

Freethought Today

Complimentary Copy
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FFRF racks up legal victories

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, a state/church watchdog based in Madison, Wis., and the nation's largest freethought association, with more than 18,500 members, is racking up legal victory after legal victory, separating religion from government and generating news coverage all over the nation.

Although FFRF jokes that it is often overlooked as a "nonprofit and a non-prophet in its own land," its increasing work caught the eye of reporter Steve Elbow of The Capital Times in Madison, which ran an Aug. 2 news story headlined "Madison group ramps up national fight against religion in government."

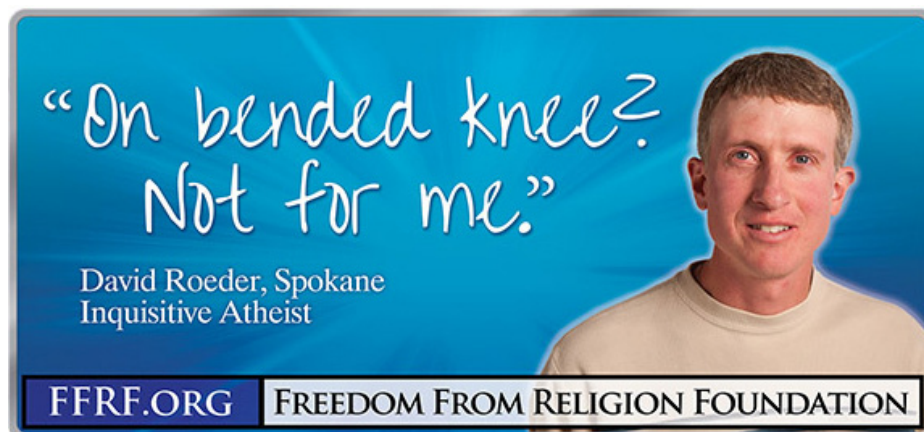
FFRF's legal staff, which has doubled to four attorneys since the start of the year, has already sent out more formal letters of complaint (612) protesting state/church entanglements than in all of last year. Many such complaints generate major news coverage and end in responses ending a diverse multitude of state/church "sins" without court battles.

FFRF currently has nine lawsuits in state or federal court, but "Our aim is to end these through education and persuasion, without having to go to court whenever possible," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

The impressive list of major state/church entanglements that FFRF action has halted in midsummer alone includes:

- **Prayers by the Henrico County, Va., Board of Supervisors.** Officials swiftly dropped a 25-year abuse after a July 10 vote, following a July 2 letter by FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott: "The board compounds the violation when the prayers are to Jesus and/or most of the officiants are Christian or Christian clergy. Sectarian prayers make religious minorities and non-believers feel like political outsiders in their own community and show an unconstitutional governmental preference for Christianity over other faiths and for religion over nonreligion."

A local citizen contacted FFRF after an overtly Christian prayer, which included "in Christ's name," was deliv-



Well-spoken, Spokane

FFRF and the Inland Northwest Freethought Society, its Washington chapter, posted seven "Out of the Closet" billboards in Spokane this summer. Turn to page 23 for a story and to view all the billboards.

ered at a June meeting. Elliott pointed out that the 4th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals consistently struck down sectarian prayers four times recently.

Joseph Rapisarda, county attorney, issued a statement: "The board was briefed on the legal ramifications of having a sectarian prayer. After careful consideration, the board decided to end the practice of having an opening prayer, effective immediately."

- **A city-hosted nativity display in Ellwood, City, Pa.** A saga that began last December, sparking huge controversy, a lot of crankmail, a prayer rally and media coverage, ended sedately with a victory for FFRF and secular government. Seven months after legal staffers

Patrick Elliott and Andrew Seidel first protested the display at the municipal building, the borough council on July 16 voted down a proposal intended to resurrect the entanglement.

A city "Nativity Committee" drafted what Ellwood City Ledger reporter Eric Poole called "a convoluted, complicated, constitutionally bereft proposal that slaps a figurative 'SUE ME' sign on the borough's back." Poole added, "This shouldn't be about winning or losing, but about honoring an American principle — that all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof, stand equally before the civil authority."

FFRF thanks FFRF member Stephen Hirtle for his invaluable assistance and dedication in monitoring and helping to end this major violation.

- **A city-sponsored prayer breakfast in Augusta, Ga.** After two months

Continued on page 5

Irrepressible irreverents



Photo: Andrew Seidel

Pictured in our summer staff photograph outside FFRF's offices in downtown Madison, Wis., are (front, left) Freethought Today Editor Bill Dunn, Attorney Patrick Elliott, Officer/Volunteer Wendy Goldberg, Summer Legal Intern Ben Zich, Officer/Volunteer Phyllis Rose; Summer Legal Intern J.J. Rolling, Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert, Bookkeeper/Executive Assistant Katie Daniel, Webmaster Scott Colson; Office Assistant Melanie Knier, (back, left) Officer Manager Jackie Douglas, Summer Legal Intern Maddy Ziegler, FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker, Publicist Katie Stenz, Attorney Andrew Seidel and Attorney Stephanie Schmitt.

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Election year caveat up in Wenatchee, Okanogan

FFRF, with the help of area secularists (see group photo above) in Wenatchee, Wash., placed an election-year caveat, “God and government a dangerous mix,” on a billboard in July at the intersection of South Mission Street and Ferry in Wenatchee. An identical billboard went up in late July in Okanogan, on Highway 97 just north of milepost 282, two miles north of the turnoff for Malott and five miles south of the southernmost exit to Okanogan.

FFRF, with 18,500 members nationwide, including almost 1,000 in Washington, placed the messages in tandem with its members and individuals connected with North Central Washington Freethinkers of Wenatchee, a local meetup group. FFRF thanks them for donating toward the costs and arranging the rentals.

“Our efforts this year are to once again remind the public that ‘We, the people’ need to preserve our Founding Fathers’ goal to give this country’s citizens a secular government without dangerous religious entanglements,” said Kurt Wyant, a member of FFRF and spokesperson for NCW Freethinkers of Wenatchee.

Meet a Member

Which side are you on?

Name: Patricia Jones.

Where I live: I live on a plateau in rural middle Tennessee.

Where I was born: I come from Michigan and never thought I’d be living in the South. But in one year’s time, I’ve actually met more atheists in “bible belt” Tennessee than I ever did in the North.

Family: A small one — daughter, son-in-law, granddaughter (one of each), and of course, my husband Mike — atheists all.

Education: I’m a graduate of the garden variety public school, but I like to think of myself as an autodidact.

Occupation: I was a home health care aide for 10 years. I also worked in a florist shop and for the Post Office. Currently, I’m a builder of rock walls.

How I got where I am today: I suppose the best way to describe my atheism is to say that religion just didn’t stick with me. The silly bible stories sounded a lot like fairy tales, and I knew those weren’t real. I read Ayn Rand’s *Anthem* when I was 14, and it was then that I knew religion was a con-jured lie.

Where I’m headed: I’m currently

the administrator of Cookeville Atheists & Agnostics. It’s a social meetup group with eight to 10 active members and 42 total in our ranks.

Persons I admire: I most admire women in science. Caroline Herschel was an astronomer like her brother William. Another is the venerable Rosalind Franklin. It was her photographs that made it possible for Crick and Watson to see the structure of DNA. Two amazing women to acclaim.

Quotations I like: “What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?” (George Eliot), and, “Self education is, I firmly believe, the only kind of education there is.” (Isaac Asimov)

Things I deplore: Oh, don’t get me started!

The way I promote freethought: I have a huge collection of books, all thoroughly read and reread in my home library, and telescopes that are kid magnets. When children are around me, not only do I introduce science and secularism, I tell them about the Constitution. I make it *fun* and speak in conversational tones so children don’t feel as though they are



Patricia Jones doesn’t just talk the talk when it comes to Jeffersonian ideals.

in school.

They just know they are around a grown-up, one who listens to them and tells them cool and exciting things. We do the stuff of science. I tell them how smart they are, and I tell them to question everything, even me. I tell them

thinking is not always easy, but it’s better than someone else doing it for them.

Some favorite things: My loving family, my cherished library, astronomy, the Cookeville meetup group, gardening and *rocks*, especially laying “miles” of dry stone walls, keeping state and church separate, and lastly, being “discovered” by Darrell Barker. It was through my Facebook friendship with Darrell that I learned about FFRF. I post in the FFRF Forum (ffrf.org/get-involved/forum/) with the username “rockon.”

Statistics about my Wall of Separation: Darrell calls it “The Great Wall of Patricia.” I started building it as a solo project in 2009. As of April, it was about 900 feet long. The average height and width are 26 by 22 inches.

Although the rock shapes and quantity vary significantly, a pickup truck load weighs about a ton. To date, I’ve hauled 106 truckloads. I know, I know, it’s hard for *me* to imagine that, too. The nearest approximation to the amount of rocks placed in the wall is about 84,700.

A Note to Members

Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and “Private Line.” If your label shows August or earlier, your membership has expired. Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 sustaining; \$25-student) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in Jan/Feb and August. Send to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

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August 2012

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

FFRF, ACLU prevail in Giles County, Va.

U.S. District Court Judge Michael Urbanski accepted a settlement July 3 and ended the lawsuit between a Giles County, Va., parent and student and the Giles County School Board. Attorneys for the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia and the Freedom From Religion Foundation filed the suit last fall.

The school board has agreed that the Ten Commandments will not be posted in any school "unless and until there is precedent in the Fourth Circuit or United States Supreme Court allowing the posting of the text of the Ten Commandments in the public schools."

Supreme Court precedent states that such postings are impermissible. The Supreme Court ruled in *Stone v. Graham* that Ten Commandments displays in public schools violate the Establishment Clause.

"No government authorities, including school officials, have the right to tell citizens, much less a captive audience of students, which god to worship, how many gods to worship or whether to worship any god at all," said Annie

Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

FFRF first contested the postings in Giles County schools in December 2010 on behalf of a local complainant. State/church watchdog FFRF has more than 19,000 members, including about 500 in Virginia.

In response to the complaint, Superintendent Terry Arbogast removed the Ten Commandments from Giles County schools in January 2011. They had been posted in a frame with the U.S. Constitution in all district schools for over a decade. Members of local churches were outraged and stormed the school board seeking to reinstall the Ten Commandments. Students at one school walked out of classes in protest. Some students called for people objecting to the displays to "go live somewhere else."

The board voted to repost them and adopted a policy to allow displays of the Ten Commandments and nine other "historical documents" in schools. The board also approved a Ten Commandments display in Narrows High School in Narrows, a town of about 2,000.

A Narrows student and parent sued

in September 2011. The plaintiffs sought a protective order shielding their identity because of the animus expressed by the public. Liberty Counsel, a Christian legal group affiliated with Liberty University, represented the board and filed a brief opposing the ability of the plaintiffs to use pseudonyms. Urbanski issued a protective order, saying in part, "no harassment, threats, intimidation, or interference with the plaintiffs will be tolerated."

During the course of litigation, other items were added to the Narrows High School display, including portraits and select items on George Washington, Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson. In May, 26 items were on display.

Urbanski's approval of the settlement ended the long and contentious dispute. In addition to assurances that the Commandments would not be reposted in school, the settlement agreement kept the protective order in effect. The school board or a third party would pay the plaintiffs' legal costs (\$6,511). Each side is responsible for their own attorney fees.

Recent changes by the school board and the settlement agreement altered some elements of the display. A page from a Prentice Hall U.S. history textbook replaced the Ten Commandments. The page includes an infographic titled "Roots of Democracy" and includes statements on "Judeo-Christian Roots," "The Enlightenment," "English Parliamentary Traditions" and "Greco-Roman Roots." References to the Commandments were removed from a separate "explanation document" in the display.

The court retains jurisdiction to enforce the settlement for eight years following dismissal of the case.

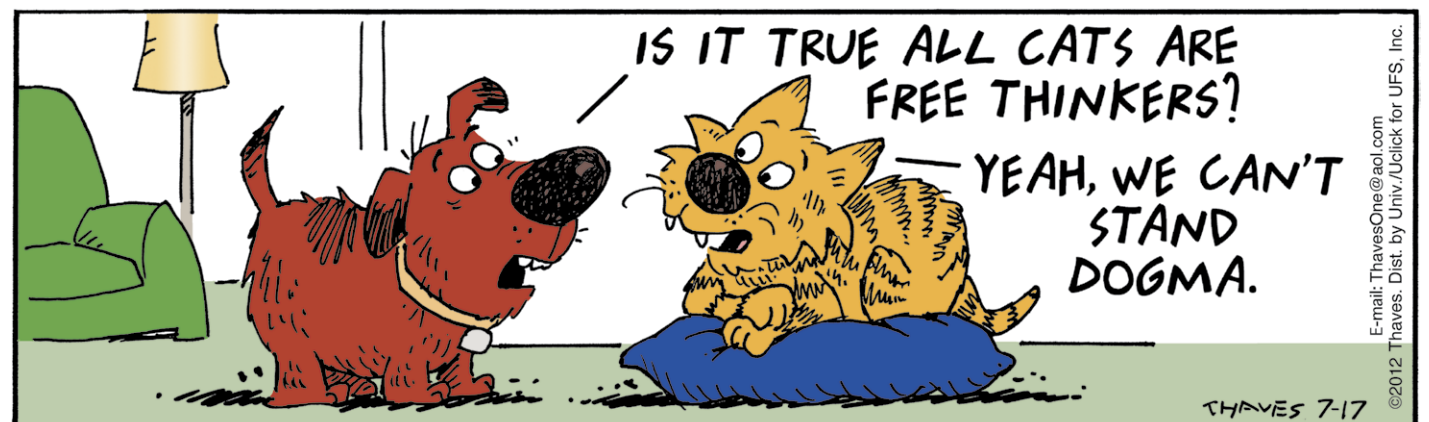
"FFRF thanks the courageous student and parent who stood up for the U.S. Constitution. We are grateful for the dedicated work of the attorneys on the case, Rebecca Glenberg and Thomas Fitzpatrick of the ACLU of Virginia, Frank Feibelman, cooperating attorney for the ACLU, and Patrick Elliott from FFRF," said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

'Nones' gain as more drop religious habits

America's "Nones" — the nonreligious — are at an all-time high, now comprising nearly one in five Americans (19%), according to a new study by the Pew Center for the People and the Press. The 19% count is based on aggregated surveys of 19,377 people conducted by the Pew Research Center throughout 2011 and reported by USA Today.

"This means great news for progress, for reasoned debate, for the status of nonbelievers in our nation," said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. "The freethought movement and FFRF are growing rapidly. There is an explosion of local and campus freethought groups, activities and conferences."

"Nones" were already the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. popula-



FRANK & ERNEST © 2012 Thaves. Reprinted by permission of Universal Uclick for UFS. All rights reserved.

tion, according to the definitive American Religious Identification Survey, whose 2008 study showed adult Nones up to 15% from 6% in 1990. ARIS, released in 2009, actually estimated "Nones" at 20% if responses to broader questions about religious practices were included.

Freethinkers have been highly marginalized, in part for being perceived as making up a small segment of the U.S. population. Actually, there have always been many more nonreligious than Jews, Muslims, Mormons or Eastern religions' adherents, currently respectively at 1.2%, 0.6%, 1.4% and 0.9% of the U.S. population, according to ARIS.

"Most minority religions, however tiny in numbers, are treated with respect, inclusion and sometimes deference. It's time public officials and the American public wake up to the changing demographics and stop treating atheists and agnostics as outsiders," added Annie Laurie Gaylor, who co-directs FFRF with Barker.

"With nonbelievers at about 20% of the population, there is no longer any excuse for leaving us out of the equation. Public officials cannot continue to assume 'all Americans' believe in a deity, or continue to offend 20% of the population by imposing prayer at governmental meetings or government-hosted events. These surveys now show

that 'In God We Trust' is a provenly inaccurate motto. Nonbelievers should not be treated as political pariahs," Gaylor said.

"'Nones' in fact were at the time of the last ARIS survey, the second-largest 'denomination' in the nation," Barker said, "following Catholics at 25% and tied with Baptists at 15%. According to the new Pew study, nonbelievers now outrank Baptists."

An atheist for president?

While 90% of Americans would vote for a black, a woman, Catholic, Hispanic, or Jewish presidential candidate, only 54% would vote for an atheist and only 58% would vote for a Muslim, according to a recent Gallup poll. It's an improvement from 1958, when Gallup first asked the question and just 18% said they'd vote for an atheist. This is the first year a majority said it would vote for an atheist candidate.

Gallup began asking a Mormon question in 1967, when former Michigan Gov. George Romney, Mitt Romney's father, was a top candidate for the GOP nomination. That year, 19% said they wouldn't vote for a Mormon for president. Now, 18% wouldn't vote for a qualified Mormon, down from 22% in 2011.

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Arrange a bequest in your will or trust, or make the Freedom From Religion Foundation the beneficiary of an insurance policy, bank account, or IRA. It's easy to do.

For related information (or to request a bequest brochure), please phone Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608) 256-8900.

FFRF
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*Freedom Depends
on Freethinkers*



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists.

The Foundation's e-mail address is info@ffrf.org. Please include your name and physical mailing address with all e-mail correspondence.

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

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

Dolphins

(Manzanillo)

A controversy roiling by the ocean
Imperils friendships with its cold commotion:
When dolphins frisk, is it some sudden swish
Of joy—or are they only after fish?

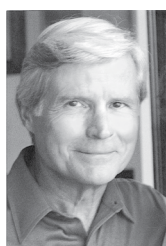
Most of us are practical; this trammels
Belief in bliss among the other mammals.
But certain dreamy fellows will insist
Gulls hanging in the wind are being kissed,
That breezes nibble at the ears of waves
And whisper rhymes to crabs in craggy caves.

I've seen the rack and scud that spoils a buss
And makes the swish of joy sound ominous;
I know a nibble may become a crunch
And rhymes are poor alternatives to lunch.

But in the noon of sunburned summertime,
When swish and kiss and nibble turn to rhyme,
The dolphins vault into our atmosphere;
And, noting that there are no fishes here,
I lean to those who favor joy, and wish
Delight would dance in my too solid flesh.

© 1996 Philip Appleman

Reprinted from *New and Selected Poems, 1956—1996*.



Philip Appleman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible* (2012), *Darwin's Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used Norton Critical Edition, *Darwin*, and the Norton Critical Edition of *Malthus' Essay on Population*. His poetry and fiction have won many awards, including a fellowship in poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Center for Science Education. His work has appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *The Paris Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, and *The Yale Review*.

He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both "Afterlife" Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. They recorded an excerpt of "Noah," *New and Selected Poems*, which is available for sale from FFRF for \$23 ppd., *The Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, is \$22 ppd., *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie*, \$27 ppd., *Darwin's Ark*, \$23 ppd., and *Perfidious Proverbs*, \$20 ppd. (ffrf.org/shop/).



Appleman interviewed by Bill Moyers

FFRF After-Life Member Philip Appleman, distinguished poet, scholar and freethinker, appeared on "Bill Moyers Journal" on July 8 on PBS. The powerful interview and transcript is online at billmoyers.com/segment/the-poetry-of-philip-appleman/.

There are website-only bonuses. Phil reads five additional poems. Photographs of Phil and his wife, playwright Margie Appleman, are featured, along with photos of Phil's mother, the subject of his moving poem, "Gertrude" (read on air).

The interview, which encompasses Phil's freethought views, included Phil reading his poem "Eve" and "God's Grandeur" (which, at his request, was

set to music by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker and is featured on FFRF's music CD, "Friendly Neighborhood Atheist"). He also read "Parable of the Perfidious Proverbs," which Freethought Today was honored to publish first and is the title of his newest book of poetry, a satiric look at the bible.

"Our love and congratulations to Philip Appleman for everything he has done for freethought, reason, population control and compassion," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

"The freethought community is honored to have Phil as one of its most distinguished, eloquent and gentle spokespersons."

Overheard

Because there is no cosmic point to the life that each of us perceives on this distant bit of dust at galaxy's edge, all the more reason for us to maintain in proper balance what we have here. Because there is nothing else. No thing. This is it. And quite enough, all in all.

Gore Vidal (Oct. 3, 1925-Aug. 1, 2012), author, playwright, commentator
National Public Radio, 8-1-12

This isn't a marriage made in heaven. **State Assembly member Tom Ammianno, D-San Francisco, who is gay, on the Vatican naming Salvatore Cordileone, who led the 2008 fight against gay marriage in California, to head the Archdiocese of San Francisco**
San Francisco Chronicle, 7-27-12

When I asked them specifically, "Will you [agree] to make the city whole?" they wouldn't do it. If they aren't going to make the taxpayers whole, why should we be putting a million dollars into the collection plate of the Catho-



lic Church when we have demonstrable needs?

Steve Kozachik, Tucson City Council, voting against an appropriation of \$1.1 million, which passed 5-2, to remodel the Catholic Marist College
Arizona Daily Star, 7-11-12

It's too easy for straight allies to think of gays and lesbians as separate from us. They need rights we already enjoy. They face bigotry we deplore. But it happens to them, not us. Chick-fil-A has performed a miracle. I'm a middle-class white guy in America, and Chick-fil-A has finally made me feel what it's like to be discriminated against. Also, I have lost my appetite for those chicken biscuits.

Twice-married columnist Jason Stanford, commenting on Chick-fil-A's religious proscription against divorce
Bennington Banner, 7-26-12

I teach my kids the same things that you do about how to treat other people. I simply believe in one less god than you do.

Thaddeus Schwartz, officer of Secular Life, Nashville, Tenn.
WBIR Knoxville, 7-24-12

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Freedom depends upon freethinkers

(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)

Steubenville, Ohio; Wyoming, Michigan

FFRF asks what's the deal with religious seals

An FFRF complaint over the depiction of a chapel with a cross atop it on the new city seal in Steubenville, Ohio, initially had the city agreeing to change the logo, although the city now says it's not so sure about the change.

On July 25, FFRF received word from the city law director that "the city council has agreed to change the logo as per your request."

But Mayor Domenick Mucci announced several days later that city leaders will review offers of legal help and all other options before making a decision. The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty plus several other unnamed Religious Right groups contacted the city offering "free" help.

Part of the silhouette prominently depicts Christ the King Chapel of Franciscan University with a cross atop it. The logo was commissioned by the city from Nelson Fine Art and Gifts, which claims it is the largest-volume American manufacturer of Catholic art and gifts.

By the logo designer's admission, the chapel and cross are a symbol of "faith." The depiction of the cross



and chapel on the city logo is a "near copy of the Franciscan University logo, which further blurs the line between church and state," said FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott.

After the decision went public, it created a media storm. Elliott, in a formal letter, cautioned city officials about being "duped by offers from Religious Right legal groups. They may volunteer their time pro bono but they never pick up the plaintiffs' tab."

For example, the Becket Fund defended the city of Cranston, R.I., from Jessica Ahlquist's challenge to the unconstitutional prayer mural in her



school. After the Becket Fund lost the case earlier this year, the school and city of Cranston officials agreed to pay \$150,000 to reimburse the ACLU of Rhode Island for part of its legal fees.

"Any claims of historical or cultural significance to the Latin cross on the Steubenville City logo do not relieve the city of its constitutional obligations," noted Elliott.

In July, Elliott also wrote the city of Wyoming, Mich., about a similar violation on its city seal, which is more than 50 years old and in need of an update. The seal features four quadrants, with a church, a factory, a house and a golf green.

"The city may not depict the church and cross because to do so places the city's imprimatur behind Christianity. This excludes non-Christians and violates the Constitution," Elliott wrote.

The Grand Rapids Press (July 31), in reporting FFRF's complaint, noted that the city of Zion, Ill., which fought to keep a seal that included a cross and the phrase "God Reigns" in the late 1980s, spent about about \$250,000 in a losing cause, as did Rolling Meadows, Ill., when it fought to retain a cross on its seal.

