

Freethought Today

Complimentary Copy
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June/July 2012

Class voted to pray at graduation

FFRF, three students sue S.C. school

The Freedom From Religion Foundation filed a federal lawsuit May 30 in U.S. District Court in Columbia, S.C., against School District 5 of Lexington and Richland Counties over a district policy that sanctions graduation prayer. Matthew “Max” Nielson, 18, who graduated May 30 from Irmo High School, was named as principal plaintiff.

Nielson has received a \$1,000 Catherine Fahringer Memorial Student Activist Award from FFRF and will speak at FFRF’s 35th annual convention in Portland, Ore., Oct. 12-14. (Read more about the case from Nielson’s perspective on Page 5. You can listen to a June 2 Freethought Radio interview with him at ffrf.org/news/radio/shows/.)

On June 11, FFRF filed an amended complaint adding two new plaintiffs, Jacob Zupon and Dakota McMillan. They will graduate respectively from Irmo High School in 2013 and 2014, keeping the lawsuit ripe. Zupon and McMillan “reasonably anticipate con-



From left are Irmo High School students Jacob Zupon, Matthew “Max” Nielson and Dakota McMillan, student plaintiffs in FFRF’s suit challenging graduation prayers in South Carolina. See Page 5 for more on the story.

stitutional injury” similar to Nielson’s due to prayer at their upcoming graduations. All students describe themselves as “religiously unaffiliated,” meaning “they subscribe to no particular organized, institutionalized religion, nor other prescribed set of beliefs.”

A district policy titled “School Ceremonies and Observations” sets guidelines for benedictions and invocations at graduations and athletic events: Use of prayer “will be determined by a majority vote of the graduating senior class with the advice and counsel of the principal.”

Nielson was forced during his senior year to participate in a “vote” by graduating seniors on whether to pray at their 2012 graduation. That vote was organized, distributed and tallied by teachers and other staff. He met with Principal Rob Weinkle and Superintendent Steve Hefner to express

his concerns. FFRF formally objected, but the district refused to remove the scheduled prayer. FFRF filed suit on the day of the graduation.

The prayer at the graduation, written by the district but delivered by a student “volunteer,” was addressed to “Father.” The prayer asked for the “Lord’s guidance, protection and mercy,” asked students to be “touched” by “the Lord,” to be led “on the path you intend for their lives to lead,” and thanked a deity for “the teachers, parents and administrators that were here through our 12 years of school.”

The students and state-church watchdog FFRF, with over 18,000 members and 130 in South Carolina, allege the district’s written policy violates the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

Continued on page 5



One of America’s best-known former Catholics, actress and “Letting Go of God” playwright Julia Sweeney, recorded a 30-second TV spot for FFRF for its “Counter the Bishops’ war on contraception” campaign. The ad aired about 1,200 times on national programming in regional markets during the Catholic Church’s “Fortnight of Freedom” June 21-July 4. For more about the ads, turn to Page 3.



FFRF placed several billboards, including this one near New York City’s Times Square through July 4, in St. Louis, Mo., and in Dallas-Fort Worth. A billboard intended for Joliet, Ill., was censored. Dioceses in St. Louis, Dallas-Fort Worth and Joliet are some of over 40 Catholic institutions suing the Department of Health and Human Services over the mandate protecting employee access to contraceptive coverage. Those lawsuits were spearheaded by Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York and head of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops. Thanks to FFRF member Mark Casazza for this photo. Turn to Page 3 for more coverage.



A shot of FFRF’s billboard on busy Interstate 30 east of Highway 360 in the Dallas-Fort Worth, which is taking Texas bishops to task for endangering women’s civil liberties.

Inside This Issue

50th
anniversary
of landmark
prayer case

Page 6



Ehrenreich
rejects
religion’s
shackle

Pages 10–11



A Christian
musician’s
path to
disbelief

Pages 12–13



Student activists (left) Jacob Zupon, Max Nielson and Dakota McMillan, plaintiffs in FFRF’s suit in South Carolina, make a lighthearted statement about the ramifications of taking an unpopular stand in their high school.

Meet an Intern

Legal heroes: Whistleblowers, dissenters



Photo: Andrew Seidel
workers, distressed complainants and freethought literature, I've developed more in-depth perspectives about my rejection of religion, religion's role in society and the necessity of state/church separation.

Something funny that's happened: I once emailed the Dawkins Foundation with a minor legal question so that I could better address a complaint. I got an email back from Richard Dawkins himself! This was while I was reading his book *The God Delusion*. I was struck.

My legal interests are: I aspire to practice public interest law in Wisconsin. I have a wide range of experience and hope to use it to help people who are impoverished and/or disenfranchised through a combination of direct legal work and big-picture policy work. Anyone hiring?

My legal heroes are: Whistleblowers and dissenters, courageous people who put so much at stake and often sacrifice greatly to provoke positive change.

These three words sum me up: I really want to blow this question off, but I'm going to attempt it: honest, passionate, analytical.

Things I like: Crafts, cooking, learning, sharing, live music, reading, exploring, social justice.

Things I smite: Paternalism, close-mindedness, arrogance.

Today's most important legal issue is: Expansion of corporate personhood rights. *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* has played out in a number of scary ways that have huge implications for the democratic process. A recent Wisconsin example is the ridiculous amount of corporate money that entered Governor Walker's recall election and, I believe, ultimately secured his victory.

This is relevant to state/church separation because the corporate personhood framework is being used to justify the Catholic bishops' rejection of President Obama's mandate for insurance to cover birth control. Employers can only object to health care provisions on religious grounds at the expense of the rights of its employees to access that health care. In essence, I believe that a system that entitles corporations to First Amendment rights drowns out human rights.

Susan Lund

Name: Susan Lund.

Where and when I was born: Kenosha, Wis., May 13, 1987.

Family: I have a wonderfully supportive family made up of my parents, Barb and Steve, and my older sister, Libby.

Education: I earned my B.A. in linguistics from the University of Minnesota in 2009 and recently received my J.D. from the University of Wisconsin Law School.

My religious upbringing was: I was baptized and confirmed at a large Lutheran church, and my family later became members of a very small liberal Lutheran church.

How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern: I didn't discover FFRF until law school, but I immediately applied when I learned about the organization and heard that they were hiring legal interns. I was finally able to work with FFRF during my third year of law school, and they allowed me to stay on as a law clerk since my graduation.

What I do here: I spend most of my time doing legal research and writing. This involves looking into allegations of state/church violations, finding case law to back up FFRF's legal assertions, and sometimes writing memos to supervising FFRF attorneys informing them that I don't think there is a legal basis to pursue a complaint. I get to spend some time talking to members about ongoing complaints and cases, which I especially enjoy.

What I like best about it: Besides growing professionally at FFRF, I've grown immensely on a personal level. Through exposure to enlightened co-



Hispanic American Freethinkers

At left and right, respectively, are Lorena Rios, vice president, and David Tamayo, president, of Hispanic American Freethinkers, Reston, Va. They visited in June with Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker at FFRF's offices in Madison, Wis. Tamayo founded the the group in 2011 as *Librepensadores Washington*. It's online at hafree.org/.

Newsnotes

Wis. faith-healing convictions appealed

The Wisconsin Supreme Court announced June 27 it will hear an appeal of the conviction of a Weston couple found guilty of reckless homicide in the faith-healing death of their 11-year-old daughter. Dale and Leilani Neumann were sentenced to 6 months in jail and 10 years' probation.

A state appeals court in Wausau declined to rule and sent the case to the Supreme Court. Wisconsin has a prayer exception, but the state contends it doesn't apply in this case.

Millennials' belief levels plummeting

A new Pew Research Center found that belief in the existence of God has dropped considerably in the last five years among Americans age 30 and under.

Just 68 percent of "millennials" in 2012 agree with the statement "I never

doubt the existence of God." That's down from 76 percent in 2009 and 83 percent in 2007.

Of all those surveyed over age 18, the study found, 80% agree and 18% disagree with the statement.

Creationist views change little since 1982

A USA Today/Gallup poll conducted May 10-13 found that 46% of Americans believe in the creationist view that God created humans in their present form at some point in the last 10,000 years. That's virtually unchanged from 30 years ago, when Gallup first asked the question.

About a third believe that humans evolved, but with God's guidance; 15% say humans evolved, but that God had no part in the process.

While 58% of Republicans believe that God created humans in their present form, 39% of independents and 41% of Democrats agree.

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 July 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 June/July. Send to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

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June/July 2012

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

‘Storming the bishops’ bastille!’

FFRF counters anti-contraceptive bishops



Zachary Moore in front of FFRF's Fort Worth billboard.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation went into high gear against a June offensive by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to impose its anti-contraceptive dogma on civil law. FFRF countered the bishops' "Fortnight for Freedom" June 21–July 4 with its own energetic media campaign.

FFRF launched a historic TV ad campaign with a 30-second spot featuring one of America's favorite former Catholics — actress Julia Sweeney, beloved by freethinkers for her play "Letting Go of God" and by the American public for her portrayal of "Androgynous Pat" on "Saturday Night Live."

In the ad, Julia says:

"Hi, I'm Julia Sweeney, and I'm a cultural Catholic. I am no longer a believer and I even wrote a play about it called 'Letting Go of God.' But I wanted to let you know that right now Catholic bishops are framing their opposition to contraceptive coverage as a religious freedom issue. But the real threat to freedom is the bishops, who want to be free to force their dogma on people who don't want it. Please join the Freedom From Religion Foundation and help keep church and state separate. (FFRF's name, toll-free number and website are displayed throughout the ad.) See ad: ffrf.org

FFRF purchased two weeks of airtime, about 1,200 showings of the ad, on an impressive variety of national TV programs, mainly news-oriented, airing regionally to about 42 million viewers whose carriers included Dish, DirecTV, Cox, Comcast, Verizon and Viamedia. Shows included first-run and reruns of programs hosted by CNN's Anderson Cooper, MSNBC's Chris Matthews and Rachel Maddow, "Mythbusters" and even Comedy Central's "Daily Show" and "Colbert Report."

Other networks included LOGO, Discovery, Science and WE (Women's Entertainment). Taking its message to some who need to hear it most, FFRF even placed a limited number on Fox's "O'Reilly Factor" and "Hannity." A similar radio commercial recorded by Sweeney also played in June on "The Randi Rhodes Show."

FFRF produced the TV ad in direct response to the Catholic bishops' posturing as victims of religious persecution, while working to limit women employees' access to contraception.

In August, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is scheduled to expand preventive care to provide FDA-approved contraceptives without charging female employees a co-pay. The bishops claim their "religious liberty" is jeopardized by this guideline, even though they and all churches and denominations are explicitly exempted from providing this benefit to their own employees.

The bishops have orchestrated federal lawsuits against the Obama administration's mandate involving 43 Catholic institutions, most of them dioceses. The suits target the administration's compromise, which orders private insurance companies to pay for and provide the contraceptive benefit to

employees of religiously affiliated hospitals, schools and other nonchurch organizations.

The Catholic Church is lobbying Congress to adopt a church-authored law to permit any employer to deny employee health care coverage if they cite a religious objection. For example, a Jehovah's Witnesses employer could bar blood transfusion coverage for an employee, or a Southern Baptist could bar prescription contraception for an unmarried female employee.

"Most Americans are not Catholic, yet the Catholic Church wants our civil laws to bend to the will of one church," noted FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. "The church is free to preach its irrational doctrine that contraception is a 'sin' to its own membership, the vast majority of whom disregard that teaching and use contraception. But no church has the right to demand that our government deny basic health care benefits because its dogma opposes such care."

Patriotic billboards go up

As part of its "Counter the Bishops" campaign, FFRF placed three strategic billboards around the country saying "Quit the Church: Put Women's Rights over Bishops' Wrongs":

- A red-white-and-blue 14x48-foot billboard went up at Interstate 70 and North Broadway in St. Louis, Mo., in mid-June for 4 weeks. Nearly 300,000 people drive by weekly. FFRF chose St. Louis for its "truth to power" message because the Archdiocese of St. Louis and Catholic Charities of St. Louis are parties to the suit over the mandate.

- FFRF also placed a patriotic 14x48-foot "Put women's rights over bishops' wrongs" billboard off busy Interstate 30 east of Highway 360 in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The Diocese of Dallas and the Diocese of Fort Worth are among the dozens of Catholic institutions suing the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Area FFRF member Zachary Moore, who was interviewed about the billboard on TV station WDBJ 7, said he used to be among the many Catholics using birth control, is now a member of FFRF and encourages others like him to "quit the church."

- For a Fourth of July "grand finale," FFRF placed a 20x60-foot billboard at 42nd Street and 8th Avenue in New York City, taking its message to Times Square and the home of Cardinal Timothy Dolan, president of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops. View more photos of the billboard at: ffrf.org/get-involved/bus-billboard-campaign/new-york-city-quit-the-church

You can find the New York Post's vid-



Photo: Brent Nicastro

Julia Sweeney

eo coverage at: youtu.be/rqd2lwC09FU

(Yes, the billboard is technically one block from the official Times Square, but it's at the Port Authority bus terminal, "where zillions pass by, many of them twice a day," as former New Yorker Lawrence S. Lerner informs us.)

Other educational efforts

FFRF also issued a white paper, "Our First, Most Cherished Freedom: A Statement Exposing the Catholic Church's Attempt to Redefine Religious Liberty," thoroughly researched and written by Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, rebutting a phony statement on religious liberty by the bishops. Read FFRF's statement at: ffrf.org/publications/OurFirstFreedom/

The bishops' fortnight assault against the contraceptive mandate began on the "the vigil of the Feasts of St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More." FFRF noted the irony of beginning with a celebration of two men who had people tortured and burned to death for exercising freedom of conscience. FFRF documented the Catholic Church's bloody history of zero tolerance for dissent.

The bishops charged religious discrimination when federal funds recently were cut off after Catholic institutions refused to provide contraception to victims of sex trafficking. A court ruled against them, noting: "To insist that the government respect the separation of church and state is not to discriminate against religion; indeed, it promotes a respect for religion by refusing to single out any creed for official favor at the expense of all others."

Previously, FFRF placed full-page ads saying "It's Time to Quit the Catholic Church," in The New York Times, The Washington Post and USA Today. View the ad: ffrf.org/news/releases/ffrfs-quit-the-catholic-church-ad-in-weekend-usa-today/

FFRF raised \$100,000 to "Counter the Bishops" campaign, thanks to many kind benefactors of the last-minute effort. "We are deeply grateful for the activism and support of FFRF's stalwart secularists, allowing a timely response," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "We also owe a debt of gratitude to Julia Sweeney for so graciously recording this commercial."

A separate, slightly longer Web-only message from Sweeney about the bishops' crusade can be viewed at FFRF's homepage at ffrf.org.

Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

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
P.O. Box 750
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Freedom Depends on Freethinkers



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • ffrf.org

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

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

A word to Socrates

“Crito, we ought to offer a cock to Asclepius.”

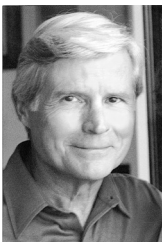
And is death, then, old man,
the purest Idea of all,
the cure for life?

I have seen only one face
return from that gray world
you welcomed: a boy who, at
a beach beyond your strange
geography—a beach
I guarded—slipped away
and drowned. We dragged for him
in the yellowing Sunday sun
and caught him on our hook,
snagged at the elbow. His
hand broke water first
and held there for a moment,
reaching out of that clammy
death to snatch at the low
daylight—a reaching out
that caught no life but mine
who lost him.

Old man, I would not since
that hour exchange the song
of one brown bird at sunset
for the purest Idea in all
eternity.

© 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/).

YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

TUNE IN TO
FREETHOUGHT RADIO

produced by the
Freedom From Religion
Foundation



Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

Broadcasts and streams Saturdays at 11 a.m. Central, Progressive Talk The Mic 92.1 FM, Madison, Wis., and over several other stations.

iTunes or podcasts archived at: ffrf.org/news/radio

Slightly irreverent views,
news, music & interviews



Overheard

The grand jury accused [Fr. Nicholas Cudemo] of sexually molesting 11 girls. He violated one girl with a Communion wafer, let another priest have sex with her and took her for an abortion when he got her pregnant in junior high school.

Philadelphia grand jury report from 2005 referred to during the trial of Msgr. William Lynn for covering up sex abuse by Catholic clergy, including a cover-up by Lynn’s predecessor of Cudemo’s activities

Associated Press, 5-10-12

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

I pledge to bring a rational voice to the Georgia Legislature.

Mike Smith, 62, La Grange, Ga., an attorney and Vietnam veteran who’s the first open atheist to qualify as a candidate for the General Assembly

Sacramento Bee, 5-24-12

They are being brought up to believe that they’re at war with secular society. The only valid government would be a Christian fundamentalist government. Obviously, some comparisons could be made to Islamic fundamentalists in schools.

Boston writer Bruce Wilson, on students in private schools, some of which get public funding but use curriculum from Accelerated Christian Education

Inc.

The Herald of Scotland, 6-24-12

Kevin Devault, 53, appeared in court holding a bible. Judge Frank LaBuda imposed the maximum sentence and called him “a sick individual.”

News story on Devault’s sentencing for sexually molesting a girl from 2000-08 in Hurleyville, N.Y.

Times Herald-Record, 5-21-12

If you don’t like the word evolution — I don’t care what you call it — but life has changed. You can lay out all the fossils that have been collected and establish lineages that even a fool could work up. So the question is why, how does this happen? It’s not covered by Genesis. There’s no explanation for this change going back 500 million years in any book I’ve read from the lips of any god.



Paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey, son of archaeologists L.S.B. and Mary Leakey

Wall Street Journal, 5-26-12

Abortion should be considered a part of reproductive health care and a basic human right, but it’s not. It’s hard to access. About 85 percent of women live in a county where there’s no abortion provider. The distribution is even more dire in rural areas, where 90 percent of women have no provider. Many women have to travel long distances just to get to a provider. That could easily help you understand why laws that impose waiting limits and notifications further distort the reality of women’s access to abortion care.

Dr. Willie Parker, Washington physician, “Why I perform abortions: A Christian obstetrician explains his choice”

Newark Star-Ledger, 5-27-12

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.)

Student takes on school over prayer

By Max Nielson

Early in the 2011-2012 school year at Irmo High School of Lexington Richland School District 5 in Columbia, S.C., faculty members distributed ballots to determine whether a majority of graduating seniors were in favor of holding a prayer at their graduation ceremony. The majority was in favor, to no one's surprise.

District policy allows for that action, so long as the prayer is nonsectarian and nonproselytizing — which is to say, it can be explicitly Christian, so long as it makes no distinctions between Catholics and Baptists, for example. The spirit of inclusion stops there.

I wasn't comfortable getting that ballot in my English class, but growing up as an atheist in South Carolina I was used to exposure to public prayer and the religious status quo. After becoming familiar with Harrison Hopkins' story — a student activist who, with the help of FFRF, reversed his school district's stance on a majoritarian-governed graduation prayer in South



Max Nielson, center, surrounded by his classmates at Irmo High School at graduation.

Carolina last year — I took immediate action. Timing was critical, as I was inspired to take action just 10 days before the graduation ceremony.

FFRF moved swiftly, issuing the ap-

propriate letters of notice and securing a spectacular lawyer for local counsel. I met with the district superintendent to discuss the issue to attempt to reach a resolution. He delivered his decision in

a follow-up email after we met, which ironically states, "I do not believe that Freedom of Religion should be interpreted as requiring Freedom from Religion within the public schools."

As such, the prayer and lawsuit proceeded. I recruited two younger students from Irmo to join the suit to ensure that it will survive despite my graduation and departure from District 5.

This event led to my realization that I have a true passion for secular activism, and I plan to tenaciously pursue involvement with the College of Charleston's chapter of the Secular Student Alliance throughout my next four years of education.

Matthew "Max" Nielson, 18, is the principal plaintiff in FFRF's federal lawsuit challenging illegal graduation prayer at his high school. Two younger students have sign on as plaintiffs.

Max is an honors and international baccalaureate candidate. He's training for a black belt in American freestyle karate this summer. He's an Eagle Scout who is religiously unaffiliated.

FFRF, three students sue S.C. school

Continued from front page

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a similar vote on whether to host prayer at school events violated the Establishment Clause in the case *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*. The Supreme Court explicitly ruled in the year 2000 case that "a student election does nothing to protect minority views but rather places the students who hold such views at the mercy of the majority . . . Fundamental rights may not be submitted to vote; they depend on the outcome of no elections."

The plaintiffs, represented by South Carolina counsel Aaron Kozloski, ask the court to declare the district's policy null and void and to enjoin the district from further school-sponsored prayers. FFRF seeks to enjoin the district from further school-sponsored graduation prayers and to award damages, costs and attorney fees. Judge Cameron McGowan Currie will preside over the case.

The legal complaint states:

"The clear purpose of the policy is to promote religion; it hardly lacks a secular legislative purpose; and it cultivates, fosters and fertilizes a most excessive governmental entanglement with religion. The mere passage by the District of this policy evidences a purpose and perception of government establishment of religion. The policy's text and the circumstances surrounding its enactment reveal that it has such a purpose. The District's implementation of an electoral process that subjects the issue of prayer to a majoritarian vote has established a governmental mechanism that turns the school into a forum for religious debate and empowers the student body majority to subject students of minority views to constitutionally improper messages. The award of that power alone is constitutionally repugnant."

"We are really proud of our trio of

impressive South Carolina students who are willing to stand up for the Constitution despite community pressure," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

She noted that students and FFRF should not have to sue over long-settled law. "The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled for more than 50 years that school prayer is inappropriate and

specifically found unconstitutional class votes on whether to pray. School graduations should be secular and inclusive," Gaylor said.

FFRF to appeal Michigan judge's ruling

FFRF will appeal the May 31 decision by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan that dismissed its nativity scene suit to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit in Cincinnati.

FFRF filed a suit in December 2011, charging Mayor James Fouts of Warren, Mich., with government censorship of its nonreligious views and unlawful endorsement of religion. Judge Lawrence Zatkoff issued a ruling granting the city's motion for summary judgment.

The city hosts a yearly holiday public forum in the atrium of the Warren Civic Center. The display includes "Christmas trees, ribbons, ornaments, a 'Winter Welcome' sign, a 'Merry Christmas' sign, nutcrackers, elves, reindeer, a Santa's mailbox, snowmen, wreaths with lights, bushels of poinsettias, candy canes, wrapped gift boxes, a 'prayer station' and a Nativity Scene." A plaque indicates that the display is "sponsored and provided by the Warren Rotary Club."

