a photo — she gave me a cookie in return. There is, of course, the occasional negative comment or stink-eye look, but still it raises awareness that we are here.

I strike out “God” on my money. A small, almost silly gesture, but I did have a cashier ask me about it when I mentioned it. I told her I did it because “In God WE trust” is a false statement.

As the “library lady,” I work with our liaison to the philosophy department. I feed him book reviews and suggestions; he is very good about purchasing books that help to add a nontheistic point of view to our collections. He even agreed to accept my donation of the complete backrun of Free Inquiry, plus an ongoing subscription. Since the library’s budget is limited, I also donate books that I purchase, sometimes from obscure authors like Dan Barker.

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Preparing to deal with judges can be trying

But every so often, all of the anxiety is worth it when the judge is reasonable

By Colin E. McNamara

Back in mid-November, when I first received a state-church complaint about a judge from a mostly rural county in eastern Tennessee, I confess that I didn't exactly jump for joy that I'd been tasked with "setting him straight."

The complainant reported that this judge, who presides over juvenile delinquency cases, was also regularly teaching bible classes at the county's juvenile detention facility. The county only has two juvenile court judges, meaning that a child sentenced to juvie on a Monday could hear "the Good News" the following Sunday from the very same judge who put him there.



Colin McNamara

As a lawyer who's done a smattering of juvenile defense practice in my nascent career, I know that it's very rare for a child to have only one hearing before a juvenile court judge. Rather, they often have to come before the bench time and again so the judge can evaluate their progress and adjust their sentence accordingly. You see, juvenile court judges are fundamentally different than your garden variety black robes. Their mission (at least in theory) is to reform, not to punish. To that end, they are given much broader discretion to craft sentences that serve "the best interests of the child."

You see the problem here, right? The complainant's concern — which I fully shared — was that the kids in this juvenile detention facility would feel pressured to "play Christian" in order to curry favor with the judge. Children can't be reasonably expected to distinguish between an authority figure acting in their personal vs. official capacity — there's an entire line of Supreme Court cases striking down religious promotion by school teachers built on that very principle.



Photo by Shutterstock

At this exceptionally vulnerable point in their young lives, the judge is the apex authority figure to these kids. It can be said, without exaggeration, that he holds their futures in his hands.

I knew I had to tell him this was coercive; I knew I had to tell him this was unethical; I knew that someone had to tell him to stop, and that it would have to be me.

But I'll level with you, dear reader: I really don't like writing to judges. If you follow FFRF's usual caseload, you know that half of the letters we send are to school district superintendents who are either completely ignorant of the law or just don't give a damn, with their responses ranging from conciliatory to cold silence at either end of the spectrum. But when it comes to judges, three critical distinctions collude to make them particularly hot potatoes to handle:

1. It is literally their job to know and apply the law.
2. They have an image of themselves as fair and impartial arbiters of justice, and tend to not appreciate suggestions to the contrary.
3. They really don't like it when lawyers try to upend the usual power dynamic and tell *them* what to do.

Suffice it to say that the responses we get from judges often veer on the, shall we say, pricklier side. So, when I found out (after a bit of digging) that this judge also happened to sit on the Board of Judicial Conduct, I set to work on the letter with all the urgency of a man preparing his last meal.

I spent two days twisting myself in knots over every comma, testing the patience of my colleague Sam Grover by asking him to review at least four different drafts. Finally, on Nov. 30, I sent it out — and patiently waited for

the return volley. And waited . . . and waited. Silence.

After almost two months passed without a reply, I sent a follow-up letter. I'd begun to suspect that this judge, rather than choosing to spew venom at me for daring to question his ineffable grasp of both the Constitution and the rules of judicial ethics, had simply elected to give me the brush-off.

And then my phone rang. Kristina, who helps field our incoming calls, told me that she had a gentleman from Tennessee on the line calling for Colin McNamara.

Oh, wonderful, I thought. I guess smiting me in a letter wasn't personal enough for him. I turned down the volume on the handset and readied myself for the tongue-lashing of a lifetime.

"Put him through." Deep breath. "Good afternoon, this is Colin McNamara with the Freedom From Religion Foundation. How can I help you?"

A warm, rich voice with a pleasant touch of Tennessee twang came through the phone.

"Hi, Mr. McNamara. How are you today?"

Lead with a smile — follow with a switchblade. Here it comes . . .

"I've received your letter, and I wanted to let you know that I thought you expressed yourself very well and had some very good thoughts. I've always been a great believer in separation of church and state, and I've even taught some constitutional law courses, so we probably have similar thoughts on many matters."

Wait, what? Is this a trap? "I just wanted to touch base with you, person to person, and let you know that it's taken care of. Back

when I first got your letter, I made a couple of calls to my church and others and let them know that, as far as any input from me goes in any of the [juvenile detention] services, I will no longer be doing that."

Oh. Your. God. "I think it's important in handling any case — I've always thought this through all my years — that you don't differentiate between people who may be atheist, may be of different religions — that those are not factors in making decisions."

AMEN-er, sorry. Caught in the moment.

What followed was a pleasant conversation about his interest in the welfare of these troubled young people. He explained that there was a bit more to the story. It wasn't just church services that he led, but also secular educational classes to make sure that these kids stayed up to date on their schooling. For the few minutes that we spoke, I got a fuller picture of this man — a good, kind-hearted, Southern gentleman who I sincerely believe really did want to see these kids succeed.

Nevertheless, he understood my concern that involving himself in the church services risked children feeling pressured into participation, so out of respect for their individual beliefs, he would no longer be a part of it. We exchanged a few laughs about "that disgrace we had down in Alabama" (his words, referring to Roy Moore — in case you couldn't guess) and then we went our separate ways.

As any enthusiast of FFRF litigation knows, we are currently engaged in a lawsuit against Judge Wayne Mack, a Texas justice of the peace who just can't help himself from foisting his Christian beliefs onto every soul who enters his courtroom. There are few things that inflame my ire more than seeing those who are granted the public's trust abuse that power to strong-arm others into their religious beliefs. Religious bullying, especially from the bench, should turn the stomach of any liberty-loving American.

Oh, how I wish the Wayne Macks of the world would take a page out of this judge's gospel.

Public officials are welcome to their religious beliefs and practices. They may pray to whomever or whatever they wish; they may burn their candles and drink their wine; they may believe in one god, 100 gods, or no god — "it neither picks my pocket, nor breaks my leg," to quote the scholar of Monticello.

To every public servant out there, I say: Keep your religion and hold it close to your heart — it is yours to have and to hold, inviolate, forever. Our First Amendment secures your right to believe as stalwartly as my right not to believe. But recognize also that the machinery of government must be wielded responsibly. By virtue of your office, your actions carry an inherent risk of coercion that has to be rigorously managed to respect individual autonomy. When you allow your personal religious beliefs to bleed into your official actions, you strike a blow to the most sacrosanct of our basic freedoms: the freedom of conscience.

To those who get it, good on you. To those who don't, shame on you. Looking at you, Judge Mack.

Colin E. McNamara is FFRF's Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellow.

The complainant's concern was that the kids in this juvenile detention facility would feel pressured to 'play Christian' in order to curry favor with the judge.

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A fun, illustrated book allowing children of all ages to explore myths like Santa Claus and compare them with ideas like the existence of God.

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shop.** [ffrf.org](http://shop.ffrf.org)

HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

MAXIMS FOR DIVERSE OCCASIONS

Bedeviled by malaise and moral cancers,
Everyone is hot for easy answers:
What this country needs, before cremation,
Is two cents’ worth of Instant Meditation.
So, little rhymes, go spread your moral jargon:
Wisdom’s rare, but preaching is a bargain.

Education

Education is whatever you cannot forget:
Answers are easy, questions are always a threat.
Ignorance hurts, in surgeons and taxi drivers.
When truths drop dead, paradox whips the survivors.

Religion

Creeds are easier to learn than unlearn:
Fanatics end with sainthood or with sunburn.
Theology’s the sport of the upper classes.
Masses are the opiate of the masses.

Art

Art is what’s left if you burn away the fact:
A poem, like prayer, is an unnatural act.
Brick is forever, marble is frightfully fickle.
Without symbolism, two dimes would buy a nickel.

Style

Style is what keeps bread from being cake:
Hamburger is the very quintessence of steak.
Strong views, like strong eggs, need a pinch of salt.
Mold is an accident, Roquefort is somebody’s fault.

Civilization

Civilizations depend on garbage men:
Progress can turn a lake into a fen.
To own a tree is shameless imprudence.
Good fences always make good arguments.

Platitudes come easy, silence hard.
Advice is always simple to discard.
So go, little rhymes, but don’t be in a hurry:
When chaos whispers, men say, “What, me worry?”
Most prefer hot cures to cool prevention.
Wisdom shrugs when no one pays attention.



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.

FFRF welcomes 27 new Life, After-Life Members

FFRF is proud to announce and recognize our 25 newest Life Members, two After-Life Members and five Immortals.

The two After-Life Members are Brooke Adams and Zef Fessenden. After-Life Membership is a tongue-in-cheek donation category of \$5,000 for those who want their donation to “live on” after them.

FFRF’s newest Life members are: Marvin Brodie, Stephen Bartlett, George J. Clark, Barrie Fairley, Jesse Forjan, Anthony Herman, Jere Hinman, Theo Kahle, David Kronen, Daniel R. Landry, David Larson,

Chuck Maurer, John P. Musselman, Kristin Pedersen, Thom Pfanner, Gareth Richards, Mark Rosenberg, Udo Schmidt-Sinns, Karen Shallcross, Don Smith, Sharon Stanley, Everett L. Vincent, Bill Wasinger, Wynn Wasinger, David Weitman and Stephen Zenker.

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

States represented are Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Washington and Wisconsin.

The latest Immortals are Jehnana Balzer, Thomas Good, Leon and Kate Krier, and Douglas Reynolds.

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.



Official White House Photo by Evan Walker

Ben Carson, secretary of Housing and Urban Development, speaks with the press outside the White House recently.

Carson

Continued from page 1

be consumed at the expense of taxpayers, or that staff may be coerced to participate in religious activities against their will.”

Carson denies any coercion, adding that “taxpayer funds are not used to support the ministry, and secondly, no staff are involved in the bible study.” It is reasonable to ask why, if this is the case, Carson is denying FFRF public documents that would prove this. FFRF is simply engaging in due diligence under FOIA and has a right to public information.

Carson’s Facebook posting then continues: “More importantly, I re-

fuse to be intimidated by anti-religious groups into relinquishing my spirituality or religious beliefs.”

Carson’s continues: “I will not stop being a Christian while in service to this country, in fact, it is my faith that helps me serve the nation even better. The relentless attacks on the spirituality of our nation must be resisted.”

Carson also accuses nontheists of a plot to “destroy morality” by keeping religion out of our secular government. Carson himself is being accused of using his governmental position for his son’s gain.

HUD

Continued from page 1

from all the various departments involved in this bible study, but HUD has been particularly secretive and obstinate,” says Seidel of the lawsuit.

The records are important because the pastor leading the bible study is an extremist with access to the highest levels of our government. According to reports: “the man leading these sessions, Ralph Drollinger of Capitol Ministries, is a conservative Christian who has called Catholicism the ‘world’s largest false religion,’ declared homosexuality an ‘abomination,’ and said it’s ‘sinful’ for women with children to serve in Congress.”

HUD also denied FFRF a fee waiver on a second request, filed in October,

over Carson’s daily schedule and appearance at “Revive Us 2,” an event at the new Museum of the Bible. HUD refused the wavier the day after the FOIA request and denied FFRF’s appeal.

CREW’s fee waiver requests were also rejected. CREW sought a fee waiver and records, including emails, relating to the role Carson’s son and wife play in HUD, where they are “omnipresent” fixtures. HUD denied another of CREW’s waivers, this time for records relating to Carson’s use of private planes to travel.

The allegations of this pattern and practice are topped off with other waiver denials HUD issued to ASPCA and Public Citizen, neither of which is a party to the lawsuit.

Caption Contest Winner!

Congratulations to **Kai Bird** for winning FFRF’s caption contest from the January/February issue.

The winning caption is: **None of it was true. I had my fingers crossed the whole time.**

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

- Walking on water was nothing. Watch me smoke this invisible joint, then juggle this single ball!
— **Jim Luke**
 - Got a cigarette? — **John Alexandr**
 - If you turn this globe over and shake it there will be snow. If you shake it just right, there will be wine.
— **Mike Wortz**
 - Auctioneer Jesus: “Do I hear three shekels for this beautiful orb?”
— **Julie Fausette**
- Thanks to all who participated. We will have another contest in



an upcoming issue. If you see any non-copyright-protected images (most likely that you took yourself) that you think would be good for a caption contest, send them to caption@ffrf.org.

What Is a Freethinker?

freethinker *n.*

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

No more #thoughtsandprayers

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

For many years, it was only FFRF and the U.S. community of nonbelievers who routinely spoke out against the pious kneejerk platitude of “thoughts and prayers” — and only “thoughts and prayers” — invariably accompanying every mass shooting in the United States.

But I’d like to issue a secular “hallelujah” because the tide has turned in the last year or so, with journalists, families of victims and survivors increasingly calling out this self-righteous and premeditated excuse for taking no action. As New York Times columnist Timothy Egan put it: “Stuff the thoughts, hold the prayers, and do something.”

Seventeen lives were senselessly snuffed out by a young assault-weapon-wielding misfit at the high school in Parkland, Fla., including 14 students whose bright, hopeful and far-too-long faces are haunting. This is the seventh shooting rampage on school grounds so far this year. Anguish and sorrow may be our first national reaction.

But a growing chorus of Americans of no religion and various religions is also expressing disgust over the do-nothing “thoughts and prayers” response by the very public officials in the best position to enact real gun reform and spare future lives from gun violence.

Survivors, victims’ families and the public at large are increasingly echoing the long-expressed views of freethinkers, atheists and agnostics, ridiculing prayer and demanding meaningful reform and action. Time magazine reports: “Adults offered ‘thoughts and prayers’ after the Florida school shooting. But students who survived want action.”

Vogue ran a reaction story headlined: “The students who survived the Parkland, Florida, shooting aren’t interested in ‘thoughts and prayers.’ ”

One of those Americans rebelling against the ubiquitous #thoughtsandprayers is Fern Malila of Michigan, a constituent of U.S. Rep. Jack Bergman, R-Mich. “Dear Rep. Bergman,” she wrote, “since you



Fern Malila of Michigan wrote this “check” to U.S. Rep. Jack Bergman after the school shooting in Parkland, Fla.

and your colleagues in Congress seem to feel that this is the solution to mass murder, please accept this contribution.” She then posted on her Facebook page the “check” with a “campaign contribution,” the check amount filled in “Thoughts and Prayers.” Others are following suit. I hope this tactic goes viral.

Actor Mark Ruffalo tweeted: “Prayers without accordant action are silent lies to oneself, heard by no God, amounting to nothing. Action is the language of truth, the prayers of Saints.”

Another famous nonreligious American, author Stephen King, had this tweet: “Broward school shooting — There will be prayers from Blabbermouth Don, Pence the Grinch, and their rightwing cohorts. There will be no call for any sort of sane gun regs.”

I don’t know Kim Kardashian’s views on religion overall, but she gets that “nothing fails like prayer” on the gun violence crisis: “We owe it to our children and our teachers to keep them safe while at school.

Prayers won’t do this: action will. Congress, please do your job and protect Americans from senseless gun violence.

The Guardian reports other subversive reactions: “Bess Kalb, a writer for the late-night television show ‘Jimmy Kimmel Live!’ tweeted the amount of contributions they received from the National Rifle Association (NRA).” The Guardian reports that the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics estimates that during the 2016 election, the NRA and its affiliates spent a record \$54 million to secure Republican control of the White House and Congress, including at least \$30.3 million to help elect Donald Trump.

Right on cue after the Florida carnage, Trump tweeted: “My prayers and condolences to the families of the victims of the terrible Florida shooting.”

One of the most despicable responses to the school shooting came from House Speaker Paul Ryan, who has received nearly \$50,000 in direct campaign contributions but far more in indirect boosts from the NRA, who told a local radio show:

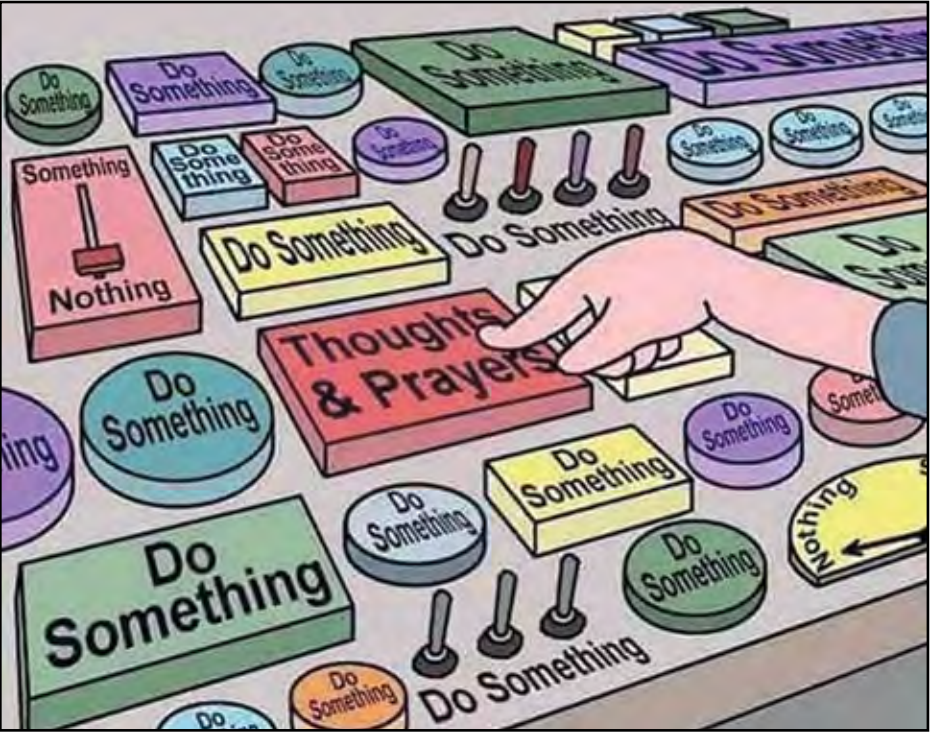
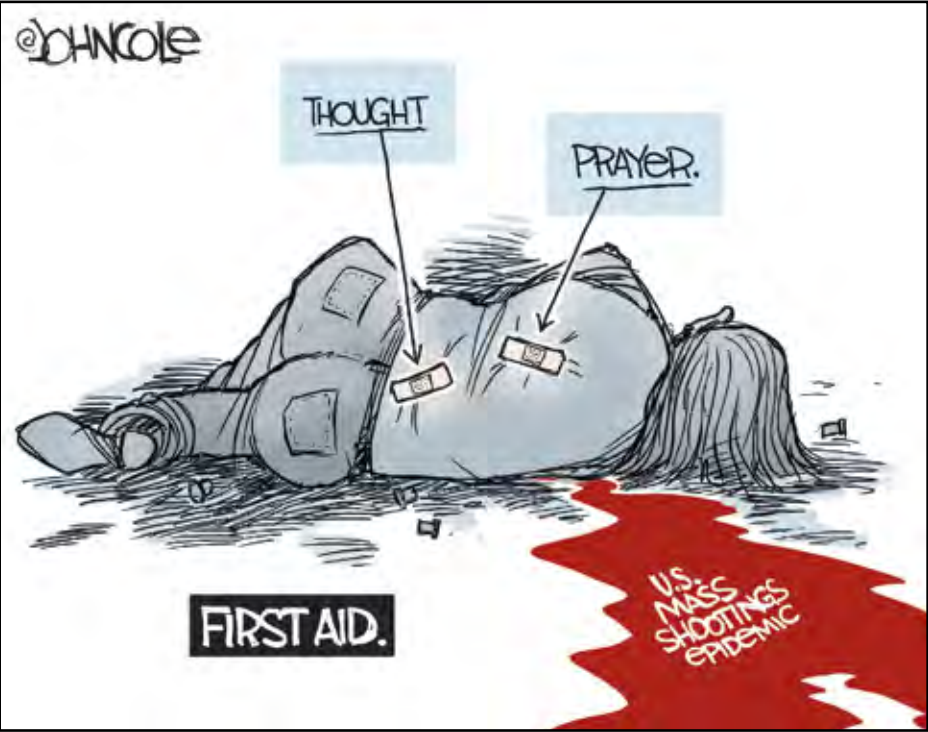
“I think we need to pray, and our hearts go out to these victims. And I think, as public-policy makers, we don’t just knee jerk before we even have all the facts and the data.” Times Columnist Egan, by the way, called this “platitudinous mush.”

Then there’s Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, whose tweet ironically seemingly confirms FFRF’s motto that “Nothing fails like prayer”: “Just spoke to Broward School Superintendent. Today is that day you pray never comes.”

Florida Sen. Rob Portman, whom the NRA has spent two-thirds of a million on, tweeted this: “Heart-breaking news out of Florida. Jane and I send our prayers to the school, the community and the victims of this tragedy.”

It’s tragic that it has taken inaction over continuing mass shooting atrocities to wake up the nation to the emptiness of political prayer platitudes.

