

# FREETHOUGHT TODAY



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We are all  
we've got**

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contemplating  
life's end**

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Vol. 37 No. 5

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June/July 2020

## Friends of FFRF



Photo by Annie Laurie Gaylor



**Sitting on his back patio,  
FFRF Co-President Dan  
Barker holds out his hand  
to feed a neighborhood  
chipmunk he has  
befriended. For a fun look  
at the other pets of FFRF  
staffers, turn to the back  
page.**

## At last!

# N.J. county ordered to pay FFRF in church funding case

A year after the Freedom From Religion Foundation won a resounding victory halting millions in tax dollars flowing unconstitutionally to repair churches in Morris County, N.J., a judge finally ruled on May 11 that FFRF and its attorneys are entitled to attorneys' fees.

FFRF and its local member David Steketee filed suit in December 2015 seeking to stop Morris County from issuing further historic preservation grants to churches after it awarded \$4.6 million in tax dollars to repair 12 churches.

More than half of its total trust fund assets had been bestowed on churches, including \$1.04 million in allocations to the Presbyterian Church in Morristown to allow "continued use by our congregation for worship services."

FFRF's win ultimately may save New Jersey taxpayers millions of dollars, even hundreds of millions over the next decade, since the grants to churches may have proceeded in a similar vein in all 21 counties.

The grants violate Article I, Paragraph 3 of the New Jersey Constitution, guaranteeing: "nor shall any person be obliged to pay tithes, taxes, or other rates for building or repairing any church or

churches, place or places of worship, or for the maintenance of any minister or ministry, contrary to what he believes to be right."

The complicated case, with many judicial maneuverings, resulted in a strong unanimous decision by the New Jersey Supreme Court in April 2018, ruling the public funding of churches unconstitutional.

The county sought to appeal that ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court, which denied its petition in March 2019. Despite this resounding loss at the country's highest court level, the county then filed an outrageous request in federal court in April 2019, not only seeking to enjoin the plaintiffs from recovering attorneys' fees, but also to resume the unconstitutional grant program. The district court granted FFRF's motion to dismiss the county's legal request in December 2019.

Finally, the Superior Court of New Jersey has ordered a total of \$217,949.15 to FFRF's attorneys, including \$124,687.50 to outside counsel Paul Grosswald and \$28,875 to constitutional scholar Erwin Chemerinsky, who defended FFRF at the Supreme Court level. FFRF was reimbursed the remainder for the work of its staff attorneys Andrew L. Seidel and Ryan Jayne.

# FFRF seeks summary judgment against council prayer

FFRF has filed a motion for summary judgment against a West Virginia city's unconstitutional prayer practice.

FFRF and two of its local members sued the city of Parkersburg, W.Va., in 2018 in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia, to challenge the City Council's formal recitation of the Christian "Lord's Prayer" to officially open every City Council meeting. The recited version is a biblical translation of Matthew 6:9-13 and concludes with a Christian doxology.

Council members lead the prayer and are joined by city residents at each meeting in reciting it. FFRF charges that the prayers violate well-established law and exclude residents who are non-Christian.

"The practice continues today in the face of plaintiffs' objections and well-established law barring legislators from reciting prayers from exclusively one faith in local government meetings," the brief states. "Through its commitment to this practice and tradition,

Parkersburg has essentially adopted the Lord's Prayer as the official prayer of the city."

"To non-Christians, the practice conveys a message of exclusion to plaintiffs," the brief adds. "The influence of elected officials — vested with the legislative and policy-making authority of the city — leading a communal recitation of a doctrinal Christian prayer pressures plaintiffs to participate. As a result, plaintiffs have withdrawn from attending public meetings, though

they remain interested in taking part in their local government."

The city of Parkersburg has filed a brief of its own in response, asking for judgment in the city's favor.

The local plaintiffs include Daryl Cibranchi, who in the past had frequently attended meetings and been directed to stand for the Lord's Prayer, a practice, he notes, that has made him conspicuous by his nonparticipation and which "as-

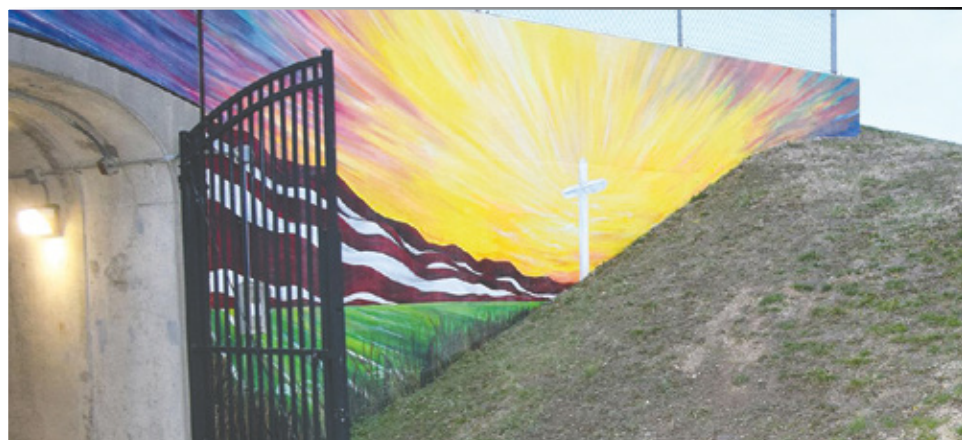
*See Judgment on page 4*

## Cross removed from Illinois city mural



Submitted photo

FFRF was successful in persuading the city of Effingham, Ill., to remove an image of a cross from a mural outside a tunnel under a street overpass facing a school. The removal occurred around May 23, according to the Effingham Daily News.



Screenshot from WCIA News

Painted in 2001, the city mural previously showed an American flag with a white Latin cross with light emanating from it. FFRF sent a letter Dec. 18 to Mayor Mike Schutzbach after hearing about it from a concerned citizen.



# Jan Brazill was advocate for women’s issues

Longtime FFRF Member Jan Brazill died on May 15 in Denver at age 93.

Jan was a frequent contributor to the pages of Freethought Today. In one column, she wrote: “A world without religion could concentrate on the greater good for humanity, employing science and logic rather than dogma. The time, energy and resources now expended on religion could be devoted to preserving our fragile environment for future generations and ensuring that every individual has the means to experience the fullness of the life we’re given.”

She was born to a farming family in Rosen, Ohio, on Nov. 27, 1926. She was the fourth and youngest child with two older sisters and a brother. After high school, her sisters entered secretarial school, but Jan enrolled in college as an English major at a time when not many women took that route.

After college, she took a summer job in Bar Harbor, Maine, on a lark and met and fell in love with Bob Kenney. They had a daughter, Barbara, their only child. Jan became a single parent in the mid-1950s, going to work in the transportation office at Dow Air Force Base in Bangor, Maine. She loved going to the ocean, particularly Acadia National Park, to explore the tidal pools or feed the sea gulls.

She married again in 1962 to George Brazill, and when Dow Air Force Base closed, the family moved to Colorado Springs, Colo., where she worked at the Air Force Academy as a computer programmer/systems analyst in the early days of computing. She was known for her strong work ethic and persistence when approaching computer problems, often serving as the go-to person for program “bugs.”

Jan always had an adventuresome spirit. She and her husband went to Germany in 1981 for four years, where she worked for NATO and traveled at every opportunity.

After her husband had a heart attack, she relocated with him to El Paso, Texas, to live at a lower altitude. There, Jan became active in liberal causes, especially those that dealt



Jan Brazill

with women’s issues. When George’s health improved, they returned to Colorado Springs and Jan retired from civil service.

She and George moved to the Inn at Garden Plaza in 2009. Jan took on many tasks in retirement. She wrote countless letters to the editor in support of what she believed in and was a columnist for the Freethinkers magazine. She was a strong supporter of women’s choice and volunteered at Planned Parenthood with her husband for escort duty.

Jan was a champion of rational thinking and being informed. She facilitated the Inn’s Philosophical Café sessions on Wednesday mornings, researching and presenting information on issues of the moment, especially dealing with political, scientific and environmental topics. The Café was one of the highlights of her week.

She played dominoes and bridge and read vociferously. Generous with her time and attention, she loved to sit with friends over a glass of wine at the inn. Jan was a good listener, always eager to have a spirited conversation.

“Dan and I, who met and corresponded with Jan for many years, as did FFRF founder Anne Gaylor, were very sad to learn of Jan’s death,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF’s co-president. “She was an FFRF member since 1979, who ardently supported women’s right to be free from religious control.”



Photo by Shutterstock

“Religious freedom” could be used as an excuse by doctors to discriminate against certain patients.

## The doctor might not see you, even in a pandemic

By Mark Dann

You perhaps have a medical horror story — probably more so in these times. Now picture your situation made much worse due to religious bigotry.

When I was in the emergency room with my husband, it was one of the worst days of my life. He was losing sight in one of his eyes, which was restored after a week of intense treatments. Think about how agonizing the process was, even with a team of dedicated, honest, hard-working professionals. Then, imagine a medical worker, system or administrator deciding to stop treating you because of a religious objection to your very existence.



Photo by Chris Line  
Mark Dann

The Trump administration has taken extraordinary measures to weaponize religious freedom (as envisioned with the Denial of Care Rule), using it to justify discrimination, advance Christian Nationalism and erode the separation of state and church.

First, Trump signed Executive Order 13798 in May 2017, requiring federal agencies to expand religious exemptions wherever possible. Then the White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative executes that order. Agencies have responded by establishing divisions such as the Religious Liberty Task Force at the Justice Department, the Conscience and Religious Freedom Division at Health and Human Services, and the Commission on Unalienable Rights at the State Department. These divisions have pushed numerous regulations designed to promote Christian Nationalism and a legal avenue for discrimination.

At a recent House Oversight and Reform Subcommittee hearing on “The Administration’s Religious Liberty Assault on LGBTQ Rights,” Evan Minton from California testified about how he was denied critical care at the Mercy San Juan Medical Center near Sacramento because of his gender transition. Minton remembers “being so devastated that I collapsed to the ground, I felt distraught and helpless that the hospital was refusing to treat me simply because of who I am.”

Minton’s story is becoming common in the Trump era. There’s the *Miracle Hill Adoption* case in South Carolina, for example, among many instances of religion-based discrimination in employment and health care. This type of intolerance is setting up a “separate but equal” system of legalized discrimination in the distribution of public services that allows publicly funded departments and service providers to pick and choose which members of the public they want to serve (the right kind of Christians) and which ones they don’t (everyone else).

The pro-secular majority in the House is pushing back. It is advancing the Do No Harm Act that would ban religious exemptions for publicly funded services. Congress is asserting itself in the budget and appropriations process. Rep. Jahana Hayes, D-Conn., is calling for the Christian Nationalist policy division at the Department of Health and Human Services to be defunded. The Congressional Freethought Caucus co-chairs, Reps. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., and Jamie Raskin, D-Md., are calling for strong nondiscrimination language to be inserted into the non-defense appropriations bills and to deny funding for regulations and entities within departments that seek to discriminate using the guise of religious liberty.

The best protection against the Christian Nationalist agenda and religious exemptions is for it to be soundly rejected. If not, picture, in the near future, the worst day you are having, in an emergency room, in a medical system rife with religious exemptions, and then the humiliation and dire consequences of being told to go somewhere else.

Now, imagine there’s a pandemic.

Mark Dann is the director of governmental affairs for FFRF.

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States



# FFRF: Justice, healing needed to halt racism

We have all watched the horrifying video documenting a helpless African-American’s life being snuffed out by a pitiless and indifferent white police officer in Minneapolis.

African-American bystanders desperately tried to point out that George Floyd was not resisting arrest and then didn’t appear to be breathing during the horrifying 9 minutes officer Derek Chauvin kept his knee on Floyd’s neck. Other cops stood by watching indifferently as Floyd desperately gasped, “Please, please, please, I can’t breathe.”

African-Americans and other minorities have long pointed out how they are imperiled in the United States, that “driving while black or brown” can get them pulled over by cops — and often much worse.

“Wearing a hoodie while black” can result in death, with the killer getting off scot-free, as when George Zimmerman was acquitted for fatally shooting Trayvon Martin, 17, in Florida in 2012.

“Jogging while black” was Ahmaud Arbery’s “crime” when he was murdered in February in Georgia at the hands of several white men who have since been arrested.



Photo by Shutterstock

Thousands of protesters take to the streets in Miami on May 31 following the death of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer.

Breonna Taylor was killed by Louisville police in her own home on March 13 during a bungled “no-knock” drug search intended for a home miles away belonging to men already in custody.

Even “bird-watching while black” led to a recent confrontation in Central Park, which fortunately did not escalate but could have endangered the life of Harvard grad Christian Cooper.

Black and brown Americans in the United States are continually aware of their vulnerability. As Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said after Floyd’s murder, “Being black in America should not be a death sentence.”

Our nation is already on edge. The pandemic is exposing glaring inequities and injustices in the United States. One in four Americans is unemployed, with African-American and Latinx communities disproportionately affected by the economic downturn. Black and Hispanic Americans are also disproportionately catching and dying of COVID-19. And it is a national shame that the Navajo Nation’s coronavirus infection rate has become the highest in the country, that many in the tribe do not even have running water on the reservation and that the federal response has been botched. This is another tragic way in which being a racial minority in the United States can become a death sentence.

Americans — white and black, religious or freethinking — must speak up and demand not only justice for Floyd, but a national reckoning with racial profiling, police brutality, vigilantism and institutional indifference and racism.

# Protesters gassed for Trump church photo

Talk about theocratically clearing the stage.

On June 2, without any warning, federal officers dispersed rubber bullets and tear gas into a crowd of peaceful protesters in Lafayette Square next to the White House — to empty the area so that President Trump could take part in a pandering photo-op at a church.

Video footage has caught the terror and cries of alarm by the peaceful demonstrators as they were suddenly set upon. Explosions sounded and demonstrators cried out. After the police dispersed the protesters, Trump self-righteously walked to St. John’s Episcopal Church, across from the White House,

where he piously stood silently, displaying “a bible.” (When a member of the media asked him, “Is that your bible,” Trump replied, “It’s a bible.”) Trump was holding the bible upside down.

The bible has for far too long been used as a weapon of white supremacy. U.S. slaveowners were able to turn to this “holy” book containing many verses ordering or sanctifying slavery to justify its long, shameful reign in America.

For instance, Leviticus 25:44-46 promises: “Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves . . . and they will become your property. You can . . . make them slaves for life.” This is not just a “passage from the bible.” It is supposedly “God’s word.” (FFRF’s website catalogs other pro-slavery biblical edicts from Dan Barker’s book, *God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*.)

The violence took place almost immediately after Trump had delivered a speech in the Rose Garden threatening to deploy the U.S. military if public officials didn’t take action to “dominate the streets.”



Rev. Mariann Budde, the Episcopal bishop of Washington, has publicly condemned Trump’s visit. “I am outraged,” Budde told the Washington Post, noting Trump did not give her notice or ask for permission to visit the church. “Everything he has said and done is to inflame violence,” Budd said.

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, head of the denomination, had his own criticism of Trump for using “a church building and the Holy Bible for parti-


san political purposes.”

FFRF is adding its freethinking voice to the chorus condemning the president.

“We have seen a lot of pandemic pandering from various governors and the White House,” says Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. “But it was shocking to see a president jeopardize the safety and well-being of his fellow Americans just so that he could engage in theocratic posturing.”



View daily entries and quotes at [ffrf.org/day](http://ffrf.org/day)



## FREETHOUGHT OF THE DAY

“Your church is a baby-house made of blocks.”

**Henry David Thoreau**

“On the Duty of Civil Disobedience” (1849)

[FFRF.ORG](http://ffrf.org) | FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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## Convention 2020 update

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the status of FFRF’s 2020 national convention in San Antonio the week-end of Nov. 13-15 is to be determined. FFRF hopes to have a definitive announcement later this summer about whether it will hold the convention. Registration for the convention has been suspended until that decision has been made.

If the convention is canceled, there will be full refunds. We discourage members from making hotel reservations and flight arrangements until final decisions are announced. Please check future issues of Free-thought Today for more information on this evolving situation.



# HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman  
**Nobody Dies in the Spring**

Nobody dies in the spring  
on the Upper West Side:  
nobody dies.  
On the Upper West Side  
we're holding hands with strangers  
on the Number 5 bus,  
and we're singing the sweet  
graffiti on the subway,  
and kids are skipping patterns through  
the bright haze of incinerators,  
and beagles and poodles are making a happy  
ruin of the sidewalks,  
and hot-dog men are racing  
their pushcarts down Riverside Drive,  
and Con Ed is tearing up Broadway  
from Times Square to the Bronx,  
and the world is a morning miracle  
of sirens and horns and jackhammers  
and Baskin-Robbins' 31 kinds of litter  
and sausages at Zabar's floating  
overhead like blimps—oh,  
it is no place for dying, not  
on the Upper West Side, in springtime.

There will be a time  
for the smell of burning leaves at Barnard,  
for milkweed winging silky over Grant's Tomb,  
for apples falling to grass in Needle Park;  
but not in all this fresh new golden  
smog: now there is something  
breaking loose in people's chests,  
something that makes butchers and bus boys  
and our neighborhood narcs and muggers  
go whistling in the streets—now  
there is something with goat feet out there, not  
waiting for the WALK light, piping  
life into West End window-boxes,  
pollinating weeds around  
condemned residential hotels,  
and prancing along at the head  
of every elbowing crowd on the West Side,  
singing:  
*Follow me—it's spring—  
and nobody dies.*



© 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 by him, available at [shop.ffrf.org](http://shop.ffrf.org), include *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* and *Darwin's Ark: Poems by Philip Appleman*.

## OVERHEARD

It was during a hearing on a bill that's being pushed across the country to mandate "In God We Trust" displays in our public schools. Instead of talking about religious pluralism and separation of church and state, several Education Committee members decided to display their ignorance and hold a trial for evolution.

The bill in question may seem small, but it's part of a nationwide effort to reshape our nation's history while opening the door for things like anti-LGBTQ bigotry.

**Joseph Couch, who is running for a Nebraska state Senate seat, under the "Why Am I Running?" section of his website.**  
*JosephCouch.com*

upon myself as a humanist. I have faith in the goodness of mankind." Is that still accurate?

**By "Q&A" interviewer Brian Lamb, repeating what Dr. Anthony Fauci had said previously regarding his religious leanings. Fauci responded, "Totally accurate today."**  
*C-SPAN, 5-4-20*

"Broadly and generically, I am not a regular church-attender. I have evolved into less a Roman Catholic religion person to someone who tries to keep a degree of spirituality about them. I look

## Judgment

Continued from page 1

signs to second-class status anyone who is not Christian." Likewise, Eric Engle, also a Parkersburg resident, follows city matters and has felt uncomfortable and pressured to participate in the Christian prayer during public meetings.

At least one member of the City Council has been openly hostile to nonparticipants, the lawsuit charges. Councilman Eric Barber glared at attendees who sat during the prayer at a meeting. At the end of that prayer, Barber positioned himself near his microphone, pressed the button, and shouted, "Amen."

The 4th U.S. Court of Appeals held in 2017 that sectarian legislator-led prayers were unconstitutional in the case *Lund v. Rowan County, N.C.* The opinion said, "The principle at stake here may be a profound one, but it is also simple. The

Establishment Clause does not permit a seat of government to wrap itself in a single faith." Given the similarities between Parkersburg's prayer practice and the Rowan County practice struck down by the 4th Circuit, *Lund* controls this case, FFRF asserts. Most importantly, both cases involve prayers promoting a single faith delivered exclusively by lawmakers year after year.

Because the city of Parkersburg is in fact promoting a single faith, the plaintiffs are entitled to judgment in their favor, FFRF concludes. FFRF seeks a permanent judicial injunction enjoining the inclusion of the Lord's Prayer as a ceremonial prelude to Parkersburg meetings. In addition, FFRF asserts, plaintiffs are entitled to nominal damages for their past injuries arising from the city's prayer practice.

## FFRF's caption contest



Photo by Shutterstock

Here is the June/July FFRF caption contest. To enter, please write a witty or humorous caption for this photo. Email your response to [caption@ffrf.org](mailto:caption@ffrf.org) by July 8. The winner, chosen by FFRF staff, will receive an FFRF T-shirt! We will announce the winner and runners-up in the August issue. If you've taken any photos that you think would be good for this contest, send them to [caption@ffrf.org](mailto:caption@ffrf.org).

## FFRF welcomes 17 new Lifers

FFRF welcomes and thanks its 17 new Lifetime Members. The newest \$1,000 Lifetime Members are John Bocek, Linda Bocek, Dr. Richard R. Crowder, Carol Cubbage, Mary Duchinsky, Christopher Grove, Mary Hand, Cathi Harding, Kathy Hudson, Joseph R. Irvine, Judith Johns, Candalaria Leyvas, Meg Mahoney, Jason Massey, J.M. Nelson, Todd Shreve and Stephen Warren.

States represented are Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, Washington as well as British Columbia, Canada.





# ‘Friendly Atheist’ gets his chance on ‘Jeopardy!’

By Hemant Mehta

Hearing “Jeopardy!” host Alex Trebek say, “Congratulations, young man” after I unexpectedly won was the shocking culmination of a year-long journey.

After auditioning a year earlier by taking an online test, I was invited to an in-person audition where the casting folks could chat with me and watch me take part in a mock game. They told me they would give me a call if they wanted us on the show, but that I should keep my expectations low.

Approximately 80,000 people take the online test each year, of which about 3,000 are selected to come to an in-person audition. Of those, only around 400 actually get invited to be on the show. I was shocked to get The Call a few weeks later.

They gave me six weeks to prepare before the day of filming. So, I started cramming. I was always a decent student, but it’s not easy studying for an exam when you don’t know the subject, much less the clues!

On the plus side, writing about religion and politics full-time for my “Friendly Atheist” blog, I felt I had an advantage on those topics. While some people may dread the broad scope of political trivia, I spend every day writing about what politicians are doing, what constitutional concerns are raised in new laws, and how religious beliefs get in the way of public policy. As narrow a scope as that might be, doing it well requires understanding quite a bit of U.S. history and legalese. (Also, how pleasantly ironic would it be if they asked an atheist about the bible? I felt confident I could hold my own against any Christian.)

