

FFRF Annual Report – 40th Anniversary

By Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker Co-Presidents,
Freedom From Religion Foundation

FFRF, incorporated on April 5, 1978, celebrated its 40th anniversary as a national group with a special section in our newspaper, *Freethought Today*, looking back on milestones. (You can still browse this section digitally at: ffrf.org/40th.) FFRF's principal founder, Anne Nicol Gaylor, who died in 2015 at age 88, lived long enough to see her vibrant legacy continue with exponential growth for FFRF.

Photo: Ingrid Laas



Dan Barker & Annie Laurie Gaylor.

This year's celebratory annual convention broke records — nearly 1,000 members representing 42 states, plus Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C., Canada and the UK. (See more under Convention Recap.)

We were “flattered” to be the subject of a 10-page diatribe by former Gov. Mike Huckabee on behalf of Citizens United (yes, *that* Citizens United), in a cynical ploy to use FFRF's name (and distort our actions) to raise even more funds for the Christian supremacist movement. Thank you if you contributed to our fund to “reclaim a secular America,” FFRF's main purpose — Huckabee's lies to the contrary.



Mike Huckabee caricature.

Following are highlights and metrics of FFRF's accomplishments in 2018, as this goes to press in mid-November.

FFRF never bigger

FFRF has grown by 9.7 percent since last year, exceeding 32,000

dues-paying members. Our warmest gratitude to you — our members — for your support, activism and participation. Growing in an election year is an accomplishment.

Captivating book for freethinking children published

Looking to the future of freethought, FFRF revised its original book for children, ***Just Pretend***, written by Dan Barker, and wondrously illustrated by the brilliantly talented art student **Kati Treu**, daughter of Lisa Treu, our director of first impressions. The paperback with magical illustrations is hot off the press, just in time for a Winter Solstice gift for your children or grandchildren.



\$56,750 awarded in student scholarships

Awarding scholarships to freethinking students counts as one of FFRF's most proud annual achievements and is an investment in the future of freethought. This year, the **William J. Schultz Memorial Scholarship** for college-bound high school seniors helped a total of 24 winners (including 14 honorable mentions) with \$13,000 in prizes.



Our **David Hudak Essay Contest for Students of Color** awarded 15 college students, paying out \$10,550 in award money. Our college competition, a memorial to **Michael Hakeem**, a sociology professor, awarded a total of \$12,750 in scholarships to 18 college students.



Students of Color major essay winners.

Generous Lifetime Member **Professor Brian Bolton** sponsors the graduate student essay competition, which had 15 winners receiving a total of \$10,450 in prizes. Essays are reprinted or excerpted in *Freethought Today*.

Additionally, **FFRF's Catherine Fahringer Student Activist Award of \$10,000** underwrites the annual **Black Skeptics of Los Angeles scholarships**, given to students of color who are first in their families to go to college. Four students each received \$2,500 based on.

\$9,000 in student activist awards

A special \$5,000 student activist award endowed by **Richard and Beverly Hermesen** went in 2018 to the remarkable **Bailey Harris, 12**, now author of two books for children, *My Name is Stardust* and *Stardust Explores the Solar System*. Bailey accepted the award in person at FFRF's 2018 convention, and charmed everyone — including fellow

Photo: Chris Line



Heathen's greetings from FFRF staffers.



Salman Rushdie & Bailey Harris.

author Salman Rushdie!
Devin Estes, 10, received a "Strong Backbone" Student Activist Award of \$1,000 endowed by a kind octogenarian. Devin protested a student-led religious program in which elementary school teachers led students in daily prayer and religious songs. He stopped it, but was bullied by the teacher.

The \$2,000 Thomas Jefferson Student Activist Award, endowed by a generous couple in the Northwest every year, went to a high school student, 17, from Tennessee, who has protested a display including the Ten Commandments at his public school, making him a "lone outsider."



Michel-Ange Desruisseaux

Receiving a **\$1,000 Paul J. Gaylor Memorial Award** endowed by Annie Laurie in her father's memory was **Michel-Ange Desruisseaux**, a student at New York City's School of Law, for his eloquent defense of nonbelievers.

FFRF non-litigation legal work ends over 200 state/church entanglements in 2018

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the hiring of FFRF's first staff attorney, Rebecca Markert, who is now its legal director and oversees a staff of seven attorneys plus two short-term legal fellows, two legal assistants & interns. Congratulations, Rebecca!

FFRF ended 255 violations through education. From January through October, FFRF has sent more than 814 official complaint letters, winning **255 significant victories**, and is on course to send over 1,000 complaint letters by year's end. About half the legal complaints FFRF makes involve defending the rights of the youngest and most vulnerable: public school students. Major complaints and victories are reported in *Freethought Today*.

FFRF litigation — on a roll



FFRF legal team.

