

# Freethought Today

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## FFRF sues over California school board prayer

The Freedom From Religion Foundation filed a federal lawsuit Nov. 13 against the Chino Valley Unified School District Board of Education, charging that its meetings in Chino, Calif., “resemble a church service more than a school board meeting.”

U.S. District Judge Jesus Bernal, a Barack Obama appointee, is assigned to the case.

FFRF, based in Madison, Wis., has more than 21,500 nonreligious members nationwide, including more than 3,360 in California.

Joining FFRF as plaintiffs are a district student, Doe 1, and parents Does 2 and 3, as well as a district employee, Doe 4. Since the suit was filed, FFRF has received a heartening outpouring of requests by Chino Valley parents and residents to join the suit, as well as additional complaints about other troubling state/church entanglements in the school district.

Area attorney David J.P. Kaloyanides is the plaintiffs’ attorney and will file an amended complaint adding a significant number of new plaintiffs. Currently there are 21 total.

Chino Valley School Board meetings open with a prayer, which often includes bible readings and proselytizing by board members. Board President James Na injects Christianity into many official statements, FFRF’s legal complaint notes. At one typical meeting, Na “urged everyone who does not know Jesus Christ to go and find Him,” after which another board member closed with a reading of Psalm 143.

Students often attend the meetings to receive awards, speak about issues affecting their schools, attend disciplinary hearings and give performances. Student attendance can be mandatory, and a student representative is a board member.

Courts have consistently held that organized prayer in the public schools is unconstitutional. Two federal appellate courts, the Third and Sixth Circuits, have specifically ruled school board prayer unconstitutional.

The plaintiffs “feel that the government is taking sides against them on religious questions,” and view the prayers, bible readings, and proselytizing as state-endorsed religion. The board is excessively entangled with religion, alleges the complaint, noting there is



FFRF staff and interns posed in front of the nearly complete Freethought Hall expansion in early December. (Photo by Andrew Seidel)

no secular or educational purpose for prayers, bible readings, or proselytizing. The suit charges this violates the Establishment Clause, the Equal Protection Clause and the California Constitution.

FFRF repeatedly tried to resolve the violations without litigation. FFRF originally contacted the board on Sept. 14, 2013, asking it to stop scheduling prayers. The board responded on Oct. 7, 2013, refusing the request.

The complaint asks the court to declare the

board’s religious practices unconstitutional under both the federal and state constitutions and to permanently enjoin the board from any further school-sponsored religious exercises.

FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert and Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel are co-counsel. Kaloyanides won a lawsuit in February on behalf of the American Humanist Association, stopping the city of Lake Elsinore, Calif., from building a war memorial depicting a soldier kneeling before a Christian cross.

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## Okla. school district rejects Hobby Lobby bible class

Thanks to FFRF’s efforts, Mustang Public Schools in Mustang, Okla., is canceling plans to conduct a bible course developed by Hobby Lobby President Steve Green, a zealous evangelical Christian.

Superintendent Sean McDaniel emailed in November that “the topic of a bible course in the Mustang School District is no longer a discussion item nor is there a plan to provide such a course in the foreseeable future.”

The district’s announcement came in response to a follow-up open records request to the district from FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, in conjunction with Americans United Senior Litigation Counsel Greg Lipper, ACLU of Oklahoma Legal Director Brady Henderson and Daniel Mach of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief.

FFRF led the charge against the proposed class in April when the school board voted to approve

Green’s curriculum. Seidel researched the curriculum, entitled “The Book, the Bible’s History, Narrative and Impact of the World’s Best-selling Book,” and pointed out numerous flaws with the course, which the billionaire Green wants to be implemented in schools around the country.

Americans United and ACLU later also wrote letters and joined FFRF’s most recent records request.

McDaniel said two “non-negotiables” the school had requested from Hobby Lobby were not met, namely that the district be permitted to review the final curriculum before introducing it and that Hobby Lobby commit to providing legal coverage to the district.

Through its first records request, FFRF learned that the curriculum contained heavy Christian bias. FFRF also criticized Green for encouraging the school

*Continued on page 3*





’Tis the season — for reason.

FFRF’s gilt winter solstice message returned for its 19th appearance to the first-floor rotunda of the Wisconsin Capitol in Madison in December. The message was composed by FFRF’s principal founder Anne Nicol Gaylor, who turned 88 in November.

Thank you, one and all, for helping FFRF building fund

Phase I of FFRF’s building expansion is nearly complete, as staff prepare to move into the four-story addition to its original building in downtown Madison, Wis., by year’s end. We couldn’t have done it without you—our kind and generous donors.

Phase II—the renovation of the original 1855 Freethought Hall, to “sprinkle” and upgrade heat and air, etc.—is expected to be done by March.

If you’d like your name on a vestibule tile, which will be handcrafted and beautiful, please purchase now. Pavers of \$1,000 to \$2,000 bearing names and messages will go up in spring in the Rose Zerwick Garden and Courtyard and should be purchased by Jan. 30, 2015. For more information, go to [ffrf.org/donate-building-fund/](http://ffrf.org/donate-building-fund/).

Future issues will carry photographs and updates!

- Gifts received 11/20/14 to 12/10/14:**  
Anonymous, California, \$3,000  
Gary Gray and Todd Gardner, California, \$2,000  
Fred Thorlin, Texas, \$2,000  
James Blase, Texas, \$1,000  
Dr. Folmar, Pennsylvania, \$1,000  
Michael Machula, Indiana, \$1,000  
Judy Saint and Kathy Johnson, California, \$1,000  
Anonymous, New York, \$1,000  
Fred Thorlin, Texas, \$1,000  
Anonymous, Washington, \$1,000  
Dan Knotter, Illinois, \$500  
Warren Geisler and Kristine Walderbach, Arkansas, \$250  
Anonymous, New York, \$250  
Mr. Phil Gormley, Massachusetts, \$200  
Donald Worrell, Alabama, \$200  
Jean Allen, Arizona, \$100

- Stephen Armiger, Montana, \$100  
Jay Hueimmer, Wisconsin, \$100  
Dan McPeck, Arizona, \$100  
Anonymous, Minnesota, \$50  
Daniel Crandall, Idaho, \$50  
Anonymous, Wisconsin, \$50  
Anonymous, Arizona, \$50  
Anonymous, Oregon, \$50  
Mr. Victor Nicolescu, New Jersey, \$50  
Jack Henley, Texas, \$30  
Alice M Kachman, Michigan, \$20  
Anonymous, Virginia, \$10  
**Subtotal: \$16,160.00**  
**New Cumulative Total: \$2,011,149.12**

Mark Welty, Iowa,, was inadvertently listed anonymously for his \$50 contribution in August.

Karen Owens, Oregon, was inadvertently listed anonymously for her \$500 contribution in October.

James Worrell, Oklahoma,, granted his permission to list his name for his June \$100 gift.

No donors will be identified by name without express permission. If you gave a gift designated to the building fund that does not appear to be reflected in this list or in prior issues, please contact FFRF Bookkeeper Katie Daniel at 608/256-8900 9-5 CDT weekdays or email [katie@ffrf.org](mailto:katie@ffrf.org).

Seniors: Watch for IRA rollover news

As of press time, Congress had not yet reauthorized the IRA rollover incentive for charitable giving, allowing seniors 70½ and older to directly donate to tax-exempt entities such as FFRF via IRA withdrawals. Watch the news for updates!



Staff Attorney (and creative force) Andrew Seidel is shown with FFRF’s “natural nativity scene,” which was first unveiled in 2011 in the Wisconsin Capitol to counter a nativity scene placed by a Religious Right group. The display recognizes the rebirth of the Sun, not baby Jesus. FFRF’s symbolic baby is black and female (for egalitarianism) and to acknowledge that humankind was birthed in Africa. FFRF’s “wise persons” depict atheists and scientific giants Charles Darwin and Albert Einstein, plus “wise woman” Emma Goldman — with humorist Mark Twain and founding “father” Thomas Jefferson thrown in for good measure. Venus, like Mary, represents a mythical fertility symbol, but also our solar system. FFRF’s “angels” are likewise natural — the Statue of Liberty and an astronaut.

No tax break for Ark Encounter

A proposed Noah’s ark theme park in northern Kentucky won’t get about \$18 million in state tax incentives, said a Dec. 10 letter from the Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet. According to the Louisville Courier-Journal, the letter said Ark Encounter intends to discriminate in hiring based on religion. The state’s development authority gave preliminary approval in July but wanted written assurances on nondiscriminatory hiring practices.

“State tourism tax incentives cannot be used to fund religious indoctrination or otherwise be used to advance religion,” Tourism Secretary Bob Stew-

art wrote. “The use of state incentives in this way violates the separation of church and state provisions of the Constitution and is therefore impermissible.”

FFRF contested the proposal from the start and asked its members on Dec. 12 to write Gov. Steve Beshear and Stewart to thank them for standing up for the rights of non-Christians.

Evangelist Ken Ham’s Answers in Genesis, the park’s developer, wants to keep 25% of the sales tax it collects for 10 years. Ham said he’s considering a lawsuit now.

FFRF thanks 22 new ‘Lifers’

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to welcome 22 new Lifetime Members. They are:

- Chuck Atkinson, James Blackburn, Evelyn Bureson, Richard Dolan, Carolyn Frawley, Michael Fredricks, Pete Gavlick, Gene Joyner, Don Kang, Joel Karafin, Dr. Herbert Kushner, Robyn Landry, Brian Madsen, Norbert Manz, Arthur Moffat, David Myers, Anthony and Dolores Nickel, James O’Neill, Michael Reed, Doug Reedy and Charles

- Sawicki.  
Fifteen states are represented: California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, North Carolina, North Dakota, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin.

Individual Lifetime Memberships of \$1,000 go into rainy-day reserves, ensure never another renewal notice and are deductible to the fullest extent of the law, as are all dues and donations.

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

**A Note to Members**  
Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and “Private Line.” If it says December 2014 or earlier please renew! Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 gung-ho; \$25-student) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in Jan/Feb and June/July. Send membership or renewal to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701.  
[ffrf.org/donate](http://ffrf.org/donate)

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## 7th Circuit throws out 'parsonage exemption' challenge on standing

# FFRF: 'You'll hear from us again'

FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor said they will continue to seek a way to bring down the discriminatory "parsonage exemption" after an appeals court on Nov. 13 overturned a district court ruling, saying they had no standing to sue.

"You'll hear from us again," the plaintiff couple promised, after criticizing the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, one of the country's most conservative appellate courts, for "timidity" in refusing to confront "this blatant preference for ministers and churches."

The panel, in a unanimous decision written by Judge Joel Flaum, vacated a favorable ruling a year ago by U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb for the Western District of Wisconsin, declaring unconstitutional 26 U.S.C. § 107(2). The 1954 bill's sponsor, Rep. Peter Mack, argued ministers should be rewarded for "carrying on such a courageous fight against this [godless and anti-religious world movement]."

The generous law allows "ministers of the gospel" to be paid through a housing allowance that can be excluded from taxable income. Ministers may use the untaxed income to purchase a home and, in a practice known as

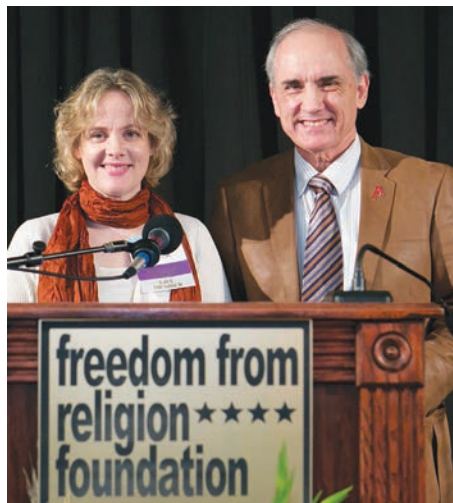


Photo: Brent Nicastro

Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker

"double dipping," deduct interest paid on the mortgage and property taxes.

"It's important to note," said attorney Richard L. Bolton, who handled the litigation, "that the court's opinion in no way reflects that the housing allowance is constitutional." As Flaum himself noted, the court did "not reach the issue of the constitutionality of the parsonage exemption."

In fact, the court seemed to acknowledge that the law is discriminatory, saying "the mere fact that discrimination is occurring is not enough to establish

standing."

FFRF sets aside a portion of the co-presidents' salaries as a "housing allowance," which, under the IRS code, the couple is not eligible to claim, as they are not "ministers of the gospel," but instead espouse atheism, freethought and secularism.

Gaylor and Barker took issue with the appeals court's cavalier assessment that they have suffered no concrete injury, since they must pay taxes on their housing allowance, while ministers are rewarded, simply for being religious leaders, with a unique and substantial tax benefit.

"We'll continue to challenge this indefensible favoritism for religion in other forums until the issue can-

not be circumvented," Barker promised. Barker is a former minister who was rewarded with this subsidy when he was "Rev. Barker" the believer, but is now penalized as "Mr. Barker" the freethought leader.

Virtually all major denominations and many minor congregations weighed in, with amicus briefs against FFRF's challenge to religious privilege, including Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Unitarian and Muslim.

"The entitlement and privilege which religion and its leaders demand is discriminatory, and clearly signals governmental preference and subsidy for the promulgation of religion over nonreligion," Gaylor charged.

Stay tuned!



**When Dan Barker was a Christian minister, working for a nonprofit organization (a church) that promotes the concept of God, he took advantage of the IRS clergy housing allowance exclusion. Now that he works for the Freedom From Religion Foundation, a nonprofit that challenges the concept of God, he no longer gets the benefit.**

## FFRF sues Wisconsin over open records violation

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has filed its first lawsuit over a violation of open records law, after a track record of taking more than 60 Establishment Clause lawsuits.

In a suit filed Dec. 17 in Dane County Circuit Court, FFRF charges that Wisconsin open records law was violated by the state Office of the Commissioner of Insurance and Commissioner Theodore Nickel. In addition to FFRF, Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott is a plaintiff.

Elliott made a series of open records requests of the Office of the Commissioner after a reported agency decision that Wisconsin's contraceptive man-

date, known as the Contraceptive Equity Law, would no longer be enforced because it was preempted by the June 30 *Hobby Lobby* ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court.

FFRF and many other observers disagreed, since the Religious Freedom Restoration Act under which the ruling was decided applies only to the federal government, not states.

On July 21, the right-wing news outlet MediaTrackers quoted J.P. Wieske, OCI legislative liaison and public information officer, as stating the Contraceptive Equity Law was "pre-empted." MediaTrackers reported that the state would not enforce the law. Legitimate news sources then piggy-backed on MediaTrackers' story.

Elliott first made a records request July 22 about OCI's enforcement of contraceptive coverage requirements, including Nickel's authority to disregard state law. Elliott followed up July 25 with further requests.

When more than a month had lapsed, Elliott again contacted the agency on Aug. 25. Although that resulted in 16 pages of documents, much of the requests were denied or not responded to. Elliott contested the denial in an Aug. 29 letter, which also was not responded to, then requested records from the Office of the Governor, including any communications with the OCI related to Wisconsin's contraceptive mandate.

Although Gov. Scott Walker's office made two denials, it otherwise yielded 36 pages of documents, including some communications with OCI that OCI had failed to provide to comply with FFRF's request.

The law says responses must be provided "as soon as practicable and without delay." FFRF charges that OCI violated numerous portions of the

law and seeks an order directing the defendants to produce the requested records, award reasonable attorneys' fees, damages of not less than \$100, punitive damages and other actual costs.

"Let there be sunlight," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, who thanked the firm of McGillivray Westerberg & Bender for representing FFRF.

## Hobby Lobby bible class trumped

*Continued from front page*

board to circumvent open meetings laws by inviting school representatives to meet at Hobby Lobby headquarters in nearby Oklahoma City on the same day in two different groups at different times.

Hobby Lobby's first commitment, according to its website, is "Honoring the Lord in all we do by operating the company in a manner consistent with biblical principles." The company brought a challenge resulting in a 5-4 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court

that said corporations with religious objections could defy the contraceptive mandate of the Affordable Care Act. Green is also planning an \$800 million bible museum to open in 2017 in Washington, D.C., clearly intended to influence Congress.

"This development is a victory not only for reason and the law but for the inviolable right of a captive audience of students to be free from indoctrination in a public school setting," commented Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

### Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

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

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

FFRF  
P.O. Box 750  
Madison WI 53701

*Freedom Depends on Freethinkers*

### Correction

A letter to the editor in the November issue was from Kathleen, not Kathryn, Yagelo. Our apologies.



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • [ffrf.org](http://ffrf.org)

### What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

The Foundation's e-mail address is [info@ffrf.org](mailto: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](mailto:info@ffrf.org).



# Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

## PHILOSOPHY

### 1. BLAISE PASCAL

Pascal, reflecting tearfully  
On our wars for the Holy Pigeon,  
Said, “Alas, we do evil most cheerfully  
When we do it for religion.”

### 2. RENÉ DESCARTES

The unruly dactyls and anapests  
Were thumping their wild dithyrambic  
When Descartes with a scowl very sternly stressed:  
“I think, therefore iambic!”

### 3. THOMAS HOBBS

Better at thinking than loving,  
He deserved his wife’s retort:  
On their wedding night, she told him, “Tom,  
That was nasty, brutish—and short!”

© Philip Appleman, 2009  
From the book *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie*



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

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

He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both “Afterlife” Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Phil’s books: [ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop).

## YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

### TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

produced by the  
Freedom From Religion  
Foundation



Hosted by Dan Barker and  
Annie Laurie Gaylor

Broadcasts and streams via i-HEART-Radio Saturdays at 11 a.m. Central, “Progressive Talk” The Mic 92.1 FM, Madison, Wis., and over several other stations.  
iTunes or podcasts archived at: [ffrf.org/news/radio](http://ffrf.org/news/radio)

Slightly irreverent views,  
news, music & interviews



## Overheard

We still have lots of people who, well, go by the bible. For example, the people in the Bible Belt. And they’re never going to be for gay marriage. Just listen to the “Duck Dynasty” guy. Because they believe this nonsense that’s in the old book of Jewish fairy tales, as I call the bible.

**Pundit Bill Maher, interview before his stage show in Jackson, Miss.**  
*Clarion-Ledger*, 11-12-14

Why put a priest who covered up sexual abuse in charge of policing it? That’s exactly what Pope Francis did when he appointed the Rev. Robert J. Geisinger as the Vatican’s “promoter of justice.” While the pope has met with abuse victims and pledged himself to zero tolerance, the appointment of Geisinger is a step backward. To signal his resolve on an issue that has deeply wounded so many, he should rescind the appointment.

**Editorial board column, “Wrong priest for the job”**  
*Boston Globe*, 12-2-14

**Bible’s Abraham to Be Tried in New York**  
**Headline about a synagogue’s mock trial, with Eliot Spitzer prosecuting Abraham and Alan Dershowitz defending him on charges of attempted murder and endangering the welfare of his son Isaac**  
*Wall Street Journal*, 11-13-14

We didn’t rebel against the crown because of religion. The Founders were not the Pilgrims. The two groups were from different centuries. Think the telegraph in relation to the iPhone.  
**Tina Dupuy, New York writer and investigative journalist, “Think Over ‘Under God’”**  
*tinadupuy.com*, 11-13-14

Funders like the National Christian Foundation (\$1.2 billion in assets), the Koch Brothers and the Green (of Hob-

by Lobby fame), DeVos, Ahmanson and Templeton foundations, continue to pour money into the “religious liberty” movement, funding organizations like Alliance Defending Freedom, the Becket Fund, the Ethics and Public Policy Center (headed by key leaders of The Gathering), the First Amendment Partnership and a variety of pseudo-autonomous state groups like the Center for Arizona Policy, Sutherland Institute (Utah) and dozens of others.

**Columnist and LGBT activist Jay Michaelson**  
*The Daily Beast*, 11-16-14

I just think it’s very exciting. We need that holiness to be here so that it’ll touch other people. He’ll touch everyone.  
**Elaine Barnes, Lake Ariel, Pa., on Pope Francis’ visit to Philadelphia next September**  
*PAhomepage.com*, 11-17-14

Sadly, the cost of belonging to those right-wing churches is this: that they demean or put down those deemed to be “Other” — those who are not part of their community. These “others” (including feminists, African-Americans, immigrants, gays and lesbians, and increasingly all liberals) are blamed for the ethos of selfishness and breakdown of loving relationships and families.  
**Rabbi Michael Lerner, “GOP’s Secret Weapon: How Right-Wing Churches Turn the 99% into the Tea Party”**  
*Salon.com*, 11-10-14

Show me ONE fossil, ANYWHERE [sic] in the world that is a “miss,” a creature in between two creatures as it evolved? Doesn’t exist.  
**Tweet by Curt Schilling, former Red Sox pitcher and ESPN sports analyst, denying the validity of the theory of evolution**  
*deadspin.com*, 11-14-14



Declare and share your nonbelief in FFRF’s online “Out of the Closet” campaign!  
[ffrf.org/out](http://ffrf.org/out)



# Colorado high court slams door on nonreligious in prayer suit

FFRF strongly criticized the Nov. 24 decision by the Colorado State Supreme Court against FFRF and four of its Colorado members, who were told they had no standing to sue the governor over his annual proclamation urging citizens to set aside a day for prayer.

Chief Justice Nancy Rice delivered the court’s 5–2 ruling that said that the psychic harm suffered by FFRF members—Mike Smith, David Habecker, Timothy Bailey and Jeff Baysinger—isn’t “injury sufficient to establish individual standing.” Despite the fact that taxpayer standing is broad under Colorado law, the justices also called the “incidental overhead costs” insufficient to establish taxpayer standing.

Dissenting was Justice William Hood III, joined by Justice Gregory Hobbs Jr., who warned “we turn a deaf ear to citizens” who have concerns about religious freedom. Hood wrote that the court is confusing “the issue of when an individual’s claim should be heard with when it should prevail.”

FFRF has more 650 Colorado members and chapters in Denver and Colorado Springs, and 21,500 nationally.

Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor noted, “Under today’s precedent, if Gov. John Hickenlooper decided to proclaim a state religion, no state citizen would have the right to challenge him. That’s shocking.”

“Being formally told to pray every year by their governor is what the Colorado Constitution so obviously sought to protect citizens from,” added Co-President Dan Barker. “This decision guts the no-preference clause of the state constitution that says no preference shall be ‘given by law to any re-

ligious denomination or mode of worship.’”

A state Court of Appeals panel ruled 3–0 in May 2010 in favor of FFRF’s challenge of Colorado Day of Prayer proclamations.

“A reasonable observer would conclude that these proclamations send the message that those who pray are favored members of Colorado’s political community, and that those who do not pray do not enjoy that favored status,” appeals Judge Steve Bernard wrote.

FFRF filed the suit in 2008 after then-Gov. Bob Ritter spoke at an exclusive, private Colorado Day of Prayer celebration on the State Capitol steps in 2007.

FFRF won a historic U.S. district court ruling, *FFRF v. Obama*, in 2010 that declared the federal National Day of Prayer unconstitutional. The suit



The honorary chairman of the National Day of Prayer Task Force this year is Jack Graham of PowerPoint Ministries in Plano, Texas. He’s also pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church, which has a 7,000-seat worship center and a pre-K-12 school. Day of Prayer critics have consistently noted the pervasive Christian evangelical bent of the annual event.

