

# FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**Escaping from dangerous oppression**

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**A convention conversation with Cecile Richards**

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**In Bangladesh, the fear for LGBTQ, atheists is real**

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Vol. 36 No. 2

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

March 2019

## Getting the message out



This 20-by-60-foot billboard was seen by travelers on the Kennedy Expressway (Interstate 90-94) west of Montrose near Chicago during February. See page 12 for the story about FFRF's ad campaign in Chicago and a column by the campaign's underwriter, a victim of clergy sexual abuse as a teen.

## FFRF's Strategic Response Team is getting it done

By Andrew L. Seidel

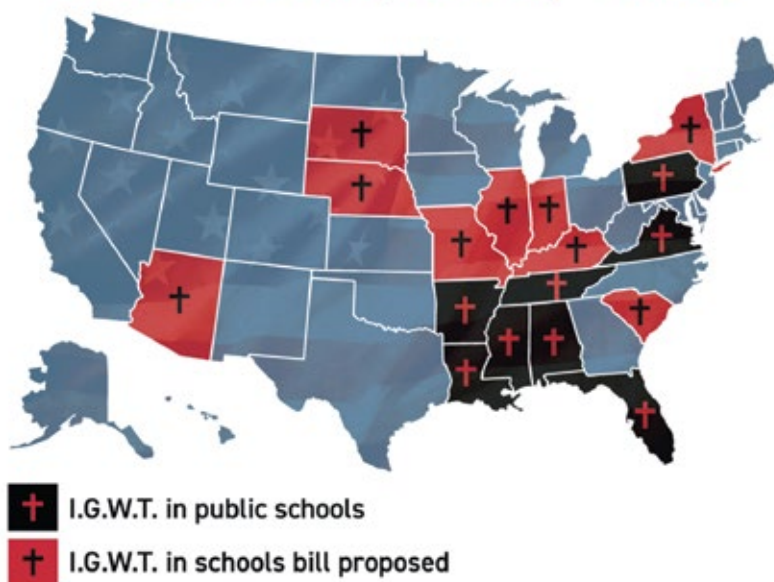
The Strategic Response Team. Sure, it's a cool name, but what does it actually do? The team is part of FFRF's legal squad. We are Jacks and Jills of all trades, tasked with:

1. Lobbying, tracking, analyzing and educating about pending legislation.
2. Shaping public opinion with articles, editorials and letters to the editor.
3. Drafting statements, press releases, action alerts and articles for FFRF.
4. Working to stop imminent state/church violations.

FFRF launched the Strategic Response Team after its 2017 national convention when the somewhat informal "rapid response" crew was formally reorganized. Our inaugural year was a success. Here are some highlights:

We tracked 115 bills, more than 80 percent of which were negative in regard to state-church separation. Most notably, we opposed bills pushed by "Project Blitz," a scheme aimed at codifying Christian nationalism into state statutes that features a wide variety of bad bills, including displaying "In God We Trust" in public schools. By mid-year, eight states had laws about posting "In God We Trust" in public schools, some adopted several years ago. This year, we're already tracking similar bills in another nine states (Arizona, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, South Carolina, South

## In God We (Don't) Trust



Freedom From Religion Foundation

This map shows states where displaying the phrase "In God We Trust" in public schools has been written into law or is proposed to be.



Photo: Chris Line  
Andrew L. Seidel

cluding elementary schools, to teach bible classes, and we opposed a bill in Mississippi forcing public school teachers to recite the Ten Commandments in class. Neither of those bills advanced.

Perhaps our biggest legislative victory was successfully defend-

Dakota).

On the bright side, much of the legislation we opposed last year failed. For instance, we opposed a bill in West Virginia requiring all schools, in-

ing the Johnson Amendment from sustained assault, an attack that continues this year.

Another important victory was convincing the Florida Constitutional Committee to retain the state's No Aid Clause, which prohibits taxpayer funds from flowing to churches. A huge win, if not racy.

We couldn't have done that without your help. The Strategic Response Team works to mobilize FFRF members, and since the last convention, you have made 29,672 connections with legislators on the 109 action alerts we sent out. That total number of connections is actually much

See Team on page 5

## It's over! Chino Valley case finally ends with victory for FFRF and Constitution

The praying, proselytizing and bible-reading school board in Chino Valley (Calif.) voted to respect the First Amendment and minority rights by not appealing a major Freedom From Religion Foundation victory to the U.S. Supreme Court.

FFRF, with 22 local parents, students and employees of the Chino Valley School District, triumphed in July before the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals (the largest in the country) against prayer at Chino Valley School Board meetings. These meetings, which resembled church revivals more than public gatherings, opened with prayer and regularly included board members reading from the bible and proselytizing. "The board's prayer policy and practice violate the Establishment Clause," a three-judge panel of the 9th Circuit had ruled unanimously. The appeals court reaffirmed FFRF's victory in December by denying a petition by the school board to rehear the case.

On Jan. 17, the Chino Valley School Board voted 3-2 not to further appeal the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. FFRF welcomes the new board's display of good sense. (The composition of the board changed following the November elections.)

"We're so pleased reason and our Constitution have prevailed in protecting the rights of students and parents to be free from proselytizing by their school board," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "The fact that we had so many members of the community with us shows how the school board was riding roughshod over the rights of students."

The display of sectarian religiosity at board meetings was brazen. Then-Board President James Na injected Christianity into many of his official statements to parents and students at meetings. For instance, at one such

See Chino Valley on page 2

## Camp Quest smiles



Playing a crucial role in the development of a new generation of secular youths, Camp Quest inspires them to live life well and fully, guided by empathy and critical thinking. See story on page 20.



# From ‘Family Guy’ to passionate freethinker

**Name:** David Williamson.  
**Where I live:** Orlando, Fla., since 2012.  
Where and when I was born: Pensacola, Fla., in 1971.  
**Family:** In 2013, I married my partner in activism, Jocelyn Williamson. Together we are raising her 15-year old son and I have a 26-year-old son in the Coast Guard.

**Education:** My childhood was spent in many places, but I finished high school in Spartanburg, S.C. I have an associate in science degree in golf course management from Florida Gateway College and a bachelor’s degree in occupational safety and health from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

**Military service:** I served four years in the Navy.

**Occupation:** After college, I worked as a golf course superintendent and about 10 years ago I moved into occupational safety.

**Tell us about your FFRF chapter:** Jocelyn and I founded the Central Florida Freethought Community in 2012 out of a passion for keeping religion out of government. We found the best way to do activism is to build a community of like-minded people and to form relationships with allied



David Williamson is co-founder (along with his wife Jocelyn) of the Central Florida Freethought Community, an FFRF chapter.



FFRF Member David Williamson (right), co-president of the Central Florida Freethinkers Community, and Danny de Armas, senior pastor at First Baptist Orlando, discussed the commonalities in their approach toward religion and government during a video segment on the Orlando Sentinel’s website in reaction to the annual National Religious Freedom Day on Jan. 16.

organizations and individuals who share our goals. Even if we don’t agree with everyone on everything, we can work together where our values align. Today we have a thriving organization that serves the Orlando area locally and the state of Florida in other ways.

We have nearly 1,000 Meetup members, 1,700 email subscribers, and 2,891 Facebook fans. There is a monthly speaker series, regular social events, occasional secular invocations, and the annual Freethought Cruise, where a national-level speaker is brought in for a weekend or a week-long getaway.

We have worked with FFRF on two lawsuits: literature distribution in Orange County Public Schools and secular invocations at Brevard County Commission meetings.

Group management has changed a lot since the days of the paper newsletter, so we find ourselves trying to grow and be dynamic while meeting the needs of those who look to us as a resource.

**How I got where I am today:** A 2008 episode of the “Family Guy” was how I first heard about Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion*. It had a profound effect on me and helped me realize the value of clear thinking

and the harm that religious dogma has visited upon civilization. That created a path for me into freethought where I found a desire to be part of fostering communities for people who want to be free from the question, “So, what church do *you* attend?”

**Where I’m headed:** My aim is to ensure Orlando always has an active freethought community. With a short supply of people interested in leadership, I and the rest of our board members need to work on identifying and empowering fans and followers who care about the same things we do, but don’t yet know how to get involved.

**Person in history I admire and why:** I really should spend more time studying history, but I am a huge fan of two types of activists. I admire regular people

who have the courage to come from a minority position and speak out about what matters to them. I also have great respect for people who are in a majority and who take the time to understand the impacts their privilege has on others. I think we should all strive to be those types of people whenever we can.

**A quotation I like:** “Freedom begins with freethinkers.” — Anne Nicol Gaylor, FFRF co-founder.

**These are a few of my favorite things:** Modestly priced dark chocolate, heated discussion among family and friends, kicking pastors out of public schools, and Oxford commas.

**These are not:** People who care about what happens in our world but do not get involved to change it frustrate me as much as eating my vegetables.

**My doubts about religion started:** I have no memory of a god-belief — thank God.

**Before I die:** I hope to see a majority of Americans regain an understanding and appreciation of the secularism which pre-dated the rise of the “Religious Right.”

**Ways I promote freethought:** Along with community development and being open about my atheism, I am creating personal relationships with local clergy so we can resolve and prevent issues of religion in government together. An organization I have recently been asked to join is the Central Florida Commission on Religious Freedom (real religious freedom). We host an annual summit open to the public and smaller discussions during the year where religious leaders get together to discuss how religious freedom affects our various communities. Working with religious people to help us maintain “Jefferson’s wall” is an area of focus I hope to write and talk about more soon.

**I wish you’d have asked me:** To come work full-time at the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

## Chino Valley

Continued from page 1

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.

“These prayers typically take place before groups of schoolchildren whose attendance is not truly voluntary and whose relationship to school district officials, including the board, is not one of full parity,” the appeals court had ruled.

U.S. District Judge Jesus Bernal had

initially decided in FFRF’s favor on Feb. 18, 2016, finding that “permitting religious prayer in board meetings, and the policy and custom of reciting prayers, bible readings, and proselytizing at board meetings, constitute unconstitutional government endorsements of religion in violation of plaintiffs’ First Amendment rights.”

The previous school board, pressured by a local megachurch to which

three members had belonged, had voted 3-2 to appeal the decision. The three-judge panel of the 9th Circuit was not impressed: “The prayers frequently advanced religion in general and Christianity in particular.” And in an acknowledgment of the presence of nonbelievers in California, the court also emphasized how discriminatory the prayer practice was toward secular local residents.

“The purpose of respecting religious diversity, to the extent that it does not encompass nonreligious belief systems and their diversity, is itself constitutionally suspect,” it stated. “Atheists and agnostics comprise 4 percent and 5 percent of the California population, respectively. Neither the purpose of respecting religious diversi-

ty nor the means of doing so via prayer acknowledges or respects the beliefs of nonreligious citizens in the district.”

Bernal had ordered the school board to pay more than \$200,000 for the initial case. Costs and fees associated with the appeal ran to \$75,000 for a total of more than a quarter million dollars.

FFRF and the plaintiffs were represented by Attorney David J.P. Kaloyanides, FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert and FFRF’s Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is a national state/church watchdog organization that has more than 31,000 nonreligious members and 20 chapters all over the country, including almost 4,000 members and a chapter in Sacramento.

ffrf

FREETHOUGHT  
TODAY

Published by Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

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Provocative Pieces

By Anne Gaylor

A must-have for any freethinker, this gracefully readable book contains Gaylor’s classic writings.

Published by FFRF

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# OVERHEARD

The doctrine of fetal personhood represents a sharp break from the great traditions of Western law that, at their philosophical core, seek to preserve space for the individual to live free from the tremendous power of the state. . . . That this doctrine is acquiring the force of law within the United States should deeply concern Americans — men and women — who value their freedoms.

**Editorial, “The Future of Personhood Nation.”**  
*The New York Times, 1-10-19*



You shouldn't need a bible to tell you to protect our planet, but it does anyway.

**U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, responding to Sarah Huckabee Sanders, who dismissed Ocasio-Cortez' push for the Trump administration to take action on climate change.**  
*Twitter, 1-23-19*

Whether they're atheist, Opus Dei, Buddhist or Muslim should have no bearing on our assessment of their fitness for office. Yet I can't help but feel anxious that both of Donald Trump's main global envoys, [Mike] Pompeo and [Mike] Pence, have a conflict between their private beliefs and what they publicly claim to be doing.

**Financial Times journalist Edward Luce.**  
*Raw Story, 1-15-19*

I think the number of women fleeing from the Saudi administration and abuse will increase, especially since there is no system to stop them. I'm sure that there will be a lot more women running away. I hope my story encourages other women to be braved and free.

**Rahaf Mohammed Alqununi, the Saudi woman who fled from her country and family and was given asylum in Canada, in her first TV interview.**  
*NPR, 1-15-19*

It isn't too late to wipe outdated laws off the books and make the procedure more accessible to low-income women

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and more available to everyone. And it is certainly high time to make abortion rights a voting issue in elections.

**Editorial, “Roe v. Wade is at risk. Here's how to prepare.”**  
*The New York Times, 1-21-19*

You cannot deny what happened. You cannot deny that there was significant abuse in the Catholic Church. You cannot deny that it was not handled appropriately. And you can't deny that people were hurt.

**New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, flanked by survivors at a press conference, after signing the Child Victims Act. The bill, extending reasonable statutes of limitation for victims of child sexual abuse, languished for 13 years, opposed by religious groups, Boy Scouts of America and, particularly, the Roman Catholic Church, which spent more than \$1.8 million since 2012 lobbying against it.**  
*The New York Times, 1-29-19*

My Christian school had “Slave Day.” One day a year, each member of the junior class was auctioned off to other students to be owned for a day. The auctioneer — a teacher — sometimes held a whip. Students stood on a box while being auctioned. It was a fundraiser for our prom — real money was exchanged. Sometimes, the auction took place in the sanctuary. In 2001, it was changed — in name only — to Servant Day. I do not recall any conversations about race and white supremacy.

**Laura Hagen of Minnesota, in response to The New York Times' request for experiences with Christian schooling after hashtag #ExposeChristianSchools went viral.**  
*The New York Times, 1-31-19*

By giving legal cover for discrimination, the Trump-Pence administration is encouraging providers to deny people health care based on their own homophobia or misogyny, while worsening health care access and forcing some to forgo care altogether.

**Dr. Leana Wen, president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, in a statement after the Department of Health and Human Services announced it is close to finalizing a conscience protection rule that would allow people to discriminate in health care settings.**  
*Rewire News, 1-28-19*

Hopefully in the future we can put in place some common-sense guidelines that would bar hate groups from earning money through Arizona license plates. State dollars should not be funding an organization that works to strip residents of our state of their human rights and human dignity. It's appalling that we've already sent over a million dollars to this extremist hate group.

**Arizona state Sen. Juan Mendez, an open atheist, who proposed a bill for the DOT to make public the names and missions of each entity receiving funds from specialty plates. Currently, \$17 of every \$25 from the specialty plates is sent to Alliance Defending Freedom, a Christian organization that the Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled as a hate group.**  
*The Friendly Atheist, 2-6-19*

# IN MEMORIAM

## Prominent scientist, activist Alice Bennett dies at 89

FFRF Life Member Alice Swenson Bennett, 89, died Jan. 27 in Indianapolis.

Alice was born Aug. 16, 1929, in Chicago and completed high school at age 16. She graduated three years later from Western Michigan College, majoring in chemistry and biology. She received her master's degree in biological chemistry from the University of Michigan in 1952. She married Carson Bennett in 1953 and had two sons, Lawrence and Thomas. She completed her Ph.D. in biochemistry at Purdue in 1968.

Alice taught for 31 years in the Biology Department at Ball State University, teaching molecular biology, biophysics and radiation biology, among other subjects. She made con-



Alice Bennett

tributions to breast cancer research and authored many research publications. She served as chair of the University Senate at Ball State and was an advocate for faculty and staff. She received many awards for her hard work in academics, First Amendment rights, voting rights, needs of low- and middle-income persons, separation of church and state, women's rights, equality and social justice. She was a consistent supporter of those who found themselves in challenging times and needing assistance.

Alice was a devoted volunteer in a wide variety of community activities. Some of her most rewarding accomplishments were volunteering and supporting the American Civil Liberties Union, Planned Parenthood, American Association of University Women, League of Women Voters and National Organization for Women. Alice was a strong supporter of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and The Center for Inquiry.

## John Hodges: 'Be irreverent'

FFRF Member John Bryan Hodges died of a heart attack on Nov. 27, 2018.

He was born May 9, 1952, in Washington, D.C., and grew up in Oxon Hill, Md. From there, he moved to Blacksburg, Va., to attend Virginia Polytechnic Institute, where he studied economics, electrical engineering and philosophy.

After graduation, he lived in Denver for about seven years before returning to Blacksburg, where he lived until his death, just one month before his scheduled retirement from the National Bank of Blacksburg.

John was a very kind person with a prodigious memory and keen sense of humor, able to recite jokes from comic strips he had enjoyed, humorous stories, poetry and quotes from serious articles and books.



John Hodges

With a lifelong interest and dedication to philosophy, he was a humanist, writing that what matters most is how we treat other people and the natural world.

As he often ended his writings, “Do justice, love mercy and be irreverent.”

## Deborah Welch dies at 46

Deborah Gail Welch, 46, died unexpectedly at her home in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, on Jan. 20.

She was born March 2, 1972, to Doris Luna and Douglas McTaggart. She married Arno Kilianski and they had an adopted daughter Samantha Mondegreen.

As expressed in her obituary, the family wished for any donations in her honor to be made to the Freedom from Religion Foundation, Diabetes Canada or PFLAG.



Deborah Welch

**FREETHOUGHT OF THE DAY**

“There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed. Let it once enter our common schools, they would be destroyed . . . Those who made our Constitution saw this, and used the most apt and comprehensive language in it to prevent such a catastrophe.”

*Justice H.S. Orton of the Supreme Court of Wisconsin, concurring opinion*

**Weiss v. the District Board**  
March 18, 1890

**FFRF.ORG** FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION



# HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

## CHECKMATE

God is all-knowing and all-powerful.  
—The Baltimore Catechism  
... and the Lord hath taken away.  
—Job, 1:21

Busy as you were, God,  
when you were alive,  
you always found time  
to torment the woman I love—not just  
that old kid stuff, her tonsil  
-ectomy,  
append  
-ectomy,  
those casual tweaks, your afternoon’s  
amusement—no,  
I mean the really dirty tricks, the mast  
-ectomy,  
blighting her beautiful body,  
and then of course her hyster  
-ectomy,  
the doomed flesh gouged away  
just as you pre-ordained,  
and listen, God, I haven’t forgiven you  
her hacksawed knees, those twin  
-ectomies,  
nor am I overlooking  
your other little favors:  
her tricky heart, thinning bones,  
lazy glands—and when you gave her  
your best shot, that sneaky stroke,  
you thought it’d be Strike  
Three, right? Well,  
not on your life, big boy,  
she’s tougher than you thought,  
and now that you’re dead,  
she’s dancing on your grave.

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

Photo by Brent Nicaastro



© 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](http://shop.ffrf.org), include *Karma*, *Dharma*, *Pudding & Pie* and *New and Selected Poems, 1956-1996*.

# FFRF thanks 24 new Lifers, 3 After-Lifers, 3 Immortals

FFRF thanks and welcomes our 24 new Lifetime Members, three After-Life Members and three Immortals.

The three new After-Lifers are Charles Bingham, Philip Lentz and Sherron Lentz. An After-Life Membership is a \$5,000 membership level for those who want their donation to “live on” after them.

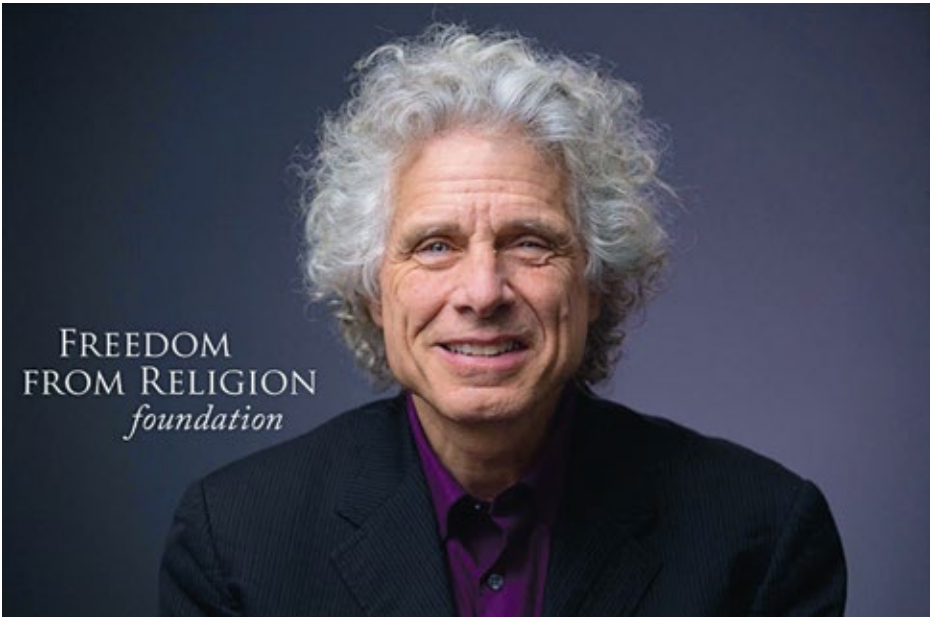
The latest \$1,000 Lifetime Members are Jim Asa, William Atkinson, George P. (Buzz) Avery, Susannah Barbee, Chris Benedict, Andrew J. Croteau, Bobbie Cunha, Allen Dines, David Gonce (gift from After-Lifer David “Chris” Allen), Austin R. Green, Mary M. Grimaldi, Art Isbell, Marc-Andre Lachance (second Life Membership), Karen Nackard, Paul M. Nichols (gift from lifer Joan-

ie Barker Nichols), Marsha Petry, Gordon Purser, John Salow, Paul D. Singleton, Michael Seaman, Mason Tikkanen, Teresa Tooth, Priscilla Wegars and David Werdegar.

States represented are Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Missouri, Nevada, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin and two from Canada (British Columbia and Ontario).

FFRF has also received word that three members have become Immortals: Sherron Lentz, Stewart Charles Singletary and Scott Timm. 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!



Steven Pinker’s ad for FFRF will air nationwide on CBS in late March.

# Steven Pinker ad for FFRF to air nationally

For the first time since 2012, CBS has permitted FFRF to advertise nationally, not just in limited markets.

FFRF’s newest ad, featuring *Enlightenment Now* author Steven Pinker, will air on “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert” (11:35 p.m. Eastern) for three consecutive days. The 30-second spot will run on Monday, March 25, Tuesday, March 26 and Wednesday, March 27.

In the ad, Pinker urges viewers to join the FFRF in its fight to prevent religion from creeping into U.S. government. Pinker has served as FFRF’s first honorary president since 2013.

“Hi, I’m Steve Pinker. In my book, *Enlightenment Now*, I show that the world has become a better place as reason has been overcoming superstition and tribalism. But the values of the Enlightenment are under attack. That’s why I’m a proud member of

the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the nation’s largest association of freethinkers, working to keep the state and church separate. Please join me in supporting the Freedom From Religion Foundation to ensure that our government is driven not by religion, but by reason.”

Pinker is one of the world’s premier intellectuals 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 books are *The Blank Slate*, *The Language Instinct* and *How the Mind Works*.

CBS continues to refuse to air FFRF’s other television commercial featuring Ron Reagan (“Not afraid of burning in hell”) nationally or regionally on CBS-owned affiliates.

# FFRF intern works doggedly for legal team

## MEET AN INTERN

**Name:** Liana McGregor  
**Where and when I was born:** Madison, Wis., in 1995.  
**Family:** It’s just me and my parents, Tom and Anita, and the dogs, Emma and Bailey.  
**Education:** University of Wisconsin-Madison class of 2018. I majored in political science.  
**My religious upbringing was:** None. My parents are agnostic and they raised me to be open-minded and respectful of all religions.  
**What I do here:** Anything they want me to, but I mostly prepare letters for the legal department. When I’m not drafting letters, I’m usually working on a research project or mass mailing for one of the attorneys.  
**What I like best about it:** I’ve learned so much from everyone here, and everyone is so helpful and patient. My writing skills have really improved, and I like to see how the attorneys edit the drafts I give them.  
**Something funny that’s happened:** The legal assistant throws things at me, but sometimes it’s candy so I can’t complain.  
**My legal interests are:** Social justice,



Liana McGregor

constitutional law, women’s rights and prison reform.

**My legal heroes are:** Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sir Thomas More and Sally Yates.

**These three words sum me up:** Caring, skeptical, sleepy.

**Things I like:** Cooking, hiking, reading, and hanging out with my dogs.

**Things I smite:** Intolerance, canned corn and dirty fingernails.

**I wish you’d asked me:** More about my dogs.



# THEY SAID WHAT?

We don't think he's suitable as a practicing Muslim to be vice chair because he'd be the representative for all Republicans in Tarrant County, and not all Republicans in Tarrant County think Islam is safe or acceptable in the U.S., in Tarrant County, and in the TCGOP.

**Tarrant County (Texas) GOP precinct chair Dorrie O'Brien, in a Facebook post, commenting on Shahid Shafi, a longtime Republican who was appointed vice chair of the Tarrant County Republican Party. The party took a vote on whether, as a Muslim, Shafi should remain as vice chair. The board overwhelmingly approved his position.**

*The New York Times, 1-10-19*

This is not putting God back into our schools. It's my opinion that we need to put God back into our schools, but this isn't doing that.

**Nebraska state Sen. Steve Erdman, who proposed a bill that would require schools to display "In God We Trust" signs or posters in classrooms or common areas "where each student shall be able to see and read it each day school is in session."**

*Lincoln Journal-Star, 1-20-19*

I pray and I tell our team when we get together, we have an opportunity to join in with what God is doing in Oklahoma.

**Gov. Kevin Stitt of Oklahoma, speaking at his "Inaugural Prayer Service."**

*Right Wing Watch, 1-15-19*

To my knowledge there is no case law that prohibits the depiction of three non-Christian Middle Eastern men on camels that are seeking wisdom. Our display has a legitimate secular purpose.

**Superintendent Peggy Mathis, claiming that the display of the "three wise men" on top of Nawaygo Elementary School in Michigan is not religious in nature.**

*The Friendly Atheist, 12-5-18*

If the commissioner of education wants to fix education in the state of New York, he can go to the public schools and fix the education being offered there. The Jewish nation will not bow or give in to the wicked, not even the commissioner of education. We will go out to war against the commissioner in every way.

