

# FREETHOUGHT TODAY



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Vol. 35 No. 4

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May 2018

## Major court victory! FFRF saves N.J. taxpayers millions

### State's Supreme Court upholds bar on funds to repair churches

FFRF has earned a huge victory in court that will save New Jersey taxpayers several millions of dollars by terminating an unconstitutional boondoggle.

The New Jersey Supreme Court, in a 7-0 decision April 18, upheld the state Constitution's ban against taxpayer funds being used for "building or repairing any church or churches." In *Freedom From Religion Foundation v. Morris County*, FFRF and member David Steketee filed suit in late 2015 against the county, challenging public grants of millions of tax dollars to repair or maintain churches. The state high court's ruling corrected a lower court's shocking refusal to apply the state Constitution's plain command.

FFRF and Steketee originally protested more than \$5.5 million in funding to churches since 2012 by the Historic Preservation Trust Fund. The lawsuit

specifically challenged \$1.04 million in allotments to Presbyterian Church in Morristown, which, in the words of the church, would allow "continued use by our congregation for worship services," as well as disbursements to St. Peter's Episcopal Church to ensure "continued safe public access to the church for worship." All of the churches that received the grants have active congregations.

FFRF contended the grants violate the unambiguous command of Article I, Paragraph 3 of the New Jersey Constitution that guarantees: "nor shall any person be obliged to pay tithes, taxes, or other rates for building or repairing any church or churches, place or places of worship, or for the maintenance of any minister or ministry, contrary to what he believes to be right." This taxpayer protection predates the creation of the United States and was seen by Thomas



The Presbyterian Church in Morristown, N.J., asked for \$1.04 million in grants from Morris County that would allow "continued use by our congregation for worship services."

See Victory on page 23



Museum of the Bible image

The Museum of the Bible recently opened in Washington, D.C. FFRF has sent officials a letter asking them to correct inaccuracies and misrepresentations.

## Museum fails to meet even low expectations

**FFRF's Andrew Seidel  
critiques D.C.'s new  
Museum of the Bible**

*This column first appeared on [patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow](http://patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow).*

By Andrew Seidel

### The good

Let's be charitable and do the exceptions first. Three things stood out.

First, the museum has a working reproduction of Gutenberg's printing press. A docent helped children print off their own pages, from Isaiah, on the press to take home. That was objectively cool. After all, the Gutenberg bible's historical significance is beyond question. That significance, though, is not because of the book's content, but because of the technology that produced it. Gutenberg's bible wasn't earth shattering; his movable type and press were.

Gutenberg was impressive.

Second, two massive bronze doors lead into the museum (which, according to staff, are not really doors as they don't open or close). Gutenberg's press produced text in two columns, and each door is a massive reproduction of one of those columns of text. That is impressive.

Finally, in a tiny display case called "The Bible and The Supreme Court," there appeared a Topps collectible card of Supreme Court litigant and champion of the First Amendment, Vashti McCollum. McCollum took a fight to that court over using public schools to preach religion — and won. The display case could have been better and more balanced, but I

See Seidel on page 6

## FFRF to bible museum: Don't bear false witness

FFRF has a message for the recently opened Museum of the Bible: Thou shalt not bear false witness.

FFRF has sent museum officials a letter unmasking serious inaccuracies and misrepresentations and asking them to correct the record.

On a recent visit to the museum, FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, accompanied by FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel, noticed significant factual problems. As well they could. A Pew 2010 survey revealed that atheists and agnostics scored best on religious knowledge, including biblical literacy. Barker, a longtime minister before "seeing the light," has debated exten-

sively on the bible. Gaylor's book on the treatment of women in the bible is called *Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So*.

At the museum's dedication ceremony, Executive Director Tony Zeiss boasted, "Our scholars vet everything that you'll see in the exhibits for accuracy and authenticity." The museum's "International Advisory Council" is charged with "appl[ying] a final layer of scrutiny to all materials to advise about the cohesiveness, accuracy, fidelity and cultural sensitivity of the museum's content." It is falling short on these fronts, says FFRF.

See Museum on page 6

Desperate. Trying too hard. Overdone. That's the Museum of the Bible.

The museum is the pet project of Steve Green, owner of Hobby Lobby.

FFRF and I have battled and beaten Green on the bible before. He wanted to put a class in Oklahoma public schools that was full of proselytizing, bad history and abysmal scholarship, so my expectations for the Museum of the Bible were low.

But I wanted to be impressed. I wanted to learn something. I wanted to be pleasantly surprised by a fair-minded presentation. With a few notable exceptions, however, the museum failed to meet even my low expectations.



Andrew Seidel



# Life goes swimmingly for former Olympian

**Name:** Rada Owen.  
**Where I live:** Los Angeles.  
**Where and when I was born:** Richmond, Va., in 1978.  
**Education:** B.A. in mass communication from Auburn University.  
**Occupation:** Swim coach and instructor.  
**Military service:** None, but I'm very thankful for those who do serve!

**How I got where I am today:** With a lot of support from my family, hard work and some natural ability, I was able to receive a full athletic scholarship to the school of my choice. I chose Auburn University, and from there I attained what is considered the pinnacle of my sport when I swam for the United States in the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia. Having the title of Olympian in front of my name presented more opportunities for me that I may not have had otherwise. However, I honestly didn't think I would end up with a career in the swim world; I initially wanted to be far from it. After venturing out in the workforce for a bit, I realized my forte, and my passion, is sharing the sport of swimming with others, so I returned "home" to the pool.

**Where I'm headed:** Probably to a pool! I'm quite content with where I am in life, but I hope in the future to be able help more people (and animals) who aren't as fortunate.



Rada Owen participated in the 2000 Summer Olympics and is a World University Games champion. She also was a 14-time All-American swimmer for Auburn.

**Person in history I admire and why:** JK Rowling. How she went from being a single mom in poverty to the first billionaire author who created a world so beloved by millions is the ultimate success story to me (though I don't necessarily measure success monetarily). Plus, I wish I had half of her Twitter wit.  
**A quotation I like:** "The hardest thing in this world is to live in it. Be brave. Live." — Buffy in "Buffy the

Vampire Slayer."  
**These are a few of my favorite things:**  
1) Poking around antique stores.  
2) Buffalo wings, which is the one food I can't let go of as I transition to eating more vegan.  
3) The charities Wings of Rescue, Swim Across America and Modest Needs.  
**These are not:** People who don't

## MEET A MEMBER

park properly. (It's the L.A. girl in me.)  
**My doubts about religion started:** As early as I can remember. I always felt weird and unusual that I couldn't wrap my head around the idea of a magic man in the sky. I couldn't understand why people didn't believe in Santa, yet believed in a god; it just didn't make any sense to me.  
**Before I die:** I would like to swim in all five oceans!  
**Ways I promote freethought:** I don't promote it too much, because of the nature of my job, but I do try to drop little freethought/nonbelief nuggets in any conversation that touch on religion, just to get people thinking. You never know how that may resonate with a person.



Rada Owen is a swim coach and instructor.

## FFRF welcomes 32 new Lifers

FFRF is proud to announce and recognize its 32 newest Life Members, two After-Life Members and two Immortals.

The new After-Life Members are James Dulak and Kris Fulmer. After-Life Membership is a tongue-in-cheek-named donation category of \$5,000 for those who want their donation to "live on" after them.

FFRF's 32 newest Life Members are Mary Arnold, Dr. Daniel R. Bowden, Andrew Broad, Meta Calder, Joel David, Lee Eberly, Susan Eberly, Michael Easterday, Barbara Freeman (gift from Susie York), Michael Galli, Susan Gilmore, Susan Gruen, Dr. Paul Heffron, Lucinda Hope (gift from Susie York), Dr. Karl A. Illig, Charles Ted Jackson, Steven Jervis, David Lippes, Paul Marcussen, Teresa Massagli, Brendan P. Merk, Alvin Miller, Jet Mitchell, Peter Norris, John Osberg, Colleen Pace, Bryan Rau,

Sherry Sheng, Maria Traversa (gift from Adam R. Rose), Karen Truskowski, Julia Whitsitt and one who wished to remain anonymous.

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

States represented are: Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Washington and Wisconsin.

The latest Immortals are Douglas Reynolds and Julia Fike Roberts. The Immortals category is a donation designation for those kind members who have contacted FFRF to report they have made provisions for FFRF in their estate planning. Thank you all!

## Editorial intern inspired by activism

### MEET AN INTERN

**Name:** Tolu Igun.  
**Where and when I was born:** June 28, 1998, in Detroit.  
**Family:** Parents Denny Igun and Lola Are and sister Moji (24).  
**Education:** I am currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree, studying psychology and philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I intend to graduate in the spring of 2019.  
**My religious upbringing was:** Christian. I grew up attending a non-denominational church.  
**How I came to work as an FFRF editorial intern:** I attended a Freethought Speaker Series at UW that featured Andrew Seidel, FFRF's director of strategic response. His talk fostered my interest with the organization and I reached out to become an intern.  
**What I do here:** Primarily, I write entries for Freethought of the Day, a compilation of biographies and quotes from freethinkers around the world and throughout history. I also help out wherever extra assistance may be needed.  
**What I like best about it:** I enjoy learning something new every day about groundbreaking freethinkers that I most likely would not have heard about otherwise. I am also inspired by the activism that these people do in whatever career or life path they have chosen, which allows me to ponder more about other potential goals I can strive for.  
**My interests are:** Art, history, journalism, social justice reform — really anything that gets me thinking.  
**My heroes:** The individuals who

Tolu Igun

have proven that they are willing to stand up for what they believe in and fight for positive change for others.

**These three words sum me up:** Positive, honest and intrigued.

**Things I like:** Music, traveling, reading books, research, writing, and meeting new people.

**My loftiest goal:** To start my own nonprofit organization.

**Fun fact:** I am on the figure skating team at UW-Madison and have been skating since I was 4 years old.

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

### 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](http://shop.ffrf.org)



# After deadly attack, fear still consumes me

*Jibon Ahmed is a photojournalist who helped atheist blogger and activist Avijit Roy and Bonya Ahmed get to a hospital after the machete attack that killed Roy in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 2015. This column has been translated from Bengali. Nonbelief Relief has offered Jibon a stipend.*

By Jibon Ahmed

Three years have gone by with little notice. During these years, I have spent many sleepless, terror-filled nights. This fear will chase me around as long as I live. I do not wish this day to occur in anybody's life. Every day, fear chases me. Before this, I never had a fear of death — ever.

To this day, it appears often before me like a movie. When this fear wakes me up at midnight, I wonder about what I am seeing in front of my eyes. I cannot hide. It is as if I still feel the warm brain of a dying man on my palms. Then I cannot control myself. I had never experienced such a brutal scene before.

Nobody was with me. Everybody left me. I understood, in this big city, if you are in danger, nobody stands by you. I cannot ever forget this memory.

It was 8:30 p.m. on Feb. 26, 2015. At that time, I worked for the photo agency Banglar Chokhe. After the day's work, I was relaxing and conversing with friends at a tea stall situated just next to the entrance gate where a book fair is held.

Suddenly, a woman's intense scream caught my attention. Through the bars of the fence, I saw a motorcycle lying on the road. A woman was lying right on the motorcycle with her head touching the ground. As soon as I saw this, I immediately came out of the enclosure. After getting through the main gate and proceeding a little further, I saw a congregation of people. When I pushed my way through the crowd, I saw the bloodied body of a man, wearing a red kurta, lying on the sidewalk. Blood was oozing out of his head and trickling down to the road.

I did not know what to do. I looked around and saw that the assembled people were looking at the scene silently. But they were not coming forward to help. There were few policemen there too, but they were also there as silent spectators.

I built up my courage and proceeded toward the woman who lay fallen on the road. I shook her shoulder a few times to get her up, but she was unconscious. She eventually responded, and looked at me with fearful eyes, imagining me as



Jibon Ahmed stands at the site where militants killed Avijit Roy and attacked Avijit's wife, Bonya Ahmed, on Feb. 26, 2015.

an attacker.

The woman had injuries on her head, with blood oozing out and streaking down to the corners of her two eyes. I became afraid looking at her eyes and took a few steps back. I cannot forget her terrible gaze. Then, the woman stood up and asked me what had happened there. Pointing with my fingers, I showed her the man lying on the sidewalk.

The woman cried out "Avi!" and embraced him. She kept saying, "Avi get up, nothing will happen to you. Avi, get up." At some point, she stood up and raised her hands to plead with the assembled crowd for its help.

When the woman was crying for help, the people were stepping back. At that moment, I brought out my camera and took a picture of the bloodied couple. As nobody came forward, I pushed through the crowd to get a motorized vehicle. We put them in there with the help of one or two onlookers.

As we were traveling to the hospital, the woman, Bonya Ahmed, held the body of her husband. I sat holding Avijit's head. His skull had been hacked by a machete, and I suddenly realized that parts of his brain had come out and were touching my palm. I moved my hand and pushed those parts inside.

By that time, my body was wet from

“Our first identity is that we are journalists. But we are also human beings. We have the sense of humanity and love for fellow humans.

— Jibon Ahmed

the blood that drained from Avijit's head. I didn't know human blood could be so warm. I can feel that heat to this day.

As we proceeded from the incident site to the hospital, Bonya was afraid that I had kidnapped them. She was pleading with me to release them; in exchange she would provide as much money as I would demand. Raising my camera, I repeatedly tried to assure her that I was a photojournalist, but she did not believe me.

On our way, there was a police checkpoint where the traffic stopped.

As soon as Bonya saw the police, she shouted for help saying that I had kidnapped them. I was afraid that I would be the victim of police harassment. To my surprise, I saw, behind us, a policeman on a motorcycle. This man was at the incident site and had seen the entire event. He signaled the check-point police to let us go and we arrived at the hospital.

Their treatment was arranged in the emergency ward of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. My photojournalist friends called me to advise me that I shouldn't have entangled myself in this incident. My job was to take pictures. Why did I get involved with this trouble? Even though I was a bit afraid after hearing this, my answer was that my first job



Jibon Ahmed

was to take pictures, which I had done, but then I came forward to help them as a common man, forgetting that I was a journalist.

I cleaned my bloodied T-shirt in the hospital and went back to my office. There I saw their names — Avijit Roy and Bonya Ahmed — on TV. I did not know them before. My boss advised me to hide in a place away from Dhaka for a few days. I did not agree with him and left the office.

By this time, my photos had gone viral on social media. Hundreds of comments were pouring in that accused me of taking pictures instead of helping them. I was being criticized in the TV talk shows also. Meanwhile, the police interrogated me a few times.

Under pressure from my bosses, I had to leave my job. They told me that they were not going to be responsible for my life. After Bonya got better, she told the investigating authorities that I had played no part in the incident, rather I had saved them that day. Still, nobody from the government contacted me.

Our first identity is that we are journalists. But we are also human beings. We have the sense of humanity and love for fellow humans. During our professional work, we encounter various incidents. Sometimes we have to risk our lives to do our job. Many times, notwithstanding our wishes, we cannot fulfill our humanitarian responsibility. This is because of some ethical rules that we need to follow. People still misunderstand us.

On that day, I helped the couple inspired by my humanitarian responsibility. I could have left the place after taking pictures, but my conscience would not let me do it. I did not know who they were, but I felt that I should step forward as a human being and that is what I did.

On Dhaka roads, many lie dead like Avijit, and nobody looks at them. We can understand, from this, how low our humanity and social responsibility have descended.

## Check out the lively ‘Freethought Matters’ TV show

If you haven't had a chance yet, check out FFRF's new television program, "Freethought Matters." The half-hour show has a talk-show format and includes notable freethinkers from around the country and world.

It airs Sunday nights at 11 p.m. in Madison, Wis., on CBS affiliate Channel 3. But if you're like most of FFRF's members and don't live in the Madison area, the shows are available to watch free on FFRF's YouTube channel ([youtube.com/ffrforg](https://youtube.com/ffrforg)) after broadcasting.

You can also watch FFRF's other video offerings on that channel, including the weekly "Ask an Atheist" and "Newsbite."

The first "Freethought Matters" show aired Jan. 7 with hosts Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF's co-presidents.

"We consider 'Freethought Matters' partly as an antidote to the Sunday morning church hour," Gaylor says. "But, mostly, we want to acquaint the community with the range of fascinating nonreligious authors and activists."



Photo by Chris Line

Larry Shapiro, left, professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, was a recent guest on FFRF's TV program, "Freethought Matters." Hosting the show are FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker.

The guests have included heavyweights such as Harvard evolutionary psychologist and bestselling author Steven Pinker, FFRF's honorary president; the

New York Times' newest columnist Michelle Goldberg; comedian Julia Sweeney; Nation columnist Katha Pollitt and Iranian-born secular London-based activist Maryam Namazie. Other guests have included science journalist and Los Angeles-based TV host Cara Santa Maria; Chicago black atheist activist Kimberly Veal; well-known atheist blogger Greta Christina of San Francisco; renowned sculptor Zenos Frudakis and American Indian composer Brent Michael Davids.

The debut guest was Chris Johnson, a photojournalist who produced the book, *A Better Life: 100 Atheists Speak Out on Joy & Meaning in a World Without God*, with a film version of the same name.

The director of the program is FFRF Videographer Bruce Johnson and the producer is FFRF Communications Coordinator Lauryn Seering.

FFRF extends thanks for camera help to FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line, and pinch-hitters Marian Herzog, Mike Remington, Mike Foley and Veronica Plum, Monica Schwartz and Kristina Daleiden.



# HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

## THE DESERT AT SHIRAZ

Come sing to me in the garden,  
Of a bowl and a lute and a kiss.  
Like the zephyrs that whisper in Eden,  
Sing of thrushes and blushes and bliss.  
Sing a tune of the blooming of jasmine,  
Of stars in the far morning air,  
Yearning arms in a tracery casement,  
And maidens ineffably fair,  
Of ambrosia and nectar and jewels,  
And meadows and magic and youth,  
Of ecstasy, tears, and avowals,  
And towers and trumpets and truth ...

Alas, with a crackle of crystal  
The silver streams muddy to lead,  
And the bulbuls and parakeets listen  
To the wail of an age that is dead.

Now passion is a pimp for any preacher,  
And spring is holding out for bigger tips.  
The nymphs are casting leers like any lecher,  
And a desert has buried our gardens and sighs  
with a blast from its hot prosy lips.

From Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie



© Philip Appleman.

Philip Appleman is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. He is editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Darwin*. He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both “After-Life” Members of FFRF. Phil’s books: [ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop).

# OVERHEARD

I’m not religious now, I would say, but there’s no way that you are raised in that environment, and also grow up singing that music, without it having an impact on your life.

**John Legend, discussing his religious upbringing while preparing to portray Jesus in “Jesus Christ Superstar” during a live television even on Easter.**  
*New York Times*, 3-29-18

This inability to correctly read Scripture is both a political and theological problem—and one that’s intrinsic to modern American Christianity. . . . White evangelical Christianity is built to cherry-pick, and the politicians of the Religious Right are particularly adept at doing it.  
**Dianna Anderson, reporter for Slate, in**

**her article, “Bad religion: Why do Republican politicians keep getting Scripture wrong?”**  
*Slate*, 4-6-18

If you were worried that the amount of money flowing into politics was bad for our democracy, imagine what will happen when you add a divine exception, allowing partisans to spend freely on behalf of their chosen candidates and causes under the cover of churches. . . . When challenged about their blatantly partisan activism, these groups invariably cry out that their religious liberty is under attack. It isn’t.  
**Author Katherine Stewart in an op-ed, “When is a church not a church?”**  
*New York Times*, 4-17-18

# Caption contest winner!

Congratulations to **David Norsen** for winning FFRF’s caption contest from the April issue.  
The winning caption is: **What a deal! Two fairy tales for the price of one!**  
The top runners-up, in no particular order, are:  
• Multi-level marketing gone wrong. — **Steve York**  
• Lettuce not into temptation, but deliver us from weevils.  
— **Judy Thomas**  
• Lepre-“con.” — **Joyce McChesney**  
• God’s love requires a lot of cabbage. — **Becca Challman**  
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](mailto:caption@ffrf.org).

# FFRF’s IT director fosters positive tech experiences

**Name:** James Phetteplace.  
**Where and when I was born:** Southern Wisconsin in 1971.  
**Education:** Attended Ripon (Wis.) College, Madison Area Technical College, and University of Wisconsin-Madison; sociology. I have many certifications, including professional trainer, project management, Leadership for Inclusivity, and as a trauma-informed parenting instructor. I’m a lifelong learner!  
**Family:** Wife (Tiffany) and one child.



James Phetteplace

**How I came to work at FFRF:** Previously I was the director of IT for the Willy Street Co-op in Madison, and was employed there for 11 years. After accomplishing many career milestones, I was ready for a new challenge! The most important aspect of the workplaces I choose is the mission and vision, and FFRF fit the bill for me.

**What I do here:** I am the director of IT, so it’s my duty to make sure that the technology needs of the organization are met.

**What I like best about it:** There are so many aspects of working for FFRF that I love. It’s hard to choose one! I would have to say it’s the people that I work with — they are kind, intelligent and very dedicated to the mission and vision of FFRF. I look forward to coming to work every day, which is such a privilege.

**What gets old about it:** Sometimes, in technology, you come across problems that are truly baffling! I enjoy being a problem-solver, but I get frustrated when I can’t immediately resolve an issue and it prevents a co-worker from getting their work done. I happen to be as tenacious as a bull terrier when faced with these challenges — I never give up.

**I spend a lot of time thinking about:** In the workplace, I spend a lot of time thinking about how I can make the experience of technology so excellent that my co-workers don’t even notice the tech. Additionally, I think about equity, diversity and inclusion in the workplace and have dedicated myself to that cause. This includes regular self-reflection about my own social identities and how it relates to others. I strive to become interculturally competent, and to deepen my skills with communication and adaptation, and to seek out (and value) difference. One of my social identities is as an atheist, and I use my experience of being considered “different” to better understand and empathize with those who have nondominant social identities.

**I spend little if any time thinking about:** Sports. Imagine that, a tech nerd who isn’t a sports fan.

**My religious upbringing was:** Messy. We were raised as Christians off and

on. We attended some United Methodist and Catholic churches over the years.

**My doubts about religion started:** When I was 12. Up until the age of 12, I was a devout Christian. I have an all-or-nothing personality, and I was all-in with Jesus, even more so than my immediate family. I was also obsessed with science, particularly astrophysics (stars, black holes, galaxies, big bang theory, etc.) In sixth grade, I came across an anthology of Greek mythology, read it cover to cover, and I had an epiphany — no one could argue that Yahweh is any more “real” than Zeus, so I was free to make up my own mind on the matter! Immediately, all of the contradictions between religion and science evaporated. I didn’t have to tie myself in knots to reconcile faith and reason if I eliminated faith from the equation. Some months later, I was in the backseat of my parents’ car, and they asked me point blank: “James, do you believe (in God)?” I confidently said “No,” and that was the end of the conversation. I feel lucky that they accepted me in that moment, and didn’t try to indoctrinate me any further.