Annie Laurie Gaylor is co-president of FFRF. This column reflects the views of the author, not FFRF.



IN THE NEWS

Pope displays moral hypocrisy

While being credited as a reformer, Pope Francis has done nothing to ease any of the Roman Catholic Church’s draconian decrees and doctrines. Yet the pope has excelled in creating a public relations image of a “kinder, gentler” church hierarchy.

But the pope’s true colors were revealed when he publicly accused victims of Chile’s most infamous priestly pedophile scandal of “slander.” Ironically, the pope’s purpose in visiting Chile was supposedly to help “heal” those survivors of priest abuse.



Pope Francis

Chile’s most notorious priestly scandal has involved Fernando Karadima, who abused dozens of children under his care. Karadima’s decades-long crime spree was ignored — which is to say, covered up — by the church until the victims went public with the abuse in 2010.

Karadima, then 80, was merely sanctioned in 2011 by the Vatican, which removed him from all pastoral duties and “sentenced” him to a “life of penance and prayer” for his crimes. Statute of limitations or decisions by fearful prosecutors and judges meant no criminal resolution.

In 2015, Pope Francis renewed Chilean anger over Karadima’s crimes and church complicity by making Juan Barros Madrid — a protégé of the abusive priest — a bishop. Even some of Chile’s church leaders opposed the appointment of Barros as

Chile’s most notorious priestly scandal has involved Fernando Karadima, who abused dozens of children under his care. Karadima’s decades-long crime spree was ignored — which is to say, covered up — by the church until the victims went public with the abuse in 2010.

“He’s been behaving like a spouse who is told that their spouse is abusing their kids, and can’t believe it.”
— Peter Saunders



Photo by Shutterstock

A protester on behalf of clergy abuse victims holds a sign outside the Cathedral Basilica of Peter & Paul in downtown Philadelphia, where Pope Francis was giving Mass in this 2015 photo.

bishop because of accusations from what they called “truthful and reliable” victims who charged Barros with personally knowing of the abuse, but doing nothing.

It recently came to light that Pope Francis acknowledged the church leaders’ complaints in a letter in January 2015, but ignored their call not to promote

Barros.

When the pope said that “there is not one single piece of proof” of cover-up, that “It’s all calumny. Is that clear?” he is disregarding the sworn, reliable testimony of the victims, just as the church ignored their claims of abuse. In short, he’s calling those victims liars.

In late January, the pope reiterated

his defense of Barros, contending that he had never received any complaints that the prelate knew of abuse by the country’s most notorious pedophile priest.

But on Feb. 5, the Associated Press reported that the pope personally received an eight-page letter in 2015 from one of the victims. The letter detailed abuses the victim said were witnessed by other clerics, including Barros.

“There is what you might call a willful blindness,” Peter Saunders, a former member of the pope’s Commission for the Protection of Minors, told The New York Times. “It’s almost angry unwillingness to accept what’s in front of him, because to acknowledge it is to acknowledge that the church still has to clean up its act. He’s been behaving like a spouse who is told that their spouse is abusing their kids, and can’t believe it.”

WSJ analysis: Vouchers don’t make much of a difference

A Wall Street Journal analysis suggests private school vouchers worked best when enrollment from voucher students was kept low. As the percentage of voucher students rises, the returns diminish until the point when there is little difference between the performance of public and private institutions. The vast majority of private schools participating in the program today have high percentages of publicly funded students.

Milwaukee was the first city in the country to use school vouchers, almost 30 years ago. In Milwaukee, the 29,000 voucher students, on average, have performed about the same as their peers in public schools on state exams, the analysis shows.

Vouchers are often described “as coupons, backed by state dollars, that parents can use to send their kids to the school of their choice, even private, religiously affiliated schools,” NPR reported. “The money is all or some of what the state would have otherwise spent to educate the child in a public school.”

Voucher programs around the country have generated similar results as Milwaukee, even though “no other voucher program in the U.S. targeting poor children and underperforming schools has penetrated as deeply or been around as long,” the WSJ reported.

Charlie May of Salon writes, “These studies seem to show that many factors can explain why a student can do better than another student, but how much he or she paid for his or her education doesn’t seem to be one of them.”

Nassar hid behind religion during decades of abuse

By Bill Dunn

“You talked about Catholicism with my mother while sexually violating me,” former gymnast Madeline Jones told Larry Nassar during her victim impact statement.

Jones was one of about 200 women to tell two state courts in Michigan their stories before Nassar, the former USA Gymnastics national team doctor and an osteopathic physician at Michigan State University, was sentenced to concurrent terms of 40 to 175 years in prison. The total number of accusers is 265. A separate federal child pornography conviction adds 60 years to that total.

Nassar, 54, preyed for almost 20 years on the nation’s top gymnasts, including Olympians, while treating their injuries. Often their parents were in the room, but Nassar blocked their view of what was going on.

Another victim was a family friend who was 6 when he started molesting her in the home where he lived with

his wife and three children. One of their daughters is autistic. His wife divorced him last July.

“In our early hearings, you brought your bible into the courtroom and you have spoken of praying for forgiveness,” victim Rachael Denhollander told him in court. The judge made him sit in the witness box so he had to face his victims during their statements.

Nassar was a catechist (lay teacher) for St. Thomas Aquinas Parish’s seventh-grade class and a eucharistic minister at St. John Church and Student Center in East Lansing, Mich. Although Annie Kitching, St. Thomas director of religious education, claimed Nassar was not affiliated with the parish “for a long time,” Michelle Danaj, another catechist, said she worked with him until September 2016.

“It seemed like a normal teaching experience,” Danaj said. “He knew a lot about the Catholic faith, he treated the students with respect.” The Diocese of Lansing said Nassar com-

pleted “Safe Environment” training to instruct parishioners working with children how to recognize and prevent child abuse.

Critics noted “institutional failures” by Michigan State University, USA Gymnastics and medical accreditation agencies. In an editorial, the Free Press in Mankato, Minn., added the church to that list: “At the same time that Nassar’s victims took to [Judge Rosemarie] Aquilina’s courtroom, Pope Francis was heaping scorn on the victims of a Chilean bishop already convicted of abuse by the Vatican.”

Denhollander, who was 15 when Nassar started molesting her, said this in an interview with the Christian Post: “It is with deep regret that I say the church is one of the worst places to go for help. That’s a hard thing to say, because I am a very conservative evangelical, but that is the truth. There are very, very few who have ever found true help in the church.”

A bill introduced by U.S. Sen. Di-

anne Feinstein, D-Calif., passed both houses of Congress in late January. The Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act requires amateur athletics governing bodies to report sex abuse allegations to law enforcement or a child welfare agency within 24 hours. It also extends the statute of limitations into adulthood for federal civil child abuse laws.

Barbara Blaine, the late founder of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, worked with Feinstein’s office on the legislation.

Kyle Stephens was 6 when Nassar first exposed his penis to her in his home’s furnace room. “He told me, ‘If you ever want to see it, all you have to do is ask.’” He masturbated, put his fingers in her vagina and rubbed his penis on her bare feet.

She told her parents, who didn’t believe her, Stephens said in her statement. “You convinced my parents that I was a liar.” Her father killed himself in 2016 as the allegations mounted.

“Little girls don’t stay little forever,” Stephens said to Nassar. “They grow into strong women who return to destroy your world.”



Larry Nassar

“It is with deep regret that I say the church is one of the worst places to go for help.”
— Rachael Denhollander

Council member takes secular affirmation

Kristine Mackin, a new council member in Waltham, Mass., used a secular affirmation during her inauguration rather than the standard “so help me God.”

Instead of saying “I do solemnly swear,” Mackin said, “I do solemnly affirm,” and in place of “So help me God,” she said, “I do so under the pains and penalties of perjury.”

Pastor admits to ‘sexual incident’ with student



On Jan. 7, a Memphis megachurch pastor received a standing ovation during a church service after admitting he engaged in a “sexual incident” with a high school student 20 years ago.

The admission by the pastor, Andy Savage, came several days after a woman accused him of sexually assaulting her in 1998 when she was 17 and he was the youth minister at a suburban Houston church.

Savage did not tell the congregation at Highpoint Church exactly what took place in 1998, but he said that he had sinned, taken responsibility for it and never kept it a secret from church leaders.

“Jules, I am deeply sorry for my actions 20 years ago,” he said. “I remain committed to cooperate with you toward forgiveness and healing.”

After he finished addressing the congregation, church members stood and applauded him.

0% of young Icelanders think God created world

Less than half of Icelanders say they are religious and more than 40 percent of young Icelanders identify as atheist. The poll found literally no (0.0 percent) Icelanders under the age of 25 who accept the creation story of the bible (that God created the world).

The poll, done at the behest of the Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association, found that of those younger than 25, 93.9 percent said the world had been created in the Big Bang.

The poll also found a growing percentage of Icelanders support the full separation of church and state. Out of those who expressed an opinion on the subject, 72 percent supported the full separation of church and state.

West Virginia bill would require bible classes

West Virginia Republican state Sen. Mike Azinger has sponsored a bill that would require every school — whether public, private or parochial — to offer elective courses in Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Senate Education Committee met on Feb. 6 to discuss it, but the meeting was adjourned with no decision made.

State Sen. Mike Romano took issue with the proposed bill. “The state should make no law,” Romano said. “We’re making a law that promotes one specific form of Christianity over

the others, to carry out some misguided gays, guns and abortion mandate.”

Florida city ends religious invocations

On Jan. 16, city commissioners in Longwood, Fla., ended the practice of beginning meetings with a religious invocation.

Instead, they voted unanimously to adopt a moment of silence. The change reverts the rules to what they were four years ago, when the invocations were added.

‘Bible literacy’ courses breaking law, ACLU says

“Bible literacy” classes being taught in some Kentucky public schools appear to violate the Constitution by promoting Christianity and “religious life lessons,” according to the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky.

The ACLU’s finding, contained in a letter to the state Department of Education, follows its review of how some school districts have begun offering courses under House Bill 128, a measure passed last year by the Kentucky General Assembly to include “bible literacy” in public school curriculum.

Supporters of the law, including state Rep. D.J. Johnson, have argued the bible literacy curriculum would expand students’ knowledge of culture, history and society.

“Whether you believe that it’s the word of God or you think it’s a complete work of fiction, you can’t deny the impact it’s had on our culture,” Johnson told Courier Journal last year.

After Gov. Matt Bevin signed the bill into law, the ACLU sent open records requests to all 173 Kentucky school districts, seeking policies and curriculum for bible literacy classes, the organization said in a press release.

‘Good Christian’ parents allegedly tortured 13 kids



Thirteen brothers and sisters were allegedly held captive by their parents, some bound with chains and padlocks, until one of them escaped and called 911.

David Allen Turpin and Louise Anna Turpin were arrested in late January after police discovered their children (aged between 2 and 29) being tortured and chained to beds in their home in Perris, Calif.

Both parents were charged with torture and child endangerment, with a bail of \$9 million each.

David Turpin’s parents, James and Betty Turpin, told authorities their son and daughter-in-law were “a good Christian family” and that they had so many children because God commanded them to. They also said the children were given “very strict homeschooling,” and would have to memorize long passages of the bible.

Atheists highly support abortion rights

According to a 2017 Pew Research Center survey, 87 percent of atheists and agnostics believe abortion should be legal in most or all cases.

That’s the highest of any group

except for Unitarian Universalists, of which 90 percent support abortion rights. The lowest religious group are Jehovah’s Witnesses at 18 percent. Nearly half of Catholics (48 percent) support abortion rights, even though Church doctrine is against it.

‘In God We Trust’ in all Florida schools?

Every Florida school and school administrative building will have to prominently display “In God We Trust” under a bill moving through the Legislature.

State Rep. Kimberly Daniels said her bill will be a lesson to children about the national and state motto that’s printed on currency and included in the state flag.

The bill received unanimous approval Tuesday from the House PreK-12 Innovation Subcommittee.

Republican state Rep. Ralph Massullo said students should know about the state’s history, and as part of that history, “we do trust in God.”

Wildlife property of ‘Almighty God’?



An Oklahoma state senator has introduced a bill that would make all wildlife in the state the property of “Almighty God.”

Oklahoma Sen. Nathan Dahm wrote SB 1457 to amend a clause related to Oklahoma’s wildlife. Instead of saying that “all wildlife found in this state is the property of the state,” the wording would be changed to say that “all wildlife found in this state is the property of Almighty God.”

Dahm’s bill states that it would go into effect Nov. 1, 2018, if passed.

Teens least Christian generation in history

Teenagers today are the most non-Christian generation in American history, as only four out of 100 teens hold a biblical worldview.

The new study by Barna Group also shows that teenagers are at least twice as likely as American adults to identify as LGBT or as atheist.

The new study found that 12 percent of teens described their sexual orientation as something other than heterosexual. About a third of teens know someone who is transgender, and a solid majority (69 percent) say it’s acceptable to be born one gender and to feel like another.

The study indicates that 35 percent of Generation Z (born from 1999 to 2015) considered themselves to be atheist, agnostic or not affiliated with any religion. By comparison, only 30 percent of Millennials, 30 percent of Generation X and 26 percent of Baby Boomers said the same. The study shows that almost twice as many teens in Generation Z (13 percent) claimed to be atheist than Millennials (7 percent).

Praying football coach has appeal rejected

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals sided with the Bremerton, Wash., school district in upholding a lower

court’s decision that found the district was justified in firing football coach Joe Kennedy for his refusal to stop praying with his students after games.

Religion cited as root of world’s problems

In a recent Best Countries survey of more than 21,000 people from all regions of the world, the majority of respondents identified religion as the “primary source of most global conflict today.”

Spiritual beliefs create an inherent “us vs. them” scenario, experts say.

“When societies shatter, they generally shatter along tribal lines. People are seeing themselves as irretrievably different from their neighbors,” says Sam Harris, a neuroscientist and philosopher.

The divisions created by religion are deeper and potentially more harmful than those formed through other aspects of identity, such as race, nationality or political affiliations because they confront individuals with differing opinions on the ultimate purpose of life, experts say. More than 80 percent of those surveyed said that religious beliefs guide a person’s behavior.

“Religion often becomes the master variable,” Harris says. “It provides a unique reward structure. If you believe that the thoughts you harbor in this life and the doctrines you adhere to spell the difference between an eternity spent in fire or one spent on the right hand of God, that raises the stakes beyond any other reward structure on earth.”

Bill aims to protect prayer by coaches

High school coaches would be allowed to participate in student-led prayers before sporting events and talk about religion with students, according to a bill introduced in the Georgia Senate.

The legislation comes in response to a FFRF complaint against East Coweta High School head coach John Small, who prayed with his players after a football game last fall.

The proposal also protects students from discrimination for expressing religious viewpoints in homework, artwork and religious clubs.

In addition, the legislation sets aside a time for student speakers to talk about their religion or other topics before football games, designated athletic events, opening announcements for the school day and school assemblies.

New Religious Freedom Division added to HHS

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on Jan. 18 announced the formation of a new Conscience and Religious Freedom Division in the HHS Office for Civil Rights.

According to the HHS website, “The Conscience and Religious Freedom Division has been established to restore federal enforcement of our nation’s laws that protect the fundamental and unalienable rights of conscience and religious freedom.”

But that opens up the possibility of discrimination, writes Jack Ende, president of the American College of Physicians, “[We] would be particularly concerned in the new HHS division takes any actions that would result in denial of access to appropriate health care based on gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity.”

FFRF NEWS

FFRF sues Kentucky correctional center

FFRF is taking legal action against a Kentucky penal institution to make it comply with the law.

In December, the Kentucky attorney general rendered an opinion that the Laurel County Correctional Center had to abide by FFRF’s open record request filed in October. The correctional center has not made any move in that direction, so FFRF is asking a Kentucky circuit court to enforce the opinion.

FFRF’s record request is regarding a “Night of Prayer” that Laurel County Jailer Jamie Mosley organized on Aug. 29 at the center. Laurel County citizens and churches were invited to the jail to pray for inmates, their fam-

ilies, their victims and jail staff. The correctional center erected a tent on the premises for the event. Christian ministers, members of the community and jail staff attended the event, and a local church choir performed. Inmates were escorted to the tent to interact with the crowd. Additionally, attendees, including community members and religious leaders, were permitted in the jail to form a “prayer chain.”

On Oct. 6, FFRF made four specific requests for Laurel County Correctional Center records related to the Night of Prayer event and two specific requests for records related to substance abuse programming and religious programming. A few weeks later, the correctional center provided FFRF with its Policy and Procedure Guidelines for the past three years, as well as its substance abuse program-

ming contracts. But it stated that it was withholding numerous documents based on a variety of exceptions set forth in Kentucky’s state statutes. Mosley claimed that turning over certain records would render the institution vulnerable to a terrorist attack. He also cited two mutually exclusive exemptions: asserting that producing these records would be overly burdensome and that he is not in possession of the records.

On Nov. 17, FFRF asked the Kentucky attorney general to review the correctional center’s denial of records. On Dec. 21, the attorney general decided that: The Laurel County Correctional Center had violated the Open Records Act; it subverted the intent of the act by commingling responsive and non-responsive documents; it infringed the act by requiring FFRF to retrieve responsive documents in per-

son; and it failed to comply with a statutory requirement that a state agency respond to a record request within three days.

The attorney general’s decision indicated the correctional center’s right to appeal the decision by filing an action within 30 days. The Laurel County Correctional Center has not done so. Absent an appeal, a Kentucky statute provides that the attorney general’s decision against the correctional center has the force of law.

FFRF is asking for an award of incurred costs, including reasonable attorney’s fees. Additionally, it is requesting statutory penalties of up to \$25 per day from the date of the request to the date of production for each document that the Laurel County Correctional Center is required to produce in this action.

Judge rules FFRF prayer lawsuit can move ahead

A federal judge has ruled that FFRF’s lawsuit against a prayerful county justice of the peace in Texas can proceed.

Judge Ewing Werlein Jr. ruled Jan. 19 that the plaintiffs could proceed in their case against Montgomery County and Montgomery County Justice of the Peace Wayne Mack.

FFRF, with several local plaintiffs, sued the county and Mack last March, when he refused to stop opening each of his court sessions with chaplain-led prayer.

Werlein noted that FFRF’s allegations that Mack “has been engaging in the prayer practice at every court session for more than three years and has prominently and publicly announced it as the official policy of Precinct 1 are sufficient to state a claim against the county.”

The county had argued Mack did not have the power to establish a policy for which the county itself could be held liable. FFRF and three individual plaintiffs argued that the prayer practice is so well-known and longstanding within the county that the County Commissioners Court bore responsibility for it.

FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover appeared at a hearing in January before the federal judge in Houston on behalf of FFRF and its co-plaintiffs. There the judge issued an oral decision that at-

torneys from First Liberty Institute — a Christian rights advocacy organization — and Gibson Dunn, who represented Wayne Mack in his personal capacity, could not argue their motion in court. In his written ruling, Werlein formally dismissed their motions.

Werlein also rejected a request to file a “friend of the court” brief by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton. The judge noted that Paxton’s brief was “largely duplicative of arguments made in other briefs, and is therefore not particularly useful, it argues facts, [and] it strongly favors one side over the other,” in addition to other reasons for denying the state’s intervention.

“This is an important step forward in our case to return Judge Mack’s courtroom to a state of judicial neutrality,” noted FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. “It’s unprecedented for a judge, who is meant to be a neutral arbiter of the law, to establish a religious ritual in a court of law.”

Werlein ruled that one of FFRF’s three local plaintiffs, “Jane Noe,” does not have standing to pursue injunctive relief, because of her expected minimal contact with the courtroom. The two remaining individual plaintiffs are both attorneys who argue cases within the Precinct 1 court. FFRF and they are being represented by Grover, with FFRF Associate Attorney Elizabeth Cavell serving as co-counsel. Attorney Patrick Luff of the Luff Law Firm in San Antonio, is serving as local counsel.




Wayne Mack



Jamie Mosley

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



Yip Harburg wrote the lyrics for ‘The Wizard of Oz,’ ‘April in Paris’ & ‘Brother Can You Spare a Dime?’

Mutual Admiration?

“Speaking of the Common Man,” said Lincoln,
“God must love him.”
And the Common Man, he must love God —
He made so many of Him.

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation


Buy it from FFRF online - shop.ffrf.org

That’s a stretch!



FFRF Member Tom Clark took these pictures of the marquee outside Holy Trinity Church in North Fort Myers, Fla. “Talk about stretching the truth,” Clark writes. “When has a superstition become the truth?”

**Woe to the Women:
The Bible Tells Me So**

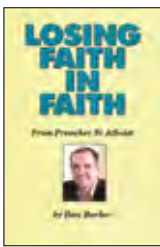


By Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

**Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org**

**Losing Faith in Faith:
From Preacher to Atheist**



By Dan Barker

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

**Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org**

FFRF’s student essay competitions offer \$30K

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is announcing its four student essay competitions for 2018.

“We consider our essay competitions to encourage and reward young free-thinkers to be one of FFRF’s most important forms of outreach,” says FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

Each of the four contests now offers seven prizes: First place — \$3,000; second place — \$2,000; third place — \$1,000; fourth place — \$750; fifth place — \$600; sixth place — \$500; seventh place — \$400. FFRF offers optional honorable mentions of \$200. To encourage student activism, Florida FFRF members Dean and Dorea Schramm offer a \$100 bonus to any winner who’s a secular student club member.