Since 2016, FFRF has been on a triumphant winning streak, victorious in 15 court cases, rounds or settlements. In 2018, FFRF has won **five judgments or settlements in our favor**, including one completed case, *FFRF v. Concord Community Schools*. In that case, the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed a district court ruling against a school nativity pageant.

This year, **FFRF has won three other solid decisions by federal appeals courts:**

- **The 11th Circuit Court of Appeals** ruled in our favor that a

34-foot-tall cross owned by the city of Pensacola and used for years in Easter services is unconstitutional, in a case brought with American Humanist Association.

- **The unanimous seven-member New Jersey Supreme Court**



New Jersey Supreme Court & churches. ruled in our favor that taxpayer monies should not be raided to repair houses of worship.

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- **The 9th U.S. Court of Appeals** ruled in our favor that the Chino Valley, Calif., public school board should not be conducting prayers or Christian worship services at public meetings.

Oral arguments were heard by federal appeals courts in three of FFRF's cases this year, two of which FFRF has won at the district court level:

- *Dan Barker v. Conroy*, in which FFRF appealed a lower court loss in Barker's challenge of suppression of his freethought invocation (sponsored by his Congressional representative Mark Pocan), by Father Patrick Conroy, a priest and House chaplain. FFRF Attorney **Andrew Seidel did a**



Rich Bolton, Andrew Seidel and Dan Barker at D.C. oral arguments.

- skillful job in oral arguments** before the D.C. appeals court.
- *Gaylor v. Mnuchin*, in which the IRS is appealing FFRF's federal court victory declaring unconstitutional the housing allowance uniquely benefiting "ministers of the gospel" and the churches that pay them. Joining outside litigator **Richard Bolton** at the oral arguments in defending FFRF's "David vs. Goliath" challenge of religious privilege was expert **Adam Chodorow**, a tax law professor.
- *FFRF v. Lehigh County, Penn.*, in which outside litigator **Marc Schneider** defended FFRF's federal court victory ruling unconstitutional a cross as part of the county's seal and flag. This case has been put on hold pending Supreme Court review of another cross case. Unfortunately, we're already seeing the chilling effect of the Kavanaugh appointment.

Additionally, FFRF won a federal court ruling this year in *FFRF v. Abbott*, when a federal judge ruled in June that **Texas Gov. Greg Abbott had violated FFRF's rights** when he censored our Bill of Rights "nativity" display, countering a Christian nativity display at the Texas Capitol. Abbott is appealing.

FFRF's newest state/church litigation

FFRF has filed five new lawsuits this year to:

- Seek open records regarding a Kentucky penal institution's sponsorship of a **"Night of Prayer" organized by the Laurel County jailer.**
- Remove a **Ten Commandments monolith planted on the lawn of the Arkansas Capitol** in May.
- End the West Virginia **city of Parkersburg's** opening of all city council meetings by **reciting the biblical "Lord's Prayer."**
- Challenge the Internal Revenue Service's discriminatory



Arkansas state Sen. Jason Rapert next to decalog.

favoritism of churches and church-related groups, which are automatically exempted from filing the Form 990 informational returns all other (c)(3) groups must file to retain tax exemption. **FFRF sued in October on behalf of Nonbelief Relief**, a humanitarian group formed by FFRF's executive board in 2015, which lost its tax exemption for failure to file the Form 990.

- Challenge outgoing Wisconsin Attorney General Brad Schimel's creation of a faith-based

employee chaplain program operated by the **Wisconsin Department of Justice**.

FFRF has four other ongoing court cases.

Strategic response — lobbying on your behalf

FFRF's Strategic Response Team (SRT), headed by attorney **Andrew L. Seidel**, works to lobby, track and educate about pending legislation, to shape public opinion with articles and editorials, to draft statements, press releases and action alerts, and stop imminent state/church violations needing immediate action.



FFRF attorneys Rebecca Markert and Andrew Seidel with U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan (center).

As part of FFRF's ongoing **Educating Congress** campaign (made possible thanks to **Stephen Uhl**), FFRF's Strategic Response Team had **60 meetings with legislators** on Capitol Hill over the course of four lobbying trips. Among those receiving special visits were members of the new Congressional Freethought Caucus, co-founded by **U.S. Reps. Jared Huffman** and **Jamie Raskin**, now boasting 10 congressional members.

Please **text FFRF to 52886 to get FFRF action alerts** relevant to your region on your mobile device.

FFRF's SRT notably lobbied against federal court nominee Jeff Mateer, whose name was ultimately withdrawn. The SRT also did major behind-the-scenes research and statements regarding

Brett Kavanaugh's disastrous record on separation of church and state. The team oversaw many other timely action alerts, statements and press releases.

FFRF is in print, over the airwaves and online

FFRF has been publishing our lively newspaper, **Freethought Today**, which comes out 10 times a year, since 1984, today ably edited by **PJ Slinger** and available as a hard copy or digitally.