Wyoming City Manager Curtis Holt commented Aug. 2 in a blog on the city's website, calling FFRF a "third-party radical group."

"It's so clear why a city cannot and should not send a message that it is a 'Christian city,' or favors Christianity or in the case of Steubenville, Catholicism," said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

"Government cannot pick sides on religion. All citizens — whether Christian, Jewish, atheist or agnostic, Muslim, etc. — must be welcomed as full participants," said Barker.

FFRF racks up legal victories around nation

Continued from front page

of back and forths with FFRF, the city agreed to discontinue its unconstitutional involvement in organizing, coordinating and promoting the monthly "Mayor's Prayer Breakfast." Major Deke Copenhaver, who initially insisted no laws were being broken, told a local news channel: "Being mayor is what I do. My faith is who I am, and I feel very strong about that."

An open records request filed by Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert revealed that Karyn Nixon, executive assistant to the mayor, coordinated the event, including selecting the churches, sending out invitations, putting together an agenda and even instructing pastors to include scripture readings and opening prayer and remarks by the hosting pastor.

Nixon used city e-mail and phones during normal business hours. Aside from one breakfast in 2009 at a Jewish synagogue, all prayer events have been held at Christian churches or by Christian groups.

On Aug. 2, Andrew Mackenzie, general counsel, responded: "Mayor Copenhaver will continue to attend the monthly Prayer Breakfasts, but he has volunteered [sic] to allow the organization, coordination and promotion of such breakfasts to be done exclusively by private sponsors."

The event will no longer be advertised on the city's website with the misleading title, "Mayor's Prayer Breakfast." It will be replaced with "Community Prayer Breakfast" to "avoid the appearance of city endorsement."

• **Two church bulletin discounts by restaurants.** FFRF is helping Pennsylvania member John Wolfe, an octogenarian, protest a Civil Rights violation by Cajun Kitchen in Columbia, Pa., whereby patrons who did not turn in

church bulletins paid 10% more for their Sunday breakfasts.

FFRF's Rebecca Markert wrote three letters over 18 months in a patient attempt to educate the restaurant owners that they were violating the Civil Rights Act. It reads in relevant part: "All persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation . . . without discrimination on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin."

Co-owner Sharon Prudhomme justified the discount by saying she's a "hardworking American" and can "advertise as I see fit." Wolff filed a complaint with the state Human Relations Commission and a resolution is expected.

Read John Wolff's letter on the subject on page 6. When the complaint was first reported, it provoked many nasty comments to and about John and FFRF. FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor wrote a blog, "Don't 'discount' civil rights," about the importance of upholding the Civil Rights Act. Visit ffrf.org/news/blog or see page 10.

FFRF also stopped a church bulletin discount at Wendy's Old-Fashioned Hamburgers in Valdosta, Ga. The restaurant was offering a 10% Sunday discount to those bearing a church bulletin as proof they'd been to church that day. FFRF was notified in July that the unlawful discount has stopped.

• **Prayers before an Indiana school board.** FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote the South Dearborn School Board in April protesting the recent inauguration of prayer to start monthly meetings. The board opened with the Lord's Prayer. Schmitt wrote that "opening school board meetings with a Christian prayer discriminates not only against nonbelievers, but also against any non-Christian attendees.

Parents and students should not be made to feel like outsiders when attending meetings."

FFRF was notified July 3 that the prayer has been discontinued.

• **Army abuse in Georgia.** The U.S. Army "no longer wants YOU! to mow the Catholic Charities' lawn" after Andrew Seidel wrote a July 5 letter objecting to soldiers providing "area beautification support to the Catholic Social Services."

The practice of the Regimental Noncommissioned Officer Academy's Advanced Leader Course at Fort Gordon, Ga., was to send soldiers to mow the grass for Catholic Social Services, whose motto is, "In every season, God is with us." Commented Seidel: "Now, in every season they are responsible for trimming their own hedges and raking their own leaves." While the Army now claims it relied on volunteers, the relationship has ceased.

• **Plans to inaugurate prayer before a Pennsylvania school board.** The Sharpesville Area School Board in late July assured FFRF it would not go forward with a proposal to inaugurate prayer at its meetings or implement a religious class. FFRF's Stephanie Schmitt sent three letters starting in February after a board member, saying "the guy up above is very important to us," recommended prayers begin.

The letter noted that the Third Circuit, which encompasses Pennsylvania, has ruled against school board prayer, considering it analogous to prayer in public schools.

• **A variety of school-related violations.** FFRF treats intrusion of proselytizing and religious ritual in public schools as a top priority. Stephanie Schmitt wrote **Thomas County Schools**, Thomasville, Ga., over a violation at a middle school, when the principal announced over the intercom on March 20 that a group (apparently Gideons

International) was in the school "and would be distributing bibles to whoever [sic] was interested in taking one."

Schmitt noted a long list of cases barring Gideons' distribution of New Testaments in schools. FFRF received assurance July 16 there would be no repetition of this violation.

In July, FFRF also received assurances from **Hastings [Mich.] Area Schools** that prayers were not said at this year's graduation ceremony as they had been for the past decade.

FFRF wrote the **Tishomingo County School District** in Iuka, Miss., after receiving complaints that teachers at Iuka Elementary were leading students in daily prayer before heading to the lunchroom and asking students to lead prayer.

In July, after several follow-ups, Schmitt received word that faculty would no longer "be encouraging students to pray or lead students in prayer."

From January through June, FFRF took about 1,275 formal requests for help to end constitutional violations. On "backlog Thursday" in late July, the legal staff, including three summer interns, drafted a record 67 letters of complaint in one day (interns wrote by far the most!)

FFRF thanks its summer interns and dedicated staff attorneys. "Our legal staff is so busy ending violations that we literally have trouble finding room to report all of our major actions in Freethought Today," said Gaylor.

See other recent actions reported on page 9 of this issue and major complaints reported elsewhere. FFRF regularly updates legal victories online at: ffrf.org/legal/other-legal-successes/

FFRF also issues press releases about many of its complaints and victories. Sign up to get press releases and news updates sent to your inbox at:

ffrf.org/news/releases/

John Wolff

Member takes flak over church challenge

This is FFRF member John Wolff's letter to the York [Pa.] Daily Record, which was published July 23 in the wake of his public complaint about a restaurant's illegal church bulletin discount in Columbia, Pa.

I have little to disagree with in your editorial, "Atheist raises a shrimpy issue over church bulletin discount." But you have misjudged my motivation. I have no animosity toward the Prudhommes [restaurant owners] and wish them luck if this publicity brings them more business. And this was never about a lousy 10 percent discount, and I am not attacking any particular religion, nor am I trying to spread my nonbelief.

I am adamant, however, in opposing the conventional wisdom that churchgoing makes you a better person. I am at least as good a person as any churchgoer. I am a much better person if you include the many religious child molesters, their enablers, embezzlers, hypocrites and even terrorists who, we are always astounded to discover, "came from a churchgoing family."

For a restaurant to use religion to



John Wolff

advance their business is tacky at best, and in my opinion and that of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, it is illegal. I am not a second-class citizen, potentially charged more because I do not attend church. If the Prudhommes want to increase traffic on Sundays, they should give everyone a discount without promoting church attendance. Restaurants have to follow

regulations, all the way from food-handling to those affecting public accommodations and civil rights.

You are correct that this a shrimpy deal, just another irksome little thing that advances the agenda of the Religious Right and leads to laws favoring religion over nonreligion like taxpayer-funded vouchers for religious schools and exemptions from fair-hiring laws. Or legislators posturing to honor the bible. Or restrictions on the availability of contraceptives. Such laws are the serious business.

I felt an obligation to speak out because my fellow nonbelievers who hold jobs must pull their punches and may need to remain in the closet in order not to offend anyone. Evidently, the issue has hit a nerve locally to even suggest that churchgoing could be criticized. I admit being very surprised by the size of the flap this has caused. Reminds me that one of the first questions newcomers to the area are often asked is "What church do you go to?"

I do not regret bringing this complaint to the Pennsylvania Human Rights Commission, and I have no in-

attention of escalating this to a lawsuit and enabling lawyers, as it is reported the well-funded Religious Right is eager to do. But I am a bit saddened by the hate mail I've received both in the papers and by mail. One came with a bulletin from a local church, accompanied by a hand-written note calling me an a-hole and adorned with a swastika. Certainly proves my point that churchgoing does not make you a good person.

John Wolff writes that he was born a German Jew in 1932. "Bad timing! My mother always told the story that she was listening to one of Hitler's first harangues while in labor. Catholics saved my life in Belgium by hiding me in boarding schools (at the price of conversion). Although my parents were never religious, I became a fervent Catholic between the ages of 10 and 16, so I understand a bit that religion/meditation can bring good feelings.

"The flap about the church bulletin discount is really the tiniest matter, but it has brought into evidence the bigotry that still lurks under the surface around here. Religion is such a large industry that no one dares attack it."

FFRF member makes plea against government prayer

This is excerpted from FFRF Lifetime Member Larry Rhodes' testimony July 23 before the Knox County Commission in Knoxville, Tenn., before it voted to keep prayer at its meetings. The vote was taken after FFRF complained about the practice. FFRF commends Larry for coming forward in person as a constituent to try to educate the commissioners. A majority of speakers were in favor of discontinuing prayer, including three ministers.



By Larry Rhodes

I am a citizen of Knoxville and have been for 40 years. I graduated from the University of Tennessee. I'm a Vietnam veteran. I've worked here, owned homes here and, for 17 years, ran my own business here.

I was born into a Southern Baptist home and raised Southern Baptist. Even though my religious views have changed over time, I'm still a citizen.

As such, I expect my government officials to represent me as a citizen, without injecting individual, personal religious views into the policies that govern my life.

The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, which you all swore to uphold, forbids the making of any laws which represent an establishment of religion. Therefore, you should be aware that you are about to vote on an unconstitutional action.

Knox County was probably, at one time, 100% Christian (Baptist). It is no longer that. It, and indeed America as a whole, is now a community made up of Baptists, Catholics, Methodists and Mormons, as well as Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and nonbelievers.

Indeed, the category called "Other" in Knox County makes up nearly 30% of the population, all of whom are taxpaying citizens. And as citizens, we have a right to be represented equally under the law.

This board today votes on a policy of having religious prayer start its meetings. It would be a specific prayer to a specific god of a specific religion. Even though you may deem it a "generic prayer," it will still leave out all the humanist, secularist, atheist and agnostic citizens of this area, a segment of the population that, like it or not, is growing every day. You will be sending a message to those citizens that "You are not real citizens. You're allowed to live here and pay taxes, but *real* citizens are those who share the religious beliefs of us, the majority."

I am not here to try to persuade you to not practice your religion. Please, do practice your religion, by all means,

in your churches, in your homes, in the closet or in the open air and on every street corner of America if you like. But not in the halls of government, and not with the power of government.

You may be thinking that you must follow your religious faith and do as it dictates. However, faith has not been proven to be a good path to truth. If it were, there would not be thousands of different religions on the planet, all claiming to be following faith.

Remember that the mother in Jonestown who gave her child poisoned Kool-Aid was also following her faith. Those misguided Muslims who flew planes into the buildings in New York

and Washington, D.C., were also following their faith. The members of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, when arming themselves and fighting the federal government, were also following their faith.

Please follow your conscience, but leave religious faith at the door. Do not practice your religion for me in the halls of government.

It is much better, by far, to follow the U.S. Constitution, keep your religion out of government and work to keep all other religions out of government as well, ensuring true religious freedom in America.

Thank you.

Chick-fil-A drops church discount

A Chick-fil-A restaurant in Chapel Hill, N.C., dropped a church discount scheduled for each Monday in June after an FFRF member complained. George White noticed an online calendar promoting Church Bulletin Night at the University Mall store:

"Bring in your Church Bulletin from Sunday from 5-8 p.m. every Monday and receive a FREE Chicken Sandwich with the purchase of a medium side and a medium drink!"

The Atlanta-based company's "corporate purpose" is "To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is en-

trusted to us." Founder S. Truett Cathy, 91, is a devout Southern Baptist who insists that all outlets close on Sunday. A series of allegations have been made against the firm for backing anti-gay initiatives.

Such discounts violate the federal Civil Rights Act and some states' equal protection laws. In a June 12 email, owner/operator Sammy Culberston thanked White for bring the matter to his attention. "At present, the church bulletin promotion runs through July but we will be suspending the promotion as of next week."

Fifth student this year named FFRF student activist awardee

Maia, 12, tells county board to shape up

The Freedom From Religion Foundation named Tennessee student Maia Disbrow, 12, its fifth student activist awardee this year for speaking up in favor of halting prayer before the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners in Chattanooga in July.

The issue has been extremely contentious, and two local men have sued the commission in federal court over the prayers and for being ejected from a meeting while addressing the commission.

Maia's write-up of her experience and a text of her speech follows. Her appearance is also on YouTube (search for Maia Disbrow).

"We are impressed with Maia's gumption, maturity and dedication to a constitutional principle. Going before government bodies to protest government prayer is something many adults are reluctant to do," said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

Maia has received a \$1,000 award. FFRF officially offers three student activist awards of \$1,000 each annually endowed by kind members: the Thomas Jefferson Youth Activist Award, the Catherine Fahringer Memorial Student Activist Award and the Paul J. Gaylor Memorial Student Activist Award. Since both state/church violations and student activism are on the rise, FFRF expects to see increasing numbers of deserving student activists nominated for awards.

Last year, FFRF gave out six \$1,000 student awards, all to high school students. This year's other activist winners were high school students as well. Three of the five are from Tennessee.

FFRF members wishing to create and endow a one-time or annual student activist award in their name, as a memorial, etc., are encouraged to con-

tact FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor at 608/256-8900.

View student winners since 1996 at ffrf.org/outreach/awards/student-activist-awards/.

Maia's heartfelt speech on prayer:



By Maia Disbrow

Good morning. My name is Maia Disbrow, and I am 12 years old. I am a perfectly normal young adult, although some of my friends would beg to differ.

I was present at the meeting at which my dad spoke. The prayer was very rude to me and some of my closest friends, not to mention parts of my family.

My dad did not put me up to this. I came because I care about this and things like it. All through elementary school, I was teased and ridiculed by people who I thought were my friends. Whenever the subject of me being a freethinker came up, I was singled out,

by my friends.

You are doing the same thing that they did to me at every meeting you have. Singling me out. Singling out every single person in Hamilton County who is not Christian.

It is not fair for you to pray openly to your God without praying to all the others as well. I believe a moment of silence would accommodate all beliefs, not just one. And after speaking today, I hope I have some friends left at school next year.

Good day.

Maia writes about bullies

Dear FFRF:

I was sitting right in front when my father spoke at the commission meeting, and also during the prayer beforehand. The prayer was very offensive to me, and when they gave the preacher an award, or present, or whatever they'd like to call it, I almost exploded inside. It made my dad so angry, he was shaking with rage after he sat down from speaking. After we got home that day, a news station called and wanted to interview my dad at our house. They came, did an interview and left.

At some point, one of us joked that I should speak in front of the commission. My dad didn't push me to do it, we just joked about it. But when I thought about it, I realized that there were some things I'd like to say to them. It took me a while to decide, because even though I go to a middle school for the arts that is supposed to accept everyone, I was worried because during elementary school, I was bullied about my beliefs. Whenever the subject of my religion, or lack thereof, came up, my social status dropped for a few days.

So really, I was worried about further bullying. When I realized that the county commissioners were actually behaving like a bunch of fifth-grade bullies, I sat down and started writing my address to them. I honestly didn't expect this much attention for a 40-second speech, but I am very thankful for it.

Thank you so much for the scholarship, although it does make me a little depressed that a person can get an award for standing up for basic human rights.

Sincerely,
Maia

Maia's father, Steven, writes:

Maia spoke on July 18. I spoke two weeks before that. I took both my kids with me so that they could see how the commission works and get a glimpse at how local government is run.

Maia was born on May 5, 2000, the same day as the supposedly apocalyptic planetary alignment [Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn were positioned in line with the Sun]. While her birth didn't herald the end of civilization, it was a big event for her family.

Her interests include reading (which she was doing at 18 months), writing, acting (currently in rehearsals for a production of "Medea"), singing and taking care of her pets (a dog and two guinea pigs). In the fall, she'll be entering seventh grade at the Center for Creative Arts, where she studies visual art.

Maia also has a younger brother, Logan, who insisted on being mentioned here at the end, rather than in the bit about the pets.

The 'God particle': One less place to hide

By Dan Barker

I guess now that the "God particle" has been discovered — or very nearly confirmed by a majority of physicists — I need to decide what church to join. We atheists, after all, have long been devoutly demanding evidence of the hypothesized intelligent designer holding the universe together.

So now that scientists have observed the predicted Higgs boson that gives matter its mass — without which there could be no creation, no gravity, galaxies, stars, planets, waterfalls, pansies, panthers or "Hallelujah" choruses — we must conclude that the theologians have been right all along.

Or maybe not.

Peter Higgs, the physicist who first deduced and proposed the existence of the theoretical field now known as the Higgs boson, does not believe in God. After Leon Lederman, another



nonbelieving physicist, had jokingly referred to the mysterious boson as the "God particle," Higgs was not happy: "I wish he hadn't done it. I have to explain to people it was a joke. I'm an atheist."

The phrase became part of the title for Lederman's 2006 book, *The God Particle: If the Universe is the Answer, What is the Question?*

Other scientists agree with Higgs. Pauline Gagnon, a Canadian physicist working at the Large Hadron Collider, said: "I hate that 'God particle' term. The Higgs is not endowed with any religious meaning. It is ridiculous to call it that."

I am certain Lederman did not have any spiritual motive. He was not trying to endow the particle with any "religious meaning." He was using language in an ironic and humorous way. And most likely his publisher knew that the word "God" helps sell books.

According to one story, Lederman first called it the "goddamn particle," but the editor didn't think that would make a great title. (Although I would have bought such a book!)

When Einstein said that "God does

not play dice with the universe," he was clearly not talking about a supernatural being playing a game of craps. The word "God" has often been used (inadvertently, in my opinion) as a convenient placeholder for "We don't know."

"God" is a synonym for "mystery." When the cause of an event is unknown, some say "God did it." Surprised by a natural disaster, some call it an "act of God." Not having a sure answer, some say "God knows" — meaning, "Who knows?"

God reflects uncertainty, not knowledge. It's the same with faith: We only rely on faith when the claim cannot stand on its own merits.

When the ancient Greek and Nordic civilizations heard thunder, they said, "Zeus is on the warpath," or "Thor is angry." In other words, "Who knows?" Now that we understand something about the weather and electricity, we no longer need Zeus or Thor. We no longer need "God did it." Thor is dead. God has one less place to hide.

But our language still reflects those old patterns. The fact that I'm writing this article on a Thursday (the day of Thor) does not mean the Norse gods

really exist or that a thunderstorm is truly an "act of God." When Lederman nicknamed the Higgs boson the "God particle," he was playing with language, joking that since we don't know what holds matter together, God must be the explanation (wink, wink).

While we atheists cannot pretend that the discovery of the Higgs boson proves there is no God, we can certainly say that such evidence, if confirmed, gives God one less place to hide.

Believers will always find other hiding places, so this discovery will pose little threat to their faith. But now maybe they can join us — those with a sense of humor — in officially changing the name of the Higgs boson.

From now on, let's call it the "Godless particle."

Dan Barker is FFRF co-president and author of *The Good Atheist: Living a Purpose-Filled Life Without God; Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher To Atheist; Godless: How An Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists; and Just Pretend: A Freethought Book for Children.*

State/Church Bulletin

Appeals court nixes Wis. church graduations

The Elmbrook [Wis.] School District illegally held graduation ceremonies at Elmbrook Church, the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled 7-3 on July 23. Symbols in the church, including a giant cross on the wall, conveyed a message that government was endorsing a particular religion, the court ruled in a 2009 suit bought by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

"[The decision] ensures that students in Wisconsin will not be forced to enter an intensely religious environment as the price of attending their own high school graduation, a seminal event in their lives," said attorney Alex Luchenitser, AU associate legal director.

Court denies challenge to hate crimes law

The 6th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals on Aug. 2 upheld a lower court's ruling that denied a 2010 claim by three Michigan pastors and the American Family Association of Michigan that the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act hampered their religious obligation "to state clearly the immoral nature of homosexuality" and "to publicly denounce homosexuality, homosexual activism and the homosexual agenda as being contrary to God's law and His divinely inspired Word."

"The Act does not prohibit Plaintiffs' proposed course of hateful speech," wrote appellate Judge James Gwin wrote.

Courts rule against reproductive rights

Women's reproductive rights took hits in July in three court rulings cheered by the Religious Right. Phoenix federal Judge James Teilborg upheld an Arizona law banning all abortions starting at 20 weeks after a woman's last menstrual period.

The New York Times reported the law "defies binding Supreme Court precedent that prevents states from banning abortions before a fetus can survive outside the womb, which generally occurs at about 24 weeks." Teilborg also embraced questionable claims about when a fetus can feel pain.

• Denver U.S. District judge issued a temporary injunction stopping the Obama administration from requiring a secular ventilation and air-conditioning company to provide employees with contraceptive coverage.

The Times noted, "There is no constitutional precedent for individuals, much less corporations, allowing them to violate generally applicable laws because they may have a religious objection. Conversely, the company's claim that its owners or officers have a First

Amendment right to impose their personal religious beliefs on the corporation's employees is groundless."

• The 8th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in St. Louis upheld 7-4 a 2005 South Dakota law requiring doctors "to misinform women seeking an abortion that they face an increased risk of suicide and suicidal thoughts" if they have an abortion, the paper reported.

Zoo removes Commandments after protest planned

The Oakland [Calif.] Zoo removed a Ten Commandments monument July 25, days before a planned protest by the East Bay Atheists and Atheist Advocates of San Francisco. The 6-foot-tall marble sculpture has been on zoo property since 1965 when the area was a state park.

Joey Piscitelli, Martinez, told the San Jose Mercury News that the removal wasn't a coincidence. "They wanted to thwart the demonstrations and keep this out of the public eye."

Court: Mennonite B&B can't bar gays

A Mennonite-owned bed-and-breakfast in Grand Forks, B.C., discriminated against a gay couple from Vancouver by refusing them a room, the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal ruled July 17.

Brian Thomas and Shaun Eadie were each awarded \$4,500 in damages and expenses.

Riverbend B&B owners Les and Susan Molnar, members of a Mennonite church, argued they were exercising their right to religious freedom in the sanctity of their own home.

Florida county sued over 10 Commandments

Bradford County commissioners in Starke, Fla., are being sued by American Atheists for refusal to remove a Ten Commandments monument from outside the courthouse in Starke.

The county asked the group that put the monument there, the Community Men's Fellowship, to remove it "immediately," but the group refused, reported News 4 in Jacksonville.

FFRF sent a complaint letter May 14 to the commission.

"The county doesn't have the ability to move it without accruing a very substantial cost in doing that," said County Attorney Terry Brown. "So somebody needs to pay for it, and it doesn't need to be the taxpayer."

Faith-healing conviction upheld in Oregon

An Oregon appellate court upheld the 2009 conviction on July 11 of Carl



Smoke and mirrors

Doug Krueger, Arkansas, notes that with the gun-shaped barbecue "smoker" next to the church sign in Springdale, "the irony is thicker than the smoke."

Brent Worthington, a member of the Followers of Christ Church, for second-degree criminal mistreatment in the death of his 15-month old daughter. The girl died of sepsis and bacterial pneumonia from an untreated cystic mass.

Worthington and his pregnant wife, Raylene, were acquitted on manslaughter charges. She was also acquitted of criminal mistreatment. He was sentenced to two months in jail and five years' probation.

Church graduations costly for Conn. school

The Enfield [Conn.] School Board voted 6-3 on July 18 to settle a suit challenging the school system's practice of holding high school graduation ceremonies in a church.

"No students or their families should feel like outsiders at their own graduation ceremony," said Daniel Mach, director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief, the Hartford Courant reported.