This year, all eligible entrants will not only receive a digital student membership in FFRF, but a freethinking T-shirt. Students must fill out an online application and upload their essays in PDF format at ffrf.org/studentessay, which contains more details on the topic, prompt and requirements.

College-bound high school senior



contest: High school seniors going on to college in the fall will write on the topic: “Why I believe ‘They who live on love and laughter don’t mess around with the hereafter.’” This rhyme by lyricist Yip (“Over the Rainbow”) Harburg appears on the free T-shirt offered all student entrants. Seniors entering the William J. Schulz High School Contest should address why this world matters, why they reject religion and its promise of an afterlife. Word limit: 300-350 words. Deadline: June 1.

Ongoing college contest: Currently-enrolled college students (up to age 24) entering the Michael Hakeem Memorial Contest will write on: “Why I’m

an unabashed nontheist, not afraid of burning in hell.” Include why you are an atheist or nonbeliever and address challenges of being a young freethinker in your family or community. Word limit: 450-650. Deadline: July 1.

College Students of Color contest: The David Hudak Memorial Contest for College Students of Color (up to age 24) is on the topic of “Why, as a student of color, I reject religion.” Tell us why you reject religion and what challenges that creates from family, community or as a minority within the minority. Word limit: 450-650. (College students may only enter one contest.) Deadline: July 1.

Grad/“Older” Students contest: Grad-

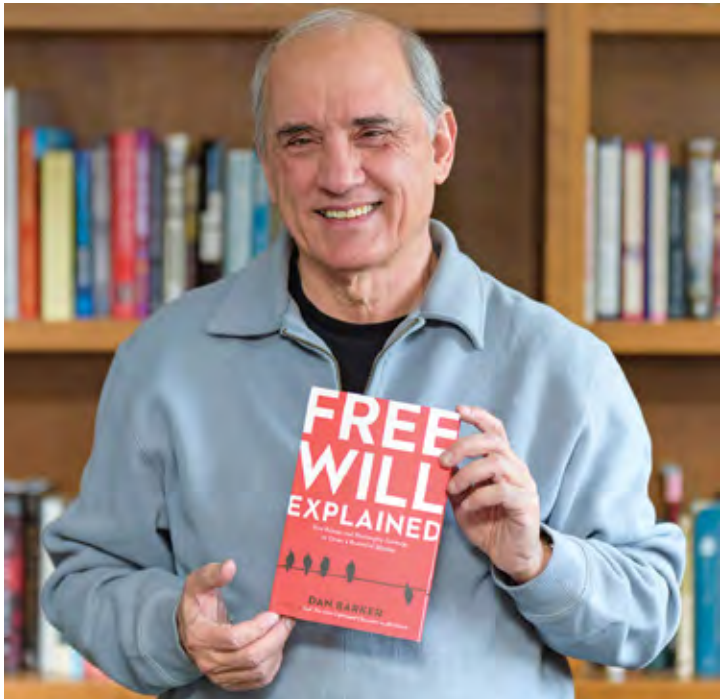
uate students (through age 30) and “older” undergrads (ages 25-30) entering the Brian Bolton Graduate/“Older” Contest are asked to write on “The danger of bibliolatry [worship of the bible] in the United States.” Why do bible teachings make bad policy and how can we fight back against campaigns to insert the bible and its dogma in schools, or laws and policies? Word limit: 550-750. Deadline: Aug. 1.

Students are asked, via the online application, to provide a short bio, age, contact information and intended majors, and college or university attended in North America. By entering the competition, they agree to allow FFRF to publish or excerpt their winning essay in FFRF’s newspaper, Freethought Today, and its website, and to provide a photograph. Students should carefully review all contest rules at ffrf.org/studentessay.

FFRF is appreciative of members who make the effort to contact local high schools, colleges and universities to help publicize its competitions. (See handy “ads” for each contest on the back interior wrap.)

Free Will Explained explained

Photos by Chris Line



The following is adapted from the Introduction of Dan Barker’s new book, *Free Will Explained*.

We need a new way of talking about free will. Many scientists inform us we don’t have it, but many philosophers assure us we do. Although scientific determinism appears to rule it out, free will continues to feel like an obvious part of our existence.

So, we have a paradox. “Yes, I have free will,” Christopher Hitchens quipped. “I have no choice but to have it.”

Scientists and philosophers have been battling with this issue for at least 2,000 years. *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* has 600 pages and looks more like an encyclopedia than a handbook. As with theology (a subject with no object), the subject of free will creates an octopus of opinions. So maybe something is wrong with our approach.

I am proposing an understanding of free will that turns it sideways and makes the paradox disappear. If we can view the world more like jazz mu-

sicians than classical musicians, we will see “free will” as a beautiful improvisation of the human species. I call it “harmonic free will.”

While playing jazz piano, I approach music from two different angles. Like classical musicians, I rely on

the formal bottom-up training of sight-reading and technique. But as a jazz improviser, I try to rise above all that (without ignoring it) and freely

create from a top-down frame of reference. When you invert the scene, you can see — or hear — that music produces something greater than the sum of its parts. Free will is like that. When we flip perspective, we suddenly experience the world from a vibrant and creative vantage point.

The question is relevant to free-thought, because if atheists claim there is free will, isn’t that admitting there is something that jumps outside of nature? We can also ask the believers: Does God have free will?

Free will is not a scientific truth. It is a social truth.

“Dan Barker has essentially eliminated the problem of free will and determinism. There is really nothing to resolve.”

— Michael Shermer

FFRF had no choice but to celebrate



The Freedom From Religion Foundation combined a Valentine’s reception on Feb. 13 with a talk and book signing for FFRF Co-President Dan Barker’s latest book, *Free Will Explained: How Science and Philosophy Converge to Create a Beautiful Illusion* (Sterling Press, February 2018). Madison, Wis.-area FFRF members were invited to the event, which also aired on Facebook Live! and can be viewed on FFRF’s YouTube channel. Special thanks to FFRF Director of First Impressions Lisa Treu (pictured above) for handling the fabulous Valentine’s Day decor and treats.



Dan illustrated his claim that free will and determinism are not in conflict with video of a backyard chipmunk he’s tamed and by performing his love song, “It’s Only Natural,” which has a scientific twist, on the Diane Uhl Steinway piano in Freethought Hall’s Charlie Brooks Auditorium. Above, Dan signs a book for FFRF Treasurer Steve Salemsen. Dan donates his royalties to FFRF for any books purchased from FFRF (\$12 postpaid via shop.ffrf.org), which is the only way to get an autographed copy. To view more of FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line’s photographs, visit the gallery at FreethoughtToday.com.

FFRF VICTORIES

Town reacts after FFRF ends Ohio school prayer

FFRF has, at least temporarily, halted pre-game prayers at a school district in Beloit, Ohio, much to the chagrin of many residents, with one student saying it's "kind of like a civil war."

The issue came to light when two concerned local citizens informed FFRF that prayer was regularly scheduled at school-sponsored events in the West Branch Local School District. At a varsity basketball game in January at West Branch High School, for instance, a prayer was delivered over the loudspeaker after the national anthem was played. Those in attendance were asked to remain standing for this Christian prayer. Reportedly, prayers were often taking place at sporting events and holiday events in the district, with the principal delivering the prayer or inviting a pastor to do so.

So FFRF stepped in.

"It is illegal for a public school to sponsor religious messages at school athletic events," FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert wrote to West Branch Local School District Superintendent Timothy Saxton. "The Supreme



Screen shot from Fox News
Two students and a parent get interviewed on Fox News about their “Prayer Matters” T-shirt sales in support of a possible defense fund against FFRF.

Court has continually struck down school-sponsored prayer in public schools. Moreover, the Supreme Court has specifically struck down invocations given over the loudspeaker at public school athletic events.”

The district proved to be receptive to FFRF’s reasoning.

“A Mahoning County school district temporarily called a stop to prayers

before sporting events after it was challenged by a national group that said it had received complaints,” reported Cleveland.com. “West Branch Schools Superintendent Tim Saxton posted a letter on the district’s Facebook page saying prayers will no longer be allowed before athletic events ‘until the situation is resolved.’”

Unfortunately, the circumstances

that have arisen out of the original constitutionally violating practice have created unnecessary strains in the community.

“Students at a northeast Ohio high school say a recent ban by administrators of prayers before athletic events is causing tension,” states an Associated Press story. “The Vindicator reports one West Branch High School student says the divide created between those supporting and opposing prayers at the public school in Beloit is ‘kind of a like a civil war.’”

According to Fox News Insider, “Nicholas Pidgeon and Nick Everett of the West Branch School District, and Pidgeon’s father, Brooke, said FFRF demanded that the district stop praying before games. Everett said everyone on the team wants to continue to pray. The elder Pidgeon said the school’s sports teams have been praying for 40 years, and that FFRF’s protest is something ‘we’re not going to take lightly.’ The trio created and printed T-shirts and hoodies that read ‘Prayer Matters’ and began selling them to pay for a possible defense fund if needed.”

FFRF keeps up pressure on constitutional violations

By Molly Hanson

It’s been another busy (and productive!) month for the FFRF legal staff. Since the last issue of Freethought Today came out, FFRF has earned more than two dozen new legal victories, signaling that a school or other public entity has told us that it will discontinue its unconstitutional violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

While oftentimes many of FFRF’s legal wins are in a handful of states (most notably Florida and Texas), this month FFRF was victorious in 22 separate states, literally all across the country.

Here is a roundup of those victories (by state):

Alabama

Where: Opp High School in Opp.

Violation: A baccalaureate service was held in the auditorium and the school principal led the seniors in prayer during the service. Also, at the high school’s graduation ceremony, a prayer was listed on the graduation program and was delivered by a student.

Outcome: On Jan. 5, the district’s attorney responded, informing FFRF that the superintendent had instructed Opp City Schools faculty that there would be no school sponsored prayer or faculty involvement in future religious services.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Associate Counsel Sam Grover.

Arkansas

Where: Glen Rose High School in Malvern.

Violation: The high school used its official Facebook page to endorse the Christian-oriented prayer rally, “See You at the Pole,” that took place this past fall.

Outcome: On Jan. 8, Superintendent Tim Holicer informed FFRF that he had met with personnel responsible for the social media posts and addressed the First Amendment violation.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Robert Ingersoll Legal Fellow Colin McNamara.

California

Where: Dixie School District in San Rafael.

Violation: The district was planning a field trip for all its fifth-graders to Alliance Redwoods Conference Grounds, a religious location. The management of the site states that its mission is to provide a place “where our guests meet the Creator in his Creation.” The organization touts itself as “the perfect way to reconnect with God.”

Outcome: District Superintendent Jason Yamashiro replied to FFRF: “Thank you for your letter, and both the research and intent behind it. Our team has discussed the content and decided not to attend Alliance Redwoods.”

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Associate Counsel Elizabeth Cavell.

Colorado

Where: Palisade High School.

Violation: An invocation led by a pastor was scheduled for its 2018 graduation ceremony and the district was endorsing a baccalaureate service for graduating seniors.

Outcome: On Jan. 2, in a letter from an attorney representing the school district, FFRF was assured that Palisade High School would discontinue the invocation portion of its graduation ceremony and that the principal of the high school was reminded of the district’s policy regarding graduation exercises.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Christopher Line.

Florida

Where: Auburndale.

Violation: The mayor’s office held an event for the National Day of Prayer at the Auburndale Civic Center. The city

organized the event, distributed advertisement flyers and sold tickets.

Outcome: In a response received Jan. 30, the city assured FFRF that it would refrain from organizing and promoting the National Day of Prayer in the future.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel.

Georgia

Where: Rome High School.

Violation: The school’s marching band chose a Christian worship theme for 2017. The performance was called “Alleluia!” It featured stained-glass church windows as props and included flags with the names of multiple books from the bible written on them. The musical selection included biblically inspired songs.

Outcome: Rome City Schools notified FFRF that, because of FFRF’s involvement, the marching band has since modified its halftime performance to remove the religious props and add in secular music.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Christopher Line.

Illinois

Where: East Alton-Wood River High School in Wood River.

Violation: Football coaches were regularly participating in prayers with their students. A Facebook post from this past September pictured several coaches praying during a football game with players from both East Alton-Wood River and Dupu high schools with the caption, “E. Alton Woodriver asked our boys (Dupu) to pray with them after the game.”

Outcome: Superintendent John Pearson responded on Jan. 19, informing FFRF that the coaching staff would be told that participating in prayer with players is a constitutional violation.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Staff Attorney Ryan D. Jayne.



Iowa

Where: Des Moines County.

Violation: The County Board of Supervisors was planning to vote on waiving a property tax exemption deadline for Harmony Bible Church. (It was also reported that Board Chairman Bob Beck said, “I’ve never gotten in trouble for saying it, but I wish our judges would hand out statements saying instead of going to jail, you have to take your family and go to Sunday school.”)

Outcome: After receiving FFRF’s letter, it was reported by local media that the county board canceled its vote because it no longer believed that it had the authority to ignore the deadline.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Ryan D. Jayne.

Kansas

Where: Trego Community High School in WaKeeney.

Violation: An all-school assembly was held for the Christian evangelical group, the Todd Becker Foundation.

Outcome: An attorney representing the school district responded on Jan. 5, informing FFRF that there are no plans to hold a Todd Becker Foundation event in the future.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott.

Kentucky

Where: South Hopkins Middle School in Nortonville.

Violation: An individual within Hopkins County Schools handed out bibles to students at the middle school during lunch.

Outcome: An attorney representing the school district informed FFRF in a response on Jan. 11 that steps had been taken to ensure that there would be no more handing out of bibles in the future.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Christopher Line.

Louisiana



Where: Washington Parish.

Violation: Sheriff Randy Seal regularly invoked Christian scripture in his official statements as sheriff, statements that were reflected on the Washington Parish Sheriff’s official Facebook page.

Outcome: The department’s legal counsel recently informed FFRF that the bible verses and highly religious posts have been deleted from the official Facebook page.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Andrew Seidel.

Missouri

Where: Smith-Hale Middle School in Kansas City.

Violation: A seventh-grade science teacher was reportedly teaching creationism.

Outcome: Superintendent Yolanda Cargile replied to FFRF: “All teachers are expected to teach prescribed curriculum and are not allowed to develop and teach curriculum outside of what has been approved by the school district. The test questions you highlighted in your letter are not aligned with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education standards and consequently are not acceptable and will not be utilized in our schools.”

FFRF attorney who handled the

case: Christopher Line.

Nebraska

Where: Blair High School.

Violation: During an end-of-the-season banquet this past October, two cross country coaches delivered a Christian prayer as a blessing for the food.

Outcome: Blair Community Schools Superintendent Rex Pfei responded to FFRF’s concern on Feb. 5, reporting that he had addressed the banquet prayer violation and educated the coaches and school administrators on the law.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Colin McNamara.

New Mexico

Where: New Mexico Junior College in Hobbs.

Violation: The college displayed numerous crosses in public spaces, including the main reception area of the school’s student center and in several offices.

Outcome: College President Kelvin Sharp recently responded, informing FFRF that the violations had been addressed and the crosses have come down.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Christopher Line.

Ohio

Where: Celina High School.

Violation: The high school football team and its coaching staff prayed with the St. Mary’s High School football team after a game this past fall. Celina High School’s head coach, Brennen Bader, encouraged his players to participate.

Outcome: On Jan. 10, an attorney representing the district informed FFRF that the violation would not be repeated.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Colin McNamara.

Ohio

Where: Portage County Courthouse in Ravenna.

Violation: A nativity scene, which was visible from the city’s main street, consisted of wooden cutouts depicting bible characters Jesus, Mary and Joseph. There was also a star and sign, which quoted a bible passage.

Outcome: Mayor Frank Seman responded on Jan. 9 expressing agreement that the nativity scene should not have been allowed on government property and that the city was already planning on better handling of holiday decorations for 2018.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Legal Director Rebecca Markert.

Pennsylvania

Where: Cocalico and Solanco school districts in Lancaster County.

Violation: After a football game between the two schools this past November, the coaches gathered their teams together in the middle of the field to say a prayer.

Outcome: FFRF was informed on Jan. 9 that the Cocalico athletic director sent a letter to district coaches, noting that as employees of a public school system, they may not participate in prayer at an athletic event.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Legal Intake Attorney Madeline Ziegler.

South Carolina

Where: Woodmont High School in Greenville.

Violation: The school had scheduled “worship night” on a Sunday evening as part of “spirit week” activities. The event had been coordinated and promoted by school staff members.

Outcome: On Jan. 19, an attorney representing the school district informed FFRF that the event had been canceled.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Patrick Elliott.

Tennessee

Where: Bradley Central High School in Cleveland, Tenn.

Violation: Prayers were being broadcasted over the loudspeaker prior to football games.

Outcome: The district attorney responded by phone on Jan. 21 informing FFRF that he told the athletic board he would be retraining school administrators regarding their constitutional duty to remain neutral on matters of religion.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Christopher Line.

Tennessee

Violation: A county Circuit Court judge was conducting a Christian church service in the county juvenile detention facility. He is one of only two juvenile court judges in the county, and many of the children in the facility are serving a sentence that the judge imposed.

Outcome: On Jan. 31, the judge called McNamara to report that he agreed with FFRF’s concerns and would no longer be involved in preaching in the juvenile facility. (See page 3 for story.)

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Colin McNamara.

Texas

Where: Gregory-Portland High School in Portland and Roy Miller High School in Corpus Christi.

Violation: Football players and coaches from the two schools recited the Lord’s Prayer at a game between the two schools this past fall.

Outcome: FFRF received a response from Gregory-Portland Independent School District Superintendent Paul Clore on Jan. 5, telling FFRF that administration would inform the district coaching staff that they should not lead, encourage, promote or participate in prayers with students.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Sam Grover.

Texas

Where: Sunray Independent School District.

Violation: The district hosted a Christmas open house that featured elaborate holiday-themed wall decora-

tions throughout the building, including hallway walls and classroom doors.

Outcome: Superintendent Marshall Harrison recently responded, assuring FFRF that Sunray ISD employees will be briefed on not promoting religion.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Sam Grover.

Texas



Where: Amarillo High School.

Violation: The school’s marching band had been issued T-shirts featuring a white staircase ascending to heaven with the words “Lifted” above “Amarillo High School Band 2017-2018.”

Outcome: On Jan. 29, FFRF received word that the district had complied with its request to investigate the situation and remove the religious shirts from use.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Sam Grover.

Virginia

Where: Dominion High School in Ashburn.

Violation: The school was regularly listing the worship services of Grace Covenant Church on the school calendar of events.

Outcome: The district responded on Jan. 16 informing FFRF that church services were removed from the school calendar of events.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Patrick Elliott.

Washington

Where: Waitsburg High School.

Violation: The boys’ basketball coach, Matthew Wyatt, was shown in a Facebook post kneeling and bowing his head in prayer with the team. Wyatt posted the photo with the caption, “My favorite thing about practice each day.”

Outcome: The district responded on Jan. 8 reporting to FFRF that it had taken appropriate action to ensure that coaching staff is aware of the law and their obligation to remain religiously neutral.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Elizabeth Cavell.

West Virginia

Where: Page Jackson Elementary School in Charles Town.

Violation: A kindergarten class was directed to cut, color and assemble a manger scene during the school day. It was reported that the school also instructed students on the myth of the biblical birth of Jesus Christ.

Outcome: In a response received on Jan. 2, Jefferson County Schools Superintendent Bondy Shay Gibson informed FFRF that the lesson plan and corresponding violation would be addressed with the staff to ensure future compliance with the First Amendment.

FFRF attorney who handled the case: Patrick Elliott.

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Freedom depends on freethinkers

Convention speech

Knowledge has enhanced human flourishing

Steven Pinker discusses the positive outcomes of reason in his new book *Enlightenment Now*

This is an edited version of Steven Pinker’s speech at FFRF’s annual convention in Madison, Wis., on Sept. 16, 2017. He was introduced by Stephen Hirtle, FFRF Executive Board chair.

I’m very pleased to introduce FFRF’s honorary president, Steven Pinker, who is a cognitive scientist, experimental psychologist, linguist, and popular science author. He is the Johnstone Family Professor in the Department of Psychology at Harvard University, known for his advocacy of evolutionary psychology and the computational theory of mind. He’s one of the foremost writers on language, mind and human nature. He has taught at Stanford and MIT, and has received eight honorary doctorates, several teaching awards, and numerous prizes for his books. He has an upcoming book called *Enlightenment Now*.

Steven is the chair of the Usage Panel of the American Heritage Dictionary and has served as editor or advisor for numerous scientific and scholarly media and humanist organizations. He served as honorary president of the Canadian Psychological Association and has been listed in Prospect magazine’s “The World’s Top 100 Public Intellectuals,” Foreign Policy’s “100 Global Thinkers” and Time magazine’s “The 100 Most Influential People in the World Today.” He received FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes award in 2004.

Please welcome the distinguished Steven Pinker.

By Steven Pinker

Thank you. It is an honor to speak about my forthcoming book in public for the first time in front of this audience.

We’re going to begin with some big questions.

- Why is the world filled with woe?
- How can we make it better?
- How do we give meaning and purpose to our lives?