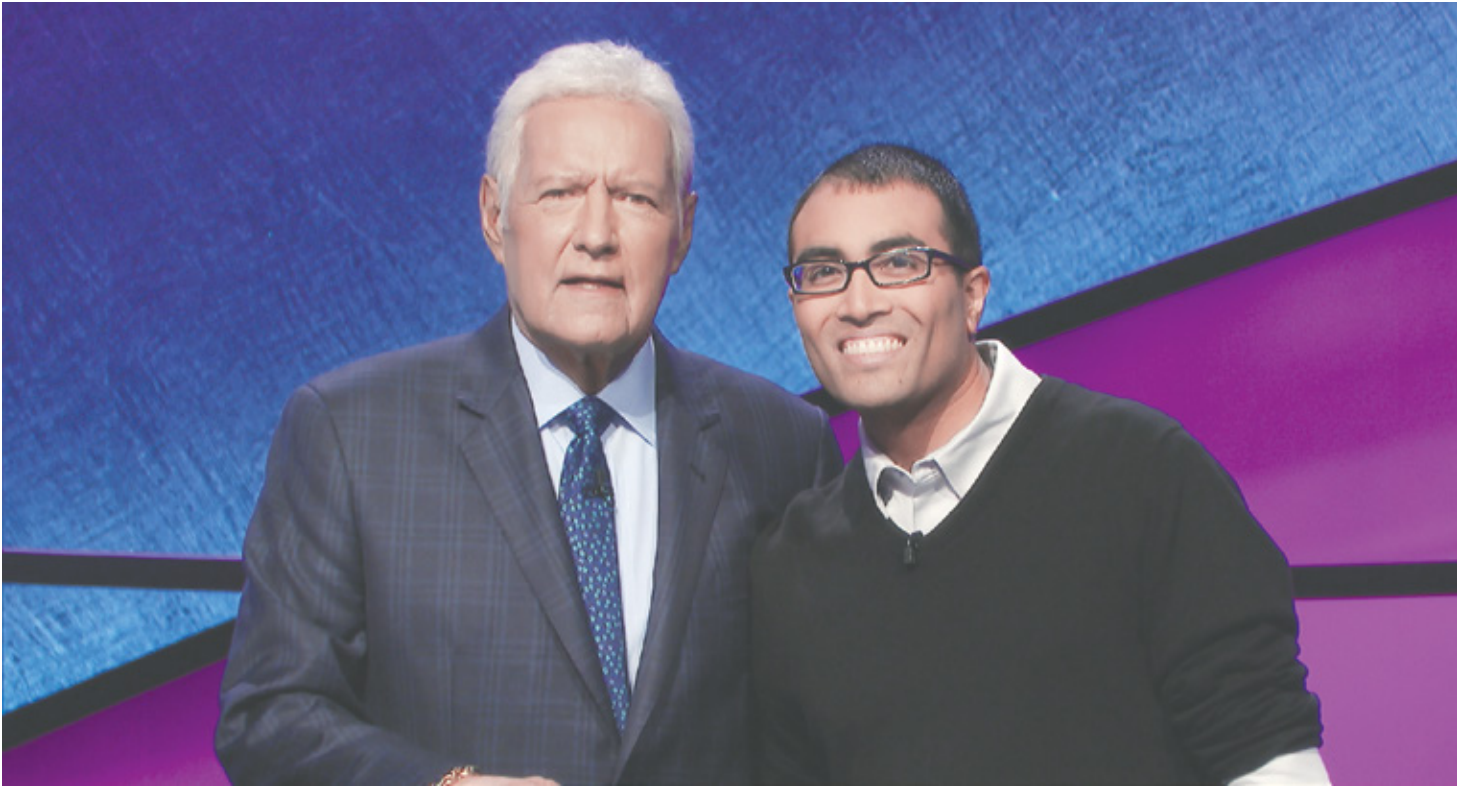
Beyond that, I also knew the topics they tend to ask about regularly: world capitals, Shakespeare, history, geography. So, I memorized those capitals, brushed up on the outlines of Shakespeare plays (thank you, Wikipedia), and did my best to re-learn as much of that high school history as I could. I also took advantage of J-Archive.com, a fan-created, text-based collection of every question asked on the show, stretching back several years.

“Jeopardy!” records five episodes on each filming day, so when I arrived at the studio and met the other contestants, none of us knew which “day” we would be playing or who we’d be up against. It was incredible, really, being surrounded by people who are all about to have their dreams come true, knowing that most of those dreams would be dashed within hours.

## Waiting to go on

We got to practice on stage with the buzzers. Later, I took my spot in the studio audience and waited for them to call my name. And waited. And waited. They filmed two full episodes before finally telling me I would be taping the “Wednesday” game. I went in for a quick touchup on my makeup, stood behind my assigned podium, and within minutes, the filming began. Alex Trebek was only a few feet away! But there was no time to think about that, because he immediately read off our first categories.

It was a nightmare. One category, about world languages, was nearly swept by the defending champion. Another one, about alcoholic drinks, was no good for a guy like me, whose liquid intake boils down to various kinds of Diet Pepsi. At the end of the first break, I was in a distant third place. I barely improved by



Hemant Mehta poses for a photo with longtime “Jeopardy!” host Alex Trebek.

the end of the “Jeopardy” round.

But the “Double Jeopardy” round was glorious. Planets! Theater! Crossword clues beginning with the letter “J”! Those were my sweet spots and I was able to capitalize on them, finishing the game with a solid \$14,200. But with the very last clue, the defending champion took the lead by the slimmest of margins: \$14,400.

With the other contestant at a mere \$1,000, my fate depended on the “Final Jeopardy” category: Canadian Geography. (Two things I knew virtually nothing about.)

This is where strategic thinking came into play, since contestants have to wager before seeing the clue. I figured that if I got the answer right and bet everything, the champion would surely know it, too, and have enough money to beat me. My only hope was both of us missing it, with her wagering a lot of money on the assumption that I would go all in.

So, I made a tiny bet: \$201. It would be enough to overtake her if I got it right, but more realistically, it was small enough that it might not hurt me if she also got it wrong.

Then came the clue: “Canada’s Four Corners Monument marks the junction of the Northwest Territories, Nunavut & these two Prairie Provinces.”

Which provinces were the Prairie Provinces? I had no clue. So, I took a wild guess that was, as expected, incorrect. (Sorry, Canada!) I sat there, resigned to my fate, just waiting to hear what the champion did. To my shock, she also got it wrong. After a few tense seconds during which Alex told us the answer (Saskatchewan and Manitoba), the champion’s wager was revealed: She bet nearly everything she had!

“Hemant, congratulations, young man! You’re the new champion,” Alex said. Or at least that’s what I saw later on TV. In the moment, it was a complete blur. Somehow, I backpedaled my way into becoming a “Jeopardy!” champion!

Once the taping ended, and after a pre-scheduled lunch break, the producers shuffled me back into the green room, where I had a few minutes to change clothes before we filmed the very

next episode.

This time, despite missing a “Daily Double,” I felt much more confident. And in “Double Jeopardy,” I felt like the nonexistent gods were on my side when Alex read off the name of a category called “Books of the Bible.” Without knowing it, I had been preparing for this for years.

Here was the first question: “Verses like ‘The Shuhamites . . . were threescore and four thousand and four hundred’ explain this book’s name.” (I buzzed in a split second too late and got beaten to “Numbers.”)

The next one: “St. John experienced this in a cave on the isle of Patmos and is said to have written the bible book of the same name.” The same contestant beat me to it and said “Revelations.” Damn! Alex responded in the affirmative, before the judges quickly ruled it was incorrect!

I caught the mistake within moments and jumped on it: “What is Revelation?” That was it. The pluralization was a common mistake, Alex said.

The questions got harder for me from there: “In the 4th chapter of this book, Peter and John are imprisoned in Jerusalem for preaching the Gospel.” I didn’t think “Jeopardy!” would ask about subtle differences between the first four books of the New Testament, so I buzzed in with the book right after those: “What is Acts?” That was right! I pushed my luck a bit more and went to the \$1,600 clue.

“The bible book named for this woman is read during Shavuot, the holiday observed 50 days after Passover.” The second half of that clue meant nothing to me. A bible book named for a woman? It had to be Ruth or Esther, I thought, but which one? I knew Esther was always associated with the holiday of Purim, so I picked the other one. “What is Ruth?” It was right. I exhaled. Lucky break.

Those clues helped me go into “Final Jeopardy” with a slight lead over both my opponents, but I knew I would have to bet most of it to win again.

This time, the category was more to my liking: Classic American Novels. But the clue sent me into a daze: “Lady Duff Twysden was the basis for a character in

this 1926 novel set partly in Spain.”

None of those hints rang any bells for me, so I took another random guess. It was wrong. This time, however, another contestant got it right and bid everything she had. (Her answer: What is *The Sun Also Rises*?)

Hey, if you lose on the show, that’s the way to go. I was perfectly content ending my one-game streak to someone who actually knew the right answer.

## Emotional rollercoaster

The entire experience was an emotional rollercoaster. Yes, there was the incredible high of winning a game, but there were also (many) moments of frustration, wondering why I missed something I felt I should have known. But I got to meet Alex Trebek. I met these incredibly smart contestants from such different walks of life. It’s hard for me to imagine any other situation where I’ll casually become friends with an opera singer, attorney, screenwriter, political activist and journalist within a few hours, only to be bonded forever through this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

(In case you’re wondering, I didn’t tell the producers exactly what I did for a living and they never asked for specifics. I told them I was a blogger who wrote about religion and politics — which is accurate, if not specific — and left it at that.)

With the show now fully in my rear-view mirror, I would also share a few lessons that hit home for me.

Every contestant had plenty of opportunities to shine. It didn’t matter what our background was — the nature of the show meant we all had areas of expertise. No one should ever be counted out.

I’m also glad I auditioned even though I never expected to get picked. The experience of trying out would have been a memorable experience by itself. Everything else was just a bonus.

So, if you’re thinking about doing something challenging, go for it. Whether it’s a political campaign or a new career, you won’t know unless you try. Have confidence in yourself and make the most of any opportunity that comes your way.

At a time when everything around us seems bleak, it’s all the more reason to pursue those dreams. Who knows where you’ll end up?

FFRF Member Hemant Mehta, who spoke at FFRF’s national convention in 2019, writes “The Friendly Atheist” blog on Patheos.com.

“If you’re thinking about doing something challenging, go for it. Whether it’s a political campaign or a new career, you won’t know unless you try.”



# IN THE NEWS

## Trump tells states to let churches open

President Trump on May 22 called on states to allow places of worship to open immediately and threatened to “override” any governors who do not comply with his demand, although legally that is doubtful.

Trump said places of worship are “essential services,” much like grocery stores. Restrictions in place in some states have become a point of contention for conservative religious leaders, an important constituency in Trump’s political base.

“If they don’t do it, I will override the governors,” Trump said of states that do not allow churches, synagogues and mosques to open on that weekend. “America, we need more prayer, not less.”

Public health officials continue to warn against mass gatherings or settings in which people will be in close quarters, and note that religious gatherings have been the source of several outbreaks.

## Supreme Court: It's OK to restrict church services

The Supreme Court denied a request from a church in California to block enforcement of state restrictions on attendance at religious services.

The ruling on May 29 was 5 to 4, with Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. joining the court’s four liberal members.

It allowed California Gov. Gavin Newsom the right to restrict attendance at religious services in the state to 25 percent of the capacity because of the coronavirus.

“Although California’s guidelines place restrictions on places of worship, those restrictions appear consistent with the free exercise clause of the First Amendment,” Chief Justice Roberts wrote in an opinion concurring in the unsigned ruling. “Similar or more severe restrictions apply to comparable secular gatherings, including lectures, concerts, movie showings, spectator sports and theatrical performances, where large groups of people gather in close proximity for extended periods of time.”

## Turkish government site lets citizens change religion

Turkey’s e-State government website portal has a new feature that allows citizens to change their religion on official identification and government records.

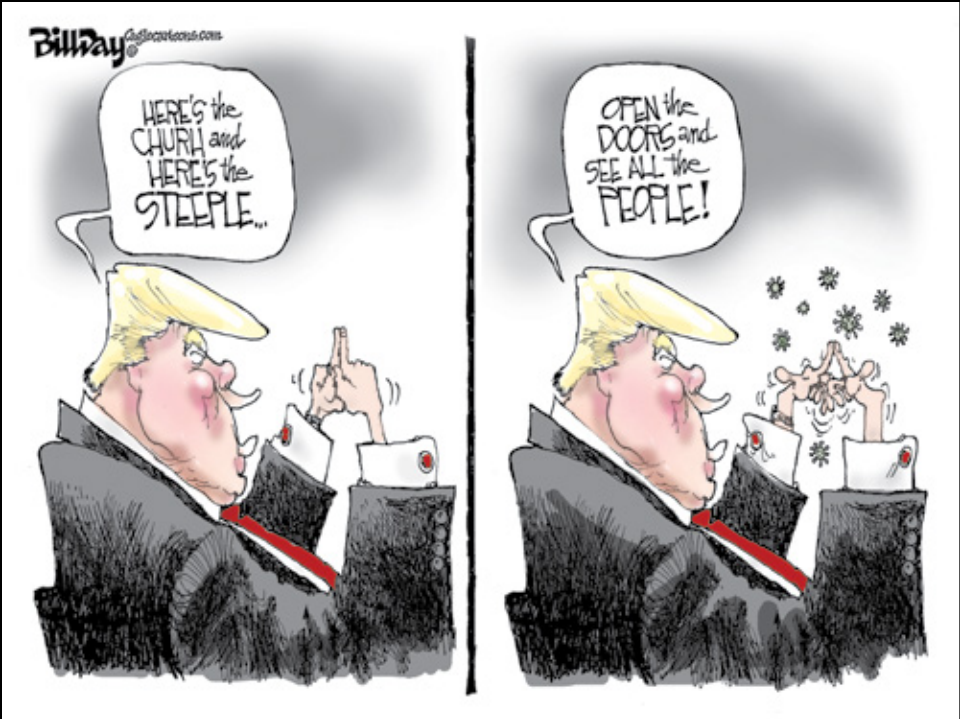
Those looking to change their religion on official records are required to fill out a short information form and submit an e-signature, it said.

Turkey is country with a 98 percent Muslim population, but studies suggest that the country’s young population is increasingly distancing itself from religion.

## Hospital seeks to end Catholic partnership

Hoag Memorial Hospital of Newport Beach, Calif., has sued to get out of a partnership with a Catholic hospital system, stating that it doesn’t agree with the Catholic Church’s restrictions on health care.

Hoag, which started as a Presbyterian institution in 1952, has been in a partnership with Providence St. Joseph Health since 2012. “The deal was controversial from the start, in part because



the Catholic partners imposed an abortion ban on Hoag’s doctors even though they’d been promised that the deal would have no impact on their practices,” the Los Angeles Times reports.

However, just weeks after the deal was made final in early 2013, abortions were banned at Hoag.

The lawsuit was filed May 4 in Orange County Superior Court, after it became clear that Providence would resist the hospital’s efforts to dissolve the partnership.

## Survey of nonreligious Americans released

A 2019 survey by American Atheists and CFI shows that of people who consider themselves nonreligious or secular, 57 percent of them consider themselves strong atheists, while almost 95 percent consider them atheists to some extent.

Participants in the survey also cited their priorities for what secular organizations should focus on. The three top priorities were to maintain secular public schools, oppose religious exemptions that allow for discrimination, and allow access to abortion and contraception.

On the downside, 29 percent of the nonreligious participants had negative experiences in education due to their nonreligious identity, and nearly 22 percent had negative experiences at work.

On the plus side, 22 percent of participants were involved with a local secular organization.

The survey included nearly 34,000 people and can be accessed at [secularsurvey.org](https://secularsurvey.org). (FFRF is planning its own membership survey later this summer. Please take part in it to have your voice heard!)

## Coronavirus kills more than 70 clergy in NYC

At least 75 New York City congregations have had clergy who have been killed by the coronavirus.

Rabbis, Catholic priests and Christian ministers, ranging in age from 42 to 96, have succumbed to COVID-19 in the past two months, and dozens more have been confirmed ill, according to a survey of religious orders, media reports and obituaries.

The dead include Holocaust survivors, pastors of some of the city’s largest churches, and clergy who preached through their final days. At least 60 rabbis have died, according to a tally of Jewish media reports,

with at least 20 deaths in the Hasidic enclave of Borough Park, where the NYPD had broken up several large funerals for violating social-distancing rules.

## Nigerian humanist held for blasphemy

A prominent Nigerian humanist accused of blasphemy has been arrested and taken to Kano.

Mubarak Bala, the president of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, was taken from his home on April 28 in Kaduna state and brought to Kano, where a warrant for his arrest was issued.

Sharia law is applied in 12 states across the predominantly Muslim north of Nigeria, including Kano, where blasphemy is punishable by death.

In a statement, Humanist UK, said: “We condemn in the strongest terms the arrest of our humanist colleague Mubarak Bala by the Nigerian authorities, who have accused him of ‘blasphemy’, which can carry the death penalty.”

## McCorvey: I was paid to speak against abortion

Norma McCorvey, the anonymous plaintiff in the 1973 Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade*, says in a Netflix documentary that she became an anti-abortion activist because she was being paid.

The documentary, “AKA Jane Roe,” shows her journey from abortion rights plaintiff and advocate to anti-abortion campaigner. Before her death in 2017, McCorvey told the director that she hadn’t changed her mind about abortion, but said what she was paid to say.

“I was the big fish,” McCorvey says in the documentary. “I think it was a mutual thing. I took their money and they’d put me out in front of the cameras and tell me what to say.”

McCorvey became well-known as Jane Roe in the case that legalized abortion in the United States. She was pregnant when the case was filed and gave birth

### 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.

to a girl who was given up for adoption.

## Texas mayor: Women can’t lead prayer at meetings

The mayor of Wylie, Texas, told a fellow City Council member in an email that women shouldn’t be allowed to lead prayer at public meetings because he believes it goes against biblical teachings, according to a report by the Associated Press.

Wylie Mayor Eric Hogue quoted two New Testament scriptures in the email sent to council member Jeff Forrester in which he suggested that the council instead select young men to give the invocation.

“All I ask is that those leading the public prayer be young men,” Hogue, who has been mayor for 12 years, wrote on May 17. “As a preacher for the Cottonwood Church of Christ, we take the two verses below literally.”

He then cites a passage in 1 Corinthians that, according to his email, says: “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.”

He follows up with a passage from 1 Timothy: “Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”

## Wisconsin county won’t let atheist couple marry

The Center for Inquiry reports that Wisconsin has discriminated against a nonreligious couple by denying them the right to marry by mutual declaration, which is a privilege granted to those who are religious.

The county clerk in Winnebago County refused permission to marry by mutual declaration because they were not religious, CFI states. “Federal courts have ruled that excluding secular celebrants from solemnizing is unconstitutional under the First Amendment and the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantee of Equal Protection,” writes CFI in its news release. CFI and American Atheists sent a warning letter to the clerk, along with a request for public records involving self-solemnization and how state officials implement this law.

### A note to FFRF Members

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# Ignorant churches sue over COVID-19 closures

Litigious churches and churchgoers — mostly of the evangelical persuasion — have filed legal challenges against stay-at-home orders in at least 19 states.

Shockingly, the Justice Department is intervening on behalf of some of the churches, in accordance with Attorney General William Barr’s memo signaling support for church gatherings during the pandemic shutdown. On May 19, the department sent a letter chiding California Gov. Gavin Newsom, subject of two church-related lawsuits, for delaying resumption of in-person services.

There is growing evidence about the spread of COVID-19 through church services. CNN reports that one worshipper later found to have the coronavirus, who had defied California’s order to attend a religious service on Mother’s Day, exposed 180 other people. In a case in Sacramento County in April, CNN reports that 71 people connected to a single church were infected. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced in mid-May that two persons with COVID-19 unknowingly spread the virus to more than 30 people during church gatherings in early March in Arkansas before any case was diagnosed in that state. And in another such instance, the CDC identified a “superspreading” event on March 17 involving a member of a church choir in Skagit County, Wash., who spread the coronavirus, resulting in 32 confirmed cases, 20 other likely infections, three hospitalizations and two deaths.

“Wouldn’t you think churches would want to protect their congregations during the pandemic and help them stay safe?” asks Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. “Instead, this is a dismaying continuation of the religious war against science with life-and-death consequences.”

Nevertheless, many righteous pastors or churchgoers are suing government officials over state-at-home orders. Here’s a roundup by state:

## California

Two California churches filed separate lawsuits in May alleging Gov. Gavin Newsom’s stay-at-home orders have illegally deprived them of religious freedom because the orders prohibit communal services. The South Bay United Pentecostal Church of Chula Vista sued in early May, alleging that the order has “criminalized all religious assembly and communal religious worship.” The lawsuit states: “To be blunt, California’s present regime, which mandates that Californians who need the Spirit of Almighty God settle for the lesser spirits dispensed out of California’s liquor stores, is demeaning and denigrating to all persons of faith.” Abiding Place Ministries and other congregations around the state previously filed a separate suit in April.

## Colorado

A federal judge denied a Denver churchgoer’s challenge, filed on March 30, seeking a preliminary injunction to bar enforcement of the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders restricting the gathering of more than 10 people at a time. The plaintiff complained his parish ceased conducting weekly mass, offering the eucharist, or hearing confessions. U.S. District Judge Daniel Domenico upheld the government’s authority and duty to control the spread of disease in an April decision.

## Delaware

Rev. Christopher Allan Bullock of Canaan Baptist Church, New Castle, filed a federal lawsuit on May 19 challenging gubernatorial stay-at-home restrictions. Under threat of being sued, Gov. John Car-



ney had already changed an order that restricted gatherings to 10 persons or fewer, to permit places of worship to reopen on May 20 at 30 percent capacity. Bullock still filed suit, stating, “It appears the state is saying that you have to have an appointment to go to church, and that’s not what the bible says nor is that practical.”

## Illinois

Two Illinois congregations are taking a lawsuit to the Supreme Court after being shot down once by U.S. District Judge Robert Gettleman and once by a three-judge panel in the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The original lawsuit was filed against Gov. J.B. Pritzker, claiming his stay-at-home rules were unconstitutional. Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church and Logos Baptist Ministries asked for a temporary restraining order against the governor’s plan. The suit says “plaintiffs are threatened with becoming criminals for merely having 11 people at church.”