**Things I like:** My family and friends, traveling, hiking/camping, kayaking, creative writing, music, reading, technology and science.

**Things I smite:** Willful ignorance. Stereotypes. Inequality and injustice. Coconut flakes (literally).

**In my golden years:** I hope to travel a lot with my wife Tiffany. We have a long bucket list of places to see when we retire.

**What is it like to be a foster/adoptive parent?:** I added this question, as it comes up all the time! People tend to be very curious about our experience. It can be very rewarding, but it is a big sacrifice and it comes with many challenges. If anyone is considering becoming a foster parent, here’s my advice: Learn as much as you can about trauma and how it impacts children, and take your time exploring the possibility before you start the certification process.

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



## A Nose Is A Nose Is A Nose

Mother, Mother,  
Tell me please,  
Did God who gave us flowers and trees,  
Also provide the allergies?

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation

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



# Clergy Project fills void after losing faith

FFRF Member John Compere is a former member of the ministry who is now the vice president of the Clergy Project, a group “for current and former religious professionals without supernatural beliefs.”

By John Compere

I couldn’t possibly identify the actual time when I became a believer. I know that I went down to the front of the church when I was 8 or 9 years old to shake my father’s hand (he was the minister) and say I was giving my heart to Jesus, but that was just what I had learned I was supposed to do.

This was the moment when I supposedly became a Christian, a new person, a born-again believer. I was baptized soon thereafter by my minister father. But nothing really changed.

You see, religion was not just a part of my life in my family of origin. It WAS my life. Everything revolved around the church. I didn’t mind. It was all I knew.



John Compere

I think I was 11 or 12 when I again made a trip down the church aisle to say that God had called me into ministry. I preached my first sermon when I was 15. It was on something like “God, Man, the Universe and the Meaning of Love,” a subject I, as a 15-year-old boy, knew a lot about!

People were kind and supportive and talked about what a wonderful representative of God I would turn out to be. But again, nothing changed.

I had imbibed deeply, from my earliest upbringing, in the notion, regularly pronounced in our home, that our only purpose for being in this world is to glorify God.

When I was ordained at age 18 while I was in college and began serving as pastor of a small rural church on the weekends, I was the fifth-generation Southern Baptist minister in my family. It was what I was “supposed” to do. As I wrote, I couldn’t possibly say exactly when I first began to believe in religion.

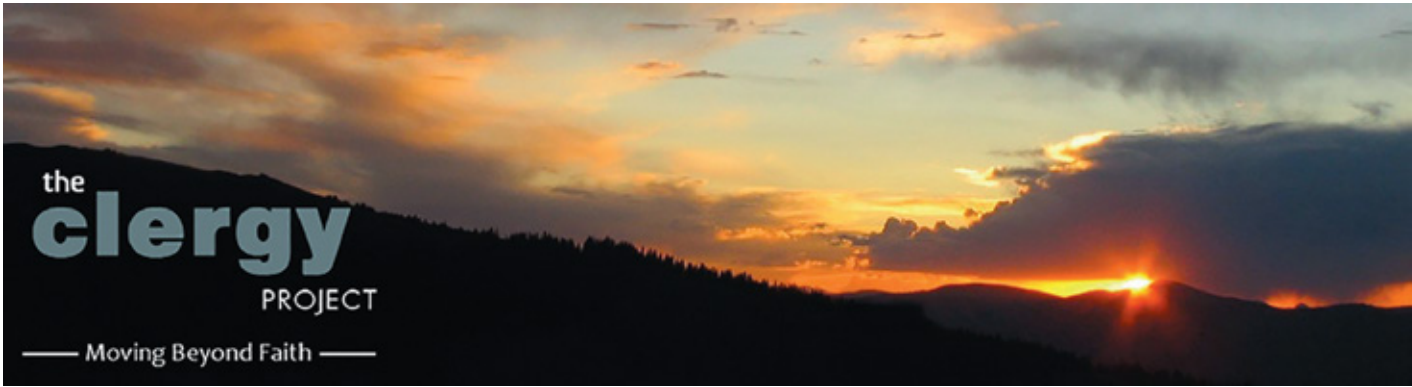
## Doubts arise

But I know precisely when I first began to doubt. It was in my sophomore year in college. I had been asked to fill the pulpit in a large First Baptist church. The minister was a friend of my father. I got another student minister to go to my little country church for that Sunday so I could fill this “prestigious” pulpit at this big city church.

Before the service started, I was walking back and forth in the luxurious pastor’s study, going over the sermon I was to deliver. As I often did, I was practicing by saying the sermon out loud. I heard myself delivering a standard line about how “if anyone didn’t accept Jesus as savior, s/he was doomed to spend an eternity in hell.” Suddenly, out of the blue, it occurred to me, “Can that possibly be true? Are all the folks who were unfortunate enough to have been born in a non-Christian country (or family or area) simply destined to have to suffer torture forever?”

Oh my! I couldn’t let myself dwell on that at the moment. I had to go deliver my sermon.

But that night, as I was driving back



to campus, the question returned. Don’t ask me why I had not ever asked that question before. I don’t know why I was so late asking such an obvious question.

Probably, as I said earlier, this was because religion was not just a way of life for me; it *was* my life!

In any event, I set out to try to find answers to this and other questions. I talked to my dad, to my religion professors, to my ministerial student friends. I got no satisfactory answers.

The essence of most of the answers I received was, “Doubt is natural, John. Go ahead and kick the rock. When you are finished kicking it, you’ll know it’s truly the Rock of Ages.”

But that didn’t turn out to be true for me. I kicked the rock, and I discovered it to be a huge pile of mythological mush!

Nevertheless, I continued on my predestined path as a young minister, serving two different rural churches while I was a college student. I even interrupted my studies to spend two stretches as a student missionary in Alaska (which was not yet a state, only a U.S. territory, in the 1950s), helping build church buildings in small Eskimo towns above the Arctic Circle.

While in seminary, I served as youth minister at the campus church and got to know my professors personally because their children were in my youth programs. I tried talking to many of them about my increasing doubts, without getting much help. I frankly think most of them were at least agnostics, if not closet atheists. But no one admitted it.

I often filled the pulpit at that campus church, which was very liberal for a Baptist church. At one point, I told the senior minister to please not ask me to fill the pulpit for a while.

The common phrase about effective sermons was to “preach from an overflowing cup.” I told the minister that if I preached at that time, I would only be banging an empty cup against the lectern. For sure, my cup was not overflowing!

After receiving my seminary degree, I served two different churches for a total of seven years. I continued my study of religion, and my doubts about its authenticity grew apace.

I concluded that if I continued in ministry, I would become like so many other well-educated clergy: publicly phony and privately cynical. Not a smart way to live out your life.

## Kept nonbelief a secret

When I finally resigned my last church, I didn’t tell the congregation that I was no longer a believer. I thought that would be too cruel. I only told them that I was doing a lot of pastoral counseling and that I realized I needed to become a more effective change agent.

And to do that, I was going back to graduate school to get an M.A. and Ph.D. in clinical psychology. That was the truth.

It just wasn’t the whole truth.

Five years later, at age 37, I had my doctorate in psychology and began teaching at Wake Forest University and Medical School, having a private clinical practice, and occasionally speaking on psychology you can use! My years in the pulpit helped me turn that professional speaking into a full-time career.

I learned about FFRF long after I had left the ministry and joined as soon as I learned about it. That led to my being among the first 44 members accepted into The Clergy Project as it was formed on March 20, 2011. By then I was retired and had written a book about my deconversion, *Outgrowing Religion: Why a Fifth-Generation Southern Baptist Minister Left God for Good*.

The Clergy Project was the brainchild of FFRF Co-President Dan Barker and Richard Dawkins, along with help from Daniel C. Dennett and Linda LaScola. The Dawkins Foundation provided the

money to get the project online, and FFRF took us under its wing until we became our own 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

We are currently at around 850 participants, all of whom must be either currently a religious professional or a former religious professional. All must also have experienced their own deconversion, since we are not in the business of trying to get anyone to leave the faith or her/his ministry.

Approximately 25 percent of our applicants are still in active ministry when they apply to join The Clergy Project. Many of these participants find a way to leave ministry after becoming a part of The Clergy Project, so their membership status changes from “active” to “former.” The number of Clergy Project members who are still active as religious professionals is 146.

We conduct an extensive phone (or Skype) interview before admitting anyone to our group, specifically to be sure the person is or has been an actual religious professional, not just active like a deacon or Sunday school teacher. Plus, all applicants must be comfortable identifying themselves as no longer believing in the supernatural.

## Difficulty of change

The difficulty of changing out of a ministerial career to a secular one can hardly be overstated, perhaps the most difficult career transition ever. Religious believers have a terribly difficult time with the fact that a trusted religious leader no longer believes.

So, former religious professionals often not only lose their jobs and salary; they often lose their marriage, their fam-

ily, friends and community respect.

One of the few Muslim imams who applied for membership in The Clergy Project said, “If it were to become public knowledge that I no longer believed, I would not only lose my career; I’d lose my head — literally!”

Now about to complete the seventh year of our existence, The Clergy Project has participants from all 50 states plus Puerto Rico. Although most of our group lives in the United States, we have members from 42 different countries.

By far the majority are males (86 percent), but this is not the result of any discrimination on our part against female applicants. Rather, it is the result that most religious communities have restricted “ordained” religious professionals to males throughout the centuries.

The Clergy Project is an all-volunteer organization. We have no paid staff. In fact, many of us make a monthly financial contribution so we’ll have enough funds to keep our operation going. Plus, we are happy to receive donations from people (like members of FFRF) who support our work.

The Clergy Project’s mission is to “provide support, community and hope to those current and former religious professionals who no longer hold to supernatural beliefs.” We do not actively seek new members; rather we are there to respond to the needs of those who seek us out.

If you go online to read about The Clergy Project, you will find a post by the current president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Albert Mohler. The post is titled, “The Sad Charade of The Clergy Project.” In this post, he says, “The Clergy Project is a magnet for charlatans and cowards who, by their own admission, openly lie to their congregations, hide behind beliefs they do not hold, make common cause with atheists.” He then goes on to claim there are two kinds of doubt — faithful doubt and pernicious doubt, with faithful doubt leading to a deeper understanding of the truth, while pernicious doubt leads to, among other things, cynicism and despair.

## It’s OK to doubt if . . .

In other words, it’s OK to doubt if you know where you’re going to come out before you begin questioning what you’ve been led to believe. That’s hardly a genuine freedom to question long-held assumptions. “Charlatans and cowards,” he says.

Compare that accusation to this heartfelt excerpt from the bio of one of our Clergy Project members, whose identity is not revealed for obvious reasons:

“All my life, I tried everything to get God to love me. I prayed, fasted, attended church, and continued to try to convince God I was worth loving. I became a Methodist clergy because I was very good at public speaking and

See Compere on page 23



# Seidel

Continued from page 1

was intrigued by the Topps card of Mrs. McCollum, even though I haven’t been able to find one of my own.  
Mrs. McCollum is Topps.  
That’s about it.

## The bad

The rest of the museum felt like it was trying too hard to prove something that isn’t there.  
I spent most of my time on the second floor, which is meant to show the “Impact of the Bible in America.” It argues that “the bible helped inspire the country’s ideas about democracy and the belief that religious liberty was essential to its success. It influenced many national debates, including the abolition of slavery and campaigns for civil rights.”

On this floor, the museum’s desperation begins to show. It claims the bible influenced fashion because crosses and religious art appear on clothing. I guess.  
The exhibit on the bible’s influence in Hollywood is just a string of clips shown in a mini-theater.  
From religious movies like the “Ten Commandments” to “X-Men 2,” which simply shows a Catholic character reciting the Lord’s prayer, to a Book of Revelation misquote in “Ghostbusters,” the clips fall short of the goal. And, given American Christianity’s insistent attacks on Hollywood as being anti-Christian, the exhibit seems a bit fatuous and self-contradictory.  
Then there is the ride. Yup, a ride. “Washington Revelations” is a simulated flight over D.C. in which you “fly” to various landmarks and “learn” about the bible’s influence on those monuments as the “wind” ruffles your hair.  
In this ride, the museum truly re-



Photo by Andrew Seidel

**The story of the Gutenberg press is one of the few things the Museum of the Bible gets right.**

vealed a bias it had been trying to hide beneath a layer of pseudo-scholarship. Perhaps the most egregious example of this attempt to prove an influence where none exists is when the ride claims that the Book of John influenced Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. The ride explains:  
“In his Gettysburg Address, President Lincoln drew inspiration from the bible: ‘that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.’ John 16.”  
This is simply not true. Read both the texts yourself (they’re only a few hundred words).  
The ride also claims that a quote from Thomas Jefferson’s “Notes on the State of Virginia,” which appears in his memorial, refers to Psalm 145:17-19. It

doesn’t.  
This isn’t the only problem. The ride concludes at the top of the Washington Monument, telling viewers, “Laus Deo or ‘praise be to God’ is carved into the very tip of the Washington Monument” with the supposed bible reference, “Psalm 146:1-2,” onscreen. But if that’s a Latin phrase from that verse of the bible, it should appear in the Latin translations of Psalm 146. It does not. The phrase is not in any of the Latin bible translations available.  
The ride also deliberately conflates government monuments with privately erected monuments, including one in Arlington National Cemetery and some quotes on Union Station, to give the impression of a greater influence than otherwise exists.  
At the very least, I was hoping to see some cool history. But so many of the exhibits I got excited about turned out to be reproductions or facsimiles. It made me wonder if the more legitimate and established institutions were reluctant to get in bed with the museum, if only because it infamously purchased thousands of artifacts ISIS smuggled out of Iraq.

## And the ugly

When you tire of the museum desperately throwing itself at you like a randy drunk at Mardi Gras, you exit through the gift shop.  
Here’s where Steve Green, purveyor of cheap religious trinkets made in China and marked up to absurd prices, lets his religious flag fly. The gift shop stock seemed higher quality than the average garbage one finds in Hobby Lobby, but it was still overpriced. For all your chintzy crystal needs.

Here, too, the Museum of the Bible sets aside its manufactured veneer of scholarship and ecumenicalism. On the bookshelf is a volume by Steve Green called *Faith in America*. The book’s cover features one of Hobby Lobby’s deliberately misleading Fourth of July advertisements. The book is full of these misleading quotations and largely features Green recounting a conversation with the Christian propagandist David Barton.  
Green’s book is light on content: It’s really just showcasing Hobby Lobby’s ads. These ads are meant to appear historic, but deliberately edit and alter the Founding Fathers’ words in subtle ways to change their meaning and push the “U.S. as a Christian nation” narrative. It’s a perfect metaphor for the museum as a whole.  
The Museum of the Bible is free, but somehow is still not worth the price of admission.



Photo by Andrew Seidel

**Andrew Seidel, standing outside the Museum of the Bible, readies himself for what awaits inside.**

# Museum

Continued from page 1

FFRF is calling upon museum officials to suspend a five-minute, \$8 ride named “Washington Revelations” that is on the second floor. Exhibits on that floor are billed as demonstrating “the enormous influence the bible has on nearly every aspect of life.” Throughout the ride, and indeed throughout the entire second floor, the museum stretches the truth to argue for a biblical influence on our secular government that is superficial or absent. Some of these quotes do not even come from or were not influenced by the bible, while others do not demonstrate the biblical influence the museum claims.  
“It should be possible for the museum to make its case that the bible is a well-known and well-quoted book without resorting to exaggeration, bowdlerizing or outright fabrication,” Barker and Gaylor write. “In the interests of intellectual honesty, the record needs to be corrected. These seemingly deliberate distortions call into question



Photo by Andrew Seidel

**Despite this painting showing George Washington kneeling in prayer at Valley Forge, historians agree that it never happened.**

the entire fidelity of the museum.”  
FFRF is pleased to see Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s “The Woman’s Bible” mentioned in the museum. But the deceptive marketing of Stanton, an arch-critic of the bible, as if she were inspired to work for women’s rights and women’s votes by the bible itself, is shocking, say the FFRF co-presidents. Stanton was an agnostic who penned an 1896 essay entitled, “The Degraded Status of Woman in the Bible.” The title says it all, but she was also explicit within the book: “So far from woman owing what liberty she does enjoy to the bible and the church, they have been the greatest block in the way of her development.” The FFRF co-pres-

idents overheard a docent tell a tour group that Stanton was inspired by the bible in her work for women’s suffrage. “Nothing could be further from the truth,” they note.  
There are problems in the museum’s depiction of the country’s founders, too. In a video recording of two actors reading Thomas Jefferson and John Adams quotes, the sayings by Jefferson in particular are bowdlerized.  
One of the few pieces in the museum that is not a facsimile is Arnold Friberg’s 1975 oil painting (on loan to the museum) of George Washington kneeling in prayer at Valley Forge. The prayer did not happen. Historians agree on this point.

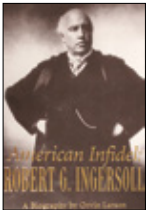


Photo by Andrew Seidel

**An image of the biblical Samson adorns one of the walls of the museum.**

The museum does have a few redeeming features. There is an exhibit showing a photograph of Vashti McCollum (a past FFRF honorary director) reading a newspaper announcing her 1948 historic win before the U.S. Supreme Court. The accompanying text notes: “The court found, ‘beyond all question,’ that the First Amendment bans religious instruction in public schools.”  
But such positive aspects are far outweighed by the negatives.  
In general, the museum appears to be relying on the perceived superficiality and short attention span of its target audience to create an exaggerated impression of the social and historical influence of the bible. The record needs to be corrected, FFRF co-presidents assert, for the museum to live up to its promise of “accuracy and authenticity.”

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



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

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



## IN THE NEWS

# Study: More government, less religious belief

Researchers have shown that better government services are linked to lower levels of strong religious beliefs.

The study, "Religion as an Exchange System: The Interchangeability of God and Government in a Provider Role," was published April 12 in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

Basically, the model states that if people can get what they need from the government, they're less likely to turn to a religion or a divine power for help.

Authors Miron Zuckerman and

Chen Li of the University of Rochester and Ed Diener of the Universities of Utah and Virginia wrote that their findings suggest "that if the function that religiosity provides can be acquired from some other source, the allure of religion will diminish."

The study also showed a delayed link between government services and levels of religiosity. In one example, between 2008 and 2013 in the United States, "better government services in a specific year predicted lower religiosity one to two years later," researchers wrote.

"If a secular entity provides what people need, they will be less likely to seek help from God or other supernatural entities. Government is the most likely secular provider," the researchers concluded. "Better government services were related to lower levels of religiosity."

The findings "imply that the government can provide an extra layer of security . . . that might help people cope

with future needs, both expected and unexpected, and as such, might reduce dependence on God or other supernatural entities," researchers wrote. "If the benefits acquired in the religious exchange can be acquired elsewhere, religion becomes less useful."

In 2013, Zuckerman, the paper's lead author, published a study with other Rochester researchers finding that the more intelligent someone is, the less strong his or her religious beliefs tend to be.

## Nonbelievers on the rise in Europe

A recent survey shows that a majority of young adults in 12 European countries have no faith, with Czechs coming in as the least religious of those countries.

The survey of 16-to-29-year-olds found that 91 percent of that age group in the Czech Republic report they have no religious affiliation. Between 70 percent and 80 percent of young adults in Estonia, Sweden and the Netherlands also say they are nonreligious.

The most religious country in Europe is Poland, where 17 percent of young adults define themselves as non-religious, followed by Lithuania at 25 percent.

The figures are published in a report, *Europe's Young Adults and Religion*, by Stephen Bullivant, a professor of theology and the sociology of religion at St Mary's University in London.

Religion is "moribund," he said. "With some notable exceptions, young adults increasingly are not identifying with or practicing religion."

## No 'atheist' chaplains, lawmakers tell Navy

A Navy board determined that Jason Heap, a secular humanist, was qualified for the chaplain corps until Congress stepped in.

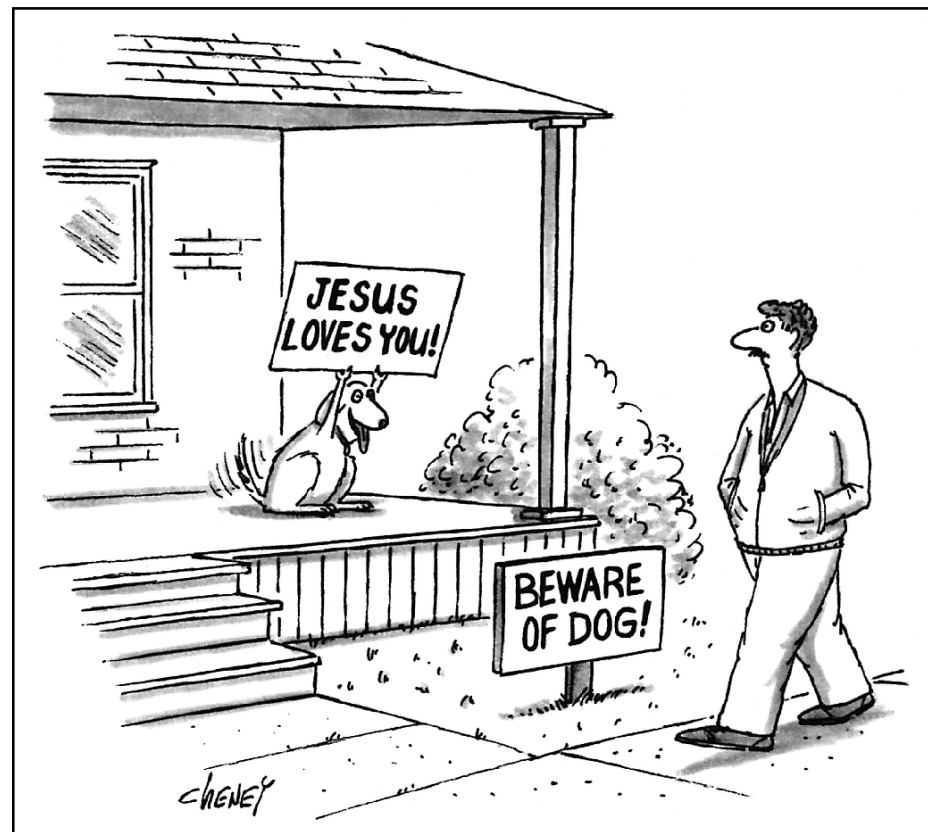
Once lawmakers got wind that Heap's application had advanced, they acted to get it rejected. Forty-five Republican representatives signed a March 9 letter to the chief of naval personnel stating, "We are concerned that the Navy is taking steps to expand the chaplain corps beyond its focused purpose . . . the chaplaincy was designed to facilitate the exercise of religious belief, not philosophical belief."