**Satmar Rebbe Aron Teitelbaum, an ultra-Orthodox Jew, in a speech translated from Yiddish, in defiance of the state's ruling that the New York City Department of Education is giving yeshivas three years to clean up their act, demanding that the religious schools ensure a curriculum "substantially equivalent" to that of public schools.**

*New York Post, 12-2-18*

The bible is an integral part of our society and deserves a place in the classroom.

**North Dakota state Rep. Aaron McWilliams, a co-sponsor of a bill that would require the state's public high schools to offer an elective on bible studies.**

*USA Today, 1-23-19*

Numerous states introducing bible literacy classes, giving students the option of studying the bible. Starting to make a turn back? Great!

**President Donald Trump.**

*Twitter, 1-28-19*

I don't need words on a piece of paper. God made us all equal.

**Virginia House of Delegates member Margaret B. Ransone, explaining why she was voting against a bill that would grant equal rights to people regardless of sex.**

*The Friendly Atheist, 1-24-19*

With faith in God, with fidelity to country, and with the fighting spirit I got from my mother, I stand before you today to announce my candidacy for president of the United States.

**U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris during her formal presidential campaign launch.**

*CNN, 1-27-19*

I think God calls all of us to fill different roles at different times and I think that he wanted Donald Trump to become president, and that's why he's there.

**Sarah Huckabee Sanders, president Trump's press secretary, in an interview with Christian Broadcasting Network's David Brody and Jennifer Wisnon.**

*Christian Broadcasting Network, 1-20-19*

It is incredible, but not surprising, that the Democrats would try to remove God from committee proceedings in one of their first acts in the majority.



**Sarah Huckabee Sanders, House Republican Conference Chairwoman Liz Cheney, on a proposal that would eliminate the "so help me God" reference from the oath administered to witnesses testifying before the House Committee on Natural Resources.**

*Fox News, 1-30-19*

I don't think we're going to listen to her on much of anything, particularly not on matters we're gonna leave in the hands of a much, much higher authority, and certainly not listen to the freshman congresswoman on when the world may end.

**Sarah Huckabee Sanders, president Trump's press secretary, referencing God while responding to a statement by U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez that the United States needs to act on climate change before it is too late.**

*Fox News, 1-22-19*

The idea that homosexual behavior is different than bestiality as a constitutional matter is unjustifiable. There is no right in our Constitution to have sex with whoever or whatever you want in the privacy of your own home (or barn).

**Brian Hagedorn, candidate for the Wisconsin Supreme Court, in a letter he wrote in 2005 to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.**

*NewCivilRightsMovement.com, 1-3-19*

## Freethought Today caption contest winner!

Congratulations to Jay Ballinger of West Virginia for winning FFRF's caption contest from the January/February issue, voted on by staff members. For his winning entry, he gets an FFRF T-shirt!

The winning caption was: **The road to nowhere.**

Top runners-up include:

**This is your last warning.** — Booth Harned of Missouri.

**Enter at your own risk** — Phillip Gold of California and (separately) Marcia Yeager of Maryland.

**The preacher kept asking for a sign.** — Judy Saint of California.

**Watch for falling standards.** — Freya Harris of Georgia.

Thanks to all who participated. If you see any pictures or images that you think would be good for a caption contest, please email them to [caption@ffrf.org](mailto:caption@ffrf.org).



The road to nowhere

## Team

Continued from page 1

higher because that tally only includes calls and emails to federal legislators, not contacts with state and local officials or contacts by other means.

A lot of those connections were about Trump's judicial nominees. Two stand out: Jeff Mateer and Brett Kavanaugh.

One of the Strategic Response Team's biggest victories was preventing Mateer from receiving a lifetime appointment on the federal bench. Mateer worked at First Liberty Institute, the Christian anti-FFRF group, and would have been a disaster for state-church separation. To stop him, we authored the most comprehensive record of Mateer's unfitness. Other groups used this report to build a narrative against Mateer, as did the media and members and staff on the Senate Judiciary Committee. We worked with journalists to publicize Mateer's troubling ties to First Liberty Institute and the Texas attorney general. We even put together an effective, popular video compiling Mateer's most egregious moments, urging viewers to oppose his confirmation. President Trump rescinded Mateer's nomination in December.

We put in as much work to oppose Brett Kavanaugh, but without the success. The Strategic Response Team vetted every possible Trump Supreme Court nominee and drafted press releases and reports on each of the final four. This allowed FFRF to issue a statement on Kavanaugh less than two minutes after his name was announced. We also collaborated with other groups, including helping to draft a letter opposing Kavanaugh that other secular

groups signed onto under the umbrella of the Secular Coalition for America and which Sen. Mazie Hirono introduced into the record. As part of that collaboration, FFRF attorneys reviewed more than 10,000 documents from Kavanaugh's time in the Bush White House, uncovering some important memos that were lost in the later media narrative.

The Strategic Response Team also works to shape public opinion. We do this with FFRF statements, op-eds and articles. We drafted 44 statements on a variety of issues, from the new "religious freedom" division at the Department of Health and Human Services to the pope accusing abuse victims of "slandering" a bishop. We pulled together 50 press releases on legal and legislative issues and another 50 articles, op-eds, blogs and letters to the editor.

An article I wrote for ThinkProgress ("The White House bible study group that influenced Trump's family separation policy") shifted public discourse on both that policy and the bible study.

This is just a sample. The Strategic Response Team handled more than 450 separate projects last year. Most of them you'll never hear about. By its nature, much of our work is behind the scenes and there's a lot that we do for which we cannot be publicly credited. We can say that your interests are being well represented, including on Capitol Hill. So well, in fact, that we're highly motivated and inspired by our work this past year to redouble our efforts. *Andrew L. Seidel is an attorney and the director of FFRF's Strategic Response Team.*



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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

## What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists. FFRF has more than 31,000 members. FFRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and donations are tax deductible for income tax purposes.

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

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



# The evangelical grip on Trump administration

*This article first appeared in The Guardian on Jan. 11 and is reprinted with permission.*

By Julian Borger

In setting out the Trump administration’s Middle East policy, one of the first things Mike Pompeo made clear to his audience in Cairo is that he had come to the region as “as an evangelical Christian.”

In his speech at the American University, Pompeo said that in his state department office: “I keep a bible open on my desk to remind me of God and his word, and the truth.”



Julian Borger

The secretary of state’s primary message in Cairo was that the United States was ready once more to embrace conservative Middle Eastern regimes, no matter how repressive, if they made common cause against Iran.

His second message was religious. In his visit to Egypt, he came across as much as a preacher as a diplomat. He talked about “America’s innate goodness” and marveled at a newly built cathedral as “a stunning testament to the Lord’s hand.”

The desire to erase Barack Obama’s legacy, Donald Trump’s instinctive embrace of autocrats, and the private interests of the Trump Organization have all been analyzed as driving forces behind the administration’s foreign policy.

## Policy consequences

The gravitational pull of white evangelicals has been less visible. But it could have far-reaching policy consequences. Vice President Mike Pence and Pompeo both cite evangelical theology as a powerful motivating force.

Just as he did in Cairo, Pompeo called on the congregation of a Kansan megachurch three years ago to join a fight of good against evil.

“We will continue to fight these battles,” the then congressman said at the Summit Church in Wichita. “It is a never-ending struggle . . . until the rapture. Be part of it. Be in the fight.”

For Pompeo’s audience, the rapture invoked an apocalyptic Christian vision of the future, a final battle between good and evil, and the second coming of Jesus Christ, when the faithful will ascend to heaven and the rest will go to hell.

For many evangelical Christians in the United States, one of the key preconditions for such a moment is the gathering of the world’s Jews in a greater Israel between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. It is a belief, known as premillennial dispensationalism or Christian Zionism – and it has very real potential consequences for U.S. foreign policy.

It directly colors views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and indirectly, attitudes towards Iran, broader Middle East geopolitics and the primacy of protecting Christian minorities. In his Cairo visit, Pompeo heaped praise on Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, for building the new cathedral, but made no reference to the 60,000 political prisoners the regime is thought to be holding, or its routine use of torture.

Pompeo is an evangelical Presbyterian, who says he was “brought to Jesus” by other cadets at the West Point military academy in the 1980s.



State Department photo

Secretary of State Michael Pompeo visited the Cathedral of the Nativity in Cairo on Jan. 10.

“He knows best how his faith interacts with his political beliefs and the duties he undertakes as secretary of state,” said Stan van den Berg, senior pastor of Pompeo’s church in Wichita in an email. “Suffice to say, he is a faithful man, he has integrity, he has a compassionate heart, a humble disposition and a mind for wisdom.”

As Donald Trump finds himself ever more dependent on them for his political survival, the influence of Pence, Pompeo and the ultraconservative white evangelicals who stand behind them is likely to grow.

“Many of them relish the second coming because for them it means eternal life in heaven,” Andrew Chesnut, professor of religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University said. “There is a palpable danger that people in high position who subscribe to these beliefs will be readier to take us into a conflict that brings on Armageddon.”

Chesnut argues that Christian Zionism has become the “majority theology” among white U.S. evangelicals, who represent about a quarter of the adult population. In a 2015 poll, 73 percent of evangelical Christians said events in Israel are prophesied in the Book of Revelation. Respondents were not asked specifically whether their believed developments in Israel would actually bring forth the apocalypse.

## Complicated relationship

The relationship between evangelicals and the president himself is complicated.

Trump himself embodies the very opposite of a pious Christian ideal. Trump is not a churchgoer. He is profane, twice divorced, who has boasted of sexually assaulting women. But white evangelicals have embraced him.

Eighty percent of white evangelicals voted for him in 2016, and his popularity among them remains in the 70s. While other white voters have flaked away in the first two years of his presidency, white evangelicals have become his last solid bastion.

Some leading evangelicals see Trump as a latter-day King Cyrus, the sixth-century B.C. Persian emperor who liberated the Jews from Babylonian captivity.

The comparison is made explicitly in “The Trump Prophecy,” a religious film screened in 1,200 cinemas around the

country in October, depicting a retired firefighter who claims to have heard God’s voice, saying: “I’ve chosen this man, Donald Trump, for such a time as this.”

Lance Wallnau, a self-proclaimed prophet who features in the film, has called Trump “God’s Chaos Candidate” and a “modern Cyrus.”

“Cyrus is the model for a nonbeliever appointed by God as a vessel for the purposes of the faithful,” said Katherine Stewart, who writes extensively about the Christian Right.

She added that they welcome his readiness to break democratic norms to combat perceived threats to their values and way of life.

“The Christian nationalist movement is characterized by feelings of persecution

and, to some degree, paranoia — a clear example is the idea that there is somehow a ‘war on Christmas,’” Stewart said. “People in those positions will often go for authoritarian leaders who will do whatever is necessary

to fight for their cause.”

Trump was raised as a Presbyterian, but leaned increasingly towards evangelical preachers as he began contemplating a run for the presidency.

Trump’s choice of Pence as a running mate was a gesture of his commitment, and four of the six preachers at his inauguration were evangelicals, including Paula White and Franklin Graham, the eldest son of the preacher Billy Graham, who defended Trump through his many sex scandals, pointing out: “We are all sinners.”

Having lost control of the House of Representatives in November, and under ever-closer scrutiny for his campaign’s links to the Kremlin, Trump’s instinct has been to cleave ever closer to his most loyal supporters.

Almost alone among major demographic groups, white evangelicals are overwhelmingly in favor of Trump’s border wall, which some preachers equate with fortifications in the bible.

Evangelical links have also helped shape alliances in the Trump presidency. As secretary of state, Pompeo has been instrumental in forging links with other evangelical leaders in the hemisphere, including Guatemala’s Jimmy Morales and the new Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro. Both have undertaken to follow the U.S. lead in moving their embassies in Israel to Jerusalem.

## Trump’s evangelical clout

Trump’s order to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv — over the objections of his foreign policy and national security team — is a striking example of evangelical clout.

The move was also pushed by Las Vegas billionaire and Republican mega-donor, Sheldon Adelson, but the orchestration of the embassy opening ceremony last May reflected the audience Trump was trying hardest to appease.

The two pastors given the prime speaking slots were both ardent Christian Zionists: Robert Jeffress, a Dallas pastor on record as saying Jews, like Muslims and Mormons, are bound for hell; and John Hagee, a televangelist and founder of Christians United for Israel (Cufi), who once said that Hitler and the Holocaust were part of God’s plan to get Jews back to Israel, to pave the way for the Rapture.

For many evangelicals, the move cemented Trump’s status as the new Cyrus, who oversaw the Jews’ return to Jerusalem and rebuilt the Temple.

The tightening of the evangelical grip on the administration has also been reflected in a growing hostility to the United Nations, often portrayed as a sinister and godless organization.

Since former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley announced her departure in October and Pompeo took more direct control, the U.S. mission has become increasingly combative, blocking references to gender and reproductive health in U.N. documents.

Some theologians also see an increasingly evangelical tinge to the administration’s broader Middle East policies, in particular its fierce embrace of Binyamin Netanyahu’s government, the lack of balancing sympathy for the Palestinians — and the insistent demonization of the Iranian government.

Evangelicals, Chesnut said, “now see the United States locked into a holy war against the forces of evil who they see as embodied by Iran.”

In a speech at the end of a regional tour, Pompeo reprised the theme, describing Iran as a “cancerous influence.”

This zeal for a defining struggle has thus far found common cause with more secular hawks such as the national security adviser, John Bolton, and Trump’s own drive to eliminate the legacy of Barack Obama, whose signature foreign policy achievement was the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran, which Trump abrogated last May.

In conversations with European leaders such as Emmanuel Macron and Theresa May, Trump has reportedly insisted he has no intention of going to war with Iran. His desire to extricate U.S. troops from Syria marks a break with hawks, religious and secular, who want to contain Iranian influence there.

But the logic of his policy of ever-increasing pressure, coupled with unstinting support for Israel and Saudi Arabia, makes confrontation with Iran ever more likely.

One of the most momentous foreign policy questions of 2019 is whether Trump can veer away from the collision course he has helped set in motion — perhaps conjuring up a last-minute deal — or instead welcome conflict as a distraction from his domestic woes, and sell it to the faithful as a crusade.

*Julian Borger is a British journalist who is the world affairs editor for The Guardian.*



# IN THE NEWS

## Pope admits nuns were sexually abused

For the first time, Pope Francis said publicly that the Catholic Church had faced a persistent problem of sexual abuse of nuns by priests and bishops.

Nuns have accused clerics of sexual abuse in India, Africa, Latin America and in Italy, and a Vatican magazine in January mentioned nuns having abortions or giving birth to the children of priests. Francis hadn't discussed the issue until he was asked to comment during a news conference on Feb. 5.

"It's true," Francis said. "There are priests and bishops who have done that."

## 300 priests accused of sex abuse in Texas

The Roman Catholic Church in Texas on Jan. 31 released the names of almost 300 priests who it said had been credibly accused of child sex abuse over nearly eight decades.

It was the latest in a wave of disclosures by the church as it faces a series of federal and state investigations into its handling of sexual misconduct.

The names were posted online by all 15 of the state's dioceses and followed the publication in August of a bombshell report on clerical sex abuse by the Pennsylvania attorney general that has spurred investigations of the church in more than a dozen other states.

## 380 Southern Baptists accused of sex abuse

More than 700 victims have been sexually abused by about 380 Southern Baptist leaders and volunteers since 1998, according to an investigation by the Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News.

"Ultimately, we compiled information on 380 credibly accused officials in Southern Baptist churches, including pastors, deacons, Sunday school teachers and volunteers," the newspapers said. "We verified that about 220 had been convicted of sex crimes or received deferred prosecutions in plea deals."

According to the report, of those 220, 90 are in prison and 100 are registered sex offenders.

## New Jersey dioceses release names of abusers

The names of nearly 200 priests and deacons who were accused of sexually abusing children were released Feb. 13 by New Jersey's five Roman Catholic dioceses.

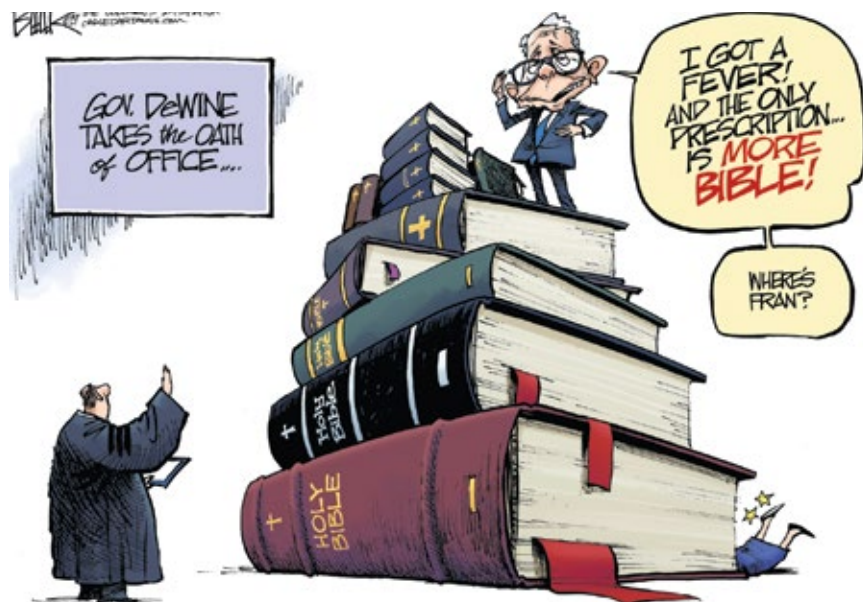
"In an effort to do what is right and just, we are publishing the names of diocesan clergy credibly accused of sexual abuse of minors in the Archdiocese of Newark," said Newark Archbishop Joseph Cardinal Tobin in a letter. The Dioceses of Camden, Trenton, Paterson and Metuchen also released their own lists.

The lists follow many similar records of names published by dioceses across the country recently. Of the 188 names released, more than 100 are deceased.

## N.Y. diocese names 108 priests in abuse cases

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, N.Y., released the names of 108 priests who have been credibly accused of sexually abusing minors during the diocese's 166-year-history.

## Ohio governor takes oath on nine bibles



New Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine was sworn in with his hand on a stack of nine bibles. His son, Ohio Supreme Court Justice Pat DeWine, administered the oath. His wife Fran held all of the bibles. A DeWine spokesman said the governor and first lady wanted a bible to represent each of their eight children. FFRF wrote a strong letter of protest. (See page 8.)

It said about two-thirds of the people on the list are dead. The diocese is one of the largest in the country.

Advocates who track abuse cases said it also roughly doubled the number of suspected abusers they had been aware of in the diocese.

The diocese in 2018 reached a \$27.5 million settlement with four men who said they were abused as boys by a Catholic school teacher between 2003 and 2009.

## Ex-cardinal McCarrick defrocked for sex abuse

The Vatican said Feb. 16 it had defrocked former cardinal Theodore McCarrick.

He is now the highest-ranking church official to be expelled from the priesthood for sex abuse.

A church tribunal found McCarrick guilty of "solicitation in the Sacrament of Confession and sins against the Sixth Commandment with minors and with adults, with the aggravating factor of the abuse of power," the Vatican said.

Pope Francis has approved the ruling and there is no possibility of appeal, the statement said.

McCarrick, 88, resigned his post as cardinal last year after an investigation found evidence he had molested a minor altar boy almost a half-century ago.

Another man told The New York Times that he was in his 20s when McCarrick abused him in the 1980s. McCarrick was a bishop in New Jersey at the time.

## Vatican official quits after abuse accusation

A Vatican official who handles sexual abuse cases for the Catholic Church quit two months after being accused of sexual abuse.

On Jan. 28, Hermann Geissler resigned from his position as chief of staff in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, a body that handles discipline in sexual abuse cases within the Catholic Church. Geissler maintained his innocence but said he was resigning to protect the church.

## Supreme Court blocks abortion law in La.

On Feb. 7, Chief Justice John Roberts joined with the Supreme Court's liberals to block a Louisiana law that opponents say would close most of the state's abortion clinics and leave it with only one doctor eligible to perform the procedure.

The justices may yet consider whether the 2014 law — requiring doctors at abortion clinics to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals — unduly burdens women's access to abortion.

The Louisiana law has never been enforced, and the Supreme Court in 2016 found a nearly identical Texas law to be unconstitutional.

"The Supreme Court has stepped in under the wire to protect the rights of Louisiana women," said Nancy Northup, president and CEO of the Center for Reproductive Rights, which represented the law's challengers.

But the legal challenge isn't over, so Roberts' position on the merits remains to be seen.

## Lawyers: Kim Davis must pay legal bills

Lawyers for Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin say former Rowan County Clerk Kim Davis should be held responsible for nearly \$225,000 in legal fees and court costs incurred by couples who sued her in 2015 when she refused to issue marriage licenses because of her religious opposition to same-sex marriage.

A three-judge panel of the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati heard arguments about who should bear the case's expenses.

A district judge ruled in 2017 that the couples suing for marriage licenses clearly prevailed and that the state of Kentucky must pay their fees and costs.

Bevin appealed that ruling, hoping to hand the bill instead to the Rowan County clerk's office. Davis acted alone, without any state support, the governor's lawyers told the 6th Circuit in briefs ahead of the oral arguments.

## Iowa abortion restriction ruled unconstitutional

An Iowa state judge on Jan. 22 struck down the state's so-called "fetal heartbeat" law, declaring one of the nation's most restrictive abortion bans unconstitutional.

The law, signed in May, would ban doctors from performing most abortions once a fetal heartbeat is detected. That can happen as early as six weeks into a pregnancy, before many women even know they are pregnant.

"Today's ruling is a victory for every Iowan who has ever needed or will need a safe, legal abortion," Planned Parenthood of the Heartland's medical director, Dr. Jill Meadows, said.

## Waiver granted to Christian ministry

The Trump administration said Jan. 22 it was granting a Christian ministry in South Carolina permission to participate in the federally funded foster-care program, even though the group will work only with Christian families.

Last year, the South Carolina Department of Social Services learned of Miracle Hill's policy, notified the group it was in violation of federal law and downgraded it to a provisional license. Gov. Henry McMaster then asked Health and Human Services for a waiver.

HHS said it would grant this waiver, days before the group's provisional license was set to expire. The department argued that the Obama-era regulation was ill-conceived and that some of its requirements "are not reflected" in the underlying statute.

## Supreme Court denies Muslim imam at execution

The Supreme Court on Feb. 7 allowed the execution of a Muslim inmate in Alabama whose request that his imam be present had been denied.

The vote was 5 to 4, with the four more liberal members of the court in dissent. The majority offered little reasoning but said that the inmate, Domineque Ray, had waited too long to object. Justice Elena Kagan, writing for the dissenters, said the majority was "profoundly wrong."

She wrote, "a Christian prisoner may have a minister of his own faith accompany him into the execution chamber to say his last rites. But if an inmate practices a different religion — whether Islam, Judaism or any other — he may not die with a minister of his own faith by his side."

In June, the Supreme Court declined to reconsider the appeal.

## Montana ends tuition tax credit program

The Montana Supreme Court invalidated the state's tuition tax credit in December, ending a program that allowed taxpayers to fund scholarships for private schools, most of which are religious-based.

Taxpayers could donate up to \$150 toward scholarships for students attending private schools — the majority of which are religious in Montana — and then receive a \$150 credit on their tax bills.

The Montana Department of Revenue determined the program unlawfully aided religion-based schools.



FFRF NEWS

Latin cross dishonors freethinking veterans

U.S. Supreme Court to rule on Maryland cross

A huge Christian cross on public land in Maryland is massively disrespectful to nonreligious Americans, the Freedom From Religion Foundation and four other secular groups are contending before the U.S. Supreme Court.

The friend-of-the-court brief in support of the American Humanist Association’s case before the Supreme Court was filed Jan. 30 by FFRF, the Center for Inquiry, American Atheists, Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers, and the Secular Coalition for America.

The Supreme Court will be holding oral arguments on Feb. 27 in the challenge of a major 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals victory that the American Humanist Association obtained in October 2017. The appeals court affirmed that a mega-cross, which was erected as a war memorial in Bladensburg, Md., is unconstitutional. It held that the 40-foot-tall cross “excessively entangles the government in religion” because the cross is the “core symbol of Christianity” and “breaches” the constitutional wall dividing state and church. The petitioners challenging this ruling are the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission and the American Legion.

The Supreme Court needs to keep in mind the rights and sensibilities of the

large disbelieving portion of the U.S. population while making its decision, the secular groups urge in their joint amicus brief. As secular and humanist organizations that promote freedom of conscience for those who do not practice religion, the groups’ brief offers a unique viewpoint on government display of religious symbols and the exclusion of religious minorities and nonbelievers.

The government’s use of prominent religious symbols serves to stigmatize, marginalize and diminish that large portion of citizens who exercise their constitutional right not to believe or practice a religion. These same trends are present in the U.S. military. In 2017, more than 30 percent of the active duty population of the American military did not affiliate with any religion. The five secular groups note that those soldiers risk their lives to defend our country. So, when we purport to honor them, why would we do so in a manner that disrespects their nonbelief?

“The ‘First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion,’” to quote the U.S. Supreme Court, the brief observes.

The brief asks the court to imagine if the shoe were on the other foot: A Christian who takes for granted being surrounded by Latin crosses and other Christian symbols might well think



Photo from Wikimedia Commons

The fate of the 40-foot cross in Bladensburg, Md., will be decided by the Supreme Court. FFRF has filed a friend-of-the-court brief backing the American Humanist Association’s case to have it removed.

twice about seeing an Islamic crescent or Wiccan pentangle or atheist atom on a prominent government building, display or monument, especially one purporting to honor the sacrifice of those with different religious views.

When deciding whether the Establishment Clause permits the government to use the Latin cross to collectively honor fallen soldiers, the historical practices of the U.S. military reveal that the military has scrupulously avoided using sectarian symbols, such as Latin crosses, to mark the graves of soldiers who practice a different religion.

The secular groups write: “This understanding requires no logical leap: A Latin cross is unmistakably ‘the preeminent symbol of Christianity,’” to quote the U.S. Supreme Court.

The U.S. solicitor general and others are asking the court to disregard the harm to nonbelievers from the government’s use of Christian symbols, arguing that there cannot be an Establishment Clause violation without a showing of coercion.

Establishment Clause principles have long prevented government from stigmatizing nonbelievers. And those principles are particularly salient today, because tens of millions of Americans identify with no religion.