The district agreed to hold no more

graduations in church. Its insurance provider will cover up to \$470,000 in settlement costs. The exact amount of the settlement wasn't revealed, but plaintiffs' legal fees are about \$1 million.

Ohio high court takes creationist teacher's case

The Ohio Supreme Court voted 4-3 on July 5 to hear Mount Vernon science teacher John Freshwater's appeal of his 2011 firing for pushing Christianity and creationism in the classroom. Freshwater alleges his rights to free speech and academic freedom were violated. The first complaint against him surfaced in 2008.

Religion Clause blog reported that the court granted review on two issues: Could he be fired if the board didn't clearly indicate what materials or teaching methods were unacceptable, and did the mere presence of religious texts from the school library and/or display of a patriotic poster can justify his firing?

Credits for release time OK'd by court

The 4th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals refused to accept a petition for *en banc* review filed by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, after a three-judge panel approved academic credit for released-time instruction on June 28.

FFRF, and two sets of parent plaintiffs with children in the school district in Spartanburg, S.C., challenged the practice as a state entanglement with religion, which favored students of the dominant religious faith. The group filed suit in 2009.

The school district delegated grading power over its students and evaluation of the course material to both the Spartanburg County Education in School Time (SCBEST) and a private Christian school, Oakbrook Preparatory Academy. FFRF contends that essentially the district has added a devotional religious course as a public school elective and gave the bible school grading power over it. "If the Bible School course consisted of five hours a week of praying on bended knee and Oak-

brook approved it, academic credit would nevertheless ensue as a matter of course," FFRF's petition noted.

The Supreme Court, in approving released time instruction in 1952, never hinted it could be treated as the equivalent of attending French or math class. It was intended as accommodation, and public schools were to have a 'hands-off' approach, with no academic reward for undergoing proselytization off-site an hour a week.

In its legal challenge, handled pro bono by attorney George Daly, FFRF documented that the superintendent gave the released time group names and addresses of children in order to publicize the program.

The public school has no control of the grades. Schools may be compelled to accommodate devotional religious instruction, but may not be required to provide it, or hand out grades for it, maintains FFRF.

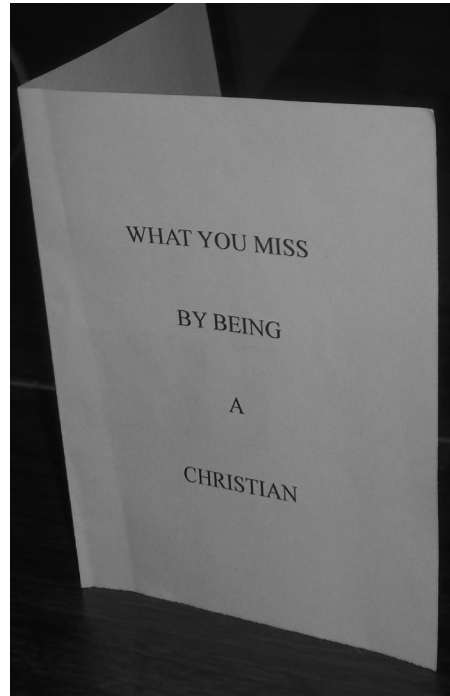
FFRF thanks its plaintiffs and Daly for challenging the violation. FFRF is considering its options.

Recruit a Member Sample Copies for \$2

Send \$2 with the name and address of each person you wish to receive a sample copy of Freethought Today to: FFRF, P.O. Box 750, Madison WI 53701

Freedom depends upon freethinkers

(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)



There'll be hell to pay

FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt has written three letters of complaint about posting of religious material in the office of Tax Commissioner Susan Kersey in Jeff Davis County in Hazlehurst, Ga. The first two letters went to Kersey, with a follow-up letter to County Administrator James Carter. "We have written two letters to Ms. Susan Kersey regarding this matter and to date have received no response," Schmitt wrote July 25 to Carter. "It is our further understanding that Ms. Kersey admits to receiving our letters and in fact has made comments online about her refusal to take [the religious items] down. I've enclosed copies of these posts as well."

Besides the displays pictured, another says "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, Philippians 4:13." (A more fitting verse for someone in Kersey's position would be "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's . . .")

Churches feel increasingly free to ignore politicking ban

FFRF is getting more and more complaints about churches violating IRS regulations on political campaigning. In June and July alone, Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent complaints about five churches to the IRS.

IRS regulations bar nonprofit 501(c)(3) groups such as churches from "[participating in or intervening in] . . . any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office."

A sample of violations:

- A South Carolina Baptist church's website links to a Facebook page titled "I will NOT vote for Obama in 2012."

- A Catholic priest in Florida was reported to have said at Mass, "You can vote for anybody, even a dog, but don't vote for Obama." Parishioners were outraged — at the dog reference, anyway. Others claimed the statement was not accurate or was taken out of context, but one of those naysayers admitted that "Father Dan did say 'Whatever you do, you can't vote for Obama.'"

- In Virginia, a Baptist church put campaign signs for a Republican congressional primary candidate on its property.

- A Washington church invited far-right gubernatorial candidate Shahrar Hadian to speak about the threat of Islam in America. Before the event, two pastors and another church member all voiced their strong support for Hadian's candidacy. One prayed that "more and more people would see the bumper stickers, they'd see the signs, they'd wonder about this man." The other was so enthusiastic he twice broke into "speaking in tongues."

- Rev. Terry Jones, infamous for burning copies of the Quran, hanged Obama in effigy on the lawn of the Dove World Outreach Center in Gainesville, Fla. The effigy included a rainbow gay pride flag in its left hand and a doll in its right to protest Obama's positions on gay marriage and abortion, with the backdrop of a trailer reading "Obama is Killing America."

FFRF has written to the IRS about all of these and similar violations. The agency responds with a form letter saying IRS can't discuss ongoing investi-

gations. Unfortunately, it has revoked only one church's tax-exempt status for campaigning since the restriction was put in place in 1954.

Even so, FFRF believes it's important to pursue the violations. If you know of any churches intervening in political campaigns, contact FFRF to send a letter on your behalf or visit our Churches and Political Lobbying Activities FAQ at ffrf.org/faq/state-church/ to learn how to send a complaint to the IRS yourself.

— By Maddie Ziegler

Georgia district flouts law

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a follow-up letter July 12 to Houston County Schools in Perry, Ga., about egregious constitutional violations. FFRF has now been contacted by 8 families, each reporting multiple violations. (Along with the complaints were threats. A Warner Robins resident mentioned "sticking guns in your mouths and blowing the backs of your god damn heads off.")

Reported violations include:

- Prayers at school events, such as assemblies, ceremonies, and school council meetings.

- Administrators encouraging teachers to pray.

- Teachers admitting, with pride, that "we (the teachers) did hold hands and have a prayer around the kids. It was lovely."

- Alma mater songs endorsing religious belief over nonbelief.

- A recommended "Summer Reading Program" including the violent Left Behind series by conservative End Times Pastor Tim LaHaye.

- Religious imagery and bible quotes on school walls and websites.

- Schools partnering with churches in close and troubling relationships.

- Mandating attendance at religious baccalaureate.

Seidel has corroborated most of the claims. The 13 enclosures and more than 30 pages of evidence make it "clear that there is a systemic lack

of adherence to and respect for the First Amendment in Houston County Schools," he wrote. "Extensive corrective measures, including training of all HCSD employees and administrators on the proper boundaries of the Establishment Clause, are imperative."

Was she even Christian?



Atop Maiden Cliff in Camden Hills State Park and visible "for miles around" is a 24-foot-tall cross. FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel's letter to Director Will Harris of the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands noted that "the cross has fallen or been blown down approximately five times" and "government resources, including National Guard helicopters and the manpower of the Maine National Guard, local fire departments and Parks and Lands employees, were used to erect the cross on multiple occasions."

Seidel's letter asks Harris "to remove the cross from state property immediately or direct the display be moved to a more appropriate private location." Local legend claims that the "cross is meant to serve as a memorial

to 11-year-old Elenora French, who fell from the cliff almost 150 years ago, in 1864."

However, Seidel's research revealed the girl's actual grave has no Christian iconography. "The placement, size and visibility of the cross make it far more likely this display was not chosen to memorialize Elenora, but to associate the area and the state of Maine with the Christian religion."

Other FFRF complaints:

- The city of Draper, Utah, used at least \$21,500 of city funds to pay for a worship concert starring Christian artist Michael W. Smith on his "Wonder, Worship, & Glory Tour." The city had backed off after a resident threatened to sue, then reversed itself.

FFRF followed up with an open records request to determine actual funding and coordination between Draper and the local Christian group that urged the city to bring Smith to town.

- A local complainant informed FFRF of the Richardson [Texas] Police Department's "Third Annual Faith-Based Crime Prevention Conference." Registration preference went to religious organizations over secular ones.

In his complaint, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel noted (tongue only slightly in cheek), "If they are looking to reduce crime, the RPD would do better to police the churches rather than partner with them, especially the Catholic churches."

- The Peach County Senior Citizens Center in Fort Valley, Ga., has illegally let staff lead prayers, bible readings and hymn singing. Federal regulations prohibit senior centers that receive federal funding from engaging in religious activities at government-sponsored functions such as meals.

- The Century, Fla., Town Council budgeted money to buy "a manger scene at town hall." Council President Ann Brooks "believe[s] we all want a manger scene." The council has not yet replied to FFRF's complaint.

2012 Herbert Bushong High School Essay Award Winners

\$11,250 in prizes awarded to seniors

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has awarded \$11,250 to 13 college-bound high school seniors in this year's essay competition. Seniors were asked to "describe a moment when they stood up for freethought and/or that made them proud to be a free-thinker," in 500-700 words. There were seven winners in the top five, with two ties for fourth and fifth place, plus six honorable mentions. Their essays can be found on pages 11-15.

Nonagenarian **Herbert "Harry" Bushong** of Texas once again generously endowed this year's contest. FFRF would also like to extend special thanks to Californian **John Moe** for endowing

the honorable mention awards of \$200 and to **Dorea and Dean Schramm**, Florida, for providing each student with a \$50 bonus.

First place (\$3,000): **Jordan Halpern**, University of California-Davis.

Second place (\$2,000): **Danielle Kelly**, University of Montana-Missoula.

Third place (\$1,000): **Joseph Price**, UCLA.



Herbert Bushong

Fourth place tie (\$500): **Nicole Schreiber**, New York University.

Fourth place tie (\$500): **Sarah Hedge**, Northwestern.

Fifth place tie (\$300): **Rebecca Ratero**, Rutgers.

Fifth place tie (\$300): **Samantha Biatich**, Smith College.

Honorable Mention (\$200): **Abigail Dove**, Swarthmore College.

Honorable Mention (\$200): **Amedee Martella**, University of Colorado-Boulder.

Honorable Mention (\$200): **Cheyenne Tessier**, The George Washington University (Cheyenne will defer her university enrollment for a year to do

humanitarian service in Senegal with Global Citizen.)

Honorable Mention (\$200): **Jarrett Browne**, Wright State University.

Honorable Mention (\$200): **Kaitlin Holden**, Winthrop University.

Honorable Mention (\$200): **Zach Gowan**, University of South Carolina-Spartanburg.

Look for honorable mention essays in future issues.

In September, 2012 college essay winners will be announced, and in October, FFRF will announce graduate/mature student winners.

FFRF blogs round out the news

FFRF staff often respond to timely news with blogs. Although there isn't space to reprint all FFRF blogs in Freethought Today, you can check out what you are missing (and sign up) at ffrf.org/news/blog/. Below are extracts from some recent blogs.

Debunking 'Did you know?'

By **Dan Barker**
FFRF Co-President
Aug. 3, 2012



The next time you receive one of those "Did You Know?" emails that claims that the Ten Commandments are prominent at the U.S. Supreme Court and are therefore the basis of American law, you can reply with this: Did you know that American law is not based on the Ten Commandments?

Some Christians believe that American law is based on biblical law. They claim that Moses and the Ten Commandments are prominently featured at the Supreme Court. But . . .

Did you know that there is nothing in the design of the Supreme Court building that would indicate that the Congress, architect or designers had any special regard for the Ten Commandments?

[This exhaustive and fully illustrated blog is intended to be a "chain email" to refute the ubiquitous Christian "spam" which repurposes to prove that the Ten Commandments are prominently featured at the Supreme Court and in U.S. law.]

Read the full refutation and start sharing it at ffrf.org/faq/freethought/did-you-know/.

Chick-fil-A lays an egg

By **Annie Laurie Gaylor**
FFRF Co-President
July 31, 2012

Two things the world doesn't need any more of: fast-food chains, and the Christian-right entrepreneurs who profit from them.

Chick-fil-A owner Dan Cathy is in hot water, and deservedly so, for telling Baptist Press he operates his chain "on biblical principles" and has an established policy against marriage equality.

These masters of emotional boycotts — the Religious Right — are *shocked!* *shocked!* that Chick-fil-A has ruffled feathers and faces consumer reprisal and boycotts. Yes, Christian-right CEOs have a right to make antigay statements and consumers have a right to boycott their restaurants.

Where is H.L. Mencken when we need him? The arch-cynic Mencken famously wrote: "No one in this world, so far as I know . . . has ever lost money by underestimating the intelligence of the great masses of the plain people."

Mencken could have added "or by underestimating their taste (bud)s."

Read more: ffrf.org/news/blog/chick-fil-a-lays-an-egg/

Atheists face religious test

By **Annie Laurie Gaylor**
July 31, 2012

Aren't candidates and the media ignoring a growing voting bloc? With Pew figures showing that 19% of adult Americans (about one in five) are not religious, the question of the day should be: When will presidential and other candidates start wooing us, the seculars?

The 15% to 19% who identify as nonreligious are roughly equivalent to the 15% of voters considered hardcore Religious Right.

And of course, we can take consolation in the fact that not all of the world is as behind the times as America. Look at Australia, where it isn't a problem

that Julia Gillard, the prime minister, is an "out" atheist.

Read more: ffrf.org/news/blog/atheist-candidates-face-religious-test-in-u.s/

Responding to pedophilia scandals

By **Andrew Seidel**
FFRF Staff Attorney
July 27, 2012

The National Collegiate Athletic Association slapped Penn State University with a \$60 million fine and penalties for covering up the rape and abuse of children by assistant coach Jerry Sandusky.

Since the allegations came to light about a year ago, Sandusky was convicted, everyone involved at PSU was fired and the NCAA handed down its harshest penalty ever. There will be additional criminal prosecutions for those who helped in the cover-up, but it's mostly over. The NCAA discovered a serious moral and criminal crisis in one of its subordinate bodies and acted swiftly to contain the crisis and punish those responsible.

Contrast this with the response of the Catholic Church in the face of decades of unremitting pedophilia scandals and institutional cover-up. The Catholic Church, which claims a monopoly on teaching morality, commands absolute obedience from its parishes, dioceses, priests, bishops and cardinals. These underlings actually believe the church controls their souls.

Rome has the ability to dictate virtually any outcome to its subordinates. Ratzinger (aka the pope) could order his predatory priests to do literally anything — turn themselves in to the civil authorities, for instance. Apparently obeying divine law is less strenuous than acting in accord with secular law.

More: ffrf.org/news/blog/report-card-responding-to-pedophilia-scandals/

Don't 'discount' civil rights

By **Annie Laurie Gaylor**
July 19, 2012

FFRF was contacted by one of our

Pennsylvania members, John Wolff, an octogenarian and retired electrical engineer who encountered an illegal church bulletin discount at a local restaurant. People bearing proof they had been to church that morning were given a 10% discount by Lost Cajun Kitchen in Columbia, Pa.

FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote three letters over 18 months in a patient attempt to educate the apparently uneducable restaurant owners.

Persuasion and recitation of the law failed utterly, so John had no recourse but to file a formal complaint with the Pennsylvania Human Rights Commission. Impressively, he is handling the case himself, despite a backlash of public criticism. (He is proof of what I always say: Octogenarians and nonagenarians are among FFRF's finest advocates, because they grew up in an era when the wall of separation was respected.)

At FFRF, we like to say there's nothing as important as working to uphold the First Amendment. But maybe there is something equally precious — working to uphold the Civil Rights Act. Would anyone call it trivial if a restaurant rewarded customers for being white with 20% off at Sunday brunch?

A few freethinkers have suggested that civil rights violations aren't worthy of FFRF's attention, that we should "pick our battles," and that negative reaction to such complaints makes atheists even more unpopular. So . . . should we blame the victims? Empower hecklers with a veto?

Ask those who have won landmark Supreme Court cases whether they were "popular" fights. FFRF and state/church complainants are not pursuing remedy of violations to be popular, or unpopular. We are working to uphold essential principles of law that protect us all. Although constitutional law is not undertaken to gain social acceptance, history shows that standing up for one's rights — as demonstrated by the civil rights and gay rights movements — is actually the surest path toward gaining social acceptance.

More: ffrf.org/news/blog/dont-discount-civil-rights/

Meet the Interns

Loving language, even legalese

Name: J.J. Rolling

Where and when I was born: Madison, Wis., April 1, 1987. (My mother was also born on April 1, no foolin'!)

Family: Parents, Cindy and John Rolling, and sister, Cecily.

Education: B.S. in economics, University of Wisconsin-Madison; University of Wisconsin Law School, anticipated J.D. in 2014.

My religious upbringing was: I was baptized a Catholic, but I attended Congregationalist and Presbyterian churches growing up. I recognize that I have been very fortunate to have a family that allowed my beliefs, religious and not, to be my own.

How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern: My previous work and internships were in the business world. They were math-heavy, research-oriented and analytical. Therefore, when I saw that I could work in a field that naturally arouses passionate discourse, I was excited to apply.

I believe that I benefit the organization by using some of the skills I acquired there to help unmask the organizations, property owners and businesses violating the Constitution.

What I do here: I help write open records requests to government agencies, draft letters for staff attorneys responding to member concerns and research everything I can get my hands on regarding First Amendment issues.

What I like best about it: All of the attorneys I have worked with are very sharp in their own right, but I have never seen their brains go to their heads. Egos do not get in the way of our team and mission.

Something funny that's happened at work: Some of the chastising, taunting and general nastiness from the FFRF's "fans" gives the office a laugh. If there is a hell and the assurances of these "supporters" are true, I look forward to meeting up with all of my office mates again.

My legal interests are: Cities have always fascinated me, so I'm interested in any legal issues at the crossroads of private property, real estate and public works. Although the legal issues we deal with at FFRF may seem remote, I think they actually fit with my interests quite well. To me, defining and enforcing the rights of groups in a society are necessary components to well-functioning urban civilization.

My legal heroes are: Although he



FFRF legal interns Ben Zich (left) and J.J. Rolling with Bertrand Russell and FFRF's "Emperor" statuettes. Note both interns were born on the same date! (Photo by Andrew L. Seidel)

may not have done much in the way of writing appeals or cross-examination, Demosthenes is the ancient equivalent of a lawyer who inspires me. Supposedly, he taught himself to deliver more forceful oratory by practicing speeches with pebbles in his mouth and shouting over roaring waves.

He matched his dedication in training with his love for Athens, which he served by attempting to use his considerable talents for rhetoric to rally against a coming invasion by the Macedonians.

These three words sum me up: Sharp, creative, redhead.

Things I like: I'm a Madison native and I love this unique city. I love playing soccer, which I did from youth and into college. Perhaps most, I love language. I love reading, the sound of words and foreign languages. I regard myself as fortunate to be a native English speaker because the language allows us to use different sentences to describe the same thought but convey entirely different meanings.

Things I smite: I hate, hate, hate any notion that our society's future is bleak or that we cannot get better. I'll allow that this may sound like naiveté or unconstrained idealism, but I absolutely refuse to listen to people who use the phrase, "given the way things are going."

We'll fix it and if not, we'll manage it, and if not, we'll survive it.

Interning at Rick's Café

Name: Benjamin Zich.

Where and when I was born: Omaha, Neb., April 1, 1987.

Family: An older sister (28), a younger brother (23), and a younger sister (17). My father is an electrical engineer and my mother was a special education teacher until she became a "stay-at-home mom" when my eldest sister was born.

Education: B.A. in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where my senior thesis on Andrew Marvell, a 17th century English metaphysical poet, is collecting dust somewhere in the deepest recesses of the UNC library. I'm currently a J.D. candidate at Wake Forest Law School in Winston-Salem.

My religious upbringing was: Evangelical. I was raised in a fundamentalist Christian household that believed the bible was literally true, that the Earth was created in six days, that it's 6,000 years old and all that jazz. I began to have qualms with Christianity when I was a sophomore in high school because I had the usual theological questions and received the usual theological "answers," but the answers I got from my pastor I found anemic and not compelling, though I couldn't say exactly why at the time.

The dissatisfaction I felt with these pat answers was the first in a series of disenchantments with religion that culminated two years later when I admitted to myself I was certainly no longer a bible-believing-Christian and probably (gasp!) an atheist.

How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern: I was interested in church/state separation issues after my first year at Wake Forest University, so I started poking around the Internet to find out about organizations that were working to enforce the First Amendment. My search quickly led me to FFRF, and I immediately knew I wanted to intern

here.

What I do here: The barbarians are at the gate! I help keep those barbarians on the other side of that gate. To do that, I help with research on Establishment Clause cases, draft and send out letters of complaint and listen to too many legislative prayer recordings.

What I like best about it: Every morning is like walking into Rick's Café from "Casablanca." Dan Barker will usually start off the day with some piano music and I, like Humphrey Bogart, will throw back a few shots (of espresso or coffee). Seriously though, I really love the work environment here. I feel lucky to be improving my professional skills while working on such important issues, especially since I get to work with such talented, smart, free-thinking people.

Something funny that's happened at work: Learning that I share the exact birthdate with one of my fellow interns, J.J. Rolling. Also, I hate to admit it, but I enjoy Dan's puns.

My legal interests are: Outside of Establishment Clause issues, my interests are in intellectual property, cyber-law, Internet architecture, free speech and privacy.

My legal heroes are: Lawrence Lessig and Jonathan Zittrain, two great visionaries of law in the Information Age, and Benjamin Cardozo, who was not just an influential judge, but a wonderful prose writer as well. He brought a whole new meaning to "poetic justice."

These three words sum me up: Happy-go-lucky.

Things I like: I am basically an "otaku" (someone who likes anime, comic books and video games), but I also like a good game of pickup basketball, Stanley Kubrick movies, *udon* noodles, the *Your Face Tomorrow* trilogy, just about every Cole Porter tune and boba tea.

Things I smite: Jogging (and working out in general). As Woody Allen said, I would prefer to atrophy. I don't like it when people thoughtlessly forward or repost stories on the Internet that are easily debunked by spending all of five seconds to look it up on *snopes.com* or *politifact.com*.

What is your favorite logical fallacy/argument? The false dichotomy. I see it all of the time when talking with theists. Somehow, tons of theists believe that "meaning" exists either on the cosmic scale or not at all. They say things like, "Well, if you're an atheist, nothing matters." This false dichotomy looks something like this:

- P1: If God does not exist, there is no ultimate meaning or purpose to the universe.

- P2: Atheists believe that God does not exist.

- C: Therefore, for atheists, nothing matters or has any meaning at all.

This drives me nuts. How do you go from "there is no ultimate meaning" to "no meaning at all"? It's such an obvious slide but many people totally buy it.

Overheard

The Boy Scouts of America just the other day reaffirmed its policy of banning openly gay boys from being members. The organization also continued its ban on gays or lesbians serving as leaders. The Scouts, in other words, came down squarely in favor of homophobia, which is a form of bigotry.

Columnist Richard Cohen, "A merit badge for bigotry?"

Washington Post, 7-18-12

Christ can't help your friends "not be gay," because sexual orientation isn't an on/off switch. (Also, Christ doesn't exist.)

