FFRF sues over Florida lit censorship

The Freedom From Religion Foundation filed a lawsuit June 13 in U.S. District Court in Florida against the Orange County School Board in Orlando for censoring distribution of freethought materials while allowing unfettered distribution of the Christian Bible.

Plaintiffs are FFRF, its Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker, and David Williamson, who heads the Central Florida Freethought Community, a new FFRF chapter.

Distribution of limited freethought literature was allowed on May 2, the National Day of Prayer.

The distribution was organized in response to a so-called “passive” bible distribution in January, when World Changers of Florida evangelists in 11 public schools were permitted to hawk bibles and promote religion.

FFRF asserts violation of its rights under the First Amendment (viewpoint discrimination and prior restraint) and 14th Amendment (equal protection).

Orange County Public Schools insisted on vetting the freethought literature from FFRF and other secular groups. It censored many of the materials, including Letter to a Christian Nation, Sam Harris’ book; “The Truth,” an essay by Robert G. Ingersoll; Jesus Is Dead, a book by Robert Price, professor of philosophy and religion; Madalyn Murray O’Hair’s book What on Earth Is an Atheist?; Why I am Not a Muslim, a book by Ibn Warraq, and several FFRF pamphlets.

The distribution was organized in response to a so-called “passive” bible distribution in January, when World Changers of Florida evangelists in 11 public schools were permitted to hawk bibles and promote religion.

The plaintiffs contend that public schools shouldn’t allow literature distribution by any outside group and told the school district that by letter before the World Changers event.

Williamson reiterated that position at a Jan. 29 pre-agenda meeting of the school board.

FFRF encouraged the district to adopt a policy that “prohibits outside groups from turning schools into religious battlegrounds while preserving the distribution system for the benefit of the school” and suggested model language.

After the district refusal, FFRF asked for permission to distribute secular materials. Williamson submitted the secular groups’ literature Jan. 29 for approval. Included were nine “nontracts,” five brochures, eight books, one essay and one sticker. Three books were voluntarily withdrawn in order to speed the approval process after stonewalling by the district.

The district prohibited four of FFRF’s five books, leaving part of one essay and one sticker.

“Good Without God” stickers were prohibited.

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FFRF helps atheist become U.S. citizen

FFRF stood up for equal rights for the nonreligious by forcing the U.S. Office of Customs and Immigration Services to strike an unconstitutional requirement for religious documentation that would have barred an atheist from becoming a citizen.

Margaret Doughty, 64, an atheist and 30-year U.S. resident who was born in Great Britain, applied to the Houston customs office to become a citizen. She has permanent resident status while running nonprofit adult literacy organizations. All citizenship applicants must take an oath to bear arms for this country before full citizenship is granted. Exemptions are permitted for those who object to war based on “religious training and belief.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Andree Seidel wrote USCIS in a June 14 letter noting that U.S. Supreme Court precedent does not require any religious test to receive an exemption to bear arms. “This exemption requires only a deeply held belief in not bearing arms or serving in the armed forces. Anything more, such as a requirement to document the belief with a particular church, is a gross violation of the law and the Constitution,” Seidel wrote.

Doughty asked for an exemption to the oath. “I am sure the law would never require a 64-year-old woman like myself to bear arms, but if I am required to answer this question, I cannot lie. I must be honest. The truth is that I would not be willing to bear arms. Since my youth I have had a firm, fixed and sincere objection to participation in war in any form or in the bearing of arms. I deeply and sincerely believe that it is not moral or ethical to take another person’s life.”

The Houston office admitted the sincerity of Doughty’s belief, but required her to submit religious documentation, including a letter from her physician.
Meet a Member

Golden Rule plenty good for Uhl

Name: Diane Uhl
Where: Live Oro Valley, Ariz.
Where and when I was born: Milwaukee in 1937 (the town that beer kept happy). I was raised in the small town of Evansville, Wis., where we drank beer but didn’t tell anyone.

Education: I survived high school in a small, rural town where there were no divorces and the only ethnic groups were Germans, Swedes and Norwegians. I received my B.A. from Ripon College. Teaching became my goal when I found out a nurse had to be able to tolerate the sight of blood. I received my M.A. from Northwestern University in speech correction/special education, which equipped me (I thought) to save all those children with special needs. Those children taught me more about life than I ever imagined.

Occupation: I taught people of all ages, from preschoolers to adults with special needs. The adults were always the toughest due to the usual adult prejudices and hangups. Thirty-three years in public schools provided me with untold opportunities to encourage students to always be free to say “show me” or “prove it.”

How I got where I am today: My parents taught me the rewards of hard work. The one action item I took from my Lutheran upbringing that seemed to make sense was the Golden Rule. I always say they should put “She Tried” on my tombstone (which I won’t have). During college summers, I worked for a couple (both totally blind) who gave me a real perspective on what “visión” really is. I freely moved forward to prepare myself to teach others and to enjoy a successful, happy independent life. Along the way, I met and married my best friend, Steve. We retired in 1993, sold it all, bought an RV and traveled full time to all 49 continental states. Geography lessons and people opportunities were boundless and furthered my education and vision of a world where we should all be able to accept and live comfortably with our differences while not forcing our choices on others.

Where I’m headed: To dust, but I like to think of it as my personal sunset.

Persons I admire: Arizona state Rep. Juan Mendez, who in May as a nonbeliever offered up a nonprayer in the House to open a session, and Rebecca Vitsmum, the Oklahoma tornado survivor. Rebecca, when asked by Wolf Blitzer on national TV “You’ve gotta thank the Lord, right?” replied, “I’m actually an atheist.”

These are my favorite things: Chocolate, my best friend, positive people, Kermit the frog, laughter, music, the First Amendment, secular humanists actions, Frank Sinatra singing “I Did It My Way.”

Diane’s billboard greeted thousands of passersby in the Tucson, Ariz., area.

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 it says June/July 2013 or earlier please renew! Your prompt renewal ($40 single membership; $50 household; $150 sustaining; $25020; $100 sustai- ning; $20 student) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Free thought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in Jan/Feb and June/July. Send to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701, ffrf.org/donate

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June/July 2013
The only freethought newspaper in the United States
Hands too busy digging to pray

“Before,” “during” and “after” photos of versatile FFRF Bookkeeper-Staff Gardener Katie Daniel beautifying Freethought Hall by planting a bed of annuals. The “patriotic” planting includes red salvia, red-eyed white vinca, red and white geraniums and (not yet blooming) blue salvia. That’s summer office worker/journalism intern Sarah Eucalano supplying Katie with some iced tea. Katie’s planting last year garnered many compliments from passersby (and FFRF staff).

FFRF calls out South Carolina school district

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is placing the blame for a string of problematic religious violations in Pickens County Schools, Pickens, S.C., on its prayerful Board of Education. Valdectator Roy Costner IV’s open defiance of a nonprayer policy at his June 3 graduation at Liberty High School, in which he ripped up his pre-approved speech and led the crowd in the Lord’s Prayer, has focused attention on the religious fervor in the district.

FFRF started corresponding with the school board late last year after receiving complaints it was opening meetings with students leading Christian prayers. Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent letters to the board on Nov. 26 and Feb. 25.

The board responded by adopting a policy March 13 to continue prayer but keep it “nondenominational” and have it led by an adult. FFRF said that’s not good enough and doesn’t comply with Supreme Court rulings.

Elliott also wrote an April 4 complaint letter after three individuals contacted FFRF about other religious violations. Complaints allege discriminatory hiring at Easley High School, religious promotion through posters and praise music in classrooms at West End Elementary School.

One violation involved EHS Athletic Director Chris Carter’s comments on the decision to hire Grayson Howell for head football coach. The Easley Patch reported:

“There were certain characteristics about Howell that were obvious when Carter spoke to him. Number one, our coach is a Christian,’ Carter said. ‘To me, that’s the most important quality, simply because the devil’s after our children and the more quality people we can surround our children with, the better chance they have.’

Elliott commented: “It is well-settled that treating an employee or job applicant favorably or with disfavor because of his/her race, color, religion, sex or national origin is illegal. Discriminatory hiring practices violate not only federal law, but also state law and Board of Trustees policies. Were Carter to have referenced the race or sex of an applicant, the district very likely would have received an immediate employment discrimination lawsuit.”

Wisconsin voucher expansion scheme alarming

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker was poised, as of press time, to sign into law on June 30 the most radical expansion of vouchers for private (mostly religious) schools in the nation. The scheme would increase voucher enrollment or in-parochial) school parents.

Republican voucher backers say they want “a voucher in every backpack.”

Education experts across the state have opposed creating what amounts to a second publicly funded education system. In the first and second year of the new scheme, vouchers would be limited to low-income families and to 500 students and 1,000 students respectively. After that, the caps are sure to be expanded or removed. Milwaukee’s voucher program started with 341 students in 1990 and now has nearly 25,000 students, with over 21,000 of them attending religious schools.

Of the current 112 voucher schools in Milwaukee, only 16 are not religiously affiliated.

State Education Superintendent Tony Evers strongly opposes voucher expansion and warns: “Let’s be clear, no cap on voucher enrollment or income limits has ever stayed in place over the past 20 years. History shows, the more voucher schools, the more quality people simply because the devil’s after our children and the more quality people we can surround our children with, the better chance they have.”

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Another complaint involves a West End Elementary teacher using Christian praise music in a second-grade classroom. “The songs are not part of a secular music program, nor are they songs with educational merit,” Elliott said. “Rather, they are adaptations of popular music altered to be all about Jesus. One of the songs is called ‘Party Praise Anthems’. The adapted songs include such lyrics as, ‘Jesus Christ you are my Savior’ and ‘Jesus Jesus Jesus.’”

“The valedictorian who so insensitively inflicted Christian prayer on a captive audience at a secular graduation ceremony is a product of a school district which itself has set an unconstitutional example by hosting school board prayer,” said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.
Kites on a Windy Day: Replay to a Farewell

Were I to tell you how I know regret—
It is like brown leaves blowing past wet window panes, or like torn kites in trees.

But why should we mourn losses, small or great, Those early sketches, metaphors for all That stings sweet into life? Let’s raise the Fall That made us brief, intact as circles, more Than merely infinite. The play of kites Is joy with strings attached; but let our flights Be integral and sovereign as we soar

Above the ties our weakness clings to yet, Secure as chains. We ride a fitful breeze

Be integral and sovereign as we soar

Than merely infinite. The play of kites

I’m guessing the Rockingham County school board’s decision to end the practice of opening meetings with a prayer was a tough call politically. But it was one of two sure ways to avoid mixing religious faith with govern- ment. The other was to open meetings with a moment of silence.

As we’ve written before, God will hear you. Isn’t that the point? Nobody else has to.

Undeclared to is to pander for votes rather than a sincere expres- sion of faith, one’s thoughtful and re- spective silence can speak volumes.

Allen Johnson, editorial page editor, urging Guilford County, N.C., to forgo prayer.

Greensboro News & Record of Greensboro. 5.19.13

These classes too often promote reli- gious values that aren’t appropriate academically. Public funds are being used to promote some religious views over others.

Mark Chances, religious studies pro- fessor at Southern Methodist Univer- sity, author of a report on how Texas public schools’ elective bible classes violate the Constitution

Bloomberg News. 5.29.13

I feel like an idiot now. I only sent mon- ey.

Atheist author/entertainer Ricky Ger- vais, tweet responding to @MTVNews: Beyonce, Rihanna & Katy Perry send prayers to #Oklahoma after the devas- tating tornado.

twitter.com. 5.21.13

I — I’m actually an atheist. We are here and, you know; I don’t blame anybody for thanking the lord.

Rebecca Vitsmun, Moore, Okla., hold- ing her son by their tornado-levelled home, answering CNN host Wolf Blitzer’s question “I guess you’ve got to thank the lord, right?”

“The Situation Room,” 5.21.13

Moore Public Schools adamantly de- nies that any teacher was fired for praying with their students. We find this accusation offensive and insulting. During this extremely difficult time, when we are trying to heal our com- munity, we are dealing with angry and threatening messages from individuals who have chosen to believe this fabri- cated story without checking on its ac- curacy.

Superintendent Susan Susie Pierce, ad- dressing an online rumor

KOCO, 5.26.13

Having a visible disability is like shark bait for ignorant people lacking scruples. I wear it; the mere sight of crutches and I bleed in the way. Having lived with a disability all my life, I’ve learned to accentuate myself to the inevitable stares or occasional questions, but the days I dread are the ones in which I’ve accidentally crossed paths with some- one who’s decided that I am the per- fect opportunity to exemplify God’s power to heal. On the spot. I’ve been taught to handle it with grace with a polite smile and nod and move about business as usual. However, there’s no manners guidebook for actually being prayed on. I don’t mean for. I mean on.