That’s why FFRF and four other like-minded organizations are urging the U.S. Supreme Court to uphold the ruling of the 4th Circuit. A judgment to the contrary would dishonor the innumerable soldiers without belief who have fought and died for our nation.

FFRF chides new governors over sectarian events

It was an inauspicious start to the new terms of several governors around the country, as they made references to God or held worship services as part of the official inaugural celebrations.

FFRF urged each of these governors, in writing, that the governor’s offices in these states honor our secular form of government and keep divisive and unnecessary religion out of state-sponsored events.

Ohio

An overdose of bibles at the new Ohio governor’s swearing in caused FFRF to be concerned about the constitutional health of the Buckeye State.

Gov. Mike DeWine chose to be officially sworn on Jan. 14 in at a religious ceremony held in his home, with Christian hymns, prayers, and an overemphasis on religion that included swearing in on not one, not two, but nine bibles.

This conveyed a fealty not to the United States, but rather to DeWine’s own religious beliefs, FFRF asserts. Instead of swearing in on nine bibles, it would have been far more appropriate for DeWine to swear in on the U.S. Constitution, a godless and entirely secular document, whose only references to religion are exclusionary.

Oklahoma

Newly inaugurated Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt had not even been in office one week before violating the Constitution he took an oath to uphold.

The day after his inauguration, Stitt and his wife attended an Inaugural prayer service at the First Baptist Church of Moore. During the service, he report-



Kevin Stitt



Kristi Noem



Bill Lee



Tony Evers

edly declared his mission as a governor to be a religious mission, to “join in with what God is doing in Oklahoma.”

Then, Oklahoma First Lady Sarah Stitt followed with similarly troublesome statements, telling Christians to use their position in elected office to convert people to Christianity: “We are God’s kingdom here on Earth. It is our call to go out into our state and save people and bring people to Him.”

**South Dakota**

On Jan. 6 — her first full day as governor of South Dakota — Gov. Kristi Noem sponsored a church service in the Capitol rotunda. The event was billed as an “Inaugural Worship Service with Governor Noem,” explicitly tying this religious event to her inauguration and public office. Despite assurances that “all [were] welcome,” this event made no attempt at being an “interfaith” service; every aspect was decidedly Christian in nature.

The service featured Christian music, a full sermon by a pastor, and multiple group prayers. One of these prayers, led by a woman who identified herself as the new governor’s family friend, endorsed a Christian

nationalist vision for South Dakota. She even pivoted from Christian nationalism to exorcism, praying that “any demon that may try to come in this place is kicked out.”

“We hope that you can see how your endorsement of an event at which attendees were asked to pray that ‘the Holy Spirit absolutely takes over every corner and every crevice of this Capitol and this state’ sent an unmistakable message to all nonreligious South Dakotans ‘that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community,’” FFRF Legal Fellow Colin McNamara wrote to the governor, quoting the U.S. Supreme Court. “We urge you to focus on the secular business of governing, and leave church services where they belong — in a church.”

**Tennessee**

Tennessee Gov.-elect Bill Lee sold tickets to a government-sponsored religious service under the guise of it being the Inaugural Ceremony. Media reported the Jan. 19 event as a “star-studded prayer service at the Ryman Auditorium.”

The governor-elect’s website sold

tickets to the event, offering those who pay \$7,500 “reserved section seating for two at the Inaugural swearing-in ceremony and the worship service.”

Wisconsin

The new governor in FFRF’s home state started his tenure with a major state/church misstep, causing FFRF to formally complain.

On Jan. 7, Wisconsin Gov. Tony Evers’ Inaugural — the first state-sponsored event with him at the helm — included religious (almost completely Christian) content that led local FFRF members who were in attendance to feel immediately excluded. For example, the ceremony opened with an invocation by the Rev. Willie Brisco that plainly conveyed a Christian message.

The occasion also included a concert of Christian songs by William Reed III Community Choir, a gospel choir, featuring repetitive theological lyrics about worshipping Jesus.

Even the ordinarily banal inclusion of “God bless” by various speakers contributed to an overall impression that the event was intended mainly as a celebration for Wisconsin Christians.

What Is a Freethinker?

**freethinker** *n.*

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



# FFRF, others decry Christian Nationalist drive

A major stealth campaign to legally enshrine Christianity in states all over the country is being forced into the public eye, thanks to dozens of leading constitutionally minded groups, such as the FFRF.

“Project Blitz” is a coordinated national effort by the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation and others to incorporate Christian nationalism in state laws across the country. It promotes a three-tiered framework of state bills intended to incrementally redefine religious freedom to tear down the separation of church and state, with each tier laying the groundwork for the next.

Religious freedom is a fundamental American value, FFRF and the 42 other organizations, which range from American Atheists to Muslim Advocates, maintain in a joint statement spotlighting Project Blitz.

“The separation of church and state . . . is the linchpin of religious freedom and a hallmark of our democracy,” the statement asserts. “It ensures that each person has the right to choose whether



to practice a religion or be nonreligious without pressure from the government.”

But Project Blitz is out to breach the wall of separation.

“An alarming effort is underway to harness the power of the government to impose its faith onto everyone else, including our public school students,” the statement contends. “This effort seeks to transform religious freedom into a sword that can be used to harm others, undermining important civil rights protections and health care access, especially for women, LGBTQ people, those of minority faiths, and the nonreligious.”

Therefore, FFRF and other secular organizations urge legislators across the nation to oppose Project Blitz and similar efforts. America is stronger when the government gives no set of religions or beliefs more power or preference than any other — and when everyone is welcome and treated equally under the law.

FFRF is proud to be part of this combined initiative, organized by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, to preserve our secular values and ensure that the nefarious “Project Blitz” project to undermine our Constitution doesn’t succeed.

## FFRF meets with Freethought Caucus



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker and Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel were among leaders of several national secular organizations invited to meet with members of the new Congressional Freethought Caucus in January. Members of the Congressional Freethought Caucus in attendance were U.S. Reps. Jamie Raskin, D-Md. (front row, second from left), Jerry McNerney, D-Calif. (front row, fourth from left) and Jared Huffman, D-Calif. (back row, fourth from left).

## Michigan pulls out of three FFRF lawsuits

Michigan is withdrawing itself from opposing three of FFRF’s cases under the leadership of its new Attorney General Dana Nessel.

The state had previously been part of a group led by conservative attorneys general that opposed FFRF’s ongoing litigation to ensure the separation of state and church. Previous Attorney General Bill Schuette had filed briefs in opposition of FFRF. Nessel has honorably decided that, under her leadership, the state will no longer waste legal resources on these cases.



The three cases are: *Freedom From Religion Foundation v. Lehigh*, *Gaylor v. Mnuchin*, and *Barker v. Conroy*.

“I will not use this office to undermine some of the most important values in our state, including those involving reproductive rights and the separation of church and state,” Nessel said in a statement announcing the state’s withdrawal.

FFRF applauds Nessel on her decision.

“The new AG has demonstrated commendable leadership by choosing to honor the values of Michigan citizens over religious interest groups,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We hope this serves as an example to other attorneys general that their positions are better served upholding the law than weaponizing religious liberty to target vulnerable groups.”

### 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.

Color Edition! Published by FFRF

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

## FFRF couldn’t have said it better

Gov. Andrew Cuomo, in a New York Times op-ed Feb.7:

Mr. Trump and the Religious Right are spreading falsehoods about New York’s law to inflame their base. Activists on the far right continue to mislead with the ridiculous claim that the act will allow abortions up to a minute before birth. . . . The 73 percent of New Yorkers who support *Roe* includes 59 percent of Catholics. While governments may very well enact laws that are consistent



Photo: Marc A. Hermann  
Andrew Cuomo

with religious teaching, governments do not pass laws to be consistent with what any particular religion dictates.

I was educated in religious schools, and I am a former altar boy. My Roman Catholic values are my personal values. The decisions I choose to make in my life, or in counseling my daughters, are based on my personal moral and religious beliefs.

Thanks to the nation’s founders, no elected official is empowered to make personal religious beliefs the law of the land. My oath of office is to the Constitutions of the United States and of the State of New York — not to the Catholic Church. My religion cannot demand favoritism as I execute my public duties.

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

Illustrated by Seymore Cwast, published by FFRF

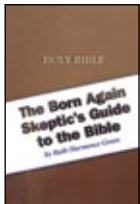


#### Strike Three

A broken clock can tell the time  
Correctly twice a day,  
Astrologers, like broken clocks,  
Are clairvoyant that way.

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

## FFRF’s classic ‘Freethinker’ mug

Our classic ‘Freethinker’ mug has been re-created. White imprint on classic blue, matte finish. 9.5 fl.oz. American-made mug.

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\$20 postpaid — Item#MU01

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# FFRF VICTORIES

By Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey

Here’s a state-by-state look at the numerous victories FFRF has won recently.

## ARIZONA

### Tuba City

Tuba City Unified School District #15 will no longer allow prayer at its graduation ceremonies.

FFRF was informed that Tuba City Junior High School’s 2018 graduation ceremony included an opening prayer led by a student. FFRF Associate Counsel Elizabeth Cavell wrote to Superintendent Sharlene Navaho, stating that unconstitutional religious rituals should not be part of graduation ceremonies or any other school-sponsored events.

The superintendent responded to FFRF’s complaint with assurances that “religious prayers will not be permitted at [their] graduation ceremonies.

## CALIFORNIA

### Rocklin

Rocklin Academy Charter School will move an annual field trip from a Christian camp retreat to a secular location in the future.

A concerned parent reported that Rocklin Academy Gateway takes an annual field trip to Alliance Redwoods Conference Grounds (ARCG), an evangelical retreat. ARCG’s mission is to provide a place “where our guests meet the Creator in his Creation,” according to the camp director in a promotional video.

FFRF Associate Counsel Elizabeth Cavell wrote to the district, outlining the plethora of the religious entanglements associated with taking students to this camp.

The school has put a plan in place to ensure this year’s trip does not include any religious proselytization, including vetting the curriculum and never allowing camp staff to be alone with students without school chaperones present. Next year’s trip will then be moved to a secular location.

## GEORGIA

### Bibb County

FFRF has ensured that Bibb County School District will no longer include prayer in district-sponsored meetings.

A district employee reported that a mandatory employee meeting at Central High School last August began with a prayer that lasted between three and five minutes and invoked Jesus. The complainant also noted that this is not the first time they had been subjected to prayers at BCSD meetings.

FFRF’s Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote to the district’s legal counsel, asking the district to refrain from including prayers in meetings.

FFRF received a response from Chief Legal Counsel Randy Howard, indicating that the district has resolved the issue.

## IDAHO

### Filer

The infamous bible-distributing Gideons will not be allowed back in the Filer School District.

FFRF received a complaint that Gideons International, an organization whose mission is to spread Christian doctrine, was allowed to distribute bibles to students at Filer Intermediate School in November. The school

also reportedly made a school-wide announcement over the PA system to promote distribution.

FFRF Associate Counsel Elizabeth Cavell sent a letter to Superintendent John Graham, alerting him to the situation. Cavell reminded the district of its constitutional obligation to remain neutral on matters of religion and to protect both its students’ and parents’ rights of conscience from religious proselytization on school property.

The superintendent has spoken with the staff at Filer Intermediate School and ensured that they would not allow the Gideons back on school property.

## ILLINOIS

### Effingham

FFRF has extracted a pledge from an Illinois school district to curb creationism-promoting events in its schools.

A concerned district parent contacted FFRF after discovering that a fourth-grade math assignment at Central Grade School in Effingham included unconstitutional overt religious instruction.

The assignment consisted of counting the total number of gifts given in the lyrics of the song, “The Twelve Days of Christmas.” Completely superfluous to the task, students were given religious metaphors for each lyric in the song. The assignment stated that “the ‘true love’ of the song refers to God,” “The partridge in a pear tree was Jesus Christ,” etc.

FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne wrote to Effingham CUSD #40 Superintendent Mark Doan, citing the unconstitutionality of the math exercise.

The district responded to FFRF’s complaint on Jan. 28, acknowledging that the religious material was inappropriate and assuring that no similar violation will occur in the future.

## KANSAS

### Wichita

A public marquee in Wichita Public Schools will no longer advertise an after-school bible club.

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote to Unified School District No. 259’s general counsel, alerting the school to the unconstitutionality of using a school-owned marquee to advertise religious clubs.

The school has adjusted its policy and, in the future, only official school-sponsored activities will be advertised on the sign.

## KENTUCKY

### Hopkins County

An employee in Hopkins County Schools reported that this year’s “Superintendent’s Day” was rife with religious proselytizing and prayer. “Superintendent’s Day” is a mandatory gathering for all district staff that is ostensibly for team-building and staff development.

The complainant reported several events that were highly religiously charged, including the reading of a biblical passage and a speech given that was based on the biblical story David and Goliath, among others.

The school’s attorney replied to FFRF’s Robert Ingersoll Legal Fellow Colin McNamara’s letter, assuring FFRF that they will “continue to monitor all of these and other issues to ensure compliance with appropriate

federal and state law and local Board policy.”

### Pike County

A Christian adventure comedy called “The Star” will not be shown in Pike County Schools again.

A Valley Elementary School parent reported to FFRF that a third-grade science teacher at the school showed a film called “The Star” in class. The movie apparently follows the biblical account of the birth of Jesus. Christian themes are reportedly also portrayed throughout the movie, including a reliance on prayer for guidance and a desire to do God’s will.

FFRF Legal Fellow Colin McNamara wrote the district, requesting that it “make certain that none of its employees is unlawfully and inappropriately indoctrinating students in religious matters.”

The district’s attorney responded to the letter by letting FFRF know he had spoken with the school’s principal and advised him to speak to his staff about the issue and to refrain from showing this movie or any like it in the future.

### Rowan County

FFRF addressed two separate instances of coach-sponsored prayer in Rowan County Schools, prompting the district to remind district employees of their constitutional obligations.

First, a concerned parent of a Rowan County Senior High School band member contacted FFRF to report that the band was subjected to a group prayer as part of a mandatory practice last October. Then, separately, a parent reported that, last December, Rowan County Schools basketball coaches joined hands with players for an on-court prayer circle.

In both instances, FFRF Legal Fellow Colin McNamara wrote to the district, asking that it cease the practice of allowing adults to proselytize to its students.

The district’s response assures FFRF that “school district central office personnel have met with principals, coaches and other school-level personnel to remind them of their obligation to refrain from any actions which have the appearance of endorsing religion, even if unplanned and unintentional, while at the same time refraining from demonstrating open hostility toward the sincerely held religious beliefs of others.”

## MICHIGAN

### Kentwood

FFRF received an exemplary response from a school district in Kentwood after reporting a substitute teacher praying with students in Kentwood Public Schools.

A concerned Southwood Elementary School parent contacted FFRF after a substitute teacher led third-grade students in prayer in the classroom. The complainant reported that after the class recited the Pledge of Allegiance, he told the class “when I was in third grade, we prayed.” He then proceeded to pray aloud, with many of the students joining in.

FFRF Legal Fellow Colin McNamara wrote to Superintendent Michael Zoerhoff, outlining the constitutional issues being violated.

Zoerhoff thanked FFRF for bringing this matter to his attention, and directed the district’s human resources department to investigate the incident.

The district notified the substitute’s employer, and has enacted a plan to ensure that this violation will not happen again.

## MISSOURI

### Columbia

A Columbia Public Schools employee has been reminded of his obligation to refrain from leading or participating in religious clubs at school.

A concerned district community member reported that a teacher and basketball coach at Gentry Middle School had been actively leading a Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) club at the school for several years. FCA is a Christian organization whose mission is to “lead every coach and athlete into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and his church.”

FFRF Legal Fellow Colin McNamara wrote to Superintendent Peter Stiepleman, alerting him to this teacher’s unlawful leadership of the club.

The district investigated the matter and spoke with the teacher. “We reiterated the school districts’ position,” the superintendent’s letter read, “that children may form religious clubs, but that teachers/staff, in their capacity as school employees, may not participate in or lead any type of religious clubs.”

## NEBRASKA

### Stapleton

Promotions for a religious Todd Becker Foundation event have been removed from Stapleton Public Schools’ website.

Stapleton Public Schools had been promoting and endorsing a religious worship event being put on by the Todd Becker Foundation at North Platte High School.

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote to the district, asking that it remove the unconstitutional religious promotion immediately. Superintendent Howard Gaffney responded quickly, complying with the request and thanking FFRF for bringing the matter to his attention.

## OHIO

### Marlington

A teacher at Marlington High School has been instructed to refrain from leading Youth 4 Christ, a religious club at the school. While the teacher is listed as the “faculty advisor” for this club, the complainant reported that he also organizes and participates in the

MOVING?



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club’s events and activities.

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote a letter to ensure that district staff members do not continue organizing or participating in religious student clubs.

The district sent a response letter informing FFRF that Marlinton Local Superintendent Joe Knoll has spoken with the club advisor and shared the constitutional concerns presented by FFRF.

**Jeromesville**

A school district in Ohio will no longer assign students to complete religious Christmas projects, thanks to intervention from FFRF.

A concerned parent in the Hillsdale Local School District in Jeromesville reported that Hillsdale Elementary School required its students to complete a religious craft assignment last December. The project included a specifically religious message, “Jesus is the reason we celebrate the season.”

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote the district to alert it to the unconstitutionality of such an assignment and ensure that, in the future, students are not required to complete explicitly religious projects.

Hillsdale Superintendent Steven Dickerson said in a response letter that “the matter had been addressed and [he] does’ not anticipate anything like this happening again.”

**OKLAHOMA**

**Midwest City**

The Midwest City school district is taking steps to ensure it is in compliance with its constitutional obligation to remain neutral on religion.

A parent in the Mid-Del School District reported that Schwartz Elementary School held a Christmas concert last December that included religious worship music. The complainant reported that students sang “Happy Birthday” to Jesus and about how much they love Jesus.

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote a letter to Superintendent Rick Cobb, who then responded, saying he is “aware of the incident and [they] are taking steps internally to ensure that the practices of our schools and staff are in alignment with state and federal laws.”

**NORTH CAROLINA**

**Johnston County**

A teacher in the Johnston County School District has removed a religious email signature from his school account.

A parent in the district reported that a teacher at South Jackson High School was sending emails from his school email account with religious messages included in the signature line. An email received by our complainant included the message, “What we are born with is God’s gift



Life Member Ken Clark sent us this photo taken near his home in Kent, Wash. The answers you’d get from Christians and nonbelievers are as different as night and day.

to us. What we do with it is our gift to God.”

The principal of the school discussed the issue with the teacher and the email signature has been removed.

**PENNSYLVANIA**

**Nazareth**

FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert sent a letter to the borough administrator of Nazareth after a local resident contacted FFRF to report a cross that was displayed on what the complainant understood to be public property. The display has a silhouette of a soldier kneeling next to a Latin Cross on the base of a cannon.

FFRF received a response from the borough explaining that while the property in question is not actually owned by the borough of Nazareth, the cross was removed as it was placed without permission or approval from the Nazareth Borough Council.

**TENNESSEE**

**Hamblen County**

The superintendent of Hamblen County Schools has instructed all teachers and administrators to refrain from unconstitutional religious endorsement after a religious prayer was delivered “in Jesus’ name” during an in-school Veteran’s Day event.

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line sent a letter, lauding the district for organizing an event to honor veterans, but reminding the district that, in order to honor all veterans and their obligation to the Constitution, they may not include religious prayers in school events.

The superintendent assured in his response to FFRF that the district will “be more vigilant in [its] efforts to prevent activities that are unconstitutional or illegal.”

**TEXAS**

**Denton**

Religious rituals will not be included in district-sponsored meetings in the Denton Independent School District anymore.

A district employee contacted FFRF to report that the district invited a religious leader from Morse Street Baptist Church to give a Christian prayer at the staff Christmas party at Thomas Rivera Elementary. The complainant reported that this was a district-sponsored event and that the school principal made clear to all employees that they were intended to be in attendance.

Associate Counsel Sam Grover wrote to ensure that no prayer is scheduled at district-sponsored events.

Superintendent of Schools Jamie Wilson responded to FFRF’s letters with assurances that they would investigate the situation and “in doing so all of our employees will be educated that prayers during mandatory training programs and staff meetings presents the message that school district decisively endorses a particular religious position.”

**Quanah**

FFRF scored two victories for state/church separation in Quanah ISD. FFRF received records from the district which confirm that Quanah High School had a practice of scheduling prayers and religious remarks at its graduation ceremonies. Each graduation ceremony for the last three years has included a program identifying the event as a “Baccalaureate and Commencement” event. Each program has included a scheduled “invocation,” “scripture reading,” “baccalaureate address,” and “benediction.”

The complainant further informed FFRF that several district employees display Christian crosses on district property, in areas frequented by students and members of the public, including a cross on the wall of the Quanah High School principal’s office.

Associate Counsel Sam Grover sent a letter to Quanah ISD, alerting it to the unconstitutionality of both.

FFRF received a response from the district, stating that future graduation ceremonies will no longer include religious prayers and practices and the religious iconography has been removed from all district property.

**Van**

A Texas school district will no longer allow the distribution of bibles in its schools after intervention from FFRF. A concerned parent of a district student reported that Van Middle School

allowed a group of outside adults access to the campus to distribute New Testament bibles to each fifth-grade student during the school day.

FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover wrote to Superintendent Don Dunn to ensure that this sort of illegal bible distribution does not take place in the future.

Dunn responded to FFRF’s letter with assurances that he has addressed the issue with the campus principal and has been assured that this bible distribution will not recur.

**UTAH**

**Davis**

Corrective action has been taken to ensure that a Utah school district will no longer recite prayers at school events.

A concerned citizen reported that North Layton Junior High School in Farmington held a Veterans Day Assembly that included a Christian prayer delivered by the principal.

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line reminded the district that it is unlawful for any school-sponsored event to include prayer and asked that it ensure any future events do not include religion.

The district’s director of education equity sent a response to FFRF.

“Corrective action has been taken to address the situation with [the principal]. The Davis School District Legal Department has reviewed the State and District Policy: Recognizing Freedoms in Public Schools.”

**Orem**

Utah Valley University has reconsidered a continuing education class assignment that centered around creating a nativity scene.

A local Orem resident reported that Utah Valley University’s continuing education program includes a woodcarving class where students will “complete and paint the beginning of a Nativity set: Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus.” Our complainant reported that they considered taking the class but were discouraged from doing so because of the religious theme.

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line reminded Utah Valley University of its obligation to remain neutral on matters of religion and pointed out the exclusionary nature of such an assignment.

The university’s legal counsel responded to FFRF’s letter. “We’re working to ensure inclusive project offerings specifically in the woodcarving course at issue, and hope that the concerned resident you reference will reconsider the course in the near future.”

**WISCONSIN**

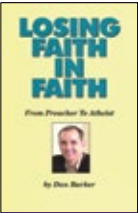
**Amherst**

FFRF wrote to the school board president in the Tomorrow River School District to urge the school not to lease space in St. James and St. Mary of Mount Carmel Church in Amherst for classes as it was considering doing.

After reviewing records related to the selection of classroom space for Tomorrow River, FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne sent a letter urging the board to select one of the alternative secular classroom spaces.

Board President Mark Kryshak said that, at the time of his response, the board does not support leasing the church space and is looking at other options.

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



By Dan Barker

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

Published by FFRF

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



Edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

Published by FFRF

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# FFRF ad blitz hits Chicago, despite censors

The Catholic Church’s clout in the Chicago area has resulted in the Windy City’s two daily newspapers rejecting a Freedom From Religion Foundation media campaign that spotlighted a survivor of priest abuse. The ad urged: “Stop ignoring headlines: It’s time to leave the Catholic Church.”

Chicago’s alternative weekly, the Chicago Reader, demonstrated more bravery than the Chicago Tribune and the Sun-Times and published the full-page ad on Jan. 31. (See ad below.)

A Chicago-area FFRF member who was sexually abused at age 13 by his parish priest suggested and underwrote the FFRF ad and is using a portion of his church settlement to pay for the plea to the public to abandon the Catholic Church. (See story below.) The person asked that the ad be timed to run during National Catholic Schools Week (Jan. 27-Feb. 2).

After encountering print censorship, FFRF fought back by placing prominent billboards all over Chicago, including a 20-by-60-foot sign



In February, FFRF placed 11 digital billboards throughout the Chicago area showing this message.

on the Kennedy Expressway west of Montrose, stating, “Value Children over Dogma: It’s Time to Leave the Catholic Church.” The powerful image depicts a small schoolgirl hiding her face. (See Page 1 for the billboard image.) That message went up in February for the entire month.

Additionally, through Feb. 10, 11 digital billboards in the Chicago area showed the message: “It’s Time to

Quit the Church.”

The ad in the Chicago Reader lists a series of real newspaper headlines about the ongoing revelations of massive priestly abuse of children and the subsequent Church cover-up, urging readers to stop supporting the world’s largest and most powerful religious institution.

The suppression of FFRF’s ad by Chicago’s two dailies shows the power

of the Catholic Church to intimidate its critics, maintains Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

“The ‘look the other way’ deference the Church has continually demanded and received — from congregations, media, police and courts — is the very reason why so many horrific crimes against children have occurred and gone unreported and unprosecuted in the first place,” Gaylor says. “The Catholic Church remains a virtuoso in silencing not only its critics, but its hundreds of thousands of victims — including one Chicago-area victim seeking to spare future children similar abuse.”

Adds Tom Cara, volunteer director of FFRF Metropolitan Chicago Chapter, which helped oversee the ad campaign: “It is tragic when a major metropolitan’s two largest newspapers elect not to publish a public condemnation of an organization’s horrific crimes. Our ad is a plea for help from a victim, and it is being ignored in order to protect the offenders.”

## My life of mental anguish after a priestly assault

*This article was written by a generous FFRF member who used a portion of his sexual-abuse settlement money to underwrite FFRF’s billboards and full-page ad pushing people to leave the Catholic Church. He wishes to remain anonymous.*

At the tender age of 13, an event occurred that would change my life.

After serving mass as an altar boy for a wedding, I was in the sacristy getting ready to go home. One of the parish priests then pinned me against the cabinets and molested me. That was a frightening, life-altering and traumatic event. The mental anguish continues for me to this day.

Up until then, I had lived a relatively normal life. I was born and raised on the southwest side of Chicago and its suburbs. I was the fifth child of seven. My dad worked in construction, and my mom held many different jobs throughout her work life, mostly working second shift. That way, one of them would always be home when we were kids. I was fortunate I had great loving parents and never knew hunger. I always had a clean, loving home atmosphere.