"Friendly Atheist" Hemant Mehta, answering Pastor Craig Gross' statement that "Most Christians believe you should just help your friends to not be gay when, in all honesty, only Christ can do that."

patheos.com, 7-6-12

I wasn't elected to be a spiritual leader. I was elected to fill potholes. I was elected to analyze budgets.

City Commissioner Adam Stern, Livingston, Mont., voting against meeting prayers and a moment of silence

Livingston Enterprise, 6-12-12

What Is a Freethinker?



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

First place: Herbert Bushong High School Essay Competition

Taking pride in nonbelief

Jordan Halpern received \$3,000 for his first-place essay.

By Jordan Halpern

I've never been religious and grew up in a fairly secular home. When I was a child, religion was never a significant part of my life. In fact, I had very little exposure to religion at all until I started making Christian friends in elementary school.

I can still remember my surprise when my friends described to me their beliefs. I had a hazy idea of what Christianity was and some vague idea of the beliefs it entailed, but even as a first-grader I was amazed at how fully some members of my social group accepted these doctrines.

It was completely foreign to me. I'd heard of God before, and my parents had raised me with a sort of vague, non-denominational spirituality, but God had never held any more importance to me than Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy. Less, actually, because Santa, at least, brought me presents.

As I grew older and my understanding of the world increased, religion still stayed mostly off my radar. My interest extended no further than my bemusement at its prevalence. I managed to avoid paying any great attention to the topic until the seventh grade.

It was Halloween night. My friends and I were trick-or-treating, and one



house gave us little pamphlets instead of candy. Examining my pamphlet later that night, I was amused to discover a fiery sermon using bible verses to explain why Halloween was of the devil and to draw mocking comparisons between the virtues of Christians and the vices of nonbelievers. That weekend, I decided to create my own pamphlet because I had been extremely put off by the arrogance and pushiness of the literature I had received.

In response I created a parody detailing the advantages of atheism over belief (atheists don't have to go to church on Sundays, etc.), and I passed it out to students at my school the next week. I intended it simply as a joke not to be taken very seriously.

I was completely unprepared for the

I was amused to discover a fiery sermon using bible verses to explain why Halloween was of the devil.

reaction it elicited. Several students complained to the administration, and a school employee was deeply offended. I ended up being pulled out of class for a very serious talk with my teacher, a fairly liberal man who said that while he empathized with what I was saying, he was disappointed in me for what he saw as a deliberate attempt to antagonize Christians.

This shocked me. I had only intended to mock the ridiculousness of the fire and brimstone of the original pamphlet and hadn't expected more than a laugh from those who read it. I couldn't believe people were taking what I had written so seriously and that their reaction to it was so vehement.

The experience forced me to see religion in another light. No longer was it just an amusing quirk shared by a lot of the people I knew. Religion was something that caused people to behave irrationally and to overreact to even the most benign dissent.

It also reinforced to me the stigma associated with nonbelief. When people objected to my pamphlet, it hadn't just been to the criticism of religion. They also hated the word "atheist." At that time, I didn't consider myself an atheist.

Until that point, I had told myself and those around me that I believed in a higher power. The event forced me to closely examine why it was I kept that belief. The only reason I could come up with was that I didn't want to be an atheist. And that, I realized, wasn't a reason at all.

The experience changed the way I thought about religion and instigated my evolution into an avowed atheist. Seeing the irrational way believers reacted to such innocuous criticism made me proud not to be one of them and marked the first time I saw my nonbelief as more than just an aspect of my character.

After that, it became a source of pride.

Jordan writes, "I'm 18 years old and live in Grass Valley, Calif. I will be attending the University of California-Davis as a film studies major. I've worked with video for years and have written and directed a number of short films in high school. I hope some day to be able to use the medium to advance freethought. I also write music and have been an avid reader my entire life. In high school, I completed 68 units at my local community college, most of which will transfer when I go to college in the fall."

Second place: Herbert Bushong High School Essay Competition

Disbelief frees the mind

Danielle Kelly received \$2,000 for her second-place essay.



By Danielle Kelly

When I arrived for my first day of high school, I was fresh on the freethinking scene. For years, I had struggled to determine whether or not "God" existed. I had eventually come to the conclusion that if God did exist, he wasn't much help to this planet and I didn't care for his company.

Then I began not to care if he existed. Finally, in the months leading up to that first day of high school, I came to the gentle but powerful realization that my core logic staunchly refuted

the existence of any sort of deity.

Unfortunately, all first-year high school students had to take the dreaded health class. Mine was held in a room with mostly blank, beige walls, adorned with only a few posters showing the human muscular and circulatory systems. The teacher was a stereotypical female gym teacher with a knack for being brutally passive aggressive. She handed us all a sheet that had a few random and boring survey questions. We were to fill it out, partner up with someone and present each other's answers to the class, one of those cheesy "get to know everyone" activities.

As I filled mine out, I was pleased to see a section that allowed you to write two random personal facts. I hadn't really told anyone about my newfound atheism yet, and I decided that a perfect way to practice revealing my disbelief to people would be in front of a bunch of kids I didn't really know and a teacher who would be irritated by the unveiling.

Mind you, I was a very shy and respectful kid, but I was already beginning to develop my signature boldness and bluntness as a 15-year-old. An honest and freethinking mind will drive you to great heights, even in a freshman class.

As my partner and I stood in front

People who free their minds capture attention, and they change things.

of the entirely apathetic class and the annoyingly enthusiastic teacher, we read off each other's survey answers. Then came the words, "And she is an atheist" out of my partner's mouth. A few kids maintained their bored stare at the walls, but everyone else immediately narrowed their eyes and looked me up and down. The teacher's lips tightened.

In that moment, I knew my atheism meant something. I was already feeling excited about the years of opposition and debate that I would face, much of which would be from and with my classmates, including the very students sitting in front of me. Montana, being a red state with widespread Christian values, does not seem to house very many atheists or agnostics. But seeing the looks on the faces of those kids already made me feel pride in the entire

global community of freethinkers that I was joining.

Thinking differently and freely is absolutely nothing to be ashamed of, I discovered, but is a virtue. People who oppose me on the basis of my disbelief in God are simply deprived of all of the freedom in every dimension that atheism and agnosticism unlock.

I have never been one to promote intolerance, but being objected to because of atheism has made me even more proud of freethinkers since that day. People who free their minds capture attention, and they change things.

Looking back on the past four years, I am pleased that I stood up in front of that class so many months ago. That moment triggered my confidence in who I am and what I do (or don't) believe in. It is now generally known among my friends, closer acquaintances and family that I am an atheist and proud of it.

It is so freeing — overcoming intolerance and rejection.

Danielle writes: "I am 18 years old. My hometown is Kalispell, Mont., and I will be attending the University of Montana in Missoula this fall. My intended major is forestry. My interests include camping, kayaking, natural photography, hiking and reading classic novels."

Third place: Herbert Bushong High School Essay Competition

Free to be whatever I want

Joseph Price received \$1,000 for his third-place essay.

By Joseph Price

After I was home-schooled for six years, my parents realized that I might want to be a bit more socially active and independent, and so I first attended public school in the seventh grade.

I didn't have a reason for nonbelief at that age. I hadn't thought much about it yet. My parents were atheists but encouraged me to explore different schools of thought. I was never told what to believe. But because of my parents, and also because "He" hadn't said two words to me my whole life, I lived under the assumption that He just wasn't there.

I didn't believe in God, nor did I believe in "trying to fit in," although my community tends to be a conservative place where it's assumed that everyone is a Christian.

One day, that first year in public school, someone asked me, "Do you believe in God?" I responded quickly, not meaning to be inflammatory, "No."

Then I was asked, "So do you think you can just do whatever you want?"

We were in a group, a very large

Religion encouraged them to think alike and to act the same.

group of real "normal" kids: Hollister kids, Vans kids, "crewcut" kids. I, on the other hand, wore a tie-dye shirt, sneakers without laces, and my hair down to my shoulders. This kid wanted to prove that I had the audacity to believe that I could do and think whatever I want.

"No —" I started. I stopped, because I realized that I didn't understand the question.

"What's gonna stop you from killing someone?"

Now that I'm older, I know how predictable it is that a nonbeliever will be confronted with questions like this. Now that I'm older, I also know a hundred other, more eloquent ways to state what I was thinking at the time. But I also do not take back, nor do I regret, what I said to him at that moment. "You're an idiot," I told him.

What concerned me was that no one else that day seemed to think he was an idiot. I know how to argue this point now: I don't kill people because I don't



want to kill people, not because the big man upstairs holds me under His Holy Thumb and keeps tabs on everything I do. But this point was not obvious to Kid Crewcut or the others, and that was very disturbing to me.

Before that day, I didn't know why I was an atheist. But as I went home and thought about what had happened, I did. I knew I did not want any part of the religions my peers were involved with, because it made them act like that. Religion encouraged them to think alike and to act the same.

I was mad, and I thought about that question, "So you think you can just do whatever you want?" I thought about

how I answered it that day: "No."

That was not true. I can do whatever I want. If I want to wear tie-dye, I do. If I want to learn something new, I do. If I wanted to kill, perhaps I would, but like most people — believers or not — I don't want to. I don't believe "Thou shalt not kill" was written by God on a piece of stone thousands of years ago, but that does not mean I'm in favor of killing. I'm not, and I oppose it, from the death penalty to wars that are fought in the name of God.

I can do "whatever I want," and no one else has a say in it. That's what freedom from religion is. I'm proud to be one of those people who has totally rejected religion and substituted good sense.

Joseph, of Fresno, Calif., writes:

"I am 17 and will be attending UCLA this fall to major in theater. I am interested in acting, directing and general production. I've been acting since I was 6 and was very involved with high school and community theater. My other activities included volunteer work at the Fresno Public Library. My achievements included a Golden State Seal Award, AP Scholar and UCLA Scholarship Recognition Award. I was also proud that the senior class chose me to be one of two student speakers at our baccalaureate. My other interests include the production of electronic music, piano composition, poetry and short stories, film and philosophy."

Fourth place (tie): Herbert Bushong High School Essay Competition

New York to Dallas: Differences beyond distance

Nicole Schreiber-Shearer received \$500 for her fourth-place essay.

By Nicole Schreiber-Shearer

I've had the privilege of coming of age in one of the most progressive, freethinking cities in the world. New York City has become far more than my hometown. It's an endless source of inspiration, a constant reminder to push the boundaries established by our society and to plunge, sometimes recklessly, into the infinite directions of one's own mind.



At my public high school in Lower Manhattan, curiosity and intellect were traits not only expected but required in order to excel both socially and academically. I prided myself on my inquisitive, hardworking and thoughtful nature, blissfully overlooking the role my environment had played in my development.

It was not until I found myself hundreds of miles away from my beloved city, in a wealthy suburb of Dallas, that I was forced to become the person I had always been. Amid the perfectly trimmed lawns and pastel polo shirts, my perspectives on politics, religion

and morality were challenged for the first time. I was no longer one of many liberal New York teenagers. Instead I was an outsider, and consequently tied to my beliefs in a way I had never been before.

It was clear I was different from the moment I stepped out of my old best friend's brand-new BMW. It had been four years since her family had moved to Texas, but it was only as a 16th birthday present that my mother rewarded me with a round-trip ticket to Dallas to visit her.

The effects of her new Southern lifestyle were evident from the moment we reunited. I struggled to pick her out of a mass of blond-haired, blue-eyed teens in khakis and Abercrombie. She had brought her friends to meet me, she explained. I paused, taking in all of the eyes placed upon me, the voices and questions bouncing toward me from all directions.

"So you live near Beyonce?" "How many times have you gotten mugged?" "Do you get used to walking through metal detectors?" "You don't actually ride the subway, do you?"

The cacophony of voices dwindled, at least temporarily as the group split up into the various cars parked in the airport's massive parking lot. As Christian rock blared from the radio, I was unaware of the challenges and questions I would soon be faced with. Celebrity spottings and mass transit were merely the introductory topics in what

We must abandon the curtain that blind faith casts over us.

would become a week of constant challenges and questioning.

While I ambivalently tagged along to a church-sponsored teen party, I could not bring myself to attend the lecture on creationism the next day. I thought sitting outside and reading quietly would be an appropriate way to avoid teachings I am strongly opposed to, but when my friend insisted I join the group, I found myself the catalyst of a heated parking lot debate.

Biology has been a favorite subject of mine. A classmate and I devoted months to studying Darwin's *Origin of Species*. I did not want to partake in any sort of meeting where the life's work of many brilliant thinkers is disregarded in the name of God and adherence to faith. While I believe people are entitled to their own beliefs regarding religion, seeing children my age, our nation's future, completely disregard scientific fact in order to remain faithful to some theoretical being deeply troubled me.

Despite the group's insistence and my adolescent desire to fit in, I stood my ground. I didn't attend the lecture,

nor did I join in when they petitioned to prohibit their high school's use of textbooks featuring scientific ideas that counter creationism. I tried to encourage the kids around me to pursue biology and the sciences, regardless of their beliefs.

In several years, we will be the workforce, and seeing a large group eschew science is beyond unsettling. Our world is becoming ever more dependent on innovation and understanding, both of which can only be attained through logic, questioning and analysis. While I doubt my one-week visit had much impact on the Dallas teens, the trip forever changed me.

I have been inspired to pursue scientific study, activism and education reform. It is essential to our society's progress that we remain curious and freethinking. In order to do so, we must abandon the curtain that blind faith casts over us and explore the world around us.

Nicole, 18, writes:

"I have always been passionate about the arts and science. I will be attending New York University in the fall to study philosophy, biology and creative writing. I am a student at a preprofessional ballet school and spent the summer dancing with North Carolina Dance Theatre. I have been awarded several scholarships to study ballet, as well as a Silver Key in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards for my personal essay 'The Dancer.'"

Fourth place (tie): Herbert Bushong High School Essay Competition

Religion thrives on fear

Sarah Hedge received \$500 for her fourth-place essay.

By Sarah Hedge

I decided in the seventh grade that I no longer had the energy to pretend to believe in a higher power or the positive power of religion. My community is staunchly, almost severely, religious. Children are placed in Sunday school before they can read; adults donate generously to the several churches in town; church functions fill each community member's schedule.

If nothing else, my community can be described as uniform. It's automatically assumed that everyone in town is conservative and Christian, and any dissent from those descriptors is baffling. When I first decided to examine my religious beliefs, I ran into several roadblocks. My classmates did not understand why I would question something that they had grown up knowing absolutely. "Don't you go to church," they would ask? "Don't you celebrate Christmas?"

Even my best friend failed to quell her confusion. "But you went with me to bible camp three years ago. How can you possibly be an atheist?" She spent a good part of the next three years trying to convince me of the certain existence of God, all the while plagued with a furrowed brow and an odd sense of urgency.

I could never understand her worry. Sure, I was an atheist, but why did she

care?

It wasn't until my sophomore year that I finally understood. Sitting in chemistry class, waiting for the instructor to produce yet another pop quiz, one of my classmates invited me to an Easter church service. I declined. The classmate asked where I went to church. I replied, "Nowhere. I'm an atheist."

At that moment, the usually quiet girl in front of me jerked around in her seat and put forth one sentence that I will never forget: "You know you're going to hell, right?"

Her question seemed more akin to a statement as she turned back toward the front of the room. It was clear from her expression that she wasn't trying to bully me, yet she seemed completely indifferent to the state of my immortal soul.

What many would take as an insult, I took as an affirmation of the acceptability of my choices. Those seven words said it all. I finally understood my best friend's expression as she tirelessly tried to convert me to Christianity.

I had always found organized religion unsettling, if not infuriating, and in that moment I could finally articulate why. In that moment, my classmate had given voice to my qualms with religion. Her absolute certainty that my lack of belief would condemn me forever came first. The idea that I would burn in hell had been impressed upon her since childhood, and she was therefore wholly unconcerned about my fate.

'You know you're going to hell, right?'

What I consider a ridiculous delusion of heaven and hell wouldn't have any effect on me if it weren't for the utter hypocrisy of it all. The idea that my classmate's god would be vindictive enough to put a generally good person in eternal hell for lack of belief, and that his or her followers would see nothing wrong with such a god, made me feel firm in my own disbelief.

At the same time, I recognized that not all religious followers are completely indifferent to the damnation of nonbelievers. The fact that my best friend worried so much that she felt the need to bring up my religious status in almost every conversation displayed the terror that religion plants in the minds of its followers.

I finally understood the social uniformity in my community: Fear of hell or some other eternal punishment can drive anyone toward thoughtless belief, "just in case." It struck me that the fear of God's very abstract wrath kept my classmates and neighbors from legitimately examining their thoughts and opinions.

Bertrand Russell once said, "I think we ought always to entertain our opinions with some measure of doubt. I shouldn't wish people dogmatically to believe any philosophy, not even mine."



To make an educated and true decision, doubt is a necessity. The nature of religion is to destroy doubt, or, more accurately, to suppress it. Too many take up causes without thinking them through; too few can thoughtfully answer the question, "Why do you believe in God?"

Religion, as I've seen it, breeds fear and contempt. It thrives on fear, and it attempts to punish those who are not afraid.

Sarah, 18, writes:

"I was born in Lebanon, Ind. In the spring, I was accepted to Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. I hope to major in radio/television/film because I want to write scripts. I'm also interested in creative writing, as writing is my passion. From a young age, I found refuge at the library, and my love of books grew to a love of writing. I volunteered for a reading camp each summer, organized a book sale and wrote grant application for the summer reading program. I wrote and edited for my high school's online journalism website, *Burning Tacos*. I also founded my school's Scrabble club and was the vice president of the Film Society."

Fifth place (tie): Herbert Bushong High School Essay Competition

Christmas carols in public schools

Samantha Chaya Biatch received \$300 for her fifth-place essay.

By Samantha Chaya Biatch

I am what my parents and their colleagues like to call an R.K. (rabbi's kid). Even worse, I am an R.K. squared. My parents met in rabbinic school,



and even though my brother and I are both atheists, one would be hard-pressed to find Reform Jewish children more knowledgeable than my brother and I are about Judaism. I attended Jewish Day School until I started sixth grade, when I began attending public school.

I have always loved to sing, so of course I registered for choir right away, staying with it through my senior year. For the first two years of middle school, choir was a great class, but in eighth grade the director decided that we would be singing a medley of Christmas carols at the winter concert.

As an atheistic Jew, I of course objected strenuously, and my parents arranged a meeting with the director and the vice principal. I felt that my ar-

gument was pretty strong: Religion has no place in a public school, and even if the law were different, I did not understand how my teacher could knowingly do something that would make one of her students uncomfortable.

Well, it turned out that the law was different. We discovered that the school system's policy allowed for sectarian songs as long as: 1) there was at least one song from a different tradition; 2) the concert was balanced; and 3) the songs had educational value.

There seemed to be nothing for us to do, and I ended up having to sit in class while the choir practiced the carols, enduring the stares of classmates and endless questions about why I was not singing. I hoped that high school would be different.

There are three choirs in Middleton [Wis.] High School and one choir director. When I registered for the freshman choir class, my parents and I met with the director to inform him of our prior difficulties and to express our hope that the experience would not be repeated. Two years went by without any problems. Again, the third year was the charm, or rather, the curse.

I found out that the junior/senior choir at Middleton performs a holiday concert each year, consisting of several Christmas songs and one token non-Christian song, usually some-

I was tired of classmates staring at me when I refused to sing a Christmas song.

thing along the lines of "I Have a Little Dreidel." The concert is not mandatory, but the choir does practice the songs during class time, and there is extra credit given for participating in the concert.

Unfortunately, the same policy that had allowed for Christmas carols in middle school applied to the high school as well. But by the time we found out about all this, it was too late to change anything for that year, and I found myself in the same situation as in eighth grade. This time, I spent the weeks leading up to the concert in the library, but it was a little better than sitting, silent, in class.

I knew this issue would come up yet again the next year, my senior year. I was tired of my classmates staring at me when I refused to sing a Christmas song and not having my rights as a minority student respected. So I, along with my two rabbi parents, met with the admin-

istration. It took several discussions, but the vice principal was sympathetic. She brought the situation to the principal's attention, and we finally reached a resolution. The concert would still happen, but it would no longer earn academic credit for students. Most importantly, we would no longer be singing religious songs in class, as the principal decreed that practices had to take place after school.

I am an adult, and I like to think I am not naïve, but there is one thing I still do not understand. I do not understand how a teacher could be so ignorant and so uncaring, that he would put his student in the position that I was forced, more than once, to take.

I think college will be better.

Samantha, 18, writes:

"I was born in Harrisonburg, Va., but I currently live in Madison, Wis. I will be attending Smith College [Northampton, Mass.] to major in theater. At Middleton High School, I was a member of the Dive Team, Mock Trial and Drama Club. I have participated with the Young Shakespeare Players for the last three years and worked as a teacher's aide at Temple Beth El's Religious School from freshman through senior year. I am a National Merit Finalist and received academic honors from my high school for a GPA of 3.7. I am a member of the International Thespian Society."

Fifth place (tie): Herbert Bushong High School Essay Competition

No nod for belief in God

Rebecca Ratero received \$300 for her fifth-place essay.

By Rebecca Ratero

Age 6, a school in northern California. At lunch it was popular to say things like, "Everybody who likes ice cream raise your hand!" and "Everybody who believes in God raise your hand!" I guess the assumption was that nobody would possibly leave their hands down.

But one 6-year-old, apparently, did not believe in God. That was me. Not that at 6 one can really stop to think about whether there is or isn't a god or gods or what that implies. I simply hadn't been raised believing there was.

Age 7, a small village in Spain on a summer's morning with my cousins, ages 5 and 9. At the small church, the priest is leaving and we say hello, as everybody always does to everybody else there. He stops and inquires kindly whether we'll be attending the upcoming special Mass.

My older cousin, who lives in the village and never misses a special Mass, confirms that she will. My younger cousin does too, imitating the oldest. I avoid the question. Back at home, my grandmother harrumphs at the notion of church; she believes in a "helping hand" in the creation of the universe, but not in a god who "takes

attendance."

After the Spanish Civil War (which my grandparents lived through), many clergy (the ones taking attendance) were favorable to the Franco regime and had plenty to eat while everybody else was going hungry.

Age 16, a restaurant in northern California at dinner with a new friend. "So, you're Catholic?" (Nod.) "Do you believe in God?" "No." "You mean, like, you're an atheist?" "Yeah." "Wow, I don't think I've actually ever met an atheist before. I've met agnostics, but I'm not sure I've ever met someone who actively does not believe in God."

We don't know where exactly we come from, or what happens when we cease to be, or even if there is continued existence in an afterlife. We agreed that based on the fact that living beings strive to continue living, human beings have decided there is another life that will enable us to not completely die.

For me, religion has never been an issue. I have always been free to decide whether I wanted to become religious, or a believer. I was simply never taught to believe. I have always been taught about evolution and how dreadful extreme religion has been throughout the course of history, from the Inquisition, intolerance in different countries, Crusades, jihad, pogroms, etc., to modern-day fundamentalism and holy wars.

If there is an all-loving god, why is there so much misery and sickness and

I was simply never taught to believe.

hunger and war and despair in the world? What is the afterlife and why do we beg for it? Why is the Vatican the richest religious institution in the world? Why have women been considered inferior? Why is our duty to serve our husbands and bear children?

If there is a question that needs resolving, it should be investigated, not attributed to some unknown force. If there is poverty and sickness, we should learn how to fix it, not pray. Aristotle already provided a response to the fear of death: If one is alive, one is not dead and should not worry about being dead, and if one is dead, then one has ceased to be or is in the afterlife and doesn't have to worry about it anymore, either.

Through education that exposes us to science in an objective way, society will very simply drift away from religion. This will enable more people to engage in answering questions instead of accepting that a supernatural force is the ultimate cause.

Religions tend to block education, something unacceptable and even deadly in today's world. If people are exposed to all kinds of information and learn tolerance and respect, we will live in a much better world with



far fewer conflicts, on both large and small scales.