## GQ lists bible as a book 'you don't have to read'

The editors of *GQ* recently put together a listing of "21 Books You Don't Have to Read" after they "realized that not all the Great Books have aged well."

Here is what it said about the bible: "The Holy Bible is rated very highly by all the people who supposedly live by it but who in actuality have not read it. Those who have read it know there are some good parts, but overall it is certainly not the finest thing that man has ever produced. It is repetitive, self-contradictory, sententious, foolish, and even at times ill-intentioned."

Other books on the list include *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Catch-22*.



## Va. GOP leader dumped after Christianity claim

Virginia's Republican Party has booted a member of its leadership whose controversial remarks underscored divisions in the era of President Trump. Fredy Burgos was voted off the State Central Committee.

Burgos faced a backlash from party leaders when he posted a Facebook comment saying that only Christians are fit to run for office. The comment was viewed as anti-Semitic because Burgos had been campaigning for Tim Hannon in his successful bid over Mike Ginsberg, who is Jewish, to become the party's committee chair in Fairfax County.

## 'In God We Trust' in all Louisiana schools?

A bill unanimously advanced through the state Senate Education Committee March 22 would require each public school in Louisiana to display the motto "In God We Trust."

The bill, introduced by Sen. Regina Barrow, would require each school district to display the national motto in each school by the 2019-20 school year.

"We have an obligation to ensure students have that introduction because we cannot always assume that it's necessarily happening at home," Barrow said.

The Tennessee Legislature recently passed a similar bill that is heading to the governor's desk for signature. Similar legislation also has popped up in Arkansas, Florida, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Wyoming.

## Judge: Humanism a faith group in N.C. prisons

The North Carolina prison system must recognize humanism as a faith group and allow its adherents behind bars to meet and study their beliefs, a federal judge ruled.

The American Humanist Association and a North Carolina inmate serving a life sentence for murder sued state Department of Public Safety officials in 2015.

They accused prison leaders of violating the religious establishment and equal protection clauses of the Constitution by repeatedly denying recognition of the requests of the inmate, Kwame Jamal Teague.

In the order, U.S. District Judge Terrence Boyle wrote that prison officials failed to justify treating humanism differently from those religions that are recognized behind bars.

Federal prisons began recognizing humanism as a faith group in 2015 after similar litigation was filed.

## N.Y. Jewish schools get special considerations

New York lawmakers accused state Sen. Simcha Felder of basically holding the state's \$168 billion budget hostage until the state agreed not to interfere with the curriculum at the private Jewish schools, known as yeshivas. Critics have accused the schools, which focus on the study of traditional Jewish texts, of leaving students without a basic command of English, math, history or science.

When the final budget passed, the legislation included special stan-

dards for schools with especially long school days, bilingual programs and nonprofit status — in other words, yeshivas.

While the bill broadened the criteria for evaluating the so-called "substantial equivalency" of the schools' curriculum to the public school version, it also for the first time granted the state education commissioner explicit authority to evaluate that equivalency — a power previously reserved for individual school districts. Critics have suggested that school officials in New York City have ignored the subpar education at yeshivas because of the Jewish community's political clout.

## Commandments display reinstalled in Arkansas

A Ten Commandments monument has been replaced and reinstalled at the Arkansas Capitol on April 26 after the first version was destroyed when a driver plowed into it.

State Sen. Jason Rapert, who sponsored the original monument, founded the American History and Heritage Foundation, which raised over \$85,000 for a new monument, and which will include concrete barriers for protection.

The original monument, which was also put up at private expense, was destroyed in June when a Christian driver hit it with a car less than 24 hours after it debuted.

Michael Tate Reed II was accused of the crash but was declared unfit to stand trial in November, according to Arkansas Online. FFRF and others plan to sue over the action.

## White evangelical men strongly support Trump

A record number of white evangelical Christians say they support President Trump.

According to a poll from the Public Religion Research Institute released April 19, 75 percent of white evangelicals said they had a favorable view of the president and just 22 percent saying they had an unfavorable view.

And white evangelical men are the most likely of that group to back the president, with 81 percent holding a favorable view of Trump, compared with 71 percent of white evangelical women.

This is a dramatic jump in support for Trump when compared to the rest of the population, with a recent poll from ABC News/Washington Post putting the president's approval rating at just 40 percent.



## FFRF NEWS

# FFRF takes on Trump’s travel ban

On March 30, FFRF filed an amicus brief before the U.S. Supreme Court opposing the latest version of President Trump’s travel ban on immigration from several Muslim-majority countries.

Never in the history of the United States have our immigration policies and procedures been used to deny opportunity to religious groups and to favor a particular religion, FFRF asserts. The current administration’s orders and proclamation regarding a ban on travel targeting six majority-Muslim countries, motivated by the religious makeup of those countries, sullies that history. The purpose is to codify religious discrimination to further the myth that the United States is a Christian nation rather than a pluralistic society built on the hard work of immigrants and refugees of all religions and none at all.

The Trump administration’s history of excluding from entry to the United States immigrants and non-immigrants from selected majority-Muslim countries violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, which FFRF works to protect and defend. FFRF notes that the order’s underlying purpose is religious: to ban a religious minority (Muslims) and to favor Christians. The brief also makes the contention that the travel ban contravenes Article VI of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits a religious test for office or public trust. It would create precedent that could be used to target not only religious minorities, but also the significant minority today that identifies as nonreligious.

The order is not tailored to address the president’s supposed purpose, FFRF maintains. Less than a quarter of Muslim-Americans involved in violent extremism of any kind have family ties to the six countries designated in the order.

For over a year, the Trump Administration has engaged in a campaign of religious discrimination and favoritism that will not stop until the Supreme Court unequivocally strikes down its religious purpose as unconstitutional. Trump has never recanted calling his immigration policy a “Muslim ban,” and he has never disavowed such a purpose when issuing the original and follow-up orders.

After issuing his second executive order on the ban, Trump stated, “[p]eople, the lawyers and the courts can call it whatever they want, but I am calling it what we need and what it is, a TRAVEL BAN!” He also described the second order as a “watered-down version of the first order,” which had been found unconstitutional by the 4th and the 9th U.S. Circuit Courts of Appeal. (FFRF filed an amicus brief in those cases that were before the Supreme Court last fall, as well.)

Trump issued his third executive order on Sept. 27, 2017, which contained the same travel ban intent as in the first two orders. He repeatedly linked the current executive order to previous orders, calling it a “larger, tougher, and more specific” ban.

Trump’s statements show that each of the travel ban orders was motivated by a desire to give preference to one favored religion and to discriminate against unpopular religious minorities.

### Nigerian atheists start library



**Dominic Omenai, holding Dan Barker’s book, *Free Will Explained*, stands with an unidentified member of the Atheist Society of Nigeria. Omenai says the Atheist Society is starting a freethinking library, and FFRF has helped out by sending it some freethought books. The group also has enlisted the aid of Atheist Alliance International in getting a book drive going.**

## First-ever Congressional Freethought Caucus launched

FFRF is celebrating a major milestone in Congress for secular representation. Several representatives have announced the formation of a Congressional Freethought Caucus that will focus on promoting secular values and will give a voice to freethinking voters.

The new caucus was fittingly announced by Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., the only openly nontheistic member of Congress, while accepting the Secular Coalition of America’s Visibility Award last Wednesday. The mission statement of the Congressional Freethought Caucus is “to promote public policy formed on the basis of reason, science, and moral values; to protect the secular character of our government by adhering to the strict Constitutional principle of the separation of church and state; to oppose discrimination against atheists, agnostics, humanists, seekers, religious and nonreligious persons, and to champion the value of freedom of thought and conscience worldwide; and to provide

a forum for members of Congress to discuss their moral frameworks, ethical values, and personal religious journeys.”

Nonreligious Americans — the so-called “Nones” — make up about one-quarter of the country but are massively underrepresented in legislative chambers. FFRF applauds Huffman and the other members of the Freethought Caucus for openly bucking the political tradition of throwing atheists and other freethinking constituents under the bus.

Other members of the Congressional Freethought Caucus include Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Mich., Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Calif., Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., and Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md. FFRF hopes that additional representatives will join their lead.

“We are delighted at the formation of a freethought caucus in Congress,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Finally, the significant portion of Americans who are not religious will have representation in Congress.”

## FFRF defends ‘blasphemous’ TV show

FFRF is standing up for a popular TV show accused of blasphemy.

Louisiana state Sen. John Milkovich and two Baptist preachers, Larry Pridmore and Edward Roberts, have recently urged “the Louisiana Office of Economic Development to flatly reject [a] request for a \$16.2 million tax refund check” for the AMC show “Preacher.” The complainants have stated their case plainly in the last sentence of their letter: “[T]he larger truth is that there is never a good time to reward production companies that trash our Louisiana values, mock our beliefs — and dishonor Christ.”

The trio is complaining about an episode of the show that aired many months ago, on Aug. 21, 2017, claiming it shouldn’t be eligible for tax credits intended to encourage film production to Louisiana. They attempt to argue that one scene of less than five minutes, in an episode 44 minutes in

length, in a season of 13 episodes, in a show with three seasons, constitutes “pornography” and that therefore all the tax incentives for the entire series should be revoked. The scene in question portrays Jesus having sex with a woman the night before he is to be crucified, and it is graphic with graphic dialogue. But graphic is not the same as pornographic and, in any event, the complainants’ true concern is a perceived insult to their religion, not the sexual content.

It’s obvious that the attack on the show as pornography is a pretext, FFRF charges. The complainants are seeking to penalize AMC and “Preacher” for the nonexistent crime of “blasphemy.”

# Chaplain who censored Barker to step down

FFRF’s lawsuit to have nonbelievers included in our nation’s legislative chambers is not immediately affected by the announcement that the current House chaplain will retire, reportedly at the urging of Speaker of the House Paul Ryan.

“The in-house chaplain of the U.S. House of Representatives is stepping down [in May] after seven years in the post,” Roll Call reports. “Rev. Patrick J. Conroy, 67, a Catholic priest of the Jesuit order, has served in the post since 2011.”

Conroy is the defendant in a historic lawsuit filed by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker for barring him as an atheist from delivering a guest invocation. Also named as a defendant in *Barker v. Conroy* is House Speaker Paul Ryan, who oversees the chaplain’s office and who is also stepping down at the end of the current congressional term.



Dan Barker

FFRF filed an appeal last December of a district court ruling that legitimized the current congressional marginalization of nonbelievers. U.S. District Judge Rosemary M. Collyer ruled in October against opening up the hallowed sanctum of our country’s lawmaking to freethinkers.

The case began when U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., who represents Barker’s district in Madison, Wis., requested that Barker give the opening invocation. Usually, such sponsorship is all that is necessary to be named guest chaplain.

But Conroy purposefully stonewalled. Although the chaplain has no written requirements for guest chaplains, Conroy required proof of Barker’s ordination, which Barker, a former minister, produced. Then Conroy declared that Barker could not deliver the opening invocation because he lacks belief in “a higher power.” Barker responded by submitting a draft of his invocation, in which he noted that he could indeed invoke a “higher power”: “There is no power higher than ‘We, the People of the United States.’”

### Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning



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

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**Freedom depends on freethinkers**



# FFRF gets partial win in school nativity case

An appeals court decision by a three-judge panel on March 23 in a crucial FFRF Indiana case is a partial victory for our secular Constitution.

Each December, for nearly half a century, the Performing Arts Department of Concord High School in Elkhart, Ind., staged several highly religious nativity performances of its “Christmas Spectacular.”

FFRF and the ACLU of Indiana sued in the fall of 2015 on behalf of parents and students who were ostracized by the annual nativity pageant, which involved students acting out the biblical story while a teacher read aloud from the New Testament. When U.S. District Judge Jon DeGuilio issued a preliminary injunction in late 2015 against the live nativity, the school responded by placing mannequins on stage as a static nativity scene, while students performed the same Christmas songs, albeit without employee-led bible readings.

DeGuilio ruled last year that the live nativity was “an impermissible message of endorsement,” but that the school could continue displaying its static nativity scene. FFRF, the ACLU, and the ACLU of Indiana filed a brief before the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals contending that, given the previous version of the nativity performance, the modest changes made by the district would be viewed by the public as an attempt to preserve the school’s 45-year tradition of First Amendment abuse.

While the 7th Circuit decision ac-

knowledgeed that it was a close call and that its ruling was confined to the specific facts before the court, ultimately it upheld the district court’s decision. Although FFRF is disappointed that the court was persuaded by the school’s superficial changes to its longstanding Christian performance, the court also affirmed that the plaintiffs are entitled to damages and a declaratory judgment that prior versions of the show violated the Establishment Clause, calling the live nativity in particular “problematic.”

Since FFRF was not challenging the entire performance, but only the final Christian portion, the court instead should have considered whether the school had a secular purpose in having students sing Christian songs about the birth of Jesus while displaying a nativity scene, which it plainly does not.

The court acknowledged that the show’s blatantly unconstitutional 45-year history affected its analysis, noting FFRF’s point that the school’s mannequin performance was “the same religious program, just with litigation-motivated edits.” But the court bizarrely concluded that the 45 years of promoting Christianity reduced the appearance of religious endorsement in the modified performance because the new version was “a major departure from [previous shows].” This reasoning is backward, since brazenly violating the Constitution for 45 years should lead to greater skepticism of the school’s intent to be neutral toward religion, not less.



Ben Hart shows off his “IM GOD” license plate he had while living in Ohio. Now in Kentucky, Hart is suing because he was turned down for that plate by the DMV.

## ‘IM GOD’ Kentucky license plate case moves forward

A federal lawsuit in Kentucky over the denial of an irreverent license plate has been given the green light by the presiding judge.

FFRF and the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky filed a lawsuit in November 2016 on behalf of a Kentucky man denied a personalized license plate reading “IM GOD.” U.S. District Court Judge Gregory F. Van Tatenhove on March 31 rejected the state’s argument that the Kentucky transportation secretary is immune from a lawsuit and that the case should be dismissed because personalized plate messages are “government speech.”

In briefing the court, the plaintiff’s attorneys contended, “For more than one hundred years, it has been clearly established that plaintiffs may bring official-capacity claims against state officials to enjoin those officials from committing future violations of individuals’ federally protected rights, such as the claims asserted in this case.” Van Tatenhove agreed.

Kentucky Division of Motor Vehicle (DMV) officials, who have approved religious personalized plates, first refused Ben Hart’s request in early 2016, calling his license plate message “obscene or vulgar.” Later, the state said the plate was rejected because it was “not in good taste.” The lawsuit challenges certain portions of the regulations governing personalized license plates as unlawful, specifically denial of plates based on vague notions of “good taste.” It also contests viewpoint or content-based restrictions on personalized plates that communicate religious, anti-religious or political messages.

Hart had the same personalized license plate issued by the state of Ohio for 12 years prior to moving to the commonwealth.

The ACLU-KY/FFRF lawsuit argues that Hart’s proposed license plate is fully protected individual speech, which Kentucky DMV officials may not suppress using content-based, viewpoint-based, vague or overboard standards.

# Kansas county commissioner to nonbelievers: ‘Go to hell’

FFRF is appalled at a Kansas county commissioner’s censure of nonbelievers.

FFRF recently wrote to the Board of Sedgwick County Commissioners after a Sedgwick County resident was denied an opportunity to deliver a secular invocation before the board because his request was “not made on behalf of a religious group.” FFRF requested that the commission either end its practice of hosting prayers at meetings, or alter its invocation policy to ensure that it does not discriminate against atheists and freethinkers.

In response, County Commissioner Dave Unruh stated, “If you don’t believe [in God], it’s fine with me. I don’t care. Go to hell. It’s fine.”

Unruh’s comment was made at a Board of County Commissioners meeting on March 13, during a conversation with County Manager Mike Schole regarding FFRF’s letter:

Unruh: “Are we gonna get sued by those people who want us to not believe in God?”

Schole: “We have an executive session to talk about that tomorrow.”

Unruh: “Alright, I just keep wondering why are you so exercised about trying to prove to me something doesn’t exist? I mean it’s logically stupid. If you don’t believe it, it’s fine with me. I don’t care. Go to hell. It’s fine.” [laughs]

Schole: “I’m willing for my name to go to the Supreme Court.”

“Prayer at government meetings is unnecessary, inappropriate and divisive,” FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Chris Line had written to the Board of Sedgwick County Commissioners. “However, if the Board insists on continuing to host prayers at public meetings, it must not discriminate against any person.”

Furthermore, a Sedgwick County code restricts those who can give an invocation to only religious leaders and clergy members, which is unconstitutional because it treats similarly situated persons differently. FFRF emphasizes that this provision of the Sedgwick County code cannot be enforced because treating an atheist or nonbeliever who wishes to give an invocation differently from a religious citizen constitutes discrimination.

### Non-conversion therapy

A photograph showing a group of about seven people standing behind a large outdoor display. The display features a large red banner with the text "KEEP STATE & RELIGION SEPARATE" in white and blue letters. Below the banner is a portrait of Thomas Jefferson with a quote. Two smaller signs are also visible in the foreground. The group is standing in front of a modern building with large windows.

Tom Cara of the FFRF Metro Chicago Chapter sent this photo after the group displayed a banner and two signs in Chicago’s Daley Center Plaza to offset a Catholic group’s “holy week” displays. The Chicago chapter’s display was up from March 31 to April 8.

Cara writes: “Here is a quote from one of the signs from our display, designed to encourage those passing by Daley Center Plaza to tell the Divine Mercy Project to keep state and religion separate: ‘Not looking to convert? Neither are we. But the Divine Mercy Project wants to take its mission of “Conversion of the World” through Catholic evangelism to the public square. Should government property, which is owned by all taxpayers, be used to endorse the beliefs of a specific religious group? Our Constitution says no.’”

### Women Without Superstition: “No Gods — No Masters”

The book cover for "Women Without Superstition: No Gods — No Masters" features a purple and white design. It includes the title in a bold, serif font and a small illustration of a woman's face.

Collected writings of 50 women freethinkers of the 19th & 20th centuries. 51 photographs.

Edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

### What Is a Freethinker?

**freethinker** *n.*

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



# FFRF VICTORIES

## Religious plaque removed from courthouse

After hearing from FFRF, a Minnesota county on March 5 removed a Ten Commandments plaque that was long on display in one of its courthouses.

It was brought to FFRF’s attention that Saint Louis County was prominently displaying a plaque that contained the Ten Commandments and a bible passage underneath the Saint Louis County seal in the county courthouse in Hibbing, Minn.

The plaque read, “God’s Laws,” with the commandments listed underneath and the biblical passage: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength, you shall love your neighbor as yourself” . . . Mark 12:30-31.

FFRF wrote to County Administrator Kevin Gray, warning the county that Ten Commandments displays within or near courtrooms unconstitutionally affiliate the justice system with biblical prohibitions rather than secular law.

“Given the content of the display, a reasonable observer would view it as an endorsement of religion,” wrote



A religious plaque, left, is shown on the wall of the St. Louis County, Minn., courthouse prior to its removal, right, on March 5 after FFRF complained.

FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott. “The display directly connects Saint Louis County and the district court with Christianity.”

The Saint Louis County attorney’s office notified FFRF that the plaque had been removed.

“After careful consideration, a determination was made to remove the plaque from public display,” Gray said in a public statement. “As you might

presume, the law and norms have developed considerably since the plaque was initially installed decades ago. The county attorney’s office researched applicable law, including relevant federal Supreme Court decisions on this topic, which contributed to the decision to direct property management to remove the plaque earlier this week.”

Kelly Grinstein of the Hibbing

(Minn.) Daily Tribune asked Dana Kazel, St. Louis County communications manager, whether the county had received much feedback from the public on the topic.

“We don’t have an exact number because different people are contacting different offices or individuals, but it hasn’t been a huge amount,” Kazel to Grinstein. “We’ve also received several inquiries from people asking if they can have the plaque to display.”

After the plaque was removed from the courthouse walls, St. Louis County Commissioner Michael Jugovich, whose office is in the courthouse, attached it to his office wall.

“We want people to come take a look at it,” Jugovich told Grinstein. “We understand that this might not be their first choice, but it’s still in the building it belongs in. People should have the opportunity to see it. It looks good here, and we believe in the message it conveys.”

FFRF has filed an open records request into the issue and will be following up on the case.

## FFRF earns several constitutional wins in Ohio

By Molly Hanson

FFRF Legal Fellow Christopher Line, who handles legal cases in Ohio, has had much success recently in getting schools to stop violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

Line has gotten three school districts and one city to end their constitutional violations. Below is a recap of those Ohio victories.

### Group washed away

FFRF initially wrote in early March to Indian Creek School District about a March 19 event at Hills Elementary School in Wintersville, Ohio, where representatives from Samaritan’s Feet were scheduled to give shoes and socks to students and then wash the students’ feet.

The washing of feet is a ritual steeped in religious significance, FFRF pointed out. The act is modeled after John 13:1–17 in the New Testament, in which Jesus washes his disciples’ feet and instructs them to wash each other’s feet. Samaritan’s Feet is a Christian missionary organization.

If the district allowed these outside adults to have this “spiritual” interaction with students, then Samaritan’s Feet would have essentially bought access, at a school-sponsored event, to proselytize the children in the district’s care, FFRF underlined.

“It is well settled that public schools may not advance or promote religion,” Line wrote to Superintendent T.C. Chappelear. “In *Lee*, the Supreme Court extended the prohibition of school-sponsored religious activities beyond the classroom to all school functions, holding prayers at public high school graduations an impermissible establishment of religion. Even if this shoe giveaway takes place outside the normal school day, it still violates the Constitution as a school-sponsored religious activity.”

The district cancelled the event as a result of FFRF’s reasoning.

### Evangelism ends

The Indian Creek School District also will not be imposing religion on its

students after FFRF received a report on a serious First Amendment violation.

It was brought to FFRF’s attention that Indian Creek Middle School had been allowing a local pastor onto its campus during the school day to proselytize to students. The pastor and president of the Valley Youth Network, which says it seeks “to reach out to area students with the gospel of Jesus Christ,” was proselytizing to students every Friday during lunch. Line wrote to the district on March 9, informing it that it is unconstitutional to offer religious leaders access to befriend and proselytize to students on school property during the school day.

The district responded on March 16, telling FFRF that the district would ensure that the pastor would not lead or attend student group activities or proselytize to students.

