

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



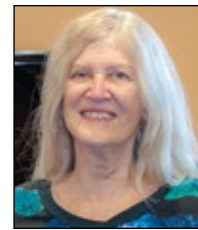
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Court sides with FFRF

**West Virginia school district had
blatantly religious curriculum**

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has struck a big blow against religious intrusion in West Virginia's secular public education system.



The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Dec. 17 decided in favor of Elizabeth Deal, a parent of a student, in a high-profile case involving bible classes in the Mercer County, W.Va., school system.

Deal, along with FFRF, had last year challenged these proselytizing classes in federal court.

Bible indoctrination classes were taught in Mercer County Schools for more than 75 years until this lawsuit. The original legal complaint has examples of the blatantly religious curriculum.

One lesson promoted creationism by claiming humans and dinosaurs co-existed. Students were asked to "picture Adam being able to crawl up on the back of a dinosaur! He and Eve could have their own personal water slide! Wouldn't that be so wild!"

Following the lawsuit, the classes were suspended by the district — a major victory for FFRF. However, the federal court then dismissed the case on jurisdictional grounds due to the suspension, even though the bible classes could resume.

Deal filed an appeal before the 4th Circuit in March 2018. The appellate brief filed by Attorney Marc Schneider and FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott argued that Deal and her daughter could continue to pursue claims against the school district even though her daughter was attending a neighboring school system. The brief detailed the misery that Deal and her daughter had to undergo due to the bible course.

"Despite Elizabeth's efforts to shield Jessica from the Christian teachings of BITS [Bible in the

See Court on page 3

Celebrating the rebirth of the sun



Photo by Roger Daleiden

A woman dances in front of the flames during the annual Winter Solstice Bonfire at Olbrich Park in Madison, Wis., on Dec. 21. FFRF was represented at the event with signage and several staff members.

9th Circuit reaffirms FFRF win

**3-judge panel denies *en banc*
petition by Chino Valley schools**

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Dec. 26 reaffirmed FFRF's resounding victory against prayer at school board meetings in the Chino Valley School District (Calif.), by denying a petition to rehear the case.

FFRF, along with 22 parents, students and employees of the district, filed suit to challenge the practice of prayer at Chino Valley School Board's meetings, which resembled church revivals more than public meetings. These meetings opened with prayer and

regularly included board members reading from the bible and proselytizing.

In July, the 9th Circuit ruled in favor of FFRF, declaring the inclusion of prayer at these school board meetings unconstitutional. The district filed an *en banc* petition soon after, which was denied by a three-judge panel of the 9th Circuit on Dec. 26. An *en banc* petition seeks to have the full court review the decision by the three-judge panel.

The denial of the petition does not come as a surprise, as the panel's unanimous decision was

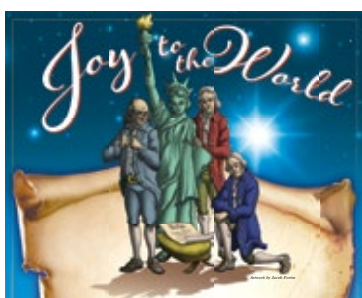
See Circuit on page 3

FFRF runs ad in N.Y. Times

FFRF placed a whimsical ad with a timely message in a Sunday New York Times, in honor of Bill of Rights Day — the anniversary of its Dec. 15, 1791, ratification.

The full-page ad appeared in the main news section on Dec. 16. To see the ad, turn to page 19.

The colorful ad, headlined "Joy to the World . . . A Bill of Rights is born," is full of gentle



seasonal notes. The graphic portrays FFRF's Bill of Rights "nativity scene" by artist Jacob Fortin.

FFRF's advertising is made possible because of, and thanks to, our kind donors.

Legal team on a roll in 2018

By Rebecca Markert

In 2017, FFRF's legal team had its most productive year ever, and that roll continued throughout 2018. The legal team has had a triumphant winning streak since 2016, and in 2018 alone FFRF won six lawsuits, four of which were solid victories at the appellate level.

We filed six new lawsuits, including:

- Against the city of Parkersburg, W.Va., over the Lord's Prayer being recited at city council meetings.
- Against the state of Arkansas over the

Ten Commandments display at the state Capitol (filed jointly with the American Humanist Association).

- Against the Wisconsin Department of Justice over its chaplaincy program.

- Against the IRS on behalf of Nonbelief Relief over preferential exemptions for churches from filing the 990 form.

- And two cases against government entities over open records requests violations.

We are carrying over 11 ongoing lawsuits and are starting 2019 handling a

See Legal on page 4

Ex-priest one of FFRF’s longest-term members

Name: Richard “Dick” Hewetson.
Where I live: Mountain View, Calif. Recently moved from San Francisco.
Where and when I was born: 1930 in suburban Chicago.
Family: Life partner John (a boat person from Vietnam), one sister, many nieces and nephews, grandnieces, grandnephews and great-grandnieces and great-grandnephews.
Education: Bachelor of arts from University of Minnesota; master of divinity from Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill.
Occupation: Retired. Worked for state of Minnesota. Before that, I was an Episcopal priest.
How I got where I am today: That’s a long story. For health reasons I left the parish ministry in 1968. In 1972, I determined that I had to be open about being gay. As a “good Christian,” I had led a celibate life.
In coming to terms with my sexuality, I also realized that I no longer believed in Christianity. In 1978, I attended the first convention of FFRF. Within a few years, I realized



Dick Hewetson and his partner John.

MEET A MEMBER

that I was an atheist.
Where I’m headed: At age 89, I have no idea, but it certainly isn’t heaven!
Person in history I admire and why: There are so many, but I have

religion.” — Steven Weinberg
These are a few of my favorite things: Reading nonfiction, bridge, trains, theater and fine dining.
These are not: Being lectured by religious people. Christians who don’t know the bible or are illiterate about theology.
My doubts about religion started: Very early in life, but I became involved with church in my adolescence.
Before I die: I’d like to ride high-speed rail from San Francisco to Los Angeles or from Chicago to the Twin Cities. Fat chance!
Ways I promote freethought: I have introduced many people to FFRF. I introduce my doubt about religion in normal conversation.
How do John (a Roman Catholic) and I get along perfectly?: Through love and respect.
What is my legacy?: Quatrefoil Library in Minneapolis. Founded by my late partner and FFRF member David Irwin and me in 1983. It is the second-largest and second-oldest LGBT lending library in the United States.

to say Anne Nicol Gaylor. What she did in her quiet dignified way for women and the resulting Freedom From Religion Foundation is truly remarkable.
A quotation I like: “With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil, that takes

Convention moment

Hewetson honored for his dedication to FFRF

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor surprised longtime and Lifetime Member Dick Hewetson at FFRF’s convention in November with a small gift for his service to FFRF. Here is her introduction:
This is not on the schedule, but it is a very deserved recognition. I want to introduce you to Dick Hewetson. Many of you know him. Before The Clergy Project, he and Dan [Barker] and a couple other folks comprised a very elite group of former ministers who are now nonbelievers.
Dick has hardly ever missed a convention. This is his 37th. He’s from San Francisco and he’s been on our board or been one of our state reps forever. We love him and want to introduce you to him.
We have a memento for you. It’s just a thingamabob and it catches the light, and it says, “With love to Dick Hewetson, FFRF 2018.”

By Dick Hewetson

I wasn’t planning on this, but I did bring a prop. It has orange hair and a red tie and it was given to me by a wonderful atheist friend. It’s called the “Damn-it Doll.” Whenever you’re upset, you go [smacks the doll on his chair] “Damn it!” and it makes you

feel very good.
Anyway, I do want to say something. The real honor for me is having been a member of this organization since 1978.
And the conventions have been the highlight of my year, except for a few times when I couldn’t make it. Last year, I got part way. I made it to Minnesota [on the way to Madison] and contracted pneumonia and had to come back here to San Francisco.
I remember the first convention I went to. I went to Madison with my dear departed partner David Irwin, who was also a Life Member. He took me kicking and screaming. I didn’t want to go, but I went — and it changed my life.
I think there were fewer than 50 people at that convention. Annie Laurie was a college student, I believe. And her dear, dear mother, Anne Gaylor, had an office in Madison, but it was the dining room table of the Gaylor house. So, I have seen this organization move from then to what we have now, which is just phenomenal. I won’t call it a miracle. [Laughs]
When I went to Madison that first



Photos by Ingrid Laas
Dick Hewetson shares a hug with FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

year, I was recovering from having been an Episcopal priest and I had left the church. But beyond that, I hadn’t given it a lot of thought. It was in Madison those first few years that I realized my whole life I’d been an atheist. But hadn’t realized it because it was a bad word. Anyway, thank you so much.



Dick shows off his “Damn-It Doll” to the convention audience.

Freethought Today caption contest!

Photo by Roger Daleiden

To enter the contest, please write a witty or humorous caption for this photo. Email your response to caption@ffrf.org by Feb. 13. The winner, chosen by FFRF staff, will receive an FFRF T-shirt! We will announce the winner and runners-up in the March issue.

OVERHEARD

If you’ve used your religious beliefs to justify the condemnation of an entire group of people based on who they love, then your religion is unjustifiable. Homophobia is a willful act of hate. Cheryl Strayed, in her advice column “Sweet Spot,” regarding a closeted teenager stuck in a conservative town. *The New York Times*, 10-23-18

This isn’t the Religious Right we thought we knew. The Christian nationalist movement today is authoritarian, paranoid and patriarchal at its core. They aren’t fighting a culture war. They’re making a direct attack on democracy itself. Katherine Stewart, in the op-ed, “Why Trump reigns as King Cyrus.” *The New York Times*, 12-31-18



By Alan Fullmer
Katherine Stewart

Not a lot. I mean, um, no. No. I went to Catholic school and grew up Catholic, but I am not Catholic. I am of no religion. I’m a humanist. Actress Kristen Bell, after podcast host Conan O’Brien asked: “You have a great moral compass. How much of that do you credit to Catholicism growing up?” “Conan O’Brien Needs a Friend” podcast, 11-25-18

I do not see how placing the motto ‘In God We Trust’ is going to protect us from someone coming down the hallway and shooting students and teachers.

Court

Continued from page 1

Schools], Jessica had direct, unwelcome contact with the classes,” it recounted. “Once Jessica was able to avoid the classes themselves, her peers began harassing her — going so far as to condemn her family to hell.” The brief also highlighted that the school’s Christian classes made Elizabeth and Jessica feel like outsiders in the community. The 4th Circuit agreed with the plaintiffs’ perspective. “If the district court were to enjoin the county from offering the BITS program to students in the future, Deal would no longer feel compelled to send Jessica to a neighboring school district to avoid what Deal views as state-sponsored religious instruction,” the appeals court stated. The court also characterized the school system’s claims that the case

Greg Pittman, teacher of honors U.S. history at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High, the Florida school where 17 people died in the February shooting, in response to an “In God We Trust” law passed in the state. *The Washington Post*, 12-1-18

Our assimilationist answer to Christmas [Hanukkah] is really a holiday about subjugating assimilated Jews. Michael David Lukas, in the column “The Hypocrisy of Hanukkah.” *The New York Times*, 12-2-18

Black churches are often oppressive spaces for black women. . . The black church would not exist without black women. However, for far too long, black men have forced them to be second-class citizens. It’s time for black churches to do better. Lawrence Ware, minister and co-director of the Center for Africana Studies at Oklahoma State University *The New York Times*, 12-2-18

Some people think the enemy is death, and some people think the enemy is suffering. That’s a very personal decision. People are in charge of their own lives and that means being in charge of their own death. If that means continuing to fight to live, fantastic. If you want hospice and palliative care, that’s your decision. But many people reach a time when the suffering



Patricia Hymanson

is so severe, suffering is the enemy and death is comfort. Maine state Rep. Patricia Hymanson, speaking about the state’s “death with dignity” legislation, modeled after Oregon’s landmark 1997 law. *Fosters.com*, 12-2-18

It is my opinion that we as an all-inclusive board do not need an invocation prayer each meeting. . . . This is the right thing to do on behalf of our Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, agnostic, et cetera, constituents. DuPage County (Ill.) Board member Dawn DeSart, on the board’s plan to evaluate its tradition of beginning meetings with a prayer. *Chicago Tribune*, 12-15-18

The scale of the [Catholic] Church’s complicity was clear previously, from revelations heaped upon revelations. The conviction of [Cardinal] Pell, though he is the highest-ranking Church official so implicated, is simply the latest, among countless pieces of evidence, that argue for broad, deep and painful reforms — precisely the sort of overhaul that the pope has so far resisted.

Newspaper editorial titled, “The No. 3 ranking official in the Catholic Church has been convicted of sex abuse. Where is the reckoning?” *Washington Post*, 12-17-18

In order to be constitutional policy, it cannot be promoting or favoring a religious set of beliefs. And it cannot overly involve the government with religion. Gig Harbor, Wash., Council Member Jeni Woock, who was the only one to vote

against reversing a decision from 2016 that prevented a resident from putting up a nativity scene on public property (after FFRF threatened to sue). *The Peninsula Gateway*, 12-20-18

When officials make statements like this, it poses a threat to the fundamental American values of freedom, democracy and security. Our nation’s diversity is to be celebrated — not feared. Clarke Tucker, who ran an unsuccessful campaign for Arkansas’s 2nd Congressional District, after state Sen. Jason Rapert posted on Twitter a quote from another article, which stated, “95% of Muslim voters participated in this year’s midterm election. Do you want them ruling everything in America?” *THV11.com*, 12-5-18



Clarke Tucker

I think it’s a shame that “Nones” mostly shrug while white evangelicals throw themselves into elections. . . . I wish that the booming secular movement could find ways to motivate non-religious voters. Until that happens, I simply hope that the steady retreat of religion in America will reduce white evangelicals to an ever-smaller fringe, a petty clique unable to sway elections. James Haught, in the column “Evangelicals vote, Nones falter.” *Patheos.com*, 11-28-18

Circuit

Continued from page 1

sound and correctly ruled that Chino Valley’s inclusion of prayer and religious proselytization at board meetings is illegal. “The board’s prayer policy and practice violate the Establishment Clause,” the panel wrote. “We hold that the Chino Valley Board’s prayer policy lacks a secular legislative purpose and therefore, under *Lemon*, violates the Establishment Clause. Accordingly, we uphold the district court’s grant of summary judgment to the Foundation on this claim,” ruled M. Margaret McKeown, Kim McLane Wardlaw, circuit judges, and Wiley Y. Daniel, district judge for Colorado, sitting by designation. Then-Board President James Na injected Christianity into many of his official statements to parents and students at meetings. For instance, at one meeting, Na “urged everyone who does not know Jesus Christ to go and find Him,” after which another board member closed with a reading of Psalm 143.

FFRF is pleased with the court’s decision not to rehear this case and subsequently continue to frivolously spend more taxpayer money battling well-settled law. “Reason — and the Constitution — have once again prevailed,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “This reaffirms the court’s message to the other school boards out there that they cannot use their public position to impose religion on other people’s children and parents.” U.S. District Court Judge Jesus Bernal already ordered the school board to pay more than \$200,000 for the initial case. Now costs and fees associated with the appeal will add significantly to that number. FFRF and the plaintiffs are represented by Attorney David J.P. Kalyanides, FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert and FFRF’s Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel. The case is *FFRF v. Chino Valley Unified School District* is No. 16-55425.

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

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists. FFRF has more than 32,000 members. FFRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and donations are tax deductible for income tax purposes.

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

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

American Infidel:
Robert G. Ingersoll

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

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

The Born Again Skeptic’s
Guide to the Bible

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

Published by FFRF

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

BUT THE DAISIES WILL NOT BE DECEIVED BY THE GODS

Seductions as countless as crosses,
as icons, none of it ever
surprising, not even
the stare of the sky
keeping score. The prize for yielding,
for giving in to paradise,
is laying down the awful burden
of mind: surrender
rings from the steeples and calls
from the minarets and temples.
But challenges sing
in the sway of treetops,
in the flutter of sparrows,
in chirring and stalking,
in waking and ripening—let
there be light enough, and
everywhere backbone stiffens
in saplings and clover. Praises, then,
to sunfish and squirrels,
blessings to bugs. Turning our backs
on the bloody altars,
we cherish each other, living here
in this brave world
with our neighbors, the earthworms,
and our old friends, the ferns
and the daisies.

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



© Philip Appleman.

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

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

FFRF welcomes 39 special members

FFRF thanks and welcomes our 38 newest Lifetime members and new After-Life member!

Robert Hanner is FFRF’s newest After-Life Member. An After-Life Membership is a \$5,000 membership level for those who want their donation to “live on” after them.

The latest \$1,000 Lifetime Members are Gregory L. Baskin, Geoffrey L. Braden, Jace Browning, Richard Burnham, Barbara F. Clark, Jonathan C. Comer, Maria Converse, Thomas P. Creswell, Linda L. Currington, Keith R. Dearborn, Frank Dowding, Alix Fargo, Corey Fields, Bill Fritch, Edward Gogol, Albert Gouyet, Dennis L. Jackson, Roger T. Johnson, Armin Kamyab, William Kannengiesser, Peter K. Lathrop, Derek J. McCleary, Andrew McPhate, Jr., Mary M. McPherson, Wayne Norton, JoAnn Papich, Duane E. Polzien, Kenneth E. Presley, Elena Rae, Mohan Rao, Bruce H. Rockwell, Kenneth Rubin, Henry David Schlib, Robert Short, Bruce G. Sweet, Barbara P. Walker, Brian Weinstein and Elisa Wolfe. Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000, designated as membership or membership renewal, and are deductible for income-tax purposes.

States represented are Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Massachu-

setts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin.

And FFRF also got word that four members have become Immortals: Joe Annino, William Cabell and Harvey and Bettye Gossard. The Immortals category is a donation designation for those members who have contacted FFRF to report they have made provisions for FFRF in their estate planning.

Special thanks to all!

RECRUIT A MEMBER

Sample copies for \$2

Send \$2 with the name and address of each person you wish to receive a sample copy of *Freethought Today* to:

FFRF
P.O. Box 750
Madison, WI 53701

Please send us only names
of likely supporters

Freedom depends upon freethinkers

Legal

Continued from page 1

record 17 lawsuits!

But litigation isn’t the only area where FFRF has seen significant victories. In 2018, FFRF’s nine in-house attorneys achieved roughly 315 nonlitigation victories after sending out more than 1,200 letters of complaint to government entities and officials demanding they keep religion out of government. The number of victories will continue to grow, as many complaints lodged last year will still have responses roll in this year.

The number of letters does not include the many follow-up letters sent or the time FFRF’s legal staff spent on responding to questions from FFRF members and members of the general public. Last year, more than 3,500 state/church inquiries were addressed by FFRF’s legal intake team.

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

1. Texas
2. Tennessee
3. Ohio
4. Georgia
5. Florida (tie)
5. Kentucky (tie)
7. Wisconsin
8. Alabama
9. Arkansas
10. Missouri

Once again, religion in our public schools topped the issue areas FFRF’s legal team addressed in 2018. Letters of complaint about prayer in schools, religious assemblies, religious clubs led by teachers or in elementary schools, and bible distributions were mainstays of the legal team’s work this past year. These are also the complaints our team prioritizes, given the young age of the students involved, their impressionability, and that they’re a captive audience for these proselytizing school officials.

Another interesting topic dominating our work this year was social media. This new and burgeoning area of state/church complaints involves religious postings by government entities on official government social media pages. Case law is still pretty scant in this area, but

it’s clear to FFRF that these postings violate the Constitution. These violations come in many forms, including Facebook postings, tweets and viral videos.

The top 10 issue areas:

1. Religion in public schools
2. Social media
3. Religious displays
4. Government prayer
5. National Day of Prayer
6. Government funding to religion
7. Holiday displays
8. Crosses
9. Elections
10. Prisons

FFRF’s legal team also submitted five amicus briefs (also called friend-of-the-court briefs) this past year. These added FFRF’s voice to high profile cases such as *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* and *Trump v. Hawaii* at the U.S. Supreme Court. We also argued in defense of “no aid” provisions in state constitutions in a case before the Colorado Supreme Court involving a school voucher program (*Taxpayers for Public Education v. Douglas County School District*). FFRF also argued in a brief to the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals that a Christian school does not have a free speech right to take over a public address system for prayer at state championship games in *Cambridge Christian School v. Florida High School Athletic Association*.

FFRF, joined by Americans United, filed a brief in support of a humanist in custody in Nevada who is trying to gain benefits for his humanist group just as any other “faith group” would receive at the correctional center.

Finally, FFRF’s legal department marked its 10-year anniversary in October 2018. Since FFRF first hired me in 2008, we’ve grown considerably. Kristina Daleiden joined the legal team as a second legal assistant in September 2018. She’s been with FFRF as a program assistant since 2017.

This brings our legal team to a total of 11 full-time staff: Seven permanent staff attorneys, two legal fellows and two legal assistants.

Rebecca Markert is FFRF’s legal director.

Freethinking in Honduras



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker spoke about “The Importance of Critical Thinking” before the Honduran Freethinkers on Dec. 5 at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras. From left, Cesar Laínez (member of Honduran Freethinkers from San Pedro Sula), Olvin Almendares (president of Honduran Freethinkers), Dan Barker, Ferney Rodríguez (biology professor from Bogotá, Colombia, who also spoke at the conference) and Héctor Amador and Geovany Kelly (members of Honduran Freethinkers from San Pedro Sula).

Who is history’s greatest abortionist?

By Brian Bolton

Christian fundamentalists constantly invoke their favorite definition of abortion: “the murder of unborn children.” They often refer to advocates of women’s reproductive rights using the epithets “baby killer” and “abortionist.”

In the Austin, Texas, area, the Heidi Group claims that “God loves the unborn,” the Georgetown Life Chain asserts



Brian Bolton

that “Jesus forgives and heals,” Texas Right to Life is “prayerfully building the Kingdom of God,” and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick proclaims that “God forgives women who have aborted children through the blood of Jesus Christ.”

These anti-abortion zealots claim that scripture is the God-breathed, verbally inspired, perfect word of God, absolutely accurate in every verse and passage. In other words, everything in the bible comes straight from the mouth of God.

With this foundation, we can now ask: Who really is history’s greatest abortionist? To answer the question,

this summarizes God’s declarations and behavior taken directly from Holy Writ, which is properly regarded as God’s personal diary.

- I declare that unborn children are property, not living persons (Ex 21: 22-25).
- I will not cause pregnant mothers-to-be to abort their unborn children, if they worship me exclusively (Ex 23:26).
- I will abort your unborn children as just punishment for committing adultery (Num 5:11-31).
- I assert that human lives are not sacred and will be destroyed as punishment for disobedience (Deut 28:18-24).
- I will murder your children and rip open pregnant mothers-to-be as punishment for disobedience (2 Kings 8:12).
- I will authorize leaders of my people to rip open pregnant mothers-to-be (2 Kings 15:16).
- I attest that the dead are happier than the living and those never born are the most fortunate (Eccl 4:2-3).
- I will murder the unborn children, infants, and living children of sinful Babylon (Isa 13:15-19).
- I reject all claims of sanctity of human life and will destroy my people for worshipping other gods (Jer 44:4-14).
- I will murder unborn children in their mother’s wombs, as well as living

children, for Israel’s sinful deeds and wickedness (Hos 9:10-16).

- I will rip open pregnant mothers-to-be and dash infants to the ground for Samaria’s sin of worshipping other gods (Hos 13:16).
- I require the death penalty for 60 violations, but not for murdering an unborn child.
- I intentionally omitted the command “Thou shalt not abort an unborn child” from the Decalogue (Ex 20:1-17).
- I drowned all living people on Earth, including pregnant mothers-to-be and their unborn children, except for eight adults (Gen 6:7, 17; 7:21).
- I incinerated all living inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and nearby cities, including pregnant mothers-to-be and their unborn children, except for the residents of Zoar (Gen 19:24-25).
- I massacred all people living in the hundreds of cities ruled by 33 kings during the Conquest of Canaan, including pregnant mothers-to-be and their unborn children (Josh 10, 11, 12).
- I annihilated all living people, including pregnant mothers-to-be and their unborn children, in 20 major slaughters (Judges, 1 Sam, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 2 Chron).
- I murder millions of unborn “persons” every year in the United States,

because two-thirds of conceived embryos fail to implant or are spontaneously aborted after pregnancy is verified.