"Freethought Matters" TV show debuts in nine cities. After a trial run last spring in Madison, Wis., FFRF took its new TV talk show to eight major cities this fall and through next spring. The other cities are: **Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, Phoenix, Portland, Ore., Sacramento, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.** "Freethought Matters" serves as an "un-sermon," airing Sunday mornings as an alternative to the religious domination of TV airwaves.



Julia Sweeney with Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker on "Freethought Matters."

Many FFRF 2018 convention speakers were filmed on-site by **FFRF's hardworking video director Bruce Johnson** and crew at the recent San Francisco gathering,

including Planned Parenthood's past president **Cecile Richards**, actor **John de Lancie**, comedians **Julia Sweeney and Leighann Lord**. For time and channel, or to view the show's playlist go to ffrf.org/freethoughtmatters. Once shows air, they are available on FFRF's YouTube channel.

Thank you for watching "Freethought Matters" . . . because freethought matters.

"Freethought Radio" with irreverent views, news, music and interviews, hosted every week by Dan and Annie Laurie, is wrapping up its 12th year on the air (**Janesville and Madison, Wis., Columbia, Mo., College Station/Bryant, Texas, Ithaca/Watkins Glen, N.Y., and Vermont-New Hampshire's "Black Sheep Radio"**). As a podcast the program had 382,765 downloads in the first 10 months of 2018, with 7,995,310 downloads since its beginning in mid-2006. Listen at ffrf.org/radio or through your favorite podcast provider.

"FFRF's Ask an Atheist" Facebook Live! "FFRF's Ask an Atheist" showcases FFRF's diverse, talented staff plus guests tackling nontheistic or legal topics and questions. The live program runs every Wednesday at noon Central, except the last Wednesday of the month, then goes on FFRF's YouTube channel.

FFRF's weekly "Newsbite" and Weekly Wrap. To keep up



Amit Pal

with FFRF's many actions and news-making, read the charming "weekly wrap" emailed to all members every Friday by FFRF **Director of Communications Amit Pal**. The wrap includes a link to FFRF's weekly **"Newsbite,"** a short video featuring an FFRF staff member giving the inside scoop on a timely FFRF development. Thanks to **Video Director Bruce Johnson** for adding all that production value.

All of our TV, Facebook and radio shows are produced in the **Stephen Uhl Friendly Atheist Studio** in Freethought Hall, soon to undergo an expansion!

FFRF is in the news!

Director of Communications **Amit Pal** has written or overseen 327 news releases about FFRF educational or legal actions, with able help from **Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey**. Those press releases generated more than 1,259 **news stories** plus 132 **local and regional TV news segments**. We link to news and TV coverage about FFRF at ffrf.org/news/media. All stats involve only the first 10 months of 2018.

Publicist **Lauryn Seering** reports that FFRF posted 85 **Freethought Now! blogs**, by staff members, at: patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow/. FFRF has more than 469,000 Facebook followers, 59,300 Twitter followers, and 15,140 YouTube followers. If you're not one of them, try us out! More than 98 urgent action alerts were sent out by (outgoing) Editorial Assistant **Molly Hanson** or current Editorial Assistant **Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey**

between January - October, 33 federal action alerts, 65 state, many in conjunction with our **Strategic Response Team**.

Advertising FFRF

Photo by Ingrid Laas



Ron Reagan

FFRF's Ron Reagan TV commercial ("Hi, I'm Ron Reagan, unabashed atheist, not afraid of burning in hell") continued to run periodically on MSNBC's Rachel Maddow Show, as well as on CNN in 2018 as resources permitted. The ad, which has been censored by CBS, NBC, ABC and many other networks, also ran regionally in the top 20 freethinking cities on Colbert's "Late Show" in early 2018. Print ads ran in **Scientific American**, The New York Times, plus several ads in regional newspapers and magazines.

FFRF warmly thanks **Jack Egger**, of Georgia, for underwriting a year's worth of educational billboards in the Atlanta area, including the popular slogan he suggested, "In SCIENCE We Trust," which has spawned a bumper sticker and a T-shirt. Donor **Monty Cleworth** liked the billboard so much that he paid to post it in Denver, after FFRF and its chapter there placed an election year "I'm an atheist and I vote" billboard.



Outreach – Speaking, campus & other events

FFRF staff has made **32 appearances in 15 states, plus Peru**. FFRF co-sponsored the First Latin American Freethinkers Conference in Peru in May, with 200 attendees from 12 nations, where Dan Barker gave the opening key note. Dan did 6 debates, there were 11 other college campuses and 4 chapter functions (including a talk at sea during a Bahama cruise as part of Central Florida Freethought Community's annual cruise). Five attorneys and Annie Laurie also spoke at events. Upcoming 2018 speaking engagements include at the Freethought Conference by Honduras Freethinkers, and a London conference: "Sharia, Segregation & Secularism."