These may seem like unanswerable questions, but all too many people have answers to them. For example, “Morality is dictated by God and holy scriptures; the world will be better when everyone obeys his laws.” “The world’s problems are the fault of a certain kind of evil people who must be defeated and punished.” “One tribe of people is inherently worthy. It should have power and prestige, implemented by a strong leader who channels its authentic virtue and experience.” “At some time in the past, there was a well-ordered state, then alien forces subverted its harmony and led to decadence and degeneration. Only a heroic vanguard with memories of the old ways can restore the society to its golden age.”

Well, what about the rest of us? The point of my book, *Enlightenment Now*, is that there is an alternative system of beliefs and values, namely the ideals of the Enlightenment, also sometimes known as classical liberalism, secular humanism, or the Open Society. In a sentence, it’s that we can use knowledge to enhance human flourishing.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

At the FFRF convention in Madison, Wis., FFRF Honorary President Steven Pinker discusses the advances humanity has made by use of reason and science, the main theme of his new book, *Enlightenment Now*.

Other ideologies have passionate advocates, and I believe that Enlightenment values need a positive defense and an explicit commitment as well. The Enlightenment values center on four themes: reason, science, humanism and progress.

Four themes

It all begins with reason, with the conviction that traditional sources of belief are generators of delusion — including faith, revelation, tradition, dogma, authority, charisma, mysticism, divination, visions, conventional wisdom, gut feelings, subjective certainty and the hermeneutic parsing of sacred texts. In place of these generators of error, we must rely on reason.

To be sure, human beings are not particularly reasonable. Cognitive science tells us that people are apt to generalize from anecdotes, to seek confirming evidence and to ignore disconfirming evidence, to project stereotypes onto individuals, and to be overconfident about their own knowledge, wisdom and rectitude. However, people are *capable* of reason, and there are norms and institutions that can refine our puny powers — norms such as free speech, open debate and criticism, logical analysis, fact checking and empirical testing.

That brings me to the second of the Enlightenment values: science. The underlying conviction of science is that the world is *intelligible*, that we can understand the world by formulating possible explanations and testing them against reality. Science has proven to be our most reliable means of understanding the world, including ourselves.

Science also provides fundamental insights about the human condition. One is naturalism, the discovery that

the laws of the universe have no goal or purpose related to human welfare. Another is entropy. In a closed system, one that is without input of energy, disorder increases because there are vastly more ways for things to go wrong than for things to go right. Yet another is evolution: Humans are products of a competitive process which selects for reproductive success, not for well-being.

That leads to the third Enlightenment ideal: humanism. Humanism is the value that the ultimate moral purpose is to reduce the suffering and enhance the flourishing of humans (and other sentient beings) — maximizing their life, health, happiness, knowledge, beauty, love, friendship and social connectedness. This may seem obvious and uncontroversial, but there are distinct alternatives to humanism, such as that

the ultimate good is to enhance the glory of the tribe, nation, race, class or faith; to achieve feats of heroic greatness, including martial conquest; to advance some mystical force or dialectic or

struggle or pursuit of a utopian or messianic age; or to obey the dictates of the divinity and pressure others to do the same.

Humanism is feasible because people are endowed with a sense of *sympathy*, an ability to have a concern for the welfare of others. Now, our circle

of sympathy, as given to us by evolution, is rather small. We naturally apply it only to kin, friends, allies and cute little fuzzy baby animals. But our circle of sympathy can be expanded through forces of cosmopolitanism: education, journalism, art, mobility and even reason, the realization that there can be nothing special about me just because I’m me and you’re not.

And that leads to the fourth of the Enlightenment ideals: progress. If

we apply knowledge and sympathy to reduce suffering and enhance flourishing, we can gradually succeed. How is this progress possible? The Enlightenment thinkers proposed that much of the answer comes from benevolent institutions. These institutions deploy energy and knowledge to combat entropy, and they magnify the positive parts of human nature — the better angels of our nature, as Abraham Lincoln put it, such as reason and sympathy — while marginalizing the negative aspects — our biases, illusions, susceptibility to magical thinking, tribalism, dominance and vengeance.

Enlightenment’s progeny

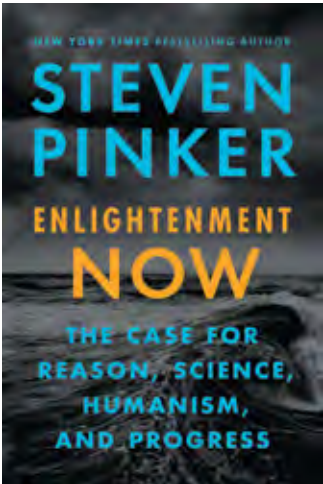
One brainchild of the Enlightenment is democracy. Humans are poised between the violence of anarchy and the violence of tyranny. But democratic governments can steer between these extremes by deploying just enough force to prevent people from preying on one another without preying on the people itself. These limits are implemented by declarations of rights, such as the French, English and American declarations of rights — red lines that governments may not cross, such as the deprivation of life and liberty without due process, the use of cruel punishments, infringements on speech.

Another brainchild of the Enlightenment is the market. A major insight of the Enlightenment is that the natural condition of humankind is poverty, and wealth must be created. It’s created by specialization, the application of knowledge and skill to produce things that people want and like; by exchange, where different specialists can exchange the fruits of their ingenuity and labor; and by prices, which propagate information about need and availability throughout society in a way that no central planner acting on his own ingenuity could do. Moreover, that exchange makes people not just richer, but nicer, the Enlightenment theory of “doux commerce,” gentle commerce. As Ludwig von Mises put it, if the tailor goes to war against the baker, he must henceforth bake his own bread.

Yet another brainchild of the Enlightenment consists of global institutions. These institutions foster international trade, which generalizes gentle commerce to relations among nations, making it easier to buy things from other countries than to invade and occupy them, and making people in other countries more valuable alive than dead. (You don’t kill your customers; you don’t kill your debtors.) Global institutions can also foster peace, by making war an illegitimate move in relations among countries. Conquest is no longer recognized, but rather punished by sanctions, shaming and withdrawal of cooperation, and international peacekeeping forces can separate belligerents.

One more family of brainchildren of the Enlightenment consists of institutions of science and scholarship, such as journals, societies, universities. They are designed to develop and disseminate knowledge, and to foster norms of disinterested inquiry, in particular, rejection of authority and dogma, open debate, peer review, and empirical testing.

Humanism is feasible because people are endowed with a sense of sympathy, an ability to have a concern for the welfare of others.



The cover of Pinker’s latest book, *Enlightenment Now*. Buy it at shop.ffrf.org.

Assessing progress

This may all sound just fine in theory, but how did that Enlightenment thing work out in practice? If you ask most intellectuals, the answer is “not very well.” I have discovered that intellectuals hate progress, and intellectuals who call themselves progressive *really* hate progress. If you think that we can solve problems, I have been told, then you have a blind faith or a quasi-religious belief in the outmoded superstition and false promise of the myth of the onward march of inevitable progress. You are a cheerleader for vulgar American can-do-ism with a rah-rah spirit of boardroom ideology. You are a naive optimist, a Pollyanna, and, of course, a Pangloss, named after the Voltaire character who believed that “all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.”

Progress, in fact, is not a matter of faith or temperament, but rather an empirical hypothesis. Aspects of human well-being can be measured: life, health, sustenance, wealth, peace, freedom, safety, knowledge, richness of experience. If they have increased over time, that is progress.

Let’s begin with life. Life expectancy for the world as a whole increased from a global average of 30 in the 19th century to 71 today, and in the richer countries to 81. The growth in longevity shows a pattern that we will see is general across aspects of human flourishing. Before the Enlightenment, pretty much everyone all over the world was wretched. Then there was an escape from universal wretchedness, first in Europe and the Americas, but other parts of the world have been catching up: Asia, followed by Africa.

Much of this increase in longevity was driven by a decline in child mortality. In the 18th century, Sweden, one of the richest countries in the world, had a child mortality rate of one-third. That is, one-third of Swedish babies did not live to the age of 5. Today, that fate befalls less than 6 percent of people in the poorest parts of the world. A child in Ethiopia today has the same chance of living to the age of 5 as a child in Sweden just 70 years ago.

Maternal mortality shows a similar pattern. Once again, in areas that we think of as affluent and blessed, like Sweden, about 1 percent of mothers died in childbirth. Starting in Europe, followed by the United States, then Asia, and then Africa, rates of maternal mortality have been falling fast.

Health. The rate of childhood deaths from the worst infectious diseases have all been in decline: pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria, measles, and HIV/AIDS. Some diseases, such as smallpox, have been eradicated altogether. Others, such as polio and Guinea worm, are down to a few dozen cases each year, and are slated for extinction.

Sustenance. Famine was one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, and was a threat to every society. But from the 19th century to the present, the risk of catastrophic famine has disappeared from most of the world, except for certain remote and war-torn regions in Africa. A less dramatic form of suffering from lack of food is undernourishment: children who are stunted, because they don’t get a minimum number of calories to flourish. Once again, the poorest parts of the world are making tremendous progress.

Prosperity. Before the Industrial Revolution, poverty was the universal condition of humankind, except for a few wealthy people who had the luxury to write about their lives, and our picture of the past comes from them. The



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Steven Pinker, center, stands with FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor

United Kingdom was the first to make the great escape from universal poverty, and other regions — South Korea, Chile, now China and India — are replicating the escapes.

As a result, the poor will not always be with us. Extreme poverty is defined as not having enough income to pay for food for oneself and one’s family. In 1820, approximately 90 percent of the world’s population lived in extreme poverty. Today, the rate is about 10 percent, and the World Bank and the United Nations have set a goal of eliminating extreme poverty from the face of the Earth by the 2030s. As a result, international inequality — after a long increase as some parts of the world escape from poverty, while others have been left behind — is now starting to reverse, because poor countries are getting richer faster than rich countries are getting richer. Meanwhile, within rich countries, there has been a huge increase in the amount of redistribution. A century ago, the richer countries of the world devoted 1 percent of their wealth to supporting children, the poor and the aged. Today they spend about a quarter of their wealth.

Peace. The world is giving peace a chance. Through most of human history, war was the natural state of relations between nations, and peace was a brief interlude between wars. About 500 years ago, the great powers were pretty

much always at war; now they are pretty much never at war. Of course, there were two horrific exceptions to this general trend: the spikes of bloodletting centered on the two world wars. But contrary to widespread predictions that a third world war was inevitable — predictions that many of us grew up with — World War III never happened. We are

living through a period that historians call the Long Peace.

The rate of death in war since 1946 shows a kind of undulating rollercoaster but one with an unmistakable down-

ward trend. The proportion of people killed annually in wars now was about a quarter of what it was in the 1980s, a sixth of what it was in the 1970s, a sixteenth of what it was in the early 1950s, and a half percent of what it was during World War II.

Democracy rising

Freedom and rights have been expanding (despite highly publicized backsliding in countries like Russia, Turkey, and Venezuela). Democracy has been increasing steadily since the 1970s. Two centuries ago, a handful of countries, embracing about 1 percent of the world’s people, were democratic. Today, two-thirds of the world’s countries, embracing about two-thirds of the world’s population, are democratic. Human-rights protection, again, despite some salient counterexamples, has also

been on the increase. Even repressive countries like China are far more respectful of human rights than during the horrific years of Mao in the 1950s and 1960s.

We see many specific reforms toward recognition of human rights worldwide. Despite backsliding in Russia and some African countries, the worldwide trend has been to decriminalize homosexuality. Capital punishment, too, is being abolished in country after country. If current trends continue — no one is certain that it will — then capital punishment will be eliminated from the face of the Earth by 2026.

The United States is in many ways backward compared to its peers among rich countries. But even in the United States, which, unlike virtually every democracy, retains capital punishment, the death penalty appears to be on death row. It’s only a matter of time before this practice is struck down once and for all.

Child labor has been in decline. Child labor used to be pretty much universal across the globe. Child labor was considered not a form of exploitation but of moral education, protecting children from idleness and slough. Today, the world as a whole is pushing back against the practice of child labor.

People are not just richer and freer and more peaceful and healthier and longer lived, but also safer. The trends in homicides since 1965 for the United States show this. After the great rise in the American crime rate in the 1960s to the ’80s, there was a dramatic decline starting in the 1990s. Americans today are about half as likely to be murdered as they were just two dozen years ago. This is true of the world as a whole. People have about 70 percent of the chance of being murdered that they had just 20 years ago.

Violence against women is in decline. Few people realize that the rate of rape has declined by more than 75 percent since its peak in the early 1970s, and that intimate partner violence — what used to be called wife beating — has been in dramatic decline as well.

Violence against children. Despite panicked news reports about child abuse, kidnapping, sexual abuse, and bullying, every measure of violence against children is in decline, including violent victimization at school, physical abuse by caregivers,

See Pinker on page 12



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Pinker speaks to a packed house at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis., on Sept. 16, 2017.

Pinker

Continued from page 11

and sexual abuse by caregivers. We’re also safer not just from deliberate malice but the forces of nature and technology. Over the course of the 20th century, Americans became 96 percent less likely to be killed in a car accident, 88 percent less likely to be mowed down on the sidewalk; 99 percent less likely to die in a plane crash, 59 percent less likely to fall to their deaths, 92 percent less likely to die by fire or by drowning, 92 percent less likely to be asphyxiated. (The only exception is an increase in “deaths by poison,” which is an indication of the current opioid epidemic.) Americans are 95 percent less likely to be killed on the job. Worldwide the chance of dying in a flood, earthquake, tornado, tsunami, hurricane and so on is down 96 percent from its peak in the 1920s.

And what about the very archetype of an act of God? The projectile that Zeus hurled down from Olympus? The common idiom for an unpredictable date with death? The literal bolt from the blue? There has been a 37-fold decline since the turn of the 20th century in the chance that an American will be killed by a bolt of lightning.

Knowledge. The world has embarked on an escape from its original condition of universal illiteracy.

About 10 to 15 percent of the world was literate in the 16th century. First Netherlands, Britain, United States and Germany began to teach their children to read, followed by countries of Southern Europe such as Italy, countries of Latin America, such as Chile and Mexico, followed by other countries in the Global South. Similarly, more and more of the world is receiving a basic education. Today, most of the world is literate. The reason that some figures are still far below 100 percent is that there are many old people who were never educated. But education is now close to universal among younger people.

This schooling, together with health and wealth, are literally making us smarter. IQ scores have been rising by about three points a decade all over the world. We are about 30 IQ points, or two standard deviations, above the scores of our ancestors just several

generations ago. **The richer, the happier** Do all of these gains in longevity and health and wealth and education actually make life better? As it happens, the richer the country, the happier its citizens. And within each country, the richer the person, the happier relative to his or her compatriots. In general, money does buy happiness, and as the world becomes richer, the world becomes happier. But it’s not just paychecks that have been improving. Americans work 22 fewer hours a week than they used to, and now have on average three weeks of paid vacation.

And as a result of the spread of running water, electricity and labor-saving devices such as washing machines, vacuum cleaner, refrigerator, stove, dishwashers and microwaves, the number of hours that people lose to housework has declined by 43 hours a week. Unlike our grandmothers and great-grandmothers, we — and by “we” I mean especially women — are less likely to spend their time “slaving over a hot stove, working their fingers to the bone.”

As a result of the increase in income and the decrease in the price of necessities such as food and clothing, there has been a steady decline in the percentage of a typical person’s paycheck that they turn over to necessities. Today, Americans spend about a third of their paycheck on necessities, rather than more than 60 percent just a few decades ago.

Leisure time has increased. Men have about 10 hours a week more of leisure than they did in the 1960s, women five hours more. The reason for the discrepancy is that women spend more time with their children than their mothers and grandmothers did. Indeed, a working or single mother today spends more time with her children than a stay-at-home mom did in the 1950s.

While we are enjoying all of these benefits, many aspects of the environment have improved. Since the Environmental Protection Agency was founded in 1970, population has increased, GDP has increased, we have



Steven Pinker

Photo by Ingrid Laas



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Pinker autographs copies of his books for convention-goers after his speech, while FFRF Legal Fellow Colin McNamara sneaks in to take a selfie.

been driving more, our consumption of energy rose and then leveled off, our emission of CO₂ rose and is now plateauing, and amazingly — thanks to regulations on emissions and emission control devices —the emissions of the five major air pollutants have all been in decline. At the same time, we see a decrease in the number of forests that have been cleared, the amount of oil that has been spilled at sea, and an increase in the amount of land and sea that’s been set aside as nature preserves. The world may have peaked in its consumption of oil, farmland, timber, paper, cars, coal, perhaps even carbon.

Challenges ahead

Is progress inevitable? Of course not! Solutions create new problems, which take time to solve in their turn. And the world will always throw nasty surprises at us, such as the two world wars, the crime boom from the 1960s to the 1980s, AIDS in Africa, and opioid overdoses among middle-aged non-college educated whites in the United States.

Also, there are severe global challenges that we have not yet solved. Foremost among them are climate change and nuclear war. But even then, although these are wicked, horrendous problems, the case can be made that they are solvable. Since the extraordinary circumstances of the closing days of World War II, nuclear weapons have not been used in the 72 years in which

they have existed — as I mentioned, contrary to every expert prediction in the 1960s and 1970s that a nuclear war between the United States and Soviet Union was just a matter of time. Few people realized that the world’s nuclear stockpiles have been reduced by 85 percent since the 1980s, and there are more reductions to come.

Few people realize that about 10 percent of the electricity generated in the United States comes from nuclear fuel repurposed from nuclear weapons. And with the exception of the rogue regime in North Korea, nuclear testing has ceased and proliferation has been frozen. Again, this does not mean that the problem is anywhere close to being solved. But it does show that progress is possible and that we should resolve to continue it.

Climate, too, is a massive unsolved problem. But it can be solved with a combination of technology and policy. There is, to be sure, a widespread assumption that the world’s prosperity depends on flaming carbon. But the world has progressively been emitting less CO₂ to generate a dollar of GDP. The fact that the rate of carbon emissions has declined does not mean it has declined enough, nor does it show how we can sequester the CO₂ that’s already in the atmosphere, as we must do. But it shows that economic growth and prosperity can be decoupled from CO₂ emissions.

Progress is not a law of nature. It is a gift of the ideals of the Enlightenment — of reason, science and humanism. Only by dedicating ourselves to these ideals can we hope for progress to continue.

A final objection. Does the Enlightenment somehow go against human nature, as some conservative critics assert? Is humanism an “arid” or “tepid” or “flattened” view of humanity? Is the conquest of disease, famine, poverty, violence and ignorance . . . boring? Do people need to believe in a father in the sky, a strong chief to protect the tribe, myths of heroic ancestors? It’s doubtful.

Secular liberal democracies are the happiest places on Earth, and the top destination of people who vote with their feet. And when we put aside these myths and superstitions, we can see that applying knowledge and sympathy to enhance human flourishing is heroic, glorious and spiritual.

Progress is not a law of nature. It is a gift of the ideals of the Enlightenment — of reason, science and humanism.

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Freethought Heroine award

Be strong and set a good example

Here is an edited version of the talk Cara Santa Maria gave at FFRF's 40th annual convention on Sept. 15, 2017, at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis.

She was introduced by FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert:

Cara Santa Maria is a Los Angeles-area Emmy award-winning journalist, science communicator, television personality, producer and podcaster. She's a correspondent on "Bill Nye Saves the World" on Netflix, reports on local issues for "SoCal Connected," and hosts the digital companion series for the popular competition reality show "America's Greatest Makers" on TBS. She's the creator and host of a weekly science podcast called "Talk Nerdy with Cara Santa Maria." She also co-hosts the "Skeptics Guide to the Universe" popular podcast, and she's a founding member of the Nerd Brigade and co-founded the annual science communication retreat #SciCon camp.

We're very pleased that she's here today to accept FFRF's Freethought Heroine award. So please join me in welcoming Cara Santa Maria.

By Cara Santa Maria

I'm so thrilled to be here. Wow, what a full house today. I want to take a moment for you guys to all cheer yourselves on for coming here to this incredible event. Look at how many of you there are. And this is just a microcosm of the 30,000 members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Can you believe that? Thirty thousand strong, and so many of you are represented here. I want to thank you for this honor, and I thought maybe what I could do is just take a few minutes to introduce myself.

For those of you who don't know, I'm going to meander a little bit like I do on my podcast. Any podcast listeners out there know that this is just how I roll.

I was born and raised in the Bible Belt in the South. I'm from the suburbs around Dallas. I live in L.A. now, but I spent the first 24 years of my life in Dallas and the surrounding area where I went to elementary, middle and high school and also college for my undergraduate and my master's degree.

I grew up in a Mormon household. As you may know, when you grow up Mormon, it is all-encompassing. Being born into the faith, that's all you really know. And especially when you're living in a place like Dallas, right there in the heart of the Bible Belt. Even though many of your friends aren't Mormon, pretty much all of your



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Cara Santa Maria



Photo by Chris Line

Cara Santa Maria speaks to the FFRF convention audience about growing up as a nonbeliever and how she got involved in science.

friends in public school are religious and of the evangelical variety, definitely the Christian variety.

Growing up in that environment, there's not a lot of places where you can go with your questions. I left the church when I was 14. It was a really difficult transition for me because there wasn't really much social support; I didn't really know anybody else who called themselves an atheist or who overtly said, "No, I don't believe in God."