## Kentucky

A federal court ruled on May 8 that Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear cannot temporarily ban mass gatherings at church services. Maryville Baptist Church and its pastor held in-person services in Easter in defiance of the pandemic restrictions, and sued to block enforcement. In Louisville, U.S. District Judge Justin Walker on April 11 ruled that “on Holy Thursday” the mayor had “criminalized the communal celebration of Easter” by discouraging large social gatherings, including at churches. Walker, 37, whom the American Bar Association rates as “unqualified,” has been nominated by President Trump to the powerful Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

## Louisiana

A federal judge in Louisiana turned down a minister’s request on May 15 to halt Gov. John Bel Edwards’ stay-at-home order. The notorious Rev. Tony Spell, pastor of the Life Tabernacle Church in Central, La., had sought a temporary restraining order. Spell had been charged with multiple misdemeanors and was placed under house arrest for continuing to flout the shelter-in-place order by holding large church services amid the pandemic. Spell was arrested for aggravated assault on April 21 for driving his church bus toward a protester. Although mandated not to leave his residence to go to the church, he defied the order by holding a church service on April 26 (wearing an electronic device on his ankle). Spell told several hundred worshippers: “God gave you an immune system to kill the virus.”

## Maine

Calvary Chapel of Bangor filed a fed-

eral lawsuit in early May against Gov. Janet Mills and her stay-at-home orders prohibiting in-person and drive-by worship services. The pastor, Ken Graves, charged that “the Christian church is, in fact, being targeted and discriminated against.”

## Michigan

Several churches, pastors and churchgoers filed a lawsuit in federal court on May 7 against Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s executive order. “We have to physically distance people 6 feet apart. That means what we’d have to do is instead of having our usual service, we’d have to have multiple services,” complained plaintiff and Minister Andrea Simpson of Word of Faith International Christian Center in Southfield, representing a 6,000-member congregation.

## Minnesota

Two churches have filed suit in federal court on May 3 against Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz’s stay-at-home order, claiming he is “treating religious organizations as second-class citizens” by limiting services to 10 people. The lawsuit was filed by the newly formed Upper Midwest Law Center, representing Northland Baptist Church of St. Paul and Brooklyn Park megachurch Living World Christian Center.

## Mississippi

In mid-May, Gov. Tate Reeves announced social-distancing and cleaning guidelines that will allow churchgoers to attend in person, but advised citizens to follow his example and worship at home. Still, two lawsuits were filed against local stay-at-home rules.

## Missouri

A federal judge on May 17 dismissed a lawsuit filed by a group of Christians alleging that St. Louis County’s stay-at-home order violates their religious freedom by banning large in-person church services. U.S. District Judge Ronnie White said they did not have standing, although a group of Christians filed notice to appeal. One of the plaintiffs, Frank O’Brien of O’Brien Industrial Holdings, has previously sued the Obama administration over the requirement that company health insurance cover birth control.

## New Jersey

A New Jersey Catholic priest filed suit on April 30 challenging Gov. Phil Murphy’s COVID-19 order, which has led to the closure of all Catholic churches in the state. A rabbi in Lakewood joined the suit after being arrested on May 11 for hosting a gathering of more than 10 people in his backyard in a tent. When police arrived, about 20 men began yelling at the police

and Rabbi Yisrael A. Knopfler was arrested for making physical contact with an officer. Police had made similar citations for two secular backyard events.

## North Carolina

A federal judge in North Carolina on May 16 sided with what Associated Press termed “conservative Christian leaders” and blocked Gov. Roy Cooper’s stay-at-home orders as it affects indoor religious services. Two churches and an organization representing other churches filed suit, saying the order violated their constitutional rights because certain stores could reopen at 50 percent capacity but not churches. The state allowed religious gatherings under 10 individuals and had begun easing restrictions on May 8 under a three-phase reopening plan, with no limits on outdoor worship services. “We don’t want indoor meetings to become hotspots for the virus, and our health experts continue to warn that large groups sitting together for long periods of time are much more likely to cause the spread of COVID-19,” said a Cooper spokesperson.

## Oregon

On May 18, the Oregon Supreme Court reinstated enforcement of Gov. Kate Brown’s statewide coronavirus restrictions, after a lower court overturned the order, in a suit brought by 16 churches and other plaintiffs. One of the churches, the Peoples Church in Salem, normally has an audience of 3,700. A lower court judge had ruled that Brown’s precautions were not required for “larger gatherings involving spiritual worship.”

## Texas

Pastors of three Houston-area churches sued over Harris County’s stay-at-home order. The Texas Supreme Court dismissed a challenge on April 8. The same group filed a similar lawsuit that same week over church restrictions, even though the county judge revised the county order to align with Gov. Greg Abbott’s executive order deeming churches “essential businesses.” The church plaintiffs are joined by Tom DeLay, former House majority leader. They have also challenged Montgomery County’s stay-at-home order in a different state district court.

## Virginia

Lighthouse Fellowship Church of Chincoteague Island, Va., supported by the Justice Department, in April sued Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam over his stay-at-home order. Northam filed a response in May saying that lifting the order “would seriously undermine Virginia’s efforts to resist a once-in-a-century pandemic and threaten irreparable harm to an unknown (and unknowable) number of people. Time and again, large gatherings — including in-person religious services — have provided fertile ground for transmitting this deadly virus.” He said the order doesn’t require places of worship to close, nor does it prevent public access to churches or block services “with a limited number of attendees.” The state noted there’s no evidence the governor singled out religious organizations or political speech when he banned all gatherings.

## Wisconsin

A churchgoer filed a lawsuit against Gov. Tony Evers’ stay-at-home order (which allowed religious gatherings under 10 persons). The Wisconsin Supreme Court on May 13 knocked down the entire order in a related challenge, thus not ruling on the churchgoer’s legal action. FFRF had filed an amicus brief against the churchgoer’s suit.



# FFRF NEWS

## ‘Freethought Matters’ on summer break

“Freethought Matters” is taking a summer hiatus and will be back broadcasting on Sunday, Sept. 6.

But that doesn’t mean you can’t watch previous episodes at your leisure! In fact, if you haven’t seen it already, watch the final episode of the spring season with special guest Julia Sweeney.

The “Saturday Night Live” alum is currently co-starring in the TV shows “Shrill” on Hulu and “Work in Progress” (of which she’s also a producer) on Showtime. She’s creator of the plays “God Said Ha!” and “Letting Go of God.”

“Freethought Matters” co-hosts Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor speak remotely on the program with the cheery comedian from her Los Angeles home, show some clips from her current TV shows and talk to her about her life during the pandemic. There’s a big teaser for viewers, too: Sweeney announces a juicy new role on a hit series with freethinking themes to begin this fall.

You can watch this show (and all the others) on FFRF’s YouTube channel at: [youtube.com/user/FFRForg](https://youtube.com/user/FFRForg).



Actress and author Julia Sweeney is the guest on the final episode of the spring season of “Freethought Matters.”

The first guest of the season was U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman, founder of the Congressional Freethought Caucus. Huffman’s appearance on the show made media waves due to his remarks about his colleague Rep. Liz Cheney’s dogmatic stance on the religious oath.

Others on the show include freethought icon Ron Reagan, world-renowned philosopher Daniel Dennett,

acting legend Ed Asner, U.S. Reps. Jamie Raskin and Mark Pocan, intellectual power couple Steve Pinker and Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, Katherine Stewart, the leading expert on Christian Nationalism, and agnostic bible scholar Bart Ehrman.

The show is produced by FFRF’s videographer Bruce Johnson, a public television veteran.

## Science works, stay home, FFRF urges

FFRF on April 27 placed a timely digital message on a billboard in Melbourne, Fla.: “Science works! Please stay home.”

The large billboard was on Interstate 95 at Pineda Causeway, Melbourne.

The message is the brainchild of a lifetime member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Dwayne Free, who lives in Melbourne and was prompted to take action by the intransigence of Florida’s governor.

“I did this in response to Gov. [Ron] DeSantis exempting churches from following social distancing requirements which endangers ALL of us. It is absolutely

unconstitutional to force companies out of business and allow churches to continue theirs,” says Free, a businessman.

FFRF had previously written DeSantis a firm letter, objecting to his reckless endangerment of health and life by explicitly exempting churches and religious gatherings from his very belated stay-at-home order. FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor wrote the governor on behalf of FFRF’s 33,000 nonreligious members, including the 1,600 members in Florida (as well as a central Florida chapter).

DeSantis specifically did not apply his so-

cial distancing order to those “attending religious services.” What is particularly egregious about his actions, avers FFRF, is the fact that this exemption “shall supercede” measures taken by local officials. DeSantis’ order appeared to be crafted to propitiate his evangelical religious base, who objected to the lawful arrest of a preacher in Hillsborough County for flouting orders. The notorious Rev. Rodney Howard-Browne called the pandemic a “phantom plague” and claimed 13 machines in his church would kill the virus. The governor’s order apparently allowed him to continue to endanger his parishioners and the public by holding church services.

FFRF has noted that Florida already regularly limits worship gatherings that jeopardize public health. It called the exemption “unconstitutional and deadly.” The organization heartily welcomes the initiative of its member to remind his fellow Floridians to follow the dictates of science and common sense, instead of religion and superstition.



## FFRF underwrites virtual law symposium

FFRF is proudly underwriting a scholar-studded virtual symposium by the Roger Williams University School of Law focusing on the separation between state and church.

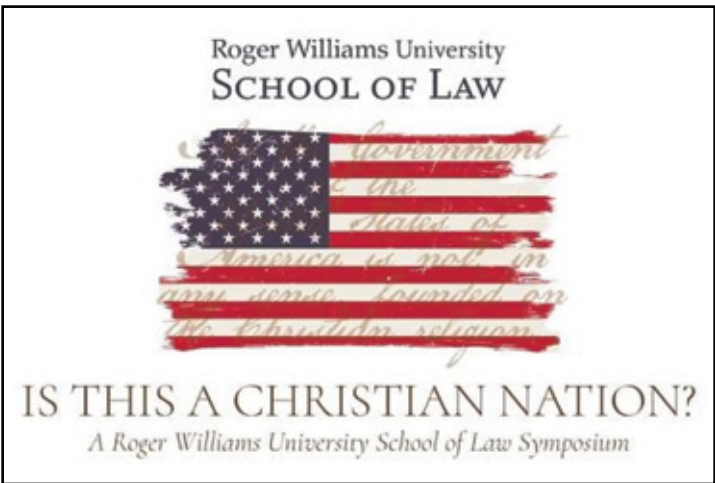
The one-day online seminar (“Is This a Christian Nation?”) will be held Sept. 25. (The symposium was initially slated to be held in March in Bristol, R.I., but was postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.)

Some of the nation’s foremost First Amendment specialists are assembling in an attempt to grapple with the timely subject.

Among them is Erwin Chemerinsky, the dean of the University of California Berkeley School of Law. Chemerinsky is considered one of the most prominent legal scholars and public intellectuals in the nation.

Other notables include University of Pennsylvania Professor Marci A. Hamilton; John A. Ragosta, historian at the Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies at Monticello; Teresa M. Bejan, associate professor of political theory at Oxford University; and Steven K. Green, director of the Willamette Center for Religion, Law and Democracy.

FFRF, which is underwriting the symposium’s costs, thanks its Legal Director Rebecca Markert, a graduate of the Rog-



er Williams University School of Law, and FFRF Strategic Response Director Andrew Seidel, as well the Roger Williams University School of Law itself, for their work and initiative in making possible this symposium.

For more information, go to [law.rwu.edu/events/christian-nation](https://law.rwu.edu/events/christian-nation).

## Clergy far from ‘essential,’ FFRF informs DHS

FFRF has objected to the Department of Homeland Security’s designation of the clergy as “essential” in securing critical infrastructure.

A recently issued guidance by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (under DHS oversight) on critical infrastructure workers during the COVID response includes a new addition: “clergy for essential support.” This is unjustifiable and should be rescinded, FFRF demands.

Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Chad Wolf discussed this change in a radio interview with Tony Perkins of the Christian Nationalist Family Research Council, who then basically claimed credit for the addition of clergy to the essential category. In the same interview, Wolf explained the purpose of guidance on essential personnel. That description reveals precisely why clergy are not, in any sense, essential:

*Our Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency or CISA, as you indicated, created what we call the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers Guidance or list. And so this is a list of industries in our critical infrastructure sectors that need to go to work every day, need to keep the economy running, the supply chain full. And as governors put in place shelter-in-place procedures, we need to make sure that certain individuals can still come and go and to do their job so that the lights turn on, the water keeps running, there’s gas in the trucks to deliver the PPE, and the like.*

“Clergy do none of those things,” FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor write to Wolf. “Their role does not remotely touch on infrastructure, energy, transportation or medicine. The collapse of any of these could threaten the security or welfare of the United States, which is why maintaining infrastructure is a DHS issue.”

Version 3.0 of the guidance inadvertently illustrates this point by listing, immediately after clergy, as essential those “workers who maintain digital systems infrastructure supporting other critical government operations.” Recognizing this disconnect, Wolf in his interview with Perkins later attempted to justify the addition of clergy, claiming: “We did include clergy in there recognizing that they provide a supportive and essential service, particularly in a number of hospitals, funeral homes, and the like.”

Hospitals will function just fine without chaplains, who are often intrusive toward nonbelieving patients, the state/church watchdog responds partly tongue-in-cheek. More seriously, it points out that without clergy roaming the halls, there will be fewer people likely to spread the virus and more personal protective equipment for medical professionals.

And of central importance here, FFRF asserts, is that there’s no valid reason for declaring clergy essential, which suggests that this was a political, not a practical decision. Perkins was seeking unwarranted privilege for himself and fellow Christians — and it’s disappointing and constitutionally suspect that the DHS has caved to Perkins’ ridiculous demand.





Photo from clergyproject.org

The Clergy Project is for current and former religious professionals without supernatural beliefs.

# The Clergy Project: We are all we’ve got

By Lon Ostrander

To quote Chance the Rapper, “Music is all we got, so we might as well give it all we got.”

While many participants of The Clergy Project are doing fine, others are not. For so many of us, when we finally grasp the inescapable truth that there isn’t any god and when we die we’re just dead, we become at risk of losing everything we hold dear. Self-identity, family, friends, income, homes and community are often all at risk of being lost. For many of us, they are all lost, some things for a time and others for all time.

We at The Clergy Project help to build new lives by providing an online community, renewing self-identity, making new friends, preserving relationships, transitioning to new vocations, and offering crisis counseling through the Secular Therapy Project.

It is said that love is two imperfect people stubbornly refusing to give up on each other. The Clergy Project is a multitude of imperfect people stubbornly refusing to give up on each other.

We have come to a point in our evolution as a nonprofit corporation where we need to get serious about growing our brand and fundraising in earnest. We are privileged to be able to offer counseling services to our participants in cooperation with Recovering From Religion ([recoveringfromreligion.org](http://recoveringfromreligion.org)) and the Secular Therapy Project



Lon Ostrander

([seculartherapy.org](http://seculartherapy.org)).

Sadly, we have run short of Secular Therapy Project counselors who are willing to provide counseling services for free. As a result, The Clergy Project has found it necessary to subsidize the psychotherapy services needed by so many of our participants drowning in religious-trauma-related emotional stress. It is also clear that this relatively small financial bump in the road threatens to consume our surprisingly meager flow of funds. However, we are pleased to announce a recent \$9,000 donation from FFRF to help tide us over.

Really, there is so much more we can do for apostate religious leaders in need. Our participants often must endure family and marriage break ups, legal complications, loss of income and even the persecution of family members back home for their connection to an apostate religious leader relative. For many of The Clergy Project participants, it’s all we’ve got, so we might as well give it all we’ve got!

In the autumn of 2019 when we reached the milestone of 1,000 participants, it seemed amazing, almost miraculous, that we had grown into such a large community of nonbelieving current and former religious leaders hailing from nearly four dozen countries around the world and from every state in these not so United States of America.

Yet, I would contend that we are but the tiniest tip of an enormous and largely submerged iceberg consisting of current and former religious leaders for whom faith in a benevolent

“The Clergy Project is a multitude of imperfect people stubbornly refusing to give up on each other.”

and all-powerful god is little more than a painful and bizarre memory with frightening consequences.

I would conjecture that most religious leaders, believing or not, still have no idea that we exist. For example, one fellow who recently joined The Clergy Project shared that when he “Googled for the first time, ‘Pastors who left Christianity,’ the very first video I saw featured Dan Barker, and from then on, I read *Godless*, and have probably watched all the Dan Barker and Bart Ehrman videos. And, finally, after watching so many videos, I found The Clergy Project!” Finally, if they persist, they may finally find The Clergy Project.

We are all we’ve got, and most in our situation don’t even know The Clergy Project exists. People need to know that it exists. Everyone, from the person who has already spent over half of one’s life preaching a misanthropic gospel, to the little child whose sadistic pastor piously proclaims that little Johnny or Janie is going to grow up to be a pastor. We’re all they have, and, for the most part, they don’t know we exist. Our mission should not be just to help our apostate few, but to be there for as many who will be ensnared in the quagmire of religious leadership. We don’t need to evangelize for atheism. We need only to be here for those who have invested their lives in a Trojan horse and know it.

There are currently about 7.5 billion humans cluttering up our tiny dust speck of a planet. We can safely venture a wild guess that there are 8 million to 10 million religious leaders among us, and easily several million of them have serious doubts about the existence of an all-powerful god, benevolent or otherwise.

These millions of well-intentioned religious leaders, who now know better, need to know that they are not alone, and there are multitudes of fellow travelers who are anxious to encourage, counsel and help pull them into a community of imperfect flesh and bone friends, who refuse to give up on each other.

The Clergy Project was created through the auspices of The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science and the Freedom From Re-

ligion Foundation. We have a secure forum website and a closed Facebook group, both accessible to The Clergy Project participants only. The following are just a few recent testimonials selected from current forum posts:

- As always, it’s a joy to be able to express myself on The Clergy Project. It’s the only outlet I have. Thanks to everyone who makes it possible.
- As one of those newer members, I appreciate the open arms with which I was received into The Clergy Project.
- Thanks for sharing your lives, thoughts, hopes, and struggles here. You’re my heroes, and I’m so glad to know you.
- I’m new to the community & so just reading this post. I wanted to offer my thanks to all who contributed.
- I too am so thankful for The Clergy Project and the great guidance I received here.
- I’m so grateful for all of you.
- I posted about a difficult situation “Danger to Family” and I received tremendous support for which I have no word big enough to say thank you. The Clergy Project made me a better person and I am glad to be a member.
- What a wonderful family I found in The Clergy Project!!!
- This is what makes The Clergy Project great, it puts people into your life who understand your situation.
- I know you will find the answers you seek among these amazing individuals
- I am grateful because The Clergy Project got me some sessions with a therapist who turned on some lights for me.

Many members of our community write blog posts for “Rational Doubt with Voices from The Clergy Project” ([patheos.com/blogs/rationaldoubt](http://patheos.com/blogs/rationaldoubt)).

In addition, we have a public website at [clergyproject.org](http://clergyproject.org), where you can learn more about who we are, our stories, available resources and contact information, and information on how you can donate to help support our cause.

We are inviting all who can, to donate generously to The Clergy Project and help us become known worldwide as a beacon of hope to millions of disillusioned religious leaders struggling to change the direction of their lives. We, who are unencumbered with religious dogma and superstition; we are all we’ve got. We may as well give it all we’ve got.

Lon Ostrander is the president of the board of The Clergy Project.

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# FFRF VICTORIES

## Louisiana

St. Mary's Parish Sheriff's Department has removed a religious post from its official Facebook page.

A Franklin, La. resident informed FFRF that St. Mary's Parish Sheriff's Office posted a "special Easter message from Sheriff Blaise Smith," including a video over 2 minutes in length that largely amounted to a sermon by a government official. In this video, Smith stated: "Jesus Christ has risen. Hallelujah. That's what we need to be thinking about. The one thing we need to be thinking about is that we're in a relationship with God . . . What a better time to come to the Father than today on Easter Sunday?" Below the video, the post stated that the sheriff's office "prays that you will find hope and comfort in these words."

FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson wrote to Smith requesting that the sheriff's office refrain from posting messages and videos that proselytize or endorse religion.

Smith has informed FFRF via email that the post has been removed and no such messages will be posted in the future.

## Minnesota

A video featuring a Fergus Falls Public Schools teacher at a religious service has been removed from the district's online learning platform.

A district parent reported that after a student posted a video of the teacher leading a religious worship at a church service, he encouraged students via the online learning platform to watch the video and to share the video with their friends outside of the class.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Jeff Drake, reminding the district of its duty to "ensure that 'subsidized teachers do not inculcate religion' or use their positions of authority to promote a particular religious viewpoint."

A response from Drake explained that the video has been removed and, while it was originally posted by a student, the teacher involved understands the content should not have been allowed to remain viewable on the district's online learning portal.

## Montana

A preaching Townsend School District #1 teacher has been reined in after routinely proselytizing to her elementary school students.

A district parent reported that a music teacher at Townsend Elementary School had been initiating conversations with her second-grade students about God by asking them to each name "one good thing about God" and used those answers as a launching pad for larger discussions about God and her religion, including discussions about bad people burning in hell. Many of these discussions apparently happened during practices for school concerts.

FFRF Legal Fellow Dante Harootunian wrote to Superintendent Erik Wilkerson, urging the district to make certain that none of its employees are unlawfully and inappropriately indoctrinating students in religious matters by leading impressionable elementary students in discussions about God and religion.

Wilkerson responded via email with assurances that the situation was addressed with the teacher and that the district takes the letter and the separation of state and church seriously.

### 'Blessing buckets' now without bibles



God's Pit Crew members show off the "emergency blessing buckets" filled with items for use during a lockdown or school shooting.

In Virginia, bibles have been removed from "emergency blessing buckets" in Danville Public Schools.

A Danville community member reported to FFRF that the district had partnered with God's Pit Crew, a Christian organization, to stock its classrooms with "blessing buckets." Each "blessing bucket" is filled with various emergency supplies and each bucket contains a bible.

FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson wrote to Superintendent Stanley Jones, urging the district to cease allowing its schools to be used for recruiting grounds for churches or as a conduit for spreading religious literature.

The school's attorney informed FFRF that Danville Public Schools removed all bibles from the "blessing buckets" after receiving the letter of complaint.

## Oklahoma

Juveniles who appear before the Grove Municipal Court will no longer be coerced into praying and memorizing bible quotes by Judge Richard James.

A local resident who was recently in James' courtroom informed FFRF that during a regular session of his court, James hosted a panel of religious leaders in the courtroom. He reportedly had a table set up at the front of the room with several Christian chaplains seated at it. After entering the courtroom, James introduced each chaplain by name and said they were there so people could live correctly based on "what the Lord says." He told those present that "we use them instead of fines, if the offenders choose them."