FFRF sponsored a legal panel, "**The state of state/church separation in the era of Trump**," at the **Religious News Association's annual convention** in Columbus, Ohio, in early September, reaching many religion reporters. Presenters included **Annie Laurie**, attorneys **Andrew Seidel**, **Liz Cavell** and **Amit Pal**, communications director.

20 chapters around the United States

FFRF has 20 chapters run by dedicated, hardworking volunteers, including two new chapters: **DFW Freedom From Religion in the Dallas Fort Worth region**, and **First State Freedom Chapter of FFRF in Delaware!** Seek one out in your area: ffrf.org/about/ffrf-chapters

2018 Office/Staff/Board

FFRF's Executive Board of Directors are: **Dan Barker** (co-president, half a vote), **Stef Moritz**, secretary; **Cheryl Kolbe**, director at large; **Sue Kocher**, director at large; **Annie Laurie Gaylor** (co-president, half a vote), **Stephen Hirtle**, chair, **Todd Peissig**, director at large, **Steve Salemsen**, treasurer; **James Zerwick**, director at large, and **Mike Cermak**, director at large.

Meet FFRF's distinguished Honorary Directors.

Harvard's illustrious **Steven Pinker**, author of *Enlightenment Now*, serves as honorary president. Other distinguished honorary directors are: **Jerry Coyne**, **Richard Dawkins**, **Daniel C. Dennett**, **Ernie Harburg**, **Jennifer Michael Hecht**, **Susan Jacoby**, **Robin Morgan**, **Mike Newdow**, **Katha Pollitt**, **Ron Reagan**, **Robert Sapolsky**, **Edward Sorel** and **Julia Sweeney**.

Photo by Ingrid Laas



Steven Pinker

FFRF Staff. FFRF's full-time staff of 25 is overseen by **Director of Operations Lisa Strand**. New staff members include: **James Phetteplace**, FFRF's IT director; **Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey**, replacing **Molly Hanson** as editorial assistant after Molly left for grad school; **Kristina Daleiden**, FFRF's second legal assistant (made possible as part of a **generous legal fund grant from Stephen Uhl**), **Monica Schwartz**, new programs manager, and **Ben Tolle**, office assistant. **Kati Treu** continues to provide occasional student help. **Tolu Igun** is FFRF's 2018 editorial intern. Our summer intern was **Paul Epland**, from Sarah Lawrence, thanks to a scholarship endowed by **Dr. Paul Redleaf**.

Legal interns. FFRF's legal department benefited from five law student interns this summer: **Corinne Staten**, Valparaiso University; **Joseph Steigmeyer**, University of Iowa; **Bryant Plank**, Marquette, **Jackson Marchant**, University of Washington, and **Luke Changet**, Case Western Reserve University. Undergrad interns helping with legal tasks included **Mario Fregoso**, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and **Liana McGregor**, also UW-Madison. We thank **Professor Paul Newman** for his annual "entertain the legal interns" stipend!

Volunteers. FFRF thanks student essay readers and other office volunteers **Linda Aton**, **Don Ardelle**, **Jeff Brinkman**, **Bill Dunn**, **Linda Josheff**, **Judy Jacobs**, **Vince Jenkins**, **Dan Kettner**, **Jessica Kopish**, **Kathy Kunz**, **Stefanie Moritz** and **Sue Schuetz**. Hardworking convention volunteers included **Todd Peissig** and **Eric Lawrence**.

Convention Recap – Next Year 42nd Convo Oct. 18-20, 2019 in Madison, Wis.!

Photo: Chris Line



Cecile Richards with Forward Award.

FFRF's annual national convention in San Francisco Nov. 2-4, was a very special 40th anniversary party with nearly 1,000 freethinkers in attendance! The convention opened with **U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman**, the only "out" nonbeliever in Congress who has formed the Congressional Freethought Caucus. **Salman Rushdie** wow'd with his humor and erudition; Clarence Darrow Award honoree **John de Lancie** with his eloquent analysis of the current state of affairs. Honoree **Cecile Richards** was inspirational and funny. Two other very funny ladies — **Julia Sweeney** and **Leighann Lord** — ended both convention evenings with laughter. In between was sandwiched a diverse roster of authors, activists, attorneys and brave former Muslims facing life-and-death situations for leaving their religion. The **Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award of \$10,000**, endowed by member Hank Zumach's generous gift of \$200,000, movingly went to **Ensaf Haidar**, fighting to free Saudi Arabian freethinker **Raif Badawi**. Videos of most speeches may be viewed online: ffrf.org/convention2018 and most convention speeches will run in Freethought Today. See you next year in **Madison, Wis.**