### Prayer exterminated

FFRF has also ended unconstitutional prayers in the Sidney, Ohio, school district.

After receiving multiple complaints that Sidney City Schools was regularly scheduling and promoting prayer at school-sponsored events and activities, FFRF took action to end the violations.

It was reported that the district’s football coach had been leading his team in prayer for the past decade, and that there is scheduled prayer at graduation and other school events. The local newspaper reported that in March, Sidney City Schools invited a religious leader from Sidney First Methodist Church to lead students in prayer at two school assemblies. Line wrote to the district on March 21 informing it that such conduct is unlawful.

The district responded that day in an email assuring FFRF that future assemblies will not include prayer.

### No more coach prayers

An Ohio high school basketball coach will no longer be leading his team in pre-game prayers thanks to FFRF.

It was brought to FFRF’s attention that Unioto High School basketball

coach Matt Hoops was leading his team in prayer before games. An article in a local paper detailed how Hoops prayed with his team before a game early in March. Hoops reportedly began the prayer with “Dear Lord,” and closed it in “Jesus’ name.”

Line wrote to Union-Scioto Local School District on March 20 informing the district that it is illegal for public school athletic coaches to lead their teams in prayer.

On March 22, a legal representative of the district responded assuring FFRF that the superintendent contacted Hoops and reminded him of the district’s policy prohibiting coach-led prayers.

### Structures removed

A concerned area resident reported to FFRF that each year during the holiday season, the city of Dover, Ohio, was displaying a nativity scene along with a large Latin cross on city property.

FFRF was also informed that there is a Ten Commandments monument that is located on city property near a local church.

“It is unlawful for the city of Dover to maintain, erect or host a holiday



display that consists solely of a nativity scene, thus singling out, showing preference for and endorsing one religion,” wrote Line in a letter to the mayor on Jan. 26. “The Supreme Court has ruled it is impermissible to place a nativity scene as the sole focus of a display on government property.”

Line also requested that the Ten Commandments display be moved to private or church grounds.

The city responded on April 3 informing FFRF that Dover will not display the cross as part of its seasonal display and will have the Ten Commandments monument moved from city property.

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



# FFRF keeps up fight for state-church separation

By Molly Hanson

Here is a roundup of FFRF’s legal victories since the last issue of Freethought Today. (See previous page for Ohio and Minnesota victories.)

## Alabama

Where: West Point High School in Cullman.  
Violation: The school was scheduling prayers before assemblies and ceremonies. The prayers were typically led by the principal or student.  
Outcome: Superintendent Shane Barnett responded on March 22, informing FFRF that he discussed the issues with the responsible staff members.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Christopher Line.

## Alabama

Where: Snow Rogers Elementary School in Birmingham.  
Violation: A kindergarten teacher led her class in prayer.  
Outcome: An attorney representing the district responded on April 17 to assure FFRF that the principal had discussed the situation with the teacher and that there would not be a similar occurrence in the future.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Christopher Line.

## Arkansas

Where: Crossett High School in Crossett.  
Violation: School staff had been scheduling prayer as a part of the annual pre-homecoming pep rally. School faculty were also involved in “See You at the Pole,” a Christian-oriented prayer rally.  
Outcome: A legal representative of the district responded on April 5, informing FFRF that prayers during pep rallies would end and that school faculty would not be participating in “See You at the Pole” events on school property.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Colin McNamara.

## Colorado

Where: North Arvada Middle School in Golden.  
Violation: The school, which rents its auditorium to a local church on Sundays, posted a sign that stayed up throughout the school week on its property that advertises the church’s services.  
Outcome: The district responded on April 11, assuring FFRF that it had informed the church that it may display the sign advertising its church services on school grounds only on Sundays.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Christopher Line.

## Illinois

Where: Okaw Valley High School.  
Violation: Coaches of the high school basketball team were participating in prayers with their students.  
Outcome: “We have shared your concern with the athletic director,” Superintendent Kent Stauder wrote to FFRF in

response. “We reinforced that this type of activity could be viewed as an endorsement of religion. The athletic director was further directed to share this information with the coaching staff.”  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Ryan Jayne.

## Illinois

Where: Central Grade School in Effingham.  
Violation: Effingham Community School Board President Jeff Michael arranged for Christ’s Church, where he is a pastor, to give a presentation about dinosaurs to students. Elementary-aged students were handed flyers promoting a weekend event, a presentation was hosted by the Creation Truth Foundation, a creationist group, which was not disclosed in the flyer.  
Outcome: District President Mark Doan has promised to implement a policy making certain that students will not be given flyers advertising religious events during school presentations.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Ryan Jayne.

## Florida

Where: Cape Coral Police Department.  
Violation: A story titled “When God created police officers” was posted to the department’s Facebook page. The fictitious story described a conversation between “the lord” and an angel and was meant to mimic the biblical creation story portrayed in the book of Genesis.  
Outcome: On March 22, Chief of Police David Newlan informed FFRF that the department had removed the story from its Facebook page and all other department social media accounts.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Andrew L. Seidel.

## Georgia

Where: Woodbine Elementary School in Kingsland.  
Violation: A Black History Month assembly held for students at Woodbine Elementary School in Kingsland, Ga., this February opened with a preacher leading the children in prayer. The preacher had been introduced by the school principal.  
Outcome: On March 23, Camden County Schools Superintendent William Hardin informed FFRF that he addressed the violations with the principal.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Christopher Line.

## Georgia

Where: Youth Elementary School in Monroe.  
Violation: A kindergarten teacher had been teaching her students that God lives up in heaven, that Christmas is God’s birthday and that Jesus is the boss of everybody.  
Outcome: Superintendent Nathan Franklin responded to FFRF on March 12, writing that the violation had been resolved.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Christopher Line.

## Kentucky

Where: East Carter and West Carter high schools.  
Violation: Basketball coaches from both schools joined hands in a prayer circle with their teams and cheerleaders after a basketball game. An image of the two teams praying with their coaches was posted on the West Carter High School official Facebook page.  
Outcome: Superintendent Ronnie Dotson responded on April 17, informing FFRF that the coaching staffs at both schools have been reminded that they are not permitted to organize, sponsor or participate in student initiated prayer.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Colin McNamara.

## Kentucky

Where: University of Louisville.  
Violation: The women’s basketball coach, Jeff Waltz, was leading his players in the Lord’s Prayer.  
Outcome: On March 14, the university responded assuring FFRF that the coaches and staff had been reminded that team prayer must be voluntary and student-led.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Rebecca Markert.

## Missouri

Where: Viburnum Police Department.  
Violation: The department placed a bumper sticker on a government patrol car reading, “2 Chronicles 7:14.”  
Outcome: The city responded on April 23 informing FFRF that the department had removed the sticker.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Patrick Elliott.

## Missouri

Where: Bolivar High School.  
Violation: The high school had invited Bob Holmes to give a presentation to its student body during school hours at the school. Holmes took several opportunities to preach his Christian faith to the students. He was also accompanied by representatives of the Agape Baptist Church of Stockton, Mo., who took pictures and video of the event and publicized it on the church’s Facebook page.  
Outcome: “I have been assured by the superintendent that [Holmes] will not be invited back for any future engagements,” the legal counsel for the Bolivar R-1 School District recently informed FFRF.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Colin McNamara.

## New Hampshire

Where: Milford High School in Milford.  
Violation: A science teacher had been guiding her students in prayer.  
Outcome: On April 16, Superintendent Robert Marquis reported to FFRF that the principal reiterated the seriousness of the accusation to the teacher and reminded her to refrain from having any conversation with students that involved prayer.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Colin McNamara.

## North Carolina

Where: Dillard Drive Middle School in Raleigh.  
Violation: The boys basketball coaches had instituted team prayers.  
Outcome: An attorney representing Wake County Public Schools responded to FFRF on April 20, writing that it addressed the violation.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Patrick Elliott.



## Tennessee

Where: Wayne County High School.  
Violation: The high school was broadcasting prayer over its public announcement system to students during the morning announcements.  
Outcome: Superintendent Marlon Davis responded to FFRF to inform it that the principal of Wayne County High School has been directed to cease the prayer broadcasts.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Christopher Line.

## Texas

Where: Houston Independent School District.  
Violation: The principal of the district’s Energized for STEM Academy adopted a policy of including a bible reading during the morning announcements each day. The chosen bible passages were read directly by either the principal or another school employee over the school’s intercom.  
Outcome: FFRF was informed that the practice was ended on March 20.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Sam Grover.

## Texas

Where: Leadership Academy in Tyler.  
Violation: Teachers within the school had established a prayer practice that was taking place each day before lunch. Allegedly, every day a teacher was selecting a student to lead the prayer or else a teacher was leading the prayer.  
Outcome: On March 21, FFRF received a response from a legal representative of the school informing FFRF that the prayer practice would end.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Sam Grover.

## Texas

Where: Rose Garden Elementary in Schertz.  
Violation: The school had scheduled an event where the Christian missionary group Samaritan’s Foot would give shoes and socks to students and then wash the students’ feet.  
Outcome: On April 3, the Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City ISD responded, informing FFRF that the missionary group would forego the washing of the feet.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Sam Grover.

## Wyoming

Where: Star Valley and Green River high schools.  
Violation: Football coaches from both teams knelt with students in the field and prayed for injured players.  
Outcome: A legal representative of the district responded on March 14, informing FFRF that all coaches in the district were reminded to avoid involvement in team prayer.  
FFRF attorney who handled the case: Christopher Line.

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FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



## FFRF VICTORIES

# FFRF celebrates legislative victories

Strategic Response Team already has more than 20 victories in 2018

By Ryan Jayne  
and Andrew L. Seidel

Every January, state legislatures around the country reconvene and lawmakers introduce bills addressing nearly every imaginable topic. They jockey for publicity and, in an election year, use this as an opportunity to pander as much as to legislate. As a result, FFRF receives a flood of reports



Ryan Jayne



Andrew L. Seidel

about bills that impact the separation between state and church. Some of these bills are good, others are bad, a handful are truly dangerous, and a few are so silly that all you can do is laugh.

Our new Strategic Response Team gives FFRF new teeth to monitor legislation and to mobilize FFRF's 33,000 members so that we can more effectively sup-

port good bills and defeat bad ones. In the first few months of 2018, the team already has more than 20 solid legislative victories. All the bills discussed below were analyzed by our group and you — our wonderful members — got involved to help shape this country's legislative landscape.

First, let's take a look at the ridiculous bills that have thankfully died well-deserved deaths. These come in two varieties: bills that are pandering wastes of time and would have no effect other than pleasing religious constituents, and bills that are so obviously unconstitutional that they would have been immediately struck down by the courts.

Oklahoma state Sen. Nathan Dahm proposed **SB 1457**, which would have given "Almighty God" ownership of all wildlife in the state. Dahm is a self-proclaimed product of missionaries and home-schooling. As one of FFRF's attorneys observed, Dahm has no business legislating the lives of citizens, let alone wildlife. In Idaho, **HB 419** sought to prevent courts from enforcing "foreign" laws, aiming at Sharia law. (Mississippi **HB 130** would have declared the bible as the state book. Really, Mississippi? Don't you have pride in your native authors?)

It's easy and appropriate to ridicule such bills — and we have — but lawmakers are wasting taxpayer time and money writing, debating and promoting these bills. Every minute spent on pandering do-nothing bills is a failure of lawmakers to find real-world solutions to the real problems affecting their state.

The second variety of silly pandering



FFRF's Associate Counsel Sam Grover, left, and Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott stand in front of the U.S. Capitol during a lobbying trip to Washington, D.C., last year.

ing bills — the wildly unconstitutional type — are more numerous. Mississippi killed a bill to require public school teachers to display and recite the Ten Commandments (**HB 1100**); Wyoming rejected a bill to declare same-sex marriages "parody marriages" (**HB 167**); and Alabama had a bill that would have required public schools to teach creationism (**HB 258**). One Georgia lawmaker even proposed a bill because of a letter FFRF sent to a school district about a praying coach. The bill, **SB 361**, purported to allow public school coaches to pray with (impose prayer on) their students. The bill died.

### Indefensible bills

These indefensible bills would have faced immediate court challenges from FFRF had they passed. However, even unconstitutional bills, if passed, are harmful because they embolden government employees to violate the U.S. Constitution by giving them the false security that they are protected by state law. The Constitution is the supreme law of the land, and state laws that conflict with it are unconstitutional. Pious lawmakers may want to use their public office to promote their imaginary friend, but FFRF members and constituents reminded them about what U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin said when he was a law professor at American University: "People place their hand on the bible and swear to uphold the Constitution; they don't put their hand on the Constitution and swear to uphold the bible."

More alarming are bad bills with legal and practical impact that would not have necessarily been immediately doomed in court. These include private school vouchers in Iowa (**HS 651**) and Idaho (**H590**); a bill that would have allowed healthcare providers in New Hampshire to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation (**HB 1787**); and Iowa bills allowing anti-transgender discrimination (**HF 2164**) and requiring public schools to offer bible classes (**HF 2031**). Three professors of religion, one from each state university, opposed the bible class bill with some behind-the-scenes help from the Strategic Response Team. FFRF thanks those professors, our members and local activists for helping us defeat these and many other harmful bills.

FFRF has also stopped bad bills that

have unfortunately gained traction in other states. We are continuing to fight against these bills as they pop up in other states, and we are looking for the best way to challenge these laws in states that have passed these bills.

Florida, meanwhile, was considering amending its constitution to remove the "No Aid Clause," a crucial religious liberty right that protects taxpayers from being forced to bankroll churches. In the wake of the disastrous *Trinity Lutheran* Supreme Court decision last year, this too has become a worrying trend. Following energized opposition from FFRF and other groups, including detailed testimony from Andrew L. Seidel, FFRF's director of strategic response, Florida's attempt failed. This victory echoes the major success of upholding and enforcing a similar clause in New Jersey's Constitution this month in FFRF's 7-0 win at the N.J. Supreme Court. Most states have similar provisions and you can count on them staying under fire in the near future.

### Supporting good bills

We are also happy to report that FFRF has supported several positive bills that have passed in 2018. In Alabama, **HB 76** closed a loophole that allowed religious child care centers to dodge basic regulations. This senseless free pass allowed for rampant abuse and neglect to go unchecked, including reports of regulators identifying severe problems at a child care center only to find it re-branded as "faith-based" just days later so as to escape any punishment.

Supporters of Alabama's **HB 76** pointed to these abuses and others, and even instances of children dying because of the religious exemption. Last

year, conservative Christian groups successfully killed the bill, arguing that the bill "removes religious liberty protections." But religious liberty does not create a right to abuse or neglect children. This year, with FFRF's support, **HB 76** passed with flying colors.

Hawaii passed **HB 2739**, the "Our Care, Our Choice Act," which makes it the sixth state to adopt a "Death with Dignity" law, allowing terminally ill, mentally competent patients to voluntarily request prescription medication that would allow the person to die in a peaceful manner rather than requiring them to endure an undignified death by letting their illness run its natural course.

While these laws have long been controversial, modern "Death with Dignity" laws have safeguards to address reasonable secular objections. The only objections that remain — and they always show up in opposition to these bills — are religious in nature, something along the lines of "only God gets to decide when someone dies." This is no way to legislate, of course, which FFRF was happy to remind Hawaii's lawmakers. FFRF is also supporting similar bills in New Jersey and several other states against religious objections.

### Lobbying for you

This isn't exhaustive and we'll be racking up more victories as the legislative year moves along. As this goes to print, two of our attorneys, Patrick Elliott and Seidel, are lobbying for your interests on Capitol Hill.

That Mississippi would even consider choosing the poorly written bible as its "state book" is shameful. That it did so when prominent authors like William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Richard Wright have such strong ties to the state (and when Mark Twain featured Mississippi in some of his American classics) is in poor taste. To paraphrase Faulkner, never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion, against injustice and lying and greed. If you do, you will change the Earth.

Your legislators, at all levels of government, need to hear your voice. Remember that some of the worst bills are advanced because lawmakers think that's what their constituents want them to do. Remind them that you are a secular voter and constituent and want them to ditch theocratic bills in favor of real solutions to real problems.

If you're not signed up for FFRF's action alerts, please do so. You can sign up by simply texting "FFRF" to 52886, emailing your contact info to [action@ffrf.org](mailto:action@ffrf.org), or calling the FFRF office.

Ryan Jayne and Andrew L. Seidel are constitutional attorneys at FFRF.



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • [FFRF.org](http://ffrf.org)

### What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists. FFRF has more than 33,000 members. FFRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and donations are tax deductible for income tax purposes.

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

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



# Convention speech

## Be heard! Together we can make a change

*This is the speech given by Kelly Helton at FFRF's 40th national convention on Sept. 15, 2017, at the Monona Terrace and Convention Center in Madison, Wis. She was introduced by FFRF Social Media Coordinator Lauryn Seering:*

Kelly Helton was named FFRF's 2017 Thomas W. Jendrock Student Activist. At just 13, she is one of the youngest student activist awardees in FFRF's history. Kelly is a middle-school feminist and freethinking activist. She has represented her generation by speaking at many protest rallies, including at events organized by Planned Parenthood, the March for Science, the Tri-State Freethinkers, NaNoCon, International Women's Day and the regional gathering of the January Women's March. Her father is FFRF Life Member Jim Helton, who is the organizer of the Tri-State Freethinkers.

Please welcome a freethinking feminist of Generation Z — Kelly Helton!

By Kelly Helton

“When equal rights are under attack, what do we do? Stand up. Fight back. By attempting to defund Planned Parenthood, you have declared war on women. I am here to tell you that we are not damsels in distress tied to the tracks. We are the train!”

Those were the words I heard at the Statehouse in Ohio. I was there because I hid in the backseat of my dad's car after my mom told me I couldn't go because it was not safe due to counterprotesters.

When we got there and the counterprotesters barged in, my dad and I got separated and I ended up by the podium next to the senators. My dad was on the other side of the room. My mom saw me on the news with my dad nowhere in sight. He got in so much trouble, but I never did. At that moment, I decided I would no longer be silent and my voice would be heard.

At the next Planned Parenthood rally, I asked to speak. There, I told the crowd I did not understand why people wanted to defund Planned Parenthood, deny access to birth control, restrict abortion, or refuse to



Photo by Ingrid Laas

The 2017 FFRF national convention opened with 13-year-old Kelly Helton talking about her activism.

teach comprehensive sex education that was medically and scientifically accurate. In the end, I realized that it wasn't me who did not understand those issues.

The real problem was that my legislators did not understand those issues.

My next opportunity came on International Women's Day. I expanded on my original speech to cover pay equality. I asked the crowd the following questions: When I grow up, why should I get paid less for the same job that my brother does? Why should women of color get paid even less than me?

I then got an opportunity to do a speech for a Swiss TV special about the separation of church and state in American public schools. In my choir class, we were singing religious songs. I was not comfortable singing religious songs — and those songs shouldn't have been there in the first place. My dad told me to talk to my teacher. And that's what I did. My teacher did not want to make me feel uncomfortable. She knew who my dad was and didn't want to get sued.

**Stand up, speak out**

In the end, she removed the religious songs. I wasn't the only student who felt this way, but I was the only

student who was willing to stand up and say something. It is amazing what one person can accomplish if they stand up for the rights of others and speak out for those who cannot.

I also had an opportunity to speak about atheism in front of the Tri-State Freethinkers. My call to action was this: In order to change the world around us, we must first let the people around us know who we are.

If I can stand up here and shout, “I am an atheist,” then perhaps you could come out of the closet so people realize they actually know an atheist. If everyone did this one simple thing, then maybe the next time I get on stage and shout, “I am an atheist,” no one will care. And how cool would that be?

Out of all the speeches I've done, the March for Science in Cincinnati was my favorite. Standing on stage and looking out into a crowd of over 10,000 people was an amazing experience. I will never forget it.

**Learning the truth**

Some of my past teachers, when talking about the big bang theory and evolution, have told us these are just theories and we can believe what we want. How can you teach something you don't even understand?

If you are a teacher, here are some



Photo by Ingrid Laas

FFRF Member Jim Helton and his daughter Kelly pose for a photo.

of the things we want to learn: The Earth is more than 4.5 billion years old (and it is not flat, either)! We want to learn about evolution from Richard Dawkins and Charles Darwin, not Ken Ham.

Neil deGrasse Tyson says the good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it. Humans are the main reason for climate change. Bringing a snowball to the Senate floor during winter does not disprove climate change.

We want to get our science information from scientists. We do not want your agenda, we do not want your politics, we do not want your beliefs. We want unadulterated science.

As a 13-year-old girl, I am often the voice of reason in a room of unreasonable adults. This became very clear to me on lobby day when I attempted to speak with some of my representatives.

I also do not stand during the Pledge of Allegiance. We are one nation indivisible. By adding God, you have instantly divided us. And not only in my classroom, but across the entire nation.

I realized something this year. If we speak out against injustice and speak up for equal rights, we can make a difference. We need all of you to speak up and speak out at your local school boards and city council meetings.

Individually, we can make a difference, but together, we can make a change!



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Kelly Helton

**A note to FFRF Members**  
Don't miss a single issue of Freethought Today & Private Line!  
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*By Ruth Hurmence Green*

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

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# Freethinkers of the year

FFRF honored four activists with this award at the 40th annual convention on Sept. 16, 2017, in Madison, Wis.



FFRF’s Freethinkers of the Year for 2017 included, from left: Marie Schaub, Jerry Bloom and Jesse Castillo. FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott is shown introducing Schaub. Awarded but not able to be present was Kevin Price. All speeches are published in this issue.

## Thoughts in full Bloom

Here is an edited version of the convention speech Jerry Bloom as a 2017 Freethinker of the Year. Bloom was introduced by FFRF Attorney Ryan Jayne:

Jerry Bloom, an FFRF member from Shelton, Conn., reached out to us in November 2015 when he became aware that the city of Shelton had allowed the American Legion to put up a religious angel display in December in a city park ironically called Constitution Park. Jerry applied for a permit to put up FFRF’s Winter Solstice display in the park. He was denied. The city said no because it thought that people would find the display offensive. Jerry then readily agreed to be the lead plaintiff in our federal lawsuit. As a result of the lawsuit, during the holiday season in 2016, the city permanently agreed to stop hosting any angel displays in Constitution Park and allowed FFRF to put up its display elsewhere.

In addition to being a staunch state-

church activist, Jerry is a retired RN and a U.S. Army veteran. On behalf of FFRF, I am delighted to name Jerry Bloom as a Freethinker of the Year.

By Jerry Bloom

Thank you, everyone. I am an atheist. However, I would like to give religion its due. Some of the greatest art humankind has ever produced has been inspired by religion. Where would the world be without the Sistine Chapel, David, the Ecstasy of Saint Teresa, “Ode to Joy,” or Handel’s “Messiah”? These are things we can all relate to and understand and recognize as beautiful.