The complainant reported that as juvenile offenders came before James, he would conduct a normal judicial hearing that he concluded by giving them a choice: pay civil fines and do community service or learn chapters from the bible and the Ten Commandments. If the juvenile offender chose the latter, James directed them to the panel of Christian chaplains who gave them religious materials for memorization.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line filed an ethics complaint on James, pointing out that coercing juvenile offenders to support or participate in any religious exercise is a serious violation of their civil liberties.

"Giving juvenile offenders the option to study the bible and Ten Commandments rather than civil fines or community service appears to any reasonable observer an endorsement of Christianity," Line wrote. "This is exactly the type of government endorsement of, and entanglement with, religion that is prohibited by our Constitution."

The Oklahoma Council on Judicial Complaints informed FFRF in a letter of response that, going forward, "any option for offenders to select memorization

over another form of punishment will exclusively feature secular texts for such memorization."

...

Guthrie Public Schools officials have taken measures to ensure school-sponsored prayer will not continue in its schools.

A district parent alerted FFRF that an official Guthrie Junior High event opened with a prayer that was scheduled as part of the event and appeared on the program.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the district's attorney and asked that the district make certain scheduled prayer is not a part of future events.

The district's attorney informed FFRF in a letter of response that "this matter has been addressed by the highest levels of district administration and that the district will redouble its efforts not to allow prayers to be a scheduled part of any school-sponsored event. Further, the superintendent will address this issue with administrative personnel at an upcoming administrative staff meeting."

## Oregon

No future Gresham-Barlow School District student performances will take place in the churches.

A concerned district parent reported that the Deep Creek Damascus Middle School choir once again performed at a church that contained graphic religious iconography and required parents to pay the venue in order to see their children perform.

FFRF Legal Fellow Dante Harootunian wrote to Superintendent A. Katrise Perera, informing the district that the use of churches for public school programming is inappropriate and unconstitutional. A school's use of a church for school functions is problematic, FFRF points out, because it sends a message of approval of the

church to impressionable students.

Executive Director of K-12 Education John Koch informed FFRF that no future performances will take place in churches.

## Texas

A religious display has been removed from Montgomery Independent School District property.

A district community member informed FFRF that the receptionist at Montgomery High School had a Christian cross and a sign reading "pray, trust, wait." on display in the school's front office, a space frequented by students and community members.

FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover wrote to Superintendent Beau Rees, requesting that the district make certain employees are not impermissibly endorsing their personal religious beliefs through religious displays on district property.

Rees informed FFRF in a letter of response that the display has been removed.

...

Public funds will no longer be spent on erecting religious displays in Val Verde County, Texas.

A local resident informed FFRF that the Val Verde County Commissioners Court approved allocation of \$4,000 of county money to purchase rebar in order to build crosses to be placed over approximately 200 unmarked graves in Val Verde County.

Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson wrote to the court, urging it to refrain from using taxpayer money to purchase materials to put up crosses, and instead choose a more inclusive method of memorializing unmarked graves.

Judge Lewis Owens responded via email to inform FFRF that public money will not be spent on building these crosses.

## West Virginia

Preston City Schools has removed a "prayer locker" from school property.

A concerned citizen alerted FFRF that Terra Alta/East Preston School had established a "prayer locker" for its students, marked with a Latin cross and sign that read: "Prayer Locker. Write your prayer request on an index card and slip it into the locker. We will be happy to pray for you! All prayer requests remain confidential."

FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson wrote to Superintendent Steve Wotring, informing him that the district has a constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion.

Wotring sent assurances via email that school administration has assured him that the "prayer locker" has been removed and that he discussed the incident with them "to ensure that no such designation would occur in the future."

...

A bible verse will be removed from Wood County Schools property.

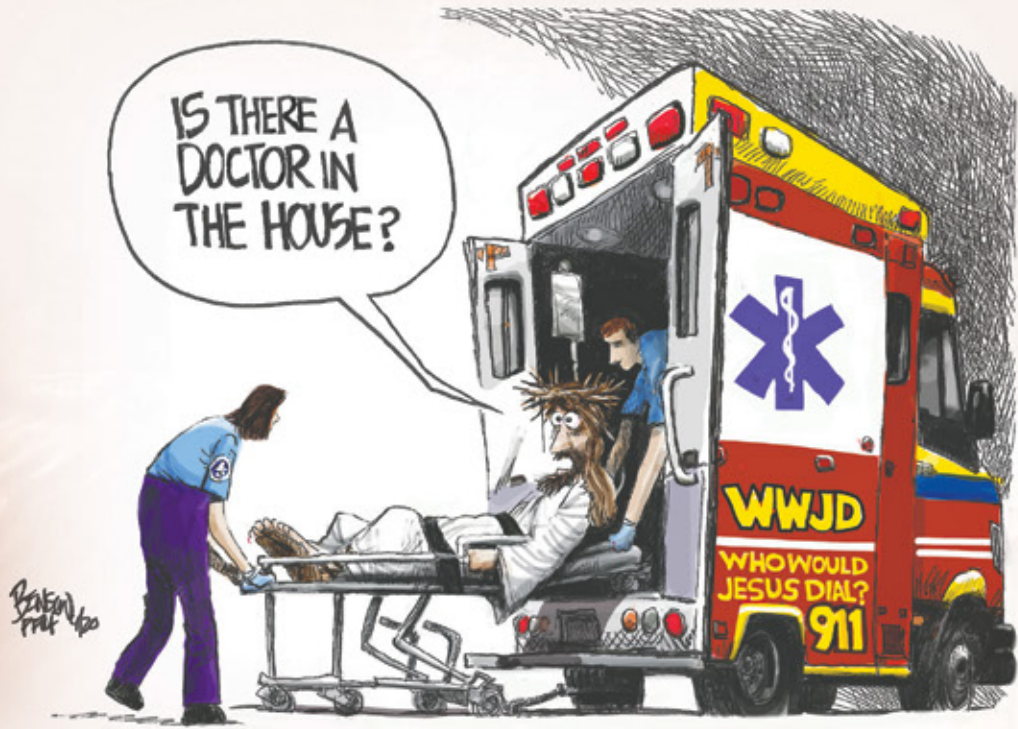
A local resident reported that the Parkersburg South High School prominently features a bible verse, Philippians 4:13 ("I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"), painted above one of the doors in its gymnasium. This display is apparently quite visible during school hours as well as during school athletic events.

FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson wrote to Superintendent William Hosaflook requesting that the religious display, and any others like it, be removed from district property.

Hosaflook confirmed that the display will be removed once custodians are permitted to re-enter the building under COVID-19 quarantine protocol.



WE NEED *Reason,* NOT PRAYER,  
TO COMBAT THE CORONAVIRUS



Congress and the President have unconstitutionally designated the first Thursday in May as the “National Day of Prayer,” enjoining citizens today to “turn to God in prayer and meditation at churches, in groups and as individuals.” The evangelical National Day of Prayer Task Force has hijacked the date, corralling local officials and governors (many of whom have unwisely exempted church gatherings from shelter-at-home orders) into issuing their own prayer proclamations. Ironically, the task force’s theme this year is “God’s glory across the Earth.”

NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER

Wishful thinking cannot suspend the natural laws of the universe. Prayer cannot stop a virus. Pious politicians should get off their knees and get to work. House Resolution 947 is wisely calling to make today a “National Day of Reason,” because “irrationality, magical thinking, and superstition have undermined the national effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.”

SCIENCE WORKS

We’re all in this together — that’s why we need actions based on science, evidence and compassion, not prayer or “alternate facts.” As Governor Andrew Cuomo has rightly pointed out, “Our behavior has stopped the spread of the virus. God did not stop the spread of the virus. And what we do now, how we act, will dictate how the virus spreads.”

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—Charity Navigator

FFRF is a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit founded in 1978 with over 31,000 members and a team of attorneys. Charity Navigator has awarded FFRF a perfect score, and a “four-star rating” 10 years in a row.

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FFRF awards \$9,500

2020 law students essay contest winners

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the winners of the 2020 Cornelius Vanderbroek Memorial Essay Competition for Law School Students. FFRF is awarding \$9,500 in scholarship money for this year’s contest.

Law school students were asked to write a legal essay based on this prompt: “Are ‘No Aid’ Clauses Constitutional?” The Supreme Court will decide an important case involving the separation of state and church during the 2019-2020 term. In *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*, the court will address whether a decision by the Montana Supreme Court prohibiting state aid for tuition at religious schools based on the state constitution’s “No Aid” clause violates the Free Exercise Clause. Many other states have similar “No Aid” clauses that prohibit taxpayer money from going to religious schools. Please write an essay exploring



Winners are listed below and include the college or university they are attending and the award amount.

**First place**  
Marc Mohan, Lewis & Clark Law School, \$4,000.

**Second place**  
Jessica Gaudette-Reed, University of Florida Levin College of Law, \$3,000.

**Third place**  
Libby Jacobson, Hamline School of Law, \$2,000.

**Honorable mention**  
Rory Brown, Northeastern University School of Law, \$500.

one legal argument defending the constitutionality of Montana’s “No Aid” provision, or rebutting one argument that the clause is unconstitutional.

FFRF awarded three top prizes and one honorable mention. For ease of reading, the essays appearing in this issue do not include the footnotes and citations that were included in the authors’ submissions.

FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994 and grad students since 2010. The law student contest debuted in 2019.

FIRST PLACE

No-aid clauses pass constitutional muster

FFRF awarded Marc \$4,000 for his winning essay.

By Marc Mohan

One argument frequently proffered against the constitutionality of no-aid clauses such as the Montana constitutional provision at issue in *Espinoza* is that their enactment was prompted by anti-Catholic bigotry or animus. This argument misreads the history surrounding the enactment of no-aid clauses and misapplies doctrine surrounding animus.

Opponents of no-aid clauses argue that provisions in the constitutions of Montana and other states arose in the context of anti-Catholic bias during the latter half of the 19th century. During this time, an increase in the Catholic population of the United States created tension within the relatively recent innovation of public, or common, schools. Such schools frequently had a nondenominational Protestant tenor to their instruction, which led to the opening of many nonpublic Catholic schools.

Sen. James Blaine proposed a federal constitutional amendment in 1875 that would have, among other things, prevented public money from flowing to “religious sects and denominations.” The Blaine Amendment was narrowly voted down by the Senate, but in its wake several states added similarly worded provisions to their constitutions, while others were forced to do so as part of their admission to the union.

The Supreme Court has held that the presence of animus can be a reason to invalidate government action. In *Romer v. Evans*, the court invalidated a Colorado constitutional amendment that forbade the extension of anti-discrimination measures to protect on the basis of sexual orientation. In doing so, Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote that the provision violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment because of “the inevitable inference that the disadvantage imposed is born of animosity toward the class of



Marc Mohan

persons affected.”

In another case, the court held that while an Alabama constitutional provision denying the right to vote to persons convicted of crimes of moral turpitude was racially neutral on its face, the measure had been enacted with discriminatory intent and had produced discriminatory effects, and so was a violation of the Equal Protection Clause.

And when “the suppression of a central element of” a religion is the object of an ordinance, that ordinance is presumptively a free exercise violation and can only survive by withstanding strict scrutiny.

However, several factors complicate the applicability of those cases to *Espinoza*. First, not all no-aid provisions were enacted during the 19th-century period when anti-Catholic sentiment was prevalent. Several founding-era state constitutions contain prohibitions against government support of churches or clergy. These measures, intended to protect against excessive government interference with reli-

gion, trace their roots to the writings of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, both of whom argued forcefully for the separation of church and state.

The idea that public tax revenue should not be directed toward religious institutions predates even the adoption of the First Amendment.

Second, many of the no-aid clauses that were adopted during the late 19th century have been re-adopted as states have revised or replaced their constitutions.

For instance, in 1972, Montana adopted a new Constitution, the culmination of a three-year process intended to replace the original 1889 Constitution with one embodying an entirely new framework of government.

Starting from scratch, the constitutional convention debated such fundamental issues as whether the state Legislature should be unicameral or bicameral.

When the language of Montana’s original constitution was employed in the new document, it was through conscious, deliberate choice. In re-adopting Article XI, Section 8, of its 1889 constitution using the exact same verbiage, the Montana Constitutional Convention commented that “[a]fter long and serious consideration, a majority of the committee decided to retain the section in the existing Constitution (Article XI, Section 8) which strongly prohibits direct or indirect aid from any public fund of the state to any sectarian educational institution or for any sectarian purpose.”

Any causal link between anti-Catholic sentiment of the late 1800s and the adoption of Article XI, Section 8 was certainly broken by the reconsideration and re-adoption of the same language in 1972.

Third, and relatedly, the word “sectarian” has a different meaning today than it did in the 19th century.

According to one historical analysis, “given the preoccupation of the advocacy literature in opposition to the so-called ‘Blaine Amendments’ with the assertion that the word ‘sectarian’ was code for ‘Catholic,’ that word should play the dominant or defining role in state Blaine clauses; but this is not the case.” The word “sectarian” did not appear in state constitutional language until 1864, but its root word, “sect,” appeared as early as 1776.

And “sect” originally referred not to Catholicism, but to “the variety of Protestant denominations found in the American colonies.” When “sectarian” begins to appear in state constitutions, it is often paired with “sect,” and the constitutional language often, on its face, refutes the notion that the terms refer to any one branch of religion or to Catholicism in particular.

By the 1940s at the latest, “nonsectarian” was used as a synonym for “secular” by the Supreme Court, implying that “sectarian” encompassed all religious denominations. And by 1972, when the Montana Constitution was ratified, the original meaning of “sectarian” was simply “religious.”

If the court, then, were to hold that any state no-aid clause that originated from perceived animus toward a particular religious denomination, or toward religion generally, was unconstitutional, then most likely “it will devolve to state courts to decide whether or not a state clause should be considered a Blaine Amendment and, if not, whether or not the state clause, like that of Washington, falls into the ‘play in the joints’ once again articulated in Locke.”

Another weakness in the animus ar-

“The idea that public tax revenue should not be directed toward religious institutions predates even the adoption of the First Amendment.”

Nothing Fails Like Prayer



gument against no-aid clauses is that, typically, it has applied in situations where the original target of the animus is the same group seeking elimination of the challenged provision. In this instance, however, it was alleged anti-Catholic bias that spurred the adoption of no-aid clauses, but those provisions are now being challenged on the basis that they discriminate against religion in general.

Given that the animus argument against Blaine Amendments alleges a desire to preserve Protestant religious schooling rather than strictly secular education, there is not a precise fit between the original animus and the present alleged harm. A holding that, nonetheless, no-aid clauses were void for

animus, could open the door to the invalidation of other provisions or statutes that were allegedly inspired by hostility toward a protected group or belief.

For instance, a polygamist who is not a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints could seek to overturn *Reynolds v. United States*, in which the Supreme Court upheld laws outlawing polygamy. If the anti-polygamy laws *Reynolds* and other 19th century decisions upheld were shown to be motivated by anti-Mormon animus, that could serve as a basis for the invalidation of such laws.

And a challenge to such laws could be brought by members of any religion, or none at all, if it were brought under equal protection concerns rath-

er than free exercise ones.

This is not to say that in some rare situations an otherwise facially neutral law cannot be invalidated on the basis of animus. In *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah*, the discriminatory intent of city regulations effectively banning the ritual slaughter of animals by followers of the Santería religion was evident. But those regulations were recent, the record was replete with expressions of hostility to the practitioners of Santería, and the rules were underinclusive to achieve their ostensible goals.

In *Lukumi*, *Romer* and *Hunter*, the animus behind the challenged provisions was markedly evident. Outside of those cases, courts have been extreme-

ly reluctant to look into the minds of drafters to discern the moral intent behind legislation or constitutional texts. Under this appropriate standard, the no-aid clause being challenged in *Espinoza* and its kin easily pass constitutional muster.

*Marc, who grew up in Wisconsin, attends Lewis & Clark Law School. He worked as a freelance film critic and video store owner before deciding to go to law school following the 2016 election. He is married and has a daughter who is 15. His goal as a lawyer will be to “work to help repair the damage that has been done to the American legal and political fabric over the last several years. I have always felt strongly about the outsized influence religion has wielded in American society and government.”*

SECOND PLACE

# There's room for play in Big Sky country

FFRF awarded Jessica \$3,000 for her essay.

By Jessica Gaudette-Reed

Montana’s no-aid provision protects, rather than injures, religious exercise by ensuring government does not become inserted into “the everyday affairs of religious institutions and organizations.” It ensures the promise of equal protection under the 14th Amendment while simultaneously guaranteeing the right of Montanans to abstain from coerced religious practice. In the alternative, the provision protects those who do choose to worship from potential governmental influence over the content of their religious message. Far from being a burden on religious exercise, Montana’s no-aid provision benefits both religious and irreligious Montanans and respects the liminal space between the religion clauses.

Montana’s no-aid provision has been attacked by proponents of religious school funding as unconstitutional on the grounds that it infringes their free exercise of religion and impermissibly discriminates against religious persons seeking taxpayer-funded scholarships based solely on their religion. However, this interpretation does not fit the jurisprudential landscape that the *Espinoza* case is situated in. The petitioners claim religious animus is constitutive of the no-aid provision, but, contrary to their assertion, the provision was viewed by the delegates of the 1972 Montana Constitutional Convention as a vehicle for “equal educational opportunity” for every child in Montana’s public schools. In fact, the view that public funds should

only be appropriated for public uses was widely held at the 1972 Convention. Further, delegates — several of whom were important church leaders in their communities — saw the potential danger government influence could pose to religious expression, with one stating that, “the control which comes with aid could excessively involve the state in religious matters and could inadvertently favor one religious group over another.”

The delegates were not operating in a legal vacuum. One year prior to the ratification of the 1972 Constitution, the Supreme Court held in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* that a statute “must have a secular legislative purpose, its principal or primary effect must be one that neither promotes nor inhibits religion, and it must not foster ‘excessive government entanglement with religion.’” Clearly, here, Montana’s present-day no-aid provision meets this test. The provision

was passed with the intent of supporting a robust public-school system. It had the dual purpose of removing any government influence from religious exercise. The delegates included a separate clause to accommodate a pass through of federal funding to private sectarian schools so as to not create a constitutional conflict.

There have been numerous Free Exercise and Establishment Clause decisions since 1972, however. Notably, petitioners claim this case is analogous to *Trinity Lutheran v. Comer*, where the Supreme Court found that the Missouri Department of Natural Resources had acted unconstitutionally when it denied a generally available grant for playground resurfacing material to a religiously affiliated daycare.

The only analogy between *Trinity*



Jessica Gaudette-Reed

*Lutheran* and this case is that the petitioners claim infringement of their First and 14th Amendment rights. In *Trinity Lutheran*, the petitioners were faced with an ultimatum: Either become secular to receive the grant or remain sectarian and forego the funding. There is no such ultimatum in this case. The students are not being penalized for their choice of a private sectarian school because children in private secular schools also don’t receive the benefit. The distinction was never made around religion or irreligion. It is a function of private versus public schools — a subject that is well-established as being within the purview of state responsibility.

The petitioners’ reliance on the *Trinity Lutheran* decision is telling, though. They claim a violation of Equal Protection and attempt to have the classification in this case brought under the strict scrutiny standard enumerated in *Trinity Lutheran*. They claim that, by dismantling the 12 scholarships in their entirety, Montana has burdened their religious practice. When a law denies the same opportunity to compete for or enjoy an otherwise generally available benefit — one that is available to secular organizations — the state violates the Equal Protection Clause and the statute is subject to strict scrutiny. There is no denial of a benefit based on religion here because the benefit no longer exists. By dismantling the program, Montana placed secular and sectarian schools back on equal footing.

If, however, we look deeper at the no-aid provision and subject it to strict scru-

tiny, it still passes muster. Montana adopted the provision to achieve a “strong, universal, and free educational system.” As discussed above, educational choice is a compelling state interest. Further, the no-aid provision was adopted with narrow-tailoring in mind. The delegates created a pass-through for federal aid and maintained tax exemptions for “institutions of purely public charity” including religious ones.

If Montana’s no-aid provision was not narrowly tailored to achieve a compelling governmental interest, it is unclear what it would take to draft a clause that does.

Finally, the petitioners claim that the case most analogous to this one, *Locke v. Davey*, was superseded by *Trinity Lutheran* and that *Locke* provides a narrow exception to the rule of religious neutrality. That is simply not the case. The *Locke* court held that it was permissible for a state to limit a scholarship program so as to not entangle government and religion.

Like in *Espinoza*, there is a lack of religious animus in the state constitution. Further, the state chose to not fund a category of instruction — in this case private schools. There is “no there there.” However, for the sake of argument, assume that Montana agreed to allow the scholarships continue for all secular subjects. Then, there would be a violation of the entanglement prong of the *Lemon* test because of the amount of oversight required, just as in *Levitt v. Committee for Public Education*.

Montana’s no-aid provision is constitutional under the First and 14th Amendments. The state’s support of religion rests in the “play in the joints” between the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses.

It promises equal protection to both the religious and irreligious by not favoring one sect over another or theists over atheists. It was framed and ratified by the people of Montana who had concerns about maintaining a strong public-school system and eschewing government insertion into religious practice. It is a protection — a shield — one that the petitioners seek to use as a weapon to chip away at the boundary between church and state.

*Jessica is a third-year law student at the University of Florida Levin College of Law. She attended Portland State University as an undergrad and got a B.A. in history and an African Studies certificate. Prior to attending college, she served in the U.S. Army. After law school, she is commissioning into the Navy JAG Corps.*

FFRF'S

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THIRD PLACE

# Not a fundamental right to school funds

FFRF awarded Libby \$2,000 for her essay.

By Libby Jacobson

I. Introduction

While the Supreme Court does not recognize the right to public education as a fundamental right, the plaintiffs in *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue* asked the court to recognize an analogous right, but a fundamental right to funding private religious education. Framed as a violation of the petitioners’ Free Exercise rights, the alleged infringement was a denial of public funding to pay for private religious education. This lack of access to public funds is not an infringement of any fundamental right. Thus, Montana’s No-Aid Clause is subject only to rational review.

II. Free Exercise, For Free

1. Free Exercise Freedoms

Under the Free Exercise Clause, there is a fundamental right to be free from unequal treatment due to religious status. Thus, in legislating between the Free Exercise Clause and Establishment Clause, a state may not support any specific church or exclude any individuals due to their religious beliefs or lack thereof.

Following the Madisonian view, this understanding of the fundamental right to Free Exercise diffuses and decentralizes power to prevent dominance by any particular sect or religion.

Since there is freedom to exercise religion without interference from the state, it follows that the right to free exercise includes the option of parents to choose to send their children to private religious schools. In choosing a private religious school, a parent exercises their religious freedom. But again, there is an important line to be drawn with regard to Free Exercise. The fundamental right of Free Exercise is absolute with regard to beliefs. However, the right to religiously motivated conduct is not absolute.

For example, the Supreme Court upheld a law forbidding polygamy, noting



Libby Jacobson

in *Reynolds v. United States* that Congress could “reach actions which were in violation of social duties or subversive of good order.” The court noted that polygamy had consistently been treated as an offense against society throughout history.

In *Goldman v. Weinberger*, the court relied on the need to defer to the military in denying the claim of a Jewish doctor in the Air Force who said his religion required he wear a yarmulke in violation of the dress code. As in *Reynolds*, in *Goldman* it was only the conduct being regulated. In both instances, the parties were free to exercise their own beliefs.

2. Fundamental funds

At stake in cases regarding No-Aid clauses, and raising issues related to the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses, are schemes providing benefits to taxpayers. These schemes, like *Reynolds* and *Goldman*, concern regulation of religiously motivated conduct, not beliefs. The petitioners’ contention that the No-Aid Clause violates their right to free exercise rests on the assertion that without these funds, the petitioners would not be able to choose to send their children to private religious schools.

In *Espinoza*, the program struck down under Montana’s No-Aid Clause was in essence a tuition credit. Individuals received tax credits for donating to nonprofit student scholarship organizations. Then, these organizations used the donations to fund scholarships for qualified education providers. Despite various degrees of separation, the program operated to lessen tuition expenses for parents choosing to send their children to private religious institutions; in fact, the petitioners relied on the tax credit to create financial aid to allow them to send their children to these religious private schools. Without the program, the parents in *Espinoza* could experience financial hardship in sending their children to religious private schools.

However, the Supreme Court has established that fundamental rights do not include the right to receive government funding in the exercise of that right. As Justice Lewis Powell explained in *Maher v. Roe*, a fundamental right “implies no limitation on the State to make a value judgment . . . and to implement that judgment by the allocation of public funds.”

Justice Potter Stewart echoed Justice Powell’s reasoning four years later in *Harris v. McRae*, stating that the fundamental right of abortion “does not confer an entitlement to such funds as may be necessary to realize all the advantages of that freedom.” In both instances, the court found that while the ability to finance abortions may have become more difficult given the specific legislation, the legislation did not infringe the fundamental right to abortion.

Similarly, while the court recognizes a fundamental right to marry, it has upheld the constitutionality of laws that may, in effect, discourage marriage. In *Califano v. Jobst*, the court upheld a pro-

vision of the Social Security Act that terminated benefits for disabled children covered as dependents of wage earners when those children got married. The court acknowledged that the exception could have an impact on a desire to marry, but ultimately held that the provision was constitutional.

In *Bowen v. Owens*, the Supreme Court again recognized the fundamental right to marriage, but allowed the denial of funds. In *Owens*, a widowed spouse of a wage earner sued regarding a different provision of the Social Security Act: a provision denying payment of survivor’s benefits to a divorced widowed spouse. Both cases involved the right to marry, a fundamental right, but neither provision infringed on that right. Instead, the provisions financially disincentivized the right, but that is neither a de facto or de jure ban on the right to marriage.

III. Conclusion

Thus, it follows that in a case involving a No-Aid Clause, the right to free

exercise of religion does not include a right to public funds to realize all the advantages of that freedom. Parents, like the parents in *Espinoza*, are able to send their children to whichever school they choose. They may exercise their religion in opting to send their children to private religious schools. What the No-Aid Clause prevents is funding of that decision. The choice of states like Montana to enact No-Aid Clauses and prohibit funds for religious education is not a Free Exercise infringement. It is a play in the joints between the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses because funds themselves are not fundamental.

Libby was born in China and grew up in Duluth, Minn. She has worked as a sales manager at Macy’s and a media buyer at Haworth. She backpacked in Europe for a month when she decided to go to law school.

“The fundamental right of Free Exercise is absolute with regard to beliefs. However, the right to religiously motivated conduct is not absolute.”

HONORABLE MENTION

# Accusation based on misinterpretation

FFRF awarded Rory \$500 for her essay.

By Rory Brown

For centuries, American society has operated on the notion of separation of church and state, for an individual’s right to practice the faith of their choice should play no role in their acceptance as an American citizen. As Justice Elena Kagan noted, “[o]ur Constitution promises that [citizens] may worship in their own way, without fear of penalty or danger, and that in itself is a momentous offering.” Petitioners maintain in *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue* that the Montana Supreme Court’s decision to uphold the No-Aid Clause of the Montana state Constitution is in violation of Free Exercise, as it prohibits religiously affiliated private schools from receiving state funds. In other words, the issue before the Supreme Court is whether a state can be required to fund religious schools with tax dollars.

In their brief of amicus curiae, the Alliance for Choice in Education (“ACE”) emphatically contends that promoting individual choice regarding which religiously affiliated school to attend would lead to increased diversity in educational options. The contention is that the ability for an individual to attend a religiously affiliated school of their choosing would lead to increased diversity in educational options.

In good faith, ACE maintains that the majority of private schools in Montana are religiously affiliated, and that the tax credit program proposed by the Montana Legislature would allow low-income families an increased chance to attend private schools. ACE’s assertion mirrors the position of petitioners, that the tax-credit program is for the benefit of the students, rather than for the support of religious institutions. Petitioners assert that the Montana Supreme Court’s decision discriminates against religiously affiliated private schools and families

who wish to attend them.

However, there is an important distinction to be made between an individual’s constitutional right to prevent state intervention into their worship, as Justice Kagan noted, and the long-standing practice of preventing the allocation of public funds to religious education.

Petitioner’s accusation of religious discrimination as a result of the Montana Supreme Court’s decision is based on a misguided interpretation of the Free Exercise Clause. Their claim of discrimination is not supported by the foundational principles of the right to Free Exercise and their proposed solution to the alleged discrimination is void of consideration for inevitable outcomes that would follow from mandating a state to provide public funds to religious institutions. While an individual is indisputably afforded constitutional protections to privately practice the religion of their choosing, this constitutional protection is not infringed upon by a state’s refusal to



Rory Brown

engage in religious sponsorship through the allocation of public funds to religiously affiliated educational institutions.



In *Locke v. Davey*, the Supreme Court articulated a long recognized “play in the joints” between the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. In order to understand what the court meant by this phrase, it is important to look at the historical context surrounding that “play” and the intention of the two clauses in the realm of education. This “play in the joints” indicates that states may provide religious protections to individuals outside of the language of the Constitution, but Supreme Court precedent indicates that the expansion of those rights is not without limitation.

For example, *Locke* recognized that states have broad, historically rooted interests in not supporting religious ministries in any way, as the state funds allocated toward supporting ministries would have a direct correlation with the religious teaching, or “indoctrination,” which is the obvious intention of the ministries’ education.

This logic employed in *Locke* to demonstrate that there is a longstanding practice of states’ refusals to publicly fund religious institutions is further grounded in the writings of James Madison and Thomas Jefferson.

In 1784, Patrick Henry proposed to the Virginia Legislature a bill that would allocate tax dollars to religious education, led by teachers of the Christian faith in order to better the morals of society through the instruction of students. To this proposition, James Madison vehemently opposed the conception that the government pay funds to support a religious agenda, asserting that requiring members of the civil community to pay any amount of money to support religious education was a violation of free exercise.

As a result of Madison’s opposition, the Virginia Legislature subsequently

passed the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, authored by Madison himself, along with Thomas Jefferson. In the Statute, Jefferson mandated that “no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever.” According to Madison and Jefferson, the constitutional right to free exercise is violated when a taxpayer is required by law or otherwise coerced, into supporting a religious entity.

While looking at the Founders’ interpretations may not always be the appropriate way to gauge the intention of constitutional protections, Jefferson and Madison provide necessary insight into what does and should constitute a violation of free exercise. Madison and Jefferson were both of the belief that the separation of church and state would allow the two to function effectively in the absence of influence of one on the other. Not only did these two Founders express an explicit aversion to the coercive nature of requiring citizen tax dollars to fund religious education, but they noted the potential pitfalls that follow from state sponsored support for religious institutions. This view is shared with those outside of the cohorts of the Founders by justices who not only believe that the two should be separate for reasons of effectiveness, but that government sponsorship of religion may lead to social strife and further division among varying religious affiliations.

For example, in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, Justice Stephen Breyer urged the Su-

preme Court to reject the publicly funded voucher program in question because he believed the program would prove to be kindling for religiously based social strife. Specifically, Justice Breyer warned that in American society, “[the court] realized the status quo favored some religions at the expense of others.” In Montana, 65 percent of individuals identify as Christian, 30 percent identify as unaffiliated, and only 5 percent identify as non-Christian faiths including 1 percent identifying as Jewish and 1 percent as Muslim. Therefore, as Justice Breyer warned, awarding state funds to religiously affiliated schools in a predominantly Christian state would inherently lead to the state sponsoring the teachings of the Christian faith.

While it is important to note that not all private schools in Montana are religiously affiliated, based on the data set forth by petitioners and amici, 70 percent of the private schools in Montana have religious affiliation.

Therefore, the tax-credit program would not necessarily provide parents with any real choice on which private school they choose to send their children to, as religiously affiliated private schools are far more prevalent throughout the state.

In fact, in 2018, more than 94 percent of scholarships awarded under the publicly funded program financed religious education. Not only would this tax credit inevitably lead to the state’s promotion of religious (predominantly Christian) schools and limit an individual’s choice

based on the overwhelming majority of solely religious options, but the data present here also contradicts the position of the petitioners and amici that the program would add an element of diversity in education institutions available to Montana residents.

Montana’s incorporation of a No-Aid Clause into the state Constitution addresses the concerns surrounding state and religious entanglement expressed by Jefferson and Madison and should be viewed as a protection against state-sponsored religious preference as outlined by Justice Breyer.

Further, the decision of the Montana Supreme Court invalidated the tax credit program in its entirety. Therefore, all private schools in the state of Montana experienced the same effect from the state court’s decision, as the program was invalidated regardless of religious or secular denomination.

As Justice Kagan continuously purports, “[w]hen the citizens of this country approach their government, they do so only as Americans, not as members of one faith or another.” Petitioners were not discriminated against by the Montana Supreme Court’s decision. Rather, to reverse the holding of the state’s highest court and to therefore require citizens to fund religious education institutions would contradict the underlying values and purpose of the Free Exercise Clause.

*Rory is from Boston and graduated from the University of South Carolina before attending Northeastern University School of Law. In her first legal internship in law school, Rory interned with a Muslim civil rights group in Boston. “I hope to continue to use my legal education to better understand how the government and religion can interact in the best way to serve a civil purpose, while avoiding discrimination and state-sponsored religious favoritism,” she said.*

# THEY SAID WHAT?

I think prayer made a difference in this [2016] election. And that’s not to say I think God put, not to say that he puts a certain political party in a certain place at a time, but I do believe certain people are meant to be in positions at a certain moment. I do believe that President Trump is the person meant for this moment, and I think prayer made a lot of difference in the election.

**White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany, in an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network.**  
*The Hill, 5-20-20*

[I’m the] best [president] in the history of the Catholic Church.  
**President Trump, in a conference call with Catholic leaders.**  
*Crux, 4-26-20*

[Religion] gives us a compass as to how we should behave. [Without religion,] we can begin to trash one another and justify our own actions. If a culture doesn’t have a set of objective realities and a way in which to judge our own behavior or to guide our own behavior, I think we get lost, and

we’re seeing that today.  
**Former Ohio Gov. John Kasich, in an interview with Brian Lehrer.**  
*New York Daily News, 4-27-20*



**Nino Vitale**  
**Ohio state Rep. Nino Vitale, writing on his Facebook page why he won’t wear a protective mask.**  
*Patheos.com, 5-4-20*

If you hear the sermon of God, the virus will never come to you.  
**Pastor David Lah, in a March sermon, prior to getting COVID-19 weeks later.**  
*Fox News, 5-20-20*

This is the greatest nation on Earth founded on Judeo-Christian principles. One of those principles is that we are all created in the image and likeness of God. That image is seen the most by our face. I will not wear a mask.

# CRANKMAIL

As we head into our coronavirus summer, here’s a few comments from the folks who got a little too riled up about FFRF. Printed as received.

**Chronic complaints of Christians:** Please leave Christians alone! You chose to be atheist! I am a Christian and had a near death experience! I don’t care what your beliefs are so please don’t constantly complain about what Christians do after all Judeo /Christians we’re here long before atheists. The miracle of birth says it all! — *Tricia Longstreet*

Unbelievable: You people are so ignorant! No one is without sin, and no one is truly good except God and Jesus. Yes, you people are extremely stupid. God created you (your spirits) and God can certainly destroy you. — *Ron Stellman*

**Congratulation:** YOU FUCKING PIECE OF SHITS. FOR GOD AND COUNTRY US RIGHT-WING ARE TIRED OF PEOPLE LIKE YOU PUSHING YOUR BELIEF ON OTHER AND OTHER GROUPS. CONGRATULATIONS YOU HAVE MADE A LONG LINE OF A LIST OF DOUCHE BAGS. — *Joseph Morgan*

Alabama: Leave my governor alone this is the bible belt you idiots we stand with our governor in our freedom of religion i tell you what come to my house so we can sit down and talk about the constitution come sunday at 12 and listen to the bells for the risen savior — *Brandon Little*

**WHAT DOES THE BIBLE REALLY SAY ABOUT ABORTION:** You are clearly misleading people with fales scriptures. I have researched you’re version of what the bible says and you are twisting it for your good. Unfortunately, most people aren’t smart enough to research for themselves and fall victim to your lies. You apparently have a platform, use it in a Godly way not in a demonic way with your lies. — *Mel Holley*

**You guys suck:** Why wait. Go directly to hell. Hate Hearing your shit — *Mario Farber*

**Atheist LEMMINGS:** An Asteroid did NOT Slam into EARTH, and a fucking FISH, TOOK off his helmet and started walking around on earth. Nor did that same FISH, poof turned into a DINOSAUR and eventually turned into a man. That is ABSOLUTE & Totally bs! Your an idiot, Crystal Clear...WALKING ASTRONAUT FISH DONT TURN INTO HUMANS. OR The one thing, you wont COMMIT. A GOD, SOMETHING OR SOMEONE GREATER THAN OUR SELVES. OR IT MUST BE AN ASTRONAUT, FLYING SPACE CRAFT WITH LITTLE AMOEBAS WEARING HELMETS AND OXYGEN HOSES. LOOK NOTHING IS GOING TO CONVINCE YOU OR LEMMINGS LIKE YOU, TO A SATANIC Iron God. So, good luck smuck — *Larry Shryock*

**No way:** If I were a multi billionaire.....I would not give you one penny. — *Mike Malkowski*

**Evolution:** I felt compelled to respond to your claim to a teacher citing creationism that, “Evolution, like gravity, is a scientific fact. ... No controversy exists in the scientific community regarding the fact of evolution, and the teaching of alternative theories or a controversy is not only inappropriate and dishonest, it is unconstitutional,” is the height of arrogance and ignorance. Evolution is not fact and is debatable “science”.

Evolutionists will never debate Creationists because they know they will loose. FYI there are many, many Creation Scientists all over the globe that have received their PhD’s from secular universities and have come to the opposite conclusions while looking into the same evidence. I suggest you stay away from such dogmatic statements in the future, as you look so utterly foolish. No need to respond as I only converse with those who use the mind that GOD gave them. :) — *Mark Becker*

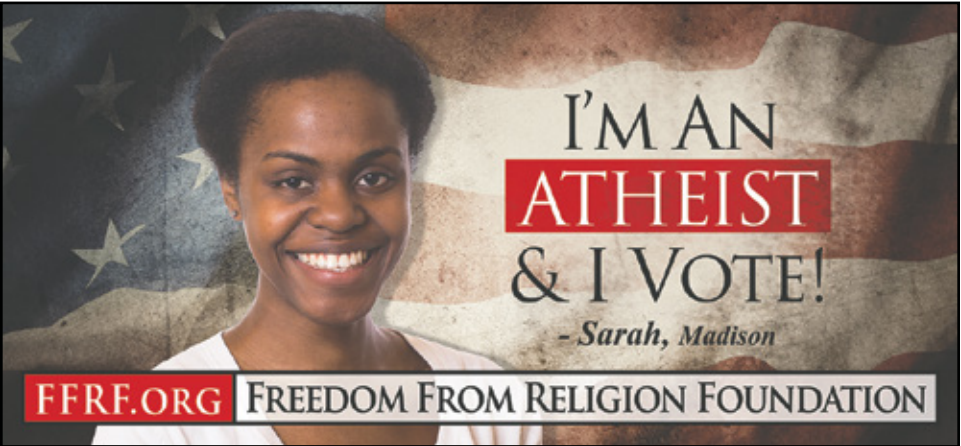
**Gays promotion:** Is the FFRF a gay institution? I have no problem with gays but ever since I clicked on FFRF thru Facebook I have hundreds of suggestions from gays. My problem with this is that other friends assume I must be gay. WHICH I AM NOT — *Harry Terry*

**Your foundation:** You’re commercial on TV is offense, mocking and WRONG! Not afraid of burning in Hell?? THAT’S EXACTLY WHERE ALL OF YOU WILL GO WHEN YOU DIE ...FOREVER !!!!! You cannot compete , dismiss or challenge an Almighty God on the truth of Hell and Your Soul. You are so so so so stupid or as the Bible calls people like you A FOOL !!! — *Roy Hensley*

**Pro-life!:** God is so PRO-LIFE / take your article down, it’s lying and a fake, deceptive, and untrue article.. Do you guys realize, that tons of your articles are lies. But I ran across on the one, “GOD is so Pro abortion”. And I would love to talk to you, on how that entire article was full of lies, or twisted truth into deceptive matter. — *Micah Keith*

**Lawsuit:** I find you as well as your foundation offensive my attorney will be in contact... — *Nathan Colson*

**Your day will come:** I will say this and only say it as a favor to you pieces of shit. normal americans grow very weary of people like your organization stands for. a day grows near when my countrymen may just decide enough is enough and that you and your ilk are a clear and present danger to the constitution and spirit of America. We are watching you and your leftist agenda and constantly evaluating you and your filth to determine if you have finally overstepped your yourselves to a degree which we cannot let pass. You will rue the day. — *Ryan Renshaw*





# Former churches with better missions



Joseph Harrington sent us this photo of St. Michael's Church in Baltimore, which was built in 1857 to serve German Catholic immigrants: "Closed in 2011, it reopened in January 2020 as the Ministry of Brewing."



"The interior looks like a German beer hall with the distinction of Jesus keeping an eye on the vats," Harrington writes.



Dot Harrigan alerted us to this Dollar Tree retail store now housed in what used to be St. Catherine's Church on Vine Street in Charlestown, Mass.



FFRF Member Gus Frederick sent us these photos of Angel's Share Barrel House in Turner, Ore., a former church built in the 1890s. Gus writes: "Long vacant, it recently reopened with a bold new mission to serve this small Willamette Valley community southeast of Salem with excellent craft brews and ciders! Being a stop on the "Turner History Tour," the deteriorating stained glass windows were replaced by local artists, with a community historical theme. 'Angel's Share' refers to the small amount of brew that would naturally evaporate out of barrels as they sat and aged."



Marcia Yeager sent us this photo of the former Calvary Baptist Church in Dover, Del., which is now home to AG-Industrial, an agriculture and construction equipment dealer.

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. Email it to [editor@FFRF.org](mailto:editor@FFRF.org).



This photo was given to us by Kate Retzlaff. It shows a former German Baptist church, which was built in 1872 in Milwaukee. It is now Captain Pabst's Pilot House, a Milwaukee brewery and taproom. Brewery tours attracted about 10,000 people last year.



# Pondering death from different perspectives

By Ted Ottinger

I think most of us, after a certain age, worry about dying. This is very normal and one of the curses of having such highly developed brains. Our dogs and cats, as far as we know, don't worry about mortality.

Most of us want to hang around as long as possible, unless we are experiencing great emotional or physical pain. A large percentage of us believe that once the sheet has been pulled over our heads, it's all over. Poof!

Only in science fiction and in many religious tomes has anyone who was really dead come back. Before my 80th birthday, I thought that the older a person became, the more welcoming of death they would become. Now, I'm not at all certain about this.

At the deaths of two beloved elderly aunts, I shared my grief with a Buddhist nun. She looked at me with a most serene smile and said, "Old people die. That's what they do."

As far back as we have records or artifacts, our ancestors weren't too excited about death, either. Those with royal blood assumed that with their status on Earth as being descended from gods, their deaths would just be a temporary inconvenience. Therefore, like going on a long trip, everything that they or their descendants thought would be needed for the next place were entombed with them, including slaves. Sadly, the slaves had to be killed before embarking on this trip with their masters. Many tribes had similar beliefs.

When Christianity came along, its major appeal was that Christ had died and came back, and if one believed this, they, too, would come back. Few historians or those with any medical knowledge ever believed Jesus came back. Forced to forgo food or water, being tortured and then nailed to a cross pretty much assures that those crucified didn't recover.