Four conclusions

The basic findings that emerge from the 18 scriptural statements and one contemporary fact about abortion create four irrefutable conclusions.

1. God does not love unborn children, or their pregnant mothers-to-be, or living children, or adults. He is the greatest murderer of unborn children and the pre-eminent mass murderer of living people in human history.
2. The bible does not support the attack on women’s reproductive health-care. The fundamentalist anti-abortion crusade is a dishonest political campaign that is thoroughly refuted by God’s holy word.
3. God causes all abortions, spontaneous and elective, as well as the destruction of fertilized ova or “persons,” because he is omnipotent and therefore is the cause of everything.
4. The anti-abortion zealots’ favorite epithets — “murderer of unborn children,” “baby killer” and “abortionist” — apply accurately to their biblical God. He is history’s greatest abortionist.

FFRF Life Member Brian Bolton is a retired psychologist living in Georgetown, Texas.

Atheist characters in fiction hard to find

This article first appeared on BookRiot.com on Dec. 10, 2018, and is reprinted with permission.

By Mya Nunnally

As someone whose religious identity fluctuates between labels like atheist, agnostic or just plain spiritual on a daily basis, I enjoy books that explore atheist characters. It’s always nice to see



Mya Nunnally

someone like you represented on the page. But wow, they are hard to find. Until I decided to specifically seek out fiction with atheist characters (specifically main characters), I assumed there were plenty. There is a whole genre dedicated to Christian fiction, of course, so why not atheist fiction? But I found barely enough to make a dent in my to-be-read list. After further searching and reading and recommendations, I found the six below that I enjoyed the most.

These works approach atheism in different ways. Some are a little didactic, some are incredibly nuanced, and some are subtle in their discussion of faith. But all of them feature atheist characters without having them eventually convert to Christianity, or die horribly and burn in hell. So, in my book, it’s some good representation. For all my atheists, agnostics, humanists, nonbelievers, questioners, skeptics or those just looking to explore the life of someone unlike themselves: Enjoy!

Heretics Anonymous

(by Katie Henry)

This book puts forth one of the finest discussions about faith and organized religion that I’ve seen in literature. In *Heretics Anonymous*, Michael finds himself in a new town, going to a new school. A Catholic school, that is. For a staunch atheist like Michael, it seems like hell. But then he stumbles upon a secret group called, you guessed it, Heretics Anonymous. Students who don’t quite fit into the school’s mold come together and find friendship in their outcast status.

There’s Avi, who’s Jewish and gay. Eden practices paganism. Max breaks the dress code. And there’s Lucy, a headstrong feminist who wants to be the first female Catholic priest. Everything Michael knows about faith will come into question as he learns about friendship and connection. He might even have feelings for Lucy, despite his lack of faith and her infinite commitment to God.



A Fraction of the Whole

(by Steve Toltz)

While Toltz’s prose gets a bit didactic at times, it’s always beautiful. This is the story of Jasper Dean and his father, who was a constant source of chaos and turmoil. Now that his father’s dead, Jasper can recollect and retell their history and journey across the globe. Both Jasper and his father are atheists, and this element of their personalities comes through throughout the novel.

Side note: I read this book first when I was in high school, and it was the first explicit depiction of an atheist main character I’d ever found.

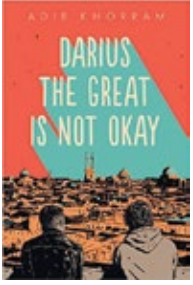


Darius The Great is Not Okay

(by Adib Khorram)

A lot of *Darius the Great is Not Okay* is subtle in a beautiful way. This is a quiet but sincerely powerful novel. Darius’ sexuality is left in a grey area, there isn’t much loud or fast action in the book, and Darius’ atheism is barely mentioned. But, it’s on here for a reason.

This book is a shining example of someone who doesn’t believe in God but revels in the culture and familial practice that comes with some religions. Darius doesn’t identify as Zoroastrian like much of his family in Iran, but when he takes a trip to the country for the first time, he finds a community and connectedness that he never felt at home.

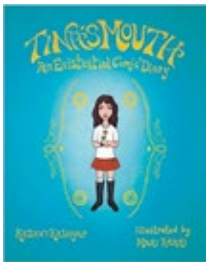


Tina’s Mouth: An Existential Comic Diary

(by Keshni Kashyap & Mari Araki)

This award-winning graphic novel explores high-schooler Tina M.’s exploration of existentialism. Existentialism is, of course, a philosophy created by an atheist and founded on a premise of individuality and free will as opposed to some religions who believe in the opposite. We see how this impacts Tina’s relationship with her Indian intellectual family and the world around her.

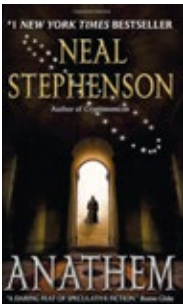
While the art of *Tina’s Mouth* is sparse and not the best I’ve seen in graphic novels, the narrative is compelling and great for teens exploring philosophy.



Anathem

(by Neal Stephenson)

In the world of the epic novel *Anathem*, the monks and priests and others who live in convents study not theology, but empirical knowledge, like math and science. They barely have contact with the outside world, and spend their time figuring out the answers to the universe through physics and philosophy. Naturally, the question of belief in a higher power comes up. Most of the monks in the convent are atheists, but they engage in mind-blowing philosophical discussions with the outsiders once they make their way into the strange new world outside the convent.

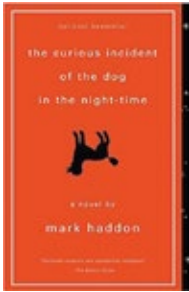


The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

(by Mark Haddon)

Fifteen-year-old Christopher is one of the most well-known examples of a character on the autism spectrum in recent literature. He detests the color yellow, knows all the prime numbers up to 7,057, and has a hard time understanding human emotions. He just so happens to be an atheist, as well. *Curious Incident* tells the story of Christopher as he tries to unravel the mystery of the death of a neighbor’s dog. This is a heart-warming, colorful story with a sweet atheist boy (contrary to popular atheist stereotypes) at its center.

Mya is a writer and poet who attends Barnard College of Columbia. Her poetry has received national acclaim and has appeared in literary magazines such as *The Legendary* and *The Raven’s Perch*. She writes a blog for *BookRiot.com*.



IN THE NEWS

Einstein’s ‘God letter’ auctioned for \$2.9M

Albert Einstein’s so-called “God letter,” written in 1954, sold for nearly \$2.9 million at an auction in New York on Dec. 4.

The Nobel Prize-winning scientist, then 74, wrote the one-and-a-half page note to German philosopher Eric Gutkind in response to one of his works.

It fetched almost double the auction house’s predicted price of between \$1 million-\$1.5 million.

In the letter, written in his native German, Einstein takes issue with the belief in God.

“The word God is for me nothing but the expression and product of human weaknesses,” he writes. “The bible is a collection of venerable but still rather primitive legends. . . . No interpretation, no matter how subtle, can [for me] change anything about this.”

Montana strikes down tax-credit program

The Montana Supreme Court on Dec. 12 struck down a state-run program that gives tax credits to people who donate to private-school scholarships, saying the program violates a constitutional ban against bestowing state aid to religious organizations.

The justices ruled 5-2 that the program giving tax credits of up to \$150 for donations to organizations that provide scholarships to private-school students amounts to indirect aid to schools controlled by churches. There is a ban in the Montana Constitution

on any direct or indirect state aid to such schools, regardless of how large or small the amount is, the opinion by Justice Laurie McKinnon said.

Poll: Americans trust clergy less than ever

The level of trust Americans have in members of the clergy has dropped to a record low, a recent Gallup survey suggests.

Gallup found that only 37 percent had a “very high” or “high” opinion of the honesty and ethical standards of clergy. Forty-three percent rated the clergy’s honesty and ethics as “average,” while 15 percent had low or very low opinions.

The 37 percent positive rating is the lowest Gallup has recorded for the clergy since it began examining views about religious leaders’ ethical standards in 1977.

Currently, only 31 percent of Catholics and 48 percent of Protestants rate the clergy positively, according to Gallup.

John Fea, a professor of American history at Messiah College in Pennsylvania, said he thinks the prominence of the Catholic Church’s sexual abuse scandal this year may be contributing to a lack of trust in the clergy.

Record low says religion can solve problems

A record low number of Americans says religion can serve as an answer to “all or most of today’s problems,” according to a Gallup poll.

The Gallup survey found that just

A worthy recipient



Freethinkers Association of Central Texas President Katie Gaines (right), presents longtime FFRF Member Julie Fisher with the Catherine Fahringer Award for her decades-long dedication to the secular communities of San Antonio and the Texas Hill Country.

“We recently came across FACT’s founding documents with Catherine Fahringer’s signature, along with Julie’s,” Gaines writes. “That tugged on a few heart strings, to say the least. I am fully aware of FACT’s close ties with Catherine Fahringer and FFRF. We could think of no better recipient for this honor, and believe Catherine Fahringer would be proud to know Julie is still such a dedicated and beloved member of this community.”

46 percent of respondents said religion can solve all or most of the world’s problems. It marked the first time in more than six decades of polling that less than half of Americans responded that way.

Meanwhile, 39 percent said that religion is “old-fashioned and out of date.”

Americans’ perspectives on that issue are predictably divided based on how frequently they attend church, according to the poll. The poll found that 81 percent of people who attend church weekly say religion can answer today’s problems, while 58 percent of people who attend infrequently called church old-fashioned.

‘In God We Trust’ now on Mississippi plates

Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant introduced the state’s new “default” license plate, one that will automatically be given to anybody who needs it, which includes the state seal emblazoned with the phrase “In God We Trust.”

Those plates are now replacing the old plates that featured the guitar, a symbol representing blues legend B.B. King.

Bryant is the reason the religious phrase is on the state’s seal at all, the result of a bill he signed in 2014.

Nones rising, religion declining for many

More than one-third of Americans identify as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular, according to a 2018 study by the American Family Survey.

This group, known collectively as Nones, make up 35 percent of the population, up 1 percent from 2017.

“Though the change from year to year is small, there is a clear upward trend,” said Chis Karpowitz, one of the authors of the survey and a professor at Brigham Young University.

For Millennials and GenXers, the

most common religion is no religion. The Nones claim 44 percent of the 18–29 age group, and 43 percent among those who are 30–44.

Also, less than half of Americans consider religion to be an “extremely” or “very” important part of their identity, according to a study by the American Family Survey.

Judge blocks opt-outs for contraception coverage

A federal judge on Jan. 13 blocked Trump administration rules that would allow most businesses to opt out of covering contraception for their employees if they have moral or religious objections.

Judge Haywood Gilliam blocked the rules, which were set to go into effect Jan. 14, in 13 states and Washington, D.C. Gilliam granted a request for a preliminary injunction from those states, but limited the ban’s scope to only the case’s plaintiffs.

Saudi woman granted asylum in Canada

An 18-year-old Saudi woman who fled from her country and family, saying she feared for her life, has been granted asylum in Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said.

Rahaf Alqunun initially fled to Thailand to escape her family. When she arrived in Bangkok, she was at first denied entry, but then allowed to stay. But there were growing fears over her security as she remained in Bangkok, so she was taken to the Canadian embassy.

Trudeau said the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had asked Canada to take in Alqunun, who grabbed international attention this week after she barricaded herself in a Bangkok airport hotel room to resist being sent home to her family, which denies any abuse.

Sinema sworn in on law book



Photo courtesy of Arizona Central

When Sen. Kyrsten Sinema took the ceremonial oath of office, she placed her hand on a law book rather than the bible.

Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., began her first term as a U.S. senator by holding her hand on a law book for her ceremonial oath of office.

Sinema openly identifies as religiously unaffiliated, according to the Pew Research Center for Religion and Public Life, which is why she did not use the bible as a prop for her oath.

During the ceremony, Vice President Mike Pence concludes the oath by saying, “So help you God?” to which Sinema answered, “I do.”

A spokesperson for the senator confirmed to The Arizona Republic that the book was from the Library of Congress and contained texts of the U.S. and Arizona constitutions.

“Kyrsten always gets sworn in on a Constitution simply because of her love for the Constitution,” Sinema’s spokesman John LaBombard told the Republic.

Sinema became Arizona’s first female senator and the first Democrat to win a Senate race in the state since 1988. Sinema is also the second openly LGBTQ person to be elected to the Senate, joining Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., who is lesbian.

Catholic Church sexual abuse scandal roundup

Top cardinal guilty of abuse of minors

Cardinal George Pell of Australia, the most senior Catholic Church official to stand trial for sexual abuse, was found guilty Dec. 11 by a Melbourne court.

After nearly four full days of deliberations, a jury rendered unanimous guilty verdicts on five charges related to the abuse of two choirboys in 1996.

“The conviction provides one of the clearest examples of how the sexual abuse scandal has eroded the church’s credibility while ensnaring figures in the upper echelons of power,” the Washington Post reported.

Pell, 77, is the most powerful Catholic in Australia, and the third-highest ranking in the Vatican.

The trial had been subject to a media blackout at the request of the prosecution, and follows a first trial in September ended after a jury failed to reach consensus.

He is on a leave of absence from his post as the Vatican’s secretary for the economy.

In June 2017, Pell was charged by Australian police with “historical sexual assault offenses,” forcing him to leave Rome and return home vowing to “clear his name.”

In May 2018, after a four-week committal hearing, an Australian magistrate struck down some of the more serious charges against Pell, but ruled he must stand trial on five charges related to sexual abuse of minors. The allegations, however, are from two separate periods in the 1970s and the 1990s. Therefore, the decision was made for two separate trials.

The first trial centered on the alleged sexual assault of two choirboys at Melbourne’s St. Patrick’s Cathedral during the late 1990s.

Pell has been a key point of reference in English-speaking Catholicism for at least the last two decades, and he was appointed by Pope Francis to his “C9” council of cardinal advisers from around the world in 2013. On Dec. 12, the Vatican announced that at the end of October, Pope Francis had removed Pell, along with two other cardinals, from his council of advisers.

He served as the archbishop of Melbourne from 1996 to 2001, then as the archbishop of Sydney from 2001 until his appointment to his Vatican position in 2014.

Earlier this year, the Australian Catholic Church unveiled its official response to Australia’s Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the nation’s highest form of inquiry.

The Royal Commission revealed last year that 7 percent of Catholic priests were accused of sexually abusing children in Australia over the past several decades, and in response, the Catholic Church accepted 98 percent of its 80 recommendations, deciding only against the recommendation that the Church eliminate the seal of the confessional.

Report: Cardinal Wuerl knew of McCarrick allegations

Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington, D.C., knew of sexual misconduct allegations against ex-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and reported them to the Vatican in 2004, church officials confirmed Jan. 10, despite Wuerl portraying himself as unaware of any complaints surrounding the disgraced ex-cardinal, the Washington Post reported.

Robert Ciolek, a former priest who reached a settlement with the church in 2005 after accusing clerics including McCarrick, told The Post he recently learned that the Pittsburgh Diocese has a file that shows that Wuerl was aware of his allegations against McCarrick. The file includes documentation that Wuerl, who was bishop of Pittsburgh at the time, shared the information with then-Vatican ambassador Gabriel Montalvo.

The content of the document, which Ciolek told The Post he saw in December, clashes sharply with Wuerl’s public statements about McCarrick since the older cleric was suspended in June due to a complaint that he groped an altar boy decades ago.

The allegations against McCarrick, which include two other accusations of abusing minors, as well as those of harassment of seminarians, began a full-blown crisis in the Catholic Church in the United States. Wuerl has rejected allegations that he played a role in it.



Photo courtesy of Wikipedia

Cardinal George Pell

Church withholds names of 500 accused of abuse

The Catholic Church in Illinois withheld the names of at least 500 priests accused of sexual abuse of minors, the state’s attorney general said Dec. 19 in a report that accused the church of failing victims by neglecting to investigate their allegations.

The report by Attorney General Lisa Madigan determined that the Catholic dioceses in Illinois are incapable of investigating themselves and “will not resolve the clergy sexual abuse crisis on their own.”

The report said that 690 priests were accused of abuse, and only 185 names were made public by the dioceses as having been found credibly accused of abuse.

“The number of allegations above what was already public is shocking,” said Madigan.

At least 16 state attorneys general have initiated investigations of varying scope since August, when a grand jury report in Pennsylvania accused more than 300 priests of sexual abuse over 50 years, and accused bishops of covering up.

L.A. bishop resigns after misconduct allegations

A Los Angeles auxiliary bishop who served as an ethics cleric resigned after “credible” allegations surfaced of prior sexual misconduct with a minor.

Pope Francis accepted Bishop Alexander Salazar’s resignation on Dec. 12. Salazar most recently was vicar for the Office of Ethnic Ministries of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

“I regret to inform you that in 2005, a year after he had been ordained a bishop, the Archdiocese was made aware of an allegation against Bishop Salazar of misconduct with a minor,” Los Angeles Archbishop José H. Gomez said in the statement.

Gomez said the accusation against Salazar stemmed from alleged misconduct in the 1990s when he was a parish priest and not an ordained bishop.

“Although the allegation was never directly reported to the Archdiocese, it was investigated by law enforcement in 2002, and the district attorney did not prosecute,” the archbishop said. It was not immediately clear why the case wasn’t prosecuted.

11 predator priests names to be kept secret in Pennsylvania

The names of 11 priests cited in the bombshell Pennsylvania grand jury report on child sex abuse will be kept secret to protect their reputations, the state’s Supreme Court ruled Dec. 3.

The grand jury report, released in mid-August after a two-year investigation, identified records of more than 1,000 children being abused by 301 priests in six of the eight Catholic dioceses in Pennsylvania.

The 11 priests were kept anonymous because they contested the allegations against them as false. The Supreme Court decision said identifying these priests would raise due process issues.

“In our prior opinion authored by Chief Justice Saylor, we stressed that an individual’s right to his or her personal reputation was regarded by the framers of our organic charter as a fundamental individual human right — one of the ‘inherent rights of mankind,’” the court decision reads.

The majority of the disclosed crimes took place years ago and were covered up, making it difficult to hold the perpetrators accountable, since victims of child sex abuse in Pennsylvania only have until their 50th birthday to file criminal charges and until their 30th birthday to file civil lawsuits.

Proposals would require clergy to report sexual abuse

Lawmakers in Washington, D.C. and Virginia say they plan to propose legislation that adds clergy to the list of people mandated by law to report child abuse or neglect.

The efforts hit at the hot-button intersection of child protection and religious liberty, but lawmakers are expected to give them an open reception at a time when recent sexual abuse scandals in churches and others involving athletes have prompted conversation about broadening legal responsibility to extend beyond positions such as teachers and doctors.

The ideas under consideration by D.C. Attorney General Karl Racine include not exempting confidential conversations for any mandatory reporters, possibly including those that occur in the Catholic Church’s confessional. Texas, West Virginia and a few other states do not exclude the confessional in mandatory reporting laws, but it has been a stumbling block in many other places.

French cardinal, 5 others, on trial for cover-up of abuse

A French Catholic cardinal and five other people went on trial Jan. 7, accused of covering up for a pedophile priest who abused Boy Scouts — France’s most important church sex abuse case to date, the Associated Press reports.

The case poses a new challenge to the Vatican, amid growing demands in overwhelmingly Catholic France for a reckoning with decades of sexual abuse by the clergy.

Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, 68, appeared in a Lyon court along with other senior church officials accused of failing to protect children from alleged abuse by the Rev. Bernard Preynat. The top Vatican official in charge of sex abuse cases, Cardinal Luis Ladaria, is among the accused — but won’t appear in court because the Vatican invoked his diplomatic immunity.

Nine people who said the priest abused them in the 1970s and 1980s brought the case to court. The victims say top clergy were aware of Preynat’s actions for years, but allowed him to be in contact with children until his 2015 retirement.

At least six California priests named in child sex abuse report

At least six Catholic priests who worked in parishes throughout San Luis Obispo County in California were among those named in a recently released Diocese of Monterey report on clergymen accused of sexually abusing children.

Some of the priests were defendants in sex abuse lawsuits filed in the early 2000s, while others had never been accused publicly. The diocese oversees parishes in San Luis Obispo, Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito counties.

The report was released weeks after California Attorney General Xavier Becerra began soliciting information about clergy sexual abuse incidents in the state in November.

The Diocese of Monterey report names 30 “credibly accused” clergymen — a term that includes priests, deacons, religious men and candidates for ordination — as part of a list compiled by the law firm Weintraub Tobin.

Compiled by PJ Slinger

Nonbelief Relief gives \$80K in donations

Nonbelief Relief, Inc., a charity established to do good in the name of nonbelievers, announced its final gifts for 2018 — and for the foreseeable future. It gave \$80,000 in December for six important causes.

NBR's newest grants included \$20,000 to aid Yemenis (\$10,000 each to International Rescue Committee and Doctors Without Borders for their work in war-torn Yemen). The United States had been selling arms to Saudi Arabia and backing the war, although the U.S. Senate voted Dec. 13 to end U.S. military support for the war. The House has not voted on it.

NBR considers theopolitics to be partly to blame for Yemen's deadly famine and humanitarian crisis, the results of a Sunni/Shiite proxy war being fought by Saudi Arabia and Iran. New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof pointed out that a million Yemenis are on the brink of famine, and up to 85,000 children are dead already. "It is wrenching for me as an American to travel across this country and see the toll of my country's actions. The most common war casualty in Yemen is not a soldier with a bullet but a child who is starving," Kristof writes.

Americans of conscience must do something to help the Yemenis, NBR avers. It has earmarked many previous donations to fight cholera and supply food to Yemen.

NBR's newest gifts also include help on the domestic front:

- \$7,500 to the California Community Foundation for its Wildfire Relief Fund.
- \$7,500 to All Hands and Hearts — Smart Response for its work, with the help of volunteers, to rebuild North Carolina after Hurricane Florence.
- \$20,000 to the Wisconsin-based Women's Medical Fund to ensure equal access to abortion care regard-



Yemeni children have been starving to death by the thousands during the war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Nonbelief Relief has donated \$20,000 to aid helpers in the war-torn area.

less of income. The all-volunteer WMF is believed to be the longest continuously operating abortion fund in the nation, and serves as many as 1,000 low-income women a year. Wisconsin is one of about three dozen states that bars Medicaid coverage of abortion care. This gift is made in memory of the late Anne Gaylor, FFRF's principal founder, who also started WMF.

- \$5,000 to the Flint Water Fund c/o United Way of Genesee County.
- Additionally, NBR gave \$20,000 to enable a Bangladeshi atheist to soon resettle in Canada. His life was imperiled by Islamist terrorists, and he fled to Nepal, where he, his wife and two children are considered illegal aliens. The funds will cover flights, penalties for overstaying in Nepal and some Canadian fees before Canada agrees to accept the family.

NBR Administrator Annie Laurie Gaylor notes in her letter to the Flint Water Fund that the fund's

people of any or of no faiths."

NBR is a creation of the FFRF Board, which is its sole member, but is set up as a separate entity. NBR is embroiled in a lawsuit with the IRS over the privileged treatment of churches and church-related charities. Since churches and their charities are automatically exempted from information filing rules that apply to all other charities, NBR informed the IRS it, too, would not file the annual Form 990 information return. As a result, NBR's tax exemption was revoked by the IRS earlier this year. NBR can no longer solicit, and is no longer able to accept donations, for which it would have to pay taxes.

"We firmly hope and expect to rev up Nonbelief Relief in the future, after our court challenge is over, and are committed to offering a way for atheists and agnostics to give in the name of nonbelief to improve this world — our only world," says Gaylor.



continuing work to help the besieged citizens of Flint, Mich., with bottled water and filtration devices is appreciated. "However, we are dismayed that donations of water on pallets is made entirely through three Christian churches, and loose cases of water also appear to be distributed almost completely through such entities," she states. NBR is encouraging the fund to enlist some secular enterprises as distribution points so individuals would "not have to enter a place of worship in order to participate in a secular and nonreligious water distribution program supported by

FFRF offers advice on country's suicide problem

FFRF has concrete suggestions on how to tackle the suicide crisis in this country.