I’m not going to talk about the other side of what religion has done. Instead, I’d like to give you a short history lesson. On All Saints Day in 1755, a natural disaster enabled us to become what we are today. On that date, an enormous earthquake struck in the Atlantic Ocean that leveled the city of Lisbon, Portugal. It rang church bells in Paris. It was felt in Moscow. Bays drained in Norway. A 50-foot tidal wave struck soon afterwards, killing thousands. This was 9:30 in the morning as the city of Lisbon’s populace was going to church. And people were very fraught. How could God do this to them on All Saints Day? Essentially, what that did is usher in the era of Enlightenment, where people actually questioned the existence of a benevolent all-loving God.

Unfortunately, religion survived the Age of Enlightenment. So here we are today.

In his introduction, Ryan summed up the case against Shelton pretty succinctly. Oh, by the way, I’m suing Shelton again. For years now they have



Jerry Bloom speaks to the FFRF members in the audience at the convention in Madison, Wis.

had a “God bless Shelton Police” sign on the lawn of their police department, flanked by American flags. I approached the mayor and asked him to remove it. He refused. I made an appointment with the police chief, but he was a no-show. So they really didn’t leave me an alternative.

There’s approximately 1 billion of us nonbelievers in the world. There are 7 billion people in the world. How does our one-seventh convince the sixth-sevenths that they’re wrong? Mass marketing. But it’s going to take more than placards and billboards.

I learned that although religion is a mind-altering thing, the Food and Drug Administration has not considered it a drug. I went down and asked. They were very upset about that question. However, I suggest that it be limited to those of the age of consent or at least with the cognitive capacity to see and smell BS when they hear it and see it.

Also, I’d like to draw upon our governmental resources. The Federal Trade Commission should be involved with false advertising in the cases of tel-

evangelism when it’s to request donations to gain God’s favor. This is something that they should be able to verify easily to substantiate their claims. Additionally, religion should be required to do the same thing to maintain its tax-exempt status.

I don’t think it’s quite this high now, but the Roman Catholic Church owned 168 million acres of land worldwide. This has been reduced, of course, because of the payouts and settlements that they have had over the years. If they were unable to provide this evidence of their deity’s existence and have their tax-exempt status stripped, it would pretty much mean their extinction in this country.

Sigmund Freud thought that religion was the “universal obsessional neurosis” of humanity. Here’s an original, and I think this one’s better: “Religion is the accepted insanity and the plague that afflicts humanity. It is a multibillion-dollar tax-exempt industry that peddles snake oil, which makes people stupid about reality.”

Thank you.



Jerry Bloom

Photo by Ingrid Laas



# Freethinkers of the year

## On the winning side of a monumental decision

Here is an edited version of the speech Marie Schaub gave as one of FFRF's four 2017 Freethinkers of the Year. She delivered it on Sept. 16, 2017, at FFRF's 40th annual convention in Madison, Wis. Schaub was introduced by FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott:

I was co-counsel on Marie Schaub's lawsuit against the Ten Commandments monument at the school that her daughter was set to attend. Five years later, I'm proud to be awarding Marie the Freethinker of the Year Award.

As you proceed through a lawsuit, each side can request information from the other side. The school district requested extensive information from Marie, including any social media posts that she wrote on the subject of religion. If you're Facebook friends with Marie, you would know this is thousands of posts. So we had to disclose literally thousands of pages to the district's attorneys. It brings a smile to my face to think of them reviewing each of Marie's defenses of freethought. Maybe they even learned something.

Marie, as the only publicly named plaintiff in the case, has been vilified in her community. In 2016, FFRF honored her with the Atheist in a Foxhole Courage Award. After the 3rd Circuit ruling and after our convention in 2016, FFRF and our attorney Mark Schneider were able to negotiate a victorious settlement.

In March of 2017, the biblical monument was finally removed. Marie, we thank you for being a champion of the First Amendment!

By Marie Schaub

Hello, everyone, and thank you for being here today!

2017 has not been a good year for controversial monuments. I'm sure most of you have heard of the Christian man who ran over the Ten Commandments monolith in Arkansas while streaming it live on Facebook. It was certainly entertaining to watch! But I was relieved to hear that it was not one of my fellow atheists.

Confederate monuments have been dropping like Trump's approval ratings. Some have been toppled over and others have been vandalized beyond repair. While I can appreciate their passion and understand their frustration, it's important to exhaust every legal avenue that is available before taking such drastic measures of civil disobedience.

Believe me, there were many nights where I imagined tying a chain around that religious monument that sat outside my kid's public school and yanking



Marie Schaub shows off her Freethinker of the Year Award.



Victorious FFRF plaintiff Marie Schaub stands with FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott, who was co-counsel on her successful lawsuit.

out the damn thing with my truck. But doing so would not only hurt our cause by tarnishing our image, it would have probably ended in jail time for me.

There was a 6-foot tall, 2,000-pound religious monument that stood outside of Valley High School, unchallenged, for over 60 years. The decalogue was placed at the end of two main foot paths leading up to the front side of the building. A very similar monument at another nearby public school was recently ruled unconstitutional, thanks to the help of FFRF, and it was relocated to private property.

### 'How is this possible?'

I remember the first time I saw the huge stone as a visitor at my child's karate event at the school in 2006. My main feeling was confusion, like, "How is this even possible?" But I was also sickened by a feeling of helplessness. It wasn't until 2011 that my family and I transferred to the New Kensington/Arnold School District.

We live in a small suburb of Pittsburgh. Where I'm from, there is a church on every block. The tax base is low and the number of senior citizens is high, but that didn't stop the district from trying to defend an unconstitutional, coercive message that negatively affected nonbelievers and people of other faiths.

It was in 2012 that I first heard of a group known as the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Our local news station was discussing the monument that I had encountered several years before. That's when it hit me. My daughter was in middle school, but eventually she would have that religious rock facing her on a daily basis. It was then that I filed my complaint.

After numerous depositions, continuations and motions, the judge said that my daughter and I did not have standing because she had not yet been harmed enough, basically saying our suit was premature. But that did not stop us.

After some discussion, FFRF Attorney Patrick Elliott, who held my hand throughout this entire process, informed me that we were going back

to court on appeal at my request. The panel of three judges unanimously agreed that the potential danger to my child was imminent and that I did have standing. This meant the case would go back to the lower court to be heard on its merits.

### Important fight

After five long years, we did it! I am proud to be a part of such an important fight for the separation of state and church. After the case was moved back to the lower court, the school realized it was going to lose. It agreed to move the monument and pay \$165,000 in legal fees. That's only a fraction of what was spent over five years of litigation. As a plaintiff and parent, it was never about the money.

It is unfortunate that it took so many years. My daughter will finish her senior year elsewhere due to this interference, but now when I drive by Valley High School, I think of the huge lesson the community learned and about the kids who will not have to walk in the shadow of its inappropriate message.



Marie Schaub waits to deliver her convention speech.

Our win did not go unnoticed. The view from my living room window of my neighbors' house across the street includes a cutout cross on their property. All over southwestern Pennsylvania, these cardboard cutouts are popping up in response to our victory. They do not realize that I support their rights to have whatever they want on their private property, and that every time I see them, it reminds me of our fight and our victory. Apparently, my neighbors can erect a life-size crucifix, yet they cannot seem to put out one recycling bin.

I have received my fair share of crank mail, but for as many negative messages I have received, I have gotten just as many, if not more, positive ones. Many people have since reached out to me to tell me that I have inspired them to speak out against inequality and that is why I am here today. I want to tell you to stand up for your rights and the rights of others.

As of today, the one-ton granite slab is in storage at an unknown location. It was secretly removed overnight at the beginning of March. Its new home will be at a Catholic school approximately two miles from its original placement. And even though the private school admits it needs a new roof, updated gym, and funding for families, it started a GoFundMe campaign with a goal of \$75,000 for the monolith. They claim they want to use the money to place the donated monument on a foundation and they want to buy a fancy, new, lighted sign to put up next to the 60-year-old stone. After falling short of their original goal, they lowered it to \$25,000. At last check, they weren't even up to \$5,000.

I have really enjoyed being a small part of this great movement and I hope to continue my involvement long after I am forgotten.

I would like to personally thank Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Anti-Defamation League, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Jewish Social Policy Action Network, the Sikh Coalition, the Union for Reform Judaism, and, of course, the Freedom From Religion Foundation! Thank you, FFRF, for everything you have done for me and my family and for all of the hard work you do.

“I want to tell you to stand up for your rights and the rights of others.”  
— Marie Schaub



# Freethinkers of the year

# Religious stickers crossed off the list

*Here is an edited version of the speech Jesse Castillo gave as one of FFRF’s Freethinkers of the Year. He delivered it on Sept. 16, 2017, at FFRF’s 40th annual convention in Madison, Wis. Castillo was introduced by FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover:*

Two brave members, Kevin Price and Jesse Castillo, served as local plaintiffs essential to the survival of FFRF’s lawsuit against Brewster County, Texas. It took courage and conviction to do what they did. They live in Brewster County and were willing to be named plaintiffs in the lawsuit challenging the aggressive religious endorsement of crosses on police vehicles. It took even more courage because they were active in the law enforcement community. After we filed, the office took down the crosses.

Jesse Castillo was born in Spain during his father’s military service and grew up in Panama, New Mexico, Louisiana and Florida. In the early 1990s, he served in the U.S. Army, graduating from Army Ranger School. He then earned a degree from Miami-Dade College and later moved to Brewster County, where he took a job in law enforcement.

Thank you, Jesse, for standing up for the First Amendment. You are deserving of the title: Freethinker of the Year.

By Jesse Castillo

I’m really glad that the Freedom From Religion Foundation has no problem messing with Texas.

I’m not originally from Texas. My wife and I, along with our three boys, moved to Alpine, Texas, in 2007. Alpine is in Brewster County, which is the largest county in Texas. However, its population is only about 9,000, and about 6,000 of those live in Alpine.

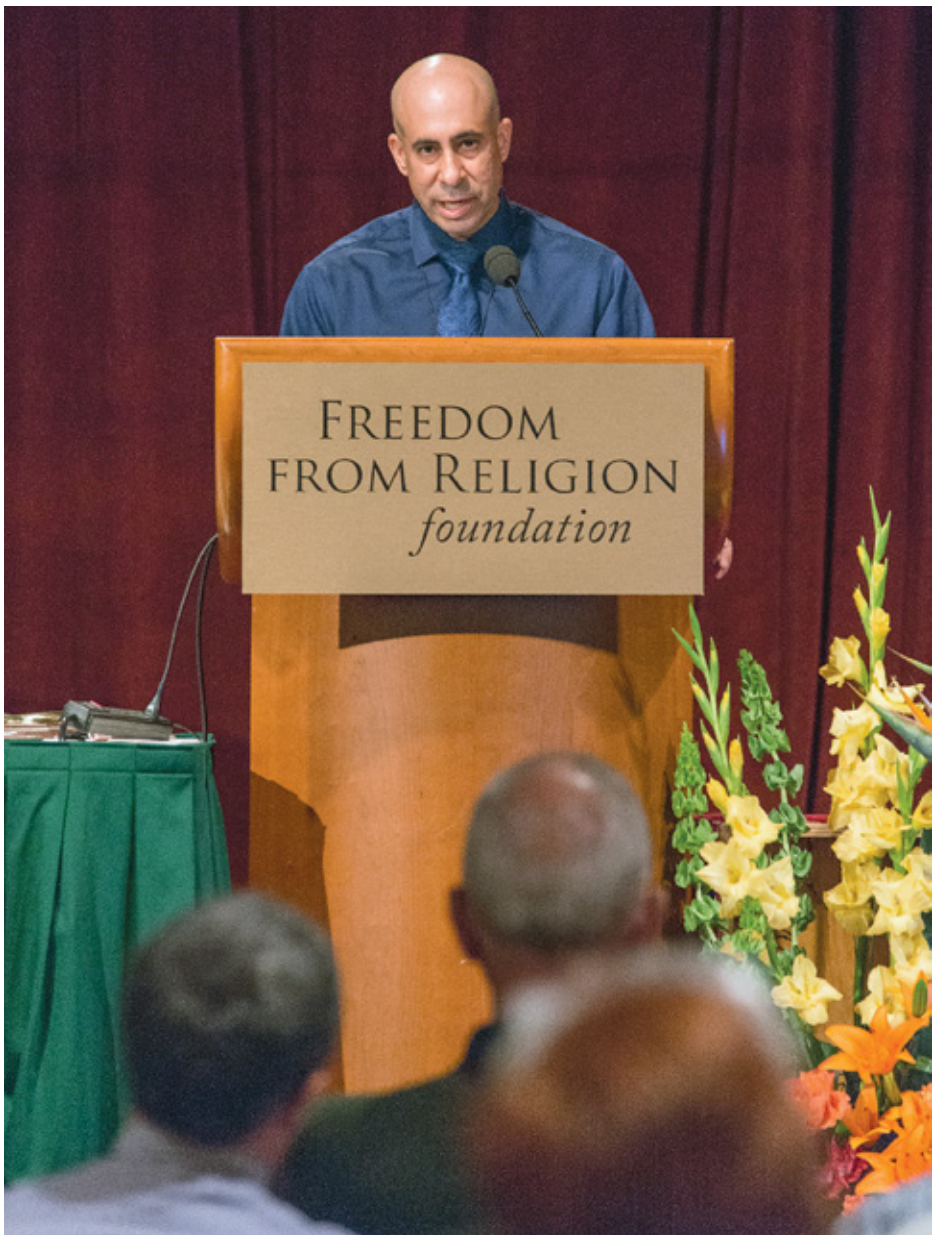
About two years ago, Christian crosses began appearing on our local sheriff’s police vehicles. The crosses were basically large stickers in the shape of a Christian cross that were placed on the back windows of some of the police vehicles. The crosses also featured a thin blue line representing support for law enforcement.

Not all of the police vehicles from the Brewster County Sheriff’s Office had these Christian crosses on them, and the sheriff himself, Ronny Dodson, didn’t actually order his deputies to display them. He just allowed his deputies to place the crosses on their assigned police vehicle if they wanted to. Of course, some of his deputies went ahead and did just that. The sheriff told



Jesse Castillo

Photo by Ingrid Laas



Jesse Castillo speaks to the convention crowd on Sept. 16, 2017, in Madison, Wis.

Photo by Ingrid Laas

our local newspaper that allowing the crosses to be displayed in this manner was his way of showing his support for his deputies.

Those Christian cross stickers that were used back then are still being sold in a small print shop in our town, and our lawsuit actually led to the boosting of sales. The crosses are currently displayed on many private vehicles in Alpine. Of course, we were not trying to stop people from placing crosses on their personal vehicles.

During the time crosses were being displayed on police vehicles, there was some online debate on the Sheriff’s Department’s Facebook page. And there was a popular post on its Facebook page that had thousands of likes and was highly shared. This particular post stated: “Dodson wanted God’s protection over his deputies and the thin blue line on the crosses stands for law enforcement.”

So, it was a belief among some Christians that just the mere presence of a cross could help protect law enforcement officers. Well, as an atheist, I can think of real ways for increasing the safety of our police officers. Better training or even better equipment would be much more effective than relying on a cross.

I have friends and family members that seem to think it’s not that big of a deal, and they definitely don’t think that something like this is important enough to sue over. Well, it is. It is worth taking action to try and stop violations like this to prevent bigger problems down the road. Crosses on government property obviously go against our nation’s principle of the separation of church and state. For

our county, it was basically saying: “Our sheriff’s department knows which religion is the one true correct religion, and if you believe in that religion, too, then you are on the right side.” It was very divisive.

When our local police officers were displaying these crosses, it made me (and others) wonder if our sheriff’s deputies were going to be fair and impartial to a public that includes people of different faiths, or to people like myself who identify as atheist.

### Road to atheism

I wasn’t always nonreligious. I grew up going to Christian churches and I was actually very enthusiastic about Christianity at an early age. But shortly after reaching adulthood and entering the U.S. Army, I had already seen too many inconsistencies in the bible and inconsistencies in what I was being taught in churches. I eventually decided that I could no longer call myself a Christian. I still believed in God and I had a strong fear of burning in hell, which kept me tormented and believing in God longer than I should have. But, through the years of analyzing my own beliefs about spirituality and about reality, I moved closer and closer to becoming an atheist.

Before I had ever met an open atheist, I basically believed that a more religious person would be a better person and an atheist would probably be a person who was more prone to engaging in immoral behavior. But, the first open atheist I ever got to know on a personal level turned out to be a person with good moral character, who had a good work ethic, and who had a good sense of humor. He was someone I admired

and even looked up to. Having known this atheist, and many other atheists, helped to break down my misconceptions about what it means to be an atheist, and also what it doesn’t mean to be an atheist.

So, I think it helps when religious people get exposed to atheists who are open about their religious views, and it’s especially helpful when they get to know an atheist on a personal level. It’s important for atheists to not shy away from religious discussions. I recently had an atheist friend tell me that he doesn’t ever like to engage in religious discussions with people because he says you are never going to change their minds. That may be true, but I know from experience that you can get them to question their own beliefs, and over time they can change their stance.

It is very important for government to stay out of religion so that people can be more comfortable expressing their own religious views publicly. I would hate to think that if we hadn’t sued our county and allowed them to promote Christianity in that way, that it would have led to some closeted atheists to decide to remain closeted.

I happen to know a few closeted atheists and I know two that have come out recently. People should feel free to discuss religion without our government telling us which religion they think is the correct one. I actually enjoy it when Mormons or Jehovah’s Witnesses come knocking at my door. It gives me a chance to share my views and ask them questions, too. As an atheist, I also have some good news to share.

### Potential for profiling

Another problem with having the Sheriff’s Department displaying Christian crosses has to do with the potential for profiling. I have never heard of a case of police profiling against an atheist before, but because some Christians already think atheists are just bad people and somehow morally bankrupt, I wouldn’t put it past a religious fundamentalist with crazy ideas who happens to be a police officer to begin feeling emboldened and to act out in the name of his or her religion, especially when their department is giving them a wink and a nod. I just think that mixing law enforcement with religion is a very bad idea.

I have not faced any backlash over this lawsuit yet, and I just wanted to mention that Sheriff Dodson’s family members are actually really good people. I have known his son for many years and worked with him in the past, and the sheriff’s wife is a fantastic veterinarian who has taken care of my pets and my co-plaintiff Kevin Price’s pets for many years. They have been good to me before the lawsuit and they continue to be friendly toward me even after the lawsuit. As I said, our town is very small, but most people I have met there are very good people. I think they just made a bad decision and I’m glad we were there to correct it.

I really want to thank the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the two outstanding attorneys involved in this case, Sam Grover and Randall Kallinen. I also want to thank my good friend and former co-worker Kevin Price, who couldn’t be here today. Thank you!



# Freethinkers of the year

# Imagery can help create false reality

Here is an edited version of a column Kevin Price wrote for FFRF after learning he was named a Freethinker of the Year Award recipient. Price was unable to be at the convention to accept the award in person because he was in Rojava, Syria, as part of the YPG (Kurdish for People's Protection Units) in the fight against ISIS.

He (along with Jesse Castillo) were the named plaintiffs in the lawsuit against Brewster County Sheriff's Department for placing Christian crosses on police vehicles.

By Kevin Price

When I first got in contact with FFRF about the Brewster County Sheriff's Office Latin crosses, it did cross my mind that there could be some blowback. But to me, having an irrational government that clearly enjoys and wants more inequality is worse than possibly getting shunned slightly, as had ended up happening over the months following the first press mentions of Jesse's and my name.

I figured early on in the process of the lawsuit being written that if we had hidden our names from the public, that could give the sheriff's office and its wannabe theocratic supporters fuel for making bad arguments, by making it seem like we were ashamed of what we were doing, or more idiotically, arguing that we "knew" we were doing something wrong.

We discussed the issue and decided it was best to not hide our names. Being open about our identities sent the sheriff's office the message that we were not afraid and that we were proud of what we were doing to hold them accountable. I think government employees should be open and public when criticizing the government when it steps out of line. But lots of people don't have that option, due to having to protect themselves and their families from threats and harassment. Since the sheriff's office gave a metaphorical middle finger to equality and secular government, I was happy to let it know exactly who was giving it a metaphorical middle finger right back.

Since I was a federal law enforcement agent at the time, it was particularly frustrating that the sheriff's office and county attorney acted like there was no problem with putting Latin crosses on public vehicles designed to be used in law enforcement activities. The powers-that-be in the Texas state Capitol acted like they needed to deliberate for weeks or months on the issue before saying anything about it.

## Dishonest fakery

This is dishonest political fakery; it doesn't take someone more than a few minutes to figure out they were violating the Constitution. If they are so incompetent that basic research takes months, there should be some basic competency requirements passed for politicians to meet before they are allowed to take office. Basic competency requirements apply to people applying for law enforcement jobs, so why should our politicians, representatives, governors and presidents not have to? But I'm sure they were just stalling in the hope that people would just forget about the crosses. They were just being dishonest.

But the sheriff's office should be fully capable of being knowledgeable



Kevin Price shows off his Freethinker of the Year Award.

Submitted photo

on constitutional issues, individual laws and case law. Somehow it thought what it was doing was legal, despite no evidence whatsoever. What was it using to determine the legality of its actions? Mob popularity? Personal preference? Faith? It seems it was, and yet none of those things are law enforcement tools in a society that seeks any kind of justice, human well-being and progress.

Do state agencies want people to get used to the idea of police being particularly religious? Maybe then nonreligious people won't even apply for law enforcement jobs and people who are more religious (Christian, of course) would have a better hegemonic grip on the nation? Are they saying that government work in general requires belief in their favorite deity? I would answer "likely yes" to those questions.

This is a no-brainer, yet the sheriff's office totally failed to execute a task that its jobs require them to do. It is totally unprofessional and irresponsible for law enforcement to just jump to a random conclusion because it prefers it. These are people whose actions can severely affect other people's lives, and yet the concept of investigating something before acting unequivocally (by placing the crosses on the vehicles) was beyond them.

## Marginalizing others

Similar crosses with "Support BCSO" (Brewster County Sheriff's Office) printed on them are pretty common now in Alpine, as if supporting its attempt to do away with equality and marginalize other religions and those with no religion is "supporting" the sheriff's office. Law enforcement should be anti-dogmatic. But by closing the doors to criticism, the state of Texas was making it clear it wanted to hold onto this dogma of one-religion government imagery and attempt to close the doors on criticism of the sheriff's office by falsely making it ap-

pear that the idiots in the state Capitol were working on a decision on the matter for a laughably long period of time.

