

Freethought Today

Complimentary Copy
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FFRF sues Calif. city for pervasive Christian prayers

The Freedom From Religion Foundation filed a lawsuit Nov. 1 in California state court against the city of Pismo Beach, challenging prayers at city council meetings and the city chaplaincy post.

The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments Nov. 6 in a related and closely watched case involving a challenge by two plaintiffs to Christian prayer by the town of Greece, N.Y. The plaintiffs are women, one atheist and one Jewish, who are seeking to invoke protections under the U.S. Constitution.

FFRF's new lawsuit invokes only the California Constitution's No Preference and Establishment Clauses, as well as a civil rights provision. Regardless of how the Supreme Court decides the Greece case, FFRF's case can proceed, and could carve out protections against government prayer for all citizens in the country's most populated state.

Plaintiffs are FFRF, which has about 2,800 California members, and local FFRF member, Dr. Sari Dworkin, who is also a member of Atheists United of San Luis Obispo, which brought the First Amendment violation to FFRF's

attention. AUSLO and FFRF have been preparing the suit for more than a year.

Dworkin, who identifies as "an atheist Jew," was surprised to encounter the council's Christian prayers, which "cause her to feel offended, disenfranchised, and intimidated about participating in her own government."

Pismo Beach established an official city chaplaincy in 2005, appointing a Pentecostal preacher, Rev. Paul Jones. He's affiliated with the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, which emphasizes "speaking in tongues" (although he has refrained from doing that during city council prayers). Jones delivered 112 of the 126 prayers scheduled by the council between Jan. 1, 2008, and Oct. 15, 2013. All but one of the 126 prayers were addressed to the Christian god.

In virtually every city prayer, Jones pressured citizens and the council to live a Christian lifestyle, to vote for "righteous" leaders and to make decisions that honor Jones' particular god. The board meets twice a month.

At least 54 of the prayers contained a "Christianized" view of history. FFRF's

Continued on back page

Off with their 'Head of Christ'

FFRF, ACLU settle Jesus portrait case

The Freedom from Religion Foundation and the American Civil Liberties

Union of Ohio have settled a lawsuit against the Jackson City School



Columbus Dispatch/Doral Chenoweth III

This Feb. 12 photo shows a painting of Jesus Christ above the entrance to Jackson Middle School in Jackson, Ohio. At right is a "Hall of Honor" showing famous Jackson residents and school alumni.



Photo: Eric Knutke

Crossroads of the World

Steve Salemsen, Wisconsin, was opportunely in New York City in late October to visit FFRF's Times Square billboard. Steve regularly volunteers at the Madison office. About a third of a million people pass through Times Square daily. FFRF's message is on the same digital billboard at 42nd Street and 8th Avenue as the Answers in Genesis message saying, "To all our atheist friends: Thank God you're wrong." (See back page for more photos.)

Inside This Issue



Arizona Rep. Juan Mendez: Emperor Has No Clothes Awardee

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FFRF Convention Photography Pages 8-14



FFRF State/Church Victories Page 16

District in Jackson, Ohio, with the district agreeing not to continue to display a portrait of Jesus.

FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote a Jan. 2 letter of complaint on behalf of parents with students at the school, provoking Superintendent Phil Howard to publicly vow that the "Head of Christ" painting would only be removed by court order.

That order came in October in the form of a consent decree mandating that the portrait be permanently removed from school property. Parties agreed to a financial settlement requiring the school to pay the plaintiffs a combination of damages and legal fees totaling \$95,000. FFRF's share of the legal fees was \$7,500.

"We're pleased that the plaintiffs — parents and students — whose identities will be protected, will each receive \$3,000 in claims and damages," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "It's just and appropriate that stu-

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Dayna Long traded Lutheranism for atheism.

Meet an Activist Staffer

Name: Dayna Elizabeth Long.
Where and when I was born: I was born in Urbana, Ill., in 1989.
Education: I graduated from the University of Illinois in 2011 with a degree in English literature.
How I came to work at FFRF: I was working at a software company but knew I wanted to be doing work that was more meaningful to me and would also allow me to spend more time volunteering for the National Organization for Women [Dayna is the newly elected volunteer president of the Wisconsin chapter of NOW]. When I saw that FFRF was hiring, I jumped on it.
What I do here: I'm an administrative assistant, so I get the mail, process sales orders, answer the phone, do some data entry plus a hundred other miscellaneous things.
What I like best about it: It's really wonderful to work in an office where I can be very open about my atheism and also my politics without worrying about offending anyone. Also, everyone who works here is really bright and funny. I laugh all day long.
What sucks about it: Occasional long lines at the post office.
I spend a lot of time thinking about: Feminism, activism, politics and how my cats, Oscar and Sally, spend their time when I'm not around.
I spend little if any time thinking

about: Answering a question like this.
My religious upbringing was: Zilch. My family started attending a Lutheran church when I was 15, but happily it was a short-lived practice.
My doubts about religion started: When I was pretty young. I can remember asking my mom if she thought God was real around the same time that I started asking why she and Santa Claus used the same wrapping paper. When I was in my late teens and early 20s and really growing into feminism, I became frustrated with organized religion's attempts to impose its doctrine on everyone, especially on issues like same-sex marriage and reproductive rights.
When I moved to Madison after college, I started hanging out with UW's student group Atheists, Humanists, and Agnostics, which is when I became comfortable openly identifying as an atheist.
Things I like: My cats, chai tea lattes, nonfiction, incredible female leaders and great Wisconsin beer. Also blueberry danish.
Things I smite: Sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, drivers who don't observe pedestrian crosswalks and online dating.
In my golden years: I'll have constitutional equality under the Equal Rights Amendment! I hope.

Welcome to 19 new 'Lifers,' from 11 states, Canada

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is grateful and pleased to announce 19 new Lifetime Members. One new "Lifer" prefers anonymity. The others are:
Raymond Borkowski, Dorothea M. Case, Howard G. Cowper, Allison Davis, Michael Doyle, Vernon Getlinger, Nancy Hertz, Waldemar Janowski, Steve Lowe, Lisa Lynch, Nate Manderfeld, Raul Martinez (gift from Michael Jacobson), Kenneth B. Millard, Joan Reisman-Brill, Eric C. Sanders, Roger Scholten, J. Darwin Soder (already an "After Lifer") and Louis Tremblay.

States represented are California, Florida, District of Columbia, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, Oregon, Wisconsin and the Canadian province of Saskatchewan.
Correction: The October issue last month incorrectly listed Kathy Pettycrew as a new Lifetime Member. Her husband, Bruce Pettycrew, should have been welcomed. Kathy is already a Lifetime Member.

Thank you to Bruce, Louis, J. Darwin, Roger, Eric, Joan, Kenneth, Michael gifting Raul, Nate, Lisa, Steve, Waldemar, Nancy, Vernon, Michael, Allison, Howard, Dorothea, Raymond and Anonymous!
Lifetime Memberships are available for \$1,000 per individual, go into a "rainy day" reserved account, ensure never another renewal notice and are deductible for income-tax purposes to the kind donor, as are all dues and donations to FFRF.

duct from taxable income a donation to FFRF that is given directly from your IRA account as part of your mandatory distribution.
You may transfer up to \$100,000 from a retirement account (traditional or Roth) to FFRF, which is a qualified 501(c)(3) charity. Congress extended the IRS charitable rollover to the end of 2013.

FFRF rates 4 stars again

For many years, FFRF has been rated "four stars" by Charity Navigator, America's largest independent evaluator of nonprofits. This fall, FFRF received notification it has retained Charity Navigator's "coveted 4-star rating for sound fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency. Receiving four out of a possible four stars indicates that your organization adheres to good governance and other best practices that minimize the chance of unethical activities and consistently executes its mission in a fiscally responsible way. Only 6% of the charities we rate have received at least four consecutive 4-star evaluations, indicating that Freedom From Religion Foundation outperforms most other charities in America. This 'exceptional' designation from Charity Navigator differentiates Freedom From Religion Foundation from its peers and demonstrates to the public it is worthy of their trust," writes Charity Navigator Ken Berger, president and CEO.

Senior FFRF donors: Take advantage of IRA rollover

A reminder that until the end of the year, seniors 70½ and older may de-

FFRF is CFC recipient

Federal employees take note: FFRF qualifies for your Combined Federal Campaign donations. The CFC code donors should use to designate their contribution is 32519.



'Saturn'alia
Minnesota Lifetime Member August Berkshire had his photo taken by "Lifer" Rachel Wilson.

Notify Us of Your Address Change Promptly!

Email: info@ffrf.org
Don't miss a single issue! If you move, notify us directly and promptly. **The Post Office does not forward third-class mail.** FFRF cannot be responsible for replacing back issues if we have not been notified prior to your move. Back issues, while they last, may be ordered for \$2 each.

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 November 2013 or earlier please renew! Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 gung-ho; \$25-student) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in Jan/Feb and June/July. Send membership or renewal to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701, ffrf.org/donate

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

Richard and Beverly Hermesen Student Activist Award

Student activist Kopplin fights faux science



Zack Kopplin, 20, received FFRF's first Richard and Beverly Hermesen Student Activist Award of \$5,000 for his impressive work to repeal a stealth creationism law in Louisiana. This is his acceptance speech, edited for print, given at FFRF's 36th national convention in September in Madison, Wis. He's now a history major at Rice University in Houston.

By Zack Kopplin

Thank you all so much for having me here so I can tell you about the fight for science in Louisiana and in the United States. My home state, Louisiana, is addicted to creationism.

In 1987, the Supreme Court threw out Louisiana's first creationism law in the *Edwards v. Aguillard* decision, but the creationists never give up. When we passed the misnamed and misguided Louisiana Science Education Act back in 2008, we became repeat offenders. I won't lie. It was really a pretty clever piece of legislation.

The act never once mentions creationism or intelligent design in order to dodge court rulings like *Edwards*, which said Louisiana cannot require that creationism be taught in public school science class, or the more recent 2005 case, *Dover v. Kitzmiller*, in which Judge John Jones ruled that intelligent design was creationism, too, just all

dressed up in a lab coat and therefore still patently unconstitutional.

Instead, the law allows and encourages teachers to use supplemental materials that "critique" evolution and other political controversies, including climate change and cloning. The overwhelming majority of scientists support evolution theory. This is only a controversy to Louisiana politicians.

But, because of this law, in our public school science classes, teachers can bring in materials that say the Earth is only thousands of years old. Throughout the bill and the talking points of proponents are references to the importance of teaching critical thinking.



Of course, you don't need a law to teach critical thinking in a science class — that's the whole point of a science class! Critical thinking is at the heart of the scientific method. You only need a law if you want to sneak unscientific and unconstitutional creationist supplemental materials into public school classrooms.

When he first introduced the bill, Sen. Ben Nevers let the cat out of the bag, explaining that a creationist group, the Louisiana Family Forum (which, by the way, claims to have drafted and promoted the LSEA) asked for the law so creationism could be taught in public schools.

"I've got no problem if a school board, a local school board, says we want to teach our kids about creationism, that some people have these beliefs as well," Gov. Bobby Jindal told NBC's "Education Nation."

When the state Board of Education originally wrote the rules implementing the LSEA, they specifically outlawed teaching creationism and intelligent design. The creationists went berserk and had those rules scrapped. The Livingston and Tangipahoa Parish boards went so far as to use the law to justify making creationism a man-



Photography by Brent Nicastro

datory part of the curriculum. This isn't just a Louisiana issue, though. Attacks on science come from all around the country, and the damage from science denial falls on all Americans. A prime example is Texas, which is currently adopting new science textbooks. And because it's Texas, creationists are attempting to undermine these biology books.

The state board has appointed "expert reviewers" to issue corrections to the textbook publishers. The issue is these experts are not experts. They're Discovery Institute fellows and members of the Creation Science Hall of Fame.



They have sent reviews to the textbook publishers, insisting they revise their books to say there are no transitional fossils and to include the "creation model" based on "biblical principles."

We need to stand up and launch a movement to fight for science. That's what I'm fighting for. We're standing up in Louisiana, we're standing up in Texas, and we need to stand up across the country.

Forging a coalition

When I was a senior in high school, I realized I had a voice and a moral responsibility to use it and started a campaign to repeal the Louisiana Science Education Act. The first thing I did was contact Dr. Barbara Forrest, one of the country's foremost leaders in fighting creationism. She happens to live just 25 miles down the road in one of our creationist hot spots, Livingston Parish.

We met and started working on the repeal. The first step was to find a legislator courageous enough to sponsor the repeal bill. The LSEA passed with only three votes against it.

I met with Sen. Karen Carter Peterson, one of the brave three, and she agreed to author the repeal legislation. Rep. Walt Leger agreed to handle our legislation when it got to the House.

When this campaign began, everyone told me that we didn't have a chance, that we were taking on powerful interests and it wasn't worth it. Our first repeal bill was defeated 5-1 in committee. We came back for a second try the next year and lost again. This year we lost again in a 3-2 vote but made progress and will be back again next spring. And we've done some incredible things along the way. We protected Louisiana's biology textbooks and now defeated four attempts to throw them out.

Nearly 40% of living Nobel laureate scientists have joined us. Major science organizations like the American Association for the Advancement of Science are on board. Public servants, including the full New Orleans City Council, and tens of thousands of others, have joined our cause.

Despite our progress, our issues have taken a new turn for the worse. It seemed like Governor Jindal had already done as much damage as he could to science education with the LSEA. Wrong.

The state has now passed a program that takes money from public schools and gives vouchers to creationist schools. The program has been ruled unconstitutional, but the Legislature could find a way around it.

I documented 20 private schools which blatantly teach creationism or use creationist curricula that could end up receiving over 1,300 voucher slots, which were initially slated to receive \$11 million in taxpayer funds annually. They've since decreased the amount to about \$4 million. If they manage to keep the program going, they're going

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Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

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

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

FFRF
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*Freedom Depends
on Freethinkers*



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

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

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

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

Thank you, God

God sends us wars to settle scores,
His holy bombs are deafening.
Our fierce belief brings blood and grief.
Oh, thank you, God, for everything.

He blesses us with pestilence,
Violence, and famine — hence
We sink down on our knees to sing
Thank you, God, for everything.

He won't explain His hurricanes
Or plagues or quakes or butchering.
Our very glands are in his hands:
Thank you, God, for everything.

He has a knack for taking back
His promises of anything.
But there's no shame, we praise His name:
O thank you, God, for everything.

© Philip Appleman 2013

Freethought Today is honored to publish this new poem.



Philip Appleman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible* (2012), *Darwin's Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used *Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, and the *Norton Critical Edition of Malthus' Essay on Population*.

His poetry and fiction have won many awards, including a fellowship in poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Center for Science Education. His work has appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *The Paris Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, and *The Yale Review*.

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

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

produced by the
Freedom From Religion
Foundation



Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

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

Slightly irreverent views,
news, music & interviews



Overheard

I'm not religious in terms of believing in organized religion. If you look at the genocide that happened in the witch hunts and the killing of women, it was about wiping out female power.



Actress Julia Ormond, who plays a witch in Lifetime's new series "The Witches of East End"
MCT News Service, 10-4-13

Secularism and excellence in moral reasoning are what's necessary for a high standard of human rights. So today at the dinner table, ask your kids where their rights come from. I have rights, you know. Really!? From where? Push them! Teach them a lesson! Because if you don't push them now, they'll be pushed, shoved and shot by religious fanatics later.

"Atheist in Wheaton" [Ill.] James Kirk Wall
ChicagoNow, 10-27-13

Ghana's economic productivity is under threat because workers are spending too much time at all-night church services, according to a senior cleric.
News story quoting Rev. Frimpong Manso, head of the Assemblies of God Church in Ghana, where two-thirds of the population is Christian
The Guardian, 10-28-13

If you believe that the world is only 6,000 years old, as some of these people do, given that the true age of the Earth is 4.6 billion years, it's equivalent to believing the width of North America is 8 yards.