If people who have access to this broader knowledge still wish to believe in a god or gods, then that should be respected as well — as long as science is not pushed aside, basic rights are not obliterated and someone's religion does not determine the course of our lives.

Rebecca, 18, was born in Madrid, Spain, and will be attending Rutgers University. Her major is undecided, but she's interested in history, political science, international relations, journalism and geography. She was an honors student in Spanish/literature, English, history and economics.

"I have played basketball for nine years on different municipal teams, and I love to read, travel and explore new places. I also like to sketch, draw, paint with watercolors, take photographs and bake. Even though I lived briefly in the United States and spent time there during summers and on vacation, going to school at Rutgers is going to be a big change, and I'm very excited about it."

Overheard

I believe that lots of people only follow a religion because of parental and cultural pressure and that they would be happier if they could be true to themselves and lead godless lives. Belief in god is not something that comes naturally to all of us; many of us find it impossible to believe in god and it can be liberating and life-enhancing to fully embrace this lack of belief and live our lives without religion.

Alom Shaha, a London science teacher and author of *The Young Atheist's Handbook: Lessons for Living a Good Life Without God*

The Commentator, 7-16-12

In my country where it's considered highly controversial, more controversial with the bishops than it is in Europe, 82% of Catholics believe contraception is morally acceptable. So let the women in Africa decide. The choice is up to them.

Melinda Gates, a practicing Catholic, speaking at the London Family Planning Summit on the Gates Foundation leading a drive to raise \$4.3 billion to provide access to contraception

Forbes, 7-12-12

After an 18-month consultation, the Girl Guides revealed they will no longer swear a 43-year-old promise to "do my duty to God, to serve the Queen and my country," and will instead promise "to be true to myself and develop my beliefs."

News story on the new wording in the pledge that Australian Girl Guides

(Scouts) recite

The Telegraph, 7-6-12

As a preacher, I could see that prayers weren't healing people. Despite preaching on wealth, the only people getting rich were the pastors. I could see that many, many people were mentally disturbed and a host of problems, not to mention the scandals and adultery. This caused me to look deeper and really find out the true essence of my faith and why the Holy Spirit wasn't active like it supposedly was back in the bible days.

Clergy Project member Lawrence Hunter, former associate pastor in the Church of God in Christ, a black Pentecostal denomination

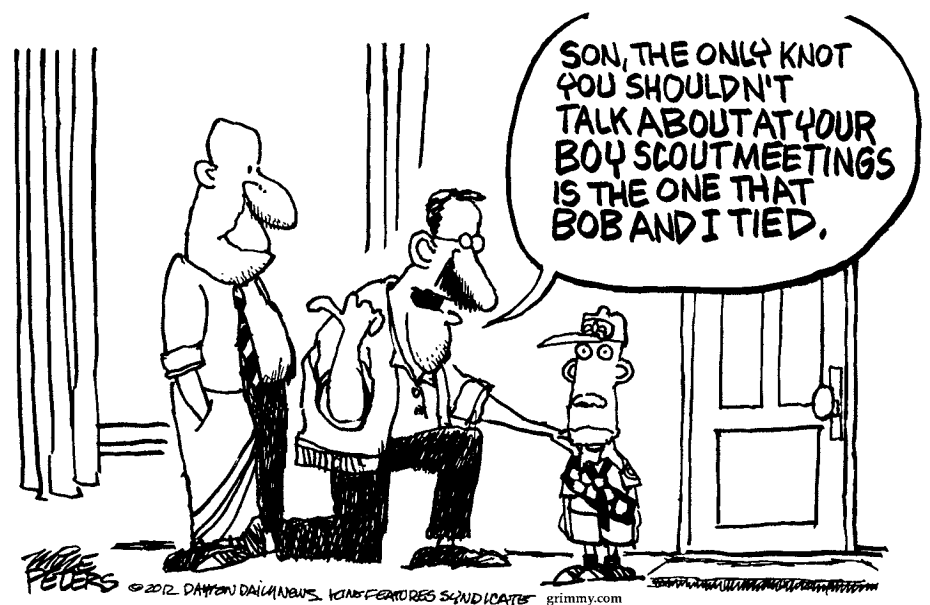
alternet.org, 6-10-12

If anything, the discovery of the Higgs boson and the confirmation of the Standard Model of the Universe make God even more unnecessary to explain the universe. In the universe are inscribed laws by which the big bang was initiated and the functioning of the universe sustained. Since we have the Higgs boson, we do not need God anymore! If ever there was a godless or an atheist particle, it is the Higgs boson!

Indian rationalist Babu Gogineni, noting that Peter Higgs is an atheist

postnoon.com, 7-12-12

"Atheist" is one of those words that people first hear as a whispered accusation, like "communist," was when I was growing up. It was, and often still is, a



label that captures their darkest fears. Knowledge is the antidote for fears of all kinds, and a book that sheds light on what atheism is (and what it isn't) is likely to diminish the fear of it. Everybody wins when we're less fearful of each other.

Dale McGowan, executive director of Foundation Beyond Belief and author of "Atheism for Dummies," the first "Dummies" book about nontheists

Religion News Service, 7-9-12

Why would one not intervene when somebody gives gullible people sewage to drink? But my reason is broader. The promotion of superstition and belief in paranormal phenomena dulls people's minds and establishes dangerous misconceptions about reality in our society. Such efforts have to be countered. **Sanal Edamaruku, president of the Indian Rationalist Association, who faces arrest for "deliberately hurting reli-**

gious feelings" for proving that "holy water" dripping from a statue of Christ in Mumbai was actually from a blocked drain

New Scientist, 7-7-12

Hallelujah in the Vatican: The leak has been found!

Caption on a photo of Pope Benedict wearing a cassock with a yellow stain for which the pope is suing the German satire magazine *Titanic*

Der Spiegel, 7-10-12

Sue Paterno had been quoted as saying Joe was not a saint. That made this difficult decision easier for me to execute. **Artist Michael Pilato, on why he painted out the halo above former Penn State head football coach Joe Paterno after revelations about Paterno's role in the Jerry Sandusky child rape scandal**

MSNBC, 7-16-12

Meet a Member

Amid music, a chorus of doubt

Name: Don Bremer.

Where I live: I've been happily retired for 31 years on the Big Island of Hawaii.

Where and when was I born: Los Angeles, 1926.

Family: Nina, my freethinking second wife of 36 years, and two daughters from my first marriage. The girls have contributed to our family in different ways. Lianne, the elder, provided our clan with four beautiful, now adult, children. Carolyn, my younger daughter, chose a career as her major life interest. She has a Ph.D. in music composition and chairs the Music Department and Conservatory at Cal State-Long Beach.

I was especially pleased when Lianne finally emancipated herself from the Mormon Church. My girls, on their mother's side, are descended from Brigham Young. Carolyn has been a closet atheist since her college years.

Education: Bachelor of arts, 1950, Occidental College, Los Angeles (which Barack Obama attended in 1979-81); M.S. in education. At Occidental I studied under Howard Swan, who was known by colleagues as the dean of American choral conductors.

Occupation: I must first admit that my activism for church/state separation has been a nearly full-time occupation during my extended retirement. Before that, I taught choral music and music history/appreciation at Santa Monica High School and Santa Monica Community College.

The wonderful Freethought Today article ["No Such Thing as Religious Music," Sept09] described how the late David Randolph conducted many sacred music scores as an avowed atheist because of the greatness of the music. Like David, I sang and conducted music with religious texts. David and I didn't buy into the dogma of the texts, but we weren't about to ignore the great body of sacred masterworks.

One year I chose to perform Charpentier's "The Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ." As I was handing out the scores to my Madrigal Singers, I came to Linda Schwartz, a devout Jew. As she looked up at me, I sensed a conflict. I looked at her straight in the eye and said, "Just cross your fingers and sing the notes!"

Such a dilemma is pretty much academic now, since religious music performance in public schools is legally restricted. In one way, I think that's a sad, educational/cultural limitation.

How I got to where I am today: Though there are always things one would like to have done over or done better or not done at all, essentially, I have no regrets and enjoy the activities that interest me and cause my days to be much too short to properly fulfill all of my interests. These include serious photography of the wonders found in Hawaiian nature and the reading, yea devouring, of humanist literature.

My attitudes about life and the need to face the reality that it must ultimately end need clarification here. Because I do not believe there are, or ever have been, any gods, my own beliefs (essentially nonbeliefs) are that when this life is over, we revert back to the Never Land of where we were before our births. When we arrive at this state, we

will encounter the same nonconsciousness and nonawareness as were in our prenatal state. I therefore embrace the literal rather than the supernatural connotation of "ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

I can now see that my folks' religious beliefs bordered on fundamentalism. Understandable, since my maternal grandmother raised my mom with the narrow ferocity of a religious dictator — no movies, no dances, no unchaperoned dates. With such a background, I happily give my mother the benefit of the doubt, as I do with my dad who had a similar lineage and upbringing.

Where I'm headed: To age 90, I hope. If I make that, there should be plenty of time to augment my website legacy of Hawaii photographs for family, friends and photo aficionados.

Person in history I admire: I have read much about Thomas Jefferson and found that he had a lifestyle that I could readily identify with. He was able to work with friend and foe alike. I treasure his portrait on a \$2 bill I own.

I must mention my long admiration of my fellow Hawaiian *kama'aina* (resident) Mitch Kahle. I have followed his many accomplishments in fighting church/state violations on the island of Oahu. His FFRF award of Freethinker of the Year was well-deserved.

A quotation I like: "There can't be a practical reason for believing what isn't true." I chose this quotation by Bertrand Russell because it's short, simple and would seem to be the anti-ecclesiastical basis of reason and evidence.

The implied alternative would characterize those who rely on their emotions to dictate a strongly held belief in things supernatural, held together with innumerable "what-ifs" and fantasies that they so readily embrace as beliefs. In the world today, there's a virtual pandemic of gullibility by the masses, well-illustrated by current tea party and Islamic extremists.

These are a few of my favorite things: Serious macro photography of Hawaii's flora and fauna displayed on my website — theincrediblebigisland.com — for viewing pleasures of our tropical climes, along with reading and rereading my collection of freethought books and magazines. I read Freethought Today from cover to cover on the day it arrives. My activism mainly consists of writing letters to the editor as I try to educate the oh-so-naive fundamentalists.

These are not: Being proselytized by evangelizing fundies. But I do enjoy blasting holes in their reasonless rantings.

My doubts about religion started: Back in my youth when my (fundamentalist) parents got me involved in a comprehensive Methodist youth activities program supervised by the youth minister who knew how to attract and keep us occupied with the church's elaborate recreational facilities. Activities such as badminton, basketball and even roller-skating in the large gym right there on the church premises were attractive come-ons, skillfully used to inject the dogma they were indoctrinating into our formative minds.

As I look back on these activities, I have also found joy in the realization that the dogma parts of these church

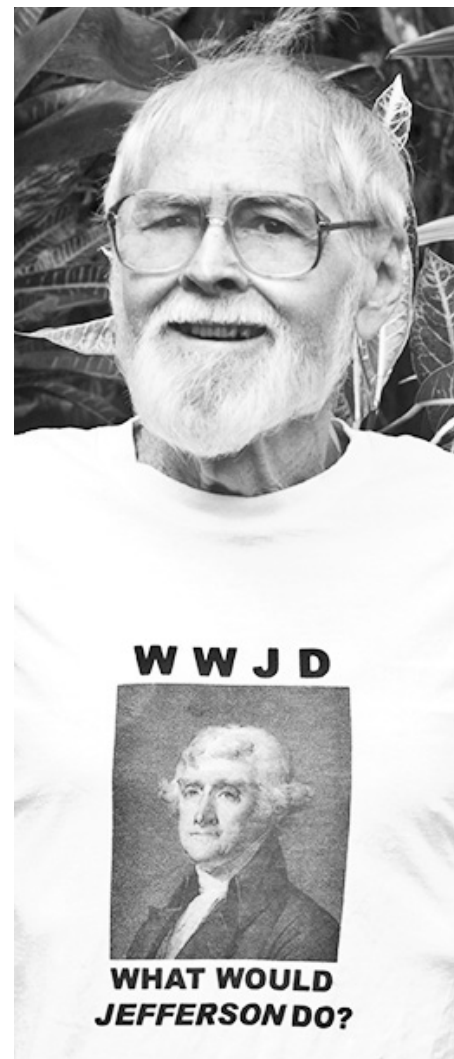
activities seemed quite superficial to me, even early in my youth. But I did indeed emancipate myself from all this religious indoctrination, thanks initially to professor Paul Kurtz. I decided to tackle his tome, *The Transcendental Temptation*. It took some time to digest, but Kurtz convinced me then and there that reason will trump emotional beliefs every time.

Why I'm a freethinker: It was probably by logical default, since I have always been skeptical of the supernatural realm that invites folks with hyperactive "belief engines" to embrace beliefs enhanced by their gross credulity. P.T. Barnum was so right! Many of his "suckers" were and still are buying into one dogma or another.

For me, the definition of a miracle is when an activity or belief defies the laws of physics: stones rolling away from a tomb entrance, saviors ascending into heaven, walking on water, all of this folderol that the gullible buy into.

How I promote freethought: For the past 20 years, I have averaged about one letter to the editor per month on various religious subjects. That plus often wearing my "What Would Jefferson Do?" shirt in public have been central to my activism.

I think we freethinkers are ahead of the game. We get it! The theory of evolution is fact-based. This calls for us to exercise patience as well as to educate others. If current demographic



Don Bremer thinks if Thomas Jefferson were to return today, he'd scoff at the idea that "America is a Christian nation."

trends continue, humankind may well evolve into two, great opposing societies: atheist-agnostics vs. evangelical extremists.

And finally, the religious extremists will self-destruct, and we will enjoy a utopian-like society we have worked so hard to achieve.

FFRF welcomes 15 new Lifetime Members

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to welcome 15 new Lifetime Members:

Francisco Alonso, Carol Cederborg & partner Kathy Kay, Timothy Dupler, Michael Fuchs, Mike Kirkland, Wayne Kleeman, Norden Lucke, Lisa Morris, Jeff Poleet, Wendolyn Posner, Paul Sislis, Maryann Stein, William van Druten and George Williams.

Wendolyn Posner was made a Lifetime Member by her husband Arik Posner, himself a Lifetime Member, through his generous Combined Federal Campaign designation. Norden Lucke made herself a Lifetime Member through her CFC donation. Mike Kirkland became a "Lifer" through five designated monthly payments of \$200.

States represented are Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Min-

nesota, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Virginia.

You may become an individual Lifetime Member with a \$1,000 gift designated explicitly as a membership or renewal, which goes into a safe "rainy day" endowment, is deductible for income-tax purposes and means never another renewal notice.

(A note to kind CFC donors: If you make a donation to FFRF through CFC, please contact FFRF directly to report what you gave and how you want it designated. Donors must explicitly give CFC permission to release such information to FFRF, but sometimes even when they have done so, this information isn't passed on.)

FFRF's warmest thanks go to its newest Lifetime Members!



Rabid Baptists?

Harry Shaughnessy, who directs FFRF's North Carolina chapter, the Triangle Freethought Society, spotted this along the Carolina coast in July.

Newsnotes

Scotland moves toward marriage equality

The Scottish government announced July 25 it will work to pass advance legislation legalizing gay and lesbian marriage. Scotland is heavily Catholic. Churches will be allowed to opt out of performing weddings under the proposed legislation.

Cardinal Keith O'Brien has been the most vocal opponent of equality. Scotland would be the 12th nation to legalize marriage equality and the first in the United Kingdom.

Mali Islamists stone couple to death

A couple who had sex outside marriage have been stoned to death by Islamists in front of about 200 people in the town of Aguelhok in northern Mali, the BBC reported July 31: "The man and woman were buried up to their necks, then pelted with stones until they died."

"I was there," said a government official. "The Islamists took the unmarried couple to the centre of Aguelhok. The couple was placed in two holes and the Islamists stoned them to death."

Deaths attributed to mohels' procedure

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported June 7 that 11 baby boys in New York City were infected with herpes between November 2000 and December 2011 following an ultra-Orthodox Jewish circumcision ritual called metzitzah b'peh, in which the mohel puts his mouth directly on the newly circumcised penis and sucks away the blood.

"There is no safe way to perform oral suction on any open wound in a newborn," New York City Health Commissioner Dr. Thomas Farley said in a statement.

Ten of the boys were hospitalized, at least two developed brain damage and two died, according to the New York City Health Department.

Study: Religious tax breaks costly

A Florida professor estimates tax breaks for religious institutions in the U.S. result in as much as \$71 billion in reduced revenues.

Ryan Cragun, a University of Tampa assistant professor of sociology, and two students examined tax laws on exemptions on property, donations, business enterprises, capital gains and "parsonage allowances." Findings include:

- States lose about \$26.2 billion a year in property taxes.
- Capital gains tax exemptions amount to about \$41 billion a year.
- Clergy claim as much as \$1.2 billion via the parsonage allowance.

FFRF seeks justice for Asian atheist

FFRF's letters to U.S. and Indonesian officials and Action Alert to members seek justice for Alexander Aan, an Indonesian civil servant serving a 30-month jail sentence for "deliberately spreading information inciting religious hatred and animosity," according to the judge who sentenced him.

Aab, 30, was arrested in January after posting "God doesn't exist" and cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad to a Facebook group he started dedicated to atheism. The group had 1,200 members.

After a crowd came to his house and beat him, he was charged with blasphemy and persuading others to embrace atheism. He was also fined of 100 million rupiah (about \$10,600).

•••

Tajul Muluk, an Indonesian Shiite cleric, was sentenced July 12 to two years in prison for blasphemy. Agence France-Presse reported that Muluk's teachings "deviated from mainstream Islam and had caused 'public anxiety.'"

Human Rights Watch said Sunni militants had attacked Muluk's village, burning houses, including Muluk's home, and an Islamic school and forcing 500 Shiites to flee their homes.

Missouri voters OK 'right to pray'

The so-called "right to pray" amendment to the Missouri Constitution passed Aug. 7 with 83% favoring it. Turnout was about 20%.

The legislation leading to the amendment passed the House 126-30 and the Senate 34-0 vote.

The ballot question stated, "Shall the Missouri Constitution be amended to ensure: That the right of Missouri citizens to express their religious beliefs shall not be infringed; That school

children have the right to pray and acknowledge God voluntarily in their schools; and that all public schools shall display the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution."

Displaying the Bill of Rights is meant "to emphasize the right to free exercise of religious expression," the amendment says.

Democratic Rep. Chris Kelly told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch the amendment is "a jobs bill for lawyers." Part of the amendment says students need not take part in assignments that violate their religious beliefs.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor said the ballot wording was so deceptive that the ACLU sued over it but lost. "The summary made it appear benign, if not redundant. Beyond codifying established rights, the constitutional change enshrines broad language on 'the right to pray individually or corporately in a private or public setting,' including by students in schools, and to 'pray on government premises and property.' It says all governmental bodies may invite ministers, clergy and others to offer invocations 'or other prayers at meetings and sessions.'"

Gaylor added, "Other troubling language would have a chilling effect on the presentation of evolution, sex education, etc., in schools, by making teachers vulnerable to accusations of religious discrimination by students or parents offended by fact-based education."

The bill's sponsor, Michael McGhee, R-Odessa, also co-sponsored a "birther" bill, a "personhood amendment" deceptively disguised as a "taxpayer protection initiatives" and a "don't say gay" bill prohibiting discussion of sexual orientation.



At least she's of age

Bishop Fernando Bargallo, 57, of the Diocese of Merlo-Moreno in Argentina, resigned after this photo and others surfaced of him with a blonde at a resort in Mexico. Bargallo first claimed the woman was a childhood friend but later admitted they had "amorous ties."

Missouri Governor Jay Nixon, a Democrat, must be called through the blood of Christ into the Light. Call for angelic visitations, divine dreams, visions and encounters.

Kingsley Walker, Reformation Prayer Network, calling for intercessory prayer warriors to keep Nixon, a Methodist, on the right path

Missouri Fast Forward Prayer Guide, 6-15-12

We are sincerely disappointed that Governor Nixon has chosen to give away our religious liberties to Washington politicians.

Pam Fichter, Missouri Right to Life president, on Gov. Jay Nixon's July 12 veto of a health insurance bill with a conscience clause for religious groups
lifeneews.com, 7-12-12

In Memoriam

Raymond Nelson, 1916–2011

Raymond Nelson, 95, DuBois, Pa., died Dec. 27, 2011, at the DuBois Nursing Home.

He was born on May 9, 1916, in Ramsaytown, Pa., to Robert and Sarah Hall Nelson. Raymond married Margaret Pfaff in 1947. Margaret, a registered nurse who cared for him as long as she could during a debilitating illness, survives him. They are longtime FFRF members.

Raymond graduated from Maryville College in Tennessee and from the

University of Virginia. He taught economics and English at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and at Pennsylvania State University-DuBois. He served as a U.S. Air Force pilot in India and Alaska in World War II, rising to the rank of major.

In 1950, he started the Raymond Nelson Tree Nursery in DuBois, which was in operation till his retirement in 1975.

FFRF sends sincere condolences to the Nelson family.

James E. Brodhead, 1932–2012

James Easton Brodhead, 80, Santa Barbara, Calif., died April 6, 2012, in Santa Barbara of a blood infection. He worked as an actor and journalist and was a Lifetime Member of FFRF.

He was born Jan. 30, 1932, in St. Louis, Mo., and worked in the theater in New York after earning a B.A. in speech from the University of Michigan. His Broadway debut (as a juror in "Inherit the Wind") was in 1957. He switched careers in 1963 to work for Time-Life as a copywriter and correspondent. He covered Truman Capote's 1966 Black and White Ball and reported on the trial of Sirhan Sirhan, Sen. Robert Kennedy's assassin.

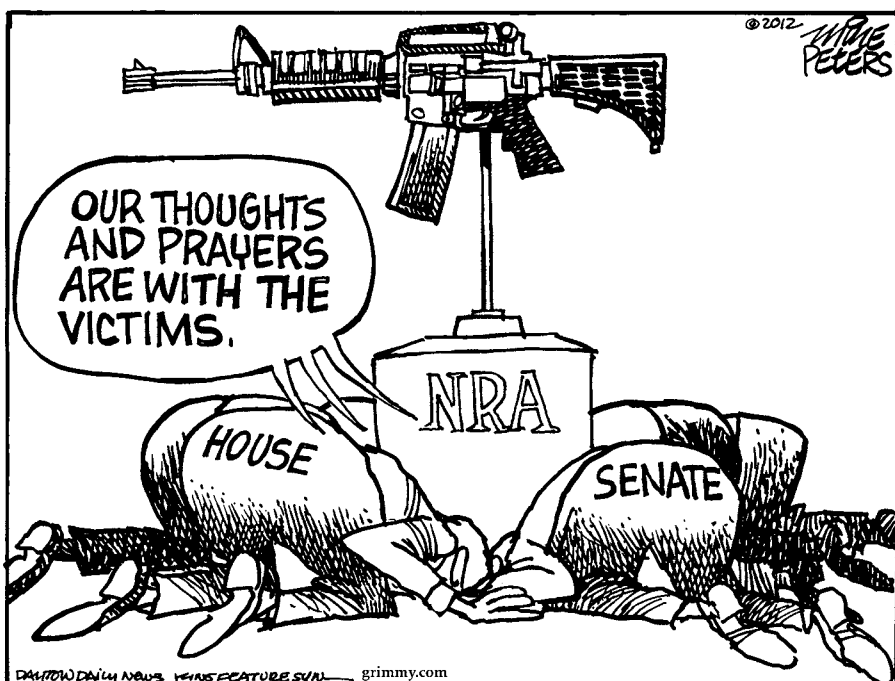
He returned to acting after moving to California and made his screen debut in 1971 in "Kotch," starring Walter Matthau. He appeared in 17 feature

films, scores of TV series and specials and 111 stage productions.