FFRF is offering its input in response to public comments requested regarding the implementation of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

The secular group highlights the need for any hotline system to support religiously unaffiliated individuals, individuals facing a faith crisis, and individuals who have faced religion-based trauma.

There is a significant lack of research into the stress experiences of nonreligious Americans, even though they comprise about a quarter of the adult population. Counselors have highlighted the necessity for a greater understanding of the needs and beliefs of individuals with no religious affiliation.

To remedy this situation, FFRF makes the following recommendations.

Make referrals for secular therapy.



We need to ensure hotline counselors are aware that nonreligious therapists are available to assist callers. The Secular Therapy Project (www.seculartherapy.org) can help clients find appropriate counseling.

Make referrals for peer-based secular support. Callers who mention any sort of faith crisis may be referred to the Recovering from Religion Helpline (www.recoveringfromreligion.org), which can identify resources to provide help. People may go through depression immediately after leaving religion, which is almost always related to loss of social support.

Normalize faith crisis and accompanying isolation as a form of loss requiring support. People leaving religion may need extra social support

because of the shunning, guilt and shame they frequently experience from their religious associates. Individuals going through a faith crisis frequently report that family and friends abandon them almost overnight, and that those who stay in contact may harangue them with harmful religious messages. This can lead to stress. Therefore, hotline counselors must be trained to help callers understand that leaving religion or having a faith crisis can be a significant loss, that this may be difficult to handle alone and that there are sources of support available to them.

Make referrals for secular addiction recovery services. Many addiction-recovery programs and peer-based recovery services employ

faith-based or religious counseling, inappropriate for atheists or religiously unaffiliated callers. Therefore, hotline counselors should be prepared to make referrals to secular recovery services such as SMART Recovery (www.smartrecovery.org).

Avoid reinforcing harmful religious messages, especially to believers. Certain religions program people to believe that they will go to hell. A person can start believing that he or she is destined for hell. This pattern may exacerbate depression and suicidality, as such individuals may come to believe that life has no meaning since they have no hope of heaven.

A counselor unaccustomed to dealing with these issues may have a negative impact on callers by reinforcing these religious messages.

Address isolation among the religiously unaffiliated. Finally, those who have been religiously unaffiliated for many years, or even their whole lives, can feel isolated in parts of the country where church is the primary social event in people's lives.

Hotline counselors must be trained to recognize that isolation and loneliness are critical factors for this population regardless of how long one has been atheist or religiously unaffiliated.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation believes our nation's suicide crisis can be dealt with much more effectively if these factors are taken into account when setting up the new hotline.

Women Without Superstition:
"No Gods — No Masters"

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

Edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor

Published by FFRF

Buy it from FFRF online

shop.ffrf.org

Secularization leads to economic development

This article was first published on the World Economic Forum website and is re-published with permission.

By Damian Ruck

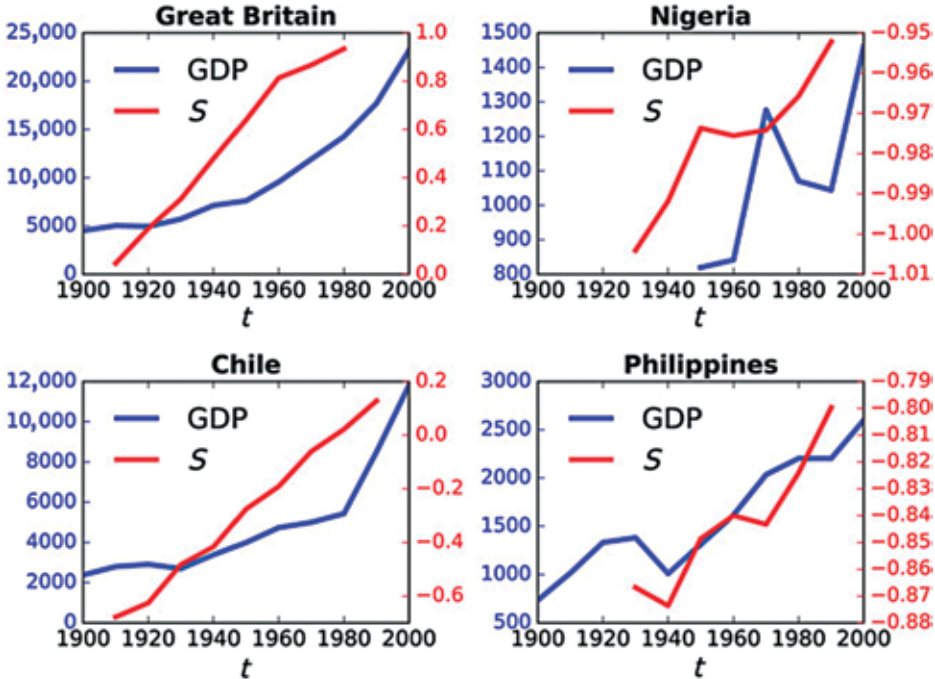
We have known for decades that secular countries tend to be richer than religious ones. Finding out why involves unpicking a complex knot of cognitive and social factors — an imposing task. So, my small research team thought we’d ask a more straightforward question: Was it



Damian Ruck

the secular chicken that came first, or the economic egg? Our recent paper in Scientific Advances shows that, in the 20th century, secularization occurred before economic development and not the other way around. Although this doesn’t prove secularization makes a country wealthier, it does rule out the reverse. The arrow of time points in one direction, so economic performance cannot be expected to influence people’s opinions in the past.

Global Gallup surveys give us a clear view of the relationship between secularization and economic development — that the world’s poorest countries are also its most religious. But before the days of modern surveys, the steam-powered scholars of the early 20th century had already noticed that industrialized societies tended to be less religious than agrarian ones; though they disagreed on the interpretation. The early 20th-century French sociologist Emile Durkheim believed that economic development came first. He saw religion as meeting society’s practical functions, such as education and welfare. But when prosperous societies started to meet these functions all by themselves, religion was pushed to the margins. On the other hand, a few decades later, the German sociologist Max Weber argued that religious change came first. He wrote that the



Protestant Reformation unleashed a stampede of productivity and economic improvement because of the “Protestant work ethic.” Only one of them can be correct. For decades, economists and political scientists, armed with modern computers and advanced statistics, have tried to find out whether it was Durkheim or Weber. Some studies found that secularization came first, some found that development comes first, and still others found they occur at the same time.

Diving deeper

My colleagues and I think one major shortcoming preventing us from getting to a solution has been a lack of historical depth. To measure a complex concept like “secularization,” comprehensive surveying is required. But this has only been possible in the majority of the world for just a couple of decades. However, for the first time, we have found a way to dive deeper and cover the entire 100 years of the 20th century. This temporal periscope presents itself when we bring together evidence from anthropology, political science and neuroscience: People’s beliefs and opinions form and harden during the first few decades of their lives. Therefore, despite a lifetime of ups

and downs, a person’s religious belief will always reflect their formative years. They unwittingly carry a fossilized version of how secular the society of their childhood was, right into the modern day. So, if you want to know how religious the world was in the 1950s, then just see how religious the people are who came of age during the 1950s. We did this by collating answers from the European Values Survey and the World Values Survey, which have asked people around the world about their religiosity since 1990. By pooling data for people who came of age at different decades of the 20th century, we were able to create a new secularization timeline. We compared this with 100 years of economic data. The image shows that, in Great Britain, Nigeria, Chile and Philippines, the red secularization line leads the blue economic development line. And our statistical analysis shows that this is the case in all of the 109 countries we measured.

Individual rights

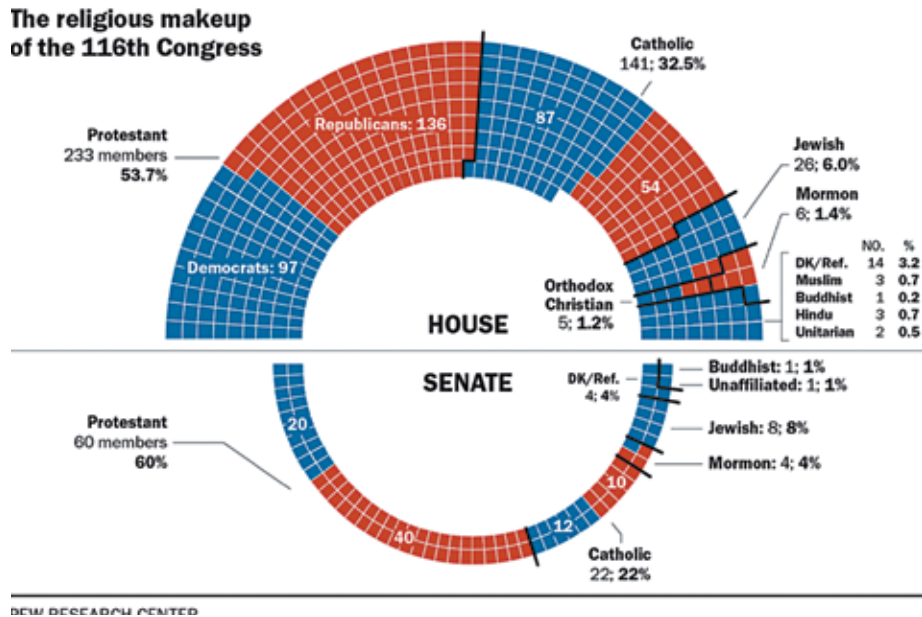
The message is crystal clear: Secularization occurs before economic devel-

It’s easy to see why individual rights flower once religious influence has withered.

opment and not after it. This means we can rule out Durkheim’s functionalist model, but we cannot declare victory for Weber. Any human society is a cacophony of tangled causes, effects and dynamic emergent phenomena. To seek a single cause for anything in this arena is a mug’s game. So, we checked if something else offers a more convincing explanation. For example, a respect for the rights of individuals is the moral triumph of the humanitarian revolution and might provide the “leg up” that societies need to reach economic prosperity. A respect for individual rights requires tolerance of homosexuality, abortion and divorce, and we showed that secular societies only become prosperous once they have evolved a greater respect for these individual rights. If we zoom in on different regions of the world, we see some rich countries that are religious and some poor ones that are secular. Countries like the United States and the Catholic countries of Europe have become economically prosperous, yet religion remains important. Conversely, the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe are some of the most secular on Earth, but have middling economic performance. It turns out that it’s a respect for individual rights that separates the rich from the poor, despite the law sometimes being slow to catch up with people’s opinions in some countries. Though we shouldn’t ignore the role of religion, it’s easy to see why individual rights flower once religious influence has withered. That said, there’s no reason why individual rights can’t exist in a religious world. If religious institutions can become less of a conservative force and embrace modern cultural values, then they could provide moral guidance for the economically prosperous societies of the future. Damian Ruck has a Ph.D. in computational social science with an interest in the role cultural values play in the development of countries.

116th Congress more religiously diverse

The 116th Congress, sworn in on Jan. 3, is more religiously diverse than any prior Congress, although it still has Christian over-representation, according to the Pew Research Center. While there is a 3-percentage-point decline in the share of members of Congress who identify as Christian, 88 percent now claim to be Christian, while just 57 percent of the United States population is currently Christian. There are four more Jewish members, one additional Muslim and one more Unitarian Universalist in the new Congress, as well as eight more members who decline to state their religious affiliation (or lack thereof). The religious makeup of Congress is very different from that of the population. The largest difference between the public and Congress is in the share who are unaffiliated with a religious group. In the general public, 23 percent say they are atheist, agnostic or



“nothing in particular.” In Congress, just one person — Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., who was recently elected to the Senate after three terms in the House — says she is religiously unaffiliated, making the share of “Nones” in Congress 0.2 percent. Rep. Jared Huffman also says he

is openly agnostic, but did not fill out the survey. When asked about their religious affiliation, a growing number of members of Congress decline to specify. This group — all Democrats — includes 18 members, or 3 percent of Congress, up from 10 members in the 115th Congress. One member in

this category, Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., announced in 2017 that he identifies as a humanist and says he is not sure God exists. Anglicans/Episcopalians and Presbyterians experienced the largest losses in the 116th Congress, which has nine fewer members in each of these groups compared with the previous Congress. Methodists, Congregationalists, Restorationists and Christian Scientists also lost at least one seat; there are no longer any Christian Scientists in Congress. There are five fewer Catholics and three fewer Mormons in the new Congress. In the 116th Congress, just two of the 252 GOP members do not identify as Christian: Reps. Lee Zeldin, R-N.Y., and David Kustoff, R-Tenn., are Jewish. By contrast, 61 of the 282 Democrats do not identify as Christian. More than half of the 61 are Jewish (32), and 18 decline to specify a religious affiliation.

FFRF NEWS



Photo: Brent Nicastro
Micah White



Photo: Ingrid Laas
Jessica Ahlquist

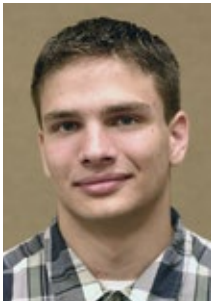


Photo: Brent Nicastro
Schiller Hill



Photo: Brent Nicastro
Darrell Lambert



Photo: Ingrid Laas
Bailey Harris

FFRF seeks student/youth activists for cash rewards

One of the programs we're proudest of at the Freedom From Religion Foundation is rewarding students or youths who demonstrate special activism to promote freethought or to keep religion out of schools and government.

In recent years, thanks to a bequest and kind donors who create one-time or annual scholarships, FFRF has been bestowed \$9,000-\$27,000 a year in activism awards. Most cash scholarships are \$1,000. These are separate from the four annual student essay contests.

For this ongoing scholarship program, we'd like your help as an FFRF member in identifying worthy candidates, who may come to your attention through news stories or local secular groups.

The level of activism of previous recipients has been remarkably high. Many recipients have fought against hostile public school administrations over religion in their schools. Or they've initiated complaints over serious state/church entanglements in their community, or even acted as litigants in controversial state/church lawsuits.

Not uncommonly, FFRF has given a young freethinker an award after learning they have been targeted by school officials or their community for speaking up for freethought or for protesting First Amendment infractions. Micah White, in 1999, received the Ruth Jokinen Memorial Scholarship after his powerful op-ed piece, "Atheists Under Siege," was published in The New York Times chronicling the difficulties he faced forming an atheist club as an alternative to Christian clubs at his Michigan school. Micah has been one of several high schoolers FFRF has recognized for fighting for their right to start a freethought club under the Equal Access Act.

State/church litigants include FFRF's own student plaintiffs, some who have sued over unconstitutional graduation prayers. Litigating recipients have included Jessica Ahlquist, the Rhode Island teen who became a freethought *cause célèbre* in 2012, as well as a pariah in her school and state, for successfully suing over a prayer banner in her school.

One of the more memorable recipients was Schiller Hill, a bright young Texan who, in 2000, bowed out

of being valedictorian, saying publicly: "I cannot accept and I will not give a speech because I know there will be prayers entailed in this ceremony and I cannot do it. I believe in a rational means to everything, not in some all-powerful being."

Another unforgettable recipient was Darrell Lambert, an exceptional Eagle Scout who became a national figure in 2002, when he was expelled at age 19 from his Washington State Boy Scout troop because he was an atheist.

Awards have gone for heroic acts as well as the more theatrical: One creative recipient was given a cash award after being disciplined and making news for dressing up as Jesus on Fictional Character Day at his high school! Recipients have been as young as 10.

FFRF members Richard and Beverly Hermesen most generously have set up a \$5,000 award to recognize very special activism, which in recent years is often bestowed at FFRF's annual convention. In 2018, the Hermesen award went to amazing 12-year-old science author and activist Bailey Harris.

Other awards include the \$2,000 Thomas Jefferson Youth Activist Award, created by an Oregon couple who prefer anonymity. An octogenarian FFRF has generously celebrated his own birthday by financing an annual \$1,000 "Strong Backbone Student Activist Award," reserved for pre-college students. FFRF administers several other one-time or recurring awards, including the Paul J. Gaylor Activist Award funded by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor to honor her father's memory as FFRF's longest-serving volunteer.

FFRF's ability to reward and encourage student activists was greatly enhanced in 2014, when the Cliff Richards Memorial Student Activist Endowment was created, after this member stipulated such use in his bequest. Tapping this fund gives FFRF the freedom to name multiple awardees a year.

So, if you become aware of remarkable activism by a young freethinker or student, please let us know by contacting Freethought Today Editor PJ Slinger, at editor@ffrf.org. Or you may prefer to mail news clippings or other information to him c/o FFRF, PO Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

FFRF raises freethought flag in N.H. town

FFRF unfurled the banner of freethought in a New Hampshire community for the second year in a row.

On Jan. 2, FFRF and local member Richard Gagnon hoisted an "A" flag in Somersworth, N.H., to honor nonbelief. The flag remained up in the "Citizens Place" traffic island until Jan. 11. The red "A" was adopted by Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*, as a symbol of atheism and agnosticism.

In 2017, the city installed two flagpoles near a contentious Ten Commandments monument for community groups to commemorate special occasions.



"The 3,000-pound monolith was knocked down in August 2016, setting off a new round of discussions as to whether or not the religious symbol violates the constitutional provision of separation of church and state," the local paper reported then. "In determining whether the Ten Commandments monument should be restored, Mayor Dana Hilliard offered a plan to create a citizen's park, adding two flagpoles which could be used by civic groups to celebrate important events."

The Somersworth mayor, who was present at the flag-raising ceremony, waxed eloquent on the occasion.

"Today in the smallest city in New Hampshire, Dr. King's dream is reinforced by Richard Gagnon going to the flagpole and having his chance," Hilliard said. "Somersworth will once again prove to New Hampshire and the nation that we stand by our Hilltopper values of honoring each other. Let us in this month continue to reflect on Dr. King's words, and his dream of understanding and equality for all,"

The display of nonbelief on the pole during the full month of January 2018 passed off without incident.

"It was the first time we were making a statement, and it was not vandalized," says Gagnon.

Incidentally, New Hampshire is the least religious state in the country, according to a 2015 Gallup survey.

London calling



Photo by Rafida Bonya Ahmed

FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker had an pleasant meeting and "talked shop" in late November with Andrew Copson, executive director of the British Humanist Association, in London. Copson also presides over the International Humanist and Ethical Union. Both groups are changing names. BHA will become British Humanists and IHEU will become Humanists International. FFRF recently joined IHEU as a member organization.

Chessboard of education



In late November, FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne was a guest speaker on constitutional law at Monroe High School in Wisconsin, where he also played 12 games of chess simultaneously against 24 students.



Make your own nontheistic cyber billboard at ffrf.org/out, and you might win an "Unabashed Atheist" tee, like Scott.

Steven Pinker endorses FFRF in new TV ad to air on Colbert

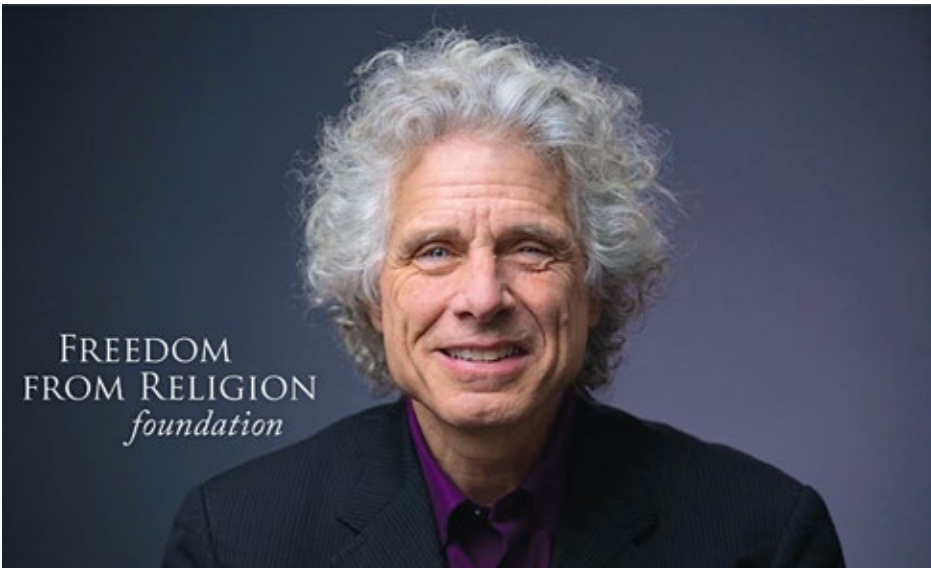
In a new TV ad campaign, *Enlightenment Now* author Steven Pinker urges viewers to join the Freedom From Religion Foundation in its fight to prevent religion from creeping into U.S. government. Pinker has served as FFRF's first honorary president since 2013.

The ad will make its television debut on select stations during CBS' "The Late Show with Steven Colbert" the week of Jan. 21. FFRF will also be running the ads on digital media outlets.

"The world has become a better place as reason has been overcoming superstition and tribalism. But the values of the Enlightenment are under attack," says Pinker in the ad. "Please join me in supporting the Freedom From Religion Foundation to ensure that our government is driven not by religion, but by reason."

"We're delighted and honored to have Steve's endorsement fresh off the success of his powerful book, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress*," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "We hope this campaign prompts secular Americans of all stripes to join FFRF at a critical time, as religious zealots are occupying our highest offices and courts."

Pinker is one of the world's premier intellects and cognitive psychologists, and serves as the Johnstone Family Professor of Psychology at Harvard University. He's been named on the Time 100 list of the world's "Most Influential People." Among his other best-selling



Steven Pinker endorses FFRF in a television ad that will appear in 18 cities nationwide in January.

Pinker's 30-second spot, as of press time, was scheduled to debut on Monday, Jan. 21 and run through Wed., Jan. 23, during the "The Late Show with Steven Colbert" (at 11:35 p.m. Eastern) in these cities:

Atlanta	Kansas City	Portland, Ore.
Austin, Texas	Madison, Wis.	Salt Lake City
Charlotte, N.C.	Milwaukee	Seattle
Columbus, Ohio	Nashville, Tenn.	St. Louis
Houston	Las Vegas	Tampa, Fla.
Indianapolis	Phoenix	Washington, D.C.

books are *The Blank Slate*, *The Language Instinct* and *How the Mind Works*.

With more than 31,000 members, FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, works as a watchdog to protect the constitutional principle of the separation be-

tween state and church. For 40 years, FFRF has served as a leading voice for freethought in America. For more information, visit ffrf.org.

To order Pinker's latest book, now in paperback, go to shop.ffrf.org.

FFRF challenges S.C. gov over official piousness

FFRF is not blessing S.C. Gov. Henry McMaster's imposition of prayers at official events.

Concerned South Carolina residents contacted FFRF about two such instances. At a Sept. 13 news conference about the government's response to Hurricane Florence, McMaster invited South Carolina National Guard Captain/Chaplain John Denny to begin the press conference with a prayer. Denny was again asked on Sept. 16 to deliver a prayer before a press conference about the progress of Hurricane Florence.

"The decision to deliver a prayer at an official state news conference sends an unfortunate official message of endorsement of religion over nonreligion by the highest executive office in the state — a message that inevitably excludes many of your constituents, and has a proselytizing intent," FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor write to McMaster. "Asking Denny, a Christian chaplain, to preside over the prayer also signals an official message of endorsement of Christianity, thereby excluding followers of minority religions."

Nonreligious Americans make up the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population by religious identification — more than one in five Americans now identifies as nonreligious, FFRF emphasizes. Beginning a televised gubernatorial news conference with a prayer signals to this sizeable minority "that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community," to quote the U.S. Supreme Court.



FFRF Reagan ad returns to Maddow, 'Late Show'

FFRF's ad, featuring Ron Reagan, self-described as "an unabashed atheist, not afraid of burning in hell," will air three times a week for two weeks at the end of January on MSNBC's "The Rachel Maddow Show."

FFRF will also run the spirited spot this month on 18 regional markets during Colbert's live broadcast Tuesday night, Jan. 29, following President Trump's State of the Union Address. The ad will air over a two-week period three times a week during the CBS national "Late Show" (11:35 p.m. Eastern) starting the week starting Jan. 28 through the week beginning March 4.

Additionally, FFRF is debuting a new endorsement by FFRF Honorary President Steven Pinker, a Harvard academic and best-selling author, during the previous week starting Feb. 21 on the "Late Show" in the same regional markets. (See related story on this page.)