When you grow up in that environment, it can be tough. But I didn't have that standard epiphany moment. There wasn't one day where I was like, "Oh, it all makes so much sense." Instead, I think back and I realized that I never actually believed, or maybe I thought I did, but I never had that kind of transcendental moment. Jesus never spoke to me personally.

I did sometimes get goosebumps and a little bit teary-eyed when I would sing in the church choir. And for years after, I thought, "Well, gosh, that religious music, it really did move me, maybe that was the Lord speaking to me." Then I realized, "No, I just really like music." No matter what the content of the lyrics are, the music is still pretty beautiful.

My father and my mother had been long divorced at this point. I really saw a streak in my mother that was kind of a secular humanist streak. I think she wanted to believe. I think that it was in her mind the right thing for her to do.

She grew up in Puerto Rico. My father was raised in an Italian family. They were both Roman Catholic stock and they became Mormon by choice, I think because they were seeking answers that their previous religion didn't bring them.

Questioning religion

When I was 14, I went to my father and said, "You know, not only do I not really believe in this, I don't think I believe in any of this." He didn't react. I don't know what I expected, but I think in my heart of hearts I hoped that we could have some discourse, that we could really talk about it, that he would maybe test my questions and try and provide answers.

I remember to this day, he said to me, "I have a moral obligation to God to force you to go to church until you're 18 so long as you live under my

roof." And I said, "Then maybe I won't live under your roof anymore."

This caused a really big rift, and after many, many years in therapy as a teenager and as an adult, I really came to realize that he kind of put me in a pretty unfair position for a young child. I had to make the decision between his faith and my family. It wasn't my faith. And giving me that Sophie's Choice was completely unfair, so I ended up living with my mother.

My father actually withdrew his child support and we had a very difficult relationship for many years after that. We've since patched that up, and we're very close now, but there's still this lingering sensibility between us.

How many of you have parents who are or were religious? You probably know the experience that I'm talking about, where even if there's mutual respect, and even if you care dearly about each other, and you kind of try to know where the other one's coming from, even in the best of scenarios, there's still a bit of kind of a sorrow between you — a guilt, maybe.

You feel bad for the other person. You know they feel sorry for you because you're going to go to hell, and that's terrible in their mind. And you feel bad for them because their worldview is so incredibly narrow, and there's so many opportunities that they may never be able to experience, or never had the chance to experience, maintaining that narrow focus.

That's where my father and I are, even to this day. I have several siblings, many of whom are adopted — a really beautiful, rich family. Many of them stayed in the church, but some of them did not. And they have similar experiences to my own. I'm very lucky that my mother was a source of support for me through all of those years when I was really trying to figure out who I was and what I believed.

Coming to science

I came to science in a little bit of a different way. We talk about this a lot on the "Skeptics Guide to the Universe," especially when we have guests on who are both scientist and atheist, or scientist and skeptic, or all three. Remember, none of these things is mutually inclusive or exclusive. Being one does not make you better or worse at the other.

I am all three: I don't believe in

God. Plus, I have worked as a scientist in the lab, and now I'm continuing my education. I'm also a skeptic, although I didn't really know it until the "Skeptics Guide" invited me to join their podcast, and I started to dig into the culture.

When you talk to a lot of individuals who wear all those different hats, they all came to it in a different progression. I find that it's somewhat uncommon to declare oneself an atheist first and then find science a decade later. For many people, that journey into the scientific endeavor is really what helped them realize their skepticism and their atheism. But I was a typical young female student of the era. I was a baby of the '80s.

Like many girls today, and like many girls decades past, I was really afraid of science. I was really afraid of math, and I avoided those courses like the plague. I remember looking back at my undergraduate transcript, and I was required to take three science classes in order to get my degree. I thought I would take the three science classes that scare me the least.

Oceanography — it's a lot harder than it looked. Stellar astronomy, right? And I want to say paleontology, but to be honest, it was listed in the course guide as "DINOSAURS!" in all capital letters with an explanation point. Yeah, I'm going to take that class! And I did honestly have a lot of fun in those classes, but I still had a little bit of a chip on my shoulder about science. There was a stigma there, and I was still kind of afraid and don't think I really blossomed.

I ended up studying psychology in my undergraduate degree, and I think that's when I found science more truly. I became very interested in neuropsychology through a series of wonderful professors, many of whom were women, and many of whom influenced me really deeply, and I still am grateful to them to this day.

That's when I decided to continue my education and get a master's degree. I moved into the biology department and studied neuroscience. I was behind, though. I had to take a lot of classes to catch up. That's truly when I fell in love with the scientific method and kind of made the decision. I started my Ph.D. soon after that. I left pretty quickly. I think I needed a break, and at that point I was realizing how much I loved communicating science, kind of for the public, for the masses, for all of the people out there, and I had a few wonderful opportunities to work in television. I was able to work in television, to start a podcast, and to be involved in trying to shape the narrative about science in this country. Let me tell you, it is an uphill battle.

Uphill fight for women

But I'm really lucky. I'm fortunate to be a correspondent on "Bill Nye Saves the World." Bill Nye is my childhood hero. He made so many people excited about science. If you're a generation above that, then we could be speaking about Carl Sagan. And, of course, if you're a generation below, perhaps Neil deGrasse Tyson speaks to you. But one thing you may notice about all three of those gentlemen is that they

See Santa Maria on page 14

are gentlemen. It's a difficult, uphill battle for women who are working in public science communication.

Again, I'm so honored to be a part of "Bill Nye Saves the World," but I am just that: I'm a correspondent on the show. There are a lot of other incredible female correspondents on the show, as well. One of my colleagues, her name is Emily Calandrelli, is the only female host of a science show on American television right now. Her television show is a show for children that appears on Fox in the mornings.

There are some difficulties when you're working in children's programming. You aren't really afforded the opportunities of prime-time programming. This is something that we're always fighting against. Many shows are pitched, many shows are developed, many shows do not get made, often because they are too smart, they are too forward thinking. The public's not ready for a woman. The public's not ready for someone so young. The public's not ready to think about those things.

It's an opportunity for science communicators of all stripes —



Cara Santa Maria shows off the FFRF Freethought Heroine Award, which was presented to her by FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert.

OVERHEARD

The forgotten stepchildren of the Great Awakening are America's skeptics and unbelievers. . . . Modern American culture, our understanding of the Constitution, and American religion itself would look much different had these gadflies not done their unpopular work.

Book review of Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Village Atheists: How America's Unbelievers Made Their Way in a Godly Nation*.
Journal of Southern History, 11-1-17

They shouldn't be made to feel ashamed or guilty. If you lose your virginity, you're not a chewed piece of gum. . . . These lessons are not only dated, but biased and harmful to students.

Gina Tonello, who got the Baldwinsville, N.Y., school district to bar a Christian-based group from teaching sex education classes after an instructor compared a girl losing her virginity to already chewed gum.
Syracuse Post-Standard, 12-10-17

Because it has caused real harm to the quality of care available to pregnant women at critical moments. Because it has not and cannot change the reality that abortion is a present and permanent part of Irish life. Because it seeks to force women to carry a pregnancy to term when they have been the victim of a rape or incest or when they have received the diagnosis of a fatal

people who are professionals who have been doing it for years, who work in television, on YouTube, and podcasting, public information officers at universities, individuals who work at NASA and other government organizations, all the way to graduate students, undergrads, everyday people who want to start a blog, who want to start talking about science and don't know where to start. It's this wonderful opportunity to get together instead of across the Internet, in person, face to face, and learn from one another and develop new relationships that we're sometimes missing in that lonely freelance life.

Know your audience

One thing I always say to people when I talk about communicating science is rule number one — know your audience. You need to know who you're talking to. You're not going to present a paper to a group of 9-year-olds, and you're not going to talk to a bunch of adults like you would talk to a group of 9-year-olds. You have to know your audience, and you have to kind

of meet them where they are, and really exercise that empathy when you're communicating science.

The quickest way to get somebody to stop listening to you is to make them feel stupid, to make them feel small. It's very important that we meet people where they are, and that we flex that empathic muscle, even when it's not comfortable for us, even when we're talking to people with whom we fundamentally disagree. We need to find common ground, otherwise our message will absolutely fall on deaf ears.

And the number two thing that I always say when it comes to communicating science is to never underestimate the intelligence of your audience, but always underestimate their vocabulary. The problem is that Hollywood producers often get those two things conflated. They think, "We need to dumb it down, dumb it down." It's the worst thing they ever say, especially when they say it in front of the scientists I'm interviewing. "Oh, no, don't use that phrase, they're going to get so mad." We don't need to dumb any of it down, we just need to choose our words more carefully. If I were to ask the plumber what he was going to do to fix my toilet, and he used a bunch of jargon, it would fall on deaf ears. "I don't know what that means, but go ahead, I trust you."

Every career choice out there, every focus of your life's work, has a specialized vocabulary within it, and science is no different. It takes years and years to learn that vocabulary, and, really, it's just a shorthand. We can communicate more rapidly and we don't have to circumlocute and talk about everything in 10 words when we could use one very technical label.

But when we're discussing this out in the open with people who haven't spent 20 years of their lives within a certain scientific field, let's just use real words. Let's just use analogies, let's tell those stories in a way that everyone can understand. This is important advice for the science community. It's import-

ant advice for the skeptic community, and it's also important advice for the freethinking community.

Be a good example

I think one of the biggest mistakes that we make within this community, and I am absolutely at fault for this, as well, is that in our zeal and our excitement to protect the rights of everyday individuals, and in our zeal and our excitement to fly the flag of the First Amendment, we end up insulting and criticizing so many people in the process. It's really ironic because isn't that the thing that we're most upset about, that we've been marginalized for so long, that we haven't been heard for so long, and that there is sort of a Christian majority in this country.

I think it's so important that we rise above and we don't make the same mistakes of the past. We can set really good examples. We can go out there, we can be strong, we can be role models for younger generations. We can also make a good example, and I know many of you in this room are just primed for this. You're already doing it.

What makes the Freedom From Religion Foundation so incredibly important is that you are examples of civic duty. You vote. You talk to your representatives. We're seeing a disconnect where the young people, in increasing numbers, are becoming less and less religious, but they're also less and less politically active. Those two things are going to fight against each other. The message can't just be that we're all equal and we should have equal protection under the law, but that we need to make sure our voices are heard, because if we don't speak up for ourselves, our representatives won't do it for us.

I really do appreciate the hard work that everybody right here in this room does day in and day out to make people like myself feel safer and more protected. And I want to thank you for this Freethought Heroine Award. It really means a lot to me. Thank you.

fetal abnormality. Because it requires that pregnant women and doctors are faced with criminal sanctions.

Michael Martin, leader of the conservative Irish Fianna Fail party, on why he supports a referendum to repeal Irish constitutional prohibitions against abortion.

New York Times, 1-20-18



Justin Trudeau

When those [religious] beliefs lead to actions determined to restrict a woman's right to control her own body, that's where I, and I think we, draw the line as a country. And that's where we stand on that.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, affirming freedom of religion, but supporting guidelines adopted by his government in December requiring groups applying for a federal grant program providing student jobs to affirm respect for "individual human rights in Canada." The checkbox on the electronic form has been criticized by anti-abortion groups.
New York Times, 1-20-18

Don't tell us how you and God have

made amends, or how you are different. You need to confess the facts.

Emma Ann Miller, one of over 200 women, mostly gymnasts, testifying at the historic sentencing hearing against convicted Olympic physician Lawrence G. Nassar, about enduring years of sexual abuse as children and teenagers under his care.
New York Times, 1-25-18

[When] the constitution established a separation of church and state. That's so important, because if you look at almost any religion, especially the major three, there is an oppression of women. I feel very lucky to be in a country with a more secular mindset.

Rachel Bloom, creator, writer and lead actor in the comedy-drama series "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend," listing one of her "favorite feminist moments."
Newsweek, 1-25-18

Freedom of religion is essential — and so is access to health care. Current law tries to accommodate both, but the far right has stirred unfounded fears that religion (and Christianity in particular) is under assault, and that people of faith are in danger of being forced to do things they find morally objectionable. In recent conflicts between patient needs and religious freedom, patients have too often lost. The Trump administration wants to keep it that way.

Editorial
New York Times, 1-28-18



Gloria Steinem

I don't understand why any political campaign would have a faith adviser.

Gloria Steinem, commenting on sexual harassment allegations against Burns Strider, aide to Hillary Clinton in her first presidential campaign, whose primary duty was to send Clinton scriptural passages every morning.
New York Times, 1-27-18

To those of you who accuse me of being an atheist, my answer is that it is my constitutional right to believe in any god or in no god. And, frankly, in a country that has for nearly a quarter of a millennia had the separation of church and state as a cornerstone of its political system, it's none of your goddamn business whom I worship or if I worship.

Columnist Sasha Abramsky, in his column, "Wild-eyed," "atheist," "foreigner" replies to his critics."
Sacramento Bee, 1-28-18

Robert Ingersoll — Peoria’s most famous citizen

This article was first published on *PeoriaMagazines.com* in its February 2016 issue and is reprinted with permission.

In 2016, FFRF paid for, with the help of 243 donors, the restoration of the Ingersoll statue in Glen Oak Park in Peoria, Ill. The statue was rededicated on Aug. 11, 2016, the 183rd anniversary of Ingersoll’s birth.

By Norman V. Kelly

Robert Green Ingersoll, known as “The Great Agnostic,” was the greatest orator America has ever produced. Yes, I know about Patrick Henry and Daniel Webster, but believe me, Ingersoll was in a class of his own.

I often called him Peoria’s most famous citizen, which, for the folks who knew nothing about him, must have seemed a silly thing to say. In my lectures and radio appearances, I enjoyed the response I always got when I told people that Ingersoll was indeed our most famous person. They liked to counter with Richard Pryor, the “Fibber McGee and Molly” show, or a handful of others, but I never wavered. Truth is, I had an advantage because I studied the life of Ingersoll, and of course, I lived way back in the radio and early-TV days when their picks were at the peak of their careers. Ingersoll had none of those electronic miracles to enhance his popularity — just his oratory skills.

20 years in Peoria

Born in Dresden, N.Y., on Aug. 11, 1833, Ingersoll came to Peoria in 1857 with his brother Eben and opened up a law office. The Ingersolls eventually lived in a five- or maybe six-sided home on Fourth Street, and early on, even the house became famous. Ingersoll was involved in several important law cases and traveled all over the United States and Europe as an orator and debater.

It was the golden age of freethinking, and that is when Ingersoll was tagged as “The Great Agnostic.” He was an author of note and even wrote a book explaining why he was an agnostic. For those who actually knew of Ingersoll here in Peoria, that is basically all they knew about him — sad that this great man, this genius, had his entire personality and life rolled up into one word: agnostic.

Ingersoll left Peoria in 1877 and moved to Washington, D.C., then to New York. But his time here was not forgotten. In 1911, a statue of him was dedicated in the lower entrance to Glen Oak Park. During World War II, some folks suggested it be scrapped for the war effort, and later, in 1950, the statue was tipped over on its face by vandals. But Old Bob was put back up and he stands in the same spot to this day, none the worse for this scandalous attack.

The Civil War

To some, Ingersoll was a hero of the Civil War, but there were people living in Peoria at the time who had their doubts. He got permission to raise his own army in this area, and he gave himself the rank of colonel. Men stood in line to join his group, and off they marched. One young man told a local reporter, “I sure hope we get to the war before it’s over.”

The first conflict with the Confederates ended with Colonel Ingersoll surrendering himself and



The refurbished statue of Robert Ingersoll was dedicated on Aug. 11, 2016, in Glen Oak Park, Peoria, Ill.

a large number of his troops. One day, he came walking home down Main Street, smiling and waving at his friends. When asked about his soldiers, he told reporters they were in good hands and that he had “been paroled by a Confederate colonel.”

Robert Green Ingersoll died at Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., on July 21, 1899. He was buried there, but his cremated remains were later buried in Arlington National Cemetery with military honors on May 4, 1932. Ingersoll’s wife, Eva, is there with him

in Section 3, grave number 1620.

A boys’ night out

Anyone can google Ingersoll, but I feel certain you will not find this Peoria connection. On a warm night in September of 1857, Ingersoll and about 10 of his friends, mostly young lawyer wannabes, decided to have a night on the town. At that time, our population was 8,256, and Peoria was already the brightest spot on the map between Chicago and St. Louis.

The boys hit the local “groggeries” — as saloons were referred to back then — making the rounds, singing and carrying on as they walked along. One bright young fellow shouted out that they should have a “town meeting.” At two in the morning, that was not the brightest of ideas, but all agreed just the same. They managed to build a rather large bonfire right there on Main Street and began to sing “Annie Laurie” at the top of their lungs. (See accompanying story on this page.)

Well, the neighbors thought that was a bit much, and the boys were

See *Ingersoll* on page 18

‘Annie Laurie’ named with a song in her heart

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

Anyone in their 80s or 90s (or older) seems to recognize my unusual first name, “Annie Laurie.” No one younger seems to. As I like to explain to those who keep trying to shorten my name to “Annie”: It’s a double first name, like Mary Jo, only less religious.

In fact, the real-life woman the poem was based on was called only “Annie.” “Laurie” was her good Scottish surname. The song was based on a poem to the daughter of Sir Robert Laurie, the first baronet of the Maxwellton family. The verses were written in in the 1600s by William Douglas, and begin:

*Maxwellton’s braes are bonnie,
Where early fa’s the dew,
And ’twas there that Annie Laurie
Gave me her promise true.*

Despite the love poem, fickle Annie married another. Lady John Scott revised the poem in the 1800s, adding a third verse, and setting it to music, or so most sources say. It became very popular during the Crimean War.

My parents, who were born in 1926, were from the generation still familiar with the ballad. I was envious when my parents and grandmother toured the house of Annie Laurie in the 1980s. Many years later, Dan and I tried to replicate their trip, finding the manor in disrepair, no longer open to the public, but in an exquisite setting. In a charmed moment looking out over those soft green “braes” (hillside), I could understand what inspired the poem.

My mother always told me that it was reading the autobiography of Mark Twain when she was pregnant that reminded her of the name and song. According to Mom, Samuel Clemens fashioned Becky Thatcher after his own childhood sweetheart, whose name was “Annie Laurie.”

I adored this idea, but cannot corroborate the story, having muscled my way through Twain’s behemoth of a rambling autobiography. I tried to read every line, and it’s not in the index. However, different versions of Twain’s bio are floating out there, so if anyone can find a reference in any version, please let me know.

While disappointed not to have this freethinking literary connection, I’ve informally collected references to other Annie Lauries. It’s a lonely business. I’ve never met another person who goes by Annie Laurie, only hearing of them, usually to next be told inexplicably, “But she goes by (another, unrelated name).” The one official Annie Laurie I’ve met — believe it or not a little girl (now grown up) living on the same block we moved to in 1991 in Madison, Wis. — doesn’t quite count because she just goes by “Annie.”

“Annie Laurie” was the favorite song of Francie’s tenor



Annie Laurie Gaylor in search of the real Annie Laurie visiting the now-closed manor in Dumfries, Scotland, where the woman who inspired the song was born in 1672.

Irish father in the novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. In the book, Francie’s little sister is named for the song, after her father’s premature death. “Annie Laurie” was the *nom de plume* of Winifred Sweet, a famous “sob sister” reporter.

On the more sinister side, I caught the name during the Claus von Bulow murder trial. Annie Laurie von Auersperg was the daughter by a prior marriage of Sunny von Bulow, the American heiress and socialite left in a coma after von Bulow allegedly poisoned her with insulin in 1980.

Reluctantly having given up the Twain angle, it gave me a thrill, when researching my anthology of women freethinkers, *Women Without Superstition: No Gods – No Masters*, to discover a freethought connection. Anarchist and freethinker Albert Parsons was one of four martyrs to hang in 1887 on trumped-up charges for the Haymarket Riot in Chicago. On the way to the gallows, he sang his favorite song, “Annie Laurie.” Afterward, for more than a decade, both anarchist and freethinking groups in Chicago and around the country would often open gatherings in his memory with a rendition of the song I’m named for. A poster of his remarkable wife, Lucy Parsons, has hung at FFRF’s offices for more than 30 years.

I owe it to FFRF State Rep. Margaret Downey for learning that one of my favorite figures in freethought history, Robert G. Ingersoll, knew and loved the song “Annie Laurie.” In later years, Ingersoll was famously abstemious, but perhaps not so much in his younger days. It was indeed a more innocent era, when a band of carousing young men could disturb the piece by singing this gentle love ballad.

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

Museum of the Bible

A safe space for Christian nationalists

This column first appeared in *The New York Times* on Jan. 6 and is reprinted with permission.

By Katherine Stewart

Looking at it, you’d think that the Museum of the Bible was, in fact, a museum. But the organizers of Revolution 2017, a gathering at the museum featuring speakers who intend to “transform nations” by “igniting a holy reformation in every sphere of society,” know better.

“We wholeheartedly believe the Museum of the Bible represents an ‘Ark of the Covenant’ for our nation, bearing witness to his goodness,” they proclaimed in their promotional material.

Calling it an “ark” may seem premature. But the business about “transforming nations” is quite serious. The Museum of the Bible, which sits a few blocks southwest of the U.S. Capitol, is a continuation of politics by other means.