Thinking about why going after church-state separation violators is so important, I would say that, historically, religions have been used by authoritarian, irrational and fascist states to easily acquire a base of supporters who will agree with anything the state does and provide itself with ideologically motivated state enforcers of some sort, such as police and military members who are ideologically aligned as much as possible with leadership. This wouldn't be hard to accomplish, considering that military and police personnel consist of a miniscule percent of the population.

A path to domination by an authoritarian state tends to involve the denial, cover-up or destruction of other religions, the nonreligious, any cultural or ethnic groups and other things that are deemed not acceptable to the superiority and domination-obsessed group.

In the case of the sheriff's office crosses, those superiority-obsessed groups would be the state of Texas and Brewster County. This can to a degree be

accomplished with imagery. Creating state-sponsored imagery implies a religious state or implies one dominant religion is an attempt to erase other different beliefs or views. It is also an attempt to get people to accept an irrational reality where one religion is seen as practically synonymous with the state or nation. This damages freedom, as there can be none without equality. It also insinuates that the patriarchal structures that go along with Christian scriptures are synonymous with the state or nation.

So, at least two structures of inequality are being pushed by church-state separation violators: patriarchy as advertised by Christianity, and the illusion of a Christian hegemonic state. These are a clear indication of an ideology of domination being exercised by the political Christian right wing.

People will say that we shouldn't worry, that this is really a far cry from what theocratic fascist states like Turkey or Daesh do. But, given the framework of the Constitution, laws and weak democratic and legal processes available in the U.S., the trend of attempts of religionization of the U.S. government and monopoly of corporate and elitist influence over the country could easily continue and snowball.

This trend paints a picture of an elite group that is trying to slowly push the United States into being an authoritarian state. Some will say it is already here. I say that organizations like FFRF are highly important now because we cannot put too much trust into our elitist corporate-bought representatives and senators to correct problems. When democracy fails, as it can in any situation, not just church-state separation cases, the legal system can and has been successfully used to correct things.

By just sticking to imagery in public spaces, though, an out-of-control state can eventually create the image of a false reality where all or most people are Christian, or, that all people accept the government being Christian.

What has been occurring (state sponsorship and promotion of Christianity) in the United States is what I believe to be a modernized and nonviolent (yet still seriously damaging, such as the ineptly titled "religious freedom" bills) version of what any authoritarian state has done in the past to diminish the power of any potential opposition groups or to create a common fear of ideas and beliefs deemed unacceptable to the state that could threaten its power.

Thanks again and keep up the good work!



Latin cross stickers on law enforcement vehicles in Brewster County, Texas, have been removed, thanks to FFRF plaintiffs Kevin Price and Jesse Castillo.



# LETTERBOX

## 40th special section was trip down memory lane

Congratulations on 40 years of FFRF! Thank you for the lapel pin you sent all the members. I will cherish it and wear it often.

Also, a big thanks for the insert in the April issue that provided a joyous and informative trip down memory lane. (I remember just 4,000 members!) What Anne and Annie Laurie Gaylor and Mr. Sontarck began has been and is amazing! Anne was so very smart and kind and sweet, and I remember fondly her asking for donations to “spruce up” the original Freethought Hall. Who could resist? We all wanted to help and be a part of something special. The work of FFRF is crucial for the success of our country, whether the religious believe it or not.

Best wishes to the entire staff. You guys mean the world to me and “I love you to the moon and back.”

**Shirley McClellan**  
North Carolina

## Give Barker’s book to religious visitors

I’ve enclosed a check for a copy of Dan Barker’s book, *God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All of Fiction*. This is the third copy I’ve ordered and I will be ordering more.

At least twice a year I’m visited by church leaders wanting me to attend their local establishments. Of course, I state my opposition to organized religion, which leads to a tension-filled debate that I am not qualified to win because I lose my temper too quickly.

So, I am trying another method. I’ll let Dan Barker speak for me through his book. I will offer those visitors a copy of Dan’s book.

I would urge all FFRF members who don’t like doorway debates to let Dan’s great book argue for them. You don’t have to buy a lot of copies. Just do what I do: Buy a copy as needed. For me, that’s about two a year.

If you’re not good at face-to-face debating, the gift of education can be offered at its best in Dan’s fascinating tome.

**Herb McClelland**  
Ohio

## It’s tough being only freethinker at this home

I am 81 years old and in an “olden agers” home with about 200 other “patients.” Some are OK, but my daughter put me in this home for my safety. Ha! I am dying from them. I must be the only freethinker here.

Anyway, I have included a small donation for you. I love your work.

**Carole Rosenberg**  
California

## Atheism altered life’s course due to final exam

My now grown children are very happy that their dad is, and always has been, an atheist. They know that if I hadn’t been so irreligious, they would not have been born!

The reason dates back to my high school final exam in Norway in 1956. I had my eye on graduate school to study applied physics, which required top

An offer we couldn’t refuse

The “Montclair Mafia” dodgeball team from Montclair, N.J., sent FFRF this tweet (from @MontclairMafia) on March 26 after winning their league: “We played for @FFRF this season in our Charity Dodgeball League. The check is in the mail!” FFRF received the check for \$150 and thanks the “Mafia” for its generous donation.

grades in all important subjects, including Norwegian composition. Back there and then, all final written exams were graded in secrecy by a team of graders who did not know you, while your teacher had no say in the grading. I had nailed down all the important grades in the various math and physics subjects, except for Norwegian composition. For that final exam, you had to describe how the various kinds of arts were being made available to the different segments of society — in the past, contemporaneously, and, finally, including your own ideas for the future.

I wrote my heart out, about 30 handwritten pages, but with my anti-religion attitude, I totally ignored the impact of religion! That was a major mistake, which dropped me down to a grade not sufficient for the very hard to get into applied physics study. Therefore, I had to settle for my next choice, mechanical engineering, which totally changed the rest of my life in terms of career, where to work, where to live, who I might meet, etc.

So, if I had included religion in my essay, as I should have done to make my composition complete, in all likelihood I would have received the grade I was used to and ended up on an entirely different track in my life. That means I would never have found my future Swedish wife, who I met while skiing in Squaw Valley. After a few years of inter-Scandinavian dating, we got married on a Friday the 13th, further underscoring my distaste for superstition. Yes, we are still married, looking forward to our 45-year anniversary on July 13 this year — another Friday!

Without that particular wife, I would never have been blessed (sorry!) with the two wonderful children we have, a son who’s an Oscar-nominated sound designer, and a daughter who’s an international sales manager for a German medical firm. Both are nonreligious,

fortunately, and both were married in civil ceremonies.

As my son, without a single “B” in his academic life, so wisely cracked: “Hur-ray for that ‘B’ in Norwegian, Dad!”

**Jorg Aadahl**  
California

## Twain novel brought out the freethinker in me

A book that deserves some FFRF publicity is Mark Twain’s *The Mysterious Stranger*. I first encountered it in the early 1950s at age 10 or 11 and it set me on the path that led to a life membership in FFRF.

I was raised in an ethnic Baptist church. My ties to it were 90 percent ethnic and 10 percent religious. That book shredded the religious ties.

When I was 14, my parents hauled me off to a strictly English-speaking church “for the good of the children.” It killed the religion in me quite dead. My parents had no idea how much good it did me!

As a University of Michigan freshman in 1960, I made friends with an outspoken atheist who had an outspoken atheist boyfriend (later husband). Whoever heard of such people in 1960? Not I! I had an “aha” moment. “So that’s what I am!” Those two showed me how to be proud and unafraid.

The Twain novel was the single most influential book of my life.

**Kathleen Yagelo**  
Michigan

## Breast cancer led to new acceptance of self

I have wanted to become a Lifetime Member for many years.

Relationship and career decisions I have made over decades — that were not in my own best interest — were

the result of an upbringing based on patriarchy, obedience and submission. It was only after two serious bouts of cancer that I accepted myself as wholly worthy and equally human (sans a couple of breasts). I agree with the early Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice H.S. Orton, who said, “There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution and war . . . as religion.”

**Colleen Pace**  
Michigan

## Use Freethought Today to thwart proselytizers

I was sitting on my front porch re-reading an old issue of Freethought Today when I spotted Jehovah’s Witnesses coming up the driveway. They went into their spiel and offered me literature to read. Without hesitation, I said that I would read theirs if they would read mine and then handed them the copy of Freethought Today. They glanced at it, looked at me like I was the devil himself, turned and fled the scene.

Needless to say, it made my day. When I relate this story to friends, it always brings a smile or chuckle.

**Lawrence Power**  
Florida

## Bible is most-printed, but likely not most-read

In response to Andrew Z. Colvin’s letter (March issue) decrying the bible as the most-printed book in the world, I suggest he take heart that’s it’s probably not the most-read book in the world. Many copies sit unopened in hotel drawers and on shelves. And some of the most bible literate people are nonbelievers, probably because there’s a high correlation between actually reading the bible and totally rejecting it and the religions that thump it.

**Joan Reisman-Brill**  
New York

## De Blasio weakening state-church separation

When I attended public schools in New York City decades ago, we were off for the week of Christmas and Easter (euphemistically called “winter break” and “spring break”). This is still the case. Good Friday was a regular school day, the last day before “spring break.” However, under our “progressive” mayor, Bill de Blasio, who hails from ultra-left wing Park Slope in Brooklyn, the public schools will now be closed on Good Friday, as well. This was never the case before. This is the same mayor who has ordered the public schools closed for Muslim and Chinese holidays, in addition to the Christian and Jewish holidays they have long recognized. Soon enough, I am sure he will have the schools closed for Hindu and Buddhist holidays, too. The teachers and students love him, the parents, not so much.

And so the separation of church and state continues to be weakened under de Blasio, whose pandering to the Hasi-dim is a scandal by itself.

**Dennis Middlebrooks**  
New York



## Positive results by FFRF make it all worthwhile

I am so glad that I decided to join FFRF a few years ago. I saw your news release about FFRF celebrating the Johnson Amendment victory. This type of feedback is so welcome it's almost beyond words. Keep up the good work.  
**Jim Maroney**  
Indiana

## FFRF lapel pin fosters occasional dialogue

I just wanted to let you know how great I think the FFRF lapel pin is. I wear it everywhere. People will ask me what the pin is for, and I proudly state that I am a die-hard member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. When they ask what that is, I say it is a tremendous group of nonbelievers to keep religion out of government, who believe in the strict separation of church and state. Occasionally a person (usually an old fuddy-duddy) will claim that this is a Christian nation and we need to put God into every aspect of life. I ask them if they know that Jesus was not a Christian but a Jew, and this provokes various responses. Anyway, just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate the new lapel pin and how proud I am to be an FFRF member. We may be a small group, although I have seen a number of changes since originally joining the group — including the impressive new headquarters — but we still get a lot done through litigation, amicus briefs, letters, etc.  
You should be very proud of how far FFRF has come. Keep up the great work!  
**Allen P. Wilkinson**  
California

## ‘Sacrificial weekend’ was a welcome relief

Congratulations to Gordon Lamb who authored “A sacrificial weekend” (April issue). His tongue-in-cheek rendition of the conversation between God the father and God the son is a welcome relief from the ultra-serious stuff we hear and read all the time. Of course, those who are afraid of burning in hell will not see

the humor (though they sorely need it), but that's their problem. Me? I'm going to get cremated anyway.  
**Raymond Hellkamp**  
New York

## Ideas of God, afterlife seem too doubtful

While visiting my family one day, my Aunt Joyce loudly declared that no one can be moral without God. I saw a dozen eyes quickly dart to me and I hastily slid away. I longed to say what I thought about this ignorant comment, and though no one would actually “see the light” from anything I could say, my mind was reeling with verbal comebacks. I grinned at them all and removed myself to my room, refusing to be baited and hooked.  
I closed my eyes to imagine myself responding to my self-righteous aunt from hell. Religion had been used to kill more people than all of the natural disasters on the planet. Countless women were tortured and burned alive as witches, simply because they had learned about the healing power of herbs. I could have quoted directly from the bible, where God tells “his people” to slaughter all the people of another tribe, with the exception of the comely girls, his gift of sex slaves.  
I understand that it is built into our genes to avoid pain and death and I have great admiration for those who give or risk death to protect others, but the idea that there is a god that will take you to a place where you will live for eternity seems extremely doubtful to me. Mind you, I would love to be able to have wings and be able to play a harp, but I fear after a few centuries I would get bored of it.  
At any rate, there is the problem that there are at least a hundred different versions of religions. Can they all be right about what happens after death? I am sick and tired of the “my god” is bigger than “your god” wars. I feel that religion is the most dangerous concept to the continuing existence of the human race. One final thought: If there was such thing as an omnipotent being, why would it need to be worshipped?  
**Karen Leonard**  
California

# Support, not prayer, keeps me positive despite Stage IV cancer

Although it may not be in the cards for me to have long years in this lifetime, I want to become a Lifetime Member. I hope this membership will support the important work FFRF is doing and will continue to do.



Jet Mitchell

I grew up in an extremely strict fundamentalist evangelical Christian home, in which rigid rules were the norm. Coming to atheism as an adult, and breaking away from family beliefs, was a long process, but well worth the journey. Reading about Dan Barker's journey was particularly relevant to me, as I grew up a Christian pianist and accompanied church choirs in Baptist and evangelical Christian churches from age 13 to 25.

The happiness and joy I experience now is exponentially better than my childhood memories. Not believing, and enjoying this life only, is truly a better experience than an illusive promise of a better life to come. As many people celebrated Easter, I was delighted to visit friends, have a bite of chocolate, and think about the day in terms of life and happiness, minus any religious overtones.

The work you are doing with the Clergy Project, in addition to the important legal work, must continue. As a licensed Nevada attorney, I fully appreciate the advocacy work being done on behalf of those of us who choose not to be believers.

When I was diagnosed in 2016 with Stage IV metastatic triple-negative breast cancer (with no family history and having run at least one half marathon in all 50 states) at a young age, it caught me quite by surprise. However, my nonbeliefs have been strengthened, seeing an amazing outpouring of love and support from



Jet Mitchell has run a half marathon in all 50 states.

people far and wide.  
I am being kept alive by my current chemotherapy treatments, and I trust that science will one day find a cure for Stage IV cancer. In the meantime, I rely on world-class doctors and the best medicine money can buy. While I am here, instead of saying a prayer, I constantly thank my amazing support team, which keeps me quite active and positive. And I'm still running half marathons.

Finding atheists in the cancer community is rare, but here we are. We find support in each other and in the science that continues to progress in search of a cure.

When I read FFRF updates, I am encouraged. I hope that FFRF continues to cultivate support from young nonbelievers, who will continue rational thought agendas for years to come.  
Please accept my good thoughts for the work you do.  
**Jet Mitchell**  
Nevada

# CRANKMAIL

Let's check in with how FFRF's detractors are responding to our work around the country. All letters/emails are printed as received.

**Repent:** What gives you the right to force your small minority views on this country? I feel nothing but sympathy for anyone that hold your views. God will forgive you, if you just repent. I don't think you have the courage to respond to this email.  
— Gary Kruse

**LIES:** You people are so misguided and your arguments are so weak and filled with lies . I hope that someday you learn the truth and the truth is you are wrong, there is a God, and we are free to worship him in this country! The violation I am reporting is in regard to your disgraceful and completely unfounded premises. You stand against the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution.  
— James Bernthal

**FFRF:** You do not want me to contact you. You won't like what I have to say — *Lisa Rudisill*

**Pussies:** Why are you such crybaby pussies? Why can't you stand on your own two feet and ignore things you don't agree with? Why must you cry like little bitches when you see the ten commandments? Why are you so weak and so frail that you fall into a panic attack at the first sign of religious paraphernalia? Stop crying every time you feel uncomfortable, only pathetically weak people would need to create/join a support group in order to cope with your unfounded and frankly pussy anxiety, then pretend to be strong and actually waste tax payer funds in order to fight

your frivolous lawsuits. I have an idea, move to a country that bans religion, see how hapoy and hopeful their people are, like nkorea. Also, how do you survive with our currency having IN GOD WE TRUST on every note and coin? Do you go into a shell when ever you touch our currency? There are a lot of pathetic groups out there, you're at the top!  
— Anthony D'Agostino

**Study to show yourself truth:** Why do you hide in darkness and tell lies ??? If there is any truth to your organization you would Founding Fathers document s and research the truth , which is they intended us to have a religion , Free from government , Not a government free from religion . There are plenty of country's free from Religion , but this one was founded for our freedom of religion.....  
— Brenda Portman

**Your work is done:** Don't worry dudes, you don't have to waste your time to make an absolute godless nation. The 10 Commandments are already out of our lives thanks to the ACLU, homosexuality is running rampant not only in America, bestiality and other weird behaviors are becoming the norm, and almost all Christian organizations are OK with evolution and LGBTs, etc. But what you love the most, there is a drastic reduction of attendance in churches, and many former “Christians” are joining the ranks of evolutionists. What else could you ask for? Just be a little bit patient for many more to agreeing with your godless philosophy because it is written “... when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”  
Luk.18:1-8 KJV — *Gustavo Pomar*

# THEY SAID WHAT?

When the cell of a pig is used and its genetic material is utilized in the production of food, the cell, in fact, loses its original identity and therefore cannot be defined as forbidden for consumption. It wouldn't even be meat, so you can consume it with dairy.  
**Rabbi Yuval Cherlow, stating that cloned pig meat is kosher.**  
*New York Post, 3-22-18*



Ralph Drollinger

To think that man can alter the Earth's ecosystem — when God remains omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent in the current affairs of mankind — is to more than subtly espouse an ultra-hubristic, secular worldview relative to the supremacy and importance of man.  
**Ralph Drollinger, who leads weekly bible study meetings for members of Congress and Trump's cabinet,**

**including EPA chief Scott Pruitt.**  
*Right Wing Watch, 4-3-18*

Prosecutions have always been focused on the abortionist. There is no way a woman would go to jail let alone face the death penalty. The statute alone, the threat of prosecution, would dramatically reduce abortion. That is my goal.  
**Bob Nonini, candidate for lieutenant governor of Idaho. During a moderated candidate forum, Nonini nodded in agreement when asked if he supported the death penalty for the woman as a possible outcome for abortion.**  
*Idaho Statesman, 4-3-18*

This is part of our country's history. Our nation was built on a Christian foundation. We need to make sure the children know that and pass it on to the next generation.  
**Louisiana state Sen. Regina Barrow, who introduced a bill that would require “In God We Trust” be taught and displayed in all public schools.**  
*USA Today, 4-9-18*



# BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

## Arrested / Charged

**Marcin A. Nurek**, 37, Morristown, NJ: Criminal sexual contact and child endangerment. Nurek, a native Pole ordained last July as a Catholic priest, was indicted in March by a county grand jury. After his arrest last August on suspicion of wrongdoing, his assignment as parochial vicar at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Mountain Lakes was canceled.

He allegedly followed a group of girls down a street in Boonton, then reached a hand under a 13-year-old's skirt and groped her buttocks over her underwear, stating either "You're sexy," or "Hey, sexy," authorities said. *Source: AP, 3-26-18*

**Robert DeLand Jr.**, 71, Freeland, MI: Attempted 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct/personal injury, 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct and gross indecency between male persons. DeLand, pastor of St. Agnes Catholic Church, is charged with unwanted sexual contact with a 21-year-old man and with sexually touching a 17-year-old boy causing injury. About 6 others, including a female, have since come forward.

Police raided offices of the Diocese of Saginaw, the residence of Bishop Joseph Cistone and the rectory at the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption. Prosecutor Mark Gaertner wouldn't disclose what evidence was being sought. "Contrary to the statements of the diocese and the bishop that they would fully cooperate with law enforcement, they did not," Gaertner said. *Source: Detroit News, 3-12-18.*

**Ronald J. Dombrowski**, 72, a priest at Holy Family Parish in Saginaw, was suspended in March due to an allegation of child sexual abuse. Gaertner said no charges have been filed against Dombrowski. *Source: ABC News, 3-22-18*

**James Hackett**, 41, Wampum, PA: Theft and receiving stolen property. Hackett, organist at St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Parish, is accused of stealing between \$10,000 and \$15,000 from the collection plate. An affidavit said marked currency was placed in a safe from which Hackett was seen on video removing money from envelopes. *Source: Tribune-Review, 3-19-18*

**José Ronaldo Ribeiro**, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Formosa, Brazil, and 4 unidentified priests, a monsignor, a vicar general and 2 officials of the administrative curia are accused of stealing over \$600,000 from church coffers to buy a cattle ranch, a lottery ticket shop and a truck.

Allegations of financial irregularity were first raised in 2010 against Ribeiro when he was bishop of the Diocese of Janaúba. Pope Francis transferred him to Formosa in November 2014. *Source: O Tempo, 3-19-18*

**Heather M. Riggs**, 42, Terre Haute, IN: Theft, check fraud, forgery, neglect of a dependent and 2 counts of dealing a controlled substance. During an investigation of a heroin operation, state police determined that proceeds were allegedly being paid from a bank account associated with Victory Christian Center, an Assemblies of God church where Riggs controlled the finances and her husband, Shawn Riggs, was pastor.

She's also accused of taking cash from church offerings and buying drugs valued at \$75,000 during the past 14 months, sometimes with children present. Shawn Riggs allegedly told police he was unaware of her drug use and hadn't received a paycheck in several months but didn't question it because the church was struggling financially. *Source: Tribune-Star, 3-19-18*

**Saeed Abedini**, 37, Lynchburg, VA: Violating a no-contact order. Abedini, a former Muslim who converted to Christianity and was jailed for 3 years in Iran for organizing underground "house churches," is accused of sending derogatory text messages to his estranged wife in Boise, ID. He pleaded guilty to a similar charge in February 2017.

His wife Naghmeh Abedini brought nationwide attention to his plight in Iran and then filed for legal separation the day he arrived back in Boise in 2016. He told the judge in March that he left Boise 9 months ago and works now as a minister in Lynchburg. *Source: Idaho Statesman, 3-19-18*

**Benjamin Baldiviez**, 23, Mesquite, TX: Continuous sexual abuse of a child. Baldiviez is accused of molesting a child at Parkside Baptist Church between March and October 2017 during church-related events while he was a Sunday school teacher. *Source: KDFW, 3-16-18*

**Harold Dien**, 57, Colton, CA: 2 misdemeanor counts of annoying or molesting a child. Dien, pastor at Laguna Indonesian Seventh-day Adventist Church, was charged with incidents involving a girl in Loma Linda after a referral from Child Protective Services. *Source: Redlands Daily Facts, 3-16-18*

**Juan A. Juarez Saravia**, 35, Durham, NC: Taking indecent liberties with a child and 2 counts of sexual exploitation of a minor. Saravia, a traveling evangelical pastor who worked in the Hispanic community, allegedly set up a fake Facebook account to entice a 14-year-old Virginia girl into sending him explicit videos.