The Reagan ad has been contracted for on a regional basis, since national CBS has censored FFRF's Ron Reagan ad from running nationally or on CBS-owned stations. Cities where the Reagan ad is scheduled to play on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday nights from Jan. 28 – Feb. 6 are:

Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte, Columbus, Ohio, Houston, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Madison, Wis., Milwaukee, Nashville, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Portland, Ore., Salt Lake City, Seattle, St. Louis, Tampa, and Washington, D.C.

CBS Network, ABC, NBC and Discovery Science have all refused to air the 30-second spot nationally. Last year, a number of contracted regional markets ended up refusing the Reagan ad at the last minute. It is hoped if that happens, that the Pinker ad will be accepted.

FFRF's Reagan commercial says: "Hi, I'm Ron Reagan, an unabashed atheist, and I'm alarmed by the intrusion of religion into our secular government. That's why I'm asking you to support the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the nation's largest and most effective association of atheists and agnostics, working to keep state and church separate, just like our Founding Fathers intended. Please support the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Ron Reagan, lifelong atheist, not afraid of burning in hell."

"We're very grateful to Steve Pinker and Ron Reagan for lending their prestige in the cause of FFRF, freethought and the constitutional principle of separation between religion and government," says Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. "Welcome to new members who catch these advertisements, which are not only reaching prospective new supporters for FFRF, but are letting the public know that the son of a conservative president can be an outspoken atheist, and that one of science's most distinguished advocates endorses FFRF's work to uphold the Enlightenment in the United States."

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Protecting the state-church wall

FFRF's Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel, right, speaks with FFRF's generous members Diane and Stephen Uhl during a break at the Secular Coalition of Arizona's 4th annual Secular Summit in Mesa, Ariz., on Dec. 9. Seidel was a member of a panel that discussed the "Status of Church-State Separation," which was hosted by Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. Seidel also spoke to about 70 FFRF members Dec. 7 at a pre-chapter event for a group in the Phoenix area considering forming an FFRF-Valley of the Sun chapter.

FFRF VICTORIES

Missouri city relocates cross

FFRF has at last convinced a Missouri town to transfer a cross from public land.

“Ozark officials said [Jan. 4] they will move a cross that is part of a holiday display in a city park,” the Springfield News-Leader reported. “The issue was raised when the city received a letter in late November from a separation-of-church-and-state group demanding the cross be removed.”

That “separation-of-church-and-state group” is FFRF, and it has been asking the city for months to do the constitutionally right thing.

As FFRF mentioned in its initial letter on Nov. 30, an illuminated cross is not a permissible city holiday

decoration.

Soon after, it seemed that Ozark had listened to FFRF’s advice. On Dec. 11, the city issued a statement indicating that a cross displayed in its Finley River Park indeed violated the Constitution. But later the same day, the city reversed course under immense pressure from the community, stating that “the cross in the Finley River Park will remain in place until a further due diligence can be completed regarding this matter.”

In its subsequent letter taking city officials to task for their reversal, FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert emphasized its original legal point.

“In *ACLU v. St. Charles* (1986), the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals pro-

hibited the city of St. Charles from displaying an illuminated Latin cross on the top of the city’s fire department as a part of its annual Christmas display,” Markert reminded City Administrator Stephen Childers. “The court stated matter of factly that ‘the cross is not in fact a common Christmas symbol.’”

Finally, Ozark has heeded FFRF’s counsel — this time, hopefully, for good.

“The city said it will move the cross to a private piece of land at the south end of the park,” the Springfield paper adds. “That land is owned by the Christian County A&M Society and is used by the Finley River Saddle Club, according to the city.”



By Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey

No more religion at Wisconsin city’s events

The city of Baraboo, Wis., affirmed its commitment to inclusion of nonreligious citizens after receiving a letter from FFRF.

In November, a shocking photo of Baraboo High School students giving a Nazi salute was circulated by the media, receiving international condemnation. In response, the city held a series of events aimed at helping the Baraboo community heal from the harm the photo caused. Local media reported that “religion played a central role” in one of the events, which were reportedly co-sponsored by local “faith leaders.”

While endorsing the anti-hate programs, FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne sent letters to the superintendent of Baraboo School District and the mayor’s office, reminding them of their constitutional obligation to keep public events secular and asking for assurance that future events would be free from government religious endorsement.

FFRF received responses from both the mayor’s office and the district, assuring that the future events were poised to remain free of religious proselytization.

FFRF’s ‘pole’ position: No teachers allowed

Teachers in a California school district have been instructed to stop promoting religious events to their students following a letter from FFRF Associate Counsel Elizabeth Cavell.

A concerned parent contacted FFRF to report that a Cosumnes Oaks High School teacher encouraged students to participate in “See You at the Pole,” an on-campus prayer event. The teacher reportedly showed a graphic promoting the prayer event on the overhead projector in his classroom.

The district sent a response to FFRF, detailing the course of action it took to remedy this violation. The district discussed the issue directly with the teacher and corrected the behavior and is taking action to “engage in a broader discussion with the entire faculty emphasizing the importance of the separation between church and state [its] constitutional obligation to refrain

from promotion religion in public education.”

FFRF says away with the manger in N.Y. school

A nativity scene was removed from a New York elementary school after FFRF intervened.

A concerned parent of a Harvey C. Fenner Elementary School student in Falconer, N.Y., reported that the school had placed a nativity scene near its main entrance. A picture of the nativity scene showed it sitting by the front desk, such that any student or guest to the school had to walk by it.

FFRF Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellow Colin McNamara wrote district Superintendent Stephen Penhollow to request that the scene be removed.

FFRF received a prompt response from the superintendent informing us that the display was removed.

No more religion in school’s holiday program

A Michigan school district removed religious messaging from a holiday program, thanks to FFRF.

It was reported to FFRF that Fairview Area Schools’ kindergarten, 2nd-, 4th- and 6th-grade students were scheduled to present “Christmas is Coming,” a holiday-themed concert that contains a number of Christian elements. While the program was set to include some secular holiday music, it also was supposed to contain narration that treats the biblical story of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem as historical fact.

“The ‘Christmas is Coming’ program contains narrative passages and songs with a distinctly devotional message that would be appropriate in a church, but not in a public school,” wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Colin McNamara to district Superintendent John Sattler.

Sattler responded quickly, saying that the religious narration had been removed from the program.

Coaches, teachers won’t pray with team anymore

A school district in Missouri has instructed coaches and teachers on their constitutional obligation to refrain from participating in student prayers.

FFRF received a complaint that

coaches and teachers in a Palmyra school district joined players in an on-field prayer at a football game held on Oct. 23, 2018. Staff from both the Palmyra R-1 School District and Monroe City R-1 School District reportedly participated in the prayer.

Legal Fellow Colin McNamara sent a letter to the district requesting that all employees, including teachers and coaches, cease praying with students.

Superintendent Kirt Malone responded, affirming the district’s commitment to upholding its constitutional responsibilities to honor its students’ religious liberty.

Teachers refrain from joining religious event

An Oklahoma public school has instructed staff on their obligation to refrain from participating in religious events.

A concerned parent reported that Adams Elementary School was sponsoring a “See You at the Pole” event in September. A Facebook page for the event indicated that it was organized and promoted by a teacher at the school.

The district’s attorney sent a reply to FFRF Legal Fellow Christopher Line, noting that district officials took swift action to resolve the issue prior to the event.

“The school district’s superintendent Nick Migliorino has assured me that relevant individuals and groups

were counseled regarding the district’s expectations that future events would not include references to the district as if the district or its employees were the sponsor of a religious events,” the attorney’s letter read. “Similarly, district resources including its contact information cannot be used to advertise non-school related activities.”

Religious favoritism taken off café’s menu

A restaurant in Virginia has discontinued offering a religious discount after FFRF alerted the establishment that it was in violation of state and federal civil rights laws.

Ms. Girlee’s Kitchen in Richmond was reportedly offering a 15-percent discount to patrons who presented a church bulletin on Sundays. This offer was advertised on the restaurant’s Facebook page.

FFRF Associate Counsel Elizabeth Cavell sent a letter to Ms. Girlee’s Kitchen’s manager, alerting them that the discount was in violation of the Civil Rights Act and the Virginia Human Rights Act as it showed favoritism based on religion.

FFRF received an uncommonly conscientious response from the restaurant’s management apologizing for unintentionally discriminating against anyone and assuring that the discount would be discontinued.

FFRF’s classic ‘Freethinker’ mug

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Illinois city cancels five-day religious trip

FFRF was able to get canceled an Illinois city-sponsored religious tour after receiving a report that the Parks and Recreation Department was hosting a five-day trip featuring visits to the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum, scheduled for fall 2019.

It is unconstitutional for a city government to endorse the religious mission of the Ark Encounter or the Creation Museum by organizing, sponsoring or funding a trip to them, FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne reminded Charleston, Ill., officials on Dec. 5.

By the next afternoon, City Attorney Rachael Cunningham had alerted FFRF that the event had been cancelled. The trip has been removed from the city's website and online registration portal.

Indiana coach will no longer pray with team

An Indiana public high school will instruct its coaches to stop participating in student prayer after intervention by FFRF.

A concerned South Gibson School Corporation community member reported that Gibson Southern High School personnel prayed with student athletes after a home game on Nov. 2.

A photo posted on social media shows coaching staff for both teams, as well as other adults, bowing their heads in prayer and placing their hands on students, along with the caption, "This is how two of the best football programs in southern Indiana complete a game . . . the power of prayer — at Gibson County, Ind."

It is unconstitutional for public school athletic coaches to lead their teams in prayer, participate in student prayers, or to otherwise promote reli-

gion to students, FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne reminded the district in his Nov. 30 letter.

On Dec. 17, FFRF received a response letter from the school district's attorney addressing the concerns and assuring it that the district would take action to ensure that it adheres to the First Amendment in the future.

"We want to emphasize to our personnel that they may not participate [in] any such student led prayer," the letter read. "We further plan to instruct the school personnel, including all coaches, that they may not encourage, lead, initiate, mandate, either directly or indirectly, any such student prayer."

FFRF stops religious teaching at W.Va. school

FFRF received multiple reports that Wood County School District in West Virginia has allowed teachers and outside adults to facilitate religious instruction during the school day in its elementary schools. Representatives from a local church reportedly created bible clubs at the school and recruited students at lunch. The bible club, "Generation NXT," openly admitted that teachers and principals "have stepped up to either start or join an NXT Club in their school!!!"

FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott sent a letter to the school superintendent William Hosaflook alerting him to the fact that adults had abused their position to proselytize within Wood County Schools.

Hosaflook directed the two schools reportedly hosting these clubs to immediately cease and desist all "Generation NXT" and other non-curricular clubs throughout the school day. The district is also undergoing the

process of establishing a new policy for managing school clubs to ensure they remain in accordance with students' constitutional rights.

FFRF cleanseth Facebook of city manager's posts

A Florida city manager has ceased posting religious messages on the city's social media following intervention from FFRF.

A concerned Lynn Haven resident contacted FFRF to say that City Manager Michael White regularly posted proselytizing messages to the city's official Facebook page. One post ended with:

"I would love to leave you with this message from my Lord and Savior: 1 John 1:7

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Similar religious messages appeared at the end of numerous posts signed by White.

FFRF Attorney Sam Grover sent a letter to the city, asking that city officials honor its residents' First Amendment rights and stick to secular messaging on their social media pages.

FFRF received a response from the attorney representing the city and the city has since ceased including religious messages and bible quotes in their Facebook posts.

Religious exhibits moved from Ohio public space

FFRF persuaded the city of Dover, Ohio, to transfer a nativity scene and a Ten Commandments monument from public to private property owned by Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church.

A concerned area resident reported to FFRF last holiday season that each year during this time, the city of

Dover was displaying religious exhibits on city property, and FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line contacted Mayor Richard Homrighausen then to let him know of the unconstitutionality of its practice.

The city had informed FFRF that Dover would no longer have such overtly Christian monuments on city property. During the holiday season, the media has been reporting on FFRF's constitutional victory.

FFRF get church signs removed from school

FFRF has ensured an end to a North Carolina school district's unconstitutional advertising of weekly religious services at a local church.

Southwest Elementary School in Durham, N.C., was allowing Keystone Church to place a large sign on the school's lawn to advertise its Sunday worship services. FFRF's local complainant reports that the sign was up at all times, including during the school week. The school had also allowed the church to store materials visible to students in the gym, including signs advertising the church.

"Southwest Elementary School may not display messages on school grounds that recruit participants to engage in religious worship," FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott wrote to the school district's legal counsel. "Courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools."

FFRF's request that the school district remove all church property from school grounds during times when the church was not renting school facilities was heeded.

"The church street sign has been removed and the signs that are stored in the gym have been completely covered," the school district's representative replied in an email.

IT PAYS TO COMPLAIN

No more nativity scene

FFRF Member Sarah Knopp of Indiana sent us her success story:

"For years, the small town in rural Indiana where I live has had a large, wooden nativity scene on the courthouse square lawn. Of course, being a lifelong freethinker and a member of FFRF, this has always bothered me. Toward the end of last year's [2017] holiday season, I got up my nerve (motivated by FFRF) and sent an anonymous letter to the county commissioners, explaining very diplomatically why this practice is unfair to many and unconstitutional.

"I am very pleased to tell you that it

is not among the holiday decorations anywhere in town this year! I am somewhat proud of my little town for making things right without a lot of fuss. I hope that the news coverage about small towns and school corporations usually being on the losing side of these types of arguments and lawsuits has helped them "see the light." Thank you for all that you do!"

Member gets nontheistic affidavit

I'm an FFRF member who's currently incarcerated in a state prison in Oregon. Recently, I was filling out paperwork for a clemency petition when I was given pause by the affidavit required to be submitted along with it. The legal form included a religious oath (that I "swore to God" the information contained therein

was true). Knowing that requiring such a pledge in a government document is unconstitutional, I wrote to the governor's office asking to be provided with an alternate form, without any theistic language.

I was heartened to know that, if I had to fight for this, FFRF would have my back. Fortunately, though, the governor did the right thing and promptly sent me an alternately worded (nontheistic) affidavit to use.

While I was grateful for this outcome, the effort it took should not have had to be made. Unless and until all government documents are, by default, nontheistic, we who understand the constitutional separation of church and state have a lot of work to do.

— Respectfully, David Chandler, temporary guest of the state of Oregon.


A secular message



FFRF Member Peter Bates holds a framed poster created by a group he co-founded, the Sun City Center Freethinkers of Florida. During the holiday season, two of the posters were hung in the largest community centers, the result of over a year's negotiation with the community association. The group convinced them that the current Christian display needed balance to reflect the community's diverse population. The poster promoted a secular message for the holidays. It was seen by several thousand people as they visited the two community centers.

Just Pretend: A Book For Young Freethinkers

NEW!



*By Dan Barker
Illustrated by Kati Treu*

Revised and adorably illustrated classic. This fun book explores myths and religion from a freethought point of view, and promotes critical thinking.

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

Illustrated by Seymore Cwast, published by FFRF



Beware Of The Dogma

The soma faces life with dread,
The psyche fears each minute,
We suffer less from a cold in the head
Than a new idea in it.

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2018 convention speech

The time is now to reclaim our democracy

This is an edited version of the speech given by Larry Decker on Nov. 3, 2018, days before the 2018 midterm elections, at FFRF's 41st annual convention in San Francisco. He was introduced by FFRF Board Chair Stephen Hirtle.

Larry Decker became executive director of Secular Coalition for America in December 2015. FFRF is a member organization of SCA.

A native of upstate New York, Decker has spent nearly two decades in Washington, D.C., as a government relations professional in the public, private and nonprofit sectors.

Larry served as the director of public policy for Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. He spent nearly eight years at the national headquarters of the American Red Cross. Larry worked at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, where he was instrumental in the launch of the chamber's first nationwide efforts to provide resources to women and minority-owned businesses. During the second term of the Clinton administration, Decker was appointed special assistant in the Office of Legislative Affairs and Public Liaison at the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

We're pleased to have Larry Decker on hand at our 41st annual convention to report briefly on SCA's actions and accomplishments.

By Larry Decker

Good morning, people of reason! It's really an honor to be here with an organization and its leaders who I admire so very much, and to be among such distinguished speakers and presenters. And speaking of distinguished speakers and presenters, thank you for not making me follow Sir Salman Rushdie. I mean, he took all of my best lines!

I want to thank FFRF for the invitation to speak. And I want to thank Annie Laurie, Dan and the whole team at FFRF for the incredible work you do each and every day defending the wall of separation between state and church. The Freedom From Religion Foundation is a pillar of the secular movement and a valued member of the Secular Coalition for America. Many of our member organizations refer to themselves as watchdog groups, but — and I mean this in the most complimentary way — the FFRF has always been the attack dog of the secular movement. They are tireless and fearless advocates who have never shied away from a tough fight, and I personally sleep easier every



Photo by Chris Line
Larry Decker is the executive director of the Secular Coalition of America.



Photo by Ingrid Laas
Larry Decker pushes for secular Americans “to make the case for why a secular government is the best safeguard for civil rights and civil liberties.”

single night knowing that FFRF is on our side. Thank you for what you do.

There are a few things going on in our nation today and I would like to talk to you about many of these.

In just a few days, Americans will head to the polls to cast a vote in what may be the most important midterm election in living memory. Our country has reached a crossroad and this election is our chance to stop it from heading down a path that I'm not sure we could recover from. Over the past two years, the Trump administration has methodically and systematically used the power of the federal government to enact the Religious Right's agenda. And there's no sign on the horizon that it intends to slow down. In fact, all signs suggest that it intends to hasten its work and accomplish in a few years what the Religious Right has tried to do for decades.

But this is what they're doing. They're distracting us with a whole bunch of noise. They're obfuscating the issues at hand. They do whatever they can so that the American people can't see clearly the ways in which they are destroying our democracy. This is the road that they want to take us down. But, to avoid this disaster, we need to contrast that toxic agenda with our own vision of a secular government, and it's up to each one of us to make the case for why a secular government is the best safeguard for civil rights and civil liberties.

Four values

Together with our partners, the Secular Coalition for America relaunched our Secular Values Voter campaign to reclaim the title of “values voter” from the Religious Right, which never deserved to have it in the first place. Our campaign is centered around four values: freedom, inclusion, equality and knowledge.

Freedom means that religion should be protected, but never imposed. When we look at modern day evangelicalism, what is the one characteristic that stands above the rest? It's the hypocrisy. For decades, they have claimed to be the moral majority and the standard bearer of family values, but what have we seen from them over the last decade? We've watched them hound one side of the aisle for their shortcomings while turning the other cheek for those on their side. We have watched men twice and thrice divorced tell our LGBTQ brothers and sisters that their same-sex marriage would destroy the sanctity of marriage. We've watched them tell us that abstinence is the best way to avoid teen pregnancies, while watching the teen birth rate and STD transmissions in their districts rise. We've watched them complain about and

legislate about the imposition of Sharia law on one hand, while, on the other hand, they are codifying into our justice system laws that are based on their own religions. Think abortion and anti-marriage equality and other laws that they have been trying to pass. Laws based on any faith will always leave someone out.

Having access to reproductive health and the right to choose doesn't force anyone to have an abortion. Having marriage equality doesn't force someone to marry someone of the same gender or require clergy to perform the ceremony. And having the right to die with dignity doesn't mean that everyone with a terminal illness has to take that pill.

The Religious Right would say that those issues are immoral. Well, you know what I think is immoral? I think it's immoral to force a woman to watch an ultrasound of her fetus before terminating a pregnancy. I think it is immoral to prevent love from flourishing. And I think it's immoral to force a human being to suffer needlessly while facing the worst challenge one can possibly face, and one they know they will ultimately lose.

But here is the thing. When the government favors any one group over another, we are divided by our differences and not united by what we share in common. It is our belief that in a secular government, patriotism has no religion.

Inclusion means including all faiths and none in legislating and honoring your fellow human beings. When it comes to the attacks on our democracy, the time is up. We've come to a roadblock. Have we been too cautious? Yes, perhaps we have. And the game plan of the last three years no longer applies. Just look at what we're up against today. We've moved into the era of alternative facts, conspiracy theories and moving beyond simple dog whistles. The

time for talk is over. The time for action is now.

The beauty of our constitutional democracy, which has survived for more than 230 years, is that when you hit a roadblock, our founders had the forethought to include a way around it. The courts may be blocked against us for the next generation, but we still have the ability to change Congress and state legislatures. Through those legislative bodies, we can write laws and policies that will remove religion from government. We can create laws and policies that will have a large impact on civil liberties across this country, in state to state and in Washington D.C. And, incidentally, we can change presidents and governors, too. We can vote locally to elect women and men who know and understand why freedom from religion is just as important as freedom of religion. We can give those local officials the ability to protect reproductive rights, to affect school curricula in ways that elevate science, reason and freethought, and dare I say it, common sense and common decency.

When government skews scientific findings for ideological reasons or suppresses accurate information, it resists freedom of thought and halts scientific progress, and that has a perilous implication on our economic, medical and societal progress. Make no mistake about that. Here in the United States, where all citizens have access to the most accurate information, empowering every individual to get to their greatest potential should be our only and ultimate goal.

Equality is equal rights and equal responsibilities. Today, right this minute, our democracy is under attack. And because of the recent appointments to the Supreme Court, as well as to lower courts, it may be difficult to win battles that unbiased jurists would normally judge fairly. This is the greatest enemy to democracy in a lifetime. A theocratic minority has seized control of our government and it is hard at work remaking our nation in its image. It wants to hi-

“ Every single major issue affecting our country today is somehow rooted in religiosity.

jack our institutions, rewrite our history and distort our values. And based on an evangelical Christian worldview, if we do nothing, we can expect more attacks on the rights of women, on the rights of our LGBTQ families, on voting rights, on immigration and asylum, on the environment, the contents of school curricula, and humane end of life choices. And all of this, at its core, is implicated by religiosity. Knowledge is important because information empowers us to be the best possible citizens.

Faith and patriotism

So, now I want to talk for just a second about faith and patriotism. I really feel I need to mention it because the Religious Right has spent much of the past decade equating faith with patriotism. We can see that most recently in the push to have “In God We Trust” emblazoned on the walls of our high schools in the Bible Belt because that, of course, is better than taking any kind of real action on the problems that we have out there. Many of you already know my disdain for this “motto” and my preference for “E Pluribus Unum” — “From many, one.” But to watch them get their knickers in a twist over a quarterback kneeling at a football game is just dumbfounding. It’s not like our nation was founded on protesting or anything.

When did they get to choose who’s a patriotic American and who’s not? The basic definition for patriotism is having vigorous support for one’s country. Well, our country, our democracy is enshrined in our Constitution. I think that fidelity to our Constitution is the true test of patriotism. Fidelity to a religion that is in direct conflict with our Constitution is not patriotic.

Earlier, I said that the playbook from three years ago is now obsolete. Well it is, and I want to tell you why. We need more than just nontheists and the Nones. We need to do more than just call our lawmakers. We need to change the hearts and minds of all Americans to believe in their country and in their Constitution again. If we want to make America great again, let’s start there. And we can only do that if we talk to more people than just those who agree with this. We need to include our communities, our neighbors, our families, our co-workers. And this means we need to include the religious, too. Why? Because there are a good number of religious Americans who have fidelity to our Constitution over their religion, who believe that their beliefs should not be imposed on others and who, throughout the course of their lives, haven’t seen the need to be concerned about religious freedom.

So, it’s up to us to tell them why they need to be concerned about religious freedom — real religious freedom.



Photo by Chris Line

SCA Director Larry Decker speaks to the audience during FFRF’s 41st annual convention in San Francisco on Nov. 3.

And to make sure that every single American knows what real religious freedom is, not this fabricated definition of religious freedom espoused by the Religious Right.

Think about this: Every single major issue affecting our country today is somehow rooted in religiosity. If you are pro-choice, which many religious Americans are, you care about real religious freedom.

If you are in favor of equality, then you care about real religious freedom. If you believe that climate change is real and is a threat to our country and to our world, then you care about real religious freedom. If you believe that human beings have a right to die with dignity, you believe in real religious freedom. If you believe in science, you believe

in religious freedom. On the other hand, if you think that, based on your religion, abortion is wrong and should therefore be outlawed, you don’t care about religious freedom, you care about religious privilege. If you think that being gay is wrong and that as a business owner you shouldn’t have to provide services to gay and lesbian couples, well, then, you’re a bigot. But you’re a bigot who doesn’t care about religious freedom; you care that your religion is privileged over their civil rights.