He brought suit against the Los Angeles Board of Education in 1986 against graduation prayers at his son's Sherman Oaks School. He dropped the suit after the District agreed not to pray.

He is survived by his wife of 49 years, Sue Hawes, a former dancer-choreographer and retired attorney; two sons, Will (Dorothy) Brodhead, San Francisco, and Dan Brodhead, Los Angeles; two sisters, Clover (Parker) Gowing, Sequim, Wash., and Heather Brodhead, Santa Barbara.

"Such a talent and such an intellect Jim had. He was always a generous FFRF supporter. Our sincere condolences go out to his family," said Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.



Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Gary Elg, 60, Red Wing, MN: Misdemeanor prostitution-patron. Elg resigned as First Presbyterian pastor after being charged in an undercover sting. "I have failed you as a pastor and a friend," Elg said in a letter sent out to church members. *Source: Bemidji Pioneer, 8-2-12*

Andrew J. Urbaniak, 39, Boston: Possession and dissemination of child pornography. Urbaniak, pastor of Our Lady of Czestochowa Catholic Church, is accused of accessing porn showing girls as young as 8 on a computer in the rectory and has been put on administrative leave. When police with a search warrant came to the rectory, his computer was downloading porn, a prosecutor said. *Source: Boston Herald, 8-1-12*

Rafael Venegas, Santa Monica, CA: Sexual battery and furnishing alcohol to a minor under 21. Venegas, pastor at St. Anne Catholic Church, is accused by a 20-year-old woman of assaulting her at the church. She's not a parishioner. *Source: L.A. Times, 7-30-12*

Woegna Yao Koufoualesse, 44, Adentan, GHA, was arrested at Kotoka International Airport in Accra for possession of 4.2 kilograms of cocaine disguised as toffee lollipops. Koufoualesse is head pastor of Inner Temple Ministry International.

A police spokesman said the pastor denied any knowledge of the drugs and said that he was a man of God and could not smuggle drugs. *Source: Joy Online, 7-30-12*

Andrew D. Jordan, 28, Elizabethtown, PA; **Glad Tidings Assembly of God**, Middletown, PA: Felony false imprisonment and simple assault. Jordan, youth pastor at Glad Tidings, and 4 others staged a mock kidnapping of church youths and their friends in March, said District Attorney Ed Marsico.

The teens, unaware it was staged, had their heads covered with pillowcases and were led to Jordan's basement, where they were interrogated under a single light bulb. One man had an assault rifle.

The exercise was to prepare teens for what they might encounter as foreign missionaries. "This is a sad case for all those involved," Marsico said. "They in essence terrorized several children." *Source: AP, 7-28-12*

Andrew McCormick, 56, Pottstown, PA: Indecent sexual assault, statutory sexual assault, sexual assault, indecent assault, indecent exposure, endangering the welfare of a child and corruption of a minor. McCormick, pastor at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, surrendered to police after being accused of molesting an altar boy in 1997 while he was pastor at St. John Cantius Church in Philadelphia. He's among 26 priests put on leave by the Philadelphia Archdiocese.

The alleged victim said he went public due to coverage of the Jerry Sandusky case at Penn State. *Source: NBC 10, CBS Philly, 7-27-12*

Thomas P. Shoback, 60, Wilkes-Barre, PA: Corruption of minors, 3 counts of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse and 2 counts each of indecent assault and endangering the welfare of children. Charges stem from alleged assaults in 1991-97 when the victim, now 32, was an altar boy at St. Mary's Catholic Parish in Blossburg, where Shoback was pastor.

The man testified the abuse occurred after Mass when he stayed to help count the collection and that he decided to come forward after the Jerry Sandusky scandal "because it was the right thing to do and he didn't want it to happen to another kid." He said he has no plans to sue. *Source: Sun-Gazette, 7-27-12*

Ronald W. Brown, 57, Largo, FL: Conspiracy to kidnap a child and possession of child pornography. Brown, a longtime volunteer running a puppet ministry at Gulf Coast Church, is accused of graphic online chats about kidnapping, sexually abusing, murdering and eating children, including their genitalia.

Gulf Coast Pastor Randy Morris said Brown volunteered for at least 15 years. He also drove a van to bring children to church. Brown claims his chats were only fantasies.

Police said Brown discussed eating a boy he knows from church. Morris said he's spoken to the boy's parents. "They are reeling emotionally." *Source: WTSP, 7-25-12*

Luis J. Cuevas, 67, Long Beach, CA: Lewd acts with a child and 8 counts of misdemeanor sexual battery. Cuevas, pastor at St. Athanasius Catholic Church, is accused of molesting 2 women. Later, a 17-year-old girl came forward to accuse him of repeated incidents of inappropriate touching.

At least 16 other sexual battery accusations won't be pursued due to the statute of limitations. *Source: Orange County Register, 7-25-12*



Robert Thomas, 68, Salisbury, NC: Felony breaking and entering, felony larceny and conspiracy. Thomas, pastor of Little Country Church in Kannapolis, is accused of arranging for his grandson to steal \$15,000 from the home of a friend while Thomas and the man were having breakfast at Richard's BBQ. *Source: WBTV, 7-25-12*

Wayne Stokeling, 50, Brooklyn, NY: Leaving the scene of a fatal accident and driving without a license. Stokeling, pastor at St. John's Baptist Church, was arrested in his damaged BMW 3 blocks from where an 88-year-old female pedestrian was fatally struck in the intersection.

Stokeling allegedly told police the dents in his car were caused by potholes and he was distracted by an ice cream treat he was eating while driving. Further charges may be brought. *Source: N.Y. Daily News, 7-23-12*

Jeffrey Mackintosh, 46, Phillipsburgh, NJ: Sexual assault and endangering the welfare of a minor. The alleged victim told police he was abused on multiple occasions in 2000 when he was 12 and Mackintosh was youth pastor at Glad Tidings Assembly of God Church.

Mackintosh now works as a computer technician and supposedly has no affiliation with the church. *Source: Village Voice, 7-23-12*

Velanmarukudiyil J. Christudas (aka Marukudiyil Velan), 64, Brick, NJ: Endangering the welfare of a child and 2 counts of criminal sexual contact. "Father Chris," a Benedictine priest serving at Church of the Visitation, is accused of assaulting a mother and her minor child, who belong to the church, at their home. *Source: Asbury Park Press, 7-17-12*

Lonny Remmers, Corona, CA: Kidnapping, false imprisonment and making criminal threats were added to previous counts of assault with a deadly non-firearm weapon causing great bodily injury and inflicting corporal injury on a minor. Remmers and 2 members at Remmers' Heart of Worship Community Church are accused of disciplining a 13-year-old boy by pinching his nipples with pliers at bible study, along with other alleged abuses.

Corona police **Cpl. Margaret Bell**, a church member, has been charged with failure to report child abuse. *Source: Press-Enterprise, 7-17-12*

James Soren, Sagardighi, IND: Sexual assault. Soren, a Catholic priest and superintendent of Don Bosco School's hostel, is charged under a section of the Indian penal code that deals with sodomy.

A 10-year-old boy who boarded at the school told his father that Soren molested him in the priest room, police said. *Source: New Delhi TV, 7-16-12*

Earl W. Gann, 56, Corona, CA: 2 counts of lewd acts with a child. Gann was arrested on suspicion of sexually assaulting a 14-year-old junior varsity soccer player he coached at Ontario Christian High School. He's accused of kissing and inappropriately touching the girl in a training room.

Superintendent Ryan Groen said Gann "was involved in off-season training" on June 15, when the alleged incident happened. Gann has been fired.

About 3 weeks later, another alleged victim accused Gann of assaulting her at his home about 10 years ago when she was 12. Authorities are investigating the allegation. *Source: Press-Enterprise, 6-27-11; Daily Bulletin, 7-13-12*

Angel Perez-Nieves, Kissimmee, FL: Fraud. The Pentecostal pastor, out on bond for alleged sexual assault of a teen church member, is accused of asking church members for their dates of birth and Social Security numbers and using the information to set up false ac-

counts, including alleged forgery.

"I don't believe that he actually did it, because people come to his house to pray and everything else," said neighbor Ivan Jordan. *Source: News 13, 7-13-12*

Bridgett Barnes Steib, 49, Zachary, LA: Simple arson and arson with intent to defraud. The televangelist, who is co-pastor with her husband at the Ministry of Love, is charged with setting her own home on fire. Video surveillance footage showed her leaving with belongings from the garage while the fire burned, an investigator's sworn statement said. *Source: WAFB, 7-12-12*

Giuseppe Savaia, 43, Delray Beach, FL: Grand theft. Savaia, pastor at the Catholic Parish of St. Clare, denied guilt in 2 shoplifting accusations but is taking leave from the Diocese of Palm Beach at the bishop's urging.

In incidents at Neiman Marcus a week apart, he's accused of putting an \$895 Jay Strongwater picture frame under his coat and stealing 2 Italian coats valued at \$400 each. *Source: Palm Beach Post, 7-10-12*

Haley Dossor, 71, Kirton, UK: 3 counts of indecent assault on a child and 11 counts of indecent assault on an adult between 1990 and 2004. He retired as priest-in-charge of St. Mary at the Elms in Ipswich, an Anglican church, in 2006. *Source: BBC, 7-9-12*

Álvaro J. Gámez Torres, Pasto, COL: Sexual abuse. Torres, pastor of the Apostolic Evangelical Ministry of Salem, surrendered in Bogotá and is suspected of abusing as many 27 girls and women.

According to authorities, Torres told victims "giving him their virginity would have privileges and blessings, and that if any came to tell on him, their family would fall under the curse of Judas and the seven plagues of Egypt."

Church members put a hidden camera in the church and recorded some of the acts. *Source: Colombia Reports, 7-8-12*

Gordon Solomon, 50, Inglewood, CA: 7 counts of committing a lewd act on a child and 1 count each of continuous sexual abuse and oral copulation of a person under the age of 14. Solomon met the alleged female victim at Christ's Community Church, where he's pastor. The girl's mother called police after finding an explicit text message. *Source: L.A. Times, 7-6-12*

Brandon Lee Hamm, 37, San Francisco: 41 counts of engaging in a lewd act with a minor, possession of child pornography, arranging for a meeting for the purpose of committing a lewd act with a minor, communicating with a minor for commission of a lewd act and sending pornography to a minor by email. Hamm was a volunteer pastor at Peninsula MCC church in San Mateo, which primarily serves the LGBT community. *Source: Bay Area Reporter, 7-5-12*

Joseph LeClair, Ottawa, CAN: Fraud over \$5,000, theft over \$5,000, criminal breach of trust and laundering proceeds of crime. LeClair, pastor at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, is suspected of misappropriating about \$400,000 from the parish from 2006-11. *Source: Times Colonist, 7-4-12*

Robert "Silas" Ruark, 65, Suisun City, CA: 19 counts related to alleged sexual abuse of 6 victims as young as 13. Ruark, pastor at St. Timothy Orthodox Church, spent 22 years in the U.S. Army criminal investigation unit and later was chief investigator for Solano County Health and Social Services. *Source: Vacaville Reporter, 7-3-12*

Dennis Carey, 65, Waterford, CT: Possession of child pornography. Carey, pastor at St. Paul in Chains Catholic Church, has resigned, announced Bishop Michael Cote. He was ordained in 1998 after a 25-year career as a certified public accountant. *Source: AP, 6-30-12*

'[The priest] had his hands down my pants almost every time I went to see him.'

— Plaintiff Michael Zenker

Gordon Rideout, 73, East Sussex, UK: 38 counts of sexual abuse. The retired Anglican priest is accused of sexual misconduct with 18 male and female minors from 1962-73. *Source: The Guardian, 6-29-12*

Curtis C. Wehmeyer, 47, St. Paul, MN: Suspicion of criminal sexual conduct. Wehmeyer, pastor at Parish of the Blessed Sacrament, is accused by a juvenile male of abuse over 2 years. He's been relieved of administrative duties. *Source: Pioneer Press, 6-27-12*

Victor Richardson, Fishers, IN: Domestic battery, strangulation and resisting an officer. Richardson, pastor at New Zion Fellowship Church, allegedly tried to strangle his wife at home. She called police, who ended up Taser-ing him.

"He's a good man, but he's just got some personal issues," said a congregation member. *Source: WISH, 6-26-12*

Pleaded / Convicted

John Astorga, 37, Wetumpka, AL: Guilty of 2 counts of 1st-degree sexual abuse. Three minor victims testified against Astorga, youth pastor at Bethel Assembly of God. He also faces 4 counts of sexual abuse in 2 other counties. *Source: WSFA, 7-25-12*

Oscar D. Perez, 69, Lake Forest, CA: Guilty by a jury of 22 counts of lewd acts on a child under 14, 4 counts of lewd acts on a child and sentencing enhancement allegations for lewd acts against multiple victims.

Perez is pastor and bishop at Iglesia Antigua Católica in Laguna Hills. He met his five victims through the congregation, which operates out of rented space at St. George's Episcopalian Church, and gained their trust by befriending their families and having the boys assist with church services.

Between 2007 and 2011, Perez sexually assaulted the five victims one or more times, starting when the boys were 9 to 15 years old. All of the sexual assaults occurred while the victims were visiting or sleeping over at the defendant's apartment, authorities said. *Source: OC Weekly, 7-12-12*

Sentenced

Robert J. Freeman, 56, Indian Head, MD: 27 months in prison and restitution of \$630,000 after pleading guilty to obstructing bankruptcy court proceedings. Freeman, a televangelist called Dr. Shine, headed Save the Seed Ministry Inc., Save the Seed International Church and Seed Faith International Church. He hid assets to avoid paying hundreds of thousands of dollars in debts.

"Freeman lived a life of fraud and deception, using millions of dollars from church members, and fraudulently obtained credit to pay for luxury cars and a mansion while falsely representing in court that he was indigent," U.S. Attorney Rod Rosenstein said in a statement. *Source: Washington Post, 7-30-12*

Leon E. Piepenbrink, 52, St. Paul, MN: 1 year in the county jail and 20 years' probation. Piepenbrink, pastor at Shepherd of the Hills Church, pleaded guilty to 7 counts of theft by swindle for taking as much as \$300,000 from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

He was also ordered to pay restitution, but that amount is to be determined because Piepenbrink claims he only stole about \$90,000. *Source: Pioneer Press, 7-25-12*

William Lynn, 61, Philadelphia: 3 to 6 years in prison. Lynn was found guilty of child endangerment, the first time a U.S. church leader has been convicted of such a charge, for covering up Catholic clergy sex abuse.

Judge Teresa Sarmina told Lynn he enabled "monsters in clerical garb . . . to destroy the souls of children, to whom you turned a hard heart. You knew full well what was right, Msgr. Lynn, but you chose wrong."

The same jury failed to reach a verdict against co-defendant James Brennan, accused of attempted rape of a 14-year-old. The prosecution said it will retry Brennan. *Source: CNN, 7-24-12*

Michael Moynihan, 59, Greenwich, CT: 5 months in jail, 2 years' supervision and restitution of \$409,000. Moynihan, pastor at St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church, was found guilty of obstructing an official proceeding for

using church money to pay personal expenses and forging letters to convince the FBI he spent the money on church purposes. *Source: Hartford Courant, 7-23-12*

Rickey A. Reed, 55, Smyrna, TN: 4 years' probation and submitting to random drug testing after pleading guilty to aggravated burglary. Reed, pastor of First Free Methodist Church, admitted stealing prescription painkillers from a church member's home, which was caught on video camera. Reed, who pleaded guilty to attempted aggravated burglary, told the court that an addiction to prescription pain medications led him to try and break into the church member's home. *Source: The Tennessean, 7-20-12*

Victor R. Gomez, 72, Bronx, NY: 2 years in prison, 1 year probation, 250 hours of community service and \$250,000 restitution. Gomez, a retired pastor, was found guilty of stealing pension checks from a teacher who died in 2000 and was living in Gomez's home, which fronted as a church. He submitted false notarized papers stating that the teacher was still alive. *Source: N.Y. Post, 7-20-12*

Toris Young, New Orleans: 10 years in prison and \$963,000 restitution. Young, pastor at Bible Way Baptist Church, pleaded guilty to theft of government funds and mail fraud for submitting false invoices to the Small Business Administration to repair the church after Hurricane Katrina. He's already in prison for an unrelated fraud conviction. *Source: nola.com, 7-13-12*

John Calnan, 73, Cork, IRE: 8 years in prison after pleading guilty to attempted rape and 4 counts of sexual assault. A former Catholic priest, Calnan admitted molesting a 7-year-old girl more than 30 years ago. Her brother has also accused him of illicit contact.

The victim, Triona O'Sullivan, now 39, talked about "the grooming process" that started when she was 3 and would play in Calnan's yard near her home. "It took years of teasing and tickling, then more and more touching down here. Then he'd let me run off and have my treat." The treat was blackberries with sugar or a Walnut Whip.

Her mother was tickling her one day when Triona asked, "Why don't you tickle me down there?"

"I remember her horrified face and her asking, 'Why would I do that?' And I said, 'Fr. Calnan does.'" Her mother told another priest, who did nothing and the abuse escalated.

Once, in his home, he had her take off her underwear and was trying to rape her when her brother's banging on the door made him let her go. Her mother confronted Calnan, who denied it, but she went to the other priest and soon Calnan was transferred a few miles away. *Source: Southern Star, Irish Times, 7-7-12*

Edward E. Prince, 62, Hernando, MS: 2 years in jail and 8 years' probation after pleading guilty to child exploitation for possessing child pornography. Prince, pastor at Oak Grove Baptist Church was observed viewing the porn in a public library. *Source: AP, 7-5-12*

Clyde D. Myers, 63, Prattville, AL: 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of possessing obscene matter. Myers, pastor at Prattville Community Church, was arrested after pornography depicting a person under 17 was found on his home and church computers. *Source: al.com, 5-16-12*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Michael Zenker, 43, Elmira, NY, is suing the **Catholic Diocese of Hamilton, ONT**, and the **Pallottines Order** for \$3 million for alleged sexual abuse by the late **Fr. Wilfrid Systeman** that started when he was 11. Acts alleged include fondling, masturbation and oral sex when he was delivering the newspaper to the manse.

"It happened all the time [for 3 years]. He had his hands down my pants almost every time I went to see him," Zenker alleges. He reported the alleged abuse to police in 1990. During the probe, Systeman was transferred to his native Germany, where he died in 1996.

Zenker is pastor at Hope Fellowship, a non-denominational church. *Source: Guelph Mercury, 7-28-12*

Chaim Abadai, Lakewood, NJ, is being sued by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection for refusing to relocate an illegal dump site his Orthodox Jewish Congregation Minyan Shelanu uses to bury discarded religious items. The DEP alleges the site would "contaminate a township drinking well" and is asking a judge to fine Abadai \$1,000 a day for noncompliance. *Source: jewocity.com, 7-27-12*

"Jane Doe" is suing the **Catholic Diocese of Arlington, VA**, **Bishop Paul Loverde**, **Human Life International** and **HLI Endowment Inc.**, alleging she was sexually abused by **Fr. Thomas Euteneur**, who was president of Human Life International and the HLI Endowment. Euteneur is not a named defendant.

Doe alleges the diocese and Loverde gave permission to Euteneur to conduct an exorcism on her, which led to molestation after she was hired by HLI. She claims the priest called his kisses "blowing the Holy Spirit into her."

Doe alleges Euteneur "sexually abused her during working hours and in various rooms at HLI and HLI headquarters" for several months. *Source: Courthouse News Service, 6-26-12*

The U.S. Justice Department is suing the cit-

ies of **Hildale, UT**, and **Colorado City, AZ**, for their alleged campaigns of intimidation of residents who don't belong to the **Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints**, run by the group's jailed leader **Warren Jeffs**.

"The cities' governments, including the Marshal's Office, have been deployed to carry out the will and dictates of FLDS leaders, particularly Warren Jeffs and the officials to whom he delegates authority," the lawsuit states. "The Marshal's Office has inappropriately used its state-granted law enforcement authority to enforce the edicts of the FLDS, to the detriment of non-FLDS members." *Source: AP, 6-21-12*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

Three men who filed the first sexual abuse lawsuits in the Navajo Nation court system recently settled their suits for undisclosed amounts. Defendants agreeing to the settlement included the **Catholic Diocese of Gallup, NM**, and the **Franciscan Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe** in Albuquerque.

The men alleged that former priest **Charles Cichanowicz**, 68, molested them as teens in the late 1970s and 1980s. Cichanowicz, who now works as a mental health counselor, agreed never to work with or around minors as part of the settlement. *Source: Gallup Independent, 7-16-12*

Legal Developments

Sixteen **Ohio Amish men** charged in beard- and hair-cutting attacks on fellow Amish rejected plea bargains and will instead stand trial. The leader, **Sam Mullet Sr.**, said they wanted to send a message of shame for the way he and his breakaway community were being treated.

The plea bargains would have given many defendants sentences of two to three years in prison or parole instead of the possibility of 20 years or more. *Source: AP, 7-30-12*

The Minnesota Supreme Court, voting 4-2, dismissed a 2006 suit filed by Jim Keenan, 45, who alleged the **Archdiocese of Minneapolis-St. Paul** and the **Diocese of Winona** covered up sexual abuse by defrocked priest **Thomas Adamson**, 79, in 1980-81 when he was pastor at Church of the Risen Savior in Burnsville.

During litigation, Keenan's attorney obtained church lists of about 3 dozen priest accused of sexual abuse. But since the case was dismissed, the lists can't be made public. Adamson was never charged criminally due to the statute of limitations. *Source: Star Tribune, 7-25-12*

An appeals court ruled 2-1 that the **Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth, UK**, is liable for claims alleged by plaintiff "JGE," now 48, for beatings by a nun and sexual abuse, including rape, by a priest when she was a child living in a convent home.

Fr. Wilfred Baldwin, now deceased, molested her in the robing room on the day of her First Holy Communion, JGE alleged. *Source: The Guardian, 7-12-12*

Judge Joan Zeldon of Superior Court in Washington, D.C., ordered **Minnesota Pastor Bradlee Dean** and his ministry, **You Can Run But You Cannot Hide**, to pay Rachel Maddow and MSNBC \$24,625 in legal fees. Dean unsuccessfully sued Maddow and MSNBC for saying he advocated killing gays on his radio show. *Source: Minn. Independent, 7-9-12*

William Lynch, 44, San Jose, CA, was acquitted by a jury of assault and elder abuse for attacking a retired Catholic priest **Jerold Lindner** at a retirement home. Lynch alleged Lindner had molested him as a child. He received \$625,000 in 1998 from the **Jesuits** in a civil settlement.

"They can't allow vigilante justice to be ignored," said former prosecutor Steven Clark. "But the D.A.'s office is not used to having pedophiles as victims." *Source: AP, 7-12-12*

Circuit Judge Michael Manners ruled a **Missouri** wrongful-death suit alleging clergy sex

'You knew full well what was right, Msgr. Lynn, but you chose wrong.'

— Judge Teresa Sarmina

abuse can proceed even though the 3-year statute of limitations has passed. Don and Rosemary Teeman sued **Msgr. Thomas O'Brien** and the **Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph** in 2011 after an altar boy who served Mass with their son, Brian, told them of the alleged abuse. Brian Teeman, 14, killed himself with a gun in 1983 at home in Independence.

The suit is thought to be the first Missouri case in involving priest sexual abuse in which the statute of limitations could be suspended based on "fraudulent concealment."

It's alleged that O'Brien forced Brian Teeman and 3 other boys to perform sex acts in the sacristy at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, starting when Brian was 11 and continuing until he graduated from 8th grade. O'Brien allegedly told the boys they would be kicked out of the church, disowned by their parents and go to hell if they told.

O'Brien has been sued more than 2 dozen times since 2004. *Source: Kansas City Star, 6-29-12*

Allegations

A sexual abuse complaint against **West Virginia Bishop Michael Bransfield** has been reopened. It stems from when Bransfield taught at a Catholic high school in the 1970s in Lansdale, PA. The **Archdiocese of Philadelphia** ruled the complaint not credible then.