He was among 76 people arrested in several



states in a sting that resulted in 13 children being identified as victims. Also arrested on 9 counts of exploitation was **Richard W. Bell**, 73, Moyock, NC, building and grounds trustee at New Moyock United Methodist Church. *Source: WTVD, 3-16-18*

**Yacov Simmonds**, 42, Winnipeg: 3 counts each sexual assault and sexual interference and 2 counts of invitation to sexual touching. Simmonds, a rabbi who worked for Chabad-Lubavitch of Winnipeg and its Jewish Learning Centre, fled last fall when he was charged for alleged incidents with 3 females between 1993-99. His whereabouts are unknown.

Police only recently released details of the charges in response to media inquiries although they were filed last October. Simmonds' association with Chabad ended in May 2016 when he was paid a severance, a spokesperson said. *Source: Canadian Jewish News, 3-16-18*

**Walter J. Ernst**, 57, Monroe, AL: Theft: Ernst is charged with stealing \$16,000 in September from Covenant Presbyterian Church, where he was treasurer, by wiring the money to his account. *Source: News Star, 3-15-18*

**Michael Hari**, 47, Clarence, IL: Several charges related to the August bombing of Dar Al-Farooq Islamic Center in Bloomington, MN, and illegal possession of a machine gun. Hari, a member of the Old German Baptist Brethren, and **2 alleged accomplices** are also suspects in the November bombing of the Women's Health Practice in Bloomington, IL.

Hari was convicted of child abduction in 2006 for taking his daughters, ages 13 and 15, from their custodial mother and fleeing to Mennonite communities in Mexico and Belize. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 3-13-18*

**Donald R. White**, Hannibal, MO: 2 counts of wire fraud. White, treasurer of Antioch Baptist Church, is accused of embezzling \$320,888 from 1994 to 2016. White was a suspect in the theft of church funds just before the church was destroyed in a December 2016 fire, the cause of which was never determined. *Source: Whig-Herald, 3-12-18*

**Andy C. Harris**, 56, Bossier City, LA: Possession of a Schedule II controlled dangerous substance (methamphetamine) and possession of drug paraphernalia. Harris, senior pastor at Church of the Cross, an Assemblies of God congregation, resigned after being charged, church officials confirmed.

An affidavit alleged detectives found 3.4 grams of meth, along with a smoking pipe and snorting straw, at his home. *Source: Shreveport Times, 3-9-18*

**Ronnie Gorton**, 39, Drummonds, TN: 47 counts of child sexual abuse, including statutory rape of a boy under age 13. Gorton, worship leader of Awakening Church, was charged after deputies responded to a call about a suicidal man. Two male alleged victims have come forward. *Source: WREG, 3-6-18*

**Larry A. Winn**, 65, Dallas: Sexual assault of a child. Winn, who coordinated a bus ministry at Open Door Baptist Church in Mesquite for people needing a ride to Sunday services, is accused of assaulting a teen girl. His son, **Steven Winn**, 33, Crandall, an Open Door youth pastor, was charged in February with 3 counts of sexual assault of a child allegedly involving a 15-year-old girl. Open Door senior pastor **Matt Jarrell** hanged himself in jail in 2011 after his arrest on a rape charge in West Virginia. *Source: Star-Telegram, 3-6-18*

**Richard J. Shaka**, 72, Blaine, MN: Criminal vehicular homicide involving grossly negligent driving, driving under the influence of alcohol and driving with a blood-alcohol content greater than 0.08. Shaka, founding pastor of All Nations Christian Assembly, is accused of driving north in the southbound

lanes in Brooklyn Park and killing another driver, Jenna Bixby, 30.

Bixby, a 911 dispatcher at the Minneapolis Emergency Communications Center, was driving to work about 8 p.m. Police said Shaka's blood-alcohol content was 0.168. *Source: Pioneer Press, 3-2-18*

**Luke Reese**, 49, Indianapolis: Criminal confinement, domestic battery, kidnapping and intimidation. Reese, a former Anglican priest ordained in Texas as a married Catholic priest in 2016, is accused of terrorizing his wife of 25 years. They have 7 children and are now divorcing.

Reese belongs to Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, a Houston-based order for former Anglicans that allows married priests. An affidavit said he made her kneel at the altar at Holy Rosary Catholic Church and threatened to choke her for having an alleged affair. The alleged abuse lasted about 18 hours and included Reese taking nude photos of her that he threatened "to send to everyone at their church." *Source: KTRK, 3-1-18*

**Christopher C. Stutts**, 36, McCalla, AL: Sex abuse of a child under age 12 and 2nd-degree sodomy. Stutts, part-time youth minister at Westwood Baptist Church in Birmingham, is accused of assaults on a girl, now 14, starting 3 years ago and ending Feb. 23. His wife also volunteered at the church. *Source: WBMA, 3-1-18*

**Spenser A. Farr**, 24, Rolla, MO: 5 counts of statutory sodomy. Farr, student pastor at Hamlin Baptist Church, is accused of alleged incidents in 2012 and 2013. Court documents allege the abuse took place at public pools in Rolla and Steelville.

In Rolla in 2012, he's accused of fondling a boy's genitals when he was 12 or 13 while they were showering after swimming. He's charged with molesting the other boy in Steelville about 30 times. After being fired as a lifeguard, he was hired at Hamlin Baptist, where he's been fired. *Source: WRAL, 3-1-18*

**Edward I. Espinosa**, 41, Waco, TX: Misdemeanor prostitution. Espinosa, outreach pastor at Antioch Community Church, is charged with having sex last October at a massage parlor where Asian women were forced to provide sex.

Investigators found videos of men who paid for sex, according to arrest affidavits for **Chun Yang Zhang**, 47, Austin. She's charged with human trafficking and operating a house of prostitution. *Source: Tribune-Herald, 3-1-18*

**George P. Lee III**, 44, Savannah, GA: Driving under the influence and failure to yield to a pedestrian in a crosswalk. Lee, senior pastor of St. John Baptist Church, was arrested at 2:30 a.m. *Source: WSAV, 3-1-18*

**Joshua Clemons**, 35, Denver: 3 counts of sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust. Clemons is accused of assaults on 3 female members of his youth ministry at Cross Roads Community Church in Parker.

He allegedly knew a Denver girl was 17 when he started having sex with her in 2014 when he was married. It's alleged that on her 18th birthday, Clemons gave her a card that said "We're legal." *Source: Denver Post, 2-28-18*

**Alvin Joiner**, 60, DeKalb County, GA: Attempted kidnapping. Joiner, who held unspecified positions since 2008 with New Hope Cathedral and Ministries in Stockbridge before being ordained Jan. 7, is accused of accosting a teen girl outside her high school while he was delivering newspapers.

He "got out of the car and then guided her into his vehicle," where the girl recorded the lewd conversation on her phone before Joyner let her go, alleged sheriff's Lt. Christopher Rorey. Other girls have made

similar allegations, Rorey said.

New Hope senior pastor Richard Leaphart said he did a background check on Joiner in 2008 and found nothing. But court records show he has 2007 convictions for solicitation for sodomy and pandering and idling for sex. *Source: WSB Atlanta, 2-27-18*

**Stephen Couch**, 41, Winnsboro, LA: 5 counts of molestation of a juvenile and 6 counts of prohibited sexual conduct between an educator and student. Charges stem from alleged incidents between 2004-16 with 5 male students at Apostolic Tabernacle Christian School, where Couch was principal until recently. *Source: News-Star, 2-27-18*

**Yisroel (Stanley) Kleinman**, 62, Queens, NY: Course of sexual conduct and other charges related to alleged serial abuse between September 2016 and September 2017 of an 11-year-old girl. Kleinman, a rabbi and 5th-grade Jewish studies teacher at Yeshiva Darchei Torah, was put on paid leave after his arrest. He's accused of fondling a girl's breasts and inserting his finger in her vagina on more than 2 occasions. *Source: NY Daily News, 2-24-18*

## Pleaded / Convicted

**James D. Worley**, 45, Gresham, OR: Guilty by jury of 7 counts of sexual abuse of children under the ages of 14 and 12 between 2002-04. Worley, senior pastor at Powell Valley Church from 2012 until his 2014 arrest, faced more than 50 counts in 2 counties for alleged abuse of 2 former family members. He has remarried.

His mother, Connie Worley, pointed her finger after the verdict at Judge Beth Bagley and said "You, you." Bagley replied, "Don't you dare shake your finger at me" and found her in contempt of court, fined her \$500 and ordered her to spend 24 hours in jail.

"I'm sorry, your honor," Worley said as she was led away in handcuffs. "I bet you are," Bagley replied. *Source: Bend Bulletin, 3-14-18*

**Paul Moore**, 82, Largs, Scotland: Guilty by jury of sexual abuse of 4 males between 1977-96 while he was a Catholic priest. The church never reported allegations and he was sent for treatment to Canada before reassignment.

One man, now 46, testified he was 5 when his teacher sent him to Moore for drawing a picture of Jesus with nipples. During the abuse, he said, "Time sort of froze. He had his hands running up and down my back. He kept saying I was a nice boy. I just wanted to get it over. I just wanted to get home to my mum." *Source: The Times, 3-15-18*

**Paul Burress**, 43, Henrietta, NY: Pleaded guilty to misdemeanor sexual abuse for forcibly touching 3 women in his home in 2016-17. The charismatic pastor at Victory Church was featured in "Fight Church," a 2014 documentary about mixed martial arts. A plea bargain calls for 1 year of probation and no incarceration. *Source: Democrat & Chronicle, 3-14-18*

**Ignacio Villafan**, 52, Tulare, CA: Pleaded no contest to embezzlement of about \$425,000 from St. Rita's Catholic Church, where he was pastor from 2005-12. Prosecutor David Alavezos said the church has sent his office a letter opposing any prison time for Villafan. *Source: KFSN, 3-5-18*

**Andrew Rushford**, 64, Yantic, CT: Pleaded guilty to 2nd-degree larceny in connection with the theft of \$43,000 since 2013 from Grace Episcopal Church, where he was treasurer. Prosecutor Lawrence Tytla said several church members have asked the court for a suspended sentence and restitution. *Source: Norwich Bulletin, 2-28-18*

**Ever Oliveros-Cano**, 50, Menlo Park, CA: Pleaded no contest to child molestation and 2 counts of sexual battery. Oliveros-Cano, pastor at Senor Justicia Nuestra Church, is charged with abuse of 3 teen girls from 2011 to 2015. One of the girls alleged he told her he was "cleansing" her. *Source: Daily Post, 2-28-18*

**Samuel Shaffer**, 34, Cedar City, UT: Pleaded guilty to rape of a child. Shaffer, founder of a fundamentalist Mormon splinter group named Knights of the Crystal Blade, still faces charges in another county of child sodomy and bigamy. **John Coltharp**, 34, and Shaffer were arrested in December for hiding Coltharp's children from his ex-wife.

Shaffer allegedly told police he married Coltharp's 8-year-old daughter and Coltharp married Shaffer's 7-year-old daughter. An affidavit alleges Coltharp planned to kill his son because he was "possessed by an evil spirit." *Source: Salt Lake Tribune, 2-21-18*

## Sentenced

**Thomas Wood**, 55, Lydiat, UK: 3-year community order [no incarceration] and 7-year sexual harm prevention order. Wood, pastor at Our Lady's Catholic Church, pleaded guilty to possessing indecent images of children and 2 counts of making indecent images of children.

The charges said in November 2015 that Wood was among 47 people watching a video stream showing children age 10-16 being molested, and with 50 others watching a girl age 8-10 being raped by a man and 2 boys age 10-12 having sex. *Source: Liverpool Echo, 3-22-18*

**Carlos López Valdés**, 72, Tlalpan, Mexico: 63 years in prison and \$4,000 damages to the victim, now 33, for raping him several times between 1994-



98, starting when he was 11 and Valdés was pastor at San Agustín de las Cuevas Catholic Parish. *Source: ACI Prensa, 3-13-18*

**Michael J. Hewitt**, 71, Fremington, UK: 15 years in prison for convictions on 8 counts of indecency with children under age 16. Hewitt, a member of a Jehovah's Witness congregation, "abused his position of trust to exploit the young girls for his own satisfaction," Detective Constable Janet Williams told the court.

Two of the 3 girls were 5 when the abuse started in the 1980s. *Source: BBC, 3-13-18*

**Musa Mulo**, 63, Lugazi, Uganda: Life in prison after pleading guilty to raping a 2-year-old girl in 2012. Mulo, an imam at Kibubbu Mosque, was accused of assaulting a girl from the neighborhood at his home. After his arrest, a group of his followers destroyed the victim's home, claiming her mother had framed Mulo. *Source: Daily Monitor, 3-12-18*

**Rupert Clarke**, 64, Manchester, Jamaica: 8 years' hard labor. Clarke, pastor of Nazareth Moravian Church, pleaded guilty to having sex with 2 sisters under age 16. He was found in a parked car in a "compromising position" in December 2016 with the younger girl. Police later determined he had impregnated her sister. *Source: Jamaica Gleaner, 3-9-18*

**Roshad Thomas**, 41, Tallahassee, FL: 25 years in prison for convictions on 9 counts of lewd and lascivious molestation when he was a youth pastor at Calvary Chapel and a counselor at several other churches. The 10 male victims' ages ranged from 11 to 16. *Source: WTXL, 3-8-18*



Harvey County Jail  
**Kansas Christian missionaries James and Paige Nachtigal.**

**James Nachtigal** and **Paige Nachtigal**, North Newton, KS: 32 months in jail and 2 years' probation for convictions of 3 counts and 2 counts, respectively, of child abuse after aggravated battery charges were dropped. They were charged in 2016 with starving and beating 3 children ages 11 and 15 who were adopted from Peru, where the Nachtigals had worked as missionaries. James Nachtigal was CEO at Kansas Christian Home in Newton and Paige was a missionary at World Outreach Ministries.

Although authorities received tips in 2014, it wasn't until February 2016 when the 11-year-old boy was found walking in a field barefoot that anything was done. He told a state trooper he feared returning home because he hadn't done his homework and that was a sin.

Abuse included broken bones from punishment and malnutrition. Starvation was so severe that when the children did get to eat, their bodies "didn't know what to do" with the food, a pediatrician testified. *Source: kansas.com, 3-8-18*

**James Irwin**, 69, Plymouth, IN: 2 years in a community corrections program after pleading guilty in a plea bargain to dealing a controlled substance and patronizing a prostitute. Irwin, director of Care and Share Ministries, was accused of offering 3 informants drugs and money for sex, which didn't actually occur.

One woman, a recovering opiate addict, went to authorities after she saw how Irwin was exploiting people in need. *Source: WSBT, 3-7-18*

**Trinette Johnson**, 44, Violet, LA: 2 years in prison, suspended, and restitution for embezzling an estimated \$102,000 from Greater Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church between 2006-13 while she was secretary. *Source: Times-Picayune, 3-5-18*

**Randy A. Johnson**, 53, Dallas Center, IA: 5 years in prison, suspended, and 3 years' probation after entering Alford pleas to child endangerment and indecent exposure. Johnson, pastor of Church of the Brethren, was charged with sexual abuse of his adopted daughter, now 17, for about 18 months when she was 12 and 13.

His wife, Kathy Johnson, knew about the abuse but did nothing despite being told multiple times, the victim stated in court. She wasn't charged. *Source: Des Moines Register, 3-2-18*

**Stephen T. Dougherty**, 61, Bexar County, TX: 60 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of aggravated sexual assault involving a 13-year-old girl at her grandparents' home in December 2011. Dougherty was removed that year from ministry as a priest with the Catholic Diocese of Corpus Christi.

The plaintiff alleges in a civil suit that he molested her from 2005-11 and that the diocese and Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity "engaged in a conspiracy to cover up the sexual abuse by Dougherty and other Catholic clerics." *Source: Caller-Times, 3-1-18*

**Bernard McGrath**, 70, Dunedin, New Zealand: 33 years in prison with no parole for 21 years. McGrath, a brother in the St. John of God Catholic order, was convicted of raping a boy at the Marylands boarding school when he was 6. McGrath has served 4 previous sentences for molesting children and was most

recently released in 2008.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that St. John of God had the highest number (40%) of alleged or convicted offenders of any Catholic order in Australia and New Zealand. The average was 7%. *Source: Daily Times, 2-20-18*

## Civil Lawsuits Filed

**Assemblies of God entities** are being sued in Oregon for \$42 million over child abuse allegations by 6 men who allege molestation in the 1980s by **Ralph Gantt** and **Todd Clark**, who were volunteers in the church's Royal Rangers scouting program and later served time in prison. A similar 2016 suit was settled for undisclosed terms in October, said plaintiffs' attorney Gilion Dumas.

The Royal Rangers' mission "is to evangelize, equip and empower the next generation of Christ-like men and lifelong servant leaders," its website say. The Pentecostal denomination is based in Springfield, MO. *Source: News-Leader, 3-11-18*

**Cynthia McCullough**, Charlotte, NC, pastor of St. John AME Zion Church, is being sued by New York Life for falsely claiming the extent of her disability from a nervous system disorder called reflex sympathetic dystrophy, for which the insurance company paid her about \$390,000 from 2010-17. McCullough claimed she was unable to bathe or dress herself and needed constant home care, according to the suit.

The company's surveillance in late 2016 and early 2017 showed McCullough lifting objects into her SUV, pumping her own gas and visiting several businesses. Church Facebook photos also allegedly showed her going down a slide and playing the arcade game Skee-Ball. *Source: Charlotte Observer, 3-10-18*

**Word of Life Ministries and Schools**, Wichita, KS, and its senior pastor **Robert J. Rotola Sr.** are defendants in a \$575,000 suit alleging its youth pastor **Chauncey M. Walker**, 48, sexually abused the plaintiff, now 20, nearly 300 times from 2012-15.

The suit contends the church failed to supervise Walker and tried to cover up allegations. Walker was jailed in August and is charged with aggravated indecent liberties with a child and 2 counts of criminal sodomy. *Source: Wichita Eagle, 3-2-18*

**Talmud Torah Kaminetz**, a Jerusalem ultra-Orthodox elementary school, is being sued by a former student who alleges abuse starting 18 years ago when he was in 3rd grade. A teacher and principal, both unidentified, are co-defendants.

He alleges the teacher repeatedly pinched his private areas during Torah testing sessions and that when he started to skip them, the principal punished him with a stick. In 6th grade, the claim says,

teacher **Edward Courtney**. The archdiocese will pay \$1.5 million and school district will pay \$950,000.

It was alleged the archdiocese knew Courtney had abused students in its school system before he began teaching in public schools but failed to report him to authorities. *Source: KOMO, 3-13-18*

The **Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York** will pay an undisclosed amount to 2 plaintiffs who alleged sexual abuse when they were 7 years old by **Gonzalo Campos**, a leader at Jehovah's Witness congregations in San Diego in the 1990s.

Campos was temporarily removed before returning and later admitted molesting at least 8 children between 1982-95. He fled to Mexico in 2010 and is still at-large. *Source: Union-Tribune, 3-6-18*

## Legal Developments

**Malka Leifer**, 54, principal of a Jewish girls' school in Australia who fled to Israel in 2008 after being accused of sexually assaulting students, must remain jailed until a decision is reached on extraditing her. A Jerusalem court ruled she is untrustworthy and a flight risk.

Leifer faces 74 counts of child sexual abuse involving at least 8 girls at Adass Israel School in Melbourne between 2003-08. She has 8 children of her own, several of whom accompanied her to Israel. *Source: Times of Israel, 3-21-18*

## Allegations

**Joseph Bishop**, 85, president of a Mormon missionary training center from 1983-86 in Provo, UT, is being investigated by the church for an alleged 1984 sexual assault at the center on a woman, now 55. She posed last December as a reporter and secretly recorded an interview with Bishop in Arizona.

He can be heard saying he doesn't recall assaulting her and adds that maybe it's "because my mind doesn't want me to remember that." On the recording, he admits giving another woman a back rub that got too "frisky," apologizes repeatedly and says that for years he has struggled with a "sexual addiction."

County prosecutor David Sturgill said the statute of limitations expired 4 years after the alleged assault. *Source: Yahoo! News, 3-22-18*

**Charles Oduro**, 56, pastor of St. Catherine of Genoa Catholic Parish in Brooklyn, NY, is accused by his former secretary of repeated sexual innuendo and groping before she was fired. On a recording she made in January and gave to a newspaper, a man she says is Oduro is heard asking to kiss her in the rectory: "Just the lips, not the tongue."

The man then asks, "So if we kiss, does that mean that we can't f---?" She can also be heard saying "ouch" on the recording.

Spokeswoman Adriana Rodriguez said the di-

gram administered by 2 former state Supreme Court justices.

The diocese estimates that since 1950 it's received at least 100 claims against 53 clergy members and has paid out about \$1.2 million in settlements. *Source: Spectrum News, 3-4-18*

## Removed / Resigned

**Dennis Riter** was put on leave by the Diocese of Buffalo as pastor of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church in Dunkirk, NY, due to allegations of child sexual abuse in the 1990s. A former altar boy named Matt alleged to media that Riter molested him about 20 times during a period of 3 years, starting when he was 6.

Another allegation involves an altar boy named Nick Caetano, who died 9 years ago. His mother, Sharon Caetano, said he came home from serving Mass at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in 1997 and told her "[Riter] went underneath my robe and tried to play with me on the altar." She said she reported it to the diocese but said there were no ramifications other than Riter eventually taking a sabbatical and being transferred. *Source: WKBW, 3-26-18*

**Armand Garcia**, 48, Philadelphia, was put on leave as pastor of St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church on the same day investigators executed a search warrant at the parish rectory. A church spokesman said there's an allegation of misconduct with a minor. *Source: philly.com, 3-25-18*

**Michael R. Duesterhaus**, 52, Winchester, VA, parochial vicar of Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church, was placed on administrative leave during investigation of an allegation of sexual misconduct with a minor between 2001-04. *Source: Winchester Star, 3-21-18*

**Andy Savage**, 42, Memphis, TN, resigned as teaching pastor at his nondenominational megachurch, saying in a statement: "After much prayer and counsel, I now believe it's appropriate for me to resign from my staff position at Highpoint Church and step away from ministry in order to do everything I can to right the wrongs of the past."

He admitted sexual misconduct in 1997 when he was 22 and was a youth minister at a Texas Baptist church. 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."