Let’s get our definitions correct, America. Maybe we need to start there. I believe in an America that is

not a theocracy. I believe in an America where facts matter and science is used smartly to determine the course of action against climate change. I believe in an America where every woman has the right to choose the path of her own health care, whether it’s about birth control and abortion or any other medical procedure. And I believe in an America where you get to marry the person you choose, not who the government wants you to spend your life with, and not because of someone else’s religion. I believe in an America where we have the right to choose to die with dignity.

If you believe these things, regardless of your religion or lack of one, you are part of this movement, and we need to be able to count on you.

Playing the long game

Now, here’s something that I might get booed for saying. But the sad fact is that the Religious Right has beaten us on every organizational front. They’ve out-strategized and out-performed us. Mostly because they have out-fundraised us. When you look at the budgets of our entire movement, the largest organizations in our movement, they pale in comparison. They’re a small percentage to just one — the Alliance Defending Freedom, whose name has absolutely nothing to do with defending freedom. It’s about imposing and privileging religion in this country with an annual budget of \$150 million dollars a year.

They’ve been playing the long game, and, I have to say, I admire them for that. If we’re going to win

this fight, which we can, we need to take a page from their playbook and play an even longer game. While their numbers dwindle, our numbers grow. Now is the time to take advantage of that. The opportunity to become an even more powerful constituency is there for us to take.

We need to band together. We need to vote. We need to call our members of Congress and demand they stop using the bible as the basis for making laws in this nation, and we need to include our friends, our family, our colleagues, our neighbors in this fight. This is a fight for our values: freedom, inclusion, equality, knowledge. Our values are worth fighting for because our values are American values.

You know, we’ve watched as the Religious Right frames patriotism — from the so-called angry mobs to kneeling NFL players being bad patriots — but we need to define the conversation of what is American and what is not.

There’s a reason that the freedom of religion, speech, press and assembly are all part of the First Amendment.

It’s because our forefathers knew how important it was for us to be a part of this democracy. And the only way we can be a part of this democracy today is if we stand up and demand that our democracy matters, our civil rights, our civil liberties, our freedom from and our freedom of religion matters. And that’s where you come in.

Thank you, FFRF, for all that you do. And may reason prevail in America!

To watch the full video of Larry Decker’s speech, go to [FFRF.org/video-2018-con](https://ffrf.org/video-2018-con)

Freethought Matters

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

An antidote to religion on the airwaves and Sunday morning sermonizing.

Watch our show every Sunday!

Freethought Matters TV Talk Show airs in:

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

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

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

No need for supernatural

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker’s latest book tackles the subject of morality.

What drives us to be good? How do we even know how to be good? Philosophers and theologians have dealt with such questions for millennia, but Barker says the answers are not so complicated.

In *Mere Morality*, he argues there’s no need to appeal to supernatural commandments or the fear of some higher power when considering morality. Stripping “good” and “evil” down to the basics, he offers a simple compass for navigating life’s most difficult moral and ethical dilemmas.

Dan donates all the royalties from copies purchased via FFRF. Go to shop.ffrf.org.

Introducing John de Lancie . . .



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Margaret Downey introduces John de Lancie, the inaugural winner of FFRF’s Clarence Darrow Award.

Here is Margaret Downey’s introduction of John de Lancie at FFRF’s 41st annual convention in San Francisco on Nov. 2, days before the 2018 midterm elections. Downey, an FFRF state representative from California, is an atheist and state-church separation activist. She is also a past board member of the American Humanist Association.

Thank you for giving me the honor of introducing John de Lancie.

John is an actor, director and producer, but many of you in this audience know him best for portray-

ing “Q” in the television series, “Star Trek: The Next Generation.”

John has appeared in numerous television shows apart from “Star Trek,” including “The Librarians,” “Torchwood,” “Breaking Bad” and “West Wing,” just to name a few.

John’s many film credits are vast. Some of the films you probably have enjoyed are “The Hand That Rocks the Cradle,” “The Fisher King,” “The Onion Field,” “Taking Care of Business,” “Fearless,” “The Big Time” and “Pathology.”

He has been a member of the American Shakespeare Company, the Seattle Repertory Company, the South Coast Repertory and, most recently, of the Freedom From Religion Foundation as an Afterlife Member!

In the world of music, John has performed with most of the major symphony orchestras in America, Canada and Australia. John has directed a number of operas, including Puccini’s “Tosca.”

He was the host of the Los Angeles Philharmonic “Symphonies for Youth,” as well as writer/director of “First Nights,” which is a concert series at Disney Hall.

John is the co-owner of Alien Voices. The other owner was Leonard Nimoy. Alien Voices is not affiliated with the SETI search for extraterrestrial intelligence, even though the name sounds like it could be a similar project. No, Alien Voices is a production company devoted to the dramatization of classic science fiction.

But John has an interest in real life and the many social concerns that confront us. Combining his talents with an interest in evolution and science, John is embarking on a project to convey Darwin’s theory of evolution to children and many other scientific themes through a new cartoon endeavor. Watch for that in the near future, folks.

John’s interest in science and the law has him examining the 2005 *Kitzmiller vs. Dover School District* trial. We may see a dramatic portrayal of the characters soon, thanks to John’s talents as a writer, director, actor and producer.

John is the very first recipient of FFRF’s Clarence Darrow Award. It is so fitting that it is being awarded to him because, in 2005, John actually portrayed Clarence Darrow in a stage production called “The Great Tennessee Monkey Trial.” John’s dear friend, Ed Asner, played William Jennings Bryan, so you can imagine what a wonderful production that must have been.

John lent his celebrity and memorable remarks to the dedication of FFRF’s commissioned statue of Clarence Darrow in Dayton, Tenn., in July 2017. The Rhea County Courthouse statue was created by sculptor, Zenos Frudakis who is in the audience tonight. Zenos, please join me on stage.

Now we are pleased that John is here to accept an award from the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Please welcome John de Lancie as the first recipient of the Clarence Darrow Award.

Clarence Darrow Award winner

The revolutionary act of telling the truth

By John de Lancie

For those of you who don’t know your Catholic saints, and I have a feeling this is a crowd that probably doesn’t, St. Genesius is the patron saint of actors. He’s also the patron saint of thieves, epileptics and clowns. I’ve known this tidbit for years and counted myself blessed to be included. Recently, however, I discovered to my horror that St. Genesius also represents lawyers. Actors, clowns, stenographers and lawyers.

I petitioned the Vatican to get the lawyers thrown out. They could easily be transferred to St. Felix, who handles spiders. He should take care of them. Or St. Dominic of Silos, who handles rabid dogs. It’s a simple request, but I’m still waiting. The reason I’m eager for this transfer stems from an unfortunate conversation I had a few months ago with a lawyer, who said to me, “If I ever got you on the witness stand, I could easily destroy your credibility with the jury simply because actors are by their very nature professional liars.” What a staggering thing to say. And something that I took deeply to heart given that we are well into the 23rd month of our great national paroxysm of lying.

Actors are a lot of things, but lying is the antithesis of what we do professionally. The craft of acting has nothing to do with deception. We are not in search of lies; quite the contrary. Just as great plays reveal profound truths, acting at its best strives to hold those truths as a mirror up to nature. That is what makes great acting so compelling. That is what we strive to achieve. Actors who conceal the truth ring false. And we dismiss their performance as being untruthful, unwatchable. There’s nothing attractive to an audience about lying. Lying sullies both the liar and the one being lied to.

Spend five minutes watching Sarah Huckabee Sanders and tell me if her performance doesn’t make you cringe and want to turn away. Acting is truth-telling, and the audience knows it when they see it. If my



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Actor John de Lancie accepted the inaugural Clarence Darrow Award Nov. 2 during FFRF’s convention in San Francisco.

lawyer friend had started the conversation like this: “You’ve played a lot of liars in your career, have you learned anything?” I would have replied, “Absolutely. I have learned the value of telling the truth.”

World of ‘what if’

During the rehearsal of a play, the actor forms an intimate relationship with the truth. The process is not just about learning your lines and avoiding the furniture. It is a period of intense examination of the character. To do it properly, you have to be honest with yourself and vulnerable to what you may uncover.

You have to be brave to enter the world of “what if.” What if I were handicapped? What if I only had a week to live? What if I were a killer?

A while back, I played the character of Hans Biebow. Biebow was the chief Nazi administrator for the ghetto of Lodz. With the help of Mordecai Rumkowski, the Jewish mayor of the ghetto, Biebow transformed Lodz into a major manufacturing center for the German army. Both men worked feverishly to keep the ghetto producing. Rumkowski’s goal was to save his people, Biebow’s was to become the top war producer. Into this symbiotic relationship came the Final Solution; the central conflict of the play. The crushing inevitability of the Final Solution made for brutal dialogue as the two men negotiated the quotas for the trains, thereby sealing the fate of thousands. The infamous speech, “Mothers and fathers, give me your children under 10,” was delivered in the ghetto of Lodz.

At the start of rehearsals, I was having great difficulty finding the character. He felt so distant. He was a monster, yet he didn’t think of himself as a monster. How do I play that in such a way that the audience might see a part of themselves in Biebow? First, I had to find a part of Biebow in me.

My first clue came as I was standing in line to buy a soda. A man in front of me pulled out some money and a five-dollar bill fell to the floor. Automatically, I reached down, picked it up and gave it to him. But as I walked back to rehearsal, I realized I could have made another choice. I could have simply stepped forward and covered the five-dollar bill with my foot and it would have been mine. Nothing grand, just a momentary lapse known only to me. A little secret, easily rationalized. No big deal.

I realized then that my mistake had been in trying to swallow Biebow whole — when he was his most repulsive, when he was willing to do anything or say anything to get the sick and elderly on the train, get the children on the train, and finally, on the last train Rumkowski himself, who, when he stepped onto the platform in Auschwitz, was bludgeoned to death by the parents of the children he had sent before.

Easy first steps

In trying to portray the enormity of Biebow’s crime, I had assumed that his life journey started with the unimaginable, when actually it started years before with perhaps something as simple as stepping forward to conceal a five-dollar bill. One dishonest step repeated ten thousand times. By the time I met Biebow, morality had nothing to do with it. That struggle had ceased in him years earlier. His had been on a long journey to self-entrapment. A journey that begins with lying to others and ends with lying to yourself.

That was the key to my performance and a life lesson for me, as well. How easy those first steps towards self-deception, and how frightening the outcome. And, so, every night in the “what if” world of a ghetto, I watched without guilt or remorse as babies were snatched from their mother’s arms and fathers shot. I ordered the deportation of children with no shame, and the audience wept.

A year ago in Washington D.C., I played Donald Trump, or, to be exact, Trump 2.0: Articulate, charismatic, corrupt. Which is why I can stand before you tonight and tell you that you are witnessing the greatest speech, the most amazing dinner speech ever delivered in the history of humankind. And that includes the Sermon on the Mount, which a lot of people are saying took place in Utah. I don’t know, but a lot of people are saying it.

I fought long and hard about playing that character. Exercising the negative parts of oneself takes its toll, but in the end, I accepted the role and went in search of the Trump in me. I spent the next four months in the world of lying, bullying and gaslighting. And you know what? In a perverse way, it’s kind of fun. Trump is not that complicated. He doesn’t struggle with great philosophical or moral issues.

In the parlance of a type of theater called commedia dell’arte, Trump is pantalone: ego-driven, greedy. His motivation is winning. Grab the last cookie on the plate. Push to the head of the line. Get through the door first. I win, you lose. And since nothing really matters to him except his own skin, he is completely unencumbered by the truth. He is shameless. Once I got on that wavelength, it was disturbingly easy.

Every night I walked out on stage and poured a bucket of lies into a pool of clear water and the tendrils reached out and permeated everything until the audience couldn’t see the lies anymore because they were drowning in them. And if you’re drowning, I’m winning. One of the fascinating aspects of acting is that while your mind knows you are pretending, your body doesn’t. As I attacked and demeaned and scored



Photo by Ingrid Laas

John de Lancie shows off his Clarence Darrow Award while standing with Margaret Downey and Zenos Frudakis, the sculptor of the statue the statuette is based on.

even the most insignificant of wins, my body was experiencing it for real. The adrenaline and the cortisol were flowing. It was exciting. It was predatory.

My fellow actors, however, were going through very different emotions. As far as they were concerned, they were being battered with their sunken chests, rounded shoulders staring at the ground waiting for the abuse to pass them by. And what did I learn? If you allow yourself to be shameless — truly shameless — then everything is easy. The rage, the lack of empathy, the lying, the entitlement, the denials, the grandiosity — exhilarating. Being shameless is powerful.

I took a long, slow walk back to my apartment every night to shake it off. Only when I got past the Chick-fil-A on 14th Street, one of Trump’s favorite eateries, did I start to relax. So, my dear lawyer friend, no, actors are not professional liars. But, when we play them, we strive to portray them truthfully and insightfully so that you might see yourself; so that we all might see ourselves.

Emotions are real

And just to be clear, actors ask permission. Both the audience and the actor enter the imaginary world together. Where everyone is aware that

what is happening on stage or on the screen is only real in the emotions it evokes. Real liars don’t ask permission. And today, you can find them in the tens of thousands in the public square doing untold damage to a population that’s so turned upside down by 22 years of Fox News, social media and a president who lies so shamelessly that many of us are drowning. We are entering the realm of the unimaginable.

Up until now, I have been describing characters in the extreme. Murderous, ruthless. But there was a world of dishonesty cloaked in righteousness that is just as perverse and just as dangerous. Three years ago,

clear that I think many of the tenets of religion are beneficial, especially when they stress charity, tolerance, forgiveness and love. But when one’s religious beliefs leave the privacy of the home and are brought into the public square, I stand as a sentinel, as do many of you, to keep the public square free of ignorance, superstition and bigotry.

In the words of Dudley Malone, defense counsel with Clarence Darrow: “Keep your bible. Keep it as your consolation, keep it as your guide, but keep it where it belongs — in the world of your conscience, in the world of theology.”

Dover trial

During these last few months, I have been working as a writer with the transcripts of the “Intelligent Design” trial that took place in 2005 in Dover, Pennsylvania. Fundamentalist Christians took over the school board and within weeks injected their religious beliefs into the teaching of science in their public school. Some of the parents pushed back and sued the school board.

It was the Scopes Monkey Trial all over again, but this time with a twist. The defendants felt emboldened and justified in their actions. Moments after taking the stand, their religious veneer, their piety fell to the wayside. Moments after swearing to their God that they would tell the truth, they lied with abandon. They were shameless. Their lying was so egregious that at one point the judge said: “This is a federal courtroom. If you continue, I’m going to charge you with perjury.”

Aided by their fundamentalist council, the Dover defendants charted a zigzag course of deception and dishonesty. Thankfully, the judge saw through it and identified Intelligent Design for the sham that it is — creationism, not science. And as for the defendants, he charged some of them with contempt. As you might expect, the defendants all left the courthouse feeling very misunderstood, very ill-used. They proclaimed themselves victims of an intolerant secular world. They didn’t feel shame or embarrassment by their behavior. They were lying for Jesus and they would do it again. They would say anything and do anything. I recognized the type.

To watch the video of John de Lancie’s speech from the 2018 national convention in San Francisco, go to [FFRF.org/video-2018-con](https://www.ffrf.org/video-2018-con)

if the Christian fundamentalists of America had been told they would be voting *en masse* for a pathological liar, a serial philanderer, a man whose very name when placed in the same sentence with the phrase Christian values elicits laughter, they would have been insulted. As arbiters of all things moral and ethical, they would have been shocked. But that was then and this is now. And just like Biebow, when you’re told the solution comes from on high, you don’t want to get too caught up in the moral details. They just get in the way. Especially if you’ve been softened up since birth not to question, not to be curious, to simply believe.

A few years ago, I toured the country performing “The Great Tennessee Monkey Trial.” This time, I played the good guy — Clarence Darrow. Many of our performances were in the Bible Belt, and at the end of every show there was a question-and-answer period. What an eye-opener! I began to realize I had entered the world of absolutes with no give-and-take and no room for doubt, a politicized world where the biblical stories were familiar, but the intentions behind their telling were very different. And yet the collective responses were always the same: “If science has produced a truth or a fact not contained in the bible, then destroy science and keep the bible.” No matter where we performed, that was the mantra.

On a personal note, I want to make



Photo by Ingrid Laas

De Lancie spoke about how lying is the antithesis of what actors do.

Shameless lying

I’ve often wondered what was their first step, their five-dollar bill. For many of them, I think it starts early and it’s very carefully orchestrated. I think it starts by telling the innocent kid, the curious kid who just wants to know what’s real, something as simple as, “Yes, he did. Jonah lived in the whale, he did. For three days he lived in a whale. It’s true.” That response is certainly easier than explaining what an allegory is to an 8-year-old, but it has its risks. In Kentucky, I watched a Ken Ham wannabe preach shamelessly to his target audience of children under 10. He was working really hard that morning — hand puppets and lollipops. And the parents loved it. I felt sorry for the kids. Their first steps were being made for them. The seeds of ignorance, prejudice and superstition were being planted.

A few days later at the University of Nebraska, I stood in a classroom of a hundred college kids as 80 of them raised their hands to bear witness that they believe the Earth was created on October 23rd, 4004 B.C., at 10

o’clock in the morning. “How do you know that?” I asked. Well, they didn’t exactly. Something about revealed truth and fossils and living in a whale. But mostly they didn’t know. Nor did they care to know.

I’m told that having faith is believing without proof, without reason. I think you can have faith and keep your reason. I’ll go a step further: You must keep your reason, otherwise, you will lose your soul to liars, manipulators, cheats and demagogues. I’m not a liar, but I play them, and I don’t think of gullible as charming or quaint. I see it for what it is — a target of opportunity. And so do a lot of others who troll our political landscape.

A young lady in West Virginia once told me that God was her bus driver. “What does that mean?” I asked. “It means I can sit at the back of my bus and party hardy because God is driving my bus.”

I have a feeling that on the eve of one of the most important elections of our lifetime, unbeknownst to her, a lot of people are driving her bus. And while our young lady has not been paying attention to where she’s



Photo by Ingrid Laas
Clarence Darrow award-winner John de Lancie

going for a very long time, the micro-lies have been piling up, and for her, they are indistinguishable from the big lies.

I fear that she is so ill-prepared to differentiate fact from fiction, truth from lies, that it’s but a few short steps

to believing that separating children from their parents keeps us safe. That Central American mothers pushing strollers down a hot Mexican highway are a threat to our country. That freedom of religion somehow means you can discriminate against those who don’t share your beliefs. That telling the truth makes you an enemy of the people and that lying can’t be all that bad if your cause is good.

When so many are so willing to forsake reason in favor of faith, is it any wonder that our leaders embrace the unreasonable, the unimaginable? That’s why educating children to be curious is so important, why debunking the notion that morality is derived from a single book is so important, why speaking up when others remain silent is so important.

As George Orwell said, “During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.” That’s why organizations like the Freedom From Religion Foundation are so important. Because the greatest, most fundamental service we can do in this world is to keep truth alive. Thanks.

Book burning ‘backfires’ for religious group

FFRF member organizes successful fundraiser for Iowa library, others

By Justin Scott

The small northwest Iowa community of Orange City made some pretty big headlines in 2018, and for all the wrong reasons.

In March 2018, the city’s library decided to “experiment” with how it groups books. It shifted from organizing them in alphabetical order by author’s name to grouping them by subject and subcategory, after being pressured by Christian conservatives and anti-LGBTQ activists in the city. According to a story featured in the Feb. 21, 2018, issue of the Des Moines Register, “More than 300 people have signed a petition to either ban or label and group materials related to homosexual and transgender content in the Orange City Public Library.”



Things then seemed to calm down until Paul Dorr got involved. Dorr is a Christian activist and director of a group called Rescue the Perishing, a religious group and website he calls a “crisis center and pro-life, pro-family movement.” Despite living nearly an hour north of Orange City, Dorr not only checked out a handful of LGBTQ-themed books, but he tossed them into a burning trash can. His destruction of property was captured during a Facebook Live session, where he read a blog post from a website called “May God and the Homosexuals of OC Pride Please Forgive Us!”

When I first heard about it, I was disgusted. As an atheist, I find many religious texts to be worth pitching, but I’ve never actually considered tossing them into the garbage, let alone going to a library to check them out and then toss them into a burning garbage can.

So, I created a Facebook fundraiser. Initially I just wanted to raise enough to replace the burned books, but the librarian in Orange City told me that it had already received replacements for the books and it didn’t have plans to fill the library with an overwhelming amount of new LGBTQ-themed books. So, my fundraising goals evolved.

My primary objectives were to:
1) Help spread the word about what had happened.
2) Let people know that there was a way they could get involved.
3) Get money and resources into the hands of folks in the Orange City and northwest Iowa area that could respond in a positive way to this.

Well, the fundraiser took off! I can’t say “thank you” enough to all of the caring individuals around the globe that helped this become such an awesome success.

The initial goal was \$750 and we ended up with more than \$2,000! In addition, it was great to see the fundraiser generate headlines in World Religion News, the Friendly Atheist, The Freethinker (Patheos), Gay Star News, Pink News (UK) and KWWL, here in Iowa.

The fundraiser concluded at the end of November and I was able to split up the funds and donate them to a variety of different LGBTQ ef-



In this screenshot from Facebook Live, Christian activist Paul Dorr throws LGBTQ-themed library books into a burning trash can.

A portion went directly to the Orange City Library. Another portion was sent to a pro-LGBTQ high school advocacy group in the Orange City area, with the hopes that it can use the funds to make a positive impact in the school and possibly the school library.

The last portion of the funds raised went to OC Pride, an LGBTQ advocacy group in Orange City that assisted me throughout much of the fundraiser. (Special thanks to Mike Goll for all of his help!) The hope here is that they’ll be able to use the

funds to focus on a family safe space during its event that will feature LGBTQ books and materials.

To me, the success of this fundraiser speaks to the amount of love there is for the LGBTQ community around the world, but especially in Orange City, Iowa. As one headline put it: “Iowa Christian’s book burning stunt spectacularly backfires.”

I couldn’t agree more.
FFRF Member Justin Scott is founder of the Eastern Iowa Atheists.

NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER CONTEST

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

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

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

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*Annie Laurie Gaylor
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This ad originally ran in the Dec. 15, 2018, New York Times.

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Artwork by Jacob Fortin

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FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

in church youth groups and went to church summer camps.

Skip to many, many, many years later, just a few years ago. (I'm now 93.)

My wife “came down” with Alzheimer’s/dementia. After a few years, I could no longer take care of her. We sold our condo so we could afford to move her into a memory care home.

One day, I looked at her and wondered: “Why her, God?” If God was so omnipotent, why would he allow such a thing to happen? She was righteous, kind, well-liked and attended church.

My belief in a kind and loving God was shattered. Then I was drawn in by the Ron Reagan “unabashed atheist” commercial I had seen on TV.

I did a lot of thinking. So, I contacted FFRF and became a member. I received a few of your books. Ah, at last, some really good reading!

I now believe that humans created God, and humans wrote the bible from their own perspective.

Bill Gibson
California

Is it better to lie through creed, or stay silent?

What if someone does not believe the words of the Apostle’s Creed? Must he/she say it anyway at a public event, such as during a president’s funeral service? In such a case, must he or she basically lie his way through this prayer?

- Specifically, what if:
- He does not believe in God, or consider anyone but his biological male parent his father? Must he pretend he does?
 - She does not recognize any supernatural “almighty,” or creator of heaven or Earth. In fact, she does not believe in any afterlife, no heaven or hell, nothing at all after death? Is it better to lie to



World-renowned classical pianist Jarred Dunn took this photo inside the cathedral of Notre Dame. “As beautiful as some of the architecture and art is inside this cathedral, it’s somehow both comforting and revolting that they’ve resorted to offerings by bank cards,” Dunn wrote.

keep up appearances? Do we not have freedom from as well as freedom of religion in America?