The case surfaced in the recently completed Philadelphia priest-abuse trials in which a witness testified a priest who abused him told him Bransfield was sexually involved with a teen. The witness said he was raped by the priest at Bransfield's beach house. Bransfield claims he wasn't home at the time and denies ever abusing anyone. *Source: Philadelphia Inquirer, 7-14-12*

Removed / Resigned

Jack Schaap, 54, Hammond, IN, a married father of 2, was fired as pastor at First Baptist Church and chancellor at Hyles-Anderson College due to an alleged relationship with a 17-year-old girl from the congregation. No criminal charges are pending.

Former First Baptist member Trisha Kee said a church deacon picked up Schaap's cellphone to bring it to him. "The deacon then saw a text come through from a teenage girl in the church, and it was a picture of Jack Schaap and this girl making out," she said. *Source: Post-Tribune, N.Y. Daily News, 8-1-12*

Daniel Valentine, 63, Sewickley, PA, resigned as pastor of St. James Catholic Church after a family came to the Diocese of Pittsburgh "and expressed deep concern about a posting on Facebook to one of their minor children." Bishop David Zubik asked the Allegheny County District Attorney's Office do a forensic audit of both the parish computers and Valentine's personal computer after the complaint. That office said no criminal charges are warranted.

The diocese said Valentine decided to resign "for the good of the parish." *Source: triblive.com, 7-31-12*

The Orthodox Church in America, headquartered in Syosset, NY, dismissed its presiding archbishop, **Metropolitan Jonah**, aka James Paffhausen, 52, for failing to remove a priest who allegedly raped a woman and was jailed for

other violent acts.

"Metropolitan Jonah has repeatedly refused to act with prudence, in concert with his fellow bishops, in accordance with the Holy Synod's policies," the synod said in a statement.

The church didn't release the accused priest's name. The synod said when the woman reported her alleged rape to police, she and a family member were warned by unnamed church officials "that their salvation depended on their silence." *Source: Philadelphia Inquirer, 7-18-12*

Alberto Zacarias Cordero Liriano, Santo Domingo, **DOM REP**: Liriana was suspended by the Catholic Diocese of La Vega from priestly activities during a probe of an accusation Liriano repeatedly raped a 15-year-old girl. *Source: AP, 7-18-12*

Thomas Brosmer, Columbus, OH, was placed on leave as pastor at St. Cecilia Catholic Church after an accusation of sexual abuse of an 11-year-old boy in 1968 surfaced. The Diocese of Columbus has deemed the allegation credible. Brosmer was pastor then at St. Nicholas Parish in Zanesville. *Source: Times Recorder, 7-17-12*

Dennis Druggan, Mt. Calvary, WI, was put on leave by the Catholic Capuchin Order as rector and president of St. Lawrence Seminary High School during an investigation of an alleged incident of sexual abuse of a minor at St. Labre Indian School in Ashland, MT, about 25 years ago. The priest denies the allegation. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 7-16-12*

An **unidentified German priest** has been dismissed from the priesthood for allegedly molesting 5 boys in 1966-80, said a statement from Bishop Stephan Ackermann of the Diocese of Trier. The diocese said 15 more procedures against priests accused of sexual abuse are still ongoing. *Source: AP, 7-13-12*

Matthew Gottschalk, 85, Detroit, co-founder of Milwaukee's House of Peace, retired, in part because of admitted inappropriate behavior with a minor 30 years ago, the Capuchin Franciscan Province of St. Joseph announced.

Capuchin spokesperson Amy Peterson declined to elaborate on the accusation, which emerged as a sealed claim in the **Archdiocese of Milwaukee** bankruptcy.

Gottschalk spent his career in predominantly African-American parishes, often taking his ministry to the streets in his brown friar's robes. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 7-7-12*

Tommy Sparger, pastor of North Point Church, Springfield, MO, resigned after confessing "moral failure" to the board of trustees. The church holds services at 3 locations and says that "more than 4,000 people come through their doors each weekend." *Source: Ozarks First, 6-30-12*

Bishop Fernando Bargallo, 57, of the Diocese of Merlo-Moreno in Argentina, resigned after photos surfaced of him swimming with and hugging a bikini-clad blonde at a resort in Mexico. He first claimed the woman was a childhood friend but later admitted he had "amorous ties" with her. *Source: IBT, 6-27-12*

Other

Tomago, **AUS**, police found the body of John Pirona, 45, in his car after he'd been missing for a week. Tracey Pirona, his wife, alerted police after finding a letter that spoke of the pain he felt being linked to a pedophile priest and of his wish "to go nobly." The pain was just too much for him," Tracey Pirona said. "He felt like his children were better off without him."

She said her husband was sexually assaulted by a Hunter priest when he was 11. She said the priest, who can't be named for legal reasons, is in prison. *Source: The Australian, 7-27-12*

Jerusalem Empowered African Methodist Episcopal Church, Milwaukee, is suing the city to stop it from collecting about \$10,000 the city says the church owes in property taxes.

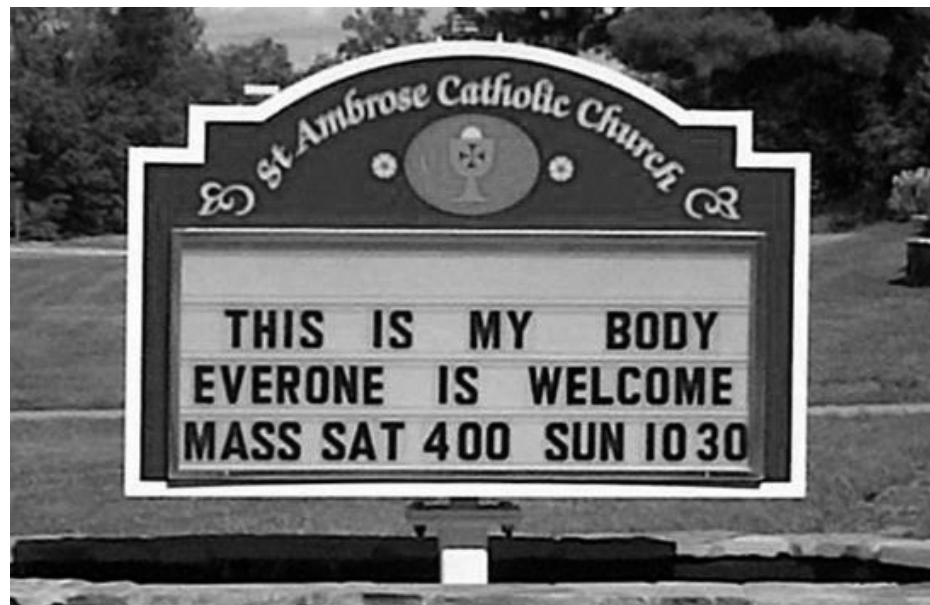
Two of the church's 4.4 acres make up an empty field. The parcel is "excess vacant" land not entitled to tax exemption, the city says. The church contends the field is used for outdoor worship, vacation bible school, carwashes, barbecues, health fairs and other events. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 7-26-12*

The city assessor ruled the **Anchorage [AK] Baptist Temple** owes \$61,000 for wrongly claiming tax-free status for the homes of two of its ministers, **Rev. Allen Prevo**, the church's lighting technician; and **Rev. Tom Cobaugh**, its education minister.

Assessor Marty McGee said the church falsely asserted it was the sole owner of the properties, a requirement for tax-exempt status. The city found out the two pastors held undisclosed ownership interests in their homes. The ruling could be expanded to include the home of **Chief Pastor Jerry Prevo**, Allen Prevo's father, for the same reason.

The two homes were among 18 parcels, 14 of them residences, claimed as tax-exempt by the Baptist Temple this year. The megachurch active in conservative politics and holds more tax-exempt residences than any church in Alaska, according to the state assessor. *Source: Daily News, 7-15-12*

Email: blackcollar@ffr.org



Johns, where are thou?

Members Tom Voigt and Steve Gramlich spotted this in the town of Wabeno in northern Wisconsin. "Besides being challenged by spelling, it appears they are resorting to the world's oldest profession to draw parishioners," they write.

Letterbox

New Lifetime Members in for long haul

The best day of the month for me is when I get our issue of Freethought Today. Enclosed is a check for \$2,500 to cover Lifetime Memberships for me and my partner, Kathy Kay, along with \$250 each for your advertising and legal funds.

Keep up the outstanding work. We'll see you at the convention!

Carol Cederborg
California

•••

Life in the U.S. is controlled by the two things I detest: politicians and religion. I can't get either out of my life, but I do so whenever possible, which is difficult in the backward bible belt. That's why I appreciate FFRF.

In Bella Vista, there's a bank or church on every block but no mosques or temples. I guess that means the Christians have all the money, and power. FFRF is one of only a few organizations that stand up to challenge oppressive religion.

I'm not a wealthy person. I'm barely clinging onto the middle class. But I want to become a Life Member. Enclosed is my check for \$1,000.

Wayne A. Kleeman
Arkansas

•••

After enduring 36 years of bigotry. I am joining the fight for the right to not believe in supernatural beings. Enclosed is my check for Lifetime Membership.

Lisa Morris
North Carolina

•••

Enclosed is my check for \$1,000 for a Life Membership! (I couldn't in good conscience lie to Santa Fe Archbishop Michael Daniel Sheehan in my recent letter):

I am writing to you today to make an *actus formalis defectionis ad Ecclesia catholica*, as described in canons 1086, 1117, 1124 of the Code of Canon Law. I believe my statements below will suffice to meet the requirements of the 2006 interpretation of the canons by Pope Benedict XVI. To wit:

I affirm that I have made the internal decision to leave the Catholic Church formally. I realized that I no longer believed in a god or spiritual beings of any kind when I was 18 years old, and have not participated in any way in the Catholic Church since that time. Furthermore, I consider myself an atheist. I am a Life Member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and a strong supporter of rational, critical thinking. I have also freely contributed financially to organizations which enable a women's right to choose, including Planned Parenthood.

I hereby renounce all trappings of religion, including the superstitions of blessings, graces and indulgences. The concept of original sin is monstrous to me, and I renounce any washing away done on my behalf by the church. I also reject the concept of an atoning sacrifice performed on my behalf by a deity to guarantee me an afterlife. I do not believe that any book, building, place, person, thing, incantation or action is holy or sanctified, nor will I pretend to believe so.

Please remove my name from the roster of the Catholic Church and record officially that I have formally renounced any connection to the

church, and have made a formally recognized *actus formalis defectionis ad Ecclesia catholica*. I was baptized at St. Constance Church in March 1951 in Chicago, Ill.

Please send me confirmation of your action in this regard. Thank you.

Daniel L. Wardlow
New Mexico

Essay endowment way beyond honorable

Here's the promised check to endow six honorable mention essays in the high school category this year. I'm happy to encourage students to express their views on atheism through writing essays.

Writing is so important as an expression of conviction that we adults bear the responsibility to encourage it. These days, writing letters rather than Tweets or badly spelled emails needs to be greatly valued over the ubiquitous iPhones and the like.

I wonder if even letter writing will become an art of the past. Will there ever be Jefferson/Adams correspondence again?

John Moe
California

Editor's note: Thanks once again, John, for your continued sponsorship.

Taking note of FFRF membership milestone

As a member since the 1980s, I always enjoy reading of a new milestone (18,500 members) in your growth. At 86, it's doubtful that I'll live much beyond 20,000 members, but I predict you'll see the day when you have 50,000. It is edifying to read of your success in combating the Christian soldiers. A million thanks for all that you do. Time, and logic, are on our side.

Bill Walker
Pennsylvania

Deconversion more freeing than divorce

Two articles from the August issue (Josh Everett's "Clergy Project: The truth set me free" and "Pie in the sky? It's a lie" by Barbara G. Walker) prompted my letter.

Of all my "freeing" experiences beginning with my divorce in 1979, the freest of all has been my "deconversion" from the dogma of religion and finally embracing the truth of my own mind.

As a relative newcomer to FFRF, I would like to say thanks for all you do. It has been exhilarating to see the progress being made, especially in the South.

Carolyn Lawing
South Carolina

Slogan idea: 'Better Off Not Believing'

As a freethought good news proselytizer, I'd welcome the opportunity to appear on a coming-out billboard. We do not have a law for billboards in Maine, where they are banned, thankfully. What we do have are opportunities for free speech.

I do want to offer a slogan someone else might want to use, in my stead, and for very good reasons. Back in 1978, I spent nearly an hour on the phone with a co-worker's wife, consoling her

and reassuring her that her husband was not in hell because he didn't go to church.

I'm acquainted with believers who live with unnecessary anxiety as the result of "Jesus Camp" indoctrination. I see the damage religion does.

One way to promote reason and critical thinking is slogans. This is one I think we could all use: "Better Off Not Believing." It states not only our freedom but posits that others might consider that they too would be better off.

I suspect that there are more than a few who profess belief while at the same time having doubts, and this would open up the window to knowing they are not alone. Perhaps it would lead to pondering and discussions.

Carl Scheiman, Lifetimer
Maine

Editor's note: Not everyone can be on an actual billboard, but everyone can create a "virtual out-of-the-closet billboard" at ffrf.org/out.

Thanks for reining in American Taliban

I appreciate your efforts to stop [U.S. troops working at Catholic Social Services] and to stop the Augusta Mayor's Prayer Breakfast. We need all the help we can get to stop the Christian Talibangelicals!

Carol Taylor
Georgia

Tennessee is horrid home for atheist



Pam Foster has seen two of these signs in Tennessee and writes, "A 'There Is No God' sign would be destroyed within four hours."

Thank you for putting together a wonderful newspaper. I enjoy it immensely.

I'm originally from Chicago. After my domestic partner retired six years ago, we found prices intolerable. I discovered that Tennessee was not only the fifth-lowest cost-of-living state but had no state income tax to affect his pension. So we moved here. Good grief, what a horrid place for an atheist! It seems there are more churches here than anywhere else, when the population figures are factored in.

Every time I meet someone new, the first thing I'm asked is, "What church do you belong to?" When I reply "None," people are horrified and invite me to join their church. I respond, "No thanks, that wouldn't interest me." They can't believe their ears! They demand to know why! (Up until now they've been smiling broadly.)

I tell them that I'm a card-carrying atheist. Immediately their expressions change to horror and hatred and they start preaching at me. I just laugh at them (which really gets them going) and ask, "You don't really believe that silly stuff, do you?" Their behavior then becomes decidedly less than what is considered "Christian." I've been told numerous times that I'm definitely hellbound. It cracks me up.

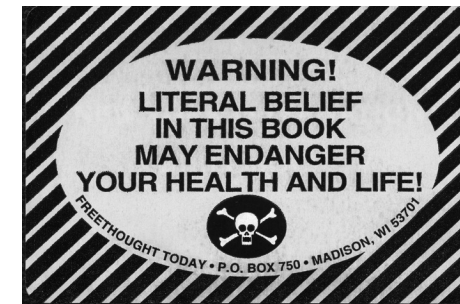
Every time I read in the paper that you've forced religious paraphernalia

from public property to be removed, I'm filled with admiration for all of you. Such courage and bravery!

Pam Foster
Tennessee

Editor's note: FFRF has 275 Tennessee members, and someday there will be more!

Gideons get appendix from FFRF member



I recently made two trips by car rather than flying as usual. I discovered that not all motels have bibles. In those that did, inside the front cover of the bible in my room, went an FFRF non-tract. One lucky room also got a copy of Freethought Today placed beneath the bible, along with your ad, "It's Time to Quit the Catholic Church" from USA Today.

That was so much fun.

Marilyn Owens
Michigan

Editor's note: FFRF offers two bible warning labels convenient for travelers, one bearing a skull and crossbones warning, "Literal belief in this book may endanger your health and life," the other, "Gideon Exposed," describing Gideon's unsavory biblical exploits. Both sell for \$3/dozen at ffrf.org/shop.

Pedophilia a 'mystery' to pathetic pope

When I read the recent article in which the pope calls sex abuse by clergy a "mystery," I was appalled. How in the world can he not know that his church for centuries has been a natural haven for pedophiles? He knows, but he's not man enough to admit it.

It's all a matter of money, like any big business. In this case, the main product is people. It's therefore no surprise that the Catholic monarchy is opposed to abortion and contraceptives. The tragedy of the abused is amplified by the deliberate cover-ups by its powerful, insensitive leaders.

I'm happy to say that the product of this business is fading away and in a short time will be bankrupt.

David M. Mandell
California

Readers react to FFRF ad in L.A. Times

Kudos on your extremely well-written "It's Time To Quit The Catholic Church" ad. It looked good in your monthly paper, but actually seeing it in the Los Angeles Times was great. And the coupon approach is the efficient way to go. Keep up the fine work.

Richard James, Life Member
California

•••

I was so very proud of the full-page ad in the Los Angeles Times today. Thank you very much. I need to start contributing to FFRF more regularly and I will. Thanks again for everything you do.

Mark Manzano
California

'Stay strong: We will prevail'

This letter refers to FFRF urging U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta to resist



Mel and Pal Pendleton

unfounded criticism from 66 Republican members of Congress alleging that the U.S. Air Force is "hostile toward religion."

I don't know how the FFRF staff manages to hang on to its sanity. These 66 members of Congress (hmmm — I wonder if there is any significance to that curious number?) are no more than incorrigible children masquerading as adults while wearing their shiny Member of Congress lapel pins.

Reason doesn't, and never will, work with them. What are these little imps up to anyway? And to think that nearly the entire planet is filled with people just like them!

I'm in awe of the energy, patience and restraint you bring to your mostly thankless work. Stay strong: We will prevail.

Bruce Kopetz
Michigan

Pal's paradise lost

When my little doggie "Pal" became aware that humans had invented a paradise for themselves but had not for doggies, she was very angry and perplexed and her pride and dignity were bruised. She'd always thought of herself as a good little doggie.

Her behavior turned negative. She sulked and pouted and looked up at me with condemning eyes. The thought that I might flit off to that paradise and leave her behind was more than she could handle. She went from happy little doggie to mental case. My Pal always seemed to know what was on my mind, so I reasoned that if I thought this out, she would pick up on it and return to being a happy doggie.

It is all true, Pal. Humans invented a paradise for itself and not for little doggies, but there is a silver lining in this for you: Humans also didn't invent a hell for you.

That got her attention, and she perked up, realizing that this invented paradise was impossible to get into. The book says that it's easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than it is to get into that paradise. With no exceptions, the rest were condemned to a lake of fire called hell forever and ever. Hmmm . . .

See how lucky you are, Pal! The inventors of these places were smelly men, roaming the desert, fasting and thirsting into delirium. I can assure you, Pal, that I am not going to either place. These are all insane myths. Alas, so many people believe in them.

We need to accept and embrace the natural world and get the best of every day that we live, and Pal, as I am 88 and you are 8, perhaps fate will be kind to us and we can pass on together.

Pal seemed to understand, and her

happiness and mental health were restored. Thank you, god — haha!

Many people have caught on to these insane myths and become free-thinkers, many hiding in their closets. Pal and I wish they would step out of their stuffy closets and into the sunshine where the FFRF family lives.

Mel (and Pal) Pendleton
Montana

Standing tall for Wisconsin women

Charlotte Siverling's letter was printed in at least two newspapers.

Whenever a religion's belief or rule is dangerous and life-threatening to a woman, it is the duty of the society and government to demand health care is provided.

A married New Hampshire woman who had already had one miscarriage was miscarrying again in her third month. Her amniotic sac had torn. The nearest hospital had just merged with a Catholic hospital, and because a slight fetal heartbeat was detected, her doctor wasn't allowed to do a uterine evacuation even though the fetus had no possibility of surviving.

Because she had no car or insurance, her doctor gave her \$400 of his own money and bundled her in the back of a cab for the 80-mile ride to the nearest non-Catholic hospital. This could have caused complications resulting in the loss of her uterus or maybe even her life.

These are the following health care services you probably won't receive at Catholic hospitals: abortion (even in cases of rape, incest or to save your life), condoms, diaphragms, IUDs, vaginal rings, Depo-Provera, birth control or morning-after pills, ectopic pregnancy treatment, in-vitro fertilization, prenatal diagnosis/genetic counseling that may lead to abortion if health problems are discovered, emergency contraception as part of sexual assault aftercare, tubal ligations for women and vasectomies for men.

Catholic hospitals also refuse to conduct embryonic stem cell research and fetal tissue experimentation and will not necessarily follow end of life directives if they conflict with their moral dogma.

I wrote to Sacred Heart Hospital in Eau Claire and St. Joseph's Hospital in Chippewa Falls to ask if a woman like the New Hampshire woman would be treated if she had a similar tragedy. Sacred Heart's spokesperson replied they hoped they would never be faced with the tragedy but do follow Catholic Church teachings. St. Joseph's never replied.

We are lucky to have a non-Cath-

olic hospital in my area, but one out of every six U.S. hospitals is Catholic. Bishops say that Catholics stand for religious freedom. If this were true, why then are lifesaving procedures denied non-Catholic women in Catholic hospitals?

If they refuse to provide all health care needs, they should not be allowed to receive state and federal funding. Write your senators and representatives to end the bullying of women.

This is pro-death, not pro-life: When a young woman with health issues, who is told not to get pregnant but does, can't afford an abortion and ends up three months into her pregnancy in the emergency room dying in the trauma doctor's arms.

Educated professionals should be running all hospitals, not medically ignorant, woman-hating bishops.

It's one thing for a Catholic woman to put little value on her own life, but you'd think she'd care about the health and lives of her daughters and granddaughters.

Charlotte Siverling
Wisconsin

Students need support from parents, adults

This is in response to a June/July letter suggesting that a proper response to states that allow a bible study class in public schools is to prime the students with facts to "challenge the bible's errors, contradictions and absurdities." In principle, I support that suggestion and think it would be all right for students who are intellectually and emotionally mature.

However, many students at that age

do not have such maturity and can be seriously hurt. I am one such example.

My father always claimed he was an agnostic, but I'm convinced he was a closet atheist afraid to admit it to others. He and my mother did everything possible to avoid receiving others' negative opinions.

So I learned to wait to express any idea until I knew it was acceptable to my professors. I could only express ideas I could point to in books that some expert has already expressed. I did not feel safe backing unpopular or novel ideas that came solely from my own reasoning.

I admire and respect those students you have reported on in this paper. They are wonderful and clearly avoided the problems I had. I am thankful for the work they did and envious at the same time, because I would have liked to be one of them.

I have very much enjoyed being a member of FFRF and read the entire newspaper each month. I should see many of you at the conference in Portland.

Karla Martin, Life Member
Washington

Appreciate billboards in Washington

Just wanted to drop you a thanks for the new billboards you folks put up in Spokane — a refreshing change from the fairy-tale billboards of local churches.

Thomas Foote
Washington



Fancy meeting you here

Ben "IM GOD" Hart, Ohio, recently visited Floridians John Kieffer and Jessica Parrish (ATHEIST) and other freethinkers at a meetup in Orlando, where Jessica just happened to have her cell phone camera handy!

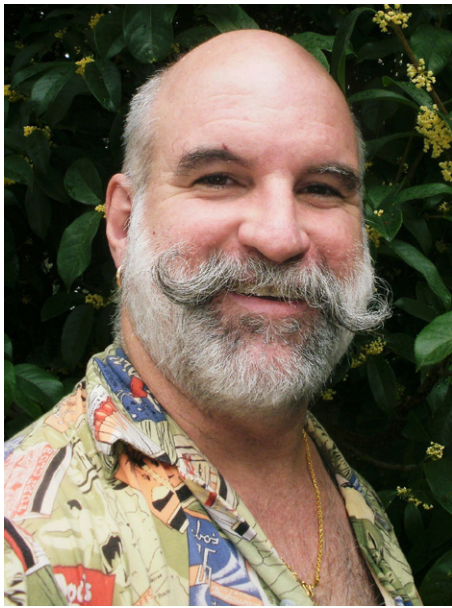


Less magic than a virgin birth

"It seems like this person's subconscious is trying to tell him or her something," says Elisabeth Steadman about this car parked at a California Barnes & Noble.