A Christian publisher has canceled publication of Savage's book "The Ridiculously Good Marriage." He and his wife have 5 children. *Source: NBC/WREG, 3-20-18*

**C. Frank Phillips**, Chicago, founder of the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius, a Catholic religious order of men, was removed from ministry during investigation "of credible allegations of improper conduct involving adult men," Cardinal Blase Cupich said in a statement. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 3-19-18*

**Anthony Apuron**, 72, suspended archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Guam, was removed from office after a Vatican tribunal convicted him of unspecified charges in a sex abuse trial. The archdiocese had had nearly 160 clergy sex abuse lawsuits filed against it since 2016 that seek about \$115 million in damages. *Source: AP, 3-16-18*

**Jeff Windy**, 47, was removed as pastor at 3 Catholic parishes in Ottawa, IL: St. Columba, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Patrick. No specific reason was given. Windy, a bodybuilder, was in federal prison from 2002-06 for making and distributing illegal steroids. *Source: Ottawa Times, 3-13-18*

**Ken Engelking**, Salem, OR, resigned as pastor of Morning Star Community Church after 4 women made abuse allegations against him and 2 more former church staff members and a member of an affiliated church. In a 23-page letter to the church board, the women chronicled accusations of an abusive, adulterous relationship involving Engelking and sexual assault and rape by **3 other men** over more than 20 years and as recently as 2010. *Source: Statesman Journal, 3-9-18*

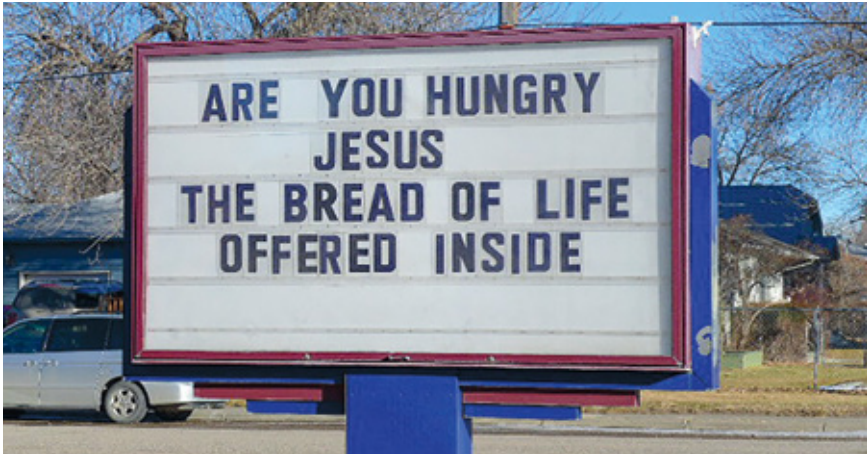
**Jeff Countryman**, Clearwater, FL, was fired as lead pastor of Country Side Christian Church for alleged theft. The church will not press charges since he has repaid the money, said to be less than \$15,000. *Source: Fox Tampa Bay, 3-6-18*

**Steven Krawatsky**, 40, was fired as Judaic studies teacher at Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School in Pikesville, MD. The Orthodox rabbi was suspended after 3 allegations by underage boys. In August 2015, a 7-year-old told a forensic interviewer that Krawatsky offered him and another boy money to touch his penis. Two others later came forward. No charges have been filed. *Source: Baltimore Sun, 3-2-18*

**John McAreavey**, 69, resigned as bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Dromore, Northern Ireland, after he came under scrutiny for his role in handling complaints about pedophile priest **Malachy Finnegan**, who died in 2002 without being prosecuted. McAreavey, bishop since 1999, had celebrated Mass with him in 2000 and officiated at his funeral. *Source: BBC, 3-1-18*

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

## Just a taste of religion



**Chris Swanberg of Montana sent us this photo of the church marquee from Grace Baptist Church in Great Falls, Mont. Chris writes: "Oh come all ye faithful flesh eaters!' That might be a good title, or how about 'All cannibals welcome'!"**

the school called the boy's mother to accuse him of spreading lies about rabbis and threatened expulsion. *Source: JTA, 2-28-18*

## Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Catholic Diocese of Buffalo, NY**, settled a sexual abuse suit with a Texas man, now 52, who alleged he was molested as an altar boy from 1979-82 by **James A. Spielman**, who left the priesthood in 1993. The diocese and Archbishop Walsh High School paid the victim \$1.5 million in 2016, although media weren't aware of the settlement until now. It was discovered in a search of federal court records.

The diocese has released a list of 42 priests removed or retired from ministry after allegations of sexual abuse of a minor. Of those, 24 are dead. *Source: Buffalo News, 3-18-18*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle** and the **Franklin Pierce School District** have settled for \$2.45 million a suit filed by a man alleging he was sexually abused in the early 1980s by elementary

ocese will now start providing back pay to the employee and classify her as being "on leave." *Source: NY Daily News, 3-9-18*

**Shambhala International**, a form of Tibetan Buddhism with more than 200 international meditation centers, released an open letter admitting to major failures in how it has dealt with "abhorrent sexual behavior" by some of its teachers.

The governing Kalapa Council responded to an investigative report by U.S. member Andrea Winn, who wrote, "Known child abusers are freely active within the Shambhala community, some are even senior teachers. Meanwhile, many who have been abused have been left with no recourse but to leave the community to heal and move forward as best they can." *Source: The Guardian, 3-4-18*

**Norbert Orsolits**, 78, a retired New York Catholic priest for the Buffalo Diocese, molested him nearly 40 years ago, Michael Whalen publicly alleged. Two days later, Bishop Richard Malone announced the Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Pro-



# IN MEMORIAM

## Norma Cunningham, former board member, dies at 100

Norma Steines Cunningham, long-time member and former Executive Board member of FFRF, died April 11.

Norma was a Life Member of FFRF, as is her husband, Joseph, and both have served on the Executive Board almost from its formation.

Norma was born Oct. 28, 1917, and grew up in St. Louis, where she was the valedictorian of the large Cleveland High School class of 1935, and earned a full four-year scholarship to Washington University in St. Louis.

Norma earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1939, and the same year received the Jesse Bar Fellowship Award, with which she acquired a master's degree in Latin in 1940. She also is a member of the Phi Beta Kappa honor society. In addition, she served as co-chair of the Arts & Sciences Century Leadership Club of Washington University.

After graduation, she taught in St. Louis area schools for four years before moving to Mascoutah, Ill., in 1944. She worked in the Mascoutah High School for 31 years, teaching Latin, German and English. At Mascoutah, Norma was chair of the school's Fine Arts department, also served on the Mascoutah Library board for many years and as a member of the Literary Society.

In December 1953, she married Joseph Cunningham, who was also a teacher at Mascoutah High School. They have two daughters — Kathryn, an attorney; and Linda, a medical doctor — and five grandchildren: Andrew, Sarah, Benjamin, Grace, and Alex.

Norma's hobbies were reading and researching the genealogy of her paternal ancestors, Herman and Frederick Steines, who were pioneers in the



Norma and Joseph Cunningham's wedding photo from Dec. 23, 1953.

St. Louis area in the 1830s. Norma and Joe spent many years traveling with their children, going to all 50 states plus Canada; and also visiting Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, Japan and China.

Norma used her fluency in German to translate the detailed diaries and letters from 1830-1835 of her

great-grandfather, Herman Steines, and great-great uncle, Frederick Steines, who immigrated from Germany. These documents were printed into two large volumes and were donated to the Missouri Historical Society, the St. Louis City Library, and many relatives.

Her other interests include reading



Norma Cunningham

classical literature, listening to classical music, working crossword puzzles, and cooking. A few years ago, Norma entered the Southwestern Illinois Spelling Bee contest and won first place, often correcting the host's pronunciation of various words.

Norma spent many happy hours entertaining family and friends over large elaborate meals at her beautifully set dining room table. She also was a recipe tester for Betty Crocker, sending in her comments and suggestions on improving the originals.

She loved flowers, particularly roses, visiting the Missouri Botanical Gardens, and was skilled at flower arrangement with blooms from her garden. Norma's favorite TV program was "Jeopardy!" She recently got all five of the week's Final Jeopardy questions correct.

Norma resided at the Silver Creek Assisted Living home in Mascoutah for the past five years, where she hosted family and friends for her 100th birthday celebration in October 2017.

"Norma was an extraordinarily loving wife, mother, and grandmother," daughter Linda Cunningham said. "She was very proud of the accomplishments of her daughters and grandchildren, and took great pleasure in each one of their achievements."

## Longtime member Al Fischer dies

Alfred Kaufman Fischer, 94, of Phoenix, died on Jan. 1, 2018. Al and his wife, Mildred, were ardent atheists and longtime members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

Al was born into a Jewish family in Cape Girardeau, Mo., and moved to New York City with his family at an early age. After going through his bar mitzvah at the age of 13, he told his parents that he didn't believe in the religion and never wished to attend services again.

Al and Mildred Morris were married in 1950 and moved to Phoenix, where they resided for more than 65 years. Al had a varied career, mostly in the newspaper business. Al and Mildred established a local newspaper, The South Phoenix Round-up, which they published for seven years.

After receiving his bachelor's degree from Arizona State, Al taught at Phoenix Union High School, then moved on to Scottsdale Community College, where he was the public information officer. In their spare time, Al and Mildred formed



Al Fischer

Golden West Publishers, which specialized in cookbooks and Western nonfiction. Together, they wrote a number of books, including Mexico's West Coast Beaches, Arizona Cook Book, Arizona Crossword Puzzles, and Arizona Museums. Al and Mildred traveled extensively in Europe, Russia and Mexico.

Al was preceded in death by his wife, Mildred, in 2017, and is survived by his three children and their spouses, Linda and Dick Thomas, Lee and Shayne Fischer, Bruce and Bobbi Fischer, and three grandchildren, Phillip Horn, Aaron Salts and James Alfred Thomas.

## State Rep. Michael Jacobson was a regular at conventions

Freethought Today is very sad to report the death of FFRF Lifetime Member Michael Jacobson, 74, who first joined FFRF in 1991. Mike died of pulmonary fibrosis on April 13 at his home in Las Vegas.

Born in Philadelphia in 1944, he had a brief marriage at 18, divorced at 19, joined the Army, then attended the University of Utah. He performed various odd jobs until he found his niche in land sales.

His partner of one year, Lawana Al-Dhari, reports that Mike closed his final land sale three days before his death. He even took a road trip the weekend before his death to Arizona, armed with 20 daily liters of oxygen, to visit his good friends, FFRF Life Members and Freethought Hall benefactors Joel Landon and Wanda Beers, to celebrate Joel's 80th birthday.

Mike attended annual FFRF conventions "religiously" and long served as Nevada's FFRF state representative. He was an ardent supporter of freethought and the separation of state and church, and belonged to many secular groups, but, according to Lawana, felt closest to FFRF. He was a founding member of the (Philadelphia) Freethought Society, run by Margaret Downey initially as a



Submitted photo  
Longtime FFRF Member Michael Jacobson spent the last year of his life with his partner, Lawana Al-Dhari.

FFRF chapter, and was active with that group until moving to Nevada.

He missed the 40th annual FFRF convention last fall, after being informed he needed emergency heart surgery. It turned out his lungs were in worse shape than his heart. Suffering from constant oxygen deprivation, after five months on hospice care, Michael "willed himself to die." Lawana reported that the evening before his death, Mike, who had lost 50 pounds, enjoyed a big "last supper."

"We will miss Michael's cheery and supportive presence so very much," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "He will leave a hole in our movement."



# Matt Stark fought hard for civil liberties

Matt Stark, former president and executive director of the Minnesota chapter of the ACLU, died on April 10 at age 88.

He was a Lifetime Member of FFRF, as is his surviving wife, Terri, who said, “FFRF was Matt’s favorite organization.” She will be completing a publication Matt had compiled on the history of 20 years of church/state battles in Minnesota.

“I support organizations with which I have fundamental agreement, such as FFRF, and I think what you guys are doing is absolutely wonderful,” Stark said in a January 2015 “Meet a Member” profile in Freethought Today. “Later in my life, when I came across FFRF, of course, I was absolutely delighted. I worked with Anne Nicol Gaylor and even sent FFRF a check to help put up a portrait of her in the new lobby!”

Stark was born Jan. 27, 1930, in New York City and remained there until he attended college at Ohio University. He earned two degrees in English and education in 1951 from Ohio University before attending the University of Minnesota, where he earned a master’s in educational psychology in 1959. He then earned a Ph.D. in educational administration and counseling at West-

ern Reserve University in 1963.

U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison of Minnesota knew Stark well. “Matt was a friend to all who hunger for justice and fairness in our society, and his tireless advocacy helped to inspire me to run for office,” Ellison told the Minneapolis Star Tribune in a news story about Stark’s death on April 15.

Stark first worked for the University of Minnesota, where he, through the ACLU, got in touch with Martin Luther King Jr.

“Martin Luther King Jr. and I developed a program where students at University of Minnesota were trained by me and others to go down South to Montgomery, Selma, etc., live there and work with black and white people positively concerned about race relations,” Stark said. “I met Dr. King through the ACLU and was his legal liaison.”

After leaving the university, Stark served as the Minnesota ACLU’s president for six years and then was its executive director from 1973-87. From there, he served on the board of directors, mostly as president, until 1998.

“Our clients are not the Nazis or the people who own porno stores,” Stark said, as reported in the Star Tribune.



Matt Stark

“Our client is the Bill of Rights. When we defend the Nazis or anyone unpopular, we’re not saying we necessarily agree with them. We’re defending their constitutional rights to peacefully assemble, or whatever. It’s only when we defend and win rights for the most hated in society that we’re protecting the rights for us all.”

“He was a zealous advocate for civil liberties,” Teresa Nelson, legal director for the ACLU of Minnesota, told the

Star Tribune. “He was unwavering in his positions.”

He was a staunch supporter of reproductive freedom and state-church separation. He also was an early proponent of LGBT rights.

In 1970, ACLU Minnesota supported LGBT rights and in 1971 filed suit when two Minnesota men were denied a marriage license. It was the first time someone had sued over the right to marry a person of the same sex. The case made it to the U.S. Supreme Court, although it refused to hear the case. It took 43 more years, but same-sex couples are now free to marry.

Terri Stark told the Star Tribune that although Matt knew he would lose that case, he also knew that eventually “gay people will have the same constitutional protections and liberties as everybody else,” she said. “He lived to see that come to fruition.”

“We send our warmest condolences to Terri on her loss. The movement has lost a monumental figure as well as a personal friend,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We admired Matt for the 30-plus years we knew him for his dedicated service to the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.”

## Victory

Continued from page 1

Jefferson and other Founders as an essential guarantee to prevent the government from establishing religion and forcing citizens to support churches or religions in which they disbelieve.

The lower court ruling claimed an unprecedented exception to this admirably clear command, holding that Morris County was justified in ignoring this constitutional mandate because the funds were part of a historic preservation program.

Fortunately, the state’s top court has corrected this mistake, overruling the trial court and holding that the New Jersey Constitution means exactly what it says.

“We find that the plain language of the Religious Aid Clause bars the use of taxpayer funds to repair and restore churches, and that Morris County’s



David Steketee

program ran afoul of that longstanding provision,” the Supreme Court states. It agrees with FFRF’s central contention that not being taxed to support a church is a central issue of religious freedom of conscience.

In an editorial by the Times of Trenton (N.J.), it sided with the judge’s decision.

“Taxpayers should have no obligation to pay for the upkeep or the preservation of those facilities, no matter how old, or how architecturally valuable, they may be,” the editorial board wrote.

FFRF cannot emphasize enough the significance of the N.J. Supreme Court decision.

“This is not just a win for secular citizens, but for every New Jersey taxpayer,” explains FFRF constitutional attorney Andrew L. Seidel. “Governments in New Jersey cannot force Muslims to bankroll temples and yeshivas, compel Jews to

subsidize Christian churches and Catholic schools, force Christians to fund mosques and madrassas or nonbelievers to support any religion. It’s a win for all.”

FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit organization dedicated to the constitutional separation of state and church, with more than 33,000 members across the country.

FFRF extends its gratitude to plaintiff David Steketee, who has vigorously fought to uphold the rights of Morris County taxpayers since before this case was filed. The lawsuit was handled by attorney Paul S. Grosswald. Seidel and FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne were co-counsel.

“ This is not just a win for secular citizens, but for every New Jersey taxpayer. — Andrew L. Seidel

## Compere

Continued from page 5

wanted to help the poor. I still miss that. I went to seminary while my three sons were teenagers . . .

“The day I was told I was accepted for ordination I thought I had achieved the pinnacle of all that I had wanted and spent 10 years working on. Now, at last, I would experience God in a way that would prove to me it was real.

“What happened blew my world apart. You see, I was ordained two weeks after my oldest son was killed in a car accident. I had asked to hold off and wait a year to be ordained, but I was told I’d have to rewrite all of my papers if I waited. There was no allowance or ‘grace’ made for me in my horrible situation. My spiritual beliefs and searching for proof of God exploded, and I was left with empty darkness. I was sitting on a pile of rubble that was my life. I did all that work and gave my life to a God I only wanted to love me, and this is how I was repaid? People

said that God must have loved my son to take him that way. They said it was God’s will, and he needed another angel. I kept wishing God didn’t love him at all, and I’d still see his smile and feel his loving arms around me.

“I left ministry for good after having served for five years. I loved my parishioners and in my last act of service, I stepped down and never returned to ministry. On top of that, my 15-year marriage ended. I filed bankruptcy and lost everything I owned. The one good thing? After having lost my son, losing everything else didn’t matter.

“As I wandered around lost, voicing my unbelief, I suffered extensive shunning. I felt I was crawling on the ground, bleeding, trying to find a place to voice all my doubt and pain. I cried a lot, watching people I loved step over me, as I hurt, and act like they never cared at all. My putting doubt into words terrified them.

“I am very happy today and hoping to connect with others so that I can see I am not alone and grow in my love for myself and learn new ideas. I can’t wait to talk to you as I thought I was alone in my leaving ministry and no longer believing in God.

“Life is short. Let’s dance along the shores and enjoy the sunshine together.”

Does that sound like a “charlatan

and coward” to you?

So, we at The Clergy Project will just continue to do our quiet work, trying to be available to current and former clergy who are honest enough to say that the evidence for their former faith simply doesn’t withstand scrutiny.

All the objective evidence suggests that religion is a man-made construct. Which is to say, God didn’t create man — man created God.

NOT AFRAID OF BURNING IN HELL

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# Planned Parenthoods Cecile Richards to speak at FFRF's convention

**Cecile Richards**, the longtime president of Planned Parenthood who recently stepped down, has agreed to speak at FFRF’s 41st annual convention in San Francisco, which runs Nov. 2-4.

Richards will receive FFRF’s “Forward” award, recognizing work to move society forward.

She is a national leader for women’s rights and social and economic justice, and the author of the New York Times bestseller, *Make Trouble*. As president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America and Planned Parenthood Action Fund for more than a decade, Richards has worked to increase affordable access to reproductive health care and to build a healthier and safer world for women and young people.

After starting her career as a labor organizer, working with women earning the minimum wage, she went on to start her own grassroots organizations, and later served as deputy chief of staff to House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi. In 2011 and 2012, Richards was named one of Time Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People in the World.

Other featured honorees and speakers at FFRF’s annual gathering include eminent writer **Salman Rushdie**, television host **Adam Savage**, actor **John de Lancie** (of “Star Trek” fame), ex-Muslims of North America co-founder **Sarah Haider**, irreverent actress **Julia Sweeney** and stand-up comedian **Leihann Lord**.

Also appearing at the convention will be **Ensaf Haidar**, the activist wife of a Saudi freethinker whose persecution has caused global outrage.

For the supposed crime of “apostasy,” Saudi blogger Raif Badawi was shockingly sentenced in 2013 to 600 lashes and seven years in prison, which was unbelievably increased to 1,000 lashes and 10 years in prison the following year (along with a hefty accompanying fine). Haidar, his wife, will receive the third annual Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award of \$10,000.

Shortly before Badawi was jailed, Haidar fled with their children to Quebec, where she was granted political asylum. Haidar has become a secular activist in her own right, establishing the Raif Badawi Foundation for Freedom to spread progressive values in the Middle East and working tirelessly for Badawi’s release.

Badawi’s real “crime” seems to have been his attempt to engender social discussion on the intrusive role of religion, the clerical establishment and the moral police in Saudi society. “Raif Badawi’s trial for ‘apostasy’ is a clear case of intimidation against him and others who seek to engage in open debates about the



Cecile Richards

issues that Saudi Arabians face in their daily lives,” said Philip Luther, Amnesty International’s director for the Middle East and North Africa.

Badawi was subjected to 50 lashes in 2015. A global movement sprang up in his defense, which, thankfully, made the Saudi government pause. But Badawi is still in prison — and reportedly in deteriorating health.

Badawi (often along with Haidar) has been given several international honors, including the prestigious Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, awarded by the European Union. Badawi’s writings have been collected in a book that serves to inspire all of us. The work is evocatively titled, *1000 Lashes: Because I Say What I Think*.

“Freedom of speech is the air that any thinker breathes; it’s the fuel that ignites the fire of an intellectual’s thoughts,” Badawi has said.

Raif Badawi is a secular icon, and Ensaf Haidar is an international freedom fighter. FFRF is pleased to be honoring them at its get-together in San Francisco.

Convention registration is only \$60 per member, \$65 per companion, \$110 non-member, and free for students and children. **Sign up for the discounted package that includes the two group meals on Saturday and save \$20.**

The convention is being held at the downtown Hyatt Regency, 5 Embarcadero Center, which has the world’s biggest hotel lobby and rooms featuring floor-to-ceiling windows. Rooms can be reserved for Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights at \$235 plus tax. Phone directly to make your reservations: 1-888-421-1442 and use the code “Freedom From Religion Foundation.” Or go online at [ffrf.org/convention2018](http://ffrf.org/convention2018) for full convention information or reserve hotel rooms directly at [bit.ly/FFRF2018](http://bit.ly/FFRF2018). Don’t delay, as rooms are going fast!



Ensaf Haidar holds up a photo of her husband, Raif Badawi, who was sentenced to 1,000 lashes and seven years in prison for “apostasy.” Haidar will be speaking at FFRF’s convention in November in San Francisco.

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

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	Number Registering	Cost
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Please indicate number of meals

#### Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast

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

#### Saturday Banquet Dinner

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

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Non-member <i>Or join for \$40 and save \$5</i>	___	\$110 \$___
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### SELECT MEALS À LA CARTE

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#### Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast

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

#### Saturday Banquet Dinner

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

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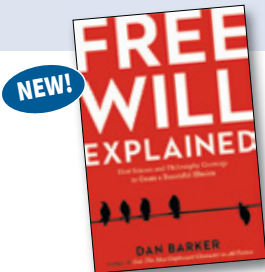
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