I was raised as a Catholic, christened shortly after birth, made the sacraments, was an altar boy and attended Catholic grammar and high schools. However, other than losing touch with some friends, there is not a thing I miss about that experience.

But the trauma of that day all those years ago caused me to withdraw and isolate myself and my thoughts to the point where I told no one about my experience.

My mother and father died without ever knowing about the abuse I endured. In fact, as a 13-year-old, I took on an adult role of not sharing the news with anyone, largely to protect my parents.

Because I never told anyone about it, when my wife and I got married (she was raised Catholic, as well), I found myself standing in a church — haunted by memories of when I was molested during another wedding. (I felt that if we did not participate in a Catholic Church ceremony, it would raise too many questions, so I just did it.)

Eventually, I filed a lawsuit against the Archdiocese of Chicago. After several years of legal wrangling, I reached a monetary settlement. But it felt good to get the abuse and the abuser documented. I also realized that much of the public either wasn’t aware of or didn’t care about the size, scope and magnitude of the abuse by Catholic priests.

You can imagine, ever since the abuse, I have viewed the whole church/God/priest thing in a very different way. I look at all religions with a large amount skepticism.

I chose not to go public with this because I am well aware of the power and the influence of the Catholic Church, that it can destroy people’s relationships and lives. It has the money, power and resources to

ADVERTISEMENT

**Stop IGNORING THE HEADLINES**

Stunning findings on report of Catholic Church abuse: Pa. priests molested more than 1,000 children  
-Fox News, August 14, 2018

Pope ignores the damage as another prelate falls  
-New York Times, October 12, 2018

Feds launch sex abuse investigation of Pennsylvania's Roman Catholic Church  
-NPR, October 19, 2018

"Priests were raping little boys and girls, and the men of God who were responsible for them not only did nothing; they hid it all. For decades..."  
-Grand Jury report on allegations of sexual abuse in the Pennsylvania Catholic Church

After five years in the papacy, the response from Pope Francis about these crimes has been a call for prayers and fasting, and the offering of empty apologies. The perpetrators should no longer be allowed to police themselves. It's up to each and every one of us to help stop the victimization of children.

This message is being underwritten during National Catholic Schools Week by a Chicago-area FFRF member. He is using a portion of his settlement with the church to pay for this appeal, with the hope that it will help spare future children similar abuse at the hands of clergy. He writes:

"After serving mass for a wedding at age 13, I was attacked and molested in the sacristy by my parish priest. The trauma that followed caused me to withdraw and isolate myself to the point where I told no one for years about my experience. My parents died without ever knowing about the abuse I endured."

**IT'S TIME TO LEAVE THE CHURCH**

**And join FFRF in our vital work to liberate minds and place humanity above dogma**

Or ask for a brochure about FFRF's significant achievements. We'll also send a complimentary copy of FFRF's newspaper, *Freethought Today*.

**Join FFRF: 1.800.335.4021 | FFRF.us/humanity**

This ad is being run in conjunction with the FFRF Metropolitan Chicago Chapter ([www.ffrf.mcc.org](http://www.ffrf.mcc.org)).

**FFRF.ORG**

**FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION**

This ad ran in the The Chicago Reader after a similar ad was refused by the Tribune and Sun-Times.

re-victimize the victim. I owe it to my classmates who were also molested, but chose not to come out, to not expose their situations. I did not want to make it any harder on them than what they already endured.

After receiving the settlement from the Catholic Church, I wanted to use the money I received to try to expose religions for what they are: controlling and manipulative. In today’s society, there is still way too much religious influence in our laws and our society. In Illinois, the statute of limitations protects the predators! This needs to be removed. I also believe very strongly in the concept of separation of church and state.

So, I decided a good use of my settlement would be to have FFRF run an ad campaign against the

Catholic Church. I want the public to challenge the validity of the church, I want to promote state/church separation, I want to promote FFRF and all the good work it does and finally, I want to acknowledge the number of religious people in prominent places within our government — i.e., state and federal justices who use their religious perspective and impose it on the rest of us.

Despite the horror of the abuse when I was 13, I have put together a good life. For the last 37 years, I was a union carpenter who was fortunate enough to have helped build the Chicago skyline and its surrounding infrastructure. I hope to continue with the most normal, healthy life I can and enjoy my retirement with my wife.



# Escaping from dangerous oppression

The Freedom From Religion Foundation in January gave a \$5,000 stipend to Shuchessmita Simonti, a young student, secularist and feminist from Bangladesh now seeking refuge in the Netherlands who has been imperiled by her activism. This is part of FFRF's "secular Underground Railroad" grants. Last year, Shuchessmita's mother received a \$5,000 grant from Nonbelief Relief, and also received aid from ICORN and other agencies to remove her from Bangladesh and settle her safely in a European nation.

By Shuchessmita Simonti

I was born in Russia and moved to Bangladesh when I was just 4 or 5 years old. While growing up, I was personally affected by a number of issues that caused deep anguish.

First and foremost, I was born to a Hindu mother and a Muslim father whose marriage did not work out, so I grew up with my mother. As a teenager, I was vulnerable and was bullied on several occasions because my religious identity did not fit into a box. I never learned about religion like many others. I was often made to feel I did not belong in society. As a young girl growing up in Bangladesh, I found myself in a traumatizing situation where I faced sexual abuse and was unable to stand up for my rights.

I felt my life would be better if I moved out of the country. I was elated when I got a scholarship to pursue a bachelor's degree in India. Once I moved to India in 2011, I tried to live my life to the fullest and keep myself safe from the discrimination I had faced earlier. However, being born to parents from Hindu and Muslim background was used against me when I was studying in India. These individuals (mainly from Bangladesh) resisted my ambition to participate in different kinds of events organized for international students. It bothered them that a woman was being so assertive. They tried to shame me for my choice of clothing and for living freely, although that was not enough to kill my enthusiasm. They used my identity to put me in a corner.

In South Asia, religious extremism is one of the major issues of concern and I found myself cornered from all ends. This affected my self-esteem. The feeling of not belonging, of being worthless, like a particle spinning in space without an orbit, was shattering. It started reflecting on my performance



Shuchessmita Simonti with her mother, Supriti Dhar, who also had to leave Bangladesh.

in different activities.

For a while, I found myself withdrawing, but I wanted to find my way back again. And this is when I stumbled upon the world of online volunteering. I joined one nonprofit as a remote volunteer in 2014, and that was my official first step toward feminist activism. I started helping them with social media, and later served in different positions. I found a safe space for myself.

## Activist writing

I had a passion for writing, so I started writing about women's issues I had observed while growing up and submitted them to different student blogs. While I continued to face politicized discrimination, these activities kept me happy despite lack of peace in my life.

In parallel, some developments occurred back home. My mother, Supriti Dhar, who had had a long career in journalism, became involved in activism and eventually founded an online portal for women called Women Chapter. It was initially published in Bengali, but sometimes she also published articles in English. I gave her a few of my articles, which she gladly published.

As the writers started addressing bold and sensitive issues, Women Chapter started getting the attention of political figures and religious extremist groups. Many writers criticized the patriarchal aspects of religion, while some talked about social stigmas. Some pointed out the corrupted and brutal acts of people affiliated with political groups. Some

articles had to be withdrawn because the writer's safety was at stake. Unfortunately, my mother had to bear most of the wrath. She started receiving threats and even lost her job.

I was afraid to go back to Bangladesh for vacation, and only returned to renew my passport. I resemble my mother, and many times when I was in a public place, I was approached by random people who asked if I was related to my mother. Given that she was already being threatened, I began to fear my own safety. In 2015, after we were both threatened, I confined myself for two months, never stepping out without necessity.

At this point I felt I could no longer keep silent. I had to use my own painful experiences and insights to help others. I organized and participated in interfaith dialogues where I felt I could contribute to promoting a culture of tolerance. As a secular and tolerant individual, I wished to foster this culture of tolerance and inclusivity. Around the same time, my mother approached me with a proposal. She told me that she wanted to create an English site of Women Chapter and invited me to be editor of the English website. I agreed, and tried to utilize my own networks to build the portal.

In 2017, I moved to the Netherlands to pursue my master's degree in social justice. I continued working for Women Chapter and I tried to provide a platform for women from diverse backgrounds. In 2018, my mother had to leave Bangladesh. To this date, she is afraid to return as it can cost her life.

## Draconian law

Sometime after she left, I got a message from an acquaintance who sent me a news link. When I opened it, I was in shock! It was a case filed against four women, including my mother and me, on the grounds of insulting Islam. I tried to recall what I could have written to merit this charge, but could not re-

member anything at all. It was filed under a draconian law in Bangladesh that aims to silence voices of dissent. I was scared and shattered at the same time because I knew that it could land me in prison, and also make me a potential target of the extremists.

Given that my mother can no longer live in Bangladesh, and I had no place to live there, I was already in a difficult situation whenever I tried to contemplate my future. Now this accusation brought everything to a standstill. I deactivated my Facebook account in panic. In no time, the news was shared in different religious extremist pages, with claims of punishing us brutally for committing the crime. The news had misspelled my name, so it may take someone awhile to find me. But in the era of technology, it is probably not so difficult to track me.

I refuse to hide my face because I am not a criminal. But I do know that I cannot ensure my safety in Bangladesh. The situation is like being blindfolded and not knowing who will attack. Even if people do not want to attack me for who I am, they can attack me for whose daughter I am. Or because I am affiliated with Women Chapter.

Reflecting on this, I feel a sense of grievance and anger. When I reflect on my life, I did not choose to be born to parents from differing religions. And yet, that made me a target for bullying and harassment. And even though I tried to resist the oppression, the oppression only amplified over time and has escalated into a much more dangerous situation.

We have a lot to do when it comes to protecting individuals who do not fall into the societal norms, or do not abide by them. In so many countries around the world, individuals are being oppressed for being who they are. And often, the government does not care.

Yes, as a child I did not choose my identity, but as an adult individual I made a conscious choice to be a secular feminist and pursue my passion freely. I also hope that in the near future, I can utilize my own experiences to help others.

Shuchessmita has a one-year visa in the Netherlands, allowing her to legally reside there for one year and try to rebuild her life in that country. She has had to leave student housing. The grant will provide her with the time needed to secure her stay there through employment or further studies.



Shuchessmita Simonti is now in the Netherlands after fleeing Bangladesh for her safety.

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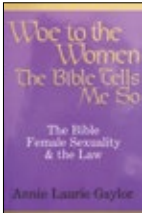
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# A conversation with Cecile Richards

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor sat down with Cecile Richards, former president of Planned Parenthood, for an hour-long discussion at FFRF's national convention in San Francisco on Nov. 3. Richards was given FFRF's Forward Award, which recognizes individuals who have moved society forward. Here is an edited version of that talk.

**Cecile Richards:** I'm so honored to be here, and this award is spectacular. And it's so important because there are barely any monuments of women anywhere in the United States of America.

**Annie Laurie Gaylor:** I just finished reading and loving your book, *Make Trouble: Standing Up, Speaking Out, and Finding the Courage to Lead*. I wondered if you could talk about the very first sentence in your book, "Little lady, you are just trying to make trouble."

I was just a wee child. I grew up in Dallas, Texas, and actually that's where this took place. I was going to the University Park School, a local public school. I was in sixth grade, and my teacher decided to open every day with the Lord's Prayer, which I neither knew the words to or wanted to recite. And I told her that. I said, "I actually don't, that's not what we do in my family." And she replied, "Are you just trying to make trouble?" I realized I really wasn't trying to make trouble, but if she thought I was, then I guess I was and that was OK. And it sort of stuck.

**You just knew it was wrong.**

Exactly. I just felt like, why should she be making me recite a prayer that has nothing to do with me and certainly had nothing to do with my family? We went to the Unitarian church, not because we were religious, but because that was where all the social movements in town were organizing.

**Before we talk about your mother, Ann Richards, you also had a very strong grandmother, Nona. And there's a couple of funny stories about her.**

My mom's parents basically survived the Depression, and really never got over it. They grew everything. They lived down the country, outside Waco. They didn't have any money, so when my grandmother got pregnant with my mom, it was unthinkable that she'd go to the hospital because they didn't have the money and you didn't do that. You had your kids at home. Once she went into labor, she had the neighbor lady come over and make dinner for my grandfather because, of course, it was unthinkable that he would cook dinner for himself. The problem was she had planned chicken for dinner and the neighbor lady didn't know how to kill a chicken. So, my grandmother, Nona, hoists herself up on one elbow in the birthing bed and rings that chicken's neck. And that's how Ann Richards came into this world.

**Tell us about Sarah Weddington, the young woman who argued *Roe v. Wade*, then went on to run for the state Legislature.**

She's as unrepentant a feminist as any woman that ever walked this Earth. Sarah had argued the *Roe v. Wade* case at the age of 26. Still the youngest person ever to win a Supreme Court case. And,

of course, it was a case that came out of Dallas. And then when she came back, even though she had done that, even though she was obviously a renowned attorney, she couldn't even get credit in her own name. She had to have her husband sign for her. She wanted to open a bank account because she had a law firm. She got so mad she decided she'd run for the state Legislature and change the law. And that was in the day when my mom had never worked for a living. She'd always taken care of kids. And Sarah asked Mom to run her campaign.

**When I think of Ann Richards, I sort of assume she'd had a career her whole life. And, of course, no, not in that era.**

Oh, no. In fact, she spent 20 years just building up all this energy. Once she found out about the women's movement, she just never stopped. She basically left us back at home and said, "I'm going to go do this thing." And she ran Sarah's race. Mom was a campaign manager — and that was unheard of. So, we kids got to hand out bumper stickers and learn all those important skills you learn as a young person — like taking down the opponent's yard signs, you know, critical things. [Laughs] And the statute of limitations has passed on all of that, but it was really wild. As a young person, I didn't appreciate what Sarah had done at the Supreme Court. That wasn't really part of my consciousness. But to have a woman win against all odds was really quite amazing. So yeah, Sarah won that race and that's kind of what kicked off Mom's political career.

**So, you were in college by the time your mother was running for governor. She was the first woman to win a statewide office earlier, right?**

Yes. She became county commissioner, which was kind of funny because they thought only men could be county commissioners because you had to do things like look at roads and bridges and heavy machinery. That was really unique to have a woman county commissioner. But then she ran for treasurer.

**Well, let's talk about that then. Because you were in California, right? Doing labor organizing when your mother**

**decided to run.**

Yeah. My husband and I had just had Lily, our first child, and we were just raising hell in Los Angeles. I was organizing immigrant janitors. Kirk was organizing home care workers, folks who take care of people that didn't have a union, didn't have any benefits or work protection. And Mom called and said she was going to run for governor. I mean, it was just like a movie. We just packed up the U-Haul, put all our stuff in, took Lily, put her in the car seat, and we drove to Texas and helped on her campaign.

**It was amazing. Of course, she had gotten into the national consciousness of the Democratic Party. That famous speech.**

Her convention speech in Atlanta. Yes.

**Do you want to quote that one line?**

I can never really quite do it justice because she had more of an accent than I do. But of course, that was the speech that not only launched her, but that people still repeat to me in airports and on the street: "Poor George. He

was born with a silver foot in his mouth."

**George H.W. So, anyway, then she ran for re-election. I know you were very involved. Of course, that was a bitter defeat. But that opened your eyes to a different need.**

Right. So just to back up for a second, I do think one thing is important to remember. I think it's important just to put it in context that Mom was never supposed to be elected governor. It wasn't like people said, "Oh, my god, a progressive woman, pro-choice governor. That's what we need in Texas."

So, every step of the way it was a fight. And there was never a poll showing that she could win that race. Never. And yet people just never gave up. And I do think it is an important lesson. That was 28 years ago, but it was because teachers and farm workers and LGBT activists and students and labor folks or people who had been shut out of government for so long just never gave up. And it was a grassroots uprising.

That is the reason that Ann Richards became governor. It wasn't just her. She just represented the hopes and dreams of a lot of people, and I think we are seeing that now in other parts of the country. At least I hope so. I think it's important to remember that polls don't vote, people vote. Right? And that's really where we have to remember that's what democracy is about.

So anyway, she was governor for four years. But it was also important because she was able to appoint more people of color, women, LGBT leaders, folks who had never been in office than all the previous governors in the state combined and literally changed the face of government in Texas. And that mattered. That actually mattered. Like President Obama did, I think those are things that could never be undone. She did lose re-election to George W. Bush in 1994, that horrible, terrible year. She got beat, Mario Cuomo got beat, Newt Gingrich and sort of the Christian Right took over the House of Representatives. And in Texas, I mean they just, it was a



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Former Planned Parenthood director Cecile Richards speaks with FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor during FFRF's national convention in San Francisco on Nov. 3, 2018.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Cecile Richards poses with comedian Julia Sweeney for a selfie following Richards' convention conversation.



wipeout. It was a total wipeout.

**You were seeing the Christian Coalition begin, and . . .**

Well, it's funny. Yeah, I was. I mean, honestly, I didn't know. I still remember this sort of apocryphal call that I got from a friend of mine in California. She said, "Have you heard about this new group called the Christian Coalition, because we're seeing them out here." And it really wasn't until after the election that we realized how much money organizing had been done in Texas. And I remember very specifically going to plant gates and handing out literature to union guys who had been the backbone of Mom's support and how she'd done so much for organized labor and men snarling at me saying "I'm not going to vote for that baby-killer lesbian." Things like that.

And it wasn't until later we realized there had been a concerted effort around the country, and certainly in Texas, to not only defeat Mom but to elect people to our State Board of Education. And, honestly, they took over the Republican Party in Texas, and they still have control. And that's when I realized, instead of just being despondent, that we needed to organize. And that's how I organized the Texas Freedom Network.

**Which is still thriving.**

Exactly. In fact, it has grown and blossomed and is on the forefront of fighting for separation of church and state, fighting for public education, and fighting for LGBT rights, reproductive rights. I'm just so incredibly proud of the folks that are in Texas doing that work right now.

**Then you went on to found, this is not quite in order, but another group, America Votes. And you write in your book, "Coordinating progressive leaders is like keeping puppies in a basket. Just when they're all in, someone jumps out." So how did you do it, and what is your advice on that?**

Well, it's like that because we're opinionated folks. We don't follow along as sheep. The reason we started it was because I felt like we had all these different groups doing great work, but none of them were really talking to each other. I think the only way that anything ever works is that people don't do things for *your* reasons, they do things for *their* own reasons. What we were able to show is, and I'll never forget being in Pennsylvania, that it was smarter in some areas for the labor union folks to be carrying the message and doing door-to-door outreach on voting. The Planned Parenthood folks could actually just go with them and help and support them. Whereas, in the Philly suburbs, where we have a lot of independent women, labor was able to join up with Planned Parenthood and begin to talk to people about issues that matter to them. And I do believe we've gotten better, but it's very frustrating that we haven't made progress on some fundamental issues of democracy.

**They are being targeted. Now as a co-founder myself of a nonprofit with the Freedom From Religion Foundation, I nodded my head all the time when you were writing about nonprofits and talking about what a privilege it is to work for social justice, and I can't believe they pay you to make trouble. That's how I feel. But I sympathized also about something that came up with Planned Parenthood and abortion. Peo-**



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Cecile Richards shows off her Forward Award, presented to her by Annie Laurie Gaylor.

**ple would come up to you and say, "Why don't you change your name?" or "Why don't you separate out the abortion from the contraceptive?"**

I spent a lot of time on this topic, and so for those of you who don't know much about Planned Parenthood, we just turned 102, so we've been around a long, long time. It's important to put in context, too, that we were born in controversy. People say, "My gosh, Planned Parenthood is so controversial." I say, "Well, if we aren't, then we're not doing our job, right?" Our founder was thrown in jail. As we know, Margaret Sanger and her sister opened up a completely illegal birth control center to hand out pamphlets to women. Even though it was illegal, folks lined up from day one. And it wasn't until 10 days later that an undercover cop posing as a mother busted Margaret, threw her in jail where she taught all of her fellow inmates about birth control. I like to remind people of that. That is the spirit.

On this whole topic, abortion, it's important to me that people, that all of us, understand that abortion is healthcare. It's health care for people who are pregnant, and they need the right to it, and it's not different. At Planned Parenthood, we are never going to be where you go in one door if you're getting an abortion or you're going to the other door for other care.

For us, it is the continuum of reproductive health care. So much has been done to stigmatize and shame people who have had abortions. And one of the most important things I think we've been doing over the last decade, led by the reproductive justice movement that was way out in front of this, is for women to actually share their abortion stories. And it is incredibly important to me that we all, that everyone who can, is public about this because it is not uncommon.

I had an abortion. I wrote about it in a women's magazine. And I can't tell you the number of women who come up to me and say, "Thank you for sharing your story because I was able to go home and share my story for the first time with my family." We've got to make sure that we keep abortion safe, legal and available. And I know that there are folks in this audience that help do that.

I do write about one person in particular who wanted us to quit providing abortion, but I don't know if you're going to ask about him. It's OK. He's related to the president. Jared Kushner.

**Go ahead.**

Yeah, well, good. I had gotten a call after the election that Ivanka Trump wanted to meet, wondering how she could help with Planned Parenthood because obviously the president had said he was going to defund us. And I thought, "OK." I really didn't want to go, but then I talked my husband into going. I said, "Kirk maybe you would go with me because I just want a witness."

**Was it a very weird meeting?**

It was, actually. It was a meeting at one of the golf clubs, a Trump golf club, I guess. Jared Kushner and Ivanka were there. Jared said, "Look, we control everything now. Republicans have the White House. We have the House, we have the Senate. So, if you want to keep your funding, you're going to have to make a deal with us." He basically said, "If Planned Parenthood will quit providing abortion, then I will talk to Paul Ryan and maybe we'll get you even more funding." And I said, "First of all, that is never going to happen. We are not going to give up. We're not going to trade away women's access to abortion for money. That's not going to happen." And he said, "I just can imagine a headline in The New York Times that says 'Planned Parenthood quits providing abortions.'" And I said, "That's not ever going to be in The New York Times. I'm not going to do that." And we went

back and forth, and Ivanka was very upset that I hadn't said anything nice about her father because once he said something nice about Planned Parenthood. I said, "I know he did. He said that we did great work because he knew women who'd been helped by Planned Parenthood. And he was going to defund us." There was really nothing more I could say.

Anyway, we went on about our ways, and I just have to say this because I think it's important as freethinkers, as people who believe in justice: That was a scary time. I do think it's important, particularly in these moments when I think everyone is trying to figure out how are we going to make it through. Even though we were threatened in that way, and Paul Ryan said he was going to have a bill on the president's desk was going to defund Planned Parenthood and get rid of Obamacare by the very beginning. It was a long, hard fight, but I'm just here to say

Paul Ryan is in retirement and Planned Parenthood's doors are still open all across the United States of America. [applause]

**You write that one of the things that drew you to Planned Parenthood was that history of brave, troublemaking women. Margaret Sanger, "No gods, no masters" was her motto, and she said she thought women should have a go-to-hell look in their eye, and that they risked their reputations and even their lives to change things. But you also say you have a concern that for the first time in your life you are concerned that you will have had more rights than your daughters, that our daughters are going to lose those rights. And I, as a mother, share that concern. It is a scary, scary time right now.**

It really is. Right now, if my daughters lived in Texas, they would have fewer rights than I had when I lived in Texas because abortion is harder to access. Access to Planned Parenthood is much more difficult. It's not even a future state. I know a lot of folks say, well, now with Kavanaugh on the Supreme Court, which I can't believe those words have just come out of my mouth, because it is so distressing. People say, "Well, with Kavanaugh on the Supreme Court, does this mean that *Roe* is at risk?" And I would say, "100 percent." That's why women and



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Board Chair Professor Stephen Hirtle enjoys a moment with Cecile Richards.



other people mobilized so strongly over the last few months.

But *Roe* already has been undermined. In fact, I was just talking to someone here who is an escort, or a volunteer, at a Planned Parenthood in California, saying a woman from Alabama had just been brought by her grandmother to get abortion services in Pasadena because she couldn't get them in Alabama anymore. This isn't like a theoretical, intellectual issue — it's happening already all across the country.

**When you wrote your book, Neil Gorsuch had just been confirmed. Let's talk a little bit about Planned Parenthood. I know you retired from it, but just to go over all that it does.**

The latest research I saw was that one in three women in this country have been to Planned Parenthood at some point in her lifetime, including me. That's where I got birth control. Right? So, it's not a kind of a random thing. It's actually a community health care provider all across the country. We're in all 50 states, and we provide safe and legal abortion, and proudly do and will. We also provide birth control of all types. We provide STI testing and treatment. We provide for a lot of people, in particular women. We may be their only healthcare providers, so they come for their breast exam and their annual exam. And I'm really proud of the fact that we are also expanding LGBTQ services.

One of the last things I did before leaving: We had spent a lot of years raising resources to expand services in the South because of course health care outcomes and access to reproductive health care is particularly bad in the Deep South. Before I left, I got to cut the ribbon on a brand new health care center in South Carolina that not only is providing safe and legal abortion services, but also providing transgender care in South Carolina. It's just been really interesting to talk to patients and to talk to providers about the shame and the stigma. And just the downright challenge that exists everywhere for transgender people to actually get life-affirming medical services by someone who knows what they're doing. And that is extraordinary to me.

A young woman in Virginia said to me, "Going to Planned Parenthood in Richmond was the first time I had a doctor who actually knew more about my health care needs than I did." And I'm proud that Planned Parenthood is doing more.

**And Planned Parenthood also serves many, many low-income women.**

Predominantly. I'd say like 75 percent of our patients are at 150 percent of poverty or below. A lot of them are young



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Cecile Richards signs a copy of her book, *Make Trouble*, for Gwendolyn Olson. Order the book at [FFRF.org/shop](http://FFRF.org/shop).

people. This gets back to the work of the Texas Freedom Network and some of the fights we had under, actually, the Bush administration. But then it got better because we provided sex education to tons and tons of young people. And for a lot of young people, they live in places that you don't get sex education in your schools. One of the things that just makes my head explode is that we actually got this teen pregnancy prevention program under President Obama and we actually are now at a record low for teenage pregnancy in the United States. And that's a big thing. Folks always say to me, "Where can we find common ground?" I say, "That's about as common ground as you get." And we're in a lawsuit against the administration. He is now trying to end the teen pregnancy prevention program and give money only to abstinence-only organizations that are not health care providers.