- He does not believe in Jesus Christ, or any of that business about “His only son, our Lord,” and all that babble about being conceived by some kind of woo woo holy spirit?
- She can’t get her head around someone born of a virgin. Must she pretend to accept that 2 plus 2 equals 5, or something equally ridiculous?
- He doesn’t believe that Jesus (or

anybody for that matter) rose from the dead? Do all those leaders who affirmed this at President Bush’s memorial service think that someone literally rose from the dead? If not, are the prayer intoners either irrational, hypocritical or intimidated?

- She does not believe in the Holy Catholic Church, has no idea what the communion of saints is all about or scoffs at the notion of life everlasting, which does not sound so appealing anyway? Does she proclaim what she does

not believe anyway?

I’m in a curious position defending Donald Trump, a first for me, but there is a possibility that he was among the most honorable of all in attendance for remaining silent during the prayer. For once in his presidency, maybe he didn’t lie. Maybe.

Donald B. Ardell
Florida

Birthday gift in honor, memory of FFRF founder

We’ve enclosed a gift to FFRF in memory of our friend, Anne Nicol Gaylor, and to honor her Nov. 25 birthday. She was a sweet tough lady and we were honored to be her friends.

Pat and Dan Cornwell
Wisconsin

FFRF can confront, beat religious ‘authorities’

One thing I’ve noticed about religious spokespersons is that, no matter how much damage their religion is responsible for and despite its moral corruptions, they have the chutzpah to insist they’re moral authorities. They feel they have the right to dictate public morality. They have the audacity to insist on creating laws to override facts, based on the blatant assertion that what they believe is the only thing that matters!

So, you can see why any moral person ought to support FFRF. It has the unmitigated boldness to confront those “unquestionable” God authorities by telling them the facts and beating them at their own game.

Keep up the good works.

Carl Scheiman
Maine

LETTERBOX POEMS

‘But, Praise the Lord’

I wrote this poem in memory of John Paul Gary Broadstreet (Oct. 5, 1977-Sept. 5, 1981), whose mother beat him for almost four years and, eventually, starved him to death in Elizabeth, Ind.

Oh, little one, the curse of birth that day.
Oh, little one, the price you had to pay.
Oh, little one, your life was no bouquet.
Oh, little one, abuse was on its way.

But, praise the Lord, did Jesus feel your pain?
But, praise the Lord, Jesus sees you with disdain.
But, praise the Lord, divine love cannot explain.
But, praise the Lord, prayers to God in vain.

Oh, little one, if only I had known.
Oh, little one, the sound of breaking bones.
Oh, little one, abused before you had grown.
Oh, little one, the hours you had to moan.

But, praise the Lord, the Christian thing to do.
But, praise the Lord, preordained, this just for you.
But, praise the Lord, as a child, you had no clue.
But, praise the Lord, the bruises turning blackish blue.

Oh, little one, you just made it to 3.
Oh, little one, the starvation you could not flee.
Oh, little one, this God allowed this to be.
Oh, little one, God’s hell is your eternity.

But, praise the Lord, this God allows suffering.
But, praise the Lord, this God is not listening.
But, praise the Lord, this God is extremely mean.
But, praise the Lord, this God’s existence has not been seen.

Larry E. Farr
Indiana

‘A Word Before Dying’

“What’s in a name, a word?”
A song, a message, a life, a bird
“Does the wayward child always come home?”
No, sometimes people just grow old, alone.
“That sounds awful. I just want to pretend.”
You do what you want to, the end’s still the end.
“Just please give me something. Even a belief is OK.”
Mythology and dogma, your intellect will pay.
“I don’t care of the price. The comfort’s what I need.”
You sold away your reason. Your body still bleeds.
“I can’t just be matter. Does any part

live on?”
Only your children, your paintings, your song.
“OK, just give me one more small moment, then let me just breathe.”
I understand completely. None of us ever wants to leave.

Tracy Long
North Carolina

‘Microbes of the Ark’

Microbes of the Ark
Two of every kind
He didn’t forget bacteria
Left dinosaurs behind

Noah on the Ark
Checked off Ape to Zebra
Thought he had it finished then
Remembered the amoeba

And all of the bacteria
Must’ve put them in his boat
We have ’em living here today
These procaryotes

Microbes of the Ark
Two of every kind
He didn’t forget listeria
Left mastodons behind

Noah gathered up the germs
With teeny tiny tweezers
Seeing them proved difficult
For a 600-year-old geezer

All the little tiny things
Smaller than a centipede
Noah needed a microscope

Call the 16th Century!

Microbes of the Ark
Two of every kind
He didn’t forget clostridium
Left pterosaurs behind

Packed ’em in a petri dish
Agar was the substrate
With two species in each one
Took a million packing crates

Diphtheria and whooping cough
In plates on the credenza
Then wondered why the family
Came down with influenza

Microbes of the Ark
Two of every kind
He didn’t forget chlamydia
Left stegosaurs behind

The smallpox germs he carried
Took 500 million souls
The world would be better
If he left ’em off his rolls

Thank you for the salmon
But why the salmonella?
Strep and staph, clostridium
Malaria, shigella?

Microbes of the Ark
Two of every kind
He didn’t forget bacteria
Left dinosaurs behind

WP Meyer
Illinois

The bible isn’t what Christians think it is

By R.G. Price

The bible is, in my opinion, the single most fascinating collection of writings known to humankind. What makes the bible so fascinating isn’t simply the writings themselves, but how those writings have been interpreted and understood over the generations. The bible is arguably both the most highly studied and highly misunderstood collection of literature ever produced.

It is, of course, popular for critics of Christianity to criticize the bible itself, but I feel that this criticism is misdirected and largely unfair to the original authors. You see, almost none of the writings in the bible were written with the intention of being interpreted the way that Christians have interpreted them, with the exception of perhaps a handful of the latest letters in the New Testament. Criticizing the bible is like criticizing ancient Greek mythology. It is, in many ways, highly unfair to the people who produced the writings in their time and place. The problem isn’t with the bible itself, but rather the Christian interpretation of its writings.

Indeed, the bible actually contains some of the most compelling evidence against the beliefs of Christianity. The latest generation of biblical scholarship is revealing that major Christian assumptions about how and why various texts of the bible were written are fundamentally wrong. Christianity as we know it really emerged in the second century as Romans came into contact with the so-called “gospel” stories. It has become clear that it was really the gospels themselves that led to the spread and adoption of Christianity. Prior to the writing of the gospels, “Christianity” was a tiny insignificant cult that would likely have died out in a very short period of time. It was the gospel stories that enamored audiences and convinced many Roman elites of the “divinity” of Jesus and “truth” of Jewish scriptures.

But where did these gospels come from? Who wrote them? Why were they written? It turns out that the Romans who founded the Christian religion had no idea where these writings came from. They completely misunderstood them, and essentially developed a religion based on the misinterpretation of a fictional story. That same misunderstanding also led them to fundamentally misunderstand the nature and origin of



Image by Shutterstock

Author R.G. Price contends that the Gospel of Mark is entirely fictional.

the Jewish scriptures, as well. This misunderstanding, of course, has fundamentally shaped Western civilization. But the problem lies in the Christian interpretation of these writings.

Recent scholarship provides compelling evidence that the story that launched Christianity — the Gospel of Mark — is entirely fictional. The person who wrote the story knew full well that nothing in the story was literally true and had no intention of trying to convince anyone that it was true. How can we know this? What modern textual analysis reveals is that virtually every passage in the Gospel of Mark is a literary allusion to other texts.

Based on Paul

It is clear that the Jesus character in the Gospel of Mark is actually based on the writings by the apostle Paul. It is clear that whoever wrote the Gospel of Mark had read the letters of Paul and used Paul’s teachings for his Jesus character. In addition, the major plotline of the story follows the story of Elijah and Elisha from 1 and 2 Kings of the Jewish scriptures. Virtually every scene in the Gospel of Mark is developed from literary references to either the letters of Paul or to the Jewish scriptures, including the walking on water scene, the cleansing of the temple and the crucifixion itself.

It appears that the Gospel of Mark is a fictional story that was written in reaction to the First Jewish-Roman War that resulted in the sacking of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Growing evidence that the Gospel of Mark is

an invented story based on literary references overturns centuries of mainstream biblical scholarship that saw the gospels as a record of some “oral tradition.” The idea that the gospels are records of an oral tradition that stretches back to the life of Jesus is still widespread, but that was always just a supposition, a hypothesis. The hypothesis of “oral traditions” is now disproved by solid evidence of literary dependency.

Once we recognize that the Gospel of Mark is a fictional story based on literary references, the whole Christian house of cards comes tumbling down. This is because all biographies of Jesus, the other gospels and later writings are clearly dependent on the Gospel of Mark. What has become clear is that many of the literary references employed by the author of Mark were copied into the other gospels and became the inspiration for the idea that Jesus was proven to have fulfilled prophecies.

When we look at the case for Christianity made by Christian scholars in the second through fourth centuries, we see that the primary evidence that convinced them of the “truth” of the religion was the relationship between passages in the gospels and passages in the Jewish scriptures. They interpreted these relationships as evidence of “prophecy fulfillment.” Roman elites believed heavily in prophecy at this time, and thus were convinced not only that Jesus was “proven” to be divine, but that the Jewish scriptures were proven to be divine as well, due to the fact that they had so “accurately predicted” the life and deeds

of Jesus. They thought that this was all substantiated by the fact that the gospels were four “independent” accounts of Jesus’s life. As it turns out, modern scholarship shows that what we really have is a fictional story and three moderately altered copies of it.

Evidence of fiction

Ironically, what Christians believed was evidence of divinity is actually evidence of fictionality. The literary relationships between the gospels and the Jewish scriptures are the key evidence that disprove the historical veracity of the gospel narrative. But it goes beyond just the gospels. Critical analysis of biblical texts shows that the Christian understanding of virtually all of them is totally wrong. The letters of Paul, James, Jude and Hebrews in the New Testament all provide evidence that the Jesus being worshipped prior to the writing of the gospels was a spiritual being, not a person. Furthermore, “Old Testament” scholarship now shows that the works of the Old Testament were written long after Christians believed they were and are largely just as fanciful as the works of Greek and Roman mythology.

This understanding of biblical origins is not yet mainstream, but I believe it’s inevitable that it will eventually be, because the evidence supporting it is so substantial. Mainstream biblical scholarship today is still clinging to assumptions that have been largely disproved. Christianity is a religion that is fundamentally based on a specific interpretation of a specific collection of documents. The role of mainstream biblical scholarship has been largely to defend the fundamental Christian interpretation of those documents. But this isn’t a matter of faith, and it isn’t a nebulous question that is impossible to answer. Who, when, why and how these documents were written are questions that can be answered, and they are being answered. Growing evidence shows that the answers to those questions are at odds with foundational Christian assumptions.

I have faith that the evidence will win out, and when it does, it will shake the foundations of Christianity like nothing has before.

FFRF Member R.G. Price is a data analyst from Colorado and author of the recently published book *Deciphering The Gospels Proves Jesus Never Existed*.

CRANKMAIL

Ah, yes. The holiday season brought with it the annual tradition of hating others for not believing as they do. Here are some of the “best” letters FFRF received from our detractors, printed as received.

Disgusting!: Shame. Shame . Shame . On you all. What a disgusting group of individuals you are. — Kellie Stoneberger Malcolm

Go fuck yourselves: I like my freedom of speech because faggots hate it. Have a nice non godly day. — George Lombardi

You’re wrong: LEAVE THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY ALONE!!! START YOUR OWN COUNTRY IF YOU DON’T WANT GOD IN IT!!! Just because the Supreme Court got it wrong doesn't mean we need to follow suit. — Tom McIntosh

Ffrf losers: You nasty motherfuckers are the downfall off morality in our country. Piss off! — Michael George

leave us alone: just quit causing trouble, leave thongs alone that have been parts of various communities — Geoff Westerman

Jesus is love: What the fuck is y'all problem Jesus is awesome and y'all will burn in hell for turning off the the cross how dare u be selfish and y'all probably love incest you man eating barbarians Jesus is awesome — Tom Johnson

Dover: Leave the people in Dover Ohio alone you people are a bunch of communists Christmas is a

catholic holiday anyhow.!!@ — Bob Roghoff

Sue me!: You people make me sick to my stomach. You are worse than the ACLU which also sucks. I have a huge nativity scene in my front yard right by the road. Care to sue me? Go ahead. I'll fart in your face. — Gary Soskind

FFRF: How dare you ... you're all a bunch of oxygen whores. — Victoria Midgley-Roberts

Message for FFRF: The hi l i n c u f u fufu u do ufi for jf u dufufjuc.fj ncjdgdkglhkdtysdudysdy — Bill May

You are not the majority!: You guys are a real piece of work. We are very small town. One person writes you and tells you they are offended because there is a nativity scene in front of our government building and you threaten to file a lawsuit against our town if we do not take it down? How dare you justify this change for one person. There are hundreds of people in our small town who have enjoyed the nativity scene in our town for many many years, and a godless organization like yours comes along and tears down tradition like it is nothing. Next time you have a problem with the way we celebrate our holidays, you can come to me personally and discuss it, don't hind behind your lawyers like a bunch of pansies. I will be more than happy to set you straight on history and tradition. I am pretty sure you will treat this like another hate mail against your organization,

but be for warned, mess with our town again and you will have to deal with me, and believe you me you will wish you believed in god. — John Kotula

You afraid?: Why is this group so afraid of a God u don't think exists? — Joshua Tessmer

Light the cross: How dare you people come to my town and bully my town into removing certain things from the Christmas light display that has been there for years. If you dont like it, then dont drive through the park to see it. I have never understood why certain groups of people think they have the right to tell other people that there beliefs are wrong and you must follow my rules or else. In short you are wrong for what you did. Take your complaints and stay out others states business and stay out of Missouri, you have no claim and that cross will light again , God does not give you the right to takes or mess with the free will of the people all over, you woke a sleeping giant, and now you will most certainly feel the effects of the after math you have unleashed, the cross will light again. — James Roger Curtis

OZARK: STOP BEING BUTT HURT PEOPLE HAVE RELIGION IT HAS BEEN AROUND FOR DECADES AND CENTURIES FUCK U AND STUPID NONPROFIT SHIT I HAPPEN TO LOVE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS DOWN IN OZARK MO U WILL NOT WIN THIS WAR ASS HOLES IT HAS BEEN THAT WAY FOR YEARS NOW U WANT TO CHANGE IT WOW — Eddie Ramsey

We are good Christians: I am so sick of people like you that think because you think one way that everyone else should too. Well Im here to tell you that here in the south, we are good Christian people and for you to write a letter requesting our CROSS in the park to be taken down is sickening. WELL I think your website ,facebook and everything should taken down and banned because its all a fraud to get money. You are just another SCIENTOLOGY group. I know where I will go when I die, Sorry for you all your souls will burn in HELL. I hope people blow up your site wit their opinions. Keep your beliefs up there. Apparently the cold has gotten to your brains. We will just say that instead of what I really want to say. — Joan Moreland Rosmanitz

Burn!: I hope you all burn in Hell you bunch of religiophobics. — Scott Walsh

Better get Jesus: I cant express how much this group sucks!!!!!! Ya'll need Jesus lol lol — Stephen Bischoff

Go Away!: If you don't believe in GOD get on a plane with a one way ticket to somewhere and never come back.! — Gordon L Chambers Jr.

Trying hard: In the Christmas season I try very hard to think good thoughts to organizations such as yours. It's very tough. The rest of the year I just fantasize that your operation gets shut down. — John Shearson

BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Waisake Tulavu, 46, Nasinu, Fiji: Sexual assault and 4 counts of rape. Tulavu, pastor at Agape Healing Ministry, is charged with assaults on women ages 22, 29 and 32 in 2018. Senior church member Sakiusa Nakutoro, 50, is also charged with raping the 29-year-old. *Source: Fiji Sun, 12-10-18*

Jerred C. Peacock, 34, Estero, FL: Unlawful sexual activity. Peacock, a youth pastor at Living Waters Church, is accused of touching a 17-year-old girl's genitals and having her touch his at his home while his wife was at work between March and August 2018. *Source: Naples Daily News, 12-8-18*

Derek Boyce, 37, Woolwich, ME: 26 counts of gross sexual assault, unlawful sexual contact and sex abuse of a minor, stemming from allegations he had sex with a student at Pine Tree Academy, a Seventh-day Adventist school where he taught math. Court documents said the girl's mother caught him engaging in a sex act with her daughter, 15, in her living room.



Derek Boyce

Boyce told police his relationship with the girl began after she sustained a sports injury and had been depressed. He said they messaged each other over social media. He told police the relationship started in May, and turned sexual in July. He said they met in a park and performed oral sex on each other. He told police they had sexual intercourse twice. *Source: WGME, 12-6-18*

Paul Dorr, 62, Ocheyedan, IA: Misdemeanor criminal mischief for publicly burning 4 LGBTQ-themed books he checked out from the Orange City Public Library. Dorr, director of a Christian group called Rescue the Perishing, burned the books live on Facebook in October.

"Orange City Library, you won't be peddling this one anymore!" Dorr said as he pitched a book into the flames. "You should all be ashamed of yourselves and repent." He said he would not reimburse the library for the books. *Source: Sioux City Journal, 12-6-18*

Jerry Friday, 61, Mt. Holly, NC: Statutory sex offense, felony dissemination of obscene material to a minor, 4 counts of felony indecent liberties with a child and 2 counts of misdemeanor sexual battery. Friday, pastor at New Providence Baptist Church, is charged with assaults on 3 juvenile victims on the church grounds and at private homes. *Source: WBTV, 12-6-18*

Kenneth Hendricks, 77, Naval, Philippines: Engaging in illicit sexual conduct in foreign places. Hendricks, a Catholic priest, was arrested by American and Filipino agents at the Cathedral of Our Lady Rosary Parish. The case was brought by the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Southern District of Ohio, where Hendricks was previously based. Authorities have identified 10 male victims as young as 7, including some who allegedly lived with him. *Source: Straits Times, 12-5-18*

Jacop R. Hazlett, 28, W. Ashley, SC: 9 counts of criminal sexual conduct with a minor. Hazlett supervised children ages 3 to 5 in "the Tree House" at NewSpring Church. In video from Nov. 25, staff allegedly observed him escort a 3-year-old into the bathroom, take a photo of the child's genitals and molest him.

Officials reviewing security footage allegedly identified 14 separate incidents involving boys in the same bathroom. NewSpring, with 15 campuses, is the largest church in the state. *Source: Post & Courier, 12-3-18*

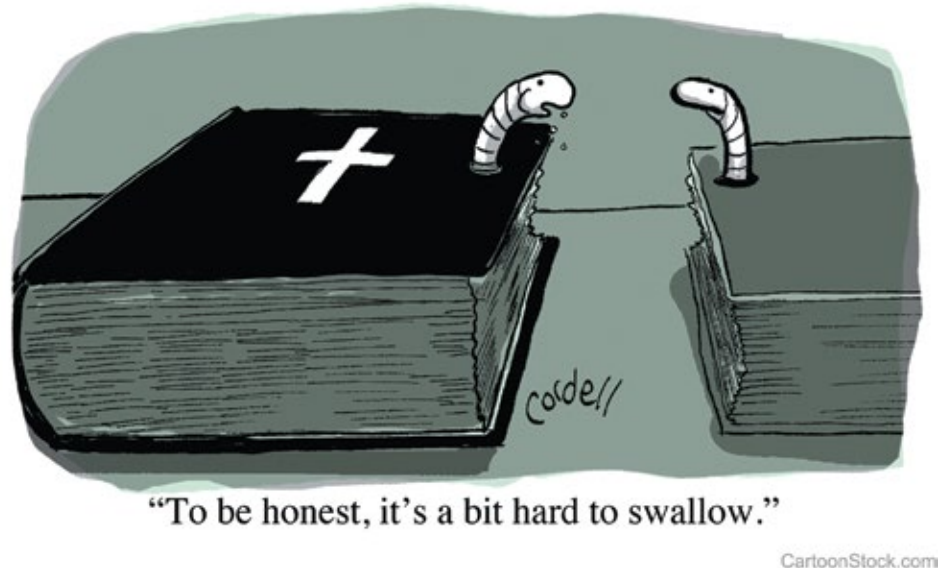
Sixteen pastors from the Congregational Christian Church, Samoa's largest church, have been charged with failure to file tax returns by the Ministry of Revenue. A law went into effect in January 2018 requiring tax payment on offerings from churchgoers. All denominations complied except the CCC, despite being given 11 months to comply. *Source: RNZ Pacific, 11-26-18*

Thomas Bruce, 53, Imperial, MO: 1st-degree murder, burglary, tampering with evidence, 3 counts each of sodomy and kidnapping and 8 counts of armed criminal action. Bruce, a Navy veteran who founded an evangelical Christian church called Calvary Chapel in 2003 and has been associated with several other Missouri ministries, is accused of forcing 3 women into a back room at Catholic Supply in Ballwin, exposing himself and ordering them to "perform deviant sexual acts on him," a complaint alleged.

When a 53-year-old refused to comply, he shot her fatally in the head, the complaint said. Bruce, who expressed support publicly for President Trump and Justice Brett Kavanaugh,

worked at Calvary Chapel until 2007. *Source: USA Today, 11-23-18*

Julien B. Williams, Tallahassee, FL: Grand theft involving more than \$20,000 and attempting to use the ID of another person without consent. Williams, pastor at Abundant Living Faith Ministries, is accused of falsifying documents to gain control of 2 parishioners' bank accounts, writing checks without permission and withdrawing money. *Source: WCTV, 11-19-18*



Jeff Countryman, 44, Clearwater, FL: Theft. Countryman is charged with stealing over \$30,000 as pastor at Cape Christian Fellowship Church in Cape Coral from 2015-17 before transferring to Countryside Christian Church in Clearwater. Countryside Church leaders said he also stole about \$15,000 there but repaid the money to avoid charges. That led to the Cape Christian probe. *Source: WBBH, 11-19-18*

Thomas E. Ericksen, 71, Minneapolis: Felony sexual abuse and 2 counts of felony sexual assault. Ericksen, who was removed from the Catholic priesthood in 1988, is charged with assaults on boys in Wisconsin in the early 1980s. The Diocese of Superior settled with his accusers in 1989 for several million dollars.

Ericksen admitted to a detective in June 2016 that he fondled 5 altar boys when he was pastor at St. Peter's Parish in Winter and 2 other boys later while serving Rhinelander and Rice Lake parishes, the complaint alleges. *Source: Sawyer County Record, 11-17-18*

Onyedikachi Enebechi, 37, Brockton, MA: Simple assault and battery. Enebechi, pastor at Winner's City Church, is charged with slapping a 5-year-old in the face during bible study for talking to his cousin. The boy's mother, who was in a different room at the church, took a photo to document the redness on his cheek. The pastor told police he only nudged the boy with 2 fingers out of frustration. *Source: WFXR, 11-15-18*

Patrick J. Sasnett, 40, Ocala, FL: Home invasion. Sasnett, pastor of St. Paul AME Church, is charged with barging into a woman's residence, physically assaulting her and taking 2 pairs of her shoes worth \$1,500. The woman told police she and Sasnett had been in a relationship for 5 years that ended a month ago and that the shoes were a gift from him. *Source: Star-Banner, 11-14-18*

Charles W. Holt, 51, Reading, PA: Aggravated indecent assault, endangering the welfare of children and corruption of minors. Holt is charged with numerous assaults on a 17-year-old girl who was babysitting for him and his wife in 2001 when he was a youth pastor at Reading Evangelical Free Church. He's now president of The Factory Ministries in Paradise. *Source: WITF, 11-14-18*

Holley Mills Morris, 56, Covington, TN: Theft over \$60,000. Morris is accused of stealing over \$117,000 as secretary at First United Methodist Church from March 2011 to December 2017. She started working at the church in 2001. *Source: Covington Leader, 11-14-18*

Lothar K. Krauth, 80, Great Falls, MT: Receipt of child pornography. Krauth, who retired in 2014 as pastor at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, allegedly received an online image Oct. 26 of a nude prepubescent male child.