FFRF sued the city after the city denied placement of FFRF's Winter Solstice display in the atrium.

Zatkoff ruled that FFRF and local plaintiff Douglas Marshall did have standing to sue but denied a free speech claim: "Plaintiffs, however, do not have an unlimited right to express their private speech on government property."

Zatkoff ruled the atrium display was a limited public forum. "The government may restrict speech in a limited public forum as long as the restrictions do 'not discriminate against speech on the basis of viewpoint' and are 'reasonable in light of the purpose served by the forum.' There is nothing indicating to the Court that the Holiday Display was intended as a forum for religious or political debate and consequently, non-celebratory advocacy and political statements are properly excluded."

The judge ruled exclusion of FFRF's solstice sign was "because its political nature does not comport with the purpose of the overall display — to celebrate the holiday season and promote

good will."

"The purpose of the Holiday Display is to celebrate the holiday season, not to act as a catalyst for religious debate," Zatkoff ruled.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor noted that Fouts has been involved in several other state-church entanglements. "He's shown good will only to people who are religious."

"Fouts may not set up a 'limited public forum' open to all religions while barring nonbelievers or critics of religion."

FFRF greatly appreciates the pro bono work of the Butzel Long law firm, Gaylor added.

Correction

A photo outline on Page 11 of the May issue said, "A Penn State campus freethought parade stopped outside the football stadium by the statue of the late head coach Joe Paterno, whose legacy was tarnished when it was revealed how the program had covered up sexual abuse by an assistant coach for years."

It should have said, "A Penn State campus freethought parade stopped outside the football stadium by the statue of the late head coach Joe Paterno, whose legacy was tarnished when it was

revealed how the program he headed was accused of covering up or ignoring alleged sexual abuse by an assistant coach for years."

The assistant, Jerry Sandusky, was convicted June 22 by a jury of 48 counts of molesting minors. Paterno was fired last November by the university's trustees, who later released this statement: "We determined that his decision to do his minimum legal duty and not to do more to follow up constituted a failure of leadership by Coach Paterno."

Celebrating 50th anniversary of landmark prayer case

By Ellery Schempp

June 25 was the 50th anniversary of the *Engel* decision. I write in remembrance and appreciation.

Engel v. Vitale was decided 7-1 on June 25, 1962, in a truly landmark Supreme Court case, regarding prayer in public schools. It was seminal to maintaining the “wall” of separation of church and state (as Roger Williams and Thomas Jefferson later described the principle).

Before *Engel*, the court had decided differently as to how much various governments could “accommodate” to prevailing religious sentiments, in the *Everson* (1947) and *Zorach* (1952) cases, and ducked the school prayer issue in *Doremus* (1952), conflicting with the *McCullum* case of 1948 as to how high the wall should be.

Engel came down squarely on maintaining a high wall. The decision was written by Hugo Black for the majority, concurred with by Douglas; the only dissent was from Potter Stewart. The decision went against the amicus arguments submitted by 22 state attorneys general and particularly against the attorney for the Archdiocese of New York.

This 50th anniversary is to celebrate the real people who made this history, and did so on behalf of their children. I honor Steven Engel, Lawrence Roth, Daniel Lichtenstein, Monroe Lerner, Lenore Lyons. (Engel and Lichtenstein were members of Jewish congregations; Lerner was a member of the Society for Ethical Culture; Lyons was a member of a Unitarian Church; the Roths were nonbelievers.)

And I honor the vital role that the New York ACLU played in this case and later ones, in support of First Amendment principles, and the attorneys who argued so eloquently and persuasively. (It has always seemed to me that successful Supreme Court cases should properly be known by the names of the attorneys, not the litigants.)

Engel was decided one year earlier than the *Abington v. Schempp* and *Murray v. Curlett* cases. I remember it well. I had just graduated from Tufts and was off to adventures in Greenland that summer. But my immediate reaction was that *Engel* paved the way, and we could not now lose *Abington*.

Indeed, *Engel* was an important precursor to the 1963 case of *Abington v. Schempp*, *Murray v. Curlett* and to many later cases: *Epperson v. Arkansas* (1968), *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), *Wallace v. Jaffree* (1985), *Stone v. Graham* (1980), *Lee v. Weisman* (1992), *Santa Fe School District v. Doe* (2000) and especially *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) and *Roe v. Wade* (1973).

My family had no direct connection to the Engel/Roth families, but there is an odd coincidence. Steven Engel described how they moved to a community called Roslyn, N.Y. The Schempp family lived in Roslyn, a part of Abington Township, in Pennsylvania. We often got mail for Roslyn, N.Y.,



First Amendment heroes Jessica Ahlquist and Ellery Schempp celebrate the Reason Rally with FFRF. (Photo by Andrew Seidel)

and I learned that Engel often got mail for us, especially after the *Abington-Murray* decision. Steve had hoped that the 1962 decision would be the end of it, but the 1963 decision reopened the nasty letters.

All the primary people are now gone. Steve died in 2008. In 2005, I met him in his apartment on Long Island, and we had a lovely conversation. His interests were far-ranging, but he acknowledged that separation of church and state were no longer central for him. He was sad that his friend Larry Roth had died. He recalled the hatred he faced during the court case, the swastikas scrawled in wet concrete in front of his house, the threats against his 7-year-old son (Roth’s children were ages 10 through 13) and the social ostracism the children faced in school. He was worried about whether his grandchildren would be “tainted.”

One thing to keep in mind: In 1959, leading up to 1962, there was no support for these families from groups such as American Humanists, Americans United, FFRF, etc. Some, such as FFRF, did not exist then. It is important to realize how isolated secularists were in 1962, and also in the shadow of the McCarthy era (“under God” being added in 1954). The ACLU was vital.

I think there are important things to incorporate from the *Engel* decision. Some memorable quotes from the opinion:

- “We think that, by using its public school system to encourage recitation of the Regents’ prayer, the State of New York has adopted a practice wholly inconsistent with the Establishment Clause. There can, of course, be no doubt that New York’s program of daily classroom invocation of God’s blessings as prescribed in the Regents’ prayer is a religious activity. It is a solemn avowal of divine faith and supplication for the blessings of the Almighty. The nature of such a prayer has always been religious, none of the respondents has denied this, and the trial court expressly so found.”

- “When the power, prestige and financial support of government is placed behind a particular religious

belief, the indirect coercive pressure upon religious minorities to conform to the prevailing officially approved religion is plain. But the purposes underlying the Establishment Clause go much further than that. Its first and most immediate purpose rested on the belief that a union of government and religion tends to destroy government and to degrade religion.”

- “We think that the constitutional prohibition against laws respecting an

Steven Engel recalled the swastikas scrawled in wet concrete in front of his house.

establishment of religion must at least mean that, in this country, it is no part of the business of government to compose official prayers for any group of the American people to recite as a part of a religious program carried on by government.”

Prayer is no part of the business of government. Could there ever be a more succinct focus on the proper business of governments?

I celebrate the *Engel* decision on this 50th anniversary. Honors go to the Engel, Roth, Lichtenstein, Lerner and Lyons families, and to the ACLU.

Ellery Schempp, an FFRF Lifetime Member, protested bible reading and devotional prayers at his own high school, a protest that turned into the subsequent landmark Abington v. Schempp decision in 1963 by the U.S. Supreme Court. He is a retired scientist who often speaks about his involvement in the Schempp case and the importance of keeping religion out of government.

FFRF welcomes 21 new Lifetime Members

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to welcome its newest Lifetime Members. They are:

Ben August, Roy Crawford, Stephen Dilly, Robert C. Eberle, Sean Gardner, La Verne Henderson, Raymond Moody, Will Scharff, Amy Siniscalchi, D R Spencer, Carol Taylor, David W. Vandiver, Daniel L. Wardlow, David Watkins, Michael Zargarov and Natalie Zett.

Additionally, Lifetime Member Harold Saferstein generously gave four gift Lifetime Memberships to John Compere, Johnny Dust, Anita Romanowski and John Sadowsky. Lifetime Member

Michael Jacobson kindly purchased a Lifetime gift for Mel Lipman.

La Verne Henderson gave herself a Lifetime Membership for her 87th birthday! Many happy returns, La Verne!

States represented are Arizona, California, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia and Washington.

Lifetime Memberships of \$1,000 per individual are deductible for the very generous donor, and mean never another renewal notice.

**Losing Faith In Faith:
From Preacher To Atheist**
by Dan Barker
“An arsenal for skeptics. A challenge to believers.”

HB, 342 pp., with photos
Member price: \$20
Nonmembers: \$25

FFRF, PO Box 750, Madison WI 53701
ffrf.org.shop/books/



FFRF Victories

Vacation bible school takes a holiday

Although kids may be out of school, FFRF knows that the Constitution doesn't take a vacation.

Hazelwood Elementary School's summer program in Waynesville, N.C., includes gardening, crafts and games, and religion. This year on June 18-22 and in years past, the school sponsored trips to a local Baptist church's vacation bible school.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott objected in a letter to Haywood County Schools Superintendent, Anne Garnett. Elliott explained that the school's summer programming, including its registration forms, program handouts and advertisement on the school website, all served to "facilitate student recruitment for religious indoctrina-

tion."

School attorney Patrick Smathers replied June 21 that he'd advised administrators that in his opinion, such coordination "is improper. Though the Haywood County School System takes pride in complying with all laws involving religion, this matter unfortunately occurred."

The superintendent "will implement plans to assure that future summer programs . . . will not coordinate or advertise vacation bible school activities," Smathers said.

FFRF letter ends church endorsement

Granite City, Ill., residents will no longer have to tacitly endorse a church or face a fine, thanks to the Freedom

From Religion Foundation.

The city municipal code required residents to purchase and prominently display sticker permits on their car windows each year. This year's permit featured a photo of St. John United Church of Christ. Drivers who did not want to showcase the religious building faced up to \$100 in fines for each day that the permit was not displayed. A local FFRF member opposed this use of permits and contacted FFRF.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote to Mayor Edward Hagnauer in late April that the mandatory church stickers violated the First Amendment rights of residents. Citing the Supreme Court case of *Wooley v. Maynard*, Elliott wrote, "No person can be compelled to display a message that violates her rights of conscience." The letter also said the stickers give the impression that the city officially approves of St. John UCC.

In response to the complaint, the City Council met May 15 to adopt a resolution allowing residents to refrain from displaying the vehicle permits. The resolution provided that police would not enforce the sticker requirement.

Residents would still have to pay the permit fee, but a receipt would suffice as proof of a permit. The adopted resolution quoted both Illinois and U.S. Constitution religion clauses.

FFRF halts Georgia teacher's prayers

A May 24 letter of complaint from FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel resulted in the principal of West Forsyth High School, Cumming, Ga., agreeing to stop leading students in prayer.

"We have been informed that, on the morning of May 21, 2012, the graduating class of West Forsyth High School was required to attend a mandatory meeting to receive information about their graduation ceremony," Seidel wrote. "We were also informed that, prior to dismissing the meeting, Principal Betty Pope asked the students to 'bow your heads for an invocation before breakfast.' Our complainant tells us that Ms. Pope then proceeded to give an overtly sectarian prayer to her 'Heavenly Father' and ending 'in Jesus' name.'"

Forsyth County Schools Superintendent L.C. Evans responded May 31 and said the principal "admitted that the prayer had been said, indicated that she did not mean to offend anyone and acknowledged that in the future, prayers will not be delivered in such a setting."

FFRF tackles coach's football prayers

An Auburn [Wash.] High School football coach will no longer lead the team in prayer before games, nor will any other school district employees. The prayers took place in the locker room, with team members and coaches bowing their heads and taking a knee. Everyone in the locker room felt obligated to participate, according to FFRF's complainant.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote May 23 to Timothy Cummings, the school district's assistant superintendent of human resources, about the illegal prayers and concerns that other schools were allowing staff to lead prayer.

Cummings responded June 1 to say that "the school district's athletic di-

rector has sent a memo to all building athletic directors to desist immediately with organized team prayers by coaches." He also sent a copy of FFRF's letter to all administrators and noted that "Principals will need to monitor closely so that staff refrains from leading prayers in school." The district will also be hosting an in-service on "Constitutionality of Prayer in Public Schools."

FFRF sacks football prayer in Alabama

Football coaches at Hoover [Ala.] High School will no longer engage in pregame locker room prayers. FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to alert Superintendent Andy Craig to the constitutional violation Jan. 6.

FFRF received confirmation from the school district's attorney June 4 that coaches would not lead prayer or arrange for other adults to pray before football games in the future.

Bible distribution ended in Tennessee

Tullahoma [Tenn.] City Schools will prohibit bible distribution after receiving an FFRF complaint letter.

Fifth-graders at East Lincoln Elementary School were told by teachers to come up and take a bible in their classrooms. Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt warned Superintendent Dan Lawson in a May 21 letter that "Courts uniformly have held the distribution of bibles to students at public schools during instructional time is prohibited."

In a May 29 response, Lawson wrote that he would advise principals to prohibit such distribution in the future, assuring FFRF that "we fully adhere to a belief that we are responsible to be neutral in matters of religion."

Cross removed from Nebraska state park

Indian Caves State Park in Shubert, Neb., removed a large wooden cross from public property after receiving an FFRF letter of complaint May 22.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to Ron Stave, chair of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, "No court of final resort has ever upheld the government's permanent display of a Latin cross on public land as constitutional. The inherent religious significance of the Latin cross is undeniable and is not disguisable."

Stave replied the next day to say that the cross had been removed.

County ends prayer at training luncheon

Christian prayers by government employees in Mecklenburg County, N.C., were silenced. FFRF acted on complaints from three county employees about prayers at a mandatory training luncheon for the county's Department of Social Services. In a Feb. 8 letter to DSS Director Mary Wilson, Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt objected to the sectarian prayers. Schmitt wrote an April 18 follow-up letter.

A county attorney responded April 23 that "the matter has been addressed and is resolved. The county and DSS are very much aware of constitutional constraints placed on governmental behavior."

Win for the home team



The U.S. Supreme Court announced June 25 it will not hear an appeal of a 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruling that the 43-foot-tall Mount Soledad cross on public property in La Jolla, Calif., is unconstitutional. It's a great legal victory for cross challenger Steve Trunk, a longtime FFRF Board Member and Life Member (and FFRF's third Atheist in Foxhole awardee). The suit was first filed in 1989 by the late Philip Paulson. Trunk joined the suit while Paulson was dying of cancer.

FFRF letter blocks Texas football prayer

Coaches will no longer encourage students to pray in the locker room at McAllen [Texas] High School. McAllen’s head football coach reportedly asked a student to recite the Lord’s Prayer before each game.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote Feb. 1 to Superintendent James Ponce: “The coaches’ apparent organizing and obvious participation in a team prayer constitutes an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion.”

Assistant Superintendent Mike Barrera responded after an April 18 follow-up letter, writing on May 9 that the district “has taken steps to orient staff and heighten awareness about the proper procedures involved in student-led prayers at public events.”

No longer will ‘God richly bless you’

Massachusetts’ Health and Human Services and Department of Children and Families will now refrain from making inappropriate religious references in their correspondence. An HHS employee forwarded FFRF an official letter from a DCF employee which included the phrase “may God richly bless you.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt noted in her Jan. 25 complaint letter to HHS Chief of Staff Stacey Monahan that “the U.S. Supreme Court has held that public officials may not seek to advance or promote religion.”

Monahan replied after FFRF sent a March 19 follow-up letter. She said the departments “regret any offense engendered,” and affirmed that they would “caution employees generally regarding inappropriate religious references in communications made in their official capacities.”

School religious materials draw FFRF scrutiny

Lewis County Intermediate School (Hohenwald, Tenn.) will stop teachers from handing out religious materials in the classroom. A local parent contacted FFRF after his fifth-grader came home on separate occasions with a bible and a permission slip for summer vacation bible school.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote May 23 to Director of Schools Benjamin Pace to note the constitutional violations. Pace replied June 7 to say that the district would revisit policy

on materials that are sent out.

FFRF mutes religious music at school

Preschoolers at Herman Leimbach Elementary School (Elk Grove, Calif.) did not sing “God Bless America” at their June 14 graduation after receiving Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel’s June 12 letter of complaint to Superintendent Steven Ladd.

“Because this is a graduation for preschool students as young as four years old, Elk Grove United School District must consider how the messages it sends are perceived by its youngest, most impressionable students,” wrote Seidel.

Seidel spoke with FFRF’s local complainant the next day, who reported that the administration agreed to remove the song from both the graduation program and the school’s future repertoire.

FFRF educates pious Texas on Constitution

Byron Nelson High School (Fort Worth, Texas) will no longer mix prayer with school-sponsored assemblies. FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt sent a June 1 letter to Superintendent Karen Rue outlining significant “constitutional concerns” brought on by an end-of-the-year assembly. A prayer was delivered during an event to honor the senior class. A local complainant told FFRF that school officials had full knowledge of the prayer before it was given and that the assembly was mandatory.

An attorney for the school district replied June 18, “The district has recently provided its administrators and educators with in-service training over a variety of issues, including those addressed in your letter.” He added that the district staff was specifically trained on the “‘do’s and don’ts’ of religion in public schools.”

FFRF excises AFB’s surgical unit bibles

FFRF put an end to the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base’s practice of placing bibles in the medical center’s waiting rooms.



Photo: Scott Colson

Defenders of the Constitution

FFRF’s current legal team includes three interns who are first-year law students. From left are Ben Zich, Wake Forest University; J.J. Rolling, UW-Madison; and Maddy Ziegler, UW-Madison. To Maddy’s right are staff attorneys Andrew Seidel, Rebecca Markert, Patrick Elliott and Stephanie Schmitt.

Prior to FFRF’s complaint, the Wright-Patterson Medical Center displayed Gideon bibles throughout its surgical unit waiting room. These bibles were the only religious materials available to patients at this government-run facility. FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote to facility management on April 27, 2012. Schmitt wrote that “providing such material to patients and guests sends the message that they are expected to want to read the religious publications and that the hospital endorses the message found in the material.” She added that “government-run hospitals have a constitutional obligation to remain neutral towards religion.”

Schmitt noted that if a patient desires to read religious material during their hospital visit “they can bring their own.”

A local resident informed FFRF on June 26 that all bibles have been removed from the surgical unit waiting room.

FFRF stops information distribution to church

Bret Harte Union High School (An-

gels Camp, Calif.) will stop distributing student contact information to and supporting a baccalaureate program at St. Andrew’s Catholic Church.

A Bret Harte student contacted FFRF after receiving an invitation to a graduation Mass at St. Andrew’s. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote Superintendent Michael Chimente on June 18 to take issue with this constitutional violation, calling it “shocking that a school, entrusted with the care, education and protection of minors, would give children’s information over to an organization known to harbor and shield sexual predators.”

Seidel emphasized that the “Stockton Diocese, of which Angels Camp is a part, has a sordid history of priests sexually abusing minors (at least 10 priests have been accused of sexual abuse of minors, two recently fled to Ireland).”

One of the most notorious is Fr. Oliver Francis O’Grady, who fled to his native Ireland and has admitted molesting at least 25 children.

Chimente called June 26 to say the school would stop distributing students’ information to religious institutions and stop supporting the baccalaureate at St. Andrew’s.



While more than nine in 10 Americans would vote for a presidential candidate who is black, a woman, Catholic, Hispanic, or Jewish, significantly smaller percentages would vote for one who is an atheist (54%) or Muslim (58%). Americans’ willingness to vote for a Mormon (80%) or gay or lesbian (68%) candidate falls between these two extremes.

Gallup Poll, June 7-10
gallup.com, 6-21-12

Much as I wish I could encourage the discontented, the Catholics of open minds and open hearts, to stay put and fight the good fight, this is a lost cause. Donohue is right. Summon your fortitude, and just go. If you are not getting the spiritual sustenance you need, if you are uneasy being part of an institution out of step with your conscience — then go. The restive nuns who are planning a field trip to Rome for a bit

Overheard

of dialogue? Be assured, unless you plan to grovel, no one will be listening. Sisters, just go. Bill Donohue will hold the door for you.

Bill Keller, former New York Times executive editor, reviewing Catholic League President Bill Donohue’s book Why Catholicism Matters
Catholic Culture, 6-18-12

Are you tired of being treated like an abused dog by the Catholic Church? Then drop the dogma and quit. After all, they quit you, your family, and your moderate belief system a long time ago.

Columnist Wayne Besen, “Exit, don’t enable the Roman Catholic Church”
Truth Wins Out, 6-19-12

I will always call it the Crystal Cathedral.

Tanya Kirkland, on the name change to Christ Cathedral that went with selling Pastor Robert Schuller’s California

megachurch to the Catholic Diocese of Orange for \$57.5 million
Orange County Register, 6-9-12

Christianity didn’t spread through the Americas with the love of Jesus. It spread through the bloody sword of Spain and the European settlers and slave traders. Many U.S. citizens of African heritage recognize that Christianity was the religion of their ancestors’ oppressors and Biblical passages were used to justify slavery. Some reject Christianity but then embrace Islam that adheres to the same god of Abraham. This is akin to protesting meat by eating beef instead of pork. The only ones who have truly broken the chains are those who reject all Abrahamic faiths.

Author James Kirk Wall, “Black atheists break one more set of chains”
chicagonow.com, 6-25-12

Not afraid to be a minority of one

By Fairfid Caudle

I am writing to tell you about the June 8 Catholic rally in New York City. I found out where it was being held from the email that FFRF sent, which included a banner to print out.

It was much too large to print on my home printer at home, so I called my local Staples early the next morning to find out if they could print it from an email forwarded to them. The result was a beautiful 1x3-foot laminated banner on heavy paper for a very reasonable cost, saying “Quit the Church — Put Women’s Rights Over Bishops’ Wrongs.”

The rally was held in front of Federal Hall at 26 Wall St. in Manhattan. A speaker told attendees the site was selected because it was where James Madison introduced the Bill of Rights in the First Congress. The First Amendment’s Establishment Clause forbids government from establishing religion in any way.

This was the crux of the Catholics’ argument, that their so-called “religious freedom” was trampled on by the Obama administration’s health care proposal, later altered in a compromise, to ensure that all women had ac-



Lifetime Member Fairfid Caudle poses with her “Quit the Church” banner to protest the Catholic Church. (Photo by Sheridan Chapin)

cess to reproductive health care services, particularly contraception, which is contrary to the Catholic point of view.

I was interviewed and photographed by a journalist from the Brooklyn Diocese. He said he was seeking “opposing voices” to balance coverage of the event. I gave permission to use this material.

I can’t tell you how many people came up to me and photographed the banner and said things such as that they would pray for me, etc. I got into discussions with several people and tried to articulate why I believed that what the Catholic Church called “religious freedom” was in reality an attempt to prevent any woman, including those

who worked for a Catholic employer, from having access to contraceptives through their health insurance.

I argued in vain that no one was required to use contraception even if available in their health care program. Over and over people said that “contraception is easy to get and cheap, about \$9 a month, and so women can get it if they want it. The Catholic Church just doesn’t want to pay for it.”

I was the *only* opposing voice there, as far as I could tell. There seemed to be 100 to 200 demonstrators, many with signs being handed out opposing “ObamaCare” and abortion and anything else that the Catholic Church opposes in this regard. There were prayers and hymns. Speakers included, among others, a Catholic female physician, a lawyer and Martin Luther King Jr.’s granddaughter (or so I was told).

The rally’s organization and the fervor of the onlookers was very sobering and made clear the enormous battle being waged as well as the reality of what we are up against.

I learned that it’s very difficult to be a minority of one in the face of such numbers. At least I still have my beautiful banner for another day!

Fairfid Caudle is a Lifetime Member from New York.

Great activism in city named for Thomas Jefferson

I was alone in my activism on the May 3 National Day of Prayer in Jefferson City, Mo. I made several signs, including KEEP PRAYER OUT OF THE CAPITOL. THEY HAVE A LOT OF WORK TO DO! The first reaction I got while waiting at the bus stop near my home was a neighbor giving me thumbs-up and a smile when he saw my signs as he mowed his lawn.

The Capitol was surrounded by a motorcycle gang of several dozen

Christians, with amplified Christian music blaring across the grounds. I didn’t see any media all day. In the morning, I established myself on the edge of a large fountain which is the grand centerpiece of the grounds, with my signs facing the folding chairs set up on the lawn.

I was approached by a woman who graciously granted me her permission to have my opinion and assured me that she will pray for me anyway. She

soon returned with about a dozen people, mostly men, who told me that my position on prayer is why the country is in the sad state that it is today.

I said, “I can see that you came over here to block the view of my signs, and I will not engage with you.” To their credit, they moved aside so that my signs were again visible, but then the men took turns praying aloud. I kept reading a magazine. As they left, one said to me, “You know, young lady (I’m

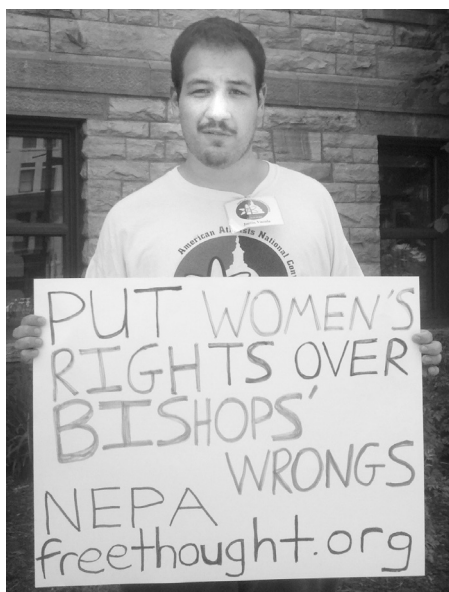
55), this country was founded on —

I finished his sentence for him: “the separation of church and state.” And they walked away.

I had also written to my state legislators and other state officials to tell them that I expect them to do any praying they may do on their own time and not while they’re on state property working for the people.

**Sue Gibson
Missouri**

Point, Counter-point?



Could this be a women’s health expert disguised as a nun in Scranton, Pa.? (Justin Vacula photo)

Above left: FFRF member Justin Vacula made good use of an FFRF Action Alert to show up as the sole protester at the June 8 Catholic rally at Courthouse Square in Scranton, Pa. Justin is also a plaintiff in FFRF’s suit challenging Pennsylvania declaring 2012 as the Year of the Bible. Interviewed at the rally by Go Lackawanna, he said, “The Constitution is explicitly godless. It’s a secular document. The government is anything but founded on religion. A lot of the founding fathers were deistic. These people are talking about religious freedom, but if they’re really for religious freedom, it wouldn’t be about their Christian beliefs.”



FFRF staff and volunteers counterpicket in Madison



FFRF led a protest of the Fortnight of Freedom rally by the Catholic Church at the Federal Courthouse in Madison, Wis., on June 8. Bottom photo: Dan Barker being harangued. (Photos by Andrew Seidel)

Ehrenreich accepts Emperor, rejects religion’s shackles



Barbara Ehrenreich displays her new honor.

Barbara Ehrenreich (atheist, feminist, author, essayist and columnist) gave this speech March 24 in acceptance of her Emperor Has No Clothes Award in Washington at FFRF’s post-Reason Rally gala dinner.

By Barbara Ehrenreich

Now, I have to hold it, OK? I think it’s anatomically correct, but there’s a fig leaf in case you’re curious. Thank you very much, Dan. I will be very proud of it as will my family.

It is an honor to be with you. I’m in so many settings where I am the only atheist, the only “out” atheist, and I kind of feel that whatever the subject is, I have got to get that in there somewhere. You know, particularly the idea that you cannot be moral, you cannot be socially involved or socially conscious unless you are with the “God Party.”

I thought I would go a little against the grain here with some dogmatic statements about God. Yes, I am going to talk about God. What qualifies me to do that? Well, I have read a lot of theology, surprisingly perhaps, a lot of the history of religion, and believe me

God does not care about your weight-loss issues.

this is very relevant, a huge amount of science fiction, which I am going to draw on. Plus since I have this award, I can now say anything, I think, I am entitled.

I wish we had the people picketing outside [Westboro Baptists] in here, because they seem to be experts, too. This is Saturday night, and I don’t know what all of you are planning to do for the rest of it, but I do know absolutely for sure that God does not care if you do it with contraceptives. He or she does not care if you do it with a person of the same sex as yourself, whether you are married or single, any of the rest of that.

In fact, if you search the bible, you will find no reference to birth control or gay marriage, and you will not find a word, strangely, about stem cell research. I have searched.

Let me say a little bit about abortion, since that is a major issue with the godly now. As a former biologist, I will say that if God cared about each fertilized human egg, he would not let an estimated 60% of them die each month before they get implanted in the uterus, flushed out with the menstrual flow.

They are killed by the deity him or herself, or at least not cared for by the deity. Unless of course you want to argue — I am always afraid to bring up this plain biological fact because someone is going to say, “Oh my god, we have to provide Christian burials for tampons” — it will get harder to dispose of a tampon than a Quran.

Where did the idea ever come from that God is called pro-life? I mean the people that say that, I am just saying pro-life here without any judgment attached to it. What about tsunamis?

What would Jesus eat?

This is equally dogmatic: God does not care about your weight-loss issues.



Barbara Ehrenreich

You may wonder why I bring that up, but if you Google Jesus and quote weight loss, you will get millions of entries. A lot of people are convinced that Jesus wants them to be thin and that he has the best diet plan on the market.

You can contribute this to divine revelation on my part, but God does not care if you lose that last five pounds. Nor, sadly, does he seem to care if we are nice to each other, whether we are kind and we share, if we are nonviolent, whether we care for each other.

Those are human values, they do not come from some divine or extra-human source, and there are no rewards in the afterlife for those who put them into practice. In fact, if by some fluke or miscarriage of divine justice, I am ever offered a place in heaven, I will have to turn it down. Not only because my friends and family will be in the other place. Face it, something

that seems very clear to me about the teachings of Jesus, whom I greatly admire, is that if you were offered a place in heaven that you would have to turn it down and give it to some poor sinner so that he or she does not have to spend eternity in hell, that would be the “Christian” thing to do.

I am just putting them on notice about that in case I should ever be put into that position. Now as for God’s particular interest in us or agenda for us in general, whatever issue you look at, sex or social morality, all the evidence points in one direction. He is just not that into us.

You may be wondering why talk about “God” at all. This is a Freedom From Religion celebration, not a theology lecture. If God is what they say — perfectly good and loving and all-powerful — then of course he doesn’t exist. It is impossible, as so many have pointed out over the centuries, for



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker presents Barbara Ehrenreich with the prestigious ‘Emperor Has No Clothes’ Award. (Photos: Andrew Seidel)

some deity to be both all-powerful and all-good. As Nietzsche or Stendhal said (it's attributed to both), "God's only excuse is that he doesn't exist."

There is no way to reconcile all that power and goodness. We won that debate. Long before Dawkins and the New Atheists came along, we won that, it's over. Ever hear of the great American nonbelievers like Robert Ingersoll, anybody? Oh wow, I don't often find many people who know.

Imagine cosmic 'others'

Now I am going to ask you to get a little bit more out of your comfort zone and think in more general terms. Forget about the familiar monotheistic patriarchal notion of God. Think instead about the possibility of other conscious agencies or minds at work in the universe and bear with me. This is not a disreputable thing to think about. This is not freethought heresy.

Some of the greatest science fiction of the last century speculates on the existence of beings vastly different from ourselves. I am talking about Arthur C. Clarke, for example, Philip K. Dick and Ursula Le Guin, among others. Clarke was an atheist, Le Guin is, and Dick was unclassifiable.

Some serious thinkers here. They all imagined cosmic "others" that under certain conditions could interact with human beings. I don't think that is such a strange thought for secular thinkers to have either. If there are such beings in the universe, especially powerful beings, I want to know about them.

I am not saying this as an agnostic. I am saying this as a curious person. If there are such beings of whatever kind, I want to know their habits, their inclinations, their tastes, their dimensions, their chemical composition, assuming

I would really like to see some separation of church and stadium.

they have dimensions and chemical composition, of course.

For me this is part of a larger curiosity about the world. For example, I want to know about extraterrestrial life. One of the greatest regrets in my life is that I will die, most likely, before we have contact with any intelligent extraterrestrial beings.

I advocate all the time for more public spending for the poor, the middle class, for the sick, but here is a confession I am proud to make. I want to see a lot more spending on science, on space exploration and on the search for extraterrestrial intelligence.

I have to admit I wasn't at the Reason Rally today because I had taken my granddaughters to the National Air and Space Museum. It is tragic. It is a monument to something we have abandoned. That's how I felt. I could remember so clearly when the idea of being beyond the year 2000, we would have colonies on Mars.

It is not just curiosity, though, about extraterrestrial sorts of intelligence that motivates me. If there are powerful nonhuman and conscious beings in the universe, whether they are on distant planets or are floating among us right now like dark matter, then we had better find out all we can about them, and I say that seriously.

Recall the question that Einstein asked about God. He was not a be-



FFRF Staffer Katie Daniel shows her sign of disapproval for the Westboro Baptist Church, who protested FFRF's dinner with Barbara Ehrenreich.

liever, but he said what he wanted to know about God was one thing: Is he friendly? I would say it is important to find out. It is even kind of urgent.

There are many, many kinds of obstacles to knowing. We don't have a lot of data on these points, and we may have some inherent mental limitations that prevent us from interacting with these other cosmic minds. But the point that I want to leave you with tonight is that one of the greatest obstacles to raising these questions and ever hoping for any kind of answer is religion.

I have all kinds of quarrels with religion — as do you, and I am not going to list them all — for its role in the oppression of women, from the Taliban to the Republican Party, for its role in fomenting war and reinforcing class hierarchies, suppressing science as well as so many other crimes against humanity.

Briefs against Christianity

I have another grievance against religion, or at least against the so-called "great" world religions, the great monotheistic religions like Christianity and Islam, Christianity being the only one I really know that much about.

Christianity has consistently for generations stood in the way of human understanding of the world: scientific understanding, philosophical understanding, even mystical insight into the world. It has prohibited these sorts of questions and punished the people who dared to raise them. It has discouraged consistently any speculation about God, or to keep that more general, as some kind of cosmic entity.

When I was a child, for example, most of my friends were Catholic and I would ask them the usual questions, "Why does God let babies die?" and so on. The answer, "It's a mystery." Remember that? It's a mystery, we can't know and if you questioned that answer or said it is not a good enough explanation for you, then you were told that God just demands one thing from you, which is obedience, submission, just shut up and do what you are told. Don't commit any sins, including the sin of intellectual arrogance as the priests liked to put it, like asking too many questions.

You probably know that, but what is less well-known to freethinkers, and I invite you to open your minds to this, is that Christianity has repeatedly crushed or harassed or tormented the most devout Christian intellectuals and mystics who dared to think for themselves.

Meister Eckhart, for example, any-

one every heard of him? Oh wow, great. When he died, the Inquisition was on his trail. He had been called to Rome because his notions about the deity were not acceptable.

Or Marguerite Porete, who was burned at the stake in 1310 because she had unusual notions about the deity, Christians, members of religions and lay orders.

Worse still in my brief against Christianity, Christians for 400 years were at the forefront of European colonialism, crushing all alternative religious systems on the planet, in the Americas, in Africa and somewhat less successfully in Asia.

They crushed polytheistic religions, they crushed ecstatic religious, they crushed goddess worship, paganism, pantheism, animism, all expunged pretty much from the world. With the destruction of all the indigenous religions throughout the world, we lost all notions of a deity other than that perfect and all-powerful monotheistic one.

We lost the female deities, we lost the multiple deities, the animal deities, the jaguar gods, the lion gods, the elephant gods. We lost the entire pantheon created by the human imagination over the centuries. We lost the vicious gods that demanded blood sacrifice, and we lost the fun-loving gods like Dionysius and Bacchus.

As all those alternative ways of understanding were wiped out, pretty much, we were left with this single inaccessible, unknowable, patriarchal deity of monotheism. Which is to say, we were left with nothing, just the paradox of the perfect god whose only excuse can be that he doesn't exist, a god who by definition doesn't exist.

It was this vacuum that the great classics of science fiction attempted to fill, not with new dogma or myths but with an invitation to speculate about questions that organized religion prohibited people from asking. If we are truly freethinkers, no issue and no topic is off limits to us, even topics that have been historically monopolized by religion.

So yes, our great common challenge here in this group, in this gathering, is to free people from religion, get it out of our laws, our schools, our health systems, our government and, I would add, also our sporting events. I would really like to see some separation of church and stadium, if we could work on that.

What I am proposing finally is in the tradition of untrammelled freethought: We might have to also free "god" from religion.

Thank you.



Barbara Ehrenreich autographs her book for FFRF member Martin Stone.



Dan Barker warms the crowd with a few freethought tunes.

A Christian musician’s path to disbelief

Joseph Taylor gave this speech (edited for print and space) at FFRF’s national convention Oct. 8 in Hartford, Conn.



All photography by Jeff Yantis

By Joseph Taylor

I first got in touch with Dan Barker after I was browsing through the atheist books at Barnes and Noble. I saw this book *Godless*, which is quite a provocative title. I started reading it right there in the aisle and saw his involvement in Christian music. It even mentioned southern California. I said, “I’ve got to get in touch with this guy.” So I dashed off an email to him and he was kind enough to respond.

I teach the history of rock music at James Madison [University, Harrisonburg, Va.] We have 306 students every semester. This is the first time I’ve addressed a group that’s made up almost completely of unbelievers, and I’m tempted to say you’re all going to hell. On the other hand it makes me think of that bumper sticker, “Where are we going and why are we in this handbasket?” All right, well, let’s detail my own trip to hell.

I’m an artist. I’m not a scientist and I’m not a philosopher. This is an important distinction to make, an obvious one, but I was listening to the speakers last night, and many of the books that we all read, we depend on science and philosophy. We even depend to some degree on theologians to find out what the other side, if you want to call it that, is thinking.

Art on the other hand is a little bit different. We depend on the raw material from science and philosophy and hopefully bring some interpretive meaning to it. How does this impact my world? How am I to think about this? How can I put this into some kind of meaningful context? The arts bring meaning to that.

It’s also meaningful to point out that laws, but also facts, as critically important as both are, are often not enough to change our hearts. Absolutely essential, but can they change our hearts? If you look at the history of the civil rights movement, we had the desegregation laws, but it was when at concerts where black artists were playing and they had a rope down the middle of the audience — one side for the blacks, one side for the whites — and they started dancing and the rope came down, they started dancing with each other, which was absolutely scandalous.

That’s what it takes to change people’s hearts. Laws and facts are essential, but it’s the arts that really appeal to people’s hearts.

A believing brain

Let me start by referencing Dr.

Shermer’s book, *The Believing Brain*. I always had a sense of God in my life from my earliest memories. It might have had something to do with the fact that my mother was an Italian Catholic whose mother was one of 19 children — between 16 and 19, we’re not sure, because they lost some in childbirth.

The youngest of those, Uncle Fred, had nine children himself. He was a devoutly Catholic, Italian guy in Philadelphia who made his family sit through one decade of the rosary every night before dinner. We were threatened, “If you don’t behave, you’re going to go to Uncle Fred’s for the weekend.” Holy shit, anything but that, please.



I remember a dream that I had when I couldn’t have been older than 5. I wrote and recorded a song about this: I was in the Vatican and I was dead, in a line of dead souls waiting to ascend a staircase to heaven. The pope was walking around and he could see us, but nobody else could, so the pope knew that we were there but nobody else did. What vivid imagery.

In first grade, a year later, a nun told us a story of a statue of the baby Jesus in the church coming to life and playing with two lonely children. This is the honest truth. I went to the church after school that day and knelt down in front of the altar because we had a statue of the baby Jesus in our church. I prayed that the statue would come to life and play with me. I was 6. Of course, we know the ending to that story.

I wanted God to be real. I used to watch “Bernadette of Lourdes,” “Ben-Hur,” “The Greatest Story Ever Told,” all these religious movies, and the music was so moving. They know how to do this to appeal to our deepest, most powerful places. I wished so hard I could have lived back then. I could have walked with Jesus, I could have seen him walk on the water, I could have seen him rise from the dead, or not. So from my oldest memories, I had a believing brain.

Of course we have to adjust at some point, we have to get over it, because it just doesn’t happen. In high school I left the church altogether. God was not present in my world; that’s just the way it was.

Three ‘Broken’ records

Shortly after I was invited to be in a band in high school, my uncle told me

I went forward at an altar call and immediately launched my mission from God.

about this church in Costa Mesa, Calif., Calvary Chapel, that had Christian rock bands. Maybe I’d like to go and check them out? I went with him. It was a very large church that spearheaded much of the Jesus movement in the late ’60s or early ’70s. The young people were coming in barefoot or with sandals and jeans and shorts. They sang and were very much animated and energized by their faith.

I really wanted God to be real in my life, and boy, God sure seemed real to these people in their lives. So there I was, and I went forward at an altar call and immediately launched my mission from God.

The band that I was in [Undercover] started playing Christian music and writing our own songs. I didn’t grow up in the Protestant sociology that Dan came from; I was Catholic. We didn’t have a lot of the same restraints, but he’s absolutely right. The church and Christian rock was an oxymoron in some of those Protestant evangelical circles.

No sooner had they started to get used to someone coming in with long hair and an acoustic guitar rather than playing piano or an organ, and here we came with tattoos and mohawks and ripped jeans and boots and spikes and leathers and earrings and whatnot. I didn’t care what they thought. We were on a mission from God. We were playing nightclubs and college campuses and high schools and wanted to communicate through the music we knew what we thought we’d found.

We were approached by Maranatha Music because we had developed a little bit of a following. They asked us to record our first record. Maranatha was a parachurch organization. It was the record company owned by Calvary Chapel, the church that started a lot of the Jesus movement stuff, and as such they were famous for their “praise” albums.

Does anyone have those early praise albums? So you know what I’m talking about. It’s very mild, stuff to be played in church. Then they started a label called A&S for edgier music. A&S’ claim to fame is Sam Phillips. She’s a great artist, writes for television shows and was married to T-Bone Burnett, who has produced all kinds of movie music and records.

We built quite a following. There were a lot of bands that were spinoffs of what we were doing. We’re talking about rather extreme music, loud alternative music, punk rock, heavy metal. And the churches are going, well, what are we going to do with this? So Maranatha Music started yet another label called Broken Records and hired me to be a staff producer to mentor new groups.

I didn’t lose my faith; my faith died a thousand deaths.

This is from a promotional postcard: “Broken Records is an unprovoked attack on complacency. Broken Records is a clear, uncompromised call to the unsaved, unchurched and culturally disenfranchised within the body of Christ. Broken Records is radical restructuring of relationships between music and the church, between artists and audience, between business and labor. Broken Records is people over product, vision over vinyl. Broken Records is surrendered and dependent.” (Whoa. Love that one.) “Broken Records is armed and dangerous. Broken Records is a militant response to the trickle-down theory of evangelism.”

We released three records on that label. Our group’s logo was designed by Rick Griffin, a quintessential San Francisco artist who did Grateful Dead record covers, concerts for the Fillmore, Janice Joplin, Jimi Hendrix. This highlights our militant approach, “Onward, Christian Soldier.”

We did 250 dates a year all over North America and Europe, giving altar calls. The lights come down, the music comes up, you know the scriptures to say. It’s powerful stuff that you can use to bring people forward.



Christian branding

Reality often interferes with the best-laid plans. Lots of us go through divorce, 52% statistically. Of course, according to the Barnard group, atheists do better than the religious, so we're probably less than 52%. So, congratulations.

But there I was then, a mentor surrounded by kids and oh, by the way, I'm going through a divorce now. It wasn't just how do you deal with the divorce and the scandalous aspect of it, but the bigger question of why was my faith so powerless to do anything about teaching me what it was like to be married, to do anything about building the kind of character I needed to be a successful human being in a functioning world?

I had four beautiful kids, so that was my question, and as a result I wrote this album, "Branded."

"Branded" had multiple meanings for me: Number one, I was branded in the sense that once you go through divorce in the Christian church, your star's dimmed a little bit. But for me the imagery of the tattoo [of crosses on the album cover] was more important. Yes, I wanted to keep my faith; I was branding myself a Christian.

So we released this record where I documented the process of my divorce and what it was like to deal with the failure of my faith. I don't mean to blame my faith, I assume full responsibility for myself, but really, the faith I was practicing, the things I believed in were completely powerless in any meaningful way in my life. We released the record, and it was powerful, 25 years ago this year. The record label did a rerelease. Right now there's a list coming out where it's in the top 50 Christian music records of all time.

In 1987 I bought Broken Records and changed the name to Brainstorm Artists. We produced well over 100 records, won all those awards. We shifted the focus because it was obvious to me that evangelicalism didn't work. I was still holding on to my faith, but we shifted from a more militant view to a more art-based form of Christian music.

I held that label for a number of years and sold it eventually. I was tired of the hypocrisy. I saw other artists whose lives were ruined. Alcoholism, drug addiction, all kinds of messes, and I don't mean to say that this is caused by religion, but I'll tell you what I do believe, that it's perpetuated because they stay in religion and there is no power there, there just is nothing. Of course you know this, I'm preaching to the choir, if there ever was such a concept.

We played scattered concerts, Chicago in 2000 and various others, but by and large I was becoming unraveled. I stayed in a period of believing in the fundamentals of Christianity. We were doing Christian music, playing the same songs, I could deliver a sermon. I don't feel like I was hypocritical because I did believe the things that I was saying, but the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike, and I can't promise anybody anything. There's no there there, so I can't promise you anything. All I can say is you need to believe in Jesus. Now here's this song, you know.

Date an atheist?

In 2007 I took my job at James Madison University, and in 2008 I knew not a soul there. So I'm going to have confession here, excuse me. I signed up for a dating website just to meet people. I came into contact with a scientist



and she was an atheist, the first atheist I'd met.

She said the first time we talked that she had Googled me: "I want you to know that if you're going to try to convert me or if you think I'm going to hell, I'm not going to go out with you."

It got me to thinking about what I believed. There's a book by Rob Bell [founding pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.]. He's trying to work his way through the idea that hell is still a possible coherent idea. It's simply not, especially if you want to postulate the existence of an all-loving God. It's ridiculous, and I knew that.

So I constructed my own idea of what hell must be like. Of course I couldn't abandon the idea — there it is in scripture. But one day I woke up and said, "I just don't believe any of it. It's all bullshit. I've been making shit up my whole life."

Keith Parsons, a wonderful philosopher, had this to say about two scholars arguing for the existence of hell: "To refuse to believe in hell is to measure God's thoughts by ours." You've all heard this argument. God's ways are higher than our ways, and we don't know the mind of God.

Parsons: "Allow me at once to plead guilty to measuring God's thoughts by my own. As I see it. I have no other choice. If my intellect and my deepest moral convictions tell me that hell is a monstrous dogma unworthy of belief by decent human beings, then I can think of no greater sin than to accept such a doctrine. It is a sad but edifying spectacle to see how intelligent defenders of the indefensible tie themselves in ethical and conceptual knots."

I had to wake up and say, "You know what? That's exactly what I've done. I've tied myself in knots trying to rationalize and justify things that cannot be rationalized or justified. So I said to the woman, "Yeah, we can go out."

But we didn't. We had a couple of nice chats and she told me that she thought I had a responsibility to come out and to announce this to my Christian audience. I disagreed. I said, "I couldn't possibly care less. It's been a number of years since I've been out of Christian music anyway, and my phone's not exactly ringing off the hook with people who are overly concerned with the well-being of my eternal soul. So I'm just inclined to say screw the whole thing and let them, let's just let the world get on with itself."

Thinking things through

Once I acknowledged to myself that I was an unbeliever, I began reading everything I could get my hands on, all the Dawkins and Hitchens, Dennett and Sam Harris. I picked up Dan's book *Godless* and just soaked it all in. But the problem was this, and I would submit to you that this is a fundamen-

tal problem, that I had no context for a life away from the idea of God.

So many hands went up when I asked how many of you are lifelong atheists. You get it. I sat at breakfast with someone this morning who said they're second-generation atheist. You're very lucky. Me, Italian Catholic, two first holy communions for crying out loud.

How do you think about reality? It wasn't enough to offer me facts. It's like, all right, how do I construct a worldview out of this?

Very shortly after, this book came out: *God's Not Dead (And Neither Are We)*. I have a chapter in the book [subtitled *The story of Christian alternative rock's pioneers then and now, as told by the artists themselves*]. It was an interview done before I acknowledged that I didn't believe any of it. I was asked to help promote the book on Facebook. I had not done Facebook, but I said OK. I had no idea what I was getting into.

Next thing I know I've got hundreds and hundreds of people coming on board. I'm faced with a crisis. I've got to be honest with these people, or not. That was an easy choice to make. I was not willing to be untruthful about where I was, what I believed.

My fear was that I wouldn't have all the right answers. If someone asked me a question about the beginning of the universe, the big bang theory. Remember, I'm not a scientist, I'm not a philosopher, I'm an artist.

What I didn't know is that I don't need the right answers; all I need is the right questions. I would submit to you that that's one way to approach this. It's not all about answers. It's about questions, and so the conversation started, and it started in earnest.

'Ojo Uncovered'

Down the Line magazine in July of 2010 is where I came out altogether, in "Ojo Uncovered." [He was known as Joey "Ojo" Taylor.] They asked me directly — we've heard on Facebook what you're saying about your beliefs. What are your beliefs? I laid it all out. What do you think about the Christian faith? And I laid it all out.

The reactions have been all over the place. I haven't had any death threats yet, although some of my friends have warned me that I should get protection sometimes. That seems so extreme, yet I know there are people that do get these kind of threats, and I'm wary about them.

I've heard things like, "Oh you're a fraud, you never were a believer, you never were sincere to begin with, you were probably just in Christian music for the money." But there's more interest in what I'm doing now than there was when I was Christian musician. Tons of questions.

What I hear more than anything is how tragic it is. I see blog posts titled "Ojo Taylor, one of our heroes, has

Stay free, that's my message to myself.

fallen." How saddened they are by it. "He's lost his faith."

No, I didn't lose my faith; my faith died a thousand deaths. From the minute I walked down the altar, things didn't make sense and it has died a thousand deaths over the years. I had no context for what it was like to live outside of that. I do now.

Many of you maybe are not involved actively with a lot of ultra-religious people, but I am regularly. Every single day, dozens of posts come to my blog, to my Facebook page.

Some are very kind and ask questions sincerely, intellectually curious, others not so much. I would submit that you have about as much chance of changing someone's religion with debate and confrontation and argument as you do changing their political affiliation. Anyone have parents that sit in front of Fox News all day long? You know what I'm talking about. Maybe your parents sit in front of MSNBC and you roll your eyes, too, I don't mean that to be a partisan statement, but we cannot change people's minds just by argument. We've all got our arguments.

Life without faith

I've learned that people need a context for seeing a life without God. I think this is where the arts become critically important: The T-shirt that says "This is what an atheist looks like." The billboards that are going up all over the country, "Good without god." The billboards that Freedom From Religion Foundation are doing that many of you have submitted that, "Yes, I'm an atheist, here's what I look like. I have a family, I have a job, responsible, taxpaying citizen. I don't eat babies, I don't have satanic sex orgies."

It's very difficult for anyone to abandon their faith without an idea of life without it. We can't just argue, we can't just throw facts around, we need more than that, as critically important as that is. In this way the arts can be extremely effective. We appeal to feelings and emotions, that's true. It's not always necessarily bad. If I pay \$75 to go see someone in a concert and I'm not moved, I'm pissed off. I kind of want my money back. I want you to take me on a journey.

We depend on metaphor, irony, paradox, all these things, asking questions. Stay free, that's my message to myself. I'm not interested in replacing one fundamentalism with another. Maybe some of you will disagree with what I have to say and maybe I'll disagree with you. That's the beauty about this. We don't have any kind of doctrinal purity to subscribe to.

I hear this all the time: "Atheism is nothing but a religion." Well, atheism is a religion like the "off" switch on a television is a channel. I don't have a purity doctrine because there isn't one. I don't believe, and neither do you, OK? Some of us are Republicans and some of us are Democrats and some of us are libertarians and independents and whatever else.

When I wrote the article in Down the Line, I was inclined to let the religious be. Coexist, what a wonderful world that would be, we all just coexist. You don't put your religion on me and I won't put my disbelief on you, but it just doesn't work that way, does it?

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The other day I posted about coming here and boy, the vitriol from the Christians about the Freedom From Religion Foundation. One guy had done some Googling and found this article by Dennis Prager about an FFRF lawsuit against a nativity scene in front of a government building. Prager got his knickers in a twist and said the people at FFRF don't know beauty. "They're atheists, and atheists don't know beauty." That was my friend posting on my Facebook wall.

I asked what in the world was he talking about? He said the nativity scene is beautiful, what don't you get?

I said look, take away the fuzzy sheep and the donkeys, you ass, and what are you left with? The cute baby Jesus. What's beautiful about a god who is so offended by us acting the way he made us act — so offended that he needs human blood sacrifice of his son to mollify him? That's beautiful?

One day I woke up and said, 'I just don't believe any of it.'

Yes, the mythology might be strong, but, I'm sorry, it's just not a beautiful statement to me at all. This is why religion is rarely harmless and why we need groups like the Freedom From Religion Foundation. It's important for us to support them and advocate on their behalf and get involved.

Love is the umbrella over all of humanity. Love is what unites us; to me that's the pinnacle of the human experience. Religion would have it the other way around: doctrine is most important, and their version of doctrine is more important than anything.

So we must aggressively — again, I'm speaking to myself — counter any attempt by religion to co-opt or assimilate our own love or any of the other human experiences, the fullness of the human experience — because it doesn't belong in the realm of religion. It's the big umbrella under which religion unfortunately resides.

To quote the Beatles, "In the end the love you take is equal to the love you make." For me it's about music, freethought and "lovism," that's what it says on my blog.

Love, the highest calling that we have. For me, that is most deeply expressed in music. Thank you very much for listening today.

Joseph Taylor teaches the history of rock, artist management, songwriting, marketing of recorded music and entrepreneurship in the music industry at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va. He blogs at ojotaylor.wordpress.com/tag/agnosticism/.

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.

Clergy Project: 'The truth set me free'



Josh Everett and his wife, Raysa, a native of Brazil.

This article appeared June 10 in the La Crosse Tribune as part of an ongoing series by Wisconsin freethinkers. It's reprinted with permission of the author.

By Joshua Everett

I am an ordained, fundamentalist evangelical Christian minister, and an atheist. It might seem counterintuitive to read such a sentence, but a surprising number of ministers are rejecting religious belief. None of us became ministers expecting to leave religion behind; we were authentic, strong, sincere, faithful clergy and practitioners of our faiths.

Changing our minds about religion does not make us inherently bad or immoral people, uncharitable, dishonest, hostile, lacking in knowledge or common sense, deviants or any of the other epithets frequently used to malign nonbelievers.

The Clergy Project (TCP) is an organization that provides a support community for nonbelieving (atheist and agnostic) clergy and former clergy from all religions and denominations around the world. The organization, started in March 2011, currently has more than 300 members and receives over 40 applications each month. Members go through an extensive screening process to ensure that prospective members are actually nonbelievers and are clergy or former clergy.

Members are classified as either "active" (active clergy) or "alumni" (former clergy). The organization is not meant to proselytize or change the beliefs of active clergy, but to provide them with a support group as they attempt to trade their religious careers for secular careers.

Many of us accumulate a great deal of debt attempting to retrain ourselves. Many work in minimum-wage jobs the rest of their lives. A great number lose their jobs and families. Some lose everything and are homeless now.

Do we complain? No, I've never heard a single complaint from any member of TCP. In fact, most of us accept the consequences of our misguided religiosity without bitterness.

We are content to have broken free in some manner or other.

The idea of active clergy who no longer have religious beliefs might strike you as dishonest. However, one must consider all of the difficulties of their situations before passing judgment, as well as remember that such major changes in life are the result of lengthy processes rather than snap decisions. Leaving one's religion can result in varying degrees of consequences for even nonclergy, but the consequences are much greater for clergy. Most have families to support, so their principal concern is finding employment.

Another important concern is the loss of spouses, friends and family who might react negatively or hostilely to such drastic changes in religious belief. Fear of losing my friends and family and of possible hostile reactions in the community were major concerns for me. Indeed, when discussing my background, I am frequently attacked and prejudged by believers who seem to consider my change of mind to be an attack on their religious identity.

Starting from scratch

Clergy Project members are extremely concerned with maintaining their integrity and being honest with their families and congregations. They also feel responsible for trying to maintain the unity of their families and providing for their needs. Furthermore, most clergy have seminary degrees that do not apply to secular careers. Thus, career changes often entail starting over completely with their education, job training and professional skills.

Few days go by that we are not depressed at least to some extent due to our previous lives. Certainly we were all sincere in our desire to help people above all, and many of us, myself included, never participated in preaching intolerance or hate. I cannot with good conscience say that my intentions justify my misguided proselytizing and preaching. These are regrets we all bear, along with the regret of so many wasted years of our own short lives. The conflictive responsibilities of maintaining one's integrity and providing for one's family, combined with

We reject religion for intellectual rather than emotional reasons.

the stress of changing one's worldview and beliefs, can lead to a great deal of emotional turmoil.

TCP offers a support network that can provide encouragement, strength, and experienced counsel to active clergy going through such traumatic processes. I became involved in the project in the fall of 2011 as an alumnus (several years after I left my career as a minister) in order to help active members make the transition more smoothly.

Members of my family have been evangelical Christian ministers for many generations, which is a legacy I was all too happy to share. I served as a minister in various volunteer and staff positions for several years before and after my ordination, including significant amounts of mission work in Central America. Throughout the majority of these years, I never questioned my beliefs whatsoever. In fact, I loved church the whole time I was involved, and always remember my experiences fondly.

My decision was not about the comfort and community offered by religion; I simply chose to follow the facts wherever they would lead me. I was encouraged in this task by several verses from the bible which encourage searching for the truth (John 8:32, Ephesians 4:25, 1 Thessalonians 5:21). We must acknowledge the courage that these clergy demonstrate by willingly following their commitment to the truth despite the probability of personal loss.

Whenever I discuss my background, the most common question everyone has is, "What caused you to change your mind about religion?" Like most clergy involved in TCP, I did not become a nonbeliever due to personal tragedy, horrible experiences with religion, ignorance of scriptures or doctrine, or a desire to be free of religious restrictions. An overwhelming number of clergy reject religion as a result of many years of serious religious study. We reject religion for intellectual rather than emotional reasons.

The passion for ethics and truth that lead us into our occupations as clergy also lead us out of religion. When I became a minister, I committed to the truth wherever that might lead. Through my religious studies, I came to know the truth, and the truth set me free.

Though originally from Texas and Louisiana, I now teach Spanish, serve as the technology guru and direct the tutoring program for the language department at a university in Wisconsin. Outside of work, I enjoy Web design and programming, as well as blogging about atheist issues in English, Spanish and Portuguese. I like to think that the language skills I learned for mission work are put to better use now.

Joshua Everett is a member of the La Crosse Area Freethought Society and the Clergy Project, co-founded by FFRF's Dan Barker.

State/Church Bulletin

Town ditches prayer before judge's order

Vermont Superior Court Judge Martin Maley ruled June 2 that the town of Franklin may not start its annual town meeting with prayer. Town resident Marilyn Hackett sued to block the prayer in March. The town decided not to have a prayer before the judge had ruled.

"The hardship on the Town is small — it can no longer include a prayer in town meeting — while the hardship on Plaintiff if the Court fails to grant the injunction is great — continued violation of her constitutional rights," Maley wrote in issuing a permanent injunction.

Hackett teaches in Richford, where she said she is harassed by teens daily, reported the Burlington Free Press. "They say 'I love Jesus. God bless you, Miss Hackett. God save you, Miss Hackett.' The only thing I can hope for is that years from now they'll remember that there was an adult who stood up for her point of view."

VTDigger.org quoted Hackett: "Every year they gaveled the meeting to order and anyone who didn't want to listen to the prayer could step outside. My response to that has been: 'I'm not the one breaking the law of the land. I'm not the one who should be asked to leave.'"

N.D. freethinkers win Commandments ruling

The 8th Circuit U.S. Appeals on May 25 reversed a lower court decision by a federal judge dismissing a lawsuit by opponents of a Ten Commandments monument on city property in Fargo, N.D. The appeals panel ruled 2-1 that the Red River Freethinkers lawsuit should be allowed to proceed.

The freethinkers group alleged a constitutional violation because the city gave the monument a religious purpose in voting three years ago to keep it.

Appeals court: Town prayers too Christian

The 2nd Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled May 17 in *Galloway v. Town of Greece* that Greece, a suburb of Rochester, N.Y., didn't make a good-faith effort in seeking non-Christians to participate in town meeting invocations.

The Associated Press reported the town violated the constitutional ban against favoring one religion over another by opening nearly every meeting over an 11-year span with prayers that stressed Christianity. The appeals court overruled a lower court's judgment against two female plaintiffs. The lower court decided other faiths weren't intentionally excluded.

"The town's process for selecting prayer-givers virtually ensured a Christian viewpoint," ruled the three-judge appeals panel.

The town and the Alliance Defense Fund both announced they would appeal. Linda Stephens, a member of FFRF, is principal plaintiff.

Baltimore abortion rights take hit

A Baltimore ordinance requiring a

Christian "pregnancy center" to post notices it offers only "limited services" that exclude abortion referrals and birth control violates its free speech rights, a federal appeals court in Richmond, Va., ruled 2-1.

Plaintiffs included the Pregnancy Center, which has two locations that promote abstinence and bible studies with prenatal classes.

Judge Robert King dissented, calling the decision "indefensible" and adding "these proceedings have thus followed a course more fitting a kangaroo court than a court of the United States," reported Bloomberg News.

King cited evidence that the centers engage in "deceptive practices" that create health risks for women.

High court denies free exercise certiorari

The U.S. Supreme Court on June 29 denied certiorari in other cases involving challenges to the Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act, reported Religion Clause. The petition in one of the cases, *Seven-Sky v. Holder*, had raised a free exercise challenge to the ACA.

The D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals held that the appellants had "failed to allege facts showing that the mandate will substantially burden their religious exercise."

'In Jesus' name' ruled out in Charlotte

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg [N.C.] Police Department has asked its chaplains to make prayers nonsectarian, the Charlotte Observer reported June 21.

"This is not in any way an effort to demean anybody's Christian beliefs," said Maj. John Diggs. "It's to show respect for all the religious practices in our organization. CMPD is not anybody's church."

If a chaplain is uncomfortable with nonsectarian prayer at an event, Diggs said a replacement will be found. The department has about 2,000 employees.

Churches can use New York schools

New York can't refuse to allow religious groups to use city public schools for worship services, U.S. District Judge Loretta Preska ruled June 29 in a lawsuit brought by Bronx Household of Faith.

The dispute dates to 1995, when the Bronx Household of Faith sued the city for allegedly violating the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment by denying it use of a school while giving other community groups access to campuses for their activities.

The U.S. Court of Appeals in Manhattan sent the case back in February to Preska, who had temporarily allowed the church to keep meeting at the public school. Bloomberg News reported Preska made that permission permanent, saying the regulation that allows community groups to use public schools for activities outside normal school hours, while banning their use for religious services, violates the First Amendment.

"We strongly disagree with the district court's view of the facts, including



its finding that the high rents in New York City require the government to provide religious organizations government-subsidized space for purposes of worship," said Jonathan Pines, deputy chief of the general litigation division of New York's law department, in a statement. He said the city will appeal.

Ellwood City looks at holiday lottery

The Borough Council in Ellwood City, Pa., where FFRF has repeatedly challenged a nativity scene in front of the Municipal Building, voted 4-3 June 18 to further consider an ordinance that would institute a lottery system to determine the content of holiday displays.

The Beaver County Times reported that any borough resident or taxpayer could submit a permit application. If no resident applied, it would be opened up to outsiders.

With multiple applicants, the borough would hold a lottery to pick one applicant, who would get to choose the display.

Marisa Bunney, who chaired a study committee, opposes a lottery. "My fear is that somebody is going to be picked in the lottery and not put up the nativity."

North Dakotans not so worried about religious freedom

A so-called religious freedom amendment on the North Dakota ballot that stated "Government may not burden a person's or religious organization's religious liberty" was defeated June 12. Results were 107,680 (64%) NO and 60,465 (36%) YES.

Bishop Samuel Aquila of the Catholic Diocese of Fargo was on the spon-

soring committee.

"It would be different if people's rights were being trampled," said Tom Fiebigler, chairman of North Dakotans Against Measure 3. "The average North Dakotan has the same religious liberties they have always had and will continue to have."

Missourians to vote on prayer Aug. 7

Missouri voters will decide Aug. 7 on a constitutional amendment guaranteeing the right to pray in public places. The amendment reaffirms that students can pray privately in public school, but it would not allow the schools to hold class prayers, Reuters reported. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1962 that school-initiated prayer amounted to establishing religion in public schools in violation of the Constitution.

The amendment also says students could not "be compelled to perform or participate in any education assignments or presentations" that violate their religious beliefs.

The prayer amendment passed 126-30 in the Missouri House and 34-0 in the Senate.

Anti-gay churches pass plate in Maine

As many as 200 Maine churches passed the collection plate on Father's Day to fight a November ballot initiative legalizing same-sex marriage.

Protect Marriage Maine has been in contact with about 800 churches across the state. Denominations include Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Nazarene, Church of God, Wesleyan, Evangelical Free, Advent Christian and others.

Marquee Madness



Champaign appetite

"This is true," opines Jay Hurt, who saw this Illinois marquee. "I have seen them preach on their TV shows."

FFRF fights state/church entanglements

‘You can’t separate church and Chuck’

FFRF received eight complaints about graduation ceremonies in Houston County, Ga., including Christian worship music, prayers by speakers (often school officials) and a speech by the superintendent that was “more of a sermon,” according to one local complainant.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter of complaint June 4 that generated lots of media attention and emboldened more complainants. Seidel had enough material for a second complaint letter by June 5. FFRF received a terse response from the school’s attorney stating that the district “intends to follow the law in these matters.”

Seidel is currently working on a third letter to bring the district’s attention to at least four and possibly 10 other specific constitutional violations in Houston County schools.

The city of Warner-Robins, also in Houston County, has also drawn FFRF’s attention. Mayor Charles Shaheen placed an ad in the Macon Telegraph on March 20, claiming, “A humble heart knows that if it were not for the grace of GOD we would have no pride for ourselves or our nation. Humbleness brings us to our knees with thankful hearts, loving spirits and prayers of praise.” He went on to quote the King James Bible.

Seidel pointed out “promotion of Christianity by you, the mayor of Warner Robins, using your official title and Warner Robins’ letterhead, gives the impression that the mayor and city government support and endorse particular religious views.”

Seidel also pointed out that the 50 million nonbelievers in this country “have great pride in our nation, not because of some god’s grace, but because, by our reason, we recognize the monumental triumph of America. Our founders spilled their blood, spent their treasure, and used their reason to draft a godless, entirely secular Constitution. Our freedoms and our country exist because ‘We the People’ made it so and founded our nation. Attributing their monumental sacrifice to god denigrates that sacrifice and cheapens their triumph.”

Shaheen has not officially responded but did tell the press that “You can separate church and state, but you can’t separate church and Chuck.”

Governor’s prayer praise draws FFRF protest

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker protested Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant’s June 5 declaration about the importance of public school prayer.

Bryant addressed over 300 high school students at American Legion Boys State. The Associated Press reported that he said he doesn’t think prayer “hurt us at all.” He added that school prayer “built our character” and “it is what we should continue to do.”

A day after the event, Bryant was at it again. He told reporters that the school day should begin with a prayer, “to let people know there is a God” and that “those children should know that he does care about them, particularly

within their classroom.”

FFRF takes issue with Bryant’s blatant disregard for the Constitution and abuse of his position as a governor. “Children may pray individually according to their own desires, when and if they wish, throughout the school day, so long as it is not disruptive,” Barker wrote Bryant on June 7. “This type of personal conduct simply bears no relationship to government-fostered, promoted or endorsed prayers which our courts have ruled impermissible.”

In October 2011, Barker and FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor sent a memorandum to 151 Mississippi superintendents calling for an end to illegal school-sponsored prayer. FFRF’s memo has since stopped unlawful prayer in several Mississippi schools.

Tulsa council prayer exclusively Christian

FFRF, with the help of its Tulsa, Okla., chapter, is challenging prayer at the Tulsa City Council meetings.

In a June 22 complaint letter, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote, “Since October 2009, Christian clergy have delivered every one of the 62 prayers. Forty-two of the prayers were given ‘in Jesus’ name’ or some variant thereof. Ten others did not explicitly mention Jesus but were clearly Christian.”

Seidel noted that “there was no prayer during the Constitutional Convention. Surely, if the founders did not need prayer to write the document that founded our nation, the council can successfully conduct its business without prayer as well.”

Bigoted Carolina pastor politicks from pulpit

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote May 23 to the Internal Revenue Service about Rev. Charles Worley’s sermon May 13 at Providence Road Baptist Church in Maiden, N.C. In an online video, Worley railed against President Obama’s stance on gay marriage and asked the congregation “Who you gonna vote for?”

From the sermon: “I figured a way out, a way to get rid of all the lesbians and queers, but I couldn’t get it past the Congress. Build a great, big, large fence — 150 or a hundred mile long — put all the lesbians in there. Fly over and drop some food. Do the same thing with the queers and the homosexuals and have that fence electrified so they can’t get out. Feed ’em. And you know, in a few years, they’ll die out. You know why? They can’t reproduce!

“I tell you right now, somebody said, ‘Who you gonna vote for?’ I ain’t gonna vote for a baby killer and a homosexual lover! [Cheers and shouts of amen.] You say, ‘Did you mean to say that?’ You better believe I did! God have mercy, it makes me pukin’ sick.”

Along with the bigotry and hate, Seidel noted, Worley violated the church’s tax-exemption privilege by urging congregants to vote against Obama in the upcoming election. “There can be no doubt that he intentionally took this political stance from the pulpit: Pastor Worley asks himself, ‘Did you mean to say that?’ and answers, ‘You better believe I did!’ ”



FFRF to sheriff: Thou shalt not

Staff Attorney formally complained May 22 to Sheriff Anthony Choate in Jamestown, Tenn., about this unconstitutional display after being alerted by a local complainant.

FFRF asked for an immediate investigation into what extent Worley violated IRS regulations. The IRS Exemption Organizations Office replied June 4 with a form letter that “the information you submitted will be considered...”

In a June 21 story headlined “As churches get political, IRS stays quiet,” Reuters noted the increasing trend of pastors politicking from the pulpit.

“It will get worse unless the IRS takes action, and they seem reluctant,” said Nicholas Cafardi, dean emeritus and professor of law at Duquesne University and the longtime lawyer for the Pittsburgh Catholic Diocese. He called the current state of affairs “toxic,” and said many religious leaders don’t like political involvement by churches and worry it will undercut their moral authority.

FFRF contests prayer luncheon sponsorship

Mayor Michael Coleman of Columbus, Ohio, hosted the city’s Interfaith Prayer Luncheon June 12 despite being asked not to by FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert in a complaint letter. The luncheon was held at the Aladdin Shrine Center and was coordinated by the city’s Community Relations Commission,

“Your participation in this event and the city’s apparent coordination of the event poses serious constitutional separation of church and state concerns,” Markert wrote. “It is grossly illegal and inappropriate for the city to be hosting, organizing, supporting or otherwise promoting a patently religious event.”

FFRF’s Columbus members saw the event being promoted on the city’s website and asked the Foundation to investigate.

The Columbus Dispatch reported about 600 people appaluded and cheered at the luncheon as Coleman said, “First, I believe in the almighty God our father. Second, I believe that we should be doing God’s work here on Earth, and I believe in thanking God for bestowing our city with his blessings.”

Georgia pastor wants prayer in schools

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote Mayor Teresa Tomlinson of Columbus, Ga., on May 24 to ward off City Council support for Pastor Paul Voorhees’ plan to put a referendum on the state ballot to put prayer in public schools.

Voorhees has made public statements that “our jails are safer than our schools” because “in our jails we have bible study, we have prayers and we have church.”

Voorhees, in a video posted on YouTube, also said, “There is [sic] some rulings that [school prayer] is unconstitutional, but when that was done it was all white justices. Now that we have some color, that would never pass, I promise you. In my unscientific poll, 80% of the whites say they want prayer and bible study in our schools. People of color, not one has said that they did not. Isn’t that something? You see, people of color had to turn to Jesus Christ because they were oppressed. Now that they have justices in the Supreme Court, let’s hear what they have to say about Jesus Christ.”

Seidel noted that Voorhees claims to have the support of “50,000 bible-thumpers for his unconstitutional proposal, but he is offending a significantly larger population by implying that the nonreligious are criminals. The American Religious Identification Survey shows that that there are over 650,000 ‘nonreligious’ Georgians and over 950,000 non-Christian Georgians.”

“We hope that this council will not misdirect precious time and resources in a foolish and divisive attack upon our Constitution,” Seidel concluded.

How are we to explain the fact that people who regularly received the Lord’s body and confessed their sins in the sacrament of Penance have offended in this way?
It remains a mystery.
Pope Benedict, talking about pedophile priests in a video message to 75,000 Catholics at a Mass in Dublin, Ireland
news24.com, 6-18-12

Newdow ready to assist potential plaintiffs

Michael Newdow, the Sacramento, Calif., attorney who had a short-lived federal appellate court victory in 2002 overturning the 1954 intrusion of “under God” into the Pledge of Allegiance, has indicated that he is available to represent parents who wish to end this violation of the mandate for governmental religious neutrality. Specifically, he is willing to represent any such parents free of charge.

“We will maintain the anonymity of the families involved in order to minimize the chance of any adverse repercussions,” he said, noting that courts virtually always allow plaintiffs in lawsuits such as this to use pseudonyms. In fact, in the 2007 lawsuit from the 1st Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals that concluded (unsuccessfully) at the end of 2010, the names of the plaintiffs have never been disclosed.

Newdow notes that only persons in circuits that have not yet ruled on the constitutionality of the pledge will be able to bring such a challenge. As a result, only families whose children recite the pledge in the 3rd Circuit (New Jersey and Pennsylvania), 6th Circuit (Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky Tennessee), 8th Circuit (North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, Iowa,



Photo: Brent Nicastro

Michael Newdow

Missouri, Arkansas), 10th Circuit (Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma), 11th Circuit (Alabama, Georgia, Florida) and Washington, D.C., are eligible.

Newdow would like to file in each of these circuits later this year.

There are basically only two requirements: The parents or parent must have final decision-making power



In response to FFRF’s complaint about a Christian war memorial in Woonsocket, R.I., a crankmailer sent this dollar with In God We Trust cut out, saving us the trouble.

regarding the child’s education (ideally, if only one parent chooses to be involved, the other will be supportive); the children are enrolled in a public school and their teachers lead pledge recitations.

More information, including contact information, is available to restorthepledge.com.

Seeking N.Y. plaintiffs

Newdow is also challenging “In God We Trust” on U.S. coins and currency in a new lawsuit. “Those parents who feel their children are at risk of being

influenced by these ubiquitous statements, and/or who wish to end the potential for such influence, are encouraged to notify me to discuss their potential participation in the case. I will seek an order requesting that the case proceed anonymously for any family that chooses to become involved.”

The case is being filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. Thus, any parents with children located in New York City would be ideal. Others in New York, Connecticut or Vermont can participate as well.

Email Newdow at FirstAmendmist@gmail.com.

Pie in the sky? It’s a lie

By Barbara G. Walker

Nowadays, the more liberal sort of Christians and Jews tend to look tolerantly upon biblical improbabilities as mythological fables drawn from the nursery age of humankind, or even as obscure allegories. The original writers, however, had no such ideas. They obviously intended all their words to be taken as literal truth, directly provided by God, who couldn’t lie.

Believers tend to disparage the confirmed existence of the same fables in other, older, heathen mythologies that the biblical writers plagiarized. Scholars know that the Old Testament patriarchs were mythical figures, with counterparts in Egypt, Babylon, Sumer, Greece and India, and that the ancient Middle East had literally dozens of god-begotten, virgin-born, dying-and-resurrecting messiahs and saviors.

Traditional believers try to keep this information suppressed. They would like to maintain that all the other gods were mistakes, and only Yahweh still lives — somewhere, if not in the sky anymore.

A surprising number of Christians still insist on the literal truth of biblical fables, even today when science has made it abundantly clear that there is no heaven in the sky, nor any hell underground, that the universe was not created 6,000 years ago, that there could never have been an Edenic garden or a Noah’s ark or a flat Earth, as the bible claims.

Green plants could not exist before the sun, nor could days and nights consisting of mornings and evenings and so on through hundreds of God’s egregiously unscientific statements. My-

thology taken as literal, historical truth is neither a fairy tale nor an allegory; it is a lie. Almost the entire content of the Judeo-Christian bible is a tissue of lies.

Why are these products of primitive ignorance still being maintained, in a civilization with knowledge that easily disproves them? The answer has always been clear: for money. Rich, powerful institutions like churches have an insatiable desire for ever more of their tax-free money, and disproof of biblical lies may threaten their endless income.

Thus, churches have been traditionally hostile to almost every scientific advance of the past three centuries. Many continue, against all reason, to deny rock-solid facts of geology, paleontology, physiology, cosmology and evolution. To such people, remaining determinedly unenlightened is the definition of faith.

From their authorities’ point of view, that kind of faith is required for their own continuing influx of money. Hence, congregations are deliberately trained to remain aggressively ignorant.

Why buy the lies?

What is the product that the faithful buy, with all their tithes, offerings, donations and widows’ mites? Simply, hot air.

Early Christians, referring to their god as the Logos (the Word), spoke more truly than they knew, because every god is made of nothing but words. Furthermore, most of the words are lies.

A god like the biblical one, telling crude, unsophisticated lies, is not really very credible. Therefore, believers have come up with many excuses for

God’s shepherds insist that no one can dare to judge him.

him. Putting the fear of God into their flocks, God’s shepherds insist that no one can dare to judge him. God’s ways are inscrutable.

No mere mortal can know the mind of God; even to presume an in-inking thereof is a sin. Then they turn around and claim to know exactly what God wants (always, more money) and tell the sheep exactly how God wants them to behave, along with the shearing. It seems that God’s inscrutability depends largely on who is doing the scrutinizing.

Many people deliberately ignore all questions about the authenticity of God or his cruder mistakes, fearful of offending their more pious neighbors, or of probing too deeply into their own doubts. They prefer to call themselves agnostic (by derivation, “no knowledge”) rather than atheist (“no god”). They may even attend a church for social reasons, but seek to know little or nothing of their own sect’s history or theological tenets.

Sometimes, the modern agnostics feel that, in the absence of hard evidence, the existence of God can’t be clearly proved or disproved. Therefore, they withhold judgment. This is not as rational as it sounds. Lack of evidence is proof of nothing. One cannot disprove the existence of vampires, ghosts, elves, dragons, fairies, demons or the Flying Spaghetti Monster, but that’s no reason to believe in them.



Gods are just as imaginary as any other allegedly supernatural being, and the burden of proof of their existence rests on the believer. To claim anything as a truth, when it is supported only by lies, is the very negation of logic.

Is it necessary, as is often claimed, to believe biblical lies in order to be a good person? Well, hardly. It has been demonstrated over and over that non-believers are usually generous, kind people, and the criminal population contains a greater percentage of believers.

Perhaps the defining virtue of non-believers may be honesty. They don’t like lies. They don’t want to be told lies. And they don’t tell lies, which may make them somewhat more admirable than the traditional God.

Barbara G. Walker is author of the monumental feminist/freethought sourcebook *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (1983). Her 20 other books, published by Harper & Row, include *The Skeptical Feminist*. An atheist, she has also specialized in debunking New Age assertions.

Order Walker’s new book (many chapters of which were originally published in *Freethought Today*), *Man Made God* (Steller Press), \$24 ppd., from FFRF, Box 750, Madison, WI, 53701, or at ffrf.org/shop/.

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Lawrence W. Roy, 47, Martinsville, NC: Suspicion of grand larceny. Roy, pastor at New Life Ministries International, is sought in connection with a robbery at the Bank of America in Danville. Roy was pastor of God's Holy Church in Christ from 2006-10, which was foreclosed on after a 2010 fire. *Source: Martinsville Bulletin, 6-24-12*

Charles Gilford, 58, and Adriane Gilford, 53, Houston: Aggregate theft and "misapplication of fiduciary property." The Gilmfords, husband and wife, are pastor and first lady, respectively, at Bethel Institutional Missionary Baptist Church.

They're charged with misappropriating at least \$430,000 in church funds to gamble at the Coughatta Casino near Lake Charles, LA, in 2004-07. *Source: KHOU, 6-22-12*

Abraham Rubin, 48, and brothers Joseph, Jacob and Hertzka Berger, all of Brooklyn, NY: Coercion, 4 counts of bribing a witness, 2 counts of tampering with a witness (Rubin); aggravated harassment (Joseph Berger); coercion (Jacob and Hertzka Berger).

The men were indicted for allegedly pressuring a girl to stop cooperating with law enforcement over sexual molestation allegations against ultra-Orthodox Rabbi **Nechemya Weberman** last year. Weberman's trial on charges of molesting the girl from 2007-10 during counseling sessions, starting when she was 12, was set to start in June but has been delayed. *Source: The Brooklyn Paper, 6-22-12*

Chuck Hager, 47, Stony Point, NC: 7 counts of insurance fraud and 6 counts of obtaining property by false pretenses. Hager, pastor of New Beginnings Christian Fellowship, is accused of "submitting a fraudulently signed disability claim form in support of a disability claim when in fact his employer did not sign the disability claim form and the defendant was not on disability leave."

Hager also worked at May's Meats in Taylorsville. AFLAC insurance company contacted the state Department of Insurance to allege he filed a fraudulent claim while continuing to work full time. AFLAC alleges he got \$23,000 in payments. *Source: Hickory Daily Record, 6-21-12*

Thomas P. Shoback, 66, Wilkes-Barre, PA: 32 counts of child sex abuse, including involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, attempted involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, indecent assault, endangering the welfare of children and corruption of minors. Police said the alleged assaults occurred between 1991-97 at the rectory of St. Mary's Parish in Blossburg, where Shoback was pastor, and at a nearby cabin.

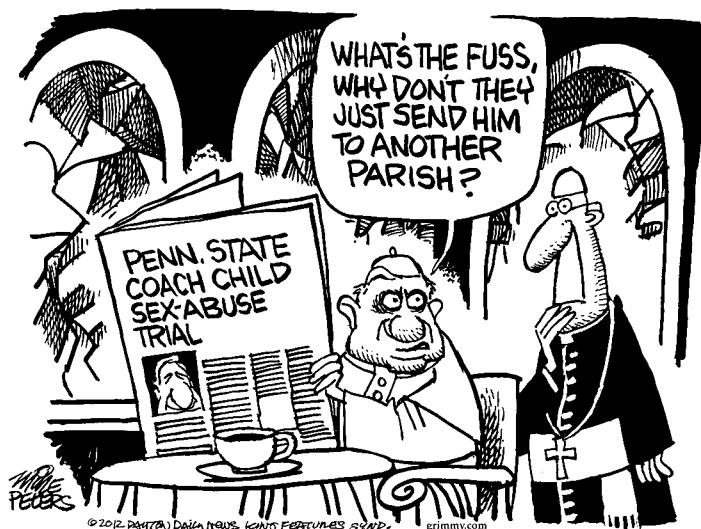
The Diocese of Scranton has suspended him from priestly duties. His brother, **Edward Shoback**, also a longtime priest in the diocese, was defrocked in 2009 for similar child sex allegations. *Source: Citizens' Voice, 6-18-12*

Brian G. Shriner, 46, Winter Park, FL: Solicitation of a minor. Shriner, an Episcopalian priest and teacher at Geneva Christian School, is accused of emailing a person he thought was a minor in order to set up a sexual encounter. The "child" was actually a deputy sheriff.

Shriner has 2 minor children. *Source: Orlando Sentinel, 6-16-12*

Roman Isaac Harkins, 25, Easley, SC: 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor. Harkins is charged with molesting his female piano student at New Life Baptist Church 2 years ago when she was 13. Pastor Ronnie Powell said Harkins played piano for the church and sang with his family. His father is music minister.

"Satan's alive and well. He's trying to do everything he can to attack and tear down the church," Powell said. "New Life Baptist Church is a great church, a soul-winning church. We



have lots of people saved here and Satan don't like it." *Source: WYFF, 6-14-12*

Ronald L. Pyles, 58, North Jackson, OH: 2 counts each of rape and gross sexual imposition. Pyles, pastor at Victory Harvest Ministry, is accused of raping a 20-year-old woman between October 2010 and March 2011 when she lived at the homeless shelter that's part of the ministry. *Source: Youngstown Vindicator, 6-14-12*

Antonio Llamado, 45, Mandaluyong City, PHI: Rape. Llamado, pastor of Lord of Nation Church, allegedly molested a 17-year-old girl for 10 months. Police Director Samuel Pagdilao said Llamado recruited the girl last August by promising to house and educate her, then allegedly turned her into his sex slave. *Source: Philippine Star, 6-12-12*

Creflo Dollar, 50, Atlanta: Simple battery and cruelty to children. Dollar, pastor of World Changers Church International, denied from the pulpit that he hit and choked his 15-year-old daughter. His ministry has about 30,000 members.

The girl called 911 about 1 a.m. to report the incident and said the argument was about her going to a party. Creflo claimed the marks on her neck were due to eczema. *Source: Boston Globe, 6-11-12*

Samuel Bangs, 23, Bellmawr, NJ: Sexual assault, endangering the welfare of a minor and 2 counts of criminal sexual conduct. Bangs, a youth mentor at Grace Bible Church, is accused of molesting a boy under age 16 he met as a church volunteer. *Source: Gloucester County Times, 6-10-12*

Mark A. Green, 41, Albertville, AL: Sexual abuse of a child and aggravated sexual abuse of a child. Green, pastor of Cowboy Baptist Church, is charged with alleged incidents in 2 Texas counties. Texas officials said Green has a criminal record that started when he was 20. He was last released from prison in 2007. The church has fired him. *Source: WAFF/Sand Mountain Reporter, 6-7-12*

Michael Wolfe, Greenville, SC: 1st-offense prostitution. Wolfe, senior pastor at Advent United Methodist Church, was among 48 people arrested in a weekend sting. A parishioner told News 4 that Wolfe told the congregation he wouldn't be preaching for a while and that he'd stopped to help someone and naively got caught up in something. *Source: WYFF, 6-4-12*

Charles R. Manning, St. Louis: 3 counts of sex assault on a child by one in a position of trust and 2 counts each of contributing to the delinquency of a minor and sexual exploitation of children. Manning, formerly of St. Gabriel the Archangel Catholic Church in Colorado Springs, CO, was put on leave in January and retired in February. *Source: AP, 5-31-12*

Joshua H. Finney, 29, Conestee, SC: 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor and lewd act on a minor. Finney, youth pastor and bible study leader at First Baptist Church, is accused of having intercourse with a girl from the congregation when she was 15 in 2010. *Source: WYFF, 5-29-12*

David A. Rice, 55, Anniston, AL: 1st-degree domestic violence. Rice, pastor of First Presbyterian Church, is accused of stabbing his brother in the arm and chest at the pastor's home, which is owned by the church. *Source: Anniston Star, 5-29-12*

Phillip L. Kittrell, 77, Marshfield, MO: 1st-degree sexual misconduct. Kittrell, a local pastor, is accused of grabbing an 18-year-old Walmart employee's penis in the store. A video camera recorded the incident, court documents said.

Kittrell pleaded guilty to 2 misdemeanor sexual misconduct counts after a similar incident in 2007 and was sentenced to 2 years' probation. *Source: Ozarks First, 5-24-12*

Finian Egan, 77, Sydney: Rape and 16 counts of indecent assault. Egan, a retired Catholic priest, allegedly molested 3 underage girls and a boy in the 1970s and 1980s. *Source: Morning Herald, 5-23-12*

Kevin G. McCurry, 35, Rock Hill, NC: Criminal domestic violence. McCurry, pastor of Faith, Hope and Love Ministries, allegedly threatened to kill his wife and throw her body in the river. *Source: Charlotte Observer, 5-23-12*

Angel Perez, 45, Kissimmee, FL: Unlawful sexual activity with a minor. Perez, pastor at Templo Pentecostal Puerto de Salvation, engaged in sexual acts with a 16-year-old boy from his church on 3 occasions, the arrest warrant said. *Source: Palm Beach Post, 5-22-12*

Mark Barninger, Dauphin Co., PA: Failure to report suspected child abuse by a mandatory reporter. Barninger, Bible Fellowship Church pastor, is charged with failing to report parental concerns about their daughter's suspected sexual abuse by a neighbor, **Gerald Regan**, who is charged with corruption of minors and indecent assault without consent of others.

State Police said Regan allegedly told the parents that "There was no penetration, and if it was just kissing that had occurred, it would be better to confront the neighbor and not go to police or news media." *Source: CBS 21, 5-22-12*

Larry M. Bollinger, 66, Gastonia, NC: Bollinger, former pastor at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, was indicted for engaging in illicit sexual conduct with 2 girls under age 18 in Haiti in 2009. Authorities said he was working as director of the Hope House, which provided food, shelter and schooling for Haitian children. *Source: WBTV, 5-21-12*

James Garner Smith, 37, West Union, SC: Criminal sexual conduct with a minor and 2 counts of lewd act upon a child. Smith was at Ebenezer Baptist Church, where the alleged victim, a 14-year-old girl, was a member. Smith has been placed on leave. *Source: WYFF, 5-18-12*

Ira Parmenter, 33, Grand Falls, NEWF: Sexual exploitation. Parmenter was youth pastor at Colwood Pentecostal Church in 2007-08 when the alleged sexual relationship with a 16-year-old girl took place. The girl's mother reported it to police in 2011 after she found about it. *Source: Times Colonist, 5-16-12*

Robert Lyzenga, 55, Lafayette,

IN: Suspicion of felony voyeurism. Lyzenga, pastor of Sunrise Christian Reformed Church, allegedly hid video cameras inside fake "Glade Air-o-Matic" boxes attached to the inside of women's restroom stall doors. A woman told police the box fell off and she saw the camera inside.

The married father of 3 has been removed from church duties. *Source: Muncie Star Press, 5-15-12*

Peter J. Hooper, 54, Bebington, UK: 3 counts of sexual activity with a child. Hooper, pastor at St. Luke the Physician Catholic Church, "has been withdrawn from all ministry in line with procedures," a Diocese of Shrewsbury statement said. *Source: BBC, 5-15-12*

Kenneth N. Allen, 36 East Prairie, MO: Possession of child pornography and 3 counts of 1st-degree statutory sodomy of deviate sexual intercourse with a person less than 14 years old. Sheriff Keith Moore said Allen, pastor of Grace Apostolic Church, may have molested as many as 4 other children.

A mother of an alleged victim said children would stay overnight with Allen while the parents worked. She said she became suspicious when her son came out of Allen's house wearing only boxer shorts, which weren't his, and had lotion on him. *Source: AP, 5-11-12*

Ralph Rowe, 72, Surrey, ON: 5 counts of sexual assault and 2 counts of indecent assault. Rowe, a former Anglican priest and Scout leader, previously served 6 years for multiple counts of sex crimes involving boys as young as 6. New charges relate to alleged incidents in 1973-86. *Source: Cloverdale Reporter, 5-10-12*

Alton "Gene" Dorrough, 62, Exeter, CA: Engaging in 3 or more acts of substantial sexual conduct with a child residing in the same home, 4 counts of oral copulation with a minor, 2 counts each of forcible sex with a child under 14 and forcible sex with a child over 14. Dorrough works with Celebrate Recovery, a Christ-centered 12-step program for "hurts, habits and hang-ups," and is a police chaplain. He's accused of molesting a female juvenile for several years. *Source: Foothills Sun-Gazette, 5-9-12*

Franklin A. Love, 39, Cumru Township, PA: Institutional sexual assault, endangering the welfare of children and corrupting minors. Love, who resigned as Berks Christian School principal, is charged with molesting a 17-year-old female student. Alleged assaults usually took place at the girl's home after her mother was asleep, police said. *Source: Reading Eagle, 5-8-12*

Keith W. Denford, 72, Shoreham, UK, and Michael Mytton, 66, East Chilton, UK: 4 counts of indecent assault, respectively, and aiding and abetting indecent assault. Denford, a semiretired Anglican priest, is accused of molesting 2 boys under age 16 in 1987-90. Mytton, who worked as an organist, is accused of facilitating at least one of the alleged assaults. *Source: The Argus, 5-8-12*

Ifeanyi Chukwu E. Abakporo, Jamaica Estates, NY: Wire fraud, bank fraud and conspiracy to commit bank fraud. Abakporo, a Nigerian citizen and pastor at Deeper Life Bible Church, is accused with Latanya Pierce of defrauding Washington Mutual Bank of more than \$1 million and of defrauding an 80-year-old retired teacher out of her interest in a 37-unit building on 164th St. in Brooklyn. *Source: MSNBC, 5-3-12*

Philip Grandine, 25, Toronto: 1st-degree murder. Grandine, pastor at Ennerdale Road Baptist Church, is charged in the death of his wife, Anna Karissa Grandine, 30, who died last October when she was 5 months pregnant.

A man phoned 911 at 10:50 p.m., saying his wife was in distress and had been in the bathtub. The death was initially listed as a drowning. *Source: Toronto Star, 5-3-12*

Raymond E. Cooper, 42, Marshall, TX: Online solicitation of a

'This was about evil men who did evil things to children.'

— D.A. Seth Williams, prosecuting Msgr. William Lynn

minor. Cooper, senior pastor at First Church of the Nazarene, is charged with trying to solicit a 14-year-old girl, who was actually an undercover Louisiana State Police officer. *Source: KYTX, 5-3-12*

Finian Egan, 77, Ryde, NSW: Rape and 16 counts of indecent assault. Egan, a retired Catholic priest, is charged with molesting an 11-year-old girl and a 16-year-old girl in 1979 and 1987 and a 17-year-old girl and a 14-year-old boy in 1972-73. *Source: Brisbane Times, 5-1-12*

Pleaded / Convicted

William Lynn, 61, Philadelphia: Guilty by jury of endangering the welfare of a child. Lynn, a Monsignor in the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, is the first senior U.S. Catholic official to be convicted for covering up child sex abuse.

"This is a monumental victory for the named and unnamed victims," said D.A. Seth Williams. "This was about evil men who did evil things to children."

Isa Logan, jury foreman and U.S. Army veteran, said Lynn had a personal responsibility to report the abuse to the proper authorities. "I am a human being before I'm a soldier, so if he's telling me something to do that is incorrect, then I'll be court-martialed before I do something like that." The same jury was unable to reach verdicts on attempted rape and child endangerment charges against one of the priests Lynn supervised in the job Lynn held for 12 years, **Edward Brennan**. *Source: Reuters, 6-23-12*

Ronald Weinland, 63, Cincinnati: Guilty by jury verdict of 5 counts of tax evasion. Weinland, who runs a ministry called the Church of God – Preparing for the Kingdom of God from his \$381,000 home, avoided paying \$357,000 in taxes between 2005-10 by illegal means, according to an indictment.

His lawyers said Weinland deposited church money in Swiss banks because he believed "society was in its 'final days,' and that before Jesus Christ returns, the U.S. financial system would collapse." *Source: Northern Kentucky News, 6-13-12*

George Benbow, 59, Plainfield, NJ: Guilty by jury of 4 counts of child endangerment. The girls, who ranged in ages between 9 and 13, were either campers, counselors or babysitters at Christian Fellowship Gospel Church. The girls testified the 59-year-old would have them sit on his lap and he would rub up against them.

Benbow founded the church in 1981. It closed after his arrest in 2008. *Source: AP, 6-13-12*

Lavel Schwartz, 60, Brooklyn, NY: Pleaded guilty to money-laundering. Rabbi Schwartz is accused of conspiring with his brother, Rabbi **Mordchai Fish**, in a New Jersey federal case. Schwartz is the last of 5 rabbis arrested in 2009 to plead guilty who were caught in a sting called Operation Bid Rig. *Source: Bank Info Security, 5-29-12*

Bartley Sorensen, 62, Churchill, PA: Pleaded guilty to receiving child pornography and possession of child pornography. Sorensen, pastor of St. John Fisher Catholic Church, was charged with possession of thousands of computer images of boys posing naked or engaging in sex acts. *Source: Post-Gazette, 5-23-12*

John M. Fiala, 53, Lawrence, KS: Guilty by jury of solicitation of capital murder. Prosecutors alleged Fiala, a

former Catholic priest in Texas, tried to hire a neighbor's brother to kill a man who accused him of sexual abuse in 2008 when he was 16.

The "hitman" Fiala met in November 2010 and offered \$5,000 was actually an undercover police officer. The jury heard their recorded conversation. He still faces 4 counts of sex crimes against children. *Source: Kansas City Star, 5-21-12*

Sentenced

Antoine Johnson, 29, Dacula, **GA**: Life in prison for 3 counts of aggravated child molestation. Johnson, a youth mentor and summer camp organizer at Hebron Baptist Church, was found guilty of inventing a 14-year-old Texan named "Kristen" on MySpace to lure troubled teen boys into sexual relationships.

Assistant D.A. Nigel Lush called Johnson an evil genius. "I've been a prosecutor 13 years, and the defendant's testimony was some of the most bizarre I've seen. We got a look inside the mind of a true pedophile." *Source: Gwinnett Daily Post, 6-22-12*

Michael A. Crippen, 53, Duenweg, **MO**: 3 years and 10 months in prison with no parole after pleading guilty to possession of child pornography. Crippen, pastor at First Baptist Church, admitted to downloading images from a porn site in the Netherlands. The married father of 2 testified he prayed to God to relieve him of his obsession, which he usually indulged in before going to work in the morning. *Source: Joplin Globe, 6-22-12*

James Hennah, 39, Bristol, **UK**: 6 months in jail, no unsupervised contact with anyone under 18 for 7 years and placement on the sex offender registry for 7 years. Hennah, youth pastor for the evangelical Bristol Community Church, was charged with molesting a boy at his parents' home while counseling him.

Testimony showed praying turned to preying as Hennah, claiming to be "bringing him peace," instead put his hand inside the boy's underwear. Another time he allegedly got the boy to strip in front of him on the pretext of showing off a new pair of underpants. *Source: Daily Mail, 6-20-12*

Peter Hooper, 55, Wirral, **UK**: 5 years in prison for sexual activity with a child. Hooper, pastor of St. Luke the Physician Catholic Church, was caught having oral sex with a boy in Hooper's church residence.

Prosecutor Robert Jansen said a man who witnessed the act asked Hooper what was going on, and Hooper allegedly replied, "I don't know what to do. I've been seduced by a 15-year-old boy." Hooper told detectives he felt "mentally raped" by the boy. *Source: Wirral Globe, 6-18-12*

Clayton Cowart, 40, Polk City, **FL**: 1 year probation after pleading no contest to stalking. Cowart, pastor of Church of God the Bibleway, was charged after a woman complained he put a GPS tracking device on her car without her knowledge.

The victim had sought a 2010 injunction of protection against dating violence after she told police she'd had an affair with Cowart, who used a church tax exemption to buy a \$350 GPS device. *Source: The Ledger, 6-7-12*

James Boudreau, 69, Guelph, **ON**: 15 months and 6 months served concurrently in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of sexual assault. Boudreau, pastor at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church admitted fondling a 15-year-old boy in the rectory in 1983 and engaging in reciprocal oral sex with a 17-year-old boy from his congregation in 1984. *Source: Guelph Mercury, 5-28-12*

Philip Caminiti, 55, Black Earth, **WI**: 2 years in prison and 6 years' probation. Caminiti, pastor of Aleitheia Bible Church, was found guilty by a jury of 8 counts of conspiracy to commit child abuse for instructing congregation members and his own family to hit children as young as 2 months old on their bare skin with wooden dowels to discipline them.

Circuit Judge Maryann Sumi denied a defense request for no prison time, noting that Caminiti had shown no remorse. "The children were beaten for of all things doing what children do, and that is crying," Sumi said. *Source: State Journal, 5-27-12*

Mark Griggs, 50, Berea, **OH**: 6

years in prison after pleading guilty to 83 counts of pandering sexually oriented matter involving a minor. The pastor of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church had evidence of hundreds of pornographic videos and images on his computer, some of children as young as 2, prosecutors said. Others described or depicted children engaged in bestiality. *Source: Fox 8 Cleveland, 5-21-12*

Nathan D. Moore, 25, Fayetteville, **GA**: 30 years in prison and probation for life after pleading guilty to 8 counts of aggravated child molestation, 2 counts of child molestation and enticing a child for indecent purposes. Moore, youth pastor at Heritage Christian Church, was accused of molesting a boy he met through the church at Moore's home.

Senior Pastor Doug Fultz said Moore was fired before allegations came to light. "He was taking the youth ministry in a different direction than the church thought was necessary." *Source: The Citizen, 5-21-12*

Carmelita Hines, 48, Waldorf, **MD**: 20 months in prison after pleading guilty to wire fraud. She was accused of embezzling \$217,074 from 2007-11 from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, where she was office operations manager. *Source: Washington Examiner, 5-12-12*

Keith J. Boyd, 44, Slidell, **LA**: 3 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of carnal knowledge and indecent behavior with a juvenile. Boyd, pastor of Open Door Apostolic Church, was convicted for having sex for 3 months with a 16-year-old girl. *Source: News Banner, 5-11-12*

Riccardo Seppia, 51, Sestri Ponente, **ITA**: 9 years, 6 months in prison and a fine of 28,000 euros after being found guilty of attempted sexual violence, attempted prostitution of a minor and attempting to furnish cocaine to minors. The Catholic priest was accused of plying altar boys and others with cocaine to facilitate sexual encounters.

Fellow priest Piercarlo Casassa said he warned church officials about Seppia in 1994. "People had told me he had a untoward approach with the scouts [altar boys], and I told the authorities he was not the right person to have around youngsters, but no one listened to me." *Source: Daily Mail, 5-3-12; AKI, 5-2-12*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Plaintiff "P.V." is suing **Gonzaga Prep** in **Seattle** for failing to protect him from **John Campbell**, a Catholic priest he alleges molested him as a student in the 1960s. The **Jesuits of the Missouri Province** are also named. The order employed Campbell and sent him to Spokane to recruit students for a religious summer camp.

According to news accounts in 2003, the Missouri Jesuits paid \$575,000 to settle multiple claims of abuse against Campbell. *Source: Spokesman-Review, 6-14-12*

A Glens Falls, **NY**, man, 36, is suing Catholic priest **Gary Mercure** and the **Albany Diocese** in federal court in Vermont on allegations Mercure raped him in the late 1980s.

Mercure was sentenced in 2011 to 20 years in prison in Massachusetts for raping at least 3 altar boys, including the plaintiff. *Source: Albany Times Union, 6-12-12*

A **Honolulu** man is suing Catholic priest **Gerald Funcheon** and **Damien Memorial Catholic School** on allegations Funcheon molested him as a 13-year-old in the 1980s.

"Before plaintiff was sexually abused, the [Crosier Fathers and Brothers Province] had serious concerns about Funcheon's interactions with children, Funcheon's sexuality and Funcheon's abuse of alcohol and prescription drugs," the lawsuit states. *Source: AP, 5-25-12*

Thomas Harkins, a Catholic priest, and the **Diocese of Camden, NJ**, are being sued over alleged sexual abuse to an 11-year-old girl in 1980-81 when Harkins, now removed from the ministry, was pastor at St. Anthony of Padua parish in Hammon-ton.

CBS reported in May that Harkins is working as a TSA checkpoint supervisor in a Philadelphia airport. He told a reporter the public has nothing to worry about even though he oper-

Pastor Hooper, 55, told detectives he felt 'mentally raped' by the boy, 15.

ates a body scanner. *Source: CBS News, 5-25-12*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The Catholic **Diocese of Orange, CA**, settled a lawsuit for \$2 million to end a lawsuit alleging former **Msgr. Michael Harris** molested the plaintiff in 1986 or 1987 when Harris was principal of Mater Dei High School in Santa Ana.

"John Doe," 41, alleges Harris called him into his office to give him a citizenship award and a rosary blessed by the pope and then orally copulated him to finish off the ceremony. A claim against Harris will be dropped because he is insolvent. *Source: Orange County Register, 6-19-12*

A jury awarded **Wisconsin** brothers Troy and Todd Merryfield \$700,000 between then in a suit against the **Diocese of Green Bay** alleging Catholic priest **John Feeney** molested them as children when he was pastor at St. Nicholas Church in Freedom. Feeney was convicted in 2004 for the assaults and has served his prison sentence. *Source: Post-Crescent, 5-21-12*

Legal Developments

Donald Buzanowski, 69, a former Catholic priest at Sts. Peter and Paul parish in Green Bay, **WI**, will be permitted to live in a state-run transitional living facility. Buzanowski was released after serving 6 years in prison for sexual assault of a child. The Green Bay Sex Offender Residence Board at first denied his request but later granted it. *Source: Press-Gazette, 6-17-12*

Kentucky Catholic priest **James Schook's** trial on sodomy charges was postponed until December because Shook, 64, is undergoing chemotherapy for stage IV melanoma, which typically means life expectancy of less than a year. *Source: AP, 6-14-12*

Jose A. Davila, 53, **San Diego**, former pastor at St. Jude Catholic Church, was reinstated as associate pastor 6 months after his arrest and guilty plea to battery for groping a woman at his home. He was sentenced to 3 years' probation and 150 hours of community service.

"No, they're all lies, all lies," said parishioner Guillermina Nava. "The girl was lying because she wanted to go on a trip and since he wouldn't lend her money she told him, you'll pay for this." *Source: NBC San Diego, 6-7-12*

Victor Koltun, 42, a rabbi from Brooklyn, **NY**, is mentally fit to stand trial on 1st- and 2nd-degree murder charges, said a psychiatric assessment, his fifth.

Koltun is accused in a "murder for hire" plot in the deaths of two men in 2010. Two co-defendants pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges and are serving prison terms. *Source: Times Herald-Record, 5-23-12*

The case against **Roger Ball**, 43, former pastor at Greenhill Baptist Church in Greenville, **TN**, arrested for solicitation of a minor, has been turned over to a grand jury. He also worked as a teacher and coach for the Tennessee Co-op Home School Support Group.

Ball's 15-year-old accuser, his daughter's best friend, testified he sent her messages that said he wanted to take off her clothes and kiss her body.

"It made me feel very scared and very gross inside that somebody that age would feel that way about me," she said at his preliminary hearing. *Source: tricities.com, 5-20-12*

Rabbi **Abraham Glick**, who ran Yeshivah College between 1986-2007, told a Melbourne, **AUS**, court he did know of allegations that **David Cyprys**, a former security guard at the Orthodox school, had molested children.

Glick admitted in his previous witness statement that he had no memory of anyone complaining about Cyprys molesting children was inaccurate. Cyprys faces 53 abuse counts. *Source: The Age, 5-15-12*

DuPage County Judge John Kinsella rejected a request from Catholic priest **John Regan**, 48, Roselle, **IL**, to resume his duties at St. Walter Catholic Church so he can more quickly pay back \$295,000 he stole from the church and gambled away. Regan served 60 days in jail and is on probation for 4 years while working at a factory job for \$9 an hour.

"I thought it was important the defendant engage in menial and manual labor," said Kinsella. "People worked hard for their money and quite rightfully were dismayed by the loss of their money. If that means it takes longer to repay, so be it." *Source: Chicago Sun-Times, 5-11-12*

Removed / Resigned

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee placed **John Schreiter**, pastor at St. John Neumann Catholic Church in Waukesha, **WI**, on leave during a probe of sexual abuse allegations. It came 2 weeks before his scheduled retirement.

He was also accused of abuse in 2004 but the Diocesan Review Board found the allegation unsubstantiated. *Source: AP, 6-11-12*

The Catholic **Diocese of Rochester, NY**, released the names of priests removed from public ministry since 2002 for credible claims of sexual abuse of minors. The list names about 2 dozen offenders and will be updated.

Priests dismissed or assigned to a life of prayer and penance: **Thomas Burr, Thomas Corbett, Eugene Emo, Robert Hammond, William Lum, Dennis Sear, David Simon, Francis Vogt, Robert Winterkorn**.

Priests who voluntarily left after being accused: **Albert Carson, Paul Cloonan, Joseph Larrabee, Foster Rogers**.

Unresolved cases in which priests have been placed on administrative leave: **Vincent Panepinto, Paul Schnacky, Dennis Shaw, Conrad Sundholm, Michael Volino**.

Complaints received after death of the priest: **David Bonin**. *Source: Evening Tribune, 6-8-12*

Jay Lawlor, 42, Kalamazoo, **MI**, who resigned as pastor at St. Luke Episcopal Church in 2011 after he was charged with assault for shov-

ing an elderly parishioner, has been given a \$468,000 severance payout by Western Michigan Bishop Robert Geper. A jury found him not guilty of assault.

Lawlor worked at St. Luke's for 21 months. His 2010 compensation was \$125,000, including \$85,000 in salary, plus housing and benefits. *Source: Kalamazoo Gazette, 6-6-12*

Daniel Valentine, 63, Sewickley, **PA**: Valentine, pastor of St. James Catholic Church, was put on leave during an investigation of his Facebook posts. A family came to the diocese "and expressed deep concern about a posting on Facebook to one of their minor children. Having heard it, we determined that it should be turned over to the district attorney's office," said Fr. Ronald Lengwin, diocesan spokesman. The diocese requested a forensic audit of church computers. *Source: Post-Gazette, 5-30-12*

Orlando Molina, 51, Opa Locka, **FL**: Suspended during a probe of his alleged gambling activities. Molina, a Nicaraguan, is a priest in the U.S. Catholic Church, which is not under Vatican authority.

In an anonymous letter sent to media with a video, parishioners accused Molina of stealing offerings to play slot machines. *Source: Miami Herald, 5-30-12*

Fr. **Joseph Byrne**, Falmouth, **MA**, was suspended pending a probe by the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston of sex abuse allegations dating to the early 1970s. Byrne received 5 years' probation for embezzling in 2005 for stealing \$135,000 from Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted parish. *Source: Boston Globe, 5-28-12*

Msgrs. **Hugh P. Campbell**, 77, and **George J. Mazzotta**, 73, were "found not suitable for ministry" by the Catholic Archdiocese of **Philadelphia** due to decades-old sexual abuse allegations. *Source: Daily Local, 5-21-12*

John Wisner, Roeland Park, **KS**, ordained as a Catholic priest in 1972, was suspended by the Archdiocese of Kansas City due to an allegation he inappropriately touched a 15-year-old boy on a youth outing in 1982.

According to a statement, Wisner "acknowledges the time, location and circumstances surrounding the allegation, but he denies that he engaged in sexual misconduct." *Source: KMBC, 5-10-12*

Randy Harry, 51, Marmora, **PA**, resigned as pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church after he was charged with loitering to engage a prostitute. Parents at the church's preschool demanded his resignation.

Harry gave various reasons for driving in the area before telling an officer he was driving to clear his mind after arguing with his wife. He pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of disorderly conduct. *Source: AP, 5-8-12*

Michael Slusz, Naugatuck, **CT**, resigned as pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church but will continue to head St. Francis-St. Hedwig School. Slusz is also taking a leave of absence from priestly ministry. No reason was given. *Source: Naugatuck Patch, 5-7-12*

The Catholic **Archdiocese of Philadelphia** has permanently removed Msgr. **Francis J. Feret**, 75, from the ministry. He was among 26 priests suspended last year due to molestation allegations.

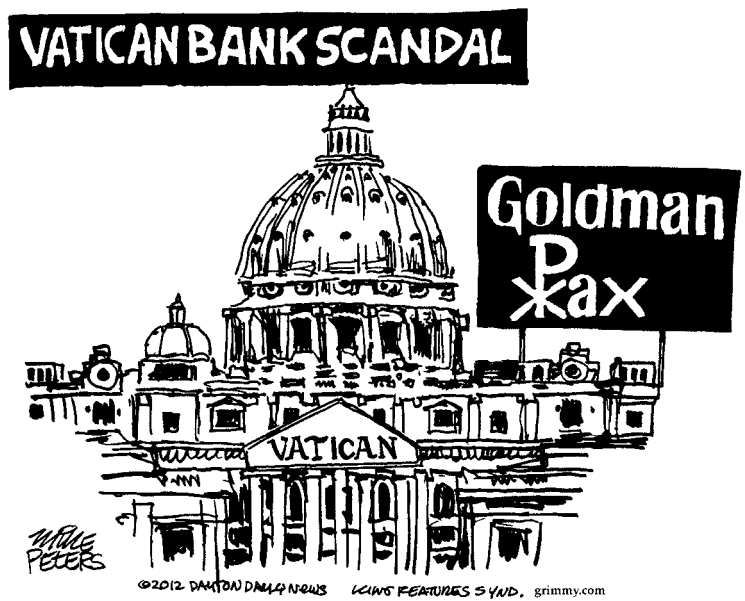
The alleged victim accused Feret of assaulting him at age 9 in the early 1970s, including anal and oral sex. *Source: philly.com, 5-4-12*

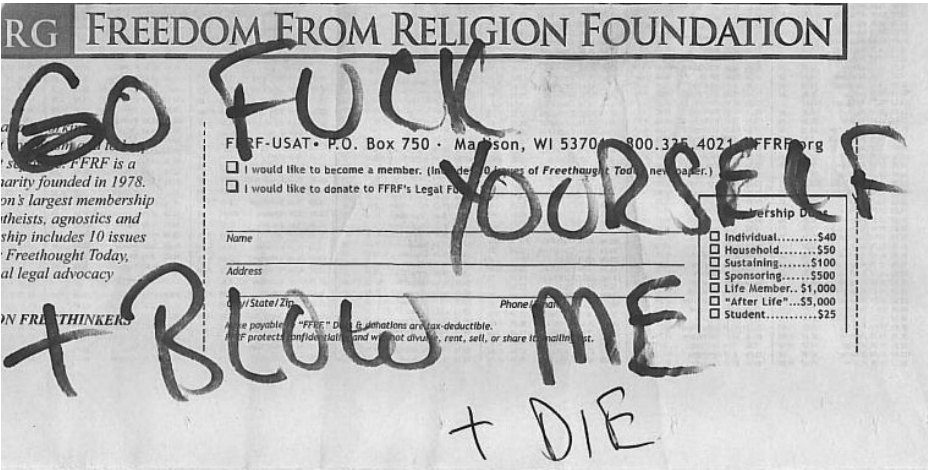
Fr. **Martin McVeigh's** PowerPoint presentation to 30 parents whose children were preparing for their First Holy Communion went dreadfully awry at St. Mary's School in Pomeroy, **N.IRE**, when images of nude men showed up on the screen. An 8-year-old boy was also present.

Parents said the images were stored on a memory stick McVeigh inserted into the computer, which later was reported missing. A parent said McVeigh quickly removed the stick and "was visibly shaken and flustered." He left the room, returned about 20 minutes later and gave no apology or explanation. Cardinal Sean Brady has granted sabbatical leave at McVeigh's request. *Source: Mid-Ulster Mail, 4-27-12*

Timothy J. Gorton was removed

Continued on next page





Black Collar Crimes

Continued from previous page

by the Catholic Diocese of Providence from the ministry at Precious Blood Parish in Woonsocket, RI, after abuse allegations by his nephew were deemed credible.

James C. Wilkinson, 43, said he was 12 when Gorton fondled him in the rectory of a church in 1983 and exposed himself at a beach cottage that belonged to a family friend. He was molested by his uncle about 6 months after he was ordained, Wilkinson alleges. Gorton is in his mid-50s.

Wilkinson alleges the first improper encounter came while his parents were in the midst of a divorce. *Source: The Call, 4-26-12*

The Albany Catholic Diocese placed **Jeremiah Nunan**, 74, Cairo, NY, on administrative leave after allegations of sexual abuse to minors. Nunan, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish and Our Lady of Knock Mission, was also put on leave 6 years ago but was restored to the ministry.

The parents and sister of 2 victims of Nunan's alleged abuse spoke to the press in Albany. Ivan Morales Sr. and Carol Morales and their daughter Maria, 20, spoke about their sons and brothers, Ivan Jr. and Martin, both of whom they allege were molested as 7-year-old altar boys.

Maria Morales said Nunan would tell her to wait outside and be "a good little girl" while he took Martin into a nearby room. "I never put two and two together."

"Martin had never spoke about what Father Nunan did to him," Carol Morales said. "Father Nunan tormented him for years. He is a monster."

Nunan gave Martin, now 23, hush money, his parents said. They showed reporters copies of checks from Nunan to Martin dated as recently as January 2011. *Source: Albany Times Union, 4-25-12*

Terry W. Specht, pastor of Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Annandale, VA, was put on leave by the Diocese of Arlington while an alleged relationship between Specht and a male minor in the 1990s is investigated. Specht denies all accusations. *Source: WJLA, 4-18-12*

The Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh placed Fr. **James Graham**, 72, on administrative leave as pastor at St. Lawrence O'Toole Parish in Garfield, PA. An allegation "involved a minor a number of years ago," Bishop David Zubik wrote to parishioners. *Source: Post-Gazette, 4-17-12*

The Catholic Diocese of Scranton, PA, has received an accusation of sexual misconduct involving Fr. Russell Motsay and a minor and has suspended him from the ministry during an investigation. Motsay was ordained in 1972. *Source: Pocono News, 4-16-12*

James Nadeau, 51, pastor at St. John Vianney Catholic Church in Fort Kent, ME, has taken a leave of absence while he is under investigation by the state Attorney General's Office, which didn't specify the reason for the investigation, the Diocese of Portland announced. *Source: Boston Herald, 4-4-12*

Robert M. Durkee, 85, Medford, MA, was

'We got a look inside the mind of a true pedophile.'

— Georgia prosecutor Nigel Lush

removed from the priesthood by the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts because of allegations he sexually abused 3 women. Durkee was pastor of Grace Episcopal Church from 1964-89. *Source: Medford Transcript, 4-3-12*

Gerald Riva, 70, resigned as pastor of St. Scholastica Catholic Church, Woodridge, IL, the Diocese of Joliet announced. The diocese said it was unaware until recently that Riva pleaded guilty to a public indecency charge in 1992.

The charged stemmed from a DuPage County Forest Preserve officer's report that Riva masturbated in front of the officer, then grabbed the male officer's genitals. *Source: Woodridge Reporter, 3-26-12*

Mark Molling, pastor of St. Paul Catholic Parish in Genesee Depot, WI, was placed on leave during an Archdiocese of Milwaukee investigation of an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor in the mid-1990s. Molling denies the allegation. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 3-19-12*

Robert Conole, pastor of Sacred Hearts Catholic Church, Bradford, MA, has resigned after an Archdiocese of Boston investigation of "serious adult-related misconduct" and a brain hemorrhage. Conole had taken leave in May 2011 to deal with personal matters. *Source: N. Andover Eagle-Tribune, 3-19-12*

Other

John P. Earl, who intentionally drove his car into a Rockford, IL, abortion clinic in 2000, has been reassigned from Holy Angels Church in Aurora to St. James Catholic Church in Belvidere. After hitting the garage door at the Northern Illinois Women's Center, the priest took an axe into the building that housed the clinic and other businesses, chopping down a door, windows and surveillance cameras.

The building's owner stopped Earl from entering the clinic itself by firing 2 warning shots. Earl pleaded guilty to criminal damage to property and completed 30 months of probation and paid \$7,664 in fines and restitution.

Barb Giolitto, Winnebago Citizens for Choice, said the community should reject Earl. "He is a violent convicted criminal, and to even let him remain as a priest is just a horrible example to all of his followers." The center closed earlier this year. *Source: Register Star, 6-16-12*

Fr. **Alvaro Corcuera**, head of the scandal-plagued Legionaries of Christ, admitted in a letter to members that he's known since about 2005 that Fr. **Thomas Williams**, an American based in Rome who was the public face of the order, was leading a double life and had fathered a child.

Williams appeared often on TV until 2010 to explain church teachings and wrote more than a dozen books, including "Knowing Right From Wrong: A Christian Guide to Conscience." *Source: Reuters, 5-22-12*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

Sharing the Crank Mail

Warning: These are unexpurgated, uncorrected emails from "good Christians" to FFRF. Not for the faint of heart.

Fuck you

You and you followers suck and you are one ugly bitch — Peter Hangslow

FFRF has a HELL OF A NERVE to be concerned about a war memorial statue in Woonsocket, RI! I'm sure like most organizations, FFRF is only very happy to receive donations, so I have enclosed one just for you with the words "IN GOD WE TRUST" removed. Spend it wisely. — God Bless You!!

Screw all of you liberal fuckers. — Jimmy Z

Christmas

What part of Christmas do you hate so much, The peace on earth or the good will towards man? If you hate Religion so much why not move to North Korea, I'm sure they would be happy to get a fine catch like you, and no Religion. A 50 year tradition gone because of you people. Those nativity scenes wasn't hurting you. What about the children who enjoyed them? I guess you have to have a heart and love in to care, Guess you don't, So sad. People like you make me thank GOD I'm not like you. Turn before you burn. — Terry Eckiss, Boonville, Ind.

u confused dillusional punk azzsatanic faggotsss

FIRST AND FROM THE TOP...AS WITH ALL FAGGOT RTRD'D MORON P's.O.S. U DILLUSIONAL FKN EMBECILES DONT KNOW WHAT THE FK ur TALK'N ABOUT AND MAKE NOT EVEN A PARTICLE OF SENSE!! FIRST, THIS COUNTRY WAS FOUNDED BY CHRISTIANS ..eg PURITANS aka>P I L G R I M S...THAT LEFT ENGLAND FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ..F-R-O-M THE STATE(THATS S-T-A-T-E) RUN CHURCH u G.D'd(LITERALLY) HOMO PIECES OF- SCARED OF THE TRUTH AND REALITY-SHIIIIIIIT!!! u DILUSIONAL GD FAGGOT PUNK DEMENTED PIECES OF SHIIIT THE ABOLITIONISTS /WERE FKN CHRISTIANS u HOMOS!!!!!!!!SHULD CALLu FAGGOTS THE F.of MINDLESS,BRAINLESS*CLUELESS EVIL MORON foundation..very acurate!!!!YEAH WIERDOS LIKE u evil pos DO ADVOCATE KILLING BABYS EVEN BORN BABIES u SICK P's OF FKN SHYYYYT!!!!YEAH u FAGGOTS ALSO SPEAKOUT FOR PRISON "reform" BUT DO SHYYYYT FOR VICTIMS OF SAID TRASH inmates..HUHHHHH FAGGOTSSSSSSSS? ?????????????????????!!!!!! CHALLENGE AN ATTEMPT AT REBUTAL GD SCARED DILLUSIONAL BURN IN HELL FAGGOTS. BET COWARDS LIKE u FAGGOTS WAT TOOOOOOOOOO SCARRREEEEED — Tim Edgley, Litchfield, Ariz.

stupidity

Look you evil satan worshipping hate mongers, Just because you don't worship GOD, keep your dumb unfounded opinions to your selves. Quit trying to force your self serving, evil, demonic beliefs on the rest of the world. This country does not need you, never has and never will. This country was founded on the premis of being able to worship GOD however we want WITHOUT being persecuted from idiots like you. Believe me you do not want to mess with me and unleash my wrath and fury, which you will never be able hide from or escape from. — Gorges Lamartre

Woonsocket, Rhode Island Cross Memorial

You douchebags need to stay in Wisconsin and make your cheese. You messed with the wrong city and all of you at the FFRF are the lowest common denominator of humanity! Whats the matter, Jealous that the CHURCH of JESUS CHRIST! is more powerful than you trouble making scumbags. May GOD BLESS! — Joseph Yram

You Cock Suckers

you stupid fucking atheist cocksucking stupid fagloving dick eating shitstains

You need to educate people?

So glad that you have ruled that the public needs educated and that you, a slop jar, are the ones to do it. I won't waste time with hell awaits you, etc. since you obviously do not believe in the inevitable. It becomes a waste of time to try to even have a dialogue with the FFRF, the equivalent of a rotting out house. How did I learn about FFRF you can't miss the stench. — Steve Grant, Benson, Ariz.

Camp Pendleton Crosses

You people are low life dirt bags. In fact, you're so low, you're lower than whale shit. — MC

woonsockett

go fuck yourselve NAZIS — Walter Mutlow

Woonsocket War Memorial

STAY THE FUCK AWAY FROM GOOD PEOPLE AND THEIR TOWNS... DICKHEAD! — Bill Hart, Augusta, Ga.

Out of Control

The freedom from religion foundation is like a bunch of flies. Eat dog crap and bother people. They should be banned!!! — Marvin Hampton

statue on big mountain

why the fuck are you people sticking your noses into our state.this country was founded on the belief in god.my suggetion to you is if you don't like our symbols here....than stay out of our state. — ross tetachuk

Catholic Church

Marriage has been always been between a man and a woman, it takes man and a woman to produce. Without this marriage, we would not have our world. — Sam Myers

Prayer at Georgia High School Graduation

Heres a nickles worth of free advice, mind your own damn business and have a great day. — Brent Edney, Georgia.

Georgia

Keep your thugs out of GA. No one really cares about what you think or do. Stay in Wisconsin and rot. — Robert Patton

God

I have seen your signs that declare that God does not exist. Where is your proof? If you cannot prove it, please remove your signs. — Warren Hibbs, Kemp, Texas

Your article has the same odor of Nazism to me that was rampant in Nazi Germany. You are sadly UN-AMERICAN and need to re-think your values. — John Bacsenko

prohibiting the free exercise thereof

You are just like the ACLU, and that is not meant as a compliment. — Harry Habearthear

debaptism certificate and ohter ffr literature

PLease send me a debaptism certificate along with other ffr literature. Dan Barker's book would be good too. I could use all of them to rip the pages out of to wipe my ass if I ever ran out of toilet paper. — David Jones, Wetumpka, Ala.

Sylvannia, AL sign

Go fark yourself about the Sylvannia, AL issue. I hope you all rot in HELL for eternity. — James Simms, Tuscaloosa, Ala.

religious sign

Dam rite the AL town aint welcoming to you so just stay away. I used to live in WI until people like u showed up — Leon Hussin



You guys are idiots!

I can't believe you don't even understand the constitution!! Go back to college and earn a real degree! — John Austin, Saint Clair Shores, Mich.

Freedom From Religion

It's not "Freedom From Religion" you stupid fucks. — Tom Calabro

Woonsocket

YOU ARE A MORON! How dare you stir up trouble for that little town of WOONSOCKET. SHAME ON YOU!!!! and the idiots you encourage! — Jennifer Abbott

crosses

just to let you know I put a cross up on public

land and also placed a plaque that says "This cross is in honor of the freedon from religon Foundation". So now you can sue yourselves you fucking idiots. I dare you to find it — Bruce

May you all die

YOu need to stop spreading your garbage. You are corrupting children. — JB

I am so saddened that you feel the way you do. I am praying for you. I used to be skeptical, but then the creator of the universe showed himself to me in a way that I will not deny. I pray he finds you in the same way. — Stephanie Austin

Cross Where it Should Not Be

What a bunch of douche bags you are! Shame on you! — Stephanie Philipp, Weterly, R.I.

Letterbox

87-year-old offers vote of confidence



I will be 87 years old this month and wish to celebrate by becoming a Lifetime Member of FFRF.
LaVerne Henderson
Missouri

FFRF gets to root of many problems

So many problems: homophobia, misogyny, racism, overpopulation, attacks on education, abuse of the environment. But what is the lowest common denominator of all these problems? Religion, and the ignorance and superstition essential for religious belief.

Now I could, for example, contribute individually to the groups promoting LGBT equality, reproductive rights for women, science, the arts, etc. Or I could focus on eradicating the root cause, which seems logical and so much simpler.

So it is with great pleasure that I enclose my check for Lifetime Membership. As a gay-trans man who's long been out of the closet, I'm thrilled FFRF has adopted what has proved to be our most effective weapon as we've made our slow journey to full and equal citizenship.

An African American president, a woman president, an LGBT president, an atheist president — our day will come.

Sean Gardner
New Mexico

Hopefully, FFRF's work will never end

Enclosed please accept (finally!) my check for Lifetime Membership. This is the proudest I have ever felt while writing out a check. Let me explain:

A few years back, after hearing my husband pine for a motorcycle for several years, I secreted away small sums of money in the hopes of making his wish a reality before his 50th birthday. I was proud that it took me a year and a half, and that he had his shiny new motorcycle in his 48th year.

Since that day two years ago, he has been asking me repeatedly, "What do you want now?" — meaning what big-ticket item was on my list for which we could start saving. I am, as I'm sure you and many of your members are, a person of simple tastes/needs. A new pair of shoes every now and then and an occasional massage is just fine for me.

But last year while attending my first FFRF annual convention in Hartford, Conn., and soaking in all of the richness in the words and songs of the amazing speakers and honorees, what I wanted hit me like a ton of bricks (that I desperately preferred to be used to keep building and maintaining the wall of separation between state and church): I wanted to save up for a Lifetime Membership.

Saving money is no easy feat for us, as my husband is an underpaid government employee and I am a social worker who has always worked for non-profits. As an administrator with a constant eye on programs and budgets, I know what it's like to focus on advancing a critical mission (for me, serving victims of intimate partner violence and human trafficking) while balanc-

ing the books, attempting to pay staff fairly and funding new initiatives, all in a tough economy.

The work of FFRF can never end, which is why a substantial gift that contributes to the agency's endowment felt like the most important thing for me to do. With every Freethought Today I read and every Freethought Radio podcast I listen to, and by witnessing all of the backward thought and action in the name of religion that is going on in the world, I have become convinced beyond a doubt that your work is the most crucial link to the kind of personal freedom that every human being deserves.

What FFRF works toward sets the baseline for personal choice — you can be religious or not religious, but you can still respect all people (even if you don't always respect what they espouse). When the religionists set the baseline, there are few if any real choices, and judgment is rampant. Nowhere is this evidenced more clearly than in the Crank Mail, which simultaneously makes me laugh and scares me to death for your personal safety, but always opens my eyes more widely.

Thank you for the risks you all take every day, and for your diligence and dedication in looking out for me and for the masses.

Amy Siniscalchi
New York

• • •

The world stops for a few hours when I get Freethought Today. It makes me so proud that I "transitioned" to (oftentimes lonely) atheist from traditional church membership. It helps immeasurably to know that I am not alone.

I thoroughly enjoyed James Haught's "Religion's bucket leaks like a sieve" and former pastor John Compere's write-up. I'm very eager to get their books. Reading books of this genre gives me much fodder for discussion at cocktail parties where my atheism is questioned.

The Crank Mail is so scary. I have encountered a lot of this venom, but I'm heartened by the letter writer who asked, "Are people ignorant because they're Christians or Christians because they're ignorant?" Can't wait for my next cocktail party to use that!

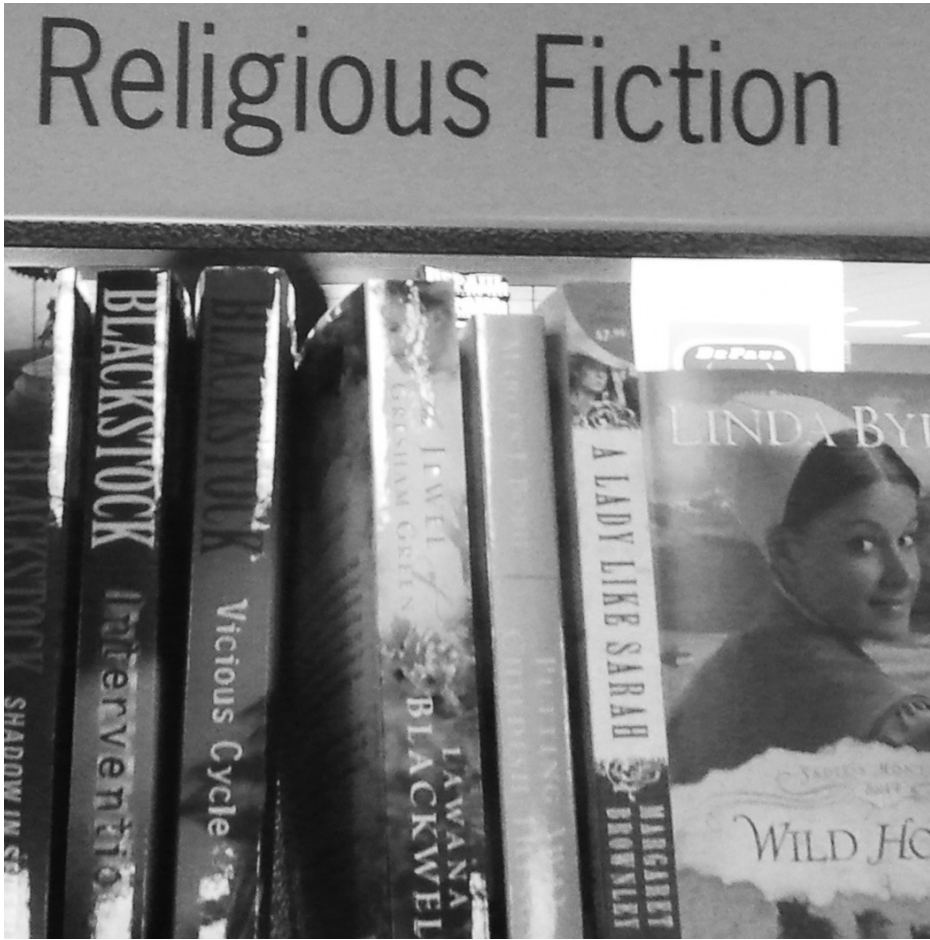
Jack M. Red
North Carolina

'No fear' is Hawaiian's state of mind

I joined FFRF a few months ago, and after the second Freethought Today I decided I should invest in Life Membership, but following my sense of frugality, I'd wait until my membership was up for renewal. After receiving the third issue, I can't wait.

I'm especially impressed by the astonishing ignorance of our critics and the corrosive venom of their threats, which, if carried out, would constitute hate crimes. I can feel sorry for those who live in a continuous state of uncertainty and fear, fervently praying for aid that never comes.

My own state is quite different: Fear, not at all; some uncertainty, yes, and nothing at all boring. There are surprises and challenges to meet every day. I'm well-equipped to meet them. Human adaptability is my deepest, well-evolved resource, honed by a lifetime of continuously accumulating



Redundancy aisle

As seen at Barnes and Noble on State Street at Jackson in Chicago. "It seemed ironic, descriptive and stupidly funny," says Candace Drimmer.

knowledge and skill development. Our critics wish to control their world by imposing their interpretation on everyone. We don't try to do the same to them. Freedom means freedom for them but not for anyone else.

Daniel Dennett points out ("Darwin's Dangerous Idea") that just as schoolchildren today acknowledge Copernicus' discovery that Earth is not the center of the universe, so too in a hundred years they will have no doubts about evolution.

We are not there yet. In the meantime, we have to defend our right to free inquiry, reason and scientific truth. It is with great pleasure that I put my money where my mouth is. Please sign me up for Life Membership.

Raymond Moody
Hawaii

Cheers to all ye 'spawn of Satan'

I live in the buckle of the bible belt (a suburb of Billy Graham's hometown). Yesterday, I sent a \$100 contribution to the FFRF. This morning, I turned on the television to see our local Baptist televangelist railing against the secularists, evolutionists, gays and hellbound atheists.

He explained that our great country must embrace the precepts of the King James Version of the bible if it is to survive. I now realize that I have contributed to an organization he surely believes is nothing less than the spawn of Satan.

The preacher's message came through to me loud and clear. Unfortunately, my check is in mail. I can't get it back, but I can send an additional \$100 (enclosed). Sorry for the extra paperwork.

William Hoffard
North Carolina

Arizonan helps move 'secular soldiers onward'

I can't believe how much hate has been revealed by Jessica Ahlquist's brave defense of our Constitution. Some Christians have crossed way over the line of decency. So if there is a "sec-

ular-socialist conspiracy," sign me up! Onward, secular soldiers!

Mike Steiner
Arizona

P.S. Here's my check for a Lifetime Membership.

Biblically, be careful what you wish for

Your recent report [March12] about teaching the bible in public schools in several states should be considered a rare opportunity for freethinking students and other non-Christian religions to challenge the bible's errors, contradictions and absurdities.

Bible advocates appear to be unaware of the Law of Unintended Consequences. A letter in my local newspaper pointed out the dangers of having the bible taught by a non-Christian. The writer who understood that within the church or religious institution, that institution could control the content of instruction and the questions and answers that would inevitably occur from it. If the school has a clergy person teach the course, the school is subject to lawsuits over the constitutional-ity of the practice.

A brilliant general takes advantage of the errors of an enemy. We have seen from the example of Jessica Ahlquist and others that there are courageous young freethinkers who will stand up to challenge the unconstitutional and irrational acts of theists. FFRF has many creative and brilliant members who should be able to compile a list of questions for those young freethinkers to ask in those classes to show the bible's irrationalities and contradictions.

Even if the teacher and others answer those questions with absurdities and non sequiturs, it will still create doubt in other students. Many of the personal histories of how people became atheists indicate that reading the bible and doubt about it was the first step in their rejection of its message.

It might take quite a while before courts put an end to public school bible course. Until then, FFRF should consider using this opportunity to teach Christians a lesson about the Law of Unintended Consequences.

Glen Salter
Arkansas

Sharing the Mail

God sees 'his' universe as spectator sport?

I thoroughly enjoyed James Haught's article in the May issue. One of the (many) questions he asked about "god" concerned the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that killed more than 200,000 people: "Did 'our father which art in heaven' just watch as a spectator?"

I think she/he/it was probably busy somewhere else, watching sparrows. (Rim shot!)

Elaine Hampton
California

Chimps smarter than chumps in Crank Mail?

I just finished reading May's Freethought Today and feel embarrassed, ashamed and slightly sick to my stomach. Why? Because I'm currently a resident of Arizona, where Gov. Jan Brewer signed two unconstitutional bills into law, one involving contraceptive services and the other allowing an elective bible course in public schools!

Then, on the same page of the paper, my beloved and beleaguered former employer, the National Park Service (I'm retired, after 30 years), is being forced by the courts to do a "public for private" land swap, allowing proponents a "war memorial" Latin cross on what should be federal land.

Finally, the entries under "Sharing the Crank Mail" seem particularly odious, making me utterly ashamed to be part of the same humankind as the writers. Don't we share something like 98% of our DNA with our chimpanzee cousins? Maybe they'd adopt me.

Which returns me to where I started: Thanks for all you do and for your strength, commitment and stamina. You have my eternal — make that "lasting" — gratitude, respect and admiration.

Neysa Dickey
Arizona

P.S. I just remembered my Life Membership and I'm "all better" now.

Christian's 'a-hole' accusation rankles

This is an FFRF member's response about a man's screed against FFRF for challenging a Christian war memorial at a fire station in Woonsocket, R.I.

That you consider the folks who disagree with you on this issue to be "assholes," highlights an important problem with bible thumpers in general. In violation of the melting pot idea of the founders of the great nation you are lucky enough to inhabit, you are fundamentally not OK with anyone who is not a Christian. Perhaps you even consider folks who are not in your particular denomination to be "assholes" as well.

I am an atheist, and as such, I don't think you are an "asshole" because you are wrong on the Woonsocket cross issue, nor because you believe in demonstrable nonsense, as do all believers in any religion. In fact, I don't think you are an "asshole" at all. You have the right to your beliefs, as do we all. You would probably not like to have Islamist symbols appearing on public property, paid for by your taxpayer dime any more than the rest of us appreciate our taxpayer dimes being spent on symbols

of other (or any) religions.

Please think about that as a member of the law enforcement community. Isn't fairness one of the fundamental underpinnings of all reasonable laws? How is it fair that anyone should be compelled to pay for public symbols on public property which declare to the world that we are second-class citizens because we don't subscribe to the "majority" religious convictions?

Please consider that before bible thumpers in the 1950s took advantage of the "Red Scare" to change the secular U.S. motto from the inclusive "E Pluribus Unum" to the exclusionary "In God We Trust," the U.S. was united around a set of revolutionary and extremely admirable principles.

Today, thanks to people like you who refuse to look at the history of your own country, we have gone from being a shining example to the rest of the world, to a severely divided Third World nation seemingly on a runaway train to Civil War. Is that really what you want?

Ulrich Fischer
Washington

In 1792 United States, cents made more sense

I truly appreciate everything FFRF does. I donate through the CFC every year and loved you at the Reason Rally. I just read about one of America's earliest one-cent coins that sold for \$1.15 million. Instead of "In God We Trust, the 1792 copper-silver penny reads "Liberty Parent of Science & Industry." I thought this was awesome and wanted to share it with you guys.

Thanks also to Barbara G. Walker for compiling the "bible morality" article. I loved reading all the crazy things found in it, especially since it was from the King James Version.

Staff Sgt. Charles Kane
United States Army

God puts Calamity Jane to shame

It's been almost a year since the tornado in Joplin, Mo., and I'm still bothered by my thoughts and feelings toward most of people I ran into there. On TV they'd asked for help from people with front-end loaders, so I loaded up my rigs and went.

I could not believe the destruction. I was directed to an area to clean up, where I walked around to see what I was getting into. A camera crew came up behind me with a woman who made this sick statement: "Even though God took my son and husband, I know he still loves me because I'm alive."

Then the camera guy asked me to move in so he could get a picture of me with the church group. "I'm not with them," I replied. They all had the name of the church on their backs. A guy who said he was the pastor put his arm on me and said, "God blessed and sent him."

I looked him in the eye and said, "No god sent me. I came by myself."

All I heard all morning was "God bless this" and "The devil or Satan did this." When I came back from getting a sandwich, there was a bible under the seat and someone spray-painted "God bless you" on the tractor blade. I was mad to say the least and made sure



Proud atheist

Mitch Kahle, founder of Hawaii Citizens for Separation of State and Church, served as parade grand marshal June 2 for the 2012 Honolulu Gay Pride Festival, the largest in the city's history. Kahle and wife, Holly Huber, and other activists have been involved in several actions challenging religion's grip in Hawaii. Kahle was FFRF's 2011 Freethinker of the Year.

they saw me throw that book on the trash pile where it belonged.

I realized I had to get away. I loaded up before dark and came home. The things I heard people say still bother me. I don't know how to deal with people who are just plain nasty and wonder how FFRF does.

When it comes time to renew my paper, there will be something extra.

Tom Gogan
Missouri



This letter by FFRF's Lake Superior chapter director first appeared April 23 in the Duluth News Tribune.

Nontheist students at the University of Minnesota-Duluth held a "tabling" event to sell cupcakes for their secular humanist projects to benefit people in need. A student reported, "An older gentleman came up and bought one of our cupcakes. He told me he didn't have a burning desire for one; he was just so sick and tired of people feeling blessed every time a hurricane or tornado missed their house."

That nicely illustrates for me the silly nature of religious thought. Some survivors of calamities claim they are "blessed." Fine, but then it follows that others crushed or burned are surely "god-cursed." We needn't be sympathetic then with women whose children slowly bleed to death under earthquake rubble. Those children were obviously satanic, and god needed to destroy them. Too bad.

God apparently curses also churches, day care facilities, schools, hospitals and religious people when they are destroyed by various god-sent tornadoes, hurricanes or earthquakes. Really? Must be! Or are gods just imaginary, invisible friends in the sky? Those who are religious always warp reason to suit their needs.

The media pander to ignorance by eagerly supporting this irrational thinking. Media need to seek evidence for so-called miracles, blessings and curses, or at least fairly report on god's

atrocities as well and stop endorsing the public's faulty moral reasoning.

Weather conditions and plate tectonics will do their thing: Don't pray, get to shelter! Wise up, folks. It's physics, not theology.

Dr. William Van Druten
Minnesota

Uncovering the hidden agenda behind religion

Jerry Coyne [April issue, "The Odd Couple: Why Science and Religion Can't Cohabit"] is so right about science and religion. It truly surprises me how many people there are who don't understand that. For those who disagree with Coyne, I offer a simple thought experiment.

Suppose that, somehow (it doesn't matter how), an established and respected scientific journal reported that it had discovered conclusive archaeological and genetic proof that Jesus existed at the time he is reported to have existed and that he did perform all the miracles ascribed to him. Which response do you think would be more likely from visible leaders of the religious community?

This one: "Those discoveries were made in the realm of science. Religion is a separate realm, so we will not take account of those discoveries in our faith; we will not discuss them in our sermons, or anything else of that nature."

Or this one: "Our religion now has scientific proof of its truth. Jesus truly existed! We now know for certain that he died for your sins! Science says so! Science says has proven it! Convert now before it's too late!"

We'll never know for certain, of course, since such a discovery will never be made, but if I had to wager, I know which response I'd put *my* money on.

The doctrine of "peaceful coexistence between science and religion" is nothing more than an attempt on the part of religion to shield itself from an enemy that it knows is more powerful than it is. Religion knows that if it confronts science head-on, it doesn't stand a chance, so instead, it tries to manufacture a reason to avoid the conflict altogether. We have to not let them get away with this hidden agenda.

Parrish Knight
Maryland

Meet a Member

Ditching religion, with bible's help



Scooby-Boo, a fox red Labrador, is Chris Wright's copilot, not God.

Name: Christopher Wright.

Where I live: Topinabee, Mich., a wonderful hybrid of "Mayberry RFD" and Never Never Land.

Where and when I was born: Pontiac, Mich., Nov. 24, 1964.

Family: My wife, Deirdre, and three adopted Labrador retrievers who eat us out of house and home, Lily Munster, Scooby-Boo and Spooky Dude. Children: They misbehaved and never cleaned their rooms, so we traded them for a riding lawnmower and an Orvis fly rod.

Education: I barely made it through high school and pretty much flunked out of college after one semester. Graduated with a 4.0 GPA from the School of Hard Knocks.

Occupation: Author/voice actor/graphic artist. In the last 12 years, I've written 84 books (under the pen names of Johnathan Rand and Christopher Knight) with over 5 million copies in print. (My website is *americanchillers.com*.)

I guess flunking out of college wasn't such a bad thing after all. Although writing books is my full-time occupation these days, I also conduct seminars on creativity and writing and produce voice-overs for radio commercials, documentaries and movies. Twice each summer, my wife and I host Author Quest, a four-day writing camp for kids ages 10-13. Attendees come from across the country.

How I got where I am today: I have always been a voracious reader. I think I've always been fairly creative and imaginative, and I thrive on doing things differently. This led to a successful career in radio broadcasting and writing/producing radio commercials — a career that merged seamlessly into writing books and public speaking.

Where I'm headed: Forward. I try not to look back, although I think we all do from time to time. But the only thing the rear-view mirror is good for is checking to see how cool you look on your way to your destination.

Person in history I admire: Ayn

Rand. I am a huge fan of her fiction and nonfiction books, and while I don't necessarily agree with her 100% of the time, she was a brilliant thinker and devout atheist. Others I admire include Carl Sagan, Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Jessica Ahlquist and anyone else who dares to think for themselves and let it be known.

A quotation I like: "We must question the story logic of having an all-knowing all-powerful God, who creates faulty humans, and then blames them for his own mistakes." (Gene Roddenberry)

These are a few of my favorite things: Reading, writing, capitalism, volunteering at the animal shelter, Calvin & Hobbes, my involvement with the Freethought Association of Northern Michigan, flyfishing, weight and resistance training and distance running. I enjoy traveling 180 days a year and visiting schools and libraries to promote the value and importance of reading and writing. It's incredibly rewarding and just plain fun.

These are not: Televangelists, most politicians regardless of party affiliation, labor unions, bibles in hotel rooms, socialism, teachers who talk or text or grade papers during my school assemblies, inexcusable grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors (like I see in the Crank Mail), animal abusers. I also despise the government telling me what or what not to eat (like they would know).

My doubts about religion started: When I finally read the bible, cover to cover. This was in 1999, and I was active in my church and a local Christian organization. I was also becoming more and more involved in a prison ministry program. My first experience was at a medium-security penitentiary, and I quickly discovered that those incarcerated knew more about the bible than I did. I felt very "convicted," (pun intended) and decided that I needed to

read it from beginning to end. I did, and the questions began piling up on one another.

After reading the works of Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Ingersoll, James Haught, Dan Barker and others, and comparing them to the works of Josh McDowell, Rick Warren and other Christian apologetics, I finally made up my own mind in December 1999 and willfully discarded my Christian faith. Dan Barker's book, *Losing Faith in Faith*, was a strong tipping point. He came across as a real guy, a genuine, nice person who had questions.

Since then, I have been a very closeted atheist. Only a few people know of my unbelief and skepticism. Over the years, keeping my atheism a secret has become weary, and I am letting my unbelief become known more and more. In April 2011 I was perusing the latest edition of Freethought Today over poached eggs, sausage patties and wheat toast when I came across a picture of a newly formed freethought group in a nearby community. I couldn't believe it! The caption beneath the photo stated that the next meeting was that very afternoon.

I literally leapt from my chair, spread my arms wide, and cried out, "My people! I've found my tribe!" I attended the meeting, joined the group, and I'm excited to be a part of it. I'm finally able to talk with like-minded unbelievers about issues that are important to me. We are now a recognized chapter of FFRF, and I couldn't be prouder.

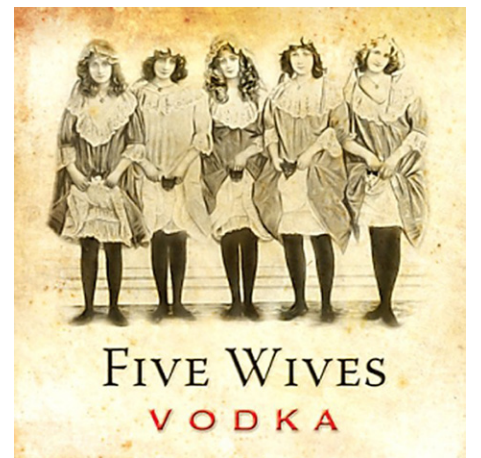
Why I'm a freethinker: Because I want to know the truth and do not wish to wander this world deluded by hallucinations. I do not bow down before nonexistent, invisible gods, and I refuse to fall prey to phony hucksters in cheap suits. It would be great to have a life after this beautiful, wonderful time that I have on Earth, but I see no evidence of "heaven" beyond what I am experiencing right now.

I make the most of what I have today, and make it count — not only for myself but for those around me, and those who will follow in my wake.

Ways I promote freethought: I am slowly coming out more and more. I am vice president of the Freethought Association of Northern Michigan, which is fun and rewarding. I wear expressive T-shirts that tend to raise eyebrows, but very few people have questioned me about them. My favorite shirt is a cartoon of an ark with a bunch of animals, and the caption beneath reads, "Seems Likely." Another shirt I wear simply proclaims, "Listen to Dawkins."

I'm still not all that comfortable with strong public displays of my unbelief yet, but I continue to challenge myself to make it known more and more. This summer, I'll be speaking at Michigan's Camp Quest, which is a camp for children of atheist/agnostic parents. I will have the opportunity to share my message about reading and writing, and this will be the first time I'll be able to talk openly to kids about my own personal atheism, and about how skepticism and reason help form a healthy, balanced mind and life.

In the Spirit



Not banned in Idaho

Idaho's state-run liquor stores initially banned Five Wives vodka, distilled in Utah, because its name and label were deemed "offensive" to Mormons. FFRF Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote a letter to the Idaho agency, quoting the Supreme Court: "It is not the business of government in our nation to suppress real or imagined attacks upon a particular religious doctrine." Liquor Board Director Jeff Anderson later assured FFRF that the ban has been lifted. About a fourth of Idahoans are Mormon.



Miraculous!

"Jesus was here," writes Joan Lawson from Washington state.

Overheard

We run away from social identities and don't want to create one for ourselves. As Dawkins says, we're like cats.

Siddharth Singh, 25, a member of Delhi Freethinkers, commenting on atheists' independent nature

Wall Street Journal, 6-12-12

The bottom line is that we're moral people, too. We pay taxes, we own businesses, we have a sense of right and wrong, and it's not that different from anybody else's.

James Gillham, spokesman for the newly founded Albany Georgia Atheists

Fox 31, 5-27-1

Talk about it in church. That's a great place for talking about academic study of the bible.

Rep. Marc Feinstein, D-Sioux Falls, who voted against a bill that passed making South Dakota the sixth state (Texas, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee and Oklahoma) to encourage bible electives in public schools

Associated Press, 5-28-12



Sara Paretsky



Julia Sweeney



Richard Dawkins



Jessica Ahlquist

Portland, Ore. — weekend of Oct. 12-13, 2012

Celebrate FFRF’s 35th annual convention!



Jerry DeWitt

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.

Joining the lineup of previously confirmed speakers are “Letting Go of God’s” **Julia Sweeney**; **Jessica Ahlquist**, victorious R.I., student litigant to be named FFRF’s 2012 Freethinker of the Year; and **Max Nielson**, a student activist honoree and plaintiff in FFRF’s newest lawsuit (see Pages 1 and 5).

Previously announced were evolutionary scientist **Richard Dawkins**, author of the blockbuster *The God Delusion*; mystery author **Sara Paretsky**; journalist **Katharine Stewart**, author of *The Good News Club: The Christian Right’s Stealth Assault on America’s Children*; and Clergy Project “graduates” **Jerry DeWitt** and **Teresa MacBain**. DeWitt, director of Recovering from Religion, openly parted with the Pentecostal ministry last year, and MacBain, who is now acting director of the Clergy Project, left the Methodist ministry this March. FFRF’s **Dan Barker** will entertain at the piano.

Hotel rooms for Friday and Saturday nights are going fast! While they last, they are \$149 single to quadruple. Call the Hilton Portland & Executive Tower, 1-503-226-1611 or use the personalized reservation link: <http://ow.ly/bZQOu>

Optional meals include the Saturday NonPrayer Breakfast, \$25: Country scrambled eggs, broiled roma tomato, crispy bacon, potato pancake, orange juice, apple pastry, cranberry muffins, pumpkin scones, fresh fruit garnish, freshly brewed coffee and teas, with vegetarian substitute for bacon.

Dinner is fresh salad, roasted local organic chicken or vegetarian strudel followed by pear tartlet (the pear is Oregon’s state fruit), \$55. Meals include 22% service charge. Vegan and gluten-



Teresa MacBain

free options are available.

FFRF registration is \$60 per member, \$65 for nonmember companion accompanying member, and \$110 per nonmember (join for \$40 and save!)

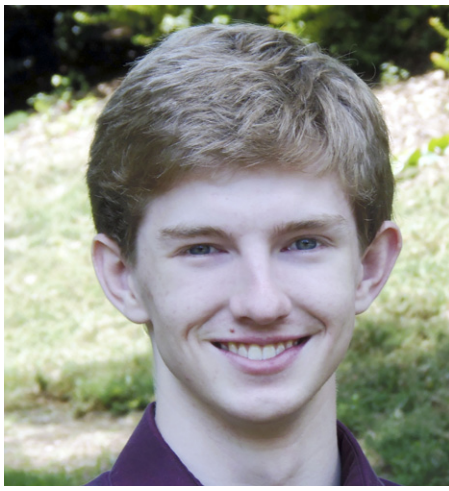
Sign up for a preconvention tour of



Katharine Stewart

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 the hotel at 1 p.m.

Official events begin Friday at 7 p.m. after dinner on your own. Dawkins will



Max Nielson

speak Friday night, followed by a complimentary dessert reception.

Reserve your room and register now to avoid disappointment. Watch for updates and more details at ffrf.org/outreach/convention.

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 \$ _____

☐ Vegetarian option _____ no. of vegetarian

☐ Vegan option _____ no. of vegan

_____ Saturday Night Dinner @ \$55* per person \$ _____

☐ Vegetarian option _____ no. of vegetarian

☐ Vegan option _____ no. of vegan

☐ Gluten-free meals required on above selections

* Meal prices include 22% gratuity

_____ 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)