**And they are usually religiously based.**

One hundred percent. And it doesn't work. This is just one of the things that really upsets me. There are so many young people, that if they don't get sex education when they're in high school, where else are they going to get it? And then they go off. They may leave home, they may go to college, and I just feel like it's directly related to the issues we have around sexual assault, sexual violence, the fact that we don't even talk to young people at an early age about what healthy relationships are like, and we are doing an enormous disservice to young people in this country. And it just is very upsetting.

**We've been on the defensive for so long. I remember when *Roe v. Wade* was handed down. I was a teenager and I thought that the battle was over. Can you give us your thoughts on how we can counteract this weaponizing of the idea that religious rights give you the right to impose your dogma on other people and even deprive them of civil liberties?**

Well, that's a big task.

I do think one is we have to vote. It's so distressing that we don't. Even my home state of Texas, we're not a red state or a blue state. We're a non-voting state. And it's just true. And absolutely we have to stand up for the right of people to believe and think and live in whatever way they want to. And I think that was really how we held ourselves at Planned Parenthood. That people needed to know there was a place where you could go, as our tagline says: "Care, no matter what." That means no matter your beliefs, no matter your income, no matter your immigration status, no matter who you love or where you live. And I just think we need more of that this country.

Obviously, you all know, you are at the forefront of this, that is increasingly what young people in this country want, too. They don't want to be judged. They don't want to be shamed. They don't want to be labeled, and they don't want anybody using their own religious values to tell them what they can and can't do.

**They don't want to hate.**

That's right. When did this idea come up that there was one true way, one true religion? Of course, religion was being used to go after women's rights, to go after LGBTQ rights. It's happening again more and more, and I'm so grateful for what you all do because the hypocrisy of the evangelical community standing with a president who has thrown in their face every single tenet of what they purport to believe. If there were never a time to really unmask the danger to people of having religion dictate government, this is it.

**Well, the Religious Right has totally ceded the high ground. You have just re-**

**cently retired from Planned Parenthood. You have defined politics as a contest of wills between folks who are satisfied about how things are and those who are passionate about what could be better. I do want to ask what's in your future. Do you have some plans?**

I don't really know. I did step aside at Planned Parenthood, but I hate the idea of retiring because I'm definitely not retired. I had the best job in the world for 12 years. Being the president of Planned Parenthood, it was the honor of a lifetime. And I could have stayed forever. I loved it, I loved everything about it. But I also think as an organizer and as someone who spent a lot of time and resources to invest in young people and a new generation, it's important for those of us who have had these awesome opportunities to step aside and make room for other folks. That's why I don't want anyone to think I gave up on the fight, because I also believe there's never been a better and more important time for us to organize as a country. I've been running around the country, not only supporting people running for office, but trying to figure out how do we take this moment, this organizing moment, and make it into a permanent movement for equality in the country. And that, to me, is the challenge.

It's going to take us a long time to get out of the fix we're in. And I think it requires all of us to think about what we do, how we live our lives, how we build multiracial, multigenerational organizations and coalitions. The exciting thing is I do believe that change is coming. And I think what we are experiencing now in this country is the last gasp of the patriarchy seeing that its time is almost over.

**Thank you.**



Photo by Chris Line

Cecile Richards and sculptor Zenos Frudakis show off FFRF's Forward Award, which Richards received at the convention. Frudakis created the statuette for FFRF.

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# Convention speech

## Open dialogue the key to religious freedom

*This is an edited version of the speech given by Mohammed Al Khadra on Nov. 3 at FFRF's national convention in San Francisco. He was introduced by FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line:*

Mohammed Al Khadra, known as “Khadra,” is the founder of Council of Ex-Muslims of Jordan, a group focused on raising awareness of atheism in Jordan, as well as helping Jordanian atheists. He is an outspoken advocate of freedom of speech, secularism and human rights.

Following a speech about Islam at the Freedom of Expression Conference in London in July of 2017, Khadra faced potential arrest by the Jordanian government and his life as an open atheist became untenable, prompting him to move to the United States. With assistance from FFRF, as well as British and other American nonprofit organizations, Khadra established a new home in the United States.

Khadra continues his activism by public speaking and working to support non-believers in Jordan and throughout the Islamic world. Please welcome Mohammed Al Khadra.

By Mohammed Al Khadra

Thank you for your kind introduction. Please keep in mind that my English-speaking skills are self-taught.

When the hero of mine, Maryam Namazie, reached out to anyone who could help when I needed to leave the country, Annie Laurie Gaylor and FFRF were the first to respond. And for that, I thank them. I am finally at a place where I can say in a crowded room: “I do not believe.”

I’ve been here in the United States for a few months now, but I’m still not used to seeing that people here can say what they want. They can eat and drink what they want. They can even tell their own president to go to an unexisting hell. It’s all OK.

This feeling of freedom came as a series of unexpected events because I had quite a lot of misconceptions upon coming here.

For example, in 2018, in a country that supposedly cannot favor one religion over the others, the president and members of government, while honoring a Vietnam veteran by receiving a medal of honor, all bowed their heads in a Christian prayer. It appeared to me that Christianity is somehow special. It’s like a special part of a secular institution.

When we speak of how religion has control of all aspects of life in the Middle East, we describe censorship, blasphemy laws, lack of liberty and freedom of thought. It’s usually considered as if it has always been the case, as if Islam has had this power all along. That’s not quite correct.

When we look back into the ’60s, you’d find, for example, publications that no one would dare print right now. Leaders would openly criticize the idea of having religion introduced back into politics. There was even a relative respect for women, a period of secular societies. And conversations on subjects that now can get you killed there, or to put it in Western terms, subjects that are Islamophobic.

I wondered why that happened. Why is it that in other societies, religion did not get to have such a comeback, while



Photo by Ingrid Laas

**Mohammed Al Khadra, the founder of Council of Ex-Muslims of Jordan, moved to the United States recently (with the help of Nonbelief Relief) after facing arrest by the Jordanian government.**

in the Middle Eastern version of it, secularism was crushed 20 years later to become almost nonexistent?

There was a key difference between the two: the Western version and the Middle Eastern one. The earlier one did not push theocrats away at gunpoint, nor did it replace man-made gods with man-made political ones. But the change in the Middle East kept the people under the control of authoritarian regimes. The subjugation of the individual and the censorship of thought were still existing phenomena. And religion waited underneath the lie of a free society until it was time for it to come back to the surface.

It can be argued that the secular authoritarian regimes are the reason for their own downfall. The authoritarian aspect of them denied any real freedom of expression and had entire nations as subjects to a selected few. This kept the ground fertile for any other totalitarian idea to control the masses, whether for the sake of a great leader or a great god.

The shift of power between those forces did not happen instantly. It took the religious about 20 years to create a generation ready to accept that re-emerging theocrats would become major players on the map. During and after that period, while trying to maintain their power, some aligned themselves

with the forces of religion, creating a mix of two evils, the results of which can be observed not only in Yemen, Syria, Egypt and Iran, but can now be seen in Boston, New York and London, to name a few.

The question of “When does religion go too far?” is important in the process of not having a flourishing suicide bombing industry again. If I would walk out of here, and I would directly meet the next person on the street, I have a great degree of confidence that he or she will be against blowing themselves up. But at what level of religious indoctrination is he at? Does he follow the Quran strictly? Are his morals based only on their Islamic scripture, and if yes, what does he exclude from them, if he does? Does he or she strictly follow the war verses, too?

After all, if I were to tell you that I’m a devout reader of *Mein Kampf*, you would be interested in knowing whether I follow it strictly or whether it just gives me a sense of community. And don’t get me wrong. I am focused on what concerns me personally and for my own safety, but this applies to all religions. You should be wondering, when interacting with a religious person or a devout reader of *Mein Kampf*, about how far the poison reached. Christians, Jews and Muslims can all be decent. Judaism, Christianity and Islam simply cannot.

It is Western values, and most importantly free speech, that kept the power-hungry religious and politicians in check. It is why you and I can say in a crowded room that we do not believe.

I had some thoughts before, disregarding the risk one has to take, but why have an uncomfortable conversation altogether? Who am I to ask and interfere with deeply held beliefs? Maybe it’s hate speech to try to have this kind of dialogue. Maybe it shouldn’t be a concern of mine.

Well, what about pinpointing the level of religiosity a society as a whole is at? Some people say 82 percent of Jordanians believe in the death penalty for people like me. Maybe I should be concerned; maybe I should be having that dialogue. Maybe, just maybe, I should not give a damn about feelings when depowering religion is depowering a major source of pain and suffering that is inflicted not just on those who leave it all together, but those who are still captives of it.

The Yemenis, Iraqis and Iranians who died and continue to die to this day are victims of the same poison that kills ex-Muslims, mutilates children, convinces followers that vaccines or condoms are bad. This is something that I will not put up with. Being an atheist or having a secular state with freedom of speech is not a monopoly for the West.

Ask yourself this: Why is a critic of Christianity called secular, while a critic of Islam is called an Islamophobe? It’s not reasonable. It is not reasonable to sanction a woman under hate speech for stating that Mohammed had pedophilic tendencies, as the European Court of Human Rights ruled recently. It is sad to see that the difference between East and West that was necessary for its values to live to this day is now slowly vanishing, and it is funny to me how I and my friends used to dream about having a life where there is no thought police.

The discovery of the lie of religion is not an easy one, especially when religion overwhelms your life. I look at you and I see faces of inquiring minds who are brave enough to be the lonely heretics. As Christopher Hitchens said, “It does not matter what you think, but how you think.” Open dialogue will always filter out bad ideas. And as we try to have it open in the East, I count on people like you, the heretics, to never allow it to be closed. Thank you.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

**Mohammed Al Khadra spoke to nearly 1,000 people at FFRF's convention in San Francisco. Watch his speech at [ffrf.org/video-2018-con](https://ffrf.org/video-2018-con) and see him on “Freethought Matters” at [ffrf.us/khadra](https://ffrf.us/khadra).**



# Introducing the Avijit Roy Courage Award winner . . .

*Below is an edited version of the speech given by Rasel Ahmed on Nov. 3, 2018, at FFRF’s national convention in San Francisco. He was introduced by Rafida Bonya Ahmed, who was introduced by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.*

**Annie Laurie Gaylor:** Many of you will remember Rafida Bonya Ahmed, known as “Bonya,” who received FFRF’s Forward Award in 2016. Bonya was born in Bangladesh and is an American citizen.

I’m pleased to announce that FFRF and Bonya are undertaking a memorial award in honor and memory of Avijit Roy, Bonya’s late husband, also an American citizen and well-known atheist and writer. Both Bonya and Avijit were set upon by machete-wielding Islamist terrorists in Bangladesh on Feb. 26, 2015, which left Avijit dead and Bonya critically wounded.

The Avijit Roy Courage Award includes \$5,000 and an award, whose image was fittingly designed by a graphic artist known as Sobak, a Bangladeshi freethinker himself in hiding, awaiting a chance to migrate to a Western nation. Rasel Ahmed declined the monetary prize for himself, but said it would go to further Roopbaan’s digital presence.

Bonya recently gave a TED Talk in Exeter, United Kingdom. Please welcome Rafida Bonya Ahmed, who will introduce our guest speaker.

**Rafida Bonya Ahmed:** Rasel Ahmed is a gay



Rasel Ahmed, center, holds the Avijit Roy Courage Award after being introduced by Rafida Bonya Ahmed, right, and FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Bangladeshi writer, visual artist and community organizer. The Bangladeshi penal code criminalizes consensual homosexual acts, with up to life in prison, dating back to a provision imposed by 19th-century British colonial authorities.

Rasel is the editor and co-founder of Bangladesh’s first and only LGBT magazine, Roopbaan. The grand launch in the capital Dhaka was attended by more than 130 allies and community members. This event was extensively covered by

more than 300 local and international media outlets and the news of the magazine became viral on social media. Roopbaan magazine and LGBT issues in Bangladesh became a major topic of debate in offices, colleges and homes.

After Xulhaz Mannan, co-founder and publisher of Roopbaan, was hacked to death, along with gay actor Mahbub Rabbi Tonoy, in Dhaka in 2016, many of the already marginalized Bangladeshi’s LGBT community went into hiding. The attack was claimed by the regional arm of al-Qaeda.

As a filmmaker, Rasel Ahmed has used his debut documentary film, “Roopbaan,” as a conversation starter on gender and sexuality issues in Bangladesh. He supervised a group of artists to produce the country’s first Muslim lesbian comic character in 2015. Besides making independent documentaries, he has designed campaigns, directed theater performances, hosted film screenings, edited magazine and blogs, curated photo exhibitions and facilitated training. He is also actively working to promote democratic spaces and diverse voices in the Bangladeshi public square.

As he feared persecution in Bangladesh, he filed for political asylum in the United States on Jan. 5, 2018, and he has received help from Non-belief Relief.

Let’s welcome Rasel to the stage.

## Convention speech

# For LGBTQ in Bangladesh, the fear is real

### Co-founder of first LGBT magazine in the country talks about dangers of promoting the lifestyle

By Rasel Ahmed

This is the largest crowd I have ever addressed in my entire life. I’m so nervous. This is wonderful. Please bear with me as I may say things that might not make any sense because this is my second language.

I will try to explain my journey, and the story of Roopbaan, because I primarily identify myself as an independent, queer storyteller. The thing I feel most comfortable with is sharing stories. I will share two stories. The first is a folk story. It’s very popular in Bangladesh, which is a Muslim-majority South Asian country near India. The other one is a real story, so starting off my remarks with the first story will eventually explain how these stories got intertwined.

The one I will begin with is the name of the magazine, Roopbaan. Many years ago in Nirashbu, which is the fictional kingdom in the story, there was a young girl named Roopbaan. And when she turned 12, on that very day, she was forced to marry a 12-day-old prince. She was forced after the marriage to leave the kingdom, so she was practically exiled to a jungle for 12 years. The reason behind that was to save the life of Roopbaan’s infant husband.

This story has evolved over 800 years in mostly the eastern part of Bengal, which is now known as Bangladesh. It has become Bangladesh in the last 50 years. I think it’s incredible that how in that part of Bengal, which is the Muslim-dominated part of Bengal, a story like this evolved. Later, I realized the reason people celebrated it was because their story was mostly narrated by heterosexual men.



Rasel Ahmed told the audience at FFRF’s national convention in San Francisco about the beginnings of the Bangladeshi LGBTQ magazine Roopbaan.

And the story has served as a kind of erotica or fantasy for heterosexual men for a long time. Muslim heterosexual men, to be precise. So why did a group of queer people name a queer magazine, a gay magazine, an LGBT magazine, after this character?

### Reclaiming the story

A group of queer men in Dhaka, which is the capital of Bangladesh, decided to reclaim the story. They took this very heterosexist, flawed and problematic story and retold it from a queer perspective, shifting the focus from heterosexism to feminism.

And how did we do that? We came up with our twist of the story. This is a love story of a woman who is 12 years older than her husband, which is not the case in real world, in real Bangladesh. The main protagonist of the story is a woman. In Bangla, I don’t think there are many references to a woman as the leading character of a folk story. What we wanted to tell them is that it’s essentially a story of a woman and her 12 years of struggle to do pushback — to push back sexism, to push back unwanted sexual moves, to push back repression. Eventually, it’s a story of the triumph of love over social stigma and oppression.

So that was the twist that we came up with when



we launched the magazine in 2014. We started working on the magazine at the end of 2013, and it took more than a year to come up with a 54-page magazine. Oh, my god. The community went mad, especially the heterosexual men. I think there are a couple of reasons for that. They were mad because gay people, for the first time, said it was OK to be gay. We are gay and we're acknowledging our gay identity, so they couldn't take that. And the second reason was, basically, how dare gay people touch their heterosexual erotica. They were super mad.

Then it turned political, so Roopbaan became news in the country and internationally. After we came up with the magazine, we realized it was very internationally sellable news. It was picked up by many international and national news outlets. What made me very scared was that my name and picture were in the magazine.

And when this news started circulating, I panicked a lot.

So that was sort of the starting of our journey of becoming more visible in that country, which is about 90 percent Muslim. I don't think that's the only reason why we couldn't come out. I think religion definitely is one reason, but there are so many other different social challenges. Patriarchy was a challenge, and how we look at the spectrum of sexuality. In Bangladesh, the discourse is missing talk about gender and sexuality. It's a lack of knowledge, lack of information. The thing I often say is that homophobia in Bangladesh is not proper homophobia because they don't know what it is. It's lack of knowledge. I think it was one of the dominant reasons why we were targeted, especially online. And social media was also booming in late 2014, so people suddenly knew about us. They started making comments on every other post they see. And we were very scared because we were not expecting something this big could happen

after the launch of the magazine.

### Introducing Xulhaz

Now, I want to introduce a character from the real story. His name is Xulhaz Mannan. Xulhaz was basically a cat lover and a traveler.

If any one of you would know Xulhaz, you would have probably received at least one travel request from any random place, like a six-day trek in Rukum, which is in India, or bungee jumping in Nepal, or rafting in Sangu, which is one of the roughest rivers in Bangladesh. He was a man with so many different and beautiful ideas. He loved organizing.

And he was the one who came up with this idea of this magazine and planted this idea in my mind because, duh, I was very naive. I was very easily convinced by him that I had to do something at the age of 24. I was convinced that we have to save the gay community in Bangladesh by writing their stories. So, we came up with this magazine.

But what followed after that, it wasn't all bad, but it was up and down, to be very honest. We were targeted, we were bullied, we were threatened, but at the same time we were appreciated. We were also encouraged when we came up with this magazine by many of our allies and supporters.

Before the magazine, Avijit Roy's book *Shomokamita* was published in 2010. We know that because the book is written about us. It was so important because before this book, even to write the magazine in Bangla, we did not have the language of sexuality. So how do you express who you are when you don't have the language? What do you do? Duh, you borrow it from the West. You start calling yourself gay, lesbian and all of those



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Rafida Bonya Ahmed hands Rasel Ahmed (not related) the Avijit Roy Courage Award at FFRF's national convention on Nov. 3, 2018, in San Francisco.

things. But we have other identities beyond this, beyond the Western spectrum of gender and sexuality.

So when Avijit Roy came up with this book, it gave us a lot of hope, and let people know that it is not a crime to be who you are. This is not a disease, which has been told by the heterosexual community for many years. So that book, even before the magazine, was something we could always refer to.

### Meeting Avijit Roy

When we were brainstorming for the magazine, we wanted to connect with Avijit Roy. I knew of him because of his work and because of his image as a public writer, but personally I never knew Avijit Roy. When

we wanted to do the magazine, we thought to connect, and he generously agreed to be interviewed by us. We did the interview during our first issue, but it was at the

last moment, so we couldn't publish it in the first issue.

But we became allies. One of the plusses of coming up with the literary magazine is that you meet other people who you didn't know before. Avijit Roy was there, and then we got connected — our gay community and the people who wanted to work together.

When that attack on Avijit Roy happened in 2015, it was not only an attack on him, but it was an attack on our entire community. The community, and I'm talking about the queer community in Bangladesh, the queer community felt the attack. We felt it. We felt threatened and we felt like other than the personal loss and mourning and outrage, what the attack evoked was also the fear. And for the first time, I think the fear was real. We always knew that we were doing something very controversial and sensitive in Bangladesh, but I don't think any of us thought that we would be targeted like this.

After that, we were very terrified. And by we, I mean the queer community. It was again very difficult to go back into the closet because, by then, we started organizing. Other than the magazine, we started doing rallies, we did a transgender fashion show, we came up with a poetry book, we did comedy nights. And af-

ter Avijit Roy's murder, every month it seemed there would be someone murdered from the blogger, activist, secular community. So that was indeed very scary. And eventually we were scared of becoming the target.

That became true in April 2016, one year after the murder of Avijit Roy. Xulhaz Mannan, my friend, the character I introduced, was in his house and having a discussion with one of his friends, who was also a Roopbaan activist. They were just chit-chatting and his doorbell rang. There were four men posing as couriers who went up to Xulhaz's apparently very secured apartment. Because they were posing as couriers, no one could tell they were armed with machetes. They forcefully opened the door and murdered both of them — hacked to death.

That opened the window of fear and many people left the country after that, including myself. I think we are the people carrying the baggage of this murder the most because the journey did not end. We are still in a very transitional phase and so is Roopbaan. Even the government of Bangladesh condemned the bloggers and the homosexual people for coming up with a gay magazine. It said this doesn't go with the culture of Bangladesh to write about sexuality.

One final thing I'd like to say. After coming to this country, a lot of people mentioned that this is a safe haven. It's great for you and they congratulate me, but we have to go deeper into this concept of safety and think more about it because it's not all about physical safety. It's also about mental security, it's also about emotional safety and identity and belongingness. And coming to this country under this administration, under this Trump administration, it feels no less horrible than being in Bangladesh. It's seriously a terrible time to be here for any immigrant.

I think we are all fighting for the same reason. We are all speaking the same language — freedom of speech and freedom of association for marginalized people in a country where dissenting voices are always crushed.

I would like to end my remarks by thanking Bonya. Bonya, thank you so much for considering Roopbaan for this award and thank you, Freedom From Religion Foundation, for considering us. Thank you very much for this award and for this recognition.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Rasel Ahmed editor and co-founder of Bangladesh's first and only LGBTQ magazine, Roopbaan.



# Camp Quest teaches kids secular ideals

By Sarah Miller

*In 2018, thanks to the Freedom From Religion Foundation and Nonbelief Relief, 25 campers attended who otherwise wouldn't have been able to afford this life-changing experience.*

Since 1996, Camp Quest has provided a supportive environment for children of nonreligious families. Over the past quarter century, our commitment to inclusion, empathy and respect for difference has made Camp Quest a vibrant and diverse community.

Now, with an expansive network of affiliate camps across the United States, Camp Quest continues to play a crucial role in the development of a new generation of secular youth. In 2018, Camp Quest programs served children from 36 states, and the demand for Camp Quest's unique take on secular summer adventuring continues to grow.

Camp Quest programs help campers develop critical thinking skills, grow empathy in relationships and communities, and offer one-of-a-kind learning experiences grounded in science, ethics, philosophy and nature. Camps typically operate week-long residential sessions for children aged 8-17. We welcome children and teenagers from all backgrounds and teach them to respect others while taking pride in themselves.

Our society needs Camp Quest at this critical moment. The percentage of nonreligious youths is rising at a rate never seen before. Generation Z, which is comprised of children



“Campers leave with the confidence and tools to have thought-provoking conversations with neighbors, friends and family who view the world differently,” says Amanda Werner, a Camp Quest Chesapeake alumna and counselor.

and teens born since 1999, is the first post-Christian generation. More than 35 percent of youth report that they identify as atheist, agnostic or do not claim a religious identity. A further 7 percent are of non-Christian faiths.

With an unprecedented number of young people rejecting dogma and choosing to think for themselves, it is vital that we provide both a community and a moral framework that can nurture and guide our children as they build their futures and form a bulwark against the regressive tide of religious

oppression. Camp Quest provides a nurturing environment for campers that fosters the development of reason, integrity and empathy — skills that are solely needed in today's confusing and polarized political climate.

Scores of dedicated Camp Quest volunteers nationwide have spent years developing supportive and inclusive programs, firmly grounded in secular humanist values, that provide a safe, ethically-based community for all children. Repeatedly, at camps across the country, parents tell us that their children are transformed after a week at Camp Quest. Campers return home more confident, outgoing and happier than when they arrived.

Camp Quest inspires youths to live life well and fully, guided by empathy, discovery and critical thinking. Our campers carry that inspiration into

their adult lives. Many Camp Quest alums return as counselors and apply the skills they learn at camp to new leadership roles. Amanda Werner, a Camp Quest Chesapeake alumna and counselor, shares why camp is meaningful to her:

“The beauty of Camp Quest is that its importance is boundless and immeasurable. It means something different but equally valuable to every single person who is touched by its magic. My life will forever be shaped by my experiences at Camp Quest as a camper, peer leader and counselor. I was thrilled to continue my own journey at Camp Quest as a counselor two years ago, and I keep returning. I return because I know that I play a small part in something much larger than myself. One week of positive influence can forever change the direction of a camper's life, especially one that feels insecure in their home community. Camp Quest plays a crucial role in the lives of campers and staff as a supportive, safe place for freethinkers and nonbelievers.

“It teaches how to respectfully question beliefs and think critically about the surrounding world. Campers leave with the confidence and tools to have thought-provoking conversations with neighbors, friends and family who view the world differently. Campers and staff develop meaningful relationships that last far into the future. For so many of us, Camp Quest is a family, a home and a community that will always live in our hearts.”

Camp Quest is grateful for the support we receive from members of FFRF and Nonbelief Relief who make this important work possible. Together, we will support secular youth as they take their place in the world.

Please visit [CampQuest.org](http://CampQuest.org) to register for the 2019 season, help or volunteer.

*Sarah Miller is Camp Quest's development director.*



Camp Quest helps children aged 8-17 develop critical thinking skills using experiences grounded in science, ethics, philosophy and nature.

## CRANKMAIL

*Welcome to another monthly installment of Crankmail, where we provide a forum for those who are critical of FFRF (but perhaps not so critical of English usage or spelling). Letters are printed as received.*

**God is real:** this country was Based on the bible we had prayers in schools and moral standards were so much higher. you are degrading America with your actions. you think the Bible is incorrect and etc. you probably believe humans were formed over the time of millions of years. all by accident. and that the universe was formed accidentally? there is a God, the creator. one Day you will stand before him. — *Daniil Moroz*

**Useless:** What a worthless organization. Can't you just be your atheist selves and leave everyone else alone? The things you people hate - "forcing religion on you" is exactly what your advocating. Everyone realizes that YOU are in the minority in this world as far as your values. So thus we are laughing our asses off at you. Pathetic.

Christians just worship on their own. They don't force their beliefs on anyone. But u use lawsuits and other tactics. — *Dan Reida*

**Hell for you:** Hope u enjoy burning in hell.hope ucan handle a godlessworld. Losers.get a life — *Bran-*

*dy Morris*

**You're punks:** You think you're hot shit, do you? Do you feel terrible about yourselves yet? If not, you should. The good men of the Amberley Police and Fire Department don't deserve to put up with atheist PUNKS like you when they're doing GOD's work and spreading His light.

**Prepare for death:** Who do you think you are?! One day He will smite all of you radical Islamic atheist evildoers right where you stand and you will all DIE a horrible death just like you DESERVE.

— *Benjamin Silverman*

**Let's vote on the cross!:** You all can go fuck yourselves. Everyone has a right to religion, if you don't like it then move. There is more people in the world in favor of the cross.

Instead of pushing your fucking weight around, why don't you have a city wide vote on of the cross is to be removed or not. Once again you all can go fuck your selves. Don't try to message back it's a fake email. — *Aaron Craver*

**Haters:** I just want to know why you hate Christians? Can you explain and feel free to call me anytime after 1 EST Monday thru Friday to discuss. — *Brad Shultz*

**Stay out of Tennessee:** Keep your opinion in Socialist Liberal Wisconsin. We in Tennessee worship our Lord God and want Him to bless our new governor. Your ridiculous comments fails to recognize "separation of. Hutch and state" doesn't appear in the American Constitution. You people are disgusting. — *David Crocker*

**You're contradicting yourselves:** Darwinian macroevolution is just a theory, and a weak one at that with zero actual physical evidence of it ever actually happening (if you really examine it, it's not reasonable at all). Atheism is a belief system, or as some call it, the religion of naturalism. It's a "belief" about our world. So, if you will work to keep one set of beliefs out of a school, why not the other belief system, since they both require an element of faith as neither can be explicitly "proved". Can you explain this contradiction of mission? — *Jenna Shepherd*

**You are part of the problem:** I just wanted to take a moment and say look at the world and the news of today. It is you and your organization that has created a world of intolerance and ignorance. Way to go, you have succeeded in turning our world into a cesspool. — *Stephen White*

**News:** You took up a part of my local news this

evening because you filed to have a cross removed from public property. This upsets me because I had to spend time having your belief shoved at me and those are minutes I will never get back...wasted. — *Steve Knox*

**Keep the cross!:** Shame on you for taking side of a single, anonymous person, and ignoring the wish of the vast majority of the city in regards with the lighted cross. If it was a lighted muslim crescent, you wouldnt give a dime! You are fighting hard against the Christian religion: is this because you feel it is something worth fighting against? How stupid! It is like cutting the branch beneath you feet. — *Ovidiu Hajdutan*

**First amendment:** Brownstown In has had a nativity scene on the front lawn for years and now it takes one person to have it removed! What ever happened to the majority rules? The first amendment is to protect us as well. — *Sandra Bobb*

**Get out of our state:** It is my prayer that your organization folds like a cheap lawn chair. Until then mind your own business and stay the hell out of Indiana or you'll look like a protester at a Trump rally...enormously outnumbered and not welcome. — *Robert Eaker*



# ‘Freethought Radio’ listeners chime in

Freethought Radio listeners were offered the opportunity to enter a random drawing for a free copy of co-host Dan Barker’s latest book, *Mere Morality* (a rejoinder to C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*).

Here are some of the messages received in January by listeners of FFRF’s radio show/podcast, which has been on the air since the spring of 2006, currently broadcasts in six cities and drawing some 10,000 weekly podcast listeners. Freethought Radio features irreverent views, news music and interviews, and reports every week on FFRF’s most timely actions. To listen, visit [ffrf.org/radio](http://ffrf.org/radio).

...

I’ve been listening to Freethought Radio through the Overcast podcast app since shortly after I met Dan Barker at the Tucson Festival of Books a few years ago, and I’ve been an FFRF member since the day after the general election in 2016. Thanks for the work you’re doing at FFRF!

**Rich Miller**  
Arizona

...

I listen to the podcast every week.

I am agnostic, after identifying as a Christian most of my life. Like many people, it wasn’t something that sprang into existence from nowhere, it evolved over time. I remember telling my mom when I was not quite a teen that I believed in an absent god, that set the world spinning and then walked away for us to manage on our own. (I’m pretty sure that wasn’t the exact quote, but that was the idea.)

As an adult, I spent much of my career working as the news director for a Christian radio group. I was considered the token liberal because, among other things, I believed in First Amendment equality for all faiths, not just Christianity, even as I expressed a specifically Christian worldview on the air, which I did firmly believe at the time.

While serving as a Sunday school teacher and youth group leader, I regularly told my students to “study to show thyself approved,” as the bible says, and not take my word for it. Interestingly, many of those same students now are themselves unchurched, atheist, agnostic, or lean toward what is now considered liberal Christianity.

As the years pass, I took the advice I gave my own students. After much thought and study, I realized that the road didn’t lead to Calvary, but to a wider road with a greater sense of the awe, mystery and majesty of the universe, unfettered by the cloistered walls of Christianity.

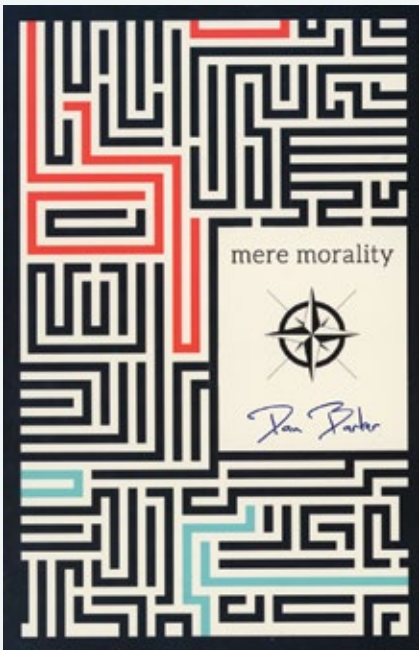
Even though I’ve been agnostic for several years, it’s not something I discuss often, telling only a few people and only when pressed on a specific religious issue.

**Robert Parson**  
Arkansas

## Mere Morality

Here is an excerpt from Dan Barker’s new book, *Mere Morality*. Dan donates all the royalties from copies purchased via FFRF. Go to [shop.ffrf.org](http://shop.ffrf.org).

Have you ever seen one of those cartoons where the character is trying to make a decision with a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other? We often find ourselves torn between what we want to do and what we feel we should do. Since there are no devils or angels, I suggest we replace the image of those silly supernatural symbols of “good and evil” with something else. Instead of cartoon characters competing for your attention, picture instinct on one shoulder, law on the other, and reason in the middle. These make up your three “moral minds,” and none of them, by itself, tells you what to do. None of them is good or bad. Actions are what we judge to be good or bad, and your moral minds are guides that help you do the judging.



*Mere Morality* is a model, a framework that can help us visualize what we are doing when we make moral choices.

...

I listen to your program in my car on my way to home after work in College Station, Texas. I am Mexican of a privileged upbringing and fortunately I have never faced the hardships my unprivileged peers face every day. However, I do feel disconnected from my community due to my nonbelief. I feel as if I can’t say out loud what I really think because people are going to reject me. That’s why I feel so refreshed when I listen to your program. It’s very comforting to know there is a big community of people who will not judge you for what you (don’t) believe.

**Ricardo Simental Magaña**  
Texas

...

I first started listening to the podcast of Freethought Radio when I was watching atheist-themed videos on YouTube, and a recommendation popped up. It was the video of Dan and Annie Laurie on the “Oprah Winfrey Show.” That led to watching more videos and to the FFRF website, where I learned about the radio show. I eagerly await each episode. I’ve read all of Dan’s books. Keep up the good work.

**David O’Reilly**  
Ireland

...

I am so glad I accidentally heard about you on the “Devil’s Advocate” radio show, which is carried on one of our local talk show radio stations. This was a year or more ago, and I think the interview was about the Johnson Amendment.

Anyway, I’ve gone on to become a member, and enjoy FFRF’s videos on

YouTube, your newspaper, the “Freethought Matters” TV show, and anything else I can find that you’re doing. It is so good to know your organization is working to keep religion out of the public arena. I’ll be really happy if/when you get rid of chaplains in the United States legislature. Thank you for everything you do.

**Gladys Burritt**  
California

...

I follow your show in podcast from @PodcastAddict. Thank you for defending the “the wall,” fence, whatever they’d like to call it. I’ll call it whatever they want. But it’s all the same thing “between church and state”!

**Dean Davis**  
Ohio

...

I’ve been a listener of your broadcast for quite a few years and just became a new member of FFRF in December. I’m glad my yearly donation is going toward such an important cause.

I listened to the show on my laptop from your website until I started using the Castbox app last year for all my podcasts. Now I have you everywhere I go with my smartphone.

Thanks for all the great work you do!

**Carl Davidson**  
Illinois

...

I’ve listened to Freethought Radio since I found out about the existence of podcasts. I really appreciate you making the frank and simple point that Christianity is not the default human condition and should not be part of the government. I’m interested in Dan’s book, *Mere Morality*, because of the false argument that a bronze-age and dark-age religion teaches humans morality.

**LK Lowe**  
Oregon

...

I listen to Freethought Radio via podcast every week. I am an FFRF member from Kentucky and it’s a great way to keep up-to-date on all the great work you do on our behalf. Living in Kentucky as an atheist is a challenge, especially with people like our governor always chipping away at the wall of separation between church and state. It’s great to have an organization that keeps the gov-

ernment in check and makes sure the wall stays in place to protect us all.

**Manolo Matos**  
Kentucky

...

Happy New Year from my flight to Bangkok! I usually listen on my monthly commute to Thailand. Month on, month off. Semi-retired for years and looking forward to full early retirement in Thailand next year.

Thanks for being the voice of reason and sanity in the crazy USA and for everything FFRF does.

**Kevin Danchisen**  
Michigan

...

I was born in a Christian home and my father is pastor in Mexico City. I preached and led worship, playing the guitar at church. I can identify with your story, Mr. Barker. Reading science with an open mind and all the questions that Christianity could not answer, and reading Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion*, amounted to my realization this past November that God doesn’t exist.

I’ve read a couple of your books and I just started on losing faith in faith. I’m 43 now and married to a surprisingly supporting wife. I’m going through a scary/exiting time and your books and now your podcast are helping me through it.

**Genaro Vega**

...

**These were the messages received by the ultimate lucky winners of the free book drawing:**

...

We listen to the program via podcast on iTunes and very much look forward to every new episode each week.

As parents raising godless (and moral) young children in small-town Ohio, we appreciate the dose of sanity and rationalism in what can seem at times an increasing oppressive religious environment.

Please keep up the fantastic work.

**Andy Ahern**  
Ohio

...

I listen to Freethought Radio as a podcast through the app PocketCast. I listen to Freethought Radio and a slew of other atheist podcasts. For me, it’s a breath of fresh air to listen to others who share my views.

I moved to the rural southwest Wisconsin area a couple of years ago. I felt alone, and even the podcasts couldn’t quench my thirst for social interaction with freethinkers. So, I started The Driftless Atheists Meetup group.

I don’t think I would have had the courage to start such a group without the encouragement and support of people like you.

**Joshua Masterson**  
Wisconsin

...

I listen to the radio show on podcast because I am an atheist, because I want to be exposed to other folks of like mind.

**William McCallister**  
Maryland

...

I listen to Freethought Radio podcasts because I’m not always available at the time of the broadcast. I’ve been a member for many years and really enjoy every radio show. I have read several of the books mentioned on various shows and have others on my long list of “to read” books. Thanks for all you do for freethought.

**Bob Stewart**  
Colorado

Your weekly antidote to the Religious Right

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**FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION**



# LETTERBOX

## FFRF’s ‘After-Life’ pin is worn with pride

Thank you so much for my new “After-Life Member” pin! I am so happy to have this beautiful pin that I will wear it with pride.

I am such a proud member of FFRF and sing your praises every chance I get. Thanks for all you do.

**Susie York**  
New Hampshire

## Crankmail writers suffer from Dunning-Kruger

I wonder how the people who write these pieces in Crankmail would feel if they knew some 32,000 people were reading their words and laughing at them. I recently heard about a malady known as the Dunning-Kruger Effect. Basically, it is being too stupid to appreciate how stupid you are. Seems to apply to the Crankmail authors.

**Jack M. Pedigo**  
Washington

## Thanks for stopping prayer at Chino Valley

Thank you for stopping the Chino Valley School Board in promoting church and religion. I strongly believe that the citizens of Chino deserve school board members who are open-minded and whose best interest is to provide a quality education to all students without the influence of religious beliefs.

**Ben Aguirre**  
California

## Plenty of unanswered questions about abortion

The column by Brian Bolton (“Who is history’s greatest abortionist?”) comes tantalizing close to some trenchant questions which I never hear publicly aired. They deserve greater attention:

How many of us are aborted by God? It’s well over half of fertilizations. The observable miscarriage rate is 10-20 percent, but most spontaneous abortions occur too early to be noticed. Whatever the fate of the unborn soul, it’s the fate of far more than half of us ever created. One may choose to include the very high infant/early childhood mortality rates that God imposes.

What is the fate of the unborn soul? A dilemma (assuming the life of the soul begins at conception). Perhaps they go straight to heaven; a free ride without running the gauntlet of life and risking hell. Presumably one must be born to get to hell. Why is abortion not a sacrament?

Or perhaps for some reason (God’s whim), these innocents are denied heaven. If so, why does anyone worship this guy?

Does the aborted soul care who kills it, be it God or someone else?

God’s scriptural admissions to mass abortion are illuminating, but, as usual, verifiable observations are more instructive.

One may quip, “If I’d been aborted, wouldn’t I be in heaven right now instead of going to hell?”

**John Wolff**  
Washington

### Birds of a FFRFeather



I thought you might enjoy photos of Darwin, my 18-year-old cockatoo, catching up on FFRF news about the convention. Darwin and I live in Florida and are grateful FFRF members.

**Gemma Dehnbostel**  
Florida

## I’m joyfully upgrading to ‘After-Life’ status

I would like to take this opportunity to joyfully upgrade my membership to After-Life status. Your organization has been life-changing. Prior to joining FFRF, I literally had no idea that there were so many of us “Nones” out there.

Unfortunately, my schedule does not allow time to join a local group, so FreeThought Today is my lifeline to what is going on. What wonderful news each issue brings! Like it is for so many, Crankmail is a guilty pleasure — though I worry about your safety at times, I just end up laughing anyway. What dimwits!

Finally, at long last, I have decided I can no longer read about all the wonderful presentations and fun at the annual convention, so have penciled in this year’s event on my calendar. I truly look forward to rubbing shoulders with the freethought Illuminati.

**Chuck Bingham**  
Wisconsin

## Which will she choose? Bible or morality?

Second Lady Karen Pence is teaching at a fundamentalist school with absolute bible beliefs. This raises disturbing questions:

The bible says clearly that gay lovers must be killed (Lev. 20:13).

The bible says clearly that brides who aren’t virgins must be stoned to death on their fathers’ doorsteps (Deut. 22).

The bible says clearly that people who work on the Sabbath must be executed (Ex. 31:15).

The bible gives explicit instructions on how to buy and sell slaves (Lev. 25:44) — including advice about selling a daughter (Ex. 21:7).

Will Mrs. Pence tell students to obey these sacred bible commands, or will she tell them to ignore God’s instructions?

**James A. Haught**  
West Virginia

## Thanks to FFRF for the Chino Valley victory

I love the good news that the newly elected school board members of the Chino Valley School District voted 3 to 2 to discontinue the appeal of your case. Thank you for this long-fought victory. The community and the plaintiffs worked long and hard, but FFRF got them through.

You might be interested to know that one of the troublesome board members ended the evening with a warning about the dangers of vaccination and its connection to autism. No end of fake facts in Chino. I’m proud of your work and the hard work of the citizens. Whew. Elections matter.

**Joanne Dallas**  
California

## Donate Stardust books to your local library

I was so impressed by reading Bailey Harris’ speech in the December 2018 issue that I purchased five copies of *My Name is Stardust* and donated them to my local public library. In the future, I hope to do the same with *Stardust Explores the Solar System* and *Stardust Explores Earth’s Wonders*.

I suggest that each FFRF member purchase at least one copy of *My Name is Stardust* and donate it to their local public library. This would be a great way to promote freethought and science.

**John Dunn**  
California

## Missed convention to become Life Member

I’ve wanted to become a Life Member for a long time, but needed to wait until this year.

Thanks for Andrew Seidel’s terrific, thought-provoking article, “Climate change is a state/church matter,” in the December issue.

As a Californian, I was pleased that San Francisco was chosen as the site of the 2018 convention. I chose not to attend, however, because I felt that a Life Membership was a better use of my limited resources.

On another topic, the usage of the terms “atheist” and “atheism” is troubling to me because they are still related to theism. Opposing something still keeps one attached to it. I’ve always found “humanism” to be far more embraceable. I’m an atheist, yes, but a humanist first.

**Bill Fritch**  
California

## Venomous tone over FFRF’s case in Ozark

The devil prompted me to send you this note regarding the cross in Ozark, Mo., on city property. I am extremely fortunate to be able to vacation there in the winters. I watched the TV news and read the local paper regarding the cross issue. The venom of the tone of the TV report and the language of the newspaper made it sound like you guys are from a different galaxy and are minions of Ming the Merciless!

Keep up the good work!

**David Mishkin**  
Texas

## We should all place stickers on hotel bibles

I was actually happy to find a Gideon bible in my hotel room at the convention in San Francisco. I promptly placed one of FFRF’s “Gideon Exposed” stickers on the cover. It gave me pleasure to know that future occupants of that room would be exposed to the brutal murderous history of Gideon.

When traveling, I never leave home without an adequate supply of the “Gideon Exposed” stickers. In late July, on a drive from Texas to North Carolina, I placed six stickers on bibles. Assuming a 50 percent occupancy rate (two adults occupy the room 182 days a year), then on an annual basis about 2,000 people would be exposed to the stickers.

Now, if each of the 30,000-plus FFRF members spent one night a year in a hotel and placed a sticker on the bible, millions of people would be exposed to the message.

I’m just being a Johnny Appleseed, planting seeds of doubt and reason.

**Howard Bostock**  
Texas

**Editor’s note:** The “Gideon Exposed” stickers and bible warning labels can be found at [shop.ffrf.org](http://shop.ffrf.org) by clicking on the “Sharables/Gifts” tab.

## Don’t bash believers, get them to join us

Many of our articles and letters bash religions and faith; yet that same faith brings relief and comfort to millions, especially in times of duress. Thus, we will always have religions.

Our best hope to prevail is to convince the people of faith to join our cause. The bashing only alienates them.

**George Gjelfriend**  
North Carolina



I don’t believe in God,  
but Robert Mueller, yes!

I don’t believe in God, but I do believe in Robert Mueller III. Although I just turned 90, I very much hope that Mr. Mueller will deposit me in heaven *before* I die!

**Willys Silvers**  
Pennsylvania

Column provided great  
examples of God’s wrath

I just want to say how much I’m enjoying being a Sponsoring Member of FFRF. I’m proud of the work you do, I appreciate the email updates, and I especially like Freethought Today, which is a breath of fresh air. All elements of it are fun to read, but I was prompted to write because of how much I particularly enjoyed Brian Bolton’s article “Who is history’s greatest abortionist?” It’s fascinating when someone distills all the little bits of evidence in the bible that paints yet another vivid example of what an incorrigible character God really is. Thanks, Brian, and thanks, FFRF!

**Ross Meisner**  
Minnesota

Based on 1990 comments,  
Trump not a Christian

The “Freethought of the Day” of Jan. 27 noted that: “Mozart refused to ask for a priest when dying. His wife sent for one anyway, who refused to attend. Mozart was buried in a pauper’s grave without a religious service. Referring to the orthodoxy of his youth, he [Mozart] said: ‘That is all over, and will never come back.’”

Contrast Mozart’s words with the answer given by Donald Trump to the “Life or death” question posed to him during his interview in Playboy magazine (March 1990).

Trump’s response: “Both. We’re here and we live our 60, 70 or 80 years and we’re gone. You win, you win, and in the end, it doesn’t mean a hell of a lot. But it is something to do, to keep you interested.”

Both Mozart and Trump provided us with the opportunity to form our own opinions about their supposed religiosity—or, more importantly, their lack thereof. However, it should be noted: Without a belief in an afterlife (with Jesus, who Trump never mentioned) one cannot be a Christian. Such “heaven-deniers” can claim to be Christians, but according to all Christian denominations, they most certainly are not.

As Napoleon Bonaparte noted, more than 200 years ago, (and what Donald Trump is obviously capitalizing on today): “Religion is excellent stuff for keeping common people quiet. Religion is what keeps the poor from murdering the rich.”

**William Dusenberry**  
Arizona

So much for benevolence



Dell Erwin of Virginia sent us this photo of the church marquee from St. John’s in Roselle, Ill. “My son saw this on the way to work. No wonder we believe religion is cruel and harmful,” Dell writes.

Why do churches get  
to pollute our air?

I was distressed to hear Christian hymns being banged out on the St. Rita Church’s bell tower on Dec. 25. I was inside my home with all the windows and doors shut and the curtains drawn, and I could still hear the religious assault on my ears very clearly. There is nothing I can do to get away from the proselytizing when the town sanctions it being broadcast in this very invasive manner. Not every taxpayer in Fairfax is a Christian. Not everyone wants to be oppressed by Christian ideology in their own homes. Some of us are even traumatized by what Christianity has done to us. I strongly urge the town to stop sanctioning Christian content being broadcast into our homes, our ears, and our minds in this inescapably invasive manner. Please do not allow St. Rita or any other religious organization to pollute our air with their religious hymns.

**Stacey Anderson**  
California

Keep focus of cases  
on constitutionality

I often see in articles about church/state separation cases that the objection to crosses and monuments that favor Christianity over any other religion or no religion is because these make others feel left out or inferior. This buys into the Christian view that we non-believers are just sinners complaining about being preached to.

So, let’s get to the heart to the matter, which is that these are unconstitutional, which is reason enough. But, also, our founders made respect for churches unconstitutional because they promote myth and superstition,

and no one in government should be given the authority to decide what is myth and superstition and what is not! This is very important. And it is time we attack these violations with the true reason for the First Amendment, which was the desire to avoid the terrors of religious conflict and persecution that once plagued Europe and still plagues the Middle East.

With this approach, we will also have great opportunities to remind everyone that religion is based on myth and superstition, which no one in all honesty can deny.

**Ron Herman**  
New Mexico

Thanks for intervening  
in state-church issues

I just want to express my gratitude to FFRF staff for having intervened in a few local concerns of mine regarding violations of state/church separation. Living in a small isolated remote west Texas city on the U.S.-Mexico border, it is hard to get help in righting wrongs involving local government, even if one has the funds to hire an attorney. Some local attorneys won’t take on cases that are not politically correct because doing so might scare off future business. Many residents do object to violations but do not know how to take on such things or are concerned about retaliation for having spoken out.

As far as the press goes, we really don’t have much, but what we do have isn’t really inclined to take on such issues. Del Rio really is a nice place to live but, like anywhere else, it is not perfect. This is where I find that FFRF is very helpful to the community overall. Please keep up the good work you do!

**Richard d’Avy**  
Texas

December issue was  
particularly good!

The December 2018 issue was a particularly good one. Kudos to all!

I loved the repurposed churches, the kidney donor story, the Kirschman memorial, the Bailey Harris convention speech (props to her!) and the account by Steven Lowe to get bibles out of hotel rooms (yes!).

And then, on the back page, I saw the wonderful piece by James Wiseman about the “loneliness” of

being a racial minority in the secular community. The column was directly above the photo of the woefully-not-diverse FFRF team. Sigh. I know it’s Madison and the demographic there is not very diverse.

I salute everyone at FFRF nonetheless. All over the globe, things are getting better year by year. Wiseman’s piece is a clarion call and an eloquent upper. Thanks to everyone!

**Lane Browning**  
Oregon

First Amendment  
defense a thankless task

It is with considerable pleasure that I am able to contribute to you again this year. I realize the defense of the First Amendment is an endless, and seemingly thankless, task. I am honored to be able to stand with you in it.

**James Wood Bailey**  
New Jersey

Hierarchy of Church  
is all about power

I finally figured out that my bias is not against Catholics nor Catholicism. My bias is against the hierarchy of the institutional church, which I consider a bunch of geriatric, misogynist, sexually perverted, totalitarian men. It took me years to realize I could separate people I dearly liked from religious tenets I thought were superstitious nonsense from priests who were the instruments of psychological damage and extreme unhappiness.

I had friends when I was first married who were afraid to use birth control. I danced off to Planned Parenthood or my ob/gyn, had two children and a very good married life. These poor women may have gone to Catholic heaven, but their married life was hell on Earth in many ways.

As I got older, I met a lot of lapsed Catholics. These people were much happier by and large than my newly wedded friends who confessed to a priest who gave women absolution for using the rhythm method! I couldn’t find anything in the bible that actually forbade birth control. All their explanations sounded pretty modern and controlling: “It’s not natural.” Well, neither is surgery, mass transportation, communication or modern agriculture. But I have never heard any criticism of these scientific unnatural practices.

The hierarchy is all about power. If I were wealthy, I’d found a home for women of any faith who want to escape.

Thank you for doing what you do.

**Marjorie Holden**  
California

Constitution is supreme  
law of the land

I frequently hear people, Judge Roy Moore included, quote the words, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.” They then claim that they haven’t established a religion.

But people forget that the First Amendment is written within the context that the Constitution is the supreme law of the land. Whenever a conflict arises between the Constitution and an establishment of religion, the Constitution is supreme.

Thanks, and keep up the good work.  
**Matthew P. Howley**  
Ohio

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# BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

## Arrested / Charged

**Jacob L. Coyle**, 36, Peoria, IL: Criminal sexual assault and aggravated criminal sexual abuse. Coyle, youth pastor at Averyville Baptist Church, is accused of sexual contact with a male parishioner on “multiple occasions” over 4 years, starting in January 2006 when he was 13. He alleged friendly back rubs led to sexual encounters at the church, mostly in a guest bedroom known as the “prophet’s chambers.” *Source: Pekin Times, 1-29-19*

**Matthew D. Tonne**, 35, Flower Mound, TX: Indecency with a child. Tonne is accused of molesting a girl from the Village Church at a camp for kids in 2012, when he was children’s minister. He was quietly removed in June 2018, although Village pastor Matt Chandler later said it was for reasons unrelated to the assault.

Some church members are upset that Chandler declined to say if anyone from the church was involved with allegations made last September. He also said “no persons of interest” in the investigation had access to children. *Source: Christian Post, 1-26-19*

**Hugh J. Lang**, 88, Castle Shannon, PA: Unlawful contact with a minor, corruption of minors, aggravated indecent assault, sexual abuse of children involving photography or other imaging, indecent exposure and 2 counts of indecent assault. “John Doe” alleged that Lang molested him in the church basement when he was 10 and was training to be an altar boy at St. Therese of Lisieux Parish in Munhall. Although he retired in 2006, Lang was still offering Mass at St. Anne Parish in Castle Shannon. *Source: Post-Gazette, 1-25-19*

**Stephen Jordan**, 67, Conway, SC: 3rd-degree assault and battery, entry on another’s land for various purposes without permission and trespassing on another’s land without permission. Jordan, who retired in 2016 as a Methodist pastor, was charged last May with 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor for allegedly fondling a 4-year-old girl.

The new charges stem from a Dec. 26 incident in which a woman reported Jordan came on her property and approached children who were playing. She told him to leave but he kept returning, a police report said. *Source: WPDE, 1-24-19*

**Charles Townsend**, 52, Lincoln, NE: Procuring alcohol for a minor. Townsend, pastor at St. Peter’s Catholic Church until placed on leave last August, is accused of an “inappropriate, nonsexual relationship” with a 19-year-old altar server that involved alcohol at a residence in July 2017, said Bishop James Conley.

Conley sent Townsend to Texas for treatment and told parishioners it was for health reasons but never told the teen’s parents about the incident, said a church statement. *Source: Journal Star, 1-18-19*

**Thomas P. Ganley**, 63, Phillipsburg, NJ: Aggravated sexual assault and 2 counts of sexual assault. Ganley, pastor at Sts. Philip and James Catholic Church, is charged with assaulting a girl in 1990-94, when he served a parish in Woodbridge. She alleges they had intercourse and oral sex on multiple occasions in New Jersey, Florida and Washington, starting when she was 16 and he was 39.

It’s the first case stemming from a new state task force investigating clergy sex abuse. The arrest came just 2 days after the accuser called the abuse hotline. *Source: nj.com, 1-17-19*

**Rashan L. Wilson**, 35, N. Charleston, SC: Domestic violence of a high and aggravated nature. Wilson, pastor at Southside Impact Church, is charged in an incident at the church involving a woman with whom he has 2 children and is 8 weeks pregnant. An affidavit stated: “The defendant then lunged toward the victim, put both of his hands around her neck and squeezed tightly until she was unconscious for an indeterminate period of time.”

She called 911 after regaining consciousness and was treated and released. Wilson has written 3 books, including “99½ Things a Woman Needs From Her Man: How to Establish and Maintain a Healthy Relationship.” *Source: Post & Courier, 1-17-19*

**Daniel L. Johnson**, 24, Greenwood, SC: Criminal solicitation of a minor, sexual exploitation of a minor and criminal sexual conduct with a minor. He was charged in November with similar assault counts involving another male alleged victim. Johnson is listed as a youth minister on the St. John’s United Methodist Church website, but Pastor Scott Nurse said that’s just because the staff doesn’t know how to remove him from the site.

A 13-year-old boy told police in November that Johnson made him take photos of his genitals and coerced him into performing oral sex, a warrant said. *Source: Index-Journal, 1-17-19*

**John K. Wetteland**, 52, Trophy Club, TX: Continuous sexual abuse of a child younger than 14. Wetteland, an evangelical Christian who formerly taught high school bible study and coached

baseball at Liberty Christian School in the Dallas suburb Argyle, is accused of forcing a relative to perform a sex act on him. It allegedly occurred when the child was 4 and happened twice more during a 2-year period.

Wetteland is a member of the Texas Rangers Hall of Fame. He was the 1996 World Series MVP while pitching for the Yankees. A 1995 New York Times column noted his “Jesus Lives” coffee mug and a bible in his locker. “I honestly try and walk with Jesus Christ every day,” he told a reporter, describing his relationship with Jesus as more important than the one with his wife. *Source: Morning News, 1-15-19*

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an altercation in a private home in December where children were present. He pleaded guilty last July to driving under the influence, with his blood-alcohol content nearly 3 times the legal limit, was fined and placed on probation. *Source: Star-Tribune, 12-31-18*

**Richard Rose**, 59, Port Colborne, Ontario: 4 counts each of sexual assault and sexual interference. Rose is accused of incidents involving 2 minors while he was pastor at Northview Community Church when he lived in Markham between 1991-2015. He also operated a home day care and coached hockey during some of that time. *Source: CTV News, 12-29-18*

of Church of the Turning Point, calls himself “the Apostle.”

An affidavit alleges a girl was 13 when the assaults started and that she conceived 3 children with him. She was living with him because her family had financial difficulties. Another alleged victim is his daughter. *Source: WFAA, 12-21-18*

**Thomas Kreiser**, 53, Bronx, NY: 1st-degree sexual abuse. Kreiser, pastor at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church, is charged with sexual touching of a 10-year-old girl outside her clothes at a church school in September. He was sentenced in 2011 to 5 years’ probation for stealing over \$25,000 from his previous parish. *Source: Daily Voice, 12-19-18*

**Shauna Haile**, Rogersville, MO: Felony stealing and forgery. Haile has worked at Harvest Community Church of the Nazarene for 13 years, the last several as treasurer. Church leaders said about \$80,000 is missing. She allegedly told investigators it first happened by accident, that she had used the church debit card instead of her own and planned to pay it back, but when she didn’t get caught she continued to keep using the card. *Source: KY3, 12-18-18*

**Jeffrey B. Head**, 54, Draper, UT: 2 counts each of forcible sexual abuse and misdemeanor lewdness. Head, the leader of a local Mormon Church ward, is accused by at least 3 underage boys of offenses. One alleges Head came to his home unannounced in May 2016 and inappropriately touched him after asking to see his genitals after surgery.

Another alleged Head talked to him about masturbation “all the time” and once locked him in a car in the boy’s driveway so they could discuss sex.

“We have to figure this masturbation thing out,” Head allegedly told him. “You’re not leaving until we figure this out.” *Source: Salt Lake Tribune, 12-15-18*

**Henry D. Gleason**, 71, Claremore, OK: Child molestation, 1st-degree rape and sexual battery. Gleason, pastor of Harmony Star Freewill Baptist Church, is accused of assaults on 3 girls under age 10 and a woman now in her 20s. He allegedly told investigators he didn’t remember any sexual touching but would take the “fall” in order to keep the children out of a courtroom. *Source: KTUL, 12-13-18*

**Jerrell G. Altic**, 40, Houston: Altic, a pastor at First Baptist Church, is accused of embezzling over \$800,000 from 2011-17, spending the money on things like overseas trips with his family, groceries and payment for his doctorate in divinity from Lancaster Bible College. The church’s insurance will cover \$500,000 of the loss. *Source: KHOU, 12-12-18*

**Albert Weathers**, 46, Sterling Heights, MI: Murder and use of a firearm in commission of a felony. Weathers, pastor at Logos Church in Detroit, is accused in the December death of Kelly Stough, a 36-year-old transgendered woman.

Prosecutors believe the shooting is tied to Stough’s gender orientation. Weathers also worked at Great Lakes Water Authority until recently. *Source: Fox 2 Detroit, 12-12-18*

**Joseph Walsh**, 66, Hamilton Hill, Australia: 6 counts of theft. Walsh allegedly stole \$252,000 between 2014-17 while he was pastor at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church in Subiaco. *Source: ABC Local, 12-11-18*

**Mohamed Rawat**, 49, London: Possession with intent to supply an illegal substance. Rawat, a volunteer Muslim chaplain, is charged with smuggling a synthetic cannabinoid called K2 or Spice into jail for inmates to smoke. *Source: Daily Star, 12-10-18*

## Pleaded / Convicted

**Richard Chibuto**, Lusaka, Zambia: Guilty by bench trial of unlawful carnal knowledge. Chibuto, a Seventh-day Adventist Church elder, was accused of impregnating his 14-year-old stepdaughter and forcing her to abort the fetus. The girl testified he gave her 60 kwacha (\$5) and other gifts to entice her to have intercourse 4 times between January and July 2018 after he had kicked her mother out of their home. *Source: Lusaka Times, 1-22-19*

**Brian Boucher**, 56, Montreal: Pleaded guilty to sexual interference and invitation to sexual touching for acts in the mid-1990s while he was pastor at St. John Brébeuf Catholic Parish. The victim testified he was molested about twice a week over a 3-year-period, starting when he was 10.

The plea came 2 weeks after Boucher was found guilty by bench trial of similar charges involving oral and anal sex with another boy, starting when he was 12, while pastor at another parish in 2008-11. *Source: Montreal Gazette, 1-9-19*

**Donald R. White**, 70, Hannibal, MO: Pleaded guilty to wire fraud for embezzling \$320,888 as treasurer of Antioch Baptist Church from 1994-2016. A fire of “suspicious” nature destroyed the church in December 2016, about 2 months after White was confronted about the embezzlement, but he was never charged and no cause was ever determined. *Source: Herald-Whig, 1-4-19*



“Quit worrying about corroborating your sources—it’s not as if anyone’s going to take all this literally.”

“We have to figure this masturbation thing out.”  
— alleged comment by Mormon leader Jeffrey Head to boy

**Malcolm J. D’Souza**, 62, Calgary, Alberta: Sexual assault. D’Souza, pastor at 2 Catholic parishes, is accused of repeated, inappropriate touching of a woman in 2012. The Diocese of Calgary put him on leave last October after receiving allegations from 2 minors and several adults about incidents between 2010-16. *Source: Calgary Herald, 1-15-19*

**Derek Smittle**, 30, Centerton, AR: Sexual assault. Smittle, a Sunday school volunteer at First Baptist Centerton, is accused of having a months-long sexual relationship starting last October with a 17-year-old girl who attended First Baptist. He also hosted bible studies in his home. The girl’s mother alleged she found Smittle and her daughter at an Airbnb in January, an affidavit said. *Source: KFSM, 1-15-19*

**Charles Kormanski**, 56, Bellefonte, PA: Embezzlement of over \$167,000 from St. John Lutheran, where he’s been treasurer since 1998. It’s alleged he wrote 379 checks to himself, starting in December 2011. *Source: WTAJ, 1-15-19*

**Donald L. Reynolds**, 59, Edmore, ND: Felony theft. Reynolds is accused of stealing \$34,668 since 2004 as pastor of High Plains Ministry, a congregation of 6 merged Lutheran parishes. He resigned in June after being confronted with allegations. *Source: Grand Forks Herald, 1-10-19*

**Douglas Packer**, 63, Sierra Vista, AZ: Sexual abuse, sexual assault and unlawful sexual conduct in a correctional facility. Packer, 2015 Chaplain of the Year for the Arizona Detention Association Conference, is accused by an inmate of inappropriate conduct at the jail in Bisbee.

“Chaplain Packer was in a position of community trust, and based solely on his actions and poor decisions, he violated his sacred oath of office,” said Cochise County Sheriff Mark Dannels. *Source: Daily Star, 1-5-18*

**John Kakkuzhiyil**, 63, Ord, NE: 1st-degree sexual assault. Kakkuzhiyil, pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church, is accused by a woman of a November assault during which she alleges she blacked out after having drinks with him at his home. He entered drug and alcohol treatment Dec. 6 and was dismissed from it Jan. 2, said a Diocese of Grand Island statement. *Source: WOWT, 1-3-19*

**Brian L. Oliver**, 30, Casper, WY: Domestic battery. Oliver, who took medical leave in September as pastor at First United Methodist Church, is accused of assaulting a woman during

**John R. McFarland**, 56, Fountain Valley, CA: 2 counts of lewd acts on a child. McFarland, lead pastor at Orangethorpe United Methodist Church, is charged in alleged incidents involving a girl under age 14 between July 2012 and August 2013. *Source: KUSI, 12-28-18*

**Aron Y. Rosner**, Brooklyn, NY: Kidnapping. Rosner, a member of an ultra-Orthodox Jewish sect named Lev Tahor, is accused of being part of a conspiracy to kidnap children ages 12 and 14 in December from their mother Sara Helbrans, 32. The children were later found in Mexico.

The sect was founded by her father **Shlomo Helbrans**, who drowned in Mexico in 2017 after being convicted of kidnapping and deported to Israel. Rosner is a brother of **Meyer Rosner**, one of 5 **Lev Tahor** leaders arrested earlier in Mexico. *Source: AP, 12-28-18*

**Charles W. Seely Jr.**, 49, Ft. Worth, TX: Indecency with a child by sexual contact, prohibited sexual conduct and sexual assault of a child/soliciting a minor. Seely, an oil company executive who served in the volunteer ministry at Christ Chapel Bible Church, is accused of assaulting a teen for about 5 years, starting when she was 15 in 2012. She alleges they had intercourse when she was still 15 and had sex in hotels, a vehicle and at a Christian camp.

“Given these allegations, and in accord with our child protection policies, the perpetrator will NEVER be allowed to serve in any Christ Chapel child-serving ministry in the future,” executive pastor Bill Egnor wrote in an email. “WE BELIEVE HER, and commend her for courageously coming forward with this information.” *Source: Star-Telegram, 12-27-18*

**Joao T. de Faria**, 76, Abadiania, Brazil: Sexual violation through fraud. Faria, aka Joao de Deus (John of God), is accused of molesting a 39-year-old woman who had come to his faith-healing clinic for treatment. Over 300 women have come forward with similar abuse accusations. Prosecutors said more charges are expected due to 9 active investigations involving 16 complainants. *Source: Morning Herald, 12-25-18*

**Darrell M. Yancey**, 59, Grand Prairie, TX: 4 counts of sexual assault of a child, 3 counts of aggravated sexual assault of a child and driving with an invalid license. Yancey, founding pastor



**Loren Copp**, 49, St. Louis: Guilty in a bench trial of 8 counts of production, attempted production and possession of child pornography and use of interstate facilities to persuade or coerce a minor to engage in sexual activity. Copp, founder of a combination church, martial arts school and pizza place, was identified in images showing incidents of oral and vaginal sex with underage girls, the youngest age 11. He ran the school under a nonprofit called Ma-ji Ryu Christian Karate Association. *Source: KMOV, 12-26-18*

**James Jackson**, 49, W. Palm Beach, FL: Guilty by jury of 12 counts of child sex abuse. He was arrested in 2016 after 3 underage girls told investigators he used his status as a pastor of a storefront church to groom them for sex during counseling sessions. He also ran a group called Positive Habitat for Aspiring Teens.

**Valerie Jackson**, now his ex-wife, pleaded guilty to child neglect last May for covering up the abuse. *Source: WPBF, 12-19-18*

**Juan G. Castillo**, 35, Carlsbad, CA: Guilty by jury of misdemeanor sexual battery. Castillo, pastor at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, was accused by a Diocese of San Diego seminarian of groping his genitals in February 2018 in a restaurant bathroom. He testified he was trying to put pressure on the man's stomach to help him stop vomiting and might have accidentally touched his genitals.

Castillo told jurors that text messages he sent to apologize were for encouraging the seminarian to drink to excess, not for groping him. *Source: Catholic News Agency, 12-18-18*

Sentenced

**Brian S. Dicken**, 38, New Bern, NC: 5 years in prison with 3 years suspended after pleading no contest to taking indecent liberties with a juvenile while he was associate pastor at the Church of Christ at Mountain View in Winchester, VA. He was accused of having a sexual relationship from December 2014 to February 2017 with a girl he was counseling. She's now 18.

Text messages entered into evidence included them discussing a numbering system for acts ranging from foreplay to intercourse (the latter was a 12). The girl alleged the relationship gradually became more physical, which Dicken denied, calling her a liar. He has 6 children.

Senior pastor Douglas Hardman took issue in his testimony with Dicken's claim he never completely closed his office door. Hardman, who had a nearby office, said he often heard Dicken's door opening and closing and once saw the girl come out in tears.

Judge Alexander Iden noted the contradiction between Dicken's plea bargain and his refusal to admit guilt. "You want me to find you guilty of a crime, but punish you like you didn't do it, and I can't do that," he said. "This is not just about inappropriate text messages." *Source: Winchester Star, 1-26-19*

**Hafiz A. Pirzada**, 76, Northolt, UK: 8 years in prison after a court found him guilty of 7 counts of sexual assault of a child and 2 counts of causing a child to engage in sexual activity. The parents of girls ages 9 and 11 had hired the imam to teach the sisters about the Quran. Incidents were alleged between 2007-09 but not reported to police until 2015. *Source: The News International, 1-26-19*

**Aryeh L. Cohen**, 44, St. Louis Park, MN: 30 days in jail, suspended, 150 hours of community service, undergo mental health counseling and register as a sex offender. Cohen, rabbi and director of youth outreach for the Minneapolis Community Kollel, pleaded guilty to engaging in electronic communication describing sexual conduct with a child.

He was arrested in February 2018 after responding to an undercover agent's online profile that said he was a male turning 16 that August. Cohen then sent an explicit photo of himself and was arrested when he arrived at an apartment to have sex. *Source: Pioneer Press, 1-16-19*

**Allan J. Mithen**, 80, a retired Australian Catholic priest, pleaded guilty to 2 counts of indecently assaulting a girl when she 15 and 16 in 1965 and was sentenced to 13 months in jail, all suspended. At the time, he was in charge of a home for Aboriginal children taken from their families. The girl was told by another priest after the abuse that she had committed a mortal sin and would "burn in hell."

Curtin University senior Hannah McGlade told reporters Mithen should serve jail time. "We all came out today to say black lives matter, Aboriginal lives matter. There should have been justice. This is a stain on Western Australia, what's happened." *Source: ABC, 1-15-19*

**David L. Poulson**, 65, Oil City, PA: 2½ to 14 years in prison after pleading guilty to corruption of minors and child endangerment as a Catholic priest. Allegations included abuse between 2002-10 involving at least 2 underage boys. "For more than 7 years, the Diocese of Erie allowed Poulson to remain a priest, even though they knew he was a predator," state Attorney General Josh Shapiro said in a statement after sentencing. *Source: AP, 1-11-19*

**Danny Wooten**, 55, Montclair, CA: 14 years in prison and restitution of \$3.7 million for convictions on 53 felony counts, including embezzlement, conflict of interest and misappropriation



tion of public funds. Wooten, founding pastor of New Covenant Christian Fellowship Center, also worked for the Pasadena Public Works Department, where he generated 300 false invoices for the city's underground utility program, which he managed. It's suspected that as much as \$6 million was stolen but evidence only existed for slightly more than half that, said prosecutor Richard Santiago.

Co-conspirator **Tyrone Collins**, owner of Collins Electric, a business through which some of the money was embezzled, was convicted of 20 counts and sentenced to 7 years and \$900,000 restitution. *Source: L.A. Times, 1-11-19*

**David Tapley**, 54, Crystal Lake, IL: 5 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of aggravated criminal sexual abuse of an underage female relative from about 2010-15 while he was a deacon at Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Cary. The girl testified the abuse started when they played guitar and sang in the choir.

Tapley served as a deacon at Fox Valley Christian Reformed Church after he was barred from Sts. Peter and Paul. *Source: Northwest Herald, 1-4-19*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

The **Diocese of Pittsburgh**, Bishop **David Zubik** and his predecessor, Cardinal **Donald Wuerl**, are being sued by "Jane Doe," who alleges she was molested in 1982 by **Paul E. Pindel**, pastor of St. Genevieve Catholic Church in Canonsburg. He died in 1991 at age 65.

Doe alleges she sought counseling about getting married while pregnant at age 15 or 16. She claims he asked if she had engaged in oral or anal sex.

"Father Pindel then placed her hand on his erect penis and requested for her to show him how she became pregnant," the lawsuit says.

A state grand jury said the diocese has received multiple allegations since 2002 of abuse by Pindel dating back to 1957. The suit alleges the diocese ignored complaints about Pindel made by Doe's father and instead transferred him.

The same defendants are accused in another suit of covering up "sexual interest in male children" by former priest **William Yockey** and repeatedly failing "to take any action to investigate, discipline or report Yockey as a sexual predator."

Plaintiff Richard Bieranowski, now 53, alleges abuse by Yockey on numerous occasions in 1981-82 when he was pastor at St. Bernadette Parish in Monroeville. Yockey was withdrawn from active ministry in 1991. Bieranowski reported the abuse to his parents and a congregation member in 1985, the complaint says. *Source: Post-Gazette/Tribune Review, 1-18-19*

The **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** is being sued in Navajo Nation tribal court in Utah by "LB," who alleges he was molested 3 times in the 1980s by an **unidentified church bishop** who lived across the street from his Mormon foster family. He was one of thousands of Native Americans in the church's Indian Student Placement Program, which started in the late 1940s and ended in about 2000.

LB alleges he told his foster mother but she accused him of lying and says his foster father spanked him for reporting his abuse to a case worker. The church didn't report the abuse to law enforcement or the plaintiff's biological family, the suit asserts. *Source: AP, 1-9-19*

The **First Presbyterian Church** of Plymouth, MI, and former church employees **Victoria Barkoff** and **Lisa Williams** are accused of negligence in a suit alleging an "adult man wear-

ing a cross on a necklace" digitally penetrated a 5-year-old girl in a church bathroom on Palm Sunday 2017, then exposed his penis and left male DNA in her underwear. A criminal probe ended with no arrest.

Her parents allege the girl was gone for about 20 minutes from the classroom and that the church failed to notify other parents about the assault. Barkoff and Williams resigned after the incident. *Source: Detroit News, 1-4-19*

**Sarah Greer**, New Haven, CT, is being sued for withdrawing \$238,000 from an account held jointly with her husband **Daniel Greer**, the former rabbi at Yeshiva of New Haven. A jury awarded Daniel Greer's former student almost \$22 million for being sexually abused in the early- to mid-2000s.

It's alleged the withdrawal was to reduce Daniel Greer's assets available to creditors and to prevent the male victim from collecting on the judgment. Daniel Greer still faces criminal charges of 2nd-degree sexual assault and risk of injury to a child. *Source: New Haven Register, 12-26-18*

The **Archdiocese of Atlanta**, Archbishop **Wilton Gregory** and **St. Joseph's Catholic Church** in Dalton, GA, are defendants in a suit filed by "Phillip Doe," who alleges he was molested starting when he was 12 by priest **John D. Edwards** from 1976-78. Edwards died in 1997. The church suppressed abuse allegations, thereby endangering the public, the complaint states. *Source: AP, 12-20-18*

**Our Lady of Health Parish**, Las Cruces, NM, and the Catholic **Diocese of El Paso, TX**, are accused of negligence in a suit filed by "Jane Doe N," who alleges she was raped several times when she was 10 in 1978-79 by pastor **Joaquin Resma**, who died in 1983. The parish was part of the Diocese of El Paso at the time. Three others have accused Resma of abuse. His name is not on a recent list of credibly accused clergy, which attorneys called an insult to his victims. *Source: Sun-News, 12-19-18*

The **Salesians of Don Bosco**, the Catholic **Archdiocese of New Orleans** and Archbishop **Gregory Aymond** are being sued by a man alleging he was raped in 1979 when he was 17 by **Salvatore Isgro**, a Salesian priest who died in 1990. He alleges Isgro held something under his nose that smelled like ammonia before raping him and afterward told him to sit in a warm bath when he got home. *Source: The Advocate, 12-12-18*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

**Fairfield University** in Connecticut, the **Society of Jesus of New England**, the **Order of Malta** and **Haiti Fund Inc.** will pay \$60 million to over 130 plaintiffs who allege sexual abuse as students at a charity school in Cap-Haitien, Haiti, from about 1999 to 2009. Fairfield graduate **Douglas Perlitz** is serving a nearly 20-year prison sentence for molesting Haitian boys as young as 11. Fairfield is a Jesuit school.

Boston attorney Mitchell Garabedian represented plaintiffs in the class-action suit, which is expect to be approved by a federal judge. The defendants agreed to a \$12 million settlement in 2013 with 24 other plaintiffs. *Source: AP, 1-25-19*

**Daniel Cronin**, 91, retired Catholic archbishop of Hartford, CT, and previously bishop of the Diocese of Fall River, MA, settled a suit filed in 2015 by 2 Massachusetts men. They each will get \$200,000 for alleged sexual abuse as altar boys in the late 1970s and early 1980s by priest **Maurice Souza**, who died in 1996 at age 83. *Source: AP, 1-24-19*

The **Archdiocese of Los Angeles** agreed to settle for undisclosed terms a 2015 sexual abuse

suit filed by "John CJ Doe," his attorney told a judge. Defendants include **St. Louise de Marillac Catholic Church** in Covina, CA, and **Chris Cunningham**, 56, who was the St. Louise pastor in 2001-02 when Doe was 12 and 13 years old.

Civil complaints filed in May and October 2017 allege Cunningham also sexually molested other boys ages 10-15 from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s at parishes in Palmdale and Redondo Beach. He was removed from ministry in 2006. *Source: San Gabriel Valley Tribune, 1-22-19*

New Life Church of Alamo, CA, and the **San Ramon Valley Unified School District** reached a \$1.55 million settlement with a student who alleged he was molested by high school wrestling coach **Kevin Lopez**. The church's insurance company will pay \$849,000 and the church agreed to strengthen its child protection policies. The district will pay \$699,000. A concerned parent reported concerns to the district in 2014 but Lopez wasn't arrested until a year later. It was then discovered that the church had received numerous complaints about his behavior at camps and on mission trips and took no action.

According to a police report, Lopez was recorded talking to himself in an interview room: "[Expletive] miracles right now, God. Please help me." He was sentenced to 10 years, 8 months in prison after pleading guilty to multiple counts of lewd acts on children. *Source: Mercury News, 1-15-19*

Five alleged victims of accused New Jersey pedophile priest **Michael Walters** settled their suits against Walters, the **Archdiocese of Newark** and **2 Catholic parishes** for \$400,000. Walters is accused of molesting boys and girls in the 1980s and 1990s. Ordained in 1965, he was removed from ministry in 2016. *Source: nj.com, 1-14-19*

**Opus Dei**, an international conservative Catholic organization, paid \$977,000 to settle a sexual misconduct claim in 2005 in Washington, a payment that was only recently made public. It was made to a woman now in her mid-50s. She alleged that priest **C. John McCloskey** groped her several times while she was getting pastoral counseling for a troubled marriage and depression.

McCloskey, who's in his 60s, suffers from advanced Alzheimer's and is largely incapacitated, said Thomas Bohlin, U.S. Opus Dei vicar. Two other women may have been victimized by McCloskey, Bohlin said. *Source: National Catholic Reporter, 1-8-19*

A survivor of child sex abuse at a **Sisters of Nazareth** children's home in Londonderry, N. Ireland, has been awarded state benefits for a series of health complaints and lingering trauma from the abuse. Kate Walmsley, 62, a member of the Survivors and Victims of Institutional Abuse group, says she was molested starting when she was 12 by 2 priests and older girls at the Catholic facility.

At a historical abuse inquiry in 2014, Walmsley testified she was also "mentally and physically abused by nuns." She described being beaten and force-fed her own vomit by nuns and scalded with hot water. *Source: Belfast Telegraph, 1-6-19*

The **Religious Sisters of Mercy**, an order of Catholic nuns founded in Ireland, settled with 6 clergy sex abuse plaintiffs who attended schools operated by the nuns on Guam. Settlement terms weren't disclosed but the suits sought total damages of \$30 million. *Source: Pacific Daily News, 1-4-19*

The Catholic **Diocese of Burlington, VT**, settled for undisclosed terms a suit that alleged sexual abuse by former priest **Alfred Willis** at St. Ann's Parish in Milton in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the plaintiff, who now lives in Texas, was an altar boy.

The diocese has settled about 50 abuse cases, paying out over \$31 million. Bishop Christopher Coyne said a lot of the money came from the sale of property in Burlington and that much of that money is now gone. *Source: WCAX, 12-21-18*

Finances

**Guam's Catholic Church** filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, a move that will let the archdiocese avoid trial in dozens of sex abuse suits and enter settlement negotiations with nearly 200 accusers. Church attorney Ford Elsaesser said assets are valued at \$22.9 million with liabilities of \$45.6 million. The church plans to sell nonessential real estate and add the proceeds to the settlement fund.

Notice will be given to potential claimants, with the estimated deadline to file in May or June. A trust fund will also be established for future claimants who did not file within the bankruptcy deadline. *Source: AP, 1-15-19*

Legal Developments

**Phra Sorasak Siripaththo**, 61, Bang Bua Thong, Thailand: Siripaththo, a Buddhist monk, was arrested after 11 years on the run after being charged in 2008 for having sex with a 14-year-old student. The girl lived near the temple with her grandmother and reportedly climbed through the window to sleep with him several times. Her family eventually filed a complaint. *Source: Bangkok*



Post, 1-15-19

**Nine Jewish yeshivas** in Ramapo, NY, were fined a combined \$70,200 for failure to provide student measles vaccination records. The schools were ordered to submit the records during a measles outbreak in which there are nearly 100 confirmed cases in Rockland County. Brooklyn health officials said there are over 40 cases in the Orthodox Jewish community. *Source: Journal News, 12-19-18*

The **Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York** has to pay a \$4 million judgment for refusing to hand over documents it received in response to a 1997 letter sent to Jehovah’s Witnesses congregations about known molesters in the church, a California appeals court ruled 3-0. The lower court awarded plaintiff “J.W.” the money. She accused church elder **Gilbert Simental** of Mountain View of abuse in 2006 at a slumber party at his home. He was eventually convicted of molesting her and 2 other girls. *Source: NY Law Journal, 12-10-18*

Allegations

The Catholic **Diocese of Green Bay, WI**, released the names of 46 clergy with substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of minors. Fifteen are still alive. At a press conference, Bishop David Ricken apologized to the 98 known victims since 1906 and called for other victims to come forward. “We believe you,” he said. Ricken said the names would be posted on the diocese’s website at noon. It appeared that the website crashed less than a minute after noon.

The next day, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests called the list “partial, biased and incomplete” and sent a letter to state Attorney General Josh Kaul to ask for a statewide investigation. The letter claimed that former Bishop David Zubik destroyed files in 2007. SNAP also alleged 16 names were left off the list. Milwaukee District Attorney John Chisholm has also called for a probe.

Diocese Chancellor Tammy Basten said those 16 priests aren’t under Ricken’s authority. “Priests who are part of religious orders, such as the Norbertines or Franciscans, are accountable to their religious superior within the order,” Basten said. *Source: Press-Gazette, 1-17-19*

**Richard McGrath**, 72, Chicago, the former president of Providence Catholic High School being investigated for allegedly molesting a male student at the New Lenox school in the mid-1990s, has gone AWOL from his religious order. Anthony Pizzo, prior provincial of the Midwest Augustinians, said McGrath was “illegitimately” absent from the Hyde Park friary.

Police were alerted in December 2017 after a female student reported seeing an image of a nude boy on McGrath’s cell phone but closed the investigation with no charges after he refused to turn over the phone. It was reopened after the student, Robert Krankvich, filed a suit alleging McGrath molested him repeatedly between the ages of 13 and 15 in his office and at the friary. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 12-29-18*

Illinois’ **6 Catholic dioceses** failed to disclose sexual abuse allegations against at least 500 priests and clergy members, according to preliminary findings, said state Attorney General Lisa Madigan. The dioceses’ lists have 185 names.

In many cases, the accusations have “not been adequately investigated by the dioceses or not investigated at all,” Madigan said in a statement, adding that the church often failed to notify law enforcement or the Department of Children and Family Services about allegations. *Source: CNN, 12-19-18*

At least 412 allegations of sexual abuse of minors by **187 independent fundamental Baptist churches** and affiliated institutions in 40 U.S. states and Canada have been documented by a Texas newspaper investigation. Victims allege the number of abused is far greater because many victims don’t ever come forward. The totals include 168 church leaders accused or convicted.

Independent fundamental Baptists deem Southern Baptists too liberal. Though they operate independently, many pastors are linked by the church-affiliated colleges they attended, such as Bob Jones University in Greenville, SC. *Source: Star-Telegram, 12-9-18*

U.S. Catholic bishops have tallied **6,846 abusive priests** who served in their parishes since the 1950s, according to an analysis of data from Bishop Accountability.org, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Vatican and Jesuit statistics and reports from clinicians. Although the conference estimates about 6% of priests are abusive, the analysis from court cases, investigations, bankruptcy filings and diocese records shows the rate is about 10%, or 11,700 clergy.

Estimates are higher in some areas, such as Fairbanks, Alaska, with a 19% rate. In addition, Bishop Accountability founder Terry McKiernan said 100 U.S. dioceses haven’t named any abusers. There’s also a year missing from the church-funded John Jay College of Criminal Justice study released in 2004 that doesn’t include the 2003 numbers. *Source: York Daily Record, 12-7-18*

Removed / Resigned

**Mark Milatz**, Brighton, MI, resigned as senior pastor at Shepherd of the Lakes Lutheran Church in Brighton, MI, and as a Missouri Synod Lutheran minister. A December letter to parishioners said church officials would contact the Michigan State Police for the “purposes of exploring possible financial improprieties.”

According to reports about what took place at meetings before his resignation, it was stated that Milatz had been treating staff in a “hostile and erratic manner” and had been asked by the board to seek counseling. While the board was mulling what action to take, a “series of financial issues” were uncovered. *Source: WHMJ, 1-28-19*

**David Crabtree**, Raleigh, NC, was permanently deposed (removed) as an ordained deacon by the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina after it investigated an allegation of sexual misconduct and conduct unbecoming a member of the clergy. Crabtree, lead anchor at WRAL-TV, told viewers that he had a relationship “years ago” with an adult woman. He’s now divorced. *Source: News & Observer, 1-26-19*

**William Sprigler**, New Ulm, MN, was permanently removed from public ministry by the Catholic Diocese of New Ulm. Sprigler retired in 2016 but has since filled in for pastors in New Ulm and Orlando and Venice, FL.

According to a statement from Bishop John LeVoir, the diocese was informed in December by the Archdiocese of San Antonio, TX, that it had discovered allegations of sexual abuse of 2 minors in 1976 while preparing a clergy abuse disclosure report. The archdiocese has determined that the allegations were credible. *Source: New Ulm Journal, 1-26-19*

**John P. Smyth**, 84, Des Plaines, IL, was removed from ministry due to allegations of sexual abuse of minors in 2002-03 at Maryville Academy, a facility for children with special emotional and medical needs. Smyth is retired but until recently was still living in the rectory of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the Maryville grounds. *Source: Sun-Times, 1-17-19*

**John F. Meyers** and **Raymond W. Smart** are unsuitable for ministry and have been removed, according to the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Meyers, 64, was put on administrative leave in late 2018 due to a substantiated abuse allegation from the early 1980s. Smart, 74, is accused of abuse of a minor in the same time period.

**Joseph Logrip**, 73, was placed on administrative leave, also for an allegation of abuse in the early 1980s. He had been removed earlier but reinstated in 2014. *Source: WHYY, 1-13-19*

**Patrick J. Lee**, 68, Chicago, head pastor at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, was asked by Cardinal Blase Cupich to “step aside” from ministry due to an accusation of child sexual abuse in 1979 at St. Christopher Catholic Church in Midlothian. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 1-12-19*

**Mark Porterfield**, pastor of St. Martin Catholic Church in St. Martins, MO, and judicial vicar for the Diocese of Jefferson City, was placed on administrative leave. “While the allegation does not involve a minor, it does fall within the protocol of the diocese for clergy conduct and requires further consultation and investigation,” a statement said. *Source: News Tribune, 1-11-19*

**Donnie Romero**, Ft. Worth, TX, resigned as founding pastor at Stedfast Baptist Church after admitting he has been “a terrible husband and father.”

“I have not been ruling my house well,” Romero, who has a wife and 7 children, told his congregation on Jan. 2. “I’m the one at fault in this situation. I love Stedfast Baptist Church. I love my family. This is the best decision for my family and this church to make.”

Romero has compared LGBTQ people to

pedophiles, called gays “scum of the earth” and applauded the 2016 mass murder of gay people at Orlando’s Pulse nightclub. In another video posted later, he said went to a Jacksonville casino and drank alcohol. “And there were girls there that were prostitutes and I committed adultery on my wife multiple times. I drank and gambled multiple times. ... I even smoked weed.” He hasn’t been charged with any crime. *Source: NY Daily News, 1-10-19*

**Donald G. Timone**, a Catholic priest who retired from the Church of St. Joseph in Middletown, NY, was suspended from ministry during reinvestigation of 15-year-old claims he molested a male minor. “There is potentially new information ... that has come to light,” said Joe Zwilling, spokesman for the Archdiocese of New York. *Source: Times Herald-Record, 12-26-18*

Jesuit priests **Frank Case** and **Pat Lee** resigned as vice presidents at Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA, after criticism of their handling of clergy sexual abuse allegations. A news report recently revealed Case, 80, recommended pedophile priest **James Poole** for a chaplain’s job in 1989 at St. Joseph Medical Center in Tacoma, although Poole had been accused of abusing Alaska Native women and girls as early as 1960.

It wasn’t clear what prompted Lee’s resignation as vice president of mission and

ministry. A Gonzaga spokesman declined to explain the reasons for the departures, saying he couldn’t discuss personnel matters. *Source: Spokesman-Review, 12-21-18*

**David R. Gaeta**, American Fork, UT, retired as pastor at St. Peter Catholic Parish and will not be allowed to return to public ministry. He was placed on leave in August amid allegations of sexual misconduct in Ogden in 1982.

The Diocese of Salt Lake City said Gaeta was accused of sharing a bed with a minor and, in a separate incident, offering 4 minors alcohol and asking them to undress. No criminal charges were filed. *Source: Daily Herald, 12-18-18*

**Joseph Metzger II**, Norfolk, VA, has taken a leave of absence as pastor of Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, Diocese of Arlington Bishop Barry Knestout wrote in a letter to parishioners. Metzger’s interactions with young people were not “in keeping with the Code of Conduct with Minors set forth in the Diocesan Safe Environment Regulations,” the bishop wrote, adding that “no allegations of child sexual abuse have been made.”

The Diocesan Review Board will determine Metzger’s suitability to returning and in what capacity, Knestout said. *Source: WVEC, 12-10-18*

**Ronald S. Escalante**, Purcellville, VA, was placed on leave as pastor at St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church. A Diocese of Arlington statement said he’s accused of “boundary violations involving a minor and adults” that go against its clergy code of conduct. Loudoun County Sheriff’s Office spokesman Kraig Troxell said an investigation concluded criminal charges aren’t warranted. *Source: AP, 12-11-18*

**Thomas J. Valenti** and **Erick Viloria** were removed from public ministry by the Catholic Diocese of Rochester, NY, during investigations of alleged misconduct. Valenti, pastor of Blessed Trinity/St. Patrick’s Parish in Owego, is among 8 priests named by Boston attorney Mitchell Garabedian as child abusers between 1950-78.

Viloria, pastor at Our Lady of Peace Parish in Geneva, is the subject of an August 2018 complaint that he “engaged in objectionable and inappropriate use of social media with an adult” that was unrelated to his parish ministry. *Source: Democrat & Chronicle, 12-10-18*

**Mark Jendrysik**, 60, Glendale Heights, IL, was permanently removed as pastor of St. Matthew Catholic Parish due to an alleged incident

with a teen girl about 35 years ago when Jendrysik was a seminarian serving a summer internship. “On behalf of the Diocese of Joliet, Bishop Conlon expresses his deepest regrets and apology to the victim. The reporting of such incidents is emotionally difficult, and the victim in this case has shown great courage in coming forward,” a statement said. *Source: WLS, 12-9-18*

**Juan Cano**, 35, Encino, CA, associate pastor at Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, was removed from ministry by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles due to reports of inappropriate contact with “several females” in the parish, which was his first assignment as a priest. In an interview with the archdiocese on Facebook, Cano, a Mexico native, said he decided to become a priest after a miracle cured a congenital tumor in his head.

Although Cano will not be charged in these cases and new accusers could come forward, the Catholic Church is removing Cano from the ministry, said Adrian Marquez, archdiocese director of media relations. Although law enforcement has determined Cano won’t be criminally charged, he’s being removed and has no right of appeal, Marquez said. “It’s not his choice. He is not going to be allowed to be a priest anymore.” *Source: L.A. Daily News, 12-7-18*

**Murrough C. Wallace**, 82, S. Lake Tahoe, CA, a retired priest and native of Ireland who last served as an active pastor at St. Theresa Catholic Parish in 2003, was directed “to withdraw from ministry until more facts can be gathered” about an allegation of assault by a 17-year-old boy in 1985 at a camp where Wallace was director, the Diocese of Sacramento said in a statement. *Source: KCRA, 12-6-18*

Other

**Paul S. Wakefield**, 62, Gilcrest, CO, pastor at Gilcrest Baptist Church was struck and killed by a train at a U.S. 85 crossing 8 days after he was charged with misdemeanor unlawful sexual contact and suspicion of committing a crime against an at-risk person, a felony. He was on foot and his death remains under investigation.

The charges stemmed from a Jan. 3 incident when a nurse at an assisted living facility in Windsor noticed the door to a patient’s room was closed. She told police she entered the room and found Wakefield kneeling in front of the woman, who has cognitive communication deficit, with his hands up her blouse and his head on her chest, according to an affidavit. Wakefield stood up and told her he was listening to the woman’s heart.

Court records said the woman’s son walked in on Wakefield with his head on his mother’s chest and once with his hand under her blouse. He told police he was examining her ribs because she told him she had fallen and hurt them.

He’s survived by his wife of 35 years, 4 sons and 6 siblings. *Source: Greeley Tribune, 1-13-19*

**Edward J. McKeown**, 74, a pedophile Catholic priest accused of molesting at least 30 boys in Nashville and east Tennessee over 20 years, died in prison of natural causes. He was convicted in 1999 of sexual assaults on a boy, starting when he was 12 and continuing for 3 years, and was sentenced to 25 years. He was due to be released May 1, 2020.

Edward Kmiec, named bishop of Nashville in 1992, had given assurances that the diocese had removed McKeown from “direct or unsupervised contact with youth” after an initial molestation complaint was lodged in 1986. But records unsealed in 2002 by the state Court of Appeals in a civil suit filed by 2 victims showed McKeown was allowed to teach youth classes, hear children’s confessions and participate in sleepovers with them. *Source: The Tennessean, 1-1-19*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org



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CONTEST

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

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



# Former churches with better missions

Loren Howerter sent us this photo of Blondie’s Plate in Sequim, Wash. Originally constructed in 1896, the building was formerly an Episcopalian church. “I can’t think of a better use for church buildings than conversions into restaurants and pubs!” Loren writes.



Life Member David Nolley sent us this photo of a former church that is now a residence, set next to dirt road about eight miles outside of Lapeer, Mich.



Ed Sweeney, pictured, sent us this photo of the Bluestone concert hall in Columbus, Ohio, which was formerly a Baptist church built 115 years ago. Sweeney tells us that the building also can be rented for corporate events, weddings and private parties. It boasts three diverse levels, seven bars, soaring stained glass windows, and a gracious outdoor patio.

Joan Reisman-Brill sent us this photo of the Limelight in New York City. The site is a former Episcopal Church of the Holy Communion, a Gothic Revival brownstone building built in 1844-1845. The building has housed numerous businesses since then, including a drug rehab house in the 1970s, an infamous disco and rock club, and in the 1990s it became a prominent place to hear techno, goth, and industrial music. In 2003, it reopened under the name “Avalon,” but closed in 2007. The building became Limelight Marketplace in 2010, but in 2014 it was converted into an outlet of the David Barton Gym chain. In June 2017, it reopened as Limelight Fitness.



Pete Prunkl of North Carolina sent us a photo of this former church, and writes, “The first worship service at Faith Reformed Church in Salisbury, N.C., was Nov. 18, 1898. Following the merger of the Reformed and Evangelical churches in 1934, the local congregation became First Evangelical and Reformed Church. When its new church was built in 1954, members marched about 100 yards across the street and up a hill to West Horah Street. That year, the congregation sold the old church building to the Knights of Pythias, a religious-based fraternity and secret society, for \$18,000. The Knights integrated the stained-glass windows and altar into their lodge rituals. The Knights sold the building to Mona and Gianni Moscardini, and in 1994 Gianni transformed the church/lodge into La Cava Italian Restaurant.”



“Crystal Connection, which replaced a lovely restaurant that was in this church, is kind of a step backward since it’s a business rooted in superstition (but the crystals are very pretty),” writes Joan Reisman-Brill. The store is housed in what was initially a Methodist church built in 1892 in Wurtsboro, N.Y.



Mark Welty sent us this photo of a former Episcopal church in Waterloo, Iowa, which is now being used by an advertising agency.



Mark Welty also sent us this photo of a former Lutheran church in Cedar Falls, Iowa, that has been remodeled into apartments.

If you see or know of any former churches that now serve a secular purpose, please send us a photo (preferably with you in it!) and a brief description of the property. Send it to [editor@FFRF.org](mailto:editor@FFRF.org).



Oct. 18-20 in Madison, Wis.

Sign up now for FFRF’s 42nd annual convention

You’re invited to join the Freedom From Religion Foundation at our 42nd annual national convention on the weekend of Friday, Oct. 18, through Sunday, Oct. 20, at the Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center, 1 John Nolen Drive, in Madison, Wis.

As always, it will be a weekend of great speakers, awesome people, good food, irreverent music and a chance to recharge your secular and freethinking battery. You won’t want to miss it! Please make your hotel reservations early to avoid disappointment.

Early-bird confirmed speakers include: **Frederick Clarkson** is a senior research analyst at Political Research Associates, a progressive think tank. He is the author, co-author or editor of several books, including *Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy* and *Dispatches from the Religious Left: The Future of Faith and Politics in America*. He has written about politics and religion for a wide range of publications for more than three decades, from Mother Jones, Church & State, and Ms. Magazine to The Christian Science Monitor and Salon.com. Last year in Religion Dispatches, he broke the story about Project Blitz, a Christian Right state legislative campaign with long range theocratic intentions.



Frederick Clarkson

**Anthony B. Pinn**, a professor of humanities and religion at Rice University, is the founding director of the Center for Engaged Research and Collaborative Learning at Rice. In addition, he is director of research for the Institute for Humanist Studies. He earned the African American Humanist Award from the Council for Secular Humanism; Unitarian Universalist Humanist Association Humanist of the Year (2017), and the Harvard University Humanist Association Humanist of the Year (2006). He is the author/editor of over 35 books, including many on free-thought, humanism and the intersection of race and religion. He will be receiving FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award.



Anthony B. Pinn

**Andrew L. Seidel**, the director of strategic response at FFRF, where he uses his law degree to challenge religious bullies. Andrew’s first book *The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism Is Un-American* features a foreword by author Susan Jacoby and a preface by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. *The Founding Myth*, published by Sterling Press, comes out in May and is highly anticipated with positive reviews.



Andrew L. Seidel

Seidel also appears on FFRF’s podcasts and shows, and has debated religion and government on networks such as MSNBC and Fox News.

**Mandisa Thomas**, the founder and president of Black Nonbelievers (“Walking by Sight, Not Faith”), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 2013 with 14 affiliates around the nation. Black Nonbelievers connects with blacks (and allies) who are living free of religion, and who might otherwise be shunned by family and friends. She has a number of media appearances to her credit, including “CBS Sunday Morning,” CNN.com, Playboy,



The Humanist and Jet magazine, as well as FFRF’s TV show, “Freethought Matters.” Thomas currently serves on the board for American Atheists and previously for Foundation Beyond Belief and the Secular Coalition for America. Additionally, she was named the Unitarian Universalist Humanist Association’s 2018 Person of the Year. Thomas will be named FFRF’s 2019 Freethought Heroine.

Convention-al wisdom

General Schedule

The pre-convention open house is Friday, Oct. 18, at Freethought Hall, FFRF’s national office.

The official starting time of the convention, at the Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center (1 John Nolen Drive, Madison) is 1 p.m., Friday, Oct. 18, continuing through Saturday night. FFRF’s membership and state representative meetings take place Sunday morning, ending by noon.

The schedule includes irreverent music, FFRF book and merch sales tables and book signings. Plus, there is the always-popular drawing for “clean” (pre-“In God We Trust”) currency on Saturday night.

Return the handy registration form or sign up at [ffrf.org/convention2019](http://ffrf.org/convention2019).

Hotels

Please reserve your hotel rooms *now* to avoid disappointment!

FFRF is using three Madison hotels. The Hilton Madison, attached to the site of the convention, is the main hotel venue. The other two hotels offer overflow rooms, and require either a three-block walk or driving or taking a free shuttle to the convention site. All hotels have blocs Thursday through Saturday nights, with a few more limited rooms Wednesday and Sunday nights.

**Hilton Madison Monona Terrace**, 9 E. Wilson St., Madison, WI 53703. Call 1-877-510-7465 or 414-935-5941, or visit [bit.ly/2SPTPlz](http://bit.ly/2SPTPlz) and mention “Freedom From Religion Foundation.” Rates are \$185 (1-4 people), plus tax. Valet parking: \$20/day.

**Sheraton Madison Hotel**, 706 John Nolen Drive, Madison, WI 53713. Call 866-716-8134 or 608-251-2300 or visit: [reservations.com/hotel/sheraton-madison-hotel](http://reservations.com/hotel/sheraton-madison-hotel), mentioning “Freedom From Religion Foundation.” Rates are \$156 (1-4 people), plus local taxes of 14.5 percent and fees. Parking is free and so is the shuttle to Monona Terrace, a 3-mile walk or 8-minute drive.

**Park Hotel Madison**, 22 S. Carroll St., Madison, WI 53703 (3 blocks from Monona Terrace). Call 800-279-8811 or 608-285-8000 or visit [reservations@parkhotelmadison.com](http://reservations@parkhotelmadison.com), mentioning “Freedom From Religion Foundation.” Rates are \$194 (1-2 people, one bed); \$214 (1-4 people, 2 beds); \$254 (suite). Two-night minimum length of stay. Guaranteed parking for one vehicle for overnight guests (\$15 per night, valet only).

Freethought Hall Reception

On Friday, Oct. 18, from 9:30-11 a.m., you’re cordially invited to tour the four-story Freethought

Hall in downtown Madison, enjoy light pastries, Mimosas, coffee and tea in the Charlie Brooks Auditorium, get your photo by the life-like model of Charles Darwin in the Joel B. Landon and Wanda Y. Beers Freethought Library, and socialize with other members and staff. Please RSVP.

Food!

Complimentary receptions include light brunch fare at the Freethought Hall Open House, ice cream and hot beverages Friday afternoon and dessert reception with cupcakes and hot beverages at the conclusion of Friday night.

Optional meals (veggie/vegan/gluten-free substitutes available) include:

**Friday Dinner Buffet**, \$35: Bucky’s Tailgate Buffet includes Wisconsin Waldorf salad, home-style potato salad, fresh vegetable and relish tray, beer-boiled Johnsonville bratwurst with sauerkraut and chopped fresh onion, grilled boneless chicken breast, black bean burgers, fresh sliced tomato and lettuce, vegetarian baked beans, buns and coffee, tea and milk.

**Saturday Nonprayer Breakfast**, \$20: Cheese & chive scrambled eggs, apple smoked bacon, rosemary wedge potatoes, ketchup, petite muffin assortment, chilled juice, coffee, tea and milk.

**Saturday ‘Grab and Go’ Box Lunch**, \$25. For your convenience, we offer a box lunch containing deli-sliced turkey on fresh Kaiser roll, fresh sliced tomato and lettuce with condiments, piece of whole fruit, home-baked cookie and chips. Vegetarian option is marinated grilled tempeh sandwich. Kaiser is replaced with gluten-free roll upon request.

**Note:** There is a two-hour lunch and sightseeing break Saturday. There are many lunch spots open on the nearby Capitol Square and on State Street (about five blocks away).

**Saturday Dinner**, \$50: Roasted airline chicken breast with truffle butter glaze, potatoes, fresh seasonal vegetable blend, house salad, bakery-fresh hard rolls & butter, plated dessert trio (strawberry pistacio tart, flourless chocolate diamond cake, and white chocolate passionfruit mousse cup), coffee, tea and milk. Cash bar.

Meals are not a fundraiser for FFRF, but your participation enables FFRF to meet significant hotel room bloc and meal minimums, and provides a chance to socialize.

More details are at: [ffrf.org/convention2019](http://ffrf.org/convention2019)

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NATIONAL CONVENTION

MADISON | OCTOBER 18-20, 2019

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Or register online: [ffrf.org/convention2019](http://ffrf.org/convention2019)

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Member	_____	\$60 \$_____
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<input type="checkbox"/> I am interested in hotel, meal or travel scholarship		
Non-member	_____	\$115 \$_____
Or join for \$40 and save \$15	_____	\$100 \$_____

OPTIONAL MEALS / EVENTS

Friday, October 18

Freethought Hall Open House 9:30-11 AM / Must register to attend

\_\_\_\_\_ Free \$\_\_\_\_\_

Friday Welcome Party (Buffet) 5-6:30 PM

\_\_\_\_\_ \$35 \$\_\_\_\_\_

Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 3 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Saturday, October 19

Please select each meal you will attend

Non-Prayer Breakfast

\_\_\_\_\_ \$20 \$\_\_\_\_\_

Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 3 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

“Grab and Go” Box Lunch

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25 \$\_\_\_\_\_

Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 3 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Saturday Dinner

\_\_\_\_\_ \$50 \$\_\_\_\_\_

Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Registrant 3 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

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