A typical museum might invite visitors to explore the multiple meanings of the bible and the complex history of its reception in different cultures over time. But this museum is not the place for that kind of inquiry; you’re here to celebrate. The exhibits will rock you — literally, when you take a simulated roller-coaster ride through selected biblical inscriptions on display in the nation’s capital — but they won’t shake your convictions.

If you walk in thinking that the bible has a single meaning, that the evidence of archaeology and history has served to confirm its truth, that it is the greatest force for good humanity has ever known and that it is the founding text of the American republic — well, then, you will leave with a smile on your face and a song in your heart.

Embedding assumptions

The museum is a safe space for Christian nationalists, and that is the key to understanding its political mission. The aim isn’t anything so crude as the imme-



Katherine Stewart

diated conversion of tourists to a particular variety of evangelical Christianity. Its subtler task is to embed a certain set of assumptions in the landscape of the capital.

One individual who definitely gets it is Ralph Drollinger, the founder and president of Capitol Ministries and one of the most politically influential pastors in America. This fall, Drollinger held a training conference for some 80 international associates at the museum on the topic of “creating and sustaining discipleship ministries to political leaders.”

Drollinger believes that social welfare programs “have no basis in Scripture,” that Christians in government have an obligation to hire only Christians and that women should not be allowed to teach grown men. He lays out his thinking in a 2013 book, *Rebuilding America: The Biblical Blueprint*.

Drollinger was an early, passionate supporter of Donald Trump’s presidential candidacy. The “institution of the state” is “an avenger of wrath,” he explains, and its “God-given responsibility” is “to moralize a fallen world through the use of force.” Apparently, President Trump excels in these biblical criteria for leadership.

Drollinger is dedicated to commu-

nicating those views in weekly bible study groups. The participants in his groups, however, aren’t just anybody. They include Mike Pompeo, the director of the CIA; Attorney General Jeff Sessions; Vice President Mike Pence; Betsy DeVos, the secretary of education; and other senior officials in the Trump administration. Drollinger seeks to institute similar if less-star-studded bible study groups in all 50 state capitals.

Drollinger claims to have planted 24 operations overseas and hopes “to create 200 ministries in 200 foreign federal capitals.” In 2015, his group was invited to “plant a discipleship bible study ministry” in Belarus for the benefit of that nation’s political leaders. His wife, Danielle Drollinger, attended as a representative of the Museum of the Bible, with a promise that the museum’s bible curriculum would soon be translated into Russian.

This past fall, the museum also hosted Revive Us 2, a “national family meeting” organized by Kirk Cameron, a television actor who has become a conservative Christian celebrity. The event was broadcast live from the museum to movie theaters around the country with the message that national unity can be achieved only through a religious “awakening” and allegiance to conservative Christianity.

Politicized religion

The intensely politicized religion that appears to be taking up residence at the Museum of the Bible isn’t there by accident. When Steve Green, the museum’s founder and the president of the Hobby Lobby crafts chain, formed the museum’s parent organization in 2010, he informed the IRS that its purpose was “to bring to life the living word of God, to tell its compelling story of preservation, and to inspire confidence in the absolute authority and reliability of the bible.” In 2012, the language was changed to say that the aim was simply “to invite people to engage with the bible.”

Green rose to fame by getting the conservative majority on the Supreme Court to confer on Hobby Lobby the right to withhold federally mandated reproductive health care coverage from its female employees. The Green family lent artifacts to the Creation Museum in Kentucky and offers support to a “religious literacy” program aimed at public school students detailing the consequences they face if they disobey God.

Joining the Hobby Lobby stores on the donor wall that memorializes large gifts to the Museum of the Bible are a dozen-plus foundations that routinely back conservative Christian causes. There is also a lot of Amway money supporting the museum, including the Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation and other foundations connected to the DeVos family.

Given the theologico-political goals of its founders and patrons, it isn’t hard to see that the location of this museum was an act of symbolic and practical genius. If you’re going to build a Christian nation, this is where you start.

That’s why Cindy Jacobs, a leading figure in the fast-growing world of charismatic Christianity, and a featured speaker at the Revolution 2017 event in December, described the museum as “God’s base camp.”

There, in the auditorium of the museum, Jacobs offered this prediction: “The army of the heavens marches into Washington, D.C., and marches out of Washington, D.C.” Soon enough, “they go into North Korea.”

Skeptics may question whether God is really storing his ammo on the corner of Fourth and D Streets SW. But the people doing his work at the Museum of the Bible don’t, and they’re pretty sure that the election of 2016 proved them right.

According to Jacobs, Trump “will be seated and mantled with the power of God.”

Katherine Stewart is the author of *The Good News Club: The Christian Right’s Stealth Assault on America’s Children*.

Ingersoll

Continued from page 17

rounded up by two police officers. After all the paperwork was over, a hearing was set by a local magistrate and the boys went home.

The trial was held in a small courtroom by the magistrate, who thought the proceedings were a bit amusing. “Is there an attorney among the defendants?” he asked. Ingersoll stood. “I represent myself and all of the defendants, your honor.” “Fine. How do you plead?” “Not guilty, your honor, and we wish to have a jury trial.” Local records do not show what the magistrate said, but back then, if you looked real hard, I bet you could see his eyes roll.

The trial

The assistant state’s attorney made a big fuss with all his witnesses, including the two police officers. Ingersoll sat staring at each witness, smiling and occasionally laughing out loud at what they had to say. He did not cross-examine anyone; he just sat there and smiled. Finally, he was called upon by the magistrate. He instructed the judge that he would address the jury with his opening, summation and closing state-

ment, calling no witnesses.

In his elegant manner, Ingersoll soon had the jurors mesmerized by talking about everything from the Bill of Rights to the Constitution. Staring at each juror for a moment, he said, “Now gentlemen, if you will bring in a verdict in accordance with the laws and the evidence, I will get the boys together and we’ll sing you a few verses of ‘Annie Laurie.’”

Of course, the verdict was “not guilty,” followed by an outburst of cheering from the defendants and those present in the courtroom. One local reporter printed a line that was repeated over and over in Peoria: “Brilliant Mr. Ingersoll waved the Stars and Stripes into shreds and pinched the American eagle until it screamed.”

The next time you are in Lower Glen Oak Park, go on over and say hello to Peoria’s most famous citizen. He has been standing there since 1911, just waiting to say hello to you.

Norman V. Kelly is a Peoria historian and author whose works can be found in the Peoria Public Library and online. Permission to reprint this article was courtesy of *iBi* magazine, Feb. 2016, *peoriamagazines*.



Robert Ingersoll’s widow joined other family members and 6,000 in attendance in Peoria, Ill., on Oct. 23, 1911, to dedicate the world’s only full-length statue of Ingersoll, by sculptor Fritz Tiebel.

LETTERBOX

Printed speeches great for those who can’t go

Thank you for publishing in Free-thought Today the speeches given at FFRF’s annual convention. It’s great to be able to read them if one can’t attend that event.
Sue Murawski
Pennsylvania

Country was founded on Constitution, not God

To Florida state Reps. Kimberly Daniels, Ralph Massullo and Larry Lee, who want to put “In God We Trust” in a “conspicuous” place in every public school in the state: It seems you didn’t read the U.S. Constitution before you swore to uphold it.
Our country was not built on God; he/she/it isn’t even mentioned in our Constitution. Not every citizen trusts or believes in your God (or whichever god you refer to) and you have no right or obligation to force your misguided beliefs on any constituent.
If you’d like the facts, ask an atheist.
Randy Lifshotz
Florida

Bias of reporter showed in writing lawsuit story

I receive the Chicago Tribune and took special exception to a certain choice of words regarding an article about FFRF’s lawsuit on the IRS parsonage allowance. The wording of the article showed the bias of the writer. One can readily detect this in the front-page story, which has the phrase: “The Freedom From Religion Foundation, a self-proclaimed guardian of church-state separation.” Using the same rhetorical ploy, I could describe the writer by saying, “This article was written by Manya Brachear Pashman, a self-proclaimed objective journalist.”
Allen Cosnow
Illinois

Donation helps fight ‘theocracy of dunces’

According to your recent “New Year 2018 Appeal” mailing, your Legal Fund is in need of a boost. Well, as an ardent FFRF booster, I am taking that challenge personally and am

There’s your answer



Photo by Marissa Luna (via Twitter)

A billboard that went up Feb. 1 in St. Paul, Minn., pokes fun at former congresswoman Michele Bachmann, following an interview where she said she was going to pray for guidance on whether to run for Sen. Al Franken’s vacated Senate seat.
The billboard features a cartoon image of God with the words, “Michele Bachmann — No.”
The ad could be the idea of thegoodlordabove.com, based on the cartoon image that the satire site uses to portray God. The site’s owner(s) did not reply to questions about their involvement in the

billboard campaign.
In late December, Bachmann told televangelist Jim Bakker she would pray in search of an answer on whether to run. “The question is: Am I being called to do this now?” On Feb. 3, two days after the billboard went up, she said, “I tried to have my ears open and hear what God was saying to me, and I considered it for quite a long time. It became very clear to me that I wasn’t hearing any call from God to do this.”
Bachmann was elected to Congress in 2007 to represent Minnesota’s 6th District. She was in office until 2015.

responding with a qualified charitable donation from my IRA to be specifically earmarked to help you fight the “theocracy of dunces.” (This is in addition to another general-purpose donation that you recently received.)
By all means, please notify Vice Theocrat Pence of my gift and tell him it’s to finance the preservation of the wall of separation between church and state.
To everyone at FFRF: Keep up the wonderful and vital work you’re doing on our behalf!
Charles B. Keeling
North Carolina

FFRF should go after untaxed church land

If you really wanted to make a splash in the ocean, you should go after churches that have a lot of land, all of it off the tax rolls.
Where I live, churches have lots

of very valuable property just sitting empty and no property tax is being paid on it. Land in the Seattle area is hard to get and very expensive.
Go get ‘em!
Terry Patterson
Washington
Our decisions create our own environment
Thanks to Dan Barker for taking on the challenging issue of free will in his new book, *Free Will Explained*.
Here’s my perspective on free will: Of course we make choices, decisions and have will. However, given our genes, our past environment, our current environment and all of our interactions, only one choice is possible. But “free” will is dangerous. It leads to us blaming others and believing ourselves as deserving, rather than fortunate or lucky. B.F. Skinner’s position is much preferable to

the “it’s a just world” perspective. Skinner argued that we have consequences for the good of the individual and society, not because the consequences are just or fair.
As M.C. Escher’s “Drawing Hands” (each hand drawing the other one) illustrates, we create ourselves with each decision we make. In essence, we are “drawing” ourselves, our future.
Each decision creates part of our new environment, which then shapes the person we are becoming. However, each decision we make is itself determined; only one outcome is possible in each decision-making process, given our genes, our environment and interactions among those factors.
Shirley Ogletree
Texas
Bible’s view of women is depraved, revolting, vile
I want to thank you for your incredible work. You are desperately needed. I am thrilled to see your legal successes and hope that your strength continues full force during this atrocious political climate.
I ordered some books from your website, including Annie Laurie Gaylor’s *Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So*. I read it immediately, assuming it was going to argue a philosophical position about treatment of women in the bible.
Boy, was I wrong! It doesn’t even need to argue it. The evidence is clear by the disgusting number of anti-women passages within the text. I had no idea how seriously depraved, revolting and vile the bible is. It was literally stomach-churning.
Because of your book, Annie Laurie, I firmly believe the bible is one of the greatest sources of female repression. I wish more people realized how truly iniquitous the bible in concerning women. It disheartens me to know that it is the most printed book in the world.
Fortunately, I feel the secular world has made serious progress. The work of FFRF and others has hastened this progress. Feminism and pro-women attitudes radiate liberalized, enlightened parts of the world. Keep up the excellent work!
Andrew Z. Colvin
Arizona
tion instead of butchering it. You all will have to answer for this one day... Weather you believe or not. Good day and GOD BLESS THE USA!!! — Jonathan Hojnicky
Prayer in school: Keep you athiest nose out of our town!!! — *Mitchell Cole*
I Oppose This Organization: I am 100 percent against what you stand for. My forefathers signed the Declaration of Independence; I am descended from Chief Tecumseh of the Shawnee Tribe; I am of English, German, Jewish and Native American BLOOD. My forefathers have fought in ALL the wars since America has been a nation. I WILL NEVER CEASE TO FIGHT YOU AND YOUR KIND. You will NEVER defeat us - those of us who cherish our GOD - that is, the GOD of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (ISRAEL). And, YES, the Son of God, Yeshua (Jesus Christ). YOU SHALL BE DEFEATED and YOUR SAD attempt to TWIST our BLESSED Constitution has already been found to be IN ERROR. YOU nor anyone else on this Earth shall MAKE NO LAW prohibiting the free exercise of RELIGION !!! Period. So, go ahead and shut down your organization. YOU HAVE ALREADY LOST THE FIGHT !!!! STOP WASTING YOUR MONEY ON STUPID LAWSUITS !!!! — *John Hinzman*

CRANKMAIL

Here are this month’s contributions to our collection of crazy correspondence, presented to you as received.
santa fe: Do you know what Santa Fe translates to? This city was built on faith. Not aitheists. Keep your business in your own state. You obviously have no regard for freedom of religion. The only reason Santa Fe is here, is becausr of the faith of our ancestors. The monument belongs in Santa Fe. The name translates to holy faith. Not aithiest disregard. — *Matthew Herrera*
Mind: You may be of assistance of minding your own damn business when it comes to “preaching” preserving the 1st Amendment. You preach that the Ten Commandments that are in Santa Fe and at one time Belen, NM be taken down, well, there wasn’t any complaints from ANYONE for decades. Did you hear that? NO ONE COMPLAINED! That’s until you people started going around “looking” for shit pots to stir. You are affiliated with Atheists, most likely are, but yet you go around all high and mighty like Bloomberg pushing YOUR agenda. Wait, you must also be Democrats, ah I see the similarities. You’re pushing to Preserve the First Amendment but don’t give a fuck at the right to

speak our Ten Commandments. We’re not bothering anyone, so why are you going around bothering everyone else? I know why, because satan is urging you to go around like the anti-Christ doing this sort of thing. He figures you Atheists are the perfect platform for suppressing the Christian, and only the Christian religion, go fuck yourselves. — *Anna Busney*
Flag: You do realize your flag is just like the A for aduItress which a woman was forced to wear to show her sin to the world. Too funny. Fly it with disgrace. — *Dorothy DeMar*
Advertisement: I heard A sample of your ad on vcy America. So you are not afraid of going to hell. I’ll be praying for you. If you die and go to hell , then later at the White Throne Judgement get thrown in the lake of fire. take all the bad things that happened to you, times 1000 and repeat daily for eternity, then you will have idea what hell is like. Just wait when the Church is taken up at the rapture. Then you will have your way for a short time , then you will have the muslims to deal with. Thik about it. — *Rick Ghering*
Delusion: what a delusion you are. trying to sue wh cause they believe in something higher then you all are. satan rules your house of cards —

Randall Docherty
Religion: I just wanted you to know that you should be ashamed of yourselves. There is a God in Heaven, and you and everyone on this planet are spirit children of our Heavenly Father. God’s purpose for all of us on this planet is to provide a way for us to return to live with Him after this mortal life is done. We were born to die. — *Russell Bender*
God Bless you all: We the people would like to say God Bless all of you and your Godless ways. We support our President and Ben Carson for having prayers and Bible studies in our White House. Just as Obama had his filthy Muslims and Muslims call to prayer meetings. So go defend another sexual assault predictor like you did with Bill Clinton.. God is great and good even to you all. — *Jason Martinez*
Reality: Why do you continue to persecute Christians? What are you so afraid of? Are you afraid of the reality that GOD is real? Are you too in love with the worldly materialism, money, greed, idolatry, lust of flesh, and/or power? If you desire to be atheist, so be it. Have you considered what happens after death if you refuse to believe in Jesus Christ? — *Kevin Jepsen*
Got your facts wrong: You people are bitter and ill informed at best. Try reading the constitu-

BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Matthew J. Jacobson, 30, Linton, IN: Child seduction. Jacobson, a youth pastor at Bethel Baptist Church, allegedly kissed the juvenile victim while they danced in their underwear before a phone call from his wife interrupted them. *Source: Daily World, 1-29-18*

Brian Cassidy, 33, Park Hills, MO: Statutory rape and child molestation. Cassidy, youth pastor at First Baptist Church, is accused of having sex twice with a teen girl, once at the church and once in a field near her home. She alleged that inappropriate contact with Cassidy, who is married, started shortly after she turned 13. *Source: Daily Journal, 1-27-18*

Gregory Parlante, 61, Philadelphia: Possession of a controlled substance, use or possession of drug paraphernalia and theft by unlawful taking. Parlante, pastor at St. Cornelius Catholic Parish, was on long-term medical leave when maintenance staff opened a package addressed to him and found what was identified as methamphetamine.

According to the affidavit, a church volunteer alleged she saw him remove about \$500 in cash from each Sunday collection from January of 2017 until his leave of absence in March 2017 (\$5,500 total). Parlante reportedly told the volunteer he needed the money “for payment to substitute priests and altar boys.” His salary was \$27,215 in 2016. *Source: Daily Times, 1-26-18*

Richard A. Taylor, 69, Columbia, SC: Criminal sexual conduct and common law assault and battery of a high and aggravated nature. Taylor was a youth pastor at Dutch Fork Baptist Church when he allegedly assaulted a boy on multiple occasions between 1989-91, starting when he was 15.

“Meeting my emotional and psychological needs that I wasn’t getting at home or through my social group of friends and he provided love, support, attention, gifts — that eventually came at the cost of fondling, mutual sexual acts and then rape,” the boy told a reporter. *Source: WIS-TV, 1-24-18*

Jeffrey Eisenbath, 28, Troy, MO: Invasion of property, invasion of privacy, invasion of possession of child pornography. Eisenbath, who volunteered as a children’s religious education teacher at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, is accused of installing secret recording devices in bathrooms at the church and at the Adrenaline Zone amusement center where he worked. *Source: Post-Dispatch, 1-24-18*

Luis CruzCruz, 24, Fremont, CA: Sending harmful matter to a minor. CruzCruz, a youth pastor at Adventista del Séptimo día, allegedly sent multiple sexually explicit images via social media to a 13-year-old girl who attended the Seventh-day Adventist church. *Source: KNTV, 1-22-18*

David Turpin, 57, and Louise Turpin, 49, Perris, CA: Torture and child endangerment. The Turpins are charged with long-term abuse of their 13 children, ages 2 to 29. The children were home-schooled and kept secluded in filthy conditions, sometimes in shackles. One daughter, 17, escaped and called 911. Police said she was emaciated and appeared to be about 10 years old.

David Turpin’s parents told authorities the couple had so many children because “God called on them” to do so. The grandparents said the Turpins were Pentecostal but didn’t have a church in the area and that their children were made to memorize long bible passages as part of their schooling. David Turpin is listed as school principal. *Source: ABC News, 1-16-18*

John Bishop, 54, San Diego: Unlawful importation of a controlled substance. Bishop, former lead pastor of Living Hope Church in Vancouver, BC, is accused of trying to smuggle 282 pounds of marijuana from Mexico into San Ysidro, CA, in a Volkswagen Jetta.

Bishop and his former wife started Living Hope in 1996. It grew into a congregation of thousands. He resigned as pastor in 2015 due to allegations of moral indiscretions. *Source: The Columbian, 1-16-18*

An unidentified priest from Ngonda Catholic Parish in Kenya was arrested for allegedly sodomizing a church member. A police report said he was found in bed with the boy. Reports conflict whether he is 17 or 18.

Police acted on a tip from people who had been monitoring the priest’s activities. *Source: Daily Nation, 1-16-18*

Gerardo Custodio Jr., 30, Ontario, CA: Lewd acts with a minor and unspecified “additional charges involving both victims.” Custodio is a youth

pastor at La Familia de Dios, where his father is senior pastor.

Two women allege they were molested by Custodio on church property when they were 14 and 15 years old between 2012 and 2015. *Source: KNBC, 1-15-18*

An unidentified imam at a mosque in Blackburn, UK, was arrested on suspicion of inciting a child to engage in sexual activity after allegedly trying to meet a 15-year-old boy for sex and offering him money on a gay dating app.

The imam, 45, a married father of 5, was accosted by a group called “Justice Will Be Served.” A video shows him telling them he could be killed by Muslims for engaging in homosexual acts. The mosque has suspended him. *Source: Daily Mail, 1-12-18*

Nashimen McKinnon, 30, Hope Mills, NC: 3 and head of the investment company HBFS Wealth Management’s Manchester office, previously worked as the Manchester director of the Orthodox Jewish outreach group Aish HaTorah.

Also charged is **Freddy David**, HBFS Wealth Management’s managing director. *Source: Jewish Chronicle, 12-28-17*

Muhammad L. Hasan, 50, Corvallis, OR: 3rd-degree sex abuse and 6 counts of 1st-degree sex abuse. Hasan operates the American Islamic Center for the Holy Quran, which teaches recitation and memorization of the Quran.