Blog post entitled “Please Don’t Pray with Me (In Airports)” by Megan, 22, a Duke University graduate who has epi- dermolysis bullosa, a connective tissue disease

thematterwithmegans.wordpress.com, 5.28.13

I had a very special occasion to have dinner with Governor Walker and his lovely wife, Tonette, about a year ago and I can testify that they are strong conservative Christians with “Alabama Values” and not ashamed of it.

Evan Heckman, Alabama GOP, press release detailing Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker’s Aug. 23 speech in Montgomery

alagop.org, 5.27.13

Ingersoll was the perfect humanist. He was very engaging as a speaker because he used humor and he was outrageous in that he would speak against religion with such fervor. All of that was very tit- illating, and people would go to hear him whether they agreed with him or not. He did not respect religion, but he respected people who were religious.

The close friend of the editorial Robert Ingersoll Oratory Contest,

“Meet Robert Ingersoll, America’s most famous forgotten atheist”

Washington Post, 5.29.13

© Philip Appleman 1996

New and Selected Poems, 1956—1996


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Washington Post, 5.29.13
Colorado appeals FFRF’s Day of Prayer victory

The Colorado Supreme Court announced May 10 that it will hear an appeal by Gov. John Hickenlooper of the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s solid appeals court victory declaring unconstitutional the governor’s annual Colorado Day of Prayer proclamations.

Hickenlooper and his predecessors, including Gov. Bill Ritter, annually issue proclamations encouraging Coloradans to pray on the first Thursday in May in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer. A unanimous three-judge panel of the Colorado Court of Appeals ruled last year that FFRF and four of its Colorado members have standing to sue over the proclamations and that the proclamations violate the Colorado Constitution.

On May 10, 2012, Colorado Appellate Court Justice Judge Steve Bernard, with Judges Alan Loeb and Nancy Lichtenstein concurring, ruled in favor of FFRF overturning a lower court decision. Bernard wrote: “A reasonable observer would conclude that these proclamations send the message that the events and matters we pray are favored members of Colorado’s political community, and that those who do not pray do not enjoy that favored status.”

The 7-page decision examined proclamations from 2004 to 2009, finding that “they showed religious preference and endorsed religion. The decision noted that the proclamations conveyed a religious message, included ‘biblical verses and religious themes,’ referenced uniting in prayer and have the governor’s imprimatur through use of his signature and seal. 

Gubernatorial proclamations of a Colorado Day of Prayer have often embraced the biblical themes of the Colorado Springs-based National Day of Prayer Task Force, including this year’s proclamation which said in part, “The 2013 National Day of Prayer theme is ‘pray for America’ supported by Matthew 12:21 which reminds us that ‘In His name nations will put their hope.’”

FFRF, a state/church watchdog based in Madison, Wis., is a national association of more than 19,000 free-thinkers (atheists and agnostics), including nearly 600 members in Colorado. FFRF won a significant federal court victory in 2010 declaring the National Day of Prayer unconstitutional, which was overturned on other grounds. U.S. District Judge Barbara Calabresi had ruled, “The same law that prohibits the government from declaring a National Day of Prayer also prohibits it from declaring a National Day of Blasphemy.”

FFRF warmly thanks its Colorado plaintiffs: Mike Smith, Timothy G. Bailey, Lifetime Member Jeff Bayinger and David Habecker. The case is brought on behalf of FFRF by Dan Boniface, local counsel, and attorney Richard L. Bolton, Boardman Law Firm, Madison.

Arizona slams courthouse doors on nonbelievers

The Arizona Court of Appeals on June 12 refused to declare unconstitutional the annual Arizona Day of Prayer proclamations by Gov. Jan Brewer.

FFRF had sued in January 2012 on behalf of its 500 Arizona members, its Valley of the Sun chapter, several named Arizona FFRF members and Maricopa County citizens of diverse religious beliefs. The superior court threw it out on standing in August 2012.

The appeals court decision by Judge Donna Knesele, while confirming that psychological injury from government action can provide standing for someone to sue, rejected FFRF’s claim of injury. FFRF contended that nonbelievers are sent a message that they are not welcome to fully participate in government processes.

“You can imagine how the court would have ruled if Brewer had issued a proclamation stating that prayer was futile and encouraged all citizens a proclamation stating that prayer would have ruled had Brewer issued a proclamation stating that prayer was futile and encouraged all citizens to refrain from prayer.”

FFRF issued an annual Arizona proclamations coinciding with the Christian-based National Day of Prayer on the first Thursday in May. She also had issued a Day of Prayer for Arizona’s Economy and State Budget in 2010, encouraging “all citizens to pray for God’s blessings on our State and our Nation.”

“The ruling emphasizes an invented and heightened requirement for standing,” said FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott. “It says that plaintiffs must demonstrate behavior of avoidance of the violative conduct, or ‘that the alleged violation is so pervasive and continuing that it of necessity affects on a practi- cal level how the plaintiffs interact with government.’ Challenges in religious cases have not required such a high hurdle to protect constitutional rights.”

Elliott added, “With the court’s view on standing, Arizona citizens are un- able to challenge religious endorse- ments at the highest levels of state government. The challenge was brought by pro bono Arizona attorneys Richard Morris and Marc Victor.

FFRF helps atheist become U.S. citizen

FFRF sues over Florida lit censorship

The complaint lists dozens of factual examples of how secular materials and secular volunteers were treated differ- ently from the World Changers and the biblical material:

- The district objected to the Har- rison book for describing “the sacrifice of virginity and the raising of children in order to ensure the future fertility of mothers, feeding infants to sharks, and the burning of widows so they can follow their husbands into the next world.” FFRF’s complaint notes that the concepts flagged as age inappropri- ate all appear in the bible.

- WCF put up interactive white- boards, had volunteers staffing tables and talking with students and passed out invitations to worship at the De- lando Wesleyan Church. Plaintiffs at- tempted to pass out a pizza party invi- tation but were censored at several schools. Freethought volunteers had to wait up to an hour at some schools to set up.

- FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, who negotiated the distribution with the district, noted that it’s not merely the number of books and materials — it’s the volume. He calculated that while the average bible has about 1,950 pages, the secular books totaled 1,184 pages.

- Seidel added, “Moreover, there are actually 66 books in bible (give or take depending on your particular re- ligion). Either way you look at it, the bible is more massive than all the ma- terials we are asking to distribute put together.

FFRF’s attorneys are Jerry Jeffreys, trial counsel; Steven Brady, co-counsel; and Seidel, pro hac vice co-counsel. Jeff- reys and Brady are working pro bono.

FFRF thanks chapter director Da- vid Williamson for serving as principal plaintiff and for his diligence in co- ordinating the literature distribution with FFRF, Secular Student Alliance, American Humanist Association and Freedom From Religion and American Atheists.

Read the legal complaint at: ffrf.org/uploads/legal/OSchools-Distribution-Complaint.pdf

Continued from front page

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Page 5
The real IRS scandal
Politicizing churches get free pass

By FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor

L
ot in the political outrage over the Internal Revenue Service’s alleged targeting of the tea party for scrutiny is the IRS’s failure to go after church politi­cizing, most of it by Christian Right pastors. Where’s the congressional fury over the fact that the IRS has not been enforcing restrictions against partisan politi­cizing by churches from 2009, despite blatant violations on a massive and organized level?

The electioneering prohibition is not limited to churches. No 501(c)(3) organization may politic or endorse political candidates. Nor should any 501(c)(3) be permitted to elec­tioneer, which amounts to taxpayer subsidi­zation of political speech. More than $100 billion is given annually in tax-exempt contributions to churches and religious groups. Imagine that kind of money flowing with no accountability to political candidates.

As many as 1,500 clergy reportedly violated the electioneering restrictions on Sunday, Oct. 7, 2012, as FFRF’s le­gal complaint noted when we filed our historic federal lawsuit challenging the fact that churches, unlike other 501(c)(3)s, need not file for tax exemption to file a multiannual political attack on President Barack Obama.

While the IRS has not been enforcing the law against partisan politi­cizing by churches, FFRF is asking of the IRS is to name the IRS is to name those who have “turned themselves in” and demonstrate that lifting BSA’s other longstanding ban wasn’t even debated, much less considered this spring by BSA,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., 1200 Park Av., Madison, WI 53715, (608) 255-8090, ffrf@ffrf.org, www.ffrf.org, a non-profit educational organization exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) and no part of any contributions to the organization is used for campaign contributions or expenditures intended to influence any election. Annual Membership Donations: $50 and up, $25 and up.

Why is it OK to discriminate against atheists?

University of Wisconsin-Madison junior student Calli Miller received the AHA Freethought Student Activist Award. It was at the urging of AHA Executive Director Chris Calvey that I applied to be a legal intern at FFRF. It is currently double majoring in sociology and legal studies at UW and has always wanted to go to law school. Chris (correctly) thought that an internship at a nonprofit that paired my faithlessness and my love of law would be right up my alley. Thank god (pun intended) that he encouraged me to go for it — my time at FFRF was one of the best experiences of my life. Quite literally, every single person who works at FFRF is a quality human. Being surrounded by people who were about cheerful, passionate, and incredibly kind made for a great internship experience. Of course, I also learned a lot. My writing skills improved, I gained a far more comprehensive knowledge of constitutional law as it relates to the separation of state and church, and I discovered just how badly America needs organizations such as FFRF.

It seems true to say that “I will never forget time at FFRF” because that seems obvious. But I do know that the lessons I learned there won’t fade throughout the years. I would like to thank FFRF for generously granting me their Catherine Fahringer Memorial Student Activist Award. More importantly, I would like to thank everyone at Freethought Hall for their time and the knowledge they’ve imparted to me.

At a school board meeting which my family attended, my father overheard a man sitting behind me say he would like to walk up and punch me in the face. While I was doing a television interview, I could barely concentrate because of the mass of people staring at me.

There has been an overwhelming amount of support from people around the world, and that support is what helped me through this entire ordeal. The hate mail has all been the same — they tell me I am going to hell and ask me if I am happy about what I’ve done.

My close friends have all supported me and have told me that even though they don’t understand it, they do support me in what I did. I am proud of what I did, no matter how many people hate me. The only thing I want is for people in this world to be all be treated equally. And no matter if it takes my entire life, I will continue to do what is necessary to achieve that goal.


Oklahoman wins ‘Strong Backbone’ student activist award

On May 13, a public school district in Muldrow, Okla., confirmed it had permanently removed Ten Commandments plaques posted in classrooms. The whistleblower was 16-year-old student Gage Pulliam, who is the recipient of FFRF’s new “Strong Backbone Student Activist Award,” a cash scholarship of $1,000.

When Gage contacted FFRF about this major constitutional violation, FFRF sent a letter demanding they be taken down. FFRF did not identify the complainant, following its usual policy to protect identities. But after students began fingering peers they suspected of contacting FFRF, Gage bravely came forward.

He and his family subsequently faced a strong backlash from the overwhelmingly Christian community of about 3,500 residents, including bulling of his younger sister and threats about 9.

On his first day of school, he was point and stare at me like I was a monster. I had noticed the Ten Commandments immediately, but was still way had a problem with displaying them because it showed complete dis-regard for the law.

In the eighth grade I moved to Muldrow. I had noticed the Ten Com-mandments immediately, but was still very secretive about my atheism. I al-ways had a problem with displaying them because it showed complete dis-regard for the law.

It wasn’t until recently that I got the courage to say something. I wanted to remain anonymous, but after fingers

and, most notably, founded the non-annual Freethought Fest held every year on campus.

Freethought Fest is a 100% free three-day conference with many speak-ers from all over the country. I feel very fortunate to be a part of the stu-dent group resourceful and innovative enough to bring the “large atheist con­ference” feeling directly to UW-Madison students.

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Students stop prayer with FFRF help
Luis Lucas-Tzn and Michael Thorpe, students at Jordan-Matthews High School in Siler City, N.C., contacted FFRF and spoke at a board meeting of Chatham County Schools in opposition to plans to include prayers at their graduation.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a May 25 letter to Superintendent Robert Logan to report that the scheduled prayer proposal made for the 2012 graduation day shown for a similar violation in South Carolina. Lucas-Tzn told the Ashboro Courier-Tribune that he and other students continued to oppose the prayers even when they were bullied and harassed by other students with epithets like “homosexual freak.”