(On a related note, FFRF Staff Attorneys Elizabeth Cavell and Andrew Seidel are looking forward to hearing a cry of a different sort on May 7, Liz’s recently announced due date. Coincidence? We think not!)

demonstrated the religious origins of the 1952 and 1988 acts of Congress, with Rev. Billy Graham and other evangelists pushing for the laws. The evangelical National Day of Prayer Task Force — based at Focus on the Family headquarters in Colorado Springs and chaired by Shirley Dobson — has essentially acted as an arm of the government since 1988.

In 2011, the conservative 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals threw out FFRF’s standing.

“We thank our all-important state plaintiffs. We’re indignant on their behalf that courthouse doors are being slammed shut against citizens whose freedom of conscience is being violated so blatantly by theocratic elected officials,” Barker added.

Richard L. Bolton served as litigation attorney. and noted that the high court ruled only that the plaintiffs lacked standing and not that the governor’s practice is constitutional.

## Islam-pushing prof gets FFRF attention

Professor Daoud Nassimi’s “Introduction to Islam” course crosses the line from objective religious teaching to proselytization, said a recent complaint letter from FFRF to Northern Virginia Community College in Annandale.

“[T]his class has been used to proselytize students and advance belief in the existence of a god in an attempt to prove religious belief correct,” wrote Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott and Legal Fellow Katherine Paige.

An audio recording and PowerPoint slides from a lecture show that Nassimi’s class is “a one-sided monologue by a government-paid employee whose

agenda is to show the truth of religion—namely, the existence of a god.”

Nassimi also has belittled atheists and other nonbelievers. When one student expressed concern on the class website, Nassimi responded, “The reality is that science does not offer any support for the claims of those who deny God, but they are using science as a cover to hide their agenda. Please note that this course is ‘Introduction to Islam.’ So, I will be offering Islam’s position and views all along the semester, whether anyone likes it or not.”

In one lecture, he called people who deny God’s existence “worse than animals,” because they have human

intelligence and still “[go] so low and wild to deny the source of their own existence.”

“The primary legal issue with this class is Prof. Nassimi’s active promotion of his personal religious views. This is not a question of Prof. Nassimi’s free speech—Prof. Nassimi is abusing his government position,” wrote FFRF. “Given his inability to separate his teaching duties from his religious sensibilities, we fail to see how he can conduct a collegiate course on Islam or religion.”

An attorney for the Virginia Community College System responded, saying it was conducting a review.

### Overheard

I still believe that Islam often stands in opposition to human rights and women’s rights. I believe that the Quran relays that Muhammad demanded death for nonbelievers. Many Muslims may disagree with my view, or interpret Islam in a more moderate way, but I cannot accept this religion myself. That is what my conscience tells me.

**Waleed Al Hussein, who was beaten by guards while serving 10 months in a Palestinian prison for blasphemy and now lives in France**

*The Daily Beast, 12-8-14*



## ‘Out Of The Closet’ Chicago!



The Freedom From Religion Foundation with Tom Cara, intrepid director of FFRF Metropolitan Chicago Chapter, will be leasing a series of “Out of the Closet” billboards in Chicagoland from mid-December through early February. The billboards feature area FFRF members and freethinkers with their own slogans, and are intended to dispel myths, educate and encourage atheists and other nonbelievers to speak out. Above are two of the billboards expected to be placed in December. The January/February issue will carry complete details.

### Equal time

FFRF member Steve King struck a blow for reason in a Manassas, Va., city park by coordinating placement of a winter solstice banner near a Christian nativity scene.





# FFRF legal victories span range of issues

## FFRF ends several school violations

Prairie Crossing Charter School in Grayslake, Ill., resolved several constitutional violations after getting an FFRF letter.

Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote the school’s executive director July 8 to object to an assembly during the school day marking the installation of a “Freedom Shrine.” The mandatory assembly opened and closed with prayers. The Freedom Shrine was installed in a school building with a plaque engraved with the Pledge of Allegiance, on which the line “one nation under God” was in a larger, different colored and bolded font.

“Though teaching students about the history of our nation is a commendable goal, allowing an outside group to insert religious messages into a school assembly gives the appearance that PCCS endorses that group’s religious messages,” wrote Grover.

The director responded Nov. 7, informing FFRF that the school would prescreen future third-party presentations, watching for potential state/church violations. He also said the school removed the pledge plaque and held a staff meeting “to reiterate the neutrality toward religion in a public school.”

## Sewer biller, cop emails go secular

A Seminole County, Fla., employee in the water and sewer billing department will no longer include a bible verse in her email signature.

Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote the county attorney Oct. 10 of behalf of FFRF, saying, “The statements of a government employee are attributable to Seminole County. It is inappropriate and unconstitutional for the county or its agents to promote a religious message because it conveys government

preference for religion over nonreligion.”

The attorney replied Oct. 13 to say that the bible quote had been removed from the email signature and assuring FFRF that the county “does not, by administrative policy, countenance any dissemination of religious preference in its customer communications and is fully aware of the legal mandate for government neutrality in matters religious and nonreligious.”

• • •

A University of Colorado police officer at the Colorado Springs campus removed a religious email signature after Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel’s Sept. 25 complaint letter to the university.

“For he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer,” read the officer’s email.

The university responded Nov. 18, saying that the officer met with his supervisor, who instructed him to remove the religious signature. The university also reviewed his email account several weeks later and reported that no additional religious emails were found.

## Schools turn down Mormon invite

Two public high schools in Kalispell, Mont., declined this year’s invitation to participate in a performance “celebrating the birth of our savior Jesus Christ” at a Mormon church after FFRF objected to the school’s participation last year.

“Because this event includes literally hundreds of depictions of the birth of Jesus Christ as described in the bible, school participation in this overtly religious ‘Community Christmas Celebration’ event crosses the line by creating a perception of school endorsement of the religious aspects of Christmas,” wrote Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel on

Nov. 29, 2013.

The Flathead Area Secular Humanist Association in Whitefish told FFRF that the schools’ choir directors turned down an invitation to participate this year. Often, a school district or other governmental body will make the changes FFRF requests and then fail to report the action taken, as was the case here.

FFRF is grateful to the Flathead group for the update and encourages other local complainants to be sure to let FFRF know when its letters make a difference.

## Letter benches praying coaches

A public charter school has taken steps to ensure its participation in a religious sports league remains secular, pursuant to an FFRF letter.

Seashore Middle Academy in Corpus Christi, Texas, participates in the Parochial Sports League. A local complainant forwarded FFRF a photo of students and coaches participating in a prayer circle. Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote the school Sept. 30 asking it to refrain from further participation in religious rituals at school events.

The school director responded Oct. 2, saying that a pregame prayer circle was a league requirement, but added that in the future, coaches would sit on the bench during prayers and that Seashore students could join coaches on the bench, stand to the side or participate in the prayer.

## Gideons wear out their welcomes

The Itawamba County School District in Fulton, Miss., will not conduct bible distributions in the future. FFRF received a report that representatives from Gideons International distributed bibles at Itawamba Attendance Cen-

ter to “momentarily preach the word of God” and then “asked students to raise their hands if they wanted a bible.”

Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote the district superintendent Sept. 23, noting, “Even if the students are not forced to accept these bibles, the school sends a clear message to the children in its charge who are nonadherents ‘that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community and accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.’ ”

The superintendent responded Nov. 7, saying that the district “will not facilitate the distribution of Gideon bibles to fifth graders on school grounds during school hours.”

• • •

Cushing Public Schools, Cushing, Okla., is ending Gideon bible distribution after getting a Nov. 12 letter from Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel. The Gideons had reportedly visited a fifth-grade classroom at Harrison Elementary, where they discussed the bible and passed out bibles to students.

The superintendent responded promptly two days later, writing, “Please be assured that Cushing Public Schools will no longer allow representatives of Gideons International to enter classrooms to have discussions with students or to distribute bibles to students.”

## FFRF puts clamps on coach prayer

Long Beach High School in Long Beach, Miss., has ended two school-sponsored prayer rituals at football games. Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote the district Sept. 26.

Traditionally, a student led a Christian prayer over the loudspeaker before every football game. In addition, the high school band, led by the drum major, recited the Lord’s Prayer before its halftime performances.

Grover noted that while student-led prayer is permissible, there was significant institutional pressure on the drum major to lead the prayer because it was “tradition.”

An attorney for the district called Grover on Nov. 17 to say that prayers would no longer be led over the loudspeaker, and that while students remained free to pray by themselves, band prayer would no longer be institutionalized.

• • •

A coach in the Wimberley Independent School District in Texas will no longer pray with students or endorse students’ prayers. Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote Wimberley’s superintendent Sept. 25, detailing a report that Wimberley High School’s athletic director and head football coach led the team in prayer at the end of every football game, and that coaches also engaged in smaller prayer circles with players before games.

FFRF’s complainant said the letter led to the coach calling for a moment of silence right after his postgame talk to the team, after which he allegedly put his hands on the shoulders of two players, one of whom immediately led the students in prayer. Grover wrote a second letter Nov. 7.

The school’s attorney responded Nov. 17 that the coach no longer leads

# Secular ‘stars’ fall on Alabama

Over the last few months, an atheist and a Wiccan have given the invocation at the Huntsville (Ala.) City Council meeting, thanks in part to FFRF’s efforts.

The council approved a Wiccan priest to give an invocation, but when it discovered his religious affiliation refused to let him deliver it. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent the council a letter June 27 protesting that decision and asking the council for permission to have a local FFRF member, an atheist, give an invocation at a later meeting. “Kowtowing to majority fears about a minority religion is simply using the heckler’s veto,” wrote Seidel. “It is not a permissible reason to discriminate, censor speech, and otherwise trample the Constitution underfoot.”

The council relented, permitting FFRF member Kelly McCauley (also a North Alabama Freethought Association board member) to give the first atheist-led “invocation” Sept. 25 at an Alabama government meeting. (See Kelly’s remarks at right.) Wiccan priest Blake Kirk delivered his invocation Nov. 6.

*Note: After the May 5 Supreme Court*

**Kelly McCauley**  
**Huntsville City Council, Sept. 25, 2014**

Dearly Beloved:

When the ancients considered the values that were proper and necessary for the good governance of a peaceful, productive society, they brought to our minds the virtues of Wisdom, Courage, Justice and Moderation. These values have stood the test of time.

In more recent days, an American style of governance has led to approbation for newer enlightened values; we celebrate diversity, we enjoy protections of our freedoms in a Constitutional Republic, and we dearly value egalitarianism — equal protection of the law.

So now let us commence the affairs that are presented to our community. Let Doubt and Skepticism and Inquiry be on our lookout when caution is the appropriate course. But also let innovation and boldness take point when opportunities for excellence appear on our horizon.

In this solemn discourse, let’s remember Jefferson’s words: “. . . that Truth is great, and will prevail if left to herself, that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict, unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons free argument and debate, errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them.”

Let it be so.

*decision **Greece v. Galloway**, government prayers are difficult to challenge. In response, FFRF is encouraging atheists to*

*give irreverent or secular messages in place of those prayers with its **Nothing Fails Like Prayer** contest.*



or participates in prayers, asks students to pray or designates a student to pray or participate in prayers. The coach was instructed to step away from student-led prayer and to tell students and parents that he neither encouraged nor discouraged prayer, said the attorney.

...

Celina Independent School District in Texas will no longer permit coaches to participate in prayer circles with students. Staff Attorney Sam Grover sent a letter to the district Nov. 13, describing a local complainant's report of widespread coach participation in prayer circles.

An attorney for the district responded Nov. 25 to say that the district would discuss participation in prayer with staff and "provide training to ensure that employees do not participate in student-led prayer at any school-sponsored events in the future."

...

FFRF originally contacted Middletown City Schools in Ohio last spring about high school football coach Chris Wells leading students in prayer and inviting them to his church. The district assured FFRF that administrators had met with Wells and told him that his actions crossed the constitutional line.

But in September, FFRF received a report from a new complainant that Wells was again leading prayers before and after every game. Wells allegedly told players after a Sept. 19 losing game that they needed to rededicate themselves to God and ordered them to take a knee and pray. When one player refused, the coach allegedly threw him off the team.

"Coach Wells is purposefully and willfully ignoring the law and the district's explicit directive," wrote Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert in a second letter of complaint.

An attorney for the district responded in November, saying administrators reiterated to Wells that he could not "involve religion in any way in either his coaching or in his involvement with

students. The athletic director was directed to monitor the situation closely. "Should you receive any more complaints, please let me know, so that the district can investigate and take further action," the attorney's response said.

### Charter school ends lunch prayer

Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy's Grammar School in Forest City, N.C., has ended teacher-led prayer and implemented a new policy on religion after a Nov. 6 complaint by Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott on behalf of a parent. A second-grade teacher led students in prayer before lunch each day.

The parent was later told the prayers would be replaced with a moment of silence, but the teacher reportedly instead called on a student to lead the prayer.

Elliott noted that a moment of silence did not cure the problem because it was clearly intended for prayer.

The principal responded Dec. 1, attaching an extensive new policy the charter school's governing board had adopted clarifying that while students remain free to pray on their own, "School administrators and teachers may not organize or encourage prayer exercises in classrooms. The right of religious expression in school does not include the right to have a captive audience listen, or to compel other students to participate."

### Religious brochures removed in Tennessee

FFRF's complaint letter prompted the Blount County Sheriff's Office in Maryville, Tenn., to remove a box of religious brochures from the waiting room.

The brochures depicted Jesus, included a prayer and were the only brochures displayed. Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert called the material inappropriate and unconstitutional in

a July letter.

The county's attorney responded Nov. 17, reporting that an investigation showed that staff had indeed placed the brochures and that they had been removed.

### FFRF ousts Christ from Ala. parade

FFRF received word Dec. 1 that a city-sponsored "Keep Christ in Christmas"-themed parade meant to "reflect our strong belief in prayers" would be re-titled the "City of Piedmont Christmas Parade." An attorney for the city of Piedmont, Ala., wrote a letter notifying Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel that the parade would be renamed pursuant to FFRF's request.

FFRF sent a letter Nov. 24, challenging the unconstitutional theme on behalf of a local complainant. The theme "alienates non-Christians and others in Piedmont who do not in fact have a 'strong belief in prayers' by turning them into political outsiders in their own community," wrote Seidel, explaining that a "Keep Christ in Christmas" parade was not a permissible secular Christmas celebration.

FFRF also wrote to Piedmont City Schools after the official Piedmont High School Facebook page advertised the parade. The post has since been edited to reflect the revised theme.

### School won't censor secular websites

Round Rock Independent School District in Texas unblocked several secular websites after Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote the district Oct. 17 about its discriminatory policy. The district's filtering software left sites affiliated with Catholicism, Islam and Scientology unblocked while filtering atheist sites as "alternative beliefs."

"Schools may not ban information based on a 'dislike of the ideas,'" wrote Grover.

The superintendent responded Oct. 21 that the district was in the process of unblocking the sites mentioned. FFRF confirmed Nov. 14 they were unblocked.

### It's a (creationist) zoo out there

After getting an FFRF letter, Skiatook Public Schools in Oklahoma revised a Pledge of Allegiance worksheet that emphasized the phrase "under God" and decided it would no longer take students to a creationist zoo where students were taught about "God's miracles" and the biblical flood.

It also did not include a prayer at a Veterans Day ceremony, a change from last year's celebration.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote a letter Oct. 30 outlining the constitutional violation. An attorney for the district responded Nov. 20, informing FFRF of the changes.

### FFRF stands up for seated students

Students in the Washoe County School District in Nevada will no longer compel students to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. A district parent contacted FFRF, reporting that a student was ordered to stand for the pledge and was ordered to leave class, counted absent and not allowed back into class after refusing to stand.

"Courts have reiterated over and over again that students have a constitutional right not to be forced to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance or to be compelled to stand for its recitation," wrote Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel in an Oct. 22 letter.

The district's general counsel replied, saying that he distributed a districtwide memo "reminding our school principals that students must not be compelled to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance or be harassed for remaining seated."

## Meet an active member

**Name:** Todd L. Erickson.  
**Where I live:** Atwater, in west-central Minnesota. I spend winters in Mesa, Ariz.  
**Where and when I was born:** Willmar, Minn., May 21, 1958.  
**Family:** My father, 88, my mother, 82, and six brothers.  
**Education:** Electronics technology degree from Northwest Electronics Institute in Minneapolis.  
**Occupation:** Retired telephone company worker, 31 years; real estate investor and tree grower.  
**Military service:** Five years in the Minnesota National Guard. I'm a member of Veterans for Peace and a critic of the excessive military spending and imperialism of our government. We should rededicate many of those billions of dollars to things like higher education.  
**How I got where I am today:** I grew up on a farm and moved to Minneapolis after high school. Working for a large corporation, I valued the concept of being organized as workers. I served 16 years as an elected union representative. I've been involved with politics ever since.  
**Where I'm headed:** I'm finding more time for the things I enjoy. I spent a month in early 2014 explor-

ing Ecuador. Australia is next on my list. I work on retiree issues with the National Retiree Legislative Network's Arizona chapter.  
**People in history I admire:** Clarence Darrow and other lawyers who follow that type of legal service. He represented labor and other causes well during turbulent times. Also, George Carlin, Julia Sweeney and others who use humor to talk about the craziness of religion.  
**Quotations I like:** "There was a time when religion ruled the world. It is known as the Dark Ages." (Ruth Hurmence Green). I like the bumper sticker that says "The bible was written by the same people who said the earth was flat."  
**These are a few of my favorite things:** Hiking, disc golf, bicycling, friends, movies, books, music, documentaries, parties and travel.  
**These are not:** Our complicated, expensive health care system. People and organizations who are anti-woman, anti-choice, anti-gay, anti-science, anti-labor. Hate talk radio/TV.  
**My doubts about religion started:** My Lutheran upbringing was mild. I quit going to church after confirmation and mainly ignored/tolerated liberal religion. I learned from my

**Todd Erickson and giant tortoises roam free on one of the Galápagos Islands, visited in 1835 by Charles Darwin and now part of Ecuador.**



father's parenting skills to question authority. The Religious Right got my attention with their intolerant theories and policies in my 30s. I had more and more questions about the truth of the bible and the reason for religion.  
I bought *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins at Mayday Books on the West Bank in Minneapolis on 12-27-07 and have called myself an atheist ever since. I have read dozens of books on this subject to get myself up to speed. It's been quite the eye opener.  
**Before I die:** I hope to learn to play guitar and sing country and folk songs that appeal to me.  
**Ways I promote freethought:** It has taken quite awhile, but I'm ready and willing to let people know that I'm a

proud nonbeliever when it comes to religion. I do get letters to the editor published on religious issues — lots of right-wing religious nuts in Arizona.  
**I've made life easier by:** Avoiding debt and being on the frugal side of things have made money matters less stressful.  
**I like this about FFRF:** Friendly staff, talented and well-spoken attorneys, outstanding leadership of Annie Laurie and Dan. I treasure each issue of Freethought Today. I like FFRF's appreciation of the history of freethinkers. I like the music and humor. I value being part of the greater freethought community. I enjoy the annual conventions. Thanks to FFRF and FFRF members for what you do!



## 37th national FFRF convention speech

# Prayer plaintiff: ‘View from under the bus’

*Linda Stephens and co-plaintiff Susan Galloway accepted Freethinker of the Year awards at the Los Angeles convention on October 25.*

By Linda Stephens

Good evening. I too would like to thank Annie Laurie and Dan and FFRF for this award. I am a longtime admirer of this organization, so this is a real honor.

I am Linda Stephens, the atheist plaintiff in the *Town of Greece* prayer case, the plaintiff who, you may have heard, got thrown under the bus at the Supreme Court.

Here’s how it all began: In 2002, I belonged to People for Parks, a parks advocacy group which had some issues with a town supervisor. That’s when I first started attending town board meetings and became aware that the new supervisor had started opening meetings with prayers delivered exclusively by conservative Christian pastors. Naturally, I thought this was wrong, but I just grumbled about it and did nothing.

Then, over time, I became aware of other inappropriate things that the supervisor was doing, such as hosting prayer services in the Town Hall every Jan. 1 and giving one of the churches government funds to put on its Fourth of July celebration.

I eventually learned that there was a local chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State in Rochester, so I ended up joining that group, got on their board and started getting monthly newsletters. I read about AU’s lawsuit in Forsyth County, N.C. It involved a situation very similar to what was going on in Greece, N.Y. The local government was opening meetings with Christian prayers, and the issue was being challenged in federal court by AU and the ACLU.

That’s what prompted me to speak with AU’s legal director in Washington about the situation in Greece. She asked if I knew of any other Greece residents who objected to these prayers. I put her in touch with Susan Galloway. Susan and I had both been active in the local chapter of the National Organization for Women, and I knew Susan’s views on this subject.

First, Susan and I met with town officials and asked them to stop the prayers. The deputy supervisor told us, no, they couldn’t do that because it would offend the pastors.

Next, AU legal staff tried to reason with the town. The supervisor ignored the letter.

AU then went ahead and filed a lawsuit in federal district court in Rochester in February 2008 on my and Susan’s behalf. The lawyers wanted to use the same argument that they, and the ACLU, were successfully using in the Forsyth County case. They wanted the court to rule that Greece was violating the First Amendment because the prayers were almost exclusively sectarian.

To be clear, AU was not arguing that the prayers in Greece should be abolished altogether. They were arguing that in order to be in compliance with the First Amendment, the prayers would have to be nonsectarian.

We would have preferred to ask the court to declare all prayers before the Greece Town Board unconstitutional, but there was a problem with that. In 1983, in the *Marsh v. Chambers* decision, the Supreme Court had ruled that prayers before government meetings were legal so long as they were nonsectarian and delivered to a generic god without bringing up specifics of particular religions, such as Jesus.

You may wonder why I, an atheist, was willing to go along with this argument. My thinking at the time was this: The overwhelming number of pastors who delivered prayers in Greece had made it clear, in the paper and elsewhere, that they could never deliver nonsectarian prayers, that they were compelled by their religion to pray to Jesus.

So, I thought to myself, if the court buys the nonsectarian prayer argument, most of the supervisor’s pastors will bow out and that will end the prayer business in Greece. Problem solved.

Well, that’s not the way it went down. District Judge Charles Siragusa, a Bill Clinton appointee, didn’t buy the nonsectarian prayer argument and ruled against us. We then appealed to the 2nd Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals

in New York City, and a three-judge panel ruled in our favor.

The court held that the town had violated the Establishment Clause by having “a steady drumbeat” of Christian prayers at meetings and for several other reasons. But the court did not like the nonsectarian prayer argument. As Judge Guido Calabresi, who wrote the decision, explained, requiring nonsectarian prayers would be in itself an establishment of religion, an establishment of the “OK” religions, of the religions that are sufficiently acceptable to the majority.

And, as Judge Calabresi also pointed out, the problem with nonsectarian prayers is that they leave out secularists, and of course people of minority faiths who pray to multiple gods.

### Whether this new policy is just a ruse to keep atheists out is still unknown.

### Supremes take the case

After losing in the appeals court, the town and its Alliance Defending Freedom lawyers appealed to the Supreme Court. Our lawyers were a little nervous about that, but not real worried because the Supreme Court gets about 7,000 or 8,000 requests to hear cases each year and only take about 80 of those.

But the prayer case had one thing going against it. Similar cases were being litigated all over the country, and lower courts were coming down on different sides of the issue. Some courts were buying the nonsectarian prayer argument and others weren’t. When such a situation occurs, the Supreme Court is more likely to step in, which is exactly what happened.

Now our lawyers started getting worried. They knew what kind of Supreme Court they were up against. They also suspected that atheists and the rights of atheists were not high priority items for most of these justices. Justice Scalia, for example, had just recently given a widely reported speech in which he said that it was “utterly absurd to say that the Constitution cannot favor religion over nonreligion.”

The lawyers decided to stick with the nonsectarian prayer argument and soft-pedal much mention of atheists. By this time, I had become less than thrilled with the nonsectar-



Supreme Court plaintiff Linda Stephens. (Photo by Ingrid Laas)

ian prayer argument, particularly after what the appeals and district courts had said about it. I brought up my concerns in a conference call with Susan and the AU legal department. But at this point, the legal staff was insistent and said we couldn’t switch horses in midstream.

Now I started worrying what our lawyer would say if one of the justices asked why an atheist would want nonsectarian prayer. But our lawyer told me not to worry — if that question were asked, she would give a “layered response.”

It turned out there would be no layered response because the legal staff decided to have a law professor from the University of Virginia argue the case. His name was Douglas Laycock.

### ‘Under the bus’

Susan and I met Laycock for the first time on Nov. 6, 2013, on the day of oral arguments. Early on, Chief Justice Roberts asked Laycock, “We’ve excluded the atheists, right?”

Astonishingly, the professor agreed. I’m sitting there listening to this and wanting to sink under my seat. Professor Laycock, it appeared, had chosen to ignore the fact that one of his clients is an atheist.

Then we’re pushed outside in front of the TV cameras, and all I can think of to say is, “Atheists need to come out of the closet like the gay community.”

Then the reporters and the bloggers start writing about this. The headline in *The Economist* is “Atheists thrown under the bus.”

Dahlia Lithwick, who reports on the Supreme Court for *Slate* magazine, told an audience at a conference the same thing: “Atheists were thrown under the bus.” And I’m told that the atheist Twitter community barraged the AU legal staff with tweets, the basic theme of which was “WTF” (What The F\*\*\*).

Ron Lindsay, the president of the Center for Inquiry, wrote a blistering piece on the CFI website titled “We’ve excluded the atheists, right?” In the article, Lindsay pointed out that the Establishment Clause was intended to protect minority rights, not the sentiments of the majority. He also acknowledged the reality that the court was not going to overturn the *Marsh* decision and outlaw prayer before government meetings. Then he proceeded to give a “layered response” to Justice Roberts’ question.

This is in part what Lindsay said Laycock should have said to Justice Roberts: “[I]f this court is going to allow prayer, it’s clear that if we want everyone to feel part of the political community, there are certain

*Continued on next page*



Linda Stephens with Florida attorney Steven Brady. (Photo by Andrew Seidel)



# ‘No sweat’ says legal staff after ‘race day’ complaint sprint

*These FFRF complaint letters were all drafted on Friday, Nov. 21, as part of a legal staff “race day” to get out as many letters as possible. They were edited and sent out over the following week. Legal staff sent out dozens more letters during the month.*

**Contact: Elk Grove Unified School District, Calif.**

Violation: After a church’s sign was taken down from school property pursuant to an FFRF letter, our local complainant reported the sign was back up.

**Contact: Miamisburg City Schools, Ohio; Zeeland Public Schools, Mich.; Madison County Schools, Fla.; Hardy County Schools, W.Va.; Willard Public Schools, Mo.**

Violation: These districts conducted bible distributions in schools. In Zeeland, a teacher reportedly stood by the table with the bibles and “told the kids she would like each one to take a bible home.”

**Contact: Paso Robles School Board, Calif.**

Violation: The board was considering implementing prayers at meetings.

**Contact: Colleton County School District, S.C.**

Violation: A district-wide mandatory employee meeting, where students were also present, included a prayer.

**Contact: Fish City Grill, Katy, Texas**

Violation: The restaurant offered a church bulletin discount.

**Contact: Wisconsin Department of Corrections**

Violation: The department secretary delivered a prayer at a Veterans Day event.

**Contact: U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Alameda County Sheriff’s Office, Calif.**

Violation: FFRF sent a records request regarding a SWAT training exercise that included a scenario where a “militant atheist extremist group” took hostages at a church.

**Contact: Bibb County Schools District, Centreville, Ala.**

Violation: Students at Randolph Elementary School went on a field trip to a church-owned pumpkin patch, where they were given name tags reading “Hay there, Jesus loves you” with a bible verse underneath. Bible verses also adorned students’ finger paintings and the fence where they took a class photo.

**Contact: Temecula Valley Unified School District, Calif.**

Violation: Good News Club signs were displayed outside LaVorgna Elementary and Temecula Valley Charter School.

**Contact: Eufaula Public Schools, Okla.**

Violation: FFRF submitted a records request after receiving a report that a church was permitted to use a school facility for free.

**Contact: Franklin County District Schools, Eastpoint, Fla.**

Violation: The district employs a team chaplain, who, along with coaches, leads students in prayer in the locker rooms and at practices and games.

**Contact: Gulf Coast Charter Academy South, Naples, Fla.**

Violation: Children were taught a song about angels and praying, the chorus of which was something to the effect

of “I believe in angels sent down from heaven.”

**Contact: Autauga County School System, Prattville, Ala.**

Violation: Two Prattville Primary School teachers led students in Christian prayer during the school day.

**Contact: St. Clairsville Schools, Ohio**

Violation: The St. Clairsville High School fall sports banquet included a religious invocation and benediction.

**Contact: Wylie ISD, Texas**

Violation: Several teachers’ Web pages on the district’s site had inappropriate religious references.

**Contact: Okaloosa County School District, Fort Walton Beach, Fla.**

Violation: Bob Sikes Elementary School’s music teacher taught students many religious songs and a lesson on the birth of Jesus to accompany the song “Away in a Manger.”

**Contact: Algoma School District, Wis.**

Violation: Algoma Elementary holds a “bible lesson” in the cafeteria each week. FFRF requested records related to the lessons.

**Contact: Collin County Clerk’s Office, Texas**

Violation: A tax collection clerk includes a religious signature line in her messages to residents from her county email: “Living He loved us, dying He saved us.”

**Contact: Waskom ISD, Texas**

Violation: The district was featured in a local news article that claimed the district “focuses on faith-based living,” describing how the district organizes prayers at many events and allows Gideons to distribute bibles that par-



Staff Attorney Sam Grover sent a complaint letter Nov. 19 to the school district in Belton, Texas, about this sign outside the nurse’s office at a middle school. The sign reads: “Wash your Hands and Say your prayers, because Germs and Jesus are Everywhere.”

ents must opt out of if they do not want their child to get one.

**Contact: Green Forest Public Schools, Ark.**

Violation: Green Forest High School included prayer at a mandatory Veterans Day assembly.

**Contact: Corsicana ISD, Texas**

Violation: High school football games, faculty meetings, the faculty end-of-year awards ceremony and graduation ceremonies all include prayer.

**Contact: Davidson County Schools, Lexington, N.C.**

Violation: A West Davidson High School history teacher inserts his Christian views into nearly all aspects of the curriculum, commenting that “the Earth is only a few thousand years old” and referring to dates occurring in “the year of our Lord and Savior.”

**Contact: Manchester City Schools, Tenn.**

Violation: Westwood Middle School faculty participated in a “See You at the Pole” prayer event. A mandatory district in-service also included prayer, at which employees were instructed to bow their heads and join.

**Contact: Marshall County School District, Benton, Ky.**

Violation: A flier for a program called “Kids in Training” at Benton First United Methodist Church was distributed to parents with school forms. No fliers for any other activities were distributed.

**Contact: Madison County School District, Miss.**

Violation: Many classroom doors at Madison Station Elementary have religious messages sent in by parents posted on them. Many contain bible quotes or tell students and teachers things like “you are being prayed for.”

**Contact: St. Elmo School District, Ill.**

Violation: Four signs reading “Plow the Land / Plant the Seed / Love Our God / Follow His Creed” were posted along a fence on school property.

**Contact: Calcasieu Parish Public Schools, Lake Charles, La.**

Violation: FFRF sent a records request to find out more about what appeared to be a teacher-run bible club.

**Contact: Merced City School District, Calif.**

Violation: Students at Ada Givens Elementary were instructed to put their hands together as if in prayer during the line “What’s more American than praying in a church of your choice across the land?” while singing the

*Continued on page 23*

## Linda Stephens — ‘View from under the bus’

*Continued from previous page*

things that must happen, one of which is that opportunities to open the business meeting must be offered to all, including to nonbelievers who are willing to deliver a solemn secular opening.”

### One positive result

Of course we all know the outcome of the case. The court didn’t buy the nonsectarian argument and instead said sectarian prayers were fine. (Go ahead, guys, pray to Jesus all you want.) But the ruling did include one positive thing. It said that if municipalities have prayers before meetings, they can’t bar non-Christians from delivering them.

So right after the decision came down, atheists and other secularists jumped on this and ran with it. They began delivering invocations at local government meetings all over the country, even in places like Huntsville, Ala.

In July, Dan Courtney delivered his atheist invocation at a Greece Town Board meeting where over 100 atheists and supporters showed up, along with a lone protester with a Jesus sign who refused to give his name to reporters.

This brings me to the present. According to the town’s new prayer policy, it appears that atheists might be allowed to deliver invocations at board meetings, but only if they meet certain requirements. Whether this new policy is just a ruse to keep atheists out is still



Linda Stephens at FFRF’s 2014 Los Angeles convention. (Photo by Ingrid Laas)

unknown.

In the meantime, we atheists are getting our ducks in order. We have requested that the Sunday Assembly, which is the new atheist “church” in Rochester, and the Atheist Community of Rochester both be allowed to participate in the delivery of invocations.

What is my final assessment of this Supreme Court decision? I’m glad the court did not buy the nonsectarian prayer argument. I think this whole thing has been good for atheists in one big way. It has helped raise the profile of atheists and other secularists in positive ways all over the country.

Locally, in Greece, it’s interesting

to see what’s been happening at the monthly board meetings lately. At the last two meetings, when the supervisor called on the designated Christian pastors to deliver the prayer, the pastors were nowhere to be found. They simply didn’t show up, and there was no explanation for their absence.

There has been speculation about why this is happening. It could be that the pastors don’t like the thought of sharing their platform with atheists. It could also be that they don’t like giving prayers that are now limited to one or two minutes at most. In the past, some of the pastors have given prayers that went on and on and on. It could also be that they aren’t able to deliver their prayers to the audience anymore. Now the podium faces the board members.

The final thing I would say is this court decision did not lay the issue to rest. There will be more litigation, and one day the Supreme Court may have to decide whether Judge Scalia is right when he says that the Constitution can favor religion over nonreligion and therefore bar atheists from delivering invocations before government meetings.

That issue was not settled definitively in this court case.

*Linda Stephens, FFRF Lifetime Member, has a B.A. in English (Western Michigan University), M.A. in English (SUNY-Brockport), master of library science (SUNY-Geneseo), Ed.D. (Syracuse University) and is a retired librarian.*



FFRF announces three new student activist award recipients

Oregon teen atheist receives FFRF activist award

FFRF has named Shelby Conway, 14, Salem, Ore., the recipient of the Cliff Richards Memorial Student Activist Award for bravely standing up to a proselytizing Christian youth pastor at her school, which resulted in positive changes to school district policies.

By Shelby Conway

On Oct. 23, a youth pastor approached my lunch table at Straub Middle School. He began speaking to us, and I realized he was discussing religion. I expected him to stop, but he did not and asked my friends and me about our personal religious beliefs.

A few people, myself included, replied that we were atheists, and he did not like that. He began explaining why it's a "bad thing" to be an atheist and used words such as "evil" and "wrong" to describe it. He also went into detail about what would happen to us if we were not Christians, which made me extremely uncomfortable.

When I asked him to stop, he did not, and I could see that a few of my friends were also uncomfortable, especially when he began asking for our reasoning behind our religious beliefs. Finally, the lunch bell rang and he left.

After school, I wrote an email to my principal, Laura Perez. The next day, along with a couple students from my lunch table, I was called to speak to her. At right is the email I sent:

After my email was sent, our school district made changes in order to benefit all religious groups and minorities. Following that, our local newspaper did an article about the incident in which they interviewed me and a close friend who was also at the table.



Shelby Conway, 14, says she and other students had a Salem Heights Church employee talk to them about religion during their lunch period.

After the article ran on Oct. 31, there were varying responses. Some people were very supportive and caring, which I appreciated very much. However, there were several people who viewed my actions as an overreaction, and were very adamant that they disapproved. Either way, I am very happy with the outcome, and appreciative of how the school district handled the situation.

The Statesman Journal reported Nov. 1 that the proselytizer was Tim Saffels, director of student ministries at Salem Heights Church. Principal Laura Perez said Saffels will not be allowed back as a volunteer for the rest of the school year.

"I decided that I'm not going to allow him in because to me there was a breach of trust there," Perez said.

Dear Mrs. Perez,

My name is Shelby Conway, I am 14 years old and an eighth grader at Straub. Today at lunch, a youth pastor who said he was from a Christian church out in South Salem approached our table. He then proceeded to preach to our entire table, several of whom are not Christians. When he finished, he asked us for our religious beliefs. I replied that I am an atheist, which I am, and I am very firm in my beliefs, and that he should not try to convince me otherwise.

He began insulting me, my beliefs and my intelligence, saying that, "Any logical person would see that atheism is wrong" and telling me that I am "too young" to choose this belief and saying that he believes I am simply trying to "rebel." I explained that it was quite the opposite, that I find religion itself illogical. He got upset here and started telling me that my belief was "bad," "stupid" and "evil" and that I was as well.

I was already quite upset, so I told him to "leave me alone" and he simply continued, telling me that I needed to come to a church function to "cleanse my mind and soul of evil" and gave me a card for his youth group, which I promptly got rid of. I know there were other things he said, but some were not direct, and I don't remember exact quotes.

I have no problem with religion, and I respect all peoples' beliefs, even if they aren't like mine. Some of my best friends are very strong Christians, and I have no problem with it. However, I am very willing to defend others and myself when they're insulted, which they were. I was very uncomfortable and personally offended with the way he was speaking to both me and other non-Christians around the lunchroom.

I request that we keep things like this, such as pastors and religious speeches, in places where they are welcomed, such as churches or religious schools. It offends me, and several other non-Christians, that it was assumed that we were both a small minority and unintelligent and easily convinced. There is a wide array of religious beliefs here at Straub, and we should not assume that all people believe the same.

The man refused to offer his name, but I assume that there is a way to contact him. I'm fairly certain that he was here because he was welcomed by the school. I ask that he does not return.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration,

Shelby Conway

Shelby Conway sent this email to her middle-school principal.

UW-Madison student activist gets creative

Sam Erickson has received \$1,000 from FFRF via the Cliff Fisher Memorial Student Activist Award.

By Sam Erickson

I am a junior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison studying economics and political science. I plan on going to law school or graduate school for political science. I would love to get into politics sometime down the road (10 or 20 years from now, who knows?).

Last summer I had the pleasure of interning for the Freedom From Religion Foundation, where I did graphic design work and assisted the legal department. I am truly grateful to receive this generous award.

Last spring I helped organize a nationally known conference called the Freethought Festival. Atheists, Humanists and Agnostics at UW-Madison brought in people like Dan Savage, Hemant Mehta, Dale McGowan and FFRF's Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker, among others. Many of their talks centered around activism. We are currently planning FTF4, which will take place on March 13-14 in Madison.



Sam Erickson, volunteering at FFRF's convention in Los Angeles. (Photo by Ingrid Laas)

It will feature FFRF attorneys Andrew Seidel and Patrick Elliott and many more speakers and is free for everyone.

I grew up in a very Christian household but never really believed in God. I went to church because I wanted to please my parents, but began questioning as early as sixth grade. I realized that I was an atheist by age 13 and proceeded to "come out" to my parents and friends a few months later. That resulted in some social exile at my private Christian high school, but much more difficult problems with my fundamen-

talist Baptist parents.

I was elected AHA president in December 2013. AHA is currently working with the largest funding ever received by a secular student group in the U.S., just over \$69,300. We are going through budget hearings now for 2015-16.

Periodically, throughout the school year, we put up signs on Bascom Hill at the center of our campus. We've put up signs asking "Questioning Your Faith?" "Dealing With Doubt?" and "Interested in Discussing

Non-Belief?" These were then followed by a sign reading "You Are Not Alone," intended to offer a simple, supportive and positive message to passersby. We then turned these signs into posters, which you can currently see around campus on various bulletin boards.

We also have done a display promoting our weekly meetings, where we asked questions such as "Why are we moral?" "Did the Universe come from nothing?" "Are reason and faith compatible?" and "Is free will an illusion?"



This sign was posted at the top and bottom of Bascom Hill at UW-Madison as part of the "God Graveyard."

By far the most noteworthy Bascom Hill display is our now-annual "God Graveyard" depicting more than 250 gravestones of gods, from Greek and

Continued on next page



# Alabama student activist awarded in Catherine Fahringer's memory

Amanda received a \$1,000 Catherine Fahringer Memorial Student Activist Award from the Freedom From Religion Foundation this fall.

By Amanda Scott

I am 21 years old and I live in Mobile, Ala. I was home-schooled and graduated with my GED. I am currently pursuing an associate of applied science in paralegal studies at Faulkner State Community College.

After graduation, I plan on pursuing a B.S. in political science at a four-year state university and a law degree. My dream is to work for a nonprofit dedicated to preserving the separation of church and state and protecting the civil rights of atheists.

I was adopted and was raised by my adoptive mother (who is also an atheist, but less outspoken than I am) without religion. As a teen, I became interested in learning about religion and read all of the major religious texts, such as the bible, the Quran, the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Tao Te Ching and the Analects of Confucius. I came to the logical conclusion that no gods existed and that all religions were false.

At age 17 in 2011, after I read a news article about the Freedom From Religion Foundation's complaint against the Bay Minette Police Department's "church or jail" program. I began researching the Establishment Clause and Supreme Court jurisprudence. In



Amanda Scott

October 2012, I started my own Facebook group called "The Wall of Separation" ([facebook.com/groups/TheWallOfSeparation/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/TheWallOfSeparation/)) where I post the latest news and extensive legal and historical research. It now has 2,015 members.

In February 2014, I delivered a speech on the topic of church politicking at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Mobile. In May I co-organized and spoke at the Alabama Rally for Secular Government at the Alabama Capitol in Montgomery. In June I coordinated public testimony and testified before the Mobile County Commission against a resolution to display "In God We Trust" in Government Plaza.

I co-organized a protest in July outside the Hobby Lobby store in Mobile in response to the Supreme Court's decision in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, allowing religious employers to refuse to cover contraception.

Then in August, I coordinated public testimony and testified before the Mobile County Commission to offer a proposal to open up Government Plaza as a public forum and allow atheists, pagans and other groups to put up plaques next to the "In God We Trust" plaque. In response to my testimony, I received threatening and harassing

messages from people within my community.

Since then, I have been nominated to the board of directors of the American Civil Liberties Union of Alabama and received the Outstanding Activism Award from the Secular Student Alliance. And of course, now I am working with FFRF to put up an "Atheists in Foxholes" monument at the Baldwin County Courthouse!

Amanda's interview on Freethought Radio can be heard at [ffrf.org/news/radio/shows/](http://ffrf.org/news/radio/shows/) (scroll to Oct. 2, 2014 broadcast).



Some of the thousands of responses WKRG-TV in Mobile got on its Facebook page after asking, "What are your thoughts on a local woman who wants to see an atheist motto placed next to the words, 'In God We Trust,' at Government Plaza?"

## Overheard

This paper reviews recent studies that claim to provide support, through statistical analysis of survey data, for the traditional proposition that being religious makes people more generous. The studies have serious shortcomings. First, the data consist exclusively of self-reports. Second, the dependent and independent variables are con-

ceptually problematic and ill-defined. Third, even if there is a positive correlation between religious involvement and personal generosity, it may be due to selection bias. Thus, these studies do not provide serious evidence for the traditional hypothesis. Moreover, it has been directly controverted by experimental studies of economic and other

behaviors.

**Abstract of research study by Roy Sablosky** [[ffrf.org/radio/shows/](http://ffrf.org/radio/shows/) on 11-29], "Does religion foster generosity?" *Science Journal*, Dec. 14

Thomas consistently couches his vision of the Establishment Clause in terms of "liberty," as though restricting state support of religion somehow reduces freedom rather than guaranteeing it. This rhetorical subterfuge is bad, but what's worse is that Thomas's support of freedom, so lavishly dispensed to religious groups demanding state assistance, suddenly dries up when the topic switches to personal rights.

**Columnist Mark Joseph Stern**, "What does Clarence Thomas have against the separation of church and state?" *playboy.com*, 11-20-14

They have failed to act responsibly. I pray that you have done a much better job of protecting your children, because as an organization we have failed.

**Mike Sullivan, pastor of St. Joseph the Worker in Maple Grove, Minn.**, letter to parishioners blaming the Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis for a \$2,000 a week drop in Sunday contributions *WCCO*, 11-24-14

I decided it's time for someone to come out to show others who may be victims and who are scared or embarrassed that they aren't alone. I receive no reward for this, and I'll probably be shamed by members of the church more so than being applauded, which I'm fine with.

**Jacob Thibodeaux, 25, Fort Worth, TX**, on deciding to speak out on his alleged abuse by Cowboy Way Church pastor Dan Haby, leading to another criminal charge of indecency with a child/fondling *Star-Telegram*, 11-28-14

The State of Mississippi hereby acknowledges the fact of her identity as a principally Christian and quintessentially Southern state, in terms of the majority of her population, character, culture, history, and heritage, from 1817 to the present; accordingly, the Holy Bible is acknowledged as a foremost source of her founding principles, inspiration, and virtues; and, accordingly, prayer is acknowledged as a respected, meaningful, and valuable custom of her citizens.

**Proposed constitutional amendment put forth by the Magnolia State Heritage Campaign as an initiative requiring 107,000 signatures to be placed on the 2016 ballot** *Religion Clause*, 10-30-13

## Student activist Sam Erickson

Continued from previous page

Roman mythology to ancient Mesopotamia. We have also shared these materials with the Secular Student Alliance in the hopes that other groups can use the idea.

This past December, a few weeks after applying and being approved for a permit, we put up a display in the Wisconsin Capitol to advocate for the state/church separation. Our display depicted the Flying Spaghetti Monster, followed by "He boiled for your sins!" and "Be touched by His Noodly Appendage before it is too late!"

This was my favorite part of the display: "Think this is ridiculous? We agree. Religious ideas should not be promoted in the halls of government. Protect the separation of church and state, it protects us all." When the state decided to turn the Capitol into

an open forum, they opened the floodgates, which our FSM flew right through.

After sending out a press release, fielding calls for a day and being interviewed on a local radio station, I was interviewed on the Michael Medved radio show, nationally syndicated to over 200 different markets, with Chris Calvey (AHA's revitalizer and FFRF graduate student essay contest winner). I was also quoted in a front-page Huffington Post article.

We are currently planning devious ways to make the display even bigger, better and more blasphemous this holiday season!

Our broad goal for everything we do at AHA is to promote the discussion of faith and religion on the UW-Madison campus and to advocate for secular issues.



## 37th annual FFRF convention speech

# Death with dignity quest personal for Barbara Mancini

*Lisa Strand, FFRF operations director, introduced speaker Barbara Mancini on October 24, 2014, at FFRF's national conference in Los Angeles:*

How many of you caught our next speaker on "60 Minutes" last weekend? Yes, she tells a compelling story. Barbara Mancini is an FFRF member who lives in Philadelphia with her husband and two daughters. She's going to tell you what happened last year when she was charged with aiding the suicide of her very elderly father. Her supposed crime: handing him his prescribed morphine.

We at FFRF didn't realize all of this was going on until Barbara contacted us earlier this year about the "60 Minutes" interview. Many freethinkers are strong supporters of end-of-life choice. We've seen the organized religious opposition to humane common-sense reforms that enable individuals to make choices to die on their own terms, not religiously dictated terms. We're pleased that Barbara is here to discuss her prosecution, how religion intruded in her criminal case and what needs to be done to ensure death with dignity and rational policies guiding end of life choices.

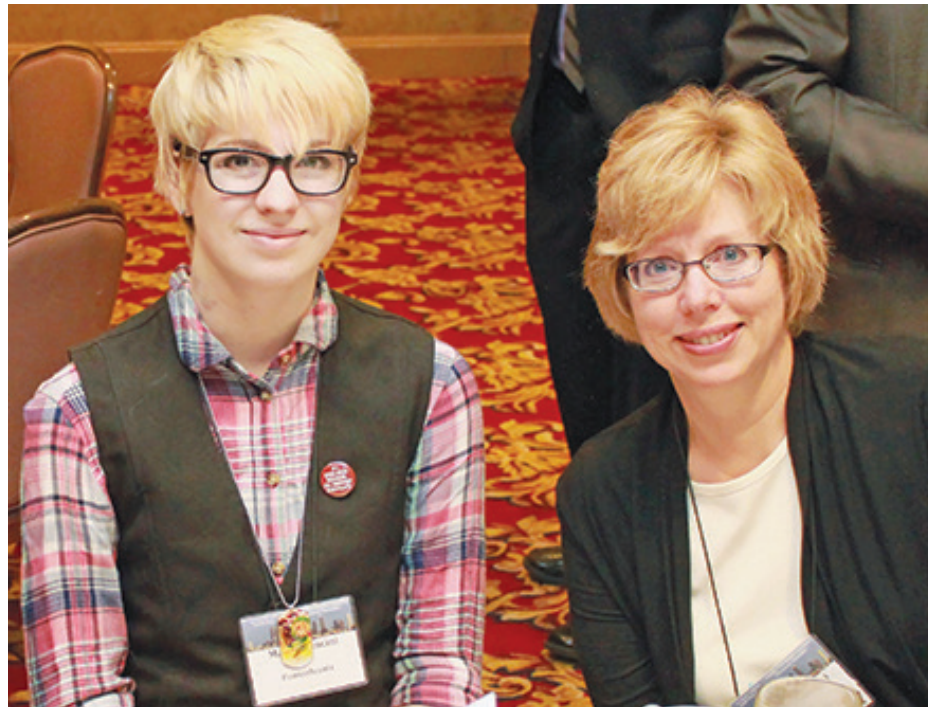
By Barbara Mancini

James Baldwin famously said, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Everyone here today strongly believes in the separation of church and state. We don't want a religious overlord telling us how we must live. Nor do we want a pious crusader telling us how we must die.

I stand here today as an example of what can happen when laws are taken to extremes, and how religion can interfere with justice. In February 2013 I was arrested and prosecuted on the charge of aiding the attempted suicide of my terminally ill 93-year-old father. Instead of having the peaceful and dignified death at home that he hoped for, he died after prolonged suffering and being subjected to exactly the medical treatment that he specified in his written advanced directives that he never wanted.

The circumstances and the politics that allowed this to happen could certainly happen again. My story is a cautionary tale. My dad, Joe Yourshaw, was one of 12 children born into a first-generation immigrant family. He was a decorated World War II veteran, and after the war he worked hard to establish his own business. He was a contractor and he did heavy excavation work. He married my mother and together they raised four children.

My father could build anything and fix anything. My mom will say she never had to call a repair person for anything until the last year of my father's life. He was independent, strong-willed and had focused convictions about how he wanted to live.



Barbara Mancini with her daughter Maria at FFRF's Los Angeles convention. (Photo by Andrew Seidel)

He had a number of medical conditions—diabetes, high blood pressure, heart and kidney disease, arthritis and he had a stroke. At the age of 92 he made the decision to stop taking the medicines that treated these conditions. Why? They weren't helping the quality of his life, which was getting worse over time. He discussed this decision with my family, his doctor and with the full knowledge that this decision would likely hasten his death. We all agreed to respect his wishes.

In February 2013 I was a regular person. I've been married for 20 years, I have two teenage daughters, a dog and two cats. I work as an ER nurse. My husband and I do volunteer work in our community.

My parents lived in Pottsville, Pa., a two-hour drive from my home in Philadelphia. I would speak on the phone with them several times a day. As dad's health worsened, I visited frequently. So I had a very busy but private life. Not even a Facebook page. If you search for my name now, you will get millions of results.

At 93 my father was terminally ill. He enrolled in home hospice care and was having significant pain. As a nurse, I know that pain and other distressing symptoms often get worse as a person nears death. My father asked me to hand him his pain medicine. It was a partly filled 1-ounce bottle of liquid morphine. When I passed the bottle to him, he removed the cap and he quickly consumed what was left. Was this to relieve his severe pain or his attempt to end it all? Only he knew that answer.

A hospice nurse arrived a short time later and I explained that dad had drunk his morphine. He was drowsy but not unconscious. The nurse and her supervisor insisted that he be taken to the ER to be treated for an overdose.

My father's written end-of-life directives specified that he wanted no life-prolonging treatment. I was his legal health care proxy. He had a standing do-not-resuscitate order. He was adamant that he never wanted to go to a hospital. I tried in vain to assure that

his wishes were upheld.

The hospice called 911 and police and paramedics arrived. Against my father's expressed wishes, he was taken to the ER to be treated and I was arrested then and there in the house.

The paramedics asked my father if he was having any pain, and for the very first time he said "no." I was charged with aiding an attempted suicide. It's a second-degree felony in Pennsylvania. Conviction carries up to 10 years in prison.

The police captain who arrested me told me I no longer had any say in what happened to my father. In my presence, he spoke on the phone to the



Barbara Mancini (Photo by Ingrid Laas)

ER doctor and told the doctor that if my father died, things would go much worse for me. That information was relayed to my 84-year-old mother, who was put in the position of having to choose between honoring her promise to my father or helping me. So my mother gave consent for the hospital to treat my dad.

Two hours after arriving in the ER, my father was given a medicine to reverse the effects of the morphine. He was furious that he'd been brought to the hospital and knew I was in trouble. He shouted repeatedly, "Don't hurt Barbara. Don't let them hurt Barbara."

My dad suffered tremendously, not only from his treatment in the hospital but also from the anguish of knowing that I was being accused of helping him end his life. He died four days later from pneumonia, not from a morphine overdose.

The Pennsylvania attorney general began a year-long zealous prosecution of me. I was placed on unpaid leave from my job. The prosecutor had the court put a gag order on me. I incurred over \$100,000 in legal fees. The emotional and financial burden on my family and me was enormous.

My case received widespread media coverage—local, national, even international. The reaction was always the same: near universal shock and outrage, with many writers urging the attorney general to exercise prosecutorial discretion and drop the charge. Not one opinion writer supported the decision to prosecute.

It created a lot of sympathy for my father and me, but it also raised very legitimate questions among the dying and their caregivers, who are now asking, "Can they do this to us, too?"

Exactly one year after my father died, a judge ruled that the case had no merit. The charge was dismissed without any apology or recognition of what they'd put us through. We were left to pick up the pieces of our lives. The question that everyone has is, "How could this happen?" There are four elements that I believe came together to create this ordeal.

### Why it happened

**FIRST:** Failure on the part of Hospice of Central Pennsylvania. My father was in home hospice care for two weeks with no medicine for pain. I called the hospice and asked them to prescribe morphine, which is reasonable and appropriate. Morphine is the most commonly used medicine to treat end-of-life pain. In fact, the same hospice had provided my father with morphine on a prior enrollment six months earlier.

That phone call was later used as evidence against me. The prosecutor said it showed that I was intending to help my father end his life. I didn't know at the time that I made the phone call that morphine had been ordered for my father two weeks earlier and the hospice withheld it.

They later stated that they did that because my father said he didn't want to take any medicine. I agree that he did not want to take any medicine that he thought would prolong his life, but he was taking lots of Tylenol and Motrin for pain.

The hospice used this phrase repeatedly in their documentation about my father: "comfortable despite pain." I defy anyone to define that. My family and I vigorously dispute that character-



ization of how my father felt. In court my attorney asked the hospice supervisor if my father had the right to have as much medicine as he needed to relieve his pain. Her answer, “that is not a stated right.” The same supervisor also testified that my father should not receive any more than a very low dose of morphine at any given time. This attitude guaranteed that my father would suffer until the very end. And it contradicts what the United States Supreme Court ruled in two landmark cases in 1997. The majority opinion in both of these cases said that, “terminally ill patients have the right to as much medicine as they need to relieve their pain, even if it advances the time of death.” Incredible as this seems, either the hospice supervisor didn’t know this, or she knew it and disagreed with the ruling.

**THE SECOND ELEMENT:** The law. The state statute that criminalizes “aiding a suicide” is vaguely written. The problem with a vague law is that it’s left open to interpretation. The attorney general interpreted it to mean that providing a dying man his legally prescribed medication rose to the felony level of “aiding a suicide.”

Clarence Darrow, who was way before his time, said it best, “I know that every step in the progress of humanity has been met and opposed by prosecutors.”

**THE THIRD ELEMENT:** Criminal justice in the United States. Once an arrest has been made, the goal is conviction. In my case, there was minimal investigation done of the supposed crime. The prosecutor relied on untrue statements by the hospice and the police. They possessed records that discredited what witnesses said and barely looked at them.

One example: A hospice witness testified that my father had never been on a narcotic before. It was this same hospice that provided him with morphine on a prior enrollment. When confronted in court with the evidence that my father had actually been prescribed a much higher dose of morphine prior to my ever making a phone call, the prosecutor told the judge that he was unaware of that information, and if true it was completely inconsistent with the testimony of his witnesses.

Yes, it was. It was right there in the hospice record. It contradicted what his witnesses said and he never bothered to read it. Did this end my prosecution? No, it continued for another four months, until a judge threw out the charge in a scathing 46-page opinion.

You have to keep in mind that in

the U.S., over 90% of criminal cases are settled through plea bargains. Tremendous pressure was placed on me to waive my preliminary hearing and work out a plea deal. It’s so much easier for the prosecutor and they still get to count it as a conviction.

Keep in mind that prosecutors are elected officials who like to tell voters that they’re tough on crime and have a high conviction rate. Most people who are charged with crimes don’t have the resources to fight that pressure to plead. I was very lucky to have an excellent criminal defense attorney who fought this unjust charge.

**FOURTH:** The admixture of politics and religion. Who wanted this case prosecuted? It was the police, the attorney general and the Schuylkill County coroner, David Moylan. Moylan made the determination that my father died from morphine overdose or toxicity and ruled that the manner of death was homicide.

Homicide. I knew that my father died of pneumonia and later had two independent experts evaluate his records. One of them was a forensic toxicologist. They both agreed that he didn’t die of morphine toxicity. To



**Joe Yourshaw, Barbara’s dad, holding her daughter Maria as a newborn. Maria, 17, came to the convention with her mom.**

quote, “This was not a lethal level of morphine by any means.”

A few weeks after releasing my father’s death certificate, Moylan announced he was running for Congress on a sanctity-of-life platform. He was asked in an interview why he decided to run. Here’s what he said: “It just boiled down to one primary issue, and it’s one I feel strongly about — the sanctity of human life. It’s so important to defend human life from conception to natural death.”

Moylan has said this publicly, “I am a pro-life coroner.” It’s pretty funny, but



**Barbara Mancini (Photo by Ingrid Laas)**

wait. He’s also said this, “It’s very important that every decision you make as a coroner to determine the cause and manner of death [asks] how does it affect the sanctity of life? I’ve been doing that for the last year and a half.”

No mention of evidence in that. He won the Republican primary for the seat in Congress, and he’ll be running in the general election in a couple of weeks. [He lost 57% to 43% to the Democratic incumbent.]

Here’s an interesting point. In a brief to the judge, the attorney general said, “The commonwealth has never argued that the defendant was responsible for Mr. Yourshaw’s death on Feb. 11, 2013.” Considering that he and the coroner were on the same side of this prosecution, that’s a pretty big difference to reconcile.

Now, you may think that this coroner is some unsophisticated rube, but I want to tell you about him. He’s a graduate of MIT and Georgetown University School of Medicine. He’s a physician with a successful practice in radiation oncology. His position as coroner gives him the power to influence what happens to a person’s livelihood, liberty and even an accused person’s life. And he is attempting to increase his power and sphere of influence by running for Congress. Does this scare you? It should.

## Death with dignity

Does anyone here think this could happen again? Here’s what the attorney general had to say after the judge dismissed my case: “If the citizens of the commonwealth disagree with an existing statute, it is incumbent upon the people to work with the General Assembly to amend the law. Until such amendment occurs, it is the legal responsibility of prosecutors to enforce the law as it currently exists.”

Now you know why I’m an activist. The Oregon Death With Dignity law is progressive. It contains significant safeguards and it allows people some choice at the end of their lives. Sadly, most of us do not have that kind of choice.

The most vocal and well-funded opponent of death with dignity is the Catholic Church. My case illustrates the extreme other side of what can happen. I’d like to leave you with three points today.

First, good hospice care is essential, and some hospices fail to provide good care. Second, this could happen again, even to you or someone you love. And third, the laws across the nation need

to be changed. We need death with dignity in all states. I urge everyone here today to do something to help affect that change.

I am currently working with an organization called Compassion and Choices, a national end-of-life advocacy organization. Currently, for all of you Californians, they are mounting a big effort in this state to help make death with dignity legal.

My father died a terrible death, needlessly and tragically. That will always haunt me. I’m speaking out to somehow make it right for him, my dad. I am an activist so no other person will have to experience the trauma that came to be known as the Barbara Mancini case.

I’d like to close with the wise words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: “An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

## Question and answer

**Q.** I applaud what you have done and want to ask what consequences has the hospice faced with the outcome of this case? As a fellow nurse, a nurse that also took care of her dying father at home, it really makes me scared that my fellow nurses would not know the law and would behave in such an unconscionable manner.

**A.** First, I want to say that you will never know what the biases or values are of the people who are giving you hospice care, so you need to arm yourself with enough information to be a strong advocate for yourself. The only consequence that I know of at this date is that the hospice has suffered bad publicity.

**Q.** We’re going through this debate in Connecticut. Our problem, however, is less the religious lobby. The bigger problem for us seems to be the disability lobby. I’m curious if that had any affect in Pennsylvania?

**A.** Other opponents are the American Medical Association and California Medical Association, some disability rights groups and hospices. I know the disabled people feel like they might be discarded, but they don’t know what this law says. There are strict safeguards. It has to be initiated by the person who has received a diagnosis of a terminal illness from two independent physicians. So if someone’s trying to get rid of a family member, they can’t do that.

There has been no case of abuse of this law in the almost 18 years that it’s been in existence in Oregon. I understand the concerns of the disabled, but they are addressed in the law.

**Q.** I can’t believe that hospice did that, because their narrative seems to be about dying with dignity and in comfort. They’re about comfort care, so this surprises me very much.

**A.** Well, you know now that not all of them carry that out.

**Q.** How do I determine who is to be trusted?

**A.** There is no database or ranking to help you with that decision, so you must do your homework. If you know the law, that gives you a leg up. Compassion and Choices also has an end-of-life advocacy counselor who can guide you with questions to ask when you interview a hospice. That’s something you need to do.

**A.** Do you know Washington state’s law? How would you compare it to Oregon’s?

**Q.** My understanding is that it’s modeled pretty much after Oregon’s.

Thank you, it was a privilege to be here.

## Jesus Christ, Superplow



After first asking two Lutheran schools in Sioux Falls, S.D., to paint over religious messages on city-owned snowplows, the city instead added a disclaimer that it doesn’t endorse any message on any of the 27 “Paint the Plows” entries. Only two had religious messages. Eric Novotny of the Siouxland Freethinkers (and husband of FFRF secular invocation honoree Amanda Novotny) had filed a complaint with the city after seeing them displayed at the Empire Mall. Last year the two schools’ messages were “Jesus loves you snow much” and “Jesus is our Superman!”



# College essay contest honorable mentions

FFRF awarded each recipient \$200. Essays were edited for space.

## Intellectual freedom

By Blake Allen

For 12 years, I believed everything I was taught as a young Catholic. I suppose though I always had doubts and was just suppressing them for fear of my eternal soul.

Some people will claim that their faith gives them comfort, but I posit that, were it not for the perceived punishment of questioning religious doctrine, there would be a vast increase in the amount of nonbelievers worldwide.

For a brief period of time, I identified as a deist, believing in a greater power that chose to not interfere in the affairs of humankind. This ultimately served as the final stage of my conversion to atheism, a word which I still find inadequate.

Unlike some nonbelievers I know, I do not “wish I could believe.” Like the late, great Christopher Hitchens, I identify as an antitheist, someone who is philosophically opposed to the idea of there being a cosmological overseer of any sort. Such an idea is both offensive and degrading to humanity. To quote Hitchens, “Heaven would be hell for me.” The notion of being forced to exist for eternity, perpetually praising an entity who created me for that very purpose, is deeply troubling.

I first “came out” to my mother during a car trip to the hospital to visit my grandmother, who had had heart surgery. My mother mentioned something about the family’s prayers having helped. I had previously mentioned my deism to her, but she once again probed as to my faith. I told her then that I no longer had any. To her credit, she took it relatively well.

A few days later, my father engaged me in a conversation about my atheism, obviously at my mother’s behest. He expressed what I consider to be perhaps the most troubling argument for faith I had yet encountered. He said to me, “Sometimes, whether you actually believe or not, it’s helpful to look to something bigger to yourself in times of trouble.”

Essentially, he was saying that even feigned belief was better than none at all, that pretending to believe in his and my mother’s point of view was better than wholeheartedly believing in an opposing philosophy. I’m not sure if I have ever been more hurt or insulted in my life.

I know that my view of the world hurts both my parents, particularly my mother. She fears for my soul, and I know that her occasional expressions of disapproval of my lack of belief are out of love. Thankfully, things are relatively peaceful on the whole.

I am left alone with my view of belief, and I go to Easter and Christmas Masses. It makes Mom happy.

Blake Allen, Houma, La., is a sophomore philosophy major at Louisiana State University, where he holds a 4.0 GPA as an honors student.

## No need for a god

By Alexander Andruzzi



McCain-Palin ticket in order to be a good Catholic.

I was raised Catholic and was an altar boy from the time I was 8. I was serving as an altar boy at my childhood parish when the priest in 2008 decided to take a little detour from the normal homily. Red-faced and angry, he began a 15-minute tirade about how it was necessary to vote for the



Obama’s health care plan would turn America into an abortion factory, he preached. That moment changed my outlook on religion forever. I knew my history, but I always thought this type of political crossover could never happen in the 21st century.

I wrote a letter to the woman who scheduled altar boys and told her that I wouldn’t be attending church again. The most disgusting part for me was being awakened to the fact that religion hadn’t really moved forward. My idealistic view of an institution which promoted peace, love, charity and all of the other tenets of Christianity that are sold to people, was extremely misguided. I realized that religion hadn’t changed as much as I thought. There certainly is still a guiding goal throughout the Catholic Church and all established religion — power over their members.

Certainly, there are instances where belief in a higher power can have positive effects on the psyche. It can make the status quo easier to accept, for soldiers at war, for example, or people starving in the desert. But I see no need to believe in a higher power or an afterlife. To people who attribute their success to a god, I ask: Doesn’t that take away from the hard work you put into achieving your success?

It’s certainly easy for one religious group to say that collectively they are the chosen ones, but within that group, the inevitable inequality (not just economic) is a product of what, levels of piety? “It’s just God’s plan” is not a good answer. To write off success or misfortune with those words is simplistic and childish.

I was raised on welfare while my single mother was in law school. I went to an inner-city high school. I am the only person from my graduating class to be attending a four-year college. My acceptance was not because of a higher power; it was due to my extremely hard work to achieve a goal I set for myself. People who suggest otherwise are actively insulting me.

People from all walks of life will find reasons to cling to religion. Some aspects of religion can be positive. But in the 21st century, we have a well-defined moral code because we have the ability to think critically about our history and society, not because of religion. Humans deemed certain behaviors such as murder reprehensible and therefore put laws in religious texts forbidding them. Religion did not influence people; people influenced religion.

To cling to any institution that rejects freethought is a disservice to humanity and will only lead to more problems than it solves. The only thing that differentiates a religion from a cult is the number of followers the former has.

Alexander Andruzzi, 22, Wolfeboro, N.H., is majoring in political science in his fourth year at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

## Truth I have come to know

By Anna Bridge

Every time I heard a Christian yell “Jesus died for our sins,” I reminded myself that they were the ignorant ones and thought of words attributed [perhaps wrongly] to Edgar Allan Poe: “All religion, my friend, is simply evolved out of fraud, fear, greed, imagination, and poetry.”

I knew that I should pity them for their blind faith in something that they couldn’t fully comprehend. To be honest, I often found myself nearly raging at them.

Some Sundays, my family and I would go to church, but the next week we would skip and watch football. After a few years of having to suffer through Sunday school, I decided that I was done. My understanding mother never made me go back. She was the driving force behind my decision to call myself an agnostic when I was 13.

It was on the day my great-grandmother Verla



died. She was one of the most influential people in my life at the time. “She’s with God now,” I heard family members say. I couldn’t accept that and finally told my entire family, after a huge meal with our distant relatives, that I wasn’t sure God existed.

After about 20 minutes of elaborating on what led me to my conclusion, my father told me to leave. My sister, a newly converted uber-Christian, tried to exorcise me. Since the supper fiasco, I have been unable and unwilling to speak with any family member about religion or anything remotely related to it for fear of recreating the horror that followed my “coming out.”

I have always tried to accommodate other’s beliefs, knowing that my arguments will likely prove fruitless in attempting to dissuade their blind faith. It seems odd to me that no religious person has ever attempted to reciprocate that courtesy.

I feel comfortable knowing that my view of life has physical and historical evidence to support it. When I first started to question the origins of our existence, I’ll admit I was rather hesitant to doubt what I had been taught my whole life. As I got older, and became surer of my mental and emotional faculties, I began to no longer question myself. I remind myself of how far I have come and how I have worked to achieve the confidence and experience I might one day take for granted.

I hope that, one day, the world will come to understand the truth that I have come to know and, in knowing that fact, be more enlightened and free to think in a way that will only further the progress of the human race.

Anna Bridge, 19, was born in Rapid City, S.D., and is majoring in global studies and German at South Dakota State University in Brookings, where she’s minoring in religion “so that I can better understand how the other half lives and to better comprehend the reasoning behind the beliefs of other cultures.”

## Outside the box

By Benjamin Carton



I was fortunate to grow up with Catholic parents who made it clear that they would respect any beliefs I chose regarding religion. When I was about 10, my brother took an interest

in Buddhism. I’d never had an intense connection to Christianity, but because my parents and everyone I knew at the time was Christian I followed suit.

I vividly remember walking down my street and thinking “What if I had been born to Buddhist or Hindu or Jewish parents? I realized that the only reason I believed in a Christian conception of the world was because I was born to a Christian family in a Christian part of the world. I was ripped out of a particularly formative box.

Years later, I concluded that spiritual questions are outside the grasp of the human intellect. I am not in any position to say whether or not I know a god or any other spiritual phenomenon exist, but I’ve found that studying spiritual traditions has matured and stimulated me intellectually.

I can’t help but see institutionalized religion as a mechanism of social control and security blanket. I’ve also found that an effective approach is to express curiosity about others’ religions by asking about them. Most people appreciate this, and in time ask about my views with an openness to listen, even if they disagree.

While science has disproven the myths of some religions, it hasn’t made religion obsolete as a learning source nor has it illuminated every mystery in the universe. If anything, science continually shows us how little we actually know. I have difficulty articulating this adequately, particularly with atheists, but I strive to show others that assumptions based on cur-



rent scientific thinking are liable to be disproven in the future.

I’ve found that neither belief nor nonbelief is satisfying for me. “Coming out” with any belief in a way which is respectful of others is important. If respect, not merely tolerance, can be developed between believers of different religions and nonbelievers, then we can begin building a fairer social order.

I hope that by living with respect and curiosity for the beliefs of others, while staying grounded in my principles, I can further my own wisdom and inspire others to think and live outside the boxes to which they limit themselves.

*Benjamin Carton, 21, Pelham, N.H., is a senior at Lesley University in Cambridge, Mass., with plans to pursue a master’s in mental health counseling with a focus on holistic and humanistic approaches.*

## Hug me, I’m an atheist

By Eric Duran

I am a nonbeliever who was raised Catholic. Until I was 15, I never questioned those beliefs.

But when telling people that I am a nonbeliever, I see faces showing confusion, disbelief and pity. Then they ask if I am a satanist. Instead of calling them ignorant fools, I take the opportunity to teach someone about freethought. Coming out to others is still a struggle, but it has allowed me to be comfortable with myself.

“You’re Catholic! You were baptized as a Catholic, and you will always be a Catholic,” my mother replies every time I tell her that I no longer follow the Catholic faith. I was taught that any belief other than Catholicism was wrong. I thought it was the only way to live, until I came to my senses.

Coming out as an agnostic was actually my second coming-out process. When I was 13, I realized I was gay. That was a struggle in itself, but my family and friends were accepting and supportive. For the next couple of years, I came to terms with my homosexuality and how it can work with Christianity, even with many others who thought differently. Being told repeatedly by my peers that it was a sin was the first factor that began my disconnect with Christianity.

If you believed in anything other than conservative Christianity, they ostracized you. I was bullied by these kind Christians, but when I tried to go to vice principals or counselors, they told me it was all in my head. I knew the true faces of these students and wondered how you could be such a faithful Christian if you partied as if God was not watching, drank the devil’s nectar, bullied others and had premarital sex every other weekend.

After graduating and learning that my boyfriend was a freethinking pagan, I was able form my opinions more thoroughly. Believing in God did not work. I did not feel the enlightenment that others did and found myself not needing God in my everyday life. I am looked down upon, and people think I have tainted morals. My ideas on life and the afterlife simply vary, just as many people’s do, but I am the same person.

I hope one day that my family and some friends will accept my views and treat me as the same person. Until then I will advocate for other nonbelievers. By attending my secular group on campus, I am able to diRobert and Sean McClain at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pa. Robert writes: “Sean battled a virulently hostile principal to start a secular students group at Brunswick High in 2012, and he brought more than one of his theistic friends into the light of reason,”

*Eric Duran, 19, Fort Worth, Texas, is pursuing a B.A. degree in speech-language pathology at the University of North Texas in Denton.*

## Escape from Mormon patriarchy

By Jenny Cox

I am the fifth of seven children descended from 21 generations of Mormons and polygamists, with



parents who taught me rigid, patriarchal Mormon values. My freethought journey started when I was about 9 when my oldest brother announced he was permanently removing his name from the church records.

I have a vivid memory of watching my family huddled with arms around each other in the entryway, sobbing after talking to a church official. I did not understand what has going on. I was scolded by my angry father when I asked my brother why he had left the church. It was his ability to see beyond religion’s confines that encouraged me to begin to open my mind.

My faith was rocked again when my parents decided to divorce. Divorce was rare in the Mormon community. Therapists tried to help me see that my father was abusive and used religion to harm my entire family. I realized just because someone was religious did not mean that they were right or they were good.

My mother eventually took control by leaving him despite church leaders not believing her when she told them how bad he was. She was no longer subordinate as the church preferred she be. I started to find faith and strength in women’s abilities.

A month before I started eighth grade, one of my brothers took his own life. I remember falling to my knees in prayer, begging God that there must be some way to revive him. God did not grant my wish. That was my first realization God did not exist.

The last straw was California’s Proposition 8. Fighting same-sex marriage became a Mormon mission. I was taking a freshman honors English class and learning about logical fallacies. Listening to speakers preach against same-sex marriage, I realized they were using common reasoning errors that I was learning about.

On my 14th birthday, I decided I was fed up. Like my brother, I wanted to remove my name from the church but needed parental permission, which my mother refused to give. I had to wait until I turned 18. I consider myself lucky. Many parents kick their children out when they renounce the household religion, but she chose to love and accept me.

The decision to leave the church was not easy and took courage, but I know I made the right choice. I support human rights that Mormonism opposes. My heart is simply too wide, and I love that I have the option to think freely.



*Jenny Cox, 21, Sacramento, Calif., earned an associate’s degree in theater arts at Cosumnes River College before transferring to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo to major in theater. “Once I earn my degree, I will use professional theater to change of the lives of audience members and students with the diligence I put into my work.”*

## My atheist life

By Marina Esposito

Before I was born, my parents prayed for a healthy baby, but I was born with a cleft palate in 1992. Then they prayed that I would have a healthy childhood. In June 1994, I was diagnosed with cancer and had 15 months of chemotherapy and my right kidney removed.

My parents and I began to pray that I would have a healthy adolescence. I was diagnosed with scoliosis when I was 9 and I underwent a full spinal fusion in 2006. We eventually stopped praying and turned to philosophy books instead of the bible and did our own research rather than listening to our pastors. In October 2011, in a 24-hour period, my heart stopped five times. I now have a pacemaker.

I have learned that with or without prayer, good



and bad things still happen. Instead of looking to God, I wanted to find strength within myself. This is how I went from a Christian to an atheist.

At first, I didn’t want to tell anyone for fear I would be judged. My parents were the only people I confided in, because they also were now atheists. In 2010, my junior year, I finally started standing up for what I believed in. I was no longer ashamed, I accepted myself and my views on life and religion. When friends or family brought up religion, I didn’t shy away and welcomed it as an opportunity for conversation.

After months of conversations, two of my dearest friends started questioning their own religious views. Asking questions is the most important thing you can do as a human.

I ended up attending a Christian university, but whether I’m talking with friends or in a classroom of a hundred students, I let them hear another viewpoint. I hope that atheists will start speaking up so that we may become the majority one day. All religion does is cloud people’s thoughts and create animosity.

It was a very long journey to get to where I am today, but I would not change anything and have no regrets.

*Marina Esposito, 22, Peoria, Ariz., works as a dance instructor and is on track to graduate with a bachelor’s in dance education from Grand Canyon University in 2015.*

## Natural wonder

By Christopher Holder

My progression from sacred to secular wonder happened at 16, when I began to love the natural world instead of the supernatural.

Growing up along the fecund Mobile, Ala., coastline, I loved exploring the trails and brooks near my house. Wilderness and wildness are indelibly linked to my identity. In my childhood, nature represented the span of possibilities of the divine. When I began examining faith as a sophomore in high school, though, I realized that humanity’s natural sense of wonder toward nature is in fact impeded by the impulse to worship.

I was fascinated with heavy equipment as a child: the bucket-wheel excavator—like a Ferris wheel ripping into the ground—and the haul truck, some models stretching higher than half a dozen humans on each other’s shoulders.

These machines, to my prepubescent mind, offered a metaphoric solution for any of my problems, bulldozing straight through anything. I saw God in them. The metal deities were undeniably human, but they possessed un-



earthly de-earthing power. It doesn’t escape me today that a child so invested in nature could be moved to wonder by its pulverization.

Over time, my view of these machines changed. First, for their complicity in the most damning sins against the environment—strip mining, for instance. More to the point, I decided in high school to put away childish things like my notions of heavenly comfort, with all the concomitant metaphors and rationalizations.

But my sense of wonder remained. Humanity’s response to the divine is, I feel, only a misguided response to the mysteries of existence, plentiful and compelling. The more one learns about our universe, the less necessary the mystical becomes. Digging into the gaps between what we know and what there is, we find (and may examine) infinity, strange physics, unexplained phenomena, unexplored territory, enigmatic consciousness.

Our reality is mystic enough.

*Christopher Holder, 21, is a senior at the University of Montevallo in central Alabama, majoring in English and music and serving as president of the school’s Secular Student Alliance chapter.*



## An ‘atheist nobody’s’ story

By Joe Magestro

I consider myself a representative of all the people you pass by every day without a glimpse. You do not know who I am and you may not even care. That is what makes me a “nobody.” But give me a chance and listen to my story about why I am the way I am today.

I could not have been happier with my childhood. I technically was raised Catholic, but I was so “blessed” to be raised in a mainly secular home. My mother worked on weekends so I rarely went to Mass, but I remained a believer.

In my senior year of high school. I met the most amazing girl, but we could not be together due to her religious obligations. She belonged to a Filipino sect called Iglesia Ni Cristo (“Church of Christ” in Tagalog). We were young, stupid and in love though and still dated, with plans to break up after the summer when I would leave for college.

At summer’s end, we decided that in order to be together, I would join her church. By this time, I was pretty much an atheist. I tried to join Iglesia Ni Cristo, which caused a major schism between me and my parents. My mother feared that I would become brainwashed. I was threatened with being kicked out of the house and cut off financially, which didn’t stop me. If it meant anything, my girlfriend’s parents finally accepted me because I had joined.

In order to become an official member, I had to take 28 lessons of indoctrination. They were one-on-one sessions with a minister. The first lessons were generally about why every other religion was wrong. Even though I had my doubts, I started to think that this church actually used reasoning. Then I heard more lessons and became appalled that people actually agreed with these horrible teachings. Where they saw peace and hope, I saw control and manipulation.

I started to research their claims and saw the flaws in their “logic” and how they cherry-picked bible verses and took them out of context. Now I wanted to learn about all religions. I started tearing through Hitchens, Dawkins and other atheist authors. I came to the conclusion that religion made absolutely no sense. I eventually came out as atheist and left the church. My girlfriend still fully accepts me for who I am.

We all need to find a passion to make our lives meaningful. I have found mine. I am now president of the UW-Whitewater Secular Student Alliance. I plan to write a book and become a motivational speaker in the secular movement. I am determined make a change in this world and am ecstatic to one day become the “atheist nobody” that many can look up to.

*Joe Magestro, 22, St. Francis, Wis., is a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater majoring in business management with a music minor.*

## Questioning everything

By Harrison Slater



by nonsentient laws, elements and events. I was impressed with Dawkins’ extensive research and his solutions for people who believe the world cannot function without religion.

Ideally, as Dawkins points out, children would be



known as the children of Jewish parents or whatever religion their guardians believe in. It’s such a simple concept, yet many parents would be outraged to even discuss it. It’s frustrating when I see how some of my intelligent friends are held back by their religious upbringing.

It wasn’t until my freshman year of college that I was truly certain of my nonbelief. I got the feeling that when I told my parents I was an atheist that they thought this was just another passing phase. Two years later, I believe they have accepted my atheism.

I’m lucky to have such accepting parents with whom I can have intelligent discussions on religion. It pains me to hear stories of atheists coming out to friends and family and getting shunned. It continues to confuse me why atheism is looked down on by a large part of society.

My first instinct says that the fear of societal rejection keeps many atheists from coming out. My second instinct is that religious propaganda has successfully portrayed atheists as ignorant and heartless people, when the truth could not be further from that.

I’ve seen firsthand how religion blinds people, even world-renowned scholars. My family from Israel has seen how religion devastates countries and communities through violence stemming from the belief that one religion’s God is the truth and another’s is not.

I came out as an atheist to join a movement that has given me passion like I’ve never felt before. I cannot sit idly by and watch society continue take two steps forward, only to be pulled one step back by the stranglehold of religion.

*Harrison Slater, 21, Westfield, N.J., is a student in the Penn State School of Earth and Mineral Sciences majoring in energy business and finance and minoring in economics, planetary science and astronomy.*

## An atheist in Texas

By Nathan Stevens

I don’t remember the first time I heard “You don’t believe in God?” but I remember the South Texas faces. It was always the same mask twisted in confusion and disgust. Perhaps it’s my distaste for authority, but these moments emboldened me.

My household was not religious, nor did it promote a disbelief in God. I grew up in an air of apathy toward the idea of a supreme being; it was something I simply didn’t think about. I don’t recall any attacks on my beliefs, or the need for debate on religious matters. It was a slow realization that I was not in the majority. I became truly confident in nonbelief early in high school.

During my freshman year, I dated a girl who was extremely religious. It was fun until she began prying. I was eventually forced to show my hand. She was immediately worried about the state of my immortal soul and made it her mission to push me into the arms of Christ. I went to church with her a few times but felt completely unmoved. The relationship began to disintegrate once she realized I was a lost cause.

I meditated and read Buddhist texts supplied by my dad. It seemed like an exciting, mysterious break from the waves of Christianity around me until I realized that Buddhism shared many common threads with the monotheistic religions I was acquainted with. I’m deeply thankful that I stumbled on a Stephen Hawking quote: “One can’t prove that God doesn’t exist, but science makes God unnecessary.”

The quote made me realize that, through thousands of years of spiritual evolution, humans have just been trying to understand the incomprehensible. I also came to see that many people of faith believe because it gave them strength and made them happy. I felt no need to lash out against the Christian majority or denounce others’ ideals if they found peace with them.

I realized that the best way I could promote my nonbelief was to be open but kind. In my slice of the South, there are many negative stereotypes about



nonbelievers. The best way to disprove these notions is to prove that we are normal, happy people. The realization that freethinkers and people of faith have much more in common than we acknowledge is fantastically important.

*Nathan Hume Stevens, 19, Friendswood, Texas, is majoring in journalism and minoring in business at the University of Oregon in Eugene.*

## ‘A classroom with no teacher’

By Jessie Warme



My early life was mostly areligious. My father refused to indoctrinate me. And while my mother took me to a Unitarian Universalist church, I’m hesitant to call that a real religion because God never really was brought up. Even as children, we did not need guidance from a higher power to be a good person.

I attended a private school populated by ardent Christians. At first, I felt no hole or fear in my life. I loved my parents, I was safe, and I played with friends. But when it was discovered I lacked religion, from all sides I heard “You’re going to hell!” or “Jesus died for your sins!” or “God will strike you down!” Children on the playground would push and hit me and, on occasion, pelt me with rocks, all in the name of Jesus Christ. My own personal stoning.

I was cowed into obedience and sought out religion to avoid the terrifying consequences their words painted.

I turned to Christianity first, the religion of my attackers after all. But even as a child, Christianity baffled me. Eventually, the insanity of it all terrified me more than hell. The answers to my questions were unsatisfying, to say the least.

Every response came down to “God is greater than we can ever understand.” This infuriated me. One cannot plug gaping holes of logic with “we just do not understand.” Nowhere else in life is “just trust me” a valid justification for belief and action.

I searched for another religion, but quickly found problems in each. Each claimed that they alone offered salvation and that to choose another was to choose condemnation, yet none offered more evidence of its validity than any other. A friend worded it wonderfully:

“Religion is like a classroom with no teacher, filled with several different textbooks. Throughout the semester, students study their chosen textbooks and argue ardently that their choice is correct. On the last day of class, the teacher appears, punishes those who chose the wrong books and rewards those who chose the right book.”

At age 12, I realized that if even one of these many gods existed, it was not one I wished to worship, if only because the god would punish those who happened to pick the wrong number in religious roulette. When the religious call me back from the darkness, I respond simply and evenly: “I am too small to say what is out there. But I am too big to believe it is what you tell me.”

I stand proudly as a skeptic and a freethinker, the only honest way to live and believe. I stand outside the cave of ignorance, blinking in the brilliant light of a world untethered by a hateful doctrine and a vengeful creator. I.Am.Free.

*Jessie Warme, 20, Van Nuys, Calif., earned associate’s degrees in social and behavioral sciences and mathematics at College of the Canyons in Valencia, where she was valedictorian. At the University of California-San Diego, she’s majoring in international studies/political science.*



## State/Church Bulletin

### Kansas judge upholds science standards

U.S. District Judge Daniel Crabtree on Dec. 2 dismissed a suit alleging that new science standards for Kansas public schools promote atheism and violate the religious freedoms of students and parents. The state Board of Education adopted standards in 2013 developed by Kansas, 25 other states and the National Research Council. The guidelines treat evolution and climate change as key scientific concepts, reported The Associated Press.

The suit was filed by Citizens for Objective Public Education, a group based in Peck (pop. 1,500). Crabtree noted that even with the standards, school districts still control the curriculum.

### Air Force loosens proselytizing ban

An Air Force News Service press release said officials approved "Instruction 1-1, Air Force Standards" on Nov. 7 that removed language explicitly restricting commanders and chaplains from pushing their personal beliefs on others.

Jason Torpy of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers called it a "damaging change" to replace "avoid the actual or apparent use of their position to promote their personal religious beliefs to their subordinates or to extend preferential treatment for any religion" with to "ensure their words and actions cannot reasonably be construed to be officially endorsing or disapproving of, or extending preferential treatment for any faith, belief, or absence of belief."

Torpy added that so-called "conscience protection" called for in the last two bills funding the Pentagon "has led to expanded opportunities for proselytism by commanders and chaplains."

### District mulls ban of religious material

Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., has decided to adjust its "passive distribution policy" so that no religious materials, Christian or satanic, can be distributed in public schools, the Christian Post reported

Nov. 18. FFRF and its Central Florida Freethought Community chapter have been challenging the policy in federal court and this year got the district to agree to allow distribution of secular materials in 2015 to counter bible and religious handouts by World Changers Christian ministry.

"The proposed changes include: materials of a denominational, sectarian, religious, political and partisan nature shall not be permitted to be distributed. The policy changes are modeled after similar policies in Miami-Dade Public Schools and Broward County Public Schools," said a statement from Orange County Schools. "The proposed changes will move to a rule development workshop in January."

The proposed action was spurred in part by a request by the Satanic Temple to also distribute materials. FFRF continues to monitor the situation and consult with other involved parties.

### Alaska city first to tax churches?

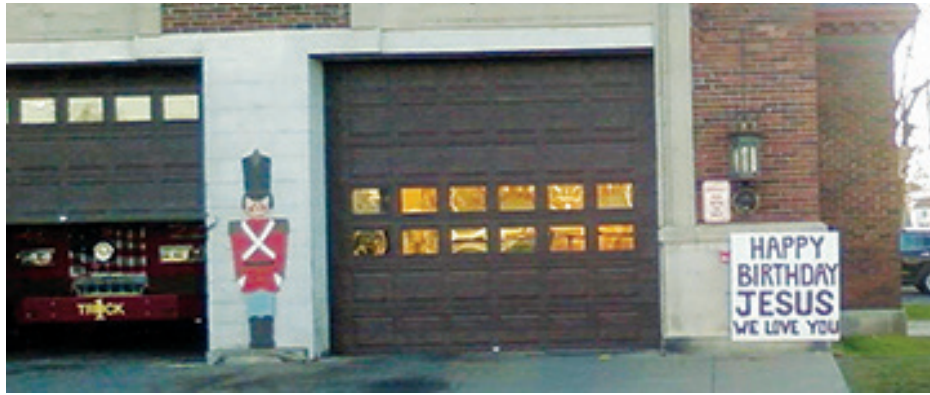
The city council in Nome, Alaska, is mulling taxing churches and other nonprofits in order to raise an estimated \$300,000 annually in the cash-strapped city of about 4,000 people, KTUU-TV reported Nov. 14, which would make it the first U.S. municipality to tax churches.

"You get rid of the sales tax exemption, most of the time these other exemptions aren't given — we're a very nice city [to do] it," said council member Matt Culley said, adding that should finances improve, refunds could be made.

Studies show exempting churches and religious organizations from taxes in America costs taxpayers between \$71 billion and \$83.5 billion a year.

### More evidence of disruptive religion

North Carolina magistrates are resigning or retiring early in record numbers after a federal judge cleared the way Oct. 10 for same-sex marriages, which led to the Administrative Office of the Courts telling magistrates they are legally bound to perform the marriages.



Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a second complaint to the city of Utica, N.Y., about this sign at Fire Station 4. The first letter was sent in April to Fire Chief Russell Brooks after a local complainant alerted FFRF that the sign was up in December 2013. After receiving word that the display had reappeared, Markert wrote Dec. 10 to Mayor Robert Palmieri.

Time Warner Cable News reported Nov. 19 that 16 magistrates left their jobs in October. "I felt like to perform same-sex unions would be in violation of the Lord's commands, so I couldn't do that," said former Gaston County Magistrate Bill Stevenson.

Time Warner determined that at least 10 of the 16 left specifically because of the mandate.

### Rogue Navy chaplain denied redress

The U.S. Court of Federal Claims on Nov. 24 rejected former Navy chaplain Gordon Klingenschmitt's challenge to his 2006 court martial conviction and discharge for wearing his uniform at a political protest at the White House, despite being ordered in advance not to participate in uniform. Klingenschmitt claimed the event was a worship service and not a protest and sought reinstatement and back pay.

The court ruled that "taking this infraction into consideration in deciding whether to recertify Dr. Klingenschmitt as a chaplain did not violate either his First Amendment rights or RFRA."

Klingenschmitt was elected Nov. 4 as a Republican to a vacant seat in the Colorado House of Representatives with 70% of the vote.

### 3 pro-religion bills advance in Michigan

Michigan's Republican-led House on Dec. 4 approved the "Religious Freedom Restoration Act" on a 59-50 party line vote, reported mlive.com. It now moves to the Senate.

Supporters say it's intended to limit restrictions on free exercise of religion. FFRF sent out an action alert Dec. 10 to urge members to contact their senator to oppose the bill.

"I should not be forced to follow the religion of my pharmacist," Rep. Vicki Barnett, D-Farmington Hills, said before the vote.

The House also approved a Republican-backed "conscience protections" package which says faith-based adoption agencies can opt out of adoptions due to religious reasons. A Democratic bill also passed that says students who miss school due to a religious holiday can still qualify for a perfect attendance award.

The Michigan Catholic Conference praised all three votes.

### Westboro Baptist wins Iowa flag case

An Iowa federal district court ruled Dec. 3 that Iowa's flag desecration statutes are unconstitutionally overbroad. The court ruled in favor of Westboro Baptist Church members Margie and Timothy Phelps, who alleged in May they were told by Red Oak law enforcement officers that they'd be arrested if they dragged the American flag on the ground or displayed it on their bodies at the funeral of a soldier.

The court rejected the Phelps' claim the laws infringed on their free exercise of religion.

### Arizona softball prayer case advances

U.S. District Judge John Sedwick ruled Dec. 5 that three former members of a Mesa, Ariz., high school varsity girls softball team lacked standing to sue the public school district over their school's Mormon Church released-time program. Sedwick also ruled that the plaintiffs' claims against softball coach Joseph Goodman could proceed.

Religion Clause reported that the court allowed an Establishment Clause claim alleging that during the 2013-14 season, certain players were appointed "prayer leaders" before every game. The plaintiffs say they were kicked off the Mountain View High School team after objecting to the prayers.

## Florida secular invocation irks commissioners

Four elected officials in Lake Worth, Fla., walked out in protest Dec. 2 before atheist Preston Smith, 34, started his invocation to open the city commission meeting. Commissioner Christopher McVoy was the only one to stay, as did the city manager and city attorney.

Mayor Pam Triolo and three commissioners left the chambers. "Free speech works both ways," Triolo told WPTV. "You can say what you want and I can choose to leave."

Walking out was "very un-American, and a slap in the face to the principles people fought very hard to make sure we had those rights," McVoy said. "If we choose to have an invocation, we have a responsibility to respectfully listen."

**Preston Smith • Lake Worth City Commission, Dec. 2, 2014**

Duly noted [after seeing commissioners walk out on him].

Our collective atheism—which is to say, loving empathy, scientific evidence, and critical thinking—leads us to believe that we can create a better, more equal community without religious divisions.

May we pray together.

Mother Earth, we gather today in your redeeming and glorious presence, to invoke your eternal guidance in the universe, the original Creator of all things.

May the efforts of this council blend the righteousness of Allah with the all-knowing wisdom of Satan. May Zeus, the great God of justice, grant us strength tonight. Jesus might forgive our shortcomings while Buddha enlightens us through His divine affection. We praise you, Krishna, for the sanguine sacrifice that freed us all. After all, if Almighty Thor is with us, who can ever be against us?

And finally, for the bounty of logic, reason, and science, we simply thank the atheists, agnostics, Humanists, who now account for 1 in 5 Americans, and [are] growing rapidly.

In closing, let us, above all, love one another, not to obtain mythical rewards for ourselves now, hereafter, or based on superstitious threats of eternal damnation, but rather, embrace secular-based principles of morality — and do good for goodness' sake.

And so we pray.

So what?

### What Is a Freethinker?



**free-think-er n.**

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



# Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

## Arrested / Charged

**Jerry D. Francis**, 42, Dayton, **OH**: Felony theft. Francis, pastor at Great Hope Community Church, allegedly stole about \$67,000 from the church’s savings account and a \$100,000 college scholarship fund a member left the church in her will. He was arrested in Temple, TX, after fleeing. *Source: WHIO, 11-25-14*

**Adam Metropoulos**, 52, Bangor, **ME**: Indicted on 1 count each of possession of sexually explicit materials and violation of privacy and 4 counts of sexual abuse of a minor. Metropoulos, pastor at St. George Greek Orthodox Church, was arrested in September for allegedly possessing child pornography and for surreptitiously photographing a woman taking a shower in his bathroom.

An investigation led the district attorney’s office to seek further charges through the county grand jury. Metropoulos was convicted in Michigan in 1983 of 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor under the age of 13. *Source: Daily News, 11-25-14*

**Three unidentified Catholic priests** and **a teacher** in Spain’s **Granada** region were arrested on allegations they sexually abused at a minor, a case that came to light after the alleged victim, now 24, wrote to Pope Francis about the abuse.

A total of 12 people, including 10 priests, are being investigated for possible involvement in a pedophile ring that targeted boys. No formal charges have yet been brought.

Archbishop Francisco Javier Martínez asked for forgiveness for the “scandals” affecting the church and prostrated himself before Granada Cathedral’s high altar, a gesture otherwise reserved for Good Friday. “The evils of the church are the evils of every one of us,” he said. *Source: thelocal.es, 11-24-14*

**Barry Meehan**, 65, West Warwick, **RI**: 5 counts of 1st-degree sexual assault involving 2 alleged victims, both males above age 14, while he was pastor at St. Mary Catholic Parish in Cranston and St. Augustine Parish in Providence in 1986, 1991 and 1992. *Source: Providence Journal, 11-21-14*

**Larry M. Thorne**, Ft. Walton Beach, **FL**: Lewd and lascivious battery (engaging in sexual activity with a person 12 to 16 years old). Thorne, pastor of Abundant Life Church, allegedly had sexual contact with a teen girl numerous times, starting in 2012 when she was 14.

The police report said when the girl asked Thorne during a “controlled phone interview” if she caused what happened by “leading him on,” he allegedly answered “yes” and said she “should not have hugged him that way,” according to officers listening in. *Source: Daily News, 11-16-14*

**Michael L. Harris Sr.**, 52, Newport News, **VA**: Causing or encouraging an act rendering a child delinquent and assault and battery. Harris, pastor of St. James Fellowship Church of God, allegedly took a 13-year-old girl on an outing without parental consent and asked if she wanted to drive his Mercedes SUV. He then allegedly put his hand under her shirt and rubbed her stomach while she was on his lap.

Harris also faces 3 recent counts of taking indecent liberties with a child in a supervisory role. Charges stem from alleged assaults in 2010-12 of a girl who’s now 17. *Source: 13newsnow.com, 11-6-14*

**Robin Q. Gwyn**, 66, Windsor, **Nova Scotia**: 9 counts of sexual assault added to earlier counts of sexual interference and invitation to sexual touching after another alleged victim came forward. Offenses were allegedly committed from the late 1980s until 2000. The Catholic Archdiocese of Kingston, Ontario, removed Gwyn from active ministry as a priest in 2004.

New charges stem from alleged abuse of a boy under age 14 in the Kingston area in 2000. *Source: Cape Breton Post, 11-6-14*

**Patrick H. Shiver**, 72, Wimauma, **FL**: Capital sexual battery. Shiver, pastor at Casa de Dios, allegedly admitted in a monitored phone call to having sex with a girl “30 to 40 years ago.”

An affidavit said Shiver allegedly admitted molesting the girl multiple times while she was younger than 11 and again when she was between 14 and 17. *Source: Tampa Tribune, 11-5-14*

**Megan Mahoney**, 25, New Brighton, **NY**: 30 counts of 3rd-degree rape, 4 counts of 3rd-degree criminal sexual act and endangering the welfare of a child.

Mahoney was fired as gym teacher and assistant basketball coach at Moore Catholic High School on Staten Island after being charged with having a sexual relationship with a male



“My reaction to the intrusion of religion exerted forcefully into our lives” is how New Jersey artist and FFRF member Charlotte Carney describes her illustration “Scream.” (You could also apply that statement to the modus operandi of black collar criminals.)

student, starting when he was 16, between Oct. 31 and Jan. 9.

Richard Postiglione resigned as Moore athletic director after Mahoney was charged. She was the second female coach to be accused of having a relationship with a student during Postiglione’s tenure. *Source: Staten Island Advance, 10-22-14*

## Pleaded / Convicted

**Alan Fox**, 60, Sparta, **NY**: Pleaded guilty to 1st-degree attempted sex abuse. Fox, a Methodist pastor and member of the Band of Brothers Christian music group, admitted molesting his foster daughter in 2013.

“Mr. Fox was a foster parent to the victim and her brother,” said prosecutor Justin Hill. “They were out for a weekend looking at the stars, and he asked if she would touch his private area, which she did. He also touched her private area. She was 5 years old at the time.”

Hill said the incident was reported within 48 hours. The children have been moved to another home. Fox and his wife Cathy have been raising foster children for 30 years.

A plea bargain calls for a sentence of 18 months in prison and sex offender registration. *Source: Genesee Sun, 11-26-14*

**Wenona Rossiter**, 37, and her husband, **Travis Rossiter**, 39, Albany, **OR**, were found guilty by jury of manslaughter in the 2013 faith-healing death of their daughter Syble, 12, from diabetic ketoacidosis.

The Rossiters belong to the Church of the First Born, whose members don’t believe in seeking medical attention. They testified they thought Syble had the flu.

Wenona Rossiter’s lawyer said she also believed Syble’s weight loss was due to height gain during puberty. She testified it was “God’s will” that her daughter died. Wenona’s father, Loyd Hays, was convicted in 1996 of negligent homicide for the death of his 7-year-old son of a treatable form of leukemia.

Travis Rossiter allegedly told a detective that doctors are for people who don’t believe strongly enough in God. *Source: Democrat-Herald, 11-11-14*

## Sentenced

**Richard McCormick**, 73, New Rochelle, **NY**: 8 to 10 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of 5 counts of child rape. McCormick, a Salesian order Catholic priest, was director of the Sacred Heart Retreat, a camp in Ipswich, MA. He was accused of molesting a male, now 44, in the early 1980s when he was between the ages of 10 and 12.

The alleged victim said he came forward after finding McCormick’s name and photo in an online directory of priests and realized it was the man he called “Father Dick.”

McCormick would pull him out of activities or wake him late at night and force him into sexual acts, the man testified. “Does he even remember me?” the victim asked at sentencing. “I don’t have to ask that today because I know the an-

swer as he sits there in his chair denying even being at the camp.”

A Feb. 5 hearing is set on allegations by another male that McCormick raped him at the camp in the same time period. *Source: Boston Globe/Salem News, 11-26-14*

**Zackary Dressner**, 38, Penfield, **NY**: 30 months in prison after pleading guilty to possession of obscene material. Dressner, former pastor at Southeast Bible Baptist Church, admitted having child pornography on his computer in 2011 but was allowed to plead to a lesser offense.

Dressner led a “dual life,” said U.S. District Judge Charles Siragusa. “You were preaching morality while engaging in immorality.”

“I was part of something very evil,” Dressner said at sentencing. He resigned as pastor after being charged. *Source: Democrat & Chronicle, 11-20-14*

**Joseph R. Hall**, Dallas, **NC**: 187 months in prison on a conviction for statutory sex offense. Hall was found guilty of starting a sexual relationship with the victim when she was 12 and he was 42 in 1998 when he was pastor of a church near Stone Chimney. It continued for about 4 years.

When arrested, he was men’s ministry leader at Restoring Hope Foursquare Church. *Source: WCNC, 11-18-14*

‘This guy isn’t selling used cars to people; he’s a deacon in the church.’ — former Navy SEAL Don Shipley

**Franklin E. Huntress Jr.**, 80, a defrocked Episcopal priest, received a 12-month suspended sentence in Manchester, **NH**, after pleading guilty to 2 counts of simple assault involving a boy, then 14, in New York in 1984-85.

The victim’s mother spoke at sentencing how Huntress violated her trust. “My memory of kneeling at the altar and taking communion from you for the remission of my sins with the same hands that you were using to abuse my son makes me literally sick,” she said.

Prosecutor Mike Zaino said that ultimately, the case was about getting Huntress to admit his guilt for the victim’s sake. *Source: WMUR, 11-17-14*

**Deric Peacock**, 30, Hopewell, **VA**: 5 years in prison and 7 years’ probation after pleading guilty to 2 counts of procuring a sex act by computer. Peacock, family and children’s pastor at South Hopewell Church of God, exposed his genitals online and tried to set up a sexual encounter with what he thought were a 12-year-old girl and her mother but was actually a detective. He used the name “ChurchGuy” in the chat room.

Peacock testified that he lived with his wife, 5 children, his mother and his stepfather. He said 4 of his children are adopted. *Source: Roanoke Times, 11-12-14*

**Stephen Gough**, 79, Auckland, **NZ**: 42 months in prison after admitting to “persistent, relentless and repeated” sexual offenses against 3 girls and a boy between 1976-87. Judge Kevin Glubb said Gough, a retired wood-working teacher, was an active member of his church, which helped gain people’s confidence.

Testimony showed Gough sometimes read the bible while molesting his victims, aged between 3 and 16. As he was led away, an accuser yelled, “Burn in hell you piece of s\*\*\*.” *Source: New Zealand Herald, 11-12-14*

**Luis A. Serna**, 61, Chatsworth, **CA**: 121 months in prison and \$4.6 million in restitution to over 80 victims of a wire fraud scheme that targeted Spanish speakers of meager means. Serna, pastor at Zion Living World Christian Center (formerly Amistad Cristiana), pleaded guilty to running a Ponzi scheme. *Source: LA Daily News, 11-12-14*

**Aidan Kay**, 71, Blenheim, **New Zealand**: \$1,500 in “emotional harm reparations” to the male victim of an indecent assault in July. Kay, a Passionist Catholic priest, avoided jail time.

Judge Peter Hobbs’ summary of facts said the assault happened at the parish presbytery with Kay sliding his hands down the man’s back into his trousers and groping his buttocks while trying to kiss him. After the victim moved back, Kay apologized. *Source: Marlborough Express, 11-10-14*

**Guyo Waqo**, a Kenyan Catholic priest, was among 5 men sentenced to death in **Nairobi** for the 2005 slaying of Luigi Locati, 77, a native Italian who was bishop of Zica and vicar apostolic at the pastoral center in Isiolo, where he was fatally shot.

The judge said he believed Waqo masterminded the plot after a disagreement about cash donations to the vicariate Locati oversaw. Kenya has not executed anyone since 1987, although capital punishment is not abolished. *Source: Catholic News Service, 11-6-14*

**Jeffrey A. Nichols**, 48, Attleboro, **MA**: 5 years in prison after pleading guilty to molesting a 7th-grade student in 2008 when she was 13 and he was assistant pastor at Grace Baptist Church and principal of Grace Baptist Christian Academy.

Nichols’ wife also taught at the school. He was originally charged with aggravated indecent assault and battery on a child under 14, indecent assault and battery on a child over 14, accosting a person of the opposite sex and open and gross behavior.

Nichols admitted asking the girl to expose herself to him and exposed himself to her, prosecutors said. *Source: Sun Chronicle, 11-7-14*

**John A. Jackson Sr.**, 64, Madison, **NC**: 9 months in prison and 3 years’ probation after pleading guilty to 3 counts each of embezzlement and corporate malfeasance. Jackson, pastor at Goodwill Baptist Church, was also ordered to pay \$30,000 in restitution.

Jackson owned 5 Cadillacs, prosecutors said. He has previous convictions for obtaining money under false pretenses in 1986 and embezzlement in 1999.

His son, **John A. Jackson Jr.**, and **Treva Tatum**, former church secretary, also face conspiracy and embezzlement charges. *Source: WFMY, 11-5-14*

**Robert Ours**, 65, Syracuse, **NY**: 10 years’ probation after pleading guilty to 6 counts of possessing a sexual performance by a child. Ours, a retired Catholic priest, accessed the images on the office computer of a nun at the Tommy Coyne Residence for Priests, where he lives.

The images Ours possessed were not at the worst end of the child porn spectrum, said prosecutor Jeremy Cali. *Source: syracuse.com, 11-5-14*

## Civil Lawsuits Filed

Former students at Palma High School, Salinas, **CA**, and St. Odilia Catholic School, Shoreview, **MN**, are suing the **Crosier Fathers & Brothers** (Order of the Holy Cross) for alleged sexual abuse by **Fr. Gerald Funcheon**, a former teacher and chaplain.

“The guy was a wolf,” said David Bidney, alleging he was molested at age 10. “They hurt me bad. And they hurt a lot of kids bad.”

In a 2012 deposition, Funcheon said he started molesting boys in the 1970s in the Twin Cities area: “I suspect, and I don’t remember, it would have been at St. Odilia’s.”

Asked how many victims he had, Funcheon said, “I would say a dozen.” Plaintiff’s attorney Jeff Anderson: “Do you think you might be underestimating that number?”



Funcheon: “Wow — I couldn’t count ’em up. I’ll go — I don’t know. I’ll go to 18. I can’t give you a number on this, OK?”

A 1992 internal church memo disclosed in a 2010 lawsuit said Funcheon, who was ordained in 1965, told the bishop there may be about “50 victims.” *Source: Monterey Herald, 11-19-14; KARE, 6-26-14*

## Civil Lawsuits Settled

**Cretin-Derham Hall**, a co-ed Catholic high school in St. Paul, **MN**, settled a lawsuit filed by a former student who alleged he was molested by a female staff member in 2008. Cameron Clarkson, now 22, claimed the school failed to supervise **Gail E. Gagne**, who was convicted in 2011 for having sex with him over a 2-month period.

Gagne, then 25, was an assistant basketball coach and weight room instructor. She’s the daughter and granddaughter respectively of former pro wrestlers Greg and Verne Gagne. She previously settled a suit with Clarkson and paid him \$1.

Gagne’s attorney Earl Gray said the school’s insurance company settled the suit for \$75,000. Gagne pleaded guilty to 5th-degree criminal sexual conduct, a gross misdemeanor, and was sentenced to a year of probation and ordered to register as a sex offender. *Source: Pioneer Press, 11-30-14*

The **Salesians of Don Bosco** settled a suit filed by a former student at Goshen Junior Seminary in **New York** that alleged defrocked Catholic priest **Sean Leo Rooney**, last known address New Rochelle, NY, molested him.

Plaintiff’s lawyer Mitchell Garabedian said his client, now 48, was fondled and masturbated by Rooney on a bus during a school trip and at the seminary in 1981-82. He said the case was settled for “6 figures” and alleged that 2 other priests molested his client. *Source: Times-Picayune, 11-5-14*

## Legal Developments

**Larry G. Singleton**, 72, former pastor of Bay Springs Baptist Church in Abbeville, **MS**, was not coerced into confessing in 2013 to sexual battery and fondling a minor, the state Court of Appeals ruled. He’s serving a 30-year sentence for molestation which allegedly started when the victim was 11 and continued for several years. *Source: AP, 11-25-14*

Federal bankruptcy Judge Susan Kelley denied a claim by laicized **Wisconsin** Catholic priest **Marvin Knighton** that the Archdiocese of Milwaukee owes him money he contributed to his retirement account. Knighton was acquitted by a jury in 2003 of child sexual abuse but was removed him from the priesthood anyway due to 2 other credible allegations.

Knighton originally sought \$475,000 in back pay, retirement contributions and expenses from the archdiocese. The amount was eventually reduced to about \$22,000 in retirement contributions, which Kelley denied. *Source: AP, 11-19-14*

**Fernando Sayasaya**, a Catholic priest believed to have fled from West Fargo, **ND**, in 1998 is still being sought. “We believe him to be in the Philippines, and there is an extradition treaty with the Philippines,” said Cass County State’s Attorney Birch Burdick.

According to a newspaper timeline, police first investigated Sayasaya in 1997 for renting a motel room with a runaway teen boy. In August 1998, 2 boys, ages 11 and 14, told police he molested them (for which he wasn’t charged till 2002). Fargo Bishop James Sullivan gave Sayasaya permission to take a vacation to the Philippines, from which he never returned. Church officials told police he allegedly had bronchitis and couldn’t travel. Another boy accused him of abuse in 1999.

“Valley News Live reached out to the Fargo diocese to see what they are doing to try to bring Sayasaya back. We are waiting on their response.” *Source: Valley News Live, 11-18-14; Dallas Morning News, 10-28-12*

The criminal conviction of Catholic monsignor **William Lynn** for child endangerment should be reinstated, a prosecutor told the state Supreme Court in Harrisburg, **PA**. Lynn, 63, served about 18 months of a 3- to 6-year sentence before an appeals court overturned the conviction in late 2013.

Philadelphia prosecutor Hugh Burns argued Lynn’s actions let Edward Avery (now in prison) continue to molest children as a priest even after abuse claims came to Lynn’s attention.

At Lynn’s sentencing, the judge said he’d “enabled monsters in clerical garb . . . to destroy the souls of children.” *Source: AP, 11-18-14*

Imprisoned former **Philadelphia** Catholic priest **Charles Engelhardt**, 67, died of heart failure while the state Supreme Court was considering the appeal of his 2013 conviction for molesting a 10-year-old boy in 1998-99.

Engelhardt denied the charges, saying he didn’t even remember the alleged victim. A 2011 grand jury report said Engelhardt caught the boy drinking sacramental wine after Mass, then offered him more and showed him pornography

with men and women, asking which he liked best.

The next week after Mass, the report said, Engelhardt told the boy it was time for him “to become a man” and performed oral sex on him. *Source: Post-Gazette, 11-18-14*

**Joseph Jeyapaul**, 59, arrived in Minneapolis after being extradited from India to face child sex abuse charges related to his time as a Catholic priest in the Diocese of Crookston, **MN**. The county attorney filed extradition papers in 2009.

He’s charged with molesting a 14-year-old girl on multiple occasions in 2004 while he served at Blessed Sacrament Church in Greenbush. The criminal complaint alleges he masturbated in front of the girl, forced her to perform oral sex and sexually touched her. The diocese settled a civil suit in 2011 with the victim.

By the time the diocese learned of the allegations in 2005, Jeyapaul had left for India, supposedly to care for his ailing mother. In 2006, another Minnesota teen accused him of abuse. *Source: Star Tribune, 11-18-14*

**Sixtus Kimaro**, a former Catholic priest in the Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam, **Tanzania**, died while the state was appealing his release after being sentenced in 2006 to 35 years in prison for sodomy and molestation of a 17-year-old boy.

A relative said Kimaro died while on private business in Mozambique. He was freed in 2008 but the state filed a new appeal in July. Kimaro and his lawyers had ignored the 3-judge panel’s order to appear in court. *Source: allafrica.com, 11-17-14*

**Jeffery A. Stallworth**, former pastor at Anderson United Methodist Church in Jackson, **MS**, asked the state Supreme Court to rule he shouldn’t have to register as a sex offender in Mississippi. He pleaded guilty in 2002 to misdemeanor sexual assault of a woman in her Maryland home in 2001. He received a suspended sentence and the conviction was expunged in 2010.

Stallworth’s similar 2008 appeal was denied. *Source: AP, 11-17-14*

**Michael T. Patrick**, 58, Scappoose, **OR**, had his October trial date moved to February on a count of felony luring. Patrick, pastor of St. Wenceslaus Catholic Parish, allegedly drove alongside a teen girl who was walking and kept asking to give her a ride in Vancouver, WA, where he has a residence.

Patrick, a native Sri Lankan, is on paid leave. The Archdiocese of Portland said it’s not contributing to his legal fees. *Source: Catholic Sentinel, 11-13-14*

**Stefano M. Cavalletti**, 45, an Italian Catholic priest arrested in July in **Milan** on cocaine possession and distribution charges, will have a “fast-track” trial in January. Police responding to a noise complaint found a large amount of cocaine and the priest’s shredded passport in the home’s bathroom.

Cavalletti told police he’d been “self-treating” with cocaine for depression after being convicted in 2013 of fraud against an elderly woman.

The fast-track process means a judge can base his ruling on evidence presented in preliminary hearings, which can reduce the sentence for a conviction by one-third. *Source: UPI, 11-13-14*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago** released 15,000 pages of internal files detailing how the church handled abuse allegations against 36 more priests.

Walter Huppenbauer’s file is nearly 400 pages long. Gregory Miller’s 275-page includes congratulatory letters of advancement in the archdiocese and multiple warnings about misconduct, including, “[W]hile in Fr. Miller’s quarters in the rectory, he instructed XX to remove his clothes; Fr. Miller also removed his clothes and had an erection; Fr. Miller took his hand and rubbed XX’s leg two times, then placed his hand on XX’s stomach and began to move his hand down to XX’s genital area.” The rest of the complaint was blacked out.

Still, Miller continued to receive parish assignments and in 2007 was commended by Cardinal Francis George, who wrote: “The support you have received for this reappointment is an indication of the fine pastoral leadership you have given the people of St. Bernadette as you have proclaimed the Gospel there these past six years.” *Source: CBS Chicago/Chicago Tribune, 11-13-14*

An order by Justice Deborah Paquette, Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador, allows continued anonymity for “Jane Doe,” who is suing **Stephen J. Collins**, 76, and the **United Church of Canada** for alleged sexual abuse by Collins in the 1960s.

Collins, believed to be living in Angola, worked as a pastor and later as a doctor before pleading guilty to molesting 11 children, as young as 7 and almost all female, from 1975-86.

The UCC is Canada’s largest Protestant denomination. Doe alleges Collins’ abuse started when she was about 8 and that she was forced to masturbate him while he digitally penetrated her. *Source: The Telegram, 11-5-14*

A regional high court in Linz, **Austria**, denied an appeal by defrocked priest **August Mandorfer**, 81, who was sentenced to 12 years in prison in 2013 for 24 cases of child abuse and

# ‘You were preaching morality while engaging in immorality.’

## — Judge to Zackary Dressner, Baptist pastor

sexual violence at the Catholic boarding school he headed between 1973-93. Mandorfer admitted guilt but sought acquittal under the statute of limitations, which was rejected. *Source: theocal.at, 11-6-14*

## Allegations

**Utah** resident Rosemary Williams of “My Five Wives” on the TLC channel went public on her blog with allegations she was molested in the 1990s starting when she was 12 by her father, **Lynn A. Thompson**, leader of a Mormon splinter group called the Apostolic United Brethren. Thompson denied the allegations.

“The reason people are afraid to say anything is because they are upholding somebody in a position of authority and they’re taught to respect them,” Williams told a reporter. “They are afraid of the repercussions. They are afraid of Utah coming down on them and carrying their kids out of their home.”

She and Brady Williams’ 4 other wives and their combined 24 children are featured in the reality show. One of the show’s goals is to show that polygamy can be healthy and stable. *Source: AP, 11-22-14*

**Robert Geisinger**, second in command of the Chicago Jesuits in the 1990s, knew as early as 1995 about abuse complaints against defrocked pedophile priest **Donald McGuire**, according to court documents. Documents also show complaints about McGuire, now 84, dating to the 1960s, but the Jesuits failed for years to tell police.

Geisinger was named by Pope Francis as Vatican sex crimes prosecutor in September. He declined to comment to a reporter, “citing the late hour.”

The Jesuits in 2013 agreed to pay \$19.6 million to settle a lawsuit by 6 men who alleged they were molested by McGuire between 1975 and the early 2000s.

Vatican spokesman Federico Lombard said Geisinger has a “solid and proven record in child protection dating back nearly two decades.” David Clohessy, director of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, urged the pope to replace Geisinger as sex crimes prosecutor. *Source: ABC News, 11-23-14*

## Removed / Resigned

**Stephen Vincent**, 40, pastor at St. Giles Church, Staffordshire, **UK**, was barred for 8 years from serving as an Anglican priest by the Lichfield Diocese after admitting to having a sexual relationship with a married woman. Vincent is also married and has 3 children.

The alleged mistress, identified as “X,” later accused Vincent of rape. After police dropped the inquiry, she complained to the Church of England.

She’d met Vincent in April 2012, right before he was ordained, saying she was interested in learning about joining the clergy herself. They soon began exchanging suggestive text messages.

In June, 3 days after his ordination, they met at a bar and had sex against a wall in an alleyway.

Vincent’s wife, Erin, said she’s giving him another chance. “I can see how much he regrets it, and I don’t think he needs punishing further.” *Source: Daily Mail, 11-24-14*

**David A. Reinhart** resigned as pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Delphos, **OH**, and St. John the Baptist Parish in Landeck, OH, and has been put on administrative leave by the Catholic Diocese of Toledo for alleged misconduct with adult females. *Source: Sandusky Register, 11-17-14*

An **unidentified Catholic priest** in Vienna, **Austria**, is under investigation for sexual abuse of a minor, according to Nina Bussek, spokesperson for the public prosecutor’s office.

A search of the priest’s residence allegedly turned up several child pornography images. He’s been suspended by the Archdiocese of Vienna during the investigation. *Source: Der Standard, 11-13-14*

Pope Francis defrocked **José Mercau**, a pedophile Argentine priest sentenced to 14 years in prison in 2011 after confessing he molested 4 teens. Mercau spent only 15 days in jail before being moved to a monastery in Buenos Aires province, where he was released in March. *Source: AP, 11-6-14*

**Mike Fortner**, 73, Hayward, **CA**, resigned

as deacon at First Southern Baptist Church in San Lorenzo after confessing in church that he lied for decades about being a Navy SEAL for 9 years.

After retired SEAL Don Shipley saw a video of Fortner making the claim to a church group, he called Fortner a liar. “This guy isn’t selling used cars to people; he’s a deacon in the church,” said Shipley, who can access a database that lists every SEAL who has ever served.

Shipley said Fortner is sorry he got caught but not sorry he lied. “There’s not a sympathetic bone in my body for him, and I’ll take down anyone else that claims Navy SEAL status when they were not.” *Source: ABC 7, 11-6-14*

## Other

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in **Tasmania** is gathering testimony about alleged abuse by staff in past decades at **Hutchins School**, a K-12 Anglican boys school in Hobart.

Richard McCreadie testified he was a sex crimes detective in 1970 when a boy about age 16 filed a report alleging he was molested by headmaster **David Lawrence** and music teacher **Ronald Thomas**. McCreadie said both men confessed and then fled to the UK and South Africa. No extradition efforts were made.

The commission heard testimony from 4 former students who claimed up to 8 staff members molested them in the 1960s.

One alleged victim testified he and Lawrence had sex on a brown chaise lounge in Lawrence’s office. McCreadie said when he went to the office, he saw “signs of sexual activity” on the furniture.

Bishop John Harrower told the commission about his 2002 recommendation to the school board: “I personally would have wished that the school had given an apology, a fulsome apology.”

A victim identified as AOA, who reported abuse in 1993, didn’t receive an apology until October 2014.

The commission also heard testimony by Bhakti Manning, who alleges she and other children were molested at the **Satyananda Yoga Ashram in New South Wales** in the 1970s and 1980s.

Manning alleged she was abused by the ashram’s director, **Akhandananda Saraswati**, and by another swami who used spiritual teachings as a form of control. Children were separated from their parents at the retreat, she said. “We were children who were groomed to be used by those who had power. Not only was there sexual abuse, we worked for nothing. Our whole lives were controlled.” *Source: The Guardian/Sky News, 11-25-14*

Victim’s attorney Jeff Anderson released files obtained through a lawsuit that show the **Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Vatican officials** knew about child pornography allegations against Catholic priest **Donald J. Dummer** in 1997 but covered them up.

Five years after an employee at St. Mary’s Church in St. Paul found the porn and told the archdiocese, then-Archbishop Harry Flynn and Joseph Hitpas, Dummer’s superior in the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, discussed the issue. Hitpas told Flynn in 2002, “I will dispose of the tapes.”

One was a VCR movie of “boys 10-12 years of age playing basketball — nude,” the employee said. Another showed older teens having sex.

Dummer, now 77, lives in Tewksbury, MA. His file wasn’t given to police until November 2013. *Source: Pioneer Press, 11-13-14*

An appeals court ruled that an unidentified Israeli couple who decided not to terminate the woman’s pregnancy on the advice of the late **Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu** will have to pay all the costs of their paralyzed son’s medical care.

The court overturned a lower court decision and ruled in favor of the Meuhedet Health Fund HMO, which had refused coverage because a gynecologist had told the woman on her first visit that she should have an abortion because it was highly likely the child would be born paralyzed.

It should have been clear that “a rabbi, as great as he may be in Torah and halacha, is not a doctor and not an engineer,” the court said. “The rabbi, who passed away in 2010, is not to blame, but the parents who took his nonprofessional opinion over that of a knowledgeable doctor, are.” *Source: Arutz Sheva, 11-6-14*

**Email: blackcollar@ffr.org**

## “I receive thousands of letters every year.”

Excuse that Twin Cities Catholic Archbishop John Nienstedt gave for falsely testifying under oath in April that he only learned of a pedophile priest’s criminal past “during the last six months” after a 2008 letter proving the opposite surfaced. *Minnsota Public Radio, 10-23-14*



## Letterbox

### Thanks for godless pledge support

*Katherine Paige, FFRF legal fellow, sent a complaint letter to the Tracy (Calif.) Unified School District, censuring the punishment of two high school students for omitting “under God” while leading the Pledge of Allegiance over the school intercom.*

Thank you for the amazingly fast response and for all the legal staff’s work. It may seem that you are engaged in an impossibly large task with ridiculously small resources, but you truly do make a difference. In a world dominated by prejudice, ignorance and superstition, FFRF raises a candle of reason.

It may never be possible for your small candle to light the darkness on its own, but a candle can be seen across a very long distance on a dark night. Thus it can inspire and give heart those who might not otherwise be so bold to light a candle of their own. Together, with persistence and patience, we may see the light of 10,000 candles.

I’ll be attending the next Tracy School District Board of Education meeting to express my views. Please let me know if I there is any way in which I can be a resource to FFRF in this matter.

**Mark Miller**  
**California**

### Freethinker finds way ‘to get their goat’

I really wanted to attend FFRF’s annual convention, but because of medical problems I just couldn’t. One quick observation: I really find it hard to believe that smart people (physicians, etc.) still believe in nonsense.

I have been asked why I don’t believe and I use a phrase that I read somewhere, “When you can tell me why you don’t believe in all the other possible gods, then you will know why I don’t believe in yours.” They usually come back and say, “They don’t exist. . .” Duh.

I think four tours in Vietnam was enough convincing for me that there is no hope in praying to some sky fairy that won’t answer the phone. I read Freethought Today cover to cover. I am baffled at the idiots that use profanity in their emails to you. I loved Ron Reagan’s ad on TV.

I now have friends that won’t email me anymore because I use “666” in my email address. They don’t know it, but I just do it to get their goat. Keep up the good work.

**Richard Schmitz**  
**California**

### Kudos for ousting bible curriculum

Congratulations on your great work in convincing the Mustang School District in Oklahoma to reject Steve Green’s bible curriculum for their public schools. This is a terrific victory for FFRF, but unfortunately probably not the end of the Green family’s attempts to inject religion into public schools. All of us in the Chicago Chapter, and everyone on the side of reason, are so glad to have such a great organization like FFRF taking on these important issues.

**Tom Cara**  
**Illinois**

### Nothing succeeded like convention!

Thank you for the amazing experience I had in Los Angeles at the convention and for the “Nothing Fails Like Prayer” award. The plaque is seriously one of the coolest things in my possession. It was also nice to meet and talk with so many FFRF staff. You all do amazing work. Thanks again for everything. We’ll see you next year in Madison!

**Amanda Novotny**  
**South Dakota**

### Supporters, new ‘Lifers’ are awesome

When I sent my first contribution to the building fund, I said that would give me incentive to live until it is completed. Now that it’s virtually completed, I’m sending another \$2,000 “congratulations” check plus a bonus of \$1,000 for painting it my favorite colors. I compared the finished product with the original drawing to make sure it lived up to its promise.

**Vera**  
**California**

• • •

I am signing up for Lifetime Membership because I decided it is time to put my money where my brain is.

**David Myers, Lifetime Member**  
**Texas**

• • •

All religion originated out of man’s desire to control others (i.e., women.)

**Doug Reedy, new Lifetime Member**  
**Ohio**

• • •

The enclosed check for \$1,200 is my yearly contribution to help with the wonderful work FFRF does to ensure that the freedoms promised by the American Constitution apply to all Americans. Please add my contribution to the legal fund. Your success is my success. I’m looking forward to a good year for us all.

**Brian Fetherstonhaugh, Life Member**  
**California**

• • •

Please find enclosed a donation in the memory of my husband, Darrell K. Hutchins, who died at age 73 of prostate cancer on Oct. 7, 2014. He believed so strongly in the importance of the work FFRF is doing. As do I. Wishing you continued success as you fight the good fight!

**Doris Hutchins**  
**Arkansas**

### Seidel’s Arkansas talk very informative

My husband and I heard Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel as a guest speaker for the University of Arkansas’ student organization Occam’s Razors. Bill, who teaches graduate level physics, and I are members of the Fayetteville Freethinkers, which has monthly meetings at a public library. While our numbers continue to increase, there’s still room for growth, since the force of organized religion has been felt in this last election with its heavy hand and desire to move our society back into biblical times — literally (see postscript).

We are now represented legislatively by a huge majority of Christians whose desire (and mandate, they believe) is to reduce women’s status and control over their own health while passing



### Midlothian, Texas

**Midlothian Freethought was represented Oct. 18 at the annual Midlothian Fall Festival by FFRF’er John McClean and Jim Hall. John writes: “The recent controversy with the unconstitutional school plaques and our voice, via the ‘Take Down the Plaques’ Facebook group, in support of FFRF’s effort to remove them, was center stage. It was aided a great deal by a generous amount of literature, including copies of Freethought Today supplied by FFRF. Many people offered to pray for us, and many commented on how thankful they were that someone was speaking up for them. It was a good day.”**

laws with no compassion whatsoever.

Hearing Andrew’s talk on the religiosity of our founding fathers was fantastic. It informed us of many unknown aspects of the framing of our Constitution. I’ve never seen this information presented in such a powerful way.

It would be good to have it available in a format easily shared with the public. Knowing the truth about the beliefs of the framers of the Constitution is vital to stopping the plethora of lies about them and their motivations.

Thanks for all you do. My daily email is like a short history lesson with an affirmation that some pretty terrific people “got it!”

P.S. Lest you think I am exaggerating about how insidious and archaic religion is here, a friend recently attended a wedding where the bride’s father approached the bride and groom during the ceremony to deliver a small key carried on a small pillow for the groom. It was the key to his daughter’s chastity belt!”

On the other hand, Bill Nye “the Science Guy” filled Barnhill Arena with more than 10,000 people last month. I was shocked at the turnout, since a majority of students wear Christian crosses.

**Carole (Westby) Harter**  
**Arkansas**

### Hope for real change rests with women

When I was born in November of 1919 in Indiana, my mother, like all women there, could not vote. That was absurd. Women confronted this absurdity of being treated like second-class citizens during the suffrage movement in the 1800s. Their efforts culminated in the approval of the 19th Amendment in 1920.

I have watched women in my lifetime move into positions of responsibility such as mayors, governors and members of Congress. According to a Sept. 8 Time magazine report, Congress is 81.5% male, but it is projected to be 50% in 31 years. As this happens, more women will have an opportunity to confront various absurdities which have confounded men, including war, overpopulation and global warming.

My father served in World War I, which ended in November 1918. I was born a year later, just in time to serve in World War II. My two sons were a few years too young to go to Vietnam. What have our various wars accomplished? Why do we have one religious faction fighting another? It is Sunnis vs. Shiites in the Muslim world as well as Israelis

vs. Palestinians.

It is noteworthy that men have been the major figures in religious beliefs from Moses to Joseph Smith. Some determined women have tried to be accepted as priests in the Catholic and the Mormon churches, but to no avail. Many Protestant churches, however, have allowed women to serve as ministers.

Some women see religion itself as absurd. Madalyn Murray O’Hair was a leader in the movement to take prayer out of public schools, which occurred in 1962. Anne Nicol Gaylor started the Freedom From Religion Foundation in 1976.

In some parts of the world, women are deprived of education and are treated disrespectfully. In a recent meeting with young African leaders, Michelle Obama said: “No country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens.”

Reducing the world’s population is another situation particularly suitable for women to address, since they have the means to reduce reproduction. Here we find a conflict with religious beliefs formed when people knew nothing about science and the population of the Earth was small. Overpopulation also contributes to global warming.

The challenge will be for women, once they see how absurdities are destroying our civilization, to take meaningful action. Women must be the true hope and change of the future.

**James L. Sanders**  
**Arizona**

### Crank mailers reveal evils of religion

Nothing displays and proves the continuing evil of most religion as the crank mail does. Sin and a lack of morals or ethics are displayed in the illiterate scribblings of these letter writers.

We need not go beyond the borders of this country to the contentious Middle East to find religion’s evils. It’s right in the mindsets of crank letter writers, who also prove the wisdom of the framers of our Constitution, who knew their history so well and tried to prevent the self-destruction that preceded us in every established nation around the globe by setting our very first right as the separation of religion and government.

So-called freedom of religion includes freedom from religion.

**Gilbert Cantlin**  
**Ohio**



‘We have over-birthed our Earth’

’Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a souse. The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, they’d been worn for six weeks and they needed the air.

A snowy, blowy Christmas 2014 for most all. More breezing, freezing, sneezing and wheezing for this wintry solstice season. Poor little Jesus, nobody knows his birthday, nor if he existed. As usual, for some, it will be a very cheery, bleary, dreary, beery new year.

Growing up, it was a Christian celebration. We thought little of the consequences, but the celebrations were rather racist and discriminatory. Jews were snickered at. Native Americans were heathens, unless the exalted missionaries had saved them for Christ. There was no separation of church and state as there were festive city-sponsored decorations everywhere.

There was no recognition of other ethnic religions. No other religions had official holidays, as we did not celebrate false beliefs. Christians proclaimed theirs was true; therefore, others were bogus.

’Tis the season for reasoning and eliminating these superstitious, fallacious, religious beliefs of conceited gods. I believe in freedom from ordained tithing and the freedoms within and from religions. No one should be coerced into wearing or eating their beliefs. There should be freedom from religious indoctrination for our innocent little children. Disbelieve in the creed of pray, pay, obey and stay.

’Tis the season, and the reason, why we should demand that all religions produce their gods before the U.N. or forever be prohibited from proclaiming such. There are the hungry and poor, unfortunately, and I quote the pope, who claimed that they shall always be with us. Not only they, but the many billions more arriving because of fundamentalists demanding that birth-

ing continue until the womb fails or the mother dies in childbirth.

We have overbirthed our Earth.

Scott A. Hunter  
Arizona

SCOTUS put beliefs over facts

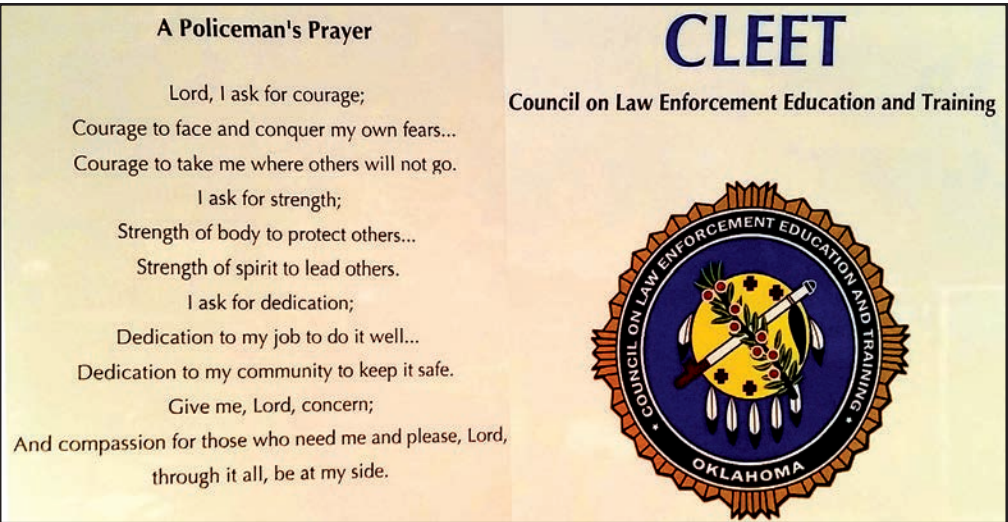
Much has been written about the Supreme Court decision on Hobby Lobby. What makes the decision so wrong comes down to the essentials.

Set aside for the moment any consideration of the religious façade, or even personal freedom of religion vs. personal moral responsibility for birth control. Focus on one fact: The judicial system is supposed to be based on analyzing the evidence, following the evidence and ruling in favor of the evidence.

What the different sides in a court case choose or don’t choose to believe is irrelevant to the facts. The overwhelming evidence is that birth control pills and devices are not abortion-producing products, despite the protestations of the employers in this case. In ruling in favor of a belief, not evidence, the court has chosen prejudice over fact.

What makes the case so familiar is that we already know many examples of prejudice trumping evidence in our country by carrying the banner of “religious freedom.” One example is discrimination by religious employers. In every instance, there is no evidence of wrongdoing by those who are discriminated against. There’s no evidence to prove any religion is truer than another, and yet a person will not be hired or will be fired for disagreeing with the employers. Sans evidence, the court is biased in allowing this to continue.

We’re all familiar with the statue of “Justice,” a blindfolded woman holding the scales of justice to show justice will be blindly fair. Has anyone noticed



Staff Attorney Sam Grover sent a complaint letter Nov. 19 to the Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training in Ada, Okla. A local complainant alerted FFRF about pervasive religious remarks during training and harassment of an atheist class member. This prayer was printed on the course graduation program. The ceremony included prayer.

that lately, she is often sneaking a peek under the blindfold, and that whenever she sees someone carrying a cross, she rules in their favor?

Carl Scheiman, Life Member  
Maine

The Gaylorettes are out a-caroling

Silent night  
Rational night  
All is calm  
All is bright

God has suffered a lingering death  
Theologians are gasping for breath

Dream of world to come  
Dream of world to come.

Ed Killian  
Florida

It’s not ‘a more perfect Christian union’

Right-wing Christian clergy spread the lie that since all the founders were Christian, they wanted to establish America as a Christian republic. Noth-

ing could be further from the truth. This lie must be smashed by referencing hard historical facts.

The Constitution begins, “We the people in order to form a more perfect union.” Had the founders wanted a theocracy, it would have read “a more perfect Christian union.” Nowhere in it will you find the words Jesus, Christ or Christianity.

The best proof comes from the 1797 Treaty of Tripoli, which flatly states, “As the government of the United States is in no sense founded on the Christian religion . . .” There is no wiggle room at all here. We are a secular republic! A treaty is not a press statement or a photo op. It is the law of the land which governs how we deal with another country. The senators who approved it were founders who supported or participated in the American Revolution.

So the next time someone tries to bamboozle you with the lie that we were intended to be a Christian nation, shoot him/her down with those cold hard facts. Then smile nicely, and wish them a good day.

Alexian Gregory  
New Jersey

Sharing the Crank Mail

Lots of crank mail this go-round (printed as received), much of it accusing FFRF of cozying up to Muhammad while dissing Jesus. Add a new suggested relocation destination to the list — Liberia. Think it has anything to do with Ebola?

**Your attitude:** By reading some writings on your site, I noticed some attitude and madness in those articles. It looks like you are ready to get guns and start fight. Religious organizations dont use guns and do not force anyone to join them. Everything is on voluntary bases. I think you should tone down your writings otherwise you might provoke someone unless provoking is your goal. — John Smith

**Your Destructive Purposes:** I read about the horrible things you do all the time in the news and I just want you to know that I believe your organizations is nothing more than a group of bullies and thugs and full of haters. Merry Christmas to you all. — Anaya Lynn

**Your sorry ass anti-american organization:** Get stuffed.... Fucking Nazi scumbags — digal58

**Move to Russia Assholes:** If you have a problem with God and Christ then move. Russia, Cuba and North Korea would love to have some more losers. — Steven Daniel, Cincinnati

**Donations:** Frickin bullies. Get lost. Move to china if you think your disgusting antics. If you don’t like Christmas or whatever then ignore it. Your sickopath methods will only get some hurt or worse. As red used to say, dumbasses!” So in parting, I say, get out of my frickin’ life, you pile of garbage that missed the boat when New York sent it’s shit out to see. Catch the next one. POS! — James Hay, Kirkland, Wash.

**you:** I thought to myself what kind of whining child gets butt-hurt by one small town parade, and I realized who you are. You are the pathetic runny nose momma’s boy that the normal kids beat on. You are the one that wouldnt shower in gym cuz your package is miniature. You are the girls who never had dates, other than family members. Are you lives so miserable that you live to bring happy people down? — Steve Sherman, River Falls, Wis.

**yall suck:** I hate y’all. y’all have no.write telling us to take down.our nativity. the first amendment says freedom.of.religion we are free to practice our religio — ronald anonymous, athens, texas

**your eternal life:** God loves you. — Jesus Christ, Bethlehem, jesu@heaven.com

**TRUTH!:** I am a thirteen-year old free thinker and I am strongly for Christ. My brother wrote a science essay in High school about the improbability of Evolution. He is also a Creationist and a strong Christian. Please read it and contact me at my e-mail once you have read it. I would love too stay in touch with you. — Dean, Virginia [The 1,121-word essay Dean kindly sent is titled “Darwinism: Fact or Fiction?”]

**right to faith:** Let’s say you are right and there is no God then I lose nothing but if there is then you lose everything. You see we will win in the end because we know who is important. You have a blessed day and keep up your work because you may win in the present but ole well you know the rest. — RJRobin72



Even the “canned” crank cards come with spelling errors. This one asks, “What’s in a Candy Cane?”

**Your wonderfully successful organization:** You sue to get manger scenes off lawns and 10 commandments taken down etc. but 36 week-ends a year nascar prays to the name of Jesus Christ on LIVE TV. and you stupid worthless hill-billys cant stop them. Ha ha ha. thank you God for a brain and the ability to use it FREELY. — Lanny Pluimer

**news paper articalabout band perfomance:** If all of you self rightest people would just leave, then we would have a much better and freer country to enjoy. — Byron Coles, Phoemix

**I have discovered the scientific truths of Mankind’s existence:** Through a uniques set of circumstances, I experienced a “near death event”, where my identity left my body for an extended period of time, and returned when my body’s brain was revived. During my “identity out of body existence”, I discovered the scien-

tific solutions to who, what, where we are in existence, and more. I will gladly submit to a polygraph test, or verification by testing my contrast in understanding Mankind’s existence. I have already passed a police poly-graph test, scoring the best one can for truthfulness on the test, verifying some of my experiences. — Norman Burton, Lexington, Ky.

**I am a Christian:** I realize your group is probably pretty much atheistic and will probably laugh, ridicule this question: On judgement day when asked what did you do about Jesus? — George Hronich, Rio Rancho, N.M.

**Greetings:** I don’t understand how you can be so dead set on interfering with the lives of other unless it is that you get your rocks off being bullies. Hmhmhmhm, is that it, are you sexually repressed? — Linda Ferguson

**mind your own business:** Your group, and others like you, tear at the very foundations of America, rooted in strong religious values christian or otherwise....if you dont like it....live in Liberia.. — C. Jerry, South Carolina

**Seriously?:** Oh yes, it will appear that you are gaining alot of ground very quickly but rest assured...the very God whom you have decided to rebel against, will have His say. I will not bother to open any emails from you so don’t waste your time. I just had the overpowering urge to stand up for God and say my peace. Athiests...I am glad you have your own holiday. April fools day. — Kerry Bunt



## Meet a juggling member



**Robert and Sean McClain at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pa. Robert writes: “Sean battled a virulently hostile principal to start a secular students group at Brunswick High in 2012, and he brought more than one of his theistic friends into the light of reason.”**

**Name:** Robert McClain.  
**Where I live:** Brunswick, Ohio.  
**Where and when I was born:** Johnstown, Pa., 1959.  
**Family:** Pamela, my wife, and sons, Sean, 19, and Corvus, 16.  
**Education:** Some college; financial services professional (Series 6).  
**Occupation:** Insurance sales, life and annuity.  
**How I got where I am today:** A high school English teacher who molded my writing, and an ability to find solutions to other’s problems  
**Where I’m headed:** Down a path that insists nontheists deserve a place at the table politically.  
**Person in history I admire:** Alan Turing (1912-54), British mathematician and the father of theoretical computer science and artificial intelligence.  
**A quotation I like:** “To argue with a man who has renounced the use of reason is like administering medicine to the dead.” (Thomas Paine, “The American Crisis”)  
**These are a few of my favorite things:** Churches converted to useful, practical or humanitarian purposes, Ken Ham’s withering debate defeat by science guy Bill Nye, “Hitchslaps” and cooking for a crowd of friends.  
**These are not:** “Filler” words (like . . . y’know, umm, etc.); bad writing; poor design; the blood and treasure wasted on religion.  
**My doubts about religion started:** At 11 years old, when a couple of door-to-door fundamentalists cornered me on my paper route and harangued me about not being saved.  
**Before I die:** There will be an atheist senator or president.  
**Ways I promote freethought:** Fighting fundamentalists in print, in person and in the education system.  
**I wish you’d have asked me:** Can you juggle? Yes.  
**I also wish you’d have asked me:** Do you encourage your children to be freethinkers?

My breakfast bar was a place for math, science, logic and discussions of theism. I always told my boys that if they wanted to go to church, I would take them. If they wanted to be Christians, I would understand but expected them to explain why choosing this path made logical sense. They knew about theistic influences in America and how dangerous it is for freedom when the

priest and politician join forces. Sean could go toe to toe with any priest or minister he encountered by age 11 or 12, and by 15 there was not a Christian in his peer group willing to argue with him in class discussions. He knew their book, and he knew Christianity’s horrific history of bloodletting, conquest and genocide. He knew more about their religion than the kids themselves did.

Trivializing the Freedom From Foundation’s complaint about the 15% discount for praying in public is unbecoming to you. They should be applauded and praised as a model watchdog group for opposing the excessive and inappropriate incursion of religion into our civil society. Discrimination based on religion in the price of your product is wrong and should be opposed. You seem to say it was OK for this discount and therefore this favoritism toward religious customers. Your attempt to recast the behavior as just “appreciation for gratitude” falls short when the receipt clearly states it is for praying! I, a fan, am very disappointed with your treatment of this issue.  
**Commenter nonbelievrndc, taking issue with “The Daily Show” segment on which Dan Barker appeared to explain FFRF’s complaint about a North Carolina restaurant’s prayer discount**  
*Comedy Central, 12-9-14*

There is a good chance that at least some of the complaints will be upheld, and whatever the rulings, they will be appealed. Either way it goes, it’s going to cost the district money in legal fees that should be going to educational materials. The community doesn’t need this confrontation now, or to become a banner case for a new challenge to invocations. The board should be willing to accept reasonable restraint in its actions and pronouncements. The community, and its public officials, should urge it to do so.  
**Newspaper editorial board, commenting on FFRF’s lawsuit against the school board in Chino, Calif., for persistent religiosity at meetings**  
*Chino Champion, 11-29-14*

*Robert McClain’s op-ed published Nov. 26 in the Newark Advocate in Ohio:*

### In defense of FFRF

Let’s set the record straight regarding the Freedom From Religion Foundation and its complaint against the Licking Valley School District by responding to a letter published Nov. 15. I will attempt to talk Mr. McBride down off the high horse from which he impugns FFRF’s mission and its executives. The author is entitled to his opinion, but not to create his own facts, an unsavory but common habit of Christian apologists.

FFRF exists for two reasons: to promote the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state, and to educate the public on matters related to nontheism. If Licking Valley obeyed the laws prohibiting the promotion of any religion (in this case the Christian faith) on public property by publicly paid employees, FFRF would have no reason to send warning letters. Since coaches like Randy Baughman are paid roughly \$5,714 in public funds, and the coach and players were praying on a publicly financed field at a publicly financed high school, the complaint is legitimate.

Mr. McBride claimed in his letter to have “learned” about FFRF, but I submit that his idea of “learning” has nothing to do with fact gathering and more to do with insult and innuendo. Charity Navigator, an online rating system for nonprofits, gives FFRF a rating of 97 out of 100, higher than AARP (88), the Southern Poverty Law Center (87) or the American Family Association (92), a Christian advocacy group. In short, FFRF exceeds all reasonable standards of transparency and accountability, which is more than can be said for the Vatican, the Southern Baptist Convention or virtually any religious institution.

Unlike religious bodies, FFRF files a complete IRS form 990 detailing all income and expenses each year. Unlike more than 1,600 churches just this year, FFRF does not engage in electioneering via the pulpit or church bulletin, and obeys all laws governing nonprofit institutions. These are the facts, stubborn as they are for the author to entertain.

What appears to stick in the author’s craw the most is that his Christian privilege was violated because people of his faith were asked to obey the law. The law applies to all citizens. FFRF launches more complaints against Christian institutions because Christians are the most frequent violators of the law. FFRF has never denied anyone the right to practice their religion in any manner that respects the law. The author should learn to deal in facts, not religious ranting.

## Overheard

I haven’t met God and I haven’t been to heaven, so I’m skeptical. Nobody’s come back to me to tell me they’re having a great time in heaven and that they’ve seen God, although there are a lot of people claiming that God is telling them what to do. I have no idea how God talks to them. Maybe they’re getting secret emails.  
**Mark Strand, 80, Pulitzer Prize winner and former U.S. poet laureate, who died Nov. 29 in New York of cancer**  
*The Associated Press, 12-1-14*

This is not about your religious beliefs. It is about your safety, the safety of your children and the safety of the community at large.  
**Superior Court Justice Marjoh Agro, sentencing a Hamilton, Ont., woman to probation for keeping her husband’s corpse at home for six months where rodents gnawed on it while she waited for him to be resurrected**  
*Hamilton Spectator, 12-2-14*

Zion Baptist pastor wholly devoted to youth  
**Dicey headline on story about youth pastor Andre Bennett, Lynn, Mass.**  
*The Daily Item, 11-18-14*

I think this guy is in for a shock when he finds out all that stuff about transubstantiation, the virgin birth and creationism is not real either. I’m guessing he did not want the children to be taken in by silly superstitions — wait a minute.  
**Chris Eccles, Buxton, UK, commenting on Catholic priest Dennis Higgins, who told primary students at Mass that “Father Christmas [Santa Claus] is not real”**  
*Buxton Advertiser, 12-2-14*

It undermined the neutrality of public service.  
**Administrative court ruling that a nativity scene must be removed from the entrance to the Vendée’s council building in the town of La Roche-sur-Yon because it violates France’s 1905 law on state/church separation**  
*thelocal.fr, 12-3-14*

There is no war on Christmas; the idea is absurd at every level. Those who object to being forced to celebrate another’s religion are drowning in Christmas in a sea of Christianity dominating all aspects of social life. An 80% majority can claim victimhood only with an extraordinary flight from reality.  
**Jeff Schweitzer, marine biologist and author, “A War on Reason, Not on Christmas”**  
*Huffington Post, 12-3-14*

When I do want to open my Bible, I don’t know where to go or what to do. Is there an app for that?  
**Q&A for “The Men’s Bible” with 1,304 pages geared to men who “often find themselves struggling in their marriages, with friendships and with pornography”**  
*Fox News, 12-5-14*

Police said the investigation is expected to take longer than usual as detectives have to search through Gamel’s computers without infringing on his “confession privilege.”  
**News story on a probe of allegations that California Catholic priest Robert Gamel possessed nude photos of a teen parishioner, for which he hasn’t been charged but has been put on administrative leave**  
*Merced Sun-Star, 11-18-14*



## 'No sweat' says legal staff after complaint sprint

*Continued from page 9*  
Bing Crosby song "What's More American?"  
**Contact: City of Saraland and Saraland Police Department, Ala.**  
Violation: The department employs a chaplain, who is also billed as the "city chaplain" on a business card.  
**Contact: Ozark Public Schools, Ark.**  
Violation: An Ozark High School student led prayers over the school's loudspeaker before football games.  
**Contact: Grapevine Colleyville ISD, Texas**  
Violation: Cross Timbers Middle School partnered with Grace Christmas Cottage, a Christian group, to run a holiday gift program. A school representative encouraged participants to attend an open house put on by the religious group.  
**Contact: Marion County Public Schools, Ocala, Fla.**  
Violation: Dunnellon High School's football program employs a team chaplain, who was photographed praying with players and cheerleaders after a game.  
**Contact: Lanier County Schools, Lakeland, Ga.**  
Violation: Lanier County Primary School held a Thanksgiving feast



### Arkansas traveler

Dispense with superfluities, advised Occam (1287–1347). Drop religious superstitions also, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel (fourth from left) told an audience of about 80 on Nov. 19 at the the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. Seidel spoke about FFRF's work and the Christian nation myth. "A lot of our members made a point to congratulate us on the presentation and tell us how much fun they had." said Alejandro Zeballos of Occam's Razors, the campus group of really sharp secular students which sponsored the event. (Nicole Rothfield photo)

where an adult led attendees, including students, in prayer.  
**Contact: Waupaca County Sheriff's Department, Wis.**  
Violation: The department's website hosts a religious poem titled "The Final Inspection," which opens with the line "The policeman stood and faced his God," and goes on to describe a conversation between God and a policeman where the policeman is judged and allowed to enter heaven.  
**Contact: Coatesville Area School District, Thorndale, Pa.**  
Violation: A high school choir performs an annual "Christmas Carol Service," a solemn, Mass-like concert which consists almost entirely of Christian hymns and songs.

**Contact: Watchung Borough School District, N.J.**  
Violation: A minister was invited to give an invocation and benediction at the district's Veterans Day ceremony.  
**Contact: Howard-Suamico School District, Green Bay, Wis.**  
Violation: Staff prayed with students during a "See You at the Pole" event.  
—Compiled by Maddy Ziegler

## They said what?

It's Miami, Florida—not Sodom and Gomorrah.  
**Joe Davila, a real estate agent opposing a proposed Miami-Dade County Commission ban on discrimination against transgender people**  
*Miami Herald, 11-12-14*

They don't want to be told anything, which is why they die prematurely, why they're unhappy. That's why we have a disproportionate number of atheists and agnostics in the [insane] asylum. All of this is true.  
**Bill Donohue, Catholic League president, on "organized groups" of atheists sticking "the middle finger in the face of Christians."**  
*"The Steve Malzberg Show," NewsMaxTV, 12-5-14*

We have American Heart Month, Black History Month, Jazz Apprecia-

tion Month, National Pet Month and on and on. For Christmas, we have one day. That's it. With all these special month-long designations, Jesus Christ is never mentioned.  
**Jimmy Terry, Clarksville, Tenn., Tabernacle Baptist Church pastor who is distributing 10,000 "Christmas is all about JESUS" yard signs**  
*Leaf-Chronicle, 11-29-14*

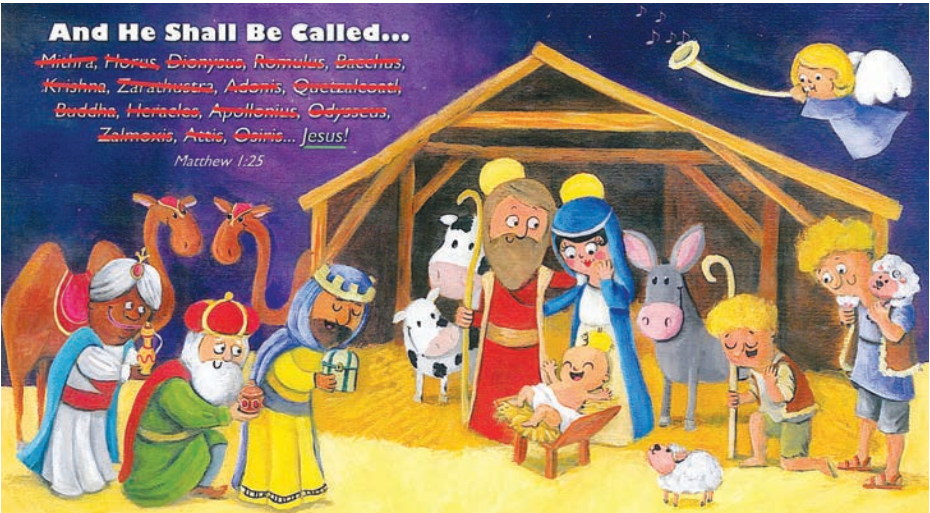
Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. – Matthew 10:28  
**Nov. 11 Facebook post by Myron May, 31, a self-described devout Christian who shot three people a week later at his alma mater Florida State University before police shot him fatally**  
*jonathanturley.org, 11-21-14*



### FFRF 'no gods' sign in Rhode Island statehouse

FFRF member and Rhode Island freethought activist Debbie Flitman (above left), assisted by FFRF member Tony Houston, for the second year in a row erected FFRF's "no gods" winter solstice sign in the Rhode Island Capitol in late November. In response, Republican state Rep. Mike Chippendale posted an attack about FFRF's display on his public Facebook page. Chippendale posted a rant, later removed, about how "atheists just can't keep their non-beliefs to themselves."

There are even more secular signs up this year to counter the nativity scene in the Capitol, which was given a big ceremony in December. The secular responses include a Tree of Knowledge by the Humanists of Rhode Island (led by Steve Ahlquist), a display by the Community of Reason and several others.



### And He Shall Be Called . . .

Meet the Phillips family, FFRF Life Members from northern Wisconsin, who sent "Keep up the good work" solstice greetings in a hilarious card by Horus Gilgamesh, author of the two-volume *Awkward Moments Children's Bible*. On the card's front is a crèche with the names of 16 "extinct" gods crossed out, with "Jesus!" replacing them.







# 4th year for FFRF sign in Milwaukee courthouse

FFRF’s “no gods” solstice message made its fourth appearance in the Milwaukee County Courthouse in December to counter a nativity display placed there every December since 2009. FFRF thanks Kurt Bocksenaum for delivering the festive display. “While we would prefer to keep religion, or irreligion, out of the seat of government, if religion is going to be there, we’ll be there, too,” said Co-President Dan Barker. The message was coined by FFRF principal founder Anne Nicol Gaylor, who turned 88 in November.



# Florida rotunda has ‘room at the inn’ for nonbelievers, others

FFRF members Gary Whittenberger (left) and Warren Brackmann stand behind the FFRF banner they placed Dec. 8 in the Florida Capitol in Tallahassee. The banner depicts a nativity scene parody in which founding fathers gaze adoringly at the Bill of Rights, whose anniversary is Dec. 15. The banner first went up in 2013 to counter a nativity scene and prompted others to place irreverent displays, including a Flying Spaghetti Monster and a Festivus pole fashioned from Pabst Blue Ribbon beer cans. Last year, Capitol officials denied the Satanic Temple a permit for a display, but after the group threatened a lawsuit, officials let them put up a display this year of an angel falling into the pit of hell. (Photo by Warren Brackman)

# B.C. 2015 best wishes for all!

Dear humanist friends: At this time of year, it is customary for religious folks to greet their fellow travelers with printed expressions of good will, fellowship and caring. We know of no principle which precludes atheists, agnostics and other assorted heathens from doing the same thing at the cheery winter solstice, and the money we save on cards and postage can be included in a corresponding donation to a humanist cause. We therefore take this opportunity to wish our fellow freethinkers whom we also consider to be our friends (and

especially those whose health is less than ideal) the very best of good fortune for the season and the new year. As Robert Ingersoll put it so adroitly, so many years ago: The time to be happy is now, The place to be happy is here, The way to be happy is to make others so. Ergo, a *Happy New Year* to one and all! Glenn and Lorraine Hardie British Columbia

# Neither rain nor snow daunts Chicago chapter activists



FFRF’s Metropolitan Chicago Chapter activists on Nov. 24 assembled their Daley Center Plaza solstice displays, despite “brutal elements of both rain and snow and heavy winds.” The 8-foot-high lighted scarlet “A,” winter solstice banner and explanatory signs balance for the second year an enormous nativity display on Dearborn Street. A judge ruled the plaza was a public forum in 1989. The “A,” the signature emblem of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science (which kindly granted permission to use it), stands for atheism or agnosticism. The banner depicts Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison on bended knee and the Statue of Liberty adoring a Bill of Rights in a crib. The Bill of Rights was adopted on Dec. 15, 1791. Chapter Director Tom Cara thanks “our incredible team of volunteers, including Jose Alvarado, Fred Dix, Bob Elmore, Joel Frazin, Nancy Kaufmann, Rich Pope, Frederick Rhine, Rick Schuch, Army Stieber and Mike Weeda.”

# No speech, free or paid, for FFRF in Pitman, N.J.



FFRF was denied space by Clear Channel Outdoor to place light-hearted billboards promoting freethought in Pitman, N.J., after being censored by Pitman city officials. Although FFRF had a contract with the company signed 11 months ago for three particular billboards, Clear Channel announced in late November that FFRF’s proposed signs could not appear within a half mile of a church.

Since all three (conveniently) are within a half mile of a church, Clear Channel severed the contract.

FFRF first wrote a letter of complaint to Pitman in 2011, when a local resident alerted FFRF to a Knights of Columbus “Keep Christ in Christmas” banner placed every December over a main street by the Pitman Fire Department. FFRF discovered the Knights did not obtain a permit for their banner.

When FFRF sought in 2012 to put up its own seasonal rejoinder, “Keep Saturn in Saturnalia,” the borough re-

quired a permit, then denied FFRF’s application. Last December, FFRF put up billboards to counter the city’s continued favoritism of the Christian banner. Two men tried to burn down the Saturnalia billboard, but it wasn’t damaged.

“The most disappointing thing is that this reinforces criminal behavior. The arsonists were trying to censor FFRF’s message, and Clear Channel has now rewarded that felonious behavior,” said Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, who is dealing with Pitman for the fourth year.

According to nj.com, Mayor Russ Johnson said the “Keep Christ in Christmas” banner represented the “spirit of Pitman” and said he hoped it would do so “for another 40 years.”

“This blackout of freethought views in Pitman is the product of government favoritism of religion and censorship of dissenting views,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

## Reminder

The January/February issue is combined and will be received in February.