He’s accused of conduct with 2 girls under age 14, allegedly involving kissing and breast fondling. *Source: Beaverton Patch, 12-26-17*

Nancy L. Brann, 43, Windsor, ME: Gross sexual assault and unlawful sexual contact. Brann, who

But don’t give yourself away



Member Chris Kramer sent us this photo of a church marquee in St. Robert, Mo. Is this sending the right message, or is it just a cheap trick?

counts of indecent liberties with a child. McKinnon, a youth leader at Antioch Bible Fellowship, told a deputy he “touched a child five to six months ago,” according to a sheriff’s office press release. The report alleges he touched a girl sexually outside her clothes at a sleepover at his home in July and at least 2 other times at church events. He is married. *Source: News & Observer, 1-11-18*

Robert Harris, 30, Overland Park, KS: 1st-degree murder. Harris, an elder at Repairers Kansas City, is charged with the strangulation death of his wife, Tanisha Harris, 38, who was associate pastor at the church.

Police had answered a domestic disturbance call at their home but Robert Harris was there alone. He later called to report his wife was missing. They each had a daughter from previous marriages. *Source: Kansas City Star, 1-10-18*

Jesse Claybon, 47, St. Louis: 4 counts of child molestation. Clayton, pastor of New Age Missionary Baptist Church, allegedly abused a minor girl multiple times in 2017, including fondling her genitals outside her clothing and having her fondle his. *Source: Riverfront Times, 1-10-18*

Glenn T. Collins, 51, Fayetteville, NC: 128 sex offenses involving 6 children and allegedly rape and sexual battery. Collins, former pastor at an unidentified church, is accused of assaults on 4 children between 1996 and 2009.

He denied the charges at a court hearing: “I own property. I’m a pillar of the community and I don’t deserve this.” *Source: Fayetteville Observer, 1-9-18*

Robert J. Batcho, 60, Elmira Heights, NY: 4 counts of unlawfully dealing with a child. Batcho, pastor at St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church, allegedly provided beer in May 2017 to 4 teens under the age of 21. *Source: WENY, 1-9-18*

Gerald R. Hechenberger, 54, Mascoutah, IL: 8 counts of possession and dissemination of child pornography and possession of methamphetamine. Hechenberger, associate pastor at Holy Childhood Catholic Church, was arrested after a search of the church rectory following a tip.

Court documents allege he used an email address with the prefix “subpigboy4u” to exchange images. One message stated: “Hello u gorgeous hot stud! Here are some pix u will enjoy i hope ... oink!” *Source: News-Democrat, 1-8-18*

Peter M. Waters, 72, Melbourne, Australia: 20 sex offenses involving 6 children and allegedly committed between 1974 and 1987 before he retired as a Catholic priest. *Source: 9news.com.au, 1-8-18*

Benji Silverstone, 40, Manchester, UK: Suspicion of conspiracy to defraud. Silverstone, a rabbi taught at Coastal Christian School in Waldboro, is accused of an alleged encounter with a student younger than 14 in the fall of 2016. *Source: Kennebec Journal, 12-22-17*

Ryan Crawford, 32, Pineville, MO: 6 counts of child molestation for alleged sexual misconduct with a child younger than 15. According to court records, Crawford told investigators he would “feel [the girl’s] groin area.” He’s associate pastor at First Baptist Church and his wife works in the youth ministry.

“Ryan also stated to me that he would watch ‘porn then go to [the girl’s] bedroom and masturbate into a sock,” an investigator wrote. *Source: KOAM, 12-21-17*

Owen Robertson, 53, Easley, SC: 9 counts of sexual exploitation of a child. Robertson, minister of education at First Baptist Church, allegedly had child pornography on a church computer and a personal computer.

Milt Ponder, head of deacons, said the church is distressed over the allegations and is praying for God’s strength and protection for Robertson’s family. *Source: WYFF, 12-20-17*

Wesley I. Lamb, 28, Belton, MO: 2 counts of statutory rape. Lamb, associate pastor at Belton Assembly of God, is charged with having sexual encounters with a 14-year-old girl who came to him for counseling.

An affidavit said Lamb’s wife found them in the couple’s bedroom and started yelling at Lamb. She later told police they were arguing about finances. A Facebook Messenger thread between Lamb and the girl allegedly went on for 66 pages and contained “very suggestive” language. *Source: Kansas City Star, 12-19-17*

Jaime Pinzon, 55, Queens, NY: 3rd-degree sex abuse and 2 counts of forcible touching. Pinzon, a deacon at St. Joan of Arc Catholic Parish, is charged with groping a 27-year-old woman’s crotch on a Manhattan subway in December. She was able to take his photo on her cellphone. *Source: NY Post, 12-18-17*

Andrea N. Baber, 29, Cottage Grove, OR: 3rd-degree rape, 3rd-degree sodomy, contributing to the sexual delinquency of a minor, online sexual corruption of a minor and unlawful delivery of marijuana to a person under 18. Baber, a language and literature teacher at Logos Christian Academy, was arrested after the alleged victim’s father got an anonymous email in December that his son and Baber were in a relationship. Attached were photos of them in bed, the affidavit said.

The boy allegedly told deputies the relationship started in 2016 when he was 15 and progressed to having sex once or twice a week at her

home. Baber’s husband also told police he had found incriminating evidence.

“Andrea has always felt called to work with youth and is very excited that God opened the door for her to be part of the Logos team,” her biography on the school’s website said. *Source: Register-Guard, 12-19-17*

Jeffery Daniels, 49, Antioch, IL: Conspiracy to commit sexual, physical and psychological abuse. Daniels and 3 other men are accused by Peruvian authorities in Lima of molesting boys and young men at Sodalitium Christianae Vitae, which trains lay people in the Catholic faith. Daniels is a native Peruvian who moved to Antioch in 2001 after allegations were first raised in 1997.

Daniels led boys ages 12 to 16 on mission trips and conducted bible studies and other group activities. Investigators pegged Daniels as “the most egregious” molester, accusing him of sexually abusing at least a dozen young males in his care between 1985-97. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 12-15-17*

Da’Qwone D. Hill, 22, Norfolk, VA: Attempted rape and indecent liberties with a child by a custodian. Hill, youth minister and choir director at Mt. Hermon Baptist Church, is charged with assaulting a boy between the ages of 13 and 17 who was a family friend. *Source: WAVY, 12-12-17*

Joseph Alexander, 60, Gretna, LA: 16 counts of bank fraud. Alexander, pastor at Franklin Avenue Church of Christ, is accused of stealing over \$320,000 from church bank accounts from 2006-14. *Source: Times-Picayune, 12-8-17*

Pleaded / Convicted

Jordan D. Baird, 26, Warrenton, VA: Guilty by jury of 5 counts of indecent liberties with a minor by a custodian. Baird, a youth pastor at Life Church, was charged with repeatedly groping and propositioning a 16-year-old girl who worshipped at the Manassas church. Baird’s father is lead pastor.

The girl testified Baird repeatedly groped her at the church in 2015, including twice when he rubbed his genitals against her. *Source: insidenova.com, 1-12-18*

Michael Hands, 51, Greenwich, NY: Pleaded guilty to 2 counts of 3rd-degree criminal sex act. Hands, a Catholic priest who was defrocked after a conviction for sodomizing a 14-year-old boy in 2003, admitted he had sexual contact with a child younger than 17 in July. He met the victim online, according to District Attorney Karen Heggen. *Source: Times Union, 1-6-18*

Terry W. Millender, 53, and Brenda Millender, 57, Springfield, VA: Guilty by jury of multiple counts of wire fraud, money laundering and filing false tax returns. The Millenders, husband and wife, ran Victorious Life Church while recruiting investors in a \$2 million Nigerian oil scheme.

Prosecutors said the couple recruited investors for companies they claimed provided small loans to poor people in developing countries and helped broker Nigerian oil deals. It’s alleged they used investor money to pay for golf trips, a birthday party and to help buy a \$1.75 million home. *Source: Time, 12-21-17*

Fernando Maldonado, 37, Concord, CA: Guilty by jury of 23 counts of child molestation. Maldonado was pastor at Morello Avenue Baptist Church when he allegedly had sex with a teen, starting when she was 13 and continuing at Grace Bible Church in 2014. When the girl came forward to police, her statements were corroborated by semen samples found inside the church that matched his DNA.

Maldonado jumped bail after hearing the girl would testify and is thought to be hiding in Mexico. The trial continued without him. Six families who put up their homes to pay the \$106,000 bond are now on the hook for his \$1.295 million bail. *Source: East Bay Times, 12-16-17*

Sentenced

Oleh Zhownirovych, 54, Clifton, NJ: 11 months in prison and 6 months in the county jail, to be served consecutively after pleading no contest to aggravated battery and intentional harm and battery. Zhownirovych was pastor of Ukrainian Orthodox Holy Ascension Cathedral for 15 years but was asked to leave in 2015 due to a drinking problem.

In October 2016 he walked up to Monquisha Hill in a checkout line at a Walmart in Overland Park, KS, and started choking her 4-month-old daughter, who was in a shopping cart. A security guard stopped the attack and the girl wasn’t seriously hurt. Hill didn’t know him and no motive has ever been made public. *Source: northjersey.com, 1-26-18*

Michael Jenkins Sr., Helena, AR: 15 years in prison for rape and sexual grooming. Jenkins, pastor of Church of the Living God, was convicted for having sex in July 2016 with a girl, 15, who had come to his home to play basketball. The victim reported the rape 3 weeks later.

It’s alleged they had an ongoing “relationship” that included the married Jenkins paying her for favors. *Source: Fox Memphis, 1-24-18*

David R. Diehl, 40, Kentwood, MI: 60 days in jail, 5 years’ probation and 150 hours of community service after pleading guilty to accosting a child for immoral purposes. Diehl, pastor at Church on Fire in

Grand Rapids, answered a Craigslist post about a fictitious man known as “Daddy Dave,” who was prostituting his daughters online. It was actually state police detective Matthew McLanin who put the item on Craigslist.

Diehl then texted “Daddy Dave” about the possibility of meeting his 11-year-old daughter. “Diehl admitted there was a strong possibility he would have met with Daddy Dave for the purpose of having sex with the 11-year-old girl if there was zero chance of Diehl being arrested by police or having to go to jail,” McLanin wrote in court documents.

“This case is not a reflection of who I am,” Diehl told the judge at sentencing. “All in all, I’m a good person, your honor.” *Source: WOOD, 1-12-18*

Prince Asiam, 55, East Hartford, CT: 17 years in prison and deportation to Ghana after completion of his sentence. A jury convicted Asiam, assistant pastor at Christian Fellowship Ministry, of sexual assault and risk of injury to a minor for molesting a 10-year-old girl.

The victim, now 17, suffered “horrific abuse” when she went to Asiam’s apartment to help him move, said prosecutor John Fahey. She testified Asiam pushed her on a bed and had sexual intercourse with her when she was in fifth grade. *Source: Hartford Courant, 1-11-18*

Larry M. Berkley, Harrison, AR: 32 years in prison after pleading guilty as a habitual offender to 11 counts of sexual assault in 2012-14. Prosecutor Chris Carter said Berkley, former pastor at Shiloh Baptist Church, walked around the house naked, watched pornography with young males and had sexual contact with them. Once he took some boys to a funeral home to look at a dead body.

Berkley is also sentenced to 35 years in Tennessee for rape, statutory rape and sexual battery. *Source: Ozarks First, 1-11-18*

Daniel Pye, 36, Ashdown, AR: 40 years in prison for 3 convictions of traveling in foreign commerce with the purpose of engaging in illicit sexual conduct with a minor. Pye was a Christian missionary who operated an orphanage in Jacmel, Haiti, from 2006-12 and was accused of molesting girls as young as 6.

Investigators also interviewed 4 alleged victims from Florida who said Pye assaulted them when they were between 5 and 7 years old between 1996-99. *Source: KXAN, 1-11-18*

Kay Olsen, 65, Providence, UT: 3 days in jail and 2 days of jail diversion after pleading guilty to misdemeanor sexual battery. Olsen, a Mormon stake executive secretary, “was just looking for someone to make [a work] assignment to” when he groped a girl at church more than once, said prosecutor Spencer Walsh. “It is not the most egregious sex crime ever, but it is still upsetting.”

Another count was dismissed in a plea bargain. *Source: State Journal, 1-10-18*

Noah Njegovan, 34, Brandon, Manitoba: 22-month conditional sentence [house arrest] after pleading guilty to theft and fraud of over \$5,000. Njegovan, an Anglican archdeacon, admitted using a church credit card for nearly \$200,000 in private purchases from 2010-12. The Diocese of Brandon said in a statement that Njegovan has paid back \$192,000. *Source: CBC News, 1-9-18*

Eddie Hilburn, 52, The Woodlands, TX: 1-year deferred adjudication of sentence if he completes probation after pleading guilty to paying an undercover officer \$80 to have sex in July 2017. A married father of 3, he resigned as associate pastor at First Baptist Church soon after being charged. *Source: Daily Mail, 1-8-18*

William Dombrow, 78, Darby Borough, PA: 8 months’ incarceration and \$533,258 restitution after pleading guilty to 5 counts of wire fraud. Dombrow, rector at Villa St. Joseph, a retirement home for Catholic priests, told the court that a gambling addiction led him to siphon money for 9 years from parishioners’ bequests and insurance payouts from priests who had died at the home. *Source: philly.com, 1-3-18*

Samuel J. Kee, 41, Lake Zurich, IL: 2 years’ probation, child sex offender registration, 200 hours of community service, internet restrictions and no contact with minors after pleading guilty to criminal sexual abuse for sexual contact with a 16-year-old girl in 2014.

Kee was pastor of teaching and discipleship at North Suburban Evangelical Free Church when he was charged. The girl was a member of the congregation. *Source: News-Sun, 12-28-17*

Stephanie Everett, 43, Troutville, VA: 2 years in prison on convictions for credit card fraud, theft and embezzlement. Everett, treasurer at Cave Rock Baptist Church, stole over \$99,000 from the church over a 5-year period.

Until changing her story, Everett blamed the shortfall on a poor system of financial oversight and unclear directions on how church money should be spent. *Source: Roanoke Times, 12-20-17*

Robert Marsicek, 76, Wauwatosa, WI: 1 year in jail after pleading guilty to misdemeanor sexual assault after 3 felony counts of sexual assault of a child were dropped. Marsicek was originally charged with molesting a girl from 2007-10, starting when she was in 1st grade and he was a priest at St. Pius Catholic Parish. He was removed from ministry in 2013.

The victim, now 16, told the court she didn’t agree with the plea bargain. “I would love to see him spend the rest of his life in jail. I was told that he wouldn’t [re-offend] because he’s ‘too old,’ but



why should I care about his age when he didn’t care about mine?” *Source: Journal Sentinel, 12-16-17*

Robert C. Trueblood, 57, Fairmont, MN: 90 days in jail and 5 years’ probation after pleading guilty to possessing child pornography involving a minor. Trueblood, pastor of St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church and superintendent of the church school, was found to be using online chat rooms to solicit child porn with the username “PervyPastor.” *Source: WCCO, 12-11-17*

Shalom Lamm, Bloomingburg, NY: 10 months’ incarceration, 400 hours of community service and a \$20,000 fine after pleading guilty to conspiring to corrupt the electoral process. Lamm, a real estate developer, was part of a scheme to sign up ineligible voters to elect a friendly government in a years-long effort to build thousands of homes for ultra-Orthodox Hasidic Jews in the village. *Source: The Forward, 12-8-17*

Erick E. Granados-Zeledon, 39, Edgewater, MD: 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to sex abuse of a minor. Granados-Zeledon, a chaperone and bible study instructor at Iglesia Hispana Emmanuel, admitted performing sexual acts with a boy in March 2017. He is also subject to deportation to his native El Salvador. *Source: Capital Gazette, 12-5-17*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Anthony S. Apuron, 72, former Catholic archbishop of Agaña, Guam, is accused in a lawsuit by his nephew of raping him in a church bathroom in 1989 or 1990. It’s the 5th sexual abuse suit filed against him. The archdiocese is currently a defendant in 96 sexual abuse suits involving Apuron, 13 priests, a Catholic school teacher, a Catholic school janitor and a Boy Scout leader. *Source: Crux, 1-22-18*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Portland, OR,** is being sued for \$29 million by 3 men alleging sexual abuse as children in the 1970s and 1980s by deceased priest **Pius Brazauskas**.

A newspaper feature story about Brazauskas in 1957 said children were a “special delight” to him and that he was known as “Dr. Bubblegum” because he always had gum or candy to hand out. He died in 1990 at age 84. *Source: The Oregonian, 1-10-18*

Ponevezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, Israel, **2 unidentified rabbis** and **an alleged sexual offender** are being sued by a 19-year-old man who alleges he was abused by another student when he was 16. The rabbis are also charged criminally for failure to report the allegations.

The claim says: “Although Defendants 2 and 3 recently admitted to the plaintiff that they are aware of the danger posed by the defendant, the defendant continues to live in the yeshiva, and it is reasonable to assume that even now he continues to harm there.” *Source: Arutz Sheva, 1-8-18*

Lives Under Construction, a Christian residential facility for troubled boys in Lampe, MO, is being sued by 3 boys who allege they were sexually assaulted by older boys in 2009-10. The suit says the ranch ignored the abuse, delayed contacting authorities and punished some boys for reporting it.

Founder Ken Ortman was a South Dakota dairy farmer 30 years ago when he felt called by God to open the ranch. Currently it houses 18 boys who attend bible study and learn trades.

A newspaper obtained internal ranch documents that include investigative reports after a 9-year-old boy was allegedly raped by his 19-year-old roommate in 2009. The state Department of Social Services said staff members were aware of the allegations but delayed contacting authorities. *Source: Macomb Daily News, 1-5-18*

The **Fundamentalist Mormon Church**, imprisoned leader **Warren Jeffs**, his brothers **Lyle Jeffs** and **Seth Jeffs** and former leader **Wendell Nielsen** are accused of sex abuse of girls as young as 8.

“R.H.” alleges she was taken from home with a bag over her head, driven to an unknown location and abused by the Jeffs and Nielsen while others watched. R.H., now 21, alleges once she turned 14, she was forced to watch younger girls being assaulted. Plaintiff’s attorney Michael Worel believes abuses continue within the church. *Source: KSTU, 12-27-17*

The **Catholic Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, MT,** is being sued by a committee of unsecured creditors who allege over \$70 million in real property and other assets should be available for creditors and survivors of sex abuse by church officials. The diocese filed for bankruptcy in March 2017. *Source: Billings Gazette, 12-22-17*

Grace Cathedral, a megachurch in Akron, OH, which televises the ministry of **Ernest Angley**, is accused of coercing Bridget Pollard, 76, to give the church \$340,000 from her late husband’s pension. Pollard suffers from dementia and has a public guardian. *Source: CBS Chicago, 12-19-17*

Paul Pressler, 87, a former Texas Court of Appeals judge and legislator, is accused by Duane Rollins, his bible study student, of sexual abuse starting in the late 1970s and continuing for several years. It’s alleged Pressler told Rollins he was “special” and that sex, including anal penetration, was their God-sanctioned secret.

Pressler was a key player in the “conservative resurgence” of Southern Baptism in the 1970s and 1980s that aimed to oust liberals and moderates from church leadership. The **Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary** and **First Baptist Church of Houston** are also named as defendants. *Source: Texas Tribune, 12-15-17*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Society of St. Edmund**, the **Catholic Diocese of Norwich, CT, its former bishop** and **Sacred Heart Parish** settled a suit for \$900,000. Andrew Aspinwall, now 50, alleged former priest **Charles Many** sexually assaulted him while he was serving as an altar boy at Sacred Heart in Groton. Many was removed from parish service in 1986 and later left the priesthood. *Source: Norwich Bulletin, 1-20-18*

The family of deceased Catholic priest **Stanley Idziak** settled a sexual abuse suit for undisclosed terms. The Georgia plaintiff, now 47, will receive payment from Idziak’s estate, worth \$62,000.

Multiple families have accused Idziak of abuse. The Archdiocese of Atlanta settled a 1991 suit for \$500,000. He left the priesthood in 1993. On Jan. 3, 2017, he was found dead at age 82 in his apartment where he’d posted “DO NOT RESUSCITATE” signs on the walls. *Source: Journal-Constitution, 1-3-18*

Arnold Kelley, a retired Massachusetts Catholic priest, settled a suit for 5 figures (\$10,000-\$99,000) in which William Brown alleged Kelley sexually assaulted him starting when he was 10 in 1973 and continuing for 3 years.

The complaint accused Kelley of sodomizing and performing oral sex on him at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Dorchester. Kelley is now in his 80s and lives in Mary Immaculate Nursing Home in Lawrence. *Source: Eagle-Tribune, 1-2-18*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of New York** will pay 3 men \$250,000 each for sexual abuse suffered at

the hands of **Gennaro “Jerry” Gentile**, a priest who served 9 different parishes between 1970 and 2002.

Victims were between the ages of 9 and 15 and the abuse went on for at least 6 years in all 3 cases, said attorney Joe O’Connor. Complaints go as far back as 1971 but Gentile wasn’t removed until 2002 and was defrocked in 2005. *Source: Times Herald-Record, 12-10-17*

Legal Developments

Scott Kallal, 36, Kansas City, will go on trial on 2 counts of aggravated indecent liberties with a child, a judge ruled at a preliminary hearing. The alleged victim testified that Kallal, pastor at St. Patrick’s Catholic Church, fondled her breasts over her clothes twice in 2015 when she was 10.