Lucas-Tzn said, “A public school is not to be made into a recruiting ground for any religion. Prayer has no place in a secular event such as a graduation ceremony.”

District legal counsel responded to Elliott on June 6 that prayer had been removed from the program. The graduation was held June 8 without any school-sponsored prayer. But in a show of opposition, some students recited the Lord’s Prayer during what was to have been moment of silence. FFRF thanks Luis and Michael and those other students at Jordan-Matthews, Shannon Dyer and Josie Turcios, for their efforts to bring their school into compliance with the U.S. Constitution.

No extra credit for baccalaureate
Students at Stilwell High School in Stilwell, Okla., weren’t required to do extra credit on that next month’s baccalaureate, thanks to FFRF. A concerned parent reached out to FFRF after her child’s teacher required the student to do extra homework because she chose not to attend. Teachers also gave extra credit to students who did attend the baccalaureate, which was privately arranged and not hosted by Stilwell Public Schools.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel told Superintendent Gail Garstap on May 15 that no student should receive extra work or credit for participation in non-participation in a religious event. Legal counsel responded May 17 that the district will not substitute moments of silence for the baccalaureate or in coercing attendance in the future.

Oklahoma graduates keep caps on
Nonreligious students at Tahlequah (Okla.) High School became alarmed when instructions for the 2013 graduation ceremonies mandated male students to remove their graduate’s caps for prayer. FFRF had contacted the school after the 2012 graduation included uninvited student-led prayer. The school administration had responded then that future graduations would not include prayer.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote Superintendent Lisa Presley on May 13: “The district cannot instruct any students on how to worship or whether to revere another’s worship. The student who contacted us is understandably upset that their school is so steeped in religion and so unwilling to adhere to the First Amendment.”

Presley responded May 15 that the instructions had been changed and redistributed. The graduation did not include prayer.

Silence will replace Texas prayer
A concerned parent in Texas contacted FFRF about Schulenburg High School’s intention to include a student-led prayer and invocation at graduation.

Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavel contacted Superintendent Walter Padgett on June 7 to urge that the school remove the divisive prayers and cite Supreme Court precedents. FFRF received a response from the district June 11 that future graduations will substitute moments of silence for prayer.

Georgia prayer ‘circles’ down the drain
Lowndes County Public Schools in Valdosta, Ga., agreed with FFRF that schools cannot promote religion. A concerned parent contacted FFRF after her child was ostracized by classmates and teachers for refusing to participate in a prayer circle at Habirah Elementary School.

Several middle school teachers led the prayer circle to “prepare students for upcoming standardized testing.”

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a May 29 letter: “This flagrant violation of neutrality exists to accommodate the religious beliefs of non-Christian students. Teachers should strive to be inclusive, not inject religion, a divisive force, into their classroom instruction.”

District legal counsel responded June 12 that “the principal has counseled with his staff as it relates to the Lowndes County School System’s prohibition against employee-directed prayer.” (FFRF recommends a good night of sleep, a healthy breakfast and studying as the best way to prepare for standardized tests.)

School will ban religious handouts
Members of a local church came to Newman Middle School in Skiatook, Okla., at lunchtime to hand out pamphlets that contained bible quotes and the church’s address. Then they reportedly asked students to attend their church.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote Superintendent Rick Thomas on June 3, outlining the legal and ethical problems with allowing a religious group to pray on a captive audience of minors. Thomas responded June 11 that the school’s administrators “were not aware” that the church was given access to students. “Visitors are not allowed to hand out information and should not be recruiting for any religious groups,” Thomas said. “We will do our best to make sure this type of thing does not happen in the future.”

County board drops prayer proposal
The Island County Board of Commissioners in Coupeville, Wash., chose not to start scheduling prayer at meetings after getting an FFRF letter. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter to the board June 4 about its prayer plans, advising leaving religion to individual consciences.

The Whidbey News Times reported June 10 that the board dropped a prayer proposal put forth by Chairperson Kelly Emerson. Commissioner Jill Johnson, who previously favored a prayer proposal, put forth a prayer and was punctuated with religious rhetoric like “All hail the power of Jesus’ name!” and “Your Great Name” and this lyric, “Jesus, worship the Lamb that was slain for us, Son of God and Man, you are high and lifted up, and all the world will praise your name!”

Seidel wrote, “This was not simply religious music, it was worship music. The SCO exhorted students to join the choir in worship. The event began with a prayer and was punctuated with religious rhetoric like ‘All hail the power of Jesus’ name!’”

McCharen responded that the central administration had had no advance notice of arrangements for the presentation but promptly investigated. [We] stressed with [the principal] the importance of avoiding reasonably perceived district endorsement of religious beliefs, scheduled a meeting of all school administrators within the district to discuss the constitutional concerns related to presentations of a religious nature, and has adopted an administrative procedural whereby any request to a local school administrator for a presentation by a nonreligious individual or group during the school day, whether having a secular or sectarian emphasis, will be referred to the central office for a decision at that level.”

FFRF Legal Victories
"Tis the season for school religious intrusion
FFRF’s busy legal staff sent more than 20 letters in June/May 31 to school districts เพิ่มเติม from state/church violations at the end of the school year. Of those, 30 were about prayer at high school or college graduations; three were letters about gatherings in churches or religious facilities and four were due to baccalaureate.

One of the most blatant attempts to violate the Constitution was in Fostoria, Ohio. FFRF received a tip that Ten Commandments tablets were to be given to Fostoria High graduates June 2 and that the plaques had a note tied to them that read “Jesus will save you.”

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote Superintendent Andrew Spence on May 31. “It is unfortunate that some educators feel it is their place to instruct other people’s children on religious edicts.

FFRF resolved a complaint over a prayer proposal put forth by Chairperson Kelly Emerson. Commissioner Jill Johnson, who previously favored a prayer proposal, put forth a prayer and was punctuated with religious rhetoric like “All hail the power of Jesus’ name!” and “Your Great Name” and this lyric, “Jesus, worship the Lamb that was slain for us, Son of God and Man, you are high and lifted up, and all the world will praise your name!”

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First-place finisher protests race prayer

The latest blow struck for rational racing by Don Ardell, Florida FFRF member and health and wellness advocate Don, who turns 75 on July 18, participated in a May 25 triathlon (quarter mile swim, 15-mile bike, 3-mile run) in Crystal River. Don won first place in his division. His wife, Carol, also participated, finishing second in her age group in just under 90 minutes. Don’s performance was so good that a race director would think that a person believes in God cursing, especially by using the word God. Don Ardell, Florida FFRF member and health and wellness advocate Don, who turns 75 on July 18, participated in a May 25 triathlon (quarter mile swim, 15-mile bike, 3-mile run) in Crystal River. Don won first place in his division. His wife, Carol, also participated, finishing second in her age group in just under 90 minutes. Don’s performance was so good that a race director would think that a person believes in God

FRCF gets Gideons off school grounds

According to Heritage Middle School in Colleyville, Texas, after receiving FFRF’s June 5 letter from Staff Attorney Liz Cavell, “Parents also understandably become nervous when adult men take an overt-keen interest in handing mate-
tials to their young children without parental knowledge or permission, ”Cavell noted.

District legal counsel responded June 7 that the Gideons should not have been permitted to distribute bi-
bles to students. FFRF frees students to ‘offend God’

FRCF intervened on behalf of a par-
ent and student after a teacher at Sea View Elementary in Salton City, Calif., told students they were offending God by cursing, especially by using the word God. FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote May 3 to Superintendent Darryl Adams that religion should be kept out of classrooms.

District legal counsel responded May 29: “Without debating too deeply into employer-employee confidential-
ity, suffice it to say that [the assistant principal] met with [the teacher] and appropriately handled the matter at that time.”

Religion goes off school lunch menu

Baptist church personnel will no longer be permitted to proselytize middle and high school students in the Wattsburg Area School District in Erie, Pa. Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent an April 26 letter to the district, noting the predatory conduct and parental unawareness at which pastor was allowed to go to students and promote church events during lunch time.

Legal counsel replied May 23 that young pastors are no longer per-
mitted to enter schools to meet with students for any reason.

Proselytizing prof told to stop

A Erie Community College profes-
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manded by the school for her religious activities.

A student was taking a final exam on May 8, 2012, when his teacher laid a folded mailing envelope on the stu-
dent’s desk and told him to open it later when he was alone. The package contained a bible with passages. The student contacted FFRF so they can look at what they can do. A student was taking a final exam on May 8, 2012, when his teacher laid a folded mailing envelope on the student’s desk and told him to open it later when he was alone. The package contained a bible with passages. The student contacted FFRF so they can look at what they can do.

Hi Ashley:

Thanks for inviting an evaluation of the race and suggestions. You can pass my notes along to the race director. Let me begin by expressing kudos for a mostly superb race experience. The course, the management, the awards ceremony, refreshments — well done. My overall takeaway, and Carol’s, was positive.

However, there was one discordant note that ensures we’ll not be back, unless changes are made. We were startled by the public praying ritual directed to all participants just before the race started. It seems astonishing that a race director would think that a person believes in God

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dance, who also were striking a count-
terpose for strict separation of church and triathlon, as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. (Yes, I’m kidding.) I don’t know about the others, but we did not travel two hours to Crystal River for a Christian triathlon. If [race director] Chris Molding’s religion is such that he feels that it’s acceptable to impose his beliefs and rituals on ev-
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Meet a ‘Trekki’ Member

**Name**: Brenda German
**Where I live**: Rural North Carolina, just west of Fort Bragg. It’s in the middle of nowhere, which is nice and quiet when Fort Bragg isn’t shooting off artillery.
**Where and when I was born**: Syracuse, N.Y., in December 1958. I grew up in a couple of small towns south of there, Lafayette and Tully.
**Family**: Paul, my husband, and Butterscotch, our 17-year-old cat. I am a classically liberal and unabashed feminist in the central New York tradition.
**Education**: Tully High School graduate in 1977. I graduated in 1989 from Sandhills Community College with an associate’s degree in science degree. A year later, I went on to attend Western Carolina University, where I earned a B.S. in clinical laboratory science. After 10 years, I returned to Sandhills and earned another applied science degree, this time in Internet technologies.
**Occupation**: I spent 10 years working in a hospital laboratory and then 10 years as a Web programmer designing in a hospital laboratory and earned another applied science degree, this time in Internet technologies.
**Where and when I was born**: Orange, N.C., in 1958.
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Meet a ‘Pesky Progressive’ Member

**Name**: Eli Work
**Where I live**: Santa Fe, N.M.
**Where and when I was born**: Glen Dale, Calif., July 9, 1969.
**Family**: Katharine, my mom; co-parent of 20 years; and stepsons, Adam and Schundler, 31 and 28, respectively.
**Education**: B.S. in social science, Portland State University, Oregon. My informal education included reading the works of my heroes. I figured if Molly Ivins could say that and Michael Moore could do that, then so could I.
**What I do for a living**: Eli Work,你 earn on to attend Western Carolina University, where I earned a B.S. in clinical laboratory science. After 10 years, I returned to Sandhills and earned another applied science degree, this time in Internet technologies.
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Alton Lemon stood the ‘test’ of time

The ‘Lemon test’ is FFRF’s best friend.

- Its principal or primary effect must neither advance nor inhibit religion.
- It must not foster excessive entanglement between government and religion.

This was not new law, per se, but a kind of noble attempt to clarify and make the Establishment Clause idiot-proof. The “Lemon test” has been invoked in virtually every lawsuit FFRF has ever taken. It is our best friend.

Alton Lemon

Alton Lemon, one of our honorary officers, died May 4 at age 84 in Jenkintown, Pa. Lemon, a founder of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and an avid letter writer and freethinker, was a founding member of the Alabama Freethought Association and卉 the first African-American in a series of government jobs. He was the recipient of the First Amendment Hero Award at FFRF’s 26th annual convention in 2003 in Washington, D.C.

Lemon volunteered to be part of the American Civil Liberties Union challenge of the landmark 1940 ruling, the Supreme Court invalidating the parochial aid. (Justice Thurgood Marshall didn’t participate in the case.)

In one of the enduring legacies of the court headed by Chief Justice Warren Burger, the decision also codified Establishment Clause precedent into what soon became known as the “Lemon test.” If any of its three prongs are violated by an act of government, the act is deemed unconstitutional:

- It must have a secular legislative purpose.
- Its principal or primary effect must neither advance nor inhibit religion.
- It must not foster excessive entanglement between government and religion.

Robert Marcy

Robert Marcy, 84, Christiansted, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, died Feb. 15, 2013, at a local hospital. He was born July 30, 1928, in the Panama Canal Zone, and was the first African-American to win a degree in mathematics from Morehouse College in Atlanta in 1950.

In 1979, Marcy earned a B.S. in mechanical engineering from the Pratt Institute in 1946 and served in the U.S. Army from 1946-52.

Moving to Michigan, he worked as an engineer and received a master’s from Wayne State University, and later to the Los Angeles area to work in the aerospace industry. He retired in 1983 and moved to St. Croix, where in 1987 he met his wife, Frankie Jo “Jody” Marcy. Both are FFRF members.

“Following his instructions and staying true to his atheism, Bob had a moving secular burial at sea,” writes Jody. “In the afternoon at an open-air restaurant, family and friends met for a celebration of his life. He will be missed.”

Eileen Lottman, 1928–2013

Eileen Lottman, 85, New York City, died at home surrounded by loved ones June 7, 2013. She was born in Minneapolis, grew up in Sioux City, Iowa, and attended the University of Iowa Writers Workshop.

She started her professional career in New York with publicist Lois Smith, becoming publicity director and then editor at major publishing houses including Putnam, Dell and Bantam before turning to writing full time. Eileen was the author of 25 novels, including The Bratwurst (1981) and The Bratwurst (1991). A lifelong advocate for free speech and social justice, she also loved animals and supported animal rights.

Her husband of more than 40 years, noted film editor Evan Lottman, and daughter Jessica Lottman preceded her in death. Survivors are her many loving friends, who feel deeply the loss of her humor, honesty and companionship. A memorial was held June 14.

“We met Eileen at an FFRF event in New York City several years ago and were very impressed with her long writing career and dedication to freethought,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Count us among her sad but appreciative friends.”

Jesse Bailey Jr., 1925–2013

Jesse V. Bailey Jr., 88, Birmingham, Ala., died April 25, 2013. A L, age 88, died April 23rd 2013. A graduate of University of West Alabama, he served in the U.S. Air Force in WWII. Bailey, a freethinker, was a founding member of the Alabama Freethought Association and a member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. He’s survived by his daughter, Anita, several other relatives and countless friends.

According to Alice Cleveland, APA historian, Jesse grew up in New York. He was the author of 23 novels, including Putnam, Dell and Bantam before turning to writing full time: “In the afternoon at an open-air restaurant, family and friends met for a celebration of his life. He will be missed.”

“Following his instructions and staying true to his atheism, Bob had a moving secular burial at sea,” writes Jody. “In the afternoon at an open-air restaurant, family and friends met for a celebration of his life. He will be missed.”

Survivors also include two daughters, Renee, a clinical psychologist, and Susan, director of a physical therapy clinic; a son, Geoffrey, a UC-Berkeley astronomy professor; a stepdaughter, Stacy; two granddaughters and three step-grandchildren. (Geoffrey and two colleagues notably discovered 70 out of the first 100 extrasolar planets. He received the 2009 Carl Sagan Prize for Science Popularization from Wonderfest.) FFRF offers sincere condolences to the Marcy family.

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The Freedom From Religion Foundation is scheduled to run a full-page ad on July 4 to “Celebrate our GODLESS Constitution” in a number of U.S. dailies. The full-page ad is a direct response to a series of July 4 ads sponsored each year by Hobby Lobby. Since 2008, the large craft store chain has run ads of disinformation on July 4. The ads portray the U.S. as founded on God and Christianity. The full-page ad, which apparently run in literally hundreds of U.S. newspapers, parodies one of the Hobby Lobby ads that uses the nation’s founding fathers and framers of the Constitution.

Although FFRF’s ad is in black and white to save money, Hobby Lobby by running ads in hundreds of dailies, is undertaking the single most expensive ad campaign in our history to counter the Religious Right’s message. As of press time, FFRF’s ad is expected to run in The New York Times, Arizona Republic, Seattle Times, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Denver Post, Albuquerque Journal and Columbus Dispatch. Most of the ads are in black and white to save money, but are in color in The New York Times and a few other dailies. It’s possible some dailies may still cancel the paid ad, which was also scheduled to play in Peoria and a few other newspapers not confirmed as of press time.

If you appreciate this ad, please help FFRF spread the truth about the secular founding of this nation. Donate to FFRF’s Advertising Fund (click Advertising Fund in the dropdown box) at ffrf.org/donate or earmark checks to the Advertising Fund sent to FFRF, PO Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

(For those who might like to help underwrite the cost of running an ad in their local newspaper, call Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608)256-8900.)

FFRF will be running issue-oriented, one-third-page ads for the next year in Scientific American, thanks to those FFRF members who responded to a matching grant by generous FFRF Board Member Lester Goldstein. Lester matched $25,000 in gifts for the magazine ads. A retired science professor, Lester suggested that each ad be fully documented and address a timely topic to show the danger of religion in government. Our first ad, appearing in the July issue, is reproduced here. Look for ads addressing blasphemy, creationism in the schools and reproductive rights in upcoming issues of the magazine.

Thank you,
Lester and all kind donors who responded.
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Hobby Lobby is also involved in litigation challenging the Affordable Care Act’s contraception mandate. Hobby Lobby is working to permit employers who are religious to deny women employees contraceptive health care.

Although FFRF can’t compete with Hobby Lobby by running ads in hundreds of dailies, we are undertaking the single most expensive ad campaign in our history to counter the Religious Right’s message. As of press time, FFRF’s ad is expected to run in The New York Times, Arizona Republic, Seattle Times, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Denver Post, Albuquerque Journal and Columbus Dispatch. Most of the ads are in black and white to save money, but are in color in The New York Times and a few other dailies.

Taking its message of “In Reason We Trust” to parts of the bible belt, FFRF has contracted to run the ad in the Huntsville [Ala.] Times, Orange County [Calif.] Register, San Diego Tribune, Colorado Springs Gazette, Orlando Sentinel, Louisville [Ky.] Courier Journal, Jackson [Miss.] Clarion Ledger, Miss., Charlotte Observer, The Tennessean (Nashville) and Oklahoma City’s Daily Oklahoman. (Hobby Lobby is based in Oklahoma City.) It’s possible some dailies may still censor the paid ad, which was also scheduled to “play in Peoria” and a few other newspapers not confirmed as of press time.

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IN REASON WE TRUST

For references, see: ffrf.org/in-reason-we-trust

Freedom From Religion Foundation
P.O. Box 750-NYT • Madison WI 53701 • (800) 335-4021

I would like to become a member (includes 10 issues of Freethought Today newspaper).
I would like to donate to FFRF’s Legal Fund.

- Annual Membership Dues
  - Individual $40
  - Household $80
  - Student $25

- Special Membership Dues
  - Sustaining $100
  - Honoring $500
  - Life Member $1,000
  - “After Life” $5,000

Make payable to “FFRF” • Dues & donations are tax-deductible.

The original godless Pledge of Allegiance

FFRF is the nation’s largest association of atheists & agnostics, working to keep religion out of government.

FFRF.Org FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

MARRIAGE EQUALITY

- The bible calls homosexuality “an abomination”; their blood shall be upon them” (Source: Critical 2013 )
- 31 states have adopted constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage, at the behest of religious lobbyists. (Source: Maureen Dowd, New York Times 3/20)
- Only 16 states bar discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity (Source: Human Rights Campaign)

Polls show more Americans support than oppose same-sex marriage. Yet many religious groups would impose their dogmas on the rest of us.

There’s no reason to keep hating. Protect against religious intrusion into civil liberties.

Defend the vital “wall of separation between church and state.”

Support FFRF, the nation’s largest association of free-thinkers (atheists, agnostics), working to keep religion out of government.

Ask for a free issue of our newspaper.

Freethought Today Join today at 1-800-335-4021

FFRF.Org/reason-must-prevail

FFRF is a 501(c)(3) educational charity

June/July 2013

Madison, Wisconsin

Freethought Today

Page 13
LaVera Langeman writes: “I began my artistic life as a fashion designer in New York City after graduating from the Fashion Institute of Technology. After having children, I started to paint. Having painted now for 20 years, I have had some success. I have won several awards, including being published in the William and Mary Review. I have had a number of shows and continue to show in several galleries. “I love to craft and use any and every medium possible to make my projects come to life. I am married and have two wonderful boys, both in college. I have an ‘everyday life’ blog at teawithlavera.blogspot.com and a lifestyle website at teawithlavera.com. I hope you will take the time to visit me there.”

By LaVera Langeman

This show was not a light-hearted undertaking. Many years of painting, research and reflection have gone into it. I have read the bible cover-to-cover and many other books to try to understand what religion is all about.

I acknowledge that some good has been done in the name of religion and its churches, and I would never want to diminish the comfort it brings to so many people. This show deals with another aspect: the damage inflicted on cultures and societies — physical and emotional damage suffered by countless individuals — all in the name of religion.

The paintings are not meant to hurt anyone; my hope is that they will promote conversation. This show is an expression of my personal journey from the fundamentalist teachings of my childhood to the present day. (Thus there are no paintings on Islam, Judaism or other religions; I wasn’t brought up in those cultures.) As a nonbeliever (or heretic, as I would have been called at other times in history) surrounded by people who believed in a deity, I became silent. But as I started those paintings it became clear to me that silence is not what I should be. Why should my beliefs — and more so, my questions — go unheard?

Every day scientific discoveries show us how the earth has become what it is. We can translate and read myths from before Christ and see where many bible stories have come from, how the bible was put together and by whom. We can look at the history of Christianity and see what has happened to keep it alive. But not many people take the time to examine their beliefs or to research the book they base their life on. If we question things that don’t make sense to us, we are told, with circular logic, that we “must have faith.”

It is certainly simpler to accept the myths than to live in fear that one might die and spend eternity in hell. It’s much easier to err on the side of religion. Is it really faith? Or is it really fear? And what does being religious mean, when we pick and choose what we want to believe from the bible? Is it God’s word or not?

Most religions are ancient belief systems, yet we let such beliefs, often based in ancient fear and hearsay, define our own beliefs, values, and even our lives. A disturbing number of people in this country take everything stated in the bible at face value, yet as hard as they try to prove that stories of the bible are true, they cannot.

Throughout history, people have questioned religion. But innocent people have been tortured or killed to assure that the church retains its power and keeps ancient beliefs alive. Many religious believers still live in fear. By letting the bible and all its beliefs serve as an historical text and not “the truth” I have moved into a world of little guilt, with lots of time to wonder and a freedom to feel what’s really going on around me. On my own terms I am able to appreciate every moment I have here on earth with those I love.

There are so many very important, urgent things we need to consider as human beings. I don’t have the answers and that’s OK for me. The paintings in this show give voice to my personal questions.

Editor’s note: To see all the paintings in the show and more work by the artist, go to hereticdiary.com.

Cheesus

A news story came on TV in 2009 about a woman finding a Cheeto shaped like Jesus on the cross. My first and strongest reaction was disbelief, and then a question: What has our country turned into? A few days later, I Googled Cheesus. I’m sad to say 11 pages came up. I thought that if people truly believe this is a message from the divine, don’t they wonder about a deity wasting time creating images of himself as a Cheeto instead of coming down to Ethiopia to feed the starving?

Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene is holding Jesus in the form of the Dove of Peace. He is no longer able to fly because his wing is broken. Wearing a crown of thorns representing the pain and humiliation inflicted on women in the name of religion throughout history, she cries for him and for the women of the world.

The Madonna of the Big Bang

With all the new information in the world of science, isn't it time to ask serious questions and not look at the world through the eyes of our fearful ancestors, who believed the world was flat? Isn’t it time for a new madonna?
Evolution

National Geographic reported in 2006 that 14% of U.S. adults thought evolution was “definitely true,” while about a third firmly rejected it. In 2007, the $27 million Creation Museum opened in Petersburg, Ky. Half a million visitors came in the first nine months. On Feb. 12, 2009, the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin’s birth, a Gallup poll showed 39% of Americans “believe in the theory of evolution,” a quarter said they didn’t and 36% had no opinion either way. Those attitudes are strongly related to education and, to an even greater degree, religiosity.

Note: The paper in her hand [“The banana — the atheist’s nightmare”] is from an evangelical group called Living Waters Publications.

The Puppet Show

LEFT: Jesus has often been used by church leaders as a puppet to promote agendas that have nothing to do with his teachings as portrayed in the bible. Myths have been turned into miracles, all in the name of power and profit.

Keep the Faith

Religious texts often use mythological constructs such as the creation story in Genesis or Jonah and the whale to illustrate a spiritual or moral concept. Yet many churches teach that these stories are to be taken literally. The denial by the church of the right to question, express doubt or view our existence in a different light can result in such horrific acts as burning not only books, but innocent people as well.
Many stops on journey to nonreligion

By Jake Hjorth

There’s a well-known saying that we should stop and smell the roses. It seems that Western culture has a hard time following that advice, maybe because we too often think of life as a journey — that is, we always need to go from one place to the next. Prompted by religion, we are taught that life here and now has no value in itself. It only serves as a journey to get to the afterlife.

Having been on such a journey from early on and engaged in the ministry as both Roman Catholic priest and United Church of Christ minister, I’ve finally gotten “off the bus.” I now view my life more like a cruise, the goal of which is to appreciate the sites visited and sites yet to come.

Before I go into more detail about my journey, I must state that whatever ups and downs, good or bad, for me, it was a great and positive life experience. Everything and everybody in my past have brought me to my “now,” and for that I am grateful. Any critical remarks that I make about past experiences should therefore be seen with that in mind.

I stepped aboard my cruise in Denmark four years before the fifteen-year occupation of my native country during World War II started. My family was Roman Catholic, both my parents having converted from Lutheranism, Denmark’s official state religion. And my five siblings were brought up in the Catholic faith. But it was never mentioned or discussed by the pope and promulgated by the local bishop.

During the war, our family was part of the resistance movement. We helped Danish Jews flee to Sweden. We hid in the basement during air raids. My father was imprisoned by the Gestapo for three months in the summer of 1944. Fortunately, he was not sent to a concentration camp in Germany.

Looking back on my life’s experience and its aftermath, I find that it gave me all the drive to make a better world, a safer world, a more trusting world. While I was too young at the time to reflect on this, I think that it was, and still is, in my genes.

I was sent to a St. Joseph Sisters school for the first two years, after which I was transferred to a Jesuit boys school. I spent four years under Jesuit discipline until it got to be too much. One day I left school and went to my dad’s office to ask for help. After a long conversation with the principal, it was decided I would transfer to a public school in our neighborhood.

Entering a public co-ed school in seventh grade was a great revelation. I enjoyed being around girls a lot. I dated a girl in high school and got engaged right after graduation. We planned on getting married as soon as I fell in love with her, a love I have to this day.

In retrospect, I admit that the education I received was very limiting. I spent my years in Mississippi during the days of the Civil Rights Movement, but it was never mentioned or discussed among us seminarians. Being somewhat isolated, I did not reflect on it. Only later did it dawn on me that a religious order of priests should have been more involved in marching along with the movement.

The segregation in the South bothered me personally. One day I boarded a bus and found it a great opportunity to show how I could befriend the blacks. I went to the back of the bus and sat down, wanting them to feel that I was one of them.

At the next stop, a young black woman got on and walked toward the back. She stopped by me and remained standing, looking at me with questioning eyes. I did not understand her dilemma. After all, there were plenty of empty seats ahead of me. I remained seated till I got off.

As the bus continued on, it dawned on me what a terrible thing I had done. In my naïveté, I had tried to join the blacks, not realizing that wherever I sat, I made a demarcation line. I wish to this day I could beg the woman’s forgiveness.

After my ordination, I spent two years in a U.S. parish and enjoyed serving as assistant in a large congregation with young families. After that cruise stop, I finally went back to Denmark to serve as one of the few native Danish priests.

Versatile volunteer

Todd Peissig, Wisconsin FFRF Board Member and Life Member, is scanning periodically to reconstruct “lost” archives of Freethought Today from the 1990s, which are gradually being added to the Foundation’s website.

Entering the priesthood

It took a couple of years before I got my wits back together. I found that the priesthood would be the right thing for me. Everything and everybody in my “ports of call,” I must state that which is to appreciate the sites visited and sites yet to come.

I would like to become a UCC minister, I’ve early on engaged in the ministry myself. It only serves as a journey to get somewhere. Of life as a journey — that is, we always need to get somewhere.

Looking back on the war experience and its aftermath, I find that it gave us a new view of life. It became clear to me that religion, any religion, enslaves the minds of people by basing life on a creed of self-righteous intolerance which invariably leads to war.

While still a minister, I once wrote an article to the local newspaper. It was titled “To be more like Jesus than about Jesus.” Religion is “to be about.” Religion is based on the use of the deadly DIFT: Dogma, Doctrine and Tradition. It would be well if we would follow the great humanists’ examples and be more like them than about them, to think freely and speak openly.

Let me finish not with an “Amen” but with “Keep cruising along!”

Todd Peissig, Wisconsin FFRF Board Member and Life Member, is scanning periodically to reconstruct “lost” archives of Freethought Today from the 1990s, which are gradually being added to the Foundation’s website.
A check for $250,000 is nothing to sneeze at (or say “God bless you” for), but our staffs are certainly quite happy about the Building Fund donation in that amount from Diane and Stephen Uhl.
150 House votes for foxhole atheists

Some 150 members of the U.S. House voted June 14 in favor of allowing nonreligious military chaplains to serve atheists and agnostics in the U.S. armed forces.

Although that wasn’t enough for the amendment offered by Rep. Jared Polis, D-Colo., to pass, it means a lot to atheists and agnostics. There were 150 Democrats who voted yes, 44 Democrats who voted no and 230 Republicans who voted no.


Andrews’ amendment brought forth some amazingly bigoted comments from some members of the House Armed Services Committee.

Kudos to Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., who defended atheists and humanists at that committee meeting: “To say that an atheist or a humanist doesn’t believe anything is just ignorant. They have very, very developed beliefs and value systems, and there are many, many of them serving in the military, including Pat Tillman. The response to the gentleman’s amendment makes me feel all the more the necessity of it. Basically, if you are an atheist or agnostic or a nonbeliever, the military’s response is, ‘We’ve got nothing for you. There’s no hope for you.’ They believe in a system of values, and that system of values is worth as much to them as Christianity is to us.”

In Raphael’s 16th-century painting “Sistine Madonna,” the madonna holds the Christ child, flanked by Sts. Sixtus and Barbara, while cherubs (inset) rest below. Katherine Hilden, an Illinois artist and FFRF member, was inspired to substitute secular angels Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker for Raphael’s. See more of Katherine’s “Facefame: Caricatures of people in the news” at facefame.wordpress.com/.

Women’s bodies belong only to women

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

This splash by FFRF’s co-president was published April 24 in The New York Times as part of its “Open for Debate” series. The topic was “Is the Hijab Worth Fighting Over?”

Nineteen is the perfect age to push the parameters of social convention, to experiment with self-expression and rebellion. Young women coming to terms with sexual objectification, harassment and social judgment have a perfect right to protest prudery and patriarchal religion without being threatened with execution.

Amina Tyler, a Tunisian 19-year-old, exercised that right. She participated in a feminist Facebook project in which she posted images of herself online, with the words “I own my body; it’s not the source of anyone’s honor” written on her bare chest.

Tunisia reacted with revilement and threats of violence. The head of Tunisia’s Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice reportedly called for Amina to be stoned to death. She and her family faced vicious threats, including that acid should be thrown in her face.

Amina, who reports having being subjected to a “virginity test” and other indignities, appears to be in hiding with the intention to escape to France.

She uploaded the photos on a Facebook page created by Femen, a Ukrainian women’s group dedicated to freeing women. In solidarity with Amina, Femen declared “Topless Jihad Day” on April 4, holding demonstrations across Europe in which women treated their bare torsos as protest placards.

The tactics are reminiscent of Slutwalk, a protest movement fighting rape culture, in which young women (some bare-breasted, others scantily clad) take to the streets to defy conventions that blame victims for rapes.

Arguments for female modesty are sadly familiar, and troubling regardless of their religious context. I’m proud to be part of the tradition that Femen and Slutwalk have joined.

In 1977, after Circuit Judge Archie Slo- monson in Madison, Wis., called the rape of a 16-year-old high school student by three boys a “normal reaction” to her wearing a turtleneck and jeans, I engaged in a different kind of street theater.

After organizing the first picket of his courthouse, I dressed in a nun’s habit and marched holding signs that said “Shall men be our dress codes?” and “Is this what you have in mind, judge?” We successfully recalled that judge. But the attitudes, unfortunately, persist.

There’s nothing obscene about breasts. What’s obscene is decked women in burqas or face-shrouding veils. What’s obscene is that a state- ment by a young woman that she owns her own body could still set a world religious on fire.

FFRF creationism complaint leads to Indiana probe

After receiving a student complaint, FFRF called for Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., to investigate allegations that a physics astronomy professor appeared to be teaching creationism at the public university.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a May 15 letter to BSU President Jo Ann Gora urging investigation of professor Eric Hedlin’s honors course, “The Boundaries of Science,” described in the syllabus as an honest, objective investigation on the intersection of science and religion. The elective class is not part of the core curriculum.

“It is our information and understanding that this class has been used to proselytize students and advance Christianity by using gaps in scientific knowledge — the ‘boundaries of science’ — in an attempt to prove religious belief correct,” Seidel wrote.

“We fully understand and support the need for academic freedom and free inquiry, particularly at the university level. But, as taught, this class crosses ethical and constitutional lines. BSU appears to offer a class that preaches religion, yet gives students honors science credit.”

Seidel wrote that he’s concerned Hedlin may also be “preaching” as opposed to “teaching” by injecting religion into his introductory astronomy class.

Students taking both of Hedlin’s courses remarked on the religious bias at the Rate My Professor online site. Comments range from “The class had an extremely Christian bias and he doesn’t believe in evolution,” to “Constantly talks religion. As an atheist, I was slightly concerned my science teacher is a devout Christian.”

Jerry Coyne, a biology professor at the University of Chicago and author of the book Why Evolution Is True, started blogging about the situation May 16 and has been posting regular updates.

Coyne, an honorary FFRF director, remarked, “The students are being duped. It’s straight theology with no alternatives. It’s a straight Christian intelligence design/creationist view of the world, which is wrong. It’s not science.”

It’s not that it’s not science, it’s science that has been discredited. It’s like saying the Holocaust didn’t happen.”

Terry King, Ball State provost and vice president of academic affairs, told the student newspaper June 23 that he expects a report by the end of June from the committee reviewing the academic integrity of the honors course. Three are Ball State faculty: Gary Dodson, professor of biology; Richard Fluegeman Jr., professor of geological sciences; and Juhl Thorsen Elin, professor of philosophy. Catherine Pila- chowski, a professor of astronomy at Indiana University, is the fourth member.

The controversy has been widely covered by mass media.
Texas school appeals bible banner ruling

The Kountze Independent School District in Kountze, Texas, is appealing a May 28 decision of the 15th District Court of Appeals, which denied the district’s appeal of a lower court’s decision to allow the display of banners with bible verses for football players to run through the school. The Associated Press reported the Associated Press issued a statement: “Marriage was created by the hand of God. No man, not even a Supreme Court, can undo what a holy God has instilled in our very nature.”

Formor Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee tweeted that because of the ruling, “Jesus wept.” He later added, “5 people in robes said they are bigger than the voters of CA and Congress are. The court laughed and grow an extension work in the Kountz/Middleton/West Madison area. One way we can do this is by offering free home Bible Studies through Bible surveys.”

In FFRF’s May 21 letter to the committee, Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott argues: “Any school employee may attend a religious meeting if it begins or after the employee’s work day and participate in the gathering if it is related to the employee’s religious of 189 U.S. metropolitan areas. The top 10 were Manchester-Nashua, N.H., Richmond-Richmond-Henrici, Va., Nashville, Tenn., and Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton, N.C. (54%).

FRRF’s home base among ‘least religious’

Provo-Orem, Utah, is the most religious in the U.S. metropolitan areas surveyed by Princeton, N.J.-based Gallup throughout 2012, with 77% of residents identifying themselves as “very religious.” Provo-Orem was in the top 10 come Montgomery, Ala., Jackson, Miss. (64%); Birmingham-Hoover, Ala. (56%); Huntsville, Ala.; Holland-Grand Haven, Mich., Greenville-Mauldin-Easley, S.C., Augusta-Richmond County, S.C./Ga., Ogden-Clearfield, Utah (33%); Little Rock-Conway, Ark., Baton Rouge, La., and Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton, N.C. (54%).

Burlington, Vt., and Boulder, Colo., were the least religious (17% identifying as “very religious”). Rounding out the top 10 were Manchester-Nashua, N.H., Portland-Biddeford, Maine (22%); Santa Rosa-Petaluma, Calif. (25%); San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, Calif., Eugene-Springfield, Ore. (24%); Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, Mass. (25%); Bremerton-Silverdale, Wash., Albany-Schenectady-Troy, N.Y., Springfield, Mass., and Madison, Wis., (26%).

Pays to complain

New Mexico FFRF member C.N. Flannery wrote to the New Mexico Department of Transportation about Christian crosses on a memorial sign to two students placed as part of Silver City’s “Adopt a Median” program. “It suggests to me that possibly a Jewish person or a nonbeliever or anyone not Christian would not be welcome in Silver City. Would you please look into this and let me know what your thoughts are?” While DOT didn’t contact Mr. Flannery, he noticed a few days later that the crosses were off the sign.

Same-sex rulings upset Religious Right

Religious forces opposed to same-sex marriage and civil unions lost twice in U.S. Supreme Court decisions announced June 26. The court struck down the 1996 federal Defense of Marriage Act on a 5-4 vote, with the majority opinion written by Justice Anthony Kennedy. The court’s DOMA decision immediately proscribed full federal benefits to same-sex couples in states that have legalized gay marriage. In a 5-4 ruling written by Chief Justice John Roberts, the court paved the way for same-sex couples to marry in California by leaving intact a 2010 lower-court ruling that struck down the state’s constitutionally approved ban known as Proposition 8.

California Attorney General Kamala Harris urged the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals to lift the stay on the injunction against Proposition 8 and allow same-sex couples to marry “as quickly as possible.”

Rev. Steve Jones of the Masonic Church in Fort Wayne, Ind., said in a statement: “[A]t least 15 pastoral leaders have implored us to declare marriage as the union of one man and one woman, no matter what the courts or legislatures may say. Defending the truth is more important than personal popularity.”

U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., also issued a statement: “Marriage was created by the hand of God. No man, not even a Supreme Court, can undo what a holy God has instilled in our very nature.”

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Churches upstream at BSA gay policy

The Boy Scouts of America, headquartered in Grapevine, Texas, will start accepting gay Scouts, much to the chagrin of some churches. Of the roughly 1,400 voting members of the BSA’s National Council who voted May 22, 61% supported the proposal drafted by the governing Executive Committee. The policy change takes effect Jan. 1, the Associated Press reported. Gay Scout leaders (and atheists) will still be barred.

“We are deeply saddened,” said Frank Page, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Executive Committee. “Homosexual behavior is incompatible with the principles enshrined in the Scout oath and Scout law.”

The Assemblies of God said the change “will lead to a mass exodus from the Boy Scouts of America program.” Texas Gov. Rick Perry said he was “greatly disappointed.”

The American Family Radio’s “FoCo Point With Bryan Fischer,” the host commented, “BSA no longer stands for the Boy Scouts of America. It now stands for the Boy Sodomizers of America.”

The AP also reported that Baptist Pastor Greg Walker, Helena, Ala., said the proposal was unconstitutional and that his church will no longer be allowed to. KND-10 reported that Fr. Derek Lappe, pastor of Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church in Bremerton, Wash., is cutting all ties with BSA Troop 1501. Steve Rinheart, an Eagle Scout and supporter of BSA, said “Equally called Lappe’s stance “very unfortunate and downright sad.”

Wis. city turns down bible tabling

The Conservancy Lands Committee of the Middleton [Wis.] City Council voted unanimously May 22 to deny a request from Rev. Ted Krajewski of Calvary Gospel to set up an information table in the conservancy’s “to establish and grow an extension work in the Middleton-West Madison area.” One way we can do this is by offering free home Bible Studies through Bible surveys.”

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During discussion, committee members said granting permission would send the wrong message. City Administrator Mike Davis recommended denial. Staff noted that one chapter of the ordinance establishing the conservancy specifically barred such uses. “I’ve got chapters and verses, too,” Krajewski said lightheartedly right before the board voted.

High court to hear N.Y. prayer case

The Supreme Court agreed May 20 to hear Town of Greece v. Galloway, a case in which a federal appeals court on June 7 that the plain- diction against Proposition 8 and allow same-sex couples to marry “as quickly as possible.”

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Aussie author strips bible’s babble bare

By Richard Silverwood

From Australian atheist Edward Falzon’s Facebook page: I was born in Sydney, city of sinners. In the mid-50s, my family moved north to Brisbane, city of slow-driving sinners. Raised Catholic, I came to my senses in my teens, partly because I found religion to be utterly boring, and partly because I discovered that girls are generally more worthy of my attention.

My interest in religion was rekindled to a certain extent when, quite accidentally, I went onto a date with a born-again Christian. It was strange to me that an intelligent, super-hot girl was so caught up in that absurd bag of tricks, which we began to snidely at the end of our first date. Not the best first date in history.

Bigots are always quick to refer to the process by which opposing marriage, attributing their prejudices to the will of God. But how well do they actually know the book that they harp on about so much? Do they know that the same book encourages human sacrifice? Are they aware that it also prohibits wearing clothing produced from multiple types of thread?

In Being Gay Is Disgusting ([2010], Daun), author Edward Falzon, 38, points out that Christian fundamentalists are cherry-picking which parts of their holy scriptures they follow to fit in with their own prejudices. He points out that the biblical god displays a code of morality that is a world away from that of most contemporary Christians, and he draws attention to the bits of “the Good Book” that nobody who isn’t completely insane would ever think of following.

I caught up with Edward to learn more about his controversial book.

Q. What was the inspiration for the book?
A. Years ago, I went on a date with a born-again Christian. Other than her need to pray out loud in restaurants, she was a nice person, and I wondered what made her so enamored with Christianity. I started reading a bible, and on the first page, I read that the sun is inside the sky of Earth, the moon is a source of light and the stars were created to see the sun. I concluded that no semi-intelligent Christian could possibly have read any bible and set about summarizing the whole thing.

Q. Do you think Christianity’s popularity is declining because most Christians aren’t actually familiar with the bible?
A. I certainly do. Even Christian websites concede that only about 5% of Christians have read a bible all the way through. There’s a reason atheists are more familiar with biblical contents: Most were religious, then given to read the owner’s manual and thought, “What the hell?”

Q. Which of the immoral and bizarre decrees supposedly handed down by God is the most disturbing?
A. It’s probably a 15-way tie. Maybe killing your children for being disobe­dient or slicing open the bellies of unarmed, pregnant women for being Canaanite. How about a god requiring a man to gut his own son to test how much he fears his shed? Slavery is not only sanctioned but mandated and codified. Rape is an effective way to gain a wife. The list goes on.

Q. Why the subtitle “God likes the smell of burning fat?”
A. Parity for suckers and partly to further illustrate the nonsense in these allegedly holy books. In the U.S. (“One nation under God”), no organization lobbies the government to burn the fat of sacrificed animals to please Yahweh. Churches don’t even do it themselves, but yet they still scream about how gayness is a sin.

Q. Why is humor such a powerful tool for exposing religion?
A. Humor is sometimes the best approach to subjects that some consider sensitive because they’ve got little choice but to laugh at a concept when it’s distilled to its purest, simplest form. For example, it’s genuinely laughable when it becomes apparent that Genesis claims Abraham got rich from pipping out his 90-year-old wife.

Q. When did you first begin to question your faith?
A. Actually, I didn’t just grow out of it. By the time I was about 13, I neither knew nor cared whether the Christian god existed and was quite unaware of any other religion. It seems to me that faith is like a leaky battery; if you don’t plug in and charge up at a church at least once a week, it drains out of you. You just forget about it and move on with your life.

Q. Why, as you have said, is Christianity particularly harmful to children?
A. It’s quite clear that threatening kids with eternal damnation, hellfire and suffering is going to cause them considerable distress, so that probably doesn’t need underscoring. More subtle yet equally harmful is how religion teaches kids and adults that it’s OK to believe something without the slightest shred of evidence, and even to believe things in the face of evidence to the contrary.

It also conditions people to disbelief such as Darwinian evolution on the grounds that they’re unpalatable to their authority figures. This is upside-down thinking that stagnates and often reverses individual and societal progress.

Q. How has the gay community received your book?
A. I’ve had many positive reviews and none that were negative. They get the joke. In fact, my book barely men­

Despite the title, the book barely mentions homosexuality.

Lucky 7

Anna Pierre, mayoral candidate in North Miami, Fla., didn’t fare so well in the May 14 election despite her claim of maybe the Highest Powered endorsement a candidate could have. Pierre got 56 votes (0.83%) to finish seventh out of seven candidates. At a campaign stop on election day, Pierre told an NBC affiliate, “If I’m a freak and nuts for Jesus, let it be! Let the world know that Jesus is it, and when you have Jesus on your side, you can go on.”
The complaint alleges Kooppa went to a roof of the church where the boy was kissing his friend, kissed her on the lips and touched her breasts. "Kooppa told [the girl he loved her] and when he was done with her he wanted to come to her house so they could be together," said Anthony James Napier, 51, Afton, ME. 31 counts of first-degree sexual assault and 12 counts of second-degree sexual assault by a person younger than 12 years. Napier, who ran Needless & 3, is accused of molesting a girl between the ages of 10-16 in the 1990s at his residence.

The statute of limitations had expired. A religious official, is accused of molesting a girl between the ages of 10-13 in the 1990s and 1991-92.

The woman alleged she was raped the first time after Biizumot put a sedative in her drink. She said she woke up naked in her room,plus awake,impossible to remove her clothes so he could molest her.

The woman who called police six months after the incident said she had been planning to leave New York and go to the City Harvest evangelical church, is accused of losing a child who was his 15-year-old son.

Gray's brother-in-law, a Kansas police officer. "The man has been provisionally detained pending an exit at 85 mph. He failed a field sobriety test.

"The pastor called in his general manager to the church. The officer was identified as William Carney, the pastor at First Free Will Baptist Church, allegedly assaulted a victim at the church's parking lot.

"They are trying to tell everyone they could steal documents. Source: Thomson Times-Daily.

"He is still a priest, but he cannot administer any sacraments, nor can he preach," said Fr. Larry Helmlinger, 52, Lynn, MA. Unlawful sex, lewd and lascivious acts, and oral copulation with a minor. Gray, pastor at Anchor Baptist Church, is accused of molesting a 12-year-old girl in 2013.

"The Bible teaches that there is no evangelism without persecution of 13 and 17. Dudovitz, formerly a rabbi at the Chabad House of Northwest Indiana, is charged with molesting a 15-year-old boy in 2006. Source: Yonhap News, 5-20-13

The website.

"There is nothing to prevent him from appealing the ruling, but it is likely he will receive the 2013. She taught church bible classes.

"The reason I left was because of the financial problem at the church. In my entire time at the church, there were no credentialed for a field trip organized by Centerpoint Church in Fair Oaks.

Pereira, pastor of the City Harvest evangelical church, is accused of assaultin his role as principal for Vida Real Internacional Congregation, is accused of raping a 15-year-old girl.

"He is currently being investigated by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement in connection with the boy's death. "The reason I left was because of the financial problem at the church. In my entire time at the church, there were no credentialed for a field trip organized by Centerpoint Church in Fair Oaks.

Pereira, pastor of the City Harvest evangelical church, is accused of molesting a 15-year-old boy in 2006. Source: Yonhap News, 5-20-13

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accounts were closed or had insufficient funds.

lentown churches he ran — Pneuma Life Center

was involved in criminal activity. Edri shot Liber-

had been seized.

They just want money,” Hansen said.

had been seized.

had opened at the yeshiva but had never

were guilty of wounding Eliyahu Liberty, 26, after learning he

Ty twice in the foot and struck him with the gun.

with her family.

with her family.

were guilty of concealing a dead body.

of about 400 victims

of indecent assault and 2 counts of attempted

for sexual purposes.

of 1 year in prison and 5 years in

for gagging his wife with a rubber ball and stran-

of a 14-year-old boy who killed himself in 1983, allegedly

Canada, 5-28-13

of indecent assault and 2 counts of attempted

of sexually touching a minor, 10 counts of invit-

of sexually touching a minor.

of an unknown person masturbating.

The victim had gone to the pastor for help with

of the basics of one simple day,” a victim said at

of sexually touching a minor, 10 counts of invit-

on 8 convictions for sexual offenses against

of convert[ing] a 16-year-old boy to Islam.

of a child, 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct for having

of the defendant.

of multiple sclerosis, strokes, Alzheimer’s, Par-

of St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church in

of 1 year in prison and 5 years in

of indecent assault.

of the driver of the car he alleged he tipped off

of 17 counts; 1 each of possession of child pornography

of 2 counts of mail and wire fraud, 1 each of

of the Archdiocese of Chicago, accusing the

of 10 counts of suspicion of abuse against him in

of about 400 sexual abuse victims

About 30 Illinois plaintiffs have sued the

for a sexual purpose.

of 2 counts of attempted

of insurers who marketed antiretroviral medications.

of 1 year in prison and 5 years in

of indecent assault and 2 counts of attempted

of the 5th arrest in the last 8 months for Bertrand,

of 2 counts of attempted

of 1 year in prison and 5 years in

of criminal sexual conduct.

of indecent assault and 2 counts of attempted

of 1 year in prison and 5 years in

of an unknown person masturbating.

The boy’s family sued the Carmelites, claim-

of 11 counts; 1 each of possession of child pornography

of 2 counts of attempted

of 1 year in prison and 5 years in

of criminal sexual conduct.

of 3 counts of mail and wire fraud, 1 each of

was Kern’s father, who ran Pneuma Life Center, a

of 2 counts of mail and wire fraud, 1 each of

for trying to coerce him into performing

a year in prison.

against him in 1999.

and kissing them. The secretary was fired after

of 100 videos of fornication.

was Kern’s father, who ran Pneuma Life Center, a

of 1 year in prison and 5 years in

for being an agent of a sex

of 1 year in prison and 5 years in

of criminal sexual conduct.

of 1 year in prison and 5 years in

against a man at various locations (Wert’s home,

of the driver of the car he alleged he tipped off

of 1 year in prison and 5 years in

of indecent assault.

of an egg who is 16.

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of criminal sexual conduct.
Dear Annie Laurie:

Attached is a photo I found in 2006 of molesting 2 boys in Wisconsin during the 1960s. Ratigan pleaded guilty to possession of child pornography. According to court authorities and all procedures laid down by the church, church committee is reviewing the allegations.

-Dear Annie Laurie:

-one of the churches I had attended in the 1960s.

-He also alleged the trial to use "rubbers" because a girl can "yell rape" during sex.

-Eyes on the prize? Follow Billy Graham's eyes and assess his gaze. A little more than clinical, i.e., compassionately?

-He was ordained in 1973 and defrocked in 2009 but was never criminally charged.

-About 30 minutes after Rafael Padilla communicated at the annual Night of Roses banquet the Niles Chamber of Commerce at the Beach at the annual Night of Roses banquet, the Niles Chamber of Commerce at the Beach at the annual Night of Roses banquet.
Some valuable advice about after-life

FFRF’s exciting plans for an expanded building inspire me to send you $5,000 to become an After-Life Member. You do so much to nudge (or sometimes force) the world in a kinder, more rational direction that, even though I’m now paid up for over half as many lives as a cat has, I’ll continue to make annual contributions to support your wonderful work.

Thank you for all your inspiration and the pen, which I will wear with pride and will be a “conversation starter,” as are my other freethought pins. We intend to spend our last dime on our after-life preparations for this event, our financial advisor suggested that we list FFRF and other organizations and people explicitly as beneficiaries for our IRAs, life insurance, etc. In contrast, if we pour these investments into our general estate, they may incur the standard rate for probate fees, expenses charged by our executor, etc.

Chuck Berry
Pennsylvania

Poetry that’s music to FFRF’s ears

Here’s our double thousand bucks to educate some ignorant clucks. There’s no “Jesus fish” from me, nor more from Bill, to spite those who say we’re goin’ to hell.

Kabirah FFRF, keep up the good fight despite the wrath of the “righteous” Right.

Lorraine and Bill Davis

Proud new Lifetime Members
Maine

... I’ve been planning to send in my lifetime Membership for months. Hurry!

Barbara Colley
Oregon

Fan of Zeus, Beatles pays tribute to FFRF

Who says you can’t prove God doesn’t exist? It only takes a simple four-word sentence: “Perfection can’t create imperfection.” The Bible says God is perfect. The Bible says God created man and Earth. The Bible says God is perfect. The Bible says God created man and Earth.

Lorraine and Bill Davis

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Barbara Colley
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Family Foundation head values Foundation

My mentor and very close friend, James Smith, Ralphud (formerly of Ann Arbor, Mich., but now living in Florida), suggested I consider supporting the Freedom From Religion Foundation as well as our supportive American United for Separation of Church and State. Having read your April 2013 Freethought Today, I am enclosing this check for $1,000 payable from our Family Foundation.

I love the “Crank Mail” for the wonder of ironies about Christian charity it reveals and the “Black Collar Crime,” which goes on and on revealing hypocrisy after hypocrisy. This is quite amusing we’re not such serious stuff.

Thanks to you for your good work and for Jim for recommending this avenue for our charity.

Peter Heydon
Michigan

‘Christian nation’ piece much appreciated

I loved your Jan/Feb newspaper so much I can’t stop thinking about it, especially Andrew Seidel’s article on “Debunking the Christian nation.” All articles were excellent and necessary, but Andrew’s article for me was something I never thought I would see in my lifetime.

Has he or anyone thought of debunking the words “Jesus Christ,” since one meaning in the dictionary for Christ is “an ideal lifestyle?”

Peggy Coulson
Texas

FFRF offers sanctuary for the secular

As a federal employee living and working in the D.C. area, I was thrilled to see our full-page ad today in the Washington Post on the National Day of Prayer. And with all the religious lunatics continuing their mayhem (e.g., Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, etc.)

It reveals and the “Black Collar Crime,” against it does not make it a bandwagon for atheists to jump on.

If we do things just because Christians are against them, our actions are still being determined by them. I would appreciate it if Freethought Today would only publish articles dealing directly with nontheism.

Sue Gibson
Missouri

‘Jesus fish’ symbol preceded Christianity

Your staff attorney, Elizabeth Cavell, successfully eliminated a “Jesus fish” from City Hall in Rolla, Mo. [May ’13]. This would be even better to publicize the traditional meaning of the so-called Jesus fish, and more amusing.

For the vast majority of its thousands of years as a symbol, this sacred fish sign has represented female genitalia as the “gate of life.” In India it’s well known as the holy yoni. How it came to be “Jesusied” is fully described on page 175 of my book Man Made God [ffrf.org/shop/books/].

I think “if they only knew” and enjoy a good laugh every time I see a mag- ic yoni on the bumper sticker of some fundamentalized car.

Barbara G. Walker, Life Member
Florida

Liked FFRF national ads, missed the mail

I received my Freethought Today and read it cover to cover. I miss the crank letters, although I can understand if you are no longer going to print them. They are vile, but they are the one thing I point out when I pass on a copy of the paper to others.

I love the ad you ran in the Washington Post on the National Day of Prayer. It was a similar ad in the Los Angeles Times (“Time to Quit the Catholic Church”) last July 4 that caused me to join your organization.

I didn’t realize that May 2 was the National Day of Prayer or I would have sought out a place to demonstrate, picket or otherwise make my feelings known.

Pat Hall
California

Editor’s note: The cranks got squeezed for lack of space and return this issue on page 26.

Shelley: ‘Hail to thee, blithe spirit!’

In “Inhaling spirituality’s heady fumes” [Dec 13], Dan Barker is quoted saying, “If something exists, then it must be measured or measurable. How much does spirit weigh? How much space does it take up?”

Under that premise, then, love cannot be measured, nor can it be measurable. Does that mean love doesn’t exist? How about happiness? How much does happiness weigh, or how much space does it take up?

I’ve noticed in recent months increasingly strong efforts by intellectual secularists to encourage us nonbelievers to erase the words “spirit” and “spirits” from our vocabulary. They explain that those words have a supernatural connotation and are therefore contaminated with superstition.

Let us consider, however, the word “demons,” which is also associated with the supernatural. Yet, down through the centuries, certain gifted artists and composers have been described as “battling their demons.”

Are we to assume, then, that intelligent readers will interpret those “de- mons” literally as ugly red creatures with horns, goatees, cloven feet and long tails? Of course not! They understood those “demons” are metaphors that describe the emotional anguish of temperamental artists as they struggle to satisfy their creative hunger.

If we are to breathe life into our description of deep emotions and experiences, we will need to use some form of allegory or symbolism. Natural lan- guage simply can’t create the desired effect. Certain ecstasies (such as falling in love) create an unbridgeable gap between what we experience and what we can portray. How could anyone de-
scribe romantic love in cold, natural or scientific language and find it satisfying.

Let’s also not forget that the openly atheist poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, opened one of his most loved poems, “To a Skylark,” with the words: “Hail to thee, bright spirit!” Does that imply that perhaps Shelley was not an atheist after all? Or that he had doubts about his nonbelief?

Would of course not! The poet was merely describing, with imaginative language, a beautiful singing bird. Even though we don’t believe in the supernatural, I hope we never lose our sense of mysterious wonder when we gaze into our beloved’s eyes or the eyes of a little child.

David Quintero
California

Valedictorian’s prayer was merely childish

Although Liberty High School graduate Costner in South Carolina purposely flouted the law to proselytize his religious beliefs in a public forum, the court ruled that Costner’s speech bears the marks of the American political tradition. Costner’s intent was to dare his teachers, his principal, anyone in authority, and the public to stop his address and interrupt the Lord’s Prayer. He knew exactly what he was doing, and he knew he would not be stopped! It wasn’t a “calculated risk,” it was a sure thing. When was the last or the first time anyone has been interrupted or stopped while reciting the Lord’s Prayer? Blackballed at the stake?

His actions were more like a 5-year-old having a temper tantrum than a young man who is a leader and the class valedictorian. He is someone who ignores rules, embarrasses his school, and gloats over his triumphs, especially at the expense of others.

Jeanne Owers
Texas

Christian movie review led to more hilarity

I read Sarah Encalano’s review of “Facing the Giants” [May13] aloud to my husband and we both laughed until we cried. It motivated me to go to YouTube and waste two hours of my life watching the movie.

We found it beyond the tripe, but what about that creepy guy who walks the halls speaking prayers over the kids’ lockers? To me, that was one of the weirdest things in the movie.

Julie Johnson
Georgia

The “mysterious unknown” only divides people

This May 23 letter to the editor of the Arizona Daily Star by FFRF Life Member Al was headlined “Perfect differences, commonalities.” It refers to criticism of atheist state Rep. Juan Mendez, D-Tompe, by Rep. Steve Smith, R-Maricopa, for deliving a public “Innovation” to open the May 21 House session (see Newsnotes page XX)

I pray (hope) that Rep. Steve Smith, while appreciating our commonalities, comes to respect our honest differences.

Rep. Jimena Padilla-Shaw showed much liberating wisdom telling Mr. Smith: “Your God is no more powerful than my God.”

The great theologian Karl Rahner insists that “God is a mystery.” So why keep letting the mysteriously unknown divide us when we are all praying for what atheist Mendez praised (hoped for) Is it faith-based blindness we saw recently on a bloodied street in London (his God is great), is it our frustration with our limited power when gunshots and weather kill innocent adults and children?

Let’s all hope (pray to each other) that we can lovingly open our eyes to each other’s real common hopes and dreams when we get free of blind superstitions of the past. The Golden Rule still works for all, believers and nonbelievers.

Member’s mailman moves in mysterious ways

I was very much looking forward to receiving my FFRF debaptismal certificate signed by Dan Barker, so I can imagine my horror when I discovered that my postman doesn’t share my desire to keep church and state separate. I even imagine my horror when I discovered that my postman doesn’t share my desire to keep church and state separate.

But when I opened the envelope, what did I see? Behold! Two sheets of parchment in perfect condition! It’s a miracle! Or something. Probably just materials science. But something, I’m sure of it.

Of course, I only managed to print my name on one of them correctly (but hey, 50% ain’t bad, right?), so I guess the miracle was somewhat limited and/or didn’t extend to my inkjet printer.

Nick Frohli
Pennsylvania

Whooa there: God + 1 equals majorities?

“Regarding religion and democracy, “Me and God make a majority,” declared my Pentecostal friend, ungrammatically. We were allies on a political campaign (to save 12 acres of City College land from a developer), so I never argued religion with her.

I can guarantee she was the real thing. One day she invited me over for lunch, and after lunch she talked in tongues. It raised the hairs on the back of my neck.

Obviously, it would be difficult to rule that people using their vote brought God with them, producing a great multiplicity of majorities.

Sid Kass
California

IRS won’t stop religious electioneering?

The Alliance Defending Freedom’s “Pulpit Freedom Sunday” blatantly violates 501(c)(3) rules against political campaigning by religious organizations. The IRS will not enforce the rules against churches like they do to the rest of us. Why? Afraid of offending the religious, right-wing community?

The tea party screams discrimination but says nothing about getting away with Pulpit Freedom Sunday. I demand Congress hold hearings and investigate and order the IRS to enforce the law. What’s good for the goose …

Ray Sparrow
Florida

Editor’s note: Read about FFRF’s lawsuit challenging church politicalizing on page 6.

Smile, you made it through another night

Smile, breathe deeply, it’s another bright sunny day in little ol’ Mascouah, Ill. I received a nice birthday card from a host of freethinking friends in Madison, Wis. My children are all coming home tomorrow, I’m still planting dahlias, we have four huge buckets of them waiting on my shoe. My house is dusty, but I don’t care. Life is short; make fun of it. As my old friend Em- ily Dickinson, an informed atheist/freethinker and America’s No. 1-rated female poet ever (Walt Whitman and Robert Frost tied for first among male poets) reminded us: That it will never come again. What makes life so sweet believing what we don’t believe. Does not exhilarate. Enjoy each day as though it is going to be your last. Make “to do good” your religion.

Joseph Cunningham, FFRF Officer
Illinois

Just call it ‘Freedom of Religion’

It’s common for nefarious nations to activate ambitious belligerence. And for various denominations to advocate malicious religiosity. Christian, Muslim, Hindu — what’s in a name? We’re all God—licensed to slaughter the other; and do.

J.B Kennedy
California

Keep currency neutral regarding God

One objection to “In God We Trust” is that it is not accurate. In order to be accurate, the motto would have to be changed to “In Various Gods Some of Us Trust.”

Some claim that removing the mot- to from our money would advance the atheist position. That is not so.

The atheist position would be to put the motto “There Is No God” on our money. Having neither a pro-nor an anti-religious motto is the neutral position and the position mandated by the Establishment Clause.

Charles A. Wilson, Life Member California

Minnesota nice

From left are Ken Eck, Cathi Harding and Lara Harding, members of the Grand Rapids Atheists and Freethinkers, an FFRF chapter. They were part of a group of 12 GRAFers cleaning up a 2-mile stretch of highway. The ongoing effort is part of the group’s “Good Without God” campaign, Eck said: “Ironically, this section of highway became available to us because the Catholic churches of the Greenway area had dropped their sponsorship. So the heathens have picked up (literally) where the church dropped off.” (Alana Hughes photo)
Denver People’s Fair

FFRF’s Denver chapter tabled at the June 1 fair. From left are Lifetime Member Laura Cente, chapter president Caudette St. Pierre, and Lifetime Member Vince Borengasser. (Photo by Scot Schneider, chapter secretary.)

My sister told me that my mom asked her when I was going to baptize my kids. My sister just told her, “Mom, she doesn’t believe in that, why would she?”

Lillian Alfaro, a Latina atheist from Baltimore latina.com, 5-27-13

In addition to Iraq and Afghanistan, religious sentiment is strong in Ghana, Nigeria, Armenia and Fiji, where more than nine in 10 people say they’re religious. WIN/Gallup notes that religiosity is highest among the poor and, to a lesser extent, among the less educated, which certainly correlates among the most religious countries.

Max Fisher and Caitlin Dewey, poll analysis Washington Post, 5-23-13

The food was predictably terrible, the bed was unforgiving, and the only thing he was allowed to read was the bible. To start the song “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough” because it reminded him of his wife.

News story about Richard Ross, photographer, and professor at the University of California-Santa Barbara, who lost a second child after failing to seek medical help because of religious beliefs

Do you really believe in the afterlife? Do you believe God exists? Do you believe that if Heaven/hell are real “or not”, we must have faith? I do! — Amy Arthur

They did nothing to help that child. That’s why it’s murder.

Philadelphia prosecutor Joanne Pescatelli successfully argued against dismissal of charges against Herbert and Catherine Schable, who lost a second child after failing to seek medical help because of religious beliefs

I feel that religion, adopted purely, is ultimately representative of blindly making someone else’s beliefs your own.

Edward Snowden, U.S. spring whistle-blower, from a 2003 online comment when he joined the Army and listed himself as Jewish. When he was asked if he was a Jew, he replied “Oh, and I’m also Catholic. I’m Catholic in jackson ohio i dont see how it is any of your business if you want to know. — Dustin Bock, Delray Beach, Fla.

We fight for freedom of speech and right to bear arms. Ec. People like you make me sick being slaughtered in our schools? So I guess you could actually be charged with accessory to murder. — Tonny, Pennsylvania

You people are a minority in this country, God, Guns, and Guns built this country and you bunch of paranoia’s want God removed for our society. Why don’t you all move over to Afghanistan and live. You think it is so bad in this country? We laid of less on the line for you drafting cowards and you are out to spit at us every chance you get. — Dustin Bock, Delray Beach, Fla.

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Japanese-American escapes Christian nation myth

By Satoko Makino

Aloha:

This is just one example of how an immigrant can be mired into thinking that he or she must be a Christian to be a true American. I also want you to know there is someone like me reading your newspaper.

I grew up going to a Christian church in Japan, only because my parents wanted a place where they could leave children on Sunday morning. I struggled to make sense out of the biblical stories as a child. The stories did not fit with what I was taught in history or science classes at school.

When I was in high school, my family migrated from Japan to the U.S. mainland. I had a very difficult time learning the unfamiliar language and fitting in the American high school culture. The school staff encouraged me to join a church youth group, a Christian one in order to be more “American.”

There was a church youth group leader who had access to our high school. He said my doubt about the bible’s authenticity was an insult to the U.S. and made me less patriotic. He told me I would never understand American culture unless I became a Christian. I decided to be baptized.

I misunderstood thinking that the U.S. was a Christian nation. The people in his church had a very firm opinion about my birth country: Japan was never going to be recognized as a Christian nation.

My doubt grew stronger as I matured. History, anthropology and philosophy classes in college never helped my Christian faith. “Praying until inconsistencies disappear” was not an acceptable problem-solving skill.

My doubt was heightened when George W. Bush took office as president. It was obvious he was totally incompetent as a president despite being such a devoted Christian. But by then, I had my whole social life built around church.

When I expressed my doubts, my friends told me to pray until I no longer saw inconsistencies in the bible. I did not have the courage to admit I was not a believer. I was afraid I would be persecuted for not trying to be American enough.

But after awhile, it was too uncomfortable to pretend I believed in Jesus. I did not want to lie to myself and friends at the church. I never announced my lack of faith, but I completely withdrew from church activities. I lost many friends and moved out of the area.

Currently I reside in Hawaii, where generations of Japanese-Americans have established unique communities. I see many Japanese-American people belonging to Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, but many are totally nonreligious. They are proud to be American regardless of their faith or nonfaith.

Now I look back on what made me believe I had to be a Christian to be a true American. My desire to be an “American” was twisted by the Christian church. I was naive. I wanted to have friends and belong to something in a country where I knew nobody. It was my fault.

A very simple and easy conclusion came out of a very long soul-searching process: I am happy to be an American without religion.

Mahalo [thank you] and thank you for reading.

FFRF member Satoko Makino is an accounting student at the University of Phoenix, she lives with her daughter Cherry, their cats Vanilla and Honeybee and dog Pua.

FreeThought Music available online

By Steve Brecker

I am an FFRF member in Virginia and I’ve just launched a new venture that I want to share with other members. I am calling my project FreeThought Music.

There are hundreds of radio stations in the marketplace catering to religious talk and music programming but few outlets where freethinkers can enjoy music with freethought messages.

FreeThought Music is an Internet radio station that streams a wide selection of musical styles, all of which promote freethought messages. It’s available 24/7 so you can listen anywhere and anytime via your computer, tablet or smartphone.

To visit, go to live365.com/stations/foothoughtmusic/.

You may need to register for the free membership to Live365 in order to access my station. But you do not need to sign up for the trial VIP membership. Just complete and submit the free registration and log in with your user name and password. (The benefit of VIP membership is that you don’t get interrupted by commercials.)

FreeThought Music’s playlist currently includes 40 selections. I’m looking to grow it with as much musical diversity as possible. All musical styles are programmed, including classical, jazz, country, rock, pop, folk and Broadway musicals. It’s a veritable cornucopia of freethought musical expression!

I realize that due to the broad selection, some people may not like some of what they hear. Some people don’t enjoy heavy metal rockand others don’t like jazz. But I’m betting that most freethinkers are also open-minded enough to stay tuned to find music they do enjoy and selections that may grow to like.


All of the music programmed is available for purchase via download or CD purchase through a link to Amazon.com. Click on the track listing in the “Last Played” window that you wish to purchase.

Most of the music can also be purchased through Amazon via another site I’m building, freethoughtmarketplace.com. This site is still under construction but is functional and purchases can be made.

I welcome all comments and suggestions for music selections to add. Thanks!

Meet the newest staffers

FFRF publicist Lauryn Seering (left) and journalism intern Sarah Eucalano take a break from office chores. (Photo: Andrew Seidel)
Joining the 36th annual national FFRF convention lineup, with each receiving FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award, will be columnist Dan Savage, and Arizona state Rep. Juan Mendez. The Sept. 27-29 convention starts Friday and ends Sunday at the Concourse Hotel, 1 West Dayton St., in downtown Madison, Wis.

Syndicated sex columnist Savage was offered FFRF’s special award, reserved for public figures who make known their dissent from religion, after writing, “I haven’t spent my post-Catholic decades in a sulk, wishing the church would come around on the issue of homosexuality so that I could start attending Mass again. I didn’t abandon my faith. I saw through it.” (New York Times, 4-11-13)

The activist, whose new book is called American Savage, is co-founder with his husband Terry Miller of the “It Gets Better Project” on YouTube to inspire hope for LGBT young people facing harassment. Mendez made national news when he bravely delivered a freethought invocation May 21 instead of a prayer before the state House of Representatives. Mendez asked legislators not to bow their heads but instead to look up, and unvoked Carl Sagan instead of a deity. Mendez, a first-term legislator, is a public atheist and secular humanist.

Also joining the lineup will be Life Member Ellery Schempp, who instigated the lawsuit ending in the landmark 1963 Supreme Court decision Abington v. Schempp. The decision declared school bible reading and recitation of the Lord’s Prayer unconstitutional. Ellery, a retired scientist, will celebrate the decision’s 50th anniversary.

Also on hand to celebrate the 56th anniversary of the first major Supreme Court decision against religious instruction in public schools will be Life Member Jim McCollum. Jim, who teaches constitutional law, was at the center of a firestorm when his mother, Vashli McCollum, challenged religious instruction in Champaign, Ill., public schools.

Jay Rosenstein, director of the Peabody Award-winning documentary about Jim’s case, “The Lord Is Not on Trial Here Today,” will introduce his riveting 56-minute documentary.

Plenty of entertainment will balance the enlightenment, including Jill Sobule and Julia Sweeney, who’ll team up for a delightful set that mixes witty singing with social commentary. Julia is an author, playwright, actress and comedian. She’ll sign copies of her DVD “Letting Go of God,” and her newest book If It’s Not One Thing It’s Your Mother.

Jill, who wrote the title song for “Letting Go of God,” has had a Top 40 hit, released many albums and writes commentary on Huffington Post. They’ll entertain at the piano and include selections from FFRF’s new CD “Adrift on the Sound of Music.”

Julia Sweeney (left) and Jill Sobule promise convention-goers some great entertainment. Also singing, Shelley Segal.

Register online at: http://ffrf.org/outreach/convention

Return with payment to: FFRF, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701

Freedom From Religion Foundation’s 36th Annual Convention September 27-28, 2013 The Madison Concourse Hotel Madison, Wisconsin

Make checks payable to “FFRF”

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If gluten-free, please specify.
* Most prices include 20% gratuity & 5.5% sales tax

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City/State/ZIP Please include phone/email (in case we have a question about your registration)

Avoid disappointment and book your room now at the Concourse for the convention rate of $149 plus tax, double, triple and quadruple. Phone 1-800-356-8293 or 608-257-6000. Register online indicating you’re with the Freedom From Religion Foundation block. The registration number to verify the room block is 211725.

The event features a reception with plentiful hors d’oeuvres on Friday, Sept. 27, early registration and FFRF staff workshop presentations (attorneys and media). The convention format opens at 7 p.m. (concluding with a complimentary cake reception).

Two optional group meals are offered, the Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast (including 20% gratuity and 5.5% sales tax) and the banquet dinner ($35). Friday dinner and Saturday lunch are on your own.

The membership and Board of Director meetings are Sunday morning (just to be sacrilegious), adorning by noon. Details: fff.org/outreach/convention