Court records allege devices seized from Krauth had about 400 images of children engaged in sexually explicit conduct, with most depicting prepubescent children, some young as 2 or 3. *Source: KXLH, 11-10-18*

Jean J. Jeudy, 48, El Paso, TX: Sexual assault of a child and 2 counts of indecency with a child/sexual contact. Jeudy, pastor of Walk By Faith International Missionary Church, denies allegations of incidents in 2011 and told a reporter that the devil is behind them. *Source: El Paso Times, 11-9-18*

Santino Cantalupo, 40, Reno, NV: Extortion, soliciting prostitution and furnishing a minor with alcohol. Cantalupo, a founder of Imago Dei Church, allegedly targeted a University of Nevada student by using a false name on a dating app in September and October and bought her alcohol in hopes of obtaining sexual favors. It's alleged he told her if she didn't have sex with him, he would send screen shots of their text messages to her father. *Source: KOLO, 11-8-18*

Thomas D. Duncan, 27, Greer, SC: 10 counts of sexual exploitation of a minor. Duncan, part-time music director at Victor United Methodist Church, allegedly possessed child pornography. *Source: Fox Carolina, 11-8-18*

Urbano Vazquez, 46, Washington: Child sexual abuse. Vazquez, a pastor at Shrine of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church, allegedly touched a girl's breasts twice inside her shirt in the church in 2015 when she was 13. Since the initial claim, 2 other alleged victims have made similar accusations, the Archdiocese of Washington said in a statement.

The archdiocese removed **Moises Villalta** as senior Sacred Heart pastor for not reporting abuse allegations. He and Vazquez are members of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin. **Sonia M. Aquino**, parish child protection coordinator, was also placed on administrative leave. *Source: NBC4, 11-7-18*

Rodney O. Harmon Jr., 33, Stockton, MD: 12 counts of statutory sexual assault and involuntary deviate sexual intercourse. Harmon, youth director at Bayside Community Church, is accused of assaults on alleged victims ages 14 and 15 at a church retreat in August. He was jailed earlier for allegedly making and distributing pornographic videos and for sex acts involving 4 people, including 3 minors, between May 2017 and August 2018. *Source: Lancaster Online, 11-7-18*

Fernando Hernandez, 50, Brownwood, TX: Continuous sexual abuse of children. Hernandez, pastor at It's A Challenge Church, is accused of molesting 4 minors, including a teen girl, between August 2010 and July 2018. *Source: KTXS, 11-5-18*

Daniel Goodloe, 25, W. Nashville, TN: 5 counts of sexual assault, including statutory rape by an authority figure. Goodloe was a youth pastor with Cross Point Church's Dream Center until April 2018, said lead pastor Kevin Queen, adding that the church became aware of "a situation that occurred over a year ago that created reasonable suspicion on our part of inappropriate conduct" between Goodloe and a teen in the program.

He was one of the young adults secretly embedded among students at a Topeka high school in 2017 for the A&E documentary series "Undercover High" that aired in 2018. *Source: WSMV, 11-1-18*

Hurmiz R. Ishak, 63, Fraser, MI: 3 counts of criminal sexual conduct on a child. Ishak, a native of Iraq and a subdeacon for 21 years at St. Joseph Chaldean Catholic Church in Troy, is charged with assaulting a boy from the church between May 2017 and October 2018. The diocese says a subdeacon is "an elevated altar server." *Source: WDIV, 10-31-18*

Stephen C. Brown, 61, Arlington, WA: Felony voyeurism. Brown, pastor at Seven Lakes Baptist Church and lead high school teacher at Arlington Christian, is charged with making cellphone videos that zoomed in on breasts, buttocks and crotches of unsuspecting women and girls. A faculty member allegedly found a thumb drive in the school parking lot that included views of Brown's face while he was videoing. *Source: KIRO, 10-31-18*

Alastair Gray, 65, Keith, Scotland: Gray, interim pastor at St. Rufus Church, a Church

of Scotland parish, is accused of assaulting a woman in October. *Source: BBC, 10-30-18*

Nicholas Chervyatiuk, 57, Chicago: Theft and financial exploitation of an elderly person with a disability. Chervyatiuk, pastor of Holy Patronage Church, a Ukrainian Orthodox parish, is charged with swindling an elderly parishioner who survived a Nazi internment camp out of about \$350,000.

Nelly Bridgeman, 96, suffers from dementia. The priest assumed power of attorney for her in 2015. He's returned about \$200,000 to her so far. *Source: Sun-Times, 10-25-18*

Frederick Smith, 49, and **Jerri Smith**, Memphis, TN: Identity theft, theft of property between \$10,000 and \$60,000 and forgery between \$10,000 and \$60,000. Frederick Smith is pastor at New Life Holiness Church. He and his wife are accused of opening credit cards in the name of parishioner Cleve Williams, 77, and racking up about \$50,000 of purchases in her name. *Source: WHBQ, 10-24-18*

Pleaded / Convicted

Joseph R. Alexander, 61, Gretna, LA: Pleaded guilty to bank fraud. Alexander, pastor at Franklin Street Church of Christ, was charged with stealing \$321,491 during an 8-year period starting in 2006. He hid the thefts by forging signatures on checks to himself and entering fake vendors in the church's checkbook register after opening a secret bank account.

It's alleged he spent the money on his mortgage and car loan, his son's college tuition, cable bills, family vacations, gifts from the Apple Store and Victoria's Secret and other personal expenses. *Source: Times-Picayune, 12-17-18*

Nathan G. Rieger, 53, Winnipeg, Canada: Guilty by jury of meeting with a minor for lewd purposes. Rieger, pastor at Vineyard Church, was arrested in August while trying to meet a 15-year-old girl for sex in Arroyo Grande, CA. He was actually communicating online with an undercover officer, whom Rieger told sex is "much nicer without a condom." Detective James Jolly testified that during their chats he told Rieger the girl was 15 and living with her grandmother. Rieger testified he was role-playing and thought the girl also was because she looked older in photos the officer provided, perhaps in her late 20s or early 30s. *Source: San Luis Obispo Tribune, 12-14-18*

Don Martin, 45, Atlanta: Guilty by jury of rape, aggravated sexual battery, child molestation and 1st-degree cruelty to children. Martin, pastor at Cathedral of Faith Church of God in Christ, was charged with abuse of a girl for 6 years until 2011 when she turned 13. Martin fled before the jury started deliberating and was arrested 5 days later at an airport in Nassau, the Bahamas. *Source: WGCL, 12-5-18*

Suzette M. Smith, Alexandria, VA: Pleaded guilty to wire fraud as treasurer for Exponent II, a quarterly Mormon feminist magazine based in Boston. Smith, volunteer treasurer since 2012 and an executive board member, was charged with embezzling about \$107,000 from the magazine, founded in 1974 to explore women's issues in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. *Source: Salt Lake Tribune, 12-1-18*

Ronald Paquin, 76, Boston: Guilty by jury of 11 counts of gross sexual misconduct. Paquin, a defrocked Catholic priest, was accused in a Maine court of molesting altar boys from his Massachusetts parish in the 1980s. Keith Townsend testified he endured repeated abuse starting at age 11 at Salty Acres Campground in Kennebunkport between 1986-88 on trips with Paquin, who was arrested in 2017 at a homeless shelter. *Source: Portsmouth Herald, 11-29-18*

Elijah Mealancon, 58, New Orleans: Guilty by bench trial of unauthorized use of a movable (property capable of being moved to another location). Mealancon was charged with taking \$33,000 from a victim of Hurricane Katrina but never delivering on his promise to repair her home.

As lead pastor at Elijah Christian Ministries, Mealancon got several people to sign their federal Road Home grant checks over to him, convincing them their restoration money could go further if pooled. *Source: nola.com, 11-19-18*

Shawn Butler, 52, Hillsborough, NJ: Guilty by jury of criminal sexual contact and endangering the welfare of a child. Butler, youth minister and executive board member at Eternal Life Christian Center, was charged with assaults on a 15-year-old girl in 2014.

He was convicted in 1990 of sexual assault while still on probation for a 1988 criminal sexual contact conviction. He allegedly had told Eternal Life leaders about those convictions. *Source: nj.com, 11-18-18*

Andrzej Skrzypiec, 63, Salt Lake City: Pleaded no contest to patronizing a prostitute. Skrzypiec, pastor at St. Ambrose Catholic Parish, was arrested in August for offering to pay an undercover officer for oral sex. A plea agreement calls for him to pay \$680 and take an HIV test. Skrzypiec initially told police he was in the

area to get food from a taco stand. *Source: Salt Lake Tribune, 11-13-18*

Jeffery D. Rolen, 66, Wise County, VA: Pleaded guilty to 7 counts of indecent liberties with a child under age 18. He's accused of incidents in 1985-87 when he was a youth pastor at Highlands Fellowship and ran Camp Bethel Ministries in the summers. *Source: WCBY, 11-9-18*

Aryeh L. Cohen, 44, Minneapolis: Pleaded guilty to engaging in electronic communication describing sexual conduct with a child. Cohen, rabbi at Community Kollel, a Jewish learning center, was arrested in February 2018 after responding to an undercover agent's online profile that said he was a male turning 16 in August. Cohen then sent an explicit photo of himself and was arrested when he arrived at an apartment to have sex. *Source: KSTP, 11-9-18*

David Norton, 72, Ontario, Canada, was found guilty of sexual assault and 4 counts of indecent assault involving 4 altar boys from Chippewas of the Thames First Nation in the late 1970s and early 1980s when Norton was an Anglican priest ministering to the tribe.

He's already serving a 4-year sentence after pleading guilty to molesting another boy over a 4-year period starting in 1990 when the boy was 10. That victim has filed a \$4.9 million suit against Norton and the Diocese of Huron. *Source: CBC, 11-6-18*

Sentenced

W. Thomas Faucher, 73, Boise, ID: 25 years in prison with no parole after pleading guilty to possessing and distributing child pornography and possession of LSD, ecstasy and marijuana. Faucher, a retired Catholic priest, fantasized about raping and killing children and claimed in online chats to have mixed his own bodily fluids into the communion wine.

Of the more than 2,500 videos and images he was found in possession of, Faucher wrote, "There is only one of them I really like, the one of the boy being beaten to death." "I was one really sick puppy," he said at sentencing, and told the judge he's "deeply sorry" but said he should be released on probation so he could speak to victims and others about the evils of child abuse.

Faucher retired in 2014 and rented the home from St. Mary's Catholic Church. John Worster, St. Mary's pastor, said the diocesan exorcist and his prayer team prayed over the house. "We brought in the ghostbusters" to clean out the "spiritual filth." *Source: AP/CNS, 12-21-18*

John T. Sweeney, 76, Greensburg, PA: 11½ months to 5 years in prison after pleading guilty to misdemeanor indecent assault on a minor for forcing a 10-year-old boy to perform oral sex on him while counseling him about misbehaving on a school bus in 1991. He retired as a Catholic priest in 2016. The victim told investigators that after the attack, Sweeney's secretary gave him milk and cookies.

He's the first person sentenced to prison as a result of the state grand jury investigation that found hundreds of clergy had abused children over 7 decades. The victim, who has identified himself publicly only as Josh, is serving in the Coast Guard in the South Pacific. "As long as the Catholic Church is operational, there will be more victims," he wrote in a letter his brother read in court. *Source: Tribune-Review, 12-21-18*

Karma Tshojay, aka Tempa Lama, 56, La Boulaye, France: 12 years in prison. Tshojay, a native of Bhutan, was convicted after 4 female disciples at the Temple of 1,000 Buddhas or their children accused him of multiple rapes and sexual assaults in the 1990s and 2000s. *Source: Daily Monitor, 12-19-18*

Thomas Fulcher, 84, New South Wales, Australia: 4 years in prison after pleading guilty to indecent assault of 2 boys who were students at a Marist school in Burnie, Tasmania, where Fulcher served as a Catholic priest between 1960 and 1967. He retired in 2002 after being accused of abuse. *Source: ABC, 12-18-18*

Preston K. Harrison, 51, Leesburg, FL: 1 year probation and restitution after pleading no contest to contracting without a license. Harrison, lead pastor at Harvest Church in Starke and founder of Transformation Ministries, is required to repay \$26,000 to a couple who hired him in 2017 to repair their tornado-damaged roof.

The roof continued to leak after being repaired, said Helen Bohannon, who later discovered Harrison wasn't licensed. "How could a pastor do this? How could a man of God do this?" she asked a reporter. *Source: Click Orlando, 12-19-18*

Alexander Stroobandt, Bruges, Belgium: 1 month in jail, suspended, for failing to seek help for a depressed man who later gassed himself to death with carbon monoxide. The court ruled that Stroobandt, a Catholic priest, couldn't use the seal of confession as a defense and that he should pay a symbolic 1 euro in damages to the man's widow.

She had discovered that Stroobandt and her husband had exchanged a series of phone calls and text messages about the state of his

mind. Stroobandt plans to appeal. *Source: Reuters, 12-17-18*

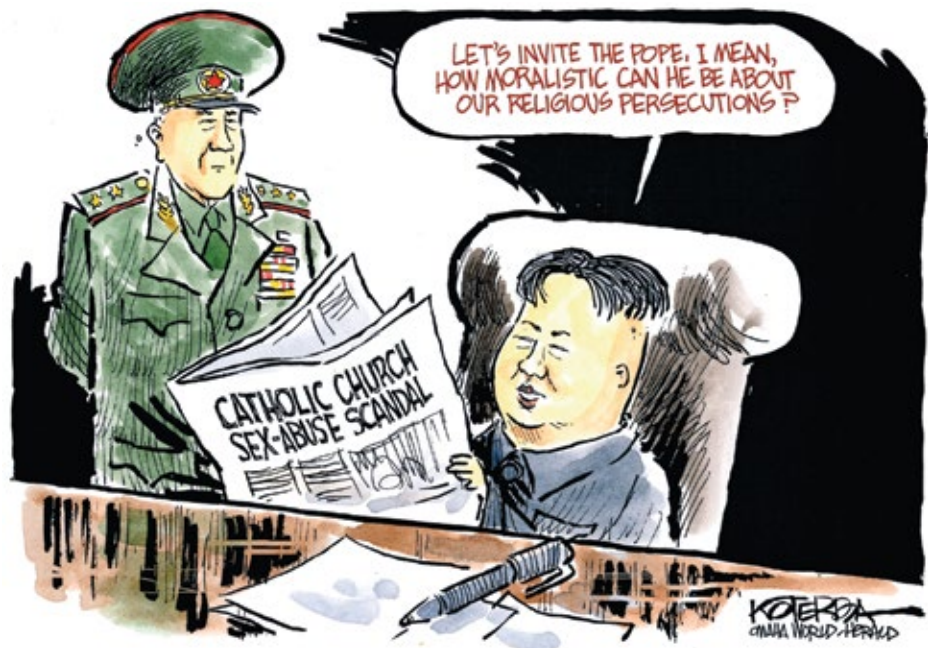
Kevin S. Heffner, 48, Pelham, NC: 25 to 35 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of statutory sex offense with a child under 15 and 12 counts of disseminating obscene material to a minor. Heffner, pastor and principal at Victory Baptist Academy, was accused of engaging in sex acts with a 14-year-old girl and sending her photos of his genitals. She and her mother were congregation members. *Source: News & Record, 11-30-18*

Henry C. Foxhoven, 45, Glouster, OH: 12 years in prison with no parole after pleading guilty to 3 counts of sexual battery for a relationship with a 17-year-old girl he impregnated in 2018 while serving as pastor at Holy Cross Catholic Parish. The girl was an altar server interested in becoming a nun.

A search of Foxhoven's residence turned up a pregnancy test with a "positive indication." He and the victim both told her mother she was pregnant. Prosecutor Keller Blackburn said other items recovered included "more than eight used condoms, countless bottles of lubricant and male enhancement drugs." *Source: KRON/AP, 11-27-18*

Timothy Lawrence, 32, S. Haven, IN: 4 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of sexual misconduct with a minor while he was a youth pastor at Emanuel Baptist Church between November 2013 and July 2014. Victims were 2 girls from the church. Prosecutors said he manipulated the girls, ages 14 and 15, into letting him take liberties with them so he would remain their friend. *Source: nwitimes.com, 11-27-18*

John L. Bishop, 55, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico: 5 years in prison for smuggling 300 pounds of marijuana into San Ysidro, CA, in December 2017. Bishop was founding pastor of Living Hope Church in Vancouver, WA, but was pushed out for substance abuse and carrying on an affair with a woman from the church while married. He then moved to Mexico to work in the time-share industry. *Source: The Columbian, 11-23-18*



Pierre de Castelet, 69, Orleans, France: 3 years in prison with 1 year suspended for molesting children at a summer camp in 1993 while pretending to carry out medical exams. His superior, former bishop of Orleans **Andre Fort**, 83, was given a suspended sentence of 8 months for failing to notify police when he was made aware of allegations in 2008. *Source: RTE, 11-22-18*

Jaerock Lee, 75, Seoul, S. Korea: 15 years in prison on convictions for raping 8 women after telling them he was carrying out "an order from God" as head of Manmin Central Church, which claims to have 133,000 followers worldwide. "The victims, who attended the church since childhood, believed that obeying Lee as a god-like figure is the path to heaven," the court said. *Source: Washington Post, 11-22-18*

Malo "Victor" Monteiro, 45, Colton, CA: 64 months in prison and \$3,000 in fines and restitution after pleading guilty to attempted copulation of a minor, 4 counts of lewd acts on a child of 14-15 years of age with the defendant at least 10 years older and 2 counts of sexual penetration with a foreign object. Three women gave victim impact statements detailing incidents when Monteiro was youth pastor at Faith Baptist Church starting in 2007 and they were teens. *Source: Press-Enterprise, 11-15-18*

Meally Morris Freeman, 56, Brooklyn Center, MN: 58 months in prison after a jury found him guilty of 2 counts of criminal sexual conduct. Freeman, a Liberian immigrant and pastor of Grace Mountaineer Tabernacle, was found guilty of drugging a female congregant, 28, and violat-

ing her under the guise of performing a religious "deliverance." *Source: KSTP, 11-9-18*

Brian Jenkins, 75, Brecon, Wales: 5 years in prison for sexually assaulting a girl while he worked as a Jehovah's Witnesses elder. The victim, now 58, testified Jenkins groped her during missionary work, at bible classes and during swimming lessons organized by the church.

She alleged he sent her older brother to knock on doors while trapping her in the back seat of his car to force his fingers inside her and that Jenkins targeted her after her father had died unexpectedly. She told the jury she reported the abuse to 2 elders, a doctor and an ex-police officer but no one took her seriously. "I'm angry at Jehovah's Witnesses elders and the governing body for the lack of protection they provide to children." *Source: Brecon & Radnor Express, 11-7-18*

Con Cunningham, 83, Carrick, Ireland: 9 months in jail after pleading guilty to 3 counts of indecent assault against a girl under age 10 in 1976-77 when he was a Catholic priest. Judge John Aylmer said Cunningham groomed the girl and progressed to simulating oral sex.

"Sometimes he would push her head down to his private parts and hold it there," said prosecutor Patricia McClaughlin. "She remembers him grunting and now understands that he was satisfying himself." *Source: Donegal Now, 11-2-18*

Anthony Figueiredo, 54, a New Jersey priest from the Catholic Archdiocese of Newark who's been working in Europe for a decade, was ordered back to the U.S. after a DUI conviction in England. He was banned from driving for 18 months in October after crashing into a pregnant woman's car while his blood-alcohol level was at twice the legal limit.

Archdiocese spokesperson James Goodness said Figueiredo has been a media commentator on church and Vatican affairs and was an adviser to student priests in Rome.

The pregnant driver, Olivia Parfitt, 35, told a reporter Figueiredo was "visibly sloshed" and that he drove off, saying he had to catch a flight, but police stopped him further down the road. *Source: nj.com, 10-30-18*

Andrew Dickson, 31, University City, MO: 4 years in prison suspended, 5 years' probation and sex offender registration after pleading guilty to child molestation and 2 counts of statutory sodomy. Dickson, a youth pastor at Central Presbyterian Church, admitted fondling and engaging in oral sex with a 15-year-old boy at Dickson's home last March. *Source: Post-Dispatch, 10-28-18*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

"Doe 596" filed a complaint against **Holy Innocents' School**, a Catholic K-12 school, who alleges she suffered "ritual sexual abuse" by 5 members of the **Sis family** that founded and still run the small school in Waite Park, MN, and by **Lawrence Brey**, a priest who lived on the grounds and died in 2006. She attended from 1978-84 from ages 5 to 11.

Josh Peck, her lawyer, speculated that Brey was transferred to the school by the Archdiocese of Milwaukee to rid itself of a problem priest. Joe Towalski, diocesan director of communications for the diocese, said the school "has no affiliation whatsoever or connection or association with the Roman Catholic Diocese of St. Cloud." *Source: Star Tribune, 12-4-18*

The **Catholic Diocese of Scranton, PA**, failed to protect plaintiff "Richard Roe" from sexual abuse by former priest **William J. Paulish**, a suit alleges. Roe, now 29, claims Paulish molested him in 2006-07 at St. Mary's Parish in Old Forge, where he was assistant pastor.

Paulish, who was transferred 11 times and twice put on leaves of absence, was convicted in 2014 for engaging in oral sex with a 15-year-old boy in a parked car and was sentenced to 8 to 23 months in prison. *Source: Citizens Voice, 11-27-18*

The **U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops** is being sued by 6 men from 5 states for allegedly concealing "the known histories and identities from the public, parishioners and law enforcement of clergy accused of sexually abusing children across the country." They're represented by attorney Jeff Anderson. A similar new suit against Pennsylvania Catholic bishops seeks to force the dioceses to reveal the names and history of accused clergy. *Source: CNS/CBS, 11-15-18*

Isidore Ndagizimana, Bishop **Joseph Vásquez** and the **Diocese of Austin, TX**, are defendants in a suit filed by 6 women alleging Ndagizimana, 60, made unwanted sexual advances and held them against their will as pastor at St. Thomas More Catholic Church. Three alleged he behaved inappropriately or groped them during their confessions.

One who was pregnant alleged he rearranged confessional chairs to block the door, rubbed her thigh while she confessed and made her discuss sexual activity with her husband. He was St. Thomas More pastor from 2012-17 and was placed on leave before being transferred to another parish. *Source: Dallas News, 11-14-18*

Bruno M. Tucci, a retired Catholic priest, and the **Diocese of Allentown, PA**, are being sued by a man alleging Tucci molested him in 1999-2001 while he was an altar boy in Nesquehoning. The suit also names former Bishop **Edward Cullen**, current Bishop **Alfred Schleit** and the **Congregation of the Servants of the Paraclete**, a New Mexico facility nicknamed "Club Ped" that treated Tucci, who retired in 2002 and lives in Maryland.

The plaintiff alleges Tucci groped his genitals and once had him "put his arms out like Jesus on the cross" before fondling him. He alleges the diocese was notified in 1991 that Tucci abused a different altar boy years earlier and admitted it. *Source: WFMZ, 11-12-18*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Hartford, CT**, and former Bishop **John Whealon** are being sued by Kevin DiStasio, 46, who alleges **Walter Vichas** molested him before morning Mass when he was a 10-year-old altar boy at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church in Waterbury in 1980. Vichas died in 2008 at age 83. *Source: Hartford Courant, 11-8-18*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Santa Fe, NM**, is named in a suit filed by "John Doe 92," who alleged he was molested at least 25 times from 1972-77 as an altar boy by **Albert Chavez**, pastor at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Peralta. Chavez died in 1996 at age 75. *Source: Albuquerque Journal, 10-30-18*

Carlos R. Rodriguez, the **Archdiocese of Los Angeles**, the **Diocese of San Bernardino** and the **Vincentians** (Rodriguez's former religious order) are being sued by 2 brothers who allege the Catholic priest molested them in the early 1990s while he was pastor at Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine in Riverside. Rodriguez, 62, Bakersfield, was sentenced to 8 years in prison in 2004 and served 4 years for sexual assaults on 2 boys. He was defrocked in 1998. *Source: L.A. Times, 10-29-18*

Six Utah plaintiffs are suing **Brenda and Richard Miles**, the daughter and son-in-law of Mormon Church President Russell M. Nelson, in federal court, alleging they and others sexually abused children in the 1980s and orchestrated cover-ups. The Mileses deny the claims, alleging they stem from false memories and citing a Bountiful police investigation that closed without charges. The suit doesn't name the church as a defendant but could be amended to include others, including Nelson, said plaintiffs' attorney Craig Vernon. *Source: KSTU, 10-25-18*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **San Francisco Catholic Diocese** has settled \$87 million worth of sex abuse claims against priests and others associated with the church, mostly in the last 15 years, according to Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone. He divulged the figure during a series of town hall meetings to address the issue.