It happened once at a graduation party and once at the parish hall gym, the girl testified. In the latter allegation, Kallal tickled her breasts, followed when she ran into a bathroom stall and carried her out to continue the touching. *Source: Kansas City Star, 12-9-17*

Allegations

Stanley Rosenfeld, 84, former assistant principal at Salanter Akiba Riverdale Academy, Bronx, NY, is accused of molesting a student in the 1970s, said an email to parents of students at the Orthodox Jewish day school.

He was convicted in 2001 of child molestation for abusing a 12-year-old bar mitzvah student while serving as cantor of Temple Am David in Warwick, RI, and was given a suspended sentence but served 18 months in prison after violating probation. *Source: JTA, 1-12-18*

Antonio Marfori, St. Cloud, MN, had his named added to the Catholic Diocese of St. Cloud’s 40-person list of priests credibly accused of sexual abuse. Marfori, placed on medical leave in 2010, was ordained in 1978.

Both alleged abuses occurred in the late 1970s while he taught at Cathedral High School, said Bishop Donald Kettler. *Source: St. Cloud Times, 1-10-18*

Mendel Levine, a Chabad Jewish rabbi in Nijmegen, is under investigation by the Organization of Jewish Communities in the Netherlands for alleged child sexual abuse in the U.S. Levine, in his 30s, came to the Netherlands in 2009 from Brooklyn, NY.

Brooklyn resident Meir Seewald alleges Levine molested him in 2000 at a summer camp where Levine was a counselor after he approached him “about a cut I had in my private area,” adding that Levine “then touched me there inappropriately. As well he used to walk around the mikvah (ritual bath) with my bunkmates with an erection.” *Source: JTA, 1-8-18*

Removed / Resigned

Peter Inzerillo, 74, a Massachusetts Catholic priest removed from ministry in 2002 for sexual assault of a 19-year-old man in 1985, has been defrocked by the Vatican at his own request. The Diocese of Worcester settled a civil suit for \$300,000 in 1999 but he wasn’t criminally charged. *Source: AP, 1-26-18*

Thomas Joseph, parochial administrator of the Church of St. Nicholas in Carver, MN, has been suspended during an investigation of an adult woman’s claim that Joseph had sexual contact with her several times over the span of 2½ years. *Source: Pioneer Press, 1-24-18*

Steven (Shmuel) Krawatsky, 40, a Judaic studies teacher at Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School in Baltimore, was fired after Jewish Week published a report he allegedly molested 3 boys, ages 7 and 8, at a day camp in 2016.

Suburban Orthodox Toras Chaim, the synagogue where Krawatsky led youth programs, announced his resignation as rabbi. Maryland Child Protective Services concluded there was “a preponderance of evidence” that sexual abuse took place. *Source: Times of Israel, 1-19-18*

David Jost, Lumberton, NJ, resigned as pastor of St. Paul’s Evangelical Lutheran Church. Bishop Tracie Bartholome told parishioners: “A number of weeks ago, I was contacted by a individual with a credible complaint your pastor engaged in an inappropriate relationship with an adult married woman, a member of this congregation, who is not his wife.” *Source: WTXF, 1-8-18*

Andy, Memphis, TN, was put on leave as teaching pastor at Highpoint Church after admitting sexual misconduct in 1997 when he was 22 and was a youth minister at a Baptist church in Texas.

Jules Woodson detailed in a blog what she said happened after Savage parked in a wooded area when he was taking her home from church after school. She was 17: “[H]e turned the headlights off. Suddenly, Andy unzipped his jeans and pulled out his penis. He asked me to suck it. I was scared and embarrassed, but I did it. I remember feeling that this must mean that Andy loved me. He then asked me to unbutton my shirt. I did. He started touching me over my bra and then lifted my bra up and began touching my breasts.”

Christian publisher Bethany House has canceled publication of Savage’s book “The Ridiculously Good Marriage.” He and his wife have 5 children. *Source: WREG, 1-6-18*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

THEY SAID WHAT?

(That's) God showing his grace on me. **Kathy Gilroy, a prominent anti-gambling crusader in Illinois who won \$25,000 playing a sweepstakes game at a local café.**
The Week, 1-12-18

Day in and day out on the radio, we Christians are bombarded with the bull, baloney and garbage from the atheists and the Freedom From Religion Foundation. . . . It is about time all of us Christians rise up and boycott all atheist-owned businesses. I hope all those who believe as the Freedom From Religion Foundation does and support that organization will have a lousy new year.
Letter to the editor
Lancaster (Pa.) Online, 1-14-18

When God tells me I got to do something, I got to do it. **Texas District Judge Jack Robison, intervening in jury deliberations to sway jurors to return a “not guilty” verdict in the trial of a woman accused of trafficking a teen girl for sex. The jury went against the judge’s wishes, finding Gloria Romero-Perez guilty and later sentenced her to 25 years in prison.**
Austin American-Statesman, 1-19-18

[Pence has] very solid evangelical credentials. We consider him to be . . . in our camp. **David Parsons, spokesperson for Christian Zionism’s International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem.**
Associated Press, 1-23-18

My country’s very first settlers also saw themselves as pilgrims, sent by providence, to build a new promised land. The songs and stories of the people of Israel were their anthems, and they faithfully taught them to their children, and do to this day. And our founders, as others have said, turned to the wisdom of the Hebrew bible for direction, guidance, and inspiration. **Vice President Mike Pence’s bible-rid-dled speech at the Knesset.**
Jerusalem Post, 1-22-18

There are people who do not understand and do not believe in the things we’re talking about right now. And there will be all the social media trolls and people that will scorn and mock and will ridicule the fact that we would call out to our creator at a time like this. **Kentucky Gov. Matt Blevin, after a school shooting in Marshall County, Ky., killed two teens and injured a dozen more, calling for a statewide day of prayer, saying he believes God intervenes on behalf “of his people” when they call out to him in prayer.**
Associated Press, 1-26-18

I personally feel blessed by the time I have spent serving our great state and would like to observe a time of prayer and fasting before God takes me on to the next part of my journey. **Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback, issuing a proclamation that called for a day of fasting and prayer on his penultimate day in office. Brownback is now am-**

bassador-at-large for international religious freedom.
Kansas City Star, 1-29-18

When he said, ‘In God We Trust’ — when my father mentioned ‘In God We Trust,’ the guiding principle of this country, no one stood. . . . There are things as Americans we should be united on. And if we can’t be united on God . . . **Eric Trump, talking on “Fox and Friends” the day after President Trump’s State of the Union address, about how Democrats were not standing and applauding enough.**
Raw Story, 1-31-18

The bible is different than the Quran. The idea of the bill is because of the specific impact the bible has had on history of our history, our founding, our culture, that the Quran has not had that impact. **Iowa State Rep. Skyler Wheeler, who co-sponsored a now-dead bill that would allow public schools to teach classes on the New Testament, after being challenged to allow other religions and religious subjects.**
The Friendly Atheist, 1-31-18

Inoculate yourself with the word of God. ‘Flu, I bind you off the people in the name of Jesus.’ Jesus himself gave us the flu shot. He redeemed us from the curse of flu. **Gloria Copeland, a member of President Trump’s faith advisory council, stating that belief in Jesus is enough to stop anyone from getting the flu.**
Yahoo News, 2-1-18

It’s an issue ONLY raised by interlopers fearful of Christian resistance to a homogenous thought-free society full of central control of all aspects of life. These people intend to remove individual liberty as an axiom of America. I’ll tell you that I believe this issue SHOULD be decided by the community in which the people with the issue lives, not interlopers who ride in from other lands to ‘help us blend in with the rest of the land’, or to ‘fix us’, so to speak. **Dennis Wayne Barcuch , City Commission candidate in Hobbs, N.M., on the potential removal of a Ten Commandments monument outside the local courthouse. The “interloper” he refers to is FFRF.**
The Friendly Atheist, 2-5-18

God called on them. **James and Betty Turpin, parents of David Turpin, who kept his 13 children malnourished and shackled, on why David and Louise Turpin had so many children.**
ABC News, 1-16-18

President Trump has never pretended to be a bible-banging evangelical. He is who he is. **Penny Young Nance, president of Concerned Women for America, over her lack of concern for Trump’s personal morals because of his support for the anti-abortion movement.**
New York Times, 1-20-18



FFRF ad airs on Anderson Cooper, Colbert shows

FFRF’s most popular television commercial was featured several times in February on one of CNN’s most high-profile shows. FFRF ran its memorable ad featuring “unabashed atheist” Ron Reagan on “Anderson Cooper 360°.” The spot aired twice on the show Mondays and Wednesdays from Feb. 5 to Feb. 25. FFRF’s commercial says: “Hi, I’m Ron Reagan, an unabashed atheist, and I’m alarmed by the intrusion of religion into our secular government. That’s why I’m asking you to support the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the nation’s largest and most effective association of atheists and agnostics, working to keep state and church separate, just like our Founding Fathers intended. Please support the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Ron Reagan, lifelong atheist, not afraid of burning in hell.” The ad also ran Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays on the “Late Show with Stephen Colbert” for three weeks. Unfortunately, due to network censorship, the ad was limited to 10 markets:

- Washington, D.C.
- Tampa, Fla.
- Phoenix
- Seattle
- Portland, Ore.

- Columbus, Ohio
- Milwaukee
- Austin, Texas
- Las Vegas
- Madison, Wis.

These are CBS-affiliated stations not owned by CBS. CBS Network, ABC, NBC and Discovery Science have all refused to air the 30-second spot. Although the Reagan ad ran last year on several regional CBS-owned stations, and was contracted to return, national CBS has clamped down. The audio version of the Ron Reagan ad is broadcasting on a major New York-area radio station: WCBS News Radio 880, which covers New York City and the surrounding region. It aired 75 times between Monday, Feb. 5, and Sunday, Feb. 25. “We’re pleased to present our message to so many different audiences, in spite of the constraints of censorship,” comments FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. The ad has been a major fount of publicity for FFRF and has helped bring in thousands of new members. “We’re delighted at how many folks we’ve been able to reach through this commercial that Ron Reagan kindly recorded for us,” adds Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

Pacifist, humanist Dr. Rudy Hecht dies

Longtime FFRF Member Rudolph “Rudy” Hecht, 90, of Madison, Wis., died on Jan. 23 of “complications from having too many birthdays,” as his obituary humorously stated. Rudy’s obituary called for donations to be made to FFRF, among other worthy nonprofits. Rudy was born on April 16, 1927, in Hamburg, Germany, to Otto Hecht and Rose Caro Hecht. At age 6, the family left Germany to escape the Nazis as German-Jewish Holocaust refugees. They landed first in Jerusalem, then Caracas, Venezuela, and finally Mexico City, where Rudy completed college and medical school at the National University of Mexico. In 1958, he married Ilse Heilbronn and settled in La Feria, Texas, where he began his private medical

IN MEMORIAM

practice as a general practitioner and surgeon. In 1973, the Hecht family moved to Madison, where Rudy was a physician for the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine. He was one of the pioneers in the Department of Family Medicine, where he trained many residents as the medical director of the Northeast Family Medical Center. Rudy was the honorary consul for Mexico to Madison and Dane County from 1973 to 2016. Rudy had a passion for secular humanism, pacifism, equality and social justice, making many volunteer medical trips to Latin America and elsewhere. In 1990, Rudy traveled to Iraq with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, carrying more than \$600,000 worth of donated medical supplies destined for the Children’s Hospital in Baghdad. His obituary ends with: “In accordance with his wishes, he will be going back to medical school,” as Rudy had donated his body to the UW body donor program to further the education of future doctors.



Rudy Hecht

Is that a threat?



Member Patrick Hughes of Pennsylvania saw this sign in the bathroom of a church in Pittsburgh and wondered: “Is this because both can make you sick?”

SECULAR INVOCATIONS

Tee Rogers
Florida
Legislature
Jan. 11, 2018



Tee Rogers

Tee Rogers, the humanist chaplain at the University of Central Florida, delivered an invocation prior to the start of the Florida State House, the first atheist to give a secular invocation in front of that body. Rogers writes, “A note of gratitude to Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith for intentionally inviting an atheist invocation, and to the Central Florida Freethought Community for their support.”

Here is the invocation:

It is an honor to represent your humanist, atheist and other non-religious constituents and colleagues with a secular invocation.

Those you serve, and those around us today, include people of different cultures and races, gender identities, levels of financial stability and backgrounds. They vary in physical and cognitive abilities. They speak many languages. They include people of many faiths and non-faith perspectives.

The deliberations in this chamber are of the highest consequence to the

people of Florida. As you work together toward solutions that address challenges facing our state, may you have the fortitude to make difficult choices while holding the needs of the diverse public at the forefront of your decisions.

While we are diverse, we are united by our common humanity.

As we seek to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. this month, I am reminded of his words: “The time is always right to do what is right.”

May your leadership be guided by integrity and compassion to uplift all people today and every day of this legislative session.

Thank you for your service and your work today to make a positive, meaningful difference for all.

“May your leadership be guided by integrity and compassion to uplift all people today and every day of this legislative session.”
— Tee Rogers

City moves church polling location



The church marquee in 2016 included attacks on secularism.

While church polling locations are common across the country, FFRF’s hometown of Madison, Wis., has taken affirmative steps to not alienate secular voters. On Jan. 16, the Madison City Council voted to move a polling location from a church to a public library. The council approved moving the Ward 31 polling location to Lakeview Library from St. Paul Lutheran Church.

FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott, who voted in the basement of the church for many years, complained to Madison officials about

IT PAYS TO COMPLAIN

using the church as a polling location. In 2016, the church’s marquee included messages that attacked secular Americans during the same week that citizens were voting at the church.

Wisconsin law provides that polling places “shall be public buildings, unless the use of a nonpublic building better serves the needs of the electorate.” FFRF asserts that the move to a more inclusive location is best for Madison residents.

Joseph
Richardson
Eustis (Fla.)
Commission
Jan. 18, 2018



Joseph Richardson

This isn’t the first time Joseph Richardson has given a secular invocation to the Eustis City Commission. In 2015, after concluding his invocation, Commissioner Anthony Sabatini took it upon himself to deliver a second invocation, this one highly religious. Sabatini’s invocation was not listed on the meeting agenda.

This time, following Richardson’s invocation, Sabatini could be heard saying, “God bless you.”

Here is Richardson’s invocation:

Mayor and Commissioners,

This past Tuesday was the 232nd anniversary of the Virginia Statue for Religious Freedom, a day we’ve come to know as “Religious Freedom Day.” Penned by Thomas Jefferson, the Virginia Statute was one of his three proudest achievements. We know this because of his specific instructions to include it on his gravestone along with “Author of the Declaration of American Independence” and “Father of the University of Virginia.”

This statute was the prelude to the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, guaranteeing everyone the freedom to believe in the religion of their choice or to reject them all.

Barely two pages long, the statute is worth reading from time to time to remind us of the importance of this freedom and the reasoning behind it.

This is the enacting clause just as he

wrote it: “Be it enacted by the General Assembly, that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect their civil capacities.”

This is the crux of the natural right that Jefferson asserts: that each of us is free to believe or not; that none is required to support the religious opinions of others; and that all are guaranteed full participation in civil matters regardless of religion or lack thereof.

Jefferson’s radically inclusive statute has stood as a lighthouse for 232 years, directing us toward a successful collective life.

Regardless of our individual beliefs, let us now welcome each other to participate in these communal efforts, respect each other as we work out solutions, and wish each other the best as we go our separate ways.

Thank you for your time and attention.

NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER
CONTEST

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

The person who gives the best secular invocation will be invited to open FFRF’s annual convention in 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

Sign up now for FFRF’s 41st annual national convention, Nov. 2-4 San Francisco, here we come!

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation in the city on the bay for its 41st annual convention!

FFRF’s annual national convention will meet in San Francisco from Nov. 2-4 at the Hyatt Regency, 5 Embarcadero Center, just two blocks from the bay.

The strong lineup of speakers and entertainers already includes “Myth-buster” Adam Savage, who’ll be receiving FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award, reserved for public figures who “tell it like it is” about religion.

Future issues of Freethought Today will update convention speakers as they are confirmed.

Confirmed speakers

Adam Savage is co-host of “Myth-Busters” on the Discovery Channel and is master of many trades. Savage has acted, designed, sculpted, anchored TV shows, and been an educator. Savage’s special effects have been on view in a dozen feature films, including the “Matrix” sequels and “Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace.”

John de Lancie, an actor, director, producer, writer, singer, musician, and voice artist, will be receiving FFRF’s first “Clarence” award — a statuette version of FFRF’s 7-foot statue of Clarence Darrow on display in front of the site of the Scopes trial, in Dayton, Tenn. De Lancie spoke at that dedication.

Well-known for portraying “Q” in the TV series “Star Trek: The Next Generation,” he has many film credits, including: “The Hand that Rocks the Cradle,” “The Fisher King,” “Fearless,” “Multiplicity,” “Women on Top” and “The Big Time.” De Lancie has appeared in numerous television shows including “The Librarians,” “Breaking Bad” and “The West Wing.”

Sarah Haider is a co-founder of Ex-Muslims of North America. Born in Pakistan and raised in Texas, she spent her early youth as a practicing Muslim. Haider directs EXM-NA’s Life Beyond Faith mini-documentaries, a series of video portraits of ex-Muslim atheists and humanists. She is also heading EXM-NA’s Normalizing Dissent tour, and travels the United States and Canada to cover a range of issues related to apostasy in Islam. She is currently a columnist for Free Inquiry magazine. In addition to atheism, Sarah is particularly passionate about civil liberties and women’s rights.

She will receive a Freethought Heroine Award.

Bailey Harris, 12, a sixth-grade student at Salt Lake City’s Open Classroom, will be receiving the \$5000 Beverly and Richard Hermsen Student Activist Award. When Bailey was 8, she was watching the episode of “Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey” in which host Neil deGrasse Tyson said, “The planets, the stars, the galaxies, we ourselves and all

of life — the same star stuff.” Inspired, she immediately went up to her family’s computer and started writing what would eventually become the beautiful picture book, *My Name is Stardust*. Her father, Doug Harris, gets a co-credit on the book. Her second book in the series, *Stardust Explores the Solar System*, will be released in the fall.

Leighann Lord, a veteran stand-up comedian, who will do stand-up routine at the convention. Lord has been seen on Lifetime, VH-1, Comedy Central, HBO and “The View.” She is a contributor to the Huffington Post and the author of *Dict Jokes: Alternate Definitions for Words You’ve Probably Never*

Heard of But Will Definitely Never Forget and *Real Women Do It Standing Up: Stories From the Career of a Very Funny Lady*. Lord was the New York City face of the African-Americans for Humanism outreach campaign sponsored by the Center for Inquiry and its Millions Living Happily Without Religion Campaign. Author Chris Johnson has featured her in *The Atheist Book: A Better Life*.

Debra Deanne Olson, who, with Dr. Craig West Wilkinson, just authored a book about her atheist grandfather, *The Honorable Culbert Levy Olson: Governor of California 1939-1943*. She is a political, environmental and peace activist and held volunteer positions on both of Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaigns. She was a national senior advisor and a fundraising consultant for the Kucinich for President campaign in 2003. She is founder of Peace Solutions.

Registration

FFRF registration, always a deal, is only \$60 per member, \$65 per companion, \$110 non-member, and students and children free. Take advantage of FFRF’s **meal and registration package** (see order form below, including Saturday Nonprayer Breakfast plus the Saturday Banquet Dinner) to save \$20 (and get a chance to socialize with other members). Friday night dinner and Saturday lunch are on your own. The menus for the two Saturday meals (with veggie, vegan and gluten-free options) are: **Breakfast** — Chef’s bakery selection, scrambled eggs, Hobb’s bacon, breakfast potatoes, juice and coffee.

Dinner — Potage Parmentier (potato leek soup), crispy shallots, chive crème fraiche, Champagne brown butter chicken, tarragon mushroom fond, Cipollini onion and Comte risotto, steamed broccolini, French pear tart, frangipane, vanilla cream.

Hotel info

Reserve rooms now to avoid disappointment! Rooms (at \$230) are being held for Friday and Saturday nights, and a slightly more limited number for Thursday early-birds. Phone directly to

make your reservations: toll free 1-888-421-1442 and use the code “Freedom From Religion Foundation.” Or go online at ffrf.org/convention2018 for full convention information or reserve hotel rooms directly at bit.ly/FFRF2018.

General schedule

Arrange your travel schedule for the convention’s expanded hours and to take in a little sightseeing as well. The official starting time is 1 p.m. Friday, Nov. 2, continuing through Saturday

night. FFRF’s membership and state representative meetings take place Sunday morning with a noon adjournment.

The convention will include irreverent music, complimentary appetizers on Friday afternoon and a complimentary Friday night dessert reception, plus the popular drawing for “clean” (pre- “In God We Trust”) currency on Saturday night.

Return the handy registration form (below) or sign up at: ffrf.org/convention2018.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION NATIONAL CONVENTION SAN FRANCISCO | NOVEMBER 2-4, 2018 2018 CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: 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 (Non-member accompanying member)	___\$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 (Non-member accompanying member)	___\$65	\$___
Non-member Or join for \$40 and save \$5	___\$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: