

Freethought Today

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January/February 2014

Marci Hamilton is attorney for amici curiae

FFRF, other advocates file brief against Hobby Lobby

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, working with noted state-church attorney Marci A. Hamilton and groups advocating for the rights of victims of religious abuse filed an amicus brief Jan. 27, before the U.S. Supreme Court. The brief opposes Hobby Lobby's claim that for-profit corporations have a right to deny contraceptive coverage to women workers based on religious objections.

The Hobby Lobby chain of stores argues that it is "a person" under the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), and that the federal government's contraceptive insurance mandate imposes a "substantial burden."

Hamilton successfully argued before the U.S. Supreme Court in *City of Borne v. Flores* (1997) that RFRA was unconstitutional as applied to state and local governments.

In the amicus brief, Hamilton argues that the unconstitutionality of the federal RFRA "has been lost in the intense public debate between claimed religious liberty for for-profit corporations and women's reproductive health."

FFRF's brief is also signed by Bishop Accountability.org, Children's Health-

THINGS YOU CAN FIND AT HOBBY LOBBY...



care Is a Legal Duty (CHILD), the Child Protection Project, the Foundation to Abolish Child Sex Abuse, Survivors for Justice and the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP).

FFRF's interest in the case arises from its position that "the radical redefinition of 'religious freedom' to include a right to impose one's religious beliefs on others is arguably the great-

est threat to individual freedom of conscience."

FFRF notes that its original founders, Anne Nicol Gaylor and Annie Laurie Gaylor, formed FFRF "partly in response to unwarranted governmental and religious intrusion into a woman's reproductive health decisions."

Hobby Lobby was founded by David Green, who has a religious objection to some forms of prescription contra-



Marci Hamilton

ception, and essentially maintains his corporation has a soul and rights of conscience that trump the rights of conscience of his employees.

Green runs a chain of more than 500 craft stores and is challenging the contraceptive mandate of the Affordable Care Act. The law requires health care plans to provide coverage for certain "preventive care" at no additional charge, including immunizations, diabetes screening, AIDS screening and contraception.

"RFRA is being invoked in this case as a license for employers to influence their female employees' contraception choices," FFRF contends in the amicus brief.

The amici also assert: "If Hobby Lobby can deploy RFRA to block coverage of women's reproductive health, the next believer will argue against vaccinations, and the next against screenings for children or domestic violence screening and counseling. There is

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Feds appeal FFRF's parish exemption win

The federal government filed notice Jan. 24 that it's appealing the Freedom From Religion Foundation's significant federal court victory declaring the "parish exemption" unconstitutional. Under the 1954 law, "ministers of the gospel" don't pay any taxes on salary designated as a "housing allowance."

U.S. District Judge Barbara B. Crabb for the Western District of Wisconsin issued a strong, 43-page decision on Nov. 22 declaring 26 U.S.C. § 107(2) unconstitutional. The case is *FFRF, Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker v. Jacob Lew, Acting Secretary of the Treasury Department and Daniel Werfel, Acting Commissioner of the International Revenue Service*.

The appeal will go before the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in Chicago.

The law allows "ministers of the gospel" who are paid through a housing

allowance to exclude that allowance from taxable income. Ministers may even use untaxed income to buy a home and deduct interest paid on the mortgage and property taxes — known as "double dipping."

The clergy benefit costs the government up to \$700 million a year in lost revenue, and benefits not just ministers but their employer churches, which can pay ministers less because untaxed income goes further.

Christianity Today found that 84 percent of senior pastors receive a housing allowance ranging from \$20,000 to \$38,000 in added (but not reported or taxed) salary.

"I agree with plaintiffs that §107(2) does not have a secular purpose or effect," wrote Crabb, adding that a reasonable observer would view it "as an endorsement of religion."

At the time of the federal ruling,

attorney Richard L. Bolton, representing FFRF, noted: "The Court's decision does not evince hostility to religion — nor should it even seem controversial." However, the decision set off "shock waves" in the clergy network.

Clergy are permitted to use the housing allowance not just for rent or mortgages, but for a wide range of home improvements, including maintenance and repairs. They may exempt from taxable income up to the fair market rental value of their home, particularly benefiting well-heeled pastors.

The 1954 bill's sponsor, Rep. Peter Mack, argued ministers should be rewarded for "carrying on such a courageous fight" against a "godless and anti-religious world movement."

All taxpayers are burdened by taxes, Crabb noted. "Defendants do not iden-

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Meet a Legal Staffer



Patrick Elliott and Macy, his Labrador pup.

Name: Patrick Elliott.

Where and when I was born: St. Paul, Minn., Oct. 7, 1983.

Education: B.S. in legal studies and political science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (2005) and a J.D. from the University of Wisconsin Law School (2009).

Family: I live in Madison with my girlfriend, Sarah, and our Labrador retriever, Macy. My parents, sister, two brothers and extended family live in the Twin Cities.

How I came to work at FFRF: As a recent law school graduate and First Amendment enthusiast, I saw that FFRF had an opening in the legal department in 2010 and I jumped at the opportunity.

What I do here: Separate church and state. Our attorneys work to resolve state/church violations through communications with government officials. We also educate the public about the Establishment Clause and advise FFRF on litigation and act as in-house counsel. I have helped oversee litigation involving Ten Commandments displays in schools, school board prayers, state days of prayer, and FFRF's IRS cases. In addition, I help with advocacy on legislation, including opposing proposals to expand private school vouchers.

What I like best about it: I get to work on a lot of really fun and interesting cases that most attorneys would never have the chance to work on. They are fun because almost every one involves the government, religion and the Constitution.

One of my favorite moments at FFRF was when I received a thank-you call from a school administrator. I thought to myself, "This never happens." We are used to angry calls but not thank-you calls. School board members had changed their mind on approving a fundamentalist charter school, and the

administrator said we were instrumental in changing the vote.

What sucks about it: I feel like Newman from "Seinfeld" sometimes and how he talked about the mail: "There's never a letup, It's relentless." The number of new violations does not seem to be letting up, even though we are surely making progress.

I spend a lot of time thinking about: Accepted everyday practices that are probably wrong or could be done better. This is mostly "Freakonomics" type stuff like how buses stopping at train tracks in the city probably cause more accidents than they prevent.

I spend little if any time thinking about: How to make sense of the bible or any religious text.

My religious upbringing was: Roman Catholic, and not just nominally Catholic. My brothers now make fun of me for hurrying them up so we would not be late to Mass and for "shushing" them in church.

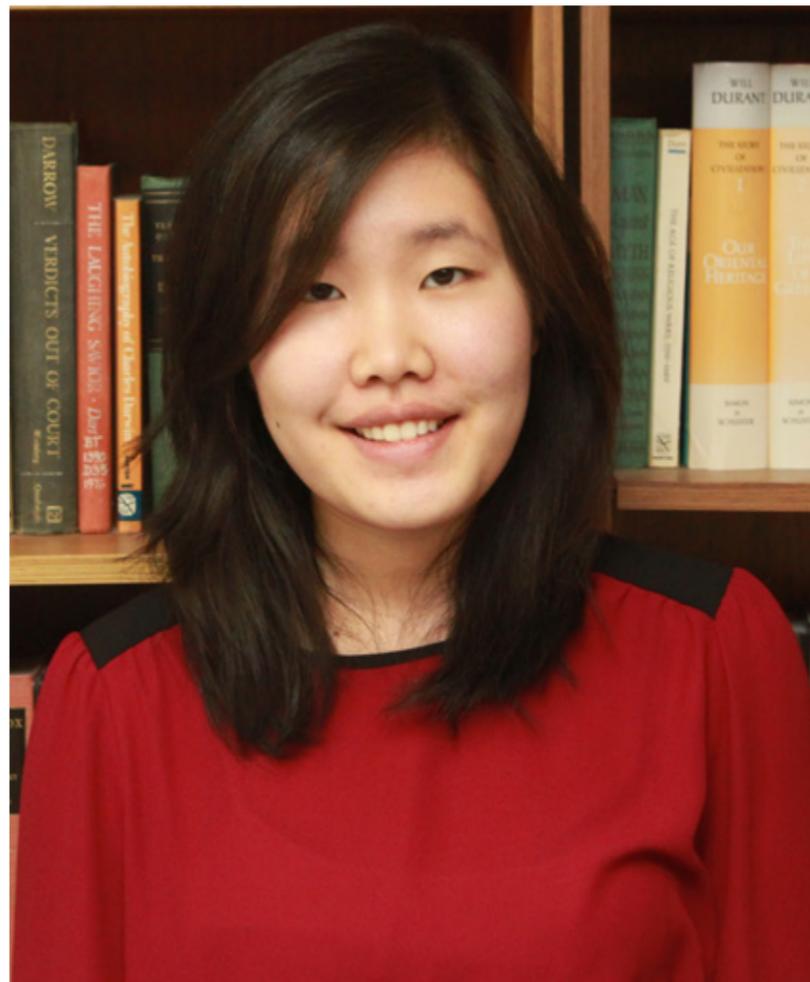
My doubts about religion started: After taking a course on early Christian literature in college. I took that class after watching Dan Barker debate a Christian apologist on whether Jesus rose from the dead. At the time, I thought Dan lost the debate but I was interested in learning more about the history of the bible. It turns out that he won the debate, but it just took me a while to realize it.

Things I like: Marine aquariums, poker, stand-up comedy, NCAA "March Madness."

Things I smite: Closed government meetings and records, revisionist history, coaches not going for it on fourth down when it's the correct thing to do.

In my golden years: I'll be living near a lake or ocean.

Upcoming projects? I'm working on creating a T-shirt celebrating the Third Amendment.



Meet an Intern

Name: Yuna Choi.

Where and when I was born: Bielefeld, Germany, Feb. 23, 1992.

Family: Mom, Dad and a 13-year-old brother.

Education: Senior psychology major at Carleton College, Northfield, Minn. I expect to graduate in 2014.

My religious upbringing was: Primarily Buddhist, although we did casually attend a Baptist church during part of my childhood. I am, however, pretty secular and have been since I was fairly young.

How I came to work as an FFRF intern: An externship opportunity at FFRF was advertised through the career center at my school. I have always been interested in religion in a philosophical way and thought that this was a good chance to become more acquainted with the political aspects of religion as well as to develop skills in public relations and journalism. Although I am a prospective medical school candidate, I wanted to extend my involvement to other areas.

What I do here: As an editorial intern, I write legal victory reports and profiles of famous "freethinkers" (Freethought of the Day), upload relevant YouTube videos, edit copy for Freethought Today and assist the publicist with various tasks.

What I like best about it: Acquiring a better understanding of the legal system through cases of First Amendment violations.

Something funny that's happened at work: I enjoy learning of the various "hate" mail and "crank" calls that FFRF receives.

My legal interests are: Separation of church and state (obviously), restorative justice, criminal prosecution/defense.

My legal heroes are: Clarence Darrow, Nelson Mandela.

These three words sum me up: Curious, empathetic, paradoxical.

Things I like: Any book by George Orwell or Kurt Vonnegut, fruit and chocolate/cheese pairings, the smell of incense, "Arrested Development" (TV show), science fiction, blunt honesty.

Things I smite: Fox News, licorice, passive aggression, chauvinism.

My loftiest goal: To find a cure for a chronic disease. Also to become proficient in Arabic (equally important and lofty).

FFRF is most appreciative of Yuna for giving us three weeks of her life, gratis, in December and making all her own living arrangements. She was immensely helpful.

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January/February 2014

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

Vouchers subsidize incompetent schools



By Patrick Elliott

Photo: Timothy Hughes

state approval were not able to garner as many applicants as the 18 Catholic schools and seven other Christian schools now receiving taxpayer money. Only parents in the religious majority were able to send their children to a denominational "choice" school.

This flawed program violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and its equivalent in the Wisconsin Constitution: Article 1, Section 18.

While the legality and feasibility of statewide vouchers have not been tested, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program has been tested. It is the longest running voucher program in the country. What have we learned? Wisconsin taxpayers are paying millions of dollars to dozens of incompetent religious schools that do not provide a comprehensive education.

Milwaukee's LifeSkills Academy, which received \$2.3 million in state voucher money since 2008, shut down suddenly in mid-December. A priest in charge of the building that was rented by the school said that the school's operators moved out "in the dead of the night." Families of students were left scrambling to find a new school.

LifeSkills students had struggled with basic reading and math, with only one of the 56 students testing proficient in either subject on 2012 state exams. Despite their poor operation of the Milwaukee school, Taron and Rodney Monroe opened LifeSkills Academy II in Florida last year and bragged about their ability to get government grants for religious schools.

LifeSkills Academy is merely one of many inept Milwaukee voucher

schools. Department of Public Instruction testing data published last year showed that Milwaukee Public School students outperform voucher students in reading and math. Looking past the averages, the data reveals that entire voucher schools lack basic skills.

Carter's Christian Academy and Daughters of the Father Christian Academy are two Milwaukee schools that rely almost entirely on taxpayer funding. Daughters of the Father promotes itself as "specializing in reading and math." Of the 92 students tested in 2012 at Daughters of the Father, only one tested proficient in reading and two tested proficient in math.

At Carter's Christian Academy, none of the 85 students tested proficient in reading and only one tested proficient in math. Between the two schools, 81% are classified as having "minimal" skills in reading and 75% have minimal math skills.

It is understandable that students attending these schools are struggling, given the fundamentalist curriculum that is being taught in what are generally considered secular subjects. Information available on each school's website makes it clear that they both utilize curriculum provided by A Beka Books, a publisher of fundamentalist Christian textbooks. A Beka has promoted its materials by saying that textbook writers "do not paraphrase progressive education textbooks and add biblical principles" but instead "create textbooks from a biblical worldview, built upon the firm foundation of Scriptural truth."

A profile of the 2011-12 curriculum

on the Daughters of the Father website includes revisionist history lessons from A Beka Books, creationism instruction in science classes and health class instruction for seventh and eighth graders on "sins such as adultery, fornication and homosexuality."

It matters what is taught in taxpayer-funded schools. No parental "choice" on where to send a child for school should mean that all taxpayers pick up the tab for fundamentally flawed schooling by educators who are incompetent. It is expected that the Milwaukee voucher program will cost \$161 million this school year alone.

With vouchers, there are no assurances that educators are answerable to the citizens who ultimately write the checks. They are not governed by publicly elected school boards that have to answer to constituents. There are virtually no protections to ensure that students are receiving a sound education.

Voucher supporters will be unable to offer reforms that guarantee another LifeSkills Academy debacle will not happen again. Moving students around in the middle of a school year like they are chess pieces is absolutely disruptive to student learning and will continue under a voucher system.

Any additional accountability measures for voucher schools that are put into place cannot fix a fundamentally broken program.

Patrick Elliott is a staff attorney with the Freedom From Religion Foundation in Madison, Wis.

FFRF, other advocates file brief against Hobby Lobby

Continued from front page

no limit to the variety of religious believers in the United States, and good reason to know that the vulnerable will pay the price."

Hamilton writes: "RFRA lets religious citizens rewrite any federal law

they don't like, to their benefit."

Oral arguments will be heard March 25. The 10th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in favor of Hobby Lobby that corporations have the same (or stronger) religious rights as individuals.

However, the 3rd Circuit ruled against a similar challenge by another business that "for-profit, secular corporations cannot engage in religious exercise" and that a business owner's religious rights do not allow that owner to impose his religion on his business's employees."

Conestoga Wood Specialties Corp., East Earl, Pa., is appealing that ruling, which will also be heard March 25.

RFRA is being "permitted to foment culture wars," Hamilton writes, which violates the separation of powers, Article V and the Establishment Clause of the Constitution.

Hamilton holds the Paul R. Verkuil Chair in Public Law at Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law and is the author of *God vs. the Gavel: Religion and the Rule of Law*.

"We find ourselves in the novel position, for once, of siding with the federal government, in this case Kathleen Sebelius, secretary of Health and Human Services," commented FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Dogma must not be permitted to trump civil liberties in our secular republic."

Feds appeal FFRF's parish exemption win

Continued from front page

tify any reason why a requirement on ministers to pay taxes on a housing allowance is more burdensome for them than for the many millions of others who must pay taxes on income used for housing expenses."

Gaylor and Barker, as co-presidents of FFRF, are the primary plaintiffs. Crabb agreed they have standing to sue and are injured because FFRF designates part of their salaries as a "housing allowance," but they are not lawfully able to claim the same benefit "ministers of the gospel" are accorded.

"The clergy and churches have become accustomed to privileges and prerogatives from our secular government which are not only unconstitutional, but which don't play fair. The rest of us should not have to pay more taxes, because clergy don't pay their fair share," said Gaylor.

Barker, a former minister, now heads the volunteer Clergy Project, which helps clergy who have changed their minds about religion leave the pulpit. Barker said he knows hundreds of former ministers who agree with FFRF that "the housing exclusion is an unfair and unwarranted boost from the government and should be abolished."

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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

Some Say the World Will End in Ice

Ice storm leaves 100,000 without power.

NY Times, December 21

So who put Robert Frost on this cool track?
Perhaps another Frost, a guy named Jack?
Or maybe he'd read Dante, and heard tell
The worst are packed in ice in the depths of hell.

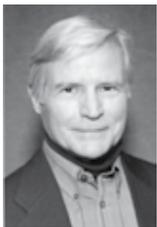
Think of the people freezing in Berlin
During the Ice-Cold War, and how they all
Grabbed a sledge or pickaxe, to begin
Proving that something doesn't love a wall.

The woods are filling up with ice and snow:
The sky has ugly promises to keep.
Our promises seem promising — although
We've many miles to go before we sleep.

"Straight up, no ice" has been my preference,
And that has made all the difference.

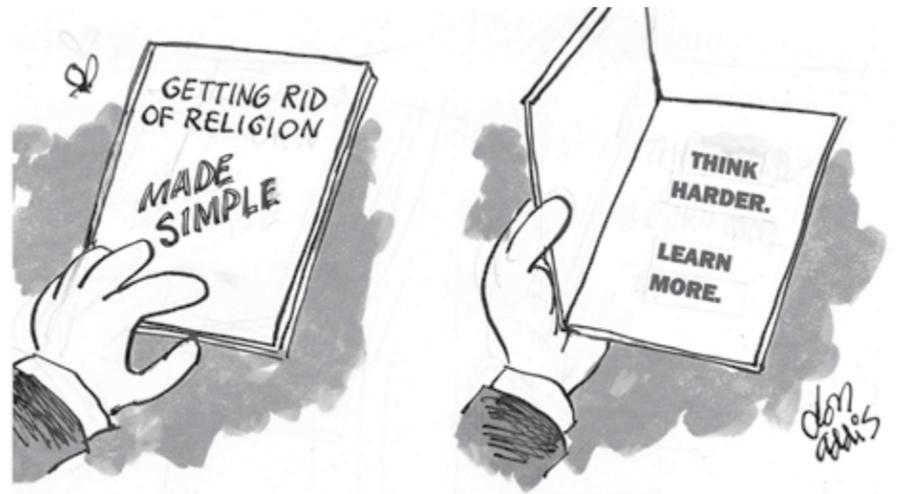
© Philip Appleman 2013

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*.



Overheard

I was an atheist by third grade.

Singer Linda Ronstadt
New York Times, 12-29-13



education and reading and facts" to faith
New York Times, 7-26-07

The Kickstarter campaign for "Bible Chronicles: The Call of Abraham" is not off to a quick start. After launching two days ago, it has gathered just \$1,649 of its \$100,000 target from 28 total backers. Funding closes on Feb. 6.

Article on the "God-focused single-player role-playing" video game
gamespot.com, 1-9-14

Sexual abuse in Jewish religious institutions has emerged as one of the most tragic issues of our generation. Fearing scandal, rabbis in the past were often inclined not to report such cases to the authorities, thus enabling pedophiles to continue preying on children as they moved on to other religious educational institutions.

Columnist Isi Leibler
Jerusalem Post, 1-1-14

If you didn't think that took balls, you've never been to Oklahoma. Saying "I'm an atheist" in Oklahoma is like screaming "jihad" at airport security.
Entertainer Doug Stanhope, on atheists raising \$125,000 for tornado survivor Rebecca Vitsmun, who famously told CNN's Wolf Blitzer she was not thanking God for saving her family
The Raw Story, 12-30-13

It's a campaign to get the word out that there are atheists and agnostics. There's no attempt to convert anyone. It doesn't say, "We hate God."
Stephen Hirtle, Pittsburgh Coalition of Reason spokesman [and FFRF chair], on a bus ad rejected by the city's Port Authority over which the group is suing
Pittsburgh City Paper, 12-4-13

You do know Jesus wasn't born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, right?
Jon Stewart, responding to Fox News host Megyn Kelly's claim that Jesus and Santa were both white men
"The Daily Show", 12-12-13

The lady looked at me. I thought she was going to put money in the kettle. She came up to me and said, "Do you believe in God?" And she says, "You're supposed to say Merry Christmas," and that's when she hit me.
Kristina Vindiola, Salvation Army bell ringer, on what happened when she said "Happy Holidays" outside a Phoenix Walmart

I am a retired Christian.
Irish actor Peter O'Toole, who died Dec. 14 at 81, saying he prefers "edu-

How did my family miss the dedication of Dorr Township to the Holy Family with a nativity in the publicly owned gazebo at the center of town?

Atheist Jeremiah Bannister, Dorr, Mich., on how a crèche was allowed on land leased by the township
Advance Newspapers, 12-15-13

The hardest thing I had to do was walk through the door of a police station and stand at a desk with people around, and say why I was there.

Clergy abuse victim DG, 55, on reporting in 1993 his molestation at age 13 by Marist Brother Raymond Foster, who killed himself after being arrested in 1999
Australian Broadcasting Corp., 12-13-13

Mr. Obama has gone to church 18 times during his nearly five years in the White House, according to Mark Knoller of CBS News, an unofficial White House historian, while his predecessor, Mr. Bush, attended 120 times during his eight years in office.

News story analyzing the president's personal faith and church attendance, which included a "no show" on Christmas
New York Times, 12-29-13

There is nothing about the image that suggests he believes in one god, no god, or several. It simply depicts a Native American shooting a bow and arrow.

U.S. District Judge Joe Heaton, ruling against a Methodist pastor in his suit claiming that the Oklahoma license plate forces him to display an image contrary to his beliefs
Tulsa World, 1-15-14

There has been anti-science propaganda running unchecked on the right for years, from anti-gay equality misinformation to climate change denials. When you look at white evangelical Protestants, the evolution denialism gets even worse. Only 27% of that group believes in evolution.

Columnist Charles Blow, citing a Pew Research Center study
New York Times, 1-4-14

It seems that if Oklahoma Christians want to imbue society with their values, there are better ways to do it that respect the pluralistic nature of our society. Perhaps they should just focus on living out the Ten Commandments and ditch the monuments.

Kirsten Powers, columnist and Fox News political analyst, on a State Capitol controversy
USA Today, 1-14-14

YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

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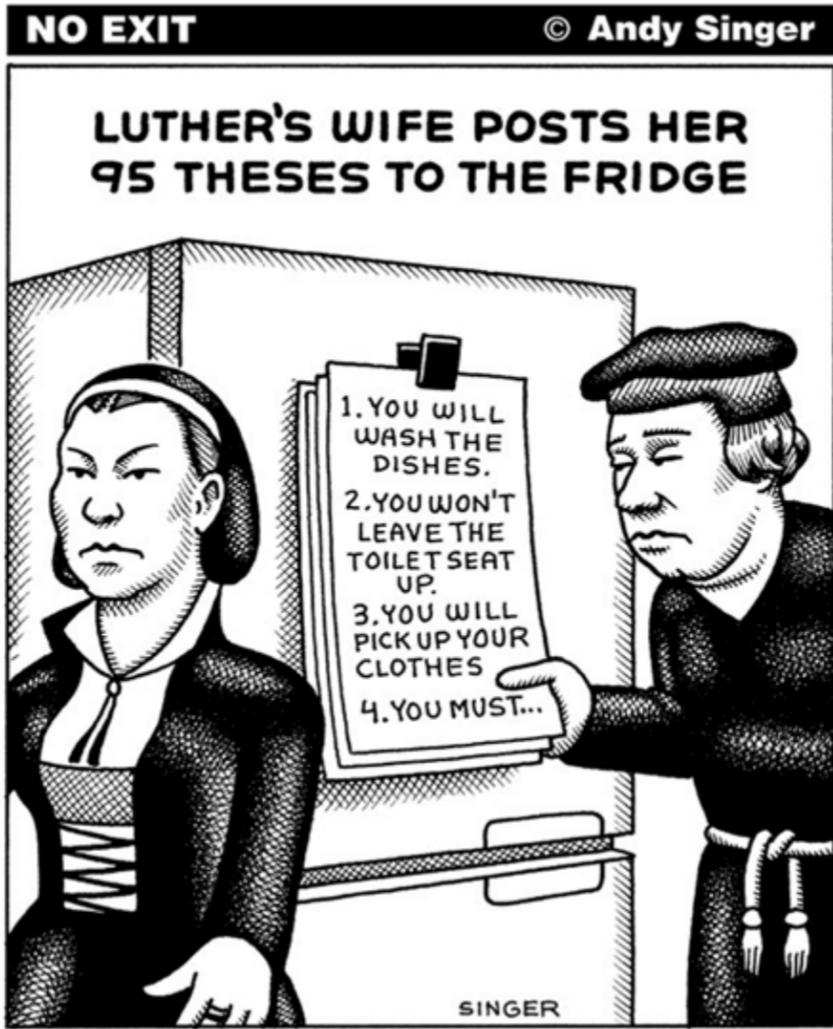
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Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

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news, music & interviews



FFRF Building Fund grows



Photo: Andrew Seidel

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- Louis Williams, CA, \$5

Subtotal: \$76,815.92

New cumulative total: \$1,723,929.56

Kenneth Schmidt, Sr., FL, previously listed as Anonymous, has since granted permission to acknowledge his \$1,000 contribution by name. Floyd Le Bouton, MI, also listed anonymously previously, has also granted permission to acknowledge his \$300 contribution. Dr. John Steinberg, M.D., was incorrectly listed without his credentials in our last listing. Many thanks for his generous \$1,000 donation.

FFRF welcomes 53 Lifers, 2 After-Lifers

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is very pleased to welcome a whopping 53 new Lifetime Members, representing 29 states and two countries. FFRF also recently received "After-Life" Memberships from Chris Allen and Ralph Eschenbach.

New Lifetime Members, including one donor who wishes to remain anonymous, are:

Deron Barnhart, Scott Brierley, Russell Collins (via Combined Federal Campaign donations), Dana Current, Salvatore D'Addona, Scott Delcomyn, Todd L. Erickson, William E. Favrot, Mark Fischer, Dorothy Fulton, Joy Goldbaum, Steve Goldrich, Ryan Grisso, Joseph Arthur Haas, Robert Harp, Christopher Helwig (through a matching donation), Matthew Hertz, Beaux Johnson, Ben A. Johnson, Dr. Raymond C. Jones, Jared Kaplan, Ms. Malita K. Kim-Schultz, Jo Ann Kremers, John Kristoff, Mr. Andriy Lapitsky, Ken Lindley, Dave Marshall, Dr. Richard Martin, Ken McMurray, Velia Mitro, Ginny Morgan (gift from Alfred Wolf), Pamela Morris, Dr. George Phillips, Jr., Jerry Rauser, Stephen Kyle Roof, Patricia Rose, Debora Salisbury, Robert Schachner, Jeffrey Sherman, Harry Siitonen (who submitted his second Lifetime payment to be a "Post-Lifer"), Joanne Karen Skeates, Ryan Patrick Sommers, Ava Stafford (her parents, Roger and Camille, are already "Lifers"), Laurie Stephenson,

Jerry Szubin, Grant Taylor, Frank Traficante, Joseph Triebwasser, Stan Ulrich, Jay Wakefield, Herbert Weiss and Ruth Weiss.

States represented include: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, New Jersey, New Mexico, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin.

Countries outside the U.S. represented are Canada (Saskatchewan) and Germany.

Additionally, FFRF formally welcomes Gerry Hirsch as a Lifetime Member. He became a Lifetime Member a year ago, and we're sorry he was inadvertently left out of the announcement at that time. Likewise, Denny Law was mistakenly omitted from the December listing of new Lifetime Members.

Individual Lifetime Members are \$1,000 designated for membership or membership renewal, mean never another renewal notice and go into rainy day reserves. After-Life Memberships of \$5,000 are for those who want their donation to live after them, and also go into reserves. All dues and donations to FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, are deductible for income-tax purposes.

Thank you to our 57 very generous, aforementioned members!



Declare and share your nonbelief in FFRF's online "Out of the Closet" campaign! ffrf.org/out

Recent FFRF legal victories

Bibles removed from UW guest rooms



Order FFRF bible warning labels at ffrf.org/shop.

After attempting to end the practice for several decades, the Freedom From Religion Foundation has persuaded University of Wisconsin-Extension in Madison to remove Gideon bibles from its 137 guest rooms.

In November, a complainant who encountered the bible at the Lowell Center on the UW-Madison campus contacted FFRF. The seven-story conference center hosts events of up to 400 people and was used by the UW secular student group — Atheists, Humanists, and Agnostics — to host a freethought festival last March.

Patrick Elliott, one of FFRF's five staff attorneys, took action, contacting UW-Extension: "When a government entity like the Lowell Center allows distribution of religious material to visitors, it has unconstitutionally entangled itself with a religious message, in this case a Christian message."

UW-Extension Chancellor Ray Cross (now UW System president) responded Nov. 25 that all bibles would be removed from guest rooms by Dec. 1. The decision received wide area media coverage.

Elliott called it a solid victory for state/church separation. "While private hotels may choose to put any type of literature they want in their guest rooms, state-run colleges have a constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion."

FFRF President Emerita Anne Nicol Gaylor first contacted UW-Extension in the 1980s and 1990s about the unconstitutional practice. Now 87, Gaylor responded, "It's satisfying to finally see this violation remedied."

Letter stops N.C. employee prayers

A complainant reported to FFRF that annual Thanksgiving celebrations at a department within the North Carolina Education Lottery have included prayers initiated by the department director.

In a Nov. 29 letter, Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott urged NCEL Executive Director Alice Garland to remind employees that such practices are unconstitutional.

Founded in 2005, the lottery is mandated to turn over 100% of its proceeds to public education.

In a Dec. 6 response, lottery counsel assured FFRF that the practice will stop. "We have addressed this matter with the affected department director, and informed all upper management that religion should never be part of any activities, NCEL-sanctioned or not, while on company property and/or time."

Okla. staff warned on teacher prayer

A concerned student reported to FFRF that pep rallies at Alva High School in Oklahoma regularly featured student-led prayer circles supported by the faculty. In a letter sent Oct. 23, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel reminded Superintendent Steve Parkhurst and the school principal that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment deems any school-sponsored sectarian practice unconstitutional.

FFRF received a statement from Parkhurst on Nov. 4, claiming that the group prayer was merely optional after a pep rally. Seidel addressed this contention in his letter, "Even if prayer at Alva High's pep rallies were voluntary, and even if participation at pep rallies were made non-mandatory for students in the band, cheerleaders, and football players, the mere voluntariness of the prayers would still not remedy this constitutional violation. Courts have summarily rejected arguments that voluntariness excuses a constitutional violation."

Parkhurst concluded his letter on a positive note, "Faculty members have been reminded that this must be student-initiated and as a faculty member they cannot participate."

Hymns removed from school music

Emmons Lake Elementary School in Caledonia, Mich., was contacted Oct. 3 by Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel on behalf of a concerned parent. Seidel informed Superintendent Randy Rodriguez that teaching Christian-themed music to students is unconstitutional.

"The problems with the music are compounded by the fact that [the teacher] used the song as an opportunity to teach Christian doctrine to students, as well as by the fact that the concert is specifically labeled a 'Christmas' concert," noted Seidel.

On Oct. 16, the superintendent assured FFRF that the school "has initiated steps to resolve this concern at a local level."

The complainant confirmed that religious teachings have been withdrawn from music classes.

Jersey restaurant stops church discount

FFRF successfully ended a discount extended exclusively to churchgoers by Aleathea's Restaurant in Cape May, N.J. Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell, informed by a concerned customer, advised the restaurant to drop the discriminatory practice in an Oct. 10 letter:

"Your restaurant's restrictive promotional practice favors religious customers, and denies both customers who do not attend church as well as nonbelievers the right to 'full and equal' enjoyment of Aleathea's. Any promotions should be available to all customers regardless of religious preference or practice on a nondiscriminatory basis."

Cavell said such a discount violates New Jersey law and the federal Civil Rights Act, which ensures equal op-

portunity to "goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages and accommodations."

The owner confirmed Dec. 2 that the restaurant had dropped the discount.

Carolina meals won't open with prayer

Prayers will no longer precede meals at the Simpsonville Activity and Senior Center in Simpsonville, S.C. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel warned the Parks and Recreation Department, which runs the center, that such religious practices are prohibited by the Establishment Clause and Title XX of the Social Security Act.

"Not only does organizing public prayer at meals jeopardize your federal funding, it also violates our citizens' rights to be free from religious proselytizing by the government or government funded organizations," wrote Seidel.

On Dec. 5, FFRF received a reply from Director of Recreation Robbie Davis, stating that "staff at the Simpsonville Senior Center has ceased leading or encouraging prayer before meal functions."

FFRF letter curbs Cornerstone prayer

FFRF reminded the Hyde Park Central School District in New York that active involvement of faculty during after-school clubs is inappropriate.

In a Nov. 7 letter to Superintendent Greer Rychcik, Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell requested that staff at F.D. Roosevelt High School in Staatsburg, N.Y., stop participation in the school's prayer group, Cornerstone, on constitutional grounds.

Cavell also referenced the Equal Access Act, which prohibits teachers from participating in noncurricular student activities.

"We ask that teachers throughout the district be reminded of their constitutional duty to remain neutral toward religion, a duty that does not simply begin and end with the school day," wrote Cavell.

The school's legal counsel responded Dec. 3: "The district understands and appreciates its constitutional and statutory obligations to students in this regard and, to that end, has reminded those teachers who were approached by Cornerstone to remain neutral toward religion and to refrain from participating in the substantive affairs of religious clubs. The district has also instructed those teachers to refrain from any participation or activity that may be perceived as an endorsement of the club's religious message."

Proselytizing cop warned to stop

A concerned citizen in Toledo, Ohio, informed FFRF that during a traffic collision investigation, after asking whether the citizen attended church, the police officer started recommending various churches in the area.

Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell requested in a Nov. 26 letter that the city remind the officer that such actions are unconstitutional.

"[The officer's] overt promotion of religion while acting in his official capacity as a government agent gives the unfortunate impression that the Toledo PD endorses Christianity over other religions and generally endorses religion over nonreligion," wrote Cavell.

In his response Dec. 4, the police chief said the situation would be investigated further and that "[the officer's] supervisor was made aware of the incident and was instructed to counsel [the officer] about his actions."

FFRF extinguishes Points of Light

A proselytizing group will no longer have access to families at Frick Middle School in Oakland, Calif. A religious organization called Points of Light hosted a barbecue at a "Back to School Night" alongside school activities. FFRF's complainant reported that both events were treated and advertised through official school channels as a single event with no mention of the ministry's involvement. At one point, a PoL representative addressed the crowd and made religious statements, such as "praise God" and "lift up Jesus."

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter to Oakland Unified School District Superintendent Gary Yee on Nov. 7: "It is regrettable that religious groups seek to use the school as a recruiting ground for their particular religion. Their presence at this school event creates the appearance of district endorsement of their programs. Given the purpose of the school welcome event, the prominence of the PoL ministry, and PoL's use of the school to spread its message, a reasonable parent would conclude that PoL has the backing of the school."

In a Dec. 19 response, the district's attorney strongly criticized the arrangement. Attorney Laura O'Neill told Points of Light, "The statements made by your staff member violated board policy because they promoted Christian viewpoints. It is the district's expectation that your staff will comply with Board Policy and refrain from making any statements that proselytize or favor one religious viewpoint over another. Specifically, your staff may not in any way promote Christian viewpoints or proselytize on any district campus."

School tells coach to stop prayer

A coach at West Linn High School in Tualatin, Ore., will no longer participate in team prayer. FFRF received a complaint last fall that Assistant Coach Art Williams would regularly join a circle of football players to bow his head in prayer.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter Sept. 24 to William Rhodes, superintendent, requesting that all coach-led prayer cease immediately: "West Linn High School and its coaches should be aware of the tremendous

influence coaches have on their athletes. Parents trust their children to the coaches' charge and coaches — through their own example — must be sure that athletes are not only treated fairly but also imbued with a sense of community and camaraderie.”

On Oct. 15, an attorney representing the district responded that Williams was directed not to join students in prayer.

Superintendent removes nativity scene

The superintendent of Green Local Schools in Green, Ohio, took down a nativity scene after receiving a letter from FFRF.

Superintendent Judith Robinson had displayed a nativity scene in her office window. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to her Dec. 18: “It is unlawful for a public school to maintain, erect, or host a nativity scene, thus endorsing Christianity.”

Robinson emailed promptly that same day stating that she had taken down the scene.

Pledge refusal OK at Utah school

Students at Oquirrh Hills Middle School (West Jordan, Utah) will no longer be reprimanded for refusing to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. A student contacted FFRF to say that, on multiple occasions, a teacher had singled out a student for refusing to recite the pledge.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the superintendent Nov. 13: “Students should not be singled out, rebuked, told they must stand, or otherwise penalized for following their freedom of conscience. It is illegal to reprimand a student in any way for non-disruptively exercising his or her constitutional right to object to reciting the pledge of allegiance.”

The district responded Nov. 20 that it has and “will continue to teach and remind our students, faculty, and staff to foster and maintain an atmosphere of respect and tolerance in our classrooms and communities.”

Religious fliers out in Ohio school

South Bloomfield Elementary School (Ashville, Ohio) will no longer be permitted to pass out religious fliers to students.

A concerned parent contacted FFRF when her child brought home an advertisement for “A Night in Bethlehem,” an event organized by a church and featuring a live nativity scene, Christmas music and religiously themed activities.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel contacted the school Dec. 12 about its constitutional obligation to remain neutral to religion and pointing out that religious fliers “waste the time and resources of paid school personnel” and force “teachers of diverse views and beliefs to distribute religious promotional materials.”

Superintendent Jeff Sheets responded Dec. 23 that the district has a policy not to send any third-party communications home with students. He said he informed the South Bloomfield principal, who was new, of this policy. Sheets also stated he would remind district residents of the policy.

K-9 unit's bible posts taken down

The Douglas County [Ga.] Sheriff K-9 Unit's Facebook page no longer posts religious messages. The page administrator regularly posted bible quotes on Sundays, as well as several other Christian-themed posts. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the sheriff Nov. 27: “It is a fundamental principle of Establishment Clause jurisprudence that the government cannot in any way promote, advance, or otherwise endorse religion.”

Since receiving FFRF's letter, there have been no further religious posts on the unit's Facebook page.

Religious marquees banned at school



The superintendent of the Wayne County [W.Va.] School District will ensure that religious messages are not put on school marquees after FFRF notified her of one such marquee and the constitutional problems it posed.

Buffalo Elementary School had displayed the message “WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM” around Christmas. Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote to the superintendent Dec. 31.

Superintendent Lynn Hurt responded Jan. 3 that she had notified the principal to remove the sign. The school district's attorney “will prepare a notice for all of our principals and share it with them at their monthly meeting about this situation,” Hurt said.

Public school prayer monitored in Minn.

FFRF has received multiple complaints about prayer at Pillager [Minn.] Public School events. In 2010, FFRF objected to a prayer led by a pastor at a Veterans Day assembly for all K-12 students. Superintendent Chuck Arns gave assurances that prayers would not recur at future events but prayers at some events continued.

Most recently, an invocation by a pastor was included as part of a National Honor Society ceremony in November.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote to the attorney for the school district about the continuation of prayers, asking for the superintendent to “issue a memorandum which makes absolutely clear that prayers are not permitted as part of school-sponsored events, which includes all events organized by school staff. We also request that all staff who plan school events are trained on the legal necessity to immediately cease scheduling prayers.”

The attorney replied Jan. 8: “In the next week, Superintendent Arns will address all school administration and others who could be responsible for planning school events. He will remind them that during school-sponsored events, there shall be no religious expression or instruction, whether in the form of prayer or references to the bible.”

FFRF members with students in the district will monitor future activities to ensure compliance.

Band director's prayer strikes sour note

The marching band director at a high school in Rock Hill School District Three, Rock Hill, S.C., apparently initiated a student prayer circle before performances. Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott contacted the school's legal counsel Dec. 6 on behalf of a complainant:

“It is a violation of the Constitution for a [school] employee to organize, schedule, or participate in prayers or other religious proselytizing before marching band performances.”

In a Dec. 12 letter, legal counsel admitted that “the band director has on occasion signaled to the students just before they recited the prayer.”

The director “understands that he is to refrain in the future from signaling that any such prayer take place at a school-sponsored activity or event.”

School strips staff of 'Jesus' shirts



FFRF action led to return of shirts like this to the donor.

Buchtel Community Learning Center teachers in Akron, Ohio, will no longer be allowed to wear religious T-shirts in school. The shirts promote the school's athletic program with messages such as “Jesus Is My Hero,” “Pick Up the Cross and Follow Me: Jesus” and “God's Got Our Back.”

FFRF contacted Akron Public School Superintendent David James on June 5. Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert detailed constitutional concerns and conflict with the board's policy, which bars staff from using their positions or property “for participant political or religious purposes.” Wearing T-shirts calling upon others to follow Christ is not an example public school teachers are constitutionally allowed to set. Furthermore, the policy states staff would “dress in a manner consistent with their professional responsibilities.”

The district responded that it takes such allegations seriously and requested names of teachers involved. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a follow-up letter with names of staff who had worn the shirts, including the principal and assistant principal. Seidel also noted that the shirts were being sold in the

official school store.

“The [shirt] designs themselves align official athletics teams (not private student clubs) with Christianity in violation of the law.”

Seidel urged the district to confiscate the remaining stock of shirts and remind staff not to wear them to school.

The district responded Oct. 23: “The entire school staff was notified that the donated shirts are not to be worn during school because they are a violation of the board's policy regarding the wearing of religious symbols. The rest of the donated T-shirts have been confiscated and will be given back to the donor.”

Religion off athletic shirts at school

After a complaint by FFRF, coaches at South Central High School in Winterville, N.C., received a lesson from the school principal on the Constitution.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote Nov. 27 to the Pitt County School District about reports of coach-led prayers at football, soccer, baseball and basketball games.

On Dec. 20, FFRF received assurances from the school district's attorney that the principal had informed all coaches of restrictions on prayer at school events. The district also agreed that bible verses would not be placed on athletic shirts, which at least one team had done in the past.

School removes 'Lord God' from mural



FFRF was successful in remedying this constitutional violation in a Georgia elementary school.

Robinson Elementary School in Dawsonville, Ga., painted over part of a verse from an Anglican hymn after FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott contacted the attorney for the Dawson County School District on behalf of a concerned parent.

The verse, which read, “All Creatures Great and Small. The Lord God Made Them All,” was painted above a cafeteria mural depicting a variety of animals and insects.

In December, the parent notified FFRF that the religious portion of the hymn had been painted over with a new message. The mural now reads, “All Creatures Great and Small. Robinson Elem. Loves Them All.”

The mural was the latest violation in Dawson County Schools that FFRF has rectified. In January 2013, FFRF received confirmation from the school system that it would not grant academic credit to students for attending an unaccredited Christian Learning Center, as had been reported in the news.

In February 2013, a parent alerted FFRF about a Latin cross painted on a large boulder beside the high school football field. After receiving a letter from Elliott, the school painted over the cross.

Convention speaker Goss fights the Right

Aisha Goss of the Secular Coalition for America spoke Sept. 28 to attendees at FFRF's 36th national convention in Madison, Wis. FFRF is affiliated with the coalition.



Photography by Brent Nicastro

By Aisha Goss

My family is from Birmingham, Ala., and when you're African-American and in Birmingham, Ala., there are certain milestones that must be met. By 3, you're walking and talking. By 5, you've joined the children's choir and had a speaking role in either the Christmas or Easter programs. And by 10, you've accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and personal savior and have been baptized.

Last year, my 8-year-old cousin decided that he was an atheist. Despite his protests, his family insisted that he be baptized. So he went to his father's gas station and took three boxes of the individually packaged Alka-Seltzer. For those wondering about the math, that is 324 tablets. Then he stuffed them in his pockets, his socks, his shoes, his underwear, anywhere that he could get an Alka-Seltzer, he put an Alka-Seltzer.

So when he was dunked in that small baptismal pool, the church went into an uproar, "Oh, lawdy, it's a demon!"

You can imagine their surprise and disgust when he emerged from the pool and said, "I think I bubbled out my Jesus."

This budding little Alabama activist had a strong statement to make about the role of religion in his life, but when

he goes back to his public school, there's still the Ten Commandments on the wall, there's still creationism in his textbook, and his whole class joins hands to say grace before every meal.

While FFRF has been amassing its 165 state/church victories this year, we've been working on the legislative side. The Secular Coalition for America works hard to push for legislation to do what our founders intended, which is to protect a secular government as the best protection of freedom for all.

We do this in two ways: We lobby federal and state governments and facilitate cooperation among secular groups. The second part is really important because part of the reason why Washington ignores secularists is because they don't see us as a united and organized group. In fact, during the past presidential election, a senior Obama staffer was asked why they haven't done any outreach to the secular community. The adviser looked at our communications manager and said, "We don't view you as a constituency. We don't do outreach to that community."

We've been working hard to change the minds of even Republicans about the importance of science, the importance of the secular nature of government, and the importance of the secular community. Some estimates say that people who consider themselves either secular or "none" number up to 20 million.

That number catches people's attention. We even were invited to go before the Republican National Committee to red-line their platform to say what they needed to do to reach out to secular Americans. With the three words that were left on the page, we kind of said "revise."

They don't see us as organized. On the other side they have the Religious Right, which is very organized. In fact, they spend about \$390 million to lobby just the federal government, not to mention the states and U.S. territories. We spend only about \$350,000 on all our lobbying at the state and federal levels.

And when you have members of a congressional science committee say things like, "We can't send any more troops to Guam because if we do, the island will capsize," there's definitely a reason why secular Americans need to be heard and need to be heard more

We like to ruffle feathers. We like to see change.

clearly.

We don't just represent those who identify themselves as atheists, free-thinkers, humanists or any of the other names that are part of the secular community. About 55% of Americans in general think political leaders shouldn't rely on religious beliefs to make decisions. Even though most of us believe that religion shouldn't be the foundation of government, because the Religious Right speaks so loudly, they pay attention.

Before the 1970s, most nontheists were Republican because the Republicans had the idea of smaller government, and smaller government often means less [perceived interference] in churches. It wasn't abortion that caused the shift. It was actually the integration of schools. The Religious Right pooled its resources to fight integration of schools during the Carter administration.

Who we are

When we talk to people and groups, we say who secular voters are. We point out that secular people tend to be more educated, have higher incomes and are more likely to vote, that they're more likely to be politically aware and understand how government operates.

We explain what our issues are. We talk about health care and science education and the military and all of the other places where religious entitlement receives special privilege. Some of the issues we're dealing with on a federal level are the religious exemption to the contraceptive mandate, religious groups using taxpayer money without limits, the Abstinence Reallocation Act of 2013 and a bill to repeal the 1954 Johnson Amendment that bars politicking from the pulpit in exchange for tax exemption. Another thing we're dealing with is the inclusion of humanist chaplains for military nontheists.

One of our victories this year was gaining more transparency for federal dollars being spent for religious purposes. Because churches aren't required to fill out certain IRS forms, there was no reporting as to where the federal money went. This is changing during the Obama administration, but it's being done fairly quietly so as to not ruffle feathers. But we like to ruffle feathers. We like to see change, and I am proud to be able to report that change to you.

We blocked the expansion of religious exemptions in the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. The House amendment we supported on humanist chaplains got 150 votes. Although it was defeated, this was the first time that something with the word humanist in it got more than 10 votes in Congress.

We also made suggestions for eliminating religious exemptions in the tax code that were included in the recommendation to the House Ways and Means Committee. This was a huge victory for us because we always send



letters and we always send comments and usually they're lost or, you know, the mail made it one day past the deadline. But this year all four of our recommendations were discussed. We'll see what the final bill looks like, but for now we're counting it as one of our successes.

Along with the contraceptive mandate, we opposed a "conscience clause" for pharmacists who deny emergency contraceptives and the medical neglect of children through faith healing. We've also included quite recently information about vaccines. Vaccines are not being administered because people believe they are not of God, or even seen as witchcraft by some.

We've seen an outbreak of measles and a resurgence of whooping cough in places where the diseases had been eradicated because children are not being vaccinated. Adults who usually have a stronger reaction to these childhood illnesses are actually dying because their children introduce diseases into the home.

On education, we oppose voucher programs, abstinence-only education, and creationism and intelligent design in science classrooms.

If the federal tax subsidies for religious exemptions were stopped, that would bring an additional \$71 billion a year into the American economy. But that's not a part of discussion right now unless we introduce it. One would think that with all of the problems with the government shutdown that an additional \$71 billion a year would be a bit of an incentive. We have to make it an issue for lawmakers.

We also address discrimination by employers and landlords and government-issued marriage licenses required on the basis of sex.

We also work on similar issues at the state level. One thing we actually were fighting in one of our state chapters, I believe it was Arizona, was that in order to graduate from high school, one must pronounce Jesus Christ as "Lord and personal savior" and know and understand each of the Ten Commandments. We were able to get that bill tabled before it made it to the floor.

These are the types of battles we fight on a daily basis. So whether you're an 8-year-old activist with a pocketful of Alka-Seltzer or someone sitting at home watching your representative say something nonsensical into a microphone, we all need to band together and collectively address the problem, not only in the courtrooms but also in our legislatures. Thank you.



In Memoriam

Celebrating the life of freethinker Kenneth Taubert Sr., 1921–2013



Ken, with Helen Hakeem, picketing the Senate chaplain.



Ken delivering meals to the elderly.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is very sorry to report the death last fall of longtime member and former treasurer Kenneth F. Taubert Sr., at Hart Park Square in Wauwatosa, Wis.

Ken was born in Madison, Wis., in 1921, and was raised, along with his sister, in a strict Catholic foster family. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps at age 20 and spent six years in that service. He married his wife, Virginia, in 1942.

Ken worked for many years as a supervisory custodian at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He was an avid golfer.

He joined FFRF in 1980. In an October 1990 article, he poignantly detailed his secular awakening:

"I left the Catholic Church when I was about 30 years old. I became disenchanted with religion in general, when we were told by a priest that our third child, whom doctors told us would not live more than one month, would not go to heaven unless he was baptized. I argued that this little fellow had done nothing wrong, and was sure to go straight to heaven. The priest insisted, so we had him baptized, but I never set foot in the Catholic Church again."

He went on to form the first Wisconsin group to support the rights of the mentally impaired, back in the days when it was not unusual for them to be hidden away.

Ken attended church with his wife for a number of years. "During this period, I read the bible for the first time and became a born-again atheist. From then on, I read every religious book I could get my hands on. I also read every freethought book I could find."

He served as volunteer treasurer for more than a decade and was known to many convention-goers and readers of Freethought Today. Ken "faithfully" helped prepare Freethought Today mailings for more than a decade back

when that work was done in-house. He and professor Michael Hakeem, then-chair of FFRF's Executive Board, and Helen Hakeem, who was secretary, often engaged in freethought activism together.

Co-President Dan Barker recalls a memorable road trip with Ken and Mike to monitor a "faith-healing" event in Milwaukee featuring Peter Popoff, after Popoff's exploits had been debunked by James Randi on "The Tonight Show."

Ken and Mike took in another Milwaukee faith-healing event ("An Evening with W.V. Grant," June/July 1991), with Ken noting, "I cannot think of a group more loathsome than the faith healers."

He once turned out at 6:30 a.m. with a few hardy FFRF "non-souls" to picket the appearance of U.S. Senate Chaplain Richard C. Halverson at a prayer breakfast attended by 600 religionists on a snowy morning in Madison.

"Ken was such a good activist and joined us in several other pickets, including in front of University Hospitals to protest Gideon bible distributions," said Anne Nicol Gaylor, FFRF president emerita.

In the May 1992 issue of Freethought Today, Ken recounted "a sweet victory" — getting his polling place in Monona, Wis., changed from a Catholic church to a public school. He also persuaded the city of Madison to enforce its own ordinance prohibiting anyone from advertising on city property, including a church that was a repeat offender.

When Ken presented his annual treasurer's report to the convention, including recapping the annual Form 990, he invariably pointed out that churches are uniquely exempted from filling it out by the IRS. "We know Ken was 100% behind our current litigation contesting that inequity," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

She added, "Ken was genuinely the most congenial man I've ever met. He

had a twinkle in his eye and something cheerful to say to everyone. We're told he loved debating religion with his mostly Catholic peers at his nursing home, and vice versa. Due to Ken's genial nature, these debates never became personal."

Ken was an avid runner who, in retirement, turned to brisk walking. He liked to boast, after having a pacemaker placed, about keeping pace with Annie Laurie and another young woman on a 13-mile walk around a Madison lake in the early 1990s.

More than 500 books in FFRF's library bear Ken Taubert's initials from previous donations. FFRF was honored to be given Ken's remaining personal library upon his death.

He was featured in a major story in The Capital Times (April 3, 1950)

for his innovative volunteerism with a neighborhood "tiny tots" group. He continued throughout his life to volunteer and participate in athletic fundraisers. In retirement, he volunteered for Mobile Meals and once wrote, "I get lots of hugs, and I don't mind that a bit."

Ken is survived by his son, Bruce, and daughter, Marcia Hochstetter, and their families, plus several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Ken and Virginia's sons Kenneth Taubert Jr. and Carl Taubert are deceased.

FFRF's staff seconds this summation in Ken's obituary: "A man who gave everyone the benefit of the doubt and taught compassion and understanding, he will be deeply missed by all who had the privilege of knowing him."

Allen Korbel, 1931–2013

My Creed

Allen Korbel, 82, a Wisconsin member of FFRF since 1991 and later a Lifetime Member, died Dec. 17, 2013.

Born in Milwaukee on April 16, 1931, he was an accomplished race car driver and downhill skier with "a passion for life," noted his friend Paul Wild. "He was a rare individual, a longtime libertarian, secular humanist and freethinker."

He is survived by two daughters who have carried on his tradition of independent thought.

Allen most generously included a \$5,000 bequest to FFRF in his estate.

His daughter, Mary Plautz, noted that he once told her, "if anything has to be written about me, I'd like it to be this" — "his creed," which was part of a picture frame hanging on the wall. He felt this exemplifies a moral and cultural attitude not only about entrepreneurship, but about the self-determining, fulfilling values in human life":

I do not choose to be a common man
It is my right to be uncommon. . . if
I can.
I seek opportunity . . . not security.
I do not wish to be a kept citizen,
humbled and dulled by having the
state look after me.
I want to take the calculated risk,
to dream and build, to fail and suc-
ceed.
I refuse to barter incentive for a dole.
I prefer the challenges of life to the
guaranteed existence;
the thrill of fulfillment to the stale
calm of Utopia.
I will not trade freedom for benefi-
cence
or my dignity for a handout.
I will try to never cower before any
master
nor bend to any threat.
It is my heritage to stand erect,
proud, and unafraid;
to think and act for myself;
enjoy the benefits of my creations;
and face the world boldly and say;
"This I have done."

— Dean Alfanje (1897-1989)

Meet a Profoundly Hilarious Member



Photo: Mike Maxwell

Thea Deley as Thea Deley.

Name: Thea Deley.

Where I live: Paonia, Colo.

Where and when I was born: I was born in 1966 while my dad was stationed at the Pueblo Army Depot in Colorado.

Family: Mike Maxwell (partner of 22 years) and two dogs (Kali and Jenna).

Education: Social sciences degree with a minor in philosophy from Colorado State University; master's in public relations from the University of Denver. Also studied improv comedy at Second City in Hollywood.

Occupation: Religious satirist, writer, performer and founding minister of the Church of Personal Responsibility. I help ex-Christians heal by giving them opportunities to laugh at their religious backgrounds. (When you get some distance, it really *is* hilarious!)

Military service: I'm a proud military brat (my father served in the Army for 20-plus years). Most people don't think about the families, but we "serve" the country alongside our military parents/spouses.

Whenever Dad got his transfer orders, we started packing. By the time I graduated from high school, I had lived in 11 cities, seven states and three countries, including pre-"Fall of the Wall" Germany.

How I got where I am today: I was raised in a conservative Protestant family. Ironically, my military upbringing influenced my evolution away from both Christianity and conservatism. Being exposed to so many different cultures forced me to question what other American kids might take for granted. You took a school field trip to SeaWorld? We went to the Rothenburg Museum of Torture. Seeing a medieval chastity belt the day you get your first period really affects a girl!

I developed critical thinking in high school debate and speech tournaments and honed them further in college with philosophy and news-writing classes. Eastern religion courses opened my mind to other spiritual paths. To this day my disgruntled mother says, "We never should have let you go to college!"

I admit my life would have been much simpler — less existential angst, perhaps — had I stuck to the Christian conditioning, but I wouldn't trade freethought for the world.

Years after I left my faith, I lived by an evangelical church. Early one Sunday morning, their worship band woke me up at 6:30, and I just snapped. I

threw on a pair of sweats, ran across the street, burst into the church and yelled, "SHUT THE F*C* UP!"

That's when I realized I had some unresolved anger issues I better deal with — simply yelling at Christians wasn't helping me and it sure wasn't going to help the world. Making people laugh is *way* more fun.

Where I'm headed: Right now I'm touring my solo comedy show, "Jesus Loves You! (But Hates Me): One Woman's Journey from Believer to Blasphemer." It's an irreverent ride through my religious childhood and Christianity in America today. There are skits and songs! Spoof films! And even game shows!

Whenever I perform, I'm struck by how many people want to tell me their stories afterward. Many of us ex-Christians feel angry, hurt and isolated. This breaks my heart.

Religious indoctrination is not something you simply "get over" by deciding you no longer believe it. The brain is much more complex than that. While I no longer believe in hell, my brain's limbic system still reacts as if it's a real threat.

Sometimes I catch myself whispering, "Please God, please forgive me" when I make a mistake. This upsets me. I don't even believe in God! Does this make me weak? No, just conditioned.

I'd like to help recovering Christians rewire their brains. We are worthy of love, and until we believe that for ourselves we cannot experience it fully.

Person I admire: Eve Ensler, creator of "The Vagina Monologues." She started a global movement with a one-woman show and reminds me that theater can change the world.

A quotation I like: I must have read and reread Dan Barker's quote (below) a hundred times while writing my show. I was scared, and his words helped me believe in myself. Thanks Dan!

"You are an intelligent human being. Your life is valuable for its own sake. You are not second-class in the universe, deriving meaning and purpose from some other mind. You are not inherently evil — you are inherently human, possessing the positive rational potential to help make this a world of morality, peace and joy. Trust yourself."

These are a few of my favorite things: Camping in the Utah desert with Mike and our dogs, sipping wine on the terrace of my favorite local winery, sharing a meal with friends, performing improv and sketch comedy, frantically changing costumes backstage while one of my spoof videos plays and hearing someone in the audience laugh so hard they snort.

These are not:

- The strange cultural assumption that the bible is a book of wisdom upon which to base your life, and that if you do you are somehow more fit to run this country than an atheist.
- Pro-lifers acting as if they care about women.
- Virginity pledges and Purity Balls.
- Bleeding heart New Age liberals who righteously promote "tolerance" because they're too afraid to take a stand.
- Dogmatic atheists who categorically demonize all Christians.
- Dualism. Life just isn't black and



Photo: David Shinn

Thea Deley as Not-Very-Virgin Mary in her solo comedy show.

white.

- Telling children that God is going to punish them if they are bad little girls and boys.

- Hypocrisy. In religious people, yes, but most especially in myself. My ethical challenge is holding Christianity accountable for its abuses while striving to see the humanity of its followers.

My doubts about religion started: Leaving Christianity was a process that took me about a decade. Highlights along the way:

- (Age 8) Learning in Sunday school that my favorite toothpaste was made by devil worshipers, and if I continued to brush with Crest I too would go to hell.

- (Age 14) Sitting in my living room while our pastor explained I couldn't become a minister because I was a girl.

- (Age 18) Dry humping my college boyfriend when the hair dryer in the other room inexplicably turned itself on. My boyfriend tossed me off the bed and fell to his knees, saying, "It's a message from God! We're not supposed to

have sex!" That was the last straw.

Before I die: I'd like to perform my show at a national secular conference and have Julia Sweeney come up to me afterward and say, "Wow, I really loved your show!" Or at the very least, "Wow, I really loved your 'virginity restoration' squirt gun!"

Ways I promote freethought: Performing my show, collaborating with progressive secular and religious groups around our shared values, officiating nonreligious wedding ceremonies, and blogging, vlogging and creating other online content.

I wish you'd have asked me: How did being an FFRF member help you create your show?

I used Freethought Today's Black Collar Crime Blotter as inspiration for a video and creepy character in one of my scenes (Pastor Irv). I also created a game show based on FFRF's online bible quiz. I call it "Bible Feud" and pit two teams of people from the audience against each other. It's lots of fun and ends in a public stoning!

It Pays to Complain

A California FFRF member was successful in getting a state Department of Public Health official in Sacramento to remove a religious statement from her email signature. After the employee's information such as title, address and phone number, her official emails ended with: "What you have made a matter of Prayer, should cease to be a matter of care!!!"

Pamela Koslyn, a Life Member, wrote the employee: "As I'm sure you know, not everyone believes in prayer, and as I'd expect you to know, the CDPH cannot endorse prayer. I think this is an inappropriate use of state resources, since your email speaks for the state, and by my reading of the California Constitution's 'No Preference,' 'No Establishment' and 'No Aid' clauses, you're forbidden from doing any

act that proselytizes for and prefers any particular sect without a secular purpose. Since there's no secular purpose to prayer, I believe it also forbids proselytizing for prayer. You're of course free to include whatever you'd like on your private emails and in your private conversations."

Koslyn followed up the next day with another email that asked the employee to "Please respond promptly in writing about what steps you are taking to respect the Establishment Clause and remedy this constitutional violation."

That same day, Dec. 24, Koslyn received an email from the employee's direct manager: "I would like to let you know that your e-mail was brought to my attention by [the employee]. The language on her e-mail account has been removed."

Meet a Member

Good without God? Of course!



Name: Alex J. Fierro.

Where I live: Tuxedo Park, N.Y.

Where and when I was born: New Jersey, 1986.

Education: Bachelor's in mathematics, State University of New York at Purchase.

Occupation: Website developer.

How I got where I am today: I am happy with what I have achieved in my life thus far, but I know that I am still young and want to continue to do more. I have been able to manufacture my own luck through hard work, dedication and believing in myself. I have also been fortunate enough to have loving friends and family. I have a spectacular wife, Lia, who has always been supportive of all of my endeavors, as well as many friends, both religious and secular.

Person in history I admire: Although it may seem cliché, the person who stands out for me is Christopher Hitchens. Hitchens was simply amazing; he had incredible wit and brilliance. It was common for me, while reading his books, to go from laughter to rage, all within the same paragraph.

He was able to wield a mastery of the English language and combine it with incredible logic. It's because of this talent that his legacy will always live on. He put together some of the most powerful arguments against organized religion and did so in a succinct, beautiful and wonderfully unapologetic way.

A quotation I like: "I would love to believe that when I die I will live again, that some thinking, feeling, remembering part of me will continue. But much as I want to believe that, and despite the ancient and worldwide cultural traditions that assert an afterlife, I know of nothing to suggest that it is more than wishful thinking. The world is so exquisite with so much love and moral depth, that there is no reason to deceive ourselves with pretty stories for which there's little good evidence. Far better it seems to me, in our vulnerability, is to look death in the eye and to be grateful every day for the brief but magnificent opportunity that life provides." — *Carl Sagan, "In the Valley of the Shadow," Parade, 3-10-96*

These are a few of my favorite things: Tarantino movies, /r/atheism

and /r/TrueAtheism [online atheist forums], fantasy football, mixed martial arts, the Flying Spaghetti Monster and designing and programming websites. I also enjoy debating the existence of a higher power with my "BFF," who is a devout Christian. We are both comfortable with who we are.

These are not: Those stupid "Keep Christ in Christmas" car magnets! They drive me absolutely crazy. Many Christians chant "Keep Christ in Christmas" as if the name signifies that the holiday belongs to them. We atheists know that the true spirit of the holidays is giving presents, spending time with family and listening to your drunk uncle explain how Barack Obama is actually the Anti-Christ.

Christmas, like most Christian holidays, is adapted from the pagan holiday that preceded it. This fact led me to create my own parody car magnet entitled "Keep Eostre in Easter." It's a subtle jab at the ubiquitous symbol. I created a website (keepeostreineaster.com) to sell the magnets, and 100% of all the proceeds will go to FFRF. Please feel free to buy one (or several) so I can get the boxes of magnets out of the garage and keep the aforementioned wife supportive of my endeavors!

My doubts about religion started: I was raised by Christian parents and attended church every Sunday for bible study from a very early age. As I got older, my love of critical thinking and analysis led me toward a career in mathematics and computer science. This same analysis also led me to doubt the validity and the morality of what I had studied.

As Penn Jillette said, "Reading the bible cover to cover will turn you atheist faster than anything." Even if you discard the ridiculous fables like talking snakes and people living to be 900 years old, many of the verses reveal a God that is not the all-loving being that cherry-picked, rewritten bible stories claim he is. Instead, as Dawkins put it, he's a character that is "jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust . . . malevolent bully."

This transition was eased by parents who, while they didn't agree with my observations, always remained supportive and respectful.

Memorable Moments in Monotheism

In the seventeenth century, Dr. John Lightfoot, vice chancellor of the University of Cambridge and one of the most eminent Hebrew scholars of his time, declared, as the result of his most profound and exhaustive study of the Scriptures, that "heaven and earth, centre and circumference, were created all together, in the same instant, and clouds full of water," and that "this work took place and man was created by the Trinity on October 23, 4004 B.C., at nine o'clock in the morning."



Please, pleads Alex Fierro, keep the pagan fertility god Eostre in Easter!

Ways I promote freethought: By trying my absolute hardest to live a good, pure life. I donate to charity, I read, volunteer when I have time and always try to be as generous as possible and treat others with kindness and respect. I do this all as an unapologetic atheist.

When the topic of religion comes up in conversation, I never choose to be timid about my religious beliefs. By giving back and building strong lasting friendships, you can provide an example to others that it is possible to be "good without God."

50th anniversary of landmark court decision

Ellery Schempp, Champion of the First Amendment

Ellery Schempp, an FFRF Lifetime Member and recipient of its Champion of the First Amendment award, is an accomplished Ph.D. physicist. He was a plaintiff in *Abington School District v. Schempp*, the landmark 1963 U.S. Supreme Court case in which mandatory bible readings in public school were declared unconstitutional. The case is chronicled in Stephen Solomon's book *Ellery's Protest: How One Young Man Defied Tradition and Sparked the Battle over School Prayer*.

Ellery discussed the case in its 50th anniversary year at FFRF's 36th annual convention Sept. 20, 2013, in Madison, Wis. His remarks were edited for print.

His introduction included a clip of him being interviewed by Eric Sevareid of CBS News in 1963.



By Ellery Schempp

It's wonderful to be back in Madison with my FFRF friends. I'm a second generation supporter of FFRF as a Life Member. Annie Laurie and Dan Barker do so much good work; they leave me breathless.

So, let us pray. Isn't it amazing how that phrase grasps us and makes us compliant? Something profound is supposed to follow to make us obedient or something, but where do we want to put our obedience, our loyalties and our commitments?

I was born in Philadelphia in the Jewish Hospital. Mom resisted having me baptized. There was a lot of pressure from the Schempp side of the family. Grandmom was a devout Methodist and a fan of Billy Graham. Dad had slowly distanced himself from the bible and what he considered to be cruel and violent. But he did want to believe in some higher power, and only late in his life concluded that gods were man-made and religion is more a business than an uplifting force in society. He was disappointed in this conclusion, but he died in 2004 as a nonbeliever.

So here I am, unwashed and unbaptized. We attended pretty faithfully the Unitarian Church in Germantown. In addition to the usual bible stories and Sunday school, we learned about all the religions, and I quickly assimilated the idea that there was no single truth, and any claim that God spoke to some and not to others was ridiculous.

The church had an especially interesting pulpit, where we heard Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich and Norman Thomas, who spoke several times a year. I was greatly enamored with



Ellery Schempp accepts a medallion noting the 50th anniversary of *Abington School District v. Schempp* from FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

Thomas. When he spoke in a ringing voice about the great problems of our time, you wanted to rush to the barricades.

It soon became clear to me that there were many claims to religious truth, and they couldn't all be right. The notion that there is only one true faith and that fits in all schools or in society is simply too absurd.

I started thinking about the Constitution and the bible way back in 1956. I was a 16-year-old junior at Abington Senior High School in a suburb of Philadelphia. Pennsylvania had a law that required 10 verses of the bible be read in every classroom at the start of each school day. Many schools included a recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

Twenty or 30 states had similar laws that had gone unchallenged for more than 60 years. It seemed to me that this was a violation of the First Amendment because it clearly established a Christian religious practice in the schools under the authority of the government.

The First Amendment is only 45 words long, so it's not taxing even for teenagers. It's interesting that this daily ceremony was known as morning devotions, so the religious nature was obvious. I did, in fact, bring a copy of the Quran to school because I wanted to show that the bible was not the only source of truth, not the only holy book. The Quran was merely by accident; I didn't know a thing about Islam at the time, neither did anybody I knew, but one of my friend's fathers had a copy of it in his library. [Ellery read the Quran while the teacher was reading bible verses to the class and refused to stand while a student recited the prayer.]

That got me sent to the principal, who lectured me on respect and school rules. I replied that I was concerned about respect for the Constitution and freedom of conscience. He sent me to the guidance counselor. Was I having problems at home? Did I have any difficulties with my father?

No, I said, I just disagreed about bible reading and prayer. So that evening, Nov. 26, 1956, I wrote a letter to the American Civil Liberties Union, asking for help:

Gentlemen,

As a student in my junior year at Abington Senior High School, I would very greatly appreciate any information you might send regarding possible union action and/or aid

in testing the constitutionality of Pennsylvania law, which arbitrarily and seemingly unrighteously and unconstitutionally compels the bible to be read in our public school system. I thank you for any help you might offer in freeing American youth in Pennsylvania from this gross violation of the religious rights as guaranteed in the First and foremost Amendment in our United States Constitution.

Well, speaking for American youth was indeed a bit pretentious. I also enclosed a \$10 bill, which is worth \$85.80 today. This got their attention. If a kid can save this sum from his allowance and cutting grass, he must be serious.

Not fit for kids

In 1956, 1960, even 1963 and later, the Secular Student Alliance didn't exist. The Freedom From Religion Foundation did not exist. American Atheists did not exist. There was no Internet. And so it was really only the ACLU that could come by to be supportive.

I had several reasons for my protest. One was fairness. I thought the schools needed to be fair to everyone. The bible is not the holy book of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, so that is an unfairness. Nonbelievers going to school to learn history and math should not have the bible or prayer forced on them.

I got to thinking, and that's always a bit dangerous. I knew that kids in Oregon and other states did not have bible reading. Could it be true that they were less moral than those of us

Nonbelievers going to school to learn history and math should not have the bible or prayer forced on them.

in Abington?

The bible is full of unimaginable cruelties to women, to children, full of violence, rapes and genocides. Maybe a million deaths have been recorded in the bible, championed as righteous and the will of God. It was obviously not a book fit for children and had passages directly contradicting science.

In the *Abington* decision, the court recognized that children are particularly vulnerable and deserve particular protection for their developing thoughts as to their freedoms of belief, without coercion from a majority or a dominant religious faith's belief. Being excused from class was not an effective answer. Self-identifying as a dissenter or nonbeliever opens the door to discrimination and taunting.

As Dan mentioned, a similar case was brought by Madalyn Murray O'Hair in Maryland in the 1960s. *Murray v. Curlett* was consolidated with our case before the Supreme Court. The decision in our favor was 8-1 with Justice Potter Stewart dissenting.

The decision made national news and caused outrage on a grand scale. I have a lot of cousins, and suddenly every one had an identity crisis. "Can we change our names?" they asked. President Kennedy made a nice statement to calm the country: "I'm sure we can all pray a little more in our homes, our churches and our synagogues."

We received about 5,000 letters, roughly one-third supporting us, one-third opposing in reasonable terms where people could differ, and one-third, of course, were hateful, vituperative and ugly. My parents answered every letter with a return address. This was in the days before Xerox machines and stamps cost 3½ cents. It still came to hundreds of dollars.

Atheists are the most hated and feared group in America. We were ac-



Ellery greets Jim McCollum, another Champion of the First Amendment (in *McCollum v. Board of Education*) and his wife Betty.

When people called us ‘you communist atheist,’ they had reached their ultimate in outrage.

cused of being everything the writers hated, so we expected the letters that said, “What are you, commies? What are you, Nazis? What are you, Catholics? What are you, Jews?” We didn’t expect ones that said, “What are you, Presbyterians?” “In the name of Christ, go to hell” was a frequent theme.

Some were newspaper clippings smeared with excrement. One of the things we learned was that in the United States, it was considered bad not to be Christian. It was very bad to be a communist, of course, but it was really quite awful to be an atheist. When people called us “you communist atheist,” they had reached their ultimate in outrage.

Our family suffered relatively little, especially compared to the Murray family or the McCollum family 65 years ago. Dog feces were thrown on our steps, the kids in the school bus rolled down the windows and shouted, “Now passing the commie camp.” My brother Roger was knocked around several times, which hurt. Some parents told their daughters not to play with my sister Donna.

The ACLU had a nice remembrance in June, and I met a man named Shannon Turk. His family had moved to Butler, Pa., from someplace in the West. He had never been part of morning devotions or reciting the Lord’s Prayer, so he was initially baffled and wouldn’t recite it. The teacher called him forward, forced him to bend over and paddled him.

Turk was a determined young man and refused, so for the next two years, every day, he was paddled in front of the class. When he told his story, he embraced me with tears in his eyes, because one day the paddling stopped. Countless people over the years have told me how unpleasant it was for them at morning devotions.

Bible’s no blueprint

I went to Tufts University in the fall of 1958. I didn’t know then that when I applied to Tufts and several other colleges, my principal at Abington Senior High School, Eugene Stull, had written a letter of “disrecommendation” to every college I had applied to.

I learned about this because when 1962-63 came about, CBS News called me up and asked if I would be willing to do an interview. I went to Charles Stearns, the dean of admissions, to ask if there was anything I should know. He told me that after my application was accepted, Stull called long distance (long distance was expensive and rare in 1958) to tell him to rescind my admission, that I was a rotten apple and would bring disrepute onto Tufts.

Stearns told me that Stull’s call was the most amazing he’s ever received as dean, but he was very kind to say that Tufts did not regret their decision.

There’s nothing in the Constitution about the bible, and there’s nothing in the bible about democracy or the Constitution. Religious people assume that there is some connection. The Consti-

tution is a purely humanistic document and mentions religion just twice. Both times, the word “no” is attached [in Article VI and the First Amendment].

The Constitution’s oath for taking office does not contain the phrase “so help me God.” That has been appended by various oath takers, probably for political spin. The writers of the Constitution were also very careful in distinguishing between an oath and an affirmation. We have the phrase “I do swear or affirm” because swearing an oath had religious connotations, and the founders were keen to put in the word “affirm” to assure freedom from religion.

The bible never mentions democracy or freedom of speech or freedom from religion. It does not mention checks and balances or limitations on the power of the executive. It does not even mention tolerance for other believers. So it’s no model for good government. I think it’s purely a religious or theological document for some believers.

You know the commandments — the 10, actually. If you type into Google “613 commandments,” you’ll find that there are 613 [mitzvahs in the Jewish tradition]. We’re not a Christian nation or a Judeo-Christian nation. We are a constitutional nation.

I’ll end by mentioning just one thing about the Declaration of Independence, which the right wing is so fond of quoting. It is a poetic document, intended to stir emotions and to override the prevalent notion of the divine right of kings. This is a topic in itself, but the Declaration is equally for religious independence as for political independence.

An important point to note is that the Declaration is not any part of the Constitution. And it is no part of the law of the United States. Not a single legal decision binds the Supreme Court or any other court based on the Declaration of Independence.

[The Declaration’s] rights “endowed by a creator” is humanistic in its intent. Even if religious, it is deistic. It emphasized the rights of the common man, the common woman, over the kingship class.

Working together

Finally, I want to say that I think it’s so important to have the Secular Coalition for America, which represents about 100 endorsing organizations at this point. The coalition has a full-time lobbyist. It’s the first time in our history that we’ve had somebody who is able to go and talk to Congress about the issues important to humanists and atheists.

I also want to say to my atheist friends, I know it’s very important to have a world outlook that rejects divine intervention and provides us a way of looking at the world around us and getting satisfaction and seeing the beauty in it. It is not enough to have a personal belief; it is important to support separation of church and state because that is social and political and extends well beyond us.

So I urge you to continue support for organizations like FFRF, Secular Student Alliance, American Humanists, the Secular Coalition, because these organizations amplify our views. When Zack Kopplin mentioned this morning that he wants to start a new organization, I worry a little bit. We don’t need a proliferation of new ones; we need to support the organizations that are doing so well now.

I thank you very much.



Photography by Brent Nicastro



“I always wonder, however did the United State manage to win World War before we had ‘under God’ in the Pledge of Allegiance?”

Appeal to reason

AN ATHEIST’S APPEAL

As we gather together, let us affirm our support for each other.

Our brains, our ideas and our goals will guide us.

Reason, common sense and truth will comfort us.

We will strive to do only good and harm no one.

Give us knowledge and new ways to resolve conflicts, ease pain, and cure diseases.

Diseases; not only of the body and mind, but also of superstition.

Let us not be deceived by the supernatural that defies logic.

For, if there is a kingdom, let it be the kingdom of reason.

And even though our powers are limited, and we are not always glorious, we will do our best to improve ourselves.

May we pledge to take care of the natural world and all living things.

And when our time is over, each one of us can say:
“I did my best to make this world a better place”.

So be it.

-Brian Hinkley
Atheist - 2013

Member Brian Hinkley, Ontario, Canada, writes, “I put this together as I was thinking of what I could say at our family Christmas dinner. Fortunately, three other members of my family are also atheists. Others are a mix of religious and nonreligious.”

'Firthought'



Margaret Downey, FFRF State Representative, Pennsylvania, puts the finishing touches on her Tree of Knowledge, erected Dec. 8 in Philadelphia to balance religious displays. Margaret decorates a tree each year with the covers of books by freethinkers.

Solstice displays



Vandals slashed FFRF's winter solstice banner in an Arlington Heights, Ill., city park in the last week in December. The banner sustained an L-shaped gash, and a carefully buried spotlight cord was wrenched from the ground. The banner was placed in North School Park for a second year in a row by Metropolitan Chicago FFRF to counter a nativity scene on public property. "Since we had planned to take the banner down this Sunday, Dec. 29, it would be too late at this point for FFRF to send a replacement," said Tom Cara, chapter director. "So perhaps the best thing is to leave it as is, so that people can see what a divisive issue religion can be when debated on government property."

FFRF's "Let Reason Prevail" banner was placed in City Park in Streator, Ill., on Dec. 16 to counter the annual nativity display. A "Let Reason Prevail" sign returned to Prineville, Ore., and to the grounds of the Washington State Capitol in Olympia. The same wording on a poster was returned to the Milwaukee Courthouse for a third year in a row by Lifetime Member Ed Susterich. FFRF thanks all local members and activists who placed the "equal time" signs.

FFRF and one of its area members placed an 8-foot banner in Washington Square in Ottawa, Ill., to counter 16 billboard-sized paintings of "the life of Jesus."



Not a typical Christmas display

FFRF and its Metropolitan Chicago Chapter erected a winter solstice display at Daley Plaza in December to counter a larger-than-life nativity display erected for decades. FFRF's display also countered an annual menorah that is at least a story tall. The 8-foot lit "A" stands for atheist and agnostic and was borrowed with permission from Richard Dawkins' "out" campaign. A banner also depicted the "nativity" of the Bill of Rights (Dec. 15). Just before Christmas, a Christian group temporarily unfurled a banner reading "A is for angels" to block the atheist "A," but the month-long display was otherwise unscathed and well-received.



Revelry!

FFRF's solstice billboard in Pitman, N.J., attracted attention from Santa and from vandals, including an attempted arson.



Capitol display

FFRF supporters (left) Gan Drak, Tony Houston, Debbie Flitman and Richard Rosol placed FFRF's secular banner to counter a religious display in the Rhode Island Capitol in Providence.



Photo: Chris Calvey

AHA!

FFRF Staff Attorney spoke at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to the campus Atheists, Humanists & Agnostics organization about FFRF's litigation. About 30 people attended the lecture, which was followed by a rousing 90-minute Q&A.

In the News

Apologist D'Souza pleads not guilty

Dinesh D'Souza, 52, Christian apologist and conservative author, was released Jan. 24 on \$500,000 bond after pleading not guilty at his arraignment in Manhattan to federal counts of making more than \$10,000 of contributions in the names of others and causing false statements. According to an indictment filed by Preet Bharara, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, D'Souza allegedly made contributions in other people's names to a U.S. Senate candidate in 2012. The indictment didn't name the candidate, but sources said it was Republican U.S. Senate candidate Wendy Long, who lost to Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y.

D'Souza takes the Christian position in frequent debates with freethinkers and has debated FFRF Co-President Dan Barker eight times. D'Souza was forced to resign in 2012 as president of King's College, an evangelical Christian school in Manhattan, over reports he was having an affair with Denise Odie Joseph, 29, while still married to his wife of 20 years. He was raised Catholic but now calls himself a non-denominational Christian.

States' abortion barriers mushroom

The Guttmacher Institute, a non-profit organization which works to advance reproductive health and abortion rights, reported Jan. 2 that more abortion restrictions were enacted in 2011-13 than in the entire previous decade.

In 2013, 39 states enacted 141 provisions related to reproductive health and rights. Half of them, 70 in 22 states, sought to restrict access to abortion services.

A few states adopted measures to expand access. Most notably, California enacted the first new state law in seven years to expand access to abortion. Five states expanded access to comprehensive sex education and to emergency contraception for sexual assault victims.

Pakistan blasphemy nets death sentence

A court in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, sentenced a British man, Muhammad Asghar, 70, to death Jan. 23 for blasphemy. Asghar was arrested in 2010 after he wrote letters to various people,

including the police, claiming he is a prophet. According to BBC News, Asghar is a British Pakistani from Edinburgh who came back to Pakistan to look after his family's property. The complaint against him was filed by a tenant who had been served with an eviction notice by Asghar.

Before returning to Pakistan, Asghar had been diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic, but a medical panel appointed by the court in Pakistan rejected the claim of mental illness.

According to Religion Clause, the death sentence is unlikely to be carried out since Pakistan has had a de facto moratorium on the death penalty since 2008. Asghar's lawyer said the conviction will be appealed, and the British Foreign Office plans to raise its concerns with the Pakistani government.

Marriage equality makes more gains

In the seven months since the 2013 Supreme Court landmark decision striking down part of the Defense of Marriage Act that defined marriage as between a man and a woman, the number of states allowing gay marriage has jumped from 12 to 17 (plus the District of Columbia). In Utah and Oklahoma, the issue is in limbo pending appeals, The Associated Press reported Jan. 16.

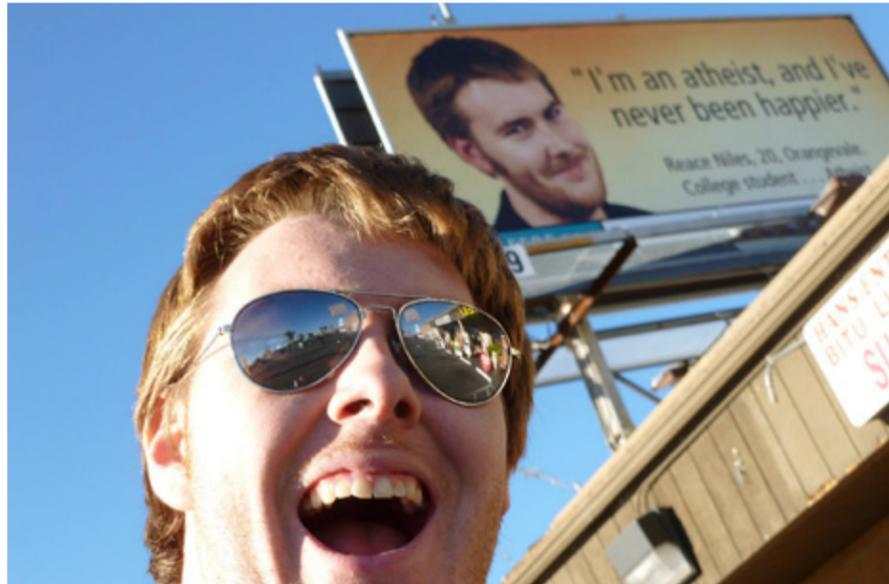
John Williamson, a former state Senate president who wrote the ballot measure that an Oklahoma judge overturned, said that as a Christian he will never accept gay marriage. "But in states that by a vote of the people have approved that, I say 'OK, they got what they want. You have a majority of the people there, and if the minority doesn't like it, they can move to Oklahoma.' But now what can we do?"

An AP poll in October showed about a third of Americans opposing gay marriage, down from 45% in 2011. Twenty-seven states still have constitutional prohibitions and four have state laws against same-sex marriage.

Judge censured for courthouse religion

Bronx County Judge Mary Brigantti-Hughes was censured by the New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct, ABA Journal reported. According to a Dec. 17 statement of facts cited by the commission, Brigantti-Hughes:

- Directed staffers to type or copy religious material for her personal use.
- Asked a court attorney to accom-



Angry atheist? Not, says Sacramento-area atheist Reace Niles, 20.

pany her to Home Depot to buy and pot plants for a church function.

- Asked court staff to join her in prayer in court chambers, and asked staffers to attend religious events after regular business hours.

Brigantti-Hughes, 54, had obtained permission to hold lunch-hour bible study and prayer group at the courthouse, but the requests for staff prayers were made at other times during regular business hours, the determination said.

She also had staff do personal favors for her that were not related to religion. The alleged conduct took place between 2006 and 2011.

Nativity scenes take military hits

Officials at Shaw Air Force Base near Sumter, S.C., ordered removal of a nativity scene that was set up by a small lake on the base, the Air Force Times reported in December.

Spokeswoman Lt. Keavy Rake said the Military Religious Freedom Foundation lodged a complaint about the display. Reke said base officials want a holiday display that reflects more than a single group's beliefs. Volunteers from the base chapel set up the nativity scene.

The commander of the Guantanamo Bay Navy Base in Cuba ordered two nativity scenes out of cafeterias to the base chapel, reported the Miami Herald.

"The spirit of the Navy's policy on this is, if it's religious, it goes to the chapel," said base commander Capt. J.R. Nettleton. "It's more appropriate there."

Eighteen service members had complained to MRFF. Guantanamo has about 6,000 residents, a third of them civilian contract workers from Jamaica and the Philippines.

Vouchers subject of North Carolina suits

Public school advocates sued the state of North Carolina on Dec. 11 to block a new law that would let taxpayer money be used by low-income students wishing to attend private or religious schools, reported The Associated Press.

The North Carolina Association of Educators and the North Carolina Justice Center filed the lawsuit in Wake County Superior Court on behalf of 25 parents, teachers and others. They contend the new law violates the state constitution, which requires that the school funding be "used exclusively for establishing and maintaining a uni-

form system of free public schools."

The law would allow annual grants of \$4,200 per students. About 2,400 students could qualify for grants in the first year, with \$10 million budgeted. Legislators said they hope to expand the program.

Thirteen states had tuition tax credit programs as of this year, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Okla. commandments hit with suits

American Atheists filed a federal lawsuit Jan. 13 against members of the Oklahoma State Capitol Preservation Commission for allowing placement of a 2,000-pound Ten Commandments monument at the north entrance to the Capitol. The American Civil Liberties Union has filed a similar lawsuit in state court.

The commission put a moratorium on proposed displays on Dec. 19 after getting ones from the New York-based Satanic Temple, a Hindu leader in Nevada, the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. The satanists' monument features a 7-foot-tall Baphomet, a goat-headed creature sometimes used as a stand-in for Satan. The demon's lap, flanked by a smiling child on each side, would double as a seat for visitors.

Tulsa atheist William Poire told KRMG-TV: "I don't want to see a Hindu monument or a satanist monument any more than I want to see any other endorsement or any other religion."

Church properties escape Fla. taxes

A 12,000-square-foot home in Coral Springs, Fla., that has a pool, guest house and several garages was recently assessed at \$1.9 million. The owner, the Church of the Bible Understanding, pays no property taxes, WPLG reported Dec. 13.

It's also the primary residence of Stewart Trail, a former vacuum salesman and carpet cleaner who founded the church. The previous owner, a former Miami Dolphins football player, paid \$50,000 a year.

A \$2 million, 5,000-square-foot house owned by the Seafarer's Church of the Creator is also tax-exempt. "It's a house hosting religious services," said Broward County property appraiser Lori Parrish.

"Federal law governs religious facilities," said Parrish. "The law is the law, and we follow the law."



State/Church Bulletin

Chambers sponsors bill to tax Neb. churches

Nebraska state Sen. Ernie Chambers, an atheist, introduced a bill Jan. 8 to eliminate property tax exemptions for religious organizations. Bill LB675 attempts to "gain more revenue, rather than less, by taking away churches' property tax exemptions," according to Chambers' Statement of Intent.

"If taxes were paid on the many churches and cathedrals and temples in every city in this State, perhaps the State's assistance to local governments and schools would be diminished considerably, leaving more in State coffers for other purposes," said Chambers, 76, of Omaha.

Chambers' name is on the 1983 landmark Supreme Court case *Marsh v. Chambers*. He sued in 1980 to end the Legislature's practice of opening with a prayer offered by a state-supported chaplain. The district court held that the prayer did not violate the Constitution but that state support for the chaplain did. The 8th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals held that both practices violated the Constitution, but the Supreme Court upheld the practice on a 6-3 vote.

In 2007, Chambers famously filed a lawsuit against God for causing "widespread death, destruction and terrorization of millions upon millions of the Earth's inhabitants."

A state district court judge dismissed *Chambers v. God* in 2008, saying the defendant wasn't properly served due to his unlisted home address. "Given that this court finds that there can never be service effectuated on the named defendant, this action will be dismissed with prejudice," wrote Judge Marlon Polk.

Chambers' reaction: "Since God knows everything, God has notice of this lawsuit." He received a Hero of the First Amendment Award from FFRF in 2005.

Secularism makes gains in Tunisia

Tunisia's National Constituent Assembly approved a new constitution Jan. 26 by a vote of 200 to 4, with 12 abstentions. The governing Islamist Ennahdha Party made some concessions, most importantly the removal of references to Islamic law, the BBC reported.

However, it also designates Islam as the state religion, while guaranteeing freedom of worship. It also forbids "attacks on the sacred," the meaning of which is unclear.

The constitution also recognizes equality between men and women for the first time. In 2011, a revolution overthrew autocratic President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and the first free elections were held. The population is 10.7 million, of which 98% are Muslim.

Chicago archdiocese releases documents

The Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago released 6,000 pages of documents to attorneys that sex abuse victims hope will reveal what the church knew and did or didn't do about decades of allegations against clergy, The Associated Press reported Jan. 16.

The documents include complaints, personnel records and other files for

30 priests with substantiated abuse allegations against them. Archdiocese attorney John O'Malley warned that the documents will be upsetting. "The information is painful; it's difficult to read, even without the benefit of hindsight."

The archdiocese has already paid about \$100 million to settle claims, including numerous ones against Fr. Daniel McCormack, who was sentenced to five years in prison after pleading guilty in 2007 to abusing five children while he was a parish priest and teacher at a Catholic school.

Many of the accused priests are dead. The documents will include only 30 of 65 priests against whom credible allegations were made. That's because settlements that required the disclosures involved only 30.

Year of the Bible in Texas city

Mayor Tom Hayden of Flower Mound, Texas, a Dallas suburb of about 65,000 people, has proclaimed 2014 the Year of the Bible.

"I was nervous about doing this," Hayden told KDFW on Jan. 1. "And I've been thinking about it for two years, and procrastinated about it for as long as I possibly could."

The proclamation draws heavily on President Ronald Reagan's almost identical proclamation in 1983. It also sets up a website: *thebible2014.com*.

"The way it's set up is that people would have the same scripture each day," said Jon Bell of Calvary Chapel. "That they would go over and so that at the end of the year, they'd have gone through the whole Bible in a year."

Hayden said the proclamation was not an official town action, which didn't assuage resident Curt Orton. "He was elected mayor, not the spiritual leader of Flower Mound."

Botched circumcision brings lawsuit

Pittsburgh Rabbi Mordechai Rosenberg is being sued for allegedly severing a newborn's penis during a ritual circumcision about eight months ago at Tree of Life Synagogue in Squirrel Hill.

According to the suit, the baby was rushed to Children's Hospital, where doctors performed microsurgery. Sources told KDKA the surgery took nearly eight hours and that the boy was hospitalized for about two months.

On his website, Rosenberg says that "a doctor's medical circumcision, usually performed in the hospital, is not considered valid according to Jewish law."

Harvard humanist chaplain dies at 84

Tom Ferrick, 84, Harvard University's first humanist chaplain, died Dec. 30 of complications from Alzheimer's disease in Cambridge, Mass. He is survived by a sister.

Ferrick attended the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester and then the seminary before being ordained a Catholic priest. After leaving the priesthood, he became Harvard's humanist chaplain in 1974. "The notion that we all stand in need of redemption is anti-

humanist," he told the Boston Globe in 1990. "The fact that ordinary human beings are capable of love, compassion and sacrifice, independent of theology, is proof that we can indeed be good without God."

Two years later, he told the Harvard Crimson that "humanism is not science, nor mysticism, but is a faith in human experience."

Pew study: How public views evolution

The Pew Research Center released a new poll Dec. 30 titled "Public's View

on Human Evolution." The U.S. adults surveyed were asked whether, in their view, humans and other living things have evolved over time, or instead have existed in their present form since the beginning of time, reported Religion Clause.

Overall, 60% said that living things have evolved, while 33% said they have always existed in their present form. About 64% of White Evangelical Protestants and 15% of White Mainline Protestants believe that evolution did not occur. Also, 48% of Republicans, 27% of Democrats and 28% of Independents believe that living things have always existed in their present form.



Sinners!

Allen Jones, Montana, writes of this sign near Montana City: "Obviously, these folks are a little short on the Constitution, federal and state laws." [Editor's note: And without God, who'd stop all the black collar crime and tsunamis?]

They Said What?

A Higgs boson goes into a church . . . and the priest says, "We don't allow Higgs bosons here." And the Higgs boson says, "But without me there is no mass."

Astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, host of "Cosmos: A SpaceTime Odyssey," a 13-part series airing in March on Fox and the National Geographic Channel, on the misnamed "God particle"

Parade magazine, 1-12-14

[Government officials] are simply blind to the religious exercise at issue: The Little Sisters [of the Poor] and other applicants cannot execute the form because they cannot deputize a third party to sin on their behalf.

Mark Rienzi, Becket Fund for Religious Liberty senior counsel, Supreme Court brief that persuaded Justice Sonia Sotomayor to block ObamaCare's contraceptive mandate ensuring women workers at nursing homes run by nuns can't get birth control coverage

Associated Press, 1-4-14

The audacious complaint [by the Little Sisters of the Poor] is against the requirement that such groups sign a short form certifying that they have religious objections to providing coverage for contraceptive services. . . . The suit by the nuns' group boils down to an unjustified attempt by an employer to impose its religious views on workers.

Editorial, "No burden to religion"

New York Times, 1-3-14

This kid was dealt a bad hand. I don't

know quite why. That's just the way God works. Sometimes some of us are lucky and some of us are not.

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, saying his policies on homelessness had nothing to do with the plight of Dasani, an 11-year-old homeless girl

Politicker, 12-17-13

Flame-broiled in lake of fire?



"I think I'll go to McDonald's or Wendy's from now on," emails Lori. "I don't want a church service, just a burger!"

God the father, God the son, God the monster



By Barbara G. Walker

In my childhood Sunday school, when I was shown a graphic picture of Jesus' execution scene, I cried. I wanted to know why all-powerful God couldn't protect his own son, of all people. Then I was told that Jesus' death was part of God's plan to forgive

others. I was shocked.

My tears were due not only to pity for the agony shown, but also to a horrified realization that God, who was said to be loving and all-forgiving, would not forgive human sins until his anger was appeased by this atrocious blood sacrifice of his allegedly beloved son.

What kind of a father was this, I wondered? Was he a God whom one could trust, or admire, or even like? If he was both kindly and all-powerful, why couldn't he just forgive everyone right off, without insisting on the brutal murder of his child? And why should such a murder appease him in the first place? Was God so sadistic as to demand bloodshed and pain for retribution?

It was a jarring moment. All my previous impressions were overturned, and I was forced to take a lonely excursion into the illogic of theology. I learned later that, in spite of the blood sacrifice that supposedly released humanity from an inevitable hell, people were still being sent to hell — even good, innocent people who committed no crimes but happened to have been

brought up in the wrong religion, or no religion.

Later, when I developed the bible-reading habit, I found even worse horrors. The Old Testament God never really meant it when he said, "Thou shalt not kill." On the contrary, again and again, he ordered dreadful massacres of thousands of men, women, children and animals, all to be slaughtered without mercy.

He condoned rape, slavery, pillage, thievery, mutilation. He even demanded the murder of one's own family members if they were insufficiently respectful to him (Deut. 13:6-9). According to the Genesis story, he destroyed nearly the whole population of Earth in order to start over when a few humans displeased him.

Far from inspiring love or adoration, this God struck me as the scariest character in all of literature. An infinite egotist, demanding eternal praises, a jealous tyrant, a monument of cruelty, a constant threat. I wondered, how could anyone read the bible and not realize that its principal subject is a monster?

This question has puzzled me for

most of my life. Might the answer be that God is so scary that people dared not criticize his behavior, out of the sheer terror euphemistically called "fear of God"? Thomas Paine remarked that the bible is "a history of wickedness," and to his mind the word of God looked more like the work of a demon.

I don't understand why this fear is still allowed to infect children in a supposedly enlightened age. Nowadays, fundamentalist organizations like the Good News Club are still teaching young children to tell each other "You're going to hell" if they don't conform. Any psychologist knows that imaginary threats, however horrific, are not the key to good behavior.

In my childhood experience, they had only one result: I was presented with what seemed to be an imaginary fiend, and I blotted him out.

Let us hope for a future less tainted by God the Monster.

Barbara G. Walker is the author of Man Made God, The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets and The Skeptical Feminist. She is a Lifetime Member of FFRF.

FFRF scores more than 200 solid state/church victories in 2013

The Freedom From Religion Foundation sent out a total of 938 formal letters of complaint in 2013 to errant public officials, winning more than 235 solid victories keeping religion out of government. The total will grow, as many complaints lodged in 2013 will bear fruit this year, especially as FFRF follows up.

The letters total doesn't include the many follow-up letters that go out or represent the time that staff attorneys spend responding to questions and queries from FFRF members and many members of the public. More than 2,430 requests for help to end state/church entanglements were received by FFRF last year. Most requests were lodged via FFRF's Web form: Report a State/Church Violation.

FFRF provides this service free of charge and is one of the few state/church watchdogs in the country, writing more individual letters of complaint over state/church violations than any other group.

"The need is great," noted FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. "We're deluged with requests for help from around the country by citizens who care about defending the Jeffersonian wall of separation between church and state."

Because of growing demand for help, FFRF is pleased to report the hiring of a fifth attorney at year's end: Sam Grover, who had served as a summer legal intern.

The "top ten" states (where FFRF sent the most complaints to):

1. Texas
2. California
3. Tennessee
4. Georgia
5. Florida
6. Wisconsin
7. Ohio
8. North Carolina
9. Michigan

10. Alabama

The top 10 legal areas were religion in schools, legislative prayer, miscellaneous, nativity/holiday displays, church bulletin discounts, crosses, National Day of Prayer violations, religion in the workplace, election law complaints and government prayer breakfasts.

FFRF attorneys filed a whopping 522 complaints over religious violations in public schools, followed by government prayer (112), nativity/menorah displays on public land (41), formal complaints over crosses on public property (23), National Day of Prayer events (18), religion in the military (17), religion in the workplace (17), and election violations (13, typically endorsement from the pulpit).

Last year FFRF downed four crosses on public land, and impressively ended at least 166 promotions of religion in public schools, some as egregious as daily prayers in elementary schools. (Keep up with FFRF's significant victories by reading the monthly synopsis in Freethought Today.)

FFRF also lodged 28 complaints about church bulletin discounts, the only other type of violation FFRF concerns itself with, whereby the Civil Rights Act is abridged when, typically, restaurants offer discounts for churchgoers.

In 2013, FFRF's legal department also wrote and filed an amicus brief in the Supreme Court case *Town of Greece v. Galloway*. Staff attorneys also aided litigation attorneys in writing and filing lawsuits. FFRF entered into an informal partnership with the Secular Student Alliance to help defend the rights of freethinking students and educate students about their rights.

FFRF and SSA drafted a Secular Public High School Students Bill of Rights. The new partnership will help

form more student groups around the country. FFRF also sent out many regional action alerts and watched developments concerning troublesome bills in several state legislatures. Staff attorneys wrote letters to the editor, blogs and other educational outreach on state/church matters.

"A decade or two ago, FFRF was winning a victory or two a month, and now it's nearly one a workday," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

"It's important to realize that nearly once a day last year, our staff attorneys' efforts educated, and ensured that reason and the Constitution prevailed."



Live free and laugh

A bit of levity for the New Year, writes Mark Sanbourne, New Hampshire, about his plate. "A rather interesting reflection in your rear-view mirror, especially if you have a fish emblem on the rear of your car."



La Última Cena

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker (seated, right) spoke in Mexico City on Nov. 16. Gerardo Romero is "Jesús" and Diana Sánchez, president of Ateos Mexicanos, is next to him. Dan's new acquaintance Gricha Raether is holding the wine bottle.

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Richard Seaton Sr., 73, Shreveport, LA: Statutory rape, 2 counts each of sexual misconduct and sodomy and 5 counts of 1st- and 2nd-degree statutory sodomy. Seaton was pastor at United Methodist Church in Leeton, MO, at the time of the alleged crimes in 1994-99.

The 5 alleged victims, all girls, ranged in age from 8 to 16 when assaulted. They came forward over time, from 1999-2009. Shortly after he was questioned in 2009, Seaton moved to Louisiana.

His son, **Richard Seaton Jr.**, now 46, was sentenced to 18 years in 2012 for forcible rape and abuse of office. Seaton, a top aide to Shreveport Mayor Cedric Glover, was found guilty of raping an 18-year-old George High School student on a couch in the mayor's office after the 2010 Independence Bowl.

The student's boyfriend had been arrested at the game for disorderly conduct and taken to jail. Seaton offered the victim, who had also been drinking heavily, a ride which eventually turned into rape, according to her testimony. Source: KSLA/KDTV, 1-11-14

Mark Lewis, 39, Vacaville, CA: Arson of an inhabited dwelling, conspiracy and stalking. Lewis, pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church, and 3 others are charged with throwing a Molotov cocktail in a Snapple bottle at a residence where his ex-girlfriend was sleeping with her 3 children and her parents.

The other suspects live at the church. The bottle was thrown through a bedroom window. Only minor damage occurred.

Sarah Nottingham alleged Lewis is harassing her because she ended their year-long relationship after naked pictures of the pastor started surfacing publicly. A former parishioner sent one to the local Fox affiliate.

Police said Lewis is also a suspect in 4 more cases of harassment and vandalism since Christmas against Nottingham. Source: news10.net, 1-12-14

Shelton P. Sanford, Rock Hill, SC: 1st-offense DUI. Sanford, co-pastor at Westminster Presbyterian Church, crashed his 2010 Honda on I-77 about 3 a.m.

"Our hearts are heavy and we are saddened," said Sheldon MacGillivray, executive pastor. "This is not the Shelton Sanford we know." Source: heraldonline.com, 1-11-14

Larry Hutcheson, Moore, OK: Unspecified landlord violations. Hutcheson, lead pastor at Power House Assembly of God, was cited for failure to provide heat and hot water in a house he rents for \$400 a month to the parents of 5 children.

The mother, Maria Lewis said, besides space heaters, the house had no heat and everyone slept in 1 bedroom. A city health inspector said he told Hutcheson in mid-December to fix the heat within 48 hours. The family moved in in April.

Hutcheson said Jan. 8 he's been working on it. "You can only make plumbers move so fast. But we're here to do what we can and get it done as quickly as we can." Source: news9.com, 1-8-14

Oliver Brazelle, 79, Shoals Creek, AL: 2nd-degree sexual abuse and 2nd-degree sodomy. Brazelle, former music and youth minister of First United Methodist Church, is accused of molesting a teen boy who was a member of his youth group in the mid-1990s.

Church members contacted police in June 2012 about allegations. Brazelle was fired the next month. Source: Times Daily, 1-7-14

Johnny Botello, 76, Wichita Falls, TX: Indecency with a child by sexual contact. Botello, pastor of Bethel Asamblea de Dios, is charged with touching a girl younger than 11 under her clothes at church. Source: Times Record News, 1-7-14

Dennis Rutledge, 62, Lancaster, SC: Exposure of private parts in a lewd and lascivious manner, 5 counts of 1st-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor and 2 counts of 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor. Rutledge, former deacon and choir director at an unidentified church, is accused of molesting 2 girls ages 10 and 8 over 5 months in 2013.

The church pastor said Rutledge resigned in June without giving a reason and said everyone is praying for everyone involved. Source: WSOC, 1-6-14

Larry Clark, 61, Buena Vista, VA: Clark, pastor of Pentecostal Outreach Church, who was first arrested on sexual molestation charges in November, has since had several charges added and now faces 28 counts of taking indecent liberties with a child and carnal knowledge of a child.

All the allegations involve teen boys. Miles Kelly, an investigator with the Rockbridge County Sheriff's Office, said the latest charges

involve a boy who was 14 when the alleged crimes began. Source: Staunton News Leader, 1-6-14

Peter Donnelly, 71, Castlewellan, N.IRE: Gross indecency with a child and 6 counts of indecent assault. Donnelly, former pastor at St. Matthew's Catholic Church in Belfast, is accused of molesting a girl, starting when she was 10, from 1982-87. Source: BBC, 1-6-14

Richard Shahan, 53, Homewood, AL: Murder. Shahan, associate pastor at First Baptist Church of Birmingham, is charged with the July murder of his wife, Karen Louise Shahan, who died in their home. He was arrested Jan. 1 at a Nashville airport on his way to Germany. A "customs lookout" alerted authorities to his flight.

"He's our only suspect," said Homewood Police Lt. Dan Smith. Cause of death hasn't been confirmed, but sources said the victim was stabbed to death. Source: AL.com, 1-2-14

An **unidentified Polish priest**, 66, was charged with drink driving after allegedly running over parishioner Katarzyna Pawlak, 41, Lwiczka, who was walking home from the priest's church service.

A hospital spokesperson said the woman suffered a concussion "but will make a full recovery." Source: orange.co.uk, 1-1-13

Godson Akubuiro, Lagos, Nigeria: Counterfeiting. Akubuiro, general overseer of the Mountain of Breakthrough Deliverance Ministry, allegedly led a 16-person ring, including the pastor's six children, that printed and circulated fake naira notes. Source: allAfrica.com, 12-31-13

Bryant Badger, 75, Casper, WY: Public indecency, obscene literature and incitement to a crime. Badger, retired pastor of First Christian Church, was arrested near a park in an undercover sting in which he allegedly left multiple obscene notes in a park restroom. The sting was mounted after the notes were turned in by a track coach concerned about his athletes running in the area.

An affidavit said undercover officer Mitch Baker met Pastor Badger and got into the back seat of the SUV at Badger's request. "When Baker observed Badger unzip, unbutton and begin to remove his pants, he signaled to other officers listening to the conversation via wire to move in by turning the radio to country music." Source: Casper Star-Tribune, 12-24-13

Gnanapragasam Selvan, Kailasapuram, India: Sexual assault. Selvan, pastor at St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Pettai, allegedly raped and impregnated a 14-year-old choir member. The priest and the doctor who allegedly terminated the pregnancy, S. Meenakshi, are being sought.

The fetus was allegedly buried in a cemetery controlled by the church, after which parishioners told police. Source: The Hindu, 12-20-13

Michael Bryant, 48, Memphis, TN: Sexual battery by an authority figure. Bryant, pastor at Hour of Restoration Church of God in Christ, is accused of molesting a 16-year-old family member for years. The teen alleged Bryant exposed himself and touched her inappropriately at least twice a week the last 2 years and that it happened the day the police report was filed.

Investigators allege the girl's mother prayed to God to remove "these thoughts" from Bryant's mind instead of telling police. The girl's aunt eventually told police. Source: WREG, 12-18-13

Elmer A. Holbrooks, 56, Jacksonville, FL: Domestic battery. Holbrooks, pastor of Anchor Church in Callahan, was jailed after a fight with his daughter Charity, 19, outside the church.

Holbrooks said Charity was using his backhoe and got frustrated: "She threw it in reverse, turned the wheels and threw it in forward, and full steam ahead, slammed on the brakes. I popped her on her right shoulder once, maybe twice. I don't think it was the second time until she looked at me with a hateful attitude like 'What did you do,' and I popped her again and said 'Don't disrespect your dad.'"

"Action News called Charity to get her side of the story, but she swore at our reporter and hung up," reported WETV. Holbrooks said he's apologized to the congregation. Source: actionnewsjax.com, 12-17-13

Willie L. Marvin Sr., 51, Columbia, SC: Criminal sexual conduct, voyeurism and producing, promoting or directing a sexual performance by a child under 18 and voyeurism. Marvin, co-pastor with his wife of New Life World Ministries, is accused of sending explicit texts and an obscene photo to a phone Marvin gave to the alleged victim. Intimate contact is also alleged. Source: The State, 12-17-13

Jacoby Kindred, 61, Maplewood, MN: 2 counts of 1st-degree criminal sexual conduct. Kindred, who told police he's a pastor with One Accord Ministries but has no church building, is accused by 2 females, now 14 and 16, of fondling, oral sex and penetration, starting when they were about 6.

He calls himself Jacoby Preacherman on

his Facebook page. He told an alleged victim the devil was inside her and he could take the demons out, the report said. Source: Pioneer Press, 12-12-13

Alexander G. Garcia, Nampa, ID: Lewd conduct. Garcia, a Seventh-day Adventist deacon, is accused by a girl under 16 of inappropriately touching her in a church storage room during a potluck.

In court documents, detectives said Garcia claimed Satan was also in the storage room and may have taken control of his body. Source: KTVB, 12-12-13

Edwin Bonet-Ruiz, 54, Elizabethtown, KY: 1st-degree sexual abuse and unlawful use of electronic means to induce a minor in sexual or prohibited acts. Bonet-Ruiz, a Central Hardin Spanish teacher, is accused of kissing and hugging a 14-year-old student in his classroom.

He was fired by the school and had his ministry credentials revoked at Abundant Life Church. Associate Pastor Terry Linscott said Bonet-Ruiz's wife of 33 years called to tell church officials he allegedly confessed to police. Source: DRB, 12-11-13

Mia Cummings, 29, Oakland, CA: 8 counts of oral copulation, forced oral copulation and contacting a minor with the intent to commit a sex crime. Cummings, an after-school program coordinator at All Saints Catholic School, is accused of molesting a male student, now 14, starting when he was 12.

Court documents said most of the alleged acts occurred in All Saints' kitchen. Source: Digital Journal, 12-11-13

Annamalai Annamalai, Dayton, GA: 22 counts of conspiracy, bankruptcy fraud, money laundering and obstructing justice. Annamalai, an India native also known as Dr. Commander Selvam, is accused of fraudulently concealing property belonging to the Hindu Temple and Community Center of Georgia Inc. from the bankruptcy trustee. The temple's former CEO, **Kumar Chinnathambi**, was also charged in the indictment.

Annamalai allegedly funneled more than \$1 million from the temple to business entities he controls and to accounts in the names of his wife, two children and assorted priests.

Annamalai, who once lived in a million-dollar home in Duluth, GA, told federal magistrate Linda Walker he could not afford a lawyer. He came to Dayton in June 2010. Source: Journal-Constitution, 12-7-13

Zachary R. Ruppel, 27, Columbus, OH: Compelling prostitution, importuning and disseminating matter harmful to juveniles and 10 counts of pandering obscenity involving a minor. Ruppel, choir director at St. Francis DeSales Catholic High School, is accused of soliciting nude photos and oral sex from 2 male juveniles in exchange for membership in the All-Ohio State Fair Youth Choir. Source: Columbus Dispatch, 12-6-13

Ronald Paul Rathbun Sr., 57, East Anchorage, AK: Possession and distribution of child pornography. Rathbun, pastor at Eternal Love Ministry, allegedly possessed images of naked girls between the ages of 6 and 14, including 102 photos of 1 child. He allegedly told police he didn't think child nudity was pornography. Source: Alaska Dispatch, 12-2-13

Pleaded / Convicted

Johnnie F. Winnell, 60, Charleston, W.VA: Pleaded guilty to sexual abuse by a guardian. Winnell, pastor of United Gospel Mission, was charged after a 14-year-old family member told authorities Winnell touched her sexually at least twice at his home while she was pretending to be asleep.

Winnell also worked as a computer operator for the school system's transportation office. Source: Charleston Gazette, 1-6-14

Mark Hooper, 43, and **Susan Hooper**, 43, Mount Jewett, PA: Pleaded no contest to child endangerment. Mark Hooper, pastor of Cobb Street Baptist Church, and his wife are accused of starving their 3 adopted children, ages 9 to 11, to punish them.

Police said the 9-year-old daughter ran away from home and went to a neighbor's. She weighed 31 pounds at the time. At an April hearing, the children said they were afraid of their mom, saying she withheld meals if the girls didn't do their hair right or if the children didn't get their homeschool assignments done on time.

The children allegedly weren't allowed to use the bathroom and would be punished for having "accidents." The 2 younger children said they were fed oatmeal laced with red pepper flakes and not allowed to drink anything with it. Source: WJAC, 12-31-13

Otis B. Jetter, 71, Indianapolis: Guilty by jury of 3 counts of child molesting. Jetter, pastor at Pilgrim Chapel Missionary Baptist Church,

'My biggest fear with Zach is my daughter won't be the last life he ruins.'

— victim's father at Baptist youth leader's sentencing

was charged with molesting a boy who was 12 years old in the 1990s and continuing until he was 14.

The victim came forward in 2012 "when he saw that a young boy, whom he didn't know, had been showing up at church and that [Jetter] had brought him," an arrest affidavit said. Source: Indianapolis Star, 12-12-13

Sentenced

Abraham Rubin, 50, Brooklyn, NY: 4 months in jail after pleading guilty to bribing a witness. Rubin, a member of the ultra-Orthodox Satmar sect, allegedly offered \$500,000 to a victim of sexual abuse not to testify against her abuser, Nechemya Weberman. She did testify and Weberman, a highly respected counselor in the ultra-Orthodox community, was sentenced to 50 years.

The victim, now 19 and married, was sent to Weberman for not meeting her sect's strict modesty guidelines on dress and for asking questions about the existence of God. Source: Jerusalem Post, 1-13-14

Alicia Gray, 28, Mobile, AL: 6 months in jail and 5 years' probation after pleading guilty to engaging in a sexual act or deviant sexual intercourse with a student under 19 years old. Gray, a public high school math teacher, admitted to molesting a 14-year-old male student.

In a video made with her pastor at Deeper Life Fellowship after sentencing, Gray credited her faith for getting her through the ordeal. God "makes me secure and happy in who I am," she said, adding that "God still makes beauty from ashes."

Judge Michael Youngpeter also barred Gray from working with minors during probation, ordered her to surrender her teaching certificate and register as a sex offender. Source: al.com, 1-13-14

Larry M. Bollinger, 67, Gastonia, NC: 25 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of engaging in illicit sexual conduct in a foreign place. Bollinger, a Lutheran minister for 33 years, admitted molesting Haitian girls between the ages of 11 and 16 in 2009 as a missionary in Haiti.

Federal prosecutors said Bollinger went with his wife to Haiti but she came home before him. The crimes allegedly took place after she left.

"I think it's a sentence that will show sex offenders they can't escape American justice just by going to a foreign country and molesting children there," said prosecutor Kimlani Ford. Source: Charlotte Observer, 1-5-14

Megan Garland, 29, Waukesha, WI: 4 years in prison and 6 years' probation after pleading no contest in October to child enticement and sexual assault by school staff. Garland, a teacher at Messmer [Catholic] High School, admitted having sex with boys ages 14 and 15.

She was initially caught performing a sex act on the younger boy in the parking lot of Destiny Church and School in Milwaukee. Source: Journal Sentinel, 1-3-14

Zachary Fuhriman, 30, Lander, WY: 3 years' probation after pleading guilty to 3rd-degree sexual abuse of a minor. Fuhriman, former youth leader at First Baptist Church, had consensual intercourse with a girl in early 2013 when she was 16. He met her in 2007 when she was a member of his youth group, the same year he left the job.

"He's made a mockery of being a church leader and a mockery of the people who put him in that place," the victim's mother said. "I do not believe the plea agreement is justice for him to walk away with a slap on the wrist and no jail time."

In a letter read aloud to the court, the victim's father said Fuhriman manipulated his daughter and exhibited the behavior of a predator. "My biggest fear with Zach is my daughter won't be the last life he ruins."

County Attorney Michael Bennett defended the plea agreement but said punishment was needed. "He violated what my office believes is a social contract between grown men and the community: You leave high school girls alone so

'You were a wolf in shepherd's clothing.'

— Judge Edward Lukemire to Pastor Terrance King

they can be high school kids." *Source: Fremont County Ranger, 12-19-13*

Finian Egan, 79, Sydney, **Australia**: 4 years in prison for sexually preying on young girls. Egan, a Catholic priest, was accused of molesting 3 girls between the ages of 10 and 17 while he worked in various dioceses starting in the 1960s. A jury found him guilty of rape and 7 counts of indecent assault.

The first victim testified she told a nun about the abuse and was then flogged, forced to drink castor oil and made to clean up her own vomit. Another told how Egan raped her and took her to confession to another priest, who ordered her to stop letting Egan touch her. She tried to throw herself out of Egan's car after confession. *Source: AAP, 12-19-13*

Howard Richmond, 53, of Naperville, **IL**: 12 years in prison after pleading guilty to forgery and operating a continuing financial crime enterprise. Richmond, founder of Life Reach Ministries, a storefront church in Aurora, bilked followers out of more than \$1 million by telling them he was going to build a megachurch in Chicago. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 12-19-13*

Mordechai Elon, **Jerusalem**: 6 months of community service and a \$2,850 fine for committing an indecent act against a minor. Elon, a rabbi and mentor in Israel's Zionist movement, was convicted of sexually fondling a 17-year-old male yeshiva student. *Source: Times of Israel, 12-17-13*

Edward P. Mallonee, 55, Union City, **TN**: Unspecified period of supervised probation after pleading guilty to felony reckless endangerment. Mallonee, pastor of Second Baptist Church, and his girlfriend, **Shelly S. Moran**, allegedly plotted to poison Cathy Mallonee, the pastor's wife of 34 years. They originally faced 2 murder counts. "I wish it would have gone to trial and all the facts would have been out and let a jury make the decision," said Police Chief Perry Barfield.

The victim held Mallonee's hand in court and wrote a letter to the court saying he shouldn't be prosecuted. He resigned in February 2013 amid rumors of an affair.

The indictment alleged the defendants took Carbofuran (trade name Furadan) to Honduras and tried to put it in Cathy Mallonee's drink. She was there on a church mission trip.

"The chemical is highly toxic to animals and humans. It would only take a very small amount for it to be fatal to a person," said Tom Womack of the state Department of Agriculture. *Source: WBBJ, 12-13-13*

Terrance King, 34, Hawkinsville, **GA**: 30 years in prison for statutory rape, aggravated child molestation and enticing a child for indecent purposes. A jury deliberated less than an hour in convicting King, pastor of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, who was accused of taking a 15-year-old girl to a hotel in 2012 and having sex.

"You were a wolf in shepherd's clothing," Judge Edward Lukemire said at sentencing. *Source: Macon Telegraph, 12-13-13*

Michael Delaney, 66, Tomah, **WI**: Life in prison. Delaney, a retired pastor with the Church of God of Prophecy in Necedah, was convicted by a jury of sexual assault of a child under age 16 as a persistent repeater and 5 counts of child enticement. The victim was 13 in 2008 when Delaney allegedly assaulted him and threatened to tell people he was gay if he said anything.

Delaney served prison time in 1982 for 2 counts of sexual abuse of a child in Arizona.

Another alleged victim said in a letter to the court that victims "will bear the scar of this man being born for the rest of their lives."

"Someday, when you're gone, you'll be forgotten. No one will care when an old pervert dies in jail." *Source: La Crosse Tribune, 12-10-13*

Brent "Pete" Turley, 23, Norwood, **MO**: 10 years in prison without parole. Turley, a married youth leader at the church the 14-year-old victim attended, pleaded guilty to using the Internet and his phone to solicit sex with the girl, whose mother found his text messages.

Turley arranged to meet an undercover officer in a park. Condoms were found in his pocket. He also allegedly admitted he enticed and engaged in sex with 2 more victims.

Court documents said Turley told officers he took a girl he thought was 12 (but was really 14) to see "Yogi Bear" in a theater and digitally penetrated her during the movie. *Source: KYTV, 12-10-13*

Hugo Ornelas, 49, Fort Collins, **CO**: Life in prison with parole eligibility after 12 years for a series of sexual assaults on a 15-year-old family member. Ornelas, pastor at Iglesia del Dios Vivo, also faces charges for allegedly violating a

protection order requiring him to stay away from anyone younger than 18. *Source: Coloradoan, 12-10-13*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Mordechai Rosenberg, 54, **Pittsburgh**, is being sued for allegedly causing a "life-changing injury" to an 8-day-old boy he circumcised in April 2013 at Tree of Life Synagogue, according to the boy's parents. The suit alleges Rabbi Rosenberg completely severed the boy's penis.

Doctors managed to reattach the penis during an 8-hour microsurgery that required 6 blood transfusions. The boy was hospitalized for nearly 2 months, the suit says. *Source: N.Y. Daily News, 12-29-13*

The **Catholic Diocese of New Ulm, MN**, and the **Servants of the Paraclete** are being sued for alleged negligence in failing to adequately supervise **Francis Markey**, pastor at St. Andrew Parish in Granite Falls. The plaintiff alleges he was molested as a child by Markey, who died in 2012 in Ireland while awaiting trial for sexually abusing a 15-year-old boy.

Markey was ordained in 1952 and was accused of sexual abuse of at least 3 children in the 1960s and 1970s in Ireland. He was sent to the Servants of the Paraclete in New Mexico in 1981 and came to Minnesota in 1981. *Source: Willmar Tribune, 12-12-13*

Former altar boy Jon Couzens is suing the **Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights**, its president and CEO **Bill Donohue**, the **Kansas City Catholic League** and 2 former officers of the now-dissolved local group for defamation.

The suit alleges Donohue published false statements about Couzens' alleged involvement with drugs and a murder conspiracy in press releases, online and in documents distributed to churches.

Donohue started attacking Couzens after a 3-day newspaper series in 2011 telling the stories of altar boys Couzens said were molested in the early 1980s by **Msgr. Thomas O'Brien** at Nativity of Mary in Independence. One of the boys, Brian Teeman, 14, killed himself in 1983. His parents settled their lawsuit against the church in 2013 for \$2.25 million.

Couzens is also suing the diocese for alleged abuse by O'Brien. It's set for trial in April. *Source: Kansas City Star, 12-1-13*

The Los Angeles-based **Kabbalah Centre** is being sued for over \$1 million by 3 former followers in **San Diego**. They allege the center pressured them "to give money until it hurts" in order to receive "the light" from its leaders. The plaintiffs claim they were told donations would go to a new building in San Diego and for a children's charity, neither of which happened.

The late Rabbi Philip Berg (born Feivel Gruberger) founded Kabbalah, which has 50 worldwide branches, in Jerusalem in the 1960s. He died last September. *Source: L.A. Times, 12-5-13*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Kansas City-St. Joseph Catholic Diocese** and the **Missionaries of the Precious Blood** settled a lawsuit for \$130,000. The plaintiff alleged he was molested as a Bishop LeBlond High School student by **Fr. James Urbanic** in the rectory after a pick-up basketball game in the mid-1970s in St. Joseph, **MO**. *Source: Kansas City Star, 12-22-14*

A suit against the **Catholic Diocese of Beaumont, TX**, was settled for an undisclosed amount. The 6 male plaintiffs alleged **Ronald Bollich**, a priest who died in 1996, molested them as teens.

"The last victim was abused 20 years after the first victims were abused," said Dallas attorney Tahira Merritt. "The diocese knew [Bollich] was a sexual predator."

Victims were fondled, groped and raped, according to the filing. "After having been so badly abused by Bollich, [the last victim's] mental status degraded to such a point that he had several nervous breakdowns. He has been declared disabled due to mental problems." *Source: Beaumont Enterprise, 12-12-13*

Legal Developments

In a letter to parishioners of the **Chicago Catholic Archdiocese**, Cardinal Francis George announced that documents on substantiated abuse claims linked to at least 30 priests will soon be made public. About a third of the priests are dead.

Files will be turned over to prominent Minnesota plaintiff's attorney Jeff Anderson. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 1-9-14*

A Campbell County grand jury declined to indict **Andrew Hamblin**, 22, pastor of Tabernacle Church of God in LaFollette, **TN**, who was arrested in November for possessing 53 poisonous snakes he used in church services. Many of the confiscated snakes have died and the others won't be returned from the Knoxville Zoo, the state said.

Religious freedom includes handling snakes, Hamblin said. "That is my God-given right in the

United States. If God moves on me to take up a serpent, I can take up a serpent."

Zoo herpetologist Michael Ogle released this statement:

"[Thirty-two of the snakes] have died due to poor body condition caused by anorexia that was a result of severe parasite infestation and overall stress caused by being housed in quarters that were too small."

Most of the 21 survivors are in fair to good condition but also were exposed to the same pathogens and are at high risk of being infected, Ogle said. *Source: WBIR, 1-8-14*

William J. Lynn, the first U.S. priest criminally convicted of covering up sexual molestation of minors by another priest, had his 2012 conviction overturned 3-0 by a **Pennsylvania** state appeals court, which ruled the trial court misinterpreted the endangering welfare of a child law under which Lynn was sentenced to 3-6 years.

The appellate court held the statute didn't apply to someone supervising the person in charge. Prosecutors plan to appeal the appellate decision.

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia posted \$25,000 bail bond, which was criticized by D.A. Seth Williams. "It is disgusting that they would pay to free this man," Williams said. *Source: Philly.com, 1-2-14; Religion Clause, 12-27-13*

Final prosecutor's and defense motions were made in the trial of former Catholic priest **Gabriele DelBianco** in Sarnia, **Ontario**. He's being tried on 18 counts of sexual assault and gross indecency allegedly involving 4 teen girls in the 1980s but claims the acts were consensual, including liaisons on overnight trips approved by parents.

DelBianco left the priesthood in 1996. *Source: Blackburn News, 12-20-13*

A **Minnesota** judge ruled "John Doe 1" may proceed with his suit alleging he was abused by **Fr. Thomas Adamson** and that the **Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis** and the **Diocese of Winona** failed to respond adequately.

Adamson had admitted to molesting boys in the Winona diocese but was still transferred to other parishes with no warning to families, the suit says.

The plaintiff alleges the defendants created a public nuisance by hiding the histories of abusive priests and that their actions also constituted a private nuisance by leading to his sexual abuse.

Ramsey County Judge John Van de North ruled the public nuisance claim should go forward but described his decision as a "close call." He dismissed the private nuisance claim.

Plaintiff's attorney Jeff Anderson said it's the first time nationally that nuisance claims have been used in a clergy sex abuse case.

Van de North also ordered information on credibly accused priests from a 2004 study to be publicly released.

The **Diocese of Duluth** has added 17 names to the public list of priests credibly accused of molesting minors. The diocese said none are active in public ministry and all but 3 are dead. *Source: Pioneer Press, 12-10-13*

Prosecutors dismissed 4 counts of 2nd-degree child rape against former Assembly of God youth pastor **Michael D. Whitson**, 51, Vancouver, **WA**. He was accused of starting a sexual relationship in 2002 with a Winlock boy who was then 12.

Prosecutors said they intend to refile charges after more investigation. Whitson pleaded guilty in 2006 to 2 counts of 3rd-degree assault of a child with a sexual motivation enhancement and was sentenced to 90 days in jail. *Source: chronline.com, 12-9-13*

Allegations

End Time Message Church founder **Robert Martin Gumbura**, Harare, **Zimbabwe**, who has 11 wives, is on trial on charges of raping 7 female church members.

On the witness stand, Gumbura said he's in love with all the women but because he wouldn't marry them, they all cried "rape."

He denied claims by an alleged victim he made her have 2 abortions. "I didn't even know that she aborted. I have 30 children and if I had known about the pregnancies, I wouldn't have asked her to abort because I want 100 children." *Source: New Zimbabwe, 12-19-13*

Shiya Ostreicher, a **New York** rabbi and political player involved in 5 Brooklyn nonprofits that get millions of dollars in taxpayer cash and private donations, is being investigated by state and federal prosecutors after a referral by the Moreland Commission on Public Corruption, which was set up by Gov. Mario Cuomo.

Ostreicher was also influential in lobbying for a law that extended the state Tuition Assistance Program to rabbinical students at an estimated cost of \$18 million a year. *Source: N.Y. Post, 12-18-13*

Mortimer Stanley, 82, Manchester, **UK**, a retired Catholic priest, is under police investigation for alleged sexual assaults against 3 women who say they were molested as preteens at St. Vincent Primary School between 1980 and 2000. Stanley retired to Ireland in 2002. *Source: Daily Mail, 12-6-13*

Anthony Fulton, New Haven, **CT**, is accused by some members of Faith Refuge of stealing about \$10,000 from the church for his personal use and of stripping the church of equipment.

"They took it upon themselves to buy flat screen TVs. And now they're leaving, they take it with them, but we've got it on black and white that they wrote it out from Faith Refuge," said Charlene Chesson, church member.

Fulton denies the allegations. *Source: WTNH, 12-6-13*

Removed / Resigned

John Paul, 67, was put on administrative leave by the Archdiocese of **Philadelphia** on allegations he molested minors more than 30 years ago. Paul resigned as pastor of Our Lady of Calvary Catholic Parish in November. *Source: Philly.com, 1-6-14*

Mark Connelly resigned as Mission Community Church pastor, Gilbert, **AZ**, due to allegations of extramarital affairs.

"We had received some information last Sunday that we took to [Mark Connelly] and presented it to him, and he ended up confessing," said Gary Sutliff, interim pastor.

Members said the affairs involved women from the 6,000-member church, one of Arizona's largest. *Source: azfamily.com, 1-6-13*

Loren Nys, a priest at Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Kiel, **WI**, will leave the parish and live in Milwaukee with other retired clergy under the supervision of the Salvatorian provincialate.

Allegations of inappropriate physical contact with minors were found in 43-year-old letters from parents during a personnel review, although the Salvatorians claimed the concerns were addressed at the time. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 1-5-14*

John Meredith, Owensboro, **KY**, was suspended as pastor of Blessed Mother Catholic Church after a diocesan probe of an unspecified allegation deemed credible.

Commonwealth's Attorney Bruce Kuegel said the diocese referred the case to his office. *Source: Messenger-Inquirer, 1-1-14*

Catholic Archbishop Charles Chaput, **Philadelphia**, permanently removed 5 priests from ministry over sexual abuse allegations, including **Michael A. Chapman**, who was earlier investigated and returned to duty in 2013.

A review board cleared Chapman in May 2012 but a new accuser came forward a few months later. The other priests removed are **Stephen B. Perzan**, **Peter J. Talocci**, **Mark E. Fernandes** and **Joseph M. Glatts**. *Source: Philly.com, 12-15-13*

Michael W. O'Connell, **Chicago**, stepped down from daily responsibilities at St. Alphonsus Catholic Parish due to an allegation he molested a minor in the late 1990s as pastor of Our Lady of the Woods Parish.

The allegation has been reported to the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, officials said. O'Connell was ordained in 1983. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 12-9-13*

Avrohom Glick, 67, Balaklava, **Australia**: Under police investigation for alleged child sex abuse as deputy principal of an Orthodox Jewish boys school in Melbourne more than 30 years ago. Glick denies the allegations.

He has been removed as head of Jewish studies at Yeshiva College boys high school, current Principal Yehoshua Smukler said in a statement.

The alleged victim said he was raped and made to perform lewd acts on the rabbi. *Source: Haaretz, 12-9-13*

Other

Michael Glennon, 69, a notorious Australian Catholic priest, died in prison in Ararat, purportedly of natural causes. Glennon was sentenced in 2003 to serve at least 15 years on 23 child sex charges involving 3 victims.

It was his 5th child molestation conviction since 1978. The youngest victim was 7. Several offenses occurred while he was free on bail.

Talk show host Derryn Hinch, who was jailed for contempt of court after disclosing Glennon's convictions, tweeted: "Good News to start 2014. Just heard evil paedophile priest Michael Glennon is dead. Died where he belonged: in jail. Victims rejoice." *Source: The Age, 1-1-14*

The Catholic Diocese of San Isidro, **Argentina**, is sorry about **Jose Mercou**, a priest sentenced to 14 years in 2006 for molesting 4 children.

"The San Isidro diocesan community, and especially the bishop and priests, publicly apologize to the young victims who were affected by the conduct of a priest within our diocese, Fr. Jose Mercou, when he was a priest at St. John the Baptist Church," said the document signed by Bishop Oscar Ojea and read at Masses Dec. 14-15.

Mercou ran a group home for homeless and runaway youths. *Source: Catholic News Service, 12-18-13*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

Letterbox

Former pastor backs parsonage suit

Enclosed you will find my check for \$40 to renew my membership for yet another year. I love Freethought Today. You might think the life of this octogenarian is dull if I say that receiving your publication is a high point of my month, but in fact I am quite active, busy and fulfilled even without your fine publication.

In the December issue, I particularly enjoyed the Dan Savage feature. I feel as if I have met a new "hero." Impressive is a weak word for the Sacramento chapter's billboard campaign. Crank mail is always as entertaining as shocking, and the black collar crime is, well, just shocking. I had to chuckle though, at the account of the "peeping Tom" who returned the next night to pray for the woman he was spying on.

As a retired Presbyterian clergyman, I have long thought the "parsonage ex-

emption" was unfair, but as an honest, law-abiding citizen, never failed to take advantage of it. Did you know that the Presbyterian Church USA now designates 100% of a member's pension a housing allowance, leaving it up to the individual and the IRS as to how much is actually taxable?

Few clergypersons of my day ever made the big bucks, but I have saved up to \$1,000 a year in taxes at times due to this perhaps someday "unconstitutional" provision. So, a small portion of the \$40 you receive from me is due to the extra funds I have available because of the parsonage exemption.

Reality, as Dawkins or someone might say, can be messy. Thanks, too, for your support for the Clergy Project, where I much enjoy my role as a screener for applicants. Finally, due to my son's recently moving to L.A., I have the possibility of attending the 2014 convention. Hoping to see you there.

Earl Crusier
California

Remember the season is the reason

For the past few weeks, I've tolerated people trying to correct me if I responded "Happy Holidays" to their "Merry Christmas." (I'd really like to say "Have a wonderful Winter Solstice" or something like that.) I cringe when I'm assailed with "Remember the reason for the season," which makes me want to retort "Remember the season is the reason."

So with this barrage of insensitivity from those who want everyone to believe the same way they do, I've decided to complete my payment for a Lifetime Membership. I submitted my Combined Federal Campaign payroll deduction forms and included a pledge, which should complete my Lifetime Membership.

Russ Collins
Nevada

Jolly Trust makes generous bequest

I am very pleased to be able to send the Freedom From Religion Foundation this gift of \$5,000 from the Bob Jolly Charitable Trust, in honor of my late friend Bob Conway Jolly, who was a staunch supporter of your organization. Bob died in August of a glioblastoma brain tumor, and he directed that his estate go into a charitable trust.

The majority of the trust will support the work of the Boston acting community, which Bob was a part of for many years, but he also directed several specific bequests, including this one to FFRF.

The gift is unrestricted, but it would be fitting to Bob's memory if some, at least, went into the FFRF endowment. I am also using a recent mailing to suggest a message on a building fund paving stone that would say "In Memory of Bob Conway Jolly, Boston Actor 1953-2013."

Marshall Williams
Rhode Island

Proud to become new Life Member

I am sending a donation for a Lifetime Membership. I have never donated an amount this large to any other charitable organization. But I firmly

believe the pursuit of reason over superstition and fear in our society outweighs all other worthy causes. I am proud to be able to donate in this manner. It is an honor to be able to support your mission to reveal the ravages of religion and the rewards of reason.

Please use this donation to keep up your important work in the courts, in the schools, in the governmental chambers and in the minds of us all.

Stan M. Deutsch
California

Thousand and one thanks to Paul

I can think of a thousand and one reasons to support FFRF, so I have to decided to donate a dollar for each of them to the building fund. Thank you for all the great work you do!

Paul Fleischauer
Wisconsin

'After-Lifer' sees harm religion causes

I've supported many causes over the years, generally environmental protection, equal rights and understanding of science, but these causes have millions of supporters. Religion is a major cause or aggravating factor of the problems in those areas, but action against religion has far fewer supporters.

That's why I want to focus my support where it will make the most difference, fighting the root source of these problems. Please accept my check for \$5,000 for the purchase of an After-Life membership.

Chris Allen
Texas

FFRF depends on support like this

I had written a \$100 donation check but hadn't yet mailed it. Then I reviewed your 2013 in review summary and realized I had to do more. Your partial summary of accomplishments is rivaled by no other freethought-related organization that I'm aware of, and I've been somewhat aware of the activities of a number of similar groups going back about 35 years.

I appreciate the work of all such groups and am a member of a number, but FFRF seems to be a fine combination of being upfront atheist, organized and very aggressive about increasing the membership, in addition to all the rest that you do. Kudos to everyone there, starting with the original and now extended family.

I tore up my \$100 check and wrote another for \$1,000 and have enclosed both. Keep up the absolutely terrific and creative hard work for which you're known.

Richard "Dick" James
California

•••

Enclosed is a check for \$200 for the building fund. I would give more if I could, but I'm retired on a fixed income. The work you do is so important. I have been an atheist most of my life. Religion never made sense to me at all.

When I was in high school, I would hear them pray at football games and wonder why their god would intervene in a silly football game but not to stop the murder of an innocent child or any other of the bad stuff going on in this world! If football is more important than a child's life, then he is sure not worth praying to, much less worshipping! That is when I started to be an atheist. Keep up the good work. We



How beastly

"I ain't afraid to park in a space reserved for the Anti-Christ," writes member Brian Wales about this scene in Lake Geneva, Wis.

must do all we can to keep religion out of the government.

"Think reason, not God" would be good on a T-shirt.

Charles Saxton
Arkansas

Costco was wrong to issue apology

[An excerpted email from a California FFRF member to Costco]:

The Costco store in Simi Valley was 100% correct to label the Holy Bible as fiction and 100% wrong to apologize. For over 2,000 years, Christians have been attempting to prove that it's a nonfiction book, and to date they have failed to present one shred of evidence that this book is anything but pure fiction.

A complaint from a Christian pastor was to be expected, but that was no reason to apologize. Instead, Costco should have asked the complainant: Where is the proof? Where is the evidence?

In a future "Informed Debate" section of the Costco Connection magazine, I recommend that you ask the question: Is the Holy Bible fiction or nonfiction?

John D. Dunn
California

Madison convention a great experience

Receiving Freethought Today in the mail always makes the day better. Most recently, I loved seeing the faces and statements of people who are on billboards. Their simple statements and colorful visibility reach so many people who would love to say thank you in person. I plan to make a poster out of these pages.

In the previous edition, the photo of the "God Graveyard" sponsored by UW Atheists, Humanists & Agnostics on Halloween was brilliant! Entire civilizations once worshiped gods that are now considered myths.

Belated thanks for the Madison convention. Each individual story is helpful to us all. The first speaker I listened to on our first day was attorney Andrew Seidel ("Sweat the Small Stuff"). I



Mixed messages?

Missouri member Matt Gaines happened on this Jeep Cherokee in St. Joseph.

hope you reprint his speech in a future edition.

As atheists and freethinkers, we need to identify ourselves by wearing our lapel pins, T-shirts and hats with the FFRF logo or our favorite freethinker/skeptic phrase. We need to recognize each other and become visible so that we can let reason replace religious superstitious delusion and intrusion. We already have the power in the sheer number of us out there. We also must attain political clout to make this happen. It is the only way to ensure that our government will remain true to the secular origin of this country. We need to assert our voice of reason with confidence. Andrew's speech gave me a lot to think about.

We experienced a taste of this power of identity and honesty at a lunch break during the conference. My husband and I were one of the first people to enter a restaurant before the lunch crowd came in. We were wearing our conference identifications. After the restaurant filled up, I looked around and it appeared that almost every patron was wearing an FFRF badge. It was a great place to strike up a conversation, and the food was good, too.

Cheers for a new year filled with progress and reason.

Deborah Hilpipre
Minnesota

Editor's note: Videos of speeches are at: ffrf.org/outreach/convention

God question brings hospital applause

Some time ago, I was sitting in Kaiser's post-operative waiting room in San Rafael, along with about a dozen other people awaiting news of their loved ones.

My wife's surgeon stopped by to tell me that all had gone well. Moments later, Betty, my wife's anxious 92-year-old mother, arrived and announced "thank God" when I told her that the surgery had gone perfectly.

I replied, "Thank God? How about thanking the doctors and the nurses?"

The entire waiting room burst into applause. It was a wonderful moment for atheism.

Richard Kirschman
California

•••

My husband and I enjoy Thoroughbred horse racing and handicapping. Recently, I ran across the name and breeding of a Thoroughbred that I thought you might appreciate — Unitarian. His sire is Pulpit and the dam's

name is Minimalist. How clever is that? He won his race that day!

Julie H. Tooth
Kentucky

•••

Whenever I have to go to a hospital and they ask me, "Religious preference," I reply:

"Chocolate."

Bill Wiener
Louisiana

•••

We were in Tallahassee a few days ago to see a grocery co-op named after Dan Barker's song, "Friendly Neighborhood Atheist." Thought you might get a kick out of knowing about it.

Rose Secrest
Tennessee

Japanese-American view very informative

Thank you very much for publishing "Japanese-American escapes Christian nation myth" [by Hawaii FFRF member Satoko Makino, June/July13]. I'm a Japanese-American atheist who comes from an evangelical Christian background. I'm struggling to find others like me, as my family (mostly in Hawaii) is still enmeshed with the church, and I live in an area where the Japanese-American community is small and not very cohesive.

Ms. Makino's perspective as an immigrant was really interesting and something I never gave much thought to with regard to how my family may have come to be converted to Christianity. Hers was the only thing I could find in an Internet search written by a Japanese-American atheist. Thanks to her for speaking out about her experience.

Keiko
Massachusetts

Billboards appreciated on both coasts

I live in Glassboro, N.J., next to Pitman, where your organization put up a "Keep Saturn in Saturnalia" billboard. I learned about it when an arsonist tried to burn it down.

I want you to know that there are those of us who appreciate the work you are doing and helping make sure that everyone's civil liberties are covered. Thank you.

Ashley Rahm
New Jersey

•••

Thanks for publishing the faces and thoughts that went up on Sacramento



New Jersey member Tom Roche writes: "I had the privilege of meeting Charles Strouse at the 2011 FFRF convention in Hartford, where he posed for a photo with me and signed 'Tomorrow' sheet music for my daughter. Last October, our family was finally able to see 'Annie' on Broadway and meet some of the cast after the show. Now I've put together an 'Annie' collage which hangs in my daughter's bedroom. I'm looking forward to it being a conversation starter: 'Oh, where did you meet Charles Strouse?' Thanks for all that you do."

billboards. I clipped four of the ones that I liked best. They will make nifty zingers in elevator conversations.

My favorites include, "The only higher power I have is on my microwave" by Billy Nilva, "I believe in people, not gods" by Liz Shoemaker, "I worship nothing and question everything," by Dylan McDonald and "Evidence matters, skepticism makes sense" by Paul Cox.

Bravo to all the Sacramento faces and voices.

Pete Prunkl
North Carolina

Believers' beliefs are inconsistent

While rejecting overwhelming scientific evidence, it is funny how the global-warming deniers often are the most devoted believers in stories made up thousands of years ago, without a shred of evidence, and against all logic.

Take the so-called "Great Flood." How about asking some logical questions, like where did all the water come from, and where did it go afterward?

Ran off the edge of the flat Earth, perhaps?

Jorg Aadahl
San Mateo

Once again, atheism not a belief

To understand atheism as religion is not to understand atheism at all. Atheism is seeing the world through belief-free glasses.

Atheists know well that they are viewed by the faith community as just another system of belief. They realize that those who approach atheism this way for any reason are missing its es-

sence. Atheists have the great task of releasing from belief anyone who approaches them for there to be any sort of encounter beyond the very superficial and trivial. In a way, atheists have to coax people to consider nonbelief in order for them to encounter it.

It might be best to view nonbelievers as having a way of thinking that's entirely different from how believers view themselves and the world. So all the friction and strife that seems to arise between believers and nonbelievers is really like people arguing while speaking two different languages.

One thing that can confuse believers is that science uses the word "belief" to label hypotheses or conjectures. That "belief" is a placeholder until actual understanding is obtained. For example: "We believe a virus is the cause of these changes." Unfortunately, some people mistake the scientist's use of the word as evidence atheists believe like the faithful.

Of course, some scientists are members of a faith. They can explain how they integrate their faith with science far better than I can.

Richard Tew
California

Wading for Godot

Immersed in various, curious faiths, sloshing around in hope, submerged in hilarious, spurious myths, and/or gushing about a Pope, religionists pray, and obediently trudge, through ridiculous layers of inebriant sludge.

JB Kennedy
California

Meet a Member (and his better half)



Deb and Bob Lee are not seeking “insurance for the hereafter” with religion.

Who we are: We are Robert “God-lessBob” and Deb Lee, married for 31 years and living in Iron Station, N.C., a small community 25 miles from Charlotte.

More about us: I was born in Georgetown, S.C., on Dec. 28, 1951. Deb was born April 20, 1959, in Greensboro, N.C. I’m employed by USAirways at Charlotte Douglas International Airport as a baggage handler and have worked in the airline industry since 1984.

Deb works for Bank of America in Charlotte as a global mobility analyst. She had spent 25 years in accounting before moving to human resources in 2010.

Education: I have a diploma in computer technology and have had training in hotel management, automotive technology and emergency medicine. Thirty years’ experience in aviation is quite an education in itself. Deb holds a bachelor’s degree in business and economics from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Military service: In January 1971, I volunteered for the draft, and on Feb. 1, I was inducted into the U.S. Army. Fortunately, instead of Vietnam, I was sent to Germany, where I spent a year and a half as a records clerk in a tank battalion motor pool. I returned to the U.S. in January 1973 and was discharged at the rank of E-4.

How I got where I am today: My father was killed in a farming accident when I was 4. Eventually, one must ask what kind of a god allows an innocent boy to be forever traumatized by such an event. That should have been my first clue that there was no god at work in my universe.

I attended a fundamentalist Pentecostal church all through school and played drums in a gospel band. After high school, I’d had enough and was looking to find a new world where logic and reason ruled the day. I rarely attended church again except for holidays, funerals etc.

To educate myself, I studied religion courses online and purchased a variety of books on religion and atheism. I listened to dozens of YouTube debates between atheists and apologists to get at the real truth of Christianity. I be-

came wonderfully enlightened to the fraud and chicanery.

I confronted my mother, a staunch, bible-believing Christian, with my atheism in the last few years of her life. She was completely closed to alternative ideas and was unable to engage in rational discourse on the issue. She died in 2008, thinking that she was going to meet Jesus.

At Mother’s funeral, my mother-in-law told me I would see her again one day, to which I responded, “If I dig her up I will!” To which she replied, “You never quit, do you?” I answered, “No, I don’t.”

In recent years, with evangelical leaders gaining a political foothold, I felt a need to become engaged in the battle for separation of church and state. I started to look for organized atheist groups and wanted one with legal abilities through which we could initiate action when needed. I found the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

I filed a complaint in 2011 with FFRF regarding prayers conducted at the opening of every session of the North Carolina General Assembly. Working with the Triangle Freethought Society (an FFRF chapter), we transcribed a vast number of the prayers to prove their sectarian nature.

I got prayer stopped at the Kannapolis City Council and had a letter sent to my county commission to have their practice changed to a “secular” prayer, if there is such a thing. I wrote letters to the editor about school prayer and why we’re not a Christian nation. I condemned my county commission for their biblical motives in denying civil rights to gays by supporting a ban on gay marriage.

My writings brought a lot of fire from the fundamentalists, but I was eating it up! I also helped sponsor a billboard on the Billy Graham Parkway which read “One Nation Indivisible” to show the godless Pledge of Allegiance in its original form.

Where I’m headed: Well, it isn’t heaven or hell! I’ve considered proposing, after I retire, that we create the “FFRF Southern Division.” There’s so much work to do in the South (North Carolina is No. 5 in the U.S. for First

Pet peeve: bastardizing the words freedom and liberty in the name of theocracy.

Amendment violations), and Wisconsin is just too damn cold!

But seriously, I want to continue educating myself. I want to speak out where I can to expose the mythology and to hold our leaders accountable to the Constitution. There are plenty of minor offenses that go unnoticed by many, which is why we must remain proactive and vigilant to stop constitutional abuse.

Persons I admire: Bart Ehrman, head of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, for my New Testament education through which I am armed to debate the most fervent fundamentalist. Christopher Hitchens for his in-your-face, anti-theistic philosophy, and making me proud to wear the title “radical atheist.” I must also include the rest of the “Four Horsemen” — Dan Dennett, Sam Harris and Richard Dawkins, for exposing the absurdity and insanity of religion.

Quotes I like: In *The Age of Reason*, Thomas Paine wrote, “It is necessary to the happiness of man that he be mentally faithful to himself. Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what one does not believe. It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief, if I may so express it, that mental lying has produced in society. When man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind, as to subscribe his professional belief to things he does not believe, he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime.”

Thomas Jefferson: “If one wishes to know more of this Three-headed, Christian Beast-god, one need only observe those who say they serve him. They are of two classes: fools and hypocrites.”

Favorite things: Travel — we’ve traveled throughout the world — Russia, China, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean and most of Western Europe. Flying — we’re both private pilots: I have an instrument rating and Deb has about 25 hours instruction in hot-air ballooning. Scuba — we’re both certified divers and enjoy the warm waters

of the Caribbean whenever possible.

Given all that we’ve done, Deb still would rather read a book, any book. She also enjoys the music of George Gershwin and the enchanting voice of Robert Goulet, whom we met when he played King Arthur in “Camelot” in Charlotte. I’m currently reading Reza Aslin’s *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* and Bart Ehrman’s *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics*.

Pet peeves: Bible thumpers who proclaim faith in something they tend to know very little about, and then claim it to be fact. Given their indoctrination, it’s no surprise what they accept as fact. Also, those who deny evolution because it doesn’t fit their biblical worldview. And those who bastardize the words freedom and liberty in the name of theocracy.

I started to doubt religion: When I realized that my parents, icons of morality, would lie for what they thought were good reasons. Some people think the Santa Claus lie is benign, but the parents who teach us that we should never lie are the first to lie to us. I found this to be a problem as a child and still do today. Why, is the question I had to ask?

For years after graduating from high school and leaving home, I didn’t even want to think about religion. I held on to the inculcated belief for a long time but never investigated what I was taught to believe. Deb says that she began to doubt as a teenager. Even after we were married, we had occasional debates. Eventually we agreed that Christianity, and religion in general, are for the feeble-minded who allow a fear of death to cloud their logic and drive them to seek insurance for the hereafter.

The critical issue is truth. Through truth one discovers honor and dignity. Abandoning the dogma and affirming one’s atheism is often a difficult choice. For me, it has proven costly in the loss of family and relationships, but it’s a cost I’m willing to bear for the cause of honesty and integrity. I encourage all nonbelievers to stand and be counted in the battle for reason. I’m fortunate to be in a place where I won’t be penalized, as some are, for speaking out and vociferously proclaiming my atheism.

Belief for belief’s sake can never be as fulfilling as truth realized through education. It’s not about *when* you begin to doubt, but that you *do* doubt that’s most important.

Now, I say “De Omnibus Dubitandum” (“doubt everything,” René Descartes).

Overheard

I don’t give a [expletive] about religion when it comes to sports. In fact, I think it’s stupid. I think everyone that goes on national television and is asked why do you win says, “I want to thank God.” Really? Like God gives a [expletive] that you made 18 jump shots. I have always had a problem with that. I have a problem with people showing their religion in public. I have a real problem with that.

Luigi “Geno” Auriemma, head coach of the University of Connecticut women’s basketball team
Hartford Courant, 1-17-14

[Atheists] need to buck up, assert our rationality, and change the way we

deal with the religious, with everyday affronts delivered (at times unknowingly) by believers, with the casual presumptions that historically have tended to favor the faithful and grant them unmerited respect. A lot is at stake. Religion is a serious matter, reaching far beyond the pale of individual conscience and sometimes translating into violence, sexism, sexual harassment and assault, and sundry legal attempts to restrict a woman’s right to abortion or outlaw it altogether, to say nothing of terrorism and war. Now is the time to act.

Journalist Jeffrey Tayler, “15 ways to stand up for rationality”
Salon.com, 1-11-14

Meet an Ohio Member



Name: Thomas J. Reke.

Where I live: Akron, Ohio.

Where and when I was born: Dayton, Ohio, Feb. 6, 1941.

Family: I live with my partner of 31 years, Charles Wright. On March 19, 2012, we were married in Washington, D.C., while we were there for the Reason Rally.

Education: B.S. in education, University of Dayton, 1963. I spent almost seven years in a Catholic seminary and had 13 years of Catholic education. My experience shows Catholic education is not cost-effective.

Occupation: I taught high school briefly and then taught basic math and reading at U.S. Forest Service Job Corps centers in Wisconsin and Michigan and one operated by Alpha Kappa Sorority. Then for 30 years, I had the privilege of working with veterans through the Department of Veterans Affairs, where I did psychological testing. Now I'm retired after 50 years of working.

How I got where I am today: I have had help from many people, both directly and indirectly, from my family to people whom I never knew.

Where I'm headed: I can't predict how many more trips I will be taking

around the sun. I hope to use the time for personal enjoyment and the enjoyment of others. I plan to keep working to improve and understand the human condition.

Person in history I admire: Martin Luther King Jr. is at the top of my list. He had the right skills, education and courage to lead the civil rights movement and was willing to pay the highest price for his beliefs. Historically, there have been few people with the right virtues at the right time to lead a movement.

A quotation I like: "The truth will set you free. But first it will piss you off." (Gloria Steinem)

These are a few of my favorite things: People, be they family, friends or strangers. I enjoy reading, walking, the computer, television, dining out, art, music and travel. I have visited 20 countries and 47 states so far.

These are not: Greed, prejudice, people who want to force their religious beliefs on others and people who talk the talk but don't walk the walk.

My doubts about religion started: In my mid-20s. The main thing that changed my thinking was realizing that there are so many different religions with divergent beliefs. I seem to have less use for religion every day. I'm almost to the point of being anticlerical.

Before I die: I hope to see more churches close their doors.

Ways I promote freethought: I belong to organizations that promote it. I'm a Life Member of FFRF and encourage other people to become members. When appropriate, I try to engage people in a productive discussion about rational thinking.

I keep up with and work on Establishment Clause issues. FFRF's legal staff has been of great assistance in this endeavor. I also let it be known that I'm an atheist or a self-liberated Catholic.

Sharing the Crankmail

A sampling of seasonal best wishes, printed as received, from some of FFRF's fans:

Stupid: You people are very very very sad and are empty in side and the only thing that can fill you is the very thing you wage war against ohhh yeah just for your info separation of church and state is no where in the constitution or the bill of rights check it out it's called reading top to bottom left to right take Advil for headaches lolololololol — Blake Hubbard

Why? Why are you guys so anti-Christian only? Everything I hear and/or read you guys attack Christianity and their beliefs only. I am just curious. What is your big deal with Christianity? — Melissa Olsen

MERRY CHRISTMAS: MERRY CHRRISTMAS YOU DOUCHE BAGS!

Christmas: Why do you want to destroy it? It isn't part of your belief- do your own thing--- honor a vacuum or whatever. — Evelyn Landis, Inkster, N.D.

You will burn in hell: I hope you know that all of the work you are doing will take you to hell. Deny God all you want but when the day comes you will pay with your soul. — David Anderson

The Bible: Most of the Bible was NEVER meant to be taken literally! The Old Testament was written thousands and thousands of years after the events happened! The Bible was written by men of FAITH not men of history or science! I teach Bible History, I teach about Jesus and the Trinity. The things you say are so wrong! And one last thing: when someone is baptized, it cannot be undone! It would be like putting rain back into a cloud! It's impossible, so your De-baptismal certificate is basically worthless. — Karen Beargie

Sign in Arlughton Heiths: Ha Ha!! On your stupid sign!! I was planning on tearing it down but someone got to it first. Every wear you put up a sign...it WILL be torn down..I promise! — James Baack, Illinois

CHRISTmas: Christmas would be nothing without out Christ as he died for us. Christ is the reason for every season. — MeLiSaA, PRO LiFe 100%, PrOuD MemBer OF tHe NRA

keep you belifes away from my rights: you people do realize that in this counrty we have a freedom OF religon not FROM — Wyatt Ellsworth

Evolution taught in Public schools: All over the country the religion of evolution is taught in public school systems. This is a clear violation of separation of church and state. These atheists need to keep their religion to themselves. If they want to discuss their religion of evolution in private, that's fine, but please, our children dont need to hear your atheist dogma. You are an embarrassment to this nation. — Didint your mom Teach you better?

Double Standard: In Chicago an "A" has been erected. Yet I do not see the "A" erected during any Jewish religious holidays such as Yom Kippur, Rosh Hadhanah, and Habnukkah? — Michael Kuehn, Cicero, Illinois

Great sign: Go fuck yourself you faggot piece of shit — Johnny Jones

God: In a foxhole, there is no such thing as an atheists. — Flagrante Delicto

HATE BILLBOARDS: NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS. FUCK YOU. — Stephanie Weiland, Illinois

IM A CHRISTIAN YEAHHH!! All y'all are is

Proud in California



Sacramento freethinkers depicted on more than 55 area billboards in December gathered Dec. 21 for a group photo. Judy Saint, Greater Sacramento FFRF Chapter director, hosted a "Meet and Greet" reception, where each FFRF'er featured on a billboard talked about being part of the "out of the closet" campaign. The campaign received widespread regional and national coverage.



Janet Thew, who stood all by herself in a small town against religious displays on town property (and lost her position on the Planning Commission as a result) is pictured with her billboard, one of 55 erected late last year FFRF and its Sacramento chapter. Judy Saint, chapter director, notes, "The good news is that this bravery is what motivated us to establish a local FFRF chapter here. We made an award just for her, which we call the 'Imagine Award.'"

some desperate homos off the street that are trying to tear apart the United States. The US was founded by god. Then that violation of yalls was made by a homo who didnt know god. Yall better watch your big mouth cuz I got freedom of speech and that was not from a homo. — sponge bob

Saturnalia sign burner: Nancy Pelosi was seen running from the area with her hair on fire. — Walter Wilson, St. Petersburg, Fla.

Pray: I heard that the FFRF celebrates the winter by Praying to the sun!!! How lunnie can you get?? — Gary Frechette

What the fuck is wrong with you people? You are pathetic and sad. I'd rather have God in the classroom than guns. — You suck and Need a Real Life

World View: I recently read the article that a Long Island middle school omitted any reference to Christ in the songs performed for the Christmas play. Then we wonder why incidents happen such as columbine and sandy hook. — Fed Up, New York

WAR ON ATHEIST: LIVE AND DIE NO ONE WILL MISS YOU.STOP OVER SOMETIME FOR AN ASS BEATING YOU DOUCHEBAGS! — dAN grisius, pickerel, Wisconsin

joining: I know you guys don't believe in HIM, but please leave us alone that do. YES, you do have your leader as President as he is the Anti-Christ. — terry butts, winchester, virginia

Your sign: Dont touch that sign christ in christ-mas he is real. Not like your stupid freedom

from. religion. Go to fucken saturn and preach your shit. We can put any sign we want up- its not racial, porn, anti gay so shove ur's up ur ass. — John Pubic, Yardley, Pa.

Plain and simple: Mean people need Jesus. They will be in my prayers tonight.

Tweet by Carrie Underwood, reacting to numerous negative reviews of her acting as Maria in "The Sound of Music" on NBC

Christian Post, 12-9-13

Boise Bible College is about students who want to make a difference. We have rigorous courses that stress writing and research.

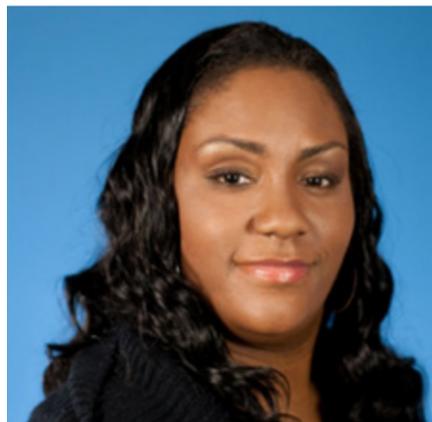
David Davolt, director of development, announcing a \$2 million gift to the school accredited by the Association for Biblical Higher Education

Idaho Statesman, 12-16-13

America, you can follow Jesus' advice and Jesus' teaching and arm yourself.

Former U.S. Navy chaplain Gordon Klingenschmitt, who was involuntarily discharged in 2007 for mixing religion and politics as an officer

rightwingwatch.org, 12-10-13



Mandisa Thomas

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, in conjunction with its lively Raleigh chapter, the Triangle Freethought Society, will hold a regional mini-convention on the weekend of May 2-3 at the Sheraton Raleigh Hotel, 421 South Salisbury St., in downtown Raleigh, N.C.

Although scheduled for the convenience of East Coasters and Southern freethinkers, all are welcome. Plan now to avoid disappointment.

Phone the Raleigh Sheraton at 1-800-325-3535 by April 4 and identify yourself as an FFRF member. The rates are \$129 single/double, \$139 triple, \$149 quad and \$169 club, plus tax.

“We’re looking forward to this much-deferred convention with our very talented Raleigh-area chapter members,” said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. The chapter is directed by Harry Shaughnessy. The event will take place the day after the National Day of Reason, er, Prayer, which is held the first Thursday of every May.

Confirmed speakers include:

• **Bart Ehrman**, who is James A. Gray Professor, Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and writes “The Bart Ehrman Blog.” He



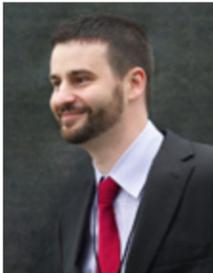
Weekend of May 2-3

Announcing Raleigh FFRF mini-convention

is author of numerous books including *Did Jesus Exist?* and *Forged*, which exposes deliberate forgeries in the New Testament. He graduated from Wheaton College and received both of his Masters of Divinity and Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary.

• **Mandisa Thomas**, founder and president of Black Nonbelievers, Inc., based in Atlanta. She was featured in a recent issue of JET magazine and is a frequent guest speaker. A married mother of three, she works to encourage more blacks to come out and stand strong as nonbelievers.

• **Todd Stiefel**, a Raleigh local, FFRF Lifetime Member and head of the Stiefel Freethought Foundation, which has sparked much freethought activism and was an integral sponsor of the Reason Rally. Todd graduated cum laude from Duke University, worked 12 years for Stiefel Laboratories and is now a full-time freethought activist.



• **Michael Nugent**, founder and chair of Atheist Ireland. Michael will fly in from Dublin to give an international flavor to the conference and talk about Irish issues, as well as the growing number of blasphemy prosecutions around the world.



• **Former clergy** in the Raleigh area

who are now part of the Clergy Project. FFRF’s Dan Barker is also administrator of the volunteer support group for clergy still in the pulpit who “have seen the light.” He will emcee the panel, which will include **Candace R.M. Gorham**, a local chapter member who left the ministry and is the author of *The Ebony Exodus Project: Why Some Black Women Are Walking Out on Religion — and Others Should Too*.

Other panelists and speakers will be announced as the schedule is finalized.

The mini-convention will include FFRF traditions such as a complimentary dessert reception on opening night, a Non-Prayer Breakfast, a drawing for “clean,” pre-“In God We Trust” currency and entertainment at the piano by Dan, who will co-emcee the conference with Annie Laurie Gaylor of FFRF. Chapter activists will run a “Meet and Greet” social where participants can meet speakers and activists.

Formal proceedings start at 7 p.m. Friday, May 2 (dinner on your own) with registration opening up earlier. Two optional group meals will begin and end Saturday (with Saturday lunch on your own). The event will conclude by 10 p.m. Saturday. Late-afternoon workshops may be scheduled (to be announced) for Friday afternoon.

Meals

The Non-Prayer breakfast includes scrambled eggs, bacon, hash browns, juice, coffee and tea and pastry rolls for \$20 (inclusive of 23% service and 7.75% sales tax). A vegetarian option will substitute a tomato for meat. Dinner of \$40 inclusive is Chicken



Candace Gorham

Saltimbocca, a chicken breast stuffed with sliced prosciutto, sage and fresh mozzarella served with penne with garlic cream sauce and sautéed asparagus.

A grilled salmon entree or a vegetarian entrée can be substituted. All include a garden salad, warm rolls with butter, sweet iced tea, Starbucks coffee and dessert, a fresh assorted berries tower with lemon zest whipped cream.

Vegan and gluten-free options may be ordered.

Registration costs

Cost to attend: \$50 for FFRF members, \$55 for non-FFRF spouse/companion accompanying a member, \$90 for non-members (includes \$40 to become FFRF member), and \$5 for students.

FFRF will be visiting the West Coast for its annual convention, set for the Millennium Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles, on the weekend of Oct. 24-25, 2014. Future issues of Freethought Today will publish full details on both conferences. Check updates at:

<http://ffrf.org/outreach>

Register online at: <http://ffrf.org/convention>

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

Freedom From Religion Foundation's Raleigh Mini-Convention

May 2-3, 2014

Raleigh, North Carolina



Make checks payable to “FFRF”



Number registering

<input type="checkbox"/> FFRF member registration(s) @ \$50 per person	\$_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-member spouse or companion accompanying member @ \$55.....	\$_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-member registration(s) @ \$90.....	\$_____
<small>(Includes \$40 annual FFRF Membership)</small>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Student registration(s) @ \$5	\$_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast @ \$20* per person	\$_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Classic <input type="checkbox"/> Classic Vegetarian <input type="checkbox"/> Vegan	
If gluten-free, please specify.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Saturday Night Dinner @ \$40* per person	\$_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Chicken <input type="checkbox"/> Salmon <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian <input type="checkbox"/> Vegan	
If gluten-free, please specify.	
<small>* Meal prices include 23% gratuity & 7.75% sales tax</small>	
Total: \$_____	

Name(s)

Please include names of all registrants for nametags

Address

City/State/ZIP

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

Mark Your Calendar!

Announcing . . .



37th Annual National Convention Weekend of October 24-25, 2014

Millennium Biltmore Hotel - Los Angeles
506 South Grand Avenue
Los Angeles, California