Irony?

'10 Commandments' chair funds FFRF billboard



By Michael Zargarov

While I was a student at the University of Texas at Austin in the early 1980s, two of my best friends were Jay Cherin and Gray Rober. A gay couple, they were ardent FFRF supporters. They introduced me and my mother, Mabelle, to the ideas of FFRF.

Mother even drove the firetruck, which served as FFRF's float, in an early '80s gay pride parade in Houston. She's now 86 and still vigorous and is really the reason I'm writing this account.

My mom really is the Auntie Mame of literature. She has either taken me everywhere worth going or sent me on my own. We've collected wonderful artworks and incredible antique pieces, which, as we both begin to age and want to be less anchored to one spot, it falls upon me to either try to sell, give away, donate or otherwise disburse. Oh, the Persian rugs!

One particular treasure has been a pair of Egyptian chairs, which were made for and used in the 1956 movie "The Ten Commandments" as well as in several subsequent films. These intricately carved and gilded chairs were copies of a unique chair in the National Museum in Cairo, Egypt.

I acquired the pair as collateral for a monetary loan to a college housemate. The friend from whom I eventually inherited them had purchased them at a big "garage sale" at Paramount Studios in Hollywood sometime in the 1970s. Several studios held these sales to make room in their tight lots for new movies and new props.

The chairs appear in several prominent scenes in the Cecil B. DeMille classic, which starred Charlton Heston, Yul Brynner, Yvonne De Carlo, Anne Baxter, Debra Paget, Edward G. Robinson and many more. One of the chairs gets knocked over in a fight between Vincent Price and a hunky Hebrew slave. This was later identified as the "double" chair (the one used and abused in rehearsals). It was missing a few components by the time I acquired the pair. The second was the onscreen "perfect" chair.

Hollywood auction block

About a year ago, I decided to see

if I could get some money out of the chairs in order to travel with Mom. I found a Hollywood-area auction house specializing in movie memorabilia. I eventually decided to enter the chairs in a "Hollywood's Golden Era" auction. The auction house director was so excited to have the chairs, because they appear so often being used by top stars.

I conservatively hoped for \$10,000 after being told that's what similar items had sold for. It cost me \$950 to have them professionally wrapped and shipped from Houston to El Segundo, Calif.

The first chair sold for \$3,500. My share of that, after fees, taxes and shipping came to \$1,700 (which I split with the friend I'd gotten the chairs from). This, for a chair which Yul Brynner, as pharaoh of Egypt, sat on in a world-famous movie (based on ancient fairy tales, tribal myths and a lot of hateful-harmful bullshit). It was the last movie DeMille directed.

After the more perfect of the chairs failed to achieve its minimum bid of \$5,000 in three consecutive auctions, I started talking to Randy Burkett, who'd bought the other chair. When I learned that he was a real collector who'd once had a museum in Missouri dedicated to his Hollywood memorabilia collections, I grew more interested in figuring out a way to make his dream of having both chairs come true, while still doing some good in the world.

Randy owns a billboard company in Lubbock, Texas. My first thought: the Freedom From Religion Foundation's billboard campaign. I started talking to Randy and told him that I wanted him to have the other chair. I knew he would preserve this unique item from religious and even American history, with care and love as I had.

We negotiated a price — use of a billboard for an FFRF ad, for an indeterminate time in a major bible belt area, in exchange for the second chair.

When Randy agreed, only then did I talk with friendly voices at the FFRF office. They were as thrilled as could be, so I put them in contact with Randy Burkett and the logistics were worked out for a wonderfully controversial billboard near Lubbock's Preston Smith International Airport.

It features John F. Kennedy's quotation, "I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute," a message which is riling the Religious Right in Texas' panhandle.

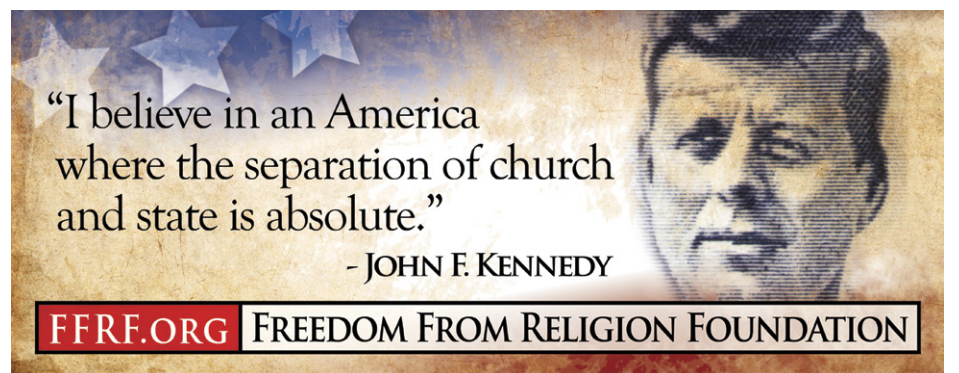
I grew up among and lived surrounded by such treasures as the throne chairs. That they have now passed to the stewardship of another makes me happy. That their absence brings about more freethought in Texas by showing a particularly backward area of my beloved home state that there are indeed opposing views thrills me!

I am deeply respectful of and admire all who work for the Foundation. Service to freethought!

Editor's note: Since Michael wrote this, the outdoor company that swapped space for the chairs sold the space and will place the billboard in a different location or locations for the next six months.



The pair of chairs fit for a movie king and/or queen.



FFRF's new 14x48-foot billboard featuring the words of John F. Kennedy went up off Interstate 27 a mile north of the airport in Lubbock, Texas. The billboard will be up for at least six months. FFRF has about 860 Texas members. The billboard was donated by FFRF member Michael Zargarov of Houston.

"The deterioration of respect for this constitutional principle since Kennedy gave that speech in 1960 is breathtaking," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. The billboard was donated by FFRF member Michael Zargarov of Houston. "It was very generous of Michael to think of FFRF when it came time to select a billboard design," Gaylor added.

"We've gone from a nation where politicians once had to show reverence for the First Amendment principle of separation between state and church to one where they wear religion on their sleeves and think they have to trash the Constitution to get elected," noted FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

Anti-gay BSA earns badge of shame

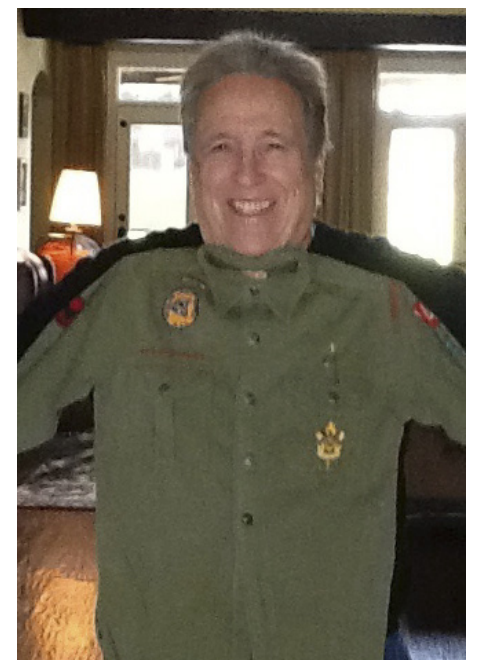


William van Druten

FFRF is creating a "Badge of Shame on BSA" webpage to house photographs of FFRF members with their rejected BSA paraphernalia. Send large JPEG photos with identification, etc., or other responses to: ffrfnews@ffrf.org.

Above, William van Druten, M.D., founder of Lake Superior Freethinkers, a chapter of FFRF in Duluth, Minn., sent a photo of himself holding his Eagle Scout medal and the words "ashamed."

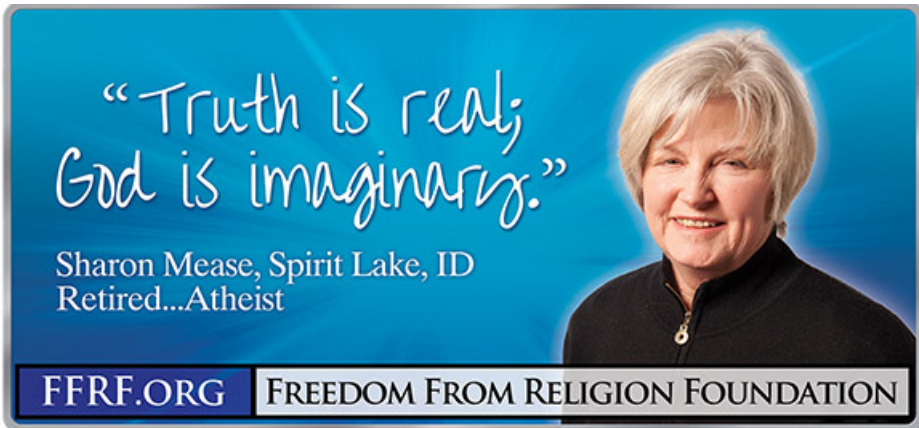
William Dusenberry, retired professor and founder of FFRF's Tulsa, Okla., chapter, sent his BSA shirt and three merit badges ("none for bigotry," he noted) to Jimmy Carter, a member of the BSA Advisory Council, encouraging Carter to publicly resign. Dusenberry says he's "miraculously" kept the



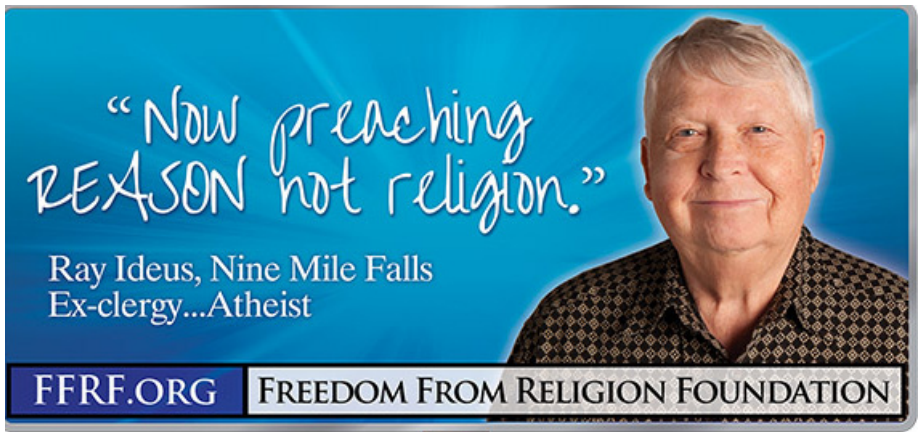
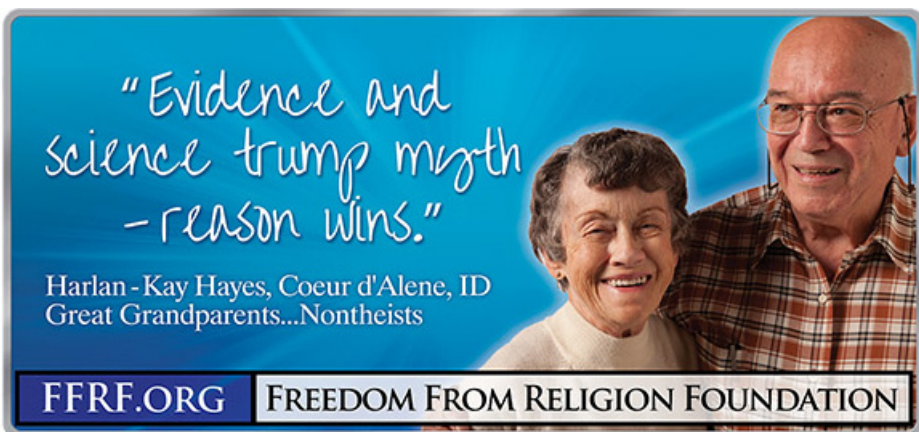
William Dusenberry

BSA paraphernalia with him through moves in seven states. He was "the only non-Roman Catholic in my troop. I had to stand quietly while the opening 'Holy Mary's' were recited," he recalls.

To contact BSA: Robert Mazzuca (retiring Aug. 31, 2012), National Boy Scouts of America Foundation, 1325 W. Walnut Hill Lane, Irving, TX 75015-2079.



Spokane, Idaho nontheists come ‘Out of the Closet’



Seven myth-dispelling billboards featuring area FFRF members and families went up in Spokane at the end of July for a month, as part of FFRF’s signature “Out of the Closet” campaign, in conjunction with its Spokane chapter, the Inland Northwest Freethought Society.

The billboards feature the friendly faces of local atheists, agnostics and freethinkers along with freethought “testimonials.”

David Roeder, president of the chapter and event coordinator, appears with his statement: “On bended knee? Not for me.” Roeder identifies himself as an “inquisitive atheist.”

Stacey and Amanda Shafer of Spokane, a married couple who are atheists, share a board reading: “Our morality comes from reality.”

Joshua and Chandra Alto, a Spokane family, are featured with their children, including a baby, and their slogan: “Atheist family: Good without a god.”

Former minister **Ray Ideus**, now an atheist living in Nine Mile Falls, says on his billboard: “Now preaching *reason*, not religion.”

“Freedom from religion lives,” proclaims Spokane salesman **Frank Bender’s** billboard.

Participants also included Idaho FFRF members who are active with the Spokane chapter: **Harlan and Kay Hayes** and **Sharon Mease**. The Hayeses, of Couer d’Alene, self-identify as “great grandparents . . . nontheists.” The couple chose as their statement:

“Evidence and science trump myth — reason wins.”

“Truth is real; God is imaginary” is Sharon Mease’s message. She hails from Spirit Lake, and was interviewed by Alecia Warren for an article, “Area atheists come out of their closets,” in the Coeur d’Alene Press (Aug. 3).

Warren quoted Sharon saying the aim is not to condescend but to enlighten and reveal there are ordinary folks in the area who are intentionally churchless and deserve equal treatment:

“‘Atheist’ has been a difficult term. It has a such a negative connotation. The point was to show that among local people and local citizens and neighbors of everyone around, there are nontheists, there are atheists, and we have a point of view and we’re normal people.”

The story also quoted FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor about the need to alleviate the stigma attached to those who don’t subscribe to religious beliefs:

“We’ve all experienced it. You’re at a party or even at a public meeting, say ‘I’m an atheist,’ and there’s a collective gasp. We are citizens and taxpayers, we are people who open the door for you at the grocery store. You don’t know us, but we’re nonbelievers. We’re part of the fabric, and we’re coming out of the closet.”

FFRF also pointed out that the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey has found 24 percent of the adult Idaho population and 25% of the

Washington population are nonreligious. When asked why numbers are so high in the Pacific Northwest, Gaylor surmised:

“Some of it is maybe beauty, going into the outdoors — who needs religion when you have all that natural beauty? Maybe it’s that frontier independence.”

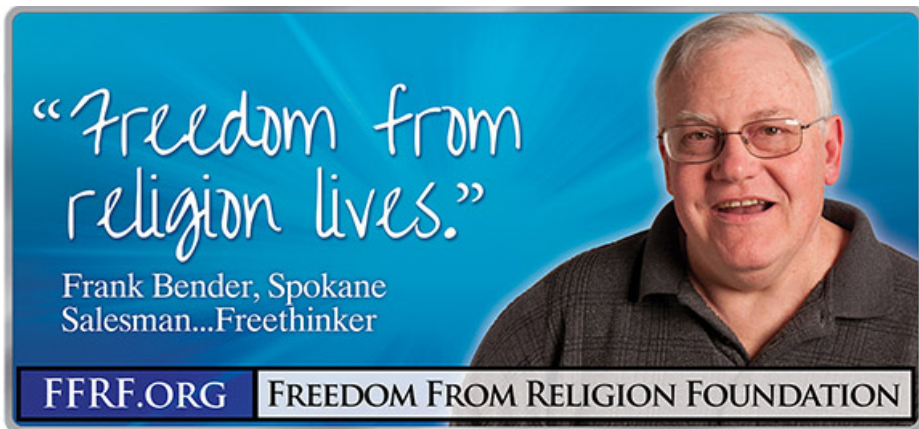
Spokane TV stations also covered the campaign.

FFRF has about 1,000 members in Washington. Spokane is FFRF’s seventh stop in its campaign to introduce its members and “friendly neighborhood atheists” to their neighbors.

FFRF debuted the “Out of the Closet” campaign in Madison, Wis., in 2010, and it has since visited Columbus, Tulsa, Raleigh, and Phoenix with the unique campaign.

FFRF offers an interactive web application allowing any nonbeliever to post a “virtual ‘billboard’” at ffrf.org/out.

If you’re interested in helping to subsidize a billboard or coordinate a campaign in your area, please contact FFRF. FFRF paid for the Spokane campaign with kind contributions designated for billboards and advertising by members across the nation.



Real family values

Spokane-area freethinkers gathered at the Alto family’s billboard.



Sara Paretsky



Julia Sweeney



Richard Dawkins



Teresa MacBain



Jerry DeWitt



Katherine Stewart



annalise fonzia



Jessica Ahlquist

Portland, Ore.: Oct. 12-13, 2012

Speaker list impressive for FFRF's 35th annual convention!

Register now for FFRF's 35th annual national convention the weekend of Oct. 12-13, 2012, at the downtown Hilton Portland & Executive Tower, 921 SW Sixth Avenue, Portland, Ore.

The impressive roster of speakers includes author and evolutionary biologist **Richard Dawkins**, mystery novelist **Sara Paretsky**, actress and playwright **Julia Sweeney**, journalist **Katherine Stewart** (author of *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children*), Clergy Project "graduates" **Teresa MacBain**, **Jerry DeWitt** and **annalise fonzia**, as well as student activists **Jessica Ahlquist** and **Max Nielson**.

DeWitt, director of Recovering from Religion, openly parted with the Pentecostal ministry last year. MacBain, who is now acting director of the Clergy Project, left the Methodist ministry in March with much media attention. fonzia is a former United Methodist clergywoman and joined the Clergy Project in July. Ahlquist was a plaintiff in a successful ACLU federal lawsuit challenging a prayer banner at her high school in Cranston, R.I., and Nielson is a student plaintiff in FFRF's ongoing South Carolina lawsuit over a district policy that sanctions graduation prayer.

Dan Barker, "The Singing Friendly Neighborhood Atheist" will perform at the piano, and he and **Annie Laurie Gaylor** will emcee the weekend. Senior Staff Attorney **Rebecca Markert** will discuss FFRF's legal activism, and **Andrew Seidel**, FFRF's newest staff attorney, will debunk the "Christian nation" myth.

The Hilton room block is sold out, but rooms are available at nonconvention rates. **Phone 1-503-226-1611** or book online.

Other hotels

Paramount: Courtesy rooms for \$149 are being held for FFRF'ers at the Paramount Hotel, 808 SW Taylor St., which is across the street from the Hilton. Call **1-800-663-1144** (make sure to mention your FFRF connection).

Reserve online at **portlandparamount.com**. Click on "reservations." The group code is PHP-GF1600.

Marriott Portland City Center: Courtesy rooms for \$143 are available to FFRF'ers at the Marriott, which is a block or two away from the Hilton. Call **1-888-236-2427** (ask for Portland Marriott City Center, 520 Southwest Broadway, Portland, Ore.) or phone **1-503-226-6300** (mentioning FFRF) or

reserve online.

Other options include using *expedia.com*, *hotel.com* and other websites to find less expensive rooms in downtown Portland's many hotels.

Convention registration is \$60 per member, \$65 for nonmember companion accompanying member, and \$110 per nonmember (join for \$40 and save \$10), \$25 for students.

Sign up for a preconvention tour of

the gorgeous Columbia Gorge, including Multnomah Falls, from 1-5 p.m. Friday, Oct. 12, for a group rate of \$45. Buses will leave from hotel at 1 p.m.

Official events begin Friday at 7 p.m. with dinner on your own. Dawkins will speak Friday night, followed by a complimentary dessert reception.

Watch for updates and more details at ffrf.org/convention.

Convention Schedule

Tentative schedule still subject to revision.

Friday Afternoon, October 12

1-5 p.m. Pre-convention tour of gorgeous Multnomah Falls/Columbia River Gorge (5 stops) Buses will load outside Hilton Portland & Executive Tower This event is optional and costs \$45

5 p.m. Registration opens and continues through convention

Friday Evening, October 12

Convention formally opens 7 p.m. Welcome — FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor

Music at the piano — Dan Barker "FFRF Highlights & Achievements 2012" Powerpoint

7:30 p.m. Student Activist Award Matthew "Max" Nielson, plaintiff, Nielson et al., FFRF v. School District Five

8 p.m. Freethinker of the Year Award — Jessica Ahlquist

8:30 p.m. Emperor Has No Clothes Award — Richard Dawkins

Followed by booksigning and complimentary dessert reception

Saturday, October 13

8 a.m. NonPrayer Breakfast (for ticketholders)

9:30 a.m. Welcome

9:45 a.m. FFRF Legal Activism Highlights — Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert

10:15 a.m. "The Religious Right's Stealth Assault on Children &

Education" — Katharine Stewart, author, *The Good News Club* 11 a.m. Freethought Heroine Award — Sara Paretsky, mystery author/commentator

Followed by booksignings for Ms. Paretsky & Ms. Stewart

Noon-2 p.m. Lunch/Sightseeing Break (on your own)

2 p.m. "The Clergy Project" Panel — With former clergy: Jerry DeWitt, Teresa MacBain, "Shift Happens," annalise fonzia, moderated by Dan Barker; "cameos" by ex-clergy FFRF'ers

3:15 p.m. Debunking the "Christian Nation" Myth — Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel

4 p.m. TBA

6:30 p.m. Dinner (for ticketholders) 8 p.m. Drawing for "clean," pre-In God We Trust currency

"The Singing Friendly Neighborhood Atheist" — Dan Barker at the piano

"Excerpts from Julia's 'Church-a-Week' project" — Julia Sweeney

Followed by CD signing by Julia and booksigning by Dan

Sunday, October 14

8:30 a.m. More FFRF Media/TV Coverage Powerpoint for early-birds

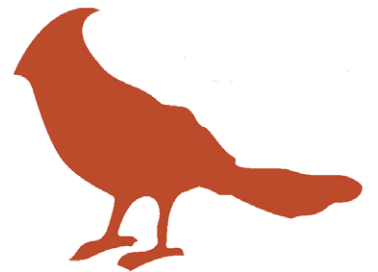
9 a.m. Annual Business Meeting for current FFRF members

Board of Directors Meeting

Adjourns by noon

Return to: FFRF, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701

Freedom From Religion Foundation's 35th Annual Convention October 12-13, 2012 Hilton Portland & Executive Tower Portland, Oregon



Make checks payable to "FFRF"

No. registering

_____ FFRF Member registration(s) @ \$60 per person	\$ _____
_____ Non-member spouse or companion accompanying member @ \$65.....	\$ _____
_____ Non-member registration(s) @ \$110	\$ _____
(or join for \$40, save \$10!)	
_____ Student registration(s) @ \$25 (Ask about student group rate)	\$ _____
_____ Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast @ \$25* per person	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian option ___ no. of vegetarian	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegan option ___ no. of vegan
_____ Saturday Night Dinner @ \$55* per person	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian option ___ no. of vegetarian	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegan option ___ no. of vegan
<input type="checkbox"/> Gluten-free meals required on above selections	
<small>* Meal prices include 22% gratuity</small>	
_____ Columbia River Gorge Waterfall Tour @ \$45 (includes bus ticket).....	\$ _____

Total: _____

Name(s)

Please include names of all registrants for nametags

Address

City/State/Zip

Please include phone/e-mail (in case we have a question about your registration)