An advocate with the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, called it "just the tip of the iceberg." According to SNAP national secretary Melanie Sakoda, who is based in the Bay Area, "Only maybe one in 10 victims ever come forward."

Cordileone said 125 cases have been settled since 2003, when California lifted the statute of limitations for adults abused as children to file civil suits for 12 months. Insurance covered 70% of the \$87 million, while about \$35 million came from the diocese, sale of church properties and other funds. *Source: S.F. Examiner, 11-27-18*

The **Seattle Catholic Archdiocese** has paid nearly \$7 million to settle claims by 6 men alleging sexual abuse as minors by priests **James McGreal**, **Paul Conn**, **John Forrester**, **Thomas Pitsch**, **Michael Cody** and **Theodore Marmo**. Only Marmo is still alive.

James Hauer is among those who settled. He alleged Marmo abused him at John F. Kennedy Catholic High School in the 1970s in Burien, WA. The church must change the “culture of collusion” that lets abuse occur, Hauer said. *Source: Seattle Times, 11-13-18*

A jury found the **Archdiocese of Los Angeles** and Catholic priest **Michael Tang** liable for \$3.57 million for firing an unwed, pregnant science teacher at Transfiguration School in Los Angeles. Kourtney Liggins, now 46, alleged she was 7 months pregnant in 2012 when Tang told her that her pregnancy would “morally corrupt” impressionable teens.

The jury also ordered Tang to pay Liggins \$87,500 in punitive damages for acting “with malice, oppression or fraud.” *Source: NBC Los Angeles, 11-2-18*

The **Catholic Diocese of Allentown, PA**, settled for an undisclosed amount a suit filed by Albert Shore, who alleged he was molested by now-deceased priest **Richard J. Ford** as a 12-year-old altar boy in 1989 in the rectory of Holy Guardian Angels Church in Reading. Pennsylvania abuse survivors are seeking to open a 2-year statute of limitations “window” allowing them to file civil suits in older cases. *Source: Morning Call, 10-26-18*

Finances

The **Catholic Diocese of Buffalo, NY**, has offered a \$650,000 settlement to a man who accused a priest of aiming a gun at his head and molesting him when he was a teen in the 1980s. It’s the highest offer revealed to date under the diocese’s Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program.

The 49-year-old has 60 days to accept the offer and give up his right to sue. The priest, **Michael R. Freeman**, allegedly provided absolution of the boy’s sins during the sacrament of confession immediately after the abuse. Freeman, who died in 2010 at age 63, was also a police and military chaplain who regularly carried a silver-plated .38-caliber revolver. He would jokingly threaten the victim with the gun, it’s alleged. The diocese has offered some accusers as little as \$10,000 to settle claims. *Source: Buffalo News, 12-18-18*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Santa Fe, NM**, filed for bankruptcy. The archdiocese claims it has about \$49 million in assets. That doesn’t include assets it holds for parishes, such as real estate worth \$57 million or nearly \$37 million in investments and cash.

Archbishop John West-er said the archdiocese has resolved hundreds of sexual abuse cases at a cost of millions of dollars. About 35 cases are pending, with estimated liabilities between \$10 million and \$50 million. The Diocese of Gallup set aside \$22 million for victims in its 2013 bankruptcy. *Source: New Mexican, 12-4-18*

The **Guam Catholic Church** announced plans to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy to cope with more than 200 sexual abuse claims against clergy in the U.S. territory. Former Archbishop **Anthony Apuron** has been accused of abusing minors, including his own nephew, and helping cover up similar crimes by priests and other Catholic authority figures. Allegations date back decades.

The latest suit, filed by “DD,” accuses Brother **Gregory Seubert** of molesting him in 1975-76 when he was 16 and Seubert was principal at Fr. Duenas Memorial High School. He’s believed to be living in Africa. *Source: NPR/PNC, 11-15-18*

The **Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport, CT**, has paid \$52.5 million to settle 156 allegations of sexual abuse of children by priests since 1953 and is still paying 8 priests “credibly accused” of molesting children, admitted Bishop Frank Caggiano. The men get monthly payments ranging from \$1,319 to \$1,466.

Victim settlement payments ranged from \$3,000 to \$1.43 million. Of the \$52.5 million paid, \$27.7 million was from sale of properties, \$19.5 million was from insurance recoveries, \$4.2 million was from other revenues and \$1.1 million was from contributors. *Source: Hartford Courant, 10-31-18*

Legal Developments

Ibrahim Omerdic, imam at the Bosnia and Herzegovina Islamic Centre in Melbourne, Australia, lost an appeal of his conviction for marrying a 14-year-old girl to a 34-year-old man in 2016. He was sentenced to 2 months’ imprisonment, suspended, and 2 years’ probation.

He appealed, claiming he had merely solemnized or blessed the marriage but hadn’t performed it. The 3-judge panel disagreed, ruling that “They were a married couple in the eyes of the Muslim community.” *Source: The Australian, 12-4-18*

Stephen J. Kilpatrick, 63, Forest, VA, was arrested last June and tentatively charged with 3 counts each of taking indecent liberties with a child younger than 15 years old and soliciting



sex from a child younger than 15 years old. Now a judge has ordered a grand jury be impaneled to consider the case of the Liberty University professor, who also held bible studies.

Kilpatrick had responded to a Craigslist ad posted by an investigator posing as a 13-year-old girl. Kilpatrick allegedly promised sexual acts to “Jenny” and drove to where he thought she lived. When arrested, he had cookies and lubrication in his car.

Sandra Kilpatrick said at a bail hearing that she was willing to put their life savings on the line to get her husband out of jail. Bond was set at \$125,000. She said her husband would host small group meetings of church members at their home and teach children about the bible. *Source: News & Advance, 11-19-18*

Bail for **Sister Concilia**, an Indian Catholic nun, was rejected by the High Court of Jharkhand state. She was arrested July 4 in connection with the alleged sale of babies born to unwed mothers at a home she managed for the Missionaries of Charity, an order founded by St. Teresa of Kolkata.

Another **staff member** is accused by a couple of keeping their \$1,850 adoption fee and not giving them the child. Theodore Mascarenhas, secretary-general of the Indian bishops’ conference, blamed Concilia’s arrest on persecution of Christians by the Hindu majority. *Source: UCA News, 11-1-18*

Dennis Creason, 48, Shawnee, KS, faces 6 more counts of aggravated indecent liberties with a child. Creason, founder of Oak-

lawn Christian School, was previously charged with 3 similar counts in August. He’s accused of “lewd fondling or touching” of 9 children under age 14 between May 2009 and August 2018. *Source: KCTV, 10-30-18*

Mohammed Ghani, 65, Wakefield, UK, an imam who sexually assaulted a girl in her home between 1997-2006, had his sentence increased from 2 to 5 years by an appeals court, which deemed his August sentence “unduly lenient.” The girl was under 14 when first assaulted. *Source: BBC, 10-30-18*

Allegations

Mary Margaret Kreuper and **Lana Chang**, Catholic nuns who retired, respectively, as principal and 8th-grade teacher last year at St. James Catholic School in Torrance, CA, are accused of and allegedly admitted to stealing as much as \$500,000 from the school during at least the last 10 years. School officials told parents the women allegedly spent some of it on trips and at gambling casinos.

Archdiocese of Los Angeles officials initially said criminal charges wouldn’t be sought because the nuns’ order, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, agreed to impose “severe sanctions” on them and pay the school full restitution. Later, after public pressure, Torrance Police Sgt. Ronald Harris said the archdiocese wants the case prosecuted.

“They indicated they were desirous of pressing charges, so we’re moving forward as soon as we formally meet with them again,” Harris said. It’s unclear whether the restitution agreement remains on the table. *Source: Daily Breeze, 12-10-18*

The **Catholic Diocese of Saginaw, MI**, released the names of **13 priests** credibly accused of sexually abusing minors. All but 2 are dead, the earliest death occurring in 1959. The diocese named **5 others** previously. *Source: mlive.com, 11-21-18*

The Catholic Diocese of Buffalo, NY, added the names of **36 priests** to a list released in March that identified clergy credibly accused of sexual abuse, bringing the number to 78. Officials said the actual total is 176 diocesan and religious order priests against whom allegations were made, but they chose not to identify deceased priests who had a single allegation against them. *Source: Buffalo News, 11-6-18*

Former students at **St. Charles Catholic School** in Columbus, OH, allege sexual abuse by **Msgr. Thomas Bennett**, who died in 2008. After Kevin Heidtman sued in August for alleged abuse in the early 2000s, other students have come forward.

Ken Wilcox alleged Bennett molested him in the rectory in 1981 during his recitation of all the presidents and their wives and their terms in office. “Somewhere around Buchanan, before Lincoln, he asked me if I was circumcised. ... I hoped I hadn’t heard him. I kept on going with the presidents ... and he said ‘Are you?’ Then ‘show me.’ I was obedient. I unzipped.”

Wilcox said Bennett then fondled him for about 10 minutes but thinks because he didn’t get aroused, it never happened again. *Source: WSYX, 11-2-18*

Jerome Coyle, 85, Ft. Dodge, IA, was moved out of a retirement home near a school by the Catholic Diocese of Sioux City after it became publicly known Coyle had victimized at least 50 boys over a 20-year period. Bishop R. Walker Nickless said Coyle was stripped of his assignments in the 1980s but was never identified to parishes as a pedophile, nor did the diocese ever inform police. The bishop to whom Coyle reported his abuse, **Lawrence Soens**, retired in 1998. A review board later found Soens had abused over 30 minor males when he was a priest and school principal but was also never charged. *Source: Des Moines Register, 10-30-18*

Removed / Resigned

Brian Danner, 51, Humboldt, IA, was removed indefinitely as pastor at St. Mary’s Catholic Church after a 4th-grade girl accused him of rubbing the top of her leg during confession. The Sioux City Diocese reported the incident in December 2017 after an internal review found Danner’s actions were inappropriate but didn’t constitute sexual abuse.

No criminal investigation occurred because the girl’s parents said they were unsure whether they wanted to move forward and never followed up, said Humboldt County Attorney Jon Beaty. *Source: AP, 11-20-18*

Joseph Aubin, a Catholic priest on senior status since 2002 and not assigned to a parish, was removed from public ministry by the Diocese of Lansing, MI, due to a credible allegation of inappropriate sexual behavior with a minor dating to the 1960s. *Source: AP, 11-16-18*

Genaro M. Reyes, Ft. Worth, TX, was removed as pastor at All Saints Catholic Church after a 43-year-old man accused him of grabbing the man’s genitals while sitting on a public park bench in September. Police determined there was insufficient evidence of assault by offensive contact and instead mailed Reyes a general complaint citation.

Reyes was recalled to Mexico by the provincial of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis in Mexico, his religious order. *Source: Star-Telegram, 11-15-18*

Denis G. Bouchard, Vienna, OH, was placed on leave as Catholic pastor of Queen of the Holy Rosary Parish, due to an allegation of inappropriate behavior with a minor who is now an adult. The parish is staffed by the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter. It also has a school, St. Joseph the Protector Learning Center. *Source: Tribune Chronicle, 11-12-18*

Richard M. Lelonis, 73, was placed on leave by the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh for 2 incidents of alleged sexual abuse of minors in the early 1970s and about 1980. *Source: Post-Gazette, 11-12-18*

Philip A. Petit, a New Hampshire Catholic priest ordained in 1980, has been defrocked by the Vatican, 32 years after he was suspended by the Diocese of Manchester over allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct. He was named in a 2003 report by the state attorney general into an abuse cover-up by the diocese.

Former Bishop **Odore Gendron** wrote to Petit in 1986 that he would “certainly destroy all documents, notes, etc., referring to your treatment” except for a 1982 letter from Petit’s doctor saying he was making progress and that an incident in Dover was isolated. Gendron also told Petit the diocese was increasing his monthly stipend by \$50. *Source: Union Leader, 11-6-18*

Douglas J. Haefner resigned as pastor of St. Matthias Catholic Church in Franklin Township, NJ, due to allegations about his “compulsive behaviors.” Bishop James Checchio told parishioners Haefner “borrowed” about \$500,000. Law enforcement is investigating the missing money. *Source: nj.com, 11-7-18*

James Mickus was removed as pastor at Catholic parishes in Stroud and Chandler, OK, due to renewal of an allegation first made in 2002 of abuse of a minor male. Mickus was removed then and reinstated in 2003. The current removal is related to the earlier one, said Diane Clay, archdiocese spokesperson. *Source: new-sok.com, 11-5-18*

Andrew Syring, 41, West Point, NE, resigned as associate pastor at St. Mary Catholic Church after being accused of “significant boundary violations with young adults and minors,” said Tim McNeil, Archdiocese of Omaha chancellor. Allegations are from 2014 when he worked at Divine Mercy Parish in Schuyler.

Syring was removed from Divine Mercy for “unwanted touching of young adults, publicly hugging and kissing minors on the cheek and inappropriate conversations with young adults and teenagers” that were reported to law enforcement. He “has indicated that he will leave priestly life,” McNeil said. *Source: World-Herald, 11-4-18*

George Hiland, **Duane Leclercq** and **John Onderko**, Illinois priests from the Catholic Diocese of Peoria, have been credibly accused of sexual misconduct from 50, 30 and 55 years ago, respectively, the diocese announced. They may not function as priests in any public capacity. *Source: WQAD, 11-1-18*

Jody J. Simoneaux, Jeanerette, LA, was placed on leave as pastor at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church for allegations of improper behavior with minors while assigned to churches in Eunice and Youngsville 30 years ago. The diocese said it’s cooperating with law enforcement. *Source: Daily Advertiser, 11-1-18*

John Jenik, 74, Bronx, NY, pastor at Our Lady of Refuge Catholic Church and auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, “stepped aside from public ministry” after church officials deemed a claim he molested a teen boy in the 1980s “credible and substantiated.” *Source: NY Post, 10-31-18*

Victor Couzens, Forest Park, OH, resigned as bishop of the College of Elders of Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship. **Paul Morton**, founder of the million-member denomination, alleged Couzens has engaged in multiple sexual relationships. Morton has admitted in the past to fathering a child out of wedlock.

The New York Police Department confirmed it has a warrant out for Couzens. Andrea Garrison, 30, alleged he threatened to blackmail her unless she recanted claims about their relationship. *Source: Christian Post, 10-29-18*

Jean-Michael Lastiri and **Ricardo Magdaleno** were placed on paid leave as Catholic pastors by the Diocese of Fresno, CA, during investigations of alleged sexual misconduct. An investigation continues of another priest, **Gaspar Bautista**, said Teresa Dominguez, diocesan chancellor. Bautista has been on paid leave since March 2016. *Source: Fresno Bee, 10-29-18*

Canadian priests **Malcolm D’Souza** and **Peter Hung Cong Tran** were placed on leave by the Catholic Diocese of Calgary. Allegations involving 2 minors and several adults are from D’Souza’s time as pastor at St. Mark Parish in Calgary between 2010-16. Accusations by 2 women against Tran stem from his time as pastor at St. Joseph Parish in Vancouver between 1998-2003. *Source: CBC, 10-29-18*

Jose Rebaque was suspended and ordered to vacate the rectory of St. Peter’s Catholic Parish in Bridgeport, CT. Bishop Frank Caggiano said the diocese was notified in September that Rebaque shared a cabin with a 15-year-old boy on a cruise sponsored by the parish in January 2017. *Source: AP, 10-27-18*

Stephen Muth, a Byzantine Catholic priest of the Eparchy of Parma, OH, was placed on leave in response to a recent credible accusation of sexual misconduct involving a vulnerable adult, considered a minor under canon law. *Source: parma.org, 10-22-18*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

Celebrating the Solstice season

The Freedom From Religion Foundation’s annual Winter Solstice and Bill of Rights exhibits were displayed in December from coast to coast.

The signs, cutouts, banners and billboards were placed in at least 13 states throughout the holiday season, from California to New Hampshire.

The Winter Solstice sign features FFRF’s traditional message by its principal founder Anne Nicol Gaylor. It was created as an equal-time challenge to combat religious dogmatism at the heart of state government and reads:

“At this season of the Winter Solstice, may reason prevail.
“There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell.
“There is only our natural world.
“Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds.”

The Winter Solstice, which occurred on Dec.



The Bill of Rights exhibit was also displayed at North School Park in Arlington Heights, Illinois.

FFRF’s whimsical Bill of Rights “nativity” is an irreverent cutout by artist Jacob Fortin that depicts Founders Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington gazing in adoration at a “baby” Bill of Rights, while the Statue of Liberty looks on.

A sign beside the wry nativity scene reads: “At this season of the Winter Solstice, join us in honoring the Bill of Rights, adopted on Dec. 15, 1791, which reminds us there can be no religious freedom without the freedom to dissent. Keep religion and government separate!”

Here’s a roundup of those displays by state:

California

Sacramento: The Bill of Rights display was put up by the Greater Sacramento chapter of FFRF outside the state Capitol.



FFRF’s Bill of Rights cutout was put up by the FFRF’s Greater Sacramento chapter. (Back row, left to right) Karrie and John Lucas, President Judy Saint, Kathy Johnson, David Diskin. (Front row) Erin Louis and Lee Hodo. Thanks to Janet Thew for obtaining the permit.



The Bill of Rights cutout was proudly displayed in VFW park in Concord, N.H.

San Diego: Katie D., a San Diego freethinker who has asked to be identified without her full last name, put up two Solstice displays to counter the religious messages placed on public property in Balboa Park. The first was the Winter Solstice banner and the other was the Bill of Rights display. The two were triumphantly displayed after Katie D. and FFRF faced challenges getting the application approved by the city, despite the large existing religious nativity scene which has been put up for many years.

Connecticut

Shelton: FFRF’s Winter Solstice banner was put up by Jerry Bloom in Huntington Park.

Georgia

Atlanta: Two digital billboards were displayed with secular holiday messages reading: “At the Season of the Winter Solstice, May Reason Prevail.” These two billboards functioned as part of a year-long media campaign in the South’s most bustling metropolis, underwritten by Georgia FFRF Member Jack Egger.

Illinois

Arlington Heights: The Bill of Rights display was also displayed at North School Park, its seventh year there, thanks to FFRF’s Metropolitan Chicago chapter.



Photo by Tom Cara

Metropolitan Chicago Chapter members Mike Weeda, Shane Stapley and Fred Dix helped erect the banner and light-up “A” sign at Daley Plaza in Chicago.

Chicago: A colorful banner invoking the Founding Fathers was again unfurled in Daley Plaza by the Metropolitan Chicago chapter. Sitting atop the banner stand was a large lighted Richard Dawkins-inspired “A” (for atheism) sign. This is the sixth year of the display, intended to counter a life-sized Christian creche and a massive Jewish menorah placed at the location

by private organizations since the 1980s.

Libertyville: The Metropolitan Chicago chapter also placed the Bill of Rights cutout at Cook Memorial Park, the first year that a free-thought exhibit has been displayed at this site. A life-sized Christian creche and an 8-foot tall menorah have been placed in the park for several years.

Morris: The Bill of Rights display was placed on the ground of the Grundy County Courthouse by FFRF Member Will Meyer.

Springfield: The Winter Solstice sign was displayed at the Illinois state Capitol building for the 10th straight year. It was installed by FFRF Member Kathryn Koldehoff.

Indiana

South Bend: FFRF Member Geoff Snyder brought FFRF’s Bill of Rights cutout back to the County-City Building. Snyder first placed the exhibit in the lobby of the County-City Building in the winter of 2015 after St. Joseph County allowed a Christian nativity scene to be prominently showed off there.



The Bill of Rights “nativity scene” returned to the County-City Building in South Bend, Ind.

Iowa

Des Moines: The Bill of Rights cutout was put up in the state Capitol for the second straight year.

New Hampshire

Concord: FFRF Member Jack Shields debuted FFRF’s Bill of Rights cutout display in New Hampshire’s capital in December. The display was set up outside the Capitol building.

New York

Hastings-on-Hudson: The Freethinkers of Hastings-on-Hudson put up FFRF’s “Reason’s Greetings” banner in VFW Park. Next to it, the group has also displayed its own sign depicting Rodin’s “The Thinker” in contemplation of the village’s water tower. It is the fifth year in a row the local organization has created a public exhibition.



FFRF’s “Reason’s Greetings” sign was displayed in Hastings-on-Hudson.

Michigan

Warren: The Reason Station, staffed and organized by FFRF activist Douglas Marshall, included the centerpiece “May Reason Prevail” sign. It was up for the fourth straight year at City Hall. The Reason Station, staffed by Marshall and others, offers information from a nonreligious perspective to counter a prayer station.

New Jersey

Maplewood: The Bill of Rights “nativity” display was put up in the business district of the city.

Ohio

Cleveland: The Northern Ohio Freethought Society, the local chapter of FFRF, obtained a spot at the Cleveland Public Square for the Bill of Rights exhibit for the second year.



In San Diego, FFRF’s Winter Solstice banner and Bill of Rights cutout are displayed for the first time.

Freethought Society Director Marni Huebner-Tiborsky and other group volunteers put up the exhibit.

Oregon

Eugene: A large banner

that spans 30 feet by 4 feet and stretches across 8th Street contains the message: “Celebrate the Solstice. Tis the Season of Reason.”

A similarly large banner has been hung up in the area in

previous years that features “Christmas” and “Jesus” in large letters. FFRF thanks member Charles Jones for his activism in getting this banner up.

Washington

Olympia: FFRF’s “Let Reason Prevail” banner was erected on the grounds of the state Capitol by Darrell Barker and others.

Wisconsin

Madison: For the 23rd consecutive year, FFRF was able to place its solstice sign at the Wisconsin Capitol in Madison.

It also displayed its Bill of Rights cutout.

Milwaukee: County Executive Chris Abele graced the installation ceremony of FFRF’s Winter Solstice display on Dec. 3.

FFRF put it up with the help of member Ted Shellhamer.



This billboard appeared in two places in suburban Atlanta during December.



The over-the-road banner was displayed for the first time in Eugene, Ore.



Darrell Barker, right, president of FFRF’s chapter “Unfettered Freethinkers of South Sound” in Washington, appears with other members around the Winter Solstice sign in front of the Capitol building in Olympia.



FFRF’s Winter Solstice sign stands next to a Chanukah display in the Milwaukee County Courthouse.



Metropolitan Chicago Chapter member Bob Hunter displays FFRF’s Bill of Rights “nativity” cutout in Libertyville, Ill.



“At this season of the Winter Solstice, may reason prevail. There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell. There is only our natural world. Religion is but myth & superstition that hardens hearts & enslaves minds.”



FFRF’s Whitney Steffen and Colin McNamara set up FFRF’s Bill of Rights “nativity” cutout and the Winter Solstice sign at the Wisconsin Capitol building. FFRF only erects solstice displays on public property to counter Christian nativities or other religious displays.

FFRF's Winter Solstice Party 2018!



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Attorney Ryan Jayne tickled the ivories as background music prior to the start of FFRF's 2018 Winter Solstice Party on Dec. 21.



Photo by Chris Line

Folk singer Kristin Lems entertained the crowd with her her freethinking songs as Dan Barker accompanied her on the piano.



Photo by Jake Swenson

The beautiful spread of flowers and treats greeted guests in the Charlie Brooks Auditorium on the fourth floor of Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis.



Photo by Chris Line

A full house listened to Kristin perform several of her classic songs.



Photo by Jake Swenson

Kristin, center, shares a moment with FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor.



Photo by Jake Swenson

FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover speaks with a member while his daughter checks out the situation.



Photo by Jake Swenson

FFRF's greeters for the party guests were, from left, Director of First Impressions Lisa Treu, Editorial Assistant Bailey Nackreiner-Mackesey and Intern Tolu Igun.



Photo by Chris Line

Guests treated themselves to chocolates, cookies, cheeses and hot cider prior to the start of the program.

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



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

Coming Next Month in Freethought Today



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Read Cecile Richards' conversation with Annie Laurie Gaylor at the 2018 convention.