Many Christians told this story and it became a wonderful tool for proselytizing and for getting money flowing into the collection plates. Catholics really capitalized on this and came up with a truck stop-like place called purgatory. To get a loved one out and back on the heavenly

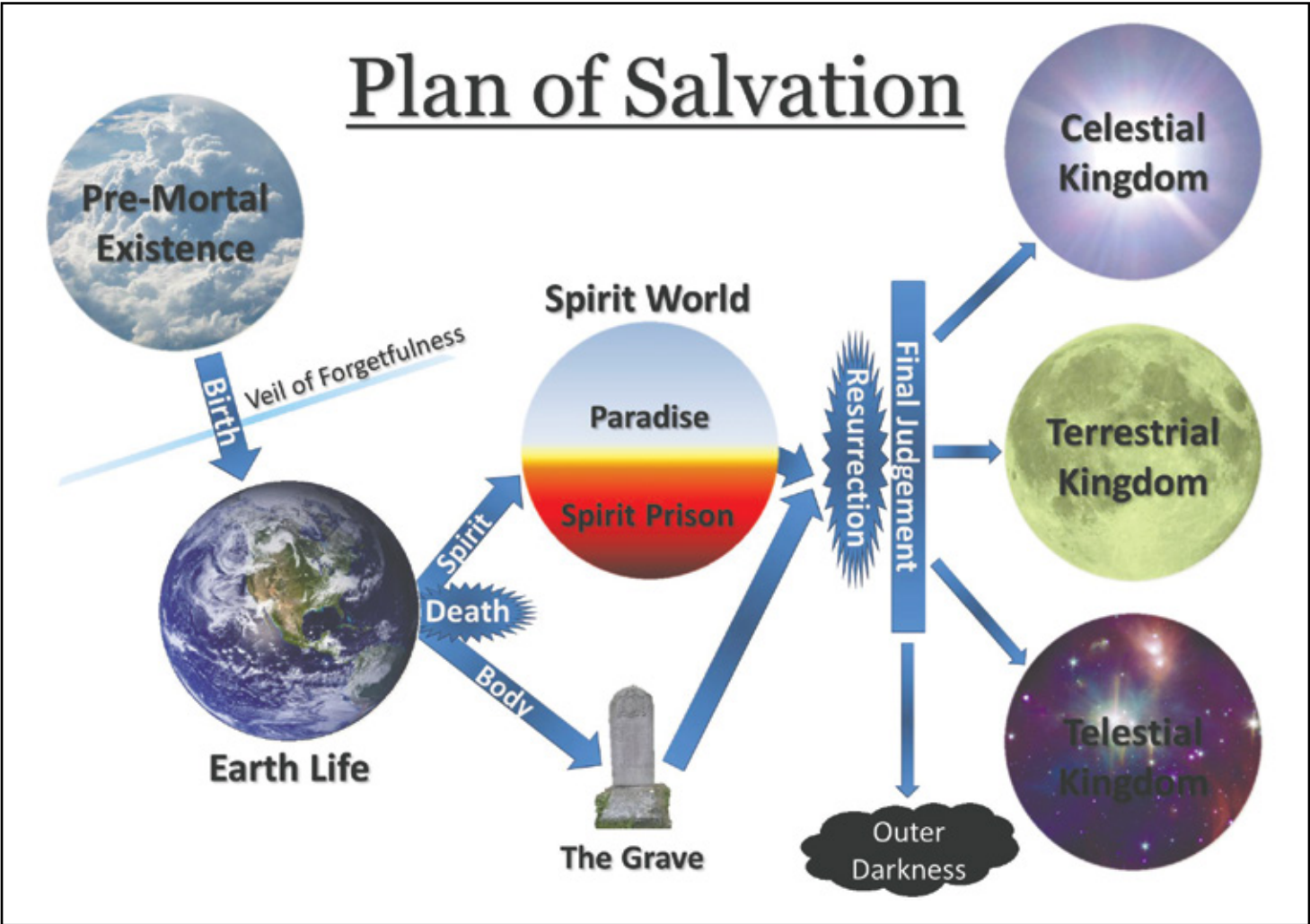


Image courtesy of Wikipedia

A visual representation of the Mormon cycle of life, death and "final judgment."

road, one only had to pay a priest. Some afterlife believers view heaven as a giant family get-together where you'll get to meet all of your kin going back forever. Well, not all of your kin, because some of them may have broken some of God's laws or some church rule. Of course, it is quite natural that we of the still living want to believe in a heavenly reward for ourselves and our loved ones.

Printed obituaries tell of loved ones being greeted by deceased relatives and getting bear hugs from Jesus. At my uncle's funeral, the minister said that my uncle, a road contractor, was now building roads of gold in heaven. At a neighbor's housewarming, a Mennonite pastor said that most of us would never have a home as nice as the one we were gathered in (even though it had only one bathroom). We would live in mansions in the next life.

African slaves in America, and slaves around the world, as well as people imprisoned, could only hope for freedom in heaven.

One summer, when I was teaching a class of those with physical disabilities, I noticed the female students having a discussion in the back of the room. Curious, I walked back and asked what they were discussing. One of them told me that they were wondering if they would be able to walk when they got to heaven. This was no time to tell them of my atheist beliefs. I told them that I hoped not only did I think they would walk, but also

skip, jump and dance. Perhaps there is no harm in ministers, as well as friends and relatives, assuring the bereaved that their loved ones are now in a better place. But is this not unlike telling children about Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy? Of course, the difference is the ages of those being told the stories.

Christians fundamentalists, including Mormons, believe that those embalmed or cremated or buried 6 feet under will come blasting out of their graves on that fateful day when Jesus returns with the rising sun. The deceased going back forever will be really looking good as any disfigurements will be erased, along with signs of aging or any physical or mental disabilities. All of this, of course, only applies to the "good" people, who probably went to your church. As for the "bad" people, you really don't want to know. Some believe that only spirits go on. This really baffles me, as I think of spirits as steam rising from the kettle.

Few people of today believe in elves, fairies or witches or that evil spirits cause diseases. Alchemy is no longer taught in science classes, and yet many people still believe that Jesus is going to show up. If you find it difficult to wait in line at the DMV or to get through security at the airport, waiting over 2,000 years will be a real challenge!!

The Mormon afterlife has always been quite puzzling to me. So, I called the Temple Square in Salt Lake City. After several

minutes on the phone (and after being told repeatedly that I was provoking the LDS spokesperson), I became more confused than ever.

In one of the Mormon heavens, it is much the same as other Christians' heaven, as far as Jesus coming back, etc. However, this Mormon afterlife is more like a good ole boys' place. Married women can only get in when their deceased husbands reach out and call the widows by their secret names given at the LDS marriage ceremony. When I questioned what would happen if the old man couldn't remember a secret name from so long ago, I was assured that among the many miracles of the next realm, all memory challenges are healed.

Single Mormon women are not left out, as a married Mormon man can get the unattached woman in as his second or third wife. As if all of this isn't confusing enough, the Mormons have other heavens in a far distant galaxy, which contains the planet that only Mormons have discovered. The planet is Kolob, which houses its own god on a big throne.

Now, be warned that if you ever masturbate (even once), you can't get into even one of the lower heavens. Also, not tithing will also keep the pearly gates closed. As I understand, if you tithed for many years before leaving or being kicked out of the fold, you are not entitled to a refund. I almost forgot: If a Mormon man goes to one of the outer heaven planets, he will be responsible for populating the barren globe by copulating around the clock with virgins. I would think this would be a full-time job with little time left for planting trees, engineering water systems and myriad other duties.

Women of the Mormon belief system, who are married to abusive Mormon husbands, are frequently advised by their bishops to "suck it up and remain married." This may seem cruel, but the bishops are only looking out for the wives' eternal rewards.

Ted Ottinger is a retired special education teacher, a humor columnist and political activist. He lives with his wife in Utah.

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# ‘I’m in the last scene of the last act’

By James A. Haught

I’m quite aware that my turn is approaching. The realization hovers in my mind like a frequent companion.

My first wife died a decade ago. Dozens of my longtime friends and colleagues likewise came to the end of their journeys. They number so many that I keep a “Gone” list in my computer to help me remember them all. Before long, it will be my turn to join the list.

I’m 88 and still work. I feel keen and eager for life. My hair’s still (mostly) dark. I have a passel of children, grandchildren and rambunctious great-grandchildren. I can no longer ski, ride my motorcycle, hike forest trails or sail my beloved dinghy on our small private lake. But I still relish symphony concerts and seek wisdom in our long-running Unitarian philosophy-and-science circle. I remarried an adorable woman in her 70s, and we enjoy our togetherness. But her health is fragile. Her turn is on the horizon, too.

I have no dread. Why worry about the inescapable, the utterly unavoidable, the sure destiny of today’s 7 billion? However, sometimes I feel annoyed because I will have no choice. I’m accustomed to choosing whatever course I want, but I won’t get to decide whether to take my final step. Damn!

I have no supernatural beliefs. I don’t expect to wake up in paradise or Hades,



James A. Haught

surrounded by angels or demons. That’s fairy-tale stuff. I think my personality, my identity — me — is created by my brain, and when the brain dies, so does the psyche. Gone forever into oblivion.

I’ll admit that some reports of “near-death experiences” raise tantalizing speculation about a hereafter. But, in the end, I assume those blinding lights and out-of-body flotations are just final glimmers from oxygen deprivation. I guess I’ll find out soon enough.

It takes courage to look death in the eye and feel ready. So be it. Bring it on. I won’t flinch. Do your damndest. I’ll never whimper. However, maybe this is bluster and bravado, an attempt to feel strong in the face of what will happen regardless of how I react.

Unlike Dylan Thomas, I won’t rage, rage against the dying of the light. Instead, I plan to live as intensely as I can, while I can, and then accept the inevitable. I find solace in wisdom I’ve heard from other departees. Just before she

died of ovarian cancer, one of my longtime friends, Marty Wilson, wrote:

“I often think of humankind as a long procession whose beginning and end are out of sight. We the living . . . have no control over when or where we enter the procession, or even how long we are part of it, but we do get to choose our marching companions. And we can all exercise some control over what direction the procession takes, what part we play, and how we play it.”

In *The Fire Next Time*, the brilliant writer James Baldwin stated:

“Life is tragic simply because the Earth turns and the sun inexorably rises and sets, and one day, for each of us, the sun will go down for the last, last time. Perhaps the root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives, will imprison ourselves in totems, taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations, in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have.”

And legendary lawyer Clarence Darrow has offered us these thoughts:

“When we fully understand the brevity of life, its fleeting joys and unavoidable pains; when we accept the fact that all men and women are approaching an inevitable doom; the consciousness of it should make us more kindly and considerate of

each other. This feeling should make men and women use their best efforts to help their fellow travelers on the road, to make the path brighter and easier . . . for the wayfarers who must live a common life and die a common death.”

My journey on the road has been proceeding for eight decades. Actuarial tables make my future so obvious that I can’t shut my eyes to it. Life proceeds through stages, and I’m in the last scene of the last act.

I have a pantheon of my favorite heroes: Einstein, Jefferson, Voltaire, Lincoln, Carl Sagan, Shakespeare, Martin Luther King Jr., Tolstoy, FDR, Beethoven, Epicurus, Gandhi, etc. They fill a different “Gone” list. They uplifted humanity, even transformed humanity, in their day — but their day ended, and life moved on.

My day was the 1960s, and ’70s, and ’80s, even the ’90s. I was a Whirling Dervish in the thick of everything. Life was a fascinating carnival. But it slides into the past so deftly, you hardly notice.

While my clock ticks away, I’ll pursue every minute. *Carpe diem*. Make hay while the sun shines. And then I’m ready for nature’s blackout, with no regrets.

FFRF member James A. Haught was the longtime editor at the *Charleston Gazette* and has been the editor emeritus since 2015.

“While my clock ticks away, I’ll pursue every minute. *Carpe diem*. — James A. Haught

# I have no problem contemplating life’s end

By Barbara G. Walker

They ask, “Aren’t you afraid of what might happen to you after you die?”

Well, I don’t see that what will happen to me is anything particularly fearful. One way or another, my body will dissolve into its component atoms and be reabsorbed into the surrounding environment; and along with this general dissolution will go my brain, the mechanism of my consciousness. Thus, I will be unconscious forever, since I will no longer exist as a single entity. That’s hardly anything frightening. I have experienced periods of unconsciousness every night of my life and found no inconvenience in it. To me it makes perfect sense to call death the “final sleep.”

“But what about God?” they ask. “Aren’t you afraid that you may have to face him after all, and you might end up in a state of eternal torture?” But I can hardly fear any such abuse when all the nerves and synapses of my body and brain are long gone. How can sensations exist when there is no way to feel them? Moreover, I have nothing but contempt for a God who would be so sadistic as to create eternal hells for his allegedly beloved children, and would punish the most trivial offenses with something so drastic as eternal torture.

One of the Catholic Church’s favorite idols, St. Thomas Aquinas, revealed an amazing depth of sadism when he said that one of the greatest pleasures God would give the blessed souls in heaven would be a perfect view of all the tortures of the damned. Both Aquinas and



Barbara G. Walker

his God fall far below my personal moral standards.

The other alternative, I was told in Sunday school, is going to heaven and spending all eternity joining the angels in singing praises to this incredibly egotistic deity who wants to be praised every second by everyone everywhere. In view of his offensive vanity, this God hasn’t much to offer.

Ancient sex-oriented religions claimed that paradise would resemble an eternal orgasm, but the patriarchal Judeo/Christian/Muslim “father” would have nothing to do with that idea. I’m not fond of choral singing, and the idea of having to do it forever sounded to me more hellish than heavenly. Surely nonexistence would be preferable to either of these alternatives.

Throughout the history of our civilization, it has been customary to locate heaven literally in the sky and hell below the Earth’s surface. Believers still speak of God looking “down,” and address their prayers upward. But we now know perfectly well what our atmosphere consists of, and also the space beyond it. We know as well what lies under the surface of the Earth, and it’s not a vast torture chamber.

No, I’m not at all afraid of death, but I

am afraid of dying if it means a period of being in pain. I dislike pain. My mother died many years ago in far too much pain, because the social network to give her relief did not then exist. More recently, dying people can receive palliative lethal medications, thanks to the efforts of the esteemed Dr. Jack Kevorkian and the hospice movement. But this is still not in full legal recognition, and many religious authorities condemn it.

Mother Teresa was known to withhold painkilling drugs, even aspirin, from her suffering terminally ill patients, on the grounds that God intends their pain for the betterment of their souls. To my mind, the most acceptable death is one that can be painlessly administered at the patient’s request. Vets euthanize our beloved pets when it’s necessary; why can’t doctors do the same for our beloved relatives?

The real reason behind the church’s centuries-old battle against suicide was simple greed. As George Carlin once remarked, what God always wants is more money. When the Inquisition was in full swing, all the property of arrested victims was immediately seized by the church, a centuries-old habit that eventually made the church the richest organization in

Europe. But if the victim managed to commit suicide before being taken to the torture chamber, the church was deprived of its loot. Therefore, suicides were condemned to the nethermost levels of hell.

Religion still seeks to control all of life’s important occasions: birth, baptism, marriage and death all present money-making opportunities for religions. It’s tax-free income, too. Thus, religious authorities want to keep these matters “holy” so they can make a profit from every ceremonial turning point of life.

I am fortunate to have lived a long, productive, enjoyable life, and I have no problem with contemplating its end. Ever since I reached an age of reason, I have turned up my nose at this absurd hangover from a dark age, the vain, pompous, punitive all-male deity that many adults seem to think they still can’t live without.

Someday, in what I hope is the not-too-distant future, most of the world will finally realize how absurd the whole idea is, and celebrations of life’s beginnings and endings will become much more secular. And — not incidentally — last words will begin to make much more sense.

FFRF Lifetime Member Barbara G. Walker is a researcher, lecturer and author of 24 books.

“I’m not at all afraid of death, but I am afraid of dying if it means a period of being in pain. — Barbara G. Walker

Yip Harburg,  
from his book:

Rhymes for the Irreverent

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

Illustrated by Seymore Chwast, published by FFRF





Photo by Shutterstock

# Godless funerals & Secular memorials

FFRF often gets requests about its “Godless Funerals and Secular Memorials” web page. We are reprinting it here with hopes it will be of use someday to you or loved ones.  
(Or you can go to [ffrf.org/publications/secular-funerals](http://ffrf.org/publications/secular-funerals))

By Anne Nicol Gaylor

Freethinkers believe that a memorial service should celebrate life, not death. Memorials should honor the person who has lived, not be a vehicle to proselytize unsavory dogmas such as sin and salvation, as typical religious funerals often are. It is time to dispense with carbon-copy, fill-in-the-blank services read by clergy who use the occasion to promote religion, instead of honoring the individual. Freethinkers can specify “no religion” in their wills and papers, and freethinking families can likewise make clear they want no religious observances at funerals, the gravesite or memorials.

At the Freedom From Religion Foundation, we often hear horror stories about what happens when religious relatives put on godly funerals for people who were “devoutly unreligious.” We have heard of religious relatives throwing out valuable freethought libraries! We receive frequent requests from FFRF members who wish to en-

## Reference books

- *Memorial Services For Women* by Meg Bowman
- *A Humanist Funeral Service* by Corliss Lamont
- *Funerals Without God: A Practical Guide to Non-Religious Funerals* by Jane Wynne Willson

sure that their own memorials or those for nonreligious friends and relatives stay secular and true to the wishes of the deceased.

Memorials can be planned with readings from favorite poets and writers, with favorite music, with personal anecdotes told by friends and families, with family photos and other personal touches.

Another way to honor the living is to specify secular charities and organizations to donate in memory of the deceased. Friends and relatives who might never consider donating to such a charity often will honor such a request and this is a way for freethinking or progressive concerns to live after you.

Many freethinkers plan memorials rather than funeral services. Memorials have the advantage of giving grieving family and friends the chance to recover from the shock of sudden death, to make travel arrangements, and to fulfill obligations and legal duties before having to plan

meeting logistics. Whether to hold a funeral or a memorial service is entirely a matter of family discretion and personal choice. Memorials are not reserved for those being cremated.

If a funeral (which includes a burial) is chosen, the timing usually takes place within a week of death. Individual state laws regulate when a burial must take place. Funeral homes can help a family consider the myriad small details, and there are also memorial societies that can help individuals plan details in advance of their deaths and save on expenses. No clergy is required to participate in any aspect of a funeral or burial.

FFRF is often asked: How do I make sure I am not given a religious burial? These requirements may be left with final papers, an “After I’m Gone” list left with trusted family, executor, or as a stand-alone instruction with your other important documents, clearly marked and signed. Do not rely on placing such a provision in a will, which likely will be read after burial or cremation. In Wisconsin, the Department of Health has an “Authorization for Final Disposition” form which allows someone to detail arrangements for a funeral or memorial (see “religious instructions”). Your own state may offer such a form.

There are no orthodox rules or religious rites that must be followed. Isn’t that nice?

Anne Nicol Gaylor was the co-founder of FFRF.

## Sample secular service

- Music
- Welcome
- Selected readings (if desired)
- Tribute/memorial portrait/eulogy (Prepared remarks)
- Song or music
- Personal memories (spontaneous memories shared by participants)
- Song or music
- Closing words or thank you
- Closing music
- Invitation to reception

During the tribute or memorial portrait, a family member or a chosen speaker remembers the person who has died. This talk can incorporate personal anecdotes, achievements; whatever it is that best describes this person. Audience members can be invited to share memories.

You may wish to point out the skeptical views of the person being remembered. For example: \_\_\_\_\_ did not believe in life after death; \_\_\_\_\_ believed in life *before* death. But \_\_\_\_\_ does live on in a natural sense, in the memories of those who remain, \_\_\_\_\_’s children and grandchildren [if applicable], and in \_\_\_\_\_’s accomplishments. (This leads to the memorial portrait or tribute).

Most freethinkers craft their own unique program. A friendly colleague or family friend may officiate. Families personalize the event with picture boards or other memorial displays. Don’t be afraid to be different. Even a favorite recipe of a good cook — brownies, etc., — can be distributed (or served). Talented friends or family can be included in the program. Songs, music, poems or sayings personal to the deceased can be featured. Many memorials provoke as much laughter as tears. Music can begin and end the event, and be interspersed throughout.

Note: If religious relatives are involved, you may wish to include a “moment of reflection” to keep the peace.

## Readings

(For more listings, go to [ffrf.org/publications/secular-funerals](http://ffrf.org/publications/secular-funerals))

Immortality By Felix Adler	An Epitaph By Walter de La Mare
When Great Trees Fall By Maya Angelou	No Single Thing Abides By Lucretius
Let There Be Light By Philip Appleman	In Flanders Fields By John McCrea
The Dead By Rupert Brooke	Dirge Without Music By Edna St. Vincent Millay
Continuance By Samuel Butler	Sonnet By Elizabeth Morrow
Unweaving the Rainbow (excerpt) By Richard Dawkins	And Why? Native American Indian
Death Sets a Thing Significant By Emily Dickinson	Remember By Christina Rossetti
The Bustle in a House By Emily Dickinson	Song By Christina Rossetti
Death By Epicurus	Epitaph By George Santayana
Do Not Stand At My Grave & Weep By Mary Elizabeth Frye	I Have a Rendezvous with Death By Alan Seeger
Sing Well! By Joyce Grenfell	I Choose By Seneca
Leavetaking By Mary Lee Hill	Sonnet CVIII By William Shakespeare
Dear Lovely Death By Langston Hughes	Adonais By Percy Bysshe Shelley
At a Child’s Grave By Robert G. Ingersoll	Prometheus Unbound By Percy Bysshe Shelley
Mystery of Life By Robert G. Ingersoll	Heritage By Theodore Spencer
This is the Silent Haven By Robert G. Ingersoll	The Faerie Queen By Edmund Spenser
The World Sweeps On By Robert Ingersoll	Requiem By Robert Louis Stevenson
A Pindaric Ode By Ben Jonson	From the Garden of Proserpine By Algernon Charles Swinburne
	In a Burying Ground By Sara Teasdale

## Music suggestions

The favorite music of the person being memorialized is an obvious choice, and/or family favorites. There is no right or wrong. FFRF Member (and brave church/state plaintiff) Phyllis Grams, who was known for being organized and fearless, planned her own memorial service down to the final period, and chose as her selection a Frank Sinatra recording of “I Did It My Way” (causing a roomful of friends to erupt in affectionate laughter).

If you want your memorial service to include the music of freethinkers, please note the impressive roster of classical composers (and popular standards composers) who have been free of religion. (They may have been commissioned to write requiems, etc., but that was because the wealthiest clients were often churches and religious monarchs!) Nonreligious composers include: Faure, Bizet, Berlioz, Brahms, Copland, Debussy, Delius and Verdi. Classical composers who were not devoutly religious, rejected church teachings, or who were Deists include Beethoven, Mozart and Tchaikovsky. Chopin was not an atheist, but he had given up the Catholic Church at his death.

Songwriters who are/were not religious: Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Richard Rodgers, Hammerstein, Stephen Sondheim and Scott Joplin. The lyrics to “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” a comforting song that is a favorite worldwide, were written by atheist Yip Harburg. “Imagine,” by John Lennon, is another international favorite. Robert Burns was also an irreverent Deist who wrote many beautiful and meaningful songs.

Other ideas: “Danny Boy,” “To a Wild Rose” from Woodland Sketches by Edward Alexander MacDowell; “Wandering Westward” from Mark Twain; Fifth Symphony (New World), Second Movement, first third by Antonin Dvorak (a believer but he wrote beautiful music), “The Last Spring” by Edvard Grieg, Eine Kleine Nachtmusik by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Old Man River by Jerome Kern.



# LETTERBOX

## Please take this poll on end-of-life choices

We are longtime and Lifetime Members of FFRF who are on the board of Exit Options Inc. in West Virginia and would like to invite all FFRF members to take an anonymous nine-question survey on end-of-life choices, allowing you to communicate with policymakers about your own end-of-life wishes.

What ways out would you like to have available for yourself if you were slowly dying of an incurable disease, in severe pain, throwing up everything that you swallowed? What would you want available for your loved ones if they were in that predicament?: Would you want the physician to prolong the agony as long as possible? Would you use hospice? Would you want to take an oral drug or an IV drug to end it all painlessly and quickly? Would you want to use a gun?

Only three of those options are available in West Virginia and the majority of states. Please participate in the free anonymous multiple-choice poll to make your own wishes known to policymakers.

The website and poll are sponsored by Exit Options Inc., a nonprofit advocacy organization. Go to [exitoptions.org](http://exitoptions.org) and select “Poll” from the menu. The website has a trove of information about the options already available to you. It also provides answers about what services hospice organizations can provide and whether you can travel to another state to take advantage of that state’s “death with dignity” laws.

**Larry and Beth Norman**  
West Virginia

## Secular education will move society forward

Hello. This is in response to your Spring 2020 Appeal. I am more concerned than ever about the mixing of church and state, particularly by our elected leaders, who should be leading, not following. They are ignoring and avoiding the wonderful opportunity our First Amendment provides to accept science, new information and reason. Leave the ministers to private matters. Do not continue to force outdated information on Americans. People make gods, not the other way around.

Just think if we could get all high schools to teach students about Abrahamic gods in the same way they teach those same students about Roman gods. Same time frame, same people, same area of the world.

Keep up your good work. It only takes one generation, with a secular education, and with all of the wonders of what we have learned, particularly in the last 100 years, to move humanity to a much better place.

**Dave Carter**  
Alaska

## FFRF deserves this \$1,200 stimulus check

Here’s the \$1,200 Donald Trump sent me. I can’t think of a better use for it than to fight his promotion of the “virus of religion.”

**Don Fedock**  
Arizona

## Words, image help tell uncomfortable truths



I’m a Lifetime Member of FFRF and an active artist in Madison, Wis., who is working on “The Corona Chronicles.” It’s an ongoing project that is being catalogued by the State Historical Society and involves my photographs and recent headlines that I arrange.

I took this photo in a Catholic church in Portugal. (It couldn’t get any creepier.) I took information from an article in The New York Times about the Happy Science religion to finish this piece.

**Thomas Ferrella**  
Wisconsin

## Which state has most religious-trained teachers?

FFRF should sponsor a competition to determine which state has the most public school high-school science and social science teachers (as well as curriculum specialists, superintendents and school board members) who are graduates of religious colleges and universities, where they received religious indoctrination, which they now might be passing on to their students instead of the fact-based science and social science that the general public should expect them to teach.

Any FFRF member can participate in this competition because all public school systems are required to provide this information when properly requested.

Why graduates of religious institutions of indoctrination should still be allowed to be certified to teach in the public schools should be a national embarrassment.

FFRF is in the best position to call this matter to the attention of the general public.

**William Dusenberry**  
Oklahoma

## ‘The perfect god’ column tickled my funny bone

The first thing I do each time I receive Freethought Today is study the list of birthdays of freethinkers for the month. I always wish I could be included on that list!

In the May issue, I especially related to “Atheism became professor’s philosophy,” about Tom Shipka, as I, too, became an atheist through my philosophy course in college. Bertrand Russell was my first freethought teacher, and I idolized him.

But I especially want to commend Gene Twaronite’s essay, “A helpful guide to choosing the perfect god.” This hilarious satire really tickled my funny bone, and I was edified by his description of more powerful gods even than Yahweh, like Shiva the Destroyer. Shiva destroys the whole universe, while Yahweh is merely a burning bush. My favorite god has long been the Deist god, who asks nothing of you and gives nothing in return. But now, I can imagine the glory of Louis Armstrong, or Lord Satchmo, creating the whole universe with “a blow of his sweet trumpet, then singing softly to himself, ‘What a Wonderful World.’” Thank you for this wonderful essay!

**Helen Bennett**  
Florida

## The Founding Myth should be required reading

Just wanted to send a message of thanks for Andrew L. Seidel’s awesome book, *The Founding Myth*. It’s an inspiring read. Every high school in the country should reinstitute required civics classes and include this book as mandatory reading in the curriculum.

Thank you all so much for being who you are.

**Janet Powers**  
Massachusetts

## FFRF reassures us that we are not alone

I’ve been a nonbeliever since age 12 and a hard-core atheist since age 18. I subscribe to Thomas Jefferson’s tolerance of religionists: “It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are 20 gods,

or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.”

Your thoughts and beliefs are yours, but I will judge closely what you do. Those are my beliefs!

I chose to donate to your legal team because I know, as an ex-cop, when all else has failed, court is where it is settled.

Keep up the good work. You reassure us that we are not alone. And you piss off a lot of Texans.

**Terry O’Donahue**  
Wisconsin

## FFRF’s coronavirus ad in NY Times was terrific

I just wanted to say what a terrific ad FFRF had in The New York Times on May 7. The focus on the need for reason, not prayer, to combat the coronavirus is beyond brilliant!

**Fairfid M. Caudle**  
New York

Editor’s note: See page 11 for the ad.

## I enjoy getting Haught’s freethinking blogs

Just a note to say how much I’m enjoying James Haught’s blogs, which get emailed to me. They remind me of the pieces the late Robert Gorham Davis used to write for Freethought Today.

**Andrew C. Jones**  
Michigan

Editor’s note: You can find James A. Haught’s columns at [patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow](http://patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow) and you can sign up to have them emailed to you on that page.

## Coronavirus proves prayer’s ineffectiveness

If anything should prove the ineffectiveness of prayer, this coronavirus pandemic should prove it beyond a shadow of a doubt. Most responsible bishops, rabbis, imams and other assorted people of the cloth have respected and followed the advice of health authorities and closed their houses of worship. But why aren’t they in their respective churches, etc., lofting prayers to their respective imaginary friends in the sky? Except for a few fundamentalist preachers in the Bible Belt who think it’s a hoax, most religious leaders have enough sense to follow the advice of the medical community.

We owe the scientific and medical personnel our gratitude and appreciation, especially the doctors and nurses who have to treat those who have been stricken with COVID-19.

**John Oman**  
Michigan

## We need more leaders who are evidence-based

Our county newspaper runs a quote across the top of each edition. On April 23, it was this one from Christopher Hitchens: “What can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence.”

I thought it was very relevant during this time. It’s no surprise that there’s a backlash over misinformation and lies on social media. Today, opinions adamantly asserted as undeniable truths are rampant. No sources or evidence are



cited. This is a huge problem for our nation because some lawmakers don't even conceal the fact they're making decisions solely based on their beliefs, with no evidence to support them.

"Faith" is used as a sneaky and illegal justification to control our right to personal decisions, opposed to that of individual liberty, the foundation of our nation. I am sick of the "God" talk being used to explain and justify the pronouncements and acts of those elected to be our servants.

Since "faith" is just another way of saying "opinion, assertion or assumption without evidence," let's consider changing the tradition of personal oaths invoking a deity by prefacing them with "asserted God" or "supposed God." That would be evidence-based and honest.

What I'm looking for is a slogan or catchphrase that'll spread like a meme and change social perceptions of what people mean by "god," and what that entails, while dismissing any deity being given credit for existing. Any suggestions?

**Carl Scheiman**  
Maine

**1935 \$1 certificate is my prized possession**



I just read Andrew L. Seidel's book *The Founding Myth* and enjoyed it very much. As I was reading Chapter 24 regarding "In God We Trust," I couldn't help but think of the \$1 silver certificate (1935 F series) that I received as change while stationed in South Korea (1984-85).

It is one of my most prized possessions because it does not bear the words "In God We Trust" on it. What luck and irony that I would receive this as change years after it was made and while stationed in another country.

My first thought was that it was fake because I had never seen a silver certificate before and the design threw me off.

Thanks for all that you do.

**Alicia M. Livingston**  
New York

**Church-state separation is immensely important**

I am so proud to be a member and am thoroughly enjoying my Freethought Today issues and the "Freethought Matters" TV shows. The Ron Reagan episode was outstanding! I have a tremendous amount of respect for him and I am honored to share his secular beliefs. Even though we've never met, I feel a kinship with him. He is a truly brilliant and honest person.

**Where do you 'Freethought'?**



Here I am reading my Freethought Today on the train from Norfolk, Va., to New York City to visit my daughter. Keep up the great work!

**Mike Dubik**  
Virginia

Editor's note: This was submitted prior to the coronavirus pandemic.

Please keep up the fight for separation of church and state! This is an immensely important issue to me, especially with this incompetent administration trashing the Constitution every 10 minutes! I've got your backs!

Please be safe and stay healthy!

**Michael Hayes**  
New Jersey

**Slavery and Christianity forever tied to each other**

Could there be more than a single answer to the question of why millions of black people still cling to the religion of those who enslaved them, despite the fact that both the Old and New Testaments favor slavery?

Perhaps the most logical reason is that after their emancipation, blacks were hated even more by the whites who could no longer claim them as their property. Thus, it seems probable that blacks thought it prudent, for self-protection, to imitate the faith of those who had the power to harm them with impunity under the new name for slavery, "Jim Crow."

And although I sympathize with the poor souls who feared the white's sadistic rage, my admiration is for people like W.E.B. Du Bois, A. Phillips Randolph and Paul Robeson, whose legacy is social justice and a well-founded distrust of Christianity.

Here, for example, is my favorite quote about slavery and Christianity, which comes from Frederick Douglass, the remarkable orator, abolitionist and ex-slave:

"The slave dealer gives his blood-stained gold to support the pulpit — and the pulpit, in return, covers his infernal

business with the garb of Christianity."

**David Quintero**  
California

**Why do I need God if I'm ethical and moral?**

Seeing all the online graduation ceremonies made me think of something that happened when I graduated high school. A neighbor lady was a hard-core Christian and was very welcoming to all the kids, so we hung out at her place a lot. She was always hoping to bring us to God, but I bugged her the most as an atheist.

She told me that as far as ethical and moral principles go, I was an ideal Christian. She said I could accept Jesus and not have to change at all and I would be saved. I replied that if I was ethically and morally principled as an atheist, then why would God punish me just because I didn't embrace Jesus? To her mind, it was "But how could it hurt?" To me it was a matter of ethical principle, an attribute that she praised in me.

As a graduation gift, she gave me a bible. A friend thought that was disrespectful, and I agreed. After some consideration, I just threw it in the trash where I thought it belonged.

**Peter Hall**  
Oregon

**Religious delusions won't stop because of pandemic**

One might hope that at least a few people would be cured of their religious delusions with what's going on with the coronavirus pandemic. Sadly, that is not likely. The religionists have prayed their way through the bubonic plague, smallpox, diphtheria and the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-19 and still have not grasped how pointless that is. Nothing fails like prayer.

**David M. Shea**  
Maryland

**FFRF like a lighthouse in frightening times**

In these frightening times, you are like a lighthouse, although I get discouraged by all the nonsense, such as a brain-dead

evangelical holding a church services in Tampa, complete with 13 magical machines that supposedly instantly kill coronavirus. If there was a god, that jerk would be struck dead. Keep up the good work.

**Peter Rode**  
Florida

**Twaronite's colum was worth my annual dues**

Thanks so much for Gene Twaronite's advice on choosing the perfect god (in the May issue). I harbored serious 6-year-old Christmas morning doubts when fewer than half my plastic animals fit into my unseaworthy made-in-china plastic Noah's ark. Gene's piece by itself was worth my membership dues. In fact, I'm immediately upping my annual donation to \$100. Swear to God.

**David Sheehan**  
California

**Succotash chowder recipe keeps me well-nourished**

Thanks to all who edit the FFRF newspaper. The especially delicious succotash chowder recipe in the "Food for Freethought" column is keeping me well-nourished as I hunker down during the coronavirus pandemic.

**David Staats**  
Wisconsin

**Black Collar Crime section is necessary**

After hearing about FFRF, I joined almost immediately. I also sent a gift membership to one of my brothers. We are unabashed nonbelievers. Our father is an American Baptist minister who (along with the vast number of clergy) has "gotten away" with horrible crimes.

I can't adequately describe my elation in reaching the Black Collar Crime section of Freethought Today.

I don't know who Bill Dunn is, but I need to thank him. [Former Freethought Today Editor Bill Dunn compiles and writes the Black Collar Crime section.] So, to Bill and anyone who has worked on this section of the paper, thank you! This is necessary work. Keep it up!

**Bekah K.**  
Washington

**Let's all try to be kind, respectful to others**

I'm an 81-year-old gay man and, for some reason, I've become very nostalgic lately. I'm very proud and thankful that I found your organization and became a member a few months ago.

Gay people have been around as long as straight people. Wouldn't it be nice if everyone could treat each other kindly? We don't have to love or even like everyone, but at least show some respect for those who are different.

I treat people nicely. I don't care about their sexual orientation, their political views, their race, creed, etc. I just care if they are good people.

Finding FFRF has been a positive thing in my life. I know there is no God because, if there is, he sure can be mean at times. Just look at all the people killed each year from natural disasters.

If God knows all and controls all, then he made those disasters, along with ticks, mosquitoes, flies and all other negative creatures on Earth.

**R. Dean Tomich**  
California

**Your weekly antidote to the Religious Right**

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— Hosted by Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor —

Slightly irreverent views, news, music & interviews

**FFRF.ORG**

**FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION**



# BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

## Arrested / Charged

**Brian Mahiques**, 41, Concord, NC: 2 counts of statutory sex offense and 3 counts of indecent liberties with a minor. Mahiques, lead pastor of Encounter Church, is accused of offenses when he was youth pastor at Refuge Church in 2005–06 involving 2 members of the church youth group who were under age 16. *Source: WCNC, 5-7-20*

**Kris Casey**, Worcester, MA, pastor of Adams Square Baptist Church, was cited a second time and faces a \$300 fine for defying Gov. Charlie Baker's ban on gatherings of 10 or more people during the coronavirus state of emergency.

Casey was delivered a warning by Police Chief Steve Sargent, who handed him a letter after his first Sunday service April 26. Several days later, 56 people attended the service.

"You know, some people aren't happy we're meeting today," said Casey during the April 26 service, which was also streamed online. "To them, I say I'm sorry. I'm sorry you feel that way, but I would rather upset your feelings than disappoint my God."

If Casey violates the order again, he will face a \$500 fine and a possible criminal charge. *Source: WCVB, 5-3-20*

**Levi Esh Sr.**, 63, Pequea Township, PA: Felony and misdemeanor counts of failure to report to appropriate authorities. Esh was bishop for 2 Amish churches when a congregation member allegedly admitted to him in 2012 or 2013 that he'd molested 3 girls. The charge says that Esh didn't contact police or social services and handled the matter internally.

**John G. Beiler**, 41, is accused of 9 sexual abuse counts involving the girls between 2011–15. According to prosecutors, Esh told Beiler to admit his sins to the girls' fathers and was excommunicated from the church. *Source: WGAL, 4-23-20*

**Burnice L. Mikell**, 64, Opa-locka, FL: Aggravated battery on an elderly person. Mikell, pastor of Mt. Tabor Ministries, which rents space from Opa-locka Church of God, is accused of battery on Felipe Madrigal, 70, president of the Rotary Club of Doral.

Madrigal told police he had gone to the area to deliver 12 pallets of food when Mikell got angry that he wasn't contacted first about the delivery. Mikell apparently thought the food was going to be donated to his church and not handed out that day, Madrigal said.

He told police that when he asked the pastor why he wasn't going to help, he punched him in the face, knocking him out. "My phone went flying. It is broken." *Source: WPLG, 4-23-20*

**Menachem Hilel**, 29, **Ariel Balon**, 37, and **Moshe Blumenfeld**, 20, New York City, were charged variously with assault, criminal trespass, resisting arrest, disorderly conduct and obstructing governmental administration for violating the city's social distancing restrictions outside the world headquarters of Chabad-Lubavitch in Brooklyn.

"After numerous warnings from officers and continued disputes, three arrests were made," NYPD Chief Terence Monahan wrote in a tweet. The temple is closed due to the coronavirus restrictions. *Source: NY Post, 4-19-20*

**Richard O. Oduor**, Rome: Negligently spreading an infectious disease. Oduor, a Catholic priest based in Italy, was charged in Kenya, where he presided over a relative's funeral and several more Masses, distributed communion to congregants and failed to comply with quarantine regulations for travelers into Kenya, it's alleged.

Oduor eventually tested positive for the coronavirus, was hospitalized for 2 weeks and has since recovered. He was charged after being released from the hospital. Kenyan officials were able to locate and quarantine about 130 people who had come into contact with him before he was diagnosed. *Source: Catholic News Agency, 4-18-20*

**Wyndford Williams**, Richmond, CA, pastor of All Nations Church of God in Christ, was cited for violating health ordinances enacted to slow the spread of COVID-19. He was the first Bay Area religious leader charged with such a violation.

A Contra Costa County sheriff's deputy found about 40 people who were not social distancing or wearing masks at Easter Sunday services, spokesman Jimmy Lee alleged. "The deputy first spoke to the deacon and asked to speak to the pastor who was in front of the parishioners. The pastor was uncooperative and refused to talk to the deputy," Lee said. *Source: Mercury News, 4-16-20*

**Muhammad Saad Khandalvi**, leader of a mosque in New Delhi's Nizamuddin suburb, has been charged with culpable homicide not resulting in death for hosting a nearly month-long March gathering attended by thousands of adherents of Tablighi Jamaat, a worldwide Sunni Muslim group that promotes a pure form of Islam and uses missionaries.

The event has been linked to 1,023 COVID-19 cases across 17 Indian states. Police also arrested more than 2 dozen others, including 16 foreigners, who participated in the gathering. The mosque's premises include dormitories to house hundreds of people. Some of the attendees were unable to return to their homes when countries locked down their borders. *Source: BBC, 4-16-20*

**Thirteen people** in a suburb of Split, Croatia, were arrested in front of a Catholic church where they had gathered to support a priest who held a Palm Sunday Mass with 20 worshippers present, breaching measures imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19.

**Josip Delas**, 70, who had been warned about breaching stay-at-home orders but still opened his church, was among those cited. *Source: Balkan Insight, 4-14-20*

Christian preachers **Saw Kwe Wah** and **Saw David Lah** and 2 others were charged in Myanmar by authorities for organizing religious gatherings in Yangon (formerly Rangoon) in defiance of a ban imposed in the wake of the coronavirus.

A video clip showed Lah telling worshippers they would be protected by Jesus. An official from the Health

Ministry said at least 19 people who joined the ceremonies or were in contact with those who were present tested positive for the coronavirus. *Source: Andalou Agency, 4-14-20*

**Fernando Aguas**, Merced, CA, was cited for holding Easter Sunday services at Iglesia de Cristo with 50–60 people attending. "He put his entire congregation in jeopardy. One person could have showed up not knowing they're infected [with COVID-19] and infected the entire congregation," said Sheriff Vern Warnke.

Warnke rescinded the citation a week later after Aguas agreed to stop opening the church and instead visit people in their homes while ensuring social distancing. "You still have freedom of speech and freedom of religion, you're just gonna have to do it a different way," he said. *Source: KFSN, 4-13-20*

**John McIntosh**, Davis, IL: Criminal sexual abuse of a minor, alleged to have occurred last January. McIntosh is pastor at Cedarville Baptist Church, has been on the board of directors of a "crisis" pregnancy center and has worked summers for a Christian camp. He's also accredited through the American Association of Christian Counselors.

"John has been married to Lori, a truly God-given helpmeet, since 1998," the church's website says. "John and Lori have been blessed with three children." *Source: WREX, 4-7-20*

**Samuel George**, Toba Tek Singh, Pakistan, who is pastor of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, catechist **Yousaf Masih** and 2 others were cited for leading a public procession on Palm Sunday in violation of a law banning gatherings. Pakistan at the time had reported 3,864 cases of COVID-19 and 55 deaths. *Source: UCA News, 4-7-20*

**Fifteen men** in Lakewood, NJ, were charged with violating Gov. Phil Murphy's executive order banning large gatherings after police broke up the funeral of Orthodox Jewish rabbi Chaim Moshe Strulovics, 72. About 70 people had gathered outside the synagogue, the Ocean County Prosecutor's Office said in a statement, and became "unruly and argumentative" when police moved in.

Of the 1,200-plus confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Ocean County, Lakewood has about 36% of them, with a population of 103,000. At least 5 Lakewood rab-

bis have died of complications from the coronavirus. Strulovics had tested negative, his grandson said. *Source: Washington Post, 4-3-20*

**Samuel Karyeah**, 54, Gbarnga, Liberia: Statutory rape. Karyeah, dean of the Gbarnga School of Theology and senior pastor of a United Methodist parish, is accused of having intercourse with a girl, now 15, on multiple occasions from September 2019 through early 2020.

According to a family source, he promised to pay her school fees in exchange for sexual favors. *Source: Liberian Daily Observer, 4-3-20*

**Augustine Yiga**, Kampala, Uganda: Uttering false information and spreading harmful propaganda about the coronavirus. Yiga, pastor of Revival Christian Church and a father of 8, made a televised comment that "there is no coronavirus in Uganda and Africa." At least 33 positive cases have been diagnosed in Uganda, according to Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

**Deogratius Kiibi**, pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Mpigi, Uganda, was arrested for defying a presidential directive on religious gatherings. **Seven parishioners** in attendance while Kiibi was saying Mass were also charged.

President Yoweri Museveni on March 18 banned all mass gatherings to stop the spread of the coronavirus. *Source: Daily Monitor, 3-31-20*

**John Orberg II**, Glen St. Mary, FL: Child abuse. Orberg, pastor at

Calvary Baptist Church in Macclenny, is accused of groping a 16-year-old girl in his home in January. The girl, a family friend, told police she was asleep on the couch and awoke to him lying beside her and rubbing the insides of her upper thighs.



Baker County SO  
John Orberg II

Several phone calls between Orberg and the girl were monitored by detectives in which he didn't deny the allegation and blamed his behavior on a medication he took that night. *Source: Action News Jax, 3-30-20*

**Pauly Padayatty**, 58, Koodapuzha, India, was arrested for celebrating a funeral Mass despite provisions enacted to prevent spread of the coronavirus. Padayatty, pastor of the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, later apologized. More than 100 people attended.

**Two other priests** were charged after celebrating public Mass on March 19 after religious services were suspended due to the pandemic. The priests face 6 months in jail and a fine for violating restrictions. *Source: AsiaNews, 3-23-20*

## Pleaded / Convicted

**Kent Whitney**, 38, Newport Beach, CA: Pleaded guilty to mail fraud and filing a false income tax return. Whitney, pastor of the now-defunct Church for the Healthy Self in Westminster, admitted he scammed investors in a church trust fund out of \$33 million from 2014–19 by falsely claiming their money was safe and guaranteeing a high, tax-deductible return on investment in the reinsurance industry.

The online church was shut down in 2019 after the Securities and Exchange Commission filed a complaint and a judge froze church assets. Whitney founded the "virtual" church in 2014 after he finished serving 44 months for commodities investment fraud. *Source: AP, 4-17-20*

## Sentenced

**Clifford Whiteley**, 73, Tipton, England: 9 years in prison after pleading guilty to sexual assault of a child and 3 other sex offenses more than 10 years ago when he was a Jehovah's Witnesses elder.

Judge Paul Farrer told Whiteley he used religion "to convince your victim she was complicit in your wrongdoing and, in that way, sought to silence her and, sadly, you succeeded for many years."

Prosecutors said church officials refused to share with police what they had learned from Whiteley during a church investigation. *Source: Birmingham Live, 4-12-20*

An **unidentified Catholic priest** in Paris was fined \$150 for celebrating Mass on the Saturday before Easter at St. Nicolas du Char-donnet Parish with about 40 people present during the coronavirus lockdown. Police shut down the service.

The church continued with live-streamed services on Sunday and Monday, although social distancing rules were observed. *Source: Daily Mail, 3-13-20*

## Civil Lawsuits Filed

**Catholic Charities**, the **Archdiocese of New York** and **Msgr. Kevin Sullivan** are being sued for sex discrimination by Alice Kenny, 63, ex-director of special projects for the nonprofit.

"Mr. Sullivan has made it clear that physical attributes and not accomplishments are what matter most when it comes to female staff," the suit alleges. "Facing out of the office, he keeps a life-size cutout of a scantily-clad Beyoncé for all of the employees at Catholic Charities to see." The suit says Sullivan once mentioned that "Jennifer Lopez's scant attire catches his eye."

Kenny, who was hired in 2008, and other female staffers complained in 2016 about perceived harassment by senior manager **Frederick Joseph**, who resigned after an investigation. As retaliation, Kenny asserts, she was moved from an office to "a small desk in a hallway" and denied promotions before a 2019 demotion. *Source: NY Post, 4-27-20*

**Hawaii Catholic clergy** are among those accused in claims by at least 100 former students, medical patients and church members who came forward by the April 24 deadline for child abuse survivors to file.

"Some of the conduct is so reprehensible that you wouldn't believe someone of the clergy would do it. But unfortunately, we've seen it over and over again," said attorney Mark Gallagher, who represents dozens of victims.

Bishop of Honolulu Larry Silva acknowledged the suits at a Sunday Mass: "I cannot tell you how it turns my stomach to read of the abuse these people have suffered, and not only that, but how their faith was damaged." *Source: Hawaii News Now, 4-24-20*

The **Children's Home**, Winston-Salem, NC, and the **Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church** are being sued by a 59-year-old man who alleges he and other orphans were molested by a husband and wife serving as house parents in the early 1970s.

About 20 children lived in the cottage overseen by **Bruce Jackson "Jack" Biggs** and **Beatrice Hatcher Biggs**. Jack Biggs also served as a substitute preacher at the Christian facility. The plaintiff alleges he was sexually abused for about 3 years starting when he was 10 by both of the Biggses, who also encouraged him and others to touch the genitals of several girls.

The suit says the Biggses are believed to have been fired around 1973 due to abuse allegations. Beatrice Biggs, 82, who lives in a nursing home, is not a defendant. Her husband died in 2015. *Source: Winston-Salem Journal, 4-17-20*

The Catholic **Diocese of Charlotte**, NC, faces 2 new suits accusing 2 priests of sexual abuse. An unidentified Georgia plaintiff who was 14 in the 1970s when he sought help from **Joseph Kelleher** to deal with a family move, alleges he was molested. Kelleher died in 2014.

A North Carolina man alleges he was abused at age 14 by a different priest, **Richard B. Farwell**. "T.T." alleges the abuse occurred after he told Farwell he had been raped by a

“ Sheriff: ‘[Aguas] put his entire congregation in jeopardy.’ ”

## Holy Smoke

Hey, all of you down there ~ there's plenty of toilet paper in your church's restrooms!





truck driver while hitchhiking. Allegations about Farwell molesting boys first surfaced in 1985. He was criminally charged by Rowan County authorities in August 2019 and is free on bail.

Both men had previously sued the diocese in 2011 and 2012 but the cases were dismissed because too much time had passed. A “look back” provision enacted by legislators last November opened a 2-year window for child sexual abuse lawsuits to be filed, regardless of the statute of limitations. *Source: Insurance Journal/Fox Charlotte, 4-15-20*

The Catholic **Archdiocese of New Orleans** is being sued by a man alleging he was molested by **James C. Collery**, pastor of St. Ann Parish in Metairie in the early 1980s when he was a 10-year-old altar boy. Collery was ordained in 1948 and died in 1987.

“It is clear that because the Archdiocese knew about Collery’s sexual abuse of at least one minor in 1983, Collery could have been prosecuted within the statute of limitations had he been reported to police,” the suit says.

The suit adds that the archdiocese has “engaged in zero outreach to potential Collery victims which, upon information and belief, there are several.” *Source: WVUE, 4-8-20*

A suit naming the Catholic **Diocese of Allentown**, PA, alleges pedophile priest **Robert G. Cofenas** began molesting plaintiff “John Doe” when he was a 7-year-old altar boy at Holy Rosary Parish in Reading and continued the abuse until Doe, now 56, was in his 30s.

Cofenas was first identified in the 2018 statewide grand jury report on abuse in the church. The report said church officials were aware of Cofenas’ inappropriate contact with a boy in 1979 and that he admitted molesting boys in 1981 and 1986. He was defrocked in 2005 and died in 2013.

The suit also identifies former priests **Stephen Halabura** and **James Agosta** as among those who molested Doe. Halabura retired in 2008 and self-reported an incident of abuse in 2019, which the diocese referred to law enforcement. Agosta, who died in 1995, does not appear on the diocese’s list of credibly accused priests. *Source: Morning Call, 3-31-20*

The Greek Orthodox **Archdiocese of New York** and Long Island monastery priest **Gerasimos Makris** have been sued by former nuns Elizabeth Brandenburg and Maria Kallis, who for a decade were allegedly harassed and touched sexually by Makris and became outcasts in the church after they complained. Kallis allegedly bore the brunt of the sexual misconduct

The women felt so ostracized that they left the state in 2018 in order to feel safe. Makris allegedly apologized to them in 2017 and was returned to the pulpit after initially being banned amid the allegations.

Brandenburg, 38, and Kallis, 37, now live in Missouri and run a company that employs survivors of sex trafficking and sells soaps and candles. *Source: NY Post, 3-20-20*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Titus Trust** (formerly the Twerne Trust), a British group that operates Christian resorts called “holiday camps,” settled a suit with 3 men and expressed “profound regret” for the abuse carried out by **John Smyth**, trust chairman from 1974–81. The scandal has embroiled the Church of England and **Justin Welby**, current archbishop of Canterbury, who worked at the camps in the 1970s and claimed to be unaware of Smyth’s abuse.

Settlement terms weren’t disclosed. An internal 1982 investigation found that boys were given “horrific beatings” while naked or seminude, mostly in Smyth’s garden shed, but the report was kept secret.

According to court documents, “The particular allegations are that [Smyth] made the complainants walk naked to the swimming pool at night; that he took showers with them in the nude; that he talked to them about masturbation and told them to be proud of their ‘dicks,’ as Jesus Christ had one; and that he assaulted them on their ‘rear bare buttocks’ with a table tennis bat.”

Smyth later moved to Zimbabwe, where he was the subject of fresh allegations, and then to Cape Town, S. Africa, where he was removed as a leader of his church after claims of inappropriate behavior 6 months before dying of a heart attack in 2018. *Source: The Guardian, 4-5-20*

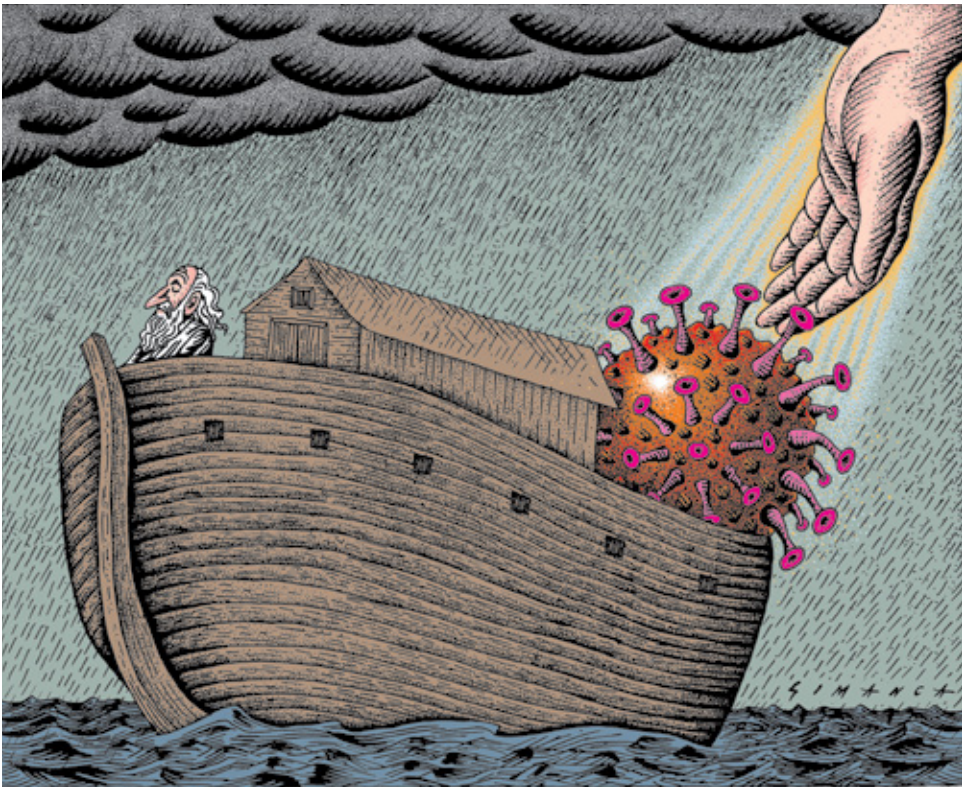
Finances

The Catholic **Archdiocese of Philadelphia** has paid nearly \$44 million in reparations to sexual abuse survivors, with the eventual total estimated at \$130 million, Archbishop Nelson Perez announced. Since the Independent Reconciliation and Reparations Program was created in 2018, over 600 claims have been filed and 208 have been resolved, an average of about \$211,000 per claimant.

Funding has come from the “sale of certain Archdiocesan assets, borrowing, and risk mitigation payments from related ecclesiastical entities.” *Source: Philly Voice, 5-6-20*

The Catholic **Diocese of Buffalo**, NY, filed a motion in federal bankruptcy court seeking an injunction on lawsuits filed under New York’s Child Victims Act. About 250 suits have been filed since August, when the act gave victims 12 months to pursue even decades-old allegations.

The diocese said continued litigation would de-



plete its insurance reserves and reduce future settlements to survivors.

“This legal maneuver by the Diocese of Buffalo is just another example of the Catholic Church coldly putting its needs before the needs of victims,” said Boston attorney Mitchell Garabedian, who represents 39 clients suing the diocese.

The diocese previously announced it would end financial support and health benefits for 23 priests with substantiated abuse allegations starting May 1 as part of the bankruptcy process. The men were continuing to collect a salary or pension from the diocese, amounting to at least \$600,000 a year in “sustenance” payments.

Three of the suspended priests had remained on the diocese’s payroll even though they hadn’t functioned as clergy in more than 25 years. The diocese later said that pension plans would not be affected by the decision. *Source: Lockport Journal/ Buffalo News, 5-4-20*

The **3 Catholic dioceses** in Colorado — Denver, Colorado Springs and Pueblo — have paid over \$3 million to 28 survivors of clergy sex abuse as part of a claims review by the Independent Reconciliation and Reparations Program. The review is ongoing, with 91 claims received so far, with 9 denied.

A 263-page report released in October detailed the abuse of 166 children by 43 clergy since 1950. Those who accept money are barred from filing a lawsuit against the church. *Source: Colorado Sun, 4-23-20*

The Catholic **Society of Christ Fathers’** appeal of a court order to pay a sexual assault survivor 1 million zloty (\$237,000) and a monthly annuity of \$190 was denied by the Polish Supreme Court.

A priest identified only as **Roman P.** was sentenced to 4 years in prison in 2010 for abducting a 13-year-old girl from her parents and raping her over a period of 10 months.

Church records show about 400 Polish Catholic clergy have sexually abused over 600 children since 1950. Bishops and religious order heads have consistently insisted they’re not legally responsible for offenses of their subordinates. *Source: Reuters, 4-1-20*

The Catholic **Diocese of Erie**, PA, suspended processing of sexual abuse survivor claims for at least 90 days due to what it called “economic turmoil” caused by the coronavirus. By December 2019 the program had already cost the diocese nearly \$12 million.

About 40 claims are still pending. The Survivors’ Network of those Abused by Priests called the move “hurtful and deceitful” and said it showed that abuse survivors should seek justice through the courts rather than through church-run programs. *Source: NPR, 3-26-20*

Legal Developments

**Paxton D. Singer**, 25, Sugar Grove, IL, was denied reconsideration of a judge’s guilty verdict of his November 2019 disorderly conduct conviction for sending suggestive text messages to a 15-year-old boy who attended Harvest Bible Chapel, where Singer was a youth pastor.

Judge Michael Noland announced the decision in a 9-page ruling supporting his February decision to not order a new trial, a defense motion he had originally granted about 2 weeks after the trial. During the bench trial, he had acquitted Singer of solicitation of a minor. Defense attorney Terry Ekl then argued that another trial would amount to double jeopardy. *Source: Daily Herald, 5-7-20*

An estimated **2,500 ultra-Orthodox males** attended the Brooklyn, NY, funeral of Rabbi Chaim

Mertz, who died of COVID-19 complications. The NYPD broke up the crowd of mourners flouting the city’s social distancing guidelines but arrested no one and cited no one.

After the incident, Mayor Bill de Blasio tweeted a warning about future large gatherings amid the pandemic: “My message to the Jewish community, and all communities, is this simple: the time for warnings has passed. I have instructed the NYPD to proceed immediately to summons or even arrest those who gather in large groups. This is about stopping this disease and saving lives.”

A police spokesperson said officers responded to a synagogue on Kent Avenue in Brooklyn, where they issued 2 summonses over doors being chained from the inside. Another summons was issued for failure to social distance. *Source: Newsweek/NY Daily News, 4-28-20*

The Maine Supreme Judicial Court upheld 10 convictions of **Ronald Paquin**, 77, a defrocked Catholic priest sentenced to 16 years in prison in 2019 for sexually assaulting a boy multiple times in the 1980s. He has already served 10 years in Massachusetts for molesting another altar boy. *Source: Press Herald, 4-23-20*

The appeal of **William “Tom” Faucher**, 74, was unanimously denied by the Idaho Court of Appeals. Faucher, a Boise Catholic priest, pleaded guilty to 2 child pornography charges in 2018 and was sentenced to 25 years. The appeal claimed the sentence was excessive and constituted cruel and unusual punishment because the offenses were cybercrimes with no victim contact and didn’t take into account his age and poor health.

“The court considered each of the mitigating factors Faucher has identified on appeal and weighed them against the aggravating factors, including that Faucher lied about the nature of his crimes, minimized their significance, did not accept responsibility, and showed no remorse and that many of Faucher’s supporters were unaware of the nature and the scope of his crimes,” the opinion said. *Source: Press-Tribune, 4-21-20*

**Orthodox yeshivas for boys** in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, NY, are running underground schools in closed synagogues and apartment buildings despite social distancing requirements designed to slow the spread of coronavirus, a parent whose child attended one of the secret schools alleged to a newspaper.

The New York City Department of Health did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Williamsburg is a Haredi enclave home to the largest community of Satmar Hasidic Jews in New York City. Some classes, the source said, were broken into smaller groups to keep the numbers of students in a room at about 12, but some are running with full classes of 24 to 26. *Source: The Forward, 4-20-20*

**Bernard McGarty**, 95, La Crosse, WI, will no longer face prosecution for allegedly offering a woman \$20 in May 2019 for sex, trying to kiss her and putting her hand on his genitals outside the public library.

District Attorney Tim Gruenke said given McGarty’s age and health problems and delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, he won’t face trial for 4th-degree sexual assault. McGarty paid a \$250 disorderly conduct fine in 2014 for removing the covering from his groin and asking a Wausau massage therapist to rub his genitals. *Source: WKBT, 4-6-20*

**Barry Freundel**, 68, Washington, DC, a prominent Modern Orthodox rabbi convicted for secretly videotaping women in his synagogue’s mikvah bath, was released from prison early due to the coronavirus pandemic, announced Amy Zubrensky,

an assistant U.S. attorney. “I know this news will be upsetting to many of you,” she said.

He was sentenced in May 2015 to 6½ years. His original release date was to have been near the end of 2021. “This early release, granting Freundel the ability to celebrate his own freedom together with Passover, is a final smack in the face to victims,” said a woman who wished to stay anonymous. *Source: JTA, 4-1-20*

Allegations

Australian Catholic Cardinal **George Pell**, 78, is being investigated by police on a new allegation of child sexual abuse soon after the nation’s high court acquitted him on 5 historical child abuse charges. Pell spent over 400 days in jail after being convicted by a jury in December 2018. The appeals court ruled the jury should have found reasonable doubt as to his guilt.

The acquittal will likely be followed by a string of civil claims against Pell and the Catholic Church from abuse survivors and their families. “We will continue to pursue a civil claim on behalf of our client despite the high court’s ruling,” said attorney Lisa Flynn, representing a plaintiff alleging Pell molested his son as a choirboy. *Source: The Guardian, 4-13-20*

**Allegations in Pakistan** of sexual harassment, rape and physical abuse by Islamic clerics teaching in madrassas (religious schools) number in the dozens, an AP investigation showed. The AP documented cases through interviews with law enforcement, abuse survivors and their parents.

There are more than 22,000 registered madrassas in Pakistan, teaching over 2 million children, but many more are unregistered. Police said the abuse problem is pervasive and the scores of reports they receive are just the tip of the iceberg. None have resulted in the conviction of a cleric.

Officials said clerics often target young boys in a society where male interaction with girls and women is unacceptable and because boys are less likely to report assault. *Source: AP, 4-13-20*

A Muslim firefighter accused one of a trio of “three Hasidic Jewish teens” of deliberately sneezing on him while responding to a call in the Borough Park neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY. Omar Sattar, 33, tested positive 9 days later for COVID-19.

The boys “taunted [Sattar] and asked him if he was afraid of the coronavirus,” said a letter to department headquarters from Lt. Kasey Koslowski of Engine Co. 282. They then ran off. *Source: NY Post, 4-3-20*

Removed / Resigned

Auxiliary Bishop **Joseph R. Binzer**, second-highest ranking prelate in the Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati, resigned the post over how he handled complaints about accused priest Geoffrey Drew, charged in August 2019 with 9 counts of raping an altar boy. He will remain a priest.

Church officials now admit they had received complaints in 2013 and 2015 about Drew, which prosecutors said were inappropriate but not criminal.

The current charges stem from a man’s accusations that Drew, now 57, raped him in 1988–91, starting when he was 10. Drew was not yet a priest but led the music ministry at St. Jude School. *Source: Cincinnati Enquirer, 5-7-20*

The San Antonio Archdiocese removed **Carlos Davalos** as pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Helotes, TX, after 2 people accused him of sexual misconduct. A letter to parishioners alleged Davalos sent sexually inappropriate text messages to an adult parishioner earlier this year.

Five days after the first allegation, the archdiocese was informed that Davalos had addressed sexually inappropriate comments and questions to a minor. The allegation involving the minor was forwarded to the Bexar County District Attorney’s Office.

Patti Koo, who represents the Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests, called on the archdiocese to tell the public where Davalos is currently located and whether it’s near public spaces where children may be nearby. *Source: KSAT, 5-7-20*

Other

**James T. Hanley**, 83, a New Jersey Catholic priest defrocked in 2003 after he admitted abusing over 20 boys over 14 years as far back as the 1960s, died of undisclosed causes at a nursing home.

Despite being laicized, Hanley had continued to receive a regular stipend from the church, said Paterson Diocese attorney Kenneth Mullaney.

The diocese settled lawsuits in 2004 with 21 of his accusers for nearly \$5 million. “Now remember, Mark,” Hanley allegedly told Mark Serrano, who was 9 at the time he was molested in the 1970s, “this is our secret. This is something special that you and I share. Best not to share it with Mom and Dad.”

A new round of lawsuits started in 2019 under the state’s extended statute of limitations. Plaintiff “B.D.” alleged “he was abused by Hanley when he was 13, in or about 1968–69, and endured abuse similar to acts Hanley admitted to during a 2003 deposition — such as touching and rubbing of genitalia, oral sex, sexual use of a vibrator, open-mouth kissing and showing pornography,” records said. *Source: nj.com, 4-29-20*



# FFRF's pet project

FFRF knows it's a scary and unpredictable world out there right now, and while we continue to fight for your rights, we also hope to bring a smile to your face. So here is a look at the variety of pets of FFRF staff members, who are keeping us company as we shelter in place and work from home. We hope you enjoy. Stay safe, friends!



Atticus (Dante Harootunian)



Kiki (PJ Slinger)



Oreo (Amit Pal)



Lucky (Jackie Douglas)



Pepsi and former foster (Renee Oberhart)



Socks and Royal (Astoria Goldsby)



Neeko (Roger Daleiden)



Moose (Andrew L. Seidel, Liz Cavell)



Macy (Patrick Elliott)



MacNCheez and Steven (Eleanor McEntee)



Blanche and Manny (Mark Dann)



Batman, Mr. Handsome, Princess (James Phetteplace)



Freddy (Madeline Ziegler)



Clarence (Annie Laurie Gaylor)



Shadow and Jasmine (Kati Treu)



Amos (Barbara Alvarez)



Bob and Nap (Greta Martens)



Rosie (Lisa Strand)



Darwin (Lauryn Seering)