Biologist Richard Dawkins
"Real Time With Bill Maher," 10-25-13

I was once Christian. But I sincerely considered the matter and found no evidence to support faith. I then decided to change for a more positive and healthy perspective on life, love and compassion. As I moved away from religion, I found both peace and a lot of good, similarly minded people. So if some think I'm going to hell, I'll probably be in better company than those who would condemn me for this.

Ricky D. Smith, Danville, Ky., letter to the editor
Advocate-Messenger, 9-16-13

[If] I were a coach, even a Christian one, I would not want team prayers at all. That's because it's no better for team-building than it is for nation-building, which our founders wisely recognized. And that's because, obvi-

ously, you exclude every player who doesn't believe in the prayer leader's god, or doesn't believe in any god, or is just smart enough to see the folly of praying to a peaceful god when playing a game as violent as football.

Columnist Dan DeWitt, an atheist, on a Florida school superintendent's memo asking coaches to not lead prayers
Tampa Bay Times, 10-8-13

Sing "The Star-Spangled Banner" or do something else to make it a grand occasion. Don't appropriate religion for that purpose. Keep religion separate and special and have the sphere of government be religion-free so that everyone feels equally included. I think that is the American tradition.

Ann Althouse, University of Wisconsin-Madison law professor, arguing against prayer at events such as graduations
Wisconsin State Journal, 10-6-13

I'm suggesting we take holy books out of the process. Instead, people will have to show they understand they could be sent to prison if they don't tell the truth.

Ian Abrahams, Bristol, UK, on a Magistrates' Association proposal to stop having witnesses swear on the bible in court
Charisma News, 10-14-13

She called me a filthy little liar and gave me a big dose of castor oil. I couldn't keep it down — threw up.
Witness in the trial of Fr. Finian Egan, alleging a nun disciplined her for reporting Egan molested her when she was 10
Sydney Morning Herald, 10-14-13

I can stand at the beach's edge with the most devout Christian, Jew, Buddhist, go on down the line, and weep with the beauty of this universe and be moved by all of humanity, all the billions of people who lived before us, who have loved and hurt and suffered. To me, my definition of God is humanity and is the love of humanity.



Endurance swimmer Diana Nyad, 64, telling host Oprah Winfrey that she's an atheist
"Super Soul Sunday," 10-13-13

Doesn't it just plain suck that the Old Testament isn't cool anymore? The book's got everything: genocide, incest, and even talking donkeys! That's why David Tuchman has taken it upon himself to rehabilitate the text as OMGWTFBIBLE.

From comedian David Tuchman's "new take on the Old Testament," recorded live in New York City the third Monday of every month and available by podcast
Tablet Magazine, 10-14-13

New donations help Freethought Hall be 'born again'

Thank you, Florida donor, & everyone!

Below are new donations to FFRF's building expansion fund. This listing generally reflects contributions received from Oct. 1 to Nov. 4, 2013, and is not cumulative, except the total.

Very Kind Donor, FL: \$137,129.78
(This donor's cumulative Building Fund contributions now total \$233,992.15)
Richard Busemeyer Atheist Foundation, OH: \$25,000
Harold Saferstein MD and Doreen Saferstein, AZ: \$8,115.99
James Wallis, WA: \$2,500
Anonymous, KY: \$2,500
Anonymous, CA: \$2,000
Sheri & Charles Bender, WI: \$1,000
Anonymous, WI: \$1,000
Frank and Nero Gordon, PA: \$1,000
Anonymous, OR: \$1,000
Nancy Ruhland, MN: \$1,000
Anonymous, IL: \$1,000
Michael Stanton, CA: \$1,000
Anonymous, OH: \$500
Anonymous, WA: \$300
John DeVault, TN: \$260
Paul and Deb Lindsey, WY: \$250
Warren Geisler/Kristine Walderbach, AR: \$250
Jack Pedigo, WA: \$100
J.E. (John) Hill, WA: \$100
Robert Kerr, TX: \$100
Ed Merkner, OH: \$100
Anonymous, NJ: \$100
Anonymous, FL: \$100
Anonymous, CA: \$100



Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

A firm's foundation

Co-President Dan Barker stands on the newly laid foundation of FFRF's addition to Freethought Hall, its offices in downtown Madison, Wis. The first concrete pour was in early November. The addition is expected to be completed in June 2014, with phase II (a third-floor library and cupola atop the original 1855 building) done by late summer 2014.

Michael Lieftring, CA: \$100
Mr. Stephen Locatelli, CA: \$100
Eugene Osegovic, CO: \$54
Anonymous, WI: \$50.00
Thomas Kluzak, KS: \$50
Anonymous, CA: \$25
Lisa Hettler-Smith/Gordon Smith, CA: \$20
John Fostvedt, WI: \$10

Anonymous, SD: \$10

Subtotal: \$186,924.77
New cumulative total:
\$1,280,915.77

Note: Gene Boyko, CT, was listed in a previous issue of Freethought Today as

Anonymous, but has since granted his permission to acknowledge his \$1,000 donation. Richard Fletcher, TX, donated \$200 to FFRF earlier this year and it was inadvertently left out of previous listings.

Thank you to all donors who have contributed to this project. Donate at ffrf.org/ffrf-building-fund-contribution-page or earmark a donation to FFRF, PO Box 750, Madison WI 53701. FFRF will not publish donor names without express permission. Check the permissions box if you wish to be identified by name. If you've given a gift designated for the Building Fund which does not appear to be reflected in this or previous listings, please contact Katie Daniel at 608-256-8900 (9-5 Central) so we can check records and acknowledge your generous gift!

All donors' names will be listed in a keepsake book. Names of the largest donors will be inscribed on an impressive full-length Wall of Honor in the new lobby. Donors giving \$5,000 or more will be listed on a lobby plaque. FFRF still has room for those who want their names (or a name in memoriam) to be listed in the new vestibule lobby on a pretty handcast tile (\$2,500), or their name or short message on a paving stone (\$1,000 for 6x12 paver; \$2,000 for 12x12 paver) in the Rose Zerwick Courtyard and Garden.

They Said What?

I like to say thanks to God and the glaciers.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, on the state's abundant deposits of coarse-grained "fracking" sand in demand worldwide

Capital Times, 10-10-13

The people of this state need a candidate who can clearly and unapologetically articulate Biblical values without fear or compromise. They need a candidate who will tell the simple truth that abortion is murder, and homosexuality is condemned by God (but that Jesus forgives and heals those who repent).

Press release from "kill the gays" Pastor Scott Lively, proclaiming "humanism breeds corruption" and announcing his run for governor of Massachusetts

Scott Lively Ministries, 9-30-13

Pray that conservatives in the House and Senate will not succumb to a godless compromise and that the Senate will not try the "nuclear option" (change Senate rules to require just 51 not 60 votes to end a filibuster and force a vote). Pray that the American people will wake up and demand that their senators defer implementation of Obamacare and find a responsible compromise on the continuing resolution and debt ceiling.

Plea to the Family Research Council's "prayer team"

frc.org, 10-10-13

Holly and I made a decision to build a house. It's a big house. It's a beautiful house. It's 8,400 square feet of heated living area to be exact. That's a big house, no doubt about it.

Steven Furlick, pastor of Elevation Church, Charlotte, NC, addressing news reports about the couple's \$1.7 million home, which totals 16,000 square feet in all

Charlotte Observer, 10-27-13

The Constitution would not have been written by Freemasons. They go against God. . . . You cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve two masters. Praise be to God. Lord Jesus Christ.

Dianne Reidy, U.S. House stenographer, shouting from the dais during a vote on whether to end the government shutdown

C-SPAN, 10-16-13

For the past 2 and ½ weeks, the Holy Spirit has been waking me up in the middle of the night and preparing me (through my reluctance and doubt) to deliver a message in the House Chamber. That is what I did.

Dianne Reidy, email to Fox News host Greta Van Susteren

Washington Time, 10-18-13

The priest who does not pray cannot live chastity, which is a gift from God. He should live obedience and poverty. In these days, one has to be more and more careful, because we are like sheep among the wolves.

Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani, archbish-

op of Lima, on recent clerical scandals in Peru

National Catholic Register, 10-17-13

O.J. is very religious now, and he's been counseling other inmates with bible studies for months. When I talk to him on the phone, all he wants to discuss is religion. He's obsessed!

O.J. Simpson associate Norman Parado, who says the 66-year-old, eligible for parole in 2017, wants to launch a worldwide crusade called "Holy Safari!"

National Enquirer, 10-17-13

Rules grow like barnacles on a ship: They're easy to pick up and hard to remove, and they really slow us down. The writ of Sarbanes and Oxley wounded the entrepreneurs in ways that only decades can heal. Consider abolishing some rules every now and then, as a sign of your love for your people.

Forbes contributor Todd Hixon, "An Entrepreneur's Prayer For Better Government"

forbes.com, 10-23-13

I don't want to support lesbianism, I don't want to support Planned Parenthood, and I don't want to support abortion. And if that be the case, I'm not buying Girl Scout cookies.

Radio host Kevin Swanson, also a teaching elder at Reformation Church, which meets at Clear Sky Elementary School in Castle Rock, Colo.

New York Daily News, 10-22-13

God will help us. That is our prayer.

Duraimony Dickson, pastor of Houston Tamil Church near Rosharon, Texas, on a fire of unknown origin which destroyed the church

KHOU-TV, 10-22-13

We don't cater to you people.

Comment allegedly made by a Hobby Lobby employee in Marlboro, N.J., to a customer asking why the store doesn't stock bar mitzvah cards

Hopelessly Partisan blog, 9-27-13

They do not value children the same way that you do. You cannot bring a child into this world with someone who does not value the child as God does and as you do.

Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, reason No. 3 of "9 reasons to not marry someone who's pro-choice"

marshill.com, 10-25-13

If I go to my service tonight and God moves on me, and I mean the Holy Ghost anoints that place and you got people shouting, you got people getting saved, people getting healed, delivered and God moves on me to pull out a four-and-a-half-foot rattlesnake and it lays fangs into me, if I'm anointed by God, that snake is not going to harm me. I don't care if it bites me 20 times, there'll be no harm.

Pastor Andrew Hamblin of Tabernacle Church of God in LaFollette, Tenn., on "Snake Salvation"

Christian Post, 10-23-13

‘Emperor’ recipient Mendez: ‘Do not bow your heads’

Arizona state Rep. Juan Mendez, D-Tempe, caused a stir nationwide May 21 with his godless invocation opening a legislative session. This is his speech, edited for print, in acceptance of FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award at the 36th national convention in September in Madison, Wis. The FFRF award is reserved for public figures who make known their dissent from religion



By Arizona Rep. Juan Mendez

First, I want to thank Freedom From Religion for its work in promoting the constitutional principle of separation of state and church and in educating the public on matters relating to non-theism.

I am honored to accept the Emperor Has No Clothes Award and join past recipients in telling it as it is when it comes to religion. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you all, the story of how I got quoted in the same article as the pope. I need to share this story with you because as defenders of freedom from religion, you deserve a firsthand account of what I can only describe as a culture of corruption.

I believe any prayer before public meetings becomes a litmus test that bars you from the norm, or at worst there’s the fear that if you don’t pass for the norm, your legislation will not be entertained or taken seriously. You can feel it in the indignation they presume and in the fear my colleagues have in losing legitimacy.

Prayer before public meetings ends up becoming a vehicle to deliver a politicized message demonizing and marginalizing entire groups of people. Despite efforts to rotate speakers of different faiths, the practice remains divisive and exclusionary for many who practice less common religions or no religion at all.

Removal of prayer before public meetings poses no threat to the secular nature of our government or society. Only those who gain their cultural capital through proselytizing on our government’s dime are fighting for this. And they are determined on preserving their “heritage,” or cultural capital, at the expense of democracy.

On the floor of the Arizona Legislature, I asked a body of publicly elected officials to forgo the assumed customs of a larger culture and *not* bow their heads [see sidebar]. I simply asked that they take one moment out of their day, that they look past the fact that we’ve spent months cooped up in a room that should have fit all our egos com-

‘I am an atheist because I’ve found no faith in any deity from Thor to Zeus.’

fortably, engaged in challenging debates, with many moments of tension, of ideological division, of frustration.

I outed myself — my humanist understandings, my absence of a faith in a deity — at the risk of political capital simply by omitting a God from a simple yet compassionate, if I might say, invocation or prayer. I quoted Carl Sagan: “For small creatures such as we, the vastness is bearable only through love.”

I asked a room full of politicians, the majority conservative, to acknowledge our shared capacity for reason and compassion, our shared love for the people of our state, for our Constitution and for our democracy. And that we root our policymaking in these values that are relevant to all Arizonans, regardless of religious belief or nonbelief.

Fallout the next day

The next day, a colleague seated next to me, for the first order of business after reciting our allegiance and offering the prayer (but before condemning Obamacare, which is how we traditionally begin our political business), called for a “redo” of yesterday’s prayer, my prayer. And they did it.

I had offended him and his religion because my invocation did not invoke his god. Or to put it in more politically correct terms, I didn’t use empty, non-descript language. I chose to stand out.

That’s the parallel I’m honored to share with the “Emperor” short story by Hans Christian Andersen. The moral, as I see it, is don’t seek to blend in with everyone else. Don’t adhere to the empty attempts at misrepresenting your values to engage in your community or to engage in the public trust as publicly elected officials.

If prayer before any public meeting has anyone choosing to blend in and agree that they are doing good work while hiding their lack of faith, we’d be saying that the 20% of the population we represent isn’t worthy of the public trust.

Having politicians fear expressing their lack of beliefs only perpetuates the culture that keeps so many of us from coming out of the closet. If we continue to allow for a cultural practice like prayer before public meetings, we’ll continue to allow millions of Americans to feel disenfranchised from civic engagement because they don’t see their values articulated by their government representatives, community leaders, neighbors and friends.

At the very least, we need to be finished with prayer before public meetings so that the people who approach a governing body or official feel equal. Neutrality on certain issues is vital to the government process.

‘No religious test’

The First Amendment grants even politicians the right to free speech. I



Photography by Brent Nicastro

know because I have a line of tea party activists ready to quote the Bill of Rights to me when I get back home.

But across the country, courts have issued differing decisions on what is acceptable, starting with a 1983 Supreme Court decision [*Marsh v. Chambers*] that approved prayer before legislative meetings. They did this while also setting no boundaries, and courts have since disagreed on the specifics.

A 2008 appellate decision that applies to Florida, Georgia and Alabama upheld prayers at the Cobb County, Ga., Commission, which invited representatives of various faiths to participate. The prayers were predominantly Christian and often referenced Jesus.

A 2011 ruling says that prayers before legislative meetings in Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia should be non-denominational and nonsectarian, using generic words that don’t refer to a specific religion.

Now the Supreme Court is set to hear this term a New York case to determine whether prayer should be permissible at government meetings. A decision in *Town of Greece v. Galloway* is expected by June 2014.

From my experiences, we need to move away from issues of free speech to issues of equal protection, or more specifically to the No Religious Test Clause of the Constitution, Article VI, paragraph 3: “[N]o religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.”

While prayer at public meetings isn’t administered as a test, my colleagues seemed to think I failed. And when they as the majority find their way into leadership positions where they have total control over the entire agenda, deciding what we talk about, when we talk about it and who gets to talk (and then determining whether any action comes from all our talking), I have to fear whether they see me as qualified to carry out the public trust.

That is the culture of corruption in which I was elected to do business. I knew about this before I got elected, so you don’t have to worry about me becoming jaded.

I want to end with the explanation of a quote I turned up awhile ago: “A person can never hope to be more than he is if he is not first honest about what he isn’t.” It probably has nothing to do with religion, but I take it seriously nonetheless and apply it when I can.

I am an atheist because I’ve found no faith in any deity from Thor to Zeus. I am so grateful for the work the people in this room have done to advance the separation of state and church, to educate communities, to build a cul-

ture that made it possible for me, as a state legislator from Arizona, to talk honestly about what I do and don’t believe in.

Together, we are in a position to go further than we ever imagined. We are standing at a moment in history where we truly can dramatically shift our culture toward feminism, environmentalism, human dignity and real liberty and justice for all by electing or reelecting more openminded legislators across our country. We even have a PAC now.

I will never stop fighting for my values, and these last couple of months have shown me that I am not fighting alone. Together, if we choose to be bold and speak the truth, if we choose to be champions of humanism, if we choose to seize this moment, we will win, and what we win is the infinitely precious dignity of all humanity.

Invocation by Rep. Juan Mendez

Most prayers in this room begin with a request to bow your heads. I would like to ask that you not bow your heads. I would like to ask that you take a moment to look around the room at all of the men and women here, in this moment, sharing together this extraordinary experience of being alive and of dedicating ourselves to working toward improving the lives of the people in our state.

This is a room in which there are many challenging debates, many moments of tension, of ideological division, of frustration. But this is also a room where, as my secular humanist tradition stresses, by the very fact of being human, we have much more in common than we have differences. We share the same spectrum of potential for care, for compassion, for fear, for joy, for love.

Carl Sagan once wrote, “For small creatures such as we, the vastness is bearable only through love.” There is, in the political process, much to bear. In this room, let us cherish and celebrate our shared humanness, our shared capacity for reason and compassion, our shared love for the people of our state, for our Constitution, for our democracy — and let us root our policymaking process in these values that are relevant to all Arizonans regardless of religious belief or nonbelief.

In gratitude and in love, in reason and in compassion, let us work together for a better Arizona.

FFRF Legal Victories

FFRF halts Ohio flagpole prayer

FFRF successfully ended a “See You At The Pole” event at Columbia High School in Tiffin, Ohio, after learning that a teacher organized and promoted the event, going so far as to order pizza and lead the students in prayer. The school principal also participated, promoting the event through the school’s morning announcements and commenting that he thought prayer was “an important thing to do.”

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter Oct. 8 to Superintendent Don Coletta to explain the violation: “Faculty participation and organization of a prayer event is inappropriate and problematic. Even if a prayer event in your school is hosted by a student organization, adult participation or promotion is impermissible. While the school cannot prohibit students from organizing or participating in a prayer event, the Supreme Court has stated that public school employees, including teachers, must refrain from actively participating in religious activities.”

Coletta responded Oct. 14: “I have taken steps with both individuals (and others) to make sure our personnel are both aware of the legal boundaries and that they act within them. I intend to monitor this situation in an effort to ensure both the rights of students and the obligation of the District are honored.”

Teacher: Freedom ‘comes from God’

A Michigan social studies teacher will no longer be allowed to distribute and display a poster with the Pledge of Allegiance alongside a message asserting that “our freedom ultimately comes from God” and that the founding fathers felt similarly.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent an Oct. 11 letter to Superintendent

Tim Haist of Big Rapids [Township] High School: “While the recitation and display of the Pledge of Allegiance in a public school is permissible, promoting and displaying religious arguments alongside it are not. The poster’s assertion overlooks many statements from this country’s founders which acknowledge their secular principles, and thus flatly ignores the secular position on the issue.”

The posters were produced by Gateways to Better Education, a Christian group whose mission is to inject “faith in the public schools” and to teach students “about the importance of the bible and Judeo-Christian history, thought and values.”

Haist replied Oct. 14 that the teacher in question had been told that “District policy states that we can ‘neither advance nor inhibit religion.’ ” Haist said the teacher was also given a document stating, “While Michigan standards do include an exploration of the American government and its foundation, including fundamental ideas and philosophical and historical origins through investigation, I struggle to see the connection between the pledge and this standard. The pledge is not a foundational document. As we both know, it was written over 100 years later and not adopted by our government until 1954.”

He also encouraged the teacher to write a lesson plan about the pledge’s revisions and their historical context.

FFRF grounds prayer at Atlanta airport

A staff member at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport attended an employee and customer satisfaction luncheon that was organized by the airport, which is owned by the city of Atlanta and is the busiest U.S. airport. The lunch began with a Christian prayer, during which guests were instructed to bow their heads. It in-



Courtesy FFRF member and illustrator Edward Sorel

“Have you noticed how many God-fearing people these days are stark-raving lunatics?”

cluded readings of bible verses and was led by a Christian chaplain.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel contacted the airport on behalf of the local complainant, pointing out that such prayer “creates acrimony, makes minorities feel like political outsiders in their own community, and shows unconstitutional governmental preference for religion over nonreligion.”

An airport representative responded in late summer, stating that FFRF’s concerns were taken very seriously, and that personnel conducting an upcoming customer service event were “committed to abiding by all applicable laws and City policies.”

VA: Stop mandatory treatment prayers

Military veterans sent to substance abuse treatment by the Sacramento Veterans Administration in California will be offered an alternative to religious programs because of an FFRF letter of complaint.

FFRF was contacted by a veteran who said that in his program, he was forced

to take part in prayers and meetings that emphasized God. Despite multiple talks with counselors about his beliefs, he was threatened with expulsion if he so much as stepped out of the room during prayers.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote to the VA on July 23: “[N]o government program can require participation in religious activity or promote one religious view over another. It seems that nothing is being done to protect the rights of conscience of those who are nonreligious.”

Elliott pointed out that 23.1% of all military personnel identify as atheist, agnostic or having no religious preference.

The Department of Veterans Affairs responded Oct. 22, stating that it was “reinforced to D&A Detox that they are not to require attendance in prayer activities to remain in treatment; reinforced with them that they should not stigmatize any Veteran who opts out of such activities; [and] reinforced with VA staff to ask about objections to 12-Step model programs in considering program placement.”

Student activist Kopplin fights faux science

Continued from page 3

to be funding millions more.

I found schools that teach “Our position on the age of the Earth and other issues is that any theory that goes against God’s Word is in error” and others that call scientists “sinful men.” I found a school that requires students to “defend creationism through evidence presented by the Bible versus traditional scientific theory.”

There be dragons

Mother Jones magazine picked out the 14th craziest lessons taught in creationist schools. My favorite was the textbook that claimed dragons were real (they were dinosaurs with chemicals in their noses, and they lived with humans).

By the way, one of our state legislators who voted for the voucher program now says she opposes it because she didn’t realize Muslim schools could potentially qualify for vouchers. She thought religious schools meant only Christian schools, and for good reason. Besides all the creationism and dragons, there’s even a school slated to receive \$360,000 a year led by a man who calls himself The Apostle and

teaches prophecy.

As the New Orleans Times Picayune opined, “Vouchers have turned out to be the answer to a creationist’s prayer.”

We’re giving public money to private schools that will fail our students through teaching creationism and bad science. But again, all of you know that this isn’t just Louisiana craziness.

I’ve found that over 300 schools across the country are teaching creationism and receiving tens of millions or quite possibly even hundreds of millions in public money. I found schools bringing students to the Creation Museum and calling evolution “the way of the heathen.”

This fight may be long and it may be hard, but as President Kennedy said when he launched the moon mission, “We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win.”

We need a new science revolution because our generation faces unprecedented challenges to our way of living

and to our survival as a species. Our population continues to climb, but the amount of clean water and living space we have is stretched thin. Our climate is growing increasingly extreme. We’ve discovered “super bugs” which are resistant to antibiotics.

Earth is experiencing a rapid decline in biodiversity, especially in our oceans. The recent meteorite that exploded over Russia is a sobering reminder that we could be faced with a killer asteroid in the near future.

I know these threats sound like science fiction, but they are real and my generation will have to address them. The way to overcome these challenges and ensure the continued long-term existence of our species is through investment in rapid scientific innovation.

Two futures

We have a choice of two futures. In the first, we keep on our present track. This is a future where science funding continues to stay stagnant or decline. In this future, we teach creationism and climate denial instead of science. In this future, we fall to these threats.

I have a vision where we invest \$1 trillion in science in the next decade.

Science funding offers a massive return on investment, over 30%. And the great thing about funding science is that what we discover, unlike a tax cut, never sunsets. Unlike a road, it never needs to be replaced or repaved. What we discover will be with us forever.

I have a vision where we teach evolution, not creationism. Where we teaching about radio carbon dating rather than Noah’s flood. Teach climate science, not just plain denial science.

I have a vision of humanity harnessing wave energy and revolutionary sustainable technology like algae fuel. I have a vision where we discover how to turn off cancer cells and even aging.

When I was a freshman in high school, when my dad ran for Congress, I didn’t recognize I had a voice and that my voice had power. I didn’t recognize that with this power, came great responsibility. I have a responsibility to serve my country and my species. We all do.

We have the power to launch a scientific revolution to overcome the challenges we face and we all have a responsibility to do that.

This is our generation’s movement. We need a Second Giant Leap for humankind!



Journalist Jamila Bey, formerly of National Public Radio, spoke on “Sex, Politics and Religion: SPARing with Jamila.”

36th Annual FFRF Convention

Speakers & Entertainers



FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker emceed the event, which attracted over 600 freethinkers from 40 states and four countries — Germany, France, Australia and Canada.



Australian singer Shelley Segal sang songs from her first recording, “The Atheist Album.”



Dan Barker entertained at the piano.



“The Jill & Julia Show,” featuring improv stories by “Saturday Night Live” alum Julia (“Letting Go of God”) Sweeney interspersed with music by singer/songwriter Jill (“I Kissed a Girl”) Sobule, was a convention hit. That’s bass player Dave Carpenter in the background.

Photography by Brent Nicastro
unless otherwise indicated



FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott.



FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell.



FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.



Aisha Goss, deputy director of the Secular Coalition of America.



Arizona state Rep. Juan Mendez, virtually the only “out” atheist state legislator, holds his Emperor Has No Clothes Award, bestowed because of Mendez’s courage in giving a freethought invocation to open a legislative session.



Author and sex columnist Dan Savage, an outspoken atheist and co-founder of the “It Gets Better” campaign, holds his Emperor Has No Clothes Award, bestowed by Dan Barker on FFRF’s behalf.



Bestselling mystery writer and feminist Sara (“V.I. Warshawski” series) Paretsky, a firm advocate of state/church separation, shows off her Freethought Heroine Award.



Zack Kopplin, 20, a student at Rice University in Houston, receiving the premiere Richard and Beverly Hermesen Student Activist Award of \$5,000 from Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel on behalf of FFRF.

September 27-29, 2013
Madison, Wisconsin



Ellery Schempp was lauded for the 50th anniversary year of his *Abington v. Schempp* Supreme Court victory barring bible reading and recitation of the Lord’s Prayer in public schools.



Jim McCollum was honored in the 65th anniversary year of his and his mother Vashti McCollum’s Supreme Court victory, *McCollum v. Champaign Board of Education*, which bars religious instruction in public schools. Jim is pictured with filmmaker Jay Rosenstein, University of Illinois, whose Peabody Award-winning film about the landmark case, “The Lord Is Not on Trial Here Today,” was screened at the convention.



Stephen Uhl's *Out of God's Closet* book benefits FFRF (order from ffrf.org/shop)!

FFRF'ers



Denise Mayes, Ohio, and her pup.



Peabody Award-winning filmmaker Jay Rosenstein, Illinois (a new FFRF Lifetime Member).



Manivanh, Alice and Mark Dluzak, Wisconsin.

Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

More photos at
convention slideshow:
ffrf.org/outreach/convention



Lifetime Member and Supreme Court victor Jim McCollum, Arkansas, with Sam Salerno, Ohio.



Thank you, David Groethe, FFRF's outgoing chair, and Mary Groethe, Minnesota, for more than two decades of help!



Nancy McClements directs the reference desk at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



Vada Luening, "Village Atheist" from Wisconsin, and Deb Hilpipre, Minnesota.



Audience members Abdul Iddrisu, Wisconsin, and Larry Moens, Wisconsin.



Jill Sobule and Julia Sweeney entertain the crowd. See photos below:



Thank you, Steve and Diane Uhl! Their respective boutonniere and corsage are in recognition of their stupendous \$250,000 gift to FFRF's Building Fund.



Memorable Moments



Ian Gaylor escorts his mother, FFRF principal founder Anne Gaylor, 86, to the podium.



Rebecca Markert, senior staff attorney, shows off the convention's youngest participant, Audrey, just eight days old, who slept through the introduction. The proud papa is Michael Markert.

Freethought convention wedding



Texans Jana Kay Weaver and Richard Halasz high-five it after Co-President Dan Barker unites them in marriage at their impromptu wedding Sept. 27 at the convention. The couple had about 600 witnesses to their brief and godless ceremony. Dan's ordination from his ministerial days is still good, allowing him to occasionally perform secular weddings. After the ceremony, Jana and Richard generously handed in two Lifetime Memberships. Many thanks and felicitations to the happy couple!



Speaker Aisha Goss relates a deconversion story.



An animated "Moment of Bedlam" starts the annual Non-Prayer Breakfast.



Director of Operations Lisa Strand greets conventioners.

FFRF Staff



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker welcomes participants.



Scott Colson introduces speaker Aisha Goss.



FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor concludes the convention.



Director of Membership Jackie Douglas registers participants.



Liz Cavell, staff attorney, sells copies of Julia Sweeney's new book, *If It's Not One Thing, It's Your Mother*.

Photo: Andrew L. Seidel



Jarvis Idowu, an FFRF legal intern from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School, asks a question.



Photo: Andrew L. Seidel



Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

Left: The Three (Freethinking) Graces — FFRF Publicist Lauryn Seering, Assistant Dayna Long and Bookkeeper Katie Daniel (also pictured above).



Jim Zerwick, FFRF treasurer, announces his mother Rose Zerwick’s \$50,000 bequest for the Rose Zerwick Garden and Courtyard in Freethought Hall.



FFRF principal founder Anne Gaylor with son, Ian, helped run the “clean money” drawing.



Meet FFRF’s Executive Board of Directors (back, left): Co-President Dan Barker, Director Joe Cunningham, Secretary Jim Bredeson, Treasurer Jim Zerwick, Director Mike Cermak, incoming Chair Stephen Hirtle, (front) Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, outgoing Chair David Groethe, Directors Pat Cleveland and Phyllis Rose. (Director Todd Peissig not pictured.)



Walter and Robin Greene, parents of FFRF attorney Andrew Seidel, staff a table.



Jessica Kopish, a very special volunteer.



Volunteer Ryan Dwyer, a summer legal intern, sells books.



Maddy Ziegler, FFRF legal intern.



Cheryl Kolbe (right), volunteer and director of FFRF’s new Portland, Ore., chapter, seated by Wisconsin member Victor Kilman.



Todd Peissig (left), volunteer and new member of FFRF’s Executive Board, with partner Eric Lawrence.

Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

FFRF

Volunteers

Photo: Andrew L. Seidel



Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

First Amendment champion Ellery Schempp, Massachusetts, hails fellow Supreme Court victor Jim McCollum and his wife, Betty, Arkansas. Ellery and Jim’s Supreme Court victories enjoyed significant anniversaries, 50 and 65 years, respectively, in 2013.



Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

FFRF co-founders Annie Laurie Gaylor and Anne Nicol Gaylor, Wisconsin.



Fairfid Caudle, New York FFRF state representative.



Attorney Richard L. Bolton, Wisconsin, who handles a lot of FFRF’s litigation, including its three current challenges to the Internal Revenue Service’s preferential treatment of ministers and religion, helps himself to some convention cake.



Legal intern Jarvis Idowu, Wisconsin, speaker Jamila Bey, District of Columbia, and Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, Wisconsin.



Librarian Nancy McClements, Wisconsin, and Stephen Uhl, Arizona, a former priest turned freethought author and FFRF benefactor.



Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

Members of AHA (Atheists, Humanists & Agnostics), an impressive Secular Student Alliance club at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, include (left) Brandon Frederick, Amanda Supak, Ashley Carter and Chris Calvey (who won FFRF’s graduate student essay competition this year).

Freethought Bonhomie

Photography by Brent Nicastro



Author Sara Paretsky chats as she signs a book for Sidney Novak and her mother, Dianne Cooper, an FFRF state representative from Iowa.



Speakers Jamila Bey, Dan Savage and Julia Sweeney get acquainted.

Star Power



Julia Sweeney autographs copies of her entertaining new book, *If It's Not One Thing, It's Your Mother* (available from ffrf.org/shop). That's fan Kevin Salter from Australia.



Dan Savage autographs a copy of his new book, *American Savage*, for Jennifer Vines, Indiana, and at least 60 other fans.



Entertainers Shelly Segal, Jill Sobule and Julia Sweeney meet and greet.

Photo: Andrew L. Seidel



Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel gets his photo taken with legal icon Jim McCollum.



Freethought Today Editor Bill Dunn (right), pictured with Dan Savage (and Dan's Emperor Has No Clothes Award).

Photo: Andrew L. Seidel



Now it's FFRF webmaster and desktop publisher Scott Colson's turn!

Photo: Andrew L. Seidel

State/Church Bulletin

Bus driving pastor fired for prayer

George Nathaniel, 49, Richfield, Minn., was fired Oct. 30 as a bus driver for refusing to stop leading students in prayer. The private contractor fired him after getting repeated complaints from the Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District.

Nathaniel is pastor at the Elite Church of the First Born and Grace Missionary Baptist Church, reported the Minneapolis Star-Tribune. Nathaniel said he drove school buses in Wisconsin and Georgia before coming to Minnesota and that he's always prayed with students.

"We got to get Christians to be able to be Christians and not have to be closet Christians. You have something good, you are going to share it with somebody."

He allegedly waited till the last child got on the bus before starting the daily prayers, which lasted about seven minutes.

Catholic 'Red Mass' draws high court

Five U.S. Supreme Court justices attended the annual Catholic "Red Mass" at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington on Oct. 6, as did several members of Congress and Denis McDonough, White House chief of staff. Attending were Chief Justice John Roberts Jr. and justices Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas, Stephen Breyer and Elena Kagan. (The first three are Catholic and the last two are Jewish.)

The Mass continued a 60-year-old tradition and is intended to bless the upcoming work of the Supreme Court and other judges and public officials, reported the Legal Times. The name refers to the bright red vestments worn by clergy and to the red flame symbolizing the Holy Ghost.

In *Stars of David*, a 2005 book by Abigail Pogrebin, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said of the Red Mass, "I went one year and I will never go again, because this sermon was outrageously anti-abortion. Even the Scalias, although they're very much of that persuasion, were embarrassed for me."

16-year-old ordered to have baby

The Nebraska Supreme Court, in a 5-2 decision Oct. 4, denied a 16-year-old girl's request for an abortion, saying she had not shown that "she is sufficiently mature and well informed to decide on her own whether to have an abortion."

The girl lives with foster parents because she was taken away from her biological parents due to physical abuse and neglect. At the parental rights hearing, she told the court she was pregnant and couldn't support a child or be "the right mom that [she] would like to be right now." She also told the court she feared losing her placement in foster care if her highly religious foster parents found out she was pregnant.

The district court judge, Peter Battalion, appears to have served in the 1980s on the Omaha committee for Metro Right to Life, according to the Houston Chronicle. Battalion alleg-

edly told her "when you have the abortion, it's going to kill the child inside of you" and asked if she would "rather do that than risk problems with the foster care people."

Vets threaten boycott over prayer

American Legion Post 311 in Hawley, Pa., said if its chaplain isn't allowed to pray at the Veterans Day ceremony at Wallenpaupack Area High School, members will boycott the ceremony.

The post chaplain has never prayed at the annual ceremony, but when Commander William Kennett heard that graduation prayers were no longer allowed [following a complaint by FFRF last June], he asked if that applied to the Veterans Day event. Yes, it does, he was told, reported the Pocono Record.

In a letter to the editor, Pat Thompson, Legion executive board member, spread a widely believed myth: "There are no atheists in foxholes. Saying a prayer does not establish a religion."

Tiller prosecutor loses law license

Former Kansas Attorney General Phillip Kline lost his law license indefinitely Oct. 18 after the Kansas Supreme Court unanimously ruled he violated ethics rules in his prosecution of abortion providers, including the late Dr. George Tiller.

The court, in a 154-page decision, found that Kline, attorney general from 2003-07, demonstrated "overzealous advocacy" and failed to operate "within the bounds of the law," reported the National Law Journal.

Kline, now an assistant professor at Christian-oriented Liberty University School of Law in Lynchburg, Va., can't seek bar readmission for three years.

He was at the center of controversy in 2006 when a memo from Kline to his staff was leaked. In the memo, he told staff how to form a campaign committee for him at each church to "encourage people to contribute and volunteer."

God in Air Force oath now optional

The U.S. Air Force Academy has made "so help me God" optional in its honor code after being pressured by the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, CNN reported Oct. 25. The oath reads "We will not lie, steal, or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone who does, so help me God."

Cadets had been required to recite the oath at the end of basic training. It's also taken yearly by all cadets to reaffirm their commitment to the honor code, said academy spokesman Maj. Brus Vidal.

The academy respects "the ability of our cadets, Airmen and civilian Airmen to freely practice and exercise their religious preference — or not," a statement said.

Mikey Weinstein, MRFF's founder and president, said he intends to sue unless the offending phrase is removed, even if it's optional. "If the words are still there and you don't say [them], you turn yourself into a tarantula on a wedding cake."



Now only myths

Atheists, Humanists, & Agnostics @ UW-Madison sponsored some Halloween fun on campus on Bascom Hill.

In the News

S.C. atheists barred from volunteering

Upstate Atheists, a freethought group in the Spartanburg, S.C., area, was barred from volunteering at the Spartanburg Soup Kitchen, according to an Oct. 23 story in the Herald-Journal.

Eve Brannon, 25, Upstate Atheists president, said the group would instead hand out 300 "care" packages to the needy on Oct. 26. Packages contained socks, gloves, toothpaste, toothbrushes, combs, soap, rain ponchos, snacks, shaving razors, antiseptic wipes, deodorants, tissues and gum.

"I told them we wouldn't wear our T-shirts. We wouldn't tell anyone who we are with. We just want to help out," Brannon said. "And they told us that we were not allowed."

Lou Landrum, Soup Kitchen executive director, told the Herald-Journal she would resign before she let atheists volunteer and be a "disservice to this community."

"This is a ministry to serve God," she said. "We stand on the principles of God. Do they think that our guests are so ignorant that they don't know what an atheist is? Why are they targeting us? They don't give any money. I wouldn't want their money."

Landrum added, "They can set up across the street from the Soup Kitchen. They can have the devil there with them, but they better not come across the street."

Legion pulls support over pledge refusal

American Legion Post 134 in Morton Grove, Ill., withdrew its financial support for the city park district because park board member Dan Ashta

refuses to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. Post Commander Joseph Lampert confronted Ashta at the Oct. 24 board meeting.

Ashta thanked Lampert for speaking his mind, according to the Morton Grove Champion, but stood his ground, as he did earlier when he told the village clerk that "I feel like we're compelling people to speak," adding that the First Amendment affords the right to also *not* speak.

Ashta objected to making people pledge allegiance to a government they might oppose. He said people with objections to religion or religious objections also shouldn't have to feel isolated or unwanted for not standing.

"I think the Constitution is what makes this country great and worth making sacrifices for. Countries with weak constitutions usually don't last," Ashta said.

Post 134, with about 800 members, contributes \$2,600 annually to city-sponsored events.

Christian college group flush with cash

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, headquartered in Madison, Wis., had just over \$99 million in 2012-13 revenues, according to an Oct. 9 InterVarsity press release. That amount puts InterVarsity atop a list of Wisconsin nonprofits compiled by KerstenDirect, a Texas fundraising and marketing agency. The ranking doesn't include hospitals, universities, museums and several other categories of nonprofits.

InterVarsity's National Service Center in Madison serves over 1,600 staff, including field staff who work with 909 InterVarsity chapters on 590 college and university campuses across the U.S.

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

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Freedom depends upon freethinkers

(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)

What Is a Freethinker?

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

FFRF Legal Victories

Praying Arizona coach ordered to stop

The football coach at Sunrise Mountain High School (Glendale, Ariz.) will no longer be allowed to force students to pray or pressure them to join the school's Christian club, nor will faculty be allowed to participate in the club, due to a complaint letter from FFRF.

FFRF's complainant reported that head football coach James Carter made all players hold hands and pray to Jesus Christ before and after football games or face reduced playing time. Carter also reportedly pressured players to join Christian Club on Campus (CCC). Several other teachers also participated in CCC.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the school district, pointing out it's unconstitutional for coaches to organize, lead, participate in or force players to pray. Seidel also noted that the Equal Access Act says school employees may only be present at religious groups in a nonparticipatory capacity, and that such groups must be student-initiated and student-run.

The school district responded promptly to say that all parties named in the letter had been contacted and claiming the district would "continue to educate all personnel in order to ensure adherence [to federal and state laws]."

'Preying' pastors ousted at lunch

FFRF has stopped the practice of allowing preachers and pastors to enter Pedro Menendez High School in St. Augustine, Fla., during the lunch period and pressure students to attend their churches and church functions.

According to the complainant, youth pastors "quite intrusively butt into conversations" to ask students to attend religious events.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent an email to the school district to detail how this practice raises serious constitutional and liability issues for the school: "This predatory conduct should raise many red flags, especially if there are no security measures in place to keep such visitors out or if these religious visitors are not subject to the same security measures that other visitors may be."

An attorney for the district responded Oct. 29: "We have terminated [the pastors'] standing invitation to visit the school at lunchtime."

Struggle successful for secular club

After a contentious six-month struggle narrowly avoiding a lawsuit, James Bowie High School in Austin, Texas, has decided to allow senior Nick Montana to form his club. The group in question? A secular student alliance, which would provide a community for nonreligious teens.

Principal Stephen Kane had repeatedly refused to approve the group, but school attorneys ordered him to relent after Montana reached out to two national secular nonprofits, the Secular Student Alliance and the Freedom From Religion Foundation. The organizations declared the school's change of course a victory for atheist equality.

Struggles like Montana's are com-

mon occurrences across the country. In a new effort to defend students' rights, SSA and FFRF have formed a partnership.

Citing the federal Equal Access Act and the First Amendment, the partnership appealed to Kane to stop stonewalling Montana. The law requires schools with extracurricular clubs to treat all student groups equally, regardless of viewpoint. Once FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel weighed in for the partnership, it took four working days for school attorneys to order Kane to approve the group.

Montana's efforts took six months from the time he first asked to start the student group. School administrators had delayed approving the group, and later suspended it when it tried to meet unofficially. Federal law and school policy state that a group shall be approved once a student has a faculty sponsor and submits a constitution, which Montana did. Two other groups submitted requests and were approved while Montana's languished.

Montana's controversy comes as America youths are becoming more secular and increasingly organizing around their secular identities. A 2012 Pew Research Center survey found that the percent of millennials 18-29 reporting doubts about the existence of God has doubled in five years, from 15% in 2007 to 31% in 2012. In the same time period, the SSA exploded with growth, from 81 campus groups to 357. They support 402 groups today, 52 of them at high schools.

Violations stopped in Tenn. schools

FFRF has stopped several First Amendment violations in Franklin County Schools, Franklin, Tenn.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a letter in early September about a memo circulated last December to parents of children attending North Lake Elementary. The memo said "Merry CHRISTmas" and mentioned that parents need to teach their children the "real reason for the season."

Markert additionally noted that candy canes were distributed by one teacher with a story attached claiming the origin of candy canes is religious: "The candymaker made the candy in the form of a 'J' to represent Jesus, who came to earth as our savior. . . Thinking that the candy was somewhat plain the candymaker stained it with red stripes. He used three small stripes to show the stripes of the scourging Jesus received, by which we are all healed. The large red stripe was for the blood shed by Christ on the cross so that we can have the promise of eternal life."

Markert noted that Snopes has debunked this evangelical legend.

In October, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel contacted the district yet again regarding a complaint that a teacher at South Middle School had passed out bibles with bookmarks warning that people who do not believe in Jesus are damned. Seidel wrote, "Parents who send their children to school in your district entrust teachers to use their positions of authority and influence for secular educational purposes, not to indoctrinate 6th graders in the teacher's personal religion."

A lawyer for the district has responded that while the school board hadn't



Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott presents a lively legal highlights workshop.

been aware of the bible and candy cane distributions, those practices would be halted immediately: "That's done, that's over."

FFRF also asked the North Lake Elementary PTO to stop praying before meetings, noting the practice is divisive. According to the Herald Chronicle, board member Chris McDonough suggested a moment of silence: "There are people in this county who do not go to churches, who do not believe the same things you do, and we have to make it possible for those people to feel comfortable as well. The majority doesn't rule."

On Oct. 14, the school board voted to sever all connections with the PTO, which no longer has official standing or district affiliation.

Tenn. judge cited for nixing Messiah

On Aug. 14, FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to Timothy R. Discenza, disciplinary counsel for the Tennessee Board of Judicial Conduct in Nashville, to lodge a formal complaint about Lu Ann Ballew, a child support magistrate. Ballew had presided over a child support hearing Aug. 8 in Cocke County Chancery Court in Newport to settle a dispute over a 7-month-old's last name.

At the hearing's end, Ballew ordered the boy's name changed from Messiah DeShawn Martin to Martin DeShawn McCullough. According to an interview with WBIR-TV in Knoxville, she said said the name change was warranted because "[T]he word Messiah is a title, and it's a title that has only been earned by one person and that one person is Jesus Christ."

Ballew further said that a child named Messiah would have a hard time growing up in a county with a large Christian population: "It could put him at odds with a lot of people, and at this point he has had no choice in what his name is."

In FFRF's complaint, Markert noted that such conduct "send a clear message to nonbelievers and those who practice minority religions that [Ballew] is not neutral and that she will abuse her position to advance her own Christian views. Ms. Jaleesa Martin, the child's mother, stated 'I was shocked. I never intended on naming my son Messiah because it means God, and I didn't think a judge could make me change my baby's name because of her religious beliefs.'"

The parents appealed and another judge ruled in September that Ballew's ruling was unconstitutional. The parents continue to call their son Messiah DeShawn McCullough. Messiah's sib-

lings are named Micah and Mason.

On Oct. 23, a three-member investigative panel of the judicial board concluded there was "reasonable cause to believe [Ballew] has committed judicial offenses" and ordered the board's disciplinary counsel to file charges, Reuters reported.

The panel cited a clause of the judicial code that says religion and other personal biases must not play a role in rulings. Ballew has 30 days to file a response.

Messiah was the 387th most popular name for boys born in the U.S. in 2012, according to the Social Security Administration. There were 762 applications for boys named Messiah in 2012. In 2011, there were 368 Messiah requests.

Charter school agrees to stop prayer

Indian River Charter High School in Vero Beach, Fla., has halted graduation prayers. After receiving a report that a student started the 2013 ceremony with a Christian prayer, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the school district June 4: "[T]he Supreme Court has settled this matter — high school graduations must be secular to protect the freedom of conscience of all students."

The district responded in late August, stating it would remove invocations from future graduation programs.

Marquee Madness



And the Word was made flesh

Jacqueline Bichsel, Illinois, sums a Quincy marquee up in one word: "amusing."

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Gilbert Deya, 61, **London**: Rape, attempted rape and sexual assault of a minor. Deya operates a registered charity called Gilbert Deya Ministries, which lists a UK membership of 36,000.

He claims to help infertile couples conceive “through the power of prayer and the Lord Jesus.” Deya is also fighting extradition to his native Kenya, where he faces kidnapping charges. *Source: Scottish Daily Record, 10-28-13*

Sosefina Amoa, 26, **Washington, DC**: 1st-degree murder. Amoa, a postulant at Little Sisters of the Poor convent, allegedly smothered her newborn son. She came to the convent Oct. 5 from Samoa and initially told police she didn’t know she was pregnant.

Prosecutors have offered a plea deal to Amoa under which she would instead plead guilty to voluntary manslaughter. *Source: WJLA, 10-24-13*

Daniel Miller, 69, **Diocese of Pembroke, ONT**: Gross indecency and indecent assault. Miller, a retired Catholic priest, is accused of molesting a teen boy between 1970-72 in Deep River. He was charged earlier with 3 counts each of gross indecency and indecent assault against several other alleged victims between 1970-80. *Source: Ottawa Citizen, 10-22-13*

Mohammad A. Naik, **Srinagar, India**: Murder. Naik, imam at a Srinagar mosque, allegedly caused the drowning death of Shahnawaz Dar, said police spokesman Syed Bukhari. Naik, who is married with 5 children, confessed to having an illicit relationship with Dar’s widow, said Bukhari.

Naik took Dar to a bridge on the River Jehlum on the pretense of praying to stop marital discord, Bukhari said. “As he began to recite the verses, Naik pushed him from behind and left him to drown.” *Source: Times of India, 10-22-13*

Galatians S. Tokpah, 43, **Monrovia, Liberia**: Sexual assault. Tokpah, pastor at an unidentified church, allegedly fondled a 12-year-old girl’s intimate parts. Bishop Adeline Tubman Weah, the girl’s grandmother, told police she was sleeping when the alleged assault occurred on her porch. *Source: allafrika.com, 10-22-13*

Gary Lieberman, 56, **Queens, NY**: 2 counts of 1st-degree sexual abuse. Lieberman, a rabbi employed at the Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, is accused of molesting a 10-year-old boy between Nov. 4, 2009, and May 2010. *Source: Newsday, 10-18-13*

Irving Fryar, 51, **Springfield, NJ**: Conspiracy and theft by deception. Fryar, pastor and founder New Jerusalem House of God, was indicted with his mother, **Allene McGhee**, on charges they conspired to steal about \$690,000 through a mortgage scam.

Fryar, a University of Nebraska graduate who was the first National Football League draft pick in 1984, is also professor of philosophy and sports management at Union County College in Cranford, NJ. He retired as an NFL wide receiver in 2000. *Source: CBS, 10-17-13*

Robert B. Price, 46, **Concord, NC**: 5 counts of taking indecent liberties with a child. Price, who returned from Central America to face charges, was youth pastor for 12 years at Kings Way Baptist Church, where his brother is now lead pastor. He was arrested Monday at Charlotte-Douglas International Airport after a two-year mission trip in Nicaragua.

A 23-year-old man alleges Price molested him as a 12-year-old over a period of 3 years. In a 2011 civil suit, the alleged victim said he was molested at the church’s “Youth Shack,” on a mission trip and at Price’s house while his wife and children were asleep. *Source: Charlotte Observer, 10-15-13*

James McGonegal, 68, **Cleveland**: Solicitation after testing positive for HIV, public indecency and abusing harmful intoxicants. McGonegal, pastor of St. Ignatius of Antioch Catholic Church, was arrested for soliciting sex from from an off-duty park ranger, allegedly offering the man \$50 to help him “get off.”

The police report details several sexual devices found in McGonegal’s Jeep along with a bottle labeled “Pig Sweat,” a product containing isobutyl nitrate, which when inhaled can be a sexual stimulant. *Source: Plain Dealer, 10-12-13*

Mendel Epstein, 68, **Lakewood, NJ**, and **Martin Wolmark**, 55, **Monsey, NY**: Kidnapping. The rabbis and 8 other men are accused of plotting to kidnap Jewish husbands and then torture them into giving their wives a “get” (a divorce in Jewish law). In turn they would allegedly charge wives up to \$100,000.

“We prefer not to leave a mark,” Epstein said in a recorded conversation with an undercover FBI agent. “We take an electric cattle prod. . . . You put it in certain parts of his body, and in one

IN VIEW OF THESE COMPLAINTS
OVER YOUR PEDOPHILIA, WERE
SHIPPING YOU OFF TO SOME
OTHER AREA. ANY PREFERENCE?

HOW ABOUT
BOYS’ TOWN?



minute the guy will know.”

Also charged were **Ariel Potash**, **Jay “Yakov” Goldstein**, **Moshe Goldstein**, **Binyamin Stimler**, **David Hellman**, **Simcha Bulmash**, **Avrohom Goldstein** and **Sholom Shuchat**. *Source: NY Daily News, 10-10-13*

Kenneth A. Keith, 48, **Burnside, KY**: 1st-degree robbery and 3 counts of murder. Keith, pastor at Main Street Baptist Church, is charged in the shooting deaths of Michael Hockensmith, 35, his wife, Angela Hockensmith, 38, and Daniel Smith, 60, at a Danville pawn shop operated by the Hockensmiths. Keith also runs a store called Gold Rush Gold Buyers in Somerset.

Tony Hockensmith, Michael’s brother, said Keith used to own the pawn shop where the shooting occurred. “Everybody’s in shock. He was at the funeral.” *Source: Herald Leader, 10-9-13*

Kenneth and Melody Miles, **Caldwell, ID**: 3 counts of embezzlement. Melody Miles was arrested on an Oklahoma warrant at Valley Church in Caldwell after a “healing” meeting where she was a guest speaker. Kenneth Miles faces similar charges.

Court documents allege that between February 2008 and October 2010, the Miles operated a remodeling business and took thousands of dollars from clients but never completed the work. They also operate Miles Global Ministry. Their website says they lead crusades and train ministers around the world. *Source: KTVB, 10-2-13*

Howard Curtis, 70, **Croydon, UK**: Unspecified counts of assault related to alleged use of “Christian domestic discipline” (CDD) with Curtis’ congregants at Coulsdon Christian Fellowship. CDD involves men asserting authority over women through spanking and other physical punishment.

Several women have accused Curtis of having them strip in his office in 2006-09 before spankings. He calls the allegations “malicious.”

A CDD website says women are the heart of the home, while men are the head. It states “most CDD marriages use spanking” for offenses such as disobedience, disrespect, dishonesty or dangerous choices. *Source: Daily Mail, 10-1-13*

Woodrow Karey Jr., 53, **Lake Charles, LA**: 2nd-degree murder. Karey, a deacon at Tabernacle of Praise Worship Center, is charged with shooting Pastor Ronald Harris Sr., 53, twice with a shotgun at a church revival service. About a week earlier, Karey found text messages on his wife’s phone, investigators said.

Calcasieu Parish Sheriff Tony Mancuso said there are allegations Harris had a sexual relationship with Karey’s wife. After he found the text messages, Karey allegedly confronted his wife, who filed a rape complaint against Harris two days before the shooting. *Source: KATC, 9-30-13*

Pleaded / Convicted

Megan Garland, 29, **Waukesha, WI**: Plead- ed no contest to felony child enticement and sexual assault by school staff. Garland, a teacher at Messmer High School, a Milwaukee Catholic school, was arrested after she was caught performing a sex act on a 14-year-old male student in the parking lot of Destiny Church and School.

Prosecutors later added a second charge, that she groped a 15-year-old male Messmer student in her car. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 10-26-13*

Joshua Finney, 31, **Conestee, SC**: Plead- ed guilty to 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct

with a child. Finney, is youth pastor at First Baptist Church, is married with 3 children. His father, Tony Finney, is pastor.

The victim said he started texting her when she was 13 while he was her bible study leader. She said he started having sex with her when she was 15 and the relationship lasted until she was 17.

The victim, Haley Thackston, now 18, told the court, “The way I was treated after this was far worse than I could have ever imagined. I was kicked out of my school. I was kicked out of my church.”

Her mother, Dana Thackston, said she confronted the elder Finney before going to police. “I was told that going to authorities would destroy the church. It would destroy the cause of Christ,” she said. “It was even told to the church that the devil was using the media, when they reported it, to attack the church.” *Source: WYFF, 10-22-13*

Haden D. Conrad, 32, **Chesapeake, VA**: Plead- ed guilty to 6 counts of online solicitation. Conrad, former pastor at Chesapeake Avenue United Methodist Church, was arrested after he exposed himself online to a person he thought was a 14-year-old girl but was an undercover investigator. A search of his computer allegedly showed he solicited at least 5 actual teen girls for sex.

Conrad was also a volunteer chaplain with the Chesapeake Police Department when he was arrested. *Source: Virginian-Pilot, 10-10-13*

Sentenced

Shawn F. Ratigan, 48, **Kansas City**: Plead- ed guilty to 3 counts of possessing child pornography and was sentenced to 7 years in prison on each count, with the combined 21-year sentence to run concurrent with his 50-year federal sentence for producing child pornography.

Ratigan took pornographic photos of children around churches and schools while working as a Catholic priest. Some of the photos were “upskirt” images of girls ages 12 and younger. At least one nude photo focused on a girl’s genitals.

“Shawn Ratigan will die in prison,” prosecutor Daniel White said after sentencing. “I am confident he will never again abuse or exploit a child.” *Source: Kansas City Star, 10-25-13*

Robert L. Rosseau, 41, **San Antonio**: 2 concurrent terms of 12 years in prison and deferred adjudication for 2 more counts of sexual assault of a child. Rosseau, who taught 8th-grade bible classes at the Christian Academy of San Antonio, started a “secret society” in 2009 as a way to seduce young girls, court documents said.

A victim alleged Rosseau “talked to her about the ‘society’ which was based on Christianity, the occult, magic and Freemasonry.” Sexual contact was required to build trust. Girls told police the rituals included smoking marijuana and salvia and that Rosseau sometimes read bible passages while assaulting them. *Source: Express-News, 10-24-13*

Robert Kondratick, **Venice, FL**: 2 years’ community control, 8 years’ probation and restitution of \$53,950 after pleading guilty to 2nd-degree larceny for embezzling from Holy Spirit Orthodox Church, where he was administrator.

In 2007, the Orthodox Church of America in Syosset, NY, relieved Kondratick of his duties as priest after a probe into financial misconduct. No criminal charges were filed then. *Source: Herald-Tribune, 10-21-13*

Ajai Singh, 38, **Abbotsford, BC**: 90 days in jail and 18 months’ probation for sexual assault

‘Shawn Ratigan will die in prison.’

— *Kansas City*
prosecutor *Daniel White*

and sexual interference with a minor. Singh was a visiting hymn singer with the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, the highest Sikh religious body.

The incident involved a 13-year-old girl. After serving his sentence, he will be deported to India. *Source: Hindustan Times, 10-20-13*

“D.,” 58, **Jerusalem**: 26 years in prison and \$28,000 restitution to his victims, who included 6 women and dozens of children, many who are his own children. His aide was sentenced to 6 years in prison.

According to the indictment, D. saw himself as the successor of a figure from the Breslov Hasidic movement. The men were convicted of sexual offenses and imprisonment in conditions of slavery and abuse.

The court ruled D. exploited his family’s religious faith and their belief in him as a spiritual leader. Many of the women still believe in him and call the charges lies. *Source: ynetnews.com, 10-17-13*

Yosef Kolko, 38, **Lakewood, NJ**: 15 years in prison for aggravated sexual assault, attempted aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault and endangering the welfare of a child. Kolko was a counselor at an Orthodox Jewish camp when he molested a male victim who was 11 years old in 2008.

“Molesting may seem harmless to you, but the reality is, it kills people,” the victim said in court. “How can you ignore the tears and open wounds when you know how much you hurt me? You ganged up on me and hurt me again.”

The victim and his family were ostracized in their Orthodox community for bringing the allegations to secular authorities and later moved to Michigan.

Kolko pleaded guilty after his trial started after hearing 2 more victims had come forward. When Kolko learned that, “His face turned white, his jaw dropped,” attorney Michael Bachner said. *Source: Asbury Park Press, 10-17-13*

Hugo Fluellen, 54, **Gilmer, TX**: 6 consecutive life sentences for multiple sexual abuse convictions involving a minor. Fluellen, former pastor at a Gilmer church, started molesting his victim in 2nd grade and continued for a decade.

DNA evidence showed he fathered her child last year. The victim is now 18. His wife, Rosie Evans Fluellen, 44, is charged with sexual assault of a child involving the same victim.

“Witness testimony indicated that Fluellen would often molest his victim on the way home from church after she had attended church and sang in the choir,” prosecutor Billy Byrd said. *Source: News-Journal, 10-16-13*

Larry M. “Matt” Pitt, 29, **Columbiana, AL**: 10 months in jail on a probation violation. Pitt, founder of the Christian youth ministry The Basement, was charged with impersonating a peace officer while he was on probation for pleading guilty to the same charge in 2012.

“He [also] had drugs in his system. But he also had numerous prescriptions for drugs. The question better asked is whether or not the drugs in his system were taken as therapeutic doses,” District Attorney Robbie Owens said. *Source: WRBL, 10-15-13*

Bill Vandergraph, 75, **Alto Pass, IL**: Register as a sex offender. Vandergraph, former pastor of Full Gospel Pentecostal Church, is accused of sexually assaulting his 4-year-old foster child. He also headed a group renovating the 111-foot-tall Bald Knob Cross.

Vandergraph was charged with predatory criminal sexual assault but is suffering from dementia and was found unfit for trial.

He was arrested in July 2010. The previous April, The Southern profiled him in its feature “Leaders Among Us.”

“As a school bus driver, you learn a lot about an area, its families and its status just by being around the children. It was very enjoyable and rewarding,” he stated.

The newspaper opined, “It’s obvious that the Vandergraphs enjoy children. They have four biological children and, throughout the years, have had some 40 foster children.”

“We saw the need and fostered children ranging from newborn to almost teenagers,” Vandergraph said. “Eventually, we adopted two and dropped out of fostering, but recently we’ve gotten back in for some very special reasons.” *Source: WSIL, 10-15-13*

Louis Bristol, 28, **Carpinteria, CA**: 1 year in

‘I love u dude. Ur a sick [expletive] like me.’ — *Fr. Matthew Riedlinger, text to an undercover agent he thought was a teen boy*

jail and 5 years’ probation after pleading guilty to molesting 2 teen girls while he was youth pastor at Carpinteria Community Church. He also sent a video of himself masturbating to another victim, an adult.

One victim spoke at sentencing: “My life was centered in that church. That church was my safe haven.” She said she turned to drugs and alcohol to cope and she saw her GPA drop from 4.33 to 0.33.

He was originally charged with forcible rape, forced sexual penetration by a foreign object and sexual battery by restraint but pleaded guilty to lewd act upon a minor, unlawful sexual intercourse with a minor, contributing to the delinquency of a minor and sending obscene material. *Source: Santa Barbara Independent, 10-11-13*

Dennis Bloom, 59, Tobyhanna, **PA**: 10 months in prison, 2 years’ probation and \$226,000 restitution to the IRS after pleading guilty to tax fraud for failing to report benefits as pastor at Shawnee Tabernacle Church.

The church gave him land valued at \$180,000 in 2006 and paid contractors nearly \$150,000 to build a home there. He reported neither on his tax return.

Bloom also founded an embattled charter school at the church. Supporters in court murmured “Amen” after statements praising Bloom. *Source: Pocono Record, 10-10-13*

Marcelo Lozano, 34, **Los Angeles**: 30 years in prison after pleading no contest to oral copulation of a person under 14 and 2 counts of continuous sexual abuse. Lozano met the victims, boys ages 8 and 11, through his work as an usher at Salón del Reino de los Testigos de Jehová, a Spanish Jehovah’s Witness congregation.

Assaults started in 2006 and continued through last June. *Source: KABC, 10-9-13*

Lynn Seibel, 71, **Calif.**: 52 months in prison after pleading guilty to 7 counts of sexual abuse involving 6 males who were students at Shattuck-St. Mary’s, a **Minnesota** Catholic boarding school where Seibel taught drama from 1992-2003 and lived in a dormitory.

He left in 2003 after child pornography was found on his computer. *Source: AP, 10-4-13*

Robert C. Manning, 78, Colorado Springs, **CO**: 4 years’ probation for contributing to the delinquency of a minor. The Catholic priest was accused of giving a 16-year-old altar boy alcohol and marijuana in 2011 and signing a parental consent form for him to get his nipples pierced. Several more serious charges were dropped.

The Colorado Knights of Columbus branch named him “Chaplain of the Year” in 2010. *Source: Colorado Springs Gazette, 10-4-13*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Gordon McLean, 78, former head of Juvenile Justice Ministry of Metro **Chicago** Youth for Christ, is being sued by 5 plaintiffs for sexual abuse. McLean was also an auxiliary chaplain for the Cook County Sheriff’s Office.

Plaintiffs allege McLean would ask young gang members if they’d been bad boys, invite them to his house, spank their bare buttocks as they laid across his lap and then engage in sex acts.

McLean allegedly gave the boys money for drugs and took them to a church on Sundays. “[McLean would introduce] the ‘bad boy’ to the suburban church audience as a successful convert to the Lord Jesus Christ who had come to saving faith in the Lord through McLean’s ministry efforts,” the suit claims. *Source: Raw Story, 10-22-13*

A South Korean student who alleges she was molested while attending **Pius X High School** in Pen Argyl, **PA**, is suing the school, the **Catholic Diocese of Allentown** and **Ace Academy USA**.

She alleges she told a priest 4 times in confession she was assaulted but police were not alerted. She lived at Ace Academy USA in order to attend Pius X and alleges ACE Director **Richard Kim** started molesting her in 2010 when she was 13.

Kim was eventually sentenced to prison and his parents, **Min** and **Yong Kim**, pleaded guilty this year to failing to report suspected child abuse and received probation. *Source: Express-Times, 10-17-13*

Susan Manter, Holden, MA, seeks a minimum of \$40,000 in damages from **Charles M. Abdelahad**, former pastor of **St. George Antiochian [Greek] Orthodox Cathedral** in Worcester, and several other state, local and national church individuals and bodies.

Manter accused Abdelahad of abusing her sexually, emotionally and physically from 2007-10. He was convicted in May 2012 of abusing Manter, then 45, during counseling sessions at the church. *Source: Telegram & Gazette, 10-17013*

Alyce Conlon, a former employee of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in Grand Rapids, **MI**, is suing the evangelical campus ministry. She alleges she was wrongfully terminated because of her divorce, even though 2 male colleagues kept their jobs after divorcing and getting remarried. Conlon was placed on paid leave in 2011 after telling supervisors she and her husband were considering separation or divorce and was later fired.

InterVarsity has more than 700 U.S. chapters. Its headquarters is in Madison, **WI**. *Source: Religion News Service, 10-15-13*

A woman, 28, has filed a lawsuit against **Michael Keating**, 57, St. Paul, **MN**, and the **Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis**, alleging that Keating, a priest and professor at the University of St. Thomas, “engaged in sexual contact” with her while she was a minor and he was in the seminary.

An email, allegedly sent by Keating, when the girl was 14 or 15 and he was 44, said, “I’m afraid you are going to have to get used to being hounded by boys. You’re too pretty and too charming not to be and you’ll only get prettier and charmier as the years go by.”

Keating has taken a voluntary leave of absence. **Kevin McDonough**, former archdiocesan vicar general who was involved in a 2006 probe of Keating, has resigned from the University of St. Thomas board of directors. *Source: Pioneer Press, 10-14-13*

Yeshiva University in **New York City** is being sued by 2 more former students in addition to 34 others who claim they were molested by officials at the prestigious Jewish high school.

One alleged victim claims that in 1955, **Rabbi Macy Gordon** tried for 15 minutes to give him a “mishey,” a term for pinning a boy down and rubbing toothpaste on his penis. Gordon was accused earlier of sodomizing a victim with a toothbrush in a dorm room.

The other new plaintiff alleged that university staffer **George Finkelstein** used a master key to enter dorm rooms in the mid-1980s to accost students. *Source: N.Y. Post, 10-1-13*

Legal Developments

Sean McIlmail, a former altar boy who alleged in January that **Fr. Robert Brennan**, 75, **Philadelphia**, molested him 15 years ago, was found dead at age 26.

“Sean suffered in silence for over a decade,” District Attorney Seth Williams said. “Sean found his own way of self-medicating, which unfortunately led to his death.”

Williams said he dropped rape and sexual assault charges against Brennan because there was no longer enough evidence to prosecute.

In an interview, McIlmail’s parents, brother and sister confirmed that Sean was the person who accused Brennan of molesting him for 4 years, starting when he was 11.

The McIlmails described themselves as “devout Irish Catholics” who no longer attend church because of the abuse of children by priests.

Deborah McIlmail recalled Sean talking to her husband, Michael, recently. “He said, ‘Dad, he took my innocence from me before I even knew what innocence was.’” *Source: NBC Philadelphia, 10-23-13*

Tonya Farnsworth, Henrico, **VA**, pleaded guilty to extorting more than \$100,000 from **Chris A. Phillips**, pastor at Mechanicsville Advent Christian Church. Phillips had responded to an ad on Backpage.com and paid Farnsworth \$200 for oral sex, according to prosecutors. Farnsworth then accused the pastor of stealing \$550 from her and demanded he repay her or she would release photos of their encounter.

Ultimately, she took more than \$100,000 from Phillips, prosecutors said. Phillips was later arrested for embezzling from his church. *Source: WWBT, 10-22-13*

The Cour de Cassation, France’s highest appeals court, upheld a 2009 fraud conviction and fines of \$812,000 for the **Church of Scientology** for preying financially on followers in the 1990s.

A statement from the church’s Los Angeles headquarters called the ruling “an affront to justice and religious liberty.”

Complaints included alleged manipulation into buying expensive Scientology products such as an “electrometer” to measure mental energy and being forced to undergo testing and enroll in courses in order to maintain employment. *Source: AFP, 10-17-13*

The Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeals upheld the conviction of **Jacqueline Crank** for child abuse in the 2002 death of her 15-year-old daughter Jessica. Crank turned to prayer instead of medical treatment for Jessica, who died of bone cancer.

She and her Ariel Sherman, her “spiritual father,” eventually both served a year in jail. Jacqueline and Jessica Crank and Jessica’s brother lived with Sherman. *Source: Religion Clause, 10-1-13*

The 3rd Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in

‘Dad, he took my innocence from me before I even knew what innocence was.’

— *Sean McIlmail, 26, former altar boy/abuse victim who committed suicide*

Philadelphia upheld the 4-year sentence of **Rabbi Mordchai Fish**, Brooklyn, NY, for a money-laundering conviction involving more than \$900,000. Fish was one of five rabbis pleading guilty after being snared in a 2009 political corruption sting in New York and New Jersey.

His attorneys argued Fish’s crimes weren’t “sophisticated” and didn’t merit an enhanced sentence. *Source: AP, 10-1-13*

Allegations

Frank Meurs, 74, Plymouth, **MN**, alleges the **Archdiocese of Saint Paul-Minneapolis** failed to respond for 9 months to his 2010 letter disclosing Meurs’ alleged abuse by **Fr. Rudolph Henrich** at St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church in Golden Valley in the 1950s and 1960s.

Kevin McDonough, former vicar general, expressed his “embarrassment” and apologized to Meurs 9 months later. Henrich died in 1992.

Meurs said at a press conference he can’t fathom why church officials who knew about Henrich’s abusive history didn’t speak up. “Has it ever come out?” Meurs said. “No. So I come because of the secrecy.” *Source: Pioneer Press, 10-9-13*

Domingo Espinal, a Catholic priest sentenced in 2010 to 15 years for raping a 12-year-old boy in 2003, was allowed to remain free while he appealed. When the **Dominican Republic** Supreme Court denied his appeal, Espinal fled. He was captured in Santo Domingo when he went to pick up a teen who was in trouble for uploading a defamatory video to the Internet. Police recognized Espinal and arrested him. The boy told police that Espinal was his father. *Source: AP, 10-9-13*

A review board for the Diocese of Columbus, **OH**, decided an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by retired priest **Raymond Lavelle**, 83, “was credible and warranted further investigation.” During the period in question (1971-80), Lavelle was pastor of St. Agnes Catholic Church.

Victim advocate Carol Zamonski encouraged victims to come forward. “It’s almost certain that this is not the only victim. It may be the only one we’ve heard of, but it’s really rare for someone to have only one victim.” *Source: Columbus Dispatch, 10-8-13*

The Diocese of Trenton, **NJ**, has again suspended **Matthew Riedlinger**, 30, as pastor of St. Aloysius Catholic Church. Riedlinger is accused of “sexting” with a person he thought was a 16-year-old boy.

In one message, he encouraged “Josh” to enjoy sex with his boyfriend and told him how alike they were in their thirst for pornography and sex. “I love u dude. Ur a sick [expletive] like me,” Riedlinger wrote.

The diocese sent him to treatment in 2011 after getting a complaint about sexual conversations. Another man pretending to be 16 online outed him to police, but prosecution was declined. *Source: USA Today, 10-4-13*

Wojciech Gil, 36, a Catholic priest sought by Interpol on suspicions he molested children in the **Dominican Republic**, was located but not detained by Polish police near Krakow.

Police spokeswoman Katrzyna Cisló said that to arrest Gil, police would need a request from Dominican investigators. Poland does not have an extradition treaty with the Dominican Republic.

Gil was home on vacation when the allegations surfaced. He was suspended by his superior and ordered to return to the Dominican Republic.

“We are in constant contact with the Polish authorities and are working closely with them,” said Francisco Dominguez Brito, the Dominican Republic’s attorney general.

A second Polish cleric, **Archbishop Jozef Wesolowski**, the Vatican’s representative on the island, is also under investigation. **Francisco Javier Occis Reyes**, a deacon arrested for molesting a minor, alerted police to alleged involvement by Gil and Wesolowski. *Source: AP, 10-2-13*

Removed / Resigned

Raymond L. Cole, 70, pastor of St. Joseph Catholic Parish in Hillsborough, **NJ**, was suspended over allegations he molested a child in the 1970s when he was pastor at St. Mary Par-

ish in South Amboy.

Diocese of Metuchen Bishop Paul Bootkoski said he was alerted to the allegation by civil authorities, who didn’t pursue criminal charges because the statute of limitations had passed.

“Both the investigator and the review board reported to me that they found the information and circumstances surrounding the allegation were not frivolous,” Bootkoski said. *Source: Star-Ledger, 10-28-13*

Gwyn I. Morgan, Carmarthen, **Wales**, 81, has been suspended from his duties at 2 Congregationalist chapels “in connection with a historic allegation of sexual activity with a minor.” *Source: BBC, 10-25-13*

Andrey Evstigneeva, a Russian Orthodox priest, was suspended for 2 months by the Diocese of Saratov, **RUS**, for comments he made while baptizing a baby girl. The girls’ parents said Evstigneeva used the Russian pejorative “zhidovskym,” or “kike,” in reference to the girl’s name. The girl’s mother is Jewish.

Evstigneeva’s behavior was “incompatible with clerical dignity and disrespectful of parish members,” a statement said. *Source: JTA, 10-25-13*

Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst, 53, bishop of Limburg, **GER**, dubbed “the bishop of bling,” was put on leave by the Vatican for spending \$42 million renovating his official residence.

German media reported that the residence was fitted with a bath that cost \$21,000, a conference table for \$34,000 and a private chapel that cost almost \$4 million. *Source: BBC, 10-23-13*

Tim Hopkins, 44, has resigned as pastor at 2 Catholic parishes in Denton, **UK**, despite being told he won’t be prosecuted over allegations he molested a young girl 3 times between 2004-07. *Source: Manchester Evening News, 10-22-13*

Akiva Roth, 42, was fired as a Hebrew teacher at Yeshiva University in **New York City** after it came to light he pleaded guilty to 4 counts of abuse for exposing himself to boys was tutoring for bar mitzvahs in 1997. He received 10 years’ probation. The university admitted it let Roth to start teaching before a background check was completed. *Source: Haaretz, 10-14-13*

Stephen M. Gemme, 43, resigned as pastor of St. Bernadette Catholic Parish in Northborough, **MA**, after allegedly embezzling more than \$230,000 over 4 years to feed a gambling addiction.

The case has been turned over to the district attorney, said Worcester Bishop Robert McManus. *Source: MetroWest Daily News, 10-14-13*

The Catholic Diocese of Duluth, **MN**, has removed retired priest **Cornelius Kelleher**, 81, from public ministry. He was recently accused of molesting a minor female when he was pastor of St. Joseph’s in Chisholm from 1975-86. *Source: Star-Tribune, 10-7-13*

Etienne Doat, pastor of a Catholic parish in Montoire, **France**, was suspended during an inquiry into the theft of about 40 valuable sacred vessels and collection money from several churches under his care.

The stolen goods included chalices, patens, monstrances and ciboria, objects usually plated with gold or silver. Some dated to the 1600s. None of the churches reported a break-in. *Source: Nouvelle Republique, 10-7-13*

Peter Laird resigned as vicar general, the No. 2 post in the **Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis**, amid growing concerns about the church’s response to clergy sex abuse.

Laird was featured in a recent Minnesota Public Radio story on how the archdiocese knew about sexual misbehavior of a priest, **Fr. Curtis Wehmeyer**, yet kept him in the ministry.

The story reported Laird received a 2011 memo on allegations against Wehmeyer, who later pleaded guilty to molesting boys ages 12 and 14 and to possessing child pornography. *Source: MPR, 10-20-13*

Other

John Folda, 52, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Fargo, **ND**, exposed parishioners in 5 parishes to the hepatitis A virus. The state Health Department issued an advisory of exposure for anyone who took communion from Folda in the last week of September and the first week in October.

Diocesan spokeswoman Aliceyn Magelky said Folda contracted the liver disease from contaminated food he ate at conference in Italy for newly ordained bishops. *Source: AP, 10-25-13*

Thomas J. O’Brien, 87, a Catholic priest who has been sued numerous times for sexual abuse, died in **Kansas City** with 6 suits pending against him and his diocese.

“Dozens of boys who were sexually assaulted by Msgr. Thomas O’Brien have suffered enough,” said victims’ advocate David Clohessy. “Please do not add to their pain. Please do not let Msgr. O’Brien be buried in a Catholic cemetery with full honors in a public ceremony.” *Source: Kansas City Star, 10-25-13*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

Letterbox

Constitution ad adds pair to FFRF fold

“Celebrate Our Secular Constitution,” FFRF’s full-page ad that ran in the Chicago Tribune, was brilliant. My wife Tara and I clipped the membership form and joined immediately. That, of course, led us to the excellent conference in Madison, from which we came home bearing books, cards and T-shirts.

After I described the conference events to my son Dane, including the politics behind the inclusion of “God” in the pledge, he told me that he and his wife had rewritten the pledge to align more closely to their personal viewpoint. He emailed me a copy: “I pledge allegiance to the Constitution of the United States of America, and to the principles for which it stands, one nation under law, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

Rick Ronvik
Illinois

High school essayists inspire sponsorship

I have been a member of FFRF for a number of years now and appreciate the monthly newspaper. I am enclosing a check for \$2,500 for the fund for the high school student scholarship essay competition. It is very important that our high school students are able to express their views and “see the light.”

Unfortunately, being on the West Coast, I was unable to attend your event in Wisconsin but you have my full support. Keep it up!

Allen P. Wilkinson
California

FFRF thanks Allen for his activism and generous \$2,500 contribution!

• • •

The student essays are the best part of your newspaper — the future, the inspiration!

Dennis Marino
Wisconsin

• • •

I celebrate all who participated in the high school essay contest! All the essays invited me to participate in the lives and experiences of these awesome new friends. I have read and reread every word and felt as though I had been introduced to their families and friends.

I am so proud of them all and am profoundly grateful for their gifts to me and others. I wish it were possible for them to be aware of the immensity of their courageous gifts!

Paul Elliott Moss Jr.
Virginia

New ‘Lifer’ figured out Santa, bible myths

I am pleased that I’m now in a financial position to be able to make this \$1,000 contribution for a Lifetime Membership. As I grew up, going to church every Sunday morning and Wednesday evening (until I was 16, when I was given a choice to go or not), I could not believe that everyone was acting like all these bible “teachings” were true.

I quickly figured out that Santa Claus was not true and neither were the bible stories. In my early teens, I became amazed that their Santa Claus (religion) was how they were basing

their life. Believe in my Santa Claus and you will go to “heaven.” Believe in someone else’s Santa Claus and go to “hell.” If you do not believe in my Santa Claus, I hate you so much that I am going to war with you!

Religion stems from our wish to know more, but we learn slowly about many things — that the world is not flat, that there are no witches, that slavery has no place in society, that no race or gender is better or worse. The main question likely can’t be answered: “What is the meaning of life?”

I am 55 and see the destruction caused by this lack of logic and how using religion to answer the unknown causes ill will. The good news is that more and more people are turning away from religion (they will tell you so in private), and thus society is and will become better. Thank you for helping our country follow our well-written document, our Constitution, especially the very first line of the First Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion ...”

Thank you for fighting to enforce the principle of separation of church and state.

Dave Whittaker
California

God on money ‘close to sacrilege’

Considering that the motto of the infamous Nazis, “Gott mit uns” (God with us), is almost a reflection of our own “In God We Trust,” common sense would seem to dictate that our country’s original motto, “E Pluribus Unum,” is a better choice for our pluralistic nation.

Moreover, Theodore Roosevelt himself, one of our most devout Christian presidents, strongly objected to the inclusion of “In God We Trust” on our money.

This is what he said: “To put such a motto on coins or to use it in any kindred manner, not only does no good but does positive harm, and is in effect irreverence, which comes dangerously close to sacrilege.”

How right he was! Legal tender currency is what winos use to buy their alcohol, what johns use to pay prostitutes, what addicted gamblers use to deprive their children of food, what drug peddlers demand from their victims and what gun merchants are paid with so that we won’t have a shortage of violence.

The list is endless. If I were the “Good Lord,” I’d feel offended to have my name printed on such a filthy, germ-infested and amoral thing as money.

David Quintero
California

Former Marine scoffs at Corps faith policy

An FFRF supporter shares his email to the U.S. Marine Corps after Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote Marine Commandant James Amos about a policy calling “lack or loss of spiritual faith” a risk indicator.

I am a qualified veteran of World War II and an ex-Marine who holds the Good Conduct Medal. I was 18 when I enlisted. I was a member of the 2nd Division, 10th Marine Regiment. I want to back up the letter you received about judging a Marine by his faith or



Kristine Walderbach and Warren Geisler’s sign near their mailbox has been there since they retired from Iowa to Arkansas three years ago. “We have only received one comment, and that was a positive one,” Warren says.

no faith in some kind of a god.

There is absolutely no empirical evidence that any sort of god exists. I was on the rifle team at Camp Lejeune, we shot the M1 .30-06 rifle with open sights at 600 yards. Those who believed in God hit the bull’s-eye with the same accuracy as those who did not believe in God. Back off and back the U.S. Constitution.

Burt Hackett
Pennsylvania

FFRF lifts spirits in northern Michigan

I submitted a concern to FFRF about signage at my son’s high school. It is now down. You get the credit, if not for the sign, for everything else.

You keep my spirits up while I’m living in a closed society up here in the far north. Thank you.

Dorothea M. Case
Michigan

FFRF thanks Dorothea for her activism and generous \$1,000 contribution!

Convention-goers share Madison experiences

We just returned from the convention, where we had a wonderful time. It was only our second, but we hope not the last. You really need to consider the South as a venue. Perhaps Bentonville (home of Wal-Mart) or Little Rock or Tulsa or Oklahoma City? We have a great many freethinkers; unfortunately many are still in the closet.

Enclosed is a check for your Building Fund. We hope to visit Madison again and see the completed building.

Godless in Arkansas!

Warren Geisler and Kristine Walderbach
Arkansas

• • •

Thank you for a wonderful weekend in Madison. The balance of entertainment and educational programs was wonderful. Friday night with Dan Savage and Jill and Julia provided a terrific kickoff. The film on Saturday was moving and worked to remind me of why we are all working to educate and build community.

I appreciate the opportunity to meet other state leaders and to see what has been working in their communities.

Thank you for your effort!

Jocelyn M. Dervis
Florida

• • •

Thank you for providing such an interesting and engaging conference in Madison. As a first-year attendee, I came away feeling a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation for FFRF’s work. I found nearly all of the speakers engaging, incredibly honest, transparent, intelligent and quite entertaining.

I must admit that I had some reservations about attending, due mostly to my current status as an active Roman Catholic here in the Madison Diocese. But when I heard from some very dear friends that they were attending, I became intrigued and decided to register. I considered writing to you beforehand to check out how you might feel about my attendance, but dismissed it as an unnecessary and perhaps irrational concern, thinking it better to ask forgiveness than permission. I first became interested in FFRF’s work after hearing Annie Laurie and Dan speak to a discussion group in the basement of the First United Methodist Church over 10 years ago.

So please keep up the great work of keeping our faiths separate from our state. Continue to challenge all of us to see our tribal gods for what they are, made in our image and likeness.

I was treated generally with great respect and tolerance by the other participants at the conference. One man did challenge me on the spot to produce some credible evidence of a higher power. It was an odd role reversal where I was the member of a religious minority. I wonder if this is how an atheist, humanist, Jew, Muslim or Buddhist feels living in our Christ-haunted society.

Dennis Harrison-Noonan
Wisconsin

• • •

I attended your convention in Madison and loved my whole trip. I had never viewed Madison as a destination location, but indeed it is.

Judy Miller
Utah

Building Fund pledge is couple’s legacy

My husband Jim and I are sorry to miss all the great events at the convention in Madison this year as well as the fellowship of fellow atheists, but at our age we felt we cannot travel so far by ourselves any longer. We hope to attend future meetings held anywhere on the West Coast.

The enclosed check is a down payment on a pledge of \$5,000 for the new building project in Madison. We plan to complete our goal this year by sending regular donations. Hopefully, this will give our children and grandchildren a place to see our names included in the many supporters of freethought.

Jackie and Jim Ede
Alaska

FFRF thanks Jackie and Jim for their ac-

tivism and generous \$1,000 contribution! Our 2014 convention is in Los Angeles.

Inmates ‘getting’ God for wrong reasons

I worked many years in the prison system supervising inmate activities, training and recruiting volunteers for programs and “clearing” providers of

religious services. The minute — the exact minute — that someone is arrested, he or she “gets” God! Christianity is usually the chosen deity, but Islam is certainly a close second.

You will find your most “God-fearing” devotees inside prison walls. It applies to car thieves as well as murderers. In fact, the more horrendous the crime, the more devout the inmate. Why? Because those inmates get to participate in all the religious activities the prison offers. It gets them out of their cells, it passes time and oftentimes allows sex between inmate and the most devoted religious volunteer. It also permits preachers to have ongoing sex with a “chosen” inmate.

Go to any church, in any city, and look for those ex-inmates. But visit any jail, and you will find a convert, most likely right after the cell door closes. We could look in any prison or jail and seldom find an atheist.

The extraordinary amount of young, pregnant women in prisons is sad. If your life is in a ghetto, you have no job, little schooling and find yourself pregnant, unmarried, alone with no resources, it’s very likely you will commit a crime that will bring you a sentence of one to five years.

Why? Because your health care in prison is not only free, it’s far superior to what may be available on the outside. Being shackled to the delivery table with manacles is a small price to pay.

Jeanne Owers
Texas

Consider ‘QCD’ as way to lessen tax bite

I turned 70½ in October and have chosen to exercise my one-time opportunity to make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from my Traditional IRA to FFRF so I can be counted as a Life Member. This will satisfy part of my required minimum distribution for 2013 and save any income taxes I would owe on the distribution.

By making a direct transfer from my IRA custodian to FFRF, I do not have report the \$1,000 as income on my 2013 tax return. Readers should note that this is the last year that this tax-saving measure may be available, since it has not been renewed by Congress for next year.

This privilege is especially useful for taxpayers who do not itemize their charitable deductions. I benefit, and so does FFRF.

J. Darwin Soder
Florida

Leviticus slavery quote was wrong chapter

I got my Freethought Today yesterday and, as usual, have pretty much perused through it. I think I caught a mistake — not to be a butthead!

In Max Lewis’ essay, he lists slavery as permissible in the bible from Leviticus 26:44-46. Shouldn’t that be Leviticus 25:44-46? I mean, that’s where it is in my bible, and if it’s not in Leviticus 25:44-46, that would be a — wait, wait for it — that would be a miracle!

Having grown up in Shawano, Wis., but now living in Martinez, Ga., I have to say THE FALCONS SUCK and GO PACK! Man, I sure miss that good old Wisconsin cheese curd!

Peace and love, now that’s where it’s at!

Jeff Miller
Georgia

Indeed, Jeff knows his Leviticus! Sorry

for the typo.

James Madison ardently defended separation

As early as 1774, young James Madison, in a letter to his friend William Bradford, denounced “religious bondage.” In the context of the time, he probably meant bondage to the mandatory Anglican Church of his Virginia childhood.

If Madison believed freedom of religion was a “natural right,” very likely he saw it as a natural right of white male Christians and would have been taken aback by the notion of extending that right to women, blacks, Jews or freethinkers.

However, FFRF correctly points out, in his later political career, Madison was the principal ardent defender of separation of church and state, and for that we should all remember him with gratitude.

David M. Shea
Maryland

Comfort Food

Does it comfort you
that the wine you drink
once flowed through the veins
of a god made man?

Does it comfort you
that your flesh will soon
become bread of life
for a hungry Earth?

Does it comfort you
that your feast of death
will bring virgins to
consummate your rage?

Does it comfort you
there is no banquet
for the blessed save
the peace of the grave?

Does it comfort you
that hungers denied
will one day set you
free from all desire?

Does it comfort you
that atoms once yours
will live forever
as something not you?

Gene Twaronite
Arizona

Respect irrational beliefs? Sorry, just can’t

The politically correct people say you must respect the beliefs of others. I’m not so sure about that. If someone’s belief is that the Holocaust didn’t happen or that the moon landing was a hoax or Earth is flat, are we required to respect those beliefs?

I well understand that most people have been brainwashed by their culture to have superstitious beliefs, but does that mean that I have to respect them? I find it counter to rational thinking to respect such irrational beliefs. While I can respect individuals as people and members of society, I feel no compulsion whatsoever to respect whatever illogical beliefs they may have.

The hate mail in Freethought Today certainly shows a lack of respect for my beliefs by those who continually beat the drum that we must respect theirs.

Dale Oliver
Texas

‘Clean’ Money Drawing

Photography by Brent Nicastro



Freethought Radio “voice deity” Buzz Kemper emceed the convention drawing for “clean” (pre-“In God We Trust”) currency.



Thanks to students who drew winning tickets. They are (from left) Lily Gaylor, Devon Arnold, Hannah Weinstein, Alice Dizuik, Ryan Chellberg and Sidney Novak.

And the winners are . . .

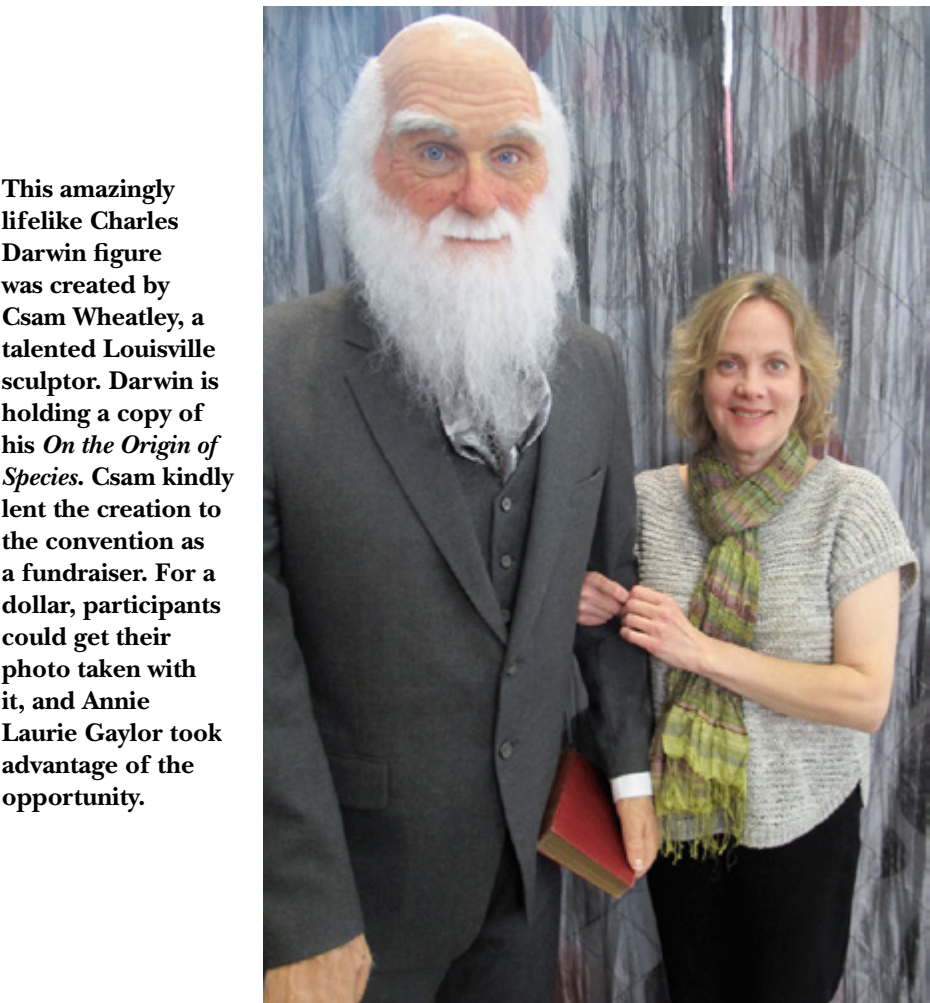


“Clean” currency (pre-1957) settles many a debate with theocrats who falsely claim God has always been on U.S. currency. Proud clean-money winners at the convention were (back, left): Maggie Freespirit, WI: \$1 (donated by Lori Martins); Kay Pettycrew, AZ: \$1 (donated by JB Geiger; Kay redonated back to FFRF); Richard Halasz, TX: \$1 (donated by Don and Donna Barski); Donna Jordahl, ID: \$1 (donated by Ray Greenbank); Guy Craig, CA: \$2 (donated by Charles and Sheri Bender); Vicki Frederick, WI: \$5 (donated by Robert Steinegger); Ellery Schempp, MA: \$10 (donated by CW Mitchell); Larry Tanner, CT: \$20 (donated by Dan and Donna Barski); Ron Locatelli, CA: \$50; David Carroll, PA: \$100 (1934); and Kathy Johnson, CA: \$1 (donated by the late Charlie French).

Sacramento freethinkers mark Freethought Day



Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor opened an event hosted by Sacramento Coalition of Reason members, including FFRF's new Sacramento chapter, on Freethought Day, Oct. 12. It was the 321st anniversary of the end of the Salem witch trials. FFRF, at the suggestion of member David Schreiber, inaugurated Freethought Day in the early 1990s to mark a "watershed of human history, surely one of the most seminal in terms of the elevation of thought." FFRF notes, "There have been many holidays for saints and superstition, but never one commemorating reason, freethought and state/church separation." Sacramento-area freethinkers have built the day into a major event, coordinated this year by FFRF member David Diskin. BELOW: Judy Saint, chapter director, staffs a table at the event at William Land Park.



This amazingly lifelike Charles Darwin figure was created by Csam Wheatley, a talented Louisville sculptor. Darwin is holding a copy of his *On the Origin of Species*. Csam kindly lent the creation to the convention as a fundraiser. For a dollar, participants could get their photo taken with it, and Annie Laurie Gaylor took advantage of the opportunity.

Overheard

I'm quite sure a Christian would not be happy if the town meeting began by everybody announcing how thankful they were we've finally learned there is no God. One could say it's just teaching Christians to be tolerant of atheists, but nobody would or should take that seriously.

Arnold Loewy, Texas Tech University law professor, arguing that government meetings shouldn't start with prayer
Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, 10-20-13

Archbishop Michalik's words make us feel fear and revulsion.
Ewa Orlowska, victim of a Polish pedophile priest, on Archbishop Jozef Michalik's comment that a troubled child "seeks closeness with others and may get lost and may get the other person involved, too."
Associated Press, 10-22-13

We're pretty sure all babies are born atheists and, rather than commit them to some religion before they're old enough to have a say (let alone control their pooping functions), we'd rather celebrate their undoubted belief in Mummy and Daddy.
Kickstarter promotion for baby shoes by Atheist Shoe Co. in Berlin
boingboing.net, 10-29-13

It's time for the atheist movement to get off the political sidelines. It's time to truly help this country become a better place to live for all its citizens. The recent Values Voter Summit demonstrated that the likely 2016 GOP front-runners and its base wish to transform America's secular state into a tyrannical theocracy — a nirvana absent gays, liberals, immigrants, Muslims and science books. If the atheist movement doesn't evolve into a politically agitated, unified and mobilized Secular Left, then the Christian Right might just get its way.
CJ Werleman, author of Crucifying America and God Hates You. Hate Him Back.
salon.com, 10-26-13

Gay marriage, pot, religion's the next one to fall.
Entertainer Bill Maher
"Real Time With Bill Maher," 10-25-13

[A Catholic] professor once asked me, "When I talk about God, I mean love and justice and reconciliation, not a man in the sky. You talk about love and justice and reconciliation. Why can't you just call that God?" I replied, "Why must you call that God? Why not just call it what it is: love and justice and reconciliation?"
Chris Stedman, assistant humanist chaplain at Harvard University
CNN, 10-16-13

Sky News reports today that in Britain, increasing numbers of prison inmates are being bullied into converting to Islam. The Prison Officers Association says this is a result of the growing influence of Muslim gangs in British prisons. Some victims have been terrorized by the gangs. But there is also concern that some of the converts could become radicalized. 13% of Britain's prison population is Muslim.
Blog synopsis of growing British prison problem
Religion Clause, 10-20-13

[Barack Obama] believes government is your God.
Rev. Rafael Cruz, Purifying Fire Ministries pastor and father of Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, speaking at a National Federation Of Republican Assemblies prayer breakfast
youtube.com, 9-15-13

In your lifetime, much of your potential, or lack thereof, can be known simply by swabbing the inside of your cheek. Are we prepared to select out the imperfect among us?
Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., warning a packed house at the late Rev. Jerry Falwell's Liberty University in Virginia that scientific advancements will lead to eugenics and more abortions
Associated Press, 10-28-13

'Reason in the Rock'



Two former pastors, Jerry DeWitt (left) and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, "preached" Oct. 27 (on Sunday!) to attendees at the second-annual freethought event in Little Rock, Ark. Jerry is the author of *Hope After Faith*.

'KFC' stands for freethought



Planners of the third annual Kentucky Freethought Convention in Louisville on Oct. 27, as well as guest speakers, assembled for a photo. From back, left are Tim Heilers, William Zingrone, Sarah Henry, Jamila Bey, Reba Boyd Wooden, Hemant Mehta, Clay Maney, Car Allen, (front) Alex Grigg, Ed Hensley, Mikel Hensley, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Delaney.



New Ohio FFRF chapter meets

The Northern Ohio Freethought Society, a new Cleveland-area FFRF chapter, held a banquet Oct. 27. Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor addressed the group. Here, she thanks Marni Heubner-Tiborsky, chapter director, and her husband Mark, and her hosts Lisa Milliron and Ray Valenti, for their hospitality, as well as Dave Huntsman for transportation. The event attracted a full house. Active chapter members attending were (back, left) Ray Valenti, Sam Salerno, Mark Tiborsky, Marni Huebner-Tiborsky, Gary Deboer, Sharon Woznicki, Dave Huntsman, Ron Taggart, Don Mossman, Matt Marshall and Keith Bowes. From front, left are Ram Pillai, Mardell Ward, Lisa Milliron, Joanna Polisena, Randy Pelton, Katherine “Kat” Bowes, Suzy Wernet and Annie Laurie Gaylor.



Akron, Ohio, students organize

The Secular Student Alliance at the University of Akron hosted a full-day conference Oct. 18 dubbed “the Sexy Secular Conference.” Addressed were women’s issues, LGBTQ issues, African-American topics, Muslim issues, ethics/morality, psychology and others. FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor’s presentation was titled “Women Without Superstition.” FFRF and its new Cleveland-area chapter, the Northern Ohio Freethought Society, both tabled at the event, which attracted about 200 students. Unless otherwise identified, pictured are SSA student planners and activists (left) Mitchell Eppich, Jess Balishin, Madeline Nagy, Chris Holley, Brian Crisan, Brock Barber, speaker Aron Ra, Claudia Allen, Craig Bauman, Grace Ebner, Bob LaBounty, Rob Frase, Lucas Barker, speaker Nate Phelps, speaker Annie Laurie Gaylor, Austin Merideth, speaker Greta Christina, Tommy Panek, Rob Lehr, speaker David Fitzgerald, speaker Heina Dadabhoy and SSA staffer Nick Stancato. Not pictured are speakers Mandisa Thomas and Darrel Ray.

Raleigh chapter portrait



Members of the Triangle Freethought Society, FFRF’s active Raleigh-area chapter, gather for a photo after an Oct. 21 presentation by Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor (seated second from left). Chapter board member and volunteer Sue Kocher, who picked Annie Laurie up at the airport, is seated next to her. Chapter President Harry Shaughnessy (in gray T-shirt) is at far right, second row.

Sharing the Crank Mail

A sampling of the voluminous crank mail recently received by FFRF, printed in all its grammatical glory:

Jesus Picture In Jackson Middle School: You know it is organizations like yours that make me see red... fuck you, your organization and everyone there.. our country is so fucked up because of people and groups like you. — *Hank Talikka*

your salaries: Are you paid to keep God out of the American society? I’m guessing you are, as your activities of suing school districts, etc. require time and effort on part. Betcha I don’t get an honest answer! — *Greg Simkovich, Laughlintown, PA*

u r freakin gay. without god you wouldn’t be alive: You are breaking the law by telling people what they can do. if we wanna pray then we will pray! I’ll sue your freakin gay website for losers. — *bobby at jesuourking13@gmail.com*

Sale Creek Middle School: Until you stand up and publicly denounce the teaching of any form of Islam in our public schools, you are nothing more than political agenda hypocrites. You are completely irrelevant. Go fuck yourselves. — *James Veach, Georgia*

Moral corruption caused by your organization: You are conducting a war on terror against Chjristianity! You are responsible for the moral decay of this nation. — *Vittorio Luchi, Arizona*

Troy University religious dorms: Are you idiots. This is total BS. Why are you doing this? What are you afraid of? If this was about porn, or weed, or anything else that destroys a society, you would be quiet. You people are bad! — *Larry Lestelle, Washington*

Idiots: Is there a Freedom from Idiots group? If so, all y’all idiots need to join. Then maybe

we can be done with your hate group. I other words, GO AWAY! And your parent group, Atheists, is a religion as well. Look up the definition for a religion. I’ll help you out, “a shared belief” Does that not describe you? It is like reparations for slavery. If a black person also has Caucasian blood, do they owe themselves money? I found out about your religion on a wall in the men’s bathroom, along side of the ads for a BJ in a parking lot. Both are wrong. — *M. Pieschel, Fayetteville, TN*

suing people of faith IS wrong: HOW does simply seeing a picture of Jesus or a plaque of the 10 commandments on a wall “harm” you? It doesn’t. Thing is if an atheist hung a dirty picture of something on a wall and anyone complained you would argue your first ammendment free speech rights, but let a Christian hang something on a wall and all of a sudden those first ammendment rights are null and void. Your fight is as old as time itself. Good verses evil, and my ticket is on good (God). — *Patty Hadley, Kentucky*

freedom: I want to file a complaint against you guys. I am offended by your actions and think it best that all of you move to Kenya or somewhere in that region. You are a bunch of ignorant asses. But you do live in the perfect state to be ass holes. Have a wonderful life because after you are done here it will get very hot. — *Carlie, South Dakota*

FFRF: Your website has made me very sad. I am praying for you. — *Jan Cain, Carrollton, Georgia*

beliefs: I see your group has raised its UGLY HEAD once again to impose your beliefs on others. I thought politicians were the lowest vermin on earth but you re right there with them. — *Jack Terrier, Virginia*

you assholes: Why can’t you assholes mind

your own fucking business instead of trying to shove your bullshit down our throats for something we do not believe in — *john demirjian, new mexico*

Yall are a bunch of crack pots: I am writing about something I seen about a pastor who said a bible verse & GOD six times when talking to students at Sale Creek Middle-High School. THAT IS OUR RIGHT TO SAY GOD AND TALK ABOUT A BIBLE VERSE IF YOU DONT WANT TO HEAR IT THEN LEAVE OR COVER YOUR EARS. Im 39 years old and when I grew up in school we said a daily prayer and said the Pledge. — *Sharon Jenkins, Tennessee*

5 Thousand Dollar Donation Enclosed: Here ya go. A nice shiny crisp 5 thousand dollar bill for you to play with. Oh wait, on that bill are the words, “In God We Trust”, opps, looks like you can’t use it after all. Sorry about yer bad luck. Heck. None of you can even touch cash of any kind if it’s US currency now can ya. HAHAAHAHA! — *Chuck Thompson*

Jesus portrait at school: You have every right not to accept any God and not worship a Cross, Half-Moon or Star of David. For all I care, you may dance in robes around a fire pit and sing 70’s disco. Find your own private Hell. Shame on you! — *David Baertsch, Plano, TX*

Website bible quiz, WTF? I take this test and do pretty well, but when I get to the scoring, you insult me. Go fuck yourselves, assholes. yes, i did go to a parochial school, but I still scored an 18 on your test that had numerous trick questions. Until you becaome ACTUAL free thinkers, mainstream society is going to consider you for what you are: douche bag-weirdo zealots. Have fun hanging out with bill maher and Penn Gilette. — *Erich Knox*

Ohio Jesus portrait: Great Job! you cost a school system and their lackeys close to 100K



There’s NO REASON to consign us ALL to hell, ma’am. With handwriting like this, you must be a ma’am. (The “C.J.” is the Louisville Courier-Journal, in which FFRF’s full-page ad appeared on July 4.)

Dollars. All for a widely distributed depiction of a religious icon. Please remember, my communist brothers, that the same religious icon will be waiting for you after you take your last breath, this time in person. — *William Burns, Stuart, Fla.*

Ohio school: Oh I am suffering severe and permanent damage from seeing a picture of Christ at the Ohio school you managed to sue. Give me a fucking break you losers. Why don’t you concentrate on real issues like poverty and hunger. Or get this, get a real job and support the economy. — *Peter Tolley, California*

Crank: Every Knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord !!!!!!!!!11 Put that in your pipe and smoke it — *Steve Johnson*



FFRF took a lighthearted message to New York City’s Times Square in October to counter an anti-atheist billboard by an evangelical group. FFRF enlisted “Saturday Night Live” alum Julia Sweeney for its rejoinder. One cube of the billboard features Sweeney’s smiling face, the other her quote: “OMG, there is no god!” The statement is a punchline from her powerful, one-woman show, “Letting Go of God.”

“A fifth of the U.S. population identifies as nonbelievers. We don’t thank a nonexistent god, we put faith in each other and human ingenuity,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-founder of the Madison, Wis.-based association. “We believe in deeds, not creeds. We believe the only afterlife that ought to concern us is leaving our descendants a secure and pleasant future.”

FFRF has placed hundreds of billboard messages since late 2007, including several previously in Times Square.

FFRF, ACLU settle Jesus portrait case

Continued from front page

dents and parents who risk public exposure amid threats of retaliation for speaking up for the First Amendment should receive damages and that public school officials who violate the First Amendment be held accountable.”

The portrait was posted prominently in Jackson Middle School but was later moved to the high school after the ACLU and FFRF filed the lawsuit. The school tried to argue that the portrait was part of a “limited public forum,” but eventually agreed in court to remove it from the school, reportedly to avoid “risking taxpayer money.”

The school district worked with an upstart Texas Religious Right group, the Liberty Institute, that proclaims at its website: “We have never lost a case to the ACLU, [or] Freedom From Religion Foundation.” (This was FFRF’s first case in which the Liberty Institute had interceded.)

Negotiations were stalled when it was discovered that the portrait had never actually been removed from the school. It had been moved to an art closet and was “resurrected” for a prayer meeting on the school lawn, which was attended by school faculty and administrators on the National Day of Prayer last May.

This violation of the court agreement prompted another round of legal filings by both sides, delaying the settlement and increasing legal fees, all of which, as the ACLU of Ohio pointed out, was unnecessary. FFRF received a small portion of the legal fees payment.

The case was before Judge Algenon L. Marbley, U.S. District Court in the Southern District of Ohio.

Janesville, Wisconsin



Wayne Hensler, a Wisconsin FFRF Lifetime Member, calls this 10-by-30-foot message he’s sponsoring in a well-traveled section of Janesville “a legacy for my grandchildren.” He first contacted FFRF in 2010 to suggest the new slogan, offering to pay for billboard space. It has gone up several times near Watertown. Wayne, an octogenarian farmer, hopes other members are “inspired” to place similar messages in their areas on behalf of FFRF, which started its billboard campaign in 2007. The “Enjoy Life Now: There Is No Afterlife” message has received national attention, including Fox News and Huffington Post, as well as regional TV and newspaper coverage.

FFRF sues Calif. city for Christian prayers

Continued from front page

legal complaint documents several egregious examples, including Jones’ claim that:

- The Constitutional Convention approved a prayer motion (there was no such prayer).
- James Madison said our government was based on the Ten Commandments (he did not).
- George Washington claimed it was impossible to govern without the bible (fabricated quote).
- James Madison read from the bible at the Constitutional Convention (untrue).

FFRF seeks a declaration that the prayers violate the California Constitution. The complaint also alleges that the prayers violate California civil rights laws by coercing and forcing citizens to undergo Christian worship if they wish to participate in their government. FFRF is also challenging the establishment of a city chaplaincy.

FFRF thanks Dworkin, attorney Pamela Koslyn for taking the case pro bono, FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, AUSLO for its support and AUSLO members for prayer transcription.

Mark Your Calendar!

Announcing . . .

Raleigh, N.C. FFRF Mini-Convention
Weekend of May 2-3, 2014
(after National Day of Reason, er, Prayer)
Sheraton Raleigh Hotel
421 South Salisbury Street
Raleigh, North Carolina



37th Annual National Convention
Weekend of October 24-25, 2014
Millennium Biltmore Hotel - Los Angeles
506 South Grand Avenue
Los Angeles, California

Photo: Andrew Kronquist