

Freethought Today

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September 2012

FFRF's 'Spotlight on Freethought' on public TV

A short first-of-its-kind feature spot, "Spotlight on Freethought and the First Amendment," produced in conjunction with the Freedom From Religion Foundation, started airing Aug. 18 on select national public television affiliates.

The spot is guaranteed to air 500 times in the next three months and reach an estimated 3 million people. A four-minute version and one of 5:30 will run interchangeably. When and where the short program, used as filler, will run can't be announced beforehand. Public TV affiliates decide which fillers are needed on the day they run.

If you catch one of the spots on your local public TV affiliate, please be sure to contact the affiliate promptly to say thank you and to encourage rebroad-

cast.

This is believed to be the first such segment featuring discussion of freethought, atheism and focus on the specific dangers of mixing state and church. The description sent to affiliates reads:

"America has more diversity, faiths, religions and cultures than any other country in the world. And yet we all seem to get along pretty well. Only in a country where we can be free of religion in our government can we then be free to practice our own or choose not to follow any faith.

"This segment focuses on our freedom to practice our faith, or no faith — exactly as we want."

The narrator says, "More wars have been waged, more people killed, in



the name of religion than by any other institutional force in human history. So with such wildly contrasting beliefs in this country, why aren't we at each other's throats? Here's why. It's our Constitution and its very core of freedom from religion. Our country was founded in part by refugees seeking freedom, seeking to escape centuries of religious persecutions, holy inquisitions, witch hunts."

The four-minute version talks about the benefits of the United States' secular form of government, defines "freethought" and includes brief interviews with FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Gaylor, a co-founder of FFRF, says

on-camera:

"The United States of America was the first nation where our founders did not claim a pipeline to a divinity. It was a revolutionary act that they created a secular and entirely godless Constitution whose only references to religion are exclusionary, that there shall be no religious test for public office. The founders were aware of the inquisitions and the pogroms and the religious wars and the terrors in Europe, and the persecutions in many of the individual colonies — and they wanted no part of that. And so they erected what Thomas Jefferson called

Continued on next page

Second 'War of Northern Aggression?'

FFRF's major successes in ending entrenched illegal prayer practices in many Southern public schools are at-

tracting the attention of the Religious Right.

Bryan Fischer of the American Family Association, a Christian group based in Tupelo, Miss., charged in a rambling broadcast Aug. 22 that FFRF has launched a "second War of Northern Aggression." (The term is used by some Southerners to describe the Civil War.)

Fischer's remarks came after publicity over FFRF's complaint that persuaded a Mississippi public school to obey the law and stop broadcasting prayers over its P.A. system before football games. Fischer mused about FFRF's legal strategy, imagining it to be, "Let's get rid of every trace of religious liberty in the South, and we can do it because these people will not fight back. And again the Freedom From Religion Foundation, based in Wisconsin, and this is the second War of Northern Aggression and they're winning this thing."

FFRF has also followed up on Walker County Schools' response to FFRF's request to investigate unusual constitutional violations by Ridgeland [Ga.] High School football coach Mark Mariakis. Although praising the superintendent's "commitment to upholding the Constitution," the response raised lingering concerns.

Attorney Andrew Seidel's Aug. 21 letter detailed allegations that FFRF had received over several egregious sports/church entanglements at Ridgeland. Most notable was the coach taking public school football teams to pregame church meals where prayers are recited.

It was also alleged that Mariakis regularly prayed with his teams, had pressured students to attend a "Christian football camp" and that the team had adopted a "team chaplain."

Superintendent Damon Raines responded Aug. 30 that "the district will not have a team chaplain nor will school officials or employees, including coaches, organize, lead or participate in any prayers. Staff will also refrain from participating in the [Fellowship of Christian Athletes]." The district said pregame meals will no longer include "religious references."

Seidel replied Sept. 11 that "taking public school teams to church still involves constitutional concerns." Quoting legal precedent that bars public schools from holding graduations in churches, he argued that regardless of the purpose in choosing to have a pregame meal in a church, "the sheer religiosity of the space create[s] a likelihood that high school students . . . would perceive a link between church

and state."

FFRF is alarmed over Mariakis' attendance at a Sept. 9 "Rally to Pray" held to "keep prayer in the practices and before games." Seidel said, "It seems to send a message that he is unrepentant and hostile to First Amendment limitations on his proselytizing."

FFRF wants the district to investigate the coach's remarks and the rally and to "ensure that Mariakis understands he cannot use his position as coach to 'share the Gospel' with his team and other public students."

FFRF also noted that it appears that school buses are taking players, coaches and staff from the school to churches for meals. FFRF further requested a response to an unanswered allegation from its original complaint that the football program has used the bible as a motivational tool.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor added, "When a public school district has permitted unconstitutional practices to flourish for years, it creates a climate of intolerance. We see that intolerance in the community's reaction to our reasonable request to ensure that student rights of conscience, and Supreme Court precedent, are honored in Walker County schools."

See nearly 30 new FFRF legal victories, pages 8-9.

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School Ten Commandments lawsuits loom

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European atheist convention scrapbook

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Above us only sky, Maddy Ziegler logically imagines.

Intern foils crank mailer

Name: Maddy Ziegler.
Where and when I was born: Janesville, Wis., Sept. 7, 1989.
Family: Parents, two sisters, 21 and 19, and a brother, 17.
Education: I majored in English and political science at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. I’m about to start my second year of law school at UW-Madison.
My religious upbringing was: I was raised Roman Catholic.
How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern: I had been an admirer of FFRF for a few years, so I applied first thing when I saw their advertisement for summer interns through the UW Law Career Services.
What I do here: I research complaints and legal issues and draft letters to people violating the First Amendment.
What I like best about it: Gaining legal experience while working toward something I’m passionate about.
Something funny that’s happened at work: Someone wrote us a piece of “anonymous” crank mail through the

online complaint form, taunting us that his restaurant gave free meals to Christians and daring us to find him. However, he included his email address, so another intern and I were able to track him down immediately online, figuring out his name, restaurant, P.O. Box and phone number in a matter of minutes. We’re still thinking of the best ways we could put this information to use.
My legal interests are: Still being figured out, but include constitutional law, environmental law and family law.
My legal hero is: Ruth Bader Ginsburg.
These three words sum me up: Intelligent, snarky, optimistic.
Things I like: Books, good TV, politics, the Green Bay Packers, playing the violin, cats, indie music, living in Madison, concerts, Wisconsin beer and fall weather.
Things I smite: Irrationality, the crickets infesting my apartment and people who chew with their mouths open.

Elvis’ bible fetches \$94,000 at auction

A bible belonging to Elvis Presley with his annotations and name embossed in gold on the front brought £59,000 (about \$94,000) at auction Sept. 8 in Manchester, England. It was part of a memorabilia auction marking the 35th anniversary of his death Aug. 16, 1977.
The book was a gift from his Uncle Vester and Aunt Clettes for his first Christmas at Graceland in 1957, the BBC reported.
On one page, Presley wrote, “To

judge a man by his weakest link or deed is like judging the power of the ocean by one wave.”
The presale estimate of the bible’s value was between £20,000 and £25,000. The winning bidder is reportedly an American man living in the U.K.
One item that didn’t sell was a pair of soiled underpants he wore at a 1977 show, which were acquired from his father Vernon. Bidding for the drawers reached £5,000 but failed to meet the reserve price of £7,000.

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 September 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 September. Send to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

Send Us Your Address Change Promptly!
Don’t miss a single issue! If you move, notify us directly and promptly. **The Post Office does not forward third-class mail.** FFRF cannot be responsible for replacing back issues if we have not been notified prior to your move. Back issues, while they last, may be ordered for \$2 each.

FFRF ‘Spotlight’ on public TV affiliates

Continued from front page

the ‘wall of separation between church and state,’ and that protects all of us. It has prevented the bloodshed and warfare that we see in so many parts of the world where religion is involved in government.”
Barker adds, “There are some believers that don’t see the difference between neutrality and hostility. They think efforts of groups like ours to keep the government neutral are also a hostile act against their faith, when we’re not asking for the government to be pro-atheistic either. If the government stays neutral, the government stays secular, then everybody’s an insider, nobody’s an outsider.”
The longer spot features a bonus: an interview with Pitzer College professor Phil Zuckerman, a leading expert on “secularity” and how secular societies measure up favorably to religious nations. Zuckerman is an FFRF member and author of many books, including *Society Without God*.
As a bonus, a version that is over seven minutes — including additional interview footage of Dan talking about freethought, morality and purpose in life — has been posted at FFRF’s website and can be viewed now on FFRF’s homepage at ffrf.org/.

Watch for little “cameos,” including appearances by Darwin, Einstein and Susan B. Anthony, shots of some mementos at FFRF’s office, Freethought Hall, a powerful quote by Mark Twain about the witch hunts, photographs of the Reason Rally crowd by Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel and of FFRF Staffer Katie Daniel giving the Westboro Baptists thumbs down when they picketed an FFRF event.
“We warmly thank members who contributed to our PR Campaign Fund as part of the spring membership appeal, whose generosity made possible the filming and airing of this first-of-its-kind segment,” said Gaylor.
Only the first three months of airing are monitored by Nielsen Ratings, but “Spotlight On” segments often run far longer. The program is not offered as any part of any PBS national program service.
FFRF has been venturing into television this year with nationally airing ads, including one featuring JFK endorsing the separation between church and state, and one by actress Julia Sweeney defending contraception from attack by Catholic bishops.
If you’d like to see more TV ads and segments, you may make a tax deductible contribution at:
ffrf.org/get-involved/donate/

FFRF welcomes 17 new ‘Lifers’

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to announce and welcome its newest Lifetime Members. They are:
Glen Arensmeier, Erwin B. Clahasey, Cathy Deutsch (gift from Adam R. Rose, also a new Lifer), Kenneth Fahrenholtz, Sam George, Michael Hanauer, George E. Jacklin, James Kirkland, Jerry Moulder, Adam R. Rose, Jamile Sims, Michael Smar, Sigrid Smith, Jeffrey Stock (via a Microsoft Match for his wife Sonya Newlyn’s \$1,000 Lifetime Membership in May), John Torrent, Jim Wallis and Reba Boyd Wood-en.
States represented are: Arizona, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho,

Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas and Wisconsin.
Individual Lifetime Memberships are offered for \$1,000, designated a membership or renewal of membership, ensure nary another renewal notice, go into a safe endowment for the future of FFRF and are deductible for income-tax purposes for the generous donor, as are all dues and donations to FFRF.
Our warm thanks to Reba, Jim, John, Sonya and Jeffrey, Sigrid, Michael, Jamile, Adam and Cathy, Jerry, James, George, Michael, Sam, Kenneth, Erwin and Glen!

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P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701
(608) 256-5800 • FAX (608) 204-0422
FTtoday@ffrf.org • ffrf.org
Editor: Bill Dunn
Executive Editor: Annie Laurie Gaylor
Contributing Editors: Dan Barker, Katie Stenz
Production Editor: Scott Colson
Contributors: Philip Appleman, Chance Campbell, Patrick Elliott, Rebecca Market, Bailey Rahn, Stephanie Schmitt, Andrew Seidel
September 2012
The only freethought newspaper in the United States

FFRF to Pennsylvania schools: Thou shalt honor thy First Amendment!

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has announced its intention to sue two Pennsylvania school districts in federal court after neither met a deadline to remove illegal Ten Commandment markers on school property.

FFRF had warned both districts that without notification by Sept. 7 that they were removing the monuments, FFRF would sue. FFRF has hired Pennsylvania counsel and has parent plaintiffs in both districts. Attorney Marcus Schneider of Pittsburgh wrote the districts Aug. 29 on behalf of FFRF, noting that the Ten Commandment monuments "will not withstand judicial scrutiny."

In response, the Connellsville Area School District grudgingly agreed to remove its 5-foot-tall monument near the Junior High School East auditorium entrance. The district placed plywood over the front of the monument. After some in the community raised a fuss, the school board declined to vote Sept. 12 to remove the monument, so a lawsuit is imminent.

A suit is also being prepared against New Kensington-Arnold School District, which FFRF Staff Attorney Pat-

rick Elliott first contacted last March. The similar granite bible monument prominently displayed at Valley High School is at the school entrance. It sits between two footpath bridges leading from the parking lot to the main entrance.

"The permanent display of the Ten Commandments in front of a New Kensington-Arnold school violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Courts have continually held that public schools may not display religious messages or iconography," wrote Elliott. He cited the Supreme Court decision (*Stone v. Graham*, 1980) that ruled posting the Ten Commandments in schools violates the Establishment Clause: "The pre-eminent purpose for posting the Ten Commandments on schoolroom walls is plainly religious in nature."

The New Kensington marker is a Catholic version of the Ten Commandments (with no reference to "graven images").

His letter also cited Justice Stephen Breyer's observation that Ten Commandments displays have no place



"on the grounds of a public school, where, given the impressionability of the young, government must exercise particular care in separating church and state."

"The school districts deserve an 'F' in civics," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Instead of protecting the freedom of conscience of students, they are sending a message that the First Amendment is trumped by the First Commandment. Contrary to the First Commandment, a school district has no business telling students and their parents which god to have, how many gods to have or whether to have any gods at all!"

FFRF has more than 18,500 nonreligious members nationwide. It's cur-



rently suing over the declaration by the Pennsylvania House that 2012 is "the Year of the Bible." That federal suit is being brought by attorney Richard Bolton behalf of FFRF and its 700 Pennsylvania members, including 41 named state members, and its chapter, Nittany Freethought.

FFRF parish exemption case clears hurdle

A district court in Madison, Wis., gave the green light to the right of FFRF's nonbelieving directors to challenge the parish exemption giving preferential tax benefits to "ministers of the gospel."

U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb, Western District of Wisconsin, issued a strong 20-page opinion and order Aug. 29 granting standing to FFRF's plaintiffs to pursue their challenge of the 1954 law. Plaintiffs are Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor and President Emerita Anne Gaylor.

FFRF v. USA was filed in September 2011. FFRF first challenged the parish

exemption in district court in Sacramento in 2009 with 21 FFRF members named as federal taxpayers in a case destined for the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals. A ruling on taxpayer standing in an unrelated Supreme Court ruling forced FFRF to withdraw the suit in 2011.

FFRF then refiled in Wisconsin, challenging the statute's injury to FFRF's paid directors, who receive part of their salaries designated as a housing allowance, yet are unable to benefit from it as ministers are.

"We're very pleased that the court has acknowledged our injury and right to sue over this," said Barker, ironically a former minister who previously qualified for and used housing allowance benefits. Barker is not accorded the same privilege as director of an atheist/agnostic organization, which shows governmental favoritism of religion over nonreligion. Barker calls the statute a subsidy rather than an accommodation of religion.

FFRF seeks a declaration that the federal statute creating the parish exemption violates the Establishment

Clause of the First Amendment. FFRF is asking the court to enjoin the tax benefits exclusively given for ministers of the gospel under 28 U.S.C. § 2201 that 26 U.S.C. §107.

"Because it is clear from the face of the statute that plaintiffs are not entitled to the exemption, I see no reason to make their standing contingent on the futile exercise of making a formal claim with the IRS," Crabb ruled. She wrote that "there is no plausible argument that plaintiffs could make that they qualify as 'ministers of the gospel,' so it would be pointless to require plaintiffs to jump through the hoop of filing a claim to prove that they are not entitled to the exemption."

She dismissed as "another straw man" the government's characterization of the FFRF directors' injury as mere "disagreement with the government's claim." Crabb wrote, "It is undoubtedly true that plaintiffs object to §107 because they believe it violates the Establishment Clause and that this may be the primary reason they filed the lawsuit, but that is not the injury plaintiffs are alleging for the pur-

pose of showing standing."

The exemptions permit clergy to deduct from their taxable income housing allowances furnished as part of compensation. Congress in 1954 amended the tax code to permit all clergy to exempt their housing costs from their taxable income. U.S. Rep. Peter Mack, author of the amendment, declared:

"Certainly, in these times when we are being threatened by a godless and antireligious world movement we should correct this discrimination against certain ministers of the gospel who are carrying on such a courageous fight against this foe. Certainly this is not too much to do for these people who are caring for our spiritual welfare."

The statute defines the gross income of a minister of the gospel as not including "the rental value of a home furnished to him as part of his compensation," or "the rental allowance paid to him as part of his compensation, to the extent used by him to rent or provide a home and to the extent such allowance does not exceed the fair rental value of the home, including furnishings and appurtenances such as a garage, plus the cost of utilities."

The exclusion can be used by ministers for virtually all of the costs of home ownership, including down payment on a home; home mortgage payments, including interest and principal; real estate taxes; personal property taxes; fire and homeowners liability insurance; rental payments and cost of acquiring a home (i.e., legal fees, bank fees, title fees, etc.).

Crabb's ruling means FFRF's lawsuit will go forward to be argued on its merits. FFRF is being represented by attorney Richard L. Bolton

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
Madison WI 53701

*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

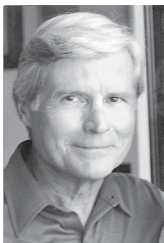
A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

The Tennis Player Waits For What Waits For The Tennis Player

In the slippery swelter of asphalt,
in a blistering backhand return,
you wait every June, every August
for that stabbing of fate in the elbow,
that first sharp knifing of fact;
and because it comes with a certain
smug angle of the sun,
and because it comes with a bird
turning transparent as truth,
and because it comes with a cry
like preaching in the wind —
you know you are becoming
one of the pure, pale
Others; and you call back
all the grubby friends
of childhood, and command them
to surround your skin with singing.

© 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/).

Recruit a Member Send a sample issue

Send \$2 with the name and address of each person you wish to receive a sample copy of Freethought Today to:
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Freedom depends upon freethinkers

(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)

YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

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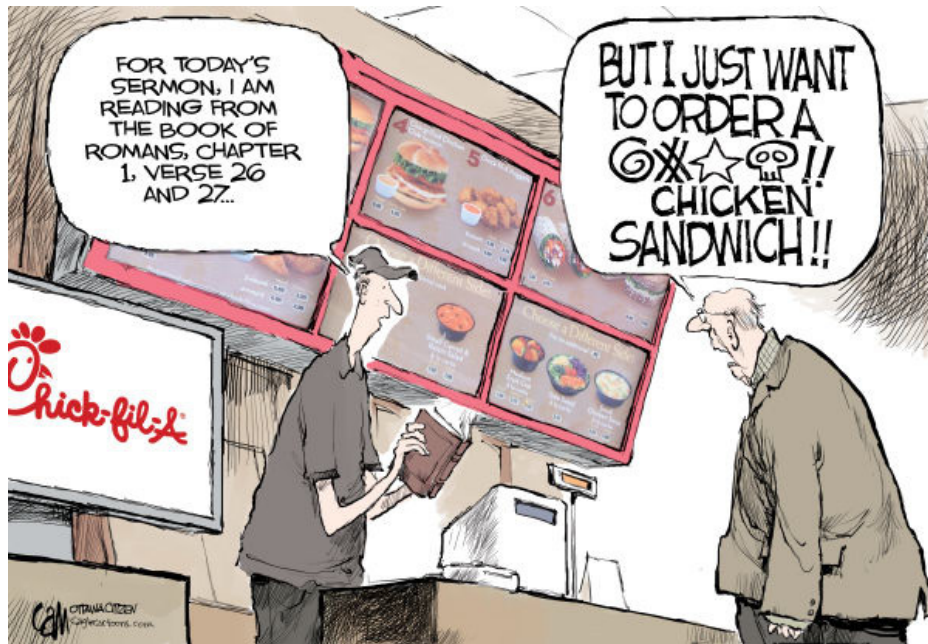


Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

I don't have any atheist friends or anything. So I would like to maybe make a couple of friends that live near me that I could actually go to their house and have dinner [and] not have to pray before eating. I can actually be the same as them and not have their parents hate me or whatever because I'm an atheist.

Chandler Garry, 11, a participant in Camp Quest Northwest near Seattle
ABC "Nightline," 8-23-12

I say to the grownups, if you want to deny evolution and live in your world, in your world that's completely inconsistent with everything we observe in the universe, that's fine, but don't make your kids do it because we need them. We need scientifically literate voters and taxpayers for the future.

Bill Nye "the science guy," online post titled "Creationism Is Not Appropriate For Children"
youtube.com, 8-23-12

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Melinda Gates, a practicing Catholic, speaking at the London Family Planning Summit on the Gates Foundation leading a drive to raise \$4.3 billion to provide access to contraception
Forbes, 7-12-12

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

Columnist Richard Cohen, "A merit badge for bigotry?"
Washington Post, 7-18-12

Sue Paterno had been quoted as saying Joe was not a saint. That made this difficult decision easier for me to execute. **Artist Michael Pilato, on why he painted out the halo above former Penn State head football coach Joe Paterno after revelations about Paterno's role in the Jerry Sandusky child rape scandal**
MSNBC, 7-16-12

The Israeli edition of Forbes magazine published a first-of-its-kind ranking last month of Israel's 13 richest rabbis. In the No. 1 spot was 36-year-old Rabbi Pinchas Abuhatzaira from Beersheba, a blue-collar southern desert city, whose wealth is estimated at \$335 million. **News story, "Israel's richest rabbis become savvy businessmen"**
Associated Press, 7-13-12

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

Alom Shaha, a London science teacher and author of The Young Atheist's Handbook: Lessons for Living a Good Life Without God
The Commentator, 7-16-12

Irish atheists feed hungry Wisconsinites

FFRF stops Milwaukee civil rights abuse

Milwaukee Irish Fest organizers announced Aug. 16, in response to a complaint by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, that they would drop a religious promotion that violated civil rights laws.

This year the annual event was Aug. 16-19 at the city-owned Henry Maier Festival Park. A Catholic Mass is held near the entrance to Irish Fest one Sunday a year at 9:30 a.m. The fest’s website said, “Guests who donate non-perishable food items prior to the liturgy are admitted to the festival free of charge after the Mass.” All others were charged \$15.

The catch was that the Fest did not open until 11 a.m.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote to Irish Fest, “This means that only those who would conceivably attend or want to attend the Catholic Mass can receive this major benefit. Therefore, you are discriminating on the basis of religion.”

FFRF sent its first letter of complaint about the discount in 2010.

Elliott followed up with a letter Aug. 9 to Kathy Pratscher, interim executive director, on behalf of a local complainant, who has been bothered for years by the discrimination.

Under Wisconsin law, it’s illegal to “Deny to another or charge another a higher price than the regular rate for the full and equal enjoyment of any public place of accommodation or amusement because of sex, race, color, creed, disability, sexual orientation, national origin or ancestry.”

Elliott discovered the Catholic practice is widespread in Wisconsin. Oshkosh Irish Fest offered free admission to Mass attendees in 2009 and 2010. Polish Fest in Milwaukee offers reduced admission to Mass attendees. German Fest in Milwaukee hosts a Mass in the Marcus Amphitheater and promotes it by saying, “All church attendees receive free admission to the Fest.” Festa Italiana offers this promotion: “FREE admission to Festa when you attend High Mass at 11 a.m. in the Marcus Amphitheater.” Elliott is pursuing complaints

against those illegal practices.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor noted that dropping the practice will also help ensure the Hunger Task Force, recipient of the food drive, will receive more contributions: “The Mass reward was a disincentive to charity, since three-fourths of Wisconsin citizens aren’t Catholic.”

Given their history, you’d think the Irish would be more sensitive about discrimination in the U.S., including religious discrimination.

Showing it knows a thing or two about tolerance and charity, Atheist Ireland donated \$100 to the Hunger Task Force to reward Irish Fest’s change of heart.

Michael Nugent, chairperson of Atheist Ireland, wrote a letter to Irish



Michael Nugent

Fest officials noting that 43% of Irish identify as nonreligious and another 10% as “convinced atheists.”

Nugent added, “Thank you for ending the discrimination in admission charges against non-Catholics attending your Irish Fest this Sunday, and for reflecting the reality that Irish identity today transcends our various religious or nonreligious beliefs.

“As a small token of our gratitude, we are sending \$100 to the Freedom from Religion Foundation to buy some food items to donate to your collection. Perhaps you might allow free admission to some people who otherwise could not afford the entrance fee.”

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker noted, “Milwaukee remains one of the poorest cities in the U.S., so this compassionate contribution by Irish secular citizens was really heartwarming and welcome.”

FFRF sent the donation directly to the Hunger Task Force.

Big Spring makes big decision — drops school board prayer

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has successfully removed prayer from the Big Spring School Board meetings in Newville, Pa.

Board President Wilbur Wolf announced Aug. 28 that “prayer will be removed from future meeting agendas to avoid the potential cost of legal action against the board and Big Spring School District.”

A local resident had asked for FFRF’s help in stopping the unlawful prayer before every twice-monthly meeting. Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert

asked Wolf and the board in an Aug. 17 letter to discontinue the “practice of scheduling prayer.”

Markert pointed out several appeals court rulings, including a decision last year in the 3rd Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals (which is binding in Pennsylvania), have struck down prayer by public school boards. In the recent *Doe v. Indian River School District* case, the Supreme Court let stand the appeals court ruling that school board prayer rose above “the level of interaction between church and state that the Estab-

lishment Clause permits.”

Markert added that nearly 1.5 million Pennsylvanians identify as nonreligious.

Wolf attributed the board’s change in policy to high legal costs and told a local newspaper that ending prayer “is the prudent thing to do.” He publicly stated that “We regret having to make this decision.”

“It’s disappointing that a school board president would send a message that essentially undermines principles that require secular education and

protect freedom of conscience,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

“A school board should be modeling respect for secular education and 60 years of firm Supreme Court precedent against religion in the schools. Whatever reasons the board gives for stopping the prayers, we are pleased to see this egregious violation ended.”

FFRF sent letters to three other Pennsylvania school boards in August. Octorara Area School Board in Atglen has suspended its usual recitation of the Lord’s Prayer until further review of FFRF’s request. Greencastle-Antrim School Board in Greencastle has gone to a moment of silence for the moment. FFRF is awaiting word from Eastern Lancaster County School Board in New Holland.

Ohio paper censors FFRF ad criticizing Catholic Church

A full-page, prepaid ad by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, which had been accepted more than a month before to run on Aug. 25, was summarily refused a few days before publication by the Daily Standard in Celina, Ohio.

FFRF was contacted Aug. 20 by Frank Snyder, publisher, and its payment was refunded.

The ad had been suggested and underwritten by a generous Celina FFRF member. The donor noted that the newspaper had accepted and published a full-page ad by a religiously motivated, anti-abortion group on June 6. The ad encouraged Ohio Senate President Pro-Tempore Keith Faber, from Celina, to pass a fetal “personhood” bill.

The signature ad, “It’s Time to Quit the Catholic Church,” has run in The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today and the Los Angeles Times, generating a lot of dialogue on Catholic bishops’ interference with contraceptive coverage for U.S. women.

The ad, an open letter to “liberal”

and “nominal” Catholics, asks:

“Do you choose women and their rights, or bishops and their wrongs? In light of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ war against women’s right to contraception . . . Why are you aiding and abetting a church that has repeatedly engaged in a crusade to ban contraception, abortion and sterilization, to deny the right of all women everywhere, Catholic or not, to decide whether and when to become mothers?”

FFRF receives “a disproportionate number of state-church complaints from Ohio residents unhappy with religion in Ohio government,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “It’s hard to educate or make headway with such obvious and blatant favoritism and censorship. What happened to the vaunted marketplace of ideas?”

The generous donor is on the lookout for a billboard or other venue for an ad promoting FFRF.

It's Time to Quit the Catholic Church

OPEN LETTER TO 'LIBERAL' AND 'NOMINAL' CATHOLICS

It's your moment of truth.

Join those of us who put humanity above dogma.

PLEASE, EXIT EN MASS.

FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

It would be an America in which access to birth control would be controlled by people who never use it.

Georgetown University law student Sandra Fluke, speaking to the Democratic National Convention about allegedly celibate Catholic bishops who oppose the contraceptive mandate in the Affordable Care Act CBS, 9-5-12

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

City Commissioner Adam Stern, Livingston, Mont., voting against meeting prayers and a moment of silence Livingston Enterprise, 6-12-12

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

On the new wording in the pledge that Australian Girl Guides (Scouts) recite The Telegraph, 7-6-12

It's FFRF's 'Just Pretend' vs. the Gideons

A nonreligious Canadian family has been battling distribution of Gideon bibles in their Ontario public schools by asking the schools to distribute *Just Pretend: A Freethought Book for Children*, written by Dan Barker and published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

It was announced in early September that the family's complaint against the District School Board of Niagara will be heard by the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal in February. Rene Chouinard says his family is being discriminated against "due to creed."

Rene and Ana Chouinard of Grimsby, Ontario, had complained several years ago after a permission slip to distribute Gideon bibles was sent home with their middle child, then in fifth grade. Their complaints prompted the principal to drop the practice. By the time their youngest child entered fifth grade in 2010, bible distribution had resumed. The school district has been permitting Gideon bible distribution since 1964.

In March 2010, after Rene Chouinard complained again, the school board amended its policy by inviting

other religions to distribute books to children. But the board refused Chouinard's request to distribute *Just Pretend* or Barker's book for adults, *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist*, also published by FFRF. Chouinard's intent, as he told media, was not actually to distribute freethought books to children, but to force the school board to stop distributing bibles.

Niagara school officials told him they had consulted the Ontario Multi-faith Information Manual, which lists diverse religions but does not mention atheism or secular humanism. Chouinard noted that the manual doesn't list the Gideon Society, either.

"If all points of view are not allowed, then Ontario's vaunted respect for equality and diversity is 'just pretend,'" commented FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

Just Pretend is an illustrated book suitable for elementary school-age children (or "children of all ages") that explores myths like Santa Claus and compares them with claims of the existence of a god. In an entertaining and fun way, *Just Pretend* introduces children to the tests of reason, and encourages

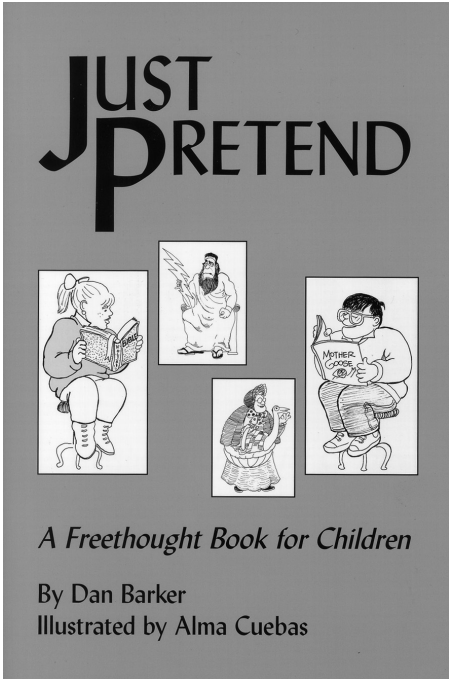
them to apply reason to any idea, fairy tale, myth or religion.

"We would consider the bible X-rated and totally unsuitable reading for young children," noted Annie Laurie Gaylor, who co-directs FFRF. "But *Just Pretend* is written with the respectful premise that children should be free to decide what to think about religion for themselves when they are mature enough to understand the concepts."

U.S. Supreme Court actions and First Amendment law bar Gideons from entering U.S. public schools to distribute bibles. Nevertheless, the predatory evangelical Protestant men's organization is continually flouting the law, with the help of religious principals.

"It takes constant vigilance to keep the Gideons out of public schools," said Gaylor.

FFRF has produced two "bible warning labels" to combat ubiquitous Gideon bibles in hotel rooms, including one, "Gideon Exposed" written by Ruth Green, author of *The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible*, which urges people to judge Gideon for themselves after reading Judges, chapters



6-9. Gideon reputedly murdered thousands for worshipping "false gods."

Listen to an interview with Rene Chouinard (second half of Freethought Radio broadcast, Sept. 8) at:

ffrf.org/news/radio/

Theocracy Alert!

Vote for the American! **Marquee message at Pleasant Valley Baptist Church, Chico, Calif., placed by from Pastor Tim Ruhl, who refused to say what it meant**
Enterprise-Record, 8-30-12

America, America is just more than a place, though. America is an idea. It's the only country founded on an idea. Our rights come from nature and God,

not from government. That's right. That's who we are, that's how we built this country. **U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., speech at the event announcing him as Mitt Romney's vice presidential running mate**
Real Clear Politics, 8-11-12

No, these human rights — and the ideas and the ideals that conceived them — came from the minds of men

and women who wrestled with the big questions: What is fair and what is just? Over time, a commonly held sense of right and wrong developed, which was then enacted into law by, yes, government. **Matt Rothschild, atheist editor of The Progressive, Madison, Wis.**
The Progressive, 8-30-12

I'm a Catholic deer hunter. I'm happy to be clinging to my guns and my religion. **Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., campaigning for vice president in Pittsburgh**
Associated Press, 8-22-12

Most of all, almighty God we thank you, for the great gift of our beloved country. For we are indeed one nation under God, and in God we trust. Dear God, bless America. You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen. **Cardinal Timothy Dolan, closing words to his prayer to the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Fla.**
CBS, 8-30-12

Thus do we praise you for the gift of life. Grant us to defend it. Life, without which no other rights are secure. We ask your benediction on those waiting to be born, that they may be welcomed and protected. **Cardinal Timothy Dolan's prayer delivered right after President Obama's speech accepting his party's nomination for a second term**
ABC, 9-7-12

We need a government that stands up for the hopes, values and interests of working people and gives everyone willing to work hard the chance to make the most of their potential. **Plank in the Democratic Party platform approved Sept. 4 at the national convention in Charlotte, N.C.**
CNN, 9-4-12

As an ordained United Methodist minister, I am here to attest and affirm that our faith in God is central to the American story and informs the values we've expressed in our party's platform. In addition, President Obama recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and our platform should as well. **Ted Strickland, former Ohio governor and Democratic platform drafting chair, introducing a resolution Sept. 5 to insert "God" into the platform**
New York Times, 9-5-12

We need a government that stands up for the hopes, values and interests of working people and gives everyone willing to work hard the chance to make the most of their *God-given* potential. [Italics added] **Democratic Party platform plank "passed" after a Christian Broadcasting Network blogger and Fox TV began berating Democrats for "removing God" from the platform and not affirming Jerusalem as Israel's capital (Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa called for a voice vote requiring a two-thirds majority three times and declared the resolution passed even though the "nays" sounded louder than the "yeas.")**
Associated Press, 9-5-12

Is Kansan gaming the parsonage exemption?

FFRF is asking a Kansas appraiser in Sedgwick County to investigate misuse of a church parsonage exemption claimed on the home of a state Senate candidate.

Michael O'Donnell II told the Wichita Eagle that he "lives where he says he lives," which is a home owned by Grace Baptist Church in Wichita, a home that should be exclusively used by an acting minister who regularly conducts religious services. O'Donnell's father is senior pastor of the church and lives in a neighboring city. It does not appear that the parsonage has been lived in by a practicing pastor in some time.

County records show that the church-owned home has been exempt from property taxes since 1996. The Wichita Eagle reported that O'Donnell has been a registered voter at his residence since 2007 and uses it as "his official address on campaign filings and for his position as a Wichita City Council member."

A local complainant tipped FFRF

off to what appears to be a misuse of a charitable tax exemption. Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote an Aug. 21 letter to County Appraiser Mike Borchard: "We request that Grace Baptist Church or Mr. O'Donnell pay the appropriate amount of current taxes, back taxes and penalties owed."

Elliott added that "taxpayers should not have to pay more taxes because a church and its leaders have falsely claimed an exemption."

After FFRF's complaint was reported in the news, O'Donnell recanted his earlier description of his housing arrangements and said that he "mis-spoke." O'Donnell said in August on multiple occasions that he paid rent to the church.

In September, he recanted that account and claimed that he continues to work for the church by taking care of the facilities and grounds and is provided free housing in return. The Appraiser's Office has yet to make a ruling on the exemption of the home.

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/

In the News

Muhammad movie trailer sparks violence

Religious rage spurred in part by a 14-minute American-made online trailer for a movie that mocks the prophet Muhammad as a buffoon, womanizer, child molester and ruthless killer sparked violence in at least six Muslim nations and is being blamed by many for the murders of four Americans in Benghazi, Libya.

Killed in the U.S. Consulate on Sept. 11 were Ambassador Chris Stevens, 52, and three others.

In an interview with the Wall Street Journal, the filmmaker characterized his movie, now called "Innocence of Muslims," as "a political effort to call attention to the hypocrisies of Islam." The actual identity of the filmmaker was unclear due to numerous aliases he's believed to have used. He was identified by some media sources as a Coptic Christian.

CNN reported thousands of rioters and demonstrators in the streets for Friday prayer Sept. 14. A crowd in Sudan set the German embassy on fire. Crowds in Cairo tried to storm the U.S. embassy.

Four people were arrested in connection with the attack that killed the four Americans. But those arrested were not directly tied to the attack, said Monem Elyasser, chief aide to Libyan Prime Minister Mustafa Abushagur.

'Legitimate rape' rep sustained by faith

U.S. Rep. Todd Akin, R-Mo., who was urged to withdraw from his U.S. Senate race against incumbent Democratic Sen. Claire McCaskill by many in his party after his comments on rape became a national scandal, says his faith won't let him quit, according to The New York Times on Aug. 22.

He said in a radio interview that recognizing "a creator, God" has been missing from the debate, and "That's the reason why we're going to contin-

ue."

In an interview with St. Louis TV station KTVI, Akin, when asked why he opposes abortion in nearly all cases, replied:

"People always want to try and make that as one of those things, well, how do you, how do you slice this particularly tough sort of ethical question. It seems to me, first of all, from what I understand from doctors, that's really rare. If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down."

Akin, a member of the Presbyterian Church in America, sponsored legislation to name 2008 "The National Year of the Bible" and to promote greater recognition of the Ten Commandments. Akin has also decried the removal of "God" from government. Akin, with a master's degree from Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, home-schooled all six of his children. He participates in bible studies and prayer groups.

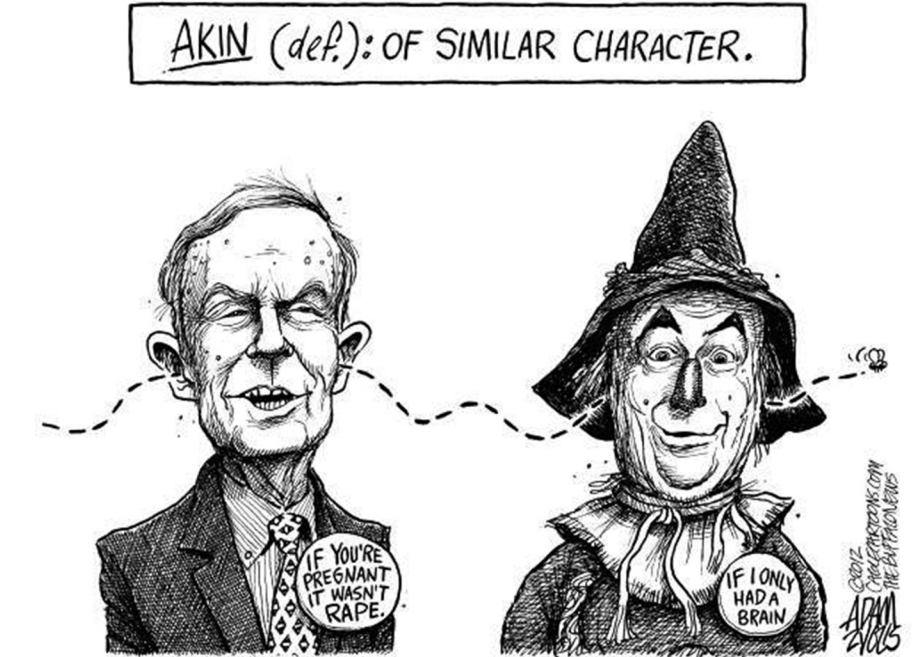
If sustained by faith, Akin is also informed by faith. His claim that rape victims don't easily get pregnant dates to a 1985 book by a leading anti-abortionist, Dr. John C. Willke, who is Catholic and former president of the National Right to Life Committee. Willke, 87, insists "way under 1 percent" of rape victims get pregnant.

One of the few peer-reviewed studies, dating to 1996 and published in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology, estimated 5% of rapes result in pregnancy.

Legislators override gov on birth control

Missouri legislators voted Sept. 12 to override Gov. Jay Nixon's veto of a bill expanding religious exceptions for insurance coverage of birth control. The override in the House got just the number of votes required — 109-45. The override passed the Senate by 26-6.

The law lets individuals, employers



and insurers cite religious reasons in order to be exempt from mandatory insurance coverage for abortion, contraception and sterilization.

Critics of the law said a 2001 Missouri statute already requires birth control prescriptions to be covered under policies with drug benefits. That law also lets insurers offer policies without contraception coverage for those who object.

Snake-handling pastor's resolution fails

The Campbell County Commission in Jacksboro, Tenn., voted 10-2 in July against a resolution calling for the legalization of snake-handling.

The proposal came from Andrew Hamblin, the 21-year-old pastor of Tabernacle Church of God, who told WBIR that the state law restricts how he worships. "My main thing is to see lost people saved. I'd love to do it under the anointment of God with two rattlers in my hand!"

However, Tennessee state law prohibits anyone from owning venomous snakes — making Hamblin's practice during services illegal.

After the vote, Hamblin said, "We'll pray harder, seek the Lord a little longer and we'll come back and try it again."

Taliban blamed for 17 party beheadings

Taliban militants in Afghanistan beheaded 15 men and two women for holding a late-night party, Afghan officials told the U.K. Telegraph on Aug.

27.

Nematullah Khan, governor of Musa Qala, said it was unclear if the victims had been shot dead before being beheaded.

An elder from the area, Juma Khan, said, "Unfortunately, the young men do this sometimes. They had a party with music and dancing and they were behaving badly with the women."

Claims filed in baptismal pool death

The parents of the 1-year-old boy who died earlier this year after drowning in a baptismal pool at a day-care ministry in Indianapolis are suing a state agency for negligence. Juan Cardenas and Maricela Serna filed a suit earlier against the ministry, Assembly of God, and its umbrella organization, Indiana District Assemblies of God.

Juan Carlos Cardenas drowned Feb. 22, after apparently wandering off during lunch.

The claim alleges the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration "negligently inspected" the facility before and after the drowning. A November 2011 agency inspection showed that Praise Fellowship had violated 18 health, safety and sanitation standards and was issued citations.

"The bottom line is the state of Indiana was sanctioning this unlicensed day care," said attorney Stephen Wagner. "If they had done a good job of inspecting the day care, they would've shut it down sooner."

Praise Fellowship closed voluntarily after the agency pulled out of a voucher program.

Church Bulletin Round-Up

Restaurant frames

FFRF complaint letter

Blue Ridge Mountain BBQ in Blue Ridge, Ga., stopped a preferential 10% discount for churchgoers after getting Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt's June 26 letter. The restaurant also offered free meals for pastors dining with a paying customer.

On July 5, FFRF received confirmation that not only had the sign offering the church discount been removed, but it had been replaced by a framed copy of FFRF's letter of complaint.

FFRF adds 'nones' to 'All Faiths Day'

The West Michigan Whitecaps baseball team, which plays in Comstock Park, Mich., decided after getting FFRF's complaint that any publication would qualify for an "All Faiths Day" promotion. Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote the team president July 18 about the discriminatory promo-

tion offering half-price seats for people with church bulletins.

A team attorney replied Aug. 9: "In actual practice, the Whitecaps accept any secular publication, such as school newsletters, community recreation department fliers, apartment and home association newsletters, municipal newsletters and publications. . . . If a patron brought an FFRF newsletter, they would be given the same discount as a patron bringing a church bulletin."

FFRF letter ends Georgia discount

A 20% church bulletin discount at Las Banderas Mexican Restaurant in Valdosta, Ga., was ended after Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt complained Aug. 16. The owner agreed in a phone call Aug. 22 to end the discount and remove the promotion from the restaurant website.

In Memoriam

Dr. Irving N. Wolfson, 1919–2012

FFRF member Dr. Irving Norman Wolfson, 90, Worcester, Mass., died peacefully at home in his sleep July 8, 2012.

He was born July 20, 1919, in New York City. After graduating from Columbia University, he received his M.D. from Yale in 1943, then served as an Army medical officer in India and China in World War II. He later practiced internal medicine and cardiology in Worcester and held many leadership positions in the medical community.

As an activist and humanist, he supported Amnesty International, UNICEF, American Civil Liberties Union,

NAACP and Freedom From Religion Foundation. He was an FFRF member since 1989. Irving's son, Charles, sent word of his death and said his dad died "still a strong atheist."

He was preceded in death in 1983 by Annabel Kreider Wolfson, his wife of 37 years. Survivors include three children: Richard (Artley) Wolfson, Middlebury, Vt., Helen (Eric Thomas) Wolfson, Durham, N.C., Charles Wolfson, Westborough; six grandchildren; a great-grandchild; and his sister, Florence Howitt, Westport, Conn.

FFRF offers its sincerest condolences to the Wolfson family.

FFRF Legal Victories

Church trailer removed from school

FFRF filed a complaint in July to Maury County Public Schools (Columbia, Tenn.) about a trailer from WellSpring Christian Church that was permanently parked next to the sign for Spring Hill Elementary. The church uses the school for Sunday worship services.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote that it “is inappropriate for the District to permit advertisement of religious organizations or churches, especially a permanent advertisement, on school property. Even if allowed to rent district facilities to churches, a public school should not allow any activity that would give the appearance of promoting or supporting religion.”

A school attorney responded July 19 that “The church has been informed that this trailer, along with any other advertisement it utilizes, may only be upon school grounds immediately before and during the time in which the church utilizes the school facilities.”

FFRF ends Kentucky graduation prayer

An invocation and benediction were given at the 2012 Mercer County High School graduation ceremony in Frankfort, Ky. Both prayers, also listed in the official program, made reference to Jesus Christ and one ended with a genuflection.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote June 8 to remind the school that “the Supreme Court has continually struck down prayers at school-sponsored events, including public school graduations.”

On July 20, the school district’s attorney wrote, “I have advised that there should not be any prayers as part of the ceremony.” He added, “While planning for the graduation ceremony in the spring of 2013 has not yet occurred, it is my understanding the School District representatives intend to make the necessary changes to next year’s graduation so that this is no longer an issue.”

FFRF letter halts Christian assemblies

Thanks to a July 26 letter from Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert, Signal Mountain Middle/High School, Chattanooga, Tenn., is on notice that future school assemblies cannot use warnings about alcohol as a pretext for Christian proselytization.

FFRF’s local complainant detailed an assembly speech by Dave Walton, allegedly an expert on substance abuse. But a cursory search of his website, *braggingforjesus.org/*, reveals ulterior motives.

The attorney for Hamilton County Schools wrote Aug. 1 that many faculty members were also concerned that the presentation was inappropriate and that the presentation resulted from a “gross failure” to screen the speaker. The attorney called the situation “a good story for training.”

Georgia school bans football prayer-giver

On behalf of a local complainant,

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote May 23 to Dougherty County Schools, Albany, Ga., to point out constitutional violations by a Fellowship of Christian Athletes member who gave postgame prayers for football teams in Albany.

FCA rep Bill Cox gathered the team and coaches told them to kneel. Prayers included several references to Jesus’ crucifixion “fiction,” including “Thank you Lord Jesus for dying on the cross to save us from our sins.”

Superintendent Joshua Murfree replied Aug. 23 that Cox’s activities “are inconsistent with the practices of the school system, and I have issued instructions that, because of his activities, Mr. Bill Cox is not to be permitted to come upon school property or to attend school-sponsored functions.”

Murfree “reiterated to our athletic employees our practice of not permitting prayer at athletic functions.”

FFRF stops Alabama graduation prayers

A graduating senior who’s an atheist reported to FFRF that East Limestone High School in Athens, Ala., had graduation prayers listed in the program for which the student leading the invocation and benediction asked everyone to bow their heads and pray.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel first wrote the school board June 4 and sent two follow-up letters. The superintendent replied Aug. 21 that schools “have been informed of the law and have taken appropriate steps to ensure that religious prayers will not be scheduled or endorsed as a part of the graduation ceremonies or any other school-sponsored events.”

Georgia bible distribution halted

Thomas County School District, Thomasville, Ga., stopped allowing Gideons to distribute bibles after a March 23 letter from Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt. A middle school principal had announced over the intercom that the bibles were being handed out.

Superintendent George Kornegay Jr. replied July 16 that bible distributions “will not occur in the future in the Thomas County Schools.”

Senior center agrees to obey law

Employees at Peach County Senior Citizens Center, Fort Valley, Ga., were regularly leading residents in prayer before meals, playing Baptist hymns on the piano and reading from the bible to celebrate any event or special day, according to FFRF’s senior citizen complainant.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote a letter July 26 to the center director noting that because it receives federal funds, it is subject to federal law which “is explicit and unequivocal in its prohibition on religious activities.”

The center responded August 9: “[W]e have discussed this matter with the participants to educate them that our staff cannot/will not initiate, encourage, or participate in any religious based activity. Any participant that observes staff promoting religion in any



The WellSpring Christian Church trailer parked by the sign for an elementary school in Columbia, Tenn.

way has been made aware of the Agency’s grievance policy.”

FFRF blocks school soccer prayer

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a complaint letter July 31 about the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) hosting a soccer tournament that included prayer. Video showed a Fellowship of Christian Athletes member praying.

AHSAA responded Aug. 6 that “we certainly appreciate your concerns and take very seriously our duties and obligations under federal and state law. To that end, we intend to fully comply with all constitutional mandates.”

FFRF stops daily prelunch prayers

The Tishomingo County School District will no longer allow teachers to lead students in prayer.

Iuka Elementary School teachers in Iuka, Miss., will stop leading students in prayers before lunch. Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote the school May 3 about the illegal practice.

Superintendent Ben McClung wrote July 23 to say “we understand that teachers cannot encourage students to pray or lead students in prayer.”

Texas FCA adviser played active role

A coach at Hutto High School in Texas can no longer play an active role in the school’s Fellowship of Christian Athletes chapter. The coach/club adviser was sending emails to staff promoting FCA events and listing himself as the contact person.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt complained in February. On Aug. 8, a school attorney replied that the district would offering training on constitutional issues and “will also ensure that this club is truly student-initiated and student-run.”

Complaint gets cross taken down

FFRF received a complaint last spring from a New Yorker who reported that a science teacher at Public School 76 in Queens displayed a cross on the wall next to the blackboard. The display included the words “love god.” Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote a letter of complaint May 8 to the principal. The principal responded July 18 that “the item has

been removed.”

FFRF stops Community College violation

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote April 4 to the Peralta Community College chancellor in Oakland, Calif., about a staff member using “BY GRACE ALONE THROUGH FAITH ALONE IN CHRIST ALONE” as his email signature. The staffer had sent a system email to all district employees inviting them to join a “prayer at the pole” event.

The college’s general counsel responded Aug. 22 to say that the employee is no longer sending emails with religious content.

FFRF stops Ohio graduation prayer

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert’s three letters of complaint about 2011 graduation prayer in Mogadore, Ohio, have borne fruit. The prayer given by the class treasurer was listed in the program.

The district has responded that “Field High School will not have prayer at graduation ceremonies and has enacted policies prohibiting prayer at graduation.” The letter included a copy of the new policy.

Pregame prayers halted in South Dakota

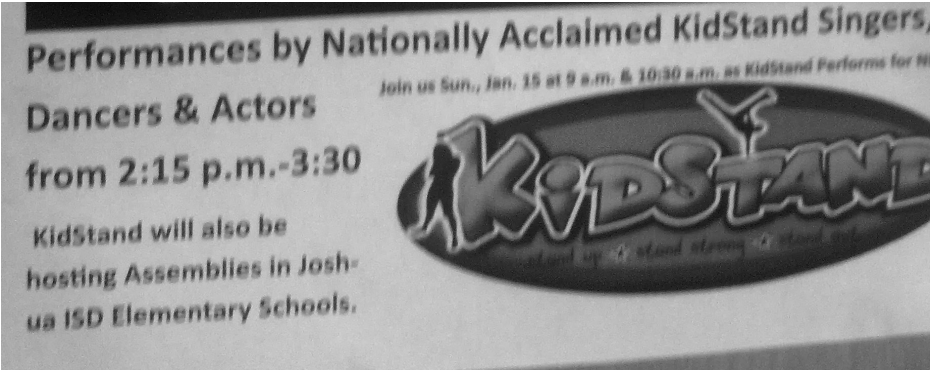
The Castlewood [S.D.] School District will no longer hold pregame prayers after an FFRF complaint May 23 and follow-up letters by Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel. A video posted on YouTube showed school personnel leading prayers before sporting events.

Superintendent Keith Fodness responded Aug. 14: “Our coaching staff has been briefed on the case law pertaining to prayer as it relates to the situation described in your letter and have been instructed to act within those guidelines.”

Florida probes ‘In God We Trust’ plates

In May, FFRF contacted four Florida state agencies about an apparent “scam in God’s name” involving a policy allowing drivers to buy specialty license plates for an additional fee which goes to the group sponsoring the plate.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel noted in several letters that the “In God We Trust Foundation” had collected over \$630,000 and distributed nothing to a



FFRF didn’t fall for KidStand

A North Joshua [Texas] Elementary School assembly was hosted by KidStand, a Christian group that stages school assemblies and targets “children with the Gospel of Christ before the window of opportunity diminishes greatly.” Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt warned the district in February about the group. A school attorney responded July 30 that the KidStand performance was against district policy and that disciplinary action was taken. “[T]his type of assembly will not occur in the future at Joshua ISD.”

charity for children which it claimed to be supporting.

The Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles replied Aug. 27: “Our department is aware of the alleged noncompliance regarding the distribution of funds from sales of the In God We Trust specialty license plate. As this is an ongoing investigation, we are not at liberty to divulge related information.”

The letter added that due to the probe, “our department has not distributed any funds to the IGWT Foundation.”

Did ‘man in sky’ see complaint coming?

FFRF’s objection about a teacher at a Mandarin language immersion elementary school in the San Mateo/Foster City [Calif.] School District was successful.

A local complainant told FFRF that the teacher told students that the “man in the sky can see everything you do, but you can’t see him because he is camouflaged.”

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the district May 22 about the allegation of proselytization of a captive audience of children.

The school district informed FFRF Aug. 16 that it “has reminded its employees of the District’s policy of not [teaching] religion in schools.”

Court now offers 12-step options

After an FFRF letter, the Rocky River [Ohio] Municipal Court will offer secular alternatives to Alcoholics Anonymous. The court had required some offenders to either attend Alcoholics Anonymous or be jailed.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote on March 16 to the court’s probation department, pointing out that courts have consistently found AA and other 12-step programs to be “religious programs for purposes of First Amendment analysis.”

Chief Probation Officer Judy Nash responded Aug. 1 that the court will offer offenders other options, including information on Rational Recovery and Secular Organizations for Sobriety.

God hates divorce in Missouri?

FFRF received a complaint about a Missouri pastor who appeared to hijack required Family Court educational programs on divorce in Jackson County by talking about himself and his faith for most of the three-hour period. The pastor also handed out fliers offering his religious services outside

of class, which were held in his church.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the court July 16 to ask for correction of the theological bent of the secular class.

The court responded a month later that the minister was told that “the issue of his religious faith and his ministry have no place in the teaching of this curriculum and we have instructed him to discontinue references to his background such that gives the appearance that the Court is promoting religion over nonreligious beliefs.” The court will “monitor this issue with all” of its instructors.

The response noted that the court is also “actively looking for locations outside of church property where we can hold classes.”

FFRF stops prayer at Michigan school

Hastings Area School District in Michigan refrained from including a prayer in its 2012 high school graduation ceremony after receiving an April 13 complaint letter from Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt. For at least 10 years, Hastings High School has included an illegal invocation in its official graduation program and selected a student to lead the prayer.

In a July 17 reply, Superintendent Todd Geerlings assured FFRF that, “there were no prayers said at the Hastings High School graduation ceremony on May 25, 2012.”

Mississippi teacher oversteps bounds

A U.S. history teacher in Raymond, Miss., who brought “Truth for Youth Bibles” to class for students to take will no longer do so after a May 23 letter from Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt. The teacher also asked her students to raise their hands if they “believe that women who have abortions are going to hell.”

While the teacher was present, a student was allowed to ask classmates who were “saved” to raise their hands.

Superintendent Stephen Handley replied Aug. 8 that “the teacher was given instruction and counseling on her role as a teacher in our district and the requirement of neutrality with respect to religious issues.”

FFRF deletes religious recording

The recorded message of the License Office in Rolla, Mo., no longer ends in “God bless you.” Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt’s letter resulted in it being changed to “Have a wonderful day.”

Indiana discovers the Constitution!

According to publicity, Indiana Dunes State Park appeared to be hosting and co-sponsoring a 5-kilometer event with St. Patrick’s Catholic Church, with proceeds going to the church’s school. In a March 15 letter, Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt chastened state officials.

A June 29 response confirmed that while a flier mistakenly stated the event was co-sponsored, the Division of State Parks did not sponsor it. The church was required to obtain a special event permit to use the park.

FFRF stops Alabama religious emails

An Alabama Medicaid Agency employee used her official email account to ask recipients to help ban an upcoming film depicting Jesus as a homosexual. Her email included a quotation from the bible and urged recipients, “Let’s stand for what we believe and stop the mockery of Jesus Christ our Savior.”

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt sent the agency a letter June 20.

Acting Commissioner Stephanie McGee Azar agreed in a July 13 letter that the employee violated policy, adding that “appropriate disciplinary action” was taken against her.

Religious narrative out in Ohio

The Antwerp [Ohio] School District will no longer include religious messages in school assemblies after a complaint last fall from Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt.

A Veterans Day assembly had included recitation of “The Meaning Behind the Folding Ceremonies of the Flag,” a discredited religious narrative which explains the “meaning” of each of the 12 folds of the flag. The “meaning” of the 12th fold, e.g., is to represent and glorify “God the Father, The Son, and Holy Ghost.”

On Aug. 9, school attorney Kimball Carey told FFRF that the principal who organized the assembly wasn’t aware of the content of the presentation, and said it wouldn’t happen again in Antwerp schools.

‘Faith & Family Night’ fan draw dismal

California University of Pennsylvania, a public school in the borough of California, Pa., agreed after getting Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt’s complaint that it’s unconstitutional to offer reduced admission to basketball games for those who mention their church affiliation.

“Faith and Family Night” last Jan. 6 offered \$3 admission for people who mentioned their church affiliation. Churches also were allowed to set up informational tables in the new basketball arena.

Legal University counsel Jacqueline Morrow replied Aug. 20 that she told administrators on the day of the event that the promotion was unconstitutional. “The University administrators responsible for the event were apologetic, and because the game had already been advertised, we decided that the available cure would be to make sure that everyone that attended the event would be charged the same, lower price.”

Morrow added, “Not only was the plan unconstitutional, it was not successful. Attendance was low.”

God’s help out in San Francisco

The San Francisco Assessment Appeals Board removed “so help me God” from the oath used to swear in parties testifying at board hearings after getting Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt’s February letter and follow-up letters.

Board Administrator Dawn Duran wrote on Aug. 14 that the religious oath is out and has been replaced by, “Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?”

Census unlinks to Catholic ‘research’

FFRF was contacted by a curious researcher in November 2011 who “wanted to look up religion statistics and tried www.census.gov/,” the U.S. Census website. The census stopped collecting religious statistics in 1936, but provides links to “more information.” These links included the Hartford Seminary and the Glenmary Research Center (GRC).

The link to the GRC in fact linked to Glenmary Home Missioners, a missionary organization “dedicated to establishing a Catholic presence in rural areas and small towns of the United States where the Catholic Church is not yet effectively present.”

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to Census Bureau Director Robert Groves on May 22 about the links. Several follow-up letters and phone calls ensued. Seidel suggested the Pew Forum on Religion & the Public Life would be a better source.

The Census’ Web and Social Media Branch reviewed all the links to religious information, and as of July 2, removed them all. The Census also now links to the Pew Research Center.

Football prayers forced to ‘take a knee’

FFRF was victorious against pre-game football prayer at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, where sectarian prayer led by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes had been a home game staple since 2010.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt initially wrote to UTC Chancellor Roger Brown on May 15: “While students, athletes, and athletic event attendees may choose to gather privately in prayer, a public university has no place in encouraging or endorsing religious ritual.”

Schmitt also noted that a 1997 decision, *Chaudhuri v. State of Tenn.*, by the 6th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals held that sectarian prayers at public university events violate the Establishment Clause.

After several months of indecision, Brown announced Sept. 10 that “the right decision for the university” was to offer a moment of silence in lieu of prayer.

Brown told the Chattanooga Times Free Press that “we need to make sure there is never anybody that goes away from our campus, our stadium, our arena or classroom or work, that feels like they have been excluded or feel uncomfortable in any way.”

2012 Michael Hakeem Memorial College Essay Competition

FFRF awards \$7,800 to college students

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has awarded \$7,800 to 10 students in this year's college essay competition.

Students were asked to describe "Why I am an out-of-the-closet atheist (freethinker)" in 750 to 900 words. Five top placers plus five honorable mentions received awards. Essays begin on page 12.

First place (\$3,000):

Second place (\$2,000): **Savannah Roland**, College of Charleston.

Third place (\$1,000): **Casimir Klim**, Columbia University.

Fourth place (\$500): **Anna Biela**, Purdue University.

Fifth place (\$300): **Eric Ouellet**, Carleton University.

Honorable mentions (\$200 each):

Kate Heetland, University of North-

ern Iowa.

Leah Aeby, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

Lukas Deem, University of Central Arkansas.

Michaelyn Everhart, University of Kansas.

Omar De Los Santos, Yale University.

This year's awards were made possible by the late Michael Hakeem,

endowed by his bequest. He was a well-known sociology professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, an FFRF officer and active atheist. FFRF also extends special thanks to members **Dorea** and **Dean Schramm** for providing each student with a \$50 bonus.

Look for the college honorable mention essays in future issues. Next month: 2012 graduate student essay winners will be announced.

State/Church Bulletin

Embryonic stem cell research upheld

In *Shirley v. Sebelius*, the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia upheld a lower court decision Aug. 24 throwing out a suit that challenged federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. Opponents claimed the National Institutes of Health was violating the 1996 Dickey-Wicker law that prohibits taxpayer financing for work that harms an embryo.

The Washington Post reported a three-judge panel unanimously agreed with a lower court judge's dismissal of the case. This is the second time the appeals court has said that the challenged federal funding of embryonic stem cell research was permissible.

D.C. court backs contraceptive mandate

In *Wheaton College v. Sebelius*, the District of Columbia federal district court on Aug. 24 dismissed for lack of standing and ripeness a challenge by Wheaton College in Illinois to the mandate issued under the Affordable Care Act requiring group health insurance policies to cover contraceptive services for women.

Religion Clause reported that "Because the Department of Health and Human Services has announced a one-year enforcement safe harbor for non-profit groups whose religious beliefs are violated by the mandate, the court concluded that Wheaton does not face imminent enforcement action."

Wisconsin board OKs SCOTUS appeal

The Elmbrook [Wis.] School Board voted 5-2 on Aug. 21 to ask the U.S. Supreme Court to decide if the district violated the Constitution by holding graduation ceremonies from 2000-09 at Elmbrook Church.

The vote came after a July 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals court ruling that reversed a decision to not hold the district liable, reported Brookfield Now.

The case was brought by Americans United.

Air Force officially bars proselytizing

Shortly before retiring as Air Force

Chief of Staff, Gen. Norton Schwartz issued a document that included what NBC on Aug. 22 called the first time the Air Force has "laid down the law on religious proselytizing by leaders."

Included in the 27-page Standards of Conduct directive are:

Government Neutrality Regarding Religion. "Leaders at all levels must balance constitutional protections for an individual's free exercise of religion or other personal beliefs and the constitutional prohibition against governmental establishment of religion. For example, they must avoid the actual or apparent use of their position to promote their personal religious beliefs to their subordinates or to extend preferential treatment for any religion. Commanders or supervisors who engage in such behavior may cause members to doubt their impartiality and objectivity. The potential result is a degradation of the unit's morale, good order, and discipline.

2.12.1. "All Airmen are able to choose to practice their particular religion, or subscribe to no religious belief at all. You should confidently practice your own beliefs while respecting others whose viewpoints differ from your own."

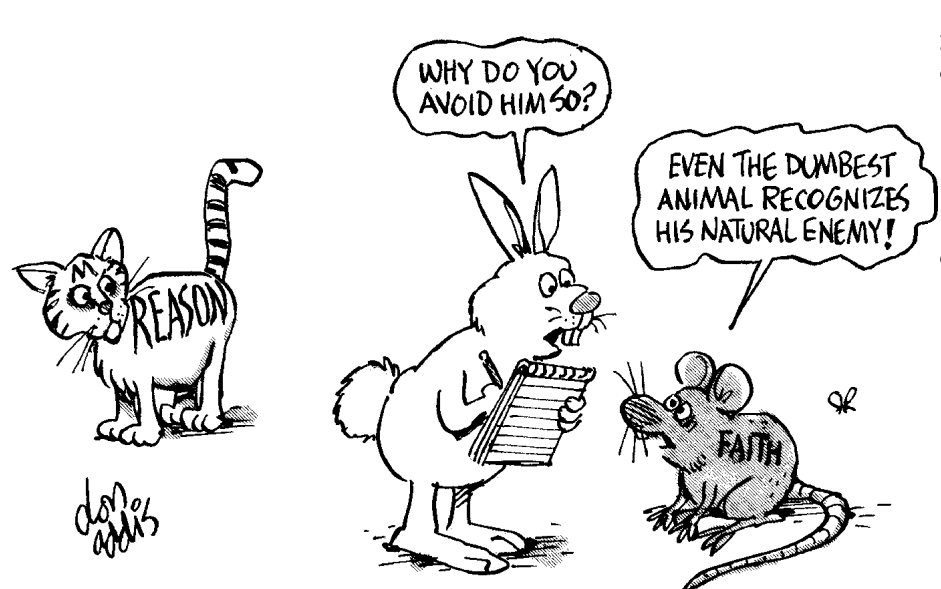
Mikey Weinstein of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, was unimpressed by the directive, calling it "a belated response to MRFF's continual exposure of [Schwartz's] scandalously nonconfrontational approach to the Christian extremist predators within the USAF who flout their oath to support and defend the U.S. Constitution."

Hawaii judge rules against gay couples

U.S. District Court Judge Alan Kay ruled Aug. 8 against two Hawaii couples who want to get married instead of entering a civil union. Kay sided with Hawaii Health Director Loretta Fuddy and Hawaii Family Forum, a Christian group that was allowed to intervene in the case.

The women, Natasha Jackson and Janin Kleid, argued they need to be married to get certain federal benefits. Co-plaintiff Gary Bradley wants to marry his foreign national partner to help him change his immigration status. Appeals are planned.

Religious lobbies have opposed marriage equality in Hawaii.



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New hearing for pregnancy center case

The full 4th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals on Aug. 15 ordered a new hearing in the case of Baltimore's truth-in-advertising ordinance requiring crisis pregnancy centers to post signs saying they don't provide or make referrals for abortion or for comprehensive birth control services.

The order struck down a June decision voiding down the ordinance, the first of its kind in the nation. A Dec. 6 hearing date was set.

The Center for Reproductive Rights joined the city of Baltimore to defend the ordinance in June 2010 against a lawsuit filed by the Archbishop of Baltimore and a local parish.

Rehearing ordered for Florida decalogue

The 11th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled Aug. 15 that a 5-foot-high Ten Commandments statue could stay at the entrance to the Dixie County Courthouse in Cross City, Fla. A lower court ordered the granite monument removed in 2011.

The American Civil Liberties Union first sued in 2007 on behalf of a "John Doe" client. The 11th Circuit ruled that U.S. District Judge Maurice Paul failed to consider conflicting evidence on whether Doe has standing to sue, the Wall Street Journal reported. The case goes back to Paul's court.

Russian PM: Free Pussy Riot Oct. 1

A judge sentenced three members of Russian feminist punk band Pussy Riot to two years in jail Aug. 17 for stag-

ing a protest against President Vladimir Putin in Moscow's main Orthodox cathedral, an act Judge Marina Syrova called "blasphemous."

Syrova found the women guilty of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred, reported Reuters. Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, 22, Marina Alyokhina, 24, and Yekaterina Samutsevich, 30, stood watching in handcuffs in a glass courtroom cage.

The Associated Press reported Sept. 12 that Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said the women should be freed when their cases are appealed Oct. 1. "In my view, a suspended sentence would be sufficient, taking into account the time they have already spent in custody."

Correction



Last month, Nicole's essay, "A Difference Beyond Distance," featured the wrong picture. FFRF apologizes. Congratulations, Nicole!

Meet a Member

‘I never fell for religion’

Name: Arik Posner.

Where I live: In the northern Virginia exurbs of the nation’s capital.

Where and when I was born: In 1968 in Wilster, a small town near the North Sea coast in northwestern Germany. My parents run a small massage therapy business in the area. After finishing my degree I got an offer and immigrated to the U.S. to pursue scientific interests. In 2008, I became a naturalized U.S. citizen.

Family: My wife Wendy, a professional violinist and FFRF Lifer; and our children, Linus, 7, and Darwin, 5. My eldest son Kelvin, 16, lives in Germany with his mom. We see him as often as possible on both sides of the pond. On our cross-country road trip this summer, Kelvin and I swung through Madison and toured Freethought Hall.

One of our recent adventures was attending the Reason Rally together. We marched to it alongside Dan Barker and a few dozen other members, carrying an FFRF banner. At the rally, we encountered members of the Westboro Baptist Church. They had the audacity to remark to Wendy, “What a terrible way to raise your kids.” Ironically, one of the main speakers at the event was Nate Phelps, the Westboro founder’s estranged son, reporting on the terrible way he was raised.

Education: Diploma in physics from the University of Heidelberg and a doctoral degree in science from the University of Kiel.

Occupation: I work in science management for the nation’s space agency. It is exciting, fast-paced work. You never know what will come up the next day or even the next hour.

How I got where I am today: When I was growing up, I followed the reports and images from the Voyager mission uncovering the mysteries of the outer

planets. I also watched the broadcast on German TV of the series “Cosmos” by Carl Sagan and his colleagues. All of this spurred my interest in science, which early on I decided would be my career choice.

Where I’m headed: Help the kids grow up well and inspire them and other young people about science as others inspired me. Isn’t it the greatest adventure there is? Maybe I’ll still have some time to find out new things in the years ahead.

Person in history I admire and why: The scientists we named our children after [Linus Pauling and Charles Darwin], and Christopher Hitchens. I admit to getting teary-eyed when I heard last December that he had died. His bravery and the way he was able to use words against all forms of tyranny could hardly be surpassed.

A quotation I like: “We would be 1,500 years ahead if it hadn’t been for the church dragging science back by its coattails and burning our best minds at the stake.” (Catherine Fahringer). We met her regularly at freethought (FACT) meetings while living in ultra-religious San Antonio. She is another person I admire greatly for her courage and outspokenness. I’m so happy that FFRF carries an award in her name.

These are a few of my favorite things: Chinese stamps (yes, I’m a boring philatelist); Scrabble (competing with Wendy is tough); Xiang Qi (Chinese chess); and an instrument on the Curiosity rover, RAD, that I originally designed. It measures radiation in preparation for the human explorers who will one day land on Mars.

These are not: In Germany: Church taxes. You become a member of a state-accredited church through baptism, which customarily happens before one has formed one’s opinion about it. I only became aware of this when I turned 18 and received my first paycheck, which was reduced by church taxes. I immediately went to the government office (where I was yelled at) in order to cancel my “membership.” My grandmother was not so lucky. At her most vulnerable, immediately following the loss of her husband, she was talked into a church burial by the pastor. A few months later, the church contacted her to inform her that she owed her husband’s “unpaid” back church taxes of several decades, which she was asked to pay on the spot. It turns out that my granddad never attended church himself. But he didn’t have much say in the matter anymore, as he was already dead. Since there was no evidence that he had ever renounced his church membership, my grandmother and my dad got stuck with a significant bill. The ruthlessness and shamelessness of church leaders victimizing a widow is astounding to me.

The other one is U.S. politicians — in particular, presidents of late, wearing faith on their sleeve. One reason I ultimately came to the U.S. was to become a (secular) voter and thus make a difference in the world. I admire John F. Kennedy for his insight. I hope that we will in the future have another president who respects the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

My doubts about religion started: I



Wendy and Arik Posner carry an FFRF banner at the 2010 Rally to Restore Sanity in Washington, D.C.

never fell for religion, although a classmate in public school, a son of missionaries, tried everything to lure me in. My school tried this as well during religion instruction, as to date there is no separation of state and church in Germany. (The German Constitution, which was drafted with American “help” after World War II, does not explicitly state anything about this question, but it contains the infamous Article 140, pointing to the relevant statutes of the pre-war Weimar Constitution that are still in place. These statutes are responsible for the ongoing entanglement.)

When I was about 15, I read Arthur C. Clarke’s 2001: A Space Odyssey, which has an atheist poem as a foreword. This was the moment I found out that I was not alone in my nonreligiosity. It is so important that this confirmation happen early in life, before one succumbs to self-doubt. I think FFRF has helped many young people in this important way.

Why I’m a freethinker: I firmly believe that education and scientific progress are good for humanity. Religion has stood in the way of progress, in a quite chaotic and random way,

wherever new knowledge has contradicted its tenets, whether it be stem cell research, evolution, family planning and prevention of STDs. Even the lightning rod was opposed when it was introduced.

Most tragic is that women in theocratic countries are excluded from educational options and full participation in society. Just recently, Iran’s mullahs decided to ban women from pursuing degrees in science and engineering.

Ways I promote freethought: I wish I could do more. I participated in the Secular Coalition’s Lobby Day for Reason, stunning some congressional staffers who apparently had never talked to an atheist before. I enjoy publicly reading Freethought Today, in particular while commuting on the bus and metro. I wish there were more large-font, stirring captions on the back page to make it more visible.

I’ve already made friends on the bus (greetings, Woody!), and I had a Mormon hand me a pamphlet and immediately “run off” the bus at what I presume was his stop.

Overheard

Because there is no cosmic point to the life that each of us perceives on this distant bit of dust at galaxy’s edge, all the more reason for us to maintain in proper balance what we have here. Because there is nothing else. No thing. This is it. And quite enough, all in all. **Gore Vidal (Oct. 3, 1925-Aug. 1, 2012), author, playwright, commentator** *National Public Radio, 8-1-12*

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

When I asked them specifically, “Will you [agree] to make the city whole?” they wouldn’t do it. If they aren’t going to make the taxpayers whole, why should we be putting a million dollars into the collection plate of the Catholic Church when we have demonstrable needs? **Steve Kozachik, Tucson City Council, voting against an appropriation of \$1.1 million, which passed 5-2, to remodel the Catholic Marist College** *Arizona Daily Star, 7-11-12*

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

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

The Gideon bible is full of references to sex and violence, although it’s written using more formal language. James’ book is easier to read.

Hotel manager Wayne Bartholomew, Crosthwaite, U.K., on replacing bibles in guest rooms with copies of the erotic Fifty Shades of Grey *Westmorland Gazette, 7-19-12*

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

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



Arik Posner in Cocoa Beach, Fla., on Nov. 25, in front of the Atlas V rocket that carried the Mars rover Curiosity into orbit the next day. It landed Aug. 6 on Mars.

Second place: College student essay competition

I once was blind, but now I see

FFRF awarded Tori a \$2,000 scholarship.



By Savannah “Tori” Roland

My name is Tori. I once was blind, but now I see. This is my story.

As an adolescent, I felt lost, hopeless and alone. I searched for something to take away the pain. Caroline, a Christian neighbor, leapt to my rescue. She told me that if I accepted Jesus as my lord and savior, He would forgive all of

my sins. How I longed for unconditional love and acceptance! I was so excited to begin this journey!

And so I called myself a Christian. I followed Caroline to church every Wednesday and Sunday. The teen program often offered free pizza and soda, and there were so many other kids to hang out with! I had never been to a rock concert, and then the church brought in a rock band! Freaking awesome! I was addicted to all of the joy and excitement at this wonderful place.

I began to attend Bible Club meetings at lunchtime at my public school. Instead of having to eat the awful school lunches, we got to eat Papa John’s pizza. It was so good to be a Christian! My brother, who had not been saved, was angry that he did not get Papa John’s for lunch.

One day he asked the head of the meeting for some pizza. The response was, “You have to be good to get pizza.”

Occasionally, Caroline and I attended Sunday sermons at church. They were not always so happy and uplifting. The pastor often preached about the people who would burn in hell — some for not truly believing in God, some for worshipping the wrong God, some for not being baptized, some for being homosexual.

Around election time, sermons

I witnessed the hate and judgment emanating from Christians.

focused on political issues, like how the conservative Christians needed to stay in power to keep the U.S. on the right track. Sometimes the pastor would preach directly from “The Good Book,” which was often frightening. God seemed overly emotional, demanding, angry, power-hungry. This was a peaceful, loving God?

I often ate dinner with Caroline and her parents. It started with a prayer, the prelude to frequent arguments, usually about whether Caroline’s mother Sally should get up from the table to fetch something for Caroline’s father Richard.

Richard often read bible passages to prove his assertion that women are men’s servants. Sally’s argument was quite reasonable: She had already cooked and served the meal. Now she would like to sit down and enjoy it.

Out of the closet

In my freshman year, I moved to a
Continued on next page

Third place: College student essay competition

In the hot seat: Atheist in firehouse

FFRF awarded Casimir a \$1,000 scholarship.



By Casimir Klim

Unlike many of my fellow non-believers, I faced no backlash for my atheism until years after I had “come out” to my family and friends. Growing up in a relatively secular household, I was encouraged to think critically and draw my own conclusions about life. Although my parents were somewhat spiritual, they never forced their beliefs on me and understood when, as a young man, I rejected religious faith.

As a child and teenager, I was not made to feel like an outsider because I refused to believe unscientific explanations for existence. That all changed when I chose to become a firefighter and moved from Ann Arbor, Mich., to El Paso, Texas.

After high school, I had decided to forgo college in favor of a career in the fire service. The choice satisfied both the desire I felt for adventure and the inclination to help others that my family instilled in me. After training in Michigan, I encountered a struggling economy where most municipalities were laying off public safety workers. Being passionate about my career choice, I accepted a position in El Paso and began working as a firefighter/paramedic at the age of 22.

I had not considered what a large role religion played in the fire service. At the training academy, I saw a large number of cross necklaces and tattoos on my classmates and teachers. But my real wake-up call occurred at the dinner table a few months after I had finished training and began station work.

In fire stations, crews work 24-hour shifts and traditionally eat breakfast, lunch and dinner together. Close quarters breed familiarity, and almost no topic of conversation is off limits. As the “new guy” from out of town, I was a bit of a curiosity. During a lull in conversation, the question of my faith arose: “Hey Klim, you Catholic? What religion are you?”

I was taken by surprise. It was a question I had never been asked point blank before, let alone in a room full of other people. I could, of course, have declined to answer. But fire crews value a type of trust that is only fostered by

brutal honesty. If I couldn’t tell them the truth about myself, how could they trust me to watch out for them inside a burning building?

“I — I’m not anything. I’m not religious,” I said cautiously.

I hoped it would blow over, but these were not people to take controversy lightly. They reacted with genuine shock, which quickly gave way to relentless mocking over the eternity I would surely spend in hell. To succeed as a firefighter, one must have thick skin, and I didn’t mind getting kidded about the “religion thing.”

It could just as easily been about my big ears or Midwestern accent. The joking was easy to take in stride. What really hurt was seeing the face on one of my mentors fall as I professed my lack of faith.

He, it turned out, was extremely devout. He looked both surprised and saddened by my proclamation. I wondered if our relationship would ever be the same. To bridge this new divide, I vowed to be the best firefighter I could be. I needed to prove that my atheism did not affect my abilities or my morals.

Earning acceptance

As time went by, my hard work paid off. When I proved I could successfully triage patients at a multi-car pileup and competently work the nozzle in a burning bedroom as flames rolled over our heads, the issue of where I went on Sunday went out the window. My mentor put the issue behind him and con-

I needed to prove that my atheism did not affect my abilities or my morals.

tinued to serve as a great friend and adviser.

I was also pleasantly surprised to find other members of the department who lived upstanding lives without any form of religious faith. These kindred spirits also happened to be some of the best firefighters I have worked with. Many of them were equally, if not more, morally scrupulous than their religious peers.

Watching them cheerfully face long shifts with no sleep reinforced my observation that morality does not come from God. These brave men and women risked their lives to help others, not for a reward in the afterlife, but because they felt it was simply the right thing to do.

The acceptance I eventually felt from my firefighter brothers and sisters does not, apparently, translate to the rest of society. A recent study by the University of Minnesota found that nearly 40% of Americans feel that atheists “do not at all agree” with the vision that they have of society.

Would they still think so, knowing that atheists are running into burning buildings to search for their families?

That we are educating their children? Policing their streets? I don’t think so. We nonbelievers are represented in myriad aspects of American society. We need to start standing up and saying so.

Initially, it was difficult to be forthcoming about my lack of faith to my peers. But in the end, it was a valuable and eye-opening experience. They were shocked at first, but it wasn’t long before we were back to eating steaks, watching TV and waiting for “the big one.” We found common ground in our work protecting the citizens of our city.

My time as a firefighter showed me the importance of “coming out” as a freethinker and atheist, regardless of one’s profession or location. If non-believing professionals make their position known, it will start to erode the view that atheists lack morality and do not share the values held by their fellow Americans.

If enough of us speak up, we will be recognized as the ethical and responsible members of the society that we are. I feel that this simple step will help us to move closer to a tolerant, inclusive and rational society.

Casimir Klim, 24, says his experiences as a first responder helped him discover a passion for health care. That led him to make the difficult decision to resign from the fire department and return to school. He’s a freshman at the School of General Studies, Columbia University’s undergraduate school for nontraditional students. He’s pursuing a neuroscience degree and plans to apply to medical school.

I once was blind, but now I see

Continued from previous page

different school. It was here that I met gay and bisexual students. I witnessed the hate and judgment emanating from Christians. A boy slammed my friend Josh into a locker, proclaiming him “fag” as he did so. Other students laughed and jeered. This motivated me to become involved with the LGBT club and to take a very close look at my Christian friends and their beliefs.

I had seen Christians treating people of alternate faiths with scorn. I had seen God used as an excuse to justify hatred and discrimination against women and gays. I had seen Satan used as an excuse for alcohol abuse, drug abuse and adultery. I had allowed a group of Christians to tell me what to believe and how to live my life.

I had seen no evidence to prove the existence of God. I started calling myself a nonbeliever and came out of the closet to family and friends.

My mother and stepfather, who are atheists, were thrilled. My father and stepmother, who are evangelical Christians, exclaimed, “You will burn in hell!” and “I will pray for your soul.” My Christian friends proclaimed, “You can’t believe in nothing!” Even my brother, who was never religious, was appalled.

I began attending activities with lo-

cal secular groups and frequented secular blogs such as The Friendly Atheist. Learning that I was one of millions of nonbelievers helped me to feel less alone.

I was appalled to learn that atheists are distrusted and hated by the vast majority of Americans, which causes many atheists to remain closeted. How to overcome the negative stereotypes?

There is power in numbers, so atheists must come out of the closet and band together. We must be active in secular groups and visible and helpful in the community. With a large, visible presence and a new, positive reputation, people who question the existence of God will no longer fear being ostracized by society, or fear being struck by a lightning bolt hurled by an enraged God.

Sadly, critical thinking is sorely neglected within the public school system. Far too much emphasis is placed on memorization. In three years, I will

be an elementary school teacher, and I will use this opportunity to teach children to use their noodles.

I imagine a future where atheists are regarded as moral and intelligent human beings. I imagine a future where individuals seek truth via scientific study and critical thinking, rather than through the bible.

I dream of a future where politicians can openly express atheist beliefs and still have a fair chance of becoming president of the United States. I dream of a future where individuals who were once blindly faithful can attain 20/20 vision.

Savannah “Tori” Roland, 18, grew up in Charleston, S.C., where she’s a sophomore at the College of Charleston, majoring in elementary and secondary education.

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.

Fourth place: College student essay contest

Gaining my freedom from religion

FFRF awarded Anna a \$500 scholarship.

By Anna Biela

Seven years ago, I was a Catholic who was starting to ask the important questions and to put words to the doubts that plagued my childhood. I spent years trying to work through all the cognitive dissonance and the shame religion taught me.

It was one of the most difficult and freeing things I've ever done. Now I'm the president of the Society of Non-Theists at Purdue University. I've been on the local evening news standing up for separation of church and state. And I'm happier than I've ever been.

I wish I could say that I got here by my own willpower, but there were four people that made it possible. They're why I'm an "out" atheist, and they're my inspiration and motivation.

Rachel has been my friend since middle school. When we first met, she was going to a fairly conservative church, though she was never really into it. While I was still struggling with my own sexuality, she was actively advocating gay marriage. She was the window that gave me a glimpse of the world beyond my sheltered Catholic childhood.

One of my most vivid memories was when I asked her how she could be reli-

gious and pro-gay rights. She responded very matter-of-factly, "I can think for myself, and I think that everyone deserves love."

It made something click in my mind. A very simple truth emerged from the jumbled mess of religion in my mind: The welfare of people trumps religious idealism. She was the first person I told I was an atheist. She smiled and said, "It's about time."

In high school I met Joseph through a friend who thought he could help me. He was the first self-labeled atheist I ever met. He never told me what to believe, just asked questions and pointed out flaws in my logic.

He made me realize that I was, in fact, an atheist already, but I was afraid of what giving up my god would mean for my world. I was afraid, and he taught me that fear wasn't a reason to dismiss the truth. For the first time, I was taught the radical notion of "good without god."

Then, in college, I met Kacey and Ben, respectively the former vice president and treasurer of the Society of Non-Theists. They encouraged me to come to meetings and made me feel welcome at a university swarming with campus ministries. Before I knew it, I had found myself a home with heathens in the middle of conservative Indiana.

Civic engagement

Kacey, Ben and the other amazing

The welfare of people trumps religious idealism.

Non-Theists turned my de facto atheism into activism. They gave me the courage and support I needed to be open and proud. Since joining, I've worked with them to raise money for charity, build relations with other campus groups, staff countless Ask an Atheist tables and coordinate trips to various conventions and the Reason Rally.

Last spring I was elected Non-Theists president almost unanimously. I was expecting a summer off, but ended up spending a month fighting a proposal for the city of West Lafayette to subsidize a church project by issuing \$7 million of economic development revenue bonds.

Our work changed the original 6-1 vote to a very close 4-3 in favor of the church, which wasn't quite a success, but we made a difference. We convinced two council members and made the city stop and think, all while establishing our presence in local government. [FFRF also got involved.]

To be completely honest, I've had my moments of doubt, wondering if my activism is worth it, considering the prevalent bias against the nonreligious. Any potential employer can easily discover my position in the club by

Googling me. The pastor of the aforementioned church had misquoted and vilified me during his Sunday service, leading members of his congregation to harass us. It has created a huge barrier between my parents and me, and I've lost too many friends.

But every time I doubt, I realize that those are the exact reasons why being out of the closet is so important. I had four amazing people to stand with me and guide me. Now I have a duty and the ability to help any other young person with doubts. I will make the Society of Non-Theists strong for everyone who comes after me. I will fight for equality and rights.

I will stand up for anyone else who finds themselves the victim of religion. Religion hurt me, taught me self-loathing and repressed me. Atheists helped me, taught me the value of my voice and helped me find an ounce of truth in this crazy, beautiful universe.


Anna Biela, 20, was born in Michigan City, Ind., and is a junior majoring in nuclear engineering at Purdue University.



Fifth place: College student essay contest

Time to stop respecting religion

FFRF awarded Eric a \$300 scholarship for his essay.



By Eric Ouellet

When I was young, my Christian mother would read bible stories to me. She would take me to church occasionally and lecture me about god. Like any child, I believed all of it.

As I grew up, I fell in love with science books at the library, particularly books about space. Christianity's claims soon seemed completely nonsensical. By the time I was 9, I had rejected religion and the idea of a God but told no one.

I remember feeling that no matter what I believed, religion merited respect, and it was wrong to question another person's beliefs. But over the

years, religion began to anger me. I became angry at the way Christians seemed so certain about things they had no way of knowing, the way they assumed they were morally superior and that the best way to raise children was by brainwashing them.

Slowly, my mother began to suspect that I had rejected Christianity. When I was 13, I was reading *A Short History of Nearly Everything* by Bill Bryson and telling my younger sister how the ancient Greeks calculated Earth's circumference. Mother said to me, "Keep in mind, scientists don't have all the answers."

That angered me enormously and to me meant, "You can learn about science if you want, but always remember that God is the real answer to everything." I didn't say anything. In fact, I didn't come out to my mother until I was 16. Thankfully, she didn't disown me.

In fact, she doesn't really seem to care that I am a nonbeliever (which makes me question whether she really believes the claims of Christianity herself, because if she does, she ought to be concerned that I will be tortured for eternity).

Deserving of ridicule

Why did it take me so long to come out of the closet? It was largely because

of the idea perpetuated by society that it's good and noble to be religious.

Thomas Jefferson once said, "Ridicule is the only weapon which can be used against unintelligible propositions." Every week, politicians are ridiculed in editorial cartoons and on satirical TV shows, but for some reason, it's unheard of to ridicule the most ridiculous beliefs of all.

Religion's unmerited respected status is the only thing that truly sustains it. After all, it's fairly obvious that most religious people don't believe as they do because they've evaluated all the possibilities and come to the conclusion that their faith makes the most sense.

They believe because those around them believe the same thing and no one seems to question it. One of the reasons it's so important for atheists to come out and become vocal is to abolish the dangerous social custom of not questioning ridiculous beliefs.

The atheism section on the social news website Reddit has over 730,000 subscribers. It's sometimes criticized for posting too much silly content mocking Christianity and Islam rather than discussions. But in my view, Zombie Jesus pictures and the like are extremely valuable in that they help destroy the assumption that religion deserves respect.

I'm always amused when religious

defenders online try to use the same tactics as atheists. For example, one posted a picture of an obese teenager at a computer with a caption calling atheists "fat fucks with no life."

Imagine the reaction if something like that were said about Christians. Rather than feel insulted, which was the intent of the childish picture, atheist commenters "agreed" that atheists are fat because they eat so many babies.

It's difficult to attack atheists because they don't have any ridiculous beliefs that require defending and therefore generally don't feel the need to resort to tribalism.

The stigma associated with criticizing religious belief does not apply to any other belief, whether it is political, scientific or otherwise. It's impossible to know the exact numbers, but I suspect that a large portion of supposedly religious people don't truly believe the claims of their faiths. Thankfully, the rise of the Internet has been unkind to unjustified claims, and as a result, non-belief appears to be accelerating.

I believe that religion will be eliminated in my lifetime, but when that happens depends on nonbelievers having the courage to come out.

Eric Ouellet, 18, lives in Mississauga, Ontario. He's in his second year at Carleton University in Ottawa, studying computer science.

Honorable mentions: high school essay contest

Hey teach, look at me now



By Amedee Marchand Martella

Ever since I heard my middle school science teacher say the hand of God was responsible for separating the continents, I knew I was going to be a freethinker who promoted the separation of church and state and the teaching of science in public schools. I wondered how a science teacher could make such a declaration without evidence to support it.

In high school, my expository debate topic was on the Flying Spaghetti Monster, which I chose to illustrate why creationism should not be taught. My coach said if I wanted to do well in competition, I should probably choose a less controversial topic.

I said I wanted to make people think, so I decided to keep my topic on church-state separation and the importance of teaching evolution in public schools. I won local competitions but received low scores in northern Idaho. I made the state finals but lost.

My coach gave me the judges' feedback. One said the topic was too absurd to be true and that I had made up Pastafarianism to bash religion (even though it's based on principles of Christianity). I knew my efforts were worth it when I heard an older couple say my presentation was their favorite because it made them think.

One particular teacher was an evangelical Christian. We frequently got into heated debates over religion. The last conversation we had was about faith versus scientific evidence. Another teacher told my class that atheism was a belief system. I explained why it wasn't and brought him an article just to reinforce my point.

In my digital media class, an assignment was to make a stop-motion video. I made one entitled "Santa versus Jesus: A Race to Determine Who Is Fact and Who Is Fiction." Concluding there was not definitive evidence for either, I ended with an evolving set of figurines and Darwin coming out of nowhere to win the race. In another class, I wrote and had published a letter to the editor about how "under God" should be removed from the Pledge of Allegiance. My letter sparked debate in the community.

All of my friends are religious. I appreciate the fact they continue to be my friends and are relatively open-

minded. They've said I'm one of the only freethinkers they've ever met. My nonreligious views bewilder them. I strive to make them think critically.

My middle school teacher would be surprised to learn her explanation of the continents motivated me to speak out against the encroachment of religion in society.

Amedee Marchand Martella, 18, Spokane, Wash., is attending the University of Colorado-Boulder to major in evolutionary biology and political science.

Not afraid to speak up



By Jarrett Browne

I'm not ashamed to admit that I'm atheist. I'm one of the few people at my school who has no religion, so it can come as a shock to people. They act surprised, as if I had just told them that I had two Bengal tigers guarding my house at night.

One day in government class, my teacher asked for an "adult discussion" about 16-year-old Jessica Ahlquist's effort to get a prayer banner removed from her school. While people were saying how stupid Jessica was, I raised my hand and was recognized.

"Many of you have no idea where this girl is coming from, but I do. I'm atheist, and one of the very few here at Butler. Our school system is horrible about keeping religion out of public schools, and I feel unwelcome here at times. Even if this prayer isn't directed toward any particular religion, it's directed toward religion in general and it goes against separation of church and state."

Many students just stared at me like deer in the headlights. "But it's not harming anything," said the girl sitting behind me. "Having a banner in the auditorium isn't prayer in school! This girl's being ridiculous!" By now she was standing up and shaking with emotion.

"I agree," said a guy in the back who was going to Notre Dame on a full-ride athletic scholarship. "If most of the school's Roman Catholic, they should have this up for the students."

"But it's offensive to some students," I told him. "No, we need it up because it agrees with my religion!" he insisted.

"What makes you better than a couple of atheist teenagers?" I asked. He shut up and didn't return to the debate.

"I'm with Jarrett now," a girl said. "Yeah, I don't think they should keep it up if it makes some students uncomfortable," said someone else.

"OK, let's vote," said our teacher.

"How many of you are with Jessica?" My hand shot right up as did a few others. But one shocked me, someone I knew to be very religious and very conservative. I couldn't believe it.

Even though we were outvoted, I still had an effect on this classroom.

Jarrett Browne, 18, Vandalia, Ohio, is attending Wright State University in Dayton to major in mechanical engineering.

Planting seeds of doubt



By Kaitlin A. Holden

Growing up in the South, religion is one of the most vital aspects of your life. From birth, you are indoctrinated by every adult who raises you. I'm the child and grandchild of ordained ministers. Ever since I can remember, I've been taught that betraying "God" is an unforgivable sin. When my parents found out that I was an atheist at age

14, my life took a turn for the worse.

They couldn't believe it. They tried getting me to read the bible over and over, took me to psychiatrists and sent me to Christian summer camps. I quickly became depressed and thought that nobody loved me. My embarrassed parents wouldn't let me talk about my views, read books by atheist authors and didn't care to hear about my life.

I felt worthless but stood my ground. Then I had an epiphany that changed everything. I realized that I was an important person with a purpose. I was kind and passionate and had ideas and knowledge that nobody could ever take away. I seemed to love and support people more than my "Christianly" parents did.

It was then I knew that lack of religion doesn't make me a bad person. I realized that even if I was considered a heathen, I was proud of myself. I am nonjudgmental, amazed by the wonders of science and the universe and have a thirst for learning that nothing could quench. It was all so beautiful to me.

Soon after, I began to tell anyone who would listen about the restraints of religion — comparing beliefs, pointing out flaws and contradictions in the bible. Although my success was limited, I still found joy planting little seeds of doubt in the minds of the indoctrinated.

Four years later, I'm proud to say that I've stayed true to myself and my nonbelief. I look back on my 14-year-old self and smile, knowing I'm in a better place now than I would be within the confines of religion. I taught myself to reason. I shall be a freethinker for life.

Kaitlin Amber Holden, 18, Murrells Inlet, S.C., is attending Winthrop University in Rock Hill to major in premedical biology and political science.

2012 Herbert Bushong High School Essay Contest

FFRF awards six honorable mentions

The Foundation printed first-through fifth-place essays in its high school contest in the August Freethought Today. In this issue, several essays (excerpted for space) from honorable mention awardees are printed. Others will appear in future issues.

A total of \$11,250 in scholarships were awarded to 13 college-bound seniors, who were asked to "describe a moment when they stood up for freethought and/or that made them proud to be a freethinker."

Herbert "Harry" Bushong of Texas once again generously endowed this year's contest. FFRF would also like to extend special thanks to Californian **John Moe** for endowing the honorable mention awards of \$200

and to **Dorea and Dean Schramm**, Florida, for providing each student with a \$50 bonus.

Honorable mention awardees each received \$200:

Abigail Dove, Swarthmore College.
Amedee Martella, University of Colorado-Boulder.

Cheyenne Tessier, The George Washington University (Cheyenne will defer her university enrollment for a year to do humanitarian service in Senegal with Global Citizen.)

Jarrett Browne, Wright State University.

Kaitlin Holden, Winthrop University.

Zach Gowan, University of South Carolina Upstate.

Religious rehab: Fishing for the weak

By Bailey Rahn
and Chance Campbell

“My name is Will and I am an alcoholic.”

Those words carried the 19-year-old to what he hoped would be early redemption for a self-admitted addict. The faces looking back at him were aged and weathered by years of pain, reflecting a desperation that was only just taking root in him. Alcoholics Anonymous with its bolstered reputation was the first option that came to mind.

Then again, it was the only option that came to mind.

Will only attended two AA sessions before walking out, disgusted by its covert conversion methods: “No one there would admit that AA was religious. They claim that they do not hold you to the Christian God, only that they hold you to some higher power. They claim it can be another god. A rock. An abstract, an ideal. ... It would be one thing if they had meant it ... But they didn’t. If the higher power could be anything we wanted, then why did we end each meeting with the Lord’s Prayer?”

Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous are centered around the 12-Step program. According to 12-Step, addicts are incapable of escaping addiction without God’s help. Narconon, the rehab empire with over 180 treatment centers worldwide, grounds its program in the writings of L. Ron Hubbard, founder of the Church of Scientology. But don’t count on them admitting that before you hand over the \$27,000 for admission.

Nowhere does Narconon’s website mention its religious affiliation. Likely, they’re avoiding association with Scientology because of the bad rap it’s developed. But let’s be real: This is the same group of people pitching you their handbook called “Integrity and Honesty.”

AA openly states its spiritual foundation, but its introduction pamphlet advertises an open-minded front: “All the great faiths are represented in our Fellowship, and many religious leaders have encouraged our growth. There are also atheists and agnostics among us. Belief in, or adherence to, a formal creed is not a condition of membership.”

But take a look at AA’s fundamental 12-step curriculum. By Step 2 the addict submits to a “Power” that is greater than him. This cleverly ambiguous higher Power is left open to the interpretation of the addict, but in any case the addict must surrender his agency and independent strength. But wait, hold on: Who says conversion can’t be an effective treatment method?

Miller’s research

As a lifelong Christian, Dr. William R. Miller at the University of New Mexico thought spirituality would surely benefit recovering addicts. To test the validity of his assumptions, he conducted a study that compared religious and secular rehabilitation treatment pro-



Bailey Rahn

grams.

The results were surprising: Not only were secular programs more effective in treating substance abuse, patients of religious programs reported higher levels of anxiety and depression than those without spiritual guidance.

In light of these discoveries, Miller concluded, “What we came away with was the sense that we had been naïve to think of spiritual direction as an acute intervention for early treatment.”

But why did graduates of religious rehab programs register higher rates of anxiety and depression? Miller speculates that it’s simply timing; with religion’s excess of moral codes and guilt-enforced modes of conduct, religious treatments only augment addicts’ stress. If that is true, what do secular programs offer that lead to lower levels of anxiety and depression?

One secular rehab program, SMART (Self-Management and Recovery Training), focuses on teaching self-empowerment and self-reliance. Simple, right? SMART’s techniques also evolve alongside addiction recovery science. In fact, these are common practices in most secular rehab programs. By restoring addicts’ agency through self-empowerment techniques, recoverers graduate with the knowledge that self-control comes from within. This prepares them to stay off drugs in the future and lead more productive lives. With these outcomes, reductions in depression and anxiety are inevitable.

The greatest distinction between religious and secular treatment programs is the source from which addicts are encouraged to derive their will to quit. In 12-step and other spiritual programs, patients must sacrifice themselves to an external entity, accepting that they cannot recover alone. Addicts effectually replace their dependence on substances with a dependence on a (real or imagined) higher power.

Rather than dependency replacement, secular rehabs shoot for dependency cessation, treating the aspects of addicts’ lives that caused them to seek external affirmation in the first place.

While spirituality has provided support for many recovering addicts, that doesn’t excuse the oversaturation of religious rehabs in the treatment market. Rather than subversively proselytizing



Chance Campbell

vulnerable individuals, rehabilitation programs should prioritize patients’ needs.

Not everyone needs religion to recover. The dishonest use of religion has caused more than one person to walk out of treatment, but the larger problem may lie in the many people too desperate to realize they’re swallowing a force-fed God.

Bailey Rahn and Chance Campbell are editors at AllTreatment.com, a resource which provides information on treatment programs nationwide and articles and in-

terviews on drug treatment.

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The Fix <http://www.thefix.com/content/narconons-big-con?page=all>

Narconon.org <http://www.narconon.org/about-narconon/>

SMART Recovery <http://www.smartrecovery.org/intro/>

“Religion in Prisons: A 50-State Survey of Prison Chaplains” <http://www.pewforum.org/Government/religion-in-prisons.aspx>

William R. Miller, Ph.D. <http://www.williamrmiller.net/Spirituality.html>

Overheard

The Israeli edition of Forbes magazine published a first-of-its-kind ranking last month of Israel’s 13 richest rabbis. In the No. 1 spot was 36-year-old Rabbi Pinchas Abuhatzera from Beersheba, a blue-collar southern desert city, whose wealth is estimated at \$335 million.

News story, “Israel’s richest rabbis become savvy businessmen
Associated Press, 7-13-12

Our banners will hang in the stadium and we will rename the team the “Mr. Paul Aints.” The team will wear Mr. Paul Aints jerseys during the game, which will be auctioned off as a fundraiser for us.

Announcement by Minnesota Atheists about sponsorship of a St. Paul Saints baseball game Aug. 10
Sports Grid, 7-12-12

It’s further evidence of this era’s move toward Balkanization in the United States. It’s no longer sufficient that they have shared norms among themselves, they are increasingly trying to impose their norms on the rest of the culture.

Marc Hamilton, Cardozo School of Law, on strict Hasidim dress codes for all shoppers at stores in Brooklyn
New York Post, 7-22-12

Within the past five years, the Roman Catholic Human Life International, the Pat Robertson-founded American Center for Law and Justice and Family Watch International, led by a Mormon, have launched or expanded their work in Africa dedicated to promoting their

Christian Right worldview. A loose network of right-wing charismatic Christians called the Transformation movement joins them in fanning the flames of the culture wars over homosexuality and abortion by backing prominent African campaigners and political leaders.

Report titled “How the U.S. Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa”
publiceye.org, 7-25-12

CNN . . . assumes from the outset the existence of some “god,” in order to ask where he “was,” at the time of the crime, as if CNN wants god to provide an alibi. Naturally, the most logical approach is to reject the premise, and with it the existence of things for which there is no physical evidence.

Michael Luciano, PolicyMic editor, on CNN Belief Blog’s question, “Where was God in Aurora massacre?”
polmic.com, 7-30-12

This case exemplifies the absurdity and tragedy of the blasphemy law, which is an instrument of abuse against the most vulnerable in society.

Ali Dayan Dasan of Human Rights Watch, commenting on the arrest of a Christian girl with Down syndrome girl for allegedly burning a religious textbook about the Quran in Pakistan, where there are at least 100 blasphemy prosecutions
New York Times, 8-21/8-29-12

Marquee Madness



Caveat worshiper

“It’s just a mile down the road from me,” writes Montanan Ralph Scott. “Well, I thought, what a ‘bargin,’ but the doors were closed so I couldn’t get any details (like ‘estimated time of arrival’). It was certainly a shock, since I thought I was already in ‘heaven’ when I moved here on this wonderful patch of prairie over 12 years ago!”

Cranksters to FFRF’ers: ‘Get packing’

Below, a small but representative sampling of disturbing emails recently received by FFRF from “loving” Christians, usually in response to news coverage of FFRF’s state/church work. Grammar and spelling are uncorrected. Warning: Language and suggestions are commonly X-rated.

Freedom of Religion

Once we win in Nov, the Conservative movement is going to ship all you assholes to Europe where you can be governed by the Muslims. — Weldon Warren, Lubbock, Texas

scumbags

Why don’t you evil anti family, baby killing homo sexual loving worms crawl back into the hole you came from and leave Americans alone. There are many country’s who would love to have you as residents in there freedom loving country. China, Russia, Cuba is close enough. I will pay for your tickets if you can’t afford them. Please leave. — Jay Mac

YOU

Why don’t you unhappy fucking Jews go find a country where you’re not DESTROYING other peoples’ cultures? YOU FUCKING FILTHY NATION DESTROYERS! Do you ever wonder why you’ve been kicked out of every fucking country you’ve ever lived in? — Joe Blow

go fuck yourself

go fuck yourself. just go fuck yourself. Leave. Leave this beautiful that was founded on a Christian foundation that you fuckers enjoy. Get the fuck out of my Country. — Gerald Miller, Oregon, Wis.

RI FIREHOUSE CROSS & WWII MEMORIAL

America has had ENOUGH of your attacks on religious rights and our memorials in this country. SHUT THE FUCK UP, YOU BASTARDS! You don’t like what we represent in this country, then GET THE FUCK OUT, you NAZI’S SCUMBAGS!!! Keep pushing us. — James Tro, Philadelphia

Fuck you all

yea, and how about if you pack up you shit-heads and take your circumized asses back to israel? — Jovan Vidovic

Compliment

YOU MOTHER FUCKING SCUM BAGS CAN LICK THE SHIT OUT OF MY DOGS AS.

FUCK YOU — Stacy Storey, Ft. Worth, Texas

Prayer at football games

Your a bunch of fithy fucking pigs pushing you stink ass way of life on others. — Gary Williams

You People Eat Cock

Mind your own fucking business you stupid fucks. — Your Mother

You

You freaking ignorant disgusting human feces. — Mickey Mathis, Brownwood, Texas

Suit

You stinking shit eaters. You mother fucking asshole eaters and the scum of the earth. — Kevin Kerr

You people are pure scum

you people are nothing more than the scum run of off the ACLU.yes i say you all are no good worthless scum. — Gary Hummel, Allen city, Mich.

GO AWAY

I am from the liberal northeast and i have seen what you miserable fucks can do to a society. The best thing people in Tn could do would be run you out on a rail. — David Tolassi, Dunlap, Tenn.

Fucking cunts like you

I hope you fuckers get your belief system proven for you individually real soon. What a wonderful world this would be without you cunts and your dirtbag children. — Steve Marzano

Georgia High School

You people need to have your fuckin heads examined. You people are a bunch of douchebags. Your parents are weeping for you. — Fuck You

feeding kids

I PRAY that you are the next target for radical muslims wanting to destroy something! You are ridiculous and against everything REAL Americans believe in ! — Paul O’Brien

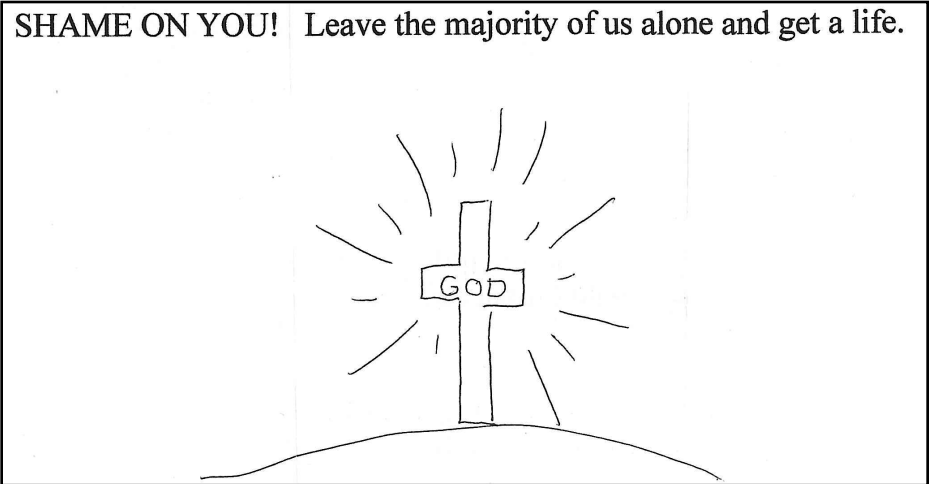
Leave the Coach Alone.

You need to back the fuck off that coach in Georgia. I mean really you have nothing better to do than act like trolls and drag everyone under the bridge with you? I myself don’t actively go to church but your organization by nature offends me. From this point forward I plan to make



Newport, Ohio

FFRF’er Rich Lane writes, “My reaction when I first saw this marquee was, ‘Keep telling yourself that.’ Personally, I’m more inclined to agree with Richard Dawkins’ description of the central doctrine of Christianity as ‘vicious, sadomasochistic, repellent, and barking mad.’”



Project much?

Missive mailed to FFRF by a secret admirer: “I am not signing my name because I don’t want you idiots to send me your garbage in the mail.”

it my life’s work to watch your organization burn to the ground. (Figuratively) — Youmomas Ass

Church feeding a football team

BURN in hell assholes, you are satan’s followers, I hope for the worst to happen to every member of this scum organization. — David Gregg

your fucking head

If you succeed in making us believe that there is no god,then we can blow your fucking head off and not lose any sleep.Fuck you perverted bastards — up your ass, Niles, Ohio

Prayers for you

I wanted you to know that I pray for your organization in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Chris. It is so sad that you deny the true and living God and I am truly saddened by your actions. Our founding fathers recognized God for what he is and your denial is absolutely mind boggling. Your organization may stop public prayer but I assure you millions of Christians will continue to pray for your organization. — In the love of Jesus Jeff

Thank you

Just wanted to thank your foundation for being the biggest bitches next to green-pease and liberals in general. Who gives a shit if a church feels like serving student meals before there games. I swear I hope you guys get shut down, your company is part of the reason this great nation has fallen so far from its roots. — Bob Sagat

god

C’mon out in mormon country and fuck with us. You’ll lose. and why are all atheists ugly. — Gary Kole, Victor, Idaho

Violation

You!!! are the ignorant jelous people. I will pray for you. Just think if you end up in hell thats internity. Just go end your wasted life if your that unappreciated to god. — Mark Curtis

Haralson County football

I hope everyone associated with your group dies a long, slow, agonizing, very painful death because your group deserves it. — James Simms, Tuscaloosa, AL

Gun Mouth Trigger Pull World Better

All you assholes should do the world a favor by sticking guns in your mouths and blowing the backs of your god damn heads off. Please give Mrs Sweeney a really big gun as she is the biggest god damn retarded asshole of your group. You people are so god damn stupid it makes my dick hurt. Please just drink the koolaid the world will not miss you one bit. — John Rossi, Warner Robins, Ga

Greetings

Lick my ass. I hope fucking Al Qaeda blows you fucktards up. — Jim Smith

Morans

I am 74 but I will do all I can to see your organization destroyed.Your tactics show that you are basicly very insecure and unhappy people. By the way I will go out of my way to support Chick Fil A!!! Heres to your end!! — M Kellar

phobia

You have a serious case of Christianphobia. You should really seek treatment for the disorder. — Darren Moser, John 3:16, Heaven

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Matthew C. Davis, 26, **Seattle**: Communication with a minor for immoral purposes. Davis, a volunteer youth pastor at Grace Church, is accused of sending sexual messages to a 15-year-old girl.

Court documents said Davis started sending romantic email to the girl early this year and offered to leave his wife to start a new life with her. *Source: seattle.com, 9-5-12*

James Napier, 60, **Alfred, ME**: Possessing child pornography. Napier, who operated New Beginnings Christian Mission, allegedly had over 100 illegal images on his home computer, including what appeared to be children younger than 12 having sex. *Source: Morning Sentinel, 9-5-12*

Sherman Brown, 70, **Des Moines, IA**: 1st-degree theft and dependent adult abuse by financial exploitation. Brown, a pastor and volunteer police chaplain, is accused of taking at least \$10,000 from a dependent adult male for whom he held power of attorney. *Source: Des Moines Register, 9-4-12*

Shantaram Gaikwad, 48, **Amboli, IND**: Assault or criminal force with intent to outrage modesty and intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace. Gaikwad, a priest at a Hindu temple in Andheri, is accused of sexually abusing his 17-year-old daughter.

A police officer said the girl's mother alleges she "walked in on them and saw what was going on." They have reportedly moved out of their home. *Source: Mumbai Daily News, 9-4-12*

Richard McCormick, New Rochelle, **NY**: 5 counts of rape of a child. McCormick, a priest and former head of the Catholic Salesian order, is accused of sexual abuse of a victim, then 11 and 12 years old, in 1981-82 in Ipswich, MA.

Attorney Mitchell Garabedian said McCormick has a long history of alleged abuse, including nine civil cases, but had never been criminally charged until now. *Source: Boston Herald, 8-31-12*

Brian Eppley, 56, **Conemaugh Township, PA**: Unlawful restraint of a minor and corruption of minors. Eppley is a deacon at Maple Spring Church of the Brethren, a school board member and longtime teacher. He's accused of forcing a boy to remove his shoes and place his feet in Eppley's face inside the church.

Police said the inappropriate contact also happened at other locations, including the Lions Club and Historical Society. More charges stemming from contact with other alleged victims are expected. Eppley resigned from the school board and was asked to step down from church leadership roles. *Source: WJAC, 8-30-12*

Gussie Smith, 77, **Omatilla, FL**: Drug trafficking. Smith, pastor at the Church of Jesus, is accused of selling oxycodone. At least 16 others were arrested. *Source: News One, 8-31-12*

Walter H. Yocum, 35, **Street, MD**: 3rd- and 4th-degree sexual offense, sexual abuse of a minor and 2nd-degree assault. Charges stem from alleged incidents with a 15-year-old girl in July during vacation bible school at Calvary Baptist Church in Bel Air, where Yocum is a youth pastor. *Source: The Aegis, 8-30-12*

Eleftherios Stavrakis, 73, **New Milford, CT**: Disorderly conduct and domestic violence. Stavrakis, a Greek Orthodox priest, is charged with striking a 58-year-old employee in the face at his home.

Police said the smell of what the woman was cooking apparently set him off. Stavrakis was convicted in 1988 of trying to bribe an undercover IRS agent to avoid paying taxes. *Source: News-Times, 8-28-12*

Katsutoshi K. Shimada, 56, **Littleton, CO**: Unlawful sexual contact with force against an at-risk adult. Shimada, chaplain at Exemplar Good Samaritan Medical Center in Lafayette, is charged in connection with an alleged incident May 23 involving a 56-year-old woman in her apartment.

The woman had met him at the hospital when he was working, a police press release said. *Source: Denver Post, 8-28-12*

Salvatore Cordileone, 56, **San Francisco**: DUI. Cordileone, currently bishop of Oakland and scheduled to become archbishop of the San Francisco Catholic Diocese on Oct. 4, was arrested at a sobriety checkpoint near San Diego State University at 12:30 a.m.

His blood-alcohol level was above the 0.08 legal limit, but Officer Mark McCullough declined to say by how much. "He was a driver that was obviously impaired, but he was quite cordial and polite throughout." *Source: AP, 8-28-12*

Feliciano T. Mofan, 58, **San Rafael, CA**: Suspicion of indecent exposure, soliciting a lewd act and nudity in a state park. Mofan, priest-in-residence at Church of St. Isabella in Terra Linda, allegedly solicited sex from an un-



dercover ranger in the park.

A statement from the Archdiocese of San Francisco said Mofan has been on "reduced ministry" since 1999 due to a stroke. *Source: Marin Independent Journal, 8-24-12*

Richard H. Craft, 68, **Thornton, CO**: Possession and distribution of child pornography. Craft, former interim pastor of Family of Christ Presbyterian Church in Greeley, is accused of the offenses from 2007-09.

Daniel Saperstein, Family of Christ executive presbyter said, "We are saddened and concerned by the news of the federal indictment of Richard Craft." He said Craft most recently served at First Presbyterian Church in Loveland in March to June 2010. *Source: KDVR, 8-24-12*

Etheridge Moore, **Kentwood, MI**: Embezzlement. Moore, senior pastor at Heritage Baptist Church, is accused of embezzling at least \$100,000 from the church. Court documents show the head deacon contacted the sheriff's office to say Moore had confessed to church officials. *Source: Wood TV, 8-24-12*

Mark Huba, 55, **New Port Richey, FL**: Fraud. Huba, pastor of Upper Room Apostolic Church, allegedly used the identities of 2 dead parishioners (for whom he conducted funerals) to boost his earnings in a pyramid scheme.

Huba sells GBG liquid vitamin supplements, a multilevel marketing operation in which leaders get a commission on goods sold by their sales reps. *Source: Tampa Bay Times, 8-24-12*

Bennit Ezell Hayes, 65, **Houston**: Engaging in organized criminal activity. Hayes, pastor of Gloryland Missionary Baptist Church, is accused with 3 others of illegally dispensing hundreds of thousands of controlled prescription pills at a clinic. *Source: Houston Chronicle, 8-24-12*

Steven E. Hicks, 57, **Twentynine Palms, CA**: Sexual harassment, indecent conduct, assault and fraternization. Hicks, a Catholic priest and Navy lieutenant commander, was removed from his assignment as a chaplain and is being charged under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

A San Diego judge granted a temporary restraining order to an enlisted sailor who alleges Hicks tried to rape him. Hicks, a San Angelo, TX, native, became an Air Force chaplain in 1993 and transferred to the Navy in 1995. *Source: Marine Corps Times, 8-20-12*

Alfred Idonije, 70, **Egor, BENIN**: Rape. Idonije, pastor at an undisclosed church, is accused of raping a 10-year-old orphan. The girl testified at the arraignment that he raped her 3 times after sending her to buy noodles and luring her into his room.

The girl's grandmother testified she saw the rape through a window of the pastor's home. *Source: allAfrica.com, 8-19-12*

Anthony L. Smith, 47, **Rialto, CA**: Suspicion of committing lewd and lascivious acts with a child and sexual assault. Smith, pastor at Jericho Baptist Assembly in Compton, is charged with molesting 2 girls, starting when they were 11. The alleged victims are now 29 and 17. *Source: Daily Bulletin, 8-17-12*

Robert Coles, 71, **Eastbourne, UK**: Attempted buggery, 3 counts of buggery and 25 counts of indecent assault. Coles, a retired Anglican priest, is alleged to have committed the offenses on 3 boys age 10-13 between 1978-82. *Source: Chichester Observer, 8-16-12*

Kelvin B. Lambert, 39, **Platte City, MO**: Attempted invasion of privacy and trespass. Lambert, pastor of Second Baptist Church, allegedly stood on a plastic lawn chair to peek in a woman's house, a witness told police. *Source:*

Wichita Eagle, 8-16-12

Basil Princewill, **Abuja, NIG**: Conspiracy, criminal impersonation, criminal intimidation and assault. Princewill, apostle and general overseer of Mountain Movers Fire Ministries Church, is accused of sexually assaulting two 14-year-old girls. *Source: Daily Times Nigeria, 8-16-12*

Angel A. Perez, 46, **Woodburn, OR**: 1st-degree sexual abuse, abuse of a child in the display of sexually explicit conduct, 3 counts of furnishing alcohol to a minor, tampering with evidence and driving under the influence of intoxicants. Perez, pastor at St. Luke Catholic Church, is charged with assaulting a 12-year-old boy who was sleeping over at the priest's residence.

"Father Angel touched me in my privates" while he was sleeping, the boy told his sister, according to an affidavit that said he woke to find his shorts and underwear around his knees and Perez with a cellphone camera in his hand. A couple later encountered the boy at midnight running away in the street from a man clad only in a Speedo swimsuit. *Source: Oregonian, 8-16-12*

Andrea Lewis, **Shreveport, LA**: 3 counts of molestation of a juvenile. Lewis, pastor of Act on Faith Ministries, allegedly had sexual relations with 3 different underaged females. After he posted bond, 2 more alleged victims came forward and he was rearrested. *Source: KTBS, 8-14-12*

Mark Broussard, 56, **Lake Charles, LA**: Sexual battery, 2 counts each of rape, aggravated sexual battery and aggravated oral sexual battery and 3 counts of molesting a juvenile. Broussard, who left the Catholic priesthood in 1994, was booked on 224 counts, but the 10 counts in the indictment were the first brought to a grand jury. They allege he molested 3 boys in 1986-91. *Source: American Press, 8-13-12*

Kris Gowdy, 42, **Newcastle, ONT**: Luring a child online. Gowdy, a former youth pastor at Lakeview Church in Saskatoon and other churches, is charged with trying to solicit a person he allegedly believed to be a 15-year-old boy for sex.

Police said in 2009 Gowdy admitted to being diagnosed as HIV-positive and that he used the name "college toy 20-33" on social media sites. *Source: CTV News, 8-12-12*

Darrell Cashdollar, 59, **New Brighton, PA**: Simple assault and harassment. Cashdollar, pastor at Paris Church of the Nazarene in Burgettstown, is charged for assaulting his adult daughter in a state park. Helicopters were called to the scene. Cashdollar's wife was also present. *Source: Post-Gazette, 8-12-12*

Anthony L. Thibodeaux, 36, of **Mexia, TX**: Sexual assault of a child and indecency with a child. Thibodeaux, pastor of Fairfield Missionary Baptist Church, allegedly molested a 15-year-old girl about 3 weeks before his arrest. *Source: KWTX, 8-10-12*

Efrey Guzman, 46, **Sandy, UT**: Aggravated sexual assault, aggravated burglary, sexual abuse of a child and forcible sexual abuse. Guzman, branch president of a Latino Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints congregation, is accused of sexually touching a 13-year-old girl.

When the girl's mother intervened, Guzman allegedly attacked her and ripped her shirt off. The girl's brother, age 20, came in.

"While he tried to get the defendant off his mother, the defendant grabbed his penis through his boxer shorts and bit his penis, causing severe damage that required surgery," said the arrest affidavit. *Source: Salt Lake Tribune,*

‘Sometimes boys will be boys.’

— *Statement attributed to Bishop Robert Finn, allegedly excusing clergy sex abuse*

8-9-12

Peter Petroske, 57, **Dearborn, MI**: Suspicion of drunken driving and indecent exposure. Petroske, pastor of Sacred Heart Catholic Parish, was driving naked in a VW Passat when he was arrested. He told police he was hot. His blood alcohol content was 0.09. *Source: Detroit Free Press, 8-8-12*

Guy A. Ritter, 92, **Salem, VA**: Crimes against nature and 5 counts of taking indecent liberties with a child. Ritter, an ordained Lutheran minister and former Roanoke College professor, is charged with alleged offenses in the 1970s and in 1958. (The earlier charge is what the offense was called then.) *Source: Roanoke Times, 8-8-12*

Kenneth Hagins, 40, **Tavares, FL**: Sexual battery against children and lewd and lascivious acts on an elderly or disabled person. Hagins, a youth pastor at Promise Land Ministries, is accused of assaults at Pat's Kidz World Development Center and at a group home for vulnerable adults, where he worked.

Six potential victims have been identified. Pat's Kidz World has surrendered its license. *Source: tbo.com, 7-22-12*

Pleaded / Convicted

Leib Glanz, 57, **Brooklyn, NY**: Pleaded guilty to tenant fraud. Rabbi Glanz, a jail chaplain, admitted lying to the federal government so he could occupy a subsidized duplex. Cost to taxpayers was about \$220,000.

"The statement was false, and I knew it was false," he said in Manhattan federal court. *Source: N.Y. Post, 9-4-12*

Patrick Edouard, 42, former pastor at Covenant Reformed Church in Pella, **IA**, was convicted on 4 counts of sexual exploitation by a counselor or therapist and acquitted of 3 counts of 3rd-degree sexual abuse. He was accused of forced sexual contact on at least 3 women.

Prosecutors said Edouard pursued vulnerable women in his congregation during a 4-year period that ended in December 2010, when a husband came home early and found the pastor's van in the driveway in the middle of the day. *Source: Daily Iowegian, 8-27-12*

Kenneth L. Miller, 46, **Stuarts Draft, VA**: Guilty by jury of aiding international parental kidnapping. Miller, an Amish-Mennonite pastor, was convicted of helping Lisa A. Miller (no relation) flee to Nicaragua with her daughter in 2009 to avoid court-ordered visits with Ms. Miller's former partner in a Vermont civil union.

After splitting with her partner, Janet Jenkins, in 2003, Miller declared herself a born-again Christian and tried to strip Jenkins of her parental rights. Whereabouts of mother and daughter remain unknown. *Source: N.Y. Times, 8-15-12*

Joseph T. Hackett, 31, **Asheville, NC**: Conspiracy to commit health care fraud. Hackett, owner of Access Regional Taskforce and pastor of the Leviticus International Network, pleaded guilty to fraudulently billing the Virginia Medicaid provider \$1.57 million when he lived in Richmond.

Hackett admitted he billed Medicaid for services that did not address mental health issues, used unqualified employees and provided care to children not in need of the services. *Source: Times-Dispatch, 8-14-12*

James R. Harris, 64, **Belle Glade, FL**: Guilty of lewd and lascivious battery, lewd and lascivious conduct, sexual activity with a minor, showing obscene material to a minor and 2 counts of promoting sexual performance by a minor.

Harris, an evangelical pastor, was charged with performing sex acts on a 15-year-old boy and making a video of the boy masturbating while watching a porn movie. He was also found guilty of recording his godson, age 16, and the godson's girlfriend, 14, having sex. *Source: Palm Beach Post, 8-10-12*

David and Bridget Montgomery, **Humble, TX**: Guilty of conspiring to impair and impede the IRS. The couple, co-founders of Restoration Temple Church of God in Christ, shorted the Treasury about \$600,000 by underreporting income from their construction business in 2003-06. *Source: KHOU, 8-9-12*

Shawn Ratigan, 46, **Kansas City, MO**: Pleaded guilty to attempting to produce child

pornography and 4 counts of producing child pornography. Ratigan, a Catholic priest, was charged with taking indecent photos of 5 girls as young as 6 in 2006-11.

A computer technician found a photo on Ratigan's laptop of a 6-year-old with her vagina exposed. Misdemeanor charges and civil lawsuits are pending against Bishop Robert Finn and the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph for failing to report child abuse. *Source: USA Today, 8-8-12*

Richard Nachajski, 66, York, **PA**: Pleaded guilty to theft for stealing money from St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, where he was pastor from 1997 to 2009. Nachajski, who's no longer a priest, admitted taking more than \$100,000 but denied it was more than \$400,000 as alleged. *Source: Reading Eagle, 8-7-12*

Sentenced

Denis Lyons, 78, Orange County, **CA**: A year in jail, 5 years' probation and 400 hours of community service after pleading guilty to 4 counts of lewd acts with a child under 14. Lyons, a retired priest, was charged with molesting a grade-school boy at St. John the Baptist Catholic School in Costa Mesa in the 1990s when the boy was between 7 and 9 years old. Prosecutors said Lyons assaulted the boy in Lyons' room in the church rectory and sacristy. *Source: L.A. Times, 8-26-12*

Mark S. Bullock, 47, Towson, **MD**: 1 year in jail (suspended), 3 years' probation, \$557.50 fine and costs (\$250 suspended) for indecent exposure. Bullock, pastor at Church of the Immaculate Conception, was charged for exposing himself in a public area at Bush River Books & Movies.

He was observed sitting on a couch with "his pants completely off," said a police report: "Bullock was not wearing any underwear and [was] exposing his penis." *Source: Baltimore Sun, 8-24-12*

Grant Storms, 55, Metairie, **LA**: 3 years' probation for obscenity after a guilty verdict in a bench trial. Storms, a "Christian patriot" pastor whose marches against homosexuality at New Orleans' Southern Decadence festival made him notorious, was charged for exposing himself while masturbating in a public park.

In a 2011 statement, Storms admitted it was the third time that week he'd masturbated in Lafreniere Park. At trial, his lawyers argued he never exposed himself, a necessary element of the charge. *Source: Times-Picayune, 8-22-12*

Allen K. Scheer, 50, Salina, **KS**: 6 months' probation after pleading no contest to misdemeanor sexual battery. Scheer, rector at Sacred Heart Cathedral, was charged with touching an adult male "with the intent to arouse or satisfy sexual desires." He's on leave from the Diocese of Salina. *Source: Salina Journal, 8-13-12*

Scott A. Hoppe, 38, Racine, **WI**: 7 years in prison and eight years' extended supervision after pleading guilty to 1st-degree sexual assault of a child younger than 13. Hoppe, former assistant pastor at Grace Church in Burlington, admitted he molested 2 infant relatives in 2000-02.

"I used the baby for my own sexual gratification. I'm so sorry. It was so wrong," Hoppe said in court. He has 6 children, who live with his wife in Colorado. She's filing for divorce.

Hoppe admitted the abuse while serving 3 years in prison after being convicted in 2008 of child enticement and sex with a child over 16 years old. She was a church member. The girl testified the relationship lasted about 2 years and said Hoppe told her his marriage was a mistake and he wished his wife would get in a car accident. *Source: Journal Times, 8-9-12*

John T. Vine, 68, Nashville, **TN**: 22 years in prison for solicitation of a minor and 2 counts of aggravated sexual battery. Vine, pastor at several Baptist churches, repeatedly molested an 11-year-old girl whose family he'd befriended. The single mother has 4 other children.

During the trial, another female victim came forward with similar allegations. *Source: Tennesseean/WSMV, 8-8-12*

Stanley V. Levitt, 66, Brighton, **MA**: 10 years' probation for 4 counts of indecent assault and battery on a child. Charges stemmed from 1975-76 when Rabbi Levitt worked at the Maimonides School, where the 3 alleged victims were sixth-graders.

Prosecutors said assaults occurred at Levitt's home and at Boston Children's Hospital, where one of the boys was hospitalized.

"He should have served jail time," said Michael Brecher, 49, who testified Levitt groped him at the hospital.

Leavitt had similar charges lodged against him in Philadelphia after he left Massachusetts, where he pleaded no contest and received 5 years' probation.

Attorney Mitchell Garabedian said he will pursue a civil suit against Levitt and the school. *Source: Boston Globe, 8-2-12*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Mark Pinkosh, 48, **Los Angeles**, has sued the **Catholic Church of Hawaii**, alleging he was raped as an altar boy when he was 8 or 9 in the 1970s by **Fr. Joseph Henry (aka J. Michael Henry)** in the choir loft at St. Anthony

Church in Kailua. He also alleges when he told **Fr. [later Bishop] Joseph Ferrario**, he was forced by Ferrario to perform oral sex in a building on the church grounds.

Both priests have been accused by others of sexual abuse and both are dead. Hawaii's new law now allows claims that were barred in the past due to the statute of limitations. *Source: Hawaii News Now, 8-23-12*

A girl, 16 at the time of the alleged offense, and her father, A.F., are suing **Keith J. Boyd**, 44, Covington, **LA**, and the **Open Door Apostolic Church**, claiming Boyd "used his position of power and influence as pastor" to coerce her into having sexual intercourse after bible study in 2010.

Boyd was convicted of carnal knowledge of a juvenile and indecent behavior and was sentenced to 6 years in jail, with 3 years suspended, the complaint said. *Source: Courthouse News Service, 8-22-12*

Janet Jenkins filed a civil Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) suit in U.S. District Court for Vermont against Mennonite pastor **Kenneth Miller**, Stuarts Draft, **VA**, who was convicted of aiding an international kidnapping by helping Jenkins' former domestic partner flee the U.S.

Jenkins also named former partner **Lisa Miller, Liberty University School of Law** and **Thomas Road Baptist Church**, the latter two founded by the late Jerry Falwell in Lynchburg, **VA**.

The suit seeks return of the child to the U.S. and actual and punitive damages. Whereabouts of Lisa Miller and the child are unknown. *Source: LGBTQ Nation, 8-16-12*

Two "John Doe" plaintiffs in their early 20s filed separate lawsuits in Cook County Circuit Court against the **Archdiocese of Chicago**, claiming defrocked priest **Daniel McCormack** molested them in 2003 when he was pastor and basketball coach at St. Agatha Catholic Church.

The suits allege the abuse happened on parish property and that the archdiocese failed to restrict McCormack's access to children while knowing he'd molested minors in the past. McCormack pleaded guilty in 2007 to abusing 5 children while he was at St. Agatha. *Source: Sun-Times, 8-13-12*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

Carolee Horning, 41, agreed to settle her suit with the Catholic **Archdiocese of Portland, OR**, for a \$480,000 settlement and a public apology to her read by Msgr. Dennis O'Donovan for being groomed for sex and then molested for years by **Fr. Edward Altstock**, starting when she was 15. Horning insisted her name be used in court documents and in the apology.

Altstock lives in Beaverton and will keep get-



ting a church pension, said Bud Bunce, church spokesman. "All of these priests who have been relieved of duty or retired, they still have to live," Bunce said. *Source: The Oregonian, 8-23-12*

U.S. District Court Judge Michael Mosman ruled in a case first filed in 2002 that the **Vatican's Holy See** doesn't employ priests and thus isn't liable for clergy abuse. A Seattle-area man had sued, alleging **Fr. Andrew Ronan** repeatedly molested him in the late 1960s.

"There are no facts to create a true employment relationship between Ronan and the Holy See," Mosman ruled in dismissing *respondent superior* claims. Claims against Ronan's religious order are pending. *Source: AP, 8-21-12*

Secondo Casarotto, 70, was removed as pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Buffalo, **NY**, as part of a settlement in a 2009 suit filed by a female parishioner, now 37.

Attorney Adam Horowitz announced the settlement with the **Diocese of Buffalo** and the **Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo**. Casarotto allegedly grabbed the woman against her will and took her into his bedroom while she was in the rectory praying with him for a family member's medical recovery. Another woman has since made similar claims.

"Jane Doe" said this in a statement to the public: "I too respected Father Secondo. However, he violated my mind and body at a time when I was most vulnerable and sought his guidance." *Source: WGRZ, 8-16-12*

Legal Developments

Sagarsen Haldar, 32, **Milwaukee**, was remanded to custody until his Oct. 25 sentencing on his 2011 conviction for conspiracy to defraud

the government by bringing sham Hindu priests to the U.S. District Judge Rudolph Randa cited risk Haldar might flee to his native India before sentencing.

The prosecution showed that over 2 years, Haldar filed 25 visa applications with the State Department to bring people from India to work at his temple. They were more like indentured servants than religious workers and paid up to \$30,000 for Haldar to arrange their entry, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Gregory Haanstad. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 9-5-12*

Dennis Carey, 65, has been receiving treatment for child pornography addiction at St. John Vianney Center in Downingtown, PA. Carey, pastor at St. Paul in Chains Catholic Church in Waterford, **CT**, was arrested in July for possession of child pornography. *Source: theday.com, 9-4-12*

An arrest warrant was issued for **Laurence Soper**, 68, a British Catholic priest who failed to show up for a hearing on a charge of suspicion of historical sexual assault at St. Benedict's School/Ealing Abbey in **London**, where he was abbot from 1991 to 2000. It's believed he may be in Italy. *Source: The Telegraph, 9-2-12*

The **Chicago Archdiocese** reinstated **Thaddeus Dzieszko** as pastor at St. Constance Catholic Church after the Cook County state's attorney announced it wouldn't bring criminal charges against Dzieszko on allegations he exploited a 93-year-old parishioner by becoming trustee of her home.

The priest claimed he took control of Walecia Krzemien's property to make sure she could keep living there.

Cook County Public Guardian Robert Harris said he was disappointed by the reinstatement decision but glad that Dzieszko agreed to give up his trustee role as trustee and deed Krzemien's home back to her. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 9-4-12*

Removed / Resigned

James Nowak, 75, retired pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Naperville, **IL**, was placed on leave during investigation by the Diocese of Joliet of an accusation he sexually abused a minor more than 20 years ago. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 8-30-12*

The **Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, PA**, placed an **unidentified 63-year-old priest** on leave from St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Parish in Mount Union after receiving a 3-decade-old allegation of sexual misconduct involving minors. The priest has been moved from the parish.

Bishop Mark Bartchak says he's praying for the alleged victims. The church's website has no pastor listed under "staff" but has a photo of Bartchak. *Source: AP, 8-27-12*

The **Archdiocese of Los Angeles** suspended **Fr. Peter Valdez** after a widow in his congregation at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Palmdale accused him of stealing \$284,000 from her.

Michalena Jones, 79, alleges in a lawsuit that after her husband died in 2003, Valdez persuaded her to give him \$150,000 to buy a home and add his name to her checking account, which he used to make mortgage payments. *Source: L.A. Times, 8-25-12*

Mark Gruber, 57, a Benedictine priest and professor at St. Vincent College, Latrobe, **PA**, was has been permanently banned from the ministry. Child pornography was found on his computer in 2009. He maintains he's innocent and sued the college for defamation but later dropped the suit.

The Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith found him guilty of possession of child pornography, production of materials that gravely injure good morals, abuse of the sacrament of Confession (but not of violating the seal of Confession) and defamation of a legitimate superior. *Source: Post-Gazette, 8-15-12*

Other

Polish authorities said they were "99% sure" a charred body found in a cemetery in Lopiennik Nadrzeczny was that of a Catholic priest, identified only as **Boguslaw P.**, who was recently charged with sexually abusing 2 teen boys 10 years ago in Turka. He was also accused of molesting an altar boy in Germany, where he worked in 2004-05.

The body was found by the grave of his parents. *Source: AP, 8-8-12*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

'Sexual history'

There is something about me that is happier when accompanied by a small boy. Perhaps besides the sexual element, the child in me wants a playmate.

Part of a recently released 27-page "sexual history" written in 1993-94 by Robert Van Handel, now 65, a defrocked California Franciscan priest who was molested himself as a seminarian by a priest who told Van Handel his ministrations in the infirmary would draw the fever out by making him sweat Associated Press, 6-1-12

Letterbox

Kudos from members, Life and otherwise

Keep up the great work at FFRF! We're grateful for your important work and are planning to see you all at the convention in Portland.

Len and Karen Eisenberg
Oregon

Editor's note: FFRF thanks the Eisenbergs for their support, which includes endowing a student activist award and, most recently, donating dozens of evolution-themed T-shirts.

...

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

Lisa Morris
North Carolina

...

I've been thinking about this for a long time, but hearing the news of your win over Whiteville [cross on Tennessee water tower] was the impetus to become a Lifetime Member.

Your team never ceases to amaze me. Congratulations!

Jamile Sims
Georgia

...

I am happy to become a Lifetime Member of an organization that promotes rational thought and the separation of church and state. I have been a closet atheist most of my life, but FFRF has given me the confidence to open up about my nonbeliefs. Thanks and keep up the good work!

Mary Ann Stein
Florida

...

As always, very best wishes. Keep doing what you do so well. At 96, handwriting failing, but thankfully can still write a check.

Herb Livingston
California

Editor's note: We should all be so fortunate to be able to write in a hand as clear as Mr. Livingston's at 96.

...

Every time I read about what the Freedom From Religion Foundation is doing, I smile.

Jim Wallis
Washington

...

Enclosed is a \$500 contribution. Please keep part of it in reserve for a Dubuque billboard, when you have the local contacts you need. Please use the rest for your other advertising. I am a Life Member. I was very happy that you participated in the Reason Rally. I wish I could have come down to the event.

Dr. John A. Wagner
New York

...

You win. I am in my 80s and have jettisoned a lot of periodicals. It hurt to drop Freethought Today, and I have been on the edge of renewal for months.

But you sent me a few free final issues to keep up my interest, and in the meantime I bought and read Dan Barker's *Losing Faith in Faith* and found it much more interesting and insightful than I had any right to expect. Good job, sir.

And finally, your last free issue had an article by Barbara G. Walker, a favorite of mine, so I had to renew.

Fred Howard
Michigan

And a 12-year-old shall lead us

We atheists ignore, cringe or laugh at most of what is in the bible, because we recognize that tome for what it is: A collection of ridiculous stories written by superstitious people who lived thousands of years ago in a barbaric world. However, when I read "Maia, 12, tells county board to shape up" [Aug12], one of the bible's passages, to me, certainly rang true.

The words are simple and the message is brief — and, dare I say, almost prophetic? This is what is written in Isaiah 11:6, "... and a little child shall lead them."

David Quintero
California

Members like 'Spotlight on Freethought'

I was watching the informative, well-crafted YouTube video on the FFRF website, Spotlight on Freethought (running on national public TV affiliates), and realized that a donation is long overdue!

Please use the enclosed check for either the advertising or legal fund. And as always, thanks so much for all your hard work!

Tom Cara, Life Member
Illinois

Editor's note: To view FFRF's "Spotlight on Freethought and the First Amendment," visit <http://ffrf.org/news/releases/ffrf-piece-to-air-on-national-public-tv-affiliates/>

...

I just viewed "Spotlight on Freethought and the First Amendment" and think it's superb! FFRF has done more to advance the freethought movement than anyone else. Keep up the good work!

Jim McCollum
Arkansas

Editor's note: Jim, now a Lifetime Member, was a part of the landmark 1948 Supreme Court decision, McCollum v. Board of Education, which has done more to keep religion out of public schools than any other court precedent.

Friend turns down sacrificial goat offer

After seeing your full-page ad in the Los Angeles Times on July 4 entitled "It's time to quit the Catholic Church," I promptly visited your website and requested more information. I just received my packet of information and a copy of your newspaper. I have sent off my check for membership and can't wait to read the next issue.

I see from other letters that I am not the only one who thought they were alone in their beliefs. How refreshing to belong to such an erudite group! What a difference in the letters from nonbelievers and those from believers! Their vocabulary is very limited, isn't it? It's scary.

I write to newspapers, answer emails and share, gently and knowledgeably, about nonbelief in a god or gods and religion. I am not trying to take something away from people but to give them something better. Using humor helps, too, and really listening to people talk about what their religion means to them and giving thoughtful, honest feedback.

I've received the usual taunts from my friends and relatives. One friend



FREEST8

J. Frank Mercer writes: "A tip of my hat to fellow FFRF member Mr. Proto of Ohio for an idea worth repeating, and I extend the challenge to a member in each state. Though the application form stated that a plate request can be refused if it's 'blasphemous,' I had no problem getting this approved in secular Washington state. But 'godspeed' to those who try this in less-secular areas."

told me she was going in the hospital for an operation and she'd ask me to pray for her but she knew I didn't believe in that. I told her if she thought it would help, maybe I could sacrifice a goat. She never answered.

Please, please, call on me if you need help here in southern California.

Mrs. Pat Hall
California

City hall Christians an invasive species

I'm quite amused by Jesus statues. Your concern, of course, is that they should not be placed on public land; bravo. The humor is that no one knows what Jesus looked like, if he ever were an actual person.

The current idea of Jesus' looks comes from later paintings conceived by artists. In other words, he and his looks were both invented. So one could very well post a statue or picture of Bozo the Clown and call him Jesus.

I hope FFRF realizes that keeping religion off government property is a never-ending battle. It's like weeding a garden: It never ends and they always come back.

A lot of your nutty opponents like to tell you that the majority rules. They insist that if you don't like their religion, which they are forcing on you, then you should live elsewhere. They obviously don't realize that, in this country, the majority does *not* rule. In this country, the Constitution rules. The rights guaranteed by our Constitution cannot be usurped by majority vote.

There's also a concerted effort by the Religious Right to restrict marriage to heterosexuals. My question is "Why?" The marriage of two people, whatever their gender, has absolutely no effect on anyone else. No one has the right to use the power of government to force their religious beliefs on everyone else.

Keep up the good, and needed, work.

Bruce Lowerre, Life Member
Florida

We're all freethought ambassadors

We should all be impressed by the high school and college students such as Jessica Ahlquist and so many others who heroically have come out to fight for their rights as atheists. It's easy to

admire them, but there's a more important lesson.

When I was in college in upstate New York (before the civil rights movement got as big as it got), I wrote school newspaper columns about racism. A guy who had been in the Navy, who I really didn't know, came up to me one day, almost in tears. He loved his father, he told me, but he'd made friends with a black guy in the Navy. Now that friendship seemed on the verge of causing a permanent split between him and his father.

I don't remember what I told him, probably some encouraging words about holding on to his principles. I left school soon after. I want to believe he and his father felt strongly enough that they eventually reconciled. Even toleration is a start.

The reason I thought of this in relation to the heroic students is this: If one has principles and stands by them, in the future some people will remember the thoughts and principles that struck a note. They may find themselves more influenced, and changed, than they had anticipated. If people never hear about our (non)beliefs, how will they learn?

I have been changed and emboldened by FFRF, and I deeply thank you, and Richard Dawkins, too.

Incidentally, there's a Catholic woman who lives in my building who told me I wasn't the only atheist here, and I said "Good! I want there to be others." (Her pet name for me, by the way, is Amethyst because it sounds like atheist.)

Numerous people question me about my nonbelief, and I want to think I have perhaps eventual influence on them.

Jerry Weinberg
Vermont

Jesus: Universal donor or recipient?

Following on your campaign to put women's health before bishop's wrongs, we should point out to Catholics that they could be doing a great service to the nation: As we are currently involved in numerous "wars," there's a severe shortage of blood in blood banks.

All good Catholics should encourage their priests to speed up the process of blessing red wine. Instead of consuming the newly created blood, it should be donated to the nearest blood



Life Members Karen and Len Eisenberg saw the dark humor in this message in Talent, Ore., midway between Medford and Ashland. “Several other people stopped to take pictures while we were there,” Len notes.

bank or hospital. Apart from the obvious benefits, we would learn of Jesus’ blood type, which would be even more cast-iron evidence for his existence.
Steve Aldred
Tennessee

Member reminds Ohio council of Constitution

This is a member’s letter to the Steubenville, Ohio, City Council:
Using a city government logo to promote religion is something they do in Pakistan, Iran, etc. Do the right thing and comply with our constitutional separation of church and state. It will infuriate the fanatics of the Religious Right if they are not allowed to use their freedom of religion to deny others the right not to share their religious ideology.
As government officials, you are sworn to uphold the tenets of our Constitution. Don’t allow yourselves to be bullied by ignorant fanatics who would stone us to death for “blasphemy” if they could get away with it!
Charles Sparrow
Florida

Battling the bible in Austin, Texas

I just got this message from the infamous American Family Association claiming they will be handing out 62,000 bibles to junior and high school students. I thought we had won that battle but guess we need to continue to fight the mythology and dogma.
I also just got the latest Freethought Today and will be sitting with it cover to cover before retiring for the night. Accolades to all the staff. Keep up the great work, and if you are ever in Austin, let me know so I can buy you a cool one!
Wayne Walczak
Texas

Freethinkers are not alone

I’m almost through the August issue and want to thank you for reminding me that I am not alone. I am a nontraditional college sophomore, age 35, living in northwest Arkansas and saw two mentions of my area in the issue. One was from one of my professors, and the other was a Lifetime Membership mention of a gentleman in my own town.
I know that there’s a secular presence in my area, but when school is out for the summer, I feel isolated in my small hamlet and do not have regular contact (other than Facebook) with my secular friends. Bella Vista is particularly pious and not overly friendly to

nonbelievers, much less outright atheists like me.
Thank you for your organization, your monthly publication and for reminding me that I am not alone.
Mary Byers
Arkansas

• • •

In the August Letterbox, a reader said “Tennessee is a horrid home for atheists.” I did a quick search for atheist, secular and freethought meet-up groups in Chattanooga, Nashville and Knoxville and there were quite a few. Just do a Google search.
Ben Hart
Ohio

Missed the crank mail in last issue

I just received my Freethought Today and immediately looked for the hate mail section, as usual. It’s so entertaining. So, where’s the hate mail section? Checked the paper three times. I hope this was just an aberration and will return in the next issue.
This wouldn’t be an issue if you would publish the hate mail online. Love the paper and look forward to it every month.
Peggy Pianalto
Oklahoma

2nd Amendment trumps 1st?

Please keep your focus squarely on defending our First Amendment rights. Based on the disingenuous cartoon on Page 17 of the August issue, you clearly do not grasp the significance of the Second Amendment.
Apparently, both you and the artist fail to understand that politicians do not worship the NRA’s guns. They live in fear of us 4.3 million members who, along with our families and hunting buddies, do grasp the true meaning of the Second Amendment and vote to preserve it.
It’s the Second Amendment that guarantees the rest. If I have to choose between organizations dedicated to the Second or to the First Amendment, the former will retain my support.
Danny G. Miller
California

Editor’s note: Mr. Miller notes that he’s an NRA Life Member. The cartoon showed U.S. House and Senate politicians bowing before a monument inscribed “NRA” and an assault weapon on top, “Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims.” FFRF has always set its constitutional sights squarely on the First Amendment, from which all others stem. It will continue to do so by publishing editorial cartoons with a viewpoint, which is what editorial cartoons always do.

Null hypothesis carries the day

Atheism is nonbelief that there is a god(s). How many people have been killed specifically in the name of atheism? None.
Atheism has no dogma to defend and no mandate to conquer, convert, persecute, bully, dominate or enslave. Atheism is not a belief system because it does not even contain one belief. Atheism is not a religion because it contains no beliefs, rituals, sacred objects, worship, reverence, “higher power,” spirituality, devotion, faith or deity.
Atheism is morally neutral. Its only relevance to morality is that morality does not come from any god. It does not tell you what you should or should not do. Atheism in itself cannot be used as a reason for good behavior or an excuse for bad behavior.
The hypothesis is that there is at least one god. The null hypothesis is that there is no god. The failure to produce any accurate and reliable evidence that there is at least one god is 100%. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.
Paul Keller
Wisconsin

Robertson again makes a fool of himself

Pat Robertson blamed atheists for the Wisconsin Sikh temple massacre. His claim that atheists are mad at “God” fails by his usual lack of logic. How can someone be mad at something they don’t believe exists? No one is afraid of, or mad at, ghosts, unless you believe such fantasies are real.
Pat Robertson’s fantasies know no limits, and he keeps making money on gullible people sharing his heartless, rambling nonsense.
Jorg Aadahl
California

Double standard on issue of life disturbing

Once again the Religious Right has raised the question of ‘When does life begin’?
To see the sincerity on the faces of people who are pro-choice when discussing abortion (be it because of rape, incest or women’s health) is remarkable, and I am surprised that it does not break into a sobbing event.
Where were these people when thousands of Iraqi children were being killed by our bombs? Is it that they consider Iraqi “fetuses” as inferior to American fetuses? Do they have any plans to reduce our defense budget and cut down our efficient killing machine? Of course not.
Will any one of them have the courage to face grieving Iraqi mothers and explain this “double standard?” Of course not.
G.M. Chandu
New York

‘Evolve or die’ is no laughing matter

An interesting thought experiment is to imagine the world free of traditional religion. Imagine if all the time and effort spent on “studying” these superstitions, myths and dogma over the decades and centuries were instead devoted to community building, science, education and efforts toward world peace. It would be a very different and better world.
Traditional religions focus on in/out-group thinking and encourage an

infantile and emotionally immature worldview. Their followers are told to believe fanciful tales and obvious untruths and to see any other belief system adherents as “infidels,” thus setting the stage for future conflict. They exploit the trust they demand to raise funds, build empires and abuse their worshippers, particularly the children.
In addition to an astonishing amount of secretive sexual molestation, there is the basic injustice of raising children in an environment that gives them no free choice and punishes any doubts. Some religions quite openly advocate the murder of anyone who believes otherwise and also seek to impose their views on our legal system for the entire population.
Many are deeply involved with government, try to influence policy and support or undermine political candidates. They do all this with an immunity to regulation and at taxpayer expense. Why they are allowed to erect magnificent facilities and have sometimes lavish lifestyles while paying no taxes in a secular democracy is a mystery.
It’s time to leave this childishness behind and “evolve or die.”
David Johnson
Washington

Jesus just another ignorant man?

If Jesus really had been a god, or the son of a god, and knew which fish in the sea had a silver coin in its mouth, he would have known that some day, Christians would want to burn scientists at the stake for insisting that the Earth moved around the sun, then he would have settled this problem right then.
He would have given us the germ theory and would have told people how to build a microscope and eyeglasses. He would have taught people how to build a printing press, and he would have known that majority Christians would soon be killing minority Christians (heretics) and others who disagreed with their theology. He would have included in his Sermon on the Mount, “Do no harm to any person because of what that person believed.”
The fact that Jesus did nothing beneficial for humankind proves that, if he existed, he was just another ignorant man.
Robert A. Bloomer
Kentucky



Thinking man’s cap
Taking time out from his FFRF staff attorney duties to do a little modeling for an item from ffrf.org/shop/ is Andrew Seidel. (Member Len Eisenberg was FFRF’s benefactor for this attractive headgear.)

Meet a Member

'The Antidote for Faith'

Name: Wayne Bartz.

Where I live: Out in the sticks in the Sierra foothills not far from Lake Tahoe, Calif. We are frequently entertained by deer and raccoons, along with mountain lions and coyotes.

Where and when I was born: Chicago, long, long ago in 1938. I actually remember Hitler strutting around in newsreels at the local movie theaters.

Family: I live with my wife, Linda, and eight rescued feral cats.

Occupation: Now retired, I began my career working the trenches as a clinical psychologist, then as a college psychology professor (and also co-authored several self-help books).

How I got where I am today: Today I am a retired geezer, so I guess I got here mainly by surviving. Where I am as a freethinker is not surprising, since as a psychologist I spent most of my professional life in the company of nonbelievers (80% of psychologists reject supernatural explanations for natural events, including human behavior).

Three decades of training college students to think critically and question authority eventually led to the publication of my recent book, *Critical Thinking: The Antidote For Faith*.

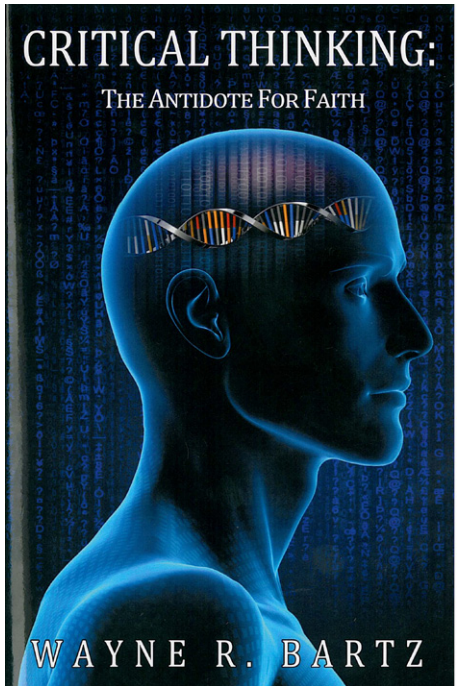
Where I'm headed: Presumably to oblivion. I am pretty sure I am not destined either for heaven or hell.

Person in history I admire: Carl Sagan, with whom I was privileged to interact briefly on two occasions. He was a warm and engaging scientist who was able to lay open the mysteries of science in a way understandable to the general public,

I most admired Sagan's ability to remain calm, pleasant and persuasive in the face of hostile questions or ignorance-based preposterous claims. He had that rare gift of keeping his cool in situations where most of us would lose it, and that made him a great educator.

A quotation I like: "Eternal suffering awaits anyone who questions God's infinite love," (the late humorist Bill Hicks). I also like comedian Rich Jeni's description of going to war over religion: "This involves two groups of people willing to kill each other in order to determine who has the best imaginary friend."

These are a few of my favorite things: My fondest freethought accom-



plishment came from spearheading a California college faculty organization 25 years ago working for the separation of church and state. Our efforts eventually resulted in invocations and closing prayers being permanently banned from graduation ceremonies at more than 100 California community colleges.

Although it sometimes may not seem that way, once in a while we actually win one. Today I am encouraged by the vociferous nationwide out-of-the-closet atheist revolt, fueled by FFRE, Dawkins, Hitchens, Newdow, Harris, et al. As a retired educator, I am delighted by the younger generation's increasing rejection of religion, with nearly a third now admitting that they have discarded traditional beliefs.

These are not: Nothing is more irritating to me than sanctimonious politicians (e.g., Rick Santorum) pandering to the ignoramus Religious Right, not to mention President Obama repeatedly babbling publicly about Jesus. That's embarrassing.

My doubts about religion started: When I was a kid, my family attended a Lutheran church where I experienced an odd mixture of community solidarity, social events and high-minded ideals, along with watching adults engage in petty squabbles, hypocrisy and political infighting. My favorite minister, a brilliant speaker and thought-provoking pastor, was let go because he failed to present simple hellfire and brimstone in his weekly sermons.

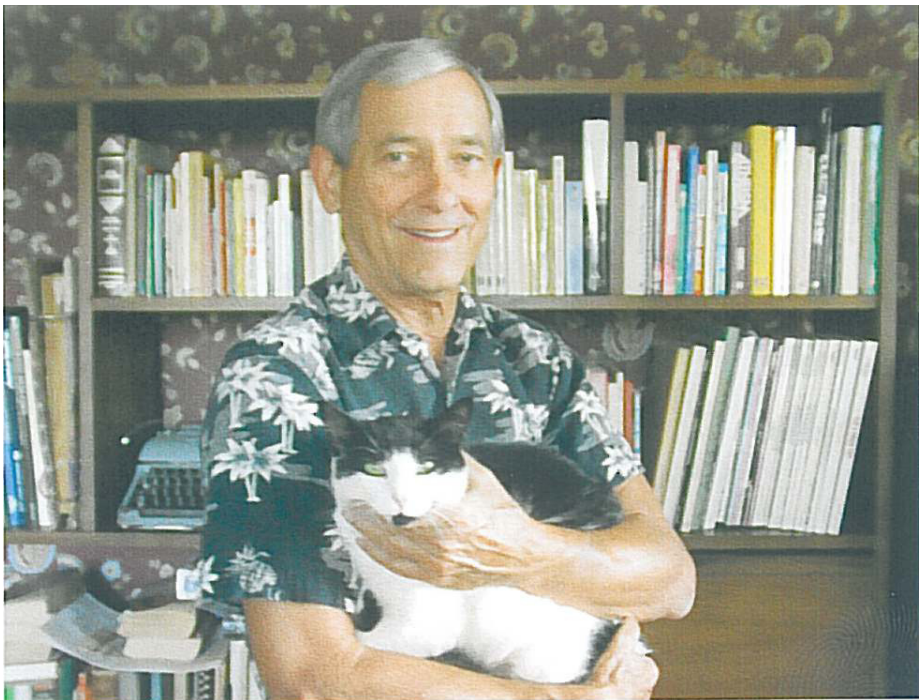
He tried to make the congregation think, and they didn't like it one bit. He was replaced by a mundane standard-issue preacher who bored me to tears, even as a teenager. Our wonderful new pastor managed to alienate my parents by pulling a nasty fast-shuffle on me and my older brother. We had worked for a couple of years as church custodians, being paid a few bucks for our labors.

One day the pastor notified me that we were being fired for failing to properly do our job and then quickly appointed his newly retired father to the position. We knew better because my father, a serious German-style taskmaster (a supervising chemist at Kaiser Steel), did a weekly white-glove inspection of our work every Saturday, making sure that everything was 100% up to snuff. He was not at all happy with the way his sons had been treated and eventually became alienated from the church. He never spoke of it, but my parents quit attending and so did I.

Why I'm a freethinker: The alternative is unthinkable.

Ways I promote freethought: I spent three decades teaching the scientific method and honing college students' critical thinking skills as a psychology professor. Based on that work, I recently wrote *Critical Thinking: The Antidote For Faith*. (It's available from Amazon and as an e-book from River's Bend Press at riversbendpress.com.) The book characterizes blind faith as a "toxic poison of the intellect," in sharp contrast to contemporary American society, which enthusiastically endorses faith as a positive value.

Chapters such as "The Folly of



Wayne Bartz rescued Bingo from the bushes outside a Sizzler restaurant.

Faith" and "Miracles, Healing and Health Hokum" point out how unsubstantiated beliefs can lead the faithful to some very silly and sometimes dark places. Critical thinking is proposed as an alternative to faith, its implementation based on a step-by-step approach summarized by the acronym CRITIC. The book also targets faith-based scam artists such as psychics, seers, faith

healers, hokey health practitioners and assorted gurus and cult leaders.

It concludes with a review of the skeptical views of the nation's founders, noted scientists, contemporary public figures and entertainers. Philip Appleman, Freethought Today poetry contributor, says that CRITIC methodology should be taught in every grade school, high school and college.

No Comment

If God has chosen to bless this [rape victim] with a life, you don't kill it.

Sharon Barnes, president of the Republican Women's Club of St. Louis, defending the "legitimate rape" remark by U.S. Rep. Todd Akin, R-Mo.
New York Times, 8-20-12

He would say things like, "I can't understand why you won't obey me [and have sex], the other ladies can." I always gave up. I was afraid not to.

Testimony from an Ohio woman in the trial of Bishop Samuel Mullet Sr., accused of orchestrating hair- and beard-cutting attacks on fellow Amish
Detroit Free Press, 8-31-12

People have this picture in their minds of a person planning to — a psychopath — but that's not the case. Suppose you have a man having a nervous breakdown, and a youngster comes after him. A lot of the cases, the youngster — 14, 16, 18 — is the seducer.

Fr. Benedict Groeschel, 78, founder of the conservative Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, claiming that emotionally needy children often seduce clergy
National Catholic Register, 8-28-12

Ask a Pastor: Is there sin in Heaven?
ANSWER: [Bible verses] seem to show that evil (thus sin) has, like a slug's slimy trail, even left its mark in Heaven.

Rev. R.A. McDonald, New Testament Baptist Church, Safford, Ariz.
Eastern Arizona Courier, 8-18-12

I was asked why the power of God isn't moving and I said it's because I haven't kicked that woman in the face. The Holy Spirit spoke to me, the gift of faith came on me, and said: "Kick her in the face, with your biker boot." I inched closer and I went like this [kicking forcefully]. Bam! Just as my boot

made contact with her nose, she fell under the power of God.

Canadian Pastor Todd Bentley, Fresh Fire Ministries, who claims he can kick disease, even cancer, out of people's bodies
Croydon Today, 7-19-12

The Truth for Youth consists of the entire New Testament in the God's Word Translation along with 100 pages of powerful, full color comic stories that present the "absolute truth" about issues that young people are confronted with, such as: Sexual Purity, Sorcery & Witchcraft, Homosexuality, Abortion, Pornography, Drug Addiction, Drunkenness, Peer Pressure, School Violence and Secular Rock Music.

Statement by Revival Fires Ministries, which wants to get a copy of the book to all "unsaved teenagers in America's public schools"
thetruthforyouth.com, 8-14-12

[Plaintiffs] believe that the procreative capacity of human beings represents a precious gift from God by which individuals are allowed to participate in God's plan to share life and that, as a result, any acts of deliberate interference with that procreative capacity bound up with acts of unitive human love — including artificial contraception, abortion, and/or sterilization — are gravely wrong and sinful.

Christopher and Mary Yep's lawsuit against the contraception mandate in the Affordable Care Act
Religion Clause, 8-24-12

Orthodoxy or death

T-shirt slogan worn by praying, cross-toting protesters burning a Pussy Riot poster as an "exorcism"
New York Times 8-9-12



'The Atheist Perspective'

Tanya Smith, outgoing president of Atheist Alliance International, is shown at the European Atheist Convention in Cologne (Köln), Germany, held May 25-27. The theme was “The Atheist Perspective & Our Future: National, Regional, Global.” It was hosted by the International League of Non-religious and Atheists. Smith, an Australian, has been living in France. The T-shirt slogan “Evil Little Thing” is worn in solidarity with Jessica Ahlquist, the Rhode Island teen who was called that by her state legislator after winning her challenge of a prayer banner at her high school. Speakers included PZ Myers, Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor of FFRE, Rebecca Watson, Leo Igwe, Atheist Ireland’s Michael Nugent and many German activists.



Dan Barker, Taslima Nasrin and Annie Laurie Gaylor.



Journey of enlightenment

German activists recounted a summer adventure in taking a double-decker bus (essentially saying “there is no god”) around Germany. A short documentary recorded the enlightening journey.



Two brave ‘blasphemers’

Taslima Nasrin, who was driven out of Bangladesh by her country’s “holy men” after a fatwa was decreed against her, spoke at the conference with a fellow exile from Pakistan, Younus Shaikh, M.D. Nasrin recounted living in Germany 16 years ago, which welcomed her and offered her political asylum after being in hiding in “my country because Islamic fundamentalists wanted to kill me.” She called herself “a stranger in my own country, a stranger in neighboring India, and a stranger in the West. There is no place I can call my home, but I think I have a home, a home that consists of a family of people who bravely oppose the forces of darkness and ignorance. There is no place in this world that I can call home, but the people who support me, sympathize and express solidarity are my home.”

Dr. Shaikh was charged with blasphemy for a public statement in 2000 that Muhammad was not Muslim until he turned 40, since that’s when he invented the religion. Sentenced to death in 2001, he appealed and was acquitted in 2003 and lives in Switzerland.

Snapshots – 2012

European Atheist Convention

Mercure Hotel Severinshof

Cologne, Germany



Transcending borders

Ingrid Matthaus-Maier (left), a freethinking German politician and jurist who has served in the Bundestag, chatting with Annie Laurie and Dan.



Fired for speaking up

Valentin Abgottspon (left) became a state/church litigant in Switzerland after he was fired from his teaching job for complaining about a crucifix on his classroom wall. He now teaches part time while pursuing his ongoing case. He’s pictured with Annie Laurie and Dan in the pretty garden at the convention hotel.



Florent Rizvanolli points to FFRF's message to Democratic National Convention delegates in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Last call to convention!

Preregistration for FFRF's 35th annual national convention at the Hilton Portland & Executive Tower, Portland, Ore., on the weekend of Oct. 12-14 closes on Friday, Oct. 5. The convention is headlined by Richard Dawkins. FFRF must be in receipt of your meal orders and registration no later than

Oct. 5. You may register at the door, but no meals may be ordered. Full information on the convention and registration online is available at: ffrf.org/outreach/convention/ Questions? Phone FFRF weekdays 9-5 Central at (608)256-8900.



The Republican National Convention was greeted by Uncle Sam in Tampa, Fla.

FFRF warns politicians against 'God fixation'

A so-called "act of god" (Hurricane Ivan) didn't stop the Freedom From Religion Foundation's message from being posted the Thursday before the Republican National Convention began in Tampa.

FFRF's patriotic red-white-and-blue message, depicting a finger-wagging Uncle Sam cautioning that "God fixation won't fix this nation," was placed on Kennedy Boulevard.

FFRF's election-year caveat was drawn by editorial cartoonist Steve Benson, the grandson of Ezra Taft Benson, the secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture under President Dwight Eisenhower who later became president of the Mormon Church. Steve Benson left the Mormon Church in the early 1990s.

"Our equal-opportunity message to both political parties and all public

officials is: Get off your knees and get to work!" said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

FFRF placed the same admonition on two billboards in Charlotte in time for the Democratic National Convention the following week. It included a hard-to-miss, 14x48-foot version near downtown Charlotte, at 1720 Freedom Drive, and on a highly visible, 10x30-foot billboard on Interstate 77.

"The preoccupation with religion by our nation and our public officials is holding back the USA scientifically, intellectually and morally," added Annie Laurie Gaylor, who co-directs FFRF.

FFRF's tradition of placing billboards at the national party conventions began in 2008. (Note: All FFRF-placed billboards are clearly identified with FFRF's full name and website.)



New landscaping

FFRF's annual patriotic red, white and blue garden at its downtown office in Madison, Wis., drew an unusual number of compliments this year. It was planted and tended by FFRF Executive Assistant Katie Daniel (above). "We thank Katie for helping to beautify our jobs," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. "Kudos also to Bill Dunn, Freethought Today editor, for his dedicated watering throughout Madison's summer of high heat and drought, even on weekends." The Foundation added new roses, shrubs and trees last spring to keep